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**FIRST PERSON AS MOLECULAR SUBJECTIVITIES:
TURKEY AND TURKISHNESS**

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this submission is the candidate's own. The total word count of thesis (including footnotes but excluding bibliography and appendices) is 54,437.

London, September 19, 2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores first person films as platforms for producing alternative subjectivities within contemporary Turkey. Its central question is: “Considering its history and power structures, how do first person films address the limitations and potentials of forming diverse subjectivities within contemporary Turkey?”

This question is addressed through a video diary practice and coupled with a theoretical inquiry. The video installation *Of Dice and Men* negotiates hegemonic identity politics in Turkey through moments of rupture and constant migration within my daily routines in London and Istanbul — both shaped by political violence. Migratory subjectivities are thought through Félix Guattari’s proposal of molecular subjectivities, which was fruitful for enacting such subjectivities in a geography where identity is largely monolithic.

The video installation *Of Dice and Men* is thus born of negotiating hegemonic identity politics in Turkey as well as a conformist filmmaking industry. In terms theory, one persistent question was: “How can a filmmaking method with a strong history, theorized foremost for US and European contexts, be a platform for alternative (in Guattari’s words, molecular) forms of subjectivity reflective of the specificities of Turkey?” The thesis thus proposes an expansion of the history and theorizations of first person film, through Guattari’s notions of the molar and the molecular.

To elaborate and probe the above problematic I discuss recent first person films and how they address subjectivisation through normative ideologies in Turkey, pertaining to two separate but intertwined spheres of identity formation. M.M. Arslan explores Kurdish-Turkish conflicts in *I Flew You Stayed* (2012), while Aykan Safoğlu’s *Off-White Tulips*

(2013) explores queer subjectivity and migration. Within this focus are multiple aims: 1) mapping the limits, if not dangers, of imposing a single identity on the body politic of an entire geographical region; 2) outlining issues of subjectivity in contemporary Turkey; and 3) examining filmmakers who use first person narrators to challenge the hegemonic perspectives linked to the formation of modernity.

I conclude with reflections on the construction of an author persona through my own filmmaking method in *Of Dice and Men*. Furthermore, presenting my work as an installation led to thinking through fluid subjectivities and reflecting on active modes of spectatorship. The installation thereby stands in a mutual questioning and expanding relationship to the written component of the thesis.

To my mother Emine.

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ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL

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<https://vimeo.com/channels/didemsavphd>

The password for all the videos is: avphd

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary upheavals undoubtedly call for a modelization turned more toward the future and to the emergence of new social and aesthetic practices in all areas.

Félix Guattari¹

The only acceptable end result of human activity is the production of subjectivity such that its relation to the world is sustained and enriched.

Félix Guattari²

This thesis argues that first person filmmaking in Turkey is a tool for subverting imposed, normative forms of identity developed through the founding ideologies of the Turkish Republic and for expressing new ‘molecular’ subjectivities in tension with molar ones. The molar and the molecular are terms adopted by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze from the fields of chemistry and biology and will be explicated in the following paragraph. What is initially outlined in the thesis is the historical context of the problematic of hegemonic identity politics, followed by the author’s encountering said problematic through her filmmaking. As a practice-based PhD my theoretical pre-occupations are based on the questions derived from my praxes while taking up a first person filmmaking practice. In doing so, I have worked with Guattari’s notions of subjectivity and the importance of desire, which I will elaborate on below.

¹ Félix Guattari, “Subjectivities for Better or Worse”, *The Guattari Reader*, ed. G. Genosko (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 197.

² Ibid.

Guattari and Deleuze suggest that one's sense of self (subjecthood) can be discerned between the "molar" and the "molecular", that subjecthood is not something entirely fixed or predetermined. The molar signifies the large structures of social production, that which forms the more easily identifiable elements of one's identity — it includes race, class, nationality, political alliances, and so on. While molarity is concerned with mass and acts as a structuring force, it also limits and restricts. Conversely, the molecular signifies the fluid part of the self; it is that which is based on desire and corporeality, the politics of the flesh as opposed to the politics of the mind.³ The molecular concerns affect or mood, the non-linguistic, the irrational, or all that which defies meaning. Guattari and Deleuze refer to the molecular as a rhizome (an image of thought that is non-hierarchical) for the rhizome is not reliant on a central, immutable core;⁴ it is volatile (in the chemical sense) and produces new fields of becoming, which Deleuze and Guattari call "lines of flight".⁵ A line of flight is an initial act of deterritorialisation; it explores new territories both physically and ontologically (as in desire). A line of flight is fundamentally revolutionary and is the first step toward molecular emancipation. But most importantly, the molecular is not opposed to the molar but exists underneath or within it. Or to think of a specific ethnicity along with a migratory hybrid subjectivity is its molecular expression.⁶ The molar and the molecular are not then separate from one another but form a chiasmic unity and are constantly at play with one another. As Guattari and Deleuze explain:

There is no question ... of establishing a dualist opposition between (the molar and the molecular); that would be no better than the dualism between the One and the multiple. There are only multiplicities forming a single assemblage, operating in the same assemblage: packs in masses and masses in packs.⁷

³ Eric Alliez, *The Guattari Effect* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 165.

⁴ The rhizome is a plant stem that jettisons various roots and shoots from its nodes and even if cut into pieces, still continues to proliferate. Guattari and Deleuze use this notion of the rhizome (and rhizomatic thought) in contradistinction to arborescent conceptions of knowledge (hierarchical, linear, dualist).

⁵ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 9.

⁶ I will develop these notions in Ch. 3, which concerns case studies, and in Ch. 4, which concerns my video work *Of Dice and Men*.

⁷ Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 3.

The molar and the molecular are two levels of experience, or two different but interrelated realms of phenomena, but neither is reducible to the other and each is equally valid. As reconceptualized by Guattari and Deleuze, the molar and the molecular enable art and film critics to understand the complexity of human subjectivity and its formation without abandoning pre-formed and ultimately useful conceptual categories and tools such as class, gender, and race.

Related to the above discussions on different forms of becoming, now is a particularly important moment for my project given the extreme political strife Turkey is undergoing; as authoritarianism and nationalism continue to manifest and spread, people in Turkey need new tools to reconceptualize their relationship to the geography⁸ (the locus where identity is typically rooted) in order to coexist more democratically. In other words, the primarily molar structures that form rigidly defined identities in Turkey, different ethnic backgrounds, and gender and class issues, need to be imagined anew. Art is one place to begin such a reconceptualization by establishing molecular conditions that can produce new forms of identity that embody both the molar and the molecular. The films that I discuss in my thesis that employ first person enunciators aim at challenging the status quo, at pinpointing the conservatism it gives rise to, and at communicating with an audience in order to instigate questions and in hopes of proposing new, fluid paradigms. As such, I argue that art is an ever-important tool for imagining the new, to potentially offer alternative visions and conceptions of reality. Nonetheless, I will challenge the efficacy or ‘the how’ of art and film as political, too.

What, however, are the limits of the aim I advance, the idea of the molecular and molar as put forward by Guattari and Deleuze, and can they be disputed? One may object

⁸ When I speak of “geography” it is for the purpose of re-iterating that what is known as “the Republic of Turkey” is not solely formed of Turks but of a population of various ethnic backgrounds, i.e., Kurds, Armenians, Bosnians, and Caucasian descendants, to name but a few.

that, while such works can be made, or such actions committed, if only seen by those who already hold such viewpoints, if limited to specific circles, what greater effect or impact can they have? If the normalising process of capitalism, as well as governmental bodies directly silencing — as I will expand upon in Ch. 2 — alternative and independent voices, is extremely rapid, it is the temporary mutualities which are formed that can carry the potential of molecular changes. And if the efficacy of such ventures may be questioned, what is vital is the declaration of a molecular voice, or the desire of producing alternative visions, even if they are only heard by the few, and even if they end in failure, they create an accumulation of molecular changes and hence lead to the potential opening of a possibility.

1. WHY?

This project is born of multiple discontents, each of which is explored in first person filmmaking. On November 30, 2011, I started making a video diary in London by recording mentally, visually, and in writing, distinct moments indicative of the political rupture of my day-to-day life, for I started this PhD project during a period of global dissent. On that specific day in the UK, I witnessed a nationwide protest against austerity measures, which brought students, teachers, and civil servants to the streets. The financial crisis of 2007–8, also known as the Global Financial Crisis, which is considered the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s, had a significant impact on the United Kingdom and the after effects of the crisis were palpable. It led to the collapse of major financial institutions, and the crisis was predominantly experienced by the general public through evictions and foreclosures and prolonged unemployment. During that time, I was moving between two cities (London and Istanbul) due to my dual nationality and to working in both places. In times of crisis, issues of belonging, identity, and nationality gain different currency, and immigrants are often the targets of increasing scrutiny during economic collapses. Even

before then, the constant oscillation between cities created in me the sense that I am a perpetual 'other'. In Turkey I am someone of mixed-race background who lives abroad while in the UK I am a Turkish woman. Consequently, the issue of geography and how to exist in different places have been preoccupations of mine in my film practice since the beginning (I will elaborate on this in Ch. 1).

In tracing moments of political rupture in my day-to-day life, I noticed that there are both similar and different political tensions in each. While the global continuities of the decline of the left as of the 1970s and the rise of neoliberalism were palpable both in the UK and Turkey, in the UK people would speak primarily of economical precarity and the rise of conservatism with xeno- and Islamophobia and of an insecure future; in Turkey, precarity has existed for three decades due to an internal political struggle that resulted in the 30-years long Kurdish conflict, along with, or one might say, as an extension of the struggles over the definition of Turkish modernity and identity.

Turkey was founded on firm notions of Turkishness and the formation of a national identity based on the Ottoman Empire, which, although in ruins, would serve as the glue that solidified the nation. To unify a nation-state, Atatürk implemented major reforms to modernize the country, from language to clothing reforms, so as to create a single, unified concept of Turkishness that would not include, if not explicitly discount the ethnic backgrounds of the citizens of the country, namely Armenians, Kurds, and Assyrians and Alevis, who comprise far less of the population. In a sense, Atatürk made a tabula rasa of Turkish history, a history that in fact never ended, and imagined a future country within which, paradoxically, all the other groups would co-exist by dismissing their singularities; after being a historically multi-lingual and multi-ethnic nation, Atatürk sought to assimilate Turkey under one language. Today, over three decades after the last military coup, which targeted the left and the right, Atatürk's 'modernization' unintentionally led the minority

groups inhabiting the same geography to start reclaiming their identities. As elaborated by author Nurdan Gürbilek, this rise of minority politics is also a global phenomenon that should be linked to the market that gives it a voice and a space just as it gives the individual the desire to create a self-presence, on which I will expand upon below and in the following Ch. 1.⁹

Being born in 1978, I belong to the third generation of citizens of the modern Turkish nation. A discourse I never understood revolved around the question of origin. “I am from Istanbul” never fulfilled the curiosity of the inquirer since one is never simply from Istanbul; one must be Kurdish, Armenian, Bosnian, or some other nationality. When growing up I found this endless self-positioning exhausting for my father was born in Adana (southern Turkey), his mother was the daughter of Bosnians, and his father was the son of a family from Thessaloniki. Although my mother also was born in Istanbul, her mother was from an Abhaza family (the Caucasia Mountains). To me then, this explanation did not lead to a clearer sense of self. Since I had never been to Adana, Bosnia, or Caucasia, all I could claim was a relation to Istanbul, but even that was contentious due to its geographical as well as cultural complexity, which encompasses Asia and Europe at once. What I could not articulate in my youth but what created a deep sense of dissent was the separation into ethnic groups, because once people identify their background, they also declare their religious, political, and/or possibly economical status, which creates further separation, if not dislocation. For instance, if a person is from Dersim, they are presumed to be Alevi; if Armenian, they are considered Christian, etc. Soon, I realized this constant longing for redefining one’s roots was a reaction against molar notions of Turkishness and a desire to reformulate a way of being and existing within contemporary Turkey and beyond. Similarly, when I would travel to

⁹ Nurdan Gürbilek, *The New Cultural Climate in Turkey: Living in a Shop Window* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 11.

London, I would meet other migrants who were also keen on identifying themselves by their roots as well as their geographical history, which spoke of the identity politics' global resonance. Differently than Turkey, the UK, with its century-long history of colonization, has received migrants for decades, whether willingly or unwillingly. The reason for my movement (or migration) was due to curiosity and educational aims, which is not comparable to the horrific conditions that drove millions to new countries in search of financial security, or simply humane living conditions.

Eventually, rather than trying to conform to one or another identity, I developed productive uses of this hybridity so as to cultivate a subject that is constantly in motion and in production in different geographies. In reflecting on this, Guattari's notions of molecular subjectivity became a fruitful tool for cultivating a new subject that exists and imagines herself in relation to her external conditions in a dynamic manner, as the above epigraph suggests: always sustaining and developing her immediate surroundings. And in that sense, to lead an ethical life in the face of the other, to give priority to being rather than to individual freedom in the encounter with the other in Emmanuel Levinas' terms,¹⁰ no matter what geography one finds oneself in, regardless of ethnic, religious, or sexual orientation. However, one must also distinguish the potentiality of a universal understanding of ethics' violence as outlined by Butler:

...the collective ethos instrumentalizes violence to maintain the appearance of its collectivity. Moreover, this ethos becomes violence only once it has become an anachronism. What is strange historically—and temporally—about this form of ethical violence is that although the collective ethos has become anachronistic, it has not become past; it insists itself into the present as an anachronism. The ethos refuses to become past, and violence is the way in which it imposes itself upon the present. Indeed, it only imposes itself upon the present, but also seeks to eclipse the present—and this is precisely one of its violent effects.¹¹

¹⁰ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 112.

¹¹ As in the case with the conservatism that I will outline in Ch. 3.

Adorno uses the terms *violence* in relation to ethics in the context of claims about universality. He offers yet another formulation of the emergence of morality, which is always the emergence of certain kinds of moral inquiry, of moral questioning: “the social problem of the divergence between the universal interest and the particular interest, the interests of particular individuals, is what goes to make up the problem of morality¹²”. What are the conditions under which this divergence takes place? He refers to a situation in which “the universal” fails to agree with or include the individual and the claim of universality itself ignores the “rights” of the individual. We can imagine, for instance, the imposition of governments on foreign countries in the name of universal principles of democracy, where the imposition of the government effectively denies the rights of the population at issue to elect its own officials. [...] In these instances, to use Adorno’s words, “the universal... appears as something violent and extraneous and has no substantial reality for human beings”.¹³

The issue of identity and belonging was not the only reason for my adopting Guattari’s conceptions of ‘the production of subjectivity’. Additionally, any form of being subjected to power, with its mechanisms of control and its allocation of roles and functions, assigns to us a specific process of individuation (via categories such as identity, sex, profession, nationality, etc.). Therefore, although the thesis at hand focuses on the molar formulations of a Turkish identity and its problematics, the thesis argues that authorship in first person films’ can be potential spaces for thinking, expressing, and ultimately for producing counter narratives to the dominant powers by producing new, alternative subjectivities. Having written this, one must also bear in mind that there are also first person authors who also make films that only reassert status quo, hence it is with reservation, and as an attempt, that I propose such a potentiality.

In the following section titled “What?” I will outline the three domains of my thesis, namely the aesthetic practice that is first person filmmaking; the geographical context, which

¹² Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2001), 19.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 4–5. What Butler outlines here is also true of the history of Kurdish politics in Turkey, yet not only as a form of physical but also as a form of ethical violence. I will expand upon this in Ch. 3. PMP

is Turkey; and the production of subjectivities, which is the connecting tissue of the first two domains.

2. WHAT?

As stated in the epigraphs above, my research revolves around questions of subjectivity in environments rife with political turmoil, and the emergence of new aesthetic practices in the face of such political unrest. I am concerned with how to exist in environments that subject us to oppressive forces, as I am about how to attempt to counter such forces through aesthetic means, which in effect become political. I will elaborate upon this point by point.

2.1. The first domain of the thesis is ‘first person films’. As I will expand upon in the 2nd Chapter, the origins of first person films in Turkey can now be compared to their development in the US. First person films arose in the 1960s in the United States as a refusal of the terms and conditions of mainstream documentary filmmaking, which filmmakers of diverse backgrounds did not believe represented their beliefs and rights.¹⁴ The first filmmakers to use the camera subjectively were either of immigrant descent and exploring their identities on screen, such as Jonas Mekas, who immigrated to the US during World War II.

I understand these films’ first person positionalities to be implicated in wider socio-political conditions, because the *I* that is consequently uttered refers to the context within which a self is produced. Film scholar and filmmaker Alisa Lebow writes, following Jean Luc Nancy, that “the individual ‘I’ does not exist alone, but always ‘with’ another, which is

¹⁴ Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), XI–XXI.

to say being one is never singular but always implies and indeed embodies another. That means the ‘I’ is always social, always already in relation, and when it speaks, as these filmmakers do, in the first person, it may appear to be in the first person singular ‘I’ but ontologically speaking, it is always in effect the first person plural ‘we’.”¹⁵ And it this interaction with the outside that I will expand upon in Ch. 2 as part of the politics and ethics of first person filmmaking. Similarly, it is in the recent decade that filmmakers from Turkey have started addressing questions of identity. Second-generation migrant children from the European diaspora and/or within Turkey began telling their own subjective filmic histories, through which they either re-assert their backgrounds, and/or challenge essentialist notions of identity (see Ch. 3 for case studies).

I arrived at the filmic form of subjective filmic histories through being displaced from Turkey while living in London. This led to my exploring a part of Turkish history I was not previously aware of since it was absent from standard narratives recounted in school. I sought to explore this history in my film, *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders* (2010), but the lack of archival material led me to narrate the story in the first person, and that became a tool for confronting the gaps in standard Turkish history books. In other words, I became the vessel through which German’s autobiographical story was narrated. My questioning presence attempted to undo what mainstream history had enforced (I will expand on this in Ch. 1).

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, this project is born out of a number of discontents. Upon completing the *Tülay German* film, certain problematics (as will be explored in Ch. 1) led me to think more thoroughly about the author that I created onscreen. And my concern over contemporary political conflicts and how they manifested in London and Istanbul compelled me to record the first entry to *Of Dice and Men*, my essayistic video

¹⁵ Alisa Lebow, *First Person Jewish* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3.

diary for this PhD. Over the following years, the diary entries served to create a memory of the present with images and texts. I sought through film to think more broadly and conceptually about subjectivity in the face of conflict. In regards to the urgency of existing in a world in crisis, the production of subjectivity takes place in my daily filmmaking activity and is expressed through the enunciator that I conceived. Thus, first person video becomes a tool for thinking of a self within a wider society. I am also interested in how the self is produced onscreen through the enunciator (the author persona) and how it interacts with her spectators. This carries with it an impossibility; a double-bind, for who is this 'I' that is speaking, and how can I at once be my self and critically analyse my self? Lebow writes in regards to her own film *Treyf* (1998), co-directed with Cynthia Madansky, about this concern:

At the risk of sounding like a postmodern drone, I am compelled to ask: how can 'I' claim a more privileged relation to the 'real me' than my image claims onscreen? Under what discursive regime can 'I' hope to transcend the boundaries of the self I have represented as myself? In other words, who is the 'I' who critiques and how does she differ from the 'I' who performs and represents herself onscreen?¹⁶

There are numerous ways to inscribe the self onscreen, yet I will argue, following Lebow, that they are born of but one operating 'I' and it is impossible to exist without it. And yet again, there is always a time slip between the immediate and the reflective I. The I is perpetually slipping away from itself whilst being in constant change, and thus opaque to itself, but one must begin somewhere, so I too will start there and expand upon this notion of the self in Ch. 2's part on 'First Person Political'.

To return to creating an enunciator, I was also searching for a filmmaking methodology that would do justice to the complexity I encountered in Turkey with regards to the demands made on identity by a society caught between republican modernization and an Ottoman Empire history, not to speak of the largely religious conservative forces that

¹⁶ Lebow, *First Person Jewish*, 91.

currently rule the country. I then sought to undo the imposition of a homogenized form of identity through what I call the molecular enunciator in first person films, which I will develop in the following chapters. As such, I conceive of first person video works as possible vehicles for the production of new subjectivities. I further argue that such work can also become a platform through which a different dialogue with the audience could occur, through creating an intimate space between the audience and the filmmaker. I explore how these spaces can be created so that the articulations of other forms of subjectivity can flourish and create moments of affective ruptures in the act of viewing itself in the spectator's minds.

Furthermore, as an extension of the first person film form, the production of freer forms of subjectivity are expanded upon and explored in the current installation of *Of Dice and Men*. The installation is born of my dissatisfaction with parts of the documentary world that are limited by formal as well as financial restraints. Since certain first person documentaries purport to interact with political and social realities, they come up against the unrealistic expectations of mainstream requirements, which serve as obstacles to presenting alternative and counter-hegemonic subjectivities in outlets such as TV and film festivals. The durational and open research process, as well as the development of the installation set-up, enabled me to attempt to supersede the demands of the market, work with molecular budgets, and create an autonomous space through which I resisted economic pressures to capture or reflect on an alternative artistic and political process. Only later did I find myself operating within a new set of economical and political restraints within the art world through the various censorship strategies applied in Turkey and beyond, as will be explored in Ch. 2. However, the move to the installation stage further allowed me to undo my own authorial power by leaving the narrative open ended, which enables the spectator to glean whatever they do from the video work. The aim is to produce thought and provoke questions in the spectator, not to provide solidified answers.

According to Guattari, the molecular meaning is the on-going effect that a work of art has on one, the affects that persist in one's body subsequent to the encounter, and which lead one to become unified with the aesthetic experience. The molecular understanding of a film is also activated by the gaps that are left in a narrative (a writing tool I also explored in my film *Of Dice and Men*), caesuras which invite us to respond in a freer, more associative manner, as in the case study of Aykan Safoğlu's *Off-White Tulips* (Ch. 3).

2.2. This leads me to the second domain of the thesis, which are 'environments rife with political turmoil'. As mentioned above, I started making an essayistic video diary every day by collecting politically charged moments because I sensed that something was changing; there was an awakening from a long slumber of political subjectivities, and although I did not know where we were headed during this period of uprisings, I wanted to document it. The identity-based struggles, as well as the increasing neoliberal condition, both of which were global, manifested themselves differently in each country. And although the connecting tissue for these social discomforts for me was that both of the nations' peoples were subjected to different forms of injustice, while UK citizens were outraged with the 1% as it was called (the top tier of the richest people of the country), Turkish citizens suffered from both the current government's corruption, hidden behind an Islamic veil, and a century-long ethnic struggle that resulted in denying the existence of minority populations, as well as an increasing conservatism.

Consequently, in highlighting the re-awakening of political subjectivities during times of unrest, the first entry of my Istanbul video diary is dated January 19, 2011, the fifth anniversary of the murder of Hrant Dink, a Turkish-Armenian human rights journalist who was assassinated in broad daylight on one of the busiest streets in Istanbul. The approaching centenary of a still largely unrecognized (by the Turkish government) Armenian Genocide

(1915–1917) along with the murder of the outspoken journalist created an immediate reaction. The event raised the consciousness of many in the nation and led to dialogues about the Turkey’s violent history, one buried in layers of largely unexcavated (in the public sphere) memories.¹⁷ The murder caused the collective crystallization of political subjectivities across different identity groups, i.e. it formed a collectivity beyond molar group formation. We might call it a molecular revolution that had been accumulating for years and which eventually saw thousands of people pouring into the streets throughout the country to demonstrate. The event was occasioned by condemnations of injustice, extreme nationalism, and suspected cover-ups by the state. It highlighted outrage in the face of the nationalism permeating the country, to the point of hate speeches made against Dink.

The fifth-year moment was also unique for me because I was not in İstanbul and so had to follow the news from afar. The shop owner around the corner from my flat in London was from Turkey, and she was Kurdish. While on my way home, I stopped to ask her if she had seen the news about the protest; jaded, she turned and said, “What is the point?” It is not hard to understand her indifference given the violence the Kurdish community has been subjected to, particularly for the past 30 years (I will elaborate on the specifics of the Kurdish case in Ch. 3). This sense of indifference, which followed soon after the protests, as well as the occupy actions that occurred in both nations, also prompted my work. It is a continuous concern for me as I also constantly question what form a political way of life and making art can take in our times rather than succumbing to inertia and pessimism. How can a form of life that is joyous and politically proactive be sustained, a political agency in the face of ever-prevailing neoliberalism and increasing authoritarianism in Turkey?

2.3. This leads me to the final part of the thesis, which concerns the interrelated concepts of ‘the molecular, subjectivities, and desire’. As expressed above, to develop new

¹⁷ Meltem Ahiska, “A Deep Fissure Is Revealed after Hrant Dink’s Assassination,” *New Perspectives in Turkey*, 36 (2007): 155–64.

notions of subjectivity, I have worked closely with Guattari's writings and what he co-wrote with Deleuze, all of which I first read when making my film *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered* (2006), a portrait-film about the mental health activist Margaret Jessop. At the time of the film's production, I was involved in mental-health activism in the UK, and along with the film's subject, Margaret Jessop, went to numerous meetings to campaign for better treatment within hospitals (I elaborate more on this film in Ch. 1). Then, I came to learn of the 'La Borde' clinic, where Guattari experimented with a more egalitarian treatment of the 'boarders', their right to be 'crazy', letting their desires be free as opposed to subordinated to uniform, homogenous forms. The unique practices established there had been a source of discussion between Margaret and myself, and in various discussions we both participated in at the hospital. Desire in Guattari and Deleuze's sense is primary, as it exists in all of us, but unlike the Freudian sense of it (a perversion in need of taming), it is revolutionary by nature; it always wants to become more. It is not born of a lack as Freud believes, but is productive, is for Guattari and Deleuze a generating 'machine'.¹⁸ Desire is the core material of subjectivity, and it is by influencing and controlling desires that subjects are produced, whether by capitalism, the familial unit, psychiatry, or state repression. The new, which is an expression of the desires of individuals, challenges the status quo through molecular revolutions, or any existing ossified power.

The molecular revolutions take place on the smallest scale, underneath the molar, on a "gut" level,¹⁹ where changes occur, to resist subjectivization. Guattari calls it a "permanent

¹⁸ "Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supple segmentarity that processes molecular energies..." See *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 215. This is however not strictly positive for Guattari & Deleuze, for they also state that desire can be given a fascist determination. "It's too easy," they assert, "to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective." Ibid., 215.

¹⁹ Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy: Soft Subversions*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 246, 182.

reinvention”²⁰ in regards to ‘upgrading’ the circumstances by creating freer, less oppressive, more humane conditions to inhabit. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988), Deleuze and Guattari wrote on the structures of the molar and the molecular. The molar is the ‘macro’ way of considering wholes, structures, and systems of organization, while the molecular is a ‘micro’ way of considering changes, particle flows, and the way that elements and forces interact to produce effects.²¹ It is the revolutions of the everyday.

That is how Hrant Dink united many sufferers of the country, be they Kurdish, LGBT, or women. They could in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms be considered the molecular of the society. “There is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular... Man constitutes the majority, or rather the standard on which the majority is based: white, male, adult, ‘rational’, etc. In short, the average European, the subject of enunciation.”²² Deleuze and Guattari are limiting their own notions by defining a white man as *the* patriarchal figure of society, as Turks, Africans, and Asians are all equally capable of being patriarchal but still subjected to racial hierarchies. Nevertheless, the notion of molecularness, which is central to my thesis, helps as a starting point, and it is then that I realized that the subject of the enunciator needed to change from molar to molecular, and first person films were an apt place for this to occur. The molecular is both in the becoming subject that is the narrator just as it is in the minor ruptures that are recorded in my video and that occur on and in front of the screen.

To define what I understand by subjectivity I must turn to why I do not use the term ‘identity’. As briefly stated above, through years of displacement from Istanbul and being subjected to multiple migration issues in the UK, from the Home Office, matters of identity and belonging gained different currencies and became acute problems with which I had to engage. But, as briefly outlined above, issues of identity born during the formation of the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 9.

²² Ibid., 292.

Turkish Republic are imbued with debates over nationalism and the repression of heterogeneity for the sake of establishing a homogeneous identity particular to the limited concept of a nation. It is, however, not my intention to re-define multiple identities in this geography, for I believe that, as outlined above, we are all hybrid. Therefore, my interest rather lies in how and if the production of molecular subjectivities can counter the subjectivization of the status quo in first person films. Furthermore, just as Gürbilek writes with reference to her own embedding of personal histories in an effort to understand the present, I too embarked on this project with a similar aim, and “I was also trying to make of them more than something approached with emotion alone, more than an object of rage, regret, or merely a feeling of relief, and analyse them as a historical period when possibility and impossibility lived side by side.”²³

These matters of becoming are deeply immersed with power and subjectivation. I understand subjectivization to be the formation of a subject in relation to another. In this sense, it is subjectivity in becoming, defined by what Guattari saw as its ‘polyphonic’ nature, open to and formed by many different inputs and influences, whether they are psychological, cultural, or political. Within this, I am imbuing the notion of subjectivization with a sense of political agency and responsibility. In perceiving subjectivity as radically heterogeneous in his article “Subjectivities for Better or for Worse”, Guattari writes of subjectivity as a “permanent reinvention”²⁴ in regards to improving the circumstances that humans inhabit, as something that encompasses not only that which involves the personal, but how the subject in any given position encounters external pressures. In facing such pressures, daily encounters are dealt with on a subjective level but are simultaneously political. That is, a person who is committed to living a life — regardless of which geography she is positioned in — in an (egalitarian) manner that is productively involved with her community for egalitarian

²³ Gürbilek, *The New Cultural Climate in Turkey*, 16.

²⁴ Guattari, *Chaosophy*, 182.

relations. It is a daily way of engaging in politics, of thinking on the smallest possible scale, on a molecular scale, and working within one's immediate circumstances, affecting those that one encounters just as they affect who they encounter.

Importantly though, Guattari's conception of subjectivity is never narcissistic. As he writes: "the only acceptable finality of human activity is the production of subjectivity that is auto-enriching its relation to the world in a continuous fashion."²⁵ What I understand by that is that it is an activity, an activity that refers to a certain involvement with the world that is aimed at change and development. It is aimed towards the world, and this part highlights the nature of subjectivity so that the relationship is primary, in the sense that one does not let oneself be subjected, but by making active choices one follows one's desire to become more. In his later work *Ecosophy*, Guattari outlines three major areas to work on, which include ecology, aesthetics, and mental worlds.

But is it simply enough to state that one is not narcissistic? How can we avoid selfishness but be focused on the self by constantly thinking from a subjective position? In thinking of a political life as an artist, it was a risk I had to take, because it became an artistic tool through which to counter hegemonic forces. And this is a negotiation I do with myself every single time I produce a first person enunciator. Is it narcissistic, or does it have a wider purpose 'with regards to upgrad[ing] the circumstances I inhabit'? Perhaps one of the ways in which it moves beyond narcissism is in establishing an alternative form of becoming in the polis, which thereby legitimizes other alternative forms of identity because it is a celebration of molecular becoming. But it is also a constant questioning of the world surrounding one and others, an awareness that each of our actions has consequences in the world. Furthermore looking at the world through a first person perspective is not the same as taking oneself as the centre of the world.

²⁵ Félix Guattari, "Subjectivities for Better or Worse", 197.

The effort of living in an egalitarian manner in the Guattarian sense referred to herein is then further expressed in the enunciator, the author persona I created in my video, which I produced alongside the written component of the thesis, whereby the subjectivity I perform onscreen is always looking outside, auto-critical, aiming to enrich itself in each and every entry of the diary through molecular revolutions. Hence, I try to read the first person films I explore through this non-narcissistic prism as well. Film scholar Laura Rascaroli's²⁶ separation of essayistic first person and the personal is apt here in the sense that the essayistic allows for the fragmented to emerge, in conversations with the outside, whereas the personal reveals that which belongs to the person. In arriving at this form of first person narration, I will critically analyse my initial film's enunciator in the film on German and elaborate on the current project *Of Dice and Men* and the difference between them.

A vital aspect of Guattari's understanding of subjectivity that lends support to this thesis as well is its future-oriented approach, is that it aims for a continuous production of the self rather than "fixations on, and regressions to the past."²⁷ As such, it is not a static being that stands in opposition to normative conceptions of identity, but a constant becoming which changes within an existential territory. In the midst of Turkey's recent violent history, artists in Turkey have a tendency to view the past with a sense of melancholy and nostalgia, reclaiming fixed notions of identity as expressed in various exhibitions and books as will be explored in Ch. 2. There are at least two conditions related to this tendency in the first person films that I analyse in the Ch. 3. On the one hand, there is what I call the re-affirming of identities, as in the case of Kurdish identities in Mizgin Müjde Arslan's film *I Flew You Stayed*, whereby 'Kurdishness' is not challenged but its existence is affirmed through the film as a necessary political act. In contrast, Aykan Safoğlu's *Off-white Tulips* is a joyful and

²⁶ Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 21–43.

²⁷ Guattari, "Subjectivities for Better or Worse", 197.

hybrid articulation of queer subjectivity. It is interlaced with migrant journeys that subvert the ideology of molar identities linked to ethnicity, race, religion, and/or sexuality. The film achieves this by establishing a (fictive) molecular link between James Baldwin and Aykan Safoğlu, and how Safoğlu searches for meaning in Baldwin's writings and life story.

When I started working from a subjective position when shooting my film on German, I found Guattari's texts useful tools, or methods, for reading first person film theory and looking at first person films differently. They offered a valuable approach to: 1) thinking the first person narrator as a desiring narrator who is in continuous production, just as it is throughout the filmmaking process; 2) producing such films on molecular budgets and means and hereby potentially circumventing normative funding structures and institutions yet nevertheless finding myself operating in the new set of socio-economical restraints of the art world; and to 3) my interaction with the audience as well as rethinking the space that is created between the screen and the audience, a space which one might think of as where the molecular can gather. My aim then is not in analysing Guattari and Guattari's co-writings with Deleuze, or in making a critical evaluation of his writings, but in simply testing his proposals on subjectivity vis-à-vis particular filmic materials, which I here interrogate as my main form of resistance.

However, over 30 years after Guattari developed these concepts and ideas, the current situation is ever more violent and requires urgent action. I often ask myself how it is possible to produce political subjectivities in the face of massacres like the one that occurred in October 2015 in Ankara, the Turkish capital, during a peace demonstration which led to the death of 102 people, or the on-going violence in the Kurdish areas in Turkey, which became an umbrella for molecular subjectivities to align, or the current immigration crisis, which is the worst humanitarian crisis since WW2. As we see, violent attacks on populations often harden identity formation, evident most recently in the reaction of certain European politics

in the face of the massive migration waves the world is currently witnessing. What actual change can we make with these ideas? While molecular acts may be gratifying on a personal level, do they change the ruling structures? Do they dismantle them? Do they overturn political and economic strongholds? Do they engender new laws? How is or can desire be articulated and grow within this context? These are all questions and challenges that we are faced with when making politically informed art and are ultimately left without answers, which, nevertheless, is itself a reason to continue trying.

3. HOW?

Chapter 1: In this chapter I provide a succinct history of the foundation of the Turkish Republic and, more importantly, debates on Turkish identity. The opening section of this chapter will be a first and brief attempt at highlighting the complexity of the socio-political context within Turkey, whose specifics will be expanded upon in each following chapter.

Since this is a practice-based PhD, I will also outline my practice history because, retrospectively, I can see the evolution of my own (political) subjectivity through my past filmic practices, which will also be the basis upon which to found the conceptualizations, positionality, and methodology of this thesis. Irit Rogoff writes in *Terra Infirma* (2000) about the redundancy of notions of belonging and place and how contemporary artists have challenged previously fixed notions of identity that were imposed upon them. She states further that “It is the effort of arriving at a positionality, rather than the clarity of having a position, that should be focused on.”²⁸ Thus, after describing the context of the production for a film such as my *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders*, I will argue for the importance of first person authorship as a processual rather than a fixed position; furthermore, I will argue for an author that resists preconceived notions of Turkish identity.

²⁸ Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.

This chapter then serves as the background of the thesis, for it outlines the tensions between those who have different conceptions of what it means to be Turkish or Kurdish (or whatever) and the aesthetic tools necessary to counter subjectivation, as I came to understand it, based on my filmmaking experience.

Chapter 2: In this chapter I establish my understanding of first person films through a synthesis of key literature in the field. I attempt to work through the theories along with Guattari's understanding of molecular practices for a possible expansion of first person film theory. Furthermore, this chapter situates this research within Turkey and looks into the necessities and the kinds of developments of first person films in this specific context.

Chapter 3: In this chapter I examine two first person films performing two different subjectivities. Mizgin Müjde Arslan's *I Flew You Stayed* is the story of the director's search for her guerrilla Kurdish father who died during the Kurdish-Turkish civil war. Her film is a journey film with a clear narrative and political purpose, which is to convey the injustices the Kurdish population has suffered. The film has a set purpose, as the director also explicitly states,²⁹ which is re-asserting Kurdish identities.

The second film I analyse is Aykan Safoğlu's *Off-white Tulips*. This film depicts Istanbul in the 1960s and the 1990s and humorously criticizes the idea of modernity in Turkey while inserting snippets of queer politics. I argue that Safoğlu's film at once criticizes the (normative) conception of Turkish identity but also queers the film by mixing and merging it with different forms, by merging fiction with fact, autobiography with biography. The film becomes an extension, an exploration of Safoğlu's molecular subjectivity, and I argue it becomes an "art of the possible".

Chapter 4: This chapter elaborates on my video *Of Dice and Men*, and stands both in a mutual questioning and expanding relationship to the written component of this thesis.

²⁹ Mizgin Müjde Arslan in discussion with the author, July 2015.

Furthermore, the film is an example of a process of production of my subjectivity, a testimony of living four years within hostile political contexts.

Conclusion:

To recapitulate, the theoretical framework of this thesis is based on documentary studies interwoven with Guattari's individual and some collaborative works with Deleuze on subjectivity along with sociological studies on Turkey. This is done to address current political tensions and how they fuse with religious conservatism within Turkey. I argue in favour of first person film as a platform for the production of subjectivity as a critique and opening up of new political spaces within contemporary Turkish contexts. Therefore, this thesis is not only practice-led but also provoked by specific current conditions and how to address them.

Although I start with my journey between the UK and Turkey, I focus on Turkey as part of a process of finding my positionality through a phase of feeling "in between." Furthermore, in order to problematize Turkishness, I had to return to that unstable geographical ground and define my own position in relation to it, as a first-hand case study. As such, I looked at first person films and different subjectivities in order to see how other artists deal with similar concerns.

The thesis, thus, 1) outlines the problematics of Turkish identity, modernity, and conservatism and situates my previous artistic practices in response to these pressures; 2) it analyses the first person films' literature and attempts a new reading through Guattari (and partly Deleuze's) conceptualizations of subjectivity; 3) it exemplifies the arguments through two case studies, whereby one film re-affirms a minority identity and the other troubles these notions and offers a molecular, migrant subjectivity; and finally, 4) I critically evaluate my first person film *Of Dice and Men*, the practice component from which the PhD project as a

whole stemmed. The next phase of the film is showing it in the UK and emphasizing my migrant positionality, and to see what kind of spectator platform will be created there.

Overall, the project examines multiple ways in which subjectivities are formed in Turkey. It also examines how molar elements, such as ethnicity or sexual orientations, are suppressed through various means while simultaneously demonstrating how molecular narratives can seep into molar existence via first person films and lead to subtle transformations, or function as subversive acts of contagion. Surely, the molar and molecular invites a certain mistrust as social struggles take place at both molar as well as molecular levels. A certain molecular emancipatory organisation is perfectly able to have molar structures and struggles within itself. Therefore, the idea of the production of subjectivity as a fluid notion is vital, for it is a process, never a fixed condition where a being is rooted but is constantly in negotiation and undergoes the influx of external forces. Nevertheless, for this project, the concepts open up a space to think of subjectivity within this geography.

After having written the thesis, one of the on-going challenges is, how to have such alternative narratives heard by a wider public, how to make a significant impact with them.

CHAPTER 1. First person Film as Response to Modernization and Identity Politics

in Turkey

Look, my son. You're at an age where you have to make bigger, more serious decisions. You will do your military service soon. You'll come back and get married. You will take over our business. Therefore you should be careful how you pick your friends. You should just hang around with people who are like yourself. We are all Muslims, Turks; you should be with people who are worthy of our family. Of course you should hang around and live your life. But at the same time you should watch out for whom you are hanging around with. Look, each day I go to work for you and our nation, to make something worthy and honourable, to achieve more. Soon you will work for your wife and kids. But you should always watch out for which crowd you're in, so we don't break each other's hearts. People like these, they seek to divide our nation. Being with these people will hurt us all. Alright my boy?³⁰

The above monologue is made by a father addressing his son in *Çoğunluk* (*Majority*, 2010), Seren Yüce's recent independent feature film from Turkey. *Majority* tells the story of a Turkish boy who falls in love with a Kurdish girl and the great resistance their relationship meets within the family, as expressed above by the father. The mother, a housewife, obeys the father's rules and is herself deeply miserable. Eventually, the main character will succumb to his father's pressures and become part of the 'majority', taking over his father's business and adopting his nationalistic and racist views. The father's monologue outlines at once notions of nationalism, patriarchy, race, and religion, all of which permeate the familial dynamics of many 'Turkish' people, who, in Guattari's words, would make up the molar structure of Turkish society.

The following section, although critical of the formation of restrictive identity politics within Turkey, does not aim to be an exhaustive analysis of the contemporary outcomes of this condition; rather, it seeks to emphasize some of the possible reasons for current first person filmmakers' practices within a Turkish context. In this chapter I will outline the

³⁰ *Çoğunluk* (*Majority*), directed by Seren Yüce (2010), DVD.

problematics of Turkish identity politics and its historical context (from its roots in the Ottoman Empire to the early 20th century), followed by my first attempt at creating a “molecular enunciator” in my film *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders*.

1.1 Historical Context: Modernization and the Formation of the Turkish Identity

Until 1923, the multi-ethnic, multi-religious Ottoman Empire ruled over the territories of contemporary Turkey. The nineteenth century marks a period when increasing contacts with the West and territorial losses led to growing fears about the survival of the empire. In this period, Turkism emerged as one of the main streams of thought that highlighted the supremacy of the Turkish race.³¹ Threatened by minority nationalisms, Turkists believed that imminent action was necessary to sustain and secure the empire. Siding with the Axis Powers in World War I sealed the fate of Turkey and led to the rise of a nationalist resistance movement, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), who eventually founded the Turkish Republic in 1923. Inspired by the Enlightenment thinkers, the new republic constructed itself as a rational modern nation-state entirely in contrast to what it perceived as the decadence of the Ottoman Empire. A project of modernization imposed by state elites resulted in the dissolution of the multi-ethnic heritage of the Ottomans. Unlike the Ottoman Empire, the new state was laic, and embraced Turkish ethnicity as the central expression of Turkey’s nationalist ideals.³² Ethno-racial mobilization and secularism were fundamental elements for aiding the development of a modern Turkey that would be seen as an international advanced nation-state, rather than being permanently relegated to the peripheries of the western world

³¹ David Kushner, “Self-Perception and Identity in Contemporary Turkey,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, No. 2 (1997): 219–33.

³² For an in-depth study of laicism in Turkey, see Andrew Davison, “Interpreting Turkey’s Secular Model” in *Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey: A Hermeneutic Reconsideration* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988), 150–1.

and perceived as the geography of the ‘Terrible Turk’.³³ The ruling-elite implemented numerous reforms (political, social, economic, and cultural). These reforms included: the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, the metric system, last names, Sunday as the official day of the weekend, the change of script from Arabic to Latin characters, the prohibition of titles, hereditary positions, and wearing of religious clothing in public spaces.³⁴ Both Westernization and Turkification constituted the backbone of these reforms.

These reforms were too extreme for some to consider them strictly as ‘reforms’ and were perceived more as the top-down impositions of the decision-making elite.³⁵ The latter considered themselves as the instigators of a revolution made on behalf of the uncivilized masses, since those very people could not be trusted to take part in their own revolution.³⁶ The decision-making elite were greatly inspired by the European Enlightenment’s modernization ideals and generated a limited amount of resistance from many segments of society³⁷ for the efforts of imitating Western and modern ideals were rarely translated into regimented codes. Nonetheless, they had unforeseen consequences. For instance, one of these reforms, the alteration of the alphabet, which was hailed as increasing the level of literacy in the nation, made it impossible for anyone who did not know Ottoman Turkish to read anything that was published prior to 1928.³⁸ This outcome must have been considered by the ruling-elite, and if so, altering the alphabet was a deliberate act of, if not erasing the Ottoman genealogy of Turkey, then at very least one of significantly obscuring it.

³³ Murat Ergin “‘Is the Turk a White Man?’ Towards a Theoretical Framework for Race in the Making of Turkishness” in *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, No. 6 (2008): 827–50.

³⁴ Andrew Davison, “Interpreting Turkey’s Secular Model”, 1988, 150–1.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kevin Robins, “Interrupting Identities: Turkey/Europe”, in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 70.

³⁷ Gavin D. Brockett, “Collective Action and the Turkish Revolution: Towards a Framework for the Social History of the Atatürk Era, 1923–38”, in *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34(4) (1998): 44–66.

³⁸ Esra Özyürek *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 5.

Decades later, Atatürk acquired cult status and it became illegal to even question issues related to the Turkish Republic.³⁹ Therefore, whenever there was a threat to the republic's secular identity, the military intervened in the state's affairs by enacting a coup d'état so as to reinforce Atatürk's notions of "Turkishness", laicism, and the regional control exercised by the CIA.⁴⁰ To sociologist Çağlar Keyder, "the state is a concept with an unequivocal referent in the Turkish context. In its eyes, the nation is an organic totality whose true interests can be known and fostered only by the Kemalist governing elite. It calls for constant vigilance against the forces who would dismantle the country and threaten Turkish national unity."⁴¹ In his description of a polarizing incident about a racial issue, sociologist Murat Ergin outlines a similar paranoid view of the state after a newspaper claimed that Atatürk's daughter was of Armenian origin:

A heated debate broke out in Turkey in 2004 after a Turkish-Armenian newspaper claimed that the adopted daughter of the republic's founder, Atatürk, had Armenian origins. Although some were quick to denounce the hunt for origins as an exercise in 'outdated racism', others considered the claim a conspiracy by external powers against the unity of the Turkish state. Soon, the military leadership issued a statement criticizing the news as an attack on Turkey's national unity and reminding [everyone] of the civic definition of Turkish citizenship as outlined in the constitution.⁴²

Due to such fears and following the Cold War, three violent coups took place in the second half of the 20th century (in 1960, 1971, and 1980), with each coup being an indication that modern Turkish society became "practiced in the art of repression."⁴³ The 1980 coup left a deep mark on a whole generation, which resulted in many growing disillusioned with politics, for there had never been a truly democratic platform, or public debates, upon which to found new ideas, express new subjectivities, or to form counter-cultures and resistance

³⁹ Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code is a controversial act that was used to levy several charges against artists as well as writers like Hrant Dink. The article makes it illegal to insult the Turkish nation and its related institutions.

⁴⁰ Mehmet Ali Birand, *12 Eylül, Saat: 04.00* (Istanbul: Karacan Yayınları, 1984), 1.

⁴¹ Çağlar Keyder, "The Turkish Bell Jar", in *New Left Review* 28 (2004): 65.

⁴² Ergin "Is the Turk a White Man? Towards a Theoretical Framework for Race in the Making of Turkishness" 827-50.

⁴³ Zafer Şenocak, *War Hitler Araber?: Irreführungen und den Rand Europas: Essays* (Berlin: Babel Verlag Hund & van Uffelen: 1994), 82-3.

movements. NGOs and trade unions were closed down; universities became an extension of the military-led state, thereby prohibiting any critical thought.⁴⁴ Anthropologist Leyla Neyzi describes the transition period from military coups to the internal war after 1983:

Then it was a left and right battle, which they finally managed to break in the coup in 1980. Today, alternative political projects to the left and right of the political spectrum have in recent decades been overtaken by identity-based movements, including Islamists, Kurdish, and Alevi political projects, as well as by the actions of increasingly vocal individuals (and citizen's groups) who have begun to make their own claims for the recognition of (cultural) difference and of the rights of citizens in an ostensibly democratic state...⁴⁵

But as Gürbilek notes, the situation is more complex than that. While 1980 coup gave way to a discussion of minorities it rescinded the political grounds upon which to debate them. Minority issues then became debateable solely in the emerging global market platforms. Gürbilek explains this dilemma: "Cultural identities could now express themselves without cover of a grand narrative umbrella; but the political common ground upon which those identities could transform one another had already lost its power to support them."⁴⁶ I will expand on this in the following section of this chapter.

And although modernization was necessary for advancement, and modernity largely asserts and reasserts itself through negation, Turkish identity was built on a series of

⁴⁴ According to The Grand National Assembly's report, dated 28 November 2012, the results of the 1980 coup are as follows: 650,000 people were placed under arrest; 1,683,000 people were blacklisted; 230,000 people were judged in 210,000 lawsuits; 7,000 people were requested to be put to death; 517 persons were sentenced to death; 50 of those given the death penalty were executed (26 political prisoners, 23 criminal offenders, and 1 Asala militant); the files of 259 people requested to be put to death were sent to the National Assembly; 71,000 people were judged on account of articles 141, 142, and 163 in Turkish Penal Code; 98,404 people were judged on charges of being members of a leftist, a rightist, a nationalist, a conservative, etc. organization; 388,000 people were not given a passport; 30,000 people were dismissed from their firms because they were suspects and therefore inconvenient; 14,000 people were removed from citizenship; 30,000 people went abroad as political refugees; 300 people died in a suspicious manner; there were 171 documented deaths by reasons of torture; 937 films were banned because they were found objectionable; 23,677 associations had their activities stopped; 3,854 teachers, 120 lecturers, and 47 judges were dismissed; 400 journalists were sentenced to a total of 3,315 years' imprisonment; 300 journalists were attacked; 3 journalists were shot dead; newspapers were not published for a period of 300 days; 303 cases were opened against 13 major newspapers; 39 tons of newspapers and magazines were destroyed; 299 people lost their lives in prison; 144 people died in a suspicious manner; 14 people died in a hunger strike; 16 people were shot while fleeing; 95 people were killed in combat; "Natural death reports" for 73 persons was given; and the cause of death of 43 people was announced as "suicide". See http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/sirasayi/donem24/yil01/ss376_Cilt1.pdf, last accessed on May 16, 2013.

⁴⁵ Leyla Neyzi, "Exploring Memory through Oral History in Turkey", in *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, ed. Maria Todorova (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2004), 60–76.

⁴⁶ Gürbilek, *The New Cultural Climate in Turkey*, 11.

disavowals. It was in order to resist, as noted above, being relegated a “Turk,” that radical reforms were implemented to define modernity with being Turkish and in juxtaposition to the Other, whereby the Other was defined as non-western. The story of this ethnic contrast was mapped on to a geographical polarization — with the dynamic West versus the static, immobile (and decadent) Orient. In thinking of the tensions between advancement and assimilation, western values were accepted as signs of civilization. In this specific context, the Turks, who are at the doorstep of Europe, have never been accepted as Western, despite demands that it westernize itself through globalization. This is most clear in migrant workers facing xenophobic attitudes, or in EU debates, which then further reinforced Turkey closing in on itself “with wounded pride” and taking “refuge once again in its own Turkishness caught self-sufficiency — ‘I’m enough for myself.’”⁴⁷ As Richard Falk puts it: “Turkey is not so much stranded at the European doorstep, but confined to the servants’ quarters in the European house.”⁴⁸ This diagnosis is most palpable in our day-to-day lives, as well as in cultural practices, as will become apparent below when I analyse my film *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders*.

1. 2. The Impact of Identity Politics on Turkish Citizens

As a consequence of the pressure to submit to standard forms of identity, pressure or fear established through the military coups, and the increasing tension between Islam and politics in Turkey, there was a palpable sense of brokenness entangled with increased conservatism in Turkish society.⁴⁹ Gürbilek summarises the period post 1980’s as follows:

⁴⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁴⁸ Richard Falk, “A Meditative Comment of European Doors”, in *Where Does Europe End?*, ed. Taciser Belge (Istanbul: Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly-Turkey, 1993), 63.

⁴⁹ Robins, “Interrupting Identities: Turkey/Europe”, 61–87.

In sum, we had to live through a great many things at the same time in Turkey. The extraordinary conditions of the period of repression, the rapid transformation of Turkey into a consumer society, Kemalism's loss of its monopoly on modernity, Turkey's discovery of its 'minorities' and own Eastern, provincial, Muslim face.⁵⁰

Gürbilek further states that, although minorities are re-emerging, their re-emergence is also a de-facto signature of the globalised consumer society as an eclectic diversity, hence it is the market that actually makes their 'return' (one greatly circumscribed) possible.⁵¹ She writes:

However crude, even hypocritical, the repression imposed on the rural by Kemalism was it always bore a promise, a promise of modernization, of civilization. But compared to what had been repressed, what returned in the 1980s was much more aware — or sly; it was not going to be fooled by promises anymore. The invisible repression of the market, unlike those ideologies, which forever postpone gratification of desire to some time in the future, also conceals the truth that it can never be gratified. And so the desire seeming to bear the promise of liberation when repressed may renounce all promise it bears and play it out as insolence when it returns.⁵²

Nevertheless, I am more hopeful for the emergence of these voices. A few examples will suffice to convey this: the *Saturday Mothers* are a group of mothers who since 1995 gather every Saturday near Taksim Square in Istanbul in defiance of state terror to honour their children, who 'disappeared' during the military coup eras and the civil war in the Kurdish region. Then there are the unrecognized historical 'remains', phantom remnants such as the Armenian Genocide that took place in 1915 but which continues to remain largely unrecognized.⁵³ Additionally, consider the fallout of the Population Exchange with Greece in 1964 — people who lost their homes, their possessions, and families within a matter of days, and who were permitted to take only 20 kilos of possessions and 20 US dollars of their money and forced to leave the country immediately.⁵⁴ If a nation is built on such atrocities,

⁵⁰ Gürbilek, *The New Cultural Climate in Turkey*, 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵² Gürbilek, *The New Cultural Climate in Turkey*, 87–88.

⁵³ In 1985, the United Nations recognised the Armenian Genocide, as did many countries around the globe, including the German parliament, which recently recognized it unanimously.

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/03/world/europe/armenian-genocide-germany-turkey.html?_r=0 Published June 2, 2016. Last accessed September 8, 2016.

⁵⁴ The Cultural Center DEPO in İstanbul hosted the exhibition *20 Dollars 20 Kilos* to mark the 50th anniversary of this event on March 5, 2014. The curatorial statement of the exhibit reads as follows: "The ethnic Greek community in Istanbul had largely consisted of Turkish and Greek citizens up until 1964. Although their

eventually such atrocities will resurface like silt from the depths of the geographical terrain, or manifest in films and other art works that can serve to re-inscribe forgotten histories even when they emerge in contradictory circumstances.

The memories of the aforementioned surviving and/or exiled citizens have been inscribed in first person films, such as Angela Melitopoulos' *Passing Drama* (1999), which seeks to account for the memories of citizens expelled from Asia Minor; Devrim Akkaya's *Diyar* (2013),⁵⁵ which is the first person story of an Armenian grandchild tracing her roots; and Ufuk Emiroğlu's *Mon Père, La Révolution et Moi* (2013), a second generation political migrant tracing the story of the 1980 military coup through her father's personal history,⁵⁶ to cite just a few examples. These films intend to undo what official records state, to present molecular narratives, and to re-inscribe their histories into the collective psyche. In other words, as stated in the introduction, the films are a first attempt at reclaiming identities that were suppressed for the sake of a single Turkish nationalism. Any form of identity that is denied by Turkish nationalism and not respected or represented in the public sphere, can be inscribed in film (and in other arts) and reclaimed in the future. Art then functions, or can in such cases, as an archive and record of what rulers seek to erase. As long as that art survives, it can serve as a repository of the repressed.

In discussing issues of being an object of the state and becoming a (molecular) subject, Neyzi analyses youth generationally in "Object or Subject? The Paradox of 'Youth' in Turkey": the first period (1923–50) includes the educated youth that embodied the nation

citizenship hardly mattered for them, the Turkish state used it as political leverage during the Cyprus dispute. The twelve thousand or so Greeks who had built a life and acquired property in Istanbul were soon expelled from the country as a result of black propaganda campaigns launched by the media under the false pretence of the Cyprus dispute. Their bank accounts were frozen, properties seized, private schools closed... While thousands of Istanbul Greeks—who, by and large, had never been to Greece in their entire lives—were being deported, they were only allowed to take 20 kilos of baggage and 20 dollars with them. The exiles were accompanied by their spouses, children, partners, and loved ones. Fifty thousand exiles, who were accused of being too Greek in Turkey and too Turkish in Greece, would soon abandon their homes and citizenship, never to return." http://www.depoistanbul.net/en/activites_detail.asp?ac=103

⁵⁵ *Diyar*, directed by Devrim Akkaya (Istanbul: Aheste Film: 2013), DVD.

⁵⁶ *Mon Père, La Révolution et Moi*, directed by Ufuk Emiroğlu (Berlin: Dschoint Ventschr Filmproduktion AG, 2013), DVD.

state's educated, westernized identity. Tülay German,⁵⁷ the subject of my film *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders* (which I will expand on below), belongs to this generation, and due to the “memory gap” of the period not discussed in official history books, discovering German's era through her was a way of also uncovering a (buried) history. The second generation includes those born between 1950 and 1980, and mostly involves the student-led movements of the left and right debates, which culminated in the 1980 coup. Finally, the third period is post-1980, mainly identified as an “apolitical” group, an overarching determination of which Neyzi is critical.⁵⁸

The transition process of Turkish youth from object to subject is still in the making⁵⁹ and first person filmmaking is one of the methods for reclaiming whatever active subjectivities they wish to establish. However, as Guattari states in “Subjectivities: For Better and For Worse”, such reclamations cannot be seen in utopic terms:

...Large movements for subjective revolution do not necessarily move in an emancipatory direction. The immense subjective revolution that has mobilized Iranian people for more than a decade has, as its focal point, religious archaisms and globally conservative social attitudes — particularly with respect to the condition of women. In a general way, one could say that contemporary history is increasingly dominated by the escalation of claims that are singularly subjective: linguistic quarrels demands for autonomy questions of nation and nationalism.⁶⁰

Similarly, one of the minority groups inhabiting the geography, the Kurds, has been denied the use of their language in public and within educational institutions. Such cultural suppression combined with economic under-development met with resistance because of the Kurdish community's desire to secure basic rights such as the right to free speech and the

⁵⁷ Tülay German is the subject of my documentary, about which I will elaborate on in the following section of this chapter. Please see my Vimeo Channel for the film. <https://vimeo.com/channels/didemsavphd> Hereafter cited as DP VC.

⁵⁸ Leyla Neyzi, “Object or Subject? The Paradox of ‘Youth’ in Turkey”, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33, No. 03 (2001): 411–432.

⁵⁹ Leyla Neyzi, “Exploring Memory through Oral History in Turkey”, in *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, ed. Maria Todorova (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2004), 60–76.

⁶⁰ Félix Guattari, “Subjectivities for Better or Worse”, 194.

freedom to practice cultural activities without the fear of losing their territory. Long periods of martial law continued in the Kurdish provinces after 1983, accompanied by torture and the forcible relocation of villagers.⁶¹ As a result of these conflicts, more than 30.000 lives were lost over a period of a 30-years-long internal war.⁶² I will elaborate further on the Kurdish issue in Chapter 3.

Relatedly, the making of *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders* (2010), which I co-directed with Barış Doğrusöz, was an act of active remembrance and a questioning of Turkey's standard historical narrative. The film served to bridge the gap between generations. German, a seminal Turkish singer who initiated Turkish popular music in the history of the republic's music, and who had also witnessed and experienced nearly 40 years of political tension in the country, was unknown to my generation. Why this lack of knowledge? Why did these people have to flee the country? Although the military juntas are not the topic of our film, the film is a consequence of them. In response to the memory fracture and the inertia caused by the military coups, as well as the increasing individualism that followed,⁶³ we attempted to create a filmic space of reflection on memory, the lack thereof, and molecular constructions of history different from what sanctioned narratives permitted. As such, the making of the film became a means for producing our own political subjectivities, thematically as well as through the process of making the film via independent means. Below is a detailed reflection on the conceptual and practical journey of the filmmaking process that ultimately led to my current research.

⁶¹ Keyder, "The Turkish Bell Jar", 72.

⁶² See Erdem Yörük's analysis of the Kurdish issue in his article "Neoliberal Hegemony and Grassroots Politics: The Islamist and Kurdish Movements", in *Turkey Reframed: Constituting Neoliberal Hegemony*, eds İsmet Akça, Barış Bekmen, and Barış Alp Özden (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 234–246.

⁶³ As I will elaborate below, this is also reflected in the filmmaking process itself.

1.3. Autobiographical History

My background is in both ethnomusicology and documentary filmmaking. I chose the latter path to pursue my passion for spontaneous and chance encounters. In my film practice I have always been inspired by the world/events around me, by being firmly based in actuality. This concreteness informs my instinctual sense for narrative, for the histories of others. Subjectivities of all formations, people with distinct personality traits who find very strong purposes in life against all odds, have always intrigued me. Retrospectively, I can see some continuity in the questions that my films ask. The main thread has always been individuals, their struggles, their existence within a society, and how they seek to integrate into that society. In other words, I have been interested in the coping mechanisms of the subject within her/his wider context, what Guattari calls the production of subjectivity.

My first film, *What do you do?* (2005),⁶⁴ was a vox pops that included interviews on what people do, whether they liked what they were doing, and what they would do in an ideal world. With this film, I was searching for a *raison d'être* and realized how few people knew what they wanted from life, let alone how to achieve it. Somehow, the fight to survive had ended up dominating anything related to personal passion, desire, and creativity. All of the artists I appreciated, and/or made films about, never accepted the social or artistic conformism that was imposed upon them, and re-created their practices in the face of financial and/or political pressures. I focused on individuals with a clear purpose or skill. For instance, the main character in my film *The Tree that Smiles at Me* (2007),⁶⁵ Kemal Usta, is a *saz* maker and an Alevi.⁶⁶ The *saz* is a sacred instrument, representative of the Alevi faith,

⁶⁴ Please see fig. 1 for stills of *What do you do?* The complete film is accessible through my VC.

⁶⁵ Please see fig. 2 for stills of *The Tree that Smiles at Me*. See DP VC for the complete film.

⁶⁶ Alevis are a minority of Shiite Muslims (a fusion of Sufism and Bektashism) who have repeatedly faced violence from Sunni fundamentalists. One tragic event took place on July 2, 1993, when a mob of Salafists blockaded, locked, and set fire to the Madımak Hotel in the city of Sivas, where a group of Alevi intellectuals

What Do You Do?

Director: Didem Pekün

5 mns / DV / 2005



Figure 1

were gathered to celebrate the 16th-century Sufi poet Pir Sultan Abdal. It resulted in the death of 35 people, mostly Alevi intellectuals.

and is often used in religious ceremonies. Kemal Usta mastered his instrument over the last 30 years of his life and has an obsessive relationship with it. In return, he is defined by and known for this skill. Neither financial nor political hardships have ever kept him from making instruments. Kemal Usta is strongly attached to his traditions and his saz making is a silent manifestation of his attachment to it.

Margaret Jessop, the main character of my film *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered* (2006),⁶⁷ is a woman with bipolar disorder who was 73-years old at the time of filming. Jessop suffered terrible violence from the UK Mental Health system; they sectioned her to the hospital and gave her countless electroshock treatments, as well as medication that she didn't consent to. This led to Jessop becoming an activist for the rights of mental health patients. As a result, she received the rank of Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) from the Queen of England,⁶⁸ but gave no value to the medal. When being honoured with the order, Jessop was invited to a ceremony with Queen Elizabeth. For Jessop, however, taking two patients from the mental hospital as her permitted guests to the ceremony (a permit to leave the hospital that would only happen in the face of monarchy), one person diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and another with deep depression, was the greater reward for Jessop. She has always been a defender of the right to be irrational and for people to freely express themselves and their desires. As she very lucidly says in my film: "But who is rational all the time? I certainly don't think Tony Blair is rational! He has got serious delusions about his standing in the world and all this sort of thing."

⁶⁷ Please see fig. 3 for stills of *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered*. See DP VC for the complete film.

⁶⁸ Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, an order of chivalry established in 1917 by King George V.

These films were formative in my experience of dealing with representation and making portraits, which I carried into the making of *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders*.⁶⁹ Jessop was particularly important in that, due both to our age difference and the vulnerability of her condition, I paid particular attention to ‘directing’ her and what to ask and what not to ask of her. The latter two films prepared me for the following task of dealing with the seminal Turkish singer Tülay German, the subject of my film *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders*. I will mostly focus on the process of filmmaking with and about her as it defined my current conceptual and practical concerns.

⁶⁹ Please see fig. 4 for stills of the film.

The Tree That Smiles At me

Director: Didem Pekün

23mns. / HDV / 2007



I do that mainly when i put the top of the saz. I come and see if it's comfortable since my home is near.



I don't have specific work hours, I leave when the saz is finished with me.

Figure 2

Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered

Director: Didem Pekün

7mns. / DV / 2006

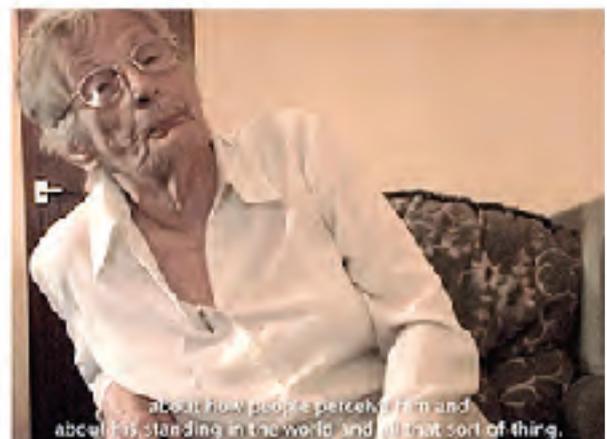
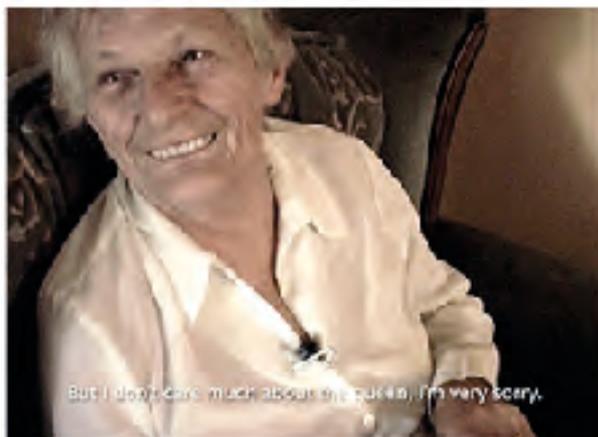


Figure 3

Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders

Director: Didem Pekün

50mns. / HDV / 2010



Figure 4

1.4. A Country in Denial of its History: Archival Politics and Working with ‘Absence’

As we observe Tülay German’s life story and musical evolution, we also witness the political evolution of the Turkish Republic. Like many of her contemporaries who appreciated western more than local music (Turkish folk music), as an expression of the period’s modernization yearnings, German was a jazz singer. She only turned to singing Turkish folk songs with new arrangements after her partner, producer, intellectual mentor, and radio programmer Erdem Buri suggested such. This was the first step toward developing what is today called Anatolian Pop. She sang the first Polyphonic Turkish Pop Music,⁷⁰ “Burçak Tarlası”, which is widely regarded as the first hit song within Turkish popular music history that is representative of the era and the Republic’s yearnings to fuse Western and local elements.

The decade following the first military coup in 1960 in Turkey was politically turbulent. The military in Turkey repeatedly suppressed the dissident voices that did not conform with Turkish identity as conceived by Atatürk, the thought line known as “Kemalizm”, and the three military coups aided the destruction of the republic’s dissident voices. When Buri was condemned to 15 years in prison for translating a Marxist book into Turkish, he and German decided to flee to Paris. German made multilingual records and gave concerts whilst also attending radio and television programs in Europe, Africa, and South America.

As noted above, Turkey went through a number of military coups, the second of which occurred in 1971, the third in 1980. These coups resulted in many artists and

⁷⁰ Turkish folk music is traditionally monophonic and thinkers of the period like Erdem Buri fused traditional music with new arrangements and western instrumentation to create a new music genre, modern and ‘appropriate’ to its historical period, which was polyphonic.

intellectuals having to flee their home country, just as did Buri and German some years before. Witnessing such events in Turkey, German no longer wanted to sing songs in French, or with lyrics devoid of intellectual value. She started singing the songs of revolutionary and mystic Turkish poets, such as Nâzım Hikmet and Yunus Emre. And by becoming more than ‘Turkish’, more than a mere imitation of western musicians, she eventually made herself molecular. During the final years of her career, she made an album titled *Respect for Nâzım Hikmet*, an ode to one of Turkey’s greatest communist poets, who died in exile in Moscow. After efforts of assimilation by singing western music, her desire to sing poems by Turkish authors is a clear reflection of an artist in diaspora who looks into cultural practices through which to connect to her native country.

To return to German’s presence, or lack thereof, in Turkish history and its significance, in contemporary Turkish society, many people from my generation were unaware of German and Buri’s presence as well as their immense contributions to Turkish popular music. The systematic military coups of 1960, 1971, and 1980 created a situation whereby the main discourse was, as Neyzi also articulates, “youth in the post-1980 period ... as apolitical consumers.”⁷¹ Aside from the countless catastrophic consequences of the military coups, they also had another deadly impact: they fractured the memory of the new generation. The systematic castration of thinkers and the censorship of artists provoked hundreds to flee the country; those who remained during the coups were either imprisoned and/or removed from their positions in universities and at newspapers.

During the production German frequently changed her mind about appearing in the film, but I never abandoned my project in the face of her vacillations because, to me, she represented many things: the absence of this knowledge in history, its absence in memory, its

⁷¹ Leyla Neyzi, “Object or Subject? The Paradox of ‘Youth’ in Turkey,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33, No. 03 (2001): 411–432.

absence in the “now.” German’s story in particular, as well as her artistically and politically active period were, in a way, filling a gap that led to the sense of inertia my generation was experiencing in Turkey. This absence, the recognition of a gap between the past of German’s generation and our present, became in a way the gateway to our historical inquiry.

German always told me, “Didem, history always keeps us apart”. She wasn’t referring only to our age difference, and that I was somehow *delayed* in meeting her, she was also referring to historical events that affected our knowledge of the past and the present. This absence of memory was further physically highlighted when I started doing research for the film with my co-director and we faced difficulties acquiring archival material. Turkish National Television and the Radio Service’s archives were difficult to gain access to; the process, as expected with any archival resource, was highly bureaucratic. Despite her fame and status, I could only find one tape from the 1970s. The TRT, the Radio Service’s TV channel, had been the only television station up until 1989, which is when private television channels came into existence in Turkey. The entire visual memory of the country therefore depended on TRT’s treatment of its visual material and preservation. Anecdotal discourse about TRT’s archive is that there had been a flood in the building that serves as the “house” for the archive and that it destroyed most of the recordings. Those that were not destroyed oxidized over time.

How then to think of this archive and, furthermore, how to think of these archival images that belong to the period that the military tried so hard to eliminate. If an archive and its preservation concern the control of power, as philosopher Jacques Derrida suggests, then what do we make of a country that systematically erases its memory? To control memory is to control identity and history, to control being in time, and thus to exercise control of the polis. As Derrida writes: “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the

participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”⁷² The period, from which we could trace no archival material, was suppressed through military coups and was a time when identity politics were challenged so as to secure the molar structure of society; there were women’s movements, left and right debates, as was the case throughout much of the world. Nonetheless, it is through this precise lack that we started uncovering the violent history of Turkey and tracing the initial molecular subjectivities through Tülay German’s own musical history.

In “Politics of the Archive: Translations in Film”, filmmaker and writer Hito Steyerl also describes the political implications of the “afterlives” of films during her pursuit of a movie titled *Battle of Neretva* (1969). Evoking philosopher Walter Benjamin’s notion of the afterlives of artefacts as “translations”, Steyerl analyses different versions of the film she succeeds in acquiring. By illustrating its visual and linguistic modifications, she states that this translation process implies certain political and economical processes:

Specific forces had been tearing it and had pushed part of it into a hors-champ, which is defined by political and economic factors. Within the contradictory dynamics of globalization and post communism/post colonialism [in the specific case of Turkey there is also post-coup periods], archives fragment and multiply, some become porous and leak, some bend and twist their contents. While some images are being destroyed for good, others can never be deleted again.⁷³

In the same spirit, when we viewed our film and the archive footage that we were able to acquire, one clip stands out as the most curious. A *leaked* clip from 1965 speaks of the period and German on various levels: approximately 25 seconds in duration, the clip is from a performance in *As Club (As Klüp)*, a molecular space which German co-founded with Buri in 1965 during a period of intense political unrest. When right-wing extremists were threatening Tülay and Erdem Buri, *As Klüp* became a space for intellectual debates and

⁷² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.

⁷³ Hito Steyerl, “Politics of the Archive.” Last modified March 2008. Last accessed February 22, 2013. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/steyerl/en>.

voices of dissent.⁷⁴ Hence that clip offered a glimpse into an era from which we had no other visual or aural material, except several photographs showing the electrifying political energy of the time. The rest of the clip was, as Steyerl asserts in the above quote, “destroyed for good”.⁷⁵

In contrast to the archival politics of Turkey, we found many of German’s performances on French Television through the French National Archive. But at the same time, this limited the visual materials to German’s post-Turkey period, from 1967 onwards. Furthermore, since she renewed herself every decade, such footage would represent only a certain period of her career, a particular genre of music only.

One final means of acquiring material was to resort to German’s personal archive. In addition to her collection of photographs, she had a number of partly damaged VHS tapes. We had them digitized, but some parts had already oxidized, and we did not know who held the rights to each video. We *bent* the footage, slowed it down, added the music, and *brought it back to life*; in this case, we were the counterforce resurrecting the archive in order to preserve memory. Through restoring German’s archive and using it in our film, we presented a counter-force against the erasure of memory, and thereby history, of voices of dissent that have opposed hegemonic forces. This was our molecular way of re-writing history, of challenging the official record.

As anthropologist Esra Özyürek argues in *The Politics of Public Memory* (2007), this practice of working with archive and memory, and the third generation citizens’ current artistic practices, are a method for competing claims of different subjectivities to which, with my film, I could claim to be a part of. One simply has to consider various cultural venues in

⁷⁴ Please see clip 01 in DP VC.

⁷⁵ Steyerl, “Politics of the Archive.” Last modified March 2008. Last accessed February 22, 2013. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/steyerl/en>

the city of Istanbul to observe the endless exhibitions of minority archival displays⁷⁶ against homogenizing policies and national boundaries. Through this film we uncovered the molecular subjectivities of an era, which the government sought to vigorously suppress, whether via military coups, archival destruction, and other means. Below is a treatment of the filmic material and explanation of how I arrived at first person filmmaking.

1.5. From Identity to Subjectivity: Arriving at First Person Film as a Response to Modernization and Identity Politics in Turkey

As mentioned above, when we started making the film about Tülay German the lack of archival material was a major problem, but this forced us to be visually inventive. We did not have a protagonist to interview and were able to trace scarcely few archive videos. Our visual tools were formed of a number of photographs as well as *The Blackbox of the Plane which Never Crashed*, German's autobiography.⁷⁷ From the beginning of the filmmaking process, we were interested in the reasons for her absence in (and from) the national memory rather than making a mere biopic. Therefore, as I will explain further below, the decision for a different mode of filmmaking was twofold. It was at once parallel to our thinking about a need for a different filmic language in response to normalizing and profit-oriented media, but also a search for content about a subject that did not exist in official histories due to a repressive regime.

The production process started in France. Since the French National Archive centres held a majority of the footage related to German, they were our first destination for sequestering funding. However, although interested in German as a person and as an artist, they were not certain that they wanted to offer support. From their position as the holders of

⁷⁶ See for Instance SALT Galata's archive exhibition room and DEPO Istanbul of Anadolu Kültür, which predominantly exhibit archival displays.

⁷⁷ Tülay German, *Düsmemiş Bir Uçağın Kara Kutusu* (Istanbul: Çınar Yayınevi, 2001). The English translation of the book title is German's own.

the rights to the archival footage, they felt the right to comment on the content of the visual material. The footage that I showed to them was from a French talk show. When one of the interviewers asks German, “Do you want to get rid of your foreign accent?” she states, “No, I want to speak just like you.” Next, she starts singing the jazz classic “Summertime.” That her intonation, as her pitch, is perfect is undeniable, but when she concludes singing, one of the interviewers states, “It would have been so good if you implemented your music with your local elements.” That specific moment was highlighted again when I showed the clip to another French producer, who was unfazed and showed me a clip of Janis Joplin singing “Summertime.”⁷⁸

The unsaid, yet extremely loud point that these cultural impresarios were making was that Tülay German was not exotic or oriental enough. She somehow did not meet their preconceived ideas of what a Turkish woman should look or sound like. All the westernization in Turkey, from cultural practices to Western female standards, to linguistic skills, were perfectly adopted, appropriated, and repeated, yet they were not enough to make German one of *them* either. She remained the Turk, yet one who was not Turkish enough. In Turkey, there was a pressing need for her to be more Europeanized due to the Modernization politics of Atatürk, whereas producers of mainstream television in Europe expected that she be quintessentially *Turkish*. It became clear that we in Turkey were not the only ones puzzled by notions of *Turkishness*.

While I observed German being forced into a certain conformism when singing jazz standards while she was displaced, I was undergoing a similar process in my filmmaking. In a pitching session that I attended to fundraise for the film, whereby the filmmakers would

⁷⁸ Please see clip 2 on DP VC.

present their projects to people from the BBC,⁷⁹ Sundance, Channel 4, et al., I remember distinctly how at the end of a session with Channel 4's commissioning editor I was asked, "Do you want to make a niche film which about a thousand people see, or a major film which you can broadcast on a major television station and which millions will see? Because if latter is the case, then you have to change your style." The situation was none too different thirty years ago, as is evident in an interview wherein Deleuze describes how the "system of 'acculturation' and anti-creativity specific to the developed nations is taking shape." He states further that this is "far worse than censorship", which "produces a ferment beneath the surface, but reaction seeks to make everything impossible. This sterile phase won't necessarily go on indefinitely. For the moment, just about all one can do is to set up networks to counter it."⁸⁰ In fact, the forms of acculturation Deleuze criticized have essentially become ever more pervasive and accelerated, and in the form of capital and its close relationship to the state. For instance, in Turkey, the current government AKP owns and/or has a very close relationship to the mainstream media.⁸¹ These forms of control remain trenchant problems. My project is part of the molecular practices and subjectivities that aim to counter it.

When we could find neither a European, nor local producer for our film, we searched for support from other networks. As I mentioned above, the system of acculturation is far worse than censorship or complete banning, and the television standards are very explicit about how to attract audiences. In brief, each film should fit into a certain time slot, age group, and broadcast time. It should be a certain length and unfold at a certain speed so as not to lose the audience's attention. In our case, Tülay German was already a forgotten icon unfamiliar to contemporary European audiences.

⁷⁹ For instance, the BBC's commissioning requirements are explained in detail in their website in terms of length, content, treatment, and format. Cf. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/>

⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972–1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 27.

⁸¹ Networks of Dispossession is a collective data system that compiles and maps the relations of capital and power in Turkey and displays the close relationship the government has to media. It was created by Yaşar Adanalı, Ayça Aldatmaz, Burak Arıkan, Elif İnce, Esra Gürakar, Özgül Şen, Zeyno Üstün, Özlem Zingil and anonymous participants. "Mülksüzleştirme Ağları," Graph Commons, last accessed August 24, 2016, <https://graphcommons.com/hubs/mulksuzlestirme>.

What compounded our difficulties was that the year during which we were seeking funding was 2008, the worst world financial crisis since the 1929 Great Depression. In Europe, television stations had considerably reduced budgets and the government of each EU member had reduced the level of support given to the arts. For television commissioning editors, it was not the time for taking risks and challenging audiences. We either had to have German on screen, or interview a number of established artists along with her archive material in order to make a TV documentary and receive funding. As a result, we made the film according to our own principles, without any financial support whatsoever,⁸² and with our own facilities. I did the voice-over, edited the film, and oversaw the production process while my co-director Barış did the camera work and oversaw post-production. Even though it took considerably longer to direct, it was possible to complete the film.⁸³ Therefore, we had initially created a molecular production space, followed by a new author person to uncover a part of history when these dissident subjectivities were explicitly suppressed.

To achieve the free production space to direct the film as we preferred, to highlight the relationship of history to contemporary times and the impact of history, I decided with my co-director to use first person narration and ask questions directly. There were two interrelated outcomes to this approach: first, it created a link between the past and the present. In an edition of *New Perspectives on Turkey*, editors Asuman Suner and Ayşe Öncü write about the importance of thinking about the past with the present, and state that we must “think about ‘the old’ and ‘the new’ together, as occupying the same public space, rather than to see them as mutually exclusive phenomena”⁸⁴ and thereby leave a mark for the future. By adding my presence to the film, I was able to make a reading of the period, a subjective interpretation one could define/speak of as molecular politics through intervening in the

⁸² In-kind support was provided in the form of flight tickets, lent cameras, and lodging.

⁸³ *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders* (2010) screened at over 25 international film festivals and was nominated for two awards.

⁸⁴ Asuman Suner & Ayşe Öncü, *New Perspectives in Turkey*, 36 (2007): 5.

writing of molar history. Although molecular political actions have limited circumferences and spheres of influence, in the case of this film, because of its being featured in international film festivals, conferences, and so on, its reach was far broader. A molecular act that functioned on a larger scale that, perhaps, infected molar history. If it does not lead to an immediate change in the narrative of Turkish popular music history, it is a record that remains, a molecular testimonial.

Second, my conviction was similar to what Lebow⁸⁵ writes of in reference to the resonance of first person films in the wider social realm within which they are situated. As Lebow writes: “If there can be said to be a grammar of the filmic autobiography, that grammar is surely film in the first person but it is not the first person singular. Autobiographical film implicates others in its quest to represent a self, implicitly constructing a subject always already in-relation — that is, in the first person plural.”⁸⁶ Thus, my story of the film reflected the context within which I was situated, and which I was questioning, and I became a vessel through which German’s story, and her wider surroundings, was revealed. Through such an approach, unconstrained by documentary concerns for truth or fact, I could conflate history and personal history. As film scholar Catherine Russell also notes, this type of approach enables a transformation; it is a point where “autobiography becomes auto-ethnography,” “the point where the film — or video maker — understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social transformations and historical processes.”⁸⁷ What was important to me was that the past was never fully past in always being inextricably part of the/our future. It is this aspect of history that I mostly attempted to emphasize in the film by establishing a connection between the past and the present, between German and myself. For instance, in the section titled “Tabula rasa” (the film on German is organized as chapters),

⁸⁵ Lebow, *First Person Jewish*, XXVIII–XXXIII.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* XII.

⁸⁷ Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography. The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (London: Duke University Press, 1999), 276.

German's voice is laid over archival images as she recounts her homesickness followed by her disappointments after her arrival to İstanbul a decade after she left. The sequence is followed by my voiceover recounting the period of 1980 over images of the coup, which is then followed by contemporary images, reflecting on the impacts of the junta. As I narrate:⁸⁸

Tülay German was right to feel this way; the country was no longer what it used to be. Following her return to Paris on March 12, 1971, there was a military coup in Turkey. Many artists and thinkers were forced to flee the country. And then, after 10 years of turmoil, the last coup on September 12, 1980, which remains a disaster for many today. The consequences were disastrous; it quelled something in the spirit of the country and tempered her liberties. At least for 3 years there was a state of terror and turmoil. The so-called left and right fights, slow deterioration of Marxist thinking spread through the Soviets and not having another option to replace it. Turkey was affected by it, just as everywhere else in the world. The economical despair the country was in, devaluations, followed by the new neoliberal period, which shook humanistic values.

I was born right at this period. Today I am asking myself, how did these events shape my/our youth?

My desire for the first person approach was not dissimilar to the seminal essay “The Birth of a New Avant-garde: La camera-stylo” (1948), whereby French film critic and film director Alexandre Astruc highlights the personal aspect of the camera. Astruc's essay was pivotal in defining the moment when the camera became a subjective tool rather than government-imposed art production under certain political regimes. More specifically, it focused on the free form of the new cinema, which would reflect the point of view of an artist, hence the ‘camera-stylo’ metaphor. Astruc furthers his argument in laying the groundwork for what today is called ‘thinking films’ by stating that these films “can tackle any subject, any genre. The most philosophical meditations on human production, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions lie well within its province.”⁸⁹ As stated in my introduction, similar to Astruc's critique of written attempts at creating biographies and how

⁸⁸ Please see clip 03, DP VC.

⁸⁹ Alexandre Astruc, “The Birth of the New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo,” in *The New Wave*, ed. P. Graham (London Secker & Warburg, 1968 [1948]).

they fail and the “idiotic transformations they impose on the works”,⁹⁰ I was equally perturbed by the idea of reducing German’s story to a number of interviews, because one of the main concerns for me as a filmmaker arose from the typical categorization of documentary film as *non-fiction* as opposed to *fiction*, making an audience expect the film to convey a *truth* or *truths*, or that it be oriented around strictly verifiable facts. This responsibility of representing reality plagued me because it brought with it the ethical responsibility of claiming a truthful representation of a period I did not live through, speaking and speculating about a protagonist that did not speak for herself, and speculating about her relationship with Buri, which she insisted remain private, however cinematically appealing it might be. In “Memory Essays,” film scholar Nora Alter illustrates a similar dilemma:

Since film, video, or literature is the work of re-presentation, veracity is impossibility for a number of reasons. These include the reality of a temporal and spatial lag between the events, for often they took place years earlier and in another place. Or, as Chris Marker quoting Boris Souvarine describes it in the CD-ROM *Immemory*: “L’histoire est quelque chose qui n’as pas eu lieu, raconté par quelqu’un qui n’était pas là”.⁹¹ [History is something that did not take place, told by someone who was not there.]⁹²

These different obstacles kept me from ‘representing someone else’s reality’; instead, I embarked on an imaginary conversation with German’s historical self on concepts of revolt, displacement, and her art, which were all put on screen from my subjective POV. Hence, with this film, my treatment of documentary material shifted from a mimetic to an evocative and affective relationship with the image. Ultimately, this search for working with actuality in a different manner resulted in a new conceptual approach to truth as described by philosopher Jacques Rancière in his book *Film Fables* (2006). There, Rancière analyses Chris Marker’s work in non-fiction, whereby he moves from an Aristotelian idea of verisimilitude,

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Nora Alter, “Memory Essays,” in *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age*, ed. Ursula Biemann (New York: Edition Voldemeer Zürich, 2003), 14.

⁹² Author’s translations.

“a plot whose truth-value depends on a system of affinities, and verisimilitudes that presupposes the objectification of the space-time specific to fiction”,⁹³ to the poetics of signs, and assemblages of signs, which are put into a resonant, dissonant, or, in Guattari’s terms, a-signifying⁹⁴ relationship. This results in a “power of metamorphoses by which a combination of signs solidifies into an opaque object or deploys itself in a signifying living form...”⁹⁵ Similarly, we combined archive footage with photographs along with contemporary images and a voice-over and sound design to create a metamorphosis of the many embedded significations of the archival image. Our objective was to offer an alternative, affective, but inconclusive reading of history from a subjective situatedness. I aimed at writing narration that was suggestive, or completely detached from the image, rather than explanatory; not a description, but rather the sense of an idea, what Rancière in *Film Fables*⁹⁶ would call the production of “a truth effect”. For instance, in the beginning of the section titled “Rootless Trees”, my voice-over narrates over images of me drifting through the streets, like a molecule, watching a street performer do capoeira, the night lights of a city, and driving in a car:

During one of my trips to Paris to visit Tülay German I drift in the streets of Paris. I remember my own experiences. Adaptation, change. It is inevitable with moving to a new country. Radical change imposes itself. To develop, to evolve. And the individual finds herself with a new identity. And at best, with a sense of universality. When I went to London I had to analyse first and then re-adjust myself.

Along with this voice-over, the sequence was made to create an evocative visual, combined with both diegetic sounds, but also with Tülay German’s music. This was my first attempt at creating a new author persona as well as working with actuality in a different manner. The enunciator in that film was not fictionalized, as the one I created in my current video project, *Of Dice and Men*. Within the process of this PhD I distanced the personal from

⁹³ Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables* (New York: Berg, 2006), 160.

⁹⁴ Guattari, *Chaosophy*, 246.

⁹⁵ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 160.

⁹⁶ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 158.

the represented enunciator on screen even more so that it is mostly concerned historical rather than personal events.

To recapitulate, the reason for this position is related, as mentioned above, to two pressures that the project was born out of: the demands of profit-oriented media, as well as the historical pressures of “being Turkish”, which I questioned through German’s story. Therefore, I appeared on-screen as well as in the voice-over as the protagonist who was searching for German, the elusive figure who would fill in a historical gap (for myself and the viewer) and serve as part of the molecular history of Turkey. In writing the voice-over, I strove not to reveal the personal but to remain a witness observing society from a subjective point of view, observing history, and observing public events in order to navigate “through the fog”.⁹⁷ The screen appearance of myself was used to fill in the gap that was caused due to German’s absence.

When I look at this film now the first discomfort is seeing myself on screen, which resonates with the main problem I have with subjectivity: narcissism. Did I really need to be onscreen? While there was scarce archive footage, we had to find solutions for conveying the story. I often ask myself this question, and I have not appeared in my following films even though I still work subjectively. In any of my future works, I will most likely not appear onscreen. Now the main issue for me is how much of the onscreen (via voice over or otherwise) Didem did I reveal? How much of it is fictional, as in Chris Marker’s authors, and what facet do I reveal? This, I believe, is the journey of a production of a molecular self, aimed outside, as “The only acceptable end result of human activity is the production of subjectivity such that its relation to the world is sustained and enriched.”⁹⁸ This has become

⁹⁷ “Through the fog” is a phrase borrowed from the eponymous exhibition title where *Of Dice and Men* was shown. State of Concept, Athens, 2016, curated by Nick Aikens.

⁹⁸ Félix Guattari, “Subjectivities for Better or Worse”, in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. G. Genosko (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 194.

one of my main preoccupations in the current project, *Of Dice and Men*, as I will describe in the final chapter.

Retrospectively, I can now see that this filmmaking process and its content was a platform for the production of my own political subjectivity, and it laid the ground for my current project, *Of Dice and Men*. *Of Dice and Men* is at once a response to the capitalist logics in the arts that manifested itself in the form of a new filmmaking method. It also continues addressing issues related to being Turkish, driven with a motive to write subjective and molecular histories as they unfold before my eyes, to think with images and sounds.

Hence the PhD project, the film, and the written component argue that first person storytelling is a vehicle and a strategy for challenging imposed forms of identity; in the example here, identity is established through the writing of history, and thereby exclusion of subjectivities and the molecular that could undo, question, or intervene in the dominant narrative. Rather than being based on imposed identities and cementing those, first person films may serve as a way to investigate the discursive possibilities of new, molecular subjectivities. The following chapter will situate the first person within Turkey through a reading of the existing literature.

CHAPTER 2: Theorizing First Person Film and its Practice in Turkey

In the following three parts of the first person film literature section, I will first outline my reasons for adopting terminology from several different theorists, explain why I follow Alisa Lebow's 'first person film' term, then summarise the history of first person film practices. In the third part, I will attempt to delineate a more theoretical debate concerning ethics and argue for the political potential of such filmic practices. Consequently, I will establish my approach to first person films and the kind of subjectivity/ies that the films I study express, guided by the writings of Guattari and what he co-wrote with Deleuze.

In the second section of the chapter I will establish the current urgency these films (namely *Off-white Tulips* and *I Flew You Stayed*) have today in Turkey. I suggest there are at least 3 interrelated reasons for such practices; first, the lack of state funding; second, as I will outline below in the second section of this chapter, the present socio-political climate in the country — as is the case throughout the world in terms of the ascendance of identity politics following the decline of leftist politics — leads minorities to re-claim a stronger and more pervasive social and political presence through the molecular links they establish in the face of oppressive regimes. Finally, there is a desire to communicate this new trend to diverse audiences, which leads to molecular links of a smaller scale.

2.1. First Person Film

2.1.1 Terminology

In this section I will establish why, to define my practice research area, I chose the term “first person”, which I adopt from Alisa Lebow who defines the term in her monograph *First Person Jewish* (2008). The terminology of subjective filmmaking varies according to the theorist. While Rascaroli uses ‘personal camera’ as an umbrella term for the practices of such subjective filmmaking, Renov’s preferred phrase is ‘filmic autobiography’, whereas Russell draws on Mary Louise Pratt’s ethnographic term — ‘autoethnography’ — to define filmmaking theory.⁹⁹ In his book *The Essay Film*,¹⁰⁰ Timothy Corrigan describes five types of essay-films, which include essay film as interview, essayistic travel films, essayistic diaries, essay film as editorial, and refractive cinema (films questioning films and the filmic form itself). Corrigan uses these definitions to delineate the different modes of subjectivity present in first person films whereas Elizabeth Bruss simply argues that “there is no real cinematic equivalent for autobiography.”¹⁰¹

Different terms have different implications, and these differences are important for me in terms of my own film practice as well. However much possible, I try to draw a line between not revealing the personal but speaking from a subjective position, which is done through an essayistic mode (this will be further elucidated in the final chapter). My specific focus and interest as a filmmaker is in forms that take a subjective viewpoint from which to critically view the world and its social, political, and economic orders rather than revealing that which is personal. To do this is to move beyond ego-oriented notions of subjectivity and

⁹⁹ Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 276.

¹⁰⁰ Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Bruss, “Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film”, in Olney, J. (ed.) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 296.

into more of a figural or typological form of subjectivity, as I described when explaining Guattari's concepts in the introduction. In *Chaosophy*, Guattari speaks of the necessity of stressing the “fundamentally pluralist, multicentered, heterogeneous character of contemporary subjectivity, in spite of the homogenization which objectifies through mass-mediatization. In this respect, an individual is already a ‘collective’ of heterogeneous components.”¹⁰² The individual then is never solely an individual but a multiplicity, and so the subjectivity is not necessarily limited to the personal. Relatedly, any notion of ‘Turkishness’ is then not stable. The filmic practices within Turkey that I address herein aim to challenge the modernist ideas about Turkish identity as described in Ch. 1 through a molecular subjectivity, the *I* enounced in the films. I also wish to distinguish at this point that the films that I will study are more modest, open, and exploratory narratives which are different from the mainstream BBC and Channel 4 type first person works which are typically centred around experts, i.e. ‘the talking-head’ types of documentaries or other non-political first person films.

As an extension of my thinking regarding subjectivity and its non-narcissistic potential and relationship to society more broadly, in general, I do not use the term “personal” camera or “new autobiography” as suggested by Rascaroli and Renov respectively because, while a film may not contain ‘personal’ content, it can still be subjective. Ergo, if the personal is “that which belongs to the person”, I understand by first person that which is uttered in the first person but not necessarily personal. The personal could be seen in contrast to the public, i.e. the personal as private and intimate versus a first person approach that does not delineate a private sphere. Personal implies a certain kind of confessional content whereas first person does not and instead points to the narrator in the film, the *I* of the filmmaker.

¹⁰² Félix Guattari and Sylvère Lotringer, *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972–1977* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 29.

Lebow, who coined the term “first person film”, describes the first person film as follows: “The designation ‘first person film’ is foremost about a mode of address: these films ‘speak’ from the articulated point of view of the filmmaker who readily acknowledges her subjective position.”¹⁰³ However, while subjective, Lebow notes further that “...first person film is not primarily, and certainly not always explicitly, autobiographical.”¹⁰⁴ Lebow expands on the wider resonances the first person has with reference to Jean Luc Nancy’s

formulation of the singular plural, wherein the individual “I” does not exist alone, but always ‘with’ another, which is to say being one is never singular but always implies and indeed embodies another. That means the ‘I’ is always social, always already in relation, and when it speaks, as these filmmakers do, in the first person, it may appear to be in the first person singular ‘I’ but ontologically speaking, it is always in effect, the first person plural ‘we’.¹⁰⁵

While I will explore this notion of the multiplistic social “I” further in the third section of this chapter where I elaborate on politics, I want to state here that this quote highlights the political reasons for my adopting this first person terminology.

In surveying the filmic practices that employ a subjective stance, Michael Renov refers to them as “new autobiography”¹⁰⁶ and he analyses them further, both through their medium specificities as confessional video, electronic essay, and personal Web page, but also through what he calls the web of social relations in which they exist, such as with domestic ethnography.¹⁰⁷ (I will write more about this in the following chapter in the section on the film *I Flew You Stayed*.) Although a director authors each and every film, it is the distinct self-inscription of the subject that unites first person films. As Renov states when describing first person filmic practices, “the author, the narrator, and the protagonist are identical”,¹⁰⁸ yet

¹⁰³ Lebow, *Cinema of Me*, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁵ Lebow, *Cinema of Me*, 2–3.

¹⁰⁶ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 104.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., XIII.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., XI.

in reference to the aforementioned micro genres, Renov says there are also different ways in which the self is inscribed in such films.

Both Russell and Rascaroli attempt to delineate different methodologies for self-inscription. Rascaroli's formulations for separating different tensions in first person films are: "I, the author, am reflecting on a problem, and share my thoughts with you, the spectator."¹⁰⁹ Her formulation on diary film is: "I am recording events that I have witnessed and impressions and emotions I have experienced." About her notebook films she says: "I am taking notes of ideas, events, existents for future use." Finally, about her self-portrait: "I am making a representation of myself."¹¹⁰ In examining different sub-categories, Rascaroli tracks the literary or artistic origins of the essay, the diary, the self-portrait, and the notebook, and discusses how their filmic versions developed from their literary counterparts. Rascaroli also stresses the subjective function of essay films, stating that they are a kind of personal filmmaking that is subjective yet not necessarily autobiographical,¹¹¹ for the autobiographical is stripped of its narcissistic values and the documentary form of its knowledge-giving position. She claims that the essay-film is that form which reflects upon external issues from a subjective point of view but is not concerned with self-revelation. These films speak from their own position to an external world, critically, analytically, and yet they confirm their political selves, i.e. a specific personal viewpoint. Rascaroli also differentiates between the diary film, the notebook film, and the self-portrait film while situating all of them under the category of 'personal camera'. Importantly, she separates essay-film as a form of communication that the filmmaker uses to think and converse with the viewer through the inter-communicative structure — a point in her argument that is crucial for this project as well. Rascaroli asserts that interpellation is *de facto* the most important aspect of essay film, whereby the enunciator addresses and asks questions to the spectator, rather than providing

¹⁰⁹ Rascaroli, *Personal Camera*, 15–16.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 2.

ready-made information.¹¹² This is different from Renov's understanding, since he sees the 'essayistic' self-interrogation as sharing some autobiographical characteristics.¹¹³ However, like Rascaroli, I think that the essayistic form has a distinct characteristic in that the gaze is outwardly directed, thus, the self is preoccupied with the world, rather than some form of interiority, the personal.

Similarly, in *Experimental Ethnography*, Catherine Russell explores modes of scientific enquiry and of cultural critique with experiments in textual form in which she suggests various methods for constructing such fragmented identities. In the final chapter, "Autoethnography: Journeys of the Self", Russell states that there are four levels of self-inscription that lead to the construction of an on-screen self:

- The self as speaker, the first person voice-over;
- The self as seer, who is the 'origin of the gaze';
- The self as the seen, the 'body image';
- The self as the avant-garde collagist or editor.¹¹⁴

Russell also distinguishes among techniques of self-inscription, such as creating new voices through self-performing, testimonial, confessional discourse, or through memory and travel, which create temporal and spatial distances that split different moments of the self.¹¹⁵ For the purposes of my research, what's more valuable to me is the fact that these fragmented portions of the self allow filmmakers to create a non-unified fragmented self-portrait. In writing about postmodern Jewish identity and the role of these films in creating it, Lebow speaks of the myriad ways in which the self is inscribed:

Many of these independently produced films construct a second or a fictionalised "self" that severs the auto-enunciative lead character from the author of text. Others detour through family or geography in their representation of self. Still others

¹¹² Ibid., 44–63.

¹¹³ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 105.

¹¹⁴ Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography. The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Duke University Press, 1999), 277–8.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 178–80.

feature multiple authors. These films invent alter egos, present prior work as a synecdoche for self, substitute other's memories as the filmmaker's own, and swap identities between characters. In this process of self-fictionalisation, they wittingly or unwittingly contribute to the historization of a postmodern Jewish subject.¹¹⁶

In thinking of this in relation to my own filmmaking, there is the self that records events on paper and on camera (the camerawoman), there is the self that writes the voice over, there is the self that reads or rather performs the voice-over, the self who edits (the editor), who decides what occurs in the main narrative of the film and what doesn't, what is cut (the director), and that self is constantly changing over the course of four years of filmmaking. Is it possible to name and separate those selves? In my filmmaking, the self is defined by her motives, her intentionality. Namely, the content of the film and its goal in representing the self, the external, world-directed gaze as opposed to the inwardly turned one. Is there a central self that governs all these sub-selves? Following Renov, I argue for a single authorial self and the ethical and political value of such a self in the third part of this section.

But perhaps even more importantly, would the self exist without the social circle within which it is situated? As Lebow writes, "first person film merely literalises and makes apparent the fact that self narration — not to mention autobiography — is never the sole property of the speaking self. It properly belongs to larger collectivities without which the maker would be unrecognizable to herself, and effectively would have no story to tell."¹¹⁷ So not only are the fractures of the self visibly and audibly inscribed on-screen selected and inscribed by the author, but there is also a silent echo of multiple authors at work and in dialogue with the author in and throughout the film.

Elizabeth Bruss suggests that autobiographical films either stress the subject (the person filmed) or the person filming and that this replicates "the split between the 'all

¹¹⁶ Lebow, *First Person Jewish*, XIV.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XII.

perceived’ and the ‘all perceiving’.¹¹⁸ To Tony Downmunt, these onscreen split selves serve “to subvert both the omniscient surveillance of the ‘other’ implicit in Bruss’s phrase the ‘all perceived’, and the sovereign subjectivity conveyed by the phrase ‘all perceiving’.”¹¹⁹ Lebow sees a similar subversion for a challenge is brought to dualist thought by subjective filmmaking: “in truth, first person film goes beyond simply debunking documentary’s claim to objectivity. In the very awkward simultaneity of being subject *in* and subject *of*, it actually unsettles the dualism of the objective/subjective divide, rendering it inoperative.”¹²⁰ In other words, as I will elaborate in the following part on the history of first person films, the turn to subjective filmmaking is partly driven by the desire to overcome the omnipotent view of a documentarist and its attendant ethical dilemmas. Subjective filmmaking desires at once to dismantle the self and other opposition just as it seeks to re-assert the self through various methods of self inscription.

In highlighting the diversity of such filmmaking practices, in a chapter section titled “Unruly Corpus”, Lebow discusses the impossibility of establishing a clear cut category for first person Jewish film practices. First, Lebow doesn’t believe such clearly defined categories can be sustained; second, she finds such “‘hybrid-docs’ are more *about* flouting conventions and categorizations than properly constituting a coherent category in and of themselves.”¹²¹ In the *Cinema of Me*, she uses a wider umbrella and, despite their shortcomings, distinguishes between two tendencies: ‘first person singular and first person plural’. While no category can do complete justice to the films it entails and covers, a category can help in the articulation of different tendencies of filmic practices.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Bruss, “Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film”, 309.

¹¹⁹ Tony Downmunt, “A Whited Sepulchre: Autobiography and Video Diaries in ‘Post-Documentary’ Culture”, PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2009.

¹²⁰ Lebow, *Cinema of Me*, 5.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, XX.

When addressing this heretical quality of first person films, theorists often refer to Adorno's text "The Essay as Form" (1958)¹²² because of its acute analysis of positioning essay-film as a heresy within a certain context and stressing its response to that. On the one hand, Adorno names scientific knowledge and what some documentary theorists have called 'discourses of sobriety', alternatively, we have the creative treatment of material, which includes modernist filmmaking methods, through fragmentation, repetition, and so on, which for Adorno has its equivalent in poetry. Between these two lay the potential of the essay drawn from subjective desire. Also, it is Adorno's view of the heretical nature of the essay form that Rascaroli refers to, that is, how it came to function as a form of resistance to homogenization.¹²³ "It revolts above all against the doctrine — deeply rooted since Plato — that the changing and ephemeral is unworthy of philosophy; against that ancient injustice toward the transitory... The essay shies away from the violence of dogma."¹²⁴ Thus, what Rascaroli names essayistic can also be thought as first person films in general, for they shy away from the discourses of sobriety and attempt to open new spaces of thought as they resist homogenization.

Brian Winston declares that "the age of post-Griersonian documentary is upon us" — an age in which 'first person documentaries' are one of the defining characteristics. Winston welcomes our escape from "the dead weight of the Griersonian heritage"¹²⁵ and its truth claims and criticises Grierson's pretence that "his films were reports on the news pages, as it were, when in fact they were editorials for the established order".¹²⁶ He looks forward to a post-Griersonian era in which "the audience's understanding is that what is on offer is

¹²² T.W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," *New German Critique*, No. 32 (Spring–Summer, 1984; original pub. date 1958): 158.

¹²³ Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, 21.

¹²⁴ T.W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form", 158.

¹²⁵ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: Documentary – Grierson and Beyond*, (London: BFI/Palgrave, 2008), 290.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 275.

indeed... a record of a film-maker's subjective interaction with the world".¹²⁷ Likewise, Michael Chanan describes how the shift towards subjectivity and self-inscription in documentary authorship "rehearses a withdrawal of documentary from the rhetoric of the public world into a space of personal pre-occupations".¹²⁸ What Chanan calls 'the new documentary wave' of filmmakers like Michael Moore, Molly Dineen, and Agnès Varda allows for a new truth regime: "the truth they insist on telling us no longer pretends to omniscience as it used to, and is no longer delivered as if from on high, but is told from an individual or personal point of view ...".¹²⁹

The older documentary conventions of "expository realism" and their relation to public life evoke documentary film scholar Bill Nichols's well-known suggestion that documentary "has a kinship with those other nonfictional systems that together make up what we might call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare — these systems assume they have instrumental power: they can and should alter the world itself..."¹³⁰ Renov argues that "Nichols's attribution of sobriety for documentary obfuscates more than it reveals, for documentary is equally a discourse of delirium".¹³¹ He objects to Nichols' situating "documentary on the side of conscious rather than unconscious processes, public activity more than psychical reality",¹³² as, for Renov, "knowledge and desire are ineluctably intertwined".¹³³ Renov critiques Bill Nichols' emphasis on the notion of 'epistophilia' versus 'desire' in the history of documentary, and points to a gap in the knowledge of desire in Nichols' literature. Renov highlights the 1920s filmmakers of European modernism, those who resist the sober discourses established by the Scottish documentarist Grierson, as an underrepresented part of documentary history.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 290.

¹²⁸ Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 246.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 5-6

¹³⁰ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 3.

¹³¹ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 100.

¹³² Ibid., 98.

¹³³ Ibid.

Renov's main focus is on psychoanalytic theory, which, as he rightfully argues, although often employed in fiction film theory, has been overlooked in documentary studies. He states that, for instance, within the existing literature a film about sex does not evoke the sexuality of the filmmaker, nor the audience, but 'information' on sexuality, hence privileging the 'epistemic' aspect of documentary films as opposed to the 'desire' of the gaze of the filmmaker. Renov thus aims to reveal the artistic motives of the filmmakers through a psychoanalytical reading, noting that it is his "contention that the notion of desire developed through psychoanalytic theory is a crucial and generally neglected component of documentary spectatorship that deserves our careful consideration and one whose neglect has hindered the development of contemporary documentary film theory."¹³⁴

In response to the lack of the notion of desire in documentary film theory, Bill Nichols analyses and links the history of documentary to Modernist avant-garde filmmakers who largely dispensed with linearity through fragmentation, broken narratives, and so on.¹³⁵ Nichols also points out how Modernist filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Jean Vigo, and Hans Richter, albeit different in their styles and convictions, used filmic forms to propose alternative subjectivities, and it is the dreams, political ideals, and ambitions, in other words, the desires of these artists, that were highlighted in their films. For instance, Richter's film *Inflation*, which he made after the 1929 economic collapse, is formed of repetitive close-ups of faces and hands counting money, forcing its audience to reflect on issues of finance and their impact on society. This film, which employs the Soviet montage technique of juxtaposing otherwise non-continuous images, is meant to lead audiences to reflect on their relationship to money. This intention is driven by Richter's desire to make a critique of

¹³⁴ Ibid., 96.

¹³⁵ Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 4 (2001): 580–610.

capitalism with a stylistic form of editing, but not by his desire to inform the audience of the nature of economic crises.

Nichols' (historical) revisionist article outlines the potentials of documentary by laying the historical groundwork concerning documentary's ties with a desire for the political and creating new universes of references rather than producing more of the same. This can be understood as freeing the documentary from its presumed motives, or the necessity of being pedagogical, and opening it up to creative, subjective explorations of the individual filmmaker so as to express the nature of his or her multiple desires. In this, we see how film can potentially become molecular.

Literature on first person films thus shows us that subjectivity in filmmaking challenges identity politics as well as crosses the bridge between the production of knowledge and a creative exploration of the filmmaker. In other words, new knowledge is created through the creative and self-reflective exploration of the filmmaker and, consequently, what Guattari refers to as the production of the new. Similarly, Lebow writes that "as soon as a filmmaker declares 'I think' or 'I feel' in a film, the illusion of documentary disinterestedness disintegrates. First person film poses a challenge to the journalistic approach as well as to empiricist (scientific) and imperialist (ethnographic) models of filmmaking."¹³⁶ The quest for objectivity, "so long the quixotic dream of documentary," is, Lebow declares, derailed, for it is ultimately an "ill-fated quest."¹³⁷

In the case of contemporary Turkey, and like Guattari, who similarly criticized the mainstream media and emphasized the need for molecular forms,¹³⁸ I suggest some first person films that not only attempt to produce new knowledge in regards to volatile geographies, but also offer alternative molecular subjectivities within these geographies and

¹³⁶ Lebow, *First Person Jewish*, XXIII.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII.

¹³⁸ Renov draws on Foucauldian theories for his conceptions of subjectivity and positions essay-films alongside the urgent need to tell personal political stories in times of upheavals.

interpretations of history. The following two sections will outline their history and political potential respectively.

2.1.2. Historical background:

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, first person film literature is not only a young discipline, it is also an offshoot of documentary film studies. The notion of subjectivity in films had first been elaborated on by Alexandre Astruc in 1948 in his seminal article “The Birth of the New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo”,¹³⁹ as well as by Hans Richter in his April 1940 article “Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film” [“The Film Essay: A New Form of Documentary Film”], the first article on essay-film.¹⁴⁰ In their texts, Astruc and Richter expressed their desire for personal expression in the face of dominant Hollywood film practices while their writings concerned modernist avant-garde filmmakers.

Thus, although literature on the origin of films with both a documentary and a poetic impulse is fairly new, personal filmmaking can be traced to the work of the Modernist avant-garde artists of the 1920s who utilized the filmic medium to represent their personal visions of reality (i.e., Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, Joris Ivens). Avant-garde film historian P. Adams Sitney also writes that filmmakers like Stan Brakhage and Jonas Mekas were making autobiographical films from the 1950s onwards¹⁴¹ while Renov and Lebow point to the early period of documentary history, namely Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) as

¹³⁹ Alexandre Astruc, “The Birth of the New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo,” in *The New Wave*, ed. P. Graham (London Secker & Warburg, 1968 [1948]).

¹⁴⁰ Ursula Biemann, ed., *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age* (Zurich: Edition Voldemeer, 2003), 69.

¹⁴¹ P. Adams Sitney, “Autobiography in Avant-Garde Film”, in P. Adams Sitney, (ed.), *The Avant-Garde Film* (New York: New York University Press: 1978), 199–246.

well as Joris Ivens' *Rain* (1929), which chronicles rainfall in Amsterdam from the point of view of a filmmaker, Ivens himself.¹⁴²

However, following Renov, who “stresses the alignment of the Modernist critique with ethical concerns rather than with aesthetic ones and with the concomitant debates surrounding periodisation or artistic technique”,¹⁴³ I also want to focus on the ethical and political concerns of subjective practices. This positionality helps us to track the “subjective turn” in documentary filmmaking: its motives, political potential, and its relationship to the wider context, which is to say, its postmodernism, essentially a distrust of certainty. Tracking this turn also acts “as a moral and intellectual recovery”¹⁴⁴ of documentary filmmaking, whose ethics and political potential I will elaborate on in the following part.

Modernist filmmakers in the UK and the Soviet Union were to hail the camera as the discovery of the century and would use it to make films to inspire the minds of a generation. In pioneer Scottish filmmaker John Grierson's case,¹⁴⁵ making films was to serve as a way of reinforcing the existing social order rather than producing a critique of it. Since Grierson's social films thesis, documentary film studies and debates have been preoccupied with knowledge production and the persuasive delivery of such ideas. As Renov writes, “the domain of non-fiction was typically fuelled by a concern for objectivity, a belief that what was seen and heard must retain its integrity as a plausible slice of the social world. How else to persuade viewers to invest belief, to produce “visible evidence,” and even induce social action?”¹⁴⁶ In the 1960s, however, a sense of crisis and transformation led a number of artists and filmmakers in North America and in Europe to include an overtly subjective point of view in their films.

¹⁴² Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, XIX. Lebow, *First Person Jewish*, XXIII.

¹⁴³ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 132.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁴⁶ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, XVII.

One of the most important cinema-verité films is Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'un été* (Chronicle of a Summer) (1961). Rouch and Morin were convinced, unlike their direct-cinema peers, who believed in achieving truth by being as invisible as possible, that it is through adding their presence on-screen that they could achieve a moment of truth, whether through their encounter with their subjects or between protagonists. The film was shot during the summer of 1960 in Paris and focused on a group of Parisians and how they lived their lives, often initiating conversations by asking them, "Are you happy?" What excited Rouch in his filmmaking, writes Ellen Freyer, "was not to film life as it is (as opposed to direct cinema makers) — but life as it is provoked!"¹⁴⁷ Rouch and Morin believed that the camera, hence the filmmakers, acted as cathartic elements to help reveal moments of intimacy and reflection and that the director should follow these moments.

Arguably, they do achieve cathartic moments in this film such as when one of the main characters, an Italian woman, Marilou, uses the camera as a confessional medium and gives testimony of her deep depression to the filmmakers, a scene which is intensely cathartic. As Freyer writes concerning their ethical motives, this specific encounter led Rouch and Morin to question their practices. "What was their role, their responsibility in this type of situation, with its unexpected and extreme intimacies? To what extent is this justified as a film experience, and when does it become personal psychodrama?"¹⁴⁸ There were several very intimate moments in the film that required careful reconsideration in terms of the ethical questions that they posed regarding the representation of the pain of the other, which is also discussed in the last scene in the film when the protagonists watch the footage with the filmmakers.

However, one is faced with an impossible task in filmmaking terms, as Renov carefully demonstrates. Even if a film chronicles an encounter between the filmmakers and

¹⁴⁷ Freyer, in Lewis Jacobs, *The Documentary Tradition from Nanook to Woodstock* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971), 441.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 442.

their subjects, and even if they edit it together, is it free of abusing its subjects? This question leads Renov to ask a general one about documentary itself: “can any documentary act hope to escape unscathed?”¹⁴⁹ If not, the act of taking responsibility authorial responsibility as the filmmaker through adopting a subjective enunciator is one of the reasons for a ‘subjective turn’ in documentary filmmaking, and this resonates with the postmodern notion of the uncertainty and relativity of knowledge.

It is at this very moment that I would like to focus on the rise of first person films against the discourses of sobriety and the angst of filmmakers with a certain ethical concern in representing the other. That ethical concern can be briefly outlined, following Renov’s reading of Levinas, as “the primacy of justice over freedom, for responsibility, being-for-the-other, as predating consciousness. According to Levinas, the encounter with the other, the ethical encounter, antedates and is the very precondition of the construction of subjectivity, for being-in-itself.”¹⁵⁰ Renov writes about the different ethical encounters that take place in various documentary modes and the non-subjective films’ limitations in encountering the other in a just manner. He writes based on Bill Nichols’ expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, performative, and reflexive modes¹⁵¹ by setting aside the participatory, reflexive, and performative modes whereby the filmmaker and her encounter with her subjects is part of a film itself: “we know how easily the subject of documentary discourse is transformed into witness or symptom for the purposes of persuasion; in other instances, the expressivity of gesture, setting, or the very surface of the image becomes an aesthetic end in itself. In such cases, the quality of listening, of receptiveness, called for in the encounter is unlikely to occur.”¹⁵² A similar dissatisfaction with certain forms of non-fiction and how it fails to do justice to the subject at hand informed my turn to first person

¹⁴⁹ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 153.

¹⁵⁰ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 160.

¹⁵¹ Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 32–75.

¹⁵² Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 152.

filmmaking, despite its major limitations and problematics. Nevertheless, it is by taking responsibility as a filmmaker, and talking from my own positionality, that I find such practice and research politically valid. Judith Butler outlines the nature of critique and its limits in *Giving an Account of Oneself*:

any relation to the regime of truth will at the same time be a relation to myself. An operation of critique cannot take place without this reflexive dimension. To call into question a regime of truth, where that regime of truth governs subjectivation, is to call into question the truth of myself and, indeed, to question my ability to tell the truth about myself, to give an account of myself.¹⁵³

This account is somewhat similar to what Guattari calls the day-to-day production of the self as it entails Foucauldian forms of subjectivisation and self-technologies. However, what Guattari's writing lacked for me in terms of a description of an ethics of life, the "how" of living a day-to-day productive subjectivity, has been elaborated by Levinas as the "face-to-face encounter with the Other and non-indifference to the other."¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, according to Butler, in that face-to-face encounter, a truth telling must start. In other words, according to Butler, the self is opaque to every individual, never truly knowable, yet she claims that

the opacity of the subject may be a consequence of its being conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge. Moments of unknowings about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematisation. If we are formed in the context of relations that become partially irrecoverable to us, then that opacity seems to be built into our formation and follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency.¹⁵⁵

Simply put, one can think of the ethics of subjective filmmaking as the understanding that one can never fully know oneself; however, self-responsibility begins with one's encounter with others (Nancy's elucidation of subjectivity is here resonant). And through such encounters, one also encounters the self, which is in a constant state of production.

¹⁵³ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 23.

¹⁵⁴ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 152

¹⁵⁵ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 20.

In regards to the transition to autobiographical films, Renov says that although he “would not argue for the participant camera style and first person voicing of Rouch as autobiographical practice per se, they do forge a crucial historical link between the avant-gardism of the 1920s and the autobiographical outbreak of the 1980s and 1990s.”¹⁵⁶ Joram Ten Brink also acknowledges the link between the avant-garde and autobiographical history when he writes about the ‘camera-stylo’ movement and that Alain Renais, Chris Marker’s films, and *Chronique d’un Ete* were a direct consequence of it.¹⁵⁷

Following this movement involving cheaper but more importantly mobile cameras,¹⁵⁸ subjectivity in documentary filmmaking became even more overt. Direct cinema filmmakers were criticized for their fly on the wall naiveté,¹⁵⁹ and cinéma vérité for triggering moments of awkward intimacies in people’s personal lives. It became clear that representing reality in a solipsistic image was an unachievable ambition, according to various critics of direct cinema and cinéma vérité practitioners, who questioned the ethical nature of such modes of representation.¹⁶⁰

In the US, filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas (in the early 1960s) and Su Friedrich (in the 1980s) were dissatisfied with mainstream forms of representation and filmmakers presenting someone else’s story. The new subjective form of filmmaking aimed to challenge this homogenous representation of identities. Hence, two aims supported one another in the emergence of this new practice in North America: first, innovations in technology; second, a technological advancement helped artists to challenge imposed and fixed identities of gender, race, and criticisms, which were also shaped by the political discourses of the post-modern and post-structuralist era and the ensuing political movements. As Renov states, “the new

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., XXII.

¹⁵⁷ J. Ten Brink, “From Caméra-Stylo to Caméra-Crayon et puis après...” in J. Ten Brink (ed.), *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 239.

¹⁵⁸ This is still very different from today, for while cameras were mobile they were still heavy and only relatively cheap, and sound equipment had to be transported on dollies and so on.

¹⁵⁹ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (London: BFI, 1995).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

autobiography, far from offering an unselfconscious transcription of the artist's life, posits a subject never exclusive of its other-in-history...transforming the ways we think about and represent ourselves for ourselves and for others."¹⁶¹ It is the act of self-inscription and absent histories that triggered artists to pick up their cameras and write their own stories. Consequently, the first filmmakers to use the camera subjectively in the US were either of immigrant descent or in search of affirming an identity (migrant identity in the case of Jonas Mekas; queer sensibilities in the case of Su Friedrich and Sadie Benning), emphasizing feminist rights, or race as political, and so on.

To expand on one example, the work of one of the most esteemed first person filmmakers, Jonas Mekas, represents a rupture in cinema history and a contrast to mainstream filmmaking in the US at that time Mekas began shooting film there. Mekas was an immigrant filmmaker from Lithuania who migrated to the US after WW2, where the UN Refugee Organization supported his arrival. He and many artists stated their discontent with film as a mass medium and sought to reclaim a personal point of view through self-representation.¹⁶² His experience was that of an immigrant in New York and his new filmic form reflected his experiences, and the greater society, in New York.¹⁶³ In a late manifesto (one of many), Mekas critiques Hollywood films and emphasises the need for smaller subjective stories:

In the times of bigness, spectaculars, one hundred million dollar movie productions, I want to speak for the small, invisible acts of human spirit: so subtle, so small, that they die when brought out under the Klieg lights. I want to celebrate the small forms of cinema: the lyrical form, the poem, the water-color, etude, sketch, portrait, arabesque, and bagatelle, and little 8mm songs. In the times when everybody wants to succeed and sell, I want to celebrate those who embrace social and daily failure to pursue the invisible, the personal things that bring no money and no bread and make no contemporary history, art history, or any other history.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 110.

¹⁶² Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, 6.

¹⁶³ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 113.

¹⁶⁴ Jonas Mekas, "Anti-100 Years of Cinema Manifesto", <http://www.incite-online.net/jonasmekas.html>, 1996. Last accessed August 8, 2015.

However, these films do more than celebrate ‘the failure and the invisible’; aside from the literature that studies how the filmmaker constructs the self on-screen, Lebow delineates auto-ethnography¹⁶⁵ in reference to Russell, who asserts that “autobiography becomes auto-ethnography at the point where the film — or video maker — understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social transformations and historical processes.”¹⁶⁶ Hence, both Lebow’s and Russell’s emphasis is on the filmmaker being implicated in historical, social, and political contexts rather than on the narcissistic/self-referential portrait of a filmmaker. Through a reading of Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Being Singular Plural*, Lebow presents two distinct features of the first person documentary: subjectivity and relationality. Subjectivity as a ‘mode of address’ to re-affirm a presence, and relationality as referring to “the larger scheme within which the self is situated and without which the self would not make sense.”¹⁶⁷ Hence emphasis shifts for Lebow from the self to its relationality by recognizing its cultural imbrications. In this way, Lebow argues that Chantal Akerman’s film *D’Est* at once traces a personal journey but also presents a wider memory of Jewish history. Lebow’s emphasis on the larger scheme within which the subject is situated is resonant with my understanding of Guattari’s production of subjectivity, where the most important activity is the production of subjectivity in relation to society so as to nurture and enhance its relation to the world.¹⁶⁸ As in the case of my video *Of Dice and Men*, each entry employs a different methodology, to reiterate the idea of a subjectivity that is fluid, adaptive to the location, and which works creatively in each place and context.

¹⁶⁵ Lebow, *First Person Jewish*, XV.

¹⁶⁶ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 276.

¹⁶⁷ Lebow, *First Person Jewish*, XV.

¹⁶⁸ Félix Guattari, *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 202.

2.1.3. Politics in and of First Person Films

The main argument I want to articulate and question in this part and for first person filmmaking is its political potentiality. I understand the political to be what Rancière calls ‘dissensus’. He writes of dissensus as “a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we sense something is given”,¹⁶⁹ for instance as argued by Lebow below through unconventional filmic treatments of filmmakers such as Hara Kazuo. And consensus for Rancière is enacted through what he calls the police, which is not only the actual police but also

an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees those bodies are assigned by the name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.¹⁷⁰

In a similar vein, Renov states that through asserting ourselves and “who we are”, “particularly for a citizenry massively separated from the engines of representation — the advertising, news and entertainments industries...”, we engage in “a vital expression of agency”¹⁷¹ — in doing so, we become political. This expression is similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of desire as a sense of growth, desire for a political way of being in the world, for transformation, not mere representation and information. The political in the certain first person films thus lies in both the transformation of the filmic material and in its transformative potential. To Renov, such films have dialogic and community building aspects, too, as opposed to being simply reactionary.

¹⁶⁹ Jacques Rancière *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2010), 69.

¹⁷⁰ Jacques Rancière *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 29.

¹⁷¹ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, XVI.

But it is Lebow who explicitly argues for the political potential of first person filmmaking in her article “First Person Political”¹⁷² wherein she claims that first person films can be political not only through their content, but through the filmic form they take. Lebow addresses an anxiety not unique to myself in regards to first person films. This anxiety is bolstered by the conviction that first person films are inherently self-involved, as a result of the ever-prevailing individualism around the globe (with varying differences) and its connection to cultural and historical contexts. Lebow positions such practices at a historical turn whereby class politics were replaced with identity politics and asks: “What basis for mass movement lies in this individualist dead end? What neoliberal divide-and-rule policy subtends such fictionalisation? Can the left ultimately sustain itself on a diet of particularism?”¹⁷³ It is with these questions in mind that Lebow argues for a first person political that can exist in certain films — while others simply further the hegemonic structures — through what Rancière names a ‘dissensus’ (a politics of contention that is enacted in first person films) rather than a consensus, which basically involves a politics of affirming the status quo both through the form as well as the content of the films.

Lebow explores the anxiety of first person film theorists and filmmakers in regards to self-involvement and losing sight of the political potential of the documentary form when writing of Kazuo’s film *Extreme Private Eros: A Love Story* (1974). The film is about the director following his ex-lover. The political is not in the film’s content, which is overtly and excessively personal, but in its breaking down of the traditional, formal norms of filmmaking, which can be thought of as the conventional narrative with a clear beginning, middle, and end and a transparent message. Lebow writes that “it is the anarchic desire to smash prevailing norms and conventions, both formally and thematically, that is so telling about this film.”¹⁷⁴ Lebow enumerates various filmic choices of a director outlining their own unconventional

¹⁷² Lebow, in Brian Winston, ed., *The Documentary Film Book* (London: BFI, 2013), 257–265.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 261.

practices; for instance, the point of view shot of the male filmmaker making love to his partner, scenes of his facial pleasure, or the unassisted birthing scene, which is totally out of focus. Lebow writes that this film is

radically rupturing the split between the private and public, breaking all received social norms and arguably laying the ground for radical change. I do not merely want to situate these characters as social signifiers — signs of the times — but to suggest that the forthright, in-your-face, iconoclastic character of the film itself along with its first person mode of address should be read as a radically destabilising political gesture: a sign or symptom of dissensus.¹⁷⁵

Lebow concludes that *Extreme Private Eros* resonated with a Japanese post-war generation — as in Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of being singular plural — and breaking social norms in the film's personal and formal content. In other words, Lebow argues for thinking the political beyond a film's content through the redistribution of the sensible, in Rancière's terms, by smashing the traditions of discourses of sobriety:

And it is precisely this intrusion of the personal, subjective, particular, that seems to threaten the authority [discourses of sobriety], hence prompting the anxiety upon which this chapter uneasily rests. As if it needs to be stated, more than thirty years after its first articulation, the personal is indeed and must be seen as political. I mean this not only in the sense that the feminists famously sloganeered, but also in the sense that Simon Critchley reads Jean-Luc Nancy, where the personal, or shall we say, subjectivity, is always intersubjective.¹⁷⁶

Lebow's arguments have been instrumental in my search for a non-narcissistic subjectivity for not only do I share the anxiety of losing the political potential of non-fiction filmmaking to which I am committed, but I question the degree to which exposing a self and oneself can be done with efficacy. In the final chapter I explore more in detail how I think of the political in my own filmmaking in terms of my relationship with the audience, which Rascaroli¹⁷⁷ writes of in terms of a shared space and an address to a spectator as an interpellation through questions and gaps in the narrative.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 261

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 261. My insertions.

¹⁷⁷ Rascaroli, *Personal Camera*, 191.

My addressing the political in first person film brings together Rancière's notion of dissensus and Guattari's writing on cinema. By linking semiology to power and consequently cinema to the manipulation of the subjectivities of the masses, Guattari considers mainstream cinema to be an institution of subjectivation, similar to his anti-psychiatry position, which promotes certain lifestyles and shapes desires through certain signs in line with capitalist production. He proposes both in various chapters in *Chaosology* as well as in *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*,¹⁷⁸ noting that mass subjectivities are produced under Integrated World Capitalism from childhood on through institutions like schools as well as through psychology and media. Guattari calls these "serialized subjectivity productions" and explains that they are formed through the use of signs and their significations. These signs are embedded in certain films, hence in the minds and perceptions of viewers, thereby shaping their desires. Guattari outlines capitalism's seizure of subjectivities through the media in his article "Towards a Post-Media Era":

The television news has already been composed of several heterogeneous elements: the figurability of the sequence, the modelization of subjectivity according to prevailing patterns, normalizing political pressure, the concern to keep singularizing ruptures to a minimum. Currently, such a production of immaterial realities is primary in all fields and comes before the production of physical links and services.¹⁷⁹

Extending his argument, Guattari states that there will be forms of art born in this sterile atmosphere and calls them 'molecular practices':

Free radio stations, challenging the system of political representation, questioning daily life, and reactions that refuse in its current form, are viruses contaminating the social body in its relation with consumption, production, leisure, communications media, culture, and so on. They are molecular relations creating mutations in the conscious and unconscious subjectivity of individuals and social groups.

¹⁷⁸ Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e); Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2008).

¹⁷⁹ Félix Guattari, "Towards a Post-Media Era," tr. Alya Sebt and Clemens Apprich (1990), <http://www.postmedialab.org/towards-a-post-media-era>, [accessed September 20, 2012].

A molecular revolution consists in producing conditions not only for collective life but also for the embodiment of life for oneself, both materially and subjectively.¹⁸⁰

In yet another arrangement, one can think of first person films as the desire to communicate, which, once suppressed, function as platforms for the production of multiple subjectivities. Butler speaks of this in relation to morality and morality's relation to agency:

...a morality that at times requires a first person account of oneself. I hope to show that morality is neither a symptom of its social conditions nor a site of transcendence of them, but rather is essential to the determination of agency and the possibility of hope. With the help of Foucault's self-criticism, it may be possible to show that the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility [which can be linked to Rancière's notion of consensus], the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgement: to someone else who is there to be addressed and whose address is there to be received.¹⁸¹

I see first person filmmaking along these lines, and it is my desire to communicate a desire in order to become different than what is required of me, but also in communication, trying to build bridges. Once you communicate something, and establish another relation with the world around you, you make that relation tangible, maybe visible, thereby producing and affirming the new. By making my desire visible and audible I create a molecular presence, a molecular link different from the homogeneity imposed by, for instance, the Turkish state; hence, affirming the political and revolutionary potential of desire in first person films. The molecular can also be addressed in terms of an audience's multiple understanding or relation to a film, which is also activated by the gaps that are left in a narrative, an editing and writing tool I also explored in my film *Of Dice and Men* — caesuras which invite us to respond in a freer, more associative manner, as in the case study of Aykan Safoğlu's *Off-White Tulips* (Ch. 3).

¹⁸⁰ Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e); Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2008), 63.

¹⁸¹ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 21–22.

Filmic self-representation could then be understood as a way of establishing molecular links that did not exist before, and without knowing the other or oneself fully, giving full account or representation of oneself or another, as Butler argues, links which can open up new pathways as an on-going process. It is related to Stuart Hall's proposal of processual forms of identification versus stable forms of identity: "[r]ather than speaking of identity as a finished thing, we should speak of identification, and see it as an ongoing process. Identity arises, not so much from the fullness of identity which is already inside us as individuals, but from a lack of wholeness which is 'filled' from outside us, by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by others."¹⁸² This is aptly reflected in John Akomfrah's film installation on Stuart Hall, *The Unfinished Conversation* (2013),¹⁸³ which allows viewers to enter and exit as they desire through the continuous screening, and to glean diverse fragments from the biographical installation. And each time they gather a new film, constructing Hall's identity depending on its form, its spatial arrangement, its discursive context, time spent with the installation, perhaps how the exhibition is framed by events, impacts how the film might be viewed, as well as how it is different from a cinema or film festival screening, and the specific mental expectations we bring with ourselves each time we are confronted with a new art work. Consequently, Hall's writing on identity as an on-going conversation and the installation format which, it can be argued, allows another unfinished conversation that invites the viewer to create many different versions of Hall's life, work, and politics. Similarly, it is this relationship with the installation video that is one of the reasons for me to choose this form in my work *Of Dice and Men*, to allow for inconclusive readings (I will elaborate on my work in Ch. 4). Having said this, an unfinished conversation can equally occur in a cinema screening through forms of narrative and editing as in *Off-White Tulips*, and many other single-screen films.

¹⁸² Hall quoted in Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 10.

¹⁸³ John Akomfrah, *The Unfinished Conversation* (London: BFI, 2013).

The issue of open-endedness and encounter is also highlighted by Renov when he writes about the ethics of this encounter with the other, whether it be the film audience or the relationship between the filmmaker and the subjects of his or her film.¹⁸⁴ One could however say that it is possible to watch a film with differently each time one views it and continue to see something else, so that each viewing is, or can become, *a filmic event* during which the film is created anew. By showing a work as an installation, I as the filmmaker aim to give away part of my narratorial status by leaving the door open, but installing the piece in a new order as it were, and attempting a more egalitarian, democratic encounter with the audience. This, of course, creates another form of politics whereby the artist establishes her sovereignty through and with the institution, the curator, and so on, and can be argued against in relation to an individualism that is fostered through installation formats. I will expand more on this in the last chapter, “Reflections on *Of Dice and Men*.”

2.2 Why Now in Turkey?

If there is nation building where differences are denied, as described in Ch. 1, then there is also a moment when subjectivation creates pressure, which calls forth the demand for differences to be acknowledged. This pressure, which evoked a shift within identity politics globally as well as in Turkey, had, I argue, various implications, some of which affected political documentaries as well as contemporary art in and about Turkey, as in various parts of the world after the failure of the revolutionary movements of 1970s and the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Out of this, one way of being political in Turkey arose from making first person videos as of 2010, a decade into the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi’s (AKP thereafter) rule. Since, in a geography where one has to continuously battle to establish and

¹⁸⁴ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 130.

validate one's existence, as Rascaroli also states in regard to the political implications of first person films, "to speak of 'I' is, after all, firstly a political act of self-awareness and self-affirmation".¹⁸⁵ And this self-affirmation is regularly done by the minorities and hybrid molecular subjectivities in Turkish society, whose existence has been denied since the foundation of the Turkish Republic. But there is another angle to this, which Gürbilek describes as "two parallel universes [...] . The State of Emergency Region Governorship's violence and patronizing posture towards the Kurds, the ban on Bülent Ersoy's performances, and the media's fever to make homosexuals heard, the prohibitions in the cultural sphere and funnelling of capital investment into culture, the destruction of institution giving voice to the demands of the masses and the emergence of a powerful mass culture: all are varied faces of the same period."¹⁸⁶ Thus, globally as well as locally, identity-based struggles took place in the revolutionary movements, and this section will make a case for first person films in Turkey, and articulate possible reasons as to why they are now being made. The historical background and tensions of the country were articulated in Ch. 1. Below I describe the contemporary tensions of the country, whose specifications on the Kurdish and the LGBT communities I will expand upon in the following chapter through my case studies.

2.2.1. Post-1980 Turkey: Regression of the Islamic Synthesis

The disquieting instrumentalization of Islam for specific political means has been made the centre of political debates for the past three decades and has added a further layer to the issues of 'otherness' in Turkey, which initially revolved around identity politics. The first elections following the 1980 coup in 1983 resulted in Turgut Özal being elected the Prime Minister (he remained in that position till 1989). Özal paved the way for the current

¹⁸⁵ Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 2.

¹⁸⁶ Gürbilek, *The New Cultural Climate in Turkey*, 8.

neoliberal governmental strategies through the privatization of otherwise public services, through a structural change in the economic model to be integrated into the global economy whereby the import-substituting industrialization and planned developmental model shifted places with export-oriented economic policies. Along with the fear factor established by the previous juntas, the financial offspring of this new model through construction and so on led to an increasingly individualistic society. People grew fearful and distanced themselves from ideas that could potentially cost them their jobs, their homes, their families, if not even their lives, as was the case during the coup periods. Another key factor reinforcing nationalism during the Özal period was the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which, Özal claimed, was the country's adhesive:

What holds together, or rather brings together, our unity and our cohesiveness is the fact that we are all citizens of the Turkish Republic. This is the first point. Everybody who lives in this land, everybody who was born here, and everybody within the boundaries of the Turkish Republic who is a citizen of this country is a first-class citizen of this country with no distinction being made. Our state is secular. But what holds our nation together, what serves in a most powerful way in our national cohesiveness and what plays the essential role is Islam.¹⁸⁷

When Özal's term ended in 1989, and following the onset of the Green Peril at the end of the Cold War, and the fall of the Berlin Wall, liberal Islam came to the forefront, each of which were factors contributing to the success of the current government, the AKP. The global view of the Middle East saw Turkey as a leader in the region. Other countries in the Middle East modelled themselves upon Turkey and have seen the neoliberal economy of the West fused with distinct Islamic signs.

The political career of the founder of the AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been in leadership since 2002, has become the peak period with regards to this tension between secularism, Islam, and neoliberalism. However, Erdoğan's conservatism was in evidence as

¹⁸⁷ Özal quoted in Kushner, 230. — *Milliyet* (January 30, 1989).

early as the late 1990s and during his involvement with the previous Welfare Party when he was the Mayor of Istanbul. Erdogan was given a ten-month prison sentence (of which he served less than four months, from March 24, 1999 to July 27, 1999) for reciting a poem in the city of Siirt in December 1997, which was regarded as an incitement to commit an offense to laicism and incitement to religious or racial hatred. The poem included verses such as: “The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers.”¹⁸⁸ The AKP’s political strategy has been to steadily fuse cultural conservatism with neoliberalism, which inevitably disconcerted the established actors of the state, who were in charge of protecting the secular state, namely the army and the urban bourgeoisie, who both felt threatened by the nouveau riche emerging from the conservative provinces.

As sociologist Erdem Yörük explains, Erdoğan inherited a country deep in recession in 2002. Because of a disastrous earthquake on August 17, 1999, during which, according to official sources, at least seventeen thousand people died (unofficial sources state at least twice that amount), and which left half a million homeless, Turkey went through the worst economic crisis in its history. In 2001, the Turkish lira was devalued 40% and many businesses that were trading abroad went bankrupt. Yörük explains how the AKP established itself out of this crisis:

The AKP has undoubtedly gained the support of a large number of people who were economically and socially hurt by the harsh economic crisis of 2001. In particular, the party won the consent of Turkey’s poor informal proletariat for the rising neoliberal power of the emergent bourgeoisies. A juxtaposition of neoliberalism, populism, conservatism, and more recently authoritarianism, has been the defining characteristic of the AKP’s rule.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ The aforementioned verses, however, are not in the original version of the poem. The poem titled *Asker Duası* (Prayer for a Soldier) was from a work written by Ziya Gökalp, a pan-Turkish activist of the early 20th century.

¹⁸⁹ Yörük in I. Akça, A. Bekmen, and B.A. Özden, eds, *Turkey Reframed: Constituting Neoliberal Hegemony* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 12.

In order to establish its successful hegemony over the Turkish population, the AKP expanded the economical beneficiaries by using the machine of the state. Urban development discourse and, by consequence, the immense building projects that the city of Istanbul is subjected to, have become the central source of income, from which the majority of the population would financially benefit. However, at the other end of this discourse was the loss of common spaces and historical neighbourhoods, which were eliminated unnecessarily and solely for the purpose of financial benefit.¹⁹⁰

The AKP was elected three times (in 2002, 2007, and 2011)¹⁹¹ and a significant foundation of the AKP's monopoly of power, apart from its economical improvements, is related to policies that weakened the traditional power of the military, which is considered the guardian of secularism in Turkey. Although the 1980 coup was the last full-fledged intervention, the armed forces maintained some control over civilian affairs until the early 2000s. One example is the February 28, 1997 military memorandum, which ended the rule of a coalition government led by the Islamic-leaning Welfare Party. Because of the absence of explicit violence, some even refer to this as a 'post-modern' coup. Yet, the looming threat of having another military coup was evaded by the imprisonment of more than 300 suspected military personnel, which was named Operation Sledgehammer, an alleged coup against the military. The coup attempt dates back to as far as 2003, one year after the Justice and Development Party gained office.

¹⁹⁰ See Yaşar Adnan Adanalı's blogs *Mutlu Kent* and *Reclaim Istanbul* for detailed analyses of the urban transformation of Istanbul.

¹⁹¹ For a detailed analysis of the JDP's neoliberal strategy and how it is fused with Islam, see Yörük's unpublished PhD thesis: Erdem Yörük, "The Politics of the Turkish Welfare System Transformation in the Neoliberal Era: Welfare as Mobilization and Containment" (The Johns Hopkins University, 2012).

2.2.2. The Current Tension and its Crystallisation within the Gezi Uprising

More than a decade long rule of the AKP resulted in a number of controversial neoliberal policies along with authoritarian and conservative activities: relentless building projects and the demolishing of public spaces; the increased policing of citizens; Prime Minister Erdoğan's public statements on the need for a new Islamic youth; the AKP's position on women's birth control; measures to control the consumption of alcohol, which some interpreted as a ban; allowing an inordinate number of shopping malls to be built throughout the urban landscape without consideration for community boards or urban planners, and finally the building of a gigantic presidential palace.¹⁹² These activities undermined political subjects and citizens steadily and rapidly and reduced them strictly to consumers.¹⁹³

Erdoğan's political authoritarianism impacted the visual culture of the city, causing a largely negative collective reaction. For instance, the Atatürk Cultural Centre was a prime example of 1960s Turkish modernist architecture, and an icon of Taksim Square, the city centre of Istanbul. This building represented the modernist yearnings of the Republic, which was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk upon the ruins of the Islamic Ottoman Empire. Despite the claims that the AKM was closed for renovation, then Prime Minister (PM) Erdoğan expressed his plans for demolishing it and building a new "baroque opera house" in its place. One by one, the Taksim neighbourhood, along with many others, began to lose its most valuable and oldest public spaces, which caused increasing resentment in the psyche of many citizens. To interpret the politics of architecture and the privatization of public spaces, as Suner writes, one has to delve "beneath the surface of visual proliferation, to consider how

¹⁹² <https://mutlukent.wordpress.com/2015/10/31/akp-iktidarinin-kentsel-sinirlari-13-yillik-bir-hesap-ozeti/> (Last accessed August 29, 2016).

¹⁹³ Nazile Kalaycı "Diren Gezi / Hakikat Kavgası: Bir Parrhesia Olarak Gezi Parkı" to *e-skop*. Published July 19, 2013. <http://www.e-skop.com/skopbulten/hakikat-kavgasi-bir-parrhesia-olarak-gezi-parki/1407>

images underwrite or destabilize notions of identity and wholeness. Most of all, it means probing how visual images are imbricated in power relations.”¹⁹⁴ For instance, Taksim Square has been the most important and debated public space in the country, for it has been the showcase of the secular state. Taksim has been the site where secularists and Islamists have always fought for recognition and argued over mosques, alcohol consumption, and so on. On the other hand, the decision to demolish Gezi Park in order to re-build the Taksim Military Barracks also resonated with the Ottoman past, which was a celebration space for the Sultans. When the barrack was demolished in 1940, Gezi Park was opened. The decision to re-build the barracks as a shopping centre was a clear demonstration of Erdoğan’s neoliberal policies, expressed against an Islamic Ottoman backdrop, as a reaction to Atatürk’s secular Turkish identity formulations. On the other hand, it also expressed what Ömer Kanıpak calls an *edifice complex*. In an article he wrote in the online architecture magazine *Arkitera*, Kanıpak likens the Justice and Development Party’s architecture politics to Sudjic and Parkinson’s theories.¹⁹⁵ He suggests that one of Erdoğan’s desires is to mark his time as president with monumental architecture, a landmark for instance, by embarking on such monstrous projects like opening the Venetian tunnels in the heart of Istanbul, building a gigantic mosque on the greenest hill of the city (in Çamlıca), and finally, constructing a third bridge as well as a third airport, which can prove to be disastrous for Istanbul’s already exhausted environment. Much of this new architecture resembles a kitschy replica of the Ottoman period, an aspiration of “Sultan Erdoğan’s neo-Ottoman fetish”,¹⁹⁶ and was

¹⁹⁴ Ayşe Öncü and Asuman Suner, eds, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol. 45, Thinking through Images (2011): 5.

¹⁹⁵ In various articles, architect and critic Ömer Kanıpak discusses the architectural projects of the AKP government. See for instance: Ömer Kanıpak, “Topçu Kışlası’nı diriltmek ne anlama geliyor?” *Arkitera*. <http://www.arkitera.com/gorus/278> (accessed March 19, 2014). Kanıpak, Ömer, “Architectural Codes of a Revolution.” See also, Ömer Kanıpak, http://www.omerkanipak.com/2013/06/17/architectural_codes-of-a-revolution/ (accessed February 28, 2014).

¹⁹⁶ Erdoğan’s desire to invoke the Ottoman Empire’s Islamic rule as well as being a sultan has been pointed out by various authors and newspapers. See for instance Emre Çalışkan and Simon A. Waldman, “Which Sultan is Erdoğan?”, *Open Democracy* (June 11, 2013). Link: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/emre-caliskan-simon-waldman/which-sultan-is-Erdoğan> (accessed January 28, 2014)

criticized by concerned architects and urban planners.¹⁹⁷ This steady demolishing of Istanbul's architecture only further resonated, as outlined above, with the military bureaucracy, which systematically erased the city's visual memory, for instance through the treatment of archival material referring to periods during and after the coups.

The AKP's authoritarianism did not end here and asserted further control over the artistic and cultural production scene through various measures, including financial pressures. Banu Karaca is an anthropologist who works specifically on censorship in the arts. In her article "Images Delegitimized and Discouraged: Explicitly Political Art and the Arbitrariness of the Unspeakable" (2011), Karaca reflects on how censorship doesn't necessarily occur in the act of immediate banning but through delegitimizing and discouraging artists. Karaca is also one of the founding members of *Siyah Bant*, an organization that documents and researches censorship cases within Turkey. Their last activity was a petition against the Ministry of Culture for banning Lars Von Trier's film *Nymphomaniac*. Kosova and Ohm¹⁹⁸ also mention similar acts. Kosova writes about the general consensus of art management by the AKP government in the field of art institutions, whereas Ohm addresses neoliberal forms of censorship in Television.¹⁹⁹ She suggests that censorship does not occur in the form of 'black screens', what Guattari would call an earlier form of fascism, which used to be the case in Turkey, but they happen through capitalist totalitarian machines,²⁰⁰ such as through monetary punishments applied to TV stations by the *RTÜK* (Radio and Television Supreme Council), the official executor of the broadcasting law. Today, after the countless leaked tapes of the PM phoning media owners, this statement also lost some element of its validity

¹⁹⁷ See Yaşar Adnan Adanalı's website *Reclaim Istanbul*.

¹⁹⁸ Erden Kosova, "Kulvarlar Arasında," *Toplum ve Bilim* 125 (2012): 23–40. Ohm, Britta, "The Location of Authoritarianism: The Monetization of Law and the Allocation of State Tenders as Forms of Censorship in Turkey's Liberalized Television," in *Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association*, Chicago: 2013.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. "The Location of Authoritarianism: The monetization of Law and the Allocation of State Tenders as Forms of Censorship in Turkey's liberalized Television."

²⁰⁰ Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, tr. by Rosemary Sheed (London: Peregrine Book, 1984), 227.

for it has been established that Erdoğan personally controls the media, and not just through the allocation of funds.²⁰¹ While the allocation of funds strengthens the media, it is also used as means by which to control content and therefore consciousness, thus following Guattari's notion of subjectivation. The close relations of capital and power in Turkey, and specifically between media and construction companies, have been made clear in the collective data compiled and mapped on the website *Networks of Dispossession*.²⁰²

It is against the background of this very tense atmosphere that when on May 27, 2013, bulldozers entered Gezi Park in Taksim Square with the aim of uprooting trees, about thirty protestors occupied the park to defend it, an action which prompted a nation-wide uprising. Although it started in Istanbul, after the police attacked the protestors with excessive force, demonstrations in 67 of 81 Turkish cities erupted and Gezi Park became a collective crystallization point for political subjectivities. The events were perceived as close to miraculous since one could see nationalists marching alongside believers, students with mothers and teachers, Kurds with Atatürk's followers and Alevis. The collective, disparate desires of each group were discussed in public spaces. If one aspect of utopia is a group of disparate people living together in harmony, a brief utopic moment was achieved, until the police responded with extreme violence. The on-going clash with the police coupled with the PM's uncompromising attitude, pushed people to the edge, people who had endured extreme physical violence in response to their non-violent protest. Hundreds of people were injured, eight died (the oldest being 28, the youngest 15), and the police detained hundreds more.²⁰³ As I write, the scale of unlawful investigations of the detainees, the brutality and abuse by the government and its police, has still not been fully documented, if it ever will.

²⁰¹ "Leaked Tapes Prompt Calls for Turkish PM to Resign." Published February 25, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/25/leaked-tapes-calls-erdogan-resign-turkish-pm>

²⁰² *Networks of Dispossession*, <http://mulksuzlestirme.org/>, last acc. January 18, 2016.

²⁰³ Didem Gençtürk Deniz Koloğlu, Gözde Kazaz, H. İlksen Mavituna, Saner Şen, *Polis Destan Yazdı* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2015).

It is through this authoritarianism that the protestors became acquainted with one another, as proposed by sociologist Zeynep Tüfekçi:

I have come to think of this moment as an anti-postmodern pluralism. Unlike early stage (or well, “traditional”) approaches, the “other” is not configured as an opaque, unknowable, “outside” entity. There is multitude but there is also unity and a unifying grand narrative — *a unity that is based on empathy rather than a single model of the desirable*. The “other” is knowable through a common human experience and suffering. Hence, this is not like post-modernity, which rejects unity or grand-narratives. In fact, it is striking how strong the grand, unifying narrative is among many participants.²⁰⁴

It is, in other words, the molecular subjectivities, which have been suppressed for so long, that have come to encounter one another in public spaces. It is also through this same drive that I shared my subjective position in my film *Of Dice and Men*, and how I consider the first person films I study herein. It is through sharing the subjective in relation to the outside, finding connecting points in multiplicities of desires, finding common human experiences and shared suffering, that new subjectivities arise.

Tüfekçi’s article, “Come, Come, Whoever You Are. As a Pluralist Movement Emerges from Gezi Park in Turkey” is one amongst many that highlighted the “identity-less” character and emergence of new subjectivities during the Gezi Movement along with Kaya (2013),²⁰⁵ Süreyya (2013),²⁰⁶ Ali (2013),²⁰⁷ and the countless personal conversations I had with occupiers, not to speak of personal observations made during the occupation of the park. The Kurds and the ultra-nationalists, the football fanatics and the LGBT — each protested side by side. Each left their differences behind and protested together in the face of common suffering. Guattari writes of a similar situation in regards to 1968: “This situation was not one in which an ideal unity represented and interpreted multiple interests, but one in which the

²⁰⁴ Zeynep Tüfekçi, “Come, Come, Whoever You Are. As a Pluralist Movement Emerges from Gezi Park in Turkey” in *Technosociology: Our Tools, Ourselves*. Published June 30, 2013, <http://technosociology.org/?p=1421> (Italics added)

²⁰⁵ Ziya Kaya, “Rancière’i Selamlayarak; Gezi Parkı’na “İmkânsız Kimlik Yakışı!” *Birikim* (June 21, 2013). <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/birikim/makale.aspx?mid=975>

²⁰⁶ Süreyya Evren to *Süreyya Evren Yazılar*, 2013. <http://surmetinler.blogspot.co.uk/>

²⁰⁷ Tariq Ali, “‘We Are All Çapulcu!’ Notes from Ankara,” *Counterpunch* (June 24, 2013). Accessed July 5, 2013. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/06/24/notes-from-ankara/>

development of many voiced multiplicities of desires produced their own guidelines and organisation.²⁰⁸

Two years later, on June 7, 2015, the general elections saw, for the first time in 12 years, a new left-wing and anti-nationalistic party, the People's Democratic Party (HDP), win enough seats to pass the 10% threshold by gaining 13.12% and securing 81 seats. HDP aligned itself with Greek SYRIZA and Spanish Podemos parties and represented many of Turkey's citizens, including the Kurdish, LGBT, and women, although one cannot dismiss its organic links to the previous Kurdish parties. HDP is also environmentalist and openly opposes nuclear power in Turkey while also allying with the Gezi Uprising during the events. The HDP also derailed the AKP from being the majority party. The AKP wanted to form a single-party government by reaching 330 seats in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the requisite number to enact a referendum necessary to change the constitution so that Turkey would abandon its traditional parliamentary government and instead adopt an American-style executive presidency government. Turkey's opposition parties uphold this and their supporters as the greatest contribution the HDP has made to the Republic of Turkey. The opposition of the party blames the HDP for its close Kurdish alliance and open talks with PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. To me, it is clear that the people in this republic want something new, and that the new political party speaks to that hope. It is not that I have hope in a single political party as a saviour, for it is only an embryonic state apparatus. However, could this also be a sign for a desire to critique and express alternative subjectivities in the face of repressive identity politics, which has been the undercurrent for some time in Turkey's recent history? The HDP addresses multiple subjectivities and addresses the need for alliances while allowing for differences, hereby in spirit following those affective relations taking place during the Gezi Uprising.

²⁰⁸ Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, 220.

For this project it has been useful to think of this political victory against the AKP with Guattari's concept of the "molecular revolution". Guattari speaks of a "permanent reinvention"²⁰⁹ in regards to improving the circumstances that humans inhabit. As I wrote in the introduction, molecular revolutions occur on a molecular level, beneath the molar, but under the skin, on a "gut"²¹⁰ or affective level; they accumulate over time. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988), Deleuze and Guattari wrote about the structures of the molar and the molecular. Molar is the 'macro' way of considering wholes, structures, and systems of organization, while the molecular is a 'micro' way of considering changes, particle flows, and the way that elements and forces interact to produce effects.²¹¹ It is not a sudden revolution, but a *becoming*, that which constantly occurs underneath the molar. In thinking about the Gezi events, I suggest that it is through the molecular revolution that took place, on a small but collective scale, that eventually, in exactly two years' time, a new political party that promises to be heterogeneous came to be. Through molecular revolutions in the past three years since the Gezi events, we have seen many changes in the molecular practices of the people who participated in the Gezi events, including forming alliances,²¹² taking steps towards uncharted waters, like establishing new independent newspapers,²¹³ feminist groups, and Müşterekler (Our Commons), and so on. In fact, one could think it was a molecular revolution all along that led to the Gezi events in the first place, in part through the resentments that were accumulated towards the AKP's repressive regime, as well as the historical grudges briefly referred to earlier on.

Today, the AKP has once again won the majority of the seats in parliament through multiple strategies, not to speak of employing strategic violence, but exploring the details of

²⁰⁹ Guattari, *Chaosology*, 182.

²¹⁰ Félix Guattari, *Chaosology*, 246, 182.

²¹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 9.

²¹² Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies* (September 2011), last acc. July 6, 2015.

²¹³ Cf. www.Diken.com.tr is an independent news website that was founded after the Gezi events since there was no news covering what was actually happening during those times.

these activities is beyond the scope of this thesis. What can be said in brief is that, although the state is again in the hands of the AKP, the crystallization of subjectivities that once occurred through molecular revolutions will remain. Because new links have been established, and despite the ever-increasing stronghold of authoritarianism, debates and grassroots politics remain a persistent and primary counterforce.

2.2.3. Filmmaking in Response to Contemporary Crises

In the midst of this era, first person films began to appear in Turkey, and it is distinctly the subjectivities that have been suppressed which claim their presence by now expressing their desires on screen, desires the opposite of normative Turkishness.

In *The Cinema of Me*, Alisa Lebow extends her lens to international first person films to see whether this phenomenon of first person films is an American cultural imperialist one, or if it is generated autochthonously from within other countries and cultural contexts²¹⁴ (through commissioning essays from writers ranging from Spain, to India, Israel and the Caribbean). Lebow concludes that it is not only an American imperialist position (or imposition), but that today, in an era of an excessive amount of image production, first person films are for artists and filmmakers but one of the tools for resisting and challenging imposed identities and the neoliberal condition. Lebow explains further how in Middle Eastern nations there is an excess of violent conflict and draws a direct parallel to the mass mediation of the war zones to argue for alternative narratives to mass media — a practice which we repeatedly saw during the Gezi Uprising.

This post-media era, with its proliferation of YouTube videos, mobile phone technologies, and so on, enabled us to be aware of what was happening in different areas of the Gezi uprising since none of the mainstream television stations broadcasted what was

²¹⁴ Lebow, *The Cinema of Me*, 6.

happening and instead broadcast a documentary on penguins. Consequently, new independent DIY networks were set up to broadcast via the Internet. After thousands of people occupied Gezi Park, Taksim Square, and the surrounding neighbourhoods, Sociologist Çağlar Keyder wrote these lines:

It is an almost perfect set-up. AKP has the numbers, and the owners of the media have to do business with the government. Newspapers and TV stations ignored the demonstrations until yesterday. There are a few critical columnists left; many have lost their jobs. There is no independent bourgeoisie: business cannot be conducted without the good will of the government. And, it has to be admitted, Erdoğan is a consummate politician. He does not delegate, he has full control of his party and all that the government does. There is no opposition politician who comes close to his monstrous appetite for politicking. The so-called social media and the brand of politics that characterizes the younger generation, however, are a novel presence in the Turkish arena. This week will tell us more about their potential.²¹⁵

When we bring this idea to the arena of artistic production, it is similar to when Guattari calls for artists to create “new universes of reference”²¹⁶ in the face of media domination. As a filmmaker, I translate this into a process of creating a framework entailing images of resistance, or being different from what the mainstream wants you to be, i.e., a new universe for future audiences to relate to so as to rethink their geographies separate from hegemonic politics. Guattari writes with reference to the role of alternative modes of media:

We can hope for transformation of mass media power that will overcome contemporary subjectivity, and for the beginning of a post-media era of collective individual reappropriation and an interactive use of machines of information, communication, intelligence, art and culture.

....

Far from being a return to earth, the events in Iraq made us lift off into an almost delirious universe of mass-media subjectivity. New technologies foster efficiency and madness in the same flow. The growing power of software engineering does not necessarily lead to the power of Big Brother. In fact it is way more cracked than it seems. It can blow up like a windshield under the impact of molecular alternative practices.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Çağlar Keyder to the *LRB* blog, June 3, 2013.

²¹⁶ Guattari, *Soft Subversions*, 109.

²¹⁷ Félix Guattari, 1990. Previously unpublished text from October 1990, featured in the journal *Chimères*, No. 28 (spring–summer 1996). <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/lab/towards-post-media-era> (accessed 8 March 2014)

The conservative economy of desire is that which is adaptable to the molar, and revolutionary breakthrough can be thought of as becoming molecular on screen, thereby producing and affirming the new. For instance, in *The Greenroom — Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art 1*, co-editors Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind draw out the necessity of documentary images employed in the contemporary art world. The editors suggest it is urgent that artists employing images of actuality pinpoint underrepresented realities of the world. Lind and Steyerl write, “At the core of its pluritopic interpretations lies a much needed ambition (desire) to challenge worn-out representational modes.”²¹⁸ This echoes the ambition and but one reason for the emergence of first person films.

Similar to Guattari’s notion of molecular practices, by using alternative production methods and technologies, like many of my contemporaries, I tried to free myself from production limitations that came with working within set media structures and expensive technologies. This created for me an autonomous space not bound by economic constraints; a space where I could communicate my desire for migrant hybrid subjectivity, only to find out later that different mechanisms of control applied within the arts sphere (I will explore this in more detail in Ch. 4, Reflections on *Of Dice and Men*). Equally so, there was also a host of self-mediation during Gezi, a point which was also highlighted during the Gezi events in İstanbul. Consequently, I think there are at least three interrelated reasons for the current employment of first person films in Turkey:

— First, the left wing and right wing debates that dominated the political scene during the 1970s and 1980s were, as Neyzi states, broken during the 1980 coup and post-1980 globally. As of the 1980s, social debates worldwide were mostly about re-affirming self-existence and different forms of inscription.²¹⁹ Locally speaking, the current political climate, through its combination of the Armenian Genocide centenary (2015), Kurdish conflict

²¹⁸ Ibid. 23.

²¹⁹ Leyla Neyzi, “Exploring Memory through Oral History in Turkey,” in *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, ed. Mariia Nikolaeva Todorova (New York: NYU Press, 2004).

negotiations, and testimonials of violence from military coup survivors, makes it a ripe time to re-claim minority backgrounds, as indicated in the various self-inscriptions in the films that I will describe in the next section.

— Second, the lack of state funding along with private funding's control of image production led filmmakers to produce their own films with available cameras. The expense of film production that once gave rise to direct cinema, i.e., cheap cameras and the availability of synch sound, is still an important factor, if not even more, in making first person DIY films in nations where support for culture is virtually non-existent. However, the limitations applied to their dissemination (as briefly explored above in various modes of censorship) still affect their impact, a vital dilemma I will explore later.

— Third and finally, the 'desire' to communicate to others and create mutualities about the suppression of unconventional identities are expressed in the various screenings and talks and debates dedicated to Turkey's history and memory, as exemplified with events I will enumerate below. This is similar to what Tüfekçi said about gathering in the face of shared suffering (mentioned above) and relates to the political potential of first person films, which I discussed above. Butler's notions of giving an account of oneself speak to this determination of agency and in trying to create platforms where no common ground seems apparent.²²⁰ These gatherings are also linked to the collectivizing process of the Gezi Uprising in terms of molecular revolutions, which evoke change on micro-levels even though, on the molar level, the authoritarian state retains more and more control — that again becomes a reaction to the threat of molecular revolutions, as exemplified by the various prohibitions and threats made against new films, events, and so on (see for instance the case study in Ch. 3 whereby the film and the filmmaker were both persecuted).

²²⁰ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 21–22.

As stated at the beginning of this section in regards to a desire to share the traumas of the past, the urge to re-claim the past is symptomatic of a desire for new subjectivities to crystallize through a collective process of sharing and forming new alliances, as in films and exhibitions. The numerous testimonial documentaries with talking heads and archival displays are two examples of this desire of displaying an attention to history, particularly to subjective histories. As Timothy Corrigan also writes in relation to first person films' affiliation to the audience, they "describe and provoke an activity of public thought, and the public nature of that subjective experience highlights and even exaggerates the participations of their audience, readers, and viewers in a dialogue of ideas."²²¹ The various events of gathering for minority rights exhibitions and/or documentary screenings of such histories²²² are a clear indication of a current desire to unmask rigidified conceptions of Turkishness and its flaws and are molecular practices that crystallized in the face of homogenization. The first person films' success, whether emancipatory or narcissistic, whether celebrating a migrant becoming or rigidified identities, are questionable, and the different films fall into a wide spectrum of that success.

²²¹ Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*, 55.

²²² There are numerous events that came about in the past few years that testify to this. For instance, an event that took place at the independent cultural exhibition centre DEPO, titled *Facing the Past*, which was dedicated to 2015, the centenary of the Armenian Genocide, and involved memorial screenings that explored Armenian memory. "Satur-dox," a weekly documentary-screening program that takes place at DEPO, dedicated a program to re-claiming this memory and its traumas. The statement of the program by DEPO reads as follows: "The projects within this program are being prepared by Armenian artists and researchers both from the diaspora and Turkey. Depo has been organizing exhibitions about the lost history of Armenians in Anatolia since its opening in 2008. These projects aimed to integrate obscured parts of the past into public memory, to help overcome the lack of awareness and misinformation around the topic, and to open up a space for dialogue." Link: http://www.depoistanbul.net/en/activites_detail.asp?ac=124 Another example is *Two Faces of Suffering*, an exhibition that brought together countless stories that a young photographer collected during a period of seven months of travelling around 70 cities and more than 100 towns in Turkey. These stories belong to those who have lost their children during the 30-year long fighting that opposed the Turkish state with the PKK. The pictures and video footage Kamuran Erkaçmaz shot bring us face to face with the true victims of this conflict: impoverished people of the country. But poverty is not the only thing that binds them: they also share a deep longing for peace. There is no hint of hatred in the direct address made to the camera by each subject, in spite of the unbearable pain that grieves their hearts. This exhibition showcases photographs, sound, and video footage, as well as personal belongings pertaining to only a few of the hundreds of stories the photographer encountered during his journey. In spite of all the attempts that were made over the years to silence them, Erkaçmaz's work brought forth the silenced outcries of a people and their longing for peace. See http://www.depoistanbul.net/en/activites_detail.asp?ac=111

CHAPTER 3: Case Studies: A Closer Look at Two First Person Films in Turkey

In Kayseri, in a türkü evi...[song house] where young people get together, one of the male students that we interviewed informed us that he had cut his once-long hair and had stopped wearing his earring. He had had enough of the reactions he faced in the neighbourhood, in the street, or on the bus such as, “You should try to look more like your father than your mother!”

When we asked a Kurdish student, who had come from a south-eastern town to Karadeniz Technical University in Trabzon, whether he felt more comfortable on campus or in town, his reply was: “Only at home.”²²³

The above account is taken from research by Binnaz Toprak mapping out repression caused by conservatism in rural cities in Turkey, which takes on many different forms, from marginalisation to verbal assault and sometimes physical violence. In most Anatolian cities, having a different identity means being harassed in the public sphere, being excluded and isolated, being left without resources, being unable to find employment, and suffering possibly severe economic difficulties. Differences in identity can either be inherited or chosen. As the authors of the research state: “Here we define the concept of conservatism with reference to the differences between modern and traditional societies... What we mean by conservatism is the collective mentality that is observed in social structures where every individual knows one another, where social norms are formed through face-to-face relations, where the lives of individuals are exposed in public and subject to constant supervision, and where individual lives are guided by custom and tradition.”²²⁴

Since the AKP came to power in 2002, the relation between religion, conservatism, and social pressure has become one of the most oft-discussed topics in Turkey. Claims concerning the AKP’s intention to alter the secular regime and establish an Islamic state have morphed into arguments that Turkey is being “Islamicized” day by day, which disconcerts the established actors of the regime, namely the army and the urban bourgeoisie. An

²²³ Binnaz Toprak, “Being Different in Turkey; Religion, Conservatism and Otherization” (Research Report on Neighbourhood Pressure, Istanbul: Bosphorus University and Open Society Foundation 2009), 17.

²²⁴ Ibid., 16.

extension of these discussions is, by consequence, an increase in conservative attitudes and polarisation within society. This debate has concentrated in particular on what sociologist Şerif Mardin calls “neighbourhood pressure”.²²⁵ While the most undesirable neighbours include Kurds, Alevis, non-Muslims, foreigners, and LGBT, conservative attitudes towards behaviour and practices such as women wearing short skirts, co-education in high schools, and unfamiliar men and women sitting next to each other on intercity buses, intensify as religiosity increases.²²⁶

Although problems such as social prejudice and repression are not novel issues, they have not been resolved but have only increased. Those prejudices range from tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims, contempt for people considered non-Turks (Kurds), or misogyny. The negative attitudes towards non-Muslims, who largely lived in peace with Muslims during the Ottoman Empire period, seem to be related to both the separatist movements of the 19th century and the nationalist movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as described in the first chapter. The root of the prejudice against the Kurds can be traced back and related to the Kurdish rebellions of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as to PKK activities that began in the 1980s (this will be explored further in the first section of this chapter). The segregation of women from the public sphere is a long-standing problem, not only in provincial Anatolian towns, but also in major cities like Istanbul and Ankara.

This chapter addresses how the stories of these marginalized groups have begun to be inscribed in first person films made in Turkey. In an article concerning the films of Turkish migrants in Germany, in taking a cue from Deniz Göktürk, Barış Kılıçbay speaks of a “cinema of duty” versus “pleasures of hybridity” in defining two tendencies. The first we can call the re-affirming of identities, the expression of shared problems, and, consequently, as

²²⁵ Şerif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

²²⁶ Ali Çarkoğlu, Binnaz Toprak, and Çiğdem Aksoy, *Religion, Society and Politics in a Changing Turkey*, (Karaköy, İstanbul: TESEV Publications, 2007), 100–118.

Göktürk argues, some lean towards self-victimization.²²⁷ Göktürk herself follows the theory through sociologist Sarita Malik's article "Beyond the Cinema of Duty? The Pleasures of Hybridity: Black British Film of the 1980s and 1990s"²²⁸ wherein Malik writes of a similar case on postcolonial filmmaking practices within the United Kingdom.

These two tendencies are resonant with what Stuart Hall writes in reference to two versions of identity — the first is that which holds true for underlying shared experiences, a shared core identity which the minority groups inhabiting Turkey must discover and express through cinematic means. The second is one which belongs not only to the past, but also to the future — not a static being, but a 'becoming'. Hall writes in regards to their variedness, noting that "far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and then when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."²²⁹ In response to Göktürk's theory, Kılıçbay writes: "This politics of representation, the 'cinema of duty', culminates, according to Göktürk, in an essentialist migrant worker identity reflected in the films from a 'social worker's perspective' and represented as 'the Other' of German purity and authenticity."²³⁰ The second tendency is the celebration of the pleasure of hybridity by recounting stories about those from the margins of society. What Göktürk calls the pleasure of hybridity can be thought of as a becoming molecular. Becoming molecular is also a "collective assemblage of enunciation", not recovering a singular solipsistic past, but 'daring to singularize', to become different, to merge differing and contrasting identities.

²²⁷ Barış Kılıçbay, "Turkish-German Cinema Reconsidered: Stereotypes, Ethnic Performance and Topographies of Loss in Karamuk," *Third Text* 28, No. 6 (2014).

²²⁸ Sarita Malik, "Beyond the Cinema of Duty? The Pleasures of Hybridity: Black British Film of the 1980s and 1990s", in *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London and New York: Cassell, 1996), 202–215.

²²⁹ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, eds Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 392–404.

²³⁰ Kılıçbay, "Turkish-German Cinema Reconsidered".

Although Kılıçbay's research concerns fiction filmmaking and films produced within the Turkish diaspora, I argue that the same tendencies can be thought of in relation to first person non-fiction filmmaking. Moreover, within Turkish territories, there are migrants of very diverse lineages, each with competing identity claims. It is the aim of this chapter to observe two different performances of the self, different subjectivities that appear to be akin to these two film types from Turkey. In the first section, I will offer a close reading of a first person narrative of a Kurdish filmmaker looking for her lost guerrilla father in Mizgin Müjde Arslan's *Ben Uçtum Sen Kaldın (I Flew You Stayed)* (2012). This film is part of a nascent trend of first person political films that perform re-assertions of minority identities in Turkey as a 'cinema of duty'.

There are a number of films made in order to reclaim minority histories in Turkey, for instance the Armenian past. One of the earliest films is Berke Baş's *Nahide'nin Türküsü (Hush! Nahide's Song)* (2009), which depicts her travels to Ordu (once a cosmopolitan city in the Black Sea area in Turkey) to uncover her grandmother's Armenian origins. Through conversations with her family members as well as locals, Baş's film is an attempt to restore a part of memory at once ignored and on the verge of being lost. Similarly, in their co-directed short first person narrative *Archiving Home* (2010), Karin Grigoryan and Mizgin Mujde Arslan go in search of Grigoryan's Armenian home in Turkey. In the first person account of Devrim Akkaya's *Diyar* (2013), a yoga instructor goes on a journey to find her long-lost Armenian great grandfather. Akkaya participates in a sort of therapy that investigates family traumas and migration. The Armenian identity of the protagonist's family had never been investigated. When she inquires into this history with her parents, Akkaya discovers that the grave of her great-grandfather Yusuf is in the cemetery of the nameless in an unknown spot. Hence, Akkaya goes on a journey to find him, and the various encounters with the family

members and their memories serve to write the unofficial history (or part of it) of the Armenian genocide.

Diasporic first person films include Ufuk Emiroğlu's *Mon père, la révolution et moi* (2013),²³¹ which is about a Turkish family that migrated to Switzerland after the 1980 coup. The film depicts Emiroğlu's father enduring torture from the military due to his leftist politics, which compels him to leave the country. Ufuk Emiroğlu sets out to investigate his father's past, the country's history, and the communist utopia, which her father was so dedicated to. Another diasporic first person film is *Dancing Alone* (2012) by German-based Turk Biene Pilavcı, which uncovers her past through interviews with her own family. Through the course of the film, we discover the violence that women undergo in rural Turkey.

These films not only serve as a "cinema of duty" to what Devrim Akkaya calls in her film "the karma of the geography" but also act as forms of domestic ethnography and are similar to Renov's writing on Mindy Faber's film *Delirium* (1993) and its potential "to mine cultural memory with a level of intensity unavailable to outsiders."²³² Russell also emphasizes the need of these films to criticize the scientific claims of ethnography, leading to a total breakdown of the colonialist perspective of ethnography through self-inscription, and emphasizing the doubt, uncertainties, and the speculative through the first person. The second section will include a close reading of a film proposing molecular subjectivities in Aykan Safoğlu's *Off-white Tulips* (2013).

²³¹ Ufuk Emiroğlu, "Mon père, la révolution et moi" (Dschoint Ventschr Filmproduktion AG, 2013).

²³² Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 226.

3.1 Re-asserting Identities in Mizgin Müjde Arslan's *I Flew You Stayed*

In *Ben Uçtum Sen Kaldın* (2012),²³³ Mizgin Müjde Arslan recounts her personal journey, wherein she searches for traces of her lost guerrilla father, who died during the Kurdish-Turkish internal war. It is a journey film because it is a road movie; the protagonist is onscreen throughout most of the film and as events unfold before the camera. The journey takes Arslan to many different locations in Eastern Turkey, from her grandparent's home in Mardin, south-east Turkey, to Mahmur, a refugee camp set up by the UN in Iraq after the Kurdish villages were evacuated in 1994. Arslan's father Kemal was a very important member of the group, a guerrilla who adopted the task of protecting the migrants in the camp.

The film mostly functions as a narrative in which Arslan shares with the audience a personal story of Kurdish injustice so as to add to or augment the official narrative of the conflict. In exploring her familial ties in the film, Arslan makes it an example of domestic ethnography as outlined by Renov, who writes it is

yet another response to the ethnographic impasse. If indeed participant observation founders in its tacking between "inside" and "outside," a passage that restages the subject/object dichotomization installed in the post-enlightenment West, the films and tapes I term *domestic ethnography* play at the boundaries of inside and outside in a unique way... Because the lives of artist and subject are interlaced through communal or blood ties, the documentation on the one tends to implicate the other in complicated ways; indeed, consanguinity and co(i)mplication are domestic ethnography's defining features.²³⁴

Exploring ethnography and the ethical debates surrounding its practice, Renov writes elsewhere of Levinas' conceptions of the ethics of the face-to-face encounter, as I discussed in the previous chapter's section on ethics. If ethnography is to overcome its colonial origins and Western conqueror, the filmmaker has to deal with the encounter that takes place in front

²³³ *Ez Firiyam Tu Ma Li Ci / Ben Uçtum Sen Kaldın*, directed by Mizgin Müjde Arslan (Asi Film: 2012).

²³⁴ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 218.

of the camera.²³⁵ Renov puts ethical debates right at the centre of documentary studies for they concern the Other. And as stated above, domestic ethnography is but one method for such encounters and ethical discussions; in them, the self as the seen subject provides a breakdown of any imperialist ethnographic encounter, not to speak of also providing a deconstruction of the official narrative of Kurdish history.

Arslan's own story creates a rupture in the official narrative. As she stated when I interviewed her: "This was a personal history written in response to official records. I also wanted to do this in a way that was not quiet, as was advised of us, but so that everyone would see and hear. One can call it a personal form of resistance."²³⁶ While some contexts might call for an explicit articulation of resistance, where speaking against what is advised can also be a means of creating a 'crack' in a set identity, at the same time it can be a confirmation of another form of identity, which, in Arslan's case, concerns being Kurdish.

The film's narrative structure is linear and provides exposition through the testimonials Arslan gathers in her first person onscreen encounters. The political is in the narrative itself and in how it re-asserts the presence of Kurdish identities rather than in troubling notions of identity. As such, it does not politicize the filmic treatment, not in narrative, sound, or in its visual components, that is, poetically rather than as 'dissensus', an act of representation such as described by Rancière in the previous chapter;²³⁷ rather, Arslan uses film as a political tool in and of itself, to allow the reassertion of the presence of Kurdish communities. As Özyürek explains in regard to artistic works dealing with history, these memories create a community and claims for identity.²³⁸ In order to understand the necessity of such films, I will look closer into the Kurdish issue within Turkey in the following section.

²³⁵ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, 152.

²³⁶ Mizgin Müjde Arslan in conversation with the author, July 2015.

²³⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011).

²³⁸ Esra Özyürek, *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* (Syracuse University Press, 2007).

3.1.1. The Kurdish Conflict and its Representation by the Media

As discussed in the first chapter, the Kurdish-Turkish conflict is one of the most pressing issues in the country, and a historical analysis of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey reveals not only continuities, but significant political and discursive shifts as well. The perception of Kurdish identity as a problem dates back to the late Ottoman Empire in the 19th century and, since then, has been closely intertwined with Turkey's struggles with nationalism and modernization. The hegemony of Turkish nationalism has been a force throughout Turkish republican history wherein utter allegiance at the expense of non-Turkish ethnic claims was demanded. Kurds were the most vocal ethnic group resisting the government's Turkification efforts, evidenced by numerous uprisings during the early decades of the republic. Modernization has also been an important factor in shaping state policies toward the Kurds. Beginning with the Ottomans, Kurds began to be seen as obstacles against modernization in the eyes of the ruling figures of the state. The Kurds were associated with tribalism, religious activity, and banditry,²³⁹ as represented by the mainstream media, which never presented the Kurdish perspective.²⁴⁰

During the nationalist resistance in the 1920s, the republican government entertained the idea of giving local autonomy to Kurds as well as to other ethnic groups. However, the perceived urgency of westernization led to the continuation of an Ottoman state policy and resulted in emphasizing the power of the central state, lest the Kurds hamper the process of modernization.²⁴¹ In the process, the Turks transformed themselves from the main ethnic group to the rulers of the nation, and the term Kurd, through the state's explicit efforts,

²³⁹ Mesut Yeğen, "'Prospective-Turks' or 'Pseudo-Citizens': Kurds in Turkey," in *The Middle East Journal*, 63(4) (2009): 597–615.

²⁴⁰ Dilara Sezgin & Melissa A. Wall, "Constructing the Kurds in the Turkish Press: A Case Study of *Hürriyet* Newspaper," *Media Culture Society* Vol. 27 (5) (2005): 795.

²⁴¹ Andrew Mango, "Atatürk and the Kurds", in *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35(4) (1999): 1–25.

vanished from public visibility, especially after the Sheik Said Rebellion in 1925, which included both Islamic and Kurdish elements.

The following period, from the post-1925 rebellion until the 1990s, is marked by the forced invisibility of the Kurdish identity. Compared to non-Muslim minority groups (which were officially recognized as minority groups by the foundational Lausanne Treaty in 1923), Kurds, as a majority Muslim group, were exposed to an inordinate degree of forced assimilation.²⁴² Policies of assimilation served a serious blow to Kurdish cultural autonomy as well as reproduction. The state virtually banned the speaking of Kurdish languages in public while those who did speak it were subject to fines; the names of Kurdish villages and towns were made Turkish; and education and publishing in Kurdish was not permissible. The official line as advanced by congress in this period was the complete denial of the Kurds as a people. The government insisted that no Kurds — except for mountain Turks who may have considered themselves Kurdish — lived in Turkey. However, the state's efforts to define the issue was paradoxical from the start: while explicit emphasis on assimilation hinted at Kurdish difference, the official policy of the denial of Kurds as a people drew an inclusive picture in which all citizens of Turkey were considered Turkish by force.²⁴³ The state engaged in a protracted violent conflict with a group of Kurdish insurgents in the early 1980s, called the PKK (*Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan*). Yet, as Guattari writes, subjective revolutions do not always lead to emancipation,²⁴⁴ and in this specific case, since then, the conflict has not only claimed more than 30,000 lives, it has also led to the displacement of millions.²⁴⁵

In the 1990s and early 2000s, a major shift in state discourse led to the recognition of the so-called “Kurdish reality”. Rather than a steady improvement, however, an increasing

²⁴² Kemal Kirişçi, “Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices”, in *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36(3), (2000): 1–22.

²⁴³ Murat Ergin, “The Racialization of Kurdish Identity in Turkey”, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37(2) (2014): 322–341.

²⁴⁴ Félix Guattari, “Subjectivities for Better or Worse”, in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. G. Genosko (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 197.

²⁴⁵ Bilgin Ayata & Deniz Yüksek, “A Belated Awakening: National and International Responses to the Internal Displacement of Kurds in Turkey,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* (32) (2005): 5–42.

amount of political and cultural rights was given to Kurds during this period, marred simultaneously by increasing conflicts and the prevalence of Turkish nationalism. A number of rights, such as the right to broadcast in Kurdish languages, were granted as gestures for ensuring the continuation of Turkey's EU accession talks. However, changes in the governmental framing of the issue, and progress made at policy levels, hardly led to declining degrees of nationalism, let alone greater understanding between Turks and Kurds.

Today, Kurds are the world's largest stateless ethnic group and constitute an estimated 14 to 16% of Turkey's population, with significant numbers in the neighbouring countries.²⁴⁶ Due to a history of prejudice and discrimination, large inequalities exist between Turks and Kurds in contemporary Turkey: Kurds have higher levels of poverty, unemployment, inequality, and illiteracy.²⁴⁷

These problems are not only evident in the content of Arslan's film, but they are also revealed through the film's subsequent impact on the director. The director was taken into custody for four days and only released after the prosecutor watched the film. The arrest was part of a larger cabal enacted against Kurds that led to over 400 Kurds being taken into custody from late 2011 to February 2012. House raids and arrests were carried out in 16 different cities, targeting the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK). The operation was part of a wider legal offensive against the KCK, a union regarded by authorities in Ankara as the political wing of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Since 2009, a Kurdish resource states, over 3,500 people have been arrested, whereas government sources list only 700.²⁴⁸ The film was eventually premiered at the Istanbul Film Festival in 2013 to great

²⁴⁶ Ismet Koç, Atilla Hancıoğlu, & Akanur Cavlin, "Demographic Differentials and Demographic Integration of Turkish and Kurdish Populations in Turkey," *Population Research and Policy Review*, 27 (4) (2008): 447–457.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ "Turkey Arrests over 100 People in Operation against KCK (Kurdish Communities Union)" Last accessed August 28, 2016. <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/2/turkey3763.htm>.

acclaim, with critics celebrated its Kurdish politics. Afterwards, Arslan's film went on to play in the international festival circuit, winning a number of awards.²⁴⁹

3.1.2. Personal Resistance: “We do exist”

It is against this background that the first person political occurs in the Kurdish conflict. The film begins with a voice-over in black, narrating the story of someone in search of a father she had lost a long time ago. After speaking of having met a group of Kurds in Armenia, the character inquires about her father, who also inhabited the same camp as the group. When she asks, “Do you know Kemal?” one of the girls in the group, Gülistan, replies, “Yes, he is my father.” At that moment we see the person to whom the story is being told, a middle-aged woman, who listens with awe. The voice-over continues: “While I couldn't accept he was my father, some other stranger was telling me what I couldn't say. I told her: ‘He cannot be your father because he is my father’.” We then see a wider shot of the setting, whereby the protagonist, whose story we begin to follow, emerges onscreen. And she says, “I borrowed a camera, some cash, and a cameraman, and I went to see the camp where I heard he lived.”²⁵⁰

Arslan's first destination is her grandparents home in Mardin in south-eastern Turkey. While the audience observes the grandparents having breakfast as Arslan asks questions about her father, in the background we hear a television broadcast featuring nationalistic discourse. The TV footage depicts a group of men with Turkish flags shouting, “Turkish martyrs never die. The motherland will never be divided... What is named ‘Kurdish openness’ is nothing but a rendition to PKK, surrender to terror, service to imperialism...” Through this news collage, the viewer acquires a glimpse of the socio-political context as

²⁴⁹ The film's awards include “International Mirella Galetti Award” in Italy (2014) as well as the “Documentary of the Year Award” by the Turkish Film Critics Association (2012), amongst others.

²⁵⁰ Please see fig. 5 for stills of the film *I Flew You Stayed*.

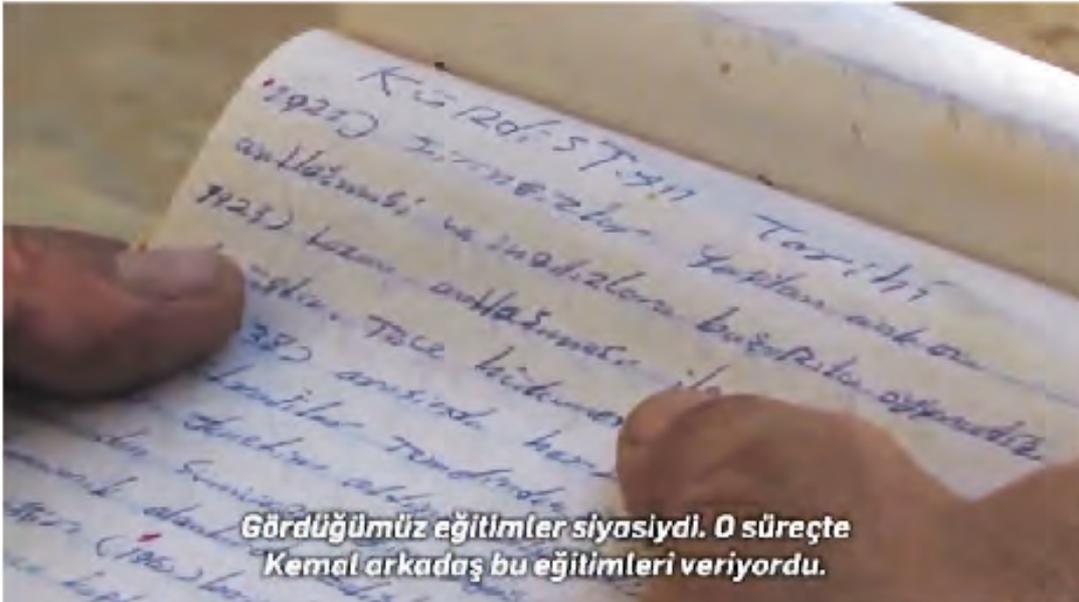
Ben Uçtum Sen Kaldın / I Flew You Stayed

Director: Mizgin Müjde Arslan

Images: courtesy of the artist, 78 min. / 2012



Kemal, Mizgin Müjde Arslan's father



"The training we received was political. At the time Kemal used to teach us these - the history of Kurdistan."

Figure 5

disseminated through the media. It is presented²⁵¹ to offer context, to denote that violence not only takes place physically, but also mentally, through ideological propaganda. All forms of media serve to produce serialised subjectivities, act as tools for subjugating the masses, and enable the re-enforcement of a nationalistic ideology by portraying Kurds as terrorists. There is no dialogue, nor true investigatory process, only condemnatory propaganda disguised as news accounts.

After visiting her grandparents, Arslan embarks on a new journey to Mahmur Camp, which is where her father lived. The sight of the camp Arslan visits, and in which she talks to numerous people who knew her father, serves as an assertion of the Kurdish people's reality. As research on the representation of Kurds in the media reveals, there is virtually no voice from the Kurdish side represented in Turkish media.²⁵² When we hear and see the various members of the camp re-iterate their suffering, they serve as filmic indexical evidence of the events. Another sequence through which Kurdish reality is re-affirmed is through the pedagogy that occurs in the camp. Salih, a close friend of Arslan's father, shows the notebook in which Kemal wrote the history of the Kurds and which he taught to the members of the camp. These acts of pedagogy serve as unofficial discourse, molecular acts which emerge from the written as well as the audible proof on screen.

One of the most striking parts of the film is a scene that takes place at the Martyr Families Foundation, whose walls are covered with hundreds of pictures of martyrs. Saliha, the manager of the foundation, stresses the lack of room for adding new pictures, a death toll that, due to the civil war, reached 50,000 people. Saliha notes further how the majority of the

²⁵¹ In a written interview I held with the director, Arslan stated: "We constructed the television sequences to indicate the time period we filmed as well as to provide context and finally to say that those two elderly parents are right in the middle of these events. Those news reports impact and will continue to influence our lives." Please see appendices for a full transcript of the interviews.

²⁵² Sezgin & Wall, "Constructing the Kurds in the Turkish press: a case study of *Hürriyet* newspaper," 787–798.

victims don't have graves, and that there are graves that don't have names, which emphasizes the value (or lack thereof) of Kurdish lives in this geography.

In a recent article, Arslan writes in reference to a number of Kurdish films about drawing a narrative that pursues the source of the voice of their fathers sent through cassette recordings from far-off lands to which they had to migrate due to political tensions in Turkey. She states that, "the pursuing [of the owner] of [the] voice in these films is not coincidental. The identity, literature, history which does not exist officially, only existed through these voices for many years." It is in a sense similar to what Hito Steyerl writes in regards to leaked archival material and only how it resurfaces to reassert itself in the collective psyche.²⁵³

The same thing can be thought of in terms of the cassette recordings in which displaced and disappeared people who have been erased from official discourses emerge and are leaked through cassettes sent from abroad. Arslan uses a voiceover of her father speaking against a black screen, interlaced with still images, when he explains his departure to his family: "Always for the greater good... A revolutionary becomes so out of love for his country."

Arslan notes further that the Kurdish language did not gain official acceptance by the mainstream Turkish film industry until the 2000s; therefore, films with Kurdish dialogue did not include subtitles. Arslan likens this to American films with dialogue in Vietnamese with no subtitles as the incomprehensible language that 'foreigners' speak. She concludes, "Kurdish cinema should be read as the last chain of events from 'Kurds don't exist' to a cinema in Kurdish... Kurdish cinema is the desire to be seen, is the transformation of silence to sound, it is re-writing of history, it is the self-inscription of a community and most importantly it is resistance without guns." *I Flew you Stayed* is a film that clearly understands its first person positionality "to be implicated in larger social transformations and historical

²⁵³ Hito Steyerl, "Politics of the Archive." Last modified March 2008. Last accessed February 02, 2013. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/steyerl/en>.

processes.”²⁵⁴ The subjectivity at hand is simply a mode of address, a claim for presence. And relationality²⁵⁵ is what matters to Arslan, whereby she speaks of the increase of the first person author in Kurdish films:

I think first person films are increasing in number especially in women’s and Kurdish areas... In these stories in order to tell the bigger picture we start from our own personal stories. We have big problems, big words, but it is not easy to tell these stories in large-scale proportions. That is why we start from the smallest circle of the chain, the inner stories. We can possibly explain this through the fact that my first documentary was about my aunt and my second was about me and my dad.²⁵⁶

Even the ‘we’ that the director enunciates in this interview is suggestive of the drive, the conviction with which these first person films are made in re-asserting a collective presence that has been denied for a century.

3.1.3. Prejudice and Repression as Catalysts for Asserting Identity

Through Arslan’s personal narrative, the assertion of Kurdish identities and the narrative of the suffering they endured become tools for justice in seeking to acknowledge the violence that Kurds underwent. In thinking through Renov’s notion of domestic ethnography another layer of the film is revealed where Arslan questions her mother and it is where the personal becomes a co(i)mplication. The film is at once an autobiography for Arslan and a reinscription of history by not resorting to the Other person but to the Other self, through encounters with the family and telling their stories of what it means to be Kurdish in this geography.

I Flew You Stayed certainly has a place in Turkey in highlighting the Kurdish fight for existence and political legitimacy. The assertion of once-suppressed identities in Turkey in

²⁵⁴ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 276.

²⁵⁵ Lebow, *First Person Jewish*, X.

²⁵⁶ Mizgin Mijde Arslan in conversation with the author, July 2015. Please see appendices for a full transcript of the interview.

first person films is a growing trend. As Arslan explains, “it is understandable why an increased number of young Kurdish people are making new films every year and why Kurdish cinema is on a sharp rise. Their story is untold or has been manipulated by others so far; now they are telling their own stories and rewriting their history/reality truthfully.”²⁵⁷

The film follows existing political discourses in regards to the rights of the Kurds and supports these discourses through a personal story. The narrative is constructed in such a way that it does not leave room for interpretation; it has a clear narrative structure and the suffering that the families went through is a fact that is not open to judgment. Arslan’s personal family as shown on-screen is left behind is devastated; the camp shows the displacement of Kurdish people from Turkey and the exacting conditions under which they live. And while the mainstream media completely denies the Kurdish voice on-screen, this film serves to ameliorate that void. My previous film, *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders*, can in part be thought of as connected to this process, too. In that sense, it can be said that there is a movement of re-writing the histories of a lost (or deliberately obfuscated) past, one not visible in official records.

Films such as Arslan’s and mine fit into a wide spectrum extending from ‘cinema of duty’ to ‘self-victimization’. And the first person voice allows for this political self to emerge and to state that it exists within Turkey’s national territory, whether it is a granted right, or not.

3.2 First Person Essayistic in Aykan Sifoğlu’s *Off-white Tulips*

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there are at least two tendencies in first person films from Turkey: one is the affirmation of the status of the minority identity,

²⁵⁷ Mizgin Müjde Arslan, “It Depends,” *This is not art*, <http://questanonearte.com/english-version/mizgin-mujde-arслан-it-depends/>. Last accessed July 21, 2015.

another is the production of a subjectivity that is hybrid, fluid, and critical of normative conceptions of identity and interrogates the formation of subjectivities in order to render them molecular. Aykan Safoğlu's *Off-White Tulips* (2013) is an essay-film that does not affirm a certain identity but complicates it, both in content as well as in form. The film is a critique of the Turkish modernisation process and its impact since its foundation, which is framed through an intertwining of James Baldwin's biography and the filmmaker's personal history. Baldwin acts as a Trojan horse²⁵⁸ enabling Safoğlu to discuss a period and a geography that could potentially bore foreign audiences. Both artists faced racial and gender inequalities, were involved in queer activist environments, and were displaced from their home countries. Although developed throughout the film, it is only at the very end of the film that Safoğlu elaborates this connection directly between the two displaced men in his voice-over: "Although you give me weird looks, I would say your writings help me to see clearly my childhood, and in the different ways life happens to us as well what fear, love, hate and desire mean. In a way, what my own life story is. And to make a meaning out of it."

In order to contextualise the film, I will first elaborate on queer politics in Turkey and emphasise their value in the formation of dissident subjectivities.

3.2.1. Queer Politics in Turkey

A brief genealogical investigation of the social codes linked to the political regime in the face of sexuality in Turkey, starting with the formation of the nation state in the early 1920s, sets the context and reveals the intersectionalities of nationalism, militarism, and class dynamics. I will also elaborate upon the LGBT Movement, which has actively engaged in sexual politics since the early 1990s. As Andrea Smith argues, "heteropatriarchy is the

²⁵⁸ Aykan Safoğlu in discussion with the author, May 2015. Please see appendices for a full transcript of the interview.

building block of the nation-state form of governance.”²⁵⁹ The authoritarian modernization process in Turkey, which started with the establishment of the Turkish Republic, can be considered a social engineering project, and the regulation of reproduction and sexuality are inherent elements in the formation of the state through the Kemalist ideology, the nationalism of the military elites who established the Republic.

To speak of but one of the devastating impacts of the military-coup in 1980, consider the enactment of state violence against many non-heteronormative individuals. The heterosexist attitudes of the militarist country continue till this day, and the fact that the military considers homosexuality an illness, a psychosexual disorder, confirms these attitudes, a point also stressed in Safoğlu’s film. The view of homosexuality as illness was most clear in the statement by the former state minister Aliye Kavaf, who is responsible for women and family affairs, when she insisted that being LGBT is a biological disorder and should be treated as such.²⁶⁰ Even her government position title, “Women and Family Affairs”, implies that the role of the woman is a domestic one²⁶¹ and that “doing” military service is taken as proof of heterosexual masculinity and a rite of passage to becoming a man.²⁶² It is obligatory and can be read as being a precondition to becoming a full citizen.

Following Judith Butler’s understanding of gender as “the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity”, “a stylized repetition of acts”,²⁶³ and in line with her theory of gender performativity, these repetitive acts are more than performances enacted by each pre-existing subject, but they constitute the subject. Hence, identity is constantly in the process of formation. Butler furthers her argument of gender as performance and also as limitation when thinking of sexuality in terms of reproduction: “...acts and gestures,

²⁵⁹ Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy,” in *Color of Violence: INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence* (2006).

²⁶⁰ Faruk Bildirici, “Eşcinsellik Hastalık, Tedavi Edilmeli,” *Hürriyet* (2010). Last accessed on July 25, 2015.

²⁶¹ H. Burcu Baba, “The Construction of Heteropatriarchal Family and Dissident Sexualities in Turkey,” *Fe Dergi* 3, No. 1 (2011), 56–64.

²⁶² Pınar Selek, *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak* [Crawling to be a Man] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008)

²⁶³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge. 1990), 179.

articulated and enacted desires, create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive sexuality.”²⁶⁴ From this, we can understand the construction of national gender identities as an on-going project in Turkey in relation to compulsory heterosexuality and reproduction as exemplified in the military as well as in the stories recounted above by Aliye Kavaf.²⁶⁵

To see the LGBT emancipatory movements in retrospect, we need to return to the post-1980 military coup. After the most ruthless of the three military juntas, the Radical Democrat Green Party was established with the leadership of Ibrahim Eren. Subsequently, the violent history that the LGBT community underwent in Turkey started gaining visibility. The party’s political agenda concerned a wide range of political activism such as feminism, ecology, LGBT politics, anti-militarism, and atheism.²⁶⁶ Although the party could not perform efficient politics within Turkish society, since its existence, their inclusion of LGBT terms and politics was significant for the visibility and politicization and participation in a global trend within the local socio-political context. After that, the LGBT movement started to proceed with protests, hunger strikes (in 1987),²⁶⁷ and the struggle for and attainment of legal status for transsexuals in 1988. It was then followed by the founding of the first LGBT magazine and organization, Kaos GL, in Ankara in 1994.²⁶⁸ After the establishment of the Kaos GL group, other groups, organizations, and student forums began to sprout up, inspired by the momentum that the LGBT movement gained in Turkey. However, concurrently, state suppression, discrimination, and violence against the new visibility of the LGBT community was increasing. This was especially true with transsexual individuals, as in the Ülker Street

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 173.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 174.

²⁶⁶ ILGA Europe, “A Brief History of the Lgbt Movement in Turkey” (2004). <http://ilga.org/a-brief-history-of-the-lgbt-movement-in-turkey/>. Last accessed August 8, 2015.

²⁶⁷ Çağlar Doğan, “Dernekten Açlık Grevine Ve Buluşmalara 25 Yıl,” *Bianet* (2004). Last accessed July 18, 2015.

²⁶⁸ ILGA, 2004.

case in 1996, which occurred just prior to the United Nations Human Settlement Program meeting in Istanbul. At that historic event, many transgendered people were displaced and driven out of their homes, subjected to investigation, arrests, and torture.²⁶⁹

As visible in the recent events, along with the rise of activism in Turkey, the state's cultural and political repression has also increased. Despite certain advantages gained, and despite visibility and political momentum being sustained from the 1980's to the present, the image of LGBT people in society at large did not change in terms of the social hierarchy and politics. In particular, transsexuals and transvestites are subjected to social and economic deprivation, severe violence, and murder.²⁷⁰ Being LGBT has long since been associated with psychological disorders and perversion, not only by the Turkish state, but also by a great number of citizens. In its report titled "Ne Bir Hastalık Ne De Bir Suç; Türkiye'de Lezbiyen, Gey, Biseksüel Ve Transeksüel Bireyler Eşitlik İstiyor" (Neither an illness nor a crime, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Individuals want Equality), Amnesty International²⁷¹ has condemned the Turkish state both internally and internationally. The report further advocates modifications in local legislations, and at the judiciary level. It also promotes the reconsideration of international laws and their binding forces over nation states.

One of the most visible activities of the LGBT movement, the pride march, first took place in June 2003 in Istanbul, when the movement's ties with global contemporaries were becoming intense. The march in 2015 endured immense pressure from the police, with tear

²⁶⁹ Öykü Tümer, "Türkiye'deki Travesti Ve Transeksüellerin Direniş Deneyimleri," Last Accessed July 30, 2015. <http://www.feminisite.net/news.php?act=details&nid=267>.

²⁷⁰ İlay Ertetik, "Coming out as a Political Act in LGBT Movement in Turkey" (Master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2010).

²⁷¹ Amnesty International, "Ne Bir Hastalık Ne De Bir Suç, Türkiye'de Lezbiyen, Gey, Biseksüel Ve Transeksüel Bireyler Eşitlik İstiyor," Last accessed July 16, 2015. <https://www.amnesty.org.tr/uploads/Docs/lgbt-raporu-tr240.pdf> (2011).

gas and water cannons²⁷² as the primary forms of oppression, and is indicative of the ongoing limitations and severe pressure imposed by the government.

Given the context, there is also another trend of films in Turkey that exposes the brutality that the LGBT community experience in Turkey in a much more overt manner. Melisa Önel's *Ben ve Nuri Bala* (2012) is a documentary about trans-activist Esmeray, who is very vocal in her activities in regards to LGBT rights. And Can Candan's documentary *My Child* (2013) is the story of parents of LGBT children, who publicly share their experiences of parenting and the process of assimilating into conservative Turkish society. Or Aykut Atasay, who made a series of queer activist films from the LGBT perspective including *Shemales* (2007), which is a mockumentary that satirises the mainstream medias portrayal of transvestites. All of these films are important for they participate in rewriting Turkey's history and help to re-assert the presence of the LGBT community in Turkey.

However, as David Halperin argues, one type of being queer is an action, an act of "resistance to the normal", rather than simply a site or sexual orientation. Thus, it does not have a direct referent and it does not represent any stable category of people.²⁷³ If queer politics can be a subject position, can involve the possibility of becoming a subject, even if in flux and constantly produced, it can also become a position from which not to be subjugated to normative politics. Here, Queer Theory is of significance since it is not only about 'queer people', but about an entire society as it problematizes the ways individuals are constituted within and by sexual codes, or subjected to other forms of being. A queer politics that makes room for global and local alliances among non-conforming people seems then to offer solutions for new subjectivities and the essay-film form, as the one I will analyse in the following section offers a fruitful discussion for such molecular subjectivities. *Off-white*

²⁷² "Istanbul Gay Pride Quashed by Riot Police, Rubber Bullets and Water Cannon," *Euronews* (June 28, 2015). Last accessed July 19, 2015.

²⁷³ Halperin in Janet R. Jacobsen, "Queer is? Queer Does? Normativity and the Problem of Resistance," in *GLQ* 4:4 (1998), 511–536.

Tulips differs from the aforementioned first person films, and although it still addresses the context of LGBT politics, ‘queers’ the film form itself, albeit via a non-Turkish figure, thereby localizing and broadening the politics of the film at the same time. It also addresses migratory subjectivities through both figures and through aligning them and their journeys and how they imaginatively intertwine.

3.2.2. Constructing a Molecular *Subject* in the Film

“You were jaded, and in search of a way out.” — so starts the eloquent voice-over in Safoğlu's textually rich, witty, and politically charged film, over a still image of a map of Turkey. The spectator does not know to whom the voice-over is directed, nor do we ever see the actual source of the voice. Safoğlu narrates the film to a listener, and to an imagined James Baldwin living in 1960s Istanbul. Eventually, as the video unfolds and picture after picture of Baldwin is shown, though never revealing the source of the voice and the hand that disposes these pictures, the imaginary friendship between the two men becomes apparent to the viewer.

In interweaving Baldwin's stay in Istanbul with his own personal narrative, Safoğlu's film becomes the story of an artist searching for meaning through another artist's life. Consequently, the essayistic film form is an apt choice for Safoğlu, whereby through displaying photographs before the camera and creating a voiceover, he criticises essentialist notions of identity, gender, and art. With an acute sense of humour, often hidden behind self-critical comments highlighting the modernization process of Turkey as reflected in his family, *Off-white Tulips* uses a double story telling method. It at once crosses geographical as

well as filmic genre boundaries between the fictional and documentary. It also travels across time periods, through its double narrative of James Baldwin's extended stays in Istanbul in the 1960s and Safoğlu's own journey to Berlin in 2008.

The merging of different filmic components and heretic quality of essay film is explored by Ursula Biemann, who writes the essayistic film is “that odd film that refuses to behave properly within the designated categories.”²⁷⁴ This could be seen as analogous to refusing to accept (or be coerced into adopting) designated categories of national and sexual identities, thus ‘queering’ the film. The essay-film form is born of the documentary in the sense of working with actual materials (photographs, e.g. in the case of *Off-white Tulips*), but it plays with these materials and does not use them for truth production. Image, sound, graphics, and voice over — all the formal elements of film — are re-configured to create an unorthodox time-based media. Hito Steyerl also states, in working with actuality, both documentary filmmakers and artists have looked into new models for representing their own version of what truth means, with a desire to contest exhausted representational modes.²⁷⁵ This desire, which Deleuze and Guattari²⁷⁶ see as a primary revolutionary and political impulse (as explored in Ch. 2), is enacted in the essay film as a creative and personal force, which questions realism as an artistic mode and thereby differentiates itself from conventional filmic narratives. The essay-film's desire to challenge worn-out or restricted and stultifying representations can also be conceived as an analogy for resisting restrictive identity politics.

In *Encyclopaedia of the Essay*, the essay-film is described as trans-nationalistic and speaks in particular of the contemporary displacement of essay filmmakers like Trinh T. Minh-ha and Raúl Ruiz. It is noted that, “falling themselves between categories, more or less finding a home in multicultural lands, they [Minh-ha and Ruiz] have been inspired, if not

²⁷⁴ Ursula Biemann, ed., *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age* (Zürich: Edition Voldemeer, 2003), 8–12.

²⁷⁵ Steyerl & Lind, *Greenroom*, 225.

²⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone, 1987), 2.

forced, to look for their inspiration to a similarly multilayered practice of filmmaking.”²⁷⁷ This notion of transnationalism is an underlying concept in much contemporary essay-filmmaking in the international arena from Ursula Biemann to Angela Melitopoulos to John Akomfrah,²⁷⁸ as well as in the case study at hand, *Off-white Tulips*. The film playfully and purposefully brings different archives and geographies together. In regards to his own filmmaking, Safoğlu states:

Inspired by the tradition of ‘arrangement’ that started in the ’60’s in popular music circles in Turkey to adapt Italian or French chansons into Turkish, I began to see how the translation aspect embedded in my work operates: I was juggling with forms and re-arranging them, as those musicians once did, to reflect my experience of being a *Stranger in the Village*²⁷⁹ in Europe by inventing a visual language that was totally mine.²⁸⁰

The director achieves this by creating a filmic narrative through still images and drawings, which he connects through his voice over. Thus, the two distinguishing characteristics of Safoğlu’s film are the voice-over narration, which serves as the fictional dialogue, the friendship²⁸¹ he maintains with Baldwin, and the absence of any on-screen person. We only ever see the synecdoche of a person, Safoğlu’s hands. Thus the factual is extended through the fictional, where newness is created, as exemplified in Safoğlu’s imaginary friendship with James Baldwin. This new link creates a platform upon which to imagine the new, the molecular subjectivity that did not exist before. Safoğlu claims that he uses Baldwin as a tool to attract the attention of foreign audiences:

From the very beginning, it wasn’t a film about James Baldwin; it was rather how I understood him. So I believe he became a very generous vessel for me to deliver my emotions and ideas. I do not think there is a better metaphor for this than the Trojan

²⁷⁷ Tracy Chevalier, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Essay* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 264. Laura Marks, *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and The Senses* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), 24–5.

²⁷⁸ *Performing the Border*, directed by Ursula Biemann (1999); *The Stuart Hall Project*, directed by John Akomfrah (2012); *Passing Drama*, directed by Angela Melitopoulos (1999).

²⁷⁹ “Stranger in the Village” is an essay by James Baldwin, narrating his experience in Switzerland, which deals with issues of racism. James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 3rd Beacon pbk. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

²⁸⁰ Aykan Safoğlu in discussion with the author, July 2015.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

horse. Since I planted myself in him, so I could trespass a certain threshold in my audiences, then spill all over.²⁸²

Safoğlu gradually introduces Baldwin to his father through displaying one still photograph of Baldwin after another of his father, a gesture that allows Safoğlu to divert the narrative to a critique of modernization in Turkey through his own family history. In his own words, when the story “spills over” from the Trojan horse, Safoğlu’s story only emerges at the ninth minute of the 23-minute film, when he asks, “Have you ever met my father?” From then onwards, the film’s focus changes to the director. It is indeed a trick, which might also trouble the viewer as an editing mishap, or an imbalance as to the merging of the two stories. In that sense, Safoğlu not only touches upon queer politics — as I will expand upon below — , but also queers the film itself as well in his blurring of fact and fiction and his queering of time and geography. This is akin to what Amy Villarejo explains in relation to queer theory as troubling the expectations of normality:

to put it differently, queer theory seems to me most equipped to ‘tarry with the normative’ when it forsakes its claims to the literal and makes for the dangerous — but also more commodious — complications of relationality and variegation. Queer is but one name, hurled back with pride, for social abjection, exclusion, marginalisation and degradation; it provides, by this logic, but one opening toward freedom.²⁸³

Safoğlu achieves this by placing objects in front of the camera, such as tulips, photographs, and cardboard drawings of Turkish modernist icons, while he narrates — images and objects are linked to a person through his hands or voice over, but that person is not a fixed subject. The sight of a still image from 1960s Istanbul is followed by Safoğlu’s father’s photographs from 1970’s Istanbul. A geography where both characters in the film resided, in different moments of history, meet in the linearity of the film, thus newness and new links are created, or molecular narratives that now embody new subjectivities.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Amy Villarejo, “Tarrying with the Normative: Queer Theory and Black History,” *Social Text* 23, No. 3–4 (2011).

Since the film is composed mostly of still images and has no music and only becomes a narrative through voiceover, in following the writing tradition of the essay in its 400-year history,²⁸⁴ I will emphasise the written/textual aspect of Safoğlu's film from here on. The title highlights the critique of prejudices against queerness as both tulips and the colour off-white refer to a number of signs in Turkey. Off-white in Turkish is 'kırık beyaz' but 'kırık' is also Turkish slang for gay men, literally meaning 'broken'.²⁸⁵ It is one of the verbal insults the queer community endures.

The colour white also refers to modernisation, as the desire of the westernisation of white Turks is another thread in the film. 'White' and 'Black' Turks are imaginary groups referring to the social classes, with reference to their urbanisation as well as the desire to become modern as opposed to rural, black Turks.²⁸⁶ The fascination with appearance and racial colour is a running thread throughout the film, which at once creates a larger narrative of racism (which Baldwin was also subjected to, and also questions the fascination with skin colour). Safoğlu narrates to his imaginary friend Baldwin:

You knew what it was to be a black child in the USA, what fear meant. You remembered your adolescent years, the tension they created. While you were thinking of ways to tell the whites about the history of their country they had forgotten you were in the largest city of another country that had slowly started to forget its history. You tried to explain your case, and they tried to understand it. With their language revealing and feeding other discriminations they probably didn't know how to define you. Zenci stands in Arabic for dark-skinned or African. It's widely believed that this word in Ottoman Turkish originated from Arabic. But no one remembers that etymologically it comes from the Farsi word 'zangī' meaning rusty.

This narration is made over the positioning of two coins, a rusty one and a new one.

The director uses these objects differently than as documentary material for proof or illustration; he uses them through a metaphorical approach, leading to the essayistic form.

²⁸⁴ See Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009).

²⁸⁵ "Although the Turkish title reflects this idea, the English translation does not. I would have translated it differently now." Aykan Safoğlu in discussion with the author, May 2015.

²⁸⁶ Nilüfer Göle, *Islam and Public Controversy in Europe, Global Connections* (VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013)

The difference in treatment of the filmic material, the indexicality versus the metaphorical use of images, relates to the role of the spectator and how the viewer unpacks the story. As Peter Limbrick writes in regards to Kamal Aljafari's film *The Roof*: "Rather than relying upon an expositional description and definitive explanation of these traces, the film instead allows space for the activity of the documentary spectator, 'obsessed with realism', to invest in the image a pastness that carries not just a sense of history but a sense of agency; a 'we' for whom this past exists."²⁸⁷ In relation to the spectator's role in *Off-White Tulips*, the director achieves this through gaps in his narrative, as well as through combining objects in unexpected manners. I will expand on the role of the active spectator below.

Safoğlu's critique of uncritical westernization is also highlighted when we witness his mother becoming blonder each year through a series of photographs. He furthers the same issue by including in the narration child actors from the mainstream high-peak of Turkish films, called the Yeşilçam²⁸⁸ era (from the 1950s to 1970s), through photographs from popular films such as *Ayşecik*, *Sezercik*, *Ömercik* and *Yumurcak*. Safoğlu finally returns to his imaginary friend Baldwin: "When you decided to leave, Turkey was obsessed with these surreal children. I don't mean they didn't understand you. I just say that a society that recruits children for social justice can only understand the intricate structures you discussed as much as a child does." These blonde kids, who don't resemble local ones (because filmmakers used fair-skinned children for the sake of looking modern), Safoğlu claims, are a clear indication of the country's desire for Westernisation, and to be seen as Western (and modern) society. This concordance between blondness and Westernisation is explored by Murat Ergin in his article "Is the Turk a White Man?" To Ergin, race and whiteness emerge as decisive

²⁸⁷ Peter Limbrick, "From the Interior: Space, Time and Queer Discursivity in Kamal Aljafari's the Roof," in *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First person Documentary*, ed. Alisa Lebow (London: Wallflower Press, 2012).

²⁸⁸ Yeşilçam is named after the street where many actors and film studios were based in during the golden era of Turkish cinema.

components of Turkish modernity and he argues that through analysing race we can understand the Turkish experience of modernization.²⁸⁹ Ergin outlines what he calls “chromatism” in the levels of Turkishness, which is determined through skin colour, and does a close reading of how this is used to understand Turkish modernity. The case that blond kids were used in the films that looked nothing like the local ones is an apt example of this conception.

The second sign embedded in the film’s title is the tulip, which is one of the recurrent objects in the film and can also be related to ‘the White Turks’. The Golden Age of the Ottomans, also called the Tulip Age, ended with the insurgency of the oppressed classes. In contemporary Turkey, tulips are still indicative of state wealth; however, when one of the most brutal Mayday celebrations took place in 1996, three protestors died. The day has since been referred to as that of an uprising. A memorable incident was when one of the protestors beat a bouquet of tulips as a sign of revolt against the state. As Safoğlu narrates in his film: “To understand why the tulips were smashed we have to take a closer look at our reflection of our European faces in our eastern mirrors.” What he means by this is the clash between our desire to become European in a context of forced Westernisation and the revolt in the face of this repression.

The tulips are also mentioned when Safoğlu narrates his expulsion from the military service, which is obligatory for all Turkish men. The only way to avoid it is to prove that one is either gay or unhealthy due to a major illness. When Safoğlu shows an envelope from the Turkish Armed Forces that indicates that he is exempt from military service, Safoğlu narrates over a photograph of himself dressed as a woman: “If tulips were lilies, they would be expelled from the army.”²⁹⁰ In a sense, then, tulips represent the patriarchal structure of the

²⁸⁹ Ergin, “Is the Turk a White Man?”, 827–50.

²⁹⁰ See fig. 6 for the picture of beaten tulips as well as Safoğlu’s military exemption picture.

Kırık-Beyaz Laleler / Off -White Tulips

Director: Aykan Safoğlu

Images: courtesy of the artist, 23min. / 2013



Dhkp-c member woman smashing tulips in grief and anger on may 1, 1996, after the police escalated the peaceful demonstrations and killed three of her comrades on site, in front of her.
(collage from the film, Aykan Safoğlu)



Aykan Safoğlu was asked to submit 'homo-erotic' photos to prove his sexuality, when he came out to the military authorities in Turkey. Here, him posing as Carmen Miranda to be exempted.
(Hair and make-up: Tümay Tüzüner, photo: Gencay Ünsalan, still from the film)

Figure 6

Turkish society, and this statement, hence the lilies highlight becoming molecular and non-conformist against conservative Turkish society.

Safoğlu's critique is subtle, but pointed. By virtue of not saying many things, he still reveals much. For instance, when he removes a photograph of himself dressed as a woman from the envelope he received from the Turkish Armed Forces, it is the audience that fills in the gaps, hopefully realizing that he applied for exemption because of his sexual orientation. Safoğlu never openly states his sexuality; whatever comments he makes are coded with signs against which a statement is positioned, such as an image of tulips, or the still image of his military exemption, each of which are to be read and explicated by the spectator.

In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), Jacques Rancière suggests that the position of the spectator has to be the foremost topic in the relationship of art to politics, because all spectacles take place before an audience. Through the formulation of the spectator as one who seeks the meaning of the spectacle, Rancière critiques the assumption of a spectator's position as passive and ignorant. He argues instead that any spectator is always already active, meaning she is able to actively engage and make connections to what she already knows. He proposes that "the position of [a] passive spectator" be exchanged "for that of [a] scientific investigator or experimenter, who observes phenomena and searches for their causes."²⁹¹ For Rancière, this type of audience demands more than just being absorbed by a story — it requires active participation, through not providing the entire story, by broken narratives, by gaps left for the audience. "It involves an idea of community as self-presence, in contrast to the distance of representation."²⁹² This is precisely what Safoğlu achieves with his address to an imagined friend, and by leaving many parts of his story unrevealed. It opens a filmic space, a space between the screen and the spectator for new subjectivities to be imagined. It is also the point highlighted by Rascaroli as 'interpellation', which is a de facto

²⁹¹ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 4.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 5.

prerequisite of essay films, the intercommunicative structure of such essayistic works. The specificity here is being interpolated via a ‘gap’ or a question in the narration, rather than an ideology or identification with a person.

What we cannot access in our apprehension of the images used in the film is their precise “when-ness” or context. So, while we understand them to be evidence of some kind of past-ness, we must infer or ‘fill in the gaps’ that are raised by the ambiguity of the image.²⁹³ In this sense, Safoğlu gives the audience a larger role in the film, which starts with the first person address, then leaves gaps of information regarding historical dates and specifications. There are interruptions of the given ‘logic of the action’ though the gaps in the narrative and what is revealed becomes of importance, for instance when Safoğlu opens the envelope from the military service and we see his picture along with the voice over “If tulips were lilies”, we fill in the gaps that he was exempt from military service because he didn’t fit into the molar structure.

The subjectivity Safoğlu performs in the film then at once denies military, geographical, and filmic boundaries, and by further blurring the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, he himself becomes molecular through new relations to Baldwin, and thus to his own history, and to Turkey. Thus, he simultaneously queers historical as well as personal archives. Safoğlu achieves this through his evocative open narrative, with photographs and other material, such as tulips and coins, and also a new author is created, hidden behind many layers of fiction, which, I would argue, frees the subjective essay-film from the claims of narcissism.

²⁹³ Peter Limbrick, “From the Interior: Space, Time and Queer Discursivity in Kamal Aljafari’s the Roof,” in *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First person Documentary*, ed. Alisa Lebow (London: Wallflower Press, 2012).

3.2.3. Celebrating Hybridity:

Initially I didn't understand when the German Government handed me this document, which entailed something like a fiction certificate. However it became clear, it was only a provisional residence permit. You came into my mind. Wherever you want to go, you would have preferred to have something like that instead of a permanent residence permit.²⁹⁴

So narrates Safoğlu over an image of the visa he receives at the end of his visual essay. The film started as an address to an unknown persona: “You were jaded, and you were looking for a way out”, and Safoğlu finds a “fictional” way out, like the temporary residence permit in Germany, “Fiktionsbescheinigung”, a temporary and transitory one. In its merging of different registers of different cultures and geographies, and a temporary rather than a permanent situatedness, the above quote suggests Safoğlu’s commitment to becoming molecular. The so-called document is also queered by becoming a fiction as well since Safoğlu is playing with a governing tool and temporariness receives a positivity and a space of the possible while still critiquing the governmental aspect of it.

Similar to Baldwin, Safoğlu writes a visual “book” abroad, displaced from his home, titled *Off-white Tulips*. And it is through the story of Baldwin, an African-American gay author who found a freer environment in Turkey, that Safoğlu reveals that it is not Turkey or Germany or the US, but the subjectivity we perform in our day to day through which we constantly create “fictional” ways of resisting that cross essentialist boundaries and/or imposed sexual identities. Fiction is then not the opposite of the real but the opening of spaces of the possible, and as I mentioned in the introduction, it is through creating new links, producing the new in Guattari’s terms, that Safoğlu produces a subjectivity in the face of the oppressive structures such as border politics and military.

Safoğlu’s political desires as expressed in the filmic form leaves more open spaces for a spectator, calling forth the becoming of subjectivities in the act of viewing, thereby

²⁹⁴ *Off-White Tulips*, directed by Aykan Safoğlu (2014).

engendering active engagement. His film resonated with my thesis' proposal of the potential of first person film as a platform for resisting notions of Turkishness. It further allows for establishing new molecular subjectivities through merging the fictional with the factual, thereby distancing the self from the onscreen character of the director, allowing for a layered and fragmented reading of subjectivity, countering imposed notions of fixed national, sexual, and racial identities.

CHAPTER 4: Reflections On *Of Dice And Men*

Of Dice and Men is an essayistic diary film concerned with the fluctuating rhythms of my daily life. Due to its dependence on daily life activities, and my attempts to draw together glimpses from my life in London and Istanbul, thematically, it is a polyphonic video. The contents of the entries are based on the moments of rupture that highlight the problematics I faced as both a Turkish as well as a British citizen. These include ideas of modernity and Turkishness leading up to present tensions characterised by a combination of elements: the AKP's authoritarianism, a revived Kurdish-Turkish conflict, an increase in conservatism due to Islamicization of Turkish society, and finally the pressures caused by the neoliberal condition, which largely rules everyday politics, especially in terms of the loss of public spaces (I explored this in Ch. 2), a dilemma in both Turkey and the UK. My video began at a moment of urgency and crisis. Its creation was born of my desire to record events that would highlight the tensions noted above in order to participate in writing the history occurring before my eyes, to infect narratives with molecular interpretations or shades and complexities. What initiated the first footage I shot in the UK for the diary entries was the Occupy demonstration on November 30, 2011 whereas what prompted me to shoot my initial footage in Turkey was rage in the face of the murder of Hrant Dink, the Armenian human rights journalist. The incident was followed by state cover-ups and the crystallization of the political minds of my generation. Such major events are interlaced with more elusive experiences, such as boys diving into the Bosphorus, and my first encounter with a feat of nature, each of which are not directly linked to politics but which are breathing spaces for me, events which enable me to pay attention to things other than violence. Loosely defined, I followed the meeting points of the personal and the public, i.e. in public spaces, and recorded these events, and the video is a testimony of four years of my life (2011–2015).

Corrigan's description of the essayistic literary tradition corresponds to aspects of my video since he outlines articulations of subjectivity and their meeting points with the public. As he notes, the essay is: "1) a testing of expressive subjectivity through 2) experiential encounters in a public arena; 3) the product of which becomes the figuration of thinking or thought as a cinematic address and spectatorial response."²⁹⁵ Likewise, throughout the process, I observed in my video how resistances to the supposed normality of daily life, such as a strike, occur, how temporary alliances on the streets are formed, alliances not based on state-imposed national, sexual, and/or political ideologies, but on molecular forces (like watching a street performance), to major ones like Gezi and Occupy. These observations then took the perspective of a first person narrator, which I will expand on below.

Following the diaristic entries of my video, I think of each entry of the video reflecting my production of subjectivity, each entry carrying its own specific conditions, and requiring its own specific formal treatment. Consequently, each entry is a brief essay, and based on the content it aims to tackle, I form a certain momentary molecular subjective enunciator expressed through the narrator, and enact my political positionality. As Rascaroli writes in her introduction to *The Personal Camera* in reference to the political value of first person filmmaking, "to speak of 'I' is, after all, firstly a political act of self-awareness and self-affirmation".²⁹⁶ At the same time, each entry then creates another experiential encounter and thereby aims to become a platform for polyphonic spectatorial responses.

The throw of dice in the video is a visual leitmotif denoting the indeterminable patterns of daily life. The action also affirms how history is a perpetual repetition, but with paradoxical variations for, while the events may be similar, the subjects, the people, are in states of perpetual change. It is a repetition with a difference.

²⁹⁵ Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*, 30.

²⁹⁶ Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 2.

Below, in separate sections, I will expand upon the methodology of filmmaking, the enunciator I created, the encounter with the spectator, and working in the gallery space.

4.1 Methodology: Filming and Editing

Daily, I documented my own experiences as well as ‘life’ around me, even if I did not always know what for. I filmed, I wrote, I shot, and took still images. I used mobile phones as well as video cameras and later started searching for archive footage related to particular events like Gezi, as well as footage of eagles falling from the sky. In a sense, I became a collector of such events and then made collages of them; like the ‘gleaners’ in Agnès Varda’s film *The Gleaners and I*,²⁹⁷ I gleaned moments from daily life. Collecting is also similar to Russell’s classifications of the first person filmmaker as collagist.²⁹⁸ And the collage material is formed of molecular revolutions within daily life and/or building molecular links between seemingly unrelated events.

Following a process of collecting material, I then condensed my observations and created short diary entries through editing. Condensation often took place through eliminating information but trying to distil a political effect from the situation, which was finalised in the writing process. Like the thinking films Corrigan describes,²⁹⁹ the material I filmed helped me to return to fleeting moments and to rethink them. In other words, I think with my camera; it has been my form of participating in demonstrations and many smaller events for the past four years, and this act at once collapses observation and participation, which become mutual acts.

I included other entries, unedited, which for me involve “magic moments”, small glimpses of life I captured on camera. I tried to balance the joys of life, like a rainbow and musicians on the street, with the violence of everyday life, like an encounter with an ultra-

²⁹⁷ *The Gleaners and I*, directed by Agnès Varda (Paris: Cine Tamaris, 2000).

²⁹⁸ Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography. The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Duke University Press, 1999), 277–8.

²⁹⁹ Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*, 55.

nationalist cab driver in Istanbul, or the mechanised noise of guards rehearsing military drills in London. I wanted the film to undo a hierarchy between so-called trivial everyday events and major political events, but to also find textures of the political in the everyday.

Referring to interpreting my daily camera work as a thinking process, collecting subtle and brief moments allowed me to contemplate how events like the Gezi Uprising occur and how they might be linked to previous minor events. It also led me to consider what traces events like Gezi might leave in the everyday after they occur, which is also what provoked me to continue shooting post-Gezi.

However, reflecting further on filming as observation and participation, I also needed to continue to acknowledge that filming can sometimes, or even most often, be directly linked to an exercise of power. The on-going politics of image making tackles questions like: “What to film and what not to film?” “What is the efficacy of indexicality and realism in representing an event?” “What to say and what not to say in a voice over (how much information to give)?” Such questions can be perceived as extensions of the production of subjectivity with their constant ethical implications and negotiations with the self. For example, for the narration of the video entry about a young girl playing music in the metro, I composed a single shot of me contemplating the view from my apartment, a scene of reminiscence, because I had chosen not to film her during that event, not to disturb her and possibly lose the moment. Not filming her was a choice about observing and later presenting a story without compromising the event when it occurred by referring to it through memory. In that sense, realism is not required in documentary filming in order to convey an event. It raises the question of using the video camera as a diary, while not always shooting when events occur; instead, shooting becomes an after-effect of what was observed — so the image shot later becomes a memory image of sorts and addresses the real through memory rather than through an indexical record of the event. Consequently, this relates to: 1) the camera as

actor or intruder — as it does to: 2) a wider understanding of documentary recording, namely here remembering the event with the girl and ‘documenting’ it later through recollection.

But when I observed two nationalist men shouting on the street from my home without them being able to see me, nor me revealing their faces, a scene that figures in the next entry, I chose to film them. This to me was not ethically problematic since I did not expose them; I only ‘silently’ commented while shooting them. In retaining their anonymity and the expressiveness of the situation, I was able to expose an atmosphere of violence remotely. This process of thinking through experienced events after their occurrence became a general practice whereby in the entries, direct documentation is collapsed with subjective re-collection.

4.2 Writing and Voice-Over

All of my sketches are examined and put on screen in a self-reflexive manner via a voice-over, and that metalinguistic feature is what links all of the filmmakers that I continuously return to, such as Agnès Varda, Sophie Calle, Jonas Mekas, Harun Farocki, and Chris Marker, to name but a few. I mentioned Marker earlier in regards to his working with non-fiction in an a-signifying manner, as well as in the fictional authors he constructs. Calle and Varda worked with the personal in both humorous but intimate and honest ways, particularly Calle’s *‘Double Blin’ aka ‘No Sex Last Night’* (1992) and Varda’s *Gleaners and I* (2000), as well as later works like *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008). And Farocki, as I will expand upon below, just as Marker, has led my thoughts in the writing of voice-over and making political films beyond the content in regards to the relationship with the audience. With the voice-over, one can cut across images, undo or challenge editing decisions, create lines of flight, and create a well-defined authorial figure without being authoritative.

In my case, what defines the author I formed is a sense of dissatisfaction with the politics in both countries, a sense of fascination with the surprises that daily life brings, a self that enjoys contemplation and of course constant migration. These are the things that compel me to pick up my camera. So, in that sense, the “she” of my film does not reveal her personal, private self, as some of the film examples I discuss do. The talking she is not a linear or monolithic self that speaks, but a more refracted subjectivity. In “Subjectivities for Better or for Worse”, Guattari writes of subjectivity as a “permanent reinvention”³⁰⁰ in regards to improving the circumstances that humans inhabit. Further, he argues that “subjectivity, at any stage of the socius worth considering, did not occur by itself, but was produced by certain conditions, and that these conditions could be modified through multiple procedures in a way that would channel it in a more creative direction.”³⁰¹ This quote made me reflect on my position and led me to see my current filmmaking as modifying, responding to, and/or acting within events through filmic procedures.

The voice-over narrates the stories of London and Istanbul in a fragmentary manner, from a subjectivity that always reflected towards an outside, concerned with the most productive way of existing within or between the two cities whose violence was of a different nature. The subjective was never meant to stand for an authentic I, for I was always concerned with the question: “How can I debunk the authoritative implications of a voice-over?” I did not want to spoon-feed the narrative to my audience, or for the film to be didactic. Rather, I wanted to draw sketches of social violence, whether of Istanbul or London, and examine them from wherever I was, be it a taxi, from the window of my home, or through Internet sources. For example, in the entry where I describe the conversation with the cab driver, I respond to his desire to hang a gigantic Turkish flag from the Bosphorus Bridge in a rather abstract, humorous manner: “You’d make a huge shadow and the two sides of the bridge wouldn’t be able to see each other.” With this comment, I try to employ humour to

³⁰⁰ Guattari, *Chaosophy*, 182.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

bypass conflict, to create a line of flight from a straightforward discussion based on a flag's superiority and to critique it by pointing out that it will create shadows in society. As Corrigan writes, "in essay films, the subversion of a coherent subjectivity within the public experience of the everyday may not always be an easily decipherable and clear politics but it is, perhaps always, a politics whose core is ideological instability."³⁰² This was a daily life experience reflected in the film so as to highlight a way of communicating with strangers, suggesting how one might state a political opinion without having an argument, by simply destabilising normative debates on politics.

Another aspect of my voice over is that I occasionally address my audience directly and invite them to think with me by leaving some narratives open, by sometimes asking questions, because one of the key motives in these entries is to engender a relationship, a dialogue with the spectator.³⁰³ In other words, in the process of returning to my footage and asking questions of it, a new dialogical space is opened, what Rascaroli calls interpellating the spectator through questions, following which the film opens into a dialogue *with* the audience, not a lecture delivered *to* the audience.³⁰⁴ It is not didactic but communitarian.

An apt example of this is where the German essayist Farocki outlines the struggle with representing reality and one's relationship to the audience in the beginning of one of his earliest films, *The Inextinguishable Fire* (1969), which is about the impact of the napalm used by the U.S. in Vietnam. Farocki outlines the struggle of representing pain and suffering as follows:

How can we show you napalm in action? And how can we show you the injuries caused by napalm? If we show you pictures of napalm burns, you'll close your eyes. First, you'll close your eyes to the pictures. Then you'll close your eyes to the memory. Then you'll close your eyes to the facts. Then, you'll close your eyes to the entire context. If we show you a person with napalm

³⁰² Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*, 33.

³⁰³ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*. 1–25

³⁰⁴ Rascaroli, *Personal Camera*, 37.

burns, we will hurt your feelings. If we hurt your feelings, you'll feel as if we'd tried napalm out on you at your expense.

Following his outline of the problematics of representation, Farocki tackles the problem on an affective level by constructing a moment of revelation in the mind of his viewers through a performative gesture. He extinguishes a lit cigarette out on his arm while saying, "A cigarette burns at 400°C. Napalm burns at 3000°C." At this point, the audience is at once startled by the sight of self-inflicted pain, and realizes that this is only a very slight representation of the scale of violence inflicted by the U.S. in Vietnam, or to the Vietnamese.

It is a moment of shock that startles and provokes the audience into reflecting on the information and its impact on the subject since no amount of information and interviews could have conveyed this sense of empathy, let alone thorough understanding. My desire for knowledge, for epistophilia, was not sufficient; I needed a shock to grasp the impact of napalm. Put differently, Genosko stresses this point as well; he outlines how these a-signifying cinematic part signs produce "shocks to thought' speaking to the continuity between mind and matter as bodies are forced to think and this thought is itself real, not merely about reality."³⁰⁵ The a-signifying part signs function on the molecular level, on affective sense. Hence this truth process is made with the audience whereby the spectator can be equally involved in the process, depending upon how active each individual spectator will be. Zepke writes in relation to affects and notions of autopoiesis: "the autopoietic affect emerges through an encounter that dissolves subjective consistency, and produces a new surplus-value, a quality that expresses its environment by constructing its 'beyond'."³⁰⁶ In other words, art carries within itself the possibility to change something in the viewer. This is what Guattari calls the 're-singularisation' of the subject, which occurs through ruptures in the minds of the viewers when an a-signifying shock occurs — that rupture leads one to

³⁰⁵ Gary Genosko, *Félix Guattari: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 148.

³⁰⁶ Stephen Zepke, "From Aesthetic Autonomy to Autonomist Aesthetics", in *The Guattari Effect*, eds Eric Alliez and Andrew Goffrey (London: Continuum, 2011), 209.

begin to free oneself from automated reflexes. It makes me think of some of my diary entries, such as the flags in the taxi driver scene, which continue to invite discussion. The fact that it evades being named, becoming a clearly described conversation, enabled me to highlight the nationalism that prevails in everyday life in Turkey and create molecular reactions in my viewers.

Similarly, in *Cinema 2*, Deleuze outlines how the movement-image leads the audience to think in reference to Heidegger's notion that humans have the capacity to think; yet that does not guarantee thinking. As an art of movement, the time-image, cinema, different as it is from other visual arts, carries within it the possibility of "producing a shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system directly."³⁰⁷ As a filmmaker, I also reflected on how to achieve this shock to thought, a rupture, if you like. It is a moment of nullification, of what Steyerl calls "a leak".³⁰⁸ A moment when the film/filmmaker establishes a link with the audience and invites them to think with her about that subject; to be involved in a mutual journey and exchange.

And so just as Barthes writes about the reflective text, I argue that first person films not only comment on, but also move their readers to action³⁰⁹ through the affective relationships they build with audiences. An entire narrative, an entire truth (or series of truths), cannot ever be told, and each spectator has the capacity to make connections with what she already knows, as Rancière writes,³¹⁰ which speaks to my desire to develop a multiplicity of readings and of narratives in an egalitarian mode. Through this meeting between the work and the audience, another molecular mutuality in thinking with the smaller

³⁰⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 156.

³⁰⁸ Hito Steyerl, "Politics of the Archive." Last modified March 2008. Last accessed February 22, 2013. <http://eipcp.net/transveral/0608/steyerl/en>.

³⁰⁹ Réda Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xxix.

³¹⁰ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*. 2.

and larger events that unfold on screen, but are left open, is formed, temporarily, in front of the screens where people gather.

4.3 Exhibiting

Although I had started to work with subjectivity in *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders* (see Ch. 2), what is new for me is exhibiting my first person video work in installation form, and as a loop. A cyclical view of daily life is hereby explored through the repetition of the video's diary entries reoccurring in a loop, for everyday life is made of the recurrence of gestures of labour and leisure. These events, which are experienced cyclically, are accentuated by occasional ruptures. A crystallisation of events is meant to occur through connecting people in public spaces while remaining indeterminate and allowing for continuous unfolding. The diary entries, which re-occur similarly in the exhibition space, highlight the repetitive nature of daily life and the conceptual focus of the dice throw as repetition, but always with a difference, as each instance the film is seen by an audience is a repetition but with a difference.

Additionally, exhibiting the film in a gallery space allows for a multiplicity of interpretations by multiple audiences, whereby they are free to enter and exit as they please and take from my video what they will. Because it is formed of multiple diary entries each of which I worked on separately, whether one stays for the entire duration of the video, or just for two minutes, creates different interpretations. I constructed the film so that one can enter into it at any point. And this is what an exhibition space, as opposed to a cinema, allows. Alternatively, people can pass by the film without truly engaging with it, reducing it to a product that will or will not be consumed. And this is a choice that I have no choice but to accept.

This exhibiting method allowed me to show my video with no ending, whereby I would not terminate the discussion, but instead continuously, infinitely pause it with a comma. In other words, I articulate political positions without foreclosing the topic with a definitive argument. Similar to Barthes, this underlines the fact that essay filmmaking allows for incertitude and constantly battles with “the fear of not being able to resist the last word.”³¹¹ In relation to their film *Corridor X*, essayists Maurizio Lazzarato and Angela Melitopoulos suggest a narrative motif in which video is presented as performance:

The presentation of the video as a performance, in which the levels of time interwoven in the video are mixed live with real sounds (unabridged speech recordings, original noises, music, texts from the collection of materials...), is intended to lead to the present, open-ended process from which the narrative structure was born — in the non-linear process of montage.³¹²

Another reason for emphasising the loop structure was that I thought that situating Gezi as the dramaturgical high point of the narrative and the continuing form of the installation might work against my wanting to avoid a high point and an open form. However, the loop eschews emphasising a single event; even if there is much more tension embedded in the Gezi sequence, a single spectator might miss it simply by not watching the entire installation, for there is no true beginning and end, and no set start time as in movie theatres. And not having to commit fully to the video allows for a multiplicity of readings along with a differing hierarchy of events.

However, during the exhibition of *Of Dice and Men*, I received audience comments noting that they had watched the entire narrative, and thus the space became a cinema, by the free will of the audience. The audience can look for a beginning or see the beginning as created through the moment of their entrance; such is not limited to the beginning of the loop. The spectators can take different sitting locations, enter at different points, agree and

³¹¹ Barthes in Rascaroli, *Personal Camera*, 118.

³¹² Maurizio Lazzarato and Angela Melitopoulos, “Digital Montage and Weaving: An Ecology of the Brain for Machine Subjectivities” in *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age*, ed. Ursula Biemann (Zurich: Edition Voldemeer, 2003), 117.

disagree, debate, or simply dismiss whatever aspect of the film they choose. Also, different people would approach me in regards to different diary sequences to discuss the content of that specific event, thereby emphasising its singularity. Hence, exhibiting my work as an installation involves more direct and involved participation with the spectators.

One final and vital reason for my preference is that gallery spaces have created new contexts in Turkey and offer the possibility of showing work not bound by the formal specifications of cinema. Specifically, the increasing censorship in Turkey, which I mentioned in the second section of Ch. 2, has now taken a new action to ban films immediately. For instance, last year's Istanbul Film Festival was forced to cancel the premier of a documentary called *Bakur*, which narrates the story of the Kurdish rebel group, PKK. My film also received complaints from the public due to its anti-nationalistic discourse, whereby a number of audience members issued written complaints to SALT.

The issue of the relationship of economics and politics played out in the museum was most clearly explored in Hito Steyerl's lecture-performance "Is The Museum a Battlefield?" in which she elaborated on the links of the warfare and the museum at the 13th Istanbul Biennale (2014).³¹³

One of the most clear examples of the pressures applied to the art spaces in Turkey is the Aksanat exhibition "Post-Peace" and its being cancelled a week prior to its opening citing the 'delicate' situation in Turkey. However, various authors, and the curator herself, claimed that the situation had been the same from the beginning of the program of the show and it is the specific contents of the art works that led to the decision of the institution.³¹⁴ One final example is the closing of one of SALT's buildings due to state pressures, also a reflection of such pressures, for it had lately focused on the political history of the country. Consequently,

³¹³ Hito Steyerl, "Is the Museum a Battlefield?" Documentation of Hito Steyerl's lecture "Is the Museum a Battlefield", first shown at 13th Istanbul Biennial. See <https://vimeo.com/76011774>

³¹⁴ Dorian Batycka, "Istanbul Gallery cancels war-themed exhibition, citing "the delicate situation in Turkey" February 26, 2006. Last accessed August 28, 2016. See <http://hyperallergic.com/278987/istanbul-gallery-cancels-war-themed-exhibition-citing-the-delicate-situation-in-turkey/>

a new space can create a space of the possible for some time, and be a rupture, until authorities come to acknowledge its potential and then apply the same rules elsewhere, i.e. in cinema spaces. So while spaces also have fluid subjectivities and it is not the art or gallery context per se that carries spaces of emancipation, but that its potential is contextual and momentary.

But the act of installing a work in a gallery space also creates a new sovereignty that is defined by the artist. This problematic aspect is also raised by Boris Groys when he notes how:

this analysis of installation art practice tends to overlook the symbolic act of privatizing the public space of exhibition, which *precedes* the act of opening the installation space to a community of visitors... The artist defines the new space and acts as a legislator of a new sovereignty whereby she invites the spectators to her newly defined space. Consequently, installation art at once acts as a new sovereignty but also once again makes clear the sovereign power that is concealed behind the obscure transparency of the democratic order.³¹⁵

Below is a section how I negotiated the installation of my work's 'sovereignty' within the democratic institution of the gallery space.

4.4 Specific Experiences Regarding Five Different Installations of my Video

As to the video, since its making and exhibiting is current, my comments are also not developed enough since reflecting and writing requires time. Nevertheless, below is an attempt at thinking of the in situ practice.

I chose to use two 160cm to 90cm size screens suspended in a dark space and with a slight inwards-angle (15 degrees specifically) to make the video look like an open diary. A triangle I drew on the floor over a carpet indicated the infinite horizon, the timeless continuity of events, and the fact that I am leaving a subjective trace for the future. I also

³¹⁵ Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation", *e-flux* (2009). See <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-installation/>

imagined that as a journey that the audience would be invited to take with me, like a road into the horizon, just like it would be at the end of the perspective horizon, I drew on the floor of the exhibiting space as if they were marking a road continuing on into the horizon.

The first time I installed this video was at SALT Beyoğlu in Istanbul in March 2015, as part of a large-scale show titled “A Century of Centuries” curated by November Paynter.³¹⁶ Paynter chose ten artists to highlight the centenary of many defining political events in the past century, including the Armenian Genocide, WWI, and the Gezi Uprising. The installation process went extremely smoothly; Paynter was very generous and supportive, and there was a sufficient budget to meet the needs of my work. I drew my installation on the floor map of the gallery and was provided with the best equipment, which speaks to the budget of the institution at that time. Since the following show with SALT at their Ankara location was in a much smaller space, I encountered a new set of problems, such as scaling down my screens, using LED monitors instead of projectors, and decreasing the distance between the audience and the videos. This change in the setting of the installation led to a change in the relationship with the spectator as well. Additionally, I could not travel to Ankara for the installation, which led to several mistakes, such as the distance between the two monitors, but I could not intervene in time, which evokes Groy’s argument about authority of the artist.

The most problematic experience I had, and which crystallised the problems of the art arena for me, was at the MAXXI Museum in Rome when curator Hou Hanru curated an exhibition titled “Istanbul: Passion, Fury, Joy”³¹⁷ in December 2015. Hanru had very specific ideas about the installation; for instance, he wanted to have my two projections of the videos in a bright environment whereas I thought they were better served in darkness. They had no

³¹⁶ Please see figs 7 to 10.

³¹⁷ Please see fig. 11.

budget to pay the artists' fees, nor to fly us to Rome for the installation. Hence I was not present during the installation, and although they received funding later, it was only in time to invite us to the opening. The distance between the viewers and the screens was not only too small, but the installation was adversely positioned against the lift. When I raised my concerns, Hanru simply stated they had no budget to re-do it and his "objective" view was that it looked good. I learnt from this experience that one of the pre-requisites for me would be to go to the exhibition space and be present during the installation, for however 'minor' the details, elements of the work can be incorrectly executed. And when one is up against an institution such as the MAXXI Museum, it is difficult to circumvent the bureaucracy. The artist then suffers an imposition, or loss of creative control, yet despite the fact that a curator can exercise certain degrees of control over the work they choose to exhibit, spectators should not be arbitrarily positioned vis-à-vis the work. To distort its form is to distort the work.

My most productive experience was with curator Nick Aikens, with whom I worked on an independent show in Athens in February 2016, in a space called 'State of Concept'.³¹⁸ Aikens is a curator from the VanAbbe Museum in Eindhoven who was curating an exhibit titled "Through the Fog; De-scripting the Present" in which he gathered six artists who subjectively navigate our times of crisis, which he calls "the fog". Our collaboration was so productive that we conceived of the unfolding of the video together, hence the very last sentence of it reads: "It's easier to navigate through the fog when you are with people". As a result of our collaboration, we staged a lecture at the opening of my recent solo exhibition at the Delfina Foundation³¹⁹ in London, which opened in March 2016.

³¹⁸ <http://www.stateofconcept.org/> Please see fig. 12.

³¹⁹ <http://delfinafoundation.com/> Please see fig. 13.

The shift from filmmaking for cinema to artist filmmaking brought a new set of problems and politics. The interplay between the artist, the curator, the institution, and the funding as well the source of such is a defining one that requires constant negotiation. This will be the orientation of my future research. Previously, when I had finished a documentary, the film was complete and it entered screening spaces. Whatever the conditions of a specific cinema, one cannot change much; the film begins to circulate. But a video installation takes a new form, a new sovereignty in each new space, and it is an on-going negotiation whose existence the artist has to constantly battle for.

A Century of Centuries

SALT Beyoğlu Istanbul, Salt Ulus Ankara

Curator: November Paynter

March 10 – May 2015, September 15 – November 15 2015



Floor map for the exhibition 'A Century of Centuries' at Salt Beyoğlu, Istanbul

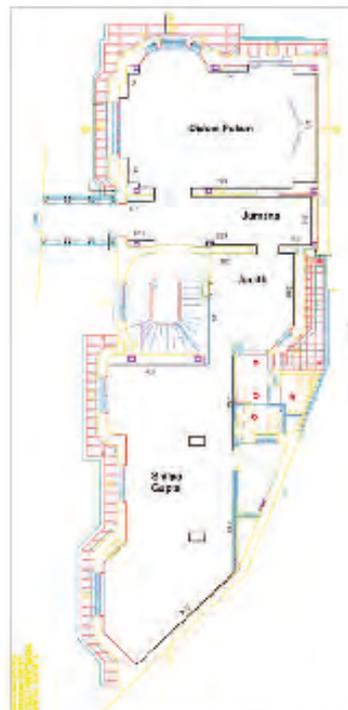


Figure 7

Floor map for the exhibition 'A Century of Centuries' at Salt Ulus, Ankara

A Century of Centuries

Stills from the exhibition, SALT Beyoğlu Istanbul

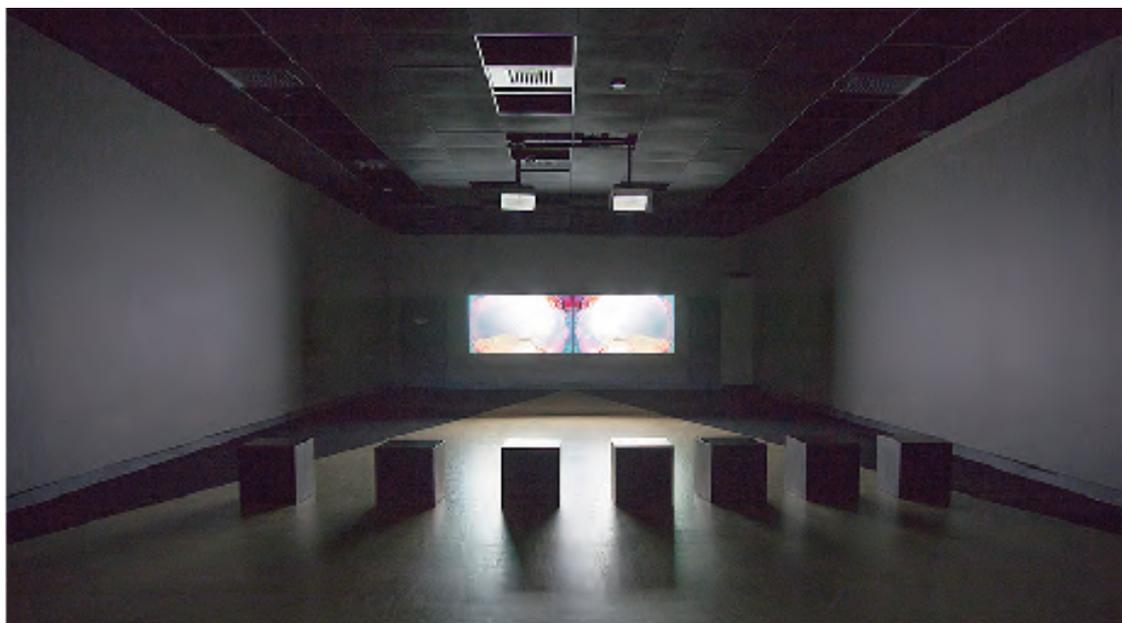


Figure 8

A Century of Centuries

Stills from the exhibition

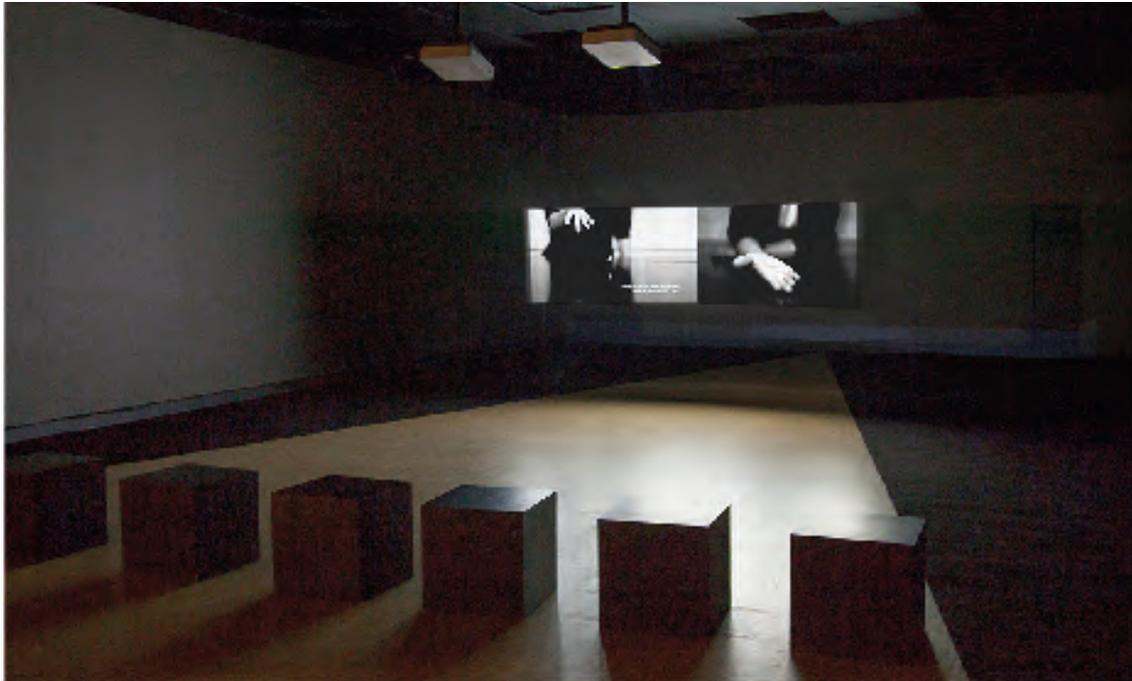


Figure 9

A Century of Centuries

Stills from the exhibition



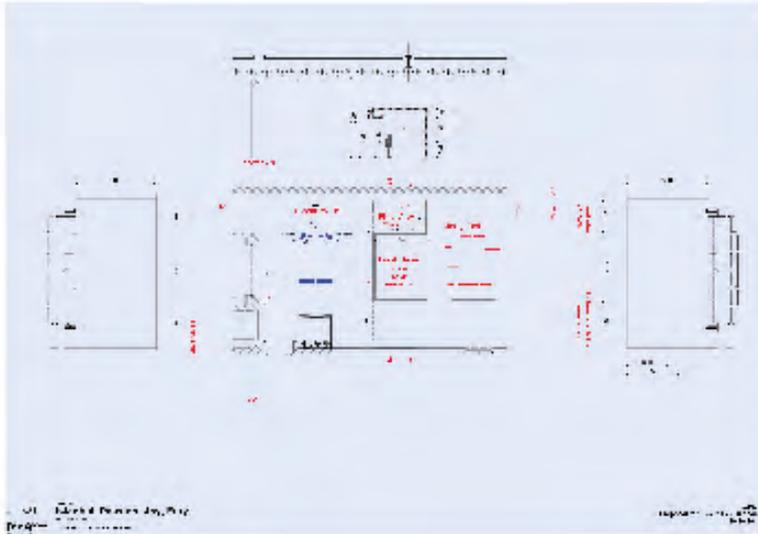
Figure 10

Istanbul: Passion, Joy, Fury

MAXXI Museum, Rome

Curator: Hou Hanru with Ceren Erdem

December 11 2015 – April 30 2016



Floor map for the exhibition 'Istanbul: Passion, Joy, Fury'

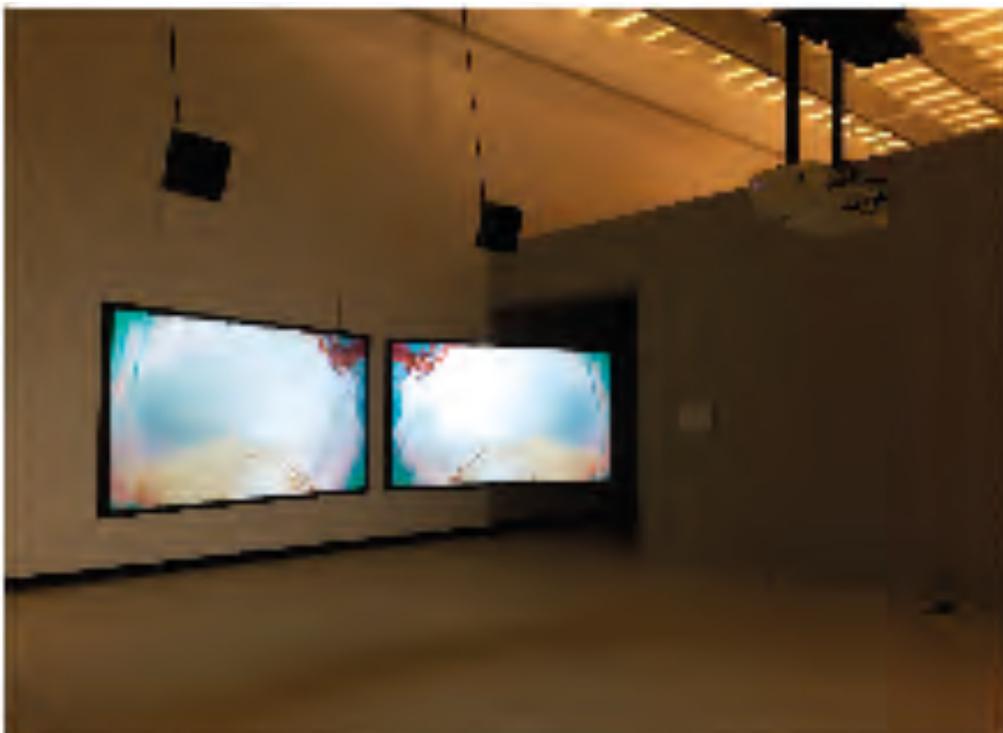
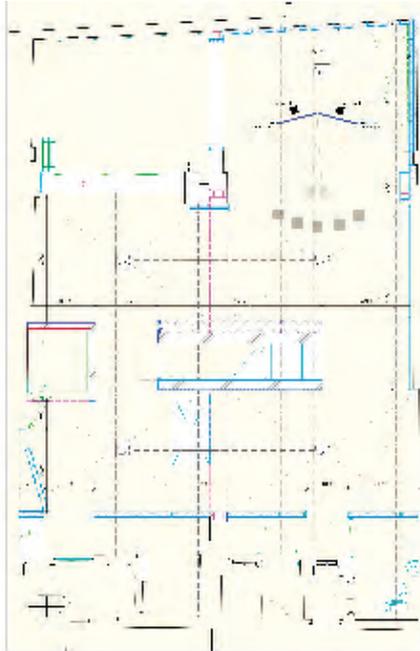


Figure 11

Solo Show: 'Of Dice and Men'

Delfina Foundation, London

March 3 – 31 2016



Floor map for the exhibition 'Of Dice and Men'



Figure 13

4.5 Conclusion

I made a conscious decision to continue shooting after Gezi. In regards to the contents of the video, after the Gezi uprising, I added new everyday entries to suggest that while many of the situations I documented have changed, while we have changed, on the other hand, we have also remained the same, in that everyday life carries on unfolding as usual. What I mean by this is that we are hopeful, that new collectives have been formed, and that there is a new discourse about Gezi and its aftermath, but also that daily life, with its routines and repetition, continues, like the throw of the dice, as if nothing has changed.

I don't perceive the video to have an end since I might pick up my camera at some unknown future date and start recording again; since it is a diary, it has no end. There are no periods, only commas: — this is a testimony of the desire to record changes that are occurring around us; to participate, record, and to hereby write them into history with my camera. But history will tell us more about what those changes are while my video will leave a subjective trace of this time.

CONCLUSION

Türküm, doğrucuyum, çalışkanım. İlkem, küçüklerimi korumak, büyüklerimi saymak, yurdumu, milletimi, özümünden çok sevmektir. Ülküm, yükselmek, ileri gitmektir.

Ey büyük Atatürk! Açtığın yolda, gösterdiğin hedefe durmadan yürüyeceğime ant içerim.

Varlığım Türk varlığına armağan olsun. Ne mutlu Türküm diyene !

I am a Turk, honest and hardworking. My principle is to protect the younger, to respect the elder, to love my homeland and my nation more than myself. My ideal is to rise, to progress.

Oh Great Atatürk! On the path that you have paved, I swear to walk incessantly toward the aims that you have set.

My existence shall be dedicated to the Turkish existence. How happy is the one who says, "I am a Turk!"

How happy is the one who says "I am a Turk!"

Reşit Galip³²⁰

To conclude, I will summarize the main points of my thesis, reflect upon the relationship of theory to praxis and praxis to theory, and address the issue of subjectivity and Turkishness, which is the core problematic of my thesis.

The summary of the thesis can be drawn from the student oath in the epigraph just above. Reşit Galip was the minister of National Education when he composed the text, and beginning in 1972, the oath was recited daily by students. The epigraph, at once highlights the notion of Turkishness as an ethnicity and its imposition upon the various ethnicities who had to repeat the oath every day. In a documentary titled *İki Dil Bir Bavul* (On the Way to School) (2008),³²¹ non-Turkish speaking Kurdish children are subjected to an education in Turkish, which includes the daily repetition of the oath. The documentary demonstrates how

³²⁰ Tanıl Bora, *Türk Sağının Üç Hali: Milliyetçilik, Muhafazakarlık, İslamcılık* (İstanbul: Birikim Yayınları, 1998), 41.

³²¹ *İki Dil Bir Bavul* (On the Way to School), dirs. Orhan Eskiköy and Özgür Doğan (İstanbul: Tiglon, 2008).

rooted Atatürk's ideas about Turkishness are as well as the value they still have in day-to-day life in Turkey. As mentioned in Ch. 1, through Atatürk's reforms, Turkishness has been established as an ethnicity meant to hold this new nation together, despite its geography already containing multiple ethnicities. The elimination of the student oath in 2013³²² by the AKP created immense dissent among ultra-nationalists and was considered a threat to the unity of Turkey and an insult to Turkishness. As mentioned in Ch. 1, one of the most important components of this nation-state has been secularism, a key debate since the AKP came to power. The abolishment of this student oath praising Atatürk and his ideas of Turkishness was read as a signal of a move towards an Islamic-based model of democracy. This story at once highlights the on-going tension concerning identity politics and AKP's political manoeuvres in creating a new society, different from the secular state that was created in 1923 by Atatürk. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to navigate through an approximately ninety-years old country with a complex modernisation history, which is intertwined with the shadow of the Ottoman Empire and an identity politics that seems to permeate all aspects of daily life as well as politics both locally as well as globally.

To recapitulate, in Ch. 1, I elaborated upon the foundation of the new Turkish Republic and its modernisation politics. This chapter also served the purpose of outlining the formation of my problematic and migratory identity and its implications upon the first person film I made, *Tülay German; Years of Fire and Cinders*. I articulated the tensions between Turks and westernisation efforts, the compromises that were made in order to achieve a state that was new, modern, and which could be considered 'appropriate' by Turkists, a state which, while by and large modern by Western standards, still retained core elements of Turkishness defined by Kemalism as secular, republican, populist, statist, reformist, and nationalist. This chapter also included elaborations on the exigent situations in Turkey post the military coups

³²² "Nationalists stage protests against package across Turkey." Last accessed February 4, 2016 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/nationalists-stage-protests-against-package-across-turkey-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=55559&NewsCatID=341>

of 1971 and 1980, and how they respectively impacted the citizens of the country. Many intellectuals fled the country and Tülay German, the subject of my film, has become a vessel through which I read this history and started questioning identity politics and the production of a political subjectivity.

In Ch. 2 I analysed first person film theory and positioned Turkish film praxis in relation to first person film theory more broadly and highlighted the urgency it has today in this specific context. Initially, I established my understanding of first person films as an expression of desire and as a tool for thinking the self in a wider society. Considering the suppression many minority groups have been subjected to, this tool is political. I thereby highlighted the uniqueness of non-narcissistic subjectivity through a terminological clarification by not employing the term ‘personal’, that which belongs strictly to the person. To achieve this, I thought through Guattari’s terms of molar and molecular for an understanding of the self within a more expansive context and in constant production in the face of outside factors (a perpetual state of becoming versus a static state of being). Molecular is thus the smallest particle, the unique subjectivities that we form in the face of molar structures such as ossified identity politics, patriarchy, and/or state pressures. Thus by molar I mean social structures, subjectivisation politics, and that which leads to serialized subjectivities. Conversely, molecular subjectivities are formed by constantly creating lines of flight — production of the new rather than yet more of the same. To achieve this first person film is an apt tool since filmmakers can form new links via its formal tools and creating hybrid molecular subjectivities onscreen. Having said this, I am acutely aware that many first person films can be narcissistic, navel gazing works that do not carry any political aim, but my specific focus in this thesis is the films with such purpose and filmmakers with such intentionalities.

The main argument of the second section of the chapter was that post the military coups of 1971 and 1980, the internal battles in Turkey (as well as globally), were mostly born of identity-based struggles, namely Kurds re-asserting their presence in the face of intense Turkification, LGBT subjectivities emerging on-screen, and the screening of Armenian films where we began to see the writing of personal stories which sought the acknowledgement of a genocide. To this date, this genocide has not been officially recognised by the state, though it has been by other official bodies as mentioned earlier in the thesis. Although one can think of these films as the molecular seeping into existence in the face of the molar, a number of them are also molar in that they carry a different form of nationalism since they express themselves within molecular structures (in terms of filmic form).

Through a close reading of Mizgin Müjde Arslan's *I Flew You Stayed* and Aykan Safoğlu's *Off-white Tulips*, in Ch. 3 I closely observe two different tendencies, one of which was the re-assertion of identities in the face of suppression and violence (such as in the Kurdish film *I Flew You Stayed*), the second of which was the celebration of hybridity (such as in the case of the LGBT film *Off-white Tulips*). I argued that through the first person authors created on-screen via multiple filmic tools, first person films of this kind offer possibilities of resistance and create lines of flight from molar structures and carry the possibility of becoming molecular, or of supplementing or reforming the molar. Consequently, that which has no place in the greater historical narratives of the country finds its expression, and hence existence, on-screen. Through the various independent screening platforms it provides possible encounters with the public out of which the new might be dispersed, through infecting, altering, or at very least questioning molecular narratives, through provoking doubt and giving equal voice to alternative forms of being. There are however many differing suppressive strategies to silence these voices, from direct censorship

to the refusal of funding. Nevertheless, the nascent trend in first person filmmaking is an attempt to overcome these structures.

In Ch. 4 I explored other possibilities of becoming molecular through the author persona as well as via collecting molecular events on-screen through my own video work *Of Dice and Men*, which I produced alongside this thesis. The making of my own essayistic first person film became a platform for thinking through the possibility of becoming molecular and thereby resisting normative and stable positions, which might be prolonged, shared, and further diversified through each screening of the film. The various exhibitions where *Of Dice and Men* was shown became encounters with each contextual audience. The engagement with the outside that is negotiated within the first person film also extends and is further diversified through the different kinds of exhibitions, formats, and contexts, i.e. positing the molecular within the molar, such as at SALT, which is funded by Garanti Bank. I thought through exhibiting and the various political dimensions it has, and negotiated the various power structures that an art institution implies.

Finally, when thinking of film in its most molecular aspects, it was important for me to delineate how to create an affective relationship with the audience. Therefore, I highlighted the relationship of first person films to the audience and argued that the clearly enunciated *I* in the film creates an intimate dialogue with the audience, to which the spectator responds equally with its own *I*. The questions raised on-screen within the essayistic first person voice-over could therefore, in Rascaroli's words, 'interpellate' the viewer through questions rather than through identifications and/or ideologies.

This leads me to the point of thinking of my practice in theoretical terms. It has been a constant dance and a choreographical adaptation and decision making whereby I started with a screen problem, that is, the representation of a subject and its ethical implications, along with the problems of working in mainstream filmmaking environments in Ch. 1. Since this

had already led me into first person filmmaking, I positioned my practice within that framework, and then studied first person film literature. By seeing different practices, other strategic gestures, and different interpretations and negotiations, I expanded on my practice and thereby enriched it. Once I returned to my practice, I started making and engaging more consciously with formal decisions such as thinking of the impact of each choice, and choosing a specific voiceover method and its implications, between lyrical and fragmented poetry. It also led me to position myself in the political art filmmaking movement within a specific geography, namely Turkey. The latter has been necessary in order to identify a gap in knowledge, but also so as to problematize the geography through a critique of identity politics. It was my conviction that first person narrators carry a political power as counter-narrators; therefore I employed it, but while thinking and questioning the measure and methodology of this enunciator. By thinking of the narcissistic aspect of the first person, I constantly reflected on and negotiated how to merge the personal with the various formal elements of film, such as in writing the voice-over, and it is particularly in this respect that first person film theory helped me to see the various forms an author persona can take on. This was the transformation and adaptation I came to starting with *Tülay German: Years of Fire and Cinders* to *Of Dice and Men*.

This leads me to my final point on the question of subjectivity. Through the acceptance of my own positionality within first person filmmaking as well as through rooting my practice and hence myself within Turkey, I came to terms with my own Turkishness, engaging with this positionality. I discussed in Ch. 1 that much of my youth was apolitical and distanced from Turkey and issues of Turkishness, embodying the modernisation discourses as outlined in the same chapter. Throughout the writing of the thesis I was able to understand and question this positionality. Guattari's propositions of a fluid subjectivity which is in perpetual production and in conversation with its surroundings opened out possibilities for a new

understanding in which I situated myself and my research in migratory sites. This helped me to continuously search for lines of flight so as to become molecular. Here I am thinking of the figure of the ‘parasite’ as described by Michel Serres,³²³ an ambivalent figure who penetrates a closed territory only to expose the imagination upon which power relations are founded in order to explode the notion of binary oppositions: the insider/outsider, black/white, straight/queer, rich/poor. It is this constant undoing of the effects of the molar with the molecular that I attempted to also document in my video *Of Dice and Men*.

Thinking with the terminology of molar and molecular helped me to address normative structures within the geography of Turkey: patriarchal constructions, nationalist discourse, and the conservatism in tension with the modernisation processes impacting on rigid identity politics as part of state craft. I then had to re-think my positionality within this, and create lines of flight through stressing urgent points such as: minority rights, recognition of the Armenian genocide, recognition of Kurdish self-determination, the LGBT movement and perhaps, re-thinking my own privileged position through active citizenship, etc. I then rethought anew how to exist with this citizenship, but not be limited by it, and to create new alliances, say for instance by meeting with other migrant emancipated subjectivities, and celebrating the hybridity that is already embedded in my personal ethnicity, namely Bosnian and Caucasian as well as Greek ancestries.

There are a number of flaws to the proposal of thinking in terms of the molar and molecular, and they always need to be followed with a word like “process’, because one has to bear in mind the capturing process of capitalism and/or state is immediate. And however fruitful or freeing it may sound, the limits of working with ideas such as the molar and the molecular can nevertheless lose their effectiveness when one faces power in real terms.

³²³ Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

One of Turkey's most prominent 'wounds' is the Kurdish conflict. With Turkey's EU candidature changing the parameters of the conflict, in the 2000s, the "Kurdish initiative" represented the epitome of the state's willingness to recognize and negotiate with the Kurds. The PKK, in return, began to seek political and cultural rights. However, the conflict between state security forces and the PKK periodically flared up, and as of now, for the past two months, South-Eastern Turkey is virtually at war, and many cities are under curfew. The polarisation in the country between the nationalists and the pro-Kurdish groups is increasingly palpable.

On January 2016 a petition was distributed urging the government to take on peaceful negotiations with the Kurds after the government incessantly targeted Kurdish cities and dozens of civilians died³²⁴. Along with 1128 other people, I too signed this petition. Following the declarations of the petition, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan publically in a state address live on television denounced all of these academics as ignorant³²⁵ and ordered the Higher Education Council to investigate the petition and whoever signed it. Not long after, investigations were launched against academics both by the universities but also by the state.

A month later, the university where I worked subjected me to a disciplinary investigation and I was called in to testify. Additionally, I was required to submit a written testimony. It was by far the closest I came to directly facing what we can call 'power'. It enabled me to

³²⁴ See the Academics for Peace initiative's website for full text of the petition as well as reports and news on legal front. <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/>

³²⁵ "Ey aydın müsveddeleri siz karanlıksınız, karanlık. Aydın falan değilsiniz. Sizler ne Güneydoğu'yu, ne Doğu'yu buraların adresini bilemeyecek kadar karanlıksınız ve cahilsiniz. Ama oraları bizler kendi evimizin yolu, adresi gibi çok iyi biliriz. Kendisine akademisyen diyen grup devleti suçluyor. Bununla yetinmeyip yabancıları Türkiye'ye çağırıyorlar. Bunun adı mandacılıktır. 100 yıl önce de aynı zihniyet vardı. Bugün de üstelik çoğu maaşını devletten alan, cebinde bu devletin kimliğini taşıyan sözde aydınların ihanetiyle karşı karşıyayız." "You are supposed to be intellectual yet you are dark, not at all enlightened. You wouldn't know Southeast nor East Turkey; you are as ignorant and as dark as not to know their addresses. But we know them as if they are our own homes. A mob calling themselves academics are blaming the government. As if this is not enough, they are inviting foreigners to Turkey. This is called being a parasite to another state. The same mentality also existed 100 years ago. Today, we are faced with so-called academics who are traitors, and on top of that many of them receive their wages from the state." http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/01/160111_erdogan_akademisyen_aciklama Published January 12, 2016. Last accessed September 10, 2016 Author's translation.

look directly into the cold face of authoritarianism. Having to defend oneself because of a petition calling for peace, and in a university no less, which is supposed to be *the* molecular space in which diverse opinions could and should flourish, was truly shocking.

It was a moment when the personal and the political merged into one as the I that I am uttering here in this thesis is in resonance with the 1128 academics who also signed the petition, each of whom also faced a different form of punishment. We are currently expecting the state persecution of each defendant based on penalty code 301, “insulting Turkey and Turkishness”.

I cannot help but think again of the similar trajectory of many cultural figures like Tülay German and her generation, each of whom were forced to flee the country because of their political convictions, during and after the military coups. Facing imprisonment, or having to deal with such processes of subjectivation such as public humiliation and the publishing of our pictures and names in local newspapers as ‘the traitors’, I have a newfound understanding for that generation. We are again on the verge of a new political and social castration. But at the same time there is immense solidarity between diverse groups signing petitions supporting us, which might be linked to Guattari’s molecular forces, which can be traced back to Gezi as well. There are other parts of one’s subjectivity that cannot be subsumed by the state, by the law, or whatever similar apparatus of power. There is yet again solidarity both within our as well as within older generations, those whom were in prison after the ’80s coup — at the same time, the current situation puts proposals like Guattari’s to test.

This thesis also then embodies the extreme limitation of writing about a volatile political present that can explode at any moment and splinter into X number of variables. Throughout the writing process I had to return to and revise various passages, as events shifted from moment to moment, none remaining concretely defined, but indeterminate. Today, as I write, Turkey is agonizing over the fast-changing dynamics along its southern border with Syria.

The violent war that is occurring in South Eastern Turkey exactly 100 years after the Sykes-Picot Agreement is a constant reminder of identity politics and the degree of their urgency in this fragile and volatile geography. Nevertheless, this thesis is also a document, both in its written and diary form, both of which encapsulate, from my current point of view, the political present and its discontents and thinking through a more active becoming with images.

The entire PhD is thus a reflection of my own production of subjectivity, a fusion of, or contest between, the molar and the molecular, which is evoked in my final video installation *Of Dice and Men*. In the film I treated each diary entry separately and eventually, one can observe the change in the author persona I created over time, giving evidence of the molecular that continues to change in the face of the molar. My move from cinema to gallery space in my first person video installation is just one attempt towards liberation, albeit an ambivalent one, as I described the power structures of the art context. As I expanded upon it, it was triggered by the act of freeing my practice from some of the outside pressures so as to be able to enunciate my thoughts freely, perhaps within a new set of constraints. The fact that, currently, in the midst of the thickest fog that engulfs our times, the video is exhibited in three cities in Europe, namely Rome, Athens, and London, is but one way of myself engaging with these crises, a practice of contamination and of spreading molecular ideas through the sharing of experiences of localised events with visitors from diverse backgrounds.

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APPENDICES

Interview With Mizgin Müjde Arslan³²⁶

Didem Pekün: Other than a personal journey, was this film a device for you to underline your Kurdish identity, and to inscribe it upon the screen and in memory?

Mizgin Müjde Arslan: Yes, this was me re-writing a history that was imposed upon us and the formation of a personal history. I wanted to do this, not by concealing things and remaining silent as I am always told to do, but in a way that everyone could see and hear. You could call this a personal act of resistance, and it was also a way in which I communicated with my family, with my grandfather and grandmother.

DP: How did you feel when you saw yourself on the screen, since this is a first-person narrative?

M.M.A: In the beginning, I did not want to present this as a documentary, as I filmed the journey, there was still the idea of making it into a feature film. The two ideas existed together all along, I could not decide between the two. But when I wrote the script for the feature film, I saw it was a strained idea, the fiction somehow never captured the feeling I wanted to convey. So it took a few years to decide to make it as a documentary. With additional footage shot in 2012, the journey I made in 2009 premiered at the Istanbul Film Festival in April 2012. There was also a detention incident a couple of months before the premiere. Both the filming and the period that came after was one of personal, spiritual and social turbulence. The process in Turkey was constantly changing as well, it was the best period of the democratic process when I visited Mahmur. A week after the group had

³²⁶ Translated from Turkish by Nazım Hikmet Richard Dikbaş.

returned from Mahmur, I had embarked upon a journey in the opposite direction. A month after I had returned, the situation changed to the worse, Kurdish politicians were handcuffed and sent to prison, the process was reversed, then later there were some positive steps, but these were also followed by new detentions, arrests, home raids and news of deaths. It was a peace process, albeit a very bloody one.

I made the film to contribute to the peace process, to confront the issue. To understand each other, to cry together, to empathize, and perhaps to meet in shared sorrow. The peace process may not have developed as desired, but many people saw the film.

DP: Why do you think there are so few films with first-person narratives in Turkey?

M.M.A: I actually think the opposite, there is an increase in the number of first-person narratives especially in films made by women and Kurds. I'm thinking of Özkan Küçük's *Seyid*, and Eylem Kaftan's *Güzide*. In order to convey the bigger picture, we have begun to tell stories from our private world. We have great issues, and great words to go with them, but it is not easy to tell these stories in those greater frames, so we begin from the smallest ring, the most intimate story. This provides an explanation as to why my first documentary was about my paternal aunt's story, and my second was about the story of my father and I.

DP: Were the television sequences in the film constructed in the editing? The flags on television in the beginning. Were they there to provide context to foreigners?

M.M.A: The television sequences were to give an idea about the time we filmed, and the events in the background, and also to remind the viewer that the elderly mother and father were right at the centre of that specific agenda. Those news reports had, and continue to have an impact on our daily life.

DP: Now you are in London, how do you look back at the politics of identity and geography in Turkey? And thus, how do you formulate your own?

M.M.A: I came to Istanbul as a very young, 20-year old journalist, and I lived there for 12 years; during that period Istanbul became the city I grew up in, I mean that in the full sense of the word. And just when I could not even imagine leaving one day, I lost my sense of security following the detention, and lost my belief in the justice system of the country I lived in, and I started thinking I could work and live anywhere in the world as long as there is sunlight and water. I am happy to live in London, I am in love with it in the same way I was in love with Istanbul when I first moved there, it looks as though I will spend my 30s here.

Identity politics are on the agenda here as well, and you feel their impact. I like being a regular earthizen here, being nobody, and not having to carry the weight of my past on my shoulders.

The situation in Turkey has gradually worsened in the last two-and-a-half years, after I left. Since November 2009, the oppression and violence has been visible and disturbing every single day. It is difficult to imagine what the future will be like, but I find the struggle for democracy there important, and I follow developments. That is the only thing that gives me hope.

Interview with Aykan Safoğlu:

Didem Pekün: What led you to move to Berlin in the first place?

Aykan Safoğlu: When I was 23, living in Istanbul, Turkey, I was extremely feeling overpowered in terms of the possibilities of life. It was a feeling rather than it was an elaborately formulated agenda. When it was 2007, I had already been politically active in the LGBTI movement, very active in the cultural scene, extremely social, done with my studies and desperately looking for other opportunities to translate my life experience in something that would not only satisfy me, but also could radiate over the ones I cared for. It was a very strong sense of that I couldn't contain myself in the available structures that were at hand in Istanbul. Imagine an ADHD child, who senses an extreme confinement, not because the limiting aspects of its environment, but rather the limiting aspects of its own body. As if it was growing in a faster pace than the speed of extension of its own surrounding's allowance for this growth. And of course there was an anxiety related to that, which had started to impose its misery on me. It felt like an anxiety, rather than a feeling of angst, because there was no feeling of hope that a rescue team might appear all of a sudden. I think, these were the conditions that paved the way that I prepared my applications to schools in Europe. It was to flee the cruel optimism that my convenient life in Istanbul was intending to capsule me in. I was desperately looking to find the humming of life, again. My life, my relatives, my friends couldn't keep up with it. Not that they would not want to, they were just clueless in how to make that happen. So I was my own savior, a notion that I came to acknowledge once after I arrived in Berlin. I wouldn't have put it that way back then, because I was simply lacking the understanding of any prescription. The self-imposed exile it was, now that I look back. Germany was an option, since I graduated the Istanbul Highschool, but I wanted to be in Berlin, because I heard that there was some humming still to be heard.

DP: Could you tell me about your voice over writing process? Which came first editing or the writing or did the two went hand in hand?

AS: First I had some images, printed matters. The images were communicating with me and I was having visions. I had the idea of making it into a film. I had a first sentence. The sentence from an inner monologue, as if I was talking to photographs. I found this to be lucid at the time. As if I was given the chance to make a film about my inner dialogue. I sensed that this would be the perfect form to hold my emotions and inner thought together. Baldwin was also a preacher, right? Yes the inspiration came first and then the form. But how was I supposed to proceed? I spent a tremendous amount of time by looking at images, I was laying them out in my studio first at Bard, then in my room in Berlin. (yes, the film started to flourish first in NY, then finally resolved in Berlin.) I was laying them out like tarot cards, piling them on top of each other, then spreading them all over to come up with a satisfying order, a loose storyboard. The pictures were the perfect companions, they informed me about my will to write. The text started to appear, I was dwelling on the images and writing. From then on, the first thing I did was shooting the images on digital video camera, on a copy-stand. Each sequence (image) was devoted to a line that I was thinking would be related. One the images started to appear on an editing timeline, I made slight changes, nuances to it.

After the shooting and editing was done, the most challenging phase of the production began: the recording of the voice-over. I was reading the text in a recording studio. But the recordings turned out to be a boring, affectless recording of a performance. It was just reading. Then I memorized the text and went back into the studio, this time I was watching the video on a reference monitor and performing the text. These recordings of a very well rehearsed performance also didn't satisfy me, since it came across as very blunt, pretentious

recordings. I could not bear my own voice. As the plan c, I did something else. I have put all the relevant text with big fonts on the sequences itself on my editing desk and went back into the studio.

I was standing in front of the mic and trying to read the text that was appearing on the sequences. This idiosyncratic way of reading soon turned out to be very exciting. I was reading the text out loud, while trying to keep up with the editing pace, it gave me an intense dose of adrenaline push, because all of a sudden everything seemed unpredictable. I finally discovered the soul in the reading, while contemplating on images.

DP: My reading of your film is that you do a critique of the identity politics here. How do you formulate your now? In other words, is ‘belonging’ a problem for you, or have you somehow resolved it by being international?

AS: After many years in Europe I started to come to the realization that my work had inherited another prolific aspect that I had been ignoring for the past years, namely my insightful struggle with foreign languages in social settings where the mother tongue was not mine. e.g: The first two summers at Bard College I witnessed and reflected upon the emergent dynamics and conflicts that occur when a person lives simultaneously in two countries (Berlin-New York). I finally could see how cultural values were mutually exclusive in many of the places I had been traveling through. I challenged myself to reveal this potential in my work. By desperately searching for an artistic form, I found out that my work actually consists of a translation act that allows for the profound exploration of questions of language and simultaneity.

Frankly my practice can't keep up with the initial problems of the forceful modernization process that Turkish Republic endured in the founding years. I, personally, also never

experienced such an abrupt change in the cultural climate, like a dress code ban, or alphabet change, etc. But I was born in a Turkey, where adaptation of western forms into the popular cultural pattern was already a custom, the dictate of the day. I was always very intrigued by the beauty regimes that came along with these idiosyncratic adaptation attempts. We all grew up in a Turkey, where Eurovision Song contest was a cultural phenomenon. This Turkey was borrowing some of the initial trauma of course, but also implementing itself in a different way. To understand these regimes I looked further in the near past. Inspired by the tradition of 'arrangement' that started in 60's in popular music circles in Turkey to adapt Italian or French chansons into Turkish, I began to see how the translation aspect embedded in my work operates: I was juggling with forms and re-arranging them, as those musicians once did, to reflect my experience of being a *Stranger in the Village* in Europe by inventing a visual language that was totally mine. And that does not necessarily deal with these initial problems of Modernity. I think, it is rather a criticism of White-Turkishness on the specific case of this film, rather than resting on essentialist definitions of its foundation base. I think, all those counter positions you could find in the contemporary Turkey have had their own modernization process long ago. And we left that point long ago. I am more interested in the clashes of racial dynamics, gender politics and things that arise, once you migrate into a different context than Turkey.

DP: Why did you need a Trojan Horse do tell your story?

AS: If it would a film only about myself, it wouldn't be as interesting as it is now to the audience. I really wanted to manipulate the attention of western audiences and the way how I structured the film was allowing me to do so. Proven by the fact that there is a lack of interest in hearing the other's story, and a very short attention span in those stories, I allowed myself to trick the audiences. The film starts as if it would be film about James Baldwin, but James

Baldwin grows bigger, so him and his legacy could even contain my life story and the recent history of Turkey. From the very beginning on it wasn't a film about JB, it was rather how I understood him. So I believe he became a very generous vessel for me to deliver my emotions and ideas. I do not think, there is a better metaphor than Trojan Horse to this. Since I planted myself in him, so I could trespass a certain threshold in my audiences then spill all over. It is like an oil spill, that is uncontrollable, or like a virus spread. Once you are the mind of your viewer, you can carefully place your ideas and contradict with given knowledge. I think by allowing myself to borrow some war strategies of ancient past (of course in a symbolic manner), I could fulfill my task, which was to tell my own life story.

DP: Essentially, "you are not so much interested in local TR critique but producing something new out of displacement and mix?"

AS: I am against essentialist ideas. So it is true that I moved from being the "other" to a more positive stance.

HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES

In Two Istanbul Galleries, Artists Piece Together Memories of Gezi

by Kirsten O'Regan on May 21, 2015

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Didem Pekün, still from "Of Dice and Men" (2011–ongoing) (image courtesy SALT)

ISTANBUL — Central Istanbul looks markedly different today than it did around this time two years ago. As the water-bound metropolis slides smoothly into summer, there's a Shake Shack on Istiklal Avenue (the city's historic pedestrian artery) and thick concrete scar tissue grafted onto the side of Gezi Park. The TOMAs (Turkish-designed armored riot control vehicles, equipped with water cannons) have disappeared from Taksim Square, and evening strolls down Istiklal are no longer marred by the acrid bite of tear gas. Flags of political parties flutter above most streets, in preparation for [June's general election](#) — an election that the ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) is expected to win.

The [Gezi Park protests](#) that broke out on May 28, 2013, were a direct challenge to the AKP and to then-prime minister, now-president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Ostensibly an environmentalist, anti-capitalist movement that grew to incorporate a plurality of agendas and social groups, the demonstrations engulfed the country, and continued, in constantly evolving form, throughout the summer. Yet despite the transformational promise of this radical, social reorganization of Turkey's urban spaces, the protests barely achieved their ostensible purpose — plans to demolish Gezi and replace the park with an [Ottoman-style shopping centre still linger](#) — and hardly any physical trace of the movement remains.

The colorful, often drily humorous graffiti that erupted across Istanbul's walls, castigating Erdogan and championing resistance, may have long since been washed away, but the intangible effects of Gezi are harder to erase than the movement's public traces. Those involved have not forgotten the thrill of collective action; two years on, they are [taking stock](#).

"How am I to edit these in a meaningful sequence?" artist and filmmaker Didem Pekün asks in a voiceover at the crux of her video "Of Dice and Men," as footage and photos of the Gezi summer flutter across the screen — a disjointed, kaleidoscopic stream of protests, pitched tents, heated clashes, and quiet joy. "Of Dice and Men," a 29-minute video diary begun in 2011 and as yet unfinished, is currently on display at [SALT Beyoğlu](#) on Istiklal. [A Century of Centuries](#), the group exhibition it is a part of, is concerned with exploring "the lasting effects of key periods and events within the longer trajectory of time they inhabit" — and Pekün's work contextualizes the Gezi movement within a broader narrative of her life.

Pekün lives and works in both London and Istanbul, and "Of Dice and Men," playing out on a double screen, seemingly nods to that duality. The footage is at times continuous across both screens, at other times split; the artist's voiceover likewise swims between Turkish and English, bearing no particular correlation to where the accompanying scenes are set. Quotidian scenarios filmed across four years are studded with a recurring black-and-white die toss motif — an archetypal gesture that, here shown in slow motion, gestures to the knife-edge wobble that determines whether the "everyday ruptures" of Pekün videos will evolve into moments of historical importance, or subside merely into significant episodes in her personal history.

The video opens with handheld footage of London's 2011 Occupy protests, before segueing into demonstrations over the unresolved assassination of Hrant Dink, an Armenian journalist, in Istanbul. Pekün is eager to examine the way violence functions in each society she's a part of, and yet her dual life also leaves her with a sense of distance. "The most incredible things always happen when you're away," her voice intones, as she reveals that she was in her London office when bulldozers entered Taksim, and the Gezi movement began in earnest.

"[S]ome things are simply unrepresentable..." Pekün says before beginning her Gezi diary entry — yet her sutured footage manages to convey a period during which "No one knew what would happen so we didn't want to sleep." A split screen juxtaposing international media reports with handheld videos made from within the protests provides scenes of chaos and confusion, before snapping to a slideshow of images from the Gezi encampment and the nightly clashes: tired, smiling children, protesters sleeping side by side, a Guy Fawkes mask, a makeshift library, milling crowds, food being doled out. Each image shifts before the viewer is able to properly register it, like a flipbook of a running man — a dynamic, indelible portrait.

"How can we go back to regular life once we saw the sublime?" asks Pekün, after the protests are dispersed. "If we had one way of living before Gezi, how were we to find a new way after this?" The diary entry on the protests is structurally incorporated into the undulating, cyclical flow of the visual diary — a river of images that jumps from political crisis (the [Reyhanli bombing](#)) to ordinary wonders (children chasing bubbles in a park; teenage boys leaping into the Bosphoros) — and yet Pekün's memories make the event subjectively distinct: a point of rupture that cannot, within the fabric of the diaristic artwork, actually sever the narrative.



Didem Pekün, still from "Of Dice and Men" (2011–ongoing) (image courtesy SALT)

Pekün's work is particularly powerful on the way history quickly accumulates without one's involvement or attendance. Constantly shuttling between cities, she's always running to catch up. Her images and words are inflected with a sense of transformation that is impossible to totally comprehend or even to witness: "My neighborhood had transformed completely," she reflects, upon arriving in Istanbul after the protests had begun. Transience imbues the narrative, with recurrent images of movement, dispersion, flight. Rain streaks down a taxi window, birds swoop in circles, ducks ripple through water, eagles plummet to earth. After a helicopter crash, Pekün recalls, "I came out of the house, and saw its traces."

Traces of Gezi surface in *Stay With Me*, an exhibition currently on at Depo — a "space for critical debate and cultural exchange," which, from SALT, is a short walk down an alley snaking off Istiklal (one of a number that once supplied handy escape routes for fleeing protesters and is now the domain of sun-drugged cats and sweaty tourists). The show pulls together Gezi detritus: notes, drawings, article clips, mementos — some scribbled and collected during that heady summer, others assembled later — compiled into notebooks by 84 of the movement's participants.



Installation view of 'Stay With Me' at Depo, Istanbul

The show's mission, as its title indicates, is one of retrieval. "Is it possible to remember this hope?" the exhibition materials ask. "We have to start somewhere..." And so they start with basic physical remains, enshrined in notebooks that are laid reverently across desks in the manner of a reading room or archive. Yet the overtly tactile quality of these objects suggests archaeology too: a physical search to uncover, catalogue, and remember a different era.

As in Pekün's video, *Stay With Me* makes no attempt to form a coherent narrative of the protests. The exhibition spills over with scenes, perspectives, information, subjectivities, subtleties, all tucked into the pages of myriad notebooks, suffused with the endearing earnestness and irreverent humor that became Gezi's hallmark. Some notebooks are immediately recognizable as products of the movement — newspaper clippings, protest flyers, chant lyrics, maps of marches, watercolors of water cannon assaults, ink portraits of protesters in gas masks — while others are more lateral: leaf rubbings, tree sketches, abstract oil paintings. There is a page pulled from Kafka, and a heavy tome entitled "Ammunition Book," which opens to reveal a single, hefty brick.

Reminiscing about Gezi is one of the preferred pastimes of many Istanbulis that I've met — a wistful gaze generally accompanies these elegiac tributes, as if the dreamer were recalling a long-lost lover still thought of fondly. And yet both Depo's show and Pekün's video avoid self-indulgent nostalgia by virtue of their inherent immediacy. They pointedly do not showcase, to quote Wordsworth, "emotion recollected in tranquillity." Rather, they are direct transcriptions of events: visual and physical imprints of a movement, preserved by its participants. As such, the two shows potently capture the spirit of Gezi, bringing its engaging optimism sharply into focus.

Yet one senses that memorializing the movement is not the highest aim of these shows. They champion resistance art and seem intended, ideally, to re-inflame the spirit of dissent in a country that has apparently moved on from it. Retrieval, as well as recollection, is yearned for. But to what extent can such projects succeed?

Pekün's video incorporates Gezi into the workaday rhythms of life: the protests were both an immense break, and a way of being — for a brief time. *Stay With Me* presents the movement's activism as a topic for academic study: a puzzle to reassemble, a pattern to follow. Both documentary efforts take as their premise the difficulty of remembering, the impossibility of holding onto this singular moment, and of packaging it neatly into a tidy narrative. The artists pursue memory — reaching for return, for permanence — while acknowledging the slipperiness of their prey. From this struggle, what emerges, improbably, is hope.

"Of Dice And Men" is on display in *A Century Of Centuries*, which continues at SALT Beyoğlu (Asmalı Mescit Mh., İstiklal Cd No:136, Beyoğlu, Istanbul) through May 24.

Stay With Me continues at Depo (Koitukçular Çk No:12, Beyoğlu, Istanbul) through June 7.

Unfinished Centuries

Arie Amaya-Akkermans

The circumstances were perhaps special on the early afternoon of May 31st, 2013 in central Istanbul, when disproportionate use of violence by police forces, in response to an environmental protest, escalated into one of the major popular uprisings in the history of Turkey, a country not particularly skilled at handling dissent peacefully. Yes, the circumstances were exceptional, as the reality of violence brought Turks from all walks of life together in an episodic moment of participatory democracy, albeit only in the form of contestation and not of agreement, which turned the country upside down. The complex set of relations dictating contemporary urban life means that a protest movement for the environment today is also about architecture, about housing, about inequality, and ultimately about the public and political domain.

Journalistic comparisons to Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring or May 1968, did very little to clarify what this moment of transition was or could have been. How do you address a moment of transition when you are profoundly immersed in it? This question haunted Turkish artist Didem Pekün, observing the uprising from London as a distant spectator, and then arriving back in Istanbul to take part in the protests that lasted for months and that still echo profoundly in the political consciousness of the present moment in Turkey, marked by increasing political uncertainty and the possibility of next door's war in Syria penetrating Turkey's porous border. Where do the borders of reality meet the horizon of what is visible to us?

These moments of convulsion that all those involved in the protests remember to a degree now seem further than they really are, as if they were part of a political cosmology erasing all previous histories yet so deeply embedded in them. The protests spread quickly nationwide, and in the unexpected solidarity that is born as a consequence of losing the objective world, very few people in central Istanbul slept that night and witnessed the hundreds of protesters marching from one side of the Bosphorus Bridge to the other at 4 AM, as we broke into tears from both shock and excitement. And that was only the beginning.

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Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, C

istafa Haznedar

SFAQ / NFAQ / AQ
INTERNATIONAL ARTS AND CULTURE

AQ 2 | COLUMN | NFAQ 1 | SFAQ 31

UNFINISHED CENTURIES

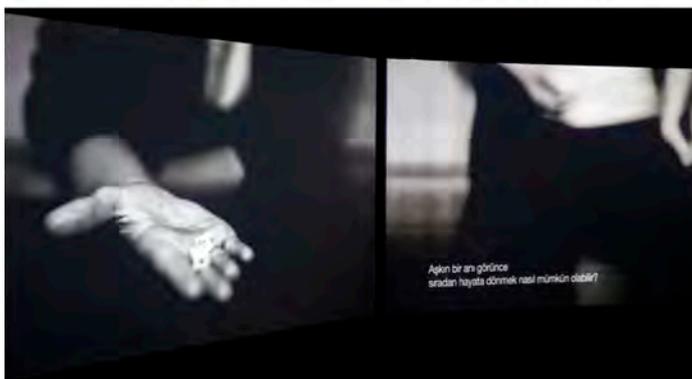
Didem Pekün had already in 2011 during years before the ev artist's lens was me Gezi Park protests, staged between London and Istanbul, in which the artist reflects on the possibility of the everyday, existing alongside so many different

merely as apocalyptic fiction.

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Didem Pekün, *Of Dice and Men*, 2011. Video Loop, 29 minutes. Courtesy of SALT and the artist. Photography by Beris Dogrusoz.



Didem Pekün, *Of Dice and Men*, 2011. Video Loop, 29 minutes. Courtesy of SALT and the artist. Photography by Beris Dogrusoz.

To live in the moment or to document the moment? A strange seamlessness foams up in between the truly cinematic and the more intimate descriptions of the everyday: a tram in London, or a window view from Istanbul. As cosmic background waves, the grandeur of the temporal ruptures; the intoxication of the future breaks through the sewn patches of the here-and-now. Passing through a number of different adopted positions, Pekün doubles and triples into persons and voices, into moments and eras, into histories and telltales. But *Of Dice and Men* is not a filmic essay about a protest movement somewhere, which sounds very ubiquitous today and not particularly incisive. The anxious loop between the everyday and the sublime and the artist's question of whether we are able to move back and forth between them, and how, is not something specific to Gezi or Istanbul or Turkey but related to a profound moment of change and global transition of which Gezi is only a late symptom.

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Rolled carpets act as an oblique metaphor for the suspended home, the condition of rootlessness: the shift of cultural forms, transition from one religion to another and ultimately between eras, the exile of the Christian minorities of Istanbul and nowadays the status of Syrian refugees who wait in legal limbo in Turkey and attempt to reach fortress Europe on boats with little else than the clothes they

and re-organized. Where exactly are we when we remember? Is this a personal space or one we share with others? Navigating the no-longer and not-yet-of-consciousness, as they relate to broader frameworks that include historical and social knowledge, how do we merge different temporalities into a consistent seamless whole? While the question is not answered by the performance, the artists involved turn to movement from theoretical knowledge and attempt to create something such as movement or dance scores based on memories, which are also part of an extended web of political events and interruptions in the flow of consciousness: revolution, upheaval, dictatorship, freedom.

November Paynter's eye and focus in selecting the artists for the exhibition expanded into a larger question about the nature of our historical consciousness, far beyond Turkey, to include Russian collective *Chito Delat?* with their performance-installation *The Excluded in a Moment of Danger* (2014) addresses forms of political organization of subjects under different forms of oppression, subtle and otherwise, and Kapwani Kiwanga's installation ... *rumors Maji was a lie* (2014) based on accounts of the 1905–1907 uprising in the African continent against the Germans is by a spiritual medium, resonate strongly within the exhibition, but it is difficult not to be overpowered by the loud volume of the conversation between Turkish artists, especially bearing in mind the erratic nature of contemporary art in the country, where it is very difficult to find meeting points between the practices of artists living in the same city, something consistent with the transformative moments that Paynter sought after.

Other works in the exhibition include Judith Rauml's eser (2014–2015), documenting German colonialism in Anatolia; Jumana Mana and Silje Storheim's *The Goodness Regime* (2013), a film about the foundations of ideology and national self-image in Norway; Maha Maamoun's videos about Egypt's visual history; and Shilpa Gupta's *Untitled* (2013–2014), dealing with geographical tensions between India and Pakistan. As a generalization, all the works in the exhibition investigate the becoming of our present world not in terms of causes, effects, and consequences, but under the light of how untold or obscured histories—be they visual, cultural, political, linguistic—can affect profound transformations in how we relate to immediacy or the past or not, and whether that will cause us to be derailed from the present into a frenzied state of suspended judgment where we are unable to move between past and future, between fiction and fact, between history and myth.

Almost hidden in plain view, lying quite anonymously in the middle of the exhibition, was the work that encapsulated the exhibition best. Diek Winchester's hermetic *Negative Epiphany* (2015) is a series of black prints made by overexposing paper, developed in traditional printing techniques and presented alongside vintage cameras from 1900–1915. The prints are not metaphorical; they stand blackened in lieu of photographs that have been shot somewhere, but that cannot be shown in the exhibition. Does this refer to images that we forgot or to objects that disappeared? To things that are not present or that have not been imagined? The work does not reveal much—a vault with indecipherable documents. The transmission of knowledge does not occur as an uninterrupted consciousness, therefore it is imperative to excavate, and to let objects speak for themselves, rather than to accommodate them.

It seems as if the central question of *A Century of Centuries* is not one of personal or even collective narratives, but what happens in politics and in artistic production when different moments in time pose themselves simultaneously as starting points of historical knowledge and as political futures. Our concept of history, as it stands today, is far removed from the way in which our ancestors looked at their narrated lives, and belongs to the 18th-century Enlightenment, in which the determinations for human experience were laid out really, removed from experience itself. It is a politico-philosophical concept. Historical time, should there be one, is bound up with our social and political circumstances and no longer anchored in a metaphysical hierarchy. To locate this time with precision is not merely a function of knowledge, or even of orientation, but of discovering how to move between different eras without being under the illusion that one or the other determines the whole.

What are the markers between one era and the other? Say, if you want to discuss the dividing line between the 19th century and the 20th and the 21st, what key events or places would come to mind? At the turning point between reality and belief, this line needs to be placed

The circumstances were perhaps special on the early afternoon of May 31st, 2013 in central Istanbul, when disproportionate use of violence by police forces, in response to an environmental protest, escalated into one of the major popular uprisings in the history of Turkey, a country not particularly skilled at handling dissent peacefully. Yes, the circumstances were exceptional, as the reality of violence brought Turks from all walks of life together in an episodic moment of participatory democracy, albeit only in the form of contestation and not of agreement, which turned the country upside down. The complex set of relations dictating contemporary urban life means that a protest movement for the environment today is also about architecture, about housing, about inequality, and ultimately about the public and political domain.

Journalistic comparisons to Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring or May 1968, did very little to clarify what this moment of transition was or could have been. How do you address a moment of transition when you are profoundly immersed in it? This question haunted Turkish artist Didem Pekün, observing the uprising from London as a distant spectator, and then arriving back in Istanbul to take part in the protests that lasted for months and that still echo profoundly in the political consciousness of the present moment in Turkey, marred by increasing political uncertainty and the possibility of next door's war in Syria penetrating Turkey's porous border. Where do the borders of reality meet the horizon of what is visible to us?

These moments of convulsion that all those involved in the protests remember to a degree now seem further than they really are, as if they were part of a political cosmology erasing all previous histories yet so deeply embedded in them. The protests spread quickly nationwide, and in the unexpected solidarity that is born as a consequence of losing the objective world, very few people in central Istanbul slept that night and witnessed the hundreds of protesters marching from one side of the Bosphorus Bridge to the other at 4 AM, as we broke into tears from both shock and excitement. And that was only the beginning.

Didem Pekün had begun her ongoing project *Of Dice and Men*, already in 2011 during an anti-austerity demonstration in London, two years before the events of Gezi Park. Upon returning to Istanbul, the artist's lens was met with raw footage from iconic moments of the Gezi Park protests, juxtaposed by a pre-existing visual monologue, staged between London and Istanbul, in which the artist reflects on the possibility of the everyday, existing alongside so many different forms of violence. Referring to a cultural unconscious, the momentum of Gezi is not an interruption by the final episode of a cycle of accumulation: global tension and uncertainty. The work is executed, albeit poetically, in a radical social realism operating a suitable model to subvert the possibility to dismiss this historical accumulation merely as apocalyptic fiction.

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temporal ruptures; the intoxication of the future breaks through the sewn patches of the here-and-now. Passing through a number of different adopted positions, Pekün doubles and triples into persons and voices, into moments and eras, into histories and telltales. But *Of Dice and Men* is not a filmic essay about a protest movement somewhere, which sounds very ubiquitous today and not particularly incisive. The anxious loop between the everyday and the sublime and the artist's question of whether we are able to move back and forth between them, and how, is not something specific to Gezi or Istanbul or Turkey but related to a profound moment of change and global transition of which Gezi is only a late symptom.

It is then not surprising that *Of Dice and Men* is the work at the core of *A Century of Centuries*, the exhibition curated by November Paynter that took place this year at SALT Beyoğlu, which was marked by the hundred-year commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in Istanbul, to this date not recognized by the government of Turkey. As in 2013, when the Gezi Park protesters battled the police and the clouds of tear gas, so it was in 2015 when demonstrators marching in recognition of the centennial of the genocide were followed closely by Turkish nationalists separated only by a very thin police barrier as they passed the Siniosoglou Apartment building that today houses SALT Beyoğlu. Paynter was primarily interested in works imbued with the memory of temporal transformations that continue to shape our present moment here and elsewhere.

But “transformation” is not strong enough a noun to denote the temporal gaps being addressed here. A transformation is merely a conversion from one symbol or function into a different one of similar value, whereas a transition implies a change in morphology, a crossover. A moment of transition is one in which the validity of certain concepts or symbols that guide us through the structure of reality begins to fail, thus we are expected to build new concepts based on knowledge of the past and wild guessing about the future. The transition is not a temporal unit but a leaped second; an adjustment that corrects time.

The installation *as if nothing has ever been said before us* (2007–2015) by Dilek Winchester, another local artist living on the islands of Istanbul—a place of exile and imprisonment in Byzantine times and later a place for minorities—takes on the polyglossic nature of Turkey in the early-20th century, rescuing cultural forms that have been buried in oblivion after the language and alphabet reforms in Turkey led to a rather violent and merciless process of homogenization and unification, which begot many of Turkey's distinctively authoritarian and intolerant traits. Winchester's investigation looks into Karamanlidika—Turkish written in the Greek alphabet—and Armeno-Turkish—Turkish written in the Armenian alphabet—and reveals buried chapters of Turkish literary history, where the first novels in modern Turkish were written by minority authors, using their own alphabets, but never registered in the official literary history.

In *as if nothing has ever been said before us*, Winchester explores the ideology of identity in relation to language, the title of which is based in the writer Oğuz Atay's 1971 novel *Tutunamayanlar* (*The Disconnected*): “We are knocking on your doors with an emotion and arrogance unparalleled in world history and without fear of seeming like those who are

conceited and behave as if nothing has ever been said before them.” The phonetic transcription is in Turkish but the alphabets include Armenian, Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic, all used extensively by the Ottoman population until the language reforms. As varieties of historical time are embedded in language, Winchester addresses the political consequences of linguistic policies and their long-term effects on the physical location of pasts: do they still shed light on us?

On the same floor, Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, Winchester’s neighbor on the same island, constructs a dialogue across time that complements the former’s investigation on Karamanlidika and Armeno-Turkish with a poetic utterance traveling far across eras. Profoundly engaged with the history of Greeks and Armenians in Istanbul, it is not a place of diaspora or exile for Büyüktaşçıyan but the epicenter of cultural and linguistic history of centuries. The artist travels in time and place between Byzantium, Constantinople, Venice, the Prince Islands, and Istanbul, and further back to a Babylonian cuneiform text of the epic of Atrahasis, also known as the tale of Noah’s Ark. *Destroy your house, build up a boat, save life* (2014–2015), titled after a quote from the Babylonian text, builds an imaginary boat and a boat of imaginaries erased from Istanbul’s long history of exiles and persecutions that make reference to the fragility yet durability of memory through gestures and symbols. Not unlike Winchester, Büyüktaşçıyan digs out an archaeology of invisible symbols, erstwhile

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Returning from the islands and the obscurities of the previous century to present-day Istanbul, Yasemin Özcan tackles article 301 of the Turkish penal code, which took effect 10 years ago and makes it a criminal offense to insult the state or government institutions. In *threehundredone* (2008), Özcan reacts to the prosecution by the state and subsequent assassination of Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink—an icon for freedom of speech—in 2007. The artist produced a necklace bearing only the numbers 301, working with Armenian craftsmen in one of Istanbul’s traditional craftsmanship centers, protesting the article almost silently, considering broader aspects of gender, justice, and freedom in Turkey. Other artists in the past have also been taken to court for infringing upon this article, most notably Hale Tenger’s case in the 1990s when she was prosecuted for insulting the Turkish flag in one of her signature installations.

Specially commissioned for *A Century of Centuries*, and lively articulating the preoccupations of the exhibition, is *Trailer* (2015), a lecture-performance by Erinç Aslanboğa, Natalie Heller, and Bahar Temiz. It offered a real-time look into how memories are organized and therefore how elements of the past can be gathered and re-organized: Where exactly are we when we

remember? Is this a personal space or one we share with others? Navigating the no-longer and not-yet-of-consciousness, as they relate to broader frameworks that include historical and social knowledge, how do we merge different temporalities into a consistent seamless whole? While the question is not answered by the performance, the artists involved turn to movement from theoretical knowledge and attempt to create something such as movement or dance scores based on memories, which are also part of an extended web of political events and interruptions in the flow of consciousness: revolution, upheaval, dictatorship, freedom.

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What are the markers between one era and the other? Say, if you want to discuss the dividing line between the 19th century and the 20th and the 21st, what key events or places would come to mind? At the turning point between reality and belief, this long century placed between the imperialism of Bismarck's Germany in the 1860s and that of corporate interests in the Middle East and elsewhere in 2015, is one and the same century punctuated by some of the most defining humanitarian crises of the modern era: the Armenian genocide in 1915 inaugurating the era of crimes against humanity and the indiscriminate slaughter of Syrians and Iraqis in 2015, which effectively ended that era together with international law and the international treaties enshrined to protect refugees all over the world from the horrors of genocide.

Not surprisingly, we are living in a very similar momentum, part and parcel of the same unfinished century: at the gates of a promising new world, propelled by economic and scientific growth, significant constitutional reforms and liberalization of the legal apparatus, reduction of poverty, and a fragile world peace. All of this paired with unspeakable humanitarian crises, the threat of an impending war, and the destruction of the middle classes. In order to "finish" this century, to move into the new one and pick up on the sublime that Didem Pekün was offering us in her work, it is necessary to think up forms of the future in which the current system of social and political organization will not be a "necessary evil" or an "inescapable circumstance" for those wanting to live in a democracy. It takes more than good judgment to walk into the future. It also takes imagination. *A Century of Centuries* imagines in reverse: it looks at the past as if it had shed light on the future.

A Century of Centuries

November Paynter and Didem Pekün in conversation with Basak Senova

Basak Senova



Bahar Temiz, Natalie Heller and Eriç Aslanbog, *Trailer*, 2015.
Courtesy SALT Istanbul.

A Century of Centuries is the cumulative end result of a research process based on dialogues with Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, Chto Delat, Shilpa Gupta, Kapwani Kiwanga, Maha Maamoun, Jumana Manna & Sille Storihle, Yasemin Özcan, Didem Pekün, Judith Raum, Dilek Winchester, Erinç Aslanboğa, Natalie Heller and Bahar Temiz. Curated by November Paynter at **SALT Beyoğlu** in Istanbul, the exhibition gathers intersected positions and artistic responses artists are presented within a framework that considers: 'transformative moments, traumatic experiences and social transitions of the past that continue to resonate in and shape the present'. Paynter's research process started with artist Didem Pekün, and a lingering dialogue between them. In this interview, Basak Senova talks to November Paynter and Didem Pekün about the development of A Century of Centuries.

Basak Senova: How did the A Century of Centuries exhibition come about?

November Paynter: Didem and I met several years ago and I had seen Of dice and men (2013–ongoing) at various stages as the work progressed. We met fairly frequently and I presented early versions of the work in two screening programs I curated at the Oberhausen Film Festival and in Sheffield Fringe. A year ago it started to become clear that the work was ready to be presented in an exhibition context. I really wanted to share this moment with Didem and find a meaningful way to present the work, so that the dialogues found within it could resonate further and be embedded in a broader set of historical references.

Didem Pekün: My video installation is part of a practice-based PhD I have been pursuing at Goldsmiths since 2011. That is also how I started researching at SALT and our collaboration started. The process of my involvement in the exhibition really was an organic one whereby November saw the video, went away for weeks and months, then came back with ideas for her show. Once A Century of Centuries had begun to crystallize in her mind, we started to meet even more regularly. But, up to that point, as November mentioned, there were a couple of smaller programmes in which she had asked to include the work in progress.

BS: In that vein, how do you locate Of dice and men in A Century of Centuries in relation to your initial dialogue?

NP: Didem's work sits in the center of the building and hence the exhibition, and is encountered as soon as you exit the first elevator level. It is both spatially located in the exhibition as a pivotal piece, but also conceptually because it emits a kind of central energy in the way that it loops relentlessly and also refers to recent events that are very much still in daily conversation

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and remain unresolved. While, Didem's work definitely helped direct the angle of the exhibition, there were several other artists I had been hoping to work with for some time and if possible commission, and these were the next conversations I had.



Yasemin Özcan, *threehundredone*, 2008.
Courtesy SALT Istanbul.

BS: Why did you choose to describe this installation, along with the other artist works, as a solo artistic position?

NP: Knowing that I wanted to present Didem's video installation in a broader framework of artistic positions that shared similar concerns, I started talking with several artists I was keen to collaborate with who I knew had a work or works that somehow stemmed from a factual event or period of time, which resulted in major political implications or transformed society.

As each artist had worked with such specific references to create a response that was so precise and personal, I very much wanted to allow these statements to be positioned independently enough to be clearly appreciated by the audience as solo positions, yet at the same time they are of course in dialogue with the other works in the exhibition. One of these

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positions is presented as a single channel installation, but in many cases a selection of works, occasionally with a newly commissioned addition, have been gathered under one title in conversation with the artist.

BS: How did these positions influence the design of the exhibition?

NP: The exhibition was structured to create three different rhythms through space. On the first floor Judith Raum very much wanted to divide up the space with new panels and columns of wood to create an environment that both supported and structured her work eser. On the second floor I wanted to create a run of works by three artists who have affiliations with one another. Either through having worked together, or in the case of Hera Büyüktaşçıyan and Dilek Winchester, a more personal interaction as they live on the same island and so often converse on their boat journey into the city each day. We worked together for over a week in the space with Hera and Dilek to balance the configuration of very different media and references, as well as two new works, one of which is in this context site-specific. To create a different rhythm again, the top floor is much more structured with dividing walls between each artists' work and yet there is always a view into or hint of the next work to come, from space to space.

BS: Of dice and men can be perceived as a diary with very personal entries. Based on this aspect and by also taking other included entries and works into consideration, how do you position your work in the exhibition?

Didem Pekün: Of Dice and Men actually stands in the peripheries of diary and essay film. So I used a diaryesque method in the video in my collecting of material, in the random daily entry mode, but the content is mostly formed of a critical gaze to the outside. As such, I try to keep a very fine line in terms of what I reveal of the private sphere of 'Didem', and the persona I create that looks outside, to the world that surrounds us. But, they all share common characteristics of a repetitive nature of history and how joys and surprises of life are interlaced with more symbolic and real violence. To me, what connects all these entries that I showed in this exhibition, is their shock, the 'awe' effect they created on me on that specific day.

BS: How do you see the relationship between the acts of keeping, preserving, and presenting a diary within the context of history?

DP: What I am doing is actually an unofficial archive, for an unforeseen future, so if anyone looks back at these entries, say in 2034, they will get a glimpse of, a taste of what it was to live in this time period in these geographies, the feelings, the tensions and the fascinations.

Repetition is like a throw of dice: there is a limited number of combinations that can fall, but each time it is different, because each time and each place and all people are different. In other words, repetition is like watching the same theatre play mostly tragedy, again and again, but each time in a different place with different actors, always remaining 'hopelessly hopeful'.

BS: Speaking of repetition, November, how do you compare the past with the present?

NP: I had been conversing with several artists about how our need to commemorate, mark, or at least remember certain calendar dates and in particular climatic moments such as centenaries, creates a rhythm that is inescapable, the is repetitive and often far too insular. Added to this, it feels like recent traumatic events, particularly in this region, understandably appear to be marked even more frequently in order to keep their meaning alive. I was interested in building an exhibition that expressed the rapid accumulation of events to be marked, that looked beyond those that are familiar to a certain culture, or time, and to add layers to a past we perhaps feel we know. Several dates do appear in the exhibition, but they move beyond being purely notations within a calendar and instead have been threaded by the artists into a much longer trajectory of history. Days, weeks, months and events merge and are cross-referenced to show a much more complex web of how history unfolds and repeats itself.

BS: Could you explain the process of selecting works and/or artists in relation to this very specific emphasis on repetition?

While references to repetition are apparent in many of the works, the aim was rather to gather a selection of responses to certain transformative or traumatic moments that would converse in a way that allowed the audience to embed each one in relation to others - both those that appear to be analogous, but also to find echoes in those that despite being distant in time, geography or cultural significance, can still affect us.

BS: Could you exemplify this dual situation by referring a work in the exhibition?

Hera Büyüktaşçıyan's initial reference for her installation Destroy your house, build up a boat,

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save life (2015) was a quotation taken from the "Story of the Flood" found on "The Epic of Atrahasis," a Babylonian cuneiform tablet. The description of this imaginary boat, also known as "Noah's Ark," became an instrument for Büyüktaşçıyan to connect land and sea, life and death, loss and perseverance, past and future, known and unknown. The boat also acts as a metaphor for the rescue and preservation of belongings, as well as fragments of memory, that are gathered up and taken from one context to another in the event of traumatic upheaval, exile, deportation and other forms of societal breakdown. An ancient story thus appears to repeat itself time again, from the forced exodus of the Greek population of Turkey in the mid 20th Century, to the current migration of hundreds of thousands of people from Syria to neighbouring countries and beyond.

BS: Many of the works also show the interdependence between personal and external effects on our daily life experiences.

NP: Yes, in a similar way to *Of dice and men*, several chapters in Chto Delat?'s work *The Excluded*. In a *Moment of Danger* touch upon how both intimate and universally acknowledged events, located in both distant or local space and time, nevertheless affect us as individuals. In the production of this work Chto Delat? invited friends and students to participate by asking them to describe how they are able function in a collective situation today. Despite their frequent collective presence on camera, each participant is also represented alone to reflect independently on various issues as well as on the deluge and impact of information from social networks and the web.

Reverting back to a very individual response to a tragic event, Yasemin Özcan's work *threehunderedone* (2008) was made almost immediately following the assassination of Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink following his prosecution under Article 301. Her paradoxical statement, of creating a necklace from the numbers 301 – a symbol of beauty, value and durability from within one of the historical commercial centers of Istanbul – amplified her tone of dispute with this Article that continues to be contentious today.

BS: Could you touch on the reason you chose to work almost solely with female artists?

NP: Early on it became apparent that the list of artists was all female and while that was not a decision I had taken intentionally it felt right and seemed somehow emblematic of a certain feeling determination of spirit and aesthetic, that I was hoping to express through the works selected for the exhibition. At the same time it was incredibly inspiring for me to work with a group of women, a number of who I should add have small children, who are committing so

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much focus, drive and attention to their work, often in fairly difficult politic climates. In the end, bar Chto Delat?, all the artists selected were female.



Chto Delat?, The Excluded. In a Moment of Danger, 2014.
Courtesy SALT Istanbul.

BS: Last but not least, I would like to ask about the new commissions in the exhibition, including a lecture performance work. How did this transient element of the program function within the exhibition as a whole?

NP: It was through long conversations with several artists that four new works were introduced, including the lecture dance performance Trailer. Following their participation in a workshop SALT hosted with Simone Forti and Jeremiah Day in 2014, Erinç Aslanboğa, Natalie Heller and Bahar Temiz approached me with a proposal to develop a work based on their interpretation of this experience. As the exhibition started to take shape and our conversations developed, their ideas for Trailer, which became a compendium of personal and collective memories reorganized in a performative frame, seemed to align more and more with the attitude of many of the other works. It also felt extremely important to have a 'live' element within the exhibition; a way to incorporate a set of real events that would adapt and be responded to in a variety of ways by different audiences at different moments. With this in mind, Trailer existed in the framework and mediation of the exhibition as one of the artworks. And it was through this performance, that the nuances of urgency, rhythm and repetition that were already gathering momentum through a reading of the other works in the exhibition became activated and simultaneously realized.

A Century of Centuries is on view until 24 May 2015 at SALT Beyoğlu: www.saltonline.org

November Paynter has been Associate Director of Research and Programs at SALT, Istanbul and Ankara, since its founding in 2011 and sits on the Editorial Board of L'Internationale, a confederation of six European museums. Following receipt of a BSc in Architecture from The Bartlett, UCL and a Masters degree from the Royal College of Art in Curating Contemporary Art she moved to Istanbul in 2002 to work with Vasif Kortun as Curator of Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center. In 2005 she also took the position of Assistant Curator of the 9th International Istanbul Biennial. In 2007 Paynter returned to London to work as Consultant Curator at Tate Modern for the exhibition Global Cities and then worked for a period in a freelance capacity curating exhibitions for venues internationally including the Bluecoat and Open Eye Galleries in Liverpool, the Philadelphia Museum and the Asia Pacific Triennial at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane. Among other achievements Paynter has been a recipient of a Fund for Arts Research from the American Center Foundation and was winner of the Premio Lorenzo Bonaldi per l'Arte – EnterPrize 2004.

Didem Pekün's work explores both research and practice; conceptually it deals with the production of subjectivities within violent geographies, displacement, and contemporary border politics. Her studio practice includes documentaries and video installations, and her work have screened internationally at festivals and galleries, (Berlinale, Arnolfini, Oberhausen, Punto de Vista, WOMEX, MUSAC, SALT Istanbul) have received and been nominated to awards, (British Council), and attended residencies (Delfina and Greenhouse). Following a BA in Music at SOAS, and an MA on Documentary at Goldsmiths, she is currently a practice-based PhD candidate in Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths and a faculty member at Media and Visual Arts Department at Koc University.

About the author

[Basak Senova](#)

Basak Senova is a curator and designer. She studied Literature and Graphic Design (MFA in Graphic Design and Ph.D. in Art, Design and Architecture at Bilkent University) and attended the 7th Curatorial Training Programme of Stichting De Appel, Amsterdam. She has been writing on art, technology and media, initiating and developing projects and curating exhibitions since 1995. Senova is the editor of art-ist 6, Kontrol Online Magazine, Lapses book series, UNCOVERED, Aftermath, Yane Calovski. Obje'ct and Scientific Inquiries among other

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publications. She is an editorial correspondent for ibraaz.org and Flash Art International and one of the founding members of NOMAD, as well as the organizer of ctrl_alt_del and Upgrade! Istanbul. Senova was the curator of the Pavilion of Turkey at the 53rd Venice Biennale. As an assistant professor, she lectured in various universities in Istanbul such as Kadir Has University, Bilgi University and Koç University. At the moment, she is lecturing at Bilkent University. She curated Zorlu Center Collection for two years (2011-2012). She co-curated the UNCOVERED (Cyprus) and the 2nd Biennial of Contemporary Art, D-0 ARK Underground (Bosnia and Herzegovina). In 2014, she acted as the Art Gallery Chair of (ACM) SIGGRAPH 2014 (Vancouver) the curator of the Helsinki Photography Biennial 2014 and the Jerusalem Show. Recently, she was appointed as the curator of the Pavilion of Republic of Macedonia at the 56th Venice Biennale.

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April 2015

SHEFFIELD FRINGE

2014 2013 2012 2011

URBAN OBSERVATIONS: IN AND AROUND ISTANBUL

Next »

Saturday 15th June 12 pm
BLOC PROJECTS
71 Eyre Lane
Sheffield S1 4RB
map

A selection of observations made in and around Istanbul are gathered together to suggest the attitude and energy of the city, and the dynamics between coexisting spaces and communities. All but one artist lives between Istanbul and another locality, their perceptions influenced perhaps by the distancing experience of living elsewhere, and the intimate nature of submerging into a place they bond with on their return. Some of the included videos delve into very precise issues, such as the transformation of particular districts, or the ceremonial planning of the day of Ashura by a distinct group of people, while others take a broader position that concerns the intangibility of comparing here and there. The linking thread is an exploration of urban performance, recital, and gathering to express opinions and beliefs, be those of the artists, the protagonists, or others who remain unnamed.

Selected by November Paynter, Associate Director of Research & Programs at SALT, Istanbul. Paynter previously worked as Curator for Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, as Assistant Curator of the 9th International Istanbul Biennial, and in 2003 was the first curator under the age of 30 to be recognized with the Premio Lorenza Bonaldi per l'Arte – EnterPrize award. In 2007 Paynter took the temporary position of Consultant Curator at Tate Modern for the exhibition *Global Cities*. Recent curatorial projects include *0 – Now: Traversing West Asia* for the Asia Pacific Triennial 7, Brisbane (2011).



Ashura | Köken Ergun | Turkey/Germany | 2012 | 22' | HD

The Battle of Karbala was a military engagement that took place on October 10, 680 in Karbala, between the forces of Yazid I, the Umayyad caliph and Hussein, the grandson of prophet Muhammad. Hussein and his supporters were killed; women and children were taken as prisoners. Central to Shi'a Muslim belief, the martyrdom of Hussein is mourned by an annual commemoration, called Ashura. Artist Köken Ergun worked in close collaboration with the people of Zeynebiye, the Istanbul neighbourhood referring to Hussein's courageous sister Zeyneb, documenting their preparations for the 2010 Ashura ceremonies.



Of dice and men | Didem Pekün | Turkey/ UK | 2013 - ongoing | 15' | HD

Of dice and men is an exploration of day-to-day chance events taking place in vastly differing geographies, namely in Istanbul and London. The work hints softly at personal and political violence and asks, how do we produce ourselves in the face of conflict?



The Great Good Place | Annika Eriksson | Turkey | 2010 | 6' | HD

The Great Good Place portrays a community of formerly well cared for domesticated cats that have since been abandoned and now live together in a park in Istanbul. The notion of place hinted at in the title refers to the non-defined spaces within a cityscape that temporarily allow for informal living-conditions to exist.



Wonderland | Halil Altindere | Turkey | 2013 | 8'25" | HD

Wonderland by Halil Altindere is filmed in several neighbourhoods where buildings are being left to ruin and communities are destroyed to enable new development. Creating a pseudo music-style video Altindere directs a group of young men as they rap about issues of gentrification and enforced relocation of inhabitants.



Casting for a Canary Opera | Esra Ersen | Turkey | 2011 | 18'22" | HD

Esra Ersen's film portrays members of a canary lovers society, reciting like actors, speeches extrapolated from a totally different context. This choice relies on the fact that in Turkey many civic initiatives, trade unions, political parties, even the army or terrorist groups, and certainly bureaucrats, when wanting to emphasize their efforts and the importance of their actions, often do so by pointing out that they are not just a simple canary lovers' society. (Courtesy of Borusan Contemporary Art Collection)

Figure 14

Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen

SALT (Turkey)
Market Screening guest

Saturday, 4 May
10.30 p.m., Sunset

SELECTION BY SALT

SALT explores critical and timely issues in visual and material culture, and cultivates innovative programmes for research and experimental thinking. Assuming an open attitude and establishing itself as a site of learning and debate SALT aims to challenge, excite and provoke its visitors by encouraging them to offer critique and response.

SALT Research sources diverse fields of knowledge and provides outlets for thought within the fissures and crossovers of different disciplines. The institution's research projects expand beyond linear chronologies, medium-based questions, and the traditional separation of fields of study. SALT assembles archives of recent art, architecture, design, urbanism, and social and economic histories, making them available for research and public use. These resources are interpreted in the form of exhibitions and discussed in all other areas of programming.

And I Awoke, Ergin Cavusoglu, GB, 2012, 5'

Separation, Barış Doğrusöz, Turkey, 2012, 5'

While the Fields Were Burning and Other Tales from Meriç, Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen,



, 2013, 16'30" (excerpt)

Of Dice and Men, Didem Pekin, Turkey/GB, 2013 ongoing, 15'

Figure 15

OF DICE AND MEN FILM CREDITS

2011 - 2016

By Didem Pekün

Digital Compositing: Barış Doğrusöz

Sound design: Fatih Rağbet

Sound mix: Metin Bozkurt

Translator: Nazım Hikmet Richard Dikbaş

Music:

All of them are memories since now

Written, performed and produced by Reverie Falls On All,

Nihan Devecioğlu: Mezzo Soprano,

Eri Hidaka: Soprano

Les jeux sont faits

Composed recorded and mixed by Tommaso Perego,

Eloisa Manera: Violin

Tommaso Perego: Max MSP

*As part of a practice-based PhD at Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths.

*With the kind support of Delfina Foundation and SAHA Association – Supporting Contemporary Art from Turkey.