

PERFORMART '14 / PERFORMING ARTS CONFERENCE
PERFORMING ARTS
AND PUBLIC SPACE



QAKAM
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ACADEMIC RESEARCH CENTER



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PERFORMART Conference takes lead from the ever-existing relation between the performing arts and public space and focuses mostly on the culminating new performing arts events, festivals, celebrations that use public space, and concentrates on the confrontations, problems and opportunities between the two. However, it also wishes to explore the exchange and dialogue between the designated spaces for performing arts such as theatre venues, theatre halls, alternative performing arts spaces and public space. PERFORMART also encourages the readers to reflect upon various possible takes on the term "public space" rather than considering it a mere physical space/venue.

PERFORMART'14 Conference, hosted by İstanbul Bilgi University, Management of Performing Arts Department and organized by DAKAM (Eastern Mediterranean Academic Research Center), has taken place on 20-21 December 2014. This book includes all presentations done by the scholars during the conference.

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PERFORMING ARTS AND PUBLIC SPACE

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CONTENTS

- 8 TRADITIONAL FORMS OF THE POSTMODERN ENVIRONMENT THE STORY TELLER AS A PERFORMER
THEODORE GRAMMATAS
- 16 ASSOCIATIONS OF TEMPLE DANCE AND TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE, A CASE OF NATARAJA TEMPLE AT CHIDAMBARAM
ASHWINI PETHE, KIRANSHINDE
- 31 STREET MUSICIANS IN BRNO CITY
MARTINA HANÁKOVÁ
- 52 STAGING COSTUMES: INTERACTION BETWEEN FASHION DESIGN AND COSTUME DESIGN.
CLAIRE MOLONEY
- 64 WEBCAM AS ACTOR AND SCREEN AS PLACEMAKER IN AN EXPERIMENTAL PUBLIC ART PRACTICE
PHILLIP COURTENAY, PETRA JOHNSON
- 74 EREHWON: FOR A CARTOGRAPHY OF CHANGE
MARIZA DIMA, BEATRIZ CANTINHO
- 82 BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: MUSIC AS A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE IN PERFORMANCE ART
SARAH COURTIS
- 90 TIME AFTER TIME – THE USE OF DRAMATIC LEITMOTIF AS A THEMATIC LINK ACROSS THE INTERDISCIPLINARY COMPONENTS OF A MUSICAL THEATRE PERFORMANCE. A CASE STUDY ON STRICTLY BALLROOM THE MUSICAL.
ELLIN SEARS
- 97 ISTANBUL PRIDE WEEK AND MARCH; PROTEST ART AS PERFORMANCE
A. SERHAN ŞAHİN
- 101 DANCER'S STILLNESS IN PUBLIC SPACE RESISTS THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHORITARIAN MOBILITY
AYRİN ERSÖZ
- 110 TRANSGRESSION OF PUBLIC SPACE: DIMINUTION OF THE PERFORMING SELF
ZEYNEP GÜNSÜR YÜCEİL
- 117 VOICE AS PUBLIC SPACE: THE PERSONAL VOICE, THE CULTURAL/POLITICAL VOICE AND THE CREATIVE VOICE IN GEZI
SUSAN MAIN
- 123 FROM VOX ROSA TO FOLLOW THE SUN: A JOURNEY THROUGH MIXED-MEDIA PERFORMANCE
ALEX EVANS, DAVID OSBON
- 132 THE CHALLENGE OF REPRESENTATION THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS AFTER VELASQUEZ AND FOUCAULT
MÓNICA PACHECO
- 139 HOME AS A PUBLIC/PRIVATE SPACE: HEADSCARVED FEMALE CHARACTERS IGOOD THINGS ARE ON OUR SIDE AND CLOUDS MAY WANDER
BURCU YASEMİN ŞEYBEN, RASİM ERDEM AVŞAR

- 146 THE BODY-SPACE INTERACTION IN MODERN DANCE
SEZA FİLİZ
- 148 TITLE OF PAPER: "A FAN CULTURE'S SURVIVAL PERFORMANCE DURING A TIME OF PUBLIC
CRISIS"
DANIEL PAWLEY
- 149 EXPLORING PHILOSOPHICAL THEORIES OF FICTION THROUGH META-THEATRE: PHILOSOPHICAL
PERSPECTIVES ON SELF-REFLEXIVE, INTERACTIVE PERFORMANCE
AYSEGUL SENTUG
- 155 CHALLENGES AND ACTIONS PROJECTS OF PERFORMANCE IN SOCIAL CONTEXT
AYLİN KALEM, BURCU HALAÇOĞLU
- 159 PUBLIC SPACE AS SECRET THEATRE: EAVESDROPPING WITH LOCATIVE AUDIO
PIETER VERSTRAETE
- 166 PERFORMING ARTS AND PUBLIC SPACE IN TURKEY, HOW IT CAN CHANGE AND BE IMPROVED
GÖNÜL GÜLCE KARAARSLAN
- 177 A THREE-DIMENSIONAL CONTACT IMPROVISATION: THE POTENTIAL OF
UNDERWATER RUGBY
ESEN GÖKÇE ÖZDAMAR
- 181 DRAMATIC AND POSTDRAMATIC STRATEGIES IN MARK RAVENHILL'S *POOL (NO WATER)*
SİBEL İZMİR
- 195 EXTENDED AUDIENCING: HOW SPECTATORS OF IMMERSIVE PRODUCTIONS EXTEND
EXPERIENCE INTO PUBLIC SPACE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA DIALOGUES
JULIA M RITTER
- 196 "CULTURAL DANCE- IS IT BROADENING THE CONTEMPORARY DANCE WORLD OR
JUST A TREND OF THE MOMENT?"
ROSAMARIA E. KOSTIC CISNEROS
- 197 ON THE RUINS OF (A) PUBLIC SPACE: ATATURK CULTURAL CENTER AS ANTI-CAMP
V. ŞAFAK UYSAL
- 198 OPERA AT THE CINEMA: VIRTUAL SHOWS AND NEW APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC
SPACES
DANIEL DOMINGUES, LUIZA BITTENCOURT
- 200 PUBLIC SPACE -PARTICIPATORY CULTURE: THE CONTEMPORARY ART OF LOZANO-
HEMMER AND SMITHBEATTY
CRAIG SMITH
- 201 BEHIND THE SCENES: INVESTIGATING DRAMATIC SUBSTRATE OF ARCHITECTURAL
SCENOGRAPHIES - SHORT CRITICAL APPROACH.
MARINA MIHAILA

PERFORMING ARTS AND PUBLIC SPACE

The relation between performing arts and public space is not a new concept. From its first inception in rituals, performing arts have nearly always taken place in public spaces such as town squares, designated places for celebrations. The introduction of venues into performing arts has occurred much later on. In the twentieth century, first with the avantgarde theatre movements and later with the performance arts and fluxus, performing arts turned "back into the streets" accompanied with artistic and/or political manifestos.

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Can the increasing use of new media, digital technologies and multimedia installations in traditional theatre-making such as video art, web spaces and free-to-access online shows be considered an orientation towards the idea of public space?

Can new theatre writing that tackles with societal and political issues and themes of our zeitgeist such as minority group visibility, social inclusion, occupy movements and the idea of congregation of individuals through social media channels turn a conventional physical venue into a public space?

While PERFORMART aims at exploring above stated themes, questions and the dialectics between performing arts and the public space, it also welcomes papers, individual and/or collective workshops revolving around the current advancements and trends in the fields of contemporary theatre, music, dance, performing arts festivals and performance in general.

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DANCER'S STILLNESS IN PUBLIC SPACE RESISTS THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHORITARIAN MOBILITY

AYRİN ERSÖZ

Abstract

This research addresses the Erdem Gündüz's 'standing man' (duran adam) performance act within the framework of discussions on, performance act, public space and capital accumulation. Stillness is explored as an implication of a critique of modern mobility. Also discussed within this context is the still performance act, a mode of resistance which not only opposes the patriarchal governing style, but also creates a different publicness. This paper also covers the two sources of authoritarianism in Turkey: the first one which is locally political, and the second one which is globally economical. Finally, it is elaborated on how this performance act of stillness in public space is related to these sources of authoritarianism.

Key words: public space, performance, stillness, modernity, authoritarianism, capital

There have been two public space performances by Turkish dancers in the last decade. First one of these was on January 27th, 2007, right after the assassination of Hrant Dink, an Armenian intellectual and journalist, on January 19th of the same year. Upon dancer and choreographer Mihran Tomasyan's call, who said "I now invite all of you to lie quietly on the pavement, like Hrant's heart-wrenching lifeless body, your feet turned in, your body covered with newspapers, to die for fifteen minutes to be born again," (<http://vimeo.com/19559662>) to the crowd who participated in the performance.

The second one took place during the Gezi Park protests on June 18th, 2013. The performance was on the news the next day: "While violence, chaos, and confrontation envelope Turkey and its anti-government protests, one man decided to just stand still. Last night, Erdem Gündüz walked to Turkey's sealed-off Taksim Square with no announcement, no signs, no explanation and silently stood there for eight hours. This small but powerful act of defiance magnetized others to join in his peaceful resistance. Slowly but surely, his protest grew and spread to other cities in a wave driven by social media." (<http://heavy.com>)

These two examples of protest show us the difference between performative act and performance act. Through Tomasyan's initiation, an announcement was made as to what kind of movement would be performed in public space, which was open to anyone's participation and had a predefined choreography, date, place, and duration. Subsequently, the performance was executed as it had been announced; the participants completed the act in stillness according to the previously agreed kinesthetic processes, as had been announced. Thus, we may say that this became a performance with a performative act. In contrast, Gündüz executed his performance, referred to as the 'standing man', where there was no speaking, no announcement, no sign, no explanation, and the act took place self-referentially, in silence and stillness with no predetermined duration and no call for participation. What Gündüz did was a pure performance act.

Language philosopher J.L. Austin's concept of the performative calls for a radical criticism against the positivist view in linguistics. He investigates how the performative can be distinguished from the constative and considers especially "how to define the performative more clearly." (Austin, 1962, p.67) Austin reminds us of "...some cases ... in which to *say* something is to *do* something; or in which *by saying* or *in saying* something we are doing something." (Austin, 1962, p.12) Saying something indicates doing something, and utterances made in order to do something points to the performative use of language. "...[P]rotesting,... may be the taking up of an attitude or the performing of an act." (Austin, 1962, p.156) Under certain circumstances speech becomes a performative act, which mostly realizes itself through bodily movements. The complex relationship between utterances made in order to do something and the doings about those that are uttered is the subject of linguistic inquiry, which is too wide a topic to be discussed here. What a performative utterance signifies is more or less linguistically clear. At least on a metaphorical level, it is explicit. An announcement such as the performative utterance "I will be standing still in Taksim Square for eight hours" presents a narrowing path from utterance to performance. However, within a pure performance, it is to the contrary: when the performance is not a performative act, it is liberated from language and has the opportunity to relate to language from a realm outside of it. While a performative act follows language, a pure act is followed *by* language. In some cases, doing without saying is in fact saying many things. Therefore, a performance act may offer '*more*' and say many things.

Without saying anything, giving any speeches, calls, or announcements, the standing man went out to the public space alone and stood still for eight hours. The social media took action, the image of the standing man went viral, and soon he got surrounded by many, standing still like him. What is of interest to us here is that as an act of protest, it is both a performance that is detached from the linguistic and fully challenges the choreographic discourse of modernity through the performance of a dancer. It is also the fact that it 'stands' against all things that are implied by this choreographic discourse, against the domination of '*choreo*' by '*graphy*', and against the kinesis and mobilization of modernity. Standing still with no signs or no explanation expands the path from acting to speech, as it triggers the thinking process. Thus our system of concepts is activated and forms a potential to start a chain reaction in our vocabulary of metaphors. Consequently, our thinking process follows a path that intersects with many different disciplines. The act here is standing in stillness on a particular spot for eight hours. It is clear that saying "I will be standing still in Taksim for eight hours" without a context is meaningless. This stillness can be interpreted in many different ways; while some attribute a positive meaning to it, seeing it as a silent protest against the government, some may consider stillness as negative, since it contradicts the fundamental kinetic principle of modernity, the modern capitalist world's dogma of faster and more expanded mobilization as a sign of development. This belief dictates that movement and mobility is fundamental to the dynamics of economy and the society, and from this point of view, stillness means regression. For both of these positive and negative interpretations, stillness is a metaphor, or a "metaphorical concept" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, pp.3-4), which assumes meaning not in and of itself, but with respect to other phenomena.

Because of its relation to Gezi Park and the specific conditions of this case, the standing man's stillness can be regarded as a form of resistance to the choreography of an authoritarian political culture and a capital accumulation of the world's economic order. In modernity the only valid and accepted form of stillness is its potentiality for movement. Similarly, in modern dance stillness is articulated as a precondition of dance. "Stillness must somehow to be present, its effect accepted, but only as originator of the dance. Stillness is no longer dance's other, but remains outside dance, as potential, as a 'system' which allows the body to 'incline' itself towards dancing. Stillness is potential dancing, it is perhaps even the primal source for dancing, but it is not quite dancing." (Lepecki, 2000, p. 342) Although a precondition of dance stillness is not in the realm of choreographic; the power of stillness "was metaphysical even transcendental, but not choreographic." (Lepecki, 2000, p. 342) Stillness in performance is a different issue; completely neutral to movement, it may or may not be a potential for movement. In standing man still there is not a potential for movement. The stillness in his performance act is referring to the stillness itself, and to the potential of its continuation as stillness and its multiplication as stillness. It resists the choreography as "apparatus of capture" (Lepecki, 2007, pp120-123).

In this way stillness is uncanny; it is uncanny, because it implies a *presence* outside the "mobilization of the planet" (Sloterdijk, 2006, p.37). It can be said that the standing man is a kind of performance of stillness, an act of resistance, the resistance against the capitalization of the Gezi Park that would transform its public use-value to exchange-value. It is a resistance against the choreography of capital accumulation, against the global mobilization of modernity, which is the reason of its existence in the center of the world capitalist system. Standing man gains its significance from here. The intention of this act is not read through what Gündüz said after his performance, but through analyzing his pure act of stillness as it is. "Ontologically, modernity is a pure 'being-toward-movement'." (Sloterdijk, 2006, p.38). As suggested by Sloterdijk, mobilization of movement becomes a physical and metaphorical force, which is both the constituent and the propeller of modernity. He claims that modernity, from an ontological standpoint, is an absolute existence towards movement: "As a matter of fact, modernity has also defined itself from the beginning in kinetic terms because it determined its mode of realization and existence as advancing and progressive." (Sloterdijk, 2006, p.37). The political problematic of acts performed in public space can be associated with the "choreographic ontology of modernity" (Lepecki, 2006, p. 13). A critical theory that ignores the mobilization towards which modernity's kinetic principle leans cannot achieve a critique of modernity. Therefore, performances in public space can fulfill this goal by critically problematizing mobility. What the standing man did was not civil disobedience, passive resistance, doing nothing, opposing force, struggle for liberation, or a activism. It is none of the above. It is a still performance act which is a mode of criticism: "...stillness can become an active performative space for empathetic experience, which identifies affect as a very difficult yet crucial mode of criticality. As an act of artistic and political criticism, we could say that stillness is ... the physical embodiment of a mode of criticism." (Gray, 2012, p.216)

Historically, the invention of the term choreography is the articulation of dance into modernity, and the idea that movement is the ontological substance of dance

also matured with modernity. In John Martin's words, it was the "...discovery of the actual substance of dance, which it found to be movement." (Martin, 1989, p.14) Thus, the content of the 'choreo', that is the dance part of choreo-graphy, can become movement. As a consequence, choreography becomes independent of dance. Choreography used to refer to composing dance, the dance creating practices and the particular piece itself. If the essence of dance is indeed movement, then each and every movement by humans can become the subject of choreography. Human practices in cities create mobilization constituting certain rhythm patterns and varieties of tempo. It seems that there is no place for stillness here. People in a highly complex web of relationships and networks, and the movements of the objects create the temporal and spatial choreography of the big cities. This is a social choreography "as a space in which social possibilities are both rehearsed and performed" (Hewitt, 2005, p.4). Choreography is "the very foundation of socialization" and also "has served not only as a secondary *metaphor* for modernity but also as a structuring *blueprint* for thinking and effecting modern social organization: it is not only a secondary representation but also primary performance of that order." (Hewitt, 2005, p.14) Under this social choreography there lies a socio-economic choreography. Furthermore, today nonhuman movement, computer and information technology, physics, animal behavior, medical sciences, and much more can also be included within the term choreography. The term also includes archiving, documenting, and preserving issues within performance art and dance theory. Reconsidering the relationship of the 'graphy' part of choreography with movement and, the necessity of language for the writing of movement can remind us: "Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience...Language is not life; it gives life orders. Life does not speak; it listens and waits." (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.84). If language exists for the purpose of control, discipline, and docility, then in similar manner choreography is the same: "Choreography was invented in order to structure a system of command to which bodies have to subject themselves... Choreography is thus akin to an apparatus of capture" (Allsopp and Lepecki, 2008, p.3).

Underlying the use of the term choreography by various disciplines is this truth indicated by its definition. The process of production of capital, transformation of money into capital and vice versa, or the circulation of commodities, the accumulation of capital may also be understood as choreographic subjects. We now can speak of the choreography of commodities, accumulation of capital and even of spectacles. Guy Debord in the *The Society of The Spectacle* uses the same opening sentence of Marx's *Capital* by replacing the word 'commodity' with the word 'spectacle': "In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. (Debord, 2006, p.35). The spectacle, not an image, "... is a social relation between people that is mediated by images." (Debord, 2006, p.36). According to Debord's analysis, alongside commodity, which functions as a mediator of a particular relation between people, another factor that undertakes this task, the spectacle, comes to the stage. Spectacle for Debord indicates a social relationship, where images are mediated, and a state in which the intensity of capital accumulation becomes images (Debord, 2006, p. 48). Mobilization, towards which modernity leans, becomes the dynamic component of the spectacle society: "... the single movement that has turned the whole planet into its field of operation: capitalism." (Debord, 2006, p.56)

"Not since the 1960s have so many people in vastly different cities across the world taken to the streets, occupying squares, and experimenting with new ways of organizing the urban commons. There is an uncanny choreographic affinity between the eruptions of discontent in cities as diverse as Istanbul, Cairo, Tunis, Athens, Madrid, Lyon, Lisbon, Rome, New York, Tel Aviv, Chicago, London, Berlin, Thessaloniki, Stockholm, Barcelona, Montreal, Oakland, Sao Paulo, or Paris, among many others. A wave of deeply political protest is rolling through the world's cities, whereby those who do not count demand a new constituent process for producing space politically." (Swyngedouw, 2015)

The standing man act seems like a kind of political resistance against the two overlapping modes of authoritarianism: the first is the patrimonial authoritarian political culture and the second is the transcendent principles commanding modern subjects to recognize no limits for mobilization of capital accumulation. The main argument behind the beginning of the Gezi protests was opposing the privatization of Gezi Park, and the planning of a shopping mall or any other construction in its place. The protesters demanded that the park remain as it is and its conditions be improved. However, the government prepared a proposition for the capitalization of this piece of land. The allocation of this land to the firms is possible only after its cancellation of public status. Once used as a public space, the land itself and the constructions built on it become the inseparable part of a capital accumulation.

It could be said that what standing man stood against is the capitalization of Gezi Park as an urban space, which actually serves to the human capital, and thus has public use-value. It is important what form this stance takes. It can be viewed as a metaphorical criticism of the growing, progressing, and developing modern world based on capital accumulation. Viewed this way, it is clear that modernity defines itself and thinks in kinetic terms as progress, growth, development, expansion. "If something like progress does exist as a matter of fact it is because movements originating from subjectivity do undeniably take place. ... When a subject gets to the point of carrying out the thought 'progress,' then within him a self-igniter introduces progress-like self-movements. ... Those who understand what modernity is can only understand it based on the self-igniting self-movement without which modernity would not exist." (Sloterdijk, 2006, p.37) At the end of the 18. century, it was Novalis who first noticed the mobility of modernity with self-movement subjectivity in its center. In his essay "*Christendom or Europe*" he combines the self-motivating subject and the milling machine in a metaphor for self-movement: "With some difficulty it placed man first in the order of created things, and reduced the infinite creative music of the universe to the monotonous clatter of a monstrous mill, which, driven by the stream of chance and floating thereon, was supposed to be a mill in the abstract, without Builder or Miller, in fact an actual perpetuum mobile, a mill that milled of itself." (Novalis, 1799)

Regarding public space in Turkey, examining this issue that has recently become controversial will be helpful in the discussion of anti-authoritarian performance acts. Standing man is part of the first major protest movements against Turkey's authoritarian patriarchal political culture. Considering the sources of authoritarianism it will be clear that the fundamental aspects of political culture in Turkey are formed by the patriarchal governing context. Patrimonialism is a factor determining the modernization process of Turkey from the Ottoman Empire to a

republic. The Ottoman State's fundamental structure is based on the principle of the patriarchal mentality and "the absolute authority of the state over society took its power directly from the patriarchal mentality". (Mahcupyan, 1998, p.31) The modernization process of Turkey was not conducted by the inner dynamics of the society, as it was in the West, but the by the state through the bureaucratic elite. This modernizing bureaucratic elite, paradoxically, has the traditional patriarchal mentality and emerged as a new secular community. Public space in the new Turkish republic was defined by this mentality. Administratively, the Ottoman Empire had its traditional 'community' (*millet*) system, in which every religious community had geographic, regulatory and cultural autonomy. The concept of public space was limited to and constrained by the communities themselves. In fact, in Turkey the actual problem is that public space is still segmented and, until now, both modern and traditional definitions of public space were done inside communities. (Mahcupyan, 1998, pp.25-53) However, in the West, public space becomes public when it is no longer "common", but rather a place where "externalities" are gathered and play a game of bonding separations and separating bonds. (Tassin, 2012, p.82)

Let's take a closer look at the mechanism of the transcendent capital accumulation principle of the capitalist world order which is the economic source of modern authoritarianism. What standing man did is also associated with the economic power of capital demanding the potential of all lands, including public lands, to be transformed to real property as a capital asset. As in recent definition "...capital is defined as the sum total of nonhuman assets that can be owned and exchanged on some market. Capital includes all forms of real property (including residential real estate) as well as financial and professional capital (plants, infrastructure, machinery, patents, and so on) used by firms and government agencies." (Piketty, 2014 p. 49) The basic principle, or the "raison d'être", of the capitalist world system is the endless accumulation of capital. (Wallerstein, 2007, p. 63) Capital accumulation is an authoritarian choreography in time and space. It is authoritarian, because it is transcendent with the vertical universality of its principle; the one not serving it is doomed to extinction. The essence of rising capital stock makes itself a source of authoritarianism. It is also choreography, because its mobility is choreographic: it prewrites movements of people and objects from investing capital in the means of production and the labor force to produce particular use-value goods to producing exchange-value goods for sale to buyers. After all, choreography is a word coined in a dance academy as a consequence of political instrumentalization of the dance, in order to build a colonialist nation state. (Burke, 1992)

If we get back to the example of Gezi Park, we may ask how the capital accumulation works, and can this transcendent accumulation be imagined as the hidden choreographer of the economy? In fact, money, capital, and means of production are different things. The transformation of money into capital or vice versa, and the function of production factors are one of the most complex issues of economics. Every mean of production and labor has an exchange-value. Capital accumulation is realized on the mobilization of the means of production and labor force as a result of the movement of money. Capital accumulation needs this surplus value, which occurs in realization of labor in production. All labor force and all means of production in the production process are always in movement. Thus, the mobilization of the capital and labor are the fundamental operation of the capitalist system.

World cities possess an enormous amount of land of industrial, commercial, and residential use-value. These have exchange-value as private property. But some city lands, such as public spaces, do not have exchange-value, although they possess the potential. Gezi Park is a public urban land that belongs to no one; it has a use-value for all people, having or not having anything in common. In fact, all lands of the planet including public spaces like Gezi Park have the potentiality of exchange-value from the capitalistic point of view. Because the privatization of the park means a radical change in the quality of its use-value, this is a loss for the users of the park and a win for the capital. When park land gains exchange-value, it becomes capital as a source for rent, and this way it contributes to accumulation. In the capitalist system, land is commodified in order to be put in the process of capital circulation. Almost every part of the world, especially in large cities, in order to reenter the circulation, overly accumulated global capital which is in constant motion, does not only directly enter the production, but it also attempts to convert urban land into the rent source.

The land in Turkey under the provisions and savings of the state and real estate in the treasury's private property compose about half of the country's surface area. Shopping malls, tourist facilities, large-scale projects such as ports are constructed on the lands that are mostly state properties, using legal means like leasing, transfer, assignment, and privatization. Urban public spaces are included in this process in a similar way. During this process, to bring more capital by making legal regulations and development plans, and providing infrastructure guarantees, state and local governments create differential rent, in addition to the absolute rent and share this rent with the owners of the capital.

There are also some features of capital accumulation in Turkey. For example, to maintain stable economic growth and capital accumulation (increasing capital stock) there are policies to privatize public assets, which are largely sold to foreign investors in order to minimize the foreign trade deficit, which has existed since Ottoman times. In this way, the privatization of the Gezi Park could be understood to contribute to capital accumulation and economic growth. The discussion of how to exploit the potential economic value of the urban public lands indicates voter acceptance of the government's privatization policies.

The multi-faceted authoritarianism of the social political choreography of providing capital accumulation is very complex. The inherent structural universal authority of accumulation of capital is of primary importance. Categorically, political and social acceptance of capital accumulation results in the political representation of its authoritarianism. Among the sources of authoritarianism, there is the broad acceptance of the authoritarian and patriarchal character of Turkey's political culture. Examples of this broad acceptance are evident in the discourse and practices of the government, the majoritarian management approach, the communitarian character of the social structure, and the social polarization. Maybe it is important to ask this question: "Is democracy spatial? How are the physical aspects of our cities, houses, streets, and public spaces—the borders, the neighborhoods, the monuments—bearers of our values? In a world of intensifying geo-economic integration, extreme financial and geopolitical volatility, deepening environmental crises, and a dramatic new wave of popular protest against both authoritarian government and capitalist speculation, cities have become leading sites for new claims on state power and new formations of political subjectivity." (www.lars-mueller-publishers.com)

Urbanization and construction are generally not among the issues considered important by macro economy. Today, we don't see an academic effort in the direction of associating urbanization and formation of the built environment with general laws of movement of the capital. (Harvey, 2012 p. 80) The urbanization process provides a significant portion of capital accumulation as a key method for the absorption of the surplus capital and labor. (Harvey, 2012 p. 88) The choreography of the capital moves not only in the economic realm, but also within the network of political and social parameters. An important role is given to the construction and urbanization sector to absorb the excessive accumulation of capital. Large corporate interests pressure governments to perform spatial and legal arrangements by creating consumer demand in the urban population. Standing man is standing still against this corporate exploitation which is rooted in the mechanism for mobilization of the planet.

Even if there are formal resemblances in the protests in public spaces between New York, Tahrir, Gezi and others, each of them are still very different in their specific conditions. In the discussion of city rights, the most common demand is for democratic control over the urbanization process of public spaces. (Harvey, 2012 p. 66) This is perhaps why Gezi Park protests brought together people from very different political groups. It shouldn't be forgotten that before the standing man and the protests, a member of the parliament stood alone in front of the bulldozers which came to uproot the trees. What can be done about the urban masses that are increasingly deprived of all rights to their cities when confronted with a different vision of urban life by the State and construction companies? There is not yet consistent opposition against the global capital system in any country. Against this global rent-seeking urbanization of capitalist choreography, the spontaneous answers found gropingly by the citizens, are nothing more than performances and protests performed in the public spaces.

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