The "found story" in Derviş Zaim's cinema: Documentary reality through the possibilities of digital cinema

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Abstract

Derviş Zaim's cinema is a cinema of exploration. Zaim blends found story with fiction, constructing a framework in which content and form reinforce each other. His films *Somersault in a Coffin* (1996) and *Cycle* (2013), based on real events and characters, are rooted in found stories drawn from the fabric of life. Zaim's latest film, *Tavuri* (2023), is a *cinéma vérité* style documentary that chronicles the last five years of the life of con artist Mustafa Serttaş. The possibilities offered by digital cinema contribute significantly to Zaim's journey along the boundaries between documentary and fiction. This study examines how Zaim incorporates Siegfried Kracauer's concept of the "found story" into the narrative structure of films, focusing on his use of digital technology while experimenting with different forms and styles within the context of auteur theory. The aim is to analyse the films in terms of characters, plot, setting, mise-en-scène, and editing.

Highlights
- By blending found stories with fictional elements in his films, Derviş Zaim has developed a unique cinematic style that navigates the boundaries between fiction and documentary cinema.
- Zaim employs traditional filmmaking techniques in *Somersault in a Coffin*, whereas he takes advantage of the opportunities provided by digital cinema in *Cycle* and *Tavuri*.
- While Zaim focuses on establishing a link between the individual and the societal in his films, he also creates a structure in which content and form reinforce each other.

Derviş Zaim sinemasında "bulunmuş öykü": Sayısal sinemanın olanaklarıyla belgesel gerçekliği

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Öz

Derviş Zaim sineması bir arayışın sinemasıdır. Zaim, bulunmuş öykü ile kurmacayı harmanlayarak içerik ve biçimin birbirini karşılıklı beslediği bir yapı inşa etmektedir. Gerçek olgu ve karakterlerden yola çıkarak gerçekleştirdiği *Tabutta Rövaşata* (1996) ve *Devir* (2013) filmleri yaşamın içinde bulunmuş öykülere dayanmaktadır. Zaim'in son filmi *Tavuri* (2023) ise, dolandırıcı Mustafa Serttaş'ın son beş yılını anlatan *cinema verité* tarzında bir belgeseldir. Sayısal sinemanın sağladığı olanaklar, Zaim'in belgesel ile kurmacanın sınırlarında iz süren yolculuğuna önemli bir katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu araştırma, Zaim'in Siegfried Kracauer'in "bulunmuş öykü" kavramını filmlerinin anlatısına nasıl dahil ettiğini ve farklı biçim ile üslup denemelerinde sayısal teknolojiyi kullanma eğilimini *auteur* kuramı bağlamında ele almaktadır. İncelenen filmler; karakter, olay örgüsü, çevre, mizansen ve kurgu gibi unsurlar çerçevesinde analiz edilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler
sinema, derviş zaim, bulunmuş öykü, belgesel, sayısal sinema

Öne çıkanlar
- Derviş Zaim, filmlerinde bulunmuş öyküler ile kurmacayı harmanlayarak kurmaca ve belgesel sinemanın sınırlarında özgün bir sinema üslubu geliştirmiştir.
- Zaim, *Tabutta Rövaşata*'yı gelenesel film yapım teknikleriyle çekerken, *Devir* ve *Tavuri* filmlerinde sayısal sinemanın sağladığı olanaklardan yararlanmaktadır.
- Zaim filmlerinde bireysel olan ile toplumsal olan arasındaki bağı kurmaya odaklanırken içerik ve biçimin birbirini karşılıklı beslediği bir yapı inşa etmektedir.

Introduction

Derviş Zaim is a distinguished filmmaker who has developed a unique cinematic language that skillfully blends real-life stories with fictional elements. By intertwining societal and individual realities, Zaim creates narratives that resonate on human values. This study focuses on Zaim's works *Somersault in a Coffin* (*Tabutta Rövaşata*, 1996), *Cycle* (*Devir*, 2013), and *Tavuri* (2023), examining how the director redefines the concept of the found story through the possibilities offered by digital cinema. This tendency to intertwine found story with fiction in Zaim's work aligns with foundational ideas from the neorealism movement. Neorealism, an influential cinematic movement, emerged in Italy between 1945 and 1951 as a response to the political and social upheavals of the post-World War II period. Defined by its emphasis on authenticity and the representation of ordinary lives, it sought to serve as both a cultural renewal and a medium for social change (Thompson & Bordwell, 2003, p. 359). André Bazin (1967) characterized neorealism as more than a filmmaking style, describing it instead as "a kind of humanism" that focused on the dignity of everyday life (p. 29).

Bert Cardullo (2011) highlights that the term "neorealism" signifying a major departure from the mainstream, artificial aesthetics of pre-war Italian cinema. According to him, the movement emphasized filming on location, employing non-professional actors, and improvising scripts, thereby creating narratives that reacted not only against the banality of the dominant mode of Italian cinema but also against the prevailing socioeconomic conditions in Italy. Cardullo also aligns with Bazin's perspective, asserting that neorealism represented an entire moral or ethical philosophy rather than merely a new cinematic style (p. 19). Robert Stam (2000), on the other hand, posits that Italy required the reconstruction of its eroded national identity through cinematic means in the aftermath of the war. He asserts that with the release of Rome, Open City, Italy was able to regain the right to look at itself in the mirror. According to him, filmmaker-theorist Cesare Zavattini argued that the experiences of war and liberation had taught filmmakers to appreciate the value of reality. Zavattini opposed the views of formalists, who considered art to be inherently conventional and fundamentally distinct from life. Instead, he advocated for the complete elimination of the distance between art and life (p. 73).

Zavattini (1966), in his essay *Some Ideas on the Cinema*, which served as a manifesto for the neorealism movement argued that a film could be built upon a simple situation, like a woman buying a pair of shoes. Zavattini emphasized the ability of cinema to discover and display the ordinary. He said, "All we have to do is to discover and then show all the elements that go to create this adventure, in all their banal dailiness and it will become worthy of attention, it will even become spectacular" (p. 221). According to him, transforming this simple situation into a narrative could give it extraordinary appeal through the ability to show things often overlooked, surprising the audience. Zavattini (1966) emphasized that the true function of cinema is not to tell fables but to show reality as it is. "I am interested in the drama of things we happen to encounter, not those we plan", he stated, suggesting that the real challenge is to make things as they are, almost

by themselves, create their own special significance, rather than trying to turn imaginary situations into reality and make them look true. He argues that reality should be approached and processed not through a fictional method but through an analytical documentary approach (p. 221).

Akin to Zavattini's humanist perspective, Aslı Daldal (2013) states that Zavattini, who has the same humanist approach as Siegfried Kracauer, emphasizes that the most important task of cinema is to create a dialogue through social awareness and contact. Additionally, she draws attention to the similarity between Zavattini's concept of "encounter" and Kracauer's concept of "found story" (p. 183). In his work, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, sociologist and film theorist Kracauer (1997) introduces the concept of found stories as he seeks to define cinematic narrative forms that operate independently of literary structures. Kracauer illustrates this by explaining that, if one watches the surface of a river or lake for long enough, patterns created by a slight breeze or an eddy will gradually reveal themselves. In a similar way, found stories emerge naturally rather than being artificially constructed, and they play an essential role in films with a documentary focus (p. 245-246).

Kracauer (1997) places a spectrum which holds embryonic story patterns at one end, well-contoured stories, often packed with dramatic action at the other end and Robert Joseph Flaherty's "Slight narrative" in the middle. He highlights Flaherty's assertion that "A story must come out of the life of a people, not from the actions of individuals" He emphasizes that Flaherty constructs sequences with a narrative style, focuses on the life of a community, and distances himself from typical plots that foreground individual characters. Flaherty argues for deriving the story from the raw material of life rather than subjecting it to predetermined narrative demands (p. 246-248).

Kracauer (2015) notes Paul Rotha's assertion that "socially and aesthetically the so-called story film and the true documentary are growing closer and closer together." He points out that in narrative documentaries that go beyond "slight narrative", the desire for formal structuring and the underlying documentary intentions intertwine and compete with one another (p. 454). In a way, the found story can be considered semi-documentary. By emphasizing the flow of life, it incorporates elements such as open-endedness, chance, and uncertainty (Demoğlu, 2022, p. 239). The concept of the found story plays a significant role in Zaim's films. His works, such as *Somersault in a Coffin*, which is based on real events and characters, and *Cycle*, inspired by a shepherd competition in Hasanpaşa village in Burdur, are rooted in found stories from real life. Zaim's latest film, *Tavuri*, a participatory mode of *cinéma vérité* style documentary portraying the last five years of con artist Mustafa Serttaş, exemplifies the reality advocated by Zavattini and Kracauer.

Zaim's cinema reflects not only originality in content and narrative structure but also the practical use of technology. With the advent of digital cinema, Zaim has utilized the flexibility offered by digital technologies to experiment more freely with the boundaries between documentary and fiction. Digital cinema significantly enhances his ability to produce films based on found stories from real life. In general terms, digital cinema

technologies, which encompass the entire process of filmmaking, including pre-production, production, post-production, distribution, and exhibition, have increasingly reshaped the film industry since the late 1990s.

In one aspect, digital technology represents an increasing power of manipulation over images, while in another, it offers opportunities that encourage documentary filmmaking. The impact of digital cinema on documentary films bears similarities to the influence that the spread of lightweight 16mm cameras and high-speed films had after World War II. Both *Cycle* and *Tavuri* are examples of films Zaim made using the possibilities provided by digital cinema. The advantages of the flexibility of digital cameras, their low-cost production capabilities, and the vast post-production opportunities paved the way for formal experimentation in Zaim's films. For instance, in *Cycle*, which portrays a shepherd competition in Burdur's Hasanpaşa village, Zaim was able to observe the reality in real-time and incorporate it into a fictional structure.

Zaim's latest film, *Tavuri*, is a *cinéma vérité* style documentary that depicts the life of Serttaş, a con artist Zaim has known since childhood. The mobility and speed offered by digital technologies allowed Zaim to adopt a more direct and improvisational approach to filming in *Tavuri*. As seen in this film, digital technologies support the documentary narrative and allow Zaim to experiment with different documentary styles. Zaim's approach to filmmaking, which allows for unrestricted experimentation, reflects an inherent tendency of digital cinema, where the distinctions between pre-production, production, and post-production phases have progressively blurred and merged into one another. This study examines how Zaim challenges the boundaries between documentary and fiction and integrates digital technologies within the framework of found stories.

Methodology

The study examines Zaim's cinema from the perspective of auteur criticism. Auteur criticism views the director as the primary creative force who bears the greatest responsibility in the filmmaking process and focuses on the director's personal cinematic language and thematic unity (Corrigan, 2008, p. 117). This approach evaluates the director's core concerns, recurring motifs, and the content and form of their films within the consistency of the filmmaker's personality and in relation to their other works (Özden, 2000, p. 108). In this context, the study investigates how the concept of the found story in Zaim's films bridges the gap between fiction and documentary cinema. Themes such as degeneration and the alienation of modern man from his own nature, which recur in Zaim's films, are explored as reflections of the director's personal vision within the framework of auteur criticism.

Three films representative of Zaim's cinema were selected using purposive sampling. According to Michael Quinn Patton, purposive sampling "allows for the in-depth study of cases that are considered to be rich in information" and is an effective approach for discovering phenomena and events (as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011, p. 116). The films

Somersault in a Coffin, *Cycle* and *Tavuri*, which are based on real characters and events, provide an ideal variety for in-depth analysis due to their mixture of documentary and fictional elements. In this study, the data was analysed using the method of descriptive analysis. According to Yıldırım & Şimşek (2011) the descriptive analysis method involves summarising and interpreting the data based on predetermined themes. In this context, the data are first described in a clear and organised manner, and then these descriptions are explained and interpreted. Cause and effect relationships are examined and conclusions are drawn (p. 224).

The purpose of the study is to analyze how the found stories in Zaim's films are incorporated into the overall narrative and how the possibilities of digital cinema are utilized, focusing on elements such as characters, plot, setting, mise-en-scène, and editing. The thematic unity in Zaim's cinema and how these themes are supported by formal elements are significant for understanding each film's place within Zaim's broader body of work. Auteur theory considers the director as the author of the film, positioning them as the primary creative force. This study examines how digital cinema technologies have broadened the director's creative boundaries, enhanced their control over the film, and enriched the narrative. In this context, the concept of digital cinema in this study is confined to the pre-production, production, and post-production stages, while the distribution and exhibition phases are excluded from the analysis. To achieve these objectives, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

- How does the integration of found stories with fiction in Derviş Zaim's films contribute to the narrative structure?
- In what ways do digital technologies facilitate a narrative structure that transitions between documentary and fiction, and how are production stages interwoven in this process?
- How is Zaim's approach to documentary filmmaking influenced by the participatory mode of *cinéma vérité*?

Findings: found story in Derviş Zaim's cinema

Analysis of Somersault in a Coffin (1996)

Somersault in a Coffin is Zaim's debut feature film, and it is considered a milestone in Turkish cinema. The film, which is a successful example of independent cinema, breaks the conventional patterns in both production style and form, inspiring young filmmakers. Critics have described the film as "documentary-like" (Zaim, ____c). Although it is a fictional film, it is entirely inspired by real-life characters and events, breaking the conventions of classical narrative cinema and bringing to light a world often ignored by mainstream cinema. Zaim revealed that the film's protagonist, Mahsun, was inspired by a man named Dursun, whom he personally knew from Rumelihisarı. Dursun, a homeless man, survived on the streets by stealing cars at night and returning them to their original locations the next day. Zaim described Dursun as an "exceptional character", whose life served as a rich source of inspiration for a filmmaker (Zaim, 2020,

p. 63).

The main characters in the film, such as Mahsun Süpertitiz, the heroin-addicted woman, and the homeless Sarı are ordinary people marginalized by society. Mahsun is protected by an elderly fisherman named Reis, and there is natural solidarity among the oppressed and marginalized characters in the film. Despite their efforts to survive day to day, their conditions are harsh. Sarı, a homeless man, dies in his boat on a cold winter's night. The historical setting of Istanbul's Rumelihisarı serves as an essential character in the film, contrasting the grandeur of the past with the dilapidated construction sites that serve as shelters for the homeless. Reflecting on his creative process, Zaim (2020) shared that his observations of Dursun, and the people in Rumelihisarı, inspired the narrative lines of the film. However, instead of merely reflecting the realities of Rumelihisarı, he incorporated fictional elements to build a framework that blended reality with fiction. This method, which he described as balancing the tension between real-life inspiration and creative storytelling, would later influence many of his subsequent works (p. 63).

The film begins almost like a documentary, observing the daily lives of the characters. The unusual nature of Mahsun's character and the incidents involving the police are interwoven with social issues. One of the most important motifs in the film are the peacocks, which are placed in the Hisar as a symbol of wealth and prosperity. Mahsun wants to see the peacocks, but the guard does not allow him to enter. With the help of Reis, Mahsun finds work and accommodation in a cafe, but loses both his job and his hopes for the woman he loves. Throughout the film, Zaim masterfully reflects the environment of Rumelihisarı with an observant attitude. The found stories are seamlessly integrated into the film. After Reis's boat crashes into the rocks, Mahsun wakes up in a historic cannon, while the rainy Hisar is depicted with shots of waves crashing against the shore, raindrops falling into puddles and boats leaning against trees. These images emphasise Mahsun's feelings of disillusionment. Despite his sensitivity towards animals, Mahsun commits a tragic act when he loses all hope and kills a peacock to cook it. The tension between the media's portrayal of reality and actual reality culminates in the final scene, where the people of Hisar watch the TV news about Mahsun with bewilderment. The subjective angle of the camera leaves the mainstream media off-screen and confronts the audience with the people of Hisar.

The title of the film, *Somersault in a Coffin*, refers to the main conflict the film deals with. Zaim uses the coffin, symbolizing a narrow and confined space, as a metaphor for life's limitations, while the concept of a bicycle kick—a football move that requires expansive space—represents the human desire to transcend constraints. According to Zaim, the impossibility of performing a bicycle kick inside a coffin underscores the tension between possibilities and impossibilities inherent in the human condition. He emphasizes that, even in the harshest circumstances, people possess the capacity to create balance in life, yet they also have the ability to reject this balance and act against what is rational or suitable for themselves. This duality of human nature is central to the film's narrative (Zaim, ____c). As Zaim has explained in various interviews, he shot *Somersault in a Coffin* on a very limited budget, using a 35mm Arriflex IIC analogue film camera lent to him by

the director, Süha Arın. As film stock was expensive, Zaim bought the last sixty rolls of AGFA film available in Turkey and used them carefully during production (Zaim, ____ c).

Given the period in which the film was shot, digital cinema technology had little impact except in post-production. Due to the limited amount of film stock, the shooting ratio, which is normally 6:1 in traditional filmmaking, was drastically reduced in this film. Rather than hindering the creative process, however, these limitations spurred innovation, as evidenced by the film's international success.

> I must say that these limitations gave me creative freedom, which influenced not only the style of the film, but also the creation of characters such as the heroin-addicted girl, the toilet attendant in love with her, the world-weary alcoholic fishermen, and the fallen man who steals but remains kindhearted (Zaim, 2020, p. 66).

Zaim (2020) noted that the film's guerrilla style, small crew and flexibility were essential to its creation, and had it been made under different circumstances, it might never have been realised (p. 63-65).

Analysis of Cycle (2013)

The film, *Cycle*, focuses on a traditional shepherds' competition held in the village of Hasanpaşa in Burdur. The competition takes place every autumn when shepherds bring their herds down from the highlands and have to pass through water as part of a purification ritual. The first shepherd to successfully guide his herd through the water wins the competition.

> Before making this film, in my previous films, the script was completed before shooting. Since the script was completed and written down, what would be filmed on the set was often predetermined. We'd start shooting after the script was finished, and the filmmaking process would follow a predetermined course (although, as with any shoot, minor changes would occur on set, but these wouldn't amount to significant changes). With *Cycle*, however, we took a different approach (Zaim, 2020, p. 66-67).

In the film *Cycle*, the main characters are portrayed by three real shepherds from the village of Hasanpaşa: Ali Özel, Mustafa Salman and Ramazan Bayar (known as Takmaz). Ali is a young shepherd who has grown tired of his job and is eager to find a new one in the city. Mustafa is a young shepherd who has never won the shepherd's competition and is obsessed with winning. Ramazan, nicknamed Takmaz, is an experienced and older shepherd who has been the champion for seven years. He is committed to ensuring that the younger shepherds carry on this ancient tradition. The opening image of the film, a surreal figure of a stag with wooden antlers, is created using the possibilities of digital cinema. This image, created by combining 3D CGI images with live-action footage, pre-emptively suggests to the audience a key motif of the film.

> When I shot this ceremony, I had no script. I only had a one or two page summary. I let myself be carried away by the characters, situations and moments I encountered there. In that sense, I let myself be guided by the phenomena I encountered, and I really enjoyed it. There was no clear narrative

> path. Rather, there was a narrative riverbed consisting of a two-page synopsis,
> but it was a riverbed that could break at any moment. Much later, when I
> began to study sociology, I discovered that some sociologists in Chicago had
> tried similar approaches (Zaim, 2020, p. 67).

The opening sequence of the film shows the villagers saying a prayer for prosperity before the Shepherds' Festival and engaging in a communal celebration, all in pure documentary style. Like many other scenes in the film, this sequence is interwoven with found stories. The same sequence also includes one of the central motifs of the film, the ritual of burying animal bones. Later in the film, the shepherd Ramazan explains this ritual to the younger generation, explaining that in order for the animal to be reborn as a whole, its bones must be buried intact. This sequence is followed by another important motif in the film, the search for red stones. Before the sheep-washing festival, it is traditional to paint the sheep, and to do this, red stones must be crushed into powder to make the paint. However, due to the activities of a mining company operating in the area, the red stones have begun to disappear.

Within the narrative structure of *Cycle*, found stories are seamlessly integrated with fictional elements in a coherent manner. While the Shepherds' Festival sequence is filmed in a documentary style, capturing the competition as it unfolds in real time, the local television station's broadcasts also become part of the fictional narrative. The local station's interviews with Takmaz and Salman during the festival are included in this sequence. The sequence depicting Mustafa's relationship with the leading sheep of his flock, as well as the scene of Ali working in a slaughterhouse in the city, evoke an atmosphere of found stories that could only come to life with the participation of these two real-life shepherds re-enacting their own lives. These sequences serve to highlight the internal conflicts of both Mustafa and Ali within the broader narrative of the film. Mustafa, having come to terms with his past mistakes, matures and shares victory in the competition with Takmaz. In the background of the scene in which Ali searches the city for ready-made paints, a television report on the effects of genetically modified food on animal births can be heard. In the final scene of the film, Ali buries the bones of a deer — shot by the engineer working at the local mine—with pieces of wood to replace its antlers, and on his way back to the village he stumbles upon a red stone.

> The ceremony, the red stone and all the accompanying rituals are necessary
> to establish a different kind of relationship with nature, one that revives
> ancient human values. The older shepherd gives the younger ones small tasks
> to help them understand that they need to think differently. The film depicts
> the strange, sometimes comical and sometimes tragic world of the shepherds,
> caught between their beliefs and the modern world, struggling to learn where
> they belong or to teach the younger generation (Zaim, ____a).

The *Cycle* also becomes a sociological study, exploiting the possibilities of digital cinema. In an interview, Zaim summarised the production process as follows: "We went, shot, edited, then went back to shoot again, looked at what we had edited after the second trip, and then shot again." Zaim first observed the first festival with 6-7 cameras, capturing almost everything, in order to select the people he would use as actors. After identifying the characters, he started shooting again to determine who the drama would be built

around, thus clarifying the narrative structure of the film (BİSAV TV, 2021, June 22).

This documentary working method, which is based on the principle of discovery, is also well-suited to the contemporary practices of digital cinema. The financial constraints that would otherwise impede the collection of a substantial volume of footage are absent in this context, which has a significant impact on the editing process. The distinctions between the stages of pre-production, production and post-production have become increasingly blurred, with the three phases becoming inextricably intertwined. This method, which reflects a tendency inherent in digital cinema, is also reflected in Zaim's statement (2020, p. 87). According to him, on occasion, one may conclude that the desired harmony has not been fully achieved. Therefore, it is necessary to return to the scene and shoot again. The new harmony is then subjected to a process of auditory evaluation. The proposed solution has not yielded the desired result. One must then return to the filming process and edit the material subsequently.

However, Zaim (2020) highlights the potential risks associated with the distinctive working method he employed in *Cycle*, noting that the director may ultimately face challenges in achieving a successful outcome. Furthermore, he highlights that this approach, which is not conducive to planning, is rarely considered economical from the perspective of producers (p. 69). Additionally, he emphasises that an alternative strategy is to "wait, observe, prepare everything, and do it in one go", adding that "everyone has to find the method that suits them" (p. 87).

Analysis of Tavuri (2023)

Zaim's *cinéma vérité* style documentary *Tavuri* chronicles the last five years of Mustafa Serttaş (known as Tavuri), a con artist whom Zaim has known since he was ten. Born into a poor and broken family, Serttaş began stealing at a young age and eventually became a notorious con artist in Cyprus. Having spent most of his life in prison, the question that arises after his release is whether Tavuri will regret his past and start a new life. Over the course of five years of filming, Zaim embarks on a journey in search of answers to these questions. As the process unfolds, hopes for Tavuri's transformation gradually fade, but despite everything, the director/narrator tells the audience that his hope is "to find the good hidden in the bad". Throughout the film, the audience witnesses Tavuri's relationships with his father, siblings, close acquaintances, prison administrators and inmates, as well as his confrontations with the people he has betrayed. Aral Moral, a journalist who wrote a biography of Tavuri, also appears in the film.

> If I hadn't made *Cycle*, I wouldn't have done this project. The reason is that, as I said, we are subjects trying to understand society. We ask questions about society. In doing so, we try to ask questions outside of conventional methodologies in order to break through the wall of knowledge that science might not be able to overcome or would struggle to address. Maybe that is one of the powers of cinema. When I get involved in such projects, there are many points that I pay attention to, and I can summarise one of them as follows: What I design at my desk before encountering the outside world may eliminate the uniqueness, singularity and irreplaceability of what I am trying

> to capture in the field. For this reason, a filmmaker must take the risk of stepping into water with the phenomenon or characters, similar to the sociologists of the Chicago School (Zaim, 2020, p. 68).

Derviş Zaimağaoğlu (2020) states that documentaries provide the opportunity to express and represent emotional areas that social science methodologies may struggle to capture. He argues that when combined with the methods of social sciences, the potential to fully understand social phenomena increases. Building on this, Zaim suggests that the art of cinema, with its various applications, forms, and methods, allows for a deeper exploration of human behavior, emotions, feelings, and the soul (p. 128-129). The filming process began in December 2014 and continued intensively until Tavuri's death in March 2019, with the editing completed and the film released in 2023. To better understand the film's carefully constructed documentary style, it is necessary to refer to Bill Nichols' categories:

> To distinguish frequently conflated concepts such as *cinema verité*, direct cinema, observational cinema, and candid eye, it is best to refer to the documentary categories developed by Bill Nichols. Nichols classifies documentary films into six modes of representation or sub-genres based on how they present reality. These categories are: Poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, and performative. Often, these styles may overlap within the same film (Yalın & Güngör, 2013, p. 85).

Although the themes and characters in *Tavuri* are real, Zaim notes that the film also contains elements of the narrative features of classical cinema through the inclusion of re-enacted scenes. He highlights the presence of experimentation with elements such as staging, reconstructing past events with real people, or even creating events that did not happen in real life. According to Zaim, the participatory, observational, reflexive and partially performative modes are combined in this film (Zaimağaoğlu, 2020, p. 128). The film is participatory because there is active interaction between the director and the characters; it is reflexive because the director/narrator is at the centre of events and the presence of the film crew is not concealed; and it is performative because it involves re-enactments. In addition, many scenes in the film are observational, where the director captures the subject without intervening. A clear example of the synthesis of different documentary approaches can be seen in the scene where Tavuri visits his brother after his release from prison: the director's signal to start the scene is left uncut and the characters often look directly at the camera.

The film begins and ends with a playground where the director/narrator, as a child of ten, plays football with Tavuri and other neighborhood children. In the prison sequence, Zaim uses the direct interview method, and in another sequence, Aral Moral uses the same interview technique with Tavuri's father. In many of the film's sequences, the director/narrator and the crew actively participate in the scenes. Typical of the participatory style, the director interacts with his subjects rather than observing them without revealing himself. This participatory approach aligns closely with foundational principles of *cinéma vérité*, where the director's involvement with subjects enhances the authenticity of the film. Nichols (2001) notes that participatory documentary emphasizes "authentic, lived encounters between director and subject, as in Dziga Vertov's *Man with*

a Camera [1929] and Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* [1961]" (p. 117).

> This style of filmmaking is what Rouch and Morin termed *cinéma vérité*, translating into French Dziga Vertov's title for his newsreels of Soviet society, kinopravda. As 'film truth', the idea emphasizes that this is the truth of an encounter rather than the absolute or untampered truth. We see how the filmmaker and subject negotiate a relationship, how they act toward one another, what forms of power and control come into play, and what levels of revelation or rapport stem from this specific form of encounter (Nichols, 2001, p. 118).

Derviş Zaim makes the following observation regarding the inevitable ethical issues that arise when dealing with such a subject:

> From the early stages of our work with Mustafa Serttaş, we consciously took care to avoid entering into any ethically or legally negative situations. For example, we did not film his real fraud attempts. However, we continued filming his actions after the fraud had been completed. In this context, we saw no harm in capturing the ups and downs of his interactions with the real people he had swindled after the fraud attempt was over. The scenes and shots in which he is seen making phone calls to defraud others were filmed as reenactments (Zaimağaoğlu, 2020, p. 11).

According to Zaimağaoğlu (2020), throughout the film, the personal memories of the director/narrator, Tavuri's accounts, other testimonies, and historical events are intertwined. Derviş Zaim expresses that his films consistently reflect an attitude in which the individual and the societal are closely connected. This approach allows for a more holistic perspective in the effort to represent life and truth, and Zaim applies this approach to Serttaş's story as well (p.3).

Like *Cycle*, *Tavuri* was also made using the possibilities offered by digital cinema technology. Zaim states that initially, he conducted interviews with Serttaş in prison for almost a year, usually using a single camera and intervening from off-screen. These shoots served to gather clues about Serttaş. After these interviews, Zaim began considering whether he could use different documentary formats as a narrative style and decided to film Serttaş during his daily life in prison. The introduction of a second camera emerged during these observational daily shoots, and Zaim notes that to capture authenticity, he avoided complex setups, generally relying on natural light (Zaimağaoğlu, 2020, p. 94-103). In addition to DSLR cameras, the use of mobile phones and action cameras in the film can be seen as part of the current possibilities provided by digital cinema, similar to how high-sensitivity film and lightweight cameras were utilized after World War II. Zaim's thoughts on the style and practices of realist movements also confirm this notion.

Zaimağaoğlu (2020) explains that the introduction of sound and color into cinema significantly enhanced the ability to create a heightened sense of realism. Furthermore, advancements that made production tools lighter and more affordable positively influenced the evolution of filmmaking and production strategies. Techniques such as handheld camera operation, positioning cameras to minimize interference during event recording, and striving to make equipment invisible, akin to a "fly on the wall", are among

the methods adopted to achieve this goal (p. 51). As in *Cycle*, the boundaries between pre-production, production, and post-production have dissolved and become intertwined in *Tavuri* as well. This working style allowed the film's unique form to take shape and provided the freedom to experiment.

Conclusion

In Zaim's films *Somersault in a Coffin*, *Cycle*, and *Tavuri*, a distinctive style emerges that navigates the boundaries between fiction and documentary, intertwining societal and individual realities. Although *Somersault in a Coffin* is a fictional film, it is entirely inspired by real events and characters, built upon observations from the lives of Dursun and the people of Rumelihisarı. In this film, the setting almost becomes a character, with the inclusion of local shopkeepers among the cast of regulars at the Hisar, enhancing the film's authenticity and sincerity. The critics' comments describing the film as having a "documentary-like" quality stem from Zaim's ability to portray a genuine world in a simple, observational manner. The open-ended structure and the intertwining of societal and individual themes reflect the film's originality and thought-provoking nature.

Similarly, *Cycle* is a work situated at the boundary between documentary and fiction, also inspired by real events. The film is built around the real experiences of shepherds in Hasanpaşa Village, using the local tradition of the shepherd competition to critically explore the alienation of modern man from nature. In this film, Zaim also constructs a narrative where nature plays as significant a role as the characters. The cyclical seasons and the presence of the natural environment are closely interwoven with the film's theme, leading the audience to reflect through its open-ended conclusion. At the same time, by employing the concept of the found story, Zaim blends reality with fiction, addressing universal themes through local elements.

Tavuri is one of the clearest examples of Zaim's bridging between documentary and fiction cinema. Shot in the cinema verité style, the film portrays the life of a real con artist, Mustafa Serttaş, and presents both documentary and reenactment scenes together. The film goes beyond the mere concern of reflecting reality in its raw form, successfully constructing a deep narrative that delves into emotional and behavioural dimensions. In Tavuri, Zaim combines different methods and its shows us how the art of cinema can collaborate with the social sciences.

Both *Cycle* and *Tavuri* are works that fully utilize digital cinema technology. It is clear that digital cinema technology contributed to Zaim's development and refinement of a particular method. The signs of this method, which includes improvisation, first appeared in his initial film *Somersault in a Coffin*, created using traditional cinema techniques, and it matured significantly in *Cycle*. Zaim's working style, which allows for free experimentation, has erased and intertwined the boundaries between pre-production, production and post-production, reflecting a tendency inherent in digital cinema. In all three films examined, it is evident that Zaim has developed a cinematic style that skillfully combines fictional and documentary elements while addressing

societal and individual realities through the art of cinema. Zaim's cinematic style can be considered not only as an aesthetic and formal innovation but also as a profound effort to understand humanity, nature, and society.

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