

“aşkını ver bana” / “give me your love”

by

Nameera Ahmed

Submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Visual Arts & Visual Communication Design
Sabancı University
Spring 2006

© Nameera Ahmed, 2006
All Rights Reserved

“aşkını ver bana” / “give me your love”

APPROVED BY:

Faculty: Can Candan

Thesis Advisor

Faculty: Selçuk Artut

Faculty: Murat Germen

DATE OF APPROVAL:

ABSTRACT

“aşkıını ver bana” / “give me your love”

Nameera Ahmed
M.A., Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design
Supervisor: Can Candan
Spring 2006

This paper tries to evaluate the processes which constitute the documentary video project, *aşkıını ver bana*, or *give me your love*, which is a story, a subjective and artistic response, to the music of the Mevlevi sufi order in Istanbul. The project was an inquiry into discovering the role of sound in leading to the ‘unseen’, how sound can lead to the flow of the unknown and becomes a missing link in the experience of the ‘spiritual seeker’. This paper discusses where my project stands vis. a vis. the different ‘modes’ of documentary, articulates the processes involved in making the video, as well as discussing how *aşkıını ver bana* itself becomes a process of inquiry.

Keywords: Audition, Music, Longing, Experience, Journey/Voyage, Unveiling/Veiling. Process.

ÖZ

“aşkıını ver bana”

Nameera Ahmed
M.A., Görsel Sanatlar ve Görsel İletişim Tasarımı
Tez Danışmanı: Can Candan
Bahar 2006

Bu tez, İstanbul'daki mevlevi müziğine öznel ve sanatsal bir yaklaşımı, bir hikayeyi anlatan *aşkıını ver bana* adlı belgesel video projesini oluşturan süreçleri değerlendirmeye çalışmaktadır. Proje, sesin, bilinmeyene ve “görünmez” olana giden yolda, arayış içinde olan için eksik olan parçayı tamamlama rolü üzerine bir sorgu/arayış olarak görülebilir. Tez, projenin, belgesel türünün farklı “mod”ları bağlamında konumunu ve videonun yapımını içine alan süreci tartışmakla birlikte, *aşkıını ver bana*'nın kendinin de bir sorgu/arayışa dönüşmesini irdelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İşitmek, Müzik, Özlem, Deneyim, Yolculuk, Açma/Kapama, Süreç.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iv
Öz.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	08
<i>aşkını ver bana</i> and <i>The Unveiling Of The Veiled</i>	10
<i>aşkını ver bana</i> and My Previous Projects.....	15
Documentary the Medium.....	20
<i>Aşkını Ver Bana</i> and the Participatory Mode	22
THE STORY CONTINUES.....	23
The Narrative.....	24
The Characters.....	25
The Landscape.....	28
The Soundscape.....	28
The 3 Chapters: <i>Ney</i> , <i>Aşk</i> and <i>Ses</i>	30
The Sublime vs. the Mundane.....	31
The Creative Process.....	31
Personal Considerations.....	33
CONCLUSION.....	34
GLOSSARY OF TERMS.....	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	36
APENDIX.....	37

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am ever so grateful to Can Candan for being my guide, mentor and a source of inspiration. Without his knowledge, continued support and kind words this project would not have been possible. Thanks to Erdağ Aksel for always inspiring me throughout my college life and for his tough critiques. Elif Ayiter for her continued guidance and advice throughout my two years of study. Murat Germen for guiding and helping me, for always being available, and for his critiques. Selçuk Artut for directing me with the sound corrections in my thesis project and giving critiques in class. Leyla Özcivelek Durlu for being a support and a friend. Alex Wong for helping. Bayram Candan for being a friend. Ayşe Ötenoğlu, Önder Arslan, Soner Biricik, Inci Ceydeli, Viket Galimidi and Hülya Köroğlu for their help.

David Rock for inspiring me with his beautiful voice! Demet Yıldız for her wisdom and comfort. Tara Alisbah, Eden, Murat Varlı, Reyhan and Risalet Ertürk for being my family in Istanbul.

And to Sabancı University for being my financial supporter in making this project.

Special thanks to all the Mevlevis who were so kind and willing to help me with my project whether it be through giving interviews, guiding me, sharing their knowledge, or just being friends: Abdülhamit Çakmut, Ferit Çakmut, Kadir Dede, Nuri Uygun, Hanefi Kırgız, İlyas Çelikoğlu. Thanks to Serkant Dervişoğlu for being an inspiration, and Hüsametdin Yivlik for his excitement and eagerness in helping me with my thesis project. Aylin for providing me with archival material, and Serap, Cemile Abla, Banu, Fazıl, Nagehan, Muhittin, Gizem, Hülya, for their companionship. And all the *Semazens* and Musicians I got to know through this project.

Thanks also to both my music teachers, Mrs. Kanga with her disciplinary but kind ways at the piano, and Safia Apa for introducing me to the beautiful sounds of the *ragas*.

Thanks to my mother for introducing me to Sufism and my sisters, Sameeta and Leena for all their overseas moral support and artistic critique!

Dedicated to dearest Abba. Thanks for letting me listen to all your music collections and making me go to my piano classes!

INTRODUCTION

The lovers lament like reeds, and Love is the flutist.

What marvelous things will Love breathe into this flute of the body!

The flute is manifest and the Flutist hidden—

in any case, my flute is drunk from the wine of His lips.

Sometimes He caresses the flute, sometimes He bites it!

Ah! I lament at the hands of this sweet-melodied, flute-breaking Flutist!

— Excerpt from Rumi's *Divan-i Shams-i Tabrizi*.¹

aşkıni ver bana (2006) starts by taking its audience on a journey, although of a mundane nature, along a regular road, with cars passing by, and the sound of traffic being all we hear. But as we progress, 'behind' the traffic noise, one faintly discovers another sound, that of someone singing. We proceed to an opening in a wall, where the singing voice rises, as if to call us inside.

As the viewer enters the opening, a discovery is made: the 'opening' is a staircase within a mysterious-looking tunnel where the singing voice rises, and then subsequently subsides. We climb up the stairs and discover a cat sitting on another flight of stairs leading to a building. As if to 'welcome' the visitor to her domain, the cat takes the lead in 'guiding' the visitor. As we follow the cat through the old building, another voice comes in, we do not know whose at this point, but a man telling us the story of the *ney* (reed-flute). How the *ney* was part of the

¹ Chittick, William C. *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. Albany: State University of New York, 1983.

reed-bed before it became the *ney*, how it lead its merry life in its marshy environment, and how a ney-player, a *neyzen*, came to cut it and separate it from its place of origin.

Here starts the symbolic story of the ney, which takes the viewer on a journey to an underground world, the world of the Mevlevis (*Mawlawi* in Arabic), who “liken the plaintive sound of the reed flute, the instrument of key importance in this music, to the bewildered human soul yearning for God.”² The Mevlevis, who derive their name from Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi and come together in a sufi order that follows his teachings and spirituality, believe that the *ney* symbolizes a human being, who longs for the life before he/she came into this world.

*Listen to the story told by the reed,
of being separated.*

*"Since I was cut from the reedbed,
I have made this crying sound.*

*Anyone apart from someone he loves
understands what I say.*

*Anyone pulled from a source
longs to go back.* — Excerpt from Jalaluddin Rumi’s *Mathnawi*

In these verses Mevlana makes an allegory of the ney with the human condition. How "We have all heard this music in Paradise"³, how we were separated from our Source and came into this world. Thus, out of its 25,000 verses, the very first 18 lines of the *Mathnawi*, one of Rumi’s greatest and most extensive works, start with the story of the the ney. Such was the importance Rumi gave to this instrument.

Mevlana Rumi (1207-1273 A.D.) who was a native of Balkh, in modern-day Afghanistan, came from a lineage of well-known scholars and was trained in the exoteric sciences and was well-versed with the Quran, the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet), Arabic grammar, prosody,

² Öztürk, Yaşar Nuri. *The Eye of the Heart*. Istanbul: Redhouse Press, 1995.

³ http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1310/is_1996_May/ai_18450238. Retrieved: 2006-08-28.

jurisprudence, history, mathematics, astrology, logic, philosophy, and theology.⁴ His family moved to Anatolia, which was then known as Rum, thus giving Jalaluddin the title of Rumi (from Rum) in later life. They eventually settled in Konya, where his father got a teaching post.

But his “great mystical genius”⁵ did not reach an absolute evolution until his meeting with Shams-i Tabrizi, a wandering dervish. Shams, considered to exhibit a “powerful personality possessed of great spiritual gifts”⁶ transformed Rumi and they became inseparable. Their “Friendship is one of the mysteries. They spent months together without any human needs, transported into a region of pure conversation.”⁷ It was, however, after Shams’ sudden disappearance, whose loss completely devoured Rumi, that he started to write poetry, began singing and listening to music, and whirling, which he would do hour after hour. “Shams-i Tabrizi’s influence upon Rumi was decisive, for outwardly he was transformed from a sober jurisprudent to an intoxicated celebrant of the mysteries of Divine Love.”⁸ He started using all his sensory faculties to find his lost and ‘unseen’ Beloved.

aşkını ver bana and the Unveiling of the Veiled

aşkını ver bana (2006) started out with the question: how can sound lead to the ‘unseen’? Having been trained in the visual arts, where the eye is given superiority over the ear, it was specially intriguing for me to try and discover what the auditory derivative of such a question could be. This inquiry developed from a previous paper I had written inspired by the book, *The Kashf Al-Mahjub*, or the ‘Unveiling of the Veiled’ by Ali Al-Hujwiri, a 12th Century Sufi whose shrine is in Lahore, in current-day Pakistan. Although Sufi theory is too vast and deep a topic to be encompassed by this limited paper, I find it necessary to try to briefly summarize its beliefs and practices here.

The Sufis, who give importance to the essence of things, rather than the form alone, get their name from, as some contend, the word ‘*suf*’ in Arabic, which means ‘wool’ (they traditionally

⁴ Chittick, William C. *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. Albany: State University of New York, 1983.

⁵ Öztürk, Yaşar Nuri. *The Eye of the Heart*. Istanbul: Redhouse Press, 1995.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Banks, Coleman. *Rumi: Selected Poems*. Penguin Books, London, England, 1995.

⁸ Chittick, William C. *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. Albany: State University of New York, 1983.

wore woollen garments); while others that the name is derived from *safa* (purity), while yet others who say that they acquire their name from the *A'shab al-Suffa* ("Companions of the Veranda") or *Ahl al-Suffa* ("People of the Veranda") who were a group of people in the time of the Prophet Muhammed who devoted their time in prayer on the veranda of the Prophet's mosque. They believe in the illumination of God's beauty in every created thing and Divine Love is what the sufi dervish tries to attain since "all things participate in God's Love, the motivating force of creation, so all things are lovers."⁹ The sufis think of this world as illusory and temporary, and to achieve Divine Love, they must undergo sufferings in this world and try to train, control and redirect their *nafs* (ego) which is the "lowest dimension of man's inward existence".¹⁰, in multifarious ways.

Among a few of the sufi practices are *zikr* (remembrance of God), *muraqaba* (meditation), *sema* (from the Arabic 'listening' and involves music and dancing, or whirling as in the case of the Mevlevis), *khalwa* (retreat).¹¹ Sufi *dervishes* require a *murshid* (teacher) to guide and help them along the spiritual journey and therefore are concerned with direct personal experience. Sufi writers make extensive use of parables, metaphors, and allegories in their writings, and look for the hidden meanings in things.

Ali Al-Hujwiri named '11 veils', on the sufi spiritual path, which need to be 'unveiled' in order to reach the ultimate awakening, and get a view of the 'Beloved'. In my paper titled *The Unveiling of the Veiled: the Primordial and the Digital*, I tried to explore the theory of the mystic path, as is elaborated in the text to investigate whether there can exist a relation between the concepts of the 'primordial' and the 'digital' as linking with the spiritual traveller's concepts of the Divine Mysteries. The paper analyzed the relation between the primordial and the digital as both a 'backward-forward' as well as an 'inward-outward' journey: how in both there exists an exploration of uncharted territories, a development of tools, a need for skills, a non-linearity, and 'dream-like' experiences, as ultimate detachment on the spiritual path from a world of senses, from this 'illusory' world, and compared the 'pilgrims of cyberspace' with the spiritual voyager. Without going into the details of the primordial-digital comparison of the previous work, here I will make a link with Mevlana

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Chittick, William C. *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. Albany: State University of New York, 1983.

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sufism>. Retrieved on 06-092006.

Rumi's experience of music as being mystic, and Al-Hujwiri's theoretical work which discusses music's place in sufi practice and spirituality.

According to Al-Hujwiri "The universe is an abode of Divine Mysteries, which are deposited in created things. Substances, accidents, elements, bodies, forms, and properties—all these are veils of Divine Mysteries." The follower of Sufism has to be able to 'unveil' each 'veil' to move ahead, to bring together knowledge of all things. Through the medium of music one such veil can be removed to reach the Beloved. Of the eleven spelled out by Al-Hujwiri, each 'veil' has its own distinctiveness, integrity and value. However, the seeker goes back and forth from one to another and then back again—a journey that could be more like that of a non-linear spiral rather than a straight linear line. The following is the list of veils that Al-Hujwiri has laid out in order, and it is interesting to note that the first and the last, Gnosis and Audition (the hearing), bring the overall link to a completion.

The first of the Divine Veils which is mentioned is Gnosis or "Ultimate knowledge". Gnosis can be through cognition (rational) or emotion (feeling). Gnosis becomes the progression from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from the observation of object/form to the higher consciousness of form as seen in the documentary *aşkını ver bana*: Hanefi cutting holes in a *kamış* (reed) while a *ney* (reed-flute) plays in background. Al-Hujwiri says: "Gnosis is more excellent than cognition, for it leads to 'right feeling'", which is a superior form of consciousness. To achieve Gnosis many sufis choose to take on a spiritual journey. Physical stations begin to correspond to spiritual stations and openings. Linear and non-linear movements can characterize both trajectories, and process can itself be destination. Faith and love lead to contemplative experience of the Beloved. The true object of pilgrimage is not to visit the sanctuary but to obtain contemplation. The process of the journey is considered just as important and rewarding as the union or ultimate destination itself—movement becomes marker rather than just the object of the pilgrimage at the end.

The second veil is Unification. It implies "harmony in the experience of creation". "The following of the Dervish Path is pursuing a concealed Unity in spite of, and not by means of, the claims of diversity". It is the consciousness of perfection and harmony in everything. The seeing of all aspects of form supporting each other, not as dualistic opposites, or only separated parts, but part of a larger whole. The rest of the veils mentioned are: "Conviction beyond the Rational", "Freedom from the unnecessary", "Inward-Seeking, Meditation" (truth

about form lying within the recesses of form), “Outer giving, giving of oneself into this world”, “Re-direction of the senses through abstinence”, “Code of the Spirit”, and the eleventh and last one being ‘Audition’ which leads to contemplation. This last aspect or veil connects most directly to the themes of the documentary being discussed here.

“Audition is superior to sight” since sound leads to the unseen, connects to the flow of the ‘unknown’, and becomes a missing link in the experience for the seeker. Of the auditor, Al-Hujwiri says, he “ought to hear the spiritual reality, not the mere sound...One who in that audition follows the truth will experience a revelation, whereas one who follows his lower soul will be veiled.” The sufi concept of the lower-versus-higher self is being applied to the receiving of music by the follower. The self can operate at a lower, animal self, or at a higher, more spiritual level. The attraction to a Beloved can start from a worldly attachment slowly moving to the highest plane, that being the Ultimate Truth. He can also be ‘transformed’ and find a higher level by ‘tuning in’ to the highest level of musical reception, allowing the unveiling mentioned by Al-Hujwiri. Sound being non-tangible and emotionally evocative, helps in leading from material reality to higher sublime states.

Another sufi shaykh, who echoes Al-Hujwiri’s philosophy, has said: “Audition is that which makes the heart aware of the things in it that produce absence, so that the effect thereof is to make the heart present...” Thus music allows an emptying of everyday consciousness, and actually drawing out from the inside, an inner, purer state. Therefore, “as in Unification, the heart has love and the soul has contemplation and the spirit has union and the body has service, so the *ear* also must have such a pleasure as the eye derives from seeing.” Knowledge moves ahead as it gains emotional energy from the musical experience and then again towards rational-cognition— back and forth the cycle continues towards a transformation.

“Whatever is heard by longing lovers increases their longing for vision.”¹² Al-Hujwiri says: “When the heart throbs with exhilaration and rapture becomes intense and the agitation of ecstasy is manifested... that agitation is neither dancing nor foot-play nor bodily indulgence, but a dissolution of the soul.” Thus, devotional music especially leads to this most important contemplation and attainment. An example from *aşkıni ver bana* which highlights this

¹² AlHujwiri, Ali B. Uthman Al-Jullabi. *The Kashf Al-Mahjub*, trans. Reynold A Nicholson. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1996.

experience is the scene where the retired army officer says, talking about the importance of music: “*böylecene göze görünmeyene tutabiliyorum*”, or “I can hold onto that which cannot be seen by the eye”. The serenity and then again the pain of the *ney*, a music building up towards the whirling ecstasy, aim to reach that ‘dissolution of the soul’.

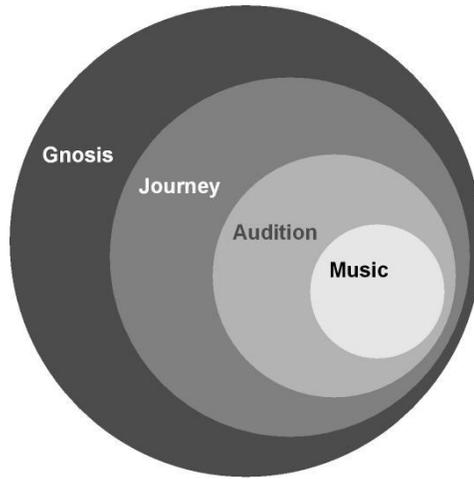


Figure questioning the context of Music within Sufism.

aşkınu ver bana was a project to explore the theme of listening for the ‘unseen’ and in so doing, find out about the importance given by the Sufis to music and how music becomes the missing link in the path for the seeker, a query which is illustrated in the diagram above. The film takes on a journey, through whose artistic and narrative processes it seeks to question and search for the ‘unveiling’ by creating a matching audio-visual experience for the viewer. The style of the video seeks to unravel the mysteries, trying to de-mystify the age-old genre of the music of the Mevlevis, of treating primordial themes in a novel way, and expressing the sublime in a mundane way. Or conversely, trying to reach the sublime through the channels of everyday sensuous experience.

aşkım ver bana and its Relation to My Previous Projects

Before I arrived at the documentary, I worked on the proposal of an installation project, taking off from the paper mentioned *Unveiling of the Veiled: the Primordial and the Digital*. The aim of this installation project was to illustrate, or symbolically ‘unveil’ the eleven veils of Al-Hujwiri by juxtaposing primordial objects with digital objects. The plan was to use eleven large-sized urns (3 meters in height) placed along a circular path.

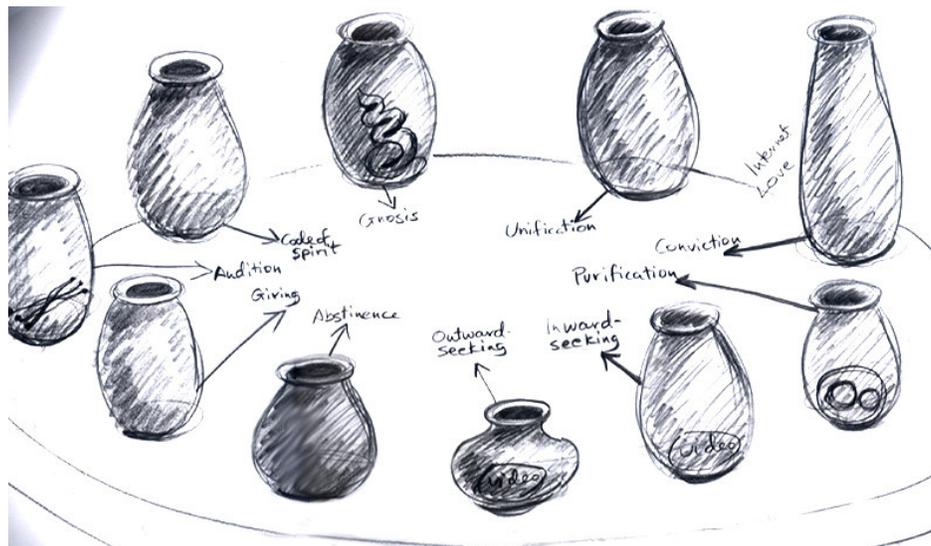


Figure showing the urns' placement along a circular path

The urns were to represent the ‘primordial’, since clay vessels were an integral part of ancient civilizations. From the outside, one would only see simple clay vessels, but as one approached, and looked inside an urn, one would discover in each, a digital object from the new media, a video display, a digital sound, projections from a projector hung from the ceiling into the urn, etc. The viewer would symbolically ‘unveil’ a veil by audio-visually ‘reading’ the contents inside each urn.

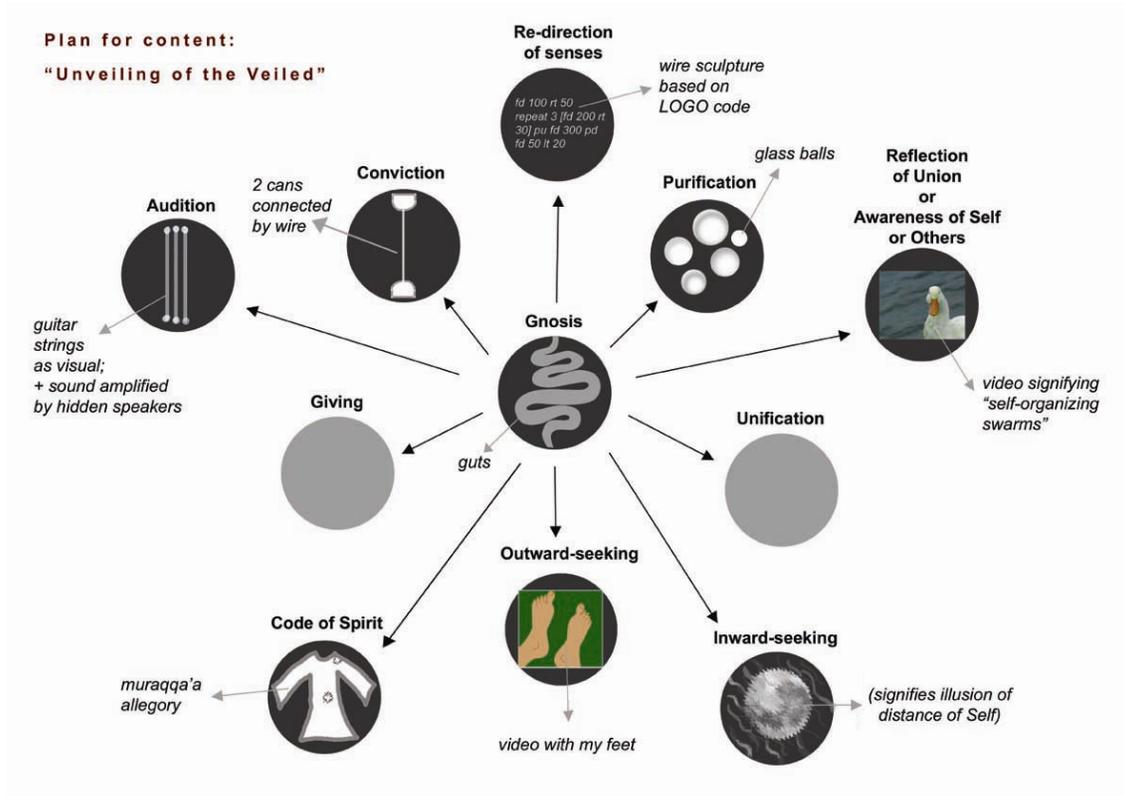


Figure showing the plan for the urn exhibit.

Besides this installation project, I worked on some other preliminary documentary shorts that I made in the Fall of 2005. These short films were precursors to *aşkıını ver bana* and continue that search for the primordial in their different ways and styles. The short documentaries, *My Return* (2005) and *From my Grandmother's Diary: when far from home* (2005), both acted as a means, in trying to dig up something from my past. They express a longing to return to my origins and to re-locate that vanished moment.



Figure showing a still from the documentary short, *From my Grandmother's Diary*.

The documentary *From my Grandmother's Diary* symbolizes that longing by presenting a recipe for a food from my own native land. The 'recipe' for the film came up from my memories from childhood, when I would watch my grandmother cook the simplest, most basic food. In its being a recipe for food, it is at the same time a recipe for reliving those moments from the past with all their associations and memories. The close-up shots I used, seemed to be a natural result of my grandmother's eye for details, and the need to look carefully: the way certain vegetables should be cut differently, which spices go with which food, etc. This piece of documentary is at the same time, a practical and mundane representation of a fantasy, and a recipe wrapped up in a dark box full of dreams. The candlelight and the low-key lighting give it that 'atmosphere' of a reverie which is long lost and vanished.



Figure showing a still from the documentary short, with subtitles, *From my Grandmother's Diary*.

Whereas in *From my Grandmother's Diary* the longing is more subtle, it makes a much stronger and overt comeback in the autobiographical piece, *My Return*. It is literally a time-travel into the past with the old photographs from my childhood and my voice-over talking about my birth in a Karachi hospital.



Figure showing still, with subtitles, from the autobiography, *My Return*.

It is a self-representation from my point-of-view, so the images are those of what I see. And even when I do appear, it is in the form of my photographs, or my hands and feet, as I would see them. It takes on, both a backward-forward and an inward-outward journey: taking a peek into my past and into my soul. The language of the narrative is in a story-telling mode, which is both simple and poetic, like a story I would have heard from my mother in my childhood. It is full of nostalgia, and though not sentimental, expresses the longing inside me to return to my past, and literally, as my own voice-over informs, to my mother's womb.



Figure showing still from the autobiography, *My Return*.

The theme of the mother's womb had also been explored in a previous project of mine, which had been titled, *The Return to the Womb*. Although an interactive virtual 3D environment, and not a documentary, it aimed at providing a comforting, educative environment for abused women. Its organic and fluid environment with its warm colours mimicked the inside of a mother's womb, and in so doing providing abused women with a 'safe' and comforting place, away from the harshness of the real world.

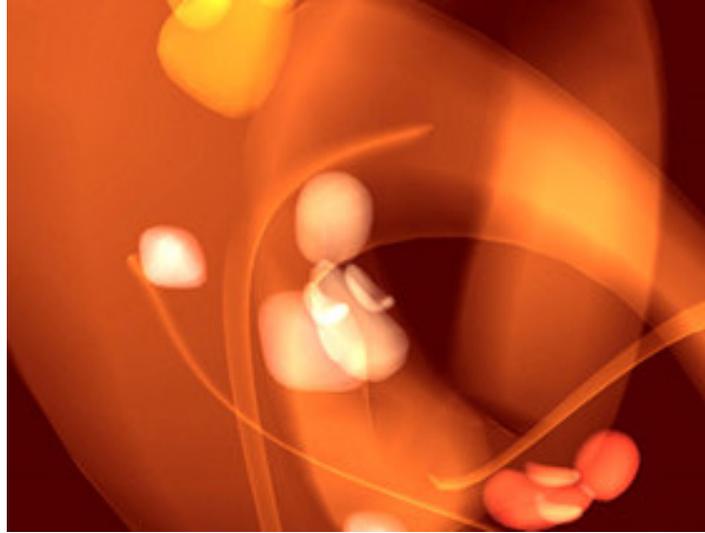


Figure showing still from the virtual 3D environment, *The Return to the Womb* .

One of the very basic difference between exploring the very varying media of the virtual environment and the documentary, is that the virtual environment is a timeless environment, whereas the documentary is based on a timeline, has a beginning, a life and a death. The virtual environment is completely imaginary and alienating from the 'real' world, whereas the documentary takes us right into the middle of 'real-life' events and happenings and where the "bond between documentary and the historical world is deep and profound."¹³

Here arrives the problem of the documentary.

Documentary, the Medium

Although the documentary appears to be, at first glance, a medium which provides us the 'facts' about life with an omniscient voice and an objective 'truth', on the contrary, it is a subjective medium of expression. It is a way of story-telling, like its counterpart, the fiction film and just like the fiction film, it creates its own world within a world with its own narrative. There is no one formula for making a documentary and a filmmaker, just like any artist, presents his/her own reality, by taking decisions throughout the filmmaking process, like how to use the camera, whether a shot will be close-up, or long shot, or extreme close-up,

¹³ Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.

or medium shot. How to compose his/her subjects in the frame, what lighting to use. At the editing stage, he/she has to decide which interviews to use, how to develop the 'voice' of the documentary, and how that voice will affect her narrative. All these decisions make up the very personal and subjective narrative of the story.

Basil Wright, the filmmaker of *Song of Ceylon* described the documentary in his essay, *Documentary Today* (1947) as "an artistic interpretation of reality"¹⁴, and John Grierson, considered the father of the British documentary film, states one of the advantages of the documentary as "it cannot only observe the living material of the world, it can also reproduce it...and it is a world of material peculiarity necessary to our minds and our imaginations".¹⁵

Bill Nichols, a historian and theoretician of documentary film, in trying to correct the misconceptions about documentary, which has gained much popularity recently, says it "suggests fullness and completion, knowledge and fact, explanations of the social world...More recently, though, documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction." According to Nichols, in the documentary, "people are treated as social actors: they continue to construct their lives more or less as they would have done without the presence of a camera. They remain cultural players rather than theatrical performers."¹⁶

In his 2001 book, *Introduction to Documentary* (Indiana University Press), Bill Nichols defines the following six modes of documentary:

- **The Poetic Mode** reassembles fragments in a lyrical form.
- **The Expository Mode** employs a 'direct address' and the 'voice-of-God' kind of narration, and which is associated with the 1920s-1930s and the World War II.
- **The Observational Mode** documents life in a less intrusive manner and developed in the 1960s due to advances in technology leading to the new light-weight camera equipment not previously available.

¹⁴ Interview with Ian Aitlen (1987) *The Documentary Film Movement*. (Ed. Ian Aitken).

¹⁵ From an *Untitled Lecture on Documentary*(1927-33). *The Documentary Film Movement*. (Ed. Ian Aitken).

¹⁶ Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001

- **The Participatory/Interactive Mode** records the encounter between subject and filmmaker, where the filmmaker actively engages with her subjects, asking questions and even sharing experiences with them.
- **The Reflexive Mode** deals with the issues of representation and acknowledging the presence of the viewer, and became more prominent after the 1980s.
- **The Performative Mode** can often be autobiographical in nature, and acknowledges the emotional and subjective aspects of documentary.¹⁷

Although Nichols has classified these modes, a single documentary does not necessarily have to stick to one mode. In fact, most documentaries can borrow from more than one of these modes, depending on the needs of the filmmaker.

***aşkı* ver bana and the Participatory/Interactive Mode**

Unlike the observational mode, where the filmmaker usually records events with a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ attitude and with the least amount of intervention within those events, the participatory mode engages with the subjects more actively and in so doing she becomes part of the events being recorded. *aşkı* ver bana can be classified as constituting of mainly the participatory mode, although I think it also overlaps a little with the observational mode.

I, the filmmaker, take both a proactive role, as well as a role of a silent observer. I arrive at the *ney*-maker’s studio, where he shows me the processes of making a *ney*. I ask him questions, although from behind the camera, making my presence ‘visible’ to the audience. On the other hand, I also observe silently as Husamettin Yivlik and Serkant ‘perform’ their conversations without any of my proactive intervention. However, the extent to which I affect their conversations is debatable, since I do have an influence with my presence on them in some way.

I sometimes cause the actors to act in a way which is the ‘every-day’ norm for them, or I cause them to ask questions which they would not have asked if I were not present, like in the case of İlyas Çelikoğlu, a *ney*-player. He gave me answers to my questions, told me stories from his past, but was also inspired to say these words: “*Bu güc nedir? Sizi buraya getiren*

¹⁷ <http://www.mediaknowall.com/Documentary/definitions.html>, acquired, August 09, 2006

güc? Evet, onu sormak isterdim...Onun için olmaz diye bir konu düşünmemek lazım”, which translates as “What is this force? The force that brings you here? Yes, I would like to ask this question. For this reason, one should not think of anything as unattainable”.

This is the force of the documentary. It takes people places which they would not have even imagined they would go to. And since I choose to work with this medium, it propels me into undiscovered lands and unexpected situations.

THE STORY CONTINUES

After the ney is cut from its source, as Nuri Uygun tells us, it is brought to the *ney*-maker’s studio (in our story, Hanefi Kırgız, the *ney*-maker’s studio). We see Kırgız cleaning, oiling, heating and cutting holes in the *kamuş* (reed) and turn it into a *ney*. He jokingly blows into it and remarks “I will become a good *ney*’, says the *kamuş!*” And while we see close-up shots of Kırgız making holes in the *ney*, we hear the sound of a beautiful ney playing. We wonder where that sound is coming from and the next shot we see is of a woman playing a *ney* in a public performance. This surprises the viewer, because we are not used to seeing women playing such instruments. The surprise technique employed in the film, heightens the interest of the viewer. Just as the musician finishes playing, another *ney* -player is brought in. This is İlyas Çelikoğlu, an elderly musician, performing for the camera, in his own private room. In between his performance, the shots are cut to him talking directly, and in a very personal manner, to the camera, about how he got interested in playing, about his youth and tells us the story of how he got smitten by love in his youth.

The Narrative

Although the narrative voice of *aşkını ver bana* is that of its actors, it tries to break through the limitations of the interview-based form, by introducing characters talking to each other, as in the case of Hüsametdin Yivlik and Serkant Dervişoğlu, and the speech by Ilyas *Hoca* which he gave at a moment of inspiration spontaneously and was not in response to the questions of the filmmaker.

It uses the direct address of the interview to try and avoid the problematics of a voice-over narration, which can become an omniscient all-knowing ‘voice’ and sometimes even didactic. Instead, it leaves it to the actors to illustrate in their own way, their own culture and viewpoints. As Bill Nichols says “The emergence of so many documentaries built around strings of interviews strikes me as a strategic response to the recognition that neither can events speak for themselves, nor can a single voice speak with ultimate authority.”¹⁸

“The voice of the text is not above history but part of the very historical process on which it confers meaning” — Bill Nichols

aşkını ver bana tries to stay very much within the historical process mentioned by Bill Nichols above, by employing the participatory mode rather than the expository. It wants to involve the audience in that process as much as it involves the filmmaker. Rather than giving the feeling that history is in the past, it wants to give the feeling that history is a process.

The tone-of-voice in *aşkını ver bana* is pensive, and of a longing. From Ilyas Çelikoğlu talking about his youth, to Hüsametdin Yivlik making the analogy about the relationship between God and the spirit with the television and the remote control; to Nuri Uygun’s last speech informing us about the Mevlevi belief in the human’s longing for beautiful music. All of these give a pensive, deeply thought-out personal views of the characters and at the same time help to form the narrative.

¹⁸ Rosenthal, Alan. Ed. *New Challenges for Documentary*. Nichols, Bill. *The Voice of Documentary*. University of California Press, 1998.

The Characters



Bıdık, the cat She is the first character to appear on screen, sitting on the entrance of a building, where it seemed she was waiting for someone to come visit her domain, and then subsequently takes the ‘lead’ in taking the filmmaker inside the building, and up the stairs. Bıdık was a surprise element in the process of shooting the film, since her appearance was by ‘accident’ and not by design. While writing the editing script for the film, however, I decided to give her key importance by attaching meaning to her presence and making her the ‘guide’ for the filmmaker, as an allegory to the ‘spiritual guide’, in showing the way to the *ney*-maker.

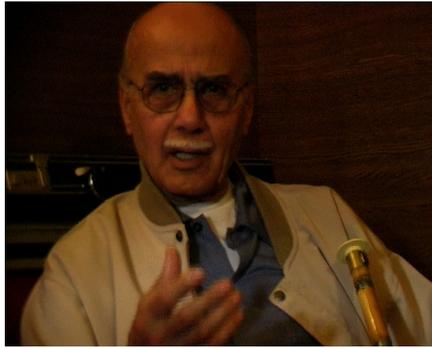


Hanefi Kırgız The technician and the practical *ney*-maker. With his demonstrations, one learns of the processes involved in making a *ney*. He appears in the introductory chapter only, although his sequence is quite detailed and long.



Nuri Uygun A pensive, *ney*-player and teacher.

At first we do not see him, we just hear his voice narrating the story of the *ney* in the introductory section of the film. He makes a physical appearance after Hanefi Kırgız and the *ney*-making process.



İlyas Çelikoğlu An elderly romantic *ney*-player who seems to be from a bygone era. He tells us his own story, when he was smitten by love in his youth, and how he started playing the *ney*.



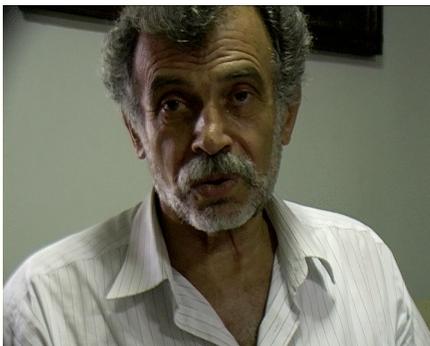
Esma İnceci A young student and enthusiast of the *ney* in Nuri Uygun's class.



Serkant Dervişoğlu A young *semazen* (whirling dervish). His appearance is both in his conversations with Hüsamettin Yivlik, and in the *sema* sequences, where he is the main character followed by the camera.



Hüsamettin Yivlik An outsider, a *muhibban* (friend of the Mevlevis) in whose uninterrupted/perennial world, time never seems to move, even though the clock in his room keeps ticking at a steady but monotonous pace. He is a practical observer of the Mevlevis.



Kadir Dede Represents a wise, but practical observer of the 'real' world, and of his *semazens*.

The choice of these characters helped me to develop a cohesive narrative: the stories they told, their style of narration, tone-of-voice, and physical appearances all contributed to forming a unifying whole in the story. I had done other interviews and shootings as well, like the one with Ahmet Çalıřır, a Mevlevi musician in Konya, but for the purposes of maintaining a comprehensive narrative, I decided not to include him.

The Landscape

The space within the video is ‘contained’ between the stairs sequences at the beginning and at the end. Just as the tunnel-staircase takes us ‘into’ this world, it also takes us out. One seems to be entering into another, mysterious land from a fairytale. But we tend to realize that in this land of the Mevlevi, the people are normal, ordinary people going about their daily lives. ‘Containing’ the environment gives a solid, tangible quality to the story of a topic which is mystical in nature. The viewer is not informed, as the film progresses, about the characters’ role in their lives. He is given, on the other hand, visual clues as to who they are, and what they do, as the story progresses.

The visual language of the documentary has a raw, ‘rustic’ feel to it. Mainly warm colours give a feeling of comfort. There are no non-diegetic inserts like intertitles, thus the story keeps the viewer in its own world.

The Soundscape

The acoustic environment created by this video seeks to heighten the audience’s perceptions. The environment noise, like that of traffic, birds, the filmmaker’s footsteps are kept intentionally audible to create the ‘soundscape’. These road sounds also symbolize a journey or voyage which the filmmaker has undertaken which she shares with her audience. Raw, mainly unmodified sounds complement the rustic-looking visual world of the video, like the crusty sound from Kırgız’s knife as he cleans the dry *kamış*. We can hear heavy traffic, cars blowing their horns, which gives us the clue that his studio is in a busy part of town. The sound of İlyas Çelikođlu’s husky *ney*, gives the feeling of an incompleteness, of an imperfection.

The treatment of sound in this video is mainly *diegetic*. The sound sources are those coming from the original sources of the people and events taking place, to heighten the feeling of the ‘now’. For this reason, the video does not use a non-diegetic soundtrack, rather, it utilizes the original music recorded by the filmmaker. The foreground sounds, intended to attract attention, like the voices of the interviewees or the *ney* performance of Nuri Uygun and his student, also help the listener to keep their attention focused on the present events of the story, and are utilized most evidently, to meet the artistic needs of the filmmaker, and to help create a sense of the present and the ‘now’. The background sounds in *aşkını ver bana* belong to a second audio track, or even a third track, and accompany the foreground sounds, usually starting from a *piano* (soft) sound, reaching *crescendo*, gradually becoming louder until they become part of the foreground: as in the scene where Hanefi Kırgız cuts holes in the *ney* while the music from someone playing the *ney* enters in the background.

There are audible *soundmarks* in the story which act as audio markers throughout the video. Like landmarks, they mark the appearance of certain characters and/or events on the timeline, and within a soundscape, a listener can begin to recognize their appearance. The conversations between Hüsametdin Yivlik and Serkant have a clock ticking in the background. This clock-ticking before the appearance of either of them on the screen, gives the audience an audio clue as to what or who they will see on the screen next. The clock-ticking symbolizes the passage of time in a timeless world.

Also, the voice of the filmmaker in certain places heightens her presence, and demonstrates the interactive quality of the video. There is constant insertion of sequences where there is music playing, which seeks to give a ‘feel’ of the Mevlevi music, like the *sema* sequences. Rather than just providing facts about this genre of music, it seeks to provide an experience and a taste of this music, to the audience. Besides the maestros and the orchestra, there are sequences with students playing as well. This heightens the ‘process’ aspect of the video, whereas the maestros playing the music symbolizes the completion of the process, which does not come at the end of the process, but goes along with it.

The 3 chapters: *Ney*, *Aşk* and *Ses*

The story is based on three chapters: *Ney*, *Aşk* (Love) and *Ses* (Sound). Although not ‘visibly’ marked by the use of intertitles, they are derived from the ceremony of the *sema* to form the basic backbone of the story.

The *sema* ceremony always starts with a *ney taksim* (a *taksim* is an instrumental improvisation), a prelude which is always played in the *largo*, a slow and broad tempo. The *ney taksim* is followed by the other instruments which slowly rise in tempo to *andante*, a walking pace, to which the *semazens* start to walk in slow, swaying motion around the *semahane*. As the ceremony advances, the tempo keeps on rising according to the needs of the four *selams*, to which the *semazens* whirl, until it reaches the fastest tempo, in the third *selam* of the *sema* which is where the dervishes ‘search’ for God. This can be described in the language of the Western Classical Musical tradition as *Presto*, or fast tempo. The tempo again slows down, in the fourth *selam* to which the *semazens* still whirl, bringing the ceremony to a completion.

I followed the sequences of the *sema* and its tempos in creating these chapters. The *Ney* chapter is a prelude, which leads us into the story. Even among the 25,000 verses of poetry in the *Mathnawi* (*Mesnevi* in Turkish) of Jalaluddin Rumi¹⁹, the *ney* comes at the beginning, as an introduction to the *Mathnawi*. As mentioned earlier, this signifies the importance of the *ney* in Mevlevi culture, giving rise to the need for making *Ney* the introductory chapter.

The second chapter, *Aşk* or Love, signifies the 3rd *selam* in the *sema* ceremony. It is where the tempo rises to its zenith. Love is the frenzy, and the climax. “Music is the language of the heart”, as Kadir *Dede* puts it, it is where, in his words, “music flows from the ear to the heart”. This scene is of dramatic significance in the story and in John Grierson’s words, who gave a lot of importance to the dramatization of a film, heightens “the living drama on the spot”²⁰.

Love leads us to Sound and Sound leads us to Love. Love is the main running theme whereas Sound takes us places never visited by the eye. The Sound chapter is the finale, just as in a music composition. Its mood is pensive and its pace is slower. But, just as soon as we think

¹⁹ *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*. Ed & Trans. Reynold A. Nicholson.

²⁰ *First Principles of Documentary* (1932) From, *The Documentary Movement, An Anthology*. Ed. Ian Aitken

the film will end with the playing of slow music, it again gains a little tempo with the appearance of the lady musicians, and then goes back to the story of the *Ney* to pull us out of the underground world and onto the streets again.

The Sublime vs. the Mundane

In *aşkıını ver bana*, the attempt is to treat the super-ordinary as the ordinary, and the sublime as the mundane. The ‘sublime’ (which comes from the Latin *sublimis* (exalted)), is what the treatment of such a topic would normally be like. Instead of romanticizing and sentimentalizing the story, the filmmaker chose to address it in an ‘everyday’ and ‘normal’ fashion which can relate to our daily lives. The introductory road sequence, the presence of the cat, the *ney*-maker’s studio, the interviews with people in their own ‘real’ environments, all these demonstrate that. The speech by Hüsamettin Yivlik about the analogy of the spirit with the television and the remote control is a prime example in the story of representing the sublime through the mundane.

The attempt is not only to make the sublime the mundane, but also vice versa. The mundane takes us to the sublime, and the sublime brings us back to the mundane. Even though there are sequences from the *sema*, which can be considered having a taste of the exalted, they are broken with the interventions of the interviews.

Bill Nichols calls the observational mode, the “tradition of filming ordinary people.”²¹ It is the lives of ordinary people that make the documentary dramatic and all the more exciting.

The Creative Process

The ‘process’ in general was extremely important in the making of *aşkıını ver bana*. Being a beginner in the medium of the documentary, the making of *aşkıını ver bana* was a learning experience for the filmmaker. I learnt about the methodologies of making a documentary on the job, from conceiving the idea, to learning how a documentary treatment should be written,

²¹ Rosenthal, Alan. Ed. *New Challenges for Documentary*. Nichols, Bill. *The Voice of Documentary*. University of California Press, 1998.

to the art of conducting interviews, to understanding the camera and microphone settings, to writing an editing script and finally applying the script to the footage. I had to develop my own techniques for juggling the camera and the microphone simultaneously while taking interviews (all of which would normally be tasks undertaken by the camera, sound and light experts).

Dealing with a foreign language on a large scale such as this video, also required me to develop my language faculties further. I learnt some of the Sufi and music terminology used in the Turkish language which would help me to convey my wants, needs and questions to the interviewees, besides the terminology which is specific to the Mevlevi culture. I attended some of the classes in Mevlevi Culture so that I would be able to learn and understand, and in turn represent the Mevlevi culture better.

Consequently, I decided to apply the ‘process’ in the documentary and its creative aspect itself and tried to make the making of *aşkıını ver bana* ‘transparent’. The very first opening scene of the story starts with the filmmaker walking down a road from where she finds the *ney*-maker. It is here that one process leads to another process. The filmmaker, in the middle of one process of shooting with the tools of the camera equipment, is led to record another process, that of making a *ney*. The *ney*-maker shows us the different processes involved in making a *ney*, and for this reason these shots in the *ney*-maker’s studio were all hand-held shots to highlight that process.

I also wanted to show the process of learning to play the *ney*. The students, both of Nuri Uygun’s, Esmâ, the *ney* enthusiast, who talks about her experiences with the *ney*, and İlyas Çelikoğlu’s student who appears soon after, both represent that learning process. Besides seeing students with their *ney*-learning process, we also hear accounts from different people about their learning experience with the *ney*. Serkant Dervişoğlu talks about how difficult the *ney* is as an instrument, and Hüsâmettin Yivlik narrates to us his funny experience as a school boy when his teacher asked him to practice blowing into a soda bottle for a month before starting to blow into the *ney*!

The use of handheld shots of the camera, even in some interviews, which would ‘normally’ be shot on a tripod, have been used intentionally to highlight the ‘process’ in the story. The out-of-focus shots turning to fully focussed shots also serve the same purpose. They

represent the learning experience, and become part of the creative process. These hand-held and out-of-focus shots also bring to light the presence of the filmmaker, making the story more of an ‘interactive’ experience for the audience, thus making *aşkıını ver bana* itself a tool within an inquiry.

Personal considerations

The one-woman production team had its advantages and its disadvantages. The research and the preproduction stage were not affected by the one-woman team in a negative way. In fact it simplified matters to be my own boss and to make my own decisions. It was at the shooting stage that I had to overcome some difficulties.

But this arrangement’s most obvious advantage was that it made it easier for me to conduct the interviews, making the interviewees open up easier and feel free to talk. It gave me the chance to spend extra time with my interviewees, to chat with them on a one-on-one basis, to explain my project in detail, and in turn to get to know them better. When one is alone with the camera, one is free to experiment at one’s own pace and time. And since I was a beginner, I got the chance to practice the various settings of the camera and the microphone, learning as I went along at my own pace.

CONCLUSION

Through this participatory documentary, I as the filmmaker, take on the role of the traveller in seek of knowledge, and the wandering ‘pilgrim’, who actively participates in the events coming across her and thereby becoming one of the actors in the film. Besides being an attempt at trying to discover what the relationship between music and Sufism is in general, why the Sufis give so much importance to music and listening, it is also a discovery into Mevlevi culture.

To get a fresh look at Mevlevi music and culture, and at the same time to have an ‘interactive’ experience with the medium of the documentary, was one of my aims in making this video, which changed my perception of what a documentary can be. I decided to make a non-fiction video, because it is a very vivid mode of story-telling. By using real-life events and people, one can tell an articulate and coherent story from the footage acquired. Although one can make completely different stories, and of any length from the footage available, the length of *aşkınu ver bana*, thirty-four mins and fifty-two seconds, gave a natural completion to the story. If it were any shorter, it would have remained too abrupt, and if it were any longer, it might have become too overblown for the audience. Also it would not have been possible to do justice to the material with the time constraints I was working with.

Being my first full-fledged documentary, I learnt a lot from it, not only the technical but also the creative and theoretical aspects involved in making a documentary. But most of all, what gave me pleasure in making *aşkınu ver bana* was the learning experience gained from the interaction with so many different people with their different ideas, styles, and opinions, who were part of my documentary-making process.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Andante: (in Western Music terminology, from Italian) at a walking pace

Aşk: (in Turkish) love

Crescendo: (in Western Music terminology, from Italian) getting louder

Dede: (in Turkish) spiritual teacher

Hadith: (in Arabic) sayings of the Prophet

Hoca: (in Turkish) teacher

Kamış: (pronounced 'kamush') reed

Largo: (in Western Music terminology, from Italian) slow and broad tempo

Muhibban: (in Mevlevi terminology) friend of the Mevlevis

Ney: (in Turkish) reed-flute

Neyzen: (in Turkish) reed-flute player

Piano: (in Western Music terminology, from Italian) soft

Presto: (in Western Music terminology, from Italian) fast tempo

Sema: (in Turkish) or sama (in Arabic) is a term that means *hearing* in Arabic and Persian. In the Turkish Mevlevi tradition it refers to the ceremony of the whirling dervishes.

Semazen: whirling dervish

Ses: (in Turkish) Sound

Taksim: (in Turkish) instrumental improvisation

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aitken, Ian. Ed. *The Documentary Film Movement*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
- AlHujwiri, Ali B. Uthman Al-Jullabi. *The Kashf Al-Mahjub*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1996.
- Banani, Amin, Richard Houannisian & Georges Sabagh. Eds. *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Chittick, William C. *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. Albany: State University of New York, 1983.
- Landy, Marcia. Ed. *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000.
- Lewis, Franklin D. *Rumi: Past, Present, East and West*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000.
- Nelmes, Jill. Ed. *An Introduction to Film Studies*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Nichols, Bill. *Blurred Boundaries*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Nichols, Bill. *Movies and Methods*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Öztürk, Yaşar Nuri. *The Eye of the Heart*. Istanbul: Redhouse Press, 1995.
- Rabiger, Michael. *Directing the Documentary*. Woburn: Focal Press, 1998.
- Renov, Michael. Ed. *Theorizing Documentary*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Rumi, Jalal'uddin. *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, Ed. & trans. Reynold A. Nicholson. Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1926.
- Wrightson, Kendall. *An Introduction to Acoustic Ecology*. From *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology*. Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 2000 <http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/WFAE/about/wrightson.pdf>.
Retrieved 06-09-2006

APPENDIX A



Figure 1: On the Road



Figure 2: Discovery of the 'hole'



Figure 3: Entry into the 'hole'



Figure 4: Up the tunnel



Figure 5: The ‘Guide’

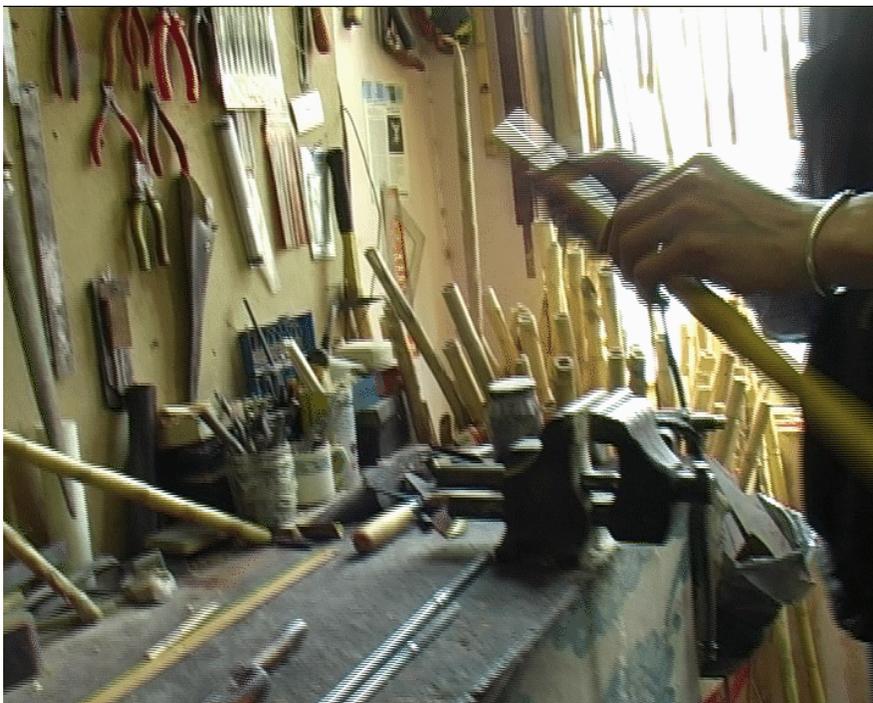


Figure 6: In the *Neyzen*'s studio



Figure 7: Hanefi Kirgiz Showing How a Ney is Made



Figure 8: The holes have been drilled



Figure 9: The first *Neyzen*



Figure 10: İlyas Çelikoğlu playing

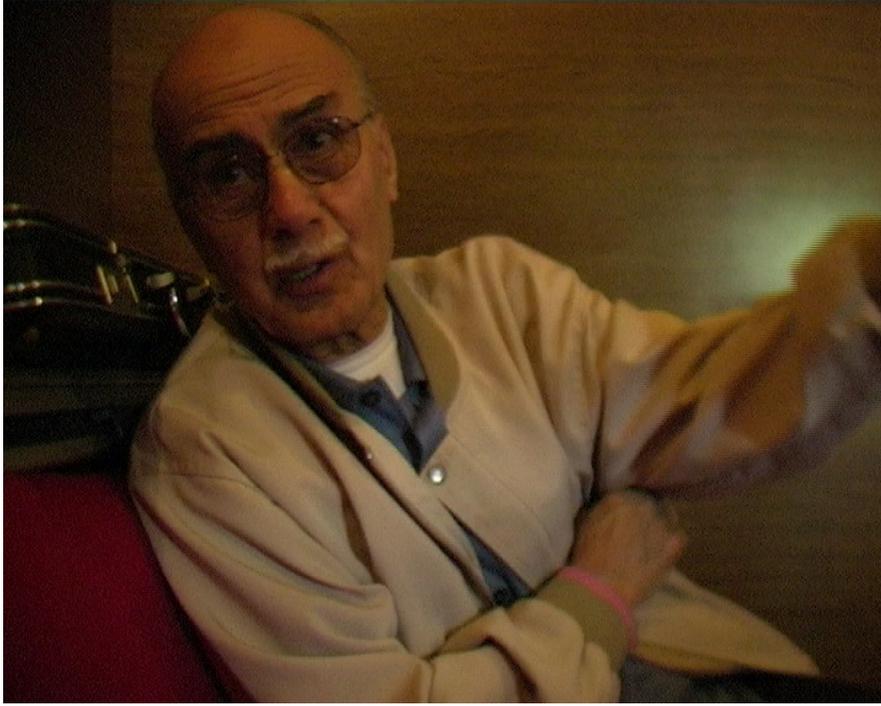


Figure 11: İlyas Çelikođlu talking



Figure 12: Hüsamettin Yivlik performing



Figure 13: Serkant ready for sema



Figure 14: Nuri Uygun playing with student



Figure 15: Esma playing in class

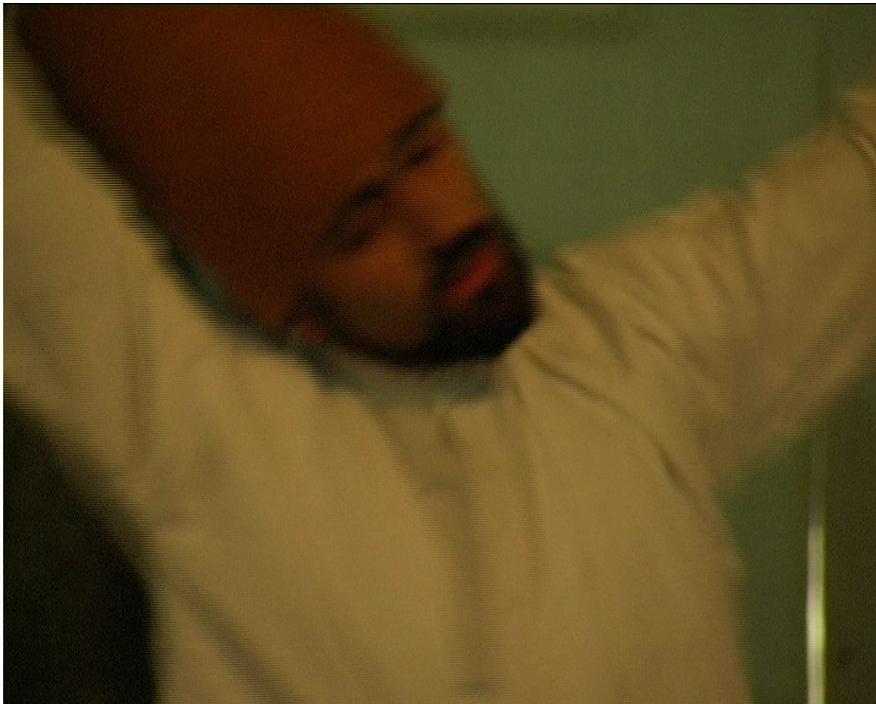


Figure 16: Serkant in *Sema*



Figure 17: Nuri Uygun and student



Figure 18: Kadir Dede at the *Sema*

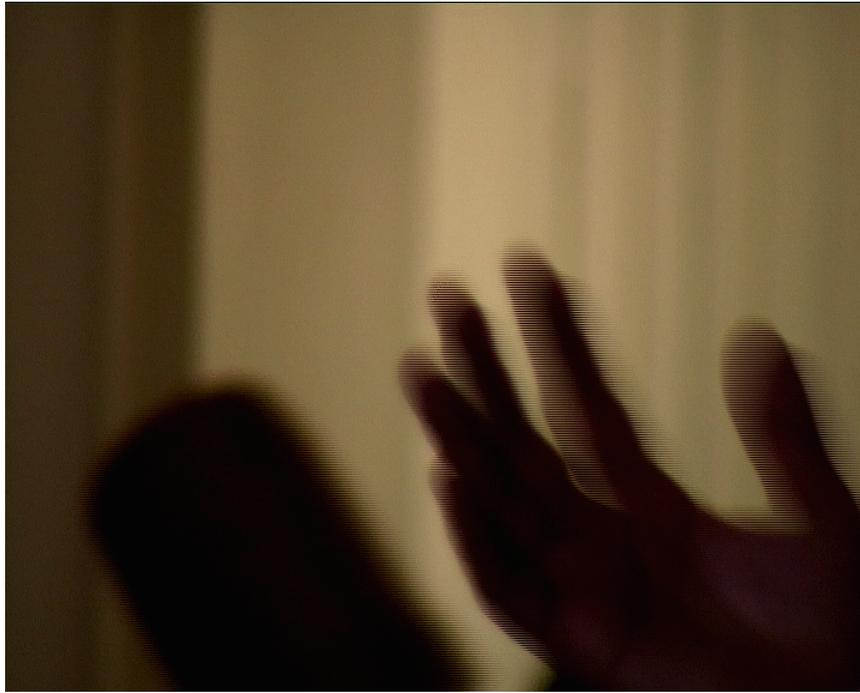


Figure 19: *Semazen's* hand

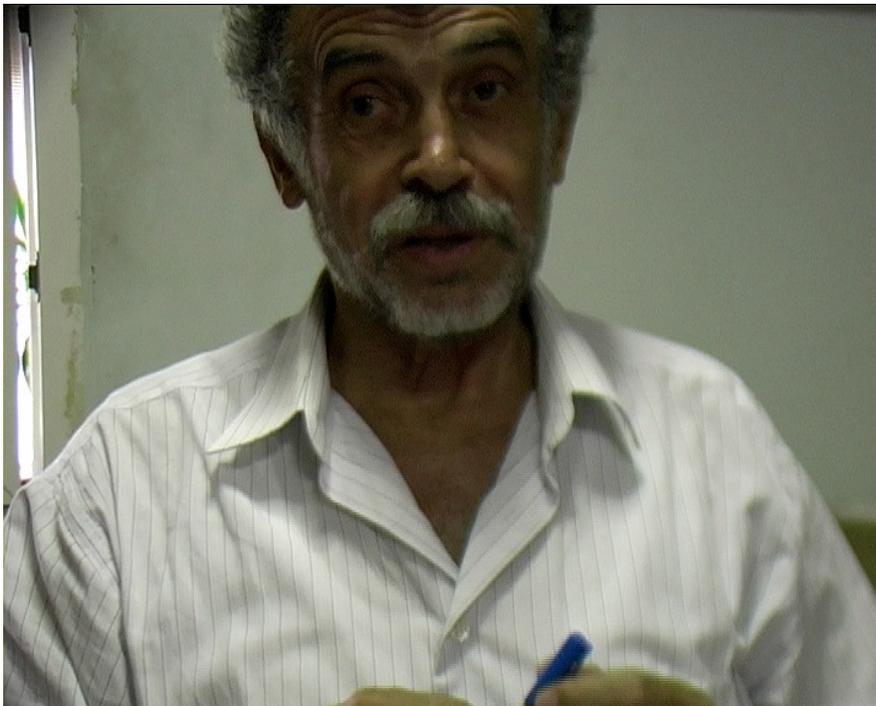


Figure 20: *Kadir Dede* talking



Figure 21: Serkant talking with Hüsamettin



Figure 22: Nuri Uygun talking



Figure 23: Ladies performing at the *Sema*



Figure 24: Girls performing at the *Sema*

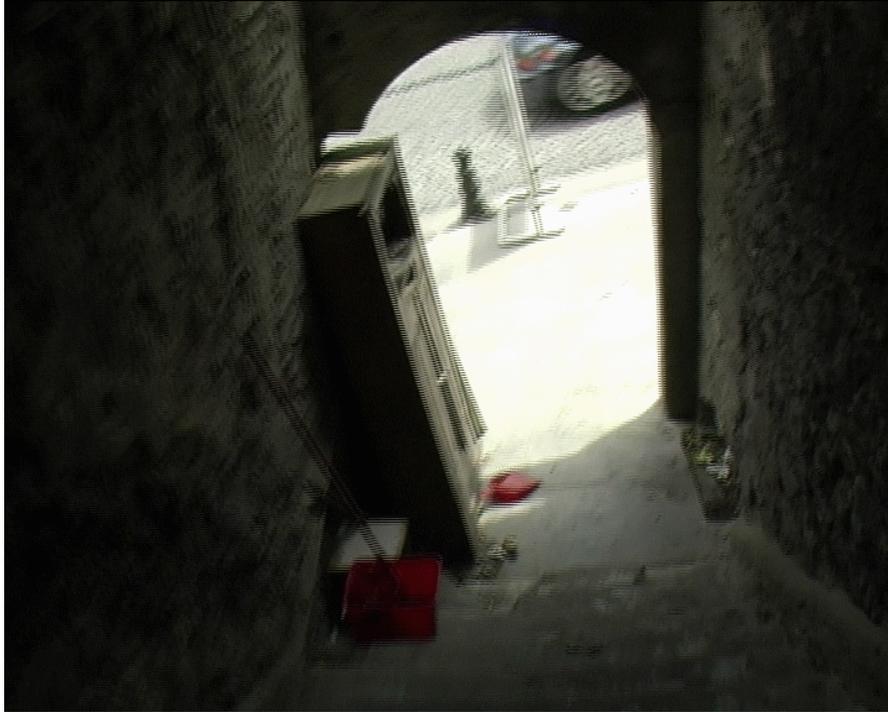


Figure 25: On the way out



Figure 26: On the road again

APPENDIX B

DVD containing film, *aşkıını ver bana*, 35 minutes, 22 seconds.

The contents of this DVD is the copyright of Nameera Ahmed
and can not be copied or used without permission.