

Mental Minefields: The Dark Tales of Zeki Demirkubuz
September 19-24, 2007
Walter Reade Theater
(West 65th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue)
New York City

Though grounded in the hubbub of city life, the films of Turkish director Zeki Demirkubuz unfold on a more metaphysical plane populated by the living dead and the dearly departed. Cramped urbanity offers lost souls anonymity but denies privacy, and Demirkubuz rations the glimmers of hope. If his obsession with the cosmic friction of quotidian life recalls Kieslowski, his absurdist, often diabolical tendencies suggest Beckettian farce as realized by the Coen brothers—David Ng, “Scars and Bars: Turkish Anomie and Anonymity,” *The Village Voice*.

C Blok / Block C
1994, Turkey, 90 minutes

Zeki Demirkubuz’s first feature film in many ways established the style and themes that would mature in his later work. A woman, Tulay, lives in a smart, modern apartment development; while her marriage falls apart, a neighbor, Halit, begins spying on her, following her every move. Gradually, Tulay’s experience of the everyday reality around her begins to blend with her fears, desires and memories; her relations with her maid Asli, her husband, and with Halit are always uncertain and contradictory, existing potentially only in her mind. Demirkubuz (who would himself later take over the role of cinematographer on his films) uses a cool, hard photographic style that, together with the rigidly geometric set up of the apartment complex, provides an effective counterpoint to the emotions raging beneath Tulay’s seemingly placid exterior. A provocative modern parable about the desire for controlling one’s own destiny in a worlds that seems to have a mind of its own.

Masumiyet / Innocence
1997, Turkey, 105 minutes

“Zeki Demirkubuz’s *Innocence* provoked me into thinking about cinema, acting, the world, innocence, childhood, poverty, compassion, conscience, language, dumbness—in short, about life.”—Yildirim Turker, *Radikal*.

Demirkubuz’s second feature, *Innocence*, thrust his work onto an international stage, being screened in Venice and a number of other international festivals. Led by a trio of top-notch Turkish actors—Güven Kiraç, Derya Alabora, Haluk Bilginer—*Innocence* chronicles the tense development of an unsettling live triangle. Yusuf, released from

prison after having served a ten-year sentence, goes to live in his sister's house. But that soon becomes difficult, and once again he's off on his own. Back in prison a fellow inmate had given him address, and Yusuf, with few other prospects decides to check it out. It turns out to be a run down, cheap hotel, and Yusuf check in. Soon, his path crosses with that of a strange family—a couple with a child—who become the focus of Yusuf's life. *Innocence* marked an impressive leap in Demirkubuz's work; he comes to rely much more on his actors, allowing them the space to really show off their skills.

Ucuncu Sayfa / The Third Page

1999, Turkey, 92 minutes

“An auteur with a genuine spiritual sensitivity, Zeki Demirkubuz (is) one of the world's few convincing existential filmmakers.”—Peter Keough, *Boston Phoenix*.

Isa, a movie extra living from job to job, crosses some tough guys who accuse him of stealing fifty dollars; after roughing him up, they threaten to come back and do worse if they're not paid. Searching everywhere for the money, Isa instead finds a gun, which he decides might best be used on himself. But then, suddenly, circumstances change: the movie extra gets transformed into the true protagonist of his own story, as he links up with a beautiful but mysterious woman. As previously seen in his films, Demirkubuz challenges the audience to discern whether what is being shown on screen is truly happening or if it instead on some other level of the his characters' reality. Especially as the threat of death seems to envelop him, Isa begins to live life more fully than ever before.

Yazgi / Fate

2001, Turkey, 119 minutes

"Take the ennui of Camus, the soul of Bresson and the unwavering gaze of Kiarostami, and you might get something like Zeki Demirkubuz's *Fate*." —Dan Glaister, *The Guardian*.

A loose adaptation of Camus' *The Stranger*, *Fate* is the story of Musa (a wonderful performance by Serdar Orçin), a customs clerk who lives quietly with his mother. One day on his way to work he goes into her room to wake her up, but she's unresponsive. Nevertheless, he simply leaves the apartment; when he returns later, he becomes involved in an altercation with a neighbor, and winds up being arrested. An austere tone poem, *Fate* attempts to capture a very modern variety of spiritual deadening; Musa feels so little connection to anyone or anything around him that actions and events appear to have little consequence. The first part of Demirkubuz's "Tales of Darkness" trilogy.

Itiraf / Confession

2001, Turkey, 100 minutes

Screened (along with *Fate*) at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival, *Confession* brings a chilling, Dostoevskian feel to this searing look at the disintegration of a marriage. Harun and Nilgün have been married for seven years; their relationship seems uneventful enough, with little outward strife. Then Harun begins to suspect his wife of having an affair. Little signs continue to appear of her unfaithfulness, as he begins to draw further apart from her. Yet he fears that confronting her might actually bring the affair into the open—or potentially end the marriage. With excellent performances from his two leads (Taner Birsal as Harun, Basak Köklükaya as Nilgün), Demirkubuz makes *Confession* a deeply moving study of people living with unhappiness, and the toll this takes on their daily lives. There are no heroes or villains here, just victims.

Bekleme Odasi / The Waiting Room

2003, Turkey, 88 minutes

Probably Demirkubuz's most personal work—he produced, directed, wrote, shot, edited and even stars in the film—*The Waiting Room* is the story of Ahmet (Demirkubuz), an internationally respected film director facing a creative crisis. He's signed on to do an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, but he simply can't work up any enthusiasm for the project; meanwhile, his relationship with his girlfriend is clearly in trouble. When he catches a burglar in his apartment, an idea dawns on him: to cast the burglar as Raskolnikov. Demirkubuz faces the dilemma of the modern artist: in a time in which the artists' lives are even better known than their artworks, how much must these artworks be seen as reflecting something about their authors? Can the ideas expressed in a film be separated from those of the filmmaker—and how should the ideas expressed in a film affect that author's life? Deliberately unsettling, *The Waiting Room* offers no easy answers, just sincere self-reflection and criticism.

Kader / Destiny

2006, Turkey/Greece, 103 minutes

Zeki Demirkubuz's most recent film, a co-production with Greece, studies the parallel emotional obsessions of two characters. A relatively modest carpet salesman, Bekir develops an uncontrollable passion for nightclub entertainer Ugur. For her part, Ugur is obsessed with Zagor, a ne'er-do-well constantly in and out of prison. When Zagor receives a stiff sentence for his involvement in the murder of two policemen, Bekir is hopeful that his rival's imprisonment might open up a possibility for him with Ugur. While many of his films deal with moral issues and concerns, Demirkubuz never sets himself up as a kind of arbiter of his characters' actions: he rarely takes sides, preferring instead to show how each has his or her reasons for doing what they do. In *Destiny*, the

prequel to *Innocence*, he treats the twin obsessions of Bekir and Ugur with respect: they might be self-destructive or even delusional, but there's a kind of innocence to their passion. Demirkubuz was awarded the Best Director award for *Destiny* at the 2006 International Istanbul Film Festival.