ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Self-Identity, Class, and Social Stratification in the Movie *Parasite*

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The movie *Parasite* displays a story of three families moving between classes. The movement and lens of the characters show how the living environment represents their social position and how classism and social stratification is implemented within their society. To confirm and prove that classism does exist across all strata of society, this thesis analyzes the storyline and dialogue of *Parasite*, the production design, cinematography, sounds, original score, visual effects, and film editing.

This analysis is guided by the following questions:

How does topography in the movie *Parasite* reveal classism in the South Korean society?

How are these landscape representations of social hierarchies generalized in contemporary societies around the world?

These questions are answered through a detailed movie analysis of *Parasite*. By viewing the movie and researching the meaning behind the characters’ travel between the three houses where they live, it displays the topographical evidence of classism in South Korea. From the neighborhood, streets, entry, house, and views outside the house, to the cleanliness and smells inside the house, these character movements through the landscape creates an excellent study of social stratification. Since production design is different than architecture, the houses in *Parasite*
consist of objects and scenery that are symbolic of class in South Korea and beyond. Moreover, these cinematic landscapes serve as focal points that make the audience reflect back on their living environment and the way it has been, and continues to be, shaped by years of social stratification that operates unconsciously in people, which, for the most part, they fail to notice until it is pointed out.
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Introduction

Everyone is judged by the way they look, talk and where they live, and these judgments are commonly used to divide people into a hierarchy of social classes. Society ranks people within these tiers by their wealth, education, and power. The social stratification generates prejudice that determines outside attitudes and mannerisms towards one another. This classism exists within all strata of society.

The living environment is one of the most effective ways to convey hierarchies of social class, and their impact upon behavior. As noted by the philosopher Gaston Bachelard, a house is where one creates a home and leaves traces based on living habits and daily activities. When this idea is considered in terms of classism, it then becomes possible to argue the physical traces of social stratification are visible in our houses.

Hence, the self-identity that arises from our living environment subtly exposes classism within society, showing the different ways people use cues from the environment to consciously and subconsciously form stereotypes that position themselves in relationship to others.

In the movie *Parasite*, director Bong Joon Ho cleverly uses the plot and movement of characters, as they navigate the terrain of Seoul, South Korea, to present the metaphors and symbolism of classism in South Korean society, and to position the living environment as the epitome of classism in contemporary society. The movie highlights the voices of the unheard, overlooked, and neglected segments of society, directly displaying the factual difficulties and discrimination people experience under the impact of classism. From movement that are directed by the landscape, to iconography in the lens of the characters and audience, this thesis illustrates the close, pervasive relationship of classism to elevation.
Methods

To create this thesis, various approaches are performed. First, by viewing and analyzing the plot and scenography displayed in the movie *Parasite*, I illustrate social stratification in the living environment. Particular attention is paid to the storyline of the movie and the dialogue of the characters. These detailed aspects of the movie reveal mannerisms that represent the social discriminations and stereotyping typical of classism.

In addition to the plot synopsis, I researched on the meaning of place and space, social class, social stratification, parasitism, social issues in urban and cinema studies, and how *Parasite* illustrate these topics. This aspect of the thesis involved analyzing the movie, concentrating on the topography, views, site, sounds, sensory experiences, and landscape iconography. Specifically, the elucidation of classism is seen in topography and elevation in the landscape and architecture, which is visually represented through the role of filmic techniques that bring attention to changes. In that sense, the movie is an ideal case study to explore the symbology and meaning of the physical and social landscape. The intent here is to observe the difference in the living environments that appear in the movie *Parasite*, and through this comparative research and cinematic lens’ analysis, in order to understand classism in South Korea. In conclusion, I will draw comparisons with other instances of topography and classism, describing how the relationship impacts landscape architecture.
Bong Joon Ho is a South Korean film director, producer and screen writer (Fig. 1) He often uses dark humor and sarcasm to illustrate controversial social and political subjects in his films. He believes there is no specific genre of a movie because life is filled with a range of emotions; the feelings of the moment determine how the audience subjectively perceives the movie. His notable works include *Memories of Murder, Snowpiercer*, and *Parasite*.6
The inspiration of *Parasite* comes from Bong’s tutorship experience with a rich family when he was in his early 20s and felt he was parasitizing the family:  

"But I thought a lot of fascinating cinematic elements could come out of it because in reality the rich and poor so rarely really mix together. They're always separated. But when you're working as a tutor or a housekeeper, you're in the most private spaces, and both sides are brought together in such intimacy."

The idea of a poor family infiltrating the lives of a rich one is similarly executed with the roles of a tutor and a housekeeper in the movie, and the invisible boundaries that constantly remind these individuals that they are only there to serve the family. With that idea, the roles of a tutor and a housekeeper successfully depict the unerasable border – the social stratification between the upper class and the lower class in today’s capitalistic society.
Three Families and Class Structure

Cast (Fig. 2)

Kim Family:
- Kim Ki Taek: Father of the Kim family
- Chung Sook: Mother of the Kim family

Park Family:
- Park Dong Ik: Father of the Park family
- Choi Yeon Gyo: Mother of the Park family

Oh Family:
- Oh Geun Se: Moon Gwang’s husband
- Gook Moon Gwang: Geun Se’s wife

Other Characters:
- Kim Ki Woo: "Kevin" Son of the Kim family
- Kim Ki Jung: "Jessica" Daughter of the Kim family
- Park Da Hye: Daughter of the Park family
- Park Da Song: Son of the Park family
- Min Hyuk: Ki Woo’s friend
- Yoon: Former chauffeur

Figure 2: Cast in movie *Parasite*
Kim family:

Kim Ki Taek – The father, currently in bankruptcy because of an investment failure

Chung Sook – The mother, sometimes folds pizza boxes for extra gains

Kim Ki Woo (Kevin) – The elder brother, failed the college exam again after the draft

Kim Ki Jung (Jessica) – The younger sister, did not go to college after high school

Park family:

Park Dong Ik – The father, a CEO of a big company

Choi Yeon Gyo – The mother, an innocent housewife who relies on the housekeeper for chores

Park Da Hye – The elder sister, a sophomore in high school who needs tutoring on English

Park Da Song – The younger brother, diagnosed with ADHD\(^10\) after a trauma in his childhood

Oh family:

Oh Geun Se – The husband, living in the bunker to escape from the loaners

Gook Moon Gwang – The wife, the original housekeeper of the Park family

Other Characters:

Min Hyuk – Ki Woo’s friend, introduces Ki Woo as an English tutor for Park Da Hye

Yoon – The previous chauffer for Park Dong Ik
Figure 3: Spatial relationship diagram of three families
In the movie *Parasite*, the plot, and the depictions of classism revolve around the interactions of three families from different social classes – the Park family, the Kim family, and the Oh family (Fig. 3). The Parks are from the upper class, and they live in a mansion far away from the crowds, near the mountains. Their wealth allows them to be distanced and well-protected from the lower classes, which causes them to be oblivious to many of the harsh realities of life. They easily believe others of their same background or status because no one, to their knowledge, has ever treated them badly. They do not like to be associated with people who are more financially restricted, and they maintain visible and invisible boundaries between themselves and lower classes. This differentiation ensures they appear to be more important than others because they enjoy more benefits and rewards.

The Kim and Oh families, are less wealthy and they find themselves in a similar financial situation due to the castella cake craze and the food safety problem associated with “King Castella” cake shop. The shutdown of the chained cake shop that is hinted at in the movie is a reflection of a real life event in South Korea. In 2016, the castella cake, originating in Taiwan, was a trendy confectionery in South Korea known for its tastiness and the advertisement of all organic ingredients. Following the successful precedent of bubble tea stores made popular by social medias, many individuals decided to take a similar chance to make a quick fortune by investing in castella cake shops. The “King Castella” was one of the castella cake brands. According to Nathan Park, a journalist from *Foreign Policy*, South Korea “had 125 restaurants per 10,000 people, more than double the rate of Japan (58 per 10,000) and six times the rate of the United States (21 per 10,000).” At first, all the castella cake shops were popular and were economically successful. But then, in March 2017, a television show titled *Food X-Files* reported a food safety problem in the production of the castella cake. Instead of using the
advertised ingredients of flour, eggs, and milk, bakers also poured in 700 ml. of non-organic oil in the batter. This caught people’s attention and caused a big stir on social media, because it was going against the healthy organic ingredients that castella cake claimed to have. Thus, multiple castella cake shops closed one by one, including “King Castella”.

The reason why Director Boon Jong Ho adds in the storyline of the castella cakes is because it is an event that is known by every person living in South Korea. Most of these cake shops owners are South Korean, but they claim to sell the original castella cakes from Taiwan, which was proven to be a lie. Therefore, these South Korean cake shops that are selling “original Taiwanese cakes” reflects the masqueraded identities of the Kims and the Ohs perfectly: the feigners.

In Parasite, both the Kim and the Oh families create lies that allow them to live off the wealth of the Park family. Even though these two families both face bankruptcy and parasitize the wealth of the Park family, there is still a sense of class distinction between them as made apparent in their living environments. Moreover, they do not empathize and help each other, even though they became poor due to the same reason: the “King Castella” cake.

To create opportunities for betterment, the Kims create a world full of lies and false flatteries. Poverty has trained them to be clever and lying is a skill that helps them survive. They live in a banjiha, a basement apartment half underground. People look down at them physically and figuratively because of where they live and their status in society.

The Ohs also suffer from the debt, but in a different way. Moon Gwang, for example, has been able to continue to work as a housekeeper for every mansion owner, the one before the Park family and the Park family. Thus, she can hide her husband, Geun Se, in a bunker below the
mansion that was built by the first owner. She secretly delivers food to Geun Se, who is wanted by authorities because of his debts and has been in hiding for four consecutive years. Moon Gwang is Geun Se’s only access to the outside world. He is forgotten by the society and is in the lowest social position in the movie. His goal is just to survive the rest of his life as best he can with the help of his wife.

After knowing each other exists, the Kims and the Ohs view themselves as rivals after the same benefits. This selfishness causes them to be in competition, illustrating that classism is not just a social hierarchy that exists between the wealthy and the poor, it also exists within the members of the of the same class, in this case the poor.16

The Kim family are the main characters in the movie and the audience views everything from their perspective, which may make the audience favor the Kim family, because, like the Kims, the majority of the audience is also from a class of society lower than the Parks. In other words, they can understand the Kim’s motivation to do anything in their power to advance their position in life. But no one in the movie is willing to share their benefits to help others; they all want to feel superior to others, and everyone, in one way or another is revealed to be some type of a social parasite. There is no social unity, and classism is not only present, but also a distinguishing feature of interpersonal relationships in the movie. For everyone in the society, there are only two classes: a class higher and a class lower than them. *Parasite* reveals the complicated, contradictory, and selfish attitudes that exists in the layers of classism in South Korean society by fully showing the conflicts between and within the different social classes.
The spatial relationship of the three families, and their notions of social class, is epitomized by the topography and elevation of their living environment which will be discussed in greater detail in the movie analysis section of this thesis. (Fig. 4). The spacious mansion of the
Park family is up on a hill, away from people (Fig. 5). The banjiha of the Kim family is half above ground, half underground, in a valley and the land all slopes down to the house (Fig. 6). The bunker of Oh Geun Se is deep underneath the mansion, hidden and away from society, forgotten and unnoticeable (Fig. 7). In an interview given to Chris O’Falt, director Bong describes these three homes as follows:  

It’s like its own universe inside this film. Each character and each team have spaces that they take over that they can infiltrate, and also secret spaces that they don’t know. So, the dynamic between these three teams and the dynamic of space, they were very much intertwined and I think that combination really creates an interesting element to this film.

The audience may think that these three environments exaggerate the difference of the living situations of upper and lower classes, as Director Bong does alter the houses to accentuate the differences. However, what also shapes the characters’ living environments is their backgrounds. Their secrets – living behavior, knowledge, habits, culture, lifestyles – creates their universe, their home, and their house. As will soon be seen in the rest of this thesis, Bong takes great pains to portray these secrets in the living environments of the three families. 

Figure 5: An Early Rendering of the Kims’ Banjiha

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Figure 6: A picture of the Park’s Mansion

Retrieved from Neon. All rights reserved.

Figure 7: The bunker's inside

Retrieved from Parasite - Neon. All rights reserved.
Plot Synopsis

*Parasite* is located in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, and it begins with a shot of the Kim family in the cluttered and dirty banjiha, a semi-basement apartment, where they live. As mentioned previously, various families are facing bankruptcy as the result of an investment in the stock of a bakery chain that sells king castella cakes. The Kim family in *Parasite*, live in a banjiha because they are one of the many victims of this business scandal.

Kim Ki Taek, the father of this family, lost all his savings during the castella cake craze and he is now jobless, at home most of the day, and provides no financial contribution to the family. All he does is help his wife, Chung Sook, the mother of the house, fold pizza boxes for money while listening to her complaints about the family’s financial difficulties. The movie script states: “*She treats Ki Taek like shit, but it doesn’t bother him.*” In other words, the failed investment decision positioned him as a failed father who cannot support his family, and since he cannot fulfill the traditional financial responsibility of a father, he chooses to ignore or “accept” the way his wife treats him. Without money to pay the bills, the family steals Wi-Fi from businesses or neighbors (Fig. 8).

![Figure 8: The Kim siblings stealing Wi-Fi](Retrieved from Parasite - Neon. All rights reserved.)
Kim Ki Woo and Kim Ki Jung, the two adult children of the Kim family, live with their parents in the banjiha. The reality of the bankruptcy leaves them with few choices and a feeling of helplessness. They may have the academic knowledge to go to college, but the heavy debt burdens the family and forces them to give up this dream. They also fold pizza boxes for money. The script details this situation in the following conversation that the son, Ki Woo, has with his friend, Min Hyuk, who visits him to give him a viewing stone and also discuss an enticing job opportunity:

MIN HYUK: Ki-Jung’s at home too? She doesn’t take college prep classes?

KI WOO: It’s not that she doesn’t want to. She can’t.

*Ki Woo downs a shot of soju. (Fig. 9)*

The shot of the alcoholic beverage, soju, that Ki Woo takes right after speaking this fact to his friend seems like an acceptance of the family’s financial situation. Yet in this scene, Ki Woo’s friend describes an opportunity to be a tutor in a rich family. At first, Ki Woo declines because
he is not even in college, but his friend persuades him that he is qualified. In the script, this conversation is enveloped in classism:  

KI WOO: You have plenty of friends at school. Why do you want a high school grad to teach your prized student?

MIN HYUK: Why do you think? I shudder just thinking about those female starved engineering students drooling around her like hungry wolves. It’s revolting.

The dialogue between the characters also reveals that Min Hyuk is romantically interested in Park Da Hye, the daughter of the wealthy Park family, partially because of her rich parents, and he does not want his college classmates to date her. Ki Woo seems perfect for what he needs – a poor boy with no college degree – someone that Park Da Hye would not ever consider dating. And even though they are friends, Min Hyuk reaches out to Ki Woo because he believes there is no chance that two people from such different classes of society would ever be together.

The two young men hatch a scheme in which Ki Woo has a new identity: he is Kevin, a graduate from a good college, who can tutor Park Da Hye. With Ki Jung’s helps, who is good at Photoshop, he forges a college degree, his first lie and act of parasitism, and Min Hyuk arranges an interview.

The illusion of having enough money to be well-educated allows Ki Woo to pass the first challenge; stepping up from his poor neighborhood and into the world of upper class. The long walk up to the mansion symbolizes that Ki Woo is entering the realm of the people who live in a high social class. He feels small as he moves through all the physical boundaries – the high walls and closed gates that demarcate this territory.

During the interview for the tutoring job, when Ki Woo meets Yeon Gyo, the mother of the Park family, he realizes how different her life is from his. During the interview, there are many times that he lies and acts suspicious, but Yeon Gyo does not think he is lying at all.
Growing up in a financially comfortable environment has made her innocent; she is so well protected that she cannot tell if people are lying or not. In the script it states, “Kevin” is educated and confident when he teaches her daughter and she is completely fooled by his actions:

*Ki Woo suddenly snatches Da Hye’s wrist, shocking both Da Hye and her mom. He presses his thumb gently and feels her pulse like a doctor.*

**KI WOO:** If this was a real test and number 14 was the first question, you would’ve been in trouble from the start.

*He presses harder.*

**KI WOO:** *(CONT’D)* See? You pulse is irregular. Your heart doesn’t lie.

*Da Hye turns bright red. Yeon Gyo is speechless, either appalled or in awe.*

**KI WOO:** *(CONT’D)* What are you supposed to do in a test? You move forward. You need to seize the flow. The rhythm. If not, you’re screwed. I don’t care about question number 14. I only care about how you seize the flow. How you conquer the test as a whole. You get it?

*Da Hye is quiet.*

**KI WOO:** *(CONT’D)* A test is all about confidence. *(English)* Attitude.

*Stunned silence. Ki Woo finally let go of Da Hye’s wrist, revealing a round, pink spot where he held her.*

**Ki Woo looks over at Yeon Gyo. She’s completely floored.**

In addition to his “education”, the way “Kevin” acts during his tutoring, makes Yeon Gyo trusts that he is capable to teach Da Hye. She believes only knowledgeable people have this type of attitude in front of people who are in a higher social position, and she opens up to “Kevin” concerning her son, Park Da Song, who is diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and often acts strange and overly active. The only thing he enjoys, she observes, is to express his thoughts in drawing. Listening to Yeon Gyo describe her trouble finding a good art teacher for Da Song, another lie pops up in Ki Woo’s head. He states he
knows a friend’s sister, “Jessica”, a Korean American from Illinois educated in art therapy, but he is really talking about his sister, Ki Jung.

Posing as “Jessica”, Ki Jung handles the lie even better than Ki Woo and fools the gullible Yeon Gyo with a false foreign identity. In most Asian countries like Korea, there is a stereotype of foreigners being smarter than the non-English speakers. The stereotype comes from the correlation between English proficiency and the quality of life in western countries. Usually, in countries where people speak English, citizens tend to have higher incomes, better educations, and more opportunities for advancement. People, in other words, associate the ability to speak English well with a higher social class. This stereotype is apparent when Ki Jung first meets Park Dong Ik, the father of the Park family who is a high-flying CEO:

YEON GYO: Dong-Ik. Say hi to Ms. Jessica, Da-Song’s new art teacher. She just started today. (to Jessica; in English) Jessica, this is Dong-Ik.

Since “Jessica” comes from America, Dong Ik assumes that she does not know how to navigate Seoul. To take care of the foreigner, Dong Ik directs his driver, Yoon, to take Ki Jung home. Ki Jung does not want Yoon to know she lives in a banjiha, in a poor part of the city, so she insists the driver drop her off at the train station. Her repeated insistence and her identity as an educated foreigner intrigues Yoon, and he keeps talking and asking questions. To avoid discovery, a plan forms in her head and she takes off her underwear to set up a trap to snare the driver in an awkward situation. The trap works.

Several nights later, when Dong Ik is in the back seat of the car returning to his mansion after work, he notices the underwear. He stares at Yoon and storms into the living room and shows Yeon Gyo the evidence. Dong Ik states that Yoon should not cross the “line” and invade his territory, which means taking advantage of Dong Ik’s expensive private car. When Dong Ik wonders why his partner left the underwear, the script displays another classist’s stereotype:
DONG IK: That’s why. I’m more concerned by his -- partner. Her mental state. Do you know what I mean?

*Dong-Ik checks the surroundings before whispering something in Yeon Gyo’s ear.*

YEON GYO: NOOOO-- *(turning pale)* Like methamphetamine? Cocaine?

As a family from an upper class, they believe in certain class-based prejudices and stereotypes related to the fact that they never really interact with people from the lower classes, such as addiction to illegal drugs. Since Yoon is Dong Ik’s chauffeur, Yoon, is from a lower position of society, they assume the woman who owns the underwear is also from a lower class and takes drugs.

In order to prevent the Parks from discovering her plan, Ki Jung, who has been secretly listening to this conversation, suddenly appears. The Parks immediately hide the evidence, as they do not want “Jessica” to associate any illegal actions with their image. When Yeon Gyo then walks Ki Jung out to the gate, she mentions that the driver would no longer be working with them due to an “incident”. Ki Jung furthers her trap by making Yeon Gyo believe the driver is a pervert, and casually talks about a good driver she once met, Mr. Kim.

With previous driving skills, and familiarity of driving Mercedes cars, which is gained by visiting the dealership, Mr. Kim, who is actually is Kim Ki Taek, the father of the Kim family, easily passes the driving test that Dong Ik requires and becomes the driver of the Park family.

There is now only one goal left, get Chung Sook, the mother of the Kim family, a position with the Park family. The only way to make this happen is to figure out a way to fire the housekeeper, Moon Gwang. Moon Gwang has been the housekeeper since the house was built. The last owner recommended her to the Park family. It is hard to get her to leave the house. But then, Da Hye, who has developed a secret love for “Kevin”, tells Ki Woo about Moon Gwang’s severe allergy to peaches. Taking advantages of that information, the Kims strategize a series of steps to
remove Moon Gwang. Ki Jung steals a peach and hands it to Ki Woo, who secretly puts peach fur on Moon Gwang. She has a severe allergic reaction and goes to the hospital. Ki Taek takes a picture of her in the hospital and lies to Yeon Gyo about how he “overhears” that Moon Gwang may be diagnosed with tuberculosis. At the same time, Ki Jung calculates the time Yeon Gyo and Mr. Kim will arrive coming home, and again spreads peach fur on Moon Gwang, which makes her cough severely. Yeon Gyo walks in and sees the tissues of Moon Gwang’s “cough blood”, which is actually hot sauce that Ki Taek puts down. Yeon Gyo believes that Moon Gwang has tuberculosis, and Moon Gwang is asked to leave.

Later, when Dong Ik complains about how Yeon Gyo cannot do housework after Moon Gwang leaves, Ki Taek mentions a recruiting company called “The Care” that can help. Although Dong Ik feels that Mr. Kim slightly crosses the line by caring too much about his family problems, Dong Ik gives the business card to Yeon Gyo. After the call to “The Care”, which is actually a fake company created by the Kims, Chung Sook is hired, and the complete Kim family successfully parasitizes the Park family.

Since all the Kims live off of the Parks now, the camera stops zooming and no longer focuses on the individual characters anymore. Before, the camera slowly pushed forward toward each actor, and it is hard not to notice that the shot becomes closer and closer. Now, after all he Kims are hired by the Parks, the camera becomes steadier and is a consistently distanced from all the characters. It is because originally when the Kims still have to plan to parasitize, director Bong Joon Ho uses the camera language of moving closely to represent that the Kims are getting closer to Parks to move up in social position: slowing creeping into their life in a way the Parks do not even know. But now, the Kim’s plan succeeded, so they and the camera stop moving closer, because the Kims have accomplished their goals.
As Yeon Gyo is gullible, Ki Taek and Chung Sook’s knowledge and skills from previous employments fool her completely. Moreover, the Park siblings are in need of the Kim siblings, because their parents only show attention to their educational needs and financial requests. The firm grasp of Ki Woo’s two fingers on Da Hye’s wrist (Fig. 10), and scenes of the intimate interaction between Ki Jung and Da Song, such as Da Song cradling Ki Jung on his lap or patting
his arm (Fig. 11), shows the degree of personal attention and physical care and love they provide to these emotionally needy children.\textsuperscript{29} And it is a type of parasitism that makes the Park family rely on them deeply.

But this whole arrangement begins to fall apart the day the Parks leave the house to Chung Sook and go camping to celebrate Da Song’s birthday. After the Park family leaves, all the Kim’s occupy the mansion as if it was their own house. They enjoy the comfortable and beautiful house and living room and Chung Sook declares: “If I had all this, my heart would be overflowing with kindness!”\textsuperscript{30} And yet, in bitterness that she does not own the home, and to foreshadow what comes next, she compares Ki Taek to a cockroach and states if the Parks come back and turn on the light, he would immediately hide himself. Ki Taek is angry, but deep down he knows it is the truth. The family continues to talk and laugh and drink Dong Ik’s wine and pretend they are the upper class, living in this comfortable home. Even though outside it is raining heavily, it does not bother them at all, because they are safe in this comfortable mansion. The storm becomes a moving picture for the Kims to enjoy through the French window, with the wine that does not belong to them. Suddenly, a doorbell breaks this moment of happiness.

Pretending she is the only one in the house, Chung Sook goes to check who is at the door. It is Moon Gwang standing at the gate in the storm, claiming that she left something at the house. Perhaps she does feel guilty, or since she is now “rich”, which makes her kindhearted, Chung Sook lets her in. Moon Gwang walks down the stairs and asks Chung Sook to help her push asides the pantry shelves of food. Confused she agrees to help, an entrance to a set of stairs appears and Moon Gwang runs down the steps. Following Moon Gwang, Chung Sook enters the underground bunker where Moon Gwang’s husband, Geun Se, also a victim of the Castella Cake bankruptcy, has been living for four years to avoid the loaners. When Moon Gwang left, there is
no longer anyone to feed him. This fact shocks Chung Sook, who insists on calling the police even when Moon Gwang kneels down and begs her to feed Geun Se. Chung Sook considers Geun Se to be an invasion, even though it is not her house. The other Kims follow Chung Sook and reveal to Moon Gwang that they are actually a family of four imposters. Moon Gwang holds up a video she has secretly made and threatens to reveal their real identity. As the Kims kneel down to ask for mercy, the phone rings. The phone draws the Ohs’ attention, and the Kims attack them. To bring Moon Gwang under control, Ki Jung runs to the fridge of the Parks for peaches and rubs them all on Moon Gwang. In the chaos that follows, the Kims attack Geun Se, Moon Gwang has severely allergic reaction to the peaches, and Chung Sook runs to pick up the phone.

On the other side of the call, it is Yeon Gyo calling to inform Chung Sook that they are coming home from the camping trip due to the storm and they would be home in five minutes. After she hangs up on the phone, the Kims rush around the house to clean up their mess and Chung Sook starts to cook ram-don mixed with expensive Hanu - an ironic symbolization of the upper class (Hanu) and lower class (ram-don) being thrown together in the same house. At the same time, Ki Taek and Ki Woo tie up the Ohs in the bunker and Ki Woo rushes back to the living room to help Ki Jung clean. When the Parks return, the Kims are like cockroaches – they start running away and hide when the light reaches them. Meanwhile, the Parks just normally walk in as Chung Sook finishes preparing the ram-don.

At this point, Ki Jung is under the coffee table after cleaning all the trash the Kims made. Ki Woo is under Da Hye’s bed after he puts back her diary, and Ki Taek is in the bunker with Geun Se and Moon Gwang, to stop them from running up.

Later on, all the Parks are asleep. Chung Sook signals the rest of the Kims to leave quietly. As the Kims are moving, they hear footsteps, so they quickly all hide underneath the
coffee table. Da Song runs down the stairs, wakes his parents up, and asks to camp on the yard outside. Dong Ik and Yeon Gyo cannot change Da Song’s mind, so they decide to sleep on the couch. Since the mansion is their property, and they do not know that the Kims are right under the coffee table next to them, Dong Ik starts mentioning the discomforting smell from Ki Taek in the car. The Kims listen to the Parks stereotyping and making fun of the lower class, and cannot do anything about it, because it is true that they are, at that moment, lower than the Parks.

When Dong Ik and Yeon Gyo are finally asleep, the Kims try to leave. However, a light penetrates through the window, Ki Taek freezes immediately (Fig. 12). Da Song is complaining to his parents through the walkie-talkie about it being hard to fall asleep. Like a cockroach, Ki Taek tries to move in the dark, but he has nowhere to hide when there is light. Luckily, Dong Ik and Yeon Gyo do not notice him and soon go back to sleep. The Kims sneaks out the mansion quietly.

![Figure 12: Ki Taek stops moving because of the sudden light](https://example.com/image.jpg)

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What waits for them outside is a big storm. The Kims now have to run back to their banjiha in the rain. From the mansion’s entrance to the stairs that connect the other neighborhoods, the farther they run, the more it is emphasized how low they are in social position and how far they are from being in the upper class. When they arrive to their own neighborhood, they see the whole street is flooded and they walk through the flooded water to get back to the banjiha. The neighbors ask Ki Taek for help, but Ki Taek ignores them. Ki Taek does not have the ability or the selflessness to help others; he can only focus on saving his house. Getting into the banjiha, the whole house is filled with the water coming from the street through the window.

The camera switches to Moon Gwang getting sicker and sicker in the bunker because of her allergic reaction. Before she dies, she keeps repeating Chung Sook’s name, and that becomes what Geun Se remembers. The camera switches back to the banjiha, and dirty water rushes out from the toilet. Ki Jung tries to cover it but she cannot. She ends up just sitting on it and smoking a cigarette. This scene symbolizes that no matter how hard Ki Jung, who rubbed the peaches all over Moon Gwang, tries to cover over this fact, the secret is still going to be spilled. All the consequences of lying are going to flowing back to the banjiha.

The Kims try to save their belongings, but soon they know it is useless, because everything is soaked, and there is no way for them get rid of the dirty water that fills up two-thirds of the banjiha. While searching, Ki Woo’s eyes are attracted to the viewing stone that flows up. The viewing stone represents Ki Woo’s desire and ambitions that flows up instead of flowing down. When the Kims are moved to be at the school gym, a temporary evacuation center, because they have nowhere to sleep, Ki Woo is still not putting the stone down. Ki Woo
is still attracted to the power. In order to get the power, and become an upper class, his is willing to do anything.

After the whole chaos, Ki Woo does not know what to do next. In the script, it describes the conversation between Ki Woo and Ki Taek about the next step:  

KI WOO: You said you had a plan. What are we going to do about-- (quiet) The basement?  

*Ki Taek is silent for a long moment. His face is cold and emotionless.*  

KI TAEK: Do you want to know how you make a foolproof plan?  

KI WOO: How?  

KI TAEK: Don’t plan at all. Have no plan.  

*Ki Woo, confused.*  

KI TAEK: (CONT’D) If you plan, something will always go wrong. That’s life. (then) Look around. Do you think these people got up this morning and said, “Tonight I’m going to sleep on a dirty floor with hundreds of strangers”? But look where they are now. Look where we are.  

*Ki Woo is hardly consoled.*  

KI TAEK: (CONT’D) That’s why you should never plan. If you don’t have a plan, you can’t fail. You can’t do anything wrong. Doesn’t matter if you kill someone or commit fucking treason. Nothing fucking matters. You understand?  

*Ki Taek talks quietly. There’s a hostility in his voice. His face drips with fatigue.*  

*Ki Woo is scared. He’s never seen his father like this. He hugs the rock more tightly.*  

Ki Taek, the father of the household, does not even know what to do. He is also tired of this mess. Ki Taek understands that at this point, they have created a big problem. He has no hope for the future, that is why he has no plan at all. If there is no plan, there is no failure. In that case, Ki Taek does not want to face the reality; he rather pretends everything is fine. He cannot give up his dignity and the role of the master of the household, and to tell his family that he has made a mistake.
The next day, the Parks wake up like nothing had happened and start to plan a birthday party for Da Song. The Parks invites the Kims as well, who just woke up at the noisy and crowded evacuation center after a long, fatigued night. Soon after, Yeon Gyo gets Ki Taek to drive her to the high-end grocery stores for the party.

Yeon Gyo and Ki Taek return back to the mansion, and she starts welcoming the guest. Ki Woo is in the upper bedroom with Da Hye, and he looks down on the guests from the upper class and states: “They’re all so gorgeous. Even though they had to come at the last minute. So cool. Laid back.” At this moment, Ki Woo makes the decision that he is going to do whatever it takes to be higher than others. He walks down to the bunker with the viewing stone. Ki Woo is going to kill Geun Se with the viewing stone. Nonetheless, he is scared and drops the stone on the stairs and makes a big noise. Ki Woo cannot find Geun Se, but he finds Moon Gwang’s body. Geun Se attacks Ki Woo from the back by choking him with a string. Ki Woo successfully throws him off and crawls up from the basement in fear. Geun Se follows him, trips Ki Woo with the string, and slams him with the viewing stone. Geun Se loses his sanity.

Out on the yard, Yeon Gyo appoints Ki Jung to give the birthday cake to Da Song. As she is walking over, Geun Se, who sees the sunlight for the first time after four years, appears in the crowd. Everyone screams and runs away. Ki Jung looks back, and gets stabbed Geun Se, on her left chest. Because Da Song has seen Geun Se before, when he snuck up to find food, Da Song thinks he is a ghost, and passes out in fear. At this moment, Yeon Gyo is screaming and scared, and Chung Sook immediately runs up to protect Ki Jung.

Ki Taek and Dong Ik who are hiding to surprise Da Song jumps up to each check on Ki Jung and Da Song. Dong Ik tries to get Ki Taek to take Da Song to the hospital, but Ki Taek panics, and debates what to do first because Ki Jung is bleeding so much. Dong Ik cannot wait,
so he tells Ki Taek to throw the car keys to him. Chung Sook stabs Geun Se with the barbeque stick, and Geun Se falls on the car keys. Looking at Dong Ik flipping Geun Se’s body while covering his nose, trying not to throw up, Ki Taek is triggered: the Parks have never seen them as normal human beings at all, because they are the lower class. Ki Taek grabs Geun Se’s knife and kills Dong Ik. Everyone is in shock, Ki Taek runs down the stairs next to the bamboo.

Later on, the police try to investigate Ki Woo, but he is crazed and laughs at everything. Even in front of Ki Jung’s ashes, Ki Woo still laughs. In order to find out where Ki Taek is after that day, police follow Ki Woo and Chung Sook, but even they do not know where Ki Taek is. Eventually, everything dies down. Ki Woo starts going up on the mountain to look at the mansion with a telescope. A new foreign family has moved in, and they look happy. Ki Woo discovers the lights outside of the mansions blink in a weird pattern at night. It is Ki Taek. After stabbing Dong Ik, hid in the bunker like Geun Se. At night he writes a letter in morse code to his son by turning on and off the lights. In the letter, Ki Taek claims that he is in regret. He does not know why he killed Dong Ik, but it happened, so he has no choice but to stay in the bunker. Ki Taek also buries Moon Gwang’s body in the yard. Everything goes hazy in the time under the mansion. But at least, Ki Taek manages to write this letter to see if Ki Woo will receive it.

After reading the letter, Ki Woo runs back to the banjiha, and starts writing a letter to his father. He plans to make a lot of money, become upper class, and buy the mansion one day. Then, eventually, Ki Taek can walk up from the stairs, see the sunlight, and walk on the yard freely. Suddenly, the camera switches back to Ki Woo, writing the letter in the banjiha in a snowy night (Fig. 13).
Figure 13: Ki Woo reading the letter to his father

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Class Structure Visualized in the Everyday Landscape of the Three Families

City and Neighborhoods

*Parasite* is set in Seoul, South Korea, the country’s capitol with a population of 10 million people. The Kim’s apartment is located at Ahyeon Dong, and the Parks’ mansion is located at Seongbuk Dong. Ahyeon Dong is relatively flat, close to the low-lying river, and contains a dense mixture of apartments buildings and commercial development. Seongbuk Dong is near the Bukhansan National Park, at a high elevation on the hill sparsely populated with mansions located close to green parkland. The Bukhansan National Park is the only nation park in the Seoul metropolitan area. The highest peak of Bukhansan, the North Han Mountain, is Baegundae with an elevation of 836.5 m (2,744 ft). As they are located on the highest mountain of the Seoul metropolitan area, the Parks are physically above everyone. In relationship to the issue of living environment and class, the Park’s mansion is physically higher than the Kim’s banjiha in terms of the actual topography.
Figure 14: Topography of Seoul, South Korea, with the location of the houses
Made by Yat Chan
Data from ESRI.
Figure 15: Building footprints of Seoul, South Korea, with the location of the houses
Made by Yat Chan
Data from ESRI.
As noted by Hyun Young Yi and Sangmi Cha, reporters from Reuters, “Ahyeon Dong, which appears in several of the scenes in Parasite to depict the Kims neighborhood, is one of the last shanty towns near downtown Seoul.” The residents are predominantly the unemployed and the elderly and, as conveyed by the movie, they mostly buy cheap ramen noodles and alcohol – which are one of the cheapest ways to eat and relax from the pressures of impoverishment.

For example, the scene of Ki Woo and his friend Min Hyuk is filmed at an old and dilapidated traditional Korean supermarket, to indicate the poverty of Ki Woo. The buildings and streets around the supermarket lack maintenance. Because there is less space to develop horizontally, there are a lot of tall buildings (Fig. 16).

In contrast, Seongbuk Dong is known as the Beverly Hills of South Korea. This neighborhood is clean and quiet, with security cameras everywhere. Hyun Young Yi and Sangmi Cha also indicate the wealth of people living in Seongbuk Dong: “According to real estate brokers, homes there usually cost around 7 billion won ($6 million). Those rented to foreign diplomats are offered for 10 million -15 million won ($8,500 to $12,725) per month.” The population density is high at 5,922 per square kilometer, but much lower than Ahyeon Dong. As a CEO of a big company, Park Dong Ik and his family can afford to live in this wealthy neighborhood, surrounded by expensive homes and wealthy people. The price of the real estate in this residential neighborhood guarantees they are differentiated and separated from the needy. (Fig. 17). The houses here have the space to expand horizontally, and with fewer people living there, the whole environment is quiet.
Figure 16: Aerial view of the Kims’ neighborhood, Ahyeon Dong
Retrieved from ESRI. All rights reserved

Figure 17: Aerial view of the Parks’ neighborhood, Seongbuk Dong
Retrieved from ESRI. All rights reserved.
Figure 18: Section from Kims’ banjiha to Parks’ mansion

5x vertically exaggerated
Figure 18 illustrates the elevation difference (five times vertically exaggerated) between the Parks’ mansion at 155 m (508 ft), the Kims’ banjiha at 73 m (246 ft), and the bunker at 142 m (466 ft). The process of travelling between the banjiha and the mansion is long way with a lot of elevation changes. The way to the bunker is rapid and sharp – just one stairway down, right underneath the mansion.

The elevation difference between these living environments indicates two types of parasitic relationships. The first are the Kims, who are much lower than the Parks in elevation. They need upperclassmen to prosper but not live and provide helpful service in return. In contrast, Geun Se is also lower than the Parks, but he is closer in elevation and needs them to survive. His parasitic relationship to the Parks is more direct; without the Parks, he would not be able to live. The Parks provide Geun Se everything, and he gives nothing at all back.
The street scenes in the movie *Parasite* also play an important role in illustrating the social class distinctions that permeate the movie. In the early scene outside of the supermarket, for example, the roads slopes down to the intersection of the supermarket and symbolizes the social position of the residents in that neighborhood (Fig. 19). The streets are old, poorly maintained, lack trees or plants, and are lined with cars and electrical wires. These images imply that the Kims, who live here, suffer disturbance from outside. The walk down the stairs at the entrance to the banjiha supports this impression (Fig. 20). The multi-purposed street gives no silence to whoever lives here, especially the residents of the banjiha because they are half below ground where every footstep is an annoyance. Looking out from the banjiha, buildings and high-rises extend to the other side of the Han River, suggesting that the Kims are not the only people who live under poverty. In fact, there are thousands of other lowerclassmen like them.

In contrast, the scene of the residential street outside the mansion projects a different reality (Fig. 21). The canopies of the trees from adjacent properties reach out and shade the street. It is bright and sunny and few people and cars pass by. Cars are all parked in private garages. The street is both a gateway and a boundary between the upper class and the lower class. High walls around the private compounds reinforce this impression and make those from the lower classes feel like invaders who do not belong. Compared to the street outside of the banjiha, the street outside of the mansion is less public, and gives a hint that the house owners who live there also own the street.

It soon becomes clear to the viewer that the Park mansion is located at a high point (Fig. 22), and this family lives above most people in society along a quiet, secluded, and peaceful street.
As noted by Michael Herh, a journalist from Business Korea, the top 0.1 percent of business owners earn the most money in Seoul, South Korea.\textsuperscript{44}

As a result of analyzing the proportion of occupations from 2011 to 2014, the highest percentage of the top 0.1 percent group was managers (28.7 percent), physicians (22.2 percent), business owners (12.7 percent), financial income earners and financial workers (7.2 percent). When managers and business owners both of whom are professional managers were combined, business managers accounted for 41.4 percent and were more than four out of ten.

In other words, only a small number of wealthy people, like CEO Dong Ik, are rich enough to afford to live in this setting and they create firm, but visually enticing boundaries to differentiate themselves from the lower classes.

There are no outside streets to Geun Se’s bunker; the bunker is completely enclosed like a prison. For Geun Se, there is no connection to the outside world. He is just a parasite in the mansion. For Geun Se to reach for the outside world, he has to pass through the mansion, and the wall of provisions that hides the door to his living environment. The owners of the mansion have plenty, but no one knows of his existence.
Figure 19: A pedestrian view of the supermarket outside of the banjiha's street
Retrieved from Google. All rights reserved

Figure 20: A pedestrian view on the street outside of the mansion
Retrieved from Google. All rights reserved.
Figure 21 (left): An illustration of the street leading to the Kims’ banjiha
It depicts a concept of the banjiha’s outside I retrieved from *Parasite.*

Figure 22 (right): An illustrative of the street leading to the Parks’ mansion
It depicts a concept of the mansion’s outside I retrieved from *Parasite.*
Entry

The entrance to a house is a transition from the outside world to the inside world, and in the movie *Parasite*, director Boon Joon Ho, uses this transition to signal the social class of his characters. The entrance to the Kim’s banjiha signals to the audience that they live half-below ground. Not completely at the bottom, but still lower than everyone else. When people reach out to them and enter their house, they walk through a dirty alley that slopes toward the banjiha, enter a door at the rear of the building, walk down a set of stairs and step on lower ground, and adjust their social position to interact with the Kims. This is seen, for instance, when Min Hyuk, Ki Woo’s friend, enters the banjiha, and has to watch his steps to make sure he does not knock into things in the narrow hallway, because there are random objects taking over spaces (Fig. 23). After the stairs, there is an open laundry room where they hand-wash and air-dry their clothes. In reverse, every time the Kims walk out the door, they must walk up the stairs to where it is higher (Fig. 24). From the stairs at the back, to the slight-sloped alley next to the building above their banjiha\(^45\). Even in the outer neighborhood, it is still a long process of walking up with a big road that slopes largely towards a long stair and connects to the other neighborhood (Fig. 25). Even though it is a short travel from the neighborhood to their banjiha, the whole scene is still staged to emphasize the low elevation of the banjiha and thus the low social position of the Kim family. They are in the center of the crowd, and also physically at the bottom among the lowest. It gives a sense that they are below everybody, and everyone who walks by is above them. People are “stepping” on them, yet they are not quite at the very bottom.
Figure 23: Entry to the Kims’ banjiha
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

Figure 24: Ki Woo leaving the banjiha
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

Figure 25: Ki Jung walking out the alley
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
Going to the Park’s house, always requires visitors to walk up, and if you do not have a car, it takes a long time on foot or on public transit to travel there from the center of the city where the Kims live. The script describes Ki Woo’s first experience in the neighborhood:

_A quiet road snaking up the hill of a wealthy neighborhood. High walls. Not a pedestrian in sight. Except Ki Woo, who consults the map on his phone as he walks up._ (Fig. 26)

To emphasize this class difference, the movie shot is filmed behind Ki Woo, as he walks his way to Parks’ house. This camera position not only indicates that he is inferior in this neighborhood, but it also indicates that Ki Woo, a lowerclassman with high ambitions, is going up the hill to try to fit into the world of upper class. The tutorship, the chance Ki Woo is holding onto, is leading him to go upward, and he tries to bring his family with him as well.

Also, there is more than one entrance to the mansion: people can also enter from the garage. (Fig. 27). Owning a car designates the family is financially comfortable. Both entrances are leisurely and carefully staged, showing what the Park family wishes the visitor to perceive: a comfortable living environment.

When leaving the mansion, this sequence is reversed and involves a whole process of going downhill for the wealthy owner. Starting at the bedrooms on the second floor, the Parks move from their open living room on the first floor, through the yard, and into the private garage on the lower ground. From there they go out to the neighborhood where outsiders rarely visit, ending up to wherever they are going in their private car (Fig. 28). For the Park family, leaving the mansion symbolizes leaving the comfortable upper circle. The elevation and distance from the mansion to the outside world where people socialize creates an aloofness for the Parks. The distance prevents others from approaching them with any unknown intentions, which makes
them hard to reach, and perhaps even untouchable. The farther the Park family is away from their property, however, the harder it is for people know their social position.
Figure 26: Entry to the Park’s mansion
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

Figure 27: The mansion's garage
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

Figure 28: Yeon Gyo in the car
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
After the Kim family has fully parasitized the Parks’ house, they discover the secret of Moon Gwang’s husband, Oh Geun Se, who lives in the basement of the Parks’ house, in a shelter originally built for the previous owner to take refuge in case of war between North and South Korea. The entrance to the underground bunker is hidden with the first basement of the house, behind a set of cabinets (Fig. 29). Besides Geun Se, Moon Gwang, and the first owner of the mansion who design the mansion, no one, not even the current owners, the Park family, knows there is a bunker underneath. The entrance to the bunker is not only hidden physically, but also hidden from society. The fact that it is such a secret entrance represents that Geun Se is also hidden, and below the Park family and society 47. The long shot that films the whole actual process of Chung Sook running down the stairs indicates how far away and hidden Geun Se is from civilization (Fig. 30). Geun Se’s social position is under everyone and also forgotten.
Figure 29: Entry to Geun Se’s bunker
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

Figure 30: Chung Sook running down the stairs
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
House

How people treat the open area of their house indicates their level of dedication to the house. The front yard gives the first impressions of the house, and how people will view the owners. A well-maintained yard implies that the owners have the effort and time to show dedication to the house. It serves as an outdoor place to relax and enjoy and is also a welcome area for the guests to get a sense of how financially stable the homeowners are. This not only works for the open area, but the whole house. People often associate a poorly maintained house with the lower class, and a beautifully renovated house with the upper class, because the house reflects how comfortable the owners are financially. Cynthia Girling and Kenneth Helphand, the landscape architects who wrote *Yard, Street, Park: Design of Suburban Open Space*, reference landscape historian Paul Growth to categorize the yard in three hierarchies: 48

Landscape historian Paul Growth as charted the distinctive meanings of the lot, yard, and garden. The lot is demarcated real estate. The yard an enclosed area for a specific function, and the “garden implies care, commitment and watching as well as enjoyment.” The three terms “constitute a hierarchy of care.”

Interpreting care as a sign of social status, Girling and Helphand, suggest people with less money use their yards in utilitarian ways as a multipurpose area to work on different activities, such as farming and clothes drying. In contrast, people with money can hire workers to manage their yard, with a garden of plants as a way of showing off their taste and wealth to pedestrians.
The three houses in Parasite are perfect examples of the different levels of maintenance attributed to different social classes. An early rendering of the banjiha illustrates the transition from the street entrance to the actual entrance is very close – just one set of stairs (Fig. 31). There is no area for them to plant, or enough sunlight for plants to grow. The only open area for them is the open laundry space, where the mother of the Kim family, Chung Sook does the laundry by hand. Clothes dry there or in the living room due to the lack of space.

The rest of the banjiha is also full of objects – clothing, kitchen implements, groceries – and every inch of space is utilized, which creates the perception of disorganization. In each scene filmed in the banjiha, there are many discordant colors coming from all the objects lying around,
yet somehow the shot is desaturated. The private rooms are visible right away with two bedrooms for the parents and the adult siblings, and the bathroom are on the left of the hallway. The bathroom is built with a step-up platform for the toilet to prevent accidental flooding. The living room contains the stove and sink, and the family usually sits on the ground to eat at a small coffee table in the living room: a situation possibly due to the low ceiling in banjiha (Fig. 32). The transition between the outside and the inside, as mentioned previously, is extremely proximate. The door and the window are right next to the street, which leaves the Kim family with no distance to create privacy from pedestrians.

Figure 32: The Kim family all eating at the mixed-purpose living room
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

On the other hand, the Park family owns a commodious house, and the entrance from the outside world to their most intimate spaces transitions in stages. Visitors can admire their achievements in society as they enter their mansion. For upperclassmen like the Parks, the entering process is a way for the visitors to know more about what the Parks want to share, and to flaunt their wealth⁴⁹.
The first shots of Ki Woo entering the mansion give a feeling that the house is too big to be included in just one glance. A wall with a gate differentiates the lot’s boundaries, and behind the gate, bamboos along the stairs take visitors to an open view of the yard and the garden. This is the first image of the façade of the Parks’ house: an open and spacious view of the big green yard and the trees surrounding the house (Fig. 33). From the early rendering of the mansion, it is visible that, as a transition from the outside world to the house, the yard creates a long distance to blur out the boundaries (Fig. 34). It is private yet open: the trees enclose the yard, but the yard is a big open space for any outdoor entertaining activity, such as camping, barbequing, and home parties. It is not only a transition, but a decoration to the house, showing the owner’s ability and how they know to relax while making big incomes. The Parks are rich enough to afford to change the outside of the house into what they want the visitors to see. Then, the path on the yard that is graded to be on a specific slope guides people to walk up to the house.
After entering the actual door of the house, the spacious living room, dining room, kitchen, and hallways are tastefully furnished, with clear boundaries to differentiate the rooms’ purposes (Fig. 35). The perception visitors receive after entering the house is full of harmonious colors, and essentially the house is clean and bright. The wooden furniture and the green plants blend the house into nature, as if they are totally away from the fast-paced city. Unlike the Kims’ banjiha, it is hard to conceptualize the layout of Parks’ house in the movie without watching it multiple times. There are barely any actual boundaries of the house shown in each shot and the audience hardly see a full wall, room, or window. Groceries are stored in the basement, and no personal items are being shown besides the expensive paintings hanging on the wall to displays the owners’ valuable taste. The whole first floor gives a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere where people would love to stay. With everything being stored properly, the house only reveals what the Parks want people to know. And in the mansion, all private rooms are on the second
floor, where the owners prepare for their everyday life. Children of the family get to have their own rooms with entertainments they enjoy, and where visitors must ask for permission to enter. This symbolizes their wealth and how they can afford to inhabit a large space and set boundaries in a highly populated city like Seoul. The Parks have the financial ability to provide every family member privacy, and also to distance themselves from the “commoners”.

Figure 35: The mansion's living room
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

In contrast to the other two living environments, the bunker has no façade at all; it is completely hidden from society. When the Kims first enter Geun Se’s “house”, their reaction is one of shock. They cannot believe people are living in an environment worse than a banjiha. The shelter, technically, is just a rectangular room with everything a person needs to survive. Facing the wall, at the left is the area for daily activity, such as sleeping, eating, and reading and on the right is the restroom area, with no doors in between (Fig. 36). The whole layout of the shelter seems almost like a jail; it is unpleasant and oppressive. At least in the Kims house, they can close the doors of the bedrooms and bathroom if they want privacy; but in this shelter, there is
not even one door to differentiate the purpose of a place. What the Kims see after entering the bunker is the wall and hallway that expands to a bedroom on one side, and a bathroom on the other side. The oppressive atmosphere of the room makes them want to leave right away.

Figure 36: The bunker's inside

Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

The fact that the bunker is underground both physically and metaphorically indicates the place where Geun Se lives, is pressed down and squeezed by the objects above ground (Fig. 37). Exactly like his situation, Geun Se cannot afford paying his debts, and ends up being forced to live under everyone. His social class can only afford him what he needs to survive: a movable place with basic resources to sustain his physical body. When director Boon Joon Ho handles the scenes in this setting, he technically does not film the complete view of the bunker, to force viewers to image how small and cramped it is in contrast to Parks’ house, and to create an anxiety within the audience.51 Living in a place where sunlight cannot reach, his will to survive is like the fading green color on the leaves of plants suffering without sunlight or sustenance. The only green that Geun Se sees is the moldy color of the walls.
Figure 37: Section from the bunker to the mansion
View

The banjiha of the Kim family and the mansion of the Park family are the two living environments that have access to the windows and views in *Parasite*. Windows play an important role in *Parasite*, and they provide light, color, and views. Lighting is also an important element to create the color and atmosphere of the house. As noted by Tmd Studio Ltd., the meaning of color in architecture arising from differences in lighting, allows architecture to be interpreted differently. For instance, cool-tone lighting in houses indicates a studious environment, or indicates loneliness, coldness, and sadness. Warm tone lighting works the other way; it generates a welcoming feeling that makes people feel comfortable, at home, and loved. From this sense, lighting literally also creates the social color of a space. Light also indicates social class. Director Bong Joon Ho points out the way sunlight represents social classes in an interview given to Chris O’Falt: “The poorer you are, the less sunlight you have access to, and that’s just how it is in real life as well: You have a limited access to windows.” Therefore, the higher people are, the closer they are to the sun, and the more sunlight they receive. The production designer of Parasite, Lee Ha Jun, also describes his thought process of the lightings and colors in the interview:

Mr. Park’s house is minimal, uncluttered, large and orderly. It’s a large house with a large garden consisting of controlled colors and materials—a contrast to the semi-basement neighborhood. In contrast to the rich house, Ki Taek’s semi-basement neighborhood is more colorful, but again, we minimized the color tones as much as possible so that no particular tone stood out. Instead, the textures are rough and the space is denser compared to the rich house. I wanted to show the increasing density that reflects the class difference between elevated areas and lower ones as appearances change from the rich house to the semi-basement neighborhood.

These two houses contradict each other. The banjiha is colorful, yet desaturated, in order to emphasize the disorganization and the density of the house; showing how impoverished the Kim
family is. In contrast, the mansion is minimalistic – only one rich, warm wood-tone color is shown in the mansion. The simplicity reflects the harmony and peace in the family who lives there; a happiness that only well-off upperclassmen can afford.

![View from the banjiha's window (looking out)](image)

Figure 38: View from the banjiha's window (looking out)
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

![The banjiha's inside](image)

Figure 39: The banjiha's inside
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

Light plays an important role in the first scene of the movie, where the audience looks out towards the street through the living room window of the Kims’ banjiha (Fig. 38). With little
natural light, the view through the window looks wan. The light coming from the window barely covers the semi-basement. This causes the color tone of the living environment to be duller and darker, giving out a gloomy vibe (Fig. 39). The lack of sunlight also causes the objects in the house to show their true colors with no filter to harmonize them. Food, decorations, clothing of varied colors in front of badly painted walls metaphorically mocks their difficulties. The unmatched colors create the first impression of “unorganized and messy”, “lack of maintenance”, or “old and moldy”. The dark tone color of the house not only states that the Kims have no urge to decorate a house that they do not like, but also symbolizes the economic barrier they are facing. A dull life that they struggle with again and again; it almost seems like there is no ending.
In the movie *Parasite*, the façade of the Kim’s banjiha is hardly noticeable (Fig. 40) because it lies under an apartment building. The Kims are the lowest of the low. All people see from outside is a window that one has to squat down to look through, or randomly glance down while walking passed the banjiha. Otherwise, the banjiha is almost hidden under the shadows of the apartment complex and the lack of sunlight. In various scenes, the Kims always look up to
the window (Fig. 41). This angle of the shot not only depicts that they are living in a semi-basement, but also symbolizes their social class. They always look out to the lively neighborhood where people are walking above them. And the outside is always a busy street with a lot of disturbance, such a random drunk pedestrian urinating, a street fumigation truck, flooding water. In the script, it shows how their life is always interrupted even at night:  

*The window, which is being rattled by a robust stream of urine. A SHORT, BARELY STANDING DRUNK MAN is relieving himself in the corner.* (Fig. 42)

The constant intrusion shows how the Kims are perceived and treated by other people, and how their privacy is always exposed to the public. The window is not framing out a nice scene for the Kims, but a reminder of how outsiders who are above them can easily break into their private life. The fact that they cannot hide their privacy in the banjiha, symbolizes how they cannot hide their class origin; they will always be lower than everyone.
In opposition, all these elements of the Parks’ house reflect a living situation that everyone envies. Through the big window, the Parks can see the light shine down on the big yard, and all the plants look lively and pleasing (Fig. 43). The sky is blue and wide and set off the open garden in the center of the window – everything is spacious in this mansion. The scenery provides them an atmosphere of being away from all the noise. At this moment, they
settle in the quiet nature and the boundary is well-kept, with the long and staged entrance positioning them away from outsiders. With the sunlight coming through the big French windows, the house is covered with a layer of golden warmth. Echoing this are the warm toned decorations and furniture, whereas every inch of this house harmonizing (Fig. 44). The warm color representing their current stage of life: a happy family of four living with properties that people desire. The uniformity and solidity of colors display the characteristic of the owners, meticulous and fastidious.58

According to the production designer of *Parasite*, Lee Ha Jun, the window of the mansion is specially designed:59

“This is the reason why Mr. Park’s first floor living room doesn’t have a TV. Director Bong mentioned that the architect in the story, Namgoong Hyeonja, built the first floor living room for the sake of appreciating the garden. So, we created the window wall in accordance with the 2.35:1 aspect ratio, and I wanted the large living room and garden to feel like a nice photograph on screen.”

This big window is a symbol of wealth for the Parks, and when people look out from the mansion through this window, they are either at eye level or looking down. Every time, when the Parks looks out the window, they are enjoying the benefit of being in upper circle. Meanwhile, the lower class cannot afford this type of natural view. And when people look into the mansion through the window, there is always enough sunlight to see the spacious, living room clearly, reflecting the beautiful scenic yard (Fig. 45). Plants surround the house and make the view pleasant. The wooden interior of the mansion blends with the green yard outside. Everything is vividly rendered and the colors are saturated: once again symbolizing the prosperity of the family and their ability to maintain this beautiful mansion.
Figure 45: View from the mansion’s window (looking in)

Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
The bunker is the worst living environment in *Parasite*, and there are no windows at all, only the stairs to a closed door. The bunker is empty with nothing to look out at, just a green wall. Below ground, there is no access at all to natural light; symbolizing Geun Se is at the bottom of the social class. Like Geun Se’s will to survive, only flickering lamps that may burn out at any time, are present. The shelter is filtered with one singular color, a creepy, unpleasing dark green emerges from the cold wall (Fig. 46). The bunker’s brightness is very low; one can hardly see anything. This color describes Geun Se’s mental status: dreadful and unstable. It seems to foreshadow his ending as well: died in craze for freedom.

While the Kims have to tolerate all the disturbance from outside, Geun Se is completely isolated from the outside; he sees nothing but his own face every day. The disturbance he endures is the suppression from the closed environment, and the loneliness he must deal with. The only “interaction” he has with the outside is turning on the “automatic lights” for Mr. Park, synchronizing with his footsteps on the stairs: 60
Above Geun Se, Ki Taek sees a tall, open space. The hollow area beneath the garage stairs. We hear Dong-Ik’s FOOTSTEPS heading up to the living room.

Geun Se continues to bang on the switches. Ki Taek sees that the lines from the switches go all the way up to the entrance. (Fig. 47)

![Image of Geun Se banging on switches](image)

Figure 47: Geun Se banging on the switches

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The irony of Geun Se banging on the switches when Dong Ik walks up the stairs symbolizes how casual it is for Dong Ik to be on top, while the lower classes work for him; and he does not even notice them. The difference of social position – the lower respect the upper, and the upper neglect the lower – is the daily life and the only social interaction for Geun Se and Mr. Park.
Cleanliness and Smells

In movie *Parasite*, smell is emphasized frequently, especially the smells from the lowerclassmen. The Parks constantly mention “the smell crossing the boundary”. The Kims have to tolerate the smells of living in the banjiha. For the Kims, the banjiha is what they can afford, so their bodies are tinged with a moldy smell from wet clothing, fumigation gas from the street, stink bugs that live in the apartment, and trash that people leave outside. Since smell cannot be blocked out, only be distanced, it represents the inevitable fact that difference in social class cannot be hidden.

The outside disturbance such as spit, the cleaning chemicals, noises that bother the Kims every day, eventually become normal. Gradually, they do not even notice that these disturbances leave stinky marks on them that reveal their social position to upperclassmen.

*Ki Taek is cooking ribs and mushrooms on an electric skillet when he suddenly smells his clothes.*

KI TAEK: He scared me, the little punk. Does this mean we all have to use different soaps?

KI WOO: Maybe we should all wash our clothes with different detergent. Different fabric softeners too.

CHUNG SOOK: You mean I have to wash all of your clothes separately? Fuck no.

KI JUNG: *(expressionless)* It won’t work. It’s the basement smell.

*Ki Woo is blank.*

KI JUNG: *(CONT’D)* The smell won’t go away unless we leave this place.

*Truth bomb. They all fall silent at the brutal reality check, and for a while we only hear the sizzling of the grill.*

Living every day in the banjiha, the smells outside have already attached to their clothing, maybe even their skin. The dirty and moldy environment already creates a smell that they cannot remove. The smell also symbolizes the fact that it is very hard, if not impossible, for the Kims to
move up in social class. This is made clear the night of storm, when Dong Ik and Yeon Gyo unaware of the Kims in their home, and they believe they are the only ones in this intimate space, they notice the smell from the Kims.63

DONG IK: Hold on. *sniffs* I know that smell.
YEON GYO: What?
DONG IK: This is Mr. Kim’s smell.
YEON GYO: Mr. Kim? Are you sure? *sniffs* I don’t know what you’re talking about.

Dong Ik and Yeon Gyo both sniff the air.

Ki Taek becomes nervous. He smells his T-shirt.

DONG IK: I guess you don’t know. I sit behind him every day so I know the smell.
YEON GYO: Like poor people smell?
DONG IK: No. It’s not that strong. It’s more like a subtle aroma that seeps into the air—
YEON GYO: Like old people smell?
DONG IK: No, no. How should I put it-- Maybe the smell of an old radish pickle? Or that smell when you’re washing a dirty rag?

Ki Taek tries his best to keep a straight face under the table.

In the well-protected environment of the Parks, the smell from the lower class is insufferable. Later on, when the Kims walk to the banjiha in the storm, they see all the rainwater flooding into the banjiha along with all the trash and dirt. This unearthing storm not only exposes the Kim’s social position, but also washes them out from the upper circle as well, as if they are like this litter on the street, all belongs to the banjiha along with the intolerable smell. Now that they know where the smell is coming from, the smell is not only insufferable to the Parks anymore; it is also insufferable to them as well. Inevitably, they can never change this smell unless they can afford to move into a better environment. This smell, which symbolizes their unacceptable position in the lower class, will always be with them when they interact with the upper class.64
And when the upperclassmen point it out, the embarrassment will remind them that they are always under others.

It is obvious to see that the next day, when Yeon Gyo is in the car with Ki Taek, she treats Ki Taek differently already. On the way back, Yeon Gyo shows her bare feet and put them on the back of the front passenger seat. Suddenly, she smells Ki Taek’s body odor, she covers her nose. However, it is so strong that she has to open the window (Fig. 48). Ki Taek smells his shirt and looks unpleasant. It is ironic that Yeon Gyo does not think her feet may stink and put it right next to Ki Taek’s face, but she cannot stand Ki Taek’s smell from the driver seat. It displays how after Dong Ik tells her about the smell, she becomes aware of the boundary immediately. Yeon Gyo does not want Ki Taek to cross the boundary, and what Dong Ik said has brought up her caution to distinguish the line clearer. It also shows that an upper class is not aware about what they do may annoy people, because they are in upper class; everything can be solved by money and power.

Figure 48: Yeon Gyo opening the car window because of Ki Taek’s body odor
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
At the end of the movie, when Dong Ik also smells the odor from Geun Se. Dong Ik cannot stand it, so he has to cover his nose. (Fig. 49) The script describes Dong Ik’s action as follows: “He smells something and frowns. It’s Geun Se’s body odor. He holds his nose at the awful smell.” Since Geun Se has been staying below ground for a long time, his clothes are always wet because of the lack of natural light, and he barely shower because he cannot socialize with other people. The bunker only provides him a shelter for survival only. The whole living environment is unclean, enclosed and depressing. The stinky smells from his own evacuation constantly surrounds him. Eventually, he gets used to the smell, just like accepting the fact that he is poor because of the investment failure. Like the Kims, this smell follows him and symbolizes his poverty. Dong Ik cannot stand the smell because it is the smell of the poor. It is something that he hates and it crosses boundaries unless one is distant from the origin of the smell.

Figure 49: Dong Ik covering his nose

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Movement

Director Boon Joon Ho uses movement between different elevations to illustrate difference in social class through a landscape of stairs in *Parasite*. A series of collages illustrate how the use of stairs and upward movement in *Parasite* is used to differentiate social class distinctions and the character’s emotions. Starting off with the Kim family, and their banjiha, for example, the highest point they reach in this basement apartment is the platform of the toilet in the bathroom (Fig. 50). Later, when Ki Woo goes for his tutorship interview with the Park family, he walks up the stairs from the banjiha, through the dirty alley that slopes up to the busy street and up to the Park mansion. Every step Ki Woo takes and every lie he tells leads him and his family to parasitize on the Park family and the highest social position he has ever reached.
All the Kims successfully parasitize the Park family.

After Ki Taek becomes the chauffeur of the Parks, the Kims are planning to kick Moon Gwang out.

Ki Woo going to the mansion from the banjiha for the tutorship interview.

The banjiha where the Kims live.

Through Ki Woo’s recommendation, Ki Jung becomes the tutor for Da Song.

Figure 50: A Collage of the Kims going up to the mansion

They go up in elevation and social position because they successfully parasitize in the mansion.

Pictures retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
During a stormy night, the Parks are returning from their camping trip while Moon Gwang rings the doorbell at the stairs of the mansion entrance. She then walks down to the basement and shows Chung Sook the entrance to the bunker. To reach the bunker, the audience sees that Chung Sook has to run down one staircase, turn left, run through the corridor, and down another staircase to reach the bunker. And then the Kims, after witnessing this descent, accidentally fall down that stairs when Chung Sook threatens to call the police to expose Geun Se.  At this point, the Kims’ social positions switches with the Oh family, and they now occupy the lowest, because the Ohs have the video evidence to prove that they are a family parasitizing the Parks with fake identity (Fig. 51). The Kims hide under the coffee table to wait for the timing to sneak out. Then, the Kims successfully leave the mansion the storm and run back down the hill to where they truly live. After the Kims’ real identity is exposed, and they make their way back to the banjiha, there is a series of shots of them going down. Beginning with the inclined road outside the mansion, they work their way towards a desolate block where the long stairs are located, then into the endless tunnel that connects the hill to the populous residential area. Afterwards, they descend more stairs down into their neighborhood where every store on the road is flooded because of the rain. The rainwater is like shining a flashlight on cockroaches, suddenly exposing them without a means of escape. Their fancy clothing, which symbolized their ascent to the upper class is all soaked by the unearthing rain. Even their banjiha is destroyed in the storm.
Figure 51: A Collage of the Kims going down to the bunker

They go down in elevation and social position because their real identity is exposed.

Pictures retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
The movement down and back to their home exposes the social maneuvering enabled by the Kims’ parasitism. Besides representing the failure of their scheme to elevate their social identity, the real physical difference in elevation indicates the characters’ emotions. When the Kims think they will improve their lives, they keep going up and up; but, when their lies are exposed, everything goes downhill. Their hopes and comforts are gone, and they must acknowledge their past mistakes and their inability to move upward in a stratified society, in which the rules -- both physical and social -- are staged against them. (Fig. 52) In contrast, the Parks are safe in their home enjoying the cleanliness the rain brings as it washes all the dirt away and The next day, the Parks wake up like nothing had happened and start to plan a birthday party for Da Song (Fig. 53). But the change in elevation as the begin and move through the day indicates something else is at play. Starting from the parents’ bedroom on the second floor, where they get ready for the day, and they step down to the first floor to check on Da Song who camped in the yard the night before. The level of privacy also goes from high to low, along with the elevation changes. Later on, when Yeon Gyo is trying to get groceries for the birthday party, she first walks down to the basement, then gets into the car that drives down to go out from the neighborhood with “Mr. Kim”. After a long drive to the high-end grocery store, they finally park at the garage below the grocery store. One thing to call out here is that the Parks’ social position is still above everyone, but the further they are from their properties, the harder to notice their social position. Their habits from being an upperclassman are hidden in the crowds of people.
Figure 52:  A Collage of the Kims going back to their banjiha

They go down in elevation and social position because their real identity is exposed.

Pictures Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
Figure 53:  A Collage of the Parks leaving the mansion

They go down in elevation and their social position is hardly noticeable in lower places.

Pictures Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
The party near the end of the movie shows the change in social position for Geun Se (Fig. 54). When Ki Woo finally decides to achieve his ambitions by killing Geun Se in the bunker, he fails. Geun Se chases after Ki Woo up to the basement, and hits him with the viewing stone. Geun Se then climbs the steps to the kitchen, grabs a knife, and slowly walks out to the sunshine after four years of living underground. He is exposed to everyone in society and they notice him. Even though he is not viewed favorably and given respect, people put eyes on him, and he is not invisible anymore.

As just demonstrated in this short selection of vignettes, elevation changes -- the ups and downs in the lives of the characters -- represent shifts in the character’s social position and emotions attached to these changes. Consequently, these developments contributes strongly to the comprehensive story line of *Parasite*. These changes are also indicative of the brutal realities of classcism in South Korea.
Figure 54: A Collage of Geun Se leaving the bunker

As people are getting the cake ready for Da Song, Geun Se is approaching them to revenge.

Geun Se grabs the knife from the kitchen.

Geun Se slams the viewing stone to Ki Woo’s head.

Ki Woo running up to the basement.

Ki Woo fails to kill Geun Se.

He goes up in elevation and social position because he is finally exposed in society.

Pictures Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
Iconography

In *Parasite*, Director Bong Joon Ho also uses other objects in the houses, such as the viewing stone, to indicate the characters’ feeling and social position, as well as foreshadowing the ending of the movie. A viewing stone, or water stone symbolizes luck and longevity in East Asian culture, and it is called Suseok in Korea. It was first introduced from China to other countries during the Han dynasty in conjunction with Taoism. Viewing stone cannot be altered by human hands; they should be shaped naturally by wind and water.

In the movie, the viewing stone was a gift to Ki Woo from his friend Min Hyuk when they hatched the plot to make Ki Woo a tutor. And from there, and it symbolizes his aspiration to become members of the upper class in cultural elite, and thus it triggers the whole sequence of interactions between the Parks, the Kims, and the Ohs. Near the end of the movie, after the Kim’s flee from the Park mansion in the rainstorm, and the family finally gets some rest at the evacuation center for people who have nowhere to sleep due to the flood, Ki Woo is still holding onto the stone:

*Ki Woo is scared. He’s never seen his father like this. He hugs the rock more tightly.*

KI WOO: I’m sorry, Dad.

KI TAEK: For what?

KI WOO: Everything. I’m going to make it right.

KI TAEK: Stop talking nonsense.

(re: viewing stone) Why are you hugging that thing?

KI WOO: This?

*Ki Woo looks down at the stone.*

KI WOO: *(CONT’D)* It wants to be with me.

*Ki Taek looks at Ki-Woo. He’s acting strange.*

KI WOO: *(CONT’D)* It’s true. It keeps following me.

KI TAEK: Get some sleep.
KI WOO:  

(to himself) I knew it was a sign when Min-Hyuk gave it to me. A symbolic gift... Ki Woo stares blankly ahead. We have no idea what he’s thinking. (Fig. 55)

![Ki Woo holding onto the viewing stone](image)

It keeps following me.

Figure 55: Ki Woo holding onto the viewing stone

Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

For Ki Woo, the viewing stone weighs as a pressure to force him to go up in class. He is attracted to the opportunity already when he first sees the stone. So, he always grabs onto it: grabs onto his desire. The next day, he uses the stone to kill Geun Se, his desire has made him willing to do anything to be above others. But unfortunately, Geun Se grabs the stone with his hand and attacks him back. Ki Woo won’t let go of his desires, and they ended up destroying his life.
The big wire mesh painting in the living room of the Park mansion, titled *Maya* by its creator the artist Seung Mo Park is also symbolic. (Fig. 56). According to the production designer of *Parasite*, Lee Ha Jun, he chose this painting for the living room wall because it looks different and projects different feelings based on the distance the viewer is from it: “If you look at it up close, it looks like sharp mosquito screens, but from afar it looks like a photograph.” 71 Just like a living parasite, it may from a distance appear to be benign, but once its true nature is revealed, it is perceived as harmful. Moreover, the rock that anchors the middle of the painting, symbolizes desire: the desire everyone has to be strong and successful. As noted by Lee Ha Jun: “It felt like *Parasite* because *Maya* has scenery and the attributes of rock. Also, because the film has the nuances of a quiet well when you throw a rock into it and see the waves get bigger.” 72 In this peaceful painting, once the rock is thrown into the water, the ripples get bigger and bigger,
like the first lie of Ki Woo. Once he lies, he must cover his lie with more and more lies that ripple outward and impact the lives of everyone in the movie.

One thing to notice here is in comparison to paintings and calligraphy, viewing stones are not as popular as others in art collections. Karen Chernick, a reporter from Art Net, writes in an interview with Kyunghee Pyun, an art history professor at New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology specializing in the history of collecting:  

“Old money doesn’t collect rocks,” she adds. “It’s new people, who need to adapt to a new status but also want to exude this air of sophistication. It’s like an easy step towards sophistication.”

That is why viewing stones perfectly matches with the Kims, and the paintings suits the Parks. Because the Kims are the people who wants to enjoy being an upper class by lying. They use shortcut to get the benefits that they should not deserve as their social position. Unlike the Kims, the Parks are raised in the wealthy family, they belong to collecting paintings but not the viewing stones who are only for new money. Moreover, Pyun also notes that: “In the hierarchy of collectors, people who only collect rocks are at the bottom 30 percent,” Collecting viewing-stones is not the top choice for high-class art collectors. The viewing stones are like the Kims, low class in art collection and social hierarchy.
The peach is just a normal fruit for the Parks to eat. In East Asian culture, it symbolizes health and prosperity. However, when the Kim family and the Oh family fighting over the video evidence, Ki Jung takes the peaches from the Parks’ fridge, and rubs them all on Moon Gwang. Part of the reason why Moon Gwang dies is because of her severe allergy to peaches. According to Bong, “peaches are so pretty to look at, but you can attack someone with them”\(^7\) When the peaches are just fruits for the Parks, they are forbidden to Moon Gwang. They are something she can never touch. One thing to notice is when the Kims setting the trap to kick Moon Gwang out, Ki Jung did not buy the peach, she steals the peach (Fig. 57). No one in the movie except the Parks owns the peaches, which indicates the peaches are also a symbol of an upper-class power that the lower class wishes to obtain by paying whatever deadly price.
In the beginning of the movie, the audience can capture the message that there are always stink bugs in the banjiha, and Ki Taek hates it. He always flicks them off the table, and he leaves the window open to let fumigation gas from the street kill them. (Fig. 58). However, in the end, Ki Taek realizes that in reality, he and his family, and Moon Gwang and Geun Se, are just stink bugs to the Parks. And like any parasite, when the host dies, the parasite dies as well. And this is what happens when the host, Mr. Park dies. Geun Se the parasite most dependent on Mr. Park, and Ki Jung the most virulent parasite best able to adapt to his upper-class living environment, are exposed and they die as well.76
The socks drying by the window of the banjiha at the beginning of the movie, symbolizing the Kim family, and the dirt and smell attached to their living environment and bodies. (Fig. 59). What interesting about this scene of the socks is that it also occurs at the end of the movie, when Ki Woo imagines buying the mansion. In this scene, the camera pans slowly
from the window and the socks and down to Ki Woo reading the letter from his father (Fig. 60). It is a surefire kill shot that brings the audience back to reality that this young man, no matter what he tries, will never achieve this goal. 77 The end song of *Parasite*, titled *A Glass of Soju*, (originally titled *564 years*) describes how Ki Woo will work to get the mansion. The lyrics state it is going to take Ki Woo 564 years of hard work to have enough money to acquire the mansion, which means he will probably never get the mansion even he works his whole life and will forever stay a lowerclassman. Actor Choi Woo Shik, who plays Ki Woo in *Parasite*, performed the song. 78

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**Figure 61:** Burying Moon Gwang's body

Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

In addition to functioning as a beautiful façade and entrance to the mansion, the ideal landscape of the yard plays other symbolic roles in *Parasite*. After Moon Gwang dies, and Ki Taek begins living in the bunker, he secretly buries her body in the yard (Fig. 61). It symbolizes that even in what appears to be the ideal environment, parasites can still be found under and behind the beautiful façade. Parasites are not only the lowerclassmen, but they are also the
upperclassmen as well. As noted by Michel Serres in the book *The Parasite*, parasitism is a one-directional relationship of one (the parasite) leeching off on another (the host). Parasites rely on others to live, and they only take or receive and never give back. Using the movie *Parasite* as an example, the Kim family lies to work for the Parks; they get their salary and benefits from working for upperclassmen, but they never meet the requirement of working for upperclassmen. Geun Se has been living in the bunker of the mansion for years, but he never let the Parks to know he is there using their resources. Nonetheless, Dong Ik as a CEO, he is also just taking money away from customers, but not giving them the quality of service or products, they deserve. Everyone in the society is a parasite; egocentric and envious, always taking.

Director Bong Joon Ho also cleverly uses the mise-en-scene to physically displays the boundary between the upper class and lower class. In multiple scenes, the audience can see that there is always a separation of structure in between characters. For example, in Ki Woo’s interview with Yeon Gyo, the separation of line appears a few times. The connection line between the glasses (Fig. 62), the middle of the fridge doors (Fig. 63), and the standing lamps (Fig. 64). All of these creates a steady differentiation between the upper and lower classes. Director uses the architecture and production of the movie to point out that in daily life, the distinction in social classes is not only in people’s mind, but it also displays in the living environment.
Figure 62: The window between Ki Woo and Yeon Gyo
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

Figure 63: The fridge between Ki Woo and Yeon Gyo
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.

Figure 64: The lamp between Ki Woo and Yeon Gyo
Retrieved from *Parasite - Neon*. All rights reserved.
Closure and Conclusion

A movie is a form of art. It uses production design, cinematography, sound, original scores, visual effects, and film editing to present a story to the audience. Unlike normal life, in movies, the director emphasizes certain points to lead the audience to think in a specific way. Thus, movies are a way to summarize and display a narrative in just a few hours. Specifically, the production design of *Parasite* is designed to present intentional hints about the characters’ backgrounds. In an interview published by the online journal *Dezeen*, Bridget Cogley, the production designer of *Parasite* claims that building the mansion for a film is different than building a mansion for daily life:

> Architects and production designers approach their work differently,“ he said. "For me blocking and framing are prioritized; on the other hand, architects build spaces for people to actually live in and thus consider how the environment informs the way the inhabitants live in the space.

> I was concerned about being able to create a space that works well as a film set," he added. "Bong's script is always meticulous and precise and describes the movements of every actor within the scene. 82

Unlike architecture, a movie production designer does not build a house with the intention of residency; they focus on how to use the house to emphasize the message of the movie in a believable living environment. Thus, every object in all three living environments - the mansion, the banjiha, and the bunker - are replicated for that purpose.

In *Parasite*, director Bong Joon Ho creates a story of lower class families trying to move upward in social position by lying. The ultimate discovery is that moving up the class scale from a low position can never be achieved. In the movie, topography and elevation metaphorically represent the changes in the characters’ social position. How the characters move up and down, near and close, and in and out, is strategically filmed to give an unspoken message to the
audience about the different living environments and what they mean. The location and the
elevation within the journey to each of the houses also displays the difference in social classes of
the three families.

Similar to Parasite, a story based off of the actual topography of Seoul, other countries
display class differences in elevation as shown through their topography. In the United States, it
can be seen in the works of Craig Evan Barton, Walter Hood, Mellissa Erickson, Kofi Boone,
Fred Brown and Anne Whiston Spirn. Not only do these professionals address class in relation to
topography but their work also reveals how topography conveys racism in the landscape. Craig
Evan Barton, a university architect and professor at Brown University, dedicated his life to
researching the correlation between race and the built environment in order to identify and
represent black cultural landscapes. In his book, Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture
and Race, he explores the historic and contemporary impacts of racism on the landscape, thus,
analyzing the relationship between environmental stereotypes and reality. Using Selma, Alabama
as an example, he dissects the cause and effect of racial segregation on the topography of the
city:

By the early 20th century, the cultural and spatial boundaries inscribed by the city’s
design had evolved into two racially distinct landscapes, complete with separate housing,
street typologies, and schools. The private, and more importantly, public spaces created
in the twentieth century reinforced the nineteenth-century traditions of Jim Crow,
determining that separate facilities for each race was the preferred methods of exercising
control and authority over the city’s black population.83

Put simply, topography in the city of Selma worked as a physical barrier to determinate racial
classes. From this, the influence from the past is still present today as shown in the demographics
of Selma now. Based on the 2010 Census, the median household income is $27,030, nearly 80
percent of the population is Black, and there is a big wealth gap is Selma, Alabama.84 Studies
have shown that in 2016, the average upper income in Selma is $186,151, middle income is $78,624, and the lower income is $25,161.\textsuperscript{85} From this information, it is obvious that most people are in the range of lower income and the majority of this group is Black. Based on Barton’s research on the history of Selma in combination with the current information, residents in Selma are still living under the impact of the topography of racism, which also creates problems of social stratification.

In the book \textit{Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture and Race}, landscape architect Walter Hood and Mellissa Erickson co-write a chapter called \textit{Storing Memories in the Yard: Remaking Poplar Street, the Shifting Black Cultural Landscape}. In this chapter, they record their observations and discoveries of Black culture as seen in different streets located in Macon, Georgia, including Cotton Ave, Broadway St, and Poplar St. They describe the yard as an open field for gathering that can be used as a vehicle for understanding black culture. Multiple yards form a streetscape that archives black art as memories. “These histories and events, they note, create a different lens to observe the contemporary black street life of Poplar Street that is organized around public parking and a meager transit system.”\textsuperscript{86} The landscape is not only about its natural topography, its topography a social layer of interaction.

The United States has many cities that are affected topographically by history and social inequity. Knowing the impact terrain can have on social stratification, landscape architects and other professionals have also worked to alter unsatisfactory living situations caused by classist topography in order loosen the tension between races and classes. Kofi Boone, a landscape architect who teaches at North Carolina State University, sees historic demographics, topography, and developments as tools to draw a society’s attention into social issues and environmental justice. One example of a solution he mentions is The Forbes Fund, which works
towards bringing regional communities together and advancing the growth capacity as a whole. Fred Brown, the president and CEO of The Forbes Fund, dedicates his effort to work on three out of the seventeen goals of the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) for the helpless communities: no poverty, decent work and economic growth, and sustainable cities and communities.\(^8^7\)

Another example is the West Philadelphia Landscape Project (WPLP) by Anne Whiston Spirn. In Kofi Boone’s education session at the 2021 NJASLA conference, he notes the WPLP “…was one of the early adapters of GIS mapping, and really tracking that pattern of coincidence between declining homes and its presence, and its proximity to components of Millcreek.”\(^8^8\) The WPLP by Spirn also reveals the problem of classism in topography. West Philadelphia is located in the Millcreek watershed, and this problematic location has exacerbated economic decline. Since 1987, Spirn has sought to restore the nature, and rebuild the community in Millcreek watershed, by using design, planning, and education since 1987.\(^8^9\) Spirn states the following:

Mill Creek is a place of many puzzles. It is among the poorest neighborhoods in Philadelphia, yet it is home to many well-educated, middle-class residents, almost all African American. Boarded-up storefronts speak of failed ventures, but other institutions, like the numerous community gardens, flourish. Blocks of vacant land and wasted structures border blocks of well-tended houses and gardens. The amount of open land in Mill Creek is striking, especially in contrast to the dense fabric of small row houses. On some blocks, only one house or one small lot is vacant; in other areas, houses have sagging porches and crumbling foundations, and there are almost as many vacant lots as buildings. There are patterns to how and where abandonment occurs. Such patterns reveal the nature of Mill Creek and are key to its future.\(^9^0\)

In order to construct a sustainable system within the Mill Creek community, Spirn studied historical atlases to collect information on changes in topography over a 34-year period. After, Spirn created that database of geographical information that Kofi Boone mentioned. She then worked with local schools, such as Sulzberger Middle School, to turn the Millcreek watershed
into a learning laboratory, encouraging the students and faculties to learn in the watershed to foster positive changes in the community engagement within the neighborhood. By doing so, she has also introduced landscape literacy to the community while they study the natural and built features of Mill Creek:

Like verbal literacy, landscape literacy is a cultural practice that entails both understanding the world and transforming it. One difference between verbal literacy and landscape literacy, however, is that many professionals responsible for planning, designing, and building the city are not landscape literate.91

WPLP is not only a project that helped the local community to gain a relationship with the natural environment, but it was also a study for landscape architects to understand their responsibility as a person in society. It is an opportunity to let the public understand the importance of the relationship between history and topography, and how it links to the current surrounding community and the future ones.

A remarkable trait of these studies, like the movie Parasite, is their ability to focus a lens on the topography of everyday life in an innovative and creative way. Each of these examples, like the movie Parasite, also indicates that it is difficult to change the classist landscape that has been built up for centuries.
End Notes


10 Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental health disorder, common symptoms are having hard time to stay still, and easily distracted, etc. (Information from “Healthline”) In Parasite, Da Song often does things based on his own will, he cannot obey his parents’ orders. The only time he would stay calm is when he is drawing.


15 Banjinha, the semi-basement, a type of apartments in South Korea. Located under a building, half of the banjinha is underground, and the other half is usually built for windows with limited sunlight. It is typically cramped and dark, but financially affordable in big city. Around 350 thousand of South Korean households is living in banjinha.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Soju, a Korean alcoholic beverage.


Ibid.


Ibid.

The Brilliant Cinematography of Parasite, YouTube (YouTube, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZF6O93noHRC.


Ram-don, the Korean name is jjapaguri actually — a combination of two types of instant noodles. Since it was too difficult to translate for an English-speaking audience, the subtitle translator Darcy Paquet invented the word ram-don. It is a wide known and common consumed comfort food in South Korea. (Information from “The Signature Noodle Dish in ‘Parasite’ Tells a Complicated Class Story)
The Korean name for premium beef, similar to Japanese Wagyu—which is as much as twice the cost of beef imported from Australia or the U.S. (Information from “The Signature Noodle Dish in 'Parasite' Tells a Complicated Class Story"


Ibid.


Dong, or a neighborhood is a Korean administrative unit under the 25 Gu(s), the districts that make up Seoul City. (Information from “Administrative Regions”)


Ibid.

Ibid.


49 Ibid, 29.


54 Ibid.


58 Ibid.


60 Ibid.


62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.


67 Ibid.


74 Ibid.


77 Ibid.


80 Mise-en-scène, the scenery and stage properties of a play or a film production.
91 Grant Ginter and About Grant Ginter Grant, “Parasite - Crossing the Line,” Raindance, March 6, 2020, https://www.raindance.org/parasite-crossing-the-line/#:~:text=Parasite%20is%20the%20result%20of%20the%20lower%20class%20stench.


88 Ibid.


91 Ibid, 16.
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