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Pins on the map

Urban mappings in European-Turkish contemporary art

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(In lieu of a)
Conclusion

Looking Ahead:
Beyond Maps and Mapping

*What we call the beginning is often the end ...
The end is where we start from.*⁴⁹⁰

T.S. Eliot

490 T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *The Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941).

How can mapping contribute to analyzing works of art and, in turn, how can art extend the possibilities of mapping? The journey on which I embarked in this dissertation was prompted by these questions. Focusing on four European-Turkish artists working in and on Amsterdam, Istanbul, and Vienna, the dissertation analyses their art through the lens of cartographic practice as imaginative urban mappings. Spanning diverse artistic practices and multiple cities, the research sheds light on the significance of maps and mapping for the selected practitioners' artistic roots and routes. Thinking through the artworks, it highlights how artists have contributed towards rethinking and conceptually challenging maps and cartographic practice, but also materially and physically remade them. Indeed, the selected works of art trace an alternative European space with new boundaries and territories: an artistic (European) map retraced in and through urban spaces, with their myriad layers.

Can we re-map art through a re-mapping of contemporary cities? This question frames Chapter Two, which follows Chapter One laying out the methodological focus of the dissertation. By positioning Istanbul on the global (art) map and providing an overview of recent artistic developments in the city, Chapter Two shows how cultural institutions have been crucial in Istanbul's positioning and artists have created performative maps of the city. It focuses on the manner in which Istanbul functions as Turkey's unofficial capital—its financial, artistic, and cultural beating heart—looking at how especially at the beginning of the 21st century it has turned to arts and culture to (re)position itself as a pin on the global map. In conceptualizing Istanbul's agency, I emphasize not only institutions but also a diverse range of urban players, including private initiatives, foundations, artists, and curators, all of whom can be considered “city-makers.”⁴⁹¹ While cities seek to differentiate themselves from one another as destinations for financial and cultural capital, they are increasingly using art (institutions) and cultural tourism as forms of economic boosterism. Istanbul is no

491 Michael Hoyler, Christof Parnreiter, and Allan Watson, eds., *Global City Makers: Economic Actors and Practices in the World City Network* (Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018).

exception to this trend and the chapter traces its progressive integration into a wider global art scene.

The discussion of the diverse venues for contemporary art in Istanbul is important because it speaks to broader social, cultural, and economic transformations in Turkish society over recent decades. In providing an overview of Istanbul's cultural scene, Chapter Two locates these urban developments within a broader cultural history of Turkey. Exploring how the arts developed between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and the early 2000s, the chapter focuses on several private initiatives and institutions that have reshaped the artistic and cultural arena. These processes of change reflect the wider changes unfolding in Turkish society, including globalization and the 21st century expressions of Turkey's European Union membership bid.⁴⁹²

Founded in 1987, the Istanbul Biennial is analyzed in the chapter, in how it functions as a crucial artistic gatekeeper. I discuss specifically its ninth edition in 2005, creating a link between the Biennial and Istanbul. Istanbul Modern, which opened in 2004, is another key case study of how art has been mobilized to (re)imagine and (re)present the city. To throw into relief the ways in which the Istanbul Modern has been envisioned as a novel artistic emblem, intended as a means of placing Istanbul on the global art map, I also closely analyzed the state-founded Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture.

Having provided some of the historical and geographical context for the institutional pins on the map, Chapter Two turns to artistic mappings that have aimed at reimagining the city and its place. Here the focus is on two contemporary videos made by Nasan Tur and Nevin Aladağ, two artists active in Berlin, who have both artistically and imaginatively mapped Istanbul. While their work has

492 Sibel Yardımcı, *Kentsel Değişim ve Festivalizm: Küreselleşen İstanbul'da* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005); Baykal, "Contemporaneity in Turkish Art," 40-47; Cem Özatalay and Senem Örnek, "From Modern to Contemporary Art: Transformations of Art Market in Istanbul," in *Recent Developments in Sociology and Social Work*, ed. Georgeta Rata, Mehmet Ali İçbay, Hasan Arslan (Çanakkale: International Association of Social Science Research, 2017): 369-79.

not been previously interpreted explicitly through the lens of urban mapping, both videos provide the viewer with a panorama that evokes Istanbul's topographies and density. Tur personally somersaults through the city, engaging with urban spaces and publics in different and humorous ways. Somersaulting becomes a form of mediation, a tool through which the artist relates to the body, ground, environment, and city.

Nevin Aladağ uses musical instruments to create an audio-visual map of Istanbul, resulting in a performance. This depiction of the city's spatial arrangement not only provides an original account of Istanbul's urbanity but allows for different visual and aural encounters with the city. It is through this combination of physical/material and sensory elements that the two artists' videos engage in the making of an Istanbul map.

Chapter Three focuses on map art. The notion of map art was coined by map studies scholars to describe a mode of mapping that "challenges the seeming self-evidence of 'space' as it is perceived, represented, and inhabited."⁴⁹³ In so doing, map art provides alternative cartographies, unraveling the normative map. Examining how handicraft is used to contest normative flat maps, this chapter looks at the work of the Turkish-Dutch artist Servet Koçyiğit, who reimagines maps as he engages with, contests, and physically remakes them through artistic processes and expression. By playing with the ordering and layering of textiles as well as reshaping and recreating existing borders, the artist explicitly reorganizes the normative map. Rethinking mapping is a profoundly decolonizing practice.⁴⁹⁴ Anchored in questions of mobility and mapping, his work directly interrogates the "naturalness" of national borders, reweaving landmarks and territory in ways that question contemporary geopolitics and colonial histories. As he artistically

493 Ferdinand, *Mapping Beyond Measure*, 6. For the coining of the term, see Wood, "Map Art."

494 For a recent discussion on this topic, see Rose-Redwood, Natchee Blu Barnd, Annita Hetoévohotohke'e Lucchesi, Sharon Dias, and Wil Patrick, "Decolonizing the Map," special issue, *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2020).

negotiates spatial, temporal, and historical borders, Koçyiğit maps alternative, preposterous histories. These bring the past to the present by tracing non-chronological and non-territorial borders on textiles, thus upending accepted territorial and temporal orders.

Koçyiğit's work responds to the narratives, themes, and colonial roots of both textiles and cartographic practice. The body of work that he has carried out in Amsterdam unmistakably connects his map art to the Dutch Empire's cartographic heritage. Employing the concept of the suture, the analysis of Koçyiğit's work engages with literature in critical border studies, emphasizing the performativity of the border in relation to questions of territory and (b)orders. The study also draws upon and extends Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, applying it to artistic practices as those of Koçyiğit's that engage maps and mapping.

In addition, the topic of mobility in Koçyiğit's art is explored in a targeted examination of the image of the car, grasped here as an example of Marc Augé's "non-place." This discussion is directly linked to recent work on "automobilities" in mobility studies.⁴⁹⁵ In so doing, I set Koçyiğit's map art alongside the artistic work of the German-Turkish sisters Anny and Sibel Öztürk, who, in their installation *Behind the Wheel*, draw on a prototypical *Gastarbeiter* odyssey between Germany and Turkey. The work allows for an examination of some of the othering mechanisms that underpin the making of national identities, especially in what are rhetorically presented as "multi-cultural societies."⁴⁹⁶ By reflecting on the colonial frames that place migrants in contemporary Europe (such as Turks in Germany), the chapter traces a connection between ongoing colonial dynamics in Europe and Koçyiğit's map art, which artistically links the imperial port cities of Amsterdam and Istanbul.

Chapter Four examines embodied and gendered maps of Vienna in Nilbar Güreş's video work, looking particularly at how

495 Mike Featherstone, "Automobilities: An Introduction," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 1-24; Mike Featherstone, Nigel Thrift, and John Urry, eds. *Automobilities* (London: Sage, 2005); John Urry, "Inhabiting the Car," and John Urry, "The 'system' of automobility," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 25-39.

496 El-Tayeb, *European Others*.

she uses the body and its movement in (public) space. This merits consideration of the artist's role in shaping debates on topics such as veiling, otherness, as well as gender and identity politics in urban settings. There is a tension between the artist's body and the veil, which has become one of the most contested cross-cultural symbols both in contemporary Europe and in relation to female identities in Turkey. The veil's presence on the streets of a European city unleashes a multitude of positionings, the veil's meaning being inescapably bound up with viewers' cultural, religious, national, and political position. Güreş's video work brings precisely this problematic into view.

The chapter analyzes fragments of her first video made, *Stranger* (Yabancı, 2004-2006), by focusing on the artist's practice of quotidian walking in the city and use of public transport. It examines her attempt to create an embodied gendered map of Vienna as a woman artist from Turkey. The work underlines the personal and collective characteristics of Güreş's social encounters as she trespasses over invisible urban borders between East and West—that is, unstated urban boundaries between “us” and “them.” As Nilbar Güreş traverses the borders between cultures, codes, media, and languages, she also questions the eye of the beholder—whether they be a pedestrian on the street or the viewer encountering the work in art galleries or exhibition spaces. More often than not, the viewer sees and reads the veil as a marker of otherness.

Drawing on previously unknown and unpublished material secured through personal interviews with the artist, Chapter Four combines direct insights from the artist with a broader conceptual discussion of the walking practices as mobile spatial practice and means of aesthetic and critical interaction with the environment. The analysis also focuses on the role of public transport and corporeal encounters that take place in this environment, highlighting how urban spaces such as those of the Viennese subway where Güreş locates her work are continually constructed through endlessly reenacted daily practices. Güreş's video presents both a vertical and a horizontal city, which are experienced through different mobilities:

both walking and riding through the city as a subway passenger. Drawing inspiration from everyday urban spaces and experiences, her work opens up new readings of artistic practice that speak to the politics of mobility and belongings. What is more, her work bears upon the politics of (in)visibility and how it is negotiated and rendered in urban quotidian interactions.

The examples of mapping at stake in this dissertation are themselves the fruits of mobility and movement. The artists' Turkish-European/European-Turkish background, like the artistic journeys navigated and charted in their work, echo this movement in all its multivalent forms and appearances. There is the movement depicted in the artworks with the overall association with the journey across borders—of a body, city, or a nation.

Alongside a consideration of these specific artists and their practice, this dissertation also aims to offer a new interdisciplinary and transnational approach that reconceptualizes the relationship between the cultural spaces of contemporary art and urban spaces. Specifically, this approach focuses on how maps have been and can be used in artistic practice and the imaginative remaking of cities. By turning to works that have not previously been analyzed through the lens of artistic mappings, the dissertation aims to provide a new methodology for studying intersections between mapping and contemporary art that challenges our ideas about what a map is and can do, transforming art into maps and maps into art.

Maps do real things and produce real effects. According to the landscape architect and theorist James Corner, mapping creates “a particular understanding and experience of the world that is being mapped,” hence, “is a creative act first disclosing and then staging the conditions for the emergence of new realities.”⁴⁹⁷ He points to maps’ “performative and creative potential” to constitute “(new) worlds,” highlighting its “agency,” which “lies in neither reconstruction nor imposition but rather in uncovering realities

497 James Corner, “The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention,” in *Mappings*, ed. Denis E. Cosgrove (London: Reaktion, 1999), 216.

previously unseen or unimagined, even across seemingly exhausted grounds. Mapping thus *unfolds* potential.”⁴⁹⁸

The aim of this dissertation, then, is to foreground art’s potentiality as a form of mapping and maps’ potentiality as an artistic, discursive, performative medium of representation. In particular, it highlights how cities can be literally and figuratively remapped, establishing the foundations for a broader set of remappings (of identity, belonging, and Europeanness). This dissertation shows how works of art can make these potentialities visible. The artistic mappings examined here create and visualize an awareness of the mediated condition of the urban and human experience. They instill new understandings and recognitions of urbanity and set up new engagements with space. The works in focus thus present novel ways of understanding art’s potentiality and translatability: they simultaneously offer a general method that applies to a multitude of places and milieus, while drawing attention to the grounded and context-dependent specificities of the cities in which the selected works are created. Indeed, what makes such artistic expressions worthy of analysis is their ability to transgress and reconfigure cultural and geographical boundaries. They embody art and artists’ potential for creating “hyphenated” maps that depict diverse borders, whether they be bodily, gendered, urban, or national in character.

This study has been undertaken to open up new routes for analysis, albeit without binding conclusions. Not all journeys have a definite destination or lead to closure. On this note, I hope to have contributed to a rethinking and repositioning of the selected artists and their work as models of maps in a state of becoming, shedding new light on their potentialities that have remained hidden thus far. The dissertation has made a case for reflecting on contemporary art by closely analyzing a selected corpus of works, looking particularly at their cartographic, performative, and identitary qualities. At the same time, I hope to have contributed to a better understanding of these particular works; having unveiled a rich map of European-Turkish art and indicated diverse paths for artistic and cultural

498 Corner, “Agency of Mapping,” 213, emphasis in the original.

analysis in the process. There are still many pins to be placed on this map—more artists, more cities, more hyphens—and countless other artistic mappings with rich afterlives.

In a cyclical or somersaulting fashion, I would like to bring this dissertation full circle and, in lieu of a conclusion, end with the final verse of *Map* by Szymborska. I believe that her words encapsulate our ongoing fascination with maps, which continuously emerge and evolve in front of our eyes.

*I like maps, because they lie.
Because they give no access to the vicious truth.
Because great-heartedly, good-naturedly
they spread before me a world
not of this world.⁴⁹⁹*