

# Wednesday Society:

## *The Couch of Meret O.*

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## Chapter I: The Exhibition

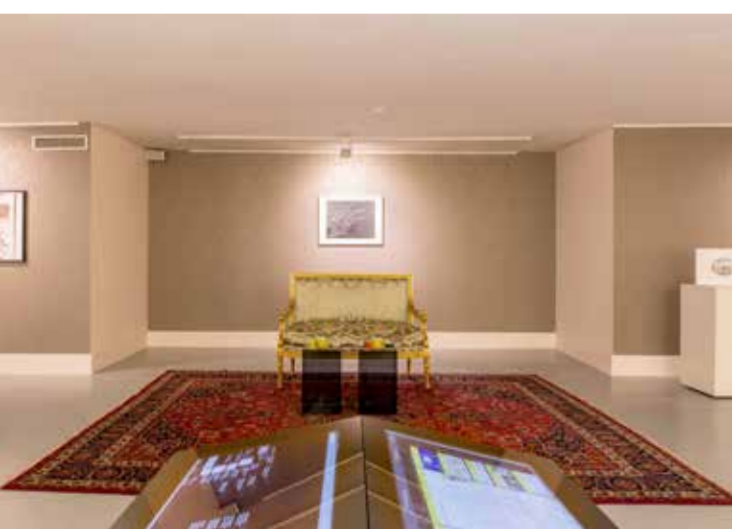
From September 18 to October 18, 2019, House of Taswir presented *Wednesday Society: The Couch of Meret O.* to Istanbul's art scene. Shown on the lower level of Artam Antik Palace, the auction house for antiques as well as Ottoman and modern Turkish paintings that is located in the Istanbul neighborhood of Maçka, this unusual exhibition opened a brand-new exhibition space for contemporary theory and art. Featuring five international artists, two of whom were shown for the first time in Turkey and four of whom are female artists, the exhibition presented works by Rebecca Horn, Meret Oppenheim, and Natela Iankoshvili along with contemporary works by Istanbul artist Gülçin Aksoy and Beirut artist Tony Chakar. The central contribution of *Wednesday Society: The Couch of Meret O.*, however, was the site-specific performance of artistic, theological, and psychoanalytic questions expressed in fragments of poetry, theory, public discourse, and public writing alongside and intertwined with the works.



1

Vital to *Wednesday Society* was a centrally staged early nineteenth-century golden-green couch for “public secrets,” which became the scene of intimate conversations with mostly female Istanbul intellectuals, along with an apparatus of in-situ writing and commentary activated by various scribes including artists, curators, poets, psychoanalysts, and other theorists.<sup>1</sup> This apparatus of scribes—consisting of two elegant Baroque desks, two red chairs, and two projectors wired to each desk by a futuristic device—became a scene of instantaneous mural writing. The entire apparatus was modeled after ancient modes of commentary with overflowing margins, invoking political traditions of mural writing, poetry, and contemporary French theory, such as those of Hélène Cixous and Geneviève Morel, on an *écriture féminine*, a “female text” that overflows. *Wednesday Society's* apparatus of writing included a poetry thread spanning the exhibition walls with poetic fragments assembled by House of Taswir

in the garb of the imaginary artist Ana Sontag. Her poetry thread presented an inherent connection between poetry and the psychoanalytic imagination in method, rhythm, and structure. This imaginary artist had intervened in exhibitions before; she loves to sneak into them with unexpected poetic interventions.<sup>2</sup> Here she assembled erratic splinters from ancient texts such as the Song of Songs,



1. INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY RED ROOM WITH MERET OPPENHEIM, “HUNDESCHNAUZHUT” (1942/2003), COURTESY LEVY GALLERY, HAMBURG. PHOTO HANNA LEHUN.

2. INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY, “DANCING TABLE WITH COUCH FOR PUBLIC SECRETS,” FRENCH GILTWOOD LOUIS XVI STYLE SETTEE, COURTESY ARTAM GLOBAL ART & DESIGN, PHOTO HANNA LEHUN

3. INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY, “SCRIBES’ APPARATUS,” HOUSE OF TASWIR (2019), WOODEN TABLE AND RED CHAIR COURTESY ARTAM GLOBAL ART & DESIGN, PHOTO HANNA LEHUN.

the Talmud, and Ibn Arabi as well as modern and contemporary prose and poetry by Roland Barthes, Fetih Benslama, Hélène Cixous, Hrant Dink, Rebecca Horn, Jacques Lacan, Geneviève Morel, Meret Oppenheim, and others. In her poetry thread—interrupted only by Natela Iankoshvili’s *Lily* portrait (1961) and Gülçin Aksoy’s *Family Cemetery I Love* (2017–19)—the imaginary artist plays a game of hide-and-seek; she tells a story of (female) love and desire, speech, betrayal, submission, death, and postponement of pleasure. In that thread—white letters on black thread and black letters on white thread in four successive rooms—Ana Sontag assembles splinters of poetry and prose and brings them into a line of broken fragments, augmented with visual and literary references above and below the line.

Addressing what Freud called the “dark continent” of female desire,<sup>3</sup> *Wednesday Society* showed a number of small and medium-sized works by the towering artist Rebecca Horn from the Peter Raue Collection (Berlin), including private postcards never before shown in public. The postcards are private communications, attesting to a lifelong relationship between artist and collector, that are humorous, intimate, detailed, with a minimal degree of artistic intervention.



4

Some of the postcards were inscribed with “Peter” or “Happy New Year Peter.” They give testimony to a private conversation and reflect the right of opacity in relationships of friendship and love. The dwindling right to opacity between lovers is a prominent theme in *Wednesday Society*. Such a right<sup>4</sup> has become a rare privilege in times in which anarchic, non-supervised scenes of intimacy either turn into massively shared public commodities or become subject to supervised scenes of professional care. An all-pervasive regime of surveillance watches over the most intimate spheres of communication administered by various regimes of the neoliberal imagination demanding the perfection of body and soul.



5

## Farewell to A

Ana Sontag gave her thread of poetry the melancholic title “Farewell to A.” In her artistic intervention she combined thirty-three framed literary citations and nine private postcards by Rebecca Horn with her own thread of prose and poetry. This thread was spanned throughout all rooms of the exhibition with citations placed eighteen centimeters below or twenty-seven centimeters above the line. Her double apparatus of scribes in the exhibition’s large headspace later acts as an in-situ commentary on the thread. The thirty-three framed literary postcards—designed and framed according to the measurements of Rebecca Horn’s cards<sup>5</sup>—reveal to the inquisitive eye the literary sources the artist had hid away in the fragmented line—in their original languages, including Arabic, French, German, Hebrew, and Turkish.



6

*Çarşamba Topluluğu* explores the threshold between domains private and public, between artistic research and poetry, between image and letter, between psychoanalytic theory and Talmudic settings of human interaction. It presents a plea for anarchic scenes of intimacy, for a regime of desire in which bodies, communications, readings, and writing are free from surveillance and yet free to overflow. A free and overflowing sense of text and image is at stake, an act of *poiesis*, an *écriture féminine* in the words of Hélène Cixous, exuberant, not to be contained, and beyond the gaze of surveillance.

## Lovers: Their Inalienable Rights to Secrecy

The site-specific installation *Family Cemetery I Love* by Istanbul artist Gülçin Aksoy represented the first of three performative scenes in the *Wednesday Society* exhibition. With its empty imperial chair, centrally staged black mattress, and surrounding walls of paper panels, this chambered installation evokes an eerie version of the psychoanalytic scene, its intimacy, its promises of privacy, seclusion, betrayal, and desire. The regime of desire in the psychoanalytic setting comes uncannily close to the rabbinic formula spoken by the bridegroom to the bride on the day of their wedding. The formula in Hebrew is *hare at mekudesbet li*—“herewith you are dedicated to me,” in the sense of “no surveillance, no divestments or communications to third parties, conversations kept private,” and free to create inalienable rights to privacy.



7

4. INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY GREEN ROOM. ANA SONTAG, “FAREWELL TO A / A'YA VEDA” (SITE-SPECIFIC 2019), POETRY THREAD, BLACK AND WHITE FOREX, 5677 X 2 CM, AND 33 POETRY FRAGMENTS, DIGITAL PRINT ON PAPER, BLACK AND WHITE FRAMES, 29.3 X 29.3 CM - WITH TWO POSTCARDS BY REBECCA HORN. THE FRAGMENT VISIBLE IN THIS SPECIFIC IMAGE READS: “THE SOULS’ CONFUSING PLAY SWINGING FORGOTTEN THE HEBREW” AND IS FROM A POEM BY REBECCA HORN DEDICATED TO MERET OPPENHEIM, “THE VERTEBRAE ORACLE” (2013). A REBECCA HORN SOLO-EXHIBITION AT SEAN KELLY IN NEW YORK IN 2014 WAS DEDICATED TO THIS POEM.

5. INSTALLATION VIEW, REBECCA HORN, “HAPPY NEW YEAR” (1993).

6. INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY RED ROOM WITH POETRY THREAD BY ANA SONTAG, “FAREWELL TO A.” (2019) AND TWO FRAMED FRAGMENTS WITH PROSE OF IBN ARABI (1165-1240).

7. FRAMED POETRY FRAGMENT, ANA SONTAG, “MEKUDESHET” FROM POETRY THREAD “FAREWELL TO A.” (2019).

8. GÜLCİN AKSOY, “FAMILY CEMETERY I LOVE” (2018/2019), EMPTY CHAIR WITH THE INSCRIPTION “AILE” (FAMILY) ON IT PRODUCED BY TORN OUT TEXTILE THREADS FORMING THE LETTERS A I L E, BLACK MATTRESS ON BLACK FLOOR, BLACK PAPER PANELS WITH WHITE PENCIL. SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION. THE “FAMILY CEMETERY I LOVE” WAS SHOWN IN THE SOLO-EXHIBITION OF GÜLCİN AKSOY IN RUM GALATA SCHOOL IN ISTANBUL, FALL 2018.

The phrase *hare at mekudesbet li* assumes a central place in the exhibition; in this rabbinic formula the imaginary artist discovers outstanding parallels to the settings and conditions for intimacy, speech, and trust laid out by the psychoanalytic scene. She suggests that there are certain Talmudic and rabbinic regimes of intimacy, love, and desire that quite specifically entered the psychoanalytic scene through a displacement of the sort that seems to be no longer accessible to the psychoanalytic field, sealed by institutional forgetfulness. A *Verschiebung* of rabbinic regulations into the analytic space, she thinks, has been to a great extent obliterated from psychoanalytic consciousness. *Wednesday Society: The Couch of Meret O.* is therefore not only an exhibition on surrealism, poetry, and psychoanalysis but embodies a performative return of forgotten rabbinic regimes of love and desire: a return of rabbinic sensibilities that have disappeared from inside the institutional frames for psychoanalytic discourse.

In the following I present the imaginary artist’s thread of broken prose and poetry in succession. The reader should keep in mind that the artist’s line is composed of citations only, poetry in fragments, with no word added on her own. The secrets of this line unfold in ruptures, in the gaps between fragments, producing an interconnectedness that remains unspoken, according to Walter Benjamin’s famous statement: “Method of this work: literary montage. I have nothing to say. Only to show.”<sup>6</sup>

The Gift—*es gibt*—*es gibt nicht*

When entering *Wednesday Society* the visitor’s first glance falls on a legendary object by Meret Oppenheim, *Word Wrapped in Poisonous Letters (Gets Transparent)* (1970). The title of the work is based upon Meret Oppenheim’s private memo to herself from that same year: “One has to be careful not to wrap words in poisonous letters, otherwise they get transparent.” The title is printed on a brass plaque in four languages inside the showcase. *Word Wrapped in Poisonous Letters (Gets Transparent)* consists of a stiff parcel string wrapping nothing, holding an invisible gift presenting an airy emptiness as if to provide a humorous and absurd artistic commentary on the famous “il n’y a pas” (de rapport sexuel) in Jacques Lacan’s *The Other Side to Psychoanalysis* or the canonical “es gibt (nicht)” in Heidegger’s universe of *Being and Time*. We may see Meret Oppenheim’s work both as a recurrence to the psychoanalytic dynamic of the withdrawal of the gift—*es gibt (nicht)*<sup>8</sup>—that provokes an abysmal overflow of uninhibited speech. Nine private postcards by Rebecca Horn are presented here with six literary postcards in combination with Ana Sontag’s poetry thread “Farewell to A.” The postcards present forgotten layers of ancient texts on love and sex, female desire, and pleasure for no reason. Rebecca Horn’s “the souls’ confusing play” in the poetry thread, for example, stems from *The Vertebrae Oracle*, which Rebecca Horn dedicated to Meret Oppenheim personally during M.O.’s lifetime.

Seelenverwirrspiel  
schaukelnd  
auf dem Ziegenbart des Onkels  
das Hebräische verliert

The souls confusing play  
Swinging  
On the goatbe of the uncle  
Forgotten the Hebrew

Rebecca Horn, 2014



w o r d , w r a p p e d i n  
p o i s o n o u s l e t t e r s ( b e c o m e s  
t r a n s p a r e n t ) t h e s o u l s '  
c o n f u s i n g p l a y s w i n g i n g  
f o r g o t t e n t h e H e b r e w t h e  
w o r l d s t a n d s o n t h r e e t h i n g s  
a n d t h e w o m a n i s a c q u i r e d  
i n t h r e e w a y s j o u i s s a n c e  
i s w h a t s e r v e s n o p u r p o s e  
. m e k u d e s h e t : I s a t u n d e r  
h i s s h a d o w w i t h d e l i g h t  
a n d h i s f r u i t w a s s w e e t  
t o m y t a s t e I w i l l s e e k  
h i m w h o m m y s o u l d e s i r e s  
I s o u g h t h i m b u t I f o u n d  
h i m n o t . w o r d , w r a p p e d i n  
p o i s o n o u s l e t t e r s ( b e c o m e s  
t r a n s p a r e n t ) t h e s o u l s '  
c o n f u s i n g p l a y s w i n g i n g  
f o r g o t t e n t h e H e b r e w



האשה נקנית בשלוש דרכים, וקונה את עצמה בשתי דרכים.

A woman is acquired in three ways and acquires herself in two. She is acquired by money, by contract, or sexual intercourse [...] She acquires herself by a letter of separation or by her husband's death.

Mishna Kiddushin, 3rd century



La jouissance, c'est ce qui ne sert à rien.

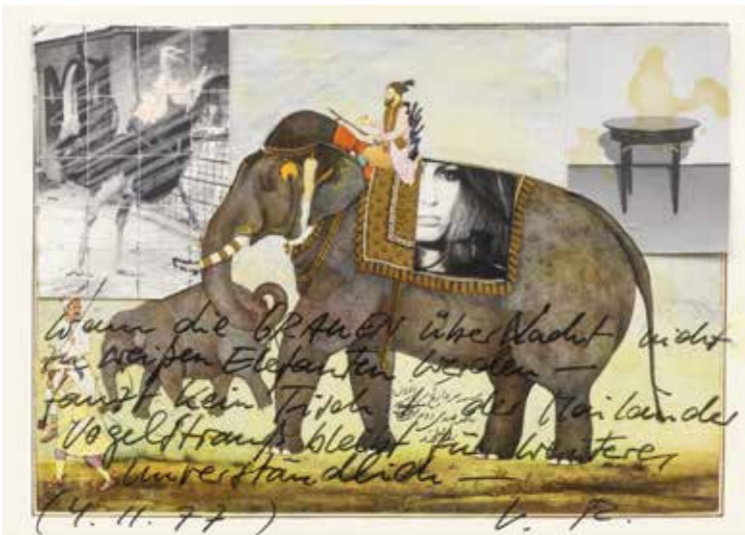
Jacques Lacan, 1994

Onun gölgesinde oturmaktan zevk alırım,  
Tadı damağımda kalır meyvesinin.

Song of Songs, 2:3

Sevgilimi arayayım, dedim.  
Aradım, ama bulamadım.

Song of Songs, 3:2



Mekudeshet [meku'dejet]\*

dedicated to a unique relationship, free to create a territory inaccessible to others, free from any usage, performed at designated times endowed with inalienable rights to opacity, to create conditions of privacy, secrecy, and touch

Ana Sontag, 2019

\*at mekudeshet II [Hebrew: you are dedicated to me] is a traditional rabbinic formula spoken by the bridegroom to the bride in front of two witnesses in public matrimonial ceremony





INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY RED ROOM WITH POETRY THREAD BY ANA SONTAG, "FAREWELL TO A." (2019) SECTION 2 SPELLED OUT BELOW.

b e h o l d      y o u      a r e  
 b e a u t i f u l   m y   l o v e  
 y o u r   e y e s   a r e   d o v e s  
 G o d   c r e a t e d   a  
 w o m a n   f o r   A d a m   a n d  
 c a l l e d   h e r   L i l i t h  
 s h e   s a i d   I   w i l l   n o t  
 l i e   b e l o w   a n d   h e  
 s a i d   I   w i l l   n o t   l i e  
 b e l o w   s h e   s a i d   t h e  
 t w o   o f   u s   a r e   e q u a l  
 s i n c e   w e   a r e   b o t h  
 f r o m   t h e   e a r t h   a n d  
 s h e   u t t e r e d   G o d ' s  
 i n e f f a b l e   n a m e   a n d  
 f l e w   a w a y   i n t o   t h e  
 a i r   s h e   k i l l s   w i t h   h e r  
 g l a n c e s   h e r   s p e e c h  
 r e s t o r e s   t o   l i f e   h e r  
 e y e s   a d o r n e d   w i t h  
 a r m o r e d   t e a s e   a n d  
 k i l l i n g   m a g i c   I   w a s  
 w i t h   h i m   a   h i d d e n  
 t r e a s u r e   a n d   l o n g e d  
 t o   b e   s e e n   t h e r e f o r e  
 I   c r e a t e d   t h e   w o r l d  
 a   f e m a l e   t e x t   i s  
 n e v e r - e n d i n g   i t   g o e s  
 o n   w o m a n ' s   s p e e c h  
 d e l a y s   d e a t h   a   d o v e  
 i s   d y i n g   o f   d e s i r e  
 a m i d   t h e   c r o w d s   a n d  
 h u m a n   b u s t l e   a l w a y s  
 a   b i t   a n x i o u s   b u t  
 a l s o   a l w a y s   a   b i t  
 f r e e   a p a r t   f r o m  
 a   n e i g h b o r   a n d   f a r  
 f r o m   a   h o m e   s h e  
 c r o s s e s   l i m i t s   s h e   i s  
 n e i t h e r   o u t s i d e   n o r  
 i n   b e h o l d   y o u   a r e  
 b e a u t i f u l   m y   l o v e  
 y o u r   e y e s   a r e   d o v e s

Ah, ne güzelsin , aşkim, ah, ne güzel!  
 Cözlerin tıpkı birer güvercin.

Song of Songs, 4:1

C'est comme une sorte de mémoire ouverte qui laisse  
 passer sans cesse. Et, à la limite, elle va inscrire cette non-  
 retenue, cette non-inscription : elle inscrit de la non-  
 inscription, le non-avoir-lieu... C'est un passe-frontières :  
 elle n'est jamais ni dehors, ni dedans ...

Hélène Cixous, 1976

Biliyorum ki bu ülkede insanlar güvercinlere dokunmaz.  
 Güvercinler kentin ta içlerinde, insan kalabalıklarında  
 dahi yaşamlarını sürdürürler. Evet biraz ürkekçe ama bir  
 o kadar da özgürce.

Hrant Dink, 2007



When she looks, she gazes with  
 the deep eye of a young gazelle;  
 to her eye belongs the blackness  
 of antimony.

Her eyes are adorned with languish-  
 ment and killing magic

[..]

By God, I fear not death; my only  
 fear is that I shall die and shall not  
 see her tomorrow.

Ibn Arabi, 12th century



INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY RED ROOM: NATEIA IANKOSHVILI, "LILY" (1961) INTERRUPTING A POETRY THREAD "FAREWELL TO A." BY HOUSE OF TASWIR / ANA SONTAG (SITE-SPECIFIC 2019). NATEIA IANKOSHVILI, ICONIC GEORGLAN MODERNIST, HAS BEEN SHOWN HERE FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME IN TURKEY. COURTESY GALERIE KORNFELD, BERLIN. PHOTO HANNA LEHUN.

Vücut ülkemde bir bahçeye konmuş  
 bir güvercindir  
 Ban ağaçları üzerinde şen şakrak  
 öten bir güvercindir  
 Şevkten ölen aşktan eriyen biridir

[..]

Yakınından ayrı düşmüş evinden  
 barkından uzak kalmış biridir  
 Ah yazık! Ah ayrılık zamanı! Ah  
 kavuşma zamanı!

Ibn Arabi, 12th century

In a garden of my body's country is  
 a dove perched on a bân bough,  
 Dying of desire, melting with passion

[..]

Parted form a neighbor and far from  
 a home! Alas, in my time of  
 severance, for my time of union!

Ibn Arabi, 12th century



INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY RED ROOM WITH POETRY THREAD BY ANA SONTAG, "FAREWELL TO A." (2019) AND TWO FRAMED FRAGMENTS WITH PROSE OF IBN ARABI (1165-1240).

Eh bien ça ne finit pas, un texte  
 féminin, ça se poursuit et à un cer-  
 tain moment le volume se clôt mais  
 l'écriture continue et pour le lecteur  
 ça signifie le lancer à l'abîme.

Ancak bu dişil metin bitmez, ilerler  
 ve hacminin sınırlarına ulaşsa bile  
 yazın devam eder ve bu okuyucu için  
 kendini sonsuz boşluğa bırakmak  
 anlamına gelir.

Hélène Cixous, 1976

كنت كثرًا محلياً فأحببت أن أكون فخللت الخلق لكي أكون.

I was with Him a hidden treasure and longed to be seen,  
 Therefore I created the world.

Hadith, 10th century

Speech alone has never been able to resolve any form of  
 madness. It is necessary for speech to make sense,  
 and for this to happen, a site, a mechanism, is necessary:  
 otherwise speech escapes in all directions—it is pure loss.  
 In short, we need to identify the way in which woman's  
 speech delays death. What is the machinery of love in The  
 Arabian Nights that seeks to get to the bottom of the  
 madness of jouissance?

Fethi Benslama, 2002



INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY, HOUSE OF TASWIR, "SCRIBES' APPARATUS" (SITE-SPECIFIC 2019) WITH SCRIBE JULIA GYEMANT. PHOTO HOUSE OF TASWIR.

## Private in the Middle of the Public

*Wednesday Society* hosts three performative and interactive scenes: Gülşin Aksoy's *The Family Cemetery I Love*, House of Taswir's *Dancing Table with Couch*, *Scribes' Apparatus*, and Beirut artist Tony Chakar's *Madonna* and site-specific installation *The Discourse of the Last Things before the First*. House of Taswir's *Dancing Table with Couch* is staged in the middle of the exhibition, a small love seat on a large Persian rug surrounded by an impressive number of iconic objects, original drawings, paintings, snake poems, and more by Meret Oppenheim and works by Rebecca Horn never shown before in Istanbul.

As the architect of *Wednesday Society's* space, I also acted as *Wednesday Society's* host during opening hours for the duration of the exhibition. I welcomed various guests and invited them for private talks on the couch, with the rug serving as an imaginary boundary for privacy, a separation between private and public that visitors did not dare to overstep. *Wednesday Society* inverted the problem of surveillance: instead of turning private matters into public affairs, instead of divesting privacy into the various channels of public digestion, therapeutic promises, and neoliberal use, the talks on the couch of Ana Sontag remained private although they were held in public. The rug was too large for visitors to overhear the conversations, its fringes served as a textile guardian of intimacy. In this setting, the artist hosted private talks on this couch every uneven hour of the day and invited mainly female Istanbul intellectuals to a one-on-one conversation to speak about anything to begin with, talks of fifty minutes that very quickly became intimate—since there was no prescribed topic. A sound transcript of these conversations—kept private between interlocutors—exists, creating a rich audio archive of conversations. After having only briefly listened into this archive it becomes evident that each and every conversation harbors an entire curriculum of themes—each couple on this couch became an idiosyncratic “university” of sorts, truly transdisciplinary to begin with. To publish the “syllabi” of these discursive private “universities” is endeavor worth considering—just the syllabi, not the transcripts—since they show the precision of free association as characteristic of personal conversation and free discourse. Jewish tradition calls this practice of engaging a text or subject matter à deux *chavrutha*: a strictly object/text-related practice of multifaceted readings performed by two people. This interaction, this speech act that flows from one person to the other in free association, is an ancient technique. The is no closure: only open fringes in their readings and lots of mutual interruptions allowed. This technique was practiced and refined in Jewish and Islamic medieval houses of study in which scholars created whole universes of closely interrelated themes, facts, and discourses. Today this associative technique is prevalent more in psychoanalytic practice, poetry, or artistic research than in any “interdisciplinary” field of academic study in which disciplines—not objects or texts—provide the framework for the questions to begin with.

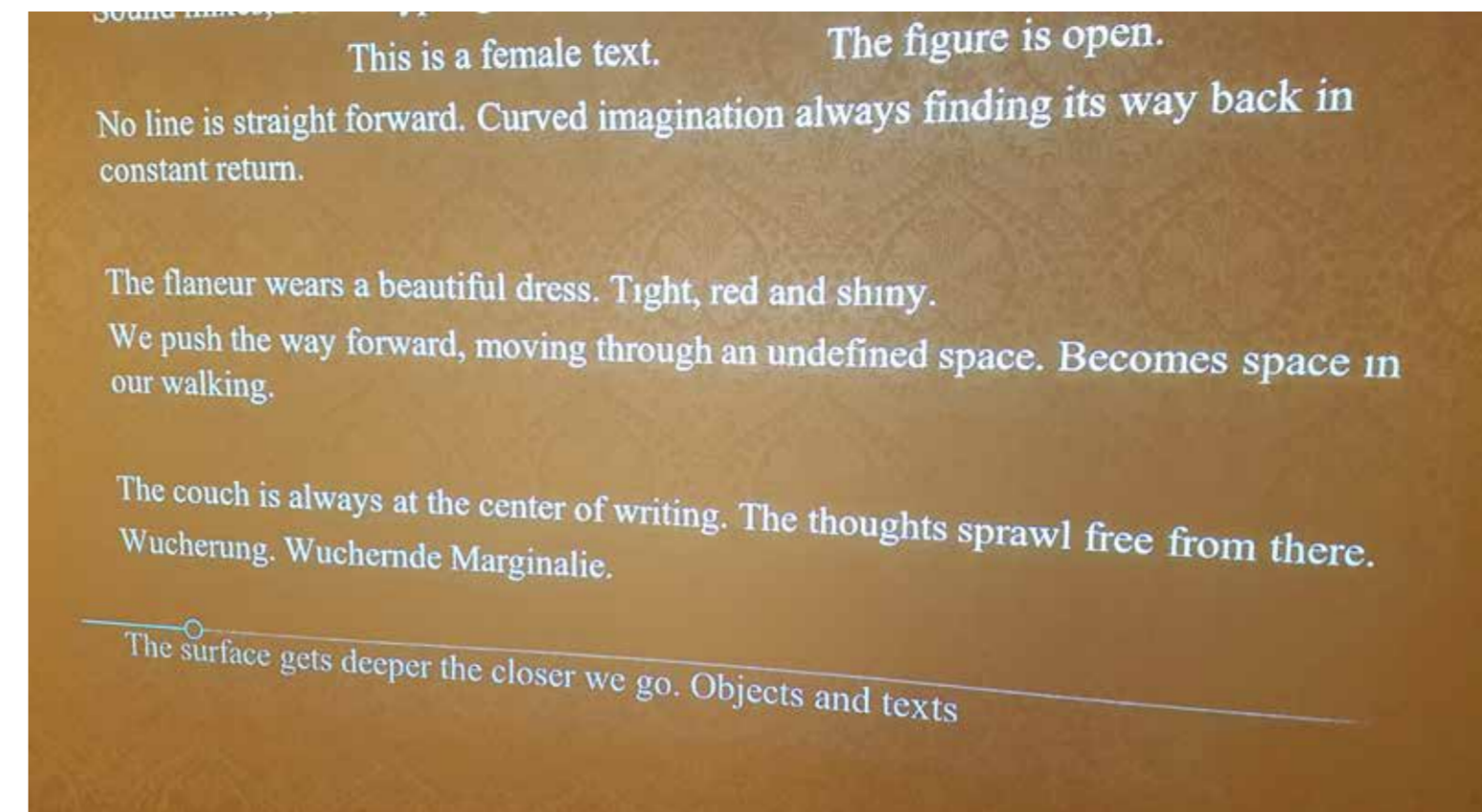
## The Scribes: Poets, Secretaries, Advocates

To the right and left, in equal distance to the couch, *Wednesday Society* installed two Baroque *escritoirs*, two secretaries with two red antique chairs, and two futuristic technical strings that connected a laptop on each desk to a projector attached to the ceiling. These apparatuses projected various in-situ texts written by the scribes on the wall of the exhibition space covered with a shimmering fab-

ric wallcovering. Whenever the author hosted a guest on her golden-green couch, two scribes were sitting right and left “taking notes” of the conversation in a live performance of mural writing. Their writing was born from the moment, from within the situation. However, the scribes’ distance from the speech act on the rug did not allow them to follow the conversation fully, as their position was too far from the couch’s scene for true surveillance. What they heard were bits and pieces, mere fragments of a private conversation, yet they were asked to provide a first layer of commentary, notes of thinking, an in-situ *écriture*, a *poiesis* of sorts, based on broken fragments of a conversation accessed via intuition only, not sure of its grasp, beginning with an anamnesis in relation to an open secret. It was poetry that was asked for. The scribes taking the position of secretaries, poets, or flaneurs were artists, curators, psychoanalysts, intellectuals, or friends. Their texts were videotaped on location and projected in loops of mural writings. On even hours, when there was no one on the couch and the scribes’ chairs were empty, their writings continued to run in loops, accompanied only by loud sounds of typing with no one sitting at the secretaries’ desks. A “female text is never-ending, a text that overflows”: an *écriture* feminine, manifold poetic acts of mural writing thus emerged in the exhibition, with an empty apparatus producing ghostwritten mural letters between speech acts until every uneven hour the host again welcomes a new guest on her golden-green couch. For the one month of the exhibition, Artam’s *souterrain* became a gathering place, a kind of living catalogue for (female) intellectuals: ghostwriting and anarchic encounters, loops of repetition and sparks of scribal letters on the one hand, pleasures of encounters in private conversations on a couch that served no purpose on the other. The scribbled public notes of our scribes are unsupervised *Mitschriften* that testify to a broken immediacy, groping, sensuous, blind, unfinished, and they act as mirror to the *mekudeshet*, a mirror to the privacy that lovers have lost, a privacy that serves no purpose. The scribes’ texts hold a promise of their own. A promise of what? A promise of the opacity that is the lovers’ right, joy, and privilege. A negotiation between private and public domains is at stake, in rabbinic terms we are negotiating the threshold (*eruv* in Hebrew), traversed by desire, the threshold defining the enclosure of the secret.

## The Discourse of the Last Things Before the First

Beirut artist and architect Tony Chakar presented an iconic installation with the title *The Discourse of the Last Things Before the First* (2017–19), which was the third performative scene in the exhibition, its last niche, which could also be viewed as its first. The site-specific features an eleventh-century Antiochian Orthodox icon, a Hodegetria Virgin from Kaftoun Monastery in North Lebanon as its centerpiece, surrounded by a field of gold and mirrors and a rough, fragmented mural copy of the Madonna on the back wall, containing an abundance of visual and literary references to the history of one-point perspective. What emerges is a complex critique of various aspects of linear thinking, from early Hellenistic architecture and Arabic theories of optics to Renaissance painting and capitalist and neoliberal strategies in modern economics and warfare. Tony Chakar’s *Madonna* lures the visitor into a scene of betrayal in which the visitors



INSTALLATION VIEW WEDNESDAY SOCIETY, MURAL WRITING, ÉCRITURE FÉMININE, WRITTEN BY JULIA GYEMANT, HOUSE OF TASWIR "SCRIBES' APPARATUS" (IN-SITU 2019). PHOTO HOUSE OF TASWIR.

themselves play a crucial role. *The Discourse of the Last Things Before the First* is a site-specific installation and performance of regret at once, changing the visitors’ perspective, learning and unlearning matters of perspective, and engaging the literary quality of the image, the icon; a profound critique of visual representation and an inspiring celebration of surface matters.

## Prospects for Future Editions

The exhibition *Wednesday Society: The Couch of Meret O.* presents an agenda of artistic and psychoanalytic research on theory and art, and acts of *poiesis* yet unfinished. *Wednesday Society* is a feminized contemporary version of the Freudian *Mittwochsgesellschaft*, in which a group of scholars publicly developed their research in international journals. Our *Wednesday Society* is an emerging place of power, exploring a continent of irregular, nonphallic, dispersed, poetic, and imaginary ways of thinking.

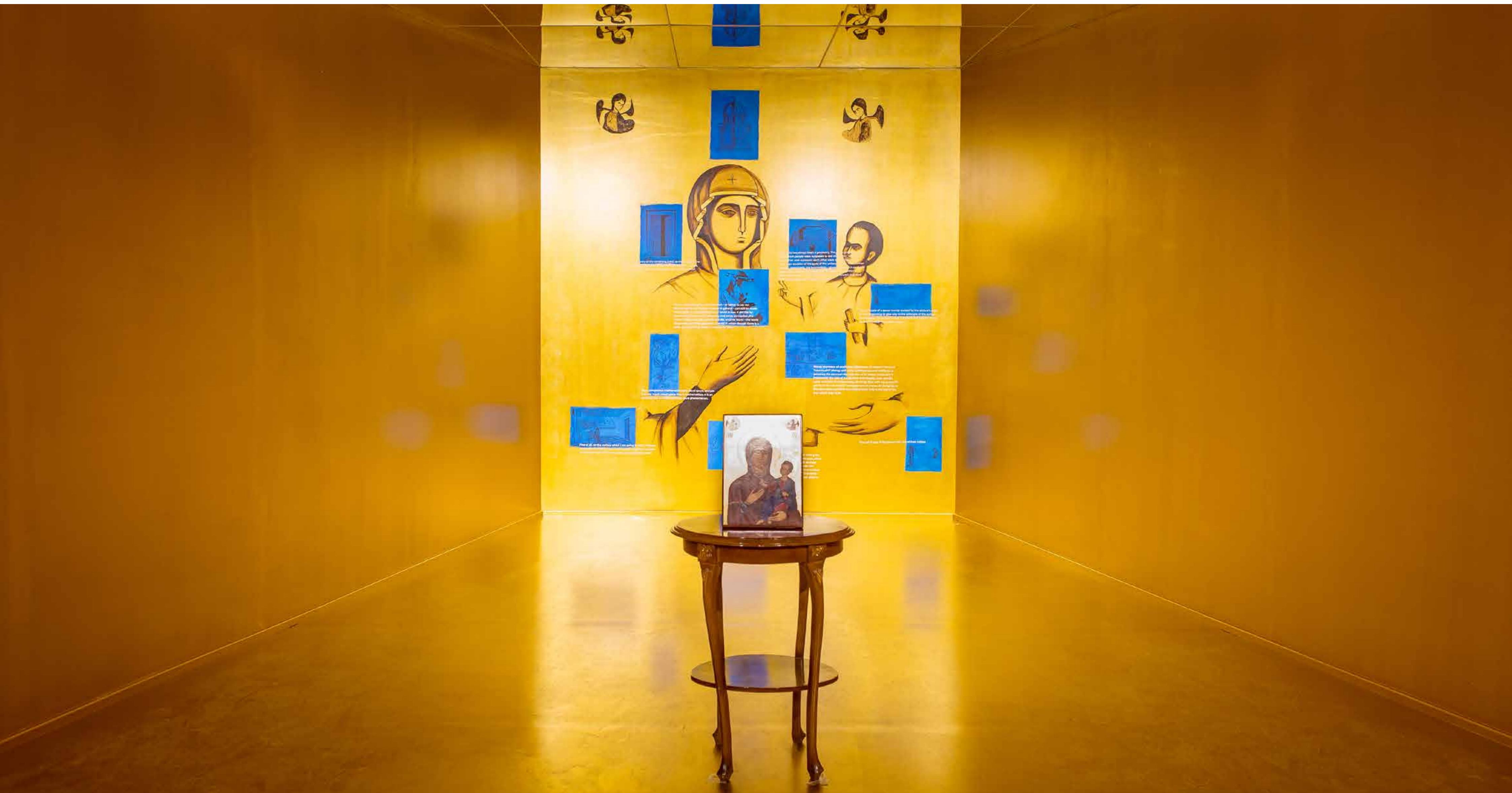
This is the first of a series of essays developed within the framework of and in collaboration with *Art Unlimited* engaging the various objects of the *Wednesday Society* exhibition in all directions. The series takes the poetry threads and fragments, the conversations on the couch, the scribes’ commentary, and the artistic objects as starting points for a multifaceted investigation of psychoanalytic, theological-political, theoretical, and artistic implications. Forgotten and repressed rabbinic concepts of desire, *jouissance*, and love toys will play as much of a role as the connections between Surrealism and psychoanalysis, the violence inherent in colonial, ethnological, and psychoanalytic settings, or the specific psycho-political implications of the flattened perspectives of ancient icons.

The series is initiated and edited by Shulamit Bruckstein Çoruh. She has done extensive research on the intertwinement of rabbinic, visual, and psychoanalytic traditions in exhibition making, philosophical texts, and poetic interventions in public spaces. Here she invites international scholars, poets, theorists, psychoanalysts, and scholars of ancient texts to contribute to her artistic and diasporic research. House of Taswir and *Art Unlimited* are setting out on new visual, artistic, and psychoanalytic research unfolding live as ongoing presentations. A close collaboration with a Berlin- or Paris-based magazine for psychoanalysis is planned. As in the founding days of psychoanalysis, a cutting-edge agenda of contemporary research unfolds collectively in magazines of art and psychoanalysis concurrently, sharing, distributing, and de-contextualizing common threads of poetry, theory, psychoanalysis, and art.



INSTALLATION VIEW, REBECCA HORN, "MADAME BOVARY" (1997), PHOTO HANNA LEHUN.

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m a n i f e s t i n i t s  
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i n s t r u m e n t a l i t y )  
i t m u s t b e  
i l l e g i b l e a b o d y  
t h a t o v e r f l o w s a n  
o p e n m e m o r y m a k e s  
w a y m e k u d e s h e t -  
s i n t h o m : s a v o i r -  
f a i r e i n d e a l i n g  
w i t h t h e r e p e t i t i o n  
w o r d w r a p p e d  
i n p o i s o n o u s  
l e t t e r s ( b e c o m e s  
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h a v e s t o l e n m y h e a r t  
m y i m a g i n a t i o n i s  
h e r p l a c e o f r i s i n g



INSTALLATION VIEW, TONY CHAKAR, "THE DISCOURSE OF THE LAST THINGS BEFORE THE FIRST" (2017-2019) SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION, ANTIOCHIAN ICON WITH MURAL PAINTING, MURAL DRAWINGS AND PLOTTED TEXTS ON GOLDEN WALLS WITH MIRRORED CEILINGS. THIS WORK WAS FIRST PRESENTED IN BEIRUT IN THE SOLO-RETROSPECTIVE "TONY CHAKAR. ON BECOMING TWO" AT BEIRUT ART CENTER, 2017; A YEAR LATER IT WAS PART OF THE ARTIST'S SOLO EXHIBITION "AS IN A BEGINNING" AT THE VAN ABBE MUSEUM IN EINDHOVEN. THE DRAWINGS AND MURAL PAINTING IN THE 2019 ISTANBUL EDITION WERE EXECUTED BY FURKAN AKHAN. PHOTO HANNA LEHUN.

1 *Wednesday Society* scribes were theorist and curator Julia Gyemant, curator and writer Sinan Eren Erk, writer and art historian Nergis Abyeveva, psychoanalysts Birgit Meyer zum Wischen and Michael Meyer zum Wischen, violinist Noga-Sarai Bruckstein, and Adam Klein, connoisseur of ancient rabbinic texts. Their contributions to mural writing will be subject to a separate forthcoming essay. Some random shots of their public performance are presented here.

2 Previous interventions by Ana Sonntag included the 4th International Çanakkale Biennial 2014 and the legendary Berlin exhibition *Lady Dada Kalam* in 2017 at Kunsthau KuLe.

3 Sigmund Freud famously referred to women's sexuality as a "dark continent" for psychoanalysis, drawing on colonial explorer Henry Morton Stanley's use of the same phrase to refer to Africa. In her book *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University, 2003), the author Ranjana Khanna explores connections between psychoanalysis, colonialism, and gender theories and develops a postcolonial feminist theory that is worth following and thinking out further.

4 The expression "We demand the right to opacity" was coined by Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

5 Each work measures 23.5 by 23.5 centimeters.

6 Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk* (1972), in the English translation by Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 73.

7 Lisa Wenger in *Meret Oppenheim: Worte nicht in giftige Buchstaben einwickeln*, ed. Lisa Wenger and Martina Corgnati (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2013), 13.

8 In the discourse of Lacan this "il n'y a pas" is related to the withholding of sexual relations

between analyst and analysand provoking an overflow in the analysand's speech act. See also Jacques Derrida's various writings on the paradoxes and impossibilities of the gift.

9 This fact that each couple is a "university" was graciously noted by psychoanalyst Birgit Meyer zum Wischen who served as one of *Wednesday Society's* scribes. This telepathic note was part of her public mural performance.

Shulamit Bruckstein, House of Taswir, Istanbul / Berlin, February 16, 2020

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*Chapter I: The Exhibition*  
*Wednesday Society: The Couch of Meret O. Meret Oppenheim, Rebecca Horn, Natela Iankoshvili, Gülçin Aksoy, Tony Chakar*  
Artam Antik A.Ş. Müzayede, September 18–October 18, 2019

*Artists: Meret Oppenheim, Rebecca Horn, Natela Iankoshvili, Gülçin Aksoy, Tony Chakar*  
*Ana Sontag (Poetry Thread, Couch, Scribes'*

*Apparatus), Steffi Weismann (Sound Installation), Julia Gyemant, Sinan Eren Erk, Nergis Abiyeva, Birgit Meyer zum Wischen, Michael Meyer zum Wischen, Noga Sarai Bruckstein, Adam Klein, and others (Scribes), In-Situ Speech Acts "100 Guests on the Couch" (daily at various uneven hours) with Shulamit Bruckstein Çoruh*

*Curated by A. S. Bruckstein Çoruh / House of Taswir*  
House of Taswir in collaboration with Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV) Tarabya Kulturakademie Goethe-Institut Allianz Kulturstiftung ifa—Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen Consulate General of Switzerland in Istanbul.

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House of Taswir, a.k.a. Taswir projects is an international platform for artistic research and diasporic thinking. It was founded by Shulamit

Bruckstein with a group of artists and thinkers in Berlin in 2007. [www.taswir.org](http://www.taswir.org)  
The exhibition is dedicated to Beral Madra, the curator of the first and second International Istanbul Biennial. A fourth edition of BM Contemporary with the title The Dancing Table was presented by *Wednesday Society*, a digital cartography showing fragments from her extensive archive, a homage to one of the most prolific curators of contemporary exhibitions in the region. [www.taswir.org](http://www.taswir.org) facebook: [taswirprojects](https://www.facebook.com/taswirprojects) instagram: [house\\_of\\_taswir](https://www.instagram.com/house_of_taswir)  
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