

SEYYAR SAHNE: EXPLORING CRAFTSMANSHIP  
IN ACTING

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İSTANBUL ŞEHİR UNIVERSITY  
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SEYYAR SAHNE: EXPLORING CRAFTSMANSHIP IN ACTING

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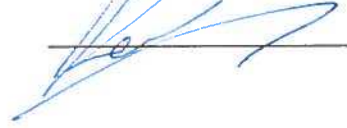
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## ABSTRACT

### SEYYAR SAHNE: EXPLORING CRAFTSMANSHIP IN ACTING

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This study explores craftsmanship in acting based upon theatre practice of the theatre group named Seyyar Sahne. Seyyar Sahne, perceiving acting above all as a multi-dimensional research activity, possesses an important position at theatre in Turkey by means of the dynamism acquired through this perception. The main argument of thesis derived from the assertion that a theatre realm, in which the actor's curiosity towards himself and his environment is dead, should be enlivened. Within this context, it is emphasized, this attempt of enlivenment can be achieved through a similar self- devotion belonging to craftsman regarding his craft. In this sense, the claim of Seyyar Sahne's work principle is rooted in such devotion is supported with the examples of the play *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* and the project of Theatre Madrasa. In this sense while examining the development of the projects in question: personal experience, observations and interviews are taken as sources alongside literature. As Seyyar Sahne's ongoing project Theatre Madrasa also shows, skill of expertise, which comes along with the embodiment of craftsmanship, holds the potential to keep the public realm as much alive as the private realm.

Keywords: acting, craftsmanship, theatre, laboratory theatre, dialogue, novel adaptation, solo performances

## ÖZ

### SEYYAR SAHNE: OYUNCULUKTA ZANAATKÂRLIK İNCELEMESİ

Ulusoy, Ilgaz

MA, Kültürel Çalışmalar Bölümü

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Bu çalışma, Seyyar Sahne adlı tiyatro grubunun tiyatro pratiğinden yola çıkarak, oyunculukta zanaatkârlık anlayışını incelemektedir. Oyunculuğa herşeyden öte çok yönlü bir araştırma faaliyeti olarak bakan Seyyar Sahne bu sayede edindiği dinamizmle, son dönem Türkiye tiyatrosunda önemli bir yere sahip olmuştur. Çalışmanın ana ekseninde; oyuncunun kendisine ve çevresine dair duyduğu merakın öldüğü bir tiyatro ortamının canlandırılmaya ihtiyacının olduğu temel argümanından yola çıkılarak, bu canlandırma hamlesinin bir zanaatkârın kendisini zanaatine vakfetmesine benzer bir fedakarlıkla yapılabileceği vurgulanmaktadır. Bu anlamda Seyyar Sahne'nin çalışma prensibinin buna benzer bir özveriye olduğu iddiası, *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* oyunu ve Tiyatro Medresesi projesi örnekleriyle desteklenmektedir. Bu amaçla, söz konusu projelerin oluşum süreci incelenirken literatürün yanında; kişisel deneyim, gözlem ve mülakatlardan da yararlanılmıştır. Seyyar Sahne'nin halihazırda yürüttüğü Tiyatro Medresesi projesi de göstermektedir ki; zanaatkârlık algısının beraberinde getirdiği uzmanlaşma yetisi, özel alanı olduğu kadar kamusal alanı da canlı tutma potansiyeline sahiptir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: oyunculuk, zanaatkârlık, tiyatro, laboratuvar tiyatrosu, diyalog, roman uyarlaması, tek kişilik oyunlar

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## INTRODUCTION

*The theatre is the only artistic discipline that does not encourage or insist upon the ongoing training of its practitioners. The result: rusty or inflexible actors who often fell unsatisfied or uninspired.*

*What musician, after graduating from a conservatory, would assume that s/he did not need to practice every day? What dancer would not take class or do bar exercises on a regular basis? What painter, what singer, what writer would not practice her/his art daily? And yet, upon graduation from a training program, actors are supposed to be ready for the marketplace without a commitment to ongoing personal training (Bogart & Landau, 2005, p. 17).*

Seyyar Sahne, which today occupies an important position in the field of alternative theatre in Turkey, was founded in 2001. Until today, the group has performed around 20 plays working on dramatic and non-dramatic texts. However Seyyar Sahne started to be recognized with the plays, which were performed after the year 2006, particularly after the performances of *I, Pierre Rivière...* and *Vaiz*. These plays were extraordinary for the audience due to two reasons: first, from the actors' presence on stage to dramaturgy of the play, an unusual technique was used comparing the previous performances of Seyyar Sahne and second, the texts were not classical theatre texts comprised of mutual dialogues, conversations, etc. The text of Seyyar Sahne's first solo performance *I, Pierre Rivière...* (2006) was memoirs belonging to a murderer who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was edited by Michel Foucault and his colleagues, and entitled as *I, Pierre Rivière, Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister, and My Brother: A Case of Parricide in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. When Mordeniz, the director of the play, was asked about this unusual text and staging technique, he replied: "We think to go beyond with different types, staging forms as far as we are faithful to same concentration and ethical anxiety I've talked about" (Dinçol, 2007). Here, if the "ethical anxiety" of Seyyar Sahne is disrobed, Seyyar Sahne's general aspect concerning theatre also becomes clear. In the same interview he says: "We, as Seyyar Sahne, don't have such anxieties: 'let's destroy the boundaries' or 'let's say something new'. But we want to allow time for theatre as much as we can, and wish to melt in it... We believe in a long rehearsal period, and we step on stage only if we feel we are ready and think we can reach the audience." By doing this Seyyar Sahne tries to connect with the audience in an organic way. As Mordeniz affirms: "We

search for a theatre, in which we can create an emotional and a critical relationship with the audience, which does not need to ‘market’ itself.”

On the other hand, *Vaiiz* (2007) was based upon a religious text taken from Old Testament. So this side of the play was another parameter to be seemed “unfamiliar” for the theatre environment of Turkey. In this sense, this “religious atmosphere” called forth different audience comments: some found it “irritating”, some thought it was full of hope and enthusiasm, etc.<sup>1</sup> However, at least considering the diversity of comments, it might be said that the play “succeeded” to touch the audience in a way. After seeing the demonstration of *Vaiiz* at the 8<sup>th</sup> Diyarbakır Cultural Festival, the journalist Ali Rıza Kılınç also points out the success of the play:

*Vaiiz*, directed by Celal Mordeniz, is progressing through a narration centered at speaking body, and out of the boundaries of classical theatre...Although Seyyar Sahne is a young group, it must be said the play they performed is quite successful...If we think that it is extremely difficult to tell the text using the body, we should admit, the actors/actresses succeeded to rule over the body through movement, to make the body through words and voice (Kılınç, 2008).

From Kılınç’s words we understand, the bodies and the voice of the actors/actresses stand as fundamental apparatuses, which serve the narration on the stage. He calls it the “speaking body”. Moreover he considers the play as “out of classical theatre forms”. Indeed, this stage form, which had been developed over the physicality of the actors/actresses, was an outcome of a research period held by Seyyar Sahne. As Senem Donatan, one of the performers in *Vaiiz* states, from the end of 2005 on, they had involved in an intensive research on acting. She says: “Our primary goal was to reconstruct the relationship with acting we had established...” (Donatan, 2007, s. 6). If a regular Seyyar Sahne audience would look at the history of the group, they would possibly notice a breakpoint at that specific time. Because following *Vaiiz*, the group started to stage solo performances, through working with non-dramatic texts such as stories, novels, memoirs, etc. Among them, *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* (2009), which has still been performed by Erdem Şenocak, demonstrates worthy elements of a successful novel adaptation. Although the play is in its sixth season, the interest and

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://eksisozluk.com/seyyar-sahne>, for the audience comments related to Seyyar Sahne plays.

curiosity of the audience still goes on. A spectator's comment sheds light on the general aspect of the play's success:

While I was watching *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, I thought that a novel can be adapted on stage only that much good. As if Erdem Şenocak is exactly the one who could perform this play in the country. I was amazed so much that after the performance I immediately ran out of the theatre, as if I dreamed Oğuz Atay and ran off not to see the rest...I didn't want to stay and see the moment of after the play, I didn't want to see the fact that all was just a play which was applauded at the end. Yes it was dream...Thank you Seyyar Sahne, it was the best performance I've seen in recent years...Or it wasn't a performance, but was the most beautiful dream I've ever seen...("sokak lambasından gelen ses", 2012).

So the duration, which begins with *I, Pierre Rivière...* and *Vaiz*, and continues with the examples of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* and Theatre Madrasa, draws attention to a curiosity concerning the group's research/work in acting. The work of Seyyar Sahne includes some layers, which -as time goes by- are becoming increased. In this sense, the project of Theatre Madrasa also arises as one of these layers in the history of Seyyar Sahne. With an attempt to *allow more time for theatre* as well as to spread the organic relationships over also other segments of life, the group has begun to build a performance research center two years ago. Although the place is only two years old and its construction has not yet finished, it has already welcomed over 300 artists from all around world. The artists in the Madrasa live, work, and share together by all means using every opportunity provided by this public realm. The administrator team of Theatre Madrasa, who are also artists of Seyyar Sahne, organizes theatre camps, artistic meetings, workshops, etc. for the purpose of serving as a public realm where people from different disciplines meet and share.

Considering the activities they have done for the past 8-9 years, it can be said they have brought a new breath into the theatre environment in Turkey, despite this, Seyyar Sahne does not dare to make such a claim. When I started to get in their practice, and observe the work they were doing, I became more eager to investigate the motivation behind Seyyar Sahne's success. At this very point Richard Sennett's concept of "craftsmanship" shed a light into my exploration, and led me study this thesis. So, the main argument of this study derived from the idea of craftsmanship belonging to Seyyar Sahne. In my opinion, the examples of qualified work above are

immensely related with Seyyar Sahne's perception of acting craft. Bearing in mind Mordeniz's words regarding the importance of the rehearsal periods for the group, we can commemorate the craftsman's dedication of his life for the sake of his work. By the same token, I cannot restrain myself to call Theatre Madrasa as the workshop of Seyyar Sahne's craftsmen.

As I mentioned, the questions, which shaped the framework of this study, are based on my personal experience and observations related to Seyyar Sahne. I met with Seyyar Sahne in 2006, and the first performance of the group that I saw was *I, Pierre Rivière....* So before stepping into the core of the argument about Seyyar Sahne's craftsmanship, I want to briefly mention about my experience belonging to that specific time.

2006 was my first year in Istanbul Technical University, where I studied my bachelor's, and was also my first year in the university's theatre club. The director and one of the founders of Seyyar Sahne, Celal Mordeniz, was also the founder of this theatre club called İTÜ Sahnesi. So between these two groups, there was an organic relationship. This organic relationship was progressing basically through meetings and theatre camps. The meetings can be classified in two forms. The first was annual meeting in which İTÜ Sahnesi showed work demonstration of their upcoming play, so before the premier of the play, Seyyar Sahne was asked to make some comments and give feedback. The second was the artistic meetings organized periodically by members of three theatre groups: Seyyar Sahne, İTÜ Sahnesi, and Bilgi Sahnesi. During these meetings, each group was giving information about their own work and by this way sharing their experience with the others. Besides, they were discussing on issues about theatre, politics, and philosophy, or under the guidance of Mordeniz they were arranging reading sessions. Another dimension of this dynamic relationship was theatre camps organized by Seyyar Sahne. Seyyar Sahne held the first theatre camp in İznik (2006) with the participation of only Seyyar Sahne members. However, after having discovered the positive effects of this camp in which, as Donatan states, they were able to focus more on their artistic work without compulsory activities of daily life (Donatan, 2007, p. 6), the group began to organize the camps also for the following years. Moreover, the actors/actresses from İTÜ Sahnesi and Bilgi Sahnesi were also called to participate. I, for the first time,

attended one of these camps in the summer of 2008. As being an actress in amateur theatre, the effect of those camps was quite inspiring for our work. The experience I had during the camps influenced every practice belonging both to theatre and daily life. So, Seyyar Sahne's practical work in those camps and the solo performances, which have still been pursued as a research topic, triggered me to ask questions about acting craft.

After having presented the main motivation of this study, I would like to make an outline of this research. This study comprises three main chapters. Since it proceeds over my personal experience, depending on my practical work and observations, the first chapter reveals how I started to relate the life of a theatre performer and of a craftsman. In the light of the evolution of Seyyar Sahne's theatre practice, I bring forth the notion of "craftsmanship" with reference to Richard Sennett's analysis of the craft of medieval craftsmen. After introducing the notion in the framework of the study, I will point out the connection between craftsman's craft and theatre performer's research activity. At this point the perception of "laboratory theatre" arises and needs to be clarified to better understand the position of the actor inside the research activity. Jerzy Grotowski is a great figure in terms of the work of his laboratory theatre, Seyyar Sahne's laboratory practice is examined in relation to Grotowski's theatre. In sum, this chapter demonstrates how theatre could be considered as "devotion" likewise a craftsperson performs it while working on his craft. At the end, it is indicated that in the practice of Seyyar Sahne the signs of this kind of devotion could be seen through the performance of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*.

In the second chapter, I focus more on the craft of Seyyar Sahne by analyzing the rehearsing period of the play *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*. The chapter draws attention to one of the outcomes of the group's laboratory work, which appears as this well-organized, successful adaptation of Oğuz Atay's novel *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*. For this, the concept of dialogue is introduced to elucidate Seyyar Sahne's work method and the relationships among the director, the actor, the writer, and the audience. By doing this I seek the background of the play's success referring to the concept of craftsmanship. Towards the end of the chapter it becomes clear Seyyar Sahne's investigation is not just aimed at themselves. It is denoted, Seyyar Sahne takes the notion of dialogue, which diffused into every practice of the group as the

fundamental principle for meeting with other people. So in the end, Theatre Madrasa is introduced as the workshop of their craft where they could find the opportunity to start a dialogue with others.

The third chapter evaluates Seyyar Sahne's recent project, Theatre Madrasa, related to its importance as a public and private realm inside the field of alternative theatre. Through the initiative of Theatre Madrasa, Seyyar Sahne has not just fulfilled their own need for a performance research center, but also undertook the responsibility to found a new area to bring artists together. At this point Hannah Arendt's conception of public and private realm is taken and demonstrated that Theatre Madrasa is intended to remain a permanent place where both artistic and humanly dialogue could proceed collaterally. So this chapter closes this study pointing to how and in what sense workshop is essential for the craft of a craftsman.

In this study I will draw attention to the importance of curiosity, which in my opinion, actors/actresses should have concerning their craft in acting. Reminding the kinship between art and craft, I invite the reader to the core of the main argument: Do we -theatre performers- really ask questions about ourselves? When do we exactly find adequate answers for taking a step forward; for starting an act? Are we honest with ourselves about taking enough care of our craft? In the light of those questions, which led me to begin studying this thesis, I brought together the notion of craftsmanship and acting. Since all is related with my theatre practice as well, this study has the characteristic feature of an investigation involving both theoretical and practical work. In this sense I must state, putting Seyyar Sahne at the center of the study is linked to my personal experience I acquired while working with this theatre group.

Some of the interviews with the members of Seyyar Sahne are conducted and translated by the author. Besides, Seyyar Sahne's archive covers many work journals, diaries, letters, and articles concerning their ongoing work. As these sources are very helpful and crucial in the craft of Seyyar Sahne, I did not avoid translating them as well. So, unless another name is specified, the reader should take it under this condition. At this point, I ask for pardon in case of any shortcomings resulting from these translations.

Often I felt the insufficiency of limited space of a master thesis in which I was trying not to miss any point from either social or theatrical analysis. However at some parts of the study I had to conclude the discussion and leave it for someone else, or for another time, hoping I have managed to give some inspiration for future studies.



# CHAPTER 1

## **Journey of Seyyar Sahne: From an Amateur Occupation to Craft**

Seyyar Sahne's theatre practice makes itself clear as a kind of devotion in the form of a research activity. The research in question varies from the actor's own investigation towards his craft, to dramaturgical inquiry as a stage form. In an attempt to explore the roots of this approach, this study elucidates the group's recent history holds some specific landmarks, which deviated the way they were working on.

In the introduction part I have explained why this study intends considering theatre as craft, after getting closer to the practice of Seyyar Sahne. So this chapter will elaborate the emphasis on craft in the realm of theatre, first by examining Seyyar Sahne's history. By the same token, to be able to understand the function of craft in Seyyar Sahne, I will refer to Richard Sennett's analysis on craftsmanship and theatre of Jerzy Grotowski who has been an important theatre figure for Seyyar Sahne's craft.

### **1.1. Foundation of Seyyar Sahne**

There are two breakpoints in the history of Seyyar Sahne according to Erdem Şenocak who is one of the oldest members of Seyyar Sahne (E. Şenocak, personal communication, 7 October 2012). He formulates, first one was the unification of two separate groups under the name of Seyyar Sahne, and second was the encounter with innovative theatre masters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly with Jerzy Grotowski. While exploring the group's history, I decided to add a third one which refers to the foundation of Theatre Madrasa. Because this recent project of the group demonstrates their endeavor to serve theatre craft, and by this way rationalizes their very unique position in theatre environment. However this part of the chapter will cover only the first and the second landmarks, consulting both to the conversations I had with, and to the work diaries written by the members of Seyyar Sahne. Further on, as being the core of the second landmark, theatre of Grotowski will be discussed

referring some extra sources. The third landmark, on the other hand, will be argued in the framework of third chapter in its own context.

### **1.1.1. Unification**

The unification of Seyyar Sahne dates back to gathering of two theatre groups that had worked in the same period in Istanbul. Prior to the unification they were two separate groups connected to each other though, and then became one group by taking one of the groups' name: Seyyar Sahne. "The Theatre of Graduates of ITU" was the other group that joined Seyyar Sahne later on, and was founded by a group of people graduated from Istanbul Technical University (ITU). Since the time of this unification gives remarkable details for the development of Seyyar Sahne's general aspect on theatre, it is better to mention about it.

At the end of the 90s, four young people –who would found Seyyar Sahne further on- Celal Mordeniz, Rezzan İlke Yiğit, Ahu Sıla Bayer, and Kerem Eksen during their college education at Boğaziçi University, were doing theatre in the university's theatre club. They were on the one hand doing theatre, and on the other hand studying at different departments such as philosophy, management and translation studies. By recalling the situation of ITU Sahnesi as a university theatre, their activity in the university's theatre group was a step for taking a part in the world of amateur theatre. Following graduation the foursome left the group due to dissidence raised from discussions inside the group that were shortly based on getting organized as a theatre club. Mordeniz as one of the foursome experienced this separation says: "There was embedded a certain manner on the subject of staging and acting when I left the BUO (The Actors of Boğaziçi University). Moreover they had been organizing the group with respect to very strict rules. Not surprisingly the organization was too bureaucratic for the one who sought for a theatrical adventure" (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012). In 2001 they founded a new group by means of an enthusiasm for searching the "new" for theatre; and called it Seyyar Sahne ("Seyyar Sahne", 2006). As Kerem Eksen –one of the founders- clarifies in his notes taken for the issue of unification, they called it "Seyyar (mobile)" because the group was not dependent on any institution in addition to the fact that they possessed no place to work, since the very beginning the group has

worked at many kinds of space such as rooms and ateliers belong to various universities, and houses of friends (Eksen, n.d.). In this way the early work of Seyyar Sahne, which were comprised of texts written or arranged by them, arose in those places. Along with one of those works, which was held in the summer of 2002, a compelling period had started for Seyyar Sahne actors/actresses. It was particularly intended to take it as “compelling,” since in the discussions concerning the future of the group, they reconciled on that the habits they had acquired should be left out for a while in order to go beyond the artistic manner they had sustained so far (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012). In fact it seems a real challenge due to the difficulty of leaving habitual gestures and everyday attitudes, if an artist would get into something “new.” Therefore, the theatre discipline adopted by Seyyar Sahne was starting to move in its context. Mordeniz’s words below could possibly help to sum up this early period of the group: “We wrote and staged plays without worrying about ‘being political’ like we did inside BUO in the past. Then we jumped to texts that were not written for stage by which I mean non-dramatic texts. When I look past, I can tell those were small steps for the art of theatre, but were giant ones for us” (C. Mordeniz).

In addition to his theatrical activities in Boğaziçi University, Mordeniz was also attending work of another group in the position of director. Those young people were engaged in amateur theatre as well throughout their education in various engineering departments of ITU. Mordeniz’s intervention came along with an invitation from this group called The Theatre of Graduates of ITU where he was asked for help while they were working to put a play on stage. So that artistic collaboration had begun. Starting from that time, Seyyar Sahne and The Theatre of Graduates of ITU occasionally spent many working hours in common in which not all members, but selected parts of both groups gathered (E. Şenocak, personal communication, 7 October 2012). The first production of this collaboration was *The Affected Young Ladies* of Molière, which was staged in 2002. In the meantime both groups were pursuing their own regular theatre practice as well. For instance the group of ITU was proceeding to hold the work routine of an ordinary university theatre. On a regular basis, a university theatre in Turkey accepts new members at the beginning of every year and during the whole academic year physical exercises, basic acting

methods and some theoretical readings are held by transmitting the experience from old members to newcomers. This type of work discipline is mostly called as “amateur tradition” among amateur theatre people. So in this sense, especially after Seyyar Sahne’s move to another path, the difference between two groups was also increasing in the context of work discipline. Regarding the period in which he stood as the director of two groups, Mordeniz remarks the qualities of the groups were quite distinct: “The theatre we had done in Seyyar Sahne was extremely academic so much that we sometimes used to forget stepping on the stage after long-lasting theoretical readings we did. However, the atmosphere during the work of ITU graduates was likely to seem as a carnival” (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012). However, regardless of what kind of diversity existed amongst them, it seems plausible that there was an inspiration coming from this collaboration by which Mordeniz was eventually persuaded to unify these two separate groups. As a result, this creative relationship had continued until ITU graduates got involved in Seyyar Sahne in the year of 2004 when the first production of the union, William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, was also staged. As they declared on web, on the way to stage *Macbeth* “the general course of theatrical progress for Seyyar Sahne for the season 2004-2005 was shaped by the common training program and cooperation that the group had with The Theatre of Graduates of ITU during the summer of 2004. The summer training program aimed at reinforcing the creativity, technical expertise and acting skills of each and every actor in the group” (“Seyyar Sahne”, 2006). Since then these intensive summer workshops have become stimulating for the group as well as for the rest of the participants, before getting ready for a new theatre season.

### **1.1.2. Inspiration**

Being an old member of The Theatre of Graduates of ITU, Şenocak tells that prior to joining Seyyar Sahne, Seyyar Sahne’s work had seemed inspiring and incentivizing for himself and also for his group (E. Şenocak, personal communication, 7 October 2012). Because, as it is observed from the eye of a “fellow”, Seyyar Sahne had been doing more than just rehearsing and staging a play, they were also creating extra time for observing, thinking on what they had done until that time, and focusing more on the theory of theatre. It was obvious, says Şenocak, this high concentration on their own work had well served their artistic purpose.

Although it is known so far that the first meeting with audience standing as full cast of Seyyar Sahne on stage was *Macbeth*, in the history of the group the main importance – as Şenocak feels in this way- was attributed to another play. It was another play of Molière called *The Miser*. As Şenocak states, preparation for *The Miser* was not distinct from earlier productions they had done: trainings, theoretical studies to better understand the text and the author, longstanding rehearsals, and finally representation of the play (E. Şenocak). Yet, the play had made a huge success with regard to the audience’s feedback, even some of the actors and actresses have still been well remembered with their role characters. However after a certain time in which they had continued to stage the play, the score of acting belonging to each performer started to decline. Subsequent to detection of such a “failure” in the group, a set of discussions and meetings had been held by the leadership of the director Mordeniz to fix it. What was wrong? What was the case that made the performers of a succeeded play unsatisfied? What was succeeding? Although these questions blurred the minds at the end of the long discussions, they thought that the solution was found (E. Şenocak). But after a while they would realize that a radical solution for the problem in fact could not be found. Among all those confusions, disappointments and questions occupying the minds during this period; Mordeniz was seeking for the answers by rereading the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s theatre world. This was the very time when he got acquainted with one of the masters of the age: Jerzy Grotowski. About this encounter Mordeniz says: “For a theatre person, I think, just after experiencing an authentic encounter with Grotowski’s work, it is very hard to maintain the same artistic paradigm he/she had” (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012).

It is obvious from the speeches of Seyyar Sahne’s members that, owing to the encounter with Grotowski they thought in a way that they had finally found the way that had been looking for. Because, just in this very specific time when they felt urgent need to be “changed”, Grotowski’s theatre proposed a path to walk through. In this path of Grotowski, theatre appears as actor’s dedication to his craft, as a space in which he is expected to search for the thing beyond theatre. By chasing this method Grotowski deviated from the mainstream of his time, and by bringing new questions as well as new suggestions he achieved to enliven theatre environment of

the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before coming back to the analysis of Grotowski's theatre through the concept of craftsmanship, it is better first to illustrate the concept of craft. For this purpose, the next part of the chapter will describe what lays behind the intention to address craftsmanship in Seyyar Sahne's practice.

## **1.2. "Theatre Craft" through Sennett's Craftsmanship**

The emphasis on craft intrinsically brings mind the phenomenon of art and craft. Although we as being individuals of modern times have an idea about what this distinction refers to, first I will briefly remind how this distinction arose with respect to the historical background and second I will elucidate that why I "reproduce" this separation.

When Larry Shiner in his well-known book *The Invention of Art* is analyzing the division of art and craft, he takes the reader back to ancient times. The word of art, he mentions, comes from the combination of Latin word *ars* and Greek word *techne*. And considering the ancient meaning of the word, the opposite of the art corresponds to "nature" rather than "craft" as we likely to suppose it is (Shiner, 2001, p. 5). At those times there was not such a distinction between art by which modern people understand the category of fine arts, and craft by which the one assumes handwork that requires manual labor. Until that time every human activity, which was performed with respect to skill and elegance was granted as art, but now there were two branches; fine arts (poetry, painting, music...) and crafts & popular arts (shoemaking, cobbling, storytelling...). Those whom valued fine arts were related with inspiration and ingenuity, and were creating "refined" taste (p. 5). While fine arts had been given a spiritual task like healing the soul and finding the absolute truth, by the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the word "fine" was discarded and there was left the mere opposition of art and craft. So when one from nowadays, as Shiner indicates, is asked "Is this really art?" it is obvious that the question refers to it is the product neither of nature nor of human, but it refers to the concept of fine arts (pp. 5-6).

Again between the words artist and artisan there was not a clear difference, since art was not just used for painters or composers but also used for shoemakers and alchemists. And again towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the division emerged and

those notions became the opposites of each other, the artist was the creator of the fine arts' product when the artisan was someone who did useful or entertaining things (p. 13).

The Renaissance paintings hung on the walls of today's modern museum, to what we call work of art, were not - unlike what people usually think - product of independent artists. As Shiner points out those works were not valued within the category of fine arts or there was an artist figure pursuing self-expression and originality (p. 35). Although signs of "modern artist" started to appear, the production of the artist was aimed to fulfill the customer's demand or better to say "to survive." This situation of the artist, which sounds quite "irritating" in terms of the status of today's artist, shows that the ancient perception of art contributes to today's craft more than to today's notion of art. In a similar way it can be said today's perception of the most virtuous artist is the one who does not sell his art in return for money, can be traced back to 18<sup>th</sup> century when the division in question was occurred. So from the window of modern times, here is the view: hand-labor activity of the craftsman deserves a reward whereas the artist is confined to content himself with appreciation. At this point this issue usually brings the question of "What is an art work?" or "How do we differentiate work of art and work of craft?" Today, is what we call art independent from "hand", or is what we call today craft independent from "head?" For one who wanders around those questions, Richard Sennett's book *The Craftsman* may help as it did for me. Because divided position of hand and head merges in Sennett's definition of craftsman by which "lower" status of craftsmanship attains the value it deserves. Thereby I should warn the reader that while calling "theatre craft" or "acting craft" during the rest of this study, I particularly refer to Sennett's craft rather than Shiner's.

Craftsmanship in Sennett's *The Craftsman* (2008) is roughly defined as the skill of making things well. Following this definition Sennett asserts "the carpenter, lab technician, and conductor are all craftsmen because they are dedicated to good work for its own sake...The craftsman represents the special human condition of being engaged" (p. 20). As it is clear from the passage Sennett does not propose "good" as the antonym of "bad". To him the word "good" for the activity of a craftsman means "to be curious about, to investigate, and to learn from ambiguity" (p. 48). Which then

would be misleading is to consider craftsmanship as only a form of *manual skill of the carpenter's sort*. Above all it would not be misleading to claim that the occupation of Sennett's craftsman requires a "devotion" which should endure throughout his life.

As to the evaluation of craftsmanship in Sennett's work the notion seems encompassing in terms of including the dichotomy of art and craft. In this sense craft emerges as a wider concept, which is simply summarized as *the special human condition of being engaged*. In the rest of the study I will evaluate the craft of actors with respect to this very definition.

### **1.2.1. Theatre Craft in Amateur Enthusiasm**

According to my observation related to Seyyar Sahne's condition, the actor's and director's research in theatre may be carried out more than one year. In other words, the actor starts working on something without knowing the exact time until meeting the audience. It may take a long time. So during this long journey, what is the fundamental motivation to continue? What do they look for in their practice? The research topics can be classified in two: first is the actor's query towards inwards such as working to improve physical and vocal capacity; and the second is usually intended to meet with audience. In both long journeys, the actor *dedicates himself to good work*, which as Sennett defines means *to be curious about, to investigate*. If the actors in Seyyar Sahne feel there is nothing left to investigate, and are satisfied with the work they have done so far, it is time to meet with audience. Moreover, the ambiguity in this process renders the actor to be ready *to learn*, or catch anything. If we look at the practice of physical theatres in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this situation appears as a common principle. However, this kind of theatre began to develop in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Turkey.

The theatre in Turkey can roughly be classified as State theatres, Municipality theatres and private theatres. In this study I also mention about another term "alternative theatre" which in case of Turkey can be included in the realm of private theatres. As Chambers (2002) states, the term "gained currency in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s as a loose movement of individuals, groups and venues grew around a set of theatrical ideas opposed to the mainstream, which by then included



the subsidized theatre that had once been the alternative to the commercial theatre (p. 19). So, by addressing alternative theatres I refer to the ones which oppose to the mainstream, which in Turkey's case corresponds to State and Municipality theatres.

One of these alternative theatres, "Kumpanya", was founded in 1991 by Kerem Kurdođlu and Naz Erayda by occupying an old building's first floor at Tarlabası, Turkey and, as Özlem Ovalı (2007) claims, started to make innovative changes in the perception of theatre belonging to the audience. As Yiđit -one of the Seyyar Sahne members- says, Kumpanya inspired them as much as other theatre companies at that time (İ. Yiđit, personal communication, 12 October 2012). Kumpanya, while sharing the 1990s' innovative theatre environment with BİLSAK and Stüdyo Oyuncuları, had continued to inspire theatre performers until 2006, when the Istanbul Art Center was closed (Ovalı, 2007, p. 14). To make clear the point that in what way Seyyar Sahne was influenced by Kumpanya, it is better to look at how Kumpanya described the way for doing theatre.

The founders of Kumpanya define themselves as two persons who got very bored from the theatre they had been doing in the country and they declared they did not want to do such a version of theatre any more (p. 14). As part of a quest, they decided to do what they would like to watch, by their own choices to represent themselves. As it can be inferred from the word "quest" Kumpanya's practice comprised of long-lasting periods aimed at serving to the discipline they wanted to acquire, rather than at focusing on a product that was reached at the end of the short-lasting periods. However they did not have a fixed manifesto explaining the way of their theatre, they clarify the reason as their reaction against the institutionalization of theatre. Yet Kurdođlu remarks the position of Kumpanya among the alternative theatre groups as such: "The trainings of Kumpanya are full of troublesome moments in which we cannot predict what to do, or how to approach to forthcoming problem. One of the distinctive characteristic of Kumpanya is the choice of starting from zero point -during the preparation of each play- as if that is our very first experience on staging; and while doing this we work on an intentional and painful 'non-technique' by which we develop a 'technique' particular to that play" (Gürün, 2002, p. xv). By looking at Kurdođlu's words we can assert that Kumpanya as being *professional* actors, held on their job with an *amateurish* enthusiasm. To my view the expressions

such as “...as if that is our very first experience on staging...” or “non-technique” support this assertion. Then could a theatre company, who does inspiring work and intends to bring a new aspect to theatre, be called amateur? Or to what kind of occupation do we call amateur? Now I will argue this in relation to the amateur theatre, which is another field keeping alive the theatre environment in Turkey.

Amateur theatre is likely to be defined as the opposite of professional theatre. After the 18<sup>th</sup> century in small cities, rural theatres, peasantry theatres, street theatres, district theatres, union theatres, community theatres were the realms of amateur theatre. Moreover, the workers’ theatre of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which had been organized as an activity in relation to the cultural policies can be involved in amateur theatre as well (“Tiyatro Sözlüğü”, 10 June 2013). When one intends to look for the amateur theatre in Turkey, in this sense, it is very likely to come up with university theatres at first sight. Those theatres fill a remarkable gap inside theatre in Turkey, despite limited conditions, which are presumed as adequate for “amateurs”. Because when the opportunities provided for amateurs and professionals are compared, huge difference can be easily noticed. In what sense between these two sides is there a difference? According to my personal observation I can assert, the difference in question cannot be linked to care that both sides take concerning their craft. At this very point it may be useful to point out the root of the word “amateur”. In its etymology, the word is derived from the Latin word “amatorem (lover)”, which also refers to “one who has a taste for something” (Online Etymology Dictionary, 22 May 2013). Apparently the meaning of the word evokes something related with “enthusiasm”. In sum it would be more appropriate to consider the amateur as one who adheres to his/her occupation with enthusiasm, rather than attributing negative expressions –as it has been doing in this way nowadays- such as “not professional”, “uneducated”, or “untrained”.

In Seyyar Sahne’s practice, this kind of enthusiasm, which arises from the dynamism of their work, can be observed as well. In this sense it can be said, Seyyar Sahne is an attempt to professionalize the theatre discipline they acquired from an amateur tradition. It should be remarked, here professionalism refers to a kind of “expertise” like craftsman’s position as an expert in his craft. So it can be considered as an improvement from apprentice to master, from amateur to professional.

Sennett (2008) also points out the important position of an amateur in the Middle Ages, which is far from the today's perception of amateur; he remarks "a 'virtuoso' meaning in the mid-eighteenth century an amateur with a lively curiosity" (p. 91). He adds: "In the early eighteenth century a virtuoso like Chambers, with wide-ranging interests, rather prided himself on his amateurism" (p. 115). Although his comparison between virtuoso and amateur does not exactly corresponds to the one held in this study so far as professional and amateur; there can be found enough resemblance to coalesce "virtuoso and professional" in the same category –at least in the context of expertise on something. Above all the most interesting point is the transparency of those opposite categories. Sennett clarifies, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century "...the line between performer and audience, technical master and amateur, was blurred" (p. 116). But what happened just before and caused this semantic shift for the amateur? Sennett finds the answer with reference to modern times: "Closer to modern times, the amateur gradually lost ground, especially with the dawn of the Industrial Age—the amateur's foraging curiosity seeming of lesser value than specialized knowledge" (p. 246).

For one who attempts to think about craftsmanship through theatre, practices of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's theatre masters would possibly shed a light. Those masters, by occupying the position of being engaged with theatre, have shaken the ground of acting for young practitioners. Ayşın Candan (2003), in her book *Yirminci Yüzyılda Öncü Tiyatro*, prefers to call "avant-garde theatre" exploring the 20<sup>th</sup> century's theatre movements. Stanislavski -who is acknowledged as the initiator of this movement- Meyerhold, Grotowski, and Barba had commonly focused on the essence of theatre through actor's technique. The qualification that distinguishes them from the former ones is their vision of taking theatre as a research activity. I will call "theatre laboratory" while talking on those men's research activity, which was once picked by Grotowski to call his theatre company as well. The reason why I prefer calling laboratory has strong connections with the word's etymology. The word is derived from Medieval Latin word "laboratorium: a place for labor or work" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 13 May 2013). However while using it throughout this study, I widen the meaning of the word from referring merely to a space to a more inclusive concept, which corresponds to the whole research activity of those masters. Because

the work place within their practice meant something more than just an auditorium or a stage where the actress rehearsed her role. Now I will explain in which way it makes sense to analyze theatre laboratory through Sennett's craftsmanship. Grotowski's theatre laboratory, for this purpose, will be quite helpful.

### **1.2.2. Theatre Laboratory**

The theatre of late the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was mostly based on textuality, that was why theatre was studied under the topic of "drama studies," and thus was involved in the studies of literary texts. Apart from that, theatre "strove to discipline its audiences..." by "...prohibiting disruptive and unfortunately often infectious misbehaviour" (Fisher-Lichte, 2008, p. 38). The reason for creating such an inhibitive control mechanism was lying behind the purpose of preventing any destructive lunge against the fictive world on the stage. The audience was expected to show empathy to those characters on the stage who were not any more living-bodies, but the transmitters of the author's text. The controlled audience was not allowed to think, to behave, via their spontaneous perceptions, they were the "passive" ingredients of the theatrical community in the auditorium, so that theatre men/women of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to question their very position.

According to Richard Schechner, Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) was one of four great directors of Western 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre. In his article *Jerzy Grotowski: 1933- 1999*, by posing the following question he begins to mention about Grotowski's theatre life: "After Stanislavsky, acting was changed; after Meyerhold, directing; after Brecht, playwriting. But after Grotowski?" (Schechner, 1999, p. 5). The reason to cut off the question about Grotowski must be related with the fact that there does not exist an absolute paradigm belongs to Grotowski concerning merely theatre. Throughout his life he intended to search beyond theatre, to some extent one may claim his primary goal was not just being a master of theatre someday. Above all, as Schechner aptly points out, Grotowski chose theatre for the purpose of reaching to an intimate relationship with someone out of himself (p. 6). For this purpose, by the agency of workshops and rehearsals spread over months and years, he as well as the people worked with him got a chance to discover what is peculiar to an interpersonal

experience. To designate Grotowski's theatre, owing to his method of doing theatre, nothing suits more than this slogan as Schechner states: "Process, not product" (p. 6).

For Grotowski's theatre, drawing a line between process and product means an attempt to understand the essence of theatre, the thing beyond the scene. By stepping into this manner he needed to call "laboratory" to what he intended to do. His laboratory became a pure space for the actor to proceed the research period under a well-disciplined circumstance. However throughout those long training hours, neither an absolute end nor an obligation was aimed to finalize the period with a product, in other words with a play. In short *working* and *laboring* was vital in the way of the Laboratory. On the matter of process and product -of the moment of rehearsing and performing- Jean-Louis Barrault (1910-1994) identifies the performance as the moment of happening, and the rehearsal as the creative period which appears specifically as true artistic moment for an actor: "Everything which in the performance is free, spontaneous, improvised, based on impulse, 'anarchistic,' is the relaxed fruit of disciplined elaboration in rehearsal" (Barrault, 1950, p. 4). However, the dichotomy of rehearsal and performance does not exactly correspond to Grotowskian process and product. In the former one the rehearsal is likely to serve to the performance, but in the latter there does not exist such a relationship between the process and the product. The process in Grotowski's laboratory serves something but not the product, rather the discovery of the actor's own persona.

In theatre laboratory, which can be thought as the craftsman's atelier, actor's tool above all is his own presence with every instrument belongs to his body and soul. Therefore the actor of the laboratory theatre has to work with himself in order to develop a technique. In *Towards a Poor Theatre* which was as one of Grotowski's well-known essays first published in 1965, Grotowski defines the content of his work as such: "Our productions are detailed investigations of the actor-audience relationship. That is, we consider the personal and scenic technique of the actor as the core of theatre art" (Grotowski, 2002a, p. 15). To develop a technique the actor had to repeat -for a long time- some certain exercises through which he had to compel the limits of his own body and voice. Although Grotowski admits the necessity of a technique for the actor, he also recommends the actor should leave

what he finally acquires as a skill at the end of the process of working on a technique.

For years one works and wants to know more, to acquire more skill, but in the end one has to reject it all and not learn but unlearn, not to know how to do, but how not to do, and always face doing; to risk total defeat; not a defeat in the eyes of others, which is less important, but the defeat of a missed gift, an unsuccessful meeting with someone, that is to say an unsuccessful meeting with oneself (Grotowski & Taborski, 1973, p. 118).

Moreover during a meeting organized by students in Wroclaw in 1971, he replied:

You have said: “you have very well trained artists.” True, this was important for us once- professionalism. But what is necessary, and what we have been searching for years, is how to leave professionalism behind, how to abandon the “skill for doing” (p. 134).

Sennett also mentions about the importance of repetitive practice of a craftsman. Although he does not provoke to reject the skill there can be found similar motivations. For example he talks about the fail of modern education that it is afraid of boring the children with long, repetitive education. Similarly it is hard to maintain such an acting laboratory without “getting bored indeed.” For a craftsman there must be something that he devotes himself to, and in the actor’s case it appears as “himself.” Sennett (2008) criticizes the modern education:

We should be suspicious of claims for innate, untrained talent. “I could write a good novel if only I had the time” or “if only I could pull myself together” is usually a narcissist’s fantasy. Going over an action again and again, by contrast, enables self-criticism. Modern education fears repetitive learning as mind-numbing. Afraid of boring children, avid to present ever-different stimulation, the enlightened teacher may avoid routine but thus deprives children of the experience of studying their own ingrained practice and modulating it from within...Skill development depends on how repetition is organized. This is why in music, as in sports, the length of a practice session must be carefully judged: the number of times one repeats a piece can be no more than the individual’s attention span at a given stage (p. 38).

Until here I have tried to make a brief introduction to the main argument. In order to approach to perception of acting craft, I briefly mentioned about the discussion on amateurism and professionalism in theatre. The intention there was to draw attention to amateurish enthusiasm pertaining to craftsman. In relation to this, the concept of

laboratory theatre is introduced in order to show its potential to call back *the amateur's foraging curiosity* which, for Sennett lost ground in modern times. As it is illustrated also in Grotowski's case, the significance of laboratory theatre cannot be underestimated for actors, by virtue of its capacity to pursue an ongoing research. In my opinion Seyyar Sahne's encounter with Grotowski reinforced their craft, so Grotowski deserves to be mentioned more in its relation to craftsmanship.

### 1.3. Encounter with Grotowski

Grotowski touched on this point many times when speaking about the question of "tourism." When you are young, he said, people let you get away with not having true technique because your energy is fresh and charming. Here, Grotowski always instanced Zeami's expression: the "flower of youth." But woe to you if you pass out of the "flower of youth" without developing the "flower of craft," the flower of mastery. It's like the story of the shoemaker, Grotowski said. When the shoemaker is young, people watch him work and exclaim, "What a beautiful shoemaker, how full of life!" A few years later, however, they start to demand, "But...these shoes? The quality of the shoes (Richards, 2004, p. 49).

Owing to those words, Mordeniz could be able to comprehend what they were experiencing at those days, the dilemma, which they inevitably confronted was getting clearer. For him, Seyyar Sahne must immediately develop *the flower of mastery* -the flower of craft- before passing out of *the flower of youth*. The source of their inextricable situation was lying just on this very thin line. Subsequent to an encounter with Grotowski, Seyyar Sahne realized there were many things to discover, and to appropriate from his doctrine not just to their perception of theatre, but also to their way of living as artists. As Mordeniz confirms there are no so many people whose theatre and life perspectives engage as such. Therefore when he is asked if he feels himself close to Grotowski's philosophy of life as well, he acknowledges it: "I think, on every person who is impressed by his theatre practices, it is also possible to find the traces of his life aspect" (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012). Regarding the encounter with Grotowski, Seyyar Sahne's archive contains a well-explained essay, which is written by Özgür Akarsu at the time of his involvement in the group as an actor. In this short essay –also coincidentally entitled as *Encounter with Grotowski*- Akarsu points out there are

several answers to the question of “Why was Grotowski important for the group?” (Akarsu, 2006).

- Theatre in “poverty”: His definition of theatre as an event between actor-audience and elimination of the rest of elements inside an ordinary theatre production. The idea of there could still be done a good theatre without stage, prop, lighting or money.
- Actor based theatre: The huge importance paid to the work/research of actor; perception of acting by means of a research activity.
- Grotowski’s emphasis on ethic of theatre company: Long working hours, collective quest in the pursuit of reaching a creative work.
- The emphasis on body and vocal exercises: According to the group that those exercises are essential for an actor to discover the limits of his own body.
- Attitude towards the audience: Naïve and respectful attitude in the face of the audience. Grotowski’s group was performing the plays with a constant level of discipline and enthusiasm even if there was only one spectator face to face.

These five main principles posited by Akarsu summarized the way in which Seyyar Sahne perceived the philosophy of Grotowski’s theatre. Like Mordeniz, Akarsu also states they were interested in the path on to a level of mastery when they first got acquainted with Grotowski. In this sense trying to find answers to what they had been doing meant, for Seyyar Sahne, trying to find the way to the mastery. According to Akarsu, in the way in which they started to follow up Grotowski they were “... just consulting on thoughts of a theatre person that we were interested in by means of our own theatre practice, we were trying to understand him and that’s all” But what was peculiar to Grotowski unlike other theatre directors? What was particular to his discipline and his consideration of relationship with audience?

### **1.3.1. Grotowski’s Poor Theatre**

Grotowski’s idea of poor theatre -he names it poor theatre by claiming the “rich” one as contemporary theatre- contributes to the elimination of other external elements inside an ordinary theatre practice. For only essential thing for doing theatre is an



empty space there could still be done a good theatre without stage, props, lighting, or money. According to Grotowski (2002a), the elimination of those elements, which were obstacles in front of a pure impulse, terminates at the possibility of infinite variation of performer-audience relationship (p. 20). By pure impulse Grotowski remarks the intention is expected from the actress of the Laboratory. By means of this “pureness”, which is acquired after the elimination of all external elements, a “pure” dialog could start between the actor and the spectator. Therefore about the position of the actor of the poor theatre comparing to the one exists in a “rich theatre” Grotowski says:

We do not want to teach the actor a predetermined set of skills or give him a “bag of tricks”...Here everything is concentrated on the “ripening” of the actor which is expressed by a tension towards the extreme, by a complete stripping down, by the laying bare of one’s own intimacy –all this without the least trace of egotism or self-enjoyment (p. 16).

But why is bareness, self-revelation so crucial for the actor? Actually it is related to the principle of poor theatre. As the actor should leave all unnecessary instruments from the stage, he should leave as well all elements -daily behavior, prejudice, gestures, masks- he has attained from the realm of social life. Grotowski calls this disarmament, which is to say the actor should develop a technique but not in order to gain a set of skills but to “disarm” himself.

If a method has any sense at all it is as a way to disarmament, not as technique. On the way to disarmament it is not possible to foresee any result in advance, to know what and how it will happen, because this depends exclusively on the existence of him who fulfills the deed. One cannot possibly foresee the forms we shall arrive at, “themes” to whose temptation we shall fall, facts which will follow next. For this will depend on everyone personally. There is no answer which should be taken as a formula to be adhered to (Grotowski & Taborski, 1973, p. 121).

Grotowski affirms the daily masks that we inevitably wear in social life should be abandoned for the purpose of meeting people intimately. On the matter of the language he claims that verbal language is a psychic process to which he attempted to eliminate the actor’s resistance. In Auslander’s words: “Grotowski proposes to eschew dependence on verbal language in the theatre, preferring ‘an elementary

language of signs and sound -comprehensible beyond the semantic value of the word even to a person who does not understand the language in which the play is performed” (Auslander, 1997, p. 34). Therefore the body, which is the other constitutive element of human’s self in addition to mind is left behind as a pure material to contact with the other. Grotowski’s special interest on the actor’s body throughout this chapter finds its root in this way of thinking by which he concentrated much on body to invoke the actor’s self.

One dimension of the technique belongs to the actor, thereby, is based on the body. As a matter of that early trainings of the Grotowski’s The Laboratory Theatre were mainly based on body and vocal exercises through which the actor was expected to develop a technique to be able to control himself. However the purpose of doing those hard exercises was not reaching an acrobatic level as it is usually misunderstood, but instead was ruling over the entire body with awareness and correcting habitual distortions. The worthy point here is the fact the hard work discipline did not make the performers feel as restricted or squeezed during the long work hours. Bearing in mind the previous point about bareness, that kind of discipline would have caused a deviation from the aim of “self-revelation”. Revealing his own self, for an actor, requires kind of relaxation as its meaning corresponds to; and it is obviously not a simple task to do especially considering the conventional way of acting. Erika Fisher-Lichte gave an example to this kind of situation in her well-analyzed book *The Transformative Power of Performance*: after the demonstration of Max Reinhardt’s *Electra* one of the performers Gertrud Eysoldt, in her role as *Electra*, was particularly criticized due to his “distracting” performance. As Fischer-Lichte (2008) mentions: “...They rejected Eysoldt’s ‘immoderate’ and ‘uncontrolled’ movements which did not serve to illustrate the text but evidently referred back to the body of the actress. They deemed her transgressive exploration of ‘pathology’ ‘unbearable’ because it dissolved not merely the limits of her dramatic character but, more importantly, of Eysoldt’s self...” (p. 34). It seems from Fischer-Lichte’s analysis that before the time of encounter with performativity in arts, there had clearly existed a certain resistance to any kind of interpretation beyond both text and role character. In this sense witnessing a piece from the performer’s self was even unbearable, as for the world of visual arts in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century concepts such as “breeness” and “self-revelation” belong to an actor was extremely new and awkward.

As a matter of fact the purpose of standing *bare* in the face of audience requires something else alongside discipline, to catch a control over the body owing to long work hours was not enough on its own. During the time of thinking and working on this, Grotowski would find the solution in Eastern techniques. As Schechner tells, since his childhood Grotowski had been attracted by Eastern philosophy and by spirituality. That is why his interest provoked him to relate his theatre with the spiritual and the communal experiences in the Eastern countries throughout his life (Schechner, 1999, p. 6). At the end of his long investigations on Eastern philosophy and theatre techniques such as Pekin Opera, Indian Kathakali, and Japanese Noh Theatre, Grotowski discovered, “spontaneity” along with discipline does not weaken but instead reinforces each other (Grotowski, 2002b, p. 121). And he declares it as the true lesson of sacred theatre. Thus by adding spontaneity to discipline, the two form a balance within a theatre practice. Referring to Huizinga’s analysis of *Homo Ludens*, this type of balance can be observed within the structure of an ordinary kids’ play. In a kids’ play there is also a balance between rules and freedom.<sup>2</sup> For children it is allowed to move freely inside a frame of some specific rules, which are determined in advance. In terms of the analogy of theatre and kids’ play, we may claim, the rules refer to discipline where the freedom of the child’s movement refers to spontaneity. Therefore coexistence of these “opposite” elements, one may say, is pivotal in a performance. Seyyar Sahne’s *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, indeed, stands as a good example concerning this argument. I have seen the performance many times so I had a chance to compare the performer’s score one by one. I should say the play mostly owes its success to Şenocak’s –the actor- ability to move on the structure that he had constituted through the technique. The structure is quite precise to such an extent he can act freely over it. By this way, the structure/technique roles as an anchor for the actor in case of facing with any kind distraction on stage. This argument will be enhanced in relation to *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* in the following chapter.

Up to here, from a Grotowskian perspective it can be said, at the center of actor’s performance there lies self-revelation of himself to what Grotowski (2002c) calls a

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<sup>2</sup> See Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, for more detail.

“total act”: “...It is the act of laying oneself bare, of tearing off the mask of daily life, of exteriorizing oneself. Not in order to ‘show oneself off’, for that would be exhibitionism. It is a serious and solemn act of revelation...” (p. 210). As it is clear from the passage, the way of thinking about the self-revelation of an actor -unlike exhibitionism- entails a disciplined work, which clearly elucidates the objective of the long trainings in the Laboratory. In this sense each fragment of the work routine of Laboratory must be estimated as a tool for removing what prevents a human contact with the other through which the actor can attain a living action. Total act, hereby, is not a form of accruing skills so much as eradicating obstacles. Here, at the center of this argument, traces of his interest on Eastern philosophy can be found. As Jennifer Lavy (2005) aptly points out, “according to Hindu thought, the word “obstacle” suggests a particular emphasis: Obstacles present a consequence of alienation from the Reality within us” (p. 184). What Grotowski saw more through his investigation on Eastern thought was the signs of a real meeting inside a communal experience, for instance during a ritual. For this very reason he was calling *meeting* to the encounters in which every member of the Laboratory stood as “doer” and spectator as “witness”. Although there seems a distinction like active and passive participant, the event emerges owing to very presence of both groups cannot be valued as active or passive. And total act, as Grotowski points out, is the key instrument for this very uniqueness of those meetings. When Mordeniz, the director of Seyyar Sahne, is asked for a comment on the notion of total act he states he conceives it as any kind of act on stage fulfilled by an actor by means of his/her whole soul and body: “...Grotowski calls it burning himself. I understood that getting detached from both past and future for a while” (Mordeniz, 2006a).

### **1.3.2. Paratheatre and Communal Experience**

In Grotowski’s theatre life “meetings” became more of an issue towards the end of his career. To draw a sketch of his work many studies on Grotowski divide his work into three major periods. In one of those studies evaluated by Ron Grimes, he respectively classifies Grotowski’s theatre life as “poor theatre phase”, “paratheatrical phase,” and “active culture phase” (Grimes, 1981, p. 67). In the way of this study up to here, it is mostly mentioned about poor theatre phase, which covers the years 1959- 1962. On the other hand the meetings with the involvement of

audience mostly belong to the research of paratheatrical phase and after. Grotowski poses the following questions to elucidate what they refer with the word “paratheatre” to, and how they relate it to the meetings:

When we bring up the word paratheatrical, in reality we're dealing with the question of participatory theatre and we face two very important questions. First of all, what is the difference between acting/pretending and being? And secondly, what is a real meeting? What must there be in common between people who don't know each other for a real meeting to take place? To what point can we reduce all the conditions in order to create a structure so simple that no one will be obliged to play a meeting or to show friendship toward people he doesn't really care about, or to demonstrate some kind of collective spirit which becomes a way of renouncing self? (Grotowski, Chwat, & Packham, 1987, p. 32)

As seen in the passage it was a real meeting was searched for by the agency of paratheatrical works. Again here we see Grotowski is against all kind of artificiality whether directly related to theatre or to life. And this is another indication of how theatre and everyday life intertwined so much that he does not separate issues of everyday life from theatre, but instead links them together. Though during his interviews and presentations he was mostly asked about his theatre practices, he did not avoid touching upon social issues and cultural phenomena alongside answering the questions. In this manner one may notice it absolutely sounds as voice of a man from “modern” times.

During the phase of paratheatre, the company for the first time called for participation from different countries and worked with a new group. The main ideas about paratheatre are defined by The Grotowski Institute as “overcoming the division between participants and spectators; working towards suspending social roles and instead finding the human dimension of one’s existence in action and experiment; encounters involving other people and nature; and gradually leading to fundamental transformations in culture” (The Grotowski Institute, 2013). For this purpose the team organized numerous tours around the world, and many projects emerged from those meetings. For example one of the projects called *Special Project* by Grotowski, took place in a village isolated from any of settlements. And the participants were

selected amongst the audience who came to *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* which was the last play of the Laboratory. As it seems from the Grotowski Institute's declaration, by stepping into paratheatre; the team of Grotowski shifted from improvisations, vocal/body trainings to the non-theatrical activities.

Aside from all whatever had been said so far about the time of paratheatre, if just one word would be required to qualify his statements that would indisputably be "unusual." The great theatre master, who came along that time with the prominence of mastery, was speaking about his shift away from theatre. For some that was expected, for others it was not. No matter what other theatre people and critics think, Grotowski was speaking neither out of theatre, nor about it. He was expressing his feelings concerning the essence of a living presence. That could be the essence of theatre, or more deeply of the human being. As Slowiak points out, what he calls his path is close to the latter one; the need to find a meaning which has existed in all epochs when people have been aware of their human condition. And additionally he describes it as "the quest for what is most essential in life" (Slowiak & Cuesta, 2007, p. 53).

### **1.3.3. Seyyar Sahne Evolves**

To be able to more understand Grotowski's theatre, Seyyar Sahne began to watch the training videos of the Laboratory Theatre. In addition to the visual sources there were also texts written by the pupils and colleagues of Grotowski, or directly by Grotowski (Akarsu, 2006). So for a time the group tried to copy videos of Grotowski's favorite actor and colleague Ryszard Cieslak in which he demonstrates some basic body exercises. At first they were in an attempt just to reach to a kind of perfect physicality they saw in Cieslak's act. Since to practice those exercises are aimed at reaching an awareness regarding every member of the body, the actor seems he knows what he is doing in every single movement. As Şenocak points out, they started with copying the body exercises from the videos but when they deeply analyzed Cieslak's movement they noticed that it is not just about technical mastery (E. Şenocak, personal communication, 7 October 2012). It was beyond that. Yet the purpose of Seyyar Sahne, at first, was to reach this kind of physical control. In one of

the diaries written at that time Gülden Aرسال –one of the Seyyar Sahne members- notes:

When Celal suggested to work on an animal's walk, the first one came to my mind was cat of course. I admire the way of using their body. They have a successful control on all muscles so much that they can both stretch and release in a very good way. But the way that we must work on is being in the place of the animal -or approaching it as an archetype- rather than imitating it. Who knows maybe the race of human being comes from cat, not monkey...Anyways I try to do something similar to Cieslak's cat movement, but others say that mine looks like a lizard rather than a cat (Suzan told me that she was trying to act like a lizard and asked me how I do it! ). Senem said I consistently hold my body stretched. Yes, when I soften the movement I look much more like a cat (Aرسال, 2005).

In relation to that in the rest of her diary she tells about difficulties they encountered while doing hard exercises, and about what they experienced during the sessions. Besides she deciphered the group's conversation evaluating the trainings. What were they thinking while and after doing the exercises? Or what kind of an awareness did they achieve? The below parts of the conversation is worthy to see how they perceived the method.

**Celal:** We try to do something out of just warming the body, or of gymnastics. In every movement there should be searched for a meaning.

**Gülden:** Grotowski mentions about a work in which the mind becomes passive whereas the body becomes active.

**Celal:** The important thing is the attempt for discovering possibilities (potentiality). At the time when you are not a tourist there is always a possibility, and that needs effort. If there is creativity then it becomes more enjoyable and relaxing...There isn't a way to do it right, but the movements should be done attentively and while doing it the actor mustn't head towards inwards. He mustn't let exhaustion. Exhaustion indeed the trouble we carry from the daily life to the trainings...Everyone finds his own rhythm, the important thing is whether he challenges own limits or not. So in work sessions there always must be a leader who warns the others time to time.

I guess we lose our freedom we used to have in childhood while we are getting 'civilized'. For instance a child jumps without any fear. Similarly a 70 year-old dancer cannot dance if he thinks that 'I am 70!' Above all we should relax our mind.

Technique is very important. Without it there is not creativity. Chinese acrobats do have excellent techniques but when you watch them you just say ‘How did she do it!?’ One shouldn’t remain there but should relate it with the creative process. What are we doing; just a technique or a creative work?

01.03.2006

Today after a short warming practice we met and talked about the sessions. Celal said that the arbitrary participation to the work sessions causes distraction...He spoke about the issues of why we cannot do a dense work, and why adding one more day into the weekly schedule causes a serious problem. And he related these to our unwillingness about doing theatre. He added “A creative work mustn’t be reduced into the number of participants, none gives us salary it is meaningless to batter each other as existing here is not obligatory.” Then he suggested stopping to work for a while. We keep terminating the boundary at acting. However Grotowski remarks that: “A theatre work starts at the very moment when you cannot proceed anymore.”

Thus Seyyar Sahne began to seek beyond the technical excellence. As it is clear from the passages the actors/actresses had always been in alert to be aware of what they had experienced. During and following those collective work sessions Seyyar Sahne began to draw its own path and found what to pursue. *Vaiz* was the first collective production that comes from this long quest period. Regarding *Vaiz*’s preparation, the director Mordeniz had taken some notes which hold remarkable points to mention (Mordeniz, 2006b):

29.10.2006

Jerzy Grotowski states that another part of the creative ethics is to risk. One should always go into risk of being unsuccessful if he wants to create.

In the meeting we held after the session, I tried to define problem as the lack of “intention”. I mean the actor must intent before whatever he is going to do on stage. Just as intending before fast. Everything done without intention is subjected to be chaotic, meaningless and worthless. If it is not then an ordinary action of a human should have called as theatre. That kind of moments may give pleasure while watching it, but in this wise there is no opportunity to occur a theatrical coalescence. An actor’s primary intention must be the will of coalescence with own self, with partners on stage, and with the audience. The intentions related to the plot comes afterwards, these are secondary.



19.02.2007

We decided to focus on a part called *Vaiz (Ecclesiastes)* from the Old Testament. But we will think this text as a guide. I guess the notion of “tragic” would be explanatory for the performance we intended to stage. From the beginning, our work shaped in a definite way. The content is based on “aloneness” in a formal sense, and on searching for what belongs to a humanistic essence. These fundamental orientations combined the works under a common theme.

This specific time of Seyyar Sahne reflects how they transformed their work from an amateur occupation to the discipline of a laboratory theatre. From now on, the individual work of the actor settled at the center of Seyyar Sahne’s research practice. *I, Pierre Rivière...* was the first production arose from this quest and the duration continued through working on non-dramatic texts like novels and narratives. One of them I put as the touchstone in the history of Seyyar Sahne is *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*. The next chapter will analyze the work method of Seyyar Sahne developed on the way to stage *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*. What lies at the center of this method? Is the actor’s individual quest is central? Or does the relationship with the audience lie at the center of this method? When I ask this question to Mordeniz, he replied:

Absolutely. Even just calling “the relationship with the audience” sounds a bit inadequate. “The relationship with the one out of me” is more convenient. Because the nature of the relationship which the actress must establish at the stage with her partner, is exactly the same with the one that she must establish with the audience. And this must be a “dialogic” relationship. Thus we may say that at the center of Seyyar Sahne’s quest there does not lie the actor, the director or the text but a dialogic relationship (personal communication, 12 October 2012).

## CHAPTER 2

### *Tehlikeli Oyunlar: The Channels of Dialogue*

A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged (Brook, 1996, p. 7).

Brook's basic formula quoted above identifies the fundamental instruments of theatre; an empty space, someone in an action, and someone who watches him/her. As it can be inferred from this quotation the connection between those instruments is crucial for the one in action. In case of theatre, thereby, the actor is responsible for creating this connection. As I argued before, kid's play and actor's action are similar to each other. Their way of performing based on the same rule; mimicry. But yet what is the difference of an actor from a kid who imitates his/her relative or neighbor? According to Karaboğa there is not an absolute distinction. Both possess same kind of tension during their action (Karaboğa, 2005, p. 11). Nevertheless the action done by the actor on stage has to catch the eye of the spectator. At this very point it becomes vital for a theatre performance that how the actor sets the ground for the relationship with his partner, with the spoken words, with the audience, with everything out of himself.

When the individual work of the actor became important in Seyyar Sahne's laboratory, a tendency towards solo performances concurrently came into view. This tendency emerged just in time when they decided to evaluate acting as a research activity, and conducted at developing acting techniques. For example to the movement technique through which actor seeks to develop his bodily movement they call "Hareket Makamı".<sup>3</sup> Or they propound the term of dialogue while they are in an attempt to overcome actress' solitude on stage. Concerning this chapter of the study I am going to focus on the latter with reference to their experience of solo performances. Since during *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* period the notion of dialogue was first conceptualized, this chapter will analyze the relationship statuses constructed in the

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<sup>3</sup> See Celal Mordeniz's dissertation, *Tiyatroda Hareket, Eylem ve Diyalog*, İ. Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Tiyatro Eleştirmenliği ve Dramaturji Bölümü, 2011

play in terms of how the actor establishes a dialogue with himself, with the director and with the audience.

I said before the focus on the actor's individual quest in Seyyar Sahne born after they discovered the opportunities of laboratory theatre. This quest for Seyyar Sahne started with the period of *I, Pierre Rivière...* the first solo performance of both the actor Şenocak and the group. The text was proposed by the director and since it is not a classical drama, Şenocak says rehearsing was quite painful comparing previous experiences of the group. The text comprises of testimonies and memories belong to a dreadful man; and although the words are coming out from the first person's mouth it was still hard to represent the character in a conventional way. By the way, in addition to Şenocak and Mordeniz, some of other members of the group were also accompanying rehearsals. Some were taking notes and some were just watching them. Şenocak expresses (E. Şenocak, personal communication, 7 October 2012):

One day Celal (Mordeniz) led a work which was really forcing for me. And he told the others that for the next two weeks he wanted to work personally with me without the participation of anyone else. He elucidated it as, when other people existed during the work he felt the obligation to address his speech to them, however, he wanted to say something directly to me. These two weeks did not pass so tough because we exceeded a limit. We had been working together by doing exercises based on movement and vocal training. At the same time the play was proceeding in some way; at least the others said so when they watched the rehearsal at the end of the course.

By those words Şenocak brings minds the phenomenon of dialogue. In other words I can claim the very first signs of the dialogue between the director and the actor occurred at that time. This work brought a new enthusiasm to the group so much that in the summer of that year they decided to organize the first theatre camp which would last two weeks. I will not go into details since I did in the previous chapter, but here I must inform the material for the preparation of *Vaiz* was derived from this camp. Şenocak points out after what they had experienced in *I, Pierre Rivière...*, *Vaiz* was Mordeniz's attempt to enter into the same research activity with the whole group. Şenocak states the preparation of *Vaiz* was a "challenge" for them: "We were reading Artaud, we were thinking on 'theatre is not written text' etc. If so, then we said, let's do it" (E. Şenocak). As to the audience's feedback given after *Vaiz*'s

demonstrations; it was really unusual in such ways the content of the text, the performers' way of using their body and voice, and so forth. Towards the end of the year, when the group was in tour at Diyarbakır, they met and talked about the forthcoming projects asking person by person. The director told them to be relax and asked what they were planning to do in the next year, and who would be in Istanbul. As Şenocak says: "Normally until that time if someone declares that he/she wants to quit group it becomes a real issue, and everyone try to persuade him/her to stay in. But during this conversation people were decisive without the anxiety of staying out of the group while telling about own projects" (E. Şenocak). By this way a new model of participation established where people who would not able to attend the workshops, yet would not feel bad about it. During the meeting Mordeniz announced that Şenocak would work on staging the novel *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* with him and then the others began to tell their individual projects. Indeed, Şenocak states, by pushing the others into working on solo performances Mordeniz intended to establish a dialogue peculiar to each actor. But while talking about dialogue, I rather refer to the classification proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer.

### **Gadamer's Dialogue**

When we say something about dialogue, especially if the topic is theatre, the very first thing comes to our minds is the mutual conversation that we see in a drama text. Gadamer, however, claims the dialogue is much different than just a conversation. He asserts that dialogue is the relationship between "I and Thou", and there are three types of "I- Thou" relationships.

In the first one I contact with Thou according to some stereotypical judgments. Gadamer calls this situation as knowledge of human nature. He continues: "We understand the other person in the same way that we understand any other typical event in our experiential field—i.e., he is predictable" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 352). In this I-Thou relation, one puts "Thou" in the position of an "object" and stay in a distance from him/her. Thus it becomes a hierarchical relationship in which the one resides at a higher position. We may see this relationship in daily life within formal relationships.

In the second one, on the other hand, the one do not objectify Thou. Both are subjects but there lies a sharp line between them; the one –I- rules over Thou. Regarding this second type Gadamer utters:

A second way in which the Thou is experienced and understood is that the Thou is acknowledged as a person, but despite this acknowledgment the understanding of the Thou is still a form of self-relatedness. Such self-regard derives from the dialectical appearance that the dialectic of the I-Thou relation brings with it. This relation is not immediate but reflective.

...

The experience of the Thou attained here is more adequate than what we have called the knowledge of human nature, which merely seeks to calculate how the other person will behave (p. 353).

This brings itself all kinds of authoritarian relationships. In case of theatre, conventional way of the relations such as “director and actor”, or “actor/writer/director and audience” are good examples where the one thinks that only he/she has the capacity to transform/change the counter side. In the section of “Dialogue with Audience” this type of I-Thou relation will be reminded.

Third type of I-Thou relationship, on the other hand, presents the real dialogic relationship for which mutually openness is required. The partners have to be attentive while listening to each other. By this way both can transform each other. They must renounce themselves for the sake of discovering the other’s world:

In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another (p. 355).

The dialogue, in this sense, requires a cycle of “question and answer”, or “feedback loop” we might say. Because it would not be a dialogue then, if the one does not care about what the other says. However the aim of this feedback loop is not to reach a state of reconciliation, but to experience a meeting in which they do not stand there as they were before: “To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter

of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (p. 371).

Martin Buber also points to the essence of dialogue through a similar perspective. Maurice Friedman, in *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (1955), explains Buber's view:

Genuine dialogue can thus be either spoken or silent. Its essence lies in the fact that "each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them." The essential element of genuine dialogue, therefore, is "seeing the other" or "experiencing the other side" (p. 87).

When it comes to analyze theatre in the sense of Gadamer's dialogic relationship, it can be said that when the actor renounces himself in favor of the role character, the audience has a chance to establish a dialogue with both the actor and the play. By this way a real meeting can exist. Therefore in the path of staging *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, Seyyar Sahne was in the quest for constituting such a dialogic relationship, such a meeting. Before examining the dimensions of the dialogic relationship within the play, we shall briefly look at the selection period of the novel.

### **Why *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*?**

*Tehlikeli Oyunlar* is a well-known novel written by well-known Turkish author Oğuz Atay. In the novel, the plot is told from the voice of Hikmet Benol who is depicted in complicated moods throughout the novel. After he divorced, he moves to a shanty to live alone hoping to change his desperate life. However from the beginning to the end, as the story goes on, we see that he cannot change anything at all. He rather accuses someone, time to time even including himself, he is furious because of feeling depreciated, or sometimes because of feeling humiliated. So in total the reader witnesses the decline of an anti-hero.

When we focus on the plays belong to the last period of Seyyar Sahne, there seems two types of challenges; one is the actor's solitude on stage, the second choosing non-dramatic texts to stage. As to Seyyar Sahne, the former is deliberately preferred for leaving the performer lonely and by this way "disarmed" in the face of the

audience. During a solo performance, according to Mordeniz, the actress has to reveal herself, leave her clichés behind (personal communication, 12 October 2012). The latter on the other hand requires a different method from conventional acting. As we told before, the first of this kind of challenge was experienced with *Vaiz*, although *I, Pierre Rivière...* which was staged before *Vaiz* was not also a dramatic text. *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, on the other hand, is a well-known novel written by a well-known Turkish author. About its selection Mordeniz says:

During the summer camp of 2008, we decided to read novel loud. At that time I wanted to remember Oğuz Atay whom I once read breathless. It was a kind of missionary endeavor for me. Because I asked the young participants and only one of them read half of another novel of Atay, *Tutunamayanlar*. Due to these two reasons, every night after physical part of the work, we started to read parts from *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*. It was at the same time a technical work for us. Erdem was one of the readers, and at this time we were passionate about working together again on another solo performance like we did for *I, Pierre Rivière...* When I heard Erdem's reading I wanted him to read it again the following day. After this second reading I offered to work this novel without knowing how the duration would end. I remember we talked that at least he reads the novel on the stage and we make people to listen to it (Atayurt, 2010).

From this passage we see the duration started without knowing how to end. In this sense it seems that staging/working on a novel is the most interesting part for them. But why is Atay's *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* selected but not another novel? In Ulus Atayurt's interview Mordeniz replies:

The thing that we had done in *I, Pierre Rivière...* was facing with a kind of novel character. In this text we were attracted by the fall of the "suffering character". Then we saw that the same theme could be operated through Atay's novel. It has been always asking among academicians that if a "tragedy" can be written at the present times. I think our era's tragedy is novel, I mean it is written. So in this way we chose a tragedy from Turkey.

As we understand from those words, *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* was assumed as a project by which a dialogic relationship -one by one between the actor and the director- would be sought for through the challenge of staging the novel. Today Seyyar Sahne's individual research period still endures as an outcome of this method. One may ask then, is not there a mutual relationship between the actor and the director in any other acting method? Although the answer starts with "yes", it needs a deeper analysis that

should cover more than one dimension –the actor and the director. In order to get a closer look at the other dimensions of the actor’s dialogic relationship, I am going to start analyzing the actor’s dialogue with the director and author, then continue with the actor’s self, and at last with the audience.

## **2.1. Dialogue with Director and Author**

At this part of the chapter the argument of how in *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* Seyyar Sahne established a dialogue with the author through director will be held. Since the play’s success on one hand depends on the relationship between the actor and the director, we will focus on the dialogue which arose from this relationship. Considering this phenomenon the following questions appear to be answered: How did Seyyar Sahne handle the text? What kind of dialogue has been established with the author and the novel? How has the dialogue between the actor and the director proceeded?

As Mordeniz states Seyyar Sahne has never intended -from the beginning- staging a non-dramatic text. In this sense their way is not an attempt to exclude or underestimate the value of dramatic texts. Rather he explains: “I guess our motivation stems from the desire of making the actor as the owner of what he says on stage. Besides we have never said that let’s adapt this novel/story into theatre” (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012). Referring Mordeniz’s words, we might support the assertion that *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* is not a classical novel adaptation. Because there is not someone who translated or transformed the text into drama: “The process of transformation is made by the actor” (C. Mordeniz). In this sense Seyyar Sahne did not search for something to stage, but came across with them. When it comes to *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, however, Mordeniz admits they prefer choosing the novels/stories in which there is existential crisis or stream of consciousness belongs to the character, not the classical novels.

After they decided to work on *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, the rehearsal period had started in which Şenocak was working alone for a while, and then showing Mordeniz. Mordeniz, on the other hand, was watching the actor’s proposal and then giving some suggestions. Şenocak, concerning this kind of connection with the director, mentions that: “This kind of relationship made me feel good. When Celal offered the others to work alone, he also demanded not to watch each other or comment on the



work of each other during the trainings. By this way he was trying to establish a dialogue directly with the actor” (E. Şenocak, personal communication, 7 October 2012). Remembering Gadamer’s dialogic relationship we can say that there exists a cycle of question and answer, or feedback loop between Şenocak and Mordeniz. In this cycle each side listens to each other without any kind of domination, thus it is possible to “experience the other”. This type of relation frees the actor from the possession of the director; as Şenocak points out Mordeniz’s way provides openness: “We entered such a road, I was working on something and then showing it Celal. Celal was making some suggestions and I was working again for trying his suggestions. I mean there were a few moments when Celal directed me one-to-one Maybe, this was for opening me” (E. Şenocak). Then what does happen in a relationship in which the actor is under the possession of the director?

### **2.1.1. Rancière’s The Ignorant Schoolmaster**

This kind of relationship between the actor and the director can be observed in public educational system, which for Rancière opposes intellectual emancipation. Since there is a one-dimensional relationship, the first thing that the schoolmaster teaches is the pupil’s own inability: “In its activity, it thereby constantly confirms its own presupposition: the inequality of intelligence. This endless confirmation is what Jacotot calls stultification” (Rancière, 2009, p. 9). According to Rancière, however, the intellectual emancipation is possible with *the ignorant schoolmaster* based on the idea of “one ignoramus could teach another what he himself did not know” (p. 1).

Thus in the relationship between the ignorant schoolmaster and pupil, a mutual connection occurs. On the other hand, in the logic of “wise teacher and ignorant pupil” the pupil always remains ignorant; because there is a radical gulf of ignorance. At this point we should remind the director’s position in theatre:

The playwright or director would like the spectators to see this and feel that, understand some particular thing and draw some particular conclusion. This is the logic of the stultifying pedagogue, the logic of straight, uniform transmission: there is something –a form of knowledge, a capacity, an energy in a body or a mind- on one side, and it must pass to the other side. What the pupil must learn is what the schoolmaster must teach her. What the spectator must see is what the

director makes her see. What she must feel is the energy he communicates to her (pp. 13-14).

The logic of the stultifying pedagogue generally fits to the relationship between director and actor. The director puts himself in the position of knowledge transmitter, and creates the one-dimensional relationship. He renders the actor as his object through which he would perform his art. According to Mordeniz, this kind of hierarchical relationship arose from the word “directing” something. If the director chooses such a way, then he becomes indistinguishable from a sculptor who does his art by shaping his material. To be able to free the actor and ensure his position of a subject as well, the director must not “direct”. Or quoting Mordeniz: “The director must be shut. The director can free the actor if only he does not direct” (Hürman & Kural, 2011). But if the director should not exist there as directing something how then can he contact with the actor? Reminding the above assertion of Buber, a real dialogue needs “seeing the other” or “experiencing the other.” For this the one should cease himself/herself to be fully open to the other, to be able to experience him/her. Grotowski also pays attention to this kind of existence of the director:

...How not to defend oneself against doing, which seems an impossibility? This is very difficult to define precisely. It begins really to exist, if the “director” exists towards the “actor,” if he ceases to be “director” and ceases to exist; on the other hand, where the “actor” does not hide before him and his own partner, and so does not think about himself, about his fear. And is not an “actor” any more... (Grotowski & Taborski, 1973, pp. 122-123)

As it can be inferred from Rancière’s aspect the director, who does not direct, corresponds to the ignorant schoolmaster. As again Mordeniz utters: “You cannot see the director in *Vaiz* and *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* for instance. There is not a design belongs to the director in *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*.” In *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, the idea of hanging swings on the ceiling arose from Mordeniz, however, it should be remarked this idea is also derived from thanks to this dialogic relationship.

Until here, I mentioned about the dialogic relationship, which refers to Gadamer’s third type of I-Thou relationship, between the director and the actor. As I said this method frees the actor’s mind as well as his creativity, and gives a priority to the actor’s own design. Thus, concerning the rehearsal period of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, more detail is necessary to understand the way of this dialogue. At this very point it should

be remarked that, this kind of I-you relationship is also a reflection of Grotowski's work with the actor. As Schechner (1999) clarifies it with reference to Buber: "Grotowski shaped himself to suit his encounters with unique individuals. In his work one-on-one he had the unparalleled gift to enter into what Martin Buber called the 'Ich-du,' the I-you, relationship. His shape-shifting was not trickery or avoidance, but an adjustment made to better drill to the core of the matter" (p. 8). For this we shall look into some of the rehearsal notes taken by Mordeniz, by which we might see the suggestions, the ideas, and the collaboration of the team -Mordeniz, Şenocak, Arıcı- belongs to that period (Mordeniz, 2009):

20 October, 2008

In *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, there should be some plays which must be dangerous.

Globe...A globe as the mirror of Hikmet's dark soul...The flowing images occur inside this globe...

23 October

Yesterday, Erdem for the first time showed a piece he has worked on. It was the "history" part...He has preferred using abstract movements. However I demand him to use more realistic movements and actions.

As it is seen above, the dialogue starts with Şenocak's feedback to Mordeniz. After Mordeniz's offer working on *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* the actor begins working alone and then proposing some ideas. By this way, the feedback loop appears. Then, the director's turn comes. He should think on the actor's proposition and say something on it (Mordeniz, 2009):

25 October

In the play, the speeches of the officer and the other characters should be designed as the variations of Hikmet's voice. Erdem should personalize the parts of his body...

5 November

It should not be forgotten that we should not consider this work as the period for exhibiting what we know, but for learning what we do not know. (Jerzy Grotowski).

20 November

I am going to rehearsals almost 7 days of the week. It exhausts me a bit. Not doing the same work, but at the same time doing three different work is really tough. On the other hand, by this model of working the actors find the chance for opening themselves more.

Referring to the novel's dramaturgy Mordeniz thinks there should be some dangerous movements. And he came up with the idea of swings through which, to him, the actor could play dangerous games. Afterwards this offer gave birth to new opportunities when the team was stuck working on the text. As Şenocak points out: "When I look at back, I see that the swings helped us a lot for attaining the atmosphere of Hikmet's uncatchable, slippery mood" (Çıtak, 2010).

13 February

When I was in Teheran, Oğuz and Erdem hanged two swings on the ceiling. One of them is short, the other is long. I was thinking that there would be many with the same height. But this form is also interesting. We looked at the transition parts. How will the transitions be between the parts? We could not find anything. Should we work together more often? Will the demonstration be a text reading? How should the corporeality and movement be set up inside the performance?...How can we manage to be not boring for someone who does not hear, or understand the text?

...

The issue of the actor's position as doer must be thought. The actor should be either a doer who reveals himself through his action, or a storyteller. On the other hand, probably, these two encompasses each other. While performing the action there is also been telling a story; a storyteller is also existing as himself/herself and at the same time being a doer of the action. By this very reason the actor must leave his position of just an imitator. Mimicry, because, causes the loss of spirituality.

6 July

Everyone thinks that he alone is condemned to hell, and this is what makes it hell... (René Girard).

I guess, in *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, we have taken the character that lives alone in hell and put him inside a crowd. To me, this is a form which has the potential for creating a miraculous effect. Indeed, understanding Hikmet means not falling into his charm.

16 July

The actor does not exhibit his art on the stage, but hides it. His art begins at the phase of rehearsal and ends there. In the moment of performing, he transforms into a doer. If he starts to stand as an artist on the stage, the most-known acting illness that is “exhibitionism” and the loss of spirituality indispensably penetrates into him (Mordeniz, 2009).

The last two quotations bring light another dimension of the dialogue, which is the one with the author. Oğuz Atay is one of the beloved authors in Turkey, and his readers generally have a romantic sight with regard to him the protagonists of his novels. The main character of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, Hikmet, is one of them. The theme of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* belongs to the same literary tradition that we see in Dostoyevski’s novels, as acknowledged by most of the critics as well; the person’s inner conflict.<sup>4</sup> As Şenocak (2010) quotes from Yıldız Ecevit that these characters desire to be seen as unique individuals, however, in contrast with an original opposition, they commit their whole existence (p. 21). This behavior which belongs to modern times’ individual, hereby, becomes familiar this era’s people. Thus, a kind of identification with the character becomes easier. The dark soul inside the novel reflects our own darkness, by this way charmingly attracts us. Therefore, when the rest of the audience laughs at some certain parts of the play, the one hates this situation and accuses the actor/director with distorting his/her beloved author’s words. We can see an example in one of the spectator comment: “Unfortunately I could not enjoy the play because of the group sitting just behind me. I don’t know which type of mood they were in, but they madly laughed at Oğuz Atay monologues so much that someone from outside might think that there was a stand-up show...” (“marido”, 2009). And another one regarding the laughter: “...I got angry, I could not concentrate, but at most I got embarrassed. From now on Seyyar Sahne should add a big note saying “It is not a comedy” onto the brochure, maybe it works...” (“jonquille”, 2009). As it is clear from these comments there is certainly exaltation about Oğuz Atay and his characters. Seyyar Sahne does not ignore the charm of Oğuz Atay, however, they think avoiding this charm is necessary in order to understand him. Şenocak also aptly puts out even Atay in his book *Günlük* (Diary) clearly expresses that Hikmet is a negative character: “We have continued our road

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<sup>4</sup> See Yıldız Ecevit’s “*Ben Buradayım... Oğuz Atay’ın Biyografik ve Kurmaca Dünyası*”, for an insightful analysis on Dostoyevski’s influence at Oğuz Atay’s novels.

and never fallen into Hikmet's charm. If we did fall, we would possibly be crushed under the novel" (Çıtak, 2010). Mordeniz also supports this argument and tells about the period that how they have dealt with it:

Yes there is a similarity between Atay and Hikmet. However we saw that, Atay only after seriously criticizing Hikmet wrote about him. We held the novel and worked on it using the same way...We said that "Hikmet is an abject man..." But people came to see "the prophet Hikmet" Then they transform him into the prophet Erdem. This is quite romantic...If we would approach as such, we could not do this play (Atayurt, 2010).

Regarding those words we can claim, one of the partners of the dialogue the Seyyar Sahne tries to constitute is the author. Author through the text proposes some thoughts, and Seyyar Sahne rather than just copying it onto the stage, seeks for the ways to give a feedback to the text. Thus a dialogic relationship begins. During the time while this dialogue has getting developed, the ideas about staging the novel changes. The details have been shaped with respect to the dialogue. Above all, as for me and as much as for most of the people, staging a novel like *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* sounds crazy when especially it is thought as a "solo performance." It is a quite long book and there are many characters besides Hikmet. Seyyar Sahne once planned the performance was going to be two parts that each part comprises of two hours. These kinds of technical details and some dramaturgic changes has been still doing today, since the play is still been staging as well as the dialogue has been enduring. Then how has the dialogue in *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* been enduring since 2008? If Seyyar Sahne is asked when they will stop performing the same play, they reply as when there is nothing left to seek for in ourselves.

The way of approaching to a text also seems another important point in Seyyar Sahne practice on the way to establishing a dialogue. As Şenocak states: "In Seyyar Sahne, there is not a separation such as author/actor or text/staging. We do not consider theatre as an event vocalized or represented form of the text. Despite the text is once written, it should be rewritten on the stage" (Çıtak, 2010). In this sense, we may consider "rewriting" as the endeavor for relating to the author and the text. Referring to Mordeniz's words, likewise in the dialogue with the director, the author must be shut as well. However this does not correspond to be disrespectful or to

underestimate the author's work. Rather it is a way to prevent the birth of Gadamer's second type I-Thou relationship, or of "wise" schoolmaster. Otherwise the author becomes the ruler or the wise schoolmaster. If the director/actor tries to be 100% faithful to what the author says, then there is no chance for the actor to initiate any kind of creative act. The dialogic relationship collapses. When the dramaturge of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, Oğuz Arıcı, is asked if there is a flagrant difference between the effect of the novel and of the play, he replies as: "I don't know how this can be explained. A different voice has come out. Now, when rereading the book, it seems a bit stranger to me. The text that we have filtered became something peculiar to us" (Atayurt, 2010).

Barba also points to the chances of the free treatment of the text quoting from Grotowski:

Faithful recitation of the text and illustration of the author's ideas are the goals of the traditional theatre. We, on the contrary, believe in the value of a theatre that some have called "autonomous." For us the text is only one of the play's elements, though not the least important. The "peripetia" of the plays (as we do them) do not correspond to the text. They are expressed through purely theatrical means. The director takes liberties with the text. He cuts, he transposes. But he never indulges in personal interpolation. He lovingly preserves the charm of the words and watches carefully to see that they are spoken. The text is artificial and composed, but it is the author's text (Barba & Sanzenbach, 1965, pp. 158-159).

This free treatment of the text, as Barba asserts, liberates theatre from literary servitude. Arıcı calls this rewriting while it does not refer to reproducing the text, but means putting a distance in between and then evaluating it preserving this distance. In sum, it can be said that, in order to start a dialogue with the author/the director/the audience, the existence of a distance is crucial. Now we will take into consideration the actor's condition of what would happen if he puts a distance between him and self.

## **2.2. Dialogue with Actor's Own Self**

It has been a unique Seyyar Sahne adaptation from my Oğuz Atay's spectacular book. Erdem Şenocak welcomes the spectators sitting on the spectator's chair, like I once saw in *I, Pierre Rivière...* When everybody sits down he steps onto the stage. He lies down. He is

becoming, Hikmet Benol, then he takes us tour of inner world by using two swings. While he is using the swings he is so much controlled. While speaking through his hands and feet, he is thousand times natural. How strange...(“stanley weber”, 2009).

Erdem Şenocak, I have only one question for you: Are you human? (“yemdihan ucak”, 2009).

Last night the image of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* in my mind became messed-up. Thanks to Seyyar Sahne and the acting of Erdem Şenocak. 130 minutes play, besides the plot is *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, we thought that we would go into crisis, or gasp along with Hikmet. But we faced with something quite different. At first Şenocak is an excellent actor, I cannot say I am a quite active spectator but I can say that, among the ones I’ve ever seen for a long time he was the most successful one by using his voice. I most times came off from the plot, I could not stop myself examining the details of his acting...Those swings became everything, those hands and feet became every character (“purpurum”, 2011).

One dimension of the actor’s dialogue is established with the actor’s own self. At this point the question of what in this study the actor’s self refers to proposes itself to be answered. This argument attracts Karaboğa’s attention as well and he attempts to elucidate what the self means for an actor from Grotowski’s perspective. Grotowski’s self, as Karaboğa (2005) points out, comes from Jung’s “persona” and “self”. Persona is the term used for mask shaped by people to be able to live with other people, and when Grotowski recommends leaving the masks, he alludes to Jung’s persona (p. 97). Only owing to this attempt one can approach “pure” self-attributed to the instinctive, wild desires of a person. And the actor should face with this side of himself in order to move away from daily dishonest attitudes, to be able to trigger creativity. By this very reason Grotowski’s work also depends on the actor’s individual quest in some way. Every person should find own intuitions, and there is not only one way or method to succeed it.

In case of Erdem Şenocak, the relationship between the self and the role character can be linked to Diderot’s paradox of acting. According to the comments of the audience after watching the play, they usually agree the actor resembles the character, even the author. Interestingly, the resemblance here refers to both physicality and characteristic features belonging to Şenocak. This evaluation actually displays a worthy point to focus on. While watching Şenocak on stage, one cannot



easily perceive whether the person who is speaking now on stage is Hikmet –the role character- or Şenocak. A transparent line exists between them. How then is it possible to maintain this line as such, or why do people attracted by this type of acting?

### **2.2.1. Diderot and Paradox of Acting**

Denis Diderot (1713-1784), in *The Paradox of Acting* –original title is *Paradoxe sur le comédien*- opposes the conventional “wisdom” of actors at the time who assumed the actor must be convincing and must feel the passion being expressed. He claims the actor must have a perfect talent of mimicry on everything with no emotionality at all to his role character: “He must have, consequently, penetration and no sensibility; the art of mimicking everything, or, which comes to the same thing, the same attitude for every sort of character and part” (Diderot, 1883, p. 7). He insists on this argument throughout the book, since to him, an actor should definitely avoid possessing “sensibility” which is a sign of weakness and impotence. However to claim that the actor must have no sensibility does not mean the actor must act emotionless, as usually misunderstood. Rather he addresses to the core of the actor’s technique, self-control, which is essential for an actor not to lose himself under the sovereignty of emotions. In this sense self-control means to be aware of every element on stage as well as of every little detail of the action. If the actor is aware he is “performing” the character rather than “being” the character, he can reach a consistency from one performance to another. Diderot says: “What confirms me in this view is the unequal acting of players who play from the heart. From them you must expect no unity” (p. 8). Actually by indicating the situation of consistency Diderot does not claim something different from what Grotowski expects from an actor’s “score.” Grotowski asserts the actor must have a certain score to catch a consistency (Slowiak & Cuesta, 2007, p. 49). So for both theorists we might say the technique of the actor is essential through which the actor establishes the structure of his score. As Sennett (2002) states, according to Diderot:

An actor who believes in his own tears, who governs his performance according to his sentiments, who has no distance from the emotions he projects, cannot act consistently. An actor must not respond to the substance of the text to act it, nor is his art governed by the substance of the text. We know, for instance, that a great actor in a bad play can

still give a great performance. The reason lies in the very nature of performed expression: without some work on the emotions to be conveyed, without the exercise of judgment or calculation in showing them, an expression cannot be performed more than once (p. 111).

Clearly, Diderot considers all external elements –nature, text...- as materials for an actor in order to do his art, and use them for the sake of creativity. By saying this indeed, Diderot bears in mind Grotowski's poor theatre. If we remind the fundamental principle of poor theatre, there was no need to use extra tools if they do not serve the actress's action. In fact, it refers more than that since Grotowski (2002a) believes in infinite opportunities that actor's body offers: "We found that it was consummately theatrical for the actor to transform from type to type, character to character, silhouette to silhouette - while the audience watched - in a **poor** manner, using only his own body and craft" (pp. 20-21).

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century people got more involved in the discussions concerning the very essence of theatre and considered acting as an independent art form aside from what had been said on stage. However, as Sennett (2002) affirms, Diderot was the first who conceives performing as an autonomous art for (p. 111). Concerning Diderot's time Sennett clarifies:

Most 16th and 17th Century French theories of acting correlated how an actor performed with the contents of what he or she performed. The truth of the lines spoken had some relationship to how well the actor could speak. Thus it was possible to subsume the idea of acting under the rubric of rhetoric, and to talk of rhetoric in relation to morals and religion (p. 110).

By looking at this passage we may better understand the "unique" position of Diderot among other philosophers and theorists at that time. But how does he value performing as an autonomous art form? Above all, unlike his contemporaries, he barely frees the actor from the author's possession:

...There are three types -Nature's man, the poet's man and the actor's man. Nature's is less great than the poet's; the poet's less great than the great actor's, which is the most exalted of all. This last climbs on the shoulders of the one before him and shuts himself up inside a great basket-work figure of which he is the soul. He moves this figure so as to terrify even the poet, who no longer recognizes himself; and he terrifies us...just as children frighten each other by tucking up their little skirts and putting them over their heads, shaking themselves

about, and imitating as best they can the croaking lugubrious accents of the specter that they counterfeit (Diderot, 1883, p. 101).

But how does he free the actor? What is left after getting freed from the author's possession? How does the actor relate his own character with the role character? Wandering around those arguments Diderot makes a very specific analysis concerning the act of the actor. He argues the very nature of acting, which is the dilemma for an actor that being as himself and representing feelings of another person, and he calls it "the paradox of acting." According to him, a good actor must neither hide his own self nor totally go inside the character. For Diderot this is the paradox of acting, and is not something must be avoided from or get rid of it; rather it is the "core" of acting.

Şenocak also points out that the profoundness of a play depends on this paradox: "Neither the actor, nor the character should be totally seen on the stage. Only Hikmet would be boring and 'arid'. Who cares about only Hikmet, or only me?" (E. Şenocak, personal communication, 7 October 2012). Thus there is not only one addressee –the audience- of the dialogue. There is also the role character. Without establishing a dialogue with these two, as Mordeniz claims, the actor cannot stand alone on the stage; it would become unbearable (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012). That actually is to say that the actor does not need any kind of "identification" with the text or the character, in contrast he should put a distance to them. This is to say, from Gadamer's point of view, the actor must renounce to be able to open himself, and to start the dialogue.

This kind of dialogue, to me, can be also observed in the narration of a storyteller. How can we see openness from the side of the storyteller? A storyteller while telling his/her story does not forget his position of "mediator". From time to time he becomes the hero in the narration, and sometimes he drinks water as himself since he is thirsty. And while doing this action he does not try to cheat the spectators like he drinks water in the position of the hero. He has to maintain such a balance while performing in the face of the others. His action, movements, then becomes real. We start to believe in his honesty, in his *naïveté*. Thus the structure of storytelling displays so many hints on the argument of dialogue.

### 2.2.2. Dialogue in Storytelling

And therefore the first action is non-action. The first thing to be done is what is necessary...We begin for example to eat, not because we're hungry, but because we don't know what to do. He who drinks –or eats- because he's thirsty, or hungry, possesses very beautiful "expression" – he has self-evidence. Because he's not searching for expression.

...

When we reach the point where, in a certain space someone is drinking water, because he is thirsty, a second is singing, because he really wants to sing, a third sleeps because he really wants to sleep, a fourth is running, because something drives him to, and a fifth is fooling about, because of an interest on the others –then we are dealing with the phenomenon of the present. There is no being ahead of oneself, or behind oneself. One is where one is. This is only a first step, but it is the first step towards being what one really is (Kumiega, 1985, p. 227).

Grotowski's words remind us the expression of storyteller. But here he clearly points to the actor's position of being in the present. The actor, who at the same time representing another character out of himself, must not forget the action occurs *at the present*. Thus the situation of "here and now" is mentioned as one of the fundamental principles belongs to acting, and to storytelling. Grotowski says that the theatre is an act carried out here and now in the actors' organisms (Grotowski, 2002b, p. 118), and "it cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, 'live' communion" (Grotowski, 2002a, p. 19).

One of the theatre men of recent times who adopts the possibilities of storytelling into his theatre practice is British director Mike Alfreds. In 1975 he founded a theatre company called "Shared Experience", and since that time he has been exploring the ways for a live actor-spectator relationship. In Crouch's study (2003) he explains why he is interested in storytelling: he says that telling stories assures an immediate relationship with spectators. Every actor, hereby, could be narrator and character at the same time:

Although the company never intended to limit their creative efforts to storytelling alone, the "here and now" and "then and there" aspects of prose seemed the logical place to begin exploring theatrical possibilities. Storytelling brought actor and audience into immediate, unforced contact, and provided freedom for the actor to explore

questions regarding their potential roles: actor as narrator, actor as actor, or actor as character (p. 86).

According to Alfreds the essence of theatre is actor's act of transformation, which is the ability of an actor "to transform himself or herself in the presence of an audience" (pp. 81-82). And the exciting thing for the spectator is witnessing this transformation. As Alfred states: "The actor said, in effect, 'I am both me, here, now and someone else in some other place and time'....The audience had to be made aware of this duality" (p. 82).

Thus actor must not fool the spectator like he does not exist as himself on the stage, but as a dramatic character living in another era. Alfreds' actor, therefore, acts as a storyteller on the stage to be able to handle with this duality. Of course there is the fact that not every text for a theatre performance is suitable for such type of acting, for this Shared Experience takes stories as such "historical epics, erotic romances, moral fables, dirty jokes, shaggy-dog stories, chauvinistic propaganda, picaresque anecdotes, learned debates, social realism, lyric poetry, tales of horror and brutality, of magic, and the supernatural...all interlocked in a complex system of Chinese Boxes" (p. 73).

When we look at Seyyar Sahne's recent plays, which are produced in the end of working on stories, novels and narrations, in all, the performer represents an aspect of storyteller, at some specific moments within the performance. When Mordeniz is asked whether storytelling is indispensable in this sense, he replies: "I guess so. Because storyteller is someone who twists time and space. During the performance he reminds that he is 'here and now'. So, sincerity always exists" (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012). Since it is a kind of narration that Şenocak performs, there are moments where he is in the position of just a mediator between the author and the audience, and moments in which he speaks through the character. Thus, for the spectator, it sometimes becomes difficult to decide who is on the stage now, whether Şenocak is speaking now, or is Hikmet? About the resemblance of Şenocak and the role, Ulus Atayurt asks Şenocak if Hikmet suits more than the other characters of Oğuz Atay. Şenocak confirms such a resemblance with the role character Hikmet: "There are some biographic concurrences. But I don't know, if I would work on *Tutunamayanlar* maybe the audience would say

‘You are just like Turgut!’” (Atayurt, 2010). Thus maybe we cannot easily claim the play’s success lies in those concurrences between the actor and the character. However if we pay attention to Mordeniz’s assertion the formula can be found. For Mordeniz, regarding some particular texts, the actor constitutes an easier dialogue (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012). So to be able to be convincing on the stage, the actor does not need to internalize the character. Rather he should find “his” text. Considering the success of the play, one may claim that Şenocak found his.

Remembering both Diderot’s paradox of acting and the principles of storytelling, what lies under Şenocak’s performance becomes clear. At first his physical technique is apparent while he is moving every part of his body. Through controlling his body, he assures the security of his dangerous movements. Thus the audience does not feel the anxiety of any kind of accidental situation, therefore can unceasingly follow the spectacle. Second, he gives the audience the pleasure of witnessing the transparent line between himself and the role. These lines can be seen at such moments during the performance: He begins his performance coming from inside of the audience, not from backstage. Moreover when he wants to give a break, we do not see a sharp transition from Hikmet to Erdem. He drinks water as Erdem on the edge and turns back to the middle of the stage, then smoothly begins to give life to Hikmet. So the actor on stage does not hide himself at times when he leaves character; he is “there” at the present even he utters someone else’s words. About the effect of this situation on the audience one of them says: “...before the play starts he accompanies the audience as an usher; when he gives a break for drinking water he asks ‘Süreyya, isn’t this spot working? Alright...’ and at the end of the play he reminds us ‘The play is ended’... Many thanks and congratulations to everyone for creating a little hope inside me regarding theatre” (“artin bosgezenyan”, 2012). From this we understood, in the moments when the actor speaks to the light man –Süreyya- to check the lights, the audience does not feel distracted. In the same way the charm of the rest of the play is not lost. The actor continues to “become” Hikmet from the point he left. Moreover, Şenocak’s attempts of getting away from the plot and reentering into it, reinforces the effect of the whole play.

To sum up it can be said, Erdem Şenocak found his text by which he has established a dialogue easier. The tricks of being a storyteller, in his path, help a lot to get in touch with the role character. Though he represents a narrative hero from a novel, he is conscious he stands there above all as himself. By this way of acting the performer does not any more valued as the person who pretends, who tries to be someone else, or who cheats the audience. Concerning this “evil” side of theatre Mordeniz states:

Theatre has such a negative image: In our daily life we often say someone “Do not act/pretend to me!” by which we imply his/her deceptive attitude. However is the actor the one who always copies/pretends the others’ behaviors?...Whereas if the actor speaks – whatever it is- through touching his/her inner world, then this negative image would no longer exist....In *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* the audience does not see someone who pretends; or someone who transcends into another world as soon as the play is ended. Besides, the actor performs with an enormous enthusiasm and sensation. Otherwise it would be something insincere. When one sees an actor who exists on stage as himself, it would be easier for the one to engage in a dialogue with him (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012).

### **2.3. Dialogue with the Audience**

The final formation of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* is 130 minutes with only one actor on the stage. Since the play is too long and it is a solo performance, it sounds a bit frightening for the spectator before coming to the performance. They might have prejudgment and anxiety concerning what they will encounter with. For example one spectator bewailed before seeing *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* as such “What would one person tell for two and half hour, we would surely get bored very much....But I really liked it, even I fell in a crisis of laughter (I hope we did not shame Oğuz Atay). But this version has become much better” (“kordelya”, 2011). For most of the spectators, however, the story can be followed without distraction or even if there is a small loss of concentration it does not cause a problem in the total. This score of the play, which is also acknowledged by the spectators, reflects the third dimension of the dialogue, the relationship with the audience.

Rancière, in his article *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), makes a quite elucidative analysis regarding the position of the spectators. He puts forward the notion of “the paradox of the spectator”, which corresponds to the formula “there is no theatre without a spectator” (p. 2). However, he says, being a spectator is usually understood

as being in a passive position. When we look at the history, as he mentions, there were some endeavors for rescuing the spectator from this position such as Brecht's epic theatre and Artaud's theatre of cruelty (p. 4). As he sheds light to this argument, the spectators are not passive instruments in a theatre activity, since viewing is not the opposite of being active.

Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions (p. 13).

As Rancière clearly states, viewing is also an action, if it would be otherwise it might conduce at the domination from the side of the actor. So there would be no possibility for a dialogic relationship to occur. What we try to elucidate even if the spectator does not have an idea about the plot he/she is watching or listening to, still he/she can be the active participant of the meeting as much as the actor is. This can happen if only the spectator is given a chance for interpreting, observing the action on the stage, in Rancière's words "...spectators see, feel and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem..." (p. 13). In my opinion, the dialogic relationship terminates for both sides at this very crucial point: *composing own poem*. If I turn back to *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, I might say, Şenocak does not stand as the mere conveyer of the author's statements, instead we witness the dialogue between the actor and the author. Through this dialogue there are left some gaps for the audience to fill. So, the actor/the director lets the spectator to compose his/her own poem. Concerning the role of the subjects in this dialogue we should remember the actor reveals, the director ceases himself. As we discussed the positions of these subjects in the previous sections; now we will look at how Seyyar Sahne connects to the audience and how the audience, in turn, experiences this.

For Mordeniz, the dialogue with the audience starts at the point where the actor gives from himself to which I would rather say "inviting the spectator:"

In a theatrical performance the spectator can witness both the performer and the role character that he represents; if only the actor renounces a little from his identity in favor of the identity belongs to the role character. So that, he/she finds the opportunity for entering a



dialogue with the play as well as with the actor. If the spectator is only in dialogue with the actor then he/she cannot live an art experience. Similarly if he/she is only in dialogue with the play; it may stay within the area of an art experience, but it is not a theatrical experience any more (C. Mordeniz, personal communication, 12 October 2012).

Then how can the actor invite the spectator into the meeting? The director does it by creating some gaps in the story. The actor, on the other hand, can manage it by watching –responding- the spectator during his action on the stage. For instance Şenocak responds to every little external stimulant coming from the room and this situation does not oblige him to come off from the role character. He hears the coughs, he sees if someone just enters into the room, he explains he is aware of every movement in the atmosphere. As a matter of fact, facing with such a precision on the stage, the spectator is getting more impressed by his acting. Bahar Çuhadar, in her article (2011), tells about the effect that Şenocak leaves on the audience: “Throughout the performance Şenocak does not let us to forget his position of the teller of the story. He is always among the spectators while he is starting, drinking water, and while the play is ending.” By doing this, Seyyar Sahne liberates the spectator from the obligation of showing empathy towards the character on the stage. As Rancière (2009) relates “...the spectator must be roused from the stupefaction of spectators enthralled by appearances and won over by the empathy that makes them identify with the characters on the stage” (p. 4). In the relationship, which is not dialogic, the spectator is subjugated by the possession of the actor/director; he/she is subject to accept/believe in what the person on the stage tells him/her. It is only through the dialogic relationship, the spectators are becoming emancipated.

The emancipation of the spectators is highly related with the spontaneity in the performance. If the spectator feels the realm of freedom, if he/she feels something on the stage happens owing to his/her particular participation; then the performance becomes unique for him/her. In every performance there must always something not yet finished. Regarding the staging period of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, Arıcı remarks: “We had practiced for 8 months until the premiere of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* at METU theatre festival. But still we were saying, it had presumably not matured yet” (Atayurt, 2010). So in every performance there occurs something particular to that night. If the

spectator sees a finished work –without any gap- on the stage, as Arıcı asserts, there is no chance to connect to the audience.

You start to give the answer which you could not give in the first part when people asked you how you find the play. It is done, you have destroyed the taboo belongs to yourself. Erdem Şenocak has hypnotized your conservative attitude towards the book by riding the swings (“recluseinist”, 2009).

130 minutes is quite long for a theatre play and because of the text is so dense the spectator might get bored, might lose concentration and miss the play but in fact he/she does not miss something in the play. Maybe some parts are spoken quickly and not heard half of them, yet it isn't important as well. It is alright for the spectator even he/she missed these parts. Since the important thing is to catch the mental process; which part of the play is caught, then it is given to the spectator and it becomes really beautiful (“servicio”, 2010).

In the first moments of the play the respectful spectator who tries to laughs gently, after a while loses himself/herself. He/she, leaving aside the comparison with the novel, gives in himself/herself to the man on the empty stage who tells a story alone with the accompaniment of two swings... (Çuhadar, 2011).

Up to here in this chapter, we have tried to perceive the relationships in a theatre activity through the notion of dialogue. It is designated “openness” by all means is necessary to be fully integrated in a mutual relationship in which no side is dominant in the face of the other. In this relationship to which Gadamer calls dialogic, both are the subjects of the action in between. Thus it requires humility, renunciation, and tolerance. Seyyar Sahne's *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, under this topic, is evaluated in the frame of the dimensions of dialogue, rather than as a technical analysis. Although we have discussed dialogue in the domain of an art form, nobody can avoid the requirement of these virtues in a humanly contact.

In Seyyar Sahne's laboratory, aside from searching this kind of dialogue inside the scope of theatre, they also seek for experiencing this with the people out of themselves. For this reason Seyyar Sahne does not appropriate a work principle towards inwards. As a matter of fact, they opened the opportunities of laboratory theatre - which Seyyar Sahne first began to discover by itself -to the others during the summer camps, believing in that this sharing of the experiences should be enhanced. In this way until 2011 they had endured these camps, which were first organized

eight years ago, at different places where they had temporarily accommodated. Those places, however, started to be unsatisfactory by virtue of its capacity to do trainings and the other activities. And the members of Seyyar Sahne, who had been dreaming to build a research center belongs to them, took the very first step to realize the project of Theatre Madrasa in 2010. Theatre Madrasa was established in a small village in İzmir with the initiative of Seyyar Sahne, in an attempt to integrate theatre and daily life, and to share the experience of doing theatre with others. In the next chapter we will look at the foundation period of Theatre Madrasa, which is the first performance research center of Turkey, in the context of its importance for the actor's occupation.

## CHAPTER 3

### Theatre Madrasa: Seyyar Sahne's Workshop

The workshop is the craftsman's home. Traditionally this was literally so. In the Middle Ages craftsmen slept, ate, and raised their children in the places where they worked. The workshop, as well as a home for families, was small in scale, each containing at most a few dozen people; the medieval workshop looked nothing like the modern factory containing hundreds or thousands of people (Sennett, 2008, p. 53).

In this short passage, Sennett reflects the form of a medieval workshop aside from just being the place for labor activity. Through the investigation of the death of the workshop, he finds its cause in the search for originality within the secular age. He makes a connection with the rising of secularity, because the workshop binds people together by the agency of these essential elements: religion and ritual (p.80). Here I will not go into further details regarding the "unfortunate" destiny of medieval workshop. Since, although Ottoman Madrasas were also victim of the secular tradition in Turkish Republic, there lie different parameters under their disappearances. The importance of the definition of medieval workshop for our study, thereby, related with its unique structure that involves the life and the profession of the person. So it might be said that, the workshop is *sine qua non* for the craftsperson.

In the previous chapters we have dealt with two of three essential elements of theatre, as to Brook's formula, which were the actor, and the viewer –audience. So there is left "the empty space." Here, Brook refers to the fundamental elements of an ordinary theatrical activity. However, in this chapter, we enhance the definition of this theatrical space from a performance area, to a wider space where theatre performers can find many opportunities for a collective work. Likewise the craftsman's need for his workshop, the theatre researcher also needs his/her laboratory. To open this, we will focus on the need for the foundation of Theatre Madrasa in terms of a public space as well as of a performance center.

### 3.1. Performance Research Center

It is declared at the web site of Theatre Madrasa that it is the first performance research center in Turkey (“Theatre Madrasa”, 2014a). They assert “Theatre Madrasa will bridge a great artistic gap in Turkey with its emphasis on research and its claim to be a venue for artists in Turkey to meet their colleagues all around the world.” The artistic gap in theatre is associated with “research” by the founders of the Madrasa. What did cause this artistic gap? And through which activities the Madrasa can fill it?

As it is mentioned earlier, the State and Municipality theatres occupy a huge area inside the theatre environment in Turkey. The State gives considerable amount of financial support to the artists who are under the State’s roof, subsidizes some private theatre groups limitedly, whereas “ignores” the other civil initiatives. For this reason the alternative groups cannot survive for long due to financial issues, and be visible inside the domain of theatre. The invisibility, however, cannot be just explicable in terms of the low subsidization, or directly with the lack of props, etc. Since its reasons are related more with an artistic curiosity than just economy. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this situation was prevalent in the European theatre environment as well. For example in Britain, Peter Brook and Michael Kustow were some of the theatre men who were aware of the moribund situation of the theatre world in the country. When Kustow had visited Poland for a congress, he had been very impressed by the work of Grotowski with whom he coincidentally met there. As Jennifer Kumiega (1985) quotes from Kustow’s article that was published in the magazine *Encore* in 1963, he makes a similar analysis concerning the perception of theatre in England:

The great irony in England today is the fervour that can be roused for a moribund art-form...More theatre is not better theatre and better theatre does not necessarily mean highly subsidized main stream work. But without demeaning any of the activity that already exists, I would point out that the one sort of theatre which is practically non-existent in England is laboratory-theatre, studio-theatre, theatre peering intently into its own nature to discover something about its own chemistry. Until such theatre is (a) understood, (b) encouraged, (c) financed, the cause of theatre may be widely championed but the state of theatre will progressively disintegrate (p. 3).

If I am asked to explain what I mean by an artistic curiosity, I would use Kustow's words to define it; *peering intently into its own nature to discover something about its own chemistry*. As we, from the very beginning of this study, tell about the need for the birth of laboratory theatre, during that specific era theatre had a dependence on the "box office". Because of being engaged in such anxieties, it was hard to go out of the system for the owners of those theatre companies. For this, laboratory theatre was a great opportunity to remember what theatre was for. If we again turn back to Turkey, Theatre Madrasa is described as a performance research center rather than a laboratory, although it could be called otherwise. The innovative changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were mostly commemorated with the term of "performance", since then the usage of word has been a reference to that specific time. Performance refers to something more than the traditional meaning of acting. As Richard Schechner (2003) describes: "Today I write "performance," but at the time I wasn't sure what performance was. I knew it was more than what was appearing on the stages of New York, London, or Paris" (p. ix). At this point we will not intend to look at the past of performance since it would take us beyond the realm of theatre. But to open the notion a bit with its connection to theatre, the examination of Erika Fisher-Lichte (2008) seems helpful:

Theatre, too, experienced a performative turn in the 1960s. In particular, it advocated a redefinition of the relationship between actors and spectators...

Theatre was no longer conceived as a representation of a fictive world, which the audience, in turn, was expected to observe, interpret, and understand. Something was to occur between the actors and the spectators and that constituted theatre. It was crucial that something happened between the participants and less important what exactly this was (pp. 20-21).

Thus, whether it is called performance research center or laboratory theatre the main motivation is to undertake a research activity. Surely, until here it is understood that by research we do not allude to a scientific research. But yet the following quotation is worthy to mention to see how Barba (2002) associates the research activity of laboratory theatre with the occupation of a craftsman: "... The word research implies that we approach our profession rather like the mediaeval wood carver who sought to recreate in his block of wood a form, which already existed. We do not work in the

same way as the artist or the scientist, but rather as the shoemaker looking for the right spot on the shoe in which to hammer the nail” (p. 27). Likewise we can easily associate Barba’s or Grotowski’s endeavor for building a theatre laboratory with the craftsman’s *dedication to good work for its own sake*, the idea of the Madrasa can be also linked to the first two. When the Madrasa is asked why a performance research center is needed in Turkey, it replies:

There are many research centers in the world that work on performing arts and inspire Theatre Madrasa. However, theatre in Turkey, which is mostly imbued with productions, does not have such institutions that have dedicated themselves to the research activity. With a few exceptions, neither the publicly-funded theatres that need to keep constant play-producing, nor the private theatres that are preoccupied with earning money, nor the amateur and alternative theatres that are supposed to be dissimilar to the first two places particular importance to the research activity. For that very reason, Theatre Madrasa and the Research Group it will host claim to fill this gap and to be a center for both amateur and professional artists to realize, push and go beyond their limits through the workshops, theatre camps, panels and conferences that will be organized in the Madrasa (“Theatre Madrasa”, 2014b).

By research activity, the Madrasa clearly illuminates what they refer to. As we have seen in the previous chapter, since Seyyar Sahne has started to be more involved in theatre as a research activity, they have tried to create alternative ways to meet more people with an increasing excitement. One of these ways was organizing theatre camps that have been held at different places. And as we have said before, the idea of Theatre Madrasa came out thanks to the experiences attained in those camps.

### **3.1.1. Theatre Camps**

As we shortly mentioned about the theatre camps in the first chapter, they have impressed the participants as well as the trainers in terms of a different theatre perspective. Especially for amateur actors/artists, it is a great opportunity to work continuously for two weeks without being occupied with any other “obligatory” jobs. Seyyar Sahne, from the very beginning, was dreaming to spread this dense theatre activity throughout the year. However due to several reasons such as being engaged with different jobs –mostly for earning money- they have not reached this goal.

At the very beginning the summer camps, by Seyyar Sahne, were intended to better understand the work of theatre masters like Grotowski, Meyerhold, and Barba. For example the first theatre camp (2006) was held in İznik lakeside, renting a friend's house far from city center. There was not even a proper place to practice trainings, but yet the team was enthusiastic enough to push the circumstances by all means. As Esma Şenel, one of the participants, tells they were cooking, cleaning, working for hours at the same time, in the evenings they were watching movies after the trainings were over, and so forth (Şenel, 2006). Besides, there were some visual materials like training videos belong to the archives of those theatre masters. A specific time of the day, which was usually morning hours, was devoted to watching and then trying to do the same exercises in the video. Then the voice exercises, presentations about different topics were following it. The day in İznik camp was starting around 9 a.m. and lasting until midnight. So, it was actually quite tiring to endure this schedule for 15 days. On the other hand the work hours were flexible. They were trying to “awake”, there were so many parameters that might affect the work such as the condition of people, the outer elements like weather, etc. As Şenel continues, although they had decided the daily schedule would start at 6:30 a.m., at the second day of the camp they canceled this earliest session (Şenel, 2006). This flexibility in a large scale, in fact, was “essential”. Kerem Eksen, in his camp diary, remarks the fluid structure of the group and makes clear why this situation is inevitable: “The most important event of the day was that some of the group has returned to Istanbul. Indeed, to some extent, the first half of the camp is ended by this way. We will continue to work with the ones who could take time off from workplace, and who don't have another compulsory work to do” (Eksen, 2006).

Aside from the artistic side of these camps that we have mentioned so far, this kind of experience also has a great influence on the practice of a collective life. As being one of the people that had experienced a camp period, I must note, living a collective life needs “self-sacrifice”, which is also required for a disciplined theatre work. In this sense I may claim, any kind of difficulty that an actress encounters with in acting, she is likely to find its correspondence in her daily life. By which I mean, theatre and everyday life are strictly interwoven. Eksen also confirms this side of the camps as following:



When we were planning İznik camp our primary goal was to put an order to which we aren't familiar regarding both in spatial and chronic sense; to get rid of the obligations belong to daily life even if for a short time; and to direct this concentration to a work tending towards an artistic production. Besides, the camp period was embodying further beyond the artistic goal...

Another dimension of the camp pertaining to the social relationships, on the other hand, also held positive qualifications for us, in general. It was very important for us that; the issues like division of labor, organization, timing did not cause serious and permanent tension in staff, and there did not occur such a separation 'hardworking and lazy ones'.

Following the first camp, Seyyar Sahne continued to organize the others in every summer. These short-lived summer activities indeed were squeezed version of a long-term theatre laboratory. However for a real laboratory training, duration is vital. As Maria Shevtsova illuminates Lev Dodin, who is one of the pupils of Stanislavski, adapts this principle of ongoing research as a lifetime practice. Regarding his trainings at Maly Drama Theatre, Shevtsova states:

Duration is central to the Maly, affecting the director as much as the actor in that all modify their work during the course of time. Dodin calls it a 'journey without end', a journey where, as well, collaborative discovery nurtures the co-authorship between actor and director at every stage of the working process, which eventually leads to the productions shared with audiences (p. 3).

From the very beginning Seyyar Sahne has been aware of the necessity of the duration, yet they could not extend it to the wintertime. By referring to the passage it can be inferred, Dodin's *journey without end* resembles the practice of Seyyar Sahne in the sense of the relationship of the actor and the director. Even if Seyyar Sahne's dense theatre activity has remained in summer times, still its impact on the practices, which have been held throughout the year is noticeable. In the previous chapter I have already demonstrated what was changed in an ordinary staging period of a play and how the relationships has been evolved after entering into the research path. Nevertheless such artistic "deviations" are not just peculiar to Seyyar Sahne. It was also prevalent among the other participants who have come from the university groups such as ITU Sahnesi and Bilgi Sahnesi. For an example the evaluation notes of Doğu Can, who was participated in more than one camp, can be shown:

...On the other hand, camp is neither a repetition, nor a workshop or a meeting. In this sense if the camp is considered as independent from the space, time and conditions belong to where it is organized; then it is subjected to be a death repetition of itself, or to lose its content. Taking into consideration of this case, it is obvious that there exist some experiences which are not possible to convey to our groups. The mountain hiking which was organized during 2008 Gümüşlük camp led me to think in this way. I did not participate in this camp, but I was trying to be informed about the trainings and the discussions... However... the mountain hiking was pertaining to that place, to that mood, and to inner experiences belong to the person... (Can, 2010).

As we understood from the participants' thoughts those theatre camps have resulted in ineffable inner experiences in addition to the ones gained through working with other people. It can be claimed that, the method of dialogue which is settled inside the theatre practice of Seyyar Sahne; it has been also intended to spread it over the relationships with other people. This attempt can be seen in the speeches of the members. For example when Şenocak is asked why he does theatre, his answer reveals a deeper intention regarding the theatre: "To be a better person" (Çıtak, 2010).

### **3.2. Structure of Madrasa**

Above we have proved that Theatre Madrasa can be both called as a performance research center or a laboratory. But rather it is called "Madrasa" with reference to its architectural structure. Why is there such a preference? Why not any other ancient architecture but Madrasa? What are those Madrasas? Aside from just being a beautiful venue for a performance research center, the founders of the Madrasa has a special interest in this old structure due to several reasons.

Before starting we must underline, referring the conversations I had, that the project was inspired by the masters such Grotowski and Barba who had also once preferred to work in nature far from crowd. The Madrasa is, as journalist Çuhadar (2012) also points, planned as a space for either secluding oneself or leading a collective work in the courtyard. On the other hand these forthcoming activities can be actualized through the opportunities provided by both the architecture and the contextual structure belongs to the Madrasa. At this point I need to go into details of how Madrasas create both private and public realms.

The word “madrasa” comes from the Arabic word *darsun*, which means “lesson” (Ashraf, 2012, p. 7). Until here we mentioned from Madrasas as ancient constructions, however, this situation is particular in Turkey’s conditions. There still exist Madrasas in many countries –especially in Arab world- operating as educational institutions. As Ashraf describes: “The madrassa connotes a school... offering instruction in Islamic subjects including the translation and interpretation of the Qur’an, sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad, Islamic jurisprudence and law etc. In recent years the madrassa has been used as a general term to mean any school that promotes an Islam-based curriculum (p. 8).” The disappearance of the Ottoman Madrasas in Turkey is very much related with this religious side of these schools. In 1924, one year after the foundation of Turkish Republic, one of the reforms was made in the realm of education. The law, *Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*, was promulgated as an attempt for laying the foundation of new, modern, and secular country. Thus as a part of this secularization process, except the ones which were not designated as “dangerous” for Republican regime, Madrasas were shut down.<sup>5</sup> And since a space can sustain its existence by means of its activity, the Madrasas have been subjugated to disappear. In consequence, one part of Seyyar Sahne’s enthusiasm about building the Madrasa is related with this fact. They explain this as following: “...Theatre Madrasa in Şirince will be the one of the rare madrasas built in the history of the Republic of Turkey. What excites us is this composition between theatre, one of the most significant symbols of the adventure of modernization in Turkey, and a deep-rooted tradition of the form of madrasa” (“Theatre Madrasa”, 2014c).

Moreover, in order to add more into the discussion about the architecture, we should hear from them why they did not prefer to build just a modern structure or just an institution:

...when we set up such a “learning centre” for theatre and performing arts, we do prefer to construct a “madrasa”, which prescribes a different insight of duration, manner and theme for each participant, rather than a “school”, which belongs to the modern era entailing a time- method-content-limited, compulsive and standardized approach

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/110.html> for the law in question, and see İshak Dursun’s article: Kürt Medreseleri’nin kapatılması da Asimilasyonun bir Parçasıydı, (2010, December 25). *Özgür Gündem*, for an insightful analysis on Madrasas and the republican regime.

for everyone. We intend to construct an *ecole* where the masters continue to learn with the apprentices and therefore, a tradition to be transferred from one generation to the other in a new fashion (2014c).

To me, here, the most striking point is the idea of transferring this structure to further generations. Since, this expression reminds me a part from Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1998) which I read once. From Arendt's point of view, Theatre Madrasa has the potential for being a public realm, because of its aim to remain "permanent". In the same way Arendt links the idea of immortality to the existence of political realm. But we will not deepen this argument since it is not related to our topic. Concerning our discussion Arendt claims:

Only the existence of a public realm and the world's subsequent transformation into a community of things which gathers men together and relates them to each other depends entirely on permanence. If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men (p. 55).

Another inspiring quality of Madrasas is the characteristic of the relationships between the masters/teachers and the pupils. In a Madrasa the teachers and the pupils live and work together under the same roof, and apprenticeship was the main factor determining the relationship between them. Since Sennett (2008) defines craftsman's home as "a place that unites family and labor" (p. 62), from this aspect we can understand the Madrasa structure as the craftsman's home. And another common point, which could be found in this comparison, is the relationship between the master and the apprentice. The relationship in between, for Sennett, should depend on a legitimate authority rather than on written rules. As he asserts: "In craftsmanship there must be a superior who sets standards and who trains. In the workshop, inequalities of skill and experience become face-to-face issues. The successful workshop will establish legitimate authority in the flesh, not in rights or duties set down on paper" (p. 54). We can say that this type of authority is tried to be established in Theatre Madrasa as well. In such a place there is difficult to organize something without dominating some groups, but which then would cause a non-dialogic relationship. For Sennett craftsman's workshop should remain as a social space because: "...Workshops present and past have glued people together through work rituals, whether these be a shared cup of tea or the urban parade; through

mentoring, whether the formal surrogate parenting of medieval times or informal advising on the worksite; through face-to-face sharing of information” (p. 73). Theatre Madrasa is now two years old, however, there is already created some *work rituals* through which people met, discuss, share together. For example, the work demonstrations are the outcomes of short camp periods, performances by which different groups/artists can represent themselves, tea times when all participants meet and talk, and of course division of labor such as cleaning the bathrooms, washing the dishes, mowing the grass.... Thus, *in this social space, public realm*, in the Madrasa; the master/apprentice relationship in question will proceed through the activity of a research team. And this research team will work parallel with the discipline belongs to Dodin’s *journey without end* or Barba’s *unending school* in which “apprenticeship is unending” (Barba, 1999, p. 67). As the Madrasa declares “Research Team will be composed of 6 to 8 people who will stay in Madrasa all the year round and do an intensive rehearsal during 5 or 6 days a week” (“Theatre Madrasa”, 2014d). Then we might claim this intensive work is seemingly focused on achieving quality, on good work, which, for Sennett, is “the craftsman’s primordial mark of identity” (Sennett, 2008, p. 25).

The construction of Theatre Madrasa is now in process. Although almost half of the structure is finished, yet there can be still organized theatre camps, and small meetings. In addition to theatre activities the Madrasa also welcomes projects, which belong to moviemakers, musicians, painters, authors, dancers, philosophers, etc. For instance, in 2013 the summer camps have started with a philosophy camp. Moreover, its capacity is getting increased although they can host 50 people at most for now. When the second floor with other training saloons and private rooms will be completed, this amount will be around 100.

Theatre Madrasa is a non-profit organization. Since there is not any institutional support, the Madrasa staff accepts all kind of support coming from artists, friends, researchers, and art-lovers. Nowadays any financial contribution is just used to finish the construction. However, after finishing it, as soon as Madrasa gets money either from donations, or from the projects, the money will be “spent for the other projects in the Madrasa or it will be given to the artists and artist candidates as scholarship” (“Theatre Madrasa”, 2014e).

In sum, Theatre Madrasa seems to satisfy the need for such a research center, serving also as an effective public realm. Until the foundation of Theatre Madrasa, Seyyar Sahne had endured theatre practice at different places, but in the end they could not resist against the circumstances of this mobility. Theatre as well as public realm needs the workshops of craftsmen, for dedicating oneself not just to be a better actor, but also perhaps *to be a better person*.

## CONCLUSION

The argument, which lies at the very center of this study, arose from a curiosity regarding actor's engagement in theatre. In the light of Seyyar Sahne's work in particular, I took the concept of craftsmanship as a means to reconsider the positions of the subjects belonging to theatre: the actor, the director, and the audience. At this point, Sennett's definition of craftsmanship shed light into this argument and made me consider theatre as a craft. Taking craft as *dedication to good work for its own sake* has become the starting point for me on the way to identify Seyyar Sahne's underlying motivation for doing theatre.

Through analyzing Seyyar Sahne's two of recent projects, *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* and Theatre Madrasa, I intended to draw attention to the quality of work they had done by means of the devotion to their craft. In *Tehlikeli Oyunlar*, it becomes clear with the performance of the actor. The background of the play rooted in a long period in which Seyyar Sahne had sought for the way to free the actor in his relation to the director and the audience, and at the end, they got a successful play in their hand. So, the rehearsal period of *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* is put forth as a small scale of Seyyar Sahne's acting craft. By deepening this period, I came up with the group's connection with the notion of dialogue. As it is argued, the dialogic relationship, which Gadamer formulates as the third type of I-Thou relationship, is adopted by Seyyar Sahne as a fundamental principle for a mutual relationship. The dialogic relationship serves two people a "living" mutual relationship, and by this way they get the opportunity to be in the subject position without ignoring the other. In the practice of Seyyar Sahne, this kind of relationship is aimed between the actor, the director, and the audience. Moreover, the dialogue existed in the group has a multi-dimensional structure, which goes beyond the dimension of the actor and the director. Since the group does not differentiate "being a good actor" and "being a good person", the actor's dialogue in his craft intertwines with his daily life. In this sense, Theatre Madrasa, which is recently founded by Seyyar Sahne as a research center, appears as a pure space to be able to exceed the borders of private realm in terms of a dialogic relationship.

Seyyar Sahne involved in theatre evolving from a small amateur group, to one, which occupies an important position in the field of alternative theatre. Beginning from its foundation, they were in an attempt to question their ongoing work by means of a challenge in acting. In this sense, it can be said, Seyyar Sahne seizes upon a work discipline which depends on an amateurish enthusiasm particular to an apprentice, and on a dedication to their craft particular to a master. By amateurish enthusiasm, I particularly evoke the word's root derived from Latin word *amatorem*. *Amatorem* means "lover", and in its etymology it corresponds to "one who has a taste for something". Coming from an amateur tradition in the university theatre Seyyar Sahne members have possessed this kind of enthusiasm regarding their craft. Otherwise, according to me, it would not conclude with a project like Theatre Madrasa. So, using Sennett's definition of craftsman, I would say, the actor in Seyyar Sahne "represents the special human condition of being engaged" (p. 20).

In this study, while exploring craftsmanship in theatre, I put forth the concept of laboratory theatre referring particularly to Grotowski. The discussions and sources about his Laboratory Theatre helped me to shape the framework the topic of craftsmanship and Seyyar Sahne's practice. Grotowski is important in this study for many reasons. His perception of theatre is vast enough to encompass also the issues belong to humanly relationships at the center of life. So, I also intended to point out this humanly relationship dimension of theatre. Because, if there is no a genuine dialogue in which, from Buber's view, people essentially see and experience the other, there is no theatre activity either. That is the reason why in the last chapter I mentioned about the opportunities provided by Theatre Madrasa, which also stands as a public space in addition to a theatre area.

In addition to all, it should be remarked, Seyyar Sahne is not the only one that keeps alive today's theatre environment in Turkey. Tiyatro Oyunevi, Altıdan Sonra Tiyatro, Semaver Kumpanya, Ekip Tiyatrosu, Stüdyo Oyuncuları, and more, which bring out good alternative ways to mainstream of theatre, must be included as well. However, due to limited space for a master thesis, I did not go into a deeper analysis on alternative theatres.



From the beginning to the end, I have personally witnessed Seyyar Sahne's dedication on acting, putting the actor at the core of this dedication, and share its experiences to with other artists. As a consequence, this path moved towards the foundation of Theatre Madrasa, which one might claim, symbolizes the embodiment of theatre as research activity. Both as a public and a private space, as providing opportunity for both seclusion and collective work, it seems that Theatre Madrasa will introduce a new perspective into the theatre world. The master-apprentice relationship, which has fallen through the cracks in modern world, will render a transmission of the legacy considering acting through a research activity. Furthermore, the Madrasa should be seen as Seyyar Sahne's attempt to integrate theatre into everyday life. Then, the dialogue that is tried to be established in the theatre practice can diffuse into every part of this space.

To conclude, I would like to say a couple of words about today's theatre world. If today we, as theatre performers, complain about the lack of interest on theatre; before accusing the spectators, we should first question ourselves. Regarding a low attendance in a play, actors usually fell into this trap of theatre, and assert "People do not understand theatre". This attitude definitely shows an aspect of "high-hat" person who innately blocks constitution of the dialogue. I believe, if the actor/director knows what he/she says on stage, then there is no way for the audience not to understand, or not to participate in it. So, theatre performer should always be in search for something inside his/her profession; be like an investigator, a craftsman. As I put Seyyar Sahne in case, then it would be nice to hear Şenocak's words concerning this discussion. In Çıtak's interview he succinctly elucidates the path of the actor. When Çıtak asks "...in general sense, towards where do you proceed?" he replies: "On the day when we would know where we are going, we will probably quit theatre" (Çıtak, 2010).

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