

By the end of May 2013, a group of young people had come together in order to protest the cutting down of some trees in Gezi Park in Istanbul. This quickly became a country-wide movement and achieved a momentum that was far greater than anyone had expected. Protesters enjoyed the “taste” of resistance, because for

many of them Gezi was the first time they had vividly experienced being an actor in a social movement. A prominent feature of the Gezi Park movement was the extensive use of art combined with satire, humor, and irony. Protesters embraced creative methods and art quickly became an indispensable part of the movement. Apart from the political content it had, art was instrumentalized as a public and individual medium, creating new opportunities within the movement; it thus took on a fundamental role in structuring the forms of protest.

What is the benefit of using art in activism? What is its role in the course of a social movement? I will elaborate these questions through analyzing the use of art for communication and problematization purposes as well as for identifying and

channeling spiritual and material resources. I will use examples of the artistic components and productions from within the Gezi Park movement to make the discussion more tangible. Before this, let’s have a look at the terminology and background of our topic.

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# Raising Resistance:

## Reinterpreting Art within the Gezi Movement

### Movement

Social movements have been a focus of social sciences for a long time. Since the first introduction of the term “social movement” in 1850 (the original formulation was *soziale Bewegung* by Lorenz von Stein), numerous researchers studied collective actions in the form of a movement. This term referred to all political and ideological movements of the nineteenth century whose aim was to promote the welfare of the working class in an industrial society.<sup>1</sup> Today, these movements are generally considered as “traditional,” although it would not be correct to say they have totally disappeared. Also, their connection to art was little different than it is nowadays. If we look at the nineteenth-century social movements and political atmosphere, we see a relationship between art and social movements that is reciprocal rather than integral. The most famous work of Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*,

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See: Kaethe Mengelberg, “Lorenz von Stein and His Contribution to Historical Sociology,” in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 22, no. 2, April/June 1961, pp. 267–274, here p. 268.

can be given as an example for the year 1830. There is certainly a connection between Delacroix's Romantic expression and the public actions; however, the painting itself was not considered an instrument within the movement.

In the mid-1960s, a new generation of social movements sprouted. New social movements have certain features that differ essentially from traditional movements. Mario Diani describes new social movements as "a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity."<sup>2</sup> New movements no longer seek to take over government power, but challenge it in a symbolic way and lead to social change through influencing people within the existing system. It is important to note that they are heterogeneous and not formed on the basis of ideology and class.<sup>3</sup>

While the roles of dominator and resister do not change radically, the instruments of domination differ from the traditional kind, meaning that the resisters' inventory of reaction methods also develops from day to day. New social movements pay particular attention to innovation and creativity including artistic methods. Although art is considered to be "political" since the Middle Ages and Renaissance,<sup>4</sup> from the 1960s on, art began to be a distinctive feature of social movements; it is not only used as a tool but considered as a must within the movement.

Almost fifty years after 1968, it is still difficult to say that the age of the new paradigm is over. A few decades after her death, Emma Goldman's famous quote "If I can't dance, it's not my revolution!" inspired many activists, and became an iconic slogan in the 1960s and 1970s. Although we don't hear this slogan that often today, the motto has stayed very much the same. Within the context of social movements, art plays an essential role in identifying our everyday experiences and problems as well as opening channels for communication. Art is being used to get in contact with people and express thoughts and feelings. We use art for satire, praise, criticism, and admiration. Marching on the streets, we dance, sing, draw, and perform. This is how we raise resistance through art.

Apart from transmitting emotions, feelings, and demands, art also provides time and space to experience these cognitive and sensory processes limited to personal and environmental qualifications. The very content of artistic products is related to daily life; how it is affected by politics, society, and environment. Generally, art is considered through the experience of various artists who are involved in the social movements and/or have a politically engaged public identity. Yet, aside from the professional artists, art can be a channel for liberation for nonartists as well. The Gezi activists were not all artists by profession; on the contrary, many of them were temporary performers.

Today, in social movements – starting from mid-1960s – art stays in the core of activism. Artistic use of materials can help us in expressing ourselves, communicating with a wider public, and creating networks inside and outside the movement. Further, art has a direct impact on emotions, which impacts both the individual

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Mario Diani, "The Concept Of Social Movement," in: *The Sociological Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, February 1992, pp. 1–25, here p. 13.

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See: Claus Offe, "Yeni Sosyal Hareketler: Kurumsal Politikanın Sınırlarının Zorlanması," in: Kenan Çayır (ed.) *Yeni Sosyal Hareketler: Teorik Açılımlar*, Kaknüs, İstanbul, 1999, pp. 53–80, here p. 66.

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See: Toby Clark, *Sanat ve Propaganda: Kitle Kültürü Çağında Politik İmge*, Ayrıntı, İstanbul, 2004, p. 14.

and the community. This circumstance enables art to go beyond its usage for practical purposes. Along with the practical purposes, the use of art opens a playground for premodern drives, the unconscious, and human desire. Art reveals the hazards of our fragmented lives while giving us hints as to how they might be reunited.

The instrumentalization of art happens in different ways within social movements. It is used both for deliberate practical purposes, such as problematization and reaching out for support, and for more emotional reasons that help to experience the projection of a moment of liberation. During the protests, Gezi activists benefited from artistic tools and products to an extent that Turkey had never witnessed before in a movement. Subverted images, satirical slogans, humorous tweets, and music were all part of the movement. Intensive use of art quickly became an essential part of the protests and even shaped the general understanding of the movement.

Apart from contributing as a channel for political expression or carrying symbolic values, art held structural importance in Gezi. It brought in some fundamental elements to the movement that were instrumentalized in different ways. Our perceptions, actions, and emotions were shaped through art, as the following examples from Gezi protests will explore.

### Art as a Tool for Frame Alignment

Framing or frame analysis is widely used in the social sciences. Although some earlier scholars mentioned it in their works, today's concept of framing was first introduced to the social sciences by Erving Goffman, who understood it as social organization of experience.<sup>5</sup> Thomas König emphasizes that “frames are basic cognitive structures which guide the perception and representation of reality.”<sup>6</sup> Frames are considered to be interpretative diagrams that help us understand the main points of an issue and that link these points with each other. Framing theory has been applied to various fields in the social sciences, including social movements, on account of its practicality in structuring our perceptions.

A number of social movements and civil society organizations use frames in their actions in order to depict what is going on out there. A movement usually states a problem and demands a change in the law, public policy, local administration practices, and so on. The problematization and political/societal demands are put together in a frame. Referring to Goffman, David A. Snow et al. underline the importance of frame alignment within a social movement, and denote frames as “schemata of interpretation” that enable us “to locate, perceive, identify, and label”<sup>7</sup> occurrences pertaining to our lives and the world in general. Within the context of social movements, frame alignment can be explored through three different types: diagnostic framing (problem identification and attributions), prognostic framing (suggesting a solution, a strategy, or a tactic), and motivational framing (call to arms or collective action).<sup>8</sup>

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See: Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 1974.

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Thomas König, “Frame Analysis: Theoretical Preliminaries,” available online at: [www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/publications/frameanalysis](http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/publications/frameanalysis), accessed 05/05/2014.

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Goffman 1974, p. 21; see also: David A. Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” in: *American Sociological Review*, vol. 51, no. 4, August 1986, pp. 464–481, here p. 464.

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See: Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” in: *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000, pp. 611–639.

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The image is available online at: <http://thecalifornial.com/post/84825917256>, accessed 05/05/2014.



#direngeziparkı, work by Doğukan Güngör, 2013

A variety of artistic products and practices was utilized for frame alignment during the Gezi protests. Often images, words, and performances conveyed messages and depicted the problem. The work shown on the left is a good example of diagnostic framing.<sup>9</sup> The image includes a tree, the initial symbol attributed to Gezi Park when the protests began over the removal of trees and construction of a shopping mall. The buildings around the

tree refer to the massive urban transformation projects undertaken in Istanbul, reminding us that Gezi Park is one of the few green areas among concrete structures.

After the riot police took over Gezi Park in mid-June 2013, and left no physical space in Taksim Square for protesters, passive resistance started up in Taksim Square and quickly spread to the whole country.

Performed by Erdem Gündüz, the “Standing Man” was introduced to the movement as a new and quite powerful tactic (prognostic framing).<sup>10</sup> Considering that the “Standing Man” arose after the first period of Gezi protests, we should take into account that it was a performance directed primarily against police violence, media blackout, and ignoring the protesters’ demands.

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For another image of Gündüz’ protest see: [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/18/turkey-standing-man](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/18/turkey-standing-man), accessed 05/05/2014.



Erdem Gündüz, *Duran Adam*, Taksim Square, Istanbul, 2013

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The image is available online at: <http://twicsy.com/i/nhCFMd>, accessed 05/05/2014.

A further image below is an example of motivational framing, a call to collective action every evening during the Gezi protests.<sup>11</sup>



Call for a protest action disseminated via the Twitter account @istanbuldaneler during the Gezi protests in 2013

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See: Ezel Akay, *A Call to End Corruption: One Minute of Darkness for Constant Light*, Liam Mahony (ed.), *A Tactical Notebook*, Center for Victims of Torture, Minneapolis (MN), 2003.

It reads: “Take supportive action with your lights and pans until the pan cracks and the lightbulb explodes.” The call found response all over the country while Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called the efforts just the same old tune. The action was inspired by “One Minute of Darkness for Constant Light,” one of the biggest civic protests that ever happened in Turkey which lasted for several weeks during 1997.<sup>12</sup>

Using art for motivational framing opens a window to discuss the role of art in recruiting supporters and creating other resources for a movement. Resource mobilization theory might help us explore this topic.

## Art as a Tool for Mobilizing Resources

Resource mobilization theory examines the resources inside and outside of the social movement. Aggregating money and labor, as well as combination and operation of these resources, are essential for any movement’s success. New social movements have benefited from art in order to mobilize resources by organizing activities such as concerts and sales of local artwork. Today’s movements, including Gezi, have avoided paid art activities and prefer occasional voluntary donations in the form of cash or in-kind. Within the context of resource mobilization through art, recruitment of more people was a central concern.



Emre Demirbakan,  
Ankara gri, Ankara gaz  
başkentine sahip çık!, 2013

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The image is available online at: [www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152878289425655](http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152878289425655), accessed 05/05/2014.

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See: Ron Eyerman, "The Role of the Arts in Political Protest," in: *Mobilizing Ideas*, The Center for the Study of Social Movements at the University of Notre Dame, June 3, 2013, available online at: <http://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/2013/06/03/the-role-of-the-arts-in-political-protest>, accessed 05/05/2014.

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See: James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest. Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago (IL), 1997, pp. 29–33.

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The interview is available online at: [www.e-skop.com/skopbulten/gezi-direnisinin-gaz-maskeli-dervisi-ziya-azazi-ile-soylesi/1559](http://www.e-skop.com/skopbulten/gezi-direnisinin-gaz-maskeli-dervisi-ziya-azazi-ile-soylesi/1559), accessed 05/05/2014.

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T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest. Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis (MN), London, 2005, p. 13.

The image above was produced during the Gezi protests.<sup>13</sup> It reads: "Ankara [is] grey, Ankara [is full of] gas, reclaim your capital!" Images, songs, video clips with similar messages were circulated via social media among the activists in order to recruit more people into the movement. Artistic forms are important in creating and communicating a collective narrative.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, addressing emotions and hope that play a considerable part in social movements is equally important in the context of resource mobilization theory.<sup>15</sup> Artistic practices during Gezi triggered emotions by generating a sense of belonging, togetherness, and solidarity. Communal activities, such as singing a song or dancing, created a bonding effect among people. The Breton band Bagad Penhars' musical intervention with Kolektif Istanbul was a notable moment. During the performance of Davide Martello, aka Klavierkunst, with his piano in the middle of the square, even the police seemed mesmerized and touched. Within a movement art can be so powerful that it has a direct impact on emotions among the activists as well as on the opposing sides. Ziya Azazi, who danced as a whirling sufi dervish with a gas mask in Gezi Park, says that art helps us accept each other's differences as enrichment.<sup>16</sup> Referring to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, T.V. Reed states "[...] that music was the key force in shaping, spreading, and sustaining the movement's culture and through culture its politics."<sup>17</sup> One might add that this applies not only for music but for art in general.

Art and social movements originate from and are reinforced by a wealth of resources, such as actual politics, social and economical developments, that are macro determinants, as well as micro determinants like daily routines, banal cycles, and individual concerns. Modern life introduces us to many facilities and innovations. It also brings with it significant challenges. Individual and societal

desires inherent in art carry the potential for an “ideal” society. In view of this potential, this article seeks to discuss another fundamental argument: art is the central component in social movements that represents the totality of everyday life and affords the opportunity to experience this totality in an instant continuum.

## Art as Mithridate

In addition to its practical uses within a movement, exploring another function of art may help us understand its ontological role, especially for the individual in action. For the activist/temporary performer, art serves as mithridate, a multifunctional antidote.<sup>18</sup>

Artists or temporary performers often isolate themselves from the hazards of modern life during their actions and artistic practices. The moments of laughing, playing, singing, drawing, dancing, and acting may become moments of ecstasy and delirium. Going through such courses of action does not signify a loss of control; quite the contrary, it is a process of intentionally experiencing rejuvenation, empowerment, and fortification.

This process has a considerable function in social movements. This immediately brings to mind the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who studied carnivals in medieval Europe and introduced the term “carnavalesque.” He points out that the carnivals are moments for insurrection. During carnivals, ordinary life is suspended and all forms of distance between people disappear. Carnivals create a different kind of communication, an open dialog among people. It is remarkable how artistic elements associated with carnivals have survived throughout the centuries, passing through several periods even though they faced severe censorship and restriction. While modernity was taking over social life day by day and dividing it, art continued to be a shelter for symbols, rituals, dialog, interactions, expression, and so on. Art became an arena for *everyday* resistance, a festive oasis through which one had respite and could experience a state of desired reunification. As Graham St John quotes Robert Stam in his article, while breaking several social barriers, carnival is “ecstatic collectivity, the joyful affirmation of social change, a dress rehearsal for utopia.”<sup>19</sup> There exists a potential for political change as well. Raoul Vaneigem famously said: “To work for delight and authentic festivity is barely distinguishable from preparing for a general insurrection.”<sup>20</sup>

Activists do not always “give off” energy, they “intake” energy, too. Art plays a vital role here by providing a means for rebirth, in order that the people can carry on and continue their struggles while they are full of life again. Gezi activists did not only want to conceptualize social problems and produce great solutions. They looked for a sense of joy, entertainment, and festivity, so that they could be refreshed and empowered. Laughter is an important part of the carnivalesque that is experienced as half play. This play and laughter means being purified from whatever reality is out there in ordinary life, forgetting what the self is, and being reborn into life.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, art is an indispensable part of any carnival, playing the role of a catalyst for the performers to get into a mood of

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Here I use the word “mithridate” but not “antidote.” Antidote refers to a medicine for a specific poison, while mithridate fortifies the body against all types of poisons. It is a semimythical remedy with 65 ingredients and owes its name to King Mithridates VI. of the Pontic Empire who used to take this medicine regularly so that no poison could kill him. See: “Mithridatum,” in: James Grout, *Encyclopædia Romana*, available online at: [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia\\_romana/aconite/mithridatum.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/aconite/mithridatum.html), accessed 05/05/2014.

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Robert Stam, “Mikhail Bakhtin and Left Cultural Critique,” in: E. Ann Kaplan (ed.) *Postmodernism and Its Discontents. Theories, Practices*, Verso, London, New York (NY), 1988, pp. 116–145, here p. 135; see also: Graham St John, “Protestival: Global Days of Action and Carnivalized Politics in the Present,” in: *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2008, pp. 167–190, here p. 168.

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Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Rebel Press, London, 1983, as quoted from: Notes from Nowhere, “Carnival: Resistance Is the Secret of Joy,” in: Notes from Nowhere (ed.), *We Are Everywhere. The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism*, Verso, London, New York (NY), 2003, pp. 173–183, here p. 182.

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See: Tül Akbal Süalp, “Babil Kulesi Tutsaklarına Bakhtin’den Öneriler,” in: *Toplumbilim – Kültürel Çalışmalar Özel Sayısı*, vol. 14, October 2001, pp. 53–60, here p. 57.

trance. At some point in art, we break down our invisible walls, meet others, and discover our feelings. Emotions and sensations take over the place of reason; we establish another way of communicating with ourselves and with others. These are just split seconds in our performance, but they give us the chance to experience a momentary totality, the reunification that we desired. Art can be revolutionary when totality stays inherent to it. Art gives us the opportunity to experience another dimension between this world and the desired one. This experience comes into existence in a very temporary but intense and vivacious moment that the practitioner of art, the artist, can live through and sense the resistance in totality. It is a moment for another reality – maybe the “real” reality – that makes us come closer to humanity. Providing such experience of totality, the “temporary oasis” created through art implies a carnivalesque moment.

In Gezi, the carnivalesque moments where activists felt empowered and experienced a utopia were many. A notable one that was videotaped and circulated via social media was an activist performing a moon dance.<sup>22</sup> Gezi Park was home to various artistic actions including singing songs together, drawing, dancing, and performing with lots of humor, satire, and grotesque, side by side. Gezi activists were demonized in the media, accused of being traitors, foreign agents, infidels, and looters. Humor, satire, irony, and grotesque were used in order to subvert and embrace such words and messages.<sup>23</sup> Especially the word “looter” (*çapulcu* in Turkish), which was advanced by Prime Minister Erdoğan, became one of the iconic words of the movement. It was subverted in a way that glorified its pejorative meaning. The activists used it as an honorable appellation to define a democracy fighter which was indeed an expression of joy rather than of anger.

Subversion of authority is closely connected with the totality of everyday life and the natural empowerment mechanism that art offers to the activist. Carnavalesque moments, being the site of resistance, provide the necessary conditions for one to experience autonomy and challenge the structures of hierarchy. Art, being a main catalyzer here, becomes an essential and indispensable component of activism and social movements.

Another emerging and one of the most important elements in social movements is the use of the Internet and social media. Alongside the art, it is a common denominator among contemporary types of action. Due to the limits of this article, it is not possible to explore this subject here in any depth, but I would like to conclude with a few words on the connection between new technologies and art.

### Art Upcoming

There is a growing interest in the use of the Internet and social media in social movements, and various scholars have explored this issue with reference to recent examples such as the Tahrir, Occupy, *indignados*, Syntagma, and Gezi movements. Apart from how social media and use of the Internet made communication

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Available online at: <http://youtu.be/FEFq9MXjLY4>, accessed 05/05/2014.

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See: Meyda Yeğenoğlu, “Smells like Gezi Spirit. Democratic Sensibilities and Carnavalesque Politics in Turkey,” in: *Radical Philosophy*, November/December 2013, available online at: [www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/smells-like-gezi-spirit](http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/smells-like-gezi-spirit), accessed 05/05/2014.



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See: "Technopolitics: the potential of connected multitudes. The 15M network-system as a new paradigm of distributed politics," available online at: <http://datanalysis15m.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/technopolitics-15m-summary.pdf>, accessed 05/05/2014.

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See: KONDA Research and Consultancy, "Gezi Report. Public perception of the 'Gezi protests'. Who were the people at Gezi Park?," June 5, 2014, available online at: [http://konda.com.tr/en/raporlar/KONDA\\_Gezi\\_Report.pdf](http://konda.com.tr/en/raporlar/KONDA_Gezi_Report.pdf), accessed 09/15/2014.

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See: Besim F. Dellaloğlu, *Frankfurt Okulu'nda Sanat ve Toplum*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Bağlam, İstanbul, 2001, p. 51.

easier among the activists, few studies go beyond this and look at the level of emotions.<sup>24</sup> As social media has been a main distribution channel for art, it would be interesting to see to what extent art was a part of the dissemination and sharing done over the Internet and the amount of responses related to that.

From observations made during Gezi, we witnessed that images, video recordings of musical happenings and performances, songs, and poems were disseminated far more than plain sentences. Particularly when there is a pinch of satire, irony, humor, and grotesque included, sharing on Facebook or via retweets on Twitter was much higher. The emotions behind this sharing would certainly be interesting to learn. Can tweeting a humorous slogan or a satirical image give a similar feeling to singing a partisan song passionately and feeling spiritually connected to everyone in the square? Can sharing a video of a group of young people dancing in front of the police be comparable to a dancer's physical experience of "temporary liberation"? Searching for answers to these questions is particularly interesting in our digital era. The average age of protesters at Gezi was 28, meaning that they were introduced to the Internet when they were very young.<sup>25</sup> We can only imagine which forms of art the social movements will include in the future and how integrated art will be with new media technologies. Our understanding of art might evolve in the upcoming years, like our ways of communication and representation. However, the intimate relationship between art's mithridatic role in social movements and carnivals that go back thousands of years is still there.

Having become a central element in social movements since the 1960s, art still seems to retain its importance in our perception of politics and society. The Gezi protests showed that art helps us define an idea and set it within a framework while making it easier to communicate the idea instantly. Art is also used for generating material resources as well as for canalizing people's emotions for a movement. At the same time, representing the totality of everyday life, art has strong impact on the individual who performs a carnivalesque moment and provides an opportunity to experience such totality. A most powerful aspect of the Gezi movement was this feeling of being "complete." It is very essential for us, human beings, this turning down of the hierarchies and experiencing a moment of social unification. The emotions, the least studied element in the social movements field, will continue to affect our thoughts and actions either on the community or individual level. As Besim Dellaloğlu said, art is the last shelter where humankind can maintain the existence of longing for *another* society that is beyond the society of today.<sup>26</sup>

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