

**VIDEO ACTIVISM IN TURKEY:
EMPOWERMENT OF OPPRESSED
OR
ANOTHER KIND OF SURVEILLANCE?
THE CASE OF KARAHABER**

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ABSTRACT

VIDEO ACTIVISM IN TURKEY: EMPOWERMENT OF OPPRESSED OR ANOTHER KIND OF SURVEILLANCE? THE CASE OF KARAHABER

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This thesis explores the conduct of video activism in Turkey through a case study on Karahaber, an Ankara based video activist collective, which was the only example of its kind in Turkey in the beginning of the study.

The purpose of the study is to investigate Karahaber's video activism through the major question of the thesis: Was Karahaber able to provide empowerment for the socially excluded and oppressed, or the practices conducted by it further contributed to the surveillance culture?

This is an exploratory research based on qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and content analysis of the videos of Karahaber hosted on its website. It is argued that by following outdated practices of early video activist groups and by limiting dissemination of produced videos with Internet, Karahaber diminished empowering effects of video activism and on the contrary contributed to the proliferation of spectacle society.

Keywords: Turkey, Video Activism, Karahaber, Surveillance, Empowerment

ÖZ

TÜRKİYE’DE VİDEO AKTİVİZM: EZİLENLERİN GÜÇLENDİRİLMESİ Mİ, BAŞKA ÇEŞİT BİR GÖZETLEME Mİ? KARAHABER ÖRNEĞİ

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Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de video aktivizm uygulamalarını tezin çalışma konusu olarak seçilen ve tezin başlangıcında türünün tek örneği olan Ankara’da yerleşik Karahaber video aktivist kolektifi üzerinden incelemektedir.

Çalışmanın amacı Karahaber’in video aktivizmini tezin ana sorusu üzerinden incelemektir: Karahaber tarafından gerçekleştirilen uygulamalar toplumsal olarak dışlanmışlar ve ezilmişlere bir güçlendirme mi sağlamıştır, yoksa gözetim kültürüne katkıda mı bulunmuştur?

Bu açınsal araştırma aktivistlerle görüşmeler ve Karahaber’in Internet sitesinde yayınlanan videoların içerik analizlerinden elde edilen nicel bilgilerden oluşmaktadır. Çalışma, erken dönem video aktivistlerinin zamanı geçmiş uygulamalarının takip edilmesi ve üretilen videoların dağıtımının Internet’le sınırlandırılması yüzünden Karahaber’in video aktivizmin güçlendirici etkilerini azalttığını ve tam tersi bir şekilde gösteri toplumunun yaygınlaşmasına katkıda bulunduğunu iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Video Aktivizm, Karahaber, Gözetim, Güçlendirme

To my parents,
who taught me
the importance of struggle for ideals
and
unconditional love for humanity

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

Juvenal, “Satire 6”

Introduction of video technology in the middle of 1960s, the technology that made CCTV surveillance possible, also marked another development, totally different in direction, as it made possible the new kind of resistance to emerge. Due to increasing dissatisfaction with commercial television, almost immediately after the first commercial video device was released, it was adopted by social movements and activists all around the world to produce their own media and to challenge the visual domination of mainstream media both in terms of content and style.

Through its historical development this new form of activism, named as video activism, emerged as a process of documenting realities and ‘truth of life’ in an artistic way for political purposes. Successfully implemented by various groups, collectives and individuals all around the world, video activism provided a novel way of resistance and opposition, together with the new techniques for empowerment and emancipation of socially excluded groups. As it has numerously proved to be one of the most essential channels for alternative

* Latin: Who will guard the guardians?

dissemination of ‘true’ and ‘just’ information, for more than 40 years now video activism was and still is an important issue on worldwide scale.

Even if video devices became available in Turkey starting from late 1970s, formation of the first video activist collective took place in 2005, in the period following the adoption of European Union Adoption Laws, when parallel with the intensifying debates on democratization, human rights and civil society, an urgent need for alternative media outlets started to be outspoken in Turkish society. This video activist collective, Karahaber, organized around the website <http://www.karahaber.org>, functioning with the motto “From the Image of the Action, to the Action of the Image”, and its predecessor, association VideA, legally founded in 2003 as an artistic, politic, and mediatic collective, were formed in the same manner as their global counterparts, but conducted video activism in a different way. In this scope, this thesis is an exploration on conducts of video activism in Turkey by Karahaber.

One of the significances of the study is the fact that in the span of 25 years only 6 academic research studies have been done on the subject of video in Turkey, 3 of them being related with video art, and 2 on the subject of personal usage of video devices. Even if the master’s thesis of Aras Özgün, submitted to METU in 1997, looked at the video as an emancipatory technological form, this study will be the first one to deal with video as a tool of political opposition inside of the Turkish context. The other significant quality of the study is that Karahaber video activist collective was the first of its kind in Turkey, but was not able to create lasting emancipatory effect due to its usage of outdated video activist practices. In this sense Karahaber is also one of unique examples in the global context and on the global scale. Therefore it is a very interesting and intriguing subject for a social scientist candidate to explore, and it is important that such study is conducted in Turkish context.

Study tried to understand how the Karahaber's conduct of video activism is contributing to the Turkish context by the main question asked by thesis: is Karahaber's practice truly an emancipatory process, providing empowerment for oppressed, or is it serving as another kind of surveillance? The binary opposition of surveillance and empowerment offered by the main question of the thesis was formed due to the fact that the video device, extensively employed by CCTV systems as the main source of visual surveillance, is same timely used by video activist groups as a 'guerilla' weapon, offering oppressed and underrepresented people opportunities for empowerment.

1.1. Theoretical Frame and Concept Map

It is important to note that no theory or no concept is employed as a singular and all-encompassing one in the scope of this study. Rather theoretical frameworks that belong to several authors, such as Debord, Foucault, Gramsci and Mathiesen are employed in a complementary manner. Moreover these frameworks are not used in their entirety and concepts such as spectacle and surveillance, panoptic and synoptic, guerilla television and participatory video are used in the contexts that they were seen as appropriate. This structure of the theoretical framework is deemed to be compatible with the avoidance of making theoretical claims about video activism and its conduct in Turkey. However, in order to help for better understanding of the theoretical stance of the thesis some of the concepts need to be introduced and explained right from the beginning.

The term *empowerment* has different meanings in different sociocultural and political contexts, and it can easily create confusion, as the number of terms so far associated with empowerment include "self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one's values, capacity to fight for one's rights, independence, own decision making, being

free, awakening, and capability.” (Narayan, 2002, pp. 13-4) Inside of the thesis term empowerment is used in accordance with the definition developed by Rowlands, where empowerment is referred to as a “process by which people, groups who are powerless, become aware of power dynamics in their lives, develop skills and capacity for gaining reasonable control over their lives, without infringing upon rights of others, and support empowerment of others.” (Rowlands, 1992, as cited in McCarthy, 2004, p. 107)

Throughout the historical development of video activism emergence of two different video activist factions occurred, who have different views on the process of empowerment through video. The first of them, named *guerilla television* with the reference to same-named book of Michael Shambert published in 1971, is putting more emphasis on disseminating content for maximum available audience. The second one, *community video*, approach sometimes referred to as *participatory video*, with the intent of promoting “self/other respect, a sense of belonging, a feeling of importance, a claim to an identity”, is more focused on the process of video making rather than its final product. (White, 2003, p. 65) When dealing with both approaches of video activism, the Gramscian term *organic intellectuals*, the term Gramsci used to depict thinking and organizing elements of class, is most widely used one, as video activism quite often is categorized within counter-hegemonic struggle.

Just like empowerment, the term *surveillance* has very broad set of meanings in different contexts, but within this study surveillance is used with negative meanings appointed to it, as an “omnipresent, omnipotent, and centralized political apparatus.” (Huey, Walby & Doyle, 2006, p. 149) Foucauldian term of *Panopticon* is especially important when studying surveillance, as by this term Foucault defined an apparatus which controls the seer-seen relation, a “machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad.” (Foucault, 1979, p. 202) In time the term *panoptic* started to be used to define mechanism, where both discipline

(conformity to the norms) and the disciplines (regulated fields of knowledge and expertise) are produced. Later on, with increasing proliferation of surveillance systems, need for new terms, which can be helpful in understanding consent ordinary people give to be watched, gave rise to introduction of *Synopticon*, a term coined together by Mathiesen to depict situation where “the many... see and contemplate the few.” (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 219) Both mechanisms, Panopticon and Synopticon, operate simultaneously, hand-in-hand, mutually reinforcing each other, and take their power from televisual technologies, apparatuses turning every day life into a *spectacle*. The term *spectacle* and Debordian term of *spectacle society* will be of special importance in this study, as the main arguments of thesis will be built upon it. Inside of the thesis *spectacle* will be used in accordance with Debord, and his statement, that the spectacle “is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.” (Debord, 1994, p. 12)

1.2. Methodology of the Study

The main source of information for this study is provided by interviews with eight core members of Karahaber in Istanbul and Ankara, which were conducted in July to November 2009. Semi-structured interviews¹ involving an initial set of questions which are available in the appendix part of this thesis, and lasting two to three hours each, were conducted with each of the participants in a variety of venues - mostly university campuses, but also café's and homes. Some of the activists, active in the history of the group, are living abroad now, so there was no possibility of face-to-face communication with them. In two of such cases instant communication technologies such as Skype and MSN Live Messenger

¹ In semi-structured interview the interviewer relies on an interview guide that includes a consistent set of questions or topics, but the interviewer is allowed more flexibility to digress and to probe based on interactions during the interview. Semistructured interviewing has been particularly useful in research on loosely organized or short lived movements. (Blee & Taylor, 2002, pp. 92-3)

were employed. In another two of cases, where very big time differences with the countries activists live in existed, brief emailing was used.

Due to the oppositional nature of the group all of the activists interviewed had minor and major problems with law enforcement agencies in the past and some of them have trials which are still going on. However the personal acquaintance of many of the Karahaber members with the author, in majority of the cases dating back as 2004, and the reputation of the author as supporter of video activism and Karahaber, contributed in gaining consent for interviews, as the author was seen as a ‘friend of the group’ rather than outsider. Generally speaking, those interviewed were keen to be involved, symptomatic of their belief in the significance of Karahaber to democratization processes in Turkey and their own political interests. In order to keep identities of interviewed activists anonymous, their names were not exposed in the thesis and instead initials were used when referring to them.

The secondary source of information for case study was obtained through a content analysis of the videos of Karahaber, published on its website <http://www.karahaber.org>. All 175 videos available on the website were watched, classified according to their themes, and tried to be evaluated based on the basic research question of the thesis, whether the conduct of video activism done by Karahaber provides empowerment or serves as another kind of surveillance. The main criteria for evaluation of videos were occurrences of faces in protest videos, the presentations of protests and protesters, and frequency of appearance of certain movements. Content analysis of video works and interviews with group members are mostly analyzed together in order to provide better panorama and understanding of the practices of video activism as conducted by Karahaber members.

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

In order to justify the abovementioned claims, this study was organized as follows: Chapter 2 offers an examination of contemporary society we live in, a society of surveillance and spectacle where our every move is tried to be detected. The chapter argues that wide spread installation of CCTV surveillance systems was possible due to effects of television, which through Reality TV and synoptic urge creates a nation of scopophiliacs and voyeurs who do not object to being watched.

The study will progress through Chapter 3, which is a detailed analysis of video activism in its global context. It provides in-depth historical analysis of the formation and proliferation of video activism, and its historical evolution. Different trends existing under the umbrella of video activism are introduced, as well as its promises and deficiencies which showed themselves in the course of history. The notions of guerilla television and community video, two different video activist practices are introduced in this chapter.

Chapter 4 examines the field of the thesis, Ankara located video activist collective Karahaber. For this purpose, the Turkish context of video, television and surveillance is given first, and after that the case study conducted on Karahaber is provided. Consisting of qualitative data obtained from semi-structured in-depth interviews with Karahaber members and content analysis of videos available on the Karahaber's website <http://www.karahaber.org>, and by focusing especially on organizational structure, ideological inclinations, collaborations, and production together with the distribution aspects of the practice of Karahaber's video activism, the chapter tries to provide an answer for the main question of the study.

The study ends with a concluding chapter which provides a discussion of the subject matter. The primary claim of the thesis is that the practices of video activism conducted by Karahaber, which theoretically should have helped for oppressed and underrepresented to empower themselves, caused rather unexpected and different results, as by deleterious choices of outdated video activist techniques and methods and by limiting dissemination of produced videos with Internet, Karahaber contributed to voyeuristic tendencies of protesters it was filming, thus unintentionally reinforcing the surveillance/spectacle society we live in and at some points even made contribution to surveillance practices of law enforcement agencies.

CHAPTER 2

UNCANNY SOCIETY OF SURVEILLANCE & SPECTACLE

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.

But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing that establishes our place in the surrounding world: we explain that world within words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.

John Berger, “Ways of Seeing”, p. 7

We are living in a world, which can be described in short as a ‘visual’ one, since vision for a long time has been the “master sense of the modern era”, and even modernity itself has been considered “resolutely ocularcentric.” (Jay, 1988, p. 3) This heavy dependence on the vision and visuality has reached such heights that now the most distinguishable essence of modern age is the fact that even the world itself has become a “picture.” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 130) These are the times when we are constantly bombarded with visual depictions from all sides, be it TV in our homes, billboards on the streets we are walking on, or the newspapers and magazines we are reading. But is the vision really the modern phenomena? Jenks argues the contrary

‘Idea’ derives from the Greek verb meaning ‘to see’. This lexical etymology reminds us that the way that we think about the way that we think in Western culture is guided by a visual paradigm. Looking, seeing and knowing have become perilously intertwined. Thus the manner in which we have come to understand the concept of an ‘idea’ is deeply bound up with the issues of ‘appearance’, of picture,

and of image. (Jenks, 1995, p. 1)

Vision comes with the power deeply embedded in it. Turkish folk culture is full with the idioms and proverbs, which clearly refer to the power of seeing, such as “The one who is distant from the eye is distant from the heart”², “Heart will bear unless the eye sees”³, “The eye sees, heart wants”⁴, and “Friend shows through face, enemy through the eye”⁵. Still quite widespread is the notion of “sinister eye”⁶, the belief that beautiful or good things and people should be “beware of sinister eye”⁷ and the amulets to protect from the sinister eye. This notion is not unique to Anatolia or Middle East, it is quite popular all over the world, like the superstitious belief in the ‘evil eye’ in Europe.⁸

All religions tried to control their population’s behavior by spreading the idea that God was ‘watching’ and judging everyone all the time. In Christianity God’s scrutiny was assisted by painted icons, murals and mosaic images showing God or his ‘son’ Jesus. In Islam, where depicting human faces was forbidden, the notion of all-watching Allah was spread through the idea of ‘eye of the soul’⁹. With the secularization processes emphasis from religious

² “Gözden irak olan gönülden de irak olur”

³ “Göz görmeyince gönül katlanır”

⁴ “Göz görür, gönül çeker”

⁵ “Dost yüzünden, düşman gözünden belli olur”

⁶ “Kem göz”

⁷ “Kem gözden sakınmak”

⁸ The continuing potency of the ‘evil eye’ in Europe was demonstrated in 1996 when the ruling British Conservative Party issued negative political propaganda showing the face of Tony Blair (the Labour Opposition Party leader) with a strip across his face upon which ‘demon eyes’ had been superimposed. A caption below the image warned: ‘New Labour, New Danger’. (Walker & Chaplin, 1997, p. 97)

⁹ “Gönül gözü”

symbolism was moved to full-face portraits, where eyes seem to follow viewers when they move. This visual effect reinforced the omniscience of God's gaze. From the 18th century on authoritarian leaders' portraits replaced religious iconography, but the effect created was still the same: 'you are being watched'. They were hung everywhere in order to make people feel themselves controlled, to behave responsibly and obey. Such mass-produced portraits were, and still, in some countries like Turkey, are the cheapest form of representational surveillance¹⁰.

In 1975 Michel Foucault published *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the Prison*¹¹, book where Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon device provided the model for his "characterization of panoptic power and the 'disciplines' of imagined scrutiny." (Friedberg, 2002, p. 397) Spoken about in order to understand the scopic regime of power built by vision, Panopticon is an apparatus which controls the seer-seen relation, a "machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad." (Foucault, 1979, p. 202) Inside of it individuals are fixed, and their every movement is seen, recorded and supervised. Panopticon consists of a tower in the centre with supervisor in it, and tower is pierced by windows that provide a panoramic view of separate peripheral cells. Light from the outer walls illuminates each cell, but supervisor remains invisible all the time. Inmates of Panopticon never know whether there is a supervisor inside of tower and are they observed or not, so they live in a constant state of uncertainty induced by the "visible and unverifiable expression of power", which ensures the "normalization of discipline and self-control." (Hier, Greenberg, Walby & Lett, 2007, p. 729) In this sense Panopticon produces "a subjective effect, a 'brutal

¹⁰ Surveillance can be defined as "any collection and processing of personal data, whether identifiable or not, for the purpose of influencing or managing those whose data have been garnered." (Lyon, 2001, p. 2)

¹¹ *Discipline and Punish* was originally published in France as *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison* in 1975. Book was firstly translated to English in 1977

dissymmetry of visibility' for both positions in this dyad: the *seer* with the sense of omnipotent voyeurism and the *seen* with the sense of disciplined surveillance." (Friedberg, 2002, p. 397) Inside of Panopticon "full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap." (Foucault, 1979, p. 200)

Panopticon must be understood as a "generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life." Panopticon is the diagram of a "mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form"; its functioning, "abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction", must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system. The panoptic mechanism is not simply a "hinge, a point of exchange between a mechanism of power and a function"; it is a way of "making power relations function in a function, and of making a function function through these power relations." (Foucault, 1979, pp. 205-7) In this way, both discipline (conformity to the norms) and the disciplines (regulated fields of knowledge and expertise) are produced within this mechanism.

2.1. Technology Reinforces Surveillance: CCTV's Inevitable Rise

A lot of things come to mind when we say the word *technology*, yet most often these are "images of the powerful machines, engines, instruments, weapons and complex, organizational systems that made such things as cars, aircraft, nuclear bombs and space travel possible." (Walker & Chaplin, 1997, p. 196) In contemporary society technological changes and advances occur nearly on the daily basis, bringing to the market new devices, which in turn disrupts whatever "settling down" that has occurred "between users and their other old tools." (Tafler, 1995, p. 236) But to say that technology changes everyday life by itself will be very technologically deterministic approach to the uses of technology.

On the contrary, social, political, economic and cultural factors are the “prime determinants of technological change.” (Winston, 1998, p. 341)

When used in unexpected ways, every technology bears in itself radical potential for facilitating emancipative or progressive change through unprecedented repercussions, but it is always good to remember that, within capitalist market economy, technologies are “looked for and developed with certain purposes and practices already in mind.” (Williams, R., 1990, p. 6) Social sphere lived within primarily conditions the technologists’ work, and that’s the social forces active within society that both push and hinder technological developments, forcing a “social fit” upon them in the process. This ‘fit’ is essentially achieved by “suppressing the disruptive power of the technology to impact radically on pre-existing social formations.” (Winston, 1998, pp. 341-2) Even if technology manufacturers are eager to sell their products to as wide a selection of population as possible in order to maximize their profits, they never consider it necessary to address the issue of widening the range of use capabilities of technological devices, but rather prefer them to stay in a predefined narrow spectrum. (Wright, 1995, p. 91) In this sense technological ‘revolutions’ never occur, it is just the “constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, ever lasting uncertainty and agitation” that continues to prevail. (Marx & Engels, 2002, p. 233)

The technological tools of production and the technology itself can not exist outside of institutionalized ideological constructs, since their inventions and utility are socially determined. It is a quite widespread mistake to understand technology, especially communication technologies as transparent or ‘value free’, even if they always “impose a form onto the information they process”, and as little thought is given to ideologically determining functions of technology during its everyday use, these hidden functions remain unknown as independent forms, although in the mean time secretly “naturalizing the beliefs

of a given community.” (Legrady, 1995, p. 189)

It is no wonder then that visual surveillance conducted manually, as in case of Foucault’s Panopticon, soon was replaced with the devices and apparatuses developed due to technological breakthroughs in the sphere of optics. ‘Theoretical’ watching of the population through iconographic images like portraits or manually like with prison guards was transformed into ‘practical’ surveillance with the help of CCTV camera systems, spreading across the globe like a plague, with amazing speed, constantly being installed in all public and private places to such degree that now everyday life itself

is subject to monitoring, checking, scrutinizing. It is hard to find a place, or an activity, that is shielded or secure from some purposeful tracking, tagging, listening, watching, recording or verification device. (Lyon, 2001, p. 1)

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) camera systems, installed by policing services, government agencies and private sector, watch us all the time and record us in the streets, banks, shopping malls, restaurants, shops, hospitals, universities and even at the entrances of our homes, and by constant feeling of being watched without knowing for sure if there is really a watcher or not, create a surveillance society, a Panopticon expanded to whole society, where every movement of us is seen and recorded. Enabled by the “miniaturization and proliferation of video cameras”, more and more of social activity is visually recorded, thus causing a huge increase in direct visual surveillance as well as in other forms of monitoring. (Doyle, 2006, p. 201) In this sense modern society can be described as a panoptic one, where we are watched all the time, but never can see and identify our watchers.

In the United Kingdom, where the expansion of video surveillance has far surpassed that of other Western nations, Bournemouth became the first city to

implement a permanent public CCTV camera system in 1985. CCTV surveillance gradually diffused to other towns and cities over the next decade, but it was not until the mid-1990s that public video surveillance became a central feature in the repertory of responses to criminality and crime control. Energized by the Home Office's City Challenge Competitions and Crime Reduction Programme in 1992, the British government committed close to £5 billion to support public CCTV surveillance systems between 1992 and 2002. (Hier et al., 2007, p. 727) This trend continued later on, and as the CCTV surveillance of public spaces has become pervasive, number of surveillance cameras installed in Britain has surpassed 1.5 million¹². (Doyle, 2006, p. 201)

Media's exaggeration of crime news creates fear and paranoia among ordinary people, thus making them willingly accept, and sometimes even demand CCTV camera systems in their neighborhoods. Downtown Camera (CCTV) Project, a 16 camera system introduced in November 2001, of The City of London, small city in the Canadian Province of Ontario, was energized by a single event: the murder of Michael Goldie-Ryder. A 20-year-old man who had attempted to intervene in a knife fight, Goldie-Ryder was stabbed to death on 16 January 1999 in London's downtown core. The grievance levied against his murderer, who was subsequently sentenced to life in prison, precipitated a flurry of media coverage, and it also culminated in the formation of 'Friends Against Senseless Endings' (FASE)¹³, a citizens' group concerned about combating the risk of community violence through education, awareness and legislative change. Spearheaded by family and friends of Goldie-Ryder, FASE was instrumental in raising over \$200,000 for the launch of London's surveillance program. Far from

¹² Currently there are 4.2 million CCTV cameras installed in the UK, one camera per every 14 individual. (Kelly, 2009, August 11)

¹³ FASE is a grassroots citizens' organization devoted to resisting community violence through education and awareness, as well as pressuring government for legislative change pertaining to criminal assaults involving knives. (Hier et al., 2007, p. 734)

an elite-initiated discourse¹⁴, however, the grievance against his murderer was quickly transformed into an imaginary set of risks afflicting the downtown core which extended to bank robberies, purse snatching, break-ins and random assaults. The specificity of the grievance, in other words, was dissociated from the singularity of the event and projected onto a wider set of risks which came to symbolize social disorder in the core. (Hier, 2004, pp. 549-50)

Efforts to implement CCTV surveillance in the City of Hamilton, another small town in Ontario, were similarly energized by a single event which came to symbolize the pervasiveness of risk in the downtown core. In early January 2001 Alexandre Hamil, an 18-year-old skater competing in the Canadian Figure Skating Championships, was ‘mugged’ and robbed of \$100. The incident sparked a series of news stories in the *Hamilton Spectator*, a local news outlet, to the extent that, commencing 17 March 2001, the newspaper ran a full week of investigative journalism entitled *Crisis in the Core: A Special Investigation of Hamilton’s Failing Downtown*. Detailing the perceived endemic risks to the downtown area, from pervasive drug use and property crime to violent assaults, the coverage was instrumental in creating an imaginary vision of social disorder premised on urban decay and the riskiness of public space. Subsequently, the development of Hamilton’s CCTV proposal derived particular strength from news reporting in the local press, taking the imaginary visualization of risk as an ontological condition in need of regulatory intervention. (Hier, 2004, p. 550)

CCTV systems and the feeling of ‘safety’ it creates among ordinary people depends not only on reductions in crime and the fear of crime, but also exclusion

¹⁴ Goldie-Ryder’s mother, Deborah Goldie-Ryder, was especially active in the process of this discourse. She even found her own voice in local newspapers publishing an op-ed article in the *London Free Press*, where she challenged critics who questioned whether the cost of a camera program was justified. She argued that, at a cost of \$1.06 per resident, the program was a ‘small price to pay to help make our streets safer’, proclaiming ‘he did not die for nothing’. (Hier et al., 2007, p. 736)

from public space those individuals or groups who are unable or unwilling to subscribe to the norms of consumer citizenship, as the CCTV surveillance systems has the potential to deal with the 'problems' of 'Group loitering', 'Drunkenness', 'Disorderly behavior' or 'those whose behavior is suspicious'. (Fyfe & Bannister, 1998, p. 261) This is no surprise, since the official objectives of the CCTV systems are listed as "(1) to provide and maintain a safe environment downtown; (2) to deter crime and "antisocial" behaviour; (3) to increase economic activity downtown; and (4) to improve the ability of police to react and respond to crime and "antisocial" behaviour." (Walby, 2005, p. 659) Ethnographic investigations of CCTV control room activity reveal that the surveillance gaze overwhelmingly falls upon individuals occupying categories of suspicion - youth, homeless persons, street traders and black men. (Hier, 2004, p. 543) In this sense, CCTV systems are not only facilitators of the strong desire to secure law and social order, they are also important components of social regulation and control, reproducing and strengthening existing power relations within the society. Police forces want to expand their surveillance networks even further to include CCTV from "shopping centers, transport and commercial CCTV schemes", and even gain access, "with the consent of individual users", to limited and smaller CCTV systems, like of local shops. (Home Office, 2007, p. 35) This goal achieved, CCTV will further continue to abolish "the crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect" and instead replace it with a "collection of separated individualities." (Foucault, 1979, p. 201)

It is surprising that the extensive adoptions and the continuing enthusiasm for CCTV surveillance occur against a background where there is little agreement among researchers about the effect of CCTV on recorded crime. Claims by law enforcement agencies, governmental bodies and those responsible for CCTV systems have certainly created a perception that CCTV is a proven crime reducing technology, effective regardless of the particularities of the place, but

as yet there is little consistent research evidence to sustain these claims. (Fyfe & Bannister, 1998, p. 257) On the contrary, London Metropolitan Police's internal report, leaked to British press in August 2009, shows that only one crime is solved per every 1,000 CCTV camera systems. (Press Association, 2009, August 24; France, 2009, August 25; Hickley, 2009, August 25; Hope, 2009, August 25; Steels, 2009, August 25) So why then CCTV systems are still so easily accepted and promiscuously deployed?

For Foucault the major effect of the Panopticon was the induction of "state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power." (Foucault, 1979, p. 201) Driven by this argument Lyon arrives at the point that CCTV camera systems are so easily embraced because "all sorts of watching have become commonplace within a 'viewer society', encouraged by the culture of television", where things "once considered 'private' have become open to the 'public gaze' of many" and "intimate and once sequestered areas of life" started to be screened. (Lyon, 2006, p. 36) Physically presenting itself as a pervasive and totemic item of furniture, television in many homes has become the "family altar - the sacred, central space, on top of which are carefully placed the family or individual's most precious objects and photographs." (Jenks, 1995, p. 22) With the further developing technology

television itself is turned into a tool of surveillance, since the new generation interactive television sets are able to record our choices of television programs to watch or the time we spent in front of our TV and send this information to content providers. In this respect television becomes a component of the larger technological apparatus, "panoptic sort", to the extent that it "involves the collection, processing, and sharing of information about individuals and groups that is generated through their daily lives... and is used to coordinate and control their access to the goods and services that define life in the modern capitalist economy. (Gandy, 1993, as cited in Tinic, 2006, p. 310)

2.2. The Obscure Object of Desire: Television

Being the oldest form of visual communication devices which has ‘immediacy’ (live transmission of events) in them, television was primarily devised for transmission and reception as abstract processes, with little or no definition of preceding content, unlike all previous communications technologies (except radio). (Williams, R., 1990, p. 17) In this sense it was bearing within itself enormous revolutionary potential, which unfortunately was never allowed to be realized. On the contrary, in very short time

whether explicitly in the terms of advertising or implicitly in the way of life portrayed in popular melodramas or the content of new programming, television had become a marketing tool. It was not the communications medium it claimed to be but, rather, a one-way channel, broadcasting programs that sanctioned limited innovation and whose very means of production were invisible to the home consumer. Television ... had become a seamless hegemonic institution. (Hanhardt, 1990, p. 71)

The hegemony of television culture had been strengthened even more as the number of TV sets around the world has increased, and “the number of TV channels has soared as television industries have been privatized and commercialized.” (Jin, 2007, p. 179) The endless series of mergers, acquisitions, buyouts and takeovers inside the television industry in the last thirty years created a situation where now only five “global-dimension firms, operating with many of the characteristics of a cartel,” referred to as Big Five¹⁵ by Bagdikian, own most of the television stations in United States.¹⁶ (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 3) At this point it is good to remember that

¹⁵ Bagdikian lists these companies as Time Warner, The Walt Disney Company, News Corporation, Viacom, and Bertelsmann. For more information check Chapter 2 “The Big Five” of Bagdikian, 2004

the screen of the television receiving signals is the head of a pin buried in one home out of millions, or a homing device, part of a huge organization without real organizers - of a character at once social, economic, technological, scientific, political - much more in any event than a network of corporate controlled production and programming of electronic images. (Debray, 1996, as cited in Beller, 2002, p. 65)

As early as in mid-1950s television industry developed itself into the “primary source of entertainment and information” in the world. (Albarran, 2002, p. 73) Institutionalized as a commercial enterprise nearly since its beginnings, television has been broadcasting in oligopolistic way for direct political and social control of society by producing “uniform styles and codes.” (Hanhardt, 1990, p. 71) It is impossible to understand the behavior and logic of television industry without accepting the “fundamental premise” that television “broadcasting is a business”, oriented only on profit.¹⁷ (Owen, Beebe, & Manning, Jr., 1974, p. 6)

In all developed television broadcasting systems the characteristic organization, and therefore the “characteristic experience”, is one of “sequence or flow.” (Williams, R., 1990, p. 79) Even if in early ages of television TV programming had been formed as series of timed units, even now it is to some degree, starting from 1960s this notion started to change. There were multiple reasons for this transformation, but the main reason was that early television transmits were complained to require ‘too much’. As one commentator in 1950s was complaining

¹⁶ Situation in the rest of the world is not very different from USA. Check Blumenthal & Goodenough, 1998, for a detailed account of television ownership in the world; Kaya, 2009, for situation in Turkey

¹⁷ Political economy approach serves as the best way to understand economic reality of television as an industry. An excellent reference for the matter is Mosco, 1996

TV requires complete and unfaltering attention... If the eye wanders... program continuity is lost... The thing moves, it requires complete attention... you can not turn your back... and you can not do anything else except listen while you are looking. (Boddy, 1984, as cited in Morley, 1995, p. 176)

Research done in the name of network affiliate stations by Paul Klein, an analyst for NBC, discovered that people did not really “watch a program” as much as they “watch television”. So Klein developed the “Least Objectionable Programming” concept, which provided the market rationale for “happy talk” and a “shift toward a more entertainment-oriented emphasis” in news programming, a strategy that started to function to manage the “flow” of audience attention across programs. (Calabrese, 2005, p. 277) The whole television programming was redesigned, not on the model of ‘private cinema’, which requires close visual attention, but on the model of radio: television as ‘radio with pictures’, where the narrative is mainly carried by the soundtrack and the visuals play a subordinate, ‘illustrative’ role. (Morley, 1995, p. 177) From then on, what started to be offered by television was not, in older terms, a program of “discrete units with particular insertions”, but a planned flow, in which the true series were not the published sequence of program items but “this sequence transformed by the inclusion of another kind of sequence,” so that these sequences together compose the real flow, the real ‘broadcasting’. (Williams, R., 1990, p. 83)

Television news bulletins never had an exceptional stance in general tendencies of the television. In the early beginning, television, like radio before it, had a tradition of maintaining a “distinct dichotomy” between entertainment and news programming. (Marc & Thompson, 2005, p. 91) Techniques of broadcast presentation were the simple transmission of news agency dispatches read by ‘announcers’, who were assumed to be at once “authoritative and neutral.” (Williams, R., 1990, p. 37) By the mid-1950s each network was offering a half

hour daily news summary scheduled at dinnertime, which came to be regarded as a kind of mid-tech updating of the “vision of the American family discussing the daily newspaper.” In addition to these regularly scheduled half-hour reports, the networks only had their news divisions ‘break in’ with “on-the-spot coverage of significant breaking events”, such as “urban riots, presidential assassinations, and acts of war.” (Marc & Thompson, 2005, p. 91) Even if borrowing the notions of ‘gate keeping’, ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’ from the older communication forms like newspapers or radio, television news broadcast have “complicated relations” with the previous forms. The reasons for this complication are multiple, but the most prominent one is the reality that main form of television news, within its own structure, is linear. This linear presentation structure of the news bulletin has “necessary effects on questions of priority between news items”, thus there is a tendency to retain “more apparent editorial control of priority and attention” in television news. (Williams, R., 1990, pp. 37-8) Broadcasters’ inclination to give more priority and attention to some issues, while neglecting some others, frequently results in disjunction with the public’s attitudes towards importance of some issues, so it was argued that television news do not “set the agenda of important issues for the public.”¹⁸ (Cumberbatch et al., 1986, as cited in Philo, 2007, pp. 102-3)

Television news producers prefer very short stories with good visuals and action stories that add excitement to the news. They are very good at providing drama and emotion but poor at giving in-depth information on complex issues. News stories are presented very quickly, in rapid succession and with little explanation. (Beder, 2004, pp. 215-6) Market economy forces television news to have even more speeded-up style of reporting than before. Stories are told with a faster visual pace, ever-shorter sound bites, and increased use of computer

¹⁸ For an excellent sociological analysis of journalism and its functions and limitations, TV journalism included, check McNair, 1998

graphics. Because so little information can be transmitted in shorter clips and bites, reporters must be “more interpretive and more emotive” than they once were. (Calabrese, 2005, p. 275) In this way they start to report more “buzz than the truth”, since often they lack even the very basic background and knowledge needed to evaluate the event they are reporting. (Hampe, 2007, p. 25) At this point it is good to remember Joseph Pulitzer, and his demands that there should be “a class feeling among journalists...based not upon money, but upon morals, education and character.” (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, as cited in Barry, 1995, p. 54) As a result of all these trends, people who rely on television to get their news tend to be “the least-informed members of the public.” (Levy, 1992, as cited in Beder, 2004, p. 216)

Much of the real content of news on television has been altered by the facts of visual presentation. In certain kinds of report there seems to be an absolute difference between the written or spoken account and the visual record with commentary. (Williams, R., 1990, p. 40) The reason for this is the fact that television news are not literally showing us what they are talking about, they are not actually image-driven. Television news features “after-the-fact recounting” of events by ‘talking heads’ rather than showing actual footage of the events in question. (Erickson, 1998, as cited in Doyle, 2006, p. 202) This way television manipulate the news through selection and editing of what to show, and using the notion of ‘seeing is believing’ places itself as an authority, who chooses what public should believe to.

Television turns news presentation into a spectacle, into a carnival which further cements the cult of beauty, so prevailing in modern society, as

the average local newscast, almost anywhere in the country, is a kind of succotash served in dollops and seasoned by bantering between anchorpersons, sportspersons, weatherpersons, and person-persons. And these people had better be good looking, sparkling or cute -

weathermen with party charm, anchorladies with good teeth and smart coiffures, sportscasters with macho charisma. It doesn't matter if they have a news background or not. (Corwin, 1986, as cited in Calabrese, 2005, p. 278)

2.3. Peeping Toms: Hordes of 'Gaze'

Commercial television, right from its beginning, was one of the driving forces in fostering the widespread conduct of surveillance by creating a 'watcher', a person who watches television to "be entertained by others' misfortunes and to laugh at their expense", to escape from his "own problems and to revel in others' predicaments", to "occupy time and to fill the silence in one's life when no one else is around." (Calvert, 2004, p. 57) Mathiesen's concept of "synopticon", where "the many... see and contemplate the few" is especially important in this scope. (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 219)

Synopticon¹⁹ operates hand-in-hand with Panopticon, in mutually reinforcing ways. Both occur simultaneously, and both depend "increasingly on similar electronic communication technologies", namely television and video technology. (Lyon, 2006, p. 40) In modern society, we are all familiar with the pleasures of being "peepers or voyeurs", of "seeing without being seen." (Walker & Chaplin, 1997, p. 101) While being constantly watched, we are also watching all the time, but our gaze fixes only on the other watched²⁰. We are all scopophiliacs²¹ for this matter.

¹⁹ Synopticon is very closely related with the mediated voyeurism, the "consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of mass media." (Calvert, 2004, p. 3)

²⁰ The word 'look' may help in understanding paradox. To look is to fix one's eyes on a certain object; however, 'a look' can also refer to the appearance of an object; for example, "a particular fashion is called 'a look'." A fashion look is intended to "attract and please the gazes of others." Since "clothes and cosmetics conceal the wearer's body" to some extent, the fashion look can be

Modern power has the delft touch of a ‘look’ in interaction. It no longer requires the hard-edge and explicit realization of the *ancien régime*, through a ‘look’ it can absorb all and do so without being noticed, or say all without even revealing its true intentions. Modern power is pervasive, though not omnipotent, because it cautiously acts on and in relation to the scopic regime; but it is not in its sway. The ‘gaze’ and the conscious manipulation of images are the dual instruments in the exercise and function of modern systems of power and social control. (Jenks, 1995, p. 15)

The voyeuristic tendency, bounded with the strong desire for safety and security, and fueled with paranoia disseminated by media, transforms society, turning citizens into informers, ready to spy, cooperate and share information on their neighbors, colleagues and strangers with the law enforcement agencies in order to assist policing society. People are enlisted to watch each other in an informing culture, “ordinary people are being policed by other ordinary people.” (Joselit, 2002, p. 453) Fiske tells about an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* which showed a very interesting case of such informer-individuals.

A doctor who has mounted a video camera on his dashboard patrols the late-night roads of Chicago looking for drunk drivers. We watched him find one, follow them, videotaping all the time, and then call the police on his CB radio and offer them his video as evidence. (Fiske, 2002, p. 389)

This incident is not unique. As back as in 1993, members of the neighborhood watch group in Methuen, Massachusetts were patrolling their streets with video cameras as the “part of community policing program”, videotaping prostitutes for two and half years, using taping to “scare customers out of the

thought of a “mask or shield that reflects the viewer’s look back”, just like mirror. (Walker & Chaplin, 1997, p. 98)

²¹ Freud defines ‘scopophilia’ as a “pleasure in looking.” (Freud, 1962, p. 23) Concept was further developed especially in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Good introduction is Lacan, 1977

neighborhood.” Police officials of the city were in total agreement with the policy declaring that “volunteer videotaping could help reduce crime as long it is done under the guidance of the local police department.” Linda Soucy, 36-year-old mother of four children, who initiated launch of program, was saying that she will keep videotaping until “these people leave her neighborhood”, adding that “If we miss a day, they'll come back.” (Richman, 1993, March 21) The same night *The Oprah Winfrey Show* broadcasted another case, two videos of the same situation, the beating of some local kid, where one video was recorded from the police helicopter, while the other one on the ground level, by some local witness. The police used this “videolow”²² to help to identify and arrest the suspects. (Fiske, 2002, p. 389)

Inside the panoptic surveillance society it does not matter what motivates the ‘observer’: “the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying or punishing.” (Foucault, 1979, p. 202) In this context, it will not be surprising then to learn that in 2005, three workers of Metropolitan Borough Council of Sefton, in Merseyside, England, have been suspended for allegedly spying on a woman with CCTV cameras. Using some of the 70 cameras Sefton council operates in Bootle, Waterloo, Crosby, Litherland, Netherton, Aintree and Southport, monitored 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, Sefton employees had used the cameras to peer into a flat bathroom above a row of shops, thus misusing public CCTV cameras for voyeurism. (Tunney, 2005, January 5)

²² Fiske differentiates between two types of video, based on their social domain of use. Videolow is the video in the domain of the low (low capital, low technology, low power). According to Fiske this type of video has an authenticity that results from its user’s lack of resources to intervene in its technology. When capital, technology, and power are high, however, the ability to intervene, technologically and socially, is enhanced, thus resulting in questionable reliability of videohigh. (Fiske, 2002, p. 387) However it should be noted that developing video editing and digital effects technologies offered with cheaper prices now allow ordinary people to manipulate their videos, too

In his analysis's, Foucault have not associated supervisor of Panopticon, the ultimate observer, with any particular gender, race or age.²³ However this kind of situation clearly shows that Laura Mulvey was right in defining the determining 'gaze' as the male, which, in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, splits pleasure in looking between "active/male and passive/female." (Mulvey, 2006, p. 346)

2.4. Love at First Sight: Surveillance, Spectacle & Reality TV

In 1967, Guy Debord published his influential book *The Society of the Spectacle* with the Thesis 1 of the book stating that

The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation. (Debord, 1994, p. 12)²⁴

Shortly after Foucault was declaring that "Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance... We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism." (Foucault, 1979, p. 217) Foucault clearly was referencing to Debord, but his stance of opposing surveillance and spectacle "seems to overlook how the effects of these two regimes of power can coincide", neglecting "the new forms by which vision itself became a kind of discipline or mode of work." (Crary, 1990, p. 18) The notion of Synopticon is crucial in understanding the bonding between surveillance and spectacle. This

²³ Fiske argues that it is "whiteness" that monitors, since technology has the perfect ability "to see racial difference." (Fiske, 2002, p. 386)

²⁴ *The Society of the Spectacle* was originally published in France as *La société du spectacle* by Buchet-Chastel in 1967

bonding perfectly reveals itself in the television genre called ‘reality television’, or Reality TV.

Reality television was formed on the same grounds as its predecessor drama-documentary, genre once praised by Raymond Williams as “one of the most significant innovations in our contemporary culture.” (Williams, R., 1990, p. 67) Claiming that it reflects pure reality, reality television started to address ordinary people and their real lives experiences in an attractive manner, tending to cover their stories in themes related with detective, police, fire, disaster, adventure, and game with some outdoor shootings and sometimes visually reanimating what happened. Since its first appearance on the screens, televisions have been keen on it, since Reality TV offered two opportunities at once: it was cheap and it was tapping into “voyeuristic impulses of society.” (Barcan, 2002, p. 88) It was also significant in the sense that the “free-fall of broadcast news standards in prime time” was finally offered a position from which it could “define and defend itself.” Anything “too ridiculous to be called journalism” could be classified as a ‘reality show’ rather than ‘news,’ with the “production responsibility kicked cleanly” to the lower expectations of the entertainment division. (Marc & Thompson, 2005, p. 126) Same timely, another technological trend was appearing in television broadcasting, the growing use of amateur video. In January 1987, CNN started its *News Hound* hotline, which encouraged viewers to call in with scoops and send in amateur camcorder footage.²⁵ By 1992, CNN was using about four of these scoops per month, which were particularly “bizarre, shocking, or legitimately newsworthy.”²⁶ Content of such footage was

²⁵ Similar phenomenon is also valid in Turkey now, as for example <http://www.sendeyolla.com>, website launched by daily *Hürriyet*, to where amateur news photographs and videos can be sent. Website functions with the motto “Join the broadest news family in Turkey” (Türkiye’nin en geniş haber ailesine katıl)

²⁶ Most of these amateur videos were reproducing the forms of official news, as people with video cameras are often present when disasters occur, whereas news crews typically arrive afterward. Television’s demand for such videos uses people’s ubiquity to extend television’s

rarely newsworthy in the traditional sense, and quite often it was “staged and fraudulent.” (Calabrese, 2005, p. 276) These kinds of arrangements were of freeing nature to entertainment producers, who no more had to deal with the “credibility thing”, which constrained news magazines from following their entertainment instincts, and no more had to pay astronomical wages to star actors, celebrities or scriptwriters.²⁷ In fact, reality shows presented opportunities to work without using any professional actors at all, as “most performers in a reality vehicle” ask nothing more for their services than a “chance to appear on national television.” (Marc & Thompson, 2005, p. 126)

Reality television can be broken down into at least three categories, such as video vérité reality TV²⁸, reconstruction²⁹ reality TV and tell-all/show-all³⁰ reality TV. At times, an individual instance or moment of media content may fit

monitoring reach and intensify system of surveillance by putting people into an alliance with television. (Fiske, 2002, p. 389)

²⁷ Although frequently presented as democratizing process, reality television’s widespread appearance on televisions was closely related with the economics of television production. For more information about inner economical dynamics of cultural production check Çakmur, 1998

²⁸ The defining characteristic of this distinctly nonfiction category is unrehearsed, unscripted moments of real life played out before, and captured by, a video camera. The individuals caught on camera often are unwilling or unsuspecting participants. This broad category ranges from recycled footage videos, such as *Greatest Car Crashes* to compilations such as *America’s Funniest Home Videos*. Shows like *Cops*, *World’s Wildest Police Videos*, and *High Speed Car Chases* are also in this category. (Calvert, 2004, pp. 5-6)

²⁹ The defining characteristic of this genre is the reenactment or dramatization of a real event. Unlike video vérité, live videotape is absent or missing and instead sensational, dramatic or sordid moments are recreated. Crime and mystery programs, such as *America’s Most Wanted*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, *The FBI Files*, and *Crime Unlimited* usually fall within this category. (Calvert, 2004, pp. 6-7)

³⁰ Into this category fall both the tell-all talk shows and the show-all/investigate-all television newsmagazines such as *Dateline* and *20/20*. Many of the individuals on these shows are not unwilling or unsuspecting participants but instead knowingly consent to tell their stories for television. These shows are surrounded with controversies and criticisms, since they usually bring in a raft of individuals revealing often prurient or titillating facts about their private lives. Another name frequently used for this kind of shows is trash-talk, since employing the low risk strategy of ‘class voyeurism’ these shows usually are hosting guests from the bottom of social barrel. (Calvert, 2004, pp. 7-10) Immensely popular TV shows such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor* are also within this category

into more than one of these categories, while at other times programs or shows do not fit cleanly into any category. (Calvert, 2004, p. 4) Reality television, especially talk shows, foster a particular form of spectatorship: it creates a “split or multiple identification,” in which there is an approximate reflection of the viewer’s experience, but also simultaneously, a “re-channeling of this experience into a limited number of conventional and highly moralized narratives.” This gap opened up between a spectator and his reflection provides a “space for ideological formations” to take root. (Joselit, 2002, p. 451)

The advent of digital manipulation and image generation techniques has seriously challenged the credibility of photographic discourses. At the same time, however, we are experiencing a growing use of surveillance cameras, and a form of factual television that seems to depend more heavily on the evidential force of the photographic image than any previous form: reality TV. (Fetveit, 2002, as cited in Hill, A., 2005, p. 455)

Television proved to be one of the biggest allies of CCTV, since they are both visual media that observe and appear to have been made for each other. Norris and Armstrong were noting that by adding “one ingredient, crime,” you had “the perfect marriage”, a marriage that would blur the “distinction between entertainment and news, between documentary and spectacle, and between voyeurism and current affairs.” (Norris & Armstrong, 1999, as cited in Lyon, 2006, p. 46) This situation shows itself more clear when we think about the television broadcast of CCTV surveillance footage depicting violent crimes.

For multiple of reasons, it is usually police itself who gives surveillance footage to the television stations. This may be done to promote success of police, like releasing footage of successful operations; to call on the TV audience to help with ongoing investigation, like distributing ‘video wanted posters’ for unidentified or wanted criminals; or to maintain favorable relations with journalists. (Doyle, 2006, pp. 203-4) But quite often the main reason is to

publicize CCTV technology itself, since CCTV regimes are reinforced when they are 'seen' to be helping to deter crime, or at least to enable police to be deployed to apprehend subjects. On the other hand, televisions also benefit a lot from this type of broadcasts, since they usually achieve high ratings. (Lyon, 2006, p. 46) Broadcasted surveillance footage features a structured bias towards reporting certain types of crimes: street crimes committed in poorer urban areas, and by populations visibly different such as visible minorities and certain youth subcultures. (Doyle, 2006, p. 208) Even the visual properties of surveillance footage itself, such as the grey and black image palette shaped like the 'film noir', fit with "a 'common sense' of crime - committed on dark, 'mean' [i.e., poor] streets at night by strangers - a vision of crime that is so naturalized it may take the critical observer a while to realize that this is a particular, ideological way of understanding crime." (Doyle, 2006, p. 210) In this way both CCTV camera systems, part of bigger surveillance system, and television industry, by helping each other, reinforce and augment existing social structure, since

Reality shows and amateur video shows dominate TV programming. It is the age of scopophilia, voyeurism, and vicarious living.... We like to watch. It is a surveillance culture. (Cameron, 1995, as cited in Andrejevic, 2004, p. 7)

2.5. Practices of Counter-Surveillance

Surveillance, panopticon, makes us silent about that which breaks fundamentally with the taken-for-granted because we are afraid to break it. Modern television, synopticon, makes us silent because we do not have anything to talk about that might initiate the break. (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 231)

One of the basic rules of physics is that there is no action without reaction. This principle is also valid when dealing with society, since forceful changes tried to be brought into lives of people were always met with opposition from some

societal groups. This situation was witnessed once more, worldwide, with the introduction of CCTV camera systems, which immediately created reactionary oppositions against them. Not giving their consent to be anonymously watched, various groups and individuals employed an arsenal of counter-surveillance tools and techniques against CCTV camera systems around the world, such as “disabling or destroying surveillance cameras, mapping paths of least surveillance and disseminating that information over the Internet, employing video cameras to monitor sanctioned surveillance systems and their personnel,” and “staging public plays to draw attention to the prevalence of surveillance in society.” (Monahan, 2006, p. 515)

All of these mentioned techniques are only related to opposing CCTV camera systems. However surveillance, the constant monitoring of everyday life, is so much more. Much broader, much wider opposition conducted with the principle of everyday resistance is needed when dealing with the surveillance society. Some initial moves for such kind of resistance are outlined by Gary Marx as detecting and avoiding surveillance, masking or obscuring identity, distorting data, blocking observation, breaking equipment, refusing to comply, achieving the assistance of frontline surveillance workers and turning surveillance against those who would survey.³¹ (Marx, G.T., 2009, p. 298)

Even if technological engagement in the social struggle will never take place on equal terms, video devices allow, “on occasion, those who are normally monitored to monitor the monitors.” (Fiske, 2002, p. 391) Video camera can be a good companion in the struggle against surveillance, by helping to “reverse the

³¹ For detailed analysis of some of everyday counter-surveillance resistance techniques which do not fit into the scope of this thesis check Gilliom, 2006

gaze” of surveyors against them, as it already started to be done by Cop Watch³² groups in USA and Canada. (Huey, Walby & Doyle, 2006) It is good to remember that

...the handheld home video camera has a mobility that makes it a good guerilla weapon, whereas carefully located surveillance cameras are typical of a powerful strategy that is well planned and highly efficient, but cumbersome. (Fiske, 2002, p. 391)

However the usage of video camera as a tool of resistance against surveillance society’s ‘gaze’ should be a careful conduct, since

When the politics of resisting organizational forms of power through countersurveillance activities bump up against the complicated goings-on associated with organizing dissent, the unintended result can be the undermining of democratic principles through the very means by which the movement intends to rescue them. (Huey, Walby & Doyle, 2006, p. 150)

We believe that practices of Karahaber, the chosen case study for the thesis, had such unintended results in the sense of contributing to the proliferation of surveillance/spectacle society by creating a closed circle, a very local and minor Panopticon/Synopticon, where the watchers and people being watched are the same, and the voyeuristic ‘gaze’ of viewers is turned against themselves. Nevertheless, before going any deeper into the analysis of unintentional surveillative potential of Karahaber videos, it would be better firstly to look in-depth at the historical development and the practices of conducting activism with

³² Through the monitoring of on-duty police behavior, Cop Watch groups attempt to decrease police misconduct and brutality, which their members see as all too often directed against society’s most vulnerable populations. These grassroots groups want police to be held accountable for their behavior, and they ultimately desire the realization of a reimagined relationship between police authorities and the communities they serve. Most Cop Watch groups are against all forms of oppression and are particularly concerned with racialized profiling. Cop Watch tactics often involve the use of video surveillance equipment, offering training sessions and literature on how to properly use video surveillance equipment for monitoring police. (Huey, Walby & Doyle, 2006, p. 150) <http://www.copwatch.org>

the help of video camera, practices most commonly known as video activism, where the handheld home video camera can turn into a 'guerilla' weapon.

CHAPTER 3

‘PEOPLE’ STRIKE BACK: VIDEO ACTIVISM

You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
is but a dream within a dream.

Edgar Allan Poe, “A Dream Within A Dream”

Technology is not emancipatory or oppressive by its own nature. It is deliberate re-appropriation of technological devices and mediums by individual users and/or communities rather than their designed uses that matters in this scope. Each technological form, especially in the field of communication technologies, can be used to reinforce and expand currently existing social and political structure, while on the other hand has within itself an enormous potential of emancipating and empowering people, thus shattering the walls of this system. Video, technological form that made CCTV surveillance possible has to be considered in this way, since while developing as a “by-product of television technology” it also emerged new kind of resistance by users who appropriated video usage for political purposes. (Özgün, 1997, p. 56)

3.1. Birth of a New Medium

In 1965, video technology in the form of “the Sony Corporation’s Portapak (and lesser known products made by Norelco and Concord)” became available to consumer market, and “once again, a new revolution in image making occurred.” (Rush, 2003, p. 7) Until then, video equipment existed only as “enormously expensive, cumbersome television-camera-and-broadcast apparatus” restricted to use within “tightly controlled broadcast transmission facilities.” (Lovejoy, 2004, p. 94) No longer bound by the constrictions of “Hollywood power brokers and mainstream television producers”, visionary people were able to participate in the “visual communication revolution that was rapidly changing social and cultural life” throughout the world. (Rush, 2003, p. 7) A heterogeneous mass of “hippies, avant-garde artists, student-intellectuals, lost souls, budding feminists, militant blacks, flower children, and jaded journalists” were immediately excited with opportunities of video. (Boyle, 1985, p. 228) Video was offering totally the opposite of so far available televisual technologies, since before the introduction of video

the development of audiovisual technologies has been driven not so much by a realist project as by an illusionary one. That is to say, the illusion of the real has had to be made more convincing and the spectacular has had to be made more “realistic”. The second-hand has had to become first-hand, the vicarious has had to be made vivid. (Hayward & Wollen, 1993, p. 2)

Video was revealing an opportunity to play with time, to play with the reality of moment, to extend, repeat, fast forward, slow down, speed up and stop it. Video made possible to see the recorded image as it was recorded, and gave full control over recorded images, since video tape can be immediately rewinded and new images can be recorded on any no-longer needed ones. (Özgün, 1997, p. 68) Video tapes can be easily copied and reproduced, so video further facilitated the democratizing effects of “mechanical reproduction.” (Benjamin, 2006) Even if editing was yet a primitive matter of cut and paste, these black and white video images became a significant medium in the hands of artists, documentary

filmmakers, choreographers, engineers, and political activists who saw them as “their ticket into the hallways of influence” previously trafficked only by “cameramen with ‘identification badges’ designating them from mainstream television stations.” (Rush, 2003, p.7)

Although being far from causing a “revolutionary structural change”, video brought certain economic advantages to independent producers and caused a positive political effect by giving “marginal cultural formations a chance” to express themselves. (Özgun, 1997, p. 65) Pressed into the service of representing ‘others’, video offered them chance to “control their own representations” in mass culture and re-present their own images. (Meecham & Sheldon, 2005, p. 154) So it was no surprise that introduction of cheap video device to the consumer market excited people who were critical of the situation television, and especially television news, were in. Minorities, leftist intellectuals, rural inhabitants and many more, groups which were never represented in ‘true light’ on television - if occasionally were talked about - took their cameras to the streets to record their own reality. They recorded events which were meaningful to their producers, but of no value to commercial televisions, events which were very small in scale and happened on local basis, like problems of poverty and discrimination, and protests related with them. Even if they were low-quality images, with poor but closely involved vantage points and moments of loss of technical control (blurred focus, too-rapid pans, tilted or dropped cameras), these early videos revealed the discursive control official news exerts over the events it reports.

These gritty, black and white tapes were generally edited in the camera, since editing technology was not yet available widespread. The technological limitations of early video equipment were merely incorporated in the style, thus ‘real time video’ - whether criticized for being “boring and inept or praised for its fidelity to the *cinéma vérité* ethic” - was in fact an aesthetic largely dictated

by the equipment. Video pioneers of necessity were “adept at making a virtue” of their limitations. Real-time video became a conscious style praised for being honest in presenting an unreconstructed reality and opposed to conventional television ‘reality’s quick, highly edited scenes and narration - whether stand-up or voice-over - by a typically white, male figure of authority. (Boyle, 1985, p. 229) Video as a technology and as the basis of a complex aesthetic discourse thus has played a key role in critiquing the circulation of media images and ideas. (Hanhardt & Villaseñor, 1995, p. 21) When electronic editing and color video became available later, the aesthetic adapted to the changing technology, but these fundamental stylistic expectations, “laid down in video’s primitive past”, lingered on through the decades. (Boyle, 1985, p. 229)

Early video works avoided voice-overs like “plague”, yet had thematic unities within them; out of practical necessity wide-lens was deployed on the price of having distorted faces and “fish-eye look”, since the Portapak lens did not let in enough light and went out of focus in many shooting situations and did not had cadres, calibrated good enough. (Boyle, 1985, p. 230) Nevertheless, these videos were able to catch the spirit of the era and clearly showed that the video camcorders were tools, weapons and witnesses, if used properly. What these early works may have lacked in technical perfectness or visual sophistication they frequently made up for in sheer energy and raw immediacy of their content, since they were documenting the true life, the ‘truth’.

3.2. A Unique Ability: Documenting ‘Truth’

Video can serve as a document, a contribution to the future generations’ better understanding of today’s world, or in another words as a ‘document’ of today’s life. Video can document actions, movements and events happening around us, in this sense act as a witness of today. Ordinary people use video to record their

most precious moments and personal memories of everyday life, their birthdays, anniversaries, vacations, holidays, voyages, child births, and sometimes even sexual fantasies³³. Video's quality of providing opportunity to remember is what makes it so valuable. The remarkable fidelity of the video to what it records gives such recording the appearance of a document. It offers a "visible evidence of what the camera saw." (Nichols, 2001, p. 83)

This quality of any kind of the filming devices was emphasized a lot by early filmmakers whose films now also serve as a document of historical events of 20th century's beginning.

In fact, the film is only the sum of the facts recorded on film, or, if you like, not merely the sum, but the product, a "higher mathematics" of facts. Each item or each factor is a separate little document. The documents have been joined with one another so that, on the one hand, the film would consist only of those linkages between signifying pieces that coincide with the visual linkages and so that, on the other hand, these linkages would not require intertitles; the final sum of all these linkages represents, therefore, an organic whole. (Vertov, 1984, p. 84)

For early film makers, who can also be considered as compilers of images and recorders of life, thus documentarians, the "recording procedure is always subservient to the facts being committed to film; the mechanical eye is simply capable of showing and clarifying for its audience that which initially stands before the naked eye." (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 15) In this scope it will be not wrong to say that

A standard way of explaining the rise of documentary involves the story of the cinema's love for the surface of things, its uncanny

³³ Strangely enough, sometimes people record their own crimes with video too, like in the case of Gamze Özçelik's rape, conducted by Gökhan Demirkol at July 1, 2004 in Kemer, Turkey, which was recorded with the mobile phone video

ability to capture life as it is, an ability that served as a hallmark for early cinema and its immense catalog of people, places, and things culled from around the world. Like photography before it, the cinema was a revelation. People had never seen images that possessed such extraordinary fidelity to their subject, and they had never witnessed apparent motion that had imparted such a convincing sense of motion itself. As film theorist Christian Metz noted in the 1960s in a discussion of the phenomenology of film, to duplicate the impression of movement is to duplicate its reality. Cinema achieved this goal at a level no other medium had ever attained. (Nichols, 2001, p. 83)

It is no wonder then that with the first introduction of video device to consumer market, video has been extensively used as a filming device by documentary film makers. In this sense, video and documentary film making has common grounds, on which their structures are built. Each documentary film involves at least three stories, which intertwine with each other, the filmmaker's story, the story of the film itself, and the story of the audience. On the contrary of feature films, these stories are often "more personal and idiosyncratic for documentary and avant-garde film." (Nichols, 2001, p. 61) It is these stories that form what may be called an essence of documentary film, the answers for questions of where, by whom, with what purpose and aim film was made. It is not uncommon that people involved in documentary film making think and evaluate their works only with a "framing concern for artefactual qualities - for how imaginative, well-crafted or 'beautiful' the documentary work itself is." (Corner, 2005, p. 50) Audiences, in a way that contrasts with their response to feature films, are likely to find these concerns a secondary matter at best, possibly ones of which they are only conscious when something is going wrong. Audience watching any kind of film - including documentary - brings with itself some kind of "willing suspension of disbelief." (Hampe, 2007, p. 301) It is these "perspective and motives based on previous experience" that viewer actually experiences during the film. (Nichols, 2001, p. 63) It may be not surprising then that quite often what audience experiences is quite different from the original intentions of filmmaker. From time to time documentary film makers may put people used in

sequences, people who have been filmed, at risk without sufficiently informing them of potential hazards. It is highly possible that film makers themselves may not know the hazards, with the best intentions they can only guess how the scenes they use will affect the lives of the people they have filmed; even a “seemingly innocuous image may have meaning for the people involved that is obscure to the filmmaker.” Sometimes documentary films can turn out badly for the people depicted in them: they may feel “debased and humiliated”, they may be “mocked by their neighbors” and even “forced to remove their children from the local schools.” (Pryluck, 2005, p. 197)

The distinction between truth and reality was an obvious and necessary one in the early days of documentary film. The technology simply didn't permit much direct filming of actual events. So a documentary was “expected to be *true* in the sense that it was based on fact and its accuracy could be verified. But it wasn't expected to be *real*.” (Hampe, 2007, p. 124) Most documentaries of early times were recreations of events, using actors and written scripts, and were often shot in a studio just like fiction films. Reality was usually too “fleeting and elusive to be captured by slow film stocks, heavy cameras, and cumbersome, inadequate sound systems.” (Hampe, 2007, p. 124) Early documentarians' interest was not in providing a clean, clear path for the development of a documentary tradition. Their interest and passion was in exploring the limits of cinema, in discovering new possibilities and untried forms. That some of these efforts would “jell into” what we now call documentary obscures “the blurred boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, documenting reality and experimenting with form, showing and telling, narrative and rhetoric that fueled these early efforts.” (Nichols, 2001, pp. 82-3) As developing technology changed the way documentaries were shot, film makers started to record events as they happened. And because they filmed real people (not actors) doing real things in a real situation, it was almost inevitable that they began to think of “nonfiction filmmaking as documenting reality.” (Hampe, 2007, p. 123)

But documentary film is “not a reproduction of reality, it is a *representation* of the world” we already occupy. (Nichols, 2001, p. 20) It stands for a particular view of the world, one we may never have encountered before even if the aspects of the world that is represented are familiar to us. We judge a reproduction by its fidelity to the original - its capacity to look like, act like, and serve the same purposes as the original. We judge a representation more by the nature of the pleasure it offers, the value of the insight or knowledge it provides, and the quality of the orientation or disposition, tone or perspective it instills. “We ask more of a representation than we do of a reproduction.” (Nichols, 2001, p. 21) If we accept that documentary film is best defined as a way of perceiving images, we cannot evade the implication that it is blind to the falsity of labels. Documentary will be consequent upon what it appears to show, rather than upon what it necessarily does show; and the relationship between the two is a matter for the filmmakers’ ethics, inaccessible to the viewer. Yet the assumptions which the viewer makes about this relationship, on the basis of signals intended or unintended, will inform his perception of the film. To make a documentary is therefore to “persuade the viewer that what appears to be *is*.” (Vaughan, 1999, as cited in Bruzzi, 2006, pp. 16-7)

Instructive clichés such as “Pictures do not lie”, “Seeing is the believing”, and “The camera never lies”, still so common in our lives, have lost their credibility starting from the 1960s, since the introduction of video device. Broad objectives of earlier eras of documentary filmmaking, such as “spreading nationalism, examining social problems, or insinuating military superiority” lost their meaning in the same period of time. (Benson & Snee, 2008, p. 2) Instead of the “detached, authoritarian male” voice-over, narration associated with the older tradition of documentary filmmaking, films that for the first time captured “the voice of people who have shared in the making of working-class history and culture” started to be created by politically conscious filmmakers using oral

history interview techniques. (Youdelman, 2005, p. 397) Evolutionary process has driven documentary filmmaking to the point where we can now speak about a totally new kind of documentary films, “self-reflexive documentaries”, that “mix observational passages with interviews, making patently clear what has been implicit all along: documentaries always were forms of re-presentation, never clear windows onto ‘reality’: the filmmaker was always a participant-witness and an active fabricator of meaning, a producer of cinematic discourse rather than a neutral or all-knowing reporter of the way things truly are.”³⁴ (Nichols, 2005, p. 18)

The difficulty of early film cameras, which used chemical films to record on, of to modify images once they were recorded, was exactly what gave cinema, especially early cinema, its value as a document, “assuring its authenticity.” (Manovich, 2001, p. 307) There always was a negative, a ‘real image’, carrying ‘the truth’ of the image - colors, tones, enframing, etc. - and other images were reproduced from this original one. In video there is no truth of the image, since video image is always due to electronic manipulation. Every TV or computer monitor enframes the picture differently, each screen has different color tones, contrast and brightness, so that video images in this sense are constantly manipulated and recreated every time they are screened. Then, if video image is inevitably a manipulated image without any qualifications of ‘true image’, one can easily manipulate the video image towards his/her own truth, so that desired colors and contrasts become ‘true’ ones, so that one can decide how s(he) will remember the particular moment recorded. (Özgün, 1997, pp. 69-70) This “mutability of digital data” impairs the value of video recordings as documents of reality. Actually, early cinema’s “regime of visual realism”, the result of automatically recording ‘visual reality’, was only an exception, an isolated accident in the history of visual representation, which has always involved

³⁴ John Grierson’s infamous definition of documentary was “creative treatment of actuality.” (Rotha, 1952, as cited in Bruzzi, 2006, p. 121)

“manual construction of images.” In this sense video becomes a “particular branch of painting”, painting in time, “no longer a kino-eye, but a kino-brush.” (Manovich, 2001, p. 308) In 1920s Vertov was saying

Our eye sees very poorly and very little - and so men conceived of the microscope in order to see invisible phenomena; and they discovered the telescope in order to see and explore distant, unknown worlds. The movie camera was invented in order to penetrate deeper into the visible world, to explore and record visual phenomena, so that we do not forget what happens and what future must take into account. (Vertov, 1984, p. 67)

Years later, the French documentarist and theorist Jean-Louis Comolli, returning to the relationship between the human eye and its mechanical counterpart, was reaching very different conclusions, believing that, through the advent of photography (and the video in this scope)

the human eye loses its immemorial privilege; the mechanical eye of the photographic machine now sees *in its place*, and in certain aspects with more sureness. The photograph stands as at once the triumph and the grave of the eye. (Comolli, 1980, as cited in Bruzzi, 2005, p. 420)

Comolli, from a perspective that acknowledges the “ambivalence of the mechanical eye”, argued that camera, recording a real event, doesn’t necessarily provide us the objective and impartial image of that reality, since “*represented* is seen via a *representation* which, necessarily, transforms it.” (Bruzzi, 2005, p. 420) However, it is good to remember that video can be “both objective record and personal testimony, both a faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality and an interpretation of that reality.” (Sontag, 2003, p. 26) This kind of situation is clearly seen with the videos of 1999 Seattle events

Even if few years have passed, when we look back at those days, these videos come forward as the witnessings, recorded in the first-

hand. Yes, but still even the word witnessing is not enough. They are exactly what we now frequently hear as the video activism. Documents of life.

Probably also opening to the discussion the concept of news, whatever it is. Even if the video images were not of high definition, even if the contrast calibration was not totally fixed, even if the cadre framing was not done properly, these things really happened. And highly probable, there were not any other records of them. The moment they were recorded, due to the events themselves, they were transforming into historical documents. They were not done for TV ratings, they were not done in hurry of producing them for prime time news program, or with a concern of whether it will be broadcasted. So they were free. Freer than the 'free' press itself! (Özdamar, para. 2-3)³⁵

Perhaps because so much faith was once placed in the ability of the camera to reflect objective truths of some fundamental social referent - often construed by the socially relevant documentary film as records of injustice or exploitation of powerless common people - the "loss of faith in the objectivity of the image seems to point, nihilistically...to the brute and cynical disregard of ultimate truths." (Williams, L., 2005, p. 60) However, some of the complaints which occurred about 'confusion between reality and fiction' look like "naive or disingenuous." This attempt to hold a hard line between absolutely separated categories seems to depend on a "fiction about reality itself." (Williams, R., 1990, p. 66) In real life truth may well be stranger than the fiction. "Fiction is bound by rules, whereas truth rests on the chaos of reality." (Hampe, 2007, p. 302)

In this sense it does not matter, whether early experimentations with video were recorded 'objectively' or not. They were just trying to catch life in its full movement. They were just trying to obtain a depiction of live moment, of an image with its past and future, and the life's flux itself, with all its pains and

³⁵ Original text is in Turkish. Translation belongs to author

joys. And most important aspect is that the ‘truth’ is contained in these recordings, the real truth of life. This real ‘truth’ together with the incorporation of aesthetic strategies of art helped early video makers to produce personal essays and autobiographies that pushed the limits of the documentary genre even more. (Boyle, 1992, p. 75) This overlapping of the narrower definitions of art and documentary not only served to bridge the chasm between the two, but also created a new art form, video art.

3.3. Video as an Artistic Form: Video Art

Portapak, the first video device introduced for mass consumption, was much cheaper and lighter compared with the filming devices available on the market, and thus bringing ease, mobility, and, most of all, affordability to the art of the moving image, Portapak waved the way for video art, the new art form which was using video as its main tool for creation.

The Portapak would seem to have been invented specifically for use by artists. Just when pure formalism had run its course; just when it became politically embarrassing to make objects, but ludicrous to make nothing; just when many artists were making performance works but had nowhere to perform, or felt the need to keep a record of their performances; just when it began to seem silly to ask the same old Berklee question, ‘If you build a sculpture in the desert where no one can see it, does it exist?’; just when it became clear that TV communicates more information to more people than large walls do; just when we understood that in order to define space it is necessary to encompass time; just when many established ideas in other disciplines were being questioned and new models were proposed - just then the Portapak became available. (Freed, 1976, as cited in Rush, 2003, p. 13)

The idea of using video device for artistic purposes immediately spread across the globe, and as this new medium of expression and experimentation “seemed to have a message of its own, proclaiming that it was everywhere”, as early as by

1968 exhibitions of video art had already taken place in Argentina, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, and United States. (Rush, 2003, p. 7)

Video artists invented new ways of storytelling right from the beginning. Being mainly interested in 'time' as a medium in video, in the early days their interest was 'real time': "video, unprocessed and unedited, could capture time as it was being experienced, right here and now, indoors or outdoors." (Rush, 2003, p. 10) Many of the early video artists were "painters and sculptors who had switched to time-based art", since the production of electronic images offered an alternative to canvas and easel. They continued the process of 'dematerialization of art' which had been started by the Dadaists and developed further by the Action Painters of the 1950s. In the 1970s, video art was often related to Conceptualism, as electronic images were considered 'art ideas' rather than physical 'art objects'. (Berghaus, 2007, p. 322) Early video artists fused global communication theories with elements of popular culture to produce "video tapes, single- and multi-channel productions, international satellite installations, and multi-monitor sculptures." (Dempsey, 2002, p. 258)

First-generation video artists, politicized by the 1968 rebellion, appropriated the rich syntax of the language of television - spontaneity, discontinuity, entertainment - in many cases to expose the dangers of such a culturally powerful medium. (Dempsey, 2002, p. 257) They used video as a tool to deconstruct the myth of television as a "window onto the world". They examined TV as 'a way of life', criticized the pervasive influence of television and the mass media, and revealed the "skewed picture of reality" that dominated commercial television broadcasts. (Berghaus, 2007, p. 322) In order to engage in a "direct confrontation with the institution of television" they made use of "practices developing in the avant-gardes." (Hanhardt & Villaseñor, 1995, p. 21) Within the questioning, adversarial, and anti-high-art project of Fluxus, Korean-

born Nam June Paik, part of the first generation to grow up with television, turned to the television set as a means to “explore the fashioning of a new media-based practice within a redefined media culture.” (Hanhardt & Villaseñor, 1995, p. 21) His works keyed in to anxieties about the long-term effects of television viewing on the public, in particular that the medium would induce “mindless apathy and passivity, or the ‘narcotisation’ of the viewer.” (Meecham & Sheldon, 2005, p. 154) Paik “reframed the discourse of television, disrupting its commercial flow of messages and images”, and “posited the television as an artist’s medium”, by taking the view that television has a democratizing potential but only if the medium itself is subjected to critical exploration. (Hanhardt & Villaseñor, 1995, p. 21) By making explicit the connection between art and politics, Paik’s videos made visible the controlling mechanisms of network television, thus exposing the fiction of technological neutrality. In this sense it is no coincidence that Paik used the “neo-Dada techniques of collage and décollage” since they were recognized tools with which to “deconstruct images and reveal concealed agendas.”³⁶ (Meecham & Sheldon, 2005, p. 154)

Later on, in the hands of such artists as Vito Acconci, Bill Viola, Gary Hill, and Marina Abramovic, video art has explored “the body of the artist, the poetry of the soul, the complexity of the mind, and the inequalities fostered by gender and political prejudice.” (Rush, 2003, p. 8) Most of these works were self-reflexive exercises examining the nature of the new electronic medium. Avant-garde video, like modernist painting, sculpture or film, had little to do with the meaning or representation of reality, but rather focused on the material

³⁶ It is really ironic that a lot of techniques and special effects, now commonplace in television and music videos, particularly in post-production, were first invented by Paik. Other early video artists and technical pioneers who unintentionally made great contributions into development of television graphics are Dan Sandin, who developed the Sandin Image Processor (IP) in 1973, which electronically alters video images and explores the dynamics of colours, and the husband-and-wife team of Steina and Woody Vasulka, who developed many electronic devices to aid artists, including the Digital Image Articulator. (Dempsey, 2002, p. 258) For a good reference to look at relations between music videos and capitalist economy of television check Çelikcan, 1996

properties of the medium and the structural laws of the signifying process. But as video did not require any operating crews, it afforded a strong sense of intimacy and became particularly attractive to artists working in an 'expressionist' environment, where "immediacy and spur-of-the-moment creativity" were highly rated. For them video replaced the canvas as the "medium on which to 'imprint' creative 'gestures'." (Berghaus, 2007, p. 322)

Performance has been highly influential in the unfolding story of video art, emerging as a principal material in this medium right from the early beginnings. (Rush, 2003, p. 9) In a video performance, a stage action is confronted with an electronically mediated image of the same event, and both are exhibited simultaneously to the audience. Two separate, but interconnected, discourses take place at the same time, enabled by the instant-relay property of the video camera. The monitor displays sequences of images that are an objective refraction or a distorted manipulation of the live performance. The discourse of the body is combined with the discourse of the electronic medium. The juxtaposition of the two information systems allows the audience to compare and critically assess the two simultaneous presentations of an organic body and its artificial image. A different category of video performance was developed by artists who substituted the live events with electro-magnetic tapes. These videos were not conceived as an element of a live performance, but devised to be viewed on a video monitor. The resulting images had a theatrical origin but were specifically generated for the video camera. They were processed, filtered, manipulated and designed to establish an objectifying distance between performer and spectator. The physical reality of the body was used as a basis for an electronic discourse that was specific to the video medium. Since the artist was at once performer and editor of the tape, he could control his primary material, his body, and the secondary images generated from it. Through the use of montage and editing techniques the artist arrived at a re-arrangement of the material, a re-structuring of the "time nexus" and a re-composition of the

imagery. The videotape became an “autonomous creation” in which the performance was subsumed without losing its intrinsically performative quality. (Berghaus, 2007, p. 323)

Due perhaps to the flexibility of the new medium and to the intimacy with which it could address issues of female identity, it appealed to a large number of women. (Dempsey, 2002, p. 259) Starting from the first events in 1970 that combined body-centered live art with an electronic mediation through the video camera, this new genre was taken up by women artists, and in the course of the 1970s it developed into a favorite genre of feminist Performance Art. There was a general tendency amongst women artists to be drawn towards body-centered video performances, whereas male artists were more often engaged in exploring the formal and material characteristics of the new electronic medium. Video performances offered an ideal outlet for feminists who sought to “confer value upon women’s experiences and achievements”, expose and subvert the traditional images and roles assigned to women in the mass media, and develop a new identity “outside the constraints of patriarchal society.” (Berghaus, 2007, pp. 323-4) Performance artist Joan Jonas was explaining, ‘Working with video enabled me to develop my own language... Video was something for me to climb into and explore as a spatial element and with myself inside of it.’ (Dempsey, 2002, p. 259) The advantage of video performances over Body Art or painting was its ability to juxtapose ‘woman as subject’ with ‘woman as object’ in the same live event. The synchronous feedback of video technology offered a unique means for making the viewing process a focus of attention. It problematized the relationship between the real woman in the performance area and the image of the woman on the video monitor, and thereby fostered a new type of spectatorship. (Berghaus, 2007, p. 324)

Integrating art and social change was the objective of many radical video makers, who explored the “possibilities for setting up counterstructures for the

democratization of the television medium.” (Berghaus, 2007, p. 322) But this emphasize on interconnectedness of video art and politics was not long lasting and in a short time split between them occurred, as by the end of 1960s, commercial galleries started to support video art. (Dempsey, 2002, p. 258) It was nearly the same time that public funding for video art started to flourish. The New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), an early supporter of video as a medium distinct from film, greatly expanded its funding of video starting in 1970. Between 1969 and 1970, NYSCA’s overall budget increased almost ten fold from \$2.3 million in 1969-1970 to \$20.2 million in 1970-1971, with over \$500,000 going to new video projects. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), established by Congress in 1965, initiated its Public Media Program in 1967 and by the end of 1970s was spending \$8.4 million on media arts, namely film and video. (Hill, C., 1995, p. 19) The 1980s saw the formation of video and new media departments in major museums and universities around the world. (Dempsey, 2002, p. 259) Institutionalization of video art developed further when new journals such as *Radical Software* and *Art Com*, established as a response to the growth of new media including video, started to provide information only on new technical advances, new media centers and grant opportunities. (Lovejoy, 2004, p. 101)

The tendency of video art to be quite individualistic, clearly showing itself in the self reflexive performance videos, combined with the choice of ‘installations’ rather than ‘screenings’, drove video art to the niche edges, so that now video art, growing out of prevailing philosophic and aesthetic currents in the arts, “exists primarily for the art world as a special-interest group” and “has received funding and encouragement for its experimental independence.” (Lovejoy, 2004, p. 115) In its little more than forty years of existence, video art has moved from brief showings on tiny screens in alternative art spaces to dominance in international exhibitions, in which vast video installations occupy factory-sized buildings and video projections take over the walls of an entire city block, as in

Times Square, New York. (Rush, 2003, pp. 7-8) In this sense video art can now be categorized as a 'high art', since it's difficult, "unfamiliar vocabulary and greater intellectual complexity" require higher level of attention and interpretative participation and, obviously, much higher cultural capital than other art forms. Video art demands "concentration", it is a "process of exploration, inquiry, and discovery." (Lovejoy, 2004, p. 115) So, video art is just as "esoteric as any abstract painting." (Meecham & Sheldon, 2005, p. 155) Although theoretically video art was structured as a critique of bourgeois practices of art conduction, its individualistic tendencies turned that notion upside down and made video art itself an art form of great social significance, due to "high modernism's explicit embrace of a self-sufficient practice." (Meecham & Sheldon, 2005, p. 155)

In the early uses of video, there were few distinctions between video artists and activists, since in 1960s the role of the artist as individualist and alienated hero was being eclipsed by a resurgence of interest in the artist's social responsibility, and so nearly everyone was making documentary tapes (Boyle, 1992, p. 67) But with the increases of funding, as stated above, the split between them occurred and video activists and video artists moved in different directions.

3.4. 'Pure' Video Activists

In Saint Paul, a Hmong teenager, Billy Her, was arrested for assaulting the police. Two days later, a videotape anonymously mailed to the police department resulted in the arresting officer's suspension from duty, because it showed him striking Billy Her repeatedly but gave no evidence of Billy Her attacking the police. (Fiske, 2002, p. 388)

The example cited above clearly shows that the quality of video to witness³⁷ and document human right violations, abuses and mistreatments makes it an invaluable tool in freedom struggle. When used properly, it can easily become an apparatus of empowerment, allowing the weak ones to have opportunity to intervene effectively in the power of surveillance and reverse its flow. But in order to be more effective, to be able to fully reveal its emancipatory potential and help out ones, who otherwise can't make their voices heard, not only on individual, but also on societal level video have to be used with political consciousness, within some political framework. This type of video usage is tried to be done by groups of activists, who due to their conscious and political use of video device started to be called video activists and extensively employed video device in their struggles, aware of the fact that the older forms of resistant cultures "will not survive unchanged" and that the new and novel avenues of countering the dominant culture are provided by the new technologies and new cultural forms, emerging opportunities for submerged to "develop and reassert" themselves. (Wright, 1995, p. 102) The term 'video activist' meant different things to different people, but the generally agreed upon definition became activists who uses video as a "tactical tool to bring about social justice", people in whose hands a "camcorder becomes a powerful political instrument that can deter police violence", "an edit suite becomes a means for setting a political agenda" and a "video projector becomes a mechanism for generating mass awareness." (Harding, 2001, p. 1) Video activists used video to expose state violence, global injustices, poverty, inequality, human rights violations and to

³⁷ It is not a coincidence that one of the largest video activist networks in the world is named WITNESS. Functioning with the motto "See It. Film It. Change It." WITNESS uses video and online technologies to open the eyes of the world to human rights violations. WITNESS empowers people to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools for justice, promoting public engagement and policy change. Envisioning a just, equitable world in which all individuals and communities are able to defend and uphold their human rights, WITNESS embodies the values of partnership, shared learning, and adaptability in the face of change. The approach reflects WITNESS' commitment to catalyzing change, and its knowledge that real impact comes from igniting the power, passion and potential of individual activists and frontline human rights organizations. <http://www.witness.org>

defend democracy, environmental sustainability, social and economic equality.³⁸ In order to be able to understand conduct of video activism we have to refer to Gramsci, whose writings from 1920s and 1930s have been a “very influential source of thinking about power, capitalism and culture” in recent decades. (Downing, 2001, p. 14)

Gramsci’s strategy for resisting and eventually overcoming the power of the capitalist class in its most advanced nations, rested on his conviction of the need to challenge and displace the cultural dominance and leadership (hence “hegemony”) of the ruling classes with a coherent and convincing alternative vision of how society might organize itself. (Gramsci, 1971) In his writings Gramsci gave special importance to “organic intellectuals”, thinking and organizing elements of class, “activist communicators organically integrated with the laboring classes in developing a just and culturally enhanced social order.” (Downing, 2001, p. 15) Based on this theory, video activism then can be categorized within counter-hegemonic³⁹ struggle, as video activists attempt to challenge dominant ideological frameworks by at least trying to disrupt silence and to counter the lies, hence to provide truth and enlighten public. Without doubt, video activism have a mission not only “to provide facts to a public denied them but to explore fresh ways of developing a questioning perspective on the hegemonic process and increasing the public’s sense of confidence in its power to engineer constructive change.” (Downing, 2001, p. 16)

Although video activism is often seen as a dramatic new development - technologically it may be true, but not historically - video has its ancestors in social movements as 16mm and 8mm films. Films “on labor struggles produced

³⁸ <http://www.videoactivism.org> is a good starting point to understand video activism. The website, among with other materials, includes a long list of video collectives all around the world, which use video for different purposes

³⁹ Gramsci himself never used the terms *counter-hegemony* and *counter-hegemonic*, yet they became quite common among writers influenced by Gramsci. (Downing, 2001, p. 15)

by Nykino and the Workers' Film and Photo League in 1930s", and films produced in 1960s and 1970s by Third World Newsreel⁴⁰ can be given as an example. (Downing, 2001, p. 193)

A variety of reasons can be stated for early interest in video by activists, but probably the most important role was played by dissatisfaction with the broadcast television. Criticism towards consumerism, political conservatism, and war was inherent in the groups that started using video.

[V]ideo posed a challenge to the sites of art production in society, to the forms and 'channels' of delivery and to the passivity of reception built into them. Not only a systemic but also a utopian critique was implicit in video's early use, for the effort was not to enter the system but to transform every aspect of it and - legacy of the revolutionary avant-garde project - to redefine the system out of existence by merging art with social life and making 'audience' and 'producer' interchangeable. (Rosler, 1996, as cited in Meecham & Sheldon, 2005, pp. 153-4)

Underground video groups appeared throughout the world, but New York served as the hub of the 1960s video underground scene. Prominent early video collectives included the "Videofreex"⁴¹, People's Video Theatre⁴², Global

⁴⁰ Originally formed in 1967 with the name Newsreel, Third World Newsreel (TWN) is an alternative media arts organization that fosters the creation, appreciation and dissemination of independent film and video by and about people of color and social justice issues. It supports the innovative work of diverse forms and genres made by artists who are intimately connected to their subjects through common bonds of ethnic/cultural heritage, class position, gender, sexual orientation and political identification. TWN promotes the self-representation of traditionally marginalized groups as well as the negotiated representation of those groups by artists who work in solidarity with them. Whether documentary, experimental, narrative, traditional or non-traditional, the importance of the media promoted by the organization is its ability to effect social change, to encourage people to think critically about their lives and the lives of others, and to propel people into action. <http://www.twn.org>

⁴¹ In 1972 the Videofreex, initially a New York City collective, moved to the Catskills, and began broadcasting a mix of live and recorded programming each week over a low power, pirate TV station to their tiny community in Lanesville. (Hill, C., 1995, p. 6)

Village, and Raindance Corporation.” (Boyle, 1992, p. 68) Hundreds of hours of documentary tapes were shot by underground groups, tapes on New Left polemics and the drama of political confrontation, thus offering an opportunity to “challenge television’s authority, to replace often negative images of youthful protest and rebellion with the counterculture’s own values and televisual reality.” (Boyle, 1992, p. 68) The work of the early collectives revealed their acknowledgement of video as “mediating social relations - managing or guiding the attention of viewers, directly engaging viewers in some aspect of the expressive, performative or production process, and educating audiences as new users.” (Hill, C., 1995, p. 6) Video’s unique ability to capitalize on the moment with instant playback and real-time monitoring of events also suited the era’s emphasis on ‘process, not product’. The “absence of electronic editing equipment - which discouraged shaping a tape into a finished ‘product’ - further encouraged the development of a ‘process’ video aesthetic.” (Boyle, 1992, p. 68) The constant emphasis on the ‘process’, not the ‘product’ itself, this unofficial motto of the early video collectives, was in great consistency with the theories of Marshall McLuhan, an acclaimed ‘prophet’ of the period, claiming that

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any extension of ourselves - result from the scale that is introduced into our affairs by each

⁴² People’s Video Theater (PVT) was founded by Ken Marsh, an artist working with light shows, and Elliot Glass, a language teacher videotaping his students’ conversations in Spanish-speaking neighborhoods in New York. PVT videotaped interviews and events on the streets of New York during the day and then invited interviewees to their loft “theater” in the evening for screenings and further discussions as part of “activating the information flow.” PVT also taped community “mediations” where points of view on a particular issue would be researched and recorded, then played back for politicians, community leaders, and neighborhood people as part of the negotiating process. Ken Marsh regarded video production at the time as an aspect of citizenship. “The rhetoric that we subscribed to was that ‘the people are the information’... Everybody could do it and everybody should do it. That was the mandate - pick it up, it’s there. Like the power to vote - vote, take responsibility. Make it and see it.” (Hill, C., 1995, p. 6) PVT was “probably the most politically and socially radical” of all video collectives of its times. (Boyle, 1985, p. 229)

extension of ourselves, or by any new technology. (McLuhan, 2001, p. 7)

In working to establish a decentralized media practice that had more to do with practice and process than product video collectives consciously positioned themselves on the cultural margins. Many of these early initiatives were undertaken by “members of minority groups or geographically-isolated communities, which had never established cultural currency outside their local scenes.” (Hill, C., 1995, p. 10) It was “during the ‘sexually liberated’ yet deceptively sexist ‘60s” that feminist collectives adopted usage of video. (Sturken, 1985, para. 2) Feminists were attracted to the newness of video for the very reason that it had “no past history, no objecthood, and no agreed-upon value.” (Lovejoy, 2004, p. 96) The very same quality of video attracted a lot of people with AIDS, among others, people who were overwhelmingly talked about in mainstream media but never spoke themselves, to make videos about AIDS. These were mainly videos “made *by* people with AIDS for people with AIDS”, videos made to overcome homophobic discrimination and prejudices about “black and Latino intravenous drug users.” (Downing, 2001, p. 195)

The 1970s ushered in a new era of alternative video. The underground became an above-grounded media phenomenon as magazine articles on the ‘alternative media guerillas’ appeared in mainstream periodicals like *Newsweek* and *New York Magazine* and in 1970 New York State Council on the Arts inaugurated government funding for video. With it, the ‘all-for-one’ camaraderie of the early video activity soon deteriorated into an all-out funding battle as video groups competed for their share of the pie, and within a year sharp divisions between ‘video artists’ and ‘video activists’ emerged. (Boyle, 1992, p. 69) Very soon teams and individuals had replaced the early collectives, a result of changing funding patterns favoring individual ‘artists’ over production groups, the end of an era of collectivism, and video makers opted more and more to make lucrative

music videos or neo-expressionist narratives hailed by the art world. (Boyle, 1992, pp. 74-5) At this point one can't but remember cultural theorist Fredric Jameson and his statements that

Authentic cultural creation is dependent for its existence on authentic collective life, on the vitality of the 'organic' social group in whatever form... [The] only authentic cultural production today has seemed to be that which can draw on the collective experience of marginal pockets of the social life of the world system... and this production is possible only to the degree to which these forms of collective life or collective solidarity have not yet been fully penetrated by the market and by the commodity system. (Jameson, 1992, as cited in Hill, C., 1995, pp. 10-1)

Probably the most crucial problem video activism was facing since its early emergence was the problem of distribution and exhibition. Harding categorizes video distribution strategies in five: public screenings, tape/disc duplication and distribution, private screenings, broadcast media (including cable, satellite and free-to-air television), Internet⁴³ and wireless. (Harding, 2005, p. 236) Most of these technologies were unavailable at early times of video activism, so despite all the efforts in production, neither organizational experience nor knowledge of video collectives were at hand to cope practically with the disinterest of movie theater chains, TV networks and film distribution companies in video. Even if some distribution agencies for alternative video existed, it was nearly impossible for video makers to disseminate, broadcast or show their works, and even screenings made with fifteen people were considered successful. (Downing, 2001, pp. 196-7) However, as Marx was noting

Production mediates consumption; it creates the latter's material; without it, consumption would lack an object. But consumption also mediates production, in that it alone creates for the products the

⁴³ With the boom of Internet, video activists' main distribution strategy became posting their videos on Internet. In this sense, video activism can also be put under the category of "cyberactivism", since it fits into the definition of cyberactivism made by McCaughey and Ayers as "political activism on the Internet." (McCaughey & Ayers, 2003, p. 1)

subject for whom they are products. The product only obtains its 'last finish' in consumption... Without production, no consumption; but also, without consumption, no production; since production would then be purposeless. (Marx, K., 1993, p. 91)

Another important factor that needed to be recognized is that many radical film and video collectives were not seeking wide, national or international audiences, their videos "were made for local groups in specific conditions" and their audience was easily able to see them. (Downing, 2001, p. 197)

McLuhan's reductionist view that 'the medium is the message' was embraced and then rejected by the first video guerillas, who asserted that "content *did* matter; finding a new form and a better means of distributing diverse opinions was the problem." (Boyle, 1985, p. 232) It took some time for them to overthrow deleterious fascination with McLuhan's spurious ideas and remember Marcuse, who just a few years before the emergence of video activism was warning that

The means of mass transportation and communication, the commodities of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. And as these beneficial products became available to more individuals in more social classes, the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity; it becomes a way of life. It is a good way of life-much better than before-and as a good way of life, it militates against qualitative change. Thus emerges the pattern of *one-dimensional thought and behavior* in which ideas, aspirations and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. They are redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension. (Marcuse, 2002, p. 14)

In the following years, due to their contradicting views on the better means of

disseminating information video activists subdivided into two factions: guerilla television groups and community video advocates.

3.4.1. Guerilla Television⁴⁴

Aware of the centrality of media in modern life, of the way television shapes reality and consciousness, some of the video pioneers tried to gain access to mass media. In the pages of “alternative movement’s 1971 manifesto”, *Guerilla Television*, they outlined their plan to decentralize television so that the medium could be made for people. Adopting a sharply critical relationship to broadcast television, they determined to use video to create an alternative to the “aesthetically bankrupt and commercially corrupt broadcast medium.” (Boyle, 1992, p. 69)

More interested in “developing the video medium and getting their tapes aired on television”, guerrilla television groups directed their resources and energies towards distribution and exhibition, yet still putting emphasize on decentralization and process. (Boyle, 1992, p. 70) Technological development further fueled this desire, since in 1972 the Time Base Corrector, device which electronically corrects “deviation errors in video signal caused by inconsistencies in equipment”, became available, hence allowing video made with nonprofessional video devices to be broadcasted on television⁴⁵. (Lovejoy, 2004, p. 117) The same year pioneer and most prominent guerilla television

⁴⁴ The term “guerilla television” came from the 1971 book of the same title by Michael Shamberg. This manifesto outlined a technological radicalism that claimed that commercial television, with its mass audiences, was a conditioning agent rather than a source of enlightenment. Video offered the means to “decentralize” television so that a Whitmanesque democracy of ideas, opinions, and cultural expressions - made both by and for the people - could then be “narrowcast” on cable television. (Boyle, 1985, p. 229)

⁴⁵ Introduction of Time Base Corrector also paved way for the rise of Electronic News Gathering (ENG) and, eventually, all-video television production. (Boyle, 1985, p. 230)

groups of 1970s, Downtown Community Television (DCTV)⁴⁶ and Top Value Television (TVTV)⁴⁷, emerged.

With a style loosely modeled on New Journalism and dedicated to making facts as vivid and entertaining as fiction, guerilla television groups used a sharp sense of irony, tackling the establishment and catching it off guard with the portable, nonthreatening equipment that gave them access to people and places where network cameramen, burdened with heavy equipment and the seriousness of commercial TV, never thought of going. Guerilla television practitioners challenged the objectivity of television journalism with its superficial balancing of issues, and distinguishing themselves from network reporters who stood above the crowd, video guerillas proudly announced that they were shooting “from *within* the crowd, subjective and involved.” (Boyle, 1992, pp. 70-1)

The “widespread availability of consumer video equipment” and a younger generation “caught up in the political and social issues of a new age”, like wars, nuclear proliferation, homelessness, environmental dangers, reproductive rights, and AIDS crisis made guerilla video tactics, idealism and enthusiasm return back with fueled energy in 1980s, from then on continuing to survive till today. (Boyle, 1992, p. 77) Having nothing but modest resources, energy and talent, revolutionary guerilla television groups like Peoples’ Video Network (PVN)⁴⁸,

⁴⁶ DCTV was co-founded by Keiko Tsuno and Jon Alpert in 1972 in New York. From its modest beginnings DCTV, working closely with immigrant groups of New York City’s Lower East Side, addressed a host of local issues like housing, health care, education, sweat shop labour, drug abuse and gang violence, issues that deeply affect the working class and immigrants communities of lower Manhattan, but which nevertheless receive scant attention in mainstream media. (Howley, 2007, p. 351)

⁴⁷ TVTV was formed in 1972 with the initial aim of covering political conventions. TVTV relied on the technical and artistic expertise of groups like the Videofreex, Raintance, and the San Francisco based Ant Farm, adding a distinctive way of producing and promoting the events. After a series of quite controversial videos on various subjects group disbanded in 1978 and several of its members found work in commercial television. (Boyle, 1992, pp. 70-2)

Whispered Media⁴⁹, Committee for Labor Access (CLA)⁵⁰ and Paper Tiger Television (PTTV)⁵¹ started to address, analyze and expose corporate ownership, hidden agendas and information biases of mainstream media, and a variety of international social issues.

The most successful of these groups proved to be Paper Tiger Television⁵², which setting up regional offshoots from Maine to California, dealt with “immediate political controversies” and featured direct participants in “social struggles, such as labor strikes and abortion rights battles”, while “maintaining a focus on how media representations do not reflect the realities of life for most people today.” (Marcus, 1991, as cited in Stein, 2001, p. 308) Consciously

⁴⁸ PVN is a group of media activists who video and audio podcast, produce and edit DVDs and videos about issues “the corporate media will not touch”. They have sent correspondents to the Lacondon Jungle in Mexico, Russia, Cuba, Korea, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Sudan, and Iraq, taped police violence at the picket lines in Detroit, the War Zone in Decatur, Illinois, anti-Klan rallies in Pittsburgh, and protests against racism and right wing terrorism in Buffalo, San Francisco and New York City with the “goal of breaking the information blockade of big business media”. PVN still maintains the activist tradition of covering the “news that the corporate media would like to bury.” <http://www.peoplesvideo.org>

⁴⁹ Whispered Media was founded as a collective that promotes the use of video and other media tools in strengthening progressive grassroots movements to support campaigns for social, economic and environmental justice. Whispered Media offers video witnessing, support and training, collects archival political footage, and produces video and audio works about specific grassroots and global campaigns and organizations. <http://www.whisperedmedia.org>

⁵⁰ CLA develops and distributes progressive television, radio, videos, and Internet communications on unions and workers issues and advocates for rank-and-file labor’s own media. <http://www.laborbeat.org>

⁵¹ PTTV is an open, non-profit, volunteer video collective active since 1981. Through the production and distribution of public access series, media literacy/video production workshops, community screenings and grassroots advocacy PTTV works to challenge and expose the corporate control of mainstream media, believing that increasing public awareness of the negative influence of mass media and involving people in the process of making media is mandatory for long-term goal of information equity. <http://www.papertiger.org>

⁵² It is really ironic and sad that the term Reality TV, the true monster of television and cultural life mentioned in previous chapter was firstly coined together by Paper Tiger TV in 1981 in order to criticize commercial television. But as television-news went from all-film crews to electronic news gathering the style of TV began to reflect guerilla television’s influence and once absorbed by television, the style and purpose of guerilla television was transformed into something at odds with its origins. (Boyle, 1992, p. 72)

mixing “almost primitive video techniques with sophisticated ideas, adding humorous touches to enliven serious problems”, PPTV, whose producers were stating that “the power of mass culture rests on the trust of the public. This legitimacy is a paper tiger”, can be described as a “1980s version of Brecht’s didactic theater”, since it was wedding “analytic processes to popular forms in order to reveal social relations and social inequities.” (Lovejoy, 2004, p. 117) In 1986, Paper Tiger “rented time on a satellite and began to transmit community-produced tapes to over 250 participating cable systems and public TV stations” across the USA, “free of charge.” (Boyle, 1992, p. 76; Stein, 2001, p. 312) Out of this trial run emerged Deep Dish Television Network (DDTV)⁵³, the first grassroots satellite network, initially running “only two hours a week” and making programs on issues such as “labor, housing, the farming crisis, and racism.” (Fiske, 2002, p. 390; Boyle, 1992, p. 76)

Practice of guerilla television seems to be widespread worldwide⁵⁴, but probably the most controversial form of guerilla televising exists in Denmark. Formed in 1987 and grew out of the squatters’ movement, guerilla television group TV Stop broadcasts news and alternative productions which for political or financial reasons are overlooked by mainstream media. Having around 30 volunteers, potential audience of a million and a half and regular attraction of around 100,000 viewers at any given time, group has a declaration in which they claim: “We want to stop television in principle. This is to say we want people to stop

⁵³ Deep Dish Television has been a laboratory for new, democratic and empowering ways to make and distribute video for 22 years. It is a hub linking thousands of artists, independent video makers, programmers and social activists. The network has produced and distributed over 300 hours of television series that challenge the suppression of awareness, the corruption of language, and the perversion of logic that characterizes so much of corporate media. <http://www.deepdishtv.org>

⁵⁴ Collection of links to over 700 guerilla television websites worldwide can be reached at The Global Village CAT. <http://www.openchannel.se/cat/index.htm>

watching TV... The ultimate goal for TV Stop is to close down.” (Halleck, 2005, p. 497)

3.4.2. Community Video

Community video (also referred to as a participatory video) is

a scriptless video process, directed by a group of grassroots people, moving forward in iterative cycles of shooting-reviewing. This process aims at creating video narratives that communicate what those who participate in the process really want to communicate, in a way they think is appropriate. (Johansson et al., 1999, as cited in Kindon, 2003, p. 143)

In this sense it is a special kind of storytelling that ideally involves the community in “telling a story, listening to a story, interpreting the story in its own lens” and being empowered to retell and change it to create a community that matches one’s own desired condition. (Bery, 2003, p. 102) Therefore it can be considered as a key tool in putting together process and product in ways that provide “avenues for marginalized communities to participate”, both in forms of critical self-analysis and ways of representation. (Evans & Foster, 2009, p. 88) The process of community video making can be very empowering, since it can enable a group or community to “take action to solve their own problems” and to “communicate their needs and ideas to decision-makers” and other groups and communities. (Lunch & Lunch, 2006, p. 10)

The use of video has different consequences in terms of how communities construct images of themselves, and how others (both inside and outside) come to see the community via the representations created. (Evans & Foster, 2009, p. 89) Severe imbalance of power and the injustices and wrongdoings it creates on economic, political, social or physical survival of people can be exposed by having a representation on a different ground other than the one shaped by those

power relations. By using video to bring images of these injustices to new public arenas, “traditional power relations can be challenged and contested.” (Dudley, 2003, p. 148)

Dialogic process created by community video can enable communities to critically analyze their own ‘realities’ and to explore the constructions of meaning. This “collaborative and negotiated use of video”, where community members identify the topic of the video production, create the content, plan the production, learn to handle the equipment, and finally make a production themselves has considerable transformative potential, not only in terms of the action it may generate, but also in terms of the structure of relationships within the society. (Kindon, 2003, p. 143) Transformation through community video, the process of moving from one state of being into another one, initially must take place within individuals. Only through “increasing the capabilities of the people” can communities transcend their present conditions and move toward new vision. (White, 2003, p. 76) Only when a “cognitive understanding of the power structures and one’s placement within the existing systems” is gained, person will start to “think, explore and take individual risk” in order to change existing political, social and economic systems. (Bery, 2003, pp. 103-4)

The perfect example for transformative capacity of community video can be TV Maxabomba, a poorly funded community video project that has been in action since 1988 in Rancho Fundo, a neighborhood inside of Baixada Fluminense, the huge and desperately poor zone of Rio de Janeiro, which does not even figure on tourist maps of the city. Started as a result of anger to “town hall’s total neglect of the neighborhood,” project produced videos about “confrontations with the major of city,” about “refuse which was never collected,” about fires and rat epidemics inside of zone. Project’s primary purpose was very local, to get the authorities “to return to neighborhood the taxes they paid in the form of urban

services” and generally to give neighborhood a much stronger “sense of its social dignity and political capacity.” (Downing, 2001, pp. 197-8)

Community video practicing can also be used in processes of “public consultation, advocacy, community mobilization and policy dialogue”, and to communicate the outcomes of participatory development processes “within and between communities or to funding agencies.” (Kindon, 2003, p. 143) Video was used this way in Taprana, a small village in India. Illiterate rickshaw drivers who had never owned the vehicles they used to earn their living told their stories on videotapes. They pointed out why they believed they were good risks for loans. The video tape was then showed to the bank manager in the city some miles away. On video, the rickshaw drivers had spoken of things they believed banks did wrong when dealing with village people. After viewing tape bank manager invited drivers to the bank to discuss getting loans, and in the following processes drivers got their loans. (Snowden, 1984, p. 6)

When dealing with the community video, despite its huge potential of developing self-esteem and sense of pride inside of community, and thus have widespread, immediate and powerful impact, it is always good to remember that community video practice is not a magic wand. It does not offer a prescription for empowerment, but rather it is a tool that could be used for empowerment. It should not be forgotten that “any venture with participatory video has to be accompanied by other political action.” (Gadihoke, 2003, p. 282) There has to be a deeper socio-political engagement with the community that goes beyond making images. Video can only be a facilitator in a larger process that involves other agents.

The case study on Karahaber, an Ankara based video activist collective chosen as the case for this study, clearly shows that this is exactly the quality Karahaber lacks in its practice of conducting video activism. Another important factor

needed to be emphasized here once more is related with the distinctive property of the early video activist collectives mentioned by Downing: the early video activist collectives were not seeking wide audiences, they were making their videos mostly for their local groups. (Downing, 2001, p. 197) As we already have seen this mistake was heavily paid for by contributing into the birth of Reality TV, but yet, before starting our case study analysis on Karahaber, it will be better if we firstly give a short outline of the Turkish social and cultural context which allowed for Karahaber to emerge.

CHAPTER 4

‘BURASI TÜRKİYE...’:⁵⁵

THE CASE STUDY ON KARAHABER

The boy's father said, “This photograph was the only corpus delicti. He denied it all until they showed it to him.”

He took a clipping out of his wallet. It came out in the *Times* in the autumn of 1968.

It was a picture of a young man grabbing another man by the throat and a crowd looking on in the background. “Collaborator Punished” read the caption.

Tereza let out her breath. No, it wasn't one of hers.

Walking home with Karenin through nocturnal Prague, she thought of the days she had spent photographing tanks. How naïve they had been, thinking they were risking their lives for their country when in fact they were helping the Russian police.

Milan Kundera, “The Unbearable Lightness of Being”, pp. 141-2

The history of video in Turkey is an interesting one and even if the first Turkish video art work, Nil Yalter’s *La Femme Sans Tête ou la Danse du Ventre (The Headless Woman or the Belly Dance)*⁵⁶, dates back to 1976, the real ‘take-off’ years for widespread penetration of video into the Turkish houses were 1981 and 1982, and the breakthrough point was reached in 1984. (Özçoban, 1985, p. 54)

⁵⁵ ‘This is Turkey...’ This sentence is commonly used within Turkish culture to cut debating on any topic related with Turkey, especially when debaters ran out of arguments

⁵⁶ This video work is also considered as a milestone in French video art’s history, since Nil Yalter made this video while living in Paris (Albertini, 1996, p. 137) In 2009 the 20th International Ankara Film Festival prepared retrospective section for Nil Yalter’s video works under the name “Respect for Nil Yalter”

Kalay lists following factors as contributors into the proliferation of video medium in Turkey

- One sided perspective in broadcasting provided by TRT, state owned national radio and television broadcast body in Turkey
 - Hassles of watching movies in cinema theaters
 - Entrance of global companies to the Turkish color TV and video market
 - 1982 law change allowing anyone who spent more than six months abroad to bring video devices to Turkey
 - Promotions of video started by some newspapers
 - Video devices brought by Turkish immigrant workers
- (Kalay, 1988, pp. 99-101)⁵⁷

By 1985, proportion of the video devices to television sets in Turkey reached an astonishing amount of about 20 percent, exceeding even some of the most industrialized countries. (Özçoban, 1985, pp. 55-6) Some of usages of video were in opposition with the censorship of post-military coup period, like for example secret underground diffusion of Yılmaz Güney films, screenings of which were banned in Turkish cinemas. (Özgün, 1997, p. 61) But still, the most extensive use or more exactly the sole function of video usage in Turkey was entertainment. (Özçoban, 1985, p. 102) Even if in the end of 1980s in Turkey existed İhsan Derman's deconstructionist and Teoman Madra's abstract expressionist videos, introduction of video to Turkey did not represented an entirely new factor in the socialization and acculturalization processes, it only reinforced the existing tendencies of Turkish society. (Özçoban, 1985, p. 103)

Formation of GİSAM⁵⁸ in 1993, an academic research center within Middle East Technical University (METU), offered a new ground for debates on both the theory and practice of video film making and artistic conduction in Turkey.

⁵⁷ Original text is in Turkish. Translation belongs to author

⁵⁸ Görsel-İşitsel Sistemler Araştırma ve Üretim Merkezi (Audio Visual Systems Research and Production Center) <http://gisam.metu.edu.tr>

Through academic courses such as “Cinema & Reality”, “Introduction to Video Production”, “Media Economics”, “International News” and series of workshops on a wide range of subjects, from documentary film making to video art, GİSAM provided more organized interest in video in Turkey. Since the center also employed within itself technical video production facilities, it helped a lot of students to get familiar with the more practical issues of video making. The center was the main facilitator for formation and development of early autonomous video production and distribution organizations of 1990s such as Körotonomedy⁵⁹ and Arkadaş Sinema Grubu (Arkadaş Cinema Group)⁶⁰, and it was due to GİSAM’s efforts that in the beginning of 1990s, minimalist videos of Bülent Baş and Ali Mahmut Demirel, and gender-politics related video works of Nur Akalın, Çağla Öztekin and Belmin Söylemez, students who have attended METU workshops of European video artists such as Angela Melitopoulos, Volker Schneider and John Adams, started to appear and being screened at film festivals. (Ankara Uluslararası Film Festivali, 2009)⁶¹

Even if in most of the advanced industrial countries video was perceived only as a complementary to the television, due to poor TV environment in the beginning of 1980s in Turkey, video was rendered as an alternative of or a substitute for television. (Özçoban, 1985, p. 68) The response of military regime seriously concerned with the formation of an alternative mass communication channel was

⁵⁹ Körotonomedy⁵⁹ was established in 1993 as a collective of filmmakers, artists, scholars and political activists in Ankara, Turkey, who shared similar political and artistic tendencies. Organization was identified as “a political-artistic collectivity for the construction of a new and emancipated world through mediatic processes.” (Özgün, 1997, pp. 62-3)
<http://www.korotonomedy.net>

⁶⁰ Arkadaş Cinema Group was formed by two agriculture workers in Tavşancık village of Kütahya. They “visited Ankara Film Festival in 1993, and learned how efficient they can use video equipment from young video filmmakers” of METU GİSAM. (Özgün, 1997, p. 63) The late Ahmet Uluçay, multiple awarded director of the movie *Karpuz Kabuğundan Gemiler Yapmak* (*Boats Out of Watermelon Rinds*) was one of the founders of group

⁶¹ Original text is in Turkish. Translation belongs to author

to increase the number of TRT TV channels to two and to start television broadcasting in color. (Kaya, 2009, p. 241) The importance of video was further diminished with the start of private television broadcasting beginning from 1990.

Private Turkish television channels immediately followed the tendencies parallel with their Western counterparts. So it should be no surprising that tabloid news bulletins and Reality TV programs started to appear in Turkey nearly from the beginning of private TV broadcasting. Compilations of real events presented under the topic of ‘world news’ and falling under ‘video vérité reality TV’ category started to be included in news bulletins, with Show TV being the leader in duration of programming. (Gencil Bek, 2004, p. 16) Same timely Turkey was introduced with the Reality TV programs which were in actuality forms of social control, appealing to ‘conscience’ of the viewers, and programs such as *Polis İmdat*, *Sıcağı Sıcağına*, *Teksoy Görevde*, *Söz Fato’da*, and *Yetiş Emmioğlu* started to dominate prime time. (Binark & Kılıçbay, 2004, p. 75) Another such program was Flash TV’s *Gerçek Kesit*, a true phenomenon and legend in the history of Turkish television broadcasting. However the most controversial programs appeared to be the so called ‘day time women programs’, which still dominate Turkish television screens during weekdays⁶². Falling under the category of ‘tell-all/show-all reality TV’, such programs created true addicts in the sense of TV watching and sometimes caused minor sensations, like the murder of a woman, who after appearing as a guest on Yasemin Bozkurt’s *Kadının Sesi* was killed by her 14-year old son upon her return to Elazığ. (Baştürk Akça & Akbulut, 2005, p. 42)

As already mentioned in previous chapters, Panopticon works hand in hand with Synopticon. When global history of CCTV proliferation is studied, a common characteristic always shows itself: the propaganda of need for more ‘social

⁶² For a very good in-depth analysis of such programs check Gün, 2006

control', spread by Reality TV programs is always followed by introduction of CCTV surveillance systems. Following this principle, on June 17, 2005 Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan officially activated MOBESE⁶³, Istanbul Police Department's video surveillance system, first of its kind in Turkey, created to continuously monitor the dense areas of Istanbul, and composed of 570 video cameras as a first phase. At the opening ceremony of MOBESE, justified with claims that it will make the criminals think twice before committing crime and will help in capturing ones wanted by the law enforcement agencies, Prime Minister Erdoğan used the words "feared dream of criminals"⁶⁴ to define the system. (Hürriyet, 2005, June 18) Later on, based on the 'success' of the system in Istanbul, MOBESE systems started to widespread around Turkey as more and more cities⁶⁵ began to install CCTV surveillance for continuous monitoring of their own citizens and MOBESE system of Ankara was very recently activated⁶⁶.

Launch of MOBESE system in Istanbul resulted in a cloud of controversy about it right at the beginning. The moment the system was installed and activated in 2005, the counter-MOBESE movement, named as NOBESE also appeared, as a

⁶³ Mobil Elektronik Sistem Entegrasyonu (Mobile Electronic System Integration)
<http://mobese.iem.gov.tr/>

⁶⁴ "suçluların korkulu rüyası"

⁶⁵ At the moment MOBESE systems are installed in 13 cities. 34 more cities expected to be equipped with MOBESE systems in 2010. (Güneç, 2009, November 16)

⁶⁶ According to protocol signed on April 10, 2009 between Ankara Municipality and the Türk Telekomünikasyon A.Ş., winner of the MOBESE implementation contract for Ankara, Ankara MOBESE system consists of 298 mobile, 550 static and 5 high definition cameras as a first phase, later on number of cameras to be increased. System also includes software with sophisticated qualities, such as face recognition from automatic alert systems, instant zooming and photographing, speed control for cars etc. The whole system costs 28,800,000 TL, and was financed by Ankara Special Provincial Administration. (Ankara İl Özel İdaresi Dergisi, 2008; 2009a; 2009b) Through its website, Greater Municipality of Ankara provides a live broadcast of MOBESE cameras installed in Kızılay and Tandoğan
http://www.ankara.bel.tr/AbbSayfalari/Kent_Rehberi/Canli_yayin_kizilay.aspx
http://www.ankara.bel.tr/AbbSayfalari/Kent_Rehberi/Canli_yayin_tandogan.html

“movement opposed to official institutions’ constant monitoring of people, envisioning them as a potential threat to city’s security.”⁶⁷ (Görgün, 2009, p. 1) Organized around the website <http://www.izleniyoruz.net>, NOBESE carried out series of creative protests against MOBESE, such as wandering along İstiklal Avenue with alien cloths and performing passages from George Orwell’s *1984*. (Görgün, 2009, p. 11) NOBESE’s protest strategy was mainly based on theater plays, and some other kinds of performance art, and each week protests were done around different camera. But the protests conducted by NOBESE group ended very soon, and even if the website <http://www.izleniyoruz.net> is still active and occasionally updated, group seems to have lost interest in organizing real life protests.

Even if the group itself does not provide an explanation for this situation, we can think of few. First of them may be the idea stated above that, like in many other countries, public was being prepared to be watched by CCTV surveillance systems through the dissemination of false need for more social control. We can clearly see it, when we read that students of Trabzon Fen Dershanesi donate money collected among themselves to the installation of MOBESE system in their neighborhood. (Oğanberdi, 2009, April 30) Another explanation of disinterest in conducting protests against MOBESE system may be the social situation of Turkey itself. MOBESE systems and surveillance cameras, although increasing rapidly, are not yet an important part of the daily life in Turkey. Physical one to one encounters with the members of police and military, security guards and even district night guards are much more frequent compared with the hidden and mostly unseen surveillance cameras. Thus much less meaning is attached to them, resulting in difficulty to persuade people in conducting protest against them.

⁶⁷ Original text is in Turkish. Translation belongs to author

After this very brief introduction of Turkish political and social context we may proceed with the case study of this thesis, Karahaber video activist group.

4.1. Nomen Est Omen* : Karahaber

“Karahaber”⁶⁸ video action collective⁶⁹ is a group of video activists, organized around the website <http://www.karahaber.org>, functioning with the motto “From the Image of the Action, to the Action of the Image” (Eylemin Görüntüsünden Görüntünün Eylemine). Although there were people from some other groups too, Karahaber was mainly formed around 2005⁷⁰ by a group of members of the VideA, a legal association based in Ankara and founded in 2003 as “an artistic, politic, mediatic collective”⁷¹ taking its name from the abbreviation of “video idea”.

The period of formation of both VideA, and later on Karahaber coincides with the developments in the political life of Turkey. Right after the Copenhagen Summit, in 2003 Turkey accepted the European Union Adoption Laws and Turkish society was introduced with the intensive debates on the importance of civil society and democratization processes. In the same period Turkish bourgeoisie, especially in the sense of media ownership, was dividing into two competing groups, who nevertheless were acting in the same way, only from the

* Latin: True to Its Name

⁶⁸ The name Karahaber, when broke down into “kara haber”, have double meaning in Turkish. One of them is “black news”, while the other, taking its roots from Turkish culture and the proverb “Bad news are heard fast” (Kara haber tez duyulur), will be “bad news”

⁶⁹ Instead of calling themselves video activist group, Karahaber refers to itself as video action collective: “Video eylem kolektifi”

⁷⁰ No one from Karahaber remembers the exact date collective was formed. Website information shows that website has been active since January 21, 2006

⁷¹ http://www.videa.org.tr/html/videa_html.html

perspective of capital owners, when they were reporting news on labor and social developments, or dealing with the issues of labor strikes or privatization. (Kaya, 2009, pp. 251-2) So there was an urgent need for alternative media channels to disseminate news on democratization, resistance and human rights both in global and local contexts, with activist approach.

VideA was very active in the matters of video activism and alternative media production since its early beginning, as for example VideA members were filming protests and distributing them as VCDs and DVDs, organized a Video Action Atelier at “Free University Ankara” (Özgür Üniversite Ankara) between November 2003 and January 2004, actively participated in the “Cinema for Peace” (Barış için Sinema) initiative and initiated “Short Wave” (Kısa Dalga), a short film/video library project to serve as a reference point for information on short films and videos produced in Turkey. Karahaber was formed as a result of discussions within VideA about the problem of placing highly controversial political videos depicting street clashes between demonstrators and police forces on the website of a legally founded association. Due to this reason Karahaber was launched as an alternative platform to address these issues in a freer way. Karahaber members tell that this formation of another collective with different name, members of which were in reality just the same people created jokes within the group as “we are schizophrenics, we have a lot of faces, Karahaber, VideA, etc. etc. but in reality everyone is just the same.”⁷²

According to video activists, the roots of both Karahaber and VideA can be traced back to GİSAM, the abovementioned academic research institution within METU. According to Karahaber members, the main contribution of the center in creation and nourishment of interest in video device as a tool of political activity

⁷² “Şizofreniz, bir sürü yüzümüz var, Karahaber, VideA, şu bu, herkes aynı aslında.” From an interview with T.B.. From this point on, unless stated otherwise, all Turkish translations of interviews with video activists belong to author

with radical capacities was through the courses “Visual Thinking” and “Thinking Through Images” offered by the late Ulus Baker. The name of Ulus Baker as a main inspiration was cited by all video activists, with the claims that “If anything like video exists now in Turkey, and it exists, nearly everyone around has learned the theory of it from him.”⁷³ The Ulus Baker⁷⁴ period of GİSAM is defined as “Totally by chance, some kind of dream team formed in that period of GİSAM, a team which further developed itself by introducing new mediums: Kōrotonomedyā is a part of it, VideA is another part, Karahaber is one part, 25+ is totally another part.”⁷⁵

The core of Karahaber is composed of eight members, although around fifteen persons have been active in the collective throughout the years of its existence. These fluctuations have been caused mainly by the educational relocations of the group members, as nearly all of Karahaber members have obtained or are on the way to obtain their doctoral degrees. All of the members, current and the past ones, are above 30 years old, all have received higher education, mainly in the social sciences, and are employed within cultural production industry as musicians, directors, graphic designers etc. While majority of the previous members now live abroad, still active ones live mainly in Istanbul, although few people are still living in Ankara.

The organizational structure of Karahaber is quite loose and is mainly based on friendship and personal acquaintances. This kind of membership situation is

⁷³ “Bugün Türkiyede video diye bir şey varsa, ki var, şu an ortalıktaki hemen herkes ondan öğrenmiştir bu işin teorisini.” From an interview with A.Ş.

⁷⁴ A compilation of writings of Ulus Baker in a wide spectrum ranging from philosophy to video can be accessed at http://www.korotonomedyā.net/kor/index.php?ulus_baker

⁷⁵ “Gisamın o döneminde bir tür bir rüya takımı şans eseri yanyana geldi, ve başka başka ortamlar açarak ilerledi: Kōrotonomedyā bunun bir parçası, VideA başka bir parçası, Karahaber bir parçası, 25+ bambaşka bir parçası.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

defined as “There exists an organic connection.”⁷⁶ Most of the members know each other for quite a long time, dating back to their undergraduate years of study, when they met each other in GISAM.

4.2. Spiritus Mundi*: Ideological Inclinations & Collaborations

There are some significant differences in political views and in relations with political processes among the Karahaber members, nevertheless it can be said that Karahaber’s overall political inclination falls within the category of new social movements, as members define themselves as libertarians and have very strong connections with anarchist, feminist, LGBTT and conscientious objection movements. The main reason they engaged in the video activism is that they already were politically conscious when they were firstly told about the radical capacity of video. In this sense they define video activism as a directly active and political process, which has a capacity of production and claim politics of video activism are three folded thanks to the productive quality of the video device

We can look at politics of video activism from three perspectives. We can see it as a witness of streets and action on them, documenting them. Secondly, we can see it as a supporter of these and thirdly we can see video activism itself as a kind of action....Video is something that includes the process of the montage in itself, so that when we put two images together or one after another, it creates meaning which is something else than the meaning of these two images, something different. If we are aware of this fact, then that means video is a device which is productive in its own nature, so it has a possibility, a very strong possibility of creating meaning....So video can act within itself even without witnessing a real action. So it can transfer a message to its viewer, a message which we can assume is political.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “organik bir bağ söz konusu” From an interview with O.İ.

* Latin: Spirit of the World

Some of the Karahaber members exactly remember the moment they became video activists

My first video recording in the form of “Yes, now I’m witnessing an action” happened just one day, after a lecture in METU, Ulus Baker’s lecture ended. Together with Ulus Baker we were on the bus, going to the city center, when nearly twenty-thirty of small gendarmerie jeeps, the ones where seven-eight soldiers sit in the back, passed us by. I wondered what was going on, and my camera was with me, so I left the bus and followed the jeeps. Ulus Baker continued his trip on the bus, and then I ran into a situation in Dormitory No. 2, you know where two policemen were taken hostages by students, it was February 2004 or something around that I guess, and I filmed that day, I filmed what was going on there, and then all footage was edited, and so I produced my first work, my first activist work.⁷⁸ It was that first work that made me sense the power of montage, the power of montage to do.⁷⁹

Karahaber does not hold regular meetings, and each member is usually following the social movements he is interested in or is already an active

⁷⁷ “Videoaktivizmin politikliğine üç yönden bakabiliriz: Sokaklara ve aksiyona tanıklık etmesi, onu belgelemesi babında bakabiliriz, onu desteklemesi olarak bakabiliriz ikincil olarak, üçüncüsü de kendisinin bizzat eylem biçimi olması olarak bakabiliriz... Video montajı barındıran bir şey, yani iki imajı yanyana ya da arka arkaya koyduğumuzda bu her iki filmde de başka, bu iki filmde herhangi biri olmayan ama üçüncü bir anlama tekabül eder. Eğer bunun farkındaysak, o zaman bu şu demektir, video kendi içerisinde eyleyebilen bir aygıttır, yani anlam üretimi ihtimalini taşır, hem de güçlü bir şekilde taşır... Dolayısıyla video hiç bir eyleme tanıklık etmeden de kendi içerisinde bir eylemde bulunabilir. Yani onun izleyenine bir mesajı, politik olduğunu varsaydığımız bir mesajı taşıyabilir.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

⁷⁸ Video activist is referring to the video *Bu Senin Askerlerinin Bu Okulun İçinde Ne İşleri Var* (*What These Soldiers Of You Are Doing Inside Of This School*)

⁷⁹ “İlk “evet ben bir aksiyona tanıklık ediyorum” şeklindeki ilk çekimim, ODTÜden dersten çıkmıştık, Ulus hocanın dersinden, ODTÜ servisiyle birlikte şehre doğru iniyorduk, kampüsün içinde küçük jandarma jiplerinden, böyle arkalarında 7-8 tane asker oturan jiplerden, herhalde bir 20-30 tane yanımızdan geçti biz otobüsle giderken, ne olduğunu merak ettim, kameram da yanımdaydı, ve inip o jipleri takip ettim, Ulus hoca otobüsle devam etti, sonra 2. yurttan yaşanan durumla karşılaştım, hani iki polislin rehin alındığı öğrenciler tarafından falan, 2004 şubat öyle birşeydi, ve o günü çektim, orda olan biteni çektim, daha sonra çekilen görüntüler montajlandı, ve böylece ilk işimi, ilk eylemci işimi üretmiş oldum. Yani montajın gücünü, montajın eyleyebilme gücünü bana sezdirenen ilk iş o oldu.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

member of. Thus, each Karahaber member is also an active participant in the demonstrations and protests. This stance was constantly emphasized during all interviews, one of video activists saying that

Video is my eye. Due to this I do not describe video activism as something outside of my life. I have a camera which just like my eye, my hand or my feet is coming with me to all places where I go. This camera tries to witness what I live.⁸⁰

Due to embedding of Karahaber members to some degree with some of the social movements the main source of learning about protests and demonstrations is by using email groups and Internet forums, together with usual public information channels, although independent media channels like Indymedia are also frequently told to be used. However video activists do not limit themselves with the protests conducted by their own group.

I go and participate in all demonstrations I have opportunity to go and participate, and it is not a prerequisite that I go to all protests with my camera. I only try to always keep my camera in my bag, I try to keep it with me all the time, because we actually can film something every moment. There may be no meaning in filming a protest itself, except for its value as news. That is why I chose school of thought which argues that video should act from inside of existing life, just as like from anything else.⁸¹

⁸⁰ “Video benim gözüm, dolayısıyla ben video aktivizmi hayatımın dışında bir şey olarak tarif etmiyorum zaten. Kendi bulunduğum yerlere gözüm gibi, elim gibi, ayaklarım gibi benimle birlikte gelen bir kameram var ve yaşadıklarına tanıklık etmeye çalışıyor.” From an interview with Ö.S.

⁸¹ “Gidebildiğim, katılabildiğim eylemlere katılıyorum, her eyleme kameramla gidiyorum diye de bir şey yok. Kameramı çantamda buldurmaya çalışıyorum, her an yanımda olmasına çalışıyorum, çünkü her an birşeyler çekebiliriz aslında. Eylemin kendisini çekmenin özel bir değeri olmayabilir, haber değeri dışında özel bir değeri olmayabilir. Dolayısıyla herhangi birşeylerden olduğu gibi varolan hayatın içerisinde videonun eylemesi gerektiğini savunan bir ekolü tercih ettim.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

Some of the Karahaber members define their way of conducting video activism as a “video tradition feeding itself from the life, Vertovian way of cinema”, saying that “the first component of our manifesto is down with the bourgeois scenarios, down with the representation of our daily life on the screen.”⁸² Video activists are referring here to the Dziga Vertov’s Kino-Eye manifesto, which under the heading of “Very Simple Slogans” was giving very simple set of instructive slogans to define new socialist way of film making:

1. Film-drama is the opium of the people.
 2. Down with the immortal kings and queens of the screen! Long live the ordinary mortal, filmed in life at his daily tasks!
 3. Down with the bourgeois fairy-tale script! Long live life as it is!
 4. Film-drama and religion are deadly weapons in the hands of the capitalists. By showing our revolutionary way of life, we will wrest that weapon from the enemy’s hands.
 5. The contemporary artistic drama is a vestige of the old world. It is an attempt to pour our revolutionary reality into bourgeois molds.
 6. Down with the staging of everyday life! Film us as we are.
 7. The scenario is a fairy tale invented for us by a writer. We live our own lives, and we do not submit to anyone’s fictions.
 8. Each of us does his task in life and does not prevent anyone else from working. The film workers’ task is to film us so as not to interfere with our work.
 9. Long live the kino-eye of the proletarian revolution!
- (Vertov, 1984, p. 71)

However, not all members agree that Karahaber’s practice of conducting video activism is in consistency with the Vertovian tradition, as for example when asked about that Ö.S. states that

⁸² “Hayatın içinden beslenen video geleneği, Vertovian sinema anlayışı”; “Manifestomuzun birinci maddesidir, kahrolsun burjuva senaryoları, kahrolsun gündelik hayatımızın sahnede temsili” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

I'm not actually very sure that we even have a tradition, but I'm sure it has nothing to do with the Vertov. No, Karahaber definitely can not be defined as Vertovian.⁸³

This seeming contradiction in the views about the very basics of Karahaber formation in the sense of film making process can be understood better when looked at the ideological stances of Karahaber members, since although Karahaber activists claim that they act with the class perspective, at the same time they also admit that their position is a bit different

In this sense I can say that I am a little bit New Leftist. Of course I base things with the class perspective, I do not think of anything else out of this perspective when basing, but I am also aware that political struggle, resistance do not have to run only class based, or I am also aware that there are some problems which can not be solved only by solving the class dilemmas, that these problems require different strategies. Because of that in all of my recordings, and all my works, in everything I live through in my life and in everything I produce I am trying to be careful about gender dynamics.⁸⁴

In this sense it is should not be surprising that the main collaborations of Karahaber occur with the movements and organizations which are running identity based politics, like KAOS GL⁸⁵, Pembe Hayat (Pink Life)⁸⁶, or Kırk

⁸³ "Aslında bir geleneğimiz olup olmadığından bile emin değilim, ama Vertov'la hiç bir ilgisinin olmadığına da eminim. Yok hayır, Karahaber kesinlikle Vertovian olarak tanımlanamaz." From an interview with Ö.S.

⁸⁴ "Ben biraz daha bu anlamda yeni solcuyum diyebilirim. Tabii ki sınıf kapsamlı temellendiriyorum, temellendirirken bunun ötesinde bir şey düşünmüyorum, ama onun dışında politik mücadelenin sadece, yani direnişin sadece sınıf temelli yürümek zorunda olmadığına farkındayım, yahut sınıfsal çelişkilerin çözülmesiyle çözülemeyecek olan bazı sorunlar olduğunu ve bunların da başka stratejiler gerektirdiğinin de farkındayım, dolayısıyla da bütün çekimlerimde ve bütün işlerimde ve hayatta yaşadığım herşeyde, ürettiğim herşeyde bir gender dinamiğine dikkat ediyorum." From an interview with Ö.Ö.

⁸⁵ KAOS GL, Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Organization, was founded in September, 1994, to unite Turkey's homosexuals in the struggle against discrimination. The group's underlying philosophy is that the liberation of homosexuals will also free heterosexuals. KAOS GL has been publishing the journal KAOS GL (now a quarterly) since

Örük⁸⁷. However from time to time Karahaber has collaborated with more politically oriented organizations and corporate bodies too, like TAYAD⁸⁸ or TMMOB⁸⁹. In the global context, Karahaber members recall collaborations with some English, French and Israeli video collectives, especially related with the Palestinian problem, but mainly on the basis of sending to these collectives DVDs or providing Turkish subtitles for their video works. In a video activism atelier, conducted by two Karahaber members A.Ş. and T.B. as a part of the IF Independent Film Festival 2009, author participated in the screenings of videos made by Undercurrents⁹⁰, a UK based video activist group, also said to be collaborating with Karahaber from time to time.

The ideological stance of the group is not easy to understand and may be the own written words of Karahaber members can help to shed light on the problem. In his article, available on the Karahaber's website <http://www.karahaber.org>,

it was founded and it owns the KAOS Cultural Center, in which many cultural activities, meetings and film shows are held. <http://www.kaosgl.com>

⁸⁶ Pink Life LGBTTT Solidarity Foundation was formed in 2006 mainly to increase solidarity among transsexual and transvestite individuals. <http://www.pembehayat.org>

⁸⁷ Kırk Örük Cooperative for Combating Violence against Women was formed in 2005 with the aims of providing social, cultural and economical help for women faced with violence. <http://www.kirkoruk.org>

⁸⁸ TAYAD, Tutuklu Hükümlü Aileleri Yardımlaşma Derneği (Foundation for Solidarity of Families of Prisoners and Detainees), can be defined as a foundation which supports more orthodox Marxist practice of political struggle, compared with new social movements. <http://www.tayad.org>

⁸⁹ TMMOB, Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects, was established in 1954 as a professional organization to defend rights of engineers and architects. However throughout its history TMMOB has also been an active fighter for human rights and democracy in Turkey. <http://www.tmmob.org.tr>

⁹⁰ Functioning with the motto "The news you don't see on the news" Undercurrents was found in 1994 as an alternative video news agency, specializing in producing and distributing DVD compilations reflecting UK & global counter-culture, mostly working with video makers and communities who have been marginalized or overlooked by TV broadcasters. <http://www.undercurrents.org>

one of the group's oldest members G.Ö., in a video manifesto-like way lists some necessities, which according to Karahaber are required to become a video activist⁹¹

-If you are working - if you are not a student or an unemployed - you have to make sure there is a way you can take time off from your workplace whenever you want, you have to be able to come up with valid excuses

-It is beneficiary if you have your own camera, otherwise you have to find one or few 'good willed' people from whom you can borrow video camera

-To be able to buy video tapes reduce your amount of smoking if you are a smoking person. If you are not, do not start. After some time you will even need to reduce your daily meals from three to two, and if it is two to one

-If you have anything like sleep order, forget it right away

-Do not forget that you will need a computer and software to be able to have decent editing. Do not try to buy software, there are cracked versions

-It is advisable to become member of various Internet groups and have knowledge of what is going on. Quite a lot of activities like protests, demonstrations and colloquies are announced through Internet

-This means that you have to get yourself uninterrupted, if not possible, cheap Internet connection

-Still, stay away from making long term plans. Anything can happen at any moment. In the meantime keep your batteries charged

-During the shooting there will be people curious about you. You have to come up with satisfactory answers for them

-Due to connectedness with abroad, knowledge of medium level English will ease you

-You shall not overlook having a valid passport with the necessary visas in the case of demonstrations abroad. Give importance to your relations from whom you can borrow money for the road

-There should be some people who can save you if you are arrested. Or they may come to visit you in jail

-In order to stay away from custom cultural styles do not watch television, if possible

⁹¹ Karahaber members frequently referred to this list as their unofficial manifesto

- Do not try to be understandable. Especially try to avoid explanations to your family
 - Do not expect to have career in this practice. Do not expect to get famous
 - Be brave and cool during video shootings
 - Do not worry about causing camera tremble, do not care about lighting or frame (you can even zoom)
 - Do not ever try to create a different mise-en-scène
 - Share what you know
 - Show what you have seen
- (Özdamar, para. 7)⁹²

Following the points outlined by this manifesto one can easily arrive at the conclusion that video activism is the most technologically dependent form of activism and to be able to practice it person has to have good - and not so cheap, video camera⁹³; a computer which has good graphics card and is fast enough to allow video editing and also has enough space in it, since the video files consume a lot of space⁹⁴; a solid knowledge of computer hardware and software, since in order to be able to edit the filmed video footage person has to be competent with usage of computers and special video editing software⁹⁵; enough money to buy video tapes⁹⁶ and most important of all, time. Then looking at the

⁹² Original text is in Turkish. Translation belongs to author. Full article is available at the address <http://www.karahaber.org/bilmiyorum/pekiyagoruntu.html>

⁹³ Even if theoretically any video camera can record, including mobile phone video cameras which at some occasions provided video proofs of some abuses and misconducts, quality of the video output enormously depends on the size of CCD or CMOS image sensor chip inside. Bigger the chip, better the quality, but thus the price is also higher in the same manner. Lens of the camera is also of great importance, and the most expensive components of modern video cameras are their lenses. Without good lens and image sensor focus of the camera will not easily fix itself during rapid movements, which are frequent during protests, resulting in blurry images

⁹⁴ Raw AVI video format, a necessary precondition in video editing in order to obtain good quality video, requires around 13 GB of hard disk space for one hour of footage, captured from video tape

⁹⁵ Each year video editing software is getting easier to use, but good technical knowledge of software is still required, since the logic of video activism is not based just on copy-paste

⁹⁶ Most of the digital video cameras still require special video tapes to record on and the most widespread current tape format is MiniDV. However it should be noted that video cameras with in-built hard disk thus eliminating need for tapes are also becoming wide spread

practice of conducting video activism from the perspective outlined by Özdamar it is quite obvious that video activism in Turkey is a very middle class⁹⁷ practice by its nature, since if person do not have technical equipment, financial means, knowledge and most importantly time to do it, or do not have means of getting them from somewhere or someone else it is nearly impossible to practice video activism, as prescribed by Karahaber.⁹⁸ It will be no surprise then that the profile of participants attending seldom workshops organized by Karahaber is also mainly composed of middle class people, treating video making as a ‘hobby’, as Ö.Ö. recalls: “Education have been given to middle class, treating it on the level of hobby, university based small groups etc.”⁹⁹ The venues these workshops are being organized, like universities, IF Independent Film Festival or collaboration with KozaVisual¹⁰⁰ from time to time, also open gates for the demographics of participants to be mainly middle class based. Another very interesting aspect worth to note here is that even if Karahaber has not received any grants, VideA has been the frequent receiver of European Union and some other grants. Some of the VideA’s projects, worth of mentioning in this scope are The Short Wave short film/video library project, which has received European Union grant; “Türkü Söylemeyen Tepe” documentary film project receiving grant from REC

⁹⁷ Author never intended to conduct a class analysis inside of the study, but the constant emphasize on libertarianism by Karahaber members together with their demographical factors creates a feeling that Karahaber activists are of middle class origin and identity

⁹⁸ When asked about financial aspects, Karahaber members told that as Karahaber they have not received any grant yet, so they finance their activities themselves, every one on their own, unless there is a big event which requires participation of more than one or two video activists, in which cases they ‘with solidarity’ collect money among themselves

⁹⁹ “Orta sınıf, hobi imişçesine ilgi duyan, üniversite içinde, küçük gruplara falan eğitim verildi.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

¹⁰⁰ KozaVisual was initiated by NIHAnkara, (Netherlands Institute for Higher Education, Ankara) and the Royal Netherlands Embassy as an audio-visual research and education project, designed to assemble the potentialities of social sciences and visual arts within the frame of exchanging the means intrinsic to the two: utilizing the audio-visual tools as a way of gathering data in social sciences and familiarize artists with the main subjects of the social sciences. <http://www.kozavisual.org>

Turkey¹⁰¹; Timescapes video editing project receiving multiple grants from prestigious associations such as Berlin Biennale, Berlin Film Festival and Goethe Institut; and “Human Rights and Visual Culture” European youth meeting which received grants from European Commission Youth program, The Council of Europe, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Goethe Institut and British Council.

In this scope, the general quality of video activism in the Turkish context to be middle class based, combined with the Karahaber members’ individualistic tendencies emphasizing libertarianism positions Karahaber at a point different from Vertovian filming tradition, since Vertov’s film collective was strongly emphasizing collectivist-constructivist approach. Au contraire, Karahaber more reminds of *Union of Egoists*,¹⁰² a term coined by Max Stirner to define a form of association which “does not violate ‘ownness’ and so constitutes an appropriate vehicle for advancing egoistic interests.” (Stirner, 1995, p. xxix) In this sense, Karahaber video activists are quite far away from the “organic intellectuals” of Gramsci, a concept which is of great help trying to understand and explain the video activist groups in other countries, as in Gramscian terms the “organic intellectuals” are distinguished less by their profession than by their “function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong”, thus providing “a link between the class and certain sections of the traditional intelligentsia.” (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 3-4) For Gramsci, the organic intellectuals of the working class are defined on the one hand by their “role in production and in the organisation of work” and on the other by their “directive political role”, as

¹⁰¹ The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) is an international organization with a mission to assist in solving environmental problems, established in 1990 by the United States, the European Commission and Hungary. The REC actively participates in key global, regional and local processes and contributes to environmental and sustainability solutions within and beyond its country office network, transferring transitional knowledge and experience to countries and regions. <http://www.rec.org.tr>

¹⁰² At this point it is good to remember that the term ‘egoist’ in Stirner philosophy has nothing to do with the contemporary meaning of the word. Stirnerian egoism in modern notion is a synonym of radical political anarchism

people full with “conscious responsibility, aided by absorption of ideas and personnel from the more advanced bourgeois intellectual strata.” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 4)

4.3. Res Gestae*: Production & Distribution

The website of Karahaber, <http://www.karahaber.org>, has been active since January 21, 2006 and thorough research conducted on the Internet reveals that there are 6 websites¹⁰³ providing link to it, whereas website itself does not provide any external links, not even to the VideA. <http://www.karahaber.org> is composed of three different parts: *Bilmiyorum*¹⁰⁴, *Görmedim*¹⁰⁵, and *Duymadım*¹⁰⁶. Whereas on the old interface¹⁰⁷ of the website these three categories were represented by the icons of three monkeys, on the new interface they exist only as captions in the upper menu. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show interfaces of the website, new and older version respectively.

* Latin: Things Done

¹⁰³ These websites are (in alphabetical order):
<http://moreleskisehir.blogspot.com> (Eskişehir branch of MorEl LGBTT Formation);
<http://sozluk.sourtimes.org/show.asp?t=karahaber.org> (Entry at Ekşi Sözlük)
<http://prosceniumarch.blogspot.com> (An artistic website focusing mainly on Gilles Deleuze);
<http://proteus.brown.edu/harmansah/1827> (Personal web page of Ömür Harmansah, academician of Turkish origin at Brown University and graduate of METU);
<http://www.etilenzine.net/blog/linkler/> (A subculture fanzine);
<http://www.stgm.org.tr/stkhaber.php?section=archive> (Rather than conscious link to Karahaber, this link exists as a part of announcement about documentary film screening of one of Karahaber members A.Ş., organized at KozaVisual)

¹⁰⁴ I Do Not Know

¹⁰⁵ I Did Not See

¹⁰⁶ I Did Not Hear

¹⁰⁷ In 2007 Karahaber decided to employ new interface and new website structure, more autonomous one, which will eliminate need for webmaster, since older version of the website required manually creating webpage for each newly uploaded video

Karahaber Bilmiyorum Duymadım Görmedim

karahaber.org
Eylemin görüntüsünden Görüntünün eylemine

Uzunince Bir Yol - İki

Tariş Direnişi


III. Uluslararası İşçi Filmleri Festivali kapsamında 2 Mayıs 2008 günü gerçekleştirilen "Tariş-Çimentepe-Gültepe Direnişi" galasının ardından yapılan "Tariş Direnişi Unutulmadı" söyleşisi ses kayıtları.

1980 yılı Ocak ayında Tariş fabrikasında başlayıp kısa sürede halk direnişi haline gelmesiyle sınıf mücadelesi tarihimizin özgün örneklerinden biri olan Tariş Fabrikası-Gültepe-Çimentepe Direnişi söyleşisine, Hacay Yılmaz-İplik İşçisi, Mustafa Özdemir-İplik İşçisi ve Cahit Akçam -Dostluk Yardımlaşma Vakfı Başkanı konuşmacı olarak katılıyorlar.


»»»»

Sakın Ona Basma

Bengisu Dönmez
2004
Ankara
3'30"



karahaber.org taşınıyor



Eylemin görüntüsünden görüntünün eylemine ilkeyle yola çıkan KARAHABER VIDEO EYLEM KOLEKTİFİNİN web sitesi yeni yerine taşınıyor. Eski haline ulaşmak için lütfen > [buraya tıklayınız.](#)

Taşıma işlemleri sırasında bazı dosyalara ulaşılamama gibi sorunlar olabilir, bu durumu anlayışla karşılayacağımızı dileriz.

Son eklenenler

- > [Uzunince Bir Yol - İki](#)
- > [Tariş Direnişi](#)
- > [Sakın Ona Basma](#)
- > [Hafıza](#)
- > [Bunu Hissedebiliyor Musunuz?](#)

Senin Askerlerinin Bu O kulun İçinde Ne İş Var




Figure 1: The new interface of the Karahaber web site

<http://www.karahaber.org/php/index.php>

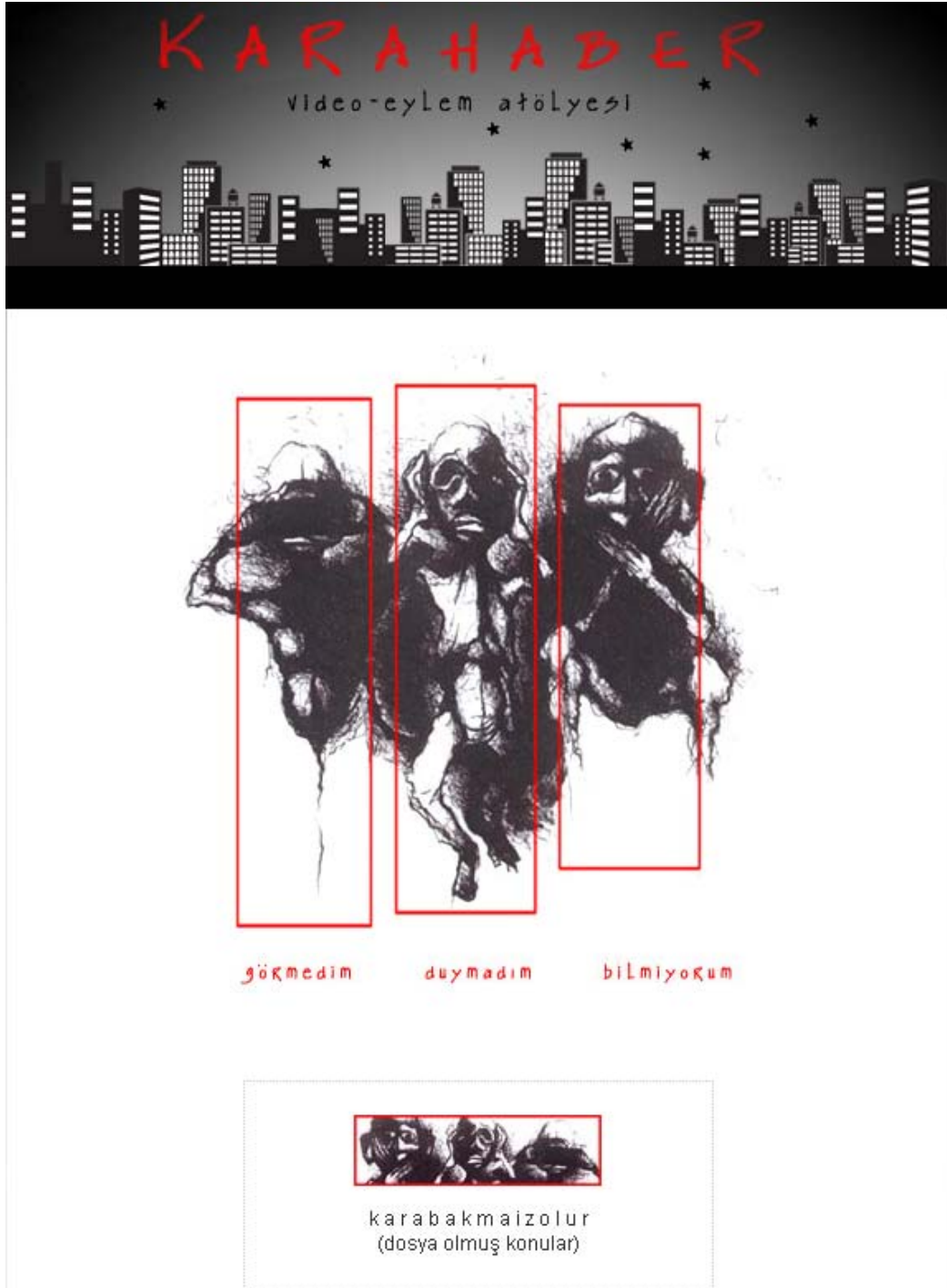


Figure 2: The older interface of the Karahaber web site
<http://www.karahaber.org/index2.html>

Bilmiyorum section is the place where Karahaber puts its own members' written works, theoretical discussions about video, visual culture and Karahaber itself. However, these writings do not possess academic or instructive style, but they are rather emotional interpretations and responses of Karahaber members towards some events, festivals, videos, books, films and 2 in-group discussion emails which occurred between Karahaber members, totaling to 14 files.

Görmedim section is the ragtag of 36 videos ranging from video home works to animations, much more conceptual and experimental works, where the visual language and style are relatively given more importance compared with the videos of *Duymadım* section. Even if the majority of the works in *Görmedim* section has political stance, it is not easy to classify them, but it can be said that the main distinctive property of these videos is that they are video art works. It is also worth of noting that majority of videos in this section are not uploaded by Karahaber members themselves, but rather by 'friends' of the group.

Duymadım section is the compilation of 139 news videos like records of press conferences and demonstrations of various political groups and social movements, and reports on certain events, mainly documentations on what happened in a specific time and location. If videos tried to be categorized, it seems that the major inclination in Karahaber video activism is in favor of new social movements, as for example antimilitarist movement is represented by 17, gay-lesbian rights movement by 16, feminist movement by 10, and environmentalist movement by 7 videos. Other categories which can be formed and their respective number of videos are: protests against F-type prison system, 15; struggle of Sinan villagers, 12; Kurdish movement, 9; scavengers, 8. The climax for Karahaber seems to be reached in the years 2006 and 2007, since respectively 57 and 52 news videos were uploaded in those years. Interestingly, even if Karahaber was formed in 2005 some of the videos date back to 2001.

Older website structure was listing uploaded works only in chronological way, without categorizing movements or events. The only exception were certain topics that were followed for a long time and thus needed a special attention, so videos related with them were organized as certain dossiers. There were five of them: *Si Nan (Otuz Ekmek): Sinan Köylüleri Ağaya Karşı*¹⁰⁸, *Hiçkimsenin Askeri: Antimilitarist Hareket*¹⁰⁹, *Yaşama Hakkı*¹¹⁰, *Fark Etmeyiniz: Tecrit Öldürür*¹¹¹, *Kimşenin Namusu: Kadınlar Sokakta*¹¹². In the new website, employed in 2007, these dossiers and even chronological structure were broken due to technical problems which appeared while restructuring the website but were never solved, so now it is nearly impossible to instantly find video looked for. Even if there is a “Search” button, it is not working properly, so in order to locate a specific video file, all pages have to be thoroughly looked in. Also quite a lot of videos went missing on the new structure of the website, all from the *Duymadım* section. In this scope it will be better to conduct analysis of the website from its older structure available at <http://www.karahaber.org/index2.html>, as it is the *Duymadım* section which is of particular interest for this thesis.

4.4. Duymadım (I Did Not Hear)

Mainstream media usually choose to neglect groups and individuals which are in

¹⁰⁸ *Si Nan (Thirty Breads): Sinan Villagers Against Aga* is the dossier on the resistance of Sinan villagers from Bismil, Diyarbakır against local aga who invaded their land

¹⁰⁹ *Nobody's Soldier: Antimilitarist Movement* is the dossier on conscientious objection movement in Turkey

¹¹⁰ *Right To Live* is the dossier on gay, lesbian, bisexual, transvestite and transsexual (LGBT) rights in Turkey and the discrimination and systematic abuse conducted against LGBT individuals in Turkey

¹¹¹ *Do Not Notice: Isolation Kills* is the dossier about protests conducted against F-type isolated prison cells

¹¹² *No One's Honor: Women On The Streets* is the dossier about feminist movement in Turkey and protests conducted against honor killings

opposition to current social order, or prefer to represent them in different light, as marginal people, whose struggles are meaningless and purposeless. Therefore, most of the time Karahaber is the only one recording small scale protests or press declarations, which are mostly chosen to be neglected and left in the dark by mainstream media. Even if some new social movements are becoming ‘popular’ in the society, like environmentalism or ‘light’ feminism, there are some other social issues, on which light is never shed on, topics which “do not have audience or news related with them do not disseminate.”¹¹³

The rights of LGBTTT individuals, violence and discrimination conducted against them are only some of these hot topics. Karahaber members frankly believe that they were able to make these topics ‘visible’ to some degree, as quite a number of videos on this issue are hosted on Karahaber.

I know that at least we made some things visible, starting with transvestites. So we provide visibility for minimum appearance situation of quite a lot of subaltern groups. People who question things, at least on the level of hobby, slowly are becoming able to find images for such action with Internet research.¹¹⁴

Videos *Yaşama Hakkı (Right to Live)*, *Travesti Kırımı (Transvestite Decimation)*, and *Karşı Pencere (Opposite Window)* are videos where the stories of daily violence against transvestites and transsexuals in Turkey, how they are denied even the most basic human right, the right to live, are told. In these stories we eye witness the bruises on face and body of Ece, a transsexual, who attacked by five masked men, threw herself on the motorway and was hit by car,

¹¹³ “seyircisi olmayan ya da bu konularda haberin yayılmadığı mevzular” From an interview with O.İ.

¹¹⁴ “En azından bazı şeyleri görünür kıldığımızı biliyorum, başta travestiler olmak üzere. Yani bilimum subaltern toplulukların minimum görünüş halinin bir tür görünürlüğünü sağlıyoruz. En azından hobi düzeyinde dahi olsa sorgulayan insanlar bu tür eylemin görüntüsüne ulaşmak istiyorlarsa bunu Internet araştırmasıyla yapabilir hale yavaş yavaş geliyorlar.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

trying to save her life; we see the leftover of bruises on the face of Zehra, a transvestite who was thrown nitric acid in her face and had to spend a fortune on series of plastic surgery operations; we listen to the stories of constant beatings of transsexuals and transvestites, conducted in daylight. Without the Karahaber videos our chances to know these stories are quite low, since mainstream media mostly depicts transvestites and transsexuals as violent and disgusting creatures responsible for troubles and moral decay in the society and simply overlooks stories of violence conducted against them.

Not only stories of members of socially excluded groups or new social movements are told by Karahaber. Videos *Elin Altında Bininci Gün (The Thousandth Day under the Hand)*, *Elin Altında Bininci Günden Sonra (After the Thousandth Day under the Hand)*, and *Elin Altında 1231. Gece (1231th Night under the Hand)* tell us the story of legendary struggle led by TAYAD members, who for 1231 days sat under a statue in the Abdi İpekçi park to be in solidarity with the detainees of F-type prisons, who went on a hunger strike in order to protest new prison system.

The scope of Karahaber videos is not limited with political movements either. The pains and struggles of ordinary people in need of their voices to be heard are also filmed by Karahaber. For example the resistance, run by Sinan villagers of Bismil, Diyarbakır against local aga who invaded their land finds itself place on the website, although this struggle was found controversial by Karahaber members, and as one video activist says

For example Sinan villagers are not leftist, in this sense their struggle is a struggle for land, and some people even can define this as a retrogressive struggle. It is not leftist in classical terms, and even besides all that, these people only struggle for their lands and do a lot of wrong things, like going near the mosque and call out to AKP, and

take AKP as a addressee¹¹⁵, really strange, different things are there, compared with other things. These people were conservative in this sense, they were not leftist progressive.¹¹⁶

On the other hand, *Tebligat X (Notification X)* is a video about the destruction of shanties in Sokullu district of Ankara by the municipality officials without even notifying residents about demolitions beforehand, simply putting X marks on the walls of the houses which were selected for demolition. Shanty owners are so desperate to find someone to explain their sorrow and the injustices done to them that it really does not matter to them who they are talking to, they are just happy to see camera to talk to.

Neither TAYAD struggle, nor protests of Sinan villagers, or complaints about the destruction of shanties in Sokullu appeared as news on mainstream media, as they were chosen to be neglected and overlooked. In this sense it is important that these events were visually covered by Karahaber, thus leaving a mark in social history and providing an opportunity to remember them, empowering protesters.

Magnum opus of Karahaber is considered the series of videos about Ankara scavengers and their daily struggle with municipality officials. These videos and their result were referred by all interviewed video activists when asked about emancipatory potentials of video. Spanning over the period of few years, videos

¹¹⁵ Video activist here is referring to the act of protest conducted by Sinan villagers on May 5, 2006 at the Kocatepe Mosque, Ankara. The headquarters of AKP, the ruling party in Turkey, are located just across the mosque. This protest was filmed by Karahaber and is depicted in the video *Toprak Kara Biz Kara İşte Geldik Ankara 7 (Land is Black We are Black Here We are Ankara 7)*

¹¹⁶ “Sinanköylüler mesela solcu değiller, o anlamda onların verdikleri mücadele toprak mücadelesi, hatta başkaları tarafından biraz geri bir mücadele olarak da nitelendirilebilir. Yani klasik solcu bir şey değil, hatta bütün bunların dışında, adamlar sadece toprakları için mücadele ediyorlar ve yanlış şeyler de yapıyorlar, caminin oraya çıkıp ordan AKPy'e seslenme ve AKPy'i muhatap almaları, gerçekten garip, diğer şeylere göre farklı şeyler var orda. Yani muhazakarlar o anlamda insanlar, solcu ilerici bir şey değillerdi.” From an interview with T.B.

show how scavengers, who are mostly of Kurdish origin from Hakkari, forced to leave their hometown after their villages were burnt down by Turkish military due to armed conflict with the members of PKK in the region, are constantly physically abused and beaten by two rival municipalities of Ankara, Metropolitan Municipality and Çankaya Municipality, as the financial gain from waste paper recycling became more and more profitable due to European Union standards on paper recycling. Videos show scavengers' gain of class consciousness, how they try to run their struggle for 'garbage' with the means of association they create in the process and the magazine *Katık* they start to publish. But the real empowerment of scavengers occurred after they learned how to use camera and editing and started using the medium in their own ways. When one night municipality workers attacked their warehouses scavengers filmed all the events by themselves, edited it and turned into a successful weapon. Immediately after the video was broadcasted on Hayat TV, an alternative small scale television station, run by the members of Emeğin Partisi (EMEP), Marxist party with the agenda of running revolutionary struggle on the principles of Enver Xoca, Çankaya municipality stepped back and offered scavengers jobs as a 'environment volunteers'. This example shows that when used effectively video camera can turn into a powerful weapon in life struggle, providing empowerment for otherwise powerless people.

As noted above, all of these videos appear only in the chronological order on the website, without any categorization at all. This chaotic structure of the Karahaber website, and especially of the *Duymadım* section, is cited as the forte of the website by group members, since as the person has to scroll down to find the video of particular interest, videos of other social movements can also be noticed and seen. In this way political activists are provided awareness for other movements and techniques of opposition. It is interesting to note that videos of movements, which would never get together on any other platform due to their differentiations in political orientation and methods of resistance, coexist side by

side in the *Duymadım* section of the website, as for example videos on anti-militarist movement and videos on political movements that do not reject violence-based methods of opposition, armed struggle included. Especially important in this sense are videos on gay-lesbian and transvestite movements, since homophobia and transphobia are unfortunately still quite widespread among more traditional oppositional political movements. At this point it is good to remember that

...if every form of oppression has its own defensive suspicions, all the movements in resistance to humiliation and inequality also discover their own wisdoms. We require a socialist movement in which there is freedom for these differences and nurture for these visions. This means that in the making of socialism people can develop positively their own strengths and find ways of communicating to one another what we have gained. (Rowbotham, 1981, as cited in Downing, 2001, pp. 18-9)

Rowbotham, writing from libertarian Marxist feminist perspective echoes on importance of sharing perceptively the gamut of issues plaguing social life, as experienced from numerous vantage points, and sharing their possible solutions. Resistance, in her perception requires “dialogue across the varying sectors - by gender; by race, ethnicity, and nationality; by age; by occupational grouping - to take effective shape.” (Downing, 2001, p. 19) Even if Karahaber does not have a concept of total revolution in mind, the opportunity provided for social movements to think about problems of each other is an important one.

However, the idea of placing all activist videos in the same place without categorizing them, hoping that all social movements will get aware of each other does not look to have worked. Political scene of Turkey is still fragmented, full with small and isolated political groups and movements, who share a lot in common but still does not combine their energies for more effective struggle. But this situation is quite understandable taken into consideration that Karahaber

itself is fragmented inside, full with prolonged strives among its members and disorganized website structure is not a cause, it is just a consequence, as the actual reason for pastiche-like website is the fact that each member is following his own agenda.

The reason for that (that website is so fragmented) is due to members' following different movements. We did not employ the notion of reporter, for example my own interest was in feminine issues and conscious objection, I was going to their demonstrations and shooting them. Because of that everyone had his own issue, when put side by side it looked like a little bit different from each other. We wanted it to be that way, since we were enjoying it that way. On one side people were sitting up all night in Abdi İpekçi, hunger strike was going on, on other side there was Kaos GL, things that normally would not be together, but it was something like actually we are all in the same place. So when he opens website to look at his video, he will see others too. Will he look or not, we do not know.¹¹⁷

Due to members' own agendas, except for very few, Karahaber videos are produced individually or in groups of two or three at most. This situation is explained as

We are not reporters, we do not gather at the beginning of each month that these and that demonstrations are going to be conducted, we have to follow them in order to understand the agenda of Turkey, this kind of situation never happened. We are already activists, the only reason we are at that demonstration is not to film, we are already attending it. And when we go, we record. No one has reporter instinct in them, there only are issues we are personally interested in.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ “Ayrı ayrı olmasının sebebi farklı insanlar farklı şeyleri takip ediyorlardı, yani biz muhabir şeyini işletmedik, yani benim ilgilendiğim mesela kadın mevzuları vardı, vicdani ret vardı, ben o eyleme gidiyordum ve onu çekiyordum, o yüzden herkesin takip ettiği bir mevzu vardı, bunları alt alta koyduğun zaman biraz birbirinden farklı görünüyordu, biz de böyle bir şey istiyorduk, çünkü böyle keyif alıyorduk. Bir yandan Abdi İpekçide sabahlanıyor, açlık grevi sürüyor, bir yandan Kaos GL, normalde hani birarada olmayacak şeylerin, ama aslında aynı yerdeyiz gibi bir şeydi yani. Yani kendi videosuna bakmak için sayfayı açtığında diğerlerini de görecektir. Bakar mı bakmaz mı bilmiyoruz.” From an interview with T.B.

¹¹⁸ “Biz muhabir değiliz, her ay başı toplantı yapıp, şu şu eylemler yapılacak, onları takip etmeliyiz Türkiye'nin nabzını tutmak için, falan, hiç böyle şeyler olmadı. Biz zaten eylemciyiz,

This disinterest in collaboration and cooperation naturally reflects itself on the editing of the videos too, as videos are also edited mostly individually and rarely anyone outside of Karahaber participates in the video editing process, thus further diminishing the empowering potential of video activism.

There has been some participation of the protesters in the editing. It is not always like that, but still it happens. But it only happens because of coincidences. Or sometimes we do editing together with some other person, with whom we have done filming together.¹¹⁹

Karahaber members are unkeen about collective editing to such degree that O.İ. even has an article on the subject, named *Kolektif Kurgu; Bir Baş Ağrısı* (*Collective Editing; A Headache*), where he argues that collective editing is an ‘impossible’ process.¹²⁰ This situation is in direct contradiction with the community video approach of video activism, where encouraging people being filmed to participate in the process of video making is even more important than the video output itself.

So it should be no wonder that in all years of its existing, Karahaber group was not successful in expanding its membership base. The only rationale for this situation seems to be the attitude of Karahaber members, their unwillingness in joining of too much people to the group. On the contrary Karahaber members strongly emphasize that current structural situation of Karahaber, where all members know each other for years, is preferred by them. There is a prevailing

bizim o eylemde var olma sebebimiz çekim yapmak değil sadece biz zaten o eyleme gidiyoruz. Gittiğimizde de çekiyoruz. Öyle bir muhabirlik dürtüsü yok kimsenin üzerinde, kendi ilgilendiğimiz mevzular var sadece.” From an interview with Ö.S.

¹¹⁹ “Montaja eylemcilerden katılanlar oldu. Sürekli böyle değil, ama olduğu oluyor. Ama bu biraz denk geldiği için oluyor. Ya da çekimi beraber yaptığımız biriyle beaber montajladığımız oluyor.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

¹²⁰ Article can be reached at <http://www.karahaber.org/bilmiyorum/kolektifkurgu.html>

fear among members that going beyond organic ties will result in an impersonal group of people united only by some abstract structure above them. They say that due to that “we did not include people from outside we do not know, people with whom we do not have political union.”¹²¹ However

From a political point of view, training others to use a camcorder is probably the most important thing a video activist can do. Why? Because there is so much in society that needs video support and yet there are not nearly enough video activists around to provide it. And training does not require a high level of skill. Anyone, with a bit of experience, can show someone else at least how to operate a camcorder. From there it is mostly down to practice.

And there’s another reason. What happens if a video activist leaves an area to go and work somewhere else? Who is going to carry on their responsibilities? The knowledge needs to be reproduced to a new generation of radical video activists. Similarly, what if a video activist can’t stay in a community 24 hours a day, and something needs to be recorded but no one knows when it’s going to happen? The person who will be there needs training to be able to capture the event when it does take place. (Harding, 2001, p. 217)

Another possible reason for ineffectiveness of Karahaber to marshall wide spread conduct of video activism is the fact that most of the videos produced by Karahaber can be considered having video art style and tendencies - even ones that show protests, a common quality of early video activist videos. May be it was due to this that quite a lot of video makers uploaded their video works to the *Görmedim* section of the website, but chose not to involve with the Karahaber itself, as they also were already practicing video art and thus did not needed to accompany their conduct with the claims of video activism. The video art style of most of Karahaber’s videos is not considered as problem by Karahaber members. On the contrary, Karahaber activists have quite political stance about the involvement of art and politics

¹²¹ “... çok dışardan tanımadığımız, politik birliktelik sağlamadığımız birilerini de dahil etmedik.” From an interview with O.İ.

I do not think that such thing as an art which is not political exists. Art always has political stance, whether the artist is aware of it or not, whether he is involved with such idea or not. Video, made for oneself only does not exist. Video, especially activist video, is always made to be shown to people, so I do not do anything special in this regard, any video work, video art included, is activist in itself. Or, in the same way, any activist video is also a work of art.¹²²

This kind of stance is also seen about the usage of specific cadres in framing of videos. Video activists claim that they do not care about framing in their videos however framing is an important aspect for video to be able to serve as a document.

Framing is not important at all. For example if you are trying to document police violence, you have to properly record the touch of bludgeon to the body if it going to serve as a document. Except for this it is really not important where camera looks or what it does besides the fact that it exists in the protest. It is important that camera is there. There is no hierarchy of values between video images. Even the most muddy images, images that you will think are not worth of anything, may turn out invaluable in video.¹²³

Karahaber members say that except for very seldom screenings the only distribution method of Karahaber is through its website, which generates very

¹²² “Politik olmayan sanat olduğunu zannetmiyorum. Sanatın her zaman böyle bir politik duruşu mevcut, sanatçısı farkında olsun veya olmasın, böyle bir niyete dahil olsun ya da olmasın. Hani, kendin için yaptığın bir video yok, bu daha çok, özellikle activist video insanlara göstermek için yapılan bir şey. Özel bir şey yapmıyorum yani, herhangi bir video işi, art video işi de yani eylemcidir. Ya da herhangi bir activist videosu da sanat eserine tekabül eder.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

¹²³ “Kadrajın bir önemi yok. Mesela polis şiddetini belgeliyorsan, o copun o bedene temasını iyi bir şekilde kaydetmek zorundasın belgeyse bu. Onun dışında bir eylem içerisinde kameranın orda bulunması dışında kameranın nereye baktığının, ne yaptığının bir önemi yok. Kameranın orda bulunması önemli. Görüntüler arasında bir değerler hiyerarşisi yok. Bir video içerisinde en çamur görüntüler dahi, beş para etmez olduğu düşünülecek görüntüler dahi hakikaten çok değerli yer alabilirler.” From an interview with Ö.S.

low traffic¹²⁴. It seems that the only people who watch Karahaber videos are the video activists and protesters themselves. However

A video is only as powerful as its ability to touch the people that watch it, to connect them to the experience of the people portrayed in the film, and to motivate them to get involved to make a difference. (Caldwell, 2005, pp. 2-3)

Limiting the dissemination of videos with Internet, Karahaber further diminishes emancipatory effects of video activism, creating a contradiction with the guerilla television approach too, where emphasis is on disseminating content for maximum available audience. Distributing protest videos as widely as possible is one of the most important issues in the conduct of video activism, as

There is no single public sphere and because no single medium is perfect, agency in the public sphere requires many people using many technologies. No single mechanism can fully support deliberation among publics. (Steiner, 2005, as cited in Howley, 2007, p. 357)

It is obvious that Karahaber is not employing neither community video nor guerilla television approaches of video activism, the practices video activists all around the world believe are true sources of empowerment through video. The way Karahaber produces and disseminates its videos very much reminds of early times of video activism, when fascinated with the possibilities of newly introduced video device, and interconnected with video art, activists were mainly experimenting with their videos and actually did not gave too much thought about possible hazardous effects of such activism. This type of video activism created a cloud of suspicion and scepticism towards it, continuing to

¹²⁴ According to Alexa, Internet traffic statistics provider, Karahaber's website has a worldwide ranking of 13,737,389th most traffic generating website, a standing which substitutes for less than 2,000 visitors per year given the fact that Karahaber website hosts video files, which create a big bandwidth usage

last for a very long time, as for example in 1995, in Courthouse, the squatted region of Brighton, England, people gathered to decide whether to invite video activists to their future activities and campaign events or not, where the arguments against were

- Footage could be taken by the police and used to incriminate others at the action.
 - There are now too many people with camcorders and not enough activists.
 - Selling the footage to television will sensationalise and distort the action.
 - The police have security camcorders so we don't know who's who anymore.
 - People are using videos to advance themselves not campaigns.
- (Harding, 2001, pp. 14-5)

These arguments against video activism can be extended to Karahaber's videos too, since most of the Karahaber videos are recorded within the crowd, and they are videos which clearly show all details of the protest and very often include full frontal face recordings, thus creating surveillative situation.

In this scope, Karahaber members have controversial views about recording protesters and their actions. Some of the members, who have witnessed a lot of demonstrations and protests, ending with clashes with police forces, sometimes violent ones, have developed a very strong ethics about filming process

If you want to record a bunch of people conducting demonstration, you can not hold your camera into their faces. So first of all, one of our principles, one of our working principles is that we do not film faces, if done we do not publish them. In order to show anger of protester I do not have to give his mouth and face while screaming. His fist raised in the air, or his hands, applauding, or the feet walking on the road can provide you the images to give the same anger.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ "Bir eylemde bulunan bir insan topluluğunu eğer çekmeye çalışırsan kameranı o insanların yüzlerine doğru tutamazsın. Yani öncelikle bizim ilkelerimizden bir tanesi, işleyen

However when looked at videos, controversies with the abovementioned statement both in present and past are available. One of such controversial videos is *27-28-29 Haziran 2004 NATO İstanbul (27-28-29 June 2004 NATO İstanbul)*, one of the videos shot by VideA prior to the launch of Karahaber during the 2004 NATO Istanbul summit. This video employs in itself few important aspects at once. First of them is the fact that the video clearly depicts protesters throwing stones at the police, when there is no police cameras around, VideA's cameras being the only ones recording the event. Second one is that one of the VideA members was taken into custody during this protest, and all his tapes were confiscated. As abovementioned, the ethics of preparing and editing video activist video is based on the notion of not showing faces of the protesters, and cutting them out, especially if protesters do not want to be filmed. However this situation, where video activist was taken into custody and tapes confiscated, clearly shows that matter of security of protesters should never be left for editing, instead faces should not be filmed right from the beginning. Questions asked about the direct showing of faces during the NATO protest made activists realize the situation and reconsider their stance

Yes, we did that at NATO, faces are clear and open. Yes, it actually needs to be thought about, because stones are being thrown at the police, and there are no police cameras around, only we are. In usual protest videos there is always a police camera, there is no problem with it, but during the things which happened at that NATO summit, and it actually was an European protest, no one actually was chased after the events, we were there before the police and showed faces, this needs to be discussed, but at that time it did not occurred as a problem for us.¹²⁶

ilkelerimizden bir tanesi yüz kaydı almayız, yüz kaydı alsak bile yüz kaydı yayınlamayız, bir eylemcinin nasıl bağırdığını ağzını ve yüz ifadesini vermek zorunda değilim onun öfkesini ifade etmek için. Yani havaya kalkan bir yumruğu ya da alkışlayan elleri ya da yolda yürüyen adımları aynı öfkeyi ifade edebilecek imajlar sağlayabilir.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

¹²⁶ “NATODA öyle bir şey yaptık biz, evet yüzler açık. Evet bunun üzerine biraz düşünmek gerekiyor aslında çünkü orada polise taş atılıyor falan, ve bir polis kamerası yok ortalıkta ve biz

This example clearly shows that video activism bears in itself a great danger of unintentionally serving as a perfect source of providing clear face shots from close distance to the police forces. And the real problem is not only the videos posted on the Internet. The real danger lies within the unedited, un-captured raw video tapes shot during the demonstration or protest. Even if these tapes theoretically can be reused and rewritten infinite times, due to their low prices tapes are mostly stored somewhere in the homes of video activists, creating an enormous archive of great value to law enforcement agencies and thus bearing within themselves surveillative potential.

Further content analysis conducted on Karahaber videos reveals that there are actually quite a lot of videos where faces and actions of protesters are fully shown in the situations where they throw rocks at the police or shout out illegal slogans. And even if at the exact point of clashes their faces tried to be cut out in some videos, in the beginning of video when everything is calm they are fully shown, thus making them very easy to be identified.¹²⁷

However video activists disagree with that their videos may be source of surveillance

We know people we are filming, we are already involved in the protests, and actually the only ones who watch these videos are the protesters themselves, and never any complaints were received. In surveillance, when police and secret cameras are filming you, there is

varız aslında. Normal eylem videosunda, orada zaten polis kamerası var onunla bir derdin yok, ama o NATO zirvesi sırasında olan şeylerde, ki o da aslında bir Avrupa eylemiydi, kimsenin de peşine de düşmediler aslında, polisten daha önce ordaydık ve yüz gösterdik, bu tartışılması gereken bir şey, ama o zaman bizim için sorun gibi gelmemişti.” From an interview with T.B.

¹²⁷ Although there are a lot, some examples of such videos are *Panik Yok (No Need for Panic)*, *Taksim Taksim (Taksim Taksim)*, *Karakola Ismarladım (I Ordered from the Police Office)* and *Kürtler İmralı'ya Yürüyor: Bursa/İnegöl Yolu (Kurds are Marching towards Imralı: Bursa/Inegöl Road)*

a situation where you can not interfere. If I am a press reporter and photograph you during the protest and then publish it in the newspaper, you can not interfere with this one either. But in our case there is a situation where people are saying “after the protest we will watch it in the evening”, where everyone knows, everyone watches and shows video to each other. I think in this situation there is no surveillance, the kind you can not interfere in.¹²⁸

Nevertheless some of the Karahaber activists are quite well aware about possible connection between video activism and surveillance, and yet they also argue that there is no room for fear.

We can use images to better explain situation, but after film leaves you, you can no longer control it, everyone can watch it, everyone can make any comment on it as they like, police can also watch, in fact police certainly checks our website. But since there is a situation where we film only people we have organic ties with, and there is no situation of filming people we do not know, and also we never put into video anyone who said us “do not film me”, and there have been such people, no need for unnecessary fear.¹²⁹

However there are also activists who are very careful and cautious in the matters of filming faces, to the degree that

I try to immediately destroy the tapes of any finished edit by recording something else on them. And even if I kept very few tapes

¹²⁸ “Çektiklerimizi tanıyoruz, eylemlerde zaten bulunuyoruz, biz videoyu internete koyduğumuz zaman izleyenler de onlar oluyor, ve hiç şikayet gelmedi. Surveillance’ta şöyle bir durum var, polisin çektikleri ve gizli kameralarda, sen buna müdahale edemezsin. Ben bir basın muhabiri olsam, eylemdeki bir fotoğrafını çeksem gazeteye koysam, buna da müdahale edemezsin, ama bizde mesela “eylemden sonra akşama izleriz” muhabbeti dönen ve herkesin haberdar olduğu, herkesin izlediği, birbirine gösterdiği bir ortam var. Bu durumda tam o tanımlanan müdahale edemedigin surveillance durumu yok, bence.” From an interview with T.B.

¹²⁹ “Durumu daha hakkıyla anlatabilmek için görüntüyü kullanabiliyoruz ama, film senden çıktıktan sonra kontrol edemiyorsun, herkes bakar, istediği yorumu yapar, polis de bakar, polis bizim sayfaya bakıyordur mutlaka zaten. Ama hani bizim biraz daha organik bir ilişki kurup tanımadığımız eylem durumu olmadığı için, bir de bizi çekme diyen adamın hiç birini koymamışızdır, öyle insanlar da oldu, gereksiz korkuya luzüm yok.” From an interview with Ö.Ö.

due to the moral value they mean to me, I hid them in such places, that even my own mother will not be able to find them in a life time.¹³⁰

Another very interesting aspect regarding the surveillance issue was mentioned by A.Ş. during interview. He stated that in the early beginnings of Karahaber

Nearly for a month we read on surveillance, and later on decided that-and this decision also had effect our own opinions-yes, everywhere is being watched, but there are some blind spots in the system, so you have to live without fear, without falling into paranoia.¹³¹

However we should not forget that surveillance systems are not one sided, just as there is no single way of providing empowerment. In the previous chapters we have seen that, as argued by Mathiesen, synoptic tendencies play an important role in the proliferation of surveillance systems and most commonly waking up of synoptic urge is done through television and Reality shows. Quite a lot of videos of Karahaber, especially videos done on feminist groups, depict the events being filmed in carnivalesque atmosphere, more like game rather than ‘protest’. One good example for such videos is *Ses Çıkar (Make Sound)*, depicting March 8, 2007 protests. Video starts with the close-ups on individual faces of protesters, who are in the process of wearing lipsticks before start of the protest. Enriched with fast techno music in the background, video shows details of conducted protest, and after the end of the protest follows protesters to bar, where they go to celebrate ‘successful’ protest. Using jump-cuts, close-ups, and fast edits video presents the whole protest as an entertaining and easy-to-watch

¹³⁰ “Üzerlerine başka birşeyler çekerek kurgusu biten kasetleri mutlaka yok etmeye çalışırım. Benim için ifade ettikleri manevi değerden bazı kasetleri silmedim, ama onları da öyle yerlere sakladım ki, kendi annem bile hayatta bulamaz.” From an interview with E.S.

¹³¹ “Surveillance üstüne bir ay nerdeyse okumuştuk, şöyle bir karar çıkarmıştık, kendi görüşlerimizi de etkileyen, kör noktalar var, heryer izleniyor, korkmadan paranoyaya düşmeden yaşayacaksınız.” From an interview with A.Ş.

spectacle, just like the kind defined by Debord as “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.” (Debord, 1994, p. 12)

Videos on feminist groups are not the only ones where protests and protesters are presented in spectacular ways. When looked at the distribution of videos in the *Duymadım* section of the website, we can see that majority of videos available there are mainly spectacular representations, including very close facial shots, thus acting as surveillative agents. For example, nearly all of videos done on antimilitarist movement are in this scope, just like the videos of LGBTTT movement. All of these videos are mostly funny, spectacular, easy-to-watch videos, where a little is left in mind after viewing them, thus leaving no space for any kind of empowerment. Nevertheless, at this point we also have to add that way the filmed protests are conducted is also spectacular, more reminding of ‘carnival’ rather than serious political protest. For example, all 3 Militarizm protests¹³² were conducted in such way by antimilitarist protesters. Yet, being filmed and presented in this way, these groups are kind of familiarized with being filmed, thus unintentionally being prepared to be watched by surveillance systems, just like inside of Panopticon, where “a state of conscious and permanent visibility” assures “the automatic functioning of power.” (Foucault, 1979, p. 201)

We can easily end up at such conclusion when we hear words of Ö.S. that

Sometimes due to unavailability of time or some other reasons I was not able to go to some of actions. Especially some women groups

¹³² Militarizm was annual antimilitarist protest activity, conducted for three years by antimilitarist movement in Turkey. Just like ordinary tourists, antimilitarists were visiting important military structures and symbols of the city activity conducted in, Istanbul in 2004, Izmir in 2005 and Ankara in 2006, along side protesting militarization. Karahaber filmed all 3 Militarizms, and videos are available under names *Militurizm 01*, *Militurizm İki* (*Militurizm Two*), *Militurizm Üç* (*Militurizm Three*)

sulked and questioned me why I did not come to action and filmed them.¹³³

Karahaber members note that for a long time they tried to encourage social movements to pick up cameras and record their own struggles themselves. This tried to be done both through some organized workshops and the personal relations with movements. While very few of groups started to use their own video cameras, most of the political groups are not very eager or enthusiastic about usage of video.

We tried to make groups buy themselves cameras but since there was no experience in using active visual material called video some time needed to pass before they realized how valuable it is. Only after that you can make them buy camera, but for example now Kaos GL is making its own shootings. For a long time we did recordings for them. Situation was in the same way with some women groups too. After I entered them I managed to get them use their own cameras which were at their homes. At Kırkörük for example this happened like that, but in general group did not tried to raise money among itself to buy camera... We did it as much as we could.¹³⁴

However we should note that only trying shall not be enough, as the activist media, and Karahaber in this sense can be defined as one, has important responsibilities towards society. As Andors is noting

An activist media has to be connected to groups that are actively organizing so that they are well informed about political events and

¹³³ “Bazen zamansızlıktan veya başka sebeplerden bazı eylemlere gitmediğim oldu. Özellikle kadın gruplardan niye eyleme gelmedin, bizi çekmedin diye küsmeler, sorgumalar oldu.” From an interview with Ö.S.

¹³⁴ “Biz gruplara kamera aldırılmaya çalıştık, ama zaten video dediğimiz o hareketli görsel malzemeyi kullanma konusunda bir deneyim olmadığı için ortamda onun kıymetli bir şey olduğunu anlamaları için biraz vakit geçiyor. Sonraki aşamada ancak kamera aldrabiliyorsun, ama mesela Kaos şu anda kendi çekimlerini kendisi yapıyor. Biz uzun bir süre onlara yaptık. Aynı şekilde bazı kadın örgütlerinde de oldu. Ben girdiğimde evdeki kameraları alıp işleme sokmayı başardım, oldu. Kırkörükte mesela öyle bir şey olmuştu, ama genel olarak örgüt arasında para toplayıp almadı... Yapabildiğimiz kadar yaptık.” From an interview with T.B.

know what to go out and document. These events are usually ignored by the mainstream media, so that we are in fact providing an accurate and invaluable record of social history. An activist media must know how to hook people up with one another and be able to mobilize people to get out on the streets. (Andors, 1996, *The Need to Organize: Activist Media Essential in the Struggle* section, para. 1)

From the panorama of the conduct of video activism by Karahaber we can easily arrive at a dilemma. What kind of empowerment is this, when only the people, who need their voices be heard are hearing them back, and the videos of oppressed, underprivileged and underrepresented are only watched by themselves?¹³⁵ It looks like that video activism conducted by Karahaber is unintentionally done with the notion of ‘video for video’, video for video’s sake. At this point it is good to remember Burnett and his notes.

Empowerment begins with the assumption that something is missing either in the community or in the people’s lives. The intervention of the videomakers, accompanied by the use of the medium on the part of ‘ordinary’ people, supposedly leads to shifts in identity and further claims of self determination... these claims must be examined very carefully if we are to avoid idealizing video and its effects. (Burnett, 1995, as cited in Gadihoke, 2003, p. 281)

This is probably the reason that video filmed by scavengers themselves of how municipality officials tried to burn down their warehouses was never sent to Karahaber by them. Instead, scavengers sent it to an institution, Hayat TV, which is also very small in scale, but at least have much more concrete political agenda in their mind. Scavengers quickly realized the deadlocks of conducting activism only on the level of Internet. Unlike Karahaber members, for whom video device and the ‘struggle’ they conduct is more like ‘game’, scavengers, the real underrepresented and oppressed people, who simply do not have time for such games, chose to integrate themselves into political struggle with much

¹³⁵ At this point we have to remember that not everyone has access to the Internet, and that there exists a digital divide, but this topic is way out of the scope of this thesis, so debate is ended here

higher class consciousness. As the Karahaber video *Atık Kağıt İşçileri (Scavengers)* shows, scavengers participate in the May 1 demonstrations with the posters “Do Not Throw Capitalism into the Garbage of History It is Worthless” (Kapitalizmi Tarihin Çöplüğüne Atmayın Beş Para Etmez). It also should be noted that according to Karahaber’s webmaster T.B. the videos which received maximum viewing are videos of protests conducted by TAYAD members.

The dilemmas of Karahaber were tried to be spoken out loudly by some of its members but their individual objections remained unheard

When a person tries to answer questions he asks to himself about the things he is doing, answers like ‘I wanted, so I did it, it happened’ can be understood, even if they are an escape, they even may be good. But a group, especially when it needs an organization due to its production, has to answer these questions differently, has to discuss them. (Karahaber, 2006, m.ali section, para. 8)¹³⁶

Inability of Karahaber to successfully discuss these problems and try to break out of ‘sacred chamber’ its members formed around Karahaber, lead to the situation where no new videos have been uploaded to Karahaber since 2008. Karahaber members say that they continue to record protests, but just do not put it on the website anymore

Everyone continues to follow issues they were usually interested in, we just do not put them on Karahaber website. In this sense, Karahaber may have ended a little bit. Videos are not uploaded anywhere. Documentary films are being shot, sent to festivals, screened, or some other works, but we are not doing news related stuff.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Original text is in Turkish. Translation belongs to author

¹³⁷ “Herkes kendisinin normalde takip ettiği mevzuları takip etmeye devam ediyor, sadece Karahaber sitesine taşımıyoruz. Karahaber o anlamda biraz bitmiş olabilir yani. Şu an videolar

4.5. Pros & Cons: Preliminary Remarks for the Conclusion

In the early stages of video practicing, right after the introduction of first commercial video device to consumer market, video activists, fascinated with the video device and its possibilities didn't give too much thought about possible hazardous effects of the video activism, conducted without consciousness. In this way they unintentionally contributed a great deal into strengthening already existing hegemony of television, which ironically they were trying to confront and criticize. As a first major contribution, they created the whole range of equipment and a set of special effects for distortion of video and sound signals, techniques, some of which are still used to create television effects on a range of televisual products, especially music videos. But their most disastrous and eerie contribution was pioneering reality television, emotional monster of modern television scene, which made the synoptic potential of television even more widespread. Early video practitioners' intentions were very naïve, they believed that by showing ordinary side of life with its ordinary people, pains and struggle, spiced a little bit more with special uses of camera and novel editing techniques, they will be able to provide a sharp critique of television, which at those times was considered highly elitist and was not giving much space to ordinary citizens. Early video activists sincerely believed that following this way they can turn around the world of television, reverse its dominating gaze and bring television closer to public. But transformative power of capitalism which, if necessary, fully embraces even the forms which were created in opposition to it, like in the case with punk music or video art, never should be underestimated and as video activists were realizing their mistakes a great deal of irreversible damage was already done since quickly realizing economic benefits Reality TV brings into the world of televising, commercial television fully embraced this form, creating

bir yere yüklenmiyor... Belgesel çekiliyor, festivallere de gönderiliyor, gösterimleri de yapıyor, ya da başka tür işler, ama habere yönelik işler yapmıyoruz.” From an interview with T.B.

more and more bizarre examples of the genre, the unthinkable zenith reached with *Big Brother*. However, after learning from their mistakes, video activists were able to conduct the practice of video activism in much more conscious way. Realizing that content of the videos sometimes matters even more than activism itself they became much more interconnected with other activist movements and all together started to force the cracks of hegemonic bloc wall, like for example aware of the importance of ownership of production tools, creating the whole range of free video editing software applications by siding with free software movement.

Activist movements in developing countries such as Turkey, as well as quite a lot of other circles of society, usually copy techniques and methods developed in Western countries, and simply try to reflect them on their own countries. However, quite frequently these methods turn out to be outdated and even not applicable at all, creating totally different result as not being able to cope with the realities of the country.¹³⁸ In this sense, claims of Karahaber activists about nature of the video devices, claims such as ‘video is an active device by its own nature’ and ‘video is the eye of the activist’, clearly show their fascination with the video device. It looks like Karahaber members felled for mistake of first generation video activists, fascination with the potentials and possibilities of the video without giving too much thought about hazards it can cause, the deleterious dazzle heavily paid for. In the same manner neither community video, where conduct is focused more on process rather than product, nor guerilla television approach, conduct putting emphasis on disseminating content for maximum available audience, methods widely practiced among video activists in other countries after the first video generation, were employed by Karahaber, except for one example of scavengers, which truly served as a source of empowerment in the context of the study. It looks like Karahaber positions its

¹³⁸ The failure of imported discourses is the destiny especially of quite a number of new social movements, which simply are too disconnected with the realities and conjuncture of Turkey

video activism sphere as a closed circle, a ‘sacred chamber’, which does not easily allow new comers inside, but at the same time does not try to make its production available for broader audience, although probably the most essential task of any kind of activism is to recruit new members and to wide spread its conduct and influence. There seems to be lack of purpose in Karahaber when conducting video activism, however as Harding warns: “Without purpose there is no strategy. Without strategy there is no social change. Without social change there is no video activism.” (Harding, 2001, p. 15) This situation places Karahaber’s video activism practice in really unique place among its global counterparts.

Except for very rare screenings at highly elitist venues, such as universities, film festivals and EU-funded cultural centers like KozaVisual, the only medium employed by Karahaber to distribute its videos is Internet, through its website <http://www.karahaber.org>. However website generates very little attraction and it seems like practically no one watches videos posted there, situation which is not considered as a problem by Karahaber. It looks like a very small number of people are aware of existence of website and Karahaber¹³⁹, and this very limited recognition is used by Karahaber as excuse when asked about another very problematic issue related with its conduct of video activism, the looseness in revealing full face disclosures of the protesters and depictions of protesters during illegal acts. Karahaber members are trying to justify themselves in the matter of showing faces of protesters by emphasizing the importance of ‘open politics’ and claiming that no complaints were received. And even if some of the activists follow the ethic of cutting scenes showing full frontal faces from their videos, majority of the videos on the website include them. And even videos, from which faces were cut during the process of montage, still exist as a raw un-

¹³⁹ Karahaber is quite well known in anarchist, feminist and gay-lesbian circles of Ankara, especially at METU, but these circles themselves are very closed and small in number

captured footage on the video tapes, creating the situation of danger. It is obvious that done this way, Karahaber's video activist conduct bears within itself a great danger of serving as a free-of-charge documentation for the police forces in the details police can only dream for.

Returning back to the problem of low audience of the website, we can dare then to ask the question of particular importance in this sense: if no one is watching them, what help does the videos of Karahaber provide? It looks like that no change at all is caused by the Karahaber's conduct of video activism, since transvestites and transsexuals are still continued to be discriminated and abused and not given right to live, conscientious objectors are still seen as traitors, women are still men's 'honor' and isolation continues to kill, and there are still no news related with them available to mass audience.¹⁴⁰ It also seems like the hope of Karahaber that different political and social movements will come closer after seeing videos of each other in the pastiche-like *Duymadım* section of Karahaber's website, a situation mainly created by Karahaber's own inner fragmentation, does not seem to work as the political opposition scene in Turkey is still cluttered and in pieces. It will be not wrong to argue then that the path followed by Karahaber seems to be inefficient and does not provide any future perspective on empowerment of people, since in the country where physical confrontations with the representatives of police, military, and security agencies are frequent, and military is the most trusted institution, conducting activist practice only through video and Internet is a high-risk gamble, at some points even meaningless one, since empowerment should not be left only into the cold hands of technology.

¹⁴⁰ Author is referring to the names of dossiers prepared by Karahaber, and of course is aware that video activism can not be expected to solve all the abovementioned problems. The emphasize of question is on the fact that all the mentioned abuses and discriminations continue to exist without being revealed to the major public

Turkish society is usually referred to as ‘memoryless’ one, that it only lives the history it was and is dictated to. But this specific situation of Turkey can be understood taken into consideration that opposition culture in Turkey was constantly diminished and undermined by frequent military interventions, quietus done by September 12, 1980 military coup. Oppressive military regime, afraid of political conditions of the period before it, tried to change the historical realities and created an apolitic culture, where political history, especially of left, was tried to be belittled. In this sense, it is important to have visual documents of ‘reality’ to be able to rewrite the history when necessary, and to contribute into remembering processes of society, to make a mark in the social memory. In this scope, video bears in itself a potential to provide a sphere where dominant representations can be challenged, and to create a space for subject positions to be transformed and history, this constantly manipulated aimless and subjectless process, to be written and shaped by its subjects, not by rulers of society. Karahaber’s filming of events and protests, which does not have chance to appear on mainstream media channels or are introduced in different light and context, is an important conduct in this sense. However, even this very important function of the video device is deleteriously used by Karahaber, since by the way they film and later on distribute videos on a very limited scale, only through its website, Karahaber diminishes empowering potential of video, and on the contrary creates very dangerous surveillative situation, as it familiarizes protesting groups with being filmed.

The surveillative properties of Karahaber videos fully showing faces and acts of protesters were already talked about, but there is another very important aspect in need to be mentioned. Study already provided answers of Karahaber activists to questions about hidden surveillance in their videos. However, one important point they have not realized is that surveillance systems are not one sided, just as there is no single way of empowerment. The way Karahaber films protests and later on edits them, excluding participation of actual protesters in the processes,

makes protesting groups familiarize being filmed, thus unintentionally preparing them to be watched by surveillance systems. Videos of Karahaber, just like Reality TV shows, create desire of 'to be seen', desire to see oneself on the screen, desire which we believe is closely related with the '15 minutes of fame' everyone tempts to. In this way, Karahaber greatly contributes to synoptic urge, by waking up voyeuristic tendencies, as it provides space for social movements to be watched and later on to spectacularly watch themselves on the website, which is nearly unknown except for Karahaber members and protesters themselves. In this sense Karahaber is unintentionally reinforcing the surveillance/spectacle society we live in, and even worse, in some way pushes social movements into the state of flanerier by not forcing them to learn operating video devices, but instead continuing to film for them. An old proverb comes into mind at this point, 'It is more important to teach how to catch fish, not to provide fish.' This state of flanerier causes already troubled discourse of new social movements to worsen even more, as already marginal becomes even more marginal, marginal of marginal in this sense, just like Debord was warning

Images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever. Apprehended in a *partial* way, reality unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation. The tendency toward the specialization of images-of-the-world finds its highest expression in the world of autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself. The spectacle in its generality is a concrete inversion of life, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life. (Debord, 1994, p. 12)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Bilirim,
hele bir düřmeyegör hasretin hâlisine,
hele bir de tam okka dört yüz dirhemse yürek,
yolu yok, Don Kiřot'um benim, yolu yok,
yeldeğirmenleriyle dövüşülecek.*
Nazım Hikmet, "Don Kiřot"

This thesis is an effort to understand and explain the conduct of video activism practiced by Karahaber, the only video activist collective available in Turkey in the beginning of study. For more than 40 years now video activism was and still is an important issue on worldwide scale and it has numerously proved to be one of the most essential channels for alternative dissemination of 'true' and 'just' information. In this sense it is important that such study is conducted in Turkish context on the only subject available at the time, Karahaber. Study tried to understand how the Karahaber's conduct of video activism is contributing to the Turkish context by the main question asked by thesis: is Karahaber's practice truly an emancipatory process, providing empowerment for oppressed, or is it serving as another kind of surveillance?

* Turkish: I know,
The moment you fall into the void of longing,
and if the heart is fully seven pounds,
There's no way, my Don Quixote, there's no way,
Wind mills have to be fought
(Translation belongs to author)

Before having a look at the quest for answer of this question, in order to make readers understand the reason behind thesis' investigation of surveillative effects and tendencies in Karahaber's video activism, Chapter 2 of the study offered an examination of society we live in, a society where our every move is tried to be detected. The chapter tried to unveil the connection between surveillance systems and television, arguing that Reality TV shows are acting as mollifying agents in the wide spread installation of CCTV by placating TV audiences. Another claim of the chapter was that Reality TVs are preparing societies to give their consent to be watched by turning them into voyeurs through synoptic urge.

The study progressed through Chapter 3, where a detailed analysis of video activism in the global context, together with the in-depth historical analysis of its formation and proliferation, as well as historical evolution, was provided. The chapter tried to introduce different strategies employed under the general name of video activism, such as guerilla television and community video. The chapter also tried to clarify differences and similarities between video activism and conducts of documentary film making and video art, two genres of audio-visual production having very strong ties with video activism. Lastly, one of the main goals of the chapter was to try to provide video activism's promises and deficiencies which showed themselves in the course of history.

Chapter 4 examined the field of the thesis, Ankara located video activist collective Karahaber. In order to understand specifics of the Turkish social, economic and cultural context, which gave possibility for Karahaber to emerge, the chapter very briefly outlined the Turkish context of video, television and surveillance first. The chapter then proceeded with the case study conducted on Karahaber, which was consisting of qualitative data obtained from semi-structured in-depth interviews with Karahaber members and content analysis of videos available on the Karahaber's website. Fortified with interpretations wherever applicable, and by focusing especially on organizational structure,

ideological inclinations, collaborations, and production together with the distribution aspects of the practice of Karahaber's video activism, the chapter tried to provide an answer for the main question of the study.

5.1. Findings of the Study

The binary opposition of surveillance and empowerment offered by the main question of the thesis was formed due to the fact that the video device, extensively employed by CCTV systems as the main source of visual surveillance, is same timely used by video activist groups as a 'guerilla' weapon, offering oppressed and underrepresented people opportunities for empowerment. Currently there exist two main factions of video activism, acting as agents of empowerment: community video advocates and guerilla television practitioners. Mainly due to its fragmented structure, neither of these approaches was employed by Karahaber activists, thus leaving no space for true empowerment through video activism. Karahaber members prefer to work independently, both on filming and editing levels, excluding participation of protesters in the production process of the videos. By limiting dissemination of produced videos only with Internet, through their practically unknown website, Karahaber members further diminish empowering effects of video activism. It looks like the main problem is related with the lack of purpose and fascination with the video device itself, a common mistake of early video activists of 1960s and early 1970s.

On the other side, Karahaber contributes a great deal into the surveillance/spectacle society of the modern world. This contribution is done two-fold. Firstly, majority of the Karahaber videos clearly show faces of protesters and depicts them during acts considered as illegal, thus serving function of surveillative documentation. The second and more dangerous

contribution is done through the way Karahaber presents protesters in its videos. The general tendency of Karahaber videos is that they are mainly spectacular videos, presenting protests and protesters in spectacular ways. In this sense Karahaber provides space for social movements to be watched and later on to spectacularly watch themselves on the website, which is nearly unknown except for Karahaber members and protesters themselves, thus creating a closed circle, a very local and minor Panopticon/Synopticon, where the watchers and people being watched are the same, and the voyeuristic 'gaze' of viewers is turned against themselves.

By not including protesters in the processes of video production, by not educating them to use video devices and on the contrary continuing to film for them, Karahaber unintentionally pushes social movements into the state of flanerie which causes already troubled discourse of new social movements to worsen even more, as already marginal becomes even more marginal, marginal of marginal in this sense. Being filmed and presented in this way, these groups are kind of familiarized with being filmed, thus unintentionally being prepared to be watched by surveillance systems.

At this point we have to admit that thesis has two main limitations. One of limitations of the thesis is that no interviews were conducted with law enforcement agencies. Once conducted, they may give more opportunity to understand whether police agencies are in fact taking advantage of video activist videos. Another limitation of this thesis is the fact that no interviews were conducted with members of new social movements in order to explore their thoughts and perspectives on the subject of video activism providing ways for empowerment. This kind of study, conducted in the future may arrive with better understanding for the dilemma of video for this question.

5.2. Laborare Pugnare Parati Sumus*: Concluding Remarks

Starting on December 6, 2008 with the murder of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos by police officer, waves of riots and protests shook Greece for months. They all started within hours after the incident, when video depicting moments after murder was posted on the Internet. These riots in Greece, where the majority of people involved in demonstrations were ordinary middle class people without specific political engagement shows what a single video can achieve. But the same riots also once more proved that the video have to be combined with the means of the real life. Only because there already were organized people in the real life, conducting political struggle in the scope of traditional political process, that demonstrators were able to gather so many people with so many different social backgrounds.

In this sense it is important that video activism should be bonded deeply with the political sphere and processes, and should not stay only on the level of filming and recording protests. But in order to do that being only an aficionado of video is not enough, and making video for the sake of video, ‘video for video’ notion, which seems to be dominant among Karahaber activists, should be transformed into more progressive form of using video for political purposes, and should be integrated into an activist struggle more efficiently, the dissemination of the video works increased and struggle combined with real life institutions such as political parties, workers unions, and cultural associations, or otherwise, as “everything that is solid melts into the air”, video activism continued to be conducted this way bears in itself danger of eventually becoming ‘just another brick in the wall’.*

* Latin: To work, (or) to fight; we are ready!

* From the lyrics of Pink Floyd’s *Another Brick in the Wall*.

Yet, it seems like the fire started by Karahaber, even if it is about to burn out now, was able to strew sparkles around, as, probably with the above mentioned notions of combined struggle in mind, Nazım Hikmet Kültür Merkezi (Nazım Hikmet Culture Center) (NHKM), a cultural association closely related with CPT, Communist Party of Turkey, very recently started video activism workshops. Combining the practice with their newly launched video portal, <http://www.solvideo.org>, NHKM tries to develop a new approach for video activist conduct in Turkish context, an approach closely combined with real life political struggle.¹⁴¹ It can only be hoped that this very recent development in the name of video activism in Turkey will turn out to be better practiced than by Karahaber, and instead of referring to Kurdish peasants seeking their rights for land as ‘retrogressive, conservative, not leftist progressive’¹⁴², will position video activists as the video troubadours of the new era, freed from spectacular representations and more connected with oppressed and unable-to-let-their-voices-be-heard people, connected with them in the way it is done on the global scope, where video activists, when necessary, even travel to Africa, Asia, and South America to document and report human rights abuses and violence conducted against ordinary people.

¹⁴¹ <http://www.solvideo.org/video/d8884feffad0c31/Video-Aktivizm-Atölyesi->

¹⁴² Author is referring to an interview with T.B. about peasants from Bismil, Diyarbakır

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APPENDIX

A. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Kişisel Sorular

1. Yaşınız, cinsiyetiniz, eğitiminiz, mesleğiniz

İdeoloji İle İlgili Sorular

2. Ne zaman, nasıl, hangi bir süreçle video aktivist olmaya karar verdiniz?
3. Farkında olduğunuz bir dönüşüm süreci var mı, bu süreç nasıl gelişti, bunu tetikleyen herhangi bir olay var mı?
4. Şayet böyle bir olay varsa şahit olduğunuz, tanık olduğunuz birebir bir olay mıydı, yoksa kendi veya bir yakınınızın başına mı geldi?
5. Yoksa medyada, sohbetlerde, veya herhangi bir afiş/duyuruda mı tanık oldunuz?
6. Polisle hiç deneyim yaşadınız mı videoaktivizm sırasında? (Gözaltına alınma, hukuki mahkeme süreçleri gibi)
7. Videoaktivistler arasında ideolojik farklılıklar var mı?
8. Siz kendinizi siyasi olarak nasıl tanımlarsınız? (Liberal, anarşist, sosyalist, komünist vs. gibi)
9. Sınıf bakışınız/duruşunuz var mı?
10. Sizi sosyoekonomik olarak orta sınıf, iyi eğitim almış birisi olarak tanımlayabilme ihtimalimiz varsa o zaman daha ziyade nasıl bir politik perspektife sahibsiniz? Kimlik politikaları mı, sınıf bilinci mi daha ağır basıyor, yoksa ikisinin bir sentezi mi söz konusu?

11. Başka sosyal hareketlerde aktif bir üyeliğiniz var mı? Kendinizi eş zamanlı olarak başka bir harekette/hareketlerde aktif görüyor musunuz, öyle sayıyor musunuz, eş zamanlı olarak başka konuların da aktivisti misiniz?
12. Her eyleme gidiyor musunuz yoksa sadece bazı belli, spesifik eylemlere mi?
13. Eylemleri nereden haber alıyorsunuz? Gel diyenler oluyor mu, yoksa kendi başınıza mı gidiyorsunuz?
14. Videoaktivizm sizin için ne ifade ediyor?
15. Sanat olarak görüyorsanız neden sanat?
16. Alternatif bir habercilik olarak görüyorsanız neden bu şekilde görüyorsunuz?

Bağlantı & Ekonomi İle İlgili Sorular

17. Kurumsallaşmış herhangi bir medya ile bağlantınız var mı?
18. Akademi ile bağlantınız var mı?
19. Akademik danışmanınız, çalışmalarını takip ettiğiniz, örnek aldığınız Türkiyeden ve dünyadan akademisyenler var mı?
20. Kurumsal destek aldığınız yerler var mı?
21. Maddi destek sağlayan kuruluş ve kişi var mı?
22. Profesyonel destek sağlayan bir yerler var mı? (teknik ekipman, kurgu setleri vs. desteği gibi)
23. İstanbul, İzmir gibi diğer şehirlerde nasıl bağlantılarınız var?
24. Video aktivizmin maddi külfetlerini nasıl karşılıyorsunuz?
25. Herhangi bir yerden aldığınız kurumsal maddi destek var mı? (Hibe, fon gibi)
26. Arkadaş çevresinden gelen katkılar var mı?
27. Halktan hiç katkı var mı?

İçerik İle İlgili Sorular

28. Videoyu siteye ham haliyle mi koyuyorsunuz, yoksa kurgu sürecinden geçiriyor musunuz?
29. Sadece kendiniz mi çekime gidiyorsunuz, yoksa yanınızda herhangi bir yardımcı var mı? (sesçi, ışıkçı gibi)
30. Tek başına mı çekime gidiyorsunuz, yoksa grup olarak mı? (Aynı etkinliği çeken birden fazla kişi oluyor mu)
31. Çekerken belirli bir kadraj, mesafe, açı gözetiyor musunuz?
32. Böyle bir gözetme varsa ön planda olan nedir? Estetik kaygı mı, görüntü kalitesi mi, kendi güvenliğiniz mi, izin alıp almama durumu gibi başka faktörler mi?
33. Kurgulama yolunu seçtiyseniz bunu neye göre yapıyorsunuz? (estetik kaygı, mesaj vurgusunu artırma vs.)
34. Sesi ham mı bırakıyorsunuz, ekstradan müzik, ses efekti de ekliyor musunuz?
35. Sadece ses veya sadece görüntüde mi kurgu yapıyorsunuz, yoksa bütün video üzerinde mi?
36. Kurgulama yolunu seçtiyseniz bütün videoyu mu elden geçiriyorsunuz, yoksa sadece teknik açıdan zayıf çıkmış yerleri mi?
37. Sadece kendi görüntülerinizi mi kurguluyorsunuz, yoksa başkalarının çektiği görüntüleri de alıyor musunuz?

Dağıtım & Tüketim İle İlgili Sorular

38. Videolarınızın kullanıcı (tüketici) çevresi sizce kim?
39. Sadece internetten mi faydalaniyorsunuz dağıtım olarak, yoksa başka araçlar da kullanılıyor mu? (DVD, toplu gösterimler gibi)
40. İsim duyurabilmek için videoaktivizm atölyesi, workshopu gibi etkinlikler de yapıyor musunuz?
41. Gerçek anlamda mağdur olanlar da bu videoların gösterimlerine katılıyor mu, bu videoları izliyor mu?
42. Mağdurlara yönelik atölyeler yapıyor musunuz?

43. Filme alınan insanlardan çekim izni alıyor musunuz? Bu tarz bir etik kaygı güdüyor musunuz?
44. Çektiğiniz grup veya bireylerle hiç tartışma yaşadınız mı? (Çekim izni, ortaya çıkan video vb. konularda)
45. Mağdur edilenlerin kendilerini üretim sürecine kattığınız oluyor mu herhangi bir noktada, yoksa tamamen onlardan bağımsız mı bir “güçlendirme” (empowerment) gerçekleşiyor?
46. Mağdur olanların kendilerini videoaktivist olarak yetiştirme işine hiç soyundunuz mu?
47. Bu tarz mağdurların kendilerini yetiştirmeye çalışma deneyimleri, bir eğitim aracı olarak videodan yararlanma durumları nasıl sonuçlandı, istenen sonuçlar alındı mı?
48. Ortaya çıkan videoları hiç festivallere yolladığımız oluyor mu? Bu anlamda bir ödüllendirme söz konusu mu?
49. Şayet yollanıyorsa ne tarz festivaller tercih ediliyor?
50. İlk versiyonla festivale yollanan versiyon birebir aynı mı, farklı mı oluyor?
51. Festivallere yollama durumuna, şayet gerçekleşiyorsa, tepki gösteren oluyor mu?

Etkiler İle İlgili Sorular

52. Videonun etkisini, gücünü nasıl görüyorsunuz?
53. Sizce video aktivizm mağdurlar, sesini duyuramayanlar için bir kanal mı?
54. “Görüntüden eyleme” şiarı ne şekilde gerçekleşiyor, gerçekleşebiliyor mu?
55. Polis şiddetinin azalması, baskıların azalması gibi gözle görünür bir değişime etkisi oluyor mu sizce video aktivizminin?
56. MOBESE vb. sistemlerle polis de sürekli olarak video çekiyor. Böyle bir durumda polis kameralarına göre çok daha yakından, daha net görüntü ve

ses alabilen bir videoyu açık bir ortam olan internete koyarak herkesin ulaşımına açmak sizce gözetime de büyük bir katkı değil midir?

57. Farklı alanların ve kurumların video kamera kullanımları videoaktivizmden hangi açıdan ayrışıyor?
58. Bu anlamda sizce egemen ideoloji ve hegemoni'ye bir katkı olmuş oluyor mu?
59. 1968 Prag örneğinde olduğu gibi, video aktivizmin sizce tam tersi bir amaca istemeden hizmet etmesi mümkün müdür? Tam tersi bir etki yaratma ihtimali var mıdır?
60. Sizce video aktivizm bir tanık olma, bir toplumsal hafıza yaratma süreci mi, yoksa gerçek anlamda bir aktivizm çeşidi midir?
61. Video aktivizm bir “güçlendirme” (empowerment) mi, yoksa bir çeşit gözetim mi?
62. Videoaktivizm de özünde bir çeşit gözetim ise, bu duygudan/durumdan kurtulmak için sizce neler yapılıyor, neler yapılmalıdır?
63. Toplumsal olayları filme alırken kendinizi nasıl hissediyorsunuz? Gömme (embedded) bir gazeteci gibi mi, gonzo haberci gibi mi, yoksa eylemci kitlenin tam bir parçası gibi mi?
64. Sizce kameranın yarattığı gözetim duygusundan tamamen kurtulmak mümkün mü? Gözetim durumunun sizce değişime uğrayıp, değişmesi, farklılaşması mümkün?