



HASET

ENVY

HUSUMET

ENMITY

REZALET

EMBARRASSMENT

ARTER

1/2

BAŞAK DOĞA TEMÜR

If you envy me, I'll envy you

Alongside their personal practices, Johanna Adebäck and Merve Ertufan have been producing art together since 2009, when they began their joint project "me | you". The project develops through sharing the process; regardless of any controversy over whose contribution is bigger or more important than the other's, and working as the co-owners/creators of the artwork.

"me | you" consists of several performances and videos where the artists themselves are seen interacting with each other. They choose rivalry as their mode of interaction and use games as a tool to try to define and represent themselves and their relationship as friends and colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. The project starts with the work "Repeaters" where we see the artists playing a childish, primitive and even bestial game, and it continues with other works such as "Tug of War" and "Follow John" in which the pair become opponents that challenge each other physically, turning the performance into a power play between them. In the following work, "31/03/2010", we see the artists sitting across from each other at a table with a bottle of vodka and two shot glasses, playing a card game and drinking in turns as they lose. In this work, there is a greater challenge than just a physical one; they have to keep on drinking while remaining sober enough to compete with their rival on a mental and emotional level. They pass through various moods, playing different characters when they are the challengers of the game, getting drunk all the while. Sometimes they are like a flirting couple: one acts sassy or becomes a spoilsport, while the other pampers and encourages her to carry on. Later, they become rivals, both avid to win the game. They rapidly switch between emotions and attitudes towards each other: "As individuals, we feel the need to both distinguish ourselves from others and to belong in a community. In order to do this, we compose an entity called the 'self' in relation to Others. What we consider to be 'ourself' is dependent on those we interact with. Both the creation of the self and our self-image are manifestations of social exchange; they are constructed and re-constructed at every moment. Since we relate and compare with Others to form our own attributes, social interaction becomes the basis of our identities."¹

¹ Quote from the project's website: <http://meyouproject.wordpress.com/>

In the recent addition to the project, "Compliments" (2012), we see Adebäck and Ertufan next to each other, in the same close-up shot on the identical blue background, dressed in similar coloured clothing and throwing each other compliments in turns. The session is shot on two separate, one-hour long video cassettes and is played in sync without any editing. The hour long, non-stop complimenting performance could be interpreted as if they're playing a game of tennis in order to dissect and expose a very common everyday act. The artists make compliments of all kinds: ones relating to looks, personality, artistic skills, physical skills and intellect... From time to time they also become exaggeratedly sycophantic, saying things that don't exactly fit these categories and that are more along the lines of eulogies: "I think you are beautiful", "Your eyes are really beautiful", "You have a very proportionate body", "Your eyebrows have this nice little curve at the end, which I love, it's really nice", "Looking, looking, looking into your eyes, is like looking to the, yeah to the sky, to the stars. It just sparkles and glitters". They thus flow between several attitudes such as friendly, sincere, caring, loving, flirty, lascivious, admiring, praising, possessive, jealous, envious and even sometimes so exaggerated that the other is challenged and provoked to come up with an even more overplayed comment. So, each compliment could be categorised on two levels: in terms of what they are related to and the tone or the way in which they are delivered, revealing the emotion/intention behind it.

Depending on the situation between the person making the compliment and the person receiving it, a compliment might be intended to please, cheer up or support the other person. In some cases, such as flirting, the intention may be to express admiration and fancy. Parents could compliment their children for encouragement and support. Everybody likes a compliment in one way or another. Yet sometimes a compliment can make a person feel insecure or could be annoying and give rise to the need to protect oneself from the "evil eye" or "bad energy", especially if it's insincere or envious in nature. Whatever the subject of a compliment, it's not always possible to sense the intention behind it. Even if sensed, it remains obscure: it's just a feeling.

In Adebäck and Ertufan's work we have the chance to adopt several positions for thinking about and understanding the structure of compliments. We may stand as an observer in the middle of this one-hour long, uninterrupted compliment tennis, and while enjoying watching several good sets of the game, we can get to know the artists personally; what they value, what they lack, what they envy and even their strengths and weaknesses. As their tones wander from calm sincerity to exaggeration, struggling to make a better, bigger compliment than the other, we discover that

they are also two rivals, despite the fact that they are actually friends on one level. One has to make a bigger compliment, since the other has already said that she has a "perfect" nose, which is a greater compliment than the one she had just made—is she therefore wittier? The other says in response that her opponent has a "proportionate" body—for the sake of being wittier—however she also seems to be envious of it.

The envy merry-go-round continues as they switch from one persona to the next, which they have built in relation to each other. Sometimes the anxiety of the challenge appears to give way to a kind of sexual tension between a would-be future couple. They interchange the positions of fugitive and hunter, in a kind of romantic flirtation. All through the work, they challenge themselves regarding the expression of their feelings, thus revealing underlying sources of envy. As we watch both of them in real time, one waiting for the other to finish her compliment, positioned next to each other in close-up, we are given the opportunity to catch their momentary emotional responses by watching their facial expressions closely. We witness how they struggle not to reveal their various feelings, depending on the content and mood of the compliments, and how they suddenly change their mind about the next compliment they'll make.

Another position available for the viewer, while caught in this cross-fire, is that of becoming the receiver of the compliments. Although they take turns making compliments; since they're looking directly at the camera, we could easily intercept and start to accept the compliments for ourselves. After enjoying this position for a while, the work has the potential to bring us to a self-conscious state where we suddenly take stock of what we value, desire, or envy and also how ephemeral our values are, which we can instantly change depending on the other person we are interacting with, or the latent narcissism within us.

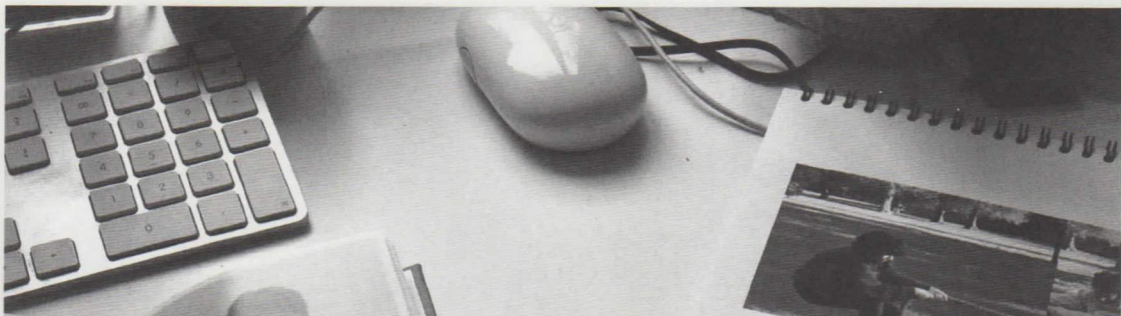
One other interpretation of the situation could be that they are complimenting their own mirror reflections, since Adebäck and Ertufan are seen in the same close-up shot on identical backgrounds, dressed in similar colours. Each compliment reveals a part of their own set of values, and could be seen as the expression of their ideal selves. This mirror situation is a bit like the one in the tale of Snow White and Seven Dwarfs, where the Queen, who is also Snow White's stepmother, constantly asks the magic mirror who is the fairest in all the kingdom and the mirror always tells her that she is the fairest of all, until one day it tells her that Snow White is the fairest of all. The Queen's envious heart leads her to attempt to kill Snow White several times, which in the end leads to her own execution, in a very embarrassing way. As Adebäck and Ertufan constantly pay each other compliments, the situation is akin to an exorcism session to eliminate Snow White.

Although making a compliment may seem like a supreme, high-minded thing that a happy, satisfied person would do; in fact, in many situations, it is related to desire and a certain sense of lack, which leads individuals to envy others. According to George M. Foster: "To pay a compliment (at least to a conceptual equal) often seems to be a culturally sanctioned device whereby in a non-disruptive fashion envy of another may be expressed. The true feelings of the speaker (who may not himself recognise them) are dressed up, sweetened, and made palatable, but for all the courtesy, the actors often sense that compliments but thinly veil repressed sentiments of potential aggression: the person complimented has, of course, been told he has something the complimenter would very much like to have himself."²

Adebäck and Ertufan's work, on one hand discloses the above-mentioned insincere act of dressing up, sweetening and palliating envy by presenting the constant challenge of receiving a compliment by paying another. On the other hand, the performative fashion that the artists have adopted to deliver the compliments to each other—the constant change in tone of the compliments, such as friendly, sincere, flirty, lascivious, praising, possessive, jealous etc.—leads us to discover our strong intention to constantly conceal who we are and change how we present our "self".

2

George M. Foster,
"The Anatomy of Envy:
A Study in Symbolic
Behaviour", in
Current Anthropology,
Vol. 13, No. 2, April 1972
(Chicago: The University of
Chicago Press), p. 172.



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WIT AND ITS RELATION TO THE ECONOMY

It is not to be understood that the same indignation felt toward a real obscenity, were it not for the fact that another factor saves us from this indignation and at the same time furnishes the more important part of the pleasure derived from it. This other factor is the "naive" or "naïve" element of the obscenity, namely, that in order to recognize the "naive" element of the obscenity, we must take into consideration the conditions in the production of the obscenity. It is by comparing it to our own state of mind, or to our own state of mind at the moment of producing the obscenity, that we are able to recognize the "naive" element of the obscenity. We might prefer the simpler explanation which we discharge into the world, but the reason has no inhibitory effect upon us. In order to avoid this, we must lead as one in the above discussion, namely, that when we read or of anything in the nature of a wit, results of our indignation become if the naive is expressed not in speech but in action. This latter case is really misleading; for one might here assume, that the pleasure originates from the economy; for one might here assume, which becomes especially evident in the explanation and transformed into action. The first case, however, can produce the effect of a light wit, which becomes especially evident in the "Hebrew" case. The naive speech in the example "Hebrew" is instructive case. In so far as we think that the pleasure originates with the masculine personal pronoun, or the more pure cause for indignation of hearing it, has no longer anything to do with the "Hebrew" case. We shall now consider what has been said to do with the "Hebrew" case. It is certainly not in the mind of the person who understands an identity and has covered it up. In following this mind, the increase in the necessary understanding still further and has covered it up.



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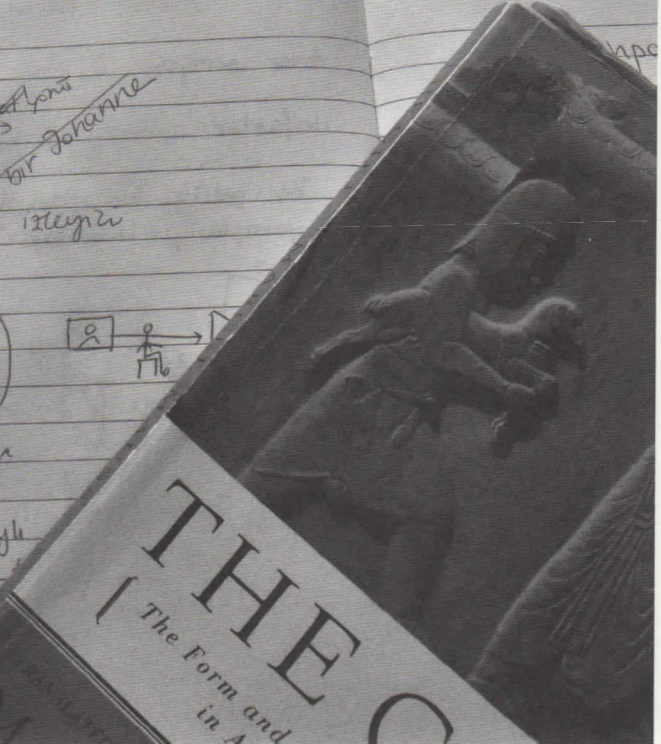
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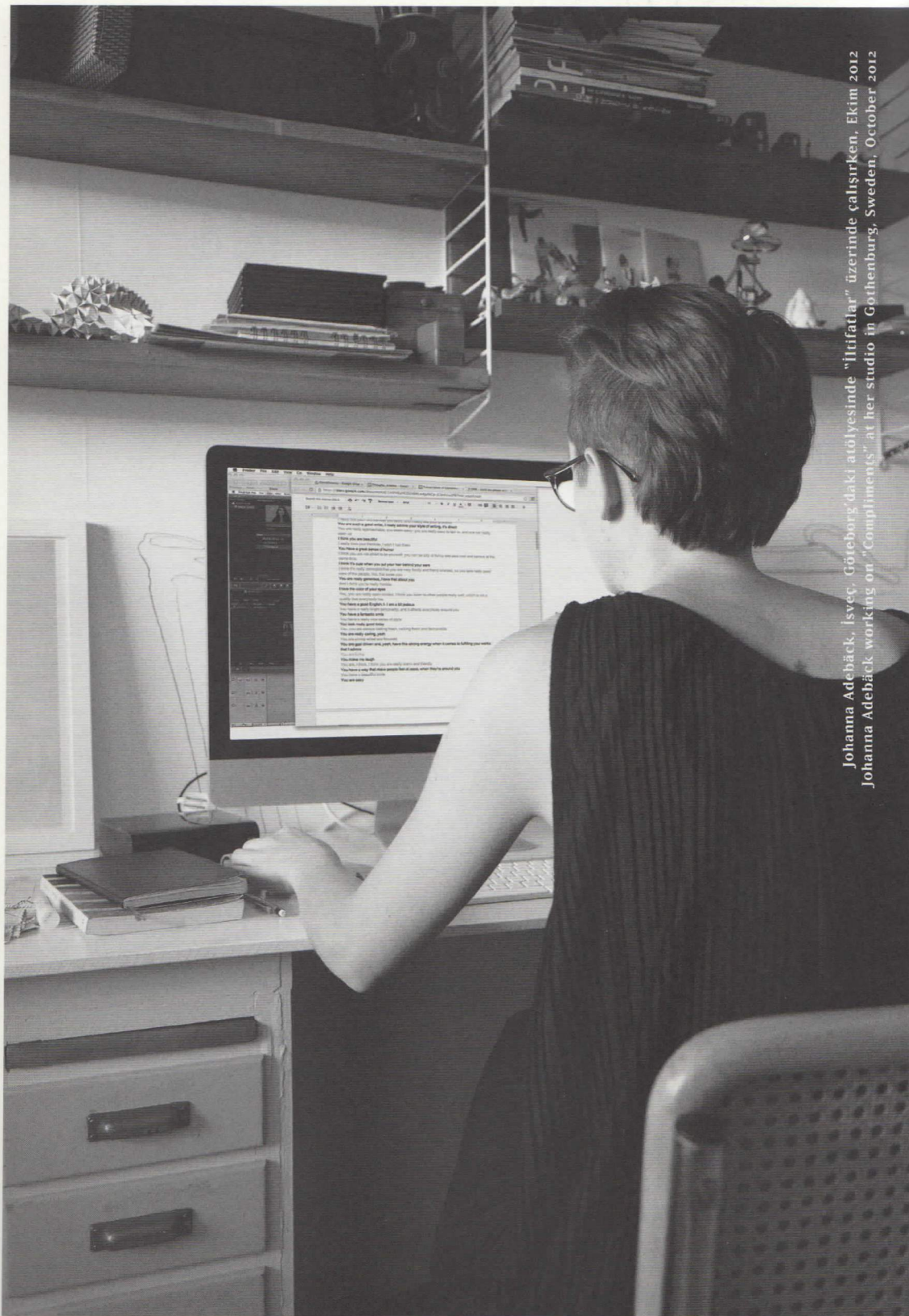
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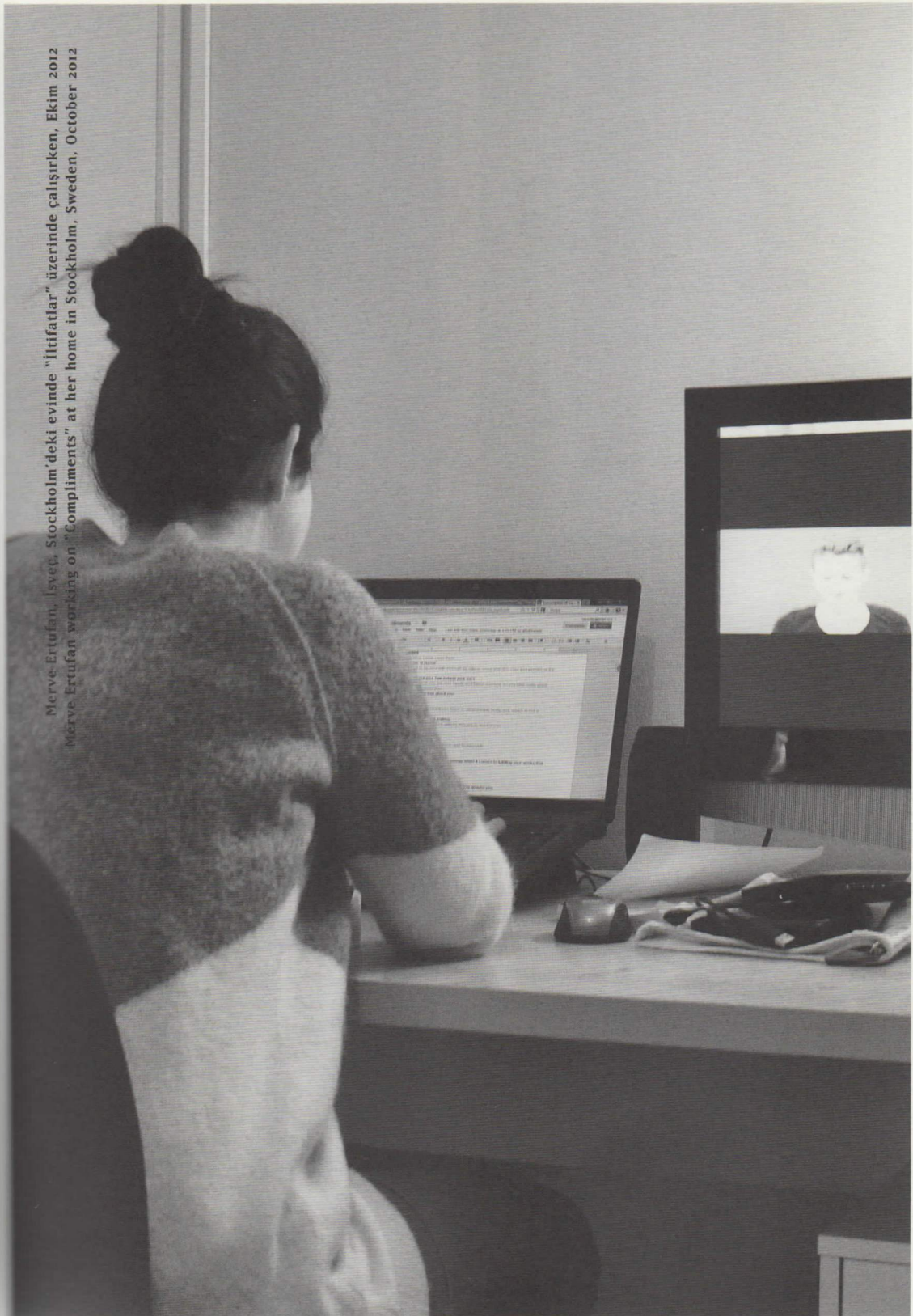
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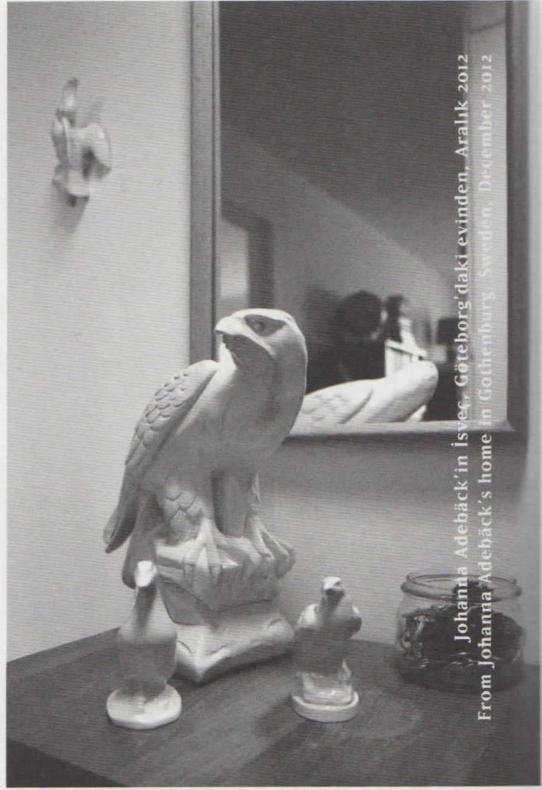




Johanna Adebäck, İsveç, Göteborg'daki atölyesinde "İtrifatlar" üzerinde çalışırken, Ekim 2012
Johanna Adebäck working on "Compliments" at her studio in Gothenburg, Sweden, October 2012

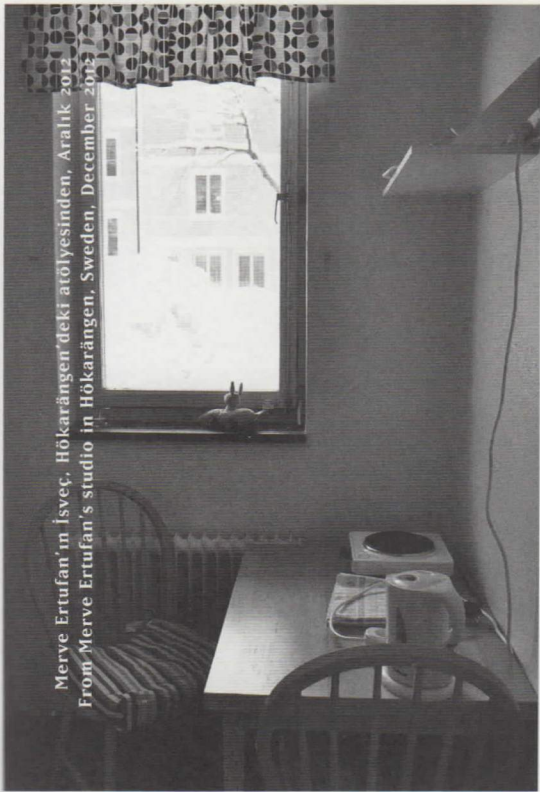
Merve Ertufan, İsveç, Stockholm'deki evinde "İltifatlar" üzerinde çalışırken, Ekim 2012
Merve Ertufan working on "Compliments" at her home in Stockholm, Sweden, October 2012





Johanna Adebäck in Isvea, Göteborg'daki evinden, Aralık 2012
From Johanna Adebäck's home in Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2012





Merve Ertufan'ın İsvet, Hökarängen'deki atölyesinden, Aralık 2012.
From Merve Ertufan's studio in Hökarängen, Sweden, December 2012.





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