

A “Sensuous” Approach to the Cinema of Nuri Bilge Ceylan

Principles of Embodied Film Experience

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Department of Media Studies

Degree 30 HE credits

Cinema Studies

Master’s Programme (120 HE credits)

Spring 2018

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University**

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Abstract

Over the last decades, film theories with their focus on the mere audiovisual quality of cinema have been questioned by film scholars with a phenomenological interest. According to these critical approaches, the film experience cannot be understood through a mere involvement of the eye (and the ear). In this context, to disregard the significance of a multisensory attachment to the film results in the consideration of relationship between the film and the viewer to be a dominating one. This dissertation examines this multisensory attachment and aims to define the film experience as an embodied relationship between the film and the viewer by means of a formal analysis of the Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s early films. Throughout the dissertation, it is argued that Ceylan encourages his viewer in various forms to have a more sensual and immediate experience of his films rather than to compel them to adhere to symbols and abstractions through a kind of intellectual effort – an intellectual effort that would damage the “sensuous” attachment between the film and the viewer.

Keywords

Nuri Bilge Ceylan, *Cocoon*, *The Small Town*, *Clouds of May*, *Distant*, phenomenology, haptic visuality, embodied film experience, senses, sensual/sensuous, body, skin, tactile, mimesis, interpretation, erotics, play/game.

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INTRODUCTION

Nuri Bilge Ceylan is a Turkish filmmaker who belongs to the ranks of, what film scholars call, “New Turkish Cinema”. What this term connotes is obvious by the name: the emphasis made by the word “Turkish” frames the national aspect, whereas “new”, as the implication of the disengagement from the earlier filmmaking tendencies, marks a temporal frame. However, within the term itself lies a distinction between the “popular” and “art” cinema as well.¹ Ceylan, as one of the filmmakers who inaugurated this “new wave” of Turkish cinema, is inarguably the most internationally acclaimed one that belongs to the latter.²

Ceylan’s attachment to the artistic side of this new wave in the national cinema is also what lies behind his unpopularity in his homeland. Needless to say, internationally acclaimed films are not always praised by fellow citizens.³ However, the unpopularity of the director does not necessarily stem from *what* he deals with in his films but rather *how*. Indeed, the director’s style is so alien to the majority of the Turkish audience, *and* to critics, insomuch that his first feature *Kasaba* (*The Small Town*, 1997) was first excluded from the competition category by the committee of the 34th Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, the most prestigious film festival in Turkey, due to its “documentary-like” character.⁴

On the one hand, not only *The Small Town* but also Ceylan’s other early films –*Koza* (*Cocoon*, 1995) (the only short film shot by him), *Mayıs Sıkıntısı* (*Clouds of May*, 1999) and *Uzak* (*Distant*, 2002)– can be considered to be “documentary-like”. This is to a great extent a matter of the director’s “mandatory” choice of working together with a non-professional crew consisting of his family members, relatives and close friends in all phases of the films – a “choice” that provides a kind of “simplicity” to his cinema.⁵ On the other hand, such an association of his cinema with “simplicity” seems to decline in his later films due to his increasing popularity that has provided relatively abundant resources to him. For the reasons that I advert below where I

¹ Asuman Suner, *Hayalet Ev: Yeni Türk Sinemasında Aidiyet, Kimlik ve Bellek* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2006), 28.

² Ceylan’s all films have premiered in major film festivals, the Cannes Film Festival being in the first place, and won prizes many times which have brought the director international prestige. Likewise, the selection committee of the 71st Cannes Film Festival has announced that the director’s new film *Ahlat Ağacı* (*The Wild Pear Tree*, 2018) will compete for the Palme d’Or.

³ Suner, 40.

⁴ Güldal Kızıldemir, “‘Kasaba’lı Anlam Avcısı – Radikal Gazetesi, 21 Aralık 1997”, in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Kasaba*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2007), 87.

⁵ For instance, the Greek film critic Lefteris Haritos describes *The Small Town* as “a film made with admirable simplicity.” See Lefteris Haritos, “The Four Seasons of Life – *Balkan Survey* (Greece) September 2006”, trans. Tina Sideris. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, April 16, 2018. http://www.nbcfilm.com/kasaba/press_balkansurvey.php

introduce my course of action under the title of “Method and Material”, this early filmmaking period of the director is of particular interest to me throughout this dissertation.

This early period of the director as well as to some extent his later are usually approached by film scholars and critics as giving rise to the tension between the urban and the provincial at the center of the narratives. As a matter of fact, Ceylan’s first three features constitute his “Provincial Trilogy” and in all of them we have protagonists who aspire to leave their province for the big city, Istanbul, or protagonists who already left the province but still carry in themselves a kind of “provincial distress” that they can never escape: wherever they go, the province inside them always prevails.⁶

This is of course not a new theme in Turkish cinema. Domestic migration has long since been an issue in the country, and accordingly, one could mention a large number of Turkish films that narrate people leaving their provinces or villages for Istanbul with high hopes. What basically distinguishes Ceylan’s cinema from these popular examples of Turkish cinema, on the other hand, is simply its way of pushing the narrative into the background. Therefore, in his films, images are mostly important not only in relation with the other images but also *in themselves*.⁷

However, it is also worth noting that the phrase of “in themselves” is in no case an implication of denying the active role of the spectator. In other words, although, or more precisely, for the very reason, that an image may not need the causal connection with other images, it does require the spectator to make sense of it. In this dissertation, I embrace a literal meaning of the phrase “sense” in saying “make sense”, because the viewer is encouraged to have an embodied experience of Ceylan’s films – an embodied film experience that leads her to “sense” the image rather than “understand” it in its causal connection with other images. Such a “sensuous” attachment to the director’s films would also allow the viewer to make a more “personal” connection to them – a connection that would let her experience them in her own unique way. This is also to suggest that the address of the images are not only the eyes, simply because the eye is not the only “sense” organ we have. Therefore, the importance of the images *in themselves* does not make Ceylan’s cinema a mere “cinema of vision”. In this dissertation, I intend to elaborate this highly overlooked aspect of the director’s cinema.

⁶ Suner, 117-118.

⁷ Ibid., 120-122.

Last but not least, I am not in any way seeking for a theorization of Ceylan's cinema. Surely, one of my main purposes is to challenge, with the means of phenomenology, certain film theories that put the audiovisual quality of cinema in the center. However, while doing this, I am aware of taking the risk of describing an embodied film experience through a rather abstract language. This is a risk, because it has the potential of harming the pleasure one takes in Ceylan's cinema as is the case with each film theory – especially when one claims that it demands an embodied attachment from its viewer. However, it is also a risk worth taking. For, after all, the purpose of the dissertation in itself is a purpose of letting this embodied relationship in. It is in a sense a humble effort of comprehending the embodied experience that we can have in and through the cinema of Ceylan.

The Aim of the Research and the Questions at Issue

The overall purpose of this dissertation is to seek for an answer to the question how an embodied kind of relationship between the film and the viewer is established in the cinema of Ceylan. But, to be able to achieve this goal, the question what is implied by an embodied film experience requires to be discussed in the first place. Once this issue is carried out, I direct my interest towards the director's earlier filmmaking period and aim to uncover the "sensuous" characteristic of his cinema from various aspects. What is meant by "sensuous" here is far from being an implication of "sentimental" and such, but rather a multisensory attachment of the viewer to the film through which a mutual/reciprocal kind of relationship between the two can be achieved.⁸ Finally, throughout the dissertation, I hope the outcomes of this embodied experience of Ceylan's cinema to be illustrated in depth.

Method and Material

Throughout my dissertation, I line up with that the spectatorship cannot be comprehended without the acknowledgment of the corporeality of both the viewer and the film. Once the corporeality of these two is acknowledged, the relationship between the film and the viewer is not to

⁸ For instance, in an interview, Ceylan himself remarks that he regards "sentimentality" in cinema with disfavor. See Seyyid N. Erkal, "Koza'dan Kasaba'ya Bir Bilge – *Zaman Gazetesi*, Mayıs 1999", in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Kasaba*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2007), 101.

be read as a relationship in which one side dominates the other. In this context, similar to what Laura U. Marks to a certain extent relies upon in her book *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*,⁹ I aim to form my arguments principally in the light of a phenomenological approach, simply because I take the relationship between the viewer and the film into account as two mutually interacting bodies that merely “perceive” each other rather than to be claimed to be “known” by one. In other words, my interest basically lies in the pre-reflective character of the spectatorship which manifests itself through an embodied film experience.

As Vivian Sobchack writes in her *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, “[p]re-reflective experience is neither verbal nor literary, and yet the goal of phenomenology is to describe experience.”¹⁰ In accordance with this, while phenomenology as a philosophical system is hard to define thoroughly, what I mean in broad terms by phenomenological approach is a philosophical attitude that challenges the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy through attaching more importance to the experience itself rather than the cognitive process. Sobchack, taking the side of existential phenomenology represented mostly by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, tends to distinguish it from the contemporary philosophy’s deconstructivist approach to the famous Cartesian proposition “I think, therefore I am” – a deconstructivist approach that simply aims to undo the presence of an integral thinking subject. Existential phenomenology, on the other hand, with its reconstructivist attitude, by admitting such a presence of the subject, considers it to be a “lived-body ‘being-in-the-world’” and thus transforms the proposition into “I see, therefore I am embodied.” As a philosophical method, then, existential phenomenology seems to have “provided the means and the vocabulary” for describing the film experience not merely as a visual activity but as an activity that would lose its significance without the involvement of the entire bodies of both the film and the viewer.¹¹

Taking “a newly revived phenomenology” into account, Marks, too, points out that theories that are concerned with the embodied experience of cinema rejects a passive kind of spectatorship in which our bodies are considered to be “‘inscribed’ with meaning” and tend to start instead with the premise of an active spectatorship in which our bodies “are sources of meaning themselves”. In this sense, although one cannot deny the significance of semiotics in analyzing

⁹ Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), xvii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 304-305.

cinema, I argue in a similar vein as Marks, none of such attempts can grasp “the embodied nature of the cinematic viewing experience.”¹² Within *this* context, I aim to refrain as far as possible from making content-related analysis of Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s films and to focus instead on their formal characteristics. Such a choice of mine seems necessary for a proper understanding of the embodied character of the director’s cinema, since it gives me the opportunity of avoiding a kind of reduction of his images to a mere effort of searching for certain symbols in them. For now, suffice it to say that such a symbolic meaning-making approach is what I strongly oppose to. Towards the end of my theoretical discussion, I aim to legitimize the motivation for my opposition by giving a larger picture about this issue through a correlative reading of three texts: Susan Sontag’s famous essay “Against Interpretation”¹³, Umberto Eco’s “Overinterpreting Texts” from the 1990 Tanner Lectures and Seminar,¹⁴ and Erich Auerbach’s highly influential work *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought*.¹⁵

Marks’s above-mentioned work in its entirety provides a basis for my discussion of Ceylan’s embodied cinema. But, especially her notion of haptic visuality is crucial to understand the embodied nature of the director’s cinema even though the notion does not directly correspond to it. As I show in detail under the title of “Theoretical Framework”, the material quality is one of the most important elements when it comes to the haptic. However, what makes it seem more beneficial to me lies in that, through haptic visuality, one is enabled “to experience cinema as multisensory” in despite of cinema’s prevalent audiovisual status.¹⁶ This feature of the haptic is exactly what I adopt to understand the embodied experience that we have in Ceylan’s cinema.

Another work I use is Jennifer Barker’s *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*.¹⁷ What especially arouses my interest in this work is Barker’s way of describing the mutual relationship between the film and the viewer through a language of erotics. Such an aspect also enables me to more critically approach Marks’s notion of haptic visuality.

At this point, I want to remark once more that I do not intend to include Ceylan’s entire *oeuvre* in my analysis. This is partly because it would be impossible to deal with all of his films in detail. However, it would also be strategically wrong to select one film by him and exclude all

¹² Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 145-146.

¹³ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009).

¹⁴ Umberto Eco, “Overinterpreting Texts”, in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 22-23.

¹⁷ Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

the others, simply because to demonstrate that the persistency in the embodied nature of his cinema constitutes another important dimension of my dissertation. With this purpose in mind, I focus on Ceylan's earlier filmmaking period which consists of his short film *Cocoon* and three features *The Small Town*, *Clouds of May* and *Distant*. What mostly characterizes all these four films is that the director uses his family members, relatives and close friends as actors in them. No doubt that the success in international film festivals gained by these films has granted Ceylan a better financial and prestigious status for his later projects. As a consequence of this, in his later films we see him working with professional actors with higher budgets. Especially starting with his fifth feature *Üç Maymun (Three Monkeys, 2008)*, this tendency explicitly manifests itself. However, such a transition from, what I would call, Ceylan the "amateur" to Ceylan the "professional", marks yet another transition: his earlier films, partly because of their castings, can be said to have a more personal dimension. Everyone in these films, to some extent, seems to play themselves. Besides, there is usually one character who is meant to be the alter ego of the director. This is not to say that one cannot find an alter ego of Ceylan in his later films, but this seems to be executed more explicitly in his earlier films. For instance, in *Distant*, his alter ego Mahmut (Muzaffer Özdemir) lives in Ceylan's apartment and drives the director's in-real-life car.¹⁸ Although such details are usually not crucial to have an embodied experience of his films, the "personal" cinema of the director, to be brief, is more crucial to my analysis, because this personal style, as will be seen through examples, is to a certain degree what intensifies our embodied film experience in Ceylan's cinema.

However, it is worth noting that where the significance of the director's "personal style" for my thesis lies in is not at all that Ceylan makes films about himself. In this respect, "intercultural cinema", a term proposed by Marks, seems to correspond to my main purpose with attributing importance to "personal". First of all, one of Marks's main attempts by coining the term is to replace terms such as "inter/transnational cinema" with it by emphasizing "cultural" rather than "nation". What the term "intercultural" indicates is "a context that cannot be confined to a single culture." In other words, "a work is not the property of any single culture, but mediates in at least two directions." And once a film becomes a matter of mediation in at least two cultures, "new forms of expression and new kinds of knowledge" are at stake. Another important feature

¹⁸ Enis Köstepen & Fırat Yücel & Yamaç Okur & İbrahim Türk, "Sinema Pratiğini Fotoğrafa Benzetmeye Çalışıyorum – *Altyazı*, Şubat 2003", in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Uzak*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2004), 200.

of intercultural cinema is that it is usually qualified as “imperfect cinema” due to the filmmakers’ limited resources.¹⁹ This is where I connect Ceylan’s “amateurish” style to his personal tone. Precisely for their personal “amateurish” tones, Ceylan’s earlier films seem to get closer to Marks’s intercultural cinema through which a new kind of knowledge emerges. The personal tone of his films, carrying his cinema beyond being a mere matter of the director’s own life story and thus his alter ego, provides more feasible elements for us to experience them through “a new kind of knowledge” which is exactly what I aim to show throughout my dissertation. But, to emphasize it again, “personal” is less a connotation of Ceylan himself than of the antonym of “universal”, because this personal tone of the director is simply what allows him to go beyond an attempt of achieving universal meanings in his films. Once it is comprehended in this way, my objection against the Cartesian knowledge, too, will make more sense.

Finally, although the director’s first three features are the parts of his so-called “Provincial Trilogy”, my motivation for including them in my analysis lies in this “personal” style of the director rather than their inter-relational value in narrative. For, after all, even if my focus seems to be shifted to content-related details of the films at particular stages of my analysis, I in no way intend to make a content-related analysis of the cinema of Ceylan.

Outline

The section of theoretical framework starts with a brief historical background about the dominant status of the “eye” before all the other senses in Western thought. In this way, I aim to show where the consideration of cinema as a mere audiovisual medium essentially stems from. Afterwards, by presenting “a new interest in the other senses”, I prepare the reader for my objection of the Cartesian privileging of a disembodied character of the “I/eye” and propose through references to Laura U. Marks and Jennifer Barker that the film experience cannot be understood without a reciprocal embodied relationship between the film and the viewer. Thereafter, since I consider both the film and the viewer to be bodies, I interrogate briefly what a body in phenomenological terms is. Once I clarify this issue, I direct my interest towards an interrogation of haptic visuality through a dialogue between my readings of what Marks and Barker say about it. The next thing I focus on is the erotic relationship between the film and the viewer – a relationship that occurs to highly resembles the child’s idiosyncratic manner in the

¹⁹ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 6-10.

world. Here, the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of "play" introduced in his magnum opus *Truth and Method*²⁰ is one of the most crucial elements for me to make my point. This is followed by the claim of that "memory is multisensory" through which I aim to prepare the reader for the final section where I demonstrate the sensuous character of the embodied film experience. In this last and the lengthiest section, I aim to show this embodied relationship through a discussion of the mimetic form of representation through the means of which I oppose a symbolic kind of meaning-making approach to the film.

The chapter where I analyze Ceylan's embodied cinema from various aspects starts with a focus on his first film *Cocoon* which is the director's only short film. In this section, I apply Marks's haptic film theory with a slight modification and thus adapt it to the film on the basis of a focus on the sound editing rather than through a mere consideration of the images. In spite of, or rather, thanks to, his intentional avoidance of narrative, I argue, he draws the viewer's attention to the details and thus provokes her to have an embodied experience of his film.

In the following section, I take into account the director's first and second features *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May* interrelatedly, and thus draw attention to the symbiotic relation between them, which provides me a useful platform for a discussion of the erotic relationship between the film and the viewer – an erotic relationship that makes sense through the child's idiosyncratic manner in the world. Different from my discussion of the director's other films, what I aim to show here is that sometimes an embodied experience of Ceylan's films depends on the viewer's awareness of their intertextual and self-reflective character.

Both the third and the fourth sections are devoted to Ceylan's third feature *Distant*. In the third section, I focus on one single element in the film in order to delineate the multisensory character of memory through which a reciprocal embodied relationship between the film and the viewer becomes possible. In the next section, taking Ceylan's "boring" filmmaking style into account, I put this embodied film experience to test by challenging it through a phenomenological examination of sleep in order to understand what happens when the viewer falls asleep out of boredom. At this particular stage, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's poetic work *The Fall of Sleep*²¹ plays a major role in building my arguments.²²

²⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum International Public Group, 2004).

²¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

²² As Nancy argues in his book, "[t]here is no phenomenology of sleep, for it shows of itself its disappearance, its burrowing and its concealment." (Ibid., 13.) However, since I aim to examine the viewer who falls asleep in front of the screen, i.e., the sleeping viewer in conjunction with the body of the film rather than mere sleep in itself,

The fifth, and the final, analysis section is where I discuss in detail the mimetic character of Ceylan's embodied cinema. As I argue, this mimetic character of the director's cinema is what urges the viewer to attach herself to the film in a more sensuous and immediate manner and thus turn her aside from an attempt of establishing a bond to the film through mere symbolic readings and abstractions.

sleep occurs to be a phenomenological issue in this particular case. In other words, my purpose turns out to be a matter of examining the relational state between two bodies with regards to sleep.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The “Eye” and the Other Senses in Western Thought

In his “The Age of the World Picture”, Martin Heidegger argues determinedly that “[t]he fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture.” He draws such a conclusion by fastening on the phrase “world view” that is made fashionable by modern man – a phrase that marks modern man’s eagerness to become subject in the midst of all that is.²³ It is remarkable that Heidegger uses the word “picture” in order to describe the modern man’s attitude towards the world. By means of that, he seems not only to draw attention to the hierarchical subject-object dichotomy between the modern man and the world but also to the Cartesian separation of “the eye as a part of the brain from the eye as a part of the body”²⁴

Within film theory, such a separation is fundamentally what Jean-Louis Baudry arrives at in his influential essay “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus”. Describing the spectator’s viewing experience by centralizing the eye and equaling it to the camera, Baudry considers the spectator to be the “transcendental subject” who, being isolated from the outside world, deceives himself that the world before his eyes is created *by* and *for* him. Even montage or editing, in this regard, appears to be a means of creating the impression of continuity in movement so that the eye’s identification with the camera, which seems to be disembodied and thereby omnipresent, does not on any account get interrupted: hence the ideological mechanism of the cinema at service.²⁵

Indeed, as Jonathan Crary remarks in his “Techniques of the Observer”, René Descartes and several of his consecutives such as Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz and John Locke considered the apparatus of camera obscura “as a sovereign metaphor for describing the status of an observer and as a model [...] of how observation leads to truthful inferences about the world.”²⁶ Moreover, specific to Descartes, camera obscura is compared to the human eye which, when is closed, resembles, according to him, the dark space of the device. Going even further, he imagined the device as its aperture is replaced with a dead person’s eye and thus aimed to empha-

²³ Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture”, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1993), 132-134.

²⁴ Thomas Elsaesser & Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (New York: Routledge: 2010), 100.

²⁵ Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus”, *Film Quarterly* 28, No. 2 (Winter, 1974-1975): 43-44.

²⁶ Jonathan Crary, “Techniques of the Observer”, *October* 45 (Summer, 1988): 3.

size the importance of “the mechanics and technicalities of the optical organs”. In short, it appears that he believed to the full extent an absolute disembodied character of the eye in which the eye did not even require a binocular feature to see and thus know. As a consequence of such a strong “belief on the authority of the monocular, metaphysical eye of God”, it becomes obvious that, in Cartesian thought, knowledge, which has to be objective, and look, as the output of the most “cerebral” sense, are utterly identical.²⁷

As the consolidation of the sensory hierarchy was carried out, the separation of knowledge from the body became even more prevalent among the thinkers of the Enlightenment. As might be expected, in conjunction with the rise of the trust in rationality, vision was utilized as the closest one to the intellect whereas smell and taste were to the body.²⁸ By Immanuel Kant, admittedly one of the most important figures among the Enlightenment thinkers, such a hierarchy of the senses was now transmitted into the field of aesthetics. According to him, bodily perceptions were important in an aesthetic attachment, but still, reason was required for a counterbalance of them. In the end, by suggesting a transformation of “aesthetics from a discourse on the body and on sensorial experience to one about judgement and transcendental, abstract contemplation on beauty”, he transformed aesthetics into “a matter of ‘taste’”, oddly enough, bereft of any kind of a bodily implication.²⁹

Friedrich Hegel, one of the most important figures of the nineteenth century world of thought, taking the placements of the facial organs into account, considered the organs on and around the forehead (the eyes and the ears) to be “the primary” because of their proximity to the mind as the sphere of spirituality. Other organs (the mouth, the nose, the chin etc.) on the other hand were considered by him “secondary” which was regarded in relation to the animalistic sphere. In his idealist philosophical system, the senses of touch, smell and taste were not even seen as human properties.³⁰

At this point, I would also like to suggest that neither the origins of the modern man’s envisaging himself as the “eye” in front of “the world as picture” nor of the apparatus theory’s way of conceiving the spectator as a mere eye isolated both from the outside world and his own body can be restricted to the mind and body duality created by the Cartesian tradition. It is worth

²⁷ Yannis Hamilakis, *Archaeology and the Senses: Human Experience, Memory, and Affect* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28.

²⁸ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 119.

²⁹ Hamilakis, 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

noting at this point that even Platonic idealism, by which the senses were fundamentally dis-trusted, enshrined the sense of sight and considered the eyes “the most ‘sun-like’ organs”.³¹ In addition to this, Christian thinkers had ambivalent opinions concerning the senses, but in general they saw them as “a source of sin” which had to be tamed. Neo-Platonist philosophers, who to some extent belongs in the Christian theological tradition, aggrandized the senses only to the degree that one aimed at getting contact with God through them. Sight and hearing in this regard were the only senses that could mediate for this purpose. Other senses, the sense of taste being in the first place, were considered “lower” and seen as sinful more in particular.³²

A New Interest in the Other Senses

Apart from all those who dismissed the other senses at different degrees, there have been a number of Western thinkers who did not hold on to the sensory hierarchy and even rejected the Cartesian mind-body duality. No doubt that the most significant one of these thinkers from the point of contemporary thinking is Baruch Spinoza whose philosophical system was apparently overshadowed especially by his contemporaneous Descartes and has only recently been widely appreciated. Through his holistic view, Spinoza considered the body and mind “one and the same thing” and thereby repudiated the idea of an omnipotent subject with full control over its body as well as other (living) things and nature. He declared that we are not and cannot be fully aware what the body is available of. To him, bodies were “defined primarily by their capacity to affect and be affected, not by any formal characteristics” as is the case with the Cartesian thought.³³

As Laura U. Marks also points out, in recent years many artists in various fields of art have in one way or another shown their interests in other sensory features with their growing awareness of the excessiveness of visual occupation. Scholars in various disciplines, being highly critical of the Cartesian privileging of the “eye”, have come up with a new kind of an epistemology based upon the other senses which, for instance, were “secondary” and “animalistic” to Hegel.

³¹ Hamilakis underscores in his book that Plato’s consideration of the eyes as “sun-like” organs connotes to a quite different sense of vision from the modernist comprehension of it. He writes: “It is a more interactive sense, more dynamic process that extends the human body, which reaches out and touches things, through the tactility of the eye” (see *Ibid.*, 26). However, I would argue that, as the phrase “extending the human body” alone demonstrates, Platonic idealism is still based on a distrust in the senses. One therefore still needs to “extend the human body” to be able to have intellectual experiences.

³² *Ibid.*, 26-27.

³³ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

The highly ocularcentrist manner of the Western thought system and artistic practice have been criticized by feminist theories as well by those that linked to the objectification of and domination over the body of the artwork.³⁴

Undoubtedly, all these recent attempts aim at a more interactive character in the viewing activity in arts. In parallel to this, such an interactivity is emphasized by Marks for film viewing as well. Getting involved in the viewing activity, the other senses than sight (and hearing) put an end to the viewer's dominating gaze over the picture and encourage her to experience it "dialogically" as an active participant.³⁵ In order for such a dialogical relationship between the spectator and the film to be achieved, first the film should also be acknowledged as a body in front of the body of the spectator. But before an investigation of the film as a body, the question what a body is first requires to be examined.

What is a Body?

If, like Spinoza claimed a long time ago, the mind and the body are "one and the same thing", what the body is becomes one of the primary questions to be able to understand our being in the world. As Jennifer Barker, in her reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological system, insists, it is "always at once a subject engaged in conscious projects of the mind and an object in the material world." As both a subject and an object in the world, the body is what makes it possible for us to relate to and make sense of the world – a world which always already existed before we were inserted into it but whose meaning is shaped by our corporeal presence.³⁶

This making sense of the world and the consciousness of the world are but "one and the same thing". Comparing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror phase, which has been highly influential in film studies, Marks draws attention to this phenomenological fact. In the mirror phase theory, we have a visually constructed self-alienated subject as the infant child becomes aware "of being seen from the outside." In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, on the other hand, what we have is "an exchange

³⁴ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 133.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

³⁶ Barker, 17.

between an embodied self-in-becoming (the viewer) and its embodied intercessor (the cinema).” In contrast to the mirror phase theory, theories of embodied visuality describes the encounter between the spectator and the film through an acknowledgment of “the presence of the body in the act of seeing”.³⁷

Accordingly, as Marks emphasizes through Vivian Sobchack, the body does not only have senses, “[i]t is rather sensible.”³⁸ Indeed, such an inherence of the senses to the body is what Sobchack celebrates in her book *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*: “We do not experience any movie only through our eyes”, she writes and continues by arguing that as we enter into the movie theater, for instance, neither do we leave our other senses back at the door nor do we taste and smell only the popcorn of ours and others’. We are there “with our entire bodily being” ready to be “informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium.”³⁹

The Body of the Film

Such recent attempts of addressing the spectator’s corporeal-material being in film theory can be seen as an effort of understanding the capacity of different bodies/entities to affect one another. In this sense, the film itself also requires to be regarded as a body which not only affects the spectator but also is affected by her. Barker describes this reciprocal relationship between the film and the spectator by provocatively suggesting that “[w]hat we do see is *the film seeing*: we see its own (if humanly enabled) process of perception and expression unfolding in space and time.”⁴⁰ Comparing Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology with Heidegger’s, she suggests that for the both philosophers “the objects of vision are co-constituted by subject and object” and adds: “But for Merleau-Ponty, the object responds.”⁴¹ The film –just like the spectator– is in the same breath a subject and an object of experience. As she refers to Sobchack, it is “an active participant of both perception and expression.”⁴²

³⁷ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 150-151.

³⁸ Ibid., 151.

³⁹ Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 63-65.

⁴⁰ Barker, 9.

⁴¹ Ibid., 17.

⁴² Ibid., 8.

But how does the object, or in our case, the film respond to its viewer? As Barker argues, it is obvious that the film does not “explode into music or color” as “we laugh or cry too hard”. On the contrary, it “borrows our ability to feel things deeply and the style with which we express our feelings tactilely and emotionally.” In order to describe the film’s ability to respond and the reciprocity between the film and its viewer, Barker coins the verbal term of “to in-spire” and suggests that the film “fills itself with” our human emotions, just as it in-spires in them. Through the hyphen, she intends to imply both the metaphorical and literal meanings of the word and argues that the film in-spires and is in-spired by the viewer in both ways. The film, as she beautifully puts it, “*feels* our emotions and our vitality so strongly that its experience overflows the boundaries of its body, not in the form of shrieks, laughter, and tears but in shockingly vibrant color, musical crescendos, and extreme close-ups.”⁴³

But what exactly happens as the film in-spires us and at the same time is in-spired by us? At this point, it would be informative to evoke what Barker asserts: “if the film has a body”, she writes, “it must also have a skin of its own.” While bringing this assertion forward, she does not omit to lay emphasis on that the skin of the film should simply be reduced neither to the screen nor to celluloid, just like the skin of the viewer would not be able to be reduced to an implication of the term’s biological meaning. Had it been the case, the complex character of the filmic skin would also be reduced, for instance, to a mere mimic of Ingmar Bergman’s nameless child protagonist in *Persona* (1966) who caresses the face of his mother on the screen.⁴⁴ And again, had it been the case, it would be a caress that completely fails to touch the film in its entirety. What the skin of the film connotes instead is the texture constituted by the whole cinematic experience.⁴⁵ It is this texture that allows a mutual relationship through which the viewer’s and the film’s bodies are “touched” and “in-spired” by each other. In the analysis section, I aim to concretize through various examples from Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s cinema how this mutual relationship is established.

The Haptic

It seems to me that such a viewing experience in which both sides are touched and in-spired by each other can be grasped better through a discussion of what Marks calls “haptic visuality” in

⁴³ Ibid., 147-148.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 28-29.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

which “the eyes themselves function like organs of touch.” She coins the term from nineteenth-century art historian Alois Riegl who distinguished the physiologic term “haptic” from “tactile” in order to avoid the latter’s implication of literally “touching”. “Haptic visuality”, writes Marks, “tends less to isolate and focus upon objects than simply to be co-present with them”. What becomes obvious with this inference is that the haptic visuality appears to require not only the skin of the viewer but also of the film for a sensuous response to the former from the latter. But such a mutually responsive contact between the image and the viewer requires a special character of the former which reveals itself to the latter gradually through the latter’s inquiring look on the surface before understanding what she is really looking at. This is to say that in haptic visuality the materiality of the image has a privilege, simply because the texture of the image plays a fundamental role.⁴⁶ However, as will be seen through my formal analysis of Ceylan’s cinema, the specific material feature of the image is not necessarily a priority for an embodied film experience. The image does not have to be a miniature, for instance, that invites the viewer’s look to browse around the surface. Besides, as will be seen, I in no way imply that Ceylan’s cinema has a direct haptic character, but still, I consider the haptic film theory to be one of the best possible ways to approach an embodied experience of his films in which no mastery between the viewer and the film is at stake. Accordingly, Marks herself also remarks that “thinking of cinema as haptic is only a step toward considering the ways cinema appeals to the body as a whole.”⁴⁷ Therefore, I take the notions of “surface” and “texture” into account less as the implications of the image’s specific material quality than as the indicators of the assurance for a kind of *transparent* boundary –but still a boundary– between the bodies of the film and the viewer.

The skin as a texture, as is mentioned by Barker, is also what inhibits the viewer’s body from losing itself in the film. At this point, it would be interesting to consider Marks’s view of ideal relationship between the viewer and the film in haptic visuality in which “the viewer is more likely to *lose herself* in the image” in contrast to the ideal relationship in optical visuality “in which the viewer isolates and comprehends the object of vision.” Moreover, she compares the haptic viewer with the Brechtian active viewer who has the ability of keeping her distance from the image and therefore can always maintain her explicitly critical attitude. As Marks argues, while the Brechtian active viewer is “indeed a suspicious” one, “the haptic viewer is quite willing to pull the wool over her eyes.” Through this comparison, it becomes obvious then that the

⁴⁶ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 162-164.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

haptic visuality is considered by her “a critique of mastery”, a mastery that is determinedly implemented by, in this case, the Brechtian “suspicious” viewer.⁴⁸

Barker, who reconsiders the emphasis of “losing oneself” in the very same context, argues on the other hand that in haptic visuality the viewer does not quite lose herself. According to her, “we are both ‘here’ –at the surface of our own body– and ‘there’ –at the surface of the film’s body– in the same moment.” Indeed, as Steven Connor remarks in his *The Book of Skin*, the skin is seen by many early civilizations “as a covering that keeps the body *inviolated*.”⁴⁹ In the same vein, albeit not as literally as Connor’s specification, Barker argues that, “[w]hen the film’s and viewer’s skins caress one another, there is *fusion* without *confusion*.” This is simply to suggest that the boundary is rendered possible by the very skins of the viewer *and* the film, and this boundary is by no means collapsed, or *violated*. Rather, during the haptic viewing, we feel ourselves both “from the outside and the inside in the same moment” as we arrive and remain at our surface (the skin) which touches the surface of the film and is at the same time touched by it.⁵⁰

Nonetheless, there is something crucial to be clarified here. It might have sounded as if Marks’s sense of haptic viewing necessitates a kind of an absorption of the viewer by the film. On the contrary, as she herself also specifies, “[c]ertainly haptic visuality requires an active viewer.”⁵¹ What seems to distinguish this active haptic viewer from the Brechtian active viewer is, on the other hand, that the latter is too critical and too suspicious insomuch that he lacks the desirous attachment to the film which constitutes one of the most significant characteristics of the haptic visuality. For this reason, I would argue that Brechtian viewer could be the perfect equivalent of the Cartesian subject for whom “being skeptical” is a prerequisite in the path to the certain knowledge.

Now, such a discourse of the skeptical approach to the film may create a false impression that the Cartesian doubt is a prerequisite for the film critic as well; that he is not allowed to have the same approach as that of the common viewer. As will be seen through examples that support the sensual quality of Ceylan’s cinema, this is a position that I argue against, too. But before giving justification to it, I would like first to finalize my discussion on the relation between the bodies of the viewer and the film.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 183-184 (emphasis added).

⁴⁹ Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 10 (emphasis added).

⁵⁰ Barker, 35-36.

⁵¹ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 184 (emphasis added).

Erotics of Embodied Film Experience

As one speaks of the relationship between two bodies through their skins, a reflection on the discourse of erotics becomes unavoidable. What is implied by the “two bodies” here is of course two bodies with mutual contact to each other in which no mastery of any side is at stake. This is in basic terms what Barker implies with eroticism. Through such a mutual contact, she argues, we not only perceive the other as a “tangible subject”, but also have a sense of ourselves in a more tangible way: “we can feel ourselves touching.” The both sides, in a sense, are rendered “real, sensible, palpable” through this reciprocal act.⁵²

At this very point I find Marks’s theory of haptic visuality quite useful, because it occurs to me that the haptic is erotic in itself. Like the one in the haptic visuality, erotic relationship is also based upon such reciprocal “bringing into existence.” However, the erotics of haptic visuality should not be confused with, for instance, the viewing experience of the pornographic film, which is famously characterized by Linda Williams as a “low” bodily involvement of the viewer with the image. Here in pornography, too, we have the viewing experience as an entirely physical one, but not haptic, for, as Williams also illustrates, these two seem to have this bodily relationship with each other under the mastery of one, simply because it functions as the place of the coming-true of the male fantasy of possessing an infinite power for seducing anyone of the opposite sex, anywhere and anytime.⁵³

Fair enough, in her discussion of the erotics of the haptic image, Marks seems to direct her interest mainly to the certain video art productions consisting of “blurry, oblique shots”⁵⁴ that forces the viewer’s look to “rest on the surface of its object rather than plunge into depth”,⁵⁵ or even to controversial pornographic video art productions such as *XCXHXEXRXXIXEXSX* (Ken Jacobs, 1980) which, according to her, radically alters the viewer’s relation to the pornographic film in this particular case by virtue of the filmmaker’s way of extending the two minutes sequence to two hours by means of extreme slow motion.⁵⁶ Since she herself indicates that she considers the haptic visuality to be “a feminist visual strategy,”⁵⁷ her special interest in haptic images –haptic images that for instance achieve to “turn on” the female viewer rather

⁵² Barker, 34-35.

⁵³ Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess”, *Film Quarterly* 44, No. 4 (Summer, 1991): 10.

⁵⁴ Laura U. Marks, “Video Haptics and Erotics”, *Screen* 39, No. 4 (Winter, 1998): 333.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 338.

⁵⁶ Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 70.

⁵⁷ Marks, “Video Haptics and Erotics”, 337.

than the male viewer who has usually been located at the center of interest in getting pleasure—is quite understandable. However, to me, neither requires an image necessarily to be laden with feminist implications nor has it to display naked bodies for us in order to possess an erotic character. On that account, I tend to approve Barker’s comprehensively larger view on eroticism whose implication is beyond a mere sexual desire. In her view of the notion, eroticism in the haptic visuality occurs to be a means for an emphasis on the two bodies’ reciprocal bringing each other into existence through pleasure.

To elaborate what is implied by “pleasure” in relation with eroticism the way Barker comprehends the notion, it would suffice to quote what she writes about the child’s relation to the world in her book:

Indeed, if eroticism is partly defined by the mutual exposure (but not possession) of two bodies to one another, *what is more erotic than the child’s relation to the world*, a relationship in which the predominant attitude is one of discovery rather than mastery of one’s surroundings and of oneself in the process?⁵⁸

This is simply what I intend to imply by the erotics of the haptic visuality. Like in Barker’s way of comprehending the erotic relationship between the bodies of the film and the viewer, I tend to see the embodied cinema experience in general as a special relation with the film that guarantees the pleasure that the child derives through her idiosyncratic relation to the world.

At this point, since the child’s relation to the world reveals itself in the form of play through which she discovers the world, I would like to resort briefly to Gadamer’s way of problematizing the concept of play with an aim of overcoming the problem of modern aesthetics that leads to the disruptive subject-object dichotomy in our relation to the artwork. “The player knows very well what play is, and what he is doing is ‘only a game’;” writes Gadamer, and continues: “but he does not know what exactly he ‘knows’ in knowing that.”⁵⁹ In this case, since the concept of play does not entail any kind of a self-awareness, the child’s way of discovering the world appears to be far from being a goal-oriented one. She does not play her game with the purpose of discovering the world but even so the play ultimately leads to the discovery. This is why the play loses its essence for instance when it becomes a mere matter of win or loss, or when it is performed for the pleasure of others as a mere show.

⁵⁸ Barker, 40 (emphasis added).

⁵⁹ Gadamer, 103.

However, as Gadamer points out, “[c]hildren play for themselves, even when they represent.”⁶⁰ At this point, it is worth noting that Gadamer draws upon the child’s play as an analogical means to be able to construct an ontology of the work of art. Consequently, the relation between the child and the play can be read as the erotic relationship between two bodies who lose themselves in each other, and thus as the erotic relationship between the bodies of the film and the spectator. Accordingly, like in the child’s play, argues Gadamer, what turns an artistic representation or a sports event into a mere show is not really the presence of the viewer. “Rather,” he writes, “openness toward the spectator is part of the closedness of the play. The audience only completes what the play as such is.”⁶¹ Therefore, I would like to argue that the relationship between the audience and the representation should be understood in correspondence with the relationship between the child and her play. In other words, in accordance with that the play requires the child for its coming into existence, the representation would in a word be left an orphan without the presence of the spectator. Therefore, I would argue, the spectator completes what the play as such is by being in conformity with the child’s idiosyncratic relation to the play and thus to the world. I hope this idiosyncratic relationship of the child to the play and the world to become clarified with certain examples from Ceylan’s cinema through which I aim to describe the idiosyncratic relationship of the viewer to the film and thus the erotics of the embodied experience of his cinema.

Memory is Multisensory

I have in reference to Sobchack already remarked above that our sensorium is acculturated and full with history. This is what mostly shapes Marks’s tactile epistemology as well. Borrowing Gilles Deleuze’s notion of “recollection-image”, she argues that there are things that are not available to vision, and that the film can represent these things by awakening the spectator’s memory through some particular objects that address her sensory perception.⁶² What matters here is that an object displayed in a film evokes different pasts depending on people with their different backgrounds.⁶³ “People” here may simply connote an individual but also individuals within their cultural contexts. But what is more important here is that, individual or not, culture is embedded “*within* the body.” Indeed, as Marks criticizes, the prevalent phenomenological

⁶⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁶¹ Ibid., 109.

⁶² Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 22.

⁶³ Ibid., 77-78.

(and in particular Merleau-Ponty's) view does not express clearly that the consciousness is not the only ground of accessibility of all of experience. We experience things, she argues, not merely by perceiving them now and here, but also by being informed by our historically encoded bodies.⁶⁴

Once our historically encoded bodies get involved in viewing films, the spectatorship becomes a participatory notion. To describe such a participatory mode in viewing, Marks propounds a Bergsonian concept, "attentive recognition", and argues that it is what steps in as we are confronted with an image. We do not simply perceive an image in a pure cognitive sense. As will be seen through my analysis of Ceylan's cinema from various aspects, our attentive recognition makes us recall virtual images through our evoked memory and compare them with the image standing in front of us. In so doing, we simply create a unique virtual image out of the oscillation between our evoked memory and the image standing before us.⁶⁵

As Marks suggests, taken into account in terms of tactile epistemology, the reciprocal relationship between the bodies of the viewer and the film is at stake through the sensoria of both as well. The viewer is not the only one who is there with her own cultural and individual background embedded in her body: so is the film. But what is intriguing here is that the viewer's and the film's sensoria "may or may not intersect." If the viewer is from another culture than what the film stands for, this particular cultural knowledge is experienced by her through a kind of "sensory translation" of it. Needless to say, through such a translation of embodied perception, some multisensory images will inevitably be missed by the viewer, but even so, the viewer will at least have a "sense" of what she is missing.⁶⁶

As I have been discussing, in Western thought, the sense of sight has for a long time been considered as the most perfect sense along with the hearing. In the Cartesian tradition, it has usually been compared to the reason through which one could have the certain knowledge of the world. This is simply why Marks mentions the translation of senses from the film's body to the viewer's. The correspondence between the film and the viewer has to occur through a sensory translation, because the image should be understood as something that addresses us in a multisensory way rather than mere audiovisually. Accordingly, since in the proper meaning of

⁶⁴ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 153.

the word “translation” of any text would be imperfect, sensory translation of an image cannot be perfect, either.

Mimesis

Let it sound contradictory: such an “imperfection” as a natural consequence of sensory translation is what constitutes a kind of an openness of the film to the viewer – and vice versa. At this point, I believe that the notion of “mimesis”, which is put account and adopted both by Marks and Barker (the latter through reference to the former), is very substantial to comprehend our multisensory attachment to the film. The word, taking its origin from the ancient Greek word *mimēsthai*, means “to imitate” with the implication of one’s representation of something “by acting like it.” Marks describes this representational form through a few examples to emphasize its dependence on the “lively and responsive relationship between” the film and the viewer, but, since I have already described the child’s erotic relation with the world, the most interesting one to me is where she mentions an example of Walter Benjamin, which is about a child observing an airplane in the sky by “zooming” it with help of his hand.⁶⁷ Here, it is obvious that Marks aims primarily to draw attention to the child’s eagerness for an intimate contact with the airplane, but it should also be remembered that such an intimacy first and foremost requires the child’s idiosyncratic manner in the world. In this case, if the viewer’s attitude in watching a representation requires to be like that of the child, mimesis, which for Marks is a “tactile epistemology”, becomes a matter on behalf of the viewer in the embodied experience of the film as well.

As Marks argues with references to various thinkers (Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School critics being in the first place), the non-goal oriented and intimate relationship that finds its expression in the child’s idiosyncratic way of being in the world tailed off with the rise of the Enlightenment idealism and the expansion of capitalism. By the former, the individual was compelled to grasp the world in abstraction, which led to his or her reduction, and by the latter to an alienated subject “not only from the products of his or her labor but from the very body and the senses”. By virtue of such an alienation through the abstraction of the world, the only option that the modern individual is left with is symbolic representation. In this manner, the notion of mimesis,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 138. (Not surprisingly, Marks also draws attention to Walter Benjamin’s appraisal of “children’s ability to relate to things mimetically”. See Ibid., 140.)

which marks the pre-symbolic character of much of sensory experience, is adopted by Marks to propound that this “symbolic representation is not the sole source of meaning.”⁶⁸

In tactile epistemology, what replaces the symbolic representation is the mimetic. “Mimesis”, writes Marks elsewhere, “is the body’s way of reading signs.” Audiovisual images evoke, to a certain extent, “a shared cultural symbolic”, but what smell, for instance –the most mimetic of all senses according to Marks– carries out is to evoke individual stories from the past by invoking a semiotics that is resolutely unprecedented, which leads each of us to have a uniquely different experience of a film. For our relationship with cinema is not established through essences. In reference to Deleuze, Marks argues that the idealization is what kills our senses and “makes us lazy”, since it “enslaves us to abstractions.” In this manner, a particular image, activating our memory through making us recall the smell of a particular object, for instance, can form a narrative – a narrative that is uniquely different from that of any other viewer. In mimetic form of representation, essences are replaced by “enormous quantities of information, most of which we never even become conscious of.”⁶⁹ As will be seen through instances, Ceylan’s cinema closes its doors to any kind of abstractions that would be derived from a symbolic representation, simply because it depends on the viewer’s sensual attachment to the film – a sensual attachment that occurs by courtesy of the direct encouragement of the film.

At this very point, I find Susan Sontag’s sensational essay “Against Interpretation” (1964) quite useful for my discussion of the mimetic form of representation. It suffices only to think of how Sontag concludes her essay in order for me to give a hint about why this essay is particularly inspiring to me. Throughout the essay Sontag rigidly criticizes the contemporary critics’ way of interpreting artworks, and famously concludes her thoughts by arguing that “[i]n place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.”⁷⁰

Sontag’s essay is sensational in two ways: first of all, it is definitely sensational due to the effect it created in the world of art criticism; and second of all, her critique is based upon an apprehension of the atrophy in our sensory faculties with regard to our relationship with the work of art – an atrophy caused by contemporary criticism. In other words, through her “sensational” language, she attempts to show that interpretation of an artwork today is a poisonous activity of the intellect against our sensibilities.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 139-141.

⁶⁹ Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, 115-125.

⁷⁰ Sontag, 14.

⁷¹ Ibid., 7.

What kind of an interpretation does Sontag speak of? How does such an interpretation poison our sensibilities considering our relationship with the work of art? To begin with, Sontag herself specifies that what she implies by the word interpretation is not at all what Friedrich Nietzsche for instance implied when he said “[t]here are no facts, only interpretations.” What she instead means by it is “a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain ‘rules’ of interpretation” through which the interpreter imposes on the reader that “X is really –or, really means– A” and thus attempts to alter the text “without actually erasing or rewriting” it. This attempt is after all seen by the interpreter himself not as an alteration of the text, but as an intellectual effort of unveiling the “true meaning” of it.⁷²

Even though what Sontag addresses in her text is the contemporary criticism, or “the modern style of interpretation”⁷³ as she calls it, her arguments are definitely applicable for designing a mutual kind of a relationship between the film and the common viewer as well. Indeed, what Sontag really demands from the modern critic is such a mutual relationship with whatever he interprets. She advises him to experience it “more immediately”, not by assuming the world of the work as another world than ours. For as one imposes “a shadow world of ‘meanings’” upon an artwork, the artwork perforce finds itself in another world that it is not meant to be.⁷⁴

I believe that Sontag’s discussion through her “sensational” language can be carried onward by Umberto Eco’s more analytical arguments in his “Overinterpreting Texts”. Considering the title of his text, Eco, by comparison with Sontag, may seem more tolerant of interpretation. And since what Eco aims to accomplish here is simply to demark the function of criticism, this is true – but only to a certain degree. For, Sontag too specifies that she by no means implies “that works of art are ineffable, that they cannot be described or paraphrased.” “The question is”, she argues, “how.”⁷⁵ In this sense, I would say that Eco aims to demonstrate this “how” with help of certain examples of “how not”.

Examples presented by Eco are quite relevant to my discussion, not only because they correspond to Sontag’s critical manner against interpretation, but also because the modern style of interpretation relies heavily on skepticism in the sense that I have mentioned several times as part of the Cartesian thought system. In his text, Eco argues that “each of us has introjected into him or her an indisputable fact, namely, that *from a certain point of view everything bears*

⁷² Ibid., 5-7.

⁷³ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 12.

relationships of analogy, contiguity and similarity to everything else.” However, this indisputable fact may sometimes lead to an exaggeration of making analogies between things whose only common ground is to happen to appear in the same place. Following Eco’s own example, one may assert, only because they appear in the same text, that the adverb “while” and the noun “crocodile” should in some way be interrelated. Such an approach to the text, as Eco takes a step further than describing the situation by applying to the Cartesian skeptical subject, can only be made by a paranoid person. The problem of course is *not* to be able to see the tantalizing appearance of these two words within the same context, but rather to start to wonder about the enigmatical motives lying behind their co-occurrence. This latter is the case that describes the very tendency of Eco’s paranoid interpreter.⁷⁶

I get back to this particular example of Eco in the analysis section in conjunction with a case in point from Ceylan’s cinema, but for now it would suffice to remark that what this paranoid interpreter of Eco is after here is the meaning of this combination. For he obsessively believes that there *has to be* a meaning behind this ostensibly designed combination of the two words. Such an obsessive way of interpreting texts, as Eco himself too remarks, can often be found among the readings of sacred texts. Once a text becomes “sacred” in a particular culture, argues Eco, it easily becomes subject to a suspicious reading practice and thus inarguably to an over-interpretation process. This is to some extent, according to Eco, what has happened for instance with Homer’s texts. However, when it comes to holy scriptures, one does not strictly speaking have much freedom to interpret them because the right of interpreting these texts are held by a supreme authority. In the last analysis, meaning(s) of these texts has/have to be clear for those who “know” how to read them. In the opposite case, the texts are in the hands of the supreme authority’s exegetical reading.⁷⁷ I would argue at this point that this exegetical reading of the texts are based upon the obsessive interest in, say, deciphering the combination of words that happen to appear in the same place. This is a tendency, as will be seen, that occurs in reading Ceylan’s films as well – a tendency that the director himself aims to fend off through his mimetically formed films.

But how can a work of art then be described, or critically approached, not to use the word of interpretation? “Our task is to cut back content”, writes Sontag, “so that we can see the thing at

⁷⁶ Eco, 48-49.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

all.”⁷⁸ The obsessive look for the connection between things occurs as the interpreter overestimates the content of the work of art. Following her argument, I would suggest that the overestimation of the content is in fact what “provokes the arrogance of interpretation”.⁷⁹ Accordingly, to deem a work of art as something “composed of items of content,” writes Sontag, “violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories.”⁸⁰ In order for the work of art to be freed of being violated, what is needed, according to her, is “more attention to form” through which the art critic should aim at “a vocabulary – a descriptive, rather than prescriptive”, one.⁸¹

In this manner, Sontag’s praising of modern abstract painting for instance makes sense: “since there is no content”, she writes, “there can be no interpretation.”⁸² However, this is in no way to imply that a work of art *with* content cannot be describable because even if an artist furnishes the content of his or her work with “lame messages” that invite interpretations, argues Sontag, to “triumph over [such] pretentious intentions” can still be achieved – as long as the matter of form stays on the front burner.⁸³

Sontag enthusiastically mentions a few of her personal favorite essays among the ones that fit in her description of criticism. Since the notion of mimesis is central to my discussion, I am at this very stage eager to include one of those works mentioned by her, Erich Auerbach’s “Odysseus’ Scar”, the first chapter of his famous work *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought*. On the one hand, the reason why this particular section of Auerbach’s book is the one of the epitomes of great criticism for Sontag is undoubtedly the author’s ability of comparing two different texts –Homer’s *Odyssey* and the Old Testament– with regard to their forms rather than the contents. What more interests me, on the other hand, is that in the final analysis he describes the meaning embedded in the Old Testament as “far more urgent than Homer’s [Odyssey]” and thus “tyrannical”, since it is too closed to all other claims of meaning.⁸⁴ Remember Eco’s mentioning of Homer’s texts and holy scriptures – namely, how the former are exposed to overinterpretation as they become sacred in a certain culture and how the

⁷⁸ Sontag, 14.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁸¹ Ibid., 12.

⁸² Ibid., 10.

⁸³ Ibid., 11. (At this point, it should be noted that Sontag mentions the Swedish director Ingmar Bergman’s name as a filmmaker whose films, according to her, are sometimes “crammed with lame messages about the modern spirit” but “still triumph over the pretentious intentions of [the] director.” This detail is essential to let the reader know because, thanks to its ability of melting the distinction between content and form away, Sontag considers cinema as “the most important of all art forms”. See Ibid., 10-12.)

⁸⁴ Auerbach, 14.

interpretations of the latter are in the hands of a supreme authority. But curiously enough, in Auerbach's formal analysis we find out that the Homeric style depends upon a basic principle of not hiding any detail from the reader. All events of the Homeric stories unfold in a certain spatial and temporal form. Psychologies of the protagonists always remain unhidden: even when they do not speak, they think out loud so that the reader is never deprived of being instructed about what is going on. Everything happens, according to Auerbach's formal analysis, in the foreground.⁸⁵

To compare with Homer's *Odyssey*, Auerbach takes the sacrifice of Isaac as an example from the Old Testament. In contrast to the Homeric style, he argues, in this story we are not told for instance neither of whereabouts of God or Abraham nor of the reasons why the former tempts Abraham so frightfully to sacrifice his son Isaac. "He has not, like Zeus," writes Auerbach, "discussed them in set speeches with other gods gathered in council; nor have the deliberations in his own heart been presented to us; unexpected and mysterious, he enters the scene from some unknown height or depth and calls: Abraham!" Contrary to the Homeric style, everything seems to remain in the background and unexpressed. As a consequence of such an obscurity in temporal, spatial, psychological details and motivations, in the sacrifice of Isaac, an unmitigated suspense, which is highly foreign to the Homeric self-evident style, is at stake. This unmitigated suspense in the former leads to a goal-oriented reading which is highly open to interpretation. The world of the latter, on the other hand, thanks to the absence of suspense, "exists for itself" and thus contains "no teaching and no secret second meaning." Accordingly, Auerbach argues that "Homer can be analyzed, [...] but he cannot be interpreted."⁸⁶

Let us once again mention at this point how the license for interpreting holy scriptures were in the hands of one supreme authority. This fact gains a paradoxical character as Auerbach infers that the stories of the Old Testament is "so greatly in the need of interpretation on the basis of its own content."⁸⁷ Interestingly enough, I would argue, precisely this paradox is what leads to the tyrannous character of the Old Testament, since once a text is open to interpretation, the very attempt of interpretation in itself becomes a mere matter of, referring once again to Sontag, "show[ing] *what [the text] means*" rather than "*how it is what it is*".⁸⁸ Finally, such an attempt

⁸⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 8-16.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁸ Sontag, 14.

of “showing what the text means” ends up with the claim saying that the text holds up a universal historical character, since interpreting a text in itself reserves the right to reject all other claims about the truth of the text.

All these explain in a sense why Homer’s *Odyssey* for instance has always remained a legend whereas the sacrifice of Isaac, and other biblical stories, had to wait almost for two millennia to gain such a legendary character—at least to some extent— thanks to the relative decline of the supreme authority’s power. The former’s eagerness to keep us in our own reality is not present in the latter which in contrast to the former “seeks to overcome our reality”. Indeed, as Auerbach puts it, “we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history.”⁸⁹ Within this context, when Sontag delineates interpretation as “the revenge of the intellect upon the world”, she also implies that this intellect puts itself someplace else than the world – “a shadow world of ‘meanings.’”. She argues that “[i]t is to turn the world into this world” and immediately protests: “‘This world’! As if there were any other.”⁹⁰ Auerbach’s description of the world imposed by the Old Testament upon us should be taken into account in parallel with this “shadow world of meanings” of Sontag’s interpreter. The Old Testament, would Auerbach argue, “insists that [this shadow world of meanings] is the only real world”. Therefore, “if we refuse [...] we are rebels.”⁹¹ To me, this rebellious manner is what resists any other world imposed on it as the genesis of the erotics of art. The mimetic form of representation that I have been aiming to discuss is the wellspring of this rebellious manner – a rebellious manner to which I hope to give sufficient evidences through my discussion of Ceylan’s embodied cinema.

⁸⁹ Auerbach, 15.

⁹⁰ Sontag, 7.

⁹¹ Auerbach, 15.

EMBODIED EXPERIENCE OF THE CINEMA OF NURİ BİLGE CEYLAN

Cocoon: Virtual Images of a Copper Vessel

That cinema attaches a great importance on narrative detracts people from the details. A little damage on the narrative may sometimes bring those details to the fore. – Nuri Bilge Ceylan⁹²

Partly because of his limited resources, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's only short feature *Koza* (*Cocoon*, 1996), which is also his first film, can perhaps be considered to be the director's most haptic work in the sense that Laura U. Marks gives precedence to the significance of the imperfection of intercultural cinema.⁹³ Indeed, in an early interview Ceylan describes his motivation of making this film as a desperate attempt of ending the torturous feelings of not being able to start to make films, and continues: "I started to make the film as if I threw myself onto the project. I really had no idea about what it looked like as I finished it."⁹⁴

This short black and white film is about an elderly couple who try to get back together but apparently fail. As in the director's subsequent early period films, here too, his parents (Fatma and Mehmet Emin Ceylan) are the actors.⁹⁵ The film does not feature any dialogue, but is not a silent one: the squeak of opening-closing doors/windows and a hammock, scuffing of grass as the characters walk on them, a terrible scream, a movie on TV, bumbling bees, woodnotes, the wind, whishing leaves on trees and shrubberies, tick-tacks, snoring, heavy breathing, sound of the rain and thunder, sound of a campfire, and finally non-diegetic music. It is crucial to note here that not only the music but also all other sounds and voices are quite noticeably added into the film in the editing process. This fact, which predictably arises from the director's limited resources, is also what allows me to describe all these sounds and voices on an individual basis. In other words, as one of these sounds or voices is heard in the film, there is nothing else to hear. All other possible sounds that would "naturally" intervene are cut off.⁹⁶

⁹² Erkal, 103 (my translation).

⁹³ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 10.

⁹⁴ Erdinç Uzak, "Nuri Bilge Ceylan – Koza – *Sinefil*, 12 Ocak 2004", Nuri Bilge Ceylan, February 15, 2018, http://www.nbcfilm.com/koza/press_sinefil.php (my translation).

⁹⁵ As a crucial note, Ceylan's parents not only act the old couple but also to some extent act themselves. In an interview, Ceylan enounces that "[w]hen I was young, with my father and mother, their problems gave me a deep pain." See Scott Foundas, "Nuri Bilge Ceylan on 'Winter Sleep' and Learning to Love Boring Movies", *Variety*, February 23, 2018, <http://variety.com/2014/film/features/nuri-bilge-ceylan-on-winter-sleep-and-learning-to-love-boring-movies-1201346563/>

⁹⁶ In fact, some scenes of the film are designed in a way that different sounds intervene one another. However, this does not mean at all that the viewer is unaware of the artificiality of the soundtrack, since there are always other

This evokes Marks's interest in "blurry, oblique shots" that ask for a more demanding look from the viewer on the surface of the image in regard to haptic visuality. I would definitely not dare to say that one may easily find one of those blurry and oblique shots in this eighteen-minutes long film. However, the director's usage of soundtrack, I would suggest, somehow forces us to attach ourselves to what we are seeing on the screen. The lack of other sounds or voices that might have intervened the present one added by the director leads to a kind of a "blurriness" and "obliquity" effect, not in the shots themselves but in terms of the wholeness of the scenes. Such a "blurriness" and "obliquity" in wholeness caused by the add-on soundtrack leads the viewer to, what Marks calls in reference to Bergson, an "attentive recognition". Through this attentive recognition, the spectatorship in *Cocoon* becomes a matter of participation in the images – a participation that sets the viewer's memory in motion to create her own individual virtual images of the objects shown on the screen.

Another factor for the participation of the viewer in the images can be grasped through Marks's discussion of blind people who can be "exquisite aural semioticians" in "watching" films. Thanks to their "acute hearing", they can sense, according to Marks's own example, who the villain is in a film as they receive a door's opening noise.⁹⁷ In *Cocoon*, the lack of the "naturally" intervening sounds and voices, I would like to argue, creates a similar effect on the viewer. As mentioned, memory has a multisensory character. However, not only memory, but also "images are multisensory".⁹⁸ Within this context, it could be said that the lack of sensual integrality arisen out of Ceylan's obligatory choice pushes the viewer to compensate her multisensory attachment to the images.

Take the copper vessel that Ceylan's mother warms up her hands with in one of the scenes as an example. Audiovisually, this object can simply be considered to some extent "a shared cultural symbolic" – a symbol of, say, rural life. However, partly because the image is integrally defective, we are encouraged to go beyond the simple audiovisual appearance of the object and thus beyond its shared cultural symbolic meaning. In rural parts of Turkey, copper vessel is an object that still can be found at every home, an object that is usually used to keep hot water available for oncoming occasions as is placed on wood-burning stoves. Here, too, the object is placed on a stove as it is supposed to be, but this time we also have the low-spirited mother putting her hands on it in order to avoid both the physical and psychological coldness that has

sounds and voices that would intervene under normal circumstances. This is why I have emphasized the adverb "naturally".

⁹⁷ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 202.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

surrounded the entire house. Here the copper vessel ceases to be a mere cultural object with a certain symbolic connotation and becomes the expression of Ceylan's tactile memory of his own mother, who herself is the one performing.

What plays the central role for the viewer here to be haptically evoked may seem to be the hands of the mother. However, similar to Marks's objection to Deleuze's appraisal of the use of hands in Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), in this copper vessel scene, too, what makes the scene gain a tactile character is not necessarily the hands. For, as Marks argues, "[g]etting a sense of touch by looking at hands would seem to require identifying with the person whose hands they are."⁹⁹ Parallel to this, I would argue that we do not feel the warmth of the copper vessel through an identification with the hands of the mother, but instead through the director's way of handling the memory in a similar way to how Marcel Proust handles it through his well-known "little piece of madeleine dipped in tea."¹⁰⁰

Like in Proust's "madeleine dipped in tea", in Ceylan's "copper vessel", too, there seems to occur too little action. On the one hand, through the taste of a little piece of madeleine, Proust's narrator recalls a particular memory from his childhood, and all the "action" occurs there. The action that does not occur within Ceylan's images on the other hand occurs in the viewer's body through her individual virtual images evoked by the urge of an embodied attachment to the image. I see these virtual images occurring in the body of the viewer as an expression of the Deleuzian transition from "what are we going to see in the next image?" to "what is there to see in the image?"¹⁰¹ Affections play no longer an intermediary role in taking part in the action. The image is now important only in itself. Therefore, it does not require the role of sequential character of action in order to be an action.

But, what happens if the reader of Proust has never tasted madeleine, or even madeleine dipped in tea? And along the same line, what happens if the viewer of *Cocoon* has no knowledge whatsoever of the copper vessel in its cultural context? How do such deprivations affect the way the reader/viewer experiences the text/image? At this point, it is crucial to keep in mind that not only the body of the viewer but also that of the film is a cultural entity. This is also to

⁹⁹ Marks, "Video Haptics and Erotics", 337.

¹⁰⁰ Marks herself also mentions this oft-quoted example a couple of times in her book. As she argues at one point, Proust's madeleine dipped in tea demonstrates in particular the *involuntary memory* rather than the *voluntary memory*. See Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 64. However, as is clarified through my following analysis, this distinction does not play any important role in terms of Ceylan's way of handling memory in itself. Accordingly, my actual aim is to draw attention to whereabouts of the "action" in embodied experience of cinema, that is, in the body of the viewer.

¹⁰¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 272.

acknowledge that these two realms of sensoria, recalling what Marks argues, “may or may not intersect.” However, we also know that a kind of sensory translation in embodied film experience is always at stake. Through this sensory translation, certain multisensory images have by definition to be missed, but at least the viewer senses what she is missing. In this manner, considering *Cocoon*, one does not really require to have a cultural knowledge of copper vessel. In fact, such a knowledge is the last thing that the viewer needs in order to have an embodied film experience. As Marks argues elsewhere, “[f]ilm is grasped not solely by an intellectual act but by the complex perception of the body as a whole.”¹⁰² And needless to say, this is because the viewing is an activity that occurs between two bodies that correspond with each other through an embodied relationship rather than a pure cognitive one in which one side (the viewer) would not be able to do without the foreknowledge of an object in order to decipher *the* meaning of it. This is in particular why Ceylan opts for the depiction of the scene with too little action. “A little damage” in the action, he knows, will lead the viewer to incite her own virtual image – a virtual image that would be an entirely different one not only from that of any other viewer, but also from that of which led the director himself to create the scene the way it is. And by saying this, I imply on no account that Ceylan had a certain knowledge of what the scene would evoke on others, or even on himself. This is also somewhat why he instinctively “admits” that he had no idea what the film looked like as he finished it.

Erotics of Play: Oscillations between the Fictional and the Actual

That’s right. Now I’m a farmer. So what? It’s alright. But I don’t want to die, you know. I hope God lets me live another twenty years at least. – Grandfather in *The Small Town* and father in *Clouds of May*

As the Turkish film scholar Asuman Suner points out in her *Hayalet Ev: Yeni Türk Sinemasında Aidiyet, Kimlik ve Bellek*,¹⁰³ one of the most essential ways that can enable us to approach Ceylan’s cinema is to consider his films as play, or game. According to her analysis, the element of play appears on three different levels. Firstly, the games of child protagonists in his films play a great importance; second, the way the grown-ups organize their lives is represented as a kind of reflection of child’s play; and third, the process of filmmaking in itself is established as

¹⁰² Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 143.

¹⁰³ For the English print of the book, see Asuman Suner, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

play.¹⁰⁴ Although all these three levels are crucial to understand the erotics of Ceylan's films, what most particularly interests me is the third one, since it is the one that would allow me to make a more formal approach to the director's embodied cinema.

Contrary to the urban *Distant*, the first two films of Ceylan's "Provincial Trilogy", *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May*, take place in the province.¹⁰⁵ However, this is not the only feature that makes these two closer to each other than they are to *Distant*, since, more than being inter-related, they appear to be interlocked as the latter comprises references back to the former. Indeed, Ceylan himself states that *Clouds of May* has emerged out of his experiences and observations from the shooting process of *The Small Town*.¹⁰⁶ The words quoted in the epigram are one of the most explicit elements that reveals this fact. These words are said by Ceylan's father in both of the films – in the former as the grandfather of the boy who apparently plays the director's childhood and in the latter as the father of the director's alter ego as a grown-up man. On the one hand, in *The Small Town*, the grandfather says these words to conclude his long monologue about his war memories as he sits under a tree with the other members of the family. In *Clouds of May*, on the other hand, the same words are said by the father this time in a film set that is being shot by his son, Muzaffer, played by not Ceylan himself but another amateur actor, Muzaffer Özdemir, a friend of the director. In this sequence we see Muzaffer demanding from his father to act natural rather than impersonate someone else. However, we see the father having a hard time fulfilling the son's demand and therefore they will have to shoot the scene several times.

Suner argues that the irony of this sequence lies behind that an amateur actor has difficulties in acting natural rather than imitating someone else.¹⁰⁷ However, when thought through, what is more significant here seems to be that what Ceylan's father is really demanded from in this sequence is "not to act natural" on purpose. For if he acted natural as he did back in *The Small Town*, the sequence would become pointless. In this manner, ironically enough, what Ceylan really requires from his father is a poor acting.

¹⁰⁴ Suner, 139-140.

¹⁰⁵ *The Small Town* takes place in Ceylan's father's hometown Yenice (a North Aegean province of Çanakkale) where the director spent his childhood. The story is partly told through the eyes of children and is mostly about the complexities arisen from familial conflicts. *Clouds of May* is a film within a film in which the protagonist comes back to his hometown to shoot his film –which appears to be *The Small Town*– with help of his parents, relatives and local people. All dramatic developments occur around this central constituent.

¹⁰⁶ Esra Alıçavuşoğlu, "Çehov Beni Isıtıyor", in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Mayıs Sıkıntısı – Senaryo*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin, trans. Ayşe Orgun Gültekin (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2003), 119.

¹⁰⁷ Suner, 159.

Based on what she finds significant with this sequence, Suner draws attention to Ceylan's ability of blurring the boundaries between the actual and the fictional through his father's natural acting.¹⁰⁸ However, her argument is compatible only with the fictional world of the film. In other words, what she takes into account here are only Muzaffer the director and his fictional father's effort to act natural. What I aim to call attention to on the other hand are Ceylan himself and his father's intentional effort to act poorly. For if Ceylan really achieves to blur the boundaries between the actual and the fictional, this achievement is manifested less in the fictional world of the film than behind the scene where we can envision Ceylan talking to his father and motivating him to act poorly even though Muzaffer will soon motivate him contrariwise in the set of the fictional world.

Aforementioned sequence is only one instance among others that establishes an oscillation between the two films and blurs the boundaries between the actual and the fictional. Through such practices of the director, not only the narrativity of the films but also the filmmaking process itself gains a game-like character. Furthermore, such a characteristic, going beyond the inclusions of the narrativity and filmmaking process in which it manifests itself, is completed with the inclusion of the viewer as well. In other words, the viewer, too, is encouraged to be participated in this game.

Here the notion of game should be considered in terms of the Gadamerian child's play. As Gadamer emphasizes, play in itself contains the notion of seriousness – which means that “[s]eriousness is *not* merely something that calls away from play”. And it is this seriousness that allows the player to avoid behaving “toward play as if toward an object.”¹⁰⁹ In this sense, to consider play a “childish” frivolous activity would place the player outside of the play. Recall the child in Benjamin's example who uses his hand to “zoom” an airplane in the sky. Here the child's play is in no way to be considered a “childish” frivolous activity. Instead, his attempt of “touching” the airplane with his eyes can be compared with the spectator's attempt of removing the distance between herself and the representation. And we already know from Gadamer that the presence of the spectator is not something that ruins an artistic representation or a game. Instead, her presence is what completes the play or the representation as such. In this context, when the spectator is thought as someone who completes the representation, she ceases to be envisioned as a Cartesian cognitive subject with the claim of having certain knowledge of the representation. As we have already learned from Gadamer, the player knows exactly that what

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰⁹ Gadamer, 103 (my emphasis).

he does is “only a game” except that he does not really know what he knows in this knowing. Accordingly, the spectator’s approach to the representation does not manifest itself in a cognitive form of “knowing” but rather in a sensuous way of doing that.

However, that the viewer is encouraged to participate in Ceylan’s game “without knowing it” is not an implication of ending up with the absorption of her by the film. For what we essentially have here is a viewer who is fully “tuned in”, to avoid using the word “conscious” with its Cartesian evocation, and therefore does not lose herself in the fictional world of the film. Where she instead “loses” herself is a world in which the fictional and the actual are endlessly translocated and by extension her inner world in conjunction with the external reality are constantly rearranged and reconsidered. In fact, this world, either, does not necessarily have to absorb the viewer, but to avoid the consideration of the viewer as the skeptical Cartesian subject who is assumedly highly aware of himself and the world, I prefer to use the word “lose” in inverted commas. Then again, this, i.e., that the viewer loses herself in the image, is what Laura U. Marks used to describe the state of the viewer in haptic visuality with an aim of avoiding the state of the Brechtian suspicious viewer. What Marks implies by “losing oneself” here resembles, I would say, Vivian Sobchack’s description of being engaged in a film through our sensorium in which we do not really “think” a transition from our sense of sight to smell or taste. Rather we experience the film “*without a thought*”: we only experience it as such.¹¹⁰ As considered from this point of view, then, “losing oneself in the image” seems to correspond to “experiencing it as such”.

Anyhow, as Suner points out, Ceylan’s films require one to make an effort to participate in the game.¹¹¹ As I discuss in detail in another section below, his films are found boring by many and he is well aware of this. One of the reasons of this general opinion, as Suner also argues, is the intertextual character of his films that actually makes the participation in the game more difficult for the viewer.¹¹² Therefore, once this characteristic escapes the viewer’s attention, the film becomes unbearable for her. I address this problematic by giving a further thought in one of the following sections, but what is significant here is that Ceylan’s films through their game-like character seem to remind us where we stand as we view them. For, as we are invited both to the fictional world and the actual one by means of the intertextuality, or the self-reflexivity, of the films, an embodied experience of them becomes possible. The director’s way of creating a

¹¹⁰ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 65.

¹¹¹ Suner, 161-162.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 161-162

narrative in the narrative which leads us to envision what really happened in the backstage makes us reconsider our position as we watch the film in a “playful” way. As I have argued through references to Jennifer Barker, if the film has a body, it has a skin of its own as well. Although Ceylan seems to blur the boundaries between the actual and the fictional sides, i.e., “here” and “there”, he wants us to bear them in mind by making them a current issue. In this sense, what he seems to demand from his viewer is to avoid both a Brechtian/Cartesian attitude towards a film through which the viewer never leaves his side and stays “here” during the entire viewing and the attitude that reveals itself in completely losing oneself in the “there” of the film. Like in an erotic relationship between two bodies, in viewing Ceylan’s films, too, we are invited to, referring back to Barker again, be “here” and “there” and feel ourselves from the inside and the outside at the same moment. However, in accordance with the nature of the play, we are by no means “here” and “there” consciously as the Brechtian/Cartesian skeptical viewer, since, as in the child’s idiosyncratic manner in the world, we are invited to “unwittingly” discover the world through a dynamic oscillation between the fictional and the actual. In other words, once we are aware of both films, we are encouraged to relate ourselves to them in a more sensuous way, because that is the only way we can really relate ourselves to the world. In the following section, I aim to dilate upon this sensual characteristic of the director’s cinema through a more specific example from his third feature *Distant*.

“Have One of These Sailor Cigarettes”: The Taste and Smell of the Province, and Beyond, in *Distant*

Our senses are becoming blunt. And so are our sensibilities and look. What should we see as we look at something? Every look sees something else. Things we see consist of patterns ever more. But at the same time, one of the tasks of art is to broaden and enrich one’s seeing: to make one feel something beyond the visible. – Nuri Bilge Ceylan¹¹³

Mahmut (Muzaffer Özdemir), somewhere in Fındıklı inshore with a view of the Bosphorus, sits on a bank and watches the beachcombers and the traveling ferries and boats with miscellaneous dimensions as the sun goes down on the skyline. In the first shot, we see him from behind as he faces the Bosphorus. After a while, we have a front view of him, as he indifferently looks at his right side, yawning, with his crossed hands under his chest. Then, as if something pops into his head all of a sudden, he puts his left hand into the pocket of his coat and takes out a box of

¹¹³ Erkal, 103 (my translation).

Samsun brand cigarette which is famously one of the cheapest and the smelliest brand of cigarettes produced in Turkey, a box of cigarette that belonged to Yusuf (Emin Toprak) but probably forgotten by him behind the floor mattress in his guest room as he left the house, *and* the town, with frustration and disappointment. Mahmut found the cigarette box behind the wall saddle when he came home from the airport to where he went to spy on his ex-wife who would leave the country for Canada with her husband. In two ticks, he now lights one of the cigarettes that he took out of the box and takes a deep sip from it. As the camera zooms in very slowly, we see his face immersed in thought as well as the smoke of the cigarette in the air. Zooming in ends up with a close-up of his face as he keeps smoking ruefully, and before long, the image slowly fades out.

This is how Ceylan's third feature *Distant* ends. But, since, despite their slow tempo, Ceylan's feature films depend on narration more than his short film *Cocoon* does, this final scene requires more background information in order for it to make sense.

Mahmut, who moved from his small town a long time ago, lives in his apartment in Istanbul alone. Yusuf, a relative to Mahmut back in the small town, comes to Istanbul to look for a job as a stewardship and stays at Mahmut's place in the meantime. However, he will shortly understand how difficult it is to find a job in this big city. Disconcerted by Yusuf's prolonging visit and not knowing when he is going to leave, Mahmut runs out of patience and starts to become rude to him. Everything about Yusuf starts to bother him. When he asks Yusuf in one of the most decisive scenes how it is going with looking for stewardship, he gets frustrated by Yusuf's nonchalance. As Yusuf desperately asks Mahmut to get him "a job at the tile factory" where Mahmut works as an advertisement photographer, Mahmut, bursting out, accuses him of "look[ing] for someone with pull" with his naïve provinciality in despite of his condition of being without "any skills" at all.

This is the last evening they spend time together in Mahmut's flat. Feeling that he had failed (he apparently could not find what he expected from the big town) and being offended, Yusuf leaves the next day without notice when Mahmut is not at home. Mahmut, who himself is a person with a provincial background, seems to feel self-reproach now. Like the name of the film implies, he is aware of the "distance" between him and his relative Yusuf. In the beginning of Yusuf's visit, he tries to help him as best as he can. For instance, he takes Yusuf to certain places outside of Istanbul to have him work for himself as a paid assistant when he takes photographs for his job. But, as someone who is quite fond of his privacy, he starts to be overbalanced by Yusuf's existence alone in his apartment as time goes by. Their common background

does not provide by any means a common living space for them. They are simply from different worlds.

They are so different so that we rarely see them talking to each other. The only scene where we see them “really” talking is the one I have mentioned above, and there what they essentially do is nothing but arguing – not establishing a dialogue. As one interviewer of Ceylan indicates, like in other films of the director, in *Distant*, too, “the protagonists make contact with one another through certain objects rather than dialogues.”¹¹⁴ This is definitely an accurate observation, but I would also like to suggest that those certain objects are particularly the director’s way of making contact with his viewers as well.

Let me go back to the Samsun brand cigarette that Mahmut smokes in the last scene of the film. It is a significant object that we encounter in another scene, where Yusuf sassily offers Mahmut to “have one of these sailor cigarettes” and gets rejected by him: “how can you smoke that shit?” With this scene in mind, the final scene makes more sense. Through the way the director uses it, this “sailor cigarette” becomes one of the major objects of the entire film, not only in terms of Mahmut’s way of bonding himself with Yusuf *and* thus to his own provincial past, but also in terms of establishing an embodied relationship between the film and the viewer. But, it should be emphasized that this embodied film experience emerges from the inadequacy of images alone. As I have discussed in detail, vision alone has always been considered in equivalent with certain knowledge. Here in *Distant*, the viewer is not given any kind of a certain knowledge about anything, since the images simply do not establish a narrative that would lead to it. In this sense, it could even be said that the unresponsiveness and quietness of Mahmut and Yusuf seem to support the feeling of uncertainty. For instance, in the simplest term, the director does not give any hint about whose side, Yusuf or Mahmut, we should take.

It should also be kept in mind that as we are given no certainty the film demands a multisensory attachment from its viewer. Having the backgrounds of the two protagonists and their relationship with each other in mind, the Samsun brand cigarette becomes one of the objects that enables such an attachment between the viewer and the film. This is something that does not seem to have escaped Asuman Suner’s notice. She describes the final scene with the following words: “This scene seems to convey the taste of the province, both to the protagonist and to the viewer.” As she argues, we infer in this final scene that the act of smoking the Samsun brand cigarette for him is something that evokes his past provincial life. He probably even used to smoke this

¹¹⁴ Enis Köstepen & Fırat Yücel & Yamaç Okur & İbrahim Türk, 200 (my translation).

“tasteless” cigarettes back then. Accordingly, the taste and smell of it seems to have brought back certain memories that he has long since forgotten.¹¹⁵

At this point, one cannot help but compare Ceylan’s film with conventional cinema which would prefer to convey such forgotten memories through flashbacks. In Deleuze’s description, “flashback is only a signpost” and “when it is used by great authors it is there only to show much more complex temporal structures” that would go “beyond the purely empirical succession of time – past-present-future.”¹¹⁶ What Deleuze to a certain extent implies by these “much more complex temporal structures” seems to be a kind of situation in which the viewer does not really know what is “now” and what is “then”. Flashback in these complex temporal structures is not given overtly. The filmmaker does not poke at the viewer, for instance, and say: “Hey! Now we are back in time.” In conventional terms, on the other hand, flashback seems to lead this temporal structure to fall behind the empirical succession of time. Past, present and future are always emphasized very distinctly. However, in Ceylan’s cinema, neither the Deleuzian *time-image* type of flashbacks nor the conventional ones in which past, present and future are always pronounced clearly are at stake. What we instead are given are certain recollection-images that consist of certain cultural objects – in this particular case, a box of Samsun brand cigarettes with its smell and taste.

As Marks remarks, for instance, “smell is difficult to verbalize and visualize”. A particular smell gains meaning through our emotional response towards it.¹¹⁷ Accordingly, “a recollection-image”, as Marks argues, “is not the direct image of a memory”. This is to say that although it “embodies the traces of an event whose representation has been buried, [...] it cannot represent the event itself.”¹¹⁸ With this fact in mind, it is worth noting that Ceylan prefers not to represent what the smell and taste of the cigarette evoke in Mahmut’s body. As I have already discussed in detail, not everything is available to vision. Of course one may prefer to represent a certain memory through a flashback, but such a choice not only would mean a simple fall behind the empirical succession of time but it would also be abhorrent to the embeddedness of culture and memory *within* the body. In this sense, Mahmut is not the only one who is evoked by the smell and taste of the cigarette, but *we* are also provoked to do the same, simply because all we have is the image of the cigarette smoked by him. Therefore, the only choice we are left with is to attach ourselves to the film through an embodied experience of it. Since the viewer

¹¹⁵ Suner, 139 (my translation).

¹¹⁶ Deleuze, xii.

¹¹⁷ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 205.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

is not taken back in time “visually”, she has to sense the “implication” of the scene by herself. In other words, since she is not given a concrete image of a certain memory, she is provoked to generate her own through the smell and taste of the cigarette. This is also where Suner’s tactile interpretation of the scene, I would like to argue, can be advanced a step further. For, although what the director aims to evoke by this particular object seems to be the taste and smell of the province itself, the viewer’s embodied experience of it cannot be comprehended through a reduction to this particular interpretation. Therefore, the virtual image that the viewer generates through the smell and taste of the cigarette is simply an unpredictable one – and this is what makes it to be considered unique.

In so using the smell of the cigarette, there is one more thing that Ceylan seems to accomplish. As Suner argues, the traditional and commercial Turkish cinema can be seen as the reflections of a kind of a growing nostalgia culture reigning over the nation. Through an interesting analysis, she suggests that there is an inversely proportional relationship between “nostalgia culture” and “collective memory loss”. Increasing interest in the past, she argues, ironically coexists with a kind of a collective forgetting.¹¹⁹ Nostalgia functions, in this sense, as a source of a false identity. Suner suggests elsewhere in her book that such a construction of identity remains to be found in contemporary Turkish popular cinema. In movies where the protagonists go back to their childhoods, for instance, “going back” usually seems to symbolize, as Suner puts it, a kind of a return to the “age of innocence”. Such a romanticizing “once upon a time” discourse unavoidably gives rise to an understanding of the past as an ideal in default of the present time and thus absolves the past.¹²⁰ In this context, Ceylan’s cinema can also be understood as a disavowal of the false identity arisen from such a romanticizing view of the past. Therefore, it can be said that his cinema has emerged, in a way, out of a necessity of making a kind of identity crisis a current issue.

In an early interview, Ceylan says, for instance: “I do not think that I tend to see the past as a romantic safeguarded zone wherein we can take shelter in order to make our lives meaningful.”¹²¹ In accordance with this, Suner argues that one of the most significant features characterizing Ceylan’s cinema as the front runner of the so called “New Turkish Cinema” is its rad-

¹¹⁹ Suner, 25-26.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 44.

¹²¹ Mehmet Erdem, “Piyasa Acımasız ve Demirden Yasalarla İşliyor!.. – *Antrakt Sinema Gazetesi*, Sayı: 59. 19-25 Aralık”, in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Kasaba*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2007), 98 (my translation).

ically different way of handling such issues of the past and home. As she discusses, “childhood”, for instance, functions as a symbol of innocence in Ceylan’s cinema, too, but it also functions as a signifier of uncanniness and defeat. In this manner, what we are confronted with in Ceylan’s films is a kind of a “counter-nostalgia”: in Ceylan’s cinema, “home” is *not* something that belongs to the past, something lost or somewhere we are longing for. On the contrary, it occurs to be something that we can never leave behind, a burden that we have to bear with ourselves in the very present time.¹²² At this point, I would go even further and consider the past to be something that we *literally* bear with ourselves as embedded in our bodies and suggest that the director’s way of handling the memory as a corporeal phenomenon emerges as a reaction to the common practice of handling the past as a fixed place to which we can return anytime and find as it was. This can also be considered to be another reason for his rejection of flashbacks.

Last but not least, it is crucial to know that such a sensual experience of the viewer is not limited to this “sailor cigarette” scene. On the contrary, the viewer is encouraged to have an embodied experience of the entire film through this one particular object, since the object, thanks to the director’s effective way of using it, goes beyond the final scene in which it appears, and thus permeates the film in its entirety. The viewer is evoked by the smell and taste of the cigarette, but again, this does not occur through the viewer’s mere identification by the character who smokes it. Had it been the case, the smell and taste of the cigarette would resemble only a cinema experience, for instance, where people gather and watch a movie with certain odors sprayed in a theater. And despite of its powerful sensual effect, this kind of cinema experience would completely miss the idea of “touching” the film in its entirety. On the contrary, it would be a mere parody of it. Here in *Distant*, we do not really smell or taste the cigarette of course, but yet, it is the smell and taste of it that allow us to “touch” the entire film, because the “sailor cigarette” means a great deal for the film – if not everything. It is this “sailor cigarette” that enables an erotic relationship between the viewer and the film – an erotic relationship that allows the film to touch its viewer and to get touched by her. On the one hand, the film “touches” its viewer by provoking her to generate her own virtual images, and on the other hand, the viewer “touches” the film by her pure ability of “sensing” Mahmut and Yusuf’s melancholic situation mimetically, that is, through “the body’s way of reading signs”.

¹²² Suner, 106.

Growing up Asleep: Testing Ceylan's Embodied Cinema via Boredom

If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation. – Walter Benjamin¹²³

Both Mahmut and his guest Yusuf, seated in front of the television set, watch Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) – only one of the everlasting sequences in the film where we see the characters travelling on railroad track. Yusuf, who is bored to death and almost fell asleep, tells Mahmut that he will go to bed. After he has left the living room, Mahmut, when he is sure that Yusuf is in his bed now, goes to some other part of the living room and comes back with a videocassette in his hand – a pornographic film. As he switches over the Tarkovsky film with the porn movie, he is now back on his lounge-chair settled down to enjoy it. After a couple of minutes, Yusuf's door opens all of a sudden. Alarmed, Mahmut manages to switch over the channel before Yusuf comes into sight. Yusuf tells Mahmut that he came back for the magazine that is supposed to be somewhere in the living room. But after he finds it, he does not go back to his own room. Standing behind Mahmut as he leans back on the wall now, he is settled down to watch the tacky Turkish comedy that Mahmut ended up with when he randomly had to change the channel in panic. As Yusuf laughs at one of the jokes, Mahmut, probably with an aim of boring him away, interferes and switches over the channel three times in a row: first to an old black and white Turkish melodrama, then to a TV-show where people are put through via telephone probably to ask for help about certain personal issues, and finally to a crap Turkish action movie. As Mahmut realizes in the end that his effort to bore Yusuf away is a futile one, he tells him now that it is late and turns the TV off.

This scene from *Distant* could very well be altered to the one where we see Mahmut falling asleep in front of the television set during this everlasting “boring” scene. In the script of the film, Ceylan describes the scene with the following words: “Mahmut and Yusuf are watching Tarkovsky. It is [for Mahmut] like an attempt of establishing a bond with his ideals again after being swayed by the accusations of his friends earlier in Arif's place.”¹²⁴ In Arif's place in the film, one of Mahmut's friends, complaining about his surrendered state, says: “you used to say then you'd make films like Tarkovsky.” Indeed, Mahmut, who erstwhile had such ideals, now quite distant from them, works only as an advertising photographer for a tile factory. Being

¹²³ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov”, in *Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1935-1938*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott & Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press: 2006), 149.

¹²⁴ Nuri Bilge Ceylan, “Senaryo”, in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Uzak*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2004), 50 (my translation).

touched on his sore spot, he decides that evening to watch a Tarkovsky film with an aim of constructing a bond between himself and his old ideals, but as he gets bored he ends up with a porn movie. As it seems from the way Ceylan describes the scene in his screenplay, Mahmut's primary motive by watching the film does not seem to be to bore his guest Yusuf away. But after all, he himself is the one who gets bored in the end and this is ultimately why he switches over the film with a porn movie. In an interview, Ceylan, curiously enough, comparing Tarkovsky with porn, says: "[t]here is not such a long way between Tarkovsky and porn. Both of these are coming from our needs. One guy feels that he couldn't make the connection with his lost ideals, so he masturbates. Sometimes masturbation means to forget the world."¹²⁵ Although this argument of the director may somewhat seem disputable, his comparison between "masturbation" and "forgetting the world" is in a way what allows me to make an analogy between two certain situations in my analysis from now on: the first one is Mahmut's boredom that leads him to switch over the film with a porn, and the second is his boredom that could possibly lead him to fall asleep. For in sleep, too, we forget the world.¹²⁶

But, what kind of forgetting is this forgetting? If we should listen to what Merleau-Ponty says about sleep, this forgetting is not to be comprehended as a kind of a negligence of the world. For him, sleep is rather "the closest thing you can get to [...] life itself."¹²⁷ It is a state of mind and body that "puts us into an embodied 'situation' in the world" as a marker of "the limit of consciousness".¹²⁸

In his pithy book *The Fall of Sleep*, Jean-Luc Nancy envisages an equal world through sleep. In sleep, he writes, "[e]verything is equal to itself and to the rest of the world."¹²⁹ And this is because the sleeper "can no longer hold anything as an object, as a perception or a thought". As one falls asleep, it becomes out of the question to distinguish oneself from the world.¹³⁰ Everything around loses its relational value. Nothing exists anymore dependent on the sleeper. The sleeper as she falls asleep is bereft of asking questions about herself and the objects surrounding

¹²⁵ Peter Bradshaw, "Nuri Bilge Ceylan on Winter Sleep: 'I Don't Like Comedies – I Don't Like to Laugh'", *The Guardian*, 27 February 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/nov/13/nuri-bilge-ceylan-winter-sleep-we-are-not-eating-sugar-in-life-all-the-time>

¹²⁶ Another important anecdote that would support my analogy is something from many years ago, as far as I remember, an interview, in which Ceylan tells about his first attempts of watching Tarkovsky films that ended up with falling asleep in the middle of them. Unfortunately, I cannot provide reference to this certain interview made by him in spite of my stubbornly eager online searches.

¹²⁷ Simon Morgan Wortham, *The Poetics of Sleep: From Aristotle to Nancy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 64.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹²⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 17.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

her. She becomes, as Nancy puts, “alien to any system of doubt, to any condition of identification”.¹³¹ Accordingly, Mahmut, as he switches over the film with a porn movie, somehow is forced to do so, since the film itself does not allow him to get involved through any kind of an identification with the characters. The film, to put it simply, bores him away.

The scene in which we can imagine Mahmut falling asleep and the actual one where Mahmut in a way “puts the film to sleep” by abandoning it can in fact be considered to be the director’s humoristic self-reflective manner. It seems to me that, no matter what his motive was in planning the scene the way it is, the director’s self-awareness of the fact that his films are quite “boring” for majority plays here an important role.¹³² Just like in Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*, in this particular scene nothing much happens in the conventional sense of happening. Everything “happens” at a slow tempo – both in the long railroad track scene in *Stalker* and in the actual scene with Mahmut and Yusuf. The two protagonists do not talk or move much. Not even the camera moves. The whole sequence consists of three shots in each of which the camera is stationary. In the first and the third shots we are in the living room via identical camera placements whereas in the second shot we stop by Yusuf’s room where he, barely seeable in the dark, secretly phones his mother who lives back in the small town. But not only that nothing happens in both of the films, but also Ceylan, having this Tarkovsky film at the center of the scene, creates a kind of a *mise en abyme* – a story in the story. However, this does not mean that the focus has to be on the story. What I imply by *mise en abyme* in this particular case is a place where one is located in between two mirrors which would lead one to see infinite number of reflections of oneself. Parallel to this, located in the middle of such an endless mirroring effect with the notion of boredom at the center, Ceylan’s viewer appears to hear him asking humorously: Am I boring you? But, then the question is: why does a director choose to make “boring” films?

I would argue that such a manner of the director puts the viewer of his film in a similar position in which the viewer is in a way provoked to reflect on her attachment to the images. At this point, recall Marks’s consideration of the haptic visuality as the “critique of mastery” through a comparison of the haptic viewer with the Brechtian one. Correspondingly, if sleep means to relinquish our ascendancy over the world (since everything becomes equal as we fall asleep)

¹³¹ Ibid., 12.

¹³² For instance, in an interview about his second feature *Mayıs Sıkıntısı* (*Clouds of May*, 1999), Ceylan says: “Some film critics said that my film has a slow rhythm as a turtle.” See Michel Ciment, “Bir Tema Üzerine Çeşitlemeler Hoşuma Gidiyor...”, in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Mayıs Sıkıntısı – Senaryo*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin, trans. Ayşe Orgun Gültekin (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2003), 97 (my translation).

what can be said for instance about Mahmut's possible dozing off during the film in terms of embodied experience of cinema? As I have already demonstrated, Marks expresses clearly that, in haptic visuality, the viewer loses herself in the image in contrast to the Brechtian skeptical viewer. Subsequently, in Barker's reconsideration, we have found a viewer that does not necessarily lose herself in the image – a viewer who is at the same moment “here”, at the surface of her own body, and “there”, at the surface of the film's body. From this point of view, where would sleep place Mahmut at in this analogical imagined scene of mine?

“By falling asleep,” writes Nancy, “I fall inside myself: from my exhaustion, from by boredom, from my exhausted pleasure or from my exhausting pain.”¹³³ This would clearly be the condition of Mahmut as he falls asleep. He would simply fall *inside himself* by boredom. But where would then the film that bored him away stand? If in the film viewing both sides are desperately in need of each other, what is the point with a film running for someone who is in the state of being *in herself* and not “there” anymore?

In an interview, Ceylan points out that the films that have had the most impact on him have usually been the ones that bored him to death in the first or second screening.¹³⁴ Along the same line, “[t]o be bored is not important,” he says elsewhere: “it may be because you are not ready for that movie. It's not the fault of the movie.”¹³⁵ As Pansy Duncan argues in her “Bored and Boringer: Avant-garde and Trash in Harmony Korine's *Gummo*”, boredom in front of the film screen arises from the film's lack of “both commercial and affective value”.¹³⁶ This explains for instance to some extent Yusuf's sudden interest in the images on TV that we see through Mahmut's pointless zapping. There we can see one of the “low” body genres of Linda Williams (melodrama), but who could deny that the viewer of those two others involves in them in the same way?

As Duncan quotes elsewhere to the British sociologist Mike Featherstone, what capitalism have led to is a “new Narcissism, where individuals seek to maximise and experience the range of sensations available”. What it has created, in other words, is a “bored subject” whose life gains meaning only through consumption.¹³⁷ I would say in this manner that, in spite of his personal interest in Tarkovsky, Mahmut can be seen as one of those who are caught in a trap of capitalism

¹³³ Nancy, 5.

¹³⁴ Erkal, 102.

¹³⁵ Foundas.

¹³⁶ Pansy Duncan, “Bored and Boringer: Avant-garde and Trash in Harmony Korine's *Gummo*”, *Textual Practice* 29, No. 4 (2015): 736.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 723.

which is designed to incessantly annihilate boredom. The problem is that Tarkovsky can only exacerbate this boredom rather than annihilate it.

As Marks argues, “[w]hen we find there is nothing to see, there may be a lot to feel”.¹³⁸ In the everlasting Tarkovsky scene, too, there is not much to see – not much action going on in the traditional sense of the term. What Mahmut has to do is to attach himself to the film in a multisensory way through his attentive recognition. But, since the film demands more attention than he pays, he fails to establish such an attachment. This is sometimes the case. As Marks argues elsewhere, as attentive recognition fails, the virtual images that arise from the viewer’s body can be fantasies and dreams that never took place in the viewer’s past.¹³⁹ However, I would also suggest that the failure of attentive recognition may lead to the sudden abandonment of the film (as in the situation where Mahmut shuts down the film for a porn movie), or even to the state of sleep as well. For, like in sleep, in dream too, “‘I am’ becomes”, as Nancy puts it, “unintelligible”.¹⁴⁰

However, if sleep is not the negligence of the world, then it does not have to be the negligence of the film, either. For instance, we say “to sleep with someone” in order to state an erotic relationship through which the distinction between “I” and “you” vanishes. Here, in accord with my analogy again, in Mahmut’s situation, we have admittedly only one side sleeping, yet still this does not prevent me from considering this situation to be an implication of the erotic relationship between the viewer and the film, since in a sense the film in the actual scene can be said to be “put to sleep” by Mahmut as he abandons it. Accordingly, in my analogy, the film would appear to address Mahmut in the form of *lull*, rather than a mere bore. As Nancy insightfully puts, “whatever one’s age, no one enters sleep without some sort of *lullaby*.”¹⁴¹ Therefore, to answer the question posed above, where the film that is being watched would stand as Mahmut falls asleep according to my analogy is not at all a “nowhere”, because the film “bores” Mahmut in the form of a lullaby (after all, he is about to go to bed and sleep in the actual scene as well, or who knows, perhaps he will lose his sleep there in the absence of his lulling object) – a lullaby that settles *in* Mahmut’s body. Some other time, when Mahmut is awake and ready, he will give another try and perhaps then be able to attach himself to the film in its entirety and

¹³⁸ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 231.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁴⁰ Nancy, 14.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 30 (my emphasis).

experience something new each time –without “putting the film to sleep” or falling asleep himself– just like Ceylan himself appears to have done.¹⁴² Then again, Ceylan is the one quoting in an interview Walter Benjamin’s words that appear at the epigram of this section.¹⁴³ With this quote in mind, he seems to be trying to say that boredom, like sleep, is what makes one grow up, and who knows, eventually “make films like Tarkovsky”.

The Sensual is Political: Mimetic Character of Ceylan’s Embodied Cinema

The task of the artist, beyond that of the journalist whose task is to keep the world updated about current matters, should be something else – like imbuing the society with a new kind of understanding. For example, whereas someone in Japan resigns for a small incident, we see nobody stepping aside the government in Turkey for much bigger incidents. But, if we can achieve to engrain senses of self-respect and shame in a culture, perhaps the same will occur there as well.
– Nuri Bilge Ceylan¹⁴⁴

These words are given as a response by Ceylan in the 67th Cannes Film Festival Press Conference to one of the attendees who addressed him with political implications of the director’s *Kış Uykusu* (*Winter Sleep*, 2014) which has won the Palme d’Or, the highest prize awarded in the festival, that year. In fact, such questions seem to have always been posed to Turkish filmmakers and actors in the international arena. To give an example, the internationally acclaimed Turkish actress Serra Yılmaz, who continues her career in Italy today, describes the situation through her first international film festival experience in 1987. She says that when she was in Venice that year “an Italian journalist wanted to interview her, not about the cinema but rather about politics.” According to her, this is something that “happens in general to the cultural workers of the third world.”¹⁴⁵

Ceylan’s response should be considered within this context, because his answer can be seen as a reaction against these political expectations of the Western world. However, the West is not

¹⁴² Ceylan, to whom Mahmut is certainly the alter ego, too, indicates in an interview that he has seen for instance Tarkovsky’s *Zerkalo* (*The Mirror*, 1975) about twenty times after a couple of failed attempts. See Foundas.

¹⁴³ Erkal, 102.

¹⁴⁴ Festival de Cannes, “Cannes 2014 Winter Sleep: Press Conference”, YouTube Video, 53:27, May 18, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=Sah_29qMHH0 (my translation). It is worth noting that Ceylan’s choice of giving an example about “resignation” is not a random one. During the festival, the worst mining disaster in the history of Turkish Republic occurred back home in Soma which cost the lives of 301 coal miners. Same as it ever was, no one in the government took responsibility.

¹⁴⁵ Deniz Bayrakdar, “Introduction: ‘Son of Turks’ Claim: ‘I’m a Child of European Cinema’”, in *Cinema and Politics: Turkish Cinema and the New Europe*, ed. Deniz Bayrakdar (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), xxv-xxvi.

alone about having such expectations from Ceylan, or Turkish filmmakers in general. In Turkey, there are a remarkable amount of critics and film scholars who find Ceylan's films, for instance, too personal and apolitical. Needless to say, to declare that a certain director tends to make apolitical films is to announce in plain language that what is essentially expected of him or her is political productions.

One of these film scholars who tacitly accuses Ceylan of being apolitical is Zahit Atam. In fact, taking a step further, he even "accuses" the protagonists of *Distant*, Mahmut and Yusuf – the former for being a "hedonist" and a "nihilist" who has given his ideals up, and the latter for being a self-involved person who aims to save himself with help of his elder cousin without considering for instance that unemployment is a problem for millions of others in the country, and not only for him. From this point of view, admitting Ceylan's competence of depicting the reality of Turkey, he suggestively criticizes the film for its "desperate atmosphere" and its lack of "linking itself to a struggle for a hopeful future."¹⁴⁶ Parallel to this, he argues in another article that Ceylan tends to see the life from his individual perspective "[r]ather than looking toward the public for answers" and this is in a way what leads him to distance "himself from what is social".¹⁴⁷

Although I am aware that Atam's argument appears to display quite a weak version of a Marxist discourse which seems to confuse reality with realism, I do believe that it is a good example in order for me to inaugurate my discussion of the mimetic character of Ceylan's embodied cinema. First of all, as Gönül Dönmez-Colin argues in her book *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*, it would be a mistake to distinguish the cinema of Ceylan, "who insists on not being political," from other certain examples of the so called New Turkish Cinema in which we can see "direct political references".¹⁴⁸ For instance, *Distant*, according to her, is the first Turkish film that critically approaches a period in which the neo-liberal lifestyle and worldview seem to be approved in Turkey *and* by the general filmmaking tendency in the country. Mahmut in *Distant*, in this sense, personifies "a new type of urban intellectual" that was created by this

¹⁴⁶ Zahit Atam, "Critical Thoughts on the New Turkish Cinema", in *Cinema and Politics: Turkish Cinema and the New Europe*, ed. Deniz Bayraktar (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 217.

¹⁴⁷ Zahit Atam, "The Existential Boundaries of Nuri Bilge Ceylan: 'In the Beginning was the Father, Why Papa?'" in *New Cinema, New Media: Reinventing Turkish Cinema*, ed. Murat Akser & Deniz Bayraktar (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 72.

¹⁴⁸ Gönül Dönmez-Colin, *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 189-190.

neo-liberal worldview of the 1980s. What characterizes this new urban intellectual is his autonomous existence from the society in which he is in the service of capitalism with all his efficiency and creativity.¹⁴⁹

All this is not to say that Ceylan as a matter of fact *makes* political films. On the contrary, all I want to imply first of all is that making personal films without “linking itself to a struggle for a hopeful future” does not necessarily have to be considered apolitical. But there is one more thing that Ceylan’s cinema seems to “lack” – which is more important to my discussion: a kind of openness to symbolic representation. In this manner, it could be said that his focus on details rather than narrative somehow disentangles his films from being in the grip of symbolic representation as the sole source of meaning.

In fact, this is what unwittingly bothers those who address Ceylan with questions related to politics and those who accuse him for being apolitical. Since they are accustomed to read a film through symbolic meanings, they are simply at a loss when the film happens to refuse to give them a great number of materials, if not any, for symbolic reading.

Following what Umberto Eco has claimed, I would say that this is a tendency that every one of us has one way or another. Visually educated or not, everyone tends to find secret meanings behind any kind of appearance in films. To give an example, the sequence in which Mahmut and Yusuf argue with each other is followed by a scene where Yusuf wakes up in the middle of the night to the voice of the bitter squealing of a poor little mouse caught in the trap that Mahmut has set. Interestingly, a large number of both international and local critics, have tended to compare the scene with one of La Fontaine’s famous fables, *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse*. French film critic Jacques Mandelbaum is only one of them. In his review of the film, he, like many others, compares Mahmut with the town mouse and Yusuf with the country mouse.¹⁵⁰ Such a comparison seems to correspond with Eco’s own example in which he mentions two words, “while” and “crocodile”, that appear in the same text. As I have already shown, only this appearance in itself, according to him, has led one to think of an interrelation between them which would be sufficient in itself to serve for a kind of decipherment of the whole text. Similarly, here in *Distant*, too, we have an urban character with a provincial background and a countryman who struggles for making his getaway in the big town on the one side

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 200.

¹⁵⁰ Jacques Mandelbaum, “*Uzak*: Şehirli Türk ile Tarla Türkü – *Le Monde*, 14 Ocak 2014”, in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Uzak*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin, trans. Ayşe Orhun Gültekin & Müjde Yılman (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2004), 143.

(“town” and “country”), and on the other, a “mouse” who is caught in a trap. These three “words” (town, country and mouse) appearing in the same “text” seem to lead many to seek for a secret meaning behind the co-appearance of them, and that is why they tend to read the scene with help of the fable.

In an interview, being asked a question about the scene, Ceylan himself, too, remarks that he used the mouse figure first as an attempt of revealing the situation that Yusuf falls into through it, and second, for calling attention to the difference between the approaches of the two protagonists to the state to which the mouse is exposed.¹⁵¹ Indeed, while Yusuf seems sorry for the mouse, the only thing Mahmut thinks of is to get rid of it with help of the caretaker, or of Yusuf, as soon as possible. As Ceylan explains, “[t]own people scarcely do this kind of things themselves. They make instead the caretakers and such like do their dirty stuff. Here, I just wanted Mahmut to have it made by Yusuf.”¹⁵²

What Ceylan says here may seem to overlap what the scene promotes the certain film critics to compare it with, i.e., the La Fontaine fable, since through the figure of mouse he apparently wants us to get to know the characters closer by a kind of identification of ourselves with them. But there is one more thing that seems to have motivated Ceylan to add the figure of mouse to the film; and it is more valuable to my discussion. In the same interview, he says: “I had once trapped a mouse in a similar way where I had caught its eye. It was squawking and as I got closer it was becoming quiet and looking at me with fear in its eyes.”¹⁵³ What is significant here is *not* at all that the figure of mouse has occurred to Ceylan’s mind out of his own personal experience. Instead, this little anecdote basically reveals the fact that the primary motivation of the director does not emerge out of a necessity for emitting certain symbols towards his viewer – symbols that would simply lead the enslavement of the viewer by abstractions. Moreover, following what Sontag argues, even if one can imagine Ceylan aspiring “lame messages” that would leave a margin for constrained interpretations, his film can prevail his pretentious intentions –if any– as we stop reading the figure of mouse, for instance, through La Fontaine’s fable as if it is the only way to do that.

This is where the importance of Ceylan’s interest on details rather than the narrative becomes evident. As already implied in the section of “mimesis”, our obsession with reading certain

¹⁵¹ Fatih Özgüven, “Nuri Bilge Ceylan ile Taşra ve Kent Üzerine... – *Yirmibir Mimarlık Dergisi*, Sayı: 12, Mayıs 2003”, in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Uzak*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin, (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2004), 218.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 218 (my translation).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 218.

elements as the symbols that lead to abstractions arises from attributing too much value to the content in criticism. Accordingly, I would argue that a content-related analysis of Ceylan's films treats those details as goal-oriented elements of the narrative that could not do without interpretation. In this sense, the film critic sees the figure of mouse, for instance, as something dreadfully in the need of interpretation, since his inadvertency leads him to consider this figure to be meaningless without the director's assumed true intention for provoking his viewer to find *the* meaning behind it. What this film critic fails to notice is the self-evident style of the director – as in the Homeric style.

As I have shown through Erich Auerbach's comparative analysis of *Odyssey* with the sacrifice of Isaac in the Old Testament, these two texts are distinguished from each other on the basis of the former's absence of suspense and the latter's high dependency on an unmitigated suspense. Indeed, in Ceylan's *Distant*, too, for instance, perhaps the biggest element of suspense –if it can be called that at all– is Yusuf's sailor cigarette where he offers one for Mahmut in one of the abovementioned scenes. Like the world of *Odyssey*, the world of *Distant*, too, exists for itself, because like in the former, in the latter, too, everything happens in the foreground. No doubt that the way Homer keeps everything in the foreground and Ceylan's way of doing that are entirely different from each other. This is partly because the former conveys his work through words whereas the latter through images. For instance, in contrast to Homer, Ceylan does not let us know anything about the psychological states of his protagonists through, say, inner voices: they do not think out loud like the protagonists of *Odyssey*. What Ceylan does instead is to take advantage of details that he carves out through certain objects that allows his cinema to exceed the mere visual character of images. In other words, these images of certain objects, as I have been discussing, appeal not only to the eye but to the entire body. Therefore, in Ceylan's films, the motto "everything happens in the foreground" makes sense only through all senses. To put it another way, "foreground" is by no means a mere implication of something like "in front of the eye".

I have already shown in detail for instance how the smell and taste of the sailor cigarette impel the viewer to "touch" the whole texture of the film. This takes my discussion back to the certain film critics' political expectations of Ceylan's cinema. Recall Auerbach's claim about the tyrannous character of the Old Testament which arose from its abysmal need of interpretation on the basis of its content. Indeed, as can be seen in Auerbach's analysis of the sacrifice of Isaac, everything in the Old Testament remains in the background and unexpressed. Ceylan's cinema, on the other hand, in spite of its ostensibly unexpressive style, establishes to express itself

through addressing the viewer's other senses than mere sight and hearing. In this context, the film critics that are used to "interpret" films in the sense that Sontag argues against, I would assert, are simply "blind" and "deaf" to such evocations that are made by the director. This is to some extent what leads them to tend to read, for instance, the figure of mouse via the "world" of the La Fontaine fable. Instead of establishing an embodied attachment to the actual world of the film, they tend to make the film highly open to the interpretation by pulling out a political lesson from establishing a far-fetched connection with another "shadow world of meanings."

This is basically what Heidegger implies through his critique of modern age in which the world is treated as a picture as if it is nothing but some external object positioned in front of the modern man. The modern critic's inability of seeing beyond the visual places him as a subject, and a highly supreme one, in the face of the image. As a pure "I/eye", his interpretation of the image becomes the absolute meaning of it. And again, this "absolute" occurs to have no other option than being placed outside of the world of the image, because it creates an alternative world for the image without actually erasing or recreating it. Moreover, this alternative world appears to be the only real world for the modern critic.

Bearing Auerbach's comparative analysis of the two major texts in mind, then, I would argue that the modern critic tends to treat Ceylan's cinema as if it is highly open to interpretation as is the case with the Old Testament, simply because he fails to attach himself to his films sensually, or mimetically. Without such an attachment to the film, all details seem to him to be the elements of certain references to certain abstractions. Therefore, the film critic, who cannot see political connotations and/or is eager to find such connotations in Ceylan's cinema, tends to read the characters for instance through universal references, so that they could be dismantled by the intellect conducted by an "I/eye" and thus be "understood" for certain. What all these film critics want to have in Ceylan's films is universal characters¹⁵⁴ such as "Abraham, Jacob, or even Moses", simply because they produce "a more concrete, direct, and historical impression than the figures of the Homeric world".¹⁵⁵ This is why for instance Ceylan's "too personal" style bothers Atam. This "too personal" style makes it difficult for him to get to know Mahmut

¹⁵⁴ For instance, in an interview, talking about the main character of *Winter Sleep*, Aydın (Haluk Bilginer), Ceylan expresses his regret about giving him that name due to one of the meanings of the word: intellectual. Only because of the protagonist's name, he argues, people has tended to reduce his intention to a mere critic of the (Turkish) intellectual. In short, what the director seems to regret here is his choice of the name for his protagonist – a name that has apparently led the viewer to read the character as a universal connotation of the intellectual and "interpret" the director's intention thus and so. See Senem Aytaç, Berke Göl & Firat Yücel, "Nuri Bilge Ceylan'la Kış Uykusu Üzerine", Altyazı, April 3, 2018. <http://www.altiyazi.net/soylesiler/nuri-bilge-ceylanla-kis-uykusu-uzerine/>

¹⁵⁵ Auerbach, 20.

and Yusuf, for instance, through abstractions. This is also why Mandelbaum and many others tend to read the figure of mouse through the aforementioned fable which leads to the consideration of the film as the product of a mere symbolic representation. Ceylan, addressing our all senses through certain objects, allows our acculturated sensorium to revive certain personal histories rather than universal ones – personal histories that are revealed through a sensory translation which is, as I have been discussing, fortunately imperfect and therefore does not have a tyrannous character. In this sense, “even though” Ceylan does not shoot political films, his “too personal” and sensual style gives way to an embodied film experience through which a humble and a more intimate relationship between the film and the viewer can be achieved. This intimate relationship is what allows us to “grasp” the warmth of the copper vessel as an immediate object to “sense” the mother’s gloom in *Cocoon*; and to “smell and taste” the “sailor cigarette” as an immediate expression of Mahmut’s sense of shame. What is more, such immediacy provided in both examples is what makes those feelings become our own.

FINAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In his review of Ceylan's *Distant*, François Skvor, praising the director's ability of overcoming the difficulty of displaying a non-visual sensibility on screen, draws attention to the tactile language of his cinema.¹⁵⁶ Likewise, the Turkish film critic Fatih Özgüven, referring to a scene in the same film where Yusuf leaves his soaked socks on Mahmut's radiator to have them dry, describes the film as "a narrative with foot odor" which, as he puts it, looks at its province through the reverse side of its binoculars which would place what it looks at at a "distance".¹⁵⁷ These critics, and to put it bluntly, not so many others, seem to have "sensed" some tactile or sensual quality in *Distant*, yet they do not really attempt to explain how this tactility/sensuality manifests itself. However, this should not be at all surprising because, as Laura U. Marks argues, "our experience of cinema is mimetic, or an experience of bodily similarity to the audiovisual images we take in." Therefore, even as one attempts to put something on paper to describe the experience that one had of a film, the film in itself will unavoidably transcend the words by which a specific form is meant to be imposed on it. "Cinema", writes Marks, "is not a merely transmitter of signs", because it is not a wholly audiovisual form of art. This is also why she calls senses of touch, smell and taste "unrepresentable".¹⁵⁸ In that vein, it could be said that not only seems Ceylan to deal with something "unrepresentable" in his films, but also the two critics mentioned above appears to strive to describe something "indescribable" in their reviews.

However, one should not consider these efforts of describing something "indescribable" to be futile. As Vivian Sobchack argues, such film reviews that reflect "on the sensuous and affective dimensions of the film experience" have usually –especially in the early 1970s– been disregarded by film scholars on behalf of "more 'rigorous' and 'objective' modes of description."¹⁵⁹ This regardful attitude, which to some extent seems to characterize our contemporary approach to cinema in general as well, is what makes Sobchack choose her title for her essay, too: "What My Fingers Knew". What Sobchack addresses through "her fingers" is the sensuous dimension of Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), which allowed her to make a connection to the film affectively, or tactilely. But more importantly, what she seems to imply by "fingers that knew" is

¹⁵⁶ François Skvor, "'Uzak, İstanbullu Çeşitlemeler', *l'Idéaliste*, Kasım 2003", in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Uzak*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin, trans. Ayşe Orhun Gültekin & Müjde Yılman (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2004), 156-157.

¹⁵⁷ Fatih Özgüven, "'Ayak Kokusu', *Radikal*, 26 Aralık 2002", in *Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Uzak*, ed. Alpagut Gültekin (İstanbul: Norgunk Yayıncılık, 2004), 136.

¹⁵⁸ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, xvi-xvii.

¹⁵⁹ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 58.

nothing else than their absolute speechlessness: they know, yet they cannot put what they know into words.

Like fingers, the nose cannot speak, either. And this is basically why I have preferred to avoid myself from any kind of a content-related analysis of Ceylan's cinema – especially speaking of how he uses, for instance, the smell and taste of the “sailor cigarette” in *Distant*, or the warmth of the copper vessel in *Cocoon*. I have aimed as far as possible to avoid my analysis from being the “interpretations” of what *Distant*'s protagonist Mahmut's smoking, or what the mother's hands on the copper vessel might mean, simply because they are “known” only to my senses. Therefore, I can, as every-body, only “sense” them as such – not the meaning of these particular objects but the films in their entirety. Even the name of a particular smell, as Marks reminds us, is predated by the smell itself. We name a smell not before we identify them “through personal memory associations”.¹⁶⁰ In this sense, what the “sailor cigarette” that Mahmut smokes in *Distant*, or the copper vessel in *Cocoon*, with or without our personal memory associations, evoke is something “indescribable”, something that we emotionally, rather than intellectually, response in the first place.

All these are not to suggest that we view a film through, in these particular cases, our nose or skin so that we cannot verbalize what the film makes us feel. But, once the nose and skin, or all the other senses than sight (and hearing), are emphasized in theory and counted in, we have our feet on the ground – in the proper meaning of the word. Only in this way, we and the film may have a chance to meet on the same level. In order for me to reveal this mutual relationship through which the bodies of the viewer and the film become integrated, I have opted for focusing mostly on Marks's haptic film theory even though it does not directly apply to Ceylan's cinema. Haptic visuality is alluring not only because it provides the best possible way of expressing the tactile attachment to the film but also because it simply unearths the child's idiosyncratic manner in the world – a manner that can be found embedded in the body of the viewer. It has therefore seemed to me to be the best possible way of giving voice to Ceylan's intuitive way of motivating his viewer for an embodied cinema experience.

Ceylan's short film *Cocoon* has been the only one among others discussed here that I have identified as an embodied cinema experience through direct references to haptic visuality. However, unlike Marks, I have suggested that the haptic quality of this film can be found not in the viewer's inquiring look on the surface of the “blurry and oblique” images but rather in her aural

¹⁶⁰ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 205.

attention evoked by the “blurriness and obliquity” caused by the director’s way of editing the soundtrack which arises to some extent from his limited resources.

Cocoon is not the director’s only film with add-on soundtrack. In his first feature *The Small Town*, too, we are deprived of hearing the natural voices and sounds. However, because I have already dealt with this theme in *Cocoon*, I have chosen to focus on some other element in this film in conjunction with Ceylan’s second feature *Clouds of May*. The director’s ability of “playing” with the boundaries between the fictional and the actual through a dynamic oscillation between the two films, I have argued, occurs to be something that allows the viewer to have a sensuous attachment to the film – a sensuous attachment that highly resembles the child’s idiosyncratic attitude towards the world. However, this sensuous attachment specific to my discussion, as I have shown, is possible only as the viewer had seen the previously released one before having seen the following. On the other hand, this does not in any way entail that the viewer cannot find other ways of sensuously attaching herself to each film.

No doubt that Ceylan’s third feature *Distant*, which is also the last part of his “Provincial Trilogy”, has been the most frequently mentioned film throughout this dissertation. This is partly because I have preferred not to go into content-related details of his films. In this film, the “sailor cigarette” is an important figure that has required certain content-related details to be introduced to the reader. Once this introduction was carried out, I have persuaded myself to have my focus on this film more than the others in order to take advantage of the already given background information about it. This is also to imply that one can inarguably find a good deal of elements in each films to approach the embodied character of Ceylan’s cinema from different perspectives. Besides, to focus on a particular element has allowed me to avoid a fragmental approach to the embodied film experience of Ceylan’s cinema and granted me the opportunity of examining it holistically. In other words, I have had the chance of showing the interpenetrating character of one particular element in terms of Ceylan’s embodied cinema.

At some point, I have also aimed to challenge the validness of the embodied experience that one can have of the director’s cinema. In this context, since one who sleeps forgets the world which makes sense only through her body, I have considered the phenomenon of sleep to be a convenient way of testing this embodied relationship between the viewer and the film. As I have demonstrated, sometimes the film may turn out to be a lulling object to its viewer – a lulling object that makes her fall asleep out of boredom. However, I have concluded that the abandonment of the film out of boredom or through falling asleep does not necessarily mean the negligence of the film. Self-aware of the boringness of his cinema for many, I have argued,

Ceylan creates a *mise en abyme* out of boredom by making use of a “boring” scene from a film of his beloved Tarkovsky and thus seems to challenge his viewer through his own “boring” film in a humble waggish manner rather than in a tongue-in-cheek self-righteous highbrow manner. All Ceylan implies with his unpretentious waggish manner is that the consumerist logic of capitalism has made us accustomed to live with an aim of annihilating the boredom as the most essential goal in our lives. Therefore, let it sound didactical, all we have to do is to invert this logic even though to be freed of our customs takes time and patience. Eventually, we may find out that we can learn a great deal from boredom.

I have devoted the last section of my analysis to an understanding of Ceylan’s cinema mimetically. Through his self-evident personal style, I have argued, his films go beyond the symbolic representation whose “meaning” has to be revealed through abstractions. This self-evident style of the director, as I have shown through examples, manifests itself not through the modern critic’s violating attitude towards the film, but through the viewer’s more sensual and immediate attachment to it.

I would also like to emphasize again that such an immediate attachment to the film is possible only as we acknowledge that mind and body are “one and the same thing.” Once this is acknowledged, it becomes inevitable to question the general view that considers the multisensory or bodily involvement to the film to be “low”. Indeed, even Linda Williams herself considers her body genres to be low *not* because she sees bodily involvement as a part of lowbrow activity but because it is the body of the female that is displayed for the body of the viewer who “is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation” of the former’s image on the screen.¹⁶¹ Such an involuntary mimicry of the emotions on the screen, as I have shown, is certainly not a feature of Ceylan’s embodied cinema. By this means, I would also like to read this argument backward and suggest that Ceylan, through his “sensuous” style, not only annuls the general tendency of disdaining bodily involvement in art as lowbrow but also seems to tell us that art cinema in general does not have to be categorized as highbrow. However, since it appears to exceed the aim of my dissertation, this argument could only be the subject of a further research.

As a final note, it is also worth mentioning a highly gratifying incident that has coincided towards the end of the writing of this dissertation: the publication of *The Cinema of Nuri Bilge*

¹⁶¹ Williams, 4.

Ceylan: The Global Vision of a Turkish Filmmaker.¹⁶² No doubt that this first Ceylan book written in English could have conducted my dissertation a good deal, and who knows, it might have led me to entirely different routes in my arguments. However, under these circumstances, I have no alternative but celebrate with enthusiasm the coming of this book and hope for many others to come.

¹⁶² Bülent Diken & Graeme Gilloch & Craig Hammond, *The Cinema of Nuri Bilge Ceylan: The Global Vision of a Turkish Filmmaker* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2018).

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