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Almost 9 Kilometers in İstanbul's Newfound Land(scape)

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Almost 9 Kilometers in İstanbul's Newfound Land(scape)

by Nazlı Tümerdem and Igor Medarić



About the Authors

Nazlı Tümerdem is an architect and a researcher. She received her Bachelor's degree (2008) from Istanbul Technical University and Master's degree (2011) from Istanbul Bilgi University. She completed her PhD entitled "Istanbul Walkabouts: A Critical Walking Study of Northern Istanbul" (2018) at Istanbul Technical University and continues performing walks around northern Istanbul for her independent walking project Istanbul Walkabouts. In September 2019, she joined the Chair of Architecture and Territorial Planning as a postdoctoral researcher holding the Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship.

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Figure 1. This photograph is taken from the moving bus's window. We are looking straight onto our first monument, the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, which is almost imperceptible here. Igor Medarić photo.

On Saturday, September 30, 2017 we left our place in Koşuyolu and took a rather stuffed minibus to the historical seaside neighborhood Üsküdar. The weather was around 19°C. The night before, we were warned of showers, but apart from an extremely overcast sky, there was no rain. [distance: 0 km; elevation: 49 m; time: 10:55]. To cross to the European side of town, we took the ferry and in 7 minutes set foot on Beşiktaş. Pondering what a French cartographer had told me about İstanbul's Asian-European sides being only a construct of political interests and not actual geographical borders, I wondered how else I could refer to these two parts of this city. We boarded bus number 25E to Sarıyer. Passing under the first and then the second suspension bridges felt like time travelling in the city's urban development. Once the capital of an empire, İstanbul—as a medieval city—

was limited to the historical peninsula situated at the southern end of the Bosphorus. Today, it's a megalopolis ever-growing towards the north due the construction of two major highways with two bridges crossing this strait. Now we were going even further north, to the uncharted territories of İstanbul where forests, fishing villages, farms, agricultural fields, and water reserves are nestled. This is where the third major highway of the city, with its suspension bridge crossing the Bosphorus, is constructed.

On this misty day, the water molecules seemed to be suspended in the air in a state between liquid and gas. At the very end, where several shades of green blended into nothingness, stood the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, our first monument. It was kind of like a ghost, more cellophane than concrete and steel: as if it would gradually dissolve into thin air when the sun came up. Riding for 21 km, we passed many stops. Before entering each neighbourhood, we saw the signage indicating where we were: *ORTAKÖY*, *ARNAVUTKÖY*, *BEBEK*, *RUMELİHİSARI*, *EMİRGAN*, *İSTİNYE*, *YENİKÖY*, *TARABYA*, *KİREÇBURNU*, *BÜYÜKDERE*. Next, we arrived at Sarıyer and stopped at a small shop to get the paper. [0 km; 12 m; 12:12]. Then, we boarded bus number 150. After we sat down, I looked at the headlines as Smithson once did. *A NEW STEP IN RELIGIONIZING EDUCATION: THEY BLACKLIST YOU THROUGH FRIDAY PRAYERS*. Apparently, the administration of a middle school has asked the students' parents to allow the school to take their children to Friday prayer. Reading the paper has become extremely dispiriting for a long while now. After riding the bus for 10 km, we got off at Fener Kavşağı (Lighthouse Junction). Here, our wandering started. [0 km; 187 m; 12:45].



Figure 2. Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge as it appeared when we started walking. Igor Medarić photo.

We made a right and started walking alongside a recently renewed double-lane tarmac road that was not named on Google Maps. The white contours of the lanes flashed under the overcast sky and there was an inscription on the road: *İSTANBUL GREATER MUNICIPALITY*. Both sides of the road were lush with green bushes, rosehip, and bramble. Here we started to see glimpses of the Bosphorus and our first monument, the bridge. It was hovering above the water like a grim apparition from the city's bleak future. A gargantuan structure built against all odds, an artifice that is made by *men* but is not art. The crooked electric posts that continued along the roadside seemed out of place next to it as if from a different epoch. After all, this is the time of million-dollar projects.

We see a sign that reads: *CIVILIAN VEHICLES. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE SAFETY OF YOUR LIFE. DO NOT STOP ON ROUTES IN FORBIDDEN MILITARY ZONES. ABSOLUTELY OBEY AT THE STOP WARNINGS OF GUARDS*. Are we somewhere we shouldn't be? Despite its myriad flows, the Bosphorus seemed quite static as if it was just a photograph of itself. Suddenly we heard the siren of a tankship, waiting to get its permission to pass from the strait to the Black Sea. This took us out of our inertia. The vessel seemed eerily small as it approached the shadow of the behemoth upon the water. [0.8 k; 168 m; 13:06].



Figure 3. The hearth, the bridge, the strait. Nazlı Tümerdem photo.

Seeing a forest track going down, we strayed from the road and entered the forest. Going down a steep hill, we kept on moving from one perspective, where we openly saw the Bosphorus, to another, where the sea was out of sight and we were surrounded by trees. These changing vistas created a cinematic journey as we moved along the track. Finally, we reached a flat area at the edge of the cliff with a whole panorama of the strait. On one side stands the city of today with two bridges and the skyscraper background. How modern, how novel! On the other side stands the city's future with the recently constructed bridge named after a sultan from the 16th century. As vehicles were shortcutting their way into a different continent, we stood on this ground, measuring our progress across the surface of the planet with nothing else but our bodies. Several remnants of nocturnal drinking, such as beer bottles and cans, were laying around. We presumed that the circular composition of bricks and stones topped with partially burnt branches was the hearth of an open-air event. This hearth was our second monument, a structure incessantly constructed by *men* since the times of Prometheus. [1.8 km; 47 m; 13:42].



Figure 4. An unlikely shortcut inside the forest. Nazlı Tümerdem photo.

On the way back up, we decided to enter the forest with the hopes of making a shortcut. [2.9 km; 113 m; 13:59]. While walking, each footprint engraves itself upon the face of the Earth. As these prints accumulate, paths are formed. The tracks engraved into the earth by repeated pedestrian traffic are called desire lines. They are the routes our hearts

desire to take. Yet, inside this forest, there was no such path. The vegetation was so thick and thorny that we had to create our own line. Thus, each step became a new mark on the terrain. We added our geomorphological contribution to the landscape. During this walk, as an addition to a hand-held camera, I also wore a chest-mounted, voice-activated camera that I had programmed to take time-lapse images every 10 seconds. As I commanded “start time-lapse,” it started to take pictures until I gave it a second command: “stop time-lapse.” The angles changed as the camera moved according to my body and to how my body was positioned upon the earth. It transformed into a prosthetic device, a new part of my body that moved across the planet with me, seeing the world with its own eyes, a *kino-eye*. Then, we saw a memorial for the people who had died in the recent coup d’état attempt. MARTYRS OF JULY 15TH MEMORIAL FOREST. Another spot with spectacular views. [3.9 km; 88 m; 14:58]. At this point, my phone’s battery ran out. From now on we were obliged to orient without the convenience of mapping applications. [4.1 km; 89 m; 14:59].



Figure 5. Abandoned checkpoint inside the forest. Igor Medarić photo.

We walked back up and continued along the road. Here, we passed through another gate with waiting stations on each side. This must have been a military zone in some recent past. Now, it seemed abandoned and replaced. We saw a big signboard instructing the current occupants of this area. NORTHERN MARMARA HIGHWAY PROJECT (THE THIRD BRIDGE INCLUDED). KINALI-ODAYERİ, KURTKÖY-AKYAZI REGION (CONNECTION ROADS INCLUDED). THE JOB OF BUILDING, OPERATING AND

TRANSFERRING THROUGH BUILD-OPERATE-TRANSFER MODEL. Flagpoles, lamp poles, electricity pylons, and the towers of the bridge—they all blended into each other in their continuous verticality as they got smaller and smaller with distance. [4.6 km; 123 m; 15:16]. Leaving the highway humming behind, we followed a track inside the abandoned military zone. Here was our next monument, a ruined checkpoint station painted in camouflage colors. Once, soldiers were waiting here guarding a constructed idea. This path led to a fire track inside the forest. As we descended down into the valley, the track slowly narrowed as vegetation took over. The whole area was covered by thorny bushes, brambles, and berries. They made it almost impossible to move forward, significantly slowing our pace. Then it started to drizzle and we got wet, up to our waistline in underbrush as we wrestled through this densely vegetated zone. When we finally reached the main road, we continued northeast towards the highway. [5.2 km; 113 m; 15:47].



Figure 6. Once this overpass was not an overpass. Igor Medarić photo.

Barriers started showing up on both sides of the road and we came to our next monument: an overpass that crossed Northern Marmara Highway. Here we saw a sign that read: *IT IS DANGEROUS AND FORBIDDEN TO ENTER THE CONSTRUCTION SITE.* After a moment of hesitation, we entered anyways. We stepped up to the cement pavement aligned with barrier on one side and guarding rail on the other. [6.1 km; 130 m; 16:11]. The highway passing underneath was actually constructed by carving out the Earth. This place was once part of the northern forests. An infrastructure project was plunked down from above, based on plans, maps, and satellite images. The road that was

formerly level with the landscape now stood as an overpass looming above it. A portion of the Earth was removed and displaced through a geomorphic transformation. As the infrastructure advanced with no regards to anything along its way, new vistas were formed on this trajectory. It was easy to imagine a dystopian landscape here. The highway already seemed like an irregularity from some other futurity. What if the vegetation took over these *man-made* surfaces in an entropic infinity? A Ballardian landscape of gargantuan concrete slabs disintegrating piecemeal into ruins while being overgrown by bushes and bramble. The trucks were passing under us, going from one continent to the other, carrying goods to and from faraway places. Clouds were so dense that it was as if a minute apocalypse was filtering the landscape into a natural grayscale. From here, we looked towards the towers of the bridge. A Turkish flag positioned at the entrance of the bridge was flapping in the wind, informing everyone of the proprietorship of this territory.



Figure 7. The three-legged bench in lieu of a bus stop. Igor Medarić photo.

We continued to walk and came across a three-legged bench on the forest ground, another monument of sorts. Its legs were made of branches with varying heights and the fiberboard on top looked quite slanted. The whole thing had an animal-like poise. A yellow metal sign indicated that the busses that pass here do stop at this point. Yet, this stop had no lane widening for the busses to stop in, nor was there the usual passenger waiting area on a paved surface. *HAVANTEPE YOLU (MORTARHILL ROAD)*. This bench, most probably crafted by the locals and set under a tree, must have been positioned here in lieu of the non-existent bus stop [7.1 km; 97 m; 16:28]. We then came to a fork. The signs

read: *RUMELİFENERİ* (RUMELIA LIGHTHOUSE). *GARİPÇE* (BIZARRELY POOR). We continued right, to Garipçe. The electricity pylons and the towers of the bridge intermingled with each other as we walked. It seemed like it was them, not us, that kept moving. We officially entered the village. *WELCOME TO GARİPÇE*. Then, a rather meaningful warning in a rather meaningful spot. *WARNING! RIP CURRENTS. AS LONG AS YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO, YOU CAN SURVIVE A RIP CURRENT. HANG ON TO LIFE, NOT TO THE CURRENT*. [8 km; 64 m; 16:41].



Figure 8. The landschaftlich landscape: confluence of the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. Igor Medarić photo.

A little bit further down was a cliff with an open view of the sea. What we were looking at was the confluence of the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. The waves hitting the dark mythological rocks on the beach below formed a giant maelstrom of foam. Another imperceptible process of entropy in the making. The houses built on the cliff were hanging over this harsh landscape as we walked above their rooftop levels. The towers and wires of the multi-nationally-constructed bridge were in an uncanny harmony with the thin and teetering electricity pole and its wire. The dark clouds merged into the horizon as a tankership was about to disappear into the fierce waters of the Black Sea. We moved on. [8.3 km; 31 m; 16:46].



Figure 9. The house on top of a bedrock. Nazlı Tümerdem photo.

Finally, there was bedrock topped with an exposed concrete building. The plumbing infrastructure was visible from the street. None of this exposure was done intentionally, however, but as a quick and economical solution to a crucial problem. Plants gushed out from the cracks inside the concrete, as well as from the bedrock. The bedrock—a geological monument whose life span goes into the abyss of deep time—shared this space with a building that will likely disappear before the century is done. At the entrance of the village square, there were two fishing boats with the same name. *WOLF OF THE SHORE*. Until now, Garipçe had been a place free from all the “utilitarian” developments and mega-scaled projects of the city. Now, one of these grandiosities was placed right next to it. What will this remote fishing village at the tip of the Bosphorus turn into in a decade, a century? One day this record will be one of the few things that remain about these moments and these monuments. As we entered a teahouse to recharge our batteries, dry ourselves, and have tea, the promised downpour started rapaciously. Here, our wandering ended. [8.9 km; 14 m; 17:02].