

An Ethics of Images: *The Distant*¹

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Abstract

The rapid development of private media and especially television in Turkey in the last two decades has led to the emergence of a consumerist society of the spectacle. This essay offers a historical and cultural analysis of this new cultural hegemony and poses the question of the status of image in such a culture. In the first part, it offers an analysis and discussion of the status of the image in the new spectacular hegemony. In the second part, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's award-winning film, *The Distant*, is interpreted as transforming the sense of image in everyday life and offering a new ethics and politics of image developed on the margins of contemporary cultural hegemony.

Introduction

The last two decades in Turkey's story of Europeanization witnessed an explosive development of private media. We are still far from being able to think about the radical changes in the public imaginary and symbolic structures effected by a frantic proliferation of television channels, music industry, weekly magazines and the Internet. In the 1980s one would still have said that television threatens cinema. It seems now that cinema or even literature cannot quite do without television. It is hard to find a movie whose important scenes we have not already seen on television. Not only do we hear about the novel by the famous writer in prime time news but the author also appears on television to tell us what it is about. We have begun to live in a culture where we see without viewing and know without reading. Moreover, as this paradox has now become internal to the very processes of viewing or reading which are increasingly consumptive activities, television is only the synecdoche of a hegemonic system of commodity production. Films and novels are increasingly produced in ways compatible with the same consumptive logic. These developments are certainly not specific to Turkey. Indeed Gilles Deleuze (1995) pointed to a similar development in the French cultural scene in the 1980s.

A Theoretical Framework

Despite technological and institutional changes of contemporary television, the Internet or cyberspace, the kinds of theoretical approaches that enable us to grasp the cultural logic of contemporary media go as far back as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2003, original publication 1947) or Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1983, original publication 1967). Adorno and Horkheimer developed a concept of "culture industry" (rather than a concept of mass culture) according to which culture has become a field of industrial production, planning and management under conditions of commodity production. The result was the absolute rule of sameness and the destruction of difference and singularity in every sphere of cultural life. Guy Debord described contemporary society as a society of spectacle in which all experience is subjected to a spectacularization. Although "digitization", which is an inseparable part of what is called "globalization", has accelerated the speed of production, circulation and consumption of images and words to a degree incomparable to the world when these works were written, the structural points made by Adorno and Horkheimer or Debord are still largely relevant. This surely does not mean that there is no need to develop these classic perspectives further and revise them. Nevertheless, it makes sense to say that, in the process of entering the EU, Turkey's

“dialectic of enlightenment” involves its rapidly growing “culture industry” and “society of the spectacle.” The levelling and homogenization of all events and desires by the *measure* of the commodity form on television today, produced and controlled by the ratings system, has reached a level where we are increasingly under the threat of losing our relationship to the *immeasurable* or incommensurable. The sheer violence from Palestine or Baghdad to the streets of the U.S. has become just another story, just another image we see every night. We now have the overall sense that, whatever program we watch, we are actually going through a specific experience of watching television. Indeed if we follow John Ellis’s (1988) classic analysis, television averages itself out in its own “commodity form” which he calls the “segment” and for which the prototype is the 30-second commercial (pp. 116-126).² Hence television is not single programs following each other through a complete day but segments which divide a day up into manageable units of condensed action or conversation packages. It is these segments which are endlessly repeated on television without any final closure. In this new machine of relentless segmentation and systematization, the differences vanish while their very disappearance is boldly hidden in a “day’s schedule.”

In 1967, Debord defined “spectacle” as “a social relationship between people, mediated by images” (p. 4). Following Lukacs (1968), he emphasized the concept of the “separation” of the worker from the products of her power as well as the separation of power from the worker. His argument implied a move from the classic Marxian concept of fetishism towards that of the spectacle which signified the absolutely autonomous power of the image and the word. Indeed it would not be wrong to say that especially the latter separation was guaranteed in Turkey by a series of military coups in 1971 and 1980 which stopped the popular movements and paved the way for privatization. The economic policy of privatization and the rapid development of media and the mediatization of politics, culture and society in the last two decades, is now gradually replacing the old authoritarian state structures with the new consumerist power of the spectacle. This is the other side of Europeanization, but it does not command the attention that the democratization or human rights issues receive.

When Debord published his work in 1967, Europe was at the peak of a long period of social capitalism or democratic consumerism and on the eve of the revolution of 1968. In this particular context, the notion of spectacle played a significant role in reconstituting political, artistic and intellectual resistance against consumer society. It is absolutely important to underline that Debord’s was not a theory of media but rather the theory of a form of society which he called “society of the spectacle”. What is the immediate result of a society of the spectacle instituted by a culture industry? Of course it is not merely an abundance of images, but a kind of general equivalence of images, words and events. This result appears troubling: as images become “just-things-to-be-seen,” events such as those in Palestine or Baghdad become more like television series’ that we just follow daily. In this climate, it no longer makes sense to depend on the concept of a “true” image. This difficulty of classical representation, originating in an assumption of the transparency of representation, is often regarded as a major reason for the crisis of politics today. In a discussion of Henri Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life, Maurice Blanchot has given a fine description of this effect:

We are no longer burdened by events as soon as we behold their image with an interested, then simply curious, then empty but fascinated look. Why take part in a street demonstration if at the same

moment, secure and at rest, we are at the *demonstration* [*manifestation*] itself thanks to a television set? 'Depoliticization' is tied to this movement. (1993, p. 240)

Are we then in Jean Baudrillard's "hyper-reality" in which we have lost all referent and event (1983, pp. 138-152)? But, in declaring the death of the event, Baudrillard mistakes a result for a process. There is nothing that assures us that the powerful processes of simulation and spectacularization should work homogeneously. Going further than Debord's attention to the spectacularization of image and language, Baudrillard draws our attention to the hegemony of the code (pp. 103-114). But the operability of the code is itself subjected to decomposition, diversion and alteration. The code cannot operate without what Jacques Derrida calls "iterability". Since the mark is citable and iterable, it can break with every given context and this necessary possibility of detachment implies a necessary possibility of its altering, becoming-other (Derrida, 1988, p. 12). If the iterability of the mark or the sign ineluctably involves its detachment, decomposition, diversion and singularization, then the conclusion is not necessarily the absence or death of the event (unless the latter is seen, in a prior assumption, as a homogeneous and stable referent).³ If the media identify, categorize, control and dominate the singularity of the event in an endlessly repetitive proliferation and leveling out, this might be because the event always escapes the media's grasp by maintaining itself in *other* ways and by keeping its *otherness*. What we call art, especially in modern society, can be seen as this process of singularization of the image.

Therefore, although Debord's emphasis on the accumulation and abundance of images and the resulting loss of immediacy is essential to his analysis, this gigantic production of images should also be seen as responsible for the paradoxical effects of their decomposition, diversion, and singularization.⁴ Debord was aware of this when he referred to modern art as a *positive* expression of the loss of communication. According to him, in affirming itself as *independent*, modern art inaugurates a process of *decomposition* and it is this process of decomposition which has come to define it (Debord, 1983, pp. 186-188).⁵ There is therefore the possibility of a different image or a different kind of production. But how? Debord's approach to art as a force of decomposition should be connected with the opposition he sets up between "quotation" and "diversion". While the former is said to repeat a prior discursive authority (and the media's mode of operation can be seen in these terms, always maintaining a hierarchy), the latter "is language which cannot be confirmed by any former or supra-critical reference" (p. 208).

Although this distinction is of fundamental importance, Debord is also taking a risk by abstractly opposing quotation and diversion in terms of pure continuity/hierarchy versus pure discontinuity/independence. He defines diversion as grounded "in itself", supposing "nothing external to its own truth as present critique" (p. 208). But in order for the diversion to divert, it must also somehow *minimally* involve or quote what it diverts from. In other words, it cannot be separated from and opposed to quotation in a simple and linear manner. It is precisely hegemonic to assume that there is *first* a word or image, and *then* its quotation or diversion. In the movement of signs, images and words, there is diversion from the very start, and quotation at the most diverse end, hence the insufficiency of these terms.⁶ This duplicity or complicity of diversion and quotation introduces *undecidability* into the movement. It is at this moment that we must invert our order of presentation. It is actually this undecidable and uncontrollable movement which comes *before* the media and culture industry and it is this process (of events, desires, singularities) that they try to control and administer in their spectacularization. The

processes of diversion, decomposition and singularization of images are the *return* of this movement as art or resistance at the margins of the cultural field hegemonized by the spectacle as a social relationship. Such a return is as ineluctable as the very space and time of creativity, but it is never the full appearance of an image conceived as Gestalt (figure against ground, a hierarchical relationship). If the difference organized and hegemonized by the culture industry is released from the grip of spectacularization in its being repeated and altered in repetition, then this deterritorialization or line of flight is positively incapable of reaching the perfection of a form. This is what allows us to speak of an “image to-come” which is not a future image (an image whose truth will be present in the future), nor is it the next image. Rather it is an image which never arrives and is always to-come. It becomes a reminder of the *otherness* of events and desires governed by the spectacular economy of media and culture industry. As Antonio Negri writes:

The everyday sense of life confirms the definition of that ‘which is coming’ as *to-come*, rather than as future. It is indeed in the struggle for the free appropriation of the present that life opens itself to the *to-come*, and desire perceives – against the empty and homogenous time in which all is equal (including, and in particular, the future) – the creative power of *praxis*. (2003, p. 163)

In what follows I will read Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s film *The Distant* in terms of this process of diversion and singularization of the image.

The Personal is the Political: A Director without a Face

It was around the same time that Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s *The Distant* was awarded the Grand Prix in Cannes and the Turkish pop singer Sertab Erener won the Eurovision Song Contest with her single “Everyway that I can.” Since Eurovision had been a trauma in the national memory with the lowest scores Turkey had year after year, Erener’s success turned into a hysterical celebration with her repeated daily appearance on television, while Ceylan’s appearance was limited to a few very short occurrences, all of which were news reports and in most of which he clearly kept a certain distance. If people has been asked then, few would have recalled Ceylan’s name or the movie’s title. It would be hard to imagine in the specific Turkish political, ideological and cultural context that major cable news channels such as CNN Turk or NTV (both of which follow a “liberal” line and are rather keen on “culture and arts” shows) would not want to interview Ceylan and celebrate his success as the most recent case of national pride in Europe. Indeed on the few occasions that he was in the news, he was presented in similar terms. It is therefore not entirely implausible to think that the rarity of Ceylan’s appearance on TV is his own choice. In Debord’s sense of image as a social relationship then, we are before two different kinds of image here. One is oriented towards its visibility and tries every way that it can (as its title suggests) to be seen and recognized, to turn itself into a spectacle. The other withdraws, pulls out and leaves its own scene the moment it becomes visible or enters into the system of recognition.

If Ceylan’s personal politics of appearance is deliberately non-spectacular, then what we observe in such a politics is not just a resistance against dominant ideology or television as a hegemonic cultural form, but more particularly a resistance to *the way in which an image is produced*. This personal choice reveals a politics and an ethics of images through a withdrawal from the Hegelian economy of recognition, of the dialectic of the recognizing slave and the recognized master, and by implication, a

withdrawal from the position of the “subject”, who is supposed to be an “*auteur*” director in our case. As I will show below, *The Distant* is characterized by minimal narrative development, as if the very economy of the subject involves an uneconomic withdrawal, a loss to which the Hegelian dialectic remains blind in its narrative sublation (*aufheben*) and which television represses in its spectacularization.

The Distant: Immeasurable Immediacy

The Distant begins with Yusuf’s (Mehmet Emin Toprak) journey to and arrival in Istanbul. He lost his job with the closing of the factory nearby the small town where he lives. He comes to Istanbul to stay with his elder cousin Mahmut (Muzaffer Özdemir), a commercial photographer, and to look for a job in international cargo ships. His search is unsuccessful with the economic crisis and unemployment in the shipping industry, while the uncertain extension of his stay in Mahmut’s apartment causes a growing tension between the two men—a tension clearly overdetermined with the class and cultural differences between them. Meanwhile, although Mahmut makes good money from advertising photography, he is struggling with the problems of his own life. He is an urban petty bourgeois intellectual who once dreamt of making films like Tarkovsky (whose films he watches frequently at night). He has too quickly come to realize the hardship of earning his living and making art in a capitalist society and has ended up as a free-lance commercial photographer who works mostly for a tiles company. Apart from his shattered dreams, he has an unstable erotic and emotional life. He has a secret relationship with a married woman, sometimes watches porn movies at night and is emotionally hurt when his ex-wife wants to leave for Canada with her new husband. The situation is further complicated emotionally by her inability to give birth to a child because of a prior abortion she had when she was married to Mahmut. She does not blame him, because it was a common decision and they still seem to have an obvious affection for each other, even though it is clear to both that their relationship will never be recovered. Yusuf’s emotional life is no better. As a small town working class boy with no experience of sophisticated urban girls, he just does not know how to approach the beautiful lady of his own age, living on the same street. He enjoys following young women secretly in his erratic wanderings through the city and even harasses one in a train.

As the tension grows between Mahmut and Yusuf, Mahmut insinuates that Yusuf has stolen an accessory that he uses for his photographs. Although he realizes later that he has misplaced it himself, Mahmut does not say anything and wants to close the topic, but Yusuf is obviously hurt. On another day Mahmut berates Yusuf again, this time for leaving the house dirty, and asks Yusuf what he is planning to do since he has not been able to find a job for months. Yusuf responds by asking Mahmut to find him a job in the tiles company (where Mahmut is currently working). Mahmut is extremely upset and raises his voice again, teaching Yusuf a lesson of life. The next morning Mahmut finds that Yusuf has gone without leaving a message. There is no clue where Yusuf went, and Mahmut picks up a pack of cigarettes that Yusuf left by his bed, as if he wants to keep a trace of the man he wanted so much to get rid of.

Although this is the story of *The Distant*, it would not be an overstatement to say that it is a story in which nothing much happens in the unfolding of a series of events initiated by a problem and its final resolution. Such a narrative condition is minimally followed as a fact of the cinema but it is not turned into a principle. Leaving aside any dialectical and narrative assurance, Ceylan’s realism is of a very different

kind. There is definitely a problem, but it is difficult to decide what and whose problem it is—everyone involved seems to have their *singular* problems. There is a series of singular problems that are never finally resolved. Mahmut is a frustrated artist with an unstable emotional life; Yusuf is the unemployed young worker who is trying hard to find a job. Mahmut's ex-wife is hoping to try new technologies to have a child in Canada, while his secret lover is unhappy in a relationship that she does not seem to have the power to end. Even the marginal character of the caretaker has his own problem of keeping up with the demands of the residents. Moreover, although there seems to be a kind of conflict between the two main protagonists, it does not develop so much as it repeats or unfolds itself *without any resolution*. Dialogues are kept to a minimum and many scenes are passages of time without word or action, while much is narrated by implication in the fascinating beauty and intricacy of Ceylan's images—a well-known photographer before he became a director, he is always the cameraman in his movies.

What is narrated by carefully designed and shot scenes is that which cannot be put into words, that which cannot be brought back in speech, the singular event as it occurs in everyday life. But this does not mean that the function of narrating is simply carried over to the image. In other words, when it is necessarily displaced to the image, something else happens. Refusing to spectacularize its visibility, the image insists on remaining upon its own surface in a kind of revenge from the dramatic depth in which it is usually lost. It would be more appropriate to say that the image doubles the silence in the movie rather than being accompanied by it; there is almost a silence of the image. The surface quality of Ceylan's images implies a very different sort of fetishism which associates itself with a singular time, that of everyday life. This re-valuing of surface is not a mere formalism or aestheticism; it is rather a destruction of the hierarchy, of the order of priorities which the dramatic depth creates. This is why it is also a liberation of the detail: a small gesture, the turn of a face, an incomplete sentence, a fading noise. It is almost as if the whole film is made up of actions that remain incomplete, of sounds that lose their way.

Mahmut gives up answering his mother's phone message, he gives up talking to his ex-wife on their very last phone conversation. In our brief passage of time, during the only opportunity he had in the entrance of the apartment, Yusuf cannot talk to the young woman he obviously likes. And later, when he attempts to do so, he realizes that it is too late. These images are obviously produced with immense care and calculated for the tiniest effect,⁷ but also with a strange kind of calculation of the impossibility of calculation, a kind of calculated letting go or loss. It is not for nothing that Ceylan chooses to work with non-professional actors who are not formally trained in dramatic acting.⁸ This is certainly not a praise for spontaneism (which the director does not have).⁹ Nor is it overlooking the actors' incredible talent (which should be obvious to anyone who has seen the film), but perhaps underlining it from a different angle. What is at stake is not merely a lack of dramatic emphasis, but the *creation* of an entirely different temporality, rhythm and pace, which I would call the "everyday". The flow of what might be called an everyday temporality creates a *de-spectacularisation* of the image, almost as if the image has decided to give the event the dignity of its singular continuing to happen, of its inhering in its otherness.

I have already referred to Maurice Blanchot's discussion of the concept of everyday life and language (1993, pp. 238-245).¹⁰ We should now open a theoretical parenthesis to discuss the concept of the everyday since, when Blanchot writes that "the everyday escapes" describing it as "the unperceived" and as "belonging to insignificance" (pp. 239-240), he is close to the uncanny space and time of the

processes I have described above. He argues that the everyday escapes because it is *without a subject* (when I live the everyday, I am anyone, not a subject) and *without an objective* (it does not consist of a series of technical acts, but an indefinite presence, continually putting one in relation with an indeterminate set of possibilities) (Blanchot, 1993, p. 244). This is also part of what makes the everyday repetitive and dreary. Our resulting incapability of reviewing or enclosing the fleeing everyday evokes a desire for an immediate knowledge of it. For Blanchot, the media's programme of instantaneous transmission is this attempt to appropriate that which is destined to escape, the everyday (p. 240). The paradoxical result is the media's loss of its very potential of mediation, its turning into an apparatus of illusion of immediacy. As for people, believing that they know things immediately, they are satisfied with the "distant and sufficient noise of the radio" (p. 240). Blanchot then argues that, since the world is offered to them by way of a gaze, in the spectacle, people choose to believe that they are the superior observers of a demonstration rather than participants in it. With this passage to a specular conclusion however, he is close to Baudrillard: "finally, there is no event other than this movement of universal transmission" (p. 240). If so, is the everyday eventless? In other words, can the event be reduced to its perception within a problematic of subject and object? What if the event cannot be reduced to an object of knowledge for a subject?

I would like to argue that *The Distant* shows us a very different sense of the everyday and the event. From this perspective, the event happens in the everyday, here and now, yet it escapes our grasp and remains distant since it is not an object and we are not a subject in the everyday. But where does Blanchot's problem lie? In referring to the distant *noise* of the radio, Blanchot has also taken note of the fact that the media's noise *lost* its own source as well as its destination *and* thus joined the subjectless and objectless everyday. But there might be two senses of the noise here. In the first sense, something can be heard as noise for it lacks form, i.e. something is heard as noise only with regard to form. In a second sense however, when the radio is part of the subjectless and objectless everyday, it is no longer heard, even though it is turned on. It is no longer radio or television, but is now an indistinguishable part of an ongoing noise, a noise that becomes *inaudible* in its very audibility (here yet distant—do I hear this inaudibility of the audible with my ears or with some other organ?).¹¹ Only when I turn back and pay attention to it, it will begin to appear as a form (or noise), that is to say as news or music, as the discourse (or noise) of radio.¹²

If the everyday escapes, it escapes from the *form* given to it. Is the event not this escape itself? For Blanchot, "in this attempt to recapture it at its own level, the everyday loses any power to reach us" (1993, p. 240). Certainly, but why is this negative? For if I cannot grasp the everyday, this does not mean that it has not touched me. We need to remember here that what reaches us reaches us as form; what we capture and appropriate, we capture and appropriate in so far as it is form, or in so far as we are capable of giving it a form. If I cannot not give form, the question then becomes *how* to turn back and pay attention to the everyday, that is, to the inaudibility of the audible, the invisibility of the visible, the distant *here*. Of course the otherness of the audible or the visible cannot be raised as such since it ceases to be other when it is raised as such (Derrida, 1976, p. 47). But its appearing has also always already begun. Hence paying attention to otherness is keeping its otherness by undoing the form it is given or by producing the form without hierarchizing it in relations of figure and ground and without perfecting it to the point of

consumptive appropriation in a spectacular regime. This is how the event is maintained as other (rather than as information). Or better, this is how the event inheres in us, as other.¹³ Such a possibility is a necessary possibility, and is part of the everyday. As the subjectless and objectless space/time of insignificance and unperceivedness, the everyday meets the forces of deterritorialization (decomposition, diversion, alteration and singularisation). What demonstrates this better than works such as *The Distant* and Blanchot's own literary work, *The Madness of the Day* (1984)?

What is the distant, distant from? what does the title mean? It surely refers to what is distant to Yusuf, his dream of finding a job in international ships and going to distant places, his burning desire, his plan for an exodus. It is also the distance between the two cousins who live in the same apartment. I will speak of this class and cultural difference below. But for the moment I should go back to the question of the commodity form. I have argued above that the reduction and homogenization of all events and desires by the *measure* of the commodity form has reached a level where we are increasingly under the threat of losing our relationship to the *immeasurable* or incommensurable. Violence, poverty or starvation have become television series' and news, just images I see every evening. The media claims to abolish or overcome distances and to bring the whole world and its events near.¹⁴ This might be described as measuring immediacy and producing measurable events subjected to the political economy of capitalist administration, even though it only reproduces the immeasurable. *The Distant's* re-valuing of the everyday and the surface is a singular attempt of giving the event or immediacy its dignity. Ceylan's silent and shadowy image appears here at a singular distance that is not subject to measure or equivalence, in a dimension of the immeasurable and the incommensurable that is not simply gigantic or excessive.

The distant is then that which is immediate, precisely the event. That which happens and continues to happen, that which is immediate, that which is closest to me and inscribes me, the world, the things that keep touching and inscribing me, always escape me and remain beyond my reach. The more I want to appropriate the immediate, the more distant it is. But this means that the distant is *here* in the everyday *as distant*. This is what I should call immeasurable immediate. Rather than developing a meager criticism of consumerism, Ceylan gives the eyes a new power of seeing and opens up a new space/time. Slightly moving the camera, changing the perspective a little, re-arranging the light, I can touch that which never fails to touch me: I can move in the distance of the distant that is always here, always with me while remaining distant. Ceylan shows that this can be done without raising the otherness of the event to the level of a Gestalt or spectacle, and keeping the otherness of one's experience as *other*.

At a Distance: Others

At a distance is always the other. But the other also *remains* distant, however close he/she may be. The presence of women in *The Distant* is precisely distant. They preoccupy a great deal of Mahmut's and Yusuf's thoughts, they are an essential yet destabilizing part of their world. They just do not know what to do with them; indeed they do not even know what to say to them, how to talk with them. Mahmut watches porn movies; he specifically asks his friend Arif if there are going to be women in the party, and then is frustrated when there are none. And yet he does not exchange a single word with the woman with whom he occasionally sleeps. He secretly follows his ex-wife to the airport as she is leaving the country, instead of telling her whatever he wanted to tell. Yusuf never finds the courage to talk with the young woman in

his street. Yet women are *there* next to these men, or perhaps there at a certain distance. *The Distant* is content witnessing to women's destabilizing force in its protagonists' souls. But the question of the distance between men and women (the question of sexual difference) is perhaps a little more intricate. For instance, while the film's silent witnessing is admirable, the question remains: do women influence from a distance yet remain there, i.e. distant, or, are they *here* as distant? The passage from the former to the latter would perhaps require another opening.

The Distance tells us more explicitly about class differences in the flow of its gestures, words and silences. The story begins with Yusuf's journey and arrival, and ends with his sudden and silent disappearance. We do not know where he went, as he left no message. What is Yusuf's script? In leaving at the end as he did at the beginning, and thus in ending the story without an end, does he not refuse the very script written for him? Yusuf exceeds the script, flows over its edges. His "exodus", if it can be called that, is without a Bible; in diversion, through the streets, it remains *other* to the upward mobility of the metropolitan migrant.

The upwardly mobile migrant is Mahmut. A typical example of his generation of young men and women, a product of historical determination, he probably came to the big city for university education and managed to stay there and move up in the social ladder. He strongly dislikes the business people he works for and does his best to keep himself away from their environment. He talks of "pride" when Yusuf asks if he could find him a job in the tiles company. And when criticized for individualism by Yusuf because of his refusal to help him, Mahmut's response is to shout at him in typical bourgeois speech: "You people come here and always look for relatives or friends instead of getting a qualification! I did everything by myself! I came to Istanbul without a cent!". Again like many people in his generation, he probably embraced the left-wing in his student years and then marginalized himself as a bohemian artist.

With the tragic defeat of the social movement by the time of the 1980 coup d'etat, and with the following rapid capitalist development, he had no chance but convert his cultural skill into cultural capital in the service of advertising. He watches Tarkovski at night, especially *The Stalker*, though he has lost all his intellectual ambition. "Photography is dead", he tells one of his friends who accuses him of putting his art into the service of business. A whole past and a tragic personal defeat are buried in this simple sentence. Mahmut's discourse and relationship with his cousin is inevitably marked by class difference as he continuously tells Yusuf how to behave. The only thing that seems to make Yusuf's long stay possible is the communal ethics that somehow survives (as usually an important social insurance for the migrant), although it is clearly disintegrating. Yusuf finally leaves after Mahmut berates him. Paradoxically, it is *after* Yusuf leaves that Mahmut realizes how much he had become used to his presence and we read the trace of affection and sorrow on his face, although it is too late. There is no resolution of the conflict, no narrative synthesis.

The Distant could be described as "minor literature" in the sense meant by Deleuze and Guattari in their work on Kafka: "in it everything takes on a collective value" and "everything is political" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 17), even though the story seems to be marginal. Further, it can also be read as the allegory of a historical parting between the intellectual and the working class as well as between theory and practice—a parting determined by a violent and rapid process of the constitution of a new capitalist hegemony which defeated both groups and shifted the social position of intellectuals. But, although such

a historical reading makes sense in the Turkish context, the sense of “determination” here must be very carefully approached, as it always carries the danger of turning into a negative version of the empty and homogenous time of progress. Speaking of the film as historical allegory, we should not forget that the Ancient Greek word “allegory” means “telling-in-another-way”, or literally “other-telling”.¹⁵ The “other-telling” cannot forget the other in telling: only when the way of telling is changed, it is possible to protect what remains other in the other (resisting my appropriation, fleeing my grasp). *The Distant* respects Yusuf’s escape from his script and determination. If it is the return of the everyday and the marginal, this return is not the production of a victorious historical determination, nor a better historical image. It produces an image which does not invest in or speculate on its visibility but de-spectacularizes itself. Breaking with the empty and homogenous time of progress and its completion of events as achieved and past history, it maintains the silent inscription of the event in its creation of an everyday time of insignificance and erasure. In this, it produces an *image to-come* rather than the next or future image and joins its protagonist’s minor powers of resistance and line of flight.

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End Notes

¹ This essay is dedicated to the memory of Mehmet Emin Toprak.

² John Ellis developed this now-classic argument in a critical reading of Raymond Williams’ concept of “flow” (Williams, 1975, pp. 78-118).

³ Baudrillard’s problem is originated in his simplistic understanding of “excess” as “too much”, a sort of hypertrophy. This is clear especially when he analyses what he calls the figures of the transpolitical (Baudrillard, 1990, pp. 25-70). Conceived in terms of iterability, excess should rather mean a little bit more than a little bit less, that is, a movement. It is important to underline that Baudrillard’s understanding of excess involves his concepts of “desire” and “capital” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 35).

⁴ This is also the argument of Giorgio Agamben in his well-known *Coming Community* (1993). It seems to me however that, while Agamben’s argument for singularity depends on the raising of the other as such, my argument rests precisely on the impossibility of raising the other as such. An extensive discussion of Agamben’s thesis can be found in Aracagok (2002) who himself develops an original concept of “whatever image”.

⁵ Gregory Ulmer emphasizes that decomposition is “another version of what Derrida describes as the most fundamental feature of language—iterability, the principle shared by both speech and writing (1985, p. 58).

⁶ This is a very brief deconstructive note on Debord. A more developed deconstructive reading of Debord’s work is essential, and it will have to deal with his notion of false consciousness in a much more detailed and conceptual way.

⁷ Ceylan’s calculation or timing is what Negri would call “*kairos*” (2003, p. 147-180).

⁸ The entirely collective nature of Ceylan’s film making is a topic in itself. (Most people in his movies are non-professionals, his friends and relatives.) But this requires the analysis of his whole work rather than a single movie.

⁹ On the contrary, as we also observe in the shooting scenes in the DVD copy, they are carefully warned by Ceylan when they tend to dramatize the situation.

¹⁰ Blanchot is offering a critical review of Henri Lefebvre’s important work on everyday life (1999).

¹¹ This argument on the noise is adapted from Zafer Aracagok (2006) whose concern and emphasis is different than mine. In a careful reading of Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, Aracagok concludes that there is more in the latter philosopher than a passage from noise to voice that we find in the former. He refers to two options: one can either keep one's distance from noise so that the scene becomes specular and therefore is opened to specularisation, and/or theorisation (and this is the option Blanchot chose in his silent passage from "the distant noise of the radio" to the world offered "by way of a gaze, in the spectacle"). Second option is "standing in the midst of one's own noise" (as Nietzsche says). In this more difficult option, one might also be distant from the noise when one is in the middle of one's own noise but cannot experience it—a situation which disallows both theorization and absolute identification. Aracagok develops these ideas in a recent unpublished essay: "Noise on Noise". I thank him for allowing me to read his manuscript. I argue above that *The Distant* goes through the kind of experience of impossibility in Aracagok's second option.

¹² Felix Guattari writes: "When I watch television, I exist at the intersection: 1. of a perceptual fascination provoked by the screen's luminous animation which borders on the hypnotic, 2. of a captive relation with the narrative content of the program, associated with a lateral awareness of surrounding events (water boiling on the stove, a child's cry, the telephone...), 3. of a world of fantasms occupying my daydreams" (1995, p. 16). Although Guattari's problem is how the subject maintains his sense of unity under such heterogenous circumstances (a problem of unity or consistency which he resolves by his concept of "refrain"), the example also implies the opposite conclusion: how the everyday continues to be a force of deterritorialization even during the supposedly conscious act of watching television. Does one not act *as if* the form is just "there"?

¹³ My concept of event is obviously inspired by Deleuze (1990) who, I must underline, does not refer to the notions of other or otherness.

¹⁴ A series of excellent Heideggerian analyses of this claim can be found in the collection of essays edited by Fry (1993).

¹⁵ Allegory is made up of two other words: "*allos*" which means other and "*agoreuein*" which means public speech.

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