



KADİR HAS UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
COMMUNICATION STUDIES DISCIPLINE AREA

## **DISPLAYING HERITAGE IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY**

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SUPERVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. DR. ESER SELEN

MASTER'S THESIS

ISTANBUL, JANUARY, 2019

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Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Kadir Has University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in the Discipline Area of Communication Studies under the Program of Communication Studies.

ISTANBUL, JANUARY, 2019

I, CANSU NUR ŐİMŐEK;

Hereby declare that this Master's Thesis is my own original work and that due references have been appropriately provided on all supporting literature and resources.

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03.01.2019

## ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

This work entitled **DISPLAYING HERITAGE IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY** prepared by **CANSU NUR ŞİMŞEK** has been judged to be successful at the defense exam held on **03.01.2019** and accepted by our jury as **MASTER'S THESIS**.

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## ABSTRACT

ŞİMŞEK, CANSU NUR. *DISPLAYING HERITAGE IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY*, MASTER'S THESIS, İstanbul, 2019.

This study is an analysis of the reconceptualization of cultural heritage via its display by contemporary art practices. Through the proposed title the understanding of heritage is reframed as an experience which is intertemporal, inter-generational, and ephemeral, that creates in-between spaces. In the first chapter heritage, today is assessed with a conclusion as to let heritage to define itself can be possible by the artistic ways of looking, displaying and also preserving the idea of heritage. Chapter Two approaches heritage both as a performance and experience while the linear perception of time is criticized by referring to the concept of contemporariness. The merging of the past, present, and future imagination is explained with mnemonic time engineering model. In the scope of İstanbul, displaying heritage have been practiced through the usage of heritage spaces for temporary contemporary art exhibitions mostly by the İstanbul Biennials. In the Chapter Three, displaying heritage and contemporary art in tandem is read as a method for alternating the spaces of exhibitions. Therefore, the conventional exhibiting methods of the art galleries, museums and biennials are also analysed. In Chapter Four, the spatial experience “Water Soul” (2015) and the practices of an art collective Oddviz and their works from the “Inventory” (2018) exhibition are analysed under the concept of displaying heritage today. In the final chapter the study is concluded that heritage today can be reconceptualized by the decentralized, and the multi-media-based gaze of art today, by allowing it to be able to define itself in a way that it cannot be adapted, stereotyped or forgotten.

**Keywords:** cultural heritage, heritage studies, contemporariness, contemporary art, exhibition design, display, experience

## ÖZET

ŞİMŞEK, CANSU NUR. *ÇAĞDAŞ TÜRKİYE ORTAMINDA KÜLTÜREL MİRASIN GÖSTERİMİ*, YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, İstanbul, 2019.

Bu çalışma, kültürel miras kavramının günümüz sanatı pratikleri tarafından gösterilmesi üzerinden tekrar kavramsallaştırılmasını ele alır. Bu doğrultuda çalışma çağdaş miras başlığı ile kültürel mirasın zamanlar-arası, nesiller arası, yaşayan ve ara-mekânlar yaratan bir deneyim olduğu öne sürer. İlk bölümde, günümüzde miras, miras fikrinin sanatsal bakış açısıyla gösterimi ve korunması ile kendini tanımlamasına izin vermenin mümkün olabileceği sonucuna varılarak değerlendirilir. Mirasın hem bir performans hem de deneyim olarak ele alındığı ikinci bölümde, zamanın doğrusal algısı, çağdaşlık kavramına değinilerek eleştirilir. Geçmiş, şimdiki ve gelecekteki hayal gücünün birleştirilmesi, anımsatıcı zaman mühendisliği modeliyle açıklanır. İstanbul özelinde kültürel mirasın gösterimi daha önce miras mekânlarının İstanbul Bienalleri tarafından çağdaş sanat sergisi geçici alanı olarak kullanıldığı bilgisi ile incelenir. Böylece üçüncü bölümde kültürel miras ile çağdaş sanatın gösterimi sergileme metotlarına bir alternatif olarak okunur. Böylelikle sanat galerilerinin, müzelerin ve bienallerin geleneksel sergileme yöntemleri de analiz edilir. Dördüncü bölümde, mekânsal deneyim “Su Ruhü” (2015) ve bir sanat kolektifi olan Oddviz’ in uygulamaları ile “Envanter” (2018) sergisinde yer alan işleri tezin inceleme konusu olarak bugün miras gösterimi başlığı altında analiz edilir. Bugün mirasın günümüz sanatının merkezsiz (*decentralized*), medyalar-arası bakışıyla yeniden kavramsallaştırılabileceği, adapte edilmiş, unutulmuş veya kalıplaşmış olmaktan çıkıp kendini tasvir edebilmesine olanak sağlanabileceği sonucuna ulaşılır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** kültürel miras, miras çalışmaları, çağdaşlık, çağdaş sanat, sergi tasarımı, gösterim, deneyim



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eser Selen for her valuable guidance, time, and friendly approach that made this thesis an inspirational experience.

I would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Dr. Levent Soysal for his valuable suggestions during the write-up of this thesis. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Savaş Arslan and Assoc. Prof. Dr. İnci Eviner for accepting my request on becoming my thesis committee members.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank my family and my brother Onur Şimşek for their never-ending patience, support, and understanding.



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This study has first resonated in my head with the idea of an exhibition in a cave – an exhibition of today’s art. Based on the conceptualization of the world today, while creating connections and exploring similarities, the idea bourgeoned from a comparison of storing information between primitive techniques of the ancient caves and today’s preservation techniques. What would the consequences be of returning to the cave today? Alternatively, what is the meaning of returning to the cave, today? Being in total darkness and silence, the space of cave calls its visitors into the roots of past, the memory that are ephemeral.

In connection with Plato's cave allegory, after the philosopher gets the bit between her teeth, she finds the gate opening to the outside, but when the shining sun captivates her eyes, she returns to the cave. To think, to mine the past, while diving into the depth of the darkness. To turn back to the cave means the ritualistic moment of the artist while thinking. To be able to see obscurity by not being blind one should be as daring as to discover it.

While looking at the caves via today’s communicative and artistic approaches, it makes me think that caves are the most proper examples of what is supposed to be referred as heritage today, which filled with the memory of the earthly livings. Although I acknowledge that particular caves can also be claimed under the title of natural heritage, here, I am excluding the categorization of natural heritage. On the contrary, I propose that caves are the spaces where the dualism of nature and culture becomes transparent since they host the first socialization process of the human communities within nature.

In his *Building Sex*, Aaron Betsky refers to old romances and poetry from tenth-century, which describe the caves as: “[t]he primeval space (cave) is a little like the Greek Chora, a sexless, inhuman space of beginnings or confrontations with them all. [...] The real work happens in the bower, the glade, the bedchamber, or some other hidden space” (1995: 75). In other words, what Betsky points out that caves are the first stages that signal the construction of the society. Since the human for their daily activities has

used caves. For instance, beyond their main functions such as being the sanctuary, caves have been used for accumulating the daily staff of earthly livings. Also, caves have been used to reflect the living conditions by being painted with the symbols on the walls. The symbols depicted in the walls tell about and illustrate living conditions and perceptions of life and surroundings of people of that time.

Accordingly, caves might be the first steps for the creation of the idea of heritage. Therefore, in order to be a creative explorer of the idea of heritage I propose to create a dialogue and a different correlation between caves and the notion of heritage by discussing their possible similarities.

At this point, I rethink the idea of heritage as a result of human performances, as well as a result of their imagination, mostly because of the social environment necessities, similar to the caves. Both the heritage and caves are hiding the valuable artifacts in their mystic, dark, and aged structures and traces of the past as well as the present waiting to be remembered. Besides a tangible heritage space might imply the periods that it has witnessed with not only its architectural style but also the attributed connotative meanings to it primarily by a nation. Here I refer to tangible heritage spaces in particular but by not omitting the intangible features in them. Instead, I consider the notion of heritage as a mix of tangibility and intangibility.

The dialogue constructed between caves and heritage reveals that in a great extent, the idea of heritage also refers to spaces that were previously used as houses like the primitive functions of the caves. This comparison makes us aware that defining something as heritage does not depend on its use value or function. Instead, the experiences and performances lived in it gain more importance while deserving to be claimed as heritage. Again, from a contemporary framework, the mixed character of the idea of heritage comprised by tangibility and intangibility comes to the front. Finally, through this reading I reframe the idea that heritage is not only a tangibility which represent the past; instead, it actively takes a significant role in today by giving an imagination for the future.

With regards to Betsky's conceptualization, recalling their primary usage as shelters and although the notions of home or homeland arouse a feeling of trustfulness, today caves are separated into two different endpoints in popular culture: first as space for terrorists

to hide within its darkest depths, and second, for tourists to explore its natural beauty through its sharp pendants and pillars. Today, in the city of Istanbul, the spaces that are called heritage have an affinity with the caves of 20.000 B.C. in some respects. As an example, a bombed terror attack in the Sultanahmet square in 2016 which is a space accepted as the most important and touristic heritage of the city, reveals that sometimes heritage could be like the most dangerous space or a cave in the city. (Sultanahmet Meydanı'nda Patlama 2016)

Finally, instead of assessing the results of returning to caves today, the main idea of this study has transformed to analyse the notion of heritage which belongs to not only the collective but also personal memory regarding experience. I aim to explore, understand and also imagine what is meant by heritage today and how the idea of heritage can be considered especially in the relation to how contemporary artists deal with the idea of heritage and its display.

### *Aim*

In this thesis, I aim to suggest a framework to deepen our understanding of displaying heritage today. This idea was initially formed after I have participated and experienced two different contemporary art exhibitions in Istanbul, as first “Water Soul” (2015) a spatial experience design held in a cistern by an art initiative Yoğunluk, and secondly “Inventory” a photogrammetric and artistic documentation of several cities (2018) by an art collective Oddviz. Although these two exhibitions and their art practices, in general, do not focus on displaying heritage, I approach them in such a frame which makes me open a different discourse through rethinking upon heritage. Therefore, first I aim to look at how heritage is defined today. By referring to David Lowenthal and Laurajane Smith, I consider heritage as a dynamic process, not frozen in time and space, an experience explored in each use of it and opened to re-conceptualization. (2000; 2006) To contextualize heritage as an experience reveals its conceptual affinity with the notion of “contemporariness” asserted by Giorgio Agamben. (2009) In order to construct a relation between the notion of the contemporariness and heritage and to visualize the immanence of the past in the present time, I briefly evaluate the perception of time as a transitive form not opposite or one-sided. Finally, by providing two cases, “Water Soul”

(2015) and “Kadıköy” (2018) from today’s art in Istanbul, I aim to emphasize that the artistic ways of displaying heritage could create influence our ways of looking to heritage today.

### *Objective*

In this thesis, I analyse contemporariness and heritage phenomenon and how they work in tandem, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of Turkey. I reconceptualize our understanding of cultural heritage under the concept of heritage today.

The main questions that I investigated throughout this study are as follow: Can ruins be considered as heritage? Could we assess heritage as the way we understand the notion of contemporary? How and when has heritage become a topic in the practices of contemporary artists? What are the results of approaching heritage while displaying it with the tools and methods of contemporary art? Can historical continuity and discontinuity be experienced over the notion of heritage and with the help of artistic practices?

In the first chapter, I analyse heritage today with a claim to whether letting heritage to define itself is possible by the artistic ways of looking, displaying and also preserving the idea of heritage. By looking at the conventional and alternative approaches around heritage, I argue that to contextualize heritage as an experience on its own and to approach it with a contemporary frame help us to see the continuity and discontinuity of all of the epochs of its time, in a transitive form which is neither opposite nor one-sided. Thus, I assess the notion of contemporary by revealing the characteristic points with heritage during in the second chapter, and I reach a comprehension as contemporary heritage.

To approach heritage as performance and experience, the linear perception of time is criticized by referring to the concept of contemporariness. I refer to the notion of contemporariness by depending on the influential ideas of philosopher Giorgio Agamben. (2000) I simultaneously conceptualize the title of contemporary art like today’s art based on the philosopher Jean Luc Nancy’s arguments in “Art Today” (2010). Regarding the merging issue of time epochs, I refer to mnemonic time

engineering model and the historical continuity and discontinuity claims in *Time Maps* by theorist Eviatar Zerubavel. (2003)

In the third chapter, displaying heritage and contemporary art is read as a method for alternating the spaces of exhibitions. Therefore, I consider Istanbul Biennials as the first stage of questioning of how and when heritage become a topic for the contemporary artistic process in the scope of Istanbul. Accordingly, after investigating the Istanbul Biennials and its methods of display, the exhibiting conventions of the art galleries, museums and biennials are also analysed.

In the last chapter, I analyse two contemporary art exhibitions in relation to displaying heritage as significant examples of how historical continuity and discontinuity can be experienced through of artistic research, methods and practices. Accordingly, the practices of an art collective Oddviz and their work entitled “Kadıköy” (2018) from their exhibition *Inventory* (2018) are analysed under the concept of displaying heritage, which also illustrates what we could be understood from heritage today. To experience the imagination of time merging over the idea of heritage the spatial experience “Water Soul” (2015) is analysed as heritage in display.

Here the notion of “experience” would be a useful partner to set the wholesome task of discovering these exhibitions. One of the critical causes of taking assistance from what “experience” could bring to the table is that the analyses of the exhibitions are based on observations as well as participant observation, which cultivated the use of qualitative methods for this research. The second cause brings the research into a point where all of these exhibitions are mainly built upon personal experiences and psychosocial experiments of the artists as they aim to explore their concern regarding the idea of heritage and its display by using a toolkit that contemporary art efficiently tolerates.

I narrowed the socio-geographical scope of this study as contemporary Turkey, and more particularly Istanbul, where the dynamics of contemporary art are rather prevalent in comparison to European cities. Also, although many artists work in heritage spaces, they do not focus on the idea of heritage itself. Therefore, it is hard to cover all of them in this study. Based on a post-structural reading from art theories and humanities, I present a qualitative assessment of a variety of exhibitions such as “Doors Open to

Those Who Knock” (2018), “I, The Imposter” (2011), “Water Soul” (2015) and “Inventory” (2018).

The study concludes that heritage today can be reconceptualized by the decentralized, and the multi-media-based gaze of art today, by allowing it to be able to define itself in a way that it cannot be adapted, stereotyped or forgotten.



## CHAPTER 2

### HERITAGE TODAY

#### 2.1. A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is worth noting that a potential reader of this text might recognize that what is referred to as “cultural heritage” in this study is often used as “heritage” to create a rather conceptual manner and new ways for understanding while signifying it as a concept. Another reason of omitting the term “cultural” is to let heritage not to remain under the complicated term of ‘culture’ and not to get lost in the middle of arguments concerning national and cultural histories. Additionally, since the culture reminds us of values and since values change according to each group of people or even individuals over time, heritage valuations have a semifluid state. (Spennemann 2010) Hence, just like theories concerning “culture,” there are several different terminologies in heritage discourse that host conflicts about identity and territory. (Baillie 2015) In order to explore its multi-vocality which is a latent feature of it, heritage should be understood as a process, a performance and especially as “experience” with reference to Laurajane Smith’s *Uses of Heritage*. (2006) Therefore, in this study, the primary approach regarding heritage is based on the declaration as to “[l]et the national heritage define itself” (Lumley 2006: 17).

However, to claim the discourse regarding cultural heritage or to call something as heritage requires to be approved by respected global institutions such as (art) museums or international organizations such as UNESCO, or nation states and their municipalities and be listed under regulation and laws. Here, reminding my preliminary idea, like an unknown, still undiscovered cave by geologists or archeologists in a mountain, to call something as heritage becomes subject to arbitrary determinations. First and foremost, they are explored then claimed by experts and called as cultural heritage according to predetermined criteria.

For example, UNESCO states that “[t]o be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection



criteria” (2017). To refer at least one requirement might make the idea of heritage not only institutionalized but also limit it with the arbitrary selections. Before the international organizations claim and title a space as a heritage space they appear as ruins or derelicts. For instance, the ancient cities or prehistoric sites accepted today as heritage such as Ephesus. It is added to the world heritage list in 2015 according to three selection criteria. Firstly, it is seen as an “[e]xceptional testimony to the cultural traditions”, next “[a]n outstanding example of a settlement landscape” finally due to its “[h]istorical accounts and archaeological remains of significant traditional and religious Anatolian cultures”, and Ephesus has been listed as an outstanding universal value. (Ephesus 2015) However, many ancient sites that are ruined would have the quality to be claimed as heritage today.

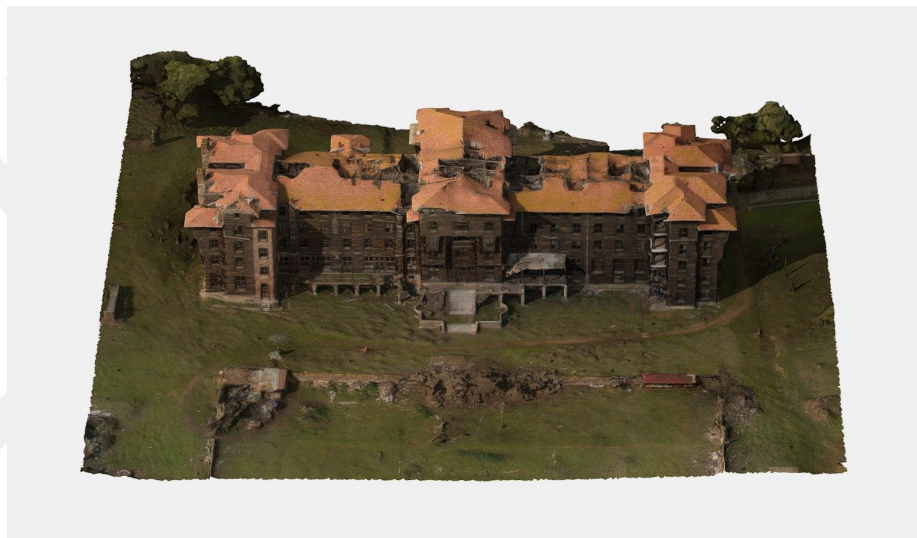
In this regard, the relation of ruin with heritage gains more importance. In his essay called “The Ruin,” George Simmel approaches ruins as they are not seen as human-made structures anymore but natural ones. (Simmel 1959) He claims that “[i]t is the fascination of the ruin that here the work of man appears to us entirely as a product of nature” (1959: 261). So, Simmel’s approach concerning ruins, which they are not seen as human-made structures anymore but natural ones are applied quickly to heritage today. Accordingly, in this study, the ruins are also accepted as heritage. Therefore, we might say that Ephesus still have the appearance of as if it belongs to nature, not to the architectural skills of a human.

## **2.2. A RETURN TO THE HERITAGE**

The old Greek Orphanage in Büyükada – the largest of the Princes’ Island in the Sea of Marmara, Istanbul – is seen as a ruin today, but appears as a natural formation with all of its ivy, darkness, cracks, and humidity. The Büyükada Greek Orphanage (also known as Prinkipo Palace) is heritage; even if it is not officially claimed with its entirely unique woodwork architecture, build in its time and fits only one of the criteria proposed by international institutions for heritage management. Besides, since such heritage spaces may appear as odd and non-regulatable spaces – in a way, queer spaces – they might be left to be afunctional. Here another point comes up that the heritage

spaces considered, as ruins do resemble the dark caves since they are generally ignored or left for oblivion by the heritage management systems.

“The Prinkipo Greek Orphanage” (2017) can be considered as a digital visualization of Simmel’s approach regarding ruins which are felt like a natural formation like a cave. (Fig.2.1) Below is a documentation of Büyükada Greek Orphanage, shot by an Istanbul based art collective, Oddviz and converted into a digital visualization revealing its closeness to nature, in the manner of Simmel, in a way that clearer than a human eye could ever capture.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 2.1** Oddviz, “The Prinkipo Greek Orphanage”, photogrammetric digital 3D animation (still image) 2017

In order to make heritage spaces more appealing, they have restored considerably irregular processes. The cause for veneering the heritage spaces might originate from an apprehension of their affinity with ruins or in other words with nature, an attempt to maintain the culture-nature dichotomy. This apprehension works to repress the impression as if they belong to nature, like caves, or they are super-natural, like haunted

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<sup>1</sup>Oddviz’s documented of the orphanage with photogrammetry technique, which is a literal sample for Simmel’s approach about ruins which are felt like a natural formation like a cave. Because entering is prohibited, the team was not allowed to document inside of the building, and only scanned the building’s façade with a drone. In 2012, World Monuments Fund included the Greek Orphanage in their watch list, and it has resulted with interest from the public attention. (Rum Orphanage 2012) However, since 2015 it is under the control of Fener Greek Patriarchate, and there is still no movement for funding to restore the building, in other words, it appears as a dead zone.

mansions, but not to human intervention. This repression might be a way to maintain the dualism of culture versus nature. However, through the comprehension of Simmel and the supportive case of Oddvizz's work, "The Prinkipo Greek Orphanage" (2017), for his argument, the dualism of culture versus nature apparently becomes altered.

Although to analyse heritage spaces through discourses and practices of architecture, city planning or heritage management exceeds the scope of this study, the claims for creating a list of selection criteria or veneering ideas about heritage bring us the context of the right to heritage.

While thinking of rights and remedies of any creature of this world, it should be possible to assert a question regarding in the realm of world heritage rights. Could heritage demand its own rights? This questioning also connects with the idea of letting heritage to define itself. In her article, "Heritage and the right/the right to heritage," Britt Baillie discusses heritage and right by depending on usage of heritage as a common. (2015) Firstly, she argues upon by asking that in what ways a common can be managed? Then she rhetorically asks: "If heritage is a public good, a common, it begs the question of which public(s) should benefit from it" (2015: 256). Here, she also refers and analyses what depicts a community and which community has the right to own heritage.

Britt Baillie states in her briefing paper that the conventional approaches found in the discourse of heritage management assume heritage as a safely dead zone. (2012) However, as her critical findings of heritage policy reveal "heritage sites should be thought of as living parts of local political ecologies with connections to the landscape and everyday practices". (Baillie 2012) So, the concept of vitality could lead us to read heritage with the notion of 'living heritage' apart from being 'safely-dead' zones.

To prevent authoritative, dominant ownership of heritage, as Baillie asserts heritage has to be taken into consideration regarding "intergenerational equity" (2015: 258). For example, according to her case, the far Right could demand more right on heritage which would create a fundamental problem in the future. (Baillie 2015) Although these arguments are too broad for the scope of this study such investigations on heritage encourage us to vary our understanding of heritage, beyond assuming it as a material thing only.

Throughout this study I argue that there should not be a clear separation between the intangible and tangible heritage since this ascribed dualism is not sufficient while understanding and experiencing heritage today. As Smith asserts “[h]eritage is not a thing, it is not a site, building or other material objects” (2006: 44). Thereby to approach heritage as a mixed character corresponds with my understanding of heritage as experience. For example, on the one hand, the experiences of tangible heritage are perceived as intangible while addressing to the five senses as well as bring feelings to surface. On the other hand, in this study since the main focus is to analyse the ways of displaying heritage, which I refer as tangibles in a great extent. So, which means that the physicality plays a vital part while discussing and creating the contexts of heritage today.

However, and again, our relationship constructed heritage is mainly intangible since its core hides in our memories or imagining habits of us. To refer to our memories is the first and foremost method while interpreting our world which influences our ways of looking and living. Also, while arguing about ‘heritage’, the faculty of the brain as ‘memory’ comes to mind eventually since there is a strong physio-psychological connection between them. Smith informs us of heritage “[a]lso involved acts or performances of remembering, [...] in embodying that remembering” (2016: 47). Since memory is a phenomenon that works as close as to metaphorically thinking processes of mind. Besides the memory resists clear descriptions, it works fragmentarily. Especially in case of collective memory, “[t]he concept of “remembering” (a cognitive process which takes place in individual brains) is metaphorically transferred to the level of culture” (Erlil 2008: 4). That is why the construction of the idea of heritage is open to manipulations by its stewardship which can manipulate the ability to remember to create new metaphors for heritage or delete some parts.

I was born and raised in a district of Istanbul known as the historical peninsula, each construction around me bear the traces which are 8500 years old. The old cities are a kind of an open book conveying the accumulation and the knowledge of the society. Bearing witness to such a vast amount of world-year makes these cities inevitably open to decay and destruction either by nature or in the hands of the human. On the one hand, decay is more natural in the flux, since it is inevitable, despite the speedily developed preservation techniques for heritage. On the other hand, if human holds onto the decay

or the destruction intentionally, the topic radically changes towards more problematic topics such as “ethnic cleansing” (Burgin 1996). Since destruction that is held by human intentionally means that one group of people seizes the rights of another and also the heritage itself.

As Victor Burgin discusses in his book *In/Different Spaces*, intentional destruction of heritage may be used as a way for the cleaning of an identity. (1996) As an example, Mostar Bridge, the unique architecture of Ottoman heritage in Balkans, had been bombarded by Croatians in 1993. This intentional destruction was a moth of a war, a war of two different ethnic identities that still creates fundamental conflicts between Bosnian and Serbians. Later the bridge has been re-built by the help of other countries, notably Turkey, in 2004. Following this, in 2005, the bridge with its old city are approved to be in the list of World Heritage by UNESCO. (Old Bridge 2005) Hence after the aesthetic surgery, (since it is a kind of treatment for the destructed parts of the bridge), Mostar Bridge is turned into a manageable, labeled construction for heritage stewards. Doubtlessly, to analyse and discuss its causes and effects gain vital importance which beyond the scope of this thesis.

### **2.3. WHEN THE WHITE END BLACK STARTS OR OTHER DISCOURSES OF HERITAGE**

We are living in a flow of change and revolution or evolution of “postmodern geography” as a countering argument to individualistic approaches of the modernist world. (Soja 1989) However, to a great extent, the historical writings attribute monumental, especially nationalistic meanings to heritage. That is why the stewardship upon heritage tries to eliminate the multi-vocality of heritage and persists sole ownership of a specific time and community. This mentality is one of the methods for creating the ‘others’ in a society. Secondly, to create a control society or if we say more politically to maintain the social and also the economic cohesion stewardship does not support “[t]he prevalence of pluralistic, fragmented and shared-power contexts around heritage commons” (Baillie 2015: 257). Thereby, with the authorized heritage discourse has to be reconsidered, and its ideological sides should not be ignored by ones who wish to work on it in the future. (Smith 2006: 29)

I need to recall our main claim used for restructuring the discourse of heritage as we need to let heritage to define itself. In order to restructure the meanings of heritage via Lowenthal claims,

No heritage was ever purely native or wholly endemic; today's are utterly scrambled. [...] Each group claims its 'own' history and heritage. This may seem politic, but it is all wrong. [...] Because we are all mixed because collective ancestral pasts cannot be possessed (2000: 22).

To accept its multi-vocality and multi-layered structure seems quite complex to authorized heritage discourse supporters such as nationalist governments. Heritage is a proper example of coalescence of past, present, and future especially an experience for noticing the illusion of irreversible, static time arrow. Lowenthal adds, "Heritage is never merely conserved or protected; it is modified –both enhanced and degraded- by each new generation" (2000: 23). Hence, it is kind of bulk to face to face on who left alive. Its existence reminds being abandoned children of who died, so it becomes a space which remains in limbo, belonging entirely not today and past attribute it an uncanny position.

To explain the mentioned uncanny position of heritage and my approach about heritage it is necessary to refer again to Betsky who propose another model for human-made structures as "It is somewhere between the cave and the construction, somewhere between a woven cloth put down on the ground and something with walls and a roof. It allows us to be at home in the world" (1995: 18). Although Betsky emphasized the notion of nomadic, heritage might correspond to the feature of nomad due to its inherent features as existing in the present and being in the flux from generation to generation.

For instance, nationalists adhere themselves strictly to their attributed national heritage because of told stories to them; oral sources they believe, or documented memories lived there since the past become experienceable or visible in the present thanks to heritage. Especially "[m]onuments and memorials embellish the past by evoking some epoch's splendor, some person's power or genius, some unique event" (Lowenthal 1985: 321). As an example, from the latest case in Istanbul, a group of people protests an exhibition held in Abdülmecid Efendi Mansion which is a private building of him from the late 19th century and a possession of Koç Holding today. The exhibition was protested by pointing out the works, specifically the hyperrealist sculpture of Ron Mueck (1998), by a group of people. Their reason depends on the previous living

attitudes and customs of Ottoman arts and craft tradition which do not use figurative painting techniques, mostly nudes.

The protester group insists that the exhibition holding in the mansion “Doors Open to Those Who Knock” (2017) is abusing the tradition and religion because of exhibiting a nude sculpture in the mihrab [niche of a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca]. Ron Mueck who is famous for his hyperrealist sculptures titles the mentioned sculpture “Man under Cardigan” (1998). The protest takes support by articles published in daily newspapers claiming that the exhibition is disrespect to the memory of Abdülmecid Efendi. Two national daily newspapers claim the idea of being disrespectful to the heritage by undertaking a kind of opinion leadership. (Son Halife 2017; Sultan Abdülhamid, 2017) Later, the Koç Holding announced in a press release that the cause of that protest arises from wrong information since it is a fireplace, not a mihrab. They highly emphasize in the release their extreme awareness of our cultural heritage. (Koç Holding 2017)

Today there are many other inactive, old mansions and palaces from the Ottoman Period that become a stage for the contemporary art exhibitions in Istanbul. However, after this provocation, the exhibition turns into a hot topic regarding the issues of heritage and the contemporary art scene of Turkey. (Akbulut 2017) Firstly, the case reveals that the stewardship of heritage can create opposite parties upon its management decisions. For example, while Koç Holding, as the current owners of the mansion, allows making an exhibition there, another group from the public, who call themselves as the representative of the previous owners of the mansion, can reject such an event. Thereby, the case becomes an important consideration under the topic of the right to heritage since both sides do not allow heritage to define itself by making prior their interest.

Secondly, in term of displaying heritage, this is an obvious instance exemplifying how the encounter of heritage and contemporary art is implied, while manipulated, which perhaps alters the future of the displays of contemporary art exhibitions in heritage spaces in Istanbul as well as the public’s accessibility to heritage when specific individuals own it.

Besides, as the crucial point, the exhibition has become a revealing example of experiencing the past exists in the present. Like an experience of the co-curator Karoly

Aliotti while entering the space we “encounter with a parallel universe, a universe that is frozen in time but still in motion” (Hattam 2017). His emphasis on the word of motion again reminds the ephemerality, the presence of the past in the present. Here, the comprehension of the heritage by its stewards as a thing belonged to a specific past is deliberately destroyed. Since heritage exists in the motion of today and thanks its lifetime comes today. Again, if I connect this claim with my argument since today or present is always contemporary with us, heritage becomes as ephemeral as the notion of contemporary implies.

To purify heritage from political economic and private interests, heritage needs to be understood as a living flux and be experienced over contemporary artistic explorations in this concept. At this point, if a mansion from the Ottoman period is evaluated as heritage, which was previously used for housing needs, to consider a bazaar complex from the 17th century, in still usage, for instance, Büyük Valide Han in Eminönü Istanbul, as heritage today, corresponds to the standpoint about the idea of heritage in this thesis. (Fig.2.2) Since, while it is a cave, a ruin, it is also a commercial bazaar, an atelier, an exhibition space, and, also a house for whoever wishes to stay there. Especially it hosts people from mixed backgrounds. Therefore, the understanding of heritage becomes free from the obligation of being belonged to the past only. Moreover, it becomes free from to be esteemed as valued in case of being belonged to a past of a community.





**Figure 2.2 Büyük Valide Han (main entrance view)  
2019**

However, Büyük Valide Han has been a focus before within the city and beyond the city that provides me another perspective to read it also in the concept of heritage today. In 2003, with the 8th Istanbul Biennial (2003), Büyük Valide Han was selected as an exhibition space. A contemporary British artist Mike Nelson and his installation “untitled” (2003), later it is called as “Magazin: Büyük Valide Han” (2003), in Büyük Valide Han create conversations regarding the perception of Büyük Valide Han in the city. According to Ayşegül Baykan, Büyük Valide Han is a space where the daily life is intense, and it is evaluated as a public space by the biennial since in the catalog of the biennial the venue appears under the title of “Public Projects” (2014). Also, the project of Mike Nelson is as a way for constructing dialogue and different relation with the city. (Baykan 2014) However, in this study, I do not cover the issues regarding being public or not instead I assess Büyük Valide Han under the notion of displaying heritage.

Therefore, in order to evaluate it under the concept of displaying heritage, I need to refer an artistic decision, Mike Nelson, that he reconstructs Büyük Valide Han and his work “Magazin: Büyük Valide Han” (2003) into a global art event, the 54<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2011). With the work entitled “I, The Imposter” (2011) Büyük Valide Han has been carried to the international art scene through the Venice Biennale (2011). Moreover, since Nelson represents Britain for the biennial, Büyük Valide Han becomes a stage depicts East at the British Pavilion that makes me think Büyük Valide Han regarding the context of the right to heritage. Also, as his artistic practice becomes the focal point, the questioning of Büyük Valide Han as heritage is skipped or at least takes little attention in the creation of the work.

By relocating the space of the old inn, the tangible entity, the artist aims to undermine the immobility of the tangibles. Besides the artist imagines the installation as a bridge between two cities that create links concerning their histories. (Withers 2011) According to him, his work is a reconstruction of a biennial inside of another one. (Nelson 2011) However, positioning Büyük Valide Han is not only comment to the art world and the structure of biennials, but it can be as a representation of heritage by ignoring its rights.

Firstly, Büyük Valide Han, hence heritage, is not supposed to be considered as only an architectural building but as an experience. By demising the daily life moves in the Han finally turns it into a sculpture, a material entity. On the contrary, what makes Büyük Valide Han is the life in it. Thereby, since heritage is not a frozen dot in the history, to represent it instead of it, or speak for it, or treat it as land to explore by colonialists create an orientalist point of view. In particular, while evaluating the work of Nelson, the primary intention of the artist can quickly turn into creating a fraction of east for the gaze of the west. Secondly, despite the reconstruction creates pseudo Büyük Valide Han, or a simulacrum of it, the installation “I, The Imposter” (2011) looks like as a similar case with previous heritage displacements from Turkey to other European countries. Although Nelson asserts that the work is not a replica of Büyük Valide Han, the artist carries some materials such as sport team flags or posters from the Han in order to reinforce an identical reconstruction that refers Turkish identity. (Withers 2011)

However, since the case can be related to artistic decisions, to cover it with all of the branches is not possible in the body of this thesis. Therefore, in order to empower and deeper the idea of heritage today and its display as not being belonged to only a specific time and community, I need to analyse the notion of contemporary and its relation with our understanding of heritage today in the next chapter. Before that, I provide a short analysis of perception of time passing by relating with heritage today in the following part.

#### **2.4. TIME AND HERITAGE: TOWARDS A CONTEMPORARY HERITAGE**

While understanding the complex relationships of the human with past, present, and future, since it is transferable, heritage as a tool always has socio-cultural or economic complications mostly because of the assumptions of belonging, and in most cases to a community. Etymologically in a similar line with Turkish, the word of heritage in English refers firstly to a property which is inherited from generation to generation. (Oxford Dictionary 2018) Regarding this first concept about heritage as being private property, i.e., the home or homeland, (like caves) it embraces personal and intimate pasts. For instance, the house that I was born and lived for almost 25 years, was a heritage from my grandparents which then got destructed because of the gentrification. What we lost during this process is not just a property but also a culture and space full of memories, experiences, a home. Hence, indeed, now there is a hole, a gap where once stood our house that makes me think a second concept about heritage as it may be a way for mourning.

For GoUNESCO which is a blog page contributed by citizen led initiatives aim for engaging with heritage, Merian Tete makes a community interview with her friends to ask what heritage meant to them. (2015) One of the answers that she has got is quite similar to what is intended to mean in this research, as “Heritage for me is a form of storytelling” (Tete 2015). Most of the human acts relate to storytelling, intentionally or unintentionally. Taking heritage as a human act, a performance or an auricular story engraving on the walls of the cave brings heritage’s different branches and roots of existence as in a family tree spread under or above the earth. That family tree comprises of every living being or had been living on the earth. Heritage is considered as the

relevance of the past in contemporary society. (Smith 2018) However, the notion of heritage is not just belonged to past but connects with the present and also the future. For example, UNESCO describes heritage as “[o]ur legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations” (World Heritage n. d.). Also, the main point about heritage emphasizes being at the moment, as a “present-centered phenomenon” (Smith 2006).

Although emphasizing the present-centered feature of heritage saves it to be confined to the past, this approach finally puts us – who are experiencing today, the contemporary – in a focal point. Primarily, an environment such as the city of Istanbul, which continuously reproduces an awareness about contemporaneity, an illusion for being here and now with the layers of history, by bringing together the past and today concentrically. The heritage preservation theories argue that “If we wish that our cultural heritage indeed has a future, then heritage must be relevant to the present, and that implies it must be relevant to the aspirations of the present-day communities”. (Spennemann 2006) To appreciate heritage and experience to the fullest extent come after the utopic wishes of handing down it to future generations. However, Baillie significantly criticizes forming the idea of three periods as a reductionist approach for heritage since it is against the pluralism of the public. (2015) At this point, it becomes a clearer that past, present, and future should be taken under consideration as merging sections, not as opposites.

There are several ways of going back to a memory that relates to an instance of the past. Especially a consideration of memory together with the term “metaphor”, which is directly related to artistic understanding, reveals that art and heritage meet in different points ready to read and discuss it. As Donald Kuspit notes: “[a]rt is not a mode or branch of social science and speculative philosophy, but the memory” (2005: 186). In “About Looking,” John Berger substitutes memory with artistic expression methods before the invention of the camera, and then finally with photography which means that he relates photography with reality, with the visible world, like tangible heritage. (1980) As a result, to let heritage to define itself is possible by re-reading it with the phenomenon of contemporary and artistic ways of looking.

All of these issues and debates regarding heritage today given the complexity and richness with their coexistence of the old and new bring us to a rethinking upon the notion of heritage. To think heritage with the instruments of today, the contemporary, can be considered as the decentralization of settled institutions. In order to understand heritage today further, I propose it is necessary to review what is understood from the notion of contemporary. Therefore, the next chapter explores the central issue raised in this chapter as “Contemporariness”.



## CHAPTER 3

### CONTEMPORARINESS

#### 3.1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In his influential *The End of Art* Kuspit writes, “[a]rt can never give it the enlightenment of Buddha, but aesthetic experience can show the self that life is not futile; however, limited” (2005: 190). According to Kuspit “art’s interhumanity” could subsist in a loop. (2005: 192) That is why the end of art means only the end of a narrative since every end starts with new beginnings. The end shows the error, lacks and provides a space to revise the past. With the same motivations done in the walls of the caves, today’s art reflects today’s life in some respects. Art is a way to interpret today and the past. On the other hand, contemporary art via considering it as today’s art refines our frame while interpreting the relation between past, present, and future.

Today is not a separate notion from the past, but as Artun suggests, the notion of contemporaneity destructs the matter of history. (2017) As in the previous chapter, the relationship between past, present, and future have been re-conceptualized under the title of heritage, to undermine the claim over heritage ownerships. Here, this relation is analysed with the help of the notion of contemporary and “contemporariness” (Agamben 2009) and the theory of “art today” (Nancy 2010) to destroy the linear time passing once again. After meditating, the emotion of contemporary allows us to re-create the connection of heritage and contemporary to reach a concept of contemporary heritage.

The notion of contemporary is also conceptualized in the name of creating a static description for it. Mainly, contemporary has been declared as the sign, which signifies the death of the modern. (Smith 2011) Oxford Dictionary describes contemporary as it conveys co-existence in shared time. (2018) By depending on its etymology in English which is a compound consisting of the ‘con’ and ‘temporary’ phrases, most of the theories upon contemporary are based on the temporality, extreme recentness, and present situations. So, the feature of ephemerality is also the main discussion in the

realm of contemporary art and has become the main characteristic of the genre. Thereby due to its ephemerality, it recycles in the continuity of time by transforming and also be transformed.

According to art historian, Terry Smith who considers the contemporary art as a global phenomenon emerged in the post-1980s, “[c]ontemporary art is – perhaps for the first time in history – truly an art of the world. It comes from the whole world and frequently tries to imagine the world as a differentiated yet inevitably connected whole” (2012: 185). His evaluation, however, was found reductive and criticized strongly by art critics and artists. For example, we might remind Maurizio Nannucci who has created a self-reflexive neon work entitled “All Art Has Been Contemporary” (1999) implying all historical art was once current.

The notion of contemporary is taken under consideration as experience since it is the sensation of being in the same time capsule together, it is an ancient enigma of a feeling. (Raqs Media Collective 2010) As the Raqs Media Collective considers the notion by preferring to use the word ‘contemporaneity’ they indicate the key feature of the notion as giving less importance to the idea of now. The collective writes, “[s]een this way, contemporaneity provokes a sense of the simultaneity of different modes of living and doing things without a prior commitment to anyone as being necessarily truer to our times” (2010). Agamben also discusses in his essay; the contemporary makes possible of meeting different episodes of time and generations. (2000) Again, referring to its etymology, ‘temporary’ gives us the clues as it means transitory, like experiences. The experiences in the flux of life are developed continuously, over-lopped and even decayed, but they are never the same.

Today the most important point about the title of contemporary art is expressed as if the term does not need a decisive description and should not be seen as an artistic movement belonged to a period. (Stallabrass 2004) While reviewing Terry Smith Dan Karholm offers a strong insight for the term as “The contemporary is defined as multi-layered, especially open to coexisting temporalities, and it is pictured as constantly shifting, moving, and transcending previous positions” (2013: 230). This quotation stands like a summary for what I intend to say about the notion of contemporary in this chapter, and also about the collision of it with the reconceptualized meaning of heritage.

Contemporary is indeed a complicated term. Its relation with the past as well as with the future is diverse as Smith emphasizes “our contemporaneity is saturated with all kinds of pasts: historical, artistic, religious, and utopian” (Smith and Mathur 2014). However, this approach might miss the contemporariness used by Agamben which has a strong relation and an impulse to have a distance to past, present, and future. In her master thesis which investigates contemporary art displays in cultural heritage Lisa Martin asserts that “the notion of the contemporary is terminologically defined in contrast to the past; at the same time, contemporary art is held to have the potential to encourage active and critical engagement with past, present, and future” (2014: 22).

An Ottoman phrase, a concept called *imtidad* which is used as an exhibition title by Lara Ögel (2018), says that the perception of time is a frequently changing continuous shift. Thereby, we can propose that contemporariness does not mean a fixation of time, space, and community. In “Art Today” Jean Luc Nancy offers the task of art today is to proceed without any schema, without any schematism. (2007) As Nancy asserts the art history considers the contemporary as a fixed phrase, and according to that fixation, we cannot go back further than 20 or 30 years ago and to a discussion of contemporary art history. (2007) Even if the contemporary art is a category of history, it is a tectonic continent among the others which shifts constantly and has a potential to bring new waves at any second because; “art has always been contemporary with its time” (Nancy 2007: 92).

### **3.2. EXPERIENCING DISTANCE**

Nancy puts forward that contemporary art is a question of art and this questioning creates a distance between art and us. (2007) The distance may be read by referring to theatre plays, especially to the epic theatre. In the epic theatre, which is firstly practiced by Bertolt Brecht, the concept of alienating occurs with the destruction of the invisible fourth wall. This demolition is the crucial cause of the distance between audiences and the play since they start to realize that there is staging in front of them. The artist of the contemporary is the one who acknowledges a similar kind of Brechtian realization for her age, as a substitution of the stage.



Thereby, here, I propose to read 'distance' through Agamben's conceptualization of the anachronism experienced through the notion of contemporary. According to Agamben, the contemporaries (who experiences contemporary at the time) pose questions and try to see their time, their present, within darkness. (2000) Like in the darkness of the cave where the shadows of this world, the present, seen as fictive to the Plato, the contemporaries find themselves in the distance. The artists are the ones who discover the obscurity by working with heritage under the darkness and also the brightness of all eras.

By basing on Nietzsche's writing in *The Birth of Tragedy*, 1874, Agamben states "[c]ontemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time keeps a distance from it" (2000: 41). Again, Agamben means what for using the notion of "distance" is to describe the experience of contemporary as being in search for understanding the present under the obscurity, while remembering the past in fragmentation and trying to foresee the future all at the same time. That is to say, reminding the re-conceptualization of heritage as an experience, or the destruction of irreversible time epochs, the experience of contemporary meets/matches with the experience of heritage.

The artist frequently addresses questions, observes and witnesses by distancing herself from the chaos of her time. Nancy clearly states on behalf of the contemporary artists that they are the ones who state, "I am not an artist or a creator, I bear witness." (2007: 95). To bear witness might occur accidentally or consciously but, the first thing that comes to the mind is that to a great extent to witness something is about the ability to see or capture. According to Agamben, what the artists see by observing and witnessing contemporary is its unique darkness. (2000) The idea of darkness has become the critical point of conceptualizing the notion of contemporary. As he describes the contemporary mean to be in the darkness and only its witnesses as contemporaries can explore it. (2000)

According to Agamben's theory of contemporariness and his definition of contemporary, all eras, for those who experience contemporariness, are obscure. (2009) That is to say to explore darkness is almost an experience of a graveyard where the past unveiled at the time of the present. However, Agamben also makes similar the word

darkness with light since the brightest thing has the power for making us blind easily. Moreover, Agamben asserts that since there is no total darkness according to neurophysiology, perceiving or experiencing the obscurity of the contemporary is just a neutralization of the lights. To dim the light, as in a ritual, prompts us to remember the primitive ages, the fire reflecting shadows on the cave wall. Thereby, the idea of catching a glimpse of the shadows remind us of the idea of the cave, once again and Plato's allegory of the cave and its shadows.

As Agamben describes "[...] to be contemporary is, first and foremost, a question of courage, because it means being able not only to fix your gaze on the darkness of the epoch firmly but also to perceive in this darkness a light that, while directed toward us, infinitely distances itself from us" (2000: 46). As the philosopher of Plato thinks in the depth of the cave, the contemporary artist who works in dark corners of heritage experiences the same efforts while her eyes are captivated by the darkness, she distances herself from the past, present, and future.

To create art by observing the darkness of the contemporary is a specific characteristic of today's artists who courage to work in heritage. While the contemporary artists are searching, rediscovering, and transforming the heritage space with the notion of contemporary, they also become transformed by it. Borrowing from Maurice Blanchot as he writes, "[w]hen someone who is fascinated sees something, he does not see it, properly speaking, but it touches him in his immediate proximity, it seizes him and monopolizes him, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance" (1982: 831). Working in heritage space with the contemporary art tools leaves the same trace that Blanchot describes.

### **3.3. EXPERIENCING CONTEMPORARINESS**

The immanence of the notion of temporary has is an implication of ephemerality or an extreme-recentness regarding contemporary. Here, to get deeper into the concept of contemporariness and its relation with heritage, a meditation on the temporality is needed. To evaluate the notion of temporality requires an evaluation of the concept of time and how it is perceived. In "Of Other Spaces" Michael Foucault states that "the

anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with “space” rather than time, however, one of the most controversial topics of humankind is still time” (1986: 230).

Numerous theorists such as Martin Heidegger, David Harvey, Arnaud Levy, and Frances Dyson, from different areas consider time with the notion of space while proposing that the two are strictly interrelated. Indeed, time and space are related to each other as Dyson claims, “[w]ithout space, there can be no concept of presence within an environment” (2009: 1–2). For instance, to remember something from the past is generally described as if it is physically behind us. It is both a spatial and a corporeal description. Victor Burgin refers to Levy in order to explain these kinds of imaginary references which are instinctively learned by humans as: “[t]he body is also at the origin of our basic notions of temporality. We habitually situate the future is ‘ahead’ of ourselves, placing the past ‘behind’ ourselves, and assume the present to be exactly where we currently are: thereby implying an anterior-posterior temporal axis” (1996: 213). This axis positions us in a straight arrow of time, a deterministic path that does not permit dynamic moves in circular forms.

Time is always under consideration as it is with contemporariness. Additionally, time converges with the concept of contemporariness through heritage space. Therefore, it becomes visible that our concept of time and space have an independent form. The perception of time is a continuum rather than an irreversible arrow model which includes dead points. However, and of course, as Jay Lampert writes “[w]ithout stopping-points nothing would cease while something else is still in the flux of it is not yet” (2012: 27). Thereby, as he makes us acknowledge the concepts of simultaneity and delay, “an event needs alternative time-lines coexisting with it: delays that are simultaneous with it” (Lampert 2012: 20). Basing on these claims it is possible to state that time is not an ever-lengthening straight arrow.

Moreover, the straight arrow of time is an acceptance of the centralized old-world model. We do not perceive time as if it has a beginning point and an end point in their daily lives. Instead, we create connections, and this sort of understanding means contemporariness and heritage.

In *Time Maps*, sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel studies two concepts, which are historical continuity and historical discontinuity. (2003) According to him both of these concepts

are mentally constructed social processes. Zerubavel establishes his theories by re-conceptualizing a general vision that the history (time) as a graphical shape which resemblances a straight arrow. Hence, he questions the pervasive and conformist way of thinking of time with an irreversible arrow model. (Zerubavel 2003) (Fig. 3.1) Zerubavel proposes mnemonic engineering of history that underestimates the imagined perception of the linear flow of time. He claims that there are gaps in the social construction of history and he provides a graph. (Fig. 3.2) The gaps are completed with mnemonic efforts by remembering of the past or conveying a completed related event to those gaps. Thereby, we experience some events in circles rather than in a straight arrow. Furthermore, we may interrelate the events which construct the time continuum with a distributed model of decentralization. By influencing from his imagination, I visualized it and draws a schema. (Figure 3.3)

Here we may remember the Mostar Bridge example again as a metaphoric sample for mnemonic mind bridges. During the war, the intention of destroying heritage is a way of creating that mentioned gaps and erasing a period. The destruction of the Mostar means to prevent possible mind bridges for recalling. All in all, heritage just like a bridge simplifies our ability to remember, as well as enhances our being in the present since it is contemporary.

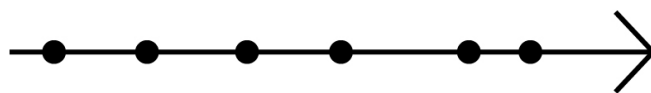


Figure 3.1 Eviatar Zerubavel, “Straight time arrow model”  
2003

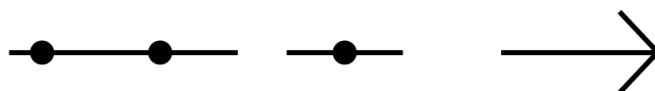


Figure 3.2 Eviatar Zerubavel, “Straight time arrow with gaps”  
2003

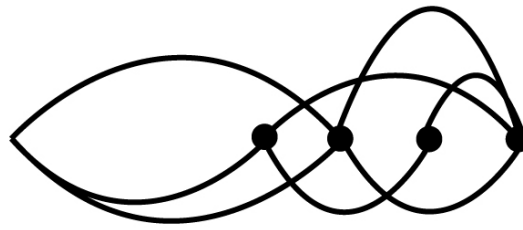


Figure 3.3 “Mnemonic engineering of time”

Zerubavel bases his theories on social memories and skips or gives little attention to individual memories which can also influence the social dimension of the past. Nonetheless, Zerubavel offers us a more appropriate frame for our discourse of heritage and its critical relation with contemporary. So, his claims improve our re-conceptualized understanding of heritage and contemporary of this study which proposes a merging of past, present, and future. Accordingly, this transparency and fluidity also remind that heritage is an experience and not frozen in time. With the presence of heritage or by encountering with it in each turn our back, as well as present and future, are always refreshed and re-constructed. Contemporary art in this respect is related to refreshing, updating, expressing the accumulated needs so far, interrogating. That is why contemporary intertwines with the past. If I repeat that the notion of contemporary makes us think independently from this constant time arrow model. For instance, to declare irreversibility in the flow of time means another way to destroy heritage and (erase) a community’s social history.

As heritage is re-conceptualized as being a multi-layered experience rather than a frozen notion or just a site belonged to past, the conclusion of this argument makes us think that the bond with time and heritage is fluid. This fluidity gives heritage a contemporary character that is the central argument of this thesis. Beside and of course, this coalescence does not mean that the one assimilates another. Instead, this cluster presents unique and varied perspectives to understand and evaluate it. One of the significant reasons for gather heritage and contemporary, or in other words, creating more like coalescence of past, present, and future eliminates or at least retains us to reproduce one settled dualism.

As I noted in the introduction, the contemporary artists’ practices while working with heritage makes me think about what is heritage today. Even if they do not create their works within the mere concept of displaying heritage, I aim to show that the gaze of the

artists might profoundly influence our thinking upon heritage today. Especially since my scope is contemporary Turkey and Istanbul, I recognize that the biennials are the most critical stages of paving the way for understanding heritage today. Therefore, in the next chapter, I analyse the Istanbul Biennials that introduce an artist with the idea of heritage and to reveal their relation with heritage in contemporary Turkey.



## CHAPTER 4

### DISPLAYING HERITAGE IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

#### 4.1. THE ISTANBUL BIENNIAL: A START IN DISPLAYING HERITAGE

The Istanbul Biennial is continuing to be held since 1987. For 30 years the biennial is resolutely blooming thanks to Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Art, and also with the support of several sponsorships from local to global institutions, corporations, and consulates. Although the first exhibition was not organized under the title of an art biennial, it has given a formulation for the display structure of the next ones by appropriating the heading of Contemporary Art in Traditional Spaces. Regarding the significance of the enchaining relation of the biennials, Hans Ulrich Obrist states, “[t]he biennial as a project could build up through sedimentary levels, rather than being seen as a tabula rasa that starts every two years afresh and negates its own history” (2009). Being the first international contemporary art exhibitions in Istanbul, the biennial also should be regarded as the first proper example that uses unconventional exhibition spaces, cultural heritage, to display the exhibitions. (Boynudelik 1999)

Therefore, the Istanbul Biennial and its relation with cultural heritage become the leading cause for covering it in this chapter. When I search their reasons for constructing a relationship with heritage I recognize that the aim of the Istanbul Biennials is more like utilizing from heritage spaces for their exhibitions. During the 80s since there were not sufficient exhibitions spaces in Istanbul, the team of the biennial takes help from the heritage spaces. So, the relationship between the biennials and heritage does not focus on questioning the idea of heritage and its display, but it can be a secondary result or impact of the exhibitions of the biennials.

Today, the biennials are a way for diversifying the exhibition spaces of contemporary arts with the usage of heritage spaces. Although these heritage spaces frequently take part in Istanbul Biennials’ displays, they are the well-known heritage sites and have strong relationships with what this study argues: an exploration of the notion of heritage and displaying heritage through contemporary arts in Istanbul. While a thorough

analysis of Istanbul Biennial's utilization of these heritage sites is needed; it goes beyond the scope of this study. Even though this study explores sites, displays and works which took part in the Istanbul Biennials.

In the absence of an imminent or existent space, especially under the umbrella of contemporary art, the fundamental idea of holding the biennial to create a space for art has been working as a guide and inspired the art scene in Turkey. It serves as a model since it opens up to ways of diversifying the spaces to display contemporary art practices primarily by situating exhibitions in heritage spaces. According to the general coordinator of the first two Istanbul Biennials, Beral Madra, during the formation processes of the biennial, the necessity of a space for art in Istanbul constitutes the central struggle in an apparent manner since the city has neither a modern nor a contemporary art museum. (2003) Similarly, Ali Artun states that the lack of an art museum has reached a peak point in the 90s and the idea of a museum of art outstretched the art itself. (2017) The Istanbul Biennial and its relation with heritage grew within the city in the midst of all this lack.

It is possible to suggest that as in the "Foreword" for the 13<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial's guidebook, the director of the Istanbul Biennial since 2008, Bige Örer, states that "Biennials also served, especially in cases where the cultural infrastructure did not meet the requirements of contemporary art, as temporary museums with contemporary tendencies, functioning as maps between the local and the global" (2013: 21). What Örer addresses here overlaps with the case of Istanbul because of its lack of a contemporary art space as both Madra and Artun pinpoint, since the founding of the Istanbul Biennial to today. Besides, Örer also asserts that the today's biennial is supposed to have a critical, creative and alternative language and permit to fade in the multipolar voices. (2013) As she affirms, it is evident that there are differences between the biennial and a conventional or national art museum which have a relation with its country regarding its founding purposes to be a representative or a symbol of the idea of modernity. Here we may give examples such as; Louvre (turned into a museum after the French Revolution, in France) and Topkapı Palace Museum (turned into a museum after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, in Istanbul), or Solomon Guggenheim as "a monument to modernism" (Karabıyık 2007).



As their press release underlines, the Istanbul Biennial strongly differentiates from an art museum since its aim neither focuses on being a representative nor is an event that displays a national identity. Additionally, and equally as important, the Biennial supports this difference by not situating its biyearly displays in any specific location. From the first to the last one, the biennial creates spaces for art while selecting places that have always strongly related to the multi-layered heritage of the city. However, since the conventional locations of the museums are generally from cultural heritage, a serious complication might occur in the minds of the visitors. Especially the Istanbul Biennial ties a knot by selecting heritage spaces to display contemporary art. It is important to emphasize again that the Istanbul Biennial's relation with the heritage of the city does not create a narrative upon a nationalistic one. Here, the first and foremost source for the full feature of the Istanbul Biennial is the very decision of choosing contemporary art as the genre and heritage as the location of its displays and events. In this regard as a primary production for creating space for contemporary art supplying details in the founding processes and significances of the exhibitions have taken parts in its continuity, the Istanbul Biennial helps us to explain this relation.

The route of the biennial which utilizes the heritage spaces of Istanbul and varies in each turn of it, includes Hagia Sophia (*Ayasofya Müzesi*), the eighth wonder of the world which was turned into a museum in 1935 from a mosque, which was used for 482 years. Before its transformation to a mosque, the place was a Byzantium church dates back to 6th century. One of the oldest and the most known church, Hagia Irene Church (*Aya İrini Kilisesi*) dates back to 4<sup>th</sup> century from the Byzantine period in Istanbul after Hagia Sophia. Moreover, it is the first known museum-like space of the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to its usage as a warehouse for weapons (Artun 2017) The Basilica Cistern (*Yerebatan Sarnıcı*) which is the most significant cistern in Istanbul dates back to 6th century and turned into a museum in 1987. Correspondingly, it is necessary to state here that this study does not mainly focus on the art museums, their relationship with the city and its history.

The spaces of biennial(s) in a large number are the famous heritage of the city, so they are driven by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey which means that they are

not independent of the political dominance and its ideologies. So, this directory could make the heritage open to manipulation and quickly turns them into spaces which produce religious or nationality-based discourses according to the ideology of the current regime since heritage is open to such a conceptualizing which would relate heritage with politics. The utilization from heritage can turn into an apparatus for creating or erasing symbols for the memory in the sake of politics. Since if we refer a conceptualization of heritage in Albert Heta as he asserts, “heritage is politics, politics is memory, and heritage is used to either erase a part of our memory or to create a forceful image that didn’t exist before” (2007: 74). Although this kind of claim is quite limited to cities like Istanbul whose heritage has various sides and layers that make it a proper case for this study, Istanbul also encounters with ideology-oriented orders for its heritage image.

For instance, we can rethink the debate on Hagia Sophia in order to give a sample for the politicization of heritage. Both Hagia Sophia and Hagia Irene Church frequently become an ideological debate in the political area of Turkey. The most known issue of Hagia Sophia is the demand to claim it as a mosque which is once baldly put into words by Yalçın Topçu who were the Minister of Culture and Tourism in 2015. (Kültür ve Turizm 2015) As this wish seems not supported, recently, these two spaces are removed from the exhibition venue list of the 13<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial in matters of display and engagement.

On the other hand, if we look from a different perspective, to exemplify with the 1st Yeditepe Biennial (2018), which was organized under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, the theme was mainly focused on traditional art and cultural representation. The argument of the biennial was upon taking the public attention to the elimination of the culture of classical Turkish art. Thereby invited artists to use public spaces and mostly heritage spaces to display their pieces that focus on traditional art. The implication underlined with this biennial is that the contemporary art excludes the tradition and there should be a dialogue between them. However, this kind of assumption ignores individual artistic practices by contemporary artists who embrace traditional arts such as Miniature, Calligraphy or Ebru [marbling art] in this context. Also, the 1st Yeditepe Biennial (2018) does not provide a question to rethink upon the idea of heritage and displaying heritage. For instance, regarding a venue of the biennial

which is Kucuk Mustafa Pasha Hammam, the solely emphasized point is that it should not be a private property since it is heritage. Therefore, it means that the Hammam does not need previously settled criteria to be claimed as heritage today since it exists through performance and experience. However, the biennial does not emphasize this point with either the artworks created within it nor in their press release.

Hence, in this chapter, while assessing on the relation between heritage and biennials held in Istanbul, a gap in the literature comes to the fore since there are minimal sources to deepen and conceptualize this relation or at least to reveal it. The existent sources focus more on the artworks or the artists. According to Zerrin İren Boynudelik whose doctoral dissertation investigates the usages of heritage spaces in art exhibitions, these environments that emerge by the meeting of heritage with contemporary art since the 80s have designated significant effects on art and artists of Istanbul in the following years. (1999) From her examples and interviews with the artists, it is slightly visible that holding contemporary art exhibitions in heritage spaces open up the ways to inquire about the past and its relation to the present.

#### **4.2. THE OTHER SIDE EFFECTS OF HOLDING BIENNIALS IN HERITAGE**

It is also necessary to consider the outputs of the biennial for the city where it has been held and also for its citizens. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial in 2013, with a decision of free entrance, not only artists and students but also a sizeable number of city dwellers have encountered with a contemporary art exhibition in heritage space. As the city dwellers start to have a dialogue with heritage through contemporary art, they also turn into tourists who are searching the city and exploring the heritage but by being an immediate exhibitiongoer as well as a newly found group of art audience all at the same time. For years, with the Biennial, the city of Istanbul has become more visible especially with its past and heritage, and as headlined by New York Times, Istanbul is highlighted as a contemporary city or “[the] City Where East Meets West and [where] the Past is Always Present” (Osborne 2018).

The main outlook for producing biennials throughout the world seems quite similar to the epidemic spread of museums in the 1990s as Elsa Vivant asserts in her article “Who

brands whom?” (2010). To brand a city as a global star in the market, establishing museums plays a significant role and this promotion occurs via usage of cultural heritage. Holding biennials in heritage to market the city and to reveal the layers of the city to the international area can be read as like the George Yudice’s term “expediency of culture” or in our context, as expediency of the heritage. (2003) Moreover, the selection of the exhibition spaces from the heritage would create be creates as technically ineffective eff for such a global art event. After the first Istanbul Biennial (1987), in an unpublished text, Madra emphasizes “working in the heritage is an obstacle for creating a perfect exhibition in terms of its structural and functional techniques, i.e., light, heating, humidity, and hanging systems and also due to the dependency of each one to a different bureaucratic institution and different regulations”<sup>2</sup> (2003).

The Istanbul Biennial, as a worldwide and institutionalized event, is referred to as the most prestigious one among the other biennials which are older than Istanbul’s such as Venice, Sao Paulo, and Sydney. (Geçmişten Günümüze 2017) Beside it is applying an exhibition design which does not prefer a national representation model that supports the idea of it is a project for taking a chair in the global world. In an interview about the 14th Istanbul Biennial Bige Örer claims that the biennial has become an exhibition which was waited impatiently by the international art world since within the last ten years it has opened up new forms, new concepts and different negotiations artistically. (Örer 2015) Breaking its record throughout biennials’ history, the 15<sup>th</sup> titled “A good neighbour” (2017) and was visited by 440 thousand people, as well as 200 billion virtually via social media within eight weeks, throughout its six different neighboring spaces. (İyi bir komşu 2018)

Within the years the biennial’s topics have diversified by different curators by addressing up to date themes, such as “Salt Water” in the 14<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial (2015), which opens several discussions about the city Istanbul and its layered past. The 13<sup>th</sup> one titled “Mom, Am I Barbarian?” (2013) focuses on the politics of public space. Especially, the 13<sup>th</sup> biennial creates a difference in selecting its spaces by not following the previous biennials as a gesture to bureaucratic obstacles. The biennial team could

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<sup>2</sup> Translation mine.

not use heritage as a display space because the city hall disallowed it. In an interview, Fulya Erdemci as the curator of the 13th Biennial raises a lingering question regarding this potency: “Is the art supposed to be separated as two different projects such as the permitted ones or unpermitted ones in public spaces?” (Erdemci 2013).

Erdemci also underlines a significant problem, which is the absence or inefficacy of the independent art spaces in the city that also resonates with the main argument of the biennial. As Yasemin Elçi transcribes according to Erdemci the practices of the biennial in the absence of another institution, have been resulted as a deception about the biennial as if it is the strongest authority in the contemporary art scene in Turkey. (Erdemci 2013) As a supportive example to Erdemci’s critique is the existence of are at least five more biennials in Turkey (Çanakkale Biennial, Mardin Biennial, International Sinop Biennial Sinopale, as well as the Izmir Triennial, and most recently Yeditepe Biennial in Istanbul). However significant and related these art organization might be, to explicate the scope of each of these biennials would have been derailed us from the proposed study.

The productions in the Istanbul Biennial solely does not give us an answer or a clue for what heritage is, but this discussion brings us to look at how heritage can define itself over the practices of contemporary artist and what does displaying heritage refer today.

Initially, to cover Istanbul Biennials was a vital part of writing up this thesis. So, in the first chapter, it has become apparent that the endeavor and the intention of the biennials focus on making exhibitions in heritage. The exhibitions and events of the biennials have been still giving inspiration for both the artists and art collectives to unveil the heritage of the city. Also, throughout the art exhibition history of Istanbul approximately by 1980s, there have been many exhibitions held in heritage beside the Istanbul Biennials. However, to reveal and to form more close readings on the connection of heritage and the notion contemporary, to concentrate on the independent art production and exhibitions rather than institution-based ones become necessary for this thesis. Making exhibitions in heritage which help it to define itself is a bridge to create new understandings and conceptualizing of heritage and contemporary art for the artists and also the visitors.

Here, evaluating biennials indicates a point that they use heritage spaces for their exhibitions, and this act is a way for varying the display methods of contemporary art. In this point to ask questions in the next section is necessary such as when or why the spaces of the exhibitions have started to be diversified or what are the results of it and finally how it connects with the concept of displaying heritage today? The next section not only tries to find answers but also creates a bridge to connect to the cases for displaying heritage today.

#### **4.3. ALTERNATING THE SPACE OF EXHIBITIONS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

In the contemporary art scene of Turkey, more specifically in Istanbul, the main problem encountered while making exhibitions is the absence of a space to display the art. To create a space for art has also constituted the fundamental idea of holding the Istanbul Biennials. Therefore, in order to bring a solution to this lack, artists and art collectives and curators/art organizers start to explore the empty spaces of the city. In an article by Istanbul Art News focused to contemporary art and art collectives in Turkey, Selda Asal, from the Apartment Project, stresses that the beginnings of the 90s are the years of exhibiting in alternative spaces. (Asal 2014) Also according to her the main factor of using alternative spaces is the fewness in the number of art galleries and also the absence of centralized organizations in Turkey. This search of the artists and art collectives becomes one of the occasions of making exhibitions in the heritage spaces of Istanbul, as it is explained in the case of Istanbul Biennial.

To exemplify metaphorically, to take the technic of photograph shooting as same as with the system of a white cube gives as a clear picture of the working system of the mentioned institutions. For instance, in the pinhole camera technique, the light should come from just a tiny little hole to make possible (actualize) a shooting. There are no other alternative ways for it. On the other hand, as a metaphorical example, in caves, light must find its way, own route, and own gate to exit. If we remember the resemblance of the caves and heritage, it becomes easy to propose that an exhibition in heritage would undermine the exhibition system which is ordered by the white cubes. Since experiencing a contemporary art exhibition in heritage space creates such layered

wayfinding. Here, site-specific art as a contemporary art practice might be a significant point to recall. As Nick Kaye has observed, “site-specificity presents a challenge to notions of “original” or “fixed” location, problematizing the relationship between work and site” (2000: 2). Accordingly, since its conditions and scope can vary for each space, to cover site-specific art is a vast topic and exceeds the limitations in this thesis.

However, today, in the age of digital, as we left behind the analog pinhole cameras to our nostalgias, art today is the freedom in selection while displaying art. In order to be independent, artists tend to create their own spaces or find spaces to show their works at the outside of the gallery or museum spaces. Especially producing and exhibiting out of gallery spaces bring a method as working collectively which foregrounds practices of living together. As Asal continues: “It is vitally important to be able to use the spaces of the city and the city itself as a field of experience; included daily life sharing several processes by feeding on each other or event to be able to produce collectively” (2014). Hence, we may infer that today’s art is a complex structure which is remolded (with knowledge), varied and evolved out of every day and reciprocal interactions that make it interactive, experience-based and not enough to be titled as the art of the artist.

Again, with a metaphorical language, the condition of art today resemblances with geography. It continually moves as the territories move on Earth by vibrating both itself and the ones who live on the top of or inside of it. As a result of this, as the characteristics of nature, art cannot be dominated by power. In case of pressure, it starts to rock and roll the spaces on its surface as well as the notions which are related to memory. At this point, it is also necessary to mention the notion of making exhibitions or as conceptual art, curating. Through the medium of the exhibition, narrative-based curatorial complexes become displays or more theatrical processes. Mieke Bal investigates the term exposition while conceptualizing the public displays that mainly practiced in museums. (1996) As he states the exposition is “an act of producing meaning, a performance” as in the case of exhibitions of art today. (1996: 2) This act of producing meanings and especially the discourse of the viewing experience in museums are the results of the “mechanism of display” which is irreversibly disturbed by the self-conscious actions and gallery interventions of the artists. (O’Dorothy 1999: 89)

When I refer to alternative display spaces, one needs to think out of the box, out of white cubes or in other words, fictional institutions, in the form of a white cube. By reviewing the art term white cube which is also brought into question and conceptualized in a very influential book *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Brian O'Doherty indicates that the gallery space has a resemblance with a sterilized hospital clinic. (1999) In order to understand the difference between the white cube and the alternatives to it, we can look what O'Dorothy states about the conventional perception of gallery space as: “[u]nshadowed, white, clean, artificial- the (gallery) space is devoted to the technology of esthetics” (1999: 15). As he continues with describing the classical Louvre type gallery space, we can see that it positions the spectators as passive beings since every corner and each wall is successfully prepared for their eye level and do not give them a chance to move randomly in the space. Also, thanks to this white cube's tight structure, nothing occupies a place unnecessarily: “The perfect hanging job is an ingenious mosaic of frames without a patch of wasted wall showing” (O'Dorothy 1999: 16).

The gallery or museum space are criticized because of being an enclosed, sterile space where the object is usually considered sacred and untouchable. Beside especially the museum is considered as an institution where mummification of the past is made. However, as the central debate about the white cubes is the dominance of the “major mainstream arts institutions” over art, and this power creates an art economy system authorized by white men. (Daniel 2007: 162) Although the white cube seems more innocent than salon regarding being a space for simplifying the encounter of art and audiences by being “beyond the confines of the home of wealthy patrons” the exhibition space of white cubes is criticized radically by artists, especially by Marcel Duchamp, and also by art theorists. (Rush 2005: 124) For example, by exhibiting “Fountain” 1917, Duchamp introduced the concept of the found object as counteracting to the conventional exhibition design approaches in art history.

Alternating the space of exhibition from conventional places to heritage spaces allows artists to look beyond the circular, closed, metric and white cube form of exhibiting art and encourages them to get in a dialogue with heritage. At this point, as this thesis proposes, the notion of heritage starts to raise its voice and what we understand from heritage should be rethought and reconceptualized through the notion of contemporary.



This hidden intimacy found in the heritage with the ephemerality that the contemporariness brings to the surface should remind us of the separation and also the coherence of the sacred and profane.

Although analysing these exhibitions gives me a pathway to understanding heritage today, the biennials and other exhibitions in alternative spaces do not fulfill my intention in this thesis. Therefore, I find necessary to provide two different cases in the next chapter analysed regarding the context of displaying heritage in contemporary Turkey.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISPLAYING HERITAGE: “WATER SOUL” AND THE WORKS OF ODDVIZ

#### 5.1. “WATER SOUL” EXHIBITION IN NAKILBENT CISTERN (2015)

At the end of the Sultanahmet Square and towards the Nakilbent Street which takes its name from the cistern under, a rug store welcomes the city dwellers, especially the tourists. The store, Nakkaş Oriental Rug and Textiles, dominates the space of the street with its Ottoman and Iranian rugs hanging on the façade of the building. However, under the surface of the street, there is a waterless cistern, called Nakilbent Cistern which dates back to 6<sup>th</sup> century. The cistern waits for its visitors who are supposed to be led to the underground by the owner of both the store and the cistern.

The owners of the store renewed the cistern in 2007 and had opened it to the public. What is important here about the debate upon heritage stewardship is that the owners of the store become the owner of the Nakilbent Cistern at the same time by only purchasing the building over the cistern. Moreover, according to an anecdote, they surprise when they notice that there is a cistern under the building. This shock and thrill motive them to make the Nakilbent Cistern opened to the public. As it starts to attract the attention of the public, mostly the tourists to their rug store, like natural beauty, the owners accelerate their efforts to make known the cistern. So, they hold several art exhibitions in that space, in order words the cistern is transformed into a gallery space which is later destructed by the exhibition of Yoğunluk.

Usually, as the cisterns are located underground of the cities, Nakilbet Cistern is isolated silently from the outside by being not only beneath the surface of the ground but also being dysfunctional today. Thereby, concerning these features of the cistern, anybody can easily describe it as a ruin. Here it is important to recall that as in the introduction part I stressed by quoting from Simmel, a ruin has the impression as if it belongs to nature. (1959) The point brings us the idea that the Nakilbent Cistern as a heritage, a construction made by the human, is in the form of a cave today. If we remind

how the caves which were substituted as houses or sanctuaries in primitive ages, are investigated today in order to infer the living conditions of the primitives, the cisterns can also give some information about the conditions of the previous living conditions. So, through the case of Nakilbent Cistern, it becomes apparent that in Istanbul, many cisterns are connected, and it reveals how a water store works within a city in previous ages.

The owners of the cistern follow a path to promote the Nakilbent Cistern, as a cultural heritage, or to pronounce the voice of the cistern which means that they stay against for its fate of disappearing. Before their endeavors, just because it lost its function as water storage after the water dried up, the cistern was left to oblivion like the many others, in the form of a dead zone. Hence, in 2015 the new owners of the cistern asked for making an exhibition from an art initiative, Yoğunluk (Density), to let the heritage sound itself loader. For instance, as the proofs for its vitality, today, whoever visits the cistern could realize that there are still the traces of water through humidity and its smell, and the small ponds from leakage.

The art initiative, Yoğunluk, conceptualizes an installation to reveal the experience of the space of Nakilbent Cistern by merging its past and present. The exhibition, “Water Soul” (2015) becomes a method for it to define itself through its timeline. While creating “Water Soul” (2015) Yoğunluk initially refer to the physical reality of the space, its previous function as the accumulation of water. The installation operates the latent algorithmic structure of that space, the working principles of the cistern. To reveal the structure of the space, artists utilize from multimedia art tools such as a robotic light head, light filters, a mist maker, and sound system, as well as water particles. The creative engagement of analog and digital media allows the visitors to experience the flow of water in an augmented and hyper vision in the exhibition space.

Throughout the exhibition, the space of the cistern is stimulated, and the steps of the performative installation as emptying and filling of the water is recalled into space. In order words, the body of the heritage space is awakened beside its soul. Also, due to the physical structure of water and fog, the experience created by the installation cannot be squeezed into a real space of tangible heritage, since it founds a bridge between reality and fantasy. The prior aim for creating an exhibition in Nakilbent Cistern arises from

the heritage space itself. That is why the artists also prefer to describe their work as an experience. Besides, since the experience created by the installation is formless, the participants are encouraged to sense the heritage space only.

Once the mechanism begins to work, it constructs a game-like environment which has several levels to complete. First, after the participants finish their journeys in Sultanahmet Square, they arrive at the cistern in the sense of wonder, with a highly alerted mind by the touristic taste of the places and staff they see, smell, touch, taste or hear. After being welcomed by the rug store, the participants go down the stairs into absolute darkness. The sharp and shocking sense of being blind throw them in a hole, like a space vacuum, and the slippery ground of the cistern would cause the risk of falling. To be able to continue to walk, the sound pattern and a shadowy light beam help the participant to move accordingly.

When the lights gradually sharpen, the structure of the cistern becomes more visible. The Nakilbent Cistern has a long, single corridor and its columns are built vis-a-vis making it different from other cisterns which have a labyrinth structure. This structure of the cistern puts the light set up at the end of the corridor in a focal point which the artists call it as the eternal light. The participant experiences the imaginative filling and draining working system of the cistern in order to see the eternal light located at the end of the corridor. Firstly, with the help of a computer program, or in other words with the help of artificial intelligence, a scenario is performed. The fog maker starts to fill the space as well as the water particles to give the impression for the cistern as if it is filled with water. (Fig. 5.1) Later, when the water starts to be lower, the participants breathe out. While the participants start to see the eternal light in front of them their experience is completed.



**Figure 5.1. Yoğunluk, “Water Soul” spatial experience, Nakilbent Cistern, 2015**

It is significant to state that “Water Soul” (2015) does not create a representation nor a nostalgia of the past. The experience stands for a moment, a record in the minds of the participants which can never be the same experience of the past stage nor the future. It positions the participant in-between as a heritage space does. Thereby, the experience created for the story of the cistern refers a contemporary understanding for the heritage. It makes it possible to experience the coalescence of the past and present by also changing the future. Accordingly, the artistic experience of "Water Soul" (2015) is an uncanny experience since it carries the past, the return of the past, in the middle of the present. Also, the experience of time merging of the cistern as the first stage filled with water, second the discharging of the water, occurs in a loop since the performance repeats itself once in every 20 minutes.

However, although the participants experience the working process of the cistern step by step in a condensed way, their total experience is fragmentary. The installation is a kind of heuristic re-creation of the heritage space by the artists within the notion of contemporary, rather than a renovation project for the cistern. By reminding the conceptualization of the contemporariness by Agamben, both the artists and the participants of the experience find themselves in the distance under obscurity. They find

themselves in the shoes of the philosopher – Plato – who returns to the cave while questioning of their own time and while imagining the past and also thinking about the future at the present moment. That is to say, the experience of “Water Soul” (2015) is the destruction of the straight time arrow, so it is an experiment for the mnemonic perception of time. The space of the cistern, regarded as safe because of being a property of the juristic persons, is turned into an organic, active and leachier platform with illusory reflections and vibrations created by the installation.

Regarding the heritage discourses, “Water Soul” (2015) underestimates the convention about heritage space that is assumed safely as a dead zone. The dynamic relationship built between heritage and the multimedia art installation engages a transitory experience, not a permanent representation. Therefore, the performance reveals that there are no frozen or dead points in the flux of life especially within the discourse of heritage stewardship. The experience is also a performative process which pushes the limits of body and space. There is no way to get out without being seized by it while it expands in a recurrence since in the absence of a participant the experience of the time merging cannot occur. So, it also becomes clear that the participants are the a priori source for the transformation of the space and they are the ones who sense the resonance of it.

## **5.2. CONTEMPORARY HERITAGE: THE ART PRACTICE OF ODDVIZ**

After the digital revolution, the notions of time and space have altered, and this alteration allows us a new form of contemporaneity. Through methods of communication and mediation, experiencing and exploring the world of today, past and the future have become a matter of re-experiencing. For instance, the technology that we use in 2018 such as, virtual and augmented reality, digital archiving methods, holograms, simulation, and data mining are the symbols and vehicles of today’s world, the world of digital media. However, at the same time, all of these are the vehicles used for a return to the past (the archive), bearing witness to the past, becoming an archaeologist of information with an insatiable desire of exploring today’s world.

To exemplify, the contents of several artworks which utilize from the most enhanced technologies tend to be fed by the past or to record today for the future. One of the causes of the relationship with past and present is the acknowledgement of continuity of time epochs. The continuity and discontinuity of the time epochs might appear in the minds via mnemonic time engineering model which is explained in the previous chapters. Also, in order to experience and also imagine the mnemonic time model one needs to rethink the notion of heritage today that connects past, present and also the future. With this argument in mind, the previous case “Water Soul” (2015) simultaneously reveals the continuity and discontinuity of time comprehension over displaying heritage. As Yoğunluk tries to explore what we mean by heritage today, they work with a tangible heritage space, a cistern, by stressing its intangible, performative, and ephemeral impact on the participants.

To explore heritage today is not limited with working with tangible heritage spaces since as I propose heritage is an experience and a result of performances of earth bound living beings. It is only possible to understand if we are to accept the ephemeral character of heritage that includes both intangibility and tangibility at the same time. Therefore, here, after analyzing the experience of “Water Soul” (2015), to drive our attention to a different method of displaying heritage I select to analyse the art practices of Oddviz, as a newly formed art collective in Istanbul, despite their claim against their practice is only about heritage today.

In the second chapter of this thesis, while assessing the notion of heritage today in the literature, I refer Oddviz slightly and their piece about Greek Orphanage in Büyükada, Istanbul. After my observations of one of their exhibition “Inventory” (2018) and their intense working methods, to approach their works under the concept of displaying heritage seems obligatory to include as the second case studies.

To begin with sorting out the meaning of their name, firstly “odd” as an English word means what is awkward not proper or expected. Secondly, “viz” stands for the first three letters of a Turkish word *vizyon* which means vision in English. Thereby, by forming such a name they might imply the looking ways which are limping or awry. Moreover, one can infer that the art collective works with visioning which is not conventional. With these references, we can say that their art practice is not related with constructing

visions that represents reality. On the contrary, with their artworks they reveal a taste of artificial, or in other words virtual for the display of what is real.

The practices of Oddviz originate from a motivation to document the environment that they live and experience by using photography, specifically the technique of photogrammetry. Photogrammetry is a technique to measure the most realistic data that can be used in producing empirical information, which is applied to the professions that need detail, especially in cartography. Oddviz is one of the few artist collectives using photogrammetry worldwide as an artistic production tool. By photographing the selected object from many respects, they reach the three dimensional (3D) and photo-realistic model.

Their motivation focuses on the idea of what we experience is ephemeral and performative therefore it needs to be documented and also displayed for the future. According to them anything can be documented, especially those that are on the verge of being on the brink of transformation. Therefore, Oddviz reproduces and also represents not only the old buildings but also the daily street materials of half public spaces by practicing photogrammetry technique.

For instance, to create the exhibition “Inventory” (2018), they work as a collector who accumulates everyday materials belongs to cityscapes. However, in case of cities, labeling something as an everyday material is just a naming process that is led by the municipality. Oddviz approaches to objects in the cities as they are the most integral parts of street culture, in other words heritage, that are formed through our experiences. Therefore, regarding this study leading concept, Oddviz supports the idea of heritage to define itself. Thereby, since our performances, as citizens, or relatives of this earth, compose what is heritage today, their works become a method for displaying heritage.

At first glance, the exhibition space of the “Inventory” (2018), fine art and diasec prints hanging on the wall give an impression that as if it is a two-dimensional photo exhibition. However, the productions in the exhibition confirm the diverse and layered methods of today's artists. The works are described by the artists as virtual installations are the result of a long production effort. The exhibition was followed by a 6-month work period as a result of archiving and preserving the street objects of four different cities that are Istanbul, New York, Berlin and Venice. The main documented objects are



painted guideposts from Istanbul, hydrants of New York, apartment entrances of Berlin, and wells of Venice. By utilizing from photogrammetric visualization method, they create collages, or settings of ordinary objects belonged to cities that they experience. Here the most important feature of these works is being not solely representations or replicas, but an understanding of the production of the contemporariness.

Hence their practice stands as a proper case while reconceptualizing heritage with the help of contemporary art which makes us inquire about the perception of time and temporality. Their artistic processes augment and recall the objects from the past or today in the form of a future vision. That is to say, the assumed three epochs of the time continuum is merged in a spatiotemporal visualization. Oddviz's works present a vision for the future in a present context since the documented products are disappearing from the earth at high speed while the artists are creating the 3D digital models of them. Their pieces re-build the reality, the world we perceive around us by utilizing from the realistic photography technique. The creative compositions of their virtual installations inquire the understanding of time passing and criticise being resigned by learned helplessness at least in a city.

As my scope focuses on Istanbul, the work entitled "Kadıköy" (2018), a district in the Asian side of Istanbul, requires more close reading. (Fig. 5.1) In the composition, the vivid colors and the pattern provided by the textured guideposts create a rhythm that is a characteristic feature of Kadıköy. According to them, the composition refers Kadıköy since it works as a piggy bank, a box which does not follow an order in its collection. This method of collection originates from Kadıköy itself since it is a space that changes every day. For instance, the guideposts lost their textures so often or gain new faces with each interaction with the people around. In "Kadıköy" (2018) there are several guideposts documented which are painted with one of the Turkish traditional art styles called çini [ceramics]. The students of fine art academies use the guideposts in the neighborhood because they provide them with an interesting blank space, as in a blank canvas, to work on it. Therefore, their usage becomes a significant point for what seems afunctional would be temporarily functional. Like the Nakilbent Cistern in the "Water Soul" (2015), any item documented in the composition of "Kadıköy" (2018) is the part of experiencing today, and also since they are created by experience, they make us rethink about them in the concept of displaying heritage today.



**Figure 5.2. Oddviz, “Kadıköy”, photogrammetric virtual installation, diasec framing, 150x266 cm, Art on, 2018**

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Even though I have followed a poststructuralist formation, while writing up this thesis, I also utilized from structuralism during my investigation of the notions of cultural heritage and contemporary art. I approach the titles of cultural heritage and contemporary art as big clouds and try to happen a shower of rain, to get more actual outputs. I separated the cultural from the heritage. The main reason for excluding the term culture is to focus solely on the notion of heritage. As the references from Lowenthal, Smith, and Lumley, reveal that there is a vast literature to purify heritage from stewardship, mainly derived from economic and national interests of human communities.

However, before creating such a framework about the discourses around heritage, the primary objective was to analyse contemporary art practices that utilize the notion of heritage spaces. I found such an investigation and comparison valuable, since putting contemporary art and heritage in one stage seems contradictory especially according to heritage stewards and supranational organizations that decide whose heritage or when or why. Curating contemporary art exhibitions in heritage spaces encourage us to question what heritage means. Besides analysing the artworks open up a way to rethink through and restructure the art exhibition conceptually and practically. Therefore, I point out that there are dualisms in the discourse of heritage such as; past versus present and culture versus nature which the centralist systems wish to maintain. Beside these oppositions, the artistic interventions unveil the monopoly over the heritage discourse.

In the first glance, conventional comprehensions take heritage only as a representative of past, and the notion of contemporary as with its bond only the current. Such slight comprehensions would suggest the impossibility of a cluster of the notion of contemporary as well as the notion of heritage. Since these comprehensions or in other words presuppositions, refine the notions of contemporary and cultural heritage from all of their underlying meanings.

Also, since displaying contemporary art in heritage space is an uncanny experience, their coalescence seems contradictory. A viable definition of Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny would be an experience of the unfamiliar within the familiar and vice versa. To exemplify it with the case of a theatre play, it displays fictive or represents reality such as art exhibitions. To stage past in the theatre give ways to an experience of an uncanny encounter. Since staging the images of the past, especially in the form of an unexpected flashback, means to re-build the past in the midst of the present. Therefore, the coalescence of contemporary art and heritage carries the cyclical return of the past in the form of fiction and provide a case of uncanny experience.

In order to contribute to the discourses in the literature around heritage and contemporary art, I propose to consider the notion of heritage as the way we understand the notion of contemporary. As a result, the etymological, as well as the linguistic meaning of heritage, converge on the notion of contemporary or vice versa that give us a new notion as contemporary heritage. So, the idea of contemporary heritage is a way to reveal their underlying meanings.

To clarify, according to the mentioned presuppositions, heritage signifies the past, and because the heritage is generally attributed to being a site, a human-made architecture, it signifies the culture in a society. In her book, Seyla Benhabib discusses that cultures frequently derive from the binaries. (2002) However, by referring to relevant literature heritage is a climax, a breaking point for the conventional understanding of time which has three stages as past, present, and future. Consequently, heritage signifies the mnemonic time model which accepts and holds the returns through its intergenerational multi-vocality. Additionally, because of the affinity between ruins and nature, according to Simmel, heritage has the same quality as nature like caves. (1959) Heritage is changeable like nature since it is an experience, a process. This argument concerning heritage stands as a counter-argument to conventional heritage conservation systems that wants to embalm heritage as a safely-dead zone in order to apply market-oriented aims to it.

Thereby, for example, the conventional heritage management discourse would not favor the idea of heritage today since it aims to create an illusion that heritage belongs to past and its display can only be done by some groups in society. These groups finally

become the ones who own the rights of heritage and embalm heritage by creating authorities and descriptions. However, the culture also exists through experiences and do not have stable rules.

To conceptualize and rethink upon displaying heritage by aiming to underestimate at least one dualism set on it, brings us to analyse the second concept; contemporariness separately. First, while analysing the notion of contemporary we see in the literature that it stands as a present-centered phenomenon as how heritage stands as if it is only past-centered. Indeed, the notion of contemporary has a strong relationship with the present, but the critical point here is to understand that each age has its contemporariness. Thereby, it cannot be locked into one specific period, for a group of people, as in the case of heritage.

On the contrary, heritage is experience. Reusing or recovering from the spaces of heritage means to re-read heritage in today's context by experiencing it as an external world filled with the accumulation of past, vitality, and imagination of the future. That is to say, the meaning of heritage overlaps with the way we understand contemporary art which is created today but also has been created in the past. Moreover, the notion of contemporary heritage means experiencing the time as a transitive continuum. The transitive timeline can be a rejection of history, but at the same time, it should be understood that the history is another human invention; it is however, also an experience of nature and culture, together and at the same time. However, the idea of contemporary heritage should not be understood as to let heritage disappear altogether. It is a suggestion to let heritage define itself.

As Istanbul Biennial leaves twenty years behind, it also constructed a significant relationship with heritage. However, today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the functionality of questioning of how to consider heritage and its display have not been properly examined yet. For instance, in the case of "Doors Open to Those Who Knock" (2017) since the stewards of the heritage space, the mansion, is a legal entity, the rights of the heritage firstly embraced by them. The idea of letting heritage to define itself is undermined by being or becoming a property. Because of the former owners of the space are the members of Ottoman Empire, the heritage space is represented by another social group and as well as their privatized sense of past about the mansion. Therefore,

in such cases, as in the Abdülhamit Mansion, the exhibitions in heritage spaces make apparent that heritage is a consideration of politics and such perspectives create obstacles against the understanding of contemporary heritage.

In other words, making art in heritage is the starting point for letting the heritage define itself today since the art is a way to signify the space behind the margins. Art provides space to underestimate stewardship claims on heritage. For example, Oddviz's art practice focuses on documenting the tangibles around them where they live, travel, and be. By depending on their artworks, heritage is recreated, today, while certainly representing the past and perhaps the future. In the introduction chapter of *Building A New Heritage*, Masser sums up that "Heritage is not only something we want to hand down to future generations, it is also something we want to appreciate and experience to the fullest extent" (2013: 31). Just like the wrinkles of a human face or like nature's process itself, the texture of heritage can display the patterns of the past; faces and the traces of people lived there before. Those traces, memories and lived experiences may not be the mere representations of the archaeological outputs or facts, however they may stand as if a windmill measures the direction of the wind and all the while witnessing its power.

However, to experience and appreciate heritage to its fullest extent is not easily possible since our existence within the contemporariness is relatively obscure today, which is to say that our age requires further effort in exploration through a distance. To be an explorer of time requires courage and a desire to experience. The artist produces contemporary art in heritage is the one, who faces with that darkness, encounters with the hidden or the unpermitted values. For example, while creating the exhibition "Water Soul" (2015) the artists experience the darkness not only of the cistern but also the all of the epoch that it witnesses. Moreover, "Water Soul" (2015) emphasizes the importance of describing such productions as an experience not solely as an exhibition. By referring Bal (1996), the terminology about expositions and exhibitions which are the methods of performing or storytelling becomes actualized over the "Water Soul" (2015) experience.

In line with Agamben's focus, artists and the participants are the explorers of their age, the epoch that they live, hence the contemporariness. Although to work in heritage is assumed as if the artists isolate themselves from the outside world, in fact, each artistic

production requires isolation in order to produce a work of art just as heritage cannot detach from the life that surrounds it. In “New Species of Space” Hu Fang proposes that in the future artists will be more engaged in life. (2009) He adds “art no longer operates in a laboratory of artists, but as intuitive and active participation in the possibility of life” (Fang 2009). Thereby, as a slight prevision for the future of art that artists who consider the notion of contemporary heritage would be more eligible to see in the darkness, behind the stage and as well as in the blinding light. Therefore, perhaps, not by reminiscing 20.000 years ago, but exhibiting in a heritage space as they are the caves of unknown pasts, presents and futures will allow us to think about memory in all its glory: a layered, assorted and hybrid structures.

Heritage today is a meeting point and a bonding zone for the dualism of culture versus nature. The interventions of contemporary artistic gaze provide new conceptual ways of seeing and temporality to the immovable, tangible heritage. Most importantly, to approach heritage as a form of experience and to break up the conventions of display multiply the understanding of heritage today and provide us with new paths to newer ways of seeing. A proposal for decentralized time perception might be a way for creating alternative ways to escape from the politics of centralist world construct. A decentralized model of art and heritage will suggest an opportunity to a similar understanding of ever-growing digital technologies and the internet today. To make a functional form from what was afunctional, disregarded or controlled by dominancy allow us to be nearer to becoming more decentralized and to suggest a possibility to let heritage define itself.

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