



# aferim iavruim!

Little gestures of cooperation



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February 2010

Silvina Der-Meguerditchian  
at the Bmsuma Gallery, Istanbul  
Direction: Beral Madra



this is a working PDF with documentation about S. Der-Meguerditchian's new work "Little gestures"

The pictures in this document show details from the artworks conforming the collection of "little gestures". The texts beside are translations of the Spanish or German original Handwrittings on the images or objects. (the English versions of the texts are working translations) The exhibition in Istanbul (February) by the Gallery BMsuma will have other new works from the series "Semantic fields" and 4 new video works, beside other older works of reference to this issue.

from here comes my grandmother Ayaric

from here comes the mother of my uncle



from here comes my grandpa Isin

from here comes my grandpa Avedis



The exhibition "AFERIM, IAVRUM" (Well done, my little child) shows a collection of moments and meetings that the artist Silvina Der-meguerditchian had since over 20 years that depicts her attempt to deal with memory, forgiveness and reconciliation. Even if in Buenos Aires there is Turkish population, the fact to be embedded in the cocoon of the Armenian Diaspora, the "cold war situation" between Armenians and Turkey in the decades between the 70/90'ies and her age at that time didn't make possible for Der-Meguerditchian the "contact" with people of Turkish descent. Of course, she knew a few Armenians coming from Istanbul that with their solely existence generated the question in her mind, "how can Armenians live with Turkish in the same place after what happened???"

In the last 20 years she collected very carefully every contact that she had with Turkish people, some less positive as others, overcoming fear, negative prejudices and questioning the image of Turkish between hated and beloved, between object of rejection and object of desire, between heimlich and unheimlich... As result of this internal struggle she did also artworks that try to find a visual expression for not enounced facts and feelings.

The last 3 or 4 years were key years in the history of the public confrontation of the Turkish population with the lost/absence of their Armenian population and the causes of their disappearing. This in fact had of course a big influence in her very own, personal story.

After regarding the first time Istanbul through the a satellite in google maps she dares a first trip to Turkey (2005) and one year later another trip with her family to Gaziantep (2006), birthplace of her grandparents, to look for traces of her culture knowing she will experiment a bitter absence.

This exhibition is part of an open process, an attempt to write new narratives of a violent interrupted story. With the new work "Little steps" she documents the path coming back to Turkey and tries to find out other ways of belonging to the "Turkish space" buried under the weight of the "Medz Yegern" and the official Denialism. The show tries to open a new context where a broader dialogue with artists, intellectuals and the public could happen in Turkey beyond official political recognitions. The dialog principle of the exhibition will be complemented by a two days conference. (see below)

The show will have a very heterogeneous language (installation, video, sound installation, rugs, bidimesional image, etc.) that depicts the hard path of reconciliation with moments of sadness, anger and also moments of humour and joy.



# WORKS

selection

1986





# Kotbusertor

“Ambivalence or controversial feelings towards Turks came up with my first trip to Europe in 1986: new arrived in Berlin, I was lost in Kreuzberg in the metro station Kotbusertor without knowing a single word German. Looking for the most familiar people to ask for help in the “strange territory” I approached intuitively a Turkish Döner stand and asked the owners for help to arrive to the neighbourhood Schöneberg explaining in a naïve way I was “er-meni” and expecting empathy from the counterparts. In fact, they helped me: a vegetables seller gave me a lift in his truck. During the 15 minutes drive he and his friend tried to touch my legs in indecent way, but, after all... they brought me safe to my friend’s home in the Crellestraße...”

In the early 90' ies, I started working at an animation studio. Hahn Film was full of foreigners, it was a veritable tower of Babel: English, Irish, French, Poles, Hungarians, etc. Even one Argentine was working there, his name was Carlos. He became my friend. My friend Carlos had some difficulties in integrating into Germany, and was stressed a lot about it. Perhaps precisely because his grandmother was German and he rejected that part of himself, so he'd find better contact to T. O., a Turkish guy, his wife's name was Lale. He was the animation director of the film Asterix in America for a while.

One day Carlos told me to go to lunch with him and T.O. in the kitchen of the studio. When we were introduced, soon I felt the need to tell him that we come from the same place, or that we have something in common. I didn't say it to provoke. I think I was very naive. I told him my grandparents were also from Turkey and had to leave, they were survivors of the genocide.

"Genocide?" He said, "What genocide?" That never happened.

1993



# Kastanienallee

The piece of bread I was chewing got stuck in my throat.  
Without saying a word, I got up from the table and left.

I never spoke again one word with him.

I think this experience quite marked a great pause in the attempts  
to recover every form of relationship with Turks. It took more than  
5 years to return to tell anyone in the face that I am Armenian,  
and so on. etc. Carlos continued to be his friend.

I wonder if he would had remained friends with someone who denies  
what the military in the 70 /80'did to the missing persons in Ar-  
gentina.

1999



## Oranienstraße

Since a long while I eat kebab in Oregano. They are almost as tasty as in Argentina. When I am in the Oranienstraße, I take the opportunity to eat there. They seemed to be very nice. Once it was rather early 2003 or 2004, I dared to ask, I told that I was Armenian and I would like to know what is said about us in Turkey. Unfortunately I had heard many bad things about Turks ... I was very excited. The young woman looked at me deep in the eyes and said, "we are Kurds, what do you think that we have been told about you?" And thus the conversation ended, I did not dare to insist and she has continued to serve the customers. There was sympathy from both sides but it was not possible for us to come closer. Perhaps it was too promptly. Perhaps it was not the right place. Too bad.

When I'm in the corner, I always eat there.  
I feel quite at home there.

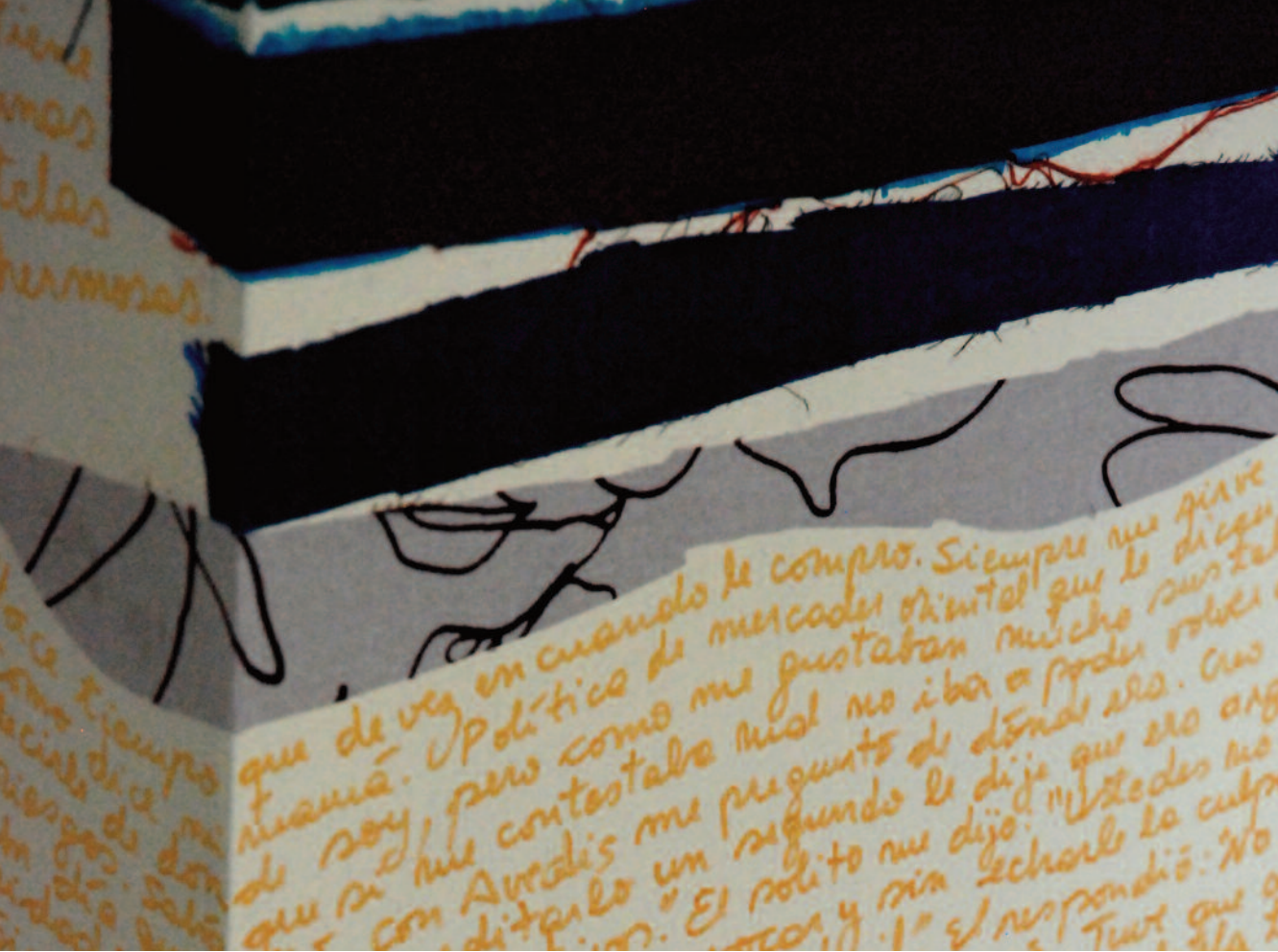
The guy from the fabric shop in front of my flat is Turkish. He has very beautiful fabrics. I buy in his place. He always serves me a tchai, he is very "hermetli" as my Mom says, speaking about somebody who like hospitality, it's the Turkish version of "hiuraser". I would rather say, Eastern merchant policies.

I always felt like telling where I come from, but because I really like his fabrics I tried not to take risks, I am very consequent, and if he answered in a wrong way, I could no longer go shopping in his store. One day I went in with my son Avedis. I think he was irritated because my son is blond and I look dark. He asked me where I come from; he felt a familiarity and thought I was from somewhere in the East. After thinking a second, I took a deep breath and said that I come from Argentina but that I am of Armenian origin; without the "additional information" that my grandparents were survivors, and so on, etc., to avoid conflicts. He seemed to look for confrontation, because he told me: you don't like Turks very much! Trying not walking into the provocation, without blaming anyone, I said that "we" share a very difficult past. Then he said, why difficult? It was not so terrible. I didn't have alternative and was obliged to answer. I told him I know what happened first hand, I grew up with my grandmother traumatized by deportation. He told me that his parents told him otherwise ... I mean ... Why could not he shut his mouth? Speaking? What for? Why was he seeking confrontation? Did he think that he could convince me? Me?

For a while I didn't went there anymore.

One day I made a commitment, I was in trouble, and for not having to go to Karstadt in the Wilmersdorferstraße five blocs away from my home, I went there to buy a black cloth for the "art mourners'" performance. That day the silk seller took it into his head to explain me why it was good that women wore chador...

2000



# Leonhardtstraße

A young guy! Who looked quite open, playing a modern person ... and he tells that to me...?? Me, whom did not end up wearing a chador, because the NER (Near East relief) or her uncle took my grandmother out from a Muslim family that from one side saved her life, but from the other side wanted her to forget who she was? So that she wrote her name and phrases in Armenian on a little piece of paper, rolled it and hid it in the interstices of a stonewall to read them again and again when nobody was looking at her, so she would not forget who she was.

I gave up. I do not buy fabric in his shop anymore.  
2008 He moved to the Kantstrasse

2009 November  
Yesterday I walked by.  
He greeted me with a smile from ear to ear,  
I am his old neighbor.

I was with my friends Chus and Concha to see a theater piece directed by Alejandro Tantanian, a regisseur from Argentina, one piece part of his masterwork "The Theatre of Melancholy". The piece was presented like this: *Where does a real biography begin? Which fragments can build reality? Carlos W. Sáenz: The enigma is in the name. There are some traces of this unbelievable character that were left in his country: Argentina. We tried to look through them.*

*The remains of a life: letters, videos, photographs, some music, two or three works of art ... Everything is exposed in order to rebuild a memory.* At the end we drank a glass of wine sponsored by the Argentinian Embassy and with Concha we walked to the Anhalter Bahnhof to take the bus. We were engaged in discussing the piece as one very handsome man approached us and asked where we came from. She answered, she comes from Spain. Me, I said, I'm from Argentina, but my ancestors are Armenians, survivors from the Armenian genocide.

When we asked where he came from, he answered: From Turkey.

I thought: Oh, oh.

It was 2 0'clock in the morning,

2003





# Stresemannstraße

He told me, did you ever thought about looking in to the matter from the Turkish point of view? I was not in the mood for discussions.

He was so good looking and kind... and very convincing. He was the heart attack of every Armenian conservative family!

I thought "vade retro"! I told him I was very interested in the dialog but I would not put in doubt the genocide. So he gave me his card and we engaged in an email exchange for 4 days. I slept very bad that nights.

## extract from email exchange

# Silvina

-----Ursprüngliche Nachricht-----

Von: silvina [mailto:silvina\_der@t-online.de]

Gesendet: Montag, 26. Mai 2003 22:33

An: E.

Betreff: Re: Dialog

Hallo,

Die Autoren die Du mir empfiehlst kenne ich auch. Ich habe sie aber nur vor 5 Jahren gelesen. Abgesehen davon bin ich mit meiner Großmutter väterlicherseits aufgewachsen, die überlebende der Deportationen war, dessen Eltern ermordet wurden, sie selber natürlich auch vergewaltigt.

Ich bin aufgewachsene mit ihren Alpträumen. Die Familie meiner Mutter hat auch Verluste erlitten. Aber sie sah ich nur alle zwei Wochen weil wir außerhalb Buenos Aires wohnten. Ferner bin ich aufgewachsen mit ähnlichen Geschichten von Tante und Cousinen, von Freunden und Schulkameraden. Ich scheine nicht so ein alter Hase wie Du in der wissenschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mit Genozid zu sein...

Ich habe schon Seminare besucht, die Tage lang sich damit auseinandergesetzt haben, die Sache von unterschiedliche Seite zu beleuchten. (Institut für Genozid Forschung, Universität, Bochum.) Das war sehr mühselig und ich sehe nicht ein warum ich mich jetzt weiter und weiter damit beschäftigen müsste. Die unterschiedliche Meinungen sowohl von türkischen, amerikanischen und deutschen Turkologen haben mich nicht überzeugt. Sie sind nicht in meinen Gedächtnis geblieben, die Unterlagen habe ich jetzt nicht zur Hand. Die Meinung von armenischen und anderen Zeugen und die Meinung von armenischen Wissenschaftler scheinen bei dir auch nicht so viel Wirkung erzeugt zu haben.

# Ertugrul

--->Meine zweite Frage an Dich

Wie soll ein Dialog zwischen uns als Menschen (und damit ja auch indirekt zwischen unseren Völkern) je zustande kommen, wenn am Ausgangspunkt des Dialoges schon Bedingungen aufgestellt werden? Genau das tust Du aber! Du sagst, dass ein Dialog nur dann möglich ist wenn ich nicht negiere "was passiert ist". Du sprichst über "eine Tatsache, die sich nicht leugnen lässt. "Genau an dieser Stelle muss der Dialog starten!

Ich habe keine Bedingung gestellt, ich habe von Basis, Grundlage gesprochen, wir scheinen keine gemeinsame Grundlage zu haben.

----> Folgende Leitfragen sind dabei von Bedeutung:

1) "WAS GENAU IST PASSIERT?" - Wie stellt sich der historische Ablauf der Dinge, aus armenischer und aus türkischer Sicht dar? Welche "Tatsachen" nehmen die einen, welche "Tatsachen" nehmen die anderen wahr?

Es geht nicht darum wie die einen oder die anderen die Tatsachen wahrnehmen, wenn hunderttausende von Frauen, alten Menschen und Kinder in Deportationszüge brutal vergewaltigt und ermordet werden, ist mit keinen armenischen Aufstand oder übergelaufene Armenier auf die Soviets zu gerechtfertigen. Was willst du da selektiv wahrgenommen haben?

Ich bin prinzipiell gegen Gewalt, und wenn türkische unschuldige Menschen Opfer von armenischen Banden waren, das tut mir ehrlich leid und ich leugne das nicht. Falls das deine Familie betrifft, tut es mir sehr leid.

---> Meiner Ansicht nach gibt es auf beiden Seiten eine selektive Wahrnehmung; der erste Schritt beim Dialog besteht darin, die Selektivität unserer Wahrnehmungen zu beheben. 2) "WELCHER BEGRIFF BESCHREIBT DAS WAS PASSIERT IST AM ZUTREFFENDSTEN?" a) Genozid?, b) Bürgerkrieg?, c) ein sonstiger Begriff?

Wenn du so viel gelesen hast, kennst du bestimmt die Definition von Genozid, die von den internationalen Gerichtshöfen festgelegt wurde, was die türkische Regierung CUP mit der aktiven oder passiven Hilfe der türkischen Bevölkerung gemacht hat trifft in alle fünf Definitionsmerkmale zu, ich möchte mich nicht wiederholen.

----> Ist die Selektivität unserer Wahrnehmungen erst einmal behoben, können wir dazu übergehen, nach dem passenden Begriff für die Ereignisse zu suchen. Wenn Türken der verschiedensten politischen Richtungen - Rechte, Linke, Liberale, Islamisten, Säkulare - den Begriff Genozid ablehnen (von wenigen Ausnahmen wie Taner Akcam abgesehen - im Übrigen gibt es auch auf armenischer Seite Personen, die eine "türkische Sicht" vertreten !), dann muss Dir dies als intellektueller Mensch zu denken geben.

Soll das etwa ein Argument sein? Wenn Armenier verstreut in der ganzen Welt die Erinnerung an Mord und Deportationen haben und eine Meinung vertreten, sollen Sie einen kollektiven Traum verfallen sein und von kosmischen Hirnwellen einer bösen antitürkischen Macht beherrscht sich seit 80 über den Atlantik beeinflussen? Das müsste Dir auch zu denken geben. Wenn, haben sie einen sehr realen kollektiven Alptraum erlebt, würde ich sagen.

----> Entweder sind Türken

a) ein niederes Volk - dies wäre eine rassistische Sicht; oder  
b) es gibt triftige Gründe, warum die ganz große Mehrheit der Türken die Beschreibung der tragischen Ereignisse von damals als Genozid ablehnen.

c) Es ist für Euch unerträglich der Gedanke dass Ihr in der Lage gewesen seid als Volk so etwas zu tun und zu tolerieren. Dazu empfehle ich dir das Buch von Arno Gruen, Der Wahnsinn der Normalität, eine Theorie zur menschlichen Destruktivität. Wenn Ihr das akzeptiert, würde Eure nationale Identität und eure Verständnis der modernen Türkei auf eine Lüge basieren. Das tut weh.

d) Die türkische Regierung seit den Anfängen der türkischen Republik, zeichnet sich nicht für ihre Offenheit gegenüber freies und kritisches Denken aus. e) Ihr müsst die Konsequenzen tragen und Wiedergutmachung zahlen, das Eigentum der Armenier zurückgeben, etc. etc.

----> Ich bin mir der tiefenpsychologischen Bedeutung der Thematik für Diaspora-Armenier bewusst. Der "Genozid" ist ein wichtiger identitätsstiftender Faktor für Diaspora Armenier. Die armenische Diaspora in Südamerika, Nordamerika oder Australien wäre in höchstem Maße assimilationsgefährdet, wenn es nicht das "Genozid" gebe.

Wenn das GENOZID nicht geschehen wäre, wären wir nicht in Australien oder Südamerika, sondern in Anatolien, vielleicht wäre ich jetzt eine Bäuerin mitten in Marash.

Das Genozid ist Identitätsteil, nicht identitätsstiftend (auch wenn ich weiß dass es solche Theorien gibt, teile ich sie nicht). Ein Volk dass 3000 Jahre Geschichte hat, verfügt über eine solide Kultur und ein Gedächtnis, das sich nicht auslöschen lässt.

---->Meine Frage in diesem Zusammenhang an Dich: Wie wichtig wäre Dir Deine armenische Identität, wenn es keinen Genozid gegeben hätte?

Genau so wichtig, allerdings hätte ich mir den ganzen Teil den Alpträume, Schmerz, Verrat, tiefsten Trauer und Leerheit gespart. Wir könnten nicht wählen, es ist da und ich muss was damit machen. Ich werde mir erlauben deinen Ton anzunehmen und dir eine Frage stellen: Warum ist Dir das so wichtig, wenn du so sicher bist dass du so richtig liegst?

---->Wenn aber der "Genozid", wesentlicher Faktor zur Abwendung der Assimilation in der dritten oder vierten Generation von Diaspora-Armeniern ist, dann liegt hier primär eine Negativdefinition von Identität vor.

Das kannst du mir glauben, ich würde gerne auf diesen so genannte "Identitätsstiftende" Faktor verzichten.

---->Weiss nicht, ob ich mich Dir hierbei für Dich verständlich ausgedrückt habe. (Ärgere Dich nicht, denk nach!)

Danke für den Vorschlag, ich pflege tagtäglich die Denktätigkeit nachzugehen.

---->Abschliessend:  
Ein Künstler sollte immerzu Begegnungen suchen, die ihn aufwühlen.

Danke für die Bestätigung, das sehe ich auch so.

---->Im Falle eines Dialoges mit mir hast Du nichts zu verlieren - ausser vielleicht die eine oder andere Gewissheit.

Ja, Zeit.

---->Ich gebe zu, dies kann manchmal sehr viel sein kann. Denn was bleibt uns als Menschen außer die wenigen Gewissheiten, die wir haben?

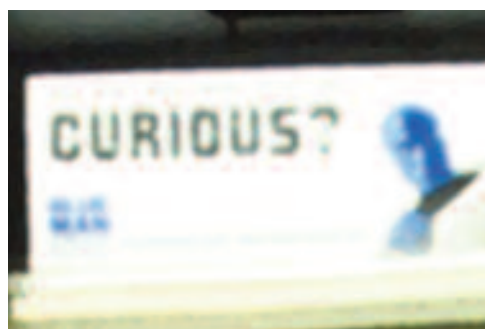
Die Würde, bleib uns.

---->Umso mehr möchten wir uns an diese klammern.

Wer du oder ich?

Ein Dialog ist dafür da mit den Dialogpartnern eine Öffnung und einen Konsens zu bewirken. Ich werde den GENOZID nicht in Frage stellen. Es schaut schlecht aus in unserem Dialogversuch.

Schönen Grüß  
Silvina



I was invited to a conference in the framework of the exhibition Focus Istanbul. I was participating in the exhibition with two artworks. The conference was called "Turkey, a Model? And the discussion was about how far Turkey can be a model for integration of an Islamic milieu in a pluralistic society in general and also for the modernization of Muslim society? A very European question ... Since different people were invited: journalists, writers, philosophers, and artists. I went to the talk the day when Hrant Dink was one of the key speakers. I wanted to meet him. He impressed me very strongly. He spoke so confidently and had very good arguments. In the discussion I noticed Ali Akay, another speaker. He also had arguments, spoke very abstract, with the language of philosophers and advocated for the complete dismantling of national identity, in the nice, good deconstructionist style.

I was pretty irritated. I thought, first they erase us and our's own national identity from the country and put their "national identity" above everything else and then 90 years later, he just goes to the next step on the dialectical spiral, just like that and says that "national identity" is over anyway, passé, outdated, simply: "totally OUT?"

2005



## Martin Gropius Bau

I was mad at myself that I was not able to respond at the moment. I thought I would write to him, which could result in an interesting dialogue. In any case, I argued, it will be a better exchange as the attempt with the guy from the bus 2 years ago. We had a good email exchange. We didn't not agree right away but we had a basis.

The first time I was in Istanbul, we met for a glass of red wine. I think we share the interest for French philosophers and the love for art. Even though some "non dits" are between us, intuitively I feel that everything is O.K. with him. In 2007 I invited him to write piece of text for the catalog of Underconstruction's exhibition at the Venice Biennial. He came to the opening at the Island of San Lazzaro.

Since then we send to each other invitations to exhibitions and keep the contact through email.





# Kemeralti cadesi

The first time I went to Istanbul I flew to midnight. That night, from the plane I saw the largest full moon I ever saw in my whole life; the clouds gave everything a very mysterious touch... I was terrified ... I almost could hear the howl of a gray wolf. The next day I went for my first lap very cautious. Suddenly I came across this church. Then I recognized that it was Armenian. I was very excited. I wanted to go in and look and look but I could not find the door. I walked several times around the block and could not find the door.

I thought: what is this???? Did they close all the entrances? At the end I made them understand me with the gestures, I tried to speak Armenian but the neighbors did not understand. They sent me to the place the door was supposed to be. At the end I found another building in front of the door that seemed to camouflage it.

I asked myself if it was so hidden to protect it or to prevent people from going in...

2005



... Mensch nicht abgegründet. Bei Ve  
... hat eine Zweckmäßigkeit erhalten ausgetaus  
... ich, es ist auch ein Auto  
**DEKONSTRUKTIVISMUS** Er sagte, wenn ich mich so  
... Identität

... ich am Boden zerstört. Ich habe S. zufällig g  
... Türkei hat einen großen demokratischen verloren. Was er  
... gemacht. Warum ist sein erster Satz zu mir  
... mit wem er spricht. Klar, "die westliche In  
... die Tatsache das ich Beweiser bin ausbleudet,  
... konkret sein "Beweiser sein".

Plattform immer noch. Ich denke, vielleicht werden wir una  
... ich immer wieder noch vorul. Mit Menschen, die  
... Weg. So lange begrüßen wir uns und lächeln

... wir sind Künstler, wir arbeiten für die Allg  
... es ehlich, wenn ich ihn anlächle.  
... auch das zwischen uns alles gut ist.

2005



I've met S. in an exhibition. He was also showing a work in the same exhibition as me. He has created a platform for artists from Berlin and Istanbul, a sort of archive. I thought it would be nice, as an exercise, to sign in his platform. This would be a test, even if only virtually, to surround myself by Turkish names. The first time I've opened the page it was a "strange" feeling to see my name between "Özgurs", "Ayses", "Ismet", "Gülsens"... It was as if I had entered a new space, although virtual, but a new space.

I did not go for confrontation with S. I wanted to let it happen. But we didn't come very close. I mean, he knew my work in the exhibition and he didn't take the initiative and didn't speak to me on the issue.

We met occasionally at openings. Occasionally, we have exchanged a useful e-mail. Once the issue came to the surface at an opening, but very softly. However, I believe that he is also a supporter of deconstruction theories. He said, if I remember it right, "he rejects the concept "national identity".

After Hrant's murder, I was devastated. I met S. randomly and the first thing he told me was: "Turkey has lost a great democrat."

This has infuriated me. Why are his first words to me are that ones? He did not seem to realize with whom he was talking. Sure, "national identities do not exist." I had the impression that he ignored the fact that I was Armenian, while the murderer of Hrant also aimed to destruct his very "Armenianness".

I am still in his platform. I think we might speak straight about the "issue", but that's a conversation that I always leave for later. With people I like, I walk away from confrontations. We continue to greet each other and smile to each other in openings. We have a lot in common, we are artists, we work for the public, and we have a platform...

I mean it sincerely when I smile at him. I also wish that everything between us were good.

# Berlin, different places

*The waiter of the hotel asked me:  
"Avedis is not a German name, right?"  
I said it's a "ermeni" name. In that moment he puts his hands on  
the heart and makes a gesture of deep feeling/compassion.*

*The masseuse on the beach told me  
"What a pretty woman, are you Turkish?"  
I answered: "No".*

It is not easy to be in Turkey on holiday with my family, It's not easy to make "this holiday". It's like being in a sort of "under-world", they all speak German, they are very friendly, make jokes like clowns ... what is behind this attitude?

In Germany they hated the Germans and here they put their best smile?

Perhaps the Turks who work in hotels feel as I feel: one foot here and another there, and they are so nice to the tourists not only for the money but because German tourists remind them their "other" life ...

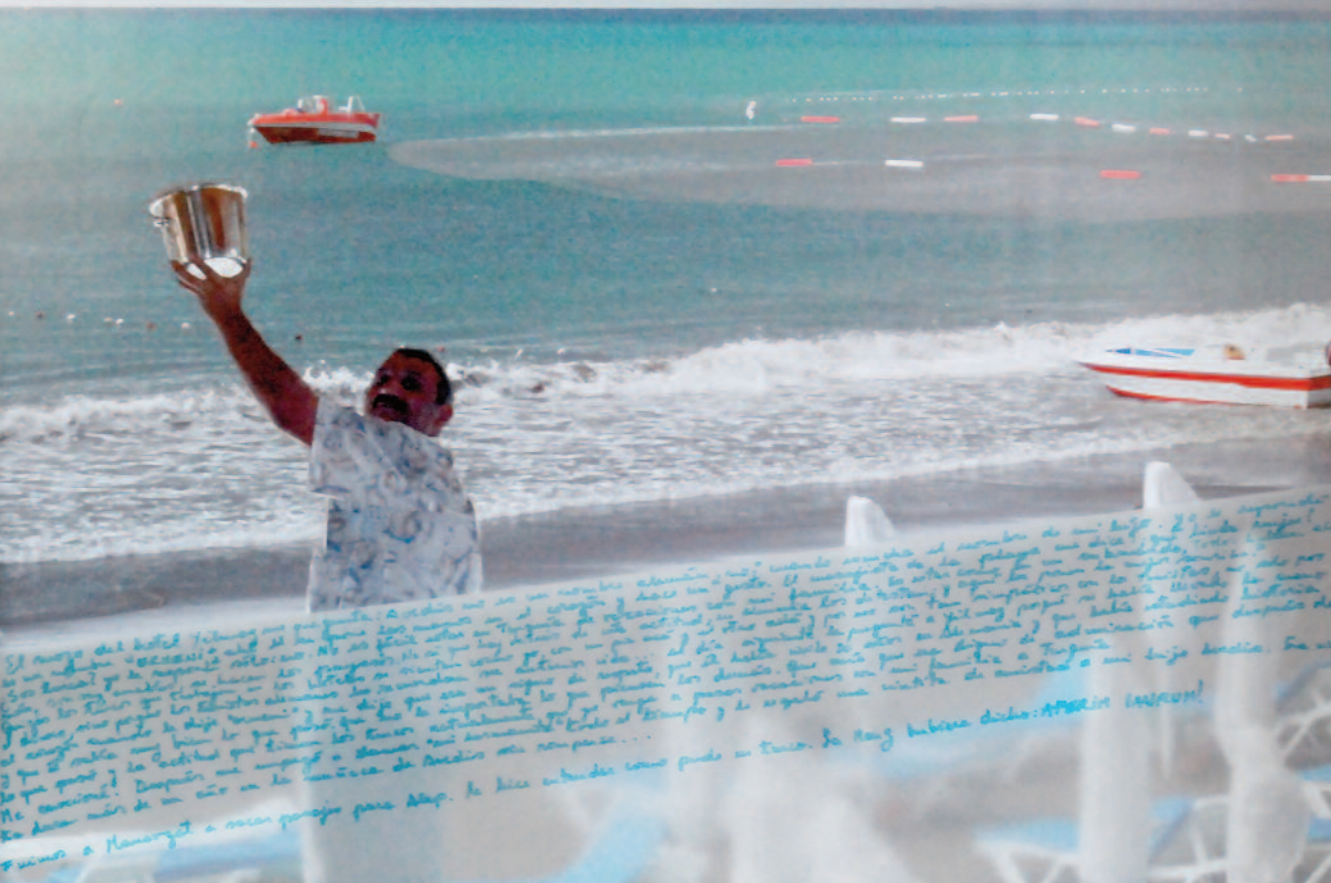
*...I do not understand my dad.*

*One time he said something he should have learned from his own father, "Never trust a Turk. On one hand they smile and on the other they stick the knife in your back ". On the other hand, he recently defended them and said, "the Turks from today, the poor ones, what fault do they have about what happened?"*

*I do not understand my dad...*

The next day I asked Yilmaz why he had put his hand on his heart, and he answered it was a sign of respect, he told me he had lived 30 years in Germany and studied history and knows what happened. He does not care what others think. He thought it was admirable that after what happened and the attitude that the Turks have now towards us to come for holidays in Turkey.

2006



# Side

Then he started calling me "my sister" all the time and he gave a tape of friendship to Avedis. The tape lasted for just over a year on Avedis's wrist.

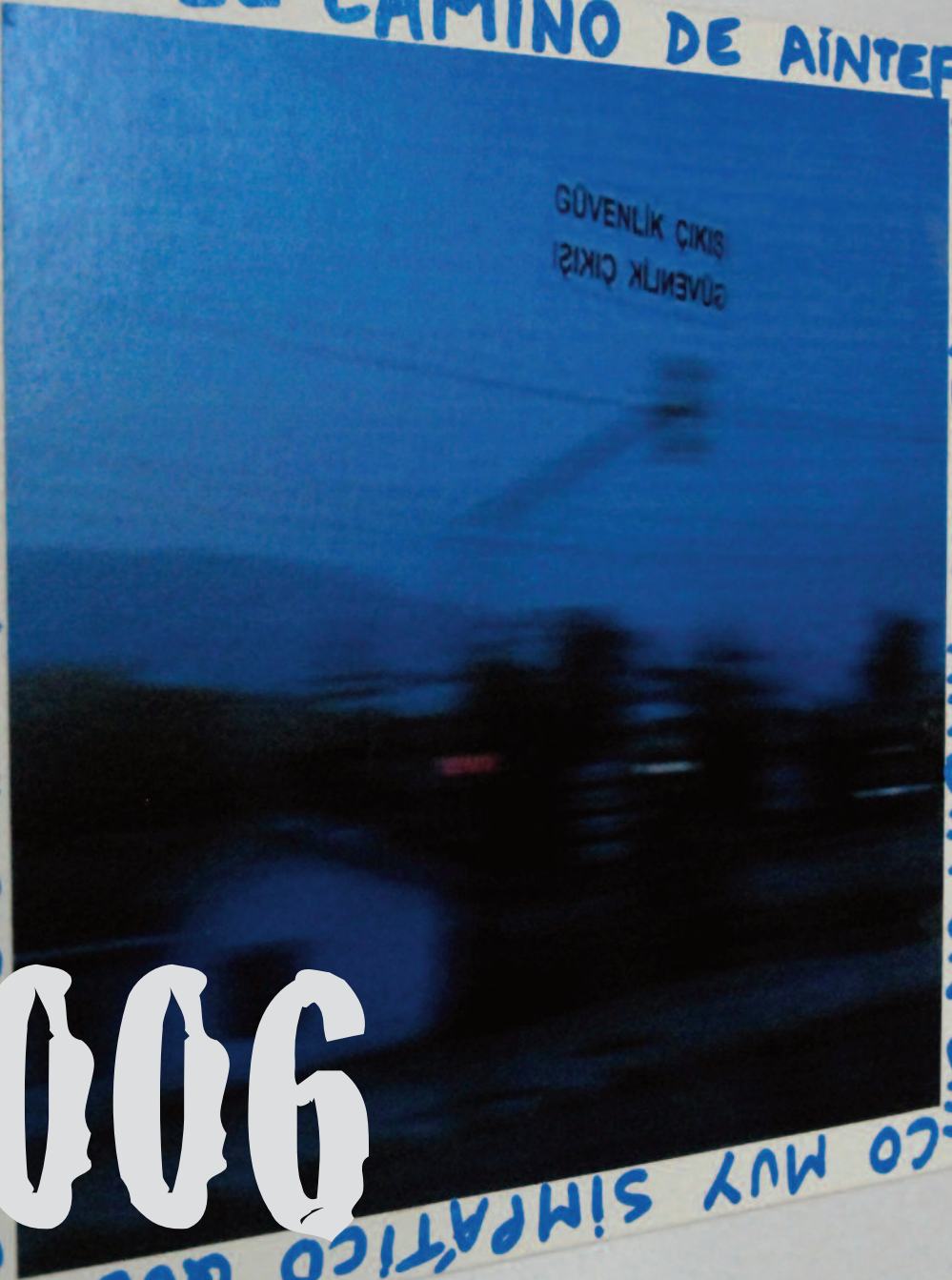
We went to Manavgat to get tickets to Aleppo. I did, as I could with my very poor Turkish, My "mez mairig" would say: Aferim, iavrum!

The hotel owners try to sell us excursions in the region and cannot understand why we go to Aleppo. They look at us as if we were aliens.

On the bus, we finally got with normal people! In the artificial world of the tourist I was getting nervous. At about 7 o'clock everybody began to take food out and they began to share. Just like us! I liked that gesture. Most were men. There were only two girls, one older woman and me. Of course, the women were apart.

EN EL CAMINO DE AİNTEP

DETRA'S MIO HABIA UN CHI



ERA MUY AMENAZA HA  
DIA CRECIDO Y VIVIA K  
2006

CO MUY SIMPÁTICO QUE HA

2006



# on the way back from Aintep to Side

behind me in the bus was a very nice guy who grew up and lives in Hamburg. He was very helpful and translated for me all the essentials. The conversation was very pleasant; I dared to tell him I was Armenian. I told him how rich is Aintab's kitchen in Argentina and he was very surprised to hear everything I knew about recipes that till that moment he saw just as his own. (in that week France had issued a Law against the denial of genocide) We discussed the reactions of people. The conversation went very well, without confrontations, very careful from both sides, just on the outskirts of the "hot" issue. Two hours later, just before arriving, the guy asked me about what my grandparents told me. He said he had a version of his grandparents; They told him, they killed Armenians, but there were also Armenians who killed Turks and Armenians were traitors because they had cooperated with the French. But he was interested in knowing the opinion of somebody from Armenian descent, he told he had never had the opportunity to speak with one of us. I told him what I know. And I said that I think the fear was the origin of everything. The psychosis that was created when the Ottoman Empire fell apart was the turning point were the population were allowed to manipulate and turned its hand against itself and its own population. Finally he was very impressed, he told me that I had good arguments and when I went, he remained quite stunned. We were stopped two times by the police to check the passports of the "nationals".

It reminded me of the era of military dictatorship in Argentina ...

In February 2008, I decide, like every winter, to go to the gym. I always intend to do more physical activity. This time JOOP fitness had an offer: "personal trainers for thirty Euros". I felt like a Hollywood movie star, but in Berlin and with a budget of a poor artist! What a plan!

I said to myself, I do nothing wrong by having somebody specialized taking care and giving me assistance in getting a better physical condition. JOOP fitness proposed Banu to me as a coach. I knew immediately that she was Turkish. I said to myself, "this is a space to relax and take care of myself, I do not know if it's OK to expose myself to tensions or interrogations like "does she know?" or "does she deny?" or "what does she think of us?" But on the other hand I had a fit of boldness and I told to myself: what could happen if I put everything aside, if I leave the issue for later, and consciously allow a Turkish girl to do something good for me, just like that... What if I let her give me something, simply allow her to do something good for me, without more questions?

January  
2008

Banu. Creo  
ella nació  
Alemania.  
Para más  
ocupada  
los prejuicios  
los hombres  
en con los  
eres y los que  
alemanes  
con los  
cos. Vinio  
tiempo en



## Wilnersdorferstraße

So I decided to make a test and after three classes, I took ten more. She is an excellent coach. She motivated me and made me feel very well. She had put strong emphasis on the fact that I was doing the exercises very well. Especially with the dumbbell exercises, she told me that if I ever go to another gym, not to let any man come to me and tell me I'm doing something wrong. I felt much better about myself thanks to Banu. I think she was born in Germany but was rather busy with the prejudices that Germans have of the Turks and men over women.

Finally I said her where my grandparents came from and she reacted diplomatically, did not want to engage much in the subject, but when I said I was doing this "cooperation" project, she had no trouble in taken this photo with me.

The European Cultural Foundation invited me to a face to face meeting. There were curators and artists from different countries who had been fellows of the foundation. Then I noticed a woman. She was introduced as Melek, from Istanbul. I thought, calm down and let's see ... I didn't want to jump into the pool from the beginning. I wanted to take care of myself a little. I was letting Banu do something good for me in Berlin as personal trainer, "without preconditions." So first I wanted to see what kind of person she was. Each one would do a presentation and in discussions I was going to find out more about her without exposing myself.

Her talk and movies looked very interesting. There was a feeling of sympathy and empathy I would say, but we didn't approach too much ... Now I know that was because of the language, my English is not very good and hers is not the best either ... but at that time I was not quite sure why we could not speak well.

The final night we were all invited to a dinner by the ECF in a boat. She wanted to put lipstick and had no mirror. Instinctively, I had the impulse to help her, I stand up and put the lipstick on her lips. And then I realized that the gesture was a bigger thing, also from her side, the fact that she accepted...

February

2008

Cada uno iba a hacer una ponencia. Ya me iba a enterar sin exponerme. Su charla y sus películas me gustaron. Había una sensación de simpatía, de empatía dice yo, pero no nos acercamos del todo... ahora sé que fue por el idioma, mi inglés no es muy bueno y el de ella un poco mejor que el mío, pero en ese momento no estaba segura de por qué no podíamos hablar bien. La noche final salimos invitados por la ECF a cenar en un barco. Ella se quería poner lápiz de labios y no tenía un espejo. Instintivamente me salió de adentro el gesto de ayudarla y ponerlo yo. y en ese momento me di cuenta que ese gesto albergaba mucho más de mi parte y también de la suya por estar dispuesta a aceptarlo.

## Lloyd hotel, Amsterdam

Later I received an invitation to send an application for the Filmmore film festival and I did. I thought, these are the paths that I have to go. A year later I was invited to the festival. Although I know it was not easy for the organizers to fund my travel costs, they did it. It's a small gesture, but to me was very important and reassuring because it demonstrates a real desire to have me there.

In March 2009 when I was in Istanbul for the presentation of the film Hatice told me I was "at home" in Istanbul and Melek thanked me, she said that my presence gave them the opportunity to talk about one issue that needs a lot of discussion. It was a very reconforting gesture.

For the project Kahvehanne I had a photo shoot. The artists should have a good portrait for their homepage. I had an appointment with B. bei Ute Langkafel. B. was a production assistant on the project. She had to write down my information and confirm the admission of the photos. As always, my name was a long topic. She asked, "Your name does not come from the Turkish?" I reacted as if stung by a tarantula, I said NO! and began a long explanation: I said, I knew that many Armenian last names carry Turkish words, but MY name would be 100% Armenian, it would be Der-Meguerditchian, "meguerdel" would mean baptized in Armenian and shows the fact that a priest was in my family ...

I was a bit peeved. I thought she might have been a bit more sensitive, mightn't she? After everything that has happened between us ...

On the way home I was surprised at myself, my reaction was not particularly fine either ... As if to be Turkish would be an insult! That was not nice of me. I told my mother the story, and that I was perplexed at myself because my reaction was not so good. And she told me another story. When she visited me a few years earlier, she was at the Kaiser's supermarket. While she was looking with great interest the various kinds of meat at the meat counter, she could not decipher some words on a package as a helpful woman came and told her in English: "It's turkey (the bird) in English, she responded as stung by a tarantula and countered,"  
"No, I'm Argentinean! "

We then had to laugh at ourselves!

November  
2008



# Dresdener / Suarezstraße

A couple days later I apologized for my reaction and B. and I explained her how difficult it was this all for me. I told her that only through the contact between us these things come out to the surface and we can work with it. She said she had nothing to do anyway with the issue, she was born in Germany. I told her it's OK, I understand it, I did not want to attack her, I just wanted to explain her my reaction, etc.

In retrospect, I hope this meeting has remained in her consciousness and has left its mark.

A few weeks ago I inquired about my other grandfather's last name: Tobjian. My mother said it came from Topchu (cannon in Turkish) The meaning of this last name I had never demanded ...

Hurra for a selective perception!

I would never have thought that one day I would be sitting in a cafe for men, full of Turkish, telling them the story of my grandparents. The theatre Ballhausnaunynstrasse has invited me to participate in a project called Kahvehanne and the guest artists were mostly Turkish of the third generation, I'm not Turkish but I also belong to the third generation of Turkish emigrants. I liked to dare to think so. I'm a third generation migrant. My grandparents come from the same place as the grandparents and parents of most of those artists, but our ancestors have left Turkey for different reasons. After swimming for so long in an imaginary world, I liked to dare to take that place as my point of reference for a while. During 4 days the men of Yavuzeli e. V. shared their space and saw people pass to see my short film "in between" every 15 minutes. Out of interest, or maybe out of habit of watching the screen when something moves, many of them saw the film, many times. I think they liked seeing their streets, their routes, listening to the music so similar to their own, that describes the sadness and the feeling of emptiness that is left after changing the geography. I had my prejudices at seeing so many Turkish men gathered together in a Kahvehanne. I thought all of them were denialists. Nevertheless, I thought that we shared the same experience of living in a foreign country and it could be a starting point of having something in common. For my surprise, the very first day a man approached me and asked what my work was about. He said: "It's about the deportees, isn't it?" I said: "Yes". He says: "It's a very sad story", I answered that it was. And he continued in a very low voice: "The government says that it wasn't genocide but I think that it was"

November

2008





# Oranienplatz

I was astounded. Others looked at me with distrust, but in general they were very kind.

Another very interested man, has invited me for a cup of tea and told: "But you have collaborate with the French!"

I answered him that yes, we did but what did he expected after what had happened in 1915 and 1916?

In the end I thought that that it would be a good idea to invite them all to a pachlaba, for the best one of course. I went to a Kilicoglu bakery at the Adalberstrasse and served it to them. I took my things and said goodbye. In the car, on my way back to Charlottenburg, the tension dropped and I had an attack of crying, like the one during this summer, when I had to climb a rock at an Austrian path and after having the fright of my life

I had to vent it out with crying.



March

2009

del 2009. Justam  
chicas que joven.  
lar. Al igual ban pr  
usts como de or  
a Kareu. Primero de or  
e hablamos de pens  
El... Festival

# Pera

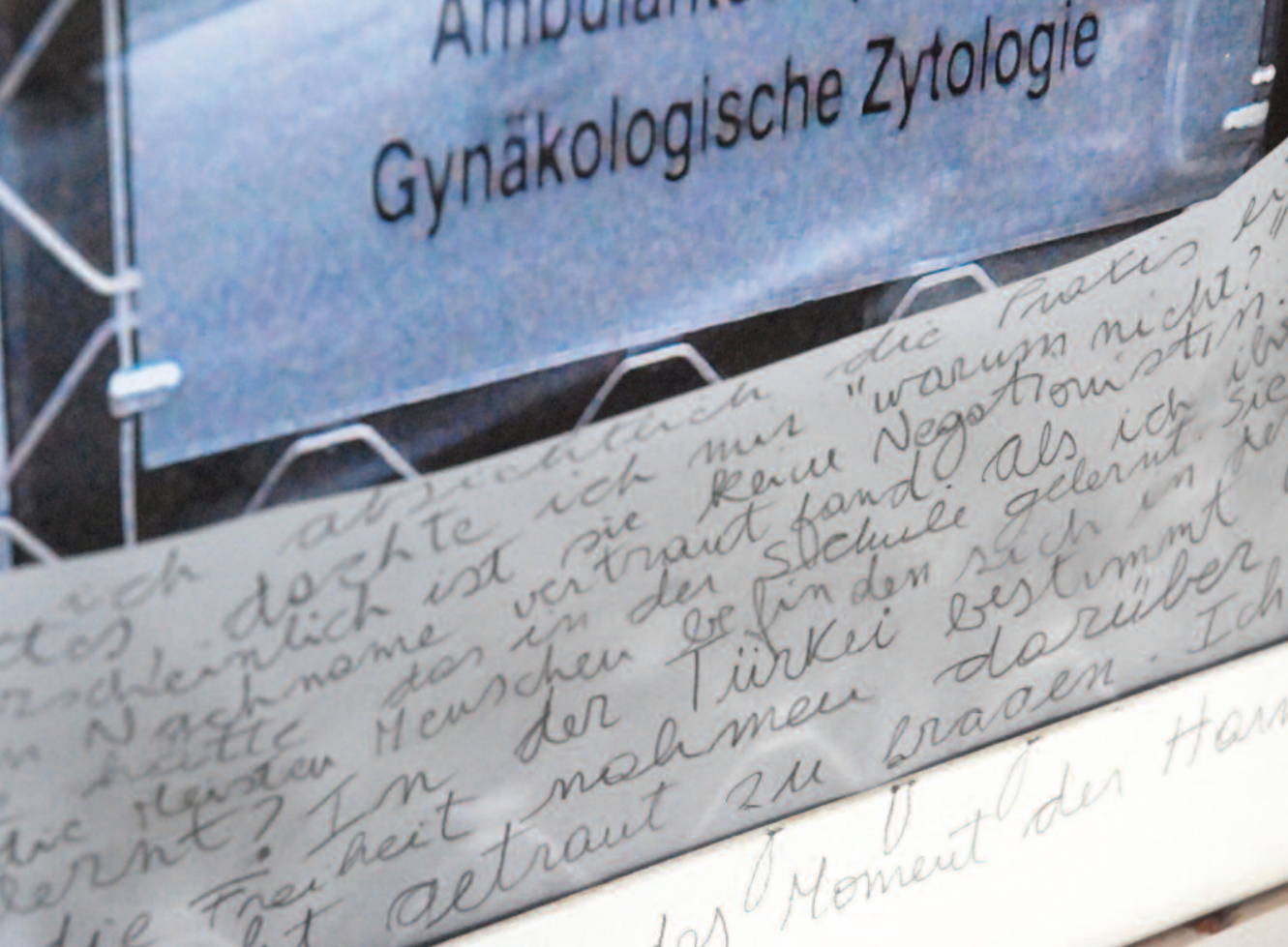
I went with two girls in their twenties to dance. They worked for the Filmmore festival. They were cute. I liked how they dealt with my English colleague Karen and me. First they thought I was from Argentina and then as we talked they realized that I'm also Armenian. Last month they had been in Iran and Yerevan. When I asked them what was their motivation, one of them told me that as in Turkey the conservatives speak so bad about both countries, she wanted to take a look for herself. How awake were these two girls! And barely twenty years old! At the location we went to dance was a great atmosphere, oriental rock group played live. It was very rewarding and I enjoyed a lot dancing with them as well. The group also played a song with Armenian lyrics: *"Girl, why did you went away, my sweet dear, why did you went away and forgot me?"*

Friday I went the first time to a gynaecologist, a Turkish gynaecologist. I passed in the Kantstrasse and saw she is new in the corner. I thought because of her name she is a Turkish gynaecologist, and then I saw a lot of women with chador going in and out. Because I needed a new gynaecologist and she has her office two streets of my home and I am in a "cooperation process" I thought it could be a good step to go further. It is a very intimate step... I mean, to put my femininity, my body... on the stage... Sometimes I develop ideas and I put me under pressure to go along, and in the moment I see it was not the best idea, but never mind, my wish was to make this step, so I went to the doctor.

I sat in the waiting room, and tried to relax, because I understood that it was not so easy as I supposed, I began to read a woman magazine, in the first page was a sentence announcing an article about sex problems, so I thought, let's take a look, I was looking for it 5 minutes and I couldn't find the article, till I realised somebody took the article out. I though, oh, oh!, probably because husbands and/or Muslim mothers doesn't want that their daughters or wife's read about this issues, the doctor took the article out, not to bother them. (After I told this story to my friend Estela, her first thought was that the pages were not there anymore, because one Turkish woman was so interested in the issue!) Very different points of view... Prejudices attacking again!

In that moment was my turn to go in. The doctor asked where I came from, she recognized my name, but was confused about my surname Silvina. I told her, my grandparents had to leave to Argentina, she asked if they were from Armenia,

May  
2009



## Kantstraße

I told, they were not from Armenia, they were from Gaziantep, Ma-rash and Sivas, and in that moment I told her that she was a part of one cooperation project that I was making because I'm an artist. I told her, that 10 years ago, I had not been able to come to her praxis, but now I was ready. She told me that her family was mixed and multicultural, and that she knew what had happened, she learned it in the school (I thought, which school? because in the Turkish schools, they tell another story. May be she went to the German school?) She explained me that the society had extremes, opening her hands very wide, but the most people were in the middle and she was in the middle also, and now in Turkey there were changes going on... To tell the truth created a sudden sympathy between us, a feeling of belonging to a similar place...

I didn't ask exactly what she knew;  
I didn't want to break the harmony.

I ask myself how far I will go to not break the harmony...

2009 - Humboldt Universität. Hoy le hallo a  
estudiante turca que tengo desde que doy de



de  
es d  
le p  
dije  
el ger  
si sus  
foto  
una foto  
dijeron  
cerca  
y  
si puedo  
alguien  
me diga  
una cosa  
que  
define mi existencia ...

June

2009

# Humboldt Uni, am Hegel Platz

Today I spoke to D., a Turkish student, the first Turkish student I've had in all the years I have been teaching at the university. I asked if she wanted to be part of my collection of Turkish/Armenian meetings. She was born here in Germany but her family is from Afion, as the family of auntie Anita. When I explained the project I told where my grandparents came from and that they survived the genocide. She looked at me a bit stressed and said: "We do not know whether it happened or not" ... Then I asked if I could take a picture of her and she refused, but told me if she could be helpful for anything else that she was available to me.  
I wanted to cry...

This student was so nice to me and close and as recent experiences had been positive... I felt particularly hurt when she said: we don't know whether it happened or not. At the same time, I wonder what it means "if I can be helpful for anything else?" How put up with the fact that someone is so young, and warm, and close and tells you, that she doesn't know if one thing that marked and defines my whole existence has happened...?

My grandfather Avedis played the Canun. His whole person was a cultural legacy: he was a photographer, did painting and vocational theater. My son Avedis is a musical boy. I thought, I'd love it - considering we live outside an Armenian community, because I don't fit with the Armenian community from Berlin- if he has any link with the Armenian culture. Perhaps learning the instrument that my grandfather used to play could be a way. Before I thought to take him to classes with an Arab musician. This year, as I am trying to make peace, inspired by this motivation, I thought I could find a school of Turkish oriental music.

I found it and went with Avedis to Kreuzberg. The professor was very good. I think he wondered why I wanted my child to learn that instrument. I told him that my family was Armenian and my grandfather played Canun. He touched his heart and said he had great admiration for Armenian musicians and that Armenians had great composers of Eastern music. When choosing an instrument, he said it had to be Turkish, not an Arab one, the Turkish were better.

August

2009





## Solmsstraße

Avedis could go once a week to individual classes and to group classes twice a week, in an orchestra with all the oriental instruments. On one hand, I liked the image: see Avedis playing oriental music and sharing this world that I did not live. I asked what language the children spoke, and the teacher told me they had that problem, kids between them spoke German, so I didn't need to be afraid, because Avedis would not be excluded. I said we had the same problem in Argentina in the Armenian school, Spanish-speaking children do not speak Armenian. On the other hand, I thought: "and if they want to talk about him behind his back? Perhaps they'll speak in Turkish and he will not understand ... or worst, he will learn Turkish and not Armenian...

I think this is too much for me at the moment...  
Sometimes I have "great ideas" and I can't follow them with my feelings.

I think I'm taking Avedis to a music school  
to learn Arabic Canon.



## short biography

Silvina Der-Meguerditchian is the granddaughter of Armenian immigrants to Argentina and was born in Buenos Aires in 1967. She grew up in Argentina and since 1988 lives in Berlin. A recurrent theme of her artistic work is the remembrance of the ethnic dislocation of the Armenian people. Silvina Der-Meguerditchian ties a net. She connects the disparate, builds bridges between separate worlds and seeks a dialogue with the unknown. Her main focus is always on the actual process of joining and dissolving, constructing and deconstructing identity. Der-Meguerditchian's work represents a type of mnemonics, namely the individual and collective art of commemoration. She is initiator of the platform for armenian artists "underconstruction", ([www.underconstructionhome.net](http://www.underconstructionhome.net)) curator of "Under Construction" - Talking about identities in the Armenian Transnation, the first "off" Armenian Diaspora representation at the 52. Venice Biennial and curator of the exhibition "Voulu/obligé, Outskirts of a small contradiction" part of the official Programm in the 53rd Venice Biennial.

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Berlin, December 2009