Slowness and Diverging Aesthetics: Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz in New Turkish Cinema

Yeni Türk Sinemasında Yavaşlık ve Ayrışan Estetik: Nuri Bilge Ceylan ve Zeki Demirkubuz

ZÜHRE CANAY GÜVEN*

* Research Assistant Dr., Necmettin Erbakan University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Public Relations and Advertising Department, Köyceğiz, 42090 Meram, Konya/Türkiye.
E-mail: zcguven@erbakan.edu.tr
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3715-2089

Abstract: *New Turkish Cinema embraces minimalist audio-visual elements, with long takes, contemplative narratives, and a mediated film experience that invites slow engagement and introspection. Through a focused comparison of Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz, two of the most influential and internationally recognized figures in this movement, this article examines how their distinct directorial styles articulate the aesthetics of slowness. Both emerged in the 1990s as central figures in the post-Yeşilçam cinematic landscape, yet their approaches differ markedly. Ceylan's films employ rural landscapes, subdued rhythms, and interior stillness, while Demirkubuz crafts existential narratives in confined urban settings through stark realism and elliptical storytelling. Despite their stylistic differences, both directors adopt techniques associated with global slow cinema. This article argues that slowness in New Turkish Cinema functions not merely as a matter of pacing, but as a cinematic strategy for expressing cultural unease, offering a lens to reflect on memory and identity.*

Keywords: *New Turkish cinema, Slow cinema, Contemplative cinema, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Zeki Demirkubuz*

Öz: *Yeni Türk Sineması, uzun planlar, düşünsel anlatılar ve izleyiciyi yavaş bir etkileşim ile içsel sorgulamaya davet eden minimalist görsel-işitsel ögeleri benimser. Bu makale, bu sinema anlayışının öne çıkan ve uluslararası alanda tanınan iki yönetmeni olan Nuri Bilge Ceylan ve Zeki Demirkubuz'un filmleri üzerinden Yeni Türk Sineması'nda yavaşlık estetiğini karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Her iki yönetmen de 1990'lı yıllarda Yeşilçam-sonrası dönemde öne çıkmış olsa da sanatsal yaklaşımları farklılık gösterir. Ceylan'ın filmleri kırsal manzaralar, uzun planlar ve sakin anlatılarla içsel sorgulamaya yönelirken; Demirkubuz, kent mekânlarında geçen, sınıfsal çatışmalar ve varoluşsal gerilimlerle örülmüş anlatıları görsel durağanlıkla işler. Bu farklara rağmen her iki yönetmen de anlatısal minimalizm ve uzatılmış zaman gibi yavaş sinemanın biçimsel stratejilerine başvurur. Makale, yavaşlığın yalnızca tempo değil; bellek, kimlik ve kültürel sorgulama için kullanılan estetik bir anlatım biçimi olduğunu tartışmaktadır.*

Anahtar kelimeler: *Yeni Türk sineması, Yavaş sinema, Düşünsel sinema, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Zeki Demirkubuz*

Introduction

While slow and contemplative aesthetics are prominently associated with New Turkish Cinema, these stylistic tendencies can be traced to earlier moments in Turkish film history, particularly the experimental efforts of the 1960s art cinema movement. However, the emergence of New Turkish Cinema in the 1990s marked a significant reorientation: from the commercially driven conventions of Yeşilçam to a new cinematic language rooted in minimalism, introspection, and formal rigor.

Yet, defining Turkish cinema solely through the binary of Yeşilçam and New Turkish Cinema risks overlooking the stylistic ruptures already evident in the 1960s. Directors such as Metin Erksan, Alp Zeki Heper, and Atilla Tokatlı challenged the melodramatic formulas of mainstream cinema with formally ambitious and socially critical works (Karadoğan, 2018, p. 152). While these films were marginal within Yeşilçam's industrial apparatus, they laid a dormant groundwork for future aesthetic experimentation. Therefore, the 1990s introduced a qualitatively different cinematic landscape. Turkish cinema underwent structural transformation, marked by auteur-driven, independently produced films characterized by elliptical storytelling, visual stillness, and long takes. This reconfiguration was supported by new production and distribution mechanisms, including international co-productions and Eurimages funding (Behlil, 2012, p. 46; Yılmazok, 2012). In this period, New Turkish Cinema established itself as a globally recognized phenomenon, one that transcended the limitations of earlier national frameworks and engaged with global art cinema discourses.

Thematically, this era has been explored through lenses such as nostalgia, cultural identity, and rural-urban tension. Suner (2015) argues the symbolic significance of provincial settings, while Colin (2008) and Arslan (2011) situate these films within broader discourses of national identity and industrial transformation. Yıldırım (2016, p. 27) emphasizes that the term "Yeşilçam" is not used pejoratively, but rather denotes a system of genre-based, mass-produced filmmaking. This clarification is crucial, as it distinguishes the industrial scale of Yeşilçam from both the socially realist and modernist experiments of the 1960s, and the more fragmented, internationalized cinema that emerged in the 1990s.

Although formal devices such as long takes, narrative opacity, and affective stillness appeared in select 1960s films, these elements had not yet coalesced into a clearly theorized aesthetic paradigm. Since the early 2000s, however, the notion of "slow cinema" has gained traction in global film theory, encompassing features such as extended temporality, sparse narrative development, ambient sound, and a focus on duration over event (Flanagan, 2008; Jaffe, 2014; de Luca, 2016). This framework aligns temporally with the rise of New Turkish Cinema and provides a productive lens through which to analyze its formal strategies.

Despite rich discussions on national themes and industrial shifts, the temporal dimension of New Turkish Cinema, its manipulation of time, narrative pacing, and particularly emotional duration, has received comparatively less critical attention. This study addresses that gap by analysing how slow cinema aesthetics operate within the works of two foundational directors: Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz.

Both filmmakers emerged in the mid-1990s and have since become central figures in international discourse on Turkish cinema. Ceylan's films are shaped by meditative long takes, hyperrealist landscapes, and subdued emotional registers, often set in rural or liminal spaces. Demirkubuz, by contrast, constructs claustrophobic urban narratives marked by moral ambiguity, existential tension, and visual stagnation. Though their aesthetic sensibilities diverge, both directors engage with the core tenets of slow cinema. Accordingly, this article asks: In what ways do Ceylan and Demirkubuz, two stylistically distinct yet thematically resonant auteurs, appropriate, localize, and transform the formal vocabulary of slow cinema? Rather than tracing a linear genealogy between 1960s Turkish art cinema and New Turkish Cinema, this study foregrounds slowness as a globally theorized aesthetic category.

Continuities of Contemplation: Aesthetic Lineages in Turkish Cinema

Turkish cinema is often narrated as a sequence of ruptures—between popular and art cinema, between Yeşilçam's melodramatic conventions and the introspective minimalism of New Turkish Cinema. Yet beneath this narrative of divergence lies a more intricate aesthetic lineage blended with recurring patterns of formal experimentation and contemplative vision. In particular, the 1960s witnessed the emergence of a modernist impulse within Turkish cinema, expressed by a group of auteurs who sought to challenge the ideological certainties and narrative formulas of the Yeşilçam mainstream (Karadoğan, 2018).

Yeşilçam narratives were structured around clear moral binaries and heightened emotional arcs, typically employing melodramatic performances, accelerated editing rhythms, and sentimental musical scores. As Nezih Erdoğan (1998, p. 261) notes, the 1960s and 1970s marked the industrial peak of Yeşilçam, with over 200 films produced annually, largely composed of what he terms "Konfeksiyon" (ready-made) films, mass-produced stories designed to meet market demands[1]. The industry's constraints, tight shooting schedules, limited budgets, and a profit-driven model, often led to adaptation-based productions. Gürata (2006, p. 242) emphasizes that many of these adaptations were uncredited, blurring the boundaries between creative homage and unauthorized reproduction. Melodrama, with its emotional immediacy and accessible narrative structures, was Yeşilçam's dominant genre. Kesirli-Unur (2015, p. 538) observes that salon comedies and melodramas shaped the industry's emotional economy, while Kaya-Mutlu (2010, p. 417) highlights the genre's fixation on heterosexual love crossing class divides, reinforcing the era's ideal of reconciliation through romantic resolution. Yeşilçam cinema functioned as a domestic popular cinema, heavily influenced by Hollywood's conventions and star system, operating within a vertically integrated capitalist model of production, distribution, and exhibition (Erdoğan, 2006, p. 232). Yet, within this industrially constrained environment, an alternative cinematic vision began to emerge. From the early 1960s, a group of filmmakers, Metin Erksan, Halit Refiğ, Ertem Göreç, Duygu Sağıroğlu, Alp Zeki Heper, and Atilla Tokatlı— started to articulate a form of cinema that resisted Yeşilçam's dominant codes.

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[1] For further discussions on how 2000s parody Turkish films engage with 1960s Yeşilçam genres and Hollywood cinema, see Akser's Green Pine resurrected: Film genre, parody and intertextuality in Turkish cinema (2010).

These filmmakers prioritized formal experimentation, subjective expression, and socio-political introspection. As Ali Karadoğan (2018) argues that their works engage with the shifting socio-political landscape through the construction of distinct personal iconographies. Films such as *Time to Love* (Sevmek Zamanı, Erksan, 1966) Love Stories of a Faded Night (Soluk Gecenin Aşk Hikayeleri, Heper, 1966), *For a Beautiful Day* (Güzel Bir Gün İçin, Dormen, 1965) departed from the social realist mode of early 1960s cinema by adopting aesthetic strategies rooted in modernist ambiguity, alienation, and narrative opacity (Karadoğan, 2018, pp. 82, 147–150). Karadoğan further argues that this modernist inclination, favoring introspection over ideological clarity, was sidelined by the commercial infrastructure of Yeşilçam, which privileged politically "engaged" but narratively conventional films. The overt subjectivity and formal autonomy of these directors ran counter to the collectivist ethos of social realism and were thus often marginalized (pp. 150–152). However, these films represented Turkey's first sustained effort to establish a cinematic language centered on aesthetic self-reflexivity and temporal contemplation. Aslı Daldal (2005, p. 60) similarly identifies films such as *Beyond the Nights* (Gecelerin Ötesi, Erksan, 1960), *Revenge of the Snakes* (Yılanların Öcü, 1962, dir. Metin Erksan), *Dry Summer* (Susuz Yaz, Erksan, 1963), *The Criminals Among Us* (Suçlular Aramızda, Erksan, 1964), *The Bus Passengers* (Otobüs Yolcuları, Göreç, 1961), *Those Who Wake Up in the Dark* (Karanlıkta Uyananlar, Göreç, 1965) as seminal works that blended political critique with modernist aesthetics. This movement established a formal vocabulary—marked by long takes, visual stillness, and elliptical structures—that would find renewed resonance decades later. New Turkish Cinema finds its closest aesthetic ancestors in the modernist art cinema of the 1960s—a marginal yet foundational current within the Yeşilçam period itself. This genealogy affirms that the shift from melodrama to modernism in Turkish cinema is not a binary opposition but a dynamic continuum—one in which New Turkish Cinema inherits, transforms, and rearticulates the unfinished aesthetic project of its predecessors. As Suner (2015) suggests, New Turkish Cinema also mirrors broader cultural anxieties, where collective ideals have given way to existential uncertainty and individual disillusionment. The formal and thematic resonance between these two moments in Turkish cinematic history reflects not rupture but recurrent patterns of introspection, aesthetic resistance, and temporal reconfiguration.

Slow Cinema: Temporal Flow and Aesthetic Strategies

Slow cinema, unlike cinema movements such as the French New Wave, is not a defined wave or school of filmmaking. Instead, it is a term used to describe a stylistic approach of certain directors (Orban, 2021, p. 16) that accentuates prolonged takes, minimalistic narrative structures, and a deliberate pacing that invites reflection and sensory and political engagement. Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barrodos Jorge (2016, p. 1) address slowness in cinema history: "Though slowness may be identified as a constitutive temporal feature of previous films, schools and traditions, the notion gained unprecedented critical valence in the last decade". Lim (2014, p. 13) expands the discussion, arguing that while films from any era can exhibit slowness, "cinema of slowness" is primarily a contemporary phenomenon that emerged around the turn of the 21st century.

Michel Ciment is often credited with introducing the term "cinema of slowness" (Flangan, 2008; Lim, 2014; Martin, 2018; de Luca and Jorge, 2016; Çağlayan; 2018) in his at the 46th San Francisco International Film Festival, where Ciment (2003) discussed how certain directors use slow and contemplative cinema to counter through slow and contemplative key features, seek to reclaim the sensuous experience in the midst of the fast-flowing stream of sound and images. Rosenbaum's *Is Ozu Slow?* (1998) lecture, delivered at the symposium *Yasujiro Ozu in the World*, engages with the concept of "slowness" through an analysis of the formal qualities of Ozu's films, although it does not directly situate them within the broader discourse of slow cinema. In "Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema", Flanagan (2008) offers one of the first comprehensive inquiry into slow cinema (Çağlayan, 2018, p. 5). Flanagan's (2008) concern is to uncover what he calls the "binary extremes of 'fast' and 'slow,'" the dichotomy between mainstream and art cinema and how contemporary filmmakers engage with the aesthetic of slowness, specifically in relation to the dominant speed pace-driven conventions of mainstream cinema. Flanagan (2008) argues that filmmakers embracing slowness as a component element offer a deeper, more reflective way to engage with the narrative rather than solely to drive the plot, and in this sense, temporality in film becomes an essential part of the experience.

The conceptualization of slow cinema becoming highly prominent in the literature aligns with the 2010s. Çağlayan (2018, p. 1) and Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge (2016, p. 2) similarly pinpoint the significance discussions in 2010s on slow cinema in Sight & Sound magazine. Notably, the journal featured critical discussions on slow cinema during this period. These articles from the 2010 issue of Sight & Sound can be regarded the emergence of a more systematic inquiry into slow cinema. One of the most comprehensive studies in film studies is Matthew Flanagan's *Slow Cinema: Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film* (2011) dissertation.

It seems more meaningful to uncover what "slow" encompasses a far broader spectrum that cannot be reduced merely to matters of tempo in a film while the term has long been used in film studies to describe films with slow or fast pacing. Slowness mostly is a subjective experience and consequently the regarding of films based solely on pacing might be inconsistent (Xiong, 2024, p. 977). Koutsourakis (2019) argues slow cinema is a historically and politically bounded category and he suggests instead of problematizing this anachronistic revival, scholars have largely overlooked the social and historical determinants that drive slow cinema's recuperation of past cinematic practices. Therefore, solely associating the term with pace is unavailing to comprehend its phenological and ontological potency.

As Koutsourakis (2019, p. 388) points many of the silent films and talkies also intersects with contemporary slow films in terms of certain elements, however slow films diverge from early days of medium. Such a framing raises questions about the fundamental qualities of slow cinema and whether it can be considered a wave, movement, or a school of filmmaking. Due to film being an audio-visual medium that combines elements from various art forms, one of which is movement, cinema itself is inherently tied to movement. Action in film is related to pacing, making concepts like slowness and fast-pacedness fluid and resistant to strict historical

classification. As a result, it is not convincing to claim that slow cinema emerged exclusively within a particular period, as variations in pacing have existed throughout cinema history. Instead, it is better to be conceptualized as a political or phenomenological experience.

Slow cinema also resists to fit neatly into a movement or wave, nor can it be classified as a genre, as it does not rely on a set of predictable narrative structures or thematic concerns that are typical of a genre. Slow cinema might best be understood as a distinctive mode of film making which generally depends on time, narration, aesthetic and/or political preoccupation (Dwyer and Perkins 2018, p.103). Some of the formal and structural devices of slow cinema are long-takes, undramatic or non-narration (Flanagan, 2012). According to Jaffe (2014, p. 3), slow films can be categorized based on their visual styles, narrative structures, thematic contexts, and character portrayals. These films often feature unusually static camera positioning, limited physical movement in front of the camera, and sparse editing to prevent spatiotemporal jumps. Additionally, single-shot scenes tend to dominate over close-ups, and there is a deliberate avoidance of detailed sets, expressive colour use, and exaggerated characters. These characteristics collectively contribute to the distinct pacing and aesthetic of slow cinema.

Slow cinema and "contemplative cinema" are often used interchangeably to describe a body of films characterized by deliberate pacing, extended shots, minimal narrative progression, and a focus on atmosphere rather than action. However, as Harry Tuttle discusses in "Slower or Contemplative" (2010) on the Unspoken Cinema blog, these terms have distinct connotations and theoretical implications that warrant careful consideration. He points out that the term "slow" can carry negative connotations, implying that such films are dull or unengaging. The emphasis on slowness may overshadow the deeper aesthetic and philosophical intentions behind the filmmakers' choices, reducing these works to mere exercises in patience rather than purposeful artistic explorations. Tuttle's argument challenges critics and scholars to move beyond the "slow cinema" and embrace the contemplative dimension as a more accurate descriptor of these films' potential.

In contrast, contemplative cinema, as advocated by Tuttle (2010), emphasizes introspection over pacing. Rather than merely slowing down narrative progression, contemplative cinema invites audiences to reflect on the subtleties of human experience, emotion, and existence. This approach emphasizes a meditative quality, where the stillness and silence serve as conduits for profound contemplation rather than as markers of slow progression. Films considered as contemplative cinema often positioned as the opposite of popular cinema, contrasting with its action-driven pacing and rhythms (Warner, 2021, p.106) transcend the aesthetic preoccupation with slowness by creating an immersive and thoughtful viewing experience. The stillness, rather than being an end in itself, becomes a medium through which philosophical questions and human conditions are subtly explored. This distinction displays how the contemplative aspect adds a layer of intentional engagement with the narrative, rather than merely slowing it down. On the other hand, critical discourse contends that contemplative cinema, much like slow cinema, cannot be neatly classified as a wave or a school. Warner (2015) contends that:

Contemplative cinema, it must be acknowledged, is a rather loose category that potentially creates more problems than it solves. Though its coinage is particular

to contemporary art cinema, it could apply as fittingly to a wider span of audiovisual practices, including documentaries, avant-garde/ experimental cinema, and screen-based gallery installations (indeed many filmmakers associated with contemplative poetics have made forays into the art world.

Given its inherent complexities, slow cinema defies rigid historical categorization, functioning instead as a flexible aesthetic tendency that intersects with diverse cinematic traditions. In the context of New Turkish Cinema, slowness is not merely a matter of pace or duration but a deliberate way of engaging with temporality, memory, and socio-political realities. It provides a perspective to understand how cultural and historical forces contribute to these films, intertwining cinematic form with social and existential themes.

New Turkish Cinema: Ceylan and Demirkubuz as Slow Aesthetics Practitioners

New Turkish Cinema, emerging in the late 1990s and early 2000s, is defined by its auteur-driven, independent filmmaking that carved out a distinctive position within global art cinema. The prevailing tendency in scholarship is to define this movement as encompassing the period from the 1990s onward (Colin, 2008; Çağlayan, 2018; Arslan, 2011; Suner, 2015; Ottone, 2017). However, conceptualizations of what constitutes the "new" in Turkish cinema vary across studies. Scholars have approached the period through diverse frameworks such as "New Turkish Cinema" (Suner, 2015; Colin, 2008), "New Turkish Auteur Cinema" (Ottone, 2017), and thematic clusters like "Boredom in Turkish Cinema" (Çağlayan, 2018). These overlapping yet distinct categories illustrate both the richness and the complexity of the field, while also showing the challenges of defining this cinematic era within a single conceptual model. Suner (2015, p. 38) contends that New Turkish Cinema can be positioned between the parameters of "national cinema" and "new wave," although she acknowledges the limitations and tensions inherent in both categories. Colin (2008, p. 180), by contrast, argues that the movement does not align with the historical "new wave" model exemplified by the French New Wave, emphasizing its more diffuse and heterogeneous character.

Atam (2011, p. 83) identifies 1994 as a symbolic starting point for this new period, citing films such as Zeki Demirkubuz's *C Blok* (1994) and Yeşim Ustaoğlu's *İz* (1994) as foundational examples. According to Atam, this transition was marked by the decline of traditional master-apprentice production relationships and the rise of independent auteurs who sought to realize formally and thematically unconventional projects. Suner (2015, p. 34) similarly notes the early 1990s as a historical turning point, when a new generation of filmmakers began operating outside of the Yeşilçam system, embracing introspective narratives and aesthetic innovation. Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz represent two distinct, yet complementary strands of New Turkish Cinema. Ceylan aligns more closely with global slow cinema conventions through meditative pacing and visual stillness, whereas Demirkubuz engages in a more austere, psychologically focused realism.

 The selection of Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz as focal figures in this study is grounded in various scholarly perspectives on how they reconfigure mainstream cinematic conventions in Turkish cinema, inviting audiences to engage

more deeply with Turkey's complex psychological and social realities. Both directors are frequently acknowledged among the foundational figures of New Turkish Cinema. Atam (2011) includes them in his identification of the movement's leading voices, while Dönmez-Colin (2008) emphasizes their role in pioneering independent, low-budget filmmaking with international resonance. Daldal (2023) also identifies Ceylan and Demirkubuz as key auteurs who introduced a modern sensibility into Turkish cinema. Most notably, Suner (2015, p. 45) describes them as the most internationally recognized directors of New Turkish Cinema, highlighting their sustained use of minimalist narrative structures and introspective formal style. Focusing exclusively on these two directors allows for a more in-depth exploration of slow aesthetics in Turkish cinema. Rather than offering a general overview of New Turkish Cinema. Their films offer a cinema of delay, silence, and moral ambiguity. By employing techniques commonly associated with slow cinema, both directors contribute to a redefinition of Turkish cinematic temporality, one that resists linear progression and emphasizes the psychological and cultural weight of the moment.

Table 1. Directors of New Turkish Cinema and Their Significance in terms of Slow Aesthetics

Director	Use of Long Takes	Narrative Structure	Representation Style	Visual Composition & Stillness
Nuri Bilge Ceylan	Very frequent; contemplative pacing; often landscape-centered	Minimalist and elliptical; subdued drama; interior psychological focus	Hyperrealist attention to detail, especially in rural/urban divides	Static wide shots; symmetrical frames; atmospheric light; silence used to convey introspection
Zeki Demirkubuz	Selective but impactful; often still, quiet, and lingering	Psychological minimalism; fragmented or anti-climactic structures	Stark realism with moral and existential tension; focus on ordinary settings	Tight, static frames; visual monotony; darkness and spatial compression reinforce emotional stagnation

Use of Long Takes

Ceylan's signature long takes are meditative and spatially expansive. In *Distant* (Uzak, Ceylan, 2002), for instance, extended shots emphasize spatial and emotional distance, allowing the atmosphere to overshadow action. A pivotal scene features Mahmut and Yusuf silently watching Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. The camera lingers, and their estrangement is mirrored by the ambient disquiet of the film they watch. As Flanagan (2008) terms it, this "aesthetic of delay" resists conventional narrative drive, suspending time in favor of introspection. Similarly, in *Clouds of May* (Mayıs Sıkıntıs, Ceylan, 1999), long static shots of rural landscapes elevate the environment into a character of its own. These scenes do not propel the plot but create a slow rhythm that mirrors the inertia of the protagonist's inner life.

In *Three Monkeys* (Üç Maymun, 2008), Ceylan employs slow pacing and temporal ambiguity to depict moral paralysis. Characters linger in silence, withholding truth

in acts of passive complicity. The aesthetic weight of extended temporality here functions not merely as a stylistic flourish but as a tool for ethical examination. In *Winter Sleep* (Kış Uykusu, Ceylan, 2014), Ceylan stretches a domestic conflict between Aydın and Nihal over an entire sequence. The static camera captures the unease in real time, transforming their dialogue into a philosophical confrontation. The deliberate stillness of the frame intensifies the emotional stakes, encouraging the viewer to dwell in discomfort and psychological tension.

Demirkubuz, by contrast, engages with long takes in a starkly different register. His static shots are often tighter, set in bleak, enclosed spaces, and saturated with existential weight. In *Fate* (Kader, Demirkubuz, 2001), the camera remains locked on the protagonist in prison, underscoring emotional stagnation. The absence of dramatic movement draws attention to the character's psychological immobility. These long takes are not meditative but accusatory—staging what Daldal (2005) calls an "aesthetic of inner collapse." In *The Third Page* (Üçüncü Sayfa, Demirkubuz, 1999), Demirkubuz frames Isa in dimly lit interiors, his existential despair emphasized by the suffocating stillness of the image. The prolonged silence becomes a space where dread accumulates, implicating the viewer in the character's inaction. This contrast underscores Jaffe's (2014) definition of slow cinema through its formal and visual characteristics: unusually static camera positioning, limited physical movement, and sparse editing to avoid temporal jumps. Both Ceylan and Demirkubuz rely on these techniques, yet to vastly different affective ends.

Narrative Structure

Both Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz employ minimalist and elliptical narrative structures aligned with the aesthetics of slow cinema, but their narrative strategies diverge significantly in tone, purpose, and emotional register. While both directors avoid conventional plot escalation and resolution, their use of minimalism generates different kinds of affective and ethical engagement. His narratives often unfold in fragments, with significant events occurring off-screen or remaining unresolved. In *Distant* (2002), for instance, the central relationship between Mahmut and Yusuf progresses not through overt conflict but through a slow accumulation of silences, glances, and minor gestures. A scene where Yusuf silently watches Mahmut's pornographic tapes—before quickly switching to a nature documentary upon being discovered—reveals deep interpersonal distance without verbal confrontation. The absence of a dramatic arc reinforces the emotional stasis that defines their cohabitation, aligning with what Flanagan (2008) calls the "aesthetic of delay"—a temporal suspension where meaning accumulates in pauses rather than actions.

In *Clouds of May* (1999), the narrative is even more diffuse, structured around the making of a film that itself never reaches fruition. The meta-cinematic plot—following a director struggling with creative block—drifts through scenes of rehearsal, landscape observation, and casual conversations with locals. The film's loose structure and meandering tempo reflect the director character's own ambivalence and serve as a meditation on artistic inertia. In *Winter Sleep* (2014), Ceylan's most dialogue-driven film, narrative minimalism takes the form of extended, unresolved

conversations. One such scene features Aydın and his wife Nihal locked in a bitter but ultimately inconclusive argument about philanthropy, agency, and marital disillusionment. The camera remains static, refusing to offer emotional release.

Representation Style

The representation style in the films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz reflects two distinct yet complementary approaches to slow cinema aesthetics—rooted respectively in poetic hyperrealism and stark, moralistic realism.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan adopts a hyperrealist visual style that elevates ordinary environments into emotionally charged landscapes. His films are marked by meticulous attention to natural light, sound, and spatial composition. Rural and liminal settings—snow-laden towns in *Distant* (2002), pastoral silence in *Clouds of May* (1999), or the cave-like interiors in *Winter Sleep* (2014)—serve not just as backgrounds but as psychological mirrors for his characters. The slow accumulation of mood and detail in these spaces facilitates a poetic realism, where emotion is encoded in textures, atmospheres, and the interplay between silence and environment. In this sense, Ceylan's work blurs the line between interior emotional states and exterior worlds, embedding the personal within the physical.

His use of natural settings to externalize inner turmoil is especially evident in *Distant* (2002), where the cold, gray urban landscape of Istanbul echoes Mahmut's emotional detachment and Yusuf's alienation. In *Clouds of May* (1999), the sleepy village becomes a site of creative and existential stasis, reflecting the protagonist's internal conflict between detachment and connection. This attention to landscape aligns with contemplative cinema's emphasis on stillness and spatial immersion, but Ceylan's treatment of mise-en-scène retains a painterly, even lyrical quality—heightening the emotional impact without overt melodrama.

Zeki Demirkubuz, by contrast, works within a stark, austere realist mode that rejects visual embellishment in favor of rawness and restraint. His settings are often confined, dimly lit interiors, shabby apartments, prison cells, bleak stairwells, that function as moral and existential traps. Unlike Ceylan's open landscapes, Demirkubuz's environments are oppressive, signalling not reflection but entrapment. These spaces are stripped of ornamentation, intensifying the viewer's focus on the emotional and ethical struggles of the characters. The realism is not aestheticized but morally charged, grounded in what might be called a Dostoyevskian universe of guilt, punishment, and spiritual disintegration.

In *Innocence* (Masumiyet, Demirkubuz, 1997), the mise-en-scène emphasizes decay and stagnation, echoing the characters' haunted pasts and fatalistic trajectories. Similarly, *The Third Page* (1999) and *Fate* (2001) unfold in dark, confined settings that seem to absorb rather than reflect light, symbolizing the psychic confinement of their protagonists. This visual austerity does not aim to beautify suffering but to present it with uncompromising honesty. His realism becomes a site of ethical confrontation, forcing the viewer to sit with pain, indecision, and emotional paralysis.

While Ceylan's representation style leans toward the poetic and impressionistic, Demirkubuz's is unapologetically blunt and ascetic. Yet both directors share a commitment to representing emotional reality through their environments, whether expansive or suffocating—and both reject the spectacle of conventional

cinema in favor of a visual language that foregrounds human vulnerability and existential weight.

Visual Composition and Stillness

Ceylan's visual style often places characters in wide static frames that dwarf them within landscapes or domestic interiors. In *Clouds of May* (1999), the natural environment becomes an emotional echo chamber. In *Distant* (2002*)*, snow-covered Istanbul streets convey psychological isolation, their vastness underscoring the characters' alienation. This hyperrealist composition—carefully lit, often muted in color—emphasizes mood and memory. The mise-en-scène is not merely decorative but emotionally resonant. Demirkubuz, in contrast, opts for visual austerity. In *Third Page* (1999) and *Innocence* (1997), tight framing in shabby apartments and dim corridors limits both visual and emotional mobility. Stillness in his work is claustrophobic and suffocating. Characters appear trapped not only in space but in their moral frameworks. It can be conceptualized as "ethical stagnation," in which visual stillness reflects a deeper immobility of the soul.

Ceylan's films often evoke introspection and a lyrical melancholy. His slow rhythms encourage meditative reflection on time, memory, and the self. Demirkubuz's works, by contrast, provoke discomfort and existential reckoning. His austerity forces viewers to confront the darkness of human motivation and emotional paralysis. In *Winter Sleep* (2014), for example, the extended conversation between Aydın and Nihal is not structured around a clear moral resolution. Instead, it forces the audience to inhabit the silences, hesitations, and emotional friction between the characters. The camera does not offer relief through cuts or reversals; it lingers, pressing the viewer into the discomfort of moral uncertainty. This approach aligns with what de Luca and Jorge (2016) describe as the ethical potential of slowness—a refusal to resolve complexity too quickly or to manipulate emotion through narrative conventions. Similarly, *Distant* (2002) and *Clouds of May Sıkıntısı* (1999) evoke a melancholic sensibility that is deeply affective but never sentimental. The affective force of these films arises not from dramatic escalation but from the accumulation of silences, glances, and subtle gestures that gain weight through prolonged observation.

Demirkubuz, on the other hand, constructs a cinema of ethical confrontation. While his stylistic restraint and long takes resonate with slow cinema, his affective register is darker, more accusatory. The ethical demand in his work often stems from what is not shown or resolved. In *Innocence* (1997), *Fate* (2001), and *The Third Page* (1999), viewers are placed in morally charged scenarios with characters who act out of desperation, trauma, or resignation. These films do not offer catharsis or redemption; instead, they insist on dwelling in the murky spaces of guilt, shame, and moral paralysis. Demirkubuz's protagonists are often framed in close, suffocating spaces, visually echoing their psychological entrapment. Their stillness is not a meditative pause but a visual expression of stagnation and spiritual erosion. In this context, the viewer is not invited to empathize uncritically but to wrestle with discomfort—to confront the voids and failures that define the human condition.

Conclusion

The cinematic works of Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz exemplify how slow cinema aesthetics can be refracted through divergent yet intersecting authorial visions within New Turkish Cinema. Far from being a homogenous mode, slowness here emerges as a pliable formal strategy—employed to articulate psychological depth, ethical ambiguity, and sociocultural unease. While Ceylan gravitates toward poetic introspection, elliptical silences, and landscapes imbued with existential melancholy, Demirkubuz deploys narrative fragmentation and visual austerity to evoke moral paralysis and emotional claustrophobia. Their films reveal that slow cinema is not merely a matter of pacing, but a modality of philosophical and affective engagement.

As Koutsourakis (2019) and Xiong (2024) remind us, slowness in cinema cannot be reduced to tempo alone; it must be understood as a historically and politically situated aesthetic practice, capable of addressing collective memory, identity, and the crises of subjectivity. Within this broader framework, Ceylan and Demirkubuz offer distinct responses to the dislocations of the post-Yeşilçam era. Their shared reliance on long takes, narrative minimalism, and visual stillness functions as a cinematic grammar through which cultural introspection and existential confrontation are rendered palpable.

These aesthetic strategies resonate with the social and political climate of the 1990s, a decade marked by intensified debates on national identity and the legacy of the past. Slow cinema in this context serves as a criterion for reflecting on memory and loss, offering a space to process trauma and negotiate fragmented identities. Through its deliberate pacing and contemplative visual style, it allows audiences to actively engage with the emotional and philosophical dimensions of each film. Therefore, approaching New Turkish Cinema through cinema of slowness not only reveals the diverse contributions of directors but also positions their works within a broader cultural reckoning with history, identity, and change. Rather than merely adopting a global cinematic trend, Turkish slow cinema articulates a distinctive vision rooted in local experience, making it an essential facet of contemporary Turkish cultural production.

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