

**'MATCHES AND ASHES' A VIDEO-ART PROJECT***Burçin ELMAS ÇUBUKÇU**Robert REIGLE***Abstract**

This article is on the duo video-art project called 'Matches and Ashes' by Burçin Elmas Çubukçu and Hilal Büşra Cebeci to represent the purchasers' burning desire to possess and consume an item until the next object appears to be more attractive to own and consume. Besides the bigger dress installation in progress, a smaller model dress was constructed to be used for the video to get burnt for the shoot. The video consists of a burning installation of small model-dress only constructed out of matchsticks by this duo. The video is accompanied by an electro-acoustic composition by Burçin Elmas Çubukçu. Original sound of the video shoot, with the sound of the wind and the burning dress are combined with electronics and improvised alto saxophone. This article makes a clear explanation of the purpose of the project, by portraying the terms desire and consumption followed by a description of how the dress installation was made and got burnt. The structure of the video edit and what it wants to emphasize is explained followed by the analysis of the music composed to it. Graphic scores are used to illustrate the details of the music analysis. Lastly, the current state of the project is expressed.



'Matches and Ashes' is a duo video-art project by Burçin Elmas Çubukçu and Hilal Büşra Cebeci. A video of a burning dress, constructed using a matchstick pasting technique onto a wooden wall of a steel construction base, is captured on camera and edited and finalized with an added electro-acoustic composition.

Being collaboration of a fashion designer and an electro-acoustic composer/ a saxophone player, this project is the first video-art/ installation experience of both collaborators who started working together in August 2012.

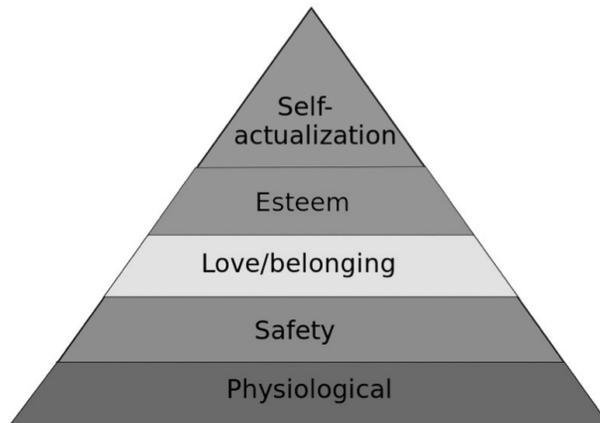
Initial idea being Büşra Cebeci's own, she explained what this project reflects in her own words:

Despite all the ferociousness, this installation stands right in between the fire that's present while the person is trying to achieve his/her desires and then the ashes that he ends up owning right after achieving them without losing out its flammable characteristics. It took years for this project to come to fruition in an environment where real turns into surreal, fire into ashes, fashionable into out of style, in an impetuous matter of a match-swing against its box. Fashion, even though entailed every lively aspect of life, in its most broad context, has often been associated with clothes. Right after the industrial revolution, the capitalist system, with a completely captive soul, hyped up the connection to materialism and the inclination to consume followed by waste. This matchstick woman symbolizes the soul for a hankering for design, even lust at times.

In daily modern life, consumption notion becomes a concept containing an image and symbolic features with emotional benefits rather than a functional benefit provider. Conspicuous consumption is a consumption type where humans compare themselves to others through what they consume. Consumption in which the consumers fantasies and emotional desires have the utmost importance is called hedonic consumption. Hedonistic consumption, related to consuming luxury items and fulfilling psychological needs, is emotional features and emotional satisfaction based on consumption (Spangenberg & Voss & Crowley, 1997:239).

Symbolic consumption on the other hand is a consumption type in which consumers buy and consume evaluating the good's symbolic features and it is a phenomenon in which people consume because of emotional driving factors rather than functional driving ones. In postmodern context, consumer has personalized consumption experience using the goods in the market. (Grubb and Grath-woll 1967:24) In post-modern thinking system, consumption also includes symbolic materials, which make most individuals happy. (Lai, 1994:45)

Before capitalism, consumption was characterized as consuming goods immediately and new ones to be made, but consumption in capitalist cultures moved from Maslow's Hierarchy of needs pyramid (see Figure 1), physical needs to the last step self-actualization, owning everything needed. (Maslow states on hierarchy of needs: "If I may assign arbitrary figures for the sake of illustration, it is as if the average citizen is satisfied perhaps 85% in his physiological needs, 70% in his safety needs, 50% in his love needs, 40% in his self-esteem needs and 10% in his self-actualization needs" (Maslow, 1943: 388-389). This pyramid is an interpretation of his theory and his statement on percentages, which cannot be found in his writings.)



**Figure 1:** Pyramid Demonstration of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

With this, consumption became a cultural phenomenon in which people express themselves with their consumption rather than only purchasing their humble needs. Consumption became a status symbol and prestige determinative and marketing changed in time in which it worked on psychological expectations in addition to functional ones.

For consumption and consumer, materialism is defined by consumers' evaluation for earthly values. Materialist individuals are people who find the good life in consuming and who think that owning property and material is the most important and unavoidable aspect of their life and identity. (Annamma & Wallendorf, 1996: 106).

As Mark C. Taylor and Esa Saarinen put it, "Desire does not desire satisfaction. To the contrary, desire desires desire." (Bauman, 1999:38) According to Bauman, "To increase their capacity for consumption, consumers must never be left to rest. They need to be constantly exposed to new temptations to keep them in the state of perpetual suspicion and steady disaffection. This cycle of desires are a compulsions, a must, for the fully-fledged, mature consumer; yet that must, which internalized pressure, that impossibility of living one's life in any other way, is seen as the free exercise of one's will. " (Bauman, 1999:38) Bauman also states that consumed items should bring instant satisfaction, so that the consumer does not focus or hold their concentration on an object for too long, so that the incoming object to desire can be effective. Bauman's view especially covered what Büşra initially had in mind while we started this project. It talks about the ongoing desire to consume and lose envy for the previously desired items.

To represent the burning desire until the next item to desire comes along, a burning matchstick dress was decided to be used because of its flammable characteristics. How to reflect this idea through the video was only agreed on during the video-editing process.

After long brainstorming sessions on how to construct the matchstick dress, a thin wooden layer was glued on a lampshade-like metal construction which was the last decision made. After the base layer was built, matchsticks were glued individually onto the bust section of the dress. The skirt section of the dress was consisting of dots. In order to create these dots evenly and equally baby powder cap was utilized. The cap was fully filled with match sticks placed upside down in an effort to create a circular shape, followed by gluing the rear end of the match stick pile. Once dry, the match sticks were then removed out of the caps and glued to the skirt section of the dress. All the matchsticks were cut in order to have the desired look on the dress. The glue used, had a spray to go with it to make the gluing process faster and durable.

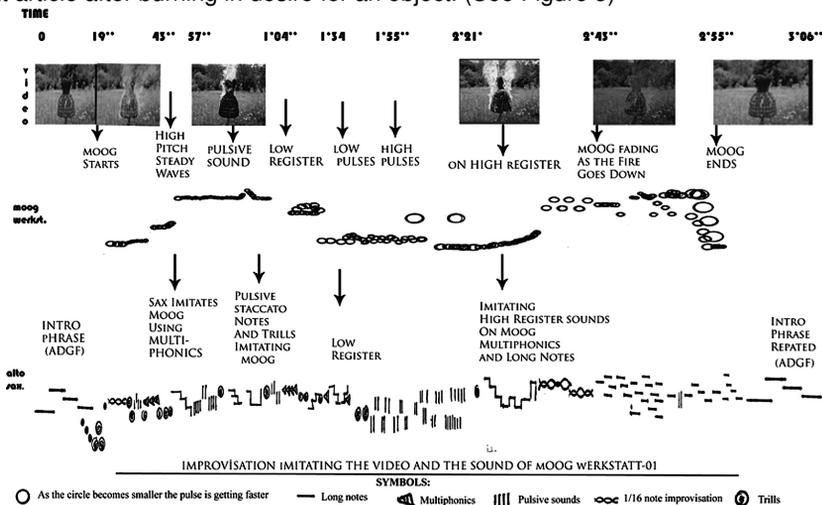
During this period, we decided on making a smaller dress to burn for the video and use the bigger dress as an installation, because there was only one chance at shooting the dress while burning. Having the same base, the metal construction made with a wooden layer, the skirt part was made the same way except using a travel size baby powder cap this time. Gluing the matchsticks individually made the breast section, but this time we used fabric strips to glue the matchsticks on for the rest of the upper body. Finally, these strips were glued onto the model. Although it was easier to be able to work horizontally, there were gaps after these strips were glued on the dress, which had to be filled individually. This smaller dress was finished on April 17th, 2013.

After the small dress was complete, the video was shot at a privately-owned farm in Kemerburgaz, Istanbul with the help of Volkan Ergen on May 20th, 2013. Since there was only one dress to burn, there was only one chance to shoot the video. After spraying alcohol onto the dress to make the model flammable, the dress was approached from the right and left corners of the skirt section with two burning tree branches. After touching the dress with these branches, it took only 5 seconds for the dress to catch fire. Burning of the dress lasted for 9 minutes. (See Figure 2) There was only metal construction left and ashes on the ground left from the dress, which enabled a 9 minutes long video shoot.



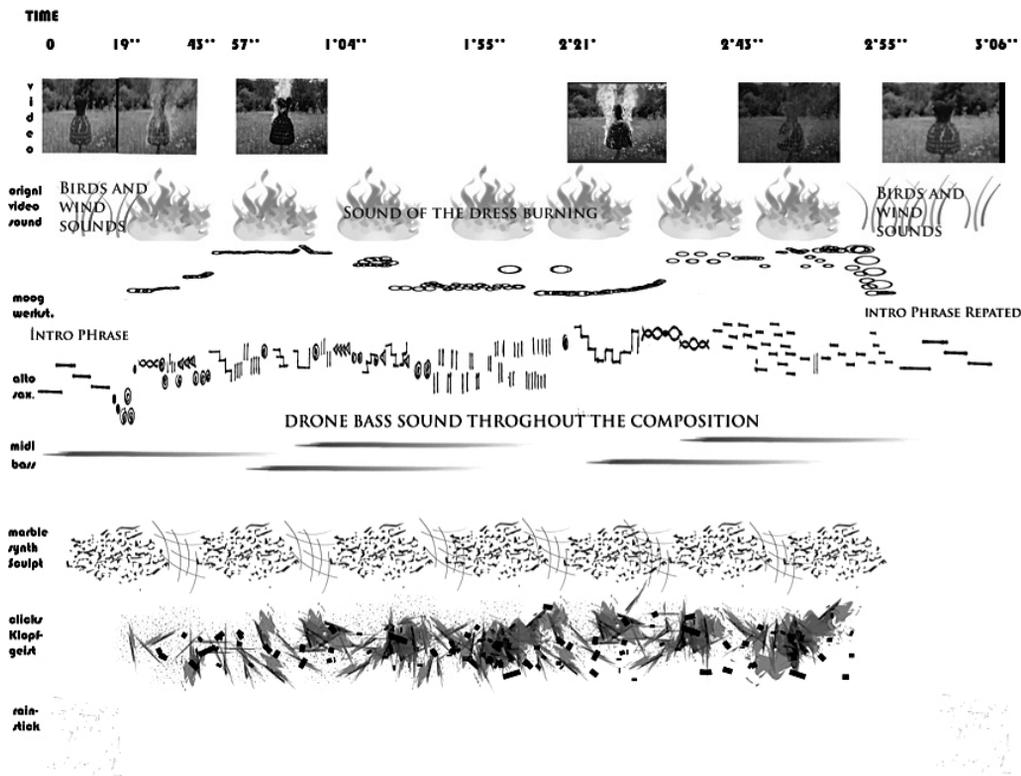
**Figure 2:** A Screenshot from Matches and Ashes Video

After gathering the video material, the editing was only made by using the burning part without using the shoot with the metal construction remains and the ashes. On the day of the shoot, three cameras, Canon Mark II5D, Canon MarkII7D and a Sony Handycam with different angles, were used, but only one of the camera's material is used for the video-edit. The video starts with the dress standing in nature with trees and grass moving with the wind in the background. The burning process with burning tree branches is also not included in the video, in which the video directly goes into the burning phase. Before the dress goes to a charred phase, the burning process is reversed on the video edit, so that it goes back to its initial phase representing the consumer's appetite for the next article after burning in desire for an object. (See Figure 3)



**Figure 3:** Matches and Ashes Video, Moog and Alto Sax Relation

After finishing the video-edit, an electro-acoustic composition was finished by Burçin Elmas Çubukçu to accompany the 3 minutes 6 seconds long video-edit made of the Matchstick Dress burning on July 23rd 2016. So the video has an A-B-B reversed-A form, if we call section B the burning section. This composition has A-B-A form with non-isochronous meter to accompany the video. (See Figure 4)



**Figure 4:** Matches and Ashes Composition Plan

The software used to compose this piece is Logic Pro X, which is a digital audio workstation and Musical Instrument Digital Interface MIDI sequencer software application. The video's original sound, the sound of the tree leaves moving with the wind and the sound of the dress burning is used as they are along the composition. From the beginning to the end, a drone bass synthesizer sound built-in in Logic Pro (Grunge Wobble Bass in Alchemy) is used to have a bass layer in the piece. Another Logic Pro built-in synthesizer sound (Marble on a Journey in Sculpt) is used in the beginning, which is similar to the sound of marbles moving in a wooden bowl. Marble on a Journey synthesizer was added to accompany the wind sound on the video. The composition starts with a live-recorded rain stick sound and a live recorded alto saxophone sound playing and intro phrase in long notes (A D G F). On the video's 19th second, start of the B section, the dress

starts burning and two more instruments are introduced to the music. To imitate the sound of burning, Moog Werkstatt-01 analog synthesizer was appropriate, because it has a variety of sound possibilities to use. Pulsing and rhythmic sounds, noises in which the pitch can be changed are some of these possibilities. After experimenting with the Moog Werkstatt-01 to see how it can be used, its improvised sound along the video with various setting changes was recorded while watching the video. The density of the sound was varying depending on the extensiveness of the dress' burning. Another built-in instrument in Logic Pro called Arp in Klopfggeist which gives click sounds, was applicable to use with the crunchy burning sound of the dress. After being done with the base, the saxophone was chosen to imitate the sound of Moog Werkstatt while accompanying the video at the same time. After the dress goes back to its initial non-burning state on the second minute and fifty fifth second, the Moog, the click sounds from Klopfggeist, the bass sound from Alchemy and marble like synth from Sculpt fades away in the composition, where the live recorded rain stick sound, original sound of the video-shoot and the saxophone playing the phrase played in the intro are the only components of the composition until the video comes to an end.

As seen on Figure 3, Saxophone section and the Moog Werkstatt recording have a close relationship within the composition. Starting and ending with the same phrase, this phrase creates a link from the un-burned to the desired dress. Because Moog is an analog synthesizer, during the recording, it was hard to have the intensity and the volume of the sound under control, which was managed to control by editing the volume on Logic Pro. With high pitch steady sound waves, multiphonics are used on the saxophone. In addition, with pulsing sounds from the Moog, staccato notes are used on the saxophone to imitate. At the end of the burning process on the video, the Moog slows down and saxophone plays high notes to accompany it in order to play the intro phrase to end the composition.

Since the project is a representation of people's burning temptations to own an item till the next item is desired, the steady and calm sound at the beginning followed by the noise filled, non-pitched harmonic spectra representing the burning desire and temptation. At the end, the new item replaced the previous, which brings us the calmness represented with the music at the A section.

The day, the video-edit and the composition was shared by Büşra Cebeci, was September 14th, 2016 and the decision of publishing this version online on vimeo was made to get feedbacks until the bigger dress installation was finished and shown publicly. Currently, bigger dress is missing its bust section and the work is in progress.

### **Equipment List:**

**MOTU Ultralitemk3** is an audio interface-sound card, which can be connected both with fire wire and USB 2.0. It has 10 inputs and 14 outputs with an onboard DSP processor.

**Moog Werkstatt-01** is an analog synthesizer kit made by moog with single VCO with Saw and Square wave shapes, LFO, VCO, VCF Modulation sections and a one octave legato keyboard and envelope shapers.

**M-Audio Axiom 49** is an USB midi keyboard with 59 keys and midi controllers, faders and knobs on.

**RODE NT1A** Microphone is a large diaphragm condenser microphone.

**Logic Pro X** is a digital audio workstation and Musical Instrument Digital Interface MIDI sequencer software application.

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