

A stylized map of Turkey is shown in a light beige color against a dark background. A red dot is placed on the map to indicate the location of Konya. The word "KONYA" is written in bold, black, uppercase letters next to the red dot.

KONYA

Translation as a Testing Ground

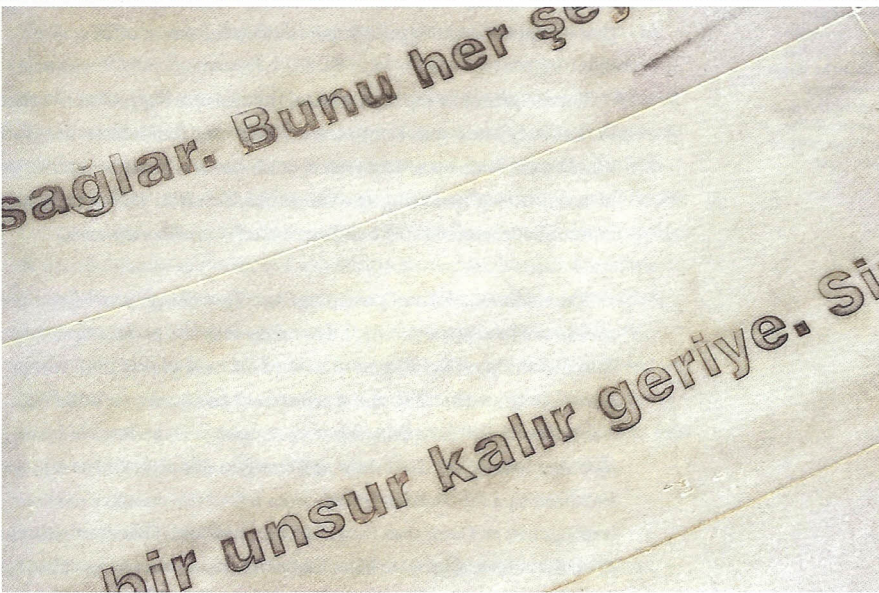
Joanna Rajkowska
Artist of the Project in Konya

No diagnoses

I usually work in public space and usually spend some time in the given city to prepare the project. This means many different strategies of working with myself, which in effect lead to an attempt to recognise the city as well as my role in it as an artist, a guest, but also a worker. Perhaps "recognition" is not the best word here, because my projects are usually situations that only provoke, and bring about such a recognition. It is a rather tedious work on building a sort of mechanism that will allow people to experience their city in a new way. I try not to "make diagnoses" but rather provoke and collect various kinds of experiences, even if I don't know where they will eventually lead me. While in Konya, I listened to a lot of music – opera music in particular – both Turkish and European. I walked around the nearby hills, discovering the inscriptions the army puts on them; I visited the university, listening to what Yasin Aktay, a sociology professor, had to say. I wandered around Konya's various neighbourhoods on a bike and around the city in a rented car. It is important to be able to observe various social rituals. Starting with the simplest ones: how people address each other, how they form a crowd, how they pray, relax, how they treat public space and how they manage it. In Konya, I wanted to understand why it happens, what are the political and cultural reasons of certain forms of public behaviour. Why Atatürk portraits hang everywhere, why the Latin alphabet is used, and why there are stray dogs in the streets. I was a "parachutist," having to learn everything from the start. In Europe, I can sometimes afford ignorance underpinned by instinctive sympathy. In Konya, I couldn't ignore the element of knowledge. I felt like a social worker, and that in the specific atmosphere of Konya, intellectual work would be more comprehensible and more effective than any visual gesture, however spectacular.

Don't chew bubble gum after dark

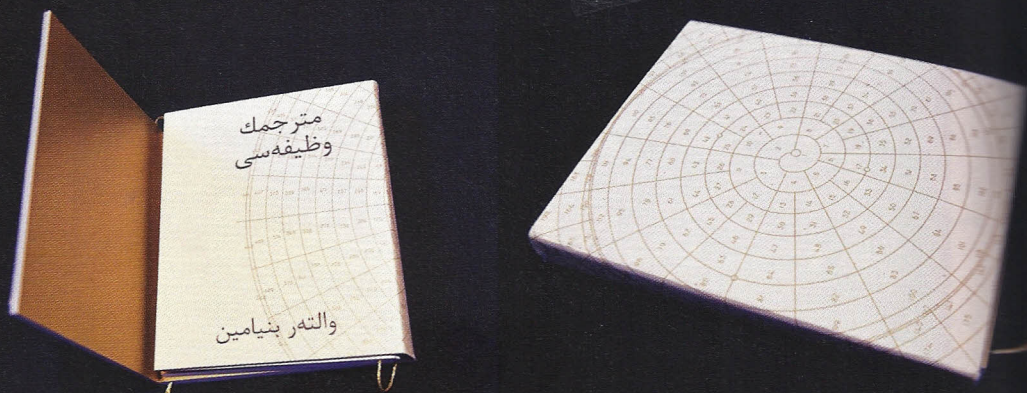
My length of stay affected very significantly my perception of the city. I spent about two months in Konya, with some breaks in-between. The beginnings were difficult, because the experience of public space in a post-communist country or in Western Europe is completely different. Towards the end, I started soaking it in, losing both my distance and my sense of being a stranger. I was horrified. I still hadn't come up with any project. But perhaps that was precisely what it was all about – about crossing the barrier of strangeness. Only when I had found myself on the side of, let's call it, transparency, did I start thinking more freely. Here's an excerpt from my diary: "Thursday, 8 October 2010. I'm finishing. I still have one big hole in the place for Turkish shamanism, though. This means I should be going in that direction. But how? I don't want to make



sculptures with bubble gum chewed in the night to evoke the “Turkish dead.” That was because of a superstition one of my Turkish friends had remembered: “Don’t chew bubble gum after dark because then you chew on the flesh of dead people.”

On the language as a testing ground

To this day, I have no clear vision of the city. I work in a way that is relatively not very “visual.” Often it is only the architects and engineers who have to imagine how my project will look like. I only have a certain intuition, which is followed by a concept, that is, a conceptual mechanism



Eighty-nine years after being written, *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* (The Task of the Translator) by Walter Benjamin is translated into Ottoman Turkish as a part of the project *Walter Benjamin in Konya*, 2010. Photo: Begüm Sayın

that is supposed to trigger off that in the intuition in others.

The frequency of my trips around the city was high; after a month or so, I already knew that Konya is a difficult city, that it lacks the grace of Mardin, the sexiness of İstanbul, that it's flat as a pancake and, 90 percent of it, consists of sprawling apartment block estates. That forced me to undertake "excursions" of a different kind – intellectual ones.

The tradition of Rumi's teachings and his writings proved one of the treasures of the place for me. I was taken with the manuscripts, which spoke of things as familiar to us as the best examples of 20th century European literature. The visual aspect was fascinating as well. Text was treated here like a drawing or ornament, with an intense focus on composition, the directions and energies of script. At some point I realised that my Turkish friends were left to the viscosity of those writings just as I was, that they didn't understand what they said, that, in the land of text, they were like visitors from another planet. The lack of realistic figuration was an important aspect of those texts. Every attempt to introduce it created a dissonance.

Reflecting on textual culture, just like listening to Turkish music, led me to the same conclusions: important elements of European culture – in this case, realistic representations of the material world or the human figure, tonal systems, or even the very idea of opera – have, in a way, remained alien to this culture. About the visual aspect, I can speak with full responsibility; about the musical one, it's based on the opinions of musicologists and musicians.

Language, in turn, which proved my main testing ground, turned out to be an extremely complex cultural and political research area. On the one hand, I felt horrified by the fact that all of the pre-1928 textual culture had to be translated to be comprehensible. On the other, I realised how elitist and inaccessible Ottoman Turkish was for the empire's average citizen. I asked myself a question, stemming directly from reading Walter Benjamin, about what happened with meaning when the alphabet had changed, when the word had received a completely new, unfamiliar visual form. How did the shape of the letter, the rhythm of punctuation, the specificity of the connections between letters and words, how did all that influence the process of comprehending, understanding meanings, and building associations? What happened with the Turkish language, and culture, when a linguistic revolution had been decreed? What happened with the whole sphere of visual culture, the culture of the written word? The idea of translation became crucial to me in my efforts to understand Turkey. That is why I decided to repeat the gesture, but backwards – to translate Walter Benjamin's 1923 *The Task of the Translator* into the now-dead Ottoman Turkish and thus, in a way, to reverse the course of history. The idea stemmed not so much from my criticism of the idea of linguistic revolution, but from a desire to realise what happened with the Turkish language after 1928. The figure of Benjamin accompanied me at all times. Let me quote a dream I had on the Saturday, 10 October: "A dream again. Walter Benjamin in Portbou. I was Walter Benjamin, horrified, under a church floor. On the wall was a tiny, narrow crack, oval, kidney-shaped. A man kneeling in the church, with the others, was somehow, I don't know how, able to bow his head so low he leaned below the floor level, his mouth appearing in the crack, upside down, whispering instructions: word after word. An image engraved in memory: the mouth, which in this position always looks as if smiling. After that, only pangs of fear."

I don't speak Turkish

Language as a means of communication is usually not so important in my process of "studying" a place. This time, however, it proved crucial: both as an information medium and as the actual working material. The language barrier resulted in many strange mistakes and ambiguities. I had to ask many questions. Those questions were of a rather complex nature: What is your attitude towards the Ottoman Turkish language? Would you like to speak it? You can't read pre-1928 poetry or archives – does that leave you with a sense of loss? The ambiguous answers I got were an obstacle in trying to understand the role of the Turkish language, and Ottoman Turkish in particular, in culture. On the other hand, the sound of contemporary Turkish, its natural melody, how it's pronounced were also important. There are languages that, while functioning very close

to each other – such as Arabic and Hebrew – have a completely different texture and different melody. This is a result of how the given language has developed over time. If a language develops continuously, organically for hundreds of years, it acquires a completely different “sound.” To hear that, I didn’t need to understand. At least that’s what I thought. To me, contemporary Turkish belongs to those “organic” languages.

The task of the translator

There is more nostalgia than admonishment in the idea. I wanted not so much to teach lessons based on Benjamin as to ask a few questions I myself didn’t have the answers to, as well as to fantasise that the text was available in 1920s’ Turkey, and that it was read and understood. The gesture of restoring the text to its place at the Yusuf Ağa Library in Konya was one of the most important ones for me in this project.

In the essay, Benjamin suggests that the translator’s task is almost messianic, that his aim is to achieve a “pure language” (*reine Sprache*) through the translation. Benjamin’s linguistic theology assumed that language not so much conveys meanings as contains them in itself, that meanings are immanent to it. A language that is nothing but a semantic medium is impure, degenerate. Pure language, in turn, is a medium that guarantees connection with God and the world of objects. The translator’s task is to reclaim this miraculous property of language.

Did Atatürk achieve that? I wondered about that, too. Did the cleansing of language, and getting it rid of Persian and Arabic influences during the second stage of the revolution mean reinvesting it with divine power...? For sure there happened something that Benjamin describes as an incompatibility between the form of language (in translation) and its meaning. The language of the original protects, and even shapes, meaning, just as the skin of a fruit protects its flesh. Translation is a royal robe, roomy, full of folds and pleats, Benjamin said. An impure language – and such are all contemporary languages – is a language of incompatibility between language and meaning, an incompatibility that should be actually highlighted in translation, in order precisely to stress the difference, “distance,” from meaning. But there is also the question whether Ottoman Turkish, with its extremely complex syntax and structure, a language that was a mixture of Persian, Arabic and Turkish, was a form more compatible with meaning?

People around the pool of text

During the process of realisation of the project, my relations with the people of Konya were very close. This was true for Yasin Aktay, who

was a key figure for me, my sort of window to the city, and for all those who surrounded me during my stay. Those were usually friends of my assistant Faruk Karaarslan – musicians and musicologists. I often spent the afternoons and evenings with them. They would play music and cook local food for me. I would offer Polish delicacies to them in return, such as steak tartare, which they didn't like at all.

Yasin gave me to read the text of one of his American lectures, and it became very important to me. The title, if I remember well, was mischievous: "Progressive Islam versus Conservative Modernism." For me, it was a lesson on how in Konya, the idea of civic society is developing, how self-help organisations successfully play the role of non-governmental organisations, and how Islam, without the European democratic mission, is able to generate a self-sufficient social community. And how NGOs are unable to replace all that.

Another chapter took place during the project's actual execution. Here, I was facing a crowd of people whom I didn't know and whose reactions were hard to predict. I was entering the very heart of the city, one of the main squares, where public meetings, referendums and street demonstrations take place. Nearby is the Şerafettin Cami Mosque and the former town hall and, across the street, the current town hall. I knew that, in a way, it was an intruder's insolent gesture. You don't sit on the floor in the middle of the living room when you've been invited for dinner. But, in my view, that there were no alternatives and language is a central issue in Turkish culture. It was for that centrality that I wanted to find a spatial equivalent.

A Jewish philosopher in Anatolia

I also knew that for people in Konya to embrace the project, they couldn't be provoked or patronised. I decided to create a sort of story within story, where only in the last subplot some perverse meanings and painful irony are hidden. I was facing a difficult task – to convince them that a Jewish philosopher, rejected in his time by Europe, had something important to tell them – about their language, history, and identity. And they had to accept all that from a post-communist artist (a woman!), parachuted by the suspicious British Council, a branch of the former empire, in the name of Turkey's future access to the European Union. The perversity of the mission was a problem for me. The irony was that the Benjamin text, in a way, reversed the course of history and asked difficult questions about Europeisation, Latinisation, cultural "translation" and, finally, identity. The most moving moment for me was the gesture of an old man during the project's opening. He started walking around the text field

and reciting out loud in Ottoman. For me, it was the city's response: a gesture of acceptance and taking the project over as their own now. The text became more important than all the political disputes preceding the realisation. Because, with Benjamin in Konya, the political aspects of the use of that particular language and alphabet had, for a long time, defined the project's nature.

How political?

The Arabic alphabet is often associated with the Koran and in non-Arabic speaking societies, any text written in this alphabet can have holy connotations. The very instance of using the Ottoman Turkish language, and the Perso-Arabic script that goes with it, can be interpreted as a political gesture and religious statement. It can be perceived to mean anti-republican views, conservatism, religious orthodoxy, and opposition to all pro-modernisation or pro-European reforms. When we applied for permission to realise the project, suspicions of political provocation arose. A famous, and obviously well-engraved in the public consciousness, photograph from 1980, the time of the military coup, was remembered. The photo, taken in Konya and published by all the newspapers at the time, shows a crowd demonstrating with a banner featuring a text in Arabic. Some say the photo became a pretext for the military, which decided that it was time to intervene in the face of growing confrontation. Some people in Konya thought my project was an attempt to reinforce the city's image as conservative and somewhat anachronistic. On the other hand, during the actual realisation, the Protection Board wanted to make sure that no aesthetic outrage would take place. Then the project started living its own quiet life. I remember a woman putting her hands in the water to feel the surface of the text.

I felt a quiet sense of joy that the text of a philosopher very important to me was embraced in this way, because it is, indeed, one of the most iconic texts about language that has ever been written.

The public space as Eden

I understand from public space in Konya, the public aspect of common space. Perhaps I will start with the aspect of authority: power. Public space is always a sphere of strict political control. In Turkey, I felt very certain that my project would be subject to scrutiny of two kinds of authority – secular and religious – that it would be a problem for both. And that, unfortunately, proved true. It is a space that is full of tension. Any otherness is very noticeable in Konya; it is studied and accepted – or not. People look at a stranger, carefully and closely; sometimes with a look of bewilderment. I think a gesture of public otherness, provocative,

or ostentatious, would be rather hard to accept here.

On the other hand, I felt a profound difference in the attitude ordinary people here have towards the public space of their city or neighbourhood. This attitude is fundamentally different from that found in, for instance, the post-communist countries. In Konya, public space is co-opted in many different ways. You only need to put out a plastic chair and sit on it for space to become symbolically someone's: personal, named and familiar. This is a very natural process. In Poland, unfortunately, this is impossible. In Konya, the spaces around mosques are paradise gardens in miniature, almost like exemplary models of public space, given, of course, all the cultural restrictions and prohibitions that are in effect there. From my diary: "Monday, 5 October. I am walking around the area, and today I've discovered a fragment of paradise nearby – the surroundings of an old mosque and around it a park, benches, fountains, flowers, lawns. All of that organically undulating in soft lines, growing out of each other. Architecture smoothly giving way to greenery, greenery to water." What more should you want from public space if it is modelled upon Eden?

Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers / Çevirmenin Görevi Mütercimnin Vazifesi / *وظیفه سی مترجمک

“Nirgends erweist sich einem Kunstwerk oder einer Kunstform gegenüber die Rücksicht auf den Aufnehmenden für deren Erkenntnis fruchtbar. Nicht genug, daß jede Beziehung auf ein bestimmtes Publikum oder dessen Repräsentanten vom Wege abführt, ist sogar der Begriff eines „idealen“ Aufnehmenden in allen kunsttheoretischen Erörterungen vom Übel, weil diese lediglich gehalten sind, Dasein und Wesen des Menschen überhaupt vorauszusetzen. So setzt auch die Kunst selbst dessen leibliches und geistiges Wesen voraus – seine Aufmerksamkeit aber in keinem ihrer Werke. Denn kein Gedicht gilt dem Leser, kein Bild dem Beschauer, keine Symphonie der Hörerschaft.”

“Bir sanat eserini veya bir sanat biçimini değerlendirirken alımlayıcıyı göz önüne almanın hiçbir yararı yoktur. Belli bir alımlayıcı kitlesine veya bu kitlenin temsilcilerine yapılacak her gönderme yoldan saptırır; “ideal” alımlayıcı kavramı ise, bunun da ötesinde, sırf bir insan varoluşu ve özü varsaymak durumunda kaldıkları için bütün teorik sanat tartışmaları açısından sakıncalıdır. Sanatın kendisi de insanın maddi ve tinsel özünü koşul sayar, gelgelelim hiçbir sanat eseri onun dikkatini, göstereceği tepkiyi koşul saymaz. Hiçbir şiir okur için yazılmamış, hiçbir resim bakan için yapılmamış, hiçbir senfoni dinleyici için bestelenmemiştir.”

“Bir san’at eserini yahud bir san’at tarzını tedkik ve takdir ederken kariî nazar-ı dikkate almanın hiçbir faidesi yoktur. Muayyen bir kari kitlesine yahud bu kitlenin temsilcilerine yapılacak her atıf bizi saded haricine çıkarır; “mükemmel” kari mefhumu ise, bunun da ötesinde, sırf bir insan existence ve essence’ı farz etmek zaruretinde kaldığı için bütün nazarı san’at münakaşaları nokta-i nazarından mahzurludur. San’atın kendisi de insanın maddî ve ruhî cevherini şart kabul eder; ne var ki hiçbir san’at eseri onun dikkatini, göstereceği aksülameli şart addetmez. Hiçbir şiir kari için yazılmamış, hiçbir resim temâşâger için yapılmamış, hiçbir senfoni samî’ için bestelenmemiştir.”

بر صنعت اثرینی یاخود بر صنعت طرزینی تدقیق و تقدیر
ایدرکن قاریئی نظر دفته آلمه‌نک هیچ بر فائده‌سی یوقدر. معین
بر قاریء کتله‌سینه یاخود بو کتله‌نک تمثیلجیلرینه یاپیلاجق هر
عطف بزى صدد خارجینه چیقاریر؛ مکمل قاریء مفهومی ایسه،
بونک ده اوته‌سنده، صرف بر انسان existence و essence ی
فرض ایتمک ضرورتند قالدیغی ایچون بوتون نظری صنعت
مناقشه‌لری نقطهء نظرندن محذورلیدر. صنعتک کندیسى ده
انسانک مادی و روحی جوهرینی شرط قبول ایدهر؛ نه وار که
هیچ بر صنعت اثری اونک دقتینی، کوستره‌جکی عکس‌العملی
شرط عد ایدهمز. هیچ بر شعر قاریء ایچون یازیلماش هیچ بر
رسم تماشاگر ایچون یاپیلماش، هیچ بر سنفونی سامع ایچون
بسته‌لنمه‌مشدر.

*Quotations are from the book *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* by Joanna Rajkowska. "The Task of the Translator" was originally published in: Charles Baudelaire, *Tableaux Parisiens: Deutsche Übertragung mit einem Vorwort über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, von Walter Benjamin, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1923. Translated from German to Turkish by Orhan Kılıç. Turkish translation rewritten in the Turkish of 1928 by Beşir Ayvazoglu & Yücel Demirel. Transliteration into Ottoman Turkish by Yücel Demirel.

Joanna Rajkowska (Collision Course of Mind Matter) Selected Notes on the Artist

Sebastian Cichocki
Curator, Nominator
for the My City Project

Some basic facts. Let us outline some basic facts: Joanna Rajkowska was born in 1968 in Bydgoszcz in northern Poland. She is the author of objects, films, installations, actions and interventions in public space. She currently lives and works in London. Between 1988 and 1993, she studied Painting at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts under Professor Jerzy Nowosielski, while at the same time studying Art History at Jagiellonian University (1987-1992). In 2007, she received the highly prestigious Paszport Polityki award for "unusual projects in public space, for reaching out to the city wanderer." In 2010, she received the Grand Prize of Fundacja Kultury for outstanding achievements in the field of culture.

Early works. Rajkowska's early works were a result of her interest in corporeality, in the body's entanglement in the processes and mechanisms of capitalistic production and consumption. Her best-known work from the period is *Satisfaction Guaranteed* (2000), an industrially-manufactured series of canned drinks that, according to the notice on the can, contained the artist's DNA.

Recent works (public space). Joanna Rajkowska's most acclaimed recent projects – *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue* (2002–2009) and *Oxygenator* (2006–2007) – were social sculptures installed in the public space of Warsaw. In both cases, the objects "planted" in the urban tissue (in the first case, a palm tree, alien to the Polish landscape; in the second one, an artificial pond with ozone-generating equipment) became a pretext for making social observations, stimulating human interactions, generating grassroots initiatives, as well as reflecting on the past and memory of the urban public space. Rajkowska's projects are usually based on working in relation with a specific, historically or ideologically charged place, or with a marginalised or stigmatised group of people. For instance, Rajkowska has worked with a group of boys from a Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin in the West Bank (conducting a workshop on "abandoning language" in talking about trauma) or with the residents of a small Swedish town called Umeå (where she tried, unsuccessfully, to build an artificial volcano). Her practice deals with ideological tensions, aggression against the other, and the difficulties of assimilation, as evidenced by projects such as *Patriotic Literature* (2006, copies of anti-Semitic publications bought in a church bookstore, printed in "mirror image"), *The Uhyst Refugee Asylum* (2008, a fictional refugee shelter created in a small village in Saxony, Germany) or *Cruising around War Island* (2004, a "leisure" cruise for the residents of Belgrade aimed at trying to at least temporarily "filter" the memory of the post-Yugoslav wars).



*Greetings from Jerusalem
Avenue (2002-2009).
Photo: Joanna Rajkowska*

The interpretative context. The public reception of Rajkowska's projects has been closely connected with the socio-political changes taking place in Poland since 1989, which have provoked intense debates on issues such as the appropriation of public space, the marginalisation of ethnic or sexual minorities, or the Catholic Church's dominant say on ethical issues. Some of Rajkowska's projects remain unrealised to this day, becoming utopian postulates to overcome official objections, common prejudices, red tape, legislative hurdles and simple distrust of "irrational" artistic propositions. Since 2009, the artist has been working on a project for Bern, Switzerland, which provides for installing a gigantic bat that would also serve as an urn for human ashes under one of the city's bridges. The same year, she began negotiations on transforming a disused factory smokestack in Poznań, Poland, into a minaret as an expression of her fascination with the Middle East, as well as a "transplantation" into the urban tissue of an element seemingly alien to the realities of the predominantly Catholic Poland.

scene no. 1: *The artist sits on what looks like a coloured stone by a small pond, with a church looming in the near distance. There are also people of various ages, dogs... Scattered deckchairs and seats. It's summer.*

material: pond, water lilies, ozonating and water spray-generating equipment, coloured stones, bad memories, extras

place: Plac Grzybowski

title: *Oxygenator*

time: 2006–2007

notes: *Oxygenator* was a trauma-dispersing device, a whip for the bad Central European karma. Rajkowska decided to create an artificial pond in the centre of Warsaw, a place veiled in mist and full of ozone. News about it spread rapidly. The pond became a favourite hang-out spot for Varsovians, especially elderly ones. The location was special: in the close vicinity of a Catholic church, a synagogue and some small shops, one of the last tiny fragments of downtown Warsaw that still resembles the city from before the war. In 1940, the square became part of the ghetto, separated from the rest of the city by a wall. Today, Plac Grzybowski is tightly surrounded by modern high-rises and anonymous, badly ageing post-war apartment blocks. The place that Rajkowska had "reactivated" with her intervention was supposed to function according to its own rules: as a deviation from the urban order, a crack in which you can hide away from big city noise, transience, and bad memories. What was important for Rajkowska was the place's history, the presence there of ideological conflicts, martyrology, "bad air," obscurantist Catholicism, the distribution of anti-Semitic publications in the nearby church, and the erosion of community relations; put shortly, the old-age diseases of

the urban tissue. The pond's purpose was to de-traumatise the historically encumbered place – if not to heal it, then at least to soothe its woes.

What matters for the artist is the aspect of breathing – air is filtrated by breath and released purified, in a way. The act of breathing in and out organically connects the human body with the city, becoming a biological extension of urbanistic structures and, at the same time, the place where its “toxic deposits” accumulate. *Oxygenator* was well received, more so perhaps by the casual, non gallery-going crowd than by the sceptical insiders (apparently alarmed by the project's sliding into the abyss of social work). Despite the great enthusiasm of local residents, activists or culture and media personalities, the city chose not to allow the project to continue. *Oxygenator* did not prove as fortunate as artistic projects such as Alan Sonfist's *Time Landscape*, which New Yorkers stood up for before it was too late, eagerly preserving a fragment of wild nature in the middle of Lower Manhattan. The new zoning plan for Plac Grzybowski, meant as an alternative for the “rustic,” “under-designed” *Oxygenator*, turned the place into yet another anonymous, impersonal public square of a moderately wealthy European city. Meanwhile, Rajkowska's project had become a legend – a reminder of a temporary suspension of the big city's playing rules. In winter 2010, a modest outdoor event took place called *Oxygenator – a Farewell Party*. A short text that I had written for Rajkowska earlier was read out in the biting frost. It is an “institutional fairy tale” about an urban pond that unexpectedly materialised in Warsaw. I allow myself to quote a short fragment here. We decided with Rajkowska that the best way to confront the project's history was through literary fiction:

“Step by step (and not suddenly, as some say), in a manner that can doubtless be called miraculous, a pond appeared right in the middle of the city. It was small but deep, and its murky waters bubbled lazily. I use the word ‘miracle’ literally, meaning a paranormal phenomenon, rather than metaphorically, to denote an unusual manifestation of human inventiveness or a rare collective deed that the residents, usually divided, managed to pull off. Speaking of a ‘miracle’ I mean bloody stigmata, resurrected dead, and bearded old men levitating in the air. The pond belonged precisely to that category, things peculiar and mysterious. One day, it simply opened up. Not all at once, of course. First, there was a rupture. It grew wider slowly, almost imperceptibly. A breakthrough occurred on the night of 12 March. Several local residents heard a loud thud and then a dull grate and a splash. In the morning, the crevice was already filled with brownish water. As the pond grew wider, the water became clearer and the bottom, full of sharp edges and faults, became visible. In the end, it assumed its final shape. Some say that from above it resembled the profile of the then Antipope, Gregory XVIII, who had held





Oxygenator, Plac Grzybowski,
Warsaw, (2006~2007).
Photo by: Marek Szczepanski

office in Rotterdam for just two months before he was assassinated by a Polish immigrant. Whatever the case, the locals got used to the presence of the unexpected arrival surprisingly quickly.

...

"It was pleasant and blissful. The water surface bubbled from time to time and a delicate rose-tinted mist hung over the pond. It had a weak but pleasant smell of roses. More and more people spent their free time by the pond, spending hours on the shore. People enjoyed the sunshine, exceptionally strong for the time of year, seniors set up folding chairs and sipped tea from thermos flasks. Children were brought, who threw stones and coins into the water. Only animals were distrustful – dogs bristled and barked, never moving too close to the water, birds never took rest on the shore."

It is hard to believe today, but no one was really interested in how the pond had come to be where it was or tried to explain its curious properties. That its presence was not entirely neutral became clear shortly after its unexpected "emergence." Perhaps it was just a sequence of – how very unusual – coincidences, or perhaps some of the residents just yearned too much for the pond's presence to produce some mystical consequences?

scene no. 2: *The artist tends to an artificial palm tree in a busy roundabout right in the middle of a Central European city.*

material: an artificial date palm (*Phoenix Canariensis*), ideologies of various provenance, numerous extras

place: a traffic island in the middle of Rondo de Gaulle'a, Warsaw

title: *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue*

time: since 2002

notes: The palm tree installed in the roundabout at the intersection of Aleje Jerozolimskie and Nowy Świat Street in Warsaw is probably the best - known public space art project realised in Poland after 1989. The process of its "adoption" by the public took several years, ultimately becoming an alternative urban moment, a focus point for civic disobedience, a national predilection for the absurd and grotesque (particularly at moments of great pomposity and pathos), as well as the young generation's burning desire to end once and for all with the martyrological clichés that bind public monuments to coarse, exaggerated and pained aesthetics. The palm is a monument. It was born in the artist's head following her trip to Israel. It stands in a place where a large Jewish community lived before the war. Aleje Jerozolimskie! (Jerusalem Avenue) For decades the name remained transparent, devoid of any historical connotations. The artist said in an interview with Artur Żmijewski:

"I miss the diversity of that world. I miss the Jews, whose absence/presence is clearly reflected in the name of the street. Not some tiny

assimilated group. I miss people different in the full sense of the word, demonstrating their difference without embarrassment but also without aggression. I miss Arabs and Africans in the same way. I miss the energy of immigrants, people who decide to leave everything behind them and start a new life, their anxiety and power... Poland is hopeless in this regard. A white, Catholic society with standard forms of behaviour and standard views. I find terrible this silent consensus, this 'normalness'... Poland is a ghetto in so many respects that sometimes it's suffocating. So I erect a tree and I treat it as an element of communication between people, non-verbal and non-intellectual communication. I don't want people to 'understand' each other. I guess it's impossible. I simply want them to *be* next to each other. Under the palm tree."

Besides the palm as something that signals crucial deficits, there is also the palm as a designate of a new urban reality. It is an alternative public monument whose nonchalant nature is understood perfectly well by groups that are marginalised, excluded or simply on the "wrong" side of the official political order. These can be nurses on strike (who, during wage-related protests in 2007, decorated the palm with a nurse's bonnet), the Green Party or LGBT activists. Rajkowska has kept alive this unique monument that also seems a tribute to the chaotic, hard-to-control and -diagnose, Central European metropolis. The palm is a praise of diversity and cultural instability. Warsaw – a typical bastard of the Central European socio-political and economic transformation – is expanding and atrophying, disintegrating into many incompatible urban fragments. Centuries of attempts to unify the city's architecture have proved futile. Fragments of uncompleted urbanistic projects interlock, forming a dizzying amalgamate of styles and mistakes in urban meta-planning. New creations appear in the niches – grassroots initiatives, untypical transformations, "paratroop-drop" architectural solutions and appropriations. The artist points to black holes: in urban planning, the collective conscience, the legal system. Her palm tree is illegal and yet it has been standing for close to a decade now right in very centre of the city. It is also absurd and grotesque. Joanna Rajkowska contradicts the Polish pride, stifles the martyrological spirit, although she fights against amnesia. The palm tree in Rondo de Gaulle'a is a striking example of that.

scene no. 3: *The artist photographs a pack of dogs in an old Muslim cemetery, a leaden sky, a drizzle.*

material: dogs, graves, humidity, text

place: Üsküdar, Turkey

notes: In 2009, I was working with Rajkowska for a project for the city of Konya in Central Anatolia, Turkey. We often took walks around İstanbul together. And it was during one of those walks that the work was created. We were wandering around the Asian side, in the neighbourhood

of Üsküdar, that which once used to serve as the municipal cemetery. A bunch of dogs resting on the graves caught our attention. The dogs felt at home there, sleeping, lolling about in comfortably lined niches, filling the cold and wet stone grave frames with their bodies, seemingly warming them up. The gravestones looked like “living units” for dogs. The dogs themselves were timid, wary and wild. They wouldn’t come when called. They ignored our presence and a few moments later they disappeared. Rajkowska returned to the same place on the next day but the dogs were gone. During our stay in Turkey, we heard many versions of the story about how the people of İstanbul “deported” the city’s stray dogs to one of the Prince’s Islands and about the earthquake they were punished with for that. The more questions we asked, the more the legend fell apart into – often contradictory – versions. Rajkowska said later about her photographs of the dogs of Üsküdar: “They serve as a reminder of the exclusion of animals from society, as well as of the power of both estrangement and attachment between animals and humans.” A year later I wrote a text, a short story that was inspired by our visit to the Üsküdar cemetery and the dog stories we had heard in Turkey. I wrote it so that it became a sort of “exhibition on paper,” where works of Joseph Beuys or Richard Long would be smuggled. Some time ago we decided that the fictional text and Rajkowska’s photographic series should meet in one place. They are the same story, a variation of certain common experiences and obsessions. Early in 2011, a book alluding to those experiences was published. Here is a short excerpt from it, about a stuffed dog that was displayed in the window of a haberdashery shop somewhere in Üsküdar:

“A dog like a dog. Nothing special, no purebred, just an ordinary street mutt. It’s stuffed, with glass beads for eyes, looks as if it was about to bite you – fangs bared, ears flat, it’s all kind of tense. The dog stands on its hind legs, a piece of wire stuck up its ass to support it. But the most important thing is that it’s dressed like a soldier! A soldier’s cap, a neatly ironed uniform, even boots made of leather, decent ones. All of it tiny, of course, like for a midget. I think what people like about it the most is that it looks as if prepared for the drill, and angry, as if it was ready for war. Kids laugh when they see it. The uniform was tailor-made by Ayşe, probably to advertise her shop. She probably doesn’t even remember it now, she’s old, doesn’t recognise her own children, has to keep record of everything in her notebook. The dog is a bit dusty, its head is balding, probably some worms have eaten the fur away. But it still stands there and it’ll probably remain so. Kids running past the shop call, “General, General, tell us who your death is!”

scene no. 4: *The artist slips a small booklet between the volumes at the Yusuf Ağa Library in Konya.*

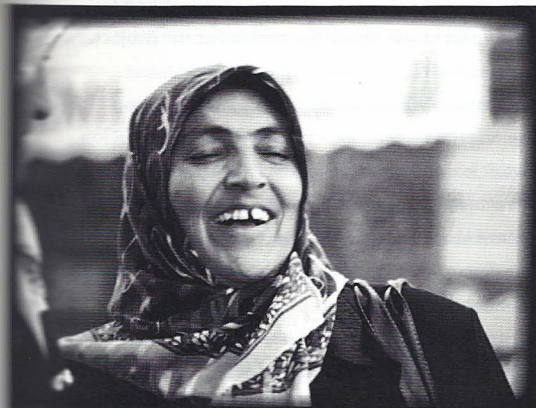
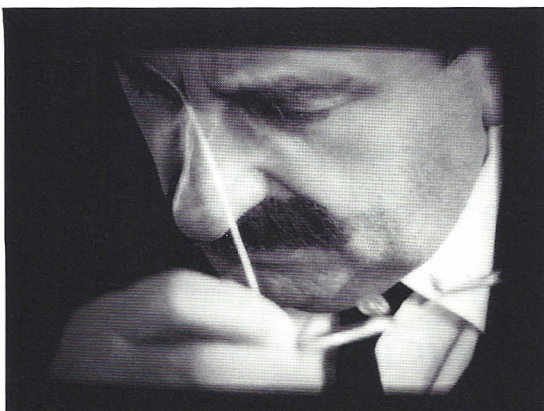
material: book, water, marble, semi-documentary, photography, wallpaper/drawing

place: Konya, Turkey

year: 2010

notes: Looking at the impressive sculpture Joanna Rajkowska has installed in one of the main public squares in Konya, where swirling water caresses text etched in marble slabs, I am reminded of Robert Smithson's small pencil drawing called *A Heap of Language*. It was made in 1966 on a sheet of graph paper and shows a thicket of handwritten language and speech-related words – phraseology, verb, Babel, slip of tongue and so on – forming the titular heap. As Smithson's commentators note, his vision of language was a geological one; words, Smithson believed, bank up, forming piles and heaps, like gravel, slate or sand. Language erodes, undergoing similar processes as geological formations. Smithson wrote of similarities between working on material (drilling, hacking off the successive layers, analysis of chemical composition) and working on language. He wrote: "Words and rocks contain a language that follows a syntax of splits and ruptures. Look at any 'word' long enough and you will see it open into a series of faults, into a terrain of particles each containing its own void." At the same time, we should note how Smithson stressed the importance of exploring material at a time when conceptualists strove to ultimately dematerialise the work of art. The artist said in interview with Patricia Norvell: "I think that conceptual art that depends completely on written data is only half the story. You not only have to deal with the mind, you have to deal with material... There's no escape from matter. I mean, there's no escape from the physical. Nor is there any escape from the mind. The two are, I guess, on a constant collision course. So that you might say that my work is like an artistic disaster... It's a kind of quiet catastrophe of mind and matter." These words offer one of the possible interpretations of *Benjamin in Konya*, Rajkowska's Turkish project (or perhaps her other recent projects as well, where language and land served as a conceptual basis for working with local communities.) An interpretation according to which the work can be described as a "quiet catastrophe of language." After several study trips to Central Anatolia, Rajkowska decided to translate Walter Benjamin's essay *The Task of the Translator* (*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*) into Ottoman Turkish. The text was published for the first time in 1923, that is, precisely the year when the modern Turkish Republic was proclaimed. This temporal coincidence is crucial for the artist. Here a whole state gets "translated:" language, alphabet and syntax becoming hostage to modernisation processes – their victim but also a reliable instrument of change. The essay itself is a sum total of Benjamin's reflections on the purpose of translation, which is to regain the divine essence of language, the ability to truly

“name things.” This ability was lost once and for all in the shadow of the crumbling Babel Tower (let’s remember the “heap of language” at this point – the chaotic, disorganised geological-linguistic formation), and man has since become stuck in incomplete language, unable to name things and thus lacking a real connection with the world. Let’s quote the Smithsonian’s reflection once again: language can be annihilated, can corrode, disintegrate into tiny fragments, can be stored like waste in a big-city waste heap. Language can degrade. What happened with Ottoman Turkish vividly resembles geological processes, further accelerated by laboratory-applied formulas – a political-cultural configuration in which the metamorphosis could proceed at an unnaturally fast pace. Using a sample of research material – the Benjamin essay – Rajkowska analyses the impact the 1928 language reform decreed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had on the Turkish language (and thus on Turkish society as a whole, its “identity continuity”). The Perso-Arabic script was abandoned; then Turkish was gradually “weeded” of Arabic and Persian imports. The first, natural stage of Rajkowska’s *Benjamin in Konya* project was, therefore, to translate (for the first time ever) *The Task of the Translator* into Ottoman Turkish. In 2010, Rajkowska’s artist’s book came out with 500 copies, featuring the original German text, its translations into Ottoman Turkish and modern Turkish, as well as a phonetic transliteration of the Ottoman version. [The publisher of *Tableaux Parisiens* also issued 500 copies of the book.] Another important component of the project was the deposition of one copy of the book in the Yusuf Ağa Library in Konya (part of the Mausoleum of Rumi), which has an excellent collection of Ottoman books. The project’s third component was a film titled *The Stroll to the Library*, documenting a fictional visit paid by Benjamin (played here by actor Henryk Rajfer, looking very much like the philosopher) to the Anatolian city. The final, most spectacular part of the project was the creation of a public sculpture in a square near the Şerafettin Cami Mosque and the City Hall. The sculpture has the form of a shallow basin in which water swirls over marble plates on which a fragment of the Benjamin text has been etched in three languages: Ottoman Turkish, German and modern Turkish. The Ottoman text is under water, whereas the farthest part emerges from the surface and runs spirally around the basin. This final, most tangible part of the project emphasises the entropic aspect. Both the submerged fragments of the text and those you can walk on are doomed to be eventually erased, annihilated. Marble is a soft material and in a few years’ time water and human feet will make sure the inscriptions have been worn away. That is how a “collision of mind and matter” occurs. Language is always the background of this “quiet catastrophe.” But these are not all of the catastrophes the artist follows. Carrying out her projects in public space, Rajkowska searches for crises, deficits, states



of social exhaustion: moments where art can become a catalyst of change, stimulation, and “fever.” At the same time, her projects serve as a critical commentary on several decades of experiences with art in public space and community-based art. Rajkowska consciously refers to its failures, dead ends and the futile hopes that were pinned on art as it left the safe space of the museum. This is another quiet catastrophe that the artist leans over.
Warsaw, January 2011

The Stroll to the Library,
 08:15 min., video piece by
 Joanna Rajkowska, as a
 part of *Walter Benjamin in
 Konya*, 2011

Was the City I am Living in Mine?

Faruk Karaarslan
*Project Assistant for the
My City Project*

When I received the job offer from the My City project to work as the project assistant, I began to ask a couple questions that were triggered in my mind by the name of the project: My City. Was the city I am living in really mine? Or to what extent did I feel like it was mine? Did the other people with whom I live together with in this city know that this city also belonged to me? More importantly, were the officials in the local government thinking that this city belonged to me?" When I began to get more detailed information about the content of the project, I thought that it, more than anything else, would shed light on these and similar questions which were occupying my mind. For this reason I immediately accepted the offer which came to me through the mediation of my professor from the Sociology department at Selçuk University, Prof. Dr. Yasin Aktay. It was also important for me that I was going to seek answers to the questions that the project triggered within an artist. This was offering a chance for me to add to the things I would learn from an artist (with whom I would have the opportunity to work with for an extended period) to the knowledge that I had accumulated over five years of education in sociology. This was going to help me to structure in my mind the relations among cities, arts and people in a much clearer manner. Best of all, these things that were going to contribute to my personal development were in accord with the aims of the project.

As I heard more about the project, I learned that an artist Joanna Rajkowska, who is Polish and lives in Warsaw, was going to come to Konya. This information excited me even further because I had just returned four months prior from Warsaw where I had spent six months as a student and I had already begun to miss my time there. At this juncture, it was very meaningful for me that I was going to assist an artist from Warsaw for a project in the city in which I was living. While on the one hand I would find the opportunity to talk and ask about my impressions of Warsaw and other cities in Poland, on the other I would be able to hear Joanna's impressions on Konya at length and discuss my own with her. In this way we were going to share our experiences on these two cities that we knew and would find the chance to compare an Eastern European city with a Turkish city. Perhaps there were many reasons as to why the position was offered to me. The most important among these must be that I am from Konya, have been living in the city for twenty years, and have a good grasp of its history, culture, spaces, and the mentality of the local government. I had systematised all of the knowledge that stems from experience through my graduate and undergraduate education in sociology and I have a sufficient command of English. These must have been influential as well. The fact that they had searched for an assistant

who is a local and has studied sociology shows that they take the project very seriously. This kind of thoughtfulness and the significance of the project further excited me. At this point the only question that remained on my mind was what was the artist who was going to come to Konya like?

When one thinks of an artist, especially one who is nationally renowned, the first thing that comes to mind is their fastidiousness. Professionally they are bound not to like anything. You would expect that they would be capricious and they would randomly scold the people around them. In this sense there is a negative perception regarding artists' human relations. Yet in our first meeting with Joanna, none of these negative connotations came to my mind. From the way she dressed and talked, she gave the impression of being a very modest person who was trying to understand the people around her. Having realised this, I tried to fully understand what her expectations of me were. Joanna wanted to learn all about Konya and particularly she wanted to understand how the inhabitants of Konya represented themselves in public spaces. She was working on "public art" and that was what she wanted to do in Konya. I did not know much about "public art", which is a rather new field in our country. Yet I later learned from her what it was and what it meant for the city. Joanna wanted to produce a work about public life in Konya and she wanted this work to represent something of the people using public spaces. To put it more saliently, Joanna wanted to include the people living in Konya in her project and she wanted to produce something that was going to find a place in the world of meanings of the people in Konya, a work that would mean something to them. First and foremost, this required a thorough knowledge of Konya's history, the ways in which the inhabitants of the city were organising themselves in the public space, the structures of its civil society, the workings of its official institutions, and the structure of its culture and religion. This was going to be my role. I was going to be the mediator between Joanna and Konya and its inhabitants.

I worked with Joanna for six months and during this period we conversed on many different issues and especially the different projects that she was entertaining in her mind. We met and talked about Konya with people from different groups and professions including representatives of civil society organisations, academics, local government officials, and students. We listened to a lot of local music and ate local food. Some local families hosted us in their homes. The most memorable among these experiences for me was Joanna's astonishment when she heard the Ramadan drums¹ and how for three nights we searched for

[1] Translator's note: During the month of Ramadan, drummers walk through the streets of the towns and cities before dawn playing their drums to wake people up so that they can eat before the next day's fasting begins right at dawn

these drummers to talk with them. We were out at two in the morning trying to take pictures of the drummers. It was not only difficult to explain to Joanna what the drummers were doing but also quite difficult to explain to the drummers themselves what we were doing. These were the most fun moments of the project. Of course, there was also "Doggy," the stray dog of the "Zazadin Han." Every time we went to the Zazadin Han to take some pictures, "Doggy" followed us around everywhere we went. Joanna was very interested in Doggy, perhaps because it was a lame dog. Each time Joanna gave it food and water it accompanied us until we left the Zazadin Han. When the time came for Joanna to leave Konya, she wanted to say good-bye to Doggy and we went back to the Zazadin Han after a couple months break. This time only the guard of the Han met us. Doggy was not there. We learned that it was neutered and taken to a shelter. When I told this to Joanna she was very upset. She almost burst into tears. She was a true animal lover and she had kept telling me that she could not understand how people would abuse animals and she did not understand zoos. At that moment, I realised why Joanna kept visiting the zoo in Konya and observed people's behavior towards the animals.

The process of the making of the project was full of moments like this. We visited various historical sites in Konya and took pictures. In the wee hours of the morning, we went to the village of Sile and made sound recordings. We visited Nasreddin Hodja's² tomb and read his funny short stories. We climbed up the Takkeli Mountain to get a bird's eye view of Konya. We tasted the traditional food in Meram. Sometimes we had long discussions on topics of mutual interest. In short, we fully lived every day of the project as we tried to discover Konya together.

I guess what Joanna was most interested in her stay in Konya was life in public spaces. She was paying great attention to the actions and the organisation of people in public spaces and was trying to learn every detail about the things that had a place in collective memory. She wanted to fully understand disparate events that were collectively remembered from the impact on the society of the collapse of the Zümürüt apartment building, the perception of the Independence Tribunals³ in Konya, to political protests in the city. Among all these events that had an impact on public life she came to be most interested in the script reform of 1928.⁴ She was astonished to learn that we could not read and understand the texts written before this date and hence were denied access to huge portions of our cultural and intellectual inheritance. She believed that this must have resulted in gaps in our collective memory. She decided to make a project on language. She consulted the academics in Konya on this issue. Finally, she decided to write in various languages a quotation from Walter Benjamin in a pool that was to be built in a central public square in Konya.

[2] Translator's note: Nasreddin Hodja is a Sufi figure who is believed to have lived during the Middle Ages in the area. He is known for his satirical funny short stories and anecdotes

[3] Translator's note: Independence Tribunals were state of emergency courts established to curb the opposition during the Anatolian war and the early years of the Turkish Republic, that is, in the early 1920s

[4] Translator's note: Script reform is one of the many reforms carried out by the leadership of early Turkish Republic which aimed to modernise and secularise Turkish society. With this reform the usage of the Arabic alphabet was abandoned by law and a new Turkish alphabet, based on a modified Latin alphabet, was introduced

The project was not just about writing the text in the pool. This project was going to give a message to all the people using this central public space and to the officials of the local administration. Furthermore, this was not a message only from Joanna but from a famous philosopher. Through the mediation of a work of art the message was going to meet the public. This way, though Walter Benjamin was only known to a very few people in Konya, at least a quote by him, was going to be read by everybody who passed by this pool located in the busiest square in the city. What is the message? This message, written also with the alphabet that we had left behind a century ago, was to emphasise the dimensions of our estrangement from our own language and civilisation. It was a message emphasising the significance of language. In this sense our project was speaking to everybody and was aimed at pointing out the importance of language to the public in Konya. Put differently, the product of our intense work with Joanna was a pool that was in harmony with Konya's traditional architecture, yet also reflecting the modern age.

Let me return to the questions that I had initially asked. Yes! This city was mine. However, in the process of the work that Joanna and I carried out, I came to understand that the people with whom I lived with in this city did not realise that this city also belonged to me. The car horns that were blown in response to the smallest mistakes, the animals in the zoo which were incarcerated only for people to watch, the people who did not hesitate to throw their garbage on the streets, even spit on the streets, streets and public buildings which were not designed to accommodate the circulation of the disabled, my inability to read texts written a century ago in my own cultural world all pointed towards this. Yet, this was not a problem peculiar to Konya. What I understood from our conversations with Joanna is that this problem existed in Warsaw and London and elsewhere. Perhaps this was the problem of the modern world. If you ask me, with this project another step was taken towards solving this problem. It made me and the other people living in Konya further feel that this city was ours. In this sense, the project was trying to establish relations with the city and the public life and the world of thought. Most important of all, it served to emphasise the importance of a bridge between the past and the future and the central significance of the experience of living together. The project took its place at the heart of Konya as a value for the city of Konya and its peoples. It told the people of Konya that the city belongs to the people living in public spaces and it will continue to say this.

Aydın Nezh Doğan
Konya Governor

Could you please introduce yourself?

I have been serving as the Konya governor since July 2009. Formerly, I have served as the Tekirdağ governor and as district governor in various districts around Turkey, including one in Konya. I have been working as a state official for the past 26–27 years.

How did you get in contact with My City project? What did you think it was going to be like when you first heard about it?

My introduction to My City project was through Joanna's request for a meeting, and her coming here. Joanna came here with her friends from the project, and I hosted them here in this very room. I met with her in the morning, and on the same day, in the afternoon in the Mevlana (Rumi) Cultural Centre. It was an introductory meeting for the project. The ideas that the artist was proposing in the meeting terrified me. Here was an artist who was not only unfamiliar with the realities of Turkey and the fault lines of Turkish politics, but also an artist who seemed as if she was not going to take them into serious consideration. It was an open meeting and many people voiced their opinions. I guess Joanna had talked about a project that she did in Poland. She talked about the problems that her art event in Warsaw had created. I said, "Alas, we will face similar problems in Konya."

Let me talk about this Warsaw project. The artist planted a certain type of palm tree in Warsaw that grows in the Arab counties, and through this, she tried to say, "Look, Israel is creating a problem in Palestinian territories." Meanwhile, the Jews were subjected to violence by the Germans during the Second World War in these lands. It is impossible for the Jews to forget this. She plants a palm tree that represents the Palestinians there, and she wants this to be accepted by the Jews in Poland. The place became a centre for protests. It became a centre for all kinds of protests against the government. An artist performs her art in order to capture the difference. Joanna's characteristic is to produce art that captures social problems. It is like you live in a place with heavy air pollution and you do not know anything of clean air. You realise the air is polluted only when you breathe in the clean air. The situation was quite similar: it is difficult to see the social problems, if you are already

living in those problems. An outside observer can see them clearly. Furthermore, Joanna is an artist who is geared to do this. When I saw what she had captured with the script written in the former alphabet, I realised that this was a conscious choice. But I told her that it needed to be softened for social acceptance. If what this lady had in mind was to be fully implemented, we could have faced a serious political rupture, social problems and an issue that would be discussed at the national level. I was worried if such a case would benefit or harm the city we are living in. Of course, it is not at all easy to explain to a foreigner the problems that can emerge from your own cultural background. Words are not enough. You need other things. You need to be able to feel it. I brought up my worries. Yet, my worries were not at all taken into account. They came back again with another project proposal. There is a place in Konya called Takkeli Mountain. It is a place visible from all parts of Konya. She was thinking of writing a poem in the Arabic alphabet on the face of the mountain. As the governor of the city, I was apprehensive about the possible conflicts that such a project would cause nationwide, and its possible interpretations because of some of the past events in Turkish political history that took place in Konya. I tried to explain this for a couple of hours to David [Codling] with carefully chosen words. I told him that we could not undertake such a project and that it would create serious conflicts and divergence among different social groups. I can see what the artist had captured. What we call the Script Reform here in Turkey represents a cultural break. The gaze of an outsider can see this much more clearly, we cannot see it as clearly because we are already living it. When you go to the mosque, visit historical monuments, and in the old books, you see a different alphabet, and there is a new alphabet today. A foreigner sees this break, sees it much more clearly when compared to us, and in a way, criticises it. Or she wants to make it a part of art. This is actually what Joanna is doing. She saw a cultural transformation. I do not want to pass a negative or positive judgement on this. *I am saying this just as an observation.* There is a break. Some would see this as a positive break, some as negative. This would produce another break. In the end, we are state officials, not artists. We have to think about the consequences. We went through this kind of a process of persuasion. In the end, it became possible to make something that did not cause the artists to give up

on her sensibilities and the current project emerged. The writing is in Ottoman, Ottoman in Latin script, German and Turkish. There are four different narratives there. This narrative was not fully understood by the people of Konya as intended by the artist. Of course, when I say the people of Konya, I do not mean a single entity. There were thousands who understood the message very well, and could internalise it. There were others who were questioning it and asking, "Why was this written this way?" But the work generated criticism mostly from the visually impaired. Here is what they were saying, "I am visually impaired, how will I know that there is a pool here?" or "There are no warnings that would keep me away from that pool. I might slide and fall into it." There were protests around the pool, but Joanna likes protests around her arts activities. Hence, to a certain extent she realised her aim. That is to say, her aim was to create a space for protest. But the protests were not about the idea embodied in the artwork, but towards the implementation of the artwork.

Various political groups organised protests against this. Then the disabled made their statements there. Many newspaper columnists criticised not the idea presented, but the implementation of the art. Two major criticisms were voiced. One was directed towards the Mayor's Office, and it was, "There was one square in Konya where people could walk comfortably, and you allocated this square for this purpose." The other criticism was: "What kind of an artwork is this that no warnings were placed for the disabled in an age of affirmative action? Why did the artist not show such a sensitivity?" Still, since it was put there, there were people around it every hour of everyday looking at what it was. Konya is one of the cities in Turkey with a sturdy tourism industry. For instance, last year, in 2010, about 460,000 foreign and 1.5 million local tourists visited the city. There are about 2 million people who come to visit Rumi every year. This project did not become one of the tourist destinations. Since its installation in September, around 600,000 visitors came to Konya. But the site was not included in the tourist excursion route. The tourist guides do not know about it. For instance, you take the tourists to the sculpture of the Brementown Musicians. It's a very simple sculpture, but they still take the tourists there. It is one of the destinations for tourists. You pay the price and go see such places. Or in Holland, there are places you go and see. In Italy, it is the same. People did not perceive that it (Joanna's art work) has a cultural significance, that it has a meaning and this meaning is in line with Konya's international vision. I do not quite understand this lack of perception. Hence, despite the fact that it is a work that represents Konya, Konya's values, the values of Rumi such as tolerance and love, Konya failed to integrate it into its cultural atmosphere. At the moment, we (as the Governor's Office) are

not making any interventions; we are trying not to stir the social tensions. But in March, we will undertake a substantial project on tourism. We will conduct an in-depth scientific study. Through that work, I will try to explain to people in the tourism industry that this project is an integral part of the city's culture. With the help of people in the culture industry, I will try to render this work one of the tourist destinations. If this happens to be the case, and people come and start taking its pictures and show an interest in it—for instance, if it turns into one of those trees that people tie pieces of cloth around, then it will be more in line with what Joanna had in mind. At the moment, it is a place from which we keep our distance.

What are your observations about the inception and the implementation of the project?

We always make the same mistake. We have a culture that tries to finish things while still making them. There is a saying that goes like, put together everything relevant about an issue and leave the rest out. We need to adopt a perspective that would include all of the necessary elements and leave out everything that is unnecessary. The project team was not put together in this manner.

Is this the reason why the pool does not have water in it at the moment?

In winter, the water freezes. The frozen water kind of spirals inwards. When the sun shines on it, it looks truly stunning. I asked Joanna if she had intended for this, and she replied that she herself did not know about it, but found it beautiful. It adds further depth to the whole thing. But in order for the municipality to get it running again in the right season, some strong support is required. The Association for the Disabled needs to be persuaded. It requires positive propaganda.

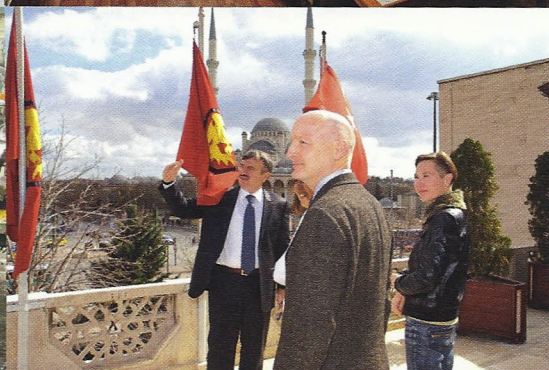
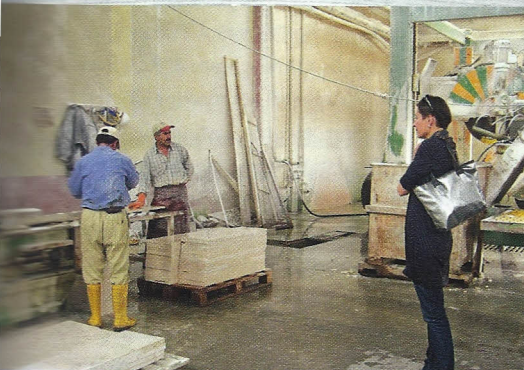
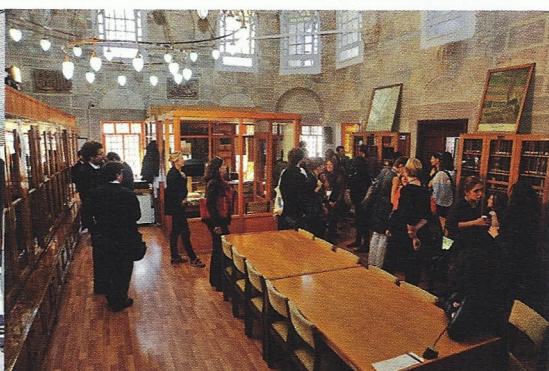
This problem about the disabled should have been foreseen and included in the project. Of course, this should have been done in a manner that would have incorporated the sensibilities of the artist. The artist wanted this pool to be accessible. She wanted the people to be able to come near the water and stand by it. Hence the original project does not have any barriers. Yet the absence of barriers creates a problem, not one that could not be overcome though. Perhaps it could have been built in a slightly elevated fashion. I think Joanna needs to come here again, and we need to tell her about the problems and ask for her suggestions towards a solution.

Has the Governor's Office worked with an artist before, or collaborated with an artist?

No, not the Governor's Office, but the Municipality did. There are works that have been done with sculptors right next to the Governor's Office. There is something else in the Culture Park, in a place called Şato Forum. There is a sculpture there. It is a place around Alaeddin. There is a beautiful sculpture there. Konya is a conservative place; people don't like sculptures very much. Yet, all of these are a testament to the fact that social prejudices are much less rigid than they are assumed to be. There are no oppositions towards these works. People have their pictures taken in front of them. My personal opinion is that this work should continue to be there. It is tremendously aesthetic and it embraces the artistic spirit and rebellion. The people of Konya should get to know it, and moreover, people visiting Konya should get to know it. If there were problems and troubles, we should assume that we have contributed to them as well. When something is not going well, all the parties involved are responsible. It is our joint responsibility.

2 February 2011

TR-ENG by B.K.



Bekir Şahin

Director of Konya Regional

Manuscript Library

Would you introduce yourself?

My name is Bekir Şahin. I was born in Kadınhanı, Konya. I went to primary and middle schools in Kadınhanı, and graduated from Konya Selçuk University's Theology department. I served 10 years as a teacher, assistant principal and principal in various schools around Turkey. In 1997, I became the director of Burdur Public Library. Since 2002, I have been serving as the director of the Konya Regional Manuscript Library. I also have positions at various non-governmental organisations such as the president of the Konya branch of the Turkish Writers Association, Konya representative of Professional Organisation of Authors of Intellectual and Artistic Works (İLESAM) and a member of the Board of Directors of Turkish Monuments Association. I am also a member of the Board of Editors, as well as a writer for the *Konya Encyclopaedia*, which started off two years ago. I have made presentations in various national and international symposiums. I write for various newspapers and magazines. I have published six books.

I first heard about this project through Adem Seleş and Yasin Aktay. Then the project coordinators came to visit our library. They said they were going to shoot a short film in the library. Since this was a cultural project, we were more than happy. The world is ridden with wars today; our biggest hope is to achieve peace. Cultural bridges are crucial in establishing world peace. As opposed to geographical boundaries, today we are faced with cultural boundaries, and I believe that for humanity to achieve future peace, arts and culture events need to become more widespread. Though we couldn't do much, we still tried to provide what we could. It was very significant for the project to contain a library because libraries are the collective consciousness and the centres of knowledge. Especially if this is a manuscript library, it brings the past to the present and carries the present to the future. These libraries are where you find primary sources of works in every language, religion and culture. Nowadays, all researchers prefer to consult primary sources for their research. If one is going to write about history or science, it is imperative to go to these libraries. Thinking about the fact that Konya is the capital of six civilisations – in fact the first city where the first civilisation was established – the project becomes significant in that respect as well. Konya was the capital of the Seljuks, and Konya saw the first urbanisation

movement with civilisations living here under one roof, people from all religions and lands were invited here, and a Konya school was formed. Unfortunately not many people know about this Konya school in the world today. During that period and the periods following it, Muslims and non-Muslims lived side-by-side in Konya, and their sweet memories lead us to the path of world peace and solidarity.

When they told you about the project, what did you think of Joanna's views about different languages co-existing in one book, in one place? What kind of an effect did this have both in the book, and in the square in the middle of daily life?

In our culture, language is referred to as "mother's milk." Language for us is as sacred as our flag. Today people are faced with at least three languages: native language, cultural language and official language. We can never overlook any one of these. People have to use all three of these languages in different occasions. It is considered shameful to say, "My official language is this, and my native language can not be used in the official language." Our culture has always given freedom to these three languages. Today the world needs exactly that. When we look back at the Ottoman rule, we see that languages have always survived. In Seljuk and Ottoman histories, language was never used as a tool of oppression. For instance, Persian was the dominant language in the Seljuks. The Ottomans used Ottoman Turkish but other languages were also easily accepted. What comes to the foreground in this project is the mixture of different languages and alphabets. Moreover, language is a tool of communication. *People should be able to express themselves freely in their own language.* The pool in the centre of Konya acquires another meaning with the language, and the water in the pool reflecting its clarity. Bringing the pool together with languages must be the symbol of our hopes for today and for the future.

Unfortunately, in our country there have been some problems with this cultural language. Inevitably, states collapse and other states take power. Initially, rebelling against this cultural language may be a good thing. But now, the republic is established and strong. Today, intellectuals study the Ottoman language. Nobody wants to have the embarrassment

of not being able to read his grandfather's tombstone or have someone else translate a martyr's letter from the past. In today's Greece, next to Greek writing you will also find Latin. In Russia, next to Russian you'll find English. Again, in Israel you'll see road signs in different alphabets, different languages. The people of the world want to protect their native language, cultural language and official language all the same.

So what did Joanna's book bring to your library? It is an unusual book for this library. It's not only an artist's book, but a book of an artist that is not from Konya...

From Joanna's point of view, it may be a first. But from our point of view, it's not at all. For us, it was a contemporary sibling of all the other books in the library written in different languages, but it was the forgotten one. Its siblings were all 100, 200, 300 years old, and this one was a young, fresh sibling. For instance, we have a 1,200-years-old Hebrew manuscript written on leather. In addition, there are various dictionaries and books in Ottoman. In our library or in other manuscript libraries, there are translations of philosophy books by famous Europeans, and, especially Greek, philosophers. This was a forgotten book and the project brought back a forgotten past. For many, it was a first. Because once you forget something, it doesn't exist anymore. So we may also look at it as new.

The project was mostly remembered through the pool, not so much through the book. Has there been any discussion about this new book in the library?

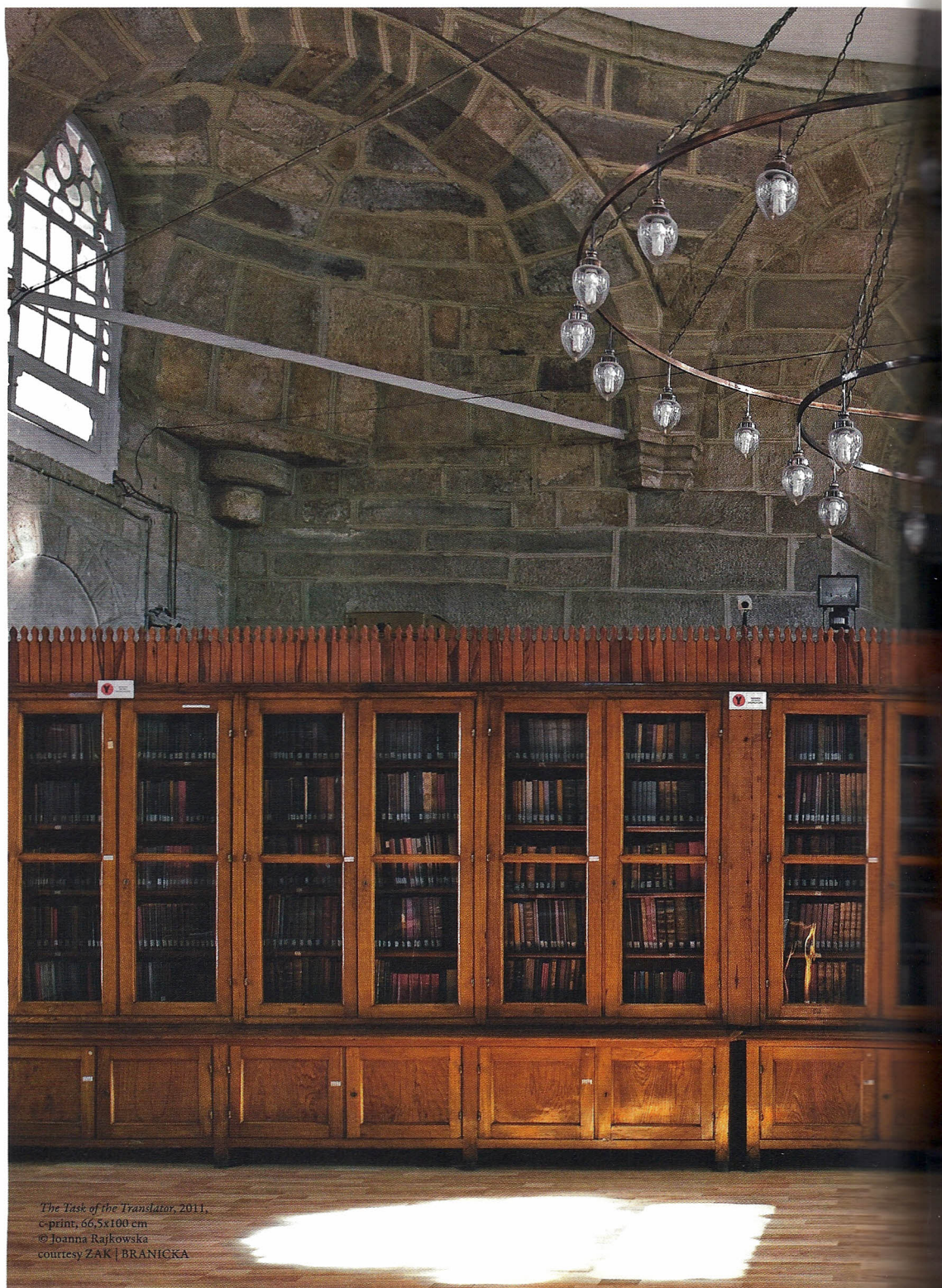
People didn't understand the library very well, and that's why it wasn't at the forefront. In fact, libraries in our day are, unfortunately, not where they deserve to be. The pool attracted attention, but this was because it had brought a reaction and caused debate. Certainly everyone was right and wrong in a way. Just the fact that the project created so much discussion brought it to the current agenda. And none of the discussions were unconstructive for the project. There were some fair arguments about the disabled. For me, it's even a privilege to get wet in that pool. There are different healing tools in different religions and communities. Again, in some cultures, there is the ritual of drinking out of a holy cup, and most of the cups have writings in different languages. They are tools of healing. We can even interpret the project in this way.

I want to give another example. Currently we are writing about the history of the neighbourhoods of Konya. The other day we went to a neighbourhood in the centre called Ferhuniye, to talk to a man of 105 years old. He was talking about the neighbourhood. He said, "There were non-Muslims living there, too." Of course, this was a very new and

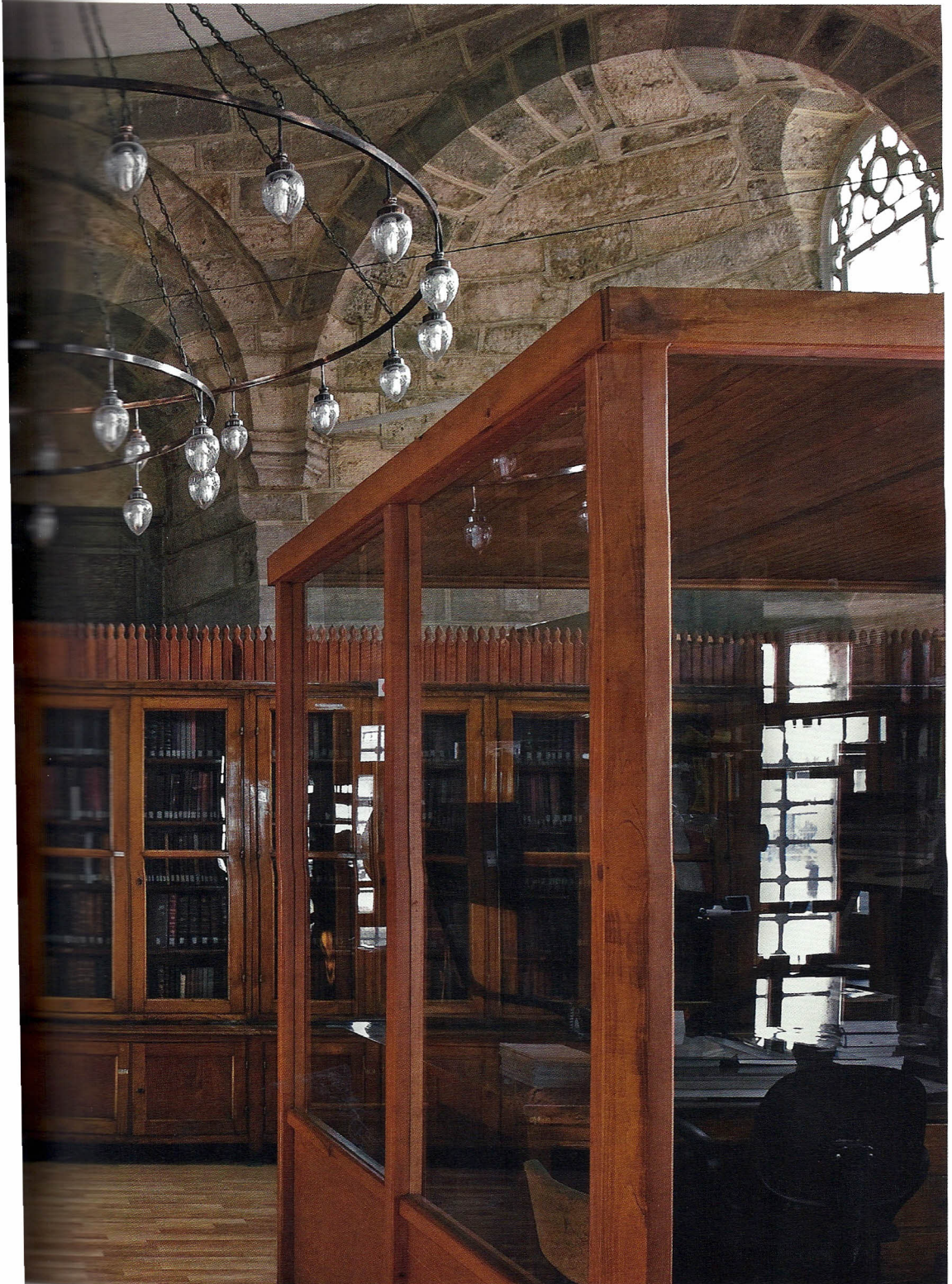
important information for us. We also wanted to know who owned the building of the Turkish Writers Association of which I'm the president of. It's the neighbourhood just north of Alaeddin where the Kültür Park is. We were going to write about what communities lived there. The old man continued with his story, "We had two non-Muslim neighbours. When they were leaving, they wanted to give us their chest box as a gift. So my wife gave them one-and-a-half liras. They refused. She insisted. They refused, 'We can't accept that, that would be unjust.' This is a conversation between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. Close to here is a neighbourhood called Sille [formerly a village]. A man that makes fedora hats there is leaving the village and says to his neighbour, 'You can sell these and send me the money.' The neighbour sells all the hats but he can't find the other man's address to send him the money. Then he goes to Mevlana Museum. He says to his friends, 'I have something that belongs to my non-Muslim neighbour, but I can't send it to him. What should I do? Give me some advice,' and he gives the money to them. So the men in the museum take the money, – this is a true story, a quite recent one – and buy paint to paint the church in Sille. Another man borrows some gold from his Muslim neighbour and says, "I'll send it back to you." Time passes and there is no gold coming from him, and the Muslim man gets upset. He thinks, 'He was an honest man. Why didn't he send it? I guess I was wrong about him.' Just as he is saying this, a guest arrives. He says, "I'm so and so's son. After my father left here, he became ill and died. He told me, 'Son, I borrowed some gold from this man in Konya, and I am quite late in returning it, add some more and take it back to him.'" The gold comes back in a greater amount. There are many stories like these. These are actions that will contribute to world peace. I think parts of formal history will be remembered by the new generations as false history. I hope there will be more projects like this and bridges will be built for cultures to come together.

3 February 2011

TR-ENG by Z.Z.



The Taste of the Translator, 2011,
c-print, 66,5x100 cm
© Joanna Rajkowska
courtesy ZAK | BRANICKA



Adem Seleş
Writer, activist

Would you introduce yourself?

My name is Adem Seleş. I graduated from Hacettepe University's Public Administration department. I work in advertising, and I am also active in non-governmental organisations. For nearly 15 years, I have been active in human rights. I am actively involved in a platform formed by 80 foundations and non-governmental organisations in Konya that has been active for the last 10 years. I am also a columnist in the daily *Merhaba*.

You have been to other cities and attended all the launch events for the projects in those cities. What do you think of the work that was done here? What did people say about it?

My view about the European Union projects is that to be beneficial for everyone, they have to be founded upon mutuality. Just as we learn from them, they should also learn from us. I have travelled abroad and talked to people, and even in my own country, I see this Orientalist perspective like, "We will go there and teach them, or they will come here and learn." We need to create a more equal platform for mutual exchange that is good for both sides. That's what I thought about the project. I think that all this talk about globalisation is just a big lie. I believe that we are going back towards localisation, and certainly diversity will be an advantage during this change. So what if everyone in the world learns to speak English? Does that help anyone? Konya has its own characteristics and, as a person who lives here, I have to protect these characteristics. A person who lives in Warsaw has to protect Warsaw's characteristics. So that when we get to know each other, we can create a source of life that is at once happy and full of vitality. This diversity is a life source. For instance, I was happy when Somalian immigrants came to Konya. Black people, dark-skinned people, there was a great diversity. You see all kinds of people, tall people, small people. Even this was eye opening for us. I wrote about the cities on My City's website and I also published these articles in my newspaper column, so that the project could get some press. If people from Konya could understand or explain the project better, it would have had a much bigger impact. Intellectuals and more educated groups understood the project, of course. But, when the public passed by the pool, they would ask, "Why was this done?" Some blame the Municipality for it, and

others the Mayor. I really like the work in Mardin; the cinema left its mark on the city. Even after years, the cinema will have a story. I liked the way that they did something with kids in Trabzon and involved the public in the process. Even I got something from the writing on the wall. When I met the artist she hadn't understood my take on it, but this diversity is still very important. From the sentence, "The one who loves speaks the truth, and laments injustice," I made out the following meaning: "The one who is in *âşık*, is also the one that plays *saz* and sings." We even came to the meaning of the word together through talking.

What kind of method do you think that Joanna could have used in order to make the project more understandable and spread it to a wider audience?

Joanna could have done some interviews with the local press or some columnists; the project could have been explained in a press conference. You do panels at the Municipality, and the hall is filled with the employees from the Municipality. The panel is at two o'clock in the afternoon; students are at school, public servants and workers are at work. The Ottoman language is important for Konya. In recent years, they have started courses in Ottoman. Translation does not do justice to the original, we know that. This was being emphasised here. Honestly, even the ones in the Municipality, the Cultural Centre and the Directorate of Culture were not completely informed about why this was being done. If they themselves don't understand it completely, how are they going to explain it to the public?

What did you think of the content? Sometimes problems get ahead of the content in these kinds of initiatives. At the end you might end up by not perceiving the work. What does it mean for you to do this kind of work in Konya?

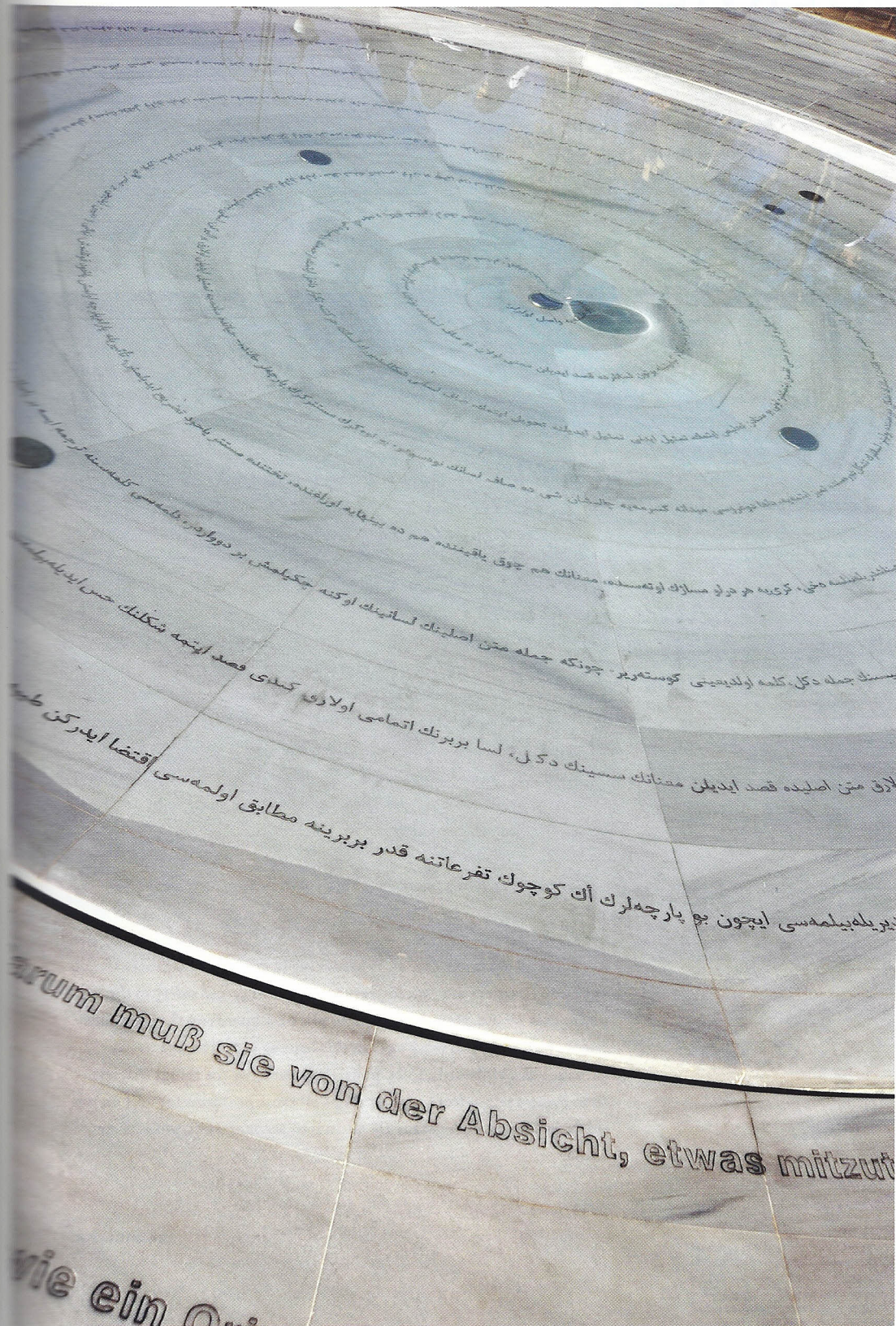
I observed that an artist from outside can have a better perspective on some issues through her unique view. Even I, as a person who deals with things like human rights and freedom, had not realised how our ties with the past had completely been cut off after the Script Reform and that the 600-year history between *the Ottoman and the Turkish* had been erased just like that, and that it had become incomprehensible. The official

ideology of the Republic has been leaning towards this direction for many years, and you eventually internalise it. In that sense, I think the work has opened many new horizons. No matter how much we think we are rebelling against it, official ideology makes us internalise certain taboos and prohibitions as natural. In fact, even the opposing voices are not free of this internalisation. For me, this was a good learning experience.

Whatever anyone says, Konya is different from all other cities. It is set upon a background of religion. For example, the Municipality built a park next to İş Bank, with water fountains and all. They put sculptures of kids playing there. Even though I'm a religious person and have reservations about sculpture, I liked it. It looked like some of the sculptures I had seen in the United States. Even this sculpture stirred up debate here, "What are these sculpture doing in the middle of the city?" That's how Konya is. Yet, if this project had been explained better, it would have received more reaction. For instance, there is no sign explaining the work. People ask, "What does this Ottoman writing mean?" If they put a summary of the text and a short description of the work, it will spread like an urban legend. Thirty thousand people pass by here, maybe three of them will read it. But the next day, through word of mouth, it will reach a thousand people. People would have owned it even if they had written something along the lines of "No translation is as good as the original text. To understand this text properly, you need to learn Ottoman. To understand your 600-year history, you need to learn Ottoman." To make this point, the artist Joanna wrote the text in Ottoman, Turkish and German. In terms of the location of the work, blind people have a point that they can't see it. Even those who aren't blind hardly notice it. Also this is the spot where all people pass by, or wait for the bus, or gather for political rallies and protests. It's been an empty space for years and now all of a sudden a pool appears there, and a few people know why it was put up there.

2 February 2011

TR-ENG by Z.Z.



Veli Özdoğan

*Association for Protection of the Visually Impaired for Common Good,
Konya Branch*

Could you please briefly introduce yourself?

My name is Veli Özdoğan. I am the chair of the Konya Branch of the Association for Protection of the Visually Impaired for Common Good. Our branch is also a member of the Executive Board of the Federation of the Visually Impaired.

Can you please describe us the square that the project is placed on?



Hükümet Square is used for political rallies during election times and it is also a place where public city buses begin and end their routes. It is a place where Vakıfbank and other major banks are located, and also a much-used transit route for the city residents. The pool for the project is located right at the centre of this square, and hence it causes problems. Or if the pool was located in a corner, or a less central place, we still would not have paid any attention to it on account of the fact that it would not be on our way. We would prefer that the needs of the pedestrians were taken into account, especially when such a project is located in a place much used by the pedestrians. Our Metropolitan Mayor stated that this is a square for political rallies, and hence the pool was going to be covered during the election campaigns.

Has there been another case of a work of art causing problems in Konya before?

As the visually impaired, we are not interested in its form, shape or what it is made of, as we can't see it. What we say in general is that there should not be any barriers that would prevent our mobility and safety in the places that we use. Now they began to place billboards on the sidewalks and we have begun to work against this issue as well. The misplaced garbage cans, billboards, trees, polls, signboards, or the things that the shop owners put in front of their shops all cause problems for us. I do not think, in Turkey, pedestrians are taken into account when projects are made.

2 February 2011



An image of a platform prepared in advance of the project's inauguration in order to cover the *Walter Benjamin in Konya* pool and not obstruct public meetings and demonstrations which take place in the square.

Yasin Aktay

Prof. Dr., Selçuk University

Sociology Department

Could you please introduce yourself?

I am a faculty member in the Sociology department in the Faculty of Literature at Selçuk University. I have been living in Konya for the past 19 years.

What was your role in My City project? What was your experience like?

I was invited to help the artist who was going to work in Konya, to find an assistant for her and provide consultancy. I tried to help her as much as I could. I introduced her to a graduate student of mine. I had a chance to learn about the project and its unfolding both from my student who had become the artist's assistant, and from the artist herself whom I met from time to time. Since our areas of interest were overlapping, I had a lot to share with the artist. I can say that we had very good discussions about language, art, social philosophy and interpretative experiences. Joanna had very interesting observations regarding Konya, and she was comparing these with her own country and other countries in the Middle East that she had visited. Her insights were original and inspiring. For instance, her insights on the formation of public spaces and the appropriation of public space in Konya were very different from the commonly assumed interpretations. I also helped her to overcome communication problems with the local administrators when her work required interaction with the local administration. This mediation between the artist and the local administration was not just about translating between two different languages but required the reconciliation of different cultural backgrounds.

How would you define public space in Konya? Can you describe the different usages of public space here? How do the people of Konya experience arts and cultural productions in public space?

The concept of public space is a fairly controversial issue in Turkey. The debate over where public space begins and ends is intertwined with the debate over individual rights and the restrictions that should or could be placed on them. Hence, at first sight it seems difficult to offer a clear analysis on the ways in which public space is experienced. Still we can say that compared to other cities, people are more conservative in public

spaces in Konya. Tacitly accepted rules are strictly followed in such spaces. As to works of art in public spaces, there is a set of specific practices and preferences in Turkey as an Islamic country. Sculptures are not a favoured form of art. People would demand a well-designed garden or an architectural work in public spaces. The aesthetics of spaces around the mosques historically have become an integral part and parcel of the worldviews of the people of Konya. There are many architecturally significant historical mosques. Traditions are carefully guarded in these spaces. Music is performed within the Rumi tradition in houses and common places, and it facilitates and enables socialisation. Streets and avenues are lively life spaces. In this sense, there are a lot of common spaces that enable neighbourhood and other forms of long-term relations. In this sense, the city boasts a very established culture of neighbourhood. There is something else that Joanna keenly captured. Different from the West, somebody can put a chair in front of his/her home or shop and, by sitting on that chair, can turn that space which essentially is public into his/her private space. This comfort and ease in the appropriation of space ties into the perception of the state in Turkey. In the West, the state looks invisible but it actually is very dominant in protecting property and hence, it would not be easy for Westerners to engage in such practices. Because of this, in the west, common spaces continue to decrease and neighbourhood culture cannot develop.

What is the significance of *Walter Benjamin in Konya* project for the city? How do you evaluate this project in relation to public space practices in the city?

This project involves the building of an architecturally original pool in one of the most favoured and busiest squares in Konya, which is surrounded by a series of historical mosques. The quotation in Ottoman, first and foremost, has the potential to trigger all kinds of different interpretations and myths for the people of Konya. Even on the day of the opening of the pool, I overheard a few different interpretations that were being voiced which would not even have crossed the artist's mind. The work provokes reflections on the nature of dialogical translation processes. It points towards the difficulties of translation between different languages and also aims at bringing people together who have lived and are living in different times. There is no predetermined point that this meeting would end in. Where the quotation from Benjamin takes you is exactly such a place of elusiveness. This is a very meaningful choice for Konya. This is the land of Rumi who had once said, "Whatever you say, your words mean as much as they are heard by the listener," a Rumi who has tried to hear the story of the reed torn from its reed bed through the sound of a reed flute, a Rumi who has produced his work in Persian on Turkish speaking territories. I believe that this work will contribute to the culture of the city and motivate a series of parallel meanings and images.