# [in]Transition

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Yeşilçam's Uncanny Mansion

İpek Gürkan, Television Reporting And Programming, İstanbul Gelişim Üniversity, Faculty of Applied Sciences, ipekgurkann@gmail.com

This work attempts to derive a horror film from the romantic melodramas of Yeşilçam (Turkish Cinema). Thus, it explores a new narrative possibility by discovering the potential of the fear and terror felt by the female characters in the films to go beyond melodrama and create the atmosphere of a horror film.
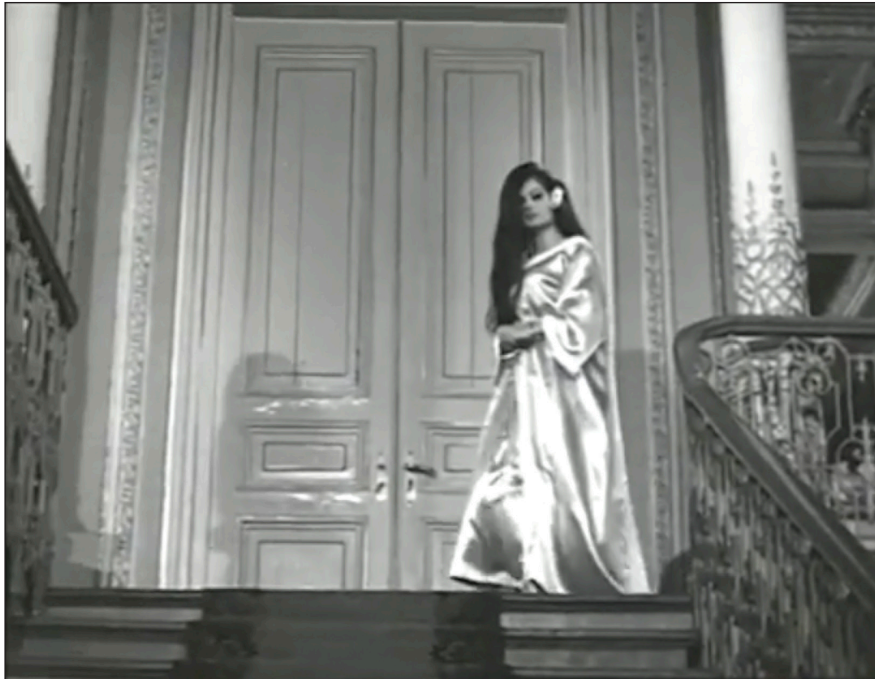
Creator's Statement

The video essay "Yeşilçam's Uncanny Mansion" reveals Yeşilçam's unexpected proximity to a genre it traditionally avoided—horror—by tracing connections between this underrepresented form and the romantic melodramas of classic Yeşilçam. Like "Hollywood," the term "Yeşilçam" refers to a place: Yeşilçam Street in Beyoğlu, Istanbul, once the heart of the Turkish film industry. The Golden Age of Yeşilçam (1960s–1970s) marked the most prolific and popular era of Turkish cinema, reflecting and dramatizing the socio-cultural structures and transformations of Turkish society. By repetitively showcasing female film stars'[1] gestures and facial expressions in these classic melodramas when confronted with fear and horror, this video essay seeks to defamiliarize[2] these familiar moments for the Yeşilçam spectator through manipulative displacement, thus inviting spectators to experience the scenes from a different perspective. Ingrained in our collective memory as "melodramatic gestures," these reactions have become entrenched as clichéd expressions of fear within a specific societal and cultural context. This video essay may evoke Matthias Müller's found footage film *Home Stories* (1990), as it similarly intervenes in moments of emotional crisis while questioning gender roles and narrative structures within Yeşilçam's cinematic language.

However, this video essay follows a conventional narrative structure by repeatedly employing visual and auditory elements from the quoted films. This narrative structure draws an episodic frame, beginning with the familiar scene of arriving at a mansion

by train and concluding with a departure by train, thus encircling the narrative. The quoted structure is also ironized while alienating the Yeşilçam spectator through these interventions. The title, "Yeşilçam's Uncanny Mansion," indicates a reflective approach, aiming to create an uncanny feeling through visual and auditory material. The re-editing of Yeşilçam's gothic and baroque interior set designs to highlight elements of horror plays a significant role in this uncanny feeling. In this structure, a line of tension begins with a scene of falling asleep; the character(s) are gradually drawn into this tension, and the narrative ends with a scene that suggests it might all have been either a nightmare or a phantasmagoria.

I strategically employed Yeşilçam's clichéd romantic verbal expressions to create a double sense of estrangement. However, I used them sparingly to shift the focus onto the gestures. These cuts, which ironically reverse meaning, blend fear with desire. This emotional amalgamation exposes the slippery ground of emotional reality in Yeşilçam. By using these now commodified gestures in Yeşilçam melodramas, I not only intensified the effect of estrangement, in Walter Benjamin's terms (1999), but also engaged in a phantasmagoric critique of the genre. This video essay aims to dissipate the *aura*[3] surrounding these gestures, transforming this dissipation into a qualitative one. The black screens used in the video essay deliberately interrupt the continuity of the narrative, encouraging the audience to view the film from a critical distance. Similarly, temporal jumps and auditory discontinuities reinforce this effect. At the same time, this effect draws attention to the accidental nature of the found footage, making viewers feel that they are watching "assembled images" within a fragmentary narrative structure.

If, as Agamben suggests (2019: 208–217), gestures represent a hesitation in meaning, Yeşilçam melodramas thrive on this hesitation and the accumulation of moments of potential action. In this video, the focus is on this gestural space that has been manipulated to concentrate the spectator's attention. However, for both the spectator and the actor, these suspended actions do not open up a space for reflection; instead, they are trapped within an aesthetic tradition, confined by social, historical, and cultural clichés. Therefore, the repeated gestures in emotionally charged moments reveal both the endless cycle inherent in the tradition and the confrontation with its possible rupture, while also illuminating the potential for emotional transformation. We can consider Georges Didi-Huberman's reflections on Agamben's writings about gestures: in the same gesture [or face], terror and disgust blend with madness from desire (2024: 35). For the Yeşilçam spectator, these easily interchangeable emotions create a visual and auditory familiarity. However, these artificial gestural expressions also open up to a promise of cheap catharsis, which we might consider as the counterpart

of *kitsch*. The spectator of Yeşilçam's classic kitsch melodramas is subjected to this false and temporary promise of catharsis. This distorted formal structure leaves this promise ironically suspended and irretrievable, but it also enlightens us about the potential for emotional transformation.

Although the image excerpts in this video are taken from various films directed by several filmmakers and featuring different female stars, we see how similar the gestural expressions and cinematography are. We know that by its very nature, the melodrama genre employs exaggerated expressions to increase the spectators' emotional involvement. The expressions of the female characters in the video essay also exhibited a similarity that could be adapted to almost any emotion. We observed these similar performances not only in the ways emotions were expressed but also in scenes such as their perfectly posed sleeping states. Thus, we can argue that in the formation of clichéd images and gestures in Yeşilçam melodramas, acting performances played as decisive a role as the structural elements of the melodramatic genre and the mise-en-scène. These elements intertwined to shape the cinematic aesthetics and narrative conventions of the period. Undoubtedly, these performances reflect the reinforcement of gender roles. The moments in the video essay where the female character appears ghost-like draw attention to the conventional perception of the narrative and the spectral nature of the character's (non-)presence. Similar gestural expressions in images of women, who are the object of a familiar voyeuristic male gaze, help us to analyse them holistically, and we see how they are transformed into cliché-images. These clichéd gestures turn them into objects of a stereotypical gaze—that is, a voyeuristic gaze—traditionally framed from a masculine perspective and intended to produce visual pleasure for the viewer. This critical analysis of gender roles in Yeşilçam films informs us about these representations' social and cultural implications. In these representations, while the female body becomes a "spectacle object" through visual codes, the frequent depiction of female characters in emotional, passive, and victimized roles reproduces the woman's position within the patriarchal order and leads to these characters being inscribed in cultural memory as passive, obedient, and romanticized figures.

Additionally, the female actors in this video essay were part of a group of iconic figures. Thus, each different female star became a similar part of a single star image, forming a constellation. This video essay records the masculinity embedded in the gaze of Yeşilçam's female characters, sequentially aligning these gestures. This arrangement also reveals how the gestures and expressions of the actors are copies of each other. Within this closeness, the female characters continue to be victims of male violence, as dictated by the gender roles assigned to them within Yeşilçam's conventional film narratives. We observe how violence is aestheticized in Yeşilçam melodramas, leading

to the stereotyping of gestural expressions. In this sense, while exaggerated gestures heighten the emotional impact, the repetition of familiar expressions in Yeşilçam creates a certain level of desensitization in the spectator. This video essay approaches these two opposing emotional effects ironically through techniques such as repetition, slowing down, and freezing, thereby creating a sense of alienation for the spectator. The "Yeşilçam Mansion" mentioned in the title, instead of contributing to the romantic atmosphere of melodramas as a "home" and safe space, provides an uncanny setting for a film genre that is not commonly embraced in the Yeşilçam convention: horror.

Notes

[1] In Turkish cinema, iconic figures of Yeşilçam are the female actors referred to as the "four-leaf clover": Fatma Girik, Filiz Akın, Hülya Koçyiğit and Türkan Şoray.

[2] The concept, in Bertolt Brecht's use, aims to prevent the spectator from emotionally identifying with the events on stage by employing various staging techniques within the framework of epic theater, thus encouraging them to watch with a critical and intellectual distance (Willett, 1964, p. 91). Additionally, Walter Benjamin (1935) was greatly influenced by Brecht's concept of alienation in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and many other works.

[3] The *aura* concept by Walter Benjamin refers to the historical, cultural, and unique existence of an artwork. In this context, it is used as a counterpart to altering and manipulating the original context of an image, thereby disrupting its authentic presence of the "here and now" (1935/1999).

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Biography

İpek Gürkan is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Applied Sciences at Istanbul Gelişim University. She completed her master's degree in Women's Studies at Istanbul University in 2014. In 2018, she received her Ph.D. in Radio, Television, and Cinema

from the same university, with a dissertation focusing on child witnesses in films about the Second World War. Her research interests include videographic studies, film criticism, and the sociology of film.

Review by Eva Álvarez-Vázquez, University of Massachusetts Amherst

With a tone that evokes Hitchcock—specifically the iconic scene of *Psycho*'s protagonist arriving at the motel beside the eerie Bates house—this video essay transforms Yeşilçam's romantic melodrama into something unsettling and revealing. Its circular structure, marked by the arrival and departure of a train, draws us into a ghostly journey led by a constellation of female stars from the golden age of Turkish cinema.

These protagonists unveil the mechanics of fear through gestures that repeat and fragment, tracing an affective atmosphere charged with disorientation, dread, and collapse. Although trapped by these clichés that reproduce rigid gender roles, the women also come to disrupt them in this video essay. They descend staircases in exploration and ascend in flight, and their nightmares—framed not as passive suffering but as alert, embodied responses—keep them alert. These sequences not only stress the uncanny but subtly reclaim agency for the characters. The "uncanny mansion" of Yeşilçam is no longer a romantic domestic space—it becomes a site of unease and ambiguity.

Gürkan's video essay is highly effective in pulling the viewer into the deconstruction of Yeşilçam's romantic aesthetic, offering an alternative genre experience that is visually pleasurable for horror lovers such as myself. Horror becomes once again a lens through which to question social conventions, this time, tied to gender roles in this case. There is no romanticism here—only horror embodied in the masculine, unease, and a lingering echo of what was once familiar. And a kind of "final girl" who, empowered, leaves behind false promises and the "fear of those who love" while trapped in romantic melodramatic clichés.

Review by Maud Ceuterick, Universitetet i Bergen

İpek Gürkan's "Yeşilçam's Uncanny Mansion" proposes to alienate Yeşilçam's spectators by isolating and gathering women's expressions of fear in the melodramatic genre of Yeşilçam. The playful Eisensteinian montage of women shouting in horror adopts a surrealist filmic style à la Luis Buñuel or Germaine Dulac, inspiring terror from repetitions of theatrical acting. In focusing on the performance of Yeşilçam stars, the video-essay points to the bodily gestures of classical cinema that have created gender roles through their accumulation similarly to the encyclopaedic "The Hand That Touches the Arm" by Calac Nogueira. While these gestures may have often been

performed by the actors and witnessed by the audiences unconsciously, videographic criticism is the ideal methodology to question the function they have played in film narrative and in producing social and cultural codes.

Gürkan dissociates any aspect of love and desire that may have traditionally been attached to women's vulnerability and expressions of fear in Yeşilçam by creating an uncanny assemblage of sleeping and shouting women. The creative tension created through a circular narrative of horror vignettes may give space to further playful critical videomaking. One could for example imagine how the video-essay could take an affirmative turn as the raging constellation of Yeşilçam women may unite in solidarity in the image of Barbara Zecchi's women in "The Rhythms of Rage: from Solitude to Solidarity."