

LEADERLESS

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The Only Creature to Imitate Freedom Özgürlüğünü taklit eden tek varlık

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Struggling for self-leadership is already a defeat at birth.

This is a defeat that takes the lead in the mother's womb and rushes to the finish line "with all its humility" (!) among all the sperm.

The creature (or sometimes two, three, four creatures) camouflage(s) themselves with the most civilized savagery possible in order to appear on the podium of life and to hoist their self-flag in this olympic game of existence.

Existence is a person's power space, place and possessions.

A person is forced to be a figurant, character actor, screenwriter, director and producer at the same time, with the chaotic raffle of many factors based on genetics, culture and chance.

Art reveals the understanding of "Gesamtkunstwerk" —Holistic Work of Art, of which Richard Wagner takes the lead, approaching people in a total manner.

In the world of 2020, this situation has become such that the more the representation escapes, the more it is caught in the truth, and the more the truth is judged by the representation it has arrested, the more it becomes its prisoner.

The spirit of today (Zeitgeist) owes its existence to the level of nothingness.

As it is expressed, it murders itself.

Because humans are the only entity that can gain the power arising from its own freedom by imitating its existence.

Perhaps this is the reason for their greedy, productive and sincere refuge in the creator and in all kinds of representation, which will continue for eternity.

Kişinin kendi(-lik) liderliği için verdiği mücadele, zaten doğduğunda kazanılmış bir yenilgidir.

Ana rahminde başı çekip, onca sperm arasından, 'tüm alçakgönüllülüğü ile' (!) finişe koşan bir yenilgidir bu.

(Bazen iki, üç, dört) varlık, hayat podyumunda boy göstermek ve bu varlık olimpiyatında kendi benlik bayrağını dalgalandırmak için, olabilecek en medenî yabanıllığı ile kendini kendine kamufle eder.

Varoluş, kişinin iktidar uzamı, alanı ve eşyasıdır. Kişi, genetik, kültürel ve tesadüfe dayalı nice etmenin kaotik şekilişiyle, varoluşun aynı anda hem figüranı, hem karakter oyuncusu, hem senaristi, hem yönetmeni ve hem de prodüktörü olmaya zorlanır.

Sanat da insana topyekûn tavır içinde yaklaşan, Richard Wagner'in öncülü olduğu 'Gesamtkunstwerk' - Bütüncül Sanat Eseri anlayışını ortaya koyar.

2020'nin dünyasında bu durum, öyle bir hal almıştır ki, temsil kaçtıkça, hakikate daha çok yakalanır ve hakikat de tutukladığı temsili yargıladıkça, onun daha da tutsağı haline dönüşür.

Bugünkü zamanın ruhu (Zeitgeist), varoluşunu yokluk seviyesine borçludur.

Tabir edildikçe, kendini katleder.

Çünkü kendi özgürlüğünden doğan iktidarı, varoluşunu taklit ederek kazanabilen tek varlık, insan olabilir.

Her türlü temsiliyete, sonsuzluğa dek sürecek, yaratıcıya gönülden açgözlü, o üretken ve samimi ilticası da, galiba bundandır.

Leaderless Lidersiz

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We are "Leaderless," an artistic political party. We don't represent any countries. We are global and transnational. We are here and everywhere. And we can always be replaced. We attempt to decentralize the power on one individual so that the singular form of a leader no longer exists. We criticize the mechanism that produces totalitarian leaders. We resist the violence of totalitarianism. We are not against leading or leadership but we are against the unbalanced power distribution which centralizes power into one individual. Leaderless is an attempt to obliterate the production of a totalitarian leader.

We are "Leaderless." We believe in no hero. We refuse to idolize the image of a leader. We are not superstitious, we don't believe that a hero exists. We don't worship any leaders. We question why there is only one leader in some countries and why the face of the leader represents the people. It is a belief that tortures everyone silently without anyone noticing their own faces. Sometimes, ignorance becomes passion, and it is the passion that frequently motivates the state to kill.

We are "Leaderless." We question the freedom of being leaderless that we actively avoid. When everyone becomes a leader, no one is a leader. We witness the collapse of the power structures in our current world. And we remodel the distribution systems where the representation of power circulates. Our power doesn't belong to the norms. Our power is non-oppressive. Our power is artistic. We are no leader. We are no hero. We are leaderless.

Biz "Lidersiz"iz, sanatsal bir siyasi partiyiz. Hiçbir ülkeyi temsil etmiyoruz. Küresel ve ulusötesiyiz. Buradayız ve her yerdeyiz. Yerimize başkasını her zaman koyabilirsiniz. Tekil bir lider formunun artık var olmaması için gücü tek bir kişiden alarak merkezsizleştirmeye çalışıyoruz. Totaliter liderler üreten mekanizmayı eleştiriyoruz. Totalitarizmin şiddetine direniyoruz. Liderlik etmeye veya liderlik kategorisine karşı değiliz, ancak gücü tek bir bireyde toplayan orantısız güç dağılımına karşıyız. Lidersiz Partisi toplumun totaliter bir lider yaratmasını yok etme girişimidir.

Biz "Lidersiz"iz. Hiçbir kahramana inanmayız. Bir liderin imajını putlaştırmayı reddediyoruz. Batıl inançlara sahip değiliz, kahramanlara inanmıyoruz. Hiçbir lidere tapmıyoruz. Bazı ülkelerde neden tek bir lider olduğunu ve bu liderin yüzünün neden tüm halkı temsil ettiğini sorguluyoruz. Bu insanların kendi yüzlerini fark etmeden sessizce bağlandığı korkunç bir inançtır. Bazen cehalet tutkuya dönüşür ve devlet, sıklıkla gördüğümüz gibi, bu tutkuyu insanları öldürmek için kullanır.

Biz "Lidersiz"iz. Aktif olarak kaçındığımız lidersiz olma özgürlüğünü sorguluyoruz. Herkes lider olduğunda, kimse lider değildir. Günümüz dünyasında güç yapısının çöküşüne tanık oluyoruz. Güç temsilinin dolaşıma girdiği dağıtım sistemlerini yeniden şekillendiriyoruz. Gücümüzü normlardan almıyoruz. Gücümüz baskıcı değil. Gücümüz sanatsal. Biz lider değiliz. Biz kahraman değiliz. Biz lidersiziz.



Crowds without Leaders: From the Streets to Solidarity Networks Sokaklardan Dayanışma Ağlarına Lidersiz Kalabalıklar

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A full year has passed with a pandemic that has externally conditioned our lives and identities. Quarantine measures that prioritizes community over individual and overreliance on state actors for public health and welfare provisioning decimated our agency to decide for ourselves. Compounded with the trend towards over-centralization of political decision making in the hands of disproportionately powerful national leaders, will the post-pandemic world witness a sweeping away of grassroots collective action in the form of discontent against the political authority or horizontal solidarity networks?

Yaşamlarımızı ve kimliklerimizi dışarıdan koşullandıran salgınla tam bir yılı devirmiş bulunuyoruz. Bireysel karantina önlemleri ve kamu sağlığının ve refahının sağlanması için devletin tek dayanak olarak kalması birer özne olarak kendi adımaza karar verme kapasitemizi elimizden aldı. Orantısız ölçüde güç sahibi ulusal liderlerin elindeki siyasi karar alma mekanizmasının aşırı derecede merkezleştirilmesi eğilimiyle birleştiğinde, pandemi sonrası dünyada siyasi otoriteye karşı duran kolektif eylemlerin ya da yatay dayanışma ağlarının zayıflayıp kaybolmasına mı tanık olacağız?

(p./syf. 7)



Gündüz Vassaf on Leaderless in Conversation with Isaac Chong Wai

Vassaf: Absolutely, language is such an important aspect. Unfortunately the growing hegemony of English is like losing the Amazon in the sense of losing many species that make up the world's eco system. Loss of languages critically diminishes our perspective of looking at the world, at each other and ourselves. As our species become more homogenous with the domination of English, the more we lose our flexibility of mental adaptation to changing conditions. In a Darwinian sense, this is a disaster. The more we have a sense of the other; the more we can communicate in a myriad of languages. We become a richer, stronger, more adaptable species. Translation machines may be of some help in preserving native languages but it is not the same thing. (p.4)

Gündüz Vassaf ve Isaac Chong Wai “Lidersiz” Üzerine Sohbet Ediyor

Vassaf: Dil meselenin kesinlikle çok önemli bir boyutu. Ne yazık ki İngilizcenin büyüyen hegemonyası, dünyanın ekosistemini oluşturan birçok türü kaybetmek bakımından Amazon'u kaybetmek gibi oldu. Dil kaybı dünyaya, birbirimize ve kendimize bakış açımızın çeşitliliğini kritik ölçüde azaltıyor. Türemüz İngiliz hakimiyetiyle homojen hale geldikçe, değişen koşullara zihinsel anlamda adapte olma esnekliğimizi yitiriyoruz. Darwinci anlamda bu bir felakettir. Diğerini ne kadar çok hissederseniz, o kadar çok dilde iletişim kurabiliriz. Daha zengin, daha güçlü, daha uyumlu bir tür haline geliyoruz. Çeviri makineleri ana dilleri korumada biraz yardımcı olabilir, ama aynı şey değil. (Syf. 5)

Gündüz Vassaf on Leaderless in Conversation with Isaac Chong Wai

Isaac: Even until today many people still believe in charismatic leadership unquestionably and it is difficult to imagine a leaderless world where totalitarianism is impossible. Your book *Prisoner of Ourselves: Totalitarianism in Everyday Life* clearly denies the totalitarian reasoning of every little decision or even words that we are “entitled” to make or utter in our daily life. I was fascinated by how you write about the word silence, and how we perceive silence. In the chapter “Prisoners of Speech” you said, “Silence is not the absence of words. It is not a void that is to be filled. For even the word silence is wrong.” (Vassaf, 2011, p. 128) With the fact that both leaderless and silence is often perceived as the absence of their positive forms. Do you think that the word leaderless is wrong in this context, like silence is wrong as you said in your book?

Vassaf: First, let me begin with something that my mother told me. Two friends get together, sit down but do not speak. At the end of an hour they get up and say “We had a wonderful time,” and part. Silence can be fulfilling.

Leaderless... Almost anything that implies “-less” in the spiritual or the social context disturbs me. We can certainly say “weightless” or “weightlessness,” we can certainly measure quantities of less and more, but when we come to social and human characteristics, it becomes an ambiguous and messy affair. Let’s take religion. Persons who don’t profess to a god are called a-theistic, without god, as if the normal situation is to have a god. If anything, it should be the other way around. People who profess to a god should say “I have a god.” Why should those who don’t, be put on the spot by having to say, “I’m an a-theist.” The same with the word “childless.” It’s just as normal to be a father or mother, as not to have a child. But especially for women in many societies, the word childless has a negative connotation, as if it’s our job is to produce a child. So, speaking about Leaderless as well, it assumes a leader or leadership as a natural part of human society. No question that it has been, in many cultures, across time. But certainly it does not mean it has to be. There are exceptions where the concept of leadership has been very fluid.

Isaac: I often think about this very dominant positive form and how negation is perceived generally as something negative. We juxtapose negativity with shortage and then we go back to the positive form. It’s just like the words, silence, leaderless and childless which lead us to think that something is missing. You said “the word silence is wrong.” Should we make it right by coining a new word? Would it then be a danger to create another positive form? If the missing, or -less or silence become a positive form of a word, then the positive form actually also includes the negative form as ambiguous.

Vassaf: New words arise out of need but it’s difficult to create new words when that need has not infiltrated itself across society, when it has not been collectively internalized. For instance, we have many programs training business leaders and politicians in public speaking, a tradition that goes back to Cicero. We can indeed learn how to speak well. However, I know of no courses or exercises on listening. We are very much geared to human speech itself. No matter how well one speaks, if we don’t know how to listen, speech is not heard in the sense that it’s not perceived. Especially with the influx of the media: A thousand radio stations, a thousand TV stations, cell phones, tablets etc. One is always hearing something. An inverse relationship in our century is that the more we hear the less we understand. It’s beyond human capacity for us take all this in, thus necessitating a filtering mechanism. But for even that, we have to be attentive to society in a way that it’s not possible since we’re drunk with sound, we’re drunk with speech. We are bombarded with speech. If there is to be a new word or words for silence, it will only come as a result of learning how to listen, so that silence, in and of itself, becomes not a lack of something but a word to describe a state of being.

Isaac: It is same for the word leaderless. Maybe a new word will come as a result of following the powerless people, so that the people won’t be drunk with being led the whole time but the subjectivity to be fol-

lowed. In the time that we are in right now, the pandemic, we always look at leaders, saying “He or she has done this wrong or right.” We always look at events on an individual basis but we forget the people who are suffering or people who are “supposed” to listen to the order from authority. We ignore people who are listening, but those people that we ignore are actually doing the job: to deal with the pandemic, we need people to act together. This is about how we should listen to the people who are “supposed” to listen and how by doing so we decentralize the need of the positive form, needing a leader, needing a speech. It is important for us to remember that we should listen and listening is powerful.

Vassaf: Although it is important to listen, the authority, the powers that be, want us to listen ad infinitum to the degree that we are expected to be attentive listeners, especially before the state and its leaders. But it all begins with the family, especially in traditional societies. A child should be seen but not heard. Whenever a child shows excitement or points out something while inadvertently interrupting adults, a parent, Instead of being attentive to what the child is experiencing, often says, “Later,” or “Listen to me!” or even “Shut up!” As we grow up, listening has different attributes and phases. When we begin to speak our first words, our parents are so proud that instead of paying attention to what we’re communicating, they show off what we’re saying to the neighbors, friends and even each other as if the children are on show. So in the initial speaking attempts, the child is not in a mutual relationship as others are not attending to the meaning, treating what’s been said as word salad. They observe the child as a performer, rather than someone communicating.

Also, were we to look at the other side of the coin, as much as it is important to listen, it’s often that we are forced to listen to those who have authority, those who are in a position of power. Thus, when the authority is no longer around we let loose and speak at random, more gibberish than anything else. In a classroom for instance, when the teacher leaves there is often an immediate uproar. The classroom is a situation where authority, a totalitarian order, reigns. Once liberated, our speech is just let off steam.

Isaac: Almost everyone has this experience of performing in the space which is coded or theorized by the authority. Within the space, you cannot speak loud, you have to listen. Even the first time that we are speaking, we are ready to be the part of the system of obedience to the parent, the system and the authority. To counter the coded space, we need the people in power to listen instead of creating oppressive reality where only one side is listening. It reminds me of the biography of Mao Zedong. He said “People like me only have a duty to ourselves; we have no duty to other people.” “I am responsible only for the reality that I know.” (Chang and Halliday, 2011, p.13) That means he is not responsible to other people’s realities.

Vassaf: That makes Mao one of the first postmodernists.

Isaac: Maybe it’s because of his skepticism. Mao is skeptical to everyone else but he forgets about being critical with himself. He refuses to perceive or listen to other realities that he has not experienced. If a social system require leaders to listen to people who are muted or supposed to listen, many political disasters could have been avoided. It makes no sense that the authority is centralized in one individual and this person is changing the world. Why do we think one person could change the world? We amplify the idea of a hero, of a leader as well as what they have done. But we forget that the great jobs that a hero has done cannot be made possible with the participation of other people. These people are often forgotten and only one name remains to be celebrated.

Vassaf: You are talking about leaders learning how to listen to those who are silent. Unfortunately what leaders expect in their egocentricism is not criticism but praise. Especially with very strong leaders where we see a cult of personality. You just mentioned Mao. It certainly existed also with Stalin, Peron, Mussolini, Castro... Elected leaders too develop a cult of personality. They get used to being praised.

Initially, in their transition, they can be modest, say “No, don’t praise me, please criticize me,” etc. But the more they are praised the more they speak and give long winded speeches. They perceive an exchange of views as criticism, as an act of opposition, a sign of animosity The biggest fear of a leader is that he can be replaced by election or overthrown by revolution. In the US constitution, there is a right to overthrow the leader if he becomes oppressive and violates the constitution. That’s why there is still the second amendment which gives the people the right to bear arms. Leaders love to forget that they are replaceable. That we the people have a right to get rid of them one way or another.

They do not like to listen to criticism because they are afraid of losing their power. Especially when they identify themselves with the well being of the state, when they become one with the state and end up silencing the people. Thus, the only way they can keep a pulse on their authority is with their secret police. They send them amongst the public to collect information as to what the people are really saying about the leader. But even that doesn’t work, because the police are afraid to relay these criticisms to the president, to the powers that be. I remember when the Spanish fascist dictator, Franco, died. There had to be a medical death certificate. The four doctors attending him could not bring themselves even to write the report that he was dead until it was early morning while keeping the nation waiting.

Isaac: It’s crazy to see how praising becomes the only reality for leaders. They are “entitled” to be praised because they have been praised for a long time. Somehow being praised becomes the only truth. When you mention about spies, it reminds me of what is going on right now in Hong Kong. They set up a hotline that you can report if your neighbors are doing something which is promoting segregation. The idea of the hotline, how “hot” is the line, saying that the word itself already promotes how “hot” it should be. The hotness of the hotlines is being set up with the truth of praising and affirming the authority. The interpretation was defined even before the call was received. They are actually listening so that they don’t lose power, they can continue

being praised and hold on to the reality that they believe. For them, they claim it is natural, because they created the meaning of being natural before even saying it. What if the hotline is leaderless that none of the interpretations will be beneficial to only one entity. We see many tactics that people use during leaderless movement such as making decision by polling online or occupying streets or spreading news and images through bluetooth to random people. Everyone becomes the person behind the hotline and has the power to decide which action to take. Looking into the leaderless social movements that we have been witnessing these years, we cannot even name a leader when we think of millions of people protesting on the streets, especially young people. How is it different from your generation? Do you see the tactics of leaderless becoming more important in the future?

Vassaf: Yes, even now, the present is becoming leaderless. The new generation is leaderless. I am of the ‘68 generation, Vietnam generation so to speak, a young people’s generation in Japan, Germany, China, and throughout the world. We had leaders. In the past decade, whether we are talking about Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, Spain, England, London, Brazil, tens of movements, millions of people participated. We cannot name a single leader. This is a first in history. A leaderless generation. Another example, are the Baltic countries like Estonia and Latvia where they had their Singing Revolutions. They joined hands across the whole country and sang their way to freedom. Russia just gave up. Yet the young are often criticized for being a political, for caring too much about their shoes, their music, of being aloof to politics, not voting, etc. When push comes to shove, as in the example of Hong Kong, they are political. It’s the outdated political game of the establishment that they are aloof to. This makes them even more political in the sense that by turning their backs to the powers that be, they show the illegitimacy of the reigning order. If you’re not participating in the order, that order is collapsing. The leaderless society is very much alive and happy. Not so happy of our planet in crises of course, but happy of being independent of leaders.

Isaac: In the chapter *Heroes Are*

Totalitarian, you wrote, “A hero has no place in free society. A free person has no heroes.” (Vassaf, 2011, p.81) The production of heroes overlaps sometimes how a leader is produced as we discussed earlier. Of course, a leader is not necessarily a hero. Do you think that we need leaders in a free society, if heroes have no place in it?

Vassaf: A leaderless society doesn’t need a hero We have a higher chance of survival and progress in a leaderless society. One person that comes to my mind is a Harvard biologist, E. O. Wilson, now retired. He wrote about hunter-gatherer groups for five, ten, fifteen, twenty people. In small groups with leaders, their chances of survival and success are less than those groups in which cooperation is the essence. I believe it’s because what’s required of a leader changes across situations, times, and persons. You can be attentive to some smells, I can be attentive to sight better than you, a third person can have more communication skills; all contributing to the harmony of a group working together. A strong, dominant leader suppresses everyone. It’s not possible for the leader to have all the qualities, all the abilities of everyone else. A leader really works against the advantage of society. But unfortunately beginning from parents and teachers and so called wise people from our past we have learned to respect them. People like Confucius and Aristotle, for example, thought that women were incompletely formed because there was too much heat in the womb, when they were born. Thus, because she was born without the genital parts that the male has, she’s not a complete human being. A human being that lacks something. She is inferior. Males are superior. They re leaders. You see this in the development of Western society. In religion, in decision-making, in the family, etc. The role of the women has been as an inferior person. Same in a Confucian society, where it’s the male scholar who is in charge, followed by warriors and others. Thus, when talking about leaders, we think of the male. Unfortunately feminism is not developing a new society in the sense that the female is functioning in a society dominated by male values.

Isaac: Gender is a very important topic when it comes to the idea of leaders. Like you said, most of the time when people



think of a leader, they think more of a man than a woman. Also, we only think of man and woman, but not any other genders that we could think of when we think of who is leading us and can be leading us. So it's like how the society has always been polarizing men and women, positive and negative. We grow up with that and we live in it. In the end we are forced to be silent. We ignore the heterogeneity whereas the ignorance becomes beneficial to totalitarianism (Vassaf, 2011, p. 202). If we are chasing after the shadow of male dominant or toxic masculinity world, how that's been constructed, we won't overthrow or make a radical change in the society. One interesting question that I was asked by Mari Spirito, curator and director of a non-profit art institution Protocinema. She asked me if I could name any city where masculinity is not dominant in our world, where we find a macho masculinity that is not dominant. Every place that I have been to, male is dominant.

Vassaf: There are exceptions on a very local level, for instance in Tibet where there are still some matriarchal societies. But they are on a small level, on a village level. So it's possible. In Africa, too, among some tribes, there were matriarchal or semi-matriarchal societies, combining many possible varieties of gender roles. But you're absolutely right. When we look around, it's male, male, male, and male. And I love the expression: Toxic masculinity.

Isaac: It is very arrogant to think that this form of gender is the only way to construct the society or lead the society. Meanwhile, with the information that we are being loaded with, we always only look at the big city. But as you said we're missing, or we're forgetting villages, or some other communities, or other ways of living.

Vassaf: Actually what I fear is that it is the male that's being challenged rather than the values and structures of a male oriented society. In the 1950's when my mother was a student at Harvard, she could not enter Harvard Graduate School of Education because she was told only males could get administrative positions in the education system where women could only become teachers; which was indeed the case in the US at that time. She was only accepted on the basis of her staying that upon returning to Turkey, not only could she become a school principal but even a Minister of Education. Now the new president in the US has said that half his cabinet will be women. This is a palliative measure, nothing more than women assuming male roles. Throughout the world there are more female university graduates than male. Would that mean that in a not too distant future males will be relegated to physical and manual tasks, which will be taken over by robots anyway. Should that be so, in a generation or two we would be living in a female dominant society and probably a lot more efficient at that, because they can multi-task. However, what is needed is a truly heterogeneous society that is not gender dominant. I remember a TV program, a sitcom in the US from the '50's called "Father Knows Best" where the mother and her two sons would try to solve some insignificant problem and finally end up going to the father who would immediately come up with the answer. Now if you look at sitcoms in many o countries, the father is the last to hear about what's happening in the family. Having lost his self proclaimed kingdom, he's usually at the butt end of a joke.

Isaac: Basically even if we swap the gender of the oppressor, we still live in the shadow of the problematic structure. Earlier, you talked about different roles in a community without a leader, and it connects to collectivity. Since you have mentioned robots and more futuristic idea of how the society will be constructed in the future, my question is: Do you think a hero can exist in a collective form without a name, without anyone who is being credited but the collective itself is being credited? The same question also goes with a leader. If the production of a leader is not about any individual, it's not about one person but it's about celebrating the collective. Regarding the mechanism of producing a hero, is it needed? Would it be possible to have it in the collective form?

Vassaf: Certainly food for thought. You touched on so many subjects in those two or three sentences. Let me start with your last point. Nameless or faceless leaders is what you are suggesting. As much as I fear and criticize the hero and the leader, I'm even more cautious about a society in which nameless or faceless leaders exist. When we see a face, a dictator especially, it's relatively easy to be on our guard while also mobilizing against a concrete image. There is also always the hope that we will get rid of that face, that person. Even with the US where under the semblance of democracy, no matter who is elected, the country goes on its imperialistic path. Still one hopes of change with each new leader. Though not much really changes, the country has been continuously at war for at least a hundred years, there is still a face to be dealt with. That's what keeps the spirit of freedom alive. But should there ever be faceless leaders, there would be such an anonymous assembly of power, that we would become sleepwalkers in a new totalitarianism.

In Orwell's 1984, Big Brother had a face. He had a presence attached to him and, as a result, there were a few people like Winston, there was an opposition, there was a sense of seeking freedom.

Now about heroes. We need to differentiate between a hero and a heroic act. Through mere chance it's possible for anyone to do a heroic act. But once we are deemed a

hero, and start playing the role, exploit that role for other gains and purposes, we feed into a cult of personality that carries a destructive potential for the society at large. Fortunately, Andy Warhol's expression that "Everybody will be famous for fifteen minutes," is bringing the hero to an end.

Isaac: I was pondering over this form of leader which we cannot even credit or recognize the image of the leader or the enemy as he or she has no face and no name. When an enemy is abstract, it is hard to imagine an enemy, that makes people in power difficult to produce enemy among people as there is no images to be recognized. Conversely, it is the same when the people in power is anonymous. In this context, facelessness and namelessness could be further discussed or taken into consideration regarding how those missing parts of our need, such as struggle for recognition, when those things are gone. First day we were born, even before we were born, we were given a name. When we were in the womb of our mothers, with the technology our face could be seen or recognised as a face. And we were told to recognize our mother, our father the first day we were born. This is one of the first things we were told to recognize: our parents' faces. It is difficult to even imagine a world where recognition is independent from name and face.

Vassaf: Based on what you have touched, there are two ways to liberate ourselves from leaders and various forms of totalitarianism. The first is decentralization so that the center no longer has the power that it has now, especially in the form of the present dominant world order of nation states. The nation states have all failed because they are too small to take care of global issues like the climate crisis or pandemics like the one we're going through now. Too small to take care of universal problems and too insensitive to local issues within their borders.

The second path to liberation has to do with the families' suppression of children. This does not mean no family. They tried that in Israel by placing children in kibbutzes and it was a failure. However, the child does need liberation. Children are our last slaves. We give them names, we give them religion, we give them a flag and expect acceptance and obedience. Why not name the child with the understanding that he will have the chance to choose any name he wants at maturity or even before. It should be a joint understanding with the parents for the happiness and individuality of the child. The same with religion. It does not mean the child should not be brought up with a religious culture, which with its art, literature and holidays one cannot avoid anyway. But the child cannot be required to believe in god, to believe in that culture. Religion as an ideology is oppression. In short, the two ways should be liberation of the child from the authority of the family, while not forsaking the love.

Isaac: I would add one more thing. We were talking about it in the beginning. If there will be a chance to liberate us from our language. As you said in your book, we are always being oppressed by what we utter. If we would go from the liberation of a child, including religion, the nation state, and name to understand that we are ourselves already in our heterogeneity, we are not a totalized entity.

Vassaf: Absolutely, language is such an important aspect. Unfortunately the growing hegemony of English is like losing the Amazon in the sense of losing many species that make up the world's eco system. Loss of languages critically diminishes our perspective of looking at the world, at each other and ourselves. As our species become more homogenous with the domination of English, the more we lose our flexibility of mental adaptation to changing conditions. In a Darwinian sense, this is a disaster. The more we have a sense of the other; the more we can communicate in a myriad of languages. We become a richer, stronger, more adaptable species. Translation machines may be of some help in preserving native languages but it is not the same thing.

Isaac: Starting from languages, nation states or even what we experience as a child, we have been witnessing or even compiling with the oppressive power from a society, from a nation to be beneficial for the people in power. We talked about what is totalitarian within all those power relations. But we didn't talk about what is not totalitarian. That would be the next question that I would like to ask. You wrote in your book that "Art can neither be expanding nor oppressive." (Vassaf, 2011, p.164) Do you think that art cannot be totalitarian?

Vassaf: Obviously, art as propaganda or even art with a mission is trash. Keep in mind the usefulness of useless language, a principle upon which the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton was founded. We talked about Wilson a few minutes ago. His farewell address to the university ended with a question, asking the audience, "If they came from outer space, what do you think they would be interested in?" Seeing that they've already come it certainly would not be physics, mathematics or Einstein. They would be interested in our art. If you look back on civilizations, what survives are not their gods, political regimes, the names of their heroes or leaders. What survives is art. Politicians fare the worst. With changing times a leader touted when alive, become the enemy of the people when dead. Art is collective. It's universal. All cultures own up to their arts. Art is liberating.

It's an utmost expression of our spirit, of our language, of all our senses. Even senses that we are not even aware of or don't have a name for. In one of his poems my friend Reşit Ergener asks when poets will no longer need to be around. His answer? When we all become poets. When everybody becomes a poet.

Unfortunately when we go through critically bad times, when it's pandemics or wars, racism, slavery, etc. we collectively become pessimists and feel doomed. After World War II, learning about death camps in Germany, Adorno said that one could never write poetry again. I have empathy for his feelings but I have anger for his thoughts. Because it's really in such circumstances that one should be with poetry. It was Anna Ahmatova's poetry after all, that in the face of Soviet tyranny, uplifted the spirit of the Russian people. Every moment, every second is time for art. The worst times are the best times for painting, for music, for poetry.

Hopefully with the development of new technologies and more efficient and just economies we will have a universal basic income for everybody. With robotics, artificial intelligence, 3D printers and goodness knows what else to come, we will all be liberated to do art whether we choose to or not. As children, we are all artists. As children we dance, we sing, as children we draw. It's a natural part of us. As children we're not factory workers, we're not bureaucrats, we're not warriors. As children we're not priests, imams, rabbis. These are all acquired skills and roles that, as technology and beliefs change, have an ever shortening shelf life.

But before we get there, in order for the planet to survive, the system needs to change. This is not a belief or hope but a fact. Unless we are prepared, artificial intelligence will bring about mass unemployment. The widening gulf between unemployed youth and the elderly also spell a major potential conflict.

Isaac: We should not stop doing what cannot be defined and we should not stop looking at the ambiguity of art. Not only art but the ambiguity itself. We should not stop writing poems because this is the act that the authority cannot steal and this is where we touch the freedom that has been stolen from us. When everyone becomes a poet, a poet becomes silent. And it is the same for leaders. When we think of a leaderless world, not in terms of the title of leader itself but in terms of what a leader does. The power is decentralized as everyone becomes a leader. By then, the leaders will become silent.

Gündüz Vassaf ve Isaac Chong Wai “Lidersiz” Üzerine Sohbet Ediyor

Isaac: Günümüzde birçok insan halen karizmatik liderliğe sorgusuz sualsiz inanıyor. Totalitaryen olmayan lidersiz bir dünya hayal etmek birçokları için imkansız. Prisoners of Ourselves: Totalitarianism in Everyday Life (Kendimize Tutsak: Gündelik Yaşamda Totalitaryenizm) kitabınızda en küçük kararların dahi totaliter mantıkla şekillendiğine işaret ederek gündelik yaşamımızda ağzımızdan çıkan kelimelerin kendimizde nelere hak gördüğümüzü açığa çıkardığını söylüyorsunuz. Sessizlik kelimesiyle, sessizliği nasıl algıladığımızla ilgili yazdıklarınızı çok sevdim. Örneğin kitabınızın “Prisoners of Speech” (Konuşma Tutsakları) bölümünde, “Sessizlik kelimelerin yokluğu değildir. Sessizlik doldurulacak bir boşluk değildir. Hatta sessizlik kelimesinin kendisi bile yanıltır,” diye yazmışsınız (Vassaf, 2011, s. 128). Lidersizlik de, sessizlik de aldıkları son ekten ötürü (-siz, -siz) pozitif formdaki kelimelerin yokluğu, eksikliği şeklinde algılanıyor. Bu gerçeği göz önünde bulundurarak, kitabınızda bahsettiğiniz üzere nasıl ki sessizlik kelimesi yanlışsa, lidersiz kelimesi de yanlış mı sizce?

Vassaf: Annemin anlattığı bir kıssayla başlamak istiyorum. İki arkadaş buluşur, hiç konuşmadan otururlar. Bir saat geçer, kalktıklarında “Ne güzel zaman geçirdik, değil mi?” diyerek ayrılırlar. Sessizlik gayet doyurucu olabilir.

Lidersizliğe gelince... Psikolojik ya da toplumsal bağlamda eksikliği belirten “-siz” olan her şey beni rahatsız ediyor. “Ağırlıksız” veya “ağırlıksızlık” diyebiliriz, azlık çokluk belirten ölçümleri elbette yapabiliriz. Toplumsal ve insani özelliklere gelince işler karışıyor, tuhaflaşıyor. Din mesela. Tanrıya inanmayana a-teist deniyor, yani tanrı-sız. Sanki normal olan tanrılı olmak. Denecekse tersi denmeli. Tanrısızım, ateistim diyen dikkatleri üzerine çekeceğine, tanrıya inanan tanrım var, tanrılıyım desin. Aynıısı “çocuksuz” kelimesi için de geçerli mesela. İnsanın çocuğunun olması, anne veya baba olması ne kadar normalse, olmaması da o kadar normal. Halbuki birçok toplumda, özellikle de kadımlar için, çocuksuz olmak, sanki isimiz çocuk üretmekmiş gibi olumsuz çağrışımlara sahip. Bu bakımdan, lidersiz kelimesi özelinde de, lidersiz dediğimizde liderin kendisini veya liderlik konumunu insan toplumunun doğal bir parçası varsaymış oluyoruz. Tabii bunun birçok kültürde ve tarihin birçok evresinde geçerli bir olgu olduğu yadsınamaz bir gerçek. Fakat yine de bir zorunluluk

değil. Liderlik kavramının çok akışkan olduğu farklı kültürlerden örnekler var.

Isaac: Bu baskın pozitif form meselesini ve genellikle olumsuz bir şey olarak algılandığını ben de sıklıkla düşünüyorum. Kelimedeki olumsuz son eki eksiklik gibi algılıyoruz ve zihnimiz ister istemez pozitif forma kayıyor. Sessizlik, lidersiz, çocuksuz gibi kelimeler bir şeyin eksikliğini düşünmeye yönlendiriyor çünkü bizi. “Sessizlik yanlış bir kelime,” dediniz. Peki, yeni bir kelime bulmak ve düzeltmek mi gerekir? Ama o zaman da başka bir pozitif form yaratma tehlikesi ortaya çıkmış olmaz mı? Eksikliği anıştıran -siz son eki veya sessizlik kelimesinin kendisi yeni bir kelimedeki pozitif bir formda ortaya çıkarsa pozitif form negatif formu muğlak bir tonda içermiş olur.

Vassaf: Yeni kelimeler ihtiyaca binaen doğar. Toplumun süzgecinden geçmemiş bir ihtiyaç yönelik yeni kelimeler üretmek zordur. Kelimeleri kolektif olarak işelleştirmek gerekir. Örneğin, gerek iş dünyası için liderlik eğitimi veren gerekse siyasetçilere hitabet öğretene birçok okulumuz var, ki bu gelenek ta Cicero'ya kadar gidiyor. İyi konuşmanın edinilebilen bir beceri olduğu doğru. Gel gör ki dinleme üzerine bir ders veya kurs açıldığını gömüdem. İnsan türü olarak bizler konuşma mefhumuna çok bağlıyız. Halbuki insan ne kadar iyi konuşursa konuşsun, karşısındaki dinlemeyi bilmiyorsa sesini duyuramaz, ne söylediği algılanmaz. Özellikle medya istilası... Bin farklı radyo kanalı, bin farklı televizyon kanalı, cep telefonları, tabletler ve saire. İnsan sürekli bir şey işitiir halde. Yüzylımızın tersliği de şu; ne kadar çok işitirsek o kadar az anlıyoruz. Tüm bunları almılam imkânımız yok zaten, insan kapasitesini aşar. Dolayısıyla bir filtreleme mekanizmasına ihtiyaç duyuyoruz. Bu filtreleme mekanizması sadece ne işitmemiz gerektiğine dair kişisel ihtiyaçlarımıza dayalı değil, çünkü sırf bunun için bile topluma imkan sınırlarını aşan bir ölçüde kulak vermemiz gerekir. Ses sarhoşuyuz, konuşma sarhoşuyuz. Konuşma bombardımanını altındayız. Sessizlik kelimesinin yerine geçecek yeni bir kelime veya kelimeler olacaksa dinlemeyi öğrenmenin sonucunda oluşacaktır. Böylelikle sessizlik, kendi içinde, bir şeyin yokluğu olarak değil de bir varoluş halini tarif etmek için kullanılacaktır.

Isaac: Lidersiz kelimesi için de aynıısı geçerli. Belki güçsüz insanları takip etmenin sonucunda yeni bir kelime doğacak, bu sayede insanlar sürekli lider sarhoşu olmayı bırakıp aksine özellikler peşinde koşacak. İçinde yaşadığımız salgın döneminde gözümüzü hep liderlere çeviriyoruz, “Şunu doğru yaptı, bunu yanlış yaptı,” diyoruz. Olaylara hep bireysel temelde bakıyor ve otoritenin buyruklarına boyun eğmesi “gerek” acı çeken insanları unutuyoruz. Dinleyen insanları göz ardı ediyoruz, halbuki tüm işleri göz ardı ettiğimiz insanları yapıyor. Salgınla baş etmek için hep birlikte eyleme geçmeye ihtiyacımız var. Boyun eğmesi “gerek” insanlara kulak vermemliyiz. Bunu yapabilirsek pozitif forma olan, lidere veya konuşmaya ve sese olan ihtiyacı ortadan kaldırabiliriz. Dinlememiz gerektiğini, dinlemenin kudret olduğunu hatırlanmamız çok önemli.

Vassaf: Dinlemek önemli, evet. Ama otoritenin bizden kendisini sonsuza dek dinlememizi istediğini de biliyoruz. Özellikle de devlet ve liderler söz konusu olduğunda, boyun eğen birer dinleyici olmamız bekleniyor. İş ailede başlıyor tabii. Hele geleneksel toplumlarda. Çocuk dediğin göz önündedir ve sesi çıkmayanı maktulüdür. Çocuk bir şeye heyecanlanıp diyelim anne babasının, yani yetişkinlerin lafını istemeden bölse, çocuğun o anki deneyimine dikkat kesilmek yerine ebeveynler genellikle “Şimdi olmaz,” veya “Beni dinle,” hatta zaman zaman “Kes sesini,” diyor. Büyüme sürecinde, dinlemenin çok farklı özellikleri ve safhaları var. İlk kelimelerimizi konuşmaya başladığımızda ebeveynlerimiz o kadar gurur duyar ki söylemeye çalıştığımız şeye dikkat etmek yerine konu komşuya, arkadaşlara ve hatta birbirlerine sanki çocuklar bir şov sahneliyormuş gibi hava atarlar. Bu yüzden çocuğun ilk konuşma girişimleri karşılıklı bir ilişki ile sonuçlanmaz, çünkü yetişkinler anlam üzerinde durmuyordur, çocuğun söylediğine “laf salatası” muamelesi yapıyordur. Çocuğu iletişime geçmeye çalışan bir insan olarak değil de bir performans sahneliyormuşçasına değerlendiriyorur.

Ayrıca madalyonun öbür yüzüne bakacak olursak, dinlemek her ne kadar önemli olsa da, otoriteyi, iktidar konumundakileri dinlemeye itiliriz. Bu yüzden, otorite artık etrafta değilse, kendimizi salar ve ağzımızdan ne çıkarsa söyleriz. Bunların çoğu da saçma sapan boş cümlelerdir. Sınıf ortamını düşünün mesela. Öğretmen sınıftan çıktığında birden sınıf uğuldumaya başlar. Neden çünkü sınıf totaliter bir yönetimin hüküm sürdüğü bir alandır. Özgürlüğe kavuştuğu an, ses ve söz, zincirinden boğalmışçasına ağızdan dökülür.

Isaac: Herkes otoritenin kodladığı veya sınırlarını belirlediği bir ortamda muhakkak bulunmuştur. Orada yüksek sesle konuşulması yasaktır, dinlemek zorundasındır. Konuşmaya yeni başladığımızda bile ebeveynlerimiz, sisteme ve otoriteye itaat etmek durumunda kalıyoruz. Sınırları belirlenmiş bu kodlanmış ortamdan çıkmak için, sırf bir tarafın dinlediği baskıcı bir gerçeklik yaratmak yerine, artık dinleme sırasının iktidardakilere gelmesi lazım. Mao Zedong'un yaşam hikayesi aklıma geldi mesela. Şöyle diyor: “Benim gibi insanlar sadece kendine karşı sorumluluk duyar. Bizim başka insan-



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