

A WALK OUT IN THE OPEN

Yavuz Erkan

The organs, or rather their organisational structure within the body, impedes the infinite without, in favour of the infinitesimal within. There is a likelihood of the eye deflecting a body from seeing what is all around, not just right in front. Following through the echoes of these opening remarks, I wish to communicate particularly (non)photographic thoughts on the environment as dwellings of symbiosis—eye and sight. In thinking about and performing photography, it is doubly inconvenient to write about that which is (re)photographable. However, Serkan Taycan's *Between Two Seas* restores such an anomaly. Setting itself both as a part and apart, it consolidates the conceptual framework of his recently completed trilogy (*Habitat-Shell-Agora*). In *Habitat*, previously titled as *Homeland*, the artist sets himself out on a self-reflexive journey across Anatolia. Hereby, he acquaints us with the meditative palette of the landscape by revisiting to photograph the cities he had lived in since birth. This photographic debut scrutinises conversational gibberish related to inhabitancy; the banality of 'where do you come from?' conundrum suddenly becomes a self-inquisitive aphorism for all urbanites out there with a (non)sense of belonging. Longing to be closely knitted to the city and to what they can only see, these landowners and jobholders renounce touch with the immaterial surrounds of the landscape. Then, in *Shell*, he sows the seeds of this dystopian melancholy by literally photographing the limits of our growing and building aggression in action. With all the mass migration and (un)urban transformation going on, the periphery of Istanbul's terrain has changed rapidly. Capturing suburban building blocks, residential skyscrapers and dirt mounds all in isolation, Taycan empties out the landscape only to fill it with a certain kind of aesthetic ugliness.

It is this inexplicable eyesore that he photographically accentuates in *Shell*, which allures us to experience the walk for *Between Two Seas* only in plain sight. Cascading from the periphery towards the metropolitan areas of Istanbul, this on-going project is a photo-political call for wa(l)king. Without pretence, he declares it as 'an action that consecrates the rhythm

of walking that opens the soul to perceive the world.'¹ For this four-day paced bypath, he masterminds a deliberately corporeal and contemplative objective—beholding Istanbul's habitat transmutation afoot. Its itinerary is chosen to be en route of *Kanal Istanbul*, a multi-billion dollar venture of (pro)creating a man-made waterway in-between the Marmara and Black Sea. Estimated to be 40-45 kilometres long and 125 metres wide, this civic intervention's publicised *raison d'être* is to reduce the future marine traffic of the adjacent Bosphorus. Since its 2011 media outing as the 'crazy' project, several investors, academics and NGOs voiced their self-rectifying motives for its pros and cons. The soon-to-boom regional enterprises' potential work and life force injection into to the community versus the inevitably cataclysmic environmental impacts for the surrounds were the two that resonated most in the press. Irrespective of its politically tentative construction plan, the wayside land befalls to be parcelled for further pandemic progress. Our creation and erection madness propels us into a future with acquisitive eyes. Wide-open, but blind within.

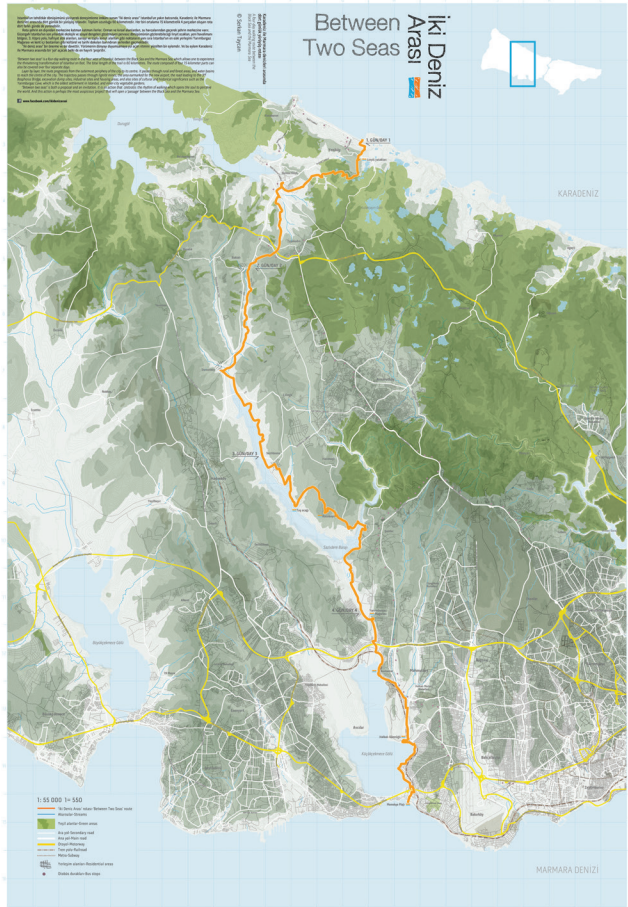
With all due respect of these diametric positions, my preferred contention to kindle the canal habitat lies elsewhere concerning (vista) photography. In the light of Taycan's plain and methodical images of GPS recorded kilometre numbers, the point to make here is to be in-with-out a human eye, if not more to expose its mechanical counterpart's topographical extension and enclosure of the individual within. Living amongst a surplus of habituated beings and compact forms at present, this assertion then sparks up the contemporaneous (re)appearance of the *I* as a photographer who records the surrounds to exist in the moment. Thereby, no choice is left other than to revisit and confide in Susan Sontag's following remark; there is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera.² To take a photograph is to claim that view as owned. Every thing each body looks at potentially ends up becoming a photograph these days. The so-called author function violates the photographic object/landscape, leaving it sensibly depleted as scene but alas never wholly absorbed in vision. There is



Serkan Taycan *Shell* #8 2012. Courtesy of the artist.



Serkan Taycan *Habitat* #12 2008. Courtesy of the artist.



Serkan Taycan *Between Two Seas* (map) 2013. Courtesy of the artist.



Serkan Taycan *Between Two Seas* (installation detail) 2013. Courtesy of the artist.

an unattainable desire for more, not of lack but as a force of observational (re)production.

Though it may seem most antithetical for the urban explorer, trending as the social media *flâneur* who strolls to spectate and snap, one can also prefer not to photograph instead. In a

similar vein, Taycan’s deadpan shooting and walking trajectory reciprocally invite the (sub)urban occupants to meditate upon the out-of-the-way nature of photography. If I may ask now, what implications this action might have on our somatic togetherness with the surrounds? At the wake of the walk in thought, I pause for quite a while to unveil my sight in the following sublime rhymes.

With full gaze the animal sees the open.
Only our eyes, as if reversed, are like snares
set around it, block the freedom of its going.
Only from the face of the beast do we know
what is outside; for even little children
we turn around and force them to look backward
at the world of forms, and they do not see the open
so deep in the animal’s eyes. Free from death.
Only we see *that*; but the beast is free
and has death always behind it and God before it,
and when it walks it goes to eternity,
as springs flow. Never, not for a single day
do we have pure space before us in which the flowers
are always unfolding. It’s forever world
and never Nowhere-without-Not:
the pure and unwatched-over air we breathe,
know infinitely and do not want.³

Eliciting upon its non-symbolic dimension for those who are only accustomed to see, this walk also sets up an opportunity to discover something anew within the (in)visible forces of nature. Whilst walking, the body and mind parallelism becomes involuntarily introspective if only one focuses on being here rather than getting somewhere. However, being at the present moment whilst on-the-go is not enough to evade a journey’s end. For an urbanite, the eye is still a hegemonic organ of modernity that renders photography as a communicable urgency for the self-constituting nature of being visually mobile at a standstill. Consciousness with visual mindfulness separates him from the transient rhythms of nature. Immediate, automated recording often becomes the sole purpose of walking because his ocular capacity to appreciate the surrounds is regulated through the camera’s affinity for projection. Always on the hunt as a captive of scenic plenitude, the *I* entangles the autonomy of his feet.

Seen in this way, photographic ambition impoverishes his sight-in-seeing. As a line of flight, Taycan’s DIY offer can be a permeable in-between, whereby the feet are a becoming of his vision.⁴ The path to follow is visibly exposed and affectively

equivocal at the same time. A routine of sixty-one images accompany the map just as a reality of the camera recording its own ability. Such a nominal camerawork gives voice to the landscape the way it is, just as such. While these small-scale images of open-ended road compositions lead us towards experiencing the unknown, destination-oriented storyline⁵ of the treasure hunt can be a fallacy of human triumph. If the participant adopts the map in verbatim, Taycan’s open call for walking becomes susceptible for misconception. Along with its participatory provocative effect and plain visual language, these two divergent components stimulate my circularly (in)animate sensory holes to welcome each and every reverberation towards the open, to the kind of bestial lead-ins R. M. Rilke’s lines spiritually herald. At this delicate moment, non-photographing becomes charmingly peculiar to me. No longer the *I* binds a walking body. Seeing without the worry of recording enables a nonrecurring intimacy between the scene and vision. This is an exploratory state of relationship, without being possessed by completion or performance. Aspiring to reach out for what my eyes cannot see, I just walk. Not photographing behind the camera, no supervision by my sight; just tuning in with a body.

1 Serkan Taycan, *Artist Statement* (2013).
2 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1977), 17.
3 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies* (1921-1922), trans. C. F. MacIntyre (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 61.
4 In hindsight of Georges Bataille’s (*Story of the Eye*, 1928) disarticulation of the eyeball as a migratory agent through various cavities of the body, implying other usages of it other than just seeing.
5 To complement Taycan’s eloquent wayfinding script, Jean-François Pérouse authored separate in-text information sections about the historical and geographical particulars of the trajectory. Pérouse is a French-born scholar working in the field of social geography, who has contributed to numerous academic publications, cultural texts and book translations concerning the recent urban transformation Istanbul is subjected to.

After his studies of engineering, Serkan Taycan completed a master-class on documentary photography at Nordens Fotoskola, Sweden. He completed his MFA degree in Visual Arts at Sabancı University, Istanbul and in Photography at Aalto University, Helsinki. He concentrates on the ever-changing relationship of urban and rural spaces, consequences of these changes, future projections and the people who are affected by these processes of transformation. He works primarily with photography and maps, and also engages with walking. His work has been exhibited in various biennials and venues, among which: Venice Architectural Biennial, Istanbul Biennial, Helsinki Photography Biennial, Sinop Biennial and Thessaloniki Photography Biennale as well as St. Petersburg Russian National Centre of Photography, Malmö Museum and Photographic Center Northwest Seattle. Taycan is a member of RecCollective. He lives and works in Istanbul.
www.serkantaycan.com / www.reccollective.org

Yavuz Erkan graduated from Queensland College of Art, Griffith University with a Bachelor of Photography (2011), having previously completed a Bachelor of Science at Istanbul Technical University, Turkey (2005). Currently, he is doing an MA in Cultural Studies at Bilgi University, Istanbul. His work has featured in exhibitions throughout Australia and the United States. Erkan was also the winner of 2011 *Youngblood Editions*, Queensland Centre for Photography.
www.yavuzerkan.net