

Gürsoy Doğtaş

The 13th Istanbul Biennale and the Squatters' Movement of Gezi Park in an Ideological Competition for the Practice of Radical Democracy

Decisions on the gigantic constructional transformation processes in Istanbul are not only made behind closed doors, they also strategically depoliticize public space. Resistance against this dynamic and its ideological foundation, a neoliberal technique of governance, burst open at several locations in Istanbul in 2013.

Two prominent but entirely different examples of such resistance are the 13th Istanbul Biennial and the Gezi Park occupy movement. Although they are similar in many respects, for example, both fall back on theories of an agonistic public developed by Chantal Mouffe and see the waning of democratic negotiation possibilities, while seeking to counter this development through the employment of artistic strategies and with the means of conflict, the two concerns do not join in a chain of equivalence.

Despite a comparable horizon, the differences between the Biennial and Gezi Park movement result in particular from their form of organization and ideological background. The Istanbul Biennale, itself the result of a neoliberal restructuring of politics and economy in Turkey and constantly expanding its hegemonies, advocates an art seeking to criticize the neoliberal development (but not its own) and destabilize sedimented power relations. This blind spot in regard to the Istanbul Biennial's own way of functioning is the starting point of my lecture.

Gürsoy Doğtaş is a freelance curator and author. He was a PhD candidate in the transdisciplinary post-graduate program Assemblies and Participation: Urban Publics and Performance at the HafenCity University in Hamburg, Germany (2012-14). He attended with his dissertation topic "Agonistic exhibition strategies of a hegemonic exhibition complex: About the politics of the 13th Istanbul and the 7th Berlin Biennial".

From 2010-12, Doğtaş was part of the Kunstraum München, an art association focusing on political and conceptual art, where he organized an alternative academy called "Forms of Informal Research" (2011), and curated the first solo exhibition of Palestinian-Jordanian artist Oraib Toukan's work, entitled Splice (2012). He writes for art magazines such as Texte zur Kunst, Frieze d/e, and Contemporary And. From 2007-2013 Doğtaş edited Matt Magazine, an artist-zine focusing on the tradition of conceptual art engaging with social and political action.