

HASET, HUSUMET, REZALET | ENVY, ENMITY, EMBARRASSMENT

ERDEM TAŞDELEN



Erdem Taşdelen'in "Endişeci" için danıştığı psikologun Kanada, Vancouver'daki ofisi. The office of the psychologist Erdem Taşdelen consulted for "Worrier", Vancouver, Canada

¹ Sigmund Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" (1918), in James Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1955), Vol. 17, p. 143.

ADNAN YILDIZ

A Ritual of Selfhood

The ego is not master in its own house.¹

SIGMUND FREUD

As one of the most powerful propositions of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy is not only used in the treatment of hysteria which is historically the driving force behind its development, but it also operates in the service of many developing needs, areas and disciplines. At the end of the day, this service sector, like other operations in circulation, cannot escape the all-embracing form of the post-Fordist economy either. Within this product diversity—the introspective quality of which is questionably shallow—the most expedient and direct experience to be had, must be a kind of transcendence to a learned level of self-perception. Considered in terms of production means, labour and vocation, those practices that are charged per session, especially in the category of personal development and consultancy services, are marketed with slogans that vary from anger management to coping with stress. The most effective advertising jargon is based on the traditional American formula of "positive thinking" and "learning through feedback", which gained momentum through the efforts of the cognitive school.

Within such traditions in the wide scale of clinical psychology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry, when the individual receives a service as a "consultee" on the condition that his/her privacy is respected, it means that he/she is entering a vast domain of language, knowledge and experience. Even though this world offers the individual various exercises, ice-breakers and social tips to look within and re-visit the self, it doesn't promise an absolute transformation. Through a Foucauldian analysis, one can suggest that the individual makes a historical break and gains a distance from the ritual of "confession" and makes peace with the existentialists. This state of peace often ricochets off that which is cathartic, develops a soft edge and evolves into a secularist question: "...what do I feel here-now?"

When this question is posed within the practice of art, can there be a testing ground reflecting the artist's professional anxieties (resulting from his/her position) that is capable of providing us with an analysis of the social role, historical mission and transformation of the artist?

Vancouver-based artist Erdem Taşdelen approaches the issue of the artist's authorship as a form of appropriation and a state of responsibility in the sphere of co-existence; and decides to run a thorough investigation into its personal, public and psychological baggage. Placing himself in a strictly North-American context, using a video camera and a kind of irony that is characteristic of Woody Allen, he sets off on a journey of self-discovery in the company of a therapist who will help him gain an external view of himself. He is the protagonist of his own story, which is both a linguistic experience and a performative research process. He is anxious to construct a social critique by transforming the rhythm and ritual of the internal experience to a form of documentation and even a performance: *Is it possible to separate the artist's personality, self-confidence and psychology from his practice? How far can we go in terms of liberating the work of art from its creator?* Taşdelen's figures that can be read as the reflection of a narrative portrait approach associating with Marcel Proust and tracing the path of *In Search of Lost Time*, connect the artist's research process to his video "Worrier" (2012). A literary narrative style gives way to a performative method.

In this video, Erdem Taşdelen attempts to confront his perception of his own self by deciding to share with his therapist his trust/risk analyses developing in interaction with his professional milieu, his attachment-identification-socialization experiences and his dreams of building a future. In fact, through his emotional experience, his personal convictions about his position also undergo a change. In a sense, we are on a conceptual ground where a work of art that only exists as an idea transforms into a contract (between the consultant and the consultee) and then the production process becomes public and this process of publicization is then "personalised". Throughout this process, another change occurs in the perception of artist creating the work. When the artist's perception was formerly driven by the mere creation of art, it now collides with the para-subjective reality of the art market where artistic authorship is reduced to a face, a tag, a brand.

These questions that are often posed only in the privacy of artists' studios are now injected into the perception of reality induced by the act of recording, and re-constructed as a work of art, this time in the privacy of a therapist's room. Taşdelen is ready to pay the price for this effort that attempts to expand the circle narrowed down by Michel Foucault by embracing Mikhail Bakhtin and which can possibly be seen as egocentric and naïve to begin with. He broadcasts the intricacies of his private inner life from a therapy room, an architectural plane into which we enter to share our innermost *faiblesse*, our fears, anxieties and our skeletons in

the closet. In an intellectual climate reached through the active subject's realisation of his own subjectivity by claiming responsibility, he seems to be searching for his actual motif within the causes that motivate his actions: *What (kind of a future) do I expect in my creation of art?* This is by all means a level of risk-taking that deserves recognition on platforms whereby art is made into a career and the artist is valued and positioned in terms of portfolios, awards and success stories.

As part of the creation process of an exhibition he's invited to partake in, Taşdelen chooses the psychotherapist's chair as the seat of his practice. In this *mise-en-scène* that first appears to have all the comforts of a feather pillow but then gradually slips away from under his feet, the screen is divided into two POVs. The coupling of the consultant's and the consultee's perspectives following a strategy that resembles Kutluğ Ataman's characteristic style, demonstrates the reason for the artist choosing video as a means of abstraction. In an age where empathy is subjected to indexation, emotional intelligence is overvalued to the point of exaggeration and confrontation is fetishised, the artist is looking for a stronghold between intellect and emotion, a possibility of attitude, a probability of catharsis. In a realm where such a multitude of political, social and aesthetic issues are consumed almost in a flash, this effort by the artist—if criticised too harshly—can be seen as a "luxury item" purchased by the artist's ego from a niche market, using corporate back-up money. However, Taşdelen outing himself in this manner is not a gesture of courage or sincerity; it is an experiment on the fictionalization of a creation process and its subsequent collision with reality. In that sense, the work's relation to reality is what distinguishes it from Ataman. Descending to the linear graphics of television thanks to the fixed position of the camera, the work can be read through a question rising from within the conceptual framework of Phil Collins: *At what point does the fictional threshold of subjective perception of reality kick in?*

In the middle of the process, in the third session to be precise, we encounter a point of view introduced by the therapist who agreed to work with Taşdelen. Making one's work, practice and labour publicly accessible in front of a camera may be quite a natural cause of apprehension for the artist, but it is by no means an ordinary professional practice that is readily acceptable to a therapist. Projecting this concern, the therapist proposes to Taşdelen that this potential which is inherent in the practice of his choice may be approached as a question not only in the field of art, but as one that manifests as part of many choices made by individuals. Maybe the most expedient means of looking into the reasons why one creates art is through the psychology of approval, guarantee of the future and economy of interests—as defined in the hierarchy of needs.

If we were to refer to the zeitgeist, we could also look at the Mexican artist Pedro Reyes' "Sanatorium" project which was one of the interesting stations of dOCUMENTA (13). It was designed as a utopian clinic emerging out of urban culture, and its construction struck a fine balance between fiction and reality. It dealt with social and psychological anxiety thresholds using solution analyses, trust tests, and techniques such as Gestalt and hypnosis. It was built as a "curative" model. Instead of referring to a practice based on a method that can be defined within the existing service sector, this project was trying/aiming to develop its own devices and organisational structure. And just like Taşdelen's video, it also set off with a plan that transformed the conceptual to the fictional. Because of this, it faced the danger of turning into a parody of itself. If we also include in this comparative analysis, the work of the curator Raimundas Malašauskas who'd been running "The Hypnotic Show" project in collaboration with the hypnotist Marcos Lutyens since 2009, and his attempt to process the exhibition form as a kind of "mental state", we reveal a disparity in terms of the politics of representation. We are either watching its documentation or attending its workshop; in any case, if the conceptualization of a re-production is in question here, then where is the critical focus? What is that we need: the documented sessions of an artist who is in therapy because of his artistic anxieties; or the model of an institute aspiring to cure new urban diseases caused by stress, loneliness and a high-speed life style. In the former, we are tied to a screen, in the latter we are obliged to an organizational structure. Or does the actual form of reflexivity transcend both the camera and architecture and extend into the spatial abstraction of that which is perceptual? Ultimately, every artistic research into the intellectual climate and the thresholds of perception turns towards the production of images, installations and objects, once it adopts a visual form. This brings with it a number of spatial conditions and questions to be dealt with.

Maybe within all this temporality, we need to look at psychoanalysis from the point where Luce Irigaray questions phallogocentrism. Or maybe we need to look at Erdem Taşdelen's textual work "Dear" (2010) comprising of 24 letters. In this work, the artist exhibited letters he wrote to a lover who's no longer by his side (lost object), with all the corrections he'd made whilst re-reading them. Not only did these texts have a heartfelt sincerity in terms of the personal language employed but they also had a literary integrity in and of themselves. And each one closed with a hopeful wish. One of the wishes went like this: "I hope one day we can just let ourselves be ourselves around each other..."







Erdem Taşdelen'in "Endişeci" içinin çekim sürecinden, Kasım 2012
From the shooting process of Erdem Taşdelen's "Worrier", November 2012