

**International Congress of Aesthetics 2007  
“Aesthetics Bridging Cultures”**

***Ayin Kültüyle Kaydedilmiş Ortak Bir  
Hafıza<sup>1</sup>: Assos Performing Art Festival***

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Under the name “Assos Uluslararası Gösteri Sanatları Festivali”, four International Performing Art Festivals were held between the years 1995 and 1999 in Assos in Çanakkale. In the sphere of performing arts in Turkey, this festival is a very distinctive one for various reasons. First of all, being the first international performing arts event in Turkey, it brought many disciplines of art together. Artists from dance to theatre, from music to circus, from photograph to art design lived together for a remarkable time period; for three weeks. Here comes the second reason for the originality of the festival: throughout three weeks being there, artists produced their works specifically for the place and audience they chose in Assos. The art director of the festival, Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu, invited each group to Assos for only once and wanted them not to stage/perform any play/installation/performance they performed/staged before. This was the “trick” of the festival. At the end of a non-stop three-week production process in Assos with other artists, each group had a site-specific work. Thirdly; apart from bringing different performing artists together and enabling them to produce for three weeks, the festival is unique also because it was held in a village and in collaboration with villagers. Especially children, then teenagers and men, lastly women participated in the production process of the works of artists at various levels. Some, just by opening their garden to theatre rehearsals; some, by acting in the plays; some, by helping to sew the costumes, villagers constituted an essential part throughout all the four festivals. By considering the fact that the festival had no financial support from any state institution and could be managed by sponsorship, the vital importance of collaboration of villagers can be seen more clearly.<sup>2</sup>

It is co-existence of more than one reason that made such a festival realizable. The antique and inspiring atmosphere of Assos may be thought of as one of the strongest motivations bringing a lot of artists and audience together. Or the potential in the art circles in İstanbul for avant-garde works may be seen as another one. However, for many people, what exactly makes possible all these things to come together is the art director of the festival, Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu, who died in 1999 as a result of a very unlucky accident. There are three factors about the “energy” of Katırcıoğlu on which a lot of people I interviewed agree. First, the fact that he had his theatre education in England and in USA provides a lot of international and national connections to him to organize such an international avant-garde festival and the secondly, he was a resident of Assos for summers, and having trustful relationships with villagers for years made villagers to be the most crucial actors of the festival. Lastly without exception everybody talked about his incredible energy and passion to realize the festival and the theatre he imagined.

In this paper, I will try to trace this festival through the narratives of the artists and villagers who took part in the festival. Actually, one does not have to make interviews to learn about the festival. There is a rich, though disorganized, archive including a lot of newspaper articles, photographs, interviews made with Katircioğlu and videos records of the festival performances. But I chose interview as my method to see both to learn about the festival and to look at the effect of the festival on the lives and narratives of people as the last festival was held 8 years ago. For the basic character of the festival was co-existence of art works within the flow of daily life, to listen the narratives of the villagers today seems important to me in terms of recording what exactly remained in their life after 8 years has passed over the project. Further, to look at the way artists and producers remember the festival days will enable us to deepen the discussion on the festival as an experiment of an artistic idea. I made interviews with eleven artists/producers who participated in the festival for different periods of time. Four of them are the people who worked for production and organization of the festival, six of them are artists and one of them is a theatre critique and the director of İstanbul International Theatre Festival in İKSV. I also interviewed with seven villagers who took part in various stages of the festival. Four men and three women from village spoke to me about the festival. I asked all of the people I interviewed to tell me their own story of being there, the exciting things they found with the festival and the details of everyday life in the village during the festival days. During all those interviews I was after the effect, or I should say the "taste", of the festival on the person I met. At the end of the interviews I reached fascinating narratives not only about the festival days but about the way different people from different fields associate festival experience with themselves today. So, I saw that to trace the festival through memoirs of people who participated in it was not a bad idea as the memoirs of the festival are still vivid and people are really eager to tell about Assos.

I will try to analyze the interviews around some key issues which seemed to me crucial to highlight. First of all, there is a critical issue which is needed to be analyzed apart from the content of the interviews. It is the commemorative aspect of talking about Katircioğlu for almost every person I spoke to. Another main issue attracted my attention was that there was a strong sense of excitement and aspiration which found its expression frequently in the words; "ritual", "magic", "carnival", "creativity", "collaboration" (referring to "imece"), "spontaneity". If formulated through some questions my basic concerns are; how villagers and artists remember such an intense experience? Do they differ from each other in terms of the ways through which they express their memories? How visual and spatial memory works here? What is the role of art in generating memories about everyday life? But before coming to those questions, it seems to be important to have an idea about the festival as an artistic experiment from the accounts of Hüseyin Katircioğlu, himself. With "experiment" I refer to the Katircioğlu's words saying that Assos is the festival of tomorrow. Following words of Katircioğlu's give a better idea about the artistic criteria of the festival;

Groups that are not based on verbal expression, groups that perform their original works, and groups that try to create their own language, groups and individuals who have reached a professional eminence with such works can participate to the festival.

For example; La Mama Theatre Group was one of the groups that participated in two festivals. As Katircioğlu worked for years in La Mama he was really well-informed about similar groups from all around the world. Some of the groups from Turkey were; Kumpanya, Yeşil Üzümler, Levent Öget, 5. Sokak Tiyatrosu. Subsequently, the way the

artists dedicated themselves to the production process professionally, constituted the primary criteria that shaped the balance between everyday life and artistic concerns. I mean, the first and foremost importance of the festival was artistic creativity and production. Then, what was the place of the everyday life in this picture? How could the artists, so overwhelmed with their art, come next to next with villagers? Hüseyin Katircioğlu's words below show that the question is an unlucky one;

It is a recent idea that art is disconnected from the people and it is esoteric. If you look back at history, art has always grown among people and that is something crucial for the people. In fact, I regard this as normal. It would be abnormal for it not to be so. We are trying to draw attention to this abnormality with this festival. We carry the art into life.

So, the claim of "carrying art into life" seems to be addressing something more than "tolerating the everyday life for the sake of show". The art, here, has to do a lot with the concern of being in the midst of everyday as Katircioğlu mentions:

Festival should not simply mean going to a performance and then returning back to ordinary life. You should feel the enthusiasm not only during the performance, but also when going to the performance, and after, when walking around; so throughout the day, you should live with art day long. This is what we are achieving in Assos. 3 days long, the performers, the people, the guests and everybody live with these performances.

The following part, by looking at the interviews closer as the modest aim of this paper, shows that the effect of the performance started from the very beginning of everything.

### **When did the Play Begin?**

For a lot of people I spoke to, the festival has no concrete beginning or end. I asked to all of my interviewees to tell me their first confrontation with the idea of the festival. Without any exception, none of them remembered any exact moment of decision or thinking to participate in the festival. "It happened spontaneously" is the most frequent phrase they use. Asiye Cengiz, one of the producers of the festival throughout the four years, after saying that Katircioğlu did not explain the festival to her, continues to tell:

...He did not say anything like "I have a project, will you help me?", everything was flowing very fast. No very detailed or long plans were made. What happened? He was doing Simurg in 1995 -you know "Simurg" is the journey of a lot of birds- he phoned to me and he said, 'in the play there is "keklik dance", you danced in your school years, come and show it to our actors.' I said, ok.

It is Emel who could lucidly verbalize the process of being one of the producers of the festival:

You have to be involved. Their life was this. Your relationship would finish. Really! Not because it is obligation. It was a situation like either you live with them or you do not. Like the car of the house. You will either get on it or you won't.

When I asked Dilek Katircioğlu, wife of Hüseyin Katircioğlu and one of the coordinators of the festival, how they explained the idea of festival to the villagers, she replied that she does not remember that anything was told:

It wasn't necessary to try to convince. It was enough for them to listen Hüseyin in kahvehane. When it is said "let's do this", they were saying alright.

The villagers also do not remember an exact time that they "decide" to participate. Accordingly, Süreya, to my question of how he was informed about the festival or the plays, said the following:

We, as villagers, love Hüseyin abi very much. He came as a child for the first time. The first strangers coming here was his parents. We say "stranger" to the ones who are not from village. We see Hüseyin abi as a villager. We can die for him. I wish he were alive and heard us. He was a very rich person, he was drinking rakı with us, he was eating from the same plate with us. It was a pleasure for us to help him.

So, from these lines the feeling of finding yourself in the midst of the festival (or "the game") can be seen concretely. The entrance to the festival is remembered sometimes through a taste, sometimes through a joke and sometimes through a voice. But it is just a moment which does not have to have any meaning or any reference to a decision process. This probably comes from the fact that Katırcıoğlu had intimate relationship with each person he invited to the festival or he was known for his intimacy by every person who was invited. Here are the words of Dilek Katırcıoğlu:

Everyone was respectful to Hüseyin. This is how we could invite the groups we wanted and we build the kind of relationship we wanted. Thus, there was trust, here.

So, the trustworthy and faithful attitude of Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu became the basic motivation for a lot of people to enter into the festival as if it is a game. I think this "game-quality" of taking part in the festival constitutes the central sense in all the narratives. It is possible to see the continuation of this sense in all the narratives about the festival. There is no severe distinction between the memories of plays and memories of preparation part of the festival.

As the basic aim of the festival was to bring different artists together for three weeks and make them produce there, it is understandable that the whole daily life in the village turns out to be a dynamic part of the production process. What is more, when there are villagers who participate in plays, rehearsals, organization; it would not be false to say that space turns out to be a space of performance for everyone. That is to mean; the relationship of people with the space and everyday life in the village shifts from the sense of "timeless routine" to the sense of performativity. In other words; the existence of artists and preparations of an artistic festival in the village replaced the routine with a dialectical and performative atmosphere for both villagers and the artists. Let me take some quotations here that show the overflow of the performances into the daily life and transformed the relationships between people and their home place, themselves, and their friends.

Sema's words below show how the identities blurred among the human relations:

There were foreigners within the process of decoration, locals also took part, there were a togetherness rather than hierarchy. And everyone was an actor in this togetherness. This was the beautiful side of it.

Some of the artists even worked specifically within the daily life and they collected "material" for their performance from everyday practices of villagers. Asiye talks about a group from England below which constitute a good example of how artists have "performed" in the daily life in Assos;

For example, these people was an interesting group. They would go to mosque to pray every morning for the reason that their staying here. –they had faith- There was a far-eastern boy among them. They were doing what the local people were involved in doing.

Or the only performance made with women from village can be shown as an example of how the everyday practice of women turned out to be something "strange" for them. This

performance called "Bir Kaşık" was made by Gamze İnceci who is a dancer and a very famous cooker at the same time:

For example, for a week, these women went with Gamze (İnceci) to Ayvacık bazaar to find pepper of the same length and tried to do something with those same shaped peppers.

In this example the routine of going for shopping is repeated for a work of performance this time. And the performance that was shown only one day lasted one week for the artists and the women.

Another example of "performing" in the village for the sake of the "game" comes from a villager, Cemal, who told his acting experience on the boat on the sea. When I asked if he had any difficulty with acting he talks about the play "Sapho" and shares a "special" moment of "performing" with me:

To say the truth, I faced difficulty with the Vikings.. I had seasickness as the boat shook, and it was weavy as usual. As we were the Viking soldiers, we should not be afraid of but.. of course we pretended not to be..

Here is another, though very similar, account, but the one who was "scared" is an artist this time. It is Asiye who is telling the story;

Aydın (Teker) confessed something after many years have passed. She told that he always had fear of high places (aeroacrophobia). In the Assos festival, Aydın had a dancing performance from down the bridge. She told; "I managed those scenes with great difficulty in day and night and managed to cope with my fear, there."

It is striking to see that a very personal feeling like being afraid of water or height is "passed over" by two different people in the same atmosphere.

Another story is told by Dilek Katırcıoğlu which gives an idea about the uncertain boundaries between "backstage" and the "stage" of the festival:

For the decoration of Medea, they took a boat waste. It was a performance by itself. All the villagers, all the artists, the tractor, our carrying the tractor, people's hurting themselves, breaking this and that.. All the process was passing in such kind of a spirit.

It seems to me that this atmosphere is the atmosphere of artistic production that tried to turn the whole village a stage for three-weeks. In this sense, it is not surprising that the words like "ritual", "magic", "creativity", "collaboration" (referring to "imece"), "spontaneity" were frequently used by the "actors" of the festival.

**"Bize Gösterilen Neyse Biz En İyi Şekilde Yapmaya Çalıştık, Yaptık da..."<sup>3</sup>**

In order to understand the artistic style predominant in the festival, I think one must understand what Katırcıoğlu aimed with "mass theatre", the theatre he made at every festival with villagers and artists. For, "mass theatre" was an attempt to answer the question of what kind of art can create such a strong influence both on artists and on ordinary people. Although; by choosing to be in the midst of the daily life of the village all of the works shared a similar "fate", it would not be false to assume that the artistic claim of the festival found its very realization with "mass theatre" as it was based principally on the participation of the locals and on the usage of the space as the most dynamic element of the performance. The plays were taken from mythological stories; such as Simurg, the poems of Sapho, the holy texts and Truva. For Katırcıoğlu, through

those texts and mass theatre the locals *understand how rich the soil is that they are standing. They make a bond with the past civilizations. When they are included in the performances, they make a bond with art.* So, the texts that speaks to basic concerns for everyone through strong stories become the basic tool to create a common language of art that speaks to everyone, in other words; to reach an "intercultural" language in Assos. As these kinds of stories are told through iconographic, visual and imaginary images; the language of the performances was mainly visual and this kind of visuality was not limited with a stage or a platform. (I want to mention the words of one of the producers of the festival here, as she was saying that the last thing that was needed was platform in Assos.) Rather, the visuality was intricately linked with space in which both performers and audience appear. In other words; nobody's gaze was enough to witness every gesture or every moment of the performances. The point was to be there as a part of a game. So, the streets, houses, roofs, stones, trees; all that is on the way of performance were designed specifically for the performance; by Selçuk Gürışık and Çağla Ormanlar; the art designers of the festival. For example; the poems of the Sapho were performed by dancers and a singer at the harbor while the other dancers came with boats from the sea to the harbor. And the audience watched the performance from a heel looking down to the harbor. In another play, in Simurg, the audience climbed to the heel with the performers in bird costumes by taking each bird from a roof. In some of these plays local songs, clothes and stories were used. For example the scene of fight in Truva was performed with the traditional Aegean music; "harmandalı". In the plays he directed with the purpose of realization of "mass theatre"; in "Simurg", in "Önce Söz Vardı" and in "Sapho", Katircioğlu's artistic claim was to bring different actors (artists, villagers, musicians...) together in a play/performance and to experiment with different ways of using the space. We must underline that with "intercultural", Katircioğlu refers to the variety among the people participating in the performance, namely; people coming from city, workers, villagers, artists...etc. In the interviews, I tried to talk specifically on these plays with the men who took role in them. With the women, our conversation turned generally around their observations about the festival. Their accounts on the festival were important in terms of showing the extent to which the effect of the festival could reach. Generally speaking, my main question was how the villagers remember the festival and today what they prefer to tell about their confrontation with art in such a dense way. Or asking specific questions; what do they remember from the plays they took role and they watched? What kind of changes happened in the way they perceive art and artists? In what ways they could manage to pursue their everyday life with artists and art works everywhere? To what extent they permit the art to affect the routine of the village? Theatrically speaking, which techniques of acting and playing helped them most?

Süreya, the first villager I talked to, is married and father of a son. He is an agriculturist. The festival is the first experience he had with performing arts and theatre. When I asked how they worked for the plays, Süreya told firstly that they worked at nights and then that the rehearsals were entertainment for them at the beginning. So, I took an answer concerning the conditions and feelings of the rehearsals rather than their practical and bodily features, or the techniques they were introduced. For example to the question how they practiced for the play "Simurg" he said:

We made our rehearsals at nights. Because we have sheep, soil during daylight. Our time begins with evening "ezan" and continues to the late hours at night.

Bayram's words about the rehearsals of the plays show the "unfaithfulness" of villagers to the "game":

We were assuming that nobody will come to these plays, we were laughing, joking, chatting..who would look at these things? But we were going to rehearsals instead of sitting at the kahvehane..

Bayram's account saying that theatre was replaced with sitting and chatting in the cafe for them, verifies the place of artistic production being out of the "working hours". However, this does not mean that their attitude towards "leisure" will not change. Süreya takes the word and tells that how they take the "game" seriously afterwards;

When things became serious, we were better experts than artists. We were urging eachother..we tried to do our best, and we did it.

To a question of mine asking if he liked to dance or to act more, Süreya gave an example to the "technique" of their integration to the process. He says that:

We did our best to do the things that were said to us. For example, in the play of French group, they asked me if I could dance like Sabine, the French dancer. I looked, she was doing things like that, like ballet, I said, ok I can.

In the statement "We did our best to do the things that were said to us", it can be argued that through acting, indebtedness to the artists or responsibility especially felt towards Katırcıoğlu is fulfilled. In other words; "doing the right thing or what is told" refers to a disciplined and respectful stage through their "actor life". So, it seems to me that the integration to the process of artistic production was not totally out of their control. They entered to the process as an entertainment, as fulfilling the things they were said to do, but ended with similar commitments with artists to the work they produced.

When I asked the plays one by one to Süreya, Süreya remembered the details about some "unfortunate" occasions that happened during the performance or rehearsals; such as falling down of one of the players into the sea and others' help without interrupting the performance. Through these anecdotes Süreya told me how organized and "calm" they were within the process. Although I guessed that asking to Süreya (or to any villager) about the whole story of the plays they performed was risky, I asked it. To my question whether he remembers the story of "Simurg", Süreya answered in a very fragmented way. He said:

All the birds begin to the journey. Was it to take the beauty of Simurg? In the end they understand that Simurg does not exist. Because the topics are from mythology...We...

But again when we came to the feeling of the performance, Süreya states even that the importance of the festival was its being everywhere, not on the stage, everywhere became a stage. So, even he had no clear memory about the technical and dramaturgical details of the plays, he can use a phrase like "everywhere was a stage".

Cemal, who participated in our conversation, is a villager who works in agriculture, too. The festival is his first experience with performing arts, like Süreya. In his narrative, the effect of Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu is more visible as his statements were fragmented and unrelated most of the time. When I asked to him how Katırcıoğlu told the plays to them, he gave a very general answer which answered more than I asked;

He was showing us to act in this or that way, he was finding hotel to the guests. In the evening he was telling the figures...As everyone loves Hüseyin abi...

So, it was really difficult for me to make him stay in one thing and tell it clearly. When I asked to Cemal about "Simurg" he told a story as soon as I said "Simurg". In this anecdote; he told how some villagers got scared when they saw a "bird" like "gulyabani" on the top of a roof. The children ran away and their parents tried to make that "gulyabani" fly away until Hüseyin Katircioğlu came and told that it is a player, not a real bird. Through this anecdote Cemal also mentions how beautiful and realist were the costumes they wore on. Another detail I learned from Cemal was about the attitude of Hüseyin Katircioğlu towards the villagers. To my question if Katircioğlu got angry with them ever, Cemal's answer is the following:

Of course, sometimes he was saying "you cannot do, you cannot act", but then we were hugging to each other. But he was shouting more to the foreigners, as they are professional, he was saying that you cannot make even like villagers.

However, because of the very fact that whole village turned out to be a stage; some people had no courage to appear on it. It is definitely accurate that most of the villagers affected from the atmosphere in positive sense, but I must underline the boundaries of the "ritualistic" atmosphere of the festival as some accounts from villagers show. The women and some men's narratives showed me that there were people who did not feel the "ritualistic atmosphere" at such extent. The women I spoke to told me very few about the festival as they did not take part in the festival themselves or took part for only kitchen work; they sometimes washed, sewed or cooked. Though talking about the festival excited them a lot, their attitude to the festival remained distanced. An anecdote Asiye told shows how it is a problem of visibility for women to participate in the festival. In the story Asiye told there is a woman called Asiye Cengiz in the village. As their surnames are the same, when people saw the name in the pamphlet of the festival they went and said to the villager woman, Asiye that her name was written to the pamphlet. Asiye went to talk with her. Here is what she told:

Then I visited Asiye Cengiz. She was like "go out, I have no interest in your works". Because it was not proper for a woman to leave all her work and do this kind of things in Assos.

Another really interesting anecdote worth noting here in terms of demonstrating the boundaries of "performance space" comes from Emel:

For me, the most lovely anecdote in Assos was this: Çiğdem announced her performance from the mosque of the village. The only reaction of the locals was to say to Hüseyin not to do it again.

One of the women I spoke to, Ayşe Şen, who is 50 years old now, made meal and bread throughout festival. Her story was important in terms of exemplifying another way of participating in the festival. She stated her participation to the festival with the words "they wanted, we made". I found this terminology of her quite meaningful in terms of emphasizing the passive participation rather than voluntary active one. Another thing that attracted my attention in Ayşe's account was that the scenes Ayşe remembered from the plays were mostly the ones about family, kinship or womanhood:

The play of English group was very beautiful. He looked for his children, he found them at last. He broke the windows of the car. We were not understanding their speeches but we did when we watch. Also, they made a play with bride in the castle. It was very beautiful, too.

Another woman I spoke to was Fahriye. She is a 37 year old married woman. The festival has an importance for her not only introducing her to performing arts but also introducing

her to outer world. When I asked how she began to work for the festival, she said that it was her father who mediated between artists and her. She helped sewing the costumes. If it were up to her, the conversation would end up here, but I asked to her what she felt when she saw the costumes on the players. Then, she smiled and said it was very exciting for her both to sew all day and night next to the artists in the same place and then going "out" to see the performance. With "out" she refers to the place of the performance which is just 3 or 4 km far from the village.

### **Visual and Spatial Memory**

Capelletto, in his article "Long-Term Memory of Extreme Events: From Autobiography to History", tells that events become memorable in proportion to the intensity of emotion in encoding. I think the account of Ayşe above verifies that argument directly. The only scene she remembered was the highest moment of the play in terms of cathartic effect it created. In the narratives of the villagers the scenes that were remembered from the festival plays are generally explained with images; like the image of bride, the image of father, the colorful costumes of birds and sometimes auditory senses like the voices of players or Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu explaining them their roles. Most of the time the villagers I spoke to told the plays they played by showing me the places around us, or at least the orientation of the place where the play was performed. They used the words like "there" ("orda"), "at a place like that" ("şöyle bir yerde"), "until here" ("buraya kadar") and the words like "we climbed" ("tırmandık"), we walked ("yürüdük"), we went up ("çıktık"). For instance; when I asked the plays she has been to Sema, the first thing she said about the play Simurg was the place of the play and her place within the play with these words:

Simurg was a performance from the center of the village to the temple. It was unbelievable when we arrived at the temple, the sun was sinking ... there is a very important true energy in that, stemming from localization...

It was Bayram, from the village, who also chose to explain the plays by showing the locations of the scenes:

He used all the streets for Simurg. For example when people are coming this way, on that house, there is a different sense of visibility, a different sense of movement, even we were looking at it. On the other side, somebody is doing something else and everything, in turn, unites.

The intensity in the narratives of people I spoke to comes mainly from the visual and spatial memories they had about the festival. It is Mueller, who talks about a special kind of memory process that is at work in our relationship with art. According to him, *we value art, we do not want to forget certain works of art, because they help us recall the depth, the magnitude and diversity of our humanity and they do so in a particularly vivid way*. So, the intensity and the vividness of memories about Assos, of course, have to do with the artistic style that transformed the space into a huge stage and made the audience experience the "depth of humanity". When we consider that "mythological, visual and site-specific" works were performed mainly in the festival, it is not surprising that the memories are mainly composed of visual and spatial elements. And the artists verbalize their memories through this terminology of artistic style.

To exemplify the difference between the verbalization of villagers and the artists their memories let me quote an account of the same performance both from a villager and an artist. The performance they are talking about is called "Sapho" which was designed,

written and directed by Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu. It was performed on the sea and at the harbor. Here are Cemal's words about the day of the performance;

There was dance there, there was an Indian girl, she was dancing a dance of death, we stepped off the boats. Then, the Indian girl finished her dance, she died, we put her in a coffin and took her. We said such things as Aspendos or so, then the soldiers came, the musicians came, there was a flute player, we put the girl in the coffin and took her, there was a place like a grave behind the castle. The performance finished. It took almost an hour.

And this is the account of Sema who sang in the performance;

Midilli island was ahead of us. We arrived by boat. We all had special costumes. There were dancers in white. Mustafa Kaplan and the Indian dancer made a performance of balance on a scale. I was making a constant sound at that scene. I was on another hill. The design for Sapho was very beautiful.

These articulations of the same moment by two people differ not only in terms of the terminology usage which is naturally more complex in the account of artist. The two are different also in the perspective they have. The villager's account sounds very personal and based on this personal taste of the moment. I will call the memory that was at work in villagers "sensory memory" in the sense Brower uses the term. According to Brower, *sensory memory is a precognitive store that maintains sensory information in its original state until it can be perceptually processed*. In other words, events are remembered as sensations rather than perceptions. On the other hand, the artist tries to convey the artistic design of the moment.

### **Do You Know Miles Davis?**

It was Levent Öget, the photograph artist who asked me if I know Miles Davis. I nodded. He continued that Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu was a school like Miles Davis who affected every musician around and after him. Throughout the narratives of the artists, Katırcıoğlu's memoir showed itself most of the time in parallel to this account of Levent Öget. He was remembered with his artistic skills, incredible ability in human relations, solution-oriented character and passion for artistic production. I was told by Dilek Katırcıoğlu that everybody I speak to will tell me about Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu, for this is the project of Hüseyin. That was the case, actually. And this was even stronger than I expected as the death of Hüseyin Katırcıoğlu still gives pain to the people every time they talk about him. So, not surprisingly, most of the interviews began with Hüseyin's personality and memoir. Sema's first words about the festival were:

I don't think such a festival could be held again. Because Huseyin Katirciogu had a very different sense of aesthetics. He had a very different view of the world. Assos and Huseyin was a whole together.

So, to remember Assos corresponds to remember Katırcıoğlu and to talk about Assos experience goes hand in hand with talking about friendship. And among the two; the memory of Katırcıoğlu is always the stronger one. For instance Sema, after she watched the video records of the festival, wanted me to wait silent for a moment. She cleaned her tears and we continued to talk. Not only for specific moments but for the whole interview I made with artists and villagers, I can say that this mood of commemorating continued in different intensities for each person. When I asked Sema's specific experience of the play "Sapho" she said the following:

When I start thinking about Sapho, I start thinking of Huseyin and cry because Huseyin was a unique person. We all the women were in love with him, for example, platonically though. Yet he was so happy and had such a brilliant face that he had, how do you say it, inner beauty, an unusual beauty, an unusual soul. In fact, he had a beautiful face.

For example to my question if she remembers the reactions of villagers to the plays, she gives a totally different answer, again related with Katircioğlu:

After Huseyin's sudden death, the villagers mourned for a very long time. We and the villagers cried and tried to soothe each other. Because the vilagers were left without a father. Nobody could replace him any more. As I say, nobody can, either.

The image of Hüseyin Katircioğlu was strong in the narratives of the villagers, as well. From the first question, I realized that the memory of Hüseyin Katircioğlu will direct the conversation and this will be an obstacle for remembrance of specific memories about their personal experience. For, the memory was like a tic coming back constantly even when it is very weird to talk about it. Below is a quotation from Cemal, who was explaining the play "Sapho" in fact. But "Hüseyin abi" enters the picture immediately:

There was a woman dancer, from India, with Mustafa Kaplan..it was a pleasure for us, if Huseyin abi was there, Assos would have been more of Assos.

In this quotation, it can be seen how timeless and sharp is the passage from the memories about a play to the Assos and Katircioğlu relationship.

It would not be exaggerating to say that people experienced the festival, were captured by the image of Hüseyin Katircioğlu especially after he has died. It is Stier who says that *icons are the vehicles for construction of memory and the public sense of the past*. In this sense Katircioğlu may be thought to be the icon of the festival that dominates and gives shape to most of the narratives while talking about Assos. That's why the interviews I made turned out to be a kind of "commemoration" somewhere in our conversation. So, performative nature of talking about the festival after the tragic death of Hüseyin Katircioğlu seems to be inevitable. So, considering the impact of the "lost person" throughout my interviews, the best thing for me to do is to listen everything that people tell about Assos or Hüseyin Katircioğlu without limiting the conversation with informative questions. Perhaps this performative nature of interviews will show me the "meaning" of being a part of the festival.

### **Instead of Conclusion**

In this paper, I tried to draw attention to some issues that seemed to be important to me in the interviews I made. These were; the performative experience of the festival by villagers and the artists which resulted from the fact that whole village became a "stage"; the narratives of the villagers to which I gave more importance in terms of understanding the daily dynamics of the performativity I talked about in the first part; the visual and spatial memories in the narratives; and lastly the memoir of Hüseyin Katircioğlu in the narratives of the people I spoke to. These are all crucial issues to articulate further and deeper, I think. However, being the entrance to a master thesis research of me, this paper, I hope, seems to fulfill its mission in terms of demonstrating the general picture about what it means to talk about Assos Performing Art Festival today; and another mission, in terms of showing my urgent need for any comments or evaluations. So, for any comment please write to the address; [ozgulakinci@gmail.com](mailto:ozgulakinci@gmail.com)

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<sup>1</sup>Meaning "A Collective Memory Recorded Through Ritual Culture" Quated from Özgür Uçkan's magazine article, "Harc-ı Alem Halk Tiyatrosu", *Express*, 90, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> I must note that this collaboration of villagers and sponsorship remained inadequate when the demands of the festival increased in terms of both finance and organization levels. This financial crisis was the reason for the artists to bring the festival to an end. Even one can open a discussion on the art politics in Turkey just looking at the way festival is financed.

<sup>3</sup> We did our best to do everything that is said to us.