



Fragmented Mimesis and Simulation: Rewriting Reality in *Synecdoche, New York*

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Abstract

Synecdoche, New York (2008) destabilizes ontological assumptions surrounding cinematic representation and constructs a recursive universe that dissolves the boundaries between selfhood, space, and temporality. The film follows an artist attempting to reproduce his life within an ever-expanding theatrical simulation; this effort generates proliferating layers of representation that displace referential stability. This study examines the reconfiguration of the classical paradigm of mimesis and analyzes representation as a recursive, self-referential structure. The analysis adopts a theoretical close reading grounded in philosophical approaches to simulation, temporality, and subjectivity. The findings indicate that representation ceases to function as correspondence with external reality and operates as a self-generating system that produces ontological instability. Recursive *mise-en-abyme* structures and synecdochic substitution convert identity into iterative performance and disperse subjectivity across layered representations. This study advances debates on postmimetic cinema by positioning recursion as a constitutive condition of contemporary cinematic ontology and by positing that representation produces

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disappearance as its primary effect and displaces meaning as a stable presence. The analysis further establishes recursion as a structuring logic that reorganizes relations between representation, temporality, and subjectivity at the level of form. It further proposes that cinematic space functions as an ontological interface, and identity registers as a transient configuration, dislodged from stability.

Keywords: Mimesis, simulation, fragmented ontology, philosophy of cinema, postmodern subjectivity, deconstruction.

Parçalanmış Mimesis ve Simülasyon: *New York Yanılsamaları*'nda Gerçekliğin Yeniden Yazımı

Öz

Synecdoche, New York (2008), sinemasal temsil etrafında kurulan ontolojik varsayımları radikal biçimde sarsarak benlik, mekân ve zamansallık arasındaki sınırları çözen yinelemeli bir evren tesis eder. Film, yaşamını giderek genişleyen bir teatral simülasyon içinde yeniden üretmeye yönelik bir sanatçıyı merkeze alır; bu yönelim, göndergesel istikrarı yerinden eden çoğalan temsil katmanları üretir. Bu çalışma, mimesisin klasik paradigmasının yeniden yapılandırılmasını incelemekte ve temsili yinelemeli ve kendine göndermeli bir yapı olarak çözümlenmektedir. Analiz, simülasyon, zamansallık ve öznellik üzerine geliştirilen felsefi yaklaşımlara dayanan kuramsal bir yakın okuma yöntemi temelinde ilerler. Bulgular, temsili dış gerçeklikle kurulan bir örtüşme ilişkisi olarak işlev görmekten uzaklaştırarak ontolojik istikrarsızlık üreten kendini kuran bir sistem olarak açığa çıkarır. Yinelemeli *mise-en-abyme* (iç içe geçmiş temsiller yapısı) yapıları ile sinek-dokik yer değiştirme süreçleri, kimliği iteratif bir performans düzlemine taşır ve özneyi katmanlı temsiller boyunca dağıtır. Bu çalışma, yinelemeyi çağdaş sinemasal ontolojinin kurucu bir koşulu olarak konumlandırmakta ve temsilin anlamı sabit bir varlık olarak tesis etmek yerine yokoluşu başat etkisi olarak ürettiğini ileri sürerek postmimetik sinema tartışmalarına katkı sağlamaktadır. Analiz ayrıca, yinelemenin temsil, zamansallık ve öznellik arasındaki ilişkileri biçim düzeyinde yeniden örgütleyen bir yapı mantığı kurduğunu göstermektedir. Buna ek olarak, sinemasal mekân ontolojik bir arayüz olarak işlev görmek; kimlik ise istikrarlı bir öz olarak değil, süreksiz ve geçici bir konfigürasyon olarak kaydedilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mimesis, simülasyon, parçalı ontolojisinema felsefesi, postmodern özne, yapıbozum.

Introduction

Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* (2008) constitutes a paradigmatic instance of postmodern cinematic ontology, presenting a narrative structure that systematically erases representational logic. The film produces a representational implosion: theatrical and real, signifier and signified fuse in a recursive simulacrum. At the centre of this vortex, Caden Cotard's obsessive endeavour to dramatize his own existence develops into an exponentially expanding replica of reality. This process deconstructs narrative integrity and collapses distinctions between identities, temporality, and spatial referents.¹ This article argues that *Synecdoche, New York* challenges the classical Aristotelian paradigm of mimesis and carries its internal tensions to metaphysical extremity. Kaufman stages life-as-theatre and constructs a series of *mise-en-abyme* layers, each theatrical iteration producing concealment and deferral of meaning.² This collapse of representational referents situates the film within poststructuralist and psychoanalytic frameworks, presenting subjectivity as performative, structured by deferral, and marked by narrative rupture. The opening tableau, Caden's sterile ablutions, his bodily decay, and the inexorable ticking of the clock, signal the collapse of temporal and representational order. *Synecdoche, New York* constitutes an ontopoietic experiment; mimesis exhausts itself in recursion and artifice. Here, the ontopoietic designates a mode of representation that generates its own ontological conditions and operates without recourse to external reality. The analysis adopts close formal reading and engages poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, and phenomenological perspectives, drawing on Baudrillard's concept of simulation, Butler's account of performativity, and Kristeva's theorization of abjection. Kaufman's cinema discloses the gradual disintegration of the real and positions representation as the locus of ontological crisis.

The trope of synecdoche, "the part standing for the whole," structures this ontological framework. Kaufman transforms this rhetorical device into an existential principle. The recursive nesting of theatrical fragments proliferates absence and forms an endless hall of mirrors; meaning eludes capture.³ With stimulation serving as an ontological register, life itself assumes simulacra,

1 Ümit Hakkı Girgin, "Simülasyon Evrenine Özgü Sinema", *SineFilozofi*, 4, no. 8, 2019, p. 199, <https://doi.org/10.31122/sinefilozofi.411670>.

2 Hümeyra Muharrem Töle, "Çağdaş Sanat Tartışmaları Bağlamında 'Kare' Filmi Üzerine Bir İnceleme", *İdil: Sanat ve Dil Dergisi*, 7, no. 46, 2018, p. 688, <https://doi.org/10.7816/idil-07-46-07>; Girgin, "Simülasyon Evrenine Özgü Sinema", p. 212.

3 Ayşe Çam, "Sinemasal Mekânlar ve Sinemasal Mekânların Çözümlemesi", *Sinecine: Sinema Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7, no. 2, 2016, p. 29, <https://doi.org/10.32001/sinecine.537771>.

and the spectator confronts a vertiginous orbit of meaning-estrangement.⁴ The film's architectural *mise-en-scène* intensifies this ontological configuration. The hyper-detailed, all-consuming replica of New York housed in a derelict hangar establishes an immersive site of identity destabilization. Çam conceptualizes cinematic space as an active agent in ontological formation.⁵ Spatiality operates as a character: an architectural unconscious formed from Caden's fragmented psyche, articulating ontological voids and performative dislocations. The warehouse sequences provide the most legible articulation of recursive spatial logic. Caden orchestrates actors performing replicas of himself within an ever-expanding reconstruction of New York. Each architectural iteration replicates the previous structure and effaces its ontological origin. This process exemplifies Baudrillard's fourth order of simulacra, a regime of images detached from any referential ground. In this infinite regress, synecdoche exceeds its rhetorical function and operates as an existential mechanism: the part ceases to signify the whole and consumes it. The cinematic image functions as generative and transforms mimesis into a process of ontological self-production. Kaufman's film functions as a phenomenological laboratory. The spatialization of simulation reveals the terminal condition of representation and defines cinematic space as both symptom and site of metaphysical disintegration.

Emre Doğan's analysis of Baudrillardian simulacra in David Fincher's cinema positions contemporary auteurs as inscribing postmodern ontology into visual form.⁶ Doğan contends that cinematic simulation exceeds narrative trickery and constitutes the ontological condition of late modernity. The image produces reality; representation loses its referential function. This aligns with Kaufman's film, as representation constitutes the structure of existence. This study develops a multifaceted hermeneutic reading of *Synecdoche, New York* as a filmic allegory of the death of mimesis. The analysis proceeds within the framework of Turkish postmodern cinema theory (Çam, Girgin, Töle) alongside contemporary Baudrillardian analysis (Doğan) as a framework for analyzing film's recursive visual logic, spatial poetics, and refusal of referential closure. Kaufman's work offers a depiction of fragmentation and institutes it at architectural, performative, and ontological levels, situating both character and viewer in an infinite regress

4 Girgin, "Simülasyon Evrenine Özgü Sinema", p. 206.

5 Çam, "Sinemasal Mekânlar ve Sinemasal Mekânların Çözümlemesi", p. 31.

6 Emre Doğan, "Jean Baudrillard'ın Simülasyon Evreninin Film Simülakları: David Fincher Örneği", *Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 12, 2016, p. 40, <https://doi.org/10.30783/nevsos-bilen.1162583>.

of simulacra.⁷ Read alongside Kaufman's recursive dramaturgy, Doğan's analysis of Fincher foregrounds simulation exceeds the level of a semiotic device and operates as an autopoietic logic. The image engenders the conditions of its own being. The *mise-en-abyme* structure of *Synecdoche, New York* renders this ontological recursion visible, as actors enact their own doubles within the warehouse labyrinth and representation exhausts itself in the reproduction of the real as the residue of a simulacrum. This synthesis, situated at the intersection of Turkish postmodern film theory and Western media philosophy, defines an emergent paradigm. Cinematic form operates as a site of metaphysical production, displacing narrative articulation. The image constitutes an epistemic organism that generates and devours its ontological ground.

The Collapse of Representation: Mimesis, Fracture, and the Death of the Real

In *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), representation collapses in a radical and irreparable manner. Recursive narration, self-referential *mise-en-scène*, and the architectural expansion of performance into life construct a cinematic ontology. Mimesis forfeits its mediating function and displaces the real. This section analyzes the philosophical and aesthetic disintegration of representational integrity. The film constructs a world detached from lived reality and structured by its own fictional logic. The opening sequence establishes a landscape of ontological exhaustion. Caden Cotard awakens to bodily decay: Bloodied urine, trembling hands, and an infected eye. These physiological breakdowns register the collapse of embodied subjectivity as a visual form. The neurologist states, "You're dying... from the inside out." Kaufman frames the corporeal as a metaphor for representational disintegration. The theatrical extends into life itself, endlessly iterated. The narrative trajectory reflects the dissolution of referential stability, an implosion Girgin defines as "the substitution of life by the performance of its repetition."⁸ The mimetic function shifts from revelation to replication and from expression to saturation. The film articulates ontological entropy. Representation loses its mediating function and absorbs the real into proliferating architectures of signification. The mimetic regime disintegrates as its semiotic operations reach saturation. This condition exposes the terminal instability of coherence and defines the epistemology of postmodern cinematic ontology.

7 Doğan, "Jean Baudrillard'ın Simülasyon Evreninin Film Simülakrları", p. 45; Töle, "Çağdaş Sanat Tartışmaları Bağlamında 'Kare' Filmi Üzerine Bir İnceleme", p. 695; Çam, "Sinemasal Mekânlar ve Sinemasal Mekânların Çözülmesi", p. 31.

8 Girgin, "Simülasyon Evrenine Özgü Sinema" p. 204.

This saturation materializes as an architectural and narrative form in Caden's theatrical project. The play stages reality and metastasizes into a self-consuming labyrinth. A life-sized replica of New York stands inside a warehouse. Actors perform recursive iterations of Caden. Recursive simulation exemplifies Baudrillard's fourth stage of the image. Signs detach from the real and assume the form of "pure simulacra."⁹ The *mise-en-abyme* deepens. Caden directs actors performing his role, and these actors direct others. Moments dissolve into affective fragments. Each layer of simulation proliferates over the absence of origin. Even grief is deferred. Olive's death remains off-screen. A fragmented letter and a dispassionate notification convey it: "You didn't go to the funeral." This architecture of infinite regress produces a hyperreal dramaturgy. Repetition displaces origin, and the logic of representation absorbs itself into its recursive generation of appearances. Simulation operates as ontogenesis and not mimesis. It functions as an autopoietic system. The image's internal semiotic economy and self-referential production of meaning continuously reconstitute the real.

These ruptures between event and narrative, between ontological loss and representational gesture, mark the film's structural refusal to bind experience into narrative coherence. The absence of catharsis, as articulated by Aristotle in classical poetics, defines a metaphysical condition. Gültekin characterizes the refusal of employment as a condition that "denies the possibility of symbolic resolution, saturating the narrative with recursive structures that cancel causality itself."¹⁰ Kaufman constructs a post-mimetic spectacle of exhaustion. Narrative collapses into its own recursive logic. This systemic disintegration defines narrative incoherence as an ontological imperative. It exposes the exhaustion of representation's capacity to stabilise experience in symbolic order. The film transforms Aristotelian teleology into a phenomenology of interminability. Meaning withdraws into deferral and persists as a spectral residue of representation.

Temporal disintegration intensifies the collapse of representation. Seasons shift across scenes, characters age discontinuously, and narrative time folds inward. Caden's daughter appears alternately as a child and as a distant adult, lacking transitional continuity. Akbulut and Yıldız characterise postmodern cinema as a form that "remaps the spatial-temporal matrix as fluid thresholds

9 Süleyman Gümüş, "Bir Medya Aracı Olarak Sinemanın Din Eğitiminde Kullanımı: Baudrillard'ın Simülasyon Teorisi Bağlamında Bir Değerlendirme", *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi*, 17, no. 38, 2019, p. 12, <https://doi.org/10.34234/ded.347162>.

10 Gökhan Gültekin, "Sinedigma: Sinemanın Zihinsel ve Toplumsal Gerçeklik Üretimi", *SineFilozofi*, 5, no. 10, 2020, p. 710, <https://doi.org/10.31122/sinefilozofi.788370>.

of perception and displaces fixed coordinates of identity”¹¹ Kaufman’s treatment of time dissolves linearity and functional clarity. Time fails to orient experience and disorients character and spectator. “I don’t know how long I’ve been alive,” Caden says. “I think I’ve been dead for some time.” These utterances register a subjectivity unmoored from temporal anchoring as ontological testimony. Temporal indeterminacy renders duration ontologically porous and dissolves the distinction between persistence and decay. The film constructs a chronotype of suspended vitality. Life persists at the horizon of its own extinction.

The film’s spatial design intensifies this epistemic dissolution. The warehouse, initially a space of theatrical rehearsal, transforms into a self-contained world with autonomous weather systems, architecture, and inhabitants. Streets are constructed indoors; artificial rain falls on real bricks. The real shifts into the fictional. Gümüş contends that “simulation constructs a new mode of experiential totality.”¹² The representational field constitutes a recursive interior, devoid of an external referent and a reality beyond its performance. Spatial recursion defines the cinematic environment as an ontopoietic mechanism. It generates its own epistemic order and reconfigures the parameters of the real. Spatiality transfigures from representational substrate into a metaphysical matrix. It develops into an autological topology. The distinction between inhabitation and construction dissolves in a continuous field of ontological immanence.

Caden assumes the role of a cleaning woman named Ellen, constituting a gesture of self-effacement. He obeys unseen instructions from an earpiece. “I’m just trying to understand what I’m supposed to do,” he says, mopping the floor of a replica apartment. This scene marks the full performative collapse of identity. Kösem Işık and Kandemir conceptualize this process as a condition in which representation absorbs identity into function, leaving behind residue: a gesture without referent, a performance without self.”¹³ Caden’s speech fragments into apologies and muttered confusion. Language, alongside spatiality and temporality, registers as a residual echo of lost meaning. *Synecdoche, New York* critiques representational strategies and stages their death. The film reveals the exhaustion of the mimetic paradigm as immersive disintegration. The film

11 Muzaffer Tolga Akbulut - Emre Yıldız, “Mimari Temsil Sistemlerine Zaman-Mekân’ın Eklenmesi ile Oluşan Mekânsal Deneyimin Sinema Aracılığı ile İncelenmesi”, *Journal of Academic Social Science Studies*, 16, no. 98, 2023, p. 532, <https://doi.org/10.29228/JASSS.74047>.

12 Gümüş, “Bir Medya Aracı Olarak Sinemanın Din Eğitiminde Kullanımı”, p. 25.

13 Cansu Kösem Işık - Taylan Yiğit Kandemir, “Sinemada Gerçekçi Temsil Ekseninde ‘Nefesim Kesilene Kadar’ Filmine Bir Bakış”, *MEKCAD* 5, no. 2, 2023, p. 82, <https://doi.org/10.55055/meccad.1313613>.

autopsies representation itself. It exposes recursive collapse and traces the disappearance of the real beneath layers of simulation. Girgin formulates this shift as follows: “when performance replaces presence, cinema ceases to be image and becomes ontology.”¹⁴ This terminal recursion compels representation to relinquish its referential mandate. It reabsorbs the real into an autopoietic matrix of signification. This matrix perpetuates its own ontological circuitry. This collapse inaugurates an ontology of simulacral endurance. The visible operates as remainder. Presence persists as spectral trace. Existence unfolds in iterative reproduction and in the closed economy of the image.

Time, Decay, and the Recursive Self: Performing Mortality in Kaufman’s Cinematic Ontology

In *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), Charlie Kaufman configures time as an ontological agent that warps experience, disorients narrative, and corrodes the coherence of the self. Time operates as recursive. It folds in on itself and forms a spiralling vortex of repetition and decay. This temporality operates as a force that directly structures the construction and dissolution of identity. The opening sequence presents Caden Cotard awakening to a ticking clock. His physical symptoms intensify in an accelerated montage. Kaufman establishes time as a dissonant and fragmented field. Stability and chronology collapse into entropy. Temporal recursion defines duration as an ontopoietic-principle. Existence enacts its own attrition and continually reconstitutes the conditions of its finitude. Temporality materializes as an entropic modality of being. This condition produces a specific phenomenology. Subjectivity persists in the reiteration of loss, and consciousness circulates at the horizon of extinction.

Caden attempts to dramatize his life as a massive theatrical simulation in a warehouse. This effort confronts the impossibility of capturing reality in representation. The simulation forms a recursive archive of memory and longing. Actors perform layered roles that replicate one another. The structure loops without origin or endpoint. Chung conceptualizes this aesthetic strategy as “cinematic archaeology.” Layers of temporality accumulate and resist unfolding. This process produces a sedimentation of lived time.¹⁵ A key scene presents Caden walking past a reconstruction of his apartment. Another version of himself rehearses lines about grief. He encounters a temporally displaced echo of himself,

14 Girgin, “Simülasyon Evrenine Özgü Sinema”, p. 21.

15 Hye Jean Chung, “Cinema as Archaeology: The Acousmètre and the Multiple Layering of Temporality and Spatiality”, *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture*, 1, 2011, p. 105-16, <https://doi.org/10.5195/contemp.2011.22>.

rather than a memory; entropic temporality defines the cinematic image as self-reflexive ontology, with decay functioning as a generative principle and repetition producing epistemic conditions. Time engenders existence and reconfigures mortality as a structural condition of cinematic thought.

The expansion of the simulation drives the recursive erosion of identity. Gültekin characterizes narrative overload as a condition that produces collapse in postmodern cinema.¹⁶ Caden's need for self-clarification in staged repetition generates further confusion. Sammy's suicide marks the most potent illustration of this: an actor fully absorbed in portraying Caden loses any stable sense of identity. Performative saturation constitutes a fatal loop. It reveals the recursive structure of subjectivity under narrative overdetermination. Recursive entanglement displaces subjectivity from coherence. It reconfigures subjectivity as a performative mechanism that reiterates its own fragmentation. The self persists as a differential residue. It forms an ontological remainder generated in repetition and detached from presence.

Time rarely registers in conventional form. Years pass in single edits. Olive, once a young girl, appears on her deathbed, inscribed with tattoos and rage. The narrative rupture exemplifies Scheie's notion of the spectral residue of the voice, a signifier detached from temporal and bodily anchoring.¹⁷ Olive refuses her father's apology: "You don't deserve my forgiveness." Her words carry the force of narrative closure. The film suspends resolution. Time fails to heal and accumulates unresolved echoes. Temporal rupture produces a phenomenology of deferred finitude. Vocality registers the trace of embodiment's erasure. Temporality transforms into an acoustic topology of absence. It produces a regime of signification. Every utterance registers the spectral persistence of death in the immanent fabric of the image.

Spatial decay mirrors temporal disintegration. The warehouse, once a site of creativity and self-expression, collapses into ruin. Walls collapse, props rot, lighting fades. Pallasmaa conceptualizes cinematic spaces as "existential images" that register the breakdown of psychological coherence.¹⁸ Caden speaks with a janitor performing the role of his ex-wife in a derelict set. The emotional scene remains inert and muted in its surroundings. Space erodes memory.

16 Gültekin, "Sinedigma", p. 710.

17 Timothy Scheie, "Roland Barthes' Grain of the Voice: From *Mélodie* to *Media*", *Romance Studies*, 34, no. 3-4, 2017, p. 163-73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02639904.2017.1307630>.

18 Juhani Pallasmaa, "The Existential Image: Lived Space in Cinema and Architecture", *Phainomenon*, 25, no. 1, 2012, p. 157-74, <https://doi.org/10.2478/phainomenon-2012-0020>.

Spatial entropy defines architecture as an ontogenetic matrix. Decay articulates perception at an ontological level. Spatiality withdraws into a topology of immanent disappearance. It defines an ontology of negation. Dissolution acquires generative force, and form persists as the remnant of its own vanishing.

Kaufman reconfigures the teleology of death. Death occupies a climactic and transformative role in cinematic narratives. In *Synecdoche*, death operates as recursive and procedural. A disembodied voice tells Caden: “You are Ellen now. You clean. You die.” These statements constitute ontological coordinates. Caden lies beside an anonymous woman and says, “I know how to do this now.” The film completes its loop. The scene lacks an audience and a conclusion; a slow fade leads into ontological void. Gültekin and Chung conceptualize recursive structuring as a mode that performs death and articulates mortality as a cinematic condition.¹⁹ Kaufman’s recursive portrayal of time constitutes an implicit critique of the self-help and therapeutic culture of modernity. *Synecdoche* disrupts the expectation that trauma or existential doubt yields to narrativization and resolution. Caden’s attempts to produce meaning generate increasing fragmentation and dislocation in his world. The absence of narrative closure constitutes ethical resistance to forced coherence. Recursive temporality defines death as an onto-poietic recurrence. Finitude constitutes the conditions of its own perpetuation. Mortality disengages from narrative teleology and configures an ontological interval. Disappearance acquires generative force, and being persists as the reiteration of its own vanishing.

The film destabilizes time via visual motifs. Clocks recur across the *mise-en-scène*: stopped, ticking erratically, buried in dust. These objects register as remnants of a symbolic order that fails to regulate experience. Conventional cinema advances plots along temporal progression. Kaufman draws the viewer toward the layered sediment of affect and memory. The recursive decay of the self extends beyond the psychological and assumes an architectural dimension. Caden constructs a city as a replication of New York. It collapses in on itself and constitutes a ruin of the mind. Pallasmaa conceptualizes cinematic architecture as a form that externalizes internal collapse.²⁰ The city decays as projected meanings accumulate. This decay exceeds the influence of weather and neglect. Collapsing topology defines architecture as the ontology of memory’s disintegration. It translates affective sediment into spatial entropy. The ruin signifies loss and constitutes an ontogenetic condition. Meaning exhausts itself and produces the material residue of representation’s decay.

19 Gültekin, “Sinedigma”, p. 714; Chung, “Cinema as Archaeolog”, p. 110.

20 Pallasmaa, “The Existential Image”, p. 72.

The act of speaking registers the burden of repetition Caden's voice, once distinct, reduces to a hollow echo of earlier lines. He forgets names, roles, even his own function in the play. Scheie conceptualizes the voice as losing its originary connection to the subject and registering as an ambient effect in postmodern media.²¹ Kaufman literalizes this process. Caden's voice disperses into an atmospheric field. Voices speak for him, about him, and around him. Direct address disappears. Kaufman constructs a structure of death-in-life, displacing the narrative of dying. Time forms a recursive choreography of collapse. Redemption arcs and narrative transformation disappear; simulation, repetition, and fading persist. Memory, space, and voice collapse into indistinction with decay. Acoustic disintegration displaces vocality from its semiotic function. Vocality enters an onto-poietic regime. Resonance articulates the dissolution of presence. Speech transforms into a spectral modality of being. It sustains existence in iterative production of absence and recursive propagation of its own erasure.

Fractured Space and the Architecture of Simulacra: Staging the Void in Postmodern Cinema

In *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), space exceeds the role of a passive stage and functions as a primary agent of disintegration. It constitutes an architectural and symbolic terrain that encapsulates the psychological collapse of the protagonist and the philosophical unravelling of representation. Caden Cotard attempts to replicate the real in a massive warehouse. This effort generates a recursive labyrinth of simulation that progressively supplants reality. The transformation of cinematic spatiality reflects the postmodern turn in visual culture. Girgin conceptualizes spatial duplication as producing ontological instability and dislocating the viewer from conventional narrative coordinates.²² Kaufman constructs a space that generates its own logic. This metacinematic environment reconfigures the real as endless reproduction. Metacinematic architecture defines spatiality as an onto-poietic matrix. Representation exhausts itself in the generation of its own simulacral logic. Space withdraws from mimesis and enacts the material ontology of repetition. Cinematic construction operates as an autological process. The image manufactures its own ontological conditions.

Kaufman's warehouse constitutes a symbolic nexus of the hyperreal. Endlessly replicating structures include streets built inside buildings and apartments nested inside replicas. Kaufman stages the hyperreal condition defined by Gümüş:

21 Scheie, "Roland Barthes' Grain of the Voice", p. 179.

22 Girgin, "Simülasyon Evrenine Özgü Sinema", p. 225.

simulation overtakes referentiality and produces models without origin.²³ The city in the warehouse exceeds the status of a set. It constitutes a prosthetic extension of Caden’s fragmented psyche and a synthetic cityscape that internalizes the logic of fragmentation. The space stages a layered semiotic implosion. Rincón-Borrego, Alonso-García, and Pérez Barreiro conceptualize this condition as spatial memory detaches from history and moves toward digital surrealism.²⁴ The hyperreal assemblage defines spatiality as performing the ontological labor of simulation. It transforms architecture into a self-referential mechanism that generates reality as recursive artifact. The cinematic image withdraws from external reference. It converts space into an epistemic apparatus. Perception, memory, and materiality converge in a singular autopoietic continuum.

The *mise-en-abyme* architecture of the film performs ontological erosion as excess. Caden constructs a replica of the warehouse and a visual allegory of infinite regress. Each nested simulation renders the previous layer obsolete. The referent sinks into strata of performative repetition. Gültekin conceptualizes such recursive structures as architectural vertigo. This spatial condition denies finality and origin.²⁵ Kaufman’s recursive layering of interiors echoes a Baudrillardian “reduction to the code.” All elements exist as variation without origin.²⁶ The recursive *mise-en-abyme* enacts the auto-referential logic of being. It transforms spatial construction into an ontopoietic operation. Representation continually produces and erases its own foundations. The built environment constitutes a metaphysical engine of recursion. It reconfigures materiality as the medium of ontological self-dissolution.

Cinematographically, Kaufman intensifies disorientation and rejects external anchoring. The film rarely cuts to the outside world after the warehouse appears. Simulation devours diegetic geography: doors lead to unexpected replications, windows open onto blank walls, staircases ascend toward voids. Caden moves across this terrain like a ghost in an ever-collapsing dream. Edwards conceptualizes Baudrillardian cinema as a “dead zone,” a neutralized field. Signs circulate and lose anchoring in reality.²⁷ Kaufman materializes spatial logic in

23 Gümüş, “Bir Medya Aracı Olarak Sinemanın Din Eğitiminde Kullanımı”, p. 281.

24 Iván Rincón-Borrego, et al., “Memories between Architecture and Cinema: A Glimpse into the Webapp Cinemapp.Net”, *SOBRE*, 10, 2024, p. 83-96, <https://doi.org/10.30827/sobre.v10i.28397>.

25 Gültekin, “Sinedigma”, p. 716.

26 Greg Edwards, “Jean Baudrillard and Cinema”, *Film International*, 8, no. 2, 2010, p. 27–42, <https://doi.org/10.3366/film.2010.0041>.

27 Edwards, “Jean Baudrillard and Cinema”, p. 259.

haunting literalness. Spatial nullity defines cinematic geography as an ontology of disappearance. It transforms perception into a recursive field. Orientation dissolves in pure simulation. The image withdraws from mediation and constitutes spatiality as its own generative circuitry. It sustains representation in the continual effacement of the real.

Characters inhabit the decaying architecture. Narrative cohesion collapses. Actors lose orientation and rehearse lines for scenes that cease to occur. They inhabit spaces devoid of original referents. Kösem Işık and Kandemir conceptualize cinematic spaces as absorbing subjectivity. Identity reduces to gesture, and presence reduces to function.²⁸ Caden-as-Ellen mops the floor in a replica of his former apartment. The structure collapses. “I know how to do this now,” she says. Her voice remains devoid of emotion. The scene articulates the condition Gümüş conceptualizes as post-mimetic fatigue: the subject remains alienated from space and persists as a construct of its voids.²⁹ Post-mimetic exhaustion defines subjectivity as an ontological residue. Repetition generates this residue, and coherence cannot sustain it. The cinematic body disperses across architectural voids and constitutes an economy of absence. Being subsists as gesture, and consciousness circulates in the mechanics of its own dissolution.

Spatial simulation expands as semantic density contracts, establishing a paradoxical topology. Accumulation generates erasure. Caden’s acts of construction intensify inward curvature and fold the structure upon itself, producing a regime of implosion as expansion and collapse coincide. Vertical growth abandons any association with transcendence and configures a closed spatial economy governed by recursion. In the final sequences, the camera adopts an elevated gaze and surveys a derelict cityscape contained in the warehouse; fragmented sets, abandoned props, and decomposing surfaces persist as material residues of exhausted signification. Spatial magnitude endures, yet meaning dissipates, and the image relinquishes any capacity to stabilize perception, exposing the erosion of perceptual anchoring. Kaufman’s cinematic topology configures space as a recursive abyss: identity dissolves, history withdraws, orientation disperses, and spatiality ceases to support habitation or navigation and produces a field of ontological indeterminacy. The remaining configuration exceeds the category of world and emerges as a topological hallucination, a *mise-en-scène* that enacts the terminal exhaustion of narrative structure and the collapse of representational coherence. Space generates absence.

28 Kösem Işık - Kandemir, “Nefesim Kesilene Kadar Filmine Bir Bakış”, p. 192.

29 Gümüş, “Bir Medya Aracı Olarak Sinemanın Din Eğitiminde Kullanımı”, p. 284.

Voice, Disembodiment, and the Acousmatic Real: Soundscapes of Ontological Drift

In *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), sound constitutes a critical ontological force. It appears disembodied, unstable, and radically unmoored. Sound, particularly voice, destabilizes the integrity of the self and disrupts the coherence of the diegetic world. Caden Cotard navigates a recursive theatrical universe. The acoustic landscape registers his descent into representational implosion. Traditional sound design reinforces spatial and narrative unity. Kaufman's sound dismantles auditory expectations and amplifies ontological confusion. Michel Chion's concept of the acousmètre frames this analysis. The acousmatic voice lacks a visible source. The film stages sonic phenomena. These phenomena disrupt spatial fixity and collapse the separation between internal thought and external sound.³⁰

Voices in *Synecdoche, New York* register without context, echo without cause, and address without resolution. Sammy (Tom Noonan) articulates Caden's inner fears: "You are afraid, afraid of dying, of being alone, of being unloved." The utterance oscillates between parody and revelation. Scheie conceptualizes,³¹ Barthes' "grain of the voice" as capturing the excess of sound beyond semantic containment. In Kaufman's cinematic world, this grain dissolves and reduces to vaporous disembodiment. Voices echo with spectral flattening and shed markers of personality. The human voice relinquishes embodied presence and produces a mechanical reverberation of meaninglessness.

Sound editing techniques disrupt spatial continuity and register the dissolution of vocal materiality. Kaufman deploys reverb, delay, and sudden audio dropouts. These techniques sever voices from visible bodies. Utterances circulate across walls, inside voids, over intercoms, and on degraded tape recordings.³² Caden listens to his daughter's voice. The recording appears archived, distorted, and endlessly looping. Its origin remains indeterminate across time and space. The voice registers as a haunting artifact of fractured temporality. It operates as a sonic ghost detached from temporal determination.

The spectral quality of the voice resonates with Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection.³³ The disembodied voice, severed from both subject and narrative,

30 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman, Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 129.

31 Scheie, "Roland Barthes' Grain of the Voice", p. 169.

32 Chung, "Cinema as Archaeology", p. 110.

33 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 4.

becomes an abject force, unclassifiable, boundary-defying, and ontologically threatening. The abject resists classification as subject or object. The acousmatic voice in Kaufman's film resists classification as thought or sound and as private or public. It constitutes an undecidable echo that corrodes symbolic order. Cavallini extends the analysis to science-fiction cinema. Acousmatic voices destabilize diegetic realism and disorient subjectivity via political and metaphysical ambiguity.³⁴

Disembodied voices inhabit a soundscape resisting cartographic logic. Rincón-Borrego et al. conceptualize sound in architectural cinema as producing a memory geography detached from continuity.³⁵ Kaufman's warehouse constitutes a physical structure and an auditory chamber. It constitutes a reverberant vessel of fractured memory. Speech persists in the absence of interlocutors, and sounds echo in the absence of source. Caden hears his name reverberate across empty scaffolding. He turns and searches. The scene yields an absent speaker. The voice exceeds communicative function and constitutes a performative trace of his own unravelling.

Žižek situates vocal eruptions within the logic of ideological interpellation, a structuring call that installs the subject into the coordinates of the symbolic.³⁶ In *Synecdoche, New York*, the interpellative mechanism loses operative force. Voices directed toward Caden fail to produce symbolic intelligibility; they mark the disintegration of legibility constitutive of subjecthood. Identification with Ellen exceeds performative substitution and penetrates the vocal register; the apparatus of speech fractures. Speech contracts into whispers and residual fragments, then recedes into silence. The final acousmatic utterance, "Now you can die," articulates itself without origin, address, or spatial anchoring, registering a terminal limit where voice persists beyond the collapse of subjecthood.

Kaufman's soundscape stages an ontological crisis grounded in acoustic disorientation. Voice ceases to secure subjectivity and instead marks its erasure. Presence yields to resonance; selfhood dissolves into echo. Within this void, the acousmatic exceeds formal function and assumes a metaphysical charge: absence rendered audible, collapse inscribed in sonic form. This extended acoustic configuration positions sound as the privileged site for the articulation of the fragility of being in *Synecdoche, New York*.

34 Marco Cavallini, "Vox Politica: Acousmatic Voices in Argentinean Science-Fiction Cinema", *Media, Culture & Society*, 33, no. 4, 2011, p. 543-58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2011.521715>.

35 Rincón-Borrego, et al., "Memories between Architecture and Cinema", p. 90.

36 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, 1989, p. 125.

Rehearsing Death: Thanatopolitics, Repetition, and the End Without End

In *Synecdoche, New York*, death operates as a rehearsed condition, deferred and aesthetically reconfigured rather than resolved as narrative culmination. Caden Cotard constructs a theatrical replica of his own life, a *mise-en-scène* that displaces mortality from terminal event into ontological horizon. This sustained rehearsal destabilizes cinematic temporality and suspends the logic of finality. Death assumes a recursive structure, indexed to the compulsive repetitions of modern subjectivity and the circularity of consciousness. Giorgio Agamben's formulation of thanatopolitics, the governance of death as a modality of power, finds concrete articulation in Caden's obsessive direction of a play without origin or conclusion. The stage constitutes a sovereign domain of simulation; actors inhabit the roles of the already dead, while Caden, positioned simultaneously as director and object, exerts biopolitical control over gesture, speech, and the distribution of death across his constructed world. Beauregard et al.'s empirical study of cinematic mortality locates a structural shift toward symbolic recursion, contemporary media generate simulations that defer affective finality and suspend experiential rupture.³⁷

Hazel's prolonged demise configures death's recursive dramaturgy. Her decision to inhabit a house in perpetual combustion assumes allegorical force, sustained in the image of flames that never extinguish. The structure of slow self-annihilation unfolds without escalation and resolves in an offhand announcement, "She's gone" delivered without affect, detached from any visible scene of dying. The affective flatness of this moment corresponds to Chung's formulation of "multiple layering of temporality"; linear causality disintegrates, and death registers as an echo without origin.³⁸ Layered temporality flattens finality; death circulates as ambient condition, emptied of eventhood. Hazel's death evades the structural logic of narrative closure and disperses into atmosphere, a dissipated occurrence without terminal resolution.

The structure of Caden's autotheatrical world configures additional mechanisms of thanatopolitical control. His full-scale reproduction of life, extending to the minutiae of gesture, operates within a regime of surveillance and recursive scripting. Every moment is pre-recorded, rehearsed, restaged. Actors inhabit simulations of themselves, a regime that eradicates spontaneity and enforces

37 Beauregard, et al., "Hollywood's Misrepresentation of Death: A Comparison of Overall and by-Gender Mortality Causes in Film and the Real World", *arXiv*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2411.10040>.

38 Chung, "Cinema as Archaeology", p. 112.

performative fixity. Cavallini's analysis of science-fiction cinema establishes an analytic frame: acousmatic voices and disembodied control configure mortality as politically legible, structured by systemic repetition, with spectacle evacuated.³⁹ Death, in this configuration, assumes the form of orchestration and ritualization as routine. Caden's inability to distinguish theatrical from real death, marked by self-eulogization in character, signals a profound dissolution of boundaries. His life folds into a feedback loop of dying performances. The stage assumes a dual function as mortuary and living archive; memory collapses into rehearsal.

In the film's final act, death sheds the pretence of ceremony. Caden receives a whispered instruction from an unseen voice: "now you can die." The acousmatic utterance reverberates without source, stripped of ritual and detached from resolution. Barthesian "death of the author" assumes literal force; Caden occupies the positions of playwright and performed fiction, director and discarded line. The ending refuses a closure; it fades, diffuses, reverberates. No originating structure sustains termination. The narrative folds into recursion, incapable of delivering terminus.

This thematic disintegration extends into Caden's final gesture. Caden inhabits the persona of Ellen, a deceased cleaning woman, and performs invisible labour within an abandoned set. The scene excludes audience, applause, and closure; recursive servitude remains. Gopinath's reflections on cultural death narratives establish an analytic frame: death assumes an iterative structure, circulating as a trope of perpetual re-performance, severed from climactic resolution.⁴⁰ Kaufman's cinematic architecture configures death as spatial condition: Ellen's movement across empty rooms articulates spectral occupation, a persistence beyond vitality. In this regime of custodial repetition, the self-evacuates, leaving only the residual form of living, stripped of subjectivity. The *mise-en-scène* assumes the status of mausoleum.

In *Synecdoche, New York*, mortality enters critique at the level of representation itself. Death assumes the form of dramaturgy, unfolds as a feedback loop, and disperses into *mise-en-scène*. Caden rehearses death without mastery, the process exposes structural inaccessibility. Within this necrological labyrinth, finality recedes. Mortality circulates as redirection, spatialization, performative iteration, a condition without terminus. Entropy replaces tragedy. Echo displaces epiphany.

39 Cavallini, "Vox Politica", p. 551.

40 Swapna Gopinath, "The Mortality Narratives in Cultural Representations: Themes and Tropes in Malayalam Cinema", *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 11, no. 1, 2023, p. 89-114, <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2023.462>.

Death withdraws from narrative closure and reorganizes the architecture of the text. Necrological recursion installs mortality as an ontogenetic axiom; finitude inscribes disappearance as the ground of signification. Kaufman's cinematic ontology advances a metaphysics of entropic persistence, converting death into the generative infrastructure of representation and positioning decay as the primordial modality of being.

Fragmented Spaces, Fractured Selves: Architecture and Ontological Topography

In *Synecdoche, New York*, spatial disintegration operates as the central metaphor for the fracturing of the self. Kaufman's cinematic ontology unfolds through architectural disjunction, recursive mirroring, and spatial defamiliarisation. Caden Cotard constructs an ever-expanding theatrical replica of New York within a warehouse; mimetic certainty collapses, and ontological vertigo intensifies. The film's architecture dissolves the self. The warehouse, initially framed as neutral rehearsal space, transforms into a living city that mimics the real New York and ultimately supersedes it. The spatial doubling corresponds to Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum; the copy "bears no relation to any reality whatsoever" and assumes the status of hyperreality.⁴¹ The expansion of the simulated city erodes referential stability; representation collapses into self-referential failure. In a later sequence, Caden traverses streets constructed decades earlier, halts, and mutters: "it all feels fake, but I know it's real. Or is it the other way around?"

Gilles Deleuze's time-image theory provides a critical framework for the collapse of spatial continuity. With coherent movement displaced, space assumes a reflective configuration articulated through what Deleuze terms "any-space-whatever" fragments severed from narrative function. The city within the warehouse assumes the status of "any-space-whatever", a non-site in the real and the symbolic collapse into indeterminacy. In a striking sequence, Caden opens a door expecting a storage closet and encounters a replica of his childhood bedroom, preserved in a state of disrepair that suspends temporal distinction. Chung conceptualizes these architectural returns as temporal disruptions; the past reappears as inhabitable space, and internal and external geographies fold into a single spatial field.⁴²

41 Gerry Coulter, "Jean Baudrillard and Cinema: The Problems of Technology, Realism and History", *Film-Philosophy*, 14, no. 2, 2010, p. 8, <https://doi.org/10.3366/film.2010.0041>.

42 Chung, "Cinema as Archaeology", p. 113.

Henri Lefebvre's theory of social space establishes an analytic frame for Caden's obsessive reconstruction of his world. Space assumes a dynamic condition, constituted by layered social and representational practices and continuously reconfigured across them.⁴³ Caden's compulsive reconstruction of apartments, cafés, and streets indexes a pathological drive to spatialize his own emotional disintegration. Each spatial iteration, Adele's apartment, Hazel's burning house, the artificial city, refuses anchorage and accumulates as ruins of memory. In the sequence set inside Hazel's house, flames persist along the walls while she remains composed within the frame, her stillness counterpointing the unstable flicker of fire and registering a space in which destruction acquires the texture of ordinary habitation. Architectural excess articulates Gopinath's concept of affective saturation: spaces saturated with failed signification and structured by incomplete mourning.⁴⁴

Hazel's house, perpetually engulfed in flame, configures spatial absurdity. She inhabits the space with composure, treating slow destruction as ordinary condition. "I like it warm," she says, smiling beside a wall on fire. Architectural collapse enters normalization and aligns with the film's broader articulation of existential drift, a mode of living structured by continual erasure. Cavallini's analysis of acousmatic space in speculative cinema establishes an analytic frame for Hazel's environment; sound and space detach from referential stability, and subjectivity disperses across ambient disorientation.⁴⁵ Sammy, the actor playing Caden, leaps to his death, the suicide within the simulation acquires greater finality than any external referent and registers the performative density of these recursive architectures.

Jameson's notion of "spatial pastiche" finds concrete articulation in Kaufman's film. The simulacral city evacuates historical depth and recycles fragments without temporal grounding. Affective flattening, central to Jameson's account of postmodern architecture, intensifies in the sequence featuring Caden, as Ellen, inhabiting an apartment stripped of identity; grey walls, sterile light, a single bed. This reduced *mise-en-scène* registers the loss of symbolic depth and the exhaustion of architectural meaning. Beauregard, Danforth, and Dodds (2024) position such spatial simulation in cinema as symptomatic of a broader cultural

43 Ayşe Nur Tür - Umut Şumnu, "İç Mekân Bağlamında Modern Mimarlık Mirası: Kavaklıdere Sineması Değer Analizi", *Ankara Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 11, no. 1, 2023, p. 139-60, <https://doi.org/10.5505/jas.2023.97658>.

44 Gopinath, "The Mortality Narratives in Cultural Representations", p. 122.

45 Cavallini, "Vox Politica", p. 553.

misrepresentation of existential experience; death, loss, and spatial dislocation circulate as aesthetic tropes, severed from material anchoring.⁴⁶

Beşgen and Köseoğlu's interdisciplinary study of space and cinema establishes an analytic frame: the spatial dimension in cinematic production functions as a tactile, sensory interface extending beyond visual backdrop.⁴⁷ This concept of tactile space further complicates Caden's inability to inhabit the architecture he creates. His city assumes the status of a failed mnemonic system and a surface of ontological resistance. Yılmaz conceptualizes production design in post-1990 Turkish cinema as silent dramaturgy, a system that communicates emotional and thematic instability through spatial detail. Caden's spaces, stripped of narrative purpose and saturated with symbolic exhaustion, inscribe this dramaturgical collapse.⁴⁸

In *Synecdoche, New York*, spatial recursion assumes the structure of melancholic ontology. Caden constructs a world and encounters his position as a function within its system, a dreamer dreamt, echoing Jorge Luis Borges' "The Circular Ruins." The recursive spaces of Kaufman's film destabilize identity and expose its impossibility. Karababa identifies postmodern *mise-en-scène* as a site of "mimetic failure inscribed upon the architecture of representation."⁴⁹ Caden's city configures a topology of absence; its structures stage the impossibility of authentic inhabitation. Space in *Synecdoche, New York* unravels meaning at the level of form. Within this melancholic topology, spatial recursion articulates an ontology of absence and inscribes architectural form with the phenomenology of loss. Kaufman's cinema advances an ontopoietic melancholia sustained through negation; space enacts the perpetual deferral of presence as the constitutive gesture of being.

46 Beaugregard, et al., "Hollywood's Misrepresentation of Death", *arXiv*.

47 Asu Beşgen - Şölen Köseoğlu, "Sinema-Mimarlık Arakesitinde Bir Mekâna Dokunmak: Sine-Tasarım Atölyesi", *SineFilozofi*, 2019, p. 47-65, <https://doi.org/10.31122/sinefilozofi.516445>.

48 Serdar Yılmaz, "1990 Sonrası Türk Sinemasında Yapım Tasarımı, Sanat Yönetmenliği ve Dramaturgi", *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies*, 2018, p. 222, <https://doi.org/10.16992/ASOS.14640>.

49 Deniz Demirarslan, "Sinema ve İç Mimarlık: Disiplinlerarası Etkileşimlerin Tarihsel Yolculuğu", *International Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences Research*, 11, no. 114, 2024, p. 2535-62, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14579724>.

Narrative Entanglement and the Crisis of Authorship: Writing the Self in Infinite Scripts

In *Synecdoche, New York*, the recursive structure of authorship registers an existential impasse. Charlie Kaufman constructs a metafictional universe; identity, authorship, and performance collapse into indistinction. Caden Cotard seeks to narrate his own life in theatre; the project unravels amid unstable subjectivity. The film's central conceit, a theatrical production that reproduces life in exhaustive detail, figures the futility of finalizing the self within a postmodern condition of infinite scripts and erodes the boundary between creator and created. From the outset, Caden's project carries the trace of failure. A MacArthur Genius Grant initiates the construction of an ever-expanding replica of New York inside a warehouse. Within this simulacrum, actors perform real individuals, including Caden himself, alongside further layers of representation. The simulation intensifies, and with it the crisis of authorship: "There are nearly thirteen million people in the world. Every individual occupies a leading role within a personal narrative." The statement marks the impossibility of omniscient authorship; every subject occupies the position of author, rendering the aspiration to a singular, unified narrative structurally contradictory.

This ontological instability activates Roland Barthes's formulation in *Image-Music-Text*: "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author." Caden experiences repeated erasure as an author, first as a writer, then as a director, and ultimately as a subject; the multiplicity of interpretation dismantles the authorial voice. His identity disperses across layers of representation: Sammy performs Caden, and Caden later inhabits Ellen, a cleaning woman positioned at the margins of the narrative. The script assumes agency; the subject enters inscription.

Paul Ricoeur's narrative theory provides a critical framework for this fragmentation. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur distinguishes between *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (selfhood) and defines identity as a narrative construction unfolding across time. Caden fails to sustain continuity between these modes of being. His theatrical project, intended to stabilize the *ipse* in narrative form, multiplies the *idem* without limit. The same self recurs across multiple performers; temporal coherence, essential to narrative identity, collapses. "Nothing is ever finished. Everything just goes on and on," Caden states, a line that articulates Ricoeur's temporal model of narrative extension without closure.

Maurice Blanchot's *the Infinite Conversation* provides a critical framework for this configuration. Blanchot situates literature as a movement oriented toward

meaning without arrival, “a space that permits no completion and no finality.” The film literalizes this infinite condition in Caden’s endless rehearsals, rewrites, and rescheduling. The play remains unperformed for any audience and persists as a perpetual state of becoming. In a key sequence, Caden encounters a script that anticipates his next thoughts; authorship reverses direction, and the author enters inscription. This recursive loop assumes an ontological dimension.

Julia Kristeva’s concept of the semiotic chora establishes a psychoanalytic frame grounded in a pre-linguistic domain of drives and contradictions. Margaroni situates this domain within Platonic thought and rearticulates it in poststructuralist discourse.⁵⁰ Caden’s narrative enters incoherence; the symbolic order recedes as the semiotic asserts itself. Language dissolves, names fall into oblivion, and Caden assumes the status of a floating signifier. His lament, “I don’t know what I’m doing. I’m just trying to do the right thing” inscribes Kristeva’s formulation of deferred meaning and the unconscious contamination. The narrative shifts toward a symptomatic register of inner fragmentation.

Scheie develops this argument in relation to Roland Barthes’ “grain of the voice” conceptualized as a media residue, a trace that eludes authorship and reasserts subjectivity in performance. Caden’s voice dissipates into a chorus of scripted echoes, each iteration erodes narrative control. Chung situates this erosion within layered cinematic temporality; the film assumes the form of a recursive archive, and the author’s presence persists as spectral repetition, destabilized across successive scripts.⁵¹

The death of authorship assumes a performative inversion. Caden relinquishes directorial control and takes cues from an external figure, a double that registers as projection or as the internalized gaze of the narrative itself. In his final incarnation as Ellen, he inhabits a marginal role scripted by another. This paradox marks a critical reversal: the author who sought totality dissolves within his own script. Roland Barthes’ formulation, “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination,” acquires concrete force; in Caden’s case, that destination aligns with obliteration.

Turkish scholarship on postmodern cinema situates narrative and authorial collapse at the centre of its critical inquiry.⁵² Gültekin conceptualizes postmodern

50 Maria Margaroni, “‘The Lost Foundation’: Kristeva’s Semiotic Chora and Its Ambiguous Legacy”, *Hypatia*, 20, no. 1, 2005, p. 78-98, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2005.tb00374.x>.

51 Chung, “Cinema as Archaeology”, p. 114.

52 Gültekin, “Sinedigma”, p. 712.

film as a site of narrative dissolution driven by cognitive overload, representational saturation produces undecidability. Karababa situates the endless play of simulacra as a force that destabilizes authorial coherence. Türkdoğan identifies spatial mimicry in Kaufman's cinema as a mechanism that disorients both viewer and protagonist and renders authorial control illusory. These interventions register a broader anxiety in contemporary narrative art: representation collapses at the level of the self, and authorial authority fragments. Within this discursive collapse, authorship assumes the status of ontological residue, a structural remainder generated by recursive representation. The postmodern author occupies a liminal position; agency devolves into textual self-generation, and identity persists as the spectral echo of its own effacement.

Caden's demise registers an epistemological fixation on control. The drive to represent life with absolute fidelity forecloses contingency as the condition of meaning. His death assumes a recursive structure, an endless loop of authorship that absorbs the author into his own fiction. Within this epistemic recursion, authorship articulates an ontology of self-erasure and converts creation into ontological implosion. Caden's final collapse delineates a metaphysics of autological dissolution; representation consumes its own authorial ground, and existence persists as the echo of textual production.

Mirrors, Doubles, and the Hall of Selves

The motif of mirroring and doubling permeates *Synecdoche, New York* and establishes a visual and narrative architecture for the fragmentation of the self. Caden Cotard's movement across layers of representation unfolds across a hall of reflected selves: actors perform versions of him, others reproduce figures from his life, and Caden himself assumes a secondary role within his own narrative. These layers articulate a post-structural ontology; the subject emerges as a product of infinite mirroring and narrative recursion. This ontological entanglement produces epistemic vertigo; each attempt at self-recognition opens another representational fold, a *mise-en-abyme* of identity. In a key sequence, Caden directs Sammy, his double, while Sammy observes another actor rehearsing for Adele; the camera frames these layered performances in depth, and reflection extends into staging itself, displacing any stable point of origin.

At the centre of this motif stands the Lacanian mirror stage; the subject's inaugural recognition in the mirror installs constitutive alienation. Caden's incessant doubling, his replacement by Sammy, and his absorption into Ellen enact this misrecognition. The pursuit of identity unfolds across representations that intensify ontological void. Scheie situates the displacement of the authorial

voice in relation to Roland Barthes' grain of the voice, a texture irreducible to narrative form.⁵³ In Kaufman's world, even this grain dissolves within recursive simulation. Residual narrative gesture persists, iterating across mirrored surfaces.

The film's visual grammar articulates a logic of splintering. Kaufman frames characters across mirrors, glass panels, and recursive reflections. These doublings exceed aesthetic flourish and inscribe fractured ontology at the level of space. In a key sequence, Caden directs Sammy, his double; Sammy observes another actor rehearsing for Adele, and the *mise-en-abyme* installs an endless deferral of reference. Coulter (2010), in his reading of Jean Baudrillard and cinema, conceptualizes the gaze as dislocated from subjective control and configured as an external architecture of being. Caden occupies the position of an object within a gaze that escapes command.⁵⁴ Pallasmaa (2012) situates this dynamic in relation to lived space; the dissolution of spatial boundaries corresponds to fragmentation of self-perception. The mirror ceases to reflect and assumes a structuring function, producing an architecture of disorientation.

This doubling reaches a philosophical apex with Caden's assumption of the role of Ellen. The self enters a condition of total mediation and collapses into its image. Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation, as articulated by Coulter, situates representation as preceding and structuring the real, resulting in the collapse of referential meaning. Caden's identity is consumed by representational excess. Mirrors in the film exceed reflective surface and assume the function of distortion. Aydın's analysis of cinematic subjectivity, alongside Gültekin's account of postmodern narrative saturation, supports this configuration: identity registers as projection across surfaces, a cinematic palimpsest without depth.⁵⁵ Chung situates recursive layering in film as generating environments that dissolve temporality and spatiality into affective abstraction.⁵⁶

The presence of doubles destabilizes any fixed point of truth. Re-enactments across multiple performers, each marked by variation, accumulate into narrative opacity. The viewer, aligned with Caden, enters a labyrinth of representations. The self-relinquishes origin and registers as an effect of mimicry and difference. Mirrors multiply and dismantle identity. A character's statement, "you're confusing the character with the actor" inscribes this instability as structural

53 Scheie, "Roland Barthes' Grain of the Voice", p. 171.

54 Coulter, "Jean Baudrillard and Cinema", p. 12.

55 Gültekin, "Sinedigma", p. 715.

56 Chung, "Cinema as Archaeology", p. 115.

principle. Mirroring folds back upon itself and erases the distinction between reflection and invention.

Kaufman's deployment of spatial and psychological recursion aligns with philosophical thought experiments in Jorge Luis Borges' "The Other" and "The Circular Ruins", doubling and dreaming generate parallel configurations of selfhood that erase origin. The recursive logic of the film transforms all space, hallways, apartments, streets, into metaphorical mirrors. The city Caden constructs assumes the form of a ghostly cartography of internal fragmentation. Each constructed set inscribes a psychic knot, trauma and desire deferred into architecture. The mirror assumes an ontological function. Juhani Pallasmaa conceptualizes cinematic space as an "existential image," a site that stores memory and disorientation.⁵⁷

The hall of selves Caden constructs assumes the structure of a tomb. Endless self-replication erodes authenticity. The mirror ceases to reflect and begins to consume. Jean Baudrillard's warning acquires concrete force: the displacement of the real by its representations leaves only the echo of an unrealized self. Kaufman's architecture of mirrors absorbs the subject and converts reflection into ontological erasure. The crisis of authorship reaches completion as Caden's attempt to perfect the image of life installs the disappearance of the self. The hall of selves stands as a site of ontological implosion.

Conclusion: Multiplying Selves, Fragmenting Realities

In *Synecdoche, New York*, Charlie Kaufman constructs a recursive philosophical structure that displaces the self from epistemological stability and reconfigures it as dispersed multiplicity. The eight analytical sections trace the dissolution of Caden Cotard's subjectivity across spatial recursion, temporal fragmentation, and ontological exhaustion. Caden's trajectory configures an iterative system of performance; identity persists in rehearsal and remains suspended from completion. Subjectivity registers as an effect generated within recursive structures; origin dissolves within the process that produces it.

The early sections trace the breakdown of narrative logic and temporal structure. Caden's ambition to represent life in its immediacy collapses into an infinite chain of representations that defer meaning and displace revelation. Chung's theory of temporal layering establishes a critical frame; Kaufman configures time as accumulating sediment and disrupts linear trajectory. Time withdraws from its function as a framework for action and assumes an affective

57 Pallasmaa, "The Existential Image", p. 162.

density; memory accumulates without clarification. Narrative resolution yields to recursive entropy. Temporality accumulates as a recursive field that sustains indeterminacy as its primary condition.

Spatial recursion intensifies this crisis. Juhani Pallasmaa's notion of cinematic space as existential projection provides a critical frame; Kaufman transforms the theatrical warehouse into an ontological trap, and repetition consumes origin. Gültekin's account of affective overload in postmodern *mise-en-scène* establishes a parallel analytic line, Synecdoche stages the exhaustion of space as a site of meaning. Space in the film registers as mourning. The built environment assumes the form of a mausoleum of memory, identity resists stabilization. Spatial recursion absorbs space into a self-consuming structure and installs absence as its governing condition.

Mortality and performance intersect in the film's recursive treatment of embodiment. Caden's decay extends as ongoing enactment rather than terminal endpoint. Scheie's notion of the voice as spectral residue establishes a critical frame: identity erodes under repetition. Caden converges with his actors and surrogates. Speech contracts into echo. Identity condenses into citation. The body registers as a surface that inscribes the failure of representation. The performative logic of dying assumes formal structure. The recursive loop of Caden's story configures death as process. Each scene of farewell or forgetting iterates without closure. The character remains within the stage; the stage extends without perimeter. The *mise-en-scène* assumes a totalizing condition and absorbs its own frame. Kaufman inverts the cinematic grammar of death. Spectacle recedes; repetition persists. Transcendence withdraws, saturation prevails. Death ceases to delimit existence and circulates as a recursive structure that converts presence into continuous disappearance.

These observations position *Synecdoche, New York* within a cinematic field that interrogates narrative unity under recursive simulation. Kaufman's aesthetics of incompleteness displace representability. The self circulates as iteration, deferral, and overwrite. Recursive structures destabilize authorship and erode coherence. The subject enters staging, fragmentation, and dissolution. This study synthesizes Turkish and international scholarship to articulate a posthuman ontology. Gültekin and Juhani Pallasmaa establish a comparative frame that situates Kaufman's cinema within epistemic rupture. These frameworks register recursive aesthetics as anticipatory of broader inquiries into simulation, multiplicity, and subjectivity.

Kaufman's cinema resists the hermeneutics of resolution and institutes a grammar of unravelling. Estrangement organizes spectatorship. *Synecdoche, New*

York disarticulates the world and destabilizes the structures that sustain identity as intelligible form. Ontological deferral permeates the film's architecture and suspends the self across the interval separating image from absence, performance from loss. Kaufman's aesthetic field reorganizes epistemology at the level of form. Disintegration acquires structural primacy, observation persists without synthesis, and recursion disperses meaning across iterative configurations. Caden Cotard occupies a position generated within this system, a vector that channels the recursive erosion of authorship. Presence does not consolidate, it attenuates across layers of representation. His final whisper, "I know how to do this now" registers a transition into disappearance than resolution. The film concludes in dispersion. Narrative coherence, authorial control, and subjective unity dissolve as organizing conditions. Representation ceases to stabilize meaning and folds inward, generating structures that produce disappearance as their primary effect. Identity persists as trace, a residue inscribed within the recursive mechanisms that erode it.

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