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ABSTRACT
The films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan are always groping for the general condition of 'humanity' – that vague anachronism, ever the object of contempt for contemporary philosophers. It is now commonplace to hear that authorship, modernity, subjectivity, history and humanity are outmoded concepts of a bygone era. Yet, in countless art films of recent years, we continue to note a dominant thematic preoccupation with recognition, anxiety and subjectivity, begging the question: If we have departed from the humanist regime of art and philosophy, why do its primary concerns continue to dominate? In this article, I wish to analyse Ceylan's oeuvre as a continuation of the themes and aesthetics of humanist film-makers and philosophers. With in-depth discussion of the themes and aesthetics of the breadth of his oeuvre, I argue that Ceylan's films are humanist because they focus on human subjectivity as a matter of conflict: between our notion of selfhood and the world around us. In opposition to claims of some flaccid 'liberal humanism' derided by posthumanists like Hayles (1999), I wish to argue that Ceylan's humanism persists with a critical condition intrinsic to the human, denying an escape into a historically rupturing, post-ist logic.

Men, women and children from three generations sit in a dark forest, their faces and bodies lit by the flicker of campfire as a dark abyss surrounds them beyond the trees. The eldest of the men gives a long speech on the trials of the modern world, the anxieties of the youth and his commitment to his own personal struggles. Small battles of character are won and lost on this woodland stage. This extensive, central scene from Nuri Bilge Ceylan's first feature film, *The Small Town* (*Kasaba* 1997) sets up many of the key thematic preoccupations and aesthetic tropes recurring throughout his later films. We witness the subtle flaring of conflicts between young and old, between the sexes, between the urban and the rural; people are uninterrupted in their monologues; nature is highlighted as a source of mystery and authority; ambiguous narratives often hinge upon

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the restrained gestures of the actor. Moreover, when these people speak, the things they say are always personal but also further reaching, towards levels of profundity. Through the psychology of a protagonist, Ceylan's films are always groping for the general condition of 'humanity' – that vague anachronism, ever the object of contempt for contemporary philosophers.

Apocalyptic declarations saturate cultural discourse today. It is now commonplace to hear that authorship, modernity, subjectivity, history and humanity are outmoded concepts of a bygone era.[1] Yet, even if we heed the 'post-isms' of twenty-first-century philosophy, we cannot ignore the continued influence of the humanistic themes of some twentieth-century cinema in contemporary films. In countless art films of recent years, we continue to note a dominant thematic preoccupation with recognition, anxiety and subjectivity, begging the question: *If we have departed from the humanist regime of art and philosophy, why do its primary concerns continue to dominate?* In this article, I wish to analyse Ceylan's oeuvre as a continuation of the themes and aesthetics of humanist film-makers (notably Ingmar Bergman and Andrey Tarkovsky) and philosophers (specifically the twentieth- and twenty-first-century writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Edward Said). To embrace and re-establish the credibility of humanism as a critical, artistic paradigm in contemporary times would be painstaking work, but I shall posit that such an effort exists in the cinema of Ceylan. His films bring to mind a legacy of auteurs who shared his preoccupation with humanity, focusing especially on our ability to relate to one another, to empathise, to attain and maintain personal freedom, to connect meaningfully. More than simply reinforcing some essential biological make-up, however, this is an oeuvre entirely concerned with critically deconstructing the human experience. Ceylan's cinema is about the torture of relationships and the desperation of finding connection to ourselves, others and the world around us. I wish to claim that his films are humanist because they focus on human subjectivity as a matter of conflict: between our notion of selfhood and the world around us. Thus, far from the flaccid 'liberal humanism' derided by posthumanists like Hayles (1999), I wish to argue that Ceylan's humanism persists with a critical condition intrinsic to the human, denying an escape into a historically rupturing, post-ist logic.

Defining humanist cinema

Hayles (1999, 2) is a key figure for an increasingly influential school of thought that seeks to define contemporary social relations – the 'global informational society' – as a time after the human. How can this be? Of course, human beings still exist, so what is meant by this? Hayles (1999, 4) defines *humanism* according to the philosophical tradition of *liberal humanism*: 'the presumption that there is an agency, desire, or will belonging to the self and clearly distinguished from the "wills of others"'. This becomes 'undercut in the posthuman, for the

posthuman's collective heterogeneous quality implies a distributed cognition located in disparate parts that may be in only tenuous communication with one another' (1999, 4). Central to this thesis is the claim that consciousness is but an epiphenomenon of human identity (1999, 3). To demonstrate the peculiarity of Hayles' claim, we might turn to Stuart Hall's seminal writing on identity. Hall argued towards a 'cultural identity', claiming, like Hayles, that our subjectivity is not essential, but that it is in fact 'positioned', 'in context' of our social and historical situation (Hall 1990, 222). Extending Said's (1977) arguments on Orientalism, Hall (1990, 226) supplements that original argument on representation with the notion of 'inner expropriation': an 'inner compulsion to the norm'. While Hayles and Hall both share the conviction that identity is never simply thought from within, Hall nevertheless stresses the interiority of the human subject. In Hall (1990, 222), there is a determined, historical point from which the subject can be seen to 'enunciate'. While Hayles implicitly recognises Hall's contribution to postcolonial theory's challenge to 'the universality of the (white male) liberal humanist subject' (Hayles 1999, 4), her integration of that challenge to her own approach is problematic. While for Hayles, consciousness is but an epiphenomenon of identity, Hall's insight on the psychological experience of otherness prioritises said consciousness, placing it at equal odds with external expropriation, pitting one another in a tense conflict. For Hall, as for Said and Sartre before him, the human experience is one of conflicted selfhood. In Hayles' account of collective heterogeneity, no such selfhood exists.

Hayles' attempt to decentre the self-contained subject (that is supposedly systemic to philosophies of humanism) has dominated Western critical theory since the likes of Roland Barthes' proclamation on 'the death of the author' (Barthes 1977). Similarly, Louis Althusser came to demand a sustained form of 'antihumanism', or 'the recognition and knowledge of humanism itself as an ideology' (Althusser 1969, 229). Film-makers that set their sights on a humanist conception of subjectivity (over and above the foregrounding of the ideological mechanisms that construct it) are thereby seen to fall prey to a staid, conservative paradigm of *liberal* humanism: an ultimately exclusive practice that dutifully segregates civility, quality and morality, from stupidity and anarchy.[2] A viewing of any of Ceylan's films immediately discredits the binding of this supposed conservatism to humanism. Rather than seeking to assert the liberal humanist subject – a preferred human subject or unimpeachable individual agency – the common thread through all his films seems to be the very deconstruction of this myth. Yet, rather than invoking a contemporary world that has moved (or must move) beyond its anthropocentrism to realise its ultimate insignificance, Ceylan's films refuse to depart from the human episteme. Following the late writings of Said, I shall argue that to engage with the human in the way Ceylan does challenges the equation of the human with liberalism. It is instead symptomatic of humanism's democratic legacy: 'a process of unending disclosure, discovery, self-criticism, and liberation' (Said 2004, 21–22). This

approach is very similar to Sartre's, whose 'existentialist humanism' seems to play itself out to a large extent in Ceylan's films. Following Sartre, Ceylan's films suggest that humanity 'must, in [its] abandoned state, make [its] own choices, and also because we show that it is not by turning inward, but by constantly seeking a goal outside of [itself] … [we] will realise [ourselves] as truly human' (Sartre 2007, 53). The tension between the internal and external exists already, then, in humanist philosophies.

Rather than propagate a conservative discourse of rigidity and stasis, both Sartre and Said place conflict at the very heart of humanism. Our notion of selfhood is apparently caught in a constant paradox, confronted always with dilemmas regarding what to think and how to act. In spite of its preoccupation with heterogeneity and fluidity, Hayles' posthumanism makes an attempt to resolve this conflict. Co-opting C. B. Macpherson's argument on liberalism's 'possessive individualism' (Macpherson 1962) to stand for humanism proper, the a priori notion of natural human identity is apparently overcome. Whereas Macpherson's liberal humanist, self-contained, 'natural' subject is caught in a paradox (produced by, and in control of, market relations), the posthuman resolves this paradox by 'doing away with the "natural" self' (Hayles 1999, 4). In its doing away with selfhood altogether, posthumanist accounts of subjectivity have apparently bypassed the anxious experience of seeking recognition for oneself, arguing instead that subjectivity is produced *entirely* outside of the self: it is just 'a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction' (Hayles 1999, 4). Through analysis of the thematic and stylistic preoccupations of Ceylan's films, I shall argue instead that human subjectivity is not simply, in the words of Steven Shaviro, a 'moribund ideology' (Shaviro 1996, 45). We need not depart altogether from the age of the human in order to highlight the centrality of alterity and heterogeneity to subjectivity. As such, I do not wish to return to a pre-Enlightenment mode of thinking about subjectivity. Rather, I simply wish to challenge the idea that human subjectivity and self-determination are necessarily bourgeois fantasies. By understanding humanism as a philosophy contingent on humanity's *conflicted-will* – rather than assured in one's *self-will* – Ceylan's films show us that being human is a tortuous process, demanding scrutiny in our relations with others and the world around us. I shall highlight the appearance and mechanisms of these conflicts throughout my analyses.

Humanist concern for the conflicted self can also be found in the work of countless film-makers whose work constitutes a clear influence on Ceylan's approach. Satyajit Ray, Yasujiro Ozu, Michelangelo Antonioni: all are detectable influences in Ceylan's films. Above all though, we must recognise the influence of Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky. The brutal intimacy of Bergman's *Persona* (1966) and *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973) are influential to the point of quotation in the autobiographical *Climates* (*Iklimler* 2006). All

Ceylan's films also frequently draw the spectator into a position of unnerving proximity, in a way that unavoidably recalls *Persona,* but also *Summer With Monika* (1953), *Dreams* (1955) and *Face to Face* (1977). In this sense, Ceylan's films can be described as Hamish Ford described Bergman's: 'these films allow the spectator *see, think,* and *feel* existential sureties in different states of crisis' (Ford 2002). Tarkovsky's influence is overtly signalled in Ceylan's third feature, *Distant.* Aesthetically speaking, Ceylan's patient technique (whether it is the small-scale movements of a character or the grand landscapes of rural Anatolia and urban Istanbul) draws clearly upon Tarkovsky's slowness. Perhaps most interestingly for the project of humanist cinema, Ceylan shares with Tarkovsky an attempt to invest in the natural world a spirituality absent in secular times. No less than *Andrei Rublev* (1966), Ceylan's films are always attentive to the relationship between the natural world and the bodies that inhabit it. Ceylan's concern for the conflicted self's place *in the world* seems to derive directly from Tarkovsky's influence.

To approach Ceylan's films in this way is to reintroduce the centrality of 'the auteur' and the connection between humanism and auteurism established in the writings of André Bazin in the 1950s and Andrew Sarris in the 1970s. This connection is continued also by the likes of Thomas Pavel in the 1990s.[3] In part a response to the contemporaneous postmodernist antagonisms with authorship, the latter group argue that a persistent concern for thematic readings remains. In spite of a widely accepted critical view on the role of the author by this point, texts continue to be read with a theme and concept, as Claude Bremond (1993) argues. Bremond (1993, 48) continues to hinge this thematic approach on the notion of authorial intentionality – the very foundation of Bazin's auteur:[4] '[a text] is done or undone in the consciousness of the author or that of the reader'. In Ceylan's films, the thinking of humanity occurs by way of what Bremond (1993, 48) terms a 'multifaceted dynamism' between the text's aesthetic, sociological, historical properties and the psychological influences of film-maker and viewer.

Doležel (1995, 59) goes beyond this to argue that thematic analysis demonstrates a fundamental trait of humanity: 'themes are *invariant* universal features of human acting underlying *variable* particular consequences. Human acting in all its variety is subject to the constraints of thematic patterns'. On one level, Doležel's argument represents the most limiting, conservative version of humanism – precisely the one Hayles is so adept to in her opposition. Thematic patterning according to rigid psychological parameters describes a human predictability that is, at best, ignorant of socio-historical difference and, at worst, suggestive of a dystopian dissolution of human contingency. If Ceylan's films can be understood as pertaining to a version of humanism, and if this humanism can be understood as developed according to recurring themes, I am keen to avoid the kind of universal invariance described by Doležel. If an invariant trope exists in these films, it relates to the inner conflict I have described.

Figure 1. A wide-shot from Clouds of May. The two characters are dwarfed by the surrounding landscape.

Nevertheless, what I am able to take from the return of thematic criticism in the 1990s is a way of locating the recurrent theme of human selfhood. It is also worthwhile recognising the continued strength of auteur studies today. This is indeed an approach to cinema with a conservative potential, entailing the collating of canons and tastes. Yet several recent studies identify a profoundly committed, social enterprise in many wholeheartedly auteurist approaches.[5]

Throughout my discussion, I hope to show that against the self-contained subject criticised by posthuman theory, humanist film and philosophy is devoted entirely to a conflicted self: it raises interlocking questions about the natural world, the self and the other. As such, each point of my argument hinges on a distinct thematic polemic concerning conflicted selfhood. Firstly, I consider the way *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May* use the rural community and surrounding nature to pose the question: *What does the world want from me?* Secondly, coupling *Distant* and *Climates,* I argue that these films ask: *How can I protect my subjectivity from invasion by another?* Third, I turn to *Three Monkeys* (*Üç Maymun* 2008) and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (*Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da* 2011) to argue that these two films incorporate a peculiar usage of generic tropes (film noir in the former, the western in the latter) in order to ask: *How are societies affected by violence?* My fourth point recognises a fresh trope in the recent *Winter Sleep* (*Kis Uykusu* 2014). Lodged between the concerns of the first and second points, I shall argue that the seventh film produces a dialogue between one person and another whereby one subjectivity is opened up to criticism in a more explicit way, producing the dilemma: *What if I am not who I think I am?* Finally, engaging the individual/collective dialectic that develops throughout the oeuvre, I shall turn to the issue that plagues the possibility of humanistic works throughout postmodern cultural discourse: the possibility of politics through humanism.

Figure 2. A close-up of the previously dwarfed characters.

What does the world want from me? On *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May*

Ceylan incorporates a number of significant elements from his first short film – the lyrical visual essay, *Cocoon* (*Koza* 1995) – into his first two features. *Cocoon* is evasive in its meaning, but is very clearly an autobiographical piece: Ceylan's parents star in the film; they are filmed in their home and at work, framed in ways (adoring, heroic, yet humble) clearly evoking something particular to their son's affection. It is, in short, a poetic ode to his parents and the world he comes from. *The Small Town* continues this tone, but introduces a critical perspective on provincial Turkey. The country is shown to be a place of boredom, where children look outward to nature in order to escape the tediousness of daily life. One man (Saffet, played by Emin Toprak, who would collaborate on the subsequent two films before dying tragically in a car crash) embodies the inevitable choice faced by the young man in late twentieth century Turkey: take up the traditions of your father or venture into the unknown city. If *Small Town* initially appears critical of village life, it retains the even-handedness of *Cocoon* in its extended woodland dialogue scene. Here, it is revealed that an old farmer named Dede (played by Ceylan's father – reappearing after *Cocoon*) faces the same existential dilemma as Saffet, but has chosen to deal with it differently. They both struggle with the question, 'what does the world want from me?', but have each answered it in different ways – each, it seems, in ways symptomatic of the social and historical circumstances into which they were born. Dede respects his position (subordinate to nature) and responds by devoting his life to the land. Saffet, on the other hand, has no such feeling; he is alienated by village life and seeks fulfilment in the city.

Clouds of May is, in many ways, a sequel to (or perhaps a reimagining of) *The Small Town*. This time, Emin Ceylan (the father is self-named here) is the intended subject of his son's (Muzaffer's) documentary. While the village is

the same one as *The Small Town,* its function is different. Returning from the big city, Muzaffer wants to portray a certain, stereotypical image of his father, portraying him as a noble, self-effacing peasant. This *naïveté* is exacerbated by the fact that a fascinating narrative is already unfolding in Emin's life: as he tries to explain to his son, he is involved in a land dispute with the local government about the forest he tends. Continuing the theme of before, Emin is devoted to the natural world; but whereas before it was he who judged the trifles of contemporary Turkish society, *Clouds of May* is far more defensive of the villagers and their customs. Muzaffer and Saffet (returning as a member of the film crew) are shown to be wholly ignorant and exploitative. They barge into the town, directing these people towards depthless caricatures. The men from the city have left the village and rejected its ancient customs and passion for nature; but in return, the anomie of urban life has developed in them a complete loss of faith in nature and social relations, exhibiting precisely what Max Weber called 'disenchantment' (Weber 1977, 271).

Thus, between *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May*, people care increasingly less about what is expected when one moves from a small town to a big city. The desire to move is explored through the tensions between young and old in *The Small Town*. The children are shown to grow increasingly unsettled by the dogma of the school, the serenity of the town and drawn to the possibilities beyond the hills. Each person's role is clearly restricted: the old men speak dourly about their responsibility; the old women abidingly prepare food; Saffet is lectured on his dishonourable inability to keep a job; a teenage girl is pictured silently peeling potatoes beside her grandmother as the men speak about the adventures they have had in the city. For the young, these moments suggest a desire to go out and experience something new: they have had enough of Mesopotamian fables and wish to discover the world for themselves. Yet, caught between the desire for freedom and the chains of tradition, the young are pensive about this transition. Saffet explains his dilemma in not wanting to do the honourable things expected of him if he were to stay, but missing the pines and stray dogs if he left.

With its freeze-frame and its gesture to the open possibilities of youth, the film's final image of the girl (pictured earlier silently preparing food for the men) recalls Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959). Clearly touched by the departure of Saffet, she wanders from her home towards a stream. Coyly approaching the water, she kneels before it and cautiously dips her hand in. This symbol of hesitancy speaks volumes about the choice before the rural youth: *Are they to abandon their way of life to seek out the unknown?* In this sensuous still image of the girl's hand in the stream, Ceylan depicts the special relationship between the people and nature: it transcends the dogma set by authority figures and exists, uniquely, in the sensation felt by the individual in the environment. As demonstrated through the framing of individuals within landscapes,

this relationship with nature is suggestive of an answer to the question posed throughout both films.

Respect for the natural world is reinforced through an editing technique that shifts between two kinds of very different shots: the close-up of faces and features (which places emphasis on subjectivity and emotion), and the wide-shot of landscapes (which work to dwarf the individual). A useful example occurs early on in *Clouds of May*. When Muzaffer first arrives, his father takes him to the land he tends (Figure 1). A wide-shot of golden crops, rich green pines and pure blue sky frames two tiny figures dressed in white, standing in the centre of the frame. After a pan around the landscape, we then cut to a close-up of the two men's faces (Figure 2). Ambivalently balancing the humanist dilemma, a person's hopes and fears are revealed to exist within this vast space; but these hopes and fears are revealed to be little more than a small component of the world. The effect of this cutting between the starkly different compositions is to answer, poetically, the question of what the world expects from individuals. While recognising the centrality of this conflict to the human, the function of the landscapes works ultimately to underline our relatively minor place in the scheme of things.

This style recurs, tellingly, throughout Ceylan's films, allowing us to trace the significance of the natural world throughout his oeuvre. An atheistic respect for nature aligns Ceylan so closely with Tarkovsky – a secular humanist whose films demonstrate acutely an anxiety over how to respond when a person (rather than a godly spirit) is responsible for his or her own actions. We should therefore conclude that the people in these early films recognise that the world (both their natural and social environment) prescribes to some extent how they should act and what they should think. Thus, that people are compelled to give *anything* to the world situates Ceylan's humanist cinema as something different to the totalising, 'liberal humanist' spoken about by Hayles and other 'posthumanists' who would like to draw a line under the era of 'the human'. Continuing the humanist lineage of film-makers who turn the camera outward to explore the psyche and inward to understand the wider world, *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May* utilise the conventions associated with the human but debunk posthumanist accusations on its 'possessive individualism'. People are aware of the way their self is shaped and manipulated by the worlds they inhabit – it is, in fact, the source of the torment, beauty and drama of these films.

How can I remain an individual? On *Distant* and *Climates*

Arguably this question was already being asked throughout the earlier works – a portrait of a society inhabited and social relations debilitated by individuals threatened by the pressures of the world around them. However, a departure is made between *Clouds of May* and *Distant* – and further still in *Climates* – from the presentation of a community to deeply introspective, psychological

Figure 3. Late on in Distant, the gaze of the protagonist is returned.

drama. The focus therefore shifts in the third and fourth features from one's duty and responses to the world around them to one's duty to the self, in order to ask: *How can I remain an individual?* Or, in less abstract terms related more concretely to the two films: *How can I deflect the overbearing presence of another being and retain my 'untainted' subjectivity?* To ask this question is to highlight the obnoxiously self-centred desire of the films' protagonists. In doing so, these films are in the process of raising important points on the way we conceive of the personality and reflexivity of the auteur. This is especially the case in *Climates,* which stars Ceylan himself. Within the two films' studies of human isolation lies a significant contribution to the way we understand the author in the postmodern, post-auteur theoretical climate. I shall discuss some moments in the two films in order to argue that a hypercritical form of self-reflexivity exists – one devoted to the humanist conflict.

Distant begins where *The Small Town* leaves off: Yusuf (previously Saffet) arrives in Istanbul, looking for work. He moves in with his cousin, Mahmut (previously Muzaffer), who has recently divorced and had a change in career, rejecting 'art' and entering the world of commercial photography. They are both in a sort of crisis when they stumble into each other's lives – one is ambitious and eager to try new things; the other has become cynical and contemptuous. While viewed by some as sharing the stage here,[6] the focus is very much on Mahmut: Yusuf's lightness primarily works to offset Mahmut's performance of a man whose mounting apathy to life swamps his ability to create a meaningful connection to any person or vocation. *Distant* therefore sets the scene for an interior conflict between segregation from and openness to others.

Similarly, in *Climates,* Isa (played by Ceylan) is a photographer and an academic. We see Isa taking pictures, teaching classes, rejecting the emotional advances of Bahar (played by his wife and creative collaborator, Ebru Ceylan), seeking lustful release from an old flame (Serap, reappearing after a very similar but more marginal role in *Distant*), before finally seeking reconciliation with

Bahar. Even more reprehensible than Mahmut, Isa's ego prevents him from connecting with others. He is too precious to submit his doctoral thesis, his photography is too beautiful to share with the people he photographs, his thoughts are too profound to share with Bahar. In Mahmut and Isa, we have, I think, two quintessential characterisations of the liberal humanist model derided by Hayles. However, the way these characters are presented is deeply scornful: to present an image of oneself as a self-contained, supreme subject is shown to embody total narcissism. Secondly, it is significant that this self-contained narcissist is both times embodied by an artist. While already very apparent in the first two films, Ceylan's self-reflexivity is further implied in Mahmut and is performed in a quasi-documentary manner in *Climates*. We therefore see a furthering of the earlier archetypal, pretentious artist. With *Climates*, this archetype is attached to a masochistic, self-critique of Ceylan himself. Against what Bülent Diken claims depicted characters' 'fears and frustrations in the grip of nihilism' (Diken 2008, 719), *Climates* offers a committed and severe reappraisal of the self-contained, author-subject. In both films, when asking how individuality can be protected, they simultaneously inquire into the possibilities of retaining the supreme status of the author. Doing this through self-consciously contemptuous, elitist, misogynistic protagonists places the auteur under severe scrutiny.

However, *Distant* and *Climates* offer more than disdain for the auteur; the films also show the processes through which social relationships decay and even offer strategies for overcoming them. We can, as before, locate these strategies in each film's approach to montage. This occurs in two senses here. The first continues the technique of the first two films: wide landscape shots counteract tightly framed close-ups, framing then undermining the self-contained subject. Since this repeats the approach we have already seen in *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May*, I will not enter discussion of this here. The second introduces a technique that will reappear in subsequent works, which itself has a long, fraught history in film aesthetics: the gaze. Throughout these films, we see the protagonists watching and judging others. However, unlike the ideological aesthetic strategy of interpellation (Mulvey 1975), Ceylan's self-critical approach provides a counter-productive effect for the bearer of the look: watching them (Mahmut, Yusuf, Isa) watch, they each appear foolish, contemptuous – they become judged by the spectator. These moments recur throughout *Distant*: the two men are regularly shown to be voyeurs, acquiring a comic dimension for Yusuf (whose watching-others leads to displays of idiocy) and a pitiful one for Mahmut (whose watching-others is more suggestive of his isolation). The shot-reverse shot regularly interplays the unknowing object of the gaze (almost always a young woman – an object of desire) with the man who looks on. There is no joy in the watcher – he is revealed to be lonely and desperate for connection. This comes to a head in the final moments of *Distant*, when Mahmut's gaze is returned. Fraught with the imminent departure of his ex-wife,

Figure 4. The expressionist mise-en-scène of Three Monkeys.

Mahmut stalks her through her journey to the departure gates. Finally, peering from behind a pillar at the airport, she turns and catches him. Shocked, Mahmut cowers back behind the pillar (Figure 3). Similarly, in *Climates,* it is when Isa has his arrogance challenged (when his arrival at Bahar's work is not greeted with the delight he had foolishly anticipated) that the counter-gaze is utilised. Bahar's dismissive return-gaze is empowering of the objectified figure, negating the narcissism of the watching protagonist.

The use and counter-use of the gaze and its connected montage-style complements the conflicted selves at the heart of *Distant* and *Climates.* Building on the aesthetic trope that situates the human being in relation to the land-scape, the shot-reverse shot's subversion of the watcher/watched convention further probes the relationship between self and other. Thus, where the previous two films tell us that we are impossibly tied to our environments, *Distant* and *Climates* reveal that we are bound to (rather than individuated from) others. Thus, following Sartre (and in spite of her critique of such a notion, like Hayles also), we are 'doomed to be free', but this freedom entails the polar opposite of absolute individuality: the human is in perpetual conflict, 'doomed' to grapple with the limits of one's self, one's freedom and one's responsibility to other 'free' beings. Through their critical and personal interrogations of existential crisis and interpersonal strife, the two films share a thoroughly scathing view of possessive individualism, but use the terms of humanism to arrive there.

How are societies affected by violence? On *Three Monkeys* and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*

Departing the intensely personal *Climates,* the narratives of *Three Monkeys* and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* are distributed quite evenly amongst a shared cast. In the former, Eyüp is a politician's chauffeur who agrees to take the fall (in exchange for a fee) when his boss kills a man in a hit and run. We follow

the effects the event has on his wife (Hacer) and son (Ismail). Hacer begins a doomed affair with the politician and Ismail's masculine burden is put to the test when he finds out. From an initial act of violence, social roles are tested and relationships are pushed to their limits. Similarly, *Anatolia* departs from an initial act of murderous violence, taking us through the psychological effects on the men charged with the task of finding the body.

While the fifth and sixth films return to the first two films' collective narratives, they also introduce a new trope to Ceylan's oeuvre (which, incidentally, disappears in the most recent film): the appropriation of genre conventions. In *Three Monkeys,* the gendered roles of the protagonists are tested through several film noir conventions, ranging from character archetypes (the mother's *femme fatale,* the son's naive young man, the politician's villain) to the distinctive *mise-en-scène*. In *Anatolia,* the obvious reference point is the epic Western, relocating the sprawling narratives to the vast desert of rural Turkey. Yet these films are never simply replaying tired generic motifs. Rather, like Ozu's *Walk Cheerfully* (*Hogaraka ni ayume* 1930), Ray's *The Zoo* (*Chiriyakhana* 1967), Bergman's *Hour of the Wolf* (*Vargtimmen* 1968) and Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), these films draw upon determined generic frameworks to test the limits of humanist cinema. Since this appearance of generic convention appears simultaneously with the theme of violence here, it might be worthwhile to understand them as related. There is good reason for this: in both films, a preferred space for interrogating conflicted selfhood is interrupted by a violent act. Whereas the prior films focus on the existential crises of characters in a mundane social reality, the noir and the western becomes a way of understanding what happens when everyday conflicts are played out in abnormal situations. Consequently, the aesthetic motifs of the previous films are themselves interrupted, extending Ceylan's humanist project into new directions.

Following Paul Schrader's discussion of noir style (Schrader 1972), we might recognise the use of chiaroscuro, the expressionistic use of vertical lines, the use of shadow to dissolve the actor into the space, the preference for 'compositional tension' (1972, 11) over action, the use of romantic narration and the foregrounding of time. *Three Monkeys* is by no means a straight noir film, but there are a number of moments when all these conventions come into play, producing a new way of broaching conflicted selfhood. For instance, let us revisit the early scene when we see Eyüp take the phone call from his boss about the accident: in the middle of the night, he enters his kitchen to answer the phone, switching on the dim light, shrouding him in darkness. Doorframes, photographs and wall-edges 'splinter the screen, making it restless and unstable' (Figure 4). Shortly after, he finds out how long he is likely to spend in prison, foregrounding time by providing an overt temporal frame for the events that will unfold in the narrative. Most significantly, however, the use of what Schrader calls 'compositional tension' is evident in Eyüp's subtle response, both to the strange phone call and the explanation of the crime.

This 'compositional tension' stages a psychological conflict: the man evokes a sense of being caught between fear and helplessness. Eyüp's minimal expression, concealing a deep unease yet inevitability about the events that will proceed, is deeply reminiscent of a noir performance: an exhibition of dread, an already-accepted fate, such as we find in the iconic of Fred MacMurray, Robert Mitchum or Humphrey Bogart. In this sense, then, noir aesthetics and humanistic self-conflict combine to produce something arguably more stylised than in his earlier films. This led Peter Bradshaw to claim that the film is 'trying too much' (Bradshaw 2009). However, if the film can be accused of being more stylistically adventurous than the earlier works, we might perhaps benefit from focusing on those areas of departure in greater detail, seeking to understand the effects of this hybrid form. There is indeed, as Bradshaw claims, something especially 'invigorating' and 'ambitious' (ibid.) about *Three Monkeys*; but it is also entirely consistent with Ceylan's project at large. Where it departs from the banalities of before simply serves to underline the effects of violence, which is ultimately directed towards exploring the conflict of the self in further detail. As we see through the addition of chiaroscuro and the expressionistic *mise-en-scène*, *Three Monkeys* complements this oeuvre with an aesthetic fitting to the extremities of this particular form of conflict.

Anatolia follows a team of police officers, two murder suspects and a doctor, searching throughout the night for a buried body. The film centres on each man's response to the act of killing, interweaving their sentiments to the crime with personal narratives and offsetting the primary narrative with an encounter between the men and the rural folk. Immediately, we are struck by how the familiar Ceylan themes provide the frame. Just as with *Three Monkeys,* generic conventions come into play as a way of negotiating the effects of violence. From the outset, we are thrust into the vast deserts of rural Turkey, shot in a way that dwarfs the police officers. Indeed, Ceylan's films share the Western's use of landscapes to evoke the superiority of nature, showing how human beings are kept in line by their surroundings: 'good' or 'bad', people in Westerns are almost always forced first to contend with the harshness of their environments. Here, the expanse of the land provides a way of connecting his concern for conflicted selfhood with the conventional Western setting. Counterpointing the landscapes, facial close-ups are even more frequent. As before, they hold a comparative function, offsetting the dominance of the earth with the human face's texture, gesture and signification of mortality. Yet it is also impossible to not engage the intertextual relationship at work with the films of Sergio Leone here, whose Westerns provided so many of cinema's great, iconic close-ups. Yet, if Leone's films hold any greater significance to Ceylan's humanist project beyond a titular reference, it is perhaps to call attention to the disparity between the two cinematic styles. As with the noir conventions, *Anatolia* calls upon generic tropes in order to provide a framework associated to the effects of violence on a society; but ultimately, in doing so, Ceylan demonstrates the

acuteness and opacity of those effects. As with *Three Monkeys,* genre is staged and thwarted, drawing attention to the superficiality of genre cinema's representations of violence in order to engage instead the psychological trauma of the conflicted self.

One such way of thwarting the genre is the way the vast space is used. Rather than a space that is navigated and overcome by a hero, the confusion produced by this repetitive desert confounds the detectives and the killers, producing a portrait of tormented beings that are forced ultimately to confront the limits of their agency. While some have written about how the metaphorical dimension of classical westerns engage with internal and social conflicts,[7] Ceylan places these in the foreground. Confronted with the inhumanity of murder, when all that surrounds Naci (a hostile police officer, disgusted by the killer and struggling with the burden of his sick son) is sand and darkness, he becomes increasingly aggravated by his inability to make sense of things. To express this exasperation, a trope from the earlier films reappears: monologues are used to express the limits of a character's understanding. These moments provide psychological access to all except the two suspects. This silencing of the pair appears to make a strong statement about *who experiences conflicted selfhood*; keeping these people silent portrays them in an 'inhuman' way mirroring the monstrous, Apache 'savages' of so many Western films. Of course, Ceylan could never be so reductive: a subtle exchange between the two suspects shows us that one of the men is taking the fall for his mentally-ill brother. Again, a genre convention is used to draw a contrast.

Both *Three Monkeys* and *Anatolia* are interesting experiments with genre conventions from a style of filmmaking (the infamous 'slow', 'arthouse' style) so often at odds with genre. The films exhibit the universality of humanism's interrogation of conflicted selfhood, broaching the theme of human mortality with the aesthetics of two genres that usually portray the stakes of life and death in more spectacular ways.[8] We can also see clear references to specific, contemporary social situations, in ways almost entirely absent from earlier films (as Suner has discussed in greater detail 2011) we might even connect this concern for society to a dominant view of the noir and the western as allegorical forms of social commentary. What is clear, however, is that these two films give something new to Ceylan's oeuvre and to debates on humanism.

What if I am not who I think I am? On *Winter Sleep*

Ceylan's most recent film again provides themes entirely consistent with his earlier work, but – in keeping with the neat evolution I have suggested thus far – presents a new challenge. Situated tightly between the community narrative of the first two and singular psychological narrative of the third and fourth, *Winter Sleep* – in its sprawling, two hundred-minute scope – immerses the spectator in the conflicts of an individual but makes room also for the inner conflicts of

those surrounding him. As such, it asks not what is expected of one, nor how can one retain a self; rather, the collision between both dilemmas pits each in tension, producing the question: *What if I am not who I think I am?*

Developed from Chekhov's short story 'The Wife', *Winter Sleep* focuses on Aydin: an ageing former actor who runs a hotel and owns several properties in scenic Anatolia. He also writes a column for the local newspaper, preaching on the virtues expected of Turkish citizens. When his car window is smashed, he comes face to face with the discontent of his tenants. From then on, his sense of superiority and honour is tested, as his sister (Necla) criticises his writing and his young wife (Nihal) challenges his controlling ways. The pedestal Aydin has built over the years is subsequently pulled from beneath him, producing a series of revealing dramatic set pieces. The key aesthetic strategies expressing Aydin's conflicted selfhood mirror those of the earlier films: the epic stone hills of Cappadocia swamp Aydin; the close-ups are more intense and Bergmanesque than ever; Aydin's gaze heightens our awareness of his attempts to oppress Nihal.

Yet the film also revolves around two central disputes, altering slightly the significance of these techniques. These occur back to back: first with Necla, then Nihal. The two women he believes he has been so honourable to and dependable for confront him, challenging his overbearing intellect and pretensions, forcing him to defend his character. More than his earlier films, *Winter Sleep*'s patient deconstruction of the flaws in Aydin's character and the responses of those around him allow us to trace the development of his conflicted self through the film's aesthetics. Landscapes, expressions and gazes take on new meanings as things progress: rocks begin to breathe, smiles become smirks, compassion becomes control. The self is hereby deconstructed in the most thorough and explicit way since *Climates*: a significant point that urges us to speculate again over yet another self-conscious critique of the pretentious artist. To ask 'am I who I think I am' is to ask the most probing and radical of all existential questions, confronting oneself with the construction and artifice of subjectivity.

Finally, we see an intensification of the gender politics that has quietly voiced itself since the girl at the end of *The Small Town* dared to put her hand in the stream. Here it is played out explicitly: in the film's closing monologue, Aydin expounds his refreshed approach to life, while Nihal is shown suffering, alone, alienated from the world he is free to dominate. It is perhaps the most overt piece of social commentary in all of Ceylan's work; but it does not appear at the cost of his avowed humanistic intent. Rather, developed slowly over his outstanding oeuvre, if there is a political philosophy at all detectable in the films of Ceylan, it relates to his insistent contemplations on the roles and responsibilities of individuals and their place in society. We might in this sense begin to consider Ceylan as a *political humanist*.

Conclusion: a political humanism?

Might we attach a political prefix to the version of humanism I have detailed thus far? We may argue that Ceylan's films imagine a political activity that is synonymous with the humanistic activity of internal (psychological) and external (social) conflicts over selfhood. Just as we find in the writings of Said, Sartre and Hannah Arendt,[9] a political humanism distinguishes itself from the social economics of utilitarian liberalism, the individualism of conservatism and the social universalism of Marxism. It also offers a strong opposition to contemporary neoliberalism's commoditisation of experience. The activity of political humanism would depend on an irreconcilable conflict between one's self and one's environment. Ceylan's cinema shows us what it is to experience the torment of this conflicted selfhood. The subtle narratives and unforgettable images of these films capture perfectly some of the dilemmas at the heart of this conflict: Dede, who is swamped by the sublime nature of the skies; Mahmut, who cannot suppress the freedoms of others; Eyüp, whose shrouded face gestures to the violence of others; Aydin, confounded at his desk after his sister's disagreement; and Nihal, helplessly left to suffer the impossibilities of patriarchy. These subtle metonymical images direct us to the themes of each narrative, but outward also, to something uncontained within the text, gesturing to something unforeseen.

It is in keeping with Ceylan's concern for the conflicted character of subjectivity and the invisible nature of the mind that meaning is so often difficult to obtain in these films – and, moreover, that a politics is difficult to locate. Nevertheless, we cannot simply accept Ceylan's repeated distancing from politics outright.[10] To probe the shared condition of conflicted selfhood between individuals in such a careful, consistent manner, is to offer a sincere reappraisal of our roles and responsibilities in society today. So concerned are these films with contemplating the travails of sociality and individuality, in spite of their scant interest in matters of national or global politics, a political philosophy is certainly traceable in the terms of its humanist discourse.

Notes

1. Halberstam and Livingston (eds.), *Posthuman Bodies* (1996); Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (1999); Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002); Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (2013).
2. To draw upon Arnold's word choice in the seminal work of liberal humanism, *Culture and Anarchy* (1994).
3. Sollors, Notably in the anthologies, *The Return of Thematic Criticism* (1993) and Bremond, Landy, and Pavel, *Thematics: New Approaches* (1995).
4. Bazin 'The Last Vacation (1997)' (Bazin 1997).
5. Notable Works include Goss (2009), Lebow (2013), and Haverty Rugg (2014).
6. This would indeed be the inference in the award of Best Actor to both at Cannes in 2003.

7. A philosophical dimension in the Western – beyond the construction of generic narratives – is argued for in Pippin, *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth* (2010) and McMahon and Csaki (eds.), *The Philosophy of the Western* (2010).
8. One wonders if a horror film may be on the horizon – although elements of both films certainly deal with certain horror tropes.
9. As argued in Mewes, *Hannah Arendt's Political Humanism* (2009) and Michael H. McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt* (2012).
10. When questioned over *Climates* and *Three Monkeys* (special features on the Artificial Eye DVD release) relation to political matters in Turkey, Ceylan rejects the suggestion outright.

Acknowledgement

Disclosure statement

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