

Ahlak Nerede Yaşar: “Adventure Time”da İyilik ve Kötülük Mekânları*

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Öz

Bu makale, çocuklara yönelik animasyon dizisi Adventure Time’ın mekânsal ve ahlaki semiyotiğini inceleyerek, çizgi filmlerdeki görsel çevrelerin etik değerleri nasıl ilettiğini Yuri Lotman’ın semiyosfer kuramı üzerinden analiz eder. Çalışma, animasyon anlatılarında mekânsal tasarımın yalnızca dekoratif değil, aynı zamanda ahlaki ikilikleri görsel olarak kodlayan anlatımsal bir araç olduğunu savunur. Lotman’ın mekânsal kategorileri olan topografik, topolojik ve semantik alanlar aracılığıyla, Adventure Time’daki Şeker Krallığı, Buz Krallığı ve Geceküresi gibi diyarların nasıl birer metaforik alan olarak ahlaki düzeni, belirsizliği ve kaosu temsil ettiğini araştırır. Bu sembolik coğrafyalar, daha derin kültürel yapıları yansıtarak izleyicinin iyi ve kötüye dair algısını şekillendirir. Ayrıca, çalışma geleneksel animasyonlarda sıklıkla görülen “güzelliğin iyilikle, çirkinliğin kötülükle eşleşmesi” gibi estetik stereotiplerin çocuk izleyiciler üzerinde yaratabileceği etik sonuçları eleştirir. Bununla birlikte, Adventure Time zaman zaman bu kalıpları tersyüz ederek ahlaki belirsizliklere yer açar. Lotman’ın mekânsal semiyotiğiyle yapılan bu analiz, animasyonlarda mekânın eğitsel gücünü vurgular ve görsel anlatıların eleştirel bir gözle okunmasını teşvik eder. Bulgular, animasyonlardaki mekânsal estetiğin kültürel kodlarla derinden ilişkili olduğunu ve bu kodların etik mesajlarının medya çalışmaları açısından dikkatle incelenmesi gerektiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çizgifilm, Mimarlık, Semiyosfer, Adventure Time, Ahlak.

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Where the Morality Lives: Good and Evil Spaces in “Adventure Time”



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Abstract

This paper explores the spatial and moral semiotics of the animated series Adventure Time, drawing on Yuri Lotman’s semiosphere theory to analyze how visual environments in children’s media communicate ethical values. The study argues that in animated narratives, spatial design is not merely decorative but functions as a narrative device that visually encodes moral dichotomies. Through the lens of Lotman’s topographic, topological, and semantic spatial categories, the paper investigates how Adventure Time constructs realms such as the Candy Kingdom, Ice Kingdom, and Nightosphere as metaphorical spaces symbolizing moral order, ambiguity, and chaos. These symbolic geographies reflect deeper cultural structures and shape the viewer’s perception of good and evil. Furthermore, the research critiques how conventional animation often reinforces aesthetic stereotypes—such as beauty aligning with goodness and ugliness with evil—posing potential ethical implications for young audiences. However, Adventure Time occasionally subverts these norms, offering spaces where moral ambiguity is acknowledged. By applying Lotman’s spatial semiotics, this study highlights the pedagogical power of animated space and encourages a critical reading of visual storytelling in children’s media. The findings suggest that animated spatial aesthetics are deeply tied to cultural codes, and their ethical messaging warrants closer scrutiny in media studies.

Keywords: Cartoon, Architecture, Semiosphere, Adventure Time, Morality.

Introduction

This study explores how the spatial and character designs in the animated television series *Adventure Time* (Cartoon Network, 2010) visually and narratively construct the concepts of “good” and “evil.” While the binary opposition between good and evil is often conveyed through characters in animated narratives, this paper proposes that space, as much as character, plays a critical role in shaping moral perception. As Webb (2024) argues, “cartoons typically strive towards a communal understanding of social harmony through navigation of evil disruptions while still not succumbing to a simplistic binary of good versus evil.” In this sense, *Adventure Time* offers a compelling case study in which moral ambiguity, hybrid characters, and layered environments encourage a more nuanced reading of traditional dichotomies.

Cartoons have had a long history of being moral landscapes, presenting exciting images of good and evil. As a public pedagogy, animation shows young people about cultural values and social norms. The stories tend to use aesthetic stereotypes to teach about morality, where the good characters are positively beautiful and lively, and evil characters are ugly and dark. This tradition, particularly perpetuated by Disney movies, threatens to educate children to judge on the basis of surface characteristics more than context or action.

Adventure Time stands out by challenging this rigid binary. The series combines childlike fantasy with deep philosophical themes, moral ambiguity, and experimental worldbuilding. Set in the post-apocalyptic Land of Ooo, the show creates a backdrop that allows for new social and spatial structures to symbolize moral ideologies. This speculative setting enables the show to appeal to a broad and diverse audience, from children to a dedicated adult fanbase, through a dual-layered storytelling approach where slapstick humor and complex philosophical motifs coexist. The show’s unique visual style, which uses a “soft, childlike palette” and simplified forms, also serves a semiotic purpose, with color codes and geometry signaling mood, power dynamics, and moral alignment. By examining how spatial environments in *Adventure Time* either support or subvert the moral identities of characters, this study aims to reveal how the series communicates ethical distinctions. The findings of this research will contribute to the broader field of media studies by highlighting the rich semiotic potential of animated media, especially in relation to ethics and worldbuilding.

1. Methodology

This study employs Yuri Lotman’s theory of space, which is part of his broader concept of the semiosphere, as a primary framework for analyzing how space is constructed and what it signifies in fictional narratives. While Lotman’s theory was originally developed for literary analysis, this paper applies it to the visual storytelling of *Adventure Time*, treating selected characters and environments as textual elements that encode cultural values and moral positions. Within this framework, animated space is more than just a backdrop; it is a semiotic entity that interacts with characters and helps to construct moral dichotomies. This study utilizes Lotman’s three interrelated levels of spatial analysis to examine the

show's realms:

Topographic Space: This refers to the physical elements that define a location, such as architecture, landscape, and objects. In *Adventure Time*, these elements often reflect the social and moral nature of the inhabitants, as seen in the candy-based architecture of the Candy Kingdom or the volcanic landscape of the Fire Kingdom.

Topological Space: This dimension focuses on spatial relationships like size, scale, and proximity, which shape movement and power within the narrative. The study analyzes how features like protective walls and central castle towers in “good” kingdoms, or enclosed and fragmented spaces in “evil” ones, contribute to a sense of safety or oppression.

Semantic Space: This final layer encodes abstract meanings and values, such as “good,” “evil,” and “safe”. The analysis demonstrates how these moral values are fused with the physical spaces, making geography a form of ethics. The study investigates how realms like the Candy Kingdom represent order and innocence, while the Nightosphere symbolizes chaos and moral ambiguity.

Table 1: A Sample Framework for Analyzing Spaces in *Adventure Time*

Kingdom/Zone	Topographic Features	Topological Features	Semantic Values
Candy Kingdom	Sweet-based architecture, colorful	Central, accessible, safe	Good, pure, innocent

By applying this model, the research aims to show how *Adventure Time* uses its animated environments as ideological actors that make moral binaries visible and, in some cases, subvert them. The methodology allows for a systematic analysis of how the show's spatial design participates in or resists conventional cultural patterns, ultimately revealing how the series communicates ethical distinctions through both form and content.

2. Representation of Morality in Animations

Cartoons and animated cinema have a history of approximately one hundred years and have developed rapidly by experimenting with various methods and techniques over time (Gökçeaslan, 2008). Although they initially developed alongside cinema, animation soon diverged with its distinct capacity to portray stories through exaggerated expressions, elastic forms, and surreal spaces. As a unique medium of visual narrative, cartoons often serve as moral landscapes, offering simplified yet compelling depictions of good and evil. These representations are not merely artistic choices, but cultural products that shape the audience's moral compass. Luhmann suggests that animation films act as tools that structure social reality (Luhmann, 2000), while Luckmann describes them as media that fictionalize and amplify everyday reality (Luckmann, 1986). They also emerge as a new form of moral communication where good and evil are central and the boundaries between them are distinctly drawn (Nieto, 2014).

Social transformation during time emerges as a significant variable in this regard. This process moves beyond individual status changes to alter institutional relationships, norms, and values. Sociological theories provide a lens for understanding how moral frameworks contribute to this change. Structural Functionalism, for instance, views law and morality as integral to maintaining social cohesion and order, while Conflict Theory sees these same frameworks as tools used by dominant groups to maintain power (Morrow, 1978). The causal link between ethics and social change is found in the mechanism of moral reasoning. Moral reasoning allows individuals and groups to identify “unfair or unequal treatment of others” and to articulate why it is unacceptable. This cognitive and developmental process enables change on both an individual and a societal timescale. Historical examples, such as Mary Beth Tinker’s persistent advocacy for free speech in the 1960s, demonstrate how moral arguments about fairness and justice can challenge the status quo and effect significant societal landmarks. This process is one of the necessary conditions for moving from conditions of inequality to equality (Killen, Dahl, 2021). Animation is uniquely suited as a vehicle for moral discourse and social commentary. Its distinctive properties allow it to simplify complex information, making it accessible to diverse audiences, and to evoke emotions and empathy in a highly engaging manner. Research confirms that audiences can feel “equal levels of empathy for computer-animated characters and real human actors,” a finding that attests to the medium’s potent emotional and cognitive impact. This capacity for emotional connection, combined with a highly organized presentation, can facilitate a viewer’s “conceptual understanding” and influence their cognitive response, thereby enhancing learning and the adoption of new perspectives. (Praveen, Srinivasan, 2022).

Scholars also emphasize that animation functions as a form of public pedagogy—transmitting cultural values and social norms to young audiences (Giroux, 2004; Webb, 2024). These narratives often present moral binaries in visually coded terms, where good characters are cute, beautiful, and vibrant, and evil ones are dark, distorted, or grotesque. Classic American animation, particularly early Disney films, serves as a prime example of a dualistic moral framework, where a clear “good vs. evil” narrative was used to reinforce hegemonic gender roles and social norms (Vaidya, Osman, 2024). These films often portrayed women as passive homemakers whose happiness depended on marriage and men as aggressive and unemotional (Clark et al., 2024; Taşkın, İnanç, 2024). This approach functioned as a form of moral instruction, aiming to teach conformity to a predetermined social script (Vaidya, Osman, 2024; Gonzale et.al, 2020). While modern Disney and Pixar films have evolved to include more nuanced narratives, featuring protagonists who face complex moral dilemmas, they still deliver mixed gendered messages by often relying on traditional structures and the resolution of conflict through romance (Clark et al., 2024; Taşkın, İnanç, 2024). During time and social changes, animated film shapes collective consciousness by providing a space to understand, reflect on, and ultimately challenge or change the moral foundations of society.

Recent studies have explored how these depictions influence children’s social perceptions. Fouts et al. (2006) argue that children’s cartoons and Disney films frequently “model the demonization of bad behavior” through characters labeled as monsters, demons, or wicked beings, and that this repetition can teach children to

associate certain physical traits or behaviors with ‘evil’ as a moral category. Such mechanisms reflect broader tendencies in visual storytelling to simplify ethical dilemmas and encourage binary thinking, especially in content targeting young viewers.

Given that television remains a primary medium of cultural communication for children, the implications of these representations are far-reaching. In Turkey, studies show that children across socio-economic strata consume large amounts of televised content, including cartoons, and that this exposure plays a significant role in shaping not only their entertainment preferences but also their perceptions of morality, identity, and community (Kabadayı, 2006). Especially during early childhood, when moral understanding is still forming, children learn to associate good with certain appearances and behaviors, and evil with others—often without questioning the underlying reasoning. As Şentürk (2011) notes, this process is not limited to plot or dialogue but extends into the very aesthetic codes that define animated worlds.

Within this visual culture, physical appearance becomes a powerful carrier of ethical judgment. The moral codes embedded in the narratives are thus reinforced by what is seen as much as by what is said. The long-standing pattern, first systematized in the “what is beautiful is good” hypothesis by Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972), finds repeated use in children’s media. Beautiful characters are not only admired, but trusted; their appearance serves as immediate moral shorthand. Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, and Longo (1991) confirm that children’s books and animated series consistently present heroic or virtuous characters as conventionally attractive, while depicting villains as ugly, asymmetrical, or physically menacing. This aesthetic polarization is further exemplified in canonical examples like Disney’s Snow White or Cinderella, where innocence and beauty are visually interlinked, while wickedness is exaggerated through visual cues such as sharp features, muted color palettes, and grotesque movements (Myers, 2002).

However, this visual stereotyping also carries pedagogical risks. By repeatedly linking morality to appearance, such representations risk naturalizing harmful biases. Children may learn to judge others’ intentions based on superficial traits rather than context or behavior. The moral judgment becomes tied to visual familiarity, and “evil” becomes less a question of action than of image. This can desensitize young viewers to more complex ethical situations and prevent them from recognizing moral nuance in real-life interactions.

At the same time, newer cartoons and studios have begun to challenge this rigid binary, introducing characters and worlds where moral ambiguity is acknowledged. Still, the legacy of simplified visual moral coding persists in much of mainstream animation. Understanding this legacy is crucial for interpreting how spatial and aesthetic design in animated series—such as *Adventure Time*—participates in or resists these cultural patterns. Before turning to Lotman’s theory of narrative space and its applicability to visual media, it is essential to understand how these representations function as foundational moral training grounds, where good and evil are not merely told, but shown, repeated, and internalized.

3. Lotman's Space Theory in Narratives

Yuri Lotman's research considers culture as a sign system or a semiotic mechanism and posits that culture can be understood and described through a fundamental set of codes and universal principles (Lotman, 1975). At the core of this theoretical apparatus is Lotman's profound engagement with the concept of space. Lotman's theory of space is not merely a descriptive instrument but a foundational metalanguage for interpreting the semiotic mechanisms that organize culture and manifest within both textual and visual narratives. This perspective is rooted in Lotman's belief that "the very construction of a world order is invariably conceived on the basis of some spatial structure which organizes all its other levels" (Lotman, 1975). Lotman's work is recognized for anticipating the "spatial turn" in cultural studies (Remm, 2022). While many scholars of this movement have concentrated on the analysis of "real places and spaces" like cities and landscapes, Lotman's work provided the foundational theoretical framework by conceptualizing space itself as a semiotic model (Lotman, 1977). His abstract, non-geographic approach laid the groundwork for others to apply spatial analysis to both physical and cultural environments (Remm, 2022).

In animated narratives, space functions as more than a backdrop; it is a semiotic entity that interacts with characters and contributes to the development of moral dichotomies. Unlike live-action cinema, which often reproduces real-world environments, animated series like *Adventure Time* construct spaces from scratch, providing designers with an open field to embed abstract values, symbolic binaries, and cultural codes into fictional landscapes. In literary texts, space descriptions not only provide information about the structure, location, and appearance of the place but also reflect the culture of the location and the social status of its inhabitants (Zengin, 2013). The space determines the worldview of the people in the narrative, giving concreteness to the fiction. Thus, space not only frames the movement of characters but also influences the theme and the execution of the narrative (Daemrich & Horst, 1995).

Yuri Lotman's theory of space, developed within his broader concept of the semiosphere, provides a powerful lens for interpreting how space is constructed and what it signifies in fictional narratives. As Lotman argues:

"Notions of moral value and of locality fuse together: places have a moral significance and morals have a localized significance, geography becomes a kind of ethics" (Lotman, 1990)

Building on this understanding, spatial analysis in *Adventure Time* reveals how moral positions are often rendered visible through architectural symbolism, environmental design, and narrative boundaries. The Ice Kingdom, Candy Kingdom, and Nightsphere are not just realms—they are value-laden spaces that visualize ideological contrasts. The Candy Kingdom, with its saturated colors, geometric harmony, and friendliness, exemplifies Lotman's "center of the semiosphere," often perceived as the normative space. The Nightsphere, in contrast, represents the chaotic periphery, housing ambiguous and dangerous moral possibilities.

Scholars emphasize that space in such narratives doesn't merely support the plot but actively shapes how moral lessons are received. As Nöth (2015) describes:

“A semiosphere may be a realm of imagination... where spatial dichotomies such as center/periphery, high/low, or near/far encode values like good/bad or mortal/immortal”.

Moreover, the relationship between character and space is not fixed. As Lotman notes, characters may traverse or even belong to multiple semantic zones simultaneously:

“Many heroes can belong to many spaces, and at the same time, can belong to incompatible space segments” (Lutman, 1993).

This notion is crucial in interpreting characters such as Marceline, who inhabit morally complex spatial zones that are neither entirely good nor evil. These ambiguous territories resist binary classifications and create fertile ground for narrative transformation. In the context of *Adventure Time*, we aim to employ Lotman's tripartite model to analyze various kingdoms or zones, mapping their topographic, topological, and semantic features. The aim is to demonstrate how these animated spaces not only reflect but also produce moral knowledge.

This framework, which will be developed in more detail in the case study section, not only systematizes the analysis but also allows for comparative readings of how spatial form intersects with moral meaning. In sum, Lotman's theory allows us to move beyond reading “space” as setting, reframing it instead as an ideological actor. The design of spatial zones in *Adventure Time* reveals how moral binaries are made visible, challenged, and at times subverted through the built environments of an animated world.

4. About *Adventure Time*

Premiering in 2010 on Cartoon Network and created by Pendleton Ward, *Adventure Time* is a groundbreaking animated series that combines childlike fantasy with deep philosophical themes, moral ambiguity, and visually experimental worldbuilding. Although ostensibly a children's cartoon, its narrative complexity, philosophical undercurrents, and visual richness make it equally appealing to older audiences. Over ten seasons and more than 280 episodes, it has carved out a distinctive space within the animated television canon. Set in the post-apocalyptic “Land of Ooo,” *Adventure Time* follows the adventures of Finn, one of the few remaining humans, and his magical dog companion Jake. The show unfolds thousands of years after the Great Mushroom War, which decimated Earth and led to the emergence of bizarre, hybrid species, anthropomorphic kingdoms, and magical landscapes. This speculative backdrop is crucial: it allows the show to design entirely new forms of social and spatial structures, which function as symbolic representations of moral ideologies.

Adventure Time, created by the American animator Pendleton Ward, premiered on Cartoon Network in 2010 and became one of the channel's most successful and

critically acclaimed programs. The show is produced by Frederator Studios and Cartoon Network Studios and was originally pitched as a short on the Nickelodeon program *Random! Cartoons* (Ewalt, 2011). However, it was not immediately picked up by networks. Ward noted that the show's surrealism and emotional depth made it "a hard idea to sell" at first (as cited in Jane, 2015). Spanning over ten seasons and totaling 283 episodes, *Adventure Time* garnered a broad and diverse audience, drawing between two to three million viewers weekly during its peak (Feeney, 2013). While it was officially rated TV-PG due to moderate violence and thematic content, the show attracted not only children but also a dedicated adult fanbase worldwide (Clark, 2012). Its widespread popularity is attributed to its dual-layered storytelling—where slapstick humor entertains younger viewers and complex philosophical, emotional, and narrative motifs resonate with older audiences.

Set in the post-apocalyptic "Land of Ooo," the show explores themes of morality, identity, memory, and transformation through vibrant worldbuilding and character-driven stories. The setting itself, a thousand years after the devastating Mushroom War, provides a surreal yet emotionally compelling backdrop that allows creators to visualize new forms of community, power, and spatial identity. Each location—from the Candy Kingdom to the Nightosphere—is narratively charged, functioning not merely as a background but as a symbolic extension of the moral and emotional logic of its inhabitants. In *Adventure Time*, each kingdom or space is more than a setting—it acts as a narrative device reflecting moral, emotional, and symbolic functions. The Candy Kingdom represents innocence and order; the Ice Kingdom, loneliness and tragic memory; and the Nightosphere, chaos and moral ambiguity. These regions are not just physical zones but visual manifestations of morality itself. As Jane (2014) notes, the world of Ooo is populated by "a stunning range of mutated life forms, monsters, magical beings, and relentlessly odd princesses," creating a surreal but internally consistent world.

One of the series' most notable achievements is its unique visual style. The drawing technique relies on 2D traditional animation, but integrates a soft, childlike palette and simplified forms that recall storybook illustrations. Backgrounds are minimal yet rich in symbolic geometry. Forests, castles, and underground zones are not hyper-detailed but are defined by shape language and color codes that signal mood, power dynamics, and moral alignment. Jane (2014) emphasizes that the show embraces "grotesque metamorphoses" over aesthetic beautification, showcasing visual transformation as a narrative mechanism rather than mere spectacle. Moreover, visual metaphors are not arbitrary. The use of saturated color in Candy Kingdom suggests safety and idealism, while the grays and blues of Ice Kingdom connote isolation and melancholy. This deliberate color coding acts as a semiotic device for communicating moral and emotional states without overt exposition. As Lotman (1990) posits, the semantic dimension of space involves "loading values such as good, bad, beautiful, ugly"—a principle that *Adventure Time* mobilizes extensively in its environmental design.

In this context, the dichotomy between good and evil is not merely personified through character behavior but spatialized through setting. Michaud (2015) observes that the visual integrity of *Adventure Time* evokes reality to such a degree that viewers become emotionally involved in the fate of characters despite

their cartoonish abstraction: “We know it isn’t real, but we experience Adventure Time as real enough that when heroes we love suffer, we worry.”

Finally, the show’s frequent use of moral ambiguity—where villains exhibit pathos and heroes show flaws—further deepens its spatial complexity. Zones like the Nightosphere challenge the binary reading of good/evil by introducing characters who are morally fluid and spaces that are unpredictable. This fits precisely within the framework of Lotman’s semiosphere theory, where boundaries are not absolute and characters may belong to overlapping, even contradictory, semantic spaces (Lotman, 1990).

In the following chapter, we will systematically examine these spatial domains using Lotman’s tripartite model and map their moral topographies through a comparative chart. This analysis will illustrate how Adventure Time uses animated space as a dynamic semiotic system to explore ethical concepts within a format accessible to children yet profound enough for critical academic study.

5. Good and Evil Characters/Spaces in Adventure Time

When forming the sample for this study, the comprehensive Adventure Time encyclopedia available on Wikia.com was utilized. This database offers a complete archive of all characters and locations appearing across the show’s 283 episodes, including their episode-specific contexts and narrative relevance. From this extensive archive, selected characters and spaces were chosen based on their representational clarity regarding the moral themes of “good” and “evil.” Special emphasis was placed on kingdoms, cities, or village-like structures rather than isolated characters and their individual dwellings, as these larger spatial entities offer richer semiotic and spatial data.

5.1. Representation of Good

As in many traditional cartoon narratives, Adventure Time constructs the concept of “good” through visual and semantic codes rooted in beauty, harmony, and innocence. These values are often communicated through specific spatial forms, chromatic palettes, and material references. According to Lotman’s theory of semantic space, moral positions are often encoded into the aesthetic and formal qualities of narrative environments. In this sense, “good” in Adventure Time is associated with bright colors, organic shapes, curved contours, and materials derived from familiar or culturally comforting sources (Lotman, 1990). These spatial signs generate a sense of safety and familiarity, aligning the viewer’s emotional perception with moral judgment.

The Candy Kingdom provides the clearest example of this design logic. Frequently visited by Finn and Jake, and ruled by the benevolent Princess Bubblegum, the Candy Kingdom is entirely composed of sugary treats. Architectural forms resemble cupcakes, lollipops, and gingerbread, with structures formed in soft curves and warm pastel hues. The city is surrounded by high protective walls and centered around a tall castle tower, visually symbolizing both security and centralized order. The inhabitants—sentient candy people—engage in dancing,

playing, and celebrations whenever the kingdom is not under threat. From a child's perspective, the kingdom's visual language (cute characters, vibrant colors, geometric symmetry) directly signals "goodness" and emotional comfort.

The Raspberry Kingdom similarly communicates goodness but with a twist: while the city is composed entirely of organic materials and plant-based forms, its spatial organization mimics the logic of a modern urban center. Tall green buildings, paved orderly streets, and functional public elements (like benches or streetlights) are all made of plant matter. This blend of natural and urban elements removes the alienating aspects of real-world urbanization—pollution, overdevelopment, concrete grayness—and replaces them with an idealized, ecologically balanced vision. The raspberry, a fruit associated with nature and sweetness, serves as a symbolic anchor for the kingdom's identity. Ruled by Raspberry Princess, the kingdom portrays a harmonious coexistence between civilization and nature, echoing eco-utopian ideals.

In Breakfast Kingdom, the visualization of "goodness" is framed through the lens of daily routine and cultural ritual. Situated like an oasis in the middle of a desert, this kingdom is made entirely of breakfast elements: toast, eggs, pancakes, juice fountains, and cereal structures define its architecture and population. Breakfast is a universally comforting ritual, associated with warmth, safety, and beginnings. Here, these qualities are spatialized—goodness emerges not only from defense against evil but from the symbolic association of breakfast with nurturing. Led by Toast and Pie, the Breakfast Princesses, this space frames "home" as both a physical shelter and a sensory experience tied to nourishment.

All of these kingdoms share common spatial codes: enclosure through borders (walls or natural barriers), a central authority figure (usually a princess), and vertical hierarchies in spatial arrangement—where rulers' dwellings are elevated or highlighted visually. These topographic and topological elements reinforce a semantic reading of stability, protection, and innocence. Their color palettes are dominated by warm hues—pinks, yellows, greens—while the linework avoids angularity in favor of curves and soft contours. Nature is frequently incorporated either as metaphor or material, and danger is always coded as external.

These elements align closely with Lotman's concept of the center in the semiosphere—a space of order, familiarity, and safety, in contrast to the chaotic periphery. In *Adventure Time*, "good" is not only a trait of the characters but a quality embedded in their spatial environments. This reading enables a deeper understanding of how visual design, moral logic, and spatial construction interact in shaping children's perceptions of goodness.

5.2. Representation of Evil

The conceptual and spatial opposition between good and evil in *Adventure Time* is not limited to character behavior—it is intricately coded into the physical and visual design of the environments. Within the framework of Yuri Lotman's spatial theory, the places associated with evil often represent the periphery of the semiosphere, where instability, danger, and moral uncertainty reign. These

spaces are enclosed, fragmented, or distorted, signaling their separation from the center of order and virtue. Visually, they employ angular forms, harsh contrasts, darker palettes, and unsettling iconography, all of which reinforce their semantic association with “evil”.

The Fire Kingdom exemplifies the spatial coding of evil through both form and atmosphere. This subterranean environment departs from structured urban representation, instead resembling a violent, volcanic topography filled with jagged peaks, magma flows, and intense heat. Though it uses bright hues like red and yellow, the overwhelming contrast with black shadows and rising smoke creates a claustrophobic and hostile setting. Inhabitants, including the ruler Flame Princess, often have flames emerging from their bodies, and their character designs feature sharp eyes, elongated limbs, and aggressive postures. These formal elements establish a sense of danger and alienation. The space itself is closed, dense, and visually harsh—features that support its role as a semantic inverse to the harmonious “good” kingdoms.

Another significant example is the City of Thieves, where the act of stealing is not only normalized but structurally embedded in the city’s social logic. Hidden within the shell of a colossal dead turtle, the city is permanently sealed off from the outside world. The visual design borrows from medieval European architecture, characterized by decayed rooftops, cramped alleyways, and splintered timber—invoking the atmosphere of pre-Enlightenment ignorance and lawlessness. Every inhabitant survives by theft, not as an act of rebellion but as a foundational rule of the city. The city’s muted brown palette and visual disrepair align with its moral decay.

The Evil Forest introduces a more psychological dimension of fear, embedding malevolence in nature itself. The forest’s design features dead trees with distorted faces, jagged edges, and unnatural darkness. No sky is visible; instead, a flat blue-black gradient shrouds the scene, enhancing the viewer’s disorientation. The narrative positions this forest as directionless—entrance and exit points are unclear, and visual cues such as misleading signs actively work against the protagonists. Lotman’s notion of “semantic reversal” applies here: the forest mimics a natural refuge but is semantically inverted, representing the uncanny, the false, and the morally hostile.

Further examples such as the Beneathverse or Land of the Dead reinforce this structure. These spaces are not just enclosed—they are epistemologically inaccessible. Characters exist within floating or sunken volumetric spaces cut off from the known world. Their behaviors are erratic, speech is fragmented, and their physical appearance often aligns with cultural markers of decay or corruption—such as skulls, muted colors, or monstrous hybridity. These spaces act as liminal zones, intensifying the narrative boundary between moral clarity and existential confusion.

Importantly, these evil-coded spaces frequently serve as narrative obstacles that Finn and Jake must navigate. The spatial morphology of evil—closed, oppressive, unpredictable—is itself a challenge to overcome. And when good triumphs over

evil, these boundaries are momentarily restored, reinforcing Lotman's theory that the movement of heroes from peripheral evil zones back toward the semantic center reflects cultural restoration (Lotman, 1990).

In all cases, evil in *Adventure Time* is spatially realized through visual discomfort, semantic opposition, and isolation. These environments don't merely house villains—they perform their malevolence through architectural form, environmental design, and symbolic layering. Evil thus becomes something that can be seen, felt, and navigated—not just confronted.

5.3. Ambiguous States

While forming the sample in *Adventure Time*, a distinct category of morally ambiguous spaces and characters emerged. Unlike many traditional cartoons, where moral values are neatly divided into binaries—good and evil, beautiful and ugly, virtuous and wicked—*Adventure Time* introduces a “gray zone” that blurs these oppositions. This liminal realm enhances narrative complexity and brings the fictional world closer to lived experience. In Lotman's terms, these ambiguous spaces lie at the border of the semiosphere, where semantic values shift and overlap (Lotman, 1990).

These intermediary states often involve the merging or inversion of visual and behavioral cues. The semiotic logic that equates moral goodness with visual beauty (curved lines, warm colors, and cuteness), and evil with visual repulsion (angular forms, dark palettes, and grotesque imagery), is frequently subverted. Some characters behave benevolently despite monstrous appearances, while certain environments evoke discomfort but house peaceful inhabitants.

A case in point is the Goblin Kingdom, which merges the codes of good and evil. The goblins, well-known figures from fantasy culture, are drawn in line with their traditional depictions—physically unattractive, neglected, and seemingly malevolent. Yet within the narrative, they are revealed to be kind and cooperative beings. Their seemingly negative behavior stems not from their nature but from the coercion of their ruler, Xergiok. Spatially, the Goblin Kingdom resembles the Candy Kingdom, with walled perimeters and turreted structures. The architecture employs bright colors, soft outlines, and geometric harmony—codes typically reserved for morally “good” spaces. This visual positivity stands in contrast to the goblins' outward grotesqueness, producing a cognitive dissonance that invites reevaluation of moral judgment.

The Mud Kingdom offers a different inversion. Situated underground in a swamp-like environment, this kingdom is characterized by messy, slimy materials and murky tones. The setting evokes decay and confinement, aligning it visually with evil-coded places. However, its inhabitants are small, delicate, and expressive of innocence. The visual opposition between environment and occupant draws attention to the fragility of moral classifications and suggests that viewer discomfort is often based on aesthetic prejudice rather than ethical content. *Adventure Time* often critiques surface-level morality by contrasting visual discomfort with narrative innocence, suggesting that ethical value is not determined by appearance

but by relational behavior.

Another example is Spiky City, located in the middle of a desert. Here, both the city and its inhabitants are defined by sharp, protruding forms. Their designs induce visual unease through jagged edges and monotone brown coloration. However, despite these unsettling visuals, the citizens are orderly and content. The only source of unrest stems from the ruler's wife, a greedy individual whose behavior contrasts with the collective harmony of the rest. The lack of enclosing walls suggests openness, but the spikiness of its inhabitants effectively creates social and physical barriers. This metaphor of non-touchability subtly critiques how alienation can arise from aesthetic difference alone.

The series' most compelling example of moral ambiguity, however, is the Ice King. The Ice King lives at the crossroads of villainy and vulnerability. His space, both majestic and desolate, performs his moral ambiguity through emotional isolation and spatial estrangement. Initially introduced as a villain who kidnaps princesses and antagonizes the main characters, Ice King's backstory reveals a deeply tragic origin. Formerly Simon Petrikov, a human scholar, he was transformed by a magical crown that corrupted his mind. Though he behaves erratically and is perceived as dangerous, he often expresses loneliness, tenderness, and a desire for companionship. His domain, the Ice Kingdom, mirrors this complexity—composed of cold blues, towering icy spires, and visual sterility, it appears uninviting. Yet the space also contains signs of domesticity and isolation: framed photos, diaries, and sentimental memorabilia.

Such characters and environments challenge the viewer's expectations and moral instincts, embodying Lotman's idea of boundary-crossing figures who "belong simultaneously to multiple semantic fields" (Lotman, 1990). These hybrids resist stable classification and reflect the show's broader interest in exploring identity, trauma, and transformation beyond binary logic.

By including these liminal zones, Adventure Time not only enriches its narrative texture but also questions how we as viewers assign moral value—reminding us that what appears monstrous may simply be misunderstood, and that visual codes of good and evil are always open to reinterpretation.

Table 2: Outputs of the Analyzing Process
(some parameters were generated with the help of ChatGpt)

Morality	Kingdom	Topographical Traits	Topological Traits	Semantic Traits
GOOD	Candy Kingdom	Soft curves, bright colors	Centralized, open	Joy, order, celebration
	Raspberry Kingdom	Plant-based urban forms	Modern urban order	Harmony, ecological idealism
	Breakfast Kingdom	Breakfast-themed, curved structures	Enclosed pit, oasis	Comfort, nurturing, home

EVIL	Fire Kingdom	Cave-like, volcanic peaks	Confined, oppressive	Danger, aggression, alienation
	Beneathverse	Void-like, dimensional space	Endless, interdimensional	Freedom, chaos, disconnection
	City of Thieves	Crude, enclosed turtle shell	Dense, layered, enclosed	Lawlessness, theft, decay
	Evil Forest	Grotesque trees, dense forest	Chaotic, directional uncertainty	Fear, hostility, deception
	Land of the Dead	Gothic, isolated	Layered, closed	Mortal boundary, unease
AMBI	Goblin Kingdom	Crude, enclosed turtle shell	Dense, chaotic	Deceit, misunderstood kindness
	Mud Kingdom	Swampy, underground	Hidden, enclosed	Moral ambiguity, cuteness vs. filth
	Spiky City	Sharp, angular desert forms	Exposed yet unapproachable	Judgment, misalignment
	Ice Kingdom	Snowy, icy peaks	Isolated, layered	Loneliness, inner sorrow
	Slime Kingdom	Slimy, squishy environments	Totalitarian layout	Messiness, responsibility

The classification above summarizes the moral and spatial organization of the most prominent kingdoms in *Adventure Time*, structured according to Lotman's tripartite spatial model. The kingdoms have been grouped into three categories—good, evil, and ambiguous—based on their visual language, spatial arrangement, and narrative function. While “good” spaces share topographical softness, central accessibility, and joyful or nurturing associations, “evil” spaces are enclosed, visually aggressive, and symbolically linked to chaos or isolation. The ambiguous domains inhabit a middle ground where visual cues contradict moral behavior or where narrative complexities blur binary oppositions. This mapping reinforces the argument that space in *Adventure Time* is not merely a narrative backdrop but a semiotic device encoding ethical positions, symbolic tensions, and affective responses.

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the spatial representation of morality in the animated series *Adventure Time*, focusing on the way good, evil, and ambiguous values are encoded through character design and environmental aesthetics. By closely examining a selection of kingdoms and their spatial, topological, and semantic characteristics, we observed that moral positions in the series are not solely communicated through narrative behavior, but are fundamentally shaped through spatial configuration and visual cues.

Traditionally, children's media often relies on binary representations of morality: the good is beautiful, colorful, and orderly, while the evil is ugly, dark, and chaotic. *Adventure Time* partially inherits this tradition. Characters that are depicted as purely good—such as those from the Candy or Raspberry Kingdoms—reside in open, symmetrical, and vibrant spaces. These kingdoms visually express harmony, innocence, and hierarchy, often highlighting the idealized structure of a protected society. Similarly, evil-coded domains such as the Fire Kingdom or

City of Thieves are enclosed, visually aggressive, and semantically associated with destruction, corruption, or fear. These representations operate on multiple levels, reinforcing ideological assumptions about morality through form, color, and spatial logic.

However, Adventure Time also introduces a significant degree of narrative and spatial ambiguity. In many cases, moral labels are not fixed, and characters challenge the expectations established by their visual design. Ambiguous zones such as the Goblin Kingdom or Spiky City reveal how misleading surface appearances can be, while characters like the Ice King embody the coexistence of tragedy, love, and danger within a single figure. These narrative and visual tensions invite viewers—especially young ones—to think beyond rigid moral binaries and consider the complexities of behavior, context, and identity.

The use of Lotman's spatial theory has proven to be an effective analytical framework for interpreting how morality is mapped onto animated environments. Through the triadic classification of space—topographic, topological, and semantic—we were able to unpack the nuanced relationship between physical setting, character construction, and ideological messaging. This model enabled a deeper understanding of how Adventure Time builds a semiosphere in which movement across boundaries reflects emotional and ethical transformation.

Ultimately, this research highlights the rich semiotic potential of animated media. Even within a format typically dismissed as juvenile or simplistic, we find a layered system of signs where space becomes a tool for storytelling, character development, and moral communication. The findings of this study not only enhance our understanding of Adventure Time, but also open up avenues for further research on spatial representation in children's animation, especially in relation to ethics, identity, and worldbuilding.

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