



**European Journal of Turkish Studies**  
Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey  
**Complete List**

---

## Two Oriental Images of Istanbul: Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle* and Erksan's *Time to Love*

Aslı Daldal

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/5590>  
ISSN: 1773-0546

**Publisher**

EJTS

**Electronic reference**

Aslı Daldal, « Two Oriental Images of Istanbul: Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle* and Erksan's *Time to Love* », *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [Online], Complete List, 2018, Online since 04 September 2018, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/5590>

---

This text was automatically generated on 1 May 2019.

© Some rights reserved / Creative Commons license

---

# Two Oriental Images of Istanbul: Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle* and Erksan's *Time to Love*

Aslı Daldal

---

## Introduction

- 1 Istanbul, the beautiful and enigmatic city, once the capital city of a powerful Oriental Empire has always attracted western artists and travelers<sup>1</sup>. As Nezih Erdoğan points out, 'Istanbul has become many things throughout the ages, including the bridge between East and West and between tradition and modernity; the capital of the Islamic World and eventually the capital of Europe in 2010. It has gained the status of an icon, in the sense that it has become an epistemological tool' (2010: 129). Although often referred to as a 'Bridge between East and West' in a well-known cliché, Istanbul has mostly been represented as an 'exotic' and 'erotic' place very different from the 'civilized' West. The 'Orientalist' representations of Istanbul, focusing mostly on the "imagined" sexual pleasures encapsulated within the broad conception of 'Orient' (as a metaphor for sexuality), attracted western writers and painters (Kabbani 1986). As for the western filmmakers, Istanbul was also a popular setting since the advent of cinema. As Ahmet Gürata, the Turkish historian of cinema, summarizes, documenting Istanbul's deep intimacy with the sea, as the quintessential starting point for the depiction of this enigmatic city was very common. Many films (one of the most recent being Patrice Leconte's *La Fille sur le Pont* dated 1999) include a scene of the Galata Bridge with its panoramic view over the Golden Horn. During the silent era, films holding to Orientalist tropes, representing Istanbul as an exotic, foreign place (such as *The Virgin of Stamboul* made in 1920 by Tod Browning) depicted western heroes rescuing beautiful girls from the hands of evil sheiks (Gürata 2012: 24). After World War II and during the Cold War, Istanbul was mostly represented as a locale of political intrigue as well as eroticism, in line with a penchant for "film noir". In addition to these, Jules Dassin's famous feature film *Topkapı*<sup>2</sup> made in the same year as *L'Immortelle* (1963) included spectacular sights of

the city such as the Basilica Cistern, Blue Mosque, and the Bosphorus together with some modern ones such as the Hilton Hotel.

- 2 The purpose of this work is to compare two different Orientalistic visions of the city reflected in two films, both made after the 1960 coup d'état in Turkey<sup>3</sup>. As the coup repositioned the capital city of Ankara (symbolizing the power of the Kemalist bureaucratic elites) as the center of Turkish political modernity, Istanbul once again became the 'nostalgic' setting for those unwilling to be fully absorbed by the 'futuristic' projections of the neo-Kemalist elites. The first of these 'nostalgic' representations is *L'Immortelle* made by Alain Robbe-Grillet in 1963 and is one of the rare examples of a classic Orientalist depiction of the city in western cinema. Although not directly related to the coup, Robbe-Grillet's 'postcard' depiction of the mythical Istanbul goes against the 'forced' modernization of the country by a Jacobin elite who were so keen on erasing the Ottoman past. As Robbe-Grillet himself admits, although having a very strong 'modernist' penchant, the film is also a mixture of Pierre Loti, *The Thousand and One Nights* and the *Blue Guide*. It is a 'postcard' Istanbul, an imaginary city which is not the 'real' Istanbul of the Turks. Like the female protagonist of the film, Leila, whose femininity is represented as an 'enigma' concealed behind a mask of seductiveness, the city is also attractive but full of mysteries and fatal dangers (Robbe-Grillet 1963: 10).
- 3 The second film with a strong, yet very different, penchant for an Oriental discourse is *Time to Love* [*Sevmek Zamanı*] directed in 1966 by a Turkish filmmaker, Metin Erksan who won the Golden Bear Award in 1963 with his *Susuz Yaz* [*Dry Summer*]. As Akser (2013) points out, *Time to Love* is Erksan's 'iconic' film for many film critics and produced a cult audience through repetitive screening of the film on television. *Time to Love*, like Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle*, talks about a 'nostalgic' city whose Ottoman past is blurred by all the modernizing efforts of a new Kemalist elite. But contrary to Robbe-Grillet's 'Oriental labyrinth', *Time to Love* is a different vision of the city not encapsulated by eroticism and fantasy but by an Oriental search for inner meaning, peace, and harmony. A Turkish filmmaker mostly educated in western culture in line with the Kemalist educational policies, Erksan, does not really live in the Oriental world he is depicting. But it mostly reflects his own quest for meaning he hopes to find in 'Sufism'. A very different Oriental sense of love (platonic, devoid of all the sexual stereotypes) and a deep melancholy [*hüzün*, which, for Orhan Pamuk, is the general mood of Istanbul] create a nostalgic setting different from Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle*. Erkan's yearning for the 'imagined' Oriental 'soul' of the city is so accentuated, that the very absence (or in some cases, the implied negative filmic depiction) of the 'modernized' or 'westernized' aspects of the city also alludes to a particular form of 'Occidentalism' very common in Turkish popular cinema of the 1960s known as *Yeşilçam* [*Pine tree*] Cinema<sup>4</sup>. Therefore these two films, although not directly related, are 'complementary', as *L'Immortelle* represents the 'flesh' of the city (its sensual beauty through an erotic women that invites us to a voyeuristic gaze) and *Time to Love*, its 'soul' that reflects the Sufi categories of Platonism, melancholy, and contemplation.

## I. *L'Immortelle* [The Immortal One, 1963]

- 4 Alain Robbe-Grillet, the famous French writer and filmmaker most associated with the trend of 'nouveau roman' created *L'Immortelle* in 1963. Although he was well-known in the French film circles with the script he wrote for *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), it is his

second cine-roman (script novel), *L'Immortelle*, which set his reputation as a filmmaker. The shooting of *L'Immortelle* (Robbe-Grillet's debut film as director) in Istanbul is closely linked to the coup d'état of 1960 and the ensuing political situation in Turkey (Armes 1981: 45). Apart from Robbe-Grillet's passion for this exotic and forgotten city, the political situation in Turkey also forced him to shoot the film in Turkey as he had some funding from international sources such as Cocinor films and The Films Tamara (Allemand and Milat 2010: VI) and they could not move the money outside of Turkey because of the new bureaucratic restrictions. Nevertheless, *L'Immortelle* did incorporate many recurrent themes of Robbe-Grillet's work up to 1963, such as the persistence of a 'labyrinth' as the controlling metaphor, the emphasis put on imaginative fantasy (as a way out of this labyrinth), and sequences which incessantly violate chronology (Stoltzfus 1967). In *L'Immortelle*, with its narrow streets, back alleys, strange mosques, Istanbul provided Robbe-Grillet with the suitable atmosphere for creating a fatal labyrinth.

- 5 The plot is relatively simple. The hero of the film is a professor named simply N (Jacques Doniol-Valcroze) who meets a mysterious lady in Istanbul and falling in love at first sight with this modern looking woman (Françoise Brion). As a corollary to 'subjective realism' (the oscillation of memory from real to imaginary) often present in Robbe-Grillet's œuvre (Morissette 1968) her real name is unknown to us and changes (as her appearance) from Leila to Lale (or to Lucille). She guides him through the beautiful streets and ruins of the city and suddenly disappears. Her address is unknown to N and while searching for her, he comes across people and places that alienate him from a common-sense reality. Throughout the film one questions whether the events and people (including Leila) are real or only N's imaginative fantasies. N is unable to get out of this labyrinth of people and places, and consequently dies (or perhaps imagines his own death) in a car crash.
- 6 As the film's leading actor Doniol-Valcroze asserts in an article entitled 'Istanbul nous Appartient' published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1963), it is the 'how' of the film (its formal qualities) that constitutes its artistic merit. The presence of Istanbul gives the film its pictorial as well as enigmatic character. The city creates a *décor en trompe-l'œil* and satisfies Robbe-Grillet's quest for a dream-like, exotic setting. It also enables the director to fulfill a classic Orientalist perspective within a modernist guise. In the introduction to his ciné-roman *L'Immortelle*, Robbe-Grillet himself admits that what he aimed at portraying was not the 'real' Istanbul and that he drew great inspiration from the Orientalist work of Pierre Loti<sup>5</sup>. Says Robbe-Grillet:

The film is a mixture of Pierre Loti, *The Thousand and One Nights* and the *Blue Guide*... This film relies on a mythology, a mythology of the Orient, an Orient seen from Paris as a postcard which occupies an important place in the mind of the Occidental societies but which has nothing to do with Istanbul of the Turks. (Robbe-Grillet quoted in Olcay 2003: 98)

- 7 In *L'Immortelle*, the protagonists, especially Leila, often remind the audience that the city is mostly a setting for an Orientalist fantasy:
 

L: You came to a Turkey of Legend. The mosques, palaces, secret gardens, harems...  
N: As in books! (Robbe-Grillet 1963: 32)
- 8 And in another impressive scene:
 

L: That's all your imagination... The Bosphorus, the minarets, the wooden houses where the women are forcefully kept... to fulfill the desires of the Sultans... Do you know the poems of Sultan Selim?  
N: Which Sultan Selim?

L: I don't know. They are all Selim, they all write the same poem with recurrent fetishes. (*Ibid*: 51)

- 9 The Orientalist perspective is certainly not new for the French intellectuals. Starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, writers and travelers such as Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Baudelaire, de Nerval, and Loti quested for happiness and peace in the Orient. Robbe-Grillet not only transports their exotic passion to the realm of a modern art but also repeats certain clichés well documented in the classic literature about 'Orientalism'. In Said's well known classic formulation (inspired from Foucauldian poststructuralism according to some critics), 'Orientalism' assumes a western domestication of the Orient for the Occidental consumption. Or, put it differently, 'Orientalism is intrinsically Eurocentric and places the Orient in opposition to the European West as the quintessential Other' (Hosford and Wojtowski 2010: 1). It is a style of thought based upon certain rigid stereotypes about the 'Orient', the 'other' of the civilized west. Although in contemporary scholarship Said's 'Foucauldian' emphasis on the constructed 'otherness' of the Orient is reassessed from various perspectives (Lockman 2013) it is still highly possible to assert that especially in French literature and art, Said's formulations are still quite meaningful. Thus is the Oriental irrational, childlike, different, whereas the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'. Europe is familiar, the Orient exotic, mysterious and seminal (Szyliowicz and Kershner 1988). The depiction of the exotic and mysterious Orient is very often combined with a licentious sexual experience that obsesses the European imagination. It is therefore very common to symbolize the entire Oriental pleasures and delights with a beautiful and mysterious woman, generally hidden behind a veil or captured by an evil pasha. The body of the Oriental woman, combined with the fantasies triggered by the 'belly dancing' mostly satisfies this Occidental quest for erotic sensation. Robbe-Grillet is also aware of that as, in *L'Immortelle*, he shoots an impressive scene of Leila belly dancing erotically for that Occidental gaze.
- 10 In his analysis of Orientalist films on Istanbul, Gürata holds that *L'Immortelle* is rather different. Although recapturing the postcard depiction of the city, the film suggests that these touristic images are constructed through the fantasies of the main character N (2012). Robbe-Grillet's female character in *L'Immortelle* is also imaginary. But this oscillation between the real and the imaginary does not change the main framing of the film: Robbe-Grillet's female heroine is no real exception to the above formulation. Leila (soul mate in Arabic) embodies the metaphor of the attractive Orient as well as the beautiful and mysterious Oriental city of Istanbul. But being part of a modern filmic movement such as *la nouvelle vague* (the new wave) prevents Robbe-Grillet from duplicating Pierre Loti's well known classic oriental heroines in *Aziyadé* (1879) and *Les Désenchantées* (1905). As Reina Lewis argues, in 'Orientalist' approach gender generally occurs as a metaphor for the negative characterization of the 'Orientalized Other' as feminine (1996). In Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle*, 'femininity' is not solely associated with 'inferiority' or 'passivity' (as is generally the case with Loti, the prime inspiration here for Robbe-Grillet) but is also granted a certain 'power' by being the subject of an 'aesthetics of curiosity' that can 'destroy' the male protagonist. Thus Leila can be seen from two different aspects:
- a. Like Pierre Loti's heroine in *Les Désenchantées*, Leila seems to be captured and put in a secret harem by an evil Oriental man. But contrary to the female characters depicted by Loti and other writers, Leila (or Lucille) can enter mosques, cafés and other places known to be forbidden to women. She is also modern looking without a veil. She often says that she does not speak Turkish (which happens to be a lie) and she interprets the events and places

around her with the remoteness and objectivity of an “outsider”. Reminiscent of the famous new wave female characters (created mostly by Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut) Leila is also a “femme fatale” eventually causing the death of the professor. Contrary to the passive oriental heroines of the classic literature who often die after their beloved Frenchmen leave, Leila is active, intelligent and outspoken.

- b. On the other hand, Leila (or Lale) also embodies the classic metaphor for the Oriental woman. Leila expresses unlimited sensuality. Her belly dancing (Robbe-Grillet shoots an impressive scene of Leila belly dancing for minutes) is done solely for the western male gaze and promises ‘unlimited desire and deep generative energies’ (Szyliowicz and Kershner 1988: 22). The oriental dance symbolizes the whole East. As Kabbani summarizes:

The dance itself proved to be the undoing of nature; even the moon turned red as Salome danced... The dance became invested with an exhibitionism that fascinated the onlooker: he saw it as a metaphor for the whole East...It was not a social expression only since the woman was there to please the onlooker who did not participate but watched. The dance could be used as a medium that illustrated what were perceived to be Orient's qualities. It could portray female nudity, rich and sequestered interiors, jewels, hints of lesbianism, sexual languor and sexual violence. (1986: 69)

- 11 *L'Immortelle* represents an exclusively male domain where women are mostly treated as products of a male power-fantasy. Apart from the captive Leila portrayed like a primitive goddess, the plot is also based on a classic story that sets the Occidental man as the western rescuer of the oppressed harem woman (Shohat 1997) (a recurrent theme since *The Virgin of Stamboul* made in 1920). In *L'Immortelle*, Leila is said to be enslaved by her jealous husband, and professor N is the western gentleman who comes to her rescue. The Oriental male, as in many classic Orientalist artworks, is evil and his villainy is aggravated by the fact that he is the captor who holds women in his cruel grasp. But this time, the villain Oriental male is not an Arab or a black man in a strange costume but a man with dark glasses holding two Great Danes. Like the captive Leila, the Oriental evil male is also depicted in a modern guise. But this modernity is only superficial, hiding the ‘never changing Oriental essence’ within this modern façade.
- 12 Contrary to the depiction of the Oriental protagonists who are in a rather modern looking appearance, Istanbul is there as a ‘phantom’ city that has never changed since the turn of the century. Reminiscent of Said's idea that the difference between the Orientalist writers and travelers can only be a *manifest* difference (in basic content every one of them kept intact the ‘separateness’ of the Orient), Robbe-Grillet also repeats the ‘frozen, static and eternally fixed’ (Said 1978: 207) conception of the Orient despite his apparent ‘quasi-modern’ treatment of Leila. Professor N's old house [köşk] in Tarabya, the road along the Bosphorus, old coffee houses, the marketplace, the cemeteries, and the ruins of Byzantium [surlar] are the main settings of the film. The new neighborhoods and the modern buildings (as well as the real inhabitants of the city) are totally absent from Robbe-Grillet's film which prefers to turn a blind eye to any touch of modernity in the ‘Oriental’ city.
- 13 Pierre Loti, in line with his Orientalist penchant, had dreamt of an unchanging Istanbul. As a romantic writer, he was drawn to Istanbul as it represented ‘the souls of the dead’ and ‘the spirit of the past’. He was obsessed with nostalgia for a simpler life and found it in the poor neighborhoods of Eyoub, scorning the bourgeois lifestyles of Pera. According to Szyliowicz, Istanbul symbolized the quintessential Orient for Loti: ‘The mysterious, the beautiful, the naturally interesting and the forever unchanging. He was always drawn to

this city, not only because he loved it for itself but because it synthesized for him all the positive things he associated with the exotic' (1983: 4).

- 14 In his subsequent visits to Istanbul, at the turn of the century, Loti tries to ignore the modern changes in the city. He is melancholic to see his beloved oriental dream disappear. Loti had sublimated the 'backwardness' of the Orient for he found in this life an alternative to the 'cold' western civilization (Quella-Villéger 1988). Often with much less romantic motives, the classic Orientalist approach wishes to preserve its stereotypes about the East. In analyzing the 'colonial discourse' and the creation of 'otherness', Bhabha emphasizes the dependence of the former on 'fixity' in the ideological construction of the latter. For Bhabha, fixity as the sign of cultural, historical, racial difference is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as a disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition (1983: 18).
- 15 Robbe-Grillet's position in creating a static, 'postcard' image of Istanbul echoing Loti's quest for a never-changing Orient is, in fact, closer to Bhabha's emphasis on 'fixity' as the sign of cultural difference. Rather than a romantic soul-searching in the naïve exotic lands (which will be more the case for Erksan's *Time to Love*), Robbe-Grillet wishes to draw attention to the (never changing) cultural 'otherness' of the Orient. Although Leila often repeats in the film that everything is false in the city and that this is solely a play done for the tourists, the insistent description of Istanbul and (especially) the male inhabitants of the city as 'strange' and 'frightening' in the 1960s, perpetuates the image of attractive but uncivilized and perilous Orient.
- 16 As cited in previous pages, Robbe-Grillet openly admits that the script of the film takes inspiration from Loti especially in constituting the city as a major actor in the film. Although far from sublimating the exotic Orient in a nostalgic spirit, Robbe-Grillet shares with Loti the 'anthropomorphization' of the city. For Loti, the backdrop of the city served more than a *mise en scene*, it was a vital part of his novels. 'The role played by the city was truly one of a character present during all the moments of the action' (Szyliowicz 1983: 3). Likewise, for Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle*, Istanbul is more than a setting for a strange love affair. Robbe-Grillet says that the scenario is in fact written for the city proper (Olçay 2003: 95). In his search for his soul mate Leila, professor N visits different places in the city which literally hides Leila. Leila and Istanbul are inseparable from each other. 'Everything N sees (palaces, mosques, the beach, the Bosphorus) is 'contaminated' by his fear, his perplexity, his love for Leila' (Stoltzfus 1967: 132). Istanbul is a place of objects which have trapped him (as a femme fatale) and which continue to influence his thoughts and his reactions.
- 17 As Mulvey points out, feminist film theory (in conjunction with postcolonial criticisms) has also argued that in patriarchal culture the image of femininity is a multipurpose signifier (1992). Here, the image of Leila's body can be considered as a sign and be analyzed (among others) in terms of 'space'. Robbe-Grillet's female character in *L'Immortelle* embodies the metaphor of the attractive Orient as well as the beautiful and mysterious Oriental city of Istanbul. This is also related to the history of the city which is mostly symbolized by the struggles of 'conquest' reminiscent of Freud's well known formulation (analyzed by Ella Shohat in many of her works on postcolonial discourse and feminist film theory) that the 'female body' is like a 'virgin land' waiting to be 'conquered' (1991). As in most Orientalist Loti novels in which the male protagonist is the 'rescuer' as well as the 'conqueror' in the metaphoric sense (Loti's western male characters settle in the heart of the city -Eyoub-, learn the language perfectly in less than a couple of months,

make the most desired female characters fall in love with them, and treat the rest of the population as subjects to be bossed over), Robbe-Grillet also reflects Istanbul as a city with (mostly) a feminine soul waiting to be possessed. The obsessive love for a woman (Leila) and the passion for a city (Istanbul) are not separable from each other. According to Tijen Olcay, there are only 41 shots with dialogue in the film and Leila talks about Istanbul in 19 of them. She generally talks about the history of the city and the reconstruction (restoration) of that history (2003). Their fantastic love story and the mythical history of the city exist side by side. Leila represents the mythical, phantom yet attractive and beautiful aspects of the city. The Bosphorus, the beach, the ruins, and palaces are mostly filmed with Leila in the center of the image. The visual pleasure the spectator takes from watching an attractive (yet perilous) woman like Leila and the joy one gets from watching the tides of Bosphorus or the picturesque cemeteries of Eyoub also have resemblances. Like one contemplates the view [manzara] of the city, we enjoy watching Leila. Thus the city of Istanbul, just like the beautiful female protagonists of the film can offer the spectator a number of possible pleasures, 'the pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object' or 'scopophilia' being one of them. As Mulvey points out, in a world ordered by sexual imbalance 'pleasure in looking' (a concept initially developed by Freud) has been split between active/male and passive/female. In a mainstream film, the presence of a woman is an indispensable element of the narration. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed to create an erotic impact (Mulvey 1975). In *L'Immortelle* the female image and the image of the city are both constructed around a chain of signifiers that connote active looking and 'active looking as the prerogative of masculinity'(1975: 57).

- 18 As argued previously, in contrast to Loti, Robbe-Grillet does not represent Leila as a 'passive' oriental woman which is often the case in classic French treatment of *Istanbuliotes* (also in Flaubert's *Kuchuk Hanem* as well as in Loti's *Aphrodite*, *Aziyadé* and others). Here Robbe-Grillet uses an 'iconography' of *femme fatale*, typical of 'film noir' genre. This fatalism is not only an attribute of the female character but can be seen as encompassing the entire space, turning the picturesque surface of Istanbul into a danger zone. Here Mulvey's allegory of 'pandora's box' can be of assistance to better understand this 'dialectics' of inside and outside in which a seemingly beautiful and attractive surface is lethal from the inside. Like the story of the beautiful Pandora sent by gods to seduce and destroy Prometheus, in classic film noir genre, the image of the female beauty is used as an artifact or mask, 'as an exterior, alluring and seductive surface that conceals an interior space containing deception and danger'(1975: 59). Here, patriarchal mythology and misogyny can also help to stigmatize the 'Oriental space' as is the case with Robbe-Grillet. The 'frozen' mask allegory here is especially useful for *L'Immortelle*, as the often emotionless godlike beauty of Leila and the static postcard image of Istanbul are repetitively used to tell the story of the potential dangers of 'curiosity' towards the 'Other' (the Oriental and the female) which can demonstrate a 'fake' surface of innocent beauty hiding a destructive essence. The beautiful palaces, the enchanting Bosphorus, the little streets and the old houses of the city associated with the beautiful image of Leila can firstly ask for an 'active look', then for the drive of 'decipherment' and eventually lead the spectator (and the male protagonist Professor N) towards transgression and destruction.
- 19 While Leila represents the 'Pandora-like' attractive yet fatalistic *milieux* of the city, the Oriental male characters (the husband, the police officer, the salesman, men in the



coffeehouses) symbolize the frightening and repulsive spaces of the city. The 'otherness' and 'cultural inferiority' of the oriental Istanbul is mostly felt in the shots of mosques where women and men are not allowed to pray together. In search of Leila, professor N comes across weird male characters who are likely to enslave or torture women. These shots are generally cut to the interiors of famous mosques (*Sultanahmet, Fatih, Süleymaniye*) accompanied by *Ezan* (Islamic call for prayer), contrary to the classic soundtrack of other sequences in which Leila is present. Islam is identified with a patriarchal culture that enslaves women in harems. For *L'Immortelle*, the 'male' soul of Istanbul associated with religious motives, is evil and degraded without exception that necessitates an Occidental gentleman for the 'rescue' of Oriental women.

## II. Sevmek Zamanı [*Time to Love*, 1966]

- 20 Compared to the films made in the 1960s, the contemporary Turkish cinema (known as the 'New Turkish cinema') uses Istanbul less and less for cinematic purposes. In rather rarer circumstances where the city is at the background of the story (such as Derviş Zaim's *Somersault in a Coffin* made in 1996 or Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Distant* made in 2003), the city is often depicted as an 'agoraphobic' place where the main characters' relationship to the city is troublesome. Says Asuman Suner:

One interesting aspect of the new Turkish cinema is Istanbul's fading out of the screen. New wave films of the last decade tend to concentrate more on provincial towns. In those rather rare instances where the story is set in Istanbul, geographical, historical and cultural characteristics of the city are usually erased from the screen to such extent that Istanbul looks like an over-sized provincial town. This attitude is actually quite contrary to Istanbul's overall standing in Turkish cinema. The spectacular metropolis has always occupied a privileged position in Turkish film history. Because of the ubiquitous presence of the city in films, critics argue that Yeşilçam cinema could indeed be called "cinema of Istanbul". (Suner 2010: 141)

- 21 Although not a classic Yeşilçam film, Erksan's Istanbul is also a city of wonder, beauty, and meditation. *Time to Love* gives a very privileged position to Istanbul unseen in many contemporary independent films. Contrary to Robbe-Grillet's quest for creating a fatalistic atmosphere within an oriental labyrinth, in *Time to Love* made in 1966, Metin Erksan aspires to recall the slow-paced harmonious lifestyle of the imperial city as a background for a platonic love story.
- 22 As a leftist intellectual, Erksan took part in the social realist movement of the post-1960 coup d'état together with Halit Refiğ, Ertem Göreç, and Duygu Sağıroğlu. Inspired from Italian neo-realism, Turkish social realism (1960-65) was a courageous and genuine attempt to define a national film language as well as catching up with the aesthetic agenda of the West (Daldal 2010). Although known as a 'Kemalist leftist', Erksan has nevertheless been under the influence of many diverse aesthetic and philosophical schools from modernism to oriental mysticism. He knew western art well as per his art history education received at Istanbul University; he was the first Turkish filmmaker to be awarded the Golden Bear in Berlin with *Susuz Yaz* [Dry Summer, 1963], but he was also critical of western materialism and individualism. His taking part in the 'national cinema' movement that came to the fore after the 1965 elections (which brought conservative circles back in power and ended the social realist movement) forced him to distance himself from Marxist politics and increased his critique of 'materialism' that he

associated with a 'degraded' love for 'Westernism'. By creating an 'Oriental' image in his beautifully crafted iconic film *Time to Love*, he tried to refrain from creating an attractive commodity for mass consumption and searched for deep layers of meaning within Eastern schools of thought. In doing so, he also created an implicit 'Occidental' discourse (a stereotypical negative depiction of the West and western values) already visible in post-1960 Turkish cinema especially in Halit Refiğ's social realist *Gurbet Kuşları* [The Birds of Exile], which tells the story of a family coming to Istanbul from a small town in the south-east of Turkey, with a wish to 'conquer the big city'. In *Time to Love*, Erksan's wish to escape from the materialism of modernity sometimes incited him to construct 'select' stereotypes aspiring, this time unlike Robbe-Grillet, to sublimate a nostalgic spiritualism associated with a positive image of oriental lifestyle.

- 23 The plot of *Time to Love* can be read from two perspectives: From a surface look, it seems to be a simple 'boy meets girl' fantasy not quite different from other commercial production of Yeşilçam in the 60s. Halil (Müşfik Kenter) is a poor house painter who falls in love with Meral (Sema Özcan), the daughter of a rich industrialist. Meral is impressed by the unusual approach of the young painter and breaks up with her fiancé Başar on the very day of their wedding. Mad from jealousy, Başar murders both of them... From a deeper analysis, the film is based on a platonic love affair and has a rich philosophical layer uncommon in Turkish cinema. Halil works in isolation in one of the beautiful Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara. He has no family except his 'soul mate' Dervish Mustafa. He falls in love with the picture of Meral, hanging on the wall he painted in one of the beautiful mansions [köşk] of the island. When he actually meets the young woman, he is terribly ashamed of his passion and runs away. But Meral is not afraid of this strange man and approaches him compassionately. Halil, nevertheless, refuses Meral's compassion by saying that he loves the representation [suret] of the young woman and not the woman herself. Abstaining from the 'degraded' pleasures of this world of consumption (which are symbolized by the erotic posture of Meral at the opening scenes of the film), Halil does not wish to engage in a sensual, erotic love affair with Meral. It is not her body but her nobler spirit reflected through the picture, that is of interest to Halil. The picture belongs forever to his world of imagination. Throughout the film, the ruins and the beautiful but deserted landscapes of old Istanbul accompany the young lovers sharing their 'spiritual agony' [or hüzn], which rises from Sufi mysticism and, in Orhan Pamuk's words, is the 'general mood of an entire city' (Pamuk 2006).
- 24 Both made in the 1960s, Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle* and Erksan's *Time to Love* have several points in common. Both directors focus on an 'imagined' love affair. For Robbe-Grillet, the entire story is only professor N's imaginative fantasy. Leila is not real, like the city that surrounds them. In *Time to Love*, Halil falls in love with the image of a woman. When he actually meets Meral, he is afraid to lose the purity and beauty of his imagined love affair. Although taking the old city of Istanbul in the background, both Erksan and Robbe-Grillet have a 'modernist' penchant as regarding the formal features of the films: Both directors place importance to the so-called 'plastics' of the image. Robbe-Grillet's modernism is more accentuated than that of Erksan, as *L'Immortelle* is entirely based on a Kafkaesque world of absurdities and breaks the conventional methods of filmic narration. In contrast to this 'modernist' inclination, though, both directors prefer to place at the center of their films the old and 'never changing' oriental atmosphere of Istanbul. The modern aspects of the city, as well as its real inhabitants, are totally absent in both films. To 'document' the real life within the city is not the purpose of the directors. Istanbul is

not reflected but 'imagined' as a mystical oriental setting. But the attitude Robbe-Grillet and Erksan assume vis-à-vis this oriental reflection diverge greatly. While Robbe-Grillet prefers to represent this orient in stereotypical images of exoticism and eroticism, Erksan sublimates old Eastern philosophical traditions and the Ottoman codes of conduct in the imperial city or *Dersaadet* (as reflected in the memoirs of Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar, Reşad Ekrem Koçu, and Orhan Pamuk). According to Erksan, the film tells a platonic love affair such as 'Leila and Majnun' that forms the poetic basis of the works of Fuzuli and Yunus Emre, and for those who are not familiar with Divan poetry, Ottoman arts and the music of the Palace, the film is not easy to understand (Altiner 2005: 72-73).

- 25 Following Ella Shohat's analysis of 'gendered metaphors', it is possible to argue that, in great contrast to Robbe-Grillet for whom the 'male' soul of Istanbul, mostly reflected through religious symbols (such as calls to prayer and mosques), is inferior and villainous, Erksan associates the profound and virtuous image of Istanbul with the 'male' protagonists of the film Halil and his soul mate Dervish Mustafa. 'The Sufi mysticism underlining the general mood of the film' (2005: 71) belongs mostly to men carrying Eastern codes of honor. Thus it is possible to argue that Robbe-Grillet's patriarchal construction of the space and its parallelism with the representation of the female heroine empower the western male protagonist as the center of the action while reducing the Oriental male protagonists to 'lower savage'. Erksan, on the other hand, elevates the Oriental man to the status of 'noble ascetic' while degrading and demonizing the modern bourgeois reminiscent of western patterns of materialism. Female characters, in both cases, are fatalistic about the seductive energies of their erotic bodies often filmed at the center of views from Istanbul. Although Erksan's female protagonist, Meral, is also ennobled as the source for Halil's deep passion, she is also forced to question her lustful body (thus her femininity) and her cosmopolitan lifestyle which organically linked her to the 'degraded' western bourgeois.
- 26 Halil (Müşfik Kenter) is the main character whose virtuous asceticism is ennobled as evoking a philosophical tradition based on Sufism. There are three spiritual virtues which the *Sufi* tradition internalizes: These are humility, charity and truthfulness. Contemplation, that is 'concentration on a visual image with a Divine Quality' is also an attribute of Sufism (Bakhtiar 1987: 25). Different from Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle* that promises scopophilic (or voyeuristic) eroticism, Erksan's *Time to Love* 'contemplates' the city and the female protagonist Meral. Halil's love for Meral's picture (Suret) which looks at him with 'kindness', his obvious refusal of material benefits, his silence, his melancholy and most important of all his isolation or 'asceticism' are reminiscent of Sufism. The solitary landscape, the sea, the never-ending rain, the cloudy sky, the sad city walls and ruins, the *ud* Dervish Mustafa endlessly plays, the background music composed of classical Ottoman (or palace) melodies complement the isolated life they lead. Like Sufi dervishes, or suffering lovers in the Eastern love stories, Halil and Derviş Mustafa 'sit in seclusion shutting the door of the house of retreat to the people' (Seyed-Gohrab 2003: 89). The Islamic ascetics, following the model of the Christian Monks, severe themselves from mankind to discipline their 'lower souls' (2003: 91). Following an isolated lifestyle, Halil and Derviş also try to elevate their souls and stay away from 'carnal desire' and 'greed'. Halil's initial refusal of Meral's compassion is also related to his fear of losing a certain spiritual purity. Meral, as the daughter of a rich industrialist, is likely to upset the delicate balance of their humble lives as, firstly, symbolizing money, and secondly, eroticism. Even if Halil refuses her money, he can certainly not ignore her 'flesh'. As Leila

emphasizes in *L'Immortelle*, for Islam, women are inferior and daemonic (*fitna*) and not likely to bring virtue and spiritual nobility to a man's life. Women, therefore, cannot be 'soul mates' in the philosophical sense but only wives and mothers. When Halil says that nothing can replace 'friendship', he refers to a long tradition in Sufism, contemptuous of the sensual love a man can live with a woman.

- 27 In spite of all that emphasis Erksan puts on such a platonic love affair representing Sufi categories, he nevertheless does not portray Meral as spiritually 'inferior' to her lover and mentor, Halil. The relationship between Halil and Meral is always hierarchical; the latter constantly symbolizes fatalism, loss of purity and eroticism. But after renouncing his bourgeois lifestyle, Meral does, in fact, assume the position of prospective apprentice. As she says, 'Halil is able to *teach* her to be a solitary and courageous lover'. Afterward, Meral is also ennobled, and the misogynic Sufi bias against the daughter of the rich bourgeois is broken. The 'virtuous' ascetic circle then enlarges to include Meral. When she tells her former fiancé the 'wicked' Başar, that she does not like him, she openly declares that she cannot deceive anybody. Just like her 'noble' lover Halil, she always has to tell the truth. When the two lovers are separated, each wanders on its own in the deserted ruins of the city, around Galata, Süleymaniye, and the cemeteries. Erksan does not limit Meral's passion to the confines of her house and her beautiful balcony with the view of old Istanbul, but let her go out (just like Halil) and visit historical sites of the city to find some inner peace. The historic old city becomes the only compassionate friend for the lonely and suffering Meral, as well as Halil.
- 28 In Erksan's *Time to Love*, as in Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle*, Istanbul is more than a background for an unusual love story. Istanbul is a living character, a hero within the film, sharing the passions of other protagonists. For Robbe-Grillet, Istanbul (just like Leila) is exotic and fatal. In concert with his tendency to sublimate Sufi categories and ignore modern changes, Erksan's *Time to Love* sees Istanbul as the city of never-ending melancholy [*hüzün*]. Meral and Halil's spiritual agony or melancholy can only be shared and understood by Istanbul. In Orhan Pamuk's analysis, *hüzün* is the spiritual anguish one feels because one cannot be close enough to Allah. Islamic culture holds *hüzün* in high esteem. But to understand its enduring power in Istanbul culture, poetry and everyday life, it is not enough to speak of the honor the Sufi tradition brings to the word. Following the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, and the end of a unique 'art of living', the *hüzün* of Istanbul reflected in the city's beautiful landscapes or historical sites became a dominant mood that we all share as a community with pride. Says Pamuk:
- It is by seeing *hüzün*, by paying our respects to its manifestations in the city's streets and views and people, that we, at last, come to sense it everywhere. On cold winter mornings, when the sun suddenly falls on the Bosphorus and that faint vapor begins to rise from the surface, the *hüzün* is so dense you can almost touch it, almost see it spread like a film over its people and its landscapes. (2006: 99)
- 29 For Pamuk, when the setting is Istanbul, all the heroes in the old black and white Turkish films (*Time to Love* is no exception) give the impression that because of this *hüzün* they have been carrying in their heart since birth, they are not ambitious in the face of money and women. They are 'losers' but this is not the same as 'failure'. This sense of *hüzün*, stemming from the nostalgia one feels for a lost city as well as the value Sufis accords to the sentiment, gives them 'poetic license' to be 'losers'. That is the reason why the walk of the hero along the ruins of Istanbul or his sad gaze at the Bosphorus often coincides with the loss of the beloved. 'For the heroes of these old films, there are only two ways to face

the impasse: Either they go for a walk along the Bosphorus or they head off into the back streets of the city to gaze at its ruins.' (2006: 107)

- 30 In his analysis on Orhan Pamuk's 'hüzün', Engin Işın holds that while Pamuk's longing appears as though it is for the past, it is animated by imagining a European city to come. Pamuk is actually mourning for a lost identity known as the 'authentic Istanbulite (Istanbulite)' not necessarily related to the Ottoman past but to a neo-Kemalist elite emerged in the modern era. So in Işın's words, "'hüzün" reorientalizes Istanbul as an object of desire while it Europeanizes it by shaping its direction towards the Occident' (2010: 41). Although Işın's analysis is accurate, Pamuk's analysis of *hüzün*, especially when it comes to the black and white Turkish films (such as *Time to Love*), has deeper layers of meaning combining Sufism and the ancient lifestyles in the 'Dersaadet'. In *Time to Love*, this *hüzün* of the city, and the melancholy of the lovers are not separable from each other. The spiritual agony of Meral and Halil stems from the knowledge that their honest love cannot survive in the modern society. This agony is shared by Istanbul which has forever lost its glorious days of the past. As the sad landscapes of the city (Galata, Suleymaniye, the ruins, the cemeteries, the Marmara sea, the rain, the steamy windows) and the old classic Turkish music that accompany the young lovers withdrawn into themselves imply, the love affair between Halil and Meral cannot end happily. Although the 'modern' face of the city is totally absent from the film, we know that the 'real' future of this love affair is the modern Istanbul and the modern materialist society of the 1960s. In a nostalgic spirit, Erksan dreams of a love affair that can only endure in the glorious days of the empire when basics of an Oriental philosophy shaped a peaceful lifestyle that the novelist Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar would call 'Bosphorus Civilization'. That's why Meral asks Halil with great surprise 'nowadays how can somebody fall in love with a picture' [bu zamanda resme aşık olan var mı]? Halil can continue falling in love with the pictures of young ladies and enjoy his ascetic lifestyle in the deserted and 'timeless' Island with his soul mate Dervish Mustafa playing the *ud*, but like the city's 'broken history' (in Pamuk's words) hidden in the picturesque but forgotten streets, ruined monuments and the sad Bosphorus, he is condemned to be defeated once he steps into the 'modern' life of the city facing the rich industrialist father and Meral's 'wicked' young fiancé.
- 31 In many aspects, *Time to Love* is an important film in the directing career of Golden Bear awarded Erksan. Its mystical atmosphere, beautiful cinematography and rich philosophical layer give it a special place within the commercial Turkish film industry of the 1960s known as Yeşilçam. Although a successful film, *Time to Love* is not totally aloof from the biases of Yeşilçam productions (even when the so-called 'art cinema' within Yeşilçam is in question). An 'Occidental' perspective is often permeated by the 'national' as well as 'commercial' films produced within Yeşilçam. A deep-rooted cynicism against the western codes of conduct is often visible even in the social realist films (which became popular after the 1960 coup) such as *Gurbet Kuşları* [The Birds of Exile] by Halit Refiğ. With the coming of the "national cinema" debates launched primarily by Halit Refiğ (2009) (and also supported by Metin Erksan) after the 1965 elections which brought conservatives back in power, the implicit negative depiction of the western lifestyles mostly symbolized with the decadent image of the 'city' became more manifest, as an obvious anti-western discourse started to be apparent especially in the so-called 'national' films of Refiğ such as *I fell in Love with a Turk* [Bir Türk'e Gönül Verdim, 1969]. In Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit's analysis the view of the West in *Occidentalism* is like

the worst aspects of its counterpart, Orientalism which strips its human targets of their humanity:

Some Orientalist prejudices made non-western people seem less than fully adult human beings; they had the minds of children, and could thus be treated as lesser breeds. Occidentalism is at least as reductive; its bigotry simply turns the Orientalist view upside down. To diminish an entire society or a civilization to a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, faithless, unfeeling individuals is a form of intellectual destruction. (2004: 10)

- 32 For Buruma and Margalit, the Occidental attitude can be observed in different guises: Hostility to the occidental city (with its image of greedy, frivolous cosmopolitanism), hostility towards science and reason, hatred towards the settled bourgeois whose existence is the antithesis of the self-sacrificing hero are but a few of the possible negative approaches towards the 'Occident'. In some of the social realist films of the 60s such as *The Birds of Exile* (Refiğ, 1964) and *The Never-Ending Road* [Bitmeyen Yol, Duygu Sağıroğlu, 1965], the modern city of Istanbul is openly described as a 'sinful city' with its commodified human relations and immorality mostly symbolized with the image of the 'prostitute'. In both films the modern city life in Istanbul depicted as based on illusion, immorality and money is often contrasted with the purity of the native village. The degeneration of the local 'oriental' values is symbolized by the loss of chastity of the family's young daughter who ends up as a soulless prostitute (which stands for Buruma and Margalit for the metaphor of the soulless machine civilization of the West).
- 33 At a first glance, those reductive Occidental biases do not seem to be present in *Time to Love*. Erksan, just like Robbe-Grillet, is busy creating an oriental myth that does not exist. But Erksan's nostalgia for his 'imagined' great days of the City of Istanbul (in which the basics of a wise Oriental philosophy based on Sufism shaped human relations and created a Platonic sense of pure love) is so great that the overvaluation of this 'affirmative' Orientalism and the stereotypical negative depiction of the city-based modern bourgeois life, nevertheless, underlines an implicit Occidental discourse which prefers, unlike Refiğ and Sağıroğlu, to turn a blind eye to the modern face of the city.
- 34 Meral's wicked fiancé which eventually murders the young lovers is named 'Başar' which means 'be successful' in Turkish. The 'black and white' depiction of his greedy ambition and moral poverty that does not contain any in-depth human analysis symbolizes the ugly face of the western bourgeois settled in the sinful city. This is not necessarily a Marxian approach which aims at contrasting class positions and individual characters. Meral's lover Halil is not necessarily 'good and noble' because he belongs to the 'working class'. His greatness comes from his 'oriental' asceticism and distance from the city crowd. Apart from working as a house painter in isolated villas, he is idle most of the time like his old soul mate Dervish (which roughly means an 'oriental monk') and he spends most of his time in drinking and mediating.
- 35 As emphasized above, Erksan wishes to escape from the modern, competitive face of Istanbul and seeks refuge in the Sufi teachings and the ancient oriental tales of love. As Robbe-Grillet, he phantasizes about a city without trying to see its real face. Erksan's nostalgic film is not set in history but in the Istanbul of the 60s. The modern face of the city as well as its real inhabitants are totally absent from his account of Istanbul. This absence of any sign of urban modernity associated with commerce, rationality and sensualism (except for Meral's erotic postures of at the beginning of the film and Başar's greedy persona) helps Erksan to construct an implicit Occidental discourse which

emphasizes the historical 'soul' of the city. Only Istanbul's traditional landmarks (Eyoub, Galata, Suleymaniye...) and Marmara's deserted islands are on screen. As stated above, Halil and Meral's great passion cannot live within the modern buildings, highways and markets of the historical city. The melodramatic ending of the film, therefore, signals that Halil's great love is in fact terminated by the 'modern' or 'western' face of Istanbul symbolized by the cruel jealousy of a stereotyped bourgeois.

## Conclusion

- 36 This essay aimed at comparing two films, both made in the 1960s that used Istanbul as an 'Oriental' setting for 'imagined' love affairs. "The love for the Orient" can take different guises and this essay tries to underline that Orientalism is never uniform. It is a constitutive element of modernism with all its contradictory aspirations and to "imagine" a lost city within an impossible love affair is also a symptom of a search for belonging and identity in a modern and insecure world. In both *L'Immortelle* and *Time to Love*, the city is 'anthropomorphized'. For Robbe-Grillet, Istanbul is a mysterious Oriental city, a labyrinth, just like the attractive but fatalistic Leila. For Erksan, the old city with a 'broken history' is a sad companion to the lovers, and she alone can understand and share their spiritual agony mostly related to the rise of a new consumerist culture. For both Erksan and Robbe-Grillet the Oriental metaphors of the city are 'gendered'. In *Time to Love*, Istanbul's old and noble image is mostly reflected through the virtues that can basically exist in 'men' following Sufi principles. In *L'Immortelle*, on the other hand, Oriental men, represented by 'religious Istanbul' are villainous. Robbe-Grillet mostly sees Istanbul as a 'feminine city', beautiful, mysterious and 'immortal' just like her female protagonist Leila. While both Erksan and Robbe-Grillet develop an 'Oriental image' for the city that excludes the documentary, realistic aspects, their Orientalism diverge greatly. As a mean to escape from the modern life, Erksan visits old eastern philosophical traditions to find some 'peace', 'harmony' and platonic 'truthfulness' within the old city. In doing so, he also creates an implicit 'Occidentalism' already visible in Turkish cinema. Robbe-Grillet, on the other hand, in search of the immortal passion and exoticism, recreates the Oriental 'myth' of Istanbul within a modernist style.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Akser, Murat (2013). 'Auteur and Style in National Cinema: A Reframing of Erksan's *Time to Love*', *Cinej Cinema Journal* 3(1), p. 162-180. DOI: 10.5195/cinej.2013.57.
- Allemand, Roger-Michel and Milat, Christian (2010). 'Alain Robbe-Grillet, le perturbateur de trafic' in Allemand, Roger-Michel and Milat, Christian (dir.), *Alain Robbe-Grillet: Balises pour le XXIe Siècle*, Paris,-Ottawa, Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa et Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, p. VI.
- Altiner, Birsen (2005). *Metin Erksan Sinemasi*, Istanbul, Pan, p. 72-73.

- Armes, Roy (1981). *The Films of Alain Robbe-Grillet*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, p. 45. DOI: 10.1075/pumrl.6.
- Bakhtiar, Laleh (1987). *Sufi: The Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, New York, Thames and Hudson, p. 25.
- Bhabka K. Homi (1983). 'The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse', *Screen* 24(6), p. 18-36. DOI: 10.1093/screen/24.6.18.
- Buruma, Ian and Margalit, Avishai (2004). *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*, New York, Penguin.
- Daldal, Asli (2010). *Art, Politics and Society: Social Realism in Italian and Turkish Cinemas*, Istanbul, Piscataway, Isis Press-Gorgias Press.
- Doniol-Valcroze, Jacques (1963). 'Istanbul Nous Appartient' *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* 143, p. 54-57.
- Erdoğan, Nezi̇h (2010). 'The Spectator in The Making: Modernity and Cinema in Istanbul, 1896-1928', in Göktürk, D., Soysal, L., and Türeli, I. (eds), *Orienteering Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?*, London, Routledge, p. 129-143. URL: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781136920028/chapters/10.4324%2F9780203844427-16>.
- Gürata, Ahmet (2012). 'The City of Intrigues: Istanbul as an Exotic Attraction' in Köksal, Özlem (ed.), *World Film Locations: Istanbul*, Bristol, Intellect Books, p. 24-25. URL: [https://www.academia.edu/11490980/City\\_of\\_Intrigues\\_Istanbul\\_as\\_an\\_Exotic\\_Attraction](https://www.academia.edu/11490980/City_of_Intrigues_Istanbul_as_an_Exotic_Attraction).
- Hosford, Desmond and Wojtkowski, Chang (2010). *French Orientalism: Culture, Politics and the Imagined Other*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Hisar, Abdülhak, şinasi (2010).. *Boğaziçi Yalılar*, Istanbul, Yapı Kredi.
- Işın, Engin (2010). 'The Soul of a City: Hüzün, Keyif, Longing' in Göktürk, D., Soysal, L., and Türeli, I. (eds) *Orienteering Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?*, London: Routledge, p. 41-54. URL: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781136920028/chapters/10.4324%2F9780203844427-9>.
- Kabbani, Rana (1986). *Europe's Myths of Orient. Devise and Rule*, London, Macmillan Press.
- Lewis, Reina (1996). *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation*, London, Routledge.
- Lockman, Zachary (2004). *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Morissette, Bruce (1968). 'Problèmes du Roman Cinématographique' *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des études françaises* 20, p. 275-289. DOI: 10.3406/caief.1968.914.
- Mulvey, Laura (1975). 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' *Screen* 16(3), p. 6-18. DOI: 10.1093/screen/16.3.6.
- Mulvey, Laura (1992). 'Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity' in Colomina, Beatriz (ed.) *Sexuality and Space*, New York, Princeton University Press.
- Olçay, Tijen (2003). 'Les Coulisses d'Istanbul dans *L'Immortelle* d'Alain Robbe-Grillet', *Dalhousie French Studies*, Summer, p. 92-99. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40837484>.
- Pamuk, Orhan (2006). *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, New-York, Vintage Books.
- Refiğ, Halit (2009). *Ulusal Sinema Kavgası*, Istanbul, Dergah.
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain (1963). *L'Immortelle*, Paris, Minuit.
- Said, Edward (1978). *Orientalism*, London, Pantheon Books.



Seyed-Gohrab, Ali Ashgar (2003). *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness, and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance*, Leiden, Brill.

Shohat, Ella (1991). 'Imaging Terra Incognita: The Disciplinary Gaze of Empire', *Public Culture* 3(2), p. 41-70. DOI: 10.1215/08992363-3-2-41.

Shohat, Ella (1997). 'Gender and Culture: Towards a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema', in Bernstein and Studlar (eds), *Visions of The East: Orientalism in Film*, New-Jersey: Rutgers University Press, p. 45-84. DOI: 10.1080/10509209109361370.

Stoltzfus, Ben (1967). 'Robbe-Grillet, *L'Immortelle* and the Novel: Reality, Nothingness and Imagination', *L'Esprit Créateur* 7(2), p. 123-134. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26277423>.

Suner, Asuman (2010). *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*, London, I.B. Tauris.

Szyliowicz, Irene (1983). 'The Role of Istanbul in Pierre Loti's Turkish Fiction', *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 2, p. 1-5.

Szyliowicz, Irene and Kershner, Seth (1988). *Pierre Loti and The Oriental Woman*, London, Macmillan. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-349-19205-2.

Quella-Villéger, Alain. (1988). 'Exotisme et Politique : Istanbul, de Pierre Loti à Claude Farrère', *Cahiers CRLH-CIRAOI* 5, p. 123-134.

## NOTES

1. See for example Pierre Loti (2002) *Aziyadé*, London: Kegan Paul, or Gérard de Nerval (2012) *Journey to the Orient*, Antipodes Press.

2. *Topkapı* is also based on a novel, Eric Ambler's *The Light of Day*, but it is a popular film about the theft of a jewel from Topkapı Palace. It also won an Oscar for best supporting actor (Peter Ustinov).

3. The "immediate" causes of the military intervention that took place in Turkey on 27 May 1960 have already been the subject of many academic inquiries. At first glance, the military seems to have reacted against the increased authoritarianism of Democrat Party (DP) reign (i.e. the formation of a so-called "national front", Investigatory commissions, actions against the press and the universities...), its ambivalent attitude towards secularism, and its ultra-conservative economic policy that pushed Turkey to declare a "moratorium" in 1958. The university professors called out to draft the new constitution, justified the coup on the grounds that DP had acted "unconstitutionally". Although all these observations are accurate, from a deeper sociological perspective, the coup does not constitute a simple "evitable" historical fact that might have been avoided, had the DP government acted constitutionally. The neo-Kemalist elites wanted to continue Atatürk's reforms that had retrogressed during the DP rule, with a special emphasis on economic productivity and social welfare. They were followed by a coalition of urban intellectuals and representatives of the manufacturing bourgeoisie whose interests had historically converged.

4. The popular film industry in Turkey was called "Pine tree", a figurative name after a street in Istanbul Beyoğlu where many film producers had their offices.

5. In the original script in French, Robbe-Grillet says: 'Comme il vient d'être dit, l'histoire est vue, entendue, imaginée par N. Pourtant, Istanbul est une ville réelle, et la jeune femme qu'il y rencontre et les gens qu'il y côtoie sont des hommes et des femmes réels. Mais du moment qu'ils passent dans la tête de quelqu'un, ils deviennent aussitôt proprement imaginaires... De même pour la ville, toute contaminée dans l'esprit de l'homme par un mélange de Pierre Loti, de Guide Bleu et des Mille et une Nuits, elle passera sans cesse de la carte postale touristique au

“symbolisme” affiché des chaînes et des grilles de fer, mais sans cesser pour cela d’être pleine de la rumeur vivante des bateaux, des ports, des foules.’ (Robbe-Grillet 1963: 10)

---

## ABSTRACTS

This essay aims at comparing Alain Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle* (1963) and Metin Erksan's *Time to Love* (1966) in terms of their depiction of Istanbul that holds a central place within both films' plots. Both films have been made in the aftermath of the 1960 coup d'état in Turkey which repositioned the 'power' of the capital city of Ankara and the modernist aspirations of the neo-Kemalist elites. So both Erksan and Robbe-Grillet are recreating the Ottoman past (as opposed to the aspirations of the neo-Kemalists) in peculiar Orientalist tropes. While the image they develop for the city is basically an 'Oriental image' that excludes the documentary, realistic aspects, their orientalism diverges greatly. Erksan wishes to retreat from the westernized modern life of Istanbul and thus sublimates old Eastern philosophical traditions to find some Platonic 'truthfulness' within the old imperial city. Robbe-Grillet, on the other hand, in search of the immortal passion and exoticism, recreates the Oriental 'myth' of Istanbul within a modernist guise. Robbe-Grillet's parallel depiction of the femme fatale Leila with the mysterious city also contrasts to Erksan's 'Occidental' emphasis upon the 'nobility' and 'naivety' of the lovers within the 'sublimated' image of the old imperial city, Istanbul or *Dersaadet* [the door of happiness].

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Istanbul Studies, Orientalism in Film, Time to Love, *L'Immortelle*, Turkish Cinema

## AUTHOR

ASLI DALDAL

Yıldız Technical University

Boğaziçi University