

In Pursuit of Transcendence in Cinema: The Cinema of Eternal Now

Sinemada Aşkınlık Arayışı: Ebedi Şimdinin Sineması

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Abstract

The issue of time, which is one of the central themes of all arts, has quickly become the focus of cinema as well. Cinema shapes and reflects time in different ways. This leads to debates about slow and commercial cinema. Slow cinema is stagnant, slow, and uses long shots. Commercial cinema is fast, smooth, and uses close-ups. This study aims to reveal that this type of cinema tries to relate its central scenes to transcendence. This kind of search for transcendence is called eternal now or everlasting present in traditional thought. Therefore, this study generally seeks the equivalent of eternal now as a search for transcendence in cinema.. The moments in these scenes break away from all contexts, including the plot of the film, and directly contact the transcendent. This study proposes to conceptualize this search for transcendence, which is found in different films by different directors and genres, as the cinema of eternal now. The cinema of eternal now brings the audience into contact with the infinity within the moment and takes them to the intersection point of the mortal and the immortal, thus elevating them to the level of the transcendent and giving them a metaphysical experience.

Öz

Bütün sanatların en merkezi temalarından biri olan zaman meselesi sinemanın da hızlıca odak noktası haline gelmiştir. Sinema zamana hem şekil vererek hem de zaman üzerinde düşünceler üreterek onunla ilişkiye girer. Bu bağlamda yavaş – ticari sinema tartışmaları ortaya çıkmıştır. Tamamen hikâyenin duraksız bir şekilde akıp gitmesine odaklanan ticari sinemanın aksine yavaş sinema, zamanı durağan bir şekilde ele alan, hikâyeyi yavaşlatan, ölü zamanlara yer veren, genel planları kullanan sinemadır. Bu çalışma özellikle bu tür sinemanın merkez sahnelerinin aşkınlıkla ilişkiye girmeye çalıştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu türden bir aşkınlık arayışı geleneksel düşüncede an-ı daim, ya da ebedi şimdi olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Bu bakımdan bu çalışma genel olarak sinemada aşkınlık arayışı olarak ebedi şimdinin karşılığını aramaktadır. Nitekim yavaş-ticari sinema ayrımının ötesinde sinemanın metafiziğine karşılık gelen ve bu çalışmada ebedi şimdinin sineması olarak adlandırılan sahneler tespit edilebilmektedir. Bu sahnelerdeki anlar filmin olay örgüsü dahil olmak üzere bütün bağlamlardan kopup doğrudan aşkın olanla irtibata geçmektedir. Farklı türden farklı yönetmenlerin filmlerinde tespit edilen bu aşkınlık arayışını bu çalışma ebedi şimdinin sineması olarak kavramsallaştırmayı önermektedir. Ebedi şimdinin sineması seyircisini anın içindeki sonsuzlukla temasa geçirecek, fani ve baki olanın kesişim noktasına taşır, böylece onu aşkın olanın katına yükselterek ona metafizik bir tecrübe yaşatır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Yavaş Sinema, Ebedi Şimdi, Ticari Sinema, Aşkınlık, Zaman

Keywords

Slow Cinema, Eternal Now, Commercial Cinema, Transcendence, Time

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1. Introduction

Time is an inherently complex concept and phenomenon. Throughout history, numerous theories and ideas have been developed to understand and explain time, yet a definitive conclusion has remained elusive. While disciplines such as physics, chemistry, and mathematics provide concrete and measurable aspects of time, it becomes enigmatic when considering its relation to human existence. Therefore, both scientific and philosophical theories have emerged to explore and comprehend time, and the exploration of time continues to evolve.

Time, from sacred scriptures to epics, has been a subject of pursuit in all texts that have survived from ancient times to the present day, and it holds significant importance in various theories. The earliest systematic thoughts on time emerged in the ancient era. In ancient Greece, time was divided into two in mythological narratives. Chronology, which is called "Kronos" because it denotes time, is the opposite of chaos. This type of time is linear and measurable (Vernant and Naquet, 2000, p. 99-101). After "Kronos," which measures and characterizes movement, the concept of "Kairos" follows, representing the inner being of humans. Kairos is non-linear and signifies a unique state, hence distinct from measurable time (Anar, 1994, p. 4). In addition, there is the concept of "Aion," representing an external, objective reality that humans cannot intervene in. According to Plato, *Aion* is the opposite of measurable time and it encompasses the notions of infinity, eternity, and immortality. It is also attributed to God and used as a concept that encompasses all times (Aristo, 2013, p. 279).

When we look at these three concepts that we encounter in various cultures, we see that the first one represents the assumed objective reality of time, the second one represents the time perception shaped in the human mind, and the third one represents the notion of time belonging to a transcendent realm beyond human influence. The distinction created by these three concepts appears in various ancient and contemporary thoughts and philosophies. When we consider the perception of time in these three different forms, a hierarchical framework emerges: first, there is a time independent of human beings, and calendars are designed to measure this time. Second, there is a time that flows in accordance with the internal perception of individuals, accelerating or decelerating based on their psychological state. Finally, there is a time that corresponds to a transcendent realm beyond human existence and outside the realm of time. This last form of time is independent of human beings and operates according to its own internal dynamics. Humans can only attempt to establish a connection with it.

The conceptualization of time has been the subject of exploration for many philosophers and scientists throughout history. Due to limitations, we cannot delve deeply into these approaches, but each of them attempts to place time within the framework established. However, with the invention of cinema, a new challenge arises: How will time be represented cinematically? Unlike other art forms, cinema has the ability to directly manipulate time, allowing for time acceleration, deceleration, and jumping forwards or backwards. These different possibilities for the manipulation of time have given rise to various cinematic approaches. Concepts such as "slow cinema" and "transcendent cinema" have emerged, as will be explored in detail below. Therefore, when addressing the issue of time in cinema, it is necessary to consider both the inherent aspects of time itself and the possibilities of temporal manipulation within cinema. This confronts us with a vast body of literature and scholarly works. To stay true to the specific aim of this study and to pursue its claim, certain concepts that hold particular significance for this research will be selected and examined.

First and foremost, this study will seek to find the cinematic counterpart of the concept of the "eternal now" or "moment of eternity," which predates the invention of cinema and is found in all ancient cultures. As will be explored in detail below, this concept emphasizes the essence of the "moment" as the core of time and raises the question of its representation in cinematic time. Additionally, the issue of relativity in time becomes a direct concern when examining this concept. Furthermore, discussions of "slow cinema" and "fast cinema" revolve around the internal temporal aspects of cinema. Ultimately, through the analysis of these discussions, the following questions will be addressed: What does relative time correspond to in cinema? Are there manifestations of the eternal now or the moment of eternity in cinematic time? What kind of films represent such a cinematic understanding of time?

2. Conceptual Framework

As previously stated, the concept of the eternal now (or eternal present), known as "an-ı daim" in Turkish, can be found across various cultural beliefs and holds a central position in these systems of thought. This idea of the eternal now has its roots in ancient Indian beliefs and is a common element in all major religions. It is noteworthy that the concept of the eternal now is encountered not only in Abrahamic religions but also in Eastern Asian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Shintoism (Coomaraswamy, 2017). This idea also finds its place in Ancient Greece. According to Aristotle, there is no time; people follow objects through moments, and these moments are not dependent on time. On the contrary, time is known through these moments, and these moments exist outside of time (Aristotle, 2012, p. 15). This moment, called the "atomic present," cannot be divided. It is not a part of the line but a boundary point. It connects the past and the future, determines the limits of both, yet it does not belong to either the past or the future (Aristotle, 2012).

According to Augustine, this "moment" is at the center. In fact, since the future has not yet happened and the past has vanished, the only reality is the "present." Time itself consists of these moments. The past and the future, on the other hand, are illusions that arise from the mental activities of individuals (Augustine, 2010).

Islamic mysticism, known as Sufism, also encompasses a similar perception of time. In Sufism, the moment is merged with the concept of unity, and the moment where eternity and pre-eternity converge is referred to as "el-anü'd-daim" or the eternal now. According to Ibn al-Arabi, the categories of time outside of this moment are valid only for changing beings, thus they are relative (Uludağ, 1998, p. 101).

The "eternal now," or what we prefer to call the "eternal now" in this study, is a moment that encompasses all times, where all human manifestations exist simultaneously in the transcendent realm, even though it is impossible from the human perspective. It is highly significant for all ancient cultures, and each culture, be it Hindu, Hebrew, or Islamic, has its own practices to reach this eternal moment. For instance, in Buddhism, the term "Nimesa," which translates to "people of the moment," refers to one of the names of God and aligns with the Islamic concept of the authentic Sufi as the "child of time," synonymous with "ibnu'l waqt." Experiencing such a moment is considered the highest experience of humanity, requiring great effort and long-term practice (Coomaraswamy, 2017).

When we question the possibility of this understanding in terms of physical reality, we encounter the theory of relativity. The theory of relativity, proposed by Einstein in 1915, challenges Newton's understanding of the universe's fixed laws by considering matter and energy as interchangeable

entities. Accordingly, it suggests that spacetime can be curved based on the distribution of mass and energy (Hawking, 1988, p. 41-42). This theory asserts that matter and energy, as well as space and time, are interconnected, presenting a dynamic and organic universe. As a result, the thesis of the relativity of time gains direct legitimacy. According to this theory, each person has their subjective time, there is no universal clock, and if one were to travel near the speed of light, upon returning to Earth after a few years of travel, one could witness the passing of several hundred years on our planet (Davies, 1983, p. 120-121). This theory, which establishes a scientific basis for the understanding that time in the realm of God in ancient cultures is not equal to human time, also provides a physical possibility for the concept of the eternal now. Accordingly, even if all times were of millions of years in length, they could be compressed into a single moment or be expansive enough to encompass all times. Thus, in this concept referred to as the eternal now, all the secrets of the universe can be found.

When we question the cinematic counterpart of this concept, we encounter the concept of "slow cinema."² This conceptualization encompasses many debates that we cannot delve into here due to limitations. In a more concise manner, slow cinema stands out as a style where slowness is functionally used both in form and content, characterized by long takes, unfocused narratives, and a focus on everyday life, as summarized in Çağlayan's study (2014). In this regard, it can also be described with adjectives such as poetic, contemplative, spiritual, and transcendental. The aesthetic experience offered by slow cinema has three underlying principles due to its critical and aesthetic historical context: nostalgia, absurd comedy, and boredom. These principles find various manifestations in films. Thus, slow cinema is a resurgence of modernist cinema movements with its unique production, distribution, and exhibition networks. In terms of being a historical and critical discourse, it comes very close to art cinema. Therefore, the pioneering examples of slow cinema can be found in Andy Warhol's "Empire" (1964), Carl Theodor Dreyer's "Ordet" (1955), and Luchino Visconti's "La Terra Trema" (1948). Other examples of slow cinema can be found in films by directors such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Béla Tarr, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Robert Bresson, Theo Angelopoulos, Abbas Kiarostami, Aleksandr Sokurov, Andrei Zvyagintsev, and Semih Kaplanoğlu (p. 236-243).

Paul Schrader introduces a different approach to the ongoing discussions and studies of slow cinema with his work "Transcendental Style in Film" (2017). According to Schrader, directors Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer, despite belonging to different cultures, converge in the realm of transcendental style. This style represents a three-fold progression of transcendence. It suggests that while films may not necessarily deal with religious subjects, they explore the transcendent, the sacred, or the divine. Unlike conventional religious films that attempt to bring the sacred down

² Viewed from a broader perspective beyond the confines of cinema, the concept of "slow" can be regarded as a stance developed in response to the rapid perception of modern times. In this study, where we are primarily concerned with its metaphysical aspect, this concept signifies a resistance against the acceleration of societal life and the rapid mechanisms driven by global capital. As indicated, the resistance against accelerated time is not confined solely to cinematic endeavors. As highlighted by Yüksel, Haluk, and others (2016), particularly after the widespread prevalence of the "fast" culture in the post-1980 era, the acceleration of time has given rise to the emergence of the "slow" movement. This movement represents a counteraction to the modernity's emphasis on speed and the rapid nature and philosophy characterizing the contemporary world. Developed as a response to the modern fixation on speed, "Slow Movement" aims to counter the impact of the rapid pace of life, especially following the significant propagation of the "fast" culture in the aftermath of the 1980s. It challenges the dominance of speed by advocating for the integration of slowness in various aspects such as slow food, slow cities, slow fashion, slow journalism, slow media, and slow travel.

to the level of the audience (p. 170-172), films with a transcendental style aim to elevate the audience to the level of the sacred. These films demonstrate that the transcendent cannot be experienced directly and instead use formal elements to convey this inexpressible nature. They lead viewers to a point where they find expression within a larger form through the narrative, plot, and resulting emotional effects (p. 54).

The three steps of the transcendental style are as follows: First, the mundane enters the scene. The mundane is presented in a straightforward and unremarkable manner, emphasizing its most mundane aspects. Character identification is discouraged, and simplicity is preferred in framing, *mise-en-scène*, and editing. However, as the film progresses, certain emotions awaken in the viewer, and the audience experiences tension due to the discrepancy between what they see and what they feel. This tension leads them to the second stage of the transcendental style: the conflict. This conflict intensifies continuously and escalates until a decisive action is reached. The decisive action occurs unexpectedly and miraculously. At this point, the viewer is on the verge of connecting with the transcendent. If the viewer accepts and finds the scene valid and meaningful, they crave more. They accept the intellectual framework that allows for such conflicts. This means creating a space for deep, irrational, and supernatural feelings in an otherwise soulless and emotionless environment. Schrader refers to this as transcendence (p.52). According to Schrader, the tension during the conflict stage is frozen and presented to the viewer. Thus, it is emphasized that such conflicts cannot be resolved with earthly logic and human emotions alone. Another realm is necessary for these contradictions to coexist (p.90). This leads to the final stage: balance. In this stage, the conflict remains unresolved, but the viewer is transported to the realm where all these paradoxes can coexist, the realm of transcendence. Here, the question arises as to whether the viewer will accept this realm of transcendence. Ultimately, the director's invitation is essentially an invitation to this realm of transcendence.

Schrader, in the preface to the subsequent edition of his work, partially revises his theory mentioned above. According to this revision, Schrader acknowledges that he made a mistake by considering transcendental style as an independent phenomenon. He suggests that transcendental style is a part of post-war neorealism, which, in Gilles Deleuze's terms, is a component of time-image (1998). This cinematic approach shifts its focus from movement to image and critically examines the changes in the image's temporality. With this revision, Schrader states that transcendental style has transformed into a multifaceted serpent within the realm of slow cinema. He argues that as films move away from the narrative core that defines their essence, they diverge in three different directions, and these directions lead to dead ends. These directions are the surveillance camera, the art gallery, and the mandala (Schrader, 2018).

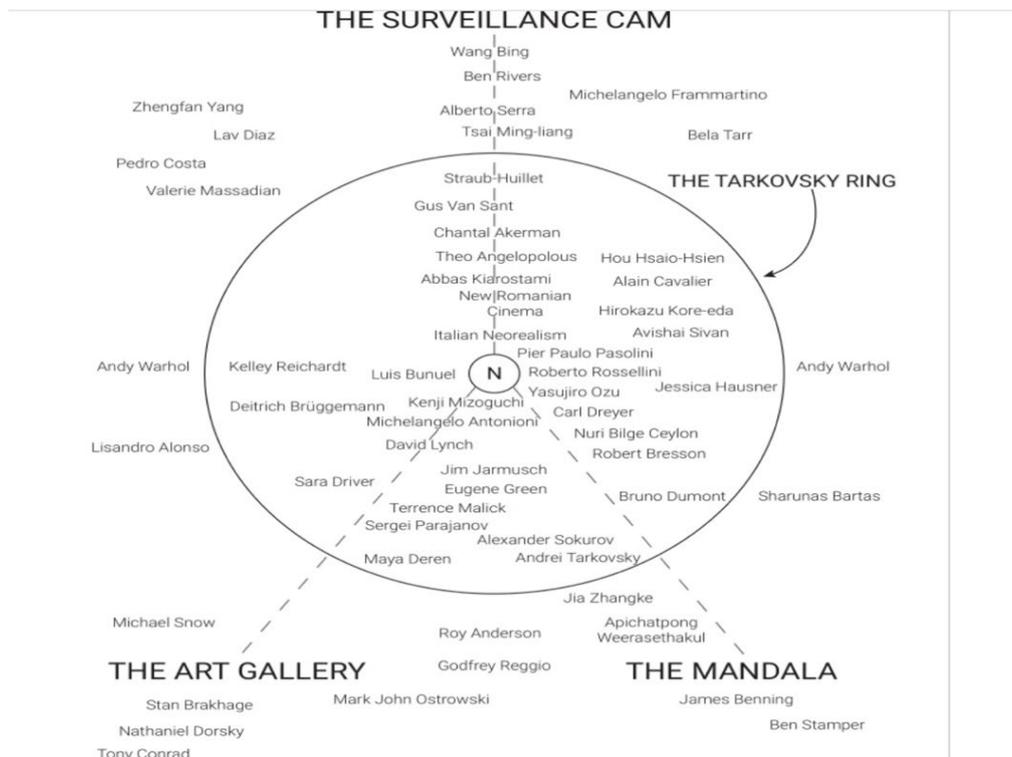


Figure 1: Schrader's diagram of slow cinema (Schrader, 2018)

Although Schrader later revised his approach, the presentation of the "frozen conflict to the audience" in his work can be seen as a quest for the eternal now in cinema. However, Schrader grounds this concept in storytelling. The other approaches to cinema, including Schrader's, generally analyze films through the lens of their overarching narratives and treat "moments" as parts of those narratives. While this study follows a similar path, it emphasizes the need to interpret the relevant films not primarily through their stories but through the "moment of eternity" mentioned above.

3. Method

It is evident that using a standalone method for this study, which proposes a new conceptualization, is quite challenging. Therefore, this study will construct its own conceptual framework based on the concepts related to the method used by Schrader in his work. It can be observed that the study employs a mixed method, including frame-by-frame film analysis, descriptive film analysis, and partial utilization of content analysis. However, instead of strictly adhering to a single method, the study will construct its conceptualization through the exploration of concepts. This study proposes the "cinema of eternal now" as an alternative to the conceptualizations of slow cinema, transcendental style, and others. This conceptualization does not negate slow cinema or transcendental style but offers a more specific and distinctive approach in comparison. Accordingly, films labeled as slow cinema can be categorized not based on their narratives but on certain moments they contain, which are the "moments of eternal now." In other words, it can be understood as an approach in cinema that emphasizes the significance of capturing and presenting moments that evoke a sense of timelessness or the eternal now. Instead of being driven by traditional narrative structures, this concept suggests that films can be analyzed and appreciated based on the powerful moments they encapsulate, which transcend the linear progression of time.

4. The "Eternal Now" in Cinema or Cinema of the Eternal Now

As mentioned above, the concept of the eternal now finds resonance in all cultures. It has been explored in various philosophical, religious, and literary works, where the idea of an eternal moment is depicted. A poet expresses it as follows: "Today, tomorrow, and yesterday, all three are the same, an eternal moment" (Coomaraswamy, 2022, p. 120). In our poetry, this moment is described by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar as "a unified, vast flow of an unbreakable moment" (2011, p. 19). Due to limitations, we cannot provide more quotations, but such references are quite abundant in the realms of eternity, art, religion, and cultural life. What then is the cinematic equivalent of this central concept?

According to this study dedicated to answering that question, the film styles referred to as slow cinema, art cinema, transcendental cinema, contemplative cinema, and others, all contain moments belonging to the eternal now, and these moments are at the core of these films. Drawing on Kiarostami, if the viewers are moved by something in a film, it is merely a "moment"; the created special moment is not the film itself (Khodaei, 2008). Our conceptualization of the cinema of the eternal now argues that these moments constitute the essence of these films or are created by directors who prioritize these moments in their films. Moreover, it claims that these moments possess an independent film language and understanding within themselves.

This study alone may not be sufficient to provide a comprehensive list of films and directors belonging to the cinema of the eternal now as we have defined it. However, if we refer to Çağlayan's list (2014), it can be argued that all the directors listed, such as Tarkovsky, Tarr, Kieslowski, Ceylan, Kaplanoğlu, Dreyer, Ozu, are part of the cinema of the eternal now. These films are all constructed around specific moments, devoid of narrative value, and these moments exist within the filmic text as references or invitations to eternity, as cinematic representations of dead time. Furthermore, these moments contain many common elements that point towards a transcendent, shared context.

In this sense, these directors, consciously or instinctively, have embarked on the timeless pursuit of humanity's ancient struggle to reach the "eternal now," to freeze time, to transcend into timelessness, or to exist within an eternal moment, or at least to experience a sense of eternity. As a result, time flows slowly in such films, almost inclined to come to a halt. These moments are the outcome of the directors' efforts to experience the eternal now and convey it to the audience. This is where the transcendental experience mentioned by Schrader comes into play. This experience, which in ancient cultures required various rituals, long periods of seclusion, and bodily practices, demands more "patience" from the directors and the audience. These films can be quite tedious for those who lack this patience. However, this tedium is not the distinguishing feature or unique element of these films. In this context, the question arises as to what sets the cinema of the eternal now apart from others.

5. The Cinema of Eternal Now and the Other Cinemas

Unlike the debates surrounding slow cinema or art cinema versus commercial cinema, according to the claim of this study, a classification can be made based on the intensity with which it carries the moments referred to as the eternal now in the Cinema of Eternal Now and others. From this perspective, there is an intersection between slow cinema, art cinema, or Schrader's transcendental style and the Cinema of Eternal Now. In fact, the Cinema of Eternal Now is the cinema of the "perpetual moment" displayed in scenes that share common characteristics among globally recognized directors, particularly those known for their art films. However, it is important

to reiterate that the Cinema of Eternal Now does not exclude commercial films or other film genres, acknowledging that moments belonging to the eternal now can be found in each of them. This classification is based on intensity.

Indeed, the experience of the perpetual present, mentioned in this study, is an experience that most individuals have encountered to some extent in their lives, while some have ignored it and others have aspired to it. Similarly, it is quite difficult for films, regardless of their genre, to avoid this type of experience. These moments have been stretched into human life, and any reference to life also implies a reference to these moments, to some extent.

In this context, as we frequently emphasize, the cinema of the eternal now is the cinema of moments. While it is more commonly found in films described as slow or transcendental cinema, these moments can be encountered in all films. However, as the intensity of action decreases, and with it the importance and the opportunity to grasp its intrinsic value, the value and scope of the moment diminish. Yet, it should be noted that the moment encompasses action; the moment aspires to be a condensed version of all actions. Otherwise, the moment would be nothingness, which is physically impossible since it contains nothing. The sense of monotony in the moment arises not from the absence of anything but from the uncertainty of what should be followed. Therefore, just as in films, in real life as well, those who have cultivated their souls do not discriminate among moments and perceive each moment as equally important. The directors of the Cinema of Eternal Now strive to eliminate the inequality between moments every time they turn their cameras towards them. In fact, this is a sacred gaze, an imitation of the understanding that "in the eyes of God, all moments are equal, there is no hierarchy of importance, and they have all occurred within a single point." The Cinema of Eternal Now attempts to bring this point, this moment, and this sacred knowledge to the silver screen. In this context, moments are both equal and hidden within each other. However, because the potential power found in moments of action complicates the possibility of experiencing them, the directors of the Cinema of Eternal Now prefer tranquility over movement. Indeed, the value and scope of the moment can be more appreciated within tranquility.

In this context, it is necessary to emphasize Schrader's criticism of "slow cinema" as a "dead end" and his subsequent characterization of it as a person entering a room and waiting for ten minutes, despite being a theorist of the transcendental style and later referring to it in a broader context. Schrader judges this type of cinema based on its slowness. He also claims that these films emerge from poverty in underdeveloped countries and argues that they have reached their end (2017). At this point, Schrader's analogy with a room directly recalls Pascal's quote, "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone" (2019). As Pascal also points out, slowing down time and contemplation of the depth within the moment is an action that enriches and deepens individuals in every aspect. Considering Virilio's conceptualization of the era of speed and its drawbacks (2019), the freezing of time in slow cinema or the cinema of eternal now and the attempt to create a hollow that encompasses all moments within the present also become an effort embedded in the future of humanity. Perhaps instead of conforming to the fast pace of life, which generates destructive inventions every day and rapidly propels humanity towards its own demise, films should slow it down, making it more controlled and thoughtful. Isn't that the primary duty of art? In this context, the Cinema of Eternal Now is a conscious or unconscious intellectual task, pointing to a depth that people may not know about themselves but need to know.

At this point, it recalls the exclusion of non-narrative moments as "dead time" in mainstream cinema. Dead times refer to moments that do not contribute to advancing the story and are considered unusable in commercial cinema. However, as mentioned above, there are doors in every moment of human life that led to all other moments, and the so-called dead times can encompass all other times. Ancient cultures, guided by this knowledge, aimed to reach the eternal now, and in cinema, directors who wanted to delve deeper into the underlying fabric of the narrative, capturing moments that are "compressed" but not tense, and encompassing the narrative itself, turned towards what we call the literary present cinema. Accordingly, a seemingly non-narrative moment can expand backward and forward, containing both the story of the film and the story of the entire universe.



Figure 2: Appearance of the eternal now.

Similarly, commercial cinema tends to prefer the point of view (POV) of characters as the perspective for tracking the narrative. Directors often choose the characters' perspectives as the camera angles since stories are followed through the viewpoints of the characters. However, in the cinema of the eternal now, ownerless perspectives, where the camera does not represent any specific character, are preferred. Especially in scenes belonging to the eternal now, in the moments of the eternal now, the camera does not look through the eyes of any character. Instead, it is positioned as the eye of transcendence, representing the divine gaze. Infinity or a moment that leads to infinity can only be contemplated through a sacred gaze. Therefore, in scenes where this eternal moment is presented, the camera is positioned in a way that humans cannot occupy, taking the place of the transcendent. Camera movements also support this positioning. In the cinema of the eternal now, continuous shots are often used in scenes that present the eternal moments.

The use of continuous shots, which are uninterrupted, corresponds to a form of observing all of God's creations without interruption. Indeed, no human eye can continuously follow objects without interruption. In the cinema of the eternal now, the director seeks transcendence in the "dead moments" that humans have abandoned by employing the perspective that could belong to God through the divine act of continuous observation. In ancient cultures as well, transcendence is spread across every moment, and there is no moment that is not divine. According to Ibn Arabi, an Islamic scholar, the universe is constantly being recreated in every moment (2017). This constant recreation signifies that every moment brings forth something new eternally. Therefore, one who dominates a moment also dominates all moments and all creations. In this sense, the director of the cinema of the eternal now presents the uninterrupted flow,

through a divine perspective, during the dead moments, inviting the audience to a divine experience, to instantly witness all the mysteries of the universe. The spectator who contemplates this transcendence is transported to the eternal realm carried by this moment and even if only for an instant, finds the opportunity to gaze into the eyes of eternity. This familiarity becomes an elevating event for the spectator, although it remains unspoken, assisting them in discovering their hidden powers and grasping their place in infinity. In this sense, it is highly enlightening. In this experience, the habitual inclination of humanity to follow events and the cause-effect relationships, which are the fundamental principles of commercial cinema, fade away, and suddenly, without being bound by all the superficial factors tied to their existence, humans sense their own existence beyond and independent from them. This sensation implies the momentary disappearance of boundaries between the divine and the human, and thus, humans perceive the divine existence that can never be expressed in words since they are subjected to the same limits.

In a comprehensive view, the Cinema of the Eternal Now consists of eternal moments, excluding narrative coherence, cause-effect relationships, and all external elements, setting it apart from commercial cinema. Furthermore, the cinema of the eternal now, like art cinema, disregards narrative coherence and other elements, detached and taken from life beyond all contexts, encompassing everything, outside all temporal frameworks yet encompassing them all, consisting of "eternal moments."

6. The Exclusive Elements of the Cinema of the Eternal Now

First and foremost, as mentioned above, while there are some commonalities in the cinematography and narrative structure of these directors' films, the main and enduring commonality lies in the feeling evoked by these scenes, which is the fundamental characteristic of the cinema of the eternal now: the sense of infinity. To create this feeling, certain elements have been primarily employed, and these elements are shared in many films. These elements include wind, still or flowing water, rain, sunset or sunrise, lightning, mist, and fire. These elements have been used as symbols of transcendence and representations of the divine in ancient religions and cultures even before their incorporation into these films.

One of the foremost elements among them is "wind." The very nature of wind, with its source being uncertain, already represents transcendence in and of itself. It frequently appears in ancient religions and philosophies in this sense. First and foremost, the human soul is considered the breath of God, a kind of activity of the wind. According to the Bible, the Noah's Flood ended with a wind (Genesis: 1). Moses divided the sea with a wind (Exodus: 10). Quails were sent to the Israelites with a wind (Numbers: 31). God gave power to the wind (Psalm: 26). No one has power over the wind (Ecclesiastes: 8). The wind will sweep them away (Isaiah: 13). Similar narratives exist in the Qur'an as well. Allah sent a wind to destroy a people (Surah al-Ahzab: 9). Allah sends winds as glad tidings of His mercy (Surah al-A'raf: 57). The wind is under the command of the Lord (Surah al-Hijr: 46). Numerous similar examples can be found in both religious texts and eternal texts. In all these texts, the wind is seen as a representation of transcendence.

Similarly, the other mentioned elements such as flowing water, lakes, and seas are frequently encountered in these films. The depiction of waves pouring into the sea, likening it to a fountain, is a metaphor often used in relevant ancient texts to illustrate the individual's position within a transcendent context (Coomaraswamy, 2022, p. 121). In these films, the human subject is also placed within the same transcendent context.

Similarly, the setting sun signifies human vulnerability within this transcendent context and is frequently referenced in relevant texts. In films of this genre, the setting sun is used in a similar context. However, providing detailed examples of these elements through films would require a more extensive and comprehensive study, approaching the volume of a book. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, we will focus on the example of wind.

When selecting these examples, it is important to note that these moments are not instantaneous flashes, such as "lightning," detached from the story of the films, but rather momentary manifestations of infinity. According to the claim of this study, the cinema of the eternal now is composed of these moments, rather than narratives, styles, or plots. Indeed, "enlightenment" is an instantaneous experience. As Coomaraswamy extensively discusses, it is a miraculous moment, and in ancient cultures, those who experience this moment of truth surpass time and live all moments at once. This is the highest state that human beings can experience. At this point, the human, who is the "son of time" (ibnül vakt), becomes the "father of time" (ebül vakt) (2022). Filmmakers of this genre seek this kind of experience in cinema. Even if it is brief, this experience is unparalleled in terms of transcendent significance and the highest emotion that human beings can attain. Therefore, one of the greatest aspirations for human beings, both physically and metaphysically, is to transcend or stop time. In this regard, it can be said that the ancient quest for immortality, which has been carried on since the Epic of Gilgamesh, continues in both cinema and science. The cinema of the eternal now is the most intense representation of this quest. Therefore, to identify the characteristics of this genre, it is necessary to examine the films of these filmmakers, who are exclusively the directors of the cinema of the eternal now, and the common elements in the scenes of eternal now claimed to be present in these films. One of these common elements is wind.

6.1. The Gateway to Transcendence in the Cinema of the Eternal Now: Wind

Wind, as one of the elements of the cinema of the eternal now, is frequently encountered in many films that can be considered at the core of this genre. Due to the limitations of this article format, we will briefly provide some examples and offer brief interpretations. Yasujiro Ozu, who can be regarded as one of the central directors of the cinema of the eternal now, presents his films as a sequence of eternal moments. However, certain moments particularly showcase the exclusive characteristics defined earlier for the cinema of the eternal now. Therefore, it is appropriate to search for the presence of wind in his films, considering it as one of the central representations of the eternal now cinema. Ozu incorporates the use of wind alongside the other elements of the cinema of the eternal now in many of his films.

In Ozu's film "Tokyo Story" (1953), frequent use of wind can be observed in the manner we have defined. One of the earliest instances of such usage can be seen in a transition between two scenes at the sixth minute of the film. The first frame shows smoke emanating from factory chimneys spreading in the wind. The second frame depicts tree branches swaying in the wind at a station. Both frames are shot in a wide angle, with indistinct human figures. In one of the subsequent frames, clothes are shown swaying in the wind on a clothesline. The wind's invisible presence becomes a powerful symbol of the ungraspable nature of time and the elusive nature of the eternal present.

These frames, at first glance, can be seen as eternal now moments that are completely independent of the film's narrative but allude to something greater. In the first frame, the factory smoke emerges from the chimney but blends into the unknown. This metaphor can be interpreted as a reference to both the transience and fragility of human existence. Despite having a known origin, humans are essentially eternally uncertain. The wind represents this uncertainty, the symbol of what lies beyond the known times. Its direction is unclear, blowing from unknown origins to unknown destinations. This perfectly aligns with the notion of transcendence. In this realm where words lose their power, the wind's interaction with objects conveys a sense of eternity within human transience. A similar occurrence of smoke is witnessed at the end of the film. This time, the smoke emanates from a train's chimney, dispersed by the wind, followed by the shapes drawn by smoke coming out of a censer in a house. All of these instances by emphasizing the intersection between the transient human experience and the infinite, invites us to ponder the mysteries of life and reflect upon our place in the vastness of existence. These are demonstrations of the eternal now moments we describe as the cinema of the eternal now.



Figure 3: A Glimpse of the Eternal Now in *Tokyo Story*

In “Ordet” (1955), another central filmmaker of the cinema of the eternal now, Carl Theodor Dreyer, utilizes the motif of wind, similar to Ozu's films. We witness the presence of wind right at the beginning of the film, as we see clothes swaying in the wind outside. This moment aligns perfectly with the depiction of the eternal now seen in Shape 4, as discussed in the previous section. Furthermore, just like in Ozu's films, we observe the dispersal of smoke from the roof of



Figure 4: A Glimpse of the Eternal Now in *Tokyo Story*

a house, carried away by the wind. Immediately following this, the character Johannes, who proclaims himself as the messiah, delivers his sermon accompanied by the howling wind. Regardless of the film's narrative and character dialogues, the use of wind in this manner represents one of the moments belonging to the eternal now and serves as the eternal essence of cinema.



Figure 5: A glimpse of the eternal now in Dreyer's film *Ordet*.

In Bela Tarr's film "The Turin Horse" (2011), the use of wind as a central character can be considered a complete embodiment of the eternal now. Throughout the film, the wind relentlessly sweeps away people, smoke, and everything in its path. This wind, whose origin and destination are unknown, depicts the frailty of humanity dressed in the garment of eternity within the ocean of transcendence. As the viewer witnesses this moment, they simultaneously touch their own mortality and the infinitude within themselves. This encounter engenders a profound sense of helplessness, while also perceiving the flickering light of transcendent love in the depths of this despair. This paradox can be regarded as the most sublime human sensibility.

By presenting these contrasting elements, Bela Tarr invites the audience to reflect on the human condition and contemplate the interplay between mortality and the eternal. The use of the wind as a symbolic element amplifies these existential themes, inviting viewers to engage with the film on a deeper level and explore their own perceptions of the sublime and the transcendent.



Figure 6: A glimpse of the eternal now in Bela Tarr's film "The Turin Horse"

Andrey Tarkovsky, another director who can be considered as part of the cinema of eternal now, also frequently utilizes the use of wind in his films. In "Mirror" (1975), there is a notable example where the character embarks on a journey and suddenly gets caught in the wind. In this moment, the individual becomes lost in uncertainty, symbolizing the human experience of being adrift in the unknown.

In the final scene of the film "Nostalgia," the wind continually extinguishing the candle represents the struggle of the individual, who is attempting to establish a connection with eternity within the context of transcendence. The wind, in this context, symbolizes the challenges and obstacles that one encounters in their pursuit of the eternal. It emphasizes the elusive nature of the sublime and the constant struggle to establish a connection with something beyond the temporal realm.

Using wind, Tarkovsky creates a visual and metaphorical representation of the human condition, evoking feelings of uncertainty, longing, and the search for meaning. The wind serves as a reminder of the impermanence of life and the ever-present tension between mortality and the desire for something eternal. It adds depth and complexity to the narrative, inviting viewers to contemplate existential themes and their own relationship with the infinite.



Figure 7: A glimpse of the eternal now in Tarkovsky's *Mirror*.

In Angelopoulos' *"The Weeping Meadow"* (2005), the scene where people play music in the flying sheets is an example of the eternal now. Due to limitations, we cannot include more frames, but it can be said that similar usage is observed in other films by the same director.

Another director who can be considered as part of the cinema of the eternal now is Nuri Bilge Ceylan, whose films frequently feature scenes of the eternal now. Among them, those related to the wind hold a significant place. Ceylan's statements (2019) such as "I am just following my instincts," "I want to make cinema about the uncontrollable aspects of life," "I want to make films about nothing and everything about life" perfectly describe the cinema of the eternal now. The scenes of the eternal now that constitute this cinema are both about nothing and about life itself.

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Figure 8: A glimpse of the eternal now in Ceylan's *The Wild Pear Tree*

From all these examples, it can be argued that when approached with this new method we have presented, the cinema genre previously conceptualized as slow cinema, art cinema, mystical cinema, or contemplative cinema, is formed from certain moments, and the directors aim to

establish a connection with transcendence in these moments and convey this connection to the audience. This is the main proposition of this study. In festivals like Sufi Cinema and the Festival of Transcendence, the attempt is essentially to establish a connection that can be reached through this transcendence. Indeed, in all these examples and in other eternal now scene examples that we couldn't include here due to limitations, the directors have utilized wide shots, preferred a divine perspective, and attempted to penetrate from dead time to eternal moments. The experience of the eternal now requires solitude, contemplation of the universe and the relationship with God, detachment from the flow of life based on stories, and establishing a connection with something higher, similar to meditation or worship. In all these examples, the directors have employed similar methods and used the possibilities of cinema to create a similar experience. However, for the fast-consuming audience who is not open or eager for this type of experience, these moments are often perceived as boring and excluded from the narrative universe of cinema. On the other hand, directors who instinctively incorporate these moments into their films and cannot detach themselves from them do not speak much about these moments because they may not fully comprehend the transcendental experience they attain in them and how they present it to the audience. Furthermore, this type of experience resides in a place beyond the reach of words and can only be grasped through feelings, making it impossible to fully express. Nevertheless, it can be said that the cinema of the eternal now elevates the audience to a transcendental level through the eternal now moments in films and envelops them in a divine sense where the entirety of human history can be contemplated as a single point. As a result of this realization, everything becomes equally significant or insignificant. This state is so elevated beyond the conditions of humanity that any director with concerns about existence has been touched by it.

Here, we have only exemplified the element of wind from the central elements of the cinema of the eternal now, such as wind, sunrise or sunset, fog, rain, still or flowing water, etc., due to limitations. This exemplification was made with quick references to different films and directors to demonstrate the presence of such usage in the cinema of the eternal now. A more extensive study could encompass all directors, all their films, and all the eternal present moments and their common elements within the cinema of the eternal now. Leaving such a comprehensive study to future research and researchers, we can conclude that the cinema of the eternal now offers an enlightening discussion for those seeking a different intellectual or divine dimension in cinema.

When conducting such studies, thinkers like Han's interpretations of the modern perception of time and time-human relationships can be read through the conceptualization of the cinema of the eternal now. Indeed, Han's book (2017) explores the discontinuity of life's orientations and its impact on the perception of time. The book suggests that the absence of fixed coordinates in life results in a fragmented time structure, causing time to break down into smaller units. In this context, the body becomes the central focal point of time, symbolizing the essence of existence and the struggle to postpone death. As time loses coherence, the concept of death becomes elusive, giving rise to a sense of radical mortality and a challenge to traditional notions of temporality. Moreover, the cinema of the eternal now can be interpreted as an escape towards the transcendent in the realm of experiences for the modern individual, as discussed by Han. Similarly, the cinema of the eternal now can also be seen as an endeavor to access eternity at the core of atomized time, aiming to escape the rapidly flowing superficial reality.

8. Conclusion

As discussed in detail above, the distinction between slow cinema and commercial cinema is a division that categorizes cinema into two entirely different trends. This perspective contrasts these two approaches against each other. It views commercial cinema as a profit-oriented understanding that seeks to captivate the audience and keep them engaged in the story, while positioning slow cinema as a form of cinema that focuses on individual experiences to enable the perception of profound human truths, prioritizing these over financial gains. Accordingly, slow cinema, or art cinema often used synonymously by many, confronts individuals with their depth and complexity, while commercial cinema merely provides an opportunity for escape and entertainment based on basic instincts. While this study generally acknowledges these viewpoints, it challenges the binary positioning of these two types of artistic tendencies created by humans. Hence, the cinema of the eternal now, as explored in this study, is more often observed in art cinema or slow cinema, yet glimpses of the eternal now cinema can also be found in commercial cinema, as the pursuit of transcendence is inherent in every work of art. In this regard, this study introduces a new perspective by adapting Schrader's mentioned ideas to the concept of the eternal now borrowed from ancient cultures within the context of the slow-commercial cinema debates. Accordingly, rather than categorizing films individually, all films can be divided into narrative structures and eternal present moments through their scenes. Or, to put it differently, traces of moments that touch upon the eternal now can be traced in all films. While this intensity may inevitably vary in certain films, the presence of such moments can be identified across all films.

In brief, cinema has provided us with the ability to penetrate time and record it, while the cinema of the eternal now aims to encapsulate all of time within a single moment. This is why it pushes the boundaries of artistic creation and bestows upon the artist a new dimension, a kind of enlightenment or wisdom through inspiration. In this sense, the cinema of the eternal now is a fleeting gaze, a point extending into infinity, a glimpse that places existence at the threshold of infinity. In that gaze, all past and future, all events that have happened and will happen, have already taken place. The director of the cinema of the eternal now focuses on this point, yearning to experience and share this sublime human experience with the audience. As explored in the study, this experience is often conveyed through symbols such as wind, especially in certain scenes. It is a kind of connection or desired connection with the transcendent. It emphasizes the non-human dimension of the human and extends an invitation to that dimension. The director extends this invitation to both themselves and the audience. The most beautiful summary of this call is perhaps found in the film "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia" (2011) by Ceylan, who can be presumed as one of the central directors of the cinema of the eternal now, where a character utters the following words:

"Rain falls on the thirsty,

Let it rain.

It has been raining for centuries, what difference does it make?

But even after only a hundred years, an Arab, neither you nor I, nor the prosecutor nor the commissioner; as the same poet said:

Years will pass again, and not a trace of me will remain.

My tired soul will be surrounded by darkness and cold."³

The longing, desire, and yearning of the transient human within the ephemeral for the eternal and everlasting find a response through this call. In the midst of the transient and the vanishing, humans aspire to transcendence, to establish a connection with the timeless and the otherworldly. This scene serves as an example of the cinema of the eternal now and represents such an invitation. Moreover, in the background of the scene, the wind, symbolizing the eternal now as defined in the study, gracefully moves over the meadows, revealing a trace of transcendence to those who struggle to escape from transience.

³ Translated by author of this article.

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