



An Aesthetic Narrative Language from Local to Universal: Suha Arın with his Auteur Identity in Turkish Documentary Cinema

Yerelden Evrensele Uzanan Bir Anlatım Dili: Türk Belgesel Sinemasında Auteur Kimliği İle Suha Arın

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Abstract

This article examines Suha Arın's auteur identity in documentary cinema and his contributions to Turkish documentary cinema. The aim of the study is to examine the original narrative language, thematic diversity and cinematographic mastery in Arın's films and to reveal his position as a "cultural ambassador" and why he has become infinite as a storyteller through examples. The study, which is a qualitative research, will also project Suha Arın's production in Turkey during the period in which he was in production, based on the idea that directors who are considered auteurs present a personal approach to cinema as well as addressing the era they witnessed within the framework of their originality; it will be stated that he is a creative documentary film director whose films have been recognized in Turkey and internationally. The study, which is based on a historical analysis, finds that Suha Arın, one of the most important figures of Turkish documentary cinema, brought a breath of fresh air to the field in terms of form and content, and changed the flow of Turkish documentary cinema. Suha Arın evaluated documentary cinema not only as an informative tool but also as a form of aesthetic and artistic expression. In terms of the development of documentary cinema in Turkey and the limited interest of the audience compared to fiction cinema, it is foreseen that a detailed examination of the films of a pioneer in this field with a historical perspective will make a significant contribution to the literature.

Keywords

Suha Arın, Turkish documentary cinema, auteur cinema.

Öz

Makalede, Suha Arın'ın belgesel sinemadaki auteur kimliği ile Türk belgesel sinemasına katkıları incelenecektir. Çalışmanın amacı, Arın'ın filmlerindeki özgün anlatım dili ile tematik çeşitliliğin ve sinematografik ustalığın irdelenerek, "kültür elçisi" konumunu ve hikâye anlatıcısı olarak neden sonsuzlaştığını örnekler üzerinden ortaya koymaktır. Nitel bir araştırma olan çalışmada, auteur olarak değerlendirilen yönetmenlerin kişisel bir sinema yaklaşımı sunmalarının yanı sıra tanık oldukları çağı, özgünlükleri çerçevesinde ele aldıkları düşüncesinden hareketle, Suha Arın'ın üretimde olduğu dönem Türkiye'sine projeksiyon tutulacak; yaşadığı topluma sırt dönmeyen bir auteur olarak Türk sinemasının belleğinde silinmez izler bırakmış yaratıcı bir belgesel sinema yönetmeni olduğu ifade edilecektir. Türk belgesel sinemasının önemli figürlerinden Arın'ın, biçimsel ve içeriksel açıdan bu alana yeni bir soluk getirdiği; Türk belgesel sineması anlayışının akışını değiştirdiği, tarihsel bir inceleme ile gerçekleştirilen çalışmanın bulguları arasındadır. Arın, belgesel sinemayı sadece bilgilendirme aracı olarak değil, estetik ve sanatsal bir ifade biçimi olarak da değerlendirmiş; biçim, içerik ve öz anlamında auteur kuram ile örtüşen birçok özgün yaklaşımı benimsemiştir. Filmlerindeki tematik çeşitlilik, sinematografik ustalık, belgesel sinemanın sınırlarını genişletmiş; bu türün sanatsal değerini artırmıştır. Belgesel sinemanın Türkiye'deki gelişimi ve izleyici ilgisinin kurmaca sinemaya kıyasla oldukça sınırlı olması bakımından, bu alana yön vermiş bir ismin tarihsel perspektifle filmlerinin ayrıntılı olarak incelenmesinin, literatüre önemli katkı sağlayacağı öngörülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Suha Arın, Türk belgesel sineması, auteur sinema.

Introduction

Documentary cinema is a genre that reflects reality directly through cinematic narration and documents social events, cultural elements, and historical processes. The development of documentary cinema and audience interest in Turkey is quite limited compared to fictional cinema. In this context, Suha Arin, one of the significant figures in Turkish documentary cinema, has brought a new perspective to the field both formally and content-wise, altering the flow of understanding in Turkish documentary cinema historically. Arin's view of documentary cinema not only as an informational tool but also as an aesthetic and artistic form of expression suggests that he adopted many unique approaches that align with auteur theory in terms of form, content, and essence. His approach has also changed the perception of documentary cinema among Turkish audiences.

Arin's identity, which is distinguished by a directing style that strongly reflects his personal vision and creative perspective, will be functional in understanding his cinema within the framework of auteur theory characteristics. The concept of auteur generally refers to a director creating an aesthetic and thematic coherence in their films that bears their personal signature. In Arin's works, this coherence can be observed in many elements, from narrative structure and visual composition to the treatment of subjects and use of sound. His prominent documentaries, such as *Tahtacı Fatma* and *Safranbolu'da Zaman*, both reveal local life and cultural values while also addressing universal human emotions and experiences.

Another notable feature of Arin's documentaries is that they result from a deep and meticulous research process. Each of his films is shaped by extensive fieldwork and detailed historical research. This makes his films both academic resources and artistic masterpieces. Arin's works also hold significant importance for social memory and cultural heritage. These documentaries document lifestyles, traditions, and processes of change in various regions of Turkey, passing them on to future generations. This narrative language extending from local to global is an important indicator in examining his auteur identity.

Suha Arin's films throughout his cinema career reveal his passion and dedication to documentary filmmaking through the connection he establishes with the content. Arin stands out not only for his technical mastery but also for his deep empathy towards human stories. As the connection between his films and himself becomes apparent, it is also felt that the fundamental element advancing documentary cinema in his works is not just form but also spiritual integrity. His films, beyond presenting works of art, invite the audience to intellectual stimulation, emotional richness, and ultimately, awareness. Therefore, while Arin uses documentary cinema as a narrative tool, he establishes a strong connection with the audience.

This article will examine Suha Arin's identity in documentary cinema and his contributions to Turkish documentary cinema. By analyzing the unique narrative language, thematic diversity, and cinematographic mastery in Arin's films, the study aims to highlight his role as a "cultural ambassador" and his enduring presence as a storyteller. The study will also project onto Turkey during Arin's active period, based on the idea that directors considered auteurs offer a personal cinematic approach and address their era within their originality. It will be emphasized that Suha Arin, as a creative documentary filmmaker who has left indelible marks on Turkish cinema and found recognition both in Turkey and internationally, did not turn his back on his society and era. The traces of his auteur identity will be explored to convey this.

1. A New Breath in Documentary Cinema: Suha Arin and Turkey in His Early Years

The 1960s are quite significant for the development of the documentary genre in Turkey. For the first time, faculty members from the Art History Department at Istanbul University focused consistently on the documentary genre, turning their texts and cameras towards Anatolian civilizations for the sake of documentary cinema. The leading figure in this team was Sabahattin Eyüboğlu. The first fruit of this approach was the film *Hitit Güneşi* (Hittite Sun), directed by Sabahattin Eyüboğlu and Mazhar Şevket İpşiroğlu in 1956. The film's winning of the Silver Bear for Best Short Film at the Berlin Film Festival marks an important milestone as Turkey's first international success in documentary cinema, giving it special significance in addition to its depth. Another film made with the same focus through the Eyüboğlu-İpşiroğlu collaboration, *Surname* (1959), is significant for depicting the rich structure of Anatolian culture, inspired by the miniatures in Nakkaş Osman's work of the same name. *Karanlıkta Renkler* (Colors in the Dark, 1959) and *Anadolu'da Roma Mozaikleri* (Roman Mosaics in Anatolia, 1960), which depict Anatolia's unique cultural history through Roman mosaics from the 2nd and 4th centuries AD found in Hatay, are also important documentaries created with the same purpose. Their final collaborative film, *Anadolu Yollarında* (On the Roads of Anatolia, 1960), focuses on many aspects of traditional Anatolian life. The film expertly addresses various elements, including details, artifacts, remains of beliefs hosted by Anatolia, and wedding rituals (Adalı, 1986: 105-107).

As Tansuğ has noted, the films of Sabahattin Eyüboğlu and Mazhar Şevket İpşiroğlu during this period introduced visual aesthetics and content-level innovations to the documentary genre in Turkey; these works became significant milestones in changing the perception of documentary cinema. It is noteworthy that almost all of these works are related to art history, social life in Anatolia, and archaeology (Tansuğ, 1973: 14). When carefully examining the content of the duo's films, similarities with the subjects focused on in Suha Arin's films are evident. Of course, while the films made by Eyüboğlu and İpşiroğlu differ significantly from Suha Arin's films in both content and style, traces of Arin's later works on Anatolian Civilizations and Anatolian culture can be found in these earlier works. Therefore, it can be said that a significant part of Arin's starting point as an auteur in Turkish documentary cinema is rooted in the films made by Sabahattin Eyüboğlu and Mazhar Şevket İpşiroğlu.

In the early years of his documentary filmmaking career, Arin worked as a scriptwriter at the Ministry of National Education Radio and Television Education Center. Following his scriptwriting work, he made his first film, *Trafik Emniyeti* (Traffic Safety, 1964), for this institution. Another film he made for this institution between 1962 and 1964 was *Başkent Ankara* (Capital City Ankara). These first two films are educational films that do not yet provide the cinematic flavor that Arin's later works would

develop (Adalı, 1986, p. 116). In 1965, Suha Arın went to the USA to receive cinema training. Although there were no significant advancements in documentary film production in Turkey during the same period, Lütfi Ömer Akad's *Tanrının Bağıışı Orman* (The Gift of God Forest, 1964) stands out as it marked the beginning of a new generation of filmmakers in Turkish cinema and paved the way for narrative cinema to produce films on a global scale. This film is notable when compared to the era's otherwise meager documentary productions in both qualitative and quantitative terms (Scognamillo, 2003, p. 226).

Suha Arın, after leaving his law studies midway, went to the USA to receive television training, following his brother Süreyya Arın, who had been invited by Voice of America. He stayed in the USA until 1973. While receiving television training there, he also worked at Capital Film Laboratories. Later, he served as a translator, announcer, and interviewer at Voice of America Radio, and in 1968, with the beginning of television broadcasting in Turkey, he became TRT's Washington correspondent. During this period, Arın reported on numerous news stories and mentioned that his most memorable excitement was announcing humanity's first footsteps on the Moon to Turkey in 1969 with his own voice (Arın, 1999). The years Arın spent in the USA were marked by rapid changes in Turkish social life, with significant transformations in the social structure. The agreement made between Germany and Turkey in 1961 allowed Turkish workers to migrate to Germany, which contributed to a reduction in the unemployment rate in Turkey by the mid-1960s. Additionally, the remittances sent by the migrants brought positive economic developments. By the end of this process, changes in consumption behavior began to emerge in Turkey. On one hand, positive developments in the industry through foreign capital aid, and on the other hand, an increase in the public's purchasing power led to a rise in consumption. However, these developments also laid the groundwork for problematic conditions that would arise later. The increase in consumption has caused the prices of almost everything to rise, signaling the onset of an economy increasingly dependent on external resources. As industrial advancements and the decline in agricultural production disrupted the balance of consumption, migration from rural areas to cities intensified significantly by the late 1960s. The first visible sign of this migration, which underscored changes in social life, was the deformation in urban living (Ahmad, 2009: 157-171).

On the other hand, the 1960s were marked by the increased diversity in multi-party politics, influenced by the relatively free atmosphere created by the 1961 Constitution. The Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP), established in 1961, aimed to secure the economic and legal rights of the working class in Turkey against capital. The party's newness and the advantage of not carrying the legal issues faced by previous parties with similar tendencies helped remove barriers to the expression and representation of large masses, enabling it to become the voice of student and worker movements in Turkey, echoing those happening worldwide (Şener, 2007, pp. 311-316). As mentioned, the 1960s were a time when student and worker movements gained momentum worldwide. In Turkey, this wave of protest was largely expressed through anti-American rhetoric, and soon, tensions between those supporting right-wing politics and those leaning toward the left began to escalate. By 1968, the student movement that started in France had spread across Europe, then to America, and eventually became a global phenomenon, resonating in Turkey as well. During this period, the ruling Justice Party in Turkey responded to the unrest by attempting to disperse it using opposing groups, while simultaneously, the left's electoral support began to decline. As this process unfolded, disappointment with the parliamentary system began to emerge in society, leading some who shared the same views to continue their struggle. On the other hand, a segment of the intellectuals, who lost faith and distanced themselves from the movement, came to believe that the future position of the left would be determined by military interventions. By the 1970s, political life in Turkey was no longer as moderate as it had been in the early 1960s. Political tensions in the country had intensified, and protests, particularly those concentrated in Istanbul, began to extend beyond legal boundaries. As the unrest escalated, the Chief of the General Staff at the time issued the March 12, 1971 memorandum, claiming that the principles of the Constitution were not being adhered to. Following the coup, a policy contrary to the liberal gains of the 1961 Constitution was pursued, leading to a wave of arrests. In the subsequent period, with the establishment of the State Security Courts, a military-influenced governance approach dominated Turkey until 1974 (Akşin, 2012, pp. 265-277).

The unrest and chaos in the political environment led to instability in social life. These years also saw an increase in the number of televisions in Turkey. Due to this and the limited number of producers who viewed cinema as an industry, film production declined in the 1960s, and public interest in cinema waned accordingly. Additionally, producers were unprepared for technical advancements, such as the transition to color film, and the rising costs of film production made them hesitant to reinvest cinema revenues back into the industry. This resulted in the end of the golden age of Turkish cinema, leading to a decline in both the quality and quantity of film production.

When Suha Arın returned to Turkey after studying in the United States, he encountered a cinema environment that had been worn down by social and economic challenges. Fictional cinema had already struggled to create a strong narrative language and lacked international recognition, while documentary cinema was almost nonexistent. Despite this tense atmosphere, it was during this period that Suha Arın began his work, which would bring a whole new dimension to documentary filmmaking.

1.1. Documentary Cinema Gains a Soul with Arın: The 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s

After completing his education in the United States, Arın came to Turkey and immediately applied to Ankara University in 1974 to share his knowledge and experiences with the younger generation. He served as a faculty member at the Faculty of Political Sciences' School of Press and Broadcasting for ten years. At the same time, he provided opportunities for his students to gain experience (Arın, 1999). Arın's early film works, while providing hints of the style he would follow in his later films, are considered less advanced in terms of aesthetics. His 1974 documentary *Silent Workers* for TRT addresses the issues faced by workers in rural areas without social security. By focusing on one of the fundamental social issues of the time, the film highlights Arın's identity as a responsible artist who did not turn a blind eye to the problems of his era. Another film made for

TRT, *After the Amnesty* (1974), focuses on the general amnesty declared in the year of the film and the criminals who were released under this amnesty, only to return to prison shortly afterward. In the film, Arın, who sought an interesting aesthetic approach both to prevent future issues for the prisoners and to adhere to ethical principles, completed the shots using only the shadows of the inmates. His dramatic lighting pushed the boundaries of the narrative possibilities of documentary cinema. The following year, Suha Arın produced two more documentary films, *Wells of Anxiety* (1975) and *A Home is Falling Apart* (1975). In *Wells of Anxiety*, he turns his camera to workers in Zonguldak who sustain their lives through mining. Considering that these documentaries were made for television, one might expect a documentary that includes views from responsible engineers, images of the mines, and information from officials about the operations. However, Arın does not hesitate to focus on the lived realities of the workers. The concept of "anxiety" in the title of *Wells of Anxiety* reflects the existential fears faced by miners living on the brink of death under harsh conditions, both for themselves and their families. A notable feature of the film is its pronounced social realist stance. The film, which can be seen as a silent scream of the miners who work under risky and sometimes illegal conditions, becomes one of the key symbols of Arın's humanistic approach.

A Home is Falling Apart narrates the process of redistributing children from an active orphanage in Ankara to various provinces of Anatolia as part of a project to convert the orphanage into a daycare center for the children of political figures. After the film was screened, the denial of the depicted issues by the Child Protection Agency and the subsequent decision to keep the orphanage as it was demonstrates the strength of Arın's documentary filmmaking and his competent narration. The fact that copies of these television documentaries have not been located is thought to be related to the limited archival awareness of the time, but it is also considered that Arın's bold narrative style and political stance may have played a role in this (Özgen, 2008, pp. 225-232).

The fact that the films discussed so far were made for television does not imply that they lack artistic quality. During the years when even narrative cinema experienced a period of stagnation, it is clear that the absence of documentary cinema works from cinema or festivals was not unusual. In these early films, Arın took on the responsibility of a documentary filmmaker by focusing on the oppressed segments of society. Confronted with a politically chaotic social structure, Arın concentrated on social issues during this initial period and provided early examples of the refined documentaries he would produce in the following years through these themes. However, in the subsequent years, the films Arın made differ thematically from these early documentaries. This transition in Arın's filmography reveals a conceptual shift from a straightforward approach to social issues to a documentary cinema approach focused on 'human and space'. This journey highlights a notable evolution in his work. The Türkiye Turing and Automobile Association (TTOK) and its founder, Çelik Gülersoy, play a significant role in Suha Arın's cinematic journey. Gülersoy aimed to introduce Turkey to the world through the cultural and artistic depth of Anatolia, and this orientation created an organic link with Arın's aspirations in documentary cinema. Films such as *From Hittites to Hittites* (1974), *The World of Midas* (1975), *Time in Safranbolu* (1976), and *The Two Seasons of Urartu* (1977), which are pivotal in Arın's career, were produced under the auspices of Çelik Gülersoy and TTOK (Adalı, 1986, p. 117). The portrayal of Turkey's historical and cultural characteristics through documentary cinema was, to some extent, achieved through collaboration between the bourgeoisie and artists. This makes Arın's films from this period particularly significant.

In this context, Arın's first work that explores human beings in spatial and cultural contexts is *From Hattians to Hittites* (1974). The film details the period of Hatti and Hittite civilizations, exploring the lives, cultures, and historical details of these two civilizations from the prehistoric era of Anatolia. By providing a detailed account of the Hattians' cultural, religious, architectural, and social legacy left to the region before the Hittites settled in Anatolia, the film offers viewers a significant opportunity to discover the rich and deep history of Anatolia. Another civilization narrative, *The World of Midas* (1975), is a documentary that explores the Phrygian Civilization, the era of King Midas, the daily lives of the Phrygians, and their interactions with other civilizations (Adalı, 1986, pp. 114-118). The common stylistic elements used in both documentaries are striking. The use of voice-over, music, and meticulous camera movements reflect an aesthetic that surpasses the documentary filmmaking standards of the period. In *The World of Midas*, the forward-panning movement in the opening segment and the unique harmony of the music are clear indicators of Arın's multifaceted approach to documentary cinema. Both films make use of camera techniques such as panning, tilting, zooming, and following. The mere use of the camera indicates the presence of a cinematic approach that goes beyond traditional documentary forms. In documentaries with such content, the primary tendency is to present the subject matter through the narration of experts, using basic shooting scales, and assembling relevant visuals mentioned by the experts through editing. However, Arın adopts a holistic approach in documentary cinema, similar to that in narrative cinema, moving away from conventional molds. This approach is evident in all of his films.

Another film by Arın that follows the "human and space" motif is *Time in Safranbolu* (1976). In this film, where historical Safranbolu houses take center stage, Arın clearly conveys the significance of these houses, which embody the spirit of time, through a bridge he creates between the past and the present. From the early years of his career, Arın infused his moral stance into his films. When the idea of making a film about Safranbolu emerged, he observed that the loss of identity experienced by the houses, neighborhoods, and Safranbolu as a whole deeply saddened him and influenced his approach to the documentary (Oktan, 2005, p. 125). In this documentary, which emphasizes the importance of preserving Safranbolu and its natural environment, the architectural structures of the houses are prominently featured. The film leads to the issuance of preservation decisions for Safranbolu. Additionally, Safranbolu's status is elevated as a cultural and economic value by opening up to both domestic and international tourism (Arın, 2008, p. 257).

Another noteworthy aspect of the film is that it competed in the short film category at the 14th Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival in 1977 and was selected as the best film in that category. There are two main reasons why this detail stands out. First, the fact that a documentary film competed in the competition category at Turkey's most significant film festival of that time

marked a shift from the perception that documentaries were only suitable for television. It signaled the beginning of attributing cinematic value to documentary filmmaking. Second, during these years, when Arın used his skilled language and contributed to changing the perception of documentaries, the documentary genre was still so marginalized that the competition category for documentaries was labeled "Best Short Film" rather than "Best Documentary." This indicates that while documentaries were beginning to be recognized as a genre worthy of film festivals, festival committees had not yet fully acknowledged the value of the documentary category. Nonetheless, Arın continued to produce documentaries, steadfast in his belief in their power in the cinematic environment.

In 1977, two more films were added to the Anatolian Civilizations series. The first of these is *Urartu'nun İki Mevsimi* (The Two Seasons of Urartu), and the second is *Likya'nın Sönmeyen Ateşi* (The Undying Fire of Lycia). These films depict the advancements and contributions of both civilizations, highlighting the rich cultural heritage of contemporary Turkey through the lens of Anatolian geography's past and present (Avcı, 2008, p. 219).

A few years later, *Tahtacı Fatma* (1979) became one of the principal examples of Suha Arın's work that transformed documentary filmmaking into art. In this film, those who experience the social issues firsthand play direct participant roles. This approach not only enhances the film's realistic impact but also integrates one of the key strengths of narrative cinema—identification—into documentary filmmaking. The film centers on the story of 12-year-old child laborer Fatma and starkly reveals the hardships faced by seasonal workers. Additionally, it places a strong emphasis on the theme of women. By featuring the semah performance of the Tahtacı people and using music intermittently in the background, Arın continues to highlight cultural values, as he has done in his other films. From the beginning of his cinematic journey, Arın has maintained his realistic portrayal of social issues, and this film is no exception. Technically, *Tahtacı Fatma* also exhibits notable differences. The director uses interviews as external voices, with a deliberate absence of synchronization between sound and image. This choice does not create a problem in terms of narrative coherence; rather, it strengthens the storytelling. All interviews are presented as external voices accompanying the images, and according to Arın, this approach serves as a much more effective formal element compared to traditional external voice usage (Çölgeçen, 2006, p. 165). The film is set in the living spaces of the woodworkers, in accordance with the spatial principles of the naturalistic tradition. Arın strives to capture images with minimal intervention and in as natural a manner as possible. By using the semah performance at both the beginning and end of the film, he traces the traces of narrative storytelling within documentary cinema. Generally avoiding close-up shots, the director prefers wide shots where the space stands out and the person appears as part of the space. However, in *Tahtacı Fatma*, there is a notable deviation from this preference. Arın sometimes uses head and face shots of the people he is telling the story of, creating a physical proximity between the audience and the subjects. Additionally, the film incorporates amor shots, a technique commonly used in narrative cinema, thus opening the door to new storytelling possibilities in documentary filmmaking. Moreover, besides amor shots, the film also includes shot-reverse shot techniques, demonstrating how the aesthetics of narrative cinema stretch the boundaries of documentary storytelling. In these amor and shot-reverse shot scenes, the element of continuity is also present. For instance, the scene where the woodworkers load logs onto a vehicle is filmed with careful attention to continuity from different angles. While this approach may seem to undermine the documentary principle of capturing the natural, the fact that none of the characters are actors and are performing their actual work, coupled with the director's choice to employ techniques from narrative cinema, suggests that the film maintains its documentary quality. Rather, it exhibits a multifaceted narrative approach.

By the 1980s, Suha Arın was supported by the Türkiye İş Bankası and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The chaotic environment of the 1970s was replaced by a society still grappling with the aftershocks of the September 12, 1980 coup; amid this tension, Suha Arın continued his documentary film production. His film *Kapalı Çarşı'da 40.000 Adım* (1979), made before the 1980 coup, showcases Arın's familiar style: a narrative voiceover adopting a story-like approach, appropriate music, a camera that moves right, left, forward, and backward, and the integration of people and space. The iconic Grand Bazaar, synonymous with Istanbul, is explored in the film through its cultural, commercial, and social dimensions. A few years later, his film *Dolmabahçe ve Atatürk* (1981) stands out as one of his first works following the September 12 coup. This film, which contains contextual significance, presents the Dolmabahçe Palace with flawless camera work and ends with the depiction of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's funeral procession leaving the palace (Aytekin, 2008, pp. 239-241).

Another film that provides one of the clearest answers to why Suha Arın should be considered an auteur in documentary cinema is *Kula'da Üç Gün* (1983). The film utilizes narrative patterns from the fictional film genre, adopting a holistic approach that includes similarities to Arın's other works, such as camera usage, voiceover, music, and narrative structure. The film depicts a traditional Kula wedding. During the three-day wedding rituals, the cultural and mental codes are conveyed with Arın's distinctive aesthetic. The film features a lack of synchronization between sound and image. While the visuals present the local wedding rituals, the sound discusses architectural elements. This creates a sense of two separate films within the same work for the viewer. The wedding depicted in the film is a staged event. Arın, aiming to capture the essence of a real wedding, chose to recreate all stages of the ceremony due to concerns that he might not achieve narrative coherence by documenting an actual wedding. The use of reenactment techniques in documentary filmmaking, which is frequently encountered today, reveals the unique value of the film and Arın in the context of Turkish documentary cinema of that period. The circular narrative, also seen in Arın's other films, is evident in *Kula'da Üç Gün*. The film begins with the wedding ceremony of a bride and groom and concludes with photos of the couple processed using an aging technique. Similar to *Tahtacı Fatma* (1979), *Kula'da Üç Gün* also addresses the role of women in societal life. In this film, while male actors are shown in public entertainment settings, women are depicted in more protected domestic spaces. The juxtaposition of men eating and enjoying themselves with women crying at a henna night creates a contrasting meaning and opens a discussion on gender roles. The film represents the most original example of Turkish documentary cinema up to that point. Arın, who masterfully utilizes nearly all

narrative possibilities of the fictional genre, reenacts a societal tradition with skill and authenticity. In the contrasts presented, he manages to maintain an objective stance rather than taking sides.

Camın Teri (1985) offers a literary depiction of reality through the voices of three young workers. The film, which exhibits a narrative style similar to the "Free Cinema" movement's documentary approach before it turned to fictional stories in the 1960s, portrays the life struggles and hopes of young glassworkers through the skillful use of cinematic elements. Arın's cinematic approach, emphasizing labor, humanity, space, and fundamentally, humanism, is evident in every frame of the film. Although the purpose of making the film was for use in the 50th Anniversary celebrations of Türkiye Şişe ve Cam Fabrikaları A.Ş., Arın diverges from this aim by focusing on the lives of three young workers at the factory (Adalı, 1986, p. 119). Suha Arın's fearless attitude in expressing his views is once again highlighted here. The film, which was intended to be a promotional piece for the sponsor, was removed from distribution by the same institution due to Arın's portrayal of a rebellion that the sponsors could not tolerate. The shift to a labor-centric narrative, a recurring theme in Arın's work, symbolizes his ongoing moral stance against the prevailing order.

Between 1985 and 1990, neo-liberal policies rose in Turkey. During the period of ANAP government's policies that accelerated free circulation, institutions such as the Banks Association and Emlak Bank sponsored Suha Arın's films (Aytekin, 2016, p. 208). During this time, Arın created the *Fırat Göl Olurken* (1985-1986) series. The film aims to archive, in an aesthetic manner, the places that will be submerged due to one of the major projects of the era, the Southeastern Anatolia Project. The film also addresses the significance of the Southeastern Anatolia Project, with Arın adding an artistic dimension to the film through his personal style (Avcı, 2008, p. 221-225). In 1986, Arın completed the film *Sisler Kovulunca* which focuses on the architecture of the Eastern Black Sea Region and the artisans in this area. The film opens with the local people's ritual called "sis kovma" (fog dispelling), and centers on houses constructed using different and region-specific building techniques.

Continuing his meticulous approach to issues of collective memory and cultural heritage, combined with his aesthetic sensibility, Suha Arın created a series on the life and works of Mimar Sinan titled *Dünya Durdukça... Mimar Sinan* (1988). This six-part series covers various works of Sinan. Following this, the film *Mimar Sinan'ın Anıları* (1989) was produced. Arın, who was careful to ensure the scientific accuracy of his films, also established the Mimar Sinan Research Center during that period. As a result of a comprehensive study on Mimar Sinan, he presented these films to the audience. In the 1990s, Arın began a new series titled *Türkiye'nin Kültür Hazineleri* (Cultural Treasures of Turkey). This series focuses on significant historical and architectural works, particularly emphasizing historic structures in Istanbul. The first film in this series is about the importance of the Topkapi Palace and Hagia Sophia. By 1996, Arın produced the film *Altın Kent İstanbul* (Golden City Istanbul), which highlights Istanbul's significance. Using the motif of gold, the film offers a multifaceted narrative from the founding of Istanbul to its current state, including historical artifacts, the gold market, and daily life (Çölgeçen, 2006, pp. 222-232). Emphasizing that documentary cinema, which he described as a way of life for himself, is located at the intersection of science and art (Arın, 1999), Arın's later documentaries generally focus on recent history and post-Republic Turkey. From his first film to the last films that marked the end of his career, Arın not only endowed the documentary genre with an artistic dimension but also maintains the title of the only auteur director in Turkish cinema for this genre.

2. Auteur Theory and Suha Arın's Cinema

Auteur Theory is a concept that developed in the mid-20th century, viewing the film director as the central creative force in the filmmaking process. The popularity of this theory was marked by figures such as André Bazin and Alexandre Astruc, and it generally emphasizes the director's ability to imprint a personal stamp on the film (Dekker & Gradoz, 2022, pp. 503-512). The works of directors included in the auteur theory are often labeled as "art films." This labeling began with Italian Neorealism and continued with the French New Wave in the late 1950s and 1960s, which significantly altered the course of cinema history. Key determinants of this approach include a preference for formal differences that challenge conventional narrative models, the rejection of identification elements through alienation, the abandonment of star actors, and the pursuit of a dissonance between sound and image. Certainly, various perspectives on auteur theory have emerged. For example, James Monaco uses the individual signatures that directors like Lewis Milestone, John Huston, Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, and Josef von Sternberg developed from film to film during Hollywood's Golden Age as criteria for calling them auteurs. He contrasts these directors with what he terms "craftsmen," who adhere to market-accepted criteria and use a formulaic approach to filmmaking. According to Monaco, Hitchcock, Hawks, Sternberg, Milestone, and Huston stand out because they display personal styles, making their designation as auteurs appropriate (Monaco, 2001, p. 284). Monaco's approach to auteurship, highlighting personal signatures as a key element, aligns well with the films of Suha Arın, as seen in the common language used across his various works. If "personal signature" is accepted as a crucial aspect of the auteur concept, Arın's cinema, in terms of its formal patterns, clearly meets this criterion. Additionally, Bordwell discusses art films in the context of auteurship, noting that such films often incorporate various analytical methods and narrative styles. Bordwell highlights how documentary realism can blend with personal perspectives shaped by cultural and psychological differences to emphasize a "multifaceted" realism (Bordwell, 2009, pp. 776-779). By adding this layer to Monaco's definition of auteurship, Bordwell suggests that the mental framework of the society in which a work is created can be displayed with a highly personal stance. Arın's film *Kula'da Üç Gün* (1983) can be examined within this context, as it explores a centuries-old local tradition, merging past and present through cultural elements.

Bazin argues that an auteur is someone who, regardless of the screenplay, always makes the same film, revolving around the same issues with different stories. He points out that an auteur does not change their approach to issues in terms of actions, characters, or moral judgments, and refers to Monaco's concept of "signature" as a "personal stamp" (Bazin, 2016, pp. 60-61). Wollen, on the other hand, approaches auteur theory from a structuralist perspective and addresses the misconception

that auteur directors are synonymous with European directors. He identifies two main tendencies in auteur criticism: one that focuses on thematic motifs and meanings, and another that emphasizes style and "mise en scène." This is related to the New Wave directors' dissatisfaction with the separation of screenwriter and director as distinct professions, which they saw as a product of the studio system. This dissatisfaction is reflected in their preference for distinguishing between the "auteur," who expresses their personal worldview, emotions, and thoughts through a unique style, and the "metteur en scène," who realizes the thoughts of others (Wollen, 2017, pp. 70-100).

It is not entirely incorrect to say that similar things have been expressed about auteur theory, despite the variety of perspectives on it. Regardless of the country and cinematic understanding, all theorists essentially agree that auteur directors not only personalize their storytelling but also infuse their films with a unique spirit that is difficult to replicate. The film should be viewed not as a commercial or cultural commodity but as an artistic expression of the director. One of the primary characteristics of an auteur is personal vision. The director's perspective is a fundamental element that shapes the artistic vision of the film. The geographical, economic, cultural, and political conditions of the director's environment, along with their personal experiences, form their worldview and artistic style. Of course, these "experiences" should not be reduced to merely the director recounting events from their own life and translating them to the screen. When the director's initially elusive character merges with their experiences, it creates a unique and recognizable signature in the work. This signifies the visibility of the director's personal vision. Another notable feature of the auteur director is the recurring themes and stylistic patterns in their films. The auteur organizes the narrative structure of their films around motifs and forms that are not identical but recognizable. The themes in the films reveal the director's personal interests and artistic priorities. With films that explore themes of humanity, time, and space in conjunction with humanism, Arın establishes the foundation of his narrative on a consistent ground. Another distinguishing characteristic of the auteur is their encompassing and creative control. The director is pivotal in all creative processes of the film. From the screenplay stage to set design, from actor direction to makeup, and from visual arrangement to editing, the director plays an active role and holds a decision-making position in every stage. While the director is not obligated to be an expert in all these areas, they possess enough knowledge to ensure that their personal views are implemented as desired across nearly all aspects. This creative control enables the director to shape their story with coherence.

In the context of auteur theory and the characteristics of auteur directors, Suha Arın's approach to documentary filmmaking reveals that he has reached a level of auteurship in Turkish documentary cinema that no other documentary filmmaker has achieved. Prioritizing an ethical standpoint, Arın has adhered to fundamental principles such as presenting truths, whether through dramatization or direct depiction, avoiding manipulation, and maintaining objectivity without compromise.

One of Suha Arın's significant impacts on the perception of documentary films in Turkey is his challenge to the view of documentaries merely as educational, informative, and monotonous television productions. Instead, Arın believes that a documentary should achieve a unique interpretation based on information and documents derived from reality. A key aspect of Arın's documentary approach is his ability to integrate his personal vision with scientific data. Arın transforms documentary filmmaking by emphasizing that it is fundamentally a medium for conveying information, where the substantial content should be distilled into a coherent message that aligns with universal values. According to Arın, the language of documentary is a whole in visual and auditory terms, and it should not only show but also interpret and be enriched with a personal perspective. He argues that a documentary does not require the storyteller to be active and the viewer to be passive. On the contrary, a documentary involves an active relationship, aiming to engage the viewer and provoke thought or action regarding the issues presented. For a documentary to possess cinematic qualities, it must accurately analyze elements of cinematic space and time (Özgen, 2008, pp. 230-232). Özgen's observations about Arın's cinema are supported by Çölgeçen, who describes Arın's documentaries as "innovative documentaries" compared to those made a generation earlier, highlighting their innovative and distinctive nature (Çölgeçen, 2006, p. 242).

In Suha Arın's cinema, themes revolve around human experience, time, space, culture, and humanism. In his films about Anatolian civilizations such as Urartian, Hittite, and Phrygian, viewers travel back in time and find themselves identifying with the people of these ancient cultures. This immersion stems from the director's deep connection with the content. Understanding people and culture requires significant empathy, and Arın's films open doors for viewers to develop this ability. The remarkable harmony between form and content in his films is a clear expression of Arın's competence in comprehensive and creative control. Seeking the aesthetics required by the entirety of the film and producing with the awareness that essence shapes form and form constitutes essence, Arın nourishes every shot in his scenes with this approach. From the locations and music used to the lighting, sound editing, and overall editing, he asserts his dominance throughout every stage of the film (Oktan, 2005, p. 82).

Suha Arın refers to the central theme of his films as the "spine." He enriches this spine with information gathered during the research phase and then brings it to life with his unique style (Aytekin, 2008, p. 249). According to Özgen, this process is crucial for Arın. It is vital for him to visualize the film in his mind before the shooting begins; he aims to see the film come to life in his imagination before it is physically produced. Arın believes that this approach is essential for conveying the intended message clearly and also aligns with Brecht's concept of engaging the audience critically rather than merely delivering a direct message (Özgen, 2008, pp. 228-233). Following the creation of the "spine," another key element of Arın's narrative is the principle of "evoking curiosity." Curiosity is one of the dominant emotions in all of Arın's films. From his early works for television to his sponsored civilization narratives and his masterpieces from his mastery period, he has consistently employed a dramaturgy that makes his subjects intriguing.

It can be said that one of the common points of Suha Arın's films is their political stance. In the context of auteur directors,

this concept is closely intertwined with the notion of "worldview," and it is a fundamental characteristic of Arın's cinema. From the 1960s, when he was actively involved, to the 1990s, when he completed his final films, Arın addressed the social issues in Turkey not through news or information dissemination, but with a sincere intention to voice his perspectives. He viewed documentary cinema not as a stepping stone or a fleeting interest but as the most important genre through which reality could be presented in its purest form (Adalı, 1986, p. 119). Through his films, with "human" as the focus of his personal signature, Arın became a unique example of how documentary cinema, once considered orphaned, could gain identity through his distinctive language.

Conclusion

The auteur theory emerged from the analysis of films by a select group of directors who worked outside the mainstream industry, starting with the Italian Neorealism movement post-World War II, and extending to influential movements such as the French New Wave, British Free Cinema, and Third Cinema, as well as American cinema. Following its intellectual expansion, the theory adopted a more restricted and sometimes experimental cinematic approach, thus continuing as a perspective confined to a specific type of film. Consequently, Turkish cinema, which has historically lagged behind in terms of narrative possibilities and understanding compared to world cinema, has mostly been excluded from auteur discussions, even among its narrative film directors—except for Ömer Kavur and perhaps some works by Metin Erksan. In this context, while it may seem difficult to recognize a representative of documentary cinema as an auteur, Suha Arın has undeniably pushed the boundaries of art cinema with his works.

Documentary cinema is rooted in reality; however, despite being the genre that most closely approximates reality, the filmmaker's signature continually reminds us that reality can be altered and transformed. The filmmaker cuts and shapes this reality to present it to the audience. In this context, the ethical issue becomes pertinent for the documentary filmmaker. Regardless of the methods used, or the form of storytelling and narrative choices made, the documentary filmmaker who remains objective despite the subject matter and social conditions, and who meets certain aesthetic criteria, brings their film closer to the realm of art cinema.

Suha Arın, Turkish documentary cinema has established himself as an auteur not only through his technical skills and aesthetic understanding but also through his profound empathy for human stories and sensitivity to social issues, which he weaves around specific themes in his films. His cinema has redefined the documentary genre as an art form and played a significant role in elevating its artistic qualities both in Turkey and internationally.

Arın's documentaries reflect his personal vision, passion for historical and cultural heritage, and sense of responsibility towards social issues. His works are shaped by in-depth field research and historical investigation, making them both valuable academic resources and artistic masterpieces. Documentaries like *Tahtacı Fatma*, *Safranbolu'da Zaman*, and *Kula'da Üç Gün* showcase local life and cultural values while also highlighting Arın's skill in addressing universal human emotions and experiences.

Suha Arın has transformed the perception of documentary cinema in Turkey, demonstrating that it is not merely an educational and informative tool but also an aesthetic and artistic form of expression. This approach has shifted the audience's view of documentary films and has contributed to the emergence of a dedicated following for the genre. Arın regards documentary cinema as an art form that takes its audience on an intellectual and emotional journey.

Another notable feature of Suha Arın's works is their result of deep and meticulous research. Each of his films is shaped by extensive fieldwork and detailed historical research, which makes them both valuable academic resources and artistic masterpieces. Arın's films also hold significant importance for social memory and cultural heritage. By documenting lifestyles, traditions, and processes of change across various regions in Turkey, his documentaries ensure that this knowledge is passed on to future generations. This narrative approach, which spans from the local to the universal, is a key indicator of his status as an auteur.

Suha Arın's contributions to documentary cinema and his auteur identity have expanded the boundaries of the genre and elevated its artistic value. His documentaries present innovative approaches that blend visual composition, sound use, editing, and narrative structure, going beyond traditional documentary forms to combine fictional cinema techniques with documentary realism. Arın has successfully created a strong connection with the audience by tracing the traces of storytelling in documentary cinema, offering a unique and impactful approach.

In conclusion, Suha Arın's auteur identity in documentary cinema highlights his significant contributions to Turkish documentary filmmaking. His unique narrative style, thematic diversity, and cinematic expertise have expanded the boundaries of documentary cinema and enhanced its artistic value. As an auteur in Turkish documentary cinema, Arın has played a crucial role in the development of the genre and has shifted the audience's perception of documentary films. His works will continue to be a valuable resource for anyone interested in and working on documentary cinema in the future.

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