

EMBODIED CARTOGRAPHY AND HAEMORRHAGING POSTMODERN SUBJECTIVITY: THE STREET AS A SITE OF THE UNCANNY

Mayank Dutt Kaushik,

Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the intersection of postmodern subjectivity and the cinematic representation of urban spaces (the street as a site) and the simultaneous uncanniness rendered through them. The paper analyses three films, namely Life is Cheap But Toilet Paper is Expensive (1989), directed by Wayne Wang and Spencer Nakasako; Naked (1993), directed by Mike Leigh; and Synecdoche, New York (2008), directed by Charlie Kauffman, as a triad configuration to understand the peripatetic impetus of modernity and its impact on subjectivity within the urban landscape. The paper begins by discussing the influence of modernity on the urban environment, its promotion of rationality and progress, and the resulting fragmentation of experience and alienation. It argues that cinema, as a medium, captures and reveals the hidden truths of modernity and post-modernity, allowing for a deeper understanding of our place within the urban landscape. The paper foregrounds the momentum of 'embodied space' being transformed within the city, whereas cinema itself portages the transformative beat. The paper engages with various theoretical frameworks that subsequently frame the ratiocination of the street as a site of exhibiting the presence and absence of self scurrying through the pace of modernity-post-modernity-post-post-modernity. By analysing the triad of films, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pace of modernity through architecture, the fragmentation of presence and absence, corporeal sensations, and viscosity felt by individuals within the urban environment. It highlights the bouleversement of universal transparency, the breakdown of language and signage, and the mapping of emotions in space as essential elements in cinematic representations of urban landscapes permeated with a forest of gestures. In conclusion, the paper attempts to offer a multidimensional exploration of the cinematic embodiment of the urban uncanny (its natant presence) in metropolitan streets and its relationship to postmodern subjectivity, providing valuable insights into the intersection of film, modernity, and the urban landscape while augmenting the framework of AI and cybernetics over contemporary forms of modernity.

Keywords: *Postmodern Subjectivity; Delirious Representation; Urban Spaces; Uncanniness; Modernity; Heterotopia; Transformative Beat.*

Welcome my son

Welcome to the machine

What did you dream?

It's alright we told you what to dream

You dreamed of a big star

He played a mean guitar

He always ate in the Steak Bar

He loved to drive in his Jaguar

So welcome to the machine

– Pink Floyd's *Welcome to the Machine*

Wild car chases, accidents, skyscraper conflagrations, violent protests, obstreperous manhole explosions, buildings collapsing, hate crimes, traffic, and 24-7 surveillance cameras are the recurrent themes of news around cities, while the public reclaims this haphazard space through marathons for mental health, animus climate activists, jaywalking maelstroms, circumambulated migrants, impecunious travellers, and people on the move in and out of giant structures of power drifting on the jazz beats of P Johnson's *You've Got to be Modernistic*. Modernity has had a sui generis impact on the urban landscape by promoting rationality and progress, and the splintering of experience in heterogeneous radiation (from the west) dropped like an A-bomb on the rest of the world, so naturally the locomotion transfigurations (speeds of modernity) varied between the several metropolitan cities, due to geographic proximity. This has led to a significant transformation of the temporality of the street (framed as an ECU shot), which has become increasingly fluid and fragmented due to rapid social and technological change, thereby generating alienation as an impediment to the egregious drive of modernity. Kracauer too believes that the streets of the city are a space for improvisation and creative social interaction, which are uniquely captured by cinema or attempt to frame a glimpse of the same. He argues that film can reveal the hidden truths of modernity and allow us to see the world as it truly is, helping us to gain a deeper understanding of our place within it. The details of catechizing between cinema and city reside in their interconnectedness with architecture and its subsequent affects on both. Vidler, in his seminal essay *Spaces of Passage*, discusses the reflection of estrangement through several spatial and architectural vectors in order to respond to the social conditions prevailing amidst the shocks of modernity. The intertwined state of subjectivity and the curated cinematic space augment the cartographic impulse, which is furthermore negotiated via the embodied experiences and memories within the straggling

tapestry of urban space within the realm of cinematic form.

The city is not merely a static entity but a sentient being that is being formulated through the art of navigation. It's like an expansive canvas of shared environments awaiting the exploratory perspective; as one advances gradually to its extended channels, camera-like discernible characteristics surface. This wide city space transforms into a cinematic backdrop wherein the camera synchronously flows in perfect unison with the modern figure of the urban subject, constantly shifting its locus from being a flaneur, wanderer, adventurer, so on and so forth, trying to embrace and at the same time come to terms with the untangled phloem bundles of modernity. Subsequently, in this process, the screen is charged with a mapping impulse that metamorphoses shooting locations into immersive cinematic landscapes. Through Benjamin's concept of peddling of space performed by "the priest of genius loci" (Flaneur), the mapped space even gets further extended into the peripheries of sub-cultures and points that evoke both urban phantasmagoria and shock, as explained by Susan Buck Morss. These urban subjects, teeming with the double consciousness of being distant yet engrossed, develop an inner-circle lexicon for deciphering the surreptitious codes and clandestine pathways. With every stride, the mind adopts the guise of a cartographer, meticulously mapping the complex web of architectural symbolism that possesses the power to be both simultaneously devastating and mesmerising.

These spaces, as I argue, are often characterised by anonymity, dislocation, and sensory overload, which can lead to a condition of neurological modernity composed of sensory simulation and shock, as elucidated by Ben Singer. Cinema, from its ontological nascence, had a mobile impulse in capturing the divergent speeds of modernity in the configuration of the cine-city. As Paul Virilio explains it, "Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the screen has become the city square." Wherein the city is visualised as mise-en-

abyeme. It functions as an anionic pulse in that the city comes alive, finding equal activation as a cinematic backdrop as it does in the bustling streets. At the core of this abstruse labyrinthine framework resides the inhabitant oppidan, who embodies the transformative logic of the haptic energy of urbanisation in motion. The iniquitous, adrift, and constantly metamorphosing figure of a postmodern subject who seizes the blank margins of obscure sites as well as urban landscapes through various constellations of inscriptions by dint of language, fashion aesthetics, physical presence, and psychological and bodily gestures is at the forefront of Mike Leigh's *Naked*.

THE SENSORIUM OF UNCANNY AND SPLITTERED PSYCHO-GEOGRAPHY IN MIKE LEIGH'S *NAKED*

In the film's early scenes and the final frames, we encounter our mancurian prototantist Johnny, a refugee who escapes to London in a stolen car after he rapes a woman. Johnny is a charming, garrulous nihilist with an autodidact state of mind, while he embodies the uncanny of the city and the psycho-geography of neurological modernity. Johnny's fiery red hair, his unkempt beard, his frayed utilitarian coat, and his spasmodic cough provide him with eccentric chords that he materialises with *riffed* power *chords* of urban charisma that he performs by fretting the *root note* (i.e., fashion and language) and its *fifth note* (i.e., quelled frustration) on his guitar of subversion mapping impulses. Leigh curates Dickensian inclement of London and marks the peripheries of zones in the urban land space, whereas Johnny's agnosticism and anger aren't merely personal but representative of the angst of the dole recipients striving towards the margins of the city (as observed in Shoreditch train station behind Brick Pande, where Johnny and Maggy discussed the squalid underbelly of London) against the revellers of the Thatcher years embracing a shift towards neo-liberal policies, deregulation, and a focus on individualism. During those years, a space of consumption got aligned with capitalist forces,

which were furled through ambition and connotations of excess. The character of Johnny emerges through his explorations of the city of London, its streets, its apartments, and the lived space of the metropolis bustling with the uncanny in his two infernal nights. Leigh's portrayal of London entwines impeccably with the psychology of his unmoored protagonist, Johnny, riding on the waves of his sandpaper sarcasm and carrying his old and battered duffle bag with books as a repository of his lived experiences, subverting Thatcher's excess at every nook and corner of the city. *Naked* intrepidly and elegiacally takes concessions with the veracity of London's geography, adducing Johnny's internal volatility. His initial point of arrival, however, is instantly ascertainable as Soho, a central district in London, long renowned as a grungy enclave of jazz clubs, risqué entertainment spots, and record emporiums. Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny gets illustrated through the disorientation generated in the urbanity filled with eerie stillness, and the conundrum here becomes that it's still but still moving, by the mapping and navigation impulses of Johnny performing as Simmel's stranger who doesn't belong to a place but is in and out as well as possesses the dialectic synthesis of wandering and alienated attachment. The "bleach bypass" process was utilised by the cinematographer Dick Pope to generate a "post-punk look" in the film, wherein the colour palette was formed via the blacks, greys, blues, and greens with their pronounced graininess. The Guerilla filmmaking process orchestrated by Mike Leigh and his team curated a format that was described by Dick Pope in his interview at the BFI.

"If you come out of the main entrance to Leicester Square tube station on Charing Cross Road, there's an island in the middle of the road where we erected something like a BT tent over the camera—one of those canvas red-and-white things with a hole in it with only the lens sticking out. And when we were ready, and Mike was ready with David, we just turned on the camera, and everyone outside the tent walked away around the corner, so no crew were visible, just the tent and David on a preordained mark for focus, and that's how that came about."



Fig.1: Johnny framed on the edge of urbanity and its blend with decay and ruin.



Fig.2: Final frame of the film showcasing limping Johnny resetting as the drifter cum stranger figure.



Fig.3: The "Therapy cancelled poster" glued to the walls in the alleys of Soho, London.



Fig.4: The heterotopic site of Brewer Street in London, framing the two characters against this kitschy neon signage bar.

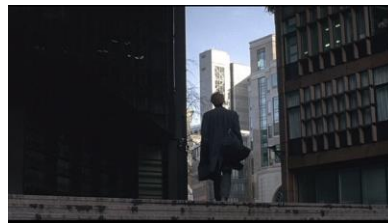


Fig.5: The resistance rendered in the form of walking from one space to another.



Fig. 6: The materialisation and embodiment of transcendental homelessness of Johnny Jaywalking through the site of underground reality of the projected opulent reveries of London.

The hidden cameras allowed us (the spectators) to observe and explore the forest of gestures about which de Certeau talks, while the camera became an extension of our perception, absorbing us in the urban narrative and travelling the streets with Johnny's eye. Through this interplay of navigation, memory, and emotions, the city reveals its secrets, its hidden depths, and its multitudinous possibilities, which are also highlighted by Guliana Bruno's essay *Site Seeing the Cine City* and captured by the spatial visual practise of filmmaking, which precariously frames and captures this hapticity through Johnny's urban charisma. As brilliantly communicated by Thomas Bloom Hansen in his article *Urban Charisma*, he writes, further converging with de Certeau's

formulations, that the official meaning of cities is removed from the concept of lived experience. Through the humdrum of the activities and performative exhibitions of citizens on the streets, the camera records the sensory empirical experiences, which in turn observe bodies experiencing the world. Worsley in that article makes an observation about charismatic nature, which according to him is an ability to handle taboo and incorporate dangerous situations into one's body. Johnny, through his rage, interprets and reinvents the narrative of London through his act of walking and his unconscious subversion of the hegemonic city's practices. The urban knowledge and intelligibility quotient are rendered through

Johnny's explorations of the interior and exterior spaces of London, which become the cultural economy of urban gestures encapsulated by the characters of the Nightwatchman, Louise (his former partner), and Sophie (the unemployed girl with punk aesthetics). The beating he endures in the London alley is probably a metaphor for the state of citizens being knocked to the ground by unfettered capitalist modernity. Captivating the performative gestures of informational exchanges, communication devices reflect the instability and unpredictable nature of the city. Johnny is both a "victim and a victimizer" of modernity's affects. The camera undergoes the mimesis of Johnny's verbal wit and speeches, and the steadicam shots frame his frenetic journey, which is not stable or oriented. The constant literary references from Homer's *Odyssey*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Camus's *The Stranger*, or even the Bible in Leigh's dialogues are reflective of the high culture and cultural capital instilled within the subject of the urban city, which is analogous to the "extra-ordinary lives of ordinary people." It's also important to highlight the importance of spaces like the office space, which Johnny calls the "postmodern gas chamber", and the temporality of the night time, its emptiness, and the way Dick Pope shot those dim-light silhouettes and shadows, which are remarkably illustrative of the shadows cast upon these spaces by other figures in the city. The film critiques the city's embourgeoisement, underscoring the catastrophe of the city in contrast with an earlier promised dream while simultaneously offering an oneiric figuration. The spine-tingling auditory landscape of the film was scored by Andrew Dickson, who assembled various geographies into his recurring ostinato played on the harp. This device was able to cicerone Johnny, spurring him ahead of the curve, plummeting chance-encounters, and continuing his audacious and desolate exploration. The second last sequence incorporates a visceral sonic affect through the track titled *Escape to Nowhere*, which accentuates the contrapuntal strategy to evoke the final defeat and a never-ending cycle of being everlastingly in motion. The interior scenes are segregated from the hustle and bustle of the city despite their close proximity, but the harp comes through at the very beat when

either Johnny is becoming who he is or even when Johnny attempts to become someone who he's not, continuously disrupting his presence and actions. The sequence that starts as a quest becomes a walk, as illustrated in Fig. 6, and makes us experience the underbelly of London. Here, when Johnny asks Sophie, another homeless woman, to "feel the trembling and mumblings coming through the bones." Here, the eerie sonority of that place is generated through a layered track, which makes the "fistulas, conduits, and colons" that Johnny is explaining lie within the underground and above-ground realms. The enchanting arpeggios and chord structures of the harp are continuously changing the rhythm, temporality, and ambient soundscape. The constant drive and draw of synchronicity and asynchronicity encompass and operates the uncanniness, which then consecutively extends to the protagonist Johnny, as it's important to note that more than anything else, *Naked* is a detailed and intricate character study hyphenated by its visceral sound design rather than a complex narrativized fictional film.

The conceptualization of heterotopia by Michel Foucault underscores physical and mental spaces that exist outside the peripheries of hegemonic social orders. These spaces challenge the dominant stream of structuring and functioning in metropolises. These spaces can be real, such as parks, pinacothecas, or even penitentiary spaces, or they can even be conceptual, like utopias or dystopias. So basically, these spaces are characterised by their potential to generate divergent formats of social and spatial experiences, which then transform into spaces of resistance or deviation, offering possibilities for subversion and distinct modes of existence in the delirious landscape of modern cities. I argue that through the cinematic mapping impulse of navigating in the urban cityscape, these spaces also generate or facilitate spurts of uncanny-ness that simulate and imbibe multiple meanings and cultural contradictions. For example, in this *Odyssey*, "Johnny drifts into west London, then a cut hurls him into east London, then Soho, then Southwark." The

cinematic portals generated by the director are converging at the ends of north and south London in a flash of frame change. But specifically, the site of Brewer Street in London, which is severed as a heterotopic site in the film by the assimilation and exhibition of meretricious video parlours, counter-culture fashion, and alternate expressions of the unemployed youth culture, all together becoming a heterotopia of coexistence and cultural exchange amidst a densely populated city.

EXSUFFLATION OF THE UNCANNY AND ITS INTERSTICES IN WANG'S FRAMED HONG KONG

Life is Cheap, But Toilet Paper is Expensive (1989), directed by Wayne Wang, is based in Hong Kong and captures an obstreperous exploration of space while mapping its cartographic impulse through the figure of the man with no name. It is a crime syndicate-docudrama fusion, inhabited by expletive-spouting cabbies, unscrupulous merchants, ageing hometown Presley imitators, and privileged opulent scions who further complicate the dialectic of panoramic and mythic imagination of the city rendered as a

phantasmagoric shock. A nameless Chinese-American courier (played by Spencer Nakasako), referred to as the man with no name, upon arrival in Hong Kong is tasked with the mission of delivering a mysterious suitcase to the big boss. The Asian-American naif exhibited the black stetson-wearing buckaroo personality through his fashion, becoming the character of a stranger and adventurer at the same time. The character of mobility generated by the film's protagonist through using fashion as "concealment and differentiation" is captured in the heat of his being both conquering and adhering to concession, as written by Simmel. This configuration of subjectivity is moving away from the ordinary experiences and embracing the adventures of a stranger figure in Hong Kong, which are framed via the aesthetics of *déjà disparu* as discussed by Akbar Abbas in his essay *Culture in a Space of Disappearance*. The evanescent nature of visibility generated by Wang's nine tableaux is at the same time provocative as the film encompasses various scenes, such as footage of ducks being bled in food markets, licentious networks in interior spaces, live shots of a man defecating, staged scenes wherein a hand undergoes a macabre mutilation, and the man with no name eating shit (literally).



Fig. 7: The site of subculture and an exhibition of urban charisma: figures of vagabonds in the chateuse bar in Hong Kong.



Fig.8: Exhibition of alienation and defeat, a recurring motif with different configuration of visuals.



Fig. 9: The Naked City sequence, which produces the centre street of Hong Kong, as Foucault's heterotopia.



Fig.10: The sequence chase to nowhere lands the protagonist and the viewer into the margins of Hong Kong's banlieues.



Fig.11: The metaphor of Peking sitting ducks to the China-Hong-Kong conflict mediated by the urban charismatic figure of butcher



Fig. 12: A three and a half-minute long shot of a dog running on a hamster's wheel, emblematic of the psychological and physical state of being of urban city dwellers.

As he immerses himself in a relationship with the boss's concubine, bedlam ensues, leading him to venture into the depths of organised crime and his own disquieting psyche, wrestling with his condition of psychasthenia. The episode of depersonalization takes place in the sequence of *A Soul Divided in Two* as urban subjects assimilate into the space and the mimetic process enthusiastically embraces the permeable boundaries between bodies and cultural spaces. Concomitantly, a frenetic hand-held 9-minute chase sequence exhibits the city's most affluent view to the Taikoo Shing, which is situated in Quarry Bay on Hong Kong Island, cage homes, ruin, disorder, and marginalisation are shot throughout this #4 sequence. In this phrenetic, artful display reminiscent of a tableau vivant, Wang skillfully punctuates the narrative through a concatenation of monologues performed by a multitude of unforgettable personas, curating a visually arresting adventure. This synchronously offers a garrulous cessation of lived experiences and a kaleidoscopic forest of gestures through a spatially cognitive and emotional mapping impulse. The physicality of the street and the social epidermis are exhibited throughout the film while also insinuating a spatial, haptic strategy to move the protagonist into a liminal space. *Life is Cheap...* is a hallucinogenic, vertiginous sojourn in pre-handover Hong Kong with flecks of American Wild West cowboy theatrics that attempts to capture the velocity of modernity via its fashion, neurasthenia

(modern nervousness), embodying an animal's (dog's and duck's) primal energy, money, and blue velvet's bouleversement for city's power structures and an incessant subversion of viewing a city as a cohesive entity into a compact mass deriving from Benjamin's writings on the *Arcades Project*. The director also explains the film's crucial context:

"Life is Cheap" was edited during the Tiananmen massacre in 1989. It was my blunt response and indictment of the overarching patriarchal Chinese ideology that dominated all strata of social existence in Hong Kong, which in many ways included my own complicated relationship with my father."

This is exactly what the stranger-turned-adventurer figure of the man with no name emulates during this armageddon-like buildup to reunification, and the spatial and sensory encounters faced by him are categorised in those nine tableaux. They furthermore provide him with the visual jargon and textual means to depict and navigate the alienating city of Hong Kong through the disarray caused by the clash of Chinese culture and unrestricted capitalism. The cartographic impulse here is more fragmented and hallucinatory as compared to the cinematic mapping of the London city generated by the recalcitrant Johnny. The invisible, integrated networks of nodes of urbanism resurface through the wanderings and encounters of the man with no name. He enters the

inimical parts of the city wherein the haptic energy of urbanisation can be both heard within the macro and micro soundscape of the city, augmented via his psychological profile, which is in reality manifesting the internal feelings of being aghast by Hong Kong's presence and absence of Baudelaire's "kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness." The film *Life is Cheap...* masterfully entwines together a haunting soundscape that echoes the deep-seated anxieties surrounding Hong Kong's impending return to China in 1997. The uncanny sonic ambiance resonates with a sense of foreboding, capturing the ambiguity and disconcertion that suffuse the space. The concurrent voice-overs and stacked dialogue tracks are also designed to facilitate the accentuation of this dream-reality-conscious-subconscious framework. In particular, the section titled *Naked City* magnifies this ominous sonic backdrop, significantly impacting the stranger/adventurer-protagonist's further journey. The detailed emphasis and how extended shots of recording ambient sounds from these sites on the street, or hidden sites on the street that are explored by the camera (not even the protagonist) create a disquieting ambiance of hearing the micro sounds and textures of these spaces, which envelope the accoutrements of the urban uncanny. Through the strident melodies, distant klaxons, and intermittent bursts of mechanised-industrial dim, the soundscape plunges the man with no name into a state of contemplation and vulnerability. The cacophony of sound mirrors the disordered, frenetic metropolis, reflecting the man with no name's inner turmoil and the dissipation of cognizant reference points in the city. As the reverberations of the city's metamorphosis permeate his subconscious, the soundscape becomes a striking analogy for the fraying of identities and the disorienting experience of navigating an ever-evolving vista.

Drawing on Simmel's *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, the metropolis herein becomes a sensory organism that influences the protagonist's perception of space, time, and self. The idea of disappearance, as discussed above in this section, reflects the velocities of historical and technological transformations, wherein the experience of the

"invisible order of things" becomes the resurfacing dimension of this desire to experience the ebb and flow of the city's life. In this film, the centre street of Hong Kong becomes the site of Foucault's heterotopia. This part is titled as the naked city in the film, where barbers are cutting hair, butchers are cleaning their carcasses, and cobblers are fixing the leather shoes. It is all framed by the aesthetics of protracted cinematography. The sequence further exhibits staccato intercutting between each action and zooms in closer and closer to the materiality of these places. The unrelenting industrial clamour and scaffolding structures that are contained within the street space are subsequently occupied by a diverse range of businesses, including eateries and kiosks. It embodies a heterotopia of culinary experiences, artisanal products, and creative industries, attracting locals and tourists alike. The uncanny here comes from literally watching the dead bodies being loaded into ambulances, which is merely an everyday phenomenon, and the affect that all these fragmented elements mentioned above coming together all at once have on the already distant foreign devil, the man with no name. Now, let's move on to propelling an eruption of unsettling uncanniness onto the theatrical stage of NYC, directed by the maven Charlie Kauffman, where the "play's the thing".

THE GENESIS OF AI CARTOGRAPHIC MAPPING THE UNCANNY IN KAUFFMAN'S MODELLED NEW YORK CITY

In *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), which marked Charlie Kauffman's directorial debut, the protagonist, Caden Cotard, is a theatre director whose relevance lies in entertaining geriatric spectators in Schenectady, New York. His life takes a nosedive when his partner decides to leave for Berlin to embark on her artistic journey, his therapist centres efforts on advertising her bestselling book over giving precedence to helping him, and an incipient romance with the riveting Hazel halts

abruptly. Additionally, he suffers from an uncanny malady that slowly but surely compromises his physiological functions. After being awarded the Macarthur fellowship and simultaneously coping with the ephemerality of life, Caden finally casts an eclectic ensemble of characters who rehearse every day for 17 years in a warehouse in New York, aspiring to make an unflinchingly honest artwork. The film acquires the post-modernist sensibility of sophisticatedly mapping and modelling the entire city's architecture, echoing the perturbations and unsettledness of the blistering speed of modernity

and its transition to post-modernity. As the years pass and he immerses himself deeper into his magnum opus, the boundaries blur between the real relationships in his life and those within the theatrical realm. This blending of reality and fiction entangles the bifurcation between the theatrical production and Caden's own retrograding reality. *Synecdoche, New York* can also be likened to a Sazerac cocktail, blending elements of Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman*, Baudrillard's *Simulacra*, Deleuze's *Desert Island*, Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and a modicum of Kafka's *Trial*.



Fig. 13(a): The caged city, shadows of dreamland and catastrophe, and the presence of a hovering airship as the iconography of psycho-geography of a postmodern subject



Fig.13(b): Construction of one of Caden's favourite streets and apartment building of New York as his own interpretation.



Fig. 14(a): The site of interiors juxtaposed with the panorama of a decaying metropolis



Fig. 14(b): The interior-exterior dialectic merges with the organised-chaotic simulation.

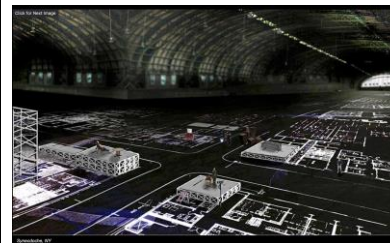
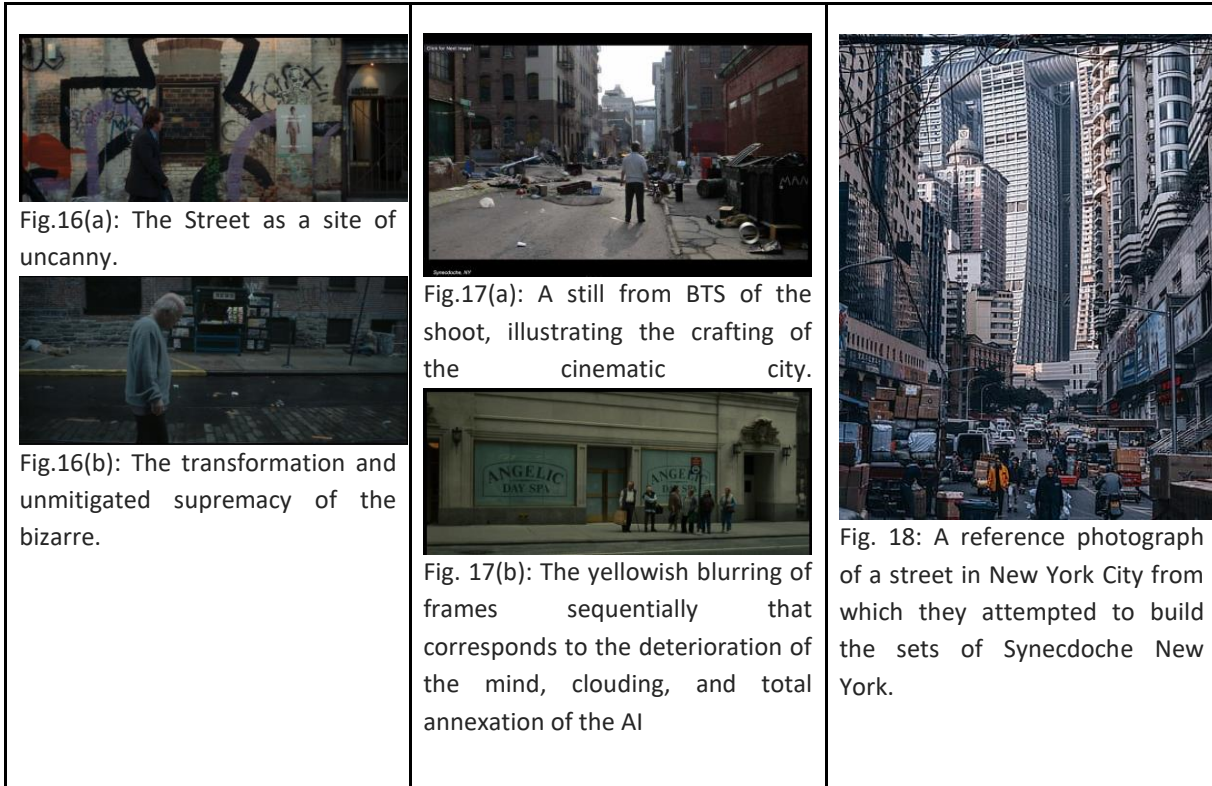


Fig.15(a): The genesis of digital mapping as a dire need to survive.



Fig.15(b): The orchestration of making reality of the urbanity into fiction and vice-versa. But the estrangement recedes rapidly.



Now I'd like to discuss the skillful production design of the film created by Mark Friedberg, which exactly encompasses the architectural impulse to model New York City into this phantasmagoric shock endured by Caden. Herein, the amalgamation of both vertical and horizontal urbanism with a splash of the uncanny was generated, which can be understood through the digital impulse of mapping.

Kaufman wanted to move from an actual set to a digital representation at certain points during production, so Friedberg and Russell worked with the helmer to create compatible real and digital worlds. We chose colours, angles, and anything else we could so that when you go to the digital set, you hopefully don't notice it at all. Adam was tasked with taking our designs and making them happen.

This process clearly indicates and highlights the structuring of such a production design that constructs a miniature city and an urban mock-up for Caden's play. He also embodies and performs the figure of flaneur as envisaged by Frisby, Benjamin, Robert Park, and Baudellaire. The mapping impulse

here is both an exploration and a reproduction of the same. The cinematic geography and its transformation adhering to the full-size replica become a warehouse within a warehouse, generating a splintered dream image of the city all brought together as well. The catastrophe of this dreamland is attributed to the postmodern subjectivity of Caden, who can only reflect reality and a truth claim by rendering it in full size. I'd also like to bring here the phenomenon of agoraphobia and the fear of extended space as explained by Vidler, which is materialised in this model city form. Vidler also foregrounds the interconnectedness between architecture and filmic imagery, emphasising the plasticity of cinema and its capability to simulate landscapes on the screen. In *Synecdoche New York*, the production work and the cinematographic shot breakdowns entail an exploration that focuses on making space as a psychological and spatial matter of Caden's subconscious while utilising the form of architecture to manifest urban space as a pathological concept. In the film, Caden builds a colossal, intricately

embellished facsimile of New York City inside the Manhattan Theatre District warehouse, building a microcosm that mirrors the external world. This constructed city within a city function as a heterotopia—a space that deviates from the norms, conventions, and reality of the actual city. The warehouse space itself becomes a heterotopia as it metamorphoses into a walled, sequestered enclosure secluded from external influences. It serves as a container for Caden's Tour de force, leading him to explore his artistic ambitions and delve into his subconscious desires. Moreover, the warehouse and the newly created city challenge traditional notions of time and space. They become sites of multiple assorted narratives, layered shifting meanings, and dynamic viewpoints, offering an alternative reality where the boundaries of identity, memory, and existence blur.

The soundscape of *Synecdoche, New York*, composed by Jon Brion, encapsulates the quintessence of the film's melancholic and transcendently destructive nature. Brion's trailblazing sonic devices and miscellaneous musical compositions create an aural panorama that resonates with the spectator's experience of watching the orchestration of the uncanny in this synthetic miniature city. From the capricious and slightly off-kilter marches in the preludes, *Tacky Entrance Music*, to the indelible piano-centric pieces like *Piano One, Two, and Three* it moves the viewer from one point to another. The primacy of guitar medleys (hammer-ons and pull-offs, i.e., *The Legato Technique*) adds a post-modernist smidgen to the entire arrangement, while the incorporation of idiosyncratic cadences and distinctive urban sonic embellishments creates a filament of disunity from reality, burgeoning the film's etiolated and otherworldly atmosphere. The songs that surface in the second half are *Little Person and Song for Caden*. These lackadaisical and wistful indie tunes, composed by Brion and the director himself and performed by jazz vocalist Deanna Storey, offer a rejuvenating respite from the instrumental pieces. The recognition of temporal dynamics in compositional works is not only determined by the

tempo and rhythm of the composition but also by the tonal and structural framework in which the music exists, writes Michel Chion. Components such as "melodic pace, rhythmic chord progression, and their rendered orbit positions pose a specific question of time." This same time is fractured and disseminated within the various quadrants of this theatrical set-design. The distinct soundscape orchestrated for the warehouse is essentially the sound design of his magnum opus, which is nothing but a collection of Caden's lived experience of the city, sometimes as a flaneur and sometimes as a stranger. The layering of the tracks and microscopic audio fragments to imbue the auricular ambience restrained within the realm of manufactured cities is analogous to what the entire apparatus of VR actually does and what Apple Vision Pro promises to its offbeat clientele.

The interplay between the body, space, and architecture is curated, featuring how movement and cognition reconfigure our perception of space. The concept of the city as a labyrinth is assembled, addressing the desire for light and total knowledge juxtaposed with the inherent inability to achieve them, which gives rise to an uncanny experience. The production of an uncanny experience through the sparking connection between the psychological state of the mind and the aesthetics encountered. But it's important to understand that here in this postmodern mosaic of kaleidoscopic theatrical worlds, Caden experiences Ernst Jentsch's "intellectual uncertainty," which clouds his presence in the urban city. The city has also always been the subject of architectural desires, right from the onset of architectural writings in Vitruvius's *Ten Books on Architecture and the Roman Ruins*. Herein, the site of a street in our protagonist's theatre wonder makes the viewer see and move beyond the materiality of the space, which is a simulation of the real New York Street. This real-and-modelled dialectic inside Caden's head evokes the marvel that is contained within the mundane reality of the everyday. My argument is that the sublime of this uncanny is handled and instilled within blocks, like the mysterious flying propellor, the rhythmic contraction

and expansion of time, the found objects—set props—the self-destruction mode of the city, the solipsistic artistic thrust, doppelgängers in the streets, dimly lit interior spaces, and the installation of the city with all its components. These blocks are further generating impetus for Caden to plan and navigate his flaner experience in the city being reflected onto his model and additionally merge them with an experiment of 17 years to attain perfection. So here in these blocks, the notion of the uncanny is utilised as a pulsating tension, which is then spatialised and experienced by the viewer as the narrative unfolds for our virtuoso dramaturge and director.

CONCLUSION

The paper uses this triad filmic configuration as a map towards a model of embodying, galvanising, and producing forms of catharsis to handle the quivering uncanny demons of the postmodern chiasmus. At which stage, their *raison d'être* is the fragmentation of subjectivity, it's the urbanic-modernist city that is at the epicentre of this proprioceptively mimicking transformation. These analyses comprehensively adumbrates the peripatetic impetus of modernity through three different modes of cinematic exploration that pirouette around the uncanny generated in the city, through the integument of the street as a site.

Focusing on postmodern subjectivities, the paper, through the above-discussed three sections, carves a mental map of anxieties sketched over the imaginative skylines of Hong Kong, London, and New York within its inhabitants that are arranged through the triad configuration, wherein *Naked* and *Life is Cheap...* are performing a sabrage filled with postmodern anxieties with an embodied uncanny concealed within the crevices of the city, while *Synecdoche New York* represents an attempt to contain and model a panacea for these trepidations while magnanimously failing at the end. This moreover highlights the current diabolical state of a digitised postmodern schizophrenic subject orbiting through the mediation of trans-generic realities and

turning into a bit of data. Drawing on the ideas of James Donald's cinematic urban land space, which is doubly textured and simultaneously blurs de Certeau's concept city, these films provide different permutations and combinations to handle these dynamic transformations in the urban city. A pedestrian poetics of resistance as spatial organisation is increasingly determined by global information flows, as illustrated by the different analyses, as they are all driven by the significant pull of the hidden networks of biopower. The paper furthermore utilises the abstracted configuration of interior spaces, heterotopic spaces, lived spaces, and transient impressions (chorus of idle footsteps) through the critical assertions of Lefebvre, Foucault, Giuliana Bruno, and Walter Benjamin to explicate and highlight Susan Buck-Morrs' dialectic of dreamland-catastrophe, which is formulated through the exhibitions of decay (experienced by Johnny) and haptic geographies surfaced through the architect's imagination (manifested in Caden). The spatial mapping orchestrated through all the protagonists materialises Elizabeth M. Anthony, Sabine Hake, and George Simmel's reflections on fashion while surfacing subcultures and evoking provocative slippages of postmodern identity. This asserts a maudlin individuality in a dense forest of gestures wherein the camera's legerdemain (capturing unconscious optics) concurrently functions as a flaneur in embodying the mobile mapping impulse of its protagonists. The third film, through its handling of the sublime of a postmodern subjectivity through modelling and re-making of the whole city (including architecture, language, signage, and inhabitants), curates an experimental exploration. This in turn generates a condensation of movement images from the other two films into several Deleuzian time (even crystallised time) images of the same reality, becoming a cognoscenti architect's simulation. This film's geographic map of New York City, showcasing 72 years in 2 hours, is surrealistically brilliant. The motley of a dreamlike reality, combined with Bruno's aesthetics of post-modern ruin and decay, creates a vivid panorama as visualised and projected. On top of that, the film's narrative progresses from a reflection of basic reality

to its own pure simulacrum. This fertile ground disseminates the seeds of distraction, strangeness, the believable-primitive-memorable trajectory. Additionally, it connects the origins of AI city planning through 3-D modelling, and the trichotillomania of finding reality. The physical violence inflicted by protagonists Johnny and the nameless man by eidolon city forces is personified through the mental violence resurfacing as traumatic neurosis in Caden. While his perfecting the model city for 17 years reflects the mapping impulse of a postmodern subject as a mode of catharsis from the experienced uncanny of urban existence. Simmel's stranger and Adventurer, Weber's Social scientist, Nietzsche's Superman, Musil's Man without qualities, Benjamin's flaneur, and Debord's derive are all figures of modernity, but it's important to understand that their traits and characteristics often bleed onto each other, as discussed above in the paper, but what's important is their essence of double consciousness. It's also essential to foreground the different urban topographies that are mapped through the cinematic apparatus and digital aesthetics, which is synchronous with the mapping impulse of the three characters in these films doing the same. These films also align political undertones embedded in the visuality and its further exploration through framing multiple sites in the dispersed urbanity of the city that consecutively generate knowledge of navigation and subversion as embodied by the three protagonists to steer their narratives forward.

The subversion of the universal transparency of Bentham and Corbusier's city throughout the three films is emblematic of the radical bodily movement in and out of the city while also understanding and dramatising the semiotics of urban architecture. The characters are in a state of physical and mental tergiversation through the architectonic project of postmodernity by exhibiting a breakdown of language and signage as a mode of communication. These films serve as an atlas of emotions, mapping the emotions in space and reflecting the cartographic impulses postulated by Tom Conley's cognitive and emotional mapping in all

three cities. The core concept explored in this paper is the handling and embodiment of minutiae paroxysms of uncanny augmented with deliriums of post-modernity. These are bodily sensations mediated through the architectural landscape of the urban city, which are then substantiated through Leigh's vicious homeostatic drifter cum flaneur cum stranger, strange shadows and adventurer moxie of the man with no name. And finally, through mental imaging i.e developing general AI (self-aware) theory of mind with limited memory. It is becoming a reactive machine imaging Caden's inchoate modelling of New York for his play-in-a-play theatre stage set, which is actually like a skillful prompter simplifying feedback loops touching a nerve with Katherine Hayles argument in her book *How We Became Posthuman*, for the set-design of his final play.

Along with the high cost of living, charged political site of the street, incessant traffic, and being multicultural economic mammoths, the three cities picked also nearly (through folded impressions) replicate each other if one folds the digital artwork of Michael Tompsett, a mashup of the skylines of New York, London, and Hong Kong. The analysis of soundscapes in these films requires listening to micro-geographies and macro-cityscapes (composed of noise, jazz-like unpremeditated symphonies, and the euphonious sound of the night) etched on the cinematic urban portraits of these cities, which can be located within Joana Demers' *Listening through the noise*. These sounds are stemming from minimal objects in micro-sounds usually placed within unknown codes of urbanity and sometimes non-places. This could be an apparatus to possibly hear the uncanny. This is achieved through the process of reduced listening and inducing the tactile textures of the sonic environments. This all produces a resultant for Marshall Bernan's analogy that *all that is solid melts into air*—that's the experience of modernity, delineating from the emergence of modernity, the Industrial Revolution, to the rise of mass culture, to us being in the post-post-modern world. Whereas the cinematography mobility bestowed upon the three protagonists emphasises three different forms,

i.e., realism, surrealism- docu-fiction, and postmodernism, sometimes all interlaced within the lacunae of each other's mode of handling the pace of modernity while rendering cumulonimbus clouds of uncanny all over the city.

ENDNOTES

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19. In the film, the narrated visuals are stitched into nine sections. *The nightmare, the naked city, the foot chase to nowhere, Peking sitting ducks, toilet paper is expensive, the setup, losing face, rebellious love, and a true hero*. Henri Lefevre's concept of social space can frame this connection between disappearance and the abstraction of space. Further adding to the arguments of Virilio, it becomes apparent that one consequence of the "tele-conquest of appearance" is a transformation in how we experience space. It becomes increasingly diverse and manifold, overflowing with signs and images, while simultaneously growing more elusive and abstract. This leads us to consider the interplay between disappearance and abstraction, where abstraction emerges as the prevailing form of vanishing in contemporary times.
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22. In his essay, Simmel underscores the detachment and anonymity that define metropolitan interactions as individuals sail around a sea of strangers and experience a myriad of fleeting encounters. He suggests that these conditions foster a sense of individual freedom and liberation, as well as a certain level of alienation and isolation.
- Moreover, Simmel explores the impact of the metropolis on the mental faculties of its inhabitants. He investigates the unfolding of a "blasé attitude" among city dwellers, delineated by nonchalance, sensory overload, and an unrelenting urge for stimulation. According to Simmel, the metropolis bombards individuals with a constant stream of stimuli, leading to desensitisation and a need to protect oneself emotionally.
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28. According to Jentsch, intellectual uncertainty arises when individuals stumble upon something that does not blend harmoniously into their existing understanding or framework of the world. It is defined by a feeling of ambiguity as individuals contend with the conflict of reconciling with the unfamiliar or uncanny elements they are confronted with. This uncertainty can generate a sense of

unease as individuals struggle with the task of deciphering and slotting in the unfamiliar.

29. De architectura, also known as Ten Books on Architecture, is a comprehensive work on the subject of architecture authored by Marcus Vitruvius, a prominent Roman architect. It was specifically created as a manual and tribute to his patron, Emperor Caesar Augustus, to provide guidance and insights for various construction endeavors.
30. The jarring discord between a place where we should feel content and the latent mood that it is innately unfamiliar connects Simmel to Freud, or at least to the Freudian hypothesis that the eerie, the *unheimlich*, is derived as a consequence of the familiar, the *heimlich*. This implies why it is pivotal to discern the individual in the teeming urban jungle not only in terms of their identity, collective, and civic participation but also in terms of a dramaturgy of yearning, raptness, and consternation.
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