

New Cinema, New Media

New Cinema, New Media:
Reinventing Turkish Cinema

Edited by

Murat Akser and Deniz Bayrakdar

Assistant Editor Melis Oğuz

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P U B L I S H I N G

New Cinema, New Media: Reinventing Turkish Cinema,
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INTRODUCTION

TEN PROPOSITIONS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW CINEMA

MURAT AKSER AND DENIZ BAYRAKDAR

How can we define “new” in cinema? Is it creating a new film movement where a new group of filmmakers emerges to call themselves the next independent movement? Is it a new cinema in an age when every day some new technological delivery system (3D, Blu-ray, VOD) changes methods of distribution and exhibition? What about a sudden shift in production economics of a nation’s cinema that goes from no film-audience to millions in dollars and audience attendance, a year later? Identifying a new cinematic phenomenon is one thing. How to define and analyse it, what methodologies to use in understanding the dynamics of that *new* core requires novel approaches. Yet how does one define the novelty of a group of films? Should they add a new style to the world of cinema? Should there be a manifesto appealing to an audience? Should it be accompanied by new modes of production? Who decides and defines a new cinema: filmmakers, critics or the audiences? Let us take *neo-realismo* as a new film movement that came out of Italy in the 1950s. Socio-political conditions (in the aftermath of war) created a shortage of camera and film stocks. This necessity of low tech gave rise to use of streets with real people. This in turn fuelled a new film aesthetic. What of French New Wave cinema that came about in the 1960s? It came about because of artistic boredom, as a rebellion of young filmmakers rejecting a stale salon aesthetic of the older generation of directors. French Nouvelle Vague could claim the streets because of the high-tech, the new hand-held camera and sound recording devices that allowed for shooting in the streets. These two countries share two opposing social and political conditions in two different decades, and yet they also share similarities in artistic sentiment. The new in cinema is a new aesthetic vision, fuelled by a new desire to tell human stories differently with the assistance of new media technologies.

Then how would we define what New Turkish Cinema is? We would like to make ten propositions on what post-1994 Turkish cinema is.

New Cinema, New Media: Reinventing Turkish Cinema comprises a wide range of essays by scholars from different corners of the world and is enhanced with contributions from England, the USA, Canada and Turkey. The essays mainly focus on various themes around films, directors and producers of Turkish and world cinema. We have tried to categorise the different parts of the book with the help of a virtual map of our knowledge about the creation and interpretation of new cinemas around the world.

The essays on New Criticism in Part One refer to new technologies, older regimes of cinematic production and New Criticism of the twenty-first century. The first chapter by Murray Pomerance “A World That Never Was: Old Special Effects, New Eyes” explores the changing perceptions of “new special effects technologies” in American cinema through the 1950s and up until now. The author states that styles and methods for representing reality in art have always been subject to the dictates of technical possibility. Effects and realism change over time with audience competence and horizons of expectation. Special effects often demonstrate features of optically perceivable reality the human eye wouldn’t pick up in real life which Pomerance calls “surface splendor”. Pomerance mentions problems of watching old movies with new sensibilities and watching new movies with old, social class problems. Surface splendor is also invoked by the screen, more frequently and opulently as cinema advances. Spectatorially powerful effects, close-ups, fragments of the scene, of characters’ makeup are used to demonstrate to viewers that they are in the hands of expert computer animators who could achieve fine-grain graphic detail that would read as hyper-informative. Pomerance comments that this new exceptional professionalism shuns the labour-intensive cinema of the old Hollywood. Instead, it valorises a computer graphics technique intensive approach. The loss here is that “old” cinema that was plainly offered in the character of the visual experience is now more and more replaced by action. We are losing something else, too, in fact, have now virtually all but completely lost it: the talents of particular individuals who gave their lives to the creation of screen illusions in the “old” days and who are now no longer among us. This is a lament in particular innovative (low-tech) experiments in illusion.

Seth Feldman’s contribution is titled “Flaherty, Fatty Arbuckle and the Invisible Bride: *Nanook of the North* and the Origins of Documentary”. Feldman rejects the idea that single notable individuals are the sole shapers of their historical eras or that there are lone inventors of any new technology. In the creation of documentary narrative techniques Robert

Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) is given as an example whereas filmmakers before him had other approaches that are still prevalent today. Feldman comments that *Nanook's* new cinematic originality is that it sparks a dialogue between the two realities: the actuality we feel like we are seeing and the craft of applying a "creative treatment" that will evoke emotional certainty.

Selim Eyüboğlu, in his piece "The Radical Novelty of Robin Wood's Political Film Criticism," summarises the multifaceted, mind provoking and politically controversial aspects of Robin Wood's film scholarship. The article was first presented in the fashion of in-memoriam style at the opening of the "New Directions in Turkish Film Studies XI Conference" in Istanbul at Kadir Has University in 2009, the year Robin Wood passed away. Eyüboğlu finds the new film criticism of Wood practical and engaging as he analysed shifting discourses of class, genre, and race. For him, Robin Wood's new approach came from the fact of his being a cinephile, a film fan and a critic; in this way, he could form a dialogic and a dialectic approach applying his comparative and communicative method. The birth of a new cinema can come from the use of such new critical approaches. One can easily point to the connection between the creation and interpretation of New Turkish Cinema as the writers of the Turkish film magazine *Altıyazı* applied some of Wood's psychoanalytic and class based methods in analysing new cinema's subtext.

In Part Two: Defining New in Cinema, there are four articles dealing with the different aspects of cinematic novelty in relation to the writing of history and defining the new features of cinema. The writing of history and defining the new features of contemporary Turkish cinema. Murat Akser, in "Towards a New Historiography of Turkish Cinema," indicates that the time has come to write the history of Turkish cinema from a fresh perspective. The current histories take a modernist approach that divided film history into progressive eras. A new way of writing Turkish film historiography as the writer suggests, will be to look at social and cultural changes as well as local, global and economic and technological changes in film production in Turkey since 1997. This essay shows that the access to historic resources and evaluation of first hand sources rather than secondary readings of other historians will reveal a new history.

Zahit Atam, in his paper "In the Beginning Was the Father: Why Papa? The 'New' in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's Cinema," presents Nuri Bilge Ceylan as one of the founding directors of new Turkish cinema. As a director Ceylan takes the viewers on a journey through an existential and intellectual past of his own and confronts us with the past of Turkey: Ceylan's cinema draws conclusions of his philosophy of life, of Ceylan's generation giving

access to the conflicting relations between Ceylan and his rendering of Turkish society. Atam takes us through this creative journey between Ceylan's existence and his creativity.

Aslı Daldal's contribution is entitled "The Concept of National Cinema and the 'New Turkish Cinema'". Aslı Daldal's purpose in this study is twofold: Firstly, to (re)define the notion of "national" cinema in the age of globalism and discuss its relevance to account for "national" film movements. Secondly, to examine the current situation in new Turkish cinema and try to investigate whether the current developments in filmmaking practices signal the birth of a new film "movement". Can we talk about a new Turkish "national" cinema as we talked about the "new German cinema," the "new Danish cinema" or "the new Iranian cinema"?

Savaş Arslan, in "Realism alla Turca—*Valley of the Wolves*," comments on the mixing of fiction and reality in new Turkish television and cinema. The difference of new realism in Turkish cinema comes from the fact that in Turkish cinema the relation between narrative realism and reality is conceived as quite a distinct form of realism than in Western cinematic realism. The new televisual experience of Turkish dramatic storytelling underlines a different fold of narrative realism in television series by allowing the possibility of real-time interaction with current news and events. Instead of displacing us from the world or blocking reality from the screen, the cinematic and televisual fiction in Turkey offers a contingency in which the mythological expression of fictional fulfilment is realised in both reality and fiction. Arslan comments that the viewer is left in between the West and the non-West, the cinematic and televisual illusionism and the narrativised reality. In this respect, the reality of the narration and/or storytelling ties the filmic and televisual culture in Turkey to its historical/cultural forms that bring together the presence of the storyteller or the bard. It is this very presence of the storyteller—not only in the fictional world, but also in the real world of the storyteller's performance—which denies the displacement of the viewer from the represented world.

Part Three: Canons Refined deals with naming new, alternative, underground or hyphenated cinemas in Turkey. Özgür Çiçek, in "The Old and the New Ways of Kurdish Filmmaking in Turkey: Potentials and Risks" takes the definition of ethnic cinema in Turkey to a new level. The writer questions the position of Kurdish filmmaking within the realm of cinematic production in Turkey. She theorises Kurdish filmmaking in Turkish cinema, referring back to the theoretical framework of a national cinema. The cinema of an ethnic minority group that does not have a recognised nation-state and that does not want to merge within another

national cinema realm/territory bears difficulties for the definition of a “new” national cinema. Thus, she finds in Yılmaz Güney’s cinema the nature of censorship motivated a new film language that is much more metaphoric, and that uses facial expressions rather than words. The restrictions motivated a narration that deals with social realities on the level of image and sound rather than in words or performance. This new Kurdish national cinema uses the experience of the present time in the new discursive space that would be incomplete if it was not mediated by memory, nostalgia and loss, censorship and isolated use of sound.

Tuncay Yüce’s “New Documentary, New Cinema and New Media” approaches the changes in new media technologies and their impact on cinematic art. The new technologies of the visual give rise to innovation in cinematic language. As a genre, documentary cinema takes advantages of these developments within contemporary art-making practices. These technological developments give new ground for ordinary citizens to tell their stories. This increasing availability of production can also mean multiplicity in narratives in a multimedia platform such as *youtube*. Yüce believes that when we trust in the deep-rooted tradition of the documentary because the documentaries that arises is limited by the artistic production. What really matters is the exposure of the subject of the documentary not the way it is made. This is an era providing us to means to create the new cinema, new documentary and the new media.

In Part Four: New Ways of Seeing, alternative approaches to the new cinema in Turkey are reflected on by three writers. Deniz Bayrakdar in “Old Beginnings, New Ends: Why Do New Turkish Films End by the Sea?” comments that the sea stands for “loss” and the “disappearance of desire” and the new and old value system of the region. She also mentions the importance of the “oceanic feeling” in “final” scenes as a key point in new Turkish cinema. Bayrakdar elaborates that Fatih Akın draws the imaginative line of genealogical evolution in time and space and in ending their films by the sea. In the cinema of Turkey of the 2000s, the directors direct our gaze toward the sea. We experience a “pause” in between: a move from the New Turkish Cinema to the Cinema of Turkey or Cinema in Turkey to continue our stories, to remember our past, to forgive and end at the same “ocean”.

Eylem Atakav’s “Do One’s Dreams Become Smaller As One Becomes Bigger? Memory, Trauma and the Child in Turkish Cinema” touches on the considerable efforts by post-1980 filmmakers in Turkey to come to terms with the national trauma of the military coup. The outpouring of cinematic texts since 2000 focusing on the coup’s consequences on individuals’ lives (through stories of children suffering) calls attention to

notions of memory, remembering trauma, torture and more importantly the child in cinema. This article focuses on the ways in which children are represented in recent films as it critically examines the implications of these representations.

Özüm Ünal in her essay “Post-Apocalyptic Science Fiction: A New Genre in Turkish Cinema?” intends to examine the theme of the “post-apocalypse” in *Gelecekten Anılar (Memories from the Future)* (Erverdi 2010), a post-apocalyptic science fiction short film project. Furthermore, her contribution speculates on the reasons why Turkish Cinema has not produced films that are related to or centre on the theme of post-apocalyptic Science Fiction genre so far, and also the reasons why post-apocalyptic narratives should be taken into consideration as a religious, historical, and socio-cultural fear formation in relation to the methods of cultural and political theories.

Elif Kahraman, in “Arm-wrestling a Superpower: The Representation of the United States and Americans in Turkish Films,” discusses the cinematic representations of American characters in Turkish comedy films with an interdisciplinary approach. Her article claims that, through comedy films, Turkish society expresses its feelings and thoughts about Americans. The study suggests that Turkish comedies that represent American characters are not only aimed at providing amusement to a Turkish audience but also express feelings on changing the power relations of the real world.

Part Five: New Reception brings theoretical ideas around how the audiences perceive the differences in “old” and “new” cinema to the fore. In Chapter Fourteen, “A New Look at Film Reception: Summer Theatres,” Hilal Erkan looks at Turkish open-air theatres as the important entertainment and socialising places of the recent past. The replacement of open air theatres by indoor multiplex theatres brings the loss of spontaneity and freedom produced in public places, which enabled social sharing. Erkan acknowledges the necessity of interacting with others in order to create a bond with audiences. This bonding disappears when one retreats to the satisfaction provided by subjectivity, the urban fabric, which includes plazas, malls and movie theatres that are “constructed” as places isolating individuals pursuing leisure-time activity and entertainment instead of socialising them. The open-air movie theatres united people from different age groups and socio-economic levels in an atmosphere of festivity like a *carnival* and opened the doors to enthusiastic experience. Open-air cinemas served not only as places to watch films but also as gathering places where people could engage in various forms of social interaction.

Tülay Çelik in the study “International Film Festivals: A Cinema Struggling to Exist between New Resources and New ‘Dependencies,’” states that the development of the auteur cinema field in Turkey can be evaluated in the context of international film festivals. As well as examining the opportunities offered to the director-producers in Turkey by the international film festivals in terms of international financing, sales, distribution and viewing, the study highlights the negative effects of the commercial structure of the festival network on the process of film production in Turkey. Çelik focuses on the thesis that the structure of the international film festivals—which may be creatively limiting the directors of the field of art cinema and exposing them to external interventions through the concern to be elected—is pushing the New Turkish Cinema into a new dependency relationship at the level of form and content.

In Chapter Sixteen, “Thinking Out Loud: On the Adaptations of *Hürmüz with Seven Husbands*,” Pınar Asan compares four versions of a Turkish film musical to form a ground on which some facts concerning the (time) periods when the films were shot can be revealed. She discusses the parallel reading of the 2009 film with a female protagonist to illustrate the ways in which “women’s films” were part of the social agenda, particularly during the 1980s in Turkey and how this discussion is reflected in our day. Asan comments that migration to the cities from various parts of the country and the encounter with a cosmopolitan environment that resulted from such a migration led to diversification of genres, stereotypes and space depictions in plays. Comedy attracted great attention in the city as it was a genre that could continue the critical tradition that transcended social classes.

Part Six: New Methodology is the closing philosophical section on defining a new cinema. Tül Akbal Süalp’s article is entitled “Cinema of Thresholds, Without Gravity, under Urgent Times: Distant Voices, Still Lives”. She mentions the September 12, 1980 military coup as a historical event that triggered long-time trauma with no mourning period. Together with other conditions such as growing unemployment, Turkish society began to experience insecurity and desperation and individuals became indifferent as if lost in time and space. Süalp comments that a new time-space chronotope is created with this trauma in Turkish cinema. This new alienated, “outsider” cinema has the “outsider” quality coming from the directors’ standpoint. These directors detached themselves from the recent past, the memories of the political and social trauma and became indifferent and numb. In this new cinema, there is a total disregard of social criticism, a lumpen nothingness, disappearance of the voices of women and hatred for the other. These films glorify rural life, the slowness

of the towns and the claustrophobic world and indirectly, the petty bourgeois life style as well, as they desperately seek for an escape from the metropolitan condition. Sualp points towards a new and emerging poetics of showing and telling. It is a two-dimensional dream stalk. Because the real might be so painful to face, and both remembering and forgetting are more problematic than ever, the directors of new cinema prefer to raise the curtains of the old shows and open up the boxes of fairy tales. Fortunately, she comments, there are alternative tracks of filmmaking other than commercial or personal (mostly male) such as women directors' feminist cinema and a rising political cinema.

Gülengül Altıntaş finds liminality to be a way of resistance in Erdem's cinema. Reha Erdem is one of the most prominent directors of Turkish Cinema since the 1990s. Gülengül Altıntaş, in her article "Inbetweenness as a Mode of Resistance in Reha Erdem's Cinema" argues that Erdem's films complement each other through a constant dialogue, while investigating the conflicts that arouse from humanity's encounter with culture through the quest for freedom and happiness. Looking at the *time-spaces* of adolescence in Erdem's films, Altıntaş argues that the repeating theme of adolescence becomes a means of representing this conflict at its climax and also, proposes its state of *in-betweenness* as a way of resistance which we should preserve all through our lives.

Hülya Alkan Akyüz, in "Spatial Realism: From Urban to Rural," discusses the cinematographic inclination from a cosmopolitan metropolis (especially Istanbul) to Anatolian towns in Turkish Cinema. The city is not just a visual background in recent epoch Turkish movies, but a dramaturgical element giving direction to the story. Anatolian cities and rural towns that are chosen as the site of the movies appear with their specific culture and real names. This spatial transition can be attributed to the fact that in many cases the directors were born and raised in these towns. The will to tell personal stories, a quest for belonging shaped by the space are the basis of the films discussed in this essay.

Ten Propositions

After looking over these articles, we can draw ten propositions about the existence of a new cinema:

1. New cinema of Turkey is an entirely new mode of cinematic production. Its directors are film school educated or at least university graduates compared to the artisanal directors of old cinema. This new cinema is part of global transformations such as the resurgence of

nationalism and, on the other hand, the impact of globalisation and post-nationalism (see Derman 2001; Arslan 2009).

2. It is a continuation of Yeşilçam and art cinema at the periphery. The duality that existed in Turkish cinema for the last fifty years still continues. There is the popular cinema of sensory pleasure, and there is the existential-contemplative cinema of personal experiences (Akser 2010). The genres, star system and audience appeal exist with the help of the television industry, its advertising and recycling of Turkish cinema. There is a new audience for new genres such as religious-horror as well as parodies of Yeşilçam classic genres (Arslan 2011; Özkaracalar 2012; Akser 2013).

3. It is a cinema of film festivals. As Tülay Çelik shows, the new cinema of Turkey has an organic connection to national and international film festivals for development and distribution. Film development funding and guidance of film festivals orient a new cinema towards being a more transnational marketable elite cultural product (Dönmez-Colin 2012).

4. The new cinema is that of memory, loss, forgetting, trauma and migration from rural to urban areas. This loss is seen in the new lumpen apolitical films as Tül Akbal Süalp illustrates of Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Zeki Demirkubuz and others (Suner 2004; Atakav 2011).

5. The new cinema is initiated by technology. New means of presentation, use of computer graphics and editing new delivery systems orient the viewer towards a new reception regime. As Murray Pomerance explains, there is a new level of high-tech special visual effects; the audience of today will look at labour intensive and more organic effects of the old cinema as passé, defunct and outmoded. A new reality is presented to the viewer that looks more real than the previous cinematic representation. The new cinema is always more real than the old cinema. New networks of distribution are also available through governmental film policies (Behlil 2010).

6. Alternative forms and genres of filmmaking are introduced. Transnational networks by expat/émigré directors like Fatih Akın and Ferzan Özpetek are part of this new cinema (Göktürk 1999; Bayraktar 2009; Hake and Mannel 2012; Arslan 2012).

7. Minor cinemas like Kurdish or women's cinema are called new. The cinema of Yılmaz Güney was a first in the expression of the Kurdish minority. The new films dealing with alternative identities are the independent part of new cinema (Robins and Aksoy 2000; Kaftan 2000; Dönmez-Colin 2010).

8. New cinema is about new urban lifestyles and alienation in big cities (Göktürk, Soysal and Türeli 2010; Köksal 2012).

9. There is a new audience that looks at the real and the fictional narrative from a different perspective (Arslan 2009b). Documentary film production is on the rise touching on traumatic issues. Narrative films more and more use *cinema verité* techniques blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction (Spence and Kotaman-Avcı 2013).

10. New Turkish cinema is partially created and totally endorsed by a new breed of film criticism. For every new cinema, there is new film criticism. As Selim Eyüboğlu elaborates, the existence of film critics who redefine the films from political viewpoints of class, genre and race makes a difference in the amount of attention given to a new cinema. As Seth Feldman states, the choice of film historians to define what was standard filmmaking practice in a given genre and era depends on their own personal preference.

At last, the New Turkish Cinema revealed the need for hope for a “new cinema” to begin newly after a long silence in Turkish cinema as a counterpoint to the European cinemas' stagnation. Where the East found a fresh perspective was in the ashes of the Revolution in Iran, social movements in Korean and Chinese cinemas. The awards received at film festivals are a motivation not only for the directors but also for the spectator (Arslan 2010). New cinema in Turkey owes much to the presence of the newly found audience, without whose large numbers of attendance the true success of new directors' films would not have been acknowledged by the critics, the funding bodies, the festivals and the rest of the world.

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PART I:
NEW CRITICISM

CHAPTER ONE

A WORLD THAT NEVER WAS: OLD SPECIAL EFFECTS, NEW EYES

MURRAY POMERANCE

To begin, a note about the Orient Express, which made its virgin eastbound journey from Paris to Istanbul (at the time, still Constantinople) on the first of June 1889, eight weeks after the inauguration of the Eiffel Tower. This train, paragon of modernity, operated by the *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits*, would have stopped in Munich, Vienna, Budapest, and Bucharest, stocked with as many as four sleeping coaches, two baggage cars, and a restaurant coach in which one could have eaten oysters and sipped turtle soup. The Istanbul terminus was the Sirkeci Station, in Eminönü; passengers continuing into Asia would have ferried over to the Haydarpaşa Garı in Kadıköy. For lovers, devotees, and students of trains, as anyone interested in modernity will surely be, the Orient Express is important chiefly because of its extremely luxurious style, a kind of late nineteenth-century special effect, if you will. In terms of style, design, and pleasant physical accommodation, this service epitomises what railway travel had become as the century drew to a close.

My reason for invoking railways here is connected to pleasure and technology, but is a step removed from simple description. In his masterful treatise on railway travel, Wolfgang Schivelbusch draws our attention to the relation between socially organised technologies and frivolous pleasure when, commenting upon carriage riding, the precursor to the development of trains, he notes that the “final fate” of this “traditional mode of travel” was “to become the amateur sport of the privileged classes” (1986, 14). Quite beyond the application of technology to the production of entertainment then, traditions and technologies gone by come in themselves to constitute entertainment when they are outmoded (note in this respect, the so-called “delights” of Michel Hazanavicius’s *The Artist* and Martin Scorsese’s *Hugo* [both 2011], which allow audiences to revel pleasurably in fundamental cinematic techniques of the past). Once, the

train existed to annihilate for travellers the topography of the landscape, by substituting with the level track on which a relatively smooth ride could be experienced, the horse-driven carriage, in earlier days vital as a means of locomotion, now only for play. We may reflect that transformations like this are widespread in capitalist culture.

I want to suggest another technical eclipse that, in the wake of a new cultural experience considered precious by those who share it, left a trail of defunct and relatively primitive operations, quite fascinating in their own right, but now considered hopelessly impractical and out of touch, material fit for only those who like to play and imitate; good for writing history or cultural analysis but not, as the multitudes wish, rushing forward to new and more smoothly-designed excitements with inventions of the moment. Television programmes of the 1950s, for example, at the time considered the crest of the wave by all who addictively watched them, are now available as sentimental downloads for those who wish to look back with superiority on their primitive charms. They represent a kind of televisual archaeology; while at the time of their first airing they were taken just as seriously, considered a rich treasure of dramatic possibility, as *Boardwalk Empire* or *Glee* or *The Boss* are today. In this age of cellular communication, “old-fashioned” dial telephones are sold for decorative purposes. And with the advent of digital cinema, special effects produced from the early days of the twentieth century and for decades afterward through matte and rear projection techniques are valued now as quaint historical toys: optical printers are sold off at auction for esoteric collectors; clips from the films adorn museum exhibitions; the works themselves are screened for esoteric cinephiles on TCM. Already by 1974, the Orient Express was in decline, relegated to the status of a glamorous film set as travellers who wanted to get from Paris to Istanbul took the plane. What I want to consider here is the use of technical effects in cinema to represent what viewers would call “reality,” specifically the way in which when they are past their prime, outdated techniques become less serious and less believable for audiences. In the end, technique toys with belief, that quintessential substrate that we cannot quite define or touch but that guides and focuses our lives.

Nerves

Styles and methods for representing reality in art have always been subject to the dictates of technical possibility. We can think of the nineteenth-century posing stand that held photographic subjects’ heads still so their expressive faces would not be blurred, and how the realism of

representation achieved thereby facilitated the work of such cataloguers as Berthillon or photographers like Edward S. Curtis who photographed North American Indians (see Scherer); or the way painting could be advanced once the colour blue “became aristocratic and fashionable” in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Pastoureau 2001, 49 ff). Beyond technology, fashion and public judgement have also played their roles, as we can see by the denigration and ridicule that the French critical establishment offered in response to the first shows of *Impressionisme*, one sniping observer writing of Monet in 1874 that he “has frenzied hands that work marvels. But to tell the truth, I never could find the correct optical point from which to look at his *Boulevard des Capucines*. I think I would have had to cross the street and look at the picture through the windows of the house opposite” (Jules-Antoine Castagnary, *Le Siècle*, 29 April) and another thinking it possible in 1886 that Seurat was “a cold-blooded mystifier” (Octave Maus, *L’Art Moderne*, 27 June). Of cinema, Maxim Gorky’s often-quoted July 4, 1896 newspaper account of some of the earliest Lumière projections, for example “Des Ouvriers sortant de l’usine” (1895), reveals a certain self-protective equivocation of sentiment, since even while aghast at some of the effects of the experience he couldn’t help seeing film evoking a rather negative, ghostly twin world to his own comparatively lively one, “a kingdom of shadows...without sound, without colour...Everything...dipped in monotonous grey...no sound of footsteps or of speech”. Cinema of the golden age (between about 1930 and 1960) was frequently misunderstood or undervalued in its evocation of reality. The locust storm in Sidney Franklin’s *The Good Earth* (1937), a special effect if ever there was one, the *New York Times* believably found “terrifying,” but the utterly splendid and often technically complex *Vertigo* (1958) the same newspaper found notable for nothing more than its “dramatic color”. And watching *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), a film that has enchanted hundreds of millions of viewers again and again, one critic ignorantly saw only “betraying jolts and split-screen overlappings” (Frank S. Nugent, *New York Times*, 18 August 1939, 16). Viewers unceasingly carry their own cultural expectations and biographically cultivated hopes, and construct their viewing experience through an unfolding negotiation between what is offered on the screen and what they wish for, think proper, and remember. This negotiation becomes complicated when history enters the formula by way of a temporal lag between a work and the audience’s experience of it, as when, for example, people look back upon cinematic effects produced before they were born but with unavowed anticipations based in their present-day experience.

I will never forget the contemptuous laughter my undergraduate class produced, year in and year out during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and in the very best of spirits, when I showed them François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*, produced in London in late 1965 by Lewis M. Allen, who had earlier produced the entirely credible *Lord of the Flies* for Peter Brook. At one point in *Fahrenheit 451*, the hero, a futuristic fireman named Montag (Oskar Werner), in flight from repressive state authorities, arrives at the edge of a river, which is the beginning of the underground road to freedom. Hearing a high-pitched drone, he quickly hides under a tarpaulin in a rowboat. The sound persists, and turns out to be produced by a team of four airborne police agents, skimming along the river with hover jets tucked under their arms and scanning beneath them for any sign of the fugitive. It's a chilling narrative moment. The sequence contains two shots, one with a very long lens for establishment showing the stretch of the river, then one with a medium-long lens that focuses on the policemen approaching, twisting this way and that as they search for Montag, but miss him. This second shot ends with a close-up featuring the jet equipment, since the agents have by now approached the camera; in this moment, actually, the matte process being used is *less* obvious than it was before. But every time this sequence came up in class, and especially this particular close-up, my students broke up laughing. Not just laughing: laughing with a kind of relief. They had endured more than an hour and fifteen minutes of the film in rapt engagement, including very elaborately designed modernist representations of a monorail, a futurist fire station and fire wagon, a wall-sized television, and even an obtrusive though extremely dramatic optical wipe, all this without even a snicker of disengagement, but now their deriding sense of superiority could be held in no longer. "Who do you think you're kidding?" they seemed to say, "Don't you know this kind of cheesy effect is beneath our dignity?" Mattes like this were all over the place in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the end of *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, a film made five years after *Fahrenheit*, there is a similarly "cheesy" group of matte and rear-projection shots of the Chocolate King's glass Wonkavator flying over a European town. This sequence, neither particularly sophisticated nor particularly cheap, didn't move audiences to laughter because it claimed to constitute a happy ending, not a tense climax. Nabokov's observation, "Some people, and I am one of them, hate happy ends. We feel cheated. Harm is the norm. Doom should not jam. The avalanche stopping in its tracks a few feet above the cowering village behaves not only unnaturally but unethically" (25-6), did not apply to most viewers of Hollywood fantasy and science-fiction films of the 1960s and 70s, for

whom any contrived special effect could be tolerated if it would lead directly to a smooth resolution of tension and conflict, and thus soothe the audience.

Obtrusive effects such as the matte shot from *Fahrenheit 451* irritate the viewer who is trying to remain convinced that cinema offers not a construction, but a veritable window on the world. (Such viewers depend upon cinema as a window or means of transportation, not a form of art.) The clarity of the effects technique *as such* tends to suggest manipulation, disingenuousness, insincerity, and a kind of low charlatanry, and provides a behind-the-scenes glimpse that (rather demanding) viewers would prefer not to have, since it seems to ruin the illusion by pointing to it. Audiences watching a reprise of this Truffaut sequence in Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002) never flinched, although the same type of matte technique was in use, albeit in a more contemporary version.



Figures 1 and 2 Matte of air-bound police from *Fahrenheit 451* (François Truffaut, 1966) and from *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002). Both digital frame enlargements. Note how the darker background in the Spielberg shot obscures the technical effect.

Serious narrative disengagement is produced for the viewer who notices that he has not been hoodwinked. Such critics populate current audiences looking back suspiciously, for example, on the attack sequences in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), sequences that were seen by audiences at the time—I sat among them—in thoroughgoing suspension of disbelief even though we knew what we were seeing could not be happening in fact. The point was: it rather looked as though it was happening—unless, of course, we allowed ourselves to withdraw and began to see it as artistry (but *who wanted to withdraw!*). Perhaps audiences today actually do wish to withdraw when they encounter such a film, only because it is from, as Montag says in *451*, “before”.¹ In 1963 at any rate, an age before the flood of popular cinematic criticism (on television and the internet) that makes an expert out of every viewer, viewers simply believed what they saw, committed to the entertainment, the indeterminacy of a direct optical experience that could not discern “special effects” as such since it had not been educated by a postmodern media to do so. The postmodern age of distrust and cynicism that was born with the assassination of John F. Kennedy was still just short of eight months away when *The Birds* came out. Watching it, audiences relished an optical experience that attached itself to characters and their fates and wondered, not why, how, or that the birds were fake, but why the birds might have wanted to take over the world. Viewers today very often see only a failure in object realisation, a reason for critical distancing and for disaffiliation with the screen. This coolness notwithstanding, one must affirm that affiliation is the transforming, the redeeming stance.²

In the early 1940s, audiences went along with—even profoundly enjoyed—some rather simplistic effects in Charles Reisner's Marx Brothers comedy *The Big Store* (1941), effects that already by 1963 could have seemed unacceptably bald and elementary. One would be the optical printing and matte work in the Bedroom Department scene, as a tent automatically unfurls from the back of a camper van, then collapses back again. A more emphatically false moment shows Harpo and Groucho

1. *Fahrenheit 451*, indeed, is an exegesis on the theme I am addressing here, advancements in sensory technology and their political and social effects.

2. I here respectfully bypass the significant critical estimation of apocalypse thrillers offered by Christopher Sharrett (see, for just one example, “American Sundown: *No Country for Old Men*, *There Will Be Blood*, and the Question of the Twilight Western,” in Pomerance and Sakeris' 2010 *Popping Culture* 6th edition, 261-68); since regardless of whether one adopts his powerfully critical critique of apocalyptic cinema or not, nevertheless the vision of the apocalypse as “real” is a matter that must be negotiated between filmmakers and audiences.

singing to a cobra in a basket, and the cobra, clearly nothing but a puppet, appearing to dance with them (and making a face at Groucho). Perhaps the simplicity of these effects lends a childlike innocence to the project. We can write off the audiences who enjoyed them, less than six months before Pearl Harbour, as childlike and innocent, too.

The issue of historicising the audience's response to visual effects is continually with us. We see it raised by George Lucas's much publicised digital revisions of his original three *Star Wars* films, so as to "improve" on the effects sequences, that is, so as to render his work less vulnerable to audience criticism and disengagement on the basis of what could be seen as "inadequate" realism (this although no one thought the realism of the first *Star Wars* films inadequate when they first came out).³ Even more bluntly interesting is the aspect of cinematic effects most widely discussed by viewers around the world, namely their easy obsolescence: the apparently obvious importance of producers continually raising the bar as to quality and detail. For example, the perfectly enchanting, and groundbreaking *TRON* (1982), with animation, visual, rotoscope, and matte effects by Harrison Ellenshaw and a team of six or seven dozen artists; or the somewhat ridiculous *Clash of the Titans* (1981), with stop-action animation by Ray Harryhausen, are both completely insufficient to our current demands for a more objective realism, and must be remade as *Clash of the Titans* (2010)—with hundreds of specialists handling digital compositing, match-move photography, rotoscoping, creature modelling, shader writing, asset modelling, texture art, digital matte creation, fluid simulation, and so on—and the similarly pumped *TRON Legacy* (2010), both films in appallingly seductive if perhaps not so very convincing 3-D.

The formula of repeating obsolescence applies not only to special effects hardware (such as the Fusion 3-D system, used for James Cameron's *Avatar*, that involves a pair of SONY high-definition cameras yoked together in a harness); or techniques (such as motion capture that, advancing rotoscoping into the twenty-first century, was used in *Avatar* to model Na'vi body movement on the movement of human actors covered with electronic sensors; or in *TRON Legacy* to make a performance out of Jeff Bridges' isolated gestures); but also to a kind of moral/economic imperative. One must continually purchase, adapt, and utilise newer and bigger computer programs to achieve animation effects; employ more and more technicians, even armies, flooding the vast battlefield of the narrative

3. I sat with an audience deep underneath Times Square when, in the very first of the films to see the screen, Han Solo and Chewbacca switched into hyperdrive for the very first time. It will suffice to say that more than twelve hundred people, most of them streetwise and young, roared with astonishment and pleasure.