

**PERFORMATIVE PUBLICNESS:  
ALTERNATIVE THEATER IN TURKEY AFTER 2000s**

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**PERFORMATIVE PUBLICNESS:**

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by

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Title: Performative Publicness

Alternative Theater in Turkey After 2000s

This thesis looks at the alternative theater field in Turkey especially after mid 2000s which is separated from conventional theater making styles by the usage of black-box stages, new texts (translated or locally written), experimental dramaturgies and new acting techniques. The research was based primarily on long-running and deep field analysis varying from spatial analysis to interviews where the supplementary material is mostly collected from newspapers and websites. The conclusions reached were that this “new” form of theater created a significant public sphere based on tools of “performative publicness” in which different groups from various backgrounds (though being limited by class to an extent for now) can have contact with each other and their stories.

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Başlık: Eylemsel\* Kamusalılık:

Türkiye'de 2000'lerden Sonra Alternatif Tiyatro

Bu tez Türkiye'deki özellikle 2005'ten sonra bilinen tiyatro yapma tarzlarından black-box sahne, yeni metinler (çeviri ya da yerli yazım), deneysel dramaturji ve yeni oyunculuk teknikleri ile ayrışan alternatif tiyatro alanını inceler. Araştırma büyük ölçüde mekansal analizden mülakatlara uzanan uzun soluklu ve derin alan çalışmasına dayanır, destekleyici materyalin ise büyük ölçüde gazeteler ve websitelerinden gelmektedir. Sonuç olarak bu "yeni" tiyatronun "eylemsel kamusalılık" ile tanımlanabilecek bir kamusal alan oluşturduğu ve bu kamusal alanda geçmişleri çok farklı olan bireylerin (şu an için kentli orta sınıflara mahsus olmakla birlikte) birbirleriyle ve birbirlerinin hikayeleri ile ilişkilenebildiği anlaşılmıştır.

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\* "Performative" terimi bu tezde kullanılan anlamıyla "oyunsuluk", "eylemsellik" ve "harekete dayalılık" gibi anlamları kapsar. Bütün kavramlara karşılık gelmesi açısından Türkçe çeviride "eylemsel" terimini kullanılmıştır.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

In an article that appeared in the Guardian recently (Brown,2012), Istanbul is the fifth city in the world to have the most theaters.<sup>1</sup> In terms of cinemas, book shops, libraries, museums and theaters in big cities, Istanbul is the only city in Eastern Europe and the Middle East to appear in the rankings. This seems quite unexpected since State Theaters and Municipality Theaters are under governmental attack especially since the late 2000s. So what has happened that theater became significantly popular in Istanbul? The accelerating increase in the number of theaters is not just due to the rise of a new form or attitude in a significant art form. It is also the rise of theater in Istanbul as an autonomous branch of art, a portal for expression for unprofessional people<sup>2</sup> also. Since mid-1980s there had been a deep current in theater to create autonomous space but only after early 2000s did it turn into a full fledged, independent theater movement with its own (young) audience.

I argue here that a “brand new” theater has been born within the context of Turkey after the early 2000s. This “new” theater was new, because it was experimental in all senses (in text, staging, dramaturgy or stage design) and it transformed the middle-aged, white collar or bureaucratic conformism of the mainstream State Theater or Municipality Theater audience in Turkey. A young generation of people who were self-educated (for instance, within University Theater

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<sup>1</sup> “New York comes out top in terms of number of theaters. It has 420, compared to 353 in Paris, 230 in Tokyo, 214 in London and 184 in Istanbul.” (Brown, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> This development is mostly due to amateur theater groups which attempt and succeed in becoming professional which I’ll examine in this thesis.

Clubs) or educated in unconventional ways in theater (outside of state conservatories or university dramaturgy departments and without formal stage design education) made a new network in marginal theaters in this period and they found their own young audiences.

To understand why “alternative theater” is alternative and why this movement happened only after the second half of the first decade of 2000s, the orthodoxy build in the field of theater should be understood. This orthodoxy is deeply related with long-run state policies, a unique combination of domination and hegemony. Earlier there had been moments in history where theater had the power to affect the political sphere such as the Ottoman theater of the 1908 Constitutional revolution (Seçkin, 2008) or the leftist theater of 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup> However, this time theater become more of a public sphere in itself and experimenting with theater is more accepted and desired by artists and audiences especially among the youth of Istanbul. The question that this thesis asks is “Why now?” and “How is this publicness constructed?”

A deep current of experimentalism has been existent especially since Brecht wave of mid-1960s about making political and/or experimental theater. The term “experimental” is used in its widest definition through the thesis, as any play performed outside of an Italian stage<sup>4</sup> or any play performed with an unconventional dramaturgy or any play that is written with any kind of aesthetic unorthodoxy. Examples are the theater activities in “found” theater spaces,Boal’s “invisible”

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<sup>3</sup> Like Ankara Art Theater or Movement for Revolution Theater (Devrim için Hareket Tiyatrosu) which made street theaters only.

<sup>4</sup> The mediocre description of stage in Wikipedia covers what is commonly known as Italian Stage or Frame Stage: “The stage serves as a space for actors or performers and a focal point (the screen in cinema theaters) for the members of the audience. As an architectural feature, the stage may consist of a platform (often raised) or series of platforms. In some cases, these may be temporary or adjustable but in theaters and other buildings devoted to such productions, the stage is often a permanent feature.” (“Stage,” n.d.)

theater trails,<sup>5</sup> use of unexpected stage materials, new dramaturgies of old texts or use of contemporary avant-garde texts such as post-dramatic or in-yer-face plays<sup>6</sup>. Experimentalism in staging or writing in theater were both rare and not continuous so they were left as anomalies within orthodoxy. Still the alternative theater movement today became possible with the efforts of the past four decades of modern theater. What I hope to show in this thesis is to historicize the experimental theater activities of the 2000s' mostly in Istanbul and examine its potential for shaping a new sphere for interaction.

The thesis explains itself under four chapters. The introduction, explains the methodology of the field work and theatrical themes internal to contextualizing theater, like performance theory, ethnographic study of theater, the concepts of place and space and what the concept of “performative publicness”. The second chapter deconstructs the experimental underground theater movement starting with Brecht wave, continuing with 90s underground avantgarde and its contemporary reflections like the Theater Madrasa. The third chapter discusses the intellectual and practical background of the break through what is called the “in-yer-face theater”.

The fourth chapter examines the sociology of artists and, the horizontal and not-solidly-defined division of labour which makes it possible for a contributor to take part in stage design, acting, directing, text writing or management of the theater. Significant examples of multi-functional use of place will be provided and how context of “stage” can vary according to the theme of the plays will be analyzed.

There are two major debates within the fourth chapter: who are the people working here and who are the audiences, and what kind of interaction takes place to

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<sup>5</sup> Like 2002 production of “Yine Ne Oldu?” by Kumpanya Theater which took part in 2002 Istanbul Theater Festival. It was a series of publicly arguing couples in urban spaces.

<sup>6</sup> I'll explain these names later in context.

form the performative publicness. Here, I assert that working on the alternative theater movement is important because the knowledge, idealism and network like solidarity created by it and the potential risks and hinted (possible) degenerations need to be recorded.<sup>7</sup> This thesis majorly bases itself on information collected by experience in the field (fringe theaters), interviews and informal talks with the artists.<sup>8</sup>

The problem in my case is not the fragmented documents but the problems of analyzing the holistic experience. This is a “labeling and branding” (Sierz, 2008) process which needs new descriptive chronological categories like “the second wave” or new communicational categories such as “performative publicness”. This is a way of defining the experience with terms invented for that significant experience

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<sup>7</sup> Theater gets lost easily if not recorded. For example the only source which gives a possibly complete information about 90s experimental theater activities is a book made from conference proceedings (Cumhuriyet’in 75. Yılında Tiyatro, 1999) which is not published anymore.

<sup>8</sup>The Theater Madrasa experience (which I lived in for a month) was significant not only because of the interviews or spatial analysis I’ve done but also the life constructed within Madrasa helped me to contextualize the terminology of a theatrical public sphere.

## Notes on Performance Theory

If I were given a million pounds to spend in Arts, to encourage creativity and provide entertainment for the public, the most difficult and dangerous decision would be to try to spend it on the theater. Here is no certain return for money.  
(Brown, 9, 1972)

It is important to understand why some people choose to do theater when it is more risky than any other artistic production, since it does not produce long lasting products to later generations<sup>9</sup> for reselling. There has to be a material advantage of theater which the other arts lack, then. Performance theory, has given a possible answer in “being present”. The audience and the artist sharing the same space and time creates the possibility of *direct* communication, a relationship that other arts lack.

This *momentariness* makes the theater audience believe an empty stage can be anything. Peggy Phelan explains this momentariness as follows: “Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.” (Phelan, 146, 1993)

As theater theorist Marvin Carlson puts it, the major change in understandings of theater came with performance studies. The text based understanding to analyze theater was strongly challenged for the first time in 1970s (Carlson, 1, 2006). It was enrooted deeply in post modernism, post structuralism and Foucault’s thesis of mult centered and multilayered pressure groups. It was

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<sup>9</sup>Aleks Sierz in his 2001 dated book, “In-yer-face Theater”, stresses a similar argument when explaining why playwrights are the backbone of British theater – because they are documented and remembered.

postmodernist because it was one of the most important moves to change the linear reading of theater history along with a new perspective on gender and analysis of performance theories. In Richard Schechner's words:

Performance is an inclusive term. Theater is only one node on a continuum that reaches from the ritualizations of animals (including humans) through performances in everyday life—greetings, displays of emotion, family scenes, professional roles, and so on—through to play, sports, theater, dance, ceremonies, rites, and performances of great magnitude. The web is the same system seen more dynamically. Instead of being spread out along a continuum, each node interacts with the others. (Schechner, 1988)

Schechner's nonlinear and experience based theory has changed the mainstream western approach to theater. Diagram 1 gives a paradigmatic summary of Schechner's theorization of the concept of performance. The upper part of the diagram named as "The fan" opens up what is included in the concept of performance. The below part, named as "The web", tends to explain the interactions between different cultural performances and rituals from various geographies.

Many of the 20<sup>th</sup> century theater theorists and directors such as Antonin Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski and Eugenio Barba were all inspired by Eastern theater practices but after the theorization of "Orientalism" by Edward Said, they were reinterpreted and criticized for being orientalist. On the other hand Westernization trials of third world theater have been written majorly as "acts of imitation". Schechner tends to go beyond these common understandings of cultural interactions but the theorization falls into the trap of Eurocentrism.

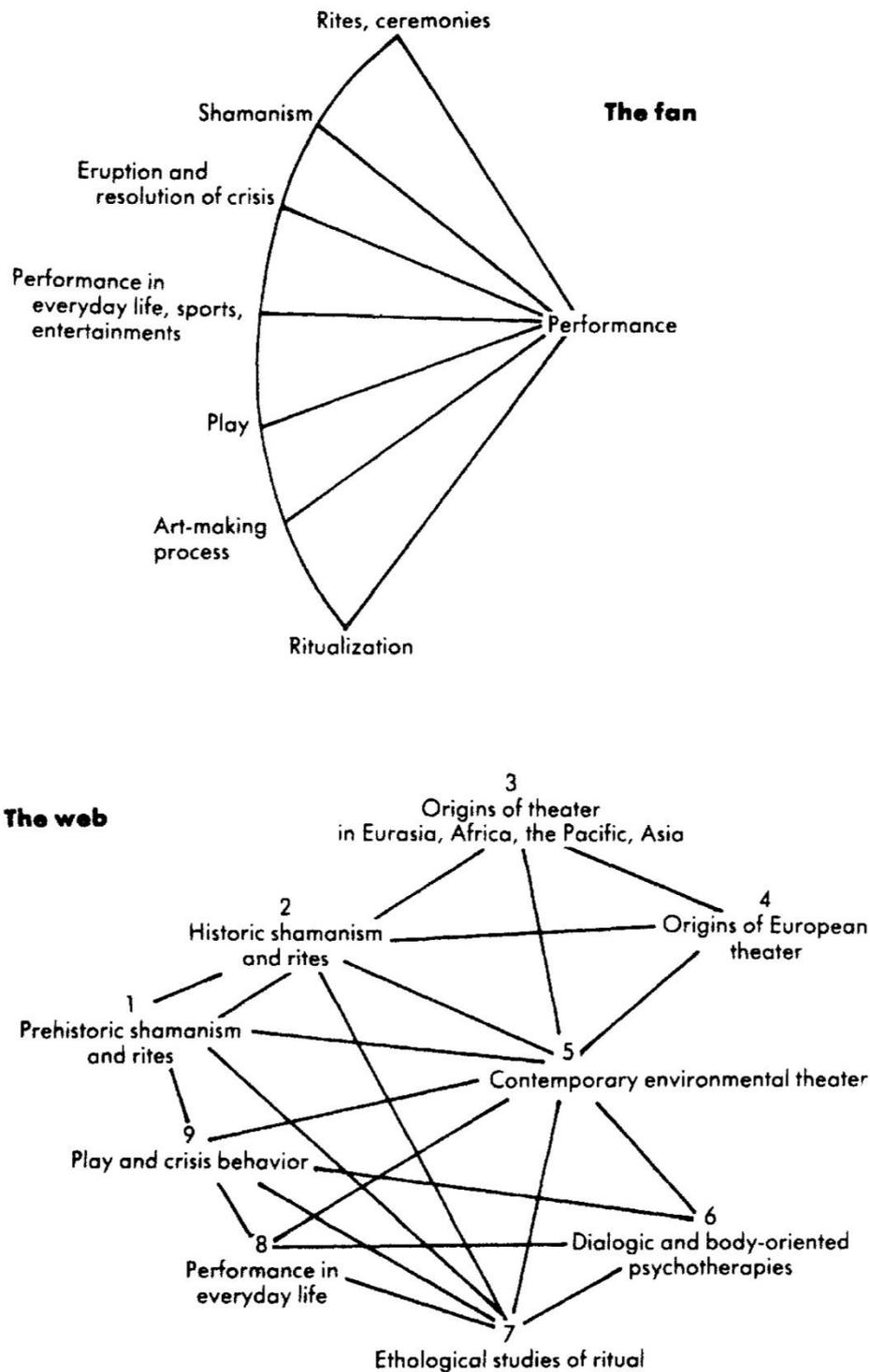


Figure 1: “The Fan and The Web” – Schechner’s System for understating the cultural interactions between various performances<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Resource : Schechner, R. (1988). *Performance theory* (Rev. and expanded ed.). New York: Routledge.

It is important to see that in “The web” part of the diagram, “origins of European theater” is a singular node (4) and “the rest” is put into node 3 under “origins of theater in Eurasia, Africa, the Pasific, Asia”. This is *still* a Eurocentric approach claiming that there is “west” and the “rest” only.

Performance theory starts with theater but moves on to social performance, and my narrative of the alternative theater field in Turkey starts within theater but moves on to cultural changes behind the movement and how these new theater spaces create a new performative publicness among artists and spectators. Definition of children’s public sphere is a good comparison to understand this variant of theatrical (playful) publicness.

If they are to realize their specific form of sensuality, to “fulfill” themselves, children require a public sphere that is more spatially conceived than do adults. They require more room in which to move, places that present as flexibly as possible a field of action, where things are not fixed once and for all, defined, furnished with names, laden with prohibitions. (Negt & Kluge, 1993, 284)

## How to Write Theater History: When the Material is Volatile

Writing theater history is a problematic area compared to writing any other branch of art history. A performance disappears completely once it is not documented by the observers or artists. How can the momentariness of theater be studied? Only after the mid70s were recordings of plays made widely, but obviously this covers a very little amount of time in human history and it is impossible to document all plays or even each performance of a single play. The problem of the historiographer while working on a recorded play is also an issue, because it is not the original work, it is a copy – unlike a movie from 1920s in which the spectator watches the *same* artwork instead getting a gist of it.

Within this subchapter, two problems of theater historiography in Turkey which cannot be separated from worldwide problems of theater historiography will be presented. The first one is the problematic definition of theater itself. Many theater theorists define theater as an activity where at least two people are needed, one to perform, one to watch. But then what does it mean when all performers are also the audience, like in a ritual? Or what if it is an experimental play where there is no performer but there is an audience?<sup>11</sup> Also there is the problem of what a performance is. When does any act turn into a performance rather than two people randomly talking?

My problems were more internal to theater ethnography which is a field-based research area. “I realized I was faced with a common dilemma of ethnographic

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<sup>11</sup> A retold story: There has been an experimental play in Edinburgh Theater Festival in last few years. The play is set in an empty room and audience watches facebook and twitter screens reflected and a continuously ringing phone and voice mails left. As the play proceeds audience understands they’re watching the room of an Egyptian reporter who newly attended suicide. The play is about missingness of a person, therefore the empty room resembles what’s left behind. (Told by Yeşim Özsoy Gülan in her “Contemporary Theater” class, Spring 2013)

writing: points that seem simple and obvious to anyone who has spent years inside a given cultural universe require a great deal of ink to convey to someone who hasn't.” (Graeber, Preface, 2009) Overcoming this handicap is what made my thesis so long.

Being the observer of an event which the researcher writes on is a dangerously subjective state. I’m not involved or worked in any theater group and I never took part in the play-making process which helps me to keep a safe distance with my objects of study. It is important to admit though, that I find most of the second wave theater groups idealistic. Still, especially in the fourth chapter I’ll mention the new social problematic of the second wave such as labor exploitation of assistants or negligence in productions.

I’ve spent many hours in theaters I’m working on (interviewing or plan-making) and with theater people whose artistic works I analyze. I conducted interviews, spent a month in Theater Madrasa (July 2013) and sometimes went to plays more than two times a week to have an insight. In total I’ve constructed a sense in people’s “causes, motivations, aims and purposes” (Postlewait, 1991). That’s why individual political discourse, the text, the total meaning of the play, the acting and the use of the physical space of the stage and the relationship with the audience are centrally important in my research.

If I differentiate and give credit to a play though this thesis though it means that play is significant for one of the following reasons. Either it is artistically unorthodox in relation to the classic theater terms of Turkey, being experimental in text, dramaturgy, stage design or acting – or in more common sense, by using blackbox stages<sup>12</sup>, or it works on contents which have “unspeakable taboos” in

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<sup>12</sup>“A **black box** theater (or experimental theater) consists of a simple, somewhat unadorned performance space, usually a large square room with **black** walls and a flat floor. It is a relatively recent innovation in theater.” (“Black Box Theater,” n.d. – bolds are from original text)

contemporary society of Turkey, or it has a left-wing discourse without ignoring aesthetic problems.

I'm not working on an already-canonized topic which is a benefit but the informal information I collected is shaped by singular individuals' positions in aesthetic or political realms. This is a general risk of oral interviews, specifically in this research it can distort the understanding of some specific works or main trends within second wave, but the final judgements are mostly dependent on my position in these realms.

After defining the problems of historicizing a theater event the second most important problem is defining the "territory" of research. The essay collection book *Writing & rewriting national theater histories* is a significantly important for understanding what "imagined communities" (in Benedict Anderson's terms) or nationalism has done to theater historiography. Theater in the western understanding, since the late eighteenth century, has been a question of "national pride" especially after it is institutionalized by the state. The western historiographer's main problems here appears in defining theater only with written and/or institutionalized theater and writing a "national" theater history. This comes with the assumption that theater history *can* be written only within the borders of the nation state and results in neglecting the artistic flows in an interconnected geography. Within the Eurocentric (or orientalist) paradigm history writing appears as a biased activity. Süreyya Evren explains this phenomenon very successfully in his study on the historiography of anarchism:

... when an idea flows from Italy to Spain, it is considered as an internal flow of 'the idea', it can even be called the development of the idea within the (European) body. But when the idea flows to Argentina, it is considered as a transfer from one body to another, a migration of the idea. Someone spreads the idea to another environment, to somewhere the idea does not actually belong there. The idea is at home

when it is in Western Europe, even when it is new [...]. But when the idea is in Japan or in Argentina, it is in a foreign environment. (Evren, 85-6, 2012)

Theater historiography suffers from the same problem also, and in the case of Turkey it has an additional danger of being self-orientalizing.

The construction of national identity and character or the choices of what to document (which theatrical events, which artists or what method to be used) has been one of the main issues of theater historiography. “Similarly, the social context, such as the redrawing of national boundaries and the ideological changes in the country”, affect historians’ choices (Wilmer, 2004).

Theater historiography of Turkey have been suffering from same biases also. The main “nationalistic” and theoretical problems of Turkish theater historiography, are quite similar with the worldwide theater historiography problems. Sevda Şener’s *Turkish Theater in the 75<sup>th</sup> year of the Republic* book (“Cumhuriyet’in 75. Yılında Türk Tiyatrosu) is a good example of national theater historiography. The language in the book describes theater within a progressive-developmental paradigm as “a contribution of theater art to our cultural progress” (Şener, 1998, 223). This paradigm does not, of course, reduce the quality or the range of knowledge presented in the book. Şener also mentions a very important and limiting common dualism in theater criticism field: “In search of theater politics, the first problematic which comes to mind is that our theater should overcome Western imitations and find its own national identity.” (Şener, 1998, 300) This hints the secret dualism which lives until today: a theater work is either authentic or local (criteria not clearly settled), or it is an imitation brought from West.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>It is fair to note that Şener criticizes this paradigm.

What this attitude has done is an endless self limitation since late Ottoman period but it especially became a restrictive paradigm during the early years of the Republic when the search for a National Identity became a central political theme and the state was the *only* sponsor of the theater field. Through this Early Republican episode, theater and state became integrated with a very little autonomy left to theater.

In Erdem Ünal Demirci's 2010 dated book named "Theater's Political Role in Turkey (1850-1950)" the author tells that theater has always been a tool for making national identity and myths of the nation. "From foreign policy to domestic policy, from identity politics to nationalist and later to a relatively humanist episode, from language-history thesis to leader cult production, to Community Centers (Halkevi), to Conservatory and shortly to every realm the Republican Government finds necessary, theater was used and highlighted as an indispensable quality." (Demirci, 2010) Another recent study presents the similar case, Esra Dicle Başbuğ's 2013 dated book "Resmi İdeoloji Sahnede" (Official Ideology on Stage) questions the same period of Early Republic.

State theaters, state opera and ballet are integrated with the early Kemalist paradigm, not only because the Kemalist paradigm made possible their existence, but also overwhelmingly stage arts were shaped within this paradigm. It is important to see this background because the alternative theater movement of the 2000s is the first true breakaway from this early model. This argument will be developed in chapter 4.

Before continuing I want to note other areas that need exploration in theater history and ethnography which would be great contributions to Turkey's theater field if studied.

The Ottoman past of the Turkish theater is a problematic area, considering nearly all the theater historiographers, especially the most important ones of previous generations (such as Özdemir Nutku, Metin And or Sevda Şener) are strongly writing within the Kemalist paradigm.<sup>14</sup> This doesn't mean their works are denying minorities contributions to the history of Turkish Theater. But this paradigm pushes And for example, into explaining many details apologetically or defensively on Güllü Agop's (Armenian founder of Turkish Theater) personal life (And, 1999). In the second chapter, I explain how the state theater relations overcame this challenge and to signify what has changed today.

All theater history is written in linear modernist form based on archival information. All the comparisons are made only with Europe. This reinforces "the belated modernity discourse" with the inferiority feeling of living in the past of Europe. The lack of comparative works makes it inevitable to miss common phenomenon which develops from similar experiences (such as military coups). I refuse to use the "belated modernity" discourse.<sup>15</sup>

Ethnic works and rituals are still not considered within even marginal theater historiography.<sup>16</sup> Especially modern (but not folkloric) works in Kurdish, Lazuri,

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<sup>14</sup>There are some new revisionist works which have the power to change the orthodoxy of theater writing such as Cafer Sarıkaya's master thesis on Ottoman Theater Group's inclusion in 1843 Chicago Fair, Bilge Seçkin's master thesis on theater activities of revolutionary 1908, Fırat Güllü's book on "Vartovyan Company and New Ottomans" or Hülya Adak's work on Halide Edip's one and only play, written in absurd theater form. Cafer Sarıkaya's master thesis on the Ottoman Theater Group's inclusion in the 1843 Chicago Fair and Fırat Güllü's book on "Vartovyan Company and New Ottomans" reflect the *cosmopolitanism* of Late Ottoman theater.

<sup>15</sup>I have tried to draw parallels with the experiences of Turkey with other third world contries which suffered from military coups or war in recent history, such as the Antigone phenomenon in Turkey has similarities with Latin American (Werth, 2010) and African Antigone (Chanter, 2011) waves even though I won't be able to present most of it within the limits of this thesis.

Antigone Phenomenon: Sofokles' Antigone being performed by many different companies and institutional theaters with various (from classical to experimental) dramaturgies densely in a significant period in some states.

<sup>16</sup> There are a few folkloric studies in recent years, a precursor of these studies and one of the most famous ones is Metin And's "Oyun ve Bügü". But these studies, secretly ignoring modern stage

Zazaki, Homşetsi, Armenian, Georgian and many other languages are not studied in the field of theater historiography or theater anthropology. Related to this problem most of the amateur works in Turkish are not studied since they can't be documented. Street theaters, invisible theater experiences (as in Augusto Boal's theory) or pantomime artists are marginalized by main body of works also.

Though, a great diversity of the professional works in Turkish are not studied also. Turkish theater historiography is mostly limited with institutional history of State Theaters or Municipality Theaters. Only a few theses were done on some very famous private theater companies such as Dormen Theater, Dostlar Theater, Kenter Theater or Semaver Kumpanya.<sup>17</sup> This attitude is strongly challenged in this thesis. One of the major themes of this thesis is to record the new places and subjects in recent theater, working on stageless or marginal theaters.

Most of the academic works on theater are on text but not on performances. I try to use my observation of plays to give an insight of the performances also. The relationship of the theatrical space to acting and performance form the basis of my research.

Censorships and awards in theater have not been studied deeply to see which works are celebrated by authorities and which are filtered. This kind of study can reveal the trends in theater more according to politics and generations clearly. The work on autocensor of Aslıhan Ünlü is the only academic work on this aspect (Ünlü, 1995).

Attempts at a gender sensitive theater historiography have newly started in Turkey. Selen Korad Birkiye and Jale Karabekir are a few examples but still it is a

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variations of ethnic groups, tend to limit the minority works into folklore studies but not modern theater of Turkey.

<sup>17</sup> Based on YÖK's (Yüksek Öğrenim Kurumu – Higher Education Institution) database

very weak area and “gender” is still mostly understood as women only<sup>18</sup>. There is no work in theater historiography of Turkey which works on the dilemma of masculinity and femininity within norms of society. This is why it is important to note the brand new feminist plays, plays on LGBTI individuals<sup>19</sup> and plays which challenge the concepts of masculinity and patriarchy.

Waves of theater movements which leave mark on Turkey’s urban generations are understudied. It would be meaningful if 1980’s Bertolt Brecht phenomena and 2000’s in-yer-face movements are analyzed sociologically. Eren Buğlalılar’s “In-Yer-Face: A Historical and Theoretical Investigation” article is the only work on the acceptance process of in-yer-face movement in Turkey (Buğlalılar, 2008). One of the aims of this study is to write the history of unorthodoxies in Turkey’s theater field which starts with 80s Brecht wave but the period under focus is late 2000s and early 2010s.

Theater history was generally not written with the terminology of the public sphere in Turkey’s theater historiography. For leading into the theoretical framework of public sphere there are some keywords to be described such as place, space and openness.

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<sup>18</sup> Karabekir wrote her master thesis on Okmeydanı Social Center where Augusto Boal’s techniques were used for women’s liberation (2003). Birkiye has articles on representations of women in Turkish Theater in new millennium and representations of family in early republican Turkish Theater (summarized from her published material through academia.edu).

<sup>19</sup> For example Ebru Nihan Celkan’s “Evim, Güzel Evim” (Home, Sweet Home) is a feminist text, Jale Karabekir’s Tiyatro Boyalı Kuş group insists on feminist plays or feminist performances of canonized masculine texts (such as nationalist “Vatan Yahut Silistre” - Homeland or Silistre) were acted with feminist dramaturgy by this group). There is even a wider aspect of LGBT identity in these new stages. A random list might go like this: Gays: Ali and Ramazan, Limonade, 6.5... Transsexuals: All self-written plays of Esmeray, The Day After Nobody Died, “Women, Amour, Songs”, Pressure Cooker, Garage, Mark... Bisexuals: Surprise... These are only the local texts, there are more LGBT characters in translated texts also.

## Sphere, Space, Place, Openness and Collectivity Ideal

Contexts of “fringe theater”, “found-space” and “site-specific theater” and the difference between “place” and “space” should be defined to understand the fringe theater<sup>20</sup> concepts of Istanbul. Space and sphere are generally used as interchangeable terms but it causes confusions since sphere is an abstract term and space centrally has a physical meaning. Within this thesis term “space” is used as the physicality of an environment and “sphere” as the communicative layer within that space.

The context of space is concretely physical in architectural discourse. Space is not defined in communicative level but in five senses, therefore space is somewhere a human can physically exist. Space is an empty volume defined with concrete and unchangeable variables, it is somewhere which can be understood with Euclidian geometry. Public space and private space is quite physical in the sense of the architecture-urban planning paradigm also. Streets and squares are the most basic public spaces since everyone can enter, they are not strictly controlled by any authority which limits who is included and who is not. Houses on the other hand are strongly private due to their very selective inclusion: only the housekeeper and her guests can enter a house. Shopping malls, clubs, libraries, universities or governmental buildings are in between public and private since entrance is selective.

The term space is taken in its architectural – urban planning meaning through this thesis, as a physical reality referring to an empty space. On the other hand the term public space is used in a hybridized sense since borrowing from paradigms of social sciences and urban planning. This hybridization meaning of public space can

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<sup>20</sup> Fringe theaters are generally blackbox type of theater which can appear in random apartments, garages or any place offering an emptiness to be reshaped in each play.

be defined as a physical empty volume which people can gather with the minimum exterior limitations and have a will for interaction or communication. According to this specialized definition the internet won't be considered public space, because there is no physicality of such a "space" and a shopping mall won't be a public space either since people mostly don't come to a shopping mall with any will of interaction or communication irrelevant to main theme of that significant architectural space, which is shopping.

Place on the other side is a term generally used in architecture and urban planning. Place is a safety zone within space because it is known to the subject and the subject knows how to act within the place to survive or socialize. The most basic differentiation can be that "a house" is space but "the home" is place. The place then cannot be explained by pure Euclidian geometry unlike space. Place also needs geometry to be explained but there are also colors, odors, textures, sounds and sometimes even tastes of place that are significant. Space and place can be transformed to each other very fast within a person's mind. That is why loss of place is referred to as loss of memory in major architectural works (Petruccioli, 2007). The space and place terms are well defined in Yi-Fu Tuan's book "Space and Place". Tuan describes space and place simply as "Place is security, space freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (Tuan, 2001, 3). The term place plays an important role in this thesis in case of explaining fringe theaters in which theater groups mostly create a stage by working together like construction workers and spend nights in rehearsals or serve tea to early coming audience members and those interactions can best be described in terms of "place". Simply, place is about experience.

The third key word in studying fringe theaters along with architectural public sphere terminology is “openness”. Openness is a wide term used both in social sciences and urban planning. In social sciences it refers to the welcoming attitude of a community and the possible range of inclusiveness<sup>21</sup>.

In architecture and urban planning it means spaces designed for the fluent moving of pedestrians. It does not coincide with a significant theatrical term but in general it has a connotation of permeability, not being blocked, the maximum availability of its users’ moving. An open place in a city is a place where people can enter without physical (walls or barriers) or psychological (like the psychological barriers of a ghetto or an extreme luxury zone) limitations. Fluent transportation of pedestrians, mothers with pram, wheel chairs are essentially important. An open building is an inclusive building which doesn’t ask for ID at the door, which is designed for wheel chairs as well as pedestrians. In more sensual layers, generally an open building would have high ceilings, big entrances and wide windows.

What does openness refer to in this thesis then? It is a hybrid again. The fringe theaters I work on generally have open doors all the time except rehearsal times, and audience and performers, director or designers can socialize before or after the plays. The term “open” though has a wider range of connotations in art philosophy like Umberto Eco’s terminology of “open work”. Here I use the term “open work” in its far-fetched limits. The works I describe in this thesis does not fit in the description of Eco all the time. Some are conventional plays in script or staging or acting but their stage usage, the fringe blackbox stage, is what makes them “open” in a sense since these works are beyond the known methods of theater making.

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<sup>21</sup>Hannah Arendt has majorly developed the term in sociology. (Arendt, 2008)

According to Eco “Every human being lives within a determinate *cultural pattern* and interprets his or her experience according to a set of acquired forms.” (Eco, 1989, 78-79) The “cultural pattern” makes possible for people to understand present and assume the future. The conventional, conformist, accepted forms of art repeat this meaning circle and give a satisfaction to spectators by confirming their way of understanding the world. The meaning cycle which leads to cultural patterns is build by the cognitive process which can be described as “[...] *stimulus-crisis-expectation-satisfaction-reestablishment of an order* [...]” (Eco, 1989, 75) Avant-garde works do not give this satisfaction but an initial distaste since they break the meaning cycle of the cultural pattern. Here open work, or avant-garde art work which doesn’t fit in the traditional and conformist logic of the form “deliberately frustrates our expectations in order to arouse our natural craving for completion.” (Eco, 1989, 74)

Avant-garde works (before they became orthodoxies in time) are “scandalous” because they challenge the paradigm, the “right form”<sup>22</sup> of how to do things. According to Eco “Every real artist constantly violates the laws of the system within which he works, in order to create new formal possibilities and stimulate aesthetic desire.” (Eco, 1989, 79)

The term openness has a coinciding meaning in terms of theater also. Peter Brook’s theater is defined as “the open circle”. The open circle refers to a horseshoe like of Bouffes du Nord’s stage which the audience surrounds the stage in three sides. The term also describes a community which forms an open circle, a community which forms a center but the center is inclusive and the differentiation

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<sup>22</sup> “Well-known social illnesses such as conformism, unidirectionism, gregariousness, and mass thinking result from a passive acquisition of those standards of understanding and judgment that are often identified with the "right form" in ethics as well as in politics, in nutrition as well as in fashion, in matters of taste as well as in pedagogical questions.” (Eco, 1989, 83)

between the center (performer) and the periphery (audience) is blurry. To sum up openness means an inclusive kind of publicness where anyone can join, change the situation and leave as they wish. Openness is the priority to collective working ideal.

Collectivity is different than corporate type of team work, it is not meant to be lead secretly (with hegemony), all people of the collective should come and go voluntarily to projects, the members of the group should trust each other, form a non-hierarchical horizontal society and take decisions democratically. Though the first concession is given when someone has to lead the process (the play in this case), like the director for example. The decision taking-process can still stay transparent and accessible though and the common case of leadership in collectives mean more efficient and longer work periods than other members. This naturally opens more autonomy to leader and some members (again naturally) tend to leave more work to other members. Collectivity is a form of working culture which is highly accredited for being democratic, being based on voluntary work and solidarity but it can create its own problems also<sup>23</sup>.

One of the things that the fringe theaters did was to set their working method as collective which radically differs from institutional theaters way of theater making where all decisions are bureaucratic and all labours are divided and well-defined hierarchically. Besides the problems the collectivity caused it also brought the most important key phrase of this thesis: “performative publicness”.

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<sup>23</sup> I'll define these problems in 4<sup>th</sup> chapter in the case of alternative theaters.

## Post-Habermasian Geographies of Theater in Istanbul and a Key Term: Performative Publicness

When I think about the end of choreography I think about Roland Barthes and how the symbolic death of the author must mean the birth of the reader, and perhaps by the extension to the theater, the birth of the spectator. (Hildebrandt, 2013)

I use the term performative publicness to contextualize what I have witnessed through my research. The idea of performative publicness derives from Habermas' term of literary publicness which means reading print material and discussing it (Habermas, 1989). It is important to see that Habermas also offers a deconstruction tool for understanding the public sphere. He tells a story of how any anonymous public sphere can be constructed by referring to a specific historical case. If literary publicness fits the description of the key element (ability to think) of being human in "homo sapiens", then performative publicness suits the key elements of Victor Turner's "homo performans"<sup>24</sup> (ability to perform) and Johan Huizinga's "homo ludens"<sup>25</sup> (ability to play). While theorizing performative publicness I've seen that Negt and Kluge's "Public Sphere and Experience" defines a proletarian public sphere based on production which includes behavior, nonverbal interactions and the process

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<sup>24</sup> "If man is a sapient animal, a tool making animal, a self-making animal, a symbolizing animal, he is no less, a performing animal, *Homo performans*, not in the sense, perhaps that a circus animal may be a performing animal, but in a way, reflexive; in performance he reveals himself to himself." (from Victor Turner's *On the edge of the bush: Anthropology as experience*, p.187 cited by Madison, 149, 2005)

<sup>25</sup> "A happier age than ours once made bold to call our species by the name of Homo Sapiens. In the course of time we have come to realize that we are not so reasonable after all as the Eighteenth Century, with its worship of reason and its naive optimism, thought us ; hence modern fashion inclines to designate our species as Homo Faber: Man the Maker. But though faber may not be quite so dubious as sapiens it is, as a name specific of the human being, even less appropriate, seeing that many animals too are makers. There is a third function, however, applicable to both human and animal life, and just as important as reasoning and making namely, playing. It seems to me that next to Homo Faber, and perhaps on the same level as Homo Sapiens, Homo Ludens, Man the Player, deserves a place in our nomenclature." (Huizinga, Foreword, 1980)

of making. The supplementary key word of proletarian public sphere which Negt and Kluge defines might be performative publicness which is parallel to literary publicness of bourgeois public sphere as Habermas defines.

Literary publicness starts in private, the emotional responses, fantasies rose by the text in reader's mind and readers all processing of the text is done in private and the dialogue starts from a digested ground of knowledge and imagination. On the other hand performing together, watching something and being moved together, or following a story on stage together generates a different dialogue base among contributors. Eugino Barba notes this difference precisely.

I don't distance myself from my actors, my spectators or my life. I distance myself from my readers. I am here, very much alive, in my theater, among my collaborators, making plans and fulfilling dreams. It is my unpredictable readers who are not with me, here and now. Are there no more of them? Will there be more? (Barba, 2010, xiv)

Performativity can exclude rationality though, it can easily turn into herd instinct which can end up in anything including severest of mass violences like lynching. Theater in specific here can help to generate a dialogue field which both has a basis in rationality, in its most basic meaning, but does not exclude performativity either. In historiography this phenomenon was discussed under the topic of "performative turn".

It is important to note that reading is an individual activity (between the reader and the print material) and then it is transformed into a public activity with the people's will to gather and discuss the print material. To draw a logical parallel with literary publicness though, I would use it here as a group of people taking part in or observing performance, and wish to discuss what they have done or seen.

Performative publicness is shaped by centering on the experience lived together,

which is watching the same alive performance together, dissimilar to literary publicness which starts with an individual activity.

But this parallelism with literary publicness crumbles when the theme of catharsis is considered. Catharsis is a relieving feeling first defined by Aristotle for analyzing tragedies. This emotional attachment and the relief which accompanies it has been central to nearly all theater activities until Brecht. Since mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, in theater, Brecht started a fight against catharsis through the use of alienation. Until today many experimental or strongly unorthodox performative or playwriting trends had an attempt to abolish catharsis altogether, or to deconstruct it. In fourth chapter I'll argue that these alternative theater productions do not try to abolish cathartic feelings but they tend to deconstruct in into their own ethical questions. This theme will be explained further with the concept of "ethical compass". Deconstruction of ethical and experience based questions is one of the most basic ingredients of performative publicness.

Only by the existence of performative publicness the new public space can be formed similar to publicity here in Habermas' theory. The below diagram describes how this significant type of public space is shaped with performative publicness.

The comparison here seems stretched at first sight because what Habermas claimed was a definition of public sphere as an arena of critical-rational discussion which to a certain aspect, takes place outside the state and market manipulations, and in 18<sup>th</sup> century it was significant in England because the public sphere was networking so well that it had the power of pressuring the state. I do not claim this for alternative theater movement of today's Turkey but I do claim that alternative theaters (especially the "second generation" I define through my thesis) constructed places of interaction which are a lot less regulated and manipulated by state or

market compared to State and Municipality Theaters or most of the private theaters shaped until today. Although the public sphere created in alternative theaters do not pressure the government today, it has a wide potential for comprehensiveness and creating publicness which has great tendency to spread to other cities. What I argue through the thesis is that the performative publicness is (not spread from but) enrooted in alternative theaters, and that was the type of publicness shaped in GeziPark and later (through late 2013 and 2014) squats. What is common in all these places are that they not only create egalitarianism but also a density of direct communication.

The term performative publicness is closely related with this mentality of playing. A play has its own decided upon ethics (rules), it can only take place by voluntariness and it has some kind of entertainment involved. What is also important about play is also that, by the nature play is never the *end*, it is always the *process*. The words of Jurgen Huizinga , “Play is older than culture” (Huizinga, 198-) is not enough to explain what play does to our social relations and public spaces. “Play is being reversed and reformed. It carries social and political issues and becomes a tool for critique and social change. By connecting the virtual and the real, it opens new spaces for communication and action. Its ability to approach and fuse into other disciplines gives birth to new forms of art and play” (Back cover, Homo Ludens Ludens<sup>26</sup>).

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<sup>26</sup> Taken from the two individual catalogues published together for the exhibitions of Playware (21.09.07 - 24.03.08) and Gameworld (30. 03.07 - 30.06.07) which took place in Portuaria de Gijon. The name of the book “Homo Ludens Ludens” comes in line with “Homo Sapiens Sapiens” which means “the specie which thinks on thinking”. Therefore “Homo Ludens Ludens” means the specie which plays on playing, which actually made a great metaphor of theater which differentiates from ritual.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONTEMPORARY THEATER IN TURKEY: AN OVERVIEW

In this chapter a specific history of trials of contemporary, and to an extent, political theater in Turkey will be presented based on secondary sources and interviews. There is a time line in the Appendix B presenting 80 crucial points of the conflicts and conformisms of theater starting from late Ottoman period but it won't be discussed in deeper levels through this text. The chapter concentrates on the more recent events (focusing especially after 80s) and developments concerning theater in Turkey. This section will focus on the avant-garde theater in Turkey which has rarely been studied.

## Brecht Wave Since Early 60s: Ankara Sanat Theater, Dostlar Theater and Acceptance of Brecht in State Theater Repertory

Bertolt Brecht had a deep effect on theater of late 60s generation with his theories on *alienation effect* and *epic theater* in Turkey. Unlike Peter Brook's effect on 90s avant-garde, Brecht's effect since 60s is much deeper since it reached beyond theater circles.

Brecht wanted to develop a theater style against dramatic theater which leads the audience to catharsis. According to Brecht catharsis was a dangerous emotional state which lead the masses of audience (society) into pacification. To overcome catharsis and rescue theater from its apolitical institutionalized version he came up with epic theater and alienation effect which is accompanied with the term *gestus*. Very shortly epic theater aims to lead the audience to see the problems and reasons of these problems in his/her daily life and motivates them to take action into changing these conditions.<sup>27</sup> It does it by the alienation effect which can appear by setting the plays in *faraway lands* like China, by the use of comedy and by declaring that the play is a play and audience should not identify themselves with it<sup>28</sup>. It can be argued that the Brechtian theater created the first experimental (unorthodox) variant in Republican Turkey during the 1960s. Secondly, until the late 90s and 2000s Brecht created its own orthodoxy in Turkey which formed another kind of (in Peter Brook's

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<sup>27</sup>In epic theater characters are not individuals but common grounds for social classes or norms. Acting can get grotesque or exaggerated in Brecht plays as a part of generating the alienation effect. *Gestus* is another acting term supporting the alienation effect which means a jest or gesture which is loaded with societal meaning. A well-known *gestus* example in Brecht plays is when Mother Courage bites the gold coin to understand if it is real when a soldier pities her and gives her a coin when she is crying over her dead child's body.

<sup>28</sup> Though he notes that Aristotle way of catharsis can lead to action taking also. He gives a specific example from Weimar Republic where working-class women took their abortion rights by demonstrations after watching a play about women victimized by state since her abortion rights were taken. (Brecht, 1967, 58-56)

terminology) “deadly theater” accompanying the Stanislavskian approach of State Theaters.

For a generation of artists born around the 50s and 60s who started their career around the late 70s and 80s, Bertolt Brecht has been the answer to all theatrical and existential problems. The effects of Brecht wave still continue, and in unconventional ways it has been one of the main ingredients of the experimental undercurrent in theater which gave birth to the alternative theater movement.

This first avant-garde current effected state theaters around two decades later with the governance of Engin Orbey in State Theaters in the 78-79 season (if the start is seen as Ankara Sanat Theater in 1962). In 78-79 season Brecht was included in the repertory and it was a revolutionary step for State Theaters of 1970s before it turned into the left wing orthodoxy it became today. It was the only season which repertory of plays in State Theaters responded to contemporary political circumstances of Turkey and audience numbers were multiplied by 2,5 (Haşar, 2008, 50).<sup>29</sup> This was an obvious sign that there was a good number of audience if the plays were chosen wisely to suit the contemporary political issues of Turkey.

Until 70s there weren't possibilities of forming an ensemble group and finding audience to continue a private theater. After the 60's the first private theater groups appeared on personal stages by state theaters artists<sup>30</sup>. Gradually, the first ensemble attempts to act local play writer's works began because by then there was

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<sup>29</sup> “It can be seen in numbers that audience has opened credit for the “Orbey Period”. The audience numbers were 39.789 in April 1978, but in April 1979 the number reached to 93.232. In the same period State Theater's revenue raised from 274.786.25 TL to 921.497.75 TL.” (Haşar, 2008, 50)

<sup>30</sup> “Keşanlı Ali Destanı” (The Ballad of Ali of Keshan) was a product of this Brecht wave also, it wasn't alienating (since the play was about a shanty town called Sinelidağ in the peripheries of a city) but using the norms of comedy in Brecht, it was a political local play without the tendency of slogan theater. It was a unique case in this sense. The play was first acted by Gülriz Sururi-Engin Cezzar Theater in 1964.

enough of an audience trained in “how to act in theater” and enough number of educated actors.

The Brecht phenomenon in Turkey is important because it was an opening for political theater in an area where censoring was common-place. There are four reasons why a generation of artists was widely influenced by Brecht.

Alienation gave a theoretical background for theater artists who wanted to criticize political circumstances without facing extra juridical pressures, like being sued or being censored. Alienation theory creates the *aesthetics* for an artist for being critical, without directly facing contemporary authorities. Also it was significant that Brecht is a Marxist theater theorist which makes many of 70-80 generation left wing artists (which many are in line with social democracy and/or socialist ideologies) feel ideologically closer to his theories since he uses Marxist linear-progressive approach and dialectic materialism in explaining Epic Theater. Artist feels that s/he “serves” the betterment of the society.

And lastly, progressive line of Marxism with the Kemalist enlightenment project which takes theater as a tool of modernization and an educative process of modern societies. Brecht here serves this project by using comedy to gather the attention of “common” people and to disseminate enlightening messages.

Brecht is a very important playwright, theorist and a director but the problem in Turkey’s case is that gradually Brecht turned into a conformist Brechtian school around 90s while many of the older generation of theater people ignored this criticism of the canon completely. Also in the long run, theories of Brecht served as a strong argument for clarification and defense of hegemonic autocensorship. The trouble in State Theaters and many private theaters until 2000’s was that each choose a technique (classical-Stanislawskian or Brechtian) and kept up with it in all times.

This creates an imprisonment to the technique (even for Brecht) which misses the new age's communicative sociology and problems created by this sociology. It is argued that there had been a drought in playwriting in 80s, which is quite understandable given the 1980 military coup (Şener, 1998, 278). It was a period where taking direct political action in writing, was strongly discouraged and suppressed by state.

It is especially important to note that the political theater experience and the Brechtian wave starting from 1960s introduced the first street theater experiences of Turkey. Street theater is a highly nonconformist version of political theater and it never turned into the conformist version of Brecht after 2000s (Çakı, 2010). For example, *Movement for the Revolution* group (*Devrim için Hareket Tiyatrosu* – in short DİHT) wrote and performed many agit-prop<sup>31</sup> plays before the 1980 military coup for three years, in line with a Brechtian vision.<sup>32</sup>

The Ankara Art Theater struggled through the military coup to keep its position under Rutkay Aziz's directorship and 78-79 general coordinator of State Theaters Engin Orbey worked in Ankara Art Theater also. Brecht's influence was always stronger in Ankara<sup>33</sup>, while in Istanbul it was represented by Dostlar Theater.

That the Brecht wave was blocked by is diagnosed by many artists since 1990s. Director Müge Gürman (which will reappear in Bilsak and Unit Theater also) explains this fact quite rationally through her speech at Turkish Theater in 75<sup>th</sup> year

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<sup>31</sup>“Political propaganda promulgated chiefly in literature, drama, music, or art”(“Agitprop,” n.d.)

<sup>32</sup> The group was first made by Işıl Özgentürk, Doğan Soyucu, Ali Özgentürk, Mehmet Ulusoy, Sabahattin Şenyüz, Sadık Karamustafa but until 1980 it nearly became a theater platform made of 160 people. (Çakı, 2010)

<sup>33</sup>Another important group to mention from Ankara is Ekin Theater. Ekin Theater had struggled with physical problems such as finding stage or pressures of marginalization due to their left wing ideology but they tried to overcome it with tours (to find more audience) and resistance. (Şener, 1998, 276) The touring solution for survival problems is still widely used especially after the network system of stages and theater groups are settled in the late 2000s alternative theater field.

of the Republic conference in 1998. First she mentions the beginning, the inspirational start of the first Brecht plays and Ankara Sanat Theater:

The most important alternative way out, (not personal or institutional) has been Ankara Art Theater especially Ankara Art Theater of 60s which was shaped with a true ensemble soul. [...] The age of Ankara Sanat Theater with Asaf Çiyiltepe, Sermet Çağan and Güner Sümer has really been a sparkling, enthusiastic process. But it couldn't continue its initial liveliness. (Gürman et al., 1999, pp.166)

Then she continues with what might have eroded the liveliness of the initial move of 60s:

The very few alternative theaters which could continue for long, because of the understandable reasons of eroding with the stability, have become institutionalized within their own lines by not renewing themselves and continually repeating their narratives. (Gürman et al., 1999, pp.166)

There are two important comments about what might have went wrong, and I'm including both of the comments below:

Müge Gürman<sup>34</sup> explains the orthodoxy build on Brecht as “a sham-fight relationship with the audience [...] or on the opposite side there is a roughly drawn imposing alienation effect relation.” (Gürman et al., 1999, pp.160) When criticizing this new conformism she reasons what goes wrong: “[...]At most there had been an avant-gardism which is shaped by one-sided Brechtian stereotypes. [...] limited in its own stereotypes and has lost its initial sincerity and liveliness for today.” (Gürman et al., 1999, pp.167) Gürman clears the turning point in Brechtian Theater in Turkey in

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<sup>34</sup>Müge Gürman defines her works within dialectical theater paradigm and she has always been closer to German avant-gardism through her career (with strong dramaturgical approaches to classics and using few new texts) compared to Kerem Kurdoğlu for example, who has been closer to American post-modernism through his career. She will appear later in the text with her directorship of Unit Theater in State Theaters.

which it became a conformist norm and lost its liveliness of the starting point which made it avant-garde and norm-breaking.

## Experimental Theater After 1980s

These difficulties can be overcome only from the late 80s till the 90s, around 90s the first performative-spatial experimentive groups found their audiences. This was the first time little theater groups (significantly in İstanbul) started to focus on “not how people move but what moves them” (Pina Bausch, 57<sup>35</sup>). It is important to note that Brecht wave was triggered in Ankara in late 1960s and early 1970s, but the individualistic theater trails of 90s appeared in İstanbul. Actually, 1970s has been the only time in history of Turkey where Ankara became more of a cultural center compared to İstanbul. The situation got back to its original state (where İstanbul leads the cultural arena of Turkey) after the 1980s military coup.

1990s experimentalism was limited to İstanbul. This might be related to Brecht wave’s correspondence to a nation-state experience (which was felt most in capital Ankara while the imperial capital, İstanbul, culturally resisted the holistic nation state ideal with its history and variety). The 90s experimentalism was based on cosmopolitanism, which emphasized the visual and the high energy found in İstanbul.

Now let’s look at the picture in front of the people who want to do theater. Where can you do theater? First option: State and municipality theaters. Which means you can do theater in funded theaters, there are different ways to enter these institutions; the person has to be graduated from conservatory or theater courses. Second option: Mission theaters which are best represented by Ankara Art Theater and Dostlar Theater. Third option: Commercial boss theaters where usually the theater owner acts the leading part and the boss’s dalliance with the audience and the appeal of this is consumed. By the way I set apart the Ankara Art

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<sup>35</sup> The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader , edited by Michael Huxley and Noel Witts – 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2010

Theater and Dostlar Theater from other political mission theaters. Because these theaters have aesthetic alleges other than their political mission and they have qualified works. [But] There are people who couldn't find place for themselves in this picture. (Kurdođlu et al., 1999, pp. 140)

According to Sevda Őener's "Turkish Theater in 75<sup>th</sup> Year of the Republic" book there are 6 theater groups in the 1980-1998 period which she refers as "other theater' movement" ('öteki tiyatro' akımı). They are Bilsak Theater Studio, Kumpanya, Studio Actors (of Őahika Tekand), Tiyatro Grup<sup>36</sup>, Oyuncular Theater and 5. Street Theater. These 6 theater groups are inter related with each other (just like today's artists contributing to alternative theater movement). Őener explains the 'other' theater as follows: "The 'other theater' activities started with the efforts of some private theater groups include experimental works." (Őener, 1999, 270<sup>37</sup>)

Istanbul Culture and Arts Foundation (İstanbul Kùltür Sanat Vakfı – İKSV) started working at 90s which had been a reliable institution for this first generation of artists. Also in 1989 Istanbul Theater Festival was started with the efforts of İKSV. The festival genuinely helped the international interactions of artists and spectators from Turkey. According to the manifest of Alternative Theaters of Turkey Contact Group, read by Kerem Kurdođlu in *Turkish Theater in 75<sup>th</sup> Year of Republic* conference held in 1998, there had been 9 alternative theater groups<sup>38</sup> until then (but there is no published information on which exact groups these are).

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<sup>36</sup>Among these 6 theater groups there is only one that I couldn't find deeper information on which is Tiyatro Grup.

<sup>37</sup>It is important to note that in a book of 328 pages there is only 1,5 pages about 'other theater' activities which gives a hint about the orthodoxy of theater history writing in Turkey.

<sup>38</sup>This formation is started by 9 theaters which questions the structural key stones of theater art and gained their continuity within Turkey's theater circumstances. These 9 theaters are also pioneers and important representatives of a revolutionary and independent movement in Turkish theater since mid 1980's. The mentioned movement is similar to 1960's alternative theater movement in Europe but it should be evaluated differently due to its significant differences in social conditions, the artistic environment and the reasons behind its formation. These pioneer theaters are distinctly different in

This seems to be an important attempt to diagnose and solve the problems of early alternative theater in Turkey. Here it is important to see that the 90s alternative theater field (just like the late 2000s) worked in a network system among artists. There are artists who worked with more than one of these groups in 90s which shows that they had a network system artistic production instead of the common institutionalization trend of many private theaters. Naz Erayda for example, was the co-founder of Kumpanya but she worked with Mustafa Avkıran's 5. Sokak Tiyatrosu also. Or Müge Gürman, after producing Macbeth of the Witches (Cadıların Macbeth'i) in Bilsak at 1985, produced Mademoiselle Julie with Oyuncular at 1991. Derya Alabora had been the co-founder of Tiyatro Grup (Şener, 1999, 270) but she also acted in Kumpanya and 5. Street Theater (also in Dot).<sup>39</sup>

1990s experimentalism in theater represented an undercurrent in theater. Especially Bilsak, starting from 80s, later Kumpanya and Studio had been significant in continuity and stability. Another important thing to note is that these theater groups were formed in 90s but they made their stages only at the beginning of 2000s, such as Bilsak's Maya Stage (2001), Oyuncular's Cem Safran Stage (2002-2013) and 5. Street Theater made Garaj İstanbul stage at 2005.

2000s carried the possibility for fringe theaters after the opening in 1990s. At 1999 Ali Akay and Berkun Oya<sup>40</sup> made the Krek group but they had their stage in

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their views on theater and art. This structure sees these differences as an enriching source. These theaters started Alternative Theaters of Turkey Contact Studies to form alternative information channels due to the lack of theater criticism institution and the blocked international publicity options in Turkey. This formation does not only introduce these founder theaters' works in international platforms. At the same time it watches the other theater works in Turkey and takes the responsibility of introducing these other works which are found original. (Alternative Theaters of Turkey Contact Group's Manifest – taken from Kurdoğlu et al., 1999, 146-7)

<sup>39</sup> These names, all from 90s avant-garde, will be explained in the next subchapter.

<sup>40</sup> 90s avant-garde later put peripheral input to institutions also, such as Kerem Kurdoğlu wrote plays named "Hatırla Avrupa" (Remember Europe), "Ve Hep Birlikte Soldan Çıkarlar" (And they all leave together from left side) or Emre Koyuncuoğlu taking active part in Kocaeli Municipality Theaters. Important figures of 2000s avant-garde, especially if they are graduates of formal conservatories, can produce works with State or Municipality Theaters also. Like Berkun Oya, a graduate of Mimar Sinan

2010. Also GalataPerform, even though I'll consider it within the second wave (because of its contributions to young theater artists), was opened in 2003.<sup>41</sup>

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Fine Arts Conservatory, wrote and performed a play named "Yangın Duası" (Fire Prayer) in 2004 and awarded as the "best director of the year" by Istanbul University and "best stage lighting of the year" by 28th İsmet Küntay Theater Awards.

<sup>41</sup>In 2006 GalataPerform started the first play writing workshop and in 2011 Kumbaracı50 opened another one. Since 2006, following playwriting workshops, there are also many playwriting contests which both private theaters (such as KaraKutu's contest in 2013) and state institutions open.

## Extent of 1990s Avant-garde: Space Usage and New Performativity

90s avant-garde was an undercurrent wave which took place nearly only in Istanbul and employing only artists in Istanbul but it set a background for the two major waves of 2000s which came as an earthquake: the arrival of Dot (the group which imported in-her-face to Turkey) and the second generation. 90s avant-garde was a questioning one, the artists involved in this underground wave questioned themselves, their art and the society deeply, in an environment which lacked theater criticism and theater theory. This leitmotiv of the “questioning artist” can be found anywhere in all declarations of this decade from Bilsak’s manifesto to speeches of artists presented in “Turkish Theater in 75<sup>th</sup> Year of the Republic” conference held in 1999.

In this skeptical atmosphere (since they were the first generation taking the risk of “not being understood by majority”), this underground wave had two very important qualities: it deformed the conventional stage and it presented a new performativity in theater circles. 1990s avant-garde based on Istanbul had similarities with continental Europe’s 1960s avant-garde, but regarding social, cultural and economic contexts, it had deep differences (Kurdoğlu et al., 1999, 146-7).

The 90s avant-garde actually started in Istanbul in 1984 with Bilsak. I’m referring to this movement as “90s avant-garde” because their peak decade was 90s. The central issue of this decade was doing theater “here and now” as in Peter Brook’s terminology. It won’t be wrong to state the three theater theorists which shape the backbone of this particular avant-garde wave were Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugino Barba. Brook’s “empty space” description of “stage” had been a key definition to change the conventional understanding of exhibitionist

theater into an imaginative space where anything and everything can happen. This description deeply shifted the paradigm of theatrical space, as Mustafa Avkıran mentions Brook's work of Empty Space as a holy book (referred with a metaphor of Quran in the original speech) for 1990s avant-garde theater (Avkıran et al., 1999, 155). 90s avant-garde figures challenged the well-known Italian Stage-frame stage understandings of conventional theater following Brook.

Jerzy Grotowski's and Eugino Barba's theories, on the other hand, challenged the conventional acting methodologies of conservatories of Turkey. These two theorists, in relation with each other, had been the reference point of the new performativity of 90s avant-garde. A central challenge to the conventional Italian-frame stage came from Assos Theater Festival, where site-specific works were made. Kumpanya's cofounder Naz Erayda and choreographer in Yeşil Üzümler Movement Theater, Emre Koyuncuoğlu (see Appendix A, Piece 1) were two leading figures of the same spatial challenge. New performativity was also central to Şahika Tekand's works. Tekand created an acting methodology and an education system for her students through the years which she calls "performative acting" (see Appendix A, Piece 2).

Before explaining these concepts and leading groups, people, organizations of 90s avant-garde it is very important to note that 90s underground avant-garde had been a very strong challenge to institutional-masculine theater practice where nearly all the leading figures were women. Other than Naz Erayda, Emre Koyuncuoğlu and Şahika Tekand, the Bilsak group gave rise to Müge Gürman, one of the directors of first generation of Bilsak and later the Unit Theater experiment of State Theaters, and Nihal Koldaş<sup>42</sup>, the cofounder of Maya Stage and still a successful playwright and

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<sup>42</sup> Nihal Koldaş still actively produces theater. In 2011 she wrote and performed her play "Tarlabaşından Bulvara Çıkmak" (Getting to Square from Tarlabası) and in since late 2013 she acts in

performer. Other central figures were Övül Avkıran and Derya Alabora who first contributed to 5<sup>th</sup> Street Theater and later GarajIstanbul. These women were either direct leaders (directors, teachers, choreographers) of their groups or shared equal positions with their male partners. In all cases the 90s underground wave was a unique period, where women directors found their successful voices.

90s avant-garde was enrooted in Bilsak just as 2010s avant-garde is based on Dot, though the two theater groups have countless number of differences Bilsak was a collective group while Dot is an institutionalized and commercial group.

Bilsak was founded by a group of artists who were silenced by the military coup in 1980. Until 1984 it was clear that they couldn't find a voice in any state institution<sup>43</sup>. The first Bilsak<sup>44</sup> was actually a theater school which also gave rise to the second generation of Bilsak. The original crew worked together for two years and trained around 40 people. Later, a group from these students<sup>45</sup> took over Bilsak for a short time. At the beginning of the 2000s the leading members of second generation Bilsak were Nihal Koldaş and Metin Deniz, and they initiated the Maya Stage in 2001 (which is still active<sup>46</sup>). (N. Koldaş, personal communication, January 9, 2014)

According to Nihal Koldaş, the main gesture defining Bilsak was their methodology which also made the alternatives possible. They adopted a theater methodology centralized in acting and based on collective dramaturgy and direction.

The most similar group to Bilsak's style in this sense had been the Oyuncular

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third play ("Tık... Tık.... Tıkılap..." by Ayşe Bayramoğlu) of one person plays of "6. Üstü Oyun" (Six Plays) project of Kumbaracı50.

<sup>43</sup> The founders of this first Bilsak were: Erol Keskin, Ayla-Beklan Algan, Cevat Çapan, Taner Barlas, Ahmet Levendoğlu, Macit Koper, Haluk Şevket, Yekta Kara, Müge Gürman, Levent Öktem, Nihat İleri, Metin Deniz and Ergüder Yoldaş. (N. Koldaş, personal communication, January 9, 2014)

<sup>44</sup> This first group had Müge Gürman in it also who the director of 1993 Unit Theater Experiment of State Theaters.

<sup>45</sup> Second generation of Bilsak after a long gap since early 1990s, starting from around early 2000s: Emre Baykal, Şerif Erol, Alp Giritli, Ceysu Koçak, Nihal G. Koldaş.

<sup>46</sup> Before Maya Stage first and second generation of Bilsak used a flat in building in Cihangir.

group.<sup>47</sup> Dramaturgy had been central to Oyuncular group's works all the time.

Another signature move of this group, mainly differentiating from Bilsak, was their translations of literary works into theatrical pieces<sup>48</sup>. Body language, music and dance were used in relation to their themes in all their works. It won't be wrong to mention that this style (translating literary pieces with strong dramaturgy, and focusing on physical theater) was later (consciously or unconsciously) adopted by SeyyarSahne.<sup>49</sup>

What is significant about Maya Stage is that it represents a transitional moment, while the paradigm of theatrical space is changing. It is not a blackbox stage which later became a signature move of late 2000s avant-garde, but it is not a flat stage either. Most 90s avant-garde theaters used flat stages where audience and performers share the same ground floor but the dynamics of watching were the same with the Italian Stage: performers and audience members share the opposite ends of a rectangular space where they face each other like in a negotiation table.<sup>50</sup> Maya Stage was made in norms of Italian Stage, with fixed and numbered seats (blackbox stages of late 2000s Istanbul have movable, unnumbered seats) and an elevated stage but the distance between performer and audience is less than 2 metres, the stage is

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<sup>47</sup>Their first play was in 1991-1992 season which is August Strindberg's "Mademoiselle Julie" with the direction of Müge Gürman.

<sup>48</sup>They staged Leyla Erbil's *Cüce* (Dwarf) which is originally a novella, a story from 1001 Nights named "Hasan and Basri's Adventures", "Hişt Hişt" which is made of Sait Faik's stories, Ursula Le K. Guin's "The Tombs of Atuan" which is originally a novel, and Onat Kutlar's essay named "Bahar İsyancıdır" (Spring is Rebellious) first at 1994-1995 and later in 2012-2013 seasons under the name "An Onat Kutlar Symphony – Spring is Rebellious". Like most 90s avant-garde individual politics and gender were background narratives of their plays.

<sup>49</sup>On the other hand the mentioned (conscious) inspirations of SeyyarSahne from 90s avant-garde was Kumpanya and Assos International Performing Arts Festival.

<sup>50</sup>Şahika Tekand's stage (since 1990) or Cem Safran Stage (2002-2013) of Oyuncular are typical examples of flat but similar-in-watching-experience-with-frame-stage stages from 90s avant-garde. Other used theatrical space closer to blackbox stage usage but they sometimes preferred this significant version also based on the nature of their work. I'll briefly quote Tekand's words about this choice: "Studio Players try to explain themselves why they stubbornly keep the frame stage form every time they are doing a play." (Tekand et al., 1999, 151) Tekand, while keeping this form, questions the form deeply to understand its advantages and disadvantages, it is not a conformist acceptance of tradition.

elevated only 70 cm and the most distanced seat from the front stage is less than 10 metres. It is one of the first compact stages.

Though Bilsak had been the first unconventional group of the era, *the first unconventional stage* in 90s was actually Kumpanya's "Playroom" (Oyun Odası) stage in Istanbul Art Center (Istanbul Sanat Merkezi) in Tarlabası in 1991. This was the first documented blackbox type of stage also.<sup>51</sup>

Kumpanya had two important (leading) figures of 90s avant-garde, Kerem Kurdođlu and Naz Erayda. The Kumpanya theater group first started in 1989 as Tiyatro Devran. Kurdođlu was the actor, playwright<sup>52</sup> and director of group where Erayda was the stage designer and concept organizer<sup>53</sup>. Kurdođlu generally displayed a more conventional theater making style, by using political comedy, following continuous narrations of stories and placing audience as in Italian Stage. The more radical person in this team work had been Naz Erayda, and her radicalism changed Kurdođlu's more conventional texts into experimental pieces.

The interesting and uncommon thing about Kumpanya is that after forming the place to work in and gather the ensemble, they were not stuck in a one-way experimentalism. They came up with a variety of trials including works coming out of performer improvisations (like *Canlanan Mekan, Kim O?*), text-based political comedies (Kurdođlu's texts), language-based theatrical experiments (like Sevim

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<sup>51</sup> Most of the 90s avant-garde groups had their settled stages around the first half of 2000s decade. Kumpanya is a unique one which has a stage of its own before this early 2000s.

- The short list of groups which make their own stages in the first half of 2000s: 1. 5. Sokak Tiyatrosu (1995)- GarajIstanbul (2005) // 2. Oyuncular (1991) – Cem Safran Stage (2002-2013) // 3. Bilsak (1984) – Maya Stage (2001)

<sup>52</sup> Kurdođlu had been one of the few playwrights of this era who can write and direct, or at least be involved in production process of his own text. He is nearly an archetype of late 2000s writer-director artist figure.

<sup>53</sup> Which means she guided improvisations of performers through the playmaking process by shaping the space (like in *Canlanan Mekan* –Space Coming to Life - project) or directing their narrations and movements on stage.

Burak's *Everest My Lord*), site-specific trials (in 1996 Assos International Performing Arts Festival), street theater performances (*Yine Ne Oldu?*) and so on... Ultimately, they succeeded in making a theatrical language of their own in a model with two directors.

Their group gave rise to important figures of early 2000s avant-garde also. The cofounder of Krek, Ali Atay, for example took part in 2002 Istanbul Theater Festival production of *Kumpanya*, named "Yine Ne Oldu?" ("What Happened Now?") which are street fights of couples performed in different points of Istanbul in arranged times. Though, the most noteworthy figure educated in *Kumpanya* in the basis of this thesis is Murat Daltaban, the artistic director and cofounder of Dot Theater.

Emre Koyuncuoğlu and Murat Daltaban's professional relationship went back to 2002, which interestingly, is also the year when Koyuncuoğlu produces a Sarah Kane play (the central figure of later-defined in-yer-face) for the Istanbul Theater Festival. Koyuncuoğlu fused two of the Kane's plays, "Crave" and "Psychosis 4.48" under the name "Suffering" for 2002 International Theater Festival which Derya Alabora (another central actor from 90s avant-garde who worked in both *Kumpanya* and *5. Sokak Tiyatrosu*) acted in also. The Turkish media noted the style of the play as "Theater of Extremes", since Aleks Sierz's book was not known yet. Unknown to most theater critics in Turkey, the actual first in-yer-face play performed in Turkey was Sarah Kane's "Suffering" in 2002 under the direction of Koyuncuoğlu.

Also in 2002 Koyuncuoğlu moderated *Tiyatro Kırmızı*'s Open Tuesday Conversations with a topic titled "Place of Experimentalism in Institutional and Private Theaters" with Murat Daltaban. In the same article, Murat Daltaban is noted as an actor in *5. Sokak Tiyatrosu* and *Kumpanya* which were two leading

experimentalist groups through 90s. ("Tiyatroda Deneysellik Tartışılıyor," 2002)Koyuncuoğlu's relation with Dot is especially important to note since she has worked through the first years of Dot (until 2008) and used her experience until Dot gained its autonomy with Murat Daltaban's leadership with the younger generation. She directed *Far Away* (2006) and, translated and directed *Blackbird* (2008) through the first years of Dot. She contributed to the making of Dot's theatrical language even though it has been more of an anomaly in her own site-specific theatrical language. She significantly notes that for *Blackbird*:

'Blackbird' was a purely a studio job for example... I actually worked on passing the text's unfolding in a clean and dynamic structure... *Blackbird* is such a text that it doesn't ask more from the director other than making the dialogues real, [the text doesn't ask] more than actor's direction [from the director]. Any play would vomit the extras anyway. Only, there was a situation [in the play] which resembled society's peeping... We made that by projection... (Yağmur, 2012)

Koyuncuoğlu has been, and still is one of the most interesting and avant-garde figures of theater field in Turkey since 90s, even though she is known only among smaller theater circles.

It can be argued that Garajİstanbul became the most hopeful and inspiring site for theater in mid-2000s, especially in the pre-Dot period. Garajİstanbul was made by the 5. Street Theater group which was shaped in 1995. Garajİstanbul was a peak point of 90s experimental wave based on dramaturgy, new methodologies of acting based on movement, voice and dance, and to a certain level new text-writing.

Murat Daltaban (founder of Dot) left Garajİstanbul in its early phase to form his own theater company. The first play of Dot was *Frozen* by Bryony Lavery and the performers were the same group which made Garajİstanbul: Derya Alabora and

Övül Avkıran were among the performers and Mustafa Avkıran was the director. The 2006 play of Dot, *The Censor* (by Anthony Neilson) was directed by Naz Erayda, the ex-coordinator of Kumpanya. The other 2006 play *Faraway* (by Carly Churchill) was directed by Emre Koyuncuoğlu. These important networks demonstrate the continuity of 90s avant-garde into 2000s and how it has gradually unfolded further in mid2000s. Dot is widely mentioned as the triggerer of what is called the “second wave” in this thesis, because it was a break from 90s experimentalism based on Brook-Barba-Grotowski triangle but it is very important to see that Dot had its roots in 90s avant-garde. Dot actually brought the first playwriting wave (in-yer-face), which almost created a paradigm shift which will be examined in the next chapter.

The 5. Street Theater group was shaped in 1995 and produced under this name until 2006, when Garajİstanbul had been in state of formation. The 5. Street Theater group was one of the few alternative theater groups made by Derya Alabora and Mustafa Avkıran. Before Garajİstanbul, the 5. Street Theater group produced in Istanbul Art Center (İstanbul Sanat Merkezi) where Kumpanya produced plays also. All through 90s and early 2000s the alternative groups were in contact with each other. People who worked in Kumpanya and Studio Players were integrated with the 5. Street Theater, which then made the first years of Garajİstanbul quite lively. In year 2005 Ödül Avkıran and Mustafa Avkıran rented the bottom floor of Galatasaray parking garage and formed the first Garajİstanbul (in the autumn of year 2013 a second Garajİstanbul was opened around the same area accompanying the first). In the manifesto they published it says “the time has come to create a new spectator experience and spectatorship culture and to make this continuous”(“Garajİstanbul,” n.d.). Garajİstanbul hosted imported new generation works too such as Berkun Oya’s (Krek) short and long plays such as Bomba, Hop Gitti Kafa and Bayrak, Yeşim

Özsoy Gülan's (GalataPerform – Ve Diğer Şeyler Topluluğu) works like Son Dünya or Ebru Nihan Celkan's Tetikçi (BuluTiyatro).

They also wanted to create a theatrical memory of events, which resulted in the journal GİST which could only be published for 1,5 years and 3 issues through the years 2008 and 2009. Each issue had a central topic and analyzed an important theater person. First issue's central topic was Garajİstanbul and focused person was Aydın Teker, second issue was on Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu (the departed coordinator of 1995-1999 Assos International Performing Arts Festival – see Appendix A, Piece 3) and focused person was Beklan Algan; and last issue was on Bilsak Theater Studio and the focused person was Şahika Tekand. The editor of the GİST magazine was Naz Erayda. They had to dissolve the journal's upcoming two issues when their contents were already decided on (personal communication with Utku Kara, 23 March 2014).

As the closure decision of GİST magazine reveals, the hopes on Garajİstanbul among the theater people did not last long. Especially after 2010 the place became more of a concert hall and in 2013 October it was taken by GNLEntertainment and RE Corporation. The important point here is that Garajİstanbul could not continue its trendsetting line after its very first years. According to Serkan Kan, who has worked in the backstage of Garajİstanbul for some years, there had been plenty of important plays in the first years of Garajİstanbul but he recalled four of them significantly:

*Ashura*<sup>54</sup>, *Histanbul*<sup>55</sup>, *A Trial in İstanbul*<sup>56</sup> (İstanbul'da Bir Dava) and *Ahvall*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>*Ashura* is only performed in the month of muharram which ashura is served as a tradition. The play had been about minorities and minority languages of Anatolia. In 2003 5. Street Theater made a play which has a central theme of the immigrations of Anatolia named *Neos Cosmos* which *Ashura* can be seen as continuity within ensemble. *Ashura* was first staged in 2004 and later in 2008 and 2009 in the month of muharram for 16 days. The play collected 25 traditional songs of Anatolia in 12 Anatolian languages (Turkish, Hebraic, Armenian, Arabic, Syriac, Zazaki, Greek, Kurdish, Coptic, Pontus Language, Lazuri and Sephardic). The play was performed with Turkish overscripts which later appeared in Destar Theater group's Kurdish plays. Light and dark was used as powerful allegories through the play according to critics.

which was a dance performance<sup>58</sup>. Late 2000s, just when the 90s avant-garde got more intense, also set a background in for the first institutional (private and state based) dance theater trials in Turkey (see Appendix A, Piece 4).

It can be said that the critical years of Garajİstanbul for theater and performance field was between 2006 and 2009 (all the plays noted are staged within these three years). In later years, the artistic and theatrical aims of the place changed undeniably and today Garajİstanbul has lost its trendsetting role within alternative theater circles.

Garajİstanbul was a very important -and successful in the beginning- attempt to collect all 90s avant-garde under one united and collective work and production space. It was a collective institution created with great hopes but apperantly it collapsed due to personal conflicts.

The collapse of Garajİstanbul was a central implosion of 90s avant-garde, which actually gave way to the second generation in late 2000s from their history. That's why a majority of young artists from the second generation would start describing their own paradigmatic roots with Dot, and go back to Brecht wave if they have to refer to an earlier avant-garde heritage. That's why I call 90s avant-garde as a

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<sup>55</sup>*Histanbul* was acted by Memet Ali Alabora and Sibel Tüzün which all the other characters were drawings reflected on moving white platforms. Memet Ali Alabora was acting an engineer who does ground analysis of Istanbul named Ali Bora and Sibel Tüzün acted the woman he falls in love with but metaphorically the soul of Istanbul. Istanbul, being a woman is a very common metaphor but the name of the play –*Histanbul* – makes it deeper in meaning: even though Istanbul is a woman she is owned by men. The moving platforms, drawings and music collected from various parts of Istanbul were the signature moves of the play.

<sup>56</sup>*A Trial in Istanbul* (Istanbul'da bir Dava) was written by Kerem Kurdoğlu and designed by Naz Erayda who are the ex-coordinators of Kumpanya. The story is framed by the "Trial" novel of Kafka but it was freely rewritten. Music is important again as whenever the theme of Istanbul appears on stage. Another important thing to note is that an actor educated in Studio Players, Yiğit Özşener took part in the play also.

<sup>57</sup>Lastly there had been an important dance performance of Movement Theater (Hareket Tiyatrosu). *Ahvall* was a feminist dance performance which 10 woman took part from a range of ages and worked on the collective memory of womanhood. The spokesperson of the project was Zeynep Günsür.

<sup>58</sup>In 2006, which has been the cofounder of Yeşil Üzümler Movement and Dance Theater, Emre Koyuncuoğlu made a play for Garajİstanbul named "Arıza" (Trouble) also.

“deep current” which continued but also changed a lot. This history has remained undocumented and is known only within marginal theatrical circles. Dot took over this imploded avant-garde theater field with the great success of Özlem Daltaban’s public relations, and built over this amnesia which led to the second generation.

Through this new performativity and the radical use of space in current of 90s avant-garde, these new efforts were interested in contemporary issues of Turkey. The contents were particularly based on individual experiences, stories of this geography and urban texture and identity issues. In 90s another political avant-garde line was The Modern Kurdish Theater (see Appendix A, Piece 5) but these two lines (the Turkish avant-garde and Kurdish avant-garde) only met each other and started a very fruitful dialogue within the second generation at the end of 2000s.

Lastly it is important to note that the younger generation which made possible the “second wave” (the second generation) was educated in these few alternative stages of early 2000s. For example the cofounder of SahneHal, Özer Arslan worked in GalataPerform and cofounder of MekanArtı, Ufuk Tan Altunkaya worked in Garajİstanbul before they formed their own stage.

## The 1990s: Lack of Theater Criticism and Pessimism

Lack of theater criticism had been a very important issue since 1990s until today. This problem is not solved mainly, even though blog writers and a few new generation critics contributed to the theater criticism field just as theater criticism and theater historiography has gaps also, and most works are descriptive. In 90s, according to Kurdođlu there were only two qualified theater critics in 1990s Turkey; Ayşin Candan and Esen Çamurdan, but they didn't share a similar paradigm in aesthetics with the artists of the 90s avantgarde artists, therefore they couldn't be expected to theorize the move either. Kurdođlu gives a brief explanation of this theoretical gap differs between avant-garde artists and these two important critics:

[...] The aesthetical way chose in play making. What is play making? This theater [experimental theater of 90s] is not pursuing a well-made play. In the present theater criticism there is a check list which includes stable-charismatic acting, well-made play, good lighting [and so on] and since the works of these theaters doesn't fit this check list, some of the very important qualities of these works are not seen. (Kurdođlu, et al., 1999, 141-2)

The other even more traditional theater critics had a stronger tendency to distance these works from "serious" theater, by listing their technical problems and noting that these can only be purely stylistic trials. It was a handicap for all theater critics of the era to see that these few groups were starting with the content and chose their stylistic pathways according to the content. Kurdođlu says that "there is no theorist of this move yet [...] a new generation of theater critics are needed and that generation does not exist." (Kurdođlu et al., 1999, 146).

Mustafa Avkıran says a similar thing about this issue in the same conference: "For some time I have been thinking that based on understanding of text, acting,

theater and criticism, this new theater – which is said to be eventually evaluated by some people - is evaluated by standards which it can never survive in and should never be evaluated on.” (Avkiran et al., 1999, 154)

This lack of theater criticism caused major misunderstandings when historicizing the 1990s avant-garde<sup>59</sup>. 1990s avant-garde or being avant-garde in general was titled under two categories, first is taking distance from play texts and ensembles making their own plays according to actors’ improvisations or making plays from other literary works rather than the play texts, and second, getting out of Italian frame stage. The point is that these two points *did* take place in 1990s avant-garde but it wasn’t *only* these. There are only a limited number of plays based on text making via improvisation such as Kumpanya’s *Canlanan Mekan* (Space Coming to Life) and *Kim O?* (Who is it?), or Bilsak’s *Burada ve Şimdi* (Here and Now). Müge Gürman’s works had been in Italian Stage and a lot of the fringe theaters (which are quite a few actually) used Italian Stage type of sitting area – performance space plan even though the stages were not architecturally made in elevated and framed stage forms of the Italian Stage. 90s avant-garde had quite a range of different trials from site-specific performances to new dramaturgical approaches to classical texts. The point is that this lack of theater criticism produced a tendency to label every differentiating work under a few limited categories.

The other problem in theater criticism of the era is that the rather vague usage of the term “post modern theater”. The speeches given in *Turkish Theater in 75<sup>th</sup> year of Republic* conference<sup>60</sup> prove that the meaning of the term post modern was quite unclear, therefore the term “postmodern theater” became just another main

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<sup>59</sup>Just as misunderstandings about mid2000s theater where all plays acted in fringe stages were labeled as in-yeer-face until a very recent time. It is still a tendency that continuous.

<sup>60</sup>I only worked on the last session which is on alternative searches in Turkish theater since all the others were on institutional theaters only.

concept to categorize the 90s avant-garde works. Leaving the first question alone (how is postmodernism understood in theater environment of 90s Turkey?), I'll only deal with the confusion on the term post-modernist theater in 90s theater of Turkey.

First of all there is a very useful separation about usage of the term "modernism" in social sciences and arts which can be applied here first applied by Raymond Williams. The term "modernism", when the first letter m is written in small case, means all the changes in daily life of people after industrial revolution which covers a very large study area. The term "Modernism" on the other hand, when the first letter M is capitalized, means the art productions which invented new forms to express and struggle with the m-in-small-case modernism (Williams, 2007). The main misunderstanding among traditional theater theorists and what the artists couldn't (and should not need to) express in analytic-academic language was caused by this brief difference about postmodernism and Postmodernism. Traditional theater critics tended to see the Postmodernist theater trials (since they tend to name them this way) as an approval of postmodernism, which was not really true.

Şahika Tekand's comments on this gap in theater theory and theater criticism as follows:

And what is most important is that while in practice of the job we are also left with the necessity of theoretically expressing what we are doing which is a horrible thing. Because this is not the duty of the artist or the creator. No job is done deciding as "I should attend this movement". After the job is done it can be seen under a movement or not. I'm not imagining on how I should make postmodern theater. (Tekand et al., 1999, 152)

The lack of qualified theater criticism and having a limited audience left nearly all of the 90s avant-garde figures in a schizophrenic self-questioning atmosphere which drew them to pessimism, which is more clarified in Tekand's example.

She mentions that no director/actor moves with a motive to fit in an artistic movement, the search for alternative starts when the person feels that s/he needs new ways to express what s/he experiences and struggles with. She says "Moving from this thought, the source of the alternative is primarily ethical, ideological and political." (Tekand et al., 1999, 149). The second significantly important thing she mentions is that what is expressed in theater shouldn't possibly be expressed in any other art form (which is true for other branches of art also). The paradigmatic form of theater and the content or theme should fulfill each other, and according to Tekand, it is the only way to get a good play. Tekand is specifically very pessimistic about the age she lives in. Her pessimism probably triggered her search in new ways of theatrical expression.

## Effects of 1990s Avant-Garde on Institutional Theaters

There had been two important trials about theatrical experimentalism starting from 90s in Institutional Theaters. One had been in Istanbul Municipality Theaters which appeared as an isolated but successful unit as TAL<sup>61</sup> but it remained closed between 2002 to 2010 and it only reappeared in 2010 as an association separate but in touch with Municipality Theaters.

In State Theaters one and only experimental trial was the Unit Theater Experiment which gained a great success but was abolished completely within a year. It was the one and only ensemble formation attempt in State Theaters and, of course, it was only tried once in Istanbul. Mustafa Avkıran states that “alternativeness” started being discussed in State Theaters since 1992-1993 (Avkıran et al., 1999, 153). Avkıran, as one of the few people in State Theaters of 90s who had a tendency for theatrical research, states an interesting case about his own position in State Theaters: “When such a gigantic and conservative institution wants you to be alternative it can easily be seen as a service for popular culture. Shortly, my alternativeness has been a good show case for State Theaters.” (Avkıran et al., 1999, 154) This is important to understand in the case of Unit Theater also. It also gives a clue about why the law which made possible the ensemble formation (Unit Theater) was not passed: the experiment got way too successful; it threatened the conservatism of the whole institution.

Theater Researches Laboratory was organized as an “experimentalist unit” under Istanbul Municipality Theaters in 1988. The paradigmatic roots of TAL were

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<sup>61</sup>Acronym of Theater Researches Laboratory in Turkish: Tiyatro Arařtırmaları Laboratuari

Tepebaşı Deneme Sahnesi (Tepebaşı Experimental Stage<sup>62</sup>), Bakırköy Halk Evi, LCC<sup>63</sup> and Bilsak according to Beklan Algan<sup>64</sup>. The primary founders were looking for a new holistic theater understanding involving the audience. These primary founders<sup>65</sup> were same with first teaching generation of 1984-6 of Bilsak. The group which took part in organizing and gathering TAL also took part in making of Eskişehir Anadolu University's Conservatory in 1986.

The group generally worked with less than 25 people. The organization continued its works under Municipality Theater until 2002. There is a gap between 2002 and 2010, but after 2010 TAL became an association though still being in touch with Istanbul Municipality Theaters.

There had been a great variety of works under TAL from summer theater academies to book publishing and archive organizing through these years. They also organized summer camps where Assos was chosen as the location in 1998 and 1992 which, when their relation to Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu is considered, these camps can be seen as a foreshadowing of International Assos Theater Festival. Later TAL's members took part in Assos Theater Festival and worked with Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu, the coordinator of the festival. Cultural performances had been a research theme in some of their works which went hand in hand with the site-specific experimentalism. They had bonds with Odin Theater<sup>66</sup> and worked on physical theater in the long run.

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<sup>62</sup> This theater was abolished traumatically (for artists) in 1984 after being the only institutional (under Istanbul Municipality Theater) experimental stage of late 1970s.

<sup>63</sup> LCC (Language and Culture Centre) is established in 1961 by Mesut Üstünel under Ministry of Education. The school first had departments of ballet, language, painting and theater. The institution made the first private theater in Turkey using a turning stage. Some of the educators of this theater school were Muhsin Ertuğrul, Haldun Taner, Yıldız Kenter, Ayla Algan, Beklan Algan, Taner Barlas, Rutkay Aziz, Nevra Serezli, Sevil Üstekin, İsmet Üstekin, Alev Uçarer, Ali Hürol.

<sup>64</sup> Ayla Algan and Beklan Algan had been central figures of most of these organizations.

<sup>65</sup> Beklan Algan, Ayla Algan, Erol Keskin, Haluk Şevket Ataseven

<sup>66</sup> In 1995 they made a workshop with Odin Theater with Eugenio Barba's lead.

From 90s avant-garde, they had contact with Kumpanya, in the 1997-1998 production of Everest My Lord (written by Sevim Burak) Ayla Algan and Beklan Algan took part as a mutual production of TAL and Kumpanya. Again Nadi Güler's autobiographic performance "Düş" (Dream – in 1995) was later performed (after being redesigned) in Kumpanya also (in this second turn named as "Yedi" – Seven in 1999). The TAL group had strong personal bonds with the 90s avant-garde from Kumpanya to 5. Street Theater, and individual figures from artistic community of Istanbul like Bülent Erkmén. Erkmén was a contributor to avant-garde theater field since 90s by designing posters and books of most of these productions – he later appears as concept designer of some plays also, including his *A Play For Two* for Dot in late 2000s.

In 1997, the Dance Theater Research and Practice Unit was opened under TAL which is significant because it was turned into TalDans in 2003. TalDans group is coordinated by Mustafa Kaplan and Filiz Sızanlı. Just as TAL group had connections to their time's avant-garde figures and discussions, TALDans has connections to other dance collectives of 2000s such as Çatı Dance.

In 90s there had been an important move to change state theaters from inside by making alternative models. Starting the Unit Theater experiment in the basement of Atatürk Cultural Center, which was later named as Aziz Nesin Sahnesi, was a revolutionary move. The immediate asking was for full autonomy for the artists and crew, in all decision making processes. If the law making possible Unit Theaters (forming ensemble groups) were passed after the first and only experiment of the 1993-1994 season, today there could have been new dramaturgies, experimental stagings, use of new and local texts and new acting techniques within State Theaters. But the attempt was brutally stopped with no explanation after the first production of

the first Unit Theater. “One day the door of the Unit Theater was locked”, the common discourse explains the situation. Müge Gürman, the director of the only play of Unit Theater which is Hamlet, explains the situation as follows: “Unexpected surprise works can come out of traditional institutions, but it is not easy for these works to survive there.” (Gürman et al., 1999, pp.163)

The only published material on Unit Theater experience is a paragraph in the conference book (Turkish Theater in 75<sup>th</sup> Year of Republic), by Müge Gürman. Since I find the declaration quite important I’m giving it here without shortening:

Really, it is very difficult to do such works in institutions which have deeply rooted habits and a continuing system. It is significantly important to pass the long-waiting law of State Theaters to overcome the blockage and renew itself. This change will not only bring a more free space but also lead to new and creative works. The experiments continue, one of them was the Unit Theater. At the same time it was the first alternative occurrence within State Theaters. As it is known, Unit Theater practice has been very important process as a successfully ended effort. The process had been spontaneous by the contribution of thirty artists which came together by their free will and could possibly be realized with the positive supports and initiative of the times’ officials (Fikri Sağlar, Emre Kongar and Yücel Erten). Again with the free choice of the group I became the art director of the Unit Theater and Unit Theater defined itself as an Ensemble which will become more integrated in time and took its own decisions with a governing body made from its members. According to our aims and principles, with the themes and problems I want to focus on since the beginning, a study process on acting started including the questioning of what is wanted, how it can be done and examination of settled habits. This process has been a painful because of the difference between wanting the new and being ready for the new. If we were able to show anything different in staging of the Hamlet this had correspondence starting in working method, understanding of the acting and the process of roles finding their owners. Sadly all these works, - though it had been looked at as a temporary attempt since the law didn’t pass – had the success of lasting for a year and proved its success with its play, but it is tried to be covered, ignored and wanted to be forgotten... It [Unit Theater] stayed as *other* within its own theater. However the groups who want to work together and share a basic common aim are deeply important for institutional theaters’ development also. (Gürman et al., 1999, pp. 169)

This is a good summary of what the group of artists went through in the trial. Levent Özdilek, who acted Claudius in the play, told that they were seen under the light of “quixotism” within State Theaters (Özdilek et al., 2012<sup>67</sup>). From the narratives I collected there seems to be an undeniable sense that Unit Theater’s success had been a discomfort within the institution.



Figure 2: The logo of Unit Theater<sup>68</sup>

From the photos and a five minute video of the play which I found in Refik Ahmet Sevengil Theater Library’s Digital Achieve, I have seen that there are two significant attempts of experimental theater making which breaks the State Theater paradigm. First is the multifunctional structure based décor which reminds me of Meyerhold’s stage designs. Second is the dramaturgical choice that the Hamlet role is divided into two, which divides all Hamlet’s lines between two actors (Uğur Polat, Zafer Algöz). This was used as a symbol of Hamlet’s double, or even schizophrenic character.

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<sup>67</sup>He took word as one of the audience members in the New Spectator Experiences Conference (Yeni Seyir Halleri) organized by 7 Alternative Theater Places’ in 17 October 2012.

<sup>68</sup>Resource: Hamlet, 1993-1994 Season, Istanbul. (n.d.). Retrieved June 14, 2013, from State Theaters Refik Ahmet Sevengil Theater Library Digital Play Information System website: [http://95.0.22.144:8088/userPandtgm/user\\_home\\_dtgm.php](http://95.0.22.144:8088/userPandtgm/user_home_dtgm.php) //The only play of Unit Theater (Birim Tiyatro)

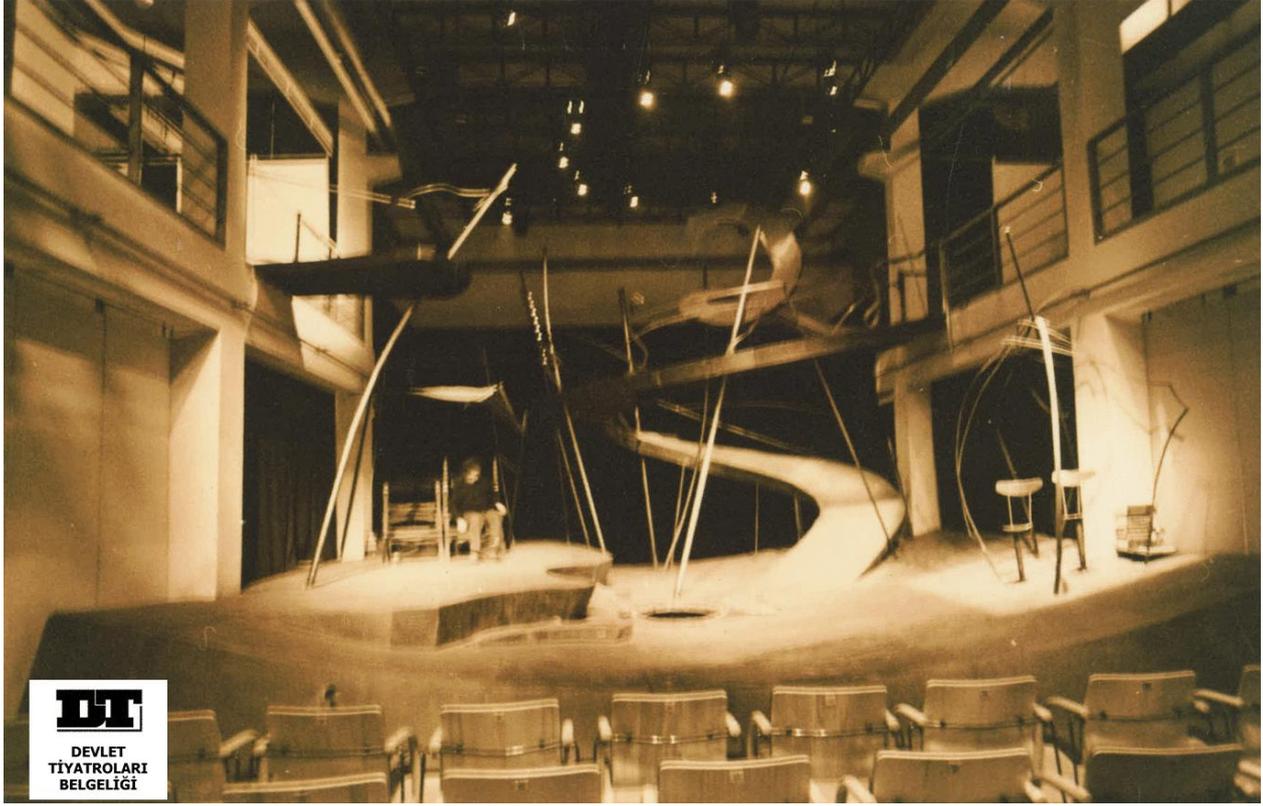


Figure 3: Stage design of Unit Theater's Hamlet<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Resource: Hamlet, 1993-1994 Season, Istanbul. (n.d.). Retrieved June 14, 2013, from State Theaters Refik Ahmet Sevengil Theater Library Digital Play Information System website: [//The only play of Unit Theater \(Birim Tiyatro\)](http://95.0.22.144:8088/userPandtgm/user_home_dtgm.php)



Figure 4: The two Hamlets – Zafer Algöz and Uğur Polat<sup>70</sup>

Gürman explains her dramaturgical choice in detail within her 1998 dated speech:

In the Hamlet I staged two actors who played Hamlet at the same time. The aim was to build the theme of the *other* inside us. According to the variations of the changing situations, one of the two Hamlets acted the *other* for the other one. Other than the internal conflict scenes this also gave the theatrical possibility of showing what is internal and external to Hamlet at the same time. Also in the scenes which Hamlet wanted to reveal the hypocrisy of the characters, this choice made possible the playmaking for the characters to show their two faces (just as the scene where one of the Hamlets acts the prostitute and the other the priest in front of Polonius). (Gürman et al., 1999, pp. 167-8)

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<sup>70</sup>Resource: Hamlet, 1993-1994 Season, Istanbul. (n.d.). Retrieved June 14, 2013, from State Theaters Refik Ahmet Sevengil Theater Library Digital Play Information System website: [//The only play of Unit Theater \(Birim Tiyatro\)](http://95.0.22.144:8088/userPandtgm/user_home_dtgm.php)



Figure 5: The two Hamlets in front of Polonius, Zafer Algöz acting the priest-Hamlet, Uğur Polat acting the prostitute-Hamlet<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Resource: Hamlet, 1993-1994 Season, Istanbul. (n.d.). Retrieved June 14, 2013, from State Theaters Refik Ahmet Sevengil Theater Library Digital Play Information System website: [//The only play of Unit Theater \(Birim Tiyatro\)](http://95.0.22.144:8088/userPandtgm/user_home_dtgm.php)



Figure 6: The crew of Unit Theater – The lady sitting in the middle front row is Müge Gürman<sup>72</sup>

In the long run, even though the Unit Theater was closed, the experience changed the institution to a certain level. At first Müge Gürman gained certain autonomy within the institution in her artistic choices, which helped her train a new generation of directors. Second, the ensembles were not legalized but it became possible for certain directors and actors to work together according to their choices.

The discussions on closing the State Theaters all together in 2012 with the AKP government's conservative policies affected the artists in State Theaters (and also in Municipality Theaters) negatively. Many artists who earlier wanted

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<sup>72</sup>Resource: Hamlet, 1993-1994 Season, Istanbul. (n.d.). Retrieved June 14, 2013, from State Theaters Refik Ahmet Sevengil Theater Library Digital Play Information System website: [http://95.0.22.144:8088/userPandtgm/user\\_home\\_dtgm.php](http://95.0.22.144:8088/userPandtgm/user_home_dtgm.php) //The only play of Unit Theater (Birim Tiyatro)

reformation in the institution resolved into silence or passivity under the thread of closure and more over, many sided with the argument that it should “stay as it is”. That is one of the reasons why Unit Theater experiment is especially important to remember today.

All in all, I wanted to show in this chapter that, the figures working on theatrical experiments (in institutions also) were more or less the same figures who formed the free avant-garde groups. In 90s there had been a secret struggle of these figures to change these institutions from within for good. They had realistic plans to start from small but successful experiments, to gain trust and hope to change the official theater institution in the long run. All these figures were marginalized and their efforts, even though successful, were crushed.

This generation of artists who formed the 90s avant-garde had formal access to state institutions since they were formally educated in theater either in Turkey or abroad. The main difference between the “second generation<sup>73</sup>” (the post-Dot generation of blackbox stages) and 90s avant-garde is that second generation, educated in theater informally, never had access to these institutions in the first place. The prior filtering mechanism of theater institutions in Turkey have always been strongly based on formal education.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Naming within this thesis: The 90s avant-garde is named as “deep current” or “under current”, Dot as the “first wave” or “first generation” and after mid2000s, there comes the “second generation” of young people.

<sup>74</sup> This theme is explained wider in the fourth chapter.

## From 1990s to the Theater Madrasa

In this subchapter I'll briefly describes the life built in Madrasa by analyzing its architecture and sociology to visualize what Madrasa means for 2010s theater field in Turkey, the opportunities it created and possible handicaps of it.

SeyyarSahne is the group which planned, constructed and still organizes the Theater Madrasa. The group is first shaped in year 2001 with four people who left Boğaziçi University Actors but they were closely related with other university's theater clubs, especially Istanbul Technical University's. Through time SeyyarSahne became an open theater platform for people who want to be professionalized in who have roots in universities' theater clubs. The first generation (now ages ranging around 33-42) which is majorly a combination of people from Boğaziçi and ITU (with a few others) had contacts with other amateur university clubs through time and since some significant works of SeyyarSahne get important attention (such as Ben Pierre Reviere, Tehlikeli Oyunlar, Yeraltından Notlar or Çocukluğumun Soğuk Geceleri) some of the first generation had the opportunity to quit their upcoming careers and dive into theater profession<sup>75</sup>.

Kerem Kurdoğlu defines the 90s avant-garde as a theatrical movement that has not yet created its "charismatic actor" and "stable-charismatic way of acting" (Kurdoğlu, et al. 1999, 141-2). Actually, the 90s avant-garde groups don't look for such a key for acting or a charismatic lead actor. To be taken seriously in

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<sup>75</sup>Oğuz Arıcı (who, unlike other SeyyarSahne members, has an undergraduate degree in dramaturgy) became a professional dramaturgist, Celal Mordeniz became a professional director and Erdem Şenocak became a professional actor within this platform. Erdem Şenocak significantly became a professional based on solidarity of SeyyarSahne group who made possible for him to leave his possible career as an industrial engineer.

professional field of 2000s though, as a group made from university theater clubs, SeyyarSahne needed this charismatic actor.

SeyyarSahne group is very significant to see the importance of “amateur work” and university theater clubs in the making of alternative theater field. Later the second generation of SeyyarSahne group (age group around 24-28) had the courage to quit their first careers and continue in dramaturgy or have a masters degree in dramaturgy<sup>76</sup>. The group has strong solidarity bonds including practices like sharing houses.

The Theater Madrasa is a huge opportunity for everyone interested in performance in Turkey. The opportunities vary in a wide range from being a perfect networking place, being a theatrical playground which most experiments are deeply enrooted in and gives possibility for being very productive. The courtyard is a very inspiring site for seeing the public sphere generating quality of theater making because it not only an area of production but also a place of living.

SeyyarSahne group, working together over a decade, has never been a purely production based professional group or even a pure theatrical ensemble. They reveal this fact in their website as:

The real motive which moves us is that theater which is seen as a branch of art which is under the risk of extinction, or left with the options of being “entertaining” or “suitable for museum”, and despite the countless difficulties of theater making, the belief that it can be continued as a dynamic activity. So this dynamism is not for “enlivening theater art” but for making cracks in the so-called flow of “daily life” which makes us accept everything as if it is all natural. (“Hakkımızda,” 2006)

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<sup>76</sup> Unlike acting, directing or stage design departments of state universities, dramaturgy is relatively open in masters degree to include other people from various undergraduate degrees.

They can better be defined as theatrical platform. Between years 2001 and 2006 they made group productions but later their works become more dependent on texts transformed from novels into one-person plays. This made possible for group to stay in solidarity but produce individual works in smaller sub-groups generally made up of a performer, a director and sometimes a dramaturgist. SeyyarSahne's second period (from 2006 until today) made the name "SeyyarSahne" into a theatrical human source make plays together – which later continued as a leitmotiv in Madrasa. The most communitarian thing the group shared before Madrasa (other than some life practices like sharing houses) had been readings they did together which formed a language of the group.<sup>77</sup>

The interesting thing is that as the name "SeyyarSahne" (moving stage) claims there has been a decentralized, completely volatile feeling of the group; even though the group doesn't do street performances. This sense came from a mindset of coming from different disciplines into forming an open commune on shared theatrical desires. To be able to *carry the stage* of course, the stage material should be dramatically limited. The theater theorist which SeyyarSahne settles itself on is significantly Grotowski who "cleaned" (in words of appreciators of Grotowski) theater from anything but acting.

Grotowski's acting methodology depends on the communication between director and the performer. Performer has to be aware and in control of his/her body in extreme intensity and use the whole body (unlike traditional head+voice+gesture acting) for expression. For acting to be the "seen" – in the most open sense – all the other elements of the play making is reduced to limits, especially stage design. Here, dramaturgical experimentalism comes naturally as all other things are reduced to

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<sup>77</sup>In the Appendix B there is a time line made to express this evolution.

create the bond between text and acting. So it won't be wrong to say SeyyarSahne's theater tradition is mainly on Grotowskian understanding of theater where acting (based on awareness of body) is central dramaturgy becomes the basic need. To this day productions of SeyyarSahne canonized itself in dramaturgical approaches to literary text which lately became more of one-person-plays.<sup>78</sup>

Grotowski also became an important name because his technique gave key solutions to problems based on the process of trying to be professional through university theater clubs. The main difference a professional staging and university club staging of a play depends on the fact that professional staging should continue at least for a theater season average per week (which could be more or less) but a university theater club performs a play in a maximum number of 3 to 5. It is easy to keep the enthusiasm (which is desperately needed to make spectators believe in the work) for a few plays but it is very hard to stay enthusiastic in 100<sup>th</sup> play and needs at least a variety of professionalism.

A general mindset of university theater clubs and their handicaps are drawn very successfully by Behiç Cem Kola in his interview.

In the first groups I worked in there had been a fetishism of working especially about timing and time management or forcing people to read material... The worst thing about this is that you become the person who does that after some time. I was forcing people to read material. Really, when I was the director of the group I was forcing people to read and mocking people who didn't, I was trying to get a privilege with my knowledge or I was forcing the actors who didn't do the physical trainings as if everyone has to have the same body or everyone has to do the same training... Because this creates a tiredness. And people have a tendency to see this tiredness as if it is equal to working. I mean you get tired physically, you talk talk talk and it feels like "yeah

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<sup>78</sup>Ilgaz Ulusoy stated that the decision of moving to one-person-plays is also because of conditions of being amateur. "The reason of evolution behind one-person-plays is related to the physical conditions. Everyone had another job, there are people who are academics, who are working on their doctoral degree, who are working... There was not really an opportunity for doing collective work; that is one side of the issue." (interview with Ilgaz Ulusoy, 30 July 2013)

we did great dramaturgy today” but it is actually because you don’t know what dramaturgy is or how it is done. This is a working fetishism. And within that [perspective] you feel as if you are doing great stuff... For example I was really thinking that I saved the theater practice in İzmir and we were the best theater in the city and the university has met theater due to our work. This thought settles in to you very easily. That’s a bad thing. I mean it wasn’t because the group members were bad. [...] Amateur theater takes the hypothesis that theater is bad within the country and declares that they are the saviors, the university theater. When in university, this person sees himself as if he spreads light from his forehead and says “everyone is hanging around, drinking and so on but we are doing dramaturgy here which means we are something else” and they would never make a research on local playwrights, never get into theater of Turkey. They would act Brecht, sometimes they would do absurd for 3 or 4 years back to back and go back to Brecht, and relax themselves in political manners. An environment enlivened for itself... The groups which couldn’t solve such problems would go back to Brecht after a couple of years. (B. C. Kola, personal communication, July 30, 2013)

The critical importance of Kola’s explanation of university club theater is that it is an openhearted explanation of how university club theaters work which can be summarized as rediscovering America. There is always a group of idealist people or people who truly want to do theater but they are intellectually not trained about the practice and their self-trainings (considering they are very young, have other things to do such as graduating, and their access to theater making knowledge is unguided) can stay very limited. The aim of the university theater club is to continue its existence by giving similar educations to new comers and make productions in the spring semester. It is a risk to try absolutely new things which are not examined by older generations.

On the other hand university theater club works have their own benefits over professionalism. First of all, the volunteering group does not depend vitally on the play and they have quite a long time compared to professional groups. Ideally, a university theater club spends a satisfactory time on theorizing the play, understanding it in various layers by reading a variety of materials together for a

holistic and shared understanding of the play and discussing the possibilities of experimental stagings. SeyyarSahne, coming from such a tradition, didn't want to lose these gains also, but they had to find some practical solutions for being able to perform for longer periods. At this point Grotowski's technique was a savior also. The awareness on body (including the thoughts and emotions which later turns into actions), makes possible to keep the continuity of the play.

Grotowski's theater methodology includes an important theme of forming an ensemble, and to make one of the significant ways proposed for making the ensemble is to go to a rural place, isolated from other people, and to work together for long and dense periods. Assos Theater Festival has been an inspiration also even though SeyyarSahne group didn't contribute in the festival since the festival gave the first opportunity for theater artists in Turkey to develop works in such "cast away" environments.

Before getting into the Madrasa experiment, the language SeyyarSahne needs to be studied significantly – which I can only do very briefly here – to show how hegemony is built and how it is working in the Gramscian (and perhaps Foucauldian sense). Within the canonized narrative of SeyyarSahne, SeyyarSahne is an open group<sup>79</sup>, an open platform which no institutional structures are constructed. Without the formal institutional structures such as "auditions of the year" (all the interviewee's gave this example insistently "there has never been auditions of SeyyarSahne"), a plan for premier dates or sessional decisions for plays which reinforces the image of an open platform. As an open platform SeyyarSahne seems to be one of the most welcoming theater groups for all people who want to make theater

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<sup>79</sup> "SeyyarSahne is not a group, a closed group..."(I. Ulusoy, personal communication, July 30, 2013) / "In our group [SeyyarSahne] these troubles don't happen because it is not a closed group." (B.C. Kola, personal communication, July 30, 2013)

but this is not the case though. The new comers can come, but they have to survive a long lasting limbo state to become a true member of the group which means to be a part of a play, or make a one-person play or –recently- work in Medrese. To become a member of SeyyarSahne, the new comer should join the philosophical discussions of the group to share their paradigmatic view on theater and more generally about life<sup>80</sup>.

The first generation (the group members who are between 33-42 today) feels less of the hierarchy of the most central group members who are Erdem Şenocak and Celal Mordeniz but both first generation and second generation openly declares the central role of the both figures, Mordeniz as the director, Şenocak as the charismatic model actor. The fallacious use of language led to the shaping of hegemony which mostly depends on the loaded language group members'. This language blocks the rational (in most basic terms) discussion on the ground floor. The Habermasian public sphere based on rational discussion has 4 elements:

1. Every contributor should have an equal chance to start the conversation, ask questions, discuss, examine and propose.
2. Everyone should have the right to question the determined discussion topics.
3. Everyone should have equal chance to declare their wants, desires and emotions.
4. Speakers should have the right to declare their statements on the procedures of discourse and the practice of these procedures, and if they are excluded through the discussions they should have the freedom to express their position and the relations of hegemony which limited their expression. (all four contents directly translated from Özbek, 2004, 62-3)

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<sup>80</sup> “Every year we read something and the terminology enriches. For example when we read Bergson there was a terminology about time and space. And we were using it. In the last years readings were on Girard’s “Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure”. From there arrogance and a desire triangle, the mechanism of how desire works settled into our language. This year for example a terminology on how violence has a continuity in life entered our language from Girard’s “Violence and the Sacred”.(B.C.Kola, personal communication, July 30, 2013).

I have directly seen an event which these items were prevented, especially the fourth one. “The mentoring relationship” (usta-çırak ilişkisi) and the identity of being a SeyyarSahne member (“SeyyarSahnelilik”) enforces the blocage of publicness. The constructed language though<sup>81</sup>, strongly made by the philosophical texts Celal Mordeniz filters and brings<sup>82</sup> lead to guided discussions of daily politics and recent history<sup>83</sup>.

The reading practice of the group is unconventional. This habit is shaped through the camping era (in İznik and Bodrum-Gümüşlük<sup>84</sup>) and continued in gatherings under various names of the group members over a decade. Second generation of SeyyarSahne which is originated from İTÜ theater club shared this tradition in gatherings under the name Hagaragort for around 2,5 years or there had been “Utopia Readings” which another group member, Özgür Akarsu, organized for the second generation of SeyyarSahne which were held in Orhan Veli Şiir Evi’s conference room (another TAZ space). The backbone of this loaded language is constructed in this unconventional readings: the philosophical texts are read line-by-

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<sup>81</sup> Doğu Can: I mean generally in the languages constructed I like to be in the peripheries. I mean a language has to be constructed for everything, for theory, arts, practice; a language to unite stuff to be able to talk on some common terms. [...] But there is a risk of this language; it can lose its liveliness. Therefore you have to work on the peripheries of the language to open it. It may be a shallow move to try to construct another language sometimes. I mean it can easily turn into “this language is so stereotyped, lets make a new language and stereotype it too”. That’s why I think a person needs to work in the peripheries of a language.

Deniz: Are you bringing new theoretical headlines to group to make this?

Doğu: No. I was talking about a more general thing... Like indirect chattings... (D.Can, personal communication, July 30, 2013)

<sup>82</sup> “Celal proposes a book that he has read some time ago and wishes to read again like “would you like to read this?” kind of way. We generally say “okay”. Since he is leading...” (I. Ulusoy, personal communication, July 30, 2013).

<sup>83</sup> Other group members (except Oğuz Arıcı who sometimes personally brings some sources to crew members) generally do not bring other reading material for group discussions. Though Arıcı and a group of younger generation of people in SeyyarSahne crew were left in a condition of leaving in the following year of 2014 after my field analysis.

<sup>84</sup> One of the inspiration spaces of the Theater Madrasa had been Gümüşlük Academy where all artists from all artistic branches can camp together and produce in touch with each other. The main difference between Gümüşlük Academy and Theater Madrasa is that Madrasa is more focused on theater and performance. (“Alternatif Sahneler Festivali,” 2014)

line(holy-book style) which the group discusses after hearing. Other than creating any other fallacy this reading version also gives unique possibilities to fallacy of quoting out of context.<sup>85</sup>

These readings and the SeyyarSahne's own loaded language is best explained in the collective interview with the first generation group.

Celal Mordeniz: My reading is like... goes with a flow of absolute acceptance. I don't really take a distance [to the text]. We don't try to take a distance... If I'm reading Bergson I adopt a totally Bergsonian perspective or if I'm reading Arendt... Sometimes even we talk as if there is no one [no other philosopher]... I personally think that this is an attitude and this is a correct attitude in philosophical readings. I mean a person shouldn't be saying "well he is saying that but the other is saying something else", therefore the philosophers should be selected according to this, the thinkers and texts should be selected accordingly. A text which you would half accept half argue, half do something... That can be a bit academic, I mean you might not be able to have a dialogue with that text.

Deniz Başar: Does the dialogue come from acceptance? I couldn't understand...

Celal Mordeniz: No, not from acceptance. It comes from full listening of the other. But it is very hard, listening at the risk of giving up yourself. And yes, you would miss a lot if you don't give up yourself. You can miss a lot of what he [the philosopher] says. We generally have some common philosophers. Arendt, Bergson and lastly and most greatly Girard. Before that there was Terry Eagleton. Before that we have read Foucault. He [Foucault] is one of our important philosophers but he didn't shake us like Girard, Bergson or Arendt.

Nesrin Uçarlar: We were not reading like that back then though. (C. Mordeniz, N. Uçarlar, E. Şenocak, & O. Arıcı, personal communication, July 25, 2013).

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<sup>85</sup> This means to quote in conditional or unconditional ways to distort the original meaning.

The readings of Rene Girard's "Violence and The Sacred" and "Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure" was dominating the SeyyarSahne language in July of 2013 when I spent a month in the Theater Madrasa. Terms like "mimetic desire", the equilibrium state between violence and sacred, and the relation between violence and arrogance were the most basic and key terminology of the shared language. Girard's hypothesis on the need of hierarchy is applied within the relationship between director and actor, and that is how the "dialogue" is defined also, especially in the relationship between Celal Mordeniz and the second generation. Now it is very important to note that group dynamics are strongly resistant to domination but these dynamics are strongly hegemonic, all the actors give their strong consent to decisions of the center group. Girard's hypothesis on the need of hierarchy feeds the reasonable environment of the designed relationship.

But the relationship we built with Erdem and Celal... Now this is very important, you don't pick a group, you don't pick a school, you pick a master [crafts master] for yourself. And you do whatever the master says. Therefore it doesn't create a violence I would say depending on Girard... I mean it doesn't transform into such a thing. Master asks you to try something and you try. You may love what you did, the master doesn't like, so you try another thing. Could I express myself, you have that kind of trust. You have a comfort. (B.C. Kola, personal communication, July 30, 2013).

The interesting part of this relationship is that all the group members have a strong tendency to believe that they are aware of the status of their relationship since they can define the nature of the hierarchy and consent among each other, but as it is very difficult for any subject to truly understand the limits of their own consent. The construction of a group language and not being institutionalized in the classical manners creates a group identity unlike a professional production group. The loaded

language used among the crew blocks the possibility of the group to see the degree of their own consent which generally appears in practice when a new comer who refuses to use the language is shunned.

They first thought of building Madrasa around 2010 but then Sevan Nişanyan, who has made his hotel in Şirince and guided Şirince villagers to continue building traditional stone crafted houses instead of apartments, suggested them to make the Madrasa project in Şirince where there is already an alternative university experiment. Sevan Nişanyan worked with Ali Nesin to make Mathematics Village in 2009 which now truly became a village for mathematicians and mathematics students and for the last few years including a philosophy formation also. Mathematics village now has a good number of potential habitants, and service areas like classrooms, and service areas like cafeterias and a library. Theater Madrasa became the neighbor of Mathematics village with close organic bonds even though they are institutionally not tied.

“We were a group who knew each other for a long time and now we became a more open structure with Madrasa.” (interview with Gül den A rsal, 20 July 2013)

Madrasa’s architecture was inspired by SülüklüHan in Diyarbakır and Kasimiye Madrasa in Mardin. The shape was decided to be an L after the funding problems were faced<sup>86</sup>. The building had a meaning of the life and publicness it meant to

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<sup>86</sup>The court yard structure of those hans and madrasas, the structure which holds public and private spaces together has given inspiration to them specifically in SülüklüHan, and later it was like “yes, a madrasa”... (...) When we opened this project to Sevan Nişanyan, when Erdem first met him and later when Celal met him, he proposed to build this project in Şirince. And later we were convinced because this project had to be shaped in a place which can accept it, it might have caused another kind of tension if we were placed in a village which wouldn’t accept us. For example in İznik, in a few trainings we did there, we had strange reactions from people. Like “what are they doing together, men and women?”... It is a great advantage that this place is very touristic. One of the most important advantages is that there is the Mathematics Village here. It is a place which this kind of working is organized. At first we thought like “ but İzmir is way too far” [crew lives in İstanbul] but on the other hand the meetings with Sevan Nişanyan and most importantly the hotels he made and the visuality of Mathematics Village which mesmerized us... We wanted to do such a thing also because the architecture of the environment you create effects your creative work also. (G. A rsal, personal communication, July 19, 2013).

create: “You know the content of a madrasa is that it is both a place for education but also it is a way of living, you live in it and your education is shaped within it. It was enrooted in such a thought, the well-known rectangular form, a court yard in the middle and an architecture combining education and living practices.” (interview with Gülden Aرسال, 20 July 2013) . The construction continues today with facing many problems. Recently Erdem Şenocak, co-organizer of Madrasa was sued for not suiting construction laws and given a punishment of 60.000 TL (Atabilen, 2014).<sup>87</sup>

The Madrasa is not a historicist replication of a classical Ottoman Madrasa though. It can be said that it is an architectural improvisation based on the egalitarianism and public sphere formation idea of a classical madrasa. Oğuz Arıcı explains that he has never imagined that they were making a place for their collective work only. Arıcı notes that he always imagined a place where the crew, including himself, can meet other people and other people can meet other people. This description interestingly includes a secret metaphor of a caravansary which shares a similar medieval middle eastern architectural theme just as the theme of madrasa. The 2013-2014 season play *Circus D’arc* from Kadro Pa has been shaped in Madrasa for example. Other than these inspiring meetings there is also possibility of coming to Madrasa as a group who would like to produce together and work on the decided play or performance in a dense rehearsal period.

As Gülden Aرسال states: “You know the content of a madrasa is that it is both a place for education but also it is a way of living, you live in it and your education is shaped within it.” (G. Aرسال, personal communication, July 19, 2013). So Madrasa

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<sup>87</sup> Stongly right wing newspapers (such as Yeni Akit) celebrated this decision given by “sensitive muslims” against “rough secularists” and at last the “immorality madrasa” which kept “boys and girls” together would be closed. (“Ahlaksızlık Medresesi'ne Ceza,” 2014) It is interesting because when other (which can be claimed to be more moderate) right-wing newspapers (such as Zaman or Yeni Şafak) supported Theater Madrasa in 2011(Safa, 2011) and 2012 (Hülagu, 2012).

was shaped to develop the idea of living and producing together.<sup>88</sup> As a witness I can state that despite all the missing parts of Madrasa, people who join the camps also became a part of this communal and collective life practice also. The living conditions of Madrasa, especially in 2013 summer when it was still in construction, was not comfortable or vacation-like. People were asked to do daily work and manage their workshop times accordingly. Other than the asked responsibilities from contributors many sacrificed their empty time to helping people who are trying to manage the life in Madrasa by taking care of kitchen or cleaning voluntarily. The mentality behind the choice of coming to Madrasa is best explained by Behiç Cem Kola who has been a second generation member of Seyyar Sahne early 2014.

From this perspective the people who decided to come to Madrasa, who stay here 15 days in summer, or even two months... No one who decided this can be separated from these things. These kinds of people come here. I mean they are coming to work like this and do better things [...] The same with actors. It is a great sign that a person is trying to do good things since he [or she] is giving a lot from his [or her] time and materiality to this place. (B.C.Kola, personal communication, July 30, 2013).

Nesrin Uçarlar notes that Madrasa is not a place where some people host some other people, Madrasa itself hosts everyone which explains the feeling of all interviewees and my own.

The problematic thing about Madrasa is that it is not legalized by the municipality plan. Madrasa's construction started as an illegal construction in 2011, just like Mathematics village and still both are under the threat of demolition by state order. All the buildings other than single floored cottages are disallowed by the municipality's land use plan, since the land is protected as rare agricultural soil

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<sup>88</sup> The idea originated from İznik and Gümüşlük summer camps.

area<sup>89</sup>. This decision is taken in a country where in all metropolitan cities, severely in Istanbul, there are countless misconstruction cases including even illegal constructions of skyscrapers and shopping malls which many never turning into lawsuits. The future of the Madrasa is bleak under this perspective but construction continuous today against the law case and red-tagging of municipality officials.

Gülden Aarsal, who is an urban planner specialized in transportation planning and a working in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, explained this paradox about how legal planning stereotypes does not give chance for reasonable projects which generates new public spaces. The full narrative of her explanation has been unique and important for my research on Madrasa since she is the only one who can explain professional planning codes and their rigidness against public space creation and what Madrasa means in such planning conditions.

In cities this is a need in the extreme sense [making new public spaces] but there is no political field or planning practice, when this need is not answered in the long run people tend to think this is natural – it is shaped this way. I mean the physical space changes you and you tend to become that kind of person [a person defined by unnatural space]. The people who live in İstanbul know that very well. (...) Of course you can directly communicate with people which you come together with a shared agenda but the design of these encountering spaces – the creation of public space – makes it possible to start a dialogue. The opportunity of this place changes the human relations. I mean you can start start a dialogue with people which you never know, never met before and even people you wouldn't have liked at all if you met them in İstanbul. This is not about us, this is about the publicness created by this place. I think this is very serious, I mean as an urban planner... In a

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<sup>89</sup>Though the Mathematics Village and the Madrasa are against the lower scaled land-use plan which protects the area from construction, these two centers actually suit the higher scaled regional plan decisions which aim to make the area a cultural and social center. Recently in January 2014 Sevan Nişanyan is arrested ("Sevan Nişanyan Bugün Cezaevine," 2014) for one of the buildings of Mathematics village. Nişanyan's arrest caused national and international resistance against government over the internet. About Nişanyan's arrest it should be noted that even though the building is not legal which makes the decision seems right in the first glance, the building which he is arrested because of is used by students in Philosophy camp which is a part of Mathematics Village. After these decisions in July 2014 Madrasa was sued and punished to pay 60.000 TL for not suiting construction laws.

period where all public spaces are pillaged and when we have lived the Gezi Resistance... In a place where all hans and passages are turned into hotels, schools are turned into hotels, parks are made into shopping malls... I mean in a period where the historical texture is degenerated and public spaces are occupied [by capitalism and neoliberal governments], the need to create public space is an act of resistance to everything, to individualism, to consumption culture... In that means I think this publicness answers a way of life. It is very hard to do this in cities. (...) We have all seen that what [construction] projects cause when the public opinion and the opinion of the civil society are not considered. In this sense, here the civil society is the theater people, and when we create a place that answers the need of theater people legislation does not become a problem anymore. (G. Arsal, personal communication, July 19, 2013)

The stone crafts are made by craftsmen brought from Southeast Anatolia who are skilled in masonry<sup>90</sup>. The Madrasa construction did not use any state-funds, the expenses of the construction is based on individual donations of theater people and groups. They are all credited with name labels on Madrasa's walls.

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<sup>90</sup>Diyarbakır Municipality (unlike other state institutions) send stones for the amphitheater as donation based on Celal Mordeniz's contact since he directed a Kurdish Antigone in 2012 for Diyarbakır Municipality Theaters.

First photos from  
Madrasa construction  
- from the Madrasa's  
digital archive



Figure 7: Construction Photos from 2011-2012

Madrasa opened in 2012 with the first play, “Tehlikeli Oyunlar” which in time became the most famous play of SeyyarSahne and is adapted from the novel by Oğuz Atay. The following diagram is one of the first proposed plans. A curious eye can trace the significant differences occurred in the construction process by comparing diagrams of proposed plans and constructed plans.

# opening play of madrasa - tehlikeci oyunlar 2012



taken from  
madrasa's  
digital archive

Figure 8: First play in the Madrasa - 2012

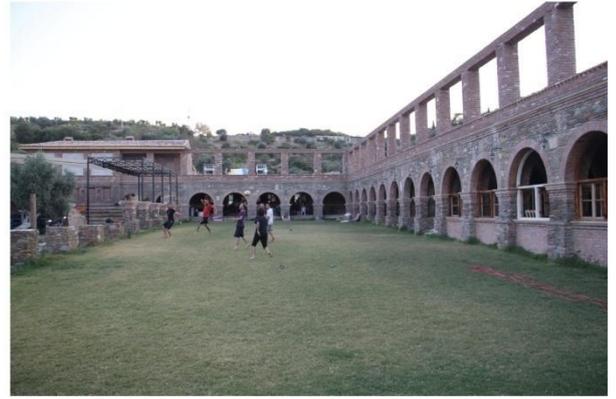
For two summer seasons now (2012 and 2013), the Theater Madrasa has continued open summer camps for all people interested in various kinds of performances including a range from story narration workshops to tai-chi-chuan or clown workshop. The life in Madrasa is truly cast away from all inputs of daily news where in 2013 summer, reaching internet meant walking (uphill) to the library of the Mathematics Village.

The daily works are divided per person and continues habitants of the Madrasa are in charge of organizing the daily labour. Kitchen work is the heaviest work which starts around 7 am and continues to 11 pm. The first shift is breakfast, which takes part between 7-10 am, and the second shift continues till night. Kitchen is also the only place where a paid worker (a cook, who also organizes the kitchen) helps other than the stone craftsman. All other cleaning and organizing work is done by inhabitants. There is also a core SeyyarSahne group who works and lives in Madrasa during the winter time starting from 2013-2014 season. The place is kept open all the time for the crew and visitors. The life in Madrasa is very communitarian and very organic. I especially realized it when I was trying to analyze the space usage. The place grew and usages changed organically which was exceptional for a stone building.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>For example the addition of sunshades created a good amount of space from nowhere since it was unbearably hot under sun in summertime. Open spaces were used generally starting from afternoon times before the sunshades which were put around mid July. Without the sunshades that space can't be used. Through July of 2013 there had been various space inventing solutions. Around July 20 a high double bed (oriental style) was constructed in free work zone which became a reading space in day time, under the sun shade. The double bed also made the isolated space into a first degree encountering area. Like the sunshades, the volleyball net which is sometimes put up in the court yard made possible long plays in the afternoon and made possible sport-based interactions.

# architecture and spatial details



personal archive, JULY 2013 - PHOTOS TAKEN BY UĞUR AÇIKGÖZ

Figure 9: Photos 1

The construction changed according to practical needs and economic reasons. First domes of the of the classical madrasa unit was cancelled due to the expenses (although it is known architectural fact that domes served Ottoman public spaces as a signature move and create egalitarian spaces – Ataman, 2000) and pragmatic reasons such as the fact that a flat terrace would actually be more useful especially for creating a space for tent – using habitants.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>The architectural unit analysis is very important in understanding a construction of space. The court yard is semi-permeable (giving a sense of limit without making a physical barrier or blockage) just like Sienna square's space defining columns. It is like deconstructing the single Lego piece which the architectural form is made up of. This analysis is inspired from Alparslan Ataman's unique work on classical Ottoman architecture named "From the unit to Kulliye [Islamic-Ottoman social complex] – The Logic of Public Space in Ottoman Kulliyes" (Bir Göz Yapıdan Külliyyeye – Osmanlı Külliyyelerinde Kamusal Mekan Mantığı) which gives a methodology of such deconstruction (Ataman, 2000). Below there is a brief explanation of Ataman's work on classical Ottoman architecture which he defines the architectural system under the terms "ruler" and "unit element". See Appendix B for comparative unit analysis of Classic Ottoman Madrasas and Theater Madrasa. The stone crafting of Madrasa is unique also, unlike stone crafting of the Mathematics Village or the stone crafting newly built traditional Şirince houses. It is open to craftsman's improvisation (one of the rooms even have the world "TİYATRO" – THEATER- written in the wall by designing the bricks) where they can express themselves through walls.

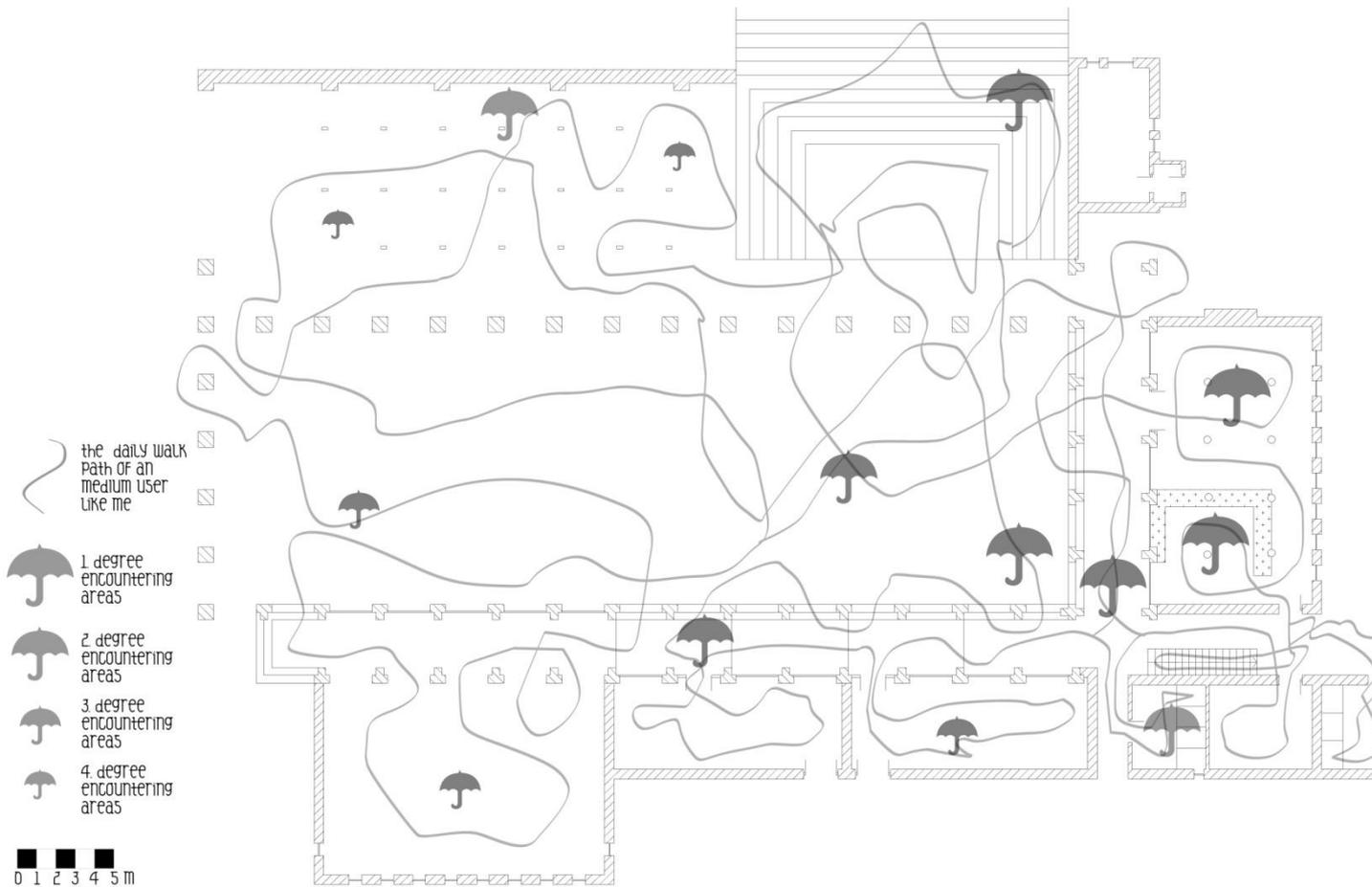


Figure 10: Random encountering spaces and daily walking paths

The usage of space is defined strongly by sun and shades created by architecture (see Appendix B for shades through a day in Madrasa). Since the library of the Madrasa is not constructed yet the space is covered with book readers settled under outdoor shades or community table next to the kitchen in living room. Workshops touch each other through the day and the nights' shows (which can be presentations of workshops or professional plays of performers attending workshops) get organized by the performing crew and by people using their free time.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Encountering spaces in day time is strongly based on sun and shades through the summer. In the Appendix B the image titled as "Shadow Analysis of the Courtyard of Theater Madrasa" shows the shades through a day in courtyard- the encountering spaces enlarge as the shades grow but the intensity of coincides fall since the space enlarges.

Also for the SeyyarSahne crew, being inside the construction part of the place-making process means a lot. I'm including the two narratives from the second generation of SeyyarSahne who explain their own experiences in the process of making the place.

No one really lives this kind of experience of... The making of where you live. Putting a contribution to the place. You would be happy even when you make a shelf in your home. I mean I feel happy when I mend a doorknob in my home. You can experience it in larger scale here. You can shape a life here together. You face some problems, you hit a handicap, it doesn't come out the way you thought and you make something else but there is an artistic and social life you create together. It scares me that it would go too large. It feels good in this scale. I mean I don't want it see it double in size like the Mathematics Village. I don't want to adopt a position of "service giving". A size which we can manage together feels better. I think the beauty of Madrasa comes from there. It is not a place where the newcomers receive a service; it feels different because we are doing it together. If this cracks down – and it may be, we don't know – it probably won't be something we desire. (D. Can, personal communication, July 30, 2013)

There is no money flowing here so there was something that everyone can do. Celal said, "there is help needed in the construction, who can come early", and I came 15 days earlier [along with some other SeyyarSahne's second generation crew]. I did live with the construction workers here for 15 days. I worked. It makes quite a lot of difference. A few more workers, even if they are unqualified, really help somethings to get faster. When it happens this way you embrace the place. I look at the place as "there is some dirt here, something happened there"... I see it as my own home. The upper construction irons of that big saloon are not painted still, they say it would be okay if they are painted in winter but my mind is there. They are rusting, losing strength, they are going to make a second floor on top of it; you think stuff like these. I mean it is very easy to be a piece of it. If you try... There is a space here [for joining in]. I think there is need also [for more people to work]... Of course this place will continue without me or without anybody but there is a need and there is the space. (S. Bursa, personal communication, July 30, 2013)



↪  
Sule Yigit  
working in  
her  
temporary  
painting and  
sculpture  
workshop



↶ 2012 summer - digital archive of madrasa      ↷ rest is personal photos from July 2013      ↷



↶ ↷  
movement-  
action-  
dialogue  
workshop,  
July 2013  
Left:  
theoretical  
work  
Right: getting ready for night's performance exercise



↷  
dinner



free working - reading place      ↷



Figure 11: Photos 2 – People of the Madrasa

The main spatial paradoxes of the Theater Madrasa is that it is made in in İzmir where since the sociology of the city is more secular than the common average of Turkey, no theater company will ever be lynched because of making theater without regarding gender differences. Though the regional choice is based on this secular sociology, the strict bureaucracy of CHP municipalities disregards the importance of these alternative education institutions (both the Mathematics Village and Theater Madrasa) and tries to destroy them since they are not included in formal municipality plans.<sup>94</sup>

So, Theater Madrasa represents a new model of institutionalization. It starts as a pure anomaly, all by the people who are educated in unconventional ways about theater and they are not encouraged by state or any corporation. They start making a place for themselves with facing countless difficulties and using their own savings, as the stone building grows it acts as a generator of collecting people and shaping space for new actions. But once the building finishes, which will happen after a few years, it is going to be stabilized forever because of language of the material itself, stone is used for eternal stabilization.

In total Madrasa is a very large scaled and important project for the theater field in Turkey which has a lot of potential for future generations also. It has its roots in amateur theater making practices of university theater clubs which should never be forgotten. Only danger it casts is upon is on SeyyarSahne itself. The life in Madrasa created potential for the group to use their loaded language continuously which may

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<sup>94</sup>Once in 2012 (as Erdem Şenocak recalls) the Municipality was about to take action to put down Mathematics Village and Abdullah Gül, the President of the Republic which comes from AKP, stopped the destruction by direct action. The architectural choice on the other hand (using Ottoman symbols) buys direct credit from government. In 2012 for example, a famous blog writer Yaşar Adanalı, who writes about urban changes in Turkey, wrote a piece with many accompanying visuals named as “The Magnificent Century of Seljuk and Ottoman Architecture” which points a danger in the government-generated historicism in 21<sup>st</sup> century architecture in Turkey (Adanalı, 2012). Though the architecture of madrasa actually suits the collective life practice shaped in the place and it is not just stencil historicism, it should be noted that it is a very useful architectural choice in governmental level in the first decades of 21<sup>st</sup> century in Turkey.

handicap a wider perspective of individuals and make them lose the awareness of the limits of the consent they have given to hegemony. This year the group went through some trouble because members didn't sense the power of the hegemony they have built together until it harmed social relations of some members.

The Madrasa creates an encountering space for people sharing goals but don't know each other until they share some time in Madrasa, gives potential education to dedicated people who didn't get an education in theater in professional sense and creates opportunity for dense work for long hours for theater groups. It should be clearly stated that the Madrasa project is surrealistically successful and it is a ground shifting decision for the theater field of Turkey.

## CHAPTER 3

### WALKING AWAY FROM DUALISTIC DEAD END OF ESTABLISHMENT VS AGIT-PROP

In Turkey mainstream theater consists of state theaters and municipality theaters, and of private theaters which either produce commercial comedies or classical plays quite in line with the central establishment. At the other extreme, we can place political plays nearly in the end of agit-prop. Agit-prop has meant the ready-made versions of Brecht or mostly propaganda plays which are produced with very little artistic worries. Agit-prop in this sense always had wide left wing political tendencies after 1950s (when it first appeared) and was generally produced by young and idealistic people, but the crafting of plays and institutional continuity was generally not achieved. There are very few groups (such as Ankara Art Theater or Dostlar Theater) in the more academically Brechtian wing of agit-prop which consider crafting and artistic side of plays also, but it can be said that they are canonized in their own way of theater making which can no longer be considered as experimental. Dot was not the first group to walk away from this dualism (there is the 90s avant-garde) but it had been a significant one in gathering media attention and inspiring the second generation.

Still it is important to see that Dot did not continue its theatrical journey as a continues progress story or even on the same line. Within a decade of Dot's works three periods can be seen. First episode is from 2005 to 2006 where Dot's crew is strongly in collaborative work with 90s underground avant-garde. The texts are contemporary British texts and there is a tendency towards in-yer-face, the space is

unconventional but in total their works are in line with 90s avant-garde and their audience is limited to a minority of theatrical circles shaped in years by the works of this avant-garde. Second period comes after late 2006 to early 2012 the group builds its own language, their organic and productive bonds with 90s figures erode and group builds a new young and dynamic crew of themselves. This is also the core episode of in-yer-face which happens to be in Mısır Apartment in Beyoğlu. After 2012<sup>95</sup> the third episode starts with moving on from in-yer-face and adapting physical theater with new variants from post-dramatic (Golden Dragon) to algorithmic interactive (Fight Night), but the major theatrical paradigm shifts into physical theater. Through the passage of second episode to third episode, while passing to physical theater from in-yer-face the text started to spill in time and place and the hyperrealism was abandoned. Through this change Dot moved out of Mısır Apartment, the fringe flat of the unique first wave's hyperrealism, and moved to G-Mall, into a completely amnesiac place<sup>96</sup>. Dot's relations with space and place is analyzed more deeply in following sections.

There are four themes in this chapter which leads my narrative of Dot. The newness of Dot is questioned and at times it feels to be approved it is not because of

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<sup>95</sup> In-yer-face was being adopted by Second Generation by then. Even in comedy series of Gülse Birsnel, named *Yalan Dünya* ("Lying World" – a saying in Turkish) which narrates the conflicts of traditional culture and Cihangir culture (a neighbourhood full with artists near Taksim) there had been a joke about it. An episode in 2012, the stereotype of the "leading man actor" character says that "in-yer-face gives him such energy!". This is the extent of mediaticness of in-yer-face at this point.

<sup>96</sup> A disoriented place is a place a person cannot locate his or her body in the space, which gives a feeling of being completely lost and sometimes can cause dizziness. Absolute symmetries, gigantic highways which externalize any bodily experiences such as walking, mass housings, shopping centers which are torn out of the understanding of time shaped in humans for centuries by the sun, peripheries of the city (industrial locations or urban sprawls shaped next to freeways) are a few examples. In historical cities like Istanbul there is deeper variant of disorientation and the experience of disoriented place though, which are amnesiac places. They are the places which had a memory once, but it is dig out with a few waves of ready-made urban transformation acts.

Disoriented places and amnesiac places are gaps in an image analysis map (this analysis technique will be explained later through the text). I can advice a curious reader to take a look at Attilio Petruccioli's "After Amnesia: Learning from the Islamic Mediterranean Urban Fabric" to get a sense of what memory loss means in urban scales.

Dot's own crew's self-narratives but more about the consent given to their work by the second generation by keeping a safety distance but generally following their lead. Their trendsetter identity is shaped by the consent of second generation also, though this is a commercial identity because it is build on importation. Since importation is the main gesture of Dot, translation has been a very central issue for all Dot's productions. It doesn't transfer a context but rather just the text which makes the transferred in-yer-face texts not so in-yer-face any more because the content is not related to the context any more. The audience of Turkey does not get confronted by British in-yer-face texts since the texts are not socially engaged to the history of this society and geography. Other than my analysis here there is only one article on the importation of in-yer-face in Turkey which is Eren Buğlalılar's article named: "In-Yer-Face: A Historical and Theoretical Investigation" (2008). Along with many important arguments of the article it also questions the basic fact that the theory of in-yer-face came to Turkey *after* its practice (Sierz's book was translated in 2009). This is a good example on the extend of importation without context.

Getting back to the beginning of the story in 2005, the most important point to see what Dot revolted against in institutional and commercial theater of Turkey.<sup>97</sup>Theater was stuck within this dead end dualism since at least half a century

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<sup>97</sup> Through the text when I note the "break of Dot" it should not be forgotten that this break not only depends on the new trends Dot imported or the perfectionism in their works, it was also because of their great publicity and international relations. Dot's audience is more class-based especially when compared to second generation and their "popularization" does not actually mean genuine numbers of audience or wide human relations based on local networks. It is more of media-based popularity, mediaticness.

In the beginning of 2000s most of the columnists had a common discourse of declaring that "theater is dead", this trend had its peak in 2002 when Perihan Mağden (a novelist who had a column in Radical newspaper) wrote an article named "Tiyatrofobia" (Theaterphobia) (Mağden, 2002). But until the start of 2010s many columnists in most published newspapers such as Hürriyet (who wrote in wide ranges of topics from elegant clothing to best vacation places or about politics) had a tendency of declaring Dot as the "savior". It is interesting that these columnists (for example: Baştürk, 2010 and Hakan, 2013) don't refer to any other plays of any group. This shows that Dot not only became a successful theater, its productions also became an entertainment event for upper night life.

PS: None of these cited columnists are theater critics.

in Turkey. 90s deep underground avant-gardism had been the first attempt to walk away from this quite classic state of theater making but none of the groups or individuals referred in 90s has been widely recognized by media. They hardly were popularized among the theater audiences even in Istanbul or widely recognized for their holistic theater approach. Dot was founded by Murat Daltaban and Özlem Daltaban in 2005, following Murat Daltaban's leaving of Istanbul Municipality Theaters. Since 2005, and especially after 2007 production of *Mercury Fur*, Dot group became popular among young and upper-middle class theater audiences in Istanbul and to this day they continuously gather remarkable attention from media.

The 90s avant-gardism in theater set, a background for the upcoming break of mid-2000s but the credit of the major break goes to Dot group. Dot made a break in the theater field of Turkey due to its publicity policies, contacts with international artist networks, their technical perfection and its significant differentiation from the well known theater making leitmotifs of theater institutions in Turkey.

In the first seasons of Dot, the theater making practices had strong continuity with important figures of 90s avant-garde such as, Naz Erayda (Kumpanya), Mustafa Avkıran (5. Sokak Tiyatrosu), Övül Avkıran (5. Sokak Tiyatrosu) and Emre Koyuncuoğlu (Yeşil Üzümler) directed plays of Dot, and Derya Alabora (5. Sokak Tiyatrosu), Uğur Polat (Unit Theater experience in State Theaters) and Cüneyt Türel<sup>98</sup> acted in the first season plays. Dot also had connections with the first impressive period of Garajİstanbul in between mid2000s to late 2000s which was a continuous variation of 5. Street Theater. But after its first years, Dot started a shift

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<sup>98</sup>Cüneyt Türel's name is given to Maya Stage also, he is known to be more a more alternative figure in Istanbul Municipality Theaters.

within itself in favor of young actors starting with the 2006 production of *Bug*, but especially reaching a climax in 2007 with *Mercury Fur*.<sup>99</sup>

The productions of Dot group started to center on younger generation due to the first successful trials of staging translated plays of new generation British playwrights. First gradually then significantly Dot group started to incline towards text-based British plays, and especially importation of in-yer-face theater which was the first signals of leaving 90s underground avant-garde of Turkey, which was based on Peter Brook, Barba and Grotowski's theater-making practices (all based on acting and space usage but not exactly focused on the content of plays). Importing in-yer-face theater to Turkey was a violent attempt to change the content. Being "absolutely terrified" or "leaving the theater with shaking hands" has never been an emotional reaction of audiences in Turkey since the beginning of its history, therefore an attempt to push the content into its taboo limits was a very risky move. Dot deserves a historical credit in its attempts to change the content presented on stages of Turkey, which eventually started a chain reaction after mid-2000s.

This chapter will try to reveal a chain reaction which continued to second wave and now leading to a third wave. Most in-yer-face texts are significantly written for fringe stages, which are stages that are not built in purpose of becoming a stage; like basements, garages, second floors and so on. This change in location, and the text being strongly related to the location creates a crooked but effective

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<sup>99</sup> Plot of the play: "Set in London in the not-too-distant future, the drama immerses us in a society where law and order have broken down. Gangs run amok in supermarkets and the British Museum has been looted and burned to the ground. An invasion of hallucinogenic butterflies, scattered over the city by some enemy power and devoured by the embattled populace, has robbed most people of their memories. Narrated from a crumbling flat in the East End of London, the story revolves around two brothers, Elliot [...] and Darren [...], who are both doing what they can to survive. With the help of the ruthless Spinx [...], they throw parties for the super-rich, as vile and gruesome as required. In this case, to satiate a creepy banker [...], they offer up a 10-year-old boy – known as the "party piece" – on whom the client gets to carry out an act of sadism involving a meat-hook and a camcorder. Completing this desperate contingent are Spinx's drag queen "sister" Lola [...], Elliot and Darren's young neighbour, Naz [...], and the enigmatic Duchess [...], who's so detached from reality that she's muddled her own biography with the plot of *The Sound of Music*." (Smith, 2012)

hyperrealism which cannot be managed in an Italian stage with any stage design. Therefore it can be said that in-yer-face texts desires unconventional spaces to come to life. These significant texts created new theater making possibilities by creating new theater making locations. It is important to note that there had been unconventional space usage in theater from amateur room theaters to bar theaters but they were using these spaces only because they didn't have the opportunity of an Italian Stage or like 90s underground avant-garde, the experimental theater field was so internal to theater circles the theater practice based on these spaces reached only a very small minority of total theater audiences. Only after the importation of in-yer-face, these unconventional spaces started to have a meaning of their own, unlike the apologetic, "modest but idealist" usages of non-Italian stages until mid2000s. Later, in second generation artists, these locations started creating texts of their own, which can no longer be classified as adaptations from British texts or labeled as in-yer-face.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>The fringe theater context did not only cover in-yer-face in the UK in the 1990s, but in Turkey in mid2000s, in-yer-face was associated with the fringe theaters only during its emergence years between 2005 and 2010, which caused many misunderstandings among theater critics afterwards. True, the fringe theater concept turned into a movement with the adoption of in-yer-face, but it doesn't mean that all the fringe theaters continued doing in-yer-face until 2013. Today, translated in-yer-face texts performed in fringe theaters are very few and locally written texts inspired by in-yer-face have some major differences than they had in 1990s UK. Nevertheless, many plays presented in fringe theaters are not in-yer-face (from clown plays to erotic puppet shows) but many critics (or blog writers) insists on naming them in-yer-face due to the misunderstanding that fringe theaters equal in-yer-face.

## In-yer-face Theater and Conditions of Its Appearance in Turkey: Superposing the Conservative Neoliberal Experience

Without any doubt, in Turkey, in-yer-face theater started with the efforts of the theater group Dot which was founded in 2005<sup>101</sup>. They rented a flat in Mısır Apartment on Istiklal Avenue which later started a fringe theater tradition on the thoroughfare. In the 2005-2006 season, DOT translated and performed *Frozen*<sup>102</sup>, *Love and Understanding*, *The Censor*, and *Faraway* and a Turkish play written for Dot by Yekta Kopan (with Bülent Erkmén's concept design), *A Play for Two* (this wasn't an in-yer-face play, but an experiment in Turkish Language performed with experimental dramaturgy). Between 2006 and 2008, the group performed *Bug*, *Mercury Fur* and *Blackbird*. In 2009, with the intervention of the Dot group, Aleks Sierz's book was translated to Turkish under the name "Suratina Tiyatro" which was a "labeling and branding" (Sierz, 2008) act for their style. In 2010, the DOT group staged their second play (but first – A Play For Two - was more of a language experiment) written in Turkish named *Malafa* by Hakan Günday.<sup>103</sup> But Dot's choice of the novelist Günday for translating his novel into a play is not very surprising, since Günday has proved himself until 2010s as a writer, and he always chooses difficult topics which conformist readers have trouble reading even though his writing is popular among the younger generation.

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<sup>101</sup>There had been a few previous translations that played in the State Theater, for example from Martin McDonagh (*Beauty Queen of Leenane*, in the 1999-2000 season), but they were staged without horrifying the audience, as in the classical form. Sierz's book "In-yer-face theater" was translated to Turkish in 2009, that's why when Emre Koyuncuoğlu produced Sarah Kane's (one of the most important writers of in-yer-face in Sierz's classification) "Crave" and "Psychosis 4.48" under the title "Suffering", in 2002 for Istanbul Theater Festival, it was referred as "Theater of Extremes" based on other sources.

<sup>102</sup> First performed in 1998 and won Theatrical Management Association's Best New Play Award. (Kellaway, June 23, 2002)

<sup>103</sup>*Malafa* cannot be classified as in-yer-face directly. Even though there are certain cases where text gets irritating the theme is based on degeneration of human relations and character in extreme capitalist corporations.

The ground-breaking figure in theater criticism who first gave credit to Dot and in-yer-face in Turkey is Robert Schild. Schild wrote his famous article in the Turkish newspaper *Radikal İki* (22 January 2006): “Can our theater be saved by a slap ‘in the face’?” (“*Suratimiza” bir tokat ile tiyatımız kurtulabilir mi?*). Schild was supporting new current because he thought there was potential for in-yer-face to start a revolution in the largely idle theater of Turkey. Schild also states that in-yer-face is the direct opposite of Brecht’s alienation effect, since it generally does not use any symbolism (in most Philip Ridley’s plays for example, the time of the performance and time of the story are the same) and acts directly to move audience emotionally. Schild,<sup>104</sup> is the theater critic who translated the term “in-yer-face theater” into Turkish as “suratina tiyatrosu” which was later used in the translation of Sierz’ book. Schild performed a Belinsky-like role (just as Belinsky’s greeting of Dostoevsky had been a turning point in Russian literature) in the acceptance of in-yer-face movement against the dualistic traditionalist wing of theater in Turkey.

What is in-yer-face then? Starting from the 1990s, under the variations of neoliberal democracy, the arts began using violence more than ever to “wake people up” from the *individual politics of ignoring* the manipulations of daily life. It is assumed that recent social transformations (like massive urban transformations, degenerations of social security and rights, rise of conservatism which lead in many

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<sup>104</sup>Schild engaged in various debates with important theater figures after his article. Even though he doesn’t mention Genco Erkal’s name in any of his writings, he referred to Erkal in the private atmosphere of the “Yeni Seyir Halleri” conference. After his critical writing on contemporary Turkish theater, Erkal (as a Brechtian) mailed him to say that “it is pity if Turkish Theater is going to be saved by a few fringe theaters capable of getting only 60-70 people.” It is interesting to see how Erkal changed his attitude towards fringe theaters later. In 2012, Erkal’s stage, Muammer Karaca Tiyatrosu, was closed by the Beyoglu Municipality. In May 2013 he transformed Ali Pasa Hanı in Eminönü into a fringe theater which is quite unconventional within the traditionalist theater paradigm of Turkey. Later, in October 2013, a well-known fringe theater from second generation, İkincikat, opened a new stage in Karaköy and invited many theater companies to perform on the new stage for support. The play which opened the stage was *İnsanlarım* by Genco Erkal. Erkal’s transformation can be seen in the old generation of theater people today; they’ll join in once they’re sure this new movement does not aim to exclude them.

ways to ethnic violence, sexual violence and so on) lead to certain modes of expression in the arts. The novel for example, is a genre which rose with the individualism brought modernism in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Can in-yer-face theater be related with the emergence of culturally conservative neoliberalization then? To see the extent of overlap with neoliberal post modernism and violence, related expressions should be examined carefully to understand in-yer-face. After mid2000s in-yer-face was accepted by significant number of young urban audiences (especially university students) in Istanbul because these translated texts spoke their anger also. That's why in-yer-face didn't become a short term trend or a within-the-field experiment but it turned into a wave, even a movement. In-yer-face presented a tune for the younger generation to voice their anger against the common experience of neoliberal conservatism after mid 2000s.

Political discourses tended to become more intolerant with the cultural conservatism in both 1980s and 1990s Britain and post-2002 Turkey, pushing the limits of representative, majoritarian democracy. According to Martin O'Shaughnessy, "One of the major appeals of Thatcherism was its attempt to abolish complexity and uncertainty by suggesting that the future could be lived through the past and that values were simply right or wrong" (O'Shaughnessy, 1996). Even though this is not exactly the same as the discourse of Erdogan, a strong parallel can be established. Erdogan uses the populist image of the ordinary, poorly-educated and pious person with which the majority can identify, and Thatcher can be seen to have laid claim to "ordinariness" to maintain her "populist appeal" (O'Shaughnessy, 1996). In Turkey in the 2000s and early 2010s, Erdogan's discourse enabled him to solve all the problems he faced politically by referring to cases like 28 February 1997 military interference against Islamic conservatism through which he deeply victimizes

himself, the *türban* (headscarf) issue which he victimizes *all* women wearing headscarf and mold them into an amorphous one piece sociological element, or simply by referring anything related to women's bodies, from abortion to clothes. He continuously refers to himself as the only representative of *everyone* (Kurds, Alevis, environmentalists, and so on) excluding only a majority of leftists from LGBTIs, anarchists, feminists, trades unionists as well as secularists.

In the 1980s, Britain went through the neoliberalization policies of Thatcherism and its cultural policies. Rabey describes it as follows: “Theater was—like everything else under Thatcherism—widely held to be answerable and justifiable on financial terms alone, and alternative ideals for art were considered increasingly indefensible or irrelevant in a climate of populist philistinism” (Rabey, 2003, 169). The cultural policies of the era defined the *wanted arts* by giving them financial encouragement, and socially ignored people and their problems were pushed aside by mainstream cultural industries. This is a similar attitude of the AKP government today.<sup>105</sup>

The most important similarity between 1980s Britain and post-2002 Turkey, though, is that the loss of economic and social security of many people under both regimes was masked by a discourse of the religious/cultural unitedness of the nation. In Thatcher's rhetoric, there was “no alternative” to an emphasis on traditional “family values” like heterosexuality and fidelity. Grants were not given to artists who

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<sup>105</sup>In 2012, Mustafa Isen, “Cumhurbaşkanlığı Genel Sekreteri” (Presidential General Secretariat) declared that conservative aesthetic and art norms should be formed and around the same time the discussions on closing the state theaters (which can be seen as a thread for municipality theaters in future also) started. In 2013 after open support of the Gezi Park protests by many of the private theaters, such as SermolaPerformans, Kumbaracı50, Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu and Dostlar Tiyatrosu, their financial support was cut back. Likewise, an actor from Emek Sahnesi, Baris Atay has been arrested (22 November 2013) for his support of the protests and he was held under custody for a week. During the Occupy Gezi Park movement, Erdogan personally targeted the director of MiMinör play, blaming Mehmet Ali Alabora for triggering the resistance with his play. And these are only those cases which have appeared in the newspapers. Just as in 1990s Britain, popular philistinism has grown into a tsunami in post-2002 Turkey because of mainstream political discourse.

created work about anything middle or upper-middle class conservative British people didn't want to see.

Contrary to the previous generation, though, the anger against the system could not be focused on one person or one institution; in the post-modern age, all the source of pressure is fragmented even though the pressure still exists. The rebellion against this kind of pressure found a voice in the arts by depicting free-floating violence<sup>106</sup>. Under the light of this perspective, such free-floating violence can be seen as an answer to the free-floating, unfocused pressure of the neoliberal era. In the 1990s, the leitmotifs of free-floating violence can be found in underground literature (with the cult figure Chuck Palahniuk's novel "Fight Club" published in 1996 and made into a movie in 1999), in cinema (with Haneke's *Benny's Video*, in 1992 or *Funny Games*, in 1997), and in punk culture which in some variants including sadism and masochism. In theater, and especially in the UK, the desire to rebel against the unfocused but continuous pressures of the neoliberal era led to the creation of in-yer-face theater. At a deeper level, the intellectual circumstances of the appearance of in-yer-face were liberal identity politics struggling with traditional left-wing authorities and the rise of cultural conservatism at the same time as political correctness was becoming "manners". At the same time, with the rise of conservative neoliberalism, quotidian life became more violent both economically and existentially, as violence against women and LGBTI individuals increased due to the stress placed on masculinity in common political discourse. Sierz insistently describes the circumstances of the appearance of in-yer-face as "masculinity in crisis" (Sierz, 2001) which appears as violence against "femininity" in daily life.

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<sup>106</sup>The term "free-floating violence" is first used by Aysun Kiran in the context of Turkey. She defines the term as "...the nature of free-floating violence is characterized as being apolitical, reactive, arbitrary and unpredictable. Its definition goes beyond the boundaries of such types of violence as honor killing, family violence or violence against women." (Kiran, 2009) But in this piece I'll use the term more widely and more as a first-world phenomenon.

In a hegemonic conservative cultural atmosphere like this, in-*yer*-face theater started as an underground movement without any manifestos or organized system. The name itself indicates close but different things in English and Turkish: In-*yer*-face means “being forced to see something you would like to ignore in a very close condition where your personal space is occupied” (Sierz, 2001), and it is translated into Turkish including a connotation of being slapped especially after Schild’s article. Secondly it is important that it is not “in-*your*-face” but “in-*yer*-face” which clarifies which economic class and status group this theater belongs to. The trend started in fringe theaters and mostly in Scotland or Ireland; places mainstream English culture would like to ignore. A “fringe” theater suggests a theater made mostly by the personal efforts of a group, somewhere not originally built to be a theater. In-*yer*-face is a mostly text-based change in theater, in direct relation with a change in the performance area.

What is the content of in-*yer*-face theater? Sierz’s canonized description is lengthy but since he “labeled and branded<sup>107</sup>” (Sierz, 2008) it first, it should be indicated:

The widest definition of in-*yer*-face theater is any drama that takes the audience by scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theater of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs shock tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bolder or more experimental than what audiences are used to. Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating

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<sup>107</sup> Aleks Sierz describes the movement of in-*yer*-face in the UK in the 1990s in his book “In-Yer-Face Theater”, published in 2001. It is important to note that this name was not chosen by the artists who contributed to the 1990s movement, but given by a researcher. In fact, some of the artists whose works are classified as in-*yer*-face don’t define themselves as in-*yer*-face playwrights. Sierz later described his work as follows: “My book [...] responded to this need for contemporary stories by offering a narrative about new writing for British theater in the 1990s. Creating a narrative is, of course, a political act, and its first step is an act of labeling, or branding.” (Sierz, 2008)

discomfort. Crucially, it tells us more about who we are. Unlike the type of theater that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-*yer-face* theater takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative. (Aleks Sierz, 2001, 4)

The content of the texts become significantly more pornographic and violent, while deconstruction of the form of the text is not especially foregrounded most of the time or held by women<sup>108</sup> in-*yer-face* playwrights mostly.<sup>109</sup>

Sierz seems to describe the works of this generation, not in the same terms as the manifest movement of the early twentieth century, but as a network, nearly an underground gang<sup>110</sup> who work together without a hierarchy. Though it can be said that in-*yer-face* always had connections with other avant-garde playwrighting movements of the late twentieth century.

Although the upsurge of in-*yer-face* theater in Britain had many antecedents, especially in the alternative theater of the 1960s, it only took off as a new and shocking sensibility in the decade of 1990s. Just as the origins of provocative and confrontational<sup>111</sup> theater can be found in the theories of Alfred Jarry and Antonin Artaud, at the start of the

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<sup>108</sup> “[...] Phyllis Nagy pointed out that women writers were often more experimental than men – and tackled subjects with more emotional depth.” (Sierz, 2001, 242)

“The challenge of questioning form was taken up most enthusiastically and radically by women, often inspired by the example of Caryl Churchill. Nagy, Wallace and Kane have used shifting timescales and open-ended structures to question our ideas of reality and to subvert received notions of what a play should be.” (Sierz, 2001, 245)

<sup>109</sup> Ground shifting figures of 90s avant-garde had been women in Turkey too: Emre Koyuncuoğlu, Naz Erayda, Şahika Tekand, Müge Gürman, later Zeynep Tanbay... This might not be a coincidence but a common feeling in women artists that the form (or the structure) should be questioned too, since all the settled norms are masculine.

<sup>110</sup> This gang terminology is important because Aleks Sierz creates a narrative for defining the network system of 90s fringe theater artists and Dot group insists on using the same term “gang” when defining themselves informally. Erdoğan Mintani, a very qualified theater critic (which is a very rare thing to find in Turkey) who writes in *Şalom*, notes this terminology “gang of Dot” through his many articles. (Mintani, April 10, 2013 and Mintani, *Şalom*, 2012)

<sup>111</sup> In-*yer-face* comes in tandem with this line of confrontation. The subconscious mind of society and the personal politics of forgetting and ignoring, a central theme of in-*yer-face* plays, are best raised in Kane’s *Blasted*. Kane’s play has been defined as an “eventually logical merger of themes that are at first glance utterly distinct, gendered violence and civil war, brought about by news footage from the Bosnian conflict.” (Zhurba, 2008, 16) The rape camps of Yugoslavia were a peripheral piece of knowledge for the audience of the 1990s, who were severely shocked by the rape scene in *Blasted*, and Kane knew the same audience was not so shocked by the daily news. Kane played on this phenomenon like most in-*yer-face* writers.

twentieth century, so it was that in 1990s it gradually became the dominant style of much new writing. (Sierz, n.d.)<sup>112</sup>  
In-yer-face period had its peak in the UK right after the “end of history”<sup>113</sup>,

when the Berlin Wall was taken down and neoliberalism rose to unchallenged power, until 1999, when the anti-globalization movement started gaining power after the Seattle protests. The 1990s was thus an era of hopelessness when governmental hegemony found new bases for coalition with markets, but the tools to resist this new hegemony had not yet been shaped.<sup>114</sup>

The common criticisms about in-yer-face theater can be listed under three main arguments. Firstly in-yer-face may desensitize the spectator to violence. It may work like a vaccination against real violence to the point where it becomes impossible for a person to be shocked even in real life and pacifies people.

Political plays, as writer David Greig points out, must contain a suggestion that change is possible. In a sense, they have to inspire audiences. But even ‘the most visceral, popular plays of today,’ argued Michael Billington in 1998, ‘imply that there is little hope of change: in

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<sup>112</sup>Aleks Sierz’s book “In-yer-face theater” did most of the canonization of in-yer-face periodization. I’m following his lead in this summary also.

<sup>113</sup>In-yer-face has an undercurrent history in UK starting from post war period of late 1950s. Summarizing the Angry Young Men (John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter and so on) trend is important to understand where in-yer-face possibly derived from. 8 May 1956 performance of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* had been a turning point. Mainstream media named a group of playwrights and novelists who were critical of socio-politics of the period as Angry Young Men. There is a significant difference between Angry Young Men and in-yer-face movement since a majority of Angry Young Men texts do not have physical violence and aggressiveness or anger appear in an absurd context. For example, the main character of *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy, is excessively angry and it is unjustified but there are subplots hinting the reasons of his anger like the unbreakable neutrality of his wife. These annoying-on-purpose texts continued until 90s with what seems like personal choice of some writers (like Harold Pinter) instead of a general trend.

<sup>114</sup>In the Appendix B there is a time line to show what 90s generation in UK (and worldwide) experienced or which kind of world they were born into for understanding their artistic response. This time line (following Madrasa’s visuals in the Appendix B) refers to some important events within the UK, Turkey, and the wider world possibly shaping in-yer-face. In-yer-face texts from 90s UK reveal subconscious of society *forcefully*, like Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* in which the raping scene became scabdalacious but it was actually referring to rape camps in Bosnia. Turkey’s subconscious past is also referred to in the table, because my hypothesis is that the in-yer-face movement was widely accepted by the new generation of artists in Turkey in the 2000s because it can be an expression of historical events which caused many personal tragedies or social discomforts. Thus, the table gives a sense of the political aspect of in-yer-face in 2000s Turkey. The density of the dotted lines for each trend shows their continuity and climax periods according to main history writing canons.

Patrick Marber's *Closer* the characters end up acknowledging their inviolable solitude, in Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* the "money is civilization" ethos murkily prevails, in Phyllis Nagy's *Never Land* the hero is quite clearly the victim of fate.' In Britain, Billington concluded, 'We are living in an aggressively post-ideological age.' (Sierz, 2001, 240)

Secondly, stylish, Tarantino-like violence (choreographed, visualized with effects, and where pain is generally not shown) doesn't offend anyone and helps violence to be seen as an aesthetic tool. "Lack of heart is the central criticism of in-yer-face theater." (Sierz, 2001, 242) Also, stylish violence doesn't show the *source* of the violence, it just gives the "inevitable" result. And lastly, on the more Brechtian wing (which is closer to the traditional left), a common criticism is that when a play becomes "way too real" it ironically weakens the backbone of the idea of theater. Theater is an *imitation*, it is not real,<sup>115</sup> and therefore it allows the possibility of examination and experimentation on reality.

A possible answer is given by Sierz to these points, even though his answer doesn't cover every aspect of these arguments. According to him, the politics of in-yer-face can be summarized as the change from the collective left-wing resistance of 70s and 80s to a *personal* resistance enrooted in the belief that every individual soul is a revolutionary place. That is why 90s in-yer-face theater generally doesn't show an outside source of violence since the *evil* is in every person. This theme appears with the distrust to metanarratives because of the zeitgeist of the period, which can be summarized as "end of history".

Near the climax of Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, the character Robbie makes a speech that's designed to appeal to anyone in the audience who suffers from an 'incredulity toward metanarratives', that malady common to our so-called postmodern condition. 'I think',

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<sup>115</sup>Marianna Abramovic says the difference between performance art and theater is that the theater will use ketchup instead of blood and in performance art there will be real blood since the artist had cut herself. (Matthew Akers, Jeff Dupre, *Mariana Abramovic: The Artist is Present*, 2012 documentary)

says Robbie, ‘we all need stories, we make up stories so that we can get by. And I think a long time ago there were big stories. Stories so big you could live your whole life in them. The Powerful Hands of the Gods and Fate. The Journey to Enlightenment. The March of Socialism. But they all died or the world grew up or grew senile or forgot them, so now we’re all making up our own stories. Little stories.’ (Sierz, 2008)

The “end of history” theme is very strong here, yet the deep individualism it leads to almost inevitably leads to depression. The individualism and suffering from loneliness are actually just another face of lack of public sphere. 90s in-er-face move can be seen as an action taking motive to build a public sphere –even though it doesn’t seem so in the first look – for theater artists and spectators by firstly changing the conventional theater space and secondly by not letting what actually are sociological disorders to be seen as psychological disorders. They bring up the stories of marginalized, the “little stories” of the neoliberal era.

It is important to note that in-er-face has been an episode in 90s UK and this generation of writers does not produce these significant kind of plays anymore since the zeitgeist has changed. The local plays produced in Turkey after in-er-face wave were not in-er-face either in the strong sense of the definition, but they were deeply inspired from in-er-face. I’ll examine this change due to time and geography in section below.

## “Staying Cool”: A Retrospective Story of Dot as a Trendsetter

Dot’s theatrical search can be titled as “staying cool”, since to this day Dot has been a main trendsetter in contemporary alternative theater field of Turkey not only because of its technical perfection, but also because of its various theatrical trials<sup>116</sup>. Between 2007 and 2010 Dot canonized itself in in-yer-face plays but then, especially after 2012 their main theatrical narrative started to incline towards physical theater. Dot has imported the ground breaking in-yer-face movement to Turkey and moved on, right after the second generation joined in. This attitude proves that the group is not looking for a canonization within itself but to stay as trendsetter.

The more important reason why Dot insistently “stays cool” is that they produce at least two or three plays in each theater season, they never stage their plays unless the whole crew feels confident about the play, they never stage a play more than one theater season and sometimes plays last only half a theater season. Therefore the plays of Dot always meet the audience in the best possible quality.<sup>117</sup>

Through time though, Dot created an embedded community of artists, strictly selected according to their talents (and skills of foreign language), made an open ended but very dense rehearsal process (6 days a week) and a performing policy of never acting a play even for a full season so each audience member sees the *same*

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<sup>116</sup> After I decided on this title I found an interview dated December 29, 2008 published in Garanti Bank’s Hobby Club page (named “Hobilerimle Mutluyum”, in direct translation “I’m happy with my hobbies”) which is an interview with Murat Daltaban as: “ ‘Cool’ ların sahnesi: Dot”, in direct translation “The Stage of “Cool” People: Dot”. This had been an interesting coincidence through my research process to see that Dot gave a similar sense to many of their spectators. (“Cool’ ların Sahnesi: Dot,” 2008).

<sup>117</sup> The “optimum” version of a play takes place after the long rehearsal period and continues around a year or maximum two years. Then the quality of the play falls since performers start to act “automatically” instead of “playing”. This is a judgement I heard over and over from many theater people.

play, maximized-in-quality. This also made possible to keep their “own” audience (people who come to every production of Dot) through each season.

## Dot and Text Choices: Edinburg Fringe Festival as a Text Pool

In this section I'll briefly give information on Edinburgh Fringe Festival to reveal some paradoxes on Dot's understanding of the festival. Edinburgh International Festival started in 1947, right after World War II where the depression and loss was still very strong and deep in society, to start an artistic awakening in Scotland – with “high and international” culture, which is “not Scottish”<sup>118</sup>. Usually, local works were not included because of the worldwide common belief that “high art” (whatever that is) should be imported. The unexpected happened though, 8 local theater groups<sup>119</sup>, uninvited to festival, showed up in the same time and started an alternative festival: Edinburgh Fringe Festival, or today Edfringe, in short. It was a spontaneous and urban anarchistic act against “high”, “correct” and “conservative” culture which was majorly imported. This artistic anarchism of the beginning did not – or could not – continue to this day though, “The spontaneity and asceticism of the first Fringe Festival has faded, clearly demonstrating that in the last fifty years the Festival has in part turned into the very thing against which the original companies fought.” (Maresh, 2000) After 1958, Festival Fringe Society was formed and festival is deeply capitalized until this day<sup>120</sup> but the central idea, *openness*, was kept to a

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<sup>118</sup>Angela Bartie notes “overall, it was felt that there was a distinct lack of Scottish material, especially in drama” (Bartie, 2013) about the first Edinburgh International Festival in 1947.

<sup>119</sup> I think it is important to give them credit, so here are their names and works:

“They were: the Christine Orr Players (an amateur company from Edinburgh), who presented *Macbeth*; Edinburgh People's Theater, doing Robert Ardrey's *Thunder Rock*; the Edinburgh District of the SCDA, who presented Bridie's *The Anatomist*; Edinburgh College of Art Theater Group, performing August Strindberg's *Easter*; a production of *Everyman* sponsored by the Carnegie Trust; and the Glasgow Unity Theater, who presented Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths* and Robert McLellan's *The Laird o' Torwatletie*.” (Bartie, 2013) It is noted that these groups probably showed up without contacting each other before but later Glasgow Unity played an establishing role in making the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

<sup>120</sup>The average amount a group should pay to attend the the festival is between £5000-£8000. This number includes “venue hire, tech hire, all printers, posters, flyerers, PR” and PR's fee as the agent. (Youngs, 2013)

certain level. It is stressed through the web page of Edinburgh Fringe Festival that “no single individual or committee” has the right to determine who can or cannot bring their work. (Edfringe, 2014) Today, still any theater group from all around the world, which desires to contribute to Edinburgh Fringe Festival, can take part if they can afford the travelling expenses, hire a venue and communicate in English.

The below table gives a holistic sense of how gigantic Edinburgh Fringe Festival is today. The numbers are taken from Edinburgh Fringe Festival’s Annual Reviews from 2010<sup>121</sup> to 2013. “Performances” column gives the number of total performances (including the repetition of each show) for each year which continues to increase every year. Also there are an average of 750 free shows in recent years. The fringe app developed significantly for the festival, which gives locations and navigations of the closest show and makes it possible to buy tickets immediately, is downloaded more than fifty thousand times only in 2012.

Table 1: Edfringe in Numbers

years	Performances	Shows	Venues	Performers	free shows	number of contributing countries	world premieres	downloaded number of fringe app
2009	34,265	2,098	265	18,901	465			
2010	40,254	2,453	259	21,148	558		1,206	22,519
2011	41,689	2,542	258	21,192	607		1,319	45,084
2012	42,096	2,695	279	22,457	814	47	1,418	51,800
2013	45,464	2,871	273	24,107	713	41	1,585	

calculated number

Today Edfringe is by far, the most contributed theater festival of the world and it is deeply integrated to urban landscape of Edinburgh. Edfringe has also taken over Edinburgh International Festival in size and popularity. It is very important to

<sup>121</sup> The data of 2009 is included in 2010’s Annual Review.

understand this overloaded excitement of the fringe festival experience and the depth and size of the festival to see what Dot does with the festival and how, in the terms of this thesis, the group has partly misunderstood this experience of *open and wild contribution* through their process of selecting and adapting.

The understanding of theatrical space in Edfringe is wildly open which definitely affected the Dot crew and their central figure, Murat Daltaban, and starting with Dot, the second generation also. The paradigm of Edfringe makes possible to transform literally any space into stage. In anarchistic terms every single empty area in any kind of architecture or urban landscape can become a TAZ<sup>122</sup> (temporary autonomous zone) stage. “The performance spaces are as ephemeral as the artistic events they house.” (Maresh, 2000) Space improvisations and site-specific works are central to festival.

The Fringe sprawls all over the city and offers an incredible assortment of talented or ambitious (and sometimes both) performing groups at more than 160 venues. The venues sometimes occupy real theater spaces, but most often appear in converted spaces – bars, meeting rooms, churches, discos – anyplace where several can gather for a performance. (Vick, 1989)

Last summer [2009] there were 2453 officially listed Fringe shows in theaters, churches, meeting halls, pubs, restaurants, conference rooms, tents, somebody’s living room, and maybe the back of a taxi. Even this figure does not include all the street musicians, acrobats, magicians, jugglers, comedians, clowns, and actors who are drawn to Edinburgh like bees to flowers. (Hornby, 2010)

Dot uses Edinburgh Fringe Festival as a pool for new ideas and texts, and selects (adapts) the ones which, in connotational terms, can be superposed with the

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<sup>122</sup> The term is created by the poet Hakim Bey in his 1991 dated book : *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*

social problems of contemporary Turkey, or they select the works which are recognized in various Fringe Awards and/or press. The *Blackbird* which Dot staged in 2007 for example had taken wide spread press recognition from its 2006's production in Scotland which was presented in 2006 International Theater Festival, which happens in the same period with Edfringe.

One of the summer's most extraordinary theater events was also its most highly anticipated. The International Festival commissioned Scotland's David Harrower to write *Blackbird*, directed by Germany's legendary Peter Stein. [...] rather, like Mark Ravenhill's far more horrifying but equally humane *Shopping and Fucking*, *Blackbird* grapples with a variety of illicit love that Western society finds unspeakable and incomprehensible. (Sorgenfrei, 2006)

What is an interesting juncture about Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei's review and Dot's text choices is that Sorgenfrei compares *Blackbird* with *Shopping and Fucking*, which Dot also performed in 2009. This coincidence gives an insight of how a playwright can be selected and performed by Dot: by wide Anglophone press recognition.

It is a huge but exclusive opportunity for a company from Turkey to reach out to such a festival and follow it for a decade. Dot using Edfringe as a text pool and making selections according to most award winning or scandalous plays though, made Dot a perfect adapter but the central ground breaking inspiration had been on the second generation of fringe theater artists in Turkey which really saw the element of the relation between local text and the space. I'll come back to the effect of having a bond with local texts and found space in later sections.

Direct contribution to Edfringe should not have been difficult for to an open-to-everyone-festival especially when Dot crew have many people with language

skills, artists could pay the travelling expenses and could have found a venue with their networks if they had an original play, but smartly they didn't take any risk of failure or lacking press appeal and waited till the point where they can join the festival with the "Edinburgh Fringe's most prestigious venue" (Shuttleworth, 2013), with Traverse Theater.<sup>123</sup>

In later years Edfringe continues to give the "qualified and contemporary texts" for the trendsetting Turkish Company. Tuğrul Tülek explains their relations with the festival and new texts as follows:

[...] we meet many new playwrights and new plays in Edinburgh Festival. Sometimes we think how we can do that play, sometimes we don't even consider, like "there is no need"... That is a very important source and it truly enlarges our vision, the festival. I mean it really helps us to understand what is really going on in the world. (T. Tülek, personal communication, February 21, 2014)

In 2012 Theater Uncut project of Traverse Theater (which still continues) got 4 awards<sup>124</sup> and in 2013 the project was given the The Scotsman Fringe Award by the newspaper The Scotsman<sup>125</sup>. In 2013 theater season Dot became a part of the

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<sup>123</sup>In 1998 Sarah Kane's *Crave* has made its premier in Traverse Theater also. Two decades later in year 2008 the Traverse Theater's play *Pornography* by Simons Stephens took place in media as: "Pornography: the most shocking play of the Edinburgh Festival?" (Cavendish, 2008). Traverse Theater insists on new texts which reveals confrontations of social conflicts, but when adapted and brought to Turkey, these texts does not confront the audience.

<sup>124</sup>The Bank of Scotland Herald Angel Award, Jack Tinker Spirit of the Fringe Award, The Scotsman Fringe First Awards, The Spirit of the Fringe Award

<sup>125</sup>Most of Dot's texts are awarded in various mechanisms in UK to encourage new writers but most is directly awarded in Edfringe. *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* was first produced by Traverse Theater in Edinburgh Fringe Festival of 2007 as *Ravenhill for Breakfast*, which got Fringe First award and Jack Tinker Spirit of the Fringe award in the festival. Dot produced the whole collection of short plays plus the radio plays as a yearlong project in 2008. If not awarded in Fringe Festival the texts of Dot are generally awarded by other encouragement mechanisms of new writing. For example Ali Taylor, writer of *Overspill* which Dot produced for 2012-2013 theater season, was awarded for his first play named *Cotton Wool* with 18<sup>th</sup> Meyer Whitworth Award, had been on Time Out's "Critics' Choice" and invited to 2007 Berliner Festspiele. (Mintani, April 10, 2013) In 2010 *Beautiful Burnout* was given Fringe First Award and Dot performed it in 2012. They already knew the writer since their first play *Frozen* had been from the same writer, Byrony Lavery and Lavery even wrote a new scene for *Supernova* for Dot's production.

project by performing short plays written all over the world with the call of Traverse Theater for Theater Uncut project, and by making a play writing workshop for professional writers from England and Turkey to write new plays. The Traverse Theater, being “the most prestigious venue”(Shuttleworth, 2013)of Edfringe, has created the Theater Uncut project which continues annually within Edfringe, with the contribution of many different playwrights from all over the world with short plays for an artistic political response to contemporary world.

The summary of the project is as follows:

We ask playwrights to write brand new short plays in response to the current political situation. These scripts are then made available for anyone to perform anywhere for a limited period to create the annual Theater Uncut mass action event where the plays are performed simultaneously across the world. (Theater Uncut, Our Story)

Dot takes part in this project in 2014. Over the years with perfectly managed international relations the group developed strong relations with the leading groups and playwrights from Edinburgh Fringe Festival which later turned into a productive partnership in Theater Uncut Project in 2013/2014 season.

Dot’s text and staging style choices are closely tied with trends of Fringe festivals where the world theater’s new performative trends can be sensed, though with a significant tendency towards Anglophone performances. Even though Tülek says they are not deeply integrated with British play writing it is a questionable statement: “As I said, we are following new plays, new writers, not only the ones in England, many directors as well from all around the world. We follow their work and where ever the theater is evolving to, essentially we are trying to follow that.” (T. Tülek, personal communication, February 21, 2014) The group claims to be using various texts from other languages too but there is only one play translated from

German (Golden Dragon) and some short plays originally written in other languages presented in Theater Uncut 1 and 2 which were translated from English also since the filter of all this process is the Anglophone Traverse Theater.

The second major dispersion within Dot after the first dispersion of in-yer-face was based on Physical Theater (look at Diagram no 25). This choice was a natural result of physical theater practices seen by the Dot crew in recent years, especially to protect their trendsetting position after second generation joins into in-yer-face movement in Turkey.

Numbers show that Dot might have an access to more than 900 productions only in year 2013 and can filter these texts easily by using the award winning ones.

Table 2: The Text Pool

	approximate number of theater performances due to percentages given	number of Dance +Physical Theater performances due to percentages given	total
2009	587	105	692
2010	711	110	821
2011	763	89	852
2012	755	108	863
2013	824	115	939

It is obvious that the Dot crew does not read or watch all of these materials produced in Edfringe but they have informal policies of inclusion to group to develop more access to the first world texts. They have a selective policy to work with people who a good level of English (which is a very class-based quality in Turkey), who can do translations and who can autonomously read in English (or any other European

language) and bring new text offerings in synopsis forms to Murat Daltaban which serves the covered idea of accessing the text pool.

The thing is that Dot, since the day it was established has been a member of many international theater communities and had a unit within its labor division which many private theaters don't have. Dot has a International Relations representative. [...] Because we, as an institution, don't think that any of our plays belong to this land, we think all of them are very universal, I mean if you take any of Dot's plays to a completely different country we believe it will find its response, that's why we never desired our works to be limited to Turkey. (M. Öner, personal communication, February 28, 2014)

Actually, Dot's considering their mutual work with Traverse Theater as major accomplishment is a paradox because two theater companies have deep contrast in their artistic priorities. The Traverse Theater was established in 1963 and according to their website they define themselves as "new writing theater". Just like the basic paradigm of Edfringe, Traverse Theater tries to form an open platform in text production, any playwright from UK can send them their plays and if they find it qualified they can stage the play. On the other hand Dot has created an exclusive theater club for artists and audience members in years instead of any kind of openness. The playwrights Murat Daltaban picked for Uncut Istanbul are all professional writers; (Ayfer Tunç – novelist, Berkun Oya – playwright, Hakan Günday – novelist, Deren Çıray – screenplay writer) which again didn't create a possible openness for new playwrights.

To this day we didn't stage any local texts except Malafa and there is only A Play For Two which Bülent Erkmen wrote<sup>126</sup>. Generally we stage foreign texts. Meaning *text-based* texts. [...] We read a lot of plays. How lucky we are that we have many people who know good English in our group. We are quite into internet. We are following the foreign works, we are following the new works of the playwrights we know, if we have the chance we order and read them. Then we take notes on our

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<sup>126</sup>Bülent Erkmen actually only made the concept design of the play. The 2006 version of the play is written by Yekta Kopan and 2012 version of the play is written by Aslı Mertan and Bülent Erkmen. Mert Öner was trying to inform me as fast as possible because of situational reasons through the interview and he makes a small mistake.

readings, like a little summary... Then we share it with Murat, if there is a work that we are truly interested, if the text makes us believe that this is what theater wants to say to this day or if it impresses us with its style we immediately start to translate it. Translation – there are so many translated texts that are not staged in our hand. (M. Öner, personal communication, February 28, 2014 – words in italic are in English in the original interview also)

Dot has an obsession with artistic perfection which actually creates a closed institution, unlike the central inspiration of Edfringe or Theater Uncut Project of Traverse Theater. This obsession of the company can be sensed in one of Murat Daltaban's interviews on Uncut Istanbul where he states that "The actors of the change are always charismatic, you can't see them peeing" (Koç, 2013). Even though this statement includes a joke, it has a connotation of a deep perfectionism.

The perfectionist discourse of Dot<sup>127</sup> and the plays they act which are about deep, shamefully intimate and commonly neglected human conditions cause dilemma between texts Dot prefer to perform and the physical place (including the urban context of the place) they perform these texts. After they moved from Mısır Apartment on Istikal Avenue their new permanent stage is in Maçka G-Mall which is a shopping mall not accessible for pedestrians and has no direct public transportation, plus their ticket price policies<sup>128</sup> (highest ticket prices among all private theaters); has a reflection of exclusiveness and high taste as a mind set. This dilemma deeply appeared in one of the short plays of Theater Uncut 1 which is David Craig's *Fragile*. The main character Jack is victimized by the society which now took away

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<sup>127</sup>"People who do not pee" is a good example for how abstract everything looks when the level is an ultimate perfection. When the material is theater though, the cult of charismatic leader or the charismatic artist appears as a pacifying bully in abstract terms, just as the metaphor of Olympic athletes in Mark Ravenhill's short play "The Village", which Dot has staged under the combination of Theater Uncut 2 –along with other two short plays- in 2013/2014 theater season. In this very play the lazy police officer believes that athletes should be half-gods since they can *run* and he believes more than ever that he cannot, while physiologically he can. This is how audience feels when faced with "the actors of change who don't pee" or charismatic leaders or perfect stagings, deeply pacified instead of moved.

<sup>128</sup> Though, it should be noted that they rejected state funding in 2013/2014 theater season.

all his will of living when the therapy center for addictions which he goes every week is going to be turned into a shopping mall and the center will be carried to a vast distance he cannot reach (walk) with his ill leg. The paradox comes here: the audience (which are expected to take part in rescue of Jack with the most unconventional and smart staging trick<sup>129</sup>) watches this play in a shopping mall which they can't walk or access with public transportation. Tülek, who acted Jack very successfully in 2013/2014 season, has a very orthodox answer which can be recognized from State and Municipality theaters discourses about being universal when faced with this paradox:

D: Like the stories are told from lowest classes or the extremely marginalized but these stories are played in lux place after giving a good amount of ticket price. How do you interpret this contradiction?

T: I don't see this as a contradiction. Since I don't see this as a contradiction... We don't tell stories that belong to a class. We care about the universality of the stories we select. Wherever the characters in the plays belong to, lower classes or upper classes... White collar or not... *Homeless* or not. What we really care about is that the story is the story we want to tell. (T. Tülek, personal communication, February 21, 2014 – words in italic are in English in the original interview also)

Through these years Dot created a unique informal position in play-making process. Translation, being a key element of their whole production process and the insistent lack of common ground relation with local playwrights resulted with a Translator-Director position. Translator here becomes also the adaptor which localizes some word jokes or language tricks. Becoming director in any theater group gives a natural authority to the person as I've seen through my study but the case in Dot is a significant variant. This is a different kind of closure in theater making

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<sup>129</sup> The audience members read the psychologist Caroline's words from slides and the actor –Tuğrul Tülek in Dot's staging – is alone on stage. We – as the audience- try to calm and stop the suicidal Jack by trying to convince him that we will protect him, we will fight with him against the disneylandification (in terms of Mike Davis) and capitalization of the world which destroys all spaces he can survive.

process which gives hierarchy to not the “most creative” member of the group (who can write, direct and act let’s say) but to the most language skilled member of the group which, again has to be reminded that, is a very class-based skill in Turkey.

To sum up, beyond Dot’s incredible success and the new horizons they brought to theater field of Turkey, they have misunderstood or preferred not to apply the most inspiring aspects of their original source of their inspiration which is Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The concept of Fringe and the contemporary British playwriting process is deeply integrated with urban life and the physical being of the fringe stages they produce for. TAZ space usage and found spaces are paradigmatic for Edfringe but Dot can never have the spontaneity of imperfection to use true found spaces. TAZ space usage and found space usage creates a form of site-specific performance even for more conventional texts.

While using Edfringe as a quality check mechanism, Dot didn’t contribute or share their artistic experience with the Second Generation’s first festival, AltFest’13<sup>130</sup> (2013) which went through quite a similar process like the “8 legendary spontaneous groups” of 1947 of first Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Lastly their insistent lack of support on local writers had been a central institutional theme in Dot’s existence and they never created an openness for any artistic opportunity for younger generation except actors.

I argue that this created a general distorted understanding of the real problems in theater field of Turkey among the Dot crew. Dot created a conservatism of its own about local texts (which is interestingly very similar to the long term attitude of State

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<sup>130</sup> I’ll refer to this main festival of 2013 in 4th chapter again. In 2014, as a smaller alternative theater festival was organized in Gümüşük Academy between 1st to 8th of August by Kumbaracı50, SahneHal, MekanArtı and KaraKutu’s contribution. The small festival consisted of four productions of these stages. The small festival’s aim was to support Gümüşlük Academy. (“Alternatif Sahneler Festivali,” 2014)

and Municipality Theaters<sup>131</sup>) and missed the point that the texts they adapt and find strong<sup>132</sup> have actually been written by similar artistic non-conformist (anarchistic even) urban environments of UK. It is a blind spot of Dot, they don't see that UK doesn't actually have *more* skilled writers compared to Turkey in number, but rather, they have the platforms these writers can be heard. They have simultaneous and prestigious awarding mechanisms to encourage young writers, they have prestigious or fringe theater groups open and accepting towards new texts, and more importantly they have academic figures (like Sierz) in intellectual field who defends these new writers against conservative theater tradition and populist massacre of media. This blind spot is built by missing or ignoring the process behind the creation of these texts (the urban contemporary life in significant metropolitan cities, personal experiences, real life troubles) and the prestige-gaining-mechanisms of these texts. Dot's conservatism<sup>133</sup> about local texts and their usage of worldwide quality check

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<sup>131</sup>After 2000's though, State and Municipality Theaters had made stronger internal policies to support local writers.

<sup>132</sup>At first there was a strong tendency towards English playwrights in Dot's plays. But it is a fact that English playwrights write new texts quite satisfyingly. Very strong texts make strong plays, therefore naturally we prefer the texts of these playwrights. (T. Tülek, personal communication, February 21, 2014)

<sup>133</sup>This conservatism about local texts (also I got a sense that the group does not strongly follow the local plays and texts either, especially compared to how they follow British texts) concluded in a hypometry which restrains them from seeing the actual problem of 2010's theater field in Turkey. The two quotes, first from Tuğrul Tülek's interview, a long term actor, director and translator from Dot and second from Firuze Engin, a playwright and actor from second generation who works in a collective theater group named Bereze reveals the decade long conservatism of Dot crew which ended in hypometry.

In many of the private theaters we see that they are trying to write their texts and play them but unfortunately these plays are not very strong in textual sense but it is a good thing that there are trials. [...] Therefore I think our most important deficiency is that we cannot produce our own texts. (T. Tülek, personal communication, February 21, 2014)

Like everyone was shouting out "There is a lack of playwrights in theater of Turkey" so on... - Now there is not a problem of playwrights, there is way too many playwrights, but now we see a very serious direction problem, the problem of director. For example, in my sense, this is a bursting problem in alternative theater especially [...] (F. Engin, personal communication, July 20, 2013)

mechanisms such as Edinburgh Fringe Festival makes the works of the group no more than perfect adaptations of contemporary first world texts.

Dot, in a very paradoxical way, has been a group importing “high art from high west<sup>134</sup>” where originally these plays, shaped in the rebellious peripheries of the “high art and high west”. Appearing as a continuity of the same paradox, the long story of the evolution of the concept of fringe has always been about the anarchistic revival of the low culture of the local, which Dot insistently misses.

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The Dot group tended to overcome this conservatism in Theater Uncut Istanbul project but this time the invited writers were not new playwrights but well-known Turkish writers.

<sup>134</sup> In the criticisms of Punk Rock for example, it is stressed that the performers “don’t look Turkish at all” which appears to be a good thing.

“As one of my friend states “**they don’t seem Turkish at all**”. Normally I **hate** this phrase. But I can approve it for the first time. In short, you should definitely watch this play.” (Baştürk, 2010 – bold phrases are from original text)

Dot and In-Yer-Face, and a Common Audience Reaction:  
“How can you do this to me?!”

The importation of in-yer-face, especially the break of 2007 production of *Mercury Fur* was a brand new shock for all the critics and spectators. It was extremely dissimilar to all the theater experience of the past and considering that watching culture in Turkey has a deep tendency to stage characters so the effect of in-yer-face, even though the stories were alienating, was incredible. It should be noted that Dot's stylizing, understanding of perfection and aesthetical quality made possible such a break since no one can belittle or push away the effect of plays.

It is true that if it weren't for Dot this break wouldn't have been possible. They presented these texts probably more qualified than the first original productions in 90s UK, since they were not a group of young urban anarchists who dig with their nails to put up a work. On the other hand they were not into conformism of common institutional theater paradigms (like Italian stage, big acting based on voice and so on...) and they truly wanted to do good plays, for the sake of the play itself. It wasn't only an importation that made possible such a break, it was the perfectionism and quality and the incredibly successful publicity of Dot. It became a break because it had been the inspiration point of the second generation. Dot's importation of in-yer-face and the blackbox stage is not a break in itself, it became groundshifting only when the second generation took these ideas and created the autonomy to make their own plays, plays of Turkey.

There are many good stories about this first moment of break. One is very significant which Murat Daltaban recalls in preface which he wrote for the Turkish publication of Aleks Sierz's book.

There are so many stories piled up actually... But the most direct example is the one we lived in *Mercury Fur* I think. The angriest person of the group leaving right in the middle of the play said some remarkable things; his hand and voice was shaky because of the tension of the play, his eyes were wide open with anger and he continuously said: “How can you have the right to ruin my Friday night? We were going to have fun through this night with my friends. But look at me now...” (Sierz, 10, 2009 - Murat Daltaban’s preface)

Then there is the same story from Veda Yurtsever İpek’s version: Of course we knew it would make a gigantic break. We were ready for this also: half of the audience would leave. Half of the audience would leave... Then the play started being seen, very few people left the play. Very few people left and we were used to very few people leaving and one day we were acting with the feeling that “not many people leave anyways” and the audience left... The room was nearly emptied. The saloon was already taking a maximum of 50-60 people, we were playing full every night, 25 people one-after-the-other... it didn’t finish... I mean one person leaves, two people leaves, you would hear then, they leave – the door didn’t close. The chattering noise outside: Dadadadadada... Actually these were grandmas, -but really grandmas- who had a program like “let’s go to Dot tonight, there is a play there, everyone is talking about it, Mercury Fur, lets watch it and later we would go to fasıl<sup>135</sup>”. When they went out they were like “How can you have the right to do this to us, look at my hands, look how they are shaking, I was going to go to the program, how am I supposed to do it now” and so on... That is a little bit of audience members’ responsibility of course, a person should know what kind of play s/he will see. Should know what s/he is going to. But it was a surprise back then, in-yer-face was not known by then – (V.Y. İpek, personal communication, December 13, 2013)

The critical part of this anecdote is the outrage of the reaction “How can you do this to me!”, as if performers *directly* hurt the spectators with the presentation of violence.

“How can you do this to me?”... Most of the audience felt like this, there were audience members who looked with annoyed faces to us. A friend of mine didn’t talk to me for a week. She hated me; she hated the play, life, theater... (V.Y. İpek, personal communication, December 13, 2013)

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<sup>135</sup>A peaceful and cheerful activity of drinking *rakı* and listening Ottoman music

This was the moment of critical break in theater field of Turkey. It was a moment of paradigmatic change and it wasn't only about the importation of texts, it had many layers: the artistic quality of performance, the successful publicity, the polemics on press about Dot's works<sup>136</sup> which all ended in a way by giving credit to holistic perfection, but mostly the change in performance space triggered the break.

In 2005 theater became an unwanted, undervalued art due to its problems coming from past. We established Dot in a time when audiences and artists had complicated feelings about theater..."(Sierz, 2009, 10 - Murat Daltaban's preface)

It was a break because this wasn't an experimentalism limited to core theatrical circles in Istanbul anymore. This first wave created a new audience, who didn't go to theater before Dot, and later this audience accepted the second generation also.

[...] they always said to us "we weren't going to theater, after Dot we started to go to theater", they said. In a sense it gave a hint to spectators about catching the spirit of the age. "Look theater is not the thing you're used to, the texts you watched or the plays or the directions, look there are plays like this, there are texts like this", once you say this people started to come. Of course other private theaters, small groups started to play new writers' plays and audiences slowly started to follow them also. I think this about a need, there was a need in audiences, it fulfilled a hunger. Like real stories, contemporary stories, the stories about metropolitan people.(T. Tülek, personal communication, February 21, 2014)

Tuğrul Tülek tells the story of the creation of the new audience from his perspective, as a successful actor in Dot. The other side of the story, the perspective

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<sup>136</sup> "But some critics hate this genre. Murat Daltaban says that some of them even called for a campaign against in-ye-face theater." (Sierz, 2009, Preface written for Turkish publication – Sierz thakfully send me the original text)

from spectators' side, has a similar narrative also. The below quote is from an interview made with Baysan Pamay, a seventy years old retired man who is nearly addicted to alternative theater and sees all the plays in a season, sometimes more than once. He is just a spectator (not a theater critic, not an academic figure, not anyone significant in any institutional level) but he is well-known, respected and loved among all the alternative theater artists (among Dot and second generation). This is the story of how he started to go to fringe theaters which is very important to see what Dot actually did:

I didn't know most of the private theaters until 2006. Except Kenters, Dormens... I have been watching them for years. Deceased Cüneyt Türel was acting Blackbird in Dot theater. He was one of the most refined actors of State Theaters, Municipality Theaters. I thought if a man like he acts in a place like this, he probably knows something. Blackbird was a two people play just in in-er-face style. I was breathless in front of Mısır Apartment after the play. Amazing! They were acting right there, two meters away from me. A hard text. I decided to go to Dot after that point. I watched all their plays until this moment without missing one. (B. Pamay's interview from Kıratioğlu, 2013)

The making of a new audience different than middle class, middle aged audiences of institutional and mostly private theaters and seeing theater as a weekend entertainment was changing after Dot. Theater – for the first time – was a tool change people from inside.

“When we declared that we would stage plays in our small place in Mısır Apartment there had been puzzlement. We were going to stage unconventionally serious(!) plays in an unconventional space design for audiences and artists. And when we reach 2009, now DOT has its own audience, its central crew is shaped and it is accepted as an admired and developing theater. Now we have plans for future.” (Sierz, 2009, 10 – Murat Daltaban's preface)

After the break of in-yer-face there was the new audience, hungry for theater, because it was no longer an activity for fun, but it became masochistic self changing act which could be compared to a painful cure for urban ennui and spleen of modern life. The in-yer-face break was an awakening both for theater artists and audience and pain was a good measure of reality to start with.

Later, after first years of 2010s, especially second wave subconsciously used this awakening to start a unique publicness which I call “performative publicness” to create a ground of dialogue. The break of in-yer-face deepened after the Turkish translation of Aleks Sierz’s book in 2009 among theater circles.

Dot ghettoized itself into a more and more upper-class context and their obsession with quality did not turn into a public sphere but more of an exclusive taste, which is unlikely of the philosophy of original in-yer-face.

I claim here that Dot couldn’t see that it wasn’t only new theater this audience was hungry for, it was also the dialogue floor which these plays gave, the performative publicness of both the performer and the spectator. These new fringe theaters have presented the architecture<sup>137</sup> –unlike conventional theater spaces – where performers and spectators can meet and talk but in one point Dot chose customer satisfaction based on negotiation (paying good ticket price to see the “best play in town” while staying intellectual also) over the imperfection of the public sphere (accepting theatrical mistakes but finding a dialogue ground). This imperfection will be discussed more deeply in fourth chapter as a basis of performative publicness.

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<sup>137</sup> Performers and spectators use the same doors for example. In conventional stages which are referred as Italian Stage or frame stages backstage has separate doors and audience entrances are differentiated.

## Dot and Space Usage: In Search of Desired Place for a Distorted Hyperrealism

The space, the closeness of performing area and audience has always been one of the major ingredients of Dot's success accompanying their strong contemporary text choices. The use of shock in an intimate environment creates an involuntary neurophysiologic reaction, more precisely if the performer and the audience share less than a 10 meter distance this reaction happens according to Eugenio Barba<sup>138</sup>, causing a mirror reaction (Karolczak, 2013).

The movement of another person evokes the onlooker's own experience of this same movement. The visual information generates an embodied kinaesthetic commitment in the spectator. Kinaesthesia is the internal sensation of our own movements and tensions, as well as those of others, in our own body. This means that the tensions and modifications in the actor's body provoke an immediate effect in the body of the spectator up to a distance of about *10 metres*. If the distance is greater, this effect diminishes and disappears. (Eugenio Barba, 2010, 23 – italics is added by me)

It was the first time that this phenomenon was played upon very decidedly to shock the audience, to get a reaction, instead of pure theatrical experimentalism to a limited into theater audience circle. More than the texts themselves, audiences in Turkey were excited by the experience of mirror reaction, which enables them to feel as if they are experiencing the story in the deepest internal level, which is not comparable to other artistic experiences, or the experience of theater presented in conventional theater spaces.

The experience of break though, was a dense one since time and space (setting) of in-yer-face plays are designed to suit fringe stages. Most in-yer-face texts have a few characters, and all the events take place in real time of the performance

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<sup>138</sup>Çetin Sarıkartal mentioned this reactivity in Yeni Seyir Haller (New Spectator Experiences) conference organized by 7 Alternative Theater Places at Kadir Has University in October 17, 2002 to explain the effect of intimacy which I learned from also.

and stage becomes a mind-space of a distorted hyperrealism. Sierz explains how this hyperrealism is shaped due to physicality of theater unique to 90s England, and now similar to second generation in 2010's Turkey, but deeply different from Dot:

Ghettoized in obscure fringe venues, new writing might have found its creativity strangled by the demands of ideologically correct edicts or the pressure to produce work that, for financial reasons, was only allowed a cast of three and no scene changes. (Sierz, 2001, 237)

It forms a distorted hyperrealism because it is a taboo breaking experience, and it is hyperrealistic because of the overlapping of the time of the performance and the time within the play –“no scene changes” - and space of the setting of the play is occupied by the audience. It is a different watching experience when this happens because as Kevin Lynch put it in his book “What time is this place?”, “we live in time-places” (Lynch, 1972, 241) In-yer-face theater, when staged in urban fringes gave a sense of shift in time-place of audience dissimilar to other experiences. When the time-place of story and reality overlaps we, as the audience, tend to share the experience of the characters more as a mirror reaction, there is no alienation effect anymore, no gap left between the character (not performer anymore) and the audience.

When the gap between performer and the audience is closed, the acting changes. The people on stage become real, they don't yell at each other to make everyone hear their words, they do not have to enlarge their gestures or they don't have to move unnaturally to face the audience all the time. Veda Yurtsever İpek explains the change in acting by comparing acting in Dot's stage (later in İkinciKat also from the second wave) to her experience in acting in State Theaters.

But this is a very beautiful situation - I come from a traditional theater background, from State Theaters, the big saloon, frame stage, to keep the voice high for audience, acting according to it – this is an adventure starting with Dot for me. Turning your back to the audience, keeping voice low, whisper, to behave as you are in normal, daily life, is luxury of the alternative, small stages, they have advantages like these. [...] I already try to find a more natural, simpler way of acting but whatever you do you have to find a voice that 400 people can hear. That's why no matter how much you try to say "I love you" in an intimate, easy and natural way to your partner on stage, it will always be a little less believable since you are saying it in high tone. (V. Y. İpek, personal communication, December 13, 2013)

Dot's integration with space though is an unconventional one compared to original (imported from Europe) texts written for fringe theaters. Dot starts from the text and finds the correct space for the text. That's why the mobile projects of Dot, and their moving from Mısır Apartment to G-Mall are very significant cases which should be analyzed more closely.

Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat was performed in Dotbilsarda, in Bilsar Cooperation's place which the whole stage design of the project was based on the actual space, redesigned by deconstructivist stage design for the continuity of the collection of Ravenhill's fragmented but sharing-a-common-theme plays. Also Festen has been a waiting project for years and it was realized when the correct space was found and redesigned into the perfect stage. In the Appendix B there is a map which shows the locations of Dot's permanent stages and places of their mobile projects.

Dot on the other hand is one of the few theater groups in Turkey which nearly doesn't tour at all<sup>139</sup>, which paradoxically means that Dot group never improvise in space to actually fit in the found space. Dot never improvises with space, even though they are the group which truly transformed the meaning of theatrical space in

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<sup>139</sup> Except very few new tours organized for Fight Night to Ankara, CerModern. Fight Night is one of the few plays of Dot which doesn't have a setting based on text though.

Turkey. Improvisation of space though had been a common and well-used theme of many important figures of 90s avatgarde including many of the works included in Assos Festival, Emre Koyuncuoğlu's works and as a very dramatic example, Kumpanya's *Canlanan Mekan* (in direct translation: *Space Coming to Life*) project<sup>140</sup> in 1993, were all based on space improvisations.

Another interesting point in Dot's relation to place is their change in their permanent stage. Dot moving from Mısır Apartment to G-Mall either changed the context of their plays, or the contextual change in their plays changed the location of their permanent stage. On the other hand, since Dot has never used local texts on urban life of Istanbul<sup>141</sup> their location change did not directly affect their work in the first sight, but the location change of the stage overlapping with their theatrical transformation (from in-yer-face to physical theater) also signifies that the imported in-yer-face texts actually had an urban bond to Istiklal Avenue and it was lost after moving.

I don't see it as an obligation for it [Dot's stage] to be in Mısır Apartment or on Istiklal Avenue. I mean, it is not. Mısır Apartment is a good place; Beyoğlu has an atmosphere of its own. It has a dynamic of its own and so on, but actually Dot wasn't directly reflecting this energy into its stage. Or [Dot] wasn't doing something based on this architectural form; it already had a standard architectural, aesthetic thing [criteria]. It has it there, [and] it has there also. (E. Yetim, personal communication, December 24, 2013)

The new place though, G-Mall is a spot which would appear empty on an image analysis map used in architecture and urban planning, unlike Mısır Apartment.

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<sup>140</sup> The crew improvised in the stage design Naz Erayda did without a story or a theme that they knew. The performers placed their bodies within the constructed – surreal space and made stories. Later these stories were tied to each other and made into a play.

<sup>141</sup> Dot only used two local texts in a decade. One, *Malafa*, the story takes place in Antalya. The other, *A Play For Two* (which has two versions one from 2006 by Yekta Kopan, the other from 2012 by Aslı Mertan and Bülent Erkmen), is a linguistic experiment on Turkish which has a story, but not a location.

I can say that Dot's new stage, G-Mall, is a blank spot in an image analysis map<sup>142</sup> because its location excludes all bodily experiences of *coming to the place* (such as walking or using public transportation) or give a bodily understandable scale to people (being related to neighboring zone or having human scaled architectural landmarks on the way). Lynch describes a similar space to Dot's new place from Jersey City: "Crisscrossed by railroads and elevated highways, it has the appearance of a place to pass through rather to live in." (Lynch, 1960, 25)

Dot's moving to a deeply amnesiac place has changed its audience profile to a certain level also, it is not quite possible to get in and ask for a last minute ticket anymore, the audience lost all its spontaneity of joining, now the audience should plan their theater experience, just as it is with middle aged theater audiences of state and municipality theaters. Dot always had a more significant economic barrier compared to any other theater company, but G-Mall also created a psychological barrier of an unwalkable (especially at night when leaving the theater, and significantly for women alone) and disoriented environment.

On its way to institutionalization and forming an exclusive club, Dot left the urban chaos of Istiklal Avenue and Beyoğlu distinct and settled itself into a pure artistic ghetto. While returning state fund in 2013/2014 season ("DOT Bakanlık Desteğini Reddetti!," 2013) – since state thinks funding gives them direct right for

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<sup>142</sup>For example, the most well-known method for human settlements' image analysis is the Kevin Lynch method. Lynch states that people remember places and locate themselves in their own mind maps due to five elements of image which are paths, edges, nodes, distinct and landmarks. Lynch gives hierarchical values to each of these elements in (generally) three layers, like first degree landmarks, second degree landmarks and third degree landmarks. "Way-finding is the original function of the environmental image, and the basis on which its emotional associations may have been founded. (...) image (...) in a broader sense it can serve as a general frame of reference within which the individual can act, or to which he can attach his knowledge." (Lynch, 1960, 126) Lynch created image maps of cities by making maps by comparing a group of new goers understanding of place and by interviews with locals, and superpose the data to see how people can recall a place. What is interesting about image analysis maps though, is that they have gaps, white and unidentified spaces to show that no one can remember that distinct. When describing maps made for Jersey City, Lynch writes: "The maps were often fragmented, with large blank areas, concentrating most often on small home territories." (Lynch, 1960, 29)

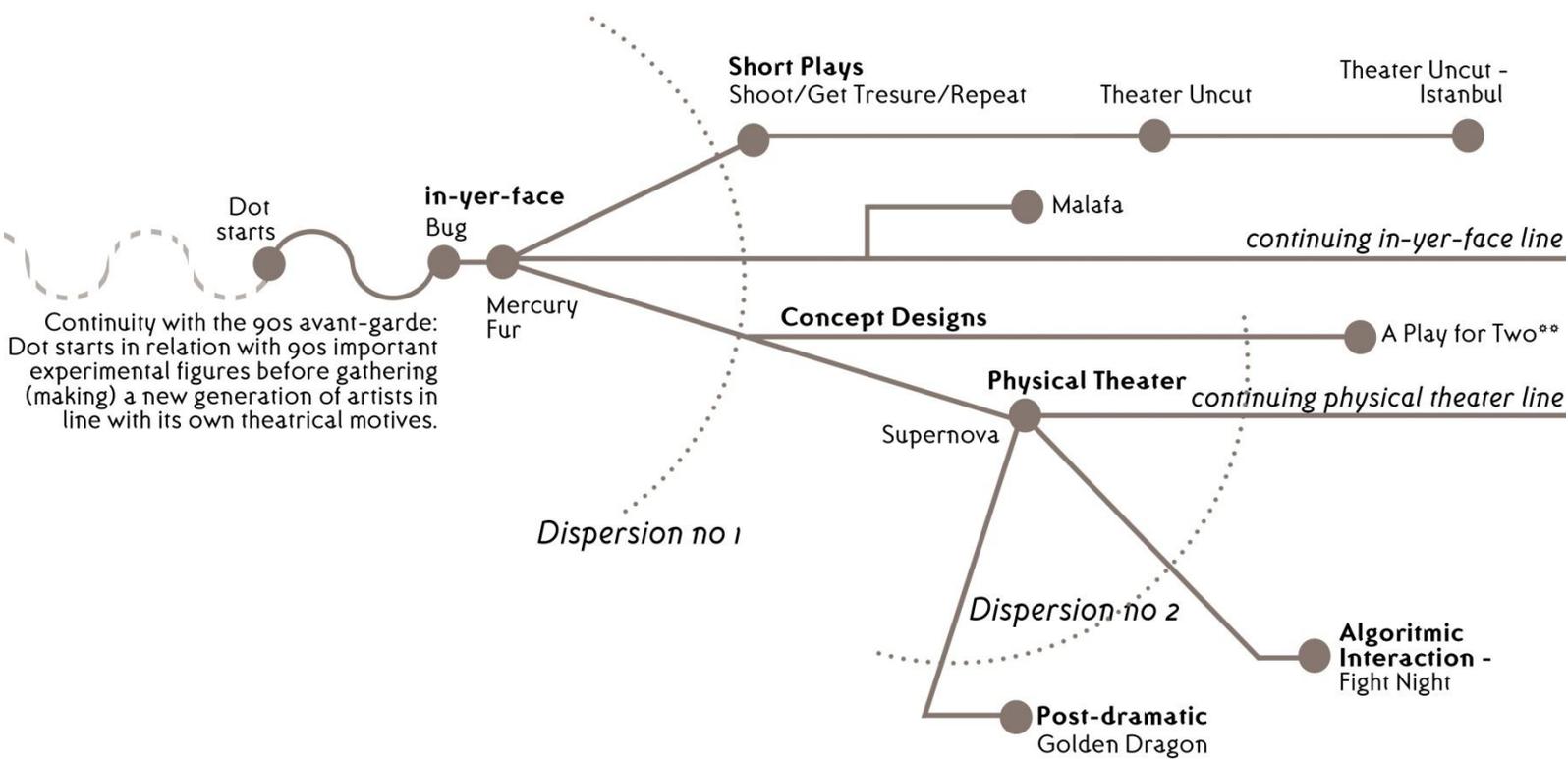
invention in artistic production process – they missed that they're collaborating with capital corporations while all of their plays criticize hegemony and consent given to capitalist hegemony.

## Dot and Its Theatrical Divergences

Since Dot's crew is generally bilingual or multi-lingual, recently there had been important translations and adaptations from languages other than English which created diversities in Dot's experimentalism. The important thing about Dot's theatrical search is that it remains in parallel with its past theatrical languages which develops a holistic tone of the group unlike an eclectic patchwork of styles and adaptations. The taste of in-yer-face still lasts in nearly all Dot plays, the group is always more open to taboo stagings of violence and sex. Following in-yer-face, physical theater practices of Dot, which started with Supernova in 2012 continues in all stagings as well. For example staging solutions of post-dramatic Golden Dragon were found in physical theater practices unlike the original version of the play where actors continuously change costumes to appear as new characters. A very performative raping<sup>143</sup> scene was included in the staging of Dot where in the original text there was only mentioning of it. This is a direction choice which is quite in line with the long term in-yer-face practice of the group.

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<sup>143</sup> Serkan Salihoğlu (the director) decided to extend the raping scene which left a creepy feeling on the audience. Ece Dizdar was acting "the man in stripped shirt" who rape the Chinese grasshopper (an metaphor used to imply an immigrant woman) which is acted by Saim Karakale. Roland Schimmelpfennig, the writer, notes that male characters should be acted by women, female characters by men, young characters by old performers and vice versa. Saim Karakale is twice as big as Ece Dizdar and a lot more powerful since in another scene he lifts Dizdar and literally makes her fly all through the stage. Than in the raping scene we – the audience- believe that Karakale is being raped by minion Dizdar and many women around me (including me) pressed their legs and got tense. This was a very interesting theatrical experiment both for actors and audience.



<b>2005</b> *Frozen *Love and Understanding	<b>2006</b> *The Cencor *Faraway *A Play for Two *Bug	<b>2007</b> *Mercury fur *Black Bird *Storyteller	<b>2008</b> *Shoot/ *Get Treasure/ *Repeat	<b>2009</b> *Pornography *Shopping and Fucking	<b>2010</b> *Malafa *Punk Rock	<b>2011</b> *Festen *Orphans	<b>2012</b> *Supernova - Beautiful Burnout *Yellow Moon *A Play for Two *Golden Dragon	<b>2013</b> *Overspill *Theatre Uncut 1	<b>2014</b> *Theatre Uncut 2 *Fight Night
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\* Names written in *italic* are local plays. The rest is translated.  
 \*\* "A Play for Two" has two versions. 2006 version is concept designed by Bülent Erkmen and written by Yekta Kopan. 2012 version is concept designed by Bülent Erkmen again, and written by Aslı Mertan and Bülent Erkmen (with more input of Aslı Mertan).  
 \*\*\* Dot's mobile projects are written in **bold**. The mobile location of Pornography was G-Mall but later Dot's permanent stage was moved there.

Figure 12: A Timeline for Understanding Dot's Experimentalism

Physical theater also caused a sprawl in time and space of plays, unlike time and space density of in-yer-face plays. Dot's theatrical divergences though end with some interesting dialogues among its text choices also. The most interesting contrast I found is seen when one of the two local plays, Malafa (produced in 2010) and Golden Dragon (produced in 2012) are compared. Malafa, as a local text, very smartly plays around the edges of occidentalism (creating exotic images of West, stereotyping West) where Golden Dragon is strongly orientalist, which became even more orientalist with the staging choices (such as the inclusion of the song "I love

Chinese”) which sometimes gets beyond the line of being ironic about orientalism and really being oriental. Malafa on the other hand, as easy to see, has a deeper dialogue with the audience of Turkey compared to Golden Dragon since the audience has more tendency towards Occidentalism compared to orientalism (or self-orientalism). The below quotes are put together from plays to see the ironic dialogue between occidentalism and orientalism.

Gabor: Evropa! oh Evropa! Once upon a time they had palace dances where you would switch partners. And now they have meter<sup>144</sup> clubs for swingers. This is the secret to monogamy... Come madam, let us away. (Günday, 2010)

The Young Woman [acting the man in stripe shirt]: You look like a Chinese grasshopper. Amazing. What a vision, in the middle of the night. Suddenly a whole foreign continent is standing in the room. You bring thousands of years of history with you! History, you understand? China. The Great Wall. The Forbidden City. The desert. The Yellow River. The Silk Road. The invention of gunpowder and the printing press. That’s all China. One billion Chinese. *Short pause*. That’s where you’re from. Isn’t it? You do come from China? *Short pause*. Come here. Sit down. Come on, let’s have a chat. Come here. (Schimmelpfennig, 2011)

Interestingly both tones, occidentalist or orientalist, are patriarchic and they both end with an action talking in annoying women. Dot’s staging of Golden Dragon, after Malafa can be seen as choice between ironic occidentalism and self-orientalism, since Turkey is “not really west”. Golden Dragon also had word jokes left in English like “Barbie-fucker”<sup>145</sup> and some jokes were not really meaningful for spectators who are not in touch with Anglophone culture and media. In line with this choice, Dot, by using clean Turkish (here I mean in diction, not in basis of excluding

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<sup>144</sup> “Meter” and “metering” means “to fuck” or “fucking” through the play.

<sup>145</sup> Probably it was left in English since the original text in German has this phrase in English.

swearing words) most of the time adapted from Anglophone jokes, do not use ethnic languages in Turkey at all. Like in *Fight Night* the definition of “a little racist” (one of the selective options from the algorithmic test questions) was adapted into racism against Kurds.

The lack of local text use, has shaped a continuous gap between audience and the plays, later this gap became a part of Dot’s theatrical language (a signature move of alienation which gives the sense that the play is not written for this audience<sup>146</sup>). Dot’s failure of making public sphere has a relation with the lack of local text choice, even though their “own audience” watch perfectly staged “universal” stories, they don’t carry the stories with them after the theatrical event, since they won’t be able to overlap or unite the stories with their daily lives. Unlike the first overlapping of the anger and directness of in-*yer-face* against neoliberal-conservative experience.

The only play of Dot which has no paradoxes about its exterior reality (location + ticket price + lack of publicness and public sphere) has been *Fight Night*<sup>147</sup>. *Fight Night* is completely in tone with its amnesiac exterior location (G-Mall) and the loss of public sphere. *Fight Night* is an algorithmic interactive play where audience members are given a remote control to vote for their favorite candidates and select a president for themselves. At the beginning audience answers some questions to both set the mood, and to understand the audience profile (gender,

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<sup>146</sup> This is an experience State Theaters and Municipality Theaters insistently continued to give the audiences until last decades, by using the discourse of “universality” of western plays.

<sup>147</sup> Another case without locational paradox is *Festen*, which is staged in a similar location to texts’ original location (a cast away rural mansion of a very rich family). The audience was transported by services organized by Dot to a cast away location in Istanbul. The exterior paradox though continues because the story was based on a very aristocratic family from the north Europe who humiliates and belittles third world, by chanting a song about it and directly humiliating the boy friend of one of the quests who is not white. And the audience in Turkey is –unlike the white first world audience– is not placed in an irony of their statuses, they are humiliated just as the boy friend of the quest. The story and production was a grand success but it should be seen that if this text had been a local text, the audience members would have been pushed to question their *own* social statuses in Turkey, because that was the intention of the text when performed in west. In *Fight Night* though, there is no setting of play other than the stage itself – which is designed a little like a talent show TV studio - so there is no orientalism or self-orientalism.

income, religious belief, so on...). Then the voting starts which has similarities to reality show system. The voting doesn't change the results of the ultimate political actions though, just like in reality, no candidate can change the system – just as voting doesn't change the system. The G-Mall, Dot's perfectionism based on customer satisfaction and loss of public sphere for the first time are in an ultimate parallel with the theme of the play. Considering that democracy is based on voting and negotiation with power, the atmosphere based on exclusiveness and externalized publicness in G-Mall enlarges the meaning of the play, Fight Night. This case only changed in Theater Uncut Istanbul project in which local writers wrote on contemporary local issues from lynching culture to internet bans and GeziPark Resistance. I'll get back to these short plays in the following chapter.

Below there is the space usage of Dot through 2013-2014 theater season for their three productions. "Empty space<sup>148</sup>" in is reshaped for each play.

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<sup>148</sup> Considering that Dot's new stage is "empty space" in architectural scale but it is amnesiac in urban scale.

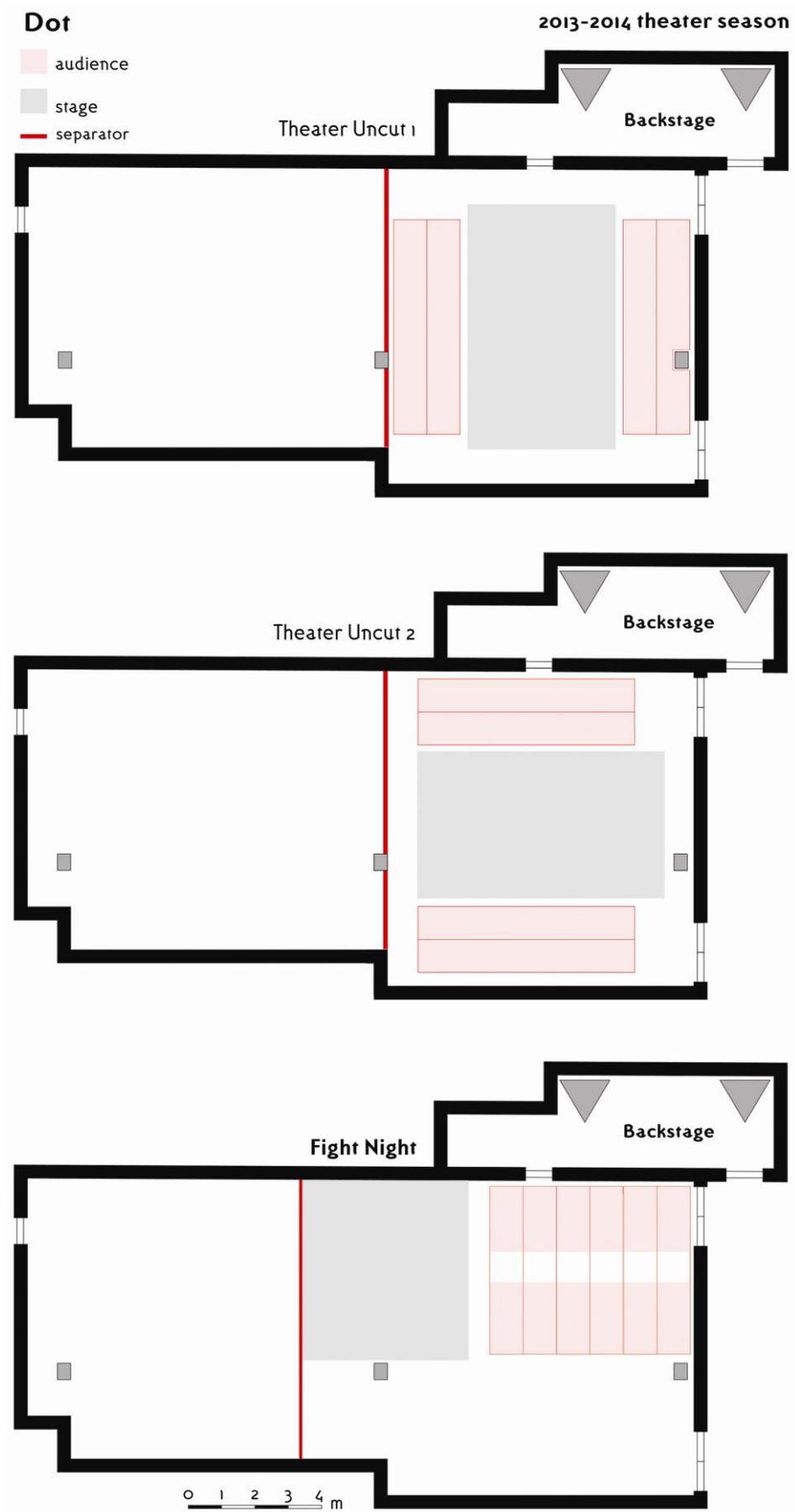


Figure 13: Dot and “Empty Space” (stage in Maçka G-Mall)

## The triggering of Second Generation

Dot's theatrical perfection created gained respect from older generation and gave hope to second generation and unlike Krek's perfectionism<sup>149</sup> for example, their staging paradigm can be widely used. Dot has created the intellectual space for fringe theaters by bringing in-yer-face, gaining credit for this style by being perfect (from its publicity service to unit of international organizations) and by helping the translation of Aleks Sierz's book, "In-Yer-Face Theater". Sierz though, in his preface for Turkish translation of his book in 2009, hints that he would actually be more satisfied with second generation works instead of perfect adaptations.

Personally, I can only hope that more and more brave spirits will eventually put aside translations of English-language plays and write their own: I would especially encourage those playwrights whose contemporary plays deal with the particular problems of society and politics in Turkey. I have great optimism that the Turkish people will, in the near future, develop more and more work that is contemporary, relevant and exciting to watch. If this translation of my book can help in any way to advance this process, my dreams will have been amply fulfilled. (Sierz, 2009, preface written for Turkish publication – original text send by Sierz)

Dot changed the meaning of the space, the fringe space got beyond theatrical experimentalism.

Who is the second generation Dot inspired? As I have mentioned in the beginning of this chapter the success of in-yer-face in urban Turkey was because it superposed the experience of neoliberal conservatism and the anger against it. Idea of in-yer-face aesthetics has made a shift in second generation but there is a third

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<sup>149</sup> Krek, founded by Berkun Oya, made very successful local plays but their stage and staging choice (separating audience and performers with glass, giving each spectator a head phone to listen the performance, carrying the the focusing idea of Italian Stage in extremity by using camera scale, 3:4) was interesting at first but it is not inspiring for other theater making groups.

generation coming from other metropolitan cities also (Ankara and İzmir as a third generation and continuing deeper into Bursa, Eskişehir and Diyarbakır). There are young theater graduates which get involved in ensemble formation in fringe theaters by –nearly always- showing a tendency to in-yer-face aesthetics of directness. Through the time I spent obsessing about how I can show the parallel between these two responses to contemporary world, one in 90s UK other in 2010s Turkey I found the below passage in Sierz’s book on what made 90s in-yer-face playwrights:

One way of understanding the point of view of a young writer is to do a thought experiment. Imagine being born in 1970s. You’re nine years old when Margaret Thatcher comes to power; for the next eighteen years –just as you’re growing up intellectually and emotionally – the only people you see in power in Britain are Tories.<sup>[150]</sup> Nothing changes; politics stagnate. Then, some time in late eighties, you discover Ecstasy and dance culture. Sexually, you’re less hung up about differences between gays and straights than your older brothers and sisters. You also realize that if you want to protest, or make music, shoot a film or put on an exhibition, you have to do it yourself. In 1989, the Berlin Wall falls and the ideological certainties disappear into the dustbin of history. And you’re still not even twenty. In the nineties, media images of Iraq, Bosnia and Rwanda haunt your mind. Political idealism – you remember Tiannanmen Square and know people who are roads protesters – is mixed with cynicism – your friends don’t vote and you think all politicians are corrupt. This is the world you write about.

Such writers were Thatcher’s Children, and their view of the world came from being brought up in the eighties. In the fierceness of its attack on market economics, in-yer-face theater was a reaction against the idea that ‘there is no such thing as society’ [...]” (Sierz, 237, 2000)

In-yer-face was an attack to the idea “there is no such a thing as society” (Sierz, 2000) because most characters are mentally messed up, but once on stage, it is seen that they can’t be judged for being messed in such a world. This is one side of

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<sup>150</sup> Culturally conservative bourgeois white British man

arts that make it possible for people to see not all psychological problems are “just” psychological, but they are also sociological. A similar explanation for Turkey’s 2010s second generation theater artists can be very helpful, both for comparison and for understanding the second generation.

Most of the second generation artists are born after mid 1980s right after the most violent military coup of Republican history and grew up in 90s when political assassinations of journalists nearly became a routine and 1993’s public lynching acts at Sivas against Alevis and secular artists happened. Through the decade of 90s – just as these artists were growing up intellectually and emotionally – the only people this generation saw in power was either Kemalist Republicans embedded to military or social democrats who are deeply masculine and bureaucratic or Islamic Radicals whose major political project is to make a new state system based on religious belief and Islamic public representations of gender roles. Coalition governments can’t solve any social or economic problems, nothing changes; politics and daily life stagnate. Through the 90s all the alternatives are buried to urban collective underground culture and sometime in late nineties the discovery punk, heavy metal and underground literature from fanzines, 6.45 publications, and ekşisözlük became a part of the escapist underground culture of 90s (these all became common orthodoxies until 2010s).

Sex has always been a way more complicated issue in Turkey compared to how it seems to be experienced in west as an unimaginable freedom (according to movies you watch) and many of these artists, as a part of this society tried to build their own sexuality with haunting social terrors of losing honor, taboos and myths about sex. Virginity of girls means family honor even in high class urban social territories where girls from twelve to fifteen are married to man who pay to girl’s

families in lower class rural areas. The fear of rape is always on street at night and laws are made to protect the rapists. In such an environment boys are constructing their masculinity based on militarist, nationalist and protective patriarchic norms where they believe they have much more responsibility in life compared to their girl friends.<sup>151</sup>

These artists' generation spent their youth solving tests without sleep or social life starting from late primary school to ending of high school. This is said to be the only way to have a successful life: to get into a decent department in a decent university even though there is no norm settled on what these actually mean but it is definitely not arts. Not to mention that popular philistinism deeply enrooted to all levels of the state and there has never been funding for young artists anyways so these artists can't protest the cut backs of state funding on arts like their first world peers and it is illogical to ask for it when state is cutting back from prior needs of workers and patients to keep a powerful army and feed the market economy.

These people were not even twenty when the war between state and Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) made its peak in 90s. Both sides lose many people including civilians and many people were either deeply cynical about the good in any action-taking and idealism. In 90s also there was a new wave of immigration from Bosnia to big western cities in Turkey to escape from the war in Bosnia. Than there is the Susurluk Scandal in 1996 which reveals the "deep" state.

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<sup>151</sup>In logical continuity with this situation, boys tend to believe they should not have sex with the girls they *actually love* because that would do pure harm to social status of the girl where girls should protect their virginity as their highest treasure (or their most marketable quality). There are many smart girls who protect their family honor with anal sex or virginity surgeries in Turkey. Queer sex is forced out of the public sight with the collective help of police and unidentified male gangs (there is a transvestite genocide period in the middle of Istanbul, in Ülker Sokak at 1996 for example), which is "normal" since society is already deeply messed up with heterosexual sex; but in private everything goes.

Mediated political Islam rose in 2002. Neoliberal Islamic conservatism rise with no oppositions and with the open encouragement of United States and European Union, and after a blink of an eye, Iraq is invaded in 2003. Around that time the common discourses became more and more on conspiracy theories since “democracy” suddenly changed its meaning to be the equal of invasion and colonialism. After the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century the pressures get very tense on all variants of secular life styles.

Then the GeziPark resistance occurred through June 2013<sup>152</sup> but the pressures continued. Many voice records of political figures show the level of corruption and scandals of blackouts through municipality elections in 2014. Such artists are the children of a long history which never truly created violence-free and gender-unbiased public spheres where arts can become a communicative element of making the society. The view of world pushed through rural piety, popular philistinism and belief in progressive neoliberal economic uprising of “new Turkey” has been the basis of society of Turkey in early 21<sup>st</sup> century which they try to resist against. (Rewritten in 2014 by the writer of this thesis, based on the structure of Sierz, 237, 2000)

This is the background of second generation artists in 2010s Turkey and, just as the tools of 90s in-your-face writers and actors in UK which Sierz reveals, when these second generation artists produce a theater work the parts of these societal subconscious declared by metaphors and allegories.

Dot was wise enough to see the superposition of the experience of the urban ennui caused by conservative majoritarian democracies serving the neoliberalization

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<sup>152</sup>After the protests many “grown-ups” (even in theater circles) said that protesters should be thankful to government and the perfection (!) of Turkey’s democracy because police “just” murdered some working class Alevis, brutally damaged many people’s physical being and blinded more than a dozen people, because they “only” gassed and beat protesters when “they could have massacred” them like May Day of 1977 in Taksim or in Tiananmen Square in 1989 or Tahrir Square in 2011.

of the market. Dot inspired the second generation by showing a new possibility in theatrical field (away from institutional theaters and commercial private theaters) and by making a new audience of young people, which later multiplied mostly by university students or newly working white collars (and when it comes to second generation, inclusion of blue collars started by random urban contacts<sup>153</sup>). Dot's efforts inspired a new generation of fringe theaters which work and produce in process oriented, amateur ways, unlike Dot itself.

Philip Ridley, Mark Ravenhill, Martin McDonagh and many more in-yer-face writers were translated and played between 2005 and 2010. İkincikat theater group (under the name *0.2* until 2012) insisted on staging Philip Ridley's plays over three seasons. They staged *The Pitchfork Disney*, *The Fastest Clock in The Universe* and *Leaves of Glass* between 2009 and 2012 and *Wastwater* from Simons Stephans in 2011 after Dot made *Pornography* in 2009. Considering Dot performed *Mercury Fur* in the 2007-2008 theater season, in-yer-face audiences in Turkey have had more opportunity to get to know Ridley than any other in-yer-face writer accompanied by Mark Ravenhill. Dot staged *Shopping and Fucking* and whole set of *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* and short play *Village in Theater Uncut 2*, and Theater Deng u Bej made a play out of 4 short plays from *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* under the name *Fear and Misery* in Turkish and Kurdish for 2013/2014 theater season. As seen above it can be said that the variant of in-yer-face known to audiences in Turkey is masculine. Today, among the second wave fringe theaters (if Dot is counted as the first wave by itself) İkincikat and Karakutu are the two major companies insistent on in-yer-face, though İkincikat has moved to local texts. Karakutu then, was the only

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<sup>153</sup> For example two ironsmiths working in Karaköy came to see *each* play in their neighbouring theater, İkincikat-Karaköy, through October 23, 2013 to November 30, 2013 when every night plays were changing and all alternative theater groups (except a few belonging to an earlier generation like Dot, Krek or Galataperform) brought their plays to support the new stage. Ultimately the housing theater group and the theater loving blacksmiths formed an acquaintanceship.

company left which still insists on performing only translated in-yer-face texts but this year in 2013/2014 season, they opened a play writing contest to stage local plays. It is interesting that Sarah Kane's *Blasted* is only performed by Karakutu<sup>154</sup>, but Karakutu is not widely known among fringe theater audiences. Karakutu has translated and performed in-yer-face plays since they started the stage in 2010. It has been the only group which has tried to break the masculinity of translated in-yer-face by performing women and/or continental European in-yer-face playwrights. They have performed *Tattoo* by Dea Loher (German) and *Fast Forward – Rewind* by Gianina Carburariu (Italian) along with *Blasted* since 2010.<sup>155</sup>

Dot, even when they strongly resist to build any kind of organic relations to second generation, still protect its trendsetting position not only by importing new techniques but also because the actors from younger generation which gets trained in some of their plays carry the play making knowledge and experience to second generation many people appearing in their crew later take part in works of second generation.

Dot's growing tendency towards physical theater or Dot's short play collections from Theater Uncut project had considerable effects on second generation. Second generation network made the bodily performativity of actors a more central issue, (considering that post-dramatic, situation based texts should be

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<sup>154</sup> The first staging of *Blasted* was 2002 theater festival in Istanbul, directed by Emre Koyuncuoğlu but it was before the first wave and very few people saw the play.

<sup>155</sup> Mark of Dot on second generation can be seen even in an analysis of only one theater season. In 2013-2014 theater season the first theater company in alternative theater field of Istanbul to make a mixed play in Turkish and Kurdish, Theater Deng û Bêj, made a play out of Mark Ravenhill's four short plays from *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* epic, and named it according to one of the name of short plays: *Fear and Misery*. In 2008 the whole set of these plays were performed by Dot. Again in 2012-2013 theater season Ekip theater group (one of the most well known stageless groups in alternative theater field) made a play of Roland Schimmelpfenning, a German post-dramatic playwright discovered by Dot's staging of the Schimmelpfenning's *Golden Dragon* in 2012-2013 theater season. A new stageless theater Kıvanç Tiyatro by the way, performed *Love and Understanding* (Dot's 2005 production) for 2013-2014 theater season.

acted more physically compared to dramatic, character based texts) and in 2014 summer season, which is generally a dead season for theaters, there is going to be a short plays project of local playwrights made by İkinciKat in whole different concept (united under the theme of “justice”). Effect on second generation though, is not imitations of Dot’s work but rather a process of learning and inspiring due to the credit they gained among all alternative theaters with their initial wave of inspiration.

## A Comparison Between Local and British In-Yer-Face: Transformation of Free-Floating Violence and Anxiety into Anger and Pain

In 2000s and early 2010s, though, the feeling that history has ended has been largely dispersed first by the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests and later by the worldwide Occupy movements. Considering the plays written and produced with the inspiration of in-yer-face in contemporary Turkey, it is obviously not the same as the British case. The changed political atmosphere and the lack of individualist culture changed the local in-yer-face texts of the late 2000s in Turkey. The locally written texts are, however, not considered as in-yer-face by many artists both because they form a different universe compared to British texts and also because of the annoying habit of many conformist theater critics of labeling anything as in-yer-face.

The main difference is that the British version of in-yer-face insists on finding the evil within people themselves without referring much to an outer reality, which is quite consistent with the philosophy of seeing every individual soul as a site of revolution (Sierz, 2000). The outside world is included in claustrophobic inner spaces only as a sense, and nearly only in subconscious level. On the other hand, in Turkey, in-yer-face texts are always closely tied to common, daily realities of life and politics. This outer reality shapes the inner story; the characters are not fully autonomous in their evil decisions, unlike in the British plays. The audience always hears the reasons behind the acts, and the story of the “monster” is always told. Even when the reasons are not given obviously, within a dialogue or monologue, there is always a hint of them. The table below is a summary of differences between the two brands of in-yer-face described.

Table 3: Comparison between “Original” In-Yer-Face of 1990s UK and “Localized Version” after 2005 in Turkey

	UK in the 1990s	Turkey since 2005
	free-floating violence and anxiety	anger and pain
	finds evil within individuals	finds evil in society
	characters are born as “monsters”	characters become monsters
	pushes audience limits in violence and pornography	pushes audience limits in violence*
major themes to discomfit the audience	drug addiction, pornography, rape, pedophilia, incest	Torture following the 1980 military coup, hate crimes, rape, human trafficking, mafia-state relations
structure of the texts	long descriptions of stage design or direction notes (didaskalia)	very few notes given to director or stage designer; performers free to fill gaps in dialogues

\* It should be noted that, in Turkey, audiences are often terrified by lower levels of onstage violence compared to the UK. This is because the audience is not used to it at all; and they are always more willing to become emotionally involved in a play compared to the audiences of UK. In-yer-face plays in Turkey have included nudity and pornography which did shock the audience, but it was never treated as openly as in British performances.

These differences are caused by three main circumstances, the first of which is time. Even though there are many overlapping experiences in politics, social life, and culture between 1990s Britain<sup>156</sup> and 2000s Turkey, the zeitgeist of the era is no longer the “end of history.” In 2000s the Occupy Movements and Arab Spring rediscovered the potential agency of individuals which created hope for the possibility of changing the world. The second difference is culture. Finding evil in society, telling the story of how the “monster” became the monster, and using themes of sociological violence all have to do with cultural differences. The difference between individualist UK and communitarian Turkey appears in the sufferings of characters. Characters in the British plays suffer from having no bonds to anyone or any idea, whereas play characters from Turkey are suffering from too much responsibility, too many attachments to family or loved ones, and this controlling society ends up in two different paradigms of crime in two societies. Thirdly, there is

<sup>156</sup> In 2000s the in-yer-face era has lost its wave, it started have its own orthodoxy and many writers which Sierz branded as in-yer-face writers wrote outside the norms Sierz described. (Sierz, 2000) Though based on this research I’ll only analyze the differences between the 90s UK version of in-yer-face and the after-the-importation version of local texts in Turkey in late 2000s.

the difference between performance cultures of Britain and Turkey. The theater text entered the literary genres of Ottoman Turkish in late nineteenth century with westernization. The performative past of Turkey is based on oral tradition of *meddah* (a special kind of story teller who generally tells traditional comic stories) or the shadow puppeteers of Karagöz and Hacivat. Therefore, the theater in Turkey had never been the *playwright's theater*. Although it is closer to being the *director's theater*, it cannot be named as such either. The theater tradition of Turkey has always been the *performer's theater*, and therefore all playwrights subconsciously give credit to performers without defining gestures or mimics. Lastly, the central transformation has been the transformation of free-floating violence and anxiety into anger and pain. Free-floating violence is not an issue in the daily life of an average person in Turkey, but reasoned violence is. Once the reasons (of any kind) behind a violent act are explained, this creates anger towards the reasons which have pushed a person, and creating pain both because of the violent action and also because the villain didn't have the power (or autonomy) to resist. Thus, the violence not only harms the victim, it harms the villain also. Pain is the central feeling here, and it appears both physically and emotionally. Compared to anxiety, pain is a denser and more focused emotion which appears with direct and "inevitable" violence. Anxiety on the other hand is a state of worrying when there is no clear reason; therefore a person has to have a calm and safe life in contradictory to the state of worrying. Anxiety is the outcome of modern western culture which has built a taboo around physical pain and where the daily life is not challenged with concrete problems. Therefore free-floating violence and anxiety is a good dualism for explaining in-yer-face of 1990s UK where anger and pain is more suitable for 2000s Turkey.

Lastly it is important to have an insight of the paradigm of “crime” of UK and Turkey to understand what discomfords the two audiences. For most people in Turkey, it is sexual or ideological violence that they come across, at least in newspapers and TV broadcasts. People in Turkey subconsciously never believe in full autonomy; the common sense is that there is always the state and then god behind a person’s decisions. That’s why the term “destiny’s victim” (kader kurbanı) is often used for criminals. This can be very dangerous when applied in a patriarchy because it leads to forgiveness for rape and finds the raped woman guilty since she is the agent of seduction. The double standard here is that a majority of society would not find guilt in society if the crime is sexual or where the victim is a woman or LBGTI. This, overall, is quite a different paradigm of crime compared to that of cold blooded serial killers, psychopathic torturers, and carnivore serial rapists of Anglophone TV series. Meaningless and unreasoned violence in British in-yer-face plays was alienating for the audience and performers in Turkey; even though they were emotionally moved they did not bond with characters to find evil within themselves. The local version of in-yer-face in 2010s Turkey overcame these difficulties and made a significant brand of in-yer-face in the third world which made a major break from every form of conformist theater since Republican times.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Local in-yer-face texts have also been written in Turkey since 2009-2010. These include DOT’s performance of Hakan Günday’s *Malafa* (adapted from the underground novel in 2010 which can be classified as “cold in-yer-face” in Sierz’s terminology), İkincikat’s *Aut* (2011), *Barselo* (2012) and *Küçük* (2013), and DestarTiyatro’s *DiskoNo5* on the SermolaPerformans stage., in İzmir Tiyatro Oyunkutusu made *Kırmızı Dükkan* which is another local in-yer-face text. Additionally, many newly written plays can have intensely violent or openly pornographic scenes while questioning taboos of daily life.

Time line of events and trends in the Appendix B also helps to juxtapose most of themes of in-yer-face plays are from recent history, but it is also a foreshadowing for the possibilities of in-yer-face in contemporary Turkey, and the collective subconscious of past violence appears in most of the contemporary “inspired by in-yer-face” plays written in Turkey today: *DiskoNo5* by Mirza Metin is about the torture of Kurdish political prisoners in 1980 under military regime; *Tetikçi* by Ebru Nihan Celkan is an important political play including some violent scenes about Hrant Dink’s assassination; and *Parti* by Cem Uslu plays on the politics of ignorance and forgetting of the middle classes in Turkey and how this creates and tolerates violence.

## Finding a Place for Ensemble Formation: Second Generation Beyond In-Yer-Face

The second generation theater in Turkey later fused with the 90s avant-garde and enlarged the major break of Dot. The people who start doing theater with their entire collective will, around the ages of 20-30 chose their found spaces to turn into stage and find TAZ spaces to rehearsal (like someone's living room<sup>158</sup> or a room in a bar give for a few hours<sup>159</sup> and a variety of other places. The true ensemble was formed with second generation for the first time in theater field of Turkey. Each group makes possible to continue a stage autonomously but collectively producing, by writing, acting, designing, publicizing and ticket selling, and by each group staying in organic relations with many other groups, forming a platform for any stage who wants to join in. They make internet sites and organize conferences, design collective promotions for spectators and so on... But the best thing about second generation, unlike Dot and more similar to 90s avant-garde is that they are more open to learning from each other and fuse techniques from many theatrical styles to serve their narrative.

To give a sense of the variety of techniques in second generation I'll give a brief panorama. While Palyaço Modern works on clown technique, Kumbaracı50 made an erotic puppet show (Haz Makamı), Ahşap Çerçeve Kukla Tiyatrosu is professionalizing in puppet shows, an important figure from 90s avant-garde Nihal Koldaş joins in with Kabuki technique (Gece Tarlabasından Meydana Çıkmak), Tiyatro Bereze works on new children's theater while them and Simge Günsan (with

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<sup>158</sup> "444" play of Kumbaracı50 by Yiğit Sertdemir (which was performed by the married couple Yiğit Sertdemir and Gülhan Kadim) was rehearsed in their living room.

<sup>159</sup> "Eski Cambaz" is located in a narrow street connected to İstiklal Avenue (at Tarlabası side of İstiklal).

Kadro Pa) also specialize in object theater<sup>160</sup>, there is already many combinations of in-yer-face, absurd, physical theater, dance theater, improvisation (such as Beyoğlu Terminal, later turning into Kadıköy Terminal) and so on... All these groups have contacts with each other.

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<sup>160</sup>Tiyatro Bereze's one of the children plays named "Kayıp Eşya Bürosu" (Lost Property Office) was an staged as object theater also.

## CHAPTER 4

### SECOND GENERATION AND GROUND FLOOR OF PERFORMATIVE PUBLICNESS

This chapter will give a general narrative of the second generation theater artists which actually made the alternative theater movement. Within this last chapter the alternative theater movement of late 2000s and early 2010's will be covered first by analyzing the contributing people, their play-making processes and their collective working environment. Secondly the performative publicness created by these plays and the places will be examined. Lastly the survival problems of the alternative theater groups will be mentioned.

## Who are they? : University Theater Clubs, Private Universities' Conservatories, Second Undergraduate Degrees

The main human source for the new generation alternative theater movement of 2000s, is university theater clubs. These theater people are generally not educated in “prestigious” state institutions giving formal theater education. Boğaziçi University Actors who run the Maya Stage between 2011-2013; Yıldız Technical University’s theater club who formed the İkinciKat are some prominent examples. Another example is Ekip Theater Group’s playwright, director and actor Cem Uslu who decided to continue his professional life in theater in Uludağ University’s theater club and who received his second undergraduate degree in Haliç University in acting. 6dan Sonra Tiyatro<sup>161</sup> group, which later made the now famous Kumbaracı50 stage, came from Istanbul Technical University’s Fine Arts Faculty’s theater club. SeyyarSahne group was formed by Boğaziçi and Istanbul Technical University’s theater clubs. Amateur at first, they usually sought a second education to become “professionals” (to be taken seriously) in theater. It is important to note that very few of them quit their first education, there is a general tendency of finishing the first one and getting a second undergraduate degree or a master on theater or acting.

Many people who contributed to university’ theater clubs and wanted to be in theater as professionals were already over the age limit of state conservatories which is 25<sup>162</sup>. Only Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University’s conservatory offers an exemption test when an applicant is over 21 but the candidate has to be in professional quality to

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<sup>161</sup> “6.dan Sonra Tiyatro” means “theater after 6 o’clock” which indicates their theater making process at the beginning. The members had to work in day in different jobs and rehearse after 6 pm.

<sup>162</sup>The state conservatories in Istanbul have the age limit of 21 fixed, and other conservatories in other cities (like Eskişehir, Ankara, Konya, Adana or Antalya) have changing age limits around 24-25.

be accepted. Applicants who are in their late teens (17-19) have the priority in acceptance, they are the people who apply to conservatory exams right after high school. It should be noted that in Turkish society only a minority of people who desire a career in theater can apply to conservatory exams in this period of their lives, due to the mainstream pressure against all arts in society. Typically families won't support their children's choice of theater as a career and most of the time they will prevent it directly. Tuğrul Tülek explains his story of becoming an actor as follows:

I always wanted, I mean it was never to become an English teacher. But at that period it happened like that. [...] Later I joined a theater group there and so on... So I looked and saw everything was fine and I didn't change my department. [...] I mean you have to take the placement<sup>163</sup> test. [...] Then, after making a satisfying score I entered the – how do you call it – you have to take a talent exam, I mean I wouldn't have got in if I couldn't pass it. The age... I was 26 years old when I entered the conservatory, there was no [age limit] in only two schools, one is Language, History, Geography, at – Ankara, the other is the conservatory in Eskişehir. I preferred Eskişehir. One shoot, if it happened I would continue, if it did not happen I would quit. It happened, so it is... (T. Tülek, personal communication, February 21, 2014)

State conservatories' student numbers are very limited and it is quite a common discourse that to be “good looking” is one of the selection criteria. This criteria is mostly shaped in early Republican era when theater directors (especially Muhsin Ertuğrul) wanted to make acting a respectable, honorable job in Turkish society since it was (and sometimes still is) largely associated with “low jobs” in entertainment, especially for female artists. Simply it was imagined that “good looking” people would be better examples<sup>164</sup>, today the same selection criteria is continued for feeding the television market. This statement cannot be proved scientifically or found written in anywhere but it is a very strong discourse among

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<sup>163</sup> The placement test is the standart test that *everyone* who wants to enter university in that particular year has to take.

<sup>164</sup> It can be claimed that beauty norms of West was imported around the same period also, which made a significant “good looking” shine among the others.

actors and directors in Turkey<sup>165</sup>. After entering the state conservatories the main problem about education is summarized openly by Mert Öner who is a graduate of a state conservatory:

But in our country the major problem of the conservatories is not about lacking good education or lacking the skills of directing the actor; most of the actors graduate school by living serious self-confidence problems. Because there is a common understanding as “the good things belong to us, only bad things are spoken” but actors and student actors, especially at very young age their fragility is very high and this can cause serious self-confidence problems. (M. Öner, personal communication, February 28, 2014)

Also all fine arts departments’ (such as stage design) and directing-acting departments’ Masters Degrees were closed to new comers due to the prior limitation that only people who had graduated from these departments’ undergraduate levels can apply for masters’ degrees. This never-bending institutional conservatism restricted the chances of professionalism for people who decided in more mature age to become artists in theater.

There are many private universities today giving education on acting, but also in general about theater, including directing to stage management.<sup>166</sup> It is important to note that many of these universities have significant scholarship options which to an extent limit the class-based lack of opportunities. For example SahneHal and Karakutu stages and Ekip Theater Group have their roots in Haliç University’s theater department and YanEtki group have their roots in Kadir Has University’s theater department. It should be noticed that private universities made possible a new

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<sup>165</sup>The reality of this phenomenon can be questioned since it can only be based on “jealous commentary” but it can probably be said that Peter Dinklage (the dwarf American actor who has appeared in many movies and TV series) couldn’t be a student in state conservatories of Turkey.

<sup>166</sup> Such as in Bilkent (Ankara), Maltepe, Yeditepe, Haliç, Kadir Has, Bahçeşehir, Beykent or Bilgi Universities.

range of artists to contribute to the professional field. This opportunity gave chance to second generation to become “professional” in the most conventional sense by the approval of a diploma.

## New Theater Criticism

The lack in theater criticism in previous generation was not only about the number of theater critics or number of theater criticisms written. The problem was mostly about the *quality* of the criticism itself. The criticism was often formulated through a discourse “liking” or “not liking”, contained insults, gave unjustified statements about the play, sometimes even gave misleading information on plays and were based on lobbying. There were also cases of *not writing a theater criticism* for a play since critics thought they would *encourage* new theater people by *not criticizing* them (a case mentioned by many people from 90s generation to late 2000s generation). There was then of course the check-list type of criticism where each and every item in play-making is separated and written in few sentences which generally missed the gist of plays.<sup>167</sup>

An important portal of criticism is the Mimesis periodical. In the long Mimesis periodical and its website became a source for contemporary archival work on theater performances, panels and interviews. Mimesis is a publication of Boğaziçi University, based on translated articles on contemporary theater in world but the website is mostly based on theater criticism of the contemporary theater works within Turkey. Mimesis periodical translated some important works of worldwide known theater theorists such as Brecht, Grotowski, Suzuki or Schechner, and had important issues on topics such as feminist theater. In most cases they printed the first Turkish sources of some leading theorists or theories of 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is very

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<sup>167</sup>In such an environment the two theater critics from older generation who are worthy to mention in this sense are Robert Schild and Erdoğan Mitrani. In the new generation there is Bahar Çuhadar and Cem Erciyes who write qualified criticisms and about theater environment of contemporary Turkey. There are also people who work in play productions but write criticisms about each other's plays without getting in the trap of lobbying or insulting such as Fatma Onat and Şamil Yılmaz.

important to see that Boğaziçi University doesn't have a *theater department*<sup>168</sup>, which means the people who are doing theater in the university club and making the Mimesis Periodical and website are actually engineers or social scientists. Mimesis was first published in 1989 to 1990 and later there had been a gap for 17 years. The periodicals and website continues without any gaps since 2007.

Website of Mimesis (mimesis-dergi.org) is the only collective, stable and completely open written source on today's theater field in Turkey. A researcher going through articles of a certain period can see the networks, flows of ideas, solidarity and tensions among theater people. Unlike the periodical, website is bilingual and includes articles in Kurdish and Turkish. The Mimesis portal, unlike professional theater periodicals printed by university departments (such as Istanbul University's Dramaturgy Department's periodical or Ankara University's Theater Department's Theater Researches Periodical) should be considered as the major documentation attempt of the alternative theater movement today.

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<sup>168</sup> Though some of the most important theater researchers (like Kerem Karaboğa) or directors (like Emre Koyuncuoğlu) were educated in Boğaziçi's theater or modern dance clubs.

## Production of Text and Place

The change in the mid2000s in favor of local playwriting was so significant that it not only created an environment for new playwrights but also formed the long desired team work, cooperating from text writing to staging. This shift went far beyond the rise of in-yer-face even though in-yer-face stayed as critical ingredient of this trend.

In Turkey playwriting has nearly been an anomaly among all literary forms until quite recently. One of the main reasons of this was that the traditional theater form in Ottoman geography was strongly based on improvisation<sup>169</sup> and there is no writer involved in this play-making process. This improvisation tradition has always been comedy-based but it had a great variety: shadow theater (Karagöz-Hacivat plays), meddah<sup>170</sup> performances or traditional village plays.

In the dawn of the industrial revolution the European theater was evolving into a *director's theater*. Before this break there was the paradigm of *writer's theater* where plays were performed mostly as writer describes, dramaturgical nuances and staging solutions were strongly text-dependent.<sup>171</sup> The shift from writer's theater to director's theater in continental Europe is important to mention in understanding contemporary Turkey, because the theater in Turkey has *never* become writer's

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<sup>169</sup> This tradition is carried orally with performers through classic Ottoman period. The form of improvisation, the play-making process and structure of stories and characters were same but each performer changed the stories according to time-place and audience profile.

<sup>170</sup> A traditional form of comedy-based storytelling, the form has some similarities with stand-up performances.

<sup>171</sup> Aysin Candan explains this transformation holistically. She states that the need for the director can not only be explained by a newly settling realism and its artistic needs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In general the aesthetic and philosophical background of theater have changed. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the artistic product was a *result*, a finished object and the play was completed as the writer finished writing it. The idea of phenomenology changed the artistic product from *the result* into *a process* in 19<sup>th</sup> century (Candan, 1997). This changed the actor's part and involved him/her in the process of making theater.

theater.<sup>172</sup> The traditional form was *performer's theater* (where there is no writer figure in play making process) and after the attempts at cultural modernization, the form was changed into *director's theater*.<sup>173</sup> Through the early state of this transition period, staging Western classics had been a priority.<sup>174</sup>

Nazım Hikmet wrote many plays in Early Republican period for example but he is never known as a playwright since his professional writing career was built on poetry. Though Hikmet's plays (which have a great variety from comedies to tragedies) are still performed because of their literary success. But Hikmet is an unconventional example. A more conventional example on this aspect would be Halide Edip. Edip wrote an absurd play named "Masked Soul" (written around 1935) which was published in a daily newspaper as episodes but it was never republished<sup>175</sup>. Just like Edip's example there are many cases where a well-known novelist or columnist writes one (or few) play, but these are not widely known or performed today since these writers generally couldn't reach the same writing skill in their plays when compared to their main literary products. Until very recent times theater texts played a supportive role in a writer's career, adding a variety, a proof of his/her writing skills.

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<sup>172</sup>Ayşin Candan indirectly states that the form of institutional theaters had been writer's theater (Candan et al., 1999, 137) but I disagree. *Writer's theater*, especially after 19<sup>th</sup> century, became a form where the director is less needed in conventional terms since the text and performers share the same culture (and even time), and writer gives direct staging descriptions in text. This never happened in Turkey.

<sup>173</sup> That's why -even in classical texts- most elderly actors tend to improvise even to limits of blocking the story, they are a generation more integrated with political-comedy improvisations of meddah tradition. But even today, being much more controlled though, some actors I met told that they improvised in text-based plays such as in-yer-face plays (personal communication with Umut Kaçamak, May 30, 2014 – the play he mentioned was Sado-Mazo Blues Bar of Maria Manolescu).

<sup>174</sup> The most central form of Ottoman-Turkish literature had been poetry but starting from around late 18<sup>th</sup> but significantly 19<sup>th</sup> century there were some important trials in other genres but playwriting had been marginal even among them (or given credit by progressive nationalists only as an entertaining tool of educating common people). Playwriting developed slowly and as I tell through the text, painfully in Turkey based on filtering mechanisms of institutional theaters.

<sup>175</sup> It is published in English though. (Adak, conference notes, December 2013)

Around 1950s, State Theaters started ordering plays from local playwrights but until the mid2000s the common discourse among theater environments continued to be “there is a great lack of local texts in Turkey.” The genre was not really developed because it was very difficult for local writers to stage their plays, very few had the luxury of being in touch with a private theater group willing to perform new texts<sup>176</sup> and to access institutional theaters they had to pass the Literary Committee<sup>177</sup>. Even if their play passed the committee<sup>178</sup> there would always be a long (a minimum of 3-5 years) waiting period to be staged. Play reading on the other hand, is a very limited reading habit<sup>179</sup> even among committed readers in Turkey. Therefore, until recently, writers did not develop their professional writing careers on playwriting because it didn't reach both a theatrical audience and a literary audience.

The new wave of playwrights appeared with alternative theaters (second generation) of mid2000s since their plays can now reach an audience directly.<sup>180</sup> These plays generally dug the collective subconscious in private stories and personal relations. Playwrights have evolved from within a theater group in

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<sup>176</sup> Like the unique Haldun Taner, his first work (Günün Adamı – The Man of The Day) was banned by Istanbul Municipality Theater (happening in late 1950s). Later his works were performed by private theaters of 1960s period and gained great success.

<sup>177</sup> There are cases where plays are rejected for unsupported reasons. Cüneyt Büktel's play “Theobe” being rejected by the literary committee ended with long lasting harsh arguments among theater circles with Büktel's insistence.

<sup>178</sup> There is a great variety of speculation on why and how plays are rejected by the Literary Committee. Politically critical plays (if not directly and openly opponent) might be accepted, but their “waiting period in bureaucracy” seems to have a tendency of being longer or the events that the play is referring to should be cooled. Like a play on 2001 economic crisis -which devastated a majority of Turkey- is performed in 2013/2014 theater season in State Theaters (name of the play: İkinci Dereceden İşsizlik Yanığı / Second Degree Unemployment Burn). No play is performed on GeziPark resistance in any institutional theater though, when there is at least seven plays I personally documented on the resistance in alternative theater field only in the season of 2013/2014.

<sup>179</sup> In year 2008 Yılmaz Ögüt (director of Mitos-Boyut Theater Publishing House) states that they still couldn't finish selling the 2000 copies of a play book even from well-known playwrights such as Memet Baydur, Adalet Ağaoğlu or Sermet Çağan since the printing date of 1993. (Ögüt et al., 2009)

<sup>180</sup> Ministry of Culture asks for text approval before funding private theaters' works, politically opponent texts and topics which state defines as “private” are generally not funded. (“Kültür Bakanlığı Özel Tiyatrolardan,” 2014)

which they can write and direct for the first time.<sup>181</sup> Yeşim Özsoy Gülan, Berkun Oya, Cem Uslu, Özer Arslan, Sami Berat Marçalı, Yiğit Sertdemir, Didem Kaplan, Berfin Zenderlioğlu and Mirza Metin (last two generally write in Kurdish) are only some examples of writer-director synthesis but there are many others. For example the 2013 play of Murat Mahmutyazıcıoğlu – Şekersiz (Sugarless) – was directed by him and he took part in stage, costume and music design also.

Contrary to what is expected, the writer-directors generally create openness for the group members the process of making the play, since they have the right to change the text spontaneously, if a group member comes with a logical criticism.<sup>182</sup> This is a different way of playwriting compared to previous period where the writer writes for an anonymous stage and anonymous performers.

But this mixture creates confusion in the academic terminology, is this the unconventional birth of writer's theater in Turkey? My basic answer is no, the 2000s theater paradigm in Turkey cannot be readily classified as the birth of the writer's theater, director's theater or even under a less canonized term of performer's theater. It is actually closer to being the "theater of the ensemble".

This process has three ingredients: an idealist group of people who want to do theater, a democratic director who is also the writer and /or theater theorist of the

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<sup>181</sup> Isochronically with the wave of second generation after mid2000s new playwriting workshops and playwriting contests appeared. Since 2006 GalataPerform organizes a yearlong play writing workshops and acts the plays written in the workshop in next season. Since 2006 Mitos-Boyut Publishing House organizes playwriting contests and publishes the award winning plays as a book. In 2011 Kumbaracı50 started organizing a playwriting workshop also. There are short playwriting workshops (1 to 7 days) appearing as more private institutions take part in theater field. Since mid2000s some municipalities take part to motivate new playwrights also like Kadıköy or Bakırköy Municipality of Istanbul.

<sup>182</sup> Some characters in some plays, like the prostitute in Sami Berat Marçalı's *Küçük* is transformed through the actress Veda Yurtsever İpek's integration as the performer. Or a more significant example is Cem Uslu's *Parti* which in the brochure gives credit to the improvisations of the *Ekip* theater group while *making* the text "Parti" is a conventional theater text, it is a story which continues from beginning till the end. The improvisations did not lead to overlapping narrations like the general tendency. The characters in the story were build by performers which Cem Uslu used in the last version of the text.

group and there is always a long time spent working together; sometimes a lifetime. And they shape horizontal communities among themselves.<sup>183</sup> This went beyond marginal groups and developed as a trend only after mid2000s in Turkey which in return created its own playwrights.

The shared collective *place* (the stage and life made encircling it) is critical in this writing process since the playwright writes for that significant environment. It is not that these plays cannot be carried to different stages, they can and they won't lack quality, but when they are staged in their original environment (just as 90s in-ner-face plays in UK) they have different layers of meaning. In this sense, they have site-specific features. The play *Fü* of Murat Mahmutyazıcıoğlu was staged in Üsküdar Tekel Stage<sup>184</sup> which is one of the smallest among State Theaters' Stages. Though Baysan Pamay, the well known theater spectator of Istanbul, watched the play both in Üsküdar Tekel Stage and İkincikat-Karaköy. He stated in social media that the experience radically differed, in alternative stages the closeness of performers and audience changes the intensity of watching experience. The personal, individual stories are deformed by frame structure of traditional stages<sup>185</sup>.

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<sup>183</sup>In Pina Bausch's documentary *Pina*, a young dancer introduced herself as "I'm the first baby born in the Tanztheater." Her father and mother are both dancers of the Tanztheater and she has become one also. This is an example of how long these groups can work and how sustainable they are.

<sup>184</sup> The play (*Fü*) was staged in Üsküdar Tekel Stage in the Istanbul International Theater Festival of 2014.

<sup>185</sup>Though not all experimental stages mean that they will open minds of writers in the long run. An unconventional example here is Berkun Oya's experience with Krek's stage in SantraIstanbul (between 2010 and 2014). The stage had been significantly different because it was the extremist version of the Italian/frame stage (even the scale of the stage was 3x4 units like a tv screen). The stage area and audience was separated by glass and audience listened the performer's voices, breaths and sounds of movement with headphones. This watching experience handicapped possibilities of performative publicness because the experience was not shared among audience members anymore. But there had been a secret, more problematic side of the stage which effected Berkun Oya's writing. The form was so extremely defined it started to close experimental writing possibilities. Berkun Oya's two plays staged in Krek back to back in two seasons show how the writing experience tended to close. In "Güzel Şeyler Bizim Tarafta" there was a moment where all performers left the stage and the audience listened their actions' sounds with earphones while watching the empty stage. The same trick was done in "Babamın Cesetleri" also.

Some plays cannot be carried to other sites on the other hand, even when they are translated texts. For years Sami Berat Marçalı (from İkinciKat) tried to stage Dissocia (by Anthony Neilson) from SahneHal to their own original stage in İstiklal Avenue but only around 2012-2013 theater season Marçalı and crew made the optimum dramaturgy of the play by starting the play in entree (organizing scenes so to force the audience to turn around and watch) and make audience walk to their seats afterwards. Seats were placed linearly which formed the stage as a corridor resembling the theme of the play as a journey. When they had to move out of the stage due to urban development policies, they couldn't carry the play to a new site. The original place had given them a very good dramaturgy and that dramaturgy couldn't be carried. Marçalı's own play Sürpriz (Surprise) lost dramaturgical meaning also when performed in İkincikat-Karaköy stage. Along with many, these are some cases that when place gives dramaturgy for the crew. "Place giving a dramaturgy" is a more intense performative publicness experience for the crew and spectator when compared to "space improvisation" of performers, because it bonds to the time-place (in Kevin Lynch's terminology) stronger. "Space improvisation" is about present time when "place dramaturgy" is about a wider span of time starting from past and continuing to future while including the present.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> For example Çıplak Ayaklar Dance Theater crew found its studio after the reality they faced after graduating Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University's Modern Dance Department that they can't work in State Institutions because there was no place for modern dance when they graduated in mid2000s (now there is a unit in Ankara State Opera and Ballet) and even if they can work in an institution as a dancer it is a bureaucratic and un-autonomous work habitat. In 2007 they were rehearsing in other people's Studio's after midnight and they were already pushed out of their rented studios first in Asmalı Mescit based on rent rises. According to one of the dancers they were in continuous need of "looking for space and making the space". When they were either going to separate or find a space they found their Studio in Tophane. The Studio at first didn't have any infrastructure and they created a usable space through years.

In their self narrative they recall the beginning a being happy for having found a space to rehearsal. Later they questioned themselves and found no reason to insist on Italian Stages (as it is practiced in conservatory) for their performances when they are actually doing contemporary works and there were in need of a performance space. Thats how the studio also became their performance

The most significant example of the stage shaping the writer's writing experience happened in Kumbaracı50. Yiğit Sertdemir, founder, writer and director of Kumbaracı50 felt that he needs to find a solution for columns in their stage area which limited the watching angles radically. At last his solution was to refer to these columns within his own texts. This way, these columns became a part of the play, nearly a décor. Some spectators even asked if they will "move" the columns after the play. Sertdemir's "Gerçek Hayattan Alınmıştır" play for example, can be read partly as a self narrative of finding that stage. The man in the play brings his mother, an ex-theater-actress, to his new (alternative) stage. The first thing mother says when entering the stage is "But there are columns!".

There are examples of attachments to bigger scales of urban spaces though which widens the "place dramaturgy" effect of performative publicness. Some plays written for Beyoğlu for example, when played in Beyoğlu, leaves the audience in a very dense feeling which they carry with themselves as they exit. There is a feeling that the story continues out on the street. These plays are generally realistic, goes within a living room of a house so the spectator watches a living room among many others similar to this one, but never stereotypically. I'll briefly give three examples and leave this argument here.

One is Şekersiz (Sugarless) written by Murat Mahmutyazıcıoğlu and acted in AsmalıSahne.<sup>187</sup> The play takes place in a livingroom where two couples from different generations are seen. First couple are ghosts, who had died around 1950s and second couple are living in present. These private stories of both couples are

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space. They call the place "home" and they use the architectural space as their starting point in many of their works like "Ters Okyanus" (Upside Down Ocean) which makes these works unique in its site-specific dramaturgy. In the long run though they will probably be displaced by the state's gentrification policies just as the rest of the neighbourhood. (Çıplak Ayaklar Crew, personal communication, July 7, 2014)

<sup>187</sup>In AsmalıMescit, the Galata side ending of İstiklal Avenue.

enrooted in the urban texture of AsmalıSahne, play continuously refers to the life on streets of AsmalıMescit neighbourhood and its change through decades. Even though the play can be said to be light hearted, the audience is left with a question of their own relationships in private in the same urban texture. In this sense this play for example, reveals another side of performative publicness which is to show that most “private” problems are not psychological but also deeply sociological (Özbek, 2004, 448).

The second case is another face of performative publicness which is revealing collective memory attached to personal narratives. İz (Trace) in this sense, is very significant. It is a play acted in GalataPerform (a stage very close to Galata Tower) about the violent history of the Beyoğlu district in there layers of stories unfolding through the play. 6-7 September 1955 case of Christian minorities being attacked (mostly Greek Orthodox people but including Christian minorities also), the 1980s military coup where especially left wing of the whole society was cut down, and 2010’s Kurdish immigration to bigger cities (because of war) and gender violence against transvestites are all told in one livingroom in the Galata district by individual stories – the place has *really* seen all the three layers of violence throughout its urban history. According to my field experience and to new self-narrating theater criticisms, it can be said that many audience members go out to the same reality afterwards which makes it impossible for audience to leave the collective memory of the place behind and go back to the ordinary state of daily life.

Third example is a very unique one, it is a play about urban transformation from Kumbaracı50, named “Yokuş Aşağı Emanetler” (Down the Hill Entrusts). The play was acted only in sunny days, which means the beginning and ending of the theater season only. It is performed in the open air, and the audience walks through

the street as a group which are made up of exiled people of the city. The walk starts in Gönül Sokak, continues to Istiklal Avenue, comes to Kumbaracı street sloping down the hill. The audience is given headphones in turn for their identity cards and in each stop they listen to the stories of each character. Audience is also given key holders at the beginning which writes what they can and can't do<sup>188</sup> and ultimately the audience understands that they are *already* exiled from the city, they are collecting the last people to be exiled<sup>189</sup>. The stories of characters start with an Armenian woman cook, continues with a women street performer clown (who doesn't speak), runs into the crazy childish lady (with a strong metaphor of The Little Match Girl) who looks for her mother, the paper collector man, the German woman who was pushed away from the peripheries of Europe and now can't find a place in Istanbul either and lastly the pianist who first lost his career as a pianist because newspapers scandalized him for giving piano lessons to young Turkish (Muslim) girls, as a Christian and later lost his arm in an accident which turned him into a state official who collects the keys of the unwanted of the city. At the end The Little Match Girl hides the audience and the unwanted characters to stage of Kumbaracı50. In the dark, lighted with candles only, they speak as if they (we) can hide until the armless state official goes away. Eventually, he gets them and the audience also. The play is strongly site-specific, it can't be carried to another site just as urban transformation cannot carry the urban culture and public relations of a society to other districts. The performers did their best to fit in the organic space – they improvised with the space and they wrote their own texts which were later made into one collective narrative.

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<sup>188</sup> “Don't ask questions. / Follow officials' orders. / Group won't wait for you. / Your old key is inoperative. / Give your identity. / Don't sing. / **Thank you for your cooperation.**” (Bolding is from the original text)

<sup>189</sup> Another play coming about urban transformation is in Summer 2014 season of Yarının Oyunları (Tomorrow's Plays) on the theme “transformation”. Firuze Engin, writer of the short play, processed the theme into “urban transformation” since it is the daily reality in Istanbul today.

And the last scene reveals the tragedy of urban development schemas, it is not only hitting the marginalized of the lower classes but also the middle classes.<sup>190</sup>

Lastly, the playwrights of this generation are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of these new stages. Disadvantages are that productions are limited to small core cadres, the décor can't be changed most of the time, if the performers fail the backstage can't save them and plays won't reach big audiences each night. Though these are also the exact advantages of these stages: the plays are produced with small number of performers, produced after dense work periods and because of the staging plays become more "real" instead of "theatrical". The watching and acting experience gets intense as the watching form changes.

This fact also changes play writing. The writer keeps in mind the staging possibilities, the advantages and disadvantages. As a general trend it should be noted that this new playwriting paradigm created a general trend of revealing personal stories of individual characters (not stereotypical or common denominator of an identity or class) in relation with collective social and place-based memories.

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<sup>190</sup> This play could have been analyzed under "Urban Dilemmas" or "Ethical Compass" subchapters also but I've put it here to show how much space improvisation helps in making original texts of contemporary life. Though this example should be kept in mind for the other sections also.

## Collectivity Ideal and Reality

There are many positive sides of the collective life and working environment shaped in alternative stages. I've mentioned some of them in other chapters but in this section I'll define this environment and its ingredients with specific details and reveal some of the negative sides of this kind of work which can only be seen after being worked in one of these stages or – like me- spending a lot of time in field study.

Positive sides of collective working starts by generating what I call “performative publicness”. Performative publicness is the term I use to express the collective production environment of the daily life of theater from making the decors to cleaning the bathrooms – without being “defined by job description” and without paid to do so. Performers’, director and writer interacts in making the decors, costumes and lighting makes it possible to end up with a holistic approach to play. Even if each single element does not come out perfect, they all serve the play.<sup>191</sup> This kind of unspecialized but voluntary work has its own problem solving mechanisms of putting together a play like reusing ex-decor material or improvising in space. This kind of play-making process helps resisting closedness of bureaucratic labour divisions by nature and keeps people more creative and open minded about finding solutions.

Another important ingredient of this kind of work and solidarity is that it leads to “immediate political action taking”, since the group is already made by people who depend on each other to start a new work from scratch. Nearly all

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<sup>191</sup> This is a common problem in institutional theaters. Every single play-making ingredient can be perfect (the well-thought, detailed decor and costume, the good acting, the well-organized lighting and so on) but they might not build up to serving the narrative of the play in the end since each element is separately crafted and put together later.

alternative theater groups' funds were cut back after GeziPark events in June 2013 since they all gave open support, from making plays in GeziPark to opening their doors to protesters who ran away from police brutality. Most of their stages were turned into temporary infirmaries<sup>192</sup> through June 2013. Later they again gave open supports to other protests from social media.<sup>193</sup>

Their solidarity bonds helped all of these stages' survival<sup>194</sup> especially when they let their audiences learn about other stages and theaters. Each of these theaters has a table or a shelf near the ticket box where brochures of other alternative stages and their plays, many stageless groups' plays are advertised. They made a successful collective brochure through the 2011-2012 season which in 2013-2014 season became a successful, updated, internet site ([www.alternatifsahneler.com](http://www.alternatifsahneler.com)). Just as the brochure, the site shows all the plays in that significant night (and month) for anyone who wants to see a play that night. They commonly share information on each others' plays in social media to inform their audience who wants to see other plays. In 2013 they made a one-week alternative theater festival named AltFest which

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<sup>192</sup> Kumbaracı50, MekanArtı, ŞermolaPerformans and İkinciKat

<sup>193</sup> Other than individual supports on various protesting cases from these groups the four events that I can recall which alternative stages made open calls to mobilize people on social media and form solidarity in social injustice cases are when an actor from Emek Stage, Barış Atay, was taken under custody for more than a week for his support of GeziPark protests. All of these groups shared photographs of themselves holding banners such as "Barış Atay is not alone". For the protests against internet limitations of government in 8<sup>th</sup> of February (2014) all of these groups shared anonymous body pieces of a member of their group where the slogan "What are you doing in 8th of February?" was written. When Kazova textile workers started their strike alternative stages sold these workers' products to show solidarity, and they collected help for earthquake victims of 2011 Van earthquake with NGOs when government failed to protect people from winter conditions of Van. They also take action in defending themselves when they are targeted by older generations to be "second league" (Çağlayan, 2014) – they gave collective answers ("Alternatif Sahneler Ve Bağımsız," 2014) to such threads. These are only the cases I documented, there are probably more examples.

<sup>194</sup> The relatives of these groups are giving help in running the stages also. For example D22's cafe is run by the mothers of the three founders (actors) of the stage.

included a playwriting contest, premiers of new plays and carrying plays to different stages within the network.<sup>195</sup>

In last few years they also organized (with the input of figures from 90s avant-garde also) two important conferences on current issues of theater in Turkey. First one took place in Kadir Has University's stage in 17<sup>th</sup> of October in 2012 named "Yeni Seyir Halleri" (New Watching Experiences). The spokespeople were theater people from 90s avant-garde (the undercurrent) and audiences from late 2000s avant-garde (the second generation), which was extremely important because many of the young second generation artists learned about the existence of such an undercurrent by the help of this conference.<sup>196</sup>

The second one was organized by the representatives of the second generation and was called "Yeni Seyir Halleriyle Yerli Metinler" (Local Texts with New Watching Experiences). The week before the conference was organized so that a spectator would watch different local plays in 7 different stages through the week<sup>197</sup> (with a special discount in ticket prices through the week) and at the end listening the

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<sup>195</sup>In late 2013-2014 theater season there was also another ticket discount system they worked. If a spectator watches a play in an alternative stage within the network s/he gets an "AltBilet" (AltTicket) which cannot be used in the same stage but can only be used in another stage within the network. With this ticket this person can see another play in another stage with discount. There are also individual ticket discount policies of stages from buying seasonal cards or seats. The most original one though takes place in SahneHal called "Askıda Bilet" (Hanging Ticket). This is when someone who wishes to help a student or a spectator who won't be able to allow a ticket by buying a ticket and hanging it on ropes in the entrance of SahneHal where this person can get the ticket and enter the play. The best part of this process is both sides of this action stay anonymous.

<sup>196</sup>The moderator was Sündüz Haşar and spokespeople were: Burcu Yasemin Şeyben, Çetin Sarıkartal, Emre Koyuncuoğlu, Kerem Kurdoğlu, Robert Schild, Zeynep Günsür

<sup>197</sup>12 January 2013 Saturday 20.30: Yalnızlar Kulübü (Loners Club) in İkincikat // 13 January 2013 Sunday 20.30: Bizde Yok (We don't have) in Mekan Artı // 14 January 2013 Monday 20.30: Yaka Beyaz (Collar White) in Sahne Hal // 15 January 2013 Tuesday 20.30: Antigone 2013 in Şermola Performans // 17 January 2013 Thursday 20.30: Bir Onat Kutlar Senfonisi (An Onat Kutlar Symphony) in Oyuncular Tiyatro Kahve // 18 January 2013 Friday 20.30: Katilcilik (A Killing Game) in Kumbaracı50 // 19 January 2013 Saturday 20.30: Yeni Bir Hayat İçin (For A New Life) in Maya Cüneyt Türel Sahnesi

stories of these plays and play-making processes from writers and/or directors.<sup>198</sup> On 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2013, the conference<sup>199</sup> was held in Kumbaracı50's stage.

This solidarity also turned into collective production projects. There are two important cases to be mentioned. One is Kumbaracı50's "6 üstü oyun" (6 plays) project where 6 writers<sup>200</sup> from contemporary playwrights wrote single person plays with the theme "Today". Three of these plays are realized in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 seasons. First play by Ebru Nihan Celkan "Kimsenin Ölmediği Bir Günün Ertesiydi" (The Day After Nobody Died: the life of a transvestite, acted by Sumru Yavrucuk) received many awards and is still successfully performed. The second play was "Evaristo" (by Cihan Canova, acted by Ayşenil Şamlıoğlu<sup>201</sup>) also. The third play (written by Ayşe Bayramoğlu, acted by Nihal Koldaş<sup>202</sup>) "Tık... Tık... Tıkılap..." is a more performative (physical) performance compared to others. The last three plays are waiting to be performed so the project has not finished yet.

The second important project realized together is İkincikat's "Yarının Oyunları" (Plays of Tomorrow) project. The theme of these plays are selected with online audience voting where four themes (justice, media, transformation, morality)

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<sup>198</sup>This organization can said to be triggered of 2013 AltFest. This was the first bigger scaled organization these groups get through together.

<sup>199</sup>Moderator: Sevinç Erbulak // Spokespeople: Berfin Zenderlioğlu (ŞermolaPerformans), Cüneyt Yalaz (Maya Cüneyt Türel), Özer Arslan (SahneHal), Sami Berat Marçalı (İkinciKat), Selma Köksal Çekiç (Oyuncular Tiyatro Kahve), Ufuk Tan Altunkaya (MekanArtı), Yiğit Sertdemir (Kumbaracı50)

<sup>200</sup>Ayşe Bayramoğlu, Cihan Canova, Ebru Nihan Celkan, Mirza Metin, Yeşim Özsoy Gülan and Yiğit Sertdemir

<sup>201</sup> Şamlıoğlu is the General Art Coordinator of Istanbul Municipality Theaters since 2009.

<sup>202</sup> An important figure from 90s avant-garde, from second generation of Bilsak and co-founder of Maya Stage.

were distributed to four playwrights<sup>203</sup> by drawing lots. The performers were chosen by lot also. The plays will begin in the summer season of 2014.<sup>204</sup>

On the other hand there are the negative effects and risks of this kind of collective work. At first sight collective working seems as if it demolishes hierarchy but it can easily lead to silent hegemony. There are at least three hierarchies I can cite in alternative theater groups' working mechanisms which increase as the group gets larger. On top of the not-so-solid pyramid, there is the cofounder writer, director or actor, secondly there is co-founder actors and actors and lastly there is the unpaid workers: voluntary assistants. These voluntary assistants are generally university students (not necessarily theater students) who work with groups around a season. They don't get treated bad of course (since they can leave any moment if they like) and they can get to see all the plays on their stage for free if there are seats left, but their work goes unseen most of the time and there are cases where their labor is exploited especially when they have to collect decors and clean the stage when only a few (or none) performers are left to help.

The other problem of this working method appears in busy periods of the theater season because of the lack of organization. In last few seasons there have been meetings organized every week to overcome such gaps of management. There is the weariness of "everyone doing everything" case which leads to confusions and unnecessary stress.<sup>205</sup> If handled rightly, these disadvantages can end up forming good publicness. For example the week before the local elections of 2014 had been a

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<sup>203</sup> Sabahattin Yakut, Özer Arslan, Deniz Madanoğlu, Firuze Engin

<sup>204</sup> The theater groups in Anatolian side (Asian side) of Istanbul, Kadıköy stages generally use more conventional forms of theater making but in recent years they tend to get together while especially when negotiating with municipality. ("Kadıköy Tiyatroları İlk Adımı," 2014)

<sup>205</sup> There are cases such as reserved tickets being sold. The reserved ticket's owner than, is asked if s/he can sit on floor or come back next week. The spectator leaves to see the play next week but the play is not acted in the following week. Or there are cases when an audience member has bought a ticket from internet but the play is canceled in afternoon but the spectator is not informed.

dead period within the peak point of the season. “Evim, Güzel Evim” (Home, Sweet Home, by Ebru Nihan Celkan) had only five spectators on that significant night and leading performers (like Füsün Demirel) welcomed the audience members and explained the situation, apologized that they can’t act with such limited number of audience and asked if they can come to another play. The spectators, voluntary workers and performers had a tea together in the small office of the theater.

The other problem faced in recent years is the fact that even though there is financial survival problems of alternative theaters they do profit in moderate amounts in the last few seasons. The profit does not generally go to improving stage facilities or even basic safety needs such as strengthening the stage lights.<sup>206</sup> The time and effort does not go to improving play making processes also. Rehearsal periods being very short (around a month and a half) victimize the first few weeks’ audiences. This fast-forward production method also disqualifies some writer’s writing also. After a writer becomes bounded with an ensemble (especially if the ensemble has a stage) the writer generally ends up writing without feeding his or her writing crafts or intellectual pool – this both closes the possibilities of giving chances to new writers (since the ensemble’s writing is monopolized) and it also kills writing quality of that writer since his/her work can access to staging way too easily.

Another problem is that the stage owning groups might, in future, have a tendency to monopolize the theatrical languages and the stageless people who want to do theater in blackbox stages. Though this seems like an outsized argument for now it is a nuance to be noted. For example in 2012-2013 Afife Awards Güzde Çetiner got the Best Supporting Actress Award with her performance in “Peri Devden Korkuyor” (Fairy is Scared of the Giant) of TiyatroKartela. TiyatroKartela is

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<sup>206</sup>Stage lights have to be bounded with iron chains but some stages use plastic cords which are not safe.

a stageless group and they have given a lot of time to find a stage among alternative theaters. Tiyatro Kartela is a group made from State Theaters actors from older generation lead by Özgür Erkekli. They were rejected countless times even though they were professionals in every sense. At last they performed their play award-winning play in Emek Sahnesi and Hayal Kahvesi. This significant case might reveal the secret bond of the solidarity between oppressed theater people of alternative theaters (with unconventional educational histories who are eliminated by institutions) who would do the same when the positions change.

The last upcoming problem is the stars or television celebrities starting to be included in alternative theater productions. When the second wave actually started around 2008 there were only no name (newly graduated or self educated) young people in these productions. There was a new platform for their voices to be heard. When stars became involved (which also helps in publicity) there is a risk of keeping new no name people off the platform.

## “Ethical Compass”: Forming an Ethical Question on the Basis of Performative Publicness

One of the most discussed problems of public space theory is differentiating between public and private. Leaving that problem aside, there is another problem about the difference between “exposure” and “representation” when crossing the line from private to public. If this problem is not well thought, especially in the rising age of neoliberal conservatism (as Sennett tells in “The Corrosion of Character”<sup>207</sup>), personal problems implode: which means they become psychological problems when actually they are sociological problems. At this point art create a public face for what seems to be “personal” problems at the first sight. This is the case of “literary publicness” based on discussions on literature which Habermas describes. Performative publicness, other than being different in constructing the dialogue floor, makes the same gesture of creating a public façade for “everyone’s personal” problems. The importance of art when constructing publicness is revealed in following quotes (translated by me).

Actually in daily life, in some way or other we know that sincerity or candidness does not mean “exposure” and imagination cannot be reduced to “revealing secrets”, individual experience can be represented without being fragmented but in a holistic narrative, or making social problems into psychological problems cause troubles of knowledge and

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<sup>207</sup>“We all write our life stories as if we were novelists, [Dan] McAdams [Northwestern University] believes, with beginnings, conflicts, turning points, and endings. (...) Those who live the most fully realized lives (...) tend to find *meaning* in their obstacles.” (Cain, 2012, 747 – italics added by me) As people lose their self-narrative in the flexible capitalism they tend to get away from most of their public interactions (probably it feels less meaningful to take part in public life since they became individuals with no political agency) and tend to get more conservative. In Sennett’s book “The Corrosion of Character”, chapter 7 named as “Failure” examines the example of fired IBM programmers to give insight to losing self-narrative by failure not dependent on their individual faults but due to shift from Fordist-Keynesian capitalism to flexible capitalism, corresponding to neoliberalism. Fired IBM programmers got away from their public actions (some of them only went to church after being fired) and vote for extremely conservative candidates in 1994 elections since conservatism suddenly become more meaningful in making a self-narrative even though this narrative is build on xenophobia. According to Sennett, in more stable times – before the time they lost their self-narrative – they would have found silly to vote for such candidates. (Sennett, 2008, 134)

understanding in the society but when it comes to public representations this common intuitional sense (and the gap formed by reflexivity) not being transformed into physical alternative languages, not having developed free-inclusive discourses and representation forms reveals our imprisonment in what Kluge calls “tyranny of privacy”. (Özbek, 2004, 449)

Here art, including theater, becomes the tool for breaking the chains of “tyranny of privacy” without exposing like in reality shows which does not conduct publicness either. Fiction is the best filter of reality for making people discuss and even change reality.

In this sense in a society (in characteristics of traditional, modern and including variants of those two, mixed or pure) the developedness of literature and art, their diversity and plurality and wide-ranged “popularity” (to be owned by the “people” – to be made into be “people’s”), shows that that society is discovering the expressions and representations of self-descriptions of being individual and collective, experiences and tastes. (Özbek, 2004, 448)

While searching to find concepts to tell how this dialogue floor is build through alternative theater I came across a beautiful metaphor in Süreyya Evren’s 2013 dated book “Anarşizmler” (Anarchisms). Directness and dialogue are very central themes to anarchist<sup>208</sup> (or post-anarchist according to some academic literature Evren is critical about) theory and there is a term Cindy Milsten added to the literature: ethical compass. Milsten describes the term as:

The important thing about moving toward a better world is how people go about doing it. Anarchist practices share distinct elements, even if they're implemented in different ways: the lives and communities that they attempt to establish are premised on a shared ethical compass. This is a key, given that most social forces presently deny and try to destroy such alternatives. Reconstructive efforts to restructure everyday life imply that people can work to destroy commodified and coercive relations. They also sustain people for the hard work of doing just that. (Milsten, 2010, 147)

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<sup>208</sup> “Anarchism serves as a touchstone not simply for anarchists but especially for those who encounter anarchism's challenge: "What's the right thing to do?" ” (Milsten, 2010, 47)

The alternative theaters here, by telling the stories of people of Turkey, their traumas, anger, biases and limits create this ground floor of discussing what goes on in “all of our private lives”. The characters on stage correspond to actual people on streets of urban Turkey. Kurds, Muslim women wearing headscarf, LGBT individuals, men traumatized in the war in Southeast Anatolia, boys growing up to become Turkish nationalist fascists, men and women traumatized by the sexual pressures of the culture – basically everyone on the street started to appear on stage.

What is the meaning of seeing these people on stage? Does anyone’s biases are broken or distorted by the questions fiction forces them into asking? Can theater raise strong ethical questions? Or can the individual story on stage give an ethical compass to the audience, beyond all biases? It is possible, and it has been possible all through the history.

This confrontation and revealing of the individual behind the stereotype by the personal story presents an ethical compass to audience by leading them to ask a very simple question: what would you do in the same situation? These plays present a variety of questions and situations that a person can’t easy judge, which starts a dialogue ground by giving an ethical compass. “In a world that feels that is increasingly wrong, anarchism's ethical compass acts as an antidote. That alone is an enormous contribution.” (Milsten, 2010, 50)

When other people come into contact with this ethical compass, they will hopefully "get it" and incorporate the same values into their lives, because it works. It offers directionality to political involvement and buttresses people's efforts to remake society. (Milsten, 2010, 49)

Among many examples about ethical compass leitmotiv in alternative theater field of Turkey, I can give a few examples only from 2013-2014 theater season such as Üst Kattaki Terörist (The Terrorist at Upstairs) production of İkinciKat, production of Gor (“Tomb” in Kurdish) by DestarTheater, and production of Garaj

(Garage) by Craft, Iska (Missed Target) by Krek and “Bakarsın Bulutlar Gider” (Maybe the clouds would go) by Bo Sahne. All of these plays are from the same theater season, and they are picked to give a sense of the variant of the confrontations of social issues and correspondences to real people.

“Üst Kattaki Terorist” (from Emrah Serbes’ story, made into play by Sami Berat Marçalı) deals with a very deep question settled in society of Turkey: How does a person becomes a fascist and under what circumstances and contacts this person can change mind? The play is centering a boy around 12 years old whose bigger brother has been killed in Southeast Anatolia by stepping on a mine when the boy was five. He didn’t cry in his older brother’s funeral and all newspapers gave this as the “heroic altruism of a little boy for his grand nation”. He is deeply traumatized even though he denies it. This resulted with his ultimate hatred against Kurds (but actually everyone) and the story unfolds itself through brotherhood build between the child and a Kurdish university student who moves to their upper flat. This relationship has a healing effect on the boy.

In “Gor” (written by Mirza Metin, in Kurdish), there is a continuous internal monologue of characters which tangles with each other. These are the souls killed from both sides of the same anonymous war (which actually is the war in Southeast Anatolia) and they are in the same tomb. No character is demonized or shown as an ultimate good example, the state and culture is criticized at the same time. There are beautiful staging details which are deeply related to the concept of ethical compass: there is only one woman character (since there is also a physical lack of women actors in theater in Kurdish) and each man on stage has harmed her on purpose or not, based on their traditional beliefs or political ideals and they all feel guilty in

front of her, which appears as none of them being able to look at her. Except one, which is a writer, he is also the only one who didn't harm the woman.

In *Garaj* (by Kemal Hamamcioğlu) we see two obviously different characters: a transvestite and a male university student in his first year of photography department. Student has just immigrated to Istanbul for university with his grandmother. Transvestite is romantic, caring but aggressive, experienced in life whereas the student is naïve, inexperienced and a believing Muslim. They meet by coincidence in a new years eve and a dialogue starts beyond any stereotypes.

*Iska* (by Fuat Mete) is about a group of people telling their stories in monologue form and in a confession tone about their personal relations to compulsory military service in Turkey. There is a white collar lawyer girl who has send her wasted brother to military service by denouncing him but regrets it, a lower class women covering headscarf who send her beloved husband to military service and prays for his returning, a retired public officer who has lost an arm by a traffic accident and whose son has gone to military service (he is extremely scared to lose his son too for no reason just as his arm), a girl whose boyfriend has gone to military service, and lastly a football hooligan who believes he is degenerated since he didn't get into the hot field of the war and deeply regrets that he didn't defend the Kurdish boy from his service period who shoot his own foot to be send to hospital to get away from their lieutenant's physiological tortures.

In “*Bakarsın Bulutlar Gider*” (written by Özen Yula) is about the two people, a Muslim women wearing headscarf whose husband committed suicide and an Anotolian Muslim tradesman who brings her a letter from her dead husband. As the story unfolds the audience sees that these characters are far beyond the stereotypes of media. The women is obsessed with shopping which is the only thing left for her as a

public activity and in the limits of sequestration and psychological break down. She has never heard of this man who knows a lot about her family life and introduced himself as a friend of her husband. She has her own traumas and fears which she reveals through the story. The man on the other hand, seems as if he wants to leave immediately but also wants to take care of her. In the end, the secret of the man reveals, women's dead husband and the tradesman were a gay couple, the husband committed suicide because of his debts, in the apartment they shared with him. Interestingly, the story ends in a point where the two people, traumatized by the same event, form some kind of friendship.

These stories bring up characters from urban Turkey that the audience members coincide everyday and judge simply by their words, clothing or ideological – cultural – religious beliefs they chose to perform. The story behind the stereotype is the part which offers the question leading to ethical compass. These characters are out on the street, they are a part of the public life but once they appear on stage the “tyranny of privacy” is broken, because the audience sees beyond the “public façade” of these people, their intimate moments, family lives, childhood stories are revealed which gives clues to why that character ended up with that public persona that we encounter everyday.

Though the most extreme act of alternative theaters representing individuals who suffer “tyranny of privacy” has been about trans women characters.<sup>209</sup> It is

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<sup>209</sup>From the MA thesis research of Deniz Akın who has studied childhood memories of transgender individuals from Turkey to trace how the heteronormativity is built and why transwomen suffer from this the most: “It is possible to analyze the paradoxical regulating principles of working processes of heteronormativity based on nuances between transsexual individuals’ childhood memories. Transsexual individuals are introduced to many solid gender norms starting from childhood. Their unconscious opponent positions cause them to be warned by family members and close circles directly or indirectly. In a sense the contradiction between masculinity and femininity concepts are delivered to the child as a must. In this way heteronormative system’s first principle starts working. The opposite sides of the gender are normalized and not fitting in these roles is seen as “perversion”. What is interesting is that this principle is a little more flexible when the subjects are FM [female to male] transsexual children. FM transsexuals’ childhood narratives show that even though they struggle

important to notice that no trans character ever appeared in any institutional theater and in commercial theaters' productions they only appeared as libidinous, extra feminine (vamp), and entertaining clichés. There had been some side trans characters appearing less stereotypically (see Appendix A, Piece 6) in movies since mid2000s like or *Anlat İstanbul* (2005), which is a combined work of 5 directors (the trans character here was acted by a woman), or Mahsun Kırmızıgül's movie *Güneşi Gördüm* (2009). Still, being homosexual in Turkey in 2010s, even in show business, can be a huge problem.

The trans women characters appearing on Turkey's contemporary stage can actually be divided into three generations by branding the central questions of these plays. I numbered the generations with their (possible) correspondences with feminist waves. In short feminist waves can be summarized with the major theme of arguments. First wave asks for equality (late 19<sup>th</sup> century to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century), second wave ask for rights enrooted in bodily differences (mid 20<sup>th</sup> century to late 20<sup>th</sup> century) which corresponds to age of identity politics also, and third wave asks for individual autonomy (since late 20<sup>th</sup> century). First generation declares that transsexuals are "also" human by sharing experiences, second generation works with literal aspects of identity politics to explain their struggle with society and grow conciseness on the issue to gain rights, and third generation creates individualized trans characters in relation with all the other fragments of society, sharing the same

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internal obscurities and confusion about their subjectivities, to an extent these individuals live a more free innocence period compared to their MF [male to female] transsexual peers. Performed masculinity is tolerated to an extent in biologically female born children. But in biologically male born children putting on femininity or qualities attributed to femininity is seen as a threat both by the individual, family, and the society. In this context, when the "manhood" is endangered, fixing and controlling mechanisms are mobilized more rapidly. In a way "there is no joking on manhood" situation is dominant. This can be explained by masculinity being seen superior to femininity. Elif Şafak (2004: 14 [\*]) points the modernization process of Turkey about this issue. Şafak, who analyzed the novel characters of this period results that femininity is a quality-lowering trait for both women and men characters." (Şeker [Akin], 2013, 156)

[\*] Şafak, Elif (2004), "Transgender Bolero", *Middle East Report*, Spring, issue 230, p. 26-47

stage. These generations are not chronological but overlapping (especially second and third generations). Majority of the plays including trans characters are produced in second generation of identity politics.

First generation is Esmeray<sup>210</sup>, all by herself, and she uses a more political tone than literal tone and her performances are autobiographical. She is a trans woman who lived on prostitution in late 1990s but now she became a theater artist, a columnist and an activist.<sup>211</sup> Second generation is Ebru Nihan Celkan, Şamil Yılmaz and Ali Cüneyt Kılıcıoğlu's plays where experiences, life or lives of trans women and their struggle with society is told in a very literal form with the attempt of finding a *common ground* in all trans experiences in Turkey. Another common thing about second generation trans woman fiction plays is that they all end with murders of the transwomen like *Kimsenin Ölmediği Bir Günün Ertesiydi* (The Day After Nobody

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<sup>210</sup>Esmeray acting career includes Dario Fo's "Rape" and "A Woman Alone" and some works abroad. In this thesis only her self-written and self-performed texts are included. ("Esmeray Oyunları Toplu Gösterimi," 2010)

<sup>211</sup> Until the last moment of this research I didn't know if there had been any plays on transmen. Lately I've found out that there had been a reading theater activity based on transmen's experiences performed by themselves. "In 2010 Pride Week we made the "Kimyam Tenime Uymuyor" (My chemistry does not fit my body) performance. In 2011 if Istanbul Rainbow Activities we made the "Trans Men Stories" reading theater." (Şeker [Arıkan], 2013, 61) It is very important to see that stage forms like reading theater or story narration are very inclusive for individuals who are not "trained" as professionals but want to share their experiences. Transmen mostly suffered from not knowing who they are since transmen identity nearly never appears on media or daily life. Only in 2013 an actor, Nil Erkoçlar (now Rüzgar Erkoçlar) became a public discussion for appearing as a transmen, before this (and still even) the transmen identity is not known genuinely unlike transwoman identity. That is why, "being seen" has been a very important issue in this significant reading theater. I'll briefly quote the part on the experience of "being on stage" for this performance:

"Of course Esmeray's performance gave us strength, also it led us. The stories we wrote were things we lived and pushed to the deepest layers of our consciousness never to remember again. [...] We said "We are not professionals. What we are going to do is to tell our own stories". That was even difficult for us. These stories were going to tell us, which is the trans men and commonize us, help us touch people who watch and listen. Many funny, sad, and sometimes surprising narrations of body fixing operations, family relations and opening, sexual experiences, problems of travelling, the anecdotes from toilets, clothing choices, formal days and childhood stories... [...] We under stage lights. Now we are seen! We aimed to be seen. Because trans men lived the problems of not being seen until today. Here we are! To share a very small piece of what we have been through... We put lights mostly on ourselves. We want you to see and understand, to associate us with yourselves. Our problem was to tell the transphobia applied on us. We start telling by saying "Bodies cannot be squeezed into only two sexes". (Şeker [Arıkan], 2013, 61, according to text this part is cited from another contributor of the reading theater named Kanno)

Now (in June 2014), as far as I know, the only sexual identity which did not appear on alternative theaters in Istanbul is the intersex identity.

Died), or *Kadınlar, Aşklar, Şarkılar* (Women, Amour, Songs). *80lerde Lubunya Olmak* (Being Queer in 80s) is between first and second generation since the play is based on real oral interviews from the book which also names the play, but performers are not the holders of the experience like in Esmeray's case. Still though, *80lerde Lubunya Olmak* is closer to second generation because of its fictional setting (a casino) and performers being biological women (using biological women for trans characters is a trend started by Ebru Nihan Celkan's *The Day After Nobody Died* play where transwoman character is act by Sumru Yavrucuk).<sup>212</sup>

First and second generation plays are single person plays or monologue based plays (in which only one performer is on stage) where the most important focus is the sexual identity. The important difference of second generation is the more literal tone (use of metaphors, allegories, dramatic ironies and so on) since the texts are fictions and expression of a common identity but an individual. On the other hand, Esmeray as the first wave, even though being more political (and more politically correct) is more individualistic since she shares her own experiences.

The third generation can be seen in Ahmet Sami Özbudak's *İz* play where there is a trans woman character named Sevengül. Sevengül is neither a stereotype, nor a common ground for a sexual identity. She is an individual, an autonomous character whose gender identity appears just as important as being a heterosexual woman or man. In *Garaj*, which can also considered as third wave, the transvestite character which Enis Arıkan acts, goes between the limits of being the libidinous and entertaining stereotype of media but becomes a real life character as her individual story and tenderness reveals. The most important difference of second wave and third

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<sup>212</sup> In 2013-2014 theater season SahneHal made "Kiss of the Spider Woman" by Manuel Puig. Molina character, though he appears as gay, can actually be seen as a transwoman also since he declares that he does not just like men, he wants to be a woman. Though I didn't include this play into the list because the transwomen characters I note are all from local texts.

wave is that it is the first time the audience sees trans women characters *talking* to other characters of urban Turkey, they are confessing or declaring their stories alone (or as internal monologues) on stage any more.

Within the public sphere created in fringe theaters there is empathy, so that the most marginalized experiences such as transgender experiences can be shared. Trans woman identities challenge patriarchy, conservatism and militarism more than the other LGBTI identities which makes their daily life facing more violence compared to other individuals due to the cultural codes which forces people to see a man's tendency of getting "feminine" as a sign of "degeneration" of all moral codes when the opposite case does not mean that necessarily. Their stories are important to be heard to question the hatred crimes which many people silently approves by marginalizing them, by not giving trans women houses or jobs. In recent years the actors who play trans woman on stage get noticed by awards giving mechanisms (such as Afife Awards or Sadri Alışık Awards) which also encourages such texts which reveals the real life problems of people

The Collective Memory of Space-Based Resistance: Plays on GeziPark through  
2013/2014 Theater Season

(...) it was almost like, water, fire, air were fighting against soil. Three against one.  
("Waking of TOMA<sup>213</sup>" from the play  
"Gezerken" by Yiğit Sertdemir - N. Kurt,  
personal communication, December 11, 2013)

GeziPark resistance was an uprising against governmental pressures but it was started mainly with the unjust invasion of a public park by state pumped capitalism. The park was decided to be turned into a shopping mall shaped as the Ottoman Military Post which was demolished more than a century ago. The shape of the building signed the conservative-Ottomonanist side of pressure on secular life styles and the meaning of the building (shopping mall) signified the capitalist hegemony on all working classes<sup>214</sup>. The park was a place defended against the government for more than a month against the police violence and other cities contributed to the protests by occupying their own urban public areas. Many people got injured, some severely; and young people died. (For a good summary from Süreyya Evren: Appendix A, Piece 7)

There were many tragic sides of the resistance, but it was an undeniable shift between the "serious protesting culture" of Turkey which generally had a masculine tone where seriousness is a priority to keep the protests together, as a sign of persistence and determination. GeziPark was a performative public in the start of

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<sup>213</sup> TOMA is the acronym for anti-riot water canon vehicle in Turkish: Toplumsal Olaylara Müdahale Aracı

<sup>214</sup> Through the AKP period work accidents increased dramatically because neoliberal-developmental economic policies stretched the work security laws. The numbers of "work accidents" (deaths because of unsecure working conditions) each day is between 5-8 according to the Labour Murders Almanack of BirUmut Association. (*İş Cinayetleri Almanacağı 2013, 2014*) The most massive "accident" happened in the event known as Soma Coal Mining Disaster in May 13, 2014 in which, according to official numbers, 301 people died.

21<sup>st</sup> century Turkey where people contributed as individuals and many groups (from LGBTI groups to Anti-Capitalist Muslims and football hooligans of all big teams of Istanbul, but especially Beşiktaş's hooligan group Çarşı) interacted intensely to create a life in the park. There were many jokes, songs, grafitis, documentaries, plays, webcards and brochures on the resistance written and designed at the moment of the events. The resistance changed many people who contributed. In my view alternative theaters which took part in resistance (and lost their fundings because of that) now became very important agents of keeping the memory of the resistance because of form's initial closeness to experience.

There are four narrative forms of GeziPark resistance which appeared in alternative theaters. One is the documentarist form. The second is the metanarrative form. Third is the most used form in the 2013-2014 theater season based on individual experiences made into fiction and experience-based storytellings. The fourth is the one which I claim will appear more in the future, though there were hints of it in the 2013-2014 season also: the allusions and metaphors of the resistance helping the central story by bringing back the collective subconscious.

When the Gezi resistance first started, the political authorities defined an outstanding agency to a theater play by blaming it for the “only” responsible thing for triggering the resistance. This play –Mi Minör- was targeted not only because of the content of the play, but also because its director and leading actor – Mehmet Ali Alabora - had been there at the beginning of Gezi Park resistance and declared the police brutality to international media.

The case is also significant for bringing back the history out of books. 2013 Gezi Park events are compared with 1908 Second Constitution uprisings in popular media through June 2013 – some pro-AKP academics and public intellectuals even

wrote that protesters were the left overs of 1908's Second Constitutional uprising and not Turkish or Muslim. Still though, it was commonly acknowledged that this is the first massive uprising of people in Istanbul in the last 105 years.

Another parallel was drawn when *Mi Minör*'s producer Mehmet Ali Alabora was blamed with triggering the uprising by the governmental authorities including president Erdoğan and later the right-wing newspaper Yeni Şafak. Alabora defended himself as follows: "In our age it is impossible to create social events<sup>215</sup> with theater but Yeni Şafak Newspaper gave great importance to our play by claiming that our play "Mi Minör" which we made with great devotion is as effective as "Vatan Yahut Silistre" which was performed two streets away from our stage in 1873." ("Mehmet Ali Alabora Mi Minör," 2013) Alabora thus defended himself and his crew by referring to the Young Ottoman liberal writer Namık Kemal.<sup>216</sup>

As a spectator of *Mi Minör* play, I didn't find it successful in any norms from dramaturgical choices to urban location (Küçük Çiftlik Park, neighboring Dot's G-Mall) from acting to the backbone of the narrative. It was an environmental play (in Richard Schechner's way) in which people were asked to take action, but the story was only made up of sketches with one narrative holding them together: the audience and performers all live in a country named Pinima which is a dictatorship, only a women pianist and her crew challenges the authority,

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<sup>215</sup> Personally I don't join this comment about the extent of the power of theater but it is questionable how much Alabora believed this also since he is a leading theater artist of Turkey. It is important to note that he made this declaration (which is actually longer than the quotation) under great pressure and later he was threatened with murder because he was against state authorities in GeziPark Resistance. He never gave up resistance like some artists (like contemporary artist Kutluğ Ataman or gag-comedian Şafak Sezer) even under the threat of murder, though he had to leave Turkey because of the lack of protection.

<sup>216</sup> Namık Kemal, as a nationalist who was an opponent to governance of state was exiled in his later life because of his play "Vatan Yahut Silistre" causing people's uprising in the first night of the show on Güllü Ağop's theater in Gedikpaşa, on 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1873.

rest is sleeping in their safety cocoons when all their rights are taken. People were asked to constantly tweet or use social media through the play to be organized against authority (an idea probably coming from Arap Spring). Before Erdoğan gave agency to this play, I wouldn't have mentioned because when I first watched it I thought it only gave secular middle-class Turks a fake catharsis and it didn't reach its true audience.<sup>217</sup> But this event is significant to see how easily arts, but especially theater, can become the black sheep of the government and this unfair agency given to *Mi Minör*, defines the unique success of theater to play beyond theatrical levels: foreshadowing the future.

Then the uprising came in 31<sup>st</sup> of May in 2013. It is important to note that the resistance itself was extremely performative, realizing the ideal description I tried to carve through my thesis as “performative publicness”, the publicness of being together, silently producing or loudly resisting. The feeling was that it was a revolution that people can dance.<sup>218</sup> And they danced, made music, paint the streets and performed.<sup>219</sup> The plays on GeziPark though, started immediately after the first days of the resistance.

*Gezerken* (While Wandering) was written by four playwrights about their experiences in GeziPark after a twitter user named *@renklisahne* (Çuhadar,

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<sup>217</sup> In my sense this play would have been a true success if it was played for free in an urban transformation neighbourhood's actual square, where there is no safety zone for performers. Though it is more risky, it could have made a deeper effect on the audience.

<sup>218</sup>“Gezi Resistance fits Emma Goldman's description of a revolution that you can dance to.” (Evren, 2013)

<sup>219</sup>The performativity of GeziPark resistance is another thesis topic. I'll give only one random example from one of the performances and continue to plays made on GeziPark. While the park was occupied three people from *Tiyatro Bereze*, specialized in their clown characters, came to park with their red noses and crippled-by-the-police make-ups, pantomiming their physical state. Some police officers in the sides of the park (not busy attacking protesters at that significant moment) laughed at them. Güray Dinçol, one of the clowns, showed his bandage and gestured that it was his fault. The police laughed again and gestured that it wasn't his fault but it was the fault of the officer next to him. (G. Dinçol, personal communication, June 20, 2013)

2013)askedthree of them<sup>220</sup> towrite a play on the current uprising in which they were also involved. This group was made by a random twitter user, not by a titled person or an employer. Later they included one more playwright<sup>221</sup> and became a group of four. Each of them wrote a monologue<sup>222</sup> about the resistance in the night joining 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> of July in the Kumbaracı50's stage, while the resistance continued. In 8<sup>th</sup> of July it was played in the occupied park, as a model of performative publicness. Through the summer the play was acted in other city forums<sup>223</sup> held after the resistance. The play itself is more a documentation of the resistance rather than being a masterpiece. Still Gezerken became a part of the ingredients of making of a public sphere each time it was performed in public spaces.

The other documentary work is Tanıklıklar (Witnesses) work of GalataPerform, it was staged as reading theater.<sup>224</sup> The play is written by four<sup>225</sup> playwrights again but composed into one narrative from four different voices by Yeşim Özsoy Gülan. This composition part (along with the difference that it is not staged in public spaces) is the main theatrical difference of the text from Gezerken. Tanıklıklar is not written “in action” like Gezerken, but “after” the action which gave enough time to craft the text better. This way the text was divided into scenes

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<sup>220</sup>Özen Yula, Cem Uslu and Yiğit Sertdemir

<sup>221</sup>Mirza Metin

<sup>222</sup>Cem Uslu wrote from the eye the median Gezi Park protester, not having a signifying identity to be marginalized, and revealed the feelings of what kept these normally-not-protesting-types in action (acted by Serkan Altıntaş). Mirza Metin wrote a text from the eye of a street dog which is performed within the clown technique (acted by Sermet Yeşil). Özen Yula superposed the spatial memory of Taksim Square by giving voice to a ghost of a man (acted by Erdem Akakçe) who has been killed by state's provocateurs in bloody 1<sup>st</sup> of May in 1977 (34 people died on that day in Kazancı slope when trying to escape). Yiğit Sertdemir wrote an absurd story from the eye of the iron nightmare of all protesters: anti-riot water canon vehicle (acted by Şebnem Sönmez first, later by Sevinç Erbulak).

<sup>223</sup> Starting from 4th of August the play was performed in Abbasağa Park in Beşiktaş and continued to Beylikdüzü, Tarabya, Moda, Cihangir, Burgazada , Caferağa, Yoğurtçu

<sup>224</sup>It is shown to audience in Russia within the Turkish Theater Day event and in third New Text New Theater festival of GalataPerform. In both cases it is staged as a reading theater.

<sup>225</sup>Burak Safa Çalış, Ahmet Sami Özbudak, Öznur Şahin and Şenay Tanrıvermiş

of moments critically important for the resistance, like 10.000 people walking through Bosphorus Bridge from Anatolian side in the dawn of the first day (1<sup>st</sup> of June) or the individual resistance act of Standing Man (performance artist Erdem Gündüz) at the moment when everyone thought it was the end. In my sense, the most interesting allusion to literary memory was the reference to Antigone.<sup>226</sup> Antigone has been a continuously revisited metaphor in Turkey's theater for at least half a decade.

Later a second group of plays on the GeziPark were produced. The second, third and eventually fourth narrative forms took shape in this episode. The second narrative form is the attempt of the playwright to give a metanarrative of the GeziPark resistance, which can be seen as a contradictory attempt to the meaning of the resistance which is mostly based on individual's contributions. The "Taksim Meydanı" play, for example, is in the form of a musical, written and composed by Mehmet Ergen. The story reaches back to 2002 when AKP came to power and presents the absolute cliché stereotypes. There is only one protester character coming to stage and the real story of the resistance is passed way too easily by his stereotypical narrative of the Gezi Park resistance from the eye of Turkish middle-class secular wing.<sup>227</sup> Important agents of Gezi such as Anti-Capitalist Muslims is referred to only once and LGBT groups contributions are totally overseen in the play which aims to tell the story by representative characters or narratives.

Actually, the main misunderstanding of the play was trying to "represent" a

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<sup>226</sup> "Öznur: Antigone. June 2013 Turkey adaptation... (laughs bitterly)" ("Tanıklıklar", 2013)

<sup>227</sup> Theater critic Bahar Çuhadar wrote: "(...) Taksim Meydanı seems like a play which winks at 70s political theater but actually goes back and forth between political theater and [fragmented] sketches." (Çuhadar, 2013) But it should be noted that there are more propaganda-based populism for middle-class secular Turks on stage appearing especially after 2014 summer such as Levent Kirca's play (a television gag-sketch producer from 1990s) "Haziran" (June) (Kirca, 2014). To see the level of propaganda it is important to note that Worker's Party's (İşçi Partisi) web site advertises the play since Kirca had been the Istanbul's Mayor Candidate from Worker's Party ("Levent Kirca Yeni Oyunu" "Haziran'la," 2014) .

resistance which was against “representations” in its essence.<sup>228</sup> The protesters were people who were not represented, who were misrepresented or who were against representation, they were for direct decision taking and action taking.

The third narrative form is the more successful form of the GeziPark narrative. These are well-crafted, experience-based, individual and fictional stories<sup>229</sup>. There are two examples I’ll give from this form. One is Mek’an groups play which is actually an Ankara-based group. Their play, “Artık Hiç Bi Şii Eskisi Gibi Olmayacak! Sil Gözyaşlarını!” (Dry Your Tears, Nothing Will Be Same Again!) written by Şamil Yılmaz, acted by Ahmet Melih Yılmaz.<sup>230</sup> The play was about the Ankara part of the nation-wide resistance. The Istanbul premier of the play had been on 8<sup>th</sup> of February in Sekicizincikat<sup>231</sup>, a stage which is located just at Galatasaray square, facing İstiklal Avenue. On 8<sup>th</sup> of February though, there

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<sup>228</sup> Cases of performative publicness increased dramatically after Gezi resistance. People shared scandal tape recordings of government officials in busses and ferries during winter and they took action whenever musicians or actors were tried to be stopped by officials in ferries for example. The most interesting and unique case though was Şafak Tanrıverdi, who became an independent candidate for municipality elections of 2014. He created an absurd public persona, making fun of all the candidates, and made slogans like “Target 1963!” (original AKP slogan: Target 2023) or “Retro everywhere!” (original AKP slogan: Metro everywhere). When he was asked why he did this he said the representative democracy failed as it was revealed in Gezi resistance. If more people put themselves out as he did, the collapse of the system can not be pushed away. He got 1089 votes in elections. His action was performative publicness, it created discussion and movement.

Also look at the book “*Electoral guerrilla theater: Radical ridicule and social movements*” by Bogad, published in 2005.

<sup>229</sup> The complete list of this third form of narrative from 2013-2014 season:  
1. “Artık Hiç Bi Şii Eskisi Gibi Olmayacak! Sil Gözyaşlarını!” (Dry Your Tears, Nothing Will Be Same Again!) – written by Şamil Yılmaz, production of Mek’an  
2. Karabatak (Cormorant) – written by Berkay Ateş, production of D22  
3. Short plays from Theater Uncut Istanbul (Dot), the plays directly about GeziPark is in italics: Ayfer Tunç – Bir Linç Dersi – A Lesson in Lynching / *Berkun Oya – Sıradan Bir Günde Tanıdık Bir Evin Kapısını Çalar Gibi – Like Knocking on the Door of a Familiar House on an Ordinary Day* / Derem Çıray – Apollo 8844 / *Davey Anderson – Polis Devleti – Police State* / Hakan Günay – Kemik Üzerine Et - Flesh on Bone / *Stef Smith – Duman (ve Aynalar) - Smoke (and Mirrors)*  
4. Kırmızı (Red) – written by İraz Yöntem, production of SahneHal

<sup>230</sup> The same group also made the “Kadınlar, Aşklar, Şarkılar” (Women, Amour, Songs) play which I note in ethical compass section.

<sup>231</sup> After İkncikat crew was forced out of their original location on İstiklal Avenue they made two new stages. One is Sekicizincikat on İstiklal Avenue, in Aznavur Passage’s 8<sup>th</sup> floor and the other at Karaköy which is named İkncikat-Karaköy.

were protests for banning of the internet and just around the time the audience was arriving, the police was gassing protesters. The play was delayed 15 minutes and the audience couldn't leave the stage for half an hour after the play.<sup>232</sup> The play's story and the life on the street fit together perfectly well. This play was among the most successful resistance plays also. It told the story of the friendship formed through the resistance between a couple who are most probably university students and a child who grew on street. He spent his life on street, he is healed by these awkward people's touch, (because he doesn't really understand the political side of the story) but feels unsure if that was good for him since he now feels more pain. Here is a drawing about the play, giving the gist of the theme, made by Firuze Engin on 10<sup>th</sup> of February, 2014.

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<sup>232</sup> On 10th of February theater critic Cem Erciyes wrote a beautiful criticism on the play titled as: "Whatever there is on the street, it is on stage also". (Erciyes, 2014)



Figure 14: Firuze Engin's Drawing Inspired from the Play "Sil Gözyaşlarını, Artık Hiç Bi Şii Eskisi Gibi Olmayacak"

The other play is Berkun Oya's short play from Theater Uncut Istanbul: "Like Knocking on the Door of a Familiar House on an Ordinary Day". The play is about a young girl who hid from police attack into a middle aged man's apartment. She is embarrassed to be in a stranger's apartment but she can't leave in such a condition. The man, on the other hand, who first appears as a completely light-hearted and irresponsible person (listening bad Turkish pop music and drinking rakı from water glass while the protests and police attacks take place outside) reveals his true identity as a political prisoner once, and a very sensitive person. The dialogues

are so well written that these two characters not only become real, they are also quite enrooted in this culture. The dialogues bring out a sense of nearly childish sensitivity which shines even in the most brutal conditions.

The fourth narrative form appears as resistance becoming a side story of other main themes. Like in *Garaj* (Garage) the transvestite recalls her acts in the resistance with a few sentences while talking to the university student. Short plays from Theater Uncut Istanbul such as Derem Çıray's short play *Apollo 8844* and Hakan Günday's *Flesh on Bone*, characters *remember* or *rediscover*<sup>233</sup> the resistance. There are many plays which are written, being written<sup>234</sup> (and will be written) *remembering* the resistance as a side story, these stories appear on stage as they pop from back of all characters' minds. In a way these theater plays attest to the history of "mentality" of this generation urban young people in Turkey.

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<sup>233</sup> In Hakan Günday's dystopic play set in future Turkey, a 16 year old girl *literally* does everything to get to very strong anesthetics. When she finally gets it, the truth behind the propaganda opens up to her, she hears the real stories of the past.

<sup>234</sup> In *Yarının Oyunları* (Plays of Tomorrow) Project for 2014 summer season of İkincikat, Özer Arslan's text gives references to resistance also. The text is not finished at this moment when I'm writing this on 19th of June in 2014, but I know the content from the first reading rehearsal which I joined by coincidence.

## Urban Dilemmas: Culture of Governmentality and Gentrification

There are a number of pressuring mechanisms (legal and illegal) on these stages. Other than the grand urban development plans, stages can be the victims of short term profit based mentality of private organizations which rent places to stages. KREK closed its stage in the end of 2013-2014, season because Bilgi University did not renew their renting agreement. SahneHal was closed during one month by the police in 2011, for not having a permit but it was reopened later. A more significant closure case has happened to Kumbaracı50 in 2010. Biriken group was performing Özen Yula's play "Yala ama Yutma" (Lick but don't swallow) which is about an angel who tries to give massages people, and falls into a porn movie set. The play was targeted by strongly conservative newspapers as a sign of degeneration, immorality and "humiliation of holy religious values". Already, artists had been physically attacked by Tophane's (a neighborhood very close to Istiklal Avenue and Kumbaracı50<sup>235</sup>) conservative and violent men crew, who are mobilized with these newspapers (who attacked an art gallery because the quests were drinking in the same year) and these gangs had attacked GeziPark protesters with sticks and flesh knives in 2013<sup>236</sup>. The municipality closed the theater for "not

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<sup>235</sup> Of course these examples do not mean there is continuous tension between Kumbaracı50 and the neighbourhood. For example Kumbaracı50 calls out for children playing on street in their neighborhood when there are free spaces left for children's plays in Sunday mornings. (F. Onat, personal communication, July 14, 2014)

<sup>236</sup> In Tophane distinct Çıplak Ayaklar dance theater suffered from conservatism of the neighborhood, even though they now have good communication with most of the local shop keepers they never came to see a play in their theater (unlike the Karaköy experience of İkinciKat) even though they invited them many times. Many of the female dancers struggled with gender-based problems when communicating the male workers of the area. Along with many anecdotes and details they recalled about the place especially at the Gezi Park protests they were nearly attacked by a man crew about 15 to 20 people whose ages had a range between 13 to early 20s and the dancers were rescued by a middle aged grocery shop owner they had good contact with. (Çıplak Ayaklar Crew, personal communication, July 7, 2014)

having a fire escape”. Later when there was public pressure on Municipality for the reopening of the stage, the Municipality helped the owners to build a fire escape and the stage was reopened.

This form of governmentality<sup>237</sup> is very significant for Turkish case.<sup>238</sup> The reason of closure is “immorality to Turkish holy values” but the open, legal form of publicizing it is the fire escape.<sup>239</sup> The Muammer Karaca Theater which Dostlar Theater group used (lead by Genco Erkal) was closed in 2012 for “not being stable for an earthquake”<sup>240</sup>, while the reason was that they were openly left wing and against the conservative government. Not surprisingly, the buildings picked for *immediate* action are the ones where critical art works are created.

The face of gentrification in Istiklal Avenue is a significantly different one from the main understanding of gentrification in urban planning. There are two versions of gentrification, in one version the state directly intervenes with planning decisions to change, develop or renew the area. In the second version it is a bit more organic where especially artists buy or rent places in lower class neighborhoods and transform them into art centers. This, in long run, both invites upper class art audiences and new art centers in the same zone where rents and building values get higher. At the end, the area gets gentrified with the invasion of upper classes since the old, poor inhabitants cannot afford to live in that

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<sup>237</sup>“By this word [governmentality] I mean [...]: The ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.”(Foucault, 1991, 5).

<sup>238</sup> Similarly many television celebrities were taken to custodies for drug use *after* they were seen in GeziPark protests.

<sup>239</sup>It is important to see all over Turkey the number of buildings which doesn't have a fire escape would outnumber the number of buildings which have a fire escape *at least* a couple of times. The case is same with Beyoğlu where buildings were build long before these planning laws.

<sup>240</sup>A majority of buildings in Istanbul will collapse in the first earthquake according to many geologists.

neighborhood any more. In this scheme, artists appear as the evil agent of gentrification. The question is whether the establishment of these alternative stages itself trigger the second wave gentrification mentioned above? The story in the Istiklal Avenue, or in Beyoğlu distinct in general, especially for the case of alternative theaters differs from this version in many ways.

Actually, the first wave fringe stages<sup>241</sup> were also the first victims of urban transformation.<sup>242</sup> Urban transformation, is a wave which has destroyed or threatened about three million people's neighborhoods since mid2000s. The government-backed (the cases where government acts as the speculator) urban transformation waves goes back to 1950 in Istanbul, and hit many areas in 1980s. But in 2000s it reached its peak. "At the moment we live in a giant construction site, where skyscrapers, mega projects and urban renewal projects are taking place all around. There is a gold rush to real-estate development." (Adanalı, 2014)

Especially Istiklal Avenue, the organic and cosmopolitan center of Istanbul (and the cultural and artistic center of whole Turkey actually) has continuously been under attack through this time. These spatial interventions, just like other significant cases of urban transformation in late 2000s such as Sulukule<sup>243</sup> (a famous and historical Roman neighbourhood in the historical peninsula) or

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<sup>241</sup> By using the phrase "first wave fringe stages" I mean both the first stages of 90s avant-garde but mostly the stages of the second generation which rose especially after 2008.

<sup>242</sup> The gentrification stories differ radically in depending on each locality. Artists or LGBTI individuals (Castels, 1983) are generally seen gentrifier types but in Turkey at least in cases of alternative theaters and LGBTI individuals, they were the victims of state's holistic gentrification policies. Especially trans-women were forced out of Cihangir in late 1990s and early 2000s and in late 2000s with the gentrification of Tarlabası trans women were moved out once again with Kurds and Romans. In line with the same theme, it should be noted that since early 2014 LGBTI activist Lambdaistanbul group struggles to keep their office in Beyoğlu district against high rents and homophobia. Lambdaistanbul is forced out from their primary office because of gentrification since they have had since 2002. ("Yerinde Kalma Hakkı" İçin," 2014)

<sup>243</sup> Similar to the case of "spaciocide" defined for Palestinian sites destroyed to the level of not leaving a sign by Israel. (Çavuşoğlu, 2014)

Tarlabaşı (poor, immigrant inhabitants with a variety of Kurds to Roman or transvestites in 90s) had been directed by municipalities and the state itself. In academic vocabulary of urban planning circles in Istanbul, these acts are both called gentrification. Gentrification, in the simplest explanation, means to “clear” the urban centers from lower classes and place high classes in the newly constructed or renewed areas.<sup>244</sup> After gentrification the urban centers have a tendency to look as “theater decors” instead of living zones. Unwanted classes, especially lower class ethnic minorities, are victimized in these state led gentrification moves.

In Istiklal though, there had been another face of gentrification: Istiklal Avenue, and in general Beyoğlu zone does not have housings but work places of creative groups from book stores to stages or movie theaters. It lives day and night and in all seasons. Since late2000s the place is under governmental attack to be monopolized by shopping malls and chain books stores or movie theaters. The historical Emek Stage (movie theater) was abolished after many protests in 2013 and around the years 2013-2014 many unique bookstores like Istiklal Kitapevi, Libraire de Pera (Pera Kitapçısı), Pandora or Robinson Crouse 389 were closed to become chain book stores monopolizing the readers access to many opponent or less sold (“collector’s piece”) works.<sup>245</sup> This act on Istiklal Avenue can be seen as a gigantic state move to monopolize the culture and information canals. Where cinemas and bookstores were replaced by capitalized chain groups, theater was completely pushed out of sight. This also enforces an information filtering

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<sup>244</sup> “According to American Heritage dictionary of 1982, gentrification is the “restoration of deteriorated urban property especially in working-class neighborhoods by the middle and upper classes.” In similar vein, the Oxford American dictionary of two years earlier contains the following definition: “movement of middle class families into urban areas causing property values to increase and having secondary effect of driving out poorer families.”” (Smith & Williams, 2013,1).

<sup>245</sup> Lack of this “less sold pieces” ends up in selling policy of bestsellers in chain bookstores, which in long run ends with a mediocrity in reading varieties.

mechanism of state in space producing mechanisms. Alternative theaters, as fields of more autonomous and political theater production places, are filtered from urban space just as these memorial bookstores are cleared.

First of all these theater places were made with collective efforts and savings of the ensembles but not with great sponsorships of big groups. They were under constant threat both the conservative media and governmental pressures as mentioned above.

The buildings they were working in were constantly being transformed into hotels through by the municipality's (state's) urban transformation policies. They often had to leave their places and move. Just as the common trend of many people forced to move from their neighborhoods, they moved to other buildings around the same areas with relatively lower rents.

From the 90s avant-garde, Kumpanya had its stage Istanbul Art Center at Tarlabaşı which is being gentrified by the state in late 2000s and early 2010s and (Oyuncular group's) Cem Safran Stage is closed to be turned into a hotel at 2013. In later 2013 one of the other contemporary stages, İkincikat-İstiklal had to be closed too since their building was going to become a hotel. Being in Tarlabaşı, the group had been one of the first victims of urban transformation (gentrification) acts of 2000s in Istanbul and moved on to Istiklal Avenue with the Talimhane Theater. The Talimhane Theater had to move from its original place in Tarlabaşı with urban transformation project around 2009. Until 2012 Çatı Dance Studio shared a common space with Theater Researches Laboratory (Tiyatro Araştırmaları Labaratuvarı – TAL) but their building in Tophane is now going to be turned into a hotel. Çatı Dance Studio moved to another flat in Tophane and remade the inside of

the flat suitable for dance performances and rehearsals with the collective help of volunteers("Harekete Devam!," n.d.) .<sup>246</sup>

In the orthodox version of this gentrification story there is gap or distance between new coming artists and the local people of the neighborhood. The people of the neighborhood don't consume the art products of these galleries, stages of concert halls but the upper classes, which visit the neighborhood just for these activities, do. There is tension between artists and locals in this classic version of gentrification. This is not the case for Istanbul's alternative theaters of 2000s most of the time<sup>247</sup>. For example when İkincikat crew moved to Karaköy's welding shop and industrial repairing workshop area they formed good bonds with workers there. Artists refer to the welding shops as "neighbors" and with first names and some of the workers come to see the plays in İkincikat-Karaköy (see footnote 153).

Talimhane Theater, before Tarlabası was completely rebuilt by the urban transformation project, was a theater serving the local people of the neighborhood, also there were open activities they could join. In an urban planning workshop in 2008 (before the neighbourhood was completely dehumanized and Talimhane Theater had to move) the members of the theater stated that Romans and Kurds which were known to have ethnic struggles in the neighborhood could share the same space when in the theater. And lastly, these alternative stages are victims of state led gentrification themselves just as all the other people of the transformation

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<sup>246</sup>Moda Stage (opened in late 2013) in Kadıköy distinct was remade with collective help of the artists who now use the stage also. This kind of collective working in the making process (including the making of the space) is especially became clear after the GeziPark protests which also triggered the first two occupied buildings in Kadıköy, first being the Don Kişot Cultural Center in Yeldeğirmeni and the other one in Caferağa distict in Kadıköy again. This significant collective place making processes is deeply integrated with performative publicness, the publicness of being and producing together without the need of continuous verbal (self presenting) communication.

<sup>247</sup> Only Tophane area is a more problematic zone because of the ideological gap between local people and artists but still, unlike the cases media consistently picks and shows, there is not much tension experienced in streets of Tophane either in daily life.

zone. They are not the part of the “upper class”, which will be placed in these districts eventually.

CHAPTER  
CONCLUSION

The time table below explains the waves of unorthodoxies (or avant-gardes of each generation after the 1960s) of theater in Turkey for last half a century. In Appendix B, the last time table explains the autonomous (to a certain extent) theater activities since 1970s. The time line below is a summary-version of the bigger and more detailed time table in Appendix B.

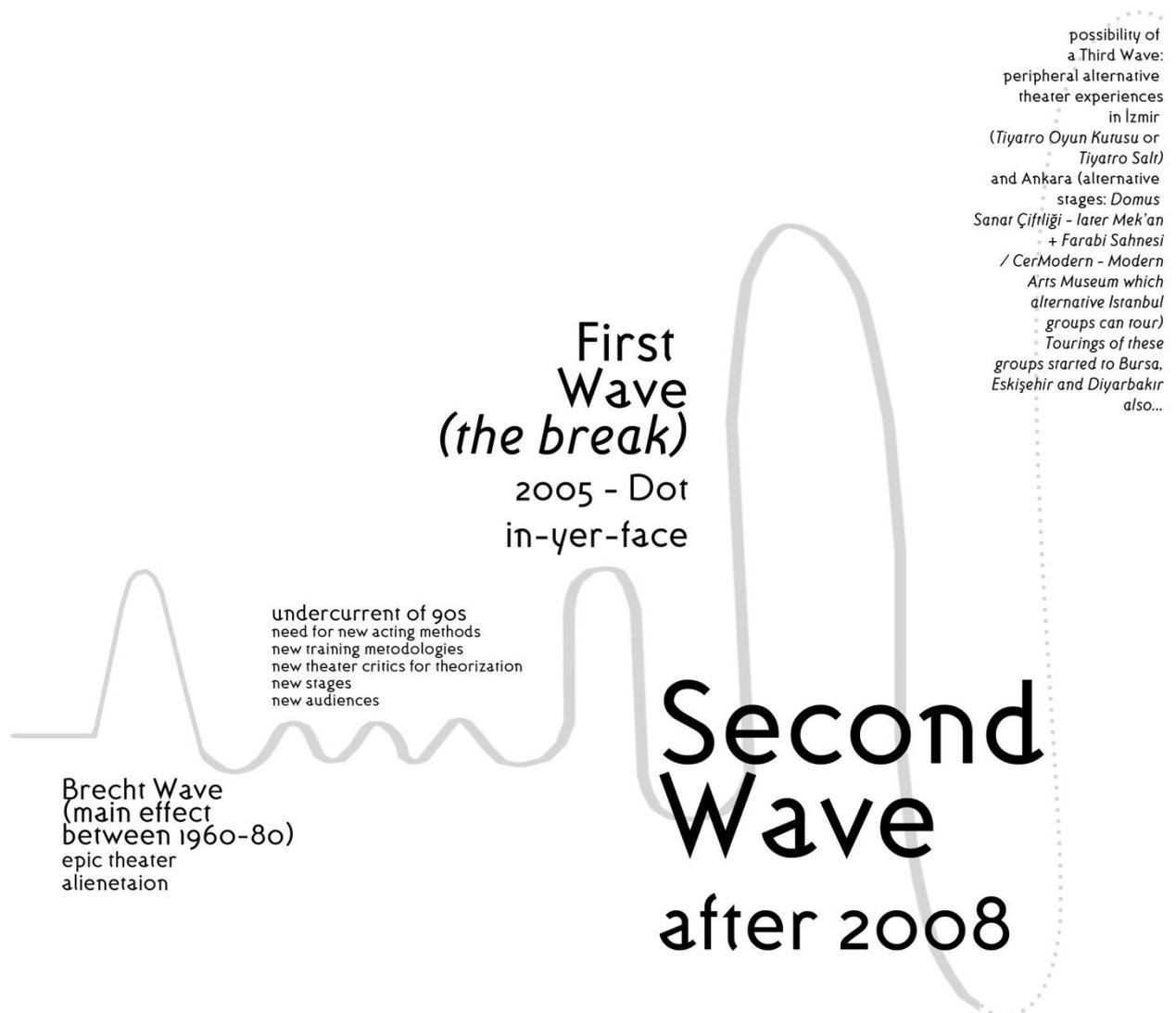


Figure 15: The Waves of Unorthodoxy

The Brechtian wave broke the institutional theater establishment built since the Republic, starting with the Ankara Sanat Theater. But less than a decade later the Brecht wave formed its own left-wing stage orthodoxy which formed a dead end dualism between the 1960 and 1980s.

After the military coup of 1980-83, artists who were forced to leave the state embedded theater institutions formed Bilsak<sup>248</sup> in 1984, which later became the starting point of underground theater avant-gardism of the 1990s based on Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba and Jerzy Grotowski's theater theories. The 1990s underground current had many variants and it was a synthesis of different theatrical colors but it never reached wide audience and it was mostly known by people who are in the theater field or deep into Beyoğlu culture. In 2005 Garajİstanbul was realized as a collective stage and publishing organization of 1990s theater avant-garde.

The 2000s break was expected from Garajİstanbul, but the organization failed to continue its line after 18 months because of personal conflicts. In 2005, Dot started its theatrical journey. Dot brought its first "in-yer-face" play in 2006 by Bug, but the major "in-yer-face" break which later became a phenomenon was the 2007 production of Mercury Fur. In-yer-face texts are written for blackbox type of fringe stages, therefore the fringe stage became a "desired place" for the first time instead of a modest starting step of the career of an artist.

The number of fringe stages increased dramatically in the following years with new adoptions and translations of in-yer-face texts. This was the first move of second wave. After a few years these second wave places started producing local

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<sup>248</sup>Bilsak had its roots in LCC, Tepebaşı Experimental Stage and Bakırköy Community Center Trial Stage. Core figures of all these institutions were pretty much the same, generally lead by Beklan Algan and Ayla Algan.

plays of new playwrights. The new “desired place” produced the ensemble and the new texts which are all integrated with the place. On the way of maturing second wave artists produced countless new plays and new texts in a wide theatrical spectrum. The move went beyond in-her-face after the integration of local texts and new techniques, such as Comedia D’ell Arte, Kabuki or Puppetry were used.

Dot became an exclusive club for audience and artists within this decade. Dot’s plays being over designed with no stage accidents occurring created a new level of perfection in Turkey but their “customer satisfaction” based experimentalism, contemporary text choices from the Edinburg Fringe Festival, the policy of ticket prices and location choice(G-Mall) resulted in a failure to create a public sphere. Today Dot maintains its trendsetting position.

On the other hand, with their imperfect stagings of local texts and their urban-walkable location choices second wave did create a public sphere based on discussion and sharing. The public sphere here is based on an urban performative culture (including internet contacts) which in the long run created networks between alternative stages and alternative-play-following-audiences.

Second wave productions, which are staged in fringe stages, have an educated, middle class audience profile (since the ticket prices cannot be lowered without state help which is not possible in Turkey) which is integrated with urban culture, but it varies greatly in all other norms.

Local texts are mostly experience based and singular which are not open to hasty generalizations. These new texts started including all the marginal characters of Republican Turkey which cannot be staged in non-stereotypical ways in any establishment or ajit prop orthodoxy, such as Kurds, LGBTs, transvestites, or women

wearing headscarves. This identity inclusiveness has created an identity inclusive audience profile also.

This new public sphere is analyzed under the term “performative publicness” within this thesis. Unlike literary publicness where people do the reading alone and come together for rational discussions in performative publicness people watch a play together, share the story and talk about the ethical processes of the singular events of the story. This process can be characterized under the term “ethical compass.” This kind of public sphere is similar to the publicness of GeziPark resistance, which had key terms of *physically staying together and sharing*. Fringe stages become a limited autonomous zone rescued from *state, market and the high intellectual market* to a certain level which created the public sphere.

*Risks:* The public sphere that the second wave has created can be degenerated by institutionalization and creating more stable labor divisions on the way to high professionalism. This will result in finishing the *openness* of these fringe stages. The first move of stages which move on to professionalism is closing their stages to stageless theater groups’ performances. High professionalism makes plays better but the contacting space will be much more limited.

Also these groups might end up forming their own orthodoxy by being awarded and getting institutionalized. The no name performers of the first years are followed by star names of tv and cinema today which doesn’t help the new coming talented but unknown people. Especially in last two years the awards<sup>249</sup> started to be

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<sup>249</sup> 1. The big arguments over Afife Awards started in 2011. It is important to see these arguments to understand Poyrazoğlu’s and his generation’s complaints.

2. The Afife Awards committee worked in two stages: first pool was decided by 7 people and later this pool was seen by the secondary members and voted. This 7 people committee changed only in five years. This first 7 people had been old and they insisted on choosing plays from only State Theaters or Municipality Theaters and most farfetched they can go was to standard commercial theaters from their own generation which got awarded only in “Comedy/Musical Awards”. In only 2011 some nominations like “Best Director” were picked only from Municipality Theaters. In year

given to alternative theaters which pissed of some of the “old masters”, some (like Ali Poyrazoğlu<sup>250</sup>) even get to the extent of (beyond the levels of acceptable criticisms) insulting the whole alternative theater field for not being awarded in Afife Awards of 2014. The alternative theaters gave an answer together to these insults and Bahar Çuhadar wrote a criticism declaring that “it is true that there is no alternative theater as Poyrazoğlu declares, because alternative has now become the new orthodox”(Çuhadar, 2014).

*What might happen later?:* There is a strong potential of a third wave in the next decade which will come from other big cities such as Ankara, İzmir, Eskişehir, Bursa and Diyarbakır. There are tours<sup>251</sup> of İstanbul’s fringe play productions to these cities today and in Ankara and İzmir there are some fringe stages<sup>252</sup> in which

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2011 again three people of the committee had been from Municipality Theaters and other three from State Theaters.

3. In year 2014 the older generation of theater people was pissed because of Okan Urun’s and Ceren Ercan’s being jury members when their play “Iz” was nominated. But only in year 2011 Serpil Tamur directed “Kadın Sığınağı” (Women Shelter) play of Tuncer Cücenoglu and Cücenoglu was awarded with the special award of the jury.

4. Until year 2011 there had been a rule in prior evaluation criteria. For a play to be nominated it should be acted in a stage at least in capacity of 75 people. This directly pushed away *all* alternative theaters from 90s generation until today.

5. This rule was harshly criticized over twitter in more than 10 days in 2011. There were even jokes like “I wish the awards would be more so no play of Municipality Theaters would be left outside”. The younger generation of theater people and audiences were organized to go to the left out plays in alternative theaters as a reaction.

6. In 2012 the rule of “75 people” was changed with long lasting arguments and struggles. Only then most of these alternative plays get to be awarded, or noticed. (Information on 2011 Afife Awards gathered from Maro, 2011)

<sup>250</sup> The crisis actually had a basis in Iz (Mark) play of GalataPerform having nominations when Okan Urun (an actor in the play) and Ceren Ercan (dramaturg of the same play) was in the jury of Afife Awards. The play got one award (Special Jury Award) given to the writer Ahmet Sami Özbudak. The crisis was used as older generation of theater people, especially Ali Poyrazoğlu, to humiliate the independent younger generation all together. GalataPerform was not even in the network of alternative theaters.

<sup>251</sup> There are not stable fringe stages in Eskişehir, Bursa or Diyarbakır today as far as I know but there are changeable collective artistic spaces in these cities where the fringe works of İstanbul, Ankara or İzmir can tour. Especially university theater clubs in these cities organize such tours. These networks get wider each year.

<sup>252</sup> Ankara: Mek’an and Farabi Stage // İzmir: TiyatroSalt and Afrodisias Sanat Merkezi used by Tiyatro OyunKutusu (only in season 2013/2014)

some local productions of in-yer-face take place as a now-common theatrical anarchism.

In Izmir there is stageless but successful group named Tiyatro Oyun Kutusu (which performs in Afrodisyas Sanat Merkezi), and there is the Salt Stage which is a typical blackbox stage. Before 2008 MekanArtı's crew had to move from İzmir to Istanbul since they couldn't continue a stage in Izmir but today it became more possible. They also host these crews from Izmir in their stage in Istanbul within theater seasons.

Ankara is busier in alternative theater field. Cermodern (new Modern Arts Museum of Ankara, similar to Istanbul Modern) invited alternative theater works through the 2013/2014 season, even Dot toured to Cermodern for the first time. But more importantly new alternative stages are opened in Ankara just as it happened in late2000s in Istanbul. This year Mek'an (the same group which made Domus Sanat Çiftliği<sup>253</sup> before – but that stage had to be closed) and Farabi Stage was opened and they toured to Istanbul's 8.kat and Şermola Performans stages.

In total, a third wave is coming. Just as the first wave and second wave the third wave (for now) first gets interested in in-yer-face<sup>254</sup> because it is just the opposite of conformism forced by institutional theaters and commercial private theaters today. But it is actually the small space which changes the performing and watching experience and norms of in-yer-face, even in local texts, are moved on within few theater seasons. University theater clubs, and the later professionalizing amateurs they give rise to, are still the main human pool of this movement but conservatory graduates and mature celebrities join in as time flows.

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<sup>253</sup> Through the first years of 2010s the only alternative theater stage was Domus Sanat Çiftliği in Ankara and there was bar theaters like Mavi Sahne.

<sup>254</sup>Tiyatro Oyun Kutusu for example, define their new texts such as "Kırmızı Dükkan" by Sedar Saatman is defined as in-yer-face by the crew.

Contrary to many thesis writing experiences, my research experience improved my socializing habits. Fieldwork of this research started around 2011 when I first went to *Fastest Clock in the Universe*<sup>255</sup> by Philip Ridley in İkinciKat. I came up with the idea of writing this thesis around a year and a half later, after continuous visits to fringe theaters. With all its flaws, I tried to document the struggle to do theater by the people who are pushed away from the field by institutions and bullied by the government in urban centers of Turkey, especially Istanbul. In Iz tv's documentary playwright Ebru Nihan Celkan says "Alternative theaters are the places where children that no one gave chance to, gives chance to each other." I find their struggle important and inspiring. I hope in the future they will remember their struggle and not close the doors for new comers as older generations have done to them.

The most difficult part of the research was that there is no written document about the issue either in academia or popular writing. The history of 90s avant-garde was almost lost, I dig clue after clue to make a meaningful narrative. If there are gaps in the narrative, it is generally because I couldn't reach any document or interview the people who hold the experience; therefore I had to make the most meaningful guess. I tried to limit my "alternative theater" form mostly based on the usage of blackbox stage. Blackbox stages, in my view, sign a paradigmatic shift from institutional and definable-by-buraucracy ways of theater making.

There are many questions I couldn't get into because of the limits of this research from Kurdish Modern Theater to Trans-characters on stage. I presented these questions openly through the text to lead any researcher interested on the topic to find a source or clue. The most interesting question that I was u nable to answer to

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<sup>255</sup> The play on April 12, 2011 at İkinciKat-Istiklal.

my satisfaction involved the changing relation of the eye and object based on architecture. In Italian Stage there is a one sided teaching relation with the placing of performers and audience members. A flat stage makes it into a negotiation table. But the real ground floor of performative publicness is the blackbox stage because it is the version which keeps the narrative (unlike most environmentalist plays), but abolishes both the authority and negotiation from the ground floor . The spectator shares the same space and time with the performer and watching becomes more into listen and even sharing experience. This is the key to performative publicness. In another study I would have wanted to take plays one by one from contemporary alternative theater field of Turkey and analyze them with these tools in architectural level, with drawings.

Personally I hope to dig more into the concept of performative publicness. As theater theorist Patsy Rodenburg claims, the people of twenty-first century are losing the ability of being in the present time, and all theater activities happen to be in the present time: the time performer and audience shares together (Rodenburg, 2008). In the moment of resistance people have a similar feeling; they share the present time, their minds can't be busy with other things, for survival reasons. This unexpected common ground keeps the seed of a revolutionary publicness in my belief. The question here is whether this feeling will last or not? The solidarity and sharing of pain has to be remembered for future resistances. Here alternative theater can especially be helpful for keeping the experience-based memory.

There is one question left which hangs on top of all these plays as the sword of Democles. Will these political plays be able to cover the tragedies of working

classes or in general lower classes also? Will the Soma mining disaster<sup>256</sup> become an issue in theater, for example? Will the insecure working conditions of so many workers ever appear as realistic and human as they are, on stage? Most Gezi plays work well because it was a shared experience – what about the political experiences of people beyond the limits of the urban middle classes? Even if these experiences are made into plays, will they ever get beyond documentarist or didactic political plays? Will they ever be successful enough to correspond to human experiences as in the case of Gezi Park plays? If these plays are successful, will they meet their *own* audience who watches with the same collective memory?

It is difficult, but not impossible. The alternative theater movement is growing into its third wave, and in future I think that there will be playwrights from a wider variety of classes and identities who can keep the record of the mentality of their own life. Just as poetry and novels cover a wider amount of society from all classes and identities, alternative theater will be able to cover more experiences as it grows into its third wave.

That is why, after experiencing local texts in alternative theaters again and again, I thought this could be the way to contain the experience for the future, and a way to make and remake the public sphere we all need beyond “just” speaking up. Listening and producing together (quietly and loudly) had been the key elements of life in alternative theaters (not that it always works) which has the same basic principles of performative publicness in every aspect of life.

The time spent on the field (in the offices, backstages and entrees of alternative theaters) corresponds to at least half an hour everyday if divided to a year.

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<sup>256</sup> In 13 May 2014 a coal mine in Soma, Manisa collapsed because of government’s hasty developmentalist economic policies which decayed all work security check mechanisms. According to official records 301 people died but there are arguments that there are actually more.

This research had been the most devastating but also the happiest work period in all my academic life. This study is just a start and I hope it will grow with collective contributions of my generation and a younger generation of academics.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Extra Content Material

#### Piece 1: Emre Koyuncuođlu

Emre Koyuncuođlu has her education in Bođaziđi University English Language and Literature Department later continues her education in Istanbul University's Dramaturgy Department. She says her theater understanding has two opposing ends, one based on dramaturgy, the other from movement and choreography (Yađmur, 2012). Through her education in Bođaziđi she gets involved in Modern Dance Club of the university which actually shifts her aim in life into dance and physical theater. In 1987 she makes Yeřil Üzümler Movement and Dance Theater with her friends which include Zeynep Günsür and Mustafa Kaplanođlu also. (Kaplanođlu helped in making TalDans later in 2003 and in 2014 Emre Koyuncuođlu made Sevim Burak's Afrika Dansı – African Dance- into an environmental play with collaboration of TalDans.) Through her time in Yeřil Üzümler she made more than 20 choreographies and performances, and dances with the group until 1997. Through the second half of 90s Emre Koyuncuođlu and Yeřil Üzümler group actively takes part in Assos International Theater Festival. In 1997 she gets involved in making of Kocaeli Metropolitan City Municipality's Theater as a dramaturge but her works for the municipality theater are significantly less experimental, more closer to conventional institutional stagings. In 2009 after Ayřenil řamliođlu had become the General Artistic Director of Istanbul Municipality Theaters, in 2010 she offered of Koyuncuođlu to become a director in Istanbul Municipality Theaters and take over TAL (Theater Researches Laboratory) within the institution.

Koyuncuoğlu has a wide range of artistic networks around the world but among the list I picked one interesting detail, she worked with Thomas Ostermeier in 2000 as a directing assistant. The most interesting and unique thing about Koyuncuoğlu though (and what makes her a lot less documented within already little documented 90s avant-garde also) is that her works are always space and place based and she never worked in a permanent stage for her experimental works.

Emre Koyuncuoğlu: Yes, I do plays in different spaces but I want to specify something: when you are choosing these different spaces why you chose that space, the reason of your choice is very important... That place should have something to tell you. If the fictional reality of that space is over the things you can say you shouldn't do a job there. It [the work] should suit or create conflict with the space, there should be continuity. [...] It is difficult! In short; memory, text and space altogether tells what can be or cannot be done. (Yağmur, 2012)

Like all the 90s avant-garde figures Koyuncuoğlu has a trouble with the time and geography she lives in and telling her trouble is her basic according to her 2012 dated interview (Yağmur, 2012). She says “The work I’ve done [she is talking about “Arıza”, her 2006 work for Garajİstanbul] is experimental but I don’t experiment just to experiment. I try new things in my own way. I search for a language.”(Atmaca, 2006).

Through her space based (site-specific mostly) works there are many unique works such as “Home Sweet Home” which was made in Diyarbakır, “Sinop Communication” performed in prison, “A Room of One’s Own No: 104” performed in an hotel room and so on... The only handicap of these works had been that very few people could see these works. She worked on many different techniques from environmental theater to site-specific theater to sound theater since she defines her “İrk Bitig” (2008) work, based on shamanic traditions as sound theater (Yağmur, 2012).

## Piece 2: Şahika Tekand and Performative Acting

In the 1998 conference named “Turkish Theater in 75th year of the Republic” Tekand draws the map of her alternative search. There are a few important things I picked from her speech. First she mentions that no one moves with a motive to fit in an artistic movement, the search for alternative starts when the person feels that s/he needs new ways to express what s/he experiences and struggles with. She says “Moving from this thought, the source of the alternative is primarily ethical, ideological and political.” (Tekand et al., 1999, 149). The second significantly important thing she mentions is that what is expressed in theater shouldn't possibly be expressed in any other form (which I find true for other branches of art also) to make it a good theatrical work. The third thing to mention is that among all the speech makers on Alternative Searches in Theater session of the conference, Tekand is specifically very pessimistic about the age she lives in. Her pessimism probably triggered her search in new ways of theatrical expression.

Şahika Tekand's Studio Players were the first continuous alternative theater school. Şahika Tekand developed a method which she named “Performative Staging and Acting” and for last 24 years many successful artists graduated from her school. Today it is still a prestigious and advised theater school among many others within theater circles. In the website of the Studio Players the history of the group is summarized as follows:

STUDIO OYUNCULARI (THE STUDIO PLAYERS) was founded as the performance group of the 'Studio for Actors and Art' which was constituted in 1988 by Şahika Tekand and Esat Tekand and in the year 1990, it has earned a professional quality. The ensemble has set out with the principle of "researching and implementing the contemporary" in performing arts, especially in the art of acting. Throughout the past 20 years, the group has become one of the most remarkable theater ensembles in the world especially in Europe with all the plays that it has performed according to the method of "Performative Staging

and Acting" which is developed by Şahika Tekand. ("About Studio Oyuncuları," n.d.)

Studio Players give a two year education in acting, and since beginning Studio have presented an alternative to conservatory. Within the two year education there are theoretical and practical lessons and reading lists for students. As the anti-thesis of conservatory the Studio strongly resisted defining their system (Performative Acting) formally, making a step-by-step guide suitable for every one or publishing a book about the method. Graduates of the school have become successful in front of camera and on stage and in commercial and artistic works. The most well-known graduate of the school –because of his appearances in commercial works more than others- is Yiğit Özşener.

The methodology of performative acting is actually enrooted in Mayerhold's biomechanic trainings since the principle is quite similar: the emotions can be constructed with the actions of the body. Just as the name "performative acting" connotes the physical performance of the player is primarily important. In the background of this acting methodology there is the apriori proposal that acting is rational. When the mathematics of the acting is done "playing" comes along. This is called *game concept* within the Studio Player's terminology. The actor is not an actor but also a player which means s/he has to follow the rules of the play just as a chess player has to follow the rules. The backbone of the system is defined by the proposal that acting starts with outer actions and grow inside the player but in specific cases the opposite (Stanislavskian "emotional memory" or imagining) - which is finding the emotion and letting the emotion shape the bodily actions – is used also. The focus is always on the individual and the moment of practice in this methodology, that is why it is difficult to define the performative acting system Tekand invented as a concrete and closed system. (Atilla, personal interview, 30 July 2013)

Tekand generally places her plays in Italian Stage form even though the stage is not elevated. Even though the text writing, acting and stagings are quite unorthodoxial the look of the audience is in one direction as the Italian Stage (or frame stage) requires. Not getting deep into this choice I'll briefly quote Tekand's words about this choice: "Studio Players try to explain themselves why they stubbornly keep the frame stage form every time they are doing a play." (Tekand et al., 1999, 151)

### Piece 3: Assos Theater Festival (1995-1999)

Assos International Performing Arts Festival had been a unique example in 90s for theater and probably one of the most outstanding theatrical experiences in the theater history of Republic. According to Özgül Akıncı's master thesis on Assos Festival there had only been one other site-specific or public sphere based theater festival in Republican history which in the Erdek Festival. I'll briefly quote the note on the festival from Akıncı's thesis:

The most influential art festival in the history of Turkish performing arts was held under the name "Erdek Senliğı" (Erdek Festival) by *Genc Oyuncular (Young Actors)*, one of the most prominent theater groups in the history of alternative theater in Turkey that was active between the years 1957 and 1963. (Akıncı, 2008; taken from: Alpog, Atilla. 2007. *Hayat Ağacında Tavus Kuşları*, Mitos Boyut Yayınları, İstanbul)

All the performances were site-specific and nearly all the avant-garde theater figures of late 90s took part in the festival such as Emre Koyuncuoğlu, Mustafa Avkıran and Övül Avkıran who made Garajİstanbul, Zeynep Günsür who organized the Ahvall dance performance and Nihal Geyran Koldaş who had been the coordinator of Bilsak. Kumpanya group produced a site-specific performance based on a short passage from Sevim Burak's Everest My Lord in 1996 Festival. The departed organizer Hüseyin

Katircioğlu had been a member of Theater Researches Laboratory along with many international theater union memberships.

Akıncı's master's thesis is the only academic work on Assos International Performing Arts Festival. Akıncı's thesis, very conveniently describes and analyzes the festival under the subfield of memory studies since the festival doesn't continue today and Hüseyin Katircioğlu, the organizer of the festival, died in November 3, 1999 due to an accident in the construction of a new performance arts center in Istanbul which was a project of his. The following quote is taken from Akıncı's thesis summary which introduces the festival:

Under the leadership of Huseyin Katircioğlu, the Assos International Performing Arts Festival was held once a year between 1995 and 1999 in the village of Behramkale. Artists from various backgrounds lived in the village for three weeks, produced site-specific works and at the end of a three weeks production process presented their works/performances/plays to the festival audience including the inhabitants of Behramkale, the artists from Istanbul and other cities, and people from Çanakkale or other villages near to Behramkale. The festival was held in a village and with the collaboration of the villagers. Especially children, then teenagers and men, lastly women participated in the festival at various levels, including the production process of the works. (Akıncı, 2008)

What is significantly important about Assos is that it reinforced the network between the artists and, since for site-specific performances everywhere can be the stage, it degenerated the idea of stabilized frame stage in a generation of artists.

Lastly, intuitionally following the floating of the organizations (festivals) site-specific performance in rural areas it might be said that Assos Festival had been an inspiration for the Theater Madrasa also. The group which made the Theater Madrasa is SeyyarSahne, when I asked the primary generation of artists of SeyyarSahne they said they knew Assos Festival and it had been an inspiration for the Theater Madrasa. Özgül Akıncı herself has been a member of SeyyarSahne also which I find important to note.

Assos Theater Festival had great internal relations with local people of Behramkale, the villagers mostly remember festival with great attachment (based on

interviews Özgül Akıncı made for her thesis) since they generally contributed to works in the festival also.

#### Piece 4: Dance Theater in Turkey

There are three important canals of contemporary dance theater practices since mid90s in Turkey. The first and earliest formation is Zeynep Tanbay's Dance Project and later the Dance Atelier. The following information is taken from the website of Zeynep Tanbay Dance Project in which Tanbay and her project is described.

As the introductory lines from the website implies that Tanbay's project is quite professional and it is not a collective group of dancers but rather a leaded group. The second canal is Çıplak Ayaklar which has some contradictions considering the language structured to introduce two groups (Çıplak Ayaklar and ZTDP). Though Tanbay's project has been a good formal start for dance theater practices, the more centrally important group in dance theater for this thesis (due to their communitarian and collective working which a central theme of performative publicness) is Çıplak Ayaklar [Bare Feet] Dance Company which was formed in Tophane (Istanbul) in 2003.

Later Çıplak Ayaklar Dance Company was formed in 2003 and they transformed an iron workshop into a dance studio under the same name in 2007. They introduce themselves with a manifest in their website: "Çıplak Ayaklar Kumpanyası prefers to be the broken string of the instrument rather than the player. It is open to any kind of dream. [...] It is itself "a dream-land" referred to by İlhan Berk in his poem "Bare Foot", or is in the search of such a "dream-land"." ("Manifest," n.d.)

Again in the website, there is a short story of how they formed the dance company. Quoting the following sentence is enough for an insight: "9 year ago Çıplak Ayaklar was selling their tickets, which they carried in their backpacks, from hand and

they were introducing this “new” performing art with a bunch of dance spectators.” (“Ön Ayak,” n.d.)

There is also Çatı Dance Studio (or Çatı Dance Contemporary Dance Artists Union) which had been active since mid2000s which was shaped in touch with Garajİstanbul and other relatively limited alternative performance community of mid2000s. The legendary performance artist Erdem Gündüz from GeziPark protests, who is known as The Standing Man (Duran Adam), is working in Çatı Dance Studio as a free lance choreographer also.

In the state institutions Dance Theater found a voice in TalDance. It is a unit established under TAL (Tiyatro Araştırmaları Laboratuvarı – Theater Researches Laboratory shaped within Istanbul Municipality Theater) in year 2003 by Mustafa Kaplan and Filiz Sızanlı. In 2010 Emre Koyuncuoğlu became a part of the institution and made Afrika Dansı (Africa Dance) from Sevim Burak’s works as environmental theater for Salt gallery in 2014.

On the other hand, more combined with international networks, there has been the iDance Contemporary Dance and Performance Festival since 2006 which is organized by BiMERAS. Though this festival may be written in the orthodoxy of “festivalism” (Yardımcı, 2005) the contemporary dance works presented within the festival were quite critical of contemporary world issues. In 2013 festival, which was overlapping with GeziPark protests, Rosas danst Rosas group gave “free of charge” performances in 22nd and 23rd of June as a supporting gesture for the protesters. (“IDANS Contemporary Dance and Performance,” n.d.) The festival also organizes dance performance which takes place in empty spaces of urban landscapes such as squares or streets like the 2012 performance of Dominique Boivin which took place in the square in front of the old Beşiktaş pier, named *Transports Exceptionnels*. Within this performance, Boivin dances with an excavator (iDANS Festival, 2013) which is

quite meaningful for people of Istanbul who struggle with constant danger of urban transformation.

#### Piece 5: Modern Kurdish Theater

It should be noted that this footnote gives very limited and secondary information on Modern Kurdish Theater. If not stated otherwise the mentioned Kurdish in this piece is the most spoken branch of Kurdish which is Kurmanji.

There are three important steps in Contemporary Theater in Kurdish since 90s. The first thing to note is that there has always been folkloric performances in Kurdish but the significance of the works and organizations told here are that they tend to do modern-contemporary and professional (or close to professional) theatrical (or performative) works in Kurdish. The first and most central move to make theater in Kurdish was Mesopotamia Cultural Center which had been active since 1991. The theater activities of the center were shared within the urban Kurdish community, the plays and performances were not – for various reasons – seen by Turkish audiences. After the first attempts of government to stop the war in Southeast Anatolia, Kurdish was removed from its taboo position and became public for Turkish audiences also especially through social media portals, cinema and music. For theater there had been few recognizable attempts such as Diyarbakır Municipality Theater’s Kurdish Hamlet in 2012 or Haldun Dormen’s (as being the leader of an important commercial theater, Dormen Theater, for some decades) 2009 production of a musical Kurdish play named *A winter tale* (Bir Kış Masalı). These, and examples like these, are quite peripheral to the contemporary, innovative plays this thesis focuses on in new generation though.

Through 1990s, with the continuing war, doing Kurdish Theater had been significantly difficult for people who took part in Mesopotamia Cultural Center. Mirza Metin told that police with heavy armory and tanks waited outside the places

Mesopotamia Cultural Center will perform and they checked the audience members through 90s (*New Spectator Experiences* [Yeni Seyir Halleri] conference (November 17, 2012) in Kadir Has University – Mirza Metin was not a speaker but an audience member who explained the history of Modern Kurdish Theater). Mirza Metin is one of the leading figures of contemporary theater in Kurdish who was educated in MMC.

Mesopotamia Cultural Center gave lessons of music, folkloric dance, theater and Kurdish. Many of the youngsters who started an informal education in MCC in 90s today produce art works in Kurdish. In the theatrical aspect the first ensemble shaped within MCC was the 1995 Theater Jiyana Nu which also had its own education unit named Şanoya Helin. According to the limited information I could reach the modern Kurdish Theater has its roots in (similar to the case of Turkish theater) nationalistic plays and agit-prop short plays but the 90s was a break for Modern Kurdish Theater also since the artistic aspect of plays became centrally important.

The first deeper artistic concerns started in 2003 with SeyriMesel and Tiyatro Avesta. These groups were made from people educated in MMC. Tiyatro Avesta, directed by Aydın Orak and Cihan Şan, staged some classical texts in Kurdish and in 2014 Istanbul Theater Festival they joined with the play “Actor” which is staged with over-scripts.

In SeyriMesel, Erdal Ceviz had been (and still is) the coordinator of SeyriMesel group and they have their own stage (in the upper flat of SermolaPerformans stage which opened later). They were one of the groups which left MMC and started doing free theater in a various scala, they preferred more abstract and artistic pieces for urban Kurdish theater circles but they toured Southeast Anatolia with village plays. Ceviz also directed a play in Zazaki (Kırmançki) named Saê Moru in 2004. Both of these groups were awarded nationally and internationally.

Later a subgroup divided from SeyriMesel lead to DestAR Theater in 2008. This is the second important step in Contemporary theater in Kurdish within the limits of this thesis. The main difference between DestAR and SeyriMesel is that DestAR uses over-scripts in Turkish so their audience profile includes people who don't know Kurdish also. DestAR Theater is formed by Mirza Metin and Berfin Zenderlioğlu. The group makes plays in Kurdish but the most important aspect for their consideration here is that their continuous concern about both the themes and aesthetics of plays they make, and secondly – which is significant within Kurdish case – that their works are not only critical of the Turkish state but also critical of patriarchic – conservative mainstream mind set of Kurdish community.

In 2010 the DestAR Theater group formed the ŞermolaPerformans mostly to freely perform their plays but also but also they created a stage opportunity of stageless theater groups. The significance of DestAR group and their stage ŞermolaPerformans is that they created a public zone for both Kurdish and Turkish audiences. Though their plays are Kurdish, they are presented with Turkish over-scripts and their stage is open to all contemporary groups which produce in Turkish. It is the first time in Republican history for urban Turkish theater audiences where the possibility of watching a contemporary play in Kurdish is set. Until this point the general modern methods of play-making in Kurdish Theater had been physical theater and pantomime, wordless physicality-based performances have always been an ingredient of this theater. Cerb (by Destar Theater) for example was especially interesting since it was made as a wordless play, a group most suffering from language handicap (Turkish speaking audience does not directly understand Kurdish plays) overcame it in one case with a non-speaking play depending on techniques of physical theater.

The third important step is the formation of Theater Deng u Bej (which has roots in DestAR's efforts) because the group made the first Turkish-Kurdish mixed play

which is the translation of Mark Ravenhill's *Fear and Misery* (an in-her-face play).

These two groups are trying to overcome the troubles of doing theater in Kurdish not just because of the constant (but eroding) taboo state of Kurdish but also because of the significant lack of women Kurdish-speaking performers. Another noteworthy point of this group is that it is started with the efforts of two women performers Gülistan Yüce and Özlem Taş. DestAR's only women performer is Berfin Zenderlioğlu who is also the co-director of the ŞermolaPerformans Stage. This is an important lack in human resources to keep in mind while discussing Kurdish play-making.

Note: Just when I was finishing this thesis the only book on Modern Kurdish Theater, "Jerzemin" by Mirza Metin, was published by Diyarbakır Municipality. The explanation on the cover of the book writes: "Kurdish Theater in Turkey Between 1991 and 2013 – Posters and Brochures". (Metin, 2014)

#### Piece 6: An Extremely Short Summary of Trans-Women Stage Representations and About The Culture That Produces These Stereotypes

Appearance of transsexuality in the context of Turkey is mostly related with trans women, *not* trans men. In the same context a trans woman almost can only be a "transvestite", which in the linguistic sociology of Turkish, meaning "transsexual woman who lives on prostitution". All the texts I'll analyze here are about (or including) trans sex workers, aka "transvestites". Even though there are gay characters appearing in contemporary stages the transvestite identity is a unique one because it is more problematic than any other ethnic, religious or sexual identity. The man to woman transsexual identity is the worst possible sexual identity in public appearance because it is seen as a "decay of all moral manly codes" both in left and right wing orthodoxies. Man-to-woman trans individuals are in a high risk group they can't hide their identities under the risk of physical attack like gay individuals can do which can be exemplified in

Ülker Street Events. 1996 is an important year for “transvestite” history of contemporary Turkey because there had been a trans genocide in Ülker Street (Cihangir, Beyoğlu) (*80lerde Lubunya Olmak*, 2012) to “clean” the area from sex worker trans women before international Habitat II conference.

Increasing or decreasing according to militarist-heterosexist waves in Turkey (military coups and hatred discourses of political leaders reinforce society’s homophobic attitudes) especially transgender people (since they cannot hide their identity by *acting* hetero in risky positions) live under great pressure and danger and most of them can only survive with prostitution. Compulsory military service pumps heterosexism to all socioeconomic and ethnic variants of contemporary Turkish society where biologically male LBGTI individuals experience many institutional difficulties additional to difficulties created by patriarchic norms of society. There are a lot of cases where LBGTI people have been killed by their families or clients (if they are sex workers). LBGTI rights movement is getting stronger in Turkey since the beginning of 2000s. Since 2000s LBGTI movement in Turkey is getting strong enough to become a political power. Still in contemporary Turkey hatred crimes, homophobia and heterosexism is very dominant once LBGTI identities appear publicly.

In general, it can be said that lesbians and transgender men live less problems publicly which proves that it is not only heterosexism but also patriarchy which challenges LBGTI individuals. I can’t back up this observation with numerical data or comparison of oral interviews but it is hinted in abusive language in Turkish. Even though there are a lot of abusive words about male homosexuality, there are nearly no abusive words about female homosexuality. A biological woman getting closer to “masculinity” is a much more publicly tolerable issue since masculinity is related with “honesty, courage, and strength”. On the other hand a biological man getting closer to

“femininity” is related with the decay of all kinds of moral codes. Therefore a trans woman in contemporary Turkey can be seen in the highest risk group of all sexual identities which appear in public life. In 2012, 265 trans women were killed (Maro, 2013) by their families or clients in Turkey (the name of one of the plays I’ll analyze refers to this fact: *Kimsenin Ölmediği Bir Günün Ertesiydi* / The Day After Nobody Died).

In the Ottoman period homosexuality was not a problem threatening public life. Middle Eastern - Mediterranean culture never strongly categorized sexes with controversial dichotomies like West. This resulted with *some* queer freedom depending on gaps of strict sexual definitions. Especially after Tanzimat (reformation movement starting in 1839), Ottoman Empire started a fast bureaucratization movement to become modernized, or in other words *Westernized*. This move made its peak after proclamation of Republic in 1923 and to this day, modernization process formed a strongly militarized and bureaucratized society especially among upper-middle classes which most intellectuals came from. This, in the long run, denied all the homosexual freedom<sup>257</sup> of the Ottoman past and resulted in a violent wave of heterosexism by defining “normal” and “healthy” in western medical terms.

Between the declaration of Republic in 1923 and 70s there is not much trace about trans identities (*80lerde Lubunya Olmak*, 2012), and gay-lesbian identities are covered in social life as much as possible. There are only a few poets who are known to be gay (such as Atilla İlhan, Ece Ayhan or Arkadaş Zekai Özger) but none of them declared it publicly. Only after 80s some writers (novelists and poets) appear who openly declare that they are gay, ready to face marginalization. Murathan Mungan and

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<sup>257</sup> This queer freedom should not be romanticized or analyzed without including reasons which are enrooted in not defining-analyzing culture (an anti-logos culture) and strict separation of biological sexes. In most historical analysis of Ottoman sexuality this freedom is either totally denied or orientalistically romanticized.

küçük İskender can be referred as leading queer figures of this generation. Starting from 90s contemporary artist Kutluğ Ataman should be referred also. In later years Ataman propagandized his homosexuality not to do compulsory military service and plenty of his major video works are on transsexuals (or other LGBTI identities).

The artistic appearance of queer figures in “high art” was something but the canonized appearances has always been in “show business”. There are two important queer singer/show girls in the Republican History. First one is Zeki Müren (1933-1996). He was a Turkish classical music singer who is widely known and loved by people because of his close to perfect Turkish dialect and compelling voice. Even though he never declared that he was gay, his clothing and “feminine” kindness gave the unmistakable message about his sexual identity to the audience. Dyed to bright golden, his hair was always towheaded, he used many accessories and wore bright-shiny colors which only staring woman casino singers wore. The other one is a way too daring character compared to Zeki Müren: Bülent Ersoy. She has started her singing and acting career as a male celebrity but she had always been way too scandalous compared to any other queer figures of last century. In late 80s she had her sex reassignment surgery and still continues her career as a singer. She married two times with different young men and has always acted like a performance artist about representing her transgender identity with using a sharp tongue on tv shows including sexual jokes. She wore extreme costumes in daily life and on stage. She appeared as Cleopatra, wore gigantic wigs, extreme accessories and so on... Bülent Ersoy’s stage appearance was banned in 1980 military coup but she reappeared as “diva” in late 80s. There are some less successful openly gay characters in show business (such as Fatih Ürek, Kuşum Aydın or VJ Bülent) but Zeki Müren and Bülent Ersoy are unique in getting wide acceptance and adoration from all the layers of society.

Another unique example is a fictional character called “Huysuz Virjin”. “Huysuz Virjin” is a showgirl character which Seyfi Dursunoğlu has been acting out in last 35 years in many tv shows. The adjective “Huysuz” means naughty and the full name both indicates that the character is non-Muslim (since Virjin is not Turkish) and she is very flirty and libidinous. Dursunoğlu has created a show character which is a combination of “zenne” (male belly dancer) of traditional Ottoman shadow plays and non-Muslim canto singers of Late Ottoman period. He has become a celebrity with using erotic jokes, singing and dancing in canto form. He never appeared in media with his private life and became a respected artist with wide acceptance even though Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) tried to ban his appearance on TV many times.(RTÜK does the same for all man-to-woman transgender appearances.)

This stereotype of naughty, libidinous and humorous trans women had its peak at 90s and there are still many representations of it in tv and commercial theater. The works analyzed under this thesis in the “Ethical Compass” title are either beyond this cultural cliché or deconstruct it.

#### Piece 7: Summary of Gezi from Süreyya Evren

Süreyya Evren explains the performativity aspect of Gezi Resistance as follows:

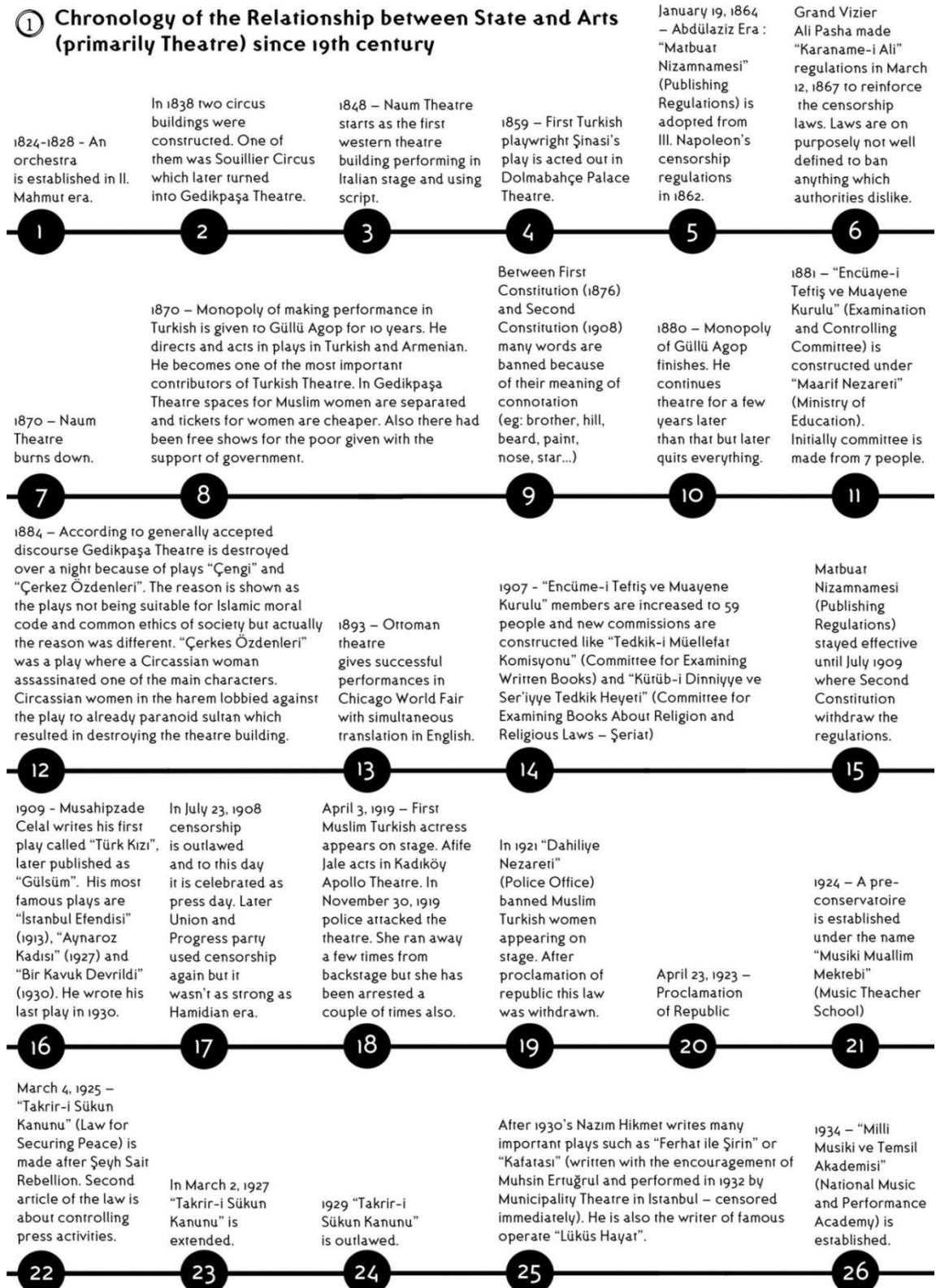
As to the details: the festival-like atmosphere of Taksim after the police withdrew was very interesting. The square was full of revolutionary groups and parties. But none were able to control the festival, so to speak. In a typical May Day celebration in Turkey, for example the one I witnessed on 1 May 2012, (which was also held in the Taksim Square), there was one main programme, one focus; it was a very good plan and it involved a lot of security. Huge flags, huge placards, all displaying the glory of the revolutionary parties. It was a grandiose show. The 31 May uprising and the June TAZ in Taksim was instead based on ‘affect’ rather than flamboyance. There was room for everyone’s

creativity. People made jokes everywhere: on the walls, on upturned police vehicles, on signs; there were performances in every corner of the square, not all by artists but some by activists, even some by passers-by. Some helped to design a park library. People used a police car to make a wish tree, like Yoko Ono's Wish Trees. There were live concerts in various parts of the square, different types of music. Some groups marched and chanted, others worked on an indie radio station, organized painting workshops for children, or just shouted against the government ... The Gezi Resistance included apolitical youth, precarious employees, workers, activists, anarchists, Marxists, Kemalists, teachers, lawyers, doctors and most importantly many artists. This movement was initiated by a new generation of young activists but their mothers supported them too, conquering bread: giving food, helping youngsters to protect themselves against police brutality. For many it was the first political action they had taken part in. After the government inflicted a series of oppressive actions designed to transform Turkey into an Islamic authoritarian regime, people reacted. (Evren, 2013)

## APPENDIX B

Visual Works (Timetables, plans, graphics)

## ① Chronology of the Relationship between State and Arts (primarily Theatre) since 19th century



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June 19, 1934 – First opera of Turkish State is performed with the order of Atatürk, he was personally involved in some stages.

1935 – German musician Paul Hindermith organized music department of conservatoire in Ankara.

1936 – Carl Ebert organized theatre department of conservatoire in Ankara with Muhsin Ertuğrul.

1936 – Mussolini government's criminal code on freedom of press and speech is adopted directly from laws number 270 and 272. In Turkish Criminal Code these two laws became 141st and 142nd articles. At the single party era Nazım Hikmet, Rifat Ilgaz, Orhan Kemal, Kemal Tahir and other writers were imprisoned because of articles number 141 and 142.

1938 – Articles number 141 and 142 are extended.

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1939 – "Filmlerin ve Film Senaryolarının Kontrolüne Dair Nizamname" (Regulation for Controlling Films and Film Scripts) made the police's permission necessary if a film shot abroad is going to be shown or a film is going to be shot within Turkey. Possible reasons for censorship were propagandas of other states, impulsion for crime or being against general moral codes (which are all very equivocally defined).

May 20, 1940 – Law for conservatoires is proposed.

June 1, 1940 – Law for conservatoires is accepted.

1946 – Articles number 141 and 142 are extended.

In 1946 painter Nuri İyem's, who has been arrested before since he was against fascism of Second World War, exhibition is blocked by the police.

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December 27, 1947 – "Küçük Tiyatro" (Small Theatre) in Ankara is opened with the organization of Muhsin Ertuğrul and help of conservatoire workers.

June 16, 1949 – Law for State Theatres (law number 544) is accepted. Right after the law state theatres started opening.

1949-1951- First "Edebi Heyet" (Literary Committee) is organized in State Theatres. Committee reads the plays send and decides which plays are suitable for State Theatre's general repertoire.

1951 – Articles number 141 and 152 are extended.

1954-1955 – Muhsin Ertuğrul made the regulations for the staff of Theatre for Children.

After September 6-7, 1955 depending on articles number 141 and 142 Asım Bezirci, Hasan İzzettin Dinamo, Aziz Nesin and Kemal Tahir are arrested. They are imprisoned for months and released afterwards without trials.

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1958 – Opera and Ballet is separated as a general management from State Theatres with the decision of Ministry of Education.

May 27, 1960 – Military Coup

1960 Constitution legalizes freedom of thinking and expression with article 20, freedom of science and arts in article 21 and freedom of press in article 22.

After 60s private theatres start to appear. This can be seen as a liberalization process in Turkish theatre.

1960 – Opera and Ballet and State Theatres are reunited under same general management.

In March 5, 1961 "Tedbirler Kanunu" (Caution Laws) is made and process against article number 142 claiming the article is against constitution is cancelled.

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In 1961, after the exhibition of "Yeni Dal Grubu" (New Branch Group), which is a group formed by painters İbrahim Balaban, Kemal İncesu, Avni Mehmetoğlu, Marta Töze and sculptor Vahi İncesu, the group is arrested. They are acquitted after 4 months.

November 17, 1965 – A general strike started in State Theatres. One of the many underlying reasons of the strike was to break the apolitical play choices (musicals, expensive productions, family dramas etc.). Later the artists who were involved to the strike declared that they were forced to resign from their positions.

March 12, 1971 – Military Coup

July 17, 1970 – Laws number 1309 and 1310 are accepted which restructured the two departments of Opera and Ballet and State Theatres by separating them again.

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1971 – Both institutions (Opera and Ballet and State Theatres) are devolved to Ministry of Culture which was newly shaped. In the same year General Management of State Theatres were given the right to open theatres wherever they see the need.

1971 – Ministry of Culture is connected to Ministry of Education as an undersecretary.

1972 – Culture Undersecretary is connected to Prime Ministry.

1974 – Opera and Ballet and State Theatres are devolved to Ministry of Culture.

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1978-1979 – Bertolt Brecht's plays are taken to State Theatre's repertoire for the first time. Political plays from Turkey and world are included with Brecht such as Gorki, Ionesco, Haldun Taner or Aziz Nesin. State theatres have a repertoire which resembles the contemporary life of people and people respond to this change with great enthusiasm. Audience numbers are multiplied by almost 2,5. This change is made possible by Engin Orbey but these positive reforms were cut down after the military coup.

September 12, 1980 – Military Coup

After the Military Coup many artists and state theatre workers were inquired, taken from their positions and fired with the law number 1402.

1982 Constitution seems like it is protecting freedom of speech. The on-purposely not well defined laws still make pressure and censorship possible but especially 8th article of "Polis Vazife ve Sela yet Kanunu" (Law of Duties and Authorization of Police) made local administrations and local police able to censor any kind of play or movie. This resulted in severe inequalities such as a theatre play or movie could have been seen in Ankara but not in Erzurum.

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Tepebaşı Deneme Sahnesi, the only experimental stage of State Theatres, is emptied in 1983 and destroyed afterwards.

1983 – Ülker Köksal's play for children named "Barış Gezegeni" (Planet of Peace) is banned in Çanakkale (in summer season) even though the tickets were already sold.

1983-1987 – Turgut Özakman becomes the General Manager of State Theatres and makes a move to institutionalize the not working institution.

1987 – Turgut Özakman resigns from the management of State Theatres with the pressure of Motherland Party's (ANAP) 2nd Culture Minister Mesut Yılmaz.

1988-1992 – A sub-organization of State Theatres, "Theatre for Children and Youngsters" were closed.

1990 – 1st Turkish Theatre Assembly is made. Idea of "Unit Theatre"s (Birim Tiyatro), full autonomy and many reforms are discussed.

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In April 1991 articles number 141 and 142 are taken out of Turkish Criminal Code.

1991 – Mesopotamia Culture Center opens. Kurdish plays are performed even though state pressures the center even by controlling the audience or making tanks wait just outside the theatre building.

1992-1994 – General Manager of State Theatres Yücel Erten was educated in Germany and idea of forming "Unit Theatres" with ensemble formation like in German model seemed quite reasonable to reform the system of State Theatres.

December 1993 – In Istanbul State Theatres there had been a voting process for first Unit Theatre trial. The question was "would you like to work in Unit Theatre?". 1/4th of the crew, 23 people said accepted the call. For the Unit Theatre a painting studio in the basement of AKM (Atatürk Culture Center) was cleaned and redesigned as an experimental stage. The first play was "Hamlet" directed by Müge Gürmen. Sadly that was the first and last play of Unit Theatre. There is no source defining the closure of Unit Theatre but the common discourse in theatre field tells the closure as "it was locked one day".

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1999-2001 – Rahmi Dilligil became the General Manager of State Theatres and made the first legal corruptions ("yolsuzluk") in the institution. He removed 200 artists away from the State Theatres with no clear reason. With the reaction of all the ex-managers (they wrote a united reaction text which all of them signed) Rahmi Dilligil was investigated and arrested because of firing artists for no legal reason and peculation. State Theatres lost most of its prestige.

2003 – Being an actor or actress is defined by Turkish Standards Institute.

In July 14, 2004 – "The Law on Evaluation, Limitation and Supporting of Films" (No: 5224) is accepted in Grand National Assembly of Turkey. It came into operation after being published in official newspaper ("Resmi Gazete" number 25529) in July 21, 2004.

2005 – Dot theatre group imports in-yer-face plays from Britain and it starts a new movement which can be analyzed under the aspects of in-yer-face adoptions and new texts and alternative stages.

2007-2008 – For seasonal tours of State Theatres, with the help of State Railways, a wagon stage was used which brought theatre to all cities and towns which are on the railroads. There had been a project to make a theatre ferry by adopting the "İnkilap Vapuru" ("Revolution Ferry") from Istanbul Cityline Ferries but this project wasn't realized.

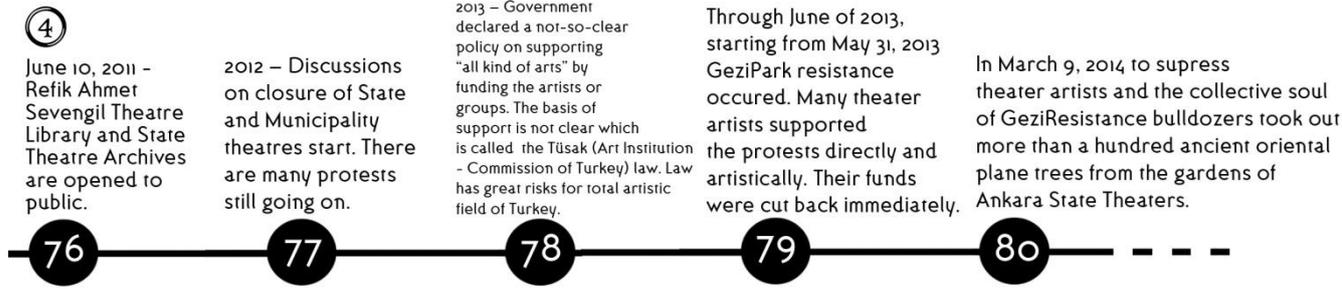
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\*Beklan Algan'ın Anlatımıyla "Tepebaşı Deneme Sahnesi". (n.d.). Retrieved June 15, 2013, from Tiyatro Müzesi website: [http://tiyatromuzesi.org/drupal/beklan\\_algan\\_tepebasi\\_deneme\\_sahnesini\\_anlatiyor](http://tiyatromuzesi.org/drupal/beklan_algan_tepebasi_deneme_sahnesini_anlatiyor) Retrieved June 14, 2013, from

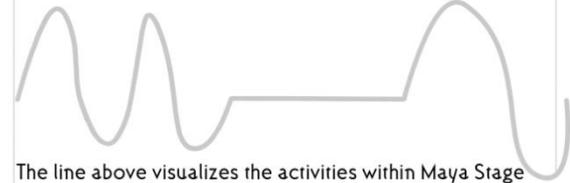
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## History of Bilsak and the Maya Stage

Year	Event
1980	12.09.1980 military coup
1981	
1982	
1983	
1984	After the 1980's military coup, a group of intellectuals who are artists and scientists were silenced because of political reasons made (probably) the first independent private cultural center in 1984 under the name BİLSAK A.Ş. (Bilim Sanat Kültür A.Ş. – Science Art Culture Corporation). They rented a building in Cihangir. 1st floor was a café, 2nd floor was for concerts and conferences, 3rd floor was theater, 4th floor was for fine arts and 5th floor became a restaurant for functional economical reasons.
1985	
1986	BİLSAK was a theater school primarily. The teachers were, Erol Keskin, Ayla-Beklan Algan , Cevat Çapan, Taner Barlas, Ahmet Levendođlu, Macir Koper, Haluk Şeyket, Yekta Kara, Müge Gürman, Levent Öktem, Nihat İleri, Metin Deniz and Ergüder Yoldaş. Bilsak Theater Studio was under the body of BİLSAK A.Ş. and according to the general principle of Bilsak, the school tried to find new approaches in theater. The teachers were either removed from their institutions after the 12.09.1980 military coup or kept away from the resources of free artistic production, and the goal was to include these people in the theater field with collective productions. These people all came from different theater paradigms but they succeeded in working cooperatively for two years. In 1986 the theater school ended.
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2000	There were about 40 people who have been educated in Bilsak within these two years and 5 of them decided to stay and form a group. One of the founders of BİLSAK, Mustafa Kemal Ağaođlu gave the space to these five people who resisted and continued their works every day in Bilsak with the condition that they should use the same name. The second generation Bilsak group was made from Emre Baykal, Şerif Erol, Alp Giritli, Ceysu Koçak, and Nihal G. Koldaş and they adopted a theater methodology centralized in acting and based on collective dramaturgy and direction. This second generation Bilsak lasted until 2000 when BİLSAK A.Ş. proscribed itself and left their building in Cihangir.
2001	
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2013	After year 2000 the only founder member left in the group was Nihal Koldaş. In 2001 Nihal Koldaş and Metin Deniz made the Maya Stage in which Nihal Koldaş worked with changing actors but the working methodology continued with the initial principal of collective working. Due to this working principle the works continued to be presented with the Bilsak Logo.

This table is made with the written information personally given by Nihal Koldaş (co-founder of second generation Bilsak) and orally given information by Feyzan Yılmaz who works in TiyatroGerçek.

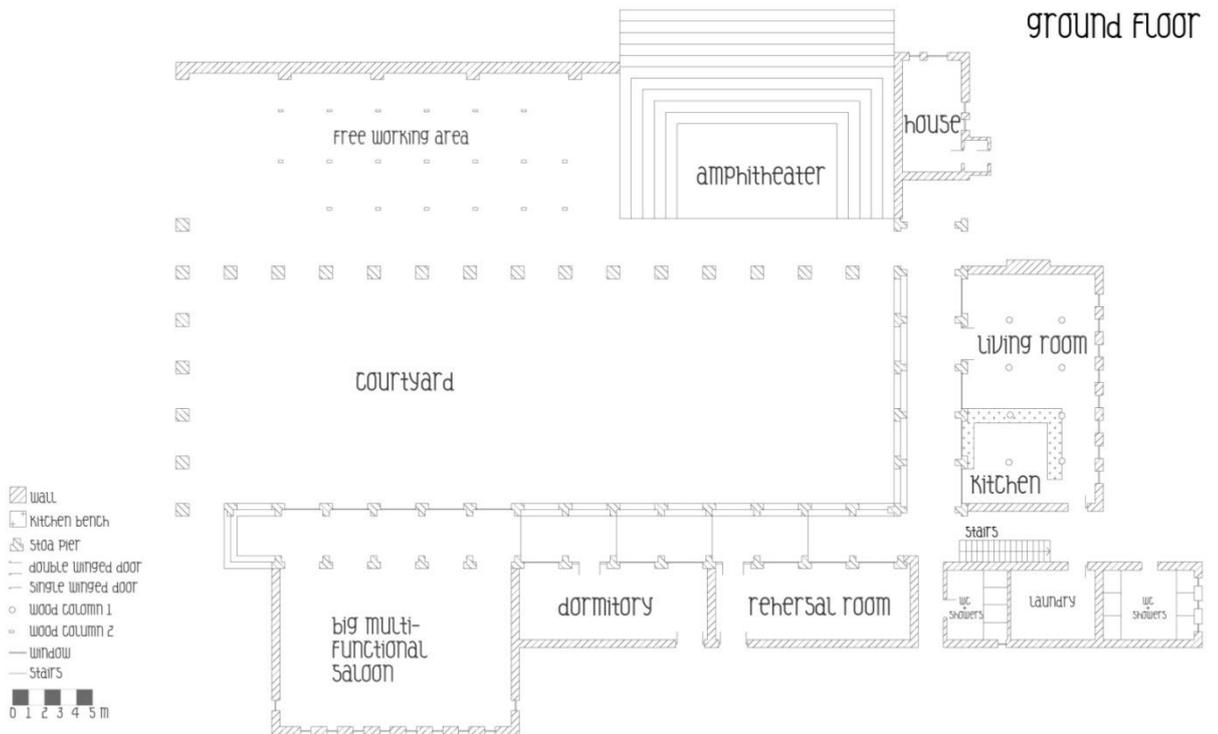
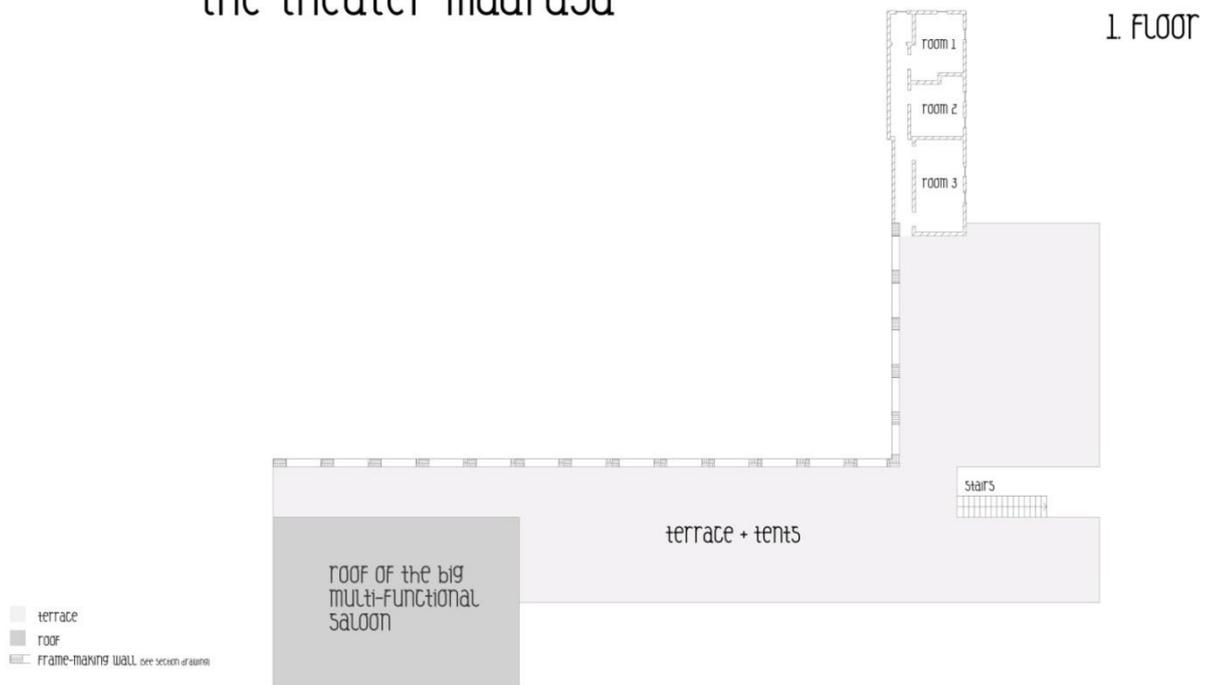


The line above visualizes the activities within Maya Stage non-precisely in graphic language. After its first establishment Maya Stage, and Bilsak Group continued productions. There had been a dead period starting from mid2000s to 2011 when Boğaziçi Performing Arts Community took over Maya Stage. In 2013 Maya Stage was taken by TiyatroGerçek.

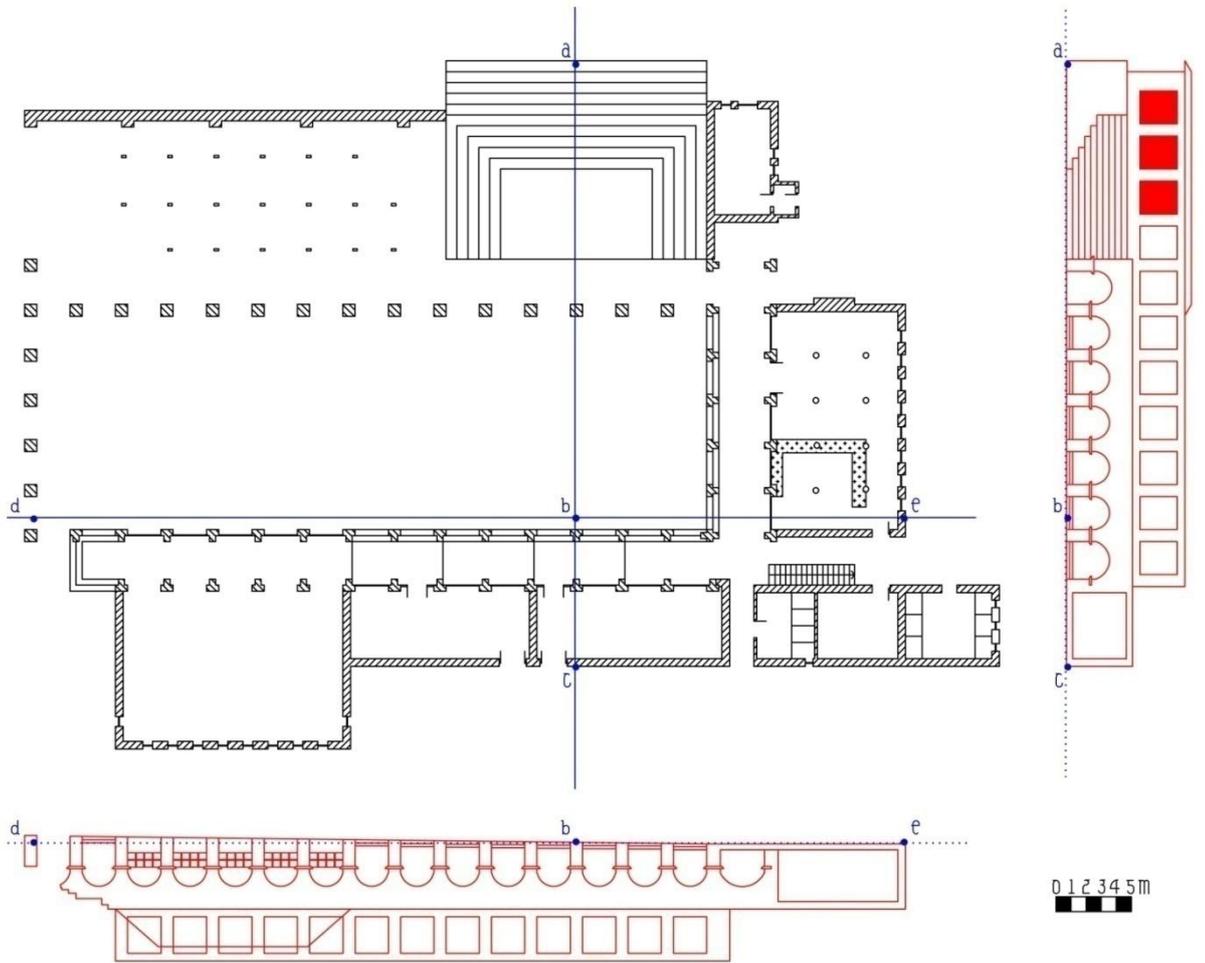


Floor plans of Theater Madrasa

JULY 22, 2013 Plan of  
the theater Madrasa



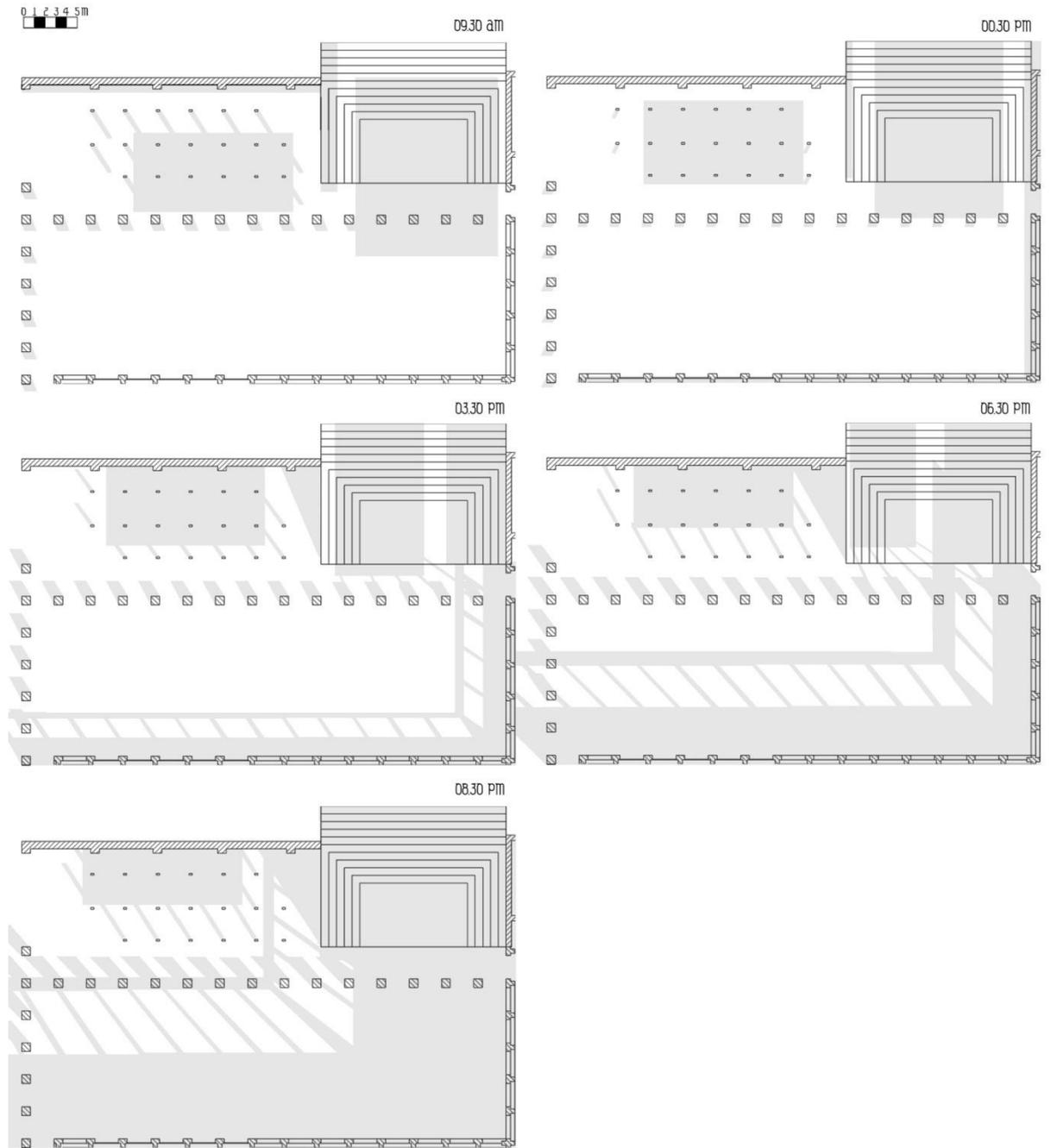
# Theater Madrasa: Plan and Cross-Sections



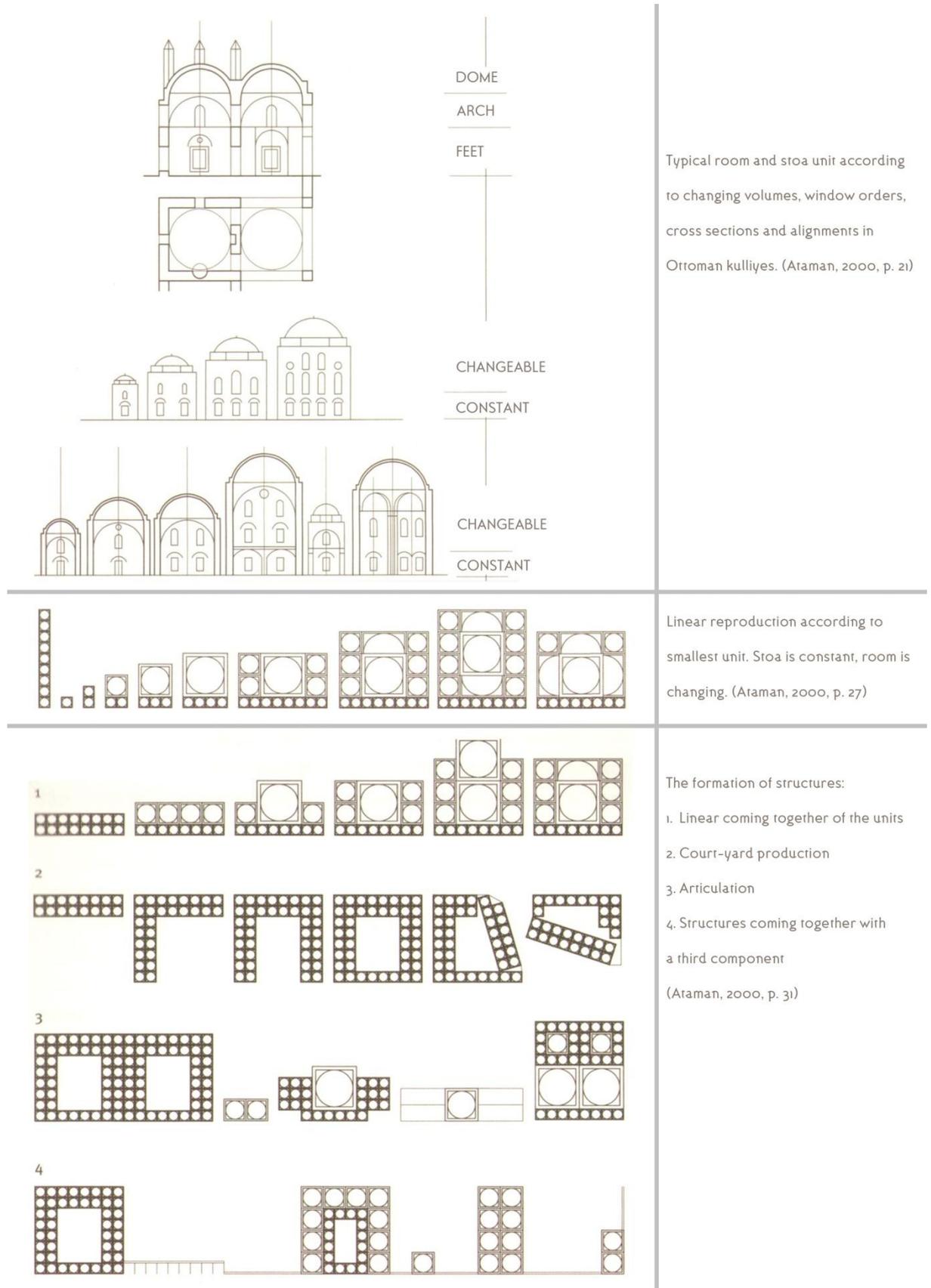
# Shadow Analysis of the Courtyard of Theater Madrasa

Shadow analysis

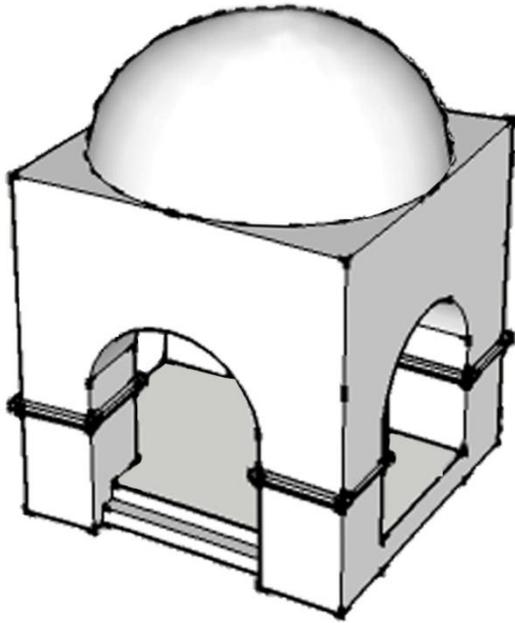
JULY 2013



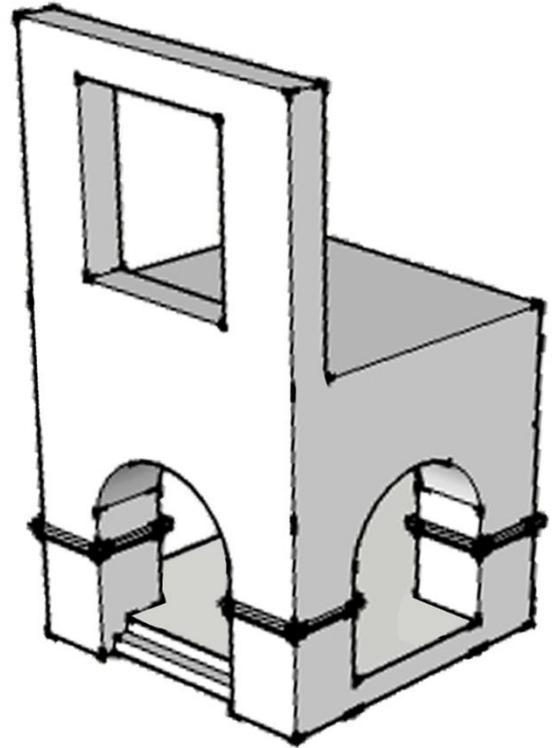
Alparslan Ataman's unit analysis method for understanding the public space's construction in Ottoman public buildings (Ataman, 2000)



A comparison between Classical Ottoman Madrasa Unit and the construction unit of Theater Madrasa

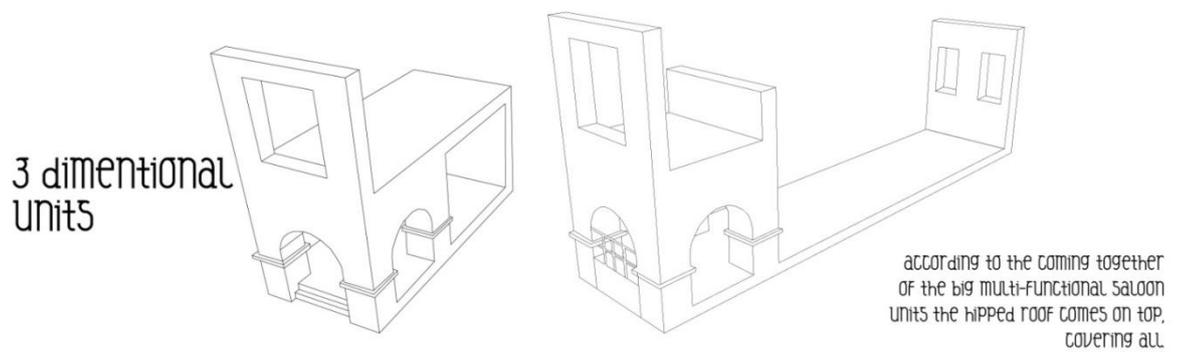
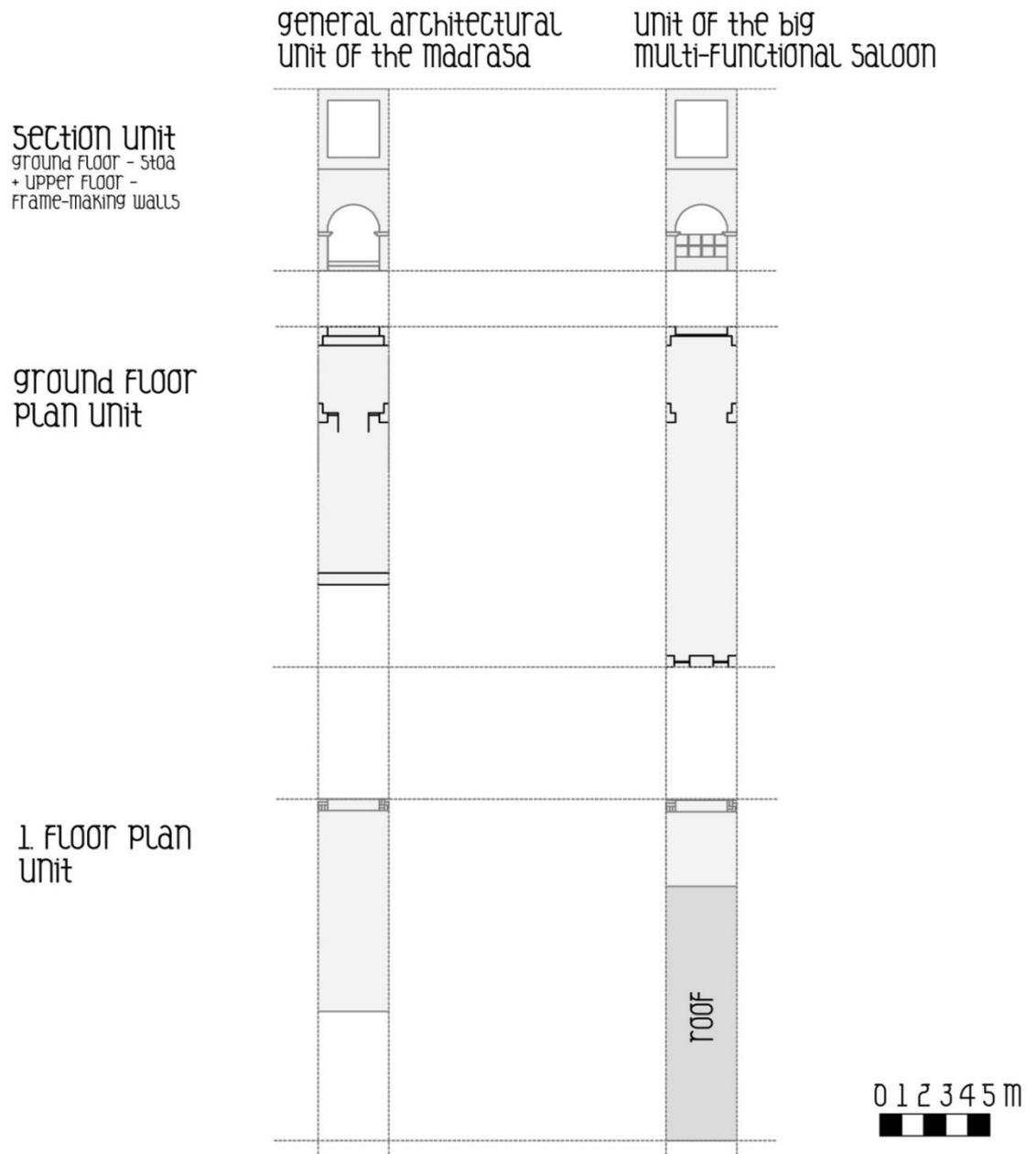


classical madrasa unit

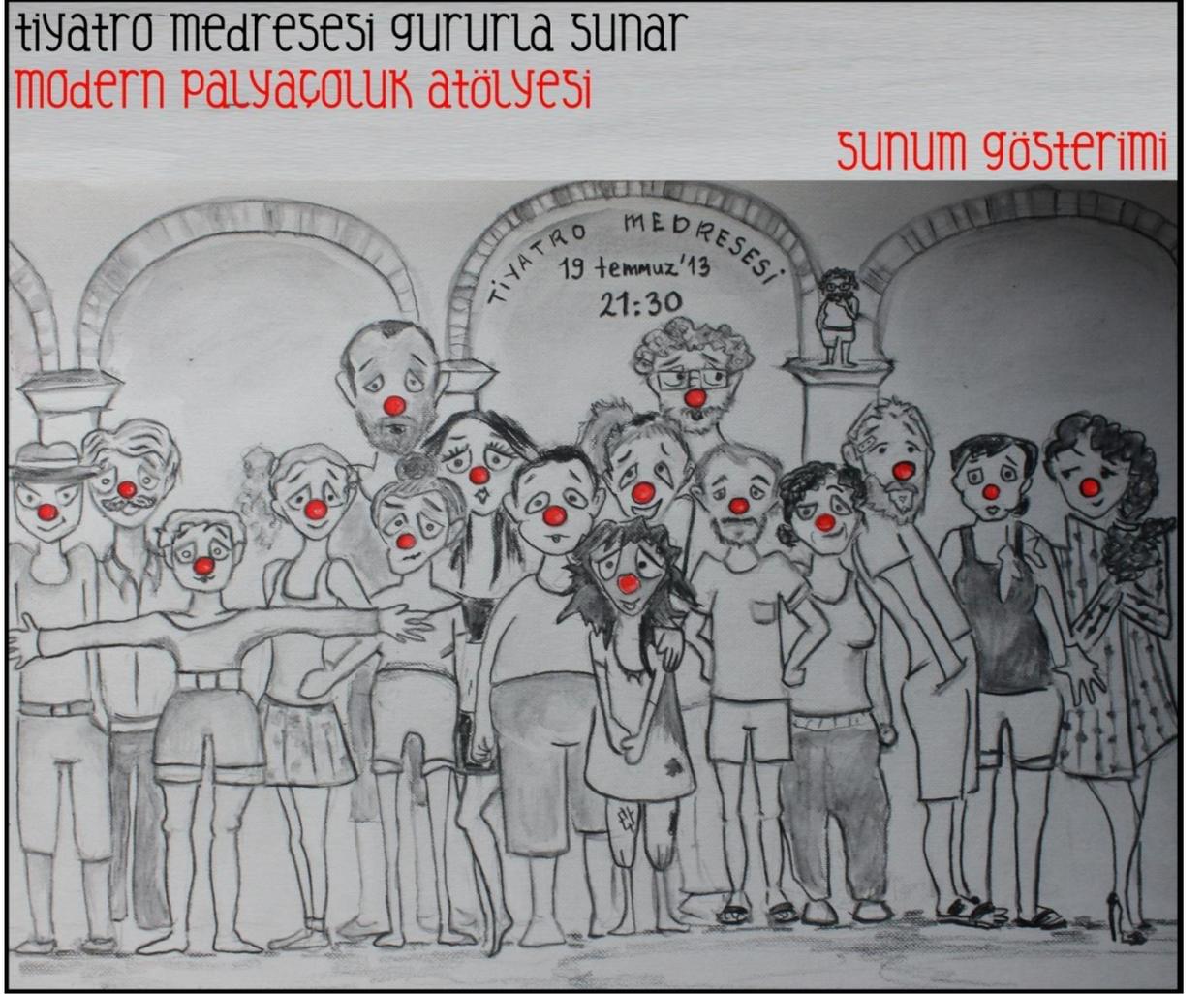


unit of the theater madrasa

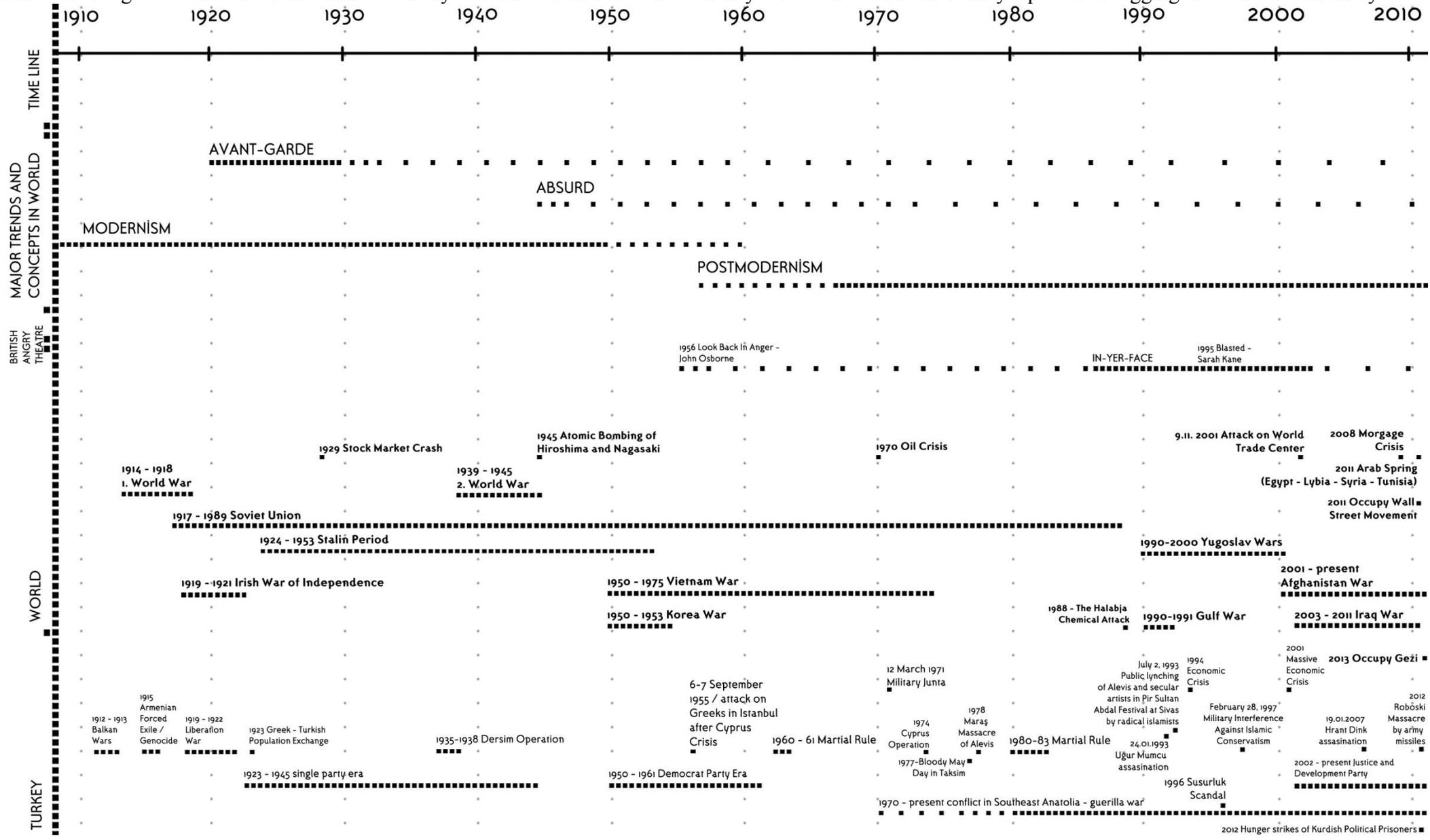
Construction Unit Analysis of Theater Madrasa based on Ataman's System



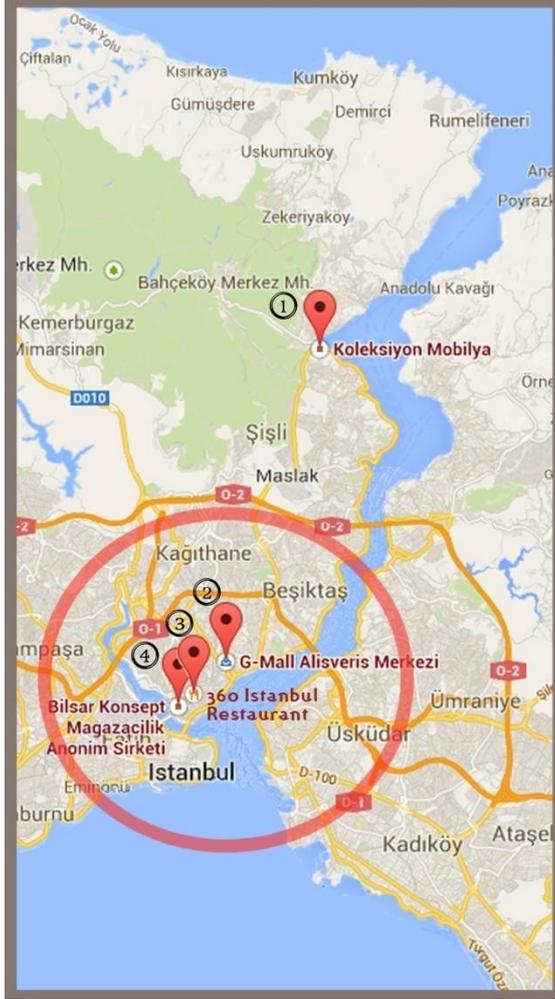
Poster of Clown Workshop's ending presentation in July 19th, 2013, drawing by:  
Firuze Engin



Timetable for great events and trends in 20<sup>th</sup> century – an answer trial to “what can in-er-face uncover from Turkey’s past after digging the collective memory?”



## Dot's permanent stages and places of their mobile projects in Istanbul



1. Koleksiyon Mobilya –  
Collection Furniture Shop –  
stage of **Festen**

2. Maçka G-Mall – Starts as the second  
mobile Project for **Pornography**, later  
becomes the permanent stage (starting  
from 2009)

3. Mısır Apartment labeled with the  
restaurant on its top floor, 360 İstanbul – S  
tage of all plays except mobile projects from  
2005 to 2009.

4. Bilsar Konsept Mağazacılık Anonim Şirketi –  
Bilsar Concept Merchandising Corporation –  
stage of **Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat**

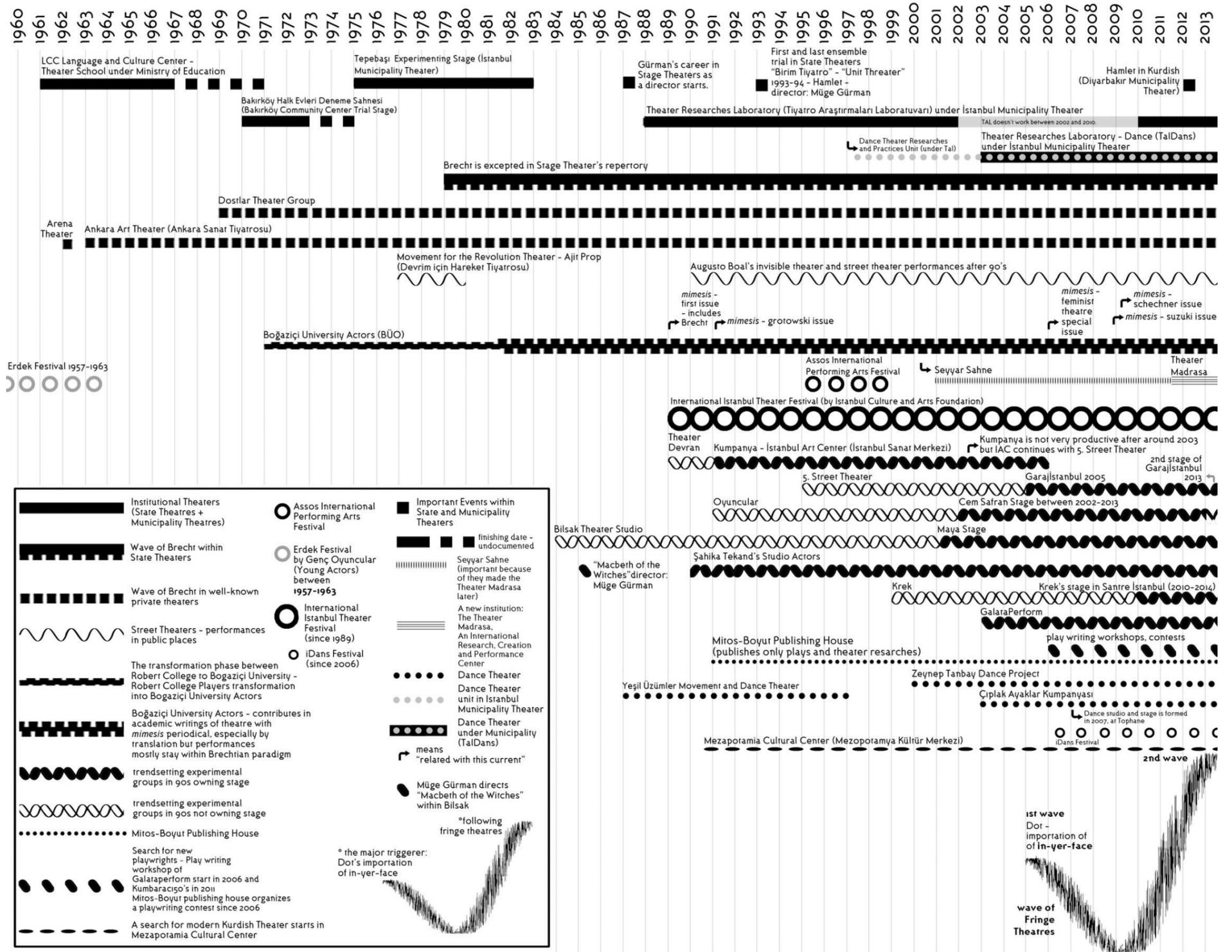


Local plays from Turkey which have unsterotypical (in the commercial sense) trans women characters

overlapping feminist waves	list of all the plays in contemporary stages where transsexuality appears	premier date (year)	writer of the play	performer and notes on performer	structure of dramaturgy	major performance structure	major text form	fiction/nonfiction
1st wave major theme: equality (humanitarian discourse)	Cadının Bohçası (Witch's Pack)	2006	Esmeray	Esmeray - She writes, directs and performs her own plays based on her experiences. She is a trans woman and she had been a sex worker in 90s.	monologue - narrated by the performer who acts different characters based on dramatic moments	planned improvisation	stories are planned but not written in classical form	nonfiction - autobiographical
	Yırtık Bohça (Torn Pack)	2012	Esmeray	Esmeray	monologue - narrated by the performer who acts different characters based on dramatic moments	planned improvisation	stories are planned but not written in classical form	nonfiction - autobiographical
	Bizim Atölye (Our Studio)	2013	Esmeray	Esmeray	monologue - narrated by the performer who acts different characters based on dramatic moments	planned improvisation	stories are planned but not written in classical form	nonfiction - autobiographical
Between 1st and 2nd wave (closer to 2nd wave)	80lerde Lubunya Olmak (Being Queer in 80s)	2013	based on documented oral history	4 woman performers: Burcu Şeyben (lecturer in Bilgi university Stage Arts department) - Elit Çam, Ayşe Gülerman, (graduates of Kadir Has Theatre Department), Neşem Akhan (graduate of MSFSU Theatre Department)	monologue of four characters acted by four performers	open form - without the fourth wall	monologues attached to each other with shared sexual identity and same military coup experience	nonfiction-made into play from the book "80lerde Lubunya Olmak"
2nd wave: major theme: rights (right to live, right to express identity)	Kimsenin Ölmediği Bir Günün Ertesiydi (The Day After Nobody Died)	2012	Ebru Nihan Celkan	Sumru Yavrucuk - she graduated from Istanbul Municipality Conservatory at the beginning of 80s. She is a celebrity in Turkey because of the movies and tv series she acted since the beginning of 80s.	monologue - acted by a single performer who acts and narrates one character	open form - without the fourth wall	classical theatre text	fiction
	Kadınlar, Aşklar, Şarkılar (Women, Amour, Songs)	2013	Şamil Yılmaz	Ahmet Melih Yılmaz - he has graduated from Ankara University's Theatre Department in 2014	monologue - acted by a single performer who gets in and out of different characters	open form - without the fourth wall	classical theatre text	fiction
Between 2nd and 3rd wave (closer to 2nd wave)	Düdüklü Tencere (Pressure Cooker)	2013	Ali Cüneyt Kılçioğlu	Fehmi Karaaslan - graduate of Lyon University Theatre Department and Lyon Conservatoire Acting Department. He has done his masters in Lyon University Theatre Department. He got a year of clown education in F.R.A.C.O.- Burlesk Acting School.	two overlapping monologues	reading theatre	classical theatre text	fiction
3rd wave major theme: individual autonomy	İz (Trace)	2013	Ahmet Sami Özbudak	Okan Urun (he acts the trans character in the play)- he got his acting education between 2001-2007 at Paris Hector Berlioz Municipality Conservatory	classical play - acted by seven actors/actresses	closed form - with the fourth wall	classical theatre text	fiction
	Garaj (Garage)	2013	Kemal Hamamcıoğlu	Enis Arıkan - A graduate of Müjdat Gezen Sanat Merkezi. He is widely known for his appearances in various tv series. He worked in theater groups like Dot and Craft.	classical play - acted by two actors	closed form - with the fourth wall	classical theatre text	fiction

The plays are not listed in exact chronologicaly. Around 2012-2013 a possible chronology of premier dates of these plays can be listed as: 1. *Yırtık Bohça* 2. *Kimsenin Ölmediği Bir Günün Ertesiydi* 3. *Bizim Atölye* 4. *Kadınlar, Aşklar, Şarkılar* 5. *İz* 6. *80lerde Lubunya Olmak* and *Düdüklü Tencere* (both first appeared in alternative theatre festival in 2013: "altfest13") 7. *Garaj*

Time table covering the unorthodoxies of theater field in Turkey starting from 1960s



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