



## Introduction: Ten Propositions On The Possibility of A New 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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