

Research Article | Araştırma Makalesi

# Reconstruction of Social Structure: Wagons Between Death and Life: An Evaluation of the Film “Snowpiercer”

## Toplumsal Yapının Yeniden İnşası: Ölümle Yaşam Arasındaki Vagonlar: “Snowpiercer” Filmi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme



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### Abstract

Class distinction has been an ongoing phenomenon throughout human history and has become particularly evident with industrialization. Marx’s Theory of Classes explains how modes of production give rise to class distinction. For this reason, this study examines Marx’s concept of class distinction and how the social effects of class distinction and the roles of ruler and ruled are reflected in cinema. By analyzing the film “Snowpiercer” directed by South Korean director Bong Joon-ho, the impact of cinema on the social structure and its semantic structures are discussed. In the study, Marx’s Theory of Classes and Greimas’ Actantial Model were employed to analyze the film. “Snowpiercer” deals with class distinction as a fundamental theme. The film focuses on the impact of class distinctions on society, and the roles of ruler and ruled within class distinction. The semiotic analysis of the film is based on Greimas’ Actantial Model. This analysis aims to reveal the semantic structures of the movie and presents the findings.

**Keywords:** Semiotics, Actantial Model, Social Structure, Snowpiercer, Film Analysis.

### Öz

Sınıf ayrımı, insanlık tarihi boyunca süregelen bir olgu olup, özellikle endüstrileşmeyle birlikte belirginleşmiştir. Marx’ın sınıf ayrımı teorisi, üretim biçimlerinin sınıf ayrımını nasıl ortaya çıkardığını açıklamaktadır. Bu nedenle, çalışmada Marx’ın sınıf ayrımı kavramı ele alınmış ve sınıf ayrımının toplumsal etkileri ile yöneten-yönetilen rollerinin sinemaya nasıl yansdığı incelenmiştir. Güney Kore’li yönetmen Bong Joon-ho’nun “Snowpiercer” filmi incelenerek sinemanın toplum yapısına olan etkisi ve anlamsal yapıları ele alınmıştır. Çalışmada, Marx’ın sınıf ayrımı teorisi ve Greimas’ın eyleyenler modeli kullanılarak film analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir. “Snowpiercer” filmi, sınıf ayrımını temel bir tema olarak ele almaktadır. Filmde, sınıf farklarının toplum üzerindeki etkisi ve sınıf ayrımının yöneten ve yönetilen rollerine odaklanılmıştır. Filmin semiyotik analizi ise Greimas’ın eyleyenler modeline dayanmaktadır. Bu analiz, filmin anlamsal yapılarını açığa çıkarmayı hedeflemekte ve bulguları ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Göstergibilim, Eyleyenler Modeli, Toplumsal Yapı, Snowpiercer, Film Analizi.



## Introduction

Throughout history, people have been categorized based on the color of their skin, gender, belief structures, political views, status and many other factors. Groups of people who set themselves as the standard try to marginalize those who are different from that society. This case indicates that people experience the concept of stereotype (stereotyped individual) from psychology in an expressive way at the level of consciousness and that they make the individuals they characterize as different experience it as well. Those who do not act in a stereotypical manner in the social structure are still prejudiced and the class distinction of “not one of us” is maintained. Class distinctions are not only behavioral but also appear in our language as otherizing and hateful discourses against those who are not one of us. Although this social structure is often thought to be the result of struggles between upper and lower, this uniformization has continued to exist within the society itself.

From a sociological perspective, these social inequalities are most prevalent today in status groups. Social class distinctions are made based on income level: upper class, in which the privileged are in a superior position, middle class as the working class and poor lower class with no property. Social class stratifications came into existence with the more modern life after the industrial revolution, as the law recognized all individuals as equals. Although transitions between strata were made possible by this equality, upper and lower class distinctions have always manifested themselves. In human history, property has never been evenly and consistently distributed. Social discrimination has always existed in every society. In history, some societies have practiced discrimination in the form of stratification, such as the caste system or slavery, and some societies have discriminated people according to certain criteria as social classifications that still exist today.

In the light of all this information, cinema has a very wide social impact in the collective sense. In this sense, cinema both reflects society and is a form of art that has the power to mobilize society. Every structure of meaning in cinema leads individuals to think and question events at conscious and sub-conscious levels. In this respect, cinema is one of the means of mass communication with a very high power of interaction and transportation. Reflecting many realities from social life, cinema presents us class discrimination and stratification arising from social structures as small sections of life.

Although this mimetic role that cinema takes from the recording arts is considered as a set of fictional universes and fictional people, its connection with reality and how this connection is associated with signs constitute the starting point of this study.

In the light of studies on gender roles, the representation of women and men, the working class and hundreds of other topics that seek answers to the questions of how cinema deals with and reproduces or changes these concepts, this paper seeks to trace how the social structure is handled through the film “Snowpiercer” and with which indicators it is presented to us.

The study employs the Actantial Model developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas and characterized as an analytical tool used in linguistics and narratology. As is well known, this model is used to analyze the structural components of a narrative and to explain meaning. Considering that the aim is to find an answer to how “class distinction” is represented in cinema, a reading of social structure has been made through the basic

elements of the film narrative, namely the actants and the actions. Furthermore, this study analyzes the concept of social class through the film “Snowpiercer” by analyzing the relations between actants and actions, focusing on how the influence of an actant belonging to a social class on the performance of an action or on the action of another actant is conveyed. With the findings to be obtained, it seeks to understand the structure and meaning of these relationships and the narrative in detail.

### **The Social System: The Social Effects of Class Segregation and the Roles of the Ruler and the Ruled in Class Segregation**

According to the approaches of Aristotle and Plato that define society on a holistic basis, parts are organisms that have a necessary connection with the whole. The basic idea in Plato’s emphasis on the unity of the social organism is that the parts are subordinate to the whole. On the other hand, Aristotle understands society as a differentiated structure. According to him, the same elements both contribute to the whole and remain independent of it. It would not be wrong to say that Plato defines society as a unified system structured around social equality and division of labor. The social order, the product of rational laws, takes precedence over the interests of the whole over the interests of the individual parts. It is widely believed that Plato’s “ideal state” is a derivative of communism, considering that separate elements such as private property and the family function in accordance with the unity of a higher whole. According to Aristotle’s anti-atomistic concept of society, the social whole, which is a complex and differentiated structure, consists of groups, not individuals. Aristotle, who gives the opinion that the origin of society lies in the nature of man, states that humanity has social and political characteristics by nature and that it is a kind of destiny for them to live in communities and with others. In Aristotle’s definition of social structure, there are social groups segregated on the basis of function and social wealth, such as food producers, warriors, traders, rich people, poor people, middle class people. Aristotle classified social phenomena (regimes) by analyzing them as ideal types such as tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy (Swingewood, 1998, s. 22)

The social system, which describes a whole formed by interactions and organizations, corresponds to the classification of the aims of the actors rather than the life worlds or socio-cultural forms of life. The social system, which can be explained from the perspectives of the actors, becomes more open to interpretation. Therefore, the social system presents an objectively functional whole from the point of view of an observer or an observing system (Ceylan, 2011, s. 90)

According to Marx’s theory, society is divided into classes and because of the division, these classes conflict with each other. According to Weber, society is associated with classes, and conflicts are not meaningful. Bourdieu, on the other hand, accepts class difference as a “field of difference” without the rigidity of Marx’s theory. According to Marx, the transition between classes can only happen with a revolution. However, in Weber’s approach, the transition between classes is possible. On the other hand, Bourdieu thinks that the transition is not as easy as Weber claims. Permeability may exist between classes, but by habit, individuals reveal their origins when entering an upper class. However, after a few generations, they adapt to this class. Accordingly, while presenting a holistic approach, Marx looks at society from above, that is, he considers the society rather than the individual. Weber, on the other hand, follows the tendency to view society from the individual. Bourdieu, on the other hand, adopts an approach that sees the society as a whole and values the individual in that society. By adopting this approach, he creates a balance between the social structure and individual actions (Palabıyık, 2020, s. 6-7).

Therefore, these class theories of Marx, Weber and Bourdieu are still used in the social sciences to analyze societies. The class conflict underlined by Marx provides a roadmap for understanding social inequalities and conflicts. Weber's approach, on the other hand, deals with the concept of class in a multidimensional way. In particular, his approach emphasizes social mobility. Bourdieu, on the other hand, looks at class distinction from a cultural and symbolic perspective and tries to strike a balance between individual actions and social structure. In light of all this information, these theories provide a valuable framework for examining class structures and social inequalities.

From the past to the present, class segregation is encountered not only in the income level as a result of industrial development, but also in many issues such as skin color, physical or mental difference, religion and sectarian difference, and sexual orientation. People have set themselves as a standard and tried to oppress anyone who is not like them by marginalizing them. As a result of this, class segregation has occurred, intentionally or unintentionally.

Social stratification appears in different structures in every period. The reason for this difference is the culture of the societies, the geography they live in and their regimes. The variable characteristics of class segregation can also be seen in the Eastern and Western origins. The ongoing class segregation today appears as status stratification (İnce, 2017, s. 295). In order to understand social stratification, it is necessary to conduct a social structure analysis. Stratification occurs when human communities living in inequality are divided among each other. These divisions categorize people, leading to acts and discourses of class segregation (İnce, 2017, s. 296).

Inequality between people is a social problem and is often handled with the concepts of social inequality, rights and justice. In social structure studies, researchers analyze class stratification with many distinctive features such as bourgeoisie/proletariat, state/social class, economic interests/ethnic-religious characteristics (İnce, 2017, s. 301).

The secondary point we should mention is the state and social class segregation, which is the other side of the class segregation. It is necessary to evaluate the class phenomenon in terms of status-based class differences in the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, stratifications from the hegemony of the power, the concepts of equality and justice, the extent to which the social state can be and how much the power of the hierarchy should depend on justice.

It is a fact that there are different types of unequal economic segregation, social segregation and cultural class segregation in all societies. Although the relationship between the ruler and the ruled appears as an implicit role, status differences bring grouping together. If we start from the example of an employer and a worker, it is necessary to mention the existence of at least two layers. In this example, there is an implicit class segregation with the differentiation of income level. However, since employers and workers think that there is a democratic division of labor among themselves, there is no legal class segregation (Tolan, 1993, s. 258).

According to Marx, people living in all ages have invented the means of production by using nature, and these tools have developed over time. Developing means of production have polarized with the old ones and caused the emergence of new means of production. Marx advocates the emergence of a new class segregation with each newly invented production technique, and this situation also reflects Marx's historical materialism and

dialectic process. According to these processes, everything changes over time, and this is due to the production of man, that is, his tangible product. Class segregation in society is in constant conflict depending on the change and development of production techniques. According to Marx, the class segregation that existed before became more evident with industrialization and sharpened as lower and upper class (Doğan, 2019, s. 77).

According to Marx, the reason why workers come together in certain categories is the exploitation of their labor by the upper classes. This situation leads to class conflicts (İnce, 2017, s. 306). Marx's dialectical approach explains class conflicts with economic theory. The working class produces 'surplus value', according to Marx. As a result of the surplus value created by the worker obtaining a much lower amount of the cost he should earn from the product he produces, the working class is considered as a commodity in which labor power is used in a sense. The main reason the upper class seizes surplus value is that the lower class does not own property. The most distinctive feature of this class segregation is that one class has only labor power, while the other class has property (Marx, 2004, s. 272). As this opposing relationship continues, capitalism will show itself more and the gap between the two classes will grow larger and this will create uprisings (Engels & Marx, 2018, s. 22).

Karl Marx's philosophical views on class segregation, the development of class segregation from past to present, and the stratification that still exists today, albeit with implicit discourses, can be mentioned in many aspects. In the continuation of the study, the semiotic analysis of the film "Snowpiercer", which has been selected as a sample on this subject, will be made. It is aimed to obtain findings based on Greimas's model of actors.

### **Reconstructing Social Structure through Cinema**

Structured like a language, the film is based on a series of shots that come together temporally and spatially, as words turn into sentences. Like language, film is open to different uses and forms. Some films are similar to stories, while others are more close to the form of a novel or poem. That's why movies activate our senses, perceptions and reactions. Because this language is based on our memories, what we know, our experiences and our subconscious. Therefore, these films attract attention with their structures that displace time, fragment it or interrupt the apparent linear flow. For example, Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* or *Hiroshima in mon amour* films fundamentally question the audience's understanding of monumental and personal destruction. Because cinema creates a bridge between the audience and the limitless whole: we speak the language of cinema, we challenge our opponent with the lines in the movies and we remember in the language of the cinema. This is the result of the dynamism of cinema and its ability to reorganize time and movement. Therefore, it reveals many dimensions deeply social, historical, philosophical or political. So cinema is about everything and always about itself. (Villarejo, 2007, s. 10-27).

At this point, it would be useful to emphasize that with the "cinematic institution" as a theoretical concept, films are conceptualized, produced and consumed within a certain economic and social context. In this sense, the cinematic institution, as a part of the hegemonic culture of a society such as painting, literature or pop music, also determines what and who will be remembered longer. In other words, the production of cultural goods is always regulated according to the demands existing in the society. Many of these are deep, unconscious desires that shape every human habitus (Zanger, 2006, s. 14-16).

Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that based on Marx's ideas, a film reflects and interprets the class relations in the society from which it feeds, and sometimes even criticizes these structures. As a result, any economic system prioritizes self-sustaining, while those in power always present the social order as a desirable object through films that make us see the world in a certain way. Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni emphasize that every film is the product of an ideological system, in other words, every film is actually political. According to Comolli and Narboni, the role of the Marxist critic is to identify the contradictions between form and political content by revealing ideological blind spots in the film and to be involved in any political criticism (Butler, 2005, s. 50-52).

Yet today's audience assumes that filmmakers have completely structured the audiovisual experience. For them, movies are always just a series of visual effects. According to Lev Manovich, films are tools for "lying and acting". From this perspective, cinema has a tremendous connection with political and social history: films as machines of the visible are used to construct preconceived illusory representations or to create a direct and calculated audience response (Andrew, 2010, s. 13-15).

Ideological theory emphasizes that every communication and every meaning has socio-political dimensions and cannot be understood apart from social context. This ideological manipulation always supports the status quo, as power classes control not only the production and distribution of commodities, but also ideas and meanings. Economic systems are organized around the interests of power classes, and derivative ideological systems seek to support, naturalize and hide the interests of these classes (Fiske, 2003, s. 26).

The visual and auditory reading of life, the reinterpretation of music, sound, lighting, objects or persons and their transfer to the audience, the viewer's interpretation of these structures and the fact that the given artistic or social messages are in the act of producing meaning as a whole reveals the importance of cinema in terms of semiotics. Semiotics, or semiology, is based on the interpretation of imaginary messages by receivers in different ways through signs in many areas of art. These differences vary according to the cultural background of the receiver, the traditional codes of that culture, and the person's knowledge.

In addition to artistic productions, there are many productions that contain social structures and sociological phenomena in cinema. From this perspective, the most effective mass communication that reflects the class hierarchy in the world of everyday life is the cinema universe. A sample-centered study has been put forward with different perspectives by making use of both the functionality of cinema and semiotics together with visual elements.

It is almost an original claim that the text of the film contains cultural considerations. The basic principle of pre-1960 film studies was to pave the way for the intellectual penetration of ideas and worldviews through film texts. This biased view, which concerns many cinema researchers, actually states that films are not only neutral depictions of life, but also simple cultural implications of sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, gender, social and political structures. The analysis is based on the assumption that cultural acceptances centered and supported by dominant social groups are probably not helpful. According to Marxist theory, and in line with Marxist principles, these cultural acceptances are unconsciously consumed by the audience, so they need to be identified and reconsidered (Lynch, 2010, s. 260).

Through its narrative habits, the film has the functional power to legitimize the dominant institutions and certain values of the country or geography in which it is made, and to convey the ideology of political power. Elements contrary to capitalist ideologies, patriarchal understandings and conservative moral values are generally portrayed negatively in both Western and Turkish cinema. The working class has posed a threat to bourgeois capitalist societies in every period since the Industrial Revolution. The working class has been negatively represented in both science fiction and horror films and other film genres since the dawn of cinema. However, many films about the working class and working life, especially since the 1970s, have a desire to overcome the reflection of the working class that threatens the class system. In the films about dissatisfaction with working class life and the limitations of capitalism, it is implied that the only way to get rid of the manual labor and class exploitation shackles to which the individual is condemned is to use his superior talents, and that it is very difficult to get rid of this situation, but it is possible with extraordinary talents (Demir, 2011, s. 64-65).

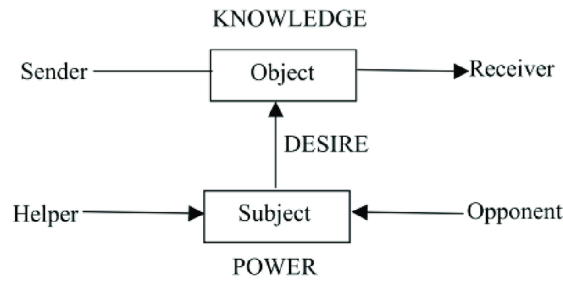
Working class films are contradictory in nature. *Rocky*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Flashdance*, and others have a desire to transcend the issue of working-class life that could threaten the class system. But capitalism's desire to transcend the limited life opportunities afforded to the most modest of people has often turned into forms that reinforce core values and justify class system ideologies. But while reflecting a desire to do one's part for the greater good is a way of reinforcing the ideal of class mobility, it also offers more radical potential. These desires, which also express dissatisfaction with the limits of working class life and capitalism, show how strong is the need to transcend the limits of capitalism and working class life. The legitimacy of structural inequality must be strengthened because it means that those who have succeeded in emerging from the working class are superior and individually more capable than their peers. It is further argued that a class system based on structural inequality will inevitably produce an intense material dissatisfaction that must somehow be satisfied if the capitalist system is to continue to function. Conservative films about the working class show individual victories, portray working class life as a pigsty that invites an escape to bourgeois utopias, and develop arguments against the unions. More liberal people question the myth of the ladder of success or treat groups of women and workers as individuals, not women or workers, in their struggle against oppression (Ryan & Kellner, 2010, s. 177).

## Method

In the Actantial Model, the conceptual roles that constitute the narrative are explained as "actants". Actants represent the basic functions and roles of a narrative. For example, in a novel or a movie, roles such as hero, antagonist, sidekick are included in this set of actants. On the other hand, this model explains not only actants but also actions. These actions correspond to actions performed by actants. For example, the hero's fight against the enemy or the sidekick's support for the hero fall into this category.

The semiotic method has been used in the analysis of the sample film (*Snowpiercer*), which is included within the boundaries of this study. According to Algirdas Julien Greimas's "actors model", although the narratives exist in many different forms, the events in the narrative develop around the same type-persons (actors: Fr. ac/anls). The characteristics of these actors are determined according to their relations in the narrative. This model of actors focuses directly around the Object, which the Subject (hero) aims to reach and is positioned as a communication unit between the Sender and the Receiver. The subject's

will, on the other hand, is shaped according to the roles (sanctions) to be played by “The Helper” and “The Opponent” in the narrative (Rifat, 2009, s. 73-74).



*Figure 1. The Actantial Model, developed by Greimas*

On the other hand, it is possible to analyze the paradigmatic structure of the narrative by means of this method. This paradigmatic structure represents the different actants and options for action that can be found in each narrative. Paradigmatic analysis also allows us to uncover the possible options of the narrative and the meaning of these options.

## Findings and Discussion

### Film Credits:

Director: Bong Joon-ho, Producer: Jeong Tae-sung, Steven Nam, Park Chan-wook, Lee Tae-hun, Screenwriter: Bong Joon-ho, Cast: Chris Evans, Song Kang-ho, Tilda Swinton, Jamie Bell, Octavia Spencer, Ewen Bremner, Ko Asung, John Hurt, Ed Harris, Music: Marco Beltrami, Genre: Science-fiction, Color: Colour-fiction, Release date: 2013, Duration: 126 minutes, Country: South Korea USA Czechia France, Language: English, Korean, Budget: USD 40 million

### Synopsis:

In 2013, an experiment to stop global warming goes wrong and the world returns to the ice age. The few people left behind from this disaster are forced to live on a train called the Snowpiercer, which is the last refuge of humanity, and revolves around the world with uninterrupted power. Wilford, who invents the train, owns it and is in the locomotive, conducts the train as he wishes with the order he establishes. While those in the front car of the train continue their lives with all the possibilities, those in the back car struggle to survive in very limited conditions and in misery.

In order to maintain order in the rear wagons, strict control is applied and the soldiers take precautions to prevent the passengers from passing into the front wagons. In addition, those in the front wagons force the rear wagon passengers to do work in order to meet their needs. Those in the back car plan to change the unbearable living conditions, so they rebel against their seventeen years of captivity and start resistance against Wilford and his soldiers in 2031 under the leadership of Curtis.





**Image 1.** Train called the Snowpiercer

The train with a thousand and one wagons, called the Snowpiercer, (Image 1) appears as a miniature of the natural human life in the world. An executive in the locomotive of the train, the upper-class people living in prosperity in the front, middle-level people and skilled workers living in the middle wagons, and the lower section living in a difficult situation in the back wagons remind the viewer that the train is a state. As in every state in the world, it is conveyed to the audience in a very sharp language that there is a class distinction in the train. It is evident from the first scenes of the film that the train has an ecosystem in which there are rulers and ruled ones. This ecosystem is designed to be self-sufficient for many years. In order to eliminate the problems experienced due to the breakdown of some parts of the train, it is necessary to use children who can fit into the engine parts from the tail section. This means that in order for the ecosystem to continue and everyone to live, the train needs all parts of it. Just as the back of the train follows the front, the people living in the back wagon also move with the direction of the people living in the front. This is a system critique that describes the form of government of each state. While the system always moves from the upper layer to the lower layer, it also moves from the front wagons to the rear wagons in the train.

### **Semiotic Analysis of the Film “Snowpiercer” within the Context of Social Class**

The lead role named Curtis (Image 2). A soldier who fulfills the orders of the dictator and takes on the task of keeping the order shows himself to the audience by standing upright among the oppressed people. The hero creates the impression of a rebellious, unyielding personality in the audience.



**Image 2.** Curtis (Snowpiercer)

The oppressed people love and trust Curtis. In this way, Curtis becomes a democratic pioneer in a dictatorial system. The director likens Curtis to revolutionaries who lived in history such as Che Guevara, Emmeline Pankhurst, Maximilien Robespierre. Just like these revolutionaries, Curtis is very uncomfortable with the oppression of his people and living in bad conditions and wants to take action on this issue. Getting help from the people he trusts, Curtis tries to gather information about the wagons that he and his people are forbidden to pass. The audience understands from these movements of Curtis

that he is a brave leader. The tail section, where Curtis also lives, is the most crowded and coldest section of the train. The people here face serious problems in terms of food and shelter. In addition, it consists of the people who are most persecuted and worked the most by the order keepers. They convey that they are the lowest layer of the hierarchy to the audience with their clothes, squalidity and living spaces.



*Image 3. Gilliam the spiritual leader*

The image of Gilliam, (Image 3) the spiritual leader of the tail section, has many details that will attract the attention of the viewer. The Wilford symbol behind Gilliam depicts it as the train's final point. Gilliam's attire is not like the people he lives in, but like the robe of a priest. To the left of Gilliam, there is a statue of Jesus Christ and the table in front of him resembles a lectern. At the same time, Gilliam's environment is wider and more private than the rest of the population. This area, which is closed with a curtain, gives the viewer the impression that it is a sacred area such as a mosque, church, temple and that Gilliam is a spiritual mentor. At the same time, the director has increased the sanctity of the area by keeping this area brighter than the other parts of the wagon. Curtis puts too much trust in Gilliam, the oldest on the wagon, and every word that comes out of Gilliam's mouth has a huge impact on Curtis' decisions. However, these words affect not only the decisions taken, but also the lives of all the people living in the wagon. Curtis consults Gilliam to interpret the messages from the front cars. Thanks to Gilliam's answers and directions, Curtis plans an uprising.



*Image 4. Scene from Proxy Mason*

In the scene where the Proxy Mason (Image 4), who lives in the front wagons of the train but is also connected to the rear wagons, is seen, the people are oppressed by the order guard and the proxy. The public is shown by the speech and dress of the proxy that the front wagons are the upper layer. The spectator understands that the agent normally wears a suit, but gets a fur coat on the way to the back car, so that the front cars are warmer. With his shooting technique, the director states to the audience that the proxy is superior to the public. The purpose of Proxy Mason's coming to this wagon is to reinforce the rules and functioning of the system. Proxy Mason is a tool to make the voice of the conductor heard to the public and he expresses the existence of this hierarchical system

every time there is a problem. The proxy describes the place of the ruler and the ruled with a shoe. In this way, their speeches are more effectively engraved in the minds of the people. The proxy makes this speech in a high-pitched voice and an egotistical manner. Mason is the largest and most visible representative of the directing part in the film. The director portrays Proxy Mason as the voice of the director, which we never saw until the end of the film.



*Image 5. Proxy Mason gives a speech*

In the image where Proxy Mason gives a speech by showing shoes to the public, (Image 5) middle and upper class people are seen. In this frame, it is clearly understood from their stance that middle class people also obey the ruling class. The shoes in the image represent the lower class people. The deputy also wants to remind the lower class people of their place by using this shoe.



*Image 6. Proxy Mason puts that shoe*

It is seen that while a rebel from the lower class is punished for throwing a shoe at an upper class ruler, (Image 6) the Proxy puts that shoe on the person's head. With this movement, the proxy emphasizes the sharp line between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie with the following words: "Do you wear shoes on your head? Of course not. Shoes are not for the head. Shoes are for feet. The hat is for the head. I am the hat, you are the shoes. I'm for the head, you for the feet." The presentation of the class segregation many times and in a harsh language makes the audience want to empathize with the public. Since the empathetic audience will put themselves in the place of the people, the words of the deputy will gain much more meaning.



*Image 7. Nam Goong from Snowpiercer*

The image features Nam Goong, (Image 7) who looks like a commoner but is a security expert. The people see the specialist as their only way to reach the front wagons. Curtis and the people learn the expert's name from notes coming from an obscure location. Nam Goong, who designs the doors of the train, takes on the role of guide. The director describes the doors as a wall separating the classes and the expert as the only key that could open these doors. The security expert in the film, Nam Goong, is a force that breaks the vicious circle, eliminating the class segregation between the ruling and the ruled strata. Thus, there will be no doors between the wagons and the train will become a single class. The mixing of the layers leads to the awareness of the lower layer by disrupting the order established by the conductor of the train.



*Image 8. The teacher of Snowpiercer*

The teacher, who is seen in the training section of the train, (Image 8) first leaves the impression of a reliable, pure and knowledgeable person in the audience. She conveys Wilford, who is the manager of the train, to the children he teaches, in a priestly manner like a god. She wants the children to unconditionally believe in the locomotive and Wilford, which she considers sacred. She manipulates the children she raises with the songs they sing and the videos they watch. In the video, Wilford's biography is told, and Wilford is at the same age as the children watching. This allows children to easily identify with Wilford. When children watch the videos, when they hear Wilford's name, they make the "W" sign, which is the first letter of the conductor, instead of the cross. The teacher presents the life before the train as very bad and far from knowledge. Since the children born on the train do not know the life before the train, they are brought up in line with the wishes of the conductor, and they are conditioned that the conductor will always do what is best for them. The fact that children have the potential to do anything for Wilford when they grow up is an important strategy for the conductor to always maintain his place. The film depicts the teacher as a media tool. Today, most media tools impose the ideas and ideals of the administration on the public. In this way, it is aimed that the new generation will become more dependent on the manager with the media content they are exposed to. The teacher in the film is in a one-way communication like today's media tools and helps the conductor of the train to achieve his goals.



*Image 9. Mr. Wilford*

The image shows director Wilford, (Image 9) who does not appear before the audience until the end of the film. He is the only person who is the conductor of the train and has the last word on the train. Wilford, who lives alone in the locomotive at the head of the train, can also be described as the locomotive of people. Thanks to Wilford's ability to manipulate people, people living on the train begin to see him as a god. The death of all people's loved ones in the ice age of the world causes people to hold grudges against their gods, and this situation facilitates Wilford's deification. Wilford is at the top and alone, as in the food chain or the triangular table of income distribution, lower class people, on the other hand, are the ones with the highest population density and the first ones to be sacrificed at the bottom. One of the biggest factors in the formation of class segregation is that one society has nothing while the other society has everything. Thus, inter-communal conflicts arise and the results of these conflicts harm both communities.

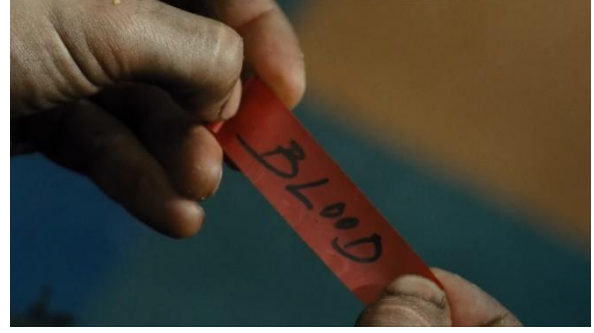


*Image 10. Logo of the train designed by Wilford.*

A logo (Image 10) with the initials of his name can be seen in many parts of the train designed by Wilford. With techniques such as different cinema shooting angles and product placement, it is engraved in the consciousness of the audience. At the end of the film, this symbol becomes even more meaningful when it is understood that Wilford is the one who conducts the train, the people on the train, the ecosystem itself, and even the free will of the people. Wilford, who is depicted as a god, is always informed about the tail that seems to be adrift. Gilliam, the spiritual leader of the tail section and Curtis' most trusted person, is actually Wilford's agent. Wilford realizes he is getting old and chooses Curtis to replace him. He devises a plan for this and sends mysterious messages to Curtis, who lives in the back wagons.



**Image 11.** *Mysterious message: Train*



**Image 12.** *Another mysterious message: Blood*

The mysterious messages (Image 11 and Image 12) that appear before the audience at some points in the film have a significant impact on Curtis' decisions. With the interpretations of the spiritual leader Gilliam, Curtis starts an uprising. The mysterious messages Wilford sends are described as revelations. Just as the revelations from God are conveyed to the public by the prophets, the messages from Wilford are conveyed to the public and Curtis by Gilliam's interpretation in the film.

Curtis is devastated when he learns where the messages comes from. He knows that he is not physically free, but he thinks that the decisions he makes are his own ideas. However, when he realizes that the ideas formed in his mind are actually formed by directions, he understands that his free will is not free, and his mind is in chains.



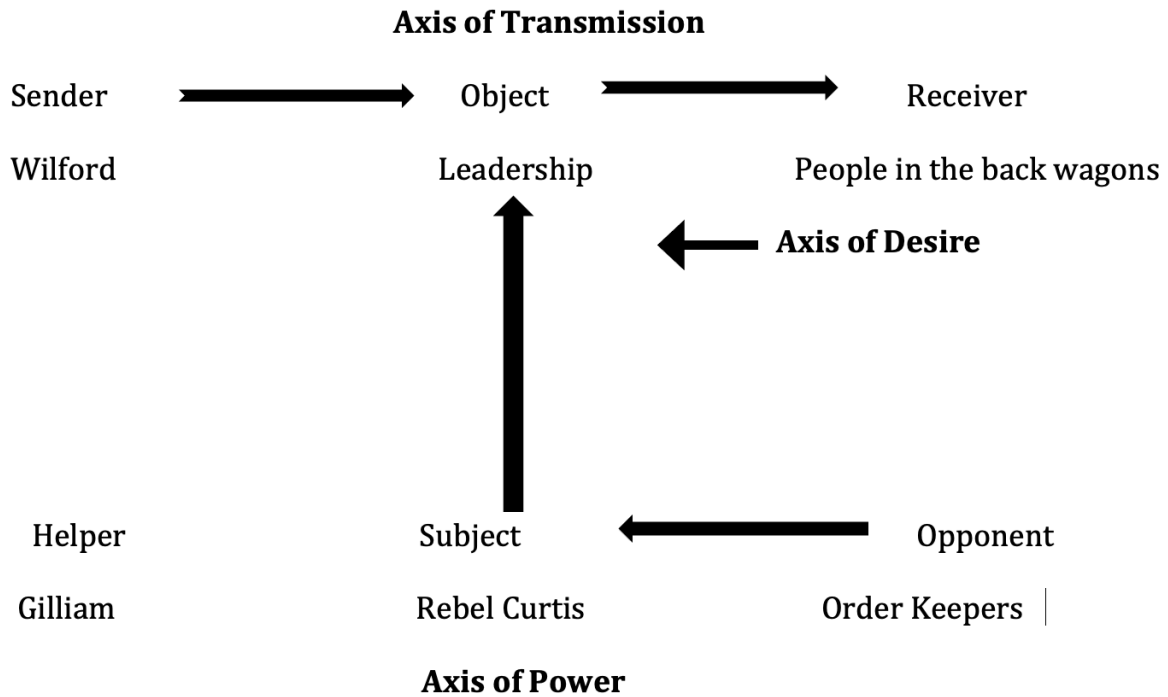
**Image 13.** *Last scene: Survivors*



**Image 14.** *Last scene: Polar bear*

The only survivors (Image 13) after the train's destruction are an Asian girl and a black boy born on the train. Of all humanity, only these two children remain, depicting Adam and Eve. After surviving the accident, the children unexpectedly see a creature outside. Children who think that there is no life outside of the train realize that what they have known until now is wrong. The creature in front of the children, ironically, is the polar bear (Image 14). The polar bear, which is the first creature to have been harmed by global warming, increased industrialization, the pollution of the environment, and the rapid depletion of natural resources in the life before the train, survives the ice age. The polar bear represents hope for the future of children and humanity. It is the greatest proof that life can exist outside the train.

In the light of the findings, it has been observed that the acting model of the film is formed as follows:



*Figure 2. The Actantial Model of Snowpiercer*

Axis of Desire (Subject-Object Opposition): The subject is the hero Curtis. The object is the front wagons Curtis wants to reach and a more just egalitarian life.

1. Axis of Transmission (Sender-Receiver Opposition): The sender is Wilford who conducts the train. The receiver is the people in the tail section of the train. Benefiting from Curtis who takes over the front wagons, the tail section will prosper.
2. Axis of Power (Helper-Opponent Opposition): Curtis' assistant is Gilliam. The opponents are the order keepers in the film. Curtis reaches the front wagons after a long battle with these order keepers.

The table of actants and actions that the film presents within the context of the "social class" concept is as follows:

**Table 1.** Actants and actions in Snowpiercer

Actants		Actions
Curtis:	He is the protagonist of the narrative. As a figure loved and trusted by the social class he represents, he is someone who rebels against the power and demands change.	Curtis' act of rebellion as a democratic pioneer against the oppression of the people.
Gilliam:	He is the spiritual leader of the tail section, i.e. the sender. He is also a guide archetype.	Gilliam's words and guidance influence Curtis' decisions and shape the lives of the public.
Wilford:	The train manager,	God-like figure, manipulative power
The Teacher:	Media tool,	Actions that convey Wilford's ideals and guide children

In the film, the train symbolizes a state. The findings show that the structure of this train, the class distinctions and the ecosystem within it, which constitute the subject of the film story, represent a microcosm of society. The most important indicators are the upper class living in prosperity in the front of the train, middle class people and skilled workers living in the middle cars, and the lower class living in hardship in the rear cars.

This train is thought to critically reflect the class distinctions of society and the way the state is governed. The rebellion against the class distinction led by Curtis, the challenge to Wilford, that is, to absolute autocracy, eliminated the class distinction and led to the unification of the train, thus breaking down the walls between the strata.

### Conclusion

By using its visual power, cinema enables the audience to interpret the signs in different ways in their consciousness. Semiotics manifests itself in human, social and cultural fields in order to analyze and interpret the meanings of images. Semiotics is a form of communication that the art of cinema establishes with the audience. This form of communication has started to be used in most of the mass media over time. The codes produced by mass media vary according to the geography or culture. In this respect, the director's placement of structures in the cinema and the process of making sense in the consciousness of the audience overlap with each other. From this point of view, it is very difficult to separate the narrative structure of cinema from the structure of society.

There are many semiotic symbols in *Snowpiercer*. Various concepts such as the segregation between the lower and upper classes, the distinctiveness of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the structure of the governing and the governed society, which are especially emphasized, are mentioned in the film. Religious terms such as the deification of the ruler and the sanctification of the locomotive are reflected in the subconscious codes.

The film "*Snowpiercer*", which was analyzed in the context of the question "how is social class distinction represented in cinema?", was observed to deal with concepts such as power struggle and the complexity of human nature. In this film, which depicts a dystopian world, the characters in different cars of the train are portrayed as *rulers* and *ruled* according to the "Actantial Model". Curtis was employed as a metaphor in the context of the subconscious of people defined as the ruled in the social class distinction, rebelling against injustices and eliminating the boundaries between strata. Wilford, as the manager of the train, represents absolute power and this power sharply defines the class distinction. In this context, the film offers the audience the opportunity to question social problems by showing how unjust the class distinction is.

In the movie *Snowpiercer*, many symbols can be mentioned semiotically. Various concepts such as the upper and lower class distinction, the bourgeoisie-proletariat distinctiveness, the ruler and ruled social structure are particularly emphasized. Religious terms such as the deification of the manager and the sacralization of the locomotive are reflected in the subconscious codes.

Based on Karl Marx's work on class distinction, the reason for class conflicts in *Snowpiercer* is the unequal and unjust life and the existence of an upper class that monopolizes property. The bourgeoisie in the front cars, the hat, as they call it, i.e. the brains of the train, retain all ownership, surplus value and dominance and exploit the labor power of the rear cars, and as a result, it ends with the revolution of the feet, as they call it, i.e. the proletarians. The forbidden doors between the cars of the train depict the caste system and accentuate the superior-inferior relationship. The class distinctions on the train express the miniaturized sociological problems of the world.

At the end of the film, it is seen that the class distinction does not disappear. While this emphasizes the complexity of human nature, the image of the polar bear as a sign of hope,



where children survive, represents the resilience and adaptability of nature. On the other hand, it is left unclear in the film whether the individual will learn from past mistakes or whether a society that can truly overcome the class divide will ever be established. In conclusion, "Snowpiercer" is a dystopian story that deals with themes such as media manipulation, power and resistance, offering viewers the opportunity to look at social problems with a critical eye and question the destructive effects of class distinction.

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# Toplumsal Yapının Yeniden İnşası: Ölümle Yaşam Arasındaki Vagonlar: “Snowpiercer” Filmi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme

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## Genişletilmiş Özet

Sinemanın ulaştığı yelpazenin büyüklüğünü düşündüğümüzde kitlesel anlamda çok geniş bir toplumsal etkiye sahiptir. Sinema bu anlamda hem toplumu yansıtır hem de toplumu harekete geçirecek etkilere sahip bir sanat dalıdır. Sinemadaki her anlam yapısı bireyleri bilinç ve bilinçaltı düzleminde düşünmeye, olayları sorgulamaya yönlendirmektedir. Bu yönüyle sinema etkileşim ve ulaşım gücü çok yüksek olan kitle iletişim araçlarından biridir. Toplumsal yaşamdan birçok gerçekliği yansıtan sinema, toplumsal yapılardan kaynaklanan sınıf ayrımcılığı ve tabakalaşmayı da hayatın ufak kesitleri gibi bizlere sunmaktadır. İnsanlık tarihinde mülkiyet hiçbir zaman eşit ve tutarlı bir şekilde dağılmamıştır. Toplumsal ayrımcılık her zaman ve her toplumda geçerli olmuştur. Tarihte kimi zaman bazı toplumlarda tabakalaşma şeklinde kast sistemi veya kölelik gibi ayrımcılıklar görülmüş, kimi zaman da günümüzde halen varlığını sürdüren toplumsal sınıflaşma olarak insanlar belirli kriterlere göre ayrıştırılmıştır.

İnsanlar tarih boyunca derilerinin rengine, cinsiyetine, inanç yapılarına, siyasi görüşlerine, statüsüne ve daha sayılamayacak birçok etken üzerine kategorize edilmiştir. Kendilerini bir standart olarak belirleyen insan grupları o toplumdan farklı olanı ötekileştirmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu durum psikolojideki stereotip (kalıp birey) kavramını insanların bilinç düzeyinde dışavurumcu bir şekilde yaşadıklarını ve farklı olarak nitelendirdikleri bireylere yaşattıklarını göstermektedir. Toplumsal yapıda basmakalıp hareket etmeyene yine önyargılı davranılarak “bizden olmayan” şeklinde sınıfsal ayrımı devam ettirmektedirler. Sınıfsal ayrımlar davranışsal olduğu kadar dilimizdeki ötekileştirici ve kendinden olmayana nefret söylemleri olarak da karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu toplumsal yapı çoğu zaman alt üst savaşlarından meydana geldiği düşünülse de toplumun kendi içinde de bu tek tipleşme varlığını sürdürmüştür.

Sosyolojik yapıdan baktığımızda bu sosyal eşitsizliklerin günümüzde en çok görüldüğü durumlar statü sınıflarıdır. Ayrıcalıklı kesimin üstün konumda olduğu üst sınıf, orta sınıf, işçi sınıfı ve hiçbir mülkiyete sahip olmayan yoksul alt sınıf olarak gelir düzeyine dayanan toplumsal sınıf ayrımları yapılmaktadır. Toplumsal sınıf tabakalaşmaları, sanayi devriminden sonra daha modern yaşamla birlikte hukukun tüm bireyleri eşit görmesiyle varlık bulmuştur. Tabakalar arası geçişler bu eşitlikle mümkün olmakla beraber üst ve alt sınıf ayrımları her daim kendini göstermiştir.

Göstergebilim ve sinema farklı bilim dalları olmalarına karşın, sinemadaki düz ve yan anlamların dizim ve dizgelerin çözümlenmeye başlanmasıyla birbirini tamamlayan kavramlar olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadırlar. Bu çalışmada örneklem olarak seçtiğimiz “Snowpiercer” adlı filmi, göstergebilimsel açıdan filmdeki anlamlarını yorumlamak amaçlanmıştır. Ancak çözümlenmeye geçmeden önce filmde tespit edilen sınıf ayrımının Karl Marx bakış açısıyla değerlendirmek konunun daha iyi anlaşılması açısından doğru olacaktır.

Bu çalışmada tarihsel süreçte ve günümüzde süregelen toplum yapısını sinema sanatına yansıtan Bong Joon-ho adlı Güney Kore’li yönetmenin ‘Snowpiercer’ filmi örneklem seçilerek onun sinemadaki anlamsal yapılarını Karl Marx’ın sınıf ayrımı ve Greimas’ın eyleyenler modeline göre göstergebilimsel olarak analiz etmek amaçlanmıştır. Sınıf ayrımı tarihin bütün dönemlerinde kendini hissettirmekle beraber insanoğlunun mülkiyet kavramını geliştirmesinden ve özellikle endüstrileşme ile birlikte işçi sınıfının ortaya çıkması ‘sınıf’ kavramını keskinleştirmiştir. Karl Marx’ın düşünce dünyasının temellerini oluşturan en önemli kavramlardan biri de sınıf ayrımıdır. Bu nedenle çalışmada önce, Marx’ın üretim biçimlerinin sınıf ayrımını nasıl ortaya koyduğu ele alınacak, sonra sınıf ayrımının toplumsal etkilerine ve yöneten-yönetilen rollerinin sınıf ayrımına yansımaları incelenecek son olarak filmin ‘eyleyenler modeli’ne göre analizi yapıp, bulgular ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Sinema görsel gücünü kullanarak izleyicinin bilincinde göstergeleri farklı anlamlarda yorumlamasını sağlamaktadır. Göstergebilim görüntülerin anlamlarını çözümlenmek ve yorumlamak adına beşeri, sosyal ve kültürel alanlarda kendini göstermektedir. Göstergebilim sinema sanatının alıcılara kurduğu bir iletişim biçimidir. Bu iletişim biçimi zamanla kitle iletişim araçlarının birçoğunda kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Kitle iletişim araçları ile üretilen bu kodlar ise yaşanan coğrafyaya veya kültüre göre değişim göstermektedir. Bu yönüyle yönetmenin sinemada yapıları yerleştirmesi ile izleyicinin bilincinde oluşan anlamlandırma süreci birbiriyle örtüşmektedir. Bu bakış açısından hareketle sinemanın anlatı yapısını, toplumun yapısından soyut hale getirmek oldukça güçtür. Snowpiercer filminde göstergesel olarak birçok sembolden söz edilebilmektedir. Özellikle vurgulanan alt üst sınıf ayrımı, burjuvazi-proletarya belirginliği, yöneten ve yönetilen toplum yapısı gibi çeşitli kavramlardan bahsedilmektedir. Yöneticinin ilahlaştırılması ve lokomotifin kutsallaştırılması gibi dini terimler bilinçaltı kodlarına yansıtılmıştır. Snowpiercer filmi yapısı itibarı ile post-apokaliptik bir filmidir. Küresel ısınmanın başlaması ve bir felaket sonucu buzul çağına girilmesiyle kıyamet sonrası yaşam başlamıştır. Filmde yaşanan gelişmeler de bir felaket ile kıyamet sonrası insanlığın yok oluşunu ve akabindeki yaşama tutunma mücadelelerini distopik bir anlatımla betimlemektedir. Karl Marx’ın sınıf ayrımına yönelik çalışmalarından hareket edersek, Snowpiercer filminde sınıf çatışmalarının yaşanmasının nedeni eşit ve adaletli olmayan bir yaşam ve mülkiyeti tek elde tutan bir üst sınıfın bulunmasıdır. Ön vagonlardaki burjuvaziler kendi deyimleriyle şapka yani trenin beyni olarak tüm mülkiyeti, artık değeri ve hakimiyeti elinde bulundurup arka vagonların emek gücünü sömürmesi ve bunun sonucunda yine kendi deyimleriyle ayakların yani proleterlerin devrimi ile son bulur. Trenin lokomotifleri arasındaki geçilmesi yasaklanan kapılar kast sistemini betimlemekte ve alt-üst ilişkisini keskinleştirmektedir. Trende yaşanan sınıf ayrımları dünyanın minyatürleşmiş sosyolojik sorunlarını dile getirmektedir.

Kar küreyici tren içinde yaşadığımız dünyanın konsantre edilmiş halidir. Dünya üzerindeki toplumların farklı şekillerdeki sınıf ayrımları ve ötekileştirilmeleri ya da insanların bir kalıba bir sınıfa yerleştirilmeleri, sistemin kısır döngüsü olarak devam etmekte Snowpiercer da bize bu konuda farkındalık yaratmak, algılarımızı değiştirmek için bir fırsat sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Göstergebilim, Eyleyenler Modeli, Toplumsal Yapı, Snowpiercer, Film Analizi.

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