

Metin Erksan's "Avant-Garde" Television Movies

Metin Erksan'ın "Avangart" Televizyon Filmleri

M. Safa KARATAŞ 

Department of Radio, Television and Cinema, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Faculty of Communication, Sivas, Türkiye

ABSTRACT

Metin Erksan and his movies have a special role in the history of Turkish cinema. Since his first movies, he has produced different productions which have a language peculiar to him. With his extraordinary stance and mind, the director has always been the focus of discussions and has presented avant-garde works to Turkish cinema. Avant-garde, in other words, extraordinary, experimental, innovative productions have had profound effects in different periods since the invention of cinema. While evaluating Metin Erksan and his movies, five television movies (*Bir İntihar*, *Geçmiş Zaman Elbiseleri*, *Hanende Melek*, *Müthiş Bir Tren*, and *Sazlık*) which were made for TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) in 1973 drew attention in order to understand the director's aesthetic and innovative perspective. Metin Erksan made these movies without earning profit. Moreover, in these movies, he expressed himself successfully. These movies were regarded as the milestones of Turkish cinema and Metin Erksan's filmography. This study will focus on the point of "pioneering" and "experimental" view of Metin Erksan's movies and television movies he made for TRT and will be evaluated in terms of story, time, place, art direction, actor preference, and cinematography of the television movies.

Keywords: Avant-garde, experimental, Metin Erksan, television movies, TRT

Öz

Metin Erksan ve sineması Türk sinema tarihinde kendine has bir yere sahiptir. İlk filmlerinden itibaren sinemamızda bir dil kurma istenciyle birbirinden farklı yapımlara imza atmıştır. Sıra dışı duruşuyla ve zihniyle sürekli tartışmaların odağında olan yönetmen, sinema kronolojimize de öncü ya da popüler tabirle avangart işler başlatmıştır. Sinemanın icadından bugüne farklı dönemlerde avangart yani sıra dışı, deneysel, yenilikçi yapımlar sinema serüveninin seyrini değiştirmiştir. Metin Erksan ve sineması değerlendirilirken yönetmenin estetik ve yenilikçi tavrının daha iyi anlaşılması için 1973 yılında TRT için yaptığı beş öyküden uyarladığı beş televizyon filmi (*Bir İntihar*, *Geçmiş Zaman Elbiseleri*, *Hanende Melek*, *Müthiş Bir Tren* ve *Sazlık*) de dikkati çekmektedir. Sanatçının kendini daha iyi ifade edebildiği ve maddi kaygı gütmeyen "motor" dediği bu filmler hem sinema tarihimiz açısından hem de Metin Erksan filmografisi açısından dönüm noktasıdır. Çalışmada, Metin Erksan sineması ve TRT için yaptığı televizyon filmleri incelenirken yönetmenin "öncü" ve "deneysel" bakış açısına odaklanılacak ve bu bakış açısının televizyon filmlerinde nasıl ortaya çıktığı öykü, zaman, mekân, sanat yönetimi, oyuncu tercihi ve sinematografi açısından değerlendirilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avangart, deneysel, Metin Erksan, televizyon filmleri, TRT

Introduction

When we look back at the history of Turkish cinema over a century, it is necessary to say that one of the first names to "make" Turkish cinema is Metin Erksan. It will be seen in the chronology of Turkish cinema, the seventh art, which was entrusted to "theatre era" for a long time after the first attempts, which we call document film, gained the identity of cinema with the hand of Metin Erksan.

A screenwriter, a director, a historian, an art philosopher, in short, as an intellectual and artist, Metin Erksan is a turning point in the history of Turkish cinema. Except for today, Metin Erksan is the first and greatest Turkish auteur, who is tried to be covered up as "deliberately" most of the time, and who is talked about with both his personality and his products. In this article, we will focus on the "experimental television films," which were also widely discussed in his cinema and which caused criticism of the director especially at the time they were shot. But when we look at it today, these



**Çalışma, III. Ulusal Sinema ve Felsefe Sempozyumu'nda aynı adlı başlıkla sunulan özet bildiriden yola çıkarak ve genişletilerek yazılmıştır.

Received/Geliş Tarihi: 06.01.2023

Accepted/Kabul Tarihi: 28.03.2023

Publication Date/Yayın Tarihi: 26.09.2023

Corresponding Author/Sorumlu Yazar:

M. Safa KARATAŞ

E-mail: msafa@cumhuriyet.edu.tr

Cite this article as: Karataş, M. S. (2023). Metin Erksan's "Avant-Garde" television movies. *Art and Interpretation*, 42(1), 34-41.



Content of this journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

television movies have great importance both in Turkish cinema and in Turkish television. First of all, we will talk about Metin Erksan's art in general and what he went through on the way to these films, and then we will examine what these television films mean in the director's filmography and what value they have for Turkish cinema. In this study, we will analyze the films *Bir İntihar*, *Geçmiş Zaman Elbiseleri*, *Hanende Melek*, *Müthiş Bir Tren*, and *Sazlık*, the repercussions of the period. We will evaluate the experimentalism and aesthetics in Metin Erksan's cinema. At the end of the study, it will be seen that these films, which were booed by both cinema critics and cultural environment in the years they were shot, have both an aesthetic and a depth of story that cannot be reached even these days when Turkish cinema is in its golden age. These and other important films of Metin Erksan, who also laid the foundations of today's creative cinema, are the first examples of surreal, experimental, in short, avant-garde films.

In the article, the shooting adventures of the films will be examined, the stories and films will be analyzed, and these pioneering films will be criticized with titles such as story structure, time, space and art direction, actor preference, cinematography, and why the films are avant-garde and how they have a place in Metin Erksan cinema will be explained.

A Brief Overview of Turkish Cinema History Until Metin Erksan's Cinema

Turkish cinema history has been classified in many ways by many authors. Some start Turkish cinema with the *Ayastefanos'taki Rus Abidesinin Yıkılışı* (1914), which is nowhere to be found. Others base it on the Manaki Brothers, who went to the early 1900s and made films within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. It will be more meaningful to begin Turkish cinema history with the Manaki Brothers. Because Turkish literature, painting, and architecture have been shaped by the legacy of the Ottoman, Seljuk and even earlier periods, and the art outputs produced in these dates have formed the past of today's art.

Esen (2010, p. 2) divided Turkish cinema into six periods because of its cinematic similarity, and these were the first years (1914–1922), the Theatre Era (1922–1939), the Transition Period (1939–1950), the Filmmakers Period (1950–1970), 1970s Opposition Period (1970–1980), Post-Coup Period (1980–2010). However, this classification cannot clearly express the change in Turkish cinema. The historiography of Turkish cinema, of which examples are widely discussed in the field, may be the subject of another study. However, Metin Erksan is also concerned about this historiography and has expressed this problem in many media. Therefore, we need to address this issue in this study as well.

Although Turkish cinema follows many developments behind, it would not be wrong to say that it is contemporary with the Lumiere Brothers. Cinema, which entered the Ottoman palace a year or two after its invention (end of 1896, beginning of 1897), spread rapidly to Anatolia geography with the attempts of the Manaki Brothers to make films in the early 1900s.

The common idea of many cinema chronology books is that after the first trials, "theatre era" shoot films in Türkiye and then the era of "filmmakers" started with three directors. The cinema which is with the monopoly of Muhsin Ertuğrul transform to art with Metin Erksan, Ömer Lütfi Akad and Atıf Yılmaz. In particular, Baker (2017, p. 109) summarizes Turkish cinema chronology with the following sentences:

Cinema could not be established in Turkey because of the man appointed by Mustafa Kemal, called Muhsin Ertuğrul. People tried to think about images, maybe starting from Metin Erksan and let's say we had to wait for Yılmaz Güney, Zeki Demirkubuz, Derviş Zaim and especially Nuri Bilge Ceylan for this.

The History of Metin Erksan and His Cinema or Toward Avant-Garde Metin Erksan

Metin Erksan was born in 1929 in Çanakkale. A few months later, he is brought to Istanbul, where he will spend his life, during a visit by his father (Gündoğdu, 2017, p. 31). Metin Erksan, with the advantages of being born as a member of an important family, finished his primary education in good schools and then completed his higher education at Istanbul University, Faculty of Literature, Department of Art History, which will deeply affect his cinema and his outlook on life. The education that the director received on "what is art" before he started the seventh art, undoubtedly created a proper background for himself while producing a work of art. With his art history education, he entered the cinema environment as a critic and later as a screenwriter. He then made his first film, *Karanlık Dünya* (1952). Metin Erksan's extraordinary character in cinema is evident from his first film. *Karanlık Dünya* is the first movie ever shot in an Anatolian village, and with this first movie, Metin Erksan encounters censorship.

After *Karanlık Dünya*, he started to establish his own cinematic language while making many films, including literary adaptations, in the 1950s. *Dokuz Dağın Efesi*, which was released in 1958, gives the good news of Metin Erksan's cinema. Metin Erksan started to establish his "place" in Turkish cinema with films such as *Hicran Yarası* (1959), *Gecelerin Ötesi* (1960), *Şoför Nebahat* (1960). In 1962, Metin Erksan would make himself accepted both in Türkiye and in the international arena with the movie *Yılanların Öcü*. Metin Erksan, who closed an era in Turkish cinema and opened another, is an auteur whose creativity is accepted by everyone today. A Turkish film that won an international award for the first time in 1964: *Susuz Yaz*. Erksan wins the *Golden Bear* from the *Berlinale*. Then, he received the best film award from the *Kartaca Film Festival* with his another masterpiece: *Yılanların Öcü*. With "*Suçlular Aramızda*," he won the Best Social Film Award at the *Milan Film Festival* in 1965. The first Turkish film to go to the Moscow Film Festival is his film, and he was also invited to the Los Angeles Film Festival.

Metin Erksan is one of the pioneers of Turkish cinema. So he is an avant-garde. He changed the venue of Turkish cinema with his first film. He destroyed the atmosphere of "performance films" with a fiction close to documentary. He has always been in search of all the films he shot after his first film, and he has always brought innovative ideas to Turkish cinema. He's the one who made horror movies like "*Şeytan*" (1974), and he created *Kadın Hamlet* (1976) by castrating a classic like Hamlet. Knowing that he cannot afford to describe a great war like Preveze, Metin Erksan is also trying to tell every detail of the war by making a dramatic-documentary film *Preveze'den Önce* (1981) in Turkish cinema. From this point of view, it was only Metin Erksan's right to film the five different stories he made for TRT in 1975, which attracted the attention of the public as well as the art world. The director, who is always looking, questioning, looking differently, tiring, and thinking, has caught an artistic language in which he finds himself completely in his own filmography with these five films. We can see the following separately in Metin Erksan's TV films: passionate and obsessive characters, extraordinary places, the story structure that disturbs

the audience, and his attitude that does not care about the concept of the classic “star” (lead role). These five films formed the sum of Metin Erksan’s artistic language.

A series of avant-garde films, of which we have not seen many examples in Turkish cinema history until then, was produced by Metin Erksan. Why are the films avant-garde? The word is French origin and it means “innovative.” Doing the undone before. When we look at Metin Erksan’s adventure in cinema, we clearly see that he is an artist who brings to life what has never been realized before. The director, who closed a period, reflects the art of cinema to the screens for the first time in Turkish cinema history. For the first time, he wins an international award. He breaks the classical narrative structure of Yeşilçam of Turkish cinema. He makes surreal television movies first time in Turkish TV. In this sense, Metin Erksan is already an avant-garde, an innovator.

Experimental Cinema and Alp Zeki Heper, the First “Experimental” Director in Turkish Cinema

Opening a small parenthesis at this point of the article will contribute to both Turkish history of cinema and the pioneering films that we are talking about. Metin Erksan’s innovative attitude and cinematic language are an undeniable fact. However, when we look at Turkish cinema chronology, another avant-garde filmmaker who made films at the same time as Metin Erksan—but left behind in history—draws attention: Alp Zeki Heper.

Avant-garde means “pioneer unity” in the dictionary, that is, “innovative.” Avant-garde cinema, on the other hand, is especially associated with surrealist and Dadaist filmmakers. Especially surrealist and collage-running productions and films that tire the minds of the audience have been referred to as “avant-garde.” Avant-garde cinema expresses an artistic orientation that seeks “ways” to combat the conformist situation and accepted expectations of the audience. This is what gives meaning to arthouse cinema, which draws attention with its intense and pure expression styles (Clarke, 2012, p. 75).

Anyone who thinks a little about “when experimental cinema start” will see immediately that experimental cinema started with the cinema itself and always takes a pioneering role by going one step ahead of it (Kaliç, 1992, p. 11).

Whenever something new happens, there is always the avant-garde. In fact, the source of most of the philosophical reflections of human beings on production, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions is within the boundaries of cinema.

Avant-garde tastes like 1920s surreal and “pseudo” abstract films. But this kind of avant-garde is already outdated. Rather than creating a purely visual metaphors and static art dreamed by surrealists, issues related to cinematic terms logical relations (Karadoğan, 2010, p. 32).

One of the first examples of avant-garde cinema, the co-work of Buñuel-Dali in 1929, *Un Chien Andalou* is counted as a milestone. This surreal trend, which started in Europe after the First World War, emerged with many products between 1921 and 1931. In this process, the films that emerged in Europe and could be called avant-garde were under the influence of surrealism, and those dealing with cinema in this period were quite obsessed. But this obsession is as much about film making as it is about film disrupting. Moreover, those who made avant-garde works in this period were turning the Hollywood scene and narrative upside down with their own minds, cameras, and especially “stars” and

developing a completely different narrative (O’Pray, 2003, p. 20). Undoubtedly, this remake showed the pioneering stance of surrealism. Afterward, “extraordinary” works were called “avant-garde” in every period of cinema history. The movement that spread from Europe to America after 1940 circulates in the United States with the hand of Maya Deren until the 1960s and then descends to the “underground” (Erdoğan, 2011). While experimental avant-garde cinema is seen as intellectualism in Europe, in America, it can be described as “experimentation” (Kaliç, 1992, p. 19).

The history of experimental cinema can also be equated with the history of creative cinema. Pioneering movements in Germany, France, and Russia draw attention in similar years (1920s). Viking Eggding, Walter Ruttmann in Germany, Delluc, Dulac, Epstein, Renoir and Buñuel in France, and Kuleslov and Vertov were pioneers in Russia.

After 1950, the avant-garde, as “underground” and “experimental” in America, opened another way. In this way, especially Stan Brakhage and Andy Warhol have taken experimentation to another dimension with their works.

The films that started after 1940 and made in France and Italy until the end of 1960 are also “new” and for this reason, they are called “new wave.” It would not be wrong to call these generations avant-garde because they are the “pioneer movement.” From another point of view, the history of avant-garde cinema can be equated with the history of creative cinema. Avant-garde cinema is nothing but the expression of cinematic styles, forms, and managements in an “explosion” (Renan cited from Kaliç, 1992, p. 54).

In Türkiye, the “avant-garde” or “experimental” attitude is mentioned for the first time with Alp Zeki Heper. The director, who is not widely known in Turkish cinema history, but circulating like a myth among those who know, cannot find a place for himself, but deserved the word of avant-garde. After graduating from Galatasaray High School, he graduated from the French IDHEC and created the first surrealist and even Dadaist examples in Turkish cinema. After encountering censorship and settling in Türkiye, although he made many attempts, he could not stay in the cinematic canon, could not find a place for himself, and burned all his photographs and films during a frenzy (Barkot, 2015, p. 25). His feature film *Suluk Gecenin Aşk Hikâyeleri*, which he shot in 1966, and his short films *Bir Kadın* (1962) and *Şafak* (1963) go down in the history of cinema as surrealist works. But he did not get a chance to meet the audience. Since they are not archived, the movies do not have many copies. This is unfortunate for cinema researchers. Although Heper makes ordinary films for Yeşilçam after these Buñuel-like attempts, he cannot maintain this attitude and stops making films. Although Alp Zeki Heper, who passed away with many unknowns, was an avant-garde in Turkish cinema history, he could not make a “move” like Metin Erksan in his period and was forgotten and remained in chronology as a name. After Alp Zeki Heper, Metin Erksan, with all his “pioneer” stance, is undoubtedly an avant-garde.

The Road to “Avant-Garde” Television Films

In the early 1970s, when İsmail Cem was the head of TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation), many directors were asked to make an adaptation from Turkish literature. One of them is Metin Erksan. Adaptations made for both television and cinema, at that time, are classic products that have always lagged behind the times. Metin Erksan again proves that he is a “genius.” He sets out

to adapt the extreme and difficult stories of contemporary and deep writers such as Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, who were not valued much in those days. However, he is unaware that there will be a big fuss both by the TV channel and the public.

Metin Erksan is a director who follows technology. He actually wanted to use the television opportunity by making films for TRT. At the same time, two of these films are the first colored television films. Erksan is also a supporter of watching movies from the comfort of home (Batur et al., 2017, p. 43). For this reason, perhaps he was thinking of bringing the cinema to people's homes with these five films. But that did not stop creating an angry crowd that the director never thought possible. The day after the films were released, the films made by Metin Erksan for TRT were circulating on everyone's lips. It was mostly talked about that the state was throwing millions to the streets.

Metin Erksan, respectively, adapts; Sait Faik Abasıyanık's *Müthiş Bir Tren*, Kenan Hulusi's *Sazlık*, Samet Ağaoğlu's *Bir İntihar*, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's *Geçmiş Zamanın Elbiseleri*, and Sabahattin Ali's *Hanende Melek*. In the fourth episode of the documentary "Sinemayı Sanat Yapanlar," Metin Erksan tells about the selection of these books as follows: (This documentary was made by Kerime Senyücel for TRT in 1995.)

I shot six stories for TRT. I offered six stories. Since the administration at that time considered one of them (Tanpınar's Abdullah Efendi'nin Rüyalari) as naked and pornographic, which I have never made such a porno and erotic film, it is irrelevant, but the administration at that time found that story of Tanpınar inclined to porn and he said no. Afterwards, I suggested Orhan Kemal's "Uyku" story, they said Orhan Kemal is making communist propaganda, and they said no, and our six stories were reduced to five and we shot five films.

After the films, many criticisms arise not only from the cinema but also from the literature community. The Turkish Writers Syndicate made heavy accusations, but Erksan does not neglect to respond; however, it seems that "the sound" that was strange at that time is turning into "classic" today (Kayalı, 2004, p. 89).

After the films were shown on television, everyone wrote articles that heavily insult Metin Erksan. The basis of all these negative criticisms is the accusation that the director spent the public's money. However, Burhan Felek publishes the letter from Metin Erksan in his column in Milliyet newspaper on February 26, 1976, and clarified the situation:

The movies that are prepared are 225 minutes long. Of these 225 minutes, 100 minutes were shot in coloured, 125 minutes in black-and-white and 35mm. Five different casts and various venues were used in five different films. Movies were performed three times as speech, music and effect. All expenses, including all kinds of taxes, from the scriptwriting of the five films to the end of the first copy being shown on television, are 948,000 (nine hundred and forty eight thousand Turkish Lira) T.L. You can check the budget in TRT accounting at any time. Since an average 90-minute colour Turkish film today costs at least 700,000 TL, it cannot be considered a waste that five films cost 948,000 TL, including all taxes. Five films cost less than water. In the Republic of Turkey era, there was nothing that the state had done cheaper than this. Moreover, more or less money cannot be used as a scale in cultural and artistic works. (Cited from Felek. Kirişçi, 2015).

All these things are actually the situation of an artist who is not understood by the public. Because until then, Turkish cinema had certain patterns. The audience was not accustomed to the novelty and the intense thinking of the cinema. Also, in the single-channel era, Türkiye's obligation to watch a certain content at a certain time in the evening turned their minds upside down when they came across these "incomprehensible" films. This inevitably raises the question of whether the artist should be involved with works that the public will love. Of course, Erksan has an answer to this question:

Some people say they make art for art, society or people. I think these words are nothing but empty claims. Yes, I firmly believe that. Every person does everything for himself first. It must be said with honesty. Hiding behind some totems seems like a scam to me. Because a single person creates a work of art. The audience evaluates whether this is for art, society or people. The works that are revealed give the answer to everything (Erksan cited from Altınar, 2005, p. 115).

Metin Erksan acts quite freely in these films he made for TRT. He makes his films with the comfort of performing his art without any financial concerns. Just like today's independent directors do. The director has placed the language of film that he has been trying to establish since his first films, with television films. Because when many of Metin Erksan's interviews are read/listened, phrases such as "that movie is unfinished," "I didn't like the movie," "This movie is incomplete" will be seen. However, the director starts each of his films with the same thought and issue. Because Metin Erksan has maintained his inner integrity, maintained his own language, and proceeded in his own way, not being affected by the sloppiness of the contemporary (Gündoğdu, 2017, p. 94). After all, he says, "(...) the artist is already after one thing. He does it in every movie," says Kesal's book (2018, p. 114).

Metin Erksan's television movies have taken their place in the history of Turkish cinema after they were heavily criticized by many names who are considered today's cinema "master," and after a lot of noise. The value of Metin Erksan and these "pioneer" films is understood more and more, especially as independent directors reveal their efficiency, especially in the creative cinema trials after and after the 1980s. With the help of Macdonald (1993, p. 11), we can say that while making films, Metin Erksan was reinventing the film, discover and explore, which is another indication of avant-garde. We will explain why these films made for TRT are extraordinary, contemporary, experimental, and pioneering in the following headings.

Story Structure of Movies

Literature adaptations are seen in Turkish cinema since first films. These adaptations are usually adaptations of novels or short stories. In addition to these adaptations, which include monotonous and dramatic elements with classical narrative and editing techniques, the work undertaken by Metin Erksan is quite different. When we look at the adapted works, it is clearly understood. In the first period, after the theatre adaptations, classical storytelling pieces such as Reşat Nuri and Halide Edip were adapted. However, almost none of Peyami Safa's novels, none of Ahmet Hamdi's works, and none of Oğuz Atay's novels have been made into films yet. The reason for this is that the texts of these authors carry postmodern elements, as well as the fact that the authors both adopt a layered narrative and are outside the classical fiction. Considering the stories that Metin Erksan chose, it is

obvious that he made a very “daring” move. Because the selected works are not stories that can be easily interpreted.

The classical narrative flow proceeds through the seven titles that Aristotle revealed while interpreting the tragedy. Seçkil Bükler (1985, p. 99) classifies these seven elements as major sins by quoting and interpreting Peter Wollen. However, contrary to these sins, cinema should have seven basic virtues. This creative stance, which distorts the classical narrative, forms the basis of contemporary cinema and even “cinema’s artistry.” Metin Erksan has also captured the contemporary narrative language by breaking down all the walls in his five television films, making a great contribution to Turkish cinema. In terms of the structure of the stories, the feeling of “dream reality” does not fit Aristotle’s narrative foundations apart from the classical narrative and disturbed the audience. The stories do not have the ending that the movie audience is used to. This situation created many question marks in the minds of the audience. This is actually the director’s creative responsibility that draws attention in all his films, and Erksan has brought it to the top in TRT films. Because, as Onaran (1994, p. 114) puts it:

Since he could not find this opportunity given to him in producers in the market, he wanted to make use of it properly. And he made successful films that revealed his own understanding of cinema. However, when these short stories were turned into 45-minute films, the slow, repetitive shooting to achieve psychological intensity was not adequately grasped by large audiences.

When we look at the story structure of the films, it is seen that it is different from the usual story setup in Turkish cinema until that day. In “*Bir İntihar*” (Author: Samet Ağaoğlu), the story progresses through a case with an unknown beginning and end, and the dialogues of men and women. In “*Müthiş Bir Tren*” (Author: Sait Faik Abasıyanık), a story setup that makes use of memories and delusions oscillates between reality and dream. Erksan tries to construct a “distorted” narrative in which the protagonist finds himself in a world other than the real world and returns to the real world again in the film *Geçmiş Zamanın Elbiseleri* (Author: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar). Erksan, on the other hand, “distributed” the stories named *Hanende Melek* (Author: Sabahattin Ali) and *Sazlık* (Author: Kenan Hulusi) with his camera and mise-en-scene, making them look unique, shocking and disturbing to the audience. Deepens the classic love theme and fiction and presents it to the audience with a “new” interpretation.

The story is like a side force that serves the image for these avant-garde films of Metin Erksan. Because in every film, we first witness the director’s mise-en-scene and setting the stage. If we adapt from Pezella (2006, p. 76); in the avant-garde films of Metin Erksan, the “visible” has prevailed over the “story.” This situation, which we encounter especially in “innovative” films, is the common aspect of Metin Erksan’s television films. While each story is important both when considering its author and from the history of literature, it has become a source that feeds images, not a basic material in the hands of Metin Erksan.

One of the common features of the stories is that they contain passionate and obsessive narratives that can be seen in many films of Metin Erksan’s cinema. The director has fictionalized his stories in the center of characters with psychological foundations and intense feelings, especially *Suçlular Aramızda* (1964) and *Sevmek Zamanı* (1965). In addition, the stories chosen for

television movies have become “pioneer” films by Metin Erksan, both because they are outside of the hitherto untested classical narrative form and have a definite ending and a deep text structure.

Time: Space

The first scene of *Müthiş Bir Tren*, which opens with the conversation of two old men smoking their hookahs behind a window hit by raindrops, examines the line between reality and imagination as the protagonist begins to talk about the flowing time and what he has gone through. “Time” breaks when the protagonist’s youth emerges and wanders around in a station where people are frozen in place.

According to Lotman (1999, p. 123):

From the beginning, cinema has sought to find a means of reflecting dreams, memories, inauthentic-direct speech, by resorting to chaining and various techniques that are not accepted today. Today, however, cinema has a rich experience of reflecting various performative tenses with the tools of the present and an unreal phenomenon through the real mode.

Metin Erksan plays with time to achieve a surrealistic narrative in other films, as he did in *Müthiş Bir Tren*. In *Bir İntihar*, the long stares of men and women and the time that suddenly jumps to the future and the camera that turns to the past play with the audience’s perception of time. The space of the film, unlike the space of the picture, is the action and way of movement (Pezella, 2006, p. 73). Metin Erksan’s multiple repetitive shootings in television movies cause time to bend and ordinary perception to disappear. While the discontinuity of the film’s frames in time dissolves in the continuous flow of the narrative, the transformation of space and the complexity of its relations are hidden and reduced. The use of time in the film is unique. Sometimes it uses a cyclical time, sometimes an imperceptible one. It creates meaning by using time. This usage is based on the moods and actions of the people in the movie. This is almost a necessity due to the nature of the film, from real time and real space to the creation of filmic time for each film. The creation of filmic time and space through the refraction of real time and space is strikingly seen in Erksan’s television films as well as in French New Wave.

Metin Erksan graduated from the Department of Art History and Aesthetics at the university. For this reason, he does not have any audience concerns or apprehension about making money. When we examine the films that he has produced and fully used his creative side, we see that art and aesthetics are at the forefront. These five stories also have aesthetic value from the literary point of view. Translating this aesthetic value into a perfect cinema scenario, the director has created five different works of art by reinforcing the language of his cinema with art, painting, sculpture, music, and architecture (see Image 1).

The places chosen by Erksan and the clever camera angles that play on the depth perception of the audience in the venues give the director the opportunity to reflect his own imagination on the screen. A Kafkaesque uncanny in the atmosphere of *Bir İntihar* effects the film from beginning to end. (After the colorless courtrooms, we are accustomed to in Yeşilçam, Erksan’s courthouse can be classified as an unusual but rich imagination). The effect of the enlarged photographs that cover the whole wall behind the man and the woman is enormous.



Image 1. A frame from *Bir İntihar* (Erksan, 1973a) about the use of space and art direction.

Apart from the places/spaces of classical cinema, Erksan has shaped his art language as he wishes, with single places/spaces, wide and empty spaces in a closed studio atmosphere, and atmospheres that create the feeling of infinity. While the compartments and long narrow corridors bore the audience in *Müthiş Bir Tren*, in the *Geçmiş Zamanın Elbiseleri*, the main male character's pursuit of the circular stairs inside the house turns the audience's head (e.g. Images 2 and 3).

The long sequences in a single location in *Hanende Melek* make the viewer think about the psychology of the film characters, while at the same time trying to include them in the reality of the film.

Reality, dreams, reality shown to us, photographs, narrated-lived reality, surreal spaces, gigantic structures, reflections, and contrasts in the five films have create conflict. The protagonist's remembering of the past on a thin board indicates the distance, inconsistency and depth of the past, memories, by looking down from above. In addition to all these, the use of symphonic-based music in all films is an uncommon choice in Yeşilçam cinema era. The compilation of this music like Metin Erksan is proof of the director is an auteur. From the beginning to the end of the film, there is the director's touch at every stage. We see the signatures of the innovative director in all these venue—space and art direction details.

Actors in Erksan's Movies

Metin Erksan always stays away from using classical actors and actresses both in these television films and in many of his other films. He destroys expectations by using faces that the audience

is not accustomed to, takes an avant-garde stance. Because, especially after the 1920s, in this movement that started in Europe and spread to America in the following decades, the directors aimed to tell and show their stories through “anyone” by destroying the classic “star” phenomenon.

It is one of the common features of the films that the stories that are the subject of the films have few characters. With a minimalist actor preference, Metin Erksan mostly concentrates on the narrative and cinematography of the films.

Actor direction is of great importance for Metin Erksan. In many of his interviews, he complains about the actors that they do not understand the movie he wants to make. According to the director, the actors are just intermediaries, the main thing is the basis of the movie. Actors are just intermediaries. For this reason, Erksan gives importance to their faces, not their ability to act, in the choice of actors in films. When asked about his casting choice in one of his speeches, he replied to the reporter that “his face suited this character.” So there is no such thing as a great actor for Erksan. He needs faces to match the type. In this sense, there are many actors and actresses who had their first film experience with Metin Erksan.

Cinematography in Metin Erksan's Movies

One of the common features of movies is long repetitions. They are an accentuation of imaginary locked and ecstasy. These are important sequences that make you feel surrealism. The long rowing in *Sazlık* and the progress of the boat in the lake, and the fact that the man who goes to the fish boat spends a part of the movie in the same place attract the audience to the action. In the opening scene of the *Hanende Melek*, watching from behind the window in the rainy weather until the song ends, Hüseyin Avni Bey conveys his mental boredom by disturbing the audience with a long scene. After Hüseyin Avni Bey enters, the second song starts with his gaze and the song gains meaning in the axis of the protagonist. Repetitions in different films such as walking in the same corridor (*Müthiş Bir Tren*), long stares and pointing a gun (*Bir İntihar*), walking around the room and circular movements (*Geçmiş Zaman Elbiseleri*) are a shooting technique that the director deliberately prefers and disturbs the audience. Because, as Tarkovsky said (2008, p. 73):

The reality of a movie image is reality in appearance. It is nothing but a dream, a desire, which reveals the features chosen by the director at the stage of implementation that is, arising from the individuality of the director's position.

Erksan also used angles that had not been tried before in Yeşilçam. For example, the lower camera angle rising from the



Image 2-3. Suffocating frames from *Müthiş Bir Tren* (Erksan, 1973d) that create a compressed feeling.



Image 4-5.
*The subversion of classical reverse angle in *Bir İntihar* (Erksan, 1973a).*

feet to the head in the *Sazlık* is a “new” for the audience of that day. The presence of a man and a woman in *Bir İntihar* together in the forest, but in opposite directions, is an unusual trial. All these are cinematographic moves that serve the narrative and disrupt the classical structure (e.g. Image 4 and 5).

In *Bir İntihar*, the painting of the man behind the woman and the painting of the woman behind the man is a state of contrast and unity. It shows and gives meaning to the woman's desire to kill both the man and herself. This sentence from the movie visualizes and explains: “Isn't suicide an introverted desire to kill?”

In Erksan's films, we also see fixed angles, extra close-ups, fast zoom-ins, static long shots, and nonflowing frames. While flowing and quick-change frames and classical plans with medium angles are used in Yeşilçam, this type of camera use also emerges as the avant-garde side of Metin Erksan. Erksan, who shoots the plans we are used to as the audience into new frames, creates images with his camera and these images offer an intellectual content with their meanings. The following frames are also selected as examples of the director's avant-garde camera use (see Images 6 and 7 and 8 and 9).

Conclusion

These five films, shot by Metin Erksan without any financial concerns, have an eccentric and avant-garde identity both in his

own filmography and in Yeşilçam cinema in terms of story, time, space/place, casting, cinematography, and camera angles. These five films, in which the audience finds an unfamiliar style of storytelling, camera use, location preferences, and casting, bear the signature of Metin Erksan as the auteur. It proves how creative he can be when he is not worried about the “box office” as a director. With these five films, Metin Erksan made movies that Turkish cinema was not accustomed to until his time, such as Alp Zeki Heper. These films of Erksan, which made a lot of noise in his period, were criticized negatively and was accused of wasting state resources, became cult in Turkish cinema. TV movies of Erkan's, which allow to be examined from many perspectives, are discussed throughout the article in the context of their avant-garde features, innovation and originality.

Whatever I want to tell myself, I use the camera like a pen.

What do you mean, where does the director come from? Regimentation, directorship, monopoly, monopoly... Director is a god, a god-king, not dictatorship (...) People says; cinema is a collective work, no sir it is not a collective work, cinema is an art made with single person.

The quotations above are from the interviews Metin Erksan in different times. We understand from these sentences that the director prioritizes his own art and fights for it.



Image 6-7.
*Disturbing the classic over-the-shoulder-angle and reverse shots in *Sazlık* (Erksan, 1973e).*



Image 8-9.
*The avant-garde shots of the space/place and actors placement in *Geçmiş Zamanın Elbiseleri* (Erksan, 1973c).*

A screenwriter, a director, a historian, an art philosopher; in short, as an intellectual artist, Metin Erksan is a turning point in the history of Turkish cinema. Erksan is always talked about with both his personality and his products. However, except for today, most of the periods are tried to be “intentionally” covered up. These television films, which were also discussed a lot, and especially during the period they were shot, caused the director to be criticized. But when we look at it today, Erksan’s “experimental television films,” which are of great importance both in Turkish cinema and in Turkish television, are works outside Yeşilçam’s patterns and also outside the classical narrative. In addition, we see that all the stories filmed by the director have surreal aspects. This surrealism and the films that Erksan made—especially for himself—show us the first avant-garde examples.

We see that surreal elements, imaginary places, passionate/obsessive characters, and the inner processes of these characters come to the fore in the stories. These elements are sharpened by Erksan’s camera. Experimentation and form are important in his films. Considering the conditions of the cinema industry at that time, we can say that such experiments were quite difficult. However, Erksan’s luck, which later turned into unlucky in a sense, is that he was able to shoot films that are truly artistic and reflect his own style, outside of Yeşilçam’s patterns, without falling into economic concerns. These films, on the other hand, became a turning point in the development of Turkish cinema as a door opener, pioneer, and innovator for the generation after Metin Erksan.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Declaration of Interests: The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Funding: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

References

- Altınar, B. (2005). *Metin Erksan sineması*. Pan Yayıncılık.
- Baker, U. (2017). *Beyin ekran*. Birikim Yayınları.
- Barkot, Z. Ö. (2015). Alp Zeki Heper. *Altyazı Dergisi* (Gayriresmi ve Resimli Türkiye Sinema Sözlüğü / Özel Sayı), 150, 23–24.
- Batur, E., Madra, Ö., & Türker, Y. (2017). *Metin Erksan aşkta, ölümden başka bir şey kalmadı (Metin Erksan’la Söyleşiler)*. Kırmızı Kedi Yayınları.
- Büker, S. (1985). *Sinema dili sinema üzerine yazılar*. Dost Yayınları.
- Clarke, J. (2012). *Sinema akımları*. Kalkedon Yayınevi.
- Erdoğan, Ş. (2011). *Avant-garde sinema üzerine*. Sinema Yayınları.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1952). *Karanlık dünya* [Film]. Atlas Film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1958). *Dokuz dağın efesi* [Film]. Birsal Film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1959). *Hicran yarısı* [Film]. Ergenekon Film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1960). *Şoför Nebahat* [Film]. Duru Film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1961). *Yılanların öcü* [Film]. Be-ya Film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1963). *Susuz yaz* [Film]. Hitit Film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1964). *Suçlular aramızda* [Film]. Birsal Film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1965). *Sevmek zamanı* [Film]. Troya Film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1973a). *Bir intihar* [Film]. TRT.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1973b). *Geçmiş zaman elbiseleri* [Film]. TRT.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1973c). *Hanende melek* [Film]. TRT.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1973d). *Müthiş bir tren* [Film]. TRT.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1973e). *Sazlık* [Film]. TRT.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1974). *Şeytan* [Film]. Saner film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1976). *Kadın Hamlet* [Film]. Uğur film.
- Erksan, M. (Director) (1981). *Preveze’den önce* [TV Film]. TRT.
- Esen, Ş. K. (2010). *Türk sinemasının kilometre taşları*. Agora Yayınları.
- Gündoğdu, M. (2017). *Metin Erksan ‘Kuyu’da bir yönetmen*. Cümle Yayınları.
- Heper, A. Z. (Director) (1962). *Bir kadın* [Film]. IDHEC.
- Heper, A. Z. (Director) (1963). *Şafak* [Film]. IDHEC.
- Heper, A. Z. (Director) (1966). *Suluk gecenin aşk hikâyeleri* [Film]. Sinema Film.
- Kaliç, S. (1992). *Deneysel sinemanın kısa tarihi*. Hil Yayınları.
- Karadoğan, A. (Ed.) (2010). *Sanat sineması üzerine*. De Ki Yayınları.
- Kayalı, K. (2004). *Metin Erksan sinemasını okumayı denemek*. Dost Yayınları.
- Kesal, E. (2018). *Kendi ışığında yanan adam*. İletişim Yayınları.
- Kirişçi, M. (2015). Metin Erksan’ın olay yaratan TV filmleri. <http://www.oteke.com/metin-erksanin-olay-yaratan-tv-filmleri-2/>
- Lotman, Y. (1999). *Sinema estetiğinin sorunları*. Öteki Sinema Yayınları.
- Macdonald, S. (1993). *Avant-garde film: Motion studies*. Cambridge University Press.
- O’Pray, M. (2003). *Avant-garde film: Form, themes and passions*. Wall-flower Press.
- Onaran, A. Ş. (1994). *Türk sineması I*. Kitle Yayınevi.
- Pezzella, M. (2006). *Sinemada estetik*. Dost Yayınları.
- Tarkovsky, A. (2008). *Mühürlenmiş zaman*. Agora Yayınları.
- Uzkinay, F. (Director) (1914). *Yastefanos’taki Rus abidesinin yıkılışı* [Film].

Yapılandırılmış Özet

Metin Erksan ve sineması değerlendirilirken yönetmenin estetik ve yenilikçi tavrının daha iyi anlaşılması için beş televizyon filmi (*Bir İntihar*, *Geçmiş Zaman Elbiseleri*, *Hanende Melek*, *Müthiş Bir Tren* ve *Sazlık*) üzerinde odaklanılması gerekir. Sanatçının maddi kaygı olarak desteklediği bu filmlerde gişe gibi bir derdi bulunmamaktadır. Bu sebeple, filmler hem sinema tarihimiz açısından hem de Metin Erksan filmografisi açısından dönüm noktasıdır.

Çalışmanın sorunu bu beş filmin neden öncü” ve “deneysel” bakış açısına sahip olduğudur. Yöntem olarak film analizleri kullanılmış, filmler öykü, zaman, mekân, sanat yönetimi, oyuncu tercihi ve sinematografi açısından değerlendirilmiştir. Bu değerlendirme sonucunda Metin Erksan’ın ürettiği beş televizyon filminin avangart olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Bir senarist, bir yönetmen, bir tarihçi, bir sanat felsefecisi; kısacası bir entelektüel ve sanatçı olarak Metin Erksan Türk sinema tarihinde bir dönüm noktasıdır. Metin Erksan sinemasında yine çok tartışılan ve özellikle çekildikleri dönemde yönetmenin topa tutulmasına neden olan ama bugün baktığımızda hem sinemamızda hem televizyon hayatımızda büyük öneme sahip Erksan’ın “deneysel televizyon filmleri” Yeşilçam’ın kalıplarının dışında, aynı zamanda klasik anlatının da dışında eserlerdir, ilk avangart örneklerdir.

Filmlerde öykünün kurgulanışı avangart bir tavırla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sinemamızın ilk dönemlerinde tiyatro uyarlamaları ardından Reşat Nuri, Halide Edip, gibi klasik hikâyeye anlatımını benimseyen uyarlamalar yapılmıştır. Bunun yanında hâlen daha Peyami Safa’nın hemen hiçbir romanı, Ahmet Hamdi’nin hiçbir eseri, Oğuz Atay’ın hiçbir romanı filmleştirilememiştir. Bunun sebebi söz konusu yazarların metinlerinin postmodern öğeler taşımasının yanında yine yazarların hem katmanlı bir anlatımı benimsemesi hem de klasik kurgunun dışında yer almalarıdır. Metin Erksan’ın seçtiği hikâyeler göz önünde bulundurulduğunda oldukça cüretkâr bir hamle yaptığı aşikârdır. Zira seçilen eserler kolay kolay yorumlanacak öyküler değildir.

Metin Erksan da beş televizyon filminde bütün duvarları yıkarak çağdaş anlatı dilini yakalamış, sinema sanatımız adına büyük katkı sunmuştur. Öykülerin yapısı bakımından “düş gerçekliği” duygusu, klasik anlatının dışında Aristo’nun anlatı temellerine uymamaktadır ve izleyiciyi rahatsız etmiştir. Öyküler, film izleyicisinin alışkın olduğu bir sonu barındırmamaktadır. Bu durum izleyicinin zihninde birçok soru işareti oluşturmuştur. Bu aslında yönetmenin bütün filmlerinde dikkati çeken yaratıcılık sorumluluğudur.

Filmlerin öykü yapısına bakıldığında o güne kadar sinemamızda alışılmış öykü kurgusunun dışında olduğu görülmektedir. *Bir İntihar*’da (Yazar: Samet Ağaoğlu) başı ve sonu belli olmayan bir vaka ve kadın ile erkeğin diyalogları üzerinden öykü ilerlerken *Müthiş Bir Tren*’de (Yazar: Sait Faik Abasıyanık) anılardan ve sanrılardan faydalanan bir öykü kurgusu gerçeklik ve düş arasında gelip gitmektedir. *Geçmiş Zamanın Elbiseleri* (Yazar: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar) filminde başkişinin kendini gerçek dünyadan başka bir dünyada bulması ve yeniden gerçek dünyaya dönmesi gibi bir “bozuk” anlatıyı benimser Erksan. *Hanende Melek* (Yazar: Sabahattin Ali) ve *Sazlık* (Yazar: Kenan Hülisi) gibi klasik öykü kurgusundaki metinleri ise kamerası ve mizansenleriyle yine “dağdarak” kendine has arayan, sarsan ve seyirciyi rahatsız eden hâle getirmiş klasik aşk temasını ve kurgusunu derinleştirerek “yeni” bir yorumla izleyiciye sunmaktadır yönetmen.

Zaman ve mekânın kullanımında yönetmenin avangart tutumu net bir şekilde görülmektedir. Metin Erksan da *Müthiş Bir Tren*’de olduğu gibi diğer filmlerde de gerçeküstü bir anlatıma kavuşmak için zamanla oynamaktadır. *Bir İntihar*’da kadın ve erkeğin uzun uzun bakışmaları ve aniden geleceğe sıçrama yapan zaman ve geçmişe dönen kamera seyircinin zaman algısıyla oynamaktadır.

Metin Erksan’ın televizyon filmlerinde gerçekleştirdiği çok tekrarlı çekimler bu zamanın bükülmesini ve sıradan algılayışın kaybolmasına yol açar. Filmin karelerinin zamandaki süreksizliği öykülemenin süregelen akışında çözünürken, uzamın dönüşümü ve onun ilişkilerinin karmaşıklığı gizlenmiş ve azaltılmış olur.

Erksan’ın seçtiği mekânlar ve mekânlarda seyircinin derinlik algısına oynayan zeki kamera açıları ona İstanbul’dan kopup kendi hayal dünyasını perdeye yansıtma olanağı vermiştir. *Bir İntihar*’daki atmosferde kafkaesk bir tekinsizlik filmi başından sonuna kadar hâkimdir. O günkü klasik sinemanın mekânları dışında tek mekânlar, kapalı stüdyo havasında geniş ve boş alanlar, sonsuzluk hissi yaratan atmosferlerle Erksan sanat dilini de istediği gibi şekillendirmiştir.

Beş filmdeki gerçeklik, rüyalar, bize gösterilen gerçeklik, fotoğraflar, anlatılan-yaşanan gerçeklik, gerçeküstü mekânlar, devasa yapılar, ters duruşlar, yansımalar, zıtlıklar: kadın erkeklerin konumlanması ve çatışmayı yaratmaktadır. Tüm bunlarla birlikte tüm filmlerde senfonik altyapılı müzik kullanımı Yeşilçam sinemasında pek rastlanmayan bir tercihtir. Bu müziklerin Metin Erksan’a derlenmesi ise yönetmenin auteur oluşunun bir delilidir. Filmin başından sonuna kadar her evresinde yönetmenin dokunuşunu bulunmaktadır. Tüm bu mekân ve sanat yönetimi detayları da yine yenilikçi yönetmenin imzaları görmektedir.

Metin Erksan’ın avangart duruşunun bir kanıtlayıcısı da oyuncu tercihidir. Metin Erksan hem bu televizyon filmlerinde hem de diğer birçok filminde klasik jön ve aktris kullanmaktan hep uzak durmaktadır. Seyircinin alışık olmadığı yüzler kullanarak beklentileri alt üst etmektedir, avangart bir duruş sergilemektedir. Filmlere konu olan öykülerin az karakterli olması filmlerin ortak özelliklerinden bir başkasıdır. Minimalist bir oyuncu tercihiyle Metin Erksan daha çok filmlerin anlatısına ve sinematografisine yoğunlaşmıştır. Oyuncu yönetimi konusu Metin Erksan için büyük önem taşır. Birçok röportajında oyuncularından dem vurarak yapmak istediği filmi anlamadıklarından yakınır. Yönetmene göre oyuncular taşıyıcıdır, asıl önemli olan filmin temelidir.

Yönetmenin filmlerde kamera kullanımı ve sinematografisi ise bir başka avangart yönü bizlere göstermektedir. Filmlerin ortak paydalarından biri uzun tekrarlardır. Bunlar bir düşsel sıkışmışlığın, kendinden geçmenin vurgulanmasıdır ve gerçeküstüçülüğü hissettiren önemli sekanslardır. Filmlerinde ayrıca sabit açılara, ekstra yakın planlar, hızlı zoom-inlere, durağan uzun planlara, akmayan karelere rastlıyoruz. Yeşilçam’ın akan ve hızlı değişen kareleri ve orta açılı klasik planlarının yanında bu tarz bir kamera kullanımı da Metin Erksan’ın avangart tarafı olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.

Hikâyelerde gerçeküstü öğelerin, hayali mekânların, tutkulu / saplantılı karakterlerin ve bu karakterlerin içsel süreçlerinin ön plana çıktığını görmekteyiz. Bu öğeler, Erksan’ın kamerası ile sivrilmiş ve keskinleşmiştir. Filmlerde deneysellik ve biçim ön plandadır. Sinema endüstrisinin o dönemki koşulları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda bu tarz denemelerin oldukça güç olduğunu söyleyebiliriz. Fakat Erksan’ın sonradan bir anlamda şanssızlığa dönüşen şanslı ekonomik kaygılara düşmeksizin, Yeşilçam’ın kalıplarının dışında, gerçek anlamda sanatsal ve Erksan’ın kendi üslubunu yansıtan filmler çekebilmiş olmasıdır. Bu filmler ise Metin Erksan sonrası kuşak için kapı açıcı, öncü ve yenilikçi olarak Türk sinemasının gelişiminde bir dönüm noktası olmuştur.