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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## Representations of everyday life in Inci Eviner's *We, Elsewhere*: comedy, use and free will

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### ABSTRACT

Inci Eviner's installation *We, Elsewhere*<sup>1</sup> for the Turkey Pavilion<sup>2</sup> at the 58th Venice Art Biennial offers a spectacle of the incomplete, in which the objects, videos and their characters, and sounds in the piece, along with the exhibition space itself, consist all of halves, missing something. It is designed as a non-place in the midst of nowhere, which appears as a liminal space of exception, in which the inside and outside become indistinct. In this respect, the role of the large ramp, which transgresses the public-private divide, is particularly remarkable for it both connects and disconnects the place in relation to the outside, incarnating a paradoxical form of inclusionary exclusion. One cannot avoid noticing the ramp on entering the pavilion: cut horizontally and vertically, the spaces between left void, it is a cross-sectional space experienced through its corridors, area closed off by metal bars, a semi-closed room and viewing area arranged on stairs. However, its interior is rendered visible through the cross-sections of buildings and the subterranean. We bear witness to the events inside it, and, ceasing to be spectators, participate in the installation. Through this displacement, we also move from a representational space to a lived space.

### KEYWORDS

*We, Elsewhere*; Inci Eviner; space; comedy; tragedy

## Introduction

Artist Inci Eviner's<sup>3</sup> nearly 40 years of production, performative research and educational experience<sup>4</sup> was on display in her installation, *We, Elsewhere*,<sup>5</sup> at the Turkey Pavilion<sup>6</sup> of the 58th Venice Biennial International Art Exhibition from 11 May to 24 November 2019. The exhibition encompasses a comprehensive diversity of her artistic production, research and thinking, particularly those of her sculpture and installations from the 1990s and video installations she began producing in the 2010s, alongside her early work mainly of drawings and photography. Whereas criticism of body norms and social gender roles, as well as the performance of women's bodies becoming active and freed from normative sexual identities in studies of subjective potentials are prominent in most of her work, here there is a form of continuous spatial relationship between the measures stretching from the urban environment to equipment. Eviner entered into a

closer relationship with architectural representations particularly with her video installation, *Harem* (2009). She greatly employs the use of spatial representations, such as architectural plans, cross-sections and perspective; geographical maps; and aerial photographs in most of her video work. She transforms these representations into unique drawings and brings together body performance, the characters in her films, sound compositions and spatial structures, moving the spectator towards a space of experience. Architectural representation envisions the ideological fiction, the ideal and designed metanarrative and control strategy of a particular power centre. The architectural representations that Eviner vivifies, however, reveal the tactics of everyday life. The spaces that the figures reproduce through physical performances, rather than the designed in ideal and normative form, expose the interruptions, hobbles and defects caused by unexpected occurrences experienced and acquired. The space opens from representation to life and the everyday, or in other words, everyday tactics destroy the fictionalized metanarrative and strategies that look down from above.

In order to discuss *We, Elsewhere* in detail, it might be helpful to start with an overview of Eviner's previous work. Let us start with *Harem* (2009). In his well-known work *Intérieur d'une partie du Harem du Grand-Seigneur*, Antoine Ignace Melling depicted the daily life of women in the imperial harem, their behaviours, relationships, rituals and use of space, all intrinsic to the palace, in a cross-sectional perspective of the space with its many levels, corridors and large, central gallery. Three hundred years later, in a spatio-temporal shift, Eviner awakens these anonymous women and reveals the desire, rebellion, violence and truth in the space. The images of bodies, gender and sexuality in Eviner's *Harem*<sup>7</sup> are put into crisis in relation to how orientalism wishes to view them in the Orient. It is not a place dripping with sexuality where submissive bodies copulate unperturbedly. It is, on the contrary, a camp in which rebellious bodies skirt madness and attempt escape (Figure 1).

The objective of Eviner's *Parliament*<sup>8</sup> (2010), in a way, is to explain the ideal European myth woven through with the discourses concerning refugee assimilation processes by bringing to life a cross section of the European Parliament building and exposing its inner goings on, and to expose the 'post-truth' of EU discourse through the cutaway.



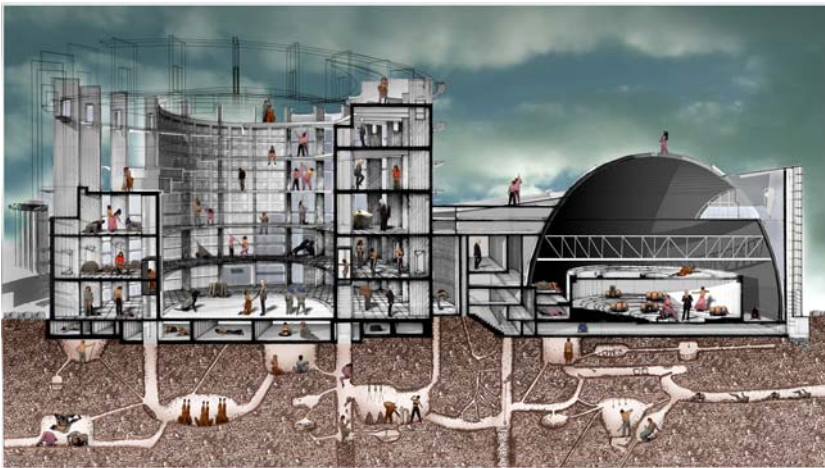
**Figure 1.** *Harem*, 2009, with the permission of Inci Eviner, the artist and the copyright holder.

Eviner reveals that European Parliament's self-created boundary serves as a zone of indistinction, or a camp, between that which is inner and outer (Figure 2).

*Nursing Modern Fall*<sup>9</sup> (2012), presents a critique of nation-state ideology, which appropriates modern architecture, and the 'modern' construction of mind-body-identity that government attends to shape. The spaces ideological governance creates are in conflict with the coerced subjects depicted within them. The strategic and the everyday cannot adapt to each other and thus the spaces of rationality disintegrate and the sacrosanct fiction dissipates due to the figures' limping activity. While the nation-state's desire for modernism collapses, the futile rush of repair and maintenance continues forcibly.

*National Fitness*<sup>10</sup> (2013), puts the bodies of the other – those outside the norms – into action. These phantasms emerge from the fissures in ideal spaces and disrupt the magnificence of those spaces as subjects whom both western art and architecture do not want to see. The existence of these uncanny bodies defeats the fictitious, sterile environment. The critique is directed at the nation-state ideology that uses the body as produced by modernism as a means to reach a 'western' or European image, and the national identity on which it is built.

The shaman in *Beuys Underground*<sup>11</sup> (2017) is an artist and the awaited saviour for the people who have taken refuge in their own separate cells in the subterranean city. These people who have been oppressed and, having resorted to withdraw into their own, individual spaces, devise new concepts as they wipe away their memories in the invisible cells in the cross-section of the city in which debate and struggle has come to an end. The powers at work, however, continue to produce oppression, fear and enemies, as well as warn against the invisible dangers that could come from outside the city. These powers do this as it is all they can to cover their mistakes and absence. As the spectacle continues above ground, people continue to grapple with their everyday troubles in their cells below. Beuys will soon come with a rabbit in hand and fleece cape hanging from his back and heal the people with art. The people, however, are pained by wiping clean and losing their memories and, at this point, art cannot be a curative.



**Figure 2.** Parliament, 2010, with the permission of Inci Eviner, the artist and the copyright holder.

Eviner, however, develops a liberating and creative language of visual expression by, in one view, negligently transforming the language and spaces of representation used in the discipline of architecture and intertwining with them her own gestural drawings and figures. This interface where architecture and contemporary art intertwine develops a new area of multiple representation for architecture. With aid of video and digital technologies, however, the moving bodies placed within the sketches and drawings in Eviner's work reproduce the space and bring it to life. The space is in a constant state of being by virtue of the bodies' cyclical and linear, rhythmic actions. The continuous loops in the videos also ensure the perpetuity of this state of being.

Unlike Eviner's previous video work, with *We, Elsewhere*<sup>12</sup> (2019), one is not an external viewer of merely the transition from representation to space, as within the transected space, we participate in the experience with our bodies and bear witness to the events revealed mainly through the facial expression of the characters in the videos. In a way, in Eviner's previous video installations, we become one of the figures who, acting at a certain point in the cross section, transforms the representative space into living space, participating in the everyday and contributing to the reproduction of the space.

### Us, in a cross-sectional space

In *We, Elsewhere* Eviner produced a piece of the tragic and comedic incomplete. We see one side of the double-edged critique Eviner creates – the tragic – in the forms of reaction expressed in most of her video installations by death, victimhood, escape, concealment, resistance, suicide, violence and the act of forgetting. These reactions are the efforts of bio-political bodies that ruling power has subjected to violence and oppression and which struggle against and weather this power to emerge from the zone of indistinction this power has left to them, or in other words, to become active, creating subjects. Eviner, however, arrives at a happy ending to the tragedy in this most recent stop of her video installations. *We, Elsewhere* presents a new language of criticism, performance and existence through the catalogue of images Eviner has created over the years in her production, along with her unique aesthetic understanding over multiple and mixed techniques and an eye for the incongruous – comedy! We are taken with the optimism and critique of the comedy before succumbing to its tragedy.

The objects, videos and their characters, figures and sounds in the piece, along with the exhibition space itself, consist all of halves, missing something and incomplete. A large ramp, cut horizontally and vertically, the spaces between left void, is a cross-sectional space experienced through its corridors, area closed off by metal bars, a semi-closed room and viewing area arranged on stairs. Tactics from daily life in opposition to totalitarian strategies for completeness and uniformity are a rebuttal to them, or in other words, daily life constantly produces unwanted deficiencies, hobbles and discontinuities. A forbidden thought or messenger of peace flies away from the perspective of the bent and twisted iron that fences off the space. Despite the imposing and all-encompassing view from the giant ramp, it is understood that this is a pliable domain, its features with holes, disconnections and gaps that can be entered and exited from every side. Through comedy, irony and play, it manifests incomplete, disconnected and hobbled daily life that frustrate totalitarian power's desire for completeness. Eviner presents

political possibilities that pledge hope for a new form of existence, invites us to play and irony, and draws us to childhood's somewhat oblivious, somewhat indifferent world (Figure 3).

Upon entering the Turkey Pavilion, we encounter the underground space, or shelter, we are familiar with from Eviner's previous video work. The underground is an area of potential for the artist to reveal hidden secrets, and/or a space of annihilation that enables escape from power.

It is possible to proceed on the left of the basement space surrounded by metal bars toward the head of the ramp that envelopes the top of the shelter and go along the path through sound channels, be a part of the amphitheatre and stage on the right side, rush through the door of a room with lamentations rising up from the ground level or continue through the corridor and wander around the ramp space, within the variety of constantly changing sounds and spatial perspectives. Roaming through the space is like the experiencing of observing the inner goings on of a crowded, complex and busy modern city with multiple stimuli that constantly engage the mind and dizzying sights and sounds.

Every viewer can create their own personal route accompanied by the video images, spatial arrangement and totality of sounds, albeit with different perceptions. The exhibition space does not have an overbearing or singular appeal in this sense, as it leaves the route up to the experimenter's perception and choice. As such, the structure offers a flexible and surprising topographic experience despite the solid, monolith and grandiose impression it gives.<sup>13</sup> It is not, however, an ostentatious, artificial architectural product turned object of fetish. To the contrary, the space of testimony is open to experience and gives multiple opportunities for the objects to be able to be faced, emphasized and communicated with.

A scattered, suspended metal structure of a double bunk, abandoned, fatigued and disconnected, stands at the head of the ramp. This, at one time, was the most private, yet also most public, space of an emergency or temporary lodging area – a refugee or labour camp. The cluster of half chairs standing haphazardly, motionless and buried



**Figure 3.** Turkey Pavillion, Venice, 2019, Photo Credit: Poyraz Tütüncü, with the permission of Inci Eviner, the artist and the copyright holder.

into the concrete floor that accompany the bunk, however, speak to the space being a waiting room. Stained half urinals are disused and left functionless. This other place is made of emptiness.

A video of an angry facial expression appears while passing between the metal bars and traces of urine, water and possibly blood on the ground that all border off the ramp. The metal bars also in the middle of the rising ramp are bewildering. Here we watch at the same time the simultaneous sequence of events that occur in the videos projected onto two walls perpendicular to each other. We focus particularly on the political criticism in the facial expressions, movements and gestures of people under shadow, their destituent lives and with half bodies or a part of it missing in the images with neither beginning nor end nor specific order, like the flow of life, within the metropolis' passing hum of the intertwining sounds of machinery, nature and people.

Another route briefly squeezes us within the metal bars and shuts us in. Along with the feeling of confinement the flow of a forbidden thought come to mind yet fleeting, or a messenger of peace gives hope from the perspectives the twisted and bent bars open. Yet another route leads to a balcony up the ramp. We are a spectral observer as we watch the display on the opposite wall of the lower level from a hole cut in its ceiling. On the room's roof, we see masked faces buried in a concrete slab.

A narrow stairwell and the traces of torture on the steps then lead back to ground level. One of the installation's possibly most difficult moments to experience is upon entering a room with its roof cut out, leaving it observable, and swelling lamentations and pained moans. The silent and curious audience stand above as they bear confused and anguished witness to the display within the room. On the back wall of this bulk are drawings extending along both sides of the narrow corridors that constitute the thought process of the work.

The giant ramp appears to be a very sharp, stable and imposing closed space at first glance. Like walls, symbolizing the strength of governing power, the concrete ramp rises in a single stretch in a threat to the viewer. Despite governing power's oppression and tyranny, the decaying bunk, haphazardly scattered half chairs, functionless half urinals, bent and twisted metal bars, leaky torture room with a hole in the roof, tracks on the ground, and reactive tragic and comical faces watching us from the videos betray that the desired confinement has not come to pass. It turns the ideal of disciplinary governing power on its head while the space, transected and perforated, allows for the flow of life.

### **An artist of displacement and profanation**

Eviner is an artist of displacements, of the sensations of the incomplete, of becoming. Her installations relentlessly deconstruct one's perception of oneself and the outer world as a space of exposure and touching. However, the logic of displacement is juxtaposed in Eviner to another logic, that of the camp. Thus, at the same time as she opens up a space for the experience of displacement, Eviner also reflects upon how biopower threatens the potentiality of this experience. In this sense, Eviner is as much an artist of the camp, of the spaces of pre-emption, of mutual exclusion, in which reaction comes before action, that is, before experience (see Diken and Tuncer 2019). It is therefore unsurprising that her work is crowded with unspecified, incomplete characters who share a

deep sense of loneliness, abandonment and abjectness. Most of her characters seem to suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, described by Barthes as the 'very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro version of death: I am truly becoming a specter' (1981, 13–14). Eviner's paradigmatic object-subject is spectral *homo sacer*, occupying a zone of indistinction between life and death. This subject is always suspended somewhere, waiting and waiting, and waiting, unable to escape suspension which is her fate. Indeed, boredom is a fundamental human condition in Eviner's universe (Figures 4 and 5).

The feeling of being abandoned is the essential experience of boredom, in which surroundings become indifferent to one, while at the same time, having no possibility of action, we cannot free ourselves from them (Agamben 2004, 64). In *We, Elsewhere*, people inhabit an interim space suspended in permanent uncertainty between future and past, inside and outside, human and animal, and so on. This is a space full of disused, functionless objects. It is marked, at the same time, by the absence of body, language and words. There are only the silent movements, facial expressions and gestures of incomplete bodies and faces in it. At some times disembodied organs and limbs, and at others half human, half animal figures emanate from the videos and participate in the experience of the space. For example, we come across a cheetah accompanying our footsteps and suddenly find ourselves in a forest, outside of civilization and divorced from the political culture that guarantees our humanity. Suddenly, the eyes of a blind prophet look into our own from his disembodied head as he patiently pushes it along the ground with his cane. The face of a child wearing a black stocking cap stares at us, both scornful and angry, a mouthful of facial expressions and gesticulations in snarling curses and contempt. He even laughs occasionally at what he says between the movements. In short, we find ourselves in a space of bare repetition, witnessing these grief-stricken, dreary and shocking moments of events with neither beginning or end nor specific order, oscillating between the tragic and the comic (Figure 6).

How can human life emerge from such repetition? Boredom paradoxically brings with it a possibility (Agamben 2004, 67). Suspending its automatic behaviour, its habits, the human subject can open up, thanks to the experience of boredom, a free zone for its own becoming which is denied the animal defined by the impossibility of such suspension, of breaking down its relation to its environment. Human, in other words, is human because it can non-relate itself to its environment. The world becomes 'open' only in non-relating (Agamben 2004, 69–70).

In this sense, there is hope in *We, Elsewhere*. For all the tragic instances expressed in her video installations focused on the bio-politics of the body – death, victimhood, escape, concealment, resistance, suicide, violence and forgetting – Eviner points toward a sphere where not only a new minor, nomadic subject can emerge but also the bio-political subjectivities as such are profaned and dissolved in proliferating forms of life, as she has emphasized in most of her work before.<sup>14</sup>

## Form of life

While Eviner depicts power as a desire to capture the potentiality of violence through the logic of exception, she insists, at the same time, on showing that ours is a 'culture' of





**Figure 4.** Turkey Pavillion, Venice, 2019, Photo Credit: Poyraz Tütüncü, with the permission of Inci Eviner, the artist and the copyright holder.

exception, in which the exception has become a norm (see Benjamin 1992, 248–249). In a culture of exception, the separation between normality and exception no longer works. And so, the paradigm of the state of exception shifts from the ‘miracle’, the sovereign decision that separates law and unlaw, to the ‘catastrophe’, which implies a zone of indistinction between anomie and law (Agamben 2005, 57). There is no longer any difference between law and violence, nothing except anomie, which power seeks to capture by



**Figure 5.** Turkey Pavillion, Venice, 2019, Photo Credit: Poyraz Tütüncü, with the permission of Inci Eviner, the artist and the copyright holder.



**Figure 6.** Turkey Pavillion, Venice, 2019, Photo Credit: Poyraz Tütüncü, with the permission of Inci Eviner, the artist and the copyright holder.

depicting it as a deficit of social order. Unmasking this depiction, Eviner's artistic strategy is to demonstrate that anomie cannot be captured by power, and to affirm a sense of anomie vis-à-vis the culture of exception. What transpires in this demonstration is not the destruction of the law, the bodies or sociality as such but a de-activated law, another use of the bodies and intimations to another sociality, an everyday life beyond the grasp of the law.

This is why nothing in *We, Elsewhere* functions in the way it is supposed to. The human body, for instance, reveals through its de-formations a crisis with respect to all

expectations as to what it should do. Its 'normal' functioning de-activated, Eviner constantly puts the body and body parts into new, unexpected uses. Hence, *We, Elsewhere* is populated by bodies attempting to crawl on their knees, shoulders and chins, toes trying to indicate something, a leg trying to teach another leg how to walk, a leg in the place of an arm, feet with wiggling toes in the place of a head, hands making feet able to walk, and so on. Through such profanation, which uncouples the body from its appropriate ('sacred') use, Eviner's bodies seek to flee bio-power. Not by strategically taking part in molar politics (e.g. class struggle) but by returning to everyday life and its mode of operation, the subterranean 'tactics' (in the sense De Certeau 1984 describes them). Some strive to submerge themselves underground<sup>15</sup> and disappear from the world. Others try to take refuge in a submarine-whale, the biblical sea monster. The Leviathan, however, wrecks and its occupants are stuck in place where they are terrorized. In shock, they try to maintain movement, attempting to develop another physical capacity and exist, another use of their bodies.

The problem with resistance to bio-power is obvious here. As Foucault has shown, it is resistance itself (critique, complaint, ...) that sets power in motion, not the other way around; the 'final word on power is that *resistance comes first*' (Deleuze 1988, 89). Therefore, Eviner does not seek to answer the question of power through the standard procedure of offering ways to resist it. For, 'to the answer already contained in a question ... one should respond with questions from another answer' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 110). In Eviner's case, that other answer is everyday life in its broadest sense, as life itself, which persists in spite of its relentless colonization by power. And Eviner's question from this answer is: how can the subterranean 'incomplete', that which does not have a 'proper' use, shape our identity, be operationalised vis-à-vis bio-political subjectivation today?

*We, Elsewhere* is an investigation of everyday life in the twenty-first century through both tragic and comic perspectives. The tensed, confounded and fear-inducing facial expression of a woman, her head painted in violent red and with a twitching eye, communicates directly with the onlooker. She witnesses a soldier to her side, his body broken in two, digging obstinately and attempting to escape, and calls us to bear witness, too. These characters, which we recognize from *Harem* and *Parliament*, depict bodies that institutional power has degraded to bare life and their attempt to flee the camps in which this power has sealed them. The severed sheep's heads on platters within shelters are also present in *Harem*. Nevertheless, the raw, bloody head of a sacrificed lamb is now a sacred dish served on a silver platter. Behind the act of politeness hides death.

Three heads in black stocking caps, their bodies lost, hide their faces. We find a ghost, 'disembodied word', Eviner's 'terrorist' image in the child suicide bomber whose face is half covered, half open, placed over the wallpaper motif in the home of a family of Kurdish forced migrants whom she visited in Tarlaşaşı during her studio years in Manastır, which she used in the videos of her installation *An Explosive Heart* (2002). The Kurdish child throwing rocks becomes a terrorist. His heart is explosive due to the bomb strapped over it. We similarly see ghost children, punished and with their faces covered, in one of Eviner's photographic works *Nowhere, Body-Here* (2010) series.

On another tragi-comic occasion, we see a man wearing the traditional, although shiny, *shalvar* of the nomadic Yörük, who lies on the ground and lovingly caresses a sheep on

top of him. His face is in shadow and his expression unreadable. His face, however, is in another corner as an extension of his body. He covers his face and eyes, ashamed and crying. He stands up and assumes the pose of a woman along with the sheep in a composition reminiscent of classic European painting. He takes the sheep in his arms and strokes it. His male body does not easily fit with his feminine movements. They shame and pain him. Finally, the sheep dies and the man takes his own life. They are both victims under the circumstances, one's killing sanctioned as a sacred sacrifice and the other's sanctioned by law.

Three people are seated on a sheepskin, two of them with the arms of their jackets tied together, heave moans as they look at each other and the space between them. They are suffering, in lamentation for the dead. Their pain is understood both from their writhing bodies, bending and twisting, and facial expressions, as well as the lamentations burning from their bellies and up through their throats before emanating from their mouths. Shadows bind them. This group of three is a moment of mourning reminiscent of shamanistic rituals of purification. At the same time, however, their voices occasionally also become sounds of pleasure, animal calls and screams of laughter. They seem to go back and forth between grief and pleasure, between the tragic and the comic (Figure 7).

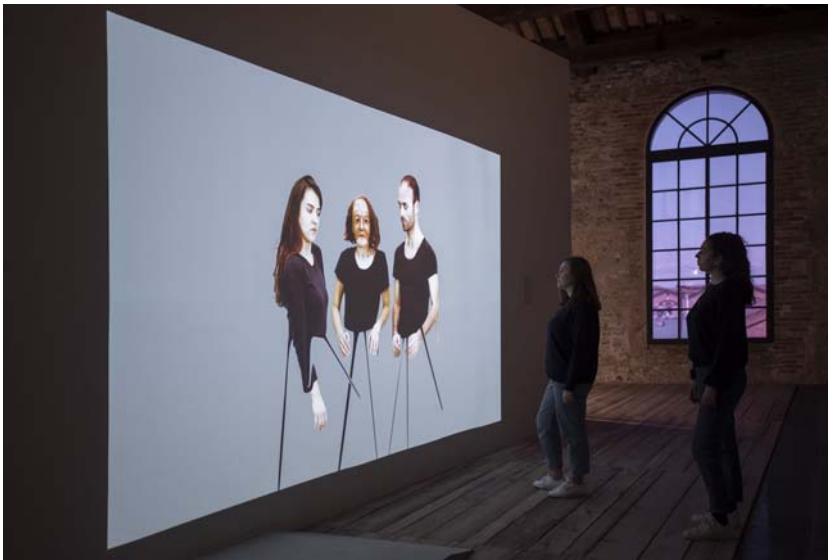
Let us consider a few instances of this unity in disunity, disunity in unity of the tragic and the comic in *We, Elsewhere*. First: a masked roly-poly in a striped, elastic costume continuously rolls to its back and then back up. It takes pleasure in endlessly toppling over and righting itself despite the goings on in its surroundings. A drawing of a half-beast, half-human warrior, however, orders his shadow to capture the roly-poly. The roly-poly can no longer play and is imprisoned within the shadow, although its facial expression maintains its playfulness. Second: two people, their faces bundled up and hidden, walk back and forth in front of a pastoral silhouette, as if dancing. They are in a state



**Figure 7.** Turkey Pavillion, Venice, 2019, Photo Credit: Poyraz Tütüncü, with the permission of Inci Eviner, the artist and the copyright holder.

between folk dancing and the pain of regret. They take their heads in their hands and squeeze. Their faces are covered, however their bodies writhe between trepidation and frolicking. Third: the facial expressions of three people cut off from the waist down to whom a shadow effect gives sticks for legs. The masked face looks with suspicion to those on her right and left. She attempts to understand who is guilty. The other figures suspiciously try to hide their guilt, but the expression of great suspicion is more important than who is guilty. The horror-stricken, sorrowful and suspicious faces in Caravaggio's paintings here become imitations, and falling from their foolishness, produce parody from tragedy (Figure 8).

Blood, faeces or bullets come out of the belly of a brush-and-ink bird and enters the mouth of a woman lying on the ground. The place is reminiscent of an area beset by war. Bodies exposed to a fiery air assault lie on the ground. They are still being tortured despite being dead. Next to this image appears a figure of a crippled torturer in leopard-print pants, ornate Yörük shirt and black stocking cap. It is a hybrid figure, somewhat anonymous and universal, as well as somewhat local. She rotates an iron bar in her hand, ready to mete out the torture. Not only for her inclination to violence, at the same time she takes pleasure in the thought of what is to come. The rigid, iron bar, taken from the fence enclosing the scene and transformed into a fluid object by a dove of peace of free thought, is in the torturer's hand. She vindictively tries to bend the iron and take revenge on it, but the iron bar does not bend from her violence. The bar is tortured first. Then, a pair of bare feet protruding from leopard-print pants are subjected to bastinado. Whereas the torturer tries to inflict pain on the feet with great pleasure, they are instead tickled and constantly wiggling. Not contented with this, the torturer then swings a pickaxe at the feet we watch that extend up legs to a waist before the body ends. The feet evade the attack as they dance. The scene of violence and torture turns comic (Figure 9).



**Figure 8.** Turkey Pavillion, Venice, 2019, Photo Credit: Poyraz Tütüncü, with the permission of Inci Eviner, the artist and the copyright holder.

In a certain sense, therefore, *We, Elsewhere* ends in favour of the comic, with a happy ending. Tactics offer a possibility of opposition to totalitarian strategies. Everyday life produces lines of flight. Through the comic Eviner presents the possibilities for a new existence, inviting us to play with this idea and to put it in different, free uses.

### Free use and happiness

To appreciate the significance of free use in Eviner, we must dwell on the meaning of use. In contrast to the modern understanding of use as utilization of an object by a subject, the term in ancient Greek points toward an intermediary zone in which the subject is affected by the action. Thus, in use, the human being and the world are in a relationship of 'reciprocal immanence' (Agamben 2015, 30). However, the Aristotelian definition of use, which also marks the contemporary definition of the term, introduces a differentiation. It divides use into potential and act, while the pivotal focus of the distinction shifts onto the passage from potential to act (Agamben 2015, 50). But does potential always automatically pass into act? One can of course have the potential in an inoperative state, without it being realized. But since for Aristotle the *ergon* (the proper function) of a human being is to act, its potential cannot, ideally, be inoperative (Agamben 2013, 96).

In Eviner's universe, though, use precedes the division of potential and act. Thus, the use of bodies in *We, Elsewhere* is never reducible to merely realizing a potential, demonstrating the proper function of an organ, etcetera. Being-in-use in Eviner does not take for granted a potential that automatically is put into regular work. The opposite is the case: use here is not a virtue of a pre-existing *habitus* that converts potential into praxis but something ontologically given, an inoperative praxis that can emerge only through a deactivation of the given patterns of use of the bodies.

All apparatuses of capture need their lifeblood from the outside, from the domain of free use. However, free use is that which cannot be included within and thus challenges



**Figure 9.** Turkey Pavillion, Venice, 2019, with the permission of Inci Eviner, the artist and the copyright holder.

the principles of the world of instrumental reason. Free use is a reminder that a world dominated by the useful alone is catastrophic. Eviner's 'utopia' of *anomie*, in this context, is not grounded in the destruction of the law, of the body, or of sociality as such but in imagining, demonstrating, or opening up a space for another possible use for them.

Eviner seeks to de-activate the monstrousness of power, exposing its central fiction by showing that there is no considerable link between life and norm. What we have in her aesthetic politics is not a struggle to control the state, which is a modern idea, fixated on and fascinated by sovereignty. Instead, Eviner forces us to ask whether a politics without sovereignty is possible. When the concept of politics moves from the socio-economic field to the bio-political field, as it does in Eviner, it becomes a resource for a bio-political struggle between the state and the non-state. What counts in this struggle is, above all, singularities which are not (yet) captured by the state. By the same token, what the state cannot tolerate is a form of life, a community of singularities that do not form an identity and do not have a claim to the state but rather articulate a way of being which cannot be included in the existing order and thus disrupts its system of counting (Agamben 1993, 85–87).

Form of life, in this sense, is what is at the centre of Eviner's work. As such, form-of-life designates a life that is irreducible to bare life. Its political meaning does not lie in its inclusion or exclusion in relation to an actual political association but in the inseparability of life and form, in exposing the distinctions through which the political constitutes itself. In each exposition, one can have a glimpse of a domain of free use that keeps re-emerging, intimating that, before their relationship is defined in terms of property, the 'master' and the 'slave', two figures Eviner seems to be obsessed with in her past and current work, find themselves in an ordinary, pre-judicial community of use, which 'the juridical order cannot admit except in the despotic intimacy between master and slave' (Agamben 2015, 36). Free use, as such, refers to the possibility of another conception of human praxis, which is, though, not utopian for it already exists as a kind of ontological communism.

## The comic

Marx said, famously, that history always occurs twice; first as tragedy, then as comedy. It is so in three senses. Firstly, in contrast to tragedy, the narrative structure of comedy is parasitic on the expectation of a happy end. Thus, secondly, and again in contrast to tragedy, which necessarily cause disharmony and disruption by 'changing everything', comedy only produces non-events. And thirdly, the only subject position comedy allows for is that of 'types' whose actions are a direct outcome of their social positions rather than of individual ('tragic') choices. As Aristotle puts it in *Poetics*, 'comedy is ... an imitation of inferior people' (Aristotle 1999, 9).

Is Inci Eviner's *We, Elsewhere*, with its incomplete figures, non-events and happy ending, a comedy in this sense? Marx thinks tragedy and comedy in terms of genres here. In contrast to tragedy, which necessarily causes disharmony and disruption by changing everything, comedy builds upon harmony and consensus; it produces non-events within the confines of a given hegemonic discourse. Thus, we first have tragedy, and then comedy; first revolution, then counterrevolution. It follows that there can be no

tragedy without comedy, no comedy without tragedy. And we get a vicious circle of revolutions and counterrevolutions, which itself can appear farcical. To come out of this vicious circle, Marx needs social revolution, which can end the dialectic of (political) revolutions and counter-revolutions.

There emerges, however, another possibility in Deleuze's reading of Marx. In Deleuze, as in Marx, there are three stages of repetition. Differently, however, Deleuze does not deal with tragedy and comedy as pre-given genres. Therefore, comedy does not follow tragedy; rather, tragedy follows comedy. The Deleuzean repetition starts with the comic situation, in which the actor, like in Marx, 'falls short' of creating something new, in which the event is 'too big' to become worthy of (Deleuze 1994, 89). In this sense, comedy defines the past. Eviner's incomplete figures, who are unable to accomplish any event, are comic in this sense. However, they endeavour to opening up a space for a second repetition, tragedy, which defines a present, in which the actor becomes equal to the event and seizes the moment. In this way, they force us to imagine a third repetition, in which the actors of the event themselves are de-subjectified so that we can move beyond identity politics. The event implies the perishing of the actor. Or, as Marx would say, comedy is there, history repeats itself, 'so that humanity should part with its past *cheerfully*' (Marx 1975, 179; see also Agamben 1999, 154). 'Happiness' is separation from the farcical pseudo-history. It is the affirmation of an originary, immanent form of life, which is never fully exhausted in the actual or captured by the sovereign exception (Agamben 2000, 115). This immanent origin, form of life, is the core of Eviner's politics.

### Instead of conclusion: free will in eviner

Something remarkable in Eviner's 'comic' politics is the lack of free will in its subjects. As Agamben shows, free will, understood as the 'cause' of subjective action, has its conceptual origin in the Aristotelian distinction between material, formal, efficient and final cause. But the ancient Greek thought did not attribute to it a central function. First with Christian theology, prefiguring the modern thought, the free will was accorded a pre-eminence as the origin and the efficient cause of action (Agamben 2018, 29–30).

Nietzsche (1974, 53) argued that the notion of 'free will' is 'fabricated' by monotheistic religions to make humanity 'accountable' to a transcendent God. One cannot sin without free will. Already in the third century, the free will became a technical term that designates 'responsibility for sin' (Agamben 2018, 47). The free will is a necessary means to hold the subject accountable for its action. Thus, in the juridical discourse, the free will indicates inclusion in the sphere of the law. The law finds in the free will that which it must presuppose, guilt as something interior to the subject, rendering the subject responsible for events it sanctions (Agamben 2018, 13). No sanctioned action, no guilt.

The origin of the sanctioned action is usually located in ancient tragedy, where the hero does not 'choose' between options but rather 'recognizes' the necessity of the one choice possible for her or him (Agamben 2018, 32). In this sense, the tragic action is simultaneously free and necessitated. Thus, the actor appears to will something not chosen or to choose something unwilled. This tension, according to Agamben, is inherent in the very form of action: every human action is simultaneously related to a subject and external sanctions which forbid, prescribe or condemn actions (Agamben 2018, 34). In this



tragic framework, in which the source of happiness is one's actions, one is always guilty and innocent at once, never being able to experience innocence without feeling guilt at the same time.

Comedy juxtaposes to this another framework in which human happiness is not determined by action, opening up a space where 'the subject is removed from the hold of sanctioned action' and guilt gives way to innocence (Agamben 2018, 40). Tragedy is a movement from a happy and serene beginning to guilt. Comedy reverses this movement, designating a movement from guilt to innocence. While tragedy presents 'the guilt of the just', comedy appears as 'the justification of the guilty' (Agamben 1996, 7).

This other, 'comic' framework, where happiness is not determined by action, brings us back to the paradigm of free use. In this prism, 'happiness' can only be imagined insofar as the bipolar machine of sovereignty-governmentality is de-activated or rendered inoperative, brought to a 'happy end'. This end is also a condition in which free use is no longer appropriated or captured. On this account, power, too, presents itself in tragic terms. Thus, it depicts desired political ends (a real democracy, for instance) as effectively impossible to reach, postulating the necessity of acknowledging this impossibility and settling with the worse in order to avoid the worst. Leviathan, or Behemoth! A 'comic' politics, on the other hand, ascertains the possibility of a happy ending, of salvation or freedom, in the form of de-activation.

Comedy, in other words, testifies to the persistence of another approach to free will and free use, and in this prism Eviner is a comic artist. This is why all her figures are exposed to affections as passionate automata. There is no 'free will' in *We, Elsewhere*. Accordingly, power in Eviner is an apparatus. It is that which captures, enlists and directs particular desires in line with its own, imposing on them its own object of desire. Free use, in turn, is that which pre-exists, persists in, and escapes power's economy of (instrumental) use. Thus, in *We, Elsewhere*, the self relates to itself, the others and the world without property and ownership. Eviner's is a world common to all.

## Notes

1. <http://pavilionofturkey19.iksv.org/colophon.php>
2. <http://pavilionofturkey19.iksv.org/theliveperformance.php>
3. Eviner's extraordinary success as a contemporary artist is evidenced by her exhibitions at international museums (such as Philadelphia Art Museum, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Massachusetts Contemporary Art Museum, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille and Istanbul Modern) and biennials (Venice 1997, Shanghai 2008, Busan 2010, Thessaloniki 2013, Sharjah 2017) as well as her projects she conducted at prominent art institutions in Europe and North America (at the Headlands Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2017; Rauschenberg Foundation Florida, 2017; SAM Art Projects, Paris, 2010; Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne, Vitry-sur-Seine, 2009; Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, 2008; and International Studio & Curatorial Program, New York, 2004–2005). Eviner is represented by Galeri Nev Istanbul. <http://www.galerinevistanbul.com/artist/inci-eviner-2/>
4. Eviner is a faculty member in the Department of Art and Design at Kadir Has University.
5. <https://www.incieviner.net/elsewhere.html>
6. <http://pavilionofturkey19.iksv.org/?lang=en>
7. For a detailed discussion, see: Diken, B. & E. Tuncer. (2019). "From Melling's Harem to Eviner's: Displacement as Parrhesia", *Third Text* 161, Vol. 33, Issue 6, November.

8. <https://www.incieviner.net/en/parlamento.html>
9. <https://www.incieviner.net/en/modern-cokusun-bakimi.html>
10. <https://www.incieviner.net/en/ulusal-zindelik.html>
11. <https://www.incieviner.net/en/beuys-underground.html>
12. For an overview, see: <http://pavilionofturkey19.iksv.org/colophon.php>  
Composition and sound design by Tolga Tüzün, architectural project by Birge Yıldırım Okta and Gürkan Okta, performance by Gülден Arsal Yavuz, Melih Kıraç and Canan yücel Pekişten.
13. *Eviner's Co-action Device* (2013) was also a production of a loose exhibition space design that was open to play and experience. The space for her retrospective exhibition at Istanbul Modern was designed as an instrument that facilitates the perception of the pieces within an experiential fiction that presents the opportunity for encounters.
14. For example, in *Runaway Girls* (2015), Eviner's protagonists in the form of girls in pyjamas who are occluded from and disciplined by myriad mechanisms and institutions of violence and oppression they encounter in daily life, demonstrate tactics of escape from and resistance and opposition to masculine, bio-political power.
15. The underground is an area of potential for the artist to reveal hidden secrets, and/or a space of annihilation that enables escape from power. Upon entering the Turkey Pavilion, we encounter the underground space, or shelter, we are familiar with from Eviner's previous video works. This underground space is sometimes shelters for the other where refugees who take refuge in Europe are forced to live, a space of confinement for those who do not conform to the healthy body norms modernity demands, the shelter for a runaway girl wrapped in a lambskin whom the artist had seen in a burned field along the Polatlı-Ankara road where she spent her childhood, and a space of escape and resistance that enables an opportunity for the existence of bio-political bodies who have incurred the wrath of governing power and have been shut out from their homes.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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