STAGING SPACE

From Cinematic Mise-en-Scène to Spatial Practice through the Bathroom

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Abstract in English

This thesis investigates how cinematic mise-en-scène can inform interior design as an operative spatial methodology. Rather than approaching film as a source of stylistic inspiration, the research examines mise-en-scène as a structured system that organizes bodies, surfaces, light, and duration within space.

The study begins by tracing the historical and theoretical development of mise-en-scène and its five core components: setting, lighting, costume and make up, staging, and color. These elements are reinterpreted not as aesthetic categories but as spatial strategies that construct atmosphere. By connecting cinematic staging with architectural discussions on atmosphere and experiential design, the thesis argues that both disciplines actively shape perception through carefully constructed spatial conditions.

The bathroom is selected as the primary focus of investigation. Although often treated as a purely functional service space in architectural practice, cinema repeatedly stages the bathroom as a site of vulnerability, confrontation, self-awareness, intimacy, exposure, and stillness. This contrast reveals the overlooked spatial potential of the bathroom and positions it as a focused environment in which staging strategies can be examined with clarity. Through a series of case studies, eight architectural elements including mirror, door, window, sink, shower, bathtub, WC, and floor are analyzed using four spatial criteria: camera space body relationship, spatial integrity, time construction, and material and light behavior. From these analyses, recurring spatial conditions are identified and reformulated as transferable design principles.

The research ultimately proposes a shift from designing interiors as static containers toward consciously staging spatial experience. By reframing architectural elements as active devices that regulate perception, exposure, and duration, the thesis establishes a methodological bridge between cinema and spatial design.

Abstract in Italian

Questa tesi indaga come la mise-en-scène cinematografica possa informare il design d'interni come metodologia spaziale operativa. Piuttosto che considerare il cinema come una semplice fonte di ispirazione stilistica, la ricerca analizza la mise-en-scène come un sistema strutturato capace di organizzare corpi, superfici, luce e durata all'interno dello spazio.

Lo studio inizia tracciando lo sviluppo storico e teorico della mise-en-scène e dei suoi cinque componenti fondamentali: ambientazione, illuminazione, costume e trucco, messa in scena e colore. Questi elementi vengono reinterpretati non come categorie estetiche, ma come strategie spaziali in grado di costruire atmosfera. Mettendo in relazione la messa in scena cinematografica con il dibattito architettonico sull'atmosfera e sull'esperienza spaziale, la tesi sostiene che entrambe le discipline modellino attivamente la percezione attraverso condizioni spaziali attentamente costruite.

Il bagno è stato scelto come principale ambito di indagine. Sebbene nella pratica architettonica venga spesso considerato uno spazio di servizio puramente funzionale, nel cinema il bagno è frequentemente messo in scena come luogo di vulnerabilità, confronto, autocoscienza, intimità, esposizione e immobilità. Questo contrasto rivela il potenziale spaziale spesso trascurato del bagno e lo definisce come un ambiente mirato in cui le strategie di messa in scena possono essere analizzate con chiarezza.

Attraverso una serie di casi studio, otto elementi architettonici come specchio, porta, finestra, lavabo, doccia, vasca, WC e pavimento vengono analizzati secondo quattro criteri spaziali: relazione tra camera, spazio e corpo; integrità spaziale; costruzione del tempo; comportamento di materiali e luce. Da queste analisi emergono condizioni spaziali ricorrenti, riformulate come principi progettuali trasferibili.

La ricerca propone infine un passaggio dal concepire gli interni come contenitori statici al considerarli come esperienze spaziali consapevolmente messe in scena. Ridefinendo gli elementi architettonici come dispositivi attivi che regolano percezione, esposizione e durata, la tesi stabilisce un ponte metodologico tra cinema e progettazione dello spazio.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Context

In both architecture and cinema, space is not simply occupied but experienced. Although these disciplines operate through different mediums, they share a common concern: shaping how people perceive and feel space. Architecture organizes the body's physical relationship with its surroundings through scale, material, enclosure, and movement. Cinema, on the other hand, presents spatial experience through the camera, framing, editing, and light. The viewer does not physically enter the space, yet cinematic interiors are carefully constructed to be seen, felt, and experienced.

Despite this difference, both fields rely on interior space as a primary vehicle for atmosphere. Space gains meaning not only through form, but through the way bodies, surfaces, light, and time are arranged. In architecture, atmosphere emerges from built conditions that regulate material presence and sensory proximity. In cinema, atmosphere is shaped through staging decisions that guide attention and structure perception over time.

This shared concern reveals a deeper connection between the two disciplines. Architectural theory has long explored atmosphere and experience, while film theory has examined mise-en-scène as a central cinematic principle. However, the dialogue between them remains limited. The spatial intelligence embedded in cinematic staging offers possibilities that can further inform interior design thinking. It is within this space that this research positions itself.

Problem Statement

Interior architecture today frequently refers to atmosphere and experiential design as central concerns. However, although atmosphere is often mentioned as an intention, the way it is produced is not always clearly articulated. In many cases, spatial decisions are still guided primarily by function, technical requirements, and efficiency. This is especially visible in service spaces such as bathrooms, which are often treated as purely functional environments rather than as spaces with experiential depth. In contrast, cinema demonstrates a more deliberate construction of atmosphere. Through mise-en-scène, interior spaces are carefully staged. Light, framing, material presence, and duration are consciously organized to shape perception and emotion. This indicates an opportunity to explore how cinematic staging can contribute to interior spatial practice in a more structured way.

Scope

This research focuses specifically on bathroom interiors in cinema as a controlled spatial environment. The study examines eight architectural elements: mirror, door, window, sink, shower, bathtub, WC, and floor. Each element is analyzed through four criteria: camera space body relationship, spatial integrity, time construction, and material light behavior. The thesis does not aim to provide a comprehensive history of cinema or architecture, nor does it attempt to produce prescriptive design solutions. Instead, it proposes a methodological framework derived from spatial analysis.

Aim

This thesis aims to investigate how cinematic mise en scène can inform interior architecture as a spatial methodology. By analyzing bathroom scenes across selected films, the research identifies recurring spatial conditions based on body positioning, framing, duration, material presence, and enclosure. These conditions are then reformulated as transferable design principles capable of informing interior spatial practice.

Questions

Q1 *How can cinematic mise-en-scène inform a spatial methodology for interior design?*

Q2 *How does mise-en-scène construct atmosphere through the alignment of body, space, light, and duration in cinematic interiors?*

Q3 *How do specific architectural elements in bathroom scenes function as active spatial devices rather than neutral fixtures?*

Q4 *What recurring spatial conditions can be identified across selected case studies?*

Contribution

This thesis contributes to the dialogue between cinema and interior architecture by approaching mise en scène as a spatial tool rather than only a cinematic term. Film interiors are examined not as visual inspiration but as deliberately organized environments where body, space, light, and time work together to shape experience.

A second contribution lies in identifying recurring spatial conditions through the study of bathroom scenes. By analyzing elements such as mirror, door, window, sink, shower, bathtub, WC, and floor, the research translates cinematic staging strategies into design principles that can be applied in interior practice.

Finally, the thesis reconsiders the bathroom within architectural thinking. Instead of reducing it to a purely functional service space, the study highlights its potential as an experiential interior where atmosphere, perception, and duration can be consciously shaped through design.

Structure

The thesis is organized into four chapters and the conclusion part, progressing from theoretical foundation to methodological application and design reflection.

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Establishes the theoretical background. It traces the historical development of mise en scène and explains its core components. The chapter then connects cinematic staging with architectural discussions on atmosphere and spatial experience, building the conceptual bridge between cinema and interior design.
Chapter 3	Establishes the conceptual shift in architecture from function to experience. Instead of treating space as a neutral container, it frames interiors as atmospheric constructs shaped by perception, framing, and bodily presence.
Chapter 4	Introduces the analytical framework used throughout the study. It defines the four spatial criteria. These criteria form the operative structure through which film scenes are examined. Presents the case studies, focusing on bathroom interiors in selected films with analysing eight architectural elements. Concludes the thesis by synthesizing the findings and reflecting on how cinematic staging can inform interior practice.
	Conclusion

Methodology

Theoretical Framework & Cross Disciplinary Reading

The research begins with a theoretical review of mise-en-scène and architectural discussions on atmosphere and spatial experience.

Visual Case Study Analysis

Selected films are examined through close visual reading. The focus is not narrative interpretation but spatial construction. Each bathroom element is analyzed using camera space body relationship, spatial integrity, time construction, and material and light behavior.

Comparative Spatial Observation

Multiple films are compared to identify recurring spatial behaviors. Additional short examples are used to verify and test each spatial condition across different cinematic contexts.

Cinema–Architecture Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical link between cinema and architecture, emphasizing how both shape spatial experience through framing, atmosphere, and the relationship between body and space.

Chapter 2

Theoratical Framework
Mise-en-scène in Cinema

2.1 Origin and Definition of Mise-en-scène

Cinema is not just a storytelling tool but also an art of constructing a holistic world that fully immerses the audience. Every detail is carefully designed to build a space for the characters and shape the narrative. This space becomes more than just a backdrop, it actively influences how the audience understands and emotionally responds to the story. A major aspect of this storytelling is mise-en-scène.

The concept of mise-en-scène (pronounced meez-ahn-sen) derived from the French expression, means "putting on stage" which originally comes from theater. As the theater term, it means the processes of deciding what to include on the stage and where it should be placed on. When adapted to cinema, the term encompasses everything that appears in front of the camera within a single shot. In a cinematic context, mise-en-scène includes all the visual elements of a scene such as setting, lighting, costume, make-up, props, and the positioning of actors (Bordwell, Thompson, & Smith, 2024). Together, these elements establish the film's atmosphere, tone, and sense of time and place. For example, the color scheme or setting that used in a film can reflect a character's mood or reinforce the film's theme. In other words, mise-en-scène refers to the totality of the director's visual expression.

2.1.1 Before the Screen: The Theatrical Birth of Mise-en-scène

Although mise-en-scène is now most associated with film studies, its conceptual foundations lie in theater. As Pavis (1998) mentions, throughout history, theatrical performances have always required someone to organize what happened on stage to decide where people stand, how they move, and how the scene unfolds. In ancient Greek theater, for example, playwrights like Aeschylus didn't just write the text, they also shaped the staging. Even Molière, one of France's most famous playwrights, guided actors in how they should interpret their roles. All these people were shaping the experience of the performance, but they were not yet called "director" in the modern sense. Staging was considered a practical, behind-the-scene job, not an independent art form.

This changed at the end of the 19th century. As theatre evolved with new artistic movements, staging began to be seen not just as a way to "place things" on a stage, but as a creative act that could shape the meaning of a story (Pavis, 1998). This shift is often described by theatre scholar Patrice Pavis (1998) as an "epistemological break" a moment when the role of the director (metteur en scène) became central to how a performance communicates.

By the early 20th century, the director had become the architect of meaning, shaping not only what the audience sees but also how they feel while watching. It was during this period that mise-en-scène emerged as an autonomous art form, no longer dependent on the written text or the actor's performance but constructing meaning through space, light, movement, and atmosphere.

> **"Mise-en-scène, though rooted in the practical history of theatre, emerged in the late 19th century as a fully autonomous art form–an epistemological shift that positioned the director as the architect of meaning."**
>
> **–Patrice Pavis, 2013, p. 232**

2.1.2 Bazin, Eisenstein and Film Theory

Over time, in the mid-20th century, French critic André Bazin identified two major stylistic tendencies in film: montage and mise-en-scène (Bazin, 1967/2005).

The concept of montage, as developed by Sergei Eisenstein, suggests that multiple images are combined in a specific composition to create meaning. While mise-en-scène preserves the spatial and temporal unity of the scene, allowing spectators to interpret freely. Bazin viewed mise-en-scène as the heart of cinematic realism, based on giving importance to the storytelling in a single image. According to him, montage method fragments the scene and controls audience's perception according to the director's intention. But mise-en-scène keeps the integrity of the scene and allows audience to make their own interpretation. This is because the arrangement of the components on a scene involves the relation among actors but also to their surroundings and to the camera. This theoretical tension between montage and mise-en-scène has shaped critical discourse in film studies, defining two fundamentally different ways of constructing cinematic meaning.

Mise-en-scène is usually the result of meticulous planning. Directors and production designers collaboratively decide how to arrange props, light sources, costumes, and actors within the frame to communicate a specific emotion or idea. Yet, this process is also dynamic. Unplanned elements such as an improvised line, a change in lighting conditions, or an accidental shift in an object's position can add unexpected layers of meaning. This reveals that mise-en-scène operates at the intersection of controlled design and spontaneous creation. In order to understand how this delicate balance between control and spontaneity shapes cinematic storytelling, it is essential to look more closely at the core components of mise-en-scène and how each contributes to the overall atmosphere and meaning of a scene.

2.2 The Core Components of Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène provides to filmmakers five main domains to work with hich covers acting and movement:

- Setting
- Costumes and Makeup
- Lighting
- Staging
- Color theory

2.2.1 Setting

Since the beginning of cinema, it has been understood that settings are not only a background but play an important role in establishing the time and place of the film's narrative. (Bazin 1967/2005) says that while theater cannot exist without actors, cinema can create a meaningful scene in their absence. Even simple images such as footage of a train passing or a candle illuminating in a dark room can create strong sense of drama.

Directors can decide to shoot in a real location which often provides a sense of authenticity and emotional dept to the narrative. In Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) the streets of Rome become a part of the story, which shows the after effects of World War 1. Figure 1 shows one of the street scenes in which the city becomes a living space, the emotional atmosphere of the film. Alternatively, Filmmakers can create their own setting, by using studios which constructs stylized and controlled environment. In *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927) the futuristic city entirely created in the studio by using monumental set design and optical techniques. This allowed Lang to create a fully designed setting which created a lasting impact also in real life architecture (Figure 2). Settings can be exaggerated even overshadowing the characters or it can have minimalistic presence. Ultimately, setting is not only a place for action but also a major component of mise-en-scène which guides the meaning, emotional tone and perception.

Figure 1. Bicycle Thieves (De Sica, 1948). Antonio riding a bicycle on the streets of Rome. Source: Color

Figure 2. Constructing the set of the City of the Future for Metropolis (1927). Source: Cinema Scholars.
Workers building the miniature sets used in Metropolis.

2.2.2 Costume and Makeup

Costume and makeup are as important as the setting while creating a powerful mise-en-scène. Costumes not only serve as décor but also have symbolic and narrative meanings. It can reveal and support the identities of the characters, it can emphasize the social status and foreground the dramatic changes. As an example, in *Snowpiercer* (Bong, 2013), which is about the struggle of humanity to survive in a moving train after Earth enters an ice age, the costume design becomes crucial to show a rigid social hierarchy and divides the passengers by class (Figure 3 and 4). Costumes are also powerful tools to visualize character transformation throughout the narrative. In *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010), for example, the gradual shift in Nina's costume, turning from white to black, shows her psychology and identity change (Figure 5 and 6).

Today, the improvement in technology allows costumes to be made or placed onto the computer-generated characters. Full digital costumes are less common in human actors, but fantasy and sci-fi movies use this technology extensively. This process generally uses the technique, motion capture. The actors' movements are recorded, and then a digitally designed costume is worn over the performance in post-production. This is especially useful for futuristic costumes that are complex or expensive to make in real life. As an example Iron Man's iconic costume was created digitally, which made it possible to achieve a more striking and dynamic lool.

During the beginning of the film history, makeup was needed because cameras didn't have the technology to capture the faces of actors clearly (Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith, 2024). Additionally, it's an essential element to create believable illusions. It can be used to age an actor or create a scar, symbolize a historical figure, or transform actors into non-human or fictional beings. Over the years, a wide range of techniques and possibilities have been raised, also with the help of CGI. Therefore, costumes and makeup are essential to direct the narrative, emotions and the perception of the audience.

Figure 3. Snowpiercer (Bong, 2013). Costume design at the front of the train.

Figure 4. Snowpiercer (Bong, 2013). Costume design at the back of the train.

Figure 5. Black Swan (Aronofsky, 2010). Costume design of white swan.

Figure 6. Black Swan (Aronofsky, 2010). Costume design of black swan.

2.2.3 Lighting

"Photograph" comes from the Greek, which means phōtós, as light and graphê as writing, thus, photography means writing with light. Film is a photographic medium and this makes lighting a main domain. But in the art of filmmaking lighting is more than illumination that makes the action visible.

01

Natural Lighting

Natural lighting in a film generally refers to daylight or existing light available within a location. Directors often use natural light in exterior scenes, later shading and color can be modified in a digital environment, or if it's needed, artificial light can be used as a supplement. Using natural light creates less control over illumination, yet it can result in more aesthetic, intimate, and authentic images.

02

Artificial Lighting

While using artificial light, the placement becomes important as each position evokes different meanings. Lighting not only conveys messages, but it also creates the mood and directs attention. As Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith (2024) mention that light direction plays an important role: Frontal light eliminates shadows, sidelight sculpts the face, backlight can be used to create silhouettes, top lighting can glamorize characters, and underlighting distorts features and is mostly used to create horror effects. As shown in Figure 8, underlighting on the character's face in *The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan, 1999) not only distorts his features but also isolates him in the darkness, showing his psychological trauma and alienation. This example shows how lighting can shape a character's inner world and create intimate or tense atmospheres in interior spaces.

Figure 7. Days of Heaven (Malick, 1978). Golden Hour in Days of Heaven.

Figure 8. The Sixth Sense (Shyamalan, 1999). Underlighting on the character's face.

Light is also characterized by its source. Classical Hollywood filmmaking developed a fixed lighting system with stable light sources. They called it three-point lighting, that helps to show the roundness and volume of elements. It creates sculptural depth rather than a planar flatness. There are two types of three-point lighting; high-key lighting is a light source that creates a low contrast between bright and dark areas. In Figure 9, the scene appears bright, resembling a sunny afternoon with almost transparent shadows, as in *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* (Jeunet, 2001). Low-key lighting generates sharp contrast and darker shadows. Thus, the images are marked by strong and opaque shadows. In Figure 10, the light coming from the left is hard and creates dark voids around the face of the characters as seen in *Mauvais Sang* (Carax, 1986).

03

Colored Light

The hue of the light source can be varied with the use of filters. This creates an unrealistic mise-en-scène which is made on purpose to involve a break from realism. Thus, filmmakers use color grading to manipulate images to create an overall consistency in the color scheme of the film. In *Suspiria* (Argento, 1977), red, blue, and green are used as dominant lighting colors to construct a surreal environment. Argento employs red to symbolize danger and evil, blue to convey a sense of innocence and goodness, and green to represent awareness and moments of revelation (Adamec, 2021).

Figure 9. Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain (Jeunet, 2001). High-key Lighting.

Figure 10. Mauvais Sang (Carax, 1986). Low- key Lighting.

Figure 11. Suspiria (Argento, 1977). Colored Lighting.

2.2.4 Staging: Movement and Performance

Staging, as a component of mise-en-scène, refers primarily to the positioning and movement of figures in a scene. It refers to the choreography of a scene's movement, shaped by the collaboration between the director and the actors. He/she designs the meaning and emotions of a scene through the arrangement of bodies and objects. Mostly these figures are human actors but also staging can be created with objects, animals or other non-living things which gain expressive qualities once placed in a cinematic shot. Throughout film history, styles of acting have shifted between naturalism and stylization.

A naturalistic composition can be described as the informal arrangement of figures in a scene. The shot does not give the feeling that it's thoughtfully or highly arranged, but rather more realistic in a natural way. Generally, exterior settings tend to feel more naturalistic, while interior locations and studio sets often appear more consciously arranged.

In contrast, stylized composition involves a formal and thoughtful arrangement. While both naturalistic and stylized compositions are the result of deliberate choices, stylized staging tends to be more formally controlled, placing figures according to a clear visual design, whereas naturalistic staging seeks to create the illusion of spontaneity and realism.

Acting goes beyond speaking dialogue. It is obvious that voice and dialogue are very important in cinema, but in terms of mise-en-scène, gestures, facial expression, posture, and body movement are always a part of the overall visual. This was more evident in silent cinema, where the audience's understanding of the film relied heavily on the actor's facial expressions. These expressive elements become key to how characters are built and perceived on screen.

Thus, actors can develop their characterization during the film. For example, *The Social Network* (Fincher, 2010), the contrast between the two protagonists is strongly transferred through facial expressions. Jesse Eisenberg playing Mark Zuckerberg with knitted brows, narrowed eyes, and a tense lip, shows his intense concentration and ambition. (Figure 14). In contrast, Andrew Garfield as Eduardo Saverin portrays the more trusting and approachable character with open eyes and raised brows (Figure 15). Ultimately, staging and acting work together to shape how the audience perceives characters and emotions, making them essential elements of mise-en-scène.

Figure 12. Burning (Lee, 2018). Naturalistic composition.

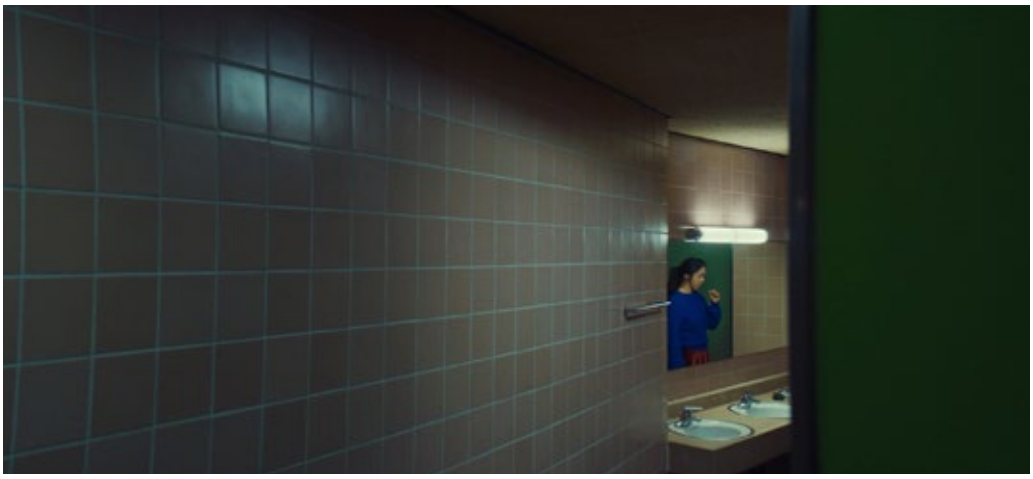


Figure 13. Decision to Leave (Park, 2022). Stylized composition.

Figure 14. The Social Network (Fincher, 2010). Jesse's facial expression.

Figure 15. The Social Network (Fincher, 2010). Eduardo's facial expression.

2.2.5 Color Theory

Within mise-en-scène, color is an important element for the filmmakers while shaping the atmosphere and guiding the audience's emotional engagement. In *Her* (Jonze, 2013), the dominance of warm red and orange tones in pastel refers to an intimate and nostalgic world, transcribing the inner world of the protagonist and his eagerness for a romantic connection (see Figure 16). The absence of cold tones is the preference of director to avoid the feeling of coldness and loneliness. On the other hand, *Play Time* by Jacques Tati (1967) has a changing color scheme during the film. The setting, costume, and tone are generally shades of grey, brown, and black in the beginning, but after the restaurant scene, vibrant colors such as red, pink, and green dominate the setting (Figure 17). This chromatic shift serves as a form of narrative development where the grey tones reflect the modernist architecture of the city, like concrete, steel, and glass, while red tones emphasize human spontaneity, playfulness, and the softening of this rigid modern order.

Color theory in cinema is not only used to create aesthetic value but also interacts narratively with other components of mise-en-scène such as lighting, costume, and makeup (Elements of Cinema, 2023). Filmmakers can emphasize human presence through costume color, either making characters stand out from their environment or merge with it, thereby creating a specific meaning. Similarly, Gibbs (2013) argues that the color palette determines the emotional tone of a narrative, shaping the audience's aesthetic and psychological engagement with the film.

Figure 16. Her (Jonze, 2013).

Figure 17. Play Time (Tati, 1967).

2.3 The Historical Evolution of Mise-en-scène as an Artistic Language

1890's - 1900's

2.3.1 Beginnings: The Lumière Brothers and Reality / Georges Méliès and Fiction

Early application of mise-en-scène dates back to twentieth century when filmmakers started to be more creative rather than shooting everyday life. The Lumière brothers were French inventors of the early motion picture camera, which was named the "Cinématographe" in 1895. The word "cinema" is derived from this name. They presented the first public film screening at the Grand Café in Paris. Their early works such as "*La Sortie des usines Lumière* (*Leaving the Lumière Factory*, 1895)" was considered to be the first motion picture as seen in Figure 18. They documented ordinary actions like workers leaving the factory, trains arriving or babies being fed without conscious staging (Calzettoni & Parker, 1995). In contrast, as Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith (2024) notes, Méliès, originally a stage magician, discovered the possibilities of special effects in early cinema. In 1897, Méliès constructed his own studio, equipped with movable flats and trapdoors that enabled him to control special effects with great precision. His theatrical background pioneered to create conscious mise-en-scène in his films by using props, lighting, costumes and special effects. In this way, mise-en-scène carried an architectural dimension. His iconic *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*, 1902) can be considered one of the first conscious uses of mise-en-scène in film history (Figure 19). He designed great interior environments that were adopted from theatrical staging (Whitehead, 2018). Thus, the scene moves beyond a simple recording and becomes like theater stage that is filled with imagination. This approach of Méliès opened the door for cinema to evolve from documentary observation to an art form capable of constructing creative interior environments. Therefore, it created the foundation for the development of mise-en-scène as a critical concept in film industry.

Figure 18. Frame from La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon (Lumière, 1895). Source: France Culture.

Figure 19. Frame from Le Voyage dans la Lune (Méliès, 1902). Source: Star Film Company.

1920's

2.3.2 German Expressionism: The Visualization of Psychology

In 1910, the artistic style of German Expressionism began to emerge in poetry and theater. It gained popularity in cinema after World War I, shaped by both the trauma of the war and the severe economic crisis. As Eisner (2008) notes, in *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (Wiene, 1920), the small medieval town with dark twisting alleys and inclined façades created a distorted architectural set with sharp, angular perspectives, turning the setting into a psychological extension of the story (Figures 20 and 21). Actors wore heavy makeup and moved slowly, using curved and exaggerated body movements. Characters were not simply existing but merging with the designed setting. For example, the character Cesare appears in a stylized forest, his arms echoing the branches of the trees (Figure 22). The heavy set design combined with dramatic lighting established a striking new visual language for mise-en-scène. Shifting light and shadow intensified the atmosphere, giving light a symbolic role rather than a purely functional one. This style symbolized internal feelings such as fear, anxiety and alienation rather than creating reality. Thus, it demonstrated the power of mise-en-scène to shape not only the visual space design but also the emotional response of the audience. By the mid-1920s, German cinema had gained international recognition, attracting foreign filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock and spreading its stylistic influence across the globe. While Expressionism as a formal movement began to fade by 1927, its distinctive visual language and the powerful mise-en-scène it created continue to inspire filmmakers even today.

Figure 20. Film still from The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Wiene, 1920). Source: The Cinematograph.

Figure 21. Film still from The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Wiene, 1920). Source: The Cinematograph.

Figure 22. [In The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Cesare's body echoes the tilted tree trunks]. From Bordwell and Thompson (2019), p. 139.

1920's
-
1950's

2.3.3 Classical Hollywood Mise-en-scène

Hollywood era dates to early 1920's during the last years of silent film era. In this era American film studios developed a visually dominant narrative style. This new language was based on continuity editing and invisible setting that gave the audience the feeling the story was actually happening. Bordwell (1985) mentions, the increase of quality in films was parallel to the concept of continuity. He adds the continuity style created a smooth and clear story, where the technique supported the plot and stayed invisible to the viewer. One of the defining principles of Classical Hollywood cinema was what Bazin famously called the "invisible style." As Bazin (1967/2005) notes Classical Hollywood mise-en-scène is not meant to be noticed, it is meant to be felt. This concept refers to the deliberate construction of cinematic space in a way that allows the spectator to become absorbed into the narrative without being overtly aware of the stylistic mechanisms at play. Mise-en-scène was used not to draw attention to itself, but to create a seamless illusion of reality. Unlike European Expressionism, Classical Hollywood prioritized narrative clarity over stylistic display.

The ideology was creating characters with a psychologically motivated and goal-oriented, each event is linked to a cause-and-effect chain, and the story ends with a clear resolution (Radulovich, 2015). Time was generally used in a linear and continuous way, with flashbacks rarely appearing in the narrative. Important objects were placed at the center of the stage, compositions were kept balanced, and actors typically faced the audience. Style, costumes and lighting always supported the narrative, avoiding exaggeration.

01

Figure 23. Wizard of Oz (Fleming, Cukor and Taurog, 1939). Dorothy opening to door.

02

Figure 24. Wizard of Oz (Fleming, Cukor and Taurog, 1939). Crossing the doorway turns the image from sepia to Technicolor.

Classical Hollywood cinema developed distinctive visual language through lighting, mise-en-scène, and cinematographic techniques. These elements became key tools for shaping atmosphere and narrative. One critical element to create the mise-en-scène in Classical Hollywood was the lighting as mentioned before the usage of high-key and low-key lighting are two variations of the classical three-point lighting system that became standard in this era. High-key lighting was common in comedies, musicals and romantic films while low-key lighting was used to express emotional tension or psychological thrillers. For example, one of the most important films in this style is *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, Cukor and Taurog, 1939). In the beginning of the film, they use low-key lighting and black, white colors to emphasize the boring life of Dorothy (Figure 23 and 24). When Dorothy enters to the Oz land, the image changes to high-key lighting and vibrant colors (Figure 25 and 26). This transformation visually reveals the character's shift in consciousness and the difference between fantasy and reality.

03

Figure 25. Wizard of Oz (Fleming, Cukor and Taurog, 1939). The shift from black-and-white tonality to vivid color redefines spatial perception.

04

Figure 26. Wizard of Oz (Fleming, Cukor and Taurog, 1939). Dorothy enters to Oz.

The other element was deep focus cinematography, which refers to a technique that keeps the foreground, middle ground, and background of a shot all sharply in focus, allowing the spectator to observe every detail within the frame simultaneously. This gave the audience a more active role, encouraging them to explore the mise-en-scène rather than just focusing on a single object. *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941) is the most famous example for this technique. In this iconic scene as seen in Figure 27, Agnes Moorehead as Mary Kane signs away her son's custody to George Coulouris playing Walter Parks Thatcher. Outside, Buddy Swan as Charles plays in the snow. Deep focus keeps every layer sharp, revealing emotional distance and power dynamics in a single shot. This scene perfectly illustrates how deep focus can enrich narrative structure and visual storytelling.

Hollywood contributed to the history of mise-en-scène by establishing a model of cinematic realism that contrasted with the more experimental European movements, emphasizing clarity, continuity, and narrative immersion.

Figure 27. Citizen Kane (Welles, 1941). *Deep Focus Framing.*

1940's – 1950's

2.3.4 Italian Neorealism: The Aesthetic of Reality

After the wake of World War 1 around 1940 a new style has sprouted, Neorealism which directly means "new reality" or "new realism". The films identified as Italian Neorealism depicts Italy removed from Fascist influence. In 1937, Benito Mussolini established Cinecittà, a vast film studio under the slogan "Il cinema è l'arma più forte," which translates to "the cinema is the strongest weapon." It was designed as a tool of Fascist propaganda, but during war it was bombed and most of the structure was destroyed. After that, Directors such as Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rossellini found a different way to tell their stories by using real locations, natural light, and non-professional actors, thereby moving away from studio artificiality. According to Lawton (1979), Neorealist cinema aimed to; eliminate the cliches, abandon the fantastic or historic narrative, focus on the human perspective and defend the necessity of showing minimal events of real life. As Marcus (1986) emphasizes, neorealist films such as *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica,1948) and *Rome, Open City* (Rosellini, 1945) use mise-en-scène not just as background, but to place characters directly in the ruins of postwar Italy. *Rome, Open City* portrays the resistance of ordinary people during the German occupation of Rome. Using real locations and natural light creates a documentary-like effect (Figure 28). Therefore, filming in real homes and war-torn streets, Neorealism collapsed the line between cinematic mise-en-scène and everyday interiors, giving domestic space new narrative weight.

Figure 28. Rome, Open City (Rosellini, 1945). The urban panorama situates the bodies within a war-torn collective landscape.

1950's
-
1960's

2.3.5 French New Wave: The Language of Freedom

The French New Wave also known as "Nouvelle Vague" emerged in a post-war France that was craving new forms of cultural expression. Dissatisfied with the predictable and conventional mainstream media, critics and film enthusiasts began to experiment with alternative filmmaking techniques, drawing inspiration from Italian Neorealism (Bordwell, Thompson, & Smith, 2024). They thought films lost their ability to capture true human emotions and lack of sincerity. Thus, directors like François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Claude Chabrol, who would later support "Auteur Theory", began to make their own films. In this wave directors were working with non-professional actors in real life environments by using handheld cameras. These cameras made it possible to create more dynamic and realistic images, giving the impression that events were happening through the camera's eye. By accepting the unevenness of natural light, directors increased the realism of the scenes. In addition, background sounds such as city noise were not removed. This approach created a sensory environment that made the audience feel closer to the film. Godard and his colleagues broke with the classic continuity editing technique by using the jump cut, this technique made the image look deliberately amateur and emphasized the artificiality of classical cinematic conventions. According to Neupert (2007), this jump cut technique emphasized to the audience that films are not reality but fiction, and it prevented viewers from remaining passive, forcing them to construct meaning in their own minds. Therefore, French New Wave left a lasting legacy in modern cinema by positioning mise-en-scène not as a mere decorative element but as a dynamic component that carries the essence and meaning of the narrative, thus involving the audience in the film's construction.

1950's
-
present

2.3.6 The Auteur Theory and Mise-en-scène

Early filmmakers demonstrated to the world that a movie director could be an artist, though not all of them. Before the emerge of this theory, stars, studios and producers were more important, and they were shaping the film industry. Auteur Theory is the idea that the director is the auteur and the creative center of a film. In the 1940s, while watching Hollywood films that had been banned in France during World War II, André Bazin and Alexandre Astruc realized that directors were creating their own perspective of mise-en-scène through their unique use of lighting, camera angles, and staging, thus they called it as auteurism, therefore this theory is fundamentally based on mise-en-scène (Hellerman, 2024). The English name of the theory was found by American critic Andrew Sarris in 1962. Sarris (1962) mentions, there are three criteria to be defined as an auteur director; technical proficiency, a distinctive personal style and the harmony between director's personal vision and the given material.

Following Sarris's definition, auteur theory spread across the United States, leading to many classical directors including Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, and John Ford being recognized as auteurs. In addition, critics define director who only design the setting according to the scenario and not involve their own perspective as metreur en scène (Martinsen, 2025). This theoretical distinction provides a framework for analyzing how specific directors imprint their personal vision onto the cinematic space. In this regard, filmmakers such as Wes Anderson, Yasujirō Ozu, and Stanley Kubrick exemplify how mise-en-scène can become a powerful tool for expressing authorship.

As an example, Wes Anderson's approach to mise-en-scène is highly distinctive. He often uses symmetry and one-point perspective, placing an actor or an object at the center of the frame. The characteristic color scheme; warm tones like pink, beige, yellow, and orange typically dominate the visual palette. Miniature sets and a theater-like aesthetic give the scenes a storybook quality. The actors usually face the camera, making the entire mise-en-scène resemble a painting. The hotel lobby scene in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) is a powerful example of this aesthetic. The characters are at the center of the frame; the pastel-colored corridors, symmetrical layout, and theatrical framing evoke both a sense of nostalgia and a deliberate desire to construct an artificial world (Figure 29). Thus, Anderson's mise-en-scène becomes not merely a visual choice but a narrative tool that shapes the narrative's atmosphere and drives emotion.

Figure 29. The Grand Budapest Hotel (Enderson, 2014).

Figure 30. Isle of Dogs (Enderson, 2018).

Figure 31. The Phoenician Scheme (Enderson, 2025).

Figure 32. Asteroid City (Enderson, 2023).

Another example, Yasujirō Ozu's cinematic language reveals the impact of mise-en-scene on narrative in an extremely simple yet profound way. His signature "Tatami shot", a camera angle taken from a height of approximately 30–40 cm, brings the audience down to the same level as the characters, creating a sense of physical intimacy within the scene. The camera remains still for the most part, which lends the narrative a timeless, meditative calm. Thus, Ozu often shows elements like doors, windows and transition spaces to emphasize the relationship between interiors and the characters. In addition, the empty shots left by the director for a few seconds after the characters leaves the scene to make the audience feel interiors are not only background but a carrier of memory. This approach is particularly evident in the scenes in T*okyo Story* (1953) where the elderly couple visit their children: characters enter and exit the scene while the camera remains fixed at a low level, but the camera never directs the emotional tone the space itself becomes an emotional narrator (Figure 33-36). In this way, Ozu's mise-en-scène quietly yet powerfully conveys the remoteness of family ties and the transience of time.

Figure 33-36. Tokyo Story (Ozu, 1953).

2.3.7 Contemporary Approaches to Mise-en-scène

Classical mise en scène focused on in camera arrangement of setting, lighting, costume, make up and acting within the frame, usually limited by the physical set and technology of the day. Twenty-first century cinema takes this foundation and extends it through digital tools. Computer generated imagery (CGI), digital color grading, visual effects, motion/performance capture and virtual production allow filmmakers to build complex worlds, adjust color and mood after shooting, and integrate live actors with digital environments. These technologies reshape the director's control over space and lighting, shifting key aspects of mise en scène from the shooting stage to post production. According to Prince (2012), unlike many other critics, he believes that digital technology should be viewed as an expanded toolkit that enhances both realistic and fantasy films rather than making them away from seriousness.

Today, visual effects became one of the natural components of narrative and mise en scène. *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) pioneered virtual cinematography. According to New York Film Academy (2023), Cameron spent fifteen years to develop the technological system behind the film, much of the film was shot with Fusion Camera System, a digital 3D apparatus co-developed by Cameron and since used with several other films. On set, actors performed in "motion capture" suits surrounded by green screens; their movements and expressions were recorded and applied to digital characters as seen in Figure 35.

Figure 37. Avatar: The Way of water (Cameron, 2022). Figure X. Motion-capture setup from Avatar (2022). Source: Avatar: innovazioni nella mocap (2023), simomr.wordpress.com.

Cinematographer Mauro Fiore used naturalistic lighting on actors and reflective paint on the set to integrate live actors with digital backgrounds. These techniques produced a seamless blend of physical and digital mise en scène. By digital color grading directors had more control over the general atmosphere and mood that they wanted to achieve, or post-production made it real to add or remove elements thus manipulate sets digitally.

These innovations shift significant elements of mise en scène into post production workflows, blurring the line between design and editing. Pavis (2013) states, the art of mise en scène is not dead, on the contrary, it lives on and evolves. Although other forms of performance, technologies, and popular entertainments are stealing the spotlight from theater today, mise en scène will continue to renew itself.

Together, these early film movements reveal how mise-en-scène evolved from theatrical staging and illusionistic trickery to stylized abstraction, psychological landscapes, embodied realism, and digitally enhanced spatial worlds. Each cinematic tradition, whether Méliès's imaginative worlds, German Expressionism's visual distortions, or Neorealism's cinematic space in everyday reality. Classical Hollywood standardized continuity and visual clarity, while the French New Wave challenged these norms with handheld cameras. In contemporary, mise-en-scène entered a new phase shaped by visual effects that enables digital and physical merge seamlessly. These legacies demonstrate that mise-en-scène is not a static element of cinema but a living and adapting tool and it will provide the foundation for understanding how cinema constructs and evolves.

Chapter 3

Beyond Cinema
Towards a Spatial Method

For years the term mise-en-scène has been discussed in relation to cinema, yet recent scholars highlight its relevance to interior design. As Ettedgui (1999) argues, production designers act as architects of illusionary worlds, shaping imagined spaces that carry psychological and emotional significance. Interiors thus function as metaphors for character development, intensify dramatic tension, and establish atmosphere. Whitehead (2018) similarly notes that at the heart of interior mise-en-scène lies the idea that spaces are never entirely what they seem, while they may reveal their raw structure as the bricks, mortar, or bare plaster, or they can also disguise themselves and suggest alternative realities. In this sense, interiors become active storytellers: design choices transform a decorated space into a staged environment, capable of conveying in a single frame what might otherwise require pages of description in a novel. Building on this, cinematic principles can inform how experiential perception is constructed within interior spaces, encouraging designers to rethink interiors as narrative and staged space.

3.1 From Function to Experience

Throughout the twentieth century, interior design was shaped by modernist principles, rationalism, functionalism and standardization. "Form follows function" (Sullivan, 1896) and "Less is more" (Mies van der Rohe, 1947) were used as main ideas positioned space primarily as a response to practical needs. Interiors were organized to perform, to serve, and to operate efficiently. Emotional resonance and atmospheric intensity were rarely treated as primary design objectives.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this paradigm gradually shifted. Interiors began to be evaluated not only by how well they functioned, but by how they felt. Experience, memory, and sensory engagement emerged as central concerns. As Klingmann (2007) mentions architecture started to evolve from "What it does?" to "What you feel?". This experiential turn reframed the role of the interior designer. Space was no longer only organized; it was staged.

This shift toward experiential design places the interior designer in front of a new kind of question: How can designers actually "design" an experience? Traditional design tools focus on function and form, but they often struggle to capture or shape the invisible layers of a space such as its mood, its rhythm, its atmosphere. This is exactly where a gap appears: There is a need for methods that can help designers to stage stories within spaces and create emotional impact intentionally, not by chance. To do that, it makes sense to look beyond the usual boundaries of architecture. Cinema, and especially the idea of mise-en-scène offers a powerful and well-tested language for shaping emotions, setting atmospheres, and guiding perception. Having understood why this experiential shift matters, the next step is to define what the goal is which is the creation of atmosphere, before exploring how mise-en-scène can become a method for interior design.

> **"I enter a building, see a room, and in the fraction of a second have this feeling about it."**
>
> **– Peter Zumthor, Atmospheres (2006)**

3.2 Atmosphere as Spatial Construction

In the art of cinema, the atmosphere conveyed to the audience is directly proportional to how well the mise-en-scene in that scene is constructed. As explained in detail before mise-en-scène comprises the visual elements arranged in front of the camera, like setting, lighting, costumes, and props, to establish a film's world and convey its story. In essence, mise-en-scène is the "what" of the visuals, while atmosphere is the "how" it makes the audience feel.

Pallasmaa (2001) states that, like in cinema, the essence of architecture lies in its ability to create atmosphere. Its not an additional layer applied to space; it is the condition through which space is experienced. A room is never perceived only through its dimensions or functions. It is sensed through light falling onto surfaces, through material textures, through acoustic resonance, and through the movement of the body within it. Zumthor (2006) emphasizes that before we consciously analyze a space, we already feel it.

As Pallasmaa suggests, architectural experience is fundamentally embodied. Space is not encountered as an abstract geometry but as lived reality shaped by memory, touch, and perception. Zumthor (2006) uses a beautiful word while describing the architectural atmosphere, the quality in architecture does not about being featured in guides, history books, or publications, it's when a building manages to move people. In his book *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments – Surrounding Objects*, to describe the intensity of atmosphere, Zumthor consistently uses the word "move." Atmosphere names the quality of a space that reaches us before we can name or analyze it. People are capable of immediate appreciation. They can decide in a fraction of a second whether they love what they see or not. Their response often has no rational explanation; it simply arises from what they sense. Atmosphere is perceived through our emotional sensibility, allowing for an instant acceptance or rejection of a place long before linear thought catches up.

Atmosphere therefore emerges from spatial decisions rather than decorative intentions. It is constructed through proportion, material articulation, sensory layering, and temporal unfolding. Light does not simply illuminate; it directs focus. Surfaces do not merely enclose; they respond to touch and reflection. Sound does not fill a void; it shapes the perception of depth and intimacy.

Because atmosphere unfolds as one moves, it is inseparable from time. A corridor turning into a darker threshold, a surface gradually revealed through shadow, or a pause before entering a confined interior all demonstrate that atmosphere is sequential. It is staged through transition.

If atmosphere can be constructed in architecture through these spatial and sensory orchestrations, then it can also be analyzed and intentionally designed. Cinema provides a particularly precise language for examining how such orchestration operates.

3.3 Framing, Perception, and the Body

In cinema, space is never neutral; it is constructed through framing. Framing operates not merely as a technical procedure but as a spatial mechanism that structures perception and defines the limits of what can be seen. By selecting, isolating, and organizing visual information, framing establishes a controlled field of attention. As discussed in architectural–cinematic representation studies, framing mediates the relationship between space and viewer, transforming spatial continuity into a perceptual construct (Kaçmaz, 1996).

Just like in cinema, architecture may be approached from a viewpoint based on the concept of framing. The object of architecture, the building and its interior is composed of space and architectonic elements which frames the space. The frame in architecture is composed of walls, floors, openings, alignments, thresholds, and controlled vistas. Space is not encountered in its totality but through partial views and guided sequences. Visual access is structured, and perception unfolds within spatial boundaries that are intentionally composed.

In film, the camera regulates distance, angle, and movement, thereby organizing the spectator's perceptual engagement. In architecture, the body assumes this role. The moving body becomes the perceptual instrument through which space is gradually revealed. Circulation replaces camera movement, thresholds function as spatial cuts, and transitions between interiors operate as temporal edits.

Designing space can therefore be understood as designing attention. Just as directors construct staged environments to guide sight and regulate perception, interior designers can structure spatial conditions that orient the body and choreograph sensory focus. Framing, in this sense, becomes a shared operative principle between cinema and architecture, not as representation alone but as a method of organizing lived experience.

Having established atmosphere as a spatial construct and the body as the perceptual medium through which it is experienced, the next step is to examine how mise-en-scène can operate as a transferable design method. In order to test the validity of this approach, it must be applied to a spatial condition where its impact can be clearly measured. If atmosphere can be intentionally constructed in a space that is typically reduced to pure function and technical necessity, then its strength as a design methodology becomes significantly more convincing.

The bathroom, perhaps unexpectedly, becomes an ideal site for this examination. It is a space of daily ritual, where the body is central and sensory perception is intensified through touch, sound, temperature, and material proximity. By selecting the bathroom, a space traditionally defined through utility rather than experience, the study shifts from abstract theoretical formulation to a concrete spatial test. The question is no longer whether mise-en-scène can shape perception in cinema, but whether its principles can inform the deliberate staging of everyday interior space. This transition prepares the ground for the analytical examination that follows.

3.4 Bathroom as a Controlled Atmospheric Interior

In order to test the power of the proposed mise-en-scène methodology it is essential to be applied to a space where it resists easy atmospheric manipulation not in those that ideal for atmospheric content. If mise-en-scène was demonstrated in a place such as a hotel lobby or a café or an art gallery it wouldn't be so reliable because these places already have an atmospheric potential by their own presence. Instead, applying this methodology to a space like bathroom, a place that is historically treated as only functional and technical, serves as a way to test its effectiveness. This choice will function as a laboratory for observing the atmosphere creating capacity of the methodology in a controlled environment. Thus, it makes the domestic bathroom not a space that stays in the background to a foregrounded spatial experience, the research tests the transformative power of mise-en-scène in interior design.

Although bathrooms are not usually the first place designed in architecture, it has a phenomenological experience. It is the first place entered in the morning and the last to be left at night, where bodily rituals take place, washing, cleansing, breathing, touching and self-care. It is an intimate and private place where the individuals focus only on themselves and body. As Pallasmaa (2012) and Bachelard (2014) suggest, spatial experience is inseparable from sensory imagination and memory. Tactile perception can be felt through the temperature of water or the softness of the towels. Acoustic perception can be evoked by the water which is running, the music that is playing from the speaker or just the calming silence. Olfactory experiences can be the scent of the candle that is lighting up or the smell of a soap.

Despite this density of embodied experience, architectural discourse has long categorized the bathroom as secondary and purely technical. Reframing it as a site of atmospheric potential reveals how even the most utilitarian interior can become a carefully staged experiential environment. The bathroom thus emerges not as a marginal domestic space, but as a concentrated spatial condition through which the transformative capacity of mise-en-scène can be critically examined.

Chapter 4

From Scenographic Space to Spatial Analysis

4.1 From Taboo to Scenographic Device: The Bathroom in Cinema

The bathroom occupies a peculiar position in the history of cinema. For decades it remained marginal, avoided, or censored not because of architectural insignificance but because of its association with bodily exposure, privacy, and taboo. Its absence from early cinematic representation reveals not spatial neutrality but cultural discomfort.

In early film history bathroom scenes were rare and cautiously framed. Even when bathtubs appeared, as in *Cleopatra* (DeMille, 1933), they were carefully aestheticized and distanced from explicit bodily confrontation. With the enforcement of the Hays Code between 1934 and 1968, bathrooms became even more restricted territories. The mere presence of a toilet was considered morally inappropriate. The bathroom therefore functioned as a spatial boundary regulated by ideology rather than as a neutral domestic interior.

A decisive shift occurred with Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* in 1960. The shower scene did more than introduce violence into a bathroom setting. It transformed the space into a site of atmospheric construction. The confined interior, the bright white surfaces, the fragmentation of the body through rapid montage, and the orchestration of sound created an intensified spatial condition. The shower scene and thus the film as a whole became a model for the renaissance of horror films in the late 1970s. Screenwriter Joseph Stefano had to fight the Production Code (Hays Code) for the inclusion of the scene showing Marion Crane flushing stolen money down the toilet (Skerry, 2008). *Psycho* thus became the first film to explicitly show a toilet on screen, breaking long-standing cinematic taboos surrounding nudity, bathroom fixtures, and sexual themes. The bathroom ceased to operate as background and became an active scenographic apparatus. With *Psycho*, the bathroom did not merely host an act of violence; it entered cinema as a fully operative spatial device. The confined interior demonstrated that a domestic, everyday room could generate suspense, vulnerability, tension, intimacy, and psychological rupture through spatial construction alone. From this moment onward, the bathroom was no longer a censored background setting but a scenographic environment capable of concentrating experience within a controlled architectural condition.

Figure 38-45. Psycho (Hitchcock, 1960).

4.2 The Bathroom as Atmospheric Instrument

Following the loosening of censorship in the late 1960s and 1970s, filmmakers increasingly recognized the bathroom as a spatial instrument capable of carrying psychological and atmospheric weight. Its architectural characteristics, including enclosure, reflective surfaces, proximity to the body, and controlled lighting conditions, made it particularly suited to heightened staging.

Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining,* 1980 offers a clear example of this transformation. The red and white restroom and the green bathroom scenes are not conceived as naturalistic interiors but as deliberately constructed spatial environments designed specifically for cinematic control. These bathrooms were built as studio sets, allowing Kubrick to determine proportions, color saturation, material reflectivity, and spatial alignment with precision. They function as psychological chambers structured through bold chromatic contrast, strict symmetry, and exaggerated spatial geometry. Rather than imitating everyday domestic realism, these interiors operate as consciously staged spaces in which every surface, axis, and reflection is calibrated to guide perception. Tension emerges not from decay or darkness but from excessive clarity and compositional rigidity. The bathroom becomes a controlled spatial apparatus in which confrontation and psychological instability unfold within an environment engineered for visual and atmospheric intensity.

In contemporary cinema this scenographic logic continues. In *The Substance* (Fargeat, 2024), reflective red surfaces, symmetrical compositions, and bodily exposure reactivate visual strategies inspired from Kubrick's interiors. The bathroom is reused as a concentrated spatial field capable of staging new forms of tension, particularly those related to the female body and self-perception. Through repetition and reinterpretation, the bathroom evolves into a cinematic template, a controlled environment that can condense fear, alienation, intimacy, or transformation.

Figure 46. The Shining (Kubrick, 1980). The Bathroom in The Overlook Hotel.

Figure 47. The Substance (Fargeat, 2024). The Bathroom in The Substance reaclling the one in The Shining.

Peter Greenaway's *Inside Rooms: 26 Bathrooms, London & Oxfordshire,* 1985 provides a parallel exploration. By presenting bathrooms as fixed stages, Greenaway reveals their potential as micro architectures of ritual. Each room operates as a condensed interior in which everyday bodily acts become deliberate performances. The bathroom is no longer secondary or technical. It becomes a spatial lens through which domestic life is framed and exposed.

Similarly, the uneasiness surrounding the bathroom as a marginal and rarely discussed domestic space finds a striking cinematic reflection in Luis Buñuel's *Le Fantôme de la liberté (The Phantom of Liberty),* 1974. In one of the film's most provocative sequences, the conventional organization of domestic rituals is deliberately reversed. A richly decorated dining room, furnished with chandeliers, formal seating, and an atmosphere of polite conversation, becomes the setting for bodily functions. Characters sit together around the table on toilet seats and engage in casual dialogue, while eating is treated as a private and almost shameful act that must take place in isolation.

Across these examples one transformation becomes evident. The bathroom shifts from taboo zone to scenographic instrument, from censored interior to atmospheric device.

Figure 48-49. Inside Rooms: 26 Bathrooms, London & Oxfordshire, (Greenway, 1985).

Figure 49-50. Le Fantôme de la liberté (Buñuel, 1974).

4.3 Why the Bathroom as a Laboratory

This historical evolution reveals why the bathroom holds particular relevance for interior design research. The bathroom is uniquely suited to atmospheric intensification because of its spatial conditions. It is enclosed and controlled. It is materially dense, often composed of tile, water, reflective surfaces, and acoustically active materials. It places the body and the sense of self at the center of spatial experience. The bathroom is one of the few domestic interiors where attention shifts from social interaction to bodily awareness. Everyday rituals such as washing, bathing, breathing, or simply standing in front of a mirror establish a direct confrontation between the individual and their own physical presence. The bathroom therefore operates as an interior where self perception and spatial perception overlap. Rather than functioning merely as a service zone, it becomes a site where bodily existence and architectural condition intersect in their most immediate form.

Unlike large public interiors the bathroom does not rely on scale or spectacle to produce effect. Its atmospheric force emerges from spatial precision and sensory concentration. For this reason the domestic bathroom becomes an ideal laboratory for examining how mise en scène constructs experience. If atmospheric principles can be identified and extracted from such a constrained and utilitarian interior, their validity as a transferable design methodology becomes significantly stronger.

The following section establishes the analytical framework through which cinematic bathroom scenes are examined.

4.4 Analytical Framework and Case Selection

This study establishes an analytical framework that treats cinematic mise-en-scène not as narrative interpretation but as a spatial construction method transferable to interior design. The objective is to isolate how atmosphere is materially and temporally produced through the study of how space, body, time, and material are staged within a fixed architectural condition.

Rather than reading symbolic meaning, the framework examines staging decisions through which space regulates perception, bodily position, duration, and sensory intensity.

To maintain methodological clarity, the analysis operates within a deliberately constrained field: domestic bathroom interiors, examined through fixed spatial criteria and recurring architectural elements.

Analytical Criteria

- Each bathroom scene is examined through four spatial criteria applied consistently across all case studies. The purpose of these criteria is not comparison of stories, but comparison of spatial construction strategies.

01

Camera-Space-Body Relationship

This criterion investigates how the camera positions itself in relation to the bathroom interior and the body occupying it. Framing axes, distance, movement, and alignment are analyzed to understand how bodily presence is directed, exposed, constrained, or destabilized by spatial configuration.

Framing is treated as a spatial act that reorganizes architectural perception rather than as a stylistic cinematic device.

Interior Translation:
In interior design, space can be designed to guide sight and organize attention. Axis control, threshold positioning, degrees of bodily exposure, and circulation alignment. The body replaces the camera as the moving perceptual instrument; spatial composition determines how users encounter, confront, or avoid architectural elements.

02

Spatial Integrity

This criterion examines whether the bathroom operates as a coherent architectural whole or as a constructed spatial fragment shaped primarily for the camera. Enclosure, depth perception, continuity, and boundary reinforcement are analyzed to reveal whether atmosphere emerges from architectural completeness or from strategic fragmentation.

Directors often manipulate interior space in order to accommodate the camera. Walls may be removed, proportions adjusted, or depth exaggerated so that the camera can enter, move, and frame the space effectively. These alterations reveal that cinematic interiors are constructed not only as architecture, but as environments designed to be filmed.

Interior Translation:
This criterion translates into decisions regarding enclosure, transparency, spatial compression, layered thresholds, and controlled fragmentation. Designers may intentionally manipulate coherence to intensify psychological or sensory experience.

03

Time Construction

Time is examined as an active spatial component rather than as narrative pacing. Shot duration, stillness, repetition, delay, and rhythm are analyzed to understand how the bathroom is revealed and inhabited over time.

Within confined interiors, duration becomes perceptible. Stillness intensifies presence; delay heightens awareness; repetition ritualizes experience.

Interior Translation:
In architectural terms, time becomes sequence, pause, compression–release dynamics, ritual duration, and experiential unfolding.

04

Material, Surface, and Light Behavior

This criterion focuses on how material qualities generate atmosphere through performance rather than representation. Reflectivity, moisture, texture, translucency, acoustic resonance, and thermal contrast are examined as active agents shaping perception.

Light is not decorative but hierarchical which guides the attention. Thus surfaces are not neutral but responsive; water becomes both tactile and acoustic medium.

Interior Translation:
This shifts attention toward material behavior under light, humidity, reflection, and sound. Interior design decisions regarding finishes, surface tactility, acoustic absorption, and luminous gradients directly construct atmospheric intensity.

Architectural Elements as Spatial Pivot

To further structure the analysis, the study identifies recurring architectural elements within domestic bathrooms:

- The bathtub
- The shower
- The mirror
- The sink
- The wc
- The door
- The floor
- The window

These elements operate as spatial pivot devices, concentrated points through which atmospheric intensity is organized. They do not function as isolated objects but as mediators that expose how the bathroom is staged through alignment, containment, duration, and material interaction.

Cinematic interiors are rarely perceived as complete architectural wholes; they are experienced through focal intensifications and partial framings. By isolating pivot elements, spatial decisions become legible, comparable, and transferable to interior design methodology.

The following case studies apply the established analytical framework to selected domestic bathroom scenes. Each example is examined through the four spatial criteria in order to extract transferable design principles.

Case Selection Logic

The spatial conditions in this study did not arise from a single film or a single scene. They developed gradually through observing how certain architectural elements repeatedly shaped perception within domestic bathroom interiors. By comparing multiple examples, it became possible to recognize distinct spatial tendencies in the way mirrors, doors, floors, or bathtubs organize the body, structure attention, and intensify atmosphere.

In some cases, these spatial conditions appear across several films. In others, they become especially clear in one particularly strong example. What matters here is not how often a condition appears, but how clearly its spatial logic can be identified. A condition may become visible through repetition, but it can also emerge with equal clarity in a single, carefully staged scene.

For each spatial condition, one film is selected for a detailed analysis when that condition forms the main focus of the discussion. These in-depth readings are supported by plan drawings and close spatial examination. In other cases, some conditions are addressed more briefly through shorter examples. These are not developed as full case studies, but included to support and clarify the spatial logic being discussed.

The difference in depth is intentional. Some spatial conditions require extended analysis to be fully explained, while others can be understood more clearly through focused observations.

The following case studies apply this framework to selected domestic bathroom scenes.

4.5 Case Studies: Cinematic Bathrooms as Staged Interiors

4.5.1

4.5.2

4.5.3

4.5.4

4.5.5

4.5.6

4.5.7

4.5.8

4.5.1

The Bathtub

The bathtub occupies a distinct position within the domestic bathroom as a site of immersion and stillness. It structures the body horizontally and requires the body to recline, to pause, and to surrender to gravity. In this configuration, the subject is not standing or active but suspended within water.

In cinema, the bathtub is rarely neutral. Its horizontal orientation often transforms it into a stage where intimacy, vulnerability, ritual, or excess can unfold. Because the body is partially submerged and physically slowed, the bathtub intensifies awareness of scale and spatial enclosure. It can function as a private sanctuary, a space of seduction, a site of death, or a spectacle of luxury depending on how it is framed.

For this reason, the bathtub operates not merely as a functional fixture, but as a scenographic device capable of generating radically different atmospheres through shifts in framing, scale, material, and duration.

Spatial Condition 1

Bathtub as a Display Platform

Scarface
1983

Genre: Action, Adventure, Crime, Gangster, Mafia, Drama, Thriller
Director: Brian De Palma
Cinematographer: John A. Alonzo
Production Designer: Ferdinando Scarfiotti
Costume Designer: Patricia Norris

Figure 51. Scarface (De Palma, 1983).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Brian De Palma and written by Oliver Stone, *Scarface* (1983) follows the rise and fall of Tony Montana, a Cuban refugee who arrives in Miami with nothing and ruthlessly builds a cocaine empire within the violent landscape of the 1980s drug trade. Driven by ambition and an uncompromising desire for wealth, Tony transforms himself from a marginal outsider into a powerful crime lord. As his influence expands, so do the scale and extravagance of his surroundings, reflecting his obsession with status and control.

Yet this ascent is inseparable from decline. Tony's growing paranoia, possessiveness, and emotional isolation gradually erode his relationships and destabilize his empire. The film portrays a world shaped by excess, consumption, and unchecked ego, where material success fails to secure stability or belonging. Through its heightened visual style and grand interiors, Scarface presents ambition not as triumph, but as a path toward self-destruction.

Scarface Bathtub Scene in Key Frames





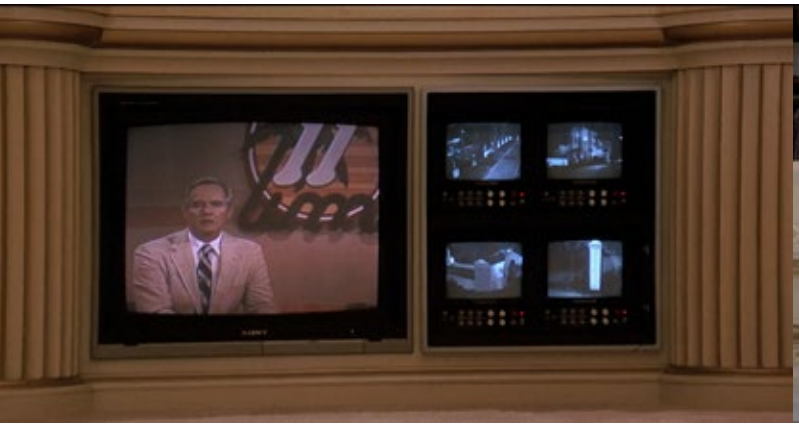



Figure 52. Scarface (De Palma, 1983). Bathtub Scene Collage.

01

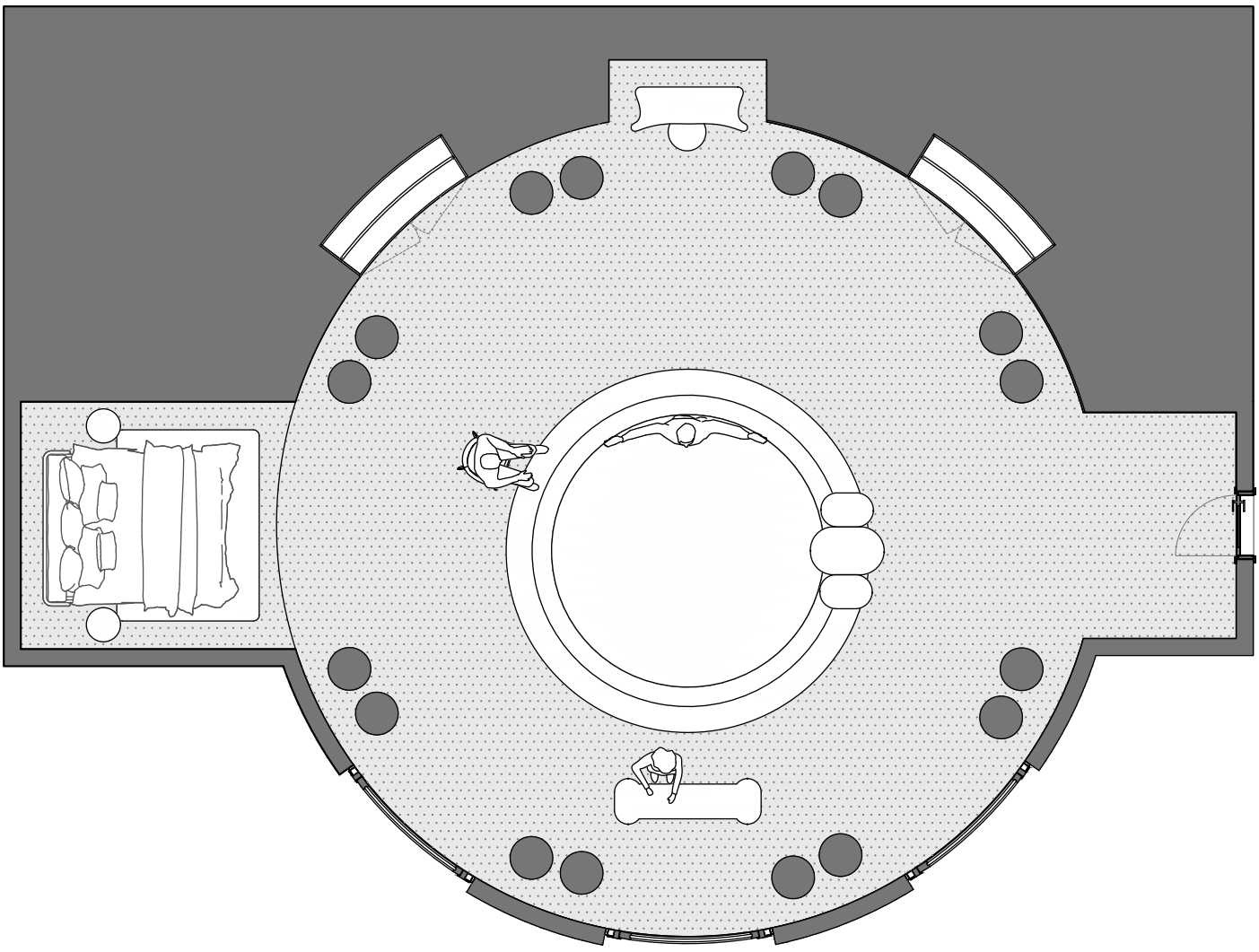
Camera - Space - Body Relationship

In *Scarface*, the bathtub scene is structured around scale and centrality. The setting itself blurs the boundary between a bathroom and a bedroom. Rather than being confined to a clearly defined bathing space, the bathtub is positioned within an expansive interior that incorporates elements associated with a private sleeping area. This spatial overlap creates a hybrid environment that exceeds the conventional scale and function of a typical bathroom.

Although the sequence employs multiple camera positions, the most spatially revealing compositions are framed diagonally, allowing both the bathtub and the surrounding interior to remain fully legible. Rather than fragmenting the space, the camera sustains a measured distance, reinforcing the monumentality of the bathroom. The bathtub dominates the spatial hierarchy and anchors the composition.

The camera does not align the viewer with an intimate or subjective perspective. Instead, it maintains an observational distance, emphasizing the architectural grandeur of the setting. Tony's body is horizontally positioned within the oversized tub, reinforcing stillness rather than vulnerability. The bathtub elevates Tony instead of trapping him, visually reinforcing the power he has accumulated.

Toward the end of the scene, the camera gradually pulls back and rises. While Manny and Elvira are initially present, the sequence concludes with Tony alone in the tub. As the viewpoint becomes increasingly elevated and detached, the exaggerated scale of the bathroom becomes more apparent. The monumental space that once signified authority now frames isolation, suggesting that excess and power ultimately lead to solitude.



Plan of Bathtub-Bedroom Space
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

In *Scarface*, spatial integrity is constructed through architectural scale and excess, although this scale is partly a cinematic fabrication. While the exterior of Tony's mansion is associated with El Fureidis in Montecito, the interior spaces, including the monumental staircase, office, and bathtub, were largely filmed on soundstages at Universal Studios. The bathroom reads as a fully realized interior.

Marble walls, gold fixtures, ornamental details, and expansive floor surfaces remain visible within the frame, reinforcing the sense of volumetric depth and material continuity. Unlike studio-built spaces designed primarily for montage, this interior appears coherent and spatially stable.

The diagonal framing enhances this perception by exposing multiple planes of the room simultaneously. Depth is not concealed but emphasized. The bathtub sits at the center of a carefully orchestrated environment where every surface contributes to scale and spectacle.

Thus, spatial integrity here does not rely on realism or fragmentation, but on continuity and spectacle. The bathroom feels complete, stable, and materially unified, transforming domestic privacy into a monumental stage of power.

03

Time Construction

The temporal structure of the bathtub scene unfolds in a steady and uninterrupted rhythm. The sequence is largely dialogue-driven, and its pacing aligns with conversational flow rather than dramatic escalation. There is no rapid cutting or deliberate slowing of time. Instead, duration follows the natural cadence of speech and presence.

This temporal continuity reinforces stability and control. Unlike scenes where montage fragments time to create shock, here the sustained rhythm allows the viewer to remain within the architectural environment. Power is conveyed not through temporal rupture but through composure and stillness.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

Material and color in the bathtub scene reinforce excess and constructed luxury. Marble surfaces, polished stone, gold fixtures, and reflective finishes dominate the interior. These materials do not create intimacy; they project wealth and spectacle. The bathroom reads less as a space of privacy and more as an extension of Tony's status.

Warm tones and metallic highlights amplify opulence. Unlike the cold sterility of the shower in Psycho, here surfaces appear heavy, dense, and ornamental. The bathtub itself is oversized and visually weighty, emphasizing abundance rather than vulnerability. Material does not disappear into the background; it asserts itself.

Lighting enhances this effect. Illumination reflects off polished surfaces, creating a glossy atmosphere that supports display and visibility. The brightness does not expose fragility; it intensifies theatricality. The environment appears curated and exaggerated, reinforcing the idea that material wealth defines spatial identity.

Through scale, texture, and chromatic richness, the bathtub becomes more than a functional object. It operates as a material symbol of excess. The space is not built to comfort the body but to frame power through surfaces.

Supporting Case 1

Cleopatra, 1963, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz

In *Cleopatra*, the bathtub similarly operates as a staged surface of presentation. Cleopatra is seated within a milk bath, centrally framed and visually isolated from the surrounding space. Like in Scarface, the body is not hidden by the enclosure of the tub. Instead, it is elevated through framing and detailed material usage. The composition emphasizes stillness and centrality. Cleopatra remains seated, upright, and composed, occupying the tub as a contained yet dominant figure. The bathroom does not function as an intimate domestic interior. It becomes a controlled stage where presence is stabilized and amplified.

Supporting Case 2

Marie Antoinette, 2006, directed by Sofia Coppola

In *Marie Antoinette*, the bathtub also functions as a space of controlled presentation. The queen is positioned within the tub as attendants move around her, transforming a private act into a formalized spectacle. The body is centrally framed and remains visually composed, even within a ritual of cleansing.

The bath does not create intimacy or concealment. Instead, it becomes a ceremonial surface. The horizontal plane of the tub stabilizes the body while the surrounding choreography reinforces visibility. The act of bathing is no longer private but spatially staged, reinforcing hierarchy and controlled exposure.

Figure 53. Cleopatra (Mankiewicz, 1963).

Figure 54. Cleopatra (Mankiewicz, 1963).

Figure 55. Marie Antoinette (Coppola, 2006).

Figure 56. Marie Antoinette (Coppola, 2006).

Spatial Condition 2

Bathtub as Stillness Chamber

Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles

1975

Genre: Drama, Family, Romance, Melodrama, Marriage, Motherhood
Director: Chantal Akerman
Cinematographer: Babette Mangolte
Production Designer: Philippe Graff

Figure 57. Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles (Akerman, 1975).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Chantal Akerman, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) follows three days in the life of a widowed mother living with her teenage son in a modest Brussels apartment. The film observes her daily routine with unusual temporal precision, focusing on domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, and bathing. Rather than relying on conventional plot progression, the narrative unfolds through repetition and duration. As minor disruptions begin to appear within her tightly structured schedule, the stability of her domestic order gradually begins to fracture. Through its restrained camera and extended real-time sequences, the film transforms ordinary interior spaces into sites of temporal tension and accumulated stillness.

Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles Bathroom Scene in Key Frames

Figure 58. Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles (Akerman, 1975). Bathtub Scene Collage.

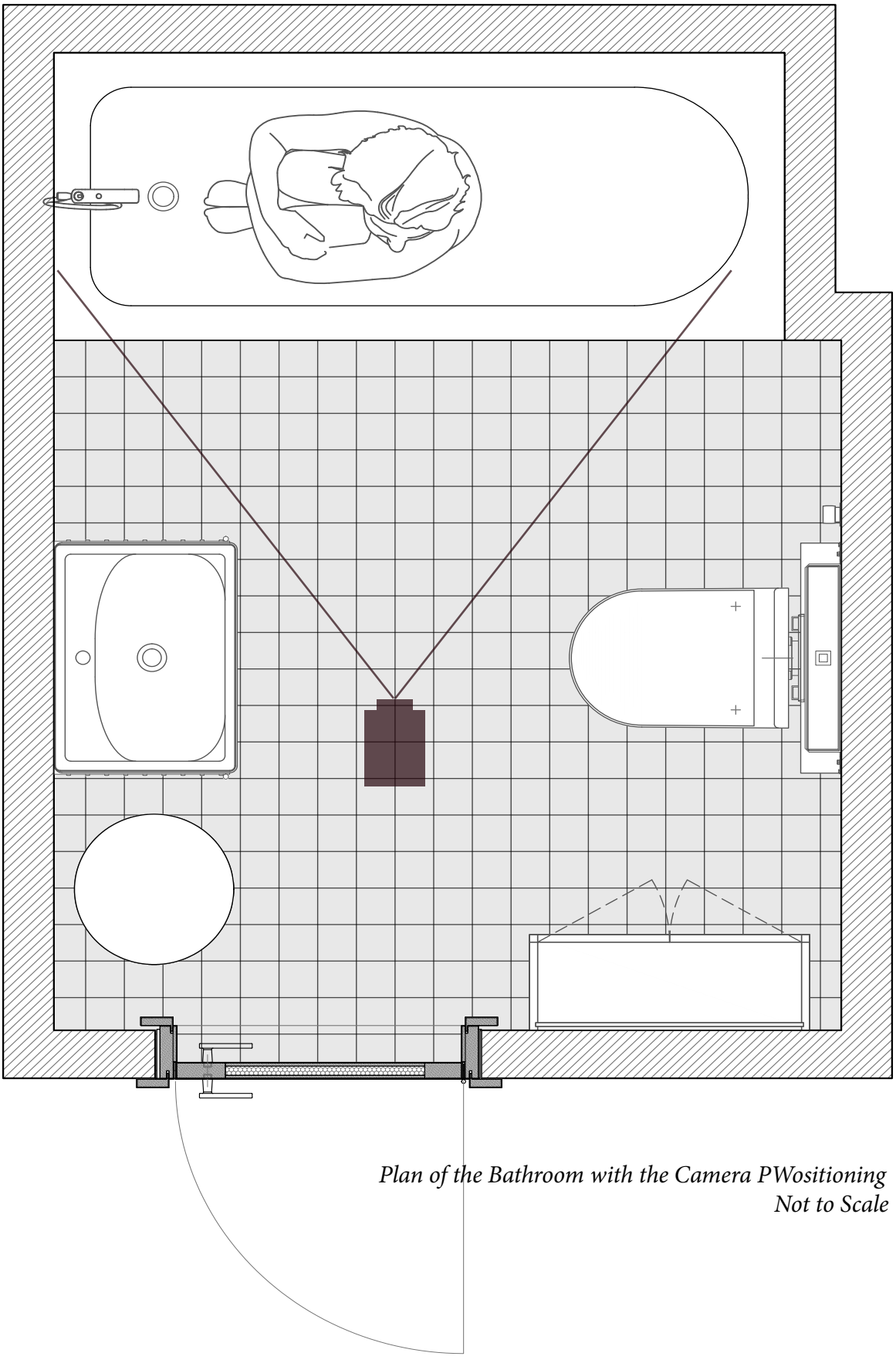
01

Camera - Space - Body Relationship

In *Jeanne Dielman*, one of the elements that makes this scene distinctive is the way the body remains in a horizontal position inside the bathtub while the act of washing unfolds without interruption. The cleaning gesture is not cut, accelerated, or dramatized. It is allowed to continue in full duration. The camera remains static and detached, typically positioned at a frontal framing. The bathroom is shown in its entirety, without fragmentation or expressive framing. This fixed viewpoint prevents the space from being aestheticized or emotionally intensified. The room is not stylized; it is simply presented.

By refusing close-ups or dynamic camera movement, the film allows the bathroom to be perceived as a stable and repetitive environment. The viewer is not guided toward interpretation through cinematic emphasis. Instead, the shot invites prolonged observation. Duration replaces drama.

Stillness in this scene does not emerge from total immobility. It emerges from repetition and minimal variation. As duration accumulates, the reduced movement of the body combined with its horizontal positioning gradually produces a condition of spatial stillness.



Plan of the Bathroom with the Camera PWositioning
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

The bathroom is presented as an ordinary domestic interior. Because the scene is staged from near the doorway, the entire room becomes legible within a single frame. The camera does not fragment the space through cuts or shifting angles. Instead, the bathroom can be read as a whole volume. Its walls, floor, fixtures, and circulation are perceptually intact. This frontal staging allows the viewer to understand the spatial boundaries clearly.

Although the entire room is visible, the perceptual focus remains on the bathtub. The geometry of the space is stable, but the visual gravity settles around the horizontal body inside the tub. The bathroom does not compete with the action; it quietly supports it.

03

Time Construction

Time is the defining element of this condition What makes this scene particularly distinctive is the way an everyday action is presented almost in full duration. Jeanne remains in a horizontal position inside the bathtub while the act of washing continues without interruption. In most films, such a routine activity would be shortened or shown only in fragments. The spectator is used to temporal compression. Here, that expectation is suspended.

Because the scene unfolds in real time, it begins to feel longer than it objectively is. The duration is not exaggerated through slow motion or dramatic emphasis, but through continuity. The absence of cuts makes the viewer aware of time passing.

At first, attention is directed toward Jeanne's body and her repetitive gestures. However, as the shot continues, perception shifts. The viewer gradually becomes more aware of the surrounding interior. The tiles, the proportions of the room, the sink, the walls, and the spatial layout begin to register more clearly. The bathroom is no longer simply a backdrop for action; it becomes something to inhabit visually.

Stillness here does not result from total immobility. It emerges from minimal movement combined with sustained duration. Jeanne's horizontal posture limits dynamic motion, and as time accumulates, a quiet spatial density develops. The bathtub functions as a temporal container. It holds the body in place and slows perception.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

In this scene, material does not draw attention to itself immediately. It becomes noticeable through duration. As the shot continues, the pale green marble on the walls and bathtub slowly registers. Its repetition across vertical and horizontal surfaces creates a quiet continuity. Nothing feels decorative or symbolic. The space feels used, ordinary, and consistent.

A pale pink wall introduces a subtle color contrast, but it does not create drama. A small floral shower curtain and the simple tiled floor reinforce the bathroom's everyday character. The materials do not try to impress. They support routine.

The lighting is flat, even, and cool. There is no dramatic shadow or expressive contrast. Although the bathroom has a window, daylight is not emphasized. The space feels artificially lit and slightly detached from the outside world. The cool light flattens surfaces and keeps everything clearly visible.

Because nothing visually dominates, the material and light remain stable. Over time, this stability contributes to the overall sense of stillness.

Supporting Case 1

A Clockwork Orange, 1971, directed by Wes Enderson

In *A Clockwork Orange*, the bathtub operates as a contained interior chamber. The body remains seated within the horizontal enclosure of the tub, stabilized by its boundaries. Although the character sings while bathing, the spatial condition does not become dynamic. The singing does not produce movement in space; it unfolds within stillness.

The body stays largely fixed, and the camera does not fragment the room through rapid cutting. The bathtub isolates the figure from the larger domestic environment, turning the space into a momentary enclosure.

Supporting Case 2

The Dreamers, 2003, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci

In *The Dreamers*, three characters lie together inside the bathtub. All of them close their eyes and remain almost completely still. There is no strong movement, no dramatic gesture. The horizontal position of their bodies reinforces a sense of suspension.

The bathtub defines a clear boundary that contains them within a single, limited surface. Even though there are three bodies, the space does not feel dynamic. Instead, the scene is marked by collective stillness.

Figure 59. A Clockwork Orange (Enderson, 1971).

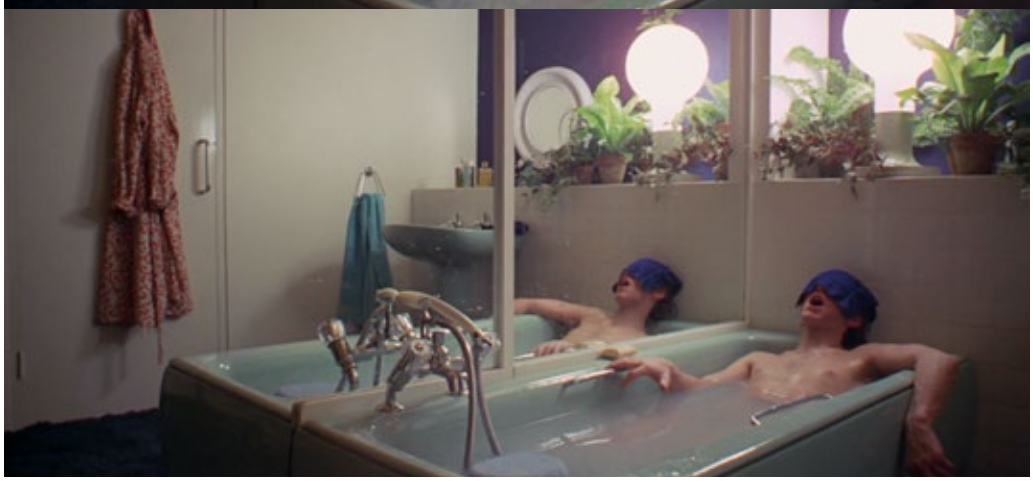


Figure 60. A Clockwork Orange (Enderson, 1971).

Figure 61. The Dreamers (Bertolucci, 2003).

Figure 62. The Dreamers (Bertolucci, 2003).

4.5.2

The Shower

The shower occupies a uniquely vulnerable position within the domestic bathroom. Unlike the mirror, which organizes vision, or the floor, which supports the body, the shower exposes it. It requires full bodily undressing and physical immersion. Within this space, the body is isolated, partially concealed by a curtain, and acoustically masked by the sound of running water.

In cinema, the shower is never a neutral functional area. Directors deliberately stage it as a threshold between privacy and exposure. The vertical enclosure of tiles and the semi-permeable boundary of the curtain create a condition where visibility and concealment coexist. The body becomes central yet defenseless.

Water further intensifies this vulnerability. It blurs vision, alters sound perception, and destabilizes sensory clarity. The bathroom shifts from a stable interior into a changing environment.

Because the subject is physically exposed, the shower can host moments of intimacy and love, but also conflict and sudden violence, even murder. For this reason, it frequently operates not merely as a backdrop for action, but as an active spatial device shaping vulnerability and tension.

Spatial Condition 1

Bathtub as a Fragile Privacy

Psycho

1960

Genre: Crime, Drama, Psychological Horror, Murder Mystery, Serial Killer, Thriller
Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Cinematographer: John L. Russell
Production Designer: Robert Clatworthy, Joseph Hurley, George Milo
Costume Designer: Rita Riggs

Figure 63. Psycho (Hitchcock, 1960).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho* (1960) follows the story of Marion Crane, a secretary who impulsively steals a large sum of money and flees town in search of a new beginning. During her escape, she stops at the isolated Bates Motel, run by the shy and enigmatic Norman Bates. What begins as a crime-driven narrative unexpectedly shifts into psychological horror after Marion's brutal murder in the motel shower. The film then reorients its focus toward the investigation of her disappearance and the disturbing secrets surrounding Norman and his mother.

Widely regarded as a turning point in horror cinema, Psycho destabilizes narrative expectations and redefines suspense through editing, framing, and spatial manipulation. The infamous shower scene, in particular, transforms a domestic space of vulnerability into a site of terror, permanently altering the cinematic meaning of the bathroom interior.

Psycho Bathroom Scene in Key Frames

Figure 64. Psycho (Hitchcock, 1960). Shower Scene Collage.

01

Camera - Space - Body Relationship

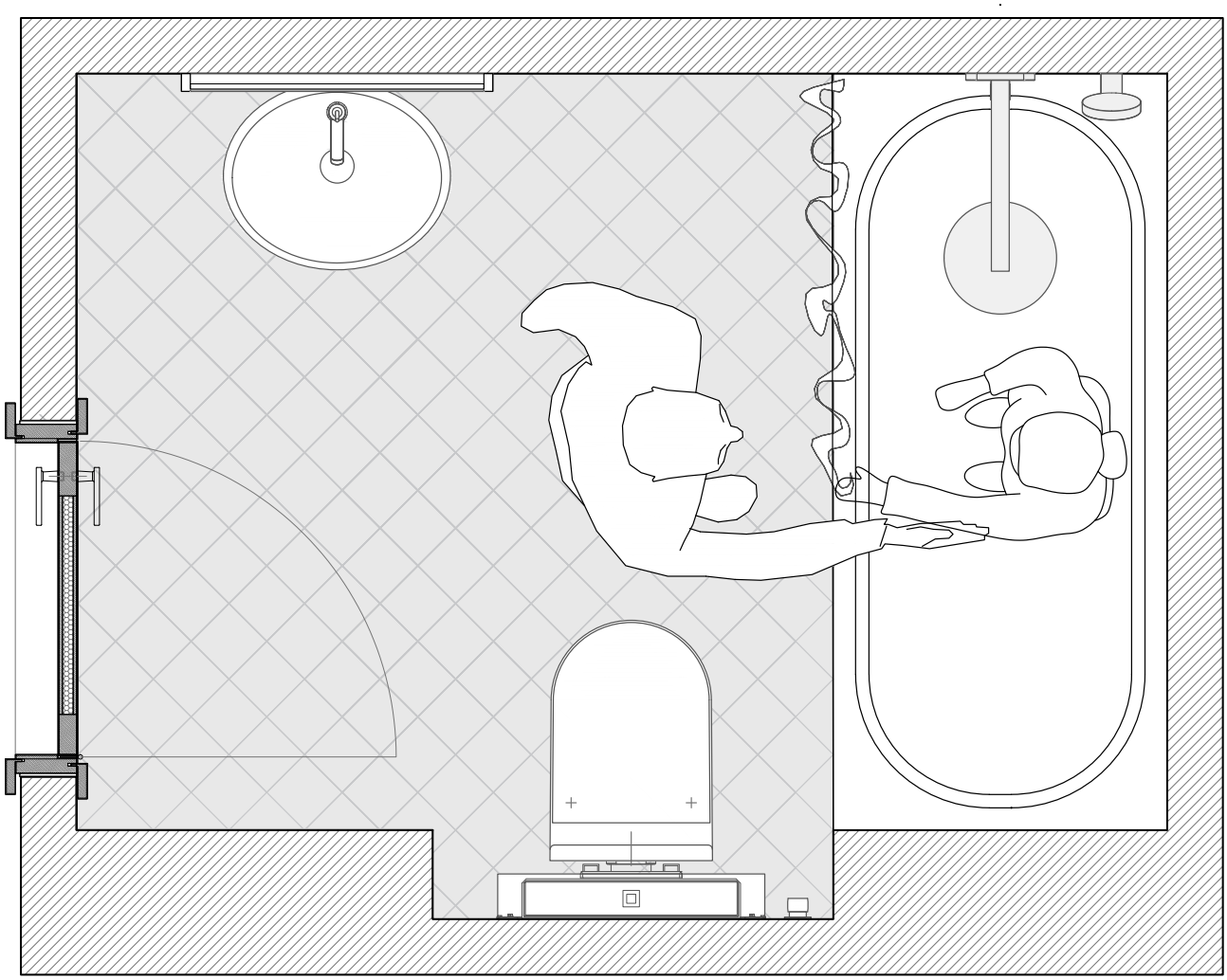
In *Psycho*, the camera fundamentally restructures the perception of space within the shower. Hitchcock used between 70 and 78 different camera setups for this single sequence, constructing the bathroom not as a realistic domestic interior but as a fully controlled cinematic set. As Skerry (2008) notes, the bathroom was designed to serve camera placement and montage rather than architectural authenticity. Space here is subordinated to framing.

Before the attack, the bathroom is presented through relatively stable compositions. Marion's body is centered within the frame, and the shower enclosure appears as a contained, legible space. The camera operates at human scale, maintaining proximity to the body and reinforcing vulnerability. The character does not move dynamically through the room; instead, she occupies a fixed position within the shower stall. The space offers no escape trajectory.

Once the attack begins, this spatial stability collapses. Alfred Hitchcock deliberately employs rapid cutting as a primary technique. Continuity gives way to fast, fragmented edits that dismantle the bathroom's spatial coherence. The camera breaks the interior into a sequence of disjointed close-ups; face, hand, knife, curtain, drain which prevents the viewer from reconstructing the room as a unified whole.

Importantly, Hitchcock does not position the camera as a distant observer. Rather than allowing the audience to watch the crime from outside, he situates the viewpoint within the violence itself. The camera adopts a proximity that aligns the spectator with the event, intensifying immediacy and psychological involvement. The viewer does not simply witness the attack; they experience it from within its spatial fragmentation.

Through this fast-cut montage, space is no longer experienced as architecture but as a succession of visual shocks. The rhythm accelerates, amplifying bodily vulnerability while denying stable orientation. Meaning is constructed not through continuous action, but through the collision of frames.



Plan of the Bathroom
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

In *Psycho*, spatial integrity does not derive from architectural realism but from cinematic construction. As Jacobs (2007) argues in *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, many of Hitchcock's interiors function as fragmented cinematic environments rather than architecturally coherent spaces. These interiors were studio-built settings constructed only to the extent required for filming, shaped primarily by camera logic rather than architectural continuity.

The bathroom in the Bates Motel was therefore not conceived as a coherent architectural whole, but as a scenographic construct organized according to camera placement and psychological effect (Jacobs, 2007). The shower set was assembled in a studio, with walls and fixtures arranged to accommodate multiple camera angles. Its architectural completeness was secondary to its cinematic function. Surface brightness, tile alignment, plumbing fixtures, and drainage details were meticulously controlled to serve framing and montage. The analyzed floor plan of Room 1 and its bathroom further confirms that this was a constructed spatial system designed to reinforce enclosure (Jacobs, 2007).

The shower functions as a site of containment. Vertical tiled walls compress the body within a narrow stall and restrict movement. Openness is nearly absent. The set does not simulate everyday domesticity; instead, it intensifies vulnerability through spatial confinement. While the spatial system appears coherent within the frame, this coherence is an effect of cinematic control rather than architectural wholeness.

Spatial integrity in Psycho is therefore paradoxical. The bathroom appears complete within the frame, yet its unity is illusory. It is engineered for fragmentation. Integrity here signifies total control over perception rather than architectural totality.

03

Time Construction

The temporal structure of the shower scene is defined by acceleration. Unlike earlier sequences in the film that maintain classical continuity, this moment unfolds through rapid cutting. Hitchcock employs fast edits to fragment action into brief, disjointed shots. The stabbing is never shown in a continuous movement. Instead, time is broken into sharp visual fragments.

This editing strategy produces a heightened sense of speed. The scene feels faster than its actual duration because perception is overwhelmed by the density of cuts. Rather than allowing time to unfold naturally, montage compresses it. Each shot lasts only a fraction of a second, preventing the viewer from stabilizing spatially or emotionally.

The rhythm intensifies bodily vulnerability. The rapid succession of images generates shock and disorientation. Time no longer flows; it strikes. Through fast cutting, the shower becomes a temporal rupture within the narrative, marking a radical shift in the film's pacing and structure.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

Lighting transforms the bathroom into an unsettling spatial field. Hitchcock deliberately emphasized its bright, clean, almost aseptic character. He asked set decorator George Milo to make the fixtures gleam, producing what has been described as an eerily disorienting brightness. This corresponds with Joseph Stefano's script description of a white brilliance that is nearly blinding. Horror emerges not from darkness, but from excessive clarity.

The high key lighting and dazzling white tiles create a cold visual environment. In black and white, tonal contrast sharpens the body against the rigid surfaces. There are no shadows to conceal movement. The violence unfolds under full exposure.
Material intensifies this harsness. Ceramic tiles, porcelain fixtures, and metal fittings appear smooth and unforgiving, reinforcing sterility and emotional distance. The shower curtain, chosen for its semi transparent quality, operates as a fragile threshold. It reveals the attacker's silhouette while partially obscuring Marion, positioning the surface between exposure and concealment.

Through brightness, rigid materiality, and controlled contrast, the shower interior becomes an active participant in the scene. The space does not hide violence. It makes it unavoidable.

Supporting Case 1

Memento, 2000, directed by Christopher Nolan

In *Memento*, the shower becomes a fragile enclosure defined by frosted glass rather than a curtain. When another figure enters the bathroom, the first sign of intrusion is not direct visibility but distortion through the glass. The enclosure is visually filtered before it is physically broken. As the fight begins, similary to the Psycho the scene shifts into rapid cuts and aggressive camera movement. The spatial field fragments. Thus the time construction accelerates.

Figure 65. Memento (Nolan, 2000).

Figure 66. Memento (Nolan, 2000).

Figure 67. Memento (Nolan, 2000).

Figure 68. Memento (Nolan, 2000).

Spatial Condition 2

Bathtub as a Reset Space

Casino Royale

2006

Genre: Action, Adventure, Thriller, Crime, Political, Spy
Director: Martin Campbell
Cinematographer: Phil Meheux
Production Designer: Peter Lamont
Costume Designer: Lindy Hemming

Figure 69. Casino Royale (Campbell, 2006).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Martin Campbell, *Casino Royale* (2006) presents the early career of James Bond as he earns his 00 status. The story follows Bond as he is assigned to bankrupt terrorist financier Le Chiffre through a high stakes poker game at the Casino Royale in Montenegro.

Throughout the mission, Bond works alongside Vesper Lynd, a treasury agent responsible for managing the government's funds. Their professional relationship gradually becomes personal as the operation unfolds. The narrative moves between surveillance, physical confrontation, and psychological tension, balancing action with character development.

The film reintroduces Bond in a more grounded and emotionally exposed form. Rather than focusing solely on spectacle, it emphasizes vulnerability, trust, and the consequences of violence within an international espionage framework.

Casino Royale Bathroom Scene in Key Frames

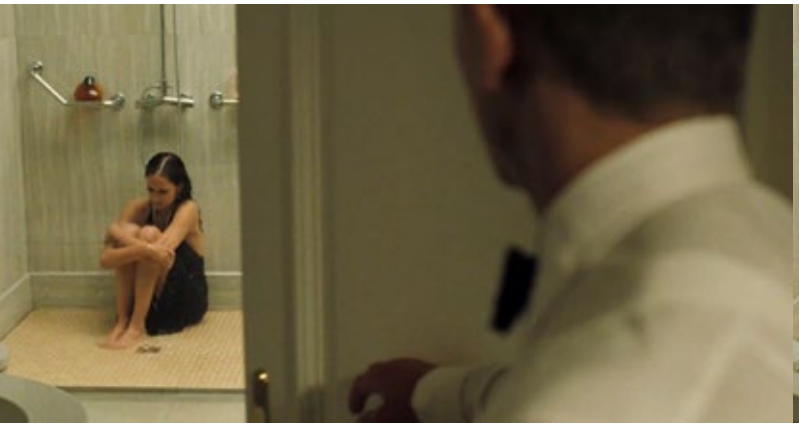





Figure 70. Casino Royale (Campbell, 2006). Shower Scene Collage.

01

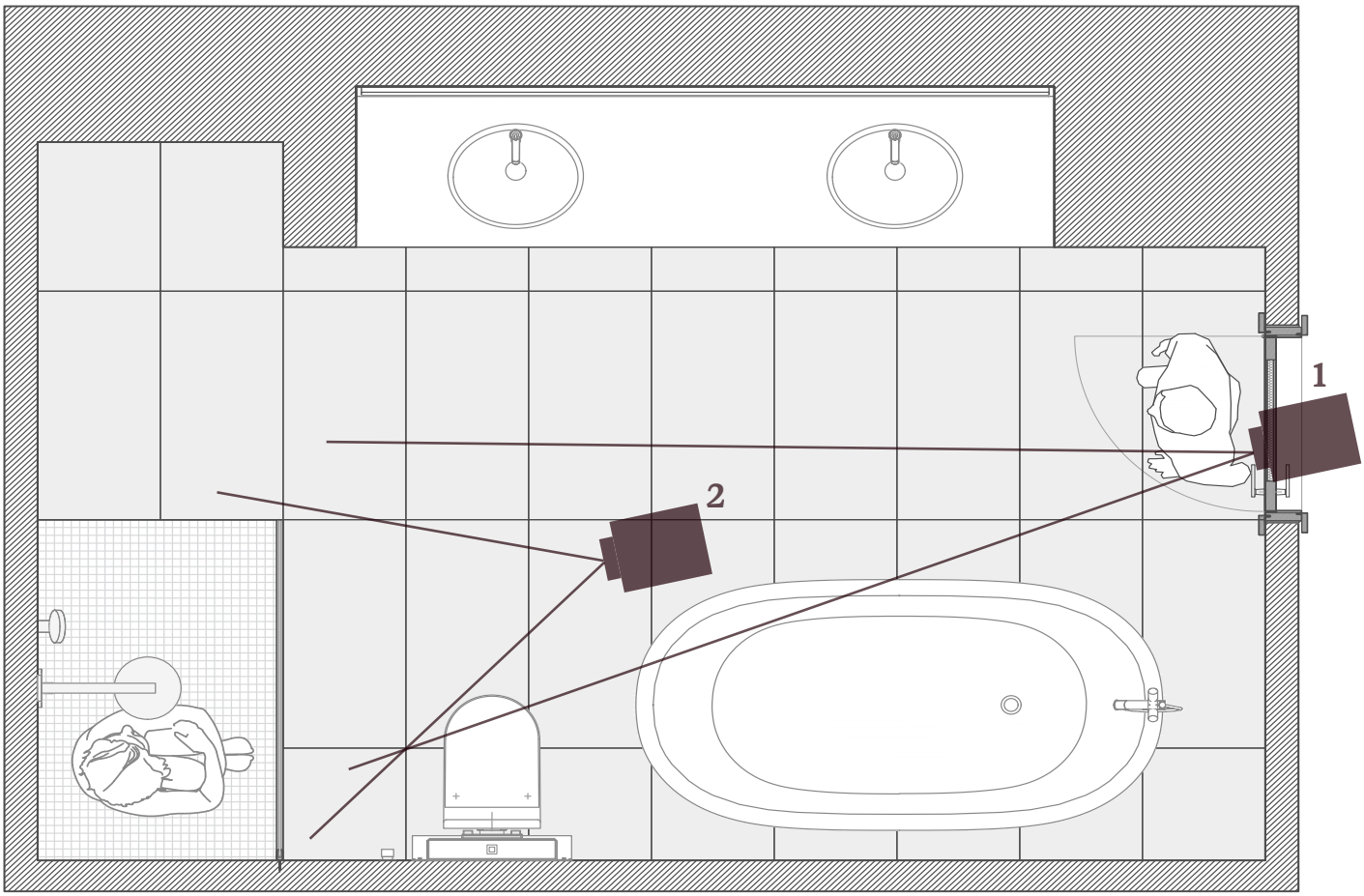
Camera - Space - Body Relationship

The camera initially frames the shower from a slight distance, maintaining spatial continuity between bedroom and bathroom. Once Bond moves toward Vesper, the framing shifts into closer compositions. The camera lowers to body level, aligning itself with the seated figures. This change in height removes dominance and places both bodies within the same horizontal plane.

The shower here becomes a space of containment and relief. Vesper sits fully clothed under the water, compressing her body inward. Bond joins her at the same level. The camera does not privilege one over the other. Instead, it stabilizes around their shared proximity.

The shower enclosure narrows the spatial field. Walls and tiled surfaces frame the bodies tightly, reducing peripheral depth. The water acts as a vertical veil, softening contours and merging figure and surface. The camera's closeness intensifies intimacy without expanding the room.

In this sequence, the shower functions as a contained chamber where bodily presence reorganizes the space. The camera remains at body height, reinforcing equality and vulnerability. Spatial emphasis shifts from architecture to shared bodily alignment within a confined enclosure.



Plan of the Bathroom with the Camera Positioning
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

Spatial integrity in this scene is defined by enclosure and vertical emphasis. The shower is a clearly bounded volume within the larger bathroom. Its tiled walls and glass partition establish a contained and legible interior. The architecture remains structurally stable and coherent.

The viewer never fully perceives the entire bathroom. The camera restricts spatial overview, keeping the focus on the shower enclosure. The broader volume of the room remains secondary. This selective framing reinforces the shower as the dominant spatial field.

03

Time Construction

Time in this sequence unfolds in a steady and continuous rhythm. The pacing is neither accelerated nor excessively prolonged. The scene avoids rapid cutting and dramatic slow motion. Instead, duration follows a natural progression aligned with bodily presence.

This temporal normalcy reinforces spatial stability. The shower remains a contained enclosure, and time does not distort it. The emotional intensity of the scene is not constructed through editing speed, but through proximity and stillness.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

Material presence in this scene is defined by pale marble and soft reflective surfaces. The bathroom is predominantly white, and water continuously runs from above. At first glance, these elements resemble those in *Psycho*: a white interior, flowing water, and a confined shower enclosure.

However, the atmosphere is constructed differently. In *Psycho*, sharp lighting contrasts, rapid cuts, and fragmented framing transform the white tiles into a tense and unstable field. Here, soft illumination eliminates harsh shadows and maintains visual continuity. The camera avoids fast editing and does not fragment the space.

The marble surfaces reflect light gently rather than sharply. Edges remain softened, and the falling water diffuses illumination instead of intensifying it. Although both scenes share similar material components, the difference in framing and lighting fundamentally alters perception.

In this scene, whiteness does not produce anxiety. Instead, the controlled lighting and steady framing generate warmth and containment. Material and light work together to create a space of relief rather than rupture, demonstrating how identical architectural elements can produce opposing atmospheres depending on cinematic treatment.

Supporting Case 1

American Psycho, 2000 directed by Mary Harron

In *American Psycho*, the shower appears after acts of extreme violence. Similar to *Casino Royale*, the body is positioned frontally beneath falling water, and vertical circulation becomes visually dominant. The running water establishes a downward axis, reinforcing the shower as a contained cleansing chamber.

The framing often maintains frontal stability, allowing the vertical flow of water to structure the composition. Unlike horror fragmentation, the space remains visually coherent. The shower operates less as a site of threat and more as a ritualized surface of bodily reset.

Supporting Case 2

The Killer , 2023 directed by David Fincher

In *The Killer*, the shower scene follows an act of violence and similarly stages the body beneath running water. Similar to the *Casino Royale* body is closer to the ground ina seated position and camera framing is frontal. The enclosure remains vertical, yet the bodily alignment reduces tension.

Later, the framing expands into a higher and wider perspective, revealing more of the bathroom volume. Despite this expansion, the lighting remains controlled and even. The atmosphere does not intensify; instead, it reinforces a sense of emotional reset.

Figure 71. American Psycho (Harron, 2000).

Figure 72. American Psycho (Harron, 2000).

Figure 73. The Killer (Fincher, 2023).

Figure 74. The Killer (Fincher, 2023).

4.5.3

The Mirror

The mirror occupies a unique position within the domestic bathroom, functioning as both a surface and a perceptual threshold. In cinema, its use is never arbitrary; directors deliberately stage the mirror to manipulate spatial perception, control perspective, and direct the viewer's gaze. Through reflection, the bathroom can be visually extended, fragmented, or destabilized, allowing the space to be experienced beyond its physical limits.

Mirror-centered staging often produces a doubled condition in which the body appears simultaneously in its physical presence and in reflection. This duality enables the character to be positioned both as subject and object, seen and seeing within the same frame. Such effects depend not only on the mirror itself but on the precise relationship between the mirror and the camera. Camera–mirror alignment is a critical spatial decision, as framing must exploit reflection without revealing the camera, turning the mirror into an active scenographic device rather than a passive surface.

The atmospheric impact of mirror-based staging does not emerge from reflection alone. It is constructed through the combined orchestration of camera position, bodily placement, temporal duration, and material behavior. The following case studies examine how these parameters operate together to shape distinct spatial experiences within bathroom interiors.

Spatial Condition 1

Mirror as Self-Encounter

La La Land

2016

Genre: Comedy, Drama, Music, Musical, Romance, Rom-Com
Director: Damien Chazelle
Cinematographer: Linus Sandgren
Production Designer: David Wasco
Costume Designer: Mary Zophres

Figure 75. La La Land (Chazelle, 2016).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Damien Chazelle, *La La Land* (2016) explores the tension between artistic ambition and intimate relationships within the urban landscape of Los Angeles. The film follows Mia, an aspiring actress, and Sebastian, a jazz musician, whose personal and professional aspirations gradually reshape their relationship. Emotional transitions are not expressed only through dialogue but through spatial choreography, color, and camera movement. Interiors frequently function as sites of self-reflection and reorientation, where characters confront moments of doubt, preparation, and decision.

Within this framework, the bathroom mirror scene operates as a contained interior moment in which Mia temporarily withdraws from external pressures. The space becomes a transitional zone between private self-alignment and relational engagement, staged through continuous camera movement and controlled framing. The scene therefore exemplifies how mise-en-scène structures emotional change through spatial positioning rather than narrative exposition.

La La Land Bathroom Scene in Key Frames

Figure 76. La La Land (Chazelle, 2016). Mirror Scene Collage.

01

Camera - Space - Body Relationship

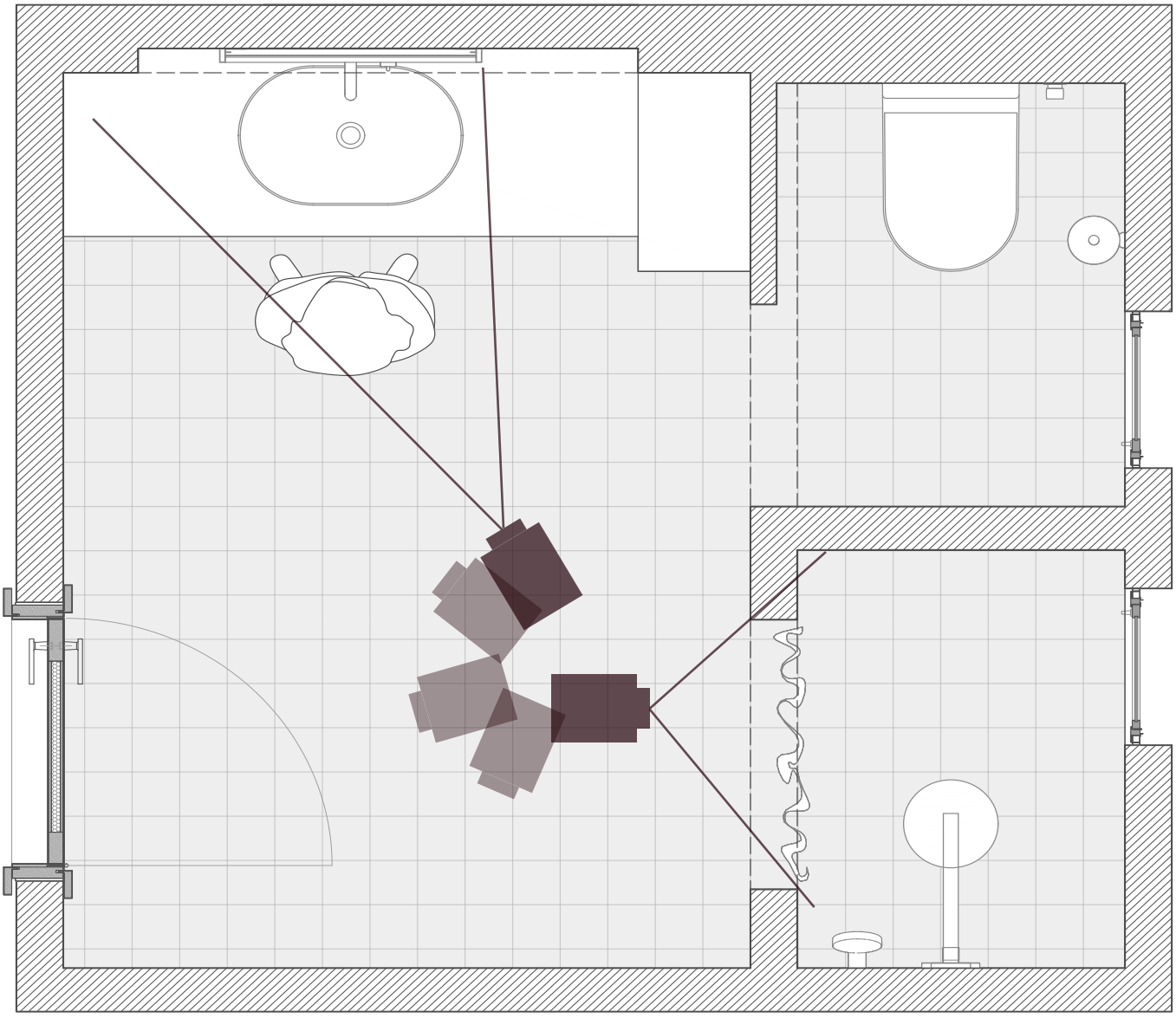
This bathroom scene is constructed as a continuous long take without visible cuts. The absence of editing allows the spatial and emotional shift to unfold in real time. As noted by the film's editor, Tom Cross, musical numbers in La La Land are conceived as "cinematic miracles," in which emotional shifts occur visibly within a single continuous movement rather than through montage (Hullfish, 2016). In this scene, the uninterrupted shot enables the viewer to witness a gradual emotional transition without temporal interruption, allowing change to register as a lived process rather than a constructed effect.

Change is not produced through montage but through duration. The camera movement remains fluid, preserving the integrity of the bathroom while extending the moment. Spatial continuity is maintained, and the viewer experiences the interior as a stable environment within which transformation occurs.

As Mia approaches the mirror, the framing becomes compositionally precise. At the initial moment, the mirror reflection is positioned close to the center of the frame, establishing it as the primary focal point and directing attention away from the physical body toward its mediated image. As the scene progresses, the composition subtly shifts to accommodate both the physical body and the reflection, aligning them along the vertical axes of the rule-of-thirds grid. Mia's reflected face aligns closely with the upper horizontal line, with her eyes positioned near an intersection point, while her physical body occupies the opposing vertical zone. This controlled balance produces a dual presence in which body and reflection coexist without competing for dominance.

When the bathroom door opens, the entering figure is first perceived in the mirror rather than directly. The interruption is therefore mediated before it becomes physical. The camera then gently reorients toward the new presence without cutting, absorbing the shift into the same continuous spatial field.

Throughout the sequence, time, movement, and framing work together to preserve spatial coherence. The mirror anchors perception, and the scene transitions from solitary self awareness to shared presence without breaking temporal or architectural continuity.



Plan of the Bathroom with the Camera Positioning
Not to Scale

Figure 77-78. La La Land (Chazelle, 2016). Mirror Scene Framing Technique.

02

Spatial Integrity

The bathroom in this scene is presented as a compact and clearly bounded domestic interior whose spatial integrity is preserved throughout the long take. Despite the continuous camera movement and extended duration, the space does not appear fragmented or artificially opened for cinematic access. The walls, mirror, and tiled surfaces remain legible as architectural boundaries, maintaining the credibility of the bathroom as a coherent interior rather than exposing it as a constructed set.

The camera operates within the spatial logic of the room, avoiding impossible viewpoints that would suggest removed walls or excessive openness. Visual depth is introduced through the mirror, extending perception without compromising containment. Openness therefore remains perceptual rather than physical, allowing intimacy while preserving spatial clarity.

The absence of cuts reinforces this integrity by preventing the bathroom from being reassembled through editing. When the door opens and another character enters, the space absorbs the new presence without disruption. The interior remains intact, shifting from solitary occupation to shared presence while maintaining architectural coherence.

03

Time Construction

Time in this bathroom scene is constructed through continuity rather than segmentation. The scene unfolds as a long take, without cuts, allowing duration to be experienced directly rather than assembled through editing. This temporal choice enables the viewer to remain inside the space as it evolves, registering changes in mood and perception as they occur in real time.

The extended shot allows the camera to move gradually with the body, stretching the moment without disrupting spatial orientation. Because time is not compressed through montage, the bathroom is not reduced to a backdrop for action; instead, it becomes a space that is inhabited over time. The absence of cuts prevents emotional interruption, allowing the scene to sustain a continuous experiential flow.

This temporal continuity intensifies spatial awareness. Background elements are not erased or abstracted, and the viewer's perception of enclosure deepens as the shot progresses. The mirror moment unfolds slowly, giving sufficient time for reflection both literal and perceptual to register before the spatial condition shifts.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

In this scene, material and light do not rely on sharp contrasts or dramatic shifts; they unfold quietly alongside the character's presence. When Mia wipes the steam from the mirror, the bathroom is bathed in soft, even light. No element is immediately emphasized. The mirror, walls, and surrounding surfaces share a similar luminosity, allowing the viewer to remain immersed in the space.

As the scene progresses, the lighting shifts subtly. A slightly more focused light from above begins to settle on Mia's reflection. The change is restrained. The space does not darken or dramatically transform; instead, the reflected face gradually becomes more present. Attention is guided gently rather than directed forcefully.

Color supports this atmosphere. The pink and green tones create a warm and intimate environment without visual tension. Material surfaces, diffused light, and reflection work together to produce a space that feels lived-in rather than staged.

Atmosphere here emerges through small adjustments in light and surface behavior. Perception shifts while the architecture remains steady, allowing the bathroom to hold body, reflection, and emotional transition within a stable spatial field.

Supporting Case 1

Gattaca, 1997, directed by Andrew Niccol

In *Gattaca*, the mirror operates as a moment of self-alignment with the self-construction. Irene is first introduced through her reflection as she dries her face, positioning the viewer within the mirror's axis. Without a cut, the camera turns with her movement, gradually revealing both her physical body and its reflection within the same spatial field. This dual presence creates a temporary alignment between body and image. Like in *La La Land* , the mirror does not introduce external threat; instead, it marks a transitional moment between private interior awareness and relational engagement, as Irene subsequently moves toward Vincent. The condition reinforces the mirror as a surface where identity is briefly stabilized before spatial reorientation occurs.

Supporting Case 2

American Psycho, 2000, directed by Mary Harron

In *American Psycho*, the mirror is used during Patrick Bateman's morning routine as he applies facial treatments and examines his own reflection. The camera maintains frontal alignment, allowing the body and its reflection to coexist within a controlled axis. However, unlike the long, continuous take used in *La La Land*, this scene is constructed through multiple cuts that segment the routine into controlled fragments. The mirror still functions as a surface of self-observation, yet time is no longer allowed to unfold organically. Instead of a fluid transition between reflection and relational movement, the editing reinforces precision and self-surveillance. While both films position the mirror as a space of self-alignment, the temporal construction in *American Psycho* produces a more mechanical and controlled form of bodily presentation.

Figure 79. Gattaca (Niccol, 1997).

Figure 80. Gattaca (Niccol, 1997).

Figure 81. American Psycho (Harron, 2000).

Figure 82. American Psycho (Harron, 2000).

Spatial Condition 2

Mirror as Revealed Presence

Basic Instinct

1992

Genre: Erotic Thriller, Neo-Noir, Psychological Thriller, Crime, Mystery
Director: Paul Verhoeven
Cinematographer: Jan de Bont
Production Designer: Terence Marsh
Costume Designer: Ellen Mirojnick

Figure 83. Basic Instinct (Verhoeven, 1992).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Paul Verhoeven, *Basic Instinct* (1992) is a neo-noir thriller structured around desire, suspicion, and shifting power dynamics. The narrative follows detective Nick Curran as he investigates a murder case entangled with Catherine Tramell, a novelist whose presence destabilizes both the investigation and Nick's psychological balance. As professional boundaries blur, attraction and distrust begin to overlap, producing a climate of controlled tension.

Rather than resolving uncertainty, the film sustains it spatially and visually. Interiors often operate as sites of confrontation, where intimacy and threat coexist within carefully staged environments. The bathroom mirror scene exemplifies this strategy: a private domestic interior becomes a controlled spatial field in which visibility, alignment, and sudden intrusion reorganize power relations between bodies.

Basic Instinct Bathroom Scene in Key Frames








Figure 84. Basic Instinct (Verhoeven, 1992). Mirror Scene Collage.

01

Camera - Space - Body Relationship

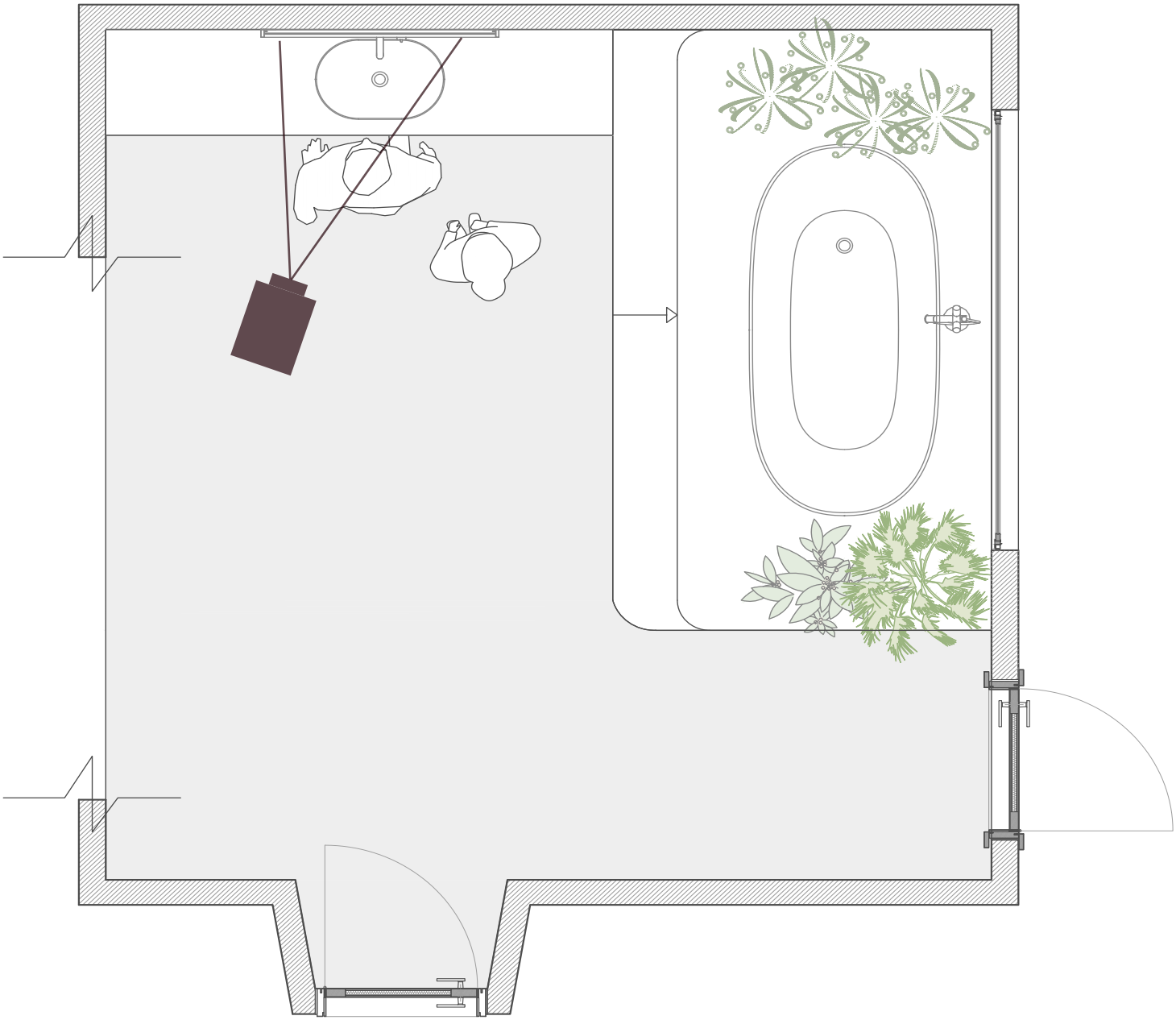
The scene begins with Nick's movement from the bedroom toward the bathroom. At this stage, the bathroom is not fully revealed; the viewer's knowledge of the space is limited to the doorway opening. The bathroom first appears as a partial interior, perceived indirectly through spatial threshold rather than direct entry. This restricted access establishes the bathroom as a space that is initially withheld rather than immediately offered.

After the cut, Nick is seen inside the bathroom for the first time through the mirror reflection. His body is not introduced directly; instead, it is mediated by the reflective surface. As he bends forward to wash his face, the camera follows his movement downward, shifting the focal point toward the sink. The body and the camera move together, maintaining close alignment as the sink becomes the spatial and bodily anchor of the frame.

When Nick straightens up, the camera follows his movement once again. At this moment, the composition reveals a new figure standing behind him: Roxy. Her presence is not announced through a cut or a dramatic reframing but appears suddenly within the existing spatial configuration and sits in the middle of the focal point. The body behind Nick enters the frame as a visual surprise, disrupting the previously solitary alignment between camera, body, and mirror.

Following this revelation, the scene transitions into a dialogue structured through reverse shots between Nick and Roxy.

Figure 85. Basic Instinct (Verhoeven, 1992). Mirror Scene Framing Technique.



Plan of the Bathroom with the Camera Positioning
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

From the beginning of the scene, the bathroom resists full spatial clarity. The viewer first encounters it indirectly, through the doorway, gaining only a partial sense of scale and enclosure. Once inside the bathroom, spatial perception is immediately filtered through the mirror. The space is not revealed directly; instead, it is framed and reduced by reflection. Both the body and the interior are first encountered as partial images contained within the mirror's surface. The mirror acts as a visual frame that organizes perception, prioritizing Nick's body while allowing the surrounding space to remain secondary and incomplete.

As Roxy appears behind Nick, the space feels suddenly more crowded and tense, not because it changes physically, but because it was never fully established to begin with. Enclosure intensifies vulnerability rather than offering comfort. The bathroom becomes a space that compresses bodies and heightens awareness, rather than one that can be calmly inhabited.

Only toward the end of the scene, when Nick exits the bathroom, does the viewer gain access to a broader spatial field. The scale of the interior expands, and adjacent spaces become visible. Yet even then, spatial understanding remains incomplete. The scene withholds total orientation, allowing the space to open just enough to be sensed, but never fully grasped.

03

Time Construction

Time in this scene is constructed through interruption rather than continuity. Unlike a sustained or flowing duration, the bathroom sequence is shaped by cuts that repeatedly reset perception. Each cut interrupts the flow of time. The viewer cannot fully settle into the space or feel present within it.

The scene alternates between moments of bodily action at the sink and sudden shifts in viewpoint, creating a rhythm that feels alert and unstable. Time does not stretch to allow reflection; instead, it contracts and fragments, keeping attention sharp and slightly uneasy. The mirror moment is not given temporal depth but is quickly disrupted by new information and shifting alignments between bodies.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

In this scene, material, light, and sound work together to create an atmosphere that feels calm on the surface yet quietly unsettling. As Nick moves toward the bathroom, a low, tension-building musical cue accompanies his movement, preparing the viewer for unease even before the space is fully revealed. Once he bends toward the sink, the music fades, leaving the body alone within the room. At the same time, the bathroom presents itself through warm materials, polished marble, golden fixtures, soft yellow lighting, and floral elements, producing an interior associated with comfort and luxury rather than threat.

The atmosphere here is not created through coherence, but through misalignment. What the space promises does not match what the situation delivers. The bathroom feels inviting, yet unstable. A place where material warmth conceals psychological tension rather than resolving it.

Supporting Case 1

Haute Tension , 2003, directed by Alexandre Aja

In *Haute Tension*, the mirror functions as a delayed surface of revelation, yet the mechanism differs from Basic Instinct. The character first enters the bathroom through the doorway, establishing spatial continuity like in Basic Instinct. The second presence does not appear through camera movement but through the physical operation of the mirrored cabinet. When Marie opens and then closes the mirrored door, the reflection suddenly reveals Alexia behind her. The reveal is therefore produced by the movement of the reflective surface itself rather than by a shift in framing. The bathroom remains spatially intact, yet perception is reorganized through the opening and closing of the mirror panel. The surface acts as both barrier and reveal, turning a functional storage element into a spatial trigger.

Supporting Case 2

Just Friends, 2005, directed by Roger Kumble

In *Just Friends*, a similar mechanism is employed. When Mike closes the mirrored cabinet, Samantha suddenly appears behind him within the reflection. The bathroom remains spatially unchanged, yet the perception of solitude collapses instantly. The mirror functions as a delayed device of spatial intrusion, reorganizing relational tension without altering architectural structure.

Figure 86. Haute Tension (Aja, 2003).

Figure 87. Haute Tension (Aja, 2003).

Figure 88. Just Friends (Kumble 2005).

Figure 89. Just Friends (Kumble 2005).

Spatial Condition 3

Mirror as Reflective Destabilization

Mirrors, 2008, directed by Alexandre Aja

In *Mirrors*, the reflection detaches from the body and performs actions independently. The woman turns away from the mirror and begins to leave the space, yet her reflected image remains facing forward, continuing to look at her. The synchronization between body and reflection is broken. The bathroom itself does not change; walls, surfaces, and light remain stable. What creates tension is the visual misalignment. The mirror no longer confirms the body's movement. Instead, it produces a second presence that appears to act independently. The threat emerges not from outside the room, but from within the reflective surface itself.

Don't Worry Darling, 2022, directed by Olivia Wilde

In *Don't Worry Darling*, the mirror stops behaving like a mirror. When the woman turns away and lowers her head into the bathtub, her reflection does not copy the movement. Instead, it stays facing her and continues to look at her. For a moment, the image in the mirror feels separate from the body in the room. The bathroom itself remains calm and carefully arranged, but something is clearly wrong. The tension comes from this small shift: the reflection is no longer a simple copy. It feels as if it has its own awareness. The mirror does not just reflect the body; it seems to watch it.

Figure 90. Mirrors (Aja, 2008).

Figure 91. Mirrors (Aja, 2008).

Figure 92. Don't Worry Darling (Wilde 2022).

Figure 93. Don't Worry Darling (Wilde 2022).

4.5.4

The Sink

The sink occupies a concentrated position within the domestic bathroom. Unlike the bathtub, which contains the body, or the shower, which encloses it, the sink operates as an interface. It is the point where the body leans forward and makes direct contact with a horizontal surface. It regulates proximity rather than enclosure. As a fixed element embedded into the wall or counter, it anchors alignment and defines a specific zone of interaction.

In cinema, the sink is rarely treated as a neutral fixture. Directors stage it as a controlled site of bodily ritual, reflection, or interruption. Because it is positioned at waist height and often aligned with a mirror, it organizes the body along a vertical axis. The basin becomes the surface where water, skin, and material meet. This proximity intensifies attention to small gestures and contained actions. In this way, the sink shifts from being a functional utility to an active spatial device that concentrates action within a limited surface.

Spatial Condition 1

Sink as Focused Action Point

The Royal Tenenbaums

2001

Genre: Comedy-Drama, Family Drama, Independent Cinema
Director: Wes Anderson
Cinematographer: Robert Yeoman
Production Designer: David Wasco
Costume Designer: Karen Patch

Figure 94. The Royal Tenenbaums (Anderson, 2001).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Wes Anderson, *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) follows the members of the Tenenbaum family, whose children were highly successful at a young age but struggle in adulthood. Years after their parents separate, the siblings return to their childhood home when their father Royal claims he is seriously ill.

The story unfolds mainly inside the family house, where each character occupies a clearly defined space. The interiors are carefully arranged, with frontal compositions and strong color coordination shaping the visual structure of the film.

The film explores family relationships, personal disappointment, and self-identity within a controlled domestic environment where space and character are closely connected.

The Royal Tenenbaums Bathroom Scene in Key Frames

Figure 95. The Royal Tenenbaums (Anderson, 2001). Sink Scene Collage.

01

Camera - Space - Body Relationship

The spatial conditions in this study did not arise from a single film or a single scene. They developed gradually through observing how certain architectural elements repeatedly shaped perception within domestic bathroom interiors. By comparing multiple examples, it became possible to recognize distinct spatial tendencies in the way mirrors, doors, floors, or bathtubs organize the body, structure attention, and intensify atmosphere.

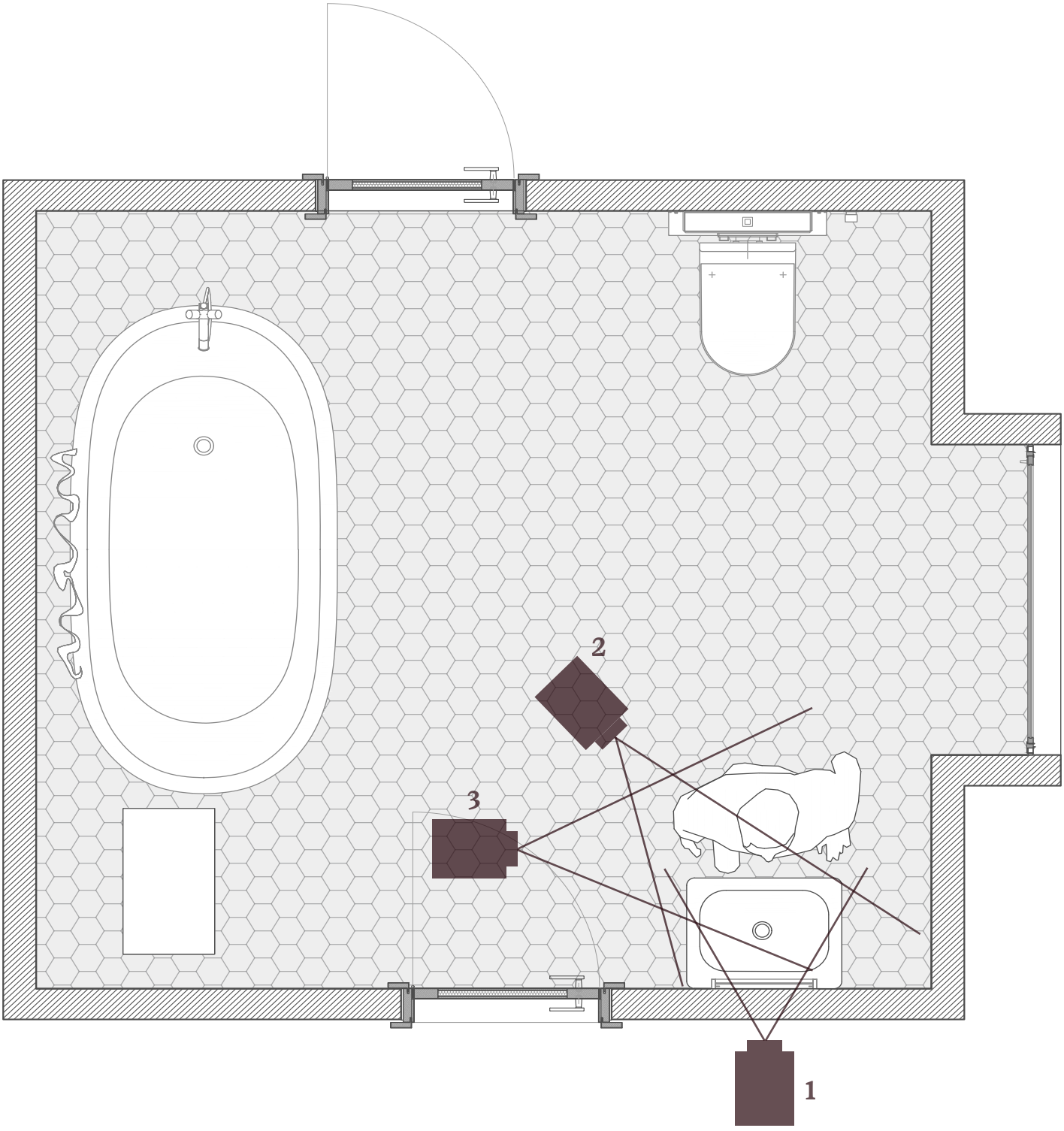
In some cases, these spatial conditions appear across several films. In others, they become especially clear in one particularly strong example. What matters here is not how often a condition appears, but how clearly its spatial logic can be identified. A condition may become visible through repetition, but it can also emerge with equal clarity in a single, carefully staged scene.

For each spatial condition, one film is selected for a detailed analysis when that condition forms the main focus of the discussion. These in depth readings are supported by plan drawings and close spatial examination. In other cases, some conditions are addressed more briefly through shorter examples. These are not developed as full case studies, but included to support and clarify the spatial logic being discussed.

The difference in depth is intentional. Some spatial conditions require extended analysis to be fully explained, while others can be understood more clearly through focused observations.

The following case studies apply this framework to selected domestic bathroom scenes. Each example is examined through the four spatial criteria in order to reveal how body, space, time, and material interact within a confined interior. The focus is not on narrative development, but on identifying the spatial strategies through which atmosphere is constructed and intensified.

Figure 96. The Royal Tenenbaums (Anderson, 2001). Sink Scene Framing Technique.



Plan of the Bathroom with the Camera Positioning
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

The bathroom is located in a real nineteenth century townhouse in Harlem, not on a studio set. Its narrow proportions are architectural conditions rather than cinematic exaggerations. The sense of compression comes from actual wall proximity, which reinforces enclosure.

Although the structure is real, the interior elements such as wall finishes and fixtures were carefully redesigned (Neufeld, 2024). This preserves spatial authenticity while maintaining visual control.

The camera never reveals the full volume of the room. Instead, it limits perception to selected surfaces. Despite this partial visibility, the bathroom remains spatially coherent. The bathroom feels complete, even though it is small and enclosed.

03

Time Construction

Time in this sequence is neither accelerated nor excessively prolonged. The pacing remains controlled and steady. The camera does not dramatize duration through slow motion or rapid cutting. Instead, events unfold in measured continuity.

This temporal neutrality reinforces the spatial stability of the bathroom. The scene does not rely on suspense created by delay. Rather, the steady rhythm aligns with the controlled composition and frontal staging.

Because time remains almost ordinary, the break feels even more sudden. The shift is not prepared through temporal exaggeration. It occurs within a calm and consistent flow, allowing the spatial order to remain visually intact while the body undergoes a drastic change.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

Material presence in this bathroom is defined by pale surfaces and cool lighting. The walls and fixtures are predominantly white, producing a visually clean and restrained interior. The sink itself is a smooth porcelain surface, consistent with the overall minimal palette.

The lighting is cold toned and even. It does not dramatize the space through shadow. Instead, it reinforces clarity and flatness. Surfaces are fully visible and materially legible.

However, the presence of blood disrupts the expected sense of hygiene. Against the white sink, the red stain becomes sharply visible. The basin no longer reads as a cleansing surface but as a collecting surface. When the sink is shown with accumulated blood and cut hair, its function is visually inverted. What is designed for washing becomes a surface that holds what should normally disappear.

Spatial Condition 2

Sink as Source of Unexpected Eruption

It

2017

Genre: Horror, Supernatural Horror, Coming-of-Agea
Director: Andy Muschietti
Cinematographer: Chung-hoon Chung
Production Designer: Claude Paré
Costume Designer: Janet Patterson

Figure 97. It (Muschietti, 2017).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Andy Muschietti, *It* (2017) follows a group of children in the town of Derry who are terrorized by a shape shifting entity that often appears as a clown named Pennywise. The story begins after the disappearance of one of the children, leading the group to confront a force that feeds on fear.

As the children face personal traumas and shared threats, they begin to understand that the entity has haunted the town for generations. The narrative focuses on friendship, fear, and the transition from childhood innocence to confrontation with violence.

The film blends supernatural horror with coming-of-age themes, showing how individual fears become amplified when made visible.

It Bathroom Scene in Key Frames








Figure 98. It (Muschietti, 2017). Sink Scene Collage.

01

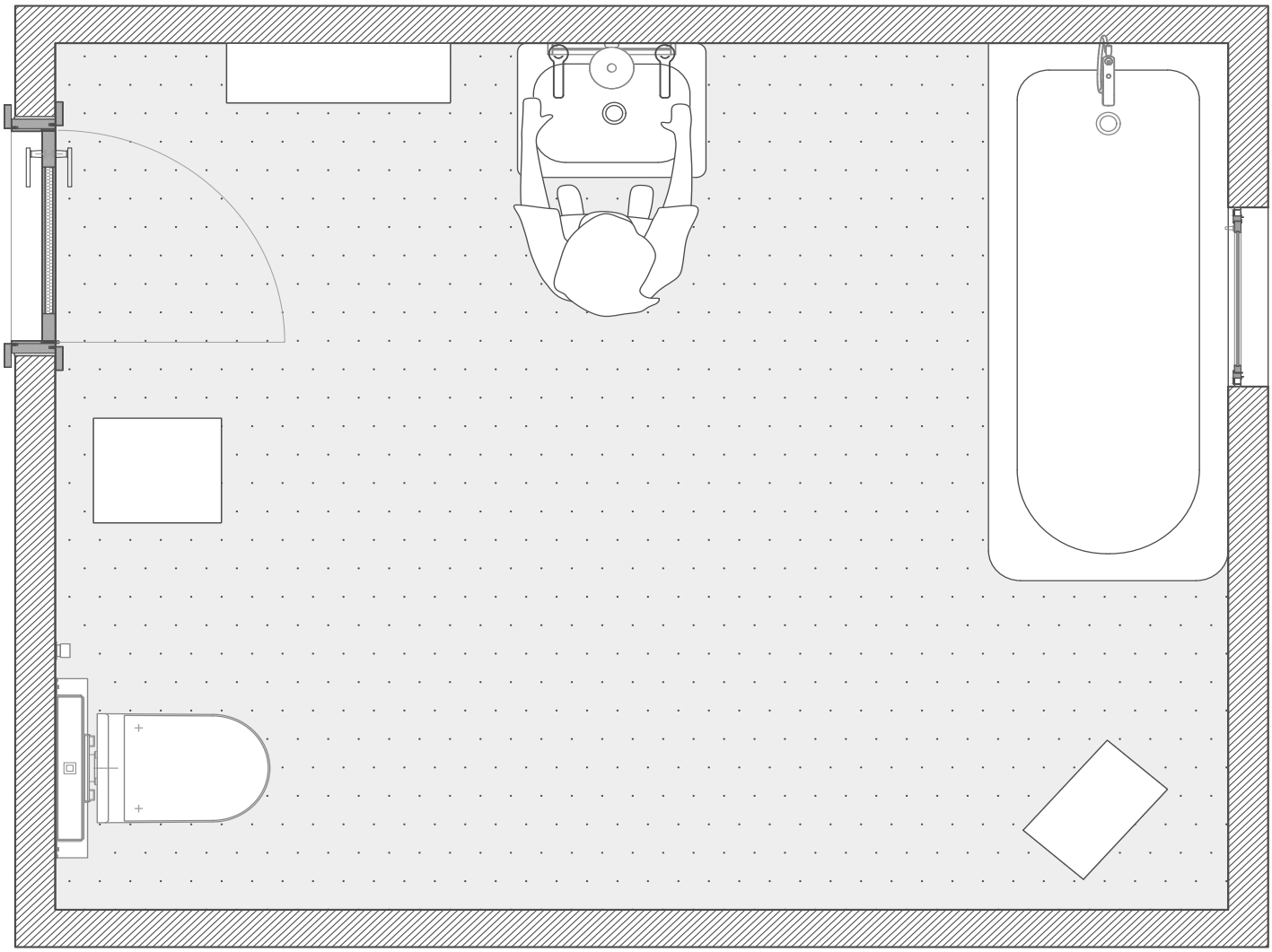
Camera - Space - Body Relationship

Beverly goes to the bathroom to read the letter in privacy, positioning herself inside the bathtub as a space of enclosure. The bathtub initially organizes the composition, suggesting containment and isolation. However, as sound begins to emerge from the sink, the spatial hierarchy shifts.

The camera does not immediately isolate the basin in a dramatic close framing. Instead, it maintains a controlled distance, allowing the sink to remain within the room's continuity before becoming dominant. This restraint delays confrontation and lets tension accumulate around the fixture.

As Beverly's attention shifts toward the sink, the camera begins to vary its angles, including elevated and subjective viewpoints. These changes destabilize the earlier spatial balance of the room. The sink gradually becomes the dominant focal element within the composition.

When blood starts coming out of the sink, the camera shifts to medium and wider shots. More of the bathroom becomes visible, yet attention stays on the sink. Even as the space opens up, the event remains centered at the basin rather than on the body. The framing makes it clear that the disturbance comes from the sink itself, keeping it as the main focus of the scene.



Plan of the Bathroom
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

Spatial integrity in this scene is initially defined by an ordinary and contained bathroom volume. The room appears proportionally stable, with tiled walls, a fixed sink, and clear boundaries. Nothing in the architecture suggests structural instability. The space reads as complete and intact.

However, the production design deliberately amplifies the scale of the blood effect. According to production designer Claude Paré, the visual ambition referenced the scale of Stanley Kubrick and the spatial tension language of Alfred Hitchcock. This indicates that the blood was conceived not as a minor surface disturbance, but as an event capable of overwhelming the room.

As the blood spreads, spatial integrity shifts from containment to saturation. The architecture does not collapse, yet it becomes visually consumed. Walls, floor, and fixtures remain physically intact, but their legibility is reduced by surface coverage. The room transforms from a bounded domestic interior into a space temporarily overtaken by material excess. So, the bathroom does not fall apart. It stays structurally the same. But as blood covers the surfaces, the room becomes harder to read.

03

Time Construction

Time in this sequence shifts according to the level of proximity to the sink. As Beverly inserts the measuring tape into the drain, the pacing slows. The camera moves into closer framings, isolating the gesture and narrowing the visual field. Duration is extended to heighten anticipation. The action is simple, yet it is temporally stretched to increase tension.

When blood begins to come out of the sink, the temporal rhythm changes. The editing accelerates and the framing expands into wider shots. The shift from close proximity to spatial openness increases visual intensity. The room becomes more visible, and movement becomes more chaotic.

This contrast between slowed anticipation and sudden acceleration structures the scene's temporal logic. Time first compresses around the drain, then expands as the disturbance overtakes the space. The sink remains central in both phases, but the rhythm of time shifts from controlled delay to rapid escalation.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

Material presence in this bathroom is defined by pale tiles and a dominant yellow toned light. The overall palette appears warm at first glance, yet the light does not produce comfort. Instead, it gives the surfaces a slightly dull and unclean appearance. The bathroom does not feel bright and hygienic. It feels used and heavy.

The primary light source is the wall fixture positioned above the sink. This localized illumination concentrates attention on the basin and drain area. The sink becomes the brightest and most visible surface in the room, reinforcing its spatial importance.

Because the light is both warm and slightly harsh, it flattens the tile surfaces rather than giving them depth. Shadows are soft but present, creating mild visual distortion around edges. When blood appears, the red contrasts sharply against the pale surfaces under the yellow light, intensifying visibility.

Material and lighting together produce a space that appears ordinary but slightly unsettled. The sink is emphasized not through darkness, but through focused illumination.

Supporting Case 1

Margaret , 2011, directed by Kenneth Lonergan

In this scene, the sink initially appears as an ordinary and stable fixture within the bathroom. The character approaches it in a routine manner, with no prior indication of disturbance. The faucet, typically associated with controlled flow and regulated function, suddenly begins to release blood instead of water.

The disruption does not originate from the body but from the fixture itself. Unlike scenes where violence is performed onto the sink, here the disturbance emerges from within it. The vertical element of the faucet, which normally regulates direction and pressure, becomes the source of an uncontrollable outflow.

Figure 99. Margaret (Lonergan, 2011).

Figure 100. Margaret (Lonergan, 2011).

Figure 101. Margaret (Lonergan, 2011).

Figure 102. Margaret (Lonergan, 2011).

4.5.5

The WC

In cinema, the WC rarely remains a neutral sanitary fixture. It often becomes a point of malfunction, overflow, or interruption. When water fails to drain or spills outward, the fixture activates the surrounding floor and destabilizes the spatial order of the room. The connection to hidden plumbing below introduces a vertical axis that links the visible interior to an unseen depth.

Beyond tension or discomfort, the WC is also frequently used in comedic staging. Blockages, excessive flushing, and uncontrolled overflow can turn the fixture into a performative device. In such cases, the humor emerges from the loss of control within a space associated with privacy and regulation. The compactness of the zone intensifies both embarrassment and absurdity.

For this reason, the WC functions as a highly reactive spatial element. Whether in horror, drama, or comedy, it concentrates bodily presence, material flow, and potential disruption within a confined architectural area.

Spatial Condition 1

WC as Overflow Point

Parasite

2019

Genre: Thriller, Black Comedy, Social Drama
Director: Bong Joon-ho
Cinematographer: Hong Kyung-pyo
Production Designer: Lee Ha-jun
Costume Designer: Choi Se-yeon

Figure 103. Parasite (Bong, 2019).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Bong Joon-ho, *Parasite* follows the Kim family, who struggle financially while living in a semi basement apartment in Seoul. Through deception and careful planning, they gradually secure employment within the wealthy Park family's modern house. As their presence inside the home expands, hidden tensions and buried secrets begin to surface, shifting the tone from dark comedy to violence.

Bong Joon ho deliberately stages interiors to visualize hierarchy. The Park house and the semi basement were carefully designed sets where ceiling heights, circulation paths, and vertical levels express power and exclusion. Architecture is not a neutral backdrop but a structured system that organizes social position.

Framing reinforces this logic. Characters are placed within compositions to reflect dominance or marginality. Movement through space mirrors class mobility or restriction. In this film, interiors are consciously constructed so that every spatial arrangement carries meaning.

It Bathroom Scene in Key Frames




Figure 104. Parasite (Bong, 2019). WC Scene Collage.

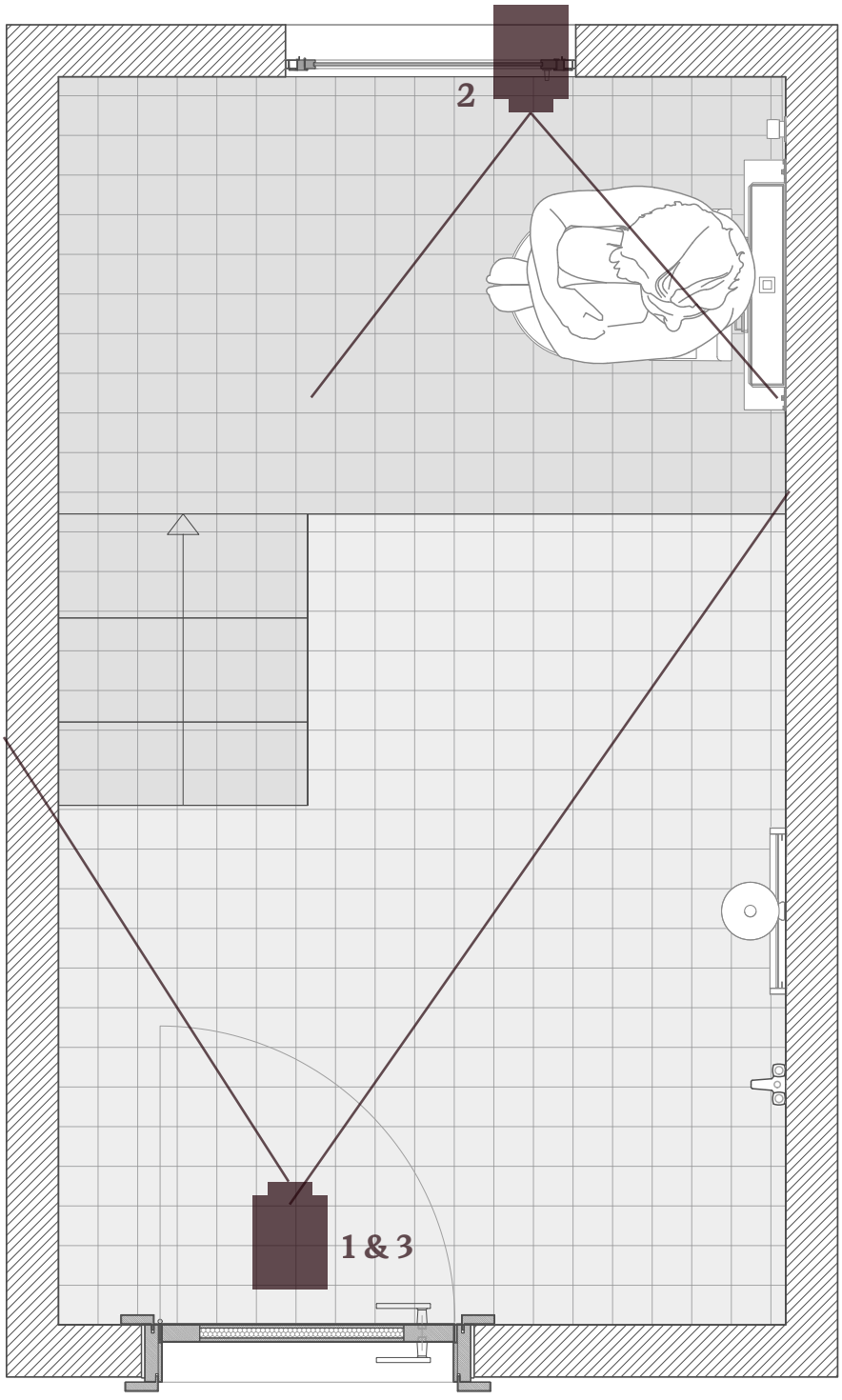
01

Camera - Space - Body Relationship

In *Parasite*, the WC is introduced very early in the film, at a point where the living conditions of the Kim family are first established. In this initial bathroom scene, mobile phone reception is only available near the toilet, positioning the WC as the lowest yet most functional point of the domestic interior. Framing reinforces the family's physical closeness and lack of privacy (Joshi, 2025). The Kim family is clustered tightly within the narrow bathroom, with the WC, tiled walls, and low ceiling pressing in around their bodies. The toilet does not function as a background element but actively frames the figures, emphasizing how basic bodily needs are carried out under conditions where space is never quite enough. The bathroom reads as a shared and compromised interior, where personal boundaries dissolve, and everyday actions are forced into uncomfortable proximity.

The later WC scene, following the family's return to their flooded home, transforms this condition into a moment of crisis. Here, Ki-jung's body is elevated onto the toilet as water rises across the floor. The camera adopts a low-static position, deliberately aligned with the level of the contaminated water, placing the viewer within the same vertical plane as the flooding. Rather than observing the scene from a safe distance, the spectator is held at water level, sharing a feeling of being trapped, with the water almost overtaking the space.

Figure 105-106. Parasite (Bong, 2019). WC Scene Framing Technique.



Plan of the Bathroom with the Camera Positioning
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

In the WC scenes of *Parasite*, the bathroom is spatially legible yet emotionally oppressive. Framed from the doorway, the camera allows the viewer to read the space as a whole, but this clarity does not create comfort. The room feels low, tight, and heavy, producing a pressing atmosphere rather than a sense of openness. Even when the layout is visible, the space does not feel breathable.

This oppressive quality is not accidental. The Kim family's home was constructed as a set, designed by production designer Lee Ha-jun after extensive research into real semi-basement apartments in Seoul. Before designing the set, Lee visited numerous semi-basement homes, closely observing their spatial proportions, plumbing constraints, and material traces such as water stains, damp walls, and signs of long-term moisture. These observations informed the set's compressed vertical dimensions, awkward spatial relationships, and the unusually elevated WC.

Rather than functioning as a neutral fixture, the toilet becomes a visible symptom of spatial shortage. Its height is not a stylistic exaggeration but a practical consequence of limited space and compromised infrastructure, conditions typical of semi-basement living. The bathroom therefore communicates constraint through construction itself, not through symbolic decoration.

Even though the bathroom remains architecturally intact, it fails to function as a place of relief. The doorway offers visibility but not escape. During the flood scene, water fills the room without breaking its structure, intensifying the sense of pressure rather than releasing it. The space holds together physically, yet its livability collapses. Through careful set design grounded in real spatial research, the WC scene makes the semi-basement condition felt directly, allowing atmosphere to emerge from proportion, material, and bodily discomfort rather than narrative explanation.

03

Time Construction

Time in the WC scene shifts noticeably as the family enters the flooded apartment. At first, movement is fast and urgent. The family rushes inside, reacting instinctively to the damage, the water, and the chaos of the space. The rhythm feels compressed, driven by shock and the need to assess what has been lost.

This tempo changes the moment Ki-jung closes the toilet lid and sits on it. From this point onward, time slows down. The camera lingers as she lights a cigarette, and the viewer is made to wait with her. Nothing dramatic happens, yet the duration of the moment becomes heavy. The scene does not rush to resolution; instead, it holds on stillness and delay.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

In the WC scenes of *Parasite*, material and light together produce a heavy and uncomfortable atmosphere. The bathroom is defined by hard, cold surfaces, ceramic tiles, exposed pipes, and worn fixtures that reflect moisture and dirt rather than absorbing them. These materials amplify dampness and contamination, making the space feel harsh and unforgiving.

Light is deliberately kept minimal and controlled. Natural light is reduced to a minimum, reinforcing the semi-basement condition of the house. Instead, the bathroom relies on artificial lighting with a yellowish tone. Rather than creating warmth, this yellow light flattens the space and presses down on it, intensifying the sense of enclosure. The light exposes stains, humidity, and wear without offering freshness or relief.

Spatial Condition 1

WC as Overflow Point

The Party

1968

Genre: Comedy, Slapstick, Satire
Director: Blake Edwards
Cinematographer: Lucien Ballard
Production Designer: Fernando Carrere
Costume Designer: Bill Thomas

Figure 107. The Party (Edwards, 1968).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Blake Edwards, *The Party* is a satirical comedy set almost entirely within a modernist house during a Hollywood party. The story follows Hrundi V. Bakshi, a socially awkward actor who is mistakenly invited to the event after being fired. Unfamiliar with elite social codes, his presence gradually disrupts the carefully staged order of the gathering.

As the night progresses, minor misunderstandings escalate into chaotic incidents involving guests, servants, and the house itself. The film relies largely on physical comedy, using bodily movement and spatial confusion rather than dialogue to generate humor. What begins as a controlled and elegant event slowly dissolves into collective disorder.

The house serves as the central setting for this transformation. Designed to project sophistication and control, the interior becomes increasingly overwhelmed as accidents accumulate. Instead of restoring order, the film allows disorder to expand, turning the party into an extended state of spatial imbalance.

The Party Bathroom Scene in Key Frames








Figure 108. The Party (Edwards, 1968). WC Scene Collage.

01

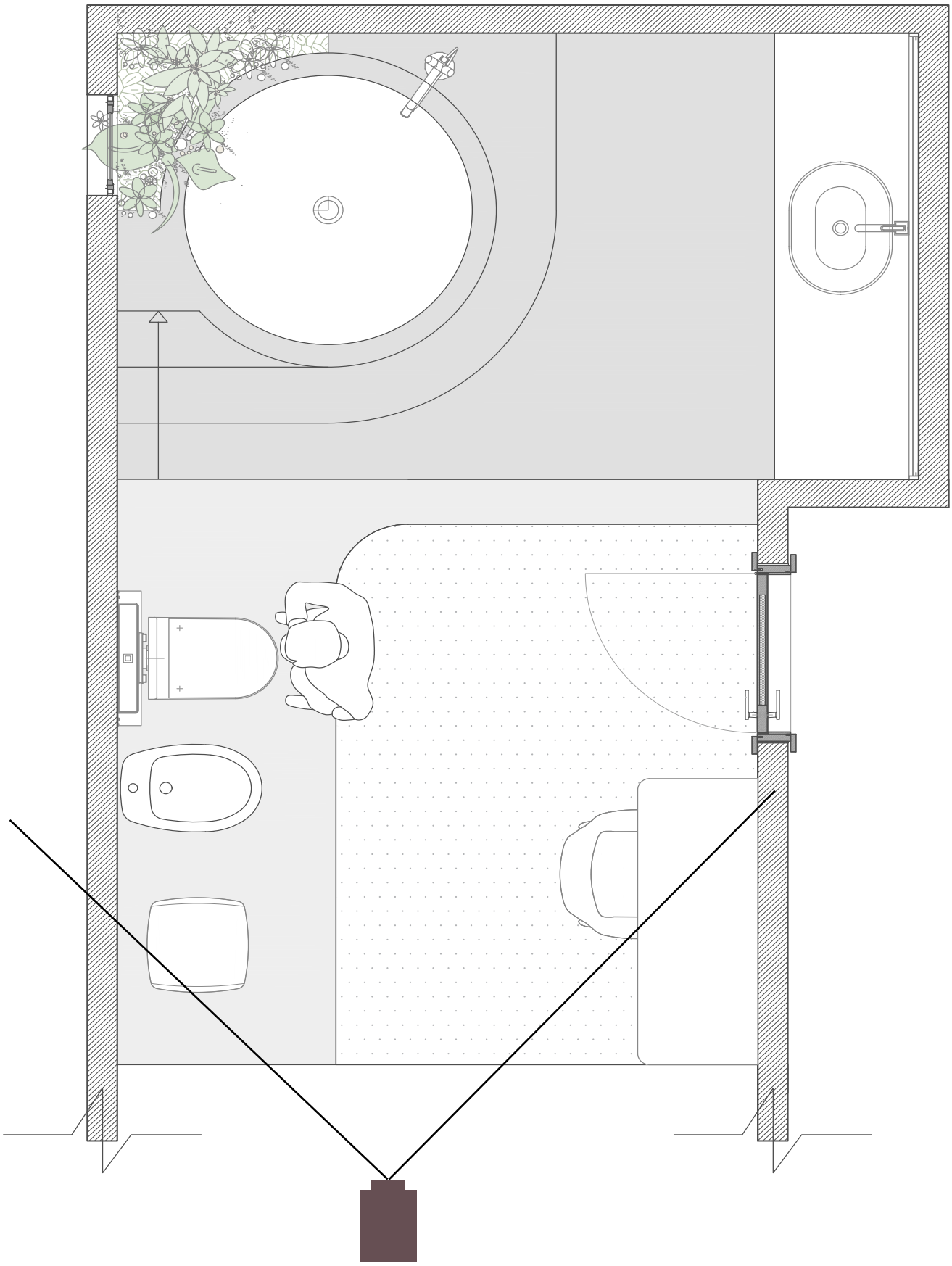
Camera - Space - Body Relationship

The WC scene in *The Party* is constructed around spatial clarity and bodily exposure. The camera remains mostly static, allowing the bathroom to be read immediately as a complete interior. The toilet, bathtub, sink, and door are positioned along a clear, parallel axis, creating a space that is open, legible, and visually stable. Unlike oppressive or fragmented bathrooms, this interior presents itself without resistance.

Bakshi's body is placed directly within this clarity. Both his body and the WC are positioned along the left vertical line of the rule-of-thirds grid, with his upper body aligning closely to the first horizontal line. This compositional choice keeps the body–toilet relationship consistently within the focal zone of the frame. Attention is subtly locked onto this interaction, preventing the viewer's gaze from drifting elsewhere. The mirror is absent; there is no mediation or concealment. The body is simply there, fully visible.

Comedy emerges not from spatial confusion but from excessive exposure. As Bakshi attempts to fix the flushing toilet, each bodily action triggers another element of the space: the painting falls, the paper dissolves, the toilet overflows. The bathroom functions as a chain-reaction environment, where objects respond directly to bodily movement. The space itself remains calm and readable while the body progressively loses control.

Figure 109. The Party (Edwards, 1968). Bathroom Scene Framing Technique.



Plan of the Bathroom with the Camera Positioning
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

The Party was shot on a set constructed at the MGM studio, allowing the interior to be fully designed around camera access and bodily movement. Much like the deliberately artificial domestic environments in Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle*, the Hollywood mansion in The Party is not intended to replicate everyday realism, but to function as a carefully staged environment (Lindbergs, 2011). Walls could be opened or removed, enabling clear sightlines and stable framing that would be difficult to achieve in a real domestic bathroom.

This openness produces an atmosphere fundamentally different from the WC in Parasite. Rather than pressing down on the body, the space remains generous and exposed. Hrundi V. Bakshi's attempts to manage the malfunctioning toilet unfold within a space that remains visually generous and fully readable. The humor does not emerge from spatial pressure, but from the contrast between an orderly, accommodating interior and a body struggling to operate within it.

03

Time Construction

Time in the WC scene of *The Party* is deliberately stretched through the use of long takes. Rather than relying on rapid cutting, the sequence unfolds slowly, allowing actions to play out in full and shifting attention from outcome to process, where duration itself becomes the primary source of comedy.

A key moment occurs when the toilet paper begins to unravel. Instead of cutting away, the camera holds, forcing the viewer to watch as the paper continues to roll until the entire spool is exposed. The humor emerges not from surprise but from anticipation, as the audience endures the malfunction alongside Bakshi, fully aware that the situation will only worsen.

Through this sustained slowness, tension accumulates without urgency. The space remains visually stable while time expands around Bakshi's ineffective attempts to regain control, transforming the WC into a space where the problem is never quickly resolved.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

In *The Party,* material and light contribute to a light, almost frictionless atmosphere that supports comedy rather than discomfort. The bathroom surfaces are clean, smooth, and visually consistent. Fixtures, walls, and sanitary elements appear polished and well-maintained, preventing the space from feeling dirty or threatening even as the situation escalates. Materials do not absorb tension; they allow it to slide across them.

Lighting is bright, even, and stable. There are no strong contrasts, shadows, or dramatic accents. This neutral illumination keeps the bathroom visually calm and readable at all times, reinforcing the sense that the space itself is not the problem. Unlike environments where light intensifies pressure, here it flattens urgency and maintains visual clarity.

Equally important is the absence of non-diegetic music. The scene unfolds without a guiding score, leaving only the sounds produced within the space itself: the flushing mechanism struggling, the toilet paper unraveling, water moving, objects falling. These isolated sounds become exaggerated through repetition and duration. Without music directing emotional response, attention is drawn entirely to the physical interaction between body and object.

Supporting Case 1

After Hours, 1985, directed by Martin Scorsese

In *After Hours*, the toilet similarly becomes a site of overflow. As in *The Party* and *Parasite*, the plumbing system fails and water spreads beyond its intended boundary. However, the spatial condition differs slightly due to scale. The bathroom is narrower and more compressed than in the other examples.

Because of this reduced width, the camera adopts a higher, almost top-down framing. This elevated viewpoint allows the viewer to register the limited proportions of the space and the rapid expansion of water across the floor. The overflow is not only material but spatial.

Figure 110. After Hours (Scorsese, 1985).

Figure 111. After Hours (Scorsese, 1985).

Figure 112. After Hours (Scorsese, 1985).

Figure 113. After Hours (Scorsese, 1985).

4.5.6

The Door

The door occupies a critical threshold position within the architectural interior. Unlike the wall, which encloses space, or the corridor, which directs movement, the door regulates access. It controls visibility, circulation, and spatial continuity. As a movable boundary, it has the capacity to both connect and divide.

In cinema, the door is never a neutral functional element. Directors stage it as a controlled point of transition where interior stability can be interrupted. When closed, it produces separation and concealment; when opened, it reorganizes spatial relationships. The frame of the door creates a secondary frame within the composition, establishing layered depth and controlled perspective.

The door marks the limit of what is visible, it creates a pause between what is present and what is revealed. What lies beyond the door is not seen, yet it is clearly implied. The surface begins to carry this tension, holding the possibility of something on the other side. In this way, the door shifts from being a simple panel to becoming an active boundary within the space.

Spatial Condition 1

Door as Threshold Reveal

The Shining

1980

Room 237 Scene

Genre: Psychological Horror, Supernatural Horror
Director: Stanley Kubrick
Cinematographer: John Alcott
Production Designer: Roy Walker
Costume Designer: Milena Canonero

Figure 114. The Shining (Kubrick, 1980).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Stanley Kubrick, *The Shining* follows Jack Torrance, who accepts a winter caretaker position at the isolated Overlook Hotel and relocates there with his wife Wendy and son Danny. As snowfall isolates the hotel, the family becomes confined within an immense interior environment. The scale, repetition, and rigid geometry of the hotel gradually intensify Jack's instability, turning architecture into a psychological force.

Kubrick constructs tension through spatial control rather than rapid action. Symmetrical framing, one point perspective, and deliberate camera movement reinforce architectural order. Time unfolds through sustained duration and stillness, allowing pressure to build without fragmentation. Discomfort emerges not from chaos, but from excessive spatial precision.

This strategy is evident in the Room 237 bathroom sequence, where symmetry, axial alignment, and controlled duration stage the threshold moment with architectural intensity.

The Shining Bathroom Scene in Key Frames

Figure 115. The Shining (Kubrick, 1980). Door Scene Collage.

01

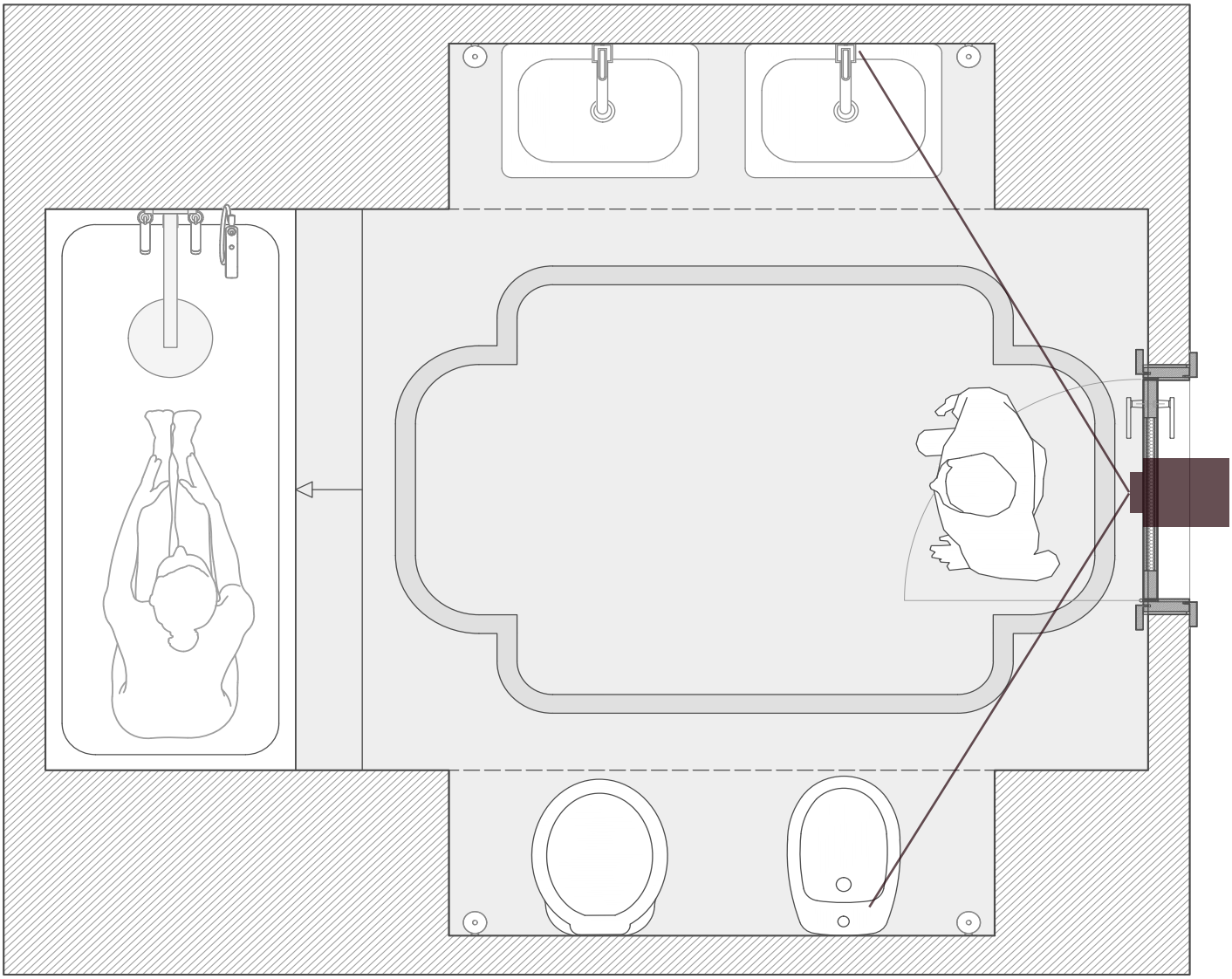
Camera - Space - Body Relationship

In *The Shining*, the bathroom in Room 237 is introduced through a carefully controlled spatial progression. The sequence begins with a sustained long take as Jack slowly approaches the door. The camera movement is measured and restrained, generating tension not through rapid montage but through duration. Suspense is produced by delay. The door operates as a threshold between the known bedroom space and the unknown bathroom interior.

When Jack opens the door, the green bathroom is revealed in a sudden yet perfectly composed frontal framing with one-point perspective. The shift is striking: the space appears symmetrical, ordered, and visually stable. The camera aligns itself centrally, presenting the bathroom as a fully legible interior. The bathtub is positioned along the central axis, and the woman inside it occupies the focal point of the composition. She is framed precisely at the center, reinforcing the geometric clarity of the mise-en-scène.

The camera holds the frontal symmetry for a long moment, allowing the bathroom to appear clear and fully composed. Only later does the structure shift into reverse shots, breaking the single axis and reorganizing the spatial relationship between Jack and the woman. As the camera moves closer, the architecture becomes less dominant and the bodies take visual priority.

At first, the symmetry feels calm and controlled. Over time, however, that same precision starts to feel rigid. The centered alignment and repeated geometry no longer read as stable but as strangely excessive. The space does not collapse or fragment; it remains ordered. Yet that order becomes uncomfortable. Horror emerges not from disorder, but from a composition that stays too perfect for too long.



Plan of the Bathroom with the Camera Positioning
Not to Scale

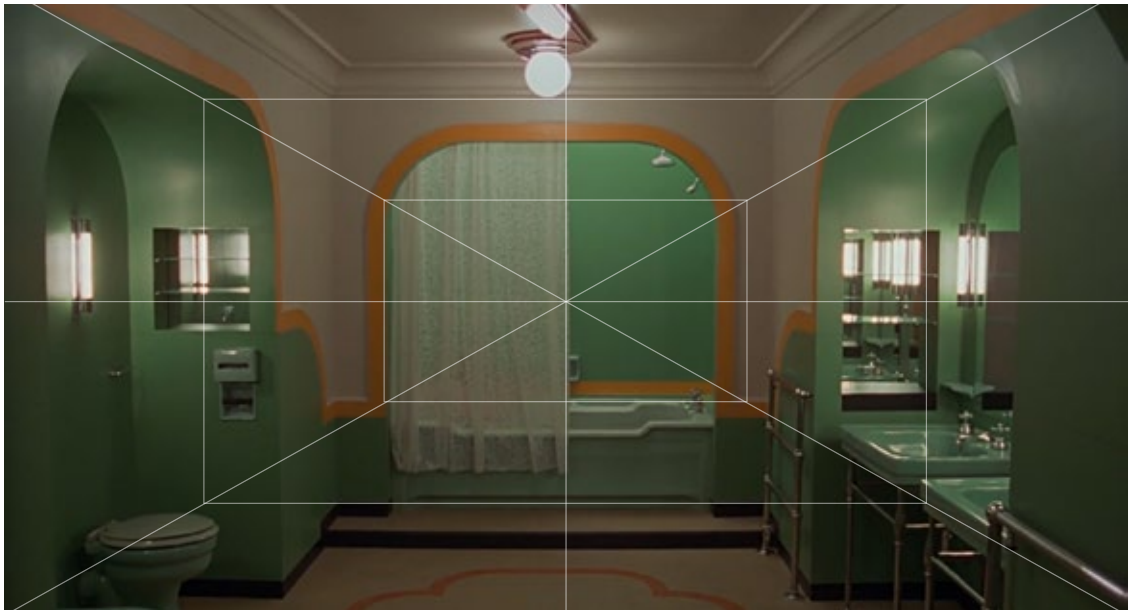


Figure 116. The Shining (Kubrick, 1980). Bathroom Scene Framing Technique.

02

Spatial Integrity

Spatial integrity in the Room 237 bathroom is defined by coherence and containment. The space is presented as a fully legible interior, structured by repetition and symmetry. The green tiles extend across walls in a continuous grid, reinforcing surface uniformity and geometric discipline. No area appears incomplete or partially constructed; the volume reads as whole.

This clarity is consistent with the larger architectural logic of the Overlook Hotel, constructed as one of the most expansive indoor sets of its time at Elstree Studios (Lambie, 2011). The hotel interior was designed as spacious, modern, and meticulously controlled. Rather than relying on darkness or visual decay, tension emerges from scale, height, and symmetry. The environment is clean, ordered, and deliberately structured.

Unlike fragmented horror spaces, this bathroom is not broken through montage or obscured through shadow. Its boundaries are clear. Walls, ceiling height, and floor plane remain perceptible within the frame. The frontal alignment strengthens this sense of enclosure by minimizing diagonal depth and emphasizing planar stability. The space feels complete and architecturally resolved, yet that very completeness contributes to its rigidity.

03

Time Construction

In the bathroom scene of Room 237, time feels deliberately stretched. Kubrick avoids rapid editing and instead relies on static framing and extended shots. The camera lingers. It does not rush toward the revelation. This stillness creates a strange calm that slowly turns uneasy.

As Jack approaches the woman in the bathtub, nothing dramatic happens at first. There is no sudden cut, no immediate disruption. We simply wait. The scene unfolds slowly, and that slowness becomes the source of tension. Time does not build through action, but through anticipation.

The delay is crucial. We are held inside the moment long enough to believe in its intimacy. The woman appears calm, almost seductive. The bathroom feels stable, symmetrical, controlled. But the longer we stay, the more fragile that stability becomes. When her body begins to decay, the shock does not come from speed, but from the duration that preceded it. The horror does not come from a sudden

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

Unlike conventional horror interiors, the bathroom in Room 237 is neither dark nor shadowed. It is fully illuminated and visually immaculate. Lighting is even and controlled, avoiding dramatic contrast or expressive shadow. Illumination does not create mystery; it reinforces clarity. Every surface remains clearly legible within the frame. Thus, uniform lighting supports spatial transparency. Nothing is concealed. The bathroom is exposed in its entirety.

Color plays a structural role in this effect. The dominant green tile saturates the walls in a continuous chromatic field. Rather than functioning as decoration, the green operates as an environmental condition. Its repetition stabilizes the space visually, reinforcing symmetry and planar coherence. At the same time, the green tone carries an association with decay, making the calm space feel slightly uneasy.

Spatial Condition 1

Door as Threshold Reveal

What Lies Beneath

2000

Genre: Thriller, Supernatural Thriller, Mystery
Director: Robert Zemeckis
Cinematographer: Don Burgess
Production Designer: Rick Carter
Costume Designer: Susanna Monson

Figure 117. What Lies Beneath (Zemeckis, 2000).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Robert Zemeckis, *What Lies Beneath* follows Claire Spencer, who begins to notice subtle disturbances inside her lakeside home. At first, the house feels calm and ordinary. Nothing appears broken or chaotic. Gradually, however, small shifts in sound, reflection, and movement begin to unsettle this stability.

Fear in the film does not emerge from a distant location or an external world. It grows from within the domestic interior itself. Doors, mirrors, the bathroom, and the bathtub slowly become central to the tension. Spaces that once felt familiar begin to feel uncertain. The architecture remains intact, yet the way it is revealed and inhabited changes. The home transforms from a place of comfort into a place that seems to conceal something. In this way, everyday architectural elements become active sources of suspense.

What Lies Beneath Bathroom Scene in Key Frames

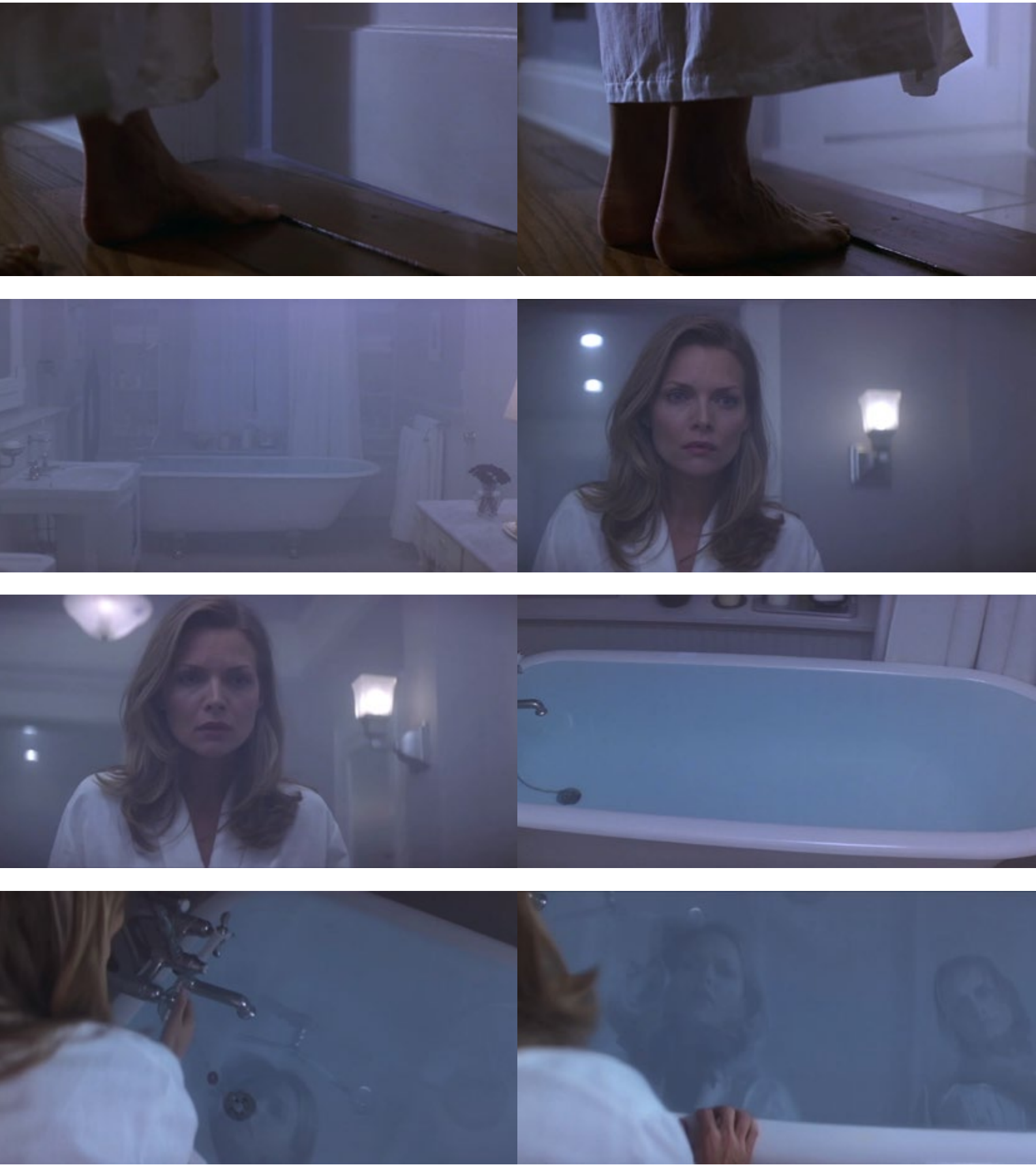


Figure 118. What Lies Beneath (Zemeckis, 2000). Door Scene Collage.

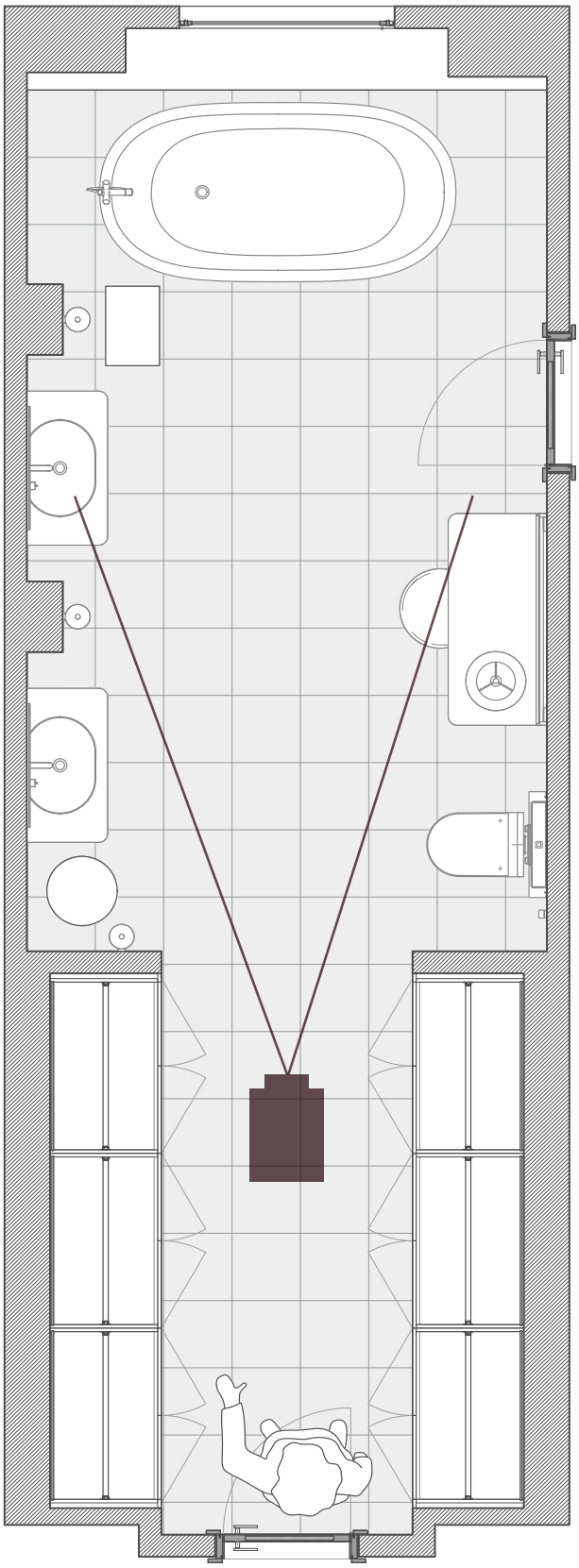
01

Camera - Space - Body Relationship

The bathroom is first constructed through the door rather than through the room itself. The camera is positioned low, aligned with the floor, focusing on the narrow gap beneath the door. Steam escaping from this opening activates the threshold before entry occurs. The door is not yet opened, yet it already mediates space.

This low framing suppresses facial identity and privileges boundary and surface. The body is introduced only through the feet, reinforcing scale and emphasizing proximity to the threshold. Once opened, the door continues to frame the bathroom. The interior remains contained within the doorway, producing a layered composition.

Once opened, the door continues to frame the bathroom. The interior remains contained within the doorway, producing a frame within the frame. This layered composition enhances spatial depth. Unlike the frontal and planar presentation in The Shining, where the bathroom appears almost two dimensional, here the threshold creates a perceptible three dimensional extension. The door emphasizes recession rather than flattening it. The door therefore regulates visibility, controlling how much of the interior becomes legible at any moment.



Plan of the Bathroom with the Camera Positioning
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

Spatial integrity in this bathroom is defined by continuity rather than symmetry. The interior is presented as part of a coherent domestic environment. Walls, floor, and ceiling remain visually connected to the rest of the house. The bathroom does not appear as a separate or hyper structured chamber; it reads as an extension of the home.

The room remains architecturally stable. Surfaces are intact, proportions are ordinary, and circulation is clear. There is no distortion of geometry. Instability emerges not from structural breakdown but from perception. The space itself does not fragment; it remains complete.

03

Time Construction

Time in this sequence is deliberately slowed. The camera avoids rapid cuts and allows the approach toward the bathroom to unfold in real duration. Tension is not created through sudden interruption, but through controlled pacing.

Once the door opens, the bathtub immediately registers as the spatial center. However, the scene does not move directly toward action. The slow movement toward the tub extends the interval between seeing and reaching. This delay becomes the primary temporal strategy.

The viewer understands where the focus lies, yet the camera withholds immediate resolution. The gradual advance turns ordinary movement into anticipation. Time is stretched just enough to make the space feel charged without breaking its continuity.

Here, tension grows from duration. The space remains stable, but the prolonged approach to the bathtub transforms it into a site of expectation.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

Material presence in this bathroom is defined by whiteness and vapor. The dominant surfaces are pale and smooth, producing a nearly monochromatic interior. Walls, bathtub, and fixtures merge into a continuous white field, reducing material contrast and flattening visual hierarchy.

Steam plays a central role in shaping perception. The vapor softens edges and partially obscures boundaries, diffusing light across the room. Unlike the clear and stable illumination seen in The Shining, visibility here is filtered. Surfaces remain intact, yet their definition becomes unstable.

The white interior does not read as hygienic or reassuring. The lack of color variation combined with atmospheric haze creates ambiguity. Light interacts with steam rather than solid surfaces, producing a muted glow instead of sharp reflection.

Material and light behavior therefore generate tension through concealment within brightness. The room is not dark, yet its whiteness and vapor prevent clear perception. The atmosphere feels unsettled not because of decay, but because the excessive purity begins to appear artificial.

Spatial Condition 2

Door as Barrier Collapse

The Shining (Axe Scene), 1980, directed by Stanley Kubrick

Later in the film, the bathroom door appears again, but under completely different conditions. Unlike the scene in Room 237, where the door worked as a threshold that controlled what could be seen, here it becomes a barrier. It no longer stages a gradual reveal. It stands as a solid surface separating two opposing zones, the vulnerable interior and the threatening exterior.

The camera is positioned slightly to the side, capturing both Jack's violent movement and the surface of the door within the same frame. This angled framing allows us to see not only the impact of the axe but also the resistance of the material. The door is no longer just a flat surface; it becomes something that absorbs force. Thus, the space is divided into refuge and threat, and the conflict is staged directly on the surface that separates them.

When the axe cuts into the wood, that division begins to fail. The boundary is not opened calmly; it is violently broken. The small hole created by the axe forms an accidental frame, limiting what can be seen to a narrow fragment. Space is reduced to that opening. When Jack's face pushes through, the broken door starts to function like a frame within the frame. The splintered wood isolates him, making his presence feel even more intense.

At this point, the door no longer controls access. It simply gives in. What was meant to protect the interior cannot hold. The tension comes not from what is hidden, but from watching the boundary itself collapse. The bathroom shifts from a temporary shelter into an exposed and vulnerable space.

Figure 119.The Shining (Kubrick, 1980).

Figure 120. The Shining (Kubrick, 1980).

Figure 121. The Shining (Kubrick, 1980).

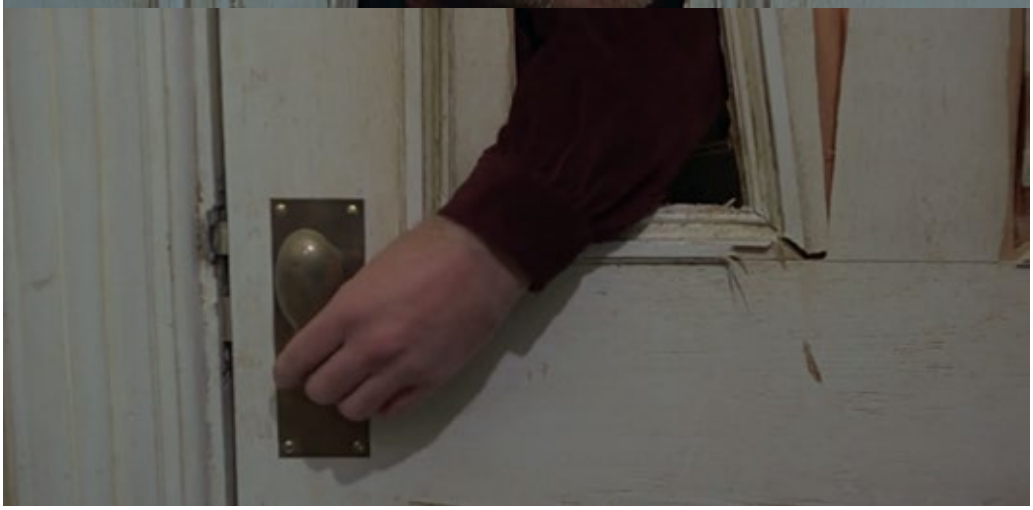


Figure 122. The Shining (Kubrick, 1980).

Supporting Case 1

Pineapple Express, 2008, directed by David Gordon Green

In *Pineapple Express*, the door also functions as a barrier, but the scene is treated with humor rather than horror. The break-in happens quickly, with fast cuts and exaggerated action. Unlike the slow and heavy tension in The Shining, here the rhythm is chaotic and energetic. Even so, the spatial role of the door remains the same. It separates inside from outside, and once it is forced open, that separation disappears. At several moments the camera frames the door directly from the front, emphasizing it as a solid surface before it gives way. Although the tone is comedic, the door still marks the boundary between safety and intrusion.

Supporting Case 2

Assassination Nation, 2018, directed by Sam Levinson

In *Assassination Nation*, the door once again functions as a barrier that is violently broken. A male intruder attacks the door with a knife and forces his way inside. The action happens quickly and with strong intensity. Similar to Pineapple Express, the camera frames the door directly from the front, highlighting it as a solid surface before it gives way. The moment the door breaks, the interior loses its protection. What was separating inside from outside disappears instantly, and the space becomes exposed.

Figure 123. Pineapple Express (Green, 2008).

Figure 124. Pineapple Express (Green, 2008).

Figure 125. Assassinatiom Nation (Levinson, 2018).

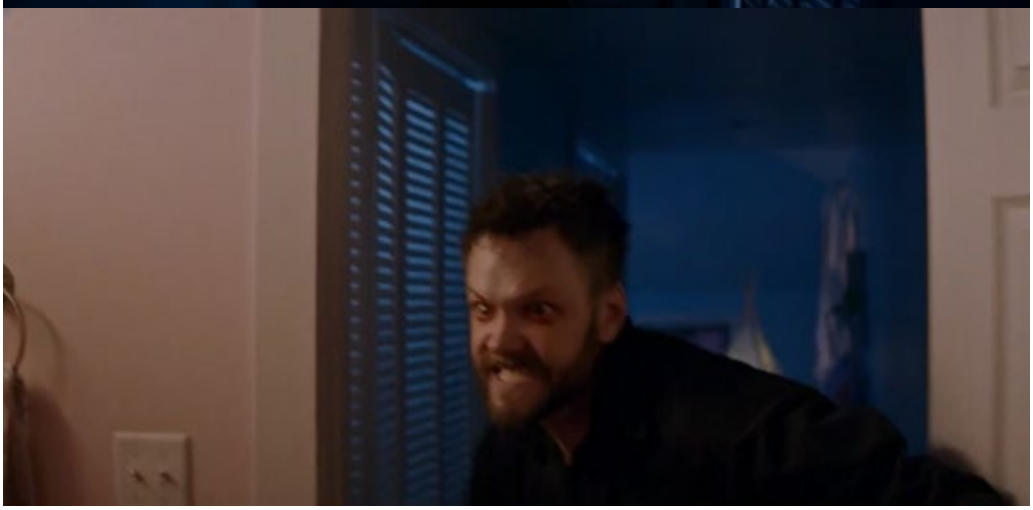


Figure 126. Assassinatiom Nation (Levinson, 2018).

Spatial Condition 2

Door as Framing Device

We Live in Time, 2024, directed by John Crowley

In *We Live in Time*, the doorway frames both characters standing upright inside the bathroom. Their vertical bodies align with the vertical structure of the door. The full height of the doorway remains visible in the shot, reinforcing its architectural presence. The space is not fragmented. Instead, it is visually organized through the doorway, which contains both figures within a clear rectangular field.

Marriage Story, 2019, directed by Noah Baumbach

In *Marriage Story*, the door similarly frames the bathroom interior. The woman sits on the bathtub, and only part of her body is visible within the doorway. The frame does not reveal the entire room. Instead, it isolates a portion of the body within a controlled opening. The door becomes a device that limits spatial access while directing attention.

Malcolm & Marie, 2021, directed by Sam Levinson

Similarly in *Malcolm & Marie*, the woman is seated on the toilet, and her body appears framed by the door. So, it structures the composition and defines the relationship between body, interior and the viewer.

Figure 127. We Live in Time (Crowley, 2024).

Figure 128. Marriage Story (Baumbach, 2019).

Figure 129. Malcom & Marie (Levinson, 2021).

4.5.7

The Floor

The floor occupies a fundamental yet often overlooked position within the domestic bathroom, functioning as the primary surface of bodily support and orientation. Unlike mirrors or windows that organize vision, the floor organizes weight. It is the plane on which the body stands, kneels, collapses, or stabilizes itself. In cinema, its staging is never incidental; directors deliberately frame the floor to shape how the body relates to space and gravity.

Floor-centered staging shifts attention from vertical perception to horizontal grounding. Through texture, color, pattern, and framing, the floor can reinforce stability or subtly destabilize it. A warm, smooth surface may generate intimacy, while a cold or patterned ground can introduce tension and fragmentation. The floor thus becomes the threshold between body and architecture.

Directors often emphasize the floor through overhead or bird's-eye framing, allowing the horizontal surface to dominate the image. From this elevated perspective, the body appears reduced or exposed, and the floor becomes a containing plane rather than an invisible support.

The following case studies examine how the floor operates as a scenographic pivot, shaping atmosphere through horizontality and embodied proximity within domestic bathroom interiors.

Spatial Condition 1
Ground as Active Plane

Amélie
Original title: Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain
2001

Genre: Romantic Comedy, Fantasy, Whimsical Drama
Director: Jean-Pierre Jeunet
Cinematographer: Bruno Delbonnel
Production Designer: Aline Bonetto
Costume Designer: Madeline Fontaine

Figure 130. Amélie (Jeunet, 2001).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, *Amélie* (2001) follows the life of Amélie Poulain, a shy and imaginative young woman living in Montmartre, Paris. After discovering a hidden childhood box in her apartment and successfully returning it to its former owner, Amélie decides to secretly dedicate herself to improving the lives of others. Rather than acting openly, she prefers subtle interventions, manipulating small details, and orchestrating situations from behind the scenes.

The film unfolds through episodic encounters, portraying Amélie's interactions with neighbors, coworkers, and strangers. While she helps others confront loneliness, regret, or missed opportunities, she herself struggles with intimacy and vulnerability. Her internal world, which is rich with fantasy, curiosity, and sensitivity, contrasts with her difficulty in expressing her own desires, particularly in her relationship with Nino Quincampoix.

Amélie Bathroom Scene in Key Frames







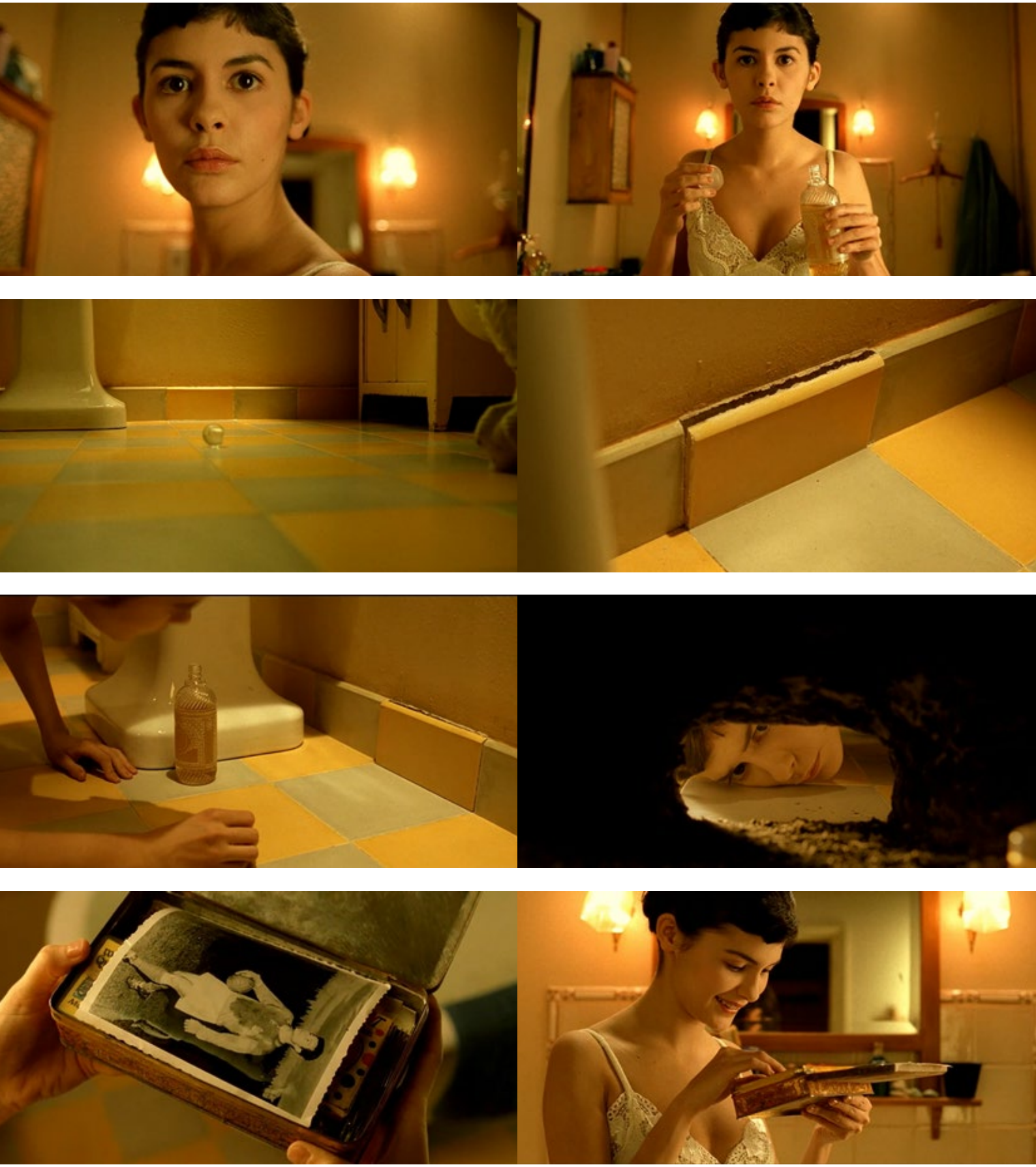



Figure 131. Amélie (Jeunet, 2001). Floor Scene Collage.

01

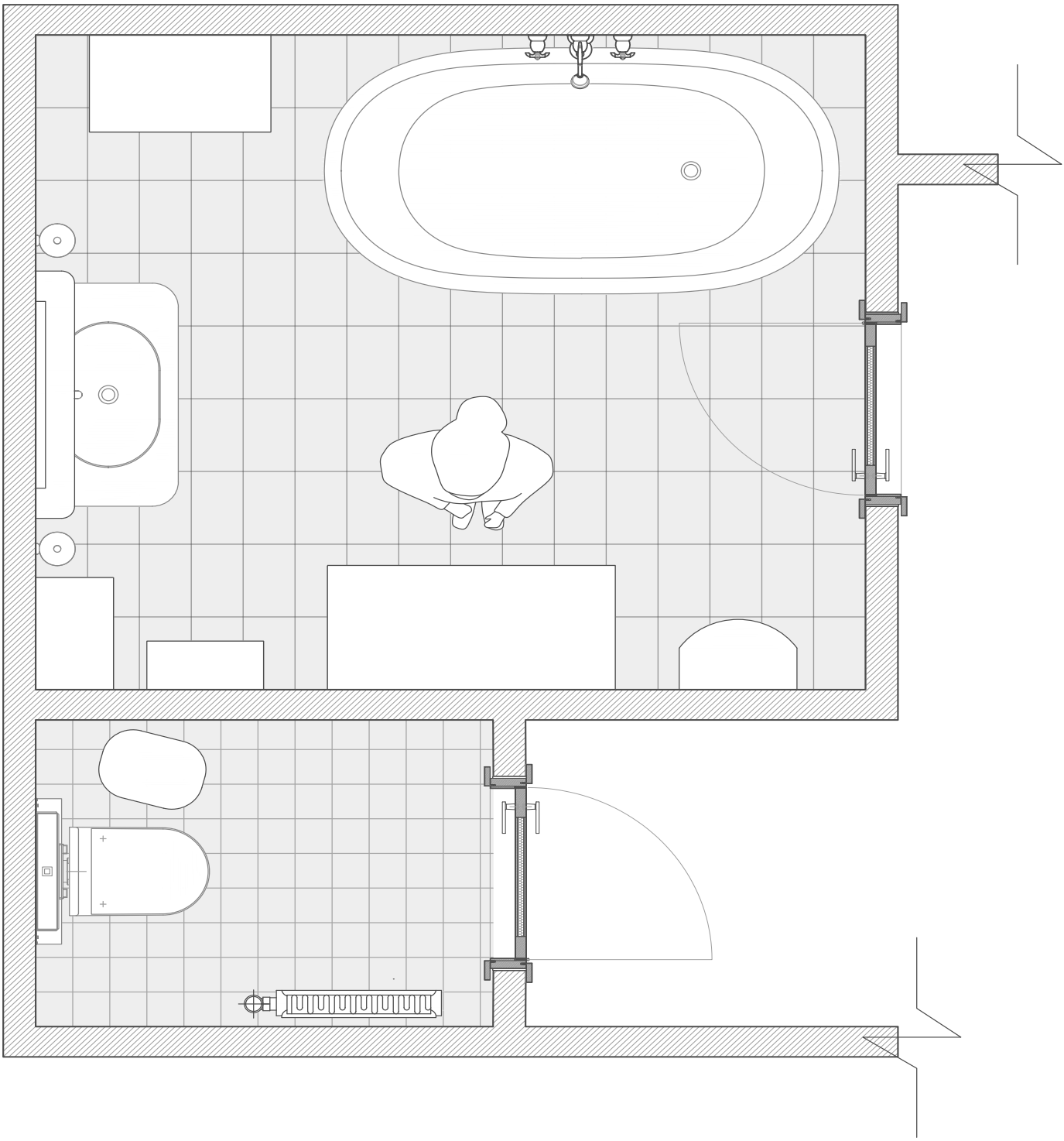
Camera - Space - Body Relationship

The scene is introduced through a sudden zoom onto Amélie's face after she hears the news on television. This unexpected movement momentarily breaks the film's otherwise soft visual rhythm, signaling a transition from passive observation to personal awareness. While watching the news, she becomes briefly distracted, and in that lapse of attention she drops the cap of a small bottle. This accidental gesture triggers a spatial shift: the camera moves from eye level down toward the ground, allowing the floor to enter the frame as a narrative consequence rather than an initial focal point.

This framing is important because the body is no longer upright. Amélie kneels and deliberately lowers herself toward the ground. This is not a fall, but a conscious descent. The floor is not merely a supporting surface; it becomes the plane where exploration begins.

The use of a wide-angle lens subtly expands the perspective. The foreground grows more prominent, yet the background does not disappear from view. When Amélie kneels, the distance between her body and the tiled surface nearly dissolves. The camera does not observe from above in a controlling, god-like manner. Instead, it remains at a central level, consistent with Jean-Pierre Jeunet's preference for frontal and balanced framing. By avoiding an overhead position, the scene refuses to dominate the body. Rather than flattening it against the ground, the camera moves closer to the floor, emphasizing physical proximity and tactile contact.

Through this shift, the floor transforms from a neutral base into an active narrative surface. It is no longer simply beneath the body; it is where the story begins.



Plan of the Bathroom
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

Unlike films that present the bathroom as a fragmented or visibly manipulated set, *Amélie* maintains a strong sense of spatial coherence. The bathroom reads as a complete and self-contained interior. Walls, fixtures, and tiled surfaces are clearly organized within the frame, and the space remains legible even when the camera shifts position. There is no visible sense of missing walls or artificial openings for camera access.

This coherence is particularly significant considering that the interior scenes were filmed in a studio in Cologne rather than in an actual Paris apartment Calhoun (2002). Despite being constructed, the space does not reveal its artificiality through fragmentation or spatial inconsistency. Instead, it preserves architectural continuity. The bathroom feels whole.

However, spatial integrity in this scene does not rely on realism alone. The bathroom operates with a heightened, almost illustrated clarity. The saturated colors and clean tile grid give the space a graphic quality, reinforcing the idea that Amélie resembles a "French graphic novel come to life." The environment feels curated and stylized rather than purely naturalistic.

03

Time Construction

The temporal structure of the scene remains relatively natural and continuous. Unlike sequences that rely on prolonged duration or accelerated cutting, this moment unfolds in a measured rhythm that neither dramatizes nor suspends time. The pacing aligns with everyday action: a distraction, a dropped object, a kneeling gesture, and a small discovery.

There is no excessive slowing of movement or exaggerated delay before the revelation of the hidden box. The discovery emerges through a fluid sequence of actions rather than through temporal tension. The scene does not isolate the moment through prolonged stillness, nor does it heighten it through rapid montage. Instead, it maintains narrative continuity.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

Material and color play a defining role in shaping the atmosphere of the bathroom scene. The tiled floor is not neutral; it is saturated in warm yellows and muted blues, forming a chromatic grid that dominates the visual field. These tones create a sense of intimacy and warmth, transforming the bathroom from a functional interior into an emotionally charged space.

The ceramic tiles are smooth and reflective, yet not cold. Unlike sterile or monochromatic bathroom environments, this surface feels tactile and alive. The repetition of the tile pattern introduces visual rhythm, while the warm palette softens the geometry. The floor does not appear hard or hostile; it feels inhabited.
Lighting reinforces this effect. The illumination remains even and gentle, avoiding harsh shadows. Surfaces are clearly visible, but the space is never flattened by excessive brightness. Instead, color saturation works in harmony with light to produce a nostalgic and slightly surreal atmosphere. The bathroom reads less as a realistic interior and more as a curated visual environment.

Supporting Case 1

What Women Want, 2000, directed by Nancy Meyers

In *What Women Want*, the floor becomes an active surface when a large number of beads scatter across the bathroom tiles. What initially appears as a stable horizontal plane suddenly changes its behavior. The smooth surface, now covered with loose objects, reduces friction and destabilizes movement.

The character's body is forced to respond to the altered ground. Steps become uncertain, balance shifts, and the body loses its normal alignment. Attention moves downward, away from faces and toward the floor itself. The camera reinforces this shift by emphasizing the horizontal plane where the action unfolds.

Unlike in *Amélie*, where the floor reveals a hidden space beneath it, here the floor does not physically open. Instead, it changes through what accumulates on it. The scattered beads alter how the surface behaves. What was once stable becomes unstable.

Figure 132. What Women Want (Meyers, 2000).

Figure 133. What Women Want (Meyers, 2000).

Figure 134. What Women Want (Meyers, 2000).

Figure 135. What Women Want (Meyers, 2000).

Spatial Condition 2

Ground as Compositional Field

The Phoenician Scheme

2025

Genre: Comedy, Period Drama, Stylized Ensemble Film
Director: Wes Anderson
Cinematographer: Robert Yeoman
Production Designer: Adam Stockhausen
Costume Designer: Milena Canonero

Figure 136. The Phoenician Scheme (Anderson, 2025).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Wes Anderson, *The Phoenician Scheme* (2025) follows the story of a ruthless businessman attempting to reconcile with his estranged daughter while navigating an intricate international espionage plot. Blending elements of a classic spy thriller with Anderson's signature focus on dysfunctional family dynamics, the film unfolds through meticulously staged interiors and highly controlled visual compositions. Rather than relying on conventional action-driven suspense, the narrative develops through spatial choreography, deadpan humor, and a stylized exploration of loyalty, secrecy, and legacy. As the father–daughter relationship intersects with a larger infrastructural "scheme," the film situates personal reconciliation within a rigid and bureaucratic world shaped by order, symmetry, and formal control.

The Phoenician Scheme Bathroom Scene in Key Frames

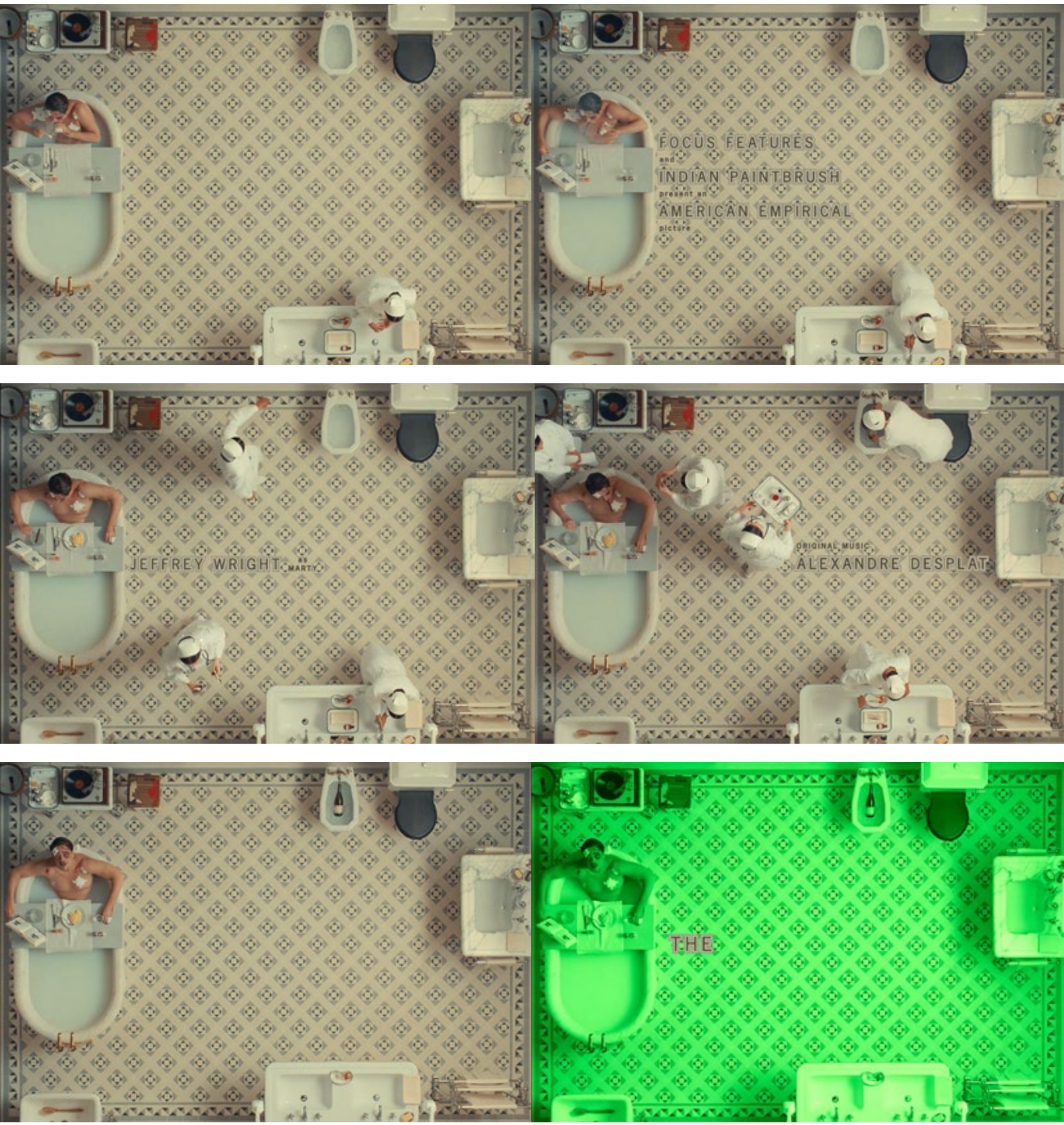


Figure 137. The Phoenician Scheme (Anderson, 2025). Floor Scene Collage.

01

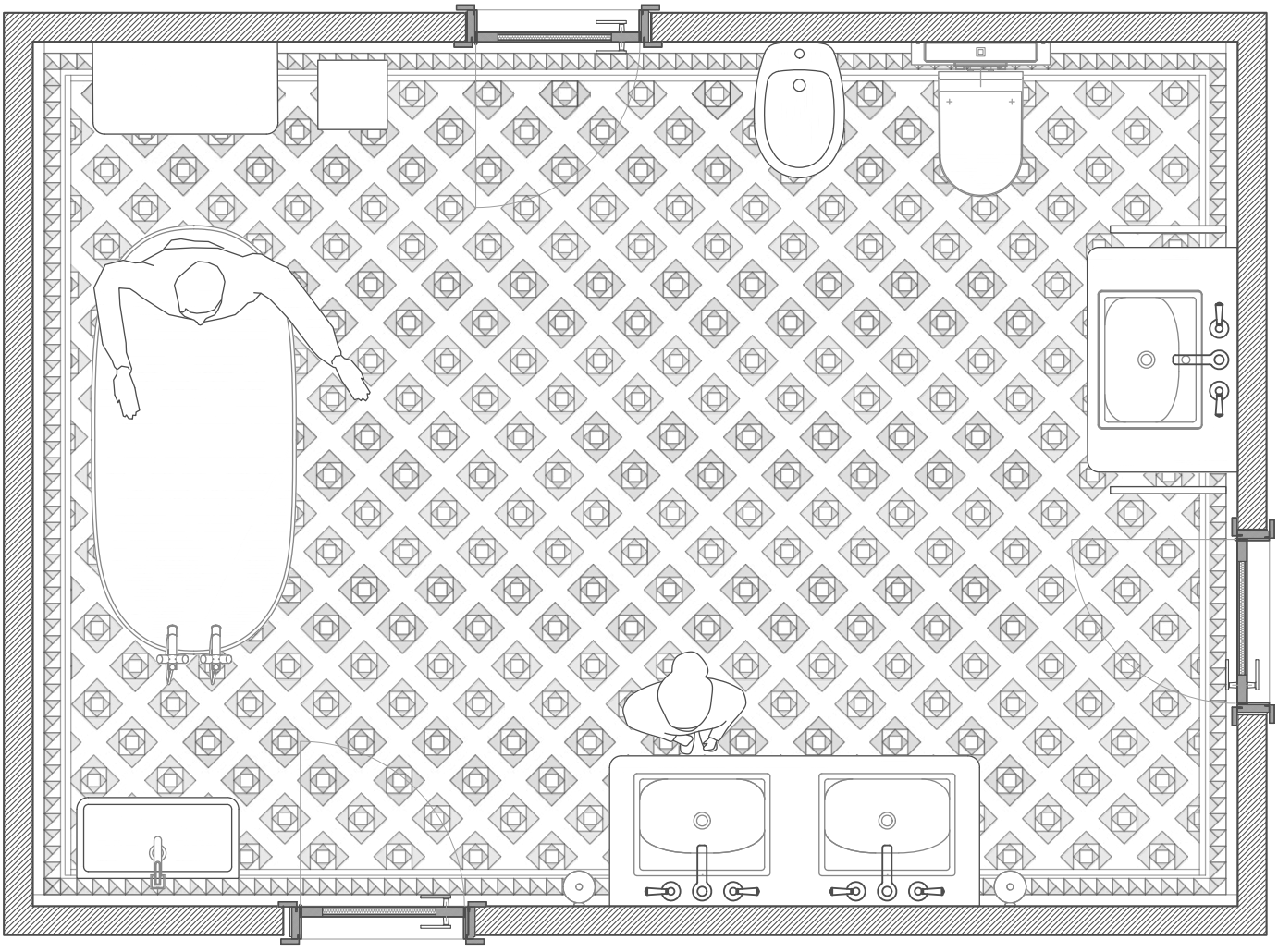
Camera - Space - Body Relationship

The sequence is framed entirely from an overhead perspective. The camera adopts a strict bird's-eye view, transforming the bathroom floor into the dominant visual field. The patterned tiles occupy the majority of the frame, while the bodies appear reduced and spatially flattened.

This elevated vantage point removes conventional bodily alignment. The camera does not meet the characters at eye level; instead, it observes from above, creating a controlled, almost diagrammatic composition. The floor doesn't function as mere support. It becomes the compositional grid upon which both bodies and movement are arranged.

Significantly, the opening credits are placed directly over the tiled surface. The floor operates not only as architectural ground but as a graphic background. The film's textual identity is inscribed onto the horizontal plane. In this configuration, the bathroom interior becomes a visual canvas. The ground carries narrative, typography, and choreography simultaneously.

Through this strategy, the floor shifts from passive base to primary scenographic device.



Plan of the Bathroom
Not to Scale

02

Spatial Integrity

In *The Phoenician Scheme*, spatial integrity is constructed through graphic dominance rather than volumetric enclosure. In the overhead bathroom sequence, the floor occupies almost the entire frame, transforming the interior into a controlled horizontal field. Walls and vertical elements recede from perception, and the space reads less as a three-dimensional room and more as a compositional surface.

Unlike the warm and tactile spatial coherence observed in *Amélie*, where the bathroom reads as an inhabited and emotionally grounded interior, here integrity is achieved through abstraction and control. Overhead framing eliminates spatial ambiguity by reducing the environment to a single dominant surface. The bathroom becomes a diagrammatic stage, visually unified and rigorously structured.

03

Time Construction

The temporal structure of the overhead bathroom sequence is defined by duration rather than fragmentation. The scene unfolds in a single long take, without visible cuts. This uninterrupted continuity allows the viewer to observe simultaneous layers of action: workers move around Anatole, one bringing food, another tending to his wounds, while the spatial composition remains stable.

At the same time, the opening credits appear across the tiled floor. Normally, credit sequences function as transitional elements that viewers only partially register. Here, however, their placement within the active spatial field alters their temporal weight. Because the text is grounded on the architectural surface rather than superimposed over the bodies, the viewer's attention oscillates between movement and typography. The credits are not written over the characters; they are anchored to the floor.

The absence of cutting prevents acceleration. The coexistence of service choreography and textual information subtly stretches perception. Time does not dramatically slow down, but it becomes denser. The viewer remains within the frame longer than usual for what is typically a functional credit sequence.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

In the overhead bathroom sequence, material and color operate with graphic precision rather than tactile intimacy. The tiled floor dominates the frame, functioning as a designed surface rather than a neutral architectural element. Its geometric pattern establishes order and visual hierarchy, turning the ground into a controlled compositional field.

The surface appears smooth and chromatically measured. The palette is muted yet deliberate, producing clarity instead of warmth. The floor does not invite touch; it organizes perception.

Lighting is even and carefully balanced. The absence of strong shadows reduces volumetric depth, reinforcing the flattened, diagrammatic quality of the image. Rather than dramatizing the room, light stabilizes it.

Through this restrained combination of surface, color, and illumination, the floor becomes more than a structural base. It acts as a scenographic plane that supports the bodies, movement, and typography within a unified visual system.

Supporting Case 1

The Matrix, 1999, directed by Lana Wachowski & Lilly Wachowski

In *The Matrix*, the bathroom is also framed from a top view framing transforming the floor into the dominant visual field. The patterned tiles occupy most of the frame, while the body appears reduced within the composition. As in *The Phoenician Scheme*, the camera does not prioritize eye-level interaction. Instead, it organizes the scene through the horizontal plane.

The geometric pattern of the tiles establishes a clear visual grid. The floor becomes more than a supporting surface; it functions as a compositional background against which the body is positioned. Movement is read in relation to this pattern.

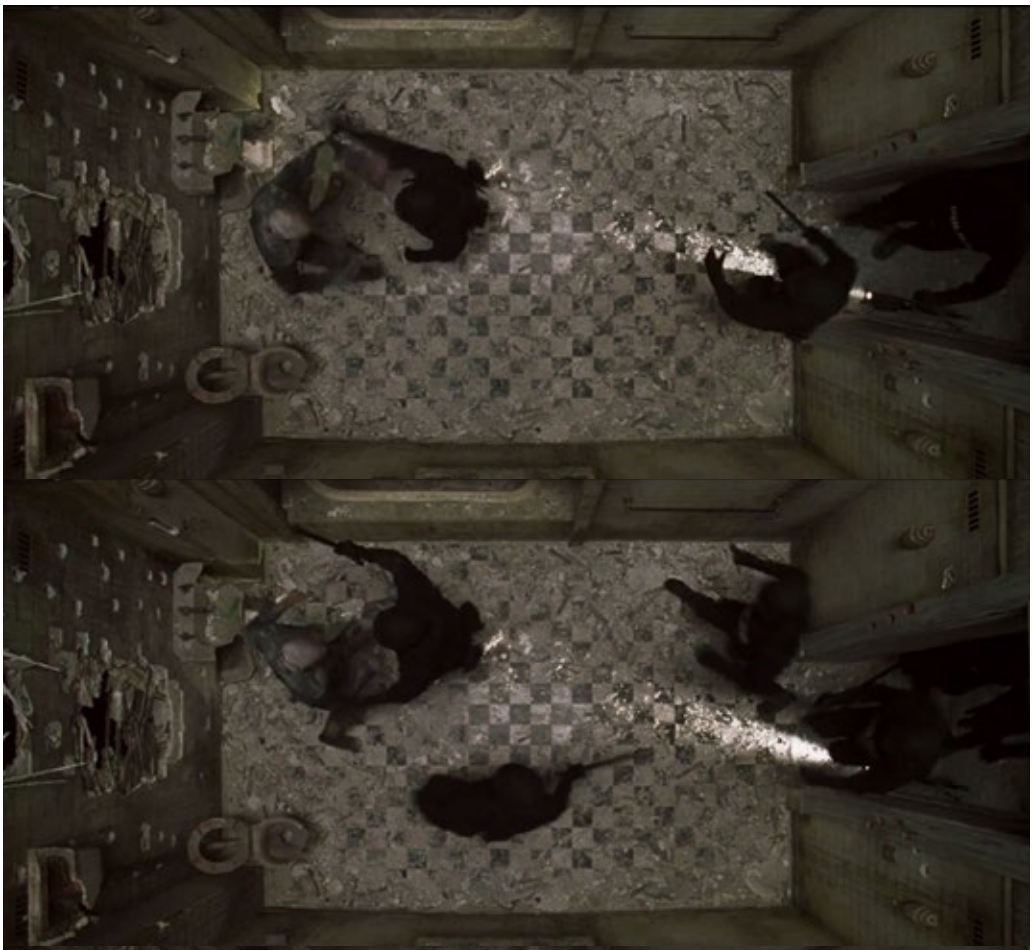


Figure 138. The Matrix (Li. Wachowski, La. Wachowski 1999).

Figure 139. The Matrix (Li. Wachowski, La. Wachowski 1999).

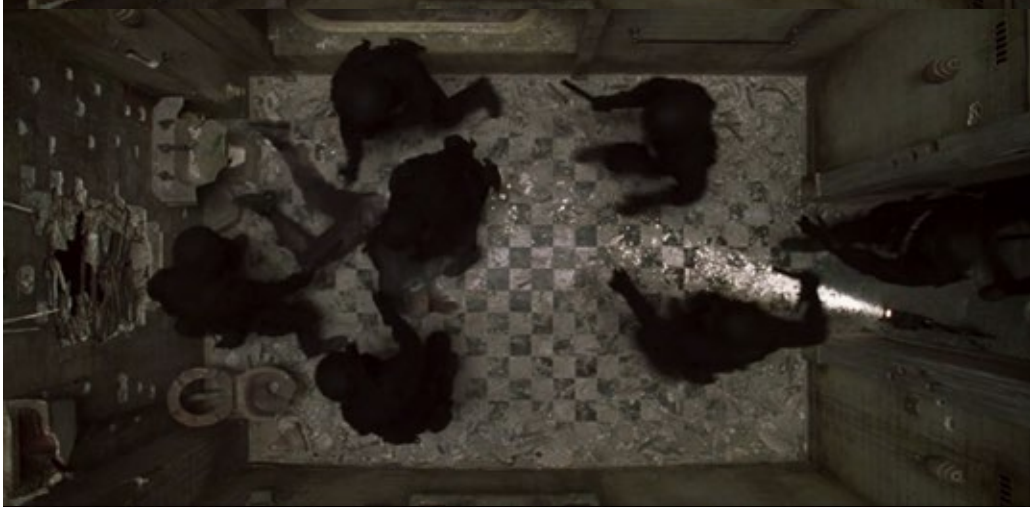


Figure 140. The Matrix (Li. Wachowski, La. Wachowski 1999).

Figure 141. The Matrix (Li. Wachowski, La. Wachowski 1999).

4.5.8

The Window

The window plays a distinct role in the domestic bathroom; it controls the connection between inside and outside. In cinema, it is used deliberately to control distance, visibility, and framing. The body may stand near it, look through it, or be framed within its borders. The window often acts as a secondary frame, limiting what can be seen while organizing the composition of both space and body.

This effect depends on the relationship between camera, body, and architectural opening. Frontal or axial framing can emphasize the geometry of the window, while vertical and horizontal divisions structure how the body is positioned within it. The window therefore becomes an active spatial device that shapes perception rather than a neutral background element.

Spatial Condition 1

Window as Shared Frame

Asteroid City

2023

Genre: Comedy-Drama, Science Fiction, Meta-Theatrical Film
Director: Wes Anderson
Cinematographer: Robert Yeoman
Production Designer: Adam Stockhausen
Costume Designer: Milena Canonero

Figure 142. Asteroid City (Anderson, 2023).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Wes Anderson, *Asteroid City* is set in a fictional desert town in the American Southwest during the late 1950s. The story revolves around a Junior Stargazer convention that brings together families, scientists, and military officials within a controlled and isolated environment. The town feels suspended from the outside world, organized through rigid routines and spatial order.

At the center of the narrative is Augie Steenbeck, who arrives with his children after the death of his wife. When the town is placed under quarantine following an unexpected event, the characters are forced into waiting. Emotional expression remains restrained, and interactions unfold through distance and observation rather than confrontation.

Wes Anderson's authorship is evident in the film's spatial construction. Symmetrical framing, one point perspective, and centered compositions establish a highly controlled visual language. Architecture is deliberately staged, not incidental. This precision becomes especially visible in the bathroom window scenes, where the window functions as a secondary frame within a rigid geometric composition, reinforcing containment and distance.

Asteroid City Bathroom Scene in Key Frames

Figure 143. Asteroid City (Anderson, 2023). Window Scene Collage.

01

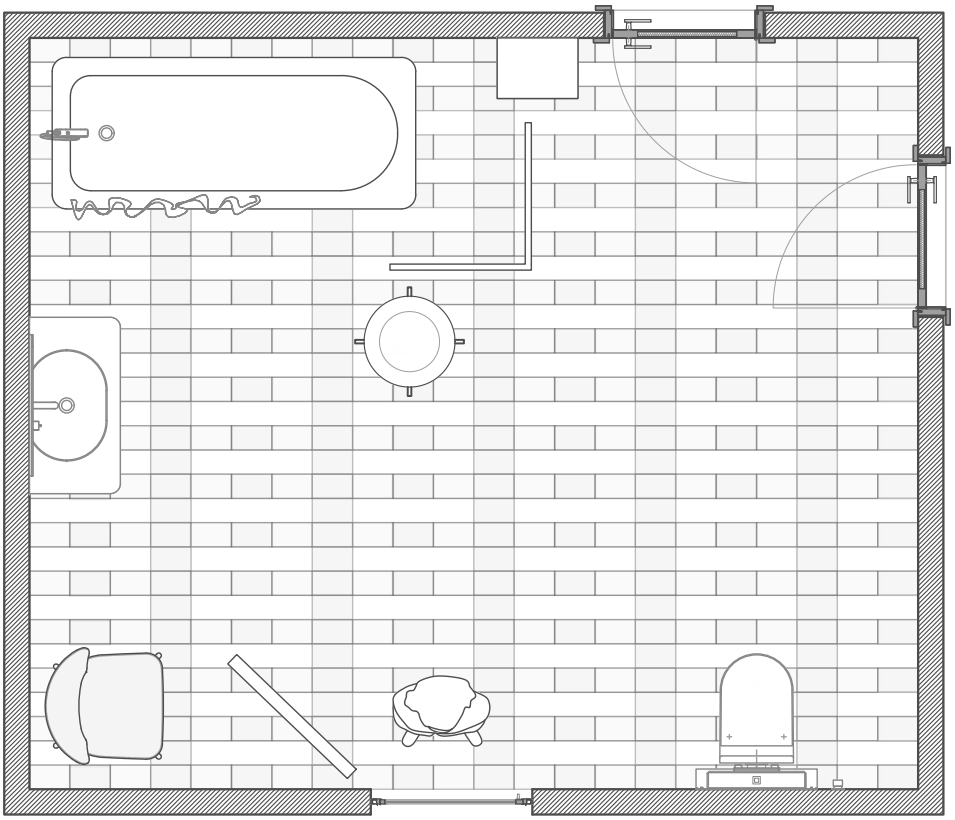
Camera - Space - Body Relationship

In *Asteroid City*, the bathroom window scenes recur three times throughout the film, gradually establishing this spatial configuration as the primary site of interaction between Augie Steenbeck and Midge Campbell. Notably, these window encounters become the only space in which the two characters engage in sustained conversation. Their relationship is therefore not developed through shared interiors or physical proximity, but through a repeated architectural condition.

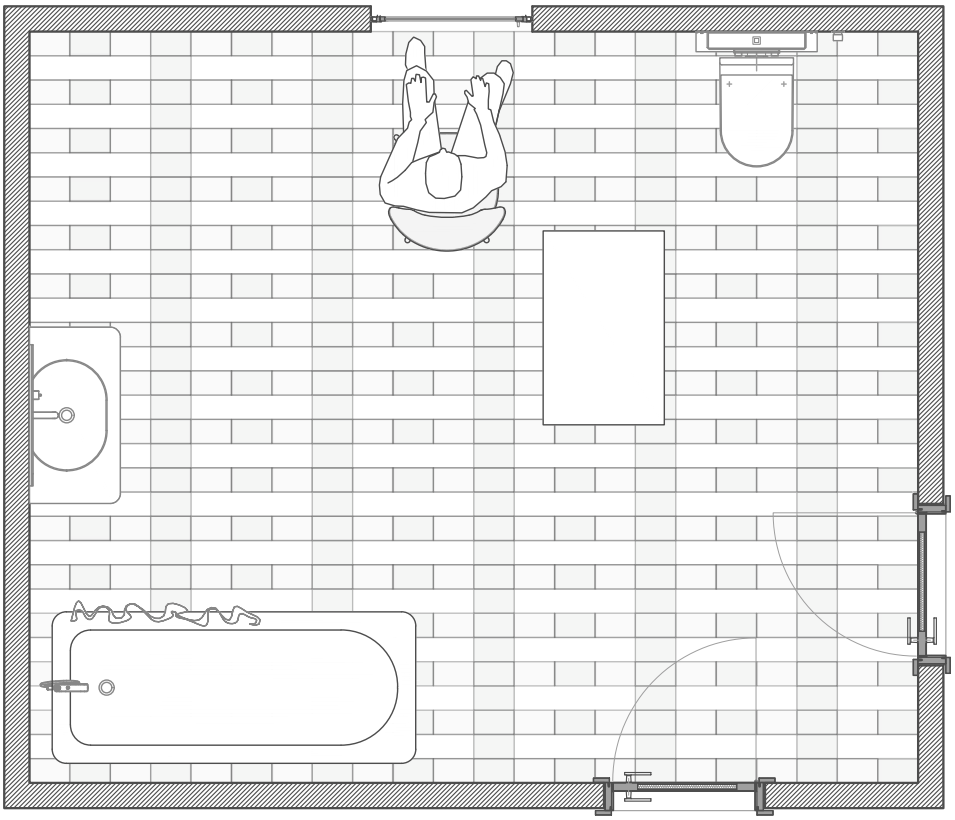
Both characters are positioned inside their own bathrooms, standing in front of mirrors placed directly beside small, square windows. These windows face each other, creating a direct visual axis between the two spaces. Wes Anderson constructs the scene as a "frame within a frame": each character is visually contained within the rigid geometry of their respective window openings, appearing almost like a portrait or a still photograph. The body is present but tightly bound by architecture.

The staging reinforces this sense of controlled intimacy. Midge is often rehearsing lines, applying makeup, or preparing for a role, while Augie is occupied with personal routines or handling his camera equipment. These everyday actions emphasize that communication occurs while both remain embedded in their most private, regulated environments. The bathroom, which is typically a space of solitude, becomes the only place where emotional exchange is possible.

Cinematographically, the scenes rely on static framing and reverse shots, maintaining a fixed spatial relationship between bodies and windows. Wes Anderson's use of the rule of thirds is particularly evident: the characters' faces are carefully positioned along the horizontal and vertical axes of the frame. This compositional precision establishes the window as the primary focal point and reinforces the sense of controlled observation, as if the viewer is positioned at a measured, external vantage point.



Plan of the Bathrooms
Not to Scale



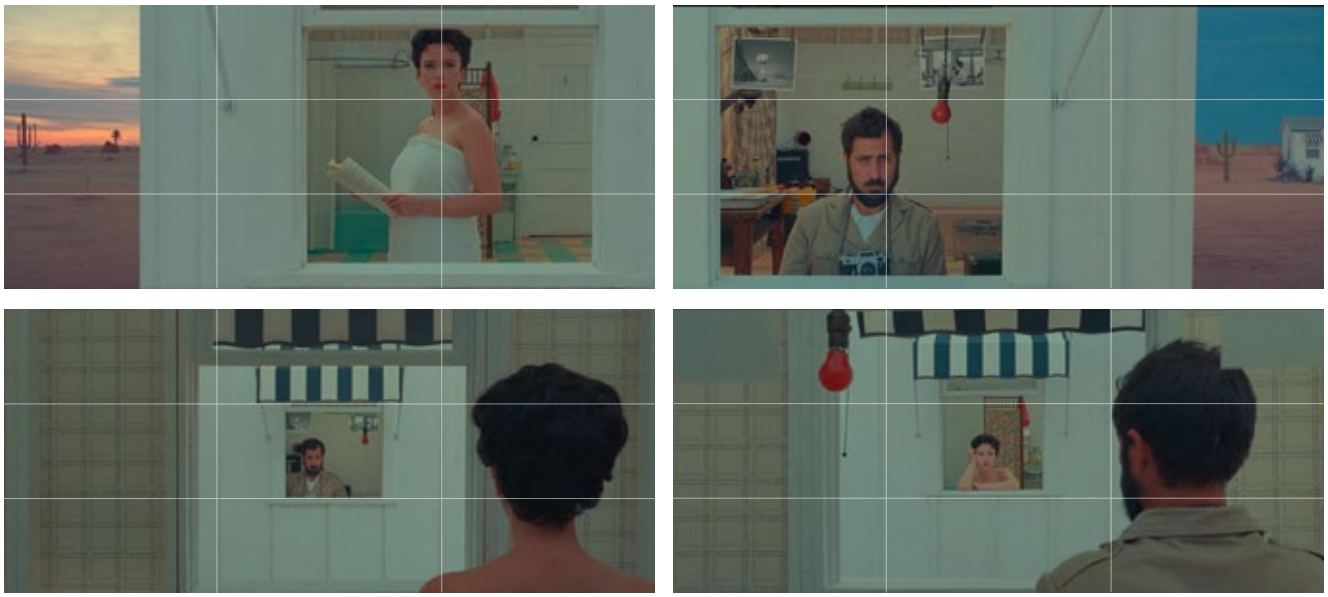


Figure 144-147. Asteroid City (Anderson, 2023). Window Scene Collage. Window Scene Framing Technique.

02

Spatial Integrity

The spatial logic of *Asteroid City* is defined by deliberate construction and controlled openness. The town was designed and built from scratch as a fully functioning set, complete with underground power, plumbing, and sewage systems (Peacock, 2023). Rather than serving as a backdrop, the environment operates as a coherent, self-contained spatial system. This completeness reinforces the film's sense of order, artificiality, and regulation.

Within this carefully engineered context, the bathroom interiors remain notably limited in their spatial openness. The window becomes the primary mediator of space. The viewer's understanding of the bathroom is restricted to what is revealed through the window frame; anything beyond this frame remains inaccessible. As a result, the space is never fully disclosed. Openness exists only to the extent that the architecture allows it.

03

Time Construction

Time in the bathroom window scenes of *Asteroid City* unfolds in a restrained and repetitive manner. These encounters are not driven by narrative urgency, but by stillness and recurrence. The scenes return three times throughout the film, establishing the window as a temporal anchor rather than a moment of progression. Each encounter feels less like a step forward and more like a pause within the story.

The scenes rely largely on static shots and reverse-shot structures, with minimal camera movement and no rapid cutting. This temporal stability allows conversations to unfold without pressure, reinforcing a sense of suspended time. Dialogue does not accelerate action; instead, it lingers. The repetition of similar framing and duration across the scenes further strengthens the impression that time is looping rather than advancing.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

Color plays a central role in shaping the atmosphere of the film, functioning almost as an active presence rather than a decorative layer. The film is saturated with soft pastel tones; muted pinks, pale blues, and gentle greens that wash over both interiors and exteriors. These colors create a calm, controlled visual environment that softens emotional intensity and reinforces distance rather than immediacy.

In the bathroom window scenes, this pastel palette is paired with even, diffuse lighting. There are no harsh shadows or dramatic contrasts; instead, light remains stable and restrained. The colors flatten depth and reduce visual tension, making the space feel carefully managed and emotionally contained. Against this chromatic calmness, dialogue unfolds without escalation. The world appears visually composed, even when characters are emotionally unsettled.

Spatial Condition 2

Window as Observing Frame

A Single Man

2009

Genre: Drama, Psychological Drama, Romantic Drama
Director: Tom Ford
Cinematographer: Eduard Grau
Production Designer: Dan Bishop
Costume Designer: Arianne Phillips

Figure 148. A Single Man (Ford, 2009).

Narrative and Thematic Film Summary

Directed by Tom Ford, *A Single Man* is set in Los Angeles in 1962 and follows a single day in the life of George Falconer, a British literature professor grieving the sudden death of his partner, Jim. Unable to openly express his loss, George moves through the day in a controlled and restrained manner while quietly preparing to end his life.

The film observes ordinary routines such as waking, dressing, teaching, and driving, revealing the emotional weight beneath them. Much of the narrative unfolds in interiors, especially George's modernist glass house, where architectural order reflects emotional distance.

Color subtly marks shifts in perception. Muted tones dominate, while moments of warmth appear when connection briefly surfaces. Rather than relying on dramatic events, the film builds meaning through restrained gestures and quiet spatial presence, portraying a man suspended between isolation and the possibility of connection.

A Single Man Bathroom Scene in Key Frames








Figure 149. A Single Man (Ford, 2009). Window Scene Collage.

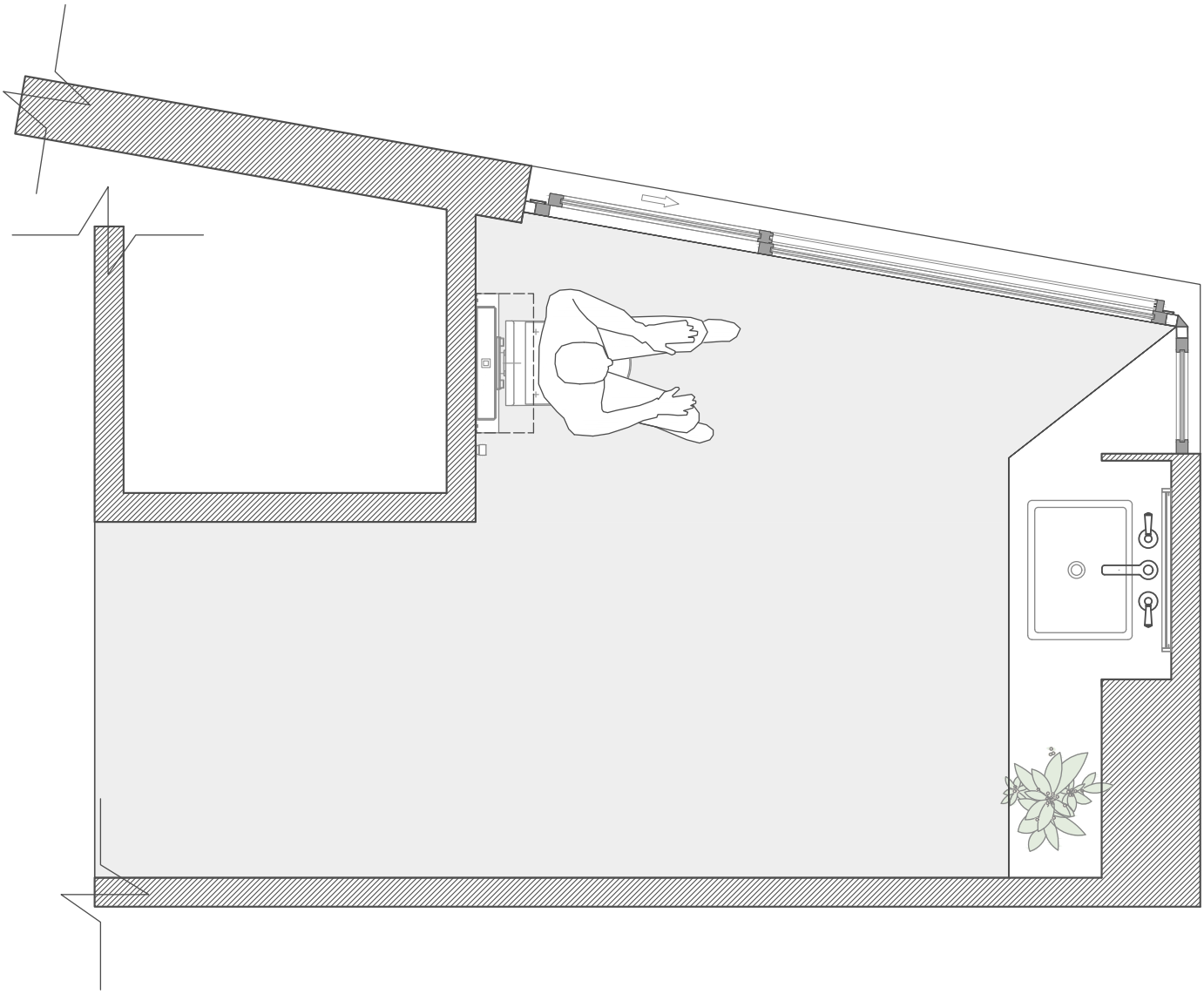
01

Camera - Space - Body Relationship

In this scene, George sits on the toilet beside a large horizontal window and looks outside at the Strunk family next door. He watches them move through their daily life, a couple and their children together in what appears to be a stable, ordinary family setting. George is physically very close to this life, yet separated from it by glass and walls.

The framing makes this separation visible. The window occupies the upper band of the frame, while George's body remains confined below it, surrounded by wood panels and interior lines. The camera does not center him in a powerful or open position. Instead, he appears contained within horizontal layers that quietly limit his presence. The outside world feels open, but he remains inside, seated and still. In the reverse shot, George is seen through architectural elements and horizontal slats. His body is partially fragmented by these lines, as if he is being viewed through a filter. The window allows him to see, but it does not allow him to belong. He is not part of what he observes; he is positioned as someone looking in from the edge.

Unlike in *Asteroid City*, where windows create a shared space between two characters, here the window isolates. It reinforces George's role as a spectator. The bathroom becomes a private enclosure from which he looks outward, but the architecture makes it clear that this outward gaze does not lead to connection. The glass keeps him near, but separate.



Plan of the Bathroom
Not to Scale

Figure 150-151. A Single Man (Ford, 2009). Window Scene Framing Technique.

02

Spatial Integrity

Unlike *Asteroid City*, which was built entirely as a constructed set, *A Single Man* was filmed in a real mid-century modern house designed in 1949 by architect John Lautner called as Schaffer House. The house follows a typical mid-century modern logic, emphasizing transparency, horizontal lines, and a strong visual connection between interior and exterior. Large glass surfaces blur the boundary between inside and outside, creating the impression of openness and continuity.

Architecturally, the house is designed to connect the inhabitant with nature. The window is not a small framed opening; it is part of a broader design philosophy that dissolves enclosure. In theory, the space should feel open, breathable, and integrated with its surroundings.

Yet in the bathroom scene, this architectural openness does not translate into emotional openness. Even though George is physically surrounded by glass and light, he remains spatially and psychologically confined. The structure allows visibility, but it does not create belonging. The exterior is accessible to the eye, but not to the body.

This creates a subtle tension: the architecture promotes connection, yet the character experiences isolation.

03

Time Construction

Time in the bathroom window scene shifts noticeably when George begins to look outside. As his gaze settles on the neighboring family, the image subtly changes: colors drain into softer, almost monochromatic tones, creating a nostalgic and slightly desaturated look. The outside world appears calmer and more idealized, as if filtered through memory rather than direct reality.

This visual shift is reinforced by music. A slow, melancholic score enters, slowing the rhythm of the moment and isolating George's gaze from the rest of the narrative flow. The scene feels suspended, less grounded in immediate time and more immersed in contemplation. The family outside appears almost romanticized, framed as an image rather than an active reality.

This altered temporal state is abruptly broken when the mother notices George and waves at him. The music fades, color returns to its natural tone, and the film snaps back into its regular rhythm. The moment of suspension collapses. George lowers his gaze, as if caught. Time resumes its normal pace.

Through this brief transformation, the film shows how perception reshapes time. The window does not only separate space; it temporarily reshapes duration. When George looks outward, time slows and softens. When he is seen in return, reality reasserts itself.

04

Material, Surface and Light Behavior

The material clarity of the modernist house shapes the bathroom scene. Glass, smooth wood panels, and clean horizontal surfaces define the space. Nothing is ornamental or excessive. The materials are restrained and controlled, consistent with mid-century modern design principles. Transparency is central: the large window eliminates heavy enclosure and visually extends the interior toward the outside world.

Light enters naturally through the glass, creating a soft but clear illumination. Unlike dramatic chiaroscuro lighting, the space feels evenly lit, almost exposed. The bathroom does not hide George; it presents him plainly within the architecture.

Supporting Case 1

The Dreamers, 2003, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci

In *The Dreamers*, the window similarly operates as an observing frame, yet the spatial dynamic shifts. The character watches the opposite bathroom from across the courtyard. Unlike *A Single Man*, where the observing body remains contained within the window frame, here the observed body is the one framed by the architectural opening. The window does not isolate the viewer but isolates the figure being seen. The bathroom interior across the courtyard becomes a staged image within a rigid border. The architectural frame defines who is visible and who remains outside the visual field. The window therefore structures the act of looking by determining which body is enclosed within its limits.

Figure 152. The Dreamers (Bertolucci, 2003).

Figure 153. The Dreamers (Bertolucci, 2003).

Figure 154. The Dreamers (Bertolucci, 2003).

Spatial Condition 3

Door as Filtered Perception

The Captive, 2000, directed by Chantal Akerman

In *The Captive,* a bathroom scene stages two characters separated by a frosted glass surface. They are physically close, yet visually obscured. The translucent glass allows light and silhouettes to pass through, but not detail. The bodies are reduced to soft outlines, and facial expression becomes unreadable.

Communication occurs across the surface rather than through it. The window does not frame the other body clearly; instead, it filters perception. The scene demonstrates how architectural material can create intimacy and distance simultaneously. Presence is sensed but not fully accessed.

Fish Tank, 2009, directed by Andrea Arnold

In *Fish Tank*, a similar filtered condition appears when the female character washes her hands at the sink while a man speaks from the other side of a frosted glass partition. The dialogue is audible, but the body behind the glass remains blurred and indistinct.

Figure 155. The Captive (Akerman, 2000).

Figure 156. Fish Tank (Arnold, 2009).

4.6 Comparative Synthesis

Across the analyzed films, the bathroom functions as a controlled spatial laboratory in which atmosphere is constructed through the activation of specific pivot elements. Each element reorganizes perception and hierarchy within the interior.

The bathtub frequently operates as the primary spatial anchor. Through scale, placement, and material presence, it becomes the dominant object within the room. Its texture, illumination, and central positioning influence whether the interior reads as monumental, intimate, or psychologically concentrated.

The shower emphasizes vertical enclosure. Falling water and confined boundaries intensify bodily presence and recalibrate intimacy, either as vulnerability or relief depending on staging.

The mirror operates through interior manipulation. By doubling space and mediating the body, it reorganizes perception without altering the architectural structure. Depth is extended perceptually, and identity is staged within a contained frame.

The sink redefines surface logic. It shifts from hygienic plane to site of rupture or containment, redirecting focus from body to object. The WC activates instability through malfunction and sound, extending spatial perception vertically toward concealed systems below.

The door structures transition. It regulates entry and determines the first visual orientation of the space. Upon opening, it directs attention toward a focal anchor, often the bathtub, establishing hierarchy from the moment of access.

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The floor establishes grounding and compositional order. As the primary horizontal plane, it organizes movement, stability, and orientation. Through pattern, material continuity, or contrast, it can either stabilize the interior or activate it as a dynamic field. When disrupted through overflow, blood, or blockage, the floor shifts from support to active surface, transforming the spatial reading of the entire room

The window constructs the interior exterior relationship. It frames what is allowed to be seen and determines how outside space enters the composition. By selecting what appears within its boundary, it controls distance, exposure, and separation. The window does not merely provide light or ventilation; it defines how the interior positions itself in relation to the outside world.

Across these cases, atmosphere does not derive from architectural type alone, but from the staging logic applied to it. Body placement, focal hierarchy, material emphasis, sound, framing, and temporal control determine how a small domestic interior is experienced. The bathroom emerges not as a neutral setting, but as a precise spatial device capable of generating containment, rupture, monumentality, or intimacy through controlled design strategies.

4.7 Stage I - Interior Translation Framework

From Cinematic Staging to Spatial Strategy

Framing and Spatial Integrity

In cinema: Directs the gaze
Fragmented or Readable

Interior translation:

- Identifying signature focal elements
  e.g. sink, bathtub, mirror
- Designing the establishing shot of the space
- Controlling the direction of view with axis planning
- Frame-within-frame plan design
- Creating a visual center within the volume
- Degree and control of enclosure

Time

In cinema: Can be stretched or compressed

Interior translation:

- Zone-by-zone planning
- Gradual transitions
- Wall/ partition placement that slows down circulation
- Ritual sequence design
- Relaxation pacing

Lighting

In cinema: Creating a focal point and shaping mood

Interior translation:

- Lighting focused on the area where the user spends the most time
- Special lighting for ritual areas
- Purpose-oriented lighting planning, not general spot lighting
- Light that guides behavior rather than dramatizing surfaces
- Vertical and horizontal lighting strategies

Material & Sensory Layering

In cinema: material + light constructs the atmosphere

Interior translation:

- Visual impact
- Not just visual, but also tactile materials
- Acoustic absorption
- Psychological tone through color
- Light reflection quality

4.8 Stage II - Analytical Synthesis Matrix

Atmosphere Construction Across Pivot Elements

The WC

In cinema, what does bathtub do?

- Horizontal body containment
- Stillness chamber
- Display platform
- Site of death or power

Bathtub immobilizes the body.

In architectural design what does it become?

- Retreat zone
- Isolation capsule
- Focal Point

→ Design question:
Is it a contained chamber or an exposed platform?

The Shower

In cinema, what does shower do?

- Fragile privacy
- Reset space
- Visual obstruction
- Sudden intrusion

Shower creates temporary enclosure.

In architectural design what does it become?

- Transparent vs opaque enclosure decision
- Controlled exposure chamber
- Acoustic control

→ Design question:
How fragile is privacy?

The Mirror

In cinema, what does mirror do?

- Doubles the body (real + reflection)
- Delays information (we see through reflection first)
- Reveals hidden presence
- Site of death or power
- Destabilizes identity
- Extends space visually
- Creates self-awareness moments

Mirror is not decoration, it manipulates perception.

In architectural design what does it become?

- Tool for spatial extension in small bathrooms
- Device for controlled self-experience (wellness, ritual, grooming)
- Surface that can distort, multiply, or fragment perception
- Tool for staged identity (retail, performative spaces)

→ Design question:
How do you position the body in front of reflection?

The Sink

In cinema, what does sink do?

- Contact interface
- Vertical body over horizontal surface
- Site of ritual (washing, cleaning)
- Source of disruption (blood, overflow)
- Concentrated focal zone

Sink compresses action into a surface.

In architectural design what does it become?

- Micro-stage for bodily ritual
- Controlled interaction height
- Attention condenser
- Hygiene-performance interface
- Material emphasis zone

→ Design question:
How can a small contact surface concentrate spatial attention?

The WC

In cinema, what does WC do?

- Loss of control
- Physical discomfort

WC destabilizes control.

In architectural design what does it become?

- Most sensitive privacy unit
- Hygiene control mechanism
- Sound isolation problem

→ Design question:
How does design maintain dignity and control?

The Door

In cinema, what does door do?

- Controls revelation (slow opening = tension)
- Frames interior as a picture
  • Reset space
- Acts as barrier under threa

Door regulates access and expectation.

In architectural design what does it become?

- Threshold sequencing tool
- Privacy gradient regulator
- Frame-in-frame spatial staging tool

→ Design question:
What does the user see first when a door opens?

The Floor

In cinema, what does floor do?

- Narrative trigger (object drops, discovery)
- Compositional field (top view grid)
- Shifts attention downward
- Changes body posture (kneeling, slipping, collapsing)

It activates perception.

In architectural design what does it become?

- Movement organizer
- Zoning device
- Graphic composition field

→ Design question:
Is the floor only something we walk on, or something that directs how we move and position our bodies?

The Window

In cinema, what does sink do?

- Creates observing position
- Frames the outside world
- Separates but connects
- Filters light and perception
- Establishes emotional distance

Window constructs relational space.

In architectural design what does it become?

- Interior–exterior mediator
- Light control element
- Controlled exposure tool
- Privacy filter

→ Design question:
Does the window connect or isolate?

Conclusion

Conclusion and Methodological Consolidation

This thesis began by asking how mise-en-scène can be translated into an operative methodology for interior architecture.

The research first traced the historical and theoretical development of mise-en-scène, from its theatrical origins to its evolution in cinema. The five core components; setting, lighting, costume and make-up, staging, and color, were examined not as aesthetic categories but as spatial tools that construct atmosphere and guide perception. Through this lens, mise-en-scène was reframed as a structured orchestration of bodies, surfaces, light, and duration.

From there, the study connected cinematic staging to architectural discourse on atmosphere and experience, drawing on the idea that space is not merely occupied but sensed, performed, and temporally constructed. In both cinema and architecture, atmosphere emerges from the relationship between body, environment, and time.

The bathroom was selected as the primary spatial laboratory of this research not because of its narrative significance, but because of its architectural marginalization. In contemporary design practice, the bathroom is often reduced to functional efficiency and technical resolution. It is treated as a service space rather than an experiential environment. By contrast, cinema repeatedly stages the bathroom as a site of vulnerability, transformation, exposure, confrontation, and stillness.

This tension revealed the bathroom's unrealized spatial potential.

Through detailed case studies structured around camera–space–body relationships, spatial integrity, time construction, and material–light behavior, the thesis identified recurring spatial conditions across eight architectural elements. Mirror, door, window, sink, shower, bathtub, WC, and floor were analyzed not as symbolic objects but as active spatial devices.

The findings demonstrate that atmosphere is not generated by decoration or stylistic choices alone. It is constructed through alignment, enclosure, exposure, duration, and surface behavior. In cinema, these effects are produced through framing, editing, and controlled lighting. In interior architecture, they can be translated into decisions about circulation, boundary systems, material calibration, vertical and horizontal alignment, and sensory thresholds.

The concept of Spatial Conditions proposed in this thesis shifts the focus from representation to operation. Instead of asking what an element means, the research asks what it does spatially. How does it position the body? How does it regulate visibility? How does it stretch or compress time? How does it alter perception?

By extracting these conditions from film and translating them into design questions, the thesis proposes a methodological bridge rather than a formal imitation. Cinema becomes not a stylistic reference, but a structural model for staging experience.

Ultimately, this research argues that interior architecture can move beyond functional resolution toward conscious staging. The bathroom, often treated as secondary, demonstrates how even the most ordinary space can become a site of calibrated atmosphere when body, surface, and duration are deliberately orchestrated.

Mise-en-scène, in this sense, is not only a cinematic concept. It becomes a spatial strategy.

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STAGING SPACE

From Cinematic Mise-en-Scène to Spatial Practice through the Bathroom

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