

Anatolia and Caucasia; from “Yusuf and Zulaikha” to “Arzu and Kamber”, to their versions written in Georgian... These stories are not retold only in Anatolia. I do not know where the source of the river is, but from faraway India, from the steppes of Asia, through Persia to Armenia, there is a river that encompasses Byzantium, Syrians, Circassians, and the Abkhaz. If you bathe in this river, you see the world differently, your mind works differently. I do not agree with the view that this tradition is narrow-minded, that it should be forgotten, that it is mere superstition; and that it is restricted to Anatolia. Once you become aware of that flowing river, once you feel it, you enter that water again. Otherwise, we can only admire, and bathe in the kind of painting known as canvas painting, or things that have been done in a masterful fashion.

What makes Yılmaz Güney different?

I am a huge admirer of Yılmaz Güney. His cinema dominated my childhood. I always felt he was a neighbourhood friend of mine. He was like a friend that played kômen (a children’s game like cowboys and indians) with me out on the street. The films of the Ugly King (Yılmaz Güney’s moniker) are as plain and simple as kômen. I find myself in his films. In my opinion, “Umut/Hope” (1970), where Yılmaz Güney is more competent as a filmmaker, is Turkish cinema’s best film of all time.

What about “Yol/The Road”?

“Yol” (1982) is a good film, too, but I must add, there is Şerif Gören in “Yol” too. Şerif Gören is a good filmmaker. “Yol” is a collaborative effort of both of them and is, in my opinion, Yılmaz Güney’s final film. I can’t regard “Duvar/The Wall” (1983) as cinema, it is a failure. Yılmaz Güney moves away from cinema in “Duvar”, he kills himself. That reality sometimes eats itself, and begins not to convince. The violence in “Duvar” seemed very constrained to me.

How do you find Ertem Göreç?

Ertem Göreç is an interesting director. He could have become a good documentary film director, in fact. He says, “I am not a film maker” himself; he is a true member of the technical crew. “Karanlıkta Uyananlar/Those Who Wake Up In The Dark” (1964) is a very important film; and of course, Vedat Türkali’s script is very strong. The shots from Balat in that film are incredibly beautiful, they have documentary value. It is a film that reflects the drama of the street with no reservations, in all its aspects. “Otobüs Yolcuları/Bus Passengers” (1961) a film starring Ayhan Işık and Türkan Şoray, with a script again written by Vedat Türkali, is also a very important film.

Are there any contemporary directors you find interesting?

River is floating. While you are bathing in it you’re not independent from it. That water will continue floating. I happened to correspond to a certain point in this water. I sense I am loaded with a mission brought on by centuries, as if I must do this.

Zeki Demirkubuz’s “Masumiyet/Innocence” (1997) and “Kader/Fate” (2006). He captures something in these films. Demirkubuz seems to have inherited the tradition of cinema in Turkey,

I find him important in this sense. Nuri Bilge is playing the Frenchman, he is free to do so of course, but he does not interest me. I find those landscapes he presents like postcards pornographic; he gives the viewer the pleasure of the image.

There is no postcardness in “Üç Maymun/Three Monkeys” (2008).

Yes, there is action. The action brought by the story and some of the actors

seem to go beyond the familiar Nuri Bilge Ceylan landscapes, but it is not that different from the other films. And the opening scene of that film is from Yılmaz Güney’s film “Baba/Father” (1971).

The Antonioni of “Blow-up” (1966) and “Zabriskie Point” (1971) is very close to you...

There is an Antonioni until “Red Desert” (1964) and “Blow-up” who is very close to me. Barthes says something similar, there is a secret Eastern motif in Antonioni. He never thrusts reality upon the viewer. He makes the viewer feel the meaning by constantly rendering it invisible. “Blow-up”, for instance, is an incredibly good piece of pop art, it is also very psychedelic, and meaning is concealed within that psychedelic structure. I find this very close.

We are talking about the image on the screen, but the text is by Cortazar, and the music by Herbie Hancock...

There is a real pop-group in the background; when The Yardbirds enter the scene as a real element, suddenly our feet are firmly grounded.

Immediately after “Blow-up”, the film he shot in 1970, “Zabriskie Point” reveals Antonioni’s view of America, although it is a professional job for Americans. Sam Shepard and

Tonino Guerra are among the scriptwriters along with Antonioni. A film shot immediately after “Easy Rider”.

I watched “Easy Rider” and “Zabriskie Point” for the first time in 1974, at the canteen of a student dormitory in Kadırga, from a 8 mm. machine. Years later, I watched “Zabriskie Point” again at a special screening. In my opinion,

Antonioni looks at America in two ways. He presents America’s inner reality, the American life style from within psychedelic, and hedonist American bands like the Grateful Dead; but then he suddenly punishes Americans with the English sound, with Pink Floyd. He looks at the metropolis, at Los Angeles from above, from the plane, with the hedonist Grateful Dead’s “Dark Star” in the background. Although there is

an allusion to the hippy movement, to flower children in the lovemaking scene shot at Zabriskie Point in the Death Valley, this is the impression it left on me: With the valley in the background, the figures, becoming almost one-dimensional, mesh in mono-colour. The land and those who are making love on the land are like Siyah Kalem figures; they are there and not there at the same time. The Dead play, the figures make love with each other and with the land, and become one. The land, that valley, is the place that will be marketed by American businessmen; it is the land that will be opened to construction. The kid throws his red t-shirt from the plane to the girl. At the end of the film, the girl puts on that t-shirt; it is a red flag in a sense. At the student demonstration at the beginning of the film, a policeman is killed, the kid escapes, he hijacks a plane...

Although the kid’s murder by the police towards the end of the film reminds us of “Easy Rider” (Dennis Hopper, 1969), “Easy Rider” does not bomb the American life-style. We only see the drama, the meaningless death. Whereas in “Zabriskie Point”, accompanied by Pink Floyd’s music, Antonioni blows up the place where the bourgeois businessmen scheming to purchase the valley we see from the girl’s eyes, he bombs America. But the finale of the film is interesting. With the sun setting or rising in the background, the girl leaves vengefully with her red t-shirt on. The music in the background resembles something like the lonely cowboy’s song. I do not like the finale at all.

Who do you think of when you think of the Beat movement?

Not Kerouac. There is something in Richard Brautigan’s “Trout Fishing in America”, or in his “The Abortion” that stands silently, in a corner, and looks towards where the road ends, something that gives Antonioni’s “Zabriskie Point” its feeling. I see an incredible beat attitude in the orgy scene in the open. That section alone makes me feel the presence of all American literature. Wherever the setting may be, the world they are in and they travel through is along the nomadic trajectory of Siyah Kalem. William Blake influences the American beats, he opens a door for them, and creates the hobo style, and America’s own inner tradition. As the hobo tradition style creates the beats, it also develops a musical attitude that extends from Woody Guthrie to Dylan.

Are there any poets or writers in the beat-mould from this land that you find compatible to the Siyah Kalem drawings?

I can’t see anyone who has come from Anatolian folk traditions, who forms a discourse based on folk stories. Orhan Veli sometimes reminds me of them. Orhan Veli could have been a beat poet. In terms of feeling, he has the potential to be a beat. To be there, the first thing is not to be imitative. Cihat Burak could have been a beat; beyond his painting, with his short stories, with his approach. He is a Bektashi who makes fun of everyday life, who treats it ironically; he has internalized it in a sense. Orhan Veli also has that irony. You can’t have beat literature without humour. It has to contain its comic quality. It is with humour that it manages to retain its seriousness. The beats have

