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Early cinema-going and the emergence of film culture: The first Pathé Cinema Theatre opens in Istanbul (1908)

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Abstract:
On January 30th, 1908 the Pathé Frères Cinema Theatre, the first cinema-specific building, opened in Istanbul. Istanbul newspapers watched Pathé closely and kept their readers up-to-date on the recent developments in and around the cinema. In this essay, by extracting utterances ('boring/interesting', 'technically successful/blurry images', etc.) from the newspapers I will attempt to trace the institutionalisation of cinema-going and the emergence of film culture in Istanbul. News, news articles and advertisements in the newspapers provided the reader (ie, the potential viewer) with the terms to think with about cinema. These were not simply judgement values, the discourses around Pathé also cued the audience as to which horizon of expectations to employ. It is intriguing that these discourses tied technological perfection to the viewer's aesthetic experience, putting emphasis on the realism of the images, voicing a demand for synchronisation of sound and image, and finally verisimilitude.

Keywords: Early cinema-going, emergence of film culture, realism, verisimilitude, film experience, reception

Introduction

On January 30th, 1908 Pathé Cinema Theatre ran its first show in Istanbul. Sigmund Weinberg, a cosmopolite, a tradesman in the business of photography now aspiring to be a showman, rented Amphi, a theatre hall with 825 seats, from the Municipality of Istanbul (then Constantinople) and converted it to a cinema-specific building (**Figure 1**).[1] The first purpose-built cinema would open six years later in 1914. Weinberg had been running a shop on *Grand Rue de Pera* (Tr. *Cadde-i Kebir*, Eng. The Great Pera Road) selling photographic devices and materials circa the 1890s. As early as 1899 he shot actualité films for the

government. Weinberg had rented the building as the representative of Pathé, hence the name Pathé Frères Cinéma Théâtre.

Amphi was part of a larger building, Petits-Champ, a theatre complex with three parts, which was situated near the west end of the Grand Rue de Pera. It was transformed into a theatre building in 1905 by the famous Greek architect Patrocle Campanaki, who had a reputation for his theatre building projects in Istanbul. In 1908 there was still no electricity grid in Istanbul. The conflicts between the companies which provided the city with gas and the companies competing for the electrification of Istanbul had become a diplomatic issue pressing Sultan Abdulhamid II, postponing the instalment of city grid to 1914 (Aksoy: 13-14). Therefore, cinema venues had to privately produce their own power through the use of dynamos imported from European countries. Pathé borrowed electricity from a nearby hotel, Pera Palace which was built to accommodate passengers arriving on the famous Orient Express (**Figure 2**). Grand Rue de Pera, today İstiklal, cuts across Pera, a major district of Istanbul known for a relatively more European lifestyle.

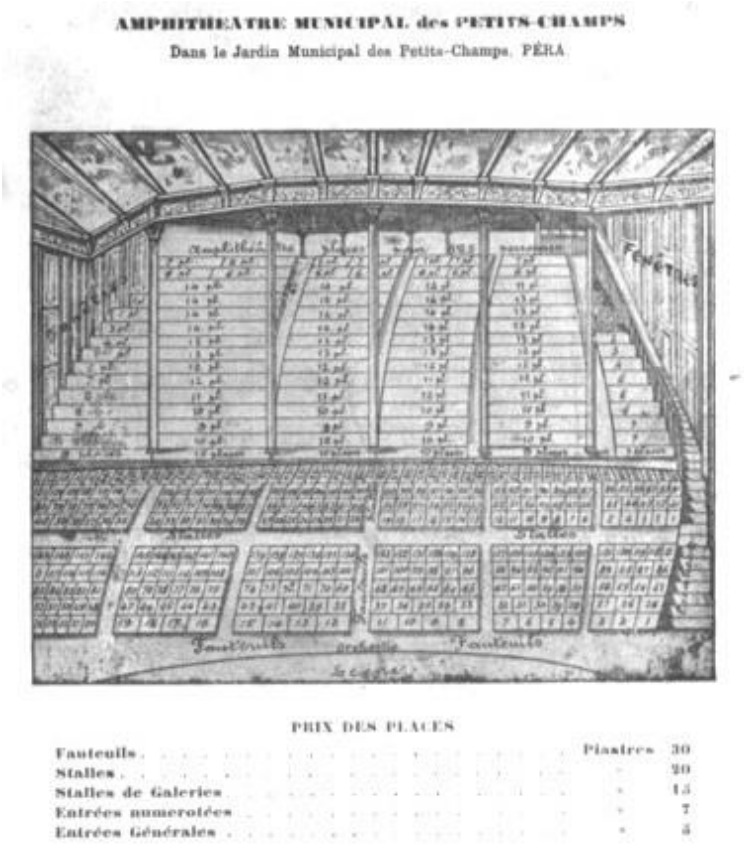


Figure 1: Amphi in 1914**.**

Pera's population was composed of Greeks, Armenians, Turks and European expatriates.[2] As such, the majority of Pathe's audience was Western-oriented and French-speaking. That might be the reason companies based in and around Pera typically placed their advertisements mainly in the periodicals and annuals published in French, Greek, Armenian

and English. At the turn of the century, the most popular newspapers were *Le Moniteur Orientale* (French), *The Levant Herald* (English and French) and *Stamboul* (French). From the outset, the newspapers printed cinema-related news articles and reviews, but most visible were advertisements which usually contained roughly the cinema's programme. Richard Abel defines newspaper as 'a cultural partner of movies' (Abel, 6), and the Istanbul newspapers perfectly verified this.

In this essay, by extracting utterances from articles and advertisements found within local newspapers, I attempt to outline a story of Pathé in terms of cinema-going and the experience of film viewing within the broader concept of the emergence of film culture.[3] Malte Hagener suggests that the emergence of film culture depends on cinema being 'taken seriously as an aesthetic object and social force' (Hagener, 1-2). Indeed, in France, Pathé spent great effort to 'legitimate the cinema as a respectable cultural form. Supported by the trade press, this effort was first visible in the distribution of literary adaptations or *films d'art*, produced by SCAGL and Film d'Art, both with close ties to prestigious Paris theatres.' (Abel, 730) In a similar vein, in Italy, Pathé founded film d'Art a production company with the emphasis on art. It is interesting, however that in Istanbul neither Pathé nor the press sought to claim such prestige. The Istanbul newspapers were far from defining cinema as the seventh art, before anything else, cinema was an entertainment.

Figure 2: Amphi from Pera Hotel

On the whole, I am more interested in cinema being taken seriously as a specific storytelling medium and its technological capacity effecting verisimilitude. I first attempt to provide a background, a prequel, by giving a brief account of the cultural reception of cinema in its early years. Initially, cinema was received in pre-existing cultural terms that we must understand in the context of modernisation in the line of scientific and technological progress. The nineteenth century was an age of scientific and technological progress in

Istanbul, and newspapers of the period were very enthusiastic about providing their readers with news of inventions. However, they did not present these developments as 'continuation' and 'transformation' of these forms as belonging to the 'history of screen practice', that is to say, each invention was conceived of as a breakthrough in itself.[4] This is confirmed by A. Gaudreault and Philippe Marion's definition of three stages that cinema went through: (1) 'the sudden *apparition* of a technological process, the apparatus'; (2) 'the emergence of an initial culture, that of "moving pictures"'; and (3) 'the constitution of an established media institution.' (cited in Maltby, 2012, 336). The emergence of an initial culture had to wait for the opening of the first cinema-specific theatres. In its first decade, the audience viewed films in a series of entertainment forms as in a variety show. For example, an advertisement from 1906 gives us a series of entertainment segments, the cinematograph amongst them: 'At Odeon Theatre, Comic Mr Arif, excellent cantos in Turkish, cinematograph, cantos performed by two sisters from Europe, violinist Mr Arif's band will perform *icra-i ahenk* [a classical Turkish music type]' (Anon*.,* 26.10.1906). By the beginning of the next decade, even if a programme included musical performances between screenings, cinema was absolutely the main attraction. This transition is reflected in the discourses of the newspapers; the emphasis shifted to the physical conditions of film viewing, the film programme with more and more narrative films, and the realism of technical images as a guarantee for film experience.

On a note of cultural and political climate, we must remember that this was a time of ongoing wars, new nations emerging, identities being redefined and the Ottoman Empire in decline. Financial crises and continuous political turmoil must have been making stability impossible, nevertheless even in this time of distress, maybe partly because of it, film exhibition business continued to grow and attract foreign companies, Pathé in the lead. Cinema was fast penetrating into Istanbul, concentrating in three areas: Pera, and two other less European areas: Chehzadebashi with Direklerarasi in the centre, where traditional performance venues gathered, and Kadiköy.

Pathé was not the first company to use a theatre building for film exhibition. Le Royal View, for example, had been running shows for short periods of time at Theatre Des Variéte beginning from 1907. It would soon become a formidable adversary. In its attempt to beat Pathé, it promised novelties such as 'singing cinematograph' and 'impeccable synchronised sound effects'. I touch on Le Royal View on occasion when I am able to show that in its competition with Pathé, it followed its example thus helped disseminate film culture. Other companies followed Pathé and Le Royal View. In 1910 the Cinematheatre Apollon rented the Zambaoglu Theatre, Cinematographe Excelsior, the Odeon Theatre and in 1911, *Les éditeurs cinématograhiques* rented Le Nouvau Cirque (1911). These cinemas, except Le Royal View, were more or less short-lived enterprises and soon left the stage.

From 'live photograph' to 'cinematograph' [5]

> My father used to call that place 'Amphi' (…) The French word 'Amphitheatre' was shortened as 'Amphi' however cinematograph was still not cinema, let alone cine (…) and we, father and son, were still watching cinematograph.
> Ziya Osman Saba (49)

Until 1908, the popular venues for films screenings in Istanbul were coffee houses, opera houses, schools, circuses, hotels, gardens, cultural and political centres, etc. There were no permanent venues for film exhibition businesses. In its early years, cinema was presented as just one segment of entertainment, a curiosity, in a series of attractions. Regardless of the content of the films that were shown, using the French version, any film screening was advertised as *cinematograph*. Although the press was well aware of the Lumière Brothers, the word did not in any way specifically refer to them. In the exhibition hall, seeing the apparatus itself must have been as important as viewing the 'live photographs' in the very first public screening. The apparatus was the source of the magic of cinema; the audiences of early cinema marvelled at the cinema as moving images plus the apparatus that was present in the auditorium. That must be one of the reasons in the early years the apparatus was generally placed between the screen and the audience. When the initial excitement wore off the apparatus disappeared from the hall and a new vocabulary had to be adopted. In Amphi, it was moved into the projection booth disappearing from sight. Was it because the emerging film culture was already shifting focus away from the apparatus to a narrative cinema whose efforts in suspending disbelief required the concealment of the means of production?

In the advertisements placed in newspapers, although reference was made to photography, a medium the audience was familiar with, the emphasis was on the new invention: an apparatus capable of animating photographs. Looking at the earlier news articles, cinema and phonograph posed a wide range of uses, from medicine to education, waiting to be explored. A news article from 1900, for example, gives an account of how phonograph and cinematograph were combined to be used in medical sciences, for instance in the treatment of speech disorders (Anon., 23.06.1900). The advertisements, of course, put little stress on cinema's potentialities other than entertainment.

The Pathé Cinema Theatre opens

It was not going to be the first time Petit-Champs hosted screenings. Some of the earlier shows may be cited thus: As early as March 1897, a screening announced as Edison's 'New Cinematograph'; January 1898, 'English New Cinematograph'; 1902, Boullier's 'American Biograph'. (And, 8, 12) None of these were regular screenings.

On January 9, 1908 the administration announced the arrival of the films that were going to be shown. They were coming directly from the Pathé 'factory' in Paris. Although the

film list was not revealed, they promised the readers that they were preparing a very efficient programme and the shows were expected to be *sensational* (Anon., 9.1.1908, emphasis mine). Another advertorial promised that

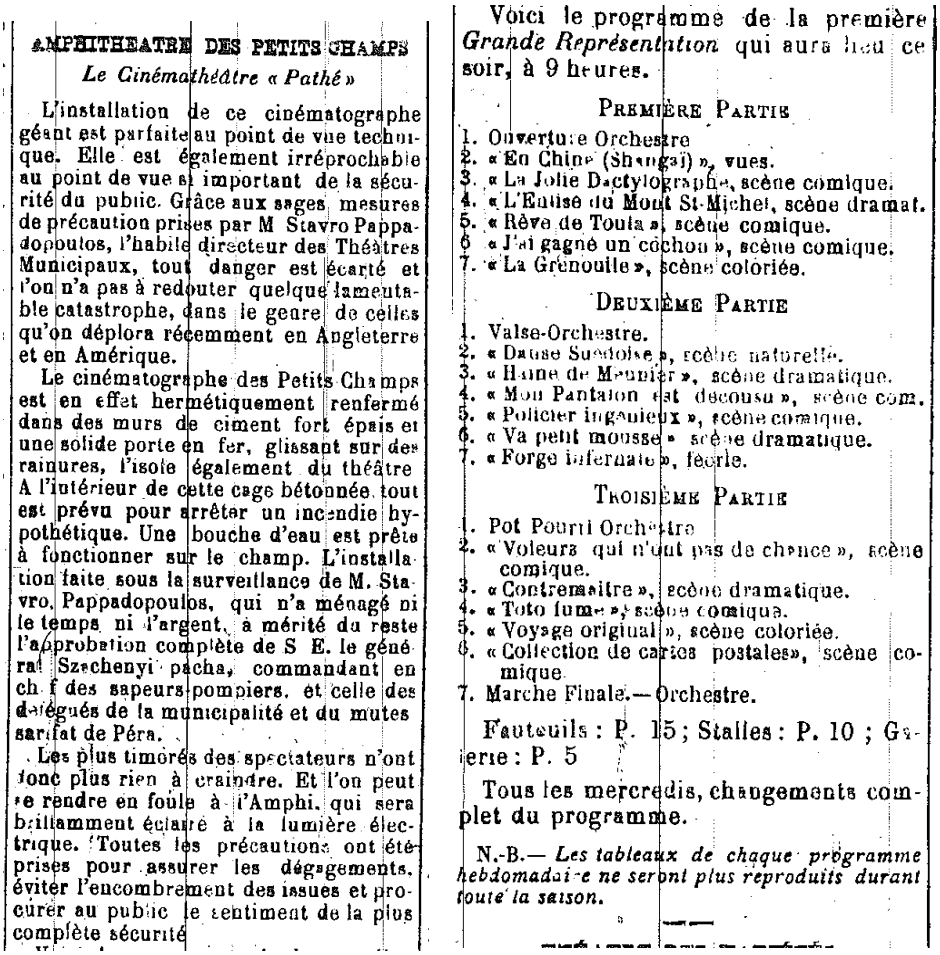
> by 1908 it will be possible for the audiences of Constantinople to attend *genuine* cinema theatre shows. The Pathé Freres Company [in Paris] which is determined to keep the promises it has made to the audience of Istanbul has sent cutting edge machines hoping that their installation which has already begun will be completed rapidly thus making it possible for the shows to commence without any delay. It is expected that its sacrifices will be met by the warm welcome of the people of Pera. (Anon., 18.01.1908, emphasis mine)

Advertisements and news articles, some of which are advertorials that appeared in *Stamboul,* strove to assure its readers that the new building would be a safe place for cinema-going. Istanbul was infamous for its conflagrations long before the coming of cinema. As a matter of fact, one of the news films that Weinberg made for Pathé was going to be 'The Big Fire in Istanbul' (1908). In addition to that, the news of cinema fires in European countries and the US had been circulating widely. The building had burned down once in 1890 and was rebuilt in 1892. The public must have been aware of the dangers of the inflammable nitrate film and projection lamps. Cinema-going had to be risk-free. Therefore, they had to be assured that the management took every measure to prevent a fire. Pathé had installed the projection machine in a room covered with thick concrete walls and a sliding iron door. There was a faucet in the projection room to use against fire. All this was the work of the renowned manager Stavro Papadopoulos and the *Stamboul* proudly stated that these measures were approved by the Municipality of Pera and General Szechenyi, the Head of the Fire Department. The government had hired Odön Szechenyi, formerly a pioneer of firefighters in Hungary, to build the first modern fire department in Istanbul. 'That is to say', the paper concludes,

> the viewers have nothing to fear. It is all right to go in crowds to the theatre which is lit by electricity. Every measure is taken to evacuate the building in the shortest possible time and ultimately to give the audience the sense of safety. (Anon., 30.1.1908)

Obviously Pathé served as a good example. On March 12, when Le Royal View would re-open at Théatre Des Variétes, it would announce proudly that 'its terrific devices complied with the criteria issued by the Paris Police Centre. They were kept in a Creusot booth made of steel which definitely provided the absolute safety measures' (Anon., 12.3.1908). Le Royal View was following Pathé closely. Again, two years later when the Oriental Cinema opened, it would inform that it repeated the same procedures (Anon., 12.9.1910).

On the 30th of January at nine in the evening Pathé ran its first show. The theatre was 'extremely' full. A danger awaiting the audiences was pickpockets. Especially on Sundays, during the busiest hours they stole money from their victims standing in front of the venues. The management posted on the wall of the box office a warning in four languages: 'Watch out for the pickpockets!' (Özen, 59)



AMPHITHEATRE DES PETITS CHAMPS

Le Cinémathéâtre « Pathé »

L'installation de ce cinématographe géant est parfaite au point de vue technique. Elle est également irréprochable au point de vue si important de la sécurité du public. Grâce aux sages mesures de précaution prises par M Stavro Pappadopoulos, l'habile directeur des Théâtres Municipaux, tout danger est écarté et l'on n'a pas à redouter quelque lamentable catastrophe, dans le genre de celles qu'on déplora récemment en Angleterre et en Amérique.

Le cinématographe des Petits Champs est en effet hermétiquement renfermé dans des murs de ciment fort épais et une solide porte en fer, glissant sur des rainures, l'isole également du théâtre A l'intérieur de cette cage bétonnée tout est prévu pour arrêter un incendie hypothétique. Une bouche d'eau est prête à fonctionner sur le champ. L'installation faite sous la surveillance de M. Stavro. Pappadopoulos, qui n'a ménagé ni le temps ni l'argent, a mérité du reste l'approbation complète de S E. le général Szechenyi pacha, commandant en chef des sapeurs-pompiers, et celle des délégués de la municipalité et du mutesarifat de Péra.

Les plus timorés des spectateurs n'ont donc plus rien à craindre. Et l'on peut se rendre en foule à l'Amphi. qui sera brillamment éclairé à la lumière électrique. Toutes les précautions ont été prises pour assurer les dégagements, éviter l'encombrement des issues et procurer au public le sentiment de la plus complète sécurité

Voici le programme de la première *Grande Représentation* qui aura lieu ce soir, à 9 heures.

PREMIÈRE PARTIE

1. Ouverture Orchestre
2. « En Chine (Shangaï) », vues.
3. « La Jolie Dactylographe », scène comique.
4. « L'Eglise du Mont St-Michel, scène dramat.
5. « Rêve de Toula », scène comique.
6. « J'ai gagné un cochon », scène comique.
7. « La Grenouille », scène coloriée.

DEUXIÈME PARTIE

1. Valse-Orchestre.
2. « Danse Suédoise », scène naturelle.
3. « Haine de Meunier », scène dramatique.
4. « Mon Pantalon est decousu », scène com.
5. « Policier ingénieux », scène comique.
6. « Va petit mousse » scène dramatique.
7. « Forge infernale », féerie.

TROISIÈME PARTIE

1. Pot Pourri Orchestre
2. « Voleurs qui n'ont pas de chance », scène comique.
3. « Contremaitre », scène dramatique.
4. « Toto fume », scène comique.
5. « Voyage original », scène coloriée.
6. « Collection de cartes postales», scène comique
7. Marche Finale.— Orchestre.

Fauteuils : P. 15 ; Stalles : P. 10 ; Galerie : P. 5

Tous les mercredis, changements complet du programme.

N.-B.— *Les tableaux de chaque programme hebdomadaire ne seront plus reproduits durant toute la saison.*

Figure 3: Pathé's opening night programme. Stamboul 30.1.1908.

The opening night's programme consisted of three parts, each being introduced by an orchestral overture (**Figure 3**). In the teens, we don't have any evidence for orchestras accompanying film screenings. They merely served as punctuation briefly to introduce the next screening. Films were in colour and black and white. *Stamboul* praised the installation of 'this grand cinematograph' as impeccable, however, apparently there were some problems. Towards the end of the first part, three films (*La Grenouille/The Frog, J'ai gagne un cochon/I Won a Pig, Dans Suedoise/Swedish Dances*, all 1908 films) were found so boring that the audience whistled in protest so they had to interrupt the projection and skip to the following films. Other films were applauded (Anon., 31.1.1908). The press expressed the audience's joy or appreciation of a film in terms of 'applause'.

It was a cold winter, yet the theatre was heated by 'a single heater which was not able to cope with the freezing cold'. Pathé's adversary Le Royal View would later place an ad in the same newspaper stressing in an ironic tone that 'in these cold days it would be fabulous to spend a night watching a show in a well heated theatre. While watching the magnificent views, unlike in some other places, one does not fear catching cold.' (Anon., 30.3.1908) Most probably it was referring to Pathé Cinematheatre's stove failing to keep the place warm. Weinberg had prepared mini Auxetophone concerts (Caruso, Battistini, etc) for the breaks but when the player did not work in the way he planned causing protests he had to put it away. The administration delayed in switching on the light after the screenings, leaving the auditorium in the dark, so some of the audience believing that their identities would not be discovered began to make strange noises. The picture went out of focus every now and then and the projector light was not strong enough.

Pathé and other cinemas which followed effected a change in the transportation network. Soon, boats and trains would be rescheduled and their routes redefined according to the location of the venues and their screening times, *matinees* and *soirées*. In 1913, The General Directorate of the Society of Tramway Transportation confirmed that tramway cars would be waiting later in the evening at the Amphiteatre's door when the screenings were over for the day (Anon. 17.11.1913).

The Programme: Commodification sequenced, the audience assured

Stamboul was primarily concerned with Pathé's programmes (**Figure 3**). The day before the cinema opened a piece appeared in the newspaper promising the readers that they (as the potential audience) need not worry about having to see films with worn-out ideas:

> What made Pathé Freres famous is no secret. The Pathé Freres company owns cinema theatres in big cities operating for them, therefore, its factories in Paris run to create hitherto unpublished subjects which are made accessible [to others] only after they have been first presented to the audiences of Pathé. So the audience is confident that it is attending very interesting screenings. (Anon., 20.1.1908)

Why did the management feel the need to make such a promise? Was it a common practice that early film exhibitors in Istanbul screened the same films over and over again? Defining the film programme, Nico de Klerk refers to the 'struggle for control of the audience's attention (and money)' (de Klerk, 770). I take the 'control of the audience's attention' as an act of commodification of the films and in that connexion, the audience's attention should be considered a consumptive behaviour. Films are worthy of attention in so far as their subjects are fresh and interesting (please note that the text equates new with interesting). The newspaper advertisements display an awareness of the fact that keeping the audience's attention can be maintained by sequencing interesting programmes:

> The *new* programme, *rich* and *attractive*
> *Interesting*, *hitherto unseen* tableauxs
> Incomparably sharp images and no flickering that exhausts the eye.
> (…)
> PS: The most elegant audiences came to view in admiration this most *interesting* programme.
> (Anon., 23.3.1908, emphases mine).

We have seen that *Stamboul* did not always praise Pathé. It criticised the programme and the technical quality of the projections: 'Yesterday's programme, which contained dramatic, comic and fantastic films, was not any more interesting than previous week's programme. Had the projection been brighter it might have been applauded.' (Anon., 6.2.1908)

Pathé had come with promises; first of all it would make a difference with fresh content, but now *Stamboul* seemed to be somewhat disappointed by the films that were screened and the technical quality of projections: 'Is it any better than the ones that we have seen before?' asks the article and continues making an ambiguous if not sceptical remark, 'And if so, why – we cannot say for sure.' The introductory programme was found 'boring'. In addition to that, some scenes were out of focus and some attractions were not novel enough. (Anon., 24.3.1908) A couple of days later, *Stamboul* used an humorous tone, playing on words that point to Pathé: 'The audience would be appalled (*épater*) for they would not be able to figure out how these films were puffed-up (*empater*).' Inspired by the joke The Royal View placed a piece in the newspaper: 'Last night, upon leaving the theatre this thought was heard voiced: 'Oh Dear, this Royal View is amazing! The programme is so rich, images clear, bright and not *puffed up* at all, I am *appalled*!' Let us add that the boxes sold like hot *pâtés*!' (Anon., 03.04.1908, emphases mine). *Stamboul* continues its criticism of Pathé:

> Besides, all these dramatic scenes are indeed artificial, they all look like each other, showing the same persons [actors] displaying different manners in abracadabra costumes. As for the comic scenes; they cause nervous laughter and when the laughter continues it becomes exhausting and unnerving.
>
> The problem is all these screenings are hardly artistic. The farces need not be this rough and (…) these little dramas generally are not suitable for the audience. Have a look at one of the programmes. This is all you will get:
> *Une femme en loterie*
> *Les amours de Dumanet*
> *Popupoulet apprend a monter a bicyclette*
> *L'enfant martyr*
> *Le gendarme humanitaire*
> *L'électrocutée*

> Of course, that can always amuse children. (Anon., 6.2.1908)

The complaint regarding the characters all looking alike and the same actors displaying different manners in abracadabra costumes is in fact a reaction to a standardisation process of continuing series that Pathé had adopted. Richard Abel argues that that was an 'instance of standardisation (…) in which one film after another was made and marketed around a single, named character/actor.' (Abel, 730) The Istanbul press obviously did not have a high regard of 'repetition of pleasure'.

Initially, the program changed on Wednesdays. There was a single screening at nine in the evening on weekdays and two screenings on weekends: *matinées* at two in the afternoon, *soirées* at nine in the evening. In response to the criticisms that the films ran too long, the management decided to change the program twice a week, Mondays and Fridays. In addition to that, it was promised that the screenings would be unrepeatable. (Anon., 29.3.1908).

At the end of April, three months after it opened, Pathé moved temporarily to Kadiköy, then a popular district for the Summer. It is not clear yet whether Weinberg had problems with the property owner or if Kadiköy was a more promising district during the Summer. In the meantime, Amphi ran theatrical performances: 'Back to drama troupes, illusionists and clairvoyants from Paris with or without orchestra.' (Anon., 02.05.1908).

In Kadikoy the audience composition suggested different exhibition strategies. Compared to Pera, Kadiköy had a more conservative population and separate screenings had to be arranged for men and women. The film subjects were advertised as more appropriate for families and Weinberg organised 'women and children only' screenings. When Pathé moved back to Petit-Champs in early August, Weinberg continued to target parents and their children.

> To run Pathé Freres Cinema in the Petit-Champs Amphitheatre was a genius idea because this fulfilled the dream of the families aiming the well-being and joy of their children. (…) On Mondays and Fridays, after the screenings were over the doors leading to the garden will be opened and the audiences will be free to go out into the garden, hence the children running around getting fresh air returning home with rosy cheeks (Anon., 20.3.1908).

What is more, when the audience went out of the building, a camera would be waiting for them in the garden. Weinberg recorded their exit and screened it the next week.

> Each time it gets even better. Now a very interesting idea. Each evening we enjoy various views very much. But, this time how surprised will the audiences be when they see themselves on the screen! Monsieur representative of Pathé Freres company thought up recording the audiences coming out of the Petits-Champs the following Sunday. There is no doubt that the 'show' will be a great

> success when the various groups who were photographed unawares recognise themselves on the screen (Anon., 20.3.1908).[6]

The first public screening of cinematographé in Paris showed workers coming out of the Lumiere factory in Lyon. The workers knew that they were going to be filmed (the women were dressed up and their hair made up) and they were looking forward to watching themselves on the screen. Referring to a Warwick Trading Company catalogue of 1902, Vanessa Toulmin relates that 'the concept of filming local events and scenes was a highly lucrative business tool for early film exhibitors' (Toulmin, 118). Famous Welsh showman and filmmaker Arthur Cheetham is known to have made films showing local people. His *Children Leaving the National Schools, Rhyl* (1902) is exemplary. In the early years of cinema, camera operators wandered around the streets of Istanbul and filmed local people. Many of them were very enthusiastic to pose for the camera perhaps with the hope that soon they would be able to watch themselves and their friends on the screen. However, I would argue that Weinberg was not particularly interested in reaching out to new audiences from different social classes, particularly workers. He was more keen to keep his existing elite audience by surprises and small tricks. Military dignitaries, foreign ambassadors who regularly visited the venue were also amongst those filmed. What kind of surprise was the newspaper promising when it revealed that a hidden camera would record the audience unawares? How would that really work? Once they realised they were being filmed, the viewers would eventually begin to pose for the camera. Hikmet Nisan, probably a regular of Pathé, remembers:

> Amphi was full up day and night. To attract the attention of the people Weinberg undertook a most fabulous venture. He had brought a camera and on Sundays he filmed the people coming out into the garden after the show was over. The next week he showed these films. It was such an appealing idea; in order to see themselves on the screen the next week, everybody ran over each other (n.d.).

The viewer viewed. They were caught by the camera unawares and next they were struggling to catch its attention. Cinema-going was always more than viewing films and now Weinberg was trying to open further space, by engaging them in a social play, by giving them a sense of belonging, he made them a part of the programme.

Weinberg used his camera also for filming 'events' of significance. In an advertisement it placed in a 1908 issue of the German film magazine *Die Kinematograph* Pathé uses the title 'Events in Turkey' (Ereignisse in der Türkei) listing two films that were shot in Istanbul. One was a 110-meter film showing a big fire in Istanbul (*Der grosse Brand in Stambul*) and the other was a 150 meter film showing Sultan Abdulhamid II going for the Friday Prayer (*Selamlik in der Moschee Hamidie in Constantinople*). *Selamlik* was a weekly routine in which the Sultan appeared in his royal carriage to his subjects and saluted them. Having access to the statesmen of highest ranks, including Sultan Abdulhamid II, it should

not have been difficult for Weinberg to obtain the necessary permissions for shooting newsreels in and around Istanbul. Aware of the opportunities for publicity the Sultan let himself be filmed during his trip to the mosque. Thus, Pathé enabled the image of the Sultan to reach a wider audience. Although he was not an Ottoman citizen, Weinberg was always in demand for making propaganda films produced by the government. His adversaries protested his privilege even went so far as to place formal complaints.

Verisimilitude and vicarious experience

> And after the Pathé Frere company's film ended and its beautiful rooster appeared and crawled as if to say 'The rooster appeared, the case is closed', outside, I was dazzled by the daylight, disoriented, appalled by the fact that the world was still turning. (Ziya Osman Saba (51))

> Since photograph is made of the soulless copy of an existing object, live photography must under any circumstances show and illustrate a material body. As it is impossible to photograph something notional and imaginary, the forms and shapes in cinematograph must of course exist. (Anon., 6.11.1906)

Elsewhere I have tried to demonstrate how cinema was presented in its early years as a miracle achieved by science and technology (Erdoğan, 2010, 137-139). The newspapers of the early cinema era described the viewers' astonishment before this extraordinary event, as if they were the first believers of a faith 'biting their fingers in awe' witnessing a miracle. 'Wondrous', 'marvellous', 'curious,' 'amazing' - these were the terms used to describe the experience of the audience. 'The viewers will marvel at [*hayret*] cinematograph's wondrous images' the advertisements promised repeatedly.[7] *Hayret* is a religious term denoting a certain stage arrived during the spiritual journey. Prior to the teens, the advertisements promised to the readers a secular version of *hayret* whose religious aspect was replaced by science and technology. I would argue that the opening of Pathé in 1908 marked a turning point, a shift of emphasis from *hayret,* deriving from the novelty of the cinematic apparatus miraculously animating photographic images, to a more narrative and realism oriented experience. The apparatus was still important but this time for its capacity to tell stories and make images appear more realistic (for example, the better the projection the sharper the image, hence more realism). The Cinematograph's performance depended on its capability to enable sharp and bright projections: 'Add to the diversity of films, a unique sharpness of bright projection. The viewers would believe in the truth of the scenes.' (Anon., 12.8.1908) It is therefore generally accepted that the technical quality of the image guaranteed its 'realism'; it is either the truth reproduced, that is to say, as indexical sign the photographic image is the proof of its object or the image is so powerful (or the viewer so naïve) that it is inseparable from its object. Pathé's programme was often applauded for the realism of its films. *Stamboul* hurried its readers to Pathé for a unique projection: *Dans le sous-marin/In*

the submarine (1908) for example was 'awesomely realist with its striking chain of scenes' (Anon., 18.3.1908). This is precisely the moment, perhaps a milestone in the history of Turkey's modernization, where cinematograph parts from the traditional Turkish shadow play, Karagöz, which can be best defined with its non-illusionistic narration. Earlier I have argued that in the context of screen practices cinema was not regarded as a continuation and transformation of shows such as Karagöz; a very popular traditional entertainment form with its translucent screen, play of light and shadow, sound effects, dialogue and musical performance. Although it strikes a resemblance to cinema, unlike the cinematograph, as described by the newspapers, the mode of narration that Karagöz adopts never attempts to conceal the means of its production and aim at verisimilitude. As a matter of fact, Karagöz itself brings up the issue in a play, 'Bahçe'/'The Garden' (1925), where Karagöz, just like Uncle Josh in the famous Edison film, *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (1902) attends the cinema and naively believes the fire presented on screen to be real, causing him to panic (Kudret, 169-214).

It was not only a sharp and bright, high-quality image that was expected from technological progress. As narrative films began to dominate cinemas, we observe a growing demand for the synchronisation of image with sound. A news article printed as early as 1894 queried Edison's latest inventions and gave a detailed account of his endeavours to 'marry' image and sound that resulted in phonokinetoscope (Anon., 10.12.1894). Neither live musical accompaniment nor intertitles could stand for voice and sound effects. The moment the actors opened their mouth in silence they pointed to a lack, thus putting bodies out of sync, perhaps creating an uncanny effect which made viewing uncomfortable.

In order to cope with the problem, early film exhibition practices in Istanbul, as elsewhere, strove to combine image and sound. In 1908 Théatre Des Varietes introduced a system called Synchronisme which basically consisted of cinematograph and phonograph working together: 'It does not only reproduce the most vivid and fantastic scenes of reality, by adding voices and songs to them it makes them even more interesting.' (Anon., 25.5.1908) Cinema with sound was advertised under two labels: singing cinema (*cinéma chantant*) and talking cinema (*cinéma parlant*). However, the attempts were mostly disappointing: 'the galloping of a horse was heard only after the horse stopped running and the sound of a fired revolver was heard only after the trigger was pulled.' (6.2.1908) Such failures were harshly criticised in the name of verisimilitude. Pathé's adversary Le Royal View claimed to perform better quality projections, it pointed out the perfection that had been achieved in the imitation of images and sounds:

> The two screenings, held yesterday and on Saturday, were triumphant indeed. Never before, even in the beginning of last year, has The Royal View been rewarded with so much admiring 'bravos' in Variety Hall whose seating capacity is no longer sufficient. All the images are interesting, extraordinarily clear and bright. But, what about the sounds from the backstage? The imitation of the sounds is so perfect that it's as though the scenes are not only

> being screened but played, actually taking place. The Royal View, who set up the grand cinematograph, without a doubt put on a new and unequalled show (Anon., 16.3.1908).

Verisimilitude enabled the wider world to be present here and now before the audience, not only in a geographical sense but also as an infinite ocean of vicarious experiences. The audience would travel wherever the camera took them, without having to leave their seats:

> 'Just yesterday', wrote Miguel Zamacoïs, the humourous author of *Tour du Monde dans un fauteuil / World Tour in an Armchair* 'the cinematograph was an interesting little thing, a meaningless magic lantern, a simple child's toy, a trick used for photography; yet today, it is a terrifying, seizing, absorbing thing, it is a storm! (…) Even if we went to Kamchatka or Cape Horn every evening returning to our beds every night! And above all – above all! – not having to pack [for the journey] in the morning!' (Anon., 28.3.1908).

The first cinematograph screening in Istanbul in 1896 was advertised as 'magnificent and astonishing', 'animated photography', 'in true size', and 'creating a stir in all of Paris' (Evren, 30). If it can create a stir in Paris, then Istanbul must be prepared for the shock. At the centre of the wider world lay, of course, Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century. Kamchatka and Cape Horn could only serve as its periphery.

Le Royal View contributes to the topic by turning to the viewer's emotions. When inviting the audience to the cinema it promises that the 'tear glands would take this opportunity to fulfil their noble function. Sad and touching scenes are designed and handled with care by experts. Le Royal View has this advantage over the realist and modern theatre: one does not have to crawl in pain for three acts through the desert of psychological-pathological-social-iodoformic cases.' (Anon., 19.3.1908).

In 1910 we see Pathé leaving Petits-Champs and moving to other venues, Theatre de Varietes, Nouveau Cirque then back to Amphi again in 1912. From his correspondences we learn that in 1913 Weinberg was the Director of Cinema Pathé Freres de Pancalti (Pancalti or Pangaltı, a neighbourhood in Pera) . Towards the end of the devastating Balkan War, in 1913, he wrote in an official letter to Hilal-i Ahmer (Red Crescent) that 'I made an agreement with the Municipality of Pera as to donate the 25% of the [cinema's] income to you.' Weinberg asked the Society to send someone over twice a week to collect the money (Özuyar, 2017, 143).

Weinberg shot Pathé newsreels many of which must have been internationally circulated. As I have already stated, his connections allowed him to shoot films and photographs freely in and around Istanbul, therefore it should not come as a surprise if a great majority of the non-fiction films, Pathé Journals, made in the capital of the Empire, today at Pathé's film archive turned out to be made by him. Why did Pathé never attempt at producing features in the area? For local production companies Weinberg tried his hand at

fiction a couple of times both of which failed due to the circumstances of ongoing wars but he never made features for Pathé. Mustafa Özen argues that in a time when it enjoyed an overwhelming domination all over Europe and even in the US, Pathé developed a specific strategy for each country where it operated. In Italy, for example, where indigenous feature production was strongest, Pathé founded the film production company, Film d'Arte Italiana to make features. Whereas in Russia and Turkey it concentrated on exhibition for there were no local feature production companies to compete with (Özen, 58). The first Turkish feature films were to be produced much later, in 1917 (*Casus/Spy* and *Pençe/The Claw* both directed by Sedat Simavi). In Istanbul, particularly in Pera, there was no demand for Turkish features, most probably because the audiences were quite happy to watch films coming from Paris.

Conclusion

In this essay, by telling the story of the opening of a cinema theatre, I have attempted to trace utterances with which newspapers, partners of cinema culture, and their readers of the early 20th century thought about cinema, and to figure out how those utterances might have provided ground for early conceptualisations of emerging film culture. The audience and film experience, the apparatus and the programme appear to be the primary terms in a discursive field (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Terms of cinema-going and film exhibition

Apparatus and screening	Programme and content	Verisimilitude and vicarious experience	The audience
intelligently installed	surprising	genuine	(expected) warm/warmest welcome
sharp images vs out of focus	selected with utmost care	actually taking place	sense of safety
no scratch	unrepeatable	synchronization (marriage of sight and sound)	(expected to) applaud
no flicker	rich	(the whole world) present	hurry, rush (to the cinema)
(during projection) steady image	attractive		(promise) satisfaction
successful equipment, grand cinematograph impeccable	Interesting vs boring		believe (in the truth of the scenes)
Low level of light vs bright images (projection)	worth seeing		great attention
well lit theatre vs dark (during the breaks)	varied, diverse		enjoy
sensational (opening)	Prosaic, rough		fascinated
	new, fresh, novel vs not novel enough, worn-out		emotionally involved ("tear glands")
	hitherto unpublished subjects		
	genuine vs artificial		

While new nations were emerging every day, film reviews began to adopt a patriotic attitude: Political and military dignitaries were praised, the army was glorified. Turkification, although partially, was observed in venue names: Turk, Milli (National), Turan (a version of pan-Turkism) were added to Americain, Splandid, Venus, etc. The cinemas with European names were managed by non-muslims and/or expatriates. The co-existence of these names

which survived even in the heydays of the building of the Republic as a nation-state may reflect Westernisation and nationalism blending into each other. The newspapers contextualised newsreels for propaganda purposes, however, the programmes never ruled out entertainment; military newsreels showing the Ottoman army on manoeuvres and at war went hand in hand with European feature films. In December 1913, Pathé found itself as the target of protests of nationalistic nature. Since its early years, almost all the film venues in Pera showed films with French intertitles. Between two wars, with the rise of nationalism, Turkish university students began to put pressure on the cinema managers, mostly non-muslims to show the films in Turkish and when they realised that no such arrangement was made, they began to protest the cinemas. It is recorded that some building windows were stoned and police were called. Pathe's manager promised to make the necessary arrangements. *Le Moniteur Orientale*, another newspaper printed in French, quotes the Turkish paper *Tanin* and carefully comments on the incident:

> *Tanin* remarks that the cinemas of the city should respect the official language and the Turkish audiences and write the titles in Turkish. It adds that the audiences had been requesting titling in Turkish for quite a while. When their demands were not met, the other day they protested until the manager promised to make the necessary arrangements. This incident is not a pleasant one, but it would not be fair to label the protesters as fanatics.
>
> Tanin adds 'We hope that such companies will not neglect the rights of the countries where they earn their money and respect their customers.
>
> *Terdjuman* and *Tasfir* write in the same line. (Anon. 20.11.1913)

The contradiction in the cultural reception of cinema is visible in this incident. The so-called nationalistic demand for the Turkish intertitles actually betrays the desire to make European films accessible to those who did not speak French. Even when the Ottoman Empire allied with Germany against the rest of central Europe, to the people of Pera, cinema was first of all French.

Richard Abel observes that something changes in the US by 1914: 'Unlike the early teens, a movie fan could now find a wealth of information and gossip about the movies, and probably learn which particular films and stars would be appearing in at least some specific picture theatres any day of the week.' In Turkey, the readers had to wait until the twenties for the first star signs to appear. Narrative cinema, for product diversification, developed its genres and welcomed the star system. This went parallel with film magazines to appear, most of them bilingual (Turkish and French), all with images of the superstars of mainstream cinema on their covers: Charles Chaplin, Asta Nielsen, Rudolph Valentino, etc (**Figure 4**). Film culture shifted its emphasis to stardom which would immediately begin to dominate

discourses. These discourses, by and large, worked on an axis of ambivalence, the audience's simultaneous identification with and distanciation from the stars.[8]

Figure 4: Artistic-Cine.

Weinberg's association with Pathé seems to have continued for a couple of years more. He moved on and undertook the management of other cinemas, worked for the Army Film Centre, made propaganda films, even started directing features that he could never complete due to the ongoing war. In 1916, he placed an advertisement in a German cinema magazine that he was looking for a pianist, a violinist, and a percussionist for Cine-Palace in Istanbul (Weinberg, 28.5.1916, iii).

During the war, it must have been easier to conduct business in Germany, the Ottoman Empire's ally. The Petit-Champs building served as a cinema to various exhibition companies into the late forties. Ruined irreparably it was demolished in 1958. Although its films continued to be distributed across the whole country, we do not find any Pathé cinemas in Istanbul after 1916. Pathé played its pioneering role in the institutionalisation of cinema-going and the emergence of film culture and disappeared from the exhibition business.

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Notes:

[1] Sigmund Weinberg (1868 – 1936?), a Romanian citizen of Polish origins, was later to become a prominent figure in the history of cinema in Turkey.

[2]Zafer Toprak records that in the second half of the nineteenth century, forty languages were spoken in Istanbul. The four major languages spoken in Pera were Turkish, French, Greek and Armenian (2008, 70).

[3] I was able to find in *Stamboul* more material on Pathé than in the other newspapers periodicals that were available during my research. As an instance of Turkification, *Stamboul* was renamed as *Istanbul* in 1923 and continued publication until 1964. I should also mention two popular and prestigious newspapers published in Turkish, *Tanin* and *Ikdam*. Although they rarely covered news on Pathé in the said period, they are a great source for the history of early cinema in Istanbul.

[4] Here, I am referring to Charles Musser's concept of 'history of screen practice which 'presents cinema as a continuation and transformation of magic lantern traditions in which showmen displayed images on a screen, accompanying them with voice, music, and sound effects.' (Musser, 59) I would argue that his definition does not rule out Karagöz, the traditional Turkish shadow play with performers telling stories by moving images (*tasvir*) behind a candle-lit curtain, accompanying them with voice, music and sound effects.

[5] Although Andre Gaudreault is right in making the distinction between 'cinema' and 'Cinématographe' I must note, however, that the Istanbul press used *cinematograph,* borrowing from French and *manzara* (Eng. view), borrowing from Arabic, interchangeably for cinema and film (Gaudreault, 15).

[6] In response to this novelty, the next day Le Royal View explained that 'although we have every device at our disposal we are not permitted to take pictures' (Anon., 21.3.1908).

[7] For a detailed account of the viewers watching films like witnessing a miracle, thus a religious expression, 'watching in awe' being repurposed for more secular reasons, see my 'The Spectator in the Making: Modernity and Cinema in Istanbul (1896-1928) (Erdoğan: 137 - 139).

[8] For a brilliant account of the emergence of stardom which went in parallel with the boom of film magazines in the 1920s, see Nihan Doğan's 'The Making of a Cinema Culture through Cinema Magazines in Early Republican Turkey (1923- 1928): The Business, Stars and the Audience' (54-93).