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DEVISING THE PERSONAL IN POST-PANDEMIC ISTANBUL

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Istanbul's theatre landscape has been a site of resilience and reclamation, with artists devising theatre and performance to navigate the resultant societal stasis. This study examines how autobiographical material in devised performances reflects societal crises and serves as a medium for artists to express individual and collective disorientation. Through an autoethnographic examination of three Istanbul-based artists—Melek Ceylan, Onur Karaoğlu and Didem Kris—this research captures the nuanced interplay between personal narrative and communal resonance. The methodology integrates performance analysis with artist interviews, utilising a new materialist lens to emphasise the ethics of care within the creative process. The findings demonstrate that autobiographical material in post-pandemic devised performances in Istanbul transcends individual experiences, addressing broader societal challenges and fostering a sense of communal identity. In doing so, this study illuminates the transformative potential of devising post-pandemic theatre, suggesting its power to chronicle the era's challenges and offer alternative narratives that confront Turkey's mainstream performing arts paradigms.

Keywords: devising, autobiography, solo performance, post-pandemic, Istanbul, auto-ethnography

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Introduction

This study explores the role of autobiographical material in the post-pandemic theatre landscape of Istanbul, focusing on how artists have used personal narratives to navigate the social, economic and artistic challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The scope of this research includes an analysis of selected post-pandemic performances, examining how these works reflect broader performing arts landscape. By addressing this underexplored area, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary Turkish theatre and its adaptive strategies during times of crisis. This article, drawn from my doctoral research titled *Devising Affects*, explores the challenges faced by performers during devising process. The concept of 'devising' in theatre refers to a collaborative creation process that often involves the integration of personal and communal narratives. While this doctoral inquiry encompasses both solo and collective works, with a focus on the potential of devising as a practice that embraces and transforms obstacles, this article shines a particular light on devising the personal—a significant devising approach prevalent in Turkey. The solo pieces devised by Melek Ceylan, Onur Karaoğlu and Didem Kris are pivotal case studies in this article in Turkey's post-pandemic scene. Despite the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts, there has been limited research on how autobiographical material in Istanbul's theatre has adapted to reflect and address the ensuing societal challenges. This study aims to explore how autobiographical material in devised performances reflects the societal disorientation experienced in Istanbul during the post-pandemic period, by exploring these artists devising approaches by making their socioeconomic conditions or social environments the thematic core of their works. Inspired and affected by the events happening around them, their productions, mainly based upon social and environmental events such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the mucilage phenomenon, occupy a central position in this article. Their integration of their environment and conditions adds another layer of complexity to their narratives. Each artist, as will be elaborated upon later, transparently places themselves and their stories about the world around them as integral components of their productions, showcasing their roles within their creative processes and offering alternatives to the discussion of relationality within a devised production, particularly regarding the dynamics between the personal and communal aspects.

The research methodology employs a multifaceted data collection and analysis approach, critically analysing the performed pieces and utilising an auto-ethnographic approach that shapes how we interpret and evaluate the performances. This study analyzes recordings of performances and interviews with performers to explore their creative processes, with a focus on devising techniques. Furthermore, our methodology involves an examination of presentations, interviews and newspaper articles where artists discuss their work and their approach to theatre and performance, drawing from diverse sources across different platforms. An autoethnographic approach was selected because it allows for a deep, reflective analysis of personal experiences, which is critical for understanding the subjective and emotional dimensions of performance in a post-pandemic context. To enhance the robustness of the analysis, thematic analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts, identifying recurring themes related to the challenges of artistic practices. Although discussing personal aspects of devising in relation to emotions may seem subjective, the new materialist approach in this study provides a framework for analyzing the relational dynamics between all elements of the performances, particularly how these relationships inform practical and ethical considerations in the creative process. We recognise that knowledge production entails active engagement with the material world, shaping our understanding of the multifaceted nature of the subject matter, including the "vitality of nonhuman others" (Harris & Holman Jones, 2019, pp. 4–5). This new materialist perspective emphasises the interconnectedness of research subjects and objects within the universe, as expressed through intra-action (Barad, 2007). Building upon insights on relationality, we acknowledge the constructed nature of time within (post)modernity, particularly in the post-pandemic era, and its impact on research practices (Halberstam, 2011). Aligning our approach with autobiographical devising adds complexity and allows us to reflect on our roles as members of a community of artists and researchers in the post-pandemic era and explore new materialist ideas and community dynamics within this framework that resists the challenges of the "structure of feeling" (Anderson, 2014, p. 135). Ultimately, our methodology encourages consideration of the political, affective and embodied dimensions of the discourse on the personal–communal, shaping our engagement with the productions and devising processes and our writing process on the subject matter (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 733).

Artists in Crisis

On a rainy December day in 2021, the Moda Stage, a recognized independent theatre and performance venue in Istanbul, hosted a performance that coincided with my first time attending a live show since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over a year had passed since leaving the city due to economic, political, and social constraints; the goal of this return visit for a doctoral qualification exam was to attend as many new performances as possible.Intrigued by the comeback narratives of performers following a period when stages worldwide had simultaneously shut down, I eagerly anticipated *The Twelfth House (2021)*, which was scheduled to be performed at Moda that night, where the artistic team had rehearsed at the same venue for

slightly more than a year. This play, which had premiered a month prior, was devised by the actress Melek Ceylan, who has a background in acting and performing in State Theatre, site-specific performances, television and cinema productions and Moda Stage's theatre plays. Along with my performer colleagues, we settled onto the cushions at the front, part of the seating arrangement that ensured close proximity to the glass wall behind which Melek Ceylan was to perform. The play unfolded in an unconventional setting, with the audience positioned in the foyer, observing a white covered glass wall where the performance would evidently take place. With the excitement of witnessing a familiar face perform and recalling the evocative joy of being an audience member—a sensation lost during the pandemic— The reflective glass surface between the stage and the audience captured attention. Before the performance began, the reflection of the audience, along with masked faces, became visible on the glass surface, symbolizing the many layers of distance created by the pandemic. The decision was made that rainy December day to research the devising approach in theatre and performance set against the backdrop of the post-pandemic scene, a period marked by global closures of cultural and entertainment venues.

Yet, amid the familiar faces and the joy of reconnecting inside theatre venues, or in the foyer of a venue-which were the audience was seated at Moda Stage when Ceylan performed, I could not help but sense a shift in our experience of being both audience members and artists in the performing arts scene that the pandemic had accelerated. Navigating these complex emotions and seeking solace in the upcoming performance, the intentions of 'a woman striving to make her voice heard,' as presented in the performance description, were deeply considered. This moment of reflection brought the realization that this invitation to speak out through theatre and performance serves as a testament to the resilience of artists and production teams, bringing performances to life and reaching audiences despite the increasing difficulties posed by the capitalist economy to which theatre and performance are bound. This study underscores the essence of devising as both a struggle and a practice, offering a transparent means of self-expression amid prevailing disorientation.

In the context of the performing arts, the term 'production' encompasses an artistic process and an organizational endeavor intricately intertwined with economic, political, and social mobility, shaped by its conditions and opportunities. Despite the challenges facing artists engaged in theatre and performance production, this article focuses on the approach of artists inspired by their own life experiences and observations, engaging in devising theatre and performance that reveal the crisis of theatre and performance-making. This crisis and its cultural transformation have been unfolding throughout the 21st century in Turkey amid social conflicts, political tensions, and economic instability. From the social upheavals of the Gezi Protests to the tragedies of suicide bombings and attacks in Suruç, Ankara, and Kobanê (Başar, 2014; Gümüş, 2023; Verstraete, 2022), and the 2015 coup attempt and subsequent state of emergency declared by the government (Verstraete 2018), artists have faced numerous obstacles requiring perseverance to continue. With the onset of the pandemic, these ongoing transformations became even more apparent, revealing the field's precariousness. Studies have examined the impact of the global health crisis on the performing arts. The cultural and arts sector, struggling to survive through digital platforms during quarantines, faced substantial challenges due to limited support for cultural professionals and independent artists. According to the 2021 report by the Association of Theater Producers, 73.3% of theatre workers in Turkey lost their jobs, and 93.1% experienced a decrease in monthly income during the pandemic (Gümüş, 2023; Yiğit, 2021). The aftermath saw the closure of 503 out of 608 theatre venues as of 2021 (Erkan & Maral, 2022).

One of the few solo performances produced in Istanbul by devising the personal after the COVID-19 pandemic is Melek Ceylan's *The Twelfth House (2021)*, in which she weaves a narrative born from collaborative efforts with Guided Autobiography (GAB) trainer Mürüvet Esra Yıldırım, navigating her story through the lens of the pandemic. The audience was positioned behind a glass case, reminiscent of a store window, where Ceylan, holding a suitcase, began to narrate inaudibly, her lips moving without sound—a powerful metaphor for the struggle to be heard. The performance interweaves narratives of her struggles to amplify her voice, creating a compelling commentary on the artist's role in post-pandemic society. Ceylan's embodiment of the theme of speaking out relates to the artist in crisis making theatre as a woman and making ends meet as an artist. As Heddon notes, 'The vast majority of autobiographical performances have been concerned with using the public arena of performance to 'speak out', attempting to make visible denied or marginalised subjects or to 'talk back', aiming to challenge, contest and problematise dominant representations about those subjects' (Heddon, 2007: 20). As Ceylan's personal story unfolds, its political resonance becomes increasingly apparent, emphasizing the narrative's intent to highlight the artist's crisis transparently. Ceylan seeks to bring the artist's crisis into the realm of performance, exploring different ways to amplify the voices of a neglected professional group in the post-pandemic era, striving to transcend mere representation.

This journey takes the audience through the various stages of Ceylan's life, from the houses she inhabited in Mersin and Adana to her pursuit of an acting career in Istanbul. Along this path, she shares fragments from different times and places of her diverse experiences, from her identity as a female Kurdish Alevi woman to her acting profession. Navigating between physical spaces and personal, intimate experiences, she

symbolically illustrates her story with houses, stick figures, numbers, words, and lines, drawing onto the glass case before her—an aesthetic and artistic act that represents her effort to make her story visible. By vocalising and drawing—any effort to make her story visible—her own life experiences, she presents the personal as political through devising rather than portraying a character attempting to speak out. Her effort to amplify her voice from behind the glass case demonstrates the potential to transform obstacles into tools, showcasing the constructive role of artists as social and political subjects in crisis. This approach, which 'demand[s] the performer give of the self-situated beneath the socially constructed personality', requires 'a considerable investment' (Arendell, 2022: 3). As the entire glass surface becomes filled with the lines of her life's journey, the story comes full circle back to its beginning—the pandemic. At this juncture, while water droplets running from above the glass surface begin to erase what has been drawn, we are introduced to the title of the performance. Ceylan probes astrology, specifically focusing on the concept of The Twelfth House, which, in her own words from the performance, symbolises 'the first signs of new life among the ruins of old life' and the 'collective unconscious'. As the water continues to flow, Ceylan tirelessly redraws the shapes. The emergence of new life now seems disoriented and distorted, much like the lines flowing down the glass, changing shape as the water keeps erasing the old life.

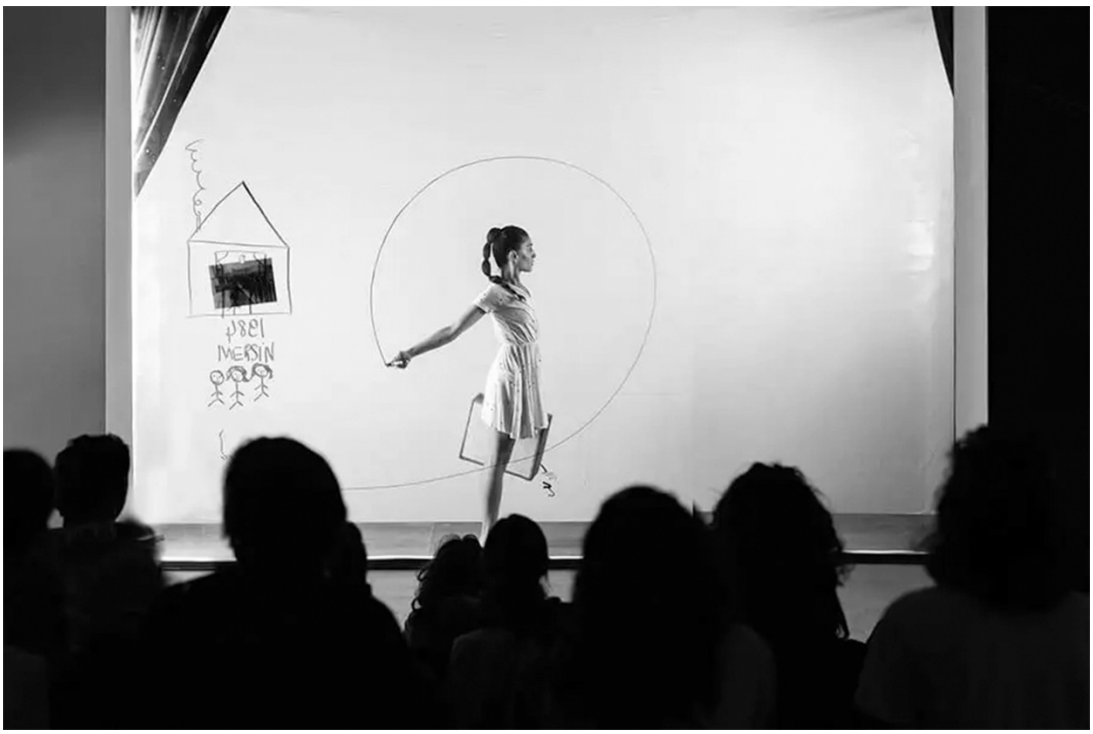

Figure 1: Melek Ceylan, The Twelfth House, 2021. Photo. İstanbul. © Orçun Kaya

Ceylan's description of this piece, where a glass serves as a 'transparent, unobscured, inviting' barrier (Sivil Düşün, 2022) highlights its symbolic potential. The portrayal of being behind a showcase, striving to amplify the heroine's journey, metaphorically contributes to the discourse on autobiographical content within devised techniques. The essence of autobiographical performance lies in the authenticity and vulnerability of sharing personal stories on stage. Similarly, the creation of a character or persona typically provides distance from a personal narrative and reduces vulnerability. In this performance, however, the glass window functions as both a persona and a mask for Ceylan, transitioning her from actor to performer and enabling a deliberate distance from her personal story (Hill & Paris, 2021: 36). This form of performance challenges traditional notions of acting by prioritizing genuine self-representation over portraying fictional characters. It emphasizes the significance of the performer's lived experiences, transforming the act of performance into 'non-acting,' which blurs the distinction between the performer's identity and her stage persona. The blurred lines between reality and fiction, further complicated by the audience's diverse experiences during the pandemic, diminish the relevance of such distinctions. Through the metaphorical and physical transparency and reflection of the glass window, an opportunity arises to explore the societal resonance of shared narratives, transcending Ceylan's authorship or construction of details. However, even with some aspects of this story being genuine, the audience is prompted to consider their own positioning as witnesses to Ceylan's narrative, whether fact or fiction, recognizing its inherent truth.

This experience of witnessing an autobiography on stage serves as 'an invitation to engage in two-way communication, and within devised autobiographical performance that invitation is usually personal and intimate' (Govan et al 2007: 78). However, as an audience member, it is not always clear whether it is your own personal or intimate story that is resonating, or that of Ceylan's. At times, both narratives may intertwine in unexpected ways. This personal and intimate aspect of devising the personal often leads to a political standpoint. Ceylan embodies the role of the narrator-performer, sharing her 'inability to do her job' due to the pandemic and her efforts to continue making theatre within her artistic journey, despite being advised to pursue it 'as a hobby.' This narrative also highlights the systemic obstacles preventing the continuation of her theatrical work (Ridout, 2009). In a subsequent interview conducted as part of this research, Ceylan discussed the origins of the performance. She explained that after the 'silence actions' demonstrations by theatre workers in Istanbul—who were left precarious and unsupported by the pandemic—she was compelled to ask what comes next. Motivated to continue her profession 'no matter what the conditions are,' and aware of the difficulties in assembling large teams under pandemic conditions, she initially sought a text for her theatrical work. Eventually, she decided to draw from her own experiences, realizing the challenges of 'making your own life story as a material' and 'acting as oneself' (Ceylan, 2023). Yet, she also recognized the potential of this approach to build a bridge between her personal narratives and the audience, emphasizing that 'this was not only her story' (Ceylan, 2023).

Ceylan underscores that devising theatre using autobiographical material serves as a means of constructing community narratives and capturing 'the structure of feeling' from personal archives (Pendzik et al., 2016). This process involves intentionally sharing 'private stories for public consumption' (Govan et al., 2007: 68) and the act of 'witnessing personal testimony' (Govan et al. 2007: 70). Whether or not audience members personally relate to the challenges faced by artists, Ceylan's performance invites them to engage with the shared struggles of surviving in a city like Istanbul, where crises such as the pandemic affect everyone, especially artists, in multiple ways. This dynamic underscores the significance of autobiographical performances in forging connections between personal narratives and broader social events. Within this 'affective atmosphere' (Anderson, 2006; Harris & Holman Jones 2021), the private sphere is transformed into the public domain, enabling the exploration of the relationship between the personal and the political through a social and economic struggle. Such performances aspire to reveal the nature of the performing subject and the discourses that mould them, challenging social invisibility and transforming an I-Story into a We-Story (Harris & Holman Jones, 2021).

Following this narrative, which resonates through the performance, a sense of unease about the presence of the intervening glass was expressed after congratulating the ensemble. It was contended that, had the glass not posed an obstacle—despite its undeniable aesthetic and metaphorical significance as a theatrical element—Ceylan's voice might have been more discernible, unimpeded by the cacophony of internal struggles typically present in personal narratives. This sentiment stemmed from a desire for clarity in expression and perhaps frustration with the ongoing suppression of voices, even on the theatrical stage. Nonetheless, the weight of the performance resonated deeply, reflecting personal experiences as an actress residing in Istanbul. Through the metaphorical lens of the 'inviting' glass, a concise montage of Ceylan's life was constructed, prompting reflection on personal life trajectories within the confines of the mindscape. However, this process of witnessing Ceylan's performance requires careful attention to truly hear the artist's voice, especially when she speaks on the artist's crisis. Despite diverse backgrounds and experiences, the audience may struggle to fully grasp the depth of her experience. Moreover, the narrative of the artist in crisis, while originating from the self and reaching the audience, highlights the various levels of privilege within the political economy. The performance's exploration of the artist's invisibility during a crisis and the transition from personal to communal underscores the need for deeper analysis. The risk of perceiving the collective as a homogenized entity presents a challenge, as audiences may overly identify with personal narratives, complicating the shift to the communal. In a landscape where the lines between reality and fiction in autobiographical narratives are blurred, it is crucial to approach such works critically, mindful of the risks of oversimplification and the power dynamics inherent in truth-telling. This necessitates resisting ingrained tropes and exploring alternative avenues of expression, as emphasized by Heddon's critique of essentializing gestures and the erasure of difference (Heddon, 2007; Pearlman, 2015). However, such a recalibration of narrative dynamics cannot occur in isolation; it must be contextualized within the broader crisis facing theatre and performance-making in Turkey, exacerbated by economic strain and political disorientation.

Nothing is in Vain

During an online open meeting on February 25, 2024 as part of the 'Performance Ecologies' program, Onur Karaoğlu delivered a presentation titled 'Crisis as a Dramatic Event,' discussing the transformative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on artistic practices (Karaoğlu, 2023). He emphasized the necessity of continuing to produce performance as a 'vital' act, one that cannot be deciphered in isolation, suggesting the importance of finding 'common words' to sustain this endeavor. In this context, performance spaces serve not only as platforms for artists to amplify their voices and explore various aspects of their identities through

storytelling, as exemplified in Ceylan's performance, but also as repositories of affect for the era. Ceylan's portrayal, which illustrates the effort to build a new life while erasing traces of the past, encapsulates both the life story of an actress and the aftermath of the pandemic. In his solo performance *In Vain (2022),* Karaoğlu transitions from creating an archive to compiling an anthology, seeking to 'find our common words' regarding shared crises. This shift to poetry invites the audience to witness and share the realities of the performing arts scene, thereby inspiring action (Depression, 2014; Lorde 2000). The narrative presented on stage transcends mere testimony, particularly when intertwined with the audience's subjective experiences of critical social phenomena. In Ceylan's narrative, the pandemic is the pivotal event affecting human health, while Karaoğlu shifts focus to another concerning crisis—mucilage in the Sea of Marmara, a 'non-human entity.' He attempts to embody mucilage, connecting his own autobiographical experiences as a socially constructed subject to object-oriented ontologies, grappling with the phenomenon as a 'crisis within a crisis' and engaging actively in its struggle for existence.

In this performance, the audience is invited into a narrative where the artist addresses an environmental concern that disrupts ordinary life, portraying a struggle born from the aspiration to transform this issue through poetry. Drawing inspiration from a song encountered 'during a moment of despair,' Karaoğlu, identifying himself as 'an inhabitant of Istanbul,' explores the prospect of 'saving the Marmara Sea with words' through his performance *In Vain*, inspired by the renowned Turkish poet Ashik Mahsuni Şerif. The Sea of Marmara, a body of water that connects many Istanbul inhabitants, served as a focal point for Karaoğlu's artistic contemplation, recalling long hours spent gazing at its waters during his youth. Although solving the pandemic of marine mucilage may seem like a scientific problem, Karaoğlu, who never intended to become a scientist but rather an artist, embarked on an artistic journey to address a scientific issue through theatre and performance. By inviting the audience into this endeavor, the performance centers on combating mucilage using words, drawing on poetry and performance as tools in this battle.

Figure 2: Onur Karaoğlu, In Vain, 2022. Photo. Vienna. © Franzi Kreis

In Karaoğlu's performance *In Vain (2022)*, the stage hosts Karaoğlu as the narrator–facilitator, accompanied by four distinct video and sound installations positioned in different corners of the space. Throughout the performance, each audience member, seated in front of these installations, bears witness to the narrative of one character, while whispers from the other three characters create a rich soundscape. Karaoğlu actively engages the audience, assigning them specific tasks and experiences, such as writing poetry and interacting with words and images. The characters in the performance represent various facets of time and space, including the ancient Tethys Sea, the poet Ashik Mahsuni Şerif, the marine scientist Luigi Marsili, and the young Onur Karaoğlu himself. These multilayered narratives intertwine personal and historical elements, inviting the audience to explore the intra-actions between different elements such as words, memories, and non-human entities like the sea (Barad 2007). Karaoğlu's performance exemplifies the power of devising, as he brings his autobiographical material to the stage in two distinct ways: by portraying his present-day struggle with mucilage and his adolescent self's quest for meaning and connection. The

characters in the performance share the central theme of finding meaning and connection in life and with the world around us.

Audience participation plays a crucial role in the devising process of *In Vain (2022)*, a significant aspect of this approach as noted in the literature. Actively involving the audience in the performance's liveness transcends traditional theatre boundaries, transforming the event into a collaborative effort. This participation enriches the audience's engagement and reinforces the notion that theatre is a shared space where collective experience is valued. In *In Vain (2022)*, the audience's involvement in tasks such as poetry-writing bridges the gap between performer and spectator, blurring the lines between creator and observer. This interactive element enhances the overall experience and underscores the significance of devising to connect with others and share stories that resonate on a personal and social level. Theatre and performance have an ability to bring people together, create a sense of shared understanding and empathy, and resonate together (Bogart, 2021). Through the art of devising, artists like Onur Karaoğlu explore complex themes and personal narratives, inviting the audience to join in this exploration. The poetic impact of theatre and performance lies in their capacity to make sense of diverse elements of life, creating connections between seemingly disparate experiences. *In Vain (2022)* reminds us that nothing is in vain when we seek connection, and theatre serves as a medium to help us discover the common threads that unite us all. In these moments of collective reflection and shared storytelling, the affective value of theatre comes to life, leaving an impact on both artists and audiences. Karaoğlu, at the end of the performance, acknowledges the limitations of his struggle to overcome the mucilage with words. However, as his younger self clarifies this effort, stating that he 'wasn't constructing [his] memories alone, [he] was also connecting to others' memories, and theirs contributed to [his]'.

Disorienting Times

The joy of feeling connected within a performance space, immersed in the poetic power of the production, occurred while attending *In Vain (2022)* in Vienna, where the performance premiered as part of the Wiener Festwochen commission. The cards shared with the audience by Karaoğlu still remain with me. One line from my own poem, crafted under Onur's guidance, lingers in my memory: 'I know I am not alone. Yet, there is nothing to expect'. Reflecting on that moment now, this line might be revised to say: 'I do not know what to expect. May it come with peace.' These cards provided a platform for us to express thoughts and feelings, each accompanied by images from a city that no longer felt like home as an artist. Revisiting these cards while writing about this performance today emphasizes the profound impact that the shared experience continues to have, acknowledging the evolving emotions and thoughts captured through words and poetry. The performance occurred during a disorienting period, adding to its unique significance. With its autobiographical beginnings, the narrative of the performance serves as a record of the atmospheric conditions of that time, intersecting the realms of 'my story' and 'our story.' Born from personal experiences, this performance holds a special place in the broader artistic journey.

At that time, everything became intertwined and merged, much like what Onur achieved with his performance. I was devising a solo performance after spending most of my time as an artist, both in Istanbul and abroad, inside a kitchen—a space mattered differently since the pandemic. In such times, having a kitchen was not only my privilege but also my rehearsal space, as connecting with colleagues inside familiar venues or studios was no longer possible. Additionally, the performance was autobiographical, like the other two solo performances. While critiques of this autoethnographic methodology often label it as self-centered, an autoethnographic exploration of this research connected three distinct artists with diverse backgrounds. Upon reflection, the connections now appear more transparent. However, at the time, confusion led me led me to title my piece *So, I Mix Things (2022)*, conveying the extent of disorientation and the resolve to transform confusion into performance (Ahmed, 2006).

Figure 3: Didem Kris, So, I Mix Things, 2022. Photo. Vienna. © Berk Kristal

So, I Mix Things (2022) is a performance combining cooking, music and storytelling elements. The performer, an artist who migrated from Turkey to Europe, takes the audience on a journey through her experiences of trying to integrate into a new city and culture. This autobiographical piece delves into themes of identity, belonging, and adaptation, exploring the complexities of navigating a new environment through the metaphor of cooking and mixing ingredients. Mixing music and food on stage creatively and sensually conveys the challenges and joys of making theatre in a distorted world and making ends meet as an artist, especially in an unfamiliar city. Using a turntable and electric pan as props adds a dynamic and interactive element to the performance. The audience witnesses a dish being prepared as well as the mixing of memories, emotions, and cultural influences. The narrative is not just about the performer but also about the people and the stories encountered along the way. It highlights the diversity of experiences and flavors that make up our lives, drawing parallels between the ingredients in a recipe and the multiple elements that shape our identities. The food cooked on stage is Ashura, known as Noah's pudding in English, a dish that requires much preparation and carries symbolic connotations of diversity, peace, and care. Premiered in August 2022 at Kultursommer Wien, the performance was multilingual, a mixture of languages. The performer devised the story of Noah's journey and the recipe of Ashura. Noah first cooked the dish with leftovers after his ship arrived at Mount Ararat following the great flood. In the performance, the time required to cook the Ashura, 45 minutes, was found to be impossible, despite initial plans to manage it. Eventually, it was admitted that the dish required more effort. At the end of the performance, after tasting the uncooked Ashura, which was inedible, the performer declared, "I did my best today to entertain you and to feed myself." This simple act symbolized the limitations of the solo effort in solitude and underscored the challenges of devising within a short period.

The fast-paced and standardized creative processes which is experienced observed by the deviser, as devising moved from marginal to mainstream, highlight the demands of the process on artists. The journey from Istanbul to Vienna, amid uncertainties about the direction of post-pandemic theatre exploration, coincided with a period of solace found in home baking, like many others worldwide. While the taste, or lack thereof, of this dessert was left to the audience's interpretation, this personal narrative encouraged spectators to reflect on the reality of creative processes and to rally behind artists in their quest to preserve the effort of making theatre and performance. Comprised of ingredients with varying cooking times and symbolic meanings, this performance aimed to unite audiences from diverse cultures in a shared endeavor. Although conceived for the stage, the performance met audiences outdoors, reaching them through the aroma and scent of the ingredients. In this context, sensory elements such as taste and smell offered a visceral experience and emerged as significant social phenomena, shaping judgments, distinctions, and power dynamics within cultural contexts (Highmore, 2010). Thus, aesthetic preferences and tastes are not merely individual but

deeply intertwined with social connections and cultural norms.

Conclusion

The production phase of devised performances invariably encounters obstacles, particularly in the absence of certain supports. Deeper insights and justice can often be achieved through extensive rehearsal processes, reflecting the method's evolution from an alternative to conventional theatre to its current mainstream status (Govan et al., 2007; Heddon & Milling, 2016; Oddey, 1994). This observation holds true, particularly within the context of Turkey and abroad. However, much like Melek, who adapted to working within the glass room provided by the venue, or like Onur and myself, who transformed living rooms and kitchens into rehearsal spaces, the production process evolves as a method that shapes the final product and invites the audience to become part of a communal experience through the incorporation of personal stories. Despite the escalating economic, political, and social crises in which these works strive to find their place, devisers remain engaged in the pursuit of reflection, the curation of a collective narrative, and the pursuit of artistic expression, steadfast in their commitment to these principles.

Utilizing autoethnography and devising autobiography poses the risk of self-indulgence, yet it also offers a unique perspective. First, it illuminates the challenging economic and political landscape within which artists operate, highlighting the difficulties of rehearsing in unconventional spaces and navigating financial hardships exacerbated by the pandemic. Besides these challenges, theatre remains intricately linked to the capitalist leisure economy, underscoring the systemic challenges faced by artists. Second, the exploration of speaking out, writing poetry, and using taste as a metaphor unveils the transformative power of solo performances enriched by poetry and autobiographical elements. Influenced by external factors such as the pandemic and economic pressures, these performances provide audiences with a shared experience that transcends individual narratives. This communal engagement fosters a sense of connection and understanding, enriching the fabric of the performing arts scene. Overall, in Istanbul's post-pandemic landscape, devising with autobiographical material has emerged as a dynamic and vital approach, characterized by its ability to forge connections, evoke sensory experiences, and bridge diverse life stories. Through the commitment of artists to sharing their personal narratives, this methodology fosters community and resilience, paving the way for continued growth and innovation in the performing arts.

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PANDEMİ SONRASI İSTANBUL SAHNESİNDE KİŞİSEL OLANIN TASARLANMASI

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ÖZ

COVID-19 pandemisinin ardından, İstanbul'un tiyatro sahnesi direniş ve geri kazanım alanı haline gelmiş, sanatçılar tiyatro ve performans aracılığıyla toplumsal durgunluğu aşmaya çalışmışlardır. Bu çalışma, otobiyografik malzemenin tasarlanan performanslardaki etkinliğini araştırarak, bunun toplumsal krizlerin bir yansıması ve sanatçıların bireysel ve kolektif yönelim bozukluklarını ifade etme aracı olarak ikili rolünü incelemektedir. Üç İstanbul merkezli sanatçı, Melek Ceylan, Onur Karaoğlu ve Didem Kris'in eserleri üzerinden yapılan otoetnografik bir inceleme yoluyla, bu araştırma kişisel anlatı ile toplumsal yankı arasındaki etkileşimi yakalamaktadır. Metodoloji, performans analizi ile sanatçı röportajlarını bütünleştirerek, yaratıcı süreçte bakım etiğine vurgu yapan yeni materyalist bir bakış açısı kullanmaktadır. Bulgular, İstanbul'da pandemi sonrası tasarlanan performanslardaki otobiyografik malzemenin, bireysel deneyimlerin ötesine geçerek daha geniş toplumsal zorlukları ele aldığını ve toplumsal bir kimlik duygusunu teşvik ettiğini gösteriyor. Bu çalışma, pandemi sonrası tiyatro tasarımının dönüştürücü potansiyelini aydınlatarak, dönemin zorluklarını belgeleme ve Türkiye'nin ana akım performans sanatları paradigmalarına karşı alternatif anlatılar sunma gücünü tartışmaya açmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ortaklaşa yaratım tiyatrosu, otobiyografi, solo performans, pandemi sonrası, İstanbul, otoetnografi