-Research Article-

Ethics and Aesthetics in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's Cinema*

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's cinema, exploring how his films intertwine moral considerations with aesthetic expression. Focusing on themes such as identity, belonging, and displacement, Ceylan's work reflects societal issues without any direct political commentary, emphasizing ethical questions. His distinctive approach, characterized by a slow pace, sparse dialogue, and extended shots, invites audiences into moral explorations. Ceylan's films stand out as profound ethical inquiries, challenging viewers to engage with the moral nuances of everyday life and reflect on their own values. This study explores the relationship of ethics and aesthetics in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films through Nicolai Hartmann's new ontology and the anthropological approach. It examines how ethical considerations shape and enhance the visual narrative in Ceylan's work, focusing on content and form relation.

Keywords: ethics, aesthetics, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, new ontology, anthropology

-Araştırma Makalesi-

Nuri Bilge Ceylan Sinemasında Etik ve Estetik*

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Özet

Bu makale, Nuri Bilge Ceylan sinemasındaki etik ve estetik ilişkisini incelemekte ve filmlerindeki ahlaki kaygılarla estetik ifadenin birbirini nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktadır. Kimlik, aidiyet ve yurtsuzluk gibi temalara odaklanan Ceylan'ın çalışmaları, doğrudan siyasi bir yorum yapmaksızın toplumsal sorunları yansıtır ve etik soruları vurgular. Özgün yaklaşımı, yavaş temposu, sınırlı diyalogları ve uzun çekimleri ile izleyicileri ahlaki bir araştırmaya davet eder. Ceylan'ın filmleri, izleyicileri günlük yaşamın ahlaki nüanslarıyla ilgilenmeye ve kendi değerleri üzerinde düşünmeye zorlayan derin etik sorgulamalar olarak öne çıkar. Bu çalışma, Nuri Bilge Ceylan'ın filmlerindeki etik ve estetik ilişkisini Nicolai Hartmann'ın yeni ontoloji ve antropolojik yaklaşım üzerinden incelemektedir. Çalışmada, içerik ve biçim ilişkisine odaklanarak, Ceylan'ın çalışmalarında etik kaygıların görsel anlatıyı nasıl şekillendirdiği ve geliştirdiği incelenmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *etik, estetik, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, yeni ontoloji, antropoloji*

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Introduction

"A good film is one that brings together a deep analysis with aesthetic and moral sensitivity."

Nuri Bilge Ceylan

In the cinema of Nuri Bilge Ceylan's themes like identity, memory, belonging, and the tensions between Eastern and Western values, city and province life are frequently explored, reflecting a broad spectrum of societal issues (Akbulut, 2005; Suner, 2004, 2006, 2010; Arslan, 2012; Harvey-Davitt, 2016; Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2022; Dönmez-Colin, 2023). Ceylan's films, known for addressing social themes like identity and displacement, are deeply intertwined with ethical discussions, underscoring a core focus on moral considerations.

Ethics explores morality of actions, emphasizing right and wrong (Nuttall, 1993, p. 1), while aesthetics examines art's beauty and value, reflecting human values and thus contributing to moral evaluation (Graham, 2001, p. 2; Hanson, 2001, p. 215). The intersection of ethics and aesthetics involves examining moral values through art's aesthetic qualities. Art influences morals subtly by fostering empathy and shaping values (Sheppard, 1987, p. 153). Ceylan's cinema skillfully explores themes such as moral decline and ethical ambiguity. His images provoke thoughts and reflection (Akbulut, 2005, p. 45). Ceylan's films explore ethical values and their influence on cinematic aesthetics. In his work, ethics and aesthetics challenge norms, fostering skepticism towards conventional meanings (Eryılmaz, 2016, p. 12). His films explore human essence and ethical values through cinematic aesthetics. His work addresses the challenges of human connections and the complexities of existence (Harvey-Davitt, 2016, pp. 250-252; Savaş, 2017, p. 67) with a unique style.

He portrays characters grappling with moral challenges and relationships strained by eroding values. While focusing on everyday life, the storytelling remains deliberately minimalist. As Ceylan (2023a, p. 429) himself says even the smallest details can inspire great stories when given enough attention. He encourages viewers to engage in thoughtful reflection. Ceylan's open-ended narratives prompt us to question reality and ponder our own moral judgments, offering a contemporary lens on human relationships and inviting us to contemplate ethical issues within a modern cinematic framework. These films, with very little plot, reveal ethical contradictions through ordinary events. Their deliberate slowness helps create what Deleuze terms the 'time-image' (Suner, 2010; Çağlayan, 2018; Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2022).

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films depict societal value decline and ethical erosion through intimate character portrayals and their interactions, highlighting the impact of selfishness on human connections against the backdrop of Turkey's societal issues. As Ceylan (2023b, p. 389) states art and cinema spotlight personal and cultural flaws, urging deeper societal value shifts. His films provoke reflection on personal guilts and regrets (Savaş, 2017, p. 65), serving as ethical inquiries. As Tarkovsky (1987, p. 113) says 'art achieves realism through the pursuit of ethical ideals, where the quest for truth, inherently beautiful, merges aesthetics with ethics. Ceylan's work invites introspection and ethical reconsideration, emphasizing moral values' influence on relationships and enhancing ethical awareness.

Methodology

This research aims to uncover the relationship between ethical and aesthetic values in Ceylan's cinema, employing an anthropological approach grounded in the ontology of art. As Mengüşoğlu (1988, p. 49) asserts, an anthropology rooted in ontological principles addresses phenomena stemming from human beings' concrete existence and actions. While

the ontological basis explains the existential attributes of the artwork, the anthropological perspective explores its connections to humanity. Kuçuradi (2013, pp. 95-97) emphasizes the importance of an anthropological approach to art evaluation, which involves understanding the depicted human relations, ethical values, analyzing the new perspectives, and showing the artwork's significance, focusing solely on the artwork itself.

Ontologically, artworks, evoke aesthetic experiences. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, these works hold significance and value for us. Art's significant role in enriching life sparks discussions on the link between aesthetic and ethical values (Freeman, 2014, p. 134). Rather than serving didactic purposes, art expands our perspectives and connects us to our humanity, offering a unique form of understanding beyond mere facts or moral judgments (Sontag, 2013, p. 23).

Nicolai Hartmann, a pioneer of "new ontology," posits that reality comprises four strata (levels of reality): inanimate, biological, psychological, and spiritual. Hartmann (2019) discusses the essence/existence in an ontic whole and tries to reveal the relation of the strata (levels of reality) to each other. Hartmann further elaborates on the ontic structure of artworks, detailing their strata and aesthetic value. His art ontology introduces a method for analyzing aesthetic objects by considering these strata. Hartmann (2014, pp. 90-101) maintains that an aesthetic object comprises a 'foreground', which represents the *real being* with its tangible material structure, and a 'background', signifying the *unreal being* through its spiritual content.

Hartmann's ideas challenge dualism, positing that an artwork is a unified entity comprising these two components. The background becomes discernible through objectivation, which Hartmann (2014, p. 90) defines as the manifestation of ideal content in tangible form. The background is perceptible to the observer only in the presence of the foreground. In the realms of ethics and aesthetics, Hartmann (2014, p. 377) argues that the emergence of aesthetic value is contingent upon the existence of moral value. Appreciating an artwork's aesthetics requires understanding its ethical values, as these underpin the artwork's layers and enhance aesthetic enjoyment.

Hartmann advocates for a systematic and detailed analysis of artworks, providing examples from music, painting, literature, and more in his book, *Aesthetics*. At the time, cinema was a relatively new invention, as Hartmann (2014, p. 118) noted. This study explores the connection between ethical and aesthetic values in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films through content and form, using Hartmann's ontological framework using anthropological attitude.

Social and Cultural Ethical Inquiry through Aesthetics in Ceylan's Cinema

When I make films, I don't aim to comment on current events or engage in journalism. Social issues don't interest me as much as understanding and exploring the human soul. I believe in injecting new perspectives into culture and confronting our weaknesses through art, rather than just raising awareness about events, or finding culprits, which I see as more of a journalist's role.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's (2014) reply about the dialogue in "Winter Sleep" (2014) regarding *non-resistance to evil*, offered during its Cannes press conference, not only reveals his view on political cinema but also shed light on the ethical aspect of his art.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's cinema focuses on human nature rather than overt social or political themes. Ceylan's films blend social and political themes with detailed character studies, exploring human behavior's nuances. Ceylan portrays his characters authentically, inviting viewers to reflect on societal, cultural, and existential themes. He focuses on the conflicted human and demonstrates how to make politics through humanism (Harvey-Davitt, 2016, p. 254). The political elements in such films are best understood as personal responses and coping strategies to life's existential challenges, expressed through acceptance, silence, and passive

aggression. In "Three Monkeys," (2008) for example, political undercurrents blend with personal narratives, challenging conventional cinematic norms and emphasizing existential struggles over direct political discourse. Although not explicitly addressing working-class issues in this film, Ceylan disrupts traditional film expectations by critiquing bourgeois cinema (Daldal, 2017, p. 182). Similarly, "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia" (2011) and "Winter Sleep" subtly navigate power dynamics and societal tensions, avoiding explicit political commentary offering philosophical questions.

His apolitical stance can be related to ethics in art. Ceylan's cinema isn't about revolutionary consciousness. Instead, it encourages viewers to make ethical judgments and take an intellectual stance, as argued by Rancière (2009). Rancière (2009, pp. 1-23) criticizes the didactic artist role, advocating for works that promote intellectual emancipation by acknowledging the audience's equal intelligence. As Ceylan (2008) himself mentioned, he's not interested in taking on the role of an informed artist or delivering manifestos through his work. This philosophy prioritizes free thought and delves into complex moral scenarios, exploring characters' responses without imposing moral judgments.

Turkish cinema, particularly in the transition from Yeşilçam's escapism to the introspective narratives of the 2000s, marks a shift towards exploring complex emotions and societal themes over direct political narratives. The social and political dimension of Turkish cinema has also evolved from the 60s, with New Turkish Cinema adopting a less didactic, more passive approach. This era's films, influenced by the political aftermath of the 80s coup, reflect a mood of silence and pessimism. This period adopts a contemplative style centered on personal and existential dilemmas (Katsanis, 2015, p. 173). Ceylan's work captures this trend, exploring human experiences and relationships with philosophical depth.

Ceylan's films intricately explore the fabric of Turkish society, touching upon the dilemmas of identity amidst the confluence of Eastern-Western, traditional-modern, rural-urban values. This narrative tension mirrors the national discourse on modernization, propelled by globalization and urban migration. "Modernization in Turkey is a project embracing and internalizing the cultural dimensions that made Europe modern" (Keyder, 2000, p. 37). The pursuit of modernization, characterized by the adoption of European cultural norms, has sparked a repudiation of traditional values, leading to a cultural and identity clash (Bora, 2017; Göle, 2015; Kandiyoti, 2002). The transition through the multiparty era in 1950s, neoliberal shifts in the 1980s, and the socio-political upheavals of the 1990s set the stage for significant societal transformations. Military coups in 1960 and 1980 deepening democratic crises, the neoliberal agenda of the 1980s, marked by consumerism amid a backdrop of moral decline and social disparity, alongside the destabilizing 1990s, eroded trust and societal norms (Gürbilek, 2001; Ahmad, 2003; Bora, 2017; Suner, 2010; Kandiyoti, 2002; Özkazanç, 2011). These decades were pivotal in reshaping social identities and exacerbating class divisions. Kandiyoti (2002, pp. 1-21) highlights how these shifts transformed social identities and stratification, resulting in intricate social dynamics and cultural tensions.

In Turkey, rural conservatism is often linked to traditional values (Bora, 2016, p. 52). The province stands as a stark symbol of deprivation, deepening the divide between urban and rural areas and class differences (Laçiner, 2016, p. 14). The 1980s marked the beginning of a shift, leading to a blend of urban and rural influences by the 2000s. However, globalization and technology have lessened the isolation of traditionally deprived rural areas, creating a unique blend of modern and traditional cultures (Bora, 2016, p. 41; Laçiner, 2016, p. 36). This has led to a complex identity for rural areas, caught between modernity and tradition. By the 2000s, a turn towards traditional and conservative values began to challenge the established notions of modernization. The complexities in Turkey's modernization, influenced by the global shift towards postmodernism, challenge absolute truths and embrace pluralism, impacting identities and cultural practices (Göle, 2013, pp. 1-26). Postmodernism, combined

with neoliberal policies and neo-conservatism has highlighted diverse identities, and altered societal norms.

Ceylan's films skillfully blend universal themes and ethical questions in human relations with local Turkish cultural elements. His films explore the challenges of relationships, self-connection, the relationships, and the painful process of being human (Harvey-Davitt, 2016, pp. 250-252). His characters, often embodying defeat and passive nihilism, mirror contemporary moral issues through their skeptical, self-interested actions and lies. These films offer ethical insights into the significance of everyday interactions that undermine values. For example, "The Wild Pear Tree" (2018) explores themes like tradition, societal norms, and economic struggles in Turkey, focusing on the protagonist Sinan's personal journey. The film delves into the artist's role, education's value, and youth challenges (McConnel, 2018) encouraging viewers to reflect on moral values and personal aspirations without overt political commentary. In "Distant" (2002) the theme of distance manifests in various forms, from social and class disparities to moral and cultural divides. "Winter Sleep" portrays the tension between Eastern and Western values through characters navigating social contradictions and moral ambiguities. It shows Aydın's critique of local customs from a position of ignorance, highlighting class and cultural differences. These films explore the rift between intellectuals and the society in Turkey, delving into class, cultural conflicts, and the urban-rural divide. Similarly, "About Dry Grasses" (2023) portrays teacher Samet's struggle with his assignment in the East, highlighting deep societal and ethical conflicts. The film examines manipulation and ethics, prompting viewers to ponder the protagonist's real nature against a backdrop of personal and societal challenges (Marshall, 2023). Along with Ceylan's other works, it probes the intricacies of bias and the urban-rural divide.

The moral dilemmas, value discrepancies, and contradictions experienced by characters in these films stem from socio-economic and political issues underneath. "Class differences manifest in status distinctions that categorize individuals and groups based on social honor, not just economic interests…" (Swartz, 1998, p. 151) like Eyüp and his family silenced by their vulnerability to the subtle authority of power structures. In "Three Monkeys," Ceylan explores the invisible moral effects of class inequality and societal violence through the story of Eyüp's family, caught in the exploitative schemes of his boss Servet. Servet's character embodies the nouveau riche, highlighted by his willingness to do anything for wealth, even making his driver take his prison sentence (Erdal Aytekin, 2015, p. 257). The film prompts a reexamination of ethical values by confronting crime, guilt and difficult realities, an approach to honesty that can be linked to Felski's (2008, pp. 105-131) comments on the shock literature, highlighting the impact of facing disturbing truths. In the film, the audience is shocked by the presentation of harsh realities revealing what people are capable of. It portrays poverty as both an economic condition and a cultural limitation, fostering lies and ethical dilemmas.

The province is often viewed as the antithesis of the urban center, marked by limited perspectives, monotony, and a restricted public sphere (Bora, 2016, p. 40). In Ceylan's films like "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia" and "The Wild Pear Tree," the province contrasts the urban, serving as a canvas for moral quandaries and societal reflections. These films explore the dichotomies of urban vs. rural and tradition vs. modernity, delving into existential questions and cultural shifts within Turkish society. The Wild Pear Tree" reflects on this transformation, showing how rural life adapts to the profit-driven logic of neoliberalism (Avcı and Kıran, 2019, p. 261). In this film, Sinan's dialogue with two young imams about faith and the clash between innovative and conservative religious views highlights the conflict between personal and social ethics. The film explores religious nuances and ethical contrasts within Turkey's socio-economic and cultural context. These films highlight the complex effects of economic, cultural, and political influences on human relationships and the evolving rural-urban dynamic within Turkish society and beyond.

Boredom, Silence, and Time as Ethical Inquiry in Ceylan's Slow Cinema

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films pose philosophical and ethical questions through simple daily events and human relations, characterized by aesthetic features. His cinema, often labeled as 'slow cinema,' (Rattee, 2017; Çağlayan, 2018; Katsanis, 2015) featuring long takes, minimal dialogues, and a minimalistic approach. Slow cinema is exemplified by directors like Angelopoulos and Tarkovsky. It prioritizes longer, uninterrupted shots (Rattee, 2017, p. 208). Ceylan's films often feature long takes and close-ups with static camera shots.

Ceylan's slow-paced films, as noted by Çağlayan (2018, p. 202), use long takes to break traditional narratives, allowing audiences to deeply explore the film's form and uncover hidden truths. This approach enhances the mood and atmosphere, enabling viewers to internalize characters' emotions, such as Bahar's unhappiness in "Climates," (2006) Aydın's loneliness in "Winter Sleep," and Samet's boredom in "About Dry Grasses". Slow films, with restrained emotion and minimal action, long pauses, sparse dialogue, limited plot, empty settings, a static camera, and extended shots evoke thought (Jaffe, 2014, pp.1-14). This formal approach captures characters' emotions, atmospheric tension, and underlying motives, demanding close viewer attention to fully appreciate the nuances of the film. Ceylan's slow-paced films emphasize character emotions and atmosphere, encouraging reflection on subtle gestures and unspoken truths. The slow rhythm and moments of silence offer a glimpse into the characters' inner worlds by pausing time (Çağlayan, 2018, p. 203).

Contributing to slowness, 'the close-up shots in Ceylan's films capture the subtle, often inexpressible aspects of reality that goes beyond words, offering a deeper look into characters' inner lives and revealing truths' (Suner, 2010, p. 98). For example, close-ups in "Three Monkeys" expose the characters' hidden emotions, such as Eyüp's fear and guilt during Hacer's attempted leap from the terrace. Ceylan's films draw viewers into a contemplative state, focusing more on moods than on the plot. These takes don't drive the narrative but offer a sensory experience, grounding viewers in the film's reality (Rattee, 2017, p. 218). These shots disrupt narrative flow but visualize themes and emotions effectively. The slow aesthetic breaks the conventional linear narrative structure through imagery unrelated to the film's narrative (Quaranta, 2020, p. 17).

Ceylan's films use close-ups to highlight intricate details, pausing the narrative for deeper reflection on character psychology and ethical questions. This approach not only enriches the story but also fosters a contemplative space, aligning with Deleuze's (1989) concept of "time-image cinema". "The time-image gives us time itself, no longer spatialized or derived from movement" (Colebrook, 2001, p. 47). The focus is on mental states and inner realities rather than action. Influenced by Bergson's (2000, pp. 226-227) idea of 'duration,' the time-image in cinema merges past, present, and future (Deleuze, 1989, pp. 22-55), offering a multi-layered experience of time and making the cinematic experience an interactive dialogue with the audience. This helps to make ethical judgements. In "Cocoon" (1995) and other Ceylan films like "Three Monkeys," "The Small Town," (1997) and "Climates," close-ups and time-images explore themes like lost time, guilt, and moral ambiguity. "Three Monkeys" uses time-image to highlight ethical voids, while "The Wild Pear Tree" focuses on inner turmoil over straightforward narratives. These films employ dream-like sequences and disjointed scenes to probe deep psychological and ethical issues, creating a reflective space for viewers to ponder complex human emotions and moral dilemmas.

The formal characteristic attributed to slowness is often accompanied by silence. The phenomena and situations elucidated regarding silences illustrate the ethical conditions they reveal and how they are employed within moral conflicts. The aesthetics of prolonged silences in Ceylan's films allow us to experience the characters' internal conflicts, perhaps enabling us to grasp the profound pain dominating their worlds (Katsanis, 2015, p. 173). Slowness prompts reflection on overlooked situations and emotions, offering a pause in life to digest complexities

we might otherwise overlook. In "Three Monkeys," Nuri Bilge Ceylan uses silence as a key narrative and aesthetic element, where moments of silence, such as the one between Eyüp and his son, carry deep, unspoken meanings (Katsanis, 2015, p. 176). This lack of genuine dialogue not only signifies linguistic limitations but also conveys sadness and frustration. For example, in "Climates" the characters' inability to communicate effectively leads to further estrangement.

These films, due to their subject matter, concepts, themes, and employed techniques, evoke a sense of boredom in the viewer. Slow films challenge viewers limiting action and dialogue, creating a feel of emptiness and stagnation (Jaffe, 2014, pp. 3-9). Boredom, in its common usage, is considered together with the concepts like lack of meaning, alienation and emptiness. Heidegger (1996, p. 80, pp. 170-173) states boredom is related to feeling of time and says 'profound boredom' direct us ask questions about our existence and triggers a philosophical thinking causing an uneasiness in Dasein. In cinema, boredom that evokes existential anxiety can detach the audience from characters and narrative, driving them to question what they watch. This form of boredom, thus, becomes an aesthetic tool, enriching the film's language and sparking philosophical introspection.

Boredom in its relation to the feeling of time in cinema is closely connected to modernity. Ceylan's films utilize boredom, reflecting the monotony and disconnectedness of modern life. Modernity encompasses urbanization, globalization, and technology, but also involves loss of meaning, isolation, and alienation (Giddens, 1991). Boredom, then, is a manifestation of the anxiety stemming from questioning modern life without the power to change it. This sentiment is sensed in Ceylan's films, which can be interpreted as reflections on or even acts of resistance to Turkey's modernization (Gezgin and Canbolat, 2019, p. 70). This is well-depicted in "Distant". As mentioned above, modernization in Turkey presents value conflicts between the West and the East, the province and the city, and tradition and modern. Ceylan's films present the boredom of both provincial existence and urban life. His idle characters, often trapped between conflicting values, are unable to adapt and stuck in limbo. Films like "Distant", "The Wild Pear Tree," and "About Dry Grasses" encapsulate this ennui, underscoring the existential void and the challenges of modernity in Turkey.

Characterization and Ethical Dilemmas

Ceylan's characters are often nihilistic, selfish, melancholic, unsympathetic, and difficult to identify with. "His films are peopled by estranged characters who ironically pursue loneliness as a cure for, or as inoculation against, their very inability to form meaningful and enduring relationships" (Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2022, p. 2). They are the ones who fail their ideals and succumb as they cannot get what they expect from life. Their narratives are punctuated by moments of stillness—childhood memories, missed opportunities, spectral encounters, or nostalgic reflections—emphasizing their emotional and psychological entrapments. This pervasive sense of displacement and longing for an "elsewhere" defines Ceylan's cinema (Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2022, p. 4). The most vivid examples can be seen in "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia" with Doctor Cemal and Prosecutor Nusret, who long for being somewhere else.

His characters do not act, and if they do, their actions harm them and others more. They are passive observers of their lives, idly watching events unfold as if detached from their own experiences. "Ceylan's characters are capable of seeing and showing rather than acting" (Suner, 2010, p. 92). In fact, they try to mask the disparity between their true selves and images. This dissonance leads to depression upon recognition by themselves and others, embodying the disillusionment of unmet aspirations. This realization brings despair, as seen with Aydın in "Winter Sleep," whose self-assurance hinders genuine connections, and Sinan in "The Wild Pear Tree," whose frustrations lead to disdain for those around him. Their attitudes reflect

Nietzsche's notion of "slave morality," rooted in resentment towards perceived superiors, fostering distrust and hostility (Berkowitz, 1996, p. 86). Their underlying resentment fosters an environment of distrust and ethical tension in their relationships.

In Ceylan's cinema, male protagonists are central, characterized by loneliness, dissatisfaction, and troubled relationships. This focus on emotionally distant and conflicted men is occasionally softened by the fleeting solace of female characters, as seen in " Once Upon a Time in Anatolia" and emphasized in "The Wild Pear Tree." Samet's struggles connecting with women in "About Dry Grasses" further underline this theme. Ceylan explores the depths of male despair and contradictions, rendering his characters complex but unsympathetic.

Ceylan's cynical characters communicate essence of moral existence and values. "Ethical values in a relationship reflect the sense of significance and respect within one's interactions with a specific individual" (Kuçuradi, 2011, p. 185). Ceylan's characters, embodying alienation and indifference, harm others while seeking self-justification, highlighting ethical dilemmas. Ceylan's cinema is basically a cinema of relations (Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2022, p. 2). Ceylan's focus on relational dynamics invites us to reflect on the nature of being human, our ethical perspectives, and the moral implications of our actions.

His films explore the subtleties of evil, presenting it through everyday actions and the influence of circumstances, thus moving beyond the traditional binary portrayals common in earlier Turkish cinema. His work examines the thin line between good and evil, emphasizing moral complexities and the intricacies of human motivations. This approach contrasts with traditional, more straightforward representations of villainy and virtue rooted in Turkish literature (Şen-Sönmez, 2017, p. 292). Ceylan's method encourages viewers to ponder the ethical implications of seemingly minor decisions and actions, offering a nuanced perspective on the nature of evil and its role in human interactions.

Ceylan's characters often prioritize self-interest through subtle actions that raise ethical concerns. In "Clouds of May," (1999) Muzaffer focuses on his film over the needs of people in his village, showing indifference to others' emotions and struggles, like Uncle Pire's sorrow and his father's battle to save his trees. Muzaffer also dismisses Saffet's aspirations for a job in Istanbul after utilizing his assistance. Similarly, in "Distant," Mahmut falsely accuses Yusuf of theft to drive him away, and in "Climates," İsa is indifferent to Bahar's feelings. In "The Wild Pear Tree," Sinan secretly sells his father's valuable possession to fund his book, demonstrating how minor, self-serving actions challenge our moral judgments. Even in films with more severe incidents, like the murder in "Three Monkeys" or " Once Upon a Time in Anatolia" or the slander and public humiliation in "About Dry Grasses," Ceylan concentrates on the characters' reactions rather than the acts themselves, underscoring the moral intricacies of seemingly insignificant decisions.

"Winter Sleep" explores moral ambiguity, showing how characters like Aydın's indifference can lead to questionable ethics, as his detachment fuels justifications for harsh choices. "To be sure, one cannot say that Aydın is an evil person. But for evil to occur you don't need evil people" (Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2022, p. 199-120). Evil can arise from a lack of empathy and moral responsibility. The film examines how material concerns, such as the cost of a broken window, can overshadow human dignity and moral duties, indicating a widespread moral insensitivity. It critiques capitalist values and superficial charity, especially highlighted by İsmail's rejection of Nihal's money, which questions the genuineness of such gestures (Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2022, p. 125-132). The film urges viewers to reflect on the essence of goodness and the moral outcomes of their choices, challenging traditional distinctions between right and wrong, and notions of resistance and forgiveness, as seen in Necla's struggle with her past.

Ceylan's films feature complex characters whose self-driven actions encourage reflection on human nature and moral complexities. Arslan (2012, p. 203) highlights that in "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia", the characters in the film are deeply aware of life's inherent limitations and imperfections, embodying the human condition through their flaws and errors. His narratives explore nuanced moral failings, reflecting Kant's (1998) notion of "radical evil", which suggests that prioritizing self-interest over moral laws is a fundamental human flaw. This concept is illustrated through characters who, 'despite recognizing duty, often opt for self-serving choices, underscoring the moral conflicts in daily decisions' (Wood, 1999, p.285). Ceylan's characters often choose self-interest, highlighting the moral dilemmas inherent in everyday choices.

The Significance of Space in Conveying Ethical Values

In Ceylan's films, space is pivotal in reflecting value conflicts and moral dilemmas. The space plays an important role to create an atmosphere in his films. These films exploring themes of alienation and despair, often set in rural Turkey or Istanbul's outskirts, reveal tensions between contrasting values. Ceylan's films explore Turkey's clash between tradition and modernity, especially in the province. Through "confrontation aesthetics," they reveal existential dilemmas and moral uncertainties, emphasizing characters' struggles with identity and values amidst widespread displacement. These narratives, imbued with guilt and passivity, delve into the darker aspects of human relationships against a somber backdrop, presenting morally complex scenarios that challenge viewers.

The city (Istanbul) represents 'modern time's homogeneity and fragmentation' mentioned by Lefebvre (1991) showcasing contrasts such as rich-poor and traditional-modern. In Ceylan's films, urban spaces, serve as backdrops for the moral complexities arising from alienating interactions. "Three Monkeys" portrays urban settings that reflect a lower-class family's struggles, emphasizing the city's alienating effect and the social disparities within it, highlighting the isolation of individuals amidst a tangled socio-economic landscape. In "Distant", we witness how being a stranger coming from a small town feels like. Despite living together, invisible boundaries persist, leading to varied perceptions of the city among its inhabitants.

Ceylan's cinema uses isolated or distressing spaces to underscore themes of belonging and displacement. The portrayal of gloomy urban and rural landscapes emphasizes characters' struggles and alienation. This motif resonates with "accented cinema," focusing on migration and exile themes, often mirroring the directors' own experiences. Transitional spaces like borders and isolated places in these films symbolize identity struggles, underscoring the multifaceted nature of journeys and the search for belonging (Naficy, 2001, pp. 5-6). Ceylan's focus on homelessness and identity ties his work to accented cinema, allowing for analysis within this context.

His cinema portrays characters alienated from their surroundings, yearning for being in another place. "As disembedded 'exiles' and outsiders, Ceylan's characters experience and endure the tensions and contradictions of metropolitan modernity and the reconfigurations of tradition and landscape in a rapidly urbanizing and suburbanizing society" (Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2022, p. 5). They always feel homesick. This theme, present in films like "The Small Town" and "Distant", uses space to convey a mindset, transcending geographical or physical boundaries. The detailed visuals and focus on atmosphere over plot depict the characters' internal and external dislocations, making space a pivotal aspect of Ceylan's narrative technique.

In Ceylan's cinema, the dichotomy between the province and the city is a central motif, where the province often embodies traditional values overshadowed by the city's alienating

atmosphere. Films like "Three Monkeys" and "Distant" depict urban environments as daunting for individuals from rural areas, underscoring the clash between provincial ideals and urban transformations. The province, portrayed as nostalgic yet lacking in opportunities, often feels like a trap for the youth. This in-betweenness is defined not by the province itself but by its relationship with the urban center, emphasizing a sense of deprivation (Çiğdem, 2016, p. 104). Characters such as Saffet in "The Small Town" and "Clouds of May" or Sinan in "Wild Pear Tree" seek escape from their provincial background. Through Ceylan's lens, the province emerges as a symbol of stagnation and limitation. His characters might get out of the province, but they can never get the province out of themselves (Suner, 2010, p. 84-85). In "The Small Town," the province is not just a place but also a matter of mentality that represents tradition and family (Raw, 2017, p. 143). The essence of the province, therefore, transcends its physical boundaries, manifesting within individuals and even within urban settings, as vividly portrayed in "Distant."

In Ceylan's later films, characters often escape to the countryside to face personal crises. "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia" portrays a gloomy, desperate atmosphere in a provincial steppe, with characters trying to escape their realities. Doctor Cemal is in a remote town in the middle of nowhere to escape from his past. "The Wild Pear Tree" shows a young man's fading hopes in the countryside. "Winter Sleep" portrays Aydın and Necla's move to Cappadocia as an escape from their discontent in Istanbul, using the countryside to highlight their internal struggles and sense of defeat. The rural setting is depicted as a stark, isolating wilderness, underscoring the characters' solitude and existential reflections.

Ceylan's films are known for their striking imagery and rural scenes, where light and color craft a supporting atmosphere, often evoking a sense of the uncanny. While depicting beautiful countryside views, his work mainly explores spaces that elicit unease, aligning with Vidler's notion that the uncanny reflects a mental state rather than a spatial quality, blurring the lines between reality and imagination (Vidler, 1994, p. 11). Ceylan uses dimly lit interiors, stark landscapes, and desolate urban scenes to underscore characters' isolation and moral dilemmas, effectively conveying their sense of confinement and unease to the audience.

Realism and Surrealism in Exploring Ethical Depth

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's cinema explores human complexities and ethical questions with a unique take on realism that goes beyond social realism. As Ceylan (2016, p. 214) states, for him, the issue of realism has different meanings from social realism. His films, blending moral dilemmas with everyday conflicts, encourage deep self-reflection and a confrontation with personal and relational intricacies. Despite its metaphysical elements, Ceylan's work remains firmly realistic, offering an authentic, unguided portrayal of the human condition and morality.

Ceylan's films blend the real with the surreal, creating a unique realm for viewers to engage with their inner conflicts and ethical uncertainties. This integration encourages introspection on moral values and the intricacies of human nature. His stories, woven with elements of truth and illusion, artfully intertwine fact and fantasy, prompting a profound exploration of ethical dimensions. This approach aligns with contemporary cinema's exploration of the blurred lines of reality, challenging perceptions of truth and fiction. Modern cinema constructs a mental image of the world, emphasizing the disparity between what is perceived and what is real (Kovacs, 2007, p. 42). Modern cinema shakes our belief in reality; we doubt the veracity of what we see and hear. It is realistic because it plays with reality, as the viewer is always aware of watching a film. The characters' words, actions, gestures, and expressions, along with the film's style, await interpretation. Open-to-interpretation images allow the audience to engage in a dialogue with the film. The medium's power lies in its lifelike mimicry, where cinematic illusions can unveil deeper truths, prompting viewers to question the authenticity.

Ceylan's films blend surreal elements with realism, from dream sequences to ghostly figures. In "Three Monkeys," a child's ghost haunting the house suggests hidden guilt and secrets among the characters. Additionally, shifts in time and varied camera angles in the terrace scenes reveal the characters' inner worlds, with each variation hinting at underlying realities. In "Climates", dreams show unspoken realities in a relationship. These cinematic techniques blend thoughts with tangible scenes, uncovering concealed truths. "The Wild Pear Tree" uses dreams, like Sinan hiding in a Trojan Horse, to blur the lines between reality and imagination, probing deep into his psyche and challenging viewers to discern truth from illusion. In another scene, the interplay of sunlight and shifting perspectives before Hatice's kiss to Sinan distorts time but the visible mark from the kiss confirms its authenticity, offering a fleeting respite from these characters' constrained lives.

Another thing that forms the ground for ethical questions in Ceylan's films is the concept of 'play' both as content and form. Playing appears as a moral issue by which people test and deceive each other. Suner (2010, p. 98) likens this to Winnicott's theory of play, demonstrating how playing shows the elusive nature of reality. Winnicott (2005) posits that playing occupies a space between the inner and outer worlds, helping us navigate the paradoxes between personal perceptions and external reality. We can claim that this is also related to ethics. Ceylan's cinema explores the thin line between reality and ethics through adult interactions that mirror children's games, often with significant moral implications. His films, such as "Clouds of May," use seemingly innocent actions to reveal deeper adult manipulations, blending ethical complexity with humor derived from social dynamics and personal gain. "Clouds of May" turns a child's innocent bet into an insight into a lesson on fraud (Akbulut, 2005, p. 97; Suner, 2010, p. 103). "Climates" and "Distant" portray relationships and deceits as tactical maneuvers, prompting reflections on morality. In "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia," the interplay of authority and facade among characters like the doctor and the prosecutor highlights the ethical puzzles in daily life, weaving humor into the depiction of their strategic exchanges.

Self-reflexivity, akin to the concept of play, is a recurring theme in Ceylan's cinema, where questioning the film medium itself and reality becomes an integral part of the narrative experience (Akbulut, 2005; Suner, 2010; Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2022; Dönmez-Colin, 2023). This approach leaves a lasting impression, prompting viewers to reflect on the authenticity of what they've witnessed long after the film concludes. For instance, the film Muzaffer shoots in "Clouds of May" makes us reflect on what we watch and question reality. We see that art itself is a game and illusion. In "About Dry Grasses," Samet's entrance to the stage through Nuray's bedroom door breaks the fourth wall, providing a crucial pause for both audience and actors to reflect on the unfolding drama. This scene suggests "all art is artifice," urging viewers to draw their own conclusions (Marshall, 2023). Ceylan's cinema combines realism with surrealism to probe ethical and human complexities, urging a reevaluation of reality and morality with a lasting impact.

Conclusion

This study discusses the relationship between ethical and aesthetic values in Ceylan's cinema. Aesthetics and ethics present us with two interwoven domains of enquiry. The approach adopted in the study casts the questions of ethics and aesthetics and their relation and find its basis in the concrete existence and actions of human beings. The films are discussed in terms of content and form relationship considering ethical and aesthetic values. Hartmann's ontological analysis method and the anthropological approach were taken into consideration to discuss Ceylan's film in general. In this context, it is shown how ethical values affect the film aesthetics in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films. It can be concluded that Ceylan's films show an aesthetic orientation that formally make ethical values evident.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films, richly layered with ethical questions, highlight a fundamental emphasis on moral exploration, addressing critical social themes like identity, belonging and displacement. Ceylan's films delve into ethical complexities, contrasting everyday actions with significant moral questions. Through characters facing ethical dilemmas amid societal background without direct social or political critique his cinema reveals the profound impact of personal choices on human relationships. His cinema intertwines ethical reflections with aesthetic elements, addressing universal themes of human existence alongside specific insights into Turkish culture. Through detailed character studies, his cinema examines the interplay between personal ethics and broader societal norms, prompting viewers to reassess their own moral standings with his own style.

His films explore the human condition through a slow cinema approach. Using minimal dialogue and long takes, he invites deep contemplation on life's complexities. His films blend themes of boredom and existential quests with visual motifs that highlight cultural divides, urging viewers to examine personal values and the essence of human connections. Merging realism with surrealism, Ceylan's work navigates ethical and human complexities, intertwining real-life issues with abstract themes for deep audience contemplation, leaving a lasting impact. Exploring human relationship ethics marked by guilt and moral shortcomings, Ceylan addresses how selfishness and deceit erode bonds through long takes, silence, and somber visuals, evoking alienation and unease. These elements prompt introspection on life's challenges and communication barriers, as he employs the mundane lives of his characters to raise significant philosophical queries. His cinema's subtle narrative and visual storytelling spotlight the nuances of selfishness and hypocrisy, encouraging viewers to seek deeper meanings behind what they see.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author of the article declared that there is no conflict of interest.

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