

Banu Cennetoğlu, Erden Kosova

The List

Erden Kosova: Banu, the last version of *The List*, which brings together the details about the people who lost their lives while trying to take refuge in Europe, will be a part of the 3. Berliner Herbstsalon, which is organised by Maxim Gorki Theater. I've got a series of questions to ask, but let me begin with something that defines the content, form and conditions of the presentation of the work, which needs to be mentioned at the start. *The List* occupies an exceptional place in your oeuvre: you don't make your signature visible; you accentuate meticulously the collaboration with your source, *UNITED-for intercultural action*; and you try to avoid elements and choices which might lead to aesthetization of the project. What does *The List* mean to you, and how do you connect it to your other artistic output?

Banu Cennetoğlu: Erden, I disagree what you articulate as details in your question. *The List* holds on to accessible information about people who die as they try to immigrate to Europe. We are able to see the people's names, age, gender, country of origin, cause of death and the source of the aforementioned news, to the extent that this information is available. For example, the cause of death is fact-checked as much as possible, looking at different sources, described without too much detail in a "column." I could say that nobody has their signature on *The List*. UNITED initiated it in 1993, starting with different sources and institutions, which are also cited on the document. We have been collaborating for a while. They are already using their means to make visible the information and I use my own means, my own work to be seated around the same table parties that might not otherwise be in conversation, pushing this agenda. In other words, I use the means of being an artist to increase the visibility of the list. The issue is more about the position I'd like to have rather than my signature.

I encountered *The List* for the first time in Amsterdam in 2002. After downloading the pdf file I found on UNITED's website, I found myself to have made a very quick decision. These names and this information should be encountered by those who didn't go to UNITED's website, actually, it should be encountered by those who would not want to visit their website. All of them, without selecting any, keeping in mind that not everyone who has lost their lives is on this list. This is how I started, how we started. The process is held up by collaborations, so everybody has to take on a different responsibility than what would normally entail the artistic production process. The content and the form require a different way of relating. I also want the dissemination to be "legal." That's why perhaps the convincing and the negotiation are the only artistic components of the process.

EK: Project, work, process... I don't know which term would describe *The List* best, but I can say one of the most striking features of it is its expansion in time. As the issues around migration and its political and legal complications got intensified, the continuity of the project attracts the attention more. The Herbstsalon considered to host the project first in 2013, during the first exhibition. I wonder, what would its impact be when we could realize it then? And how will it be perceived this time? What do you think about the journey of *The List* in time? Has it change meaning in the last ten years that have passed after the first realization in Amsterdam in 2007? And, has there been a change in its perception by the people who encounter with it, as far you have observed?

BC: The urgency is the same for me today as it was on the first day. The urgency of the subject and what needs to be done. The number of people who died being less in the 90s did not make it less dire. I think that we all play a part in these deaths and in the national and international conditions that cause these deaths. The demand to make the list visible is directly related to how topical the issue feels. Seeing this as a trend, I repress my desire to put up my guard and try to transform the situation to benefit the list. Here, the elements of distance and the feeling of distance come into play. I don't know how much I should retain a distance, my distance, and whether I can even keep a distance at all. A lot of people come to me to show the list, without understanding what the process entails. When I explain the process, there are not that many who still want to show the list. The worst is when the differences in our positions become very visible in the process of collaboration. Thankfully that hasn't happened that often. I don't know the impact on the viewers outside of my close circle or others who I have met in person. It is disseminated with little control across the public realm. The direct point of access is UNITED. I actually never cared about measuring its direct impact, maybe because I'm scared of the results.

EK: I've got another question concerning time. As you have experienced it yourself, and as you have warned the exhibition crew, the updating, editing and added translation of *The List* comes with a heavy psychological burden. People who get involved might get in a real, destructive distress after a while of working on it. How about your own psychology? Despite possible fluctuations in mood, you should be finding motivation is starting to revise *The List* from the scratch.

BC: The decision of that first moment when I read it in 2002 also resists psychological pressures. Years ago, Emel Kurma had compared my relationship to the list to a catholic marriage. For the German edition, redacting in a language I don't know is like writing names on gravestones or to try to remove the weeds in a cemetery-maybe it's better not to do it. On the other hand, thanks to the durational length of the collaboration with UNITED, I'm more involved with the list in the last few years. In 2015, for the YAMA screen, we opened up the document and the entries one by one with Nihan Somay. We went to the source of the news. We made corrections to what we

could, we made decisions on what we could touch and what we would not touch. The people who have been updating the list for many years do not have the same luxury of time. They work with a different sense of urgency. For example, we are able to check the circumstances around the death of someone, when there wasn't that much information available when the list was made. I obviously want information to console. To collate, to gather, is this a weak consolation in this infinite darkness? As I'm writing these to you, the list was published with the newspaper *Tagesspiegel* today. A friend of mine, who only knows the list through the website, wrote to me about how they felt when they held the list in their hands. In contrast to the infinite scroll of the web, the finitude of the printed version. Perhaps this would help handle, to hold a situation that we do not yet know what to do with.

EK: The updating of *The List* and its installment in the urban circulation requires an enormous amount of work, as you warn your partner institutions each time. It requires nearly an obsessive approach on details, even on punctuations in the text. Additionally, there are numerous difficulties in switching between languages. A mistake done years ago can cause chaos in today's work. When we chatted about the piece last week, you mentioned that you came face to face with the language itself. The unlimited nature of language, its labyrinths, and also paradoxically its limits, its despair in the face of reality and mortality. How would you define your relationship with language in the frame of *The List*?

BC: I hope that there is a constructive contradiction between the urgency and methodology of UNITED to update the list and my obsessive nature. The list by definition is not going to be consistent, even if I push for consistency. The language chosen for it is English. Almost a hundred percent of those who lost their lives spoke other languages. Families, witnesses, testimonies, news sources, organizations and what has been communicated to the outside, what was lost in translation, things that will never be translated into another language...

A single sentence that was pulled out of a vast moving ball of things. Due to the organizational structure of UNITED, whoever is able to stay on top of that ball picks up that sentence. Although there are numerous criteria that have been set, it is important to update these criteria. We see the traces of many people who worked on the list since 1993. UNITED goes back to revise the list as much as they can, but their resources are limited. This is when our collaboration is perhaps able to help out a bit. It is necessary to stay in the list, to look at it extensively and to read. The artist has more time to work on the periods and commas or to go back on the death of someone in 1996 and add missing information. Or an allocation of resources by art institutions who really want to show the list, transferring these modest resources UNITED.

I go back on the problems of language. For the German distribution of the list, we made an intervention on the maleness of the words for the first time. If the gender of the person at the time of death is not known, we did not assume

this gender to be male and we used the word *Migrant*innen* instead of *Migrant*. In 2012, when we were working on the list in Turkish, we found out that someone who would be considered male from their name was actually trans and we made this deduction from their cause of death, pushing us to understand that nobody's gender should be assumed. The German translation was thus quite difficult. It is difficult.

EK: An extension to the question about the language... When someone mentions the word "listing" the first things that comes to my mind are properties, central administrations, bureaucracy arising from the rising complication of modern life, statistics and so on. Does *The List* work against these connotations, and if yes, through which methods? I sense an affective dimension in all of this. You mentioned, for example, about Catholic marriage. What has struck me was rather the analogy made with Antigone and her effort to bury her brother. Would it be too far fetched if I find a ritualistic, an elegiac dimension in *The List*?

BC: No you wouldn't. Maybe this is what I mean with the weeding process. An effort to grieve on paper, through recording.

EK: The thing that connects *The List* to main body of your artistic work seems to be the contact with the public space. *The List* was hosted on billboards, advertising columns, newspaper supplements and a screen mounted on a hotel building. We also observe an interest on your side in using classic printed matter such as magazines, books and newspapers in your other art works. You even publish things yourself. Our love with the printed material will never end, I guess. But, in the mean time we observe drastic changes in the field of journalism. I'm curious about your approach to digital media: would it be possible to think about a future edition of *The List*, or of any works of your that aim to establish a contact with the public, to be conveyed through digital media?

BC: Actually, we went through a process of digitalization, although not a complete one, when preparing for the YAMA screen. We opened up the 38 page document to a 1000 pages and relayed incidents when many people died on an individual level, one by one. I quote here: Radically different from previous formats, the entire content of the list, except the sources, has been transferred into a video format. The actual screening displayed the entire document, containing the information of more than 22.342 known refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who have died within, or on the borders of Europe since 1993. The information on each individual case documented in the list, was visualized on the screen, appearing one word at a time. Screenings took place at night, from sunset to sunrise, taking exactly 360 hours to cover the document from beginning to end.

We have been talking about the possibility of the newspaper and digital printing for a while now. Soon enough, there will not be a demand for printed newspapers in certain geographies. Germany is still an exception for this,

there are more than 2000 printed newspapers. There is a chance that the list might be disseminated next June in the UK through London and Liverpool. Within this potential is also the idea of collaborating with a large-ish newspaper for a digital print. However, the mediation of the screen is a completely different perception and has a specific speed-a situation in which "handling" is not really possible.

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