

Elmgreen & Dragset

# *An Introduction*

In 1994, we both lived in a diverse leftist area just north of the fake lakes in central Copenhagen. Like most urban neighbours, we were completely unaware of each other's existence. That was until one April night, when we met in the one and only local gay club, called After Dark.

To the classic disco soundtrack of Anita Ward's *Ring My Bell*, we eyed each other across the dance floor, both noticeable for being the only ones on these premises sporting red shoe-laced Dr Marten's boots and Dennis Rodman-inspired hair. We mutually spotted an opportunity to escape this streamlined and sanitised version of sexual minority night-life fun, and went across the street to Cosy Bar, a more seedy establishment, which was said to have catered to sailors and other adventurers since the early twentieth century. In our days, it was run by the larger-than-life, bleached-blond Britta, who earned some extra pennies by playing dice on the counter with the drunken regulars. When the time came to head home, we realised that we not only lived in the same neighbourhood, but on the same street, and even in the very same four-storey building. That made the decision to walk home together so much easier.

In the twenty-three years that have since passed, we have lived in many different places, both separately and together, in Copenhagen, New York, Stockholm and London, but mostly in Berlin. And at the moment of writing, we are both staying in apartments at the Adahan Hotel, in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul. The hotel is owned by an architect and her husband, and her elderly mother is also part of the household, situated on the rooftop floor of the hotel, just behind the common breakfast room. The old lady greets us in German every morning. She jokingly thanks us for having made her an 'internet star', by which she means that she was part of the first press conference for the 15th Istanbul Biennial, which took place in December 2016. In a darkened room, forty people of different ages and backgrounds came on stage, one after the other, each asking one of forty questions that we had written about what a good neighbour could be: 'Is a good neighbour someone who reads the same newspaper as you?', was the question we asked her to pose. This question seemed particularly relevant in a time when several news outlets had recently been closed and a number of journalists and editors had been arrested – some of whom have later been released, while others remain in custody, awaiting trial.

It has been sixteen years since we first visited Istanbul, where we took part in the 7th Istanbul Biennial, curated by Yuko Hasegawa. Not only Beyoğlu – which includes Tünel Square, İstiklal and Taksim Square – but the city as a whole has changed tremendously since then. Today, we encounter a completely modernised urban landscape. However, this change probably cannot even be compared to the extreme transformation through which Istanbul must have gone from 1950 to 2000, when its population grew from roughly one million to about nine million citizens. Currently, the population is approaching sixteen million. Since our first research trip to Istanbul, whole areas that used to be inhabited by small businesses such as hardware stores and wood workshops have morphed into trendy neighbourhoods with cafés, design shops and boutique hotels, while others, like Tarlabaşı near Taksim Square – where bars with transsexual sex workers and others once offered a variety of services – have been demolished to make way for large, international hotel chains. Other parts of the city, less frequented by tourists, have seen a surge in new shopping malls of all levels, from discount to luxury. And an expansion of the city towards the north is happening at rapid speed. In close proximity to where a new airport is under construction, huge lower- to-middle-class developments – so-called TOKİ complexes – are shooting up like mushrooms, which brings us to a question asked at our first press conference by another performer: 'Is a good neighbour someone who lives the same way as you?'

Both for that 2001 Biennial, and for a subsequent exhibition in Istanbul called 'Pedestrian Projects', which was curated by Fulya Erdemci in 2005, we created ruins, or replicas of such. Ruins that had no history, but could be seen as the beginning of something. In 2001, there was still no museum of modern art in the city, and neither were there many commercial galleries. Art – outside the Biennial – was for a large part presented in showrooms on the ground floors of bank buildings. The one major exemption to this was Platform, under the initiative and directorship of Vasif Kortun – an art space, a meeting point and, perhaps most importantly, an artistic archive that had facilitated exchange between the Turkish art scene and the international art community in a time before homepages and online sharing became the norm.

The first 'ruin' we made in Istanbul was embedded into the lawn in front of the old Mint, a stone's throw from Hagia Sofia and other historic buildings. The structure alluded to a white cube museum space with a translucent, tiled skylight, sinking into the ground. Atop the double metal doors, barely visible above ground, one could read '...TEMPORARY ART', hinting that the first part of the word – 'CON...' – had been buried underground. This was three years before Istanbul Modern, the city's first museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art, opened its doors.

The second 'ruin' was a half-finished modernist structure built in Karaköy park, which at that time, when the gentrification of Karaköy had yet to take full effect, was frequented mostly by fishermen on leave and homeless people. The small building had no signs nor any instructions and could be used as people pleased. It included a minimal fireplace, a bench, and, pointedly, a panoramic window facing the historic peninsula on the other side of the Bosphorus.

At the time of our first visit to Istanbul, we had moved to Berlin for the second time in our lives, on this occasion, to stay. A friend of ours, the artist Kirsten Pieroth, had spotted an empty looking apartment in the not-yet-renovated building where she was living herself, in Mitte – before this neighbourhood's 'Sohofication'. Kirsten resided one floor diagonally above us, and we could see each other and communicate through the windows facing the backyard. We had

a lot of parties at the time, sometimes spanning both her apartment and ours, but nobody ever complained. Not about the noise, at least. But our next-door neighbour, rumoured to have been an actor with the famous East German theatre Volksbühne before the fall of the Wall, often came knocking on our door. He was clinically paranoid, and thought that the Stasi – the GDR security service – was spying on us, and on him in particular, from every nook and corner. If we left anything in the hallway, whether a broom or a bin-bag, minutes later he would be standing at our door and whispering with a fearful, sideways look in his eye: ‘They’re looking at us from inside that thing. You better remove it right away!’ And we, the polite Scandinavians, did as instructed, of course.

Why these personal anecdotes? Don’t they seem rather insignificant and self-referential in relation to a prominent, international biennial, especially in the face of the grim political reality surrounding biennials right now? Yes, of course. But as individuals, artists or curators, we have little power alone, and would have even less if we did not continue to share our stories. Often, we cannot take on the big fight in the grand arena of politics and mainstream media, but we can break out of our isolation by communicating our personal stories with each other. Many people all over the world have to fight daily just to be accepted for who they are. In a statistical survey conducted by the World Values Survey in Turkey in 2009, people were asked who they would least prefer as their neighbour.<sup>1</sup> In the top spots came a homosexual, an alcoholic, an American, a Christian and a Jew. Of course one can’t come to any conclusion based on such statistics, since many factors might have influenced the answers. But the point is that it matters for people who their neighbours are, and the small tensions on our streets or in our neighbourhoods are often symptomatic of society at large. Politics are made by and felt by individuals.

Artists often tell stories, but in the form of painting, sculpture, installation, film, sound, assemblage, performance or through actions. For many artists, it is their personal biographies that are the driving force, their starting point, their guideline and their material. An artist’s work is better understood in the light of his or her background, and as generations of artists have shown, the personal can become political.

If asked, many people would probably say they’d prefer not to have an artist as a neighbour.

You will notice that we constantly shift between the terms ‘home’ and ‘neighbour’ in this introduction. The 15th Istanbul Biennial explores how our perception of home has changed over the past decades, how we protect, shelter and express our identities within our domestic settings, but also how these private spheres, our homes, function next to each other. By naming the exhibition ‘a good neighbour’, we aim to steer the focus away from home as dwelling and design, and instead to focus on those who are living side-by-side.

The term neighbour is of course also applicable to oneself. How do we become good neighbours? Do we accept the differences we might have in relation to the people next to us? Our reactions towards our neighbours say quite a bit about ourselves. As Nancy L. Rosenblum puts it: ‘We don’t always have the wherewithal – the imaginative probing, patience, or common sense – for self-reflection. We don’t attend to ourselves. Neighbours may draw back that curtain of inattention and prod us into minding our own business.’<sup>2</sup> By ‘minding our own business’ she doesn’t mean staying out of others’ business, but truly engaging with ourselves in the light of other people’s lives.

<sup>1</sup> Yılmaz Esmer, *Radicalism, Extremism and Social Values: Findings of a Field Research* (Istanbul: Bahçeşehir University, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 233.

Matters concerning belonging, living modes and the divide between public and private have long been part of our own research as artists. Some of what we have discovered along the way has been useful in curating the 15th Istanbul Biennial. But in our meetings with artists from other places in the world, the scope has widened far beyond anything that we could have imagined on our own.

Home and belonging is as multi-layered a theme as can be. Still, it is a subject matter that is relevant for everyone; that anyone can speak about from personal experience. Right now, in a climate of conflict in many geographical regions, we find this important for a biennial that is visited by hundreds of thousands of people. In times where political problems are looming so large they seem ungraspable, inaccessible and unfathomable to us as individuals, we hope to bring politics home – back to its roots. The microcosm reflects the macrocosm and vice versa.

***If asked, many people would say they'd probably prefer not to have an artist as a neighbour.***

'I travelled a great deal at the bottom of my bed', writes Georges Perec at the beginning of *Species of Spaces*.<sup>3</sup> Just like Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, Perec seems to value the importance of day-dreaming, of the home being a natural, protective setting for the immense power of human imagination. But he doesn't want us to stay in bed all day. Amongst many other things, he lists 'Things we ought to do systematically from time to time', which begins:

In the building you live in: go and call on your neighbours; look at what there is on the party wall, for example; confirm, or belie, the homotopology of the accommodation. See what use they have made of it; notice how unfamiliar things may come to seem as a result of taking staircase B instead of staircase A, or of going up to the fifth floor when you live on the second; try to imagine on what a collective existence might be based, within the confines of this same building.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Within the institutional and spatial confines of the sites we are using for 'a good neighbour', we imagine the co-existence of multiple identities. Five out of the six venues that we have selected are within walking distance of each other, and together they constitute a sort of neighbourhood in themselves. It might only be for a short time, but hopefully such an imagined community on a smaller, symbolic scale, can help to inspire real-life communities on a larger scale.

Later on, Perec leads us out onto the street:

Carry on  
Until the scene becomes improbable  
until you have the impression, for the briefest of moments, that  
you are in a strange town or, better still, until you can no longer  
understand what is happening, until the whole place  
becomes strange, until you no longer understand that this is  
what is called a town, a street, buildings, pavements ...  
Make torrential rain fall, smash everything, make grass grow,  
Replace the people by cows.<sup>5</sup>

And this is what artists do. In our exhibition, Tsang Kin-Wah lets floods of religious dogmas pour down over you, Latifa Echakhch chips away murals that once depicted people gathering at Istanbul's Taksim Square, Lungiswa Gqunta plants a lawn where broken Coca Cola bottles act as leaves of grass, and Xiao Yu invites two Mongolian farmers and their donkey to plough a field of concrete amongst the developments on the Bosphorus harbour.

As artists, we often try to exhaust the conventional signs and control mechanisms within our urban landscapes: by bending the rules, by adding beauty to what already exists, by questioning the established. The artist Burçak Bingöl adds even more surveillance cameras on public facades, although her dysfunctional surveillance devices are made of porcelain with wilted flowers caught in their glazing. Her fellow Turkish artist Candeğer Furtun has made a row of ceramic male legs, displaying a culture of machismo through the way each pair is spread wide open. The masculine element is apparent, even though the legs are smooth, and there are no genitals attached to them. Just through their positions we know that we are being confronted with a psychological image of the male body. At a visit to her Istanbul studio, which Furtun has had since 1964, she told us that when she made this work in the early 1990s, she used her small-framed assistant as a model, to ensure that the forms would fit into her kiln – which was already the biggest one that the local municipality would allow her in the middle of Istanbul.

*Species of Spaces* starts out by dissecting the meaning of the bed, in the minute detail and anecdotal sprawl typical of Perec, then moves from the *bed* to describing the parts that make up an *apartment*, then moves out onto the *street*, into the *neighbourhood*, on to the *town*, out to the *countryside*, onwards to the *country* as a whole, then the *world*. The latter part is for the most part made up of musings on *space*:

I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep rooted; places that might be points of reference, of departure, of origin:

My birthplace, the cradle of my family, the house where I may have been born, the tree I may have seen grown (that my father may have planted the day I was born), the attic of my childhood filled with intact memories ...

Such places don't exist, and it's because they don't exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, ceases to be incorporated, ceases to be appropriated. Space is a doubt: I have constantly to mark it, to designate it. It's never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it.<sup>6</sup>

If we accept that our own lives don't automatically offer real spaces of stability, that even our memory of a stable and comforting place is always compromised by the passage of time, then perhaps we'll be more accepting of spaces and future realities that are seemingly unpredictable and challenged by outside forces; perhaps we'll be less afraid of the unfamiliar.

Perec does not possess a particularly romantic view of space, which is also apparent in his thoughts on the meaning of home and neighbourhood. He proposes a different way of living, where, rather than having a room for every function in one apartment, he would have rooms spread over many different neighbourhoods. He would bathe and shower in one neighbourhood, cook in another, sleep somewhere else and listen to music in yet another.

This instability of space in the form of home is found in several of the works in the 15th Istanbul Biennial, starting 'from the cradle' so to speak, with Aude Pariset's worms eating away at a styrofoam mattress in a baby's cot, ending with Vajiko Chachkhiani's calm but disturbing video of a man staring out of the window from a hospice, and reaching even somewhere beyond the grave with both Dan Stockholm's and Kim Heecheon's attempts to recall the memories of each of their late fathers. Another of the forty questions that constituted our first press release was: 'Is a good neighbour just one of those sentimental childhood memories?'

Moving beyond childhood to early adulthood, Young-Jun Tak's second studio apartment in Seoul is rendered at its full scale in the form of a 24-square-metre white sculpture hanging upside down, low above our heads, as we enter Istanbul Modern. Further inside the museum, Volkan Aslan's three-channel film *Home Sweet Home* is screened. At first glance everything seems perfectly normal here – a young woman re-potting a plant, another rolling a cigarette – until you realise that one home is stacked upon another as they both sail away on an unknown journey down the Bosphorus. Aslan presented his hand-drawn storyboard to us last autumn and we are happy that the Biennial was able to commission this work, some elements of which remind us of one of our favourite film directors, Federico Fellini.

In the artist collective Yoğunluk's apartment, everything is dark, and the black, latex-covered surfaces are hardly recognisable through touch – here we really become estranged in the way described by Perec: only the sound from behind the walls gives you a hint of where you are. In the apartment we lose orientation as if trapped inside a spooky movie. This is not unlike the claustrophobic feeling one experiences when in the midst of Leander Schönweger's endless series of doorways, which he has installed in the attic of the Galata Greek Primary School. On the ground floor of the same building, Pedro Gómez-Egaña's anonymous, non-descript home literally splits apart horizontally, the objects in constant movement, driven by performers as though they were an otherworldly force.

A particularly haunting picture of a home in peril and in ruin is performed by the deaf-mute child in Erkan Özgen's film *Wonderland*. In a time of one of the world's largest migrant crises to date, the Syrian boy stands alone on a bare rug in his newfound home in Turkey, desperately trying to convey to us with gestures, louder than words and stronger than images on the news can do, what horrors he, and many other migrants, have been through.

Issues around the loss of a safe home, in a physical or emotional sense, and the ensuing migration are also dealt with in other works in the exhibition. In Heba Y. Amin's film *As Birds Flying*, the migration of birds across borders plays a poignant, symbolic role. Close to where this poetic film is presented, Olaf Metzel has created a new version of his installation *Sammelstelle*, which was first made in 1992, at the start of the Yugoslavian wars. The enclosed space is covered with corrugated metal sheets and trash cans, and is only accessible through a revolving metal door, which you're unsure will operate the opposite way to ever let you out again. When visiting our studio in Berlin to discuss his project, Metzel, who now lives in Munich, could tell us plenty of anecdotes about our neighbourhood, Neukölln, where he grew up in the 1960s. In Neukölln, he witnessed the first immigration to Germany from Turkey, and early on formed friendships within the Turkish communities. He told us that these experiences with cultures different from his own have been of great importance for his work as an artist.

On another floor you find Mahmoud Obaidi's series of eight books, *Compact Home Project*, with metal covers and mesh for paper, containing his sketches, newspaper clippings, letters and notes. The durable books were conceived to protect scraps of the artist's life as he had to flee war in his native Iraq. In a similar manner, Mirak Jamal has created a passageway flanked by his works on plasterboard, which contains fragments and transfers of drawings he did as a child. Some depict scenes from Iran before he and his family left the country, seen through a child's eyes.

What happened to the optimism of the last half of the twentieth century? It is not that long ago that most people – in the West at least – believed in constant progress, expansion and development. Fernando Lanhas was a painter and an architect, and in his architectural collages from the 1960s, we see early signs that the utopian dream of the perfect, smooth, minimal and functional modernist home is cracking. Klara Lidén is also working with the failure of modernist ideals, but from a contemporary perspective. At Istanbul Modern, which is soon to be replaced by the museum's new building, Lidén has installed a long construction fence, the back of which she has personalised into a domestic-looking space by adding makeshift seating and simple self-made lamps. Fences often come up in relation to neighbours, as in the line 'Good fences make good neighbours' from a poem by American poet Robert Frost. (Jens Hoffmann expands on the perception and intended meaning of this line in his text for the Biennial's story book.) Compared to Lidén's rough construction barrier, Kasia Fudakowski's fence is more transparent, decorative and suburban in its style. She has given each of its panels a name and an identity, like the individual characters that one might encounter in any neighbourhood.

Physical and social barriers are a result of speculative urban development, where big capital is the big winner. The victims are often students, artists and other low-income groups. At the Galata Greek Primary School, Bilal Yilmaz's mechanical projection maps the disappearance of traditional crafts workshops in central Istanbul. In the room opposite, Morag Keil and Georgie Nettell's film *The Fascism of Everyday Life* documents their artist friends' absurd living condi-

tions in a gentrifying part of East London, while Sim Chi Yin's photographic series *The Rat Tribe* at the Pera Museum shows how Chinese workers and students live illegally in small, windowless bunker rooms in the basements of Beijing buildings. How can such social disparity be avoided? In her beautifully crafted installation consisting of a sparse wooden interior, Dayanita Singh seems to propose one solution: let's all consume less and surround ourselves with fewer items in our everyday lives. In our first meeting with Singh over Skype between New Delhi and Berlin last summer and later at a meeting with her in London, she talked about having based her practice on a rule never to produce anything that wouldn't fit into her own home.

In the male section of a disused fifteenth-century hammam in the Yavuz Sultan Selim neighbourhood, are works by two female artists – Monica Bonvicini's commissioned sculptural work for the Biennial and the choreographer Tuğçe Tuna's site-specific dance piece. The smaller female part of the hammam is dedicated to Stephen G. Rhodes' immersive installation. Rhodes takes as his starting point natural catastrophe and the lack of adequate government response to poverty and prejudice against race and class in Louisiana where he has spent time. The installation consists of altered footage from American TV media, amusement-park equipment, toys and pop cultural objects that are assembled into a Tower-of-Babel-like universe.

In another separate building, ARK Kültür, back in the Cihangir area, Mahmoud Khaled has created a detailed 'home museum' dedicated to a fictive, unnamed immigrant from Egypt, where the artist was born and has lived most of his life. The *Proposal for a Museum of an Unknown Crying Man* is inspired by the weeping man pictured in an iconic photograph, where he holds a white t-shirt up to his face to cover his identity. He was one of a large group of gay men arrested at a party on a boat called *The Queen* in Egypt in 2001. With furniture, art and artefacts spread over three floors, the house-museum speculates on who this man might have been, what his past was like, and why he fled to Turkey, where homosexuality is not illegal. Khaled's work is not the only one that touches upon queer identity. Among other important contributions are Henrik Olesen's *Cables, Keys, Glasses, Lights* and Gözde İlkin's embroidered take on her family album.

In addition to all the newly commissioned and recent works by contemporary artists in this Biennial, it has also been important for us to include historic positions from artists who have passed away. We have already mentioned Lanhas, but works by Louise Bourgeois, Liliana Maresca and Lee Miller also play a significant role in this Biennial's narratives. Bourgeois' photogravure *Femme Maison* inspired Monica Bonvicini's video installation *Hausfrau Swinging*, which is displayed in the same room at Pera Museum. In Bonvicini's video, a neutral, white model house is placed atop a woman's naked body, a house-head that she repeatedly bangs against a corner of white walls.

Liliana Maresca was active as an artist as Argentina came out of dictatorship in 1983, and some of her photo performances dealt with this novel freedom, and the new potential it brought with it, in a personal and poetic way. In a series of photos shown at Pera Museum, she is seen holding a small egg – symbolic of the future and growth – against a backdrop of open doors. The Argentinian curator Javier Villa, only one of the many people who have helped us with advice and suggestions in the curatorial process over the past sixteen months, enthusiastically introduced us to Maresca's work and life over a cup of coffee in Buenos Aires last December, generously showing us the blueprints of his book on her oeuvre. Lee Miller's iconic photos pay



witness to the end of another twentieth-century dictatorship: some depict her sitting naked in Hitler's bathtub in his Munich apartment shortly after he had shot himself in Berlin, while others show female Soviet prisoners of war trying on Eva Braun's make up.

The historic consciousness is indeed an important part of many of this exhibition's projects, not least Fred Wilson's elaborate, multi-disciplinary installation *Afro Kismet*. It was already clear from our first conversations with Wilson in New York that it would make sense to follow up on some of the themes he had explored in his legendary American Pavilion project at the Venice Biennale in 2004. Historically, the cultural presence of Africans in the Venetian empire was connected to, and paralleled within, the Ottoman Empire.

## ***What happened to the optimism of the last half of the twentieth century?***

As Perec pointed out, any space needs to be reassessed, to be re-conquered, over and over again. There is no such thing as a static space, not even the personal space that one carries with oneself. More than many others, the people of Turkey have of late experienced shifts in the realities surrounding them. Many had long sensed a process of division and destabilisation, whereas others have become aware of this only in the aftermath of the attempted coup on 15 July 2016. Since we chose the title

'a good neighbour' for the Biennial, there has not only been the coup attempt in Turkey, but the world has witnessed the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, and Trump being elected US President, in part by promising to erect a border wall between the US and Mexico. People are losing faith in their futures. The mass media push angles that make fertile ground for more populist politics with short-term solutions for complex problems and sow even more fear. The same questions need to be asked simultaneously in many places across the globe. This is part of the thinking behind initiating an international billboard project as part of the Biennial. The project is a collaboration between the photographer Lukas Wassmann, the graphic designer Rupert Smyth and ourselves. From Manchester to Sydney, and from Moscow to Chicago, we have collaborated with multiple cultural institutions to display a collection of billboards that relate to the Biennial theme. The billboards feature a selection of pho

tographs by Wassmann that capture unexpected encounters between people. Each photo has been paired with a specific question, asking what makes a good neighbour: 'Is a good neighbour someone who just moved in?', 'Is a good neighbour a stranger you don't fear?'

Two publications accompany 'a good neighbour': One is a book about the exhibition with a foreword by the Biennial director Bige Örer, this curatorial introduction, an essay by Kaelen Wilson-Goldie and descriptions of every artist's work by Pablo Larios. The other is a story book, which supplements the exhibition book by gathering together a wide variety of personal stories and memories about homes, neighbours and neighbourhoods. Contributors include artists, writers, academics and many others. Their accounts take on a myriad of forms and shapes, including short stories, confessional texts, creative essays, letters, dialogues and poems.

In the early 1980s, when we were very young – practically teens – there was a big hit by the British ska band Madness, called 'Our House'. It still gets airplay on popular radio stations. The tune has a naïve and familiar sound to it, and is easy to sing along to. The chorus repeatedly goes: 'Our House, in the middle of our street', and the verses tell about the banal, daily deeds of a normal working-class family, just going about their lives. But one sentence is sung much faster than the rest and is easily ignored: 'Something tells you that you've got to get away from it.' The key to the song's success might be exactly this: that it epitomises our ambivalence towards our family homes. On the one hand we romanticise them; on the other, we distance ourselves from them. The video that accompanied the song, and was played over and over again on MTV in its heyday, showed the band further poking fun at their own lyrics by having one of the young male band members playing the busy-bee mother, and by setting the whole home scene in a Victorian working-class home with 50s wallpaper and furnishings, interspersed with clips showing the Playboy mansion and Buckingham Palace. Neither of us were big fans of the song, but we came to think of it when reading Mary Douglas' text 'The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space' while preparing for this Biennial. It starts by saying:

The more we reflect on the tyranny of the home, the less surprising it is that the young wish to be free of its scrutiny and control. The evident nostalgia in much writing about the idea of home is more surprising. The mixture of nostalgia and resistance explains why the topic is so often treated as humorous.<sup>1</sup>

In this sense, 'Our House' was an interesting hit, because it translated to a larger audience the sentiments that were explored by the punk movement. It was part of the post-punk era, which refused to accept normative family values and traditions and mediated this rebellion through popular culture to the masses. It opened up for the exploration of alternative lifestyles both in terms of diversity and accessibility for a larger part of society. It was at some point in these years, in this climate, that Michael wrote a poem that he titled 'Home is the Place You Left', a title that we later used for artworks, an exhibition we curated in Ingar's home town Trondheim, and not least a collection of writings on what 'home' meant to many of our friends in 2008. That book can be seen as precursor to the story book that accompanies the 15th Istanbul Biennial.

But a biennial is more than its exhibition and its publications. The public programme, coordinated by Zeyno Pekünlü, kicks off during the opening days. In addition to the international symposia held during the opening and closing weekends, there are periodic events in which

<sup>1</sup> Mary Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space', in *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No. 1, Spring 1991, p. 287.

the audience has the opportunity to participate in discussions, debates and workshops. The first symposium is titled 'Chosen Families' and is closely linked to the theme of non-normative ways of living, which is apparent throughout the exhibition itself. The second symposium is called 'Mutual Fate' and looks at the neighbouring relationship between humans and nature, a theme that is also apparent in the exhibition, especially in the work of Mark Dion and Alper Aydın.

We would like to extend a big thank you to the Biennial team at İKSV in Istanbul and to all the artists who have guided and supported and welcomed our baby steps into biennial curatorship. Bige Örer has been the kindest and most supportive director one could wish for, and her core team – Elif Kamışlı, Özkan Cangüven and Gamze Öztürk – has become like family in the process. Another big thank you goes to Sofie Krogh Christensen, our curatorial assistant, without whom we would have lost control long ago. Special thanks also to Rupert Smyth for his great graphic design work and team spirit. We are also very grateful to our galleries and to our own studio in Berlin for everyone's continued patience with us. And last but not least, we'd like to thank the writers and the editors and co-editors who have made this two-part publication possible.

We thank the citizens of Istanbul for letting us occupy these spaces temporarily, like gentle intruders and friendly viruses, and for allowing us to occupy a bit of their time.

*Is a good neighbour too much to ask for?*