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Civic Interaction, Urban Memory, and the Istanbul International Film Festival

Sarah Jilani

> "Destruction is done in the name of progress, a concept that today still holds the status of a supreme authority, sparing people the responsibility for their destructive actions and making them believe that their actions were guided by an authority higher than human interests." – Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (2019)

The socio-political stakes of the Istanbul International Film Festival (IIFF) exceed its temporal and spatial limits. Existing as it does at the charged intersection between urban development, collective memory and freedom of assembly, the festival has survived thirty-eight years of the Turkish state's (once secular-authoritarian, now Islamist-authoritarian) censorious attitude towards the arts – thanks in various parts to civic stewardship, activist journalism, state appeasement and private capital. However, 2010–2013 saw a culture of urban resistance flourish with every April iteration of the film festival; its immediate cause was the impending destruction of the IIFF's flagship cinema, Emek, but its long-fomenting context was the encroachment of the Turkish state, in collusion with the private construction sector, on the urban fabric, collective memory and spatio-civic life of Istanbul. Holding space as it does – physically and discursively – for civic interaction, urban history and public art, the IIFF was politicized through direct action that together constituted the Emek Cinema Resistance. This grassroots movement turned the content and form of the IIFF into a public matter and a public undertaking for three years – that is to say, it initiated a culture of urban resistance that in many ways became a precursor to the millions-strong Gezi Park Protests of May–August 2013, fostering ideas of urban memory and street-based civic interaction during and beyond the official two-week run of the IIFF.

Whilst the temporal specificity of the movement yields important understandings of the relationship between Istanbul's urban fabric, the associations of film-going for one section of its population, and recent forms of social organizing against the privatization of space in Istanbul, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's words in the epigraph to this chapter gesture to the more expansive confrontation that this localized movement expressed. "Agents of destruction" (Azoulay 2019, 69) – in this context the Turkish government, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (also helmed by the governing party at the time), and their cronies in various sectors like construction and transport – persistently sought to justify their urban interventions with the ambiguous terminology of

"progress," enshrining the concept as a kind of "supreme authority" (Azoulay 69) that one challenged at risk to the well-being of one's own society. In a neoliberalising and atomizing city, however, this was not the idea of progress shared by some Istanbulites. They temporarily formed, in Michael Warner's definition, what had "the content and differentiated belonging of a group" (2002, 76), but in seeking to extend the circulation of their political discourse to all the inhabitants of the city, became a "public."

In this chapter, I will argue that two considerations make my above reading possible. The first hinges on historical-social context: namely, how cinema-going, as an art form that cut across various segments of Turkish society since its popularization in the mid-twentieth century, still carries political import in its ability to blur some of the divides in contemporary Istanbul. The second focuses on the festival's urban locality, Beyoğlu: a space of overlapping social, political and economic tensions that render the centuries-old district the closest thing this sprawling metropolis has to a city centre. Taksim Square, located at the end (or beginning) of Beyoğlu's bustling and pedestrianized Istiklâl Avenue, has long been a site of political life. Its place in Istanbul's collective urban memory ranges across different groups: from a place of memoriam and mourning for the aging left (who recall their 1970s May Days spent marching in Taksim), to a place of daily struggle against marginalization for the Syrian refugees looking for casual work in its cheap eateries. This discussion will conjoin these two foci – the social history of cinema in Istanbul and the collective spatial experience/memory of Beyoğlu – through an exploration of the public response to the destruction of Emek Cinema. In Turkey's (still ongoing) period of overlapping Islamist and neoliberal pressures, these two factors and their socio-spatial effects situated the IIFF squarely within civic concerns around who gets to shape urban space.

1. Historical context and key theoretical concepts

As book after book has attested to (Freely 1974; Ortaylı 1987; Mansel 1996; Hughes 2017), it would not be hyperbole to acknowledge that Istanbul is a unique city in terms of history, patterns of migration, geopolitical position, and religious significance. Its six millennia of urban life have yielded a veritable sedimentation of pasts that are still discernible in the present-day metropolis of well over 15 million (*World Population Review* 2020). The politics of managing its "too much history", in Elif Batuman's apt words (2015, n.p.), often quite literally reveals the priorities, policies, ideologies and vested interests of those in power. That power itself is transient, not only in

the political sense (Istanbul has had elected mayors with constitutionally limited terms since 1930) but also in a spatio-temporal sense. The 2004–2013 Yenikapı Harbor Excavation, for instance, revealed a Byzantine harbor dating back to the 5th to 11th century CE, delaying the construction of a high-speed underwater railway. Archeologists were about to call it a day, having unearthed thirty-seven shipwrecks, when a final check of the seabed revealed the remains of a Neolithic dwelling from around 6000 BCE (Kocabaş 2014, 6). An exasperated President Erdoğan decried that a few "pots and pans" were standing in the way of prosperity for the living (Bora 2016).

The city has thrown up such obstacles to centralizing power for centuries; its topography in some ways "lives outside time" (Hughes 2017, 6), thwarting the streamlining of urban transport and construction in accordance with twenty-first century expectations, whilst still being "connected to many worlds" (Hughes 2017, 6) as a vital transit point for shipping oil, gas and grain (*Reuters* 2016). However analytically rich it could be to approach historic cities through the contradictions revealed by the above and other examples, the temporal siloing this can imply is untenable. I find it theoretically fruitful to instead focus here on one aspect of Istanbul's urban fabric and publics, taking my cue from Andreas Huyssen's suggestion that no real city can ever be grasped in its present or past totality, but can certainly be approached through the prismatic vocabulary of the notion of urban imaginaries (2008). The notion of urban imaginaries allows for the multitude of perspectives and subject positions that make sense of urban spatial practices. "In some deep dimension all cities remain invisible," Huyssen proposes (2008, 3), which resonates both with the sedimented nature of Istanbul so vivid in the example above, and with the variously classed, gendered, and raced experiences of this urban space for its inhabitants.

To approach the economic and political dimensions of the Emek Resistance in the contentious district of Beyoğlu, I will also work with David Harvey's (2012) and Mark Purcell's (2002) treatments of Henri Lefebvre's notion of "the right to the city" ([1968] 1996). When Lefebvre argues that "the urban fabric, with its multiple networks of communication and exchange, is likewise part of the means of production ... the division of labour affects the whole of space – not just the 'space of work'" ([1974] 1991, 347), he draws attention to the necessity of a politics of space that can encompass the affective and interpersonal aspects of being urban dwellers – which together may be defined as seeking "the right not to be alienated from the spaces of everyday life" (Mitchell and Villanueva 2010, 667). Harvey's expansion upon this Lefebvrian "right to the city" ([1968] 1996) as a "collective rather than individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably

depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization" (Harvey 2012, 4) highlights how the former occurs alongside and through collective demands of a material nature, including social, political and economic rights and the right to education, work, health, leisure, safety and accommodation. While I will take into account the affective nuances of Beyoğlu's urban imaginary, I therefore seek to keep in sight that "urbanization [as]… a class phenomenon" (Harvey 2012, 5) plays out in Istanbul via the dual-pronged material forces of neoliberal-Islamist and neoliberal-Western capital. The spontaneous civil disobedience of 2010–13 was a case where people attempted to (re)claim their shaping power over some of these material processes of spatial control. Particularly helpful for reading some of their actions will be Purcell's stress on the "right to participation" and "right to appropriation" (2002, 102–3) in Lefebvre's thought.

2. Urbanization and spatial amnesia

Since 2002, Turkey has been ruled by the democratically-elected, pro-Islamic authoritarian government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (abbreviated to AKP in Turkish). It has a pro-free market bent that has boosted Turkey's economy, which grew on average at a rate of 7.2% between 2002 to 2007 and remained relatively prosperous for the duration of the 2008 global financial crisis. This success has been attributed to IMF loans, low inflation, and an increase in private investments, labour productivity, and exports, alongside "maintaining strong macroeconomic and fiscal policy frameworks and opening to foreign trade and finance", in the approving words of the World Bank (2019). This made it the darling of international investors, and the West's poster child for a pro-capitalist, constitutionally secular, but demographically majority-Muslim, country. That said, the "Turkish model" was also taken seriously in other majority-Muslim countries, with much discussion around the time of the Arab Spring about whether Turkey's social and economic practices could be replicated elsewhere (Akyol 2012).

Even though the rapid urbanization that accompanied Turkey's economically strong decade is noted, less frequently is it analyzed as a mechanism for the absorption of capital surpluses. That is precisely the nature of much of the accelerated construction and privatization that characterizes the 2010s in Istanbul. So successful was government-sanctioned urbanization that the subsequent chronic urban space shortage in Istanbul birthed a series of promised construction endeavors of gigantic proportions. Dubbed *Çılgın Projeler* (Crazy Projects) by supporters and critics alike, these environmentally detrimental undertakings opened new peri-urban locations to the construction

sector.[1] The "new ruling class fortified with construction" (Kentel 2016, 140) consists of leading figures in the AKP government and a strata of *yandaş* (follower, adherent) contractors and developers with financially lucrative loyalties to the ruling party. Harvey points to how capital surplus absorption drives (and indeed necessitates) such a situation; urbanization allows accumulation to continue, which creates outlets to absorb the surplus and thereby avoid systemic crises (2012, 18). In this sense, during its two-decade rule, "AKP has primarily fulfilled the requirements of a modern capitalist economy despite its 'New Turkey' rhetoric and 'conservative' and religious discourse" (Kentel 2016, 143). The AKP paints the familiar surplus-absorption-urbanisation model as a kind of Turkish nationalism ("New Turkey") rather than capitalism's imperative. The historic neighborhoods of Istanbul, seen through the lens of market logic, were thus "developed" in ways that "entailed repeated bouts of urban restructuring through 'creative destruction'" (Harvey 2012, 17). Sulukule, Istanbul's historically Roma neighborhood, and Karaköy, a waterfront working-class district that specialized in ship maintenance, are examples that underwent what Harvey describes as the "new 'urbanism' movement that touts the sale of community and a boutique lifestyle as a developer product to fulfill urban dreams" (2012, 14).[2]

By 2013, the neoliberal economic motivations of capital surplus absorption had been well consolidated, and the government's ideological and political preferences as to how urban space should be used became more overt. Socially authoritarian ideas were floated by the state, even if they were never heard of again (for instance, restrictions around the consumption of alcohol and on street-side seating), in a barely veiled warning to the secular demographic of Istanbul. In the midst of such interventions, the IIFF became an unexpected facilitator – physically and discursively – of a period of civic interaction that grew out of the district of Beyoğlu, where the first film screening in Turkey took place in 1896.

3. "Beyoğlu is a tough nut. Those who enter it mindlessly with their axes should beware"

Once a neighborhood of *levantens* (the European population of the Ottoman Empire's late decades), Beyoğlu grew more ethnically Turkish after the violent 6–7 September 1955 Istanbul

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[1] See also Baba (2020) on these projects, like Canal Istanbul.

[2] See also Karaman (2014) and van Dobben Schoon (2014) on Sulukule.

Pogroms, where the district's Greek and Jewish businesses and populations were driven out.[3] Today, because of the relatively cheap accommodation to be found in the area's aging buildings, as well as the availability of informal work in the district's many retail units, Beyoğlu attracts foreign migrants, representing "a nexus of active agents from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, working with different languages" (Demirkol-Ertürk and Paker 2014). As Ozan Karaman notes in the preface to his study on urban renewal and resistance Istanbul, there is "no single predominant factor that determines the trajectories of grassroots mobilizations and urban renewal in general" (2014, 291). These are determined by a multitude of local and extra-local dynamics, alliances and discourses. However, in Istanbul the public sphere of street and square situates, as it does in many cities, collective life, thereby inscribing "potential for political interchange that in turn recomposes the metropolis" (Cuff et al. 2020, 2). Taksim Square, which leads into Beyoğlu's main thoroughfare, Istiklâl Avenue, together forms the route of most demonstrations in Istanbul, past and present. Throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s, Istiklâl Avenue was also the locus of Istanbul's cinema-going culture and the heart of Turkey's *Yeşilçam* film industry. Atilla Dorsay, Turkey's veteran film journalist, paints an at times seedy, at times glamorous, and always socio-culturally vibrant urban locale in his 2013 memoir *Emek Yoksa Ben De Yokum!* (If Emek Goes, So Do I!). There, all manner of people deemed by mainstream Turkish society as "bohemians" (journalists, actors, writers, artists) and "misfits" (drag performers, cis and trans sex workers) felt at home (Dorsay 2013, 97).[4]

Dorsay further speaks of this district as inscribed with a certain resistant or dissenting texture that is both topographical and social: "Beyoğlu is a tough nut. Those who enter it mindlessly with their axes should beware" (2013, 112). This speaks both to the ideal of spatial justice – that which "gives orientation" to the "transformative potential" of complex "hyperobjects" like cities (Cuff et al. 2020, 5) – as well as to how Beyoğlu's architectural and spatial configurations render it difficult for state power to permanently penetrate and transform it (whether through ostensibly legal routes like building permits, renovation plans, and public works, or through shadowy means, like state-sanctioned arson).[5] Dorsay wrote the above in the national daily *Cumhuriyet* in 1990, and clarifies upon rereading his own material that "[he] probably wrote this in response to yet another bungled urban intervention on the part of the local municipality" (2013, 112). There is a degree to

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[3] See also Güven (2011) on these pogroms.

[4] All subsequent quotes from Dorsay (2013) and other Turkish sources cited are my translations.

[5] Emine Uşaklıgil's study (2014) details some of these tactics.

which Beyoğlu's history, demographics, and urban texture lend the district the reputation of being "a tough nut", in Dorsay's turn of phrase. That is, its social history, current demographic, and its subterranean "too much history" (Batuman 2015, n.p.) seem to partially block state authority from penetrating the district; steep hills and narrow streets thwart the bulldozer, and its heterogenous inhabitants cannot all be appealed to through AKP's ideology. This heterogeneity is, however, conducive to the forging of dialogues between spatial concerns and other social goals.
Ayşe Deniz Ünan (2015) discusses how Istanbul's LGBTQ+ groups mapped their ongoing struggle for rights onto spatial justice demands during the 2013 Gezi Park protests, in doing so increasing their own interactions with other identity groups – including conservative ones like Turkey's self-identifying "anti-capitalist Muslims" (Başcı 2017). Such new alliances amplified LGBTQ+ voices, drawing attention to the intersections of homophobia, police brutality, and privatization.

The Emek Resistance was born into this socio-spatial push-pull. While valuable studies of political subjectivity (Tascón and Wils 2016); activist cultures (Iordanova and Torchin 2012); and social change (Sharpe 2008) have begun to take account of the relationship between film festivals and political activism**,** scholarship has less often discussed urban space in intersection with this relationship. On the other hand, although Murat Akser brings the municipal politics behind Turkey's film festivals to the fore (2014, 141), he glosses over the IIFF on the grounds that it is insulated from the politics of its local space on account of being funded by private enterprise. In attending to the characteristics of the urban locality within which the Emek Resistance took place, and examining how it was harnessed by protestors from 2010–13, I hope this chapter will begin to address these two omissions, whilst stressing that the picture I arrive at is only one example of how this relationship transpired at a particular time and place.

4. Emek, space and power

A historic movie theatre seating 875, Emek was founded in 1924 by Jewish partners Arditi and Saltiel inside the Cercle d'Orient, a neoclassical 1882 building that was built by the Armenian Abraham Pasha (*SALT* 2011). Purchased by a Turkish family in 1932, the then-called Melek (Angel) Cinema got a second lease on life when it was bought in 1957 by the state pension fund and reopened under public ownership as Emek (Labour) Cinema. The main venue of the IIFF since its inception in 1982, Emek's flagging for demolition in 2010 to make way for what was rumored to be yet another shopping centre – Istanbul had nearly 100 at the time (*Habertürk* 2018) – sparked

collective civic action that reached a peak in terms of participation, media attention, and politicization around every April edition of the annual two-week festival.

Even this cursory summary begins to suggest the multiple temporal and social layers embedded in Emek the building and the cinema. Dorsay and many of his generation recall Emek and the other cinema salons of Beyoğlu as the "sites of [their] coming-of-age milestones, in imagination and in reality" (2013, 14), as well as a rare depository of both working-class and middle- to upper-class urban memories. As working-class entertainment, cinemas flourished in open-air settings in semi-urban and rural Turkey throughout the mid-twentieth century. These experiences often involved live audience reactions, the excitement of attending an "acceptable" space of transgression (in the sense of close opposite-sex socializing), and the fascination of adolescents seeing heterosexual romantic acts in plain (on-screen) sight for the first time. Although Istanbul's cinema-going crowds included upper-class audiences, matinée and weekend screenings were within the reach of working salaries. Cinema-going grew to have associations of being the "people's art form" (Hayır 2014). This was the result of a combination of factors that brought about changes in people's attitudes to leisure and socialization in Istanbul (Hayır 2014, 184), with money and time often set aside for film-going relative to one's earning power. Factors contributing to these changes included rural to urban migration in the 1960s, the rarity of televisions in homes, the rise of "star" fandoms, which involved actors typecast into a macho-yet-honorable male protagonist trope that held especial cultural appeal, and the relatively politically liberal atmosphere in Turkey in that decade. As such, the state kept a close eye on this popular pastime, using censorship often.[6]

However, this relative class diversity amongst audiences during the golden age (1960s) of *Yeşilçam* (Green Pine), the Turkish film industry, intersected with what was a comparatively ethnically and religiously homogenous time in the locality. In both its built environment and social history, Emek Cinema was a reminder of the pre-1955 cosmopolitanism of Beyoğlu. The first film screening in Turkey that took place in 1896 on Istiklâl Avenue had the participation of a mainly Christian demographic (Arslan 2011, 25), with cinema coming to the city's predominantly Muslim districts like Fatih around the same time. This segregated start is not so much a result of differing receptions of film by religious affiliation, but because all aspects of life were concentrated in particular districts for particular demographics: a remnant of organic Ottoman-era urban spatial

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[6] On Turkish state politics and censorship in the '60s and '70s, see Mutlu and Koçer (2012).

proximities by ethnicity. However much Istanbul's *gayrimüslim* (non-Muslim) communities have since been decimated in numbers, Beyoğlu is marked by visual reminders of its cosmopolitan past in ways that recall Dolores Hayden's idea of "body memory" in relation to urban place, wherein body memory "connects into places because shared experience of dwellings, public spaces, give body memory to its social component, modified by gender, class, race" (1995, 48).

An example of such "body memory" resurfacing was in 2012, when the İnci (Pearl) Bakery, by then a veritable institution in its 68th year of operation, went bust. Located at street level within the Cercle D'Orient building and established in 1944 by Albanian Greek migrant Lucas Zigoridi, "it always represented the last public emblem of Beyoğlu's non-Muslim community, a culture long on life support," wrote one elegy for the shop (*Culinary Backstreets* 2012, n.p). The area grew more religiously homogenous (Muslim Turkish, in this case) from the 1960s, but body memories that complicated this homogeneity lived on. One such memory is Dorsay's, of the 1988 IIFF's closing ceremony he spent on a protest walk against censorship with the celebrated Greek-American director Elia Kazan (Jilani 2011, n.p.). A sexagenarian IIFF attendee, meanwhile, recounted to me how "a film at Emek, then a pudding at İnci" lives on in memory as her quintessential festival experience. Lefebvre's reference to space as "inscriptions in the simultaneity of the external world of a series of times, the rhythms of the city, the rhythms of the urban population" ([1970] 2003, 224) is thus especially applicable to the loaded cultural and social meanings of this cinema, in this particular building, in this district. During 2013's converging neoliberal pressures, this spatial inscription of time was poised to succumb to the consequences of space being fundamental in any exercise of power (Gregory et. al. 2015).

5. "Hands Off Our Labour"

The Emek Resistance occurred largely from April 2010 to April 2013, after the state shut Emek's doors for the last time in October 2009 following the end of that year's *Film Ekimi* (Film October) festival, a smaller off-shoot of the IIFF. As works on the Cercle D'Orient building began, defending this space became defending "a series of times" (Lefebvre [1968] 1996, 10) embodied in Beyoğlu. The movement, which consisted of demonstrations that took various forms on Istiklâl Avenue and Yeşilçam Street, closely embedded the aesthetic into the political and the urban-spatial. It used forms of civic assembly and action including marches, protests, demos, talks, outdoor film screenings, impromptu musical performances, and collective mnemonic engagement with the

absence of Emek. This latter entailed the spontaneous and informal exchange of memories and anecdotes between strangers. Having a "favorite row" in Emek, for example, was a frequently discussed quirk amongst the participants (*Audience Emancipated* 2016), speaking to the powerful body memory (Hayden 1995) that the architecture of the Art Nouveau movie theatre – with its "troublesome" seats in terms of screen visibility – had fostered in its audiences. These interactions began to draw connections between the encroachment of neoliberal capital on urban space, memories of cinema-going, and "art action" as acts of reclaiming space.[7]

The demonstrations involved participants of all ages, with a large representation of students and arts sector workers, blocking pedestrian and vehicle usage of Istiklâl Avenue in non-violent gatherings. Despite the high representation of students of diverse backgrounds, and of educated but financially precarious "misfits" (in Dorsay's tongue-in-cheek shorthand for dissident writers, artists, and activists), the relatively broad concerns of the movement's demands actually revived, to an extent, Istanbul's aforementioned historic cross-class affiliations with cinema. Conservative-leaning small shopkeepers, increasingly stretched by the effects rapid development was having on their place of business, LGBTQ+ communities, for whom Beyoğlu was a relative safe haven, and sex workers, who felt policed all the more by the proliferation of private security in the new shopping centers and construction sites, were some of the groups who also participated in demonstrations in smaller numbers. Actions included speeches delivered non-hierarchically, from both organizers and participants, tying hundreds of film tickets to the railings of Emek's shuttered entrance, hanging large banners down the length of the Cercle D'Orient building's façade, and chanting slogans about rights to art, rights to space, affordable renting, anti-consumerism, and the reclamation of Beyoğlu from state securitization. Slogans and chants markedly articulated both a defense of Emek Cinema, and resistance to its demolition's root causes. The "shopping-mall-ification" (Ateşman 2015) of Istanbul was a key refrain here, addressing the state's "destruction in the name of progress" (Azoulay 2019, 69). Banners explicitly linking the destruction of Emek with "shopping-mall-ification" pointed to the mutually exclusive notions of urbanization that each embodied: the former, Emek, standing for a vision of public space as an affordable place of art, entertainment and community within a building that spoke to its inhabitants of Istanbul's living history, the latter, the mall, a vision of public space as a tightly controlled, sterile environment of cosmetic brilliance and constant surveillance, where taking up space without consuming is loitering. The slogan *"Emek'ten*

[7] I borrow the term from Altuğ Yalçıntaş to mean activism with creativity and humor that "turns the joyful rhetoric of action into a series of serious threats for political authority" (2015, 118).

çıkın, Demirören'i yıkın" ("Quit Emek, demolish Demirören"), for instance, referred to the Demirören shopping centre that one section of the Cercle D'Orient building had already been transformed into by 2011.

This language bespeaks a refusal of the state's attempts at appeasement, which included assurances that a "new and improved Emek" would be accessible through Demirören. The words of a participant interviewed in 2014 illustrate how the demonstrators were able to see through the state's claims by drawing from their own spatial experiences of Beyoğlu:

> Rather than 'actual' movie theaters which stand in their own right, I am forced to be in places where I cannot breathe, [where] I cannot reach the street easily. They promote [multiplex movie theaters inside shopping malls] in order to prohibit people's habits and activities on the streets, and make them consume more (Ateşman 2015, 693).

In addition to the refusal of the shopping centre as an acceptable alternative to public urban space, the vocabulary of dissent throughout the demonstrations also expressed a more broadly anti-capitalist demand by punning on the meaning of the word "emek". Emek, used in the cinema's case as a proper noun, is its name; however, as a noun, it translates from the Turkish as "labor". The slogan "Hands off our Emek(/labor)" and similar others associated the collective place and body memories evoked by the movie theatre with the participants themselves as productive classes, as opposed to *yandaş* developers and corporate entities reliant on privatization, speculation and embezzling public funds. Building identification around the concept of "labor", this allowed the participants – in their shared but varied situations of disenfranchisement within Istanbul's urban spaces – to feel like "addressees" rather than "bystanders" during the demonstrations, in Warner's definition of publics (2002, 77). "I think a certain segment of society, which was not on the streets before, was mobilized against the demolishing of the movie theatre," one co-organizer of the Emek Resistance said (Ateşman 2015, 693) during the 2014 IIFF. Ateşman's interviewee points out that the issue of public urban space brought into the Emek movement's remit people who would not have necessarily identified with, or come out onto the streets for, "arts and culture" issues. My personal observations during the IIFF's iterations (2010–2016), as well as the audience ethnographies of Ayşe N. Erek and Ayşe H. Köksal (2014) and Ateşman (2015), suggest that the movement did, to an extent, therefore bring together people with different income levels and backgrounds. They ranged from students and intellectuals who were responsive to arts issues; to old-timers who were keenly feeling the destruction of their place memories in and around

Beyoğlu's film scene; to those whose situations were foremost materially rather than affectively tied to the survival of Beyoğlu's urban fabric itself, such as those with precarious work in the district, or for whom Beyoğlu was a relative refuge from exclusion.

Participation could thus broadly be called cross-class, in that the above range of socio-economic backgrounds were represented, but it should be noted that this also derived from the two "sides" I sketched above in this particular situation. The two larger categories of affiliation, which put working and middle class participants on the same "side" even if everyone's reasons for coming out to the street differed somewhat, were delineated along the fault lines indicated by the participants' appropriation of the word "labor". The recurring slogans, signs and chants included: "Hey you – put down our Emek/labor"; "Hands off our Emek/labor, AKP", "Emek/labor and capital will never reconcile"; "Wake up Istanbul, defend your Emek/labor"; and "Don't touch my Emek/labor, my culture, my history".[8] This word-play's vocabulary of relations between public place, neoliberal capital, and labor rights fostered collective identification about being of the vast majority in the city – in the sense that all, whether unemployed or in working or middle class jobs, reproduced their urban existence through their labors. The "them" that participants could define themselves against, and in doing so perhaps minimize some of the class differences amongst themselves, was in this case the *yandaş* developer class, who grew capital through access to capital in the first place, not through labor. Although strategically binaristic, this broad "us" and "them" made possible a "side" that could make its demands from a place of commonality.

Also accompanying the demonstrations were "guerrilla" film screenings on Yeşilçam street, outside the boarded-up entrance to Emek. The screenings, carried out with little more than a projector and whatever chairs could be gathered from local businesses, turned the street into "an active street again," in one participant's words (Ateşman 2015, 692). To make sense of it as a form of civil disobedience and a demand for spatial justice, rather than "merely" an outdoor film screening, we can consider the specific situation that it generates. "What arises when moving images are encountered in public spaces are specific situations," scholar Annie Dell'Aria describes: "The content, context and structure of the work, in addition to the specificity of the spectator, construct each situation. The meaning of the work of public art is thus embedded within that

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[8] Sources for these slogans and posters include press coverage by bianet.org, sendika.org, the @EmekBizim Twitter handle, and diken.com.tr; personal observations; and visuals shared on social media by attendees from 2010–13.

particular configuration of space, place, image, sound, and spectator" (2016, 18). In these semi-spontaneous screenings on Yeşilçam street, the line between audiences and co-organizers became blurred as troubleshooting technical issues, curating the film selection, and crowd control became collective tasks fulfilled by all present. "Unlike the predetermined architecture and seating arrangements of the cinema and domestic television, the body's relationship to the screen in public space is ever-changing and fluid" (Dell'Aria 2016, 19), and in this case, to recreate the architecture and seating arrangements of the cinema in light of the attack on the space of the said cinema itself became a mode of civic interaction in which embodied cinema-going was one in a series of actions that created a public out of a group. Warner points out that "the idea of a public, unlike a concrete audience or the public of any polity, is text-based – even though publics are increasingly organized around visual or audio texts" (2002, 51). The observation maps remarkably well on to this collective appropriation of Yeşilçam street, which turned, mediated by the audiovisual text, an audience into a public. Embodying "the world-making and creativity of publicness" (Warner 2002, 54) in its usage of space, these guerrilla street screenings "spilled" the IIFF out of the multiplexes it was forced to utilize after 2009 following Emek's closure – a move which festival-goers understood to be a neoliberalising tactic (Ateşman 2015, 693). The guerrilla screenings even challenged the structures of a private film festival itself, by delivering a parallel kind of "service" through voluntary, collective labor – thus also highlighting how "externally organized frameworks of activity" prove "a poor substitute" to self-organized discourse, in the context of a public "produc[ing] a sense of belonging and activity" (Warner 2005, 52).

In a self-reflexive move, participants in the Emek Resistance also chronicled the period through their own eyes. *Audience Emancipated: The Struggle for Emek Movie Theater* was created by a collective called *Emek Bizim İstanbul Bizim* (Emek is Ours, Istanbul is Ours), an initiative formed in 2010 whose members remain anonymous. This 48-minute collage documentary was released in 2016, and consists of footage collected by all involved. Featuring scenes from the demonstrations, impromptu interviews, musical performances, and inserts from other audiovisual material, it forms a record of three years of activism. *Audience Emancipated* retells the Emek Resistance as a series of interwoven narratives both borne of, and constantly bearing upon, the city as a site of concrete social connections.

An attitude of shared ridicule directed towards the powers encroaching upon Beyoğlu is one such register of social connection captured by the documentary. This collective tone or mood did

significant affective and political work throughout the Emek Resistance. Perhaps best described as a mixture of sarcastic humor about the everyday ineptitudes of the authorities, world-weariness towards the city's pace and chaos, and a defensive affection towards these latter elements, this shared attitudinal register was recreated in the documentary using Dadaist influences and montage. A sequence, for example, overlays the intro tune of 20th Century Fox onto a clip of magnificent skyscrapers glinting at sunset. The dramatic soundtrack peters out as we cut to a Turkish contractor giving a press tour of the partially demolished Cercle D'Orient building. The contractor's vague arm gestures and words – "the new Emek will begin roughly here. There'll be an exit out to Yeşilçam street here" – form a deliberate contrast with the pompous grandeur of the music, mocking the government contractors' self-image as magnanimous businessmen. Ridicule is also deployed in segments that depict police use of water cannon on crowds on Istiklâl Avenue on 7 April 2013 in an attempt to disperse protestors outside Demirören Mall. As the crowd backs off reluctantly, booing the police, the documentary cuts to a clip from *State of Siege* (1975) by Costa-Gavras, which depicts police officers comically running to-and-fro in a deserted courtyard. The montage leaves us with the impression of a cornered state apparatus that fears the creative humor of its own populace. Humor was something that the Gezi protests later harnessed spectacularly for its subversive power.[9]

5. Conclusion

The *Emek is Ours, Istanbul is Ours* collective highlight that their documentary "aims to reflect the common imagination of the people who defended their right to the city. It carries the idea of a new publicness" (*Audience Emancipated* 2016). The idea of a new "publicness" does important political and conceptual work in the context at hand: one where those "spatial embodiments of histories, collective lives, intimacies, contestations, power relations, and social distinctions" together form "the cultural artifacts of urban space and the micro-settings of everyday life" in Istanbul (Cuff et al. 2020, 12). I propose that the idea of a "new publicness" gestures to, and provides an illustration of, Lefebvre's "right to the city" ([1968] 1996) in ways that highlight the concept's "more radical, more problematic, and more indeterminate" aspects (Purcell 2002, 99). These are aspects that Purcell dubs a new "urban politics of the inhabitant," which I believe maps closely onto the vision that the *Emek is Ours, Istanbul is Ours* collective sought to pin down with

[9] See also Yalçıntaş (2015) on humor in Gezi.

the phrase “new publicness”. Purcell highlights that we lack a comprehensive explanation of what the “right to the city” (Lefebvre [1968] 1996) is or how it would challenge, compliment, or replace current rights. The case of the IIFF and the Emek Resistance can enrich our understanding of those elements that collectively form the demand of the “right to the city” (Lefebvre [1968] 1996) in a situation where, ostensibly, the state *appears* to be delivering services and “destruction in the name of progress” (Azoulay 2019, 69). The power relations that currently underlie the production of urban space are ones that disenfranchise people with respect to decisions that produce urban space. Purcell singles out the “right to participation” and the “right to appropriation” (Purcell 2002, 102–3) from Lefebvre’s thinking in order to sketch out what enfranchisement could look like. Briefly, urban inhabitants would have a direct and central role in decisions that produce urban space such as policy and investment. The right to appropriate, meanwhile, would entail the ability to physically access, occupy, and use urban space.

There is a close alignment here with this concretizing reading of Lefebvre’s concept and the primary grievances of the movement that is the case study of this chapter. The transformation of Beyoğlu took place amidst state contempt, opacity and authoritarianism, where urban inhabitants were neither consulted nor informed (the denial of the right to participation), and its results further restricted physical access to urban space for any purpose other than being an individual consumer (the denial of the right to appropriation). This resistance period in Istanbul articulated desires that are at once intangible–subjective and concrete–economic: complementary and intersecting desires that, as Lefebvre suggested, converge upon how much people feel they have physical access to, and decision-making power over, the production of their urban space and its social relations. The *Emek Is Ours, Istanbul Is Ours* collective describe their activist approach in terms that make these connections, historicizing the on-again, off-again three-year period of civic disobedience within Istanbul’s longer term transformations, whilst explicitly reminding the viewer of the movement's political goals: “Should we search for the story of Emek in encyclopedias, or in what its curtain and screen witnessed over the years? Or in its layered history, [which] overlaps with historical turning points in Turkey? We didn’t do any of these; instead, we searched for Emek’s story in the streets” (*Audience Emancipated* 2016). The term “the streets” abstracts the events they recorded by designating as a storyteller urban space itself, which is the political base from which public pressure can be – and was, in Beyoğlu’s case – exerted upon those seeking to reserve the power to produce urban space. It also, at one and the same time, refers specifically to the hundreds who were

physically occupying Istiklâl Street and, in doing so, continuing to write "Emek's story" in the building's hour of peril.

That *Emek Is Ours, Istanbul Is Ours* dubs this state of being "a new publicness" suggests not only the political but also the intersubjective potential experienced by participants throughout the three years: the potential to be *in/of* Istanbul, and (re)produce its urban space in ways that exercise a "right to participation" and "right to appropriation" (Purcell 2002, 102–3). A period where urban memory was activated, the Emek Resistance holds lessons for those of us concerned with what the fight for the "right to the city" (Lefebvre [1968] 1996) can look like today, in how it attempted to call into being a new publicness that was about socio-spatial laboring: that is, the labour of refusing, contesting, resisting, subverting, mocking and where possible outright challenging those processes, actors and institutions that have no investment in the production of urban space except whatever enables the absorption and re-generation of capital. Whether or not the Emek Resistance succeeded in wresting some of these rights away from the state is a question without a definite answer, but the attempt itself briefly created a public – and that public continues to remember.

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