



### Interview With Pelin Esmer\*<sup>1</sup>

**Aydan Özsoy (A.Ö.):** Hello. We, are together again for one of our regular *SineFilozofi* director interviews. We, the team of *SineFilozofi*, are with Pelin Esmer on this meaningful day, October 29<sup>2</sup>. There's rain in Ankara, yet we will conduct a beautiful interview. We are at Büyüdü Fener (Magic Lantern Film Theatre). This is a very important place for us. It is a place where we talk about cinema, watch films and teach. Let's take this opportunity to thank all the cinema workers. Welcome, my dear director Pelin Esmer. Welcome to Ankara as well. There are two screenings of your film today: at 4 o'clock and in the evening, there will be a meeting with the audiences.

**Pelin Esmer (P.E.):** Yes, Yigit and I will be here.

**A.Ö.:** You will be together. Very nice. Let's begin then. Dear Professor Serdar Öztürk, let's start with you to talk about the film.

**Serdar Öztürk (S.Ö.):** *SineFilozofi* regards cinema as philosophy made with images. In our opinion, cinematography in your films rather noticeably produces philosophy when it comes

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\* The video of the interview is accessible from the link below:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-hmuUNPseU&list=UUA00De0KhjIMgYkyxo\\_POoA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-hmuUNPseU&list=UUA00De0KhjIMgYkyxo_POoA)

<sup>1</sup> This interview has been translated into English by Özlem Atar and proofread by Serdar Öztürk from the edited transcription reviewed by Pelin Esmer.

<sup>2</sup> October 29 Republic Day marks the creation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, and it is celebrated as a national holiday in Turkey.

to the texture of images, rhythm, sound, and music. If I may say so, what Alfred Hitchcock calls writing with a camera is dominant in your films. Therefore, we are curious about the sources -- sociology, literature, philosophy or other fields of art-- you draw on while making these films.

**P.E.:** A lot of things, but the first three I can think of are literature, cinema, and music. Also, life itself, life I live and strive to understand. These are the things that encourage me to think, to dream and to construct a world in a film. Literature is very provocative. There is an advantage of being exposed to words only, not seeing visuals, while reading. It leaves the mind more open to imagine. You can set out on a journey more freely. Music is like that, too. However, I guess the impact of music and sounds is more direct, both physically and emotionally. Music is one of the fields of art that affect our mood the most easily and directly. When it comes to cinema, if you really have been engrossed in the constructed world while watching a film, it is hard to get out of that world without taking something along. In short, I suppose what is read, watched, experienced, and heard all get imprinted on our minds over time, and they motivate us to act.

**A.Ö.:** In your films, particularly in *İşe Yarar Bir Şey* (*Something Useful*, 2017), we usually see characters that have retreated to safe spaces. I mean you seem to have characters that have virtually confined themselves to safe places while they are confronting social reality and social conditions. They nourish from those places, and then come out again, due to some conditions, in order to face those social realities. Should we remember your films, our personal view is that Mithat in *11'e 10 Kala* (*10 to 11*, 2009) takes shelter in his flat, Nihat in *Gözetleme Kulesi* (*Watchtower*, 2012) takes refuge in a fire lookout tower and the poet Leyla in *İşe Yarar Bişey* finds safety on a train. It looks as if she is observing life from the train window, and yet she seems to have confined herself to that safe space of the train. These are, of course, our personal views. Is life so? I mean is there a paradox of having a safe place and always having to confront the social reality from there? Is there a safe place?

**P.E.:** Of course there is not a space which is hundred percent safe in life. And in fact, it is good that such a place does not exist. Why need art then? For me, art can flourish better in in-between spaces, at moments and places of transition, through paradoxes and conflicts. I am interested in characters that occasionally totally immerse themselves in life and even intervene in it, and, at times, can never be part of it. I do not get excited when the characters are not part of life, by those who live in their own world only. I am interested in the ones that can survive in the two areas. Surely, in film, you can depict a character that lives in his or her own world whether or not this character has a real-life counterpart. However, I do not see it as a suitable atmosphere to tell a story because it does not include any conflicts, interactions, collisions or influences. I love to tell a story even though we forget that story in the end. Therefore, I can easily say that I am trying to create moments and places where my characters can go when they get tired of the conflicts of life, and so that, at these moments, we too can catch our breath and be alone. And these places are shelters, stations, towers or their homes, where they feel safe. And yet I would also like to see the characters while they are struggling in life, interacting with others, while something is happening to them or while they are doing something to

others after they have taken some rest. I believe that only then they become a whole. Life always forces one to make choices, take decisions and face conflicts. Conflicts can sometimes be very exhausting and weary. In life, one needs to take a decision, and yet we cannot always take that decision so easily. Yet there is serious pressure to do so, too. Real life demands that we must be consistent. The moment we become tired of these conflicts, we try to get ourselves to a secure place where we feel safer, are less likely to be questioned and judged. Yet those safe corners are not very safe since there is no communication. Your immune system may fail as you have no interaction with people. Therefore, perhaps those journeys are not solely forced comings and goings. No matter how dangerous you may view it to be, there are some comforts belonging to that place brings to you. There is the need to relax and to receive approval. Therefore, I try to imagine the characters I write with their comings and goings.

**S.Ö.:** What you have said reminds me of Nietzsche'nin *eternal recurrence*. After all, we are in a cyclical life. There are characters. The characters are thrown into life. There are structures that determine us, and what we call agency, too, has relative autonomy in those structures. There are no characters that can determine everything and are in the saddle. There is cyclical life and the characters in this cyclical life. When we watch your films, we observe that especially Mithat in *11'e 10 Kala* has a social circle, and that he is a character who wishes to exist within this social circle and continue to work as a collector. When we look at *Gözetleme Kulesi*, we see that the female character cannot determine everything that happens to her, and even that she has been forced to get involved in an incestuous relationship by the conditions beyond her control. What contribution can art, philosophy, and literature – the fields in which you are interested – make to our understanding or transformation of this cyclical life?

**P.E.:** I think that art, philosophy and literature can help a person exist in this cycle without losing himself in life, be aware of himself rather than trying to overcome this cycle issue because, on the one hand, that cycle looks very annoying as well. It looks as if nothing is going to change. It may sound as if a word of hopelessness. However, that nothing changes, and that things keep coming back sometimes give you great comfort and confidence because there is the feeling that "I am experiencing situations that I am having difficulty in coping with at the moment, but I know the point I will reach at the end." Here, knowing this, knowing that certain things will not change, no matter how annoying they are, is actually something we secretly need. Therefore, I do not think that art is in pursuit of annihilation or destruction of that cycle. In contrast, it is what helps us to realize the moment we are at, that place, our perspective at that moment, and most of all, our own being because art is something that makes us ask questions, and somehow it is a space where it is more difficult for a person to escape from himself. Nevertheless, it is not a judgmental area. Art does not try to teach anyone. It does not offer a text of better life style, but I think that art helps a person to really look at himself, to know himself and to raise his self-awareness. Also, if we really think about that circle, art is something that reminds us the journey rather than the destination because we actually know where we will arrive. Therefore, I think art is something that keeps a spotlight on what we go through rather than the excitement of the destination. Forugh Farrokhzad says, "The bird may die / Keep the flight in mind." Such a line of poetry intervenes in my life greatly. It provokes

me. It makes me stop, look at the bird for a moment, think, and feel. Here, within this cycle, this is the most important light art offers me.

**A.Ö.:** Well, let's continue with art. We observe, particularly in *İşe Yarar Bir Şey*, that your film gets closer to poetry, art and especially poetic cinema language. There is a female poet character, Leyla. We witness that she discusses art with Yavuz in the second half of the film. We also seem to get an idea about your proximity to art through the characters. What do you think about the relationship of your last film to poetry and the effort to establish poetic film language? We think it has become different from your previous two films.

**P.E.:** Yes, I agree.

**A.Ö.:** We think that your cooperation with Barış Bıçakçı must also have been influential in this. What kind of cooperation is this? And what can you say about your relation to poetic cinema, about your film's shift to that end?

**P.E.:** Of course there are advantages of having written together. Above all, the excitement of the fact that it was a very new experience for me to write with someone else must have contributed. There is also a fertile ground brought by playing the devil's advocate with someone you encounter while you are playing devil's advocate by yourself. Yes, I also see this film differently from my other films. Of course I cannot look at it from outside and interpret it like you do, but when I evaluate it reflecting upon my experiences and the questions I ask, I can say these: We wrote the scenario at a time when I wanted to tell a story without looking for and finding a counterpart in real life, when I needed to get free from the rush or worry of reality, when I needed to live a different experience than the feeling of realism I was familiar with. We brought together people who would not really come together. They will probably come together only in this film. This was actually an element that helped us to think more like poetry, providing us with a space of freedom from the very beginning. It meant envisaging. Maybe it was a little easier to put ourselves the characters' shoes in my other films. Maybe it was easier to compose by putting myself in their shoes while writing. Whereas we could have written something with reference to my own experiences or observations, there was no experience or observation that we could refer to here. This was because the things the three characters have experienced are things that have never happened or will happen to us. So I can say that since this specific area reinforces my real question, my question of realism, it has have shifted towards poetry. It is more like poetry than prose. I have said it somewhere before. Words that we are not so accustomed to see side by side can come side by side in a poem, but if we see them in prose, we soon think it is irrational, we find it strange, and therefore, separate them. We were not uncomfortable with this union here, and rather we wanted to take this journey. This was the main difference for me. I guess I was on the verge of and in need of this. Creating a poet character, therefore, might not have been a coincidence. I thought doing that could help.

**S.Ö.:** If I should express my own personal opinion, you are not breaking much away from reality in your last film. We are faced with a filmic reality. You get the material from real life,

and process it. Realism has many different dimensions, but what we call filmic reality imposes itself. When I say imposes, I do not mean it forcibly imposes. There is certain flexibility, comings and goings to the poetic world. But from wherever you look, cinematographically, there is a relation to realism. Particularly, the camera's observation of the meal scene in the last 15 minutes of *İşe Yarar Bir Şey* just like a documentary film maker does, and the main character Leyla's acting like a sociological *flaneuse*. In this context, I am curious about your approach to realism or reality. I'd like to find out what the thing we call reality or realism mean to Pelin Esmer.

**P.E.:** I interpret reality in cinema through the realism of what we see from the moment when the story of a film is projected on the screen. In fact, I think that what we are not accustomed to, what we do not find quite realistic is presented in such a way by the virtue of the director's dexterity, or in a book by the author, that we become familiar with its realism, take it as a reality, and question the concept of reality using its criteria for reality. Let's take Cortázar, whom we talked about in the film as well. You know Cortázar presents something quite fantastic as if it were something every day, as if it were banal. After entering that world, you do not ask the question, "Oh, is that true?" The question is whether or not we enter the world whose creator has presented us with. I think that the audiences evaluate that world's reality after entering that place.

**A.Ö:** Relevant to this reality, especially the train is an important place in your last film. But in your films, just as you have mentioned a moment ago, places are meeting points where characters that seem unlikely to come together. In a way, the places are gathering points for the characters that sway from one side to another. The train in your last film, the tower in *Gözetleme Kulesi* and Mithat's apartment in *11'e 10 Kala*. But the train in your last film is very interesting for us. To shoot a film there, to make two female characters meet there. Do the stories issue from place, or do you construct the setting together with the story? What do you think of your films' relation to setting? We thought that those settings had a lot of impact on the construction of reality.

**P.E:** The place is a component I really care about while writing. Sometimes, you can even imagine a character through a place. When I pass by a place, I get so fascinated with that place that it may become the starting point of the world I will build. A place can come to you with many stories. You can imagine a character for that place and place him or her there. It is because the place has a story, a language, something it tells. What it reminds you may be a situation or a character. If I look at the lookout tower and Mithat's home in particular, it is true that from the very beginning, I saw these places as characters, too. I saw those places as our characters' safe areas just like the intermediary stations where they take shelter. It is not even an intermediary station for Mithat. It is a whole world. But if we think about Nihat, the tower is a kind of shelter. It is a place with a function. It is a place for self-healing. It is just like a cat trying to cure his wound by licking it or finding a nook to give birth. The effect of the place in that film is different from its effect in this film because the place was like a character there. The tower in *Gözetleme Kulesi* is different from many places we know. It is far away from everything. It is sheltered but dangerous. The tower has a story of its own. In fact, when we

tell people about a tower, the tower instantly evokes a variety of concepts like solitude, fear, loneliness. The train had a function that served our story and characters beyond these associations. The train is uniquely suited to a scenario where inner voice is used, where there are constant comings and goings between the inner world and the outer world of our main characters, in a scenario which goes between the inside and the outside. You can build a huge world in this vehicle. It's a very convenient means of transportation to do this. But at the same time, as the train moves, you can also watch the world flowing constantly outside the window. A slow train was the most suitable vehicle through which these two would come together on the same square. I could not have shot this on a high speed train because even though the images that flowed outside the window were not the main characters of our story, they enabled us to reach the next station by getting themselves imprinted somewhere on our mind. The train goes virtually through the houses it goes by. A bus does not go so close to people. But you can go on your journey with little image that you put on a corner of your mind of the man, child and woman in a house even if the train does not stop. By joining all of these, you arrive at a station. Therefore, this movement was important for this scenario both because train is a place where you can combine the inner and outer worlds on the same scene and also it enables the cycle, that continuity you have mentioned. It is also very functional in terms of our characters. It was a very convenient vehicle for Canan. She goes on a very difficult assignment. Although she has to arrive at the place she is going on time, she also needs that delayed time no matter whether she likes it or not. She occasionally needs to run away. She cannot make it on a bus journey. The train is a vehicle that offers a lot of space. You can go to the restaurant car. You sit there for some time. If you get tired of people's questions, you can get up and walk to the corridor. If you want to hide better, you can go to your compartment. The train was important for me because it offered me the opportunity to tell the stories of the characters inside the vehicle, and it also allowed me to see the world inside and outside on its wide windows at same time.

**S.Ö:** Let's move on to sound from place. In my opinion, one of the most neglected elements of Turkish cinema is sound. But when we look at your films, we see that sound has special importance. Say Mithat's radio talk or the sound of the cello in your last film, Leyla's inner voices, some unintelligible echoes whose source we cannot decide, and for example, hearing our own voice in a phone call. You never, for example, let us hear Hüseyin's voice. But our inner voice imagines Hüseyin. That sound opens up a time and space of its own. Why do you attach so much importance and value to sound?

**P.E:** I give importance and value to sound exactly for the reason you have just mentioned. It is an element that helps us imagine the character of Hüseyin, who we never see. Sound has such power. Actually, we can go to another place, to a dream by looking at an image too, but it has a limit because there is something we see, something our brain perceives and writes. There is something shown to us. Sound is completely open to imagination. This is like the difference between reading a book and watching a film. Since you do not see the world created in a book, reading allows more imagination. I draw an analogy between the use of sound in cinema and reading. Sound has the power to arouse an emotion, evoke a feeling, revive a memory, and

leave a trace. That is why I work very hard on sound. I try to think about sound design while writing. Of course we take a lot of time in sound design and add new sounds. I also take great care of recording external sounds outside the dialogue while shooting. Sometimes, there is a sound coming from somewhere when we are shooting, and we may stop the recording and record that sound because I will not find that sound again, and that sound can obviously create a feeling. It is saying something now that it has made us take a break. It can even change the feelings of that scene and even affect the actor's acting. Indeed, like mimics and dialogues, sound is a very important element in telling a story and for being able to express an emotion.

**A.Ö:** So, can a fourth wall be broken? Do we have the chance to break the wall with sound, rather than with image? Let me put it differently. Does playing with sound have an experimental role for you, maybe nourishing your experimental streak as well?

**P.E:** Of course. Really, I think that a film is "naked" before the sound design is done. With the inclusion of the sound component in the assembly, we test whether the film changes during design and mix. During montage, I play with image editing by trying out some sounds. More often than not sound determines where and when I cut. When creating an atmosphere, for example, the stories ... I was going to talk about the stories just moment ago. You asked something like "the importance of the story" somewhere. Like sound and place, the importance of the story is something that arises from visual images I will not forget. I forget the story. I cannot remember the story of a film I liked very much, but I need that story so much that thanks to the story itself what the story really was does not really matter. After all, there are four or five stories that we revolve around in life. But, thanks to that story, I can get into the world that film has created and get engrossed in the effects the sound created. For example, I do not forget children's voices in Éric Rohmer's *A Summer's Tale* (1996), but I forget the story, or I remember the old lady who goes slowly to a waste container every day in Krzysztof Kieślowski's film. I do not forget this image. I think there lies the artist's talent. After somehow absorbing you and having invited you into that world, it lets you have your own personal experience in that world, in that atmosphere. Here, sound, no less important than image, is an element that helps us to get ourselves into that world and get engrossed in it.

**S.Ö:** I'd like to ask a general question related to what you have said as it reminds me of something else. Bergson, a philosopher, tells us that we look at life through our practical knowledge. That was what I remembered when I heard the title of your film, *İşe Yarar Bir Şey*. We already look at life as something useful. I guess we need the help of art to get away from this and to make a difference. The stories you tell us aesthetically open a space to us. The stories we hear are artistic performances themselves. You said a moment ago, "Everything has a story." It is like what Nietzsche said, "Let's design life as art." It will be a general comment, but you stand close to the understanding of designing life as art as a director.

**P.E:** It's a huge compliment and a really heavy mission. Really, the issue of being useful is something that occupies the minds of many artists since the function of art has no time or place. A lawyer can save you from a jail, a doctor can return you to life with a heart transplant, a miner can help you get warm with the coal he extracts from a mine. As long as the impact is

not very direct or tangible, there is always some questioning as to what we produce. Is art something useful? What happens if it is useless? What happens if it is useful? If it is useful, how? Many artists wade through these questions and wash up on shore only to get washed away in waves.

I think that art actually zooms in on some moments in our lives, and that it zooms in and sometimes pauses. In a way, it stops what is flying by for a moment because the artist actually has some very basic things as a concept and as a story. We do not have a thousand stories, but a director can look at it from a place I have never really looked from, and actually I think this is what is enticing about art. It offers me the opportunity to look at it from a perspective or thinking I have never used. It provides me with a pause, some time to move beyond whatever is being looked at. It enables me to stop it, reach beyond, look at it from the other side and then to continue. We come out of the film theatre in a certain way. We stay in this man's shoes as long as we can stay. But then, we dive into life. But as we dive as, we dive as a changed person. This is where art intervenes in life as has taken me out of the cinema theatre in that particular situation. And I return to life, to my work, to my home, but it seems that something has happened to me. So, maybe nothing changes in life or in me, but sometimes it serves as a pause, and helps me to take a closer look at things or look at them from a different angle. You become that something. This is the greatest contribution of art to life. If it is working, I think that it presents these moments to us must the biggest thing.

**A.Ö:** The concepts of road and journey are the concepts you always underline in your films. In general, the journey is particularly clear in your last film, with the image regime and cinematography. And perhaps related to what you have just said, and considering your journeys as a director on that side and ours as audiences on this side, what do you think of the voyages highlighted in your films?

**P.E:** The journey, the feeling of being on journey, makes me feel good. It is an area that frees both the characters and me. It is period during which we are exempt from some of our responsibilities even if for a short time. For example, there is even no obligation to fast when travelling. For me, the greatest attraction is the chance to feel a sense of non-belonging to anywhere.

**A.Ö:** The state of being out of place.

**P.E:** Yes, I also think that being out of place is a very productive area for cinema. I guess that's the reason I love journeys so much. On these journeys, you can create various shelter areas. When we are tired, and when we want to catch our breath, we take refuge in a tower or a bus terminal. But then we can go on again. But the diversity that the journey offers, and the sense of freedom it gives to the passenger, even if for a short period of time, excites me. Visually, the images that we pocket throughout our continuously flowing and changing road journey sit somewhere on our minds even if we do not zoom on them. As something in the small detail I will remember in a completely different film. I think that the journey is something that also allows them.



**A.Ö.:** Let's talk some about the male characters. I think you have male weakened male characters in your films. Let's take Ali and Mithat in "11'e 10 kala". The mistakes Ali makes in the name of changing his own standard of living, Mithat's obsessions, In *Gözetleme Kulesi*, Nihat's guilty conscience since he causes the accident in which his wife and son die, and lastly, Yavuz, and his disability. Why are men a bit weak in your films? Is this only my opinion or do you have such a purpose?

**S.Ö.:** Actually, I'm not of that opinion.

**P.E.:** Me neither. I guess this is a point on which I do not agree with you. Actually, I think differently from you. I don't try to do such a thing at all. I think if it feels like that, I should question it because I do not want to favour any one of characters over others. I can get nervous when goodness outweighs in one. In a way, I think that we should be able to see the good and the bad, the crazy and the wise, the male and female, the actions and the reactions in different situations in one character. I can also say that a number of powers may sprout under what we see as weaknesses at the first glance. One example is Ali's selling of Istanbul encyclopaedias from Mithat's collection in order to change his life. So if you look at it, at first, it is a terrible thing. This collection is one of the things that Mithat cares about most and Ali steals it. The first sentence and the summary [*sic*] is "what a bad thing." Nonetheless, there is "but." This in no way means that you affirm what Ali does, but it is something that leads you to ask questions. I want to think of the things that once led Ali to sell those encyclopaedias. Ali has to wield his power as a man, as a father, as a human being who has to live in the city. He does not own a place to have his child and his wife live humanly. He is a man who had to send his child back to his village as she developed asthma because of the dampness in his janitor's flat in the basement. I always want reach those conflicting questions here. Is it bad for Ali to sell them? Maybe the man will bring his kid there on account of selling them. I do not say that what he does is good, but I want to tell you that there is another layer underneath, that you should question other things. We can also think like this: Did he really do evil to Mithat, or just evil? Let's take the last scene, when he leaves the last volume. I got out of the film theatre feeling like this: Maybe he prompted Mithat to do something. Mithat was about to finish something and if that volume had been completed, that is, when the eleventh volume had come, that mission would have ended. He left Mithat the eleventh volume. It was what Mithat had been looking for. Yes, maybe now Mithat will begin to look for the other ten volumes Ali sold. Maybe, Ali created a reason for Mithat to go out again. We can think like that. Let's say goodness may arise from evil, just as evil may arise from goodness. When I think of Nihat, as a woman driver, I could have had the accident that Nihat had experienced. If I had been using that vehicle, I would not have felt any less guilty than Nihat. We are talking about causing an accident that results in the loss of my child, my wife, someone I love. Therefore, that guilty conscience is not a weakness of his conscience, it is a feeling that he has to cope. Besides, Nihat's decision to go to the tower is a decision that requires a certain amount of power. He could have stayed in the village for a while, completed his mourning and made a life for himself there again. No one would have judged it and life could have gone on like this. Yet Nihat chooses to face his suffering. That is to say, though it looks like an escape, he chooses to

go to somewhere where he can never escape from himself. To me, that is a sign of strength. It is something related to being strong because it is very difficult for us to stand this confrontation, to stay on our own. When it comes to the character of Yavuz, there could be a woman in his place. There is not much to do with gender when you cannot even have the power to put an end to your own life. If we ask the question, "If it were a female character, would she want it?" we can talk about it for a long time. If I answer it in a short way, "Yes, she could think". We really imagined Yavuz as a man who would not let anyone else into it if he could. But, as we do not see this in the film, we do not know it. We wrote Yavuz thinking that he was sincere in his opinion and in his words when he said, "I would not pull you into this I could do it myself." We also wrote the character believing in him. All I can say is that I do not have a particular goal to highlight a weakness or to show only those aspects in my characters be they male or female. Thinking that he would be a one- dimensional character if I did that, I prefer to stay away from doing it.

**S.Ö.:** We encounter many films related to the concept of suicide. Abbas Kiarostami's *A Taste of Cherry* (1997), and again *The Sea Inside* (2004)<sup>3</sup>. This is one of the topics philosophy has discussed much. We can think of suicide as an ethical choice. Or you can commit suicide for other reasons. But the idea of suicide in your films is slightly different than it is in other films. I mean each film has its own concept of suicide, and according to what you have told us, you maintain that what we call weakness actually leads us to ask very powerful questions, and that has features which can lead us to make comments. This is exactly one of the hallmarks of modern film. We see characters that are dispersed in the Italian New Realistic cinema. We see that there are no heroes, we see amateur people acting. You strive to think beyond good and evil. So there is an ethical window, an ethical concern in your view of life. So far, in keeping with what we understand from your narrative, your experiences, literature, maybe sociology, or perhaps other disciplines, have an effect on this. What can you say about your view of life, your understanding of beyond good and the evil? So is there any special source you draw upon? Or is this just an idea you get through your contacts?

**P.Ö.:** Are you especially asking about the comment I made about death?

**S.Ö.:** Yes.

**P.E:** Here, of course I do not think there is a being who does not think of his own death. It is the subject that is -- instinctively, philosophically, and pragmatically -- probably the most considered. It is a topic we often come face to face. Actually, I have always thought this: We do not, in fact, decide on our existence. Then, the question, "Should we take the decision concerning our death?" sometimes springs to my mind. Whether you put into practice or not, it is a question that prompts one to think. Now that I cannot decide if I should come to this world, ... But then the question "Do we harbour extreme ambition there, too?" arises. Two play at that game.

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<sup>3</sup> Directed by Alejandro Amenábar.

**S.Ö:** Let's remember the word the mafia leader spoke in Omer Kavur's *The Encounter* (2003). He said, "I will not allow this life to take me, I will kill myself."

**P.E:** It is precisely "if it is so ..." Okay, you know, I do not make the choice to be born. Certainly, I am not involved in this issue. Once we are born, there is no return. We will live in one way or another, within a time and space limit. There are some freedoms and restrictions presented to us in life. Once we are born, have lived, ... Now, how much freedom do we have to live a life in a way that does not conflict too much with our own being, or what we dream for ourselves? And if this freedom diminishes and disappears, then can we or not decide to make such an end our lives? It's worth questioning. But everyone can give the answer in the name of their unique life. In my response, suicide seems to take death too seriously. But this is what I can say from where I sit. But I can easily understand that person can come to a situation in which they prefer death to life. He may be making too much effort to survive, to continue life, and worst of all, he is so aware of this effort that he may find no reason to continue this. It can be imagined, but it is one of the basic issues that cannot be spoken on behalf of someone. You cannot understand it unless you are at that point. When I think of death, I think more of the concept of death, not the action. I think of death as much as I think of life. Do you know the picture by René Magritte? It shows a stone like a huge coffin lying on one side. Inside it there is a man curled up sleeping like a dead man. After he made this drawing, critics and his followers asked, "Were you thinking a lot of death while making this picture?" since René Magritte, who was a little depressed at the time -- these are myths, but we love these myths. He said, "Nope, I did as much as I thought of life." It seems that life and death can always be used in the same sentence. We stood at a similar place in this film. We thought that we could only describe death through life.

**A.Ö:** I'd like to ask a question about Gökhan Tiryaki because we see that the image regime and cinematography are more prominent in this film. We have observed that particularly the image regime has been studied with great care and processed one by one in the film. The scenes of the train, especially the use of Leyla's face, the contribution of Gökhan Tiryaki in your last film, and related to that, the difference in your cinematography. I do not know if you will agree with my statements about this contribution. It is collaboration. Barış Bıçakçı, Gökhan Tiryaki and Pelin Esmer working together. Of course, equal contribution is beside the point in this business association. In this sense, is collaboration important in our cinema? What can you say about the importance of collaboration in our cinema?

**P.E.:** Cinema is team work. Eventually everyone is trying to realize the director's dream during film production. A good film is done when everyone's talents come together harmoniously. Gökhan utilized his talents in this film very beautifully. He translated the world and the atmosphere I had imagined onto the screen nicely. His eye, his excitement, professionalism, technical knowledge, experience in shooting on green screen have contributed much to the film. Although the preliminary work stage we spent together was not very long, we could speak a shared language. This is really important. Before I started working with Gökhan, I had a long preliminary work process. Many plans had to be made very well in advance as we would be working in a harsh shooting environment as a train. Otherwise, there would be

neither enough time nor money. Apart from the footages I made on my many train journeys from the scriptwriting stage on, the production team have also brought me hours of recorded road images shot from the train. I watched them for days. I determined the route and locations. I decided on what would appear beyond the train window at each scene thanks to viewing of those preliminary footages. I chose the background scenes that I thought would be most suitable for the scene in the train and the main exterior pictures. Before I decided to shoot on the green screen upon Gökhan's good advice, I had thought of shooting the film on a moving train, which would have been very difficult. The result would never have been like this. It was very important that the light was controlled in the film, where the reflections were so heavily used. We prepared the indoor front lights by watching the images I picked from the preliminary shots on a laptop while shooting in the trains at Haydarpaşa Train Station. We determined which lights there would be and they reflected those lights in. At the end of the shooting, we took the train and shoot the places, roads, images and more we had determined and placed it on the green. It was detailed work that took some time, but it was really good teamwork. At the same time, Kerem Kurtoğlu, who was responsible for post-production, was always with us at the set. This offered me a great feeling of security because he warned us ahead of time about the problems we might have had later and we planned our shoots accordingly.

**S.Ö:** With your permission, I will ask the last question. We ask all directors the same question. What do you think about *Sinefilozofi*?

**P.E:** It is a very alienating process for us to tell about our own film after the film making is over. I think it is contrary to the nature of the work. It's challenging and artificial. However, by bringing philosophy and cinema under one roof, you write and present many different views and interpretations. As a matter of fact, you can sometimes offer the director the opportunity to look at the film from a completely different place, from a point where he or she does not look, does not think. Therefore, I find the journey that you take through films and offer readers in this journal important. For me, from the moment the film has been shared with the audiences, it has now been surrendered to the viewer's own imagination and real world. And you, from that point on, as an audience, as an academician, as people who take on the meaning of life and humanity, take the film and interpret it through your own language, your own world and from different angles, which is a very important layer and richness for that film. A film is the communication between its audience, who takes it and carries it to his own world, and its creator, who never meets or will never meet this audience. As I see it, *Sinefilozofi* is a journal that opens up the path for this communication, multiplies and interprets the questions. I hope it lives long.

**A.Ö:** Somehow we need to meet. The thing we always say is that it is important that you and the academy, and everybody who works in this field must meet. Thank you very much.

**P.E.:** My Pleasure.