Cool Istanbul. Urban Enclosures and Resistances
Workshop, 7-8 November 2013, SALT Galata, Istanbul

Organized by the DFG Emmy Noether Research Group
“Changing Imaginations of Istanbul. From ‘Oriental’ to the ‘Cool’ City”

www.cool-istanbul.net

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In July 2005, the international edition of Newsweek labeled Istanbul as the coolest city in Europe. Since then, in local and global travel media, but also in other fields of popular culture, the city has been described and marketed as a cool city. “Cool” is an ambiguous quality attributed to the city as a whole or to various aspects of urban culture. It can be attributed to things, people or places, as well as the interactions between them. While there is mostly an implicit reference to pleasure, it may also be imagined and lived as resistance to mainstream culture. Simultaneously and in a contradictory way, the cool can very quickly be contained by mainstream culture and become commodified. “Cool” cities, such as Berlin, Barcelona or Istanbul, suggest creativity, diversity, cosmopolitanism and a lively night life. They are attractive both at the expense of and due to processes of gentrification, culture-led urban regeneration, urban poverty, precarious labor, exploitation, discrimination, declining neighborhoods, and run-down areas.

Cool in relation to cities is produced, consumed and performed, by governments, by private developers, by inhabitants and visitors. The imaginations of the cool city are not independent from its material production. The former can be traced in the city’s spaces and the practices that make them.

This workshop aims to discuss the urban issues related to the imaginations of Istanbul as a cool city as it is produced, consumed and performed. We would like to focus on the imaginations of the city as it is produced by city marketing agencies, featured on the travel sections of newspapers, as it appears in the discourses of local and central governments and as it is consumed by tourists. We also would like to highlight the ways in which “cool Istanbul” is performed in everyday life by those who live in, pass through, visit, experience and live its spaces.

We would like to explore the phenomena of “the cool city” and the case of “cool Istanbul” along three axes:

(1) Producing cool Istanbul

What are the processes, formal and hegemonic interventions that help make the cool city? In what ways (moments, processes, instances, interventions) is the imagination of the cool city manifest in the material production of urban space (urban regeneration, gentrification, etc.) in Istanbul? What roles do these processes play in enclosures of the urban common? In what ways can we talk about those instances of “cool Istanbul” produced by the non/counter-hegemonic makers of urban life?
(2) **Consuming cool Istanbul**

What are the paradigms of consumption that apply to the cool in urban culture? In what ways is Istanbul consumed as a cool city? What are the mechanisms of co-optation that attempt to enclose cool practices, lend them exchange value and make them into commodities? To what extent can one map “cool Istanbul,” the practices, places and images it entails? Can we talk about any actual or potential practices of resistance that emerge from the practices of consuming “cool Istanbul”?

(3) **Performing cool Istanbul**

What anthropological forms do performances of cool Istanbul take? What are the multiple relationships between lived cool urban practices and imaginations of the cool city? What are the relationships between hegemonic, non-hegemonic and counter-hegemonic performances of the cool Istanbul? How does this relate to questions of socio-spatial repression, exploitation, as well as of liberation and emancipation? Are there any possibilities for socio-spatial rehabilitation manifest in performances of “cool Istanbul”?

**7 November, Thursday**

**Welcome (09:30)**

**Introduction: Derya Özkan (09:45-10:15)**

**Coffee break (10:15-10:30)**

**Panel 1: Art and the cool city (10:30 – 12:00)**

**Moderator: Derya Özkan**

**Banu Karaca: The Contradictory Currency of Political Art. Configurations of the Political in Istanbul's Art World.**

The domestic and international interest in contemporary art from Turkey over the past 15 to 20 years has largely centered on (what could be called) explicitly political works. Indeed, as frequently noted in Istanbul’s art world, the explicitly political image dealing with the social and political predicaments of Turkey, both past and present, has become a major currency in the circulation of artworks from Turkey, and maybe even a trademark for them. This paper attempts to trace how the political has been reconfigured in contemporary artistic practices in Istanbul since the 1990s. I am particularly interested in the push and pull that political art has experienced in this time period: Once scandalized, threatened by censorship or simply ignored, there is now a market for political art. At the same time new experimentations have emerged in addressing present-day political predicaments, national memory as well as the politics of the art world itself that try to elude the market or explicitly work against market rationales. The paper will review some of the major debates and controversies with regard to political art in Istanbul and its institutional and informal outlets, venues and sites.

**Banu Karaca** (Ph.D. Cultural Anthropology, Graduate Center-CUNY) is a Visiting Scholar at Sabanci University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Istanbul. Some of her recent publications interrogate the politics of intercultural exchange programs in the EU (*International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2010), current modes of art censorship in Turkey (*New Perspectives on Turkey*, 2011; *Toplum ve Bilim*, 2012), and Istanbul’s 2010 Cultural Capital of Europe tenure (*The Cultural...*)
Politics of Europe, 2013). Banu is the co-founder of “Black Ribbon”, a research platform that documents and analyzes censorship in the arts throughout Turkey, and continues her research on the possibilities and limitations of art in reconciliation processes.

**Aras Özgün: The Value of Art and the Political Economy of “Cool”**.

In this presentation, I aim to discuss how cultural and artistic production directly become dominant economic resources in post-fordist urban economies. Such hostile takeover of the cultural field by capitalist interests transforms the logic of “value” in arts and culture, and brings the substitution of the “sublime” as an aesthetic affect by the sublimation of a self-referentially codified “contemporariness”, an artificially constructed “cool”. This strategy becomes particularly effective in peripheral sites, such as Istanbul, in overcoming the resistential practices towards the biopolitical interventions brought by this new regime of cultural production and circulation. It also becomes operational in sideling the criticism towards the new forms of exploitation such transformation gives way to. But, the obvious question is, then, what to do with the notion of “cool”, the kind of aesthetic and cultural transgression we value as artists and cultural producers, if that “value” is where are captured by such hostile takeover? In my view, the answer to this pressing question is neither in a reactionary sterile over-identification strategy that abandons the transgression itself, nor investing in the takeover with hopes of “change from-the-inside”. My suggestion is a confrontation at the same biopolitical level, a counter-intervention which reformulates what we understand from “value” in arts and culture, which reevaluates “coolness” by not looking at commodified exhibition objects or self-referential “events”, but as concerned with living artistic and cultural “practices” and “relations” that transgress the social and political plane, yet leave nothing behind to be captured.

**Aras Özgün** is a media studies scholar and a media artist, whose current whereabouts are not entirely clear. Lately he has been seen teaching at a private university in Dubai. Before that, he was teaching at the Media Studies Graduate Program of the New School for Public Engagement in New York, where he earned his Ph.D degree in Sociology. He has been doing a variety of media works since a long time, as well as writing in scholarly journals on media, culture and politics, and indulging himself in developing escapist counter-strategies — such as pyromedia in New York, korotonomedya in Ankara, and Art and Desire Seminars in Istanbul. Before that, he was born at the Black Sea cost of Anatolia, where he grew up watching the horizon, looking for the crossing of an imaginary ship with eight sails and fifty cannons.

**Begüm Özen Fırat: “Can be seen until the demolition.” Urban ruins, street art and gentrification.**

Tarlabası neighbourhood, a historical landmark located in the heart of Istanbul, was declared to be an “urban regeneration” area in 2006. After years of struggling against the project, local resistance lost its pace, demolitions started in the summer of 2012. Soon after the area was completely evicted, street artists started organizing “Tarlabası weekend tours” and covered the area with graffiti and wall tags. This was followed by alternative urban festivals and art shows organized by young artists, who were against the commercialized art scene. Shortly after the festivals, Koç Holding, one of Turkey’s top industrial conglomerates, announced the opening of a contemporary art museum neighbouring the gentrification area.
The presentation will focus on this reverse artist-led gentrification process and discuss the role of critical artistic interventions in making the area charming and desirable. It will question the ambivalent state of the so-called urban ruins and urban voids as a space of encounter between the local users (those few families who were not yet evicted, homeless people, sex workers, and junkies) and “outsiders” (artists, bobos, hipsters and the like).

Begüm Özden Fırat is a writer, political activist and associate professor in Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in the Department of Sociology in Istanbul. She works in the fields of visual culture, urban sociology, and social movements studies. She is the co-editor of *Commitment and Complicity in Cultural Theory and Practice* (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2009) and *Cultural Activism: Practices, Dilemmas, Possibilities* (Rodopi, 2011).

**Panel 2: Music in the cool city (12:00 – 13:30)**

**Moderator: Martin Greve**

**Thomas Solomon: “Listening to Istanbul”. Imagining Place in Turkish Rap Music.**

Turkish rap music and hip-hop youth culture began not in Turkey, but in the Turkish diaspora in cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt, and Amsterdam in the early 1990s. The Turkish tour of the German-Turkish rap group Cartel in 1995 introduced to youth in Turkey the ideas of rapping in the Turkish language and using this musical genre as a vehicle for engaging in social commentary. By the late 1990s, a small community of Turkish rappers in Istanbul had indigenized rap music and hybridized it with local genres of Turkish popular music, producing a few songs and albums that remained mostly marginal and unnoticed within the overall Turkish popular music soundscape at that time. The Istanbul rap group Nefret (now defunct), for example, worked to fuse rap music with the sounds and texts of Turkish folk music, arabesk and Turkish light classical music. In their song “İstanbul” the group also used the rap genre’s canonical practices of intertextuality and representing locality to appropriate from Turkish popular culture and re-emplace within their own music existing ways of representing the city. The backdrop for much of this music was the major transformations since the 1980s in the urban landscape of Istanbul that resulted from the Turkish state’s and the municipality’s leadership’s embracing of neoliberal principles for developing and re-fashioning Istanbul in the image of a “global city.” Around the turn of the millennium, Istanbul rappers like Nefret thus used the globally circulating musical genre of rap and its associated cultural practices to comment on and critique what they perceived globalization and neoliberalism had wrought in Istanbul. Turkish rap music in Istanbul from this period thus embodied the tensions between a cosmopolitan, globalizing Istanbul, and an “other” Istanbul populated by rural migrants and the urban poor.

**Thomas Solomon** is Professor in the Grieg Academy-Department of Music at the University of Bergen. He has previously taught at New York University, University of Minnesota and Istanbul Technical University. He has done field research in Bolivia on musical imaginations of ecology, place and identity, and in Istanbul on place and identity in Turkish hip-hop. His publications include articles in the journals *Ethnomusicology, Popular Music, European Journal of Cultural Studies, and Yearbook for Traditional Music*, as well numerous papers in edited volumes. He is also editor of *Music and Identity in Norway and Beyond: Essays Commemorating Edvard Grieg the Humanist* (Fagbokforlaget, 2011) and co-editor of *Ethnomusicology in East Africa: Perspectives from Uganda and Beyond* (Fountain Publishers, 2012).

Gentrification is on the agenda in Istanbul. Tarlabası, Sulukule etc. neighborhoods are evacuated; an important historical cinema, Emek, will also be demolished. All “touristic” neighborhoods are designed for the use of so-called city user. Street musicians are restricted around Tünel in İstiklal. No tolerance is given for the street art; also not for the poor neighborhoods. Visibility and expressing oneself is being destroyed. However, with the emerging technology, people can easily access to internet which is also a public space.

Arabesk-rappers take this as an advantage in order to make their music - which represents also a rebellion - visible. Arabesk rappers can be categorized as a subculture since they establish a relation with a particular place and claim that they are delikanlı (upright and brave) and present coolness by expressing their agony due to life they live. What distinguishes them from apaçi concept is that arabesk rappers try to produce music and videos. They are also considered as apaçi by their lifestyle. Arabesk rappers shot videoclips and share them on social networks. Nevertheless, this process does not go in convenience with their intention. The videos are shared but just to be contemned. The viewers of the videos express their ideas on the “arabesk rap” videos which shows how the distinction between “low and high” cultures are formed. Arabesk rap and its videos are made visible only to preserve the distinction.

I will try to explain how different groups of youth that do not have any relationship develop a common character and form a subculture via internet connection; how the contempt against this culture made these culture visible and how the “high” culture is formed only by condemning another culture as low in this example.

Ekin Can Göksoy was born in Bursa in 1987. After Bursa Anatolian High School, Göksoy was graduated from Electrical and Electronics Engineering Department in Middle East Technical University. Currently, he is writing his MA Thesis in İstanbul Bilgi University Cultural Studies Masters Program. He translates books and articles, writes for various web sites on politics, art and cinema; he published several articles in journals like Birikim and short stories in web sites as altzine. His voyage from engineering to copywriting still continues but he wishes that the last stop would be making films.


This study examines how Istanbul is discursively constructed through “global music” produced in Turkey. This image of İstanbul, accompanied by discovery of the “sounds of Istanbul,” works to promote the city as a brand. Accordingly, the city becomes an entity in itself, operating nearly independently from the geographical space it occupies in cultural and economic terms. In this discursive schema, Istanbul is further defined as a liminal space in which the worn cliché of cosmopolitan Istanbul—that is, the meeting place of East and West—is no longer accurate. In the discourses of cosmopolitan Istanbul, music was previously a representation of the city’s stereotypical identity: the meeting place of ethnicized and essentialized East and West. What makes Istanbul ecstatic and “cool” in this renewed discursive schema is not the multiculturality that used to define the city, but now the “in-betweeness” associated with Istanbul. Being neither familiar (East) nor strange (West), Istanbul instead stands
for a “non-place” in which authenticity and inauthenticity intermingle with respect to musical forms and discursive elements so as to be no longer recognized.

Koray Değirmenci is associate professor of sociology at Erciyes University in Turkey. His scholarly interests range from sociology of music, to photography theory and to urban sociology. He has published in several journals and edited books including *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music, Turkish Studies, Toplum ve Bilim*, and *The Aesthetic Dimension of Visual Culture*. His first book, *Creating Global Music in Turkey*, was published by Lexington Books in 2013. He currently works on two different projects related with historic preservation and urban cultural geography, and social impact assessment processes in development projects.

**Lunch: 13:30-15:00**

**Panel 3: Cool foodscapes (15:00 – 16:30)**

**Moderator:** Aslı Duru

**Zafer Yenal & Michael Kubiena: Cooking in Istanbul. Changing culinary landscapes and the world of chefs.**

Eating out has developed into a popular pastime for ever larger parts of urban populations and into an important lifestyle signifier. The diversity and abundance of culinary options in cities like Istanbul and the shifting purposes of eating out go hand-in-hand with the changing role of the chef: From a nameless and faceless kitchen-worker to - frequently and in various combinations - cook, restaurateur, business-man & -woman, author, media-personality, brand-name, innovator, traditionalist, researcher, activist, celebrity. The world of chefs in Istanbul displays a growing versatility in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender, education, professional career and reputation. Consequently, the diversity of restaurants gradually follows suit with different interpretations and concepts of ‘Turkish’ cooking alongside distinct ‘ethnic’ or ‘foreign’ cuisines.

Based on in-depth interviews with a diverse group of chefs with different audiences, our work intends to offer a look behind the scenes of the restaurant world by focusing on the very people who play such an integral part in contemporary urban life well beyond the confines of their kitchen. How do they conceive of their role in the changing culinary field and in society, with the increased public attention and the inflationary output of food-related media? What are their views on traditions and current trends, on the restaurant and food industries? Which role does Istanbul play for their work and how do they and their restaurants contribute to the city’s culinary and urban landscape?

Coupled with first-hand observations, analyses of individual careers, of the chef’s diverse national and professional backgrounds and of the cultural and commercial aspects which shape their work we will shed light onto the fluid state of and the numerous influences on contemporary culinary practices, emerging food discourses and their impact on Istanbul’s culinary landscape.

Born in Vienna **Michael Kubiena** has worked and lived in various countries in South-Eastern and Central Europe before coming to Istanbul for an extended sabbatical, during which he completed an M.A. in Cultural Studies at Sabanci University. His research interests centered
on the intersection of food, art and museum practices as well as socio-cultural questions in the Balkans. Besides his research and writing he works as a human resources and organization consultant anywhere between Vienna and Istanbul.

Zafer Yenal teaches sociology at Boğaziçi University since 2000. After receiving his BSc in economics at Middle East Technical University he went to Binghamton University in 2001 to complete his PhD studies in sociology. His research interests include sociology of consumption, sociology of food, rural sociology and historical sociology. His most recent book, Bildiğimiz Tarımın Sonu (with Çağlar Keyder, İletişim Yayınları, 2013), is on agricultural transformations in Turkey after the 1980s.


In this study I intent to look at the ways that Turkish/Ottoman restaurants in Istanbul and London imagine, incorporate and display “Ottomanness” in various ways for multiple intentions and feelings. In the case of Istanbul I explore how history is brought back, represented and performed by food practices in the present. The mingling of old and new takes different forms in each restaurant in the city. On the other hand, Turkish-speaking restaurants in London construct a multinational regional cuisine, which is grounded on the Ottoman Empire. In both cities I analyze a number of Turkish/Ottoman restaurants in terms of their expression of the Ottoman past and their ways of performing “Ottomanness” considering the powerful forces of consumerism, commodification, and the identity concerns of individual entrepreneurs.

Defne Karaosmanoğlu received her Ph.D. in Communication Studies from McGill University in 2006. She writes extensively on cultural studies, globalization, nationalism and food. Since 2007, she has been teaching in the Faculty of Communication at Bahçeşehir University.

Tunca Üçer: Serving Identities on the Menu in Istanbul.

While it remains at the heart of political and social discussions, the issue of ethnic identity also lies at the center of the consumerism discourse, as an object to be consumed in itself. Even though national, regional and ethnic identities have always been hot debate topics, the transitions, visibility and dynamics of these identities have rarely been examined in the area of consumerism from a sociological point of view. The goal of this research is to reveal the transformations of the identity in relation to consumption in the enormously dynamic and mobile food industry. For that purpose, we conducted in depth interviews with managers from restaurants that can be categorized as “ethnic“ in their products, services and management concepts. These interviews reveal that changes in the identity are dependent upon consumption trends, market needs, global demands, as well as the current social and political context. The main orientation of the reconstruction of Istanbul representation as a cool city is based on cultural diversity in the neoliberal global era which evokes new/renewed cultural identities and their representations “on the menu” as consumption items. Consequently, in this research, I argue that the identity and its representations change constantly. As a product of consumption, its level of visibility is also subject to changeability.

Tunca Üçer is editor-in-chief of Tekin Publishing and editor of Pinhan Publishing, whose main publications are on sociology, philosophy and history. He was born in 1987 in Istanbul,
Turkey. He earned a bachelor’s degree in Galatasaray University by completing a thesis titled “Identity Representations in Ethnic Restaurants of Istanbul.” He is now a master’s student in Paris Descartes University, studying with Jan Spurk on the reconstruction of the world views of people on transnational mobility.

Panel 4: Cool and Muslim: urban practices and cultural representations in Istanbul (16:30-18:00).

Moderator: İştar Gozaydin

Panel convenor: Ayşe Çavdar

Kenan Çayır: City, religiosity and modernity in Islamic literature. An unfinished search for peace.

Islamist movements and identities cannot be understood independently from the city. Raising in the 1980s, Islamist movements and political actors became visible in big cities and modern urban spaces in Turkey, living their religious identities openly in public spaces. It is possible to observe this phenomenon in the Islamic novels written in that period, which portray idealized Muslim protagonists in cities. The city is generally described as a desired environment containing many tensions for a believer. For instance, the main motive of Huzur Sokagi, the cult novel of the 1970s, is the contact between traditional religiosity and modern, western life with the appearance of a new apartment in an old Istanbul neighborhood. The idealized religious identity is reframed through this tension. In this genre, the problems get solved in the end because everybody gets religious. In the 1990s, however, religious personalities become middle class and acquire modern occupations. In these new stories the marriages are unhappy; the life in the gated community is boring. The solution to these problems comes from religious values. In this presentation, Kenan Çayır will discuss the transformation of religious personality in the urban atmosphere through Islamic novels.

Kenan Çayır is Assistant Professor of sociology at Istanbul Bilgi University. He got his BA and MA degrees from Bogazici University, Department of Sociology. He completed his PhD at the Department of Political Science and International Relations of the same university. In 2007 he published his book Islamic Literature in Contemporary Turkey (Palgrave-Macmillan). Later he focused on human rights education and edited three volumes on this issue.

Alev Erkilet: From critique to harmony. Religiosity's integration strategy to city.

In the 1970s, Islamism produced a constant critique of modern urban life. This criticism could also be seen as an attempt to analyze modernity in the urban atmosphere from the point of view of Muslim writers. In the 1990s, many topics of discussion like “Islam and democracy”, “Islam and economy”, ”Islam and modernity” started appearing. These discussions were attempts to find a place for Islamic religiosity in the modern world. Later in the 1990s, Islamist movements had the opportunity to apply their ideas to the big city by taking power in municipalities. AKP won the general elections in 2002 and initiated a huge transformation not only in Istanbul but also in all cities. Since then, especially Istanbul became an important indicator to analyze the future of religiosity and Islamism. In this presentation, Alev Erkilet will discuss what kind of criticism and integration tendencies could be observed in Islamism, and how these tendencies determine the current representation of religiosity in the urban context.
Alev Erkilet is Assistant Professor of sociology at Kırıkkale University, Turkey. Graduated from Hacettepe University, Department of Sociology, she received her MA from the same department in 1985. Later she studied on modernity and Islamic movements. She worked for Istanbul Metropolitan Planning Office as a sociologist. She published numerous academic articles and essays on Islamism, modernity, urban issues and social movements. Here are the titles of her three books: Kuzey Kafkasya (Fecr, 2002, ), Orta Doğu’da Modernleşme ve İslami Hareketler (Yönelsi, 2004), and Eleştirellikten Uyuma Müslümanların Kamusal Alan Serüveni (Hece, 2004).

Ayşe Çavdar: Religiosity in the mass housing.

Başakşehir emerged as a housing project for working class families in the second half of the 1990s. It was conceived and initiated by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the mayor of Istanbul in that period. Since it was the first period of the Islamist Welfare Party (RP) in the municipalities, this housing project was criticized for being built for the followers of the RP. The urban identity of Başakşehir was formed in the heavy atmosphere of the “postmodern coup d’etat” in the late 1990s. After the earthquake in 1999, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality made advertisements for Başakşehir, promoting this new neighborhood as one of the safest living places under earthquake risk. Later, Başakşehir's profile got higher from working class to middle class. Following 2002, the luxury gated communities emerged in the landscape of Başakşehir inhabited by upper class religious families. Ayse Çavdar will summarize her field research in Başakşehir related to the changing characteristics of religious experience in a highly modern urban environment.

Ayşe Çavdar is PhD student in Cultural Anthropology at the European University of Viadrina, Germany. Graduated from Ankara University, Ayşe Çavdar received an MA degree in history from Bogazici University, Istanbul. She worked for dailies such as Yeni Şafak and Yeni Yüzyıl, and magazines including Nokta, Ülke, Atlas and İstanbul. As an adjunct lecturer at Kadir Has University, she gave courses on journalism and public relations. Between 2006 and 2008, Ayşe Çavdar worked as part of a research group working on Turkish agriculture’s transformation and integration with global markets. She co-edited two books: Cemil Meriç and the Children of this Land (İz Yayıncılık, 1998, with Ergun Meriç) and Media and Security Sector Oversight, Limits and Possibilities (TESEV, 2009, with Volkan Aytar). In 2010 her long interview with sociologist Nilüfer Göle was published as a book by Hayy Kitap.

EVENT: 7 November 2013. 18:30-20:00

Çapulcuyuz ama havamız yerinde / We might be “çapulcu” but we are cool!

Gezi Park protests in Istanbul started with a small group of people who gathered in the park to stop the construction on the park and, as it was called by the officials, “removal” of the trees. Mainly provoked by the police brutality against the protestors, protests grew in the space of few days becoming a movement across Turkey. In the meantime, and in the midst of it all, people started coming up with creative and humorous ways of engaging, reacting and dealing with the resistance and issues surrounding the resistance. This, almost burst of, creative energy attracted interest in the protests for various reasons and in various forms. With the help of social media, and the internet in general, these images and slogans produced by the protestors spread widely,
generating discussions on the subject not only in Turkey but also outside of Turkey. What came to be called “the Gezi spirit” started meaning (among other things) creativity and performativity as a way of resisting.

This event is initiated by Vildan Seçkiner and Özlem Köksal. It aims to look at the humour and creativity produced in the icons, images, slogans and other performances that took place during and after the Gezi Park events in Istanbul and to question their relation/contribution to the imaginations of Istanbul as the “cool city”.

8 November, Friday

Panel 5: Cultural diversity in cool Istanbul (10:00 – 11:10)
Moderator: Yeliz Soytemel

Ülker Sözen: Desire for difference and the limits of engagement. How do the Beyoğlu gentrifiers imagine and encounter diversity?

This paper explores the relationship of the educated middle class population living in Beyoğlu and looks at the ways in which they perceive/imagine and interact with the other social groups that are a part of Beyoğlu’s material and cultural space. In particular, the study tries to discuss the affective economy of gentrification which is argued to be more than a physical and socio-economic transformation but also comprises a complex and paradoxical interplay of desire, attraction, discomfort, fear, and contempt felt vis-à-vis difference. Beyoğlu is the cosmopolitan urban core of Istanbul, which is inhabited by a socio-economically and culturally heterogeneous population, hosts entertainment, culture and art facilities, and holds historical and architectural value. The district attracts along with foreign tourists, the local educated middle class population with high levels of cultural capital, globally-oriented lifestyle practices, omnivorous consumption patterns, and an interest in engaging with local history and cultural diversity, both as daily visitors and residents.

The paper, by specifically focusing on the gentrifiers’ narratives about and experiences with diversity, and the spaces of encounter/social mixing in Beyoğlu attempts to shed light upon the complex and paradoxical relationship of the educated middle class with diversity. Methodologically, the research is based on a qualitative field study which is composed of in-depth interviews conducted with thirty-six gentrifiers and participant observation in the locales where they socialize. The findings reveal that the gentrifiers establish a complex and paradoxical relationship with difference. On the one hand, this entails genuine political concerns and high regard for equality and diversity, especially at the rhetorical level. On the other, it comprises a consumption-oriented interest in otherness (i.e. cultural omnivorousness) and the desire for achieving class distinction by objectifying difference, engaging in temporary and superficial encounters and putting limits and/or avoiding certain groups when it comes to interaction with diversity.

Ülker Sözen is a PhD candidate in the Institute of Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul and in the Sociology Department at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul. She works as a teaching assistant at the latter department. Currently she is working on her dissertation project on the political and cultural relevance of local ethnic festivals in Turkey. Her academic interests comprise sociology of culture, contemporary social theory, political and cultural anthropology and urban studies.

Drawing from ethnographic material collected during fieldwork in Istanbul between 2007 and 2009, the presentation departs from the increased presence of nationals from Sub-Saharan African countries in Turkey. Ethnicity, race and gender belong to the social divisions that shape people’s lives in most social locations. Embedded in a broader account of Turkish discourses on national identity and racism, the presentation addresses the question how social relations between the majority society and immigrants play out on in everyday life. By shedding light on discourses of race, ethnic and gender relations, our presentation will conclude that while intersections of these social categories are indeed dominant markers of boundary making, also religion and legal status powerfully shape social relations between Sub-Saharan Africans and other Istanbulian inhabitants. Grounded in a constructivist paradigm and applying an intersectional perspective, we will analyse how the discourse of ‘the Other’ in the mainstream is perceived, internalised, made sense of and to some part resisted. The presentation also ‘returns the gaze’ and gives room for the interlocutor’s perception of the mainstream’s ethnicity.

Brigitte Suter received her PhD in 2012 in Ethnic and Migration Studies from Linköping University, Sweden. Her dissertation titled “Tales of Transit – Sub-Saharan African Migrants’ Experiences in Istanbul” focuses on the transit experience of African migrants intending to move onwards to Western European countries. Brigitte Suter is currently employed as a lecturer and researcher in the field of migration at Malmö University.

Nilay Kılınç holds a Masters degree in European Studies from Lund University in Sweden (2013) and a Bachelor degree in International Relations from Istanbul Bilgi University (2011). She has recently completed a two-semester internship at the Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM) at Malmö University. Her publications include the MIM working paper ”’Euro-Turks’ Return: The Counterdiasporic Migration of German-Born Turks to Turkey” (2013, co-authored with Russel King).

Coffee break: 11:10 – 11:30

Panel 6: Istanbul and its imaginations in photography, film and TV (11:30 – 13:00)

Moderator: Vildan Seçkiner


Old photographs and films of Istanbul are viewed today across generations with tender regard because they show a city in black-and-white, a city that was much poorer and more provincial — a city that is no more. This paper looks at Ara Güler’s melancholic black-and-white photographs of Istanbul from the 1950s and 1960s. Originally shot to appear on the pages of newspapers and magazines, a limited number of these photographs were recalled from the archive in the early 1990s to appear in gallery settings as well as a series of coffee table books. They have since become synonymous with a particular form of longing for Istanbul’s past.

Building on a previous article (“Ara Guler's Photography of 'Old Istanbul' and Cosmopolitan Nostalgia”, History of Photography, 2010), which reflects on why certain Güler photographs circulate while others do not, I discuss in this paper the role of color (or a lack thereof). If early postmodern theory warned against the waning of historicity and rise of
historicism in the 1980s, a new generation of theorists in the 1990s pointed to the impact of new media technologies on our experience of the past, turning their users not only obsessive with the past, but also active and reflective of it. The earlier association of historicist uses of the past in technologically reproducible mediated representations, with “regressive” modes of nostalgia and pastiche, led by the 2000s to a reevaluation of the relationship between technology and memory, and central to this was the recognition that memories are not recalled personally but are inevitably intermeshed with narratives and images disseminated through mass media. In return, mediated memories are fundamental to how individuals narrate themselves in the present. Writings on media memories have touched upon the deliberate and relative uses of monochromatic and chromatic visuals in contemporary works, especially in cinema films. This paper focuses on the recycling of old photographs of the city, and discusses how their black-and-whiteness can be read in the context of contemporary Istanbul.

İpek Türeli is Assistant Professor of Architecture at McGill University, Montreal. Her research and teaching focus on visual culture, comparative urbanism, and architectural history. She collaborates in design, media, and installation works (www.dmrlab.org). Prior to joining McGill, she gained experience in architectural practice in Turkey and the UK; taught architectural design studio courses at Middle East Technical University in Ankara and at Berkeley, and architectural and urban history and theory courses at Berkeley and Brown. She is the co-editor of Orienting Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe? (with Deniz Göktürk and Levent Soysal, Metis, 2011), a book that explores how processes of creative production and exhibition are intertwined with neoliberal urban restructuring.

Berrin Yanıkkaya: Female Protagonist and the Television Series ‘Lost City’. Mirror Mirror on the wall, Aysel is the coolest of them all...

The main protagonist of the television series Kayıp Şehir (Lost City), Aysel, is defiant, broken, though, wounded, strong, emotional, trustworthy, hurt, fun, sad, lonely, survivor, attractive, moral, fighter, scared, fearless, outspoken, compassionate, flamboyant, subtle, confident, naïve, smart, beautiful and cool, indeed the coolest of them all by all means. Aysel is one of the few female protagonists in Turkish television series that is depicted covering all aspects of her character in-depth.

In the TV series Kayıp Şehir each and every character makes a stand against being lost in the city or consumed by the city. Most of the female characters in the series are portrayed much more open-minded than male characters. But amongst all, Aysel is the subversive character who challenges the silent ‘moral’ agreements of patriarchal social structure. Her blunt honesty is bewildering not only for the other characters in the series, but also for the audiences. She defies the male gaze.

The script of Kayıp Şehir, deals with a broad range of issues from the hypocritical moral codes of the society to gentrification, health care system, domestic/interal migration, gender bias, workers’ poor conditions, corrupt justice system, femicide, solidarity, daily news, mob, football, ethnic issues and undocumented foreigners as well as love. In the back streets of Istanbul, in Tarlabaşı and Beyoğlu, the others have been struggling to survive, to bear, to love, to resist, to stay together, to break free, to be a subject, to be the main decision maker of their lives against all odds.
The series ended abruptly after two seasons. I assume it is ended in a hurry due to the fact that the issues series dealt with served as a mirror that reflected what is happening in the lives of the others, which disturbed the value systems of some groups (who do not want to see the other side of the mirror). This paper aims at analyzing the series Lost City by centralizing Aysel and her coolness. In terms of having an ‘insider’ look into the Aysel character an interview with the actress Gökçe Bahadır who played the Aysel role will be carried out.

Berrin Yanıkkaya obtained her Bachelor’s degree in Communications from the Department of Radio, TV and Cinema, Ankara University, her Master of Arts degree from the Department of Radio, TV and Cinema, Yeditepe University, Istanbul and her PhD degree from the General Sociology and Methodology Doctorate Program, Institute of Social Sciences, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul. She became an Associate Professor in April 2010 in Communication Sciences, and has been working at the Department of Radio, Television and Cinema, School of Communications, Yeditepe University since 1997.

Özlem Köksal: Imagining Istanbul Through Cinema.

In 1994 German filmmaker Win Wenders made a film about Lisbon, Lisbon Story, a film commissioned by the City of Lisbon to “promote” the city as it was selected for the Cultural Capital of Europe in 1994. The film looks at Lisbon through music in particular and through the sounds of the city in general. Although not commissioned by any organisation, in 2005 Fatih Akın made a similar film about Istanbul, Crossing the Bridge, which coincided with the rising touristic interest in Istanbul as well as its selection for the Cultural Capital of Europe for 2010. Akın’s film also looks at Istanbul through its music and sound, and imagines the city as a polyphonic and multicultural place. The first part of this paper looks at these two films and briefly compares their approach to the city, as well as their impact on the imagination and perception of their respective cities. The second part develops on the imagination of Istanbul and adds two more films to the discussion: Uzak/Distant by Nuri Bilge Ceylan (2002) and Organize Isler/Magic Carpet Ride by Yılmaz Erdoğan (2005). Each film (re)produces a cool image of Istanbul that is marketable to different expectations of “cool” both in terms of the city and in terms of what is being considered as “cool”.

Özlem Köksal received her PhD degree from University of London, Birkbeck College (2011) with a dissertation examining the relation between collective memory history and cinema in Turkey. She has published various articles and reviews both in English and in Turkish and she is the editor of World Film Locations: Istanbul (Intellect Publishing, 2012)

Lunch break: 13:00 – 14:30

Panel 7 & 8: Working Cool, Working Poor (14:30-16:00; 16:15-17:45)

Panel convenor & moderator: Aslı Odman

Panel Participants: Ayşe Berna Uçarol, Berrin Selbuz, Burcu Barakacı, Duygu Semiz, Fikriye Akgül, Melis Tantan, Mustafa Akyol

These two panel sessions will take place under the title „Working for Cool Istanbul“”. The main aim of the sessions is to facilitate a platform where workers in the new and still enduring sectors in Istanbul will have a possibility to narrate, compare and contrast their work experiences beyond the images created for their sectors. This approach is inspired by the later
19th century book „London Labour, London Poor“ by Mayhew which documented in an assiduous way the work experiences of the ‘real-existing’ jobs of the mature capitalist city.

An experienced construction worker and marble craftsman, Mustafa A. Akyol from İnşaat İşçilerinin Derneği (Association of Construction Workers: http://insaatiscileridernegi.wordpress.com/) will compare working conditions in the former midsize private builders (müteahhit) with the giant construction tycoons of today. Berna Uçarol, a sociologist currently writing her PhD on white-collar subjectivities in the plazas in the financial Maslak-Zeytinburnu axis, has herself worked for a long time as an assurance consultant and will reflect sociologically on the working conditions in this rising sector of the would-be financial city of Istanbul. The plazas they work at are constructed by people like Mustafa, although the two types of work rarely have a possibility to encounter each other in the city.

Burcu Barakacı, who has worked for over 10 years in Istanbul’s most prestigious independent artistic projects and platforms as an project coordinator and producer, and Melis Tantan, an NGO-worker formerly engaged in Türkiye Küçük Millet Meclisleri (Turkish Small National Assemblies) project and recently working at Nor Zartonk (Renaissance), an association founded by the Young Generation of the Armenian Community (http://www.norzartonk.org/), will narrate how the so-called ‘voluntary labor / affective labor’ functions in sectors like art and social/political activism/lobbying, and how new types of hierarchies and remunerations are built.

Berrin Selbuz from the Association of Call-center Workers (http://www.gercegecagrimerkezi.org/) will discuss some examples from this sector and investigate how new forms of labor control and performance extraction are relevant to the growing services sector in Istanbul. Duygu Semiz is a private course instructor (dershane öğretmeni) and also an organizer in this seemingly side sector of education, which is nonetheless an economically more important and spatially more scattered activity than the bulk of all schools in the city. Duygu Semiz will talk about the new student-teacher relationships, the ‘corrosion of character’ in this formerly very prestigious domain.

Lastly, Fikriye Akgül an apparel worker in a factory producing for a global brand at the Free Production Zone of Tuzla will compare working conditions in the 1990’s and 2010’s of Istanbul. She has witnessed the outsourcing of the leather industry from Kazlıçeşme to Tuzla and the formation of worker neighbourhoods in the latter. The intention is to re-unite these scattered labour realities in the fragmented city, by means of juxtaposing the contributions of the seven panelists. This panel should also enable a platform to question whether the thesis of globalization, precarization, intensification and de-skilling of labor in Global Cities hold true by way of comparing and contrasting different white-collar and blue-collar working conditions and subjectivities. It should also touch the ground for possible commonalities in the sphere of ‘psychodynamics of labor’ and for an alternative ‘coolness’ from below, i.e. seen and perceived within the working people’s realities.

Aslı Odman is Instructor at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Department of Urban and Regional Planning. She has worked as a research assistant in one of the oldest foundation universities of Istanbul which has been taken over by a for-profit university company. There she has witnessed a commodification process of higher education in the micro form and the accompanying transformation in the labour and spatial relations of the university. She works
mainly on the concretization of labor practices and capital accumulation processes in urban spaces, in other words on 'the production of space through human agency'. The period she has mostly worked on is the interwar period. Her recent research has focused thematically on labor processes in the Tuzla Shipbuilding Region, Ford Motor Company’s global history, the restructuration in Turkish higher education in the 2010s. She currently does anthropological research in various labor geographies of Istanbul on working people’s health and precarity.

Ayşe Berna Uçarol, PhD candidate. at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Department of Sociology and Instructor at Arel University, Istanbul. She writes her PhD on labour conditions of employees in the financial sector in Istanbul after having worked six years as a full-time employee in a private assurance company. She is the research assistant of the TÜBİTAK project „Istanbul, the City of Labour. The Social and Spatial Practices of Working in the Metropole“ run by Yıldırım Şentürk between 2010-2012.

Berrin Selbuz, programmer at a call-center, former call-center agent, member of the Association of Call-Center Workers. She has graduated from the Sakarya University, Computer Programming Programme. She has worked for three years in a call-center affiliated with Turk Telekom. She has been dismissed because of her union activities. Since January member of the Association of Call-Center Workers. Currently she is working as a programmer in another call-center.

Burcu Barakacı, art projects coordinator and developer. She has graduated from Marmara University, Istanbul, Faculty of Communication, Radio, Tv and Cinema Department. Management of KargART, festival organization of Akbank II. Short Film Festival, venue management of Garajistanbul, management of Taldans Company, project coordinator for iDans Festival, developer and executer of PERFORM 2012.

Duygu Semiz, private course teacher and Istanbul spokesperson of the Platform of Not-Appointed Teachers (Ataması Yapılmayan Öğretmenler Platformu). She has graduated from Istanbul University in 2004. Since then she has been working in private courses provider in a precarious way. As the Istanbul spokesperson of the Platform of Teachers organizing against non-assignment policies of the Ministry of Education she is active in organizing activities beyond the public / private teacher divide.

Fikriye Akgül, apparel worker, Tuzla resident for 20 years. She has been working for 24 years, mostly in the textile and apparel sectors in Kazlıçeşme, Bostancı, Göztepe and Tuzla. She comes from a leather worker’s family and moved from Kazlıçeşme to Tuzla along with the de-localization of the industry. For the last 6 years she had worked in the Tuzla Free Industry and Commerce Zone in the Ismaco Factory producing luxury shirts for the Zegna brand. She has been dismissed in December 2012 on the grounds of union activity. Since then she is camping along with her nine colleagues in front of the Free Zone for reinstatement to work and respect for the right to unionize.

Melis Tantan, executive editor of Nar Radio, a multilingual radio channel. She has graduated from the Faculty of Economics of Anadolu Üniversitesi in Eskişehir. During her studies and after she has worked for many different NGOs as project coordinator on a professional basis. Nar Radio (New Radio) of which she is the executive editor is a part of the Nor Zartonk
association. At the same time she writes an MA in the field occupational psychology at Marmara University, Istanbul.

Mustafa Akyol, marble craftsman and head of the Association of Construction Workers founded in 2012. As an experienced construction worker and a marble craftsman he has worked in big construction projects in Istanbul and in Russia right after the post-socialist turn. He was an active organizer in cases of worker’s rights violations in construction projects of Varyap, Teknik Yapı, Özsoy and others. The picket line to get non-paid wages at the construction site of the highest skyscraper of Istanbul, the Sapphire Tower, was the decisive step to form an Association of Construction Workers in 2012.

19:00 Dinner. Place to be announced.

Organizers

Derya Özkan completed a dissertation titled “The Misuse Value of Space: Spatial Practices and the Production of Space in Istanbul” and received her Ph.D. degree in Visual and Cultural Studies from the University of Rochester in 2008. She joined the Institute of European Ethnology at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich as a Postdoctoral Fellow in September 2008. Since November 2011, she has been holding a DFG Emmy Noether Fellowship and leading the Research Project “Changing Imaginations of Istanbul. From Oriental to the ‘Cool’ City”. Her research interests are situated at the intersection points of urban studies, cultural studies and migration studies. For further information on her publications, etc. see http://www.deryaoezkan.net/

Vildan Seçkiner studied City and Regional Planning and Urban Design in Middle East Technical University, Ankara where she also completed her Master’s thesis titled ‘Cinematic Representations of Gecekondu as an Urban Memory’ (2009). Since November 2011 she works as a project assistant in the “Changing Imaginations of Istanbul. From Oriental to the Cool City” project. She is writing her dissertation as part of this project by focusing particularly on the imaginations of streets in the case of “Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture (EcoC) Project”.

Aslı Duru studied Political Science in Ankara (METU, 2004) and history in Istanbul (BOUN, 2006) before going on to a PhD in geography and political economy in Canada (Carleton Uni., 2012). Her doctoral project was a biographical inquiry of the changing relations between people, place, and accessibility in Istanbul’s municipally displaced food markets. Her dissertation which was titled “Istanbul’s Weekly Markets: Narratives of Access, Provisioning, and Governance” was awarded an IDRC Doctoral Research Award in 2009. Aslı joined the Cool Istanbul research team in November 2012 as a postdoctoral researcher. Her individual research as part of the wider project explores food as the medium and objective of urban struggles in Istanbul. Her general research interests revolve around relational political economic and gender perspectives on the material and social cultures, and histories of cities.

Yeliz Soytemel is studying European Ethnology as a Major and Sociology and Turkology as Minors at Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich. During her studies she focused on nationalism in Turkey, especially historiography and representation of “the other”, for example the commemorations of Armenian genocide in Turkish media discourse. She is currently working as a student assistant in the research project “Changing Imaginations of Istanbul. From Oriental to the Cool City”.
Till Schmidt is studying European Ethnology as a Major and Ethnology and Religious Science as Minors (Bachelor of Arts) at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. He is currently working as a student assistant in the research project “Changing Imaginations of Istanbul. From Oriental to the Cool City”. He is also working as an editor for the German quarterly *Hinterland* and as journalist.

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