

# LA CULTURA Y LA CIUDAD

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(eds.)

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LA CULTURA  
Y  
LA CIUDAD

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## SATELLITE MONUMENTS AND PERIPATETIC TOPOGRAPHIES

FIRAT ERDIM

In *Walkscapes* (2002), Francesco Careri argues that walking, as an aesthetic act, structures the symbolic content of the landscape: «The act of crossing space stems from the natural necessity to move to find food and information required for survival. But once these basic needs have been satisfied, walking takes on a symbolic form that has enabled man to dwell in the world. By modifying the sense of the space crossed, walking becomes man's first aesthetic act, penetrating the territories of chaos, constructing an order on which to develop the architecture of *situated objects*»<sup>1</sup>. Understood in this sense, the walk itself can be seen as a work of architecture with as significant a role as a street, plaza, or monument: «Just as the sedentary path structures and gives life to the city, in nomadism the path becomes the symbolic life of the community»<sup>2</sup>.

This paper presents two recent projects by the author that use walking to explore the relationship between the vertical figure of a monument and the civic ground of the city. The relationship between the vertical figure and the horizon encodes how the significance of monuments and civic spaces are continuously re-activated, and occasionally transformed, through ritualized forms of walking, such as parades, marches, processions, pilgrimages, or dances.

Such ambulatory actions are usually thought of as being collective, arising from the shared identity of a community. The two projects presented below explore situations where the particular dialogue with a monument unfolds through the actions of a single protagonist. As such, they share certain concerns with the Surrealist *deambulation* as an engine for *automatic writing*, using wandering to access the unconscious zones of space; as well as with the Situationists' *dérive*, seeking to map the psychogeography of the city by «drifting» through it. They each sought to utilize a nomadic sense of space to question the redevelopment and modernization the city was undergoing, in the early and mid-twentieth century, respectively.

The relationship between the nomadic and the sedentary seems antagonistic in nature. As the biblical story of Cain and Abel documents, this sense of antagonism is rooted in an age-old division between nomadic and settled forms of life, and their respective concepts of symbolic significance in space and time. Knapp and Ashmore state in *Archaeologies*

1. Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes. Walking as an aesthetic experience*, Gustavo Gili, 2002, p. 20.

2. Ibid., p. 38.

of *Landscape* (1999) that, «In general mobile human groups create their landscapes by projecting ideas and emotions onto the world as they find it — on trails, views, campsites, or other special places. Sedentary people, on the other hand, structure their landscapes more obtrusively, physically constructing gardens, houses and villages on the land, often in the vicinity of notable natural landmarks»<sup>3</sup>. Though from the highly constructed physical environment of our cities it would seem that the «sedentary» point of view has ultimately gained the upper hand, the nomadic sense of ascribing significance to the landscape continues to exist within it. The projects presented in this paper seek to invent forms of representation that enable the latter, nomadic sense, of the city to become formally articulate.

If walking, in some form, is the key that activates the symbolic content of the vertical and the horizontal, it is important first to consider how it might engage each differently. As discussed below, the vertical figure acts as a navigational instrument for the unfolding of the walk, whereas the fabric of the horizontal is the *geo-graph*, or map, that the walk reveals over time.

According to Careri, the menhir, appearing in the Neolithic Age, is the first «situated object» in the landscape, the first symbolic architecture. A large, elongated stone turned upright, rooted in the ground, the menhir stabilizes the relationship between the horizon and the arcs of the sun, moon, and stars above: «[...] when raised vertically and planted in the ground it is transformed into a new presence that stops time and space: it institutes a ‘time zero’ that extends into eternity, and a new system of relations with the elements of the surrounding landscape»<sup>4</sup>.

Menhirs served multiple purposes: used in cults and rituals of fertility, as place-markers, surfaces on which to inscribe symbolic figures, elements with which to inscribe the landscape, signals with which to describe the territory. They pinned down significant relationships between the landscape above and below, bridging between the measure of the ground and that of the sky, revealing a consistent, cyclical nature to time and nomadic space. As markers of boundaries, they signify the presence of collective identities — the considerable effort required to lift such a stone upright and plant it in the ground must have required consensus within a community, and even between different communities roaming the same territory. As a navigational marker for journeys between places, the menhir was a place to exchange information, the center of a social space about the surrounding landscape. Careri traces the evolution of this first symbolic architecture into the obelisk, the pyramid, and even to the rows upon rows of tulip columns forming the space of ritual procession at the hypostyle hall of Karnak.<sup>5</sup> It would not be far fetched to consider that even later forms of symbolic architecture, such as bell towers, commemorative columns, etc. derive from the same source.

The significance of the vertical element is rooted in bridging between what is above and what is below the horizon. The horizontal emerges from a marriage of the two. David

3. A. Bernard Knapp and Wendy Ashmore, «Archeological landscapes: constructed, conceptualized, ideational», in A. Bernard Knapp and Wendy Ashmore (eds.), *Archeological landscapes. Contemporary perspectives*, Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999, p. 10.

4. Francesco Careri, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

5. Ibid., p. 60.

Leatherbarrow, in «Leveling the Land,» refers to the mythological story of the wedding of Zeus and Chthonia, the goddess of the underworld, as the origin of the surface of the world<sup>6</sup>. Zeus weaves a cloth with all of the lineaments of the earth and the oceans, and places it over the head of Chthonia. «The marital veil, on this account, was really a map that entwined in its fibers the axes and ordinances of the world. It was not really a covering but a gauze, gossamer, or filigree framework that *disclosed* the inhabitable landscape, one that had been there but was unknown, meaning the act of veiling resulted in an unveiling»<sup>7</sup>. One can think of this marital veil as the line of the horizon joining subsoil and sky, ultimately revealing the structure of the thin layer of the earth we inhabit. This *geo-graph* of the navigable layer extends horizontally but is contained between the two uninhabitable realms above and below.

In ancient Greek thought, the subterranean realm was associated with feminine qualities: liquid, cold, formless, physical and material yet transparent, and possessing the vital power of procreation. Men, on the other hand, were removed from any process of coming into being because they were thought to be «self defined and defining, upright, and dry»<sup>8</sup>. Thus, marriage was thought to be a meeting of opposites, «whereby formed and unformed, or dry and wet, were united, in imitation of the earth, or as a way of participating in its renewal»<sup>9</sup>. The significance of this gendering will be more apparent in the second project (*Peripatetic Horizon*) presented below. It is important to note, however, that this notion informs the sense, from the peripatetic philosophers to the romantic poets, that traversing the surface of the earth with our own upright figures enables the emergence of thoughts and ideas; or, in the case of the Surrealists, the sense of wandering as a way of tapping below the horizon of conscious thought.

Regarding the ancient Greek city, the choros that Daedalus designed for Ariadne in Knossos, as depicted on the shield of Achilles, is the key that links the marital veil with the weaving of the civic fabric of the city. This woven shield/map did not depict the physical dimensions or qualities of the dance floor but was instead a surface formed by the choreographed activity of young men and women dancing together<sup>10</sup>. Indra Kagis McEwen, in *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings* (1993), argues that the term «choros» refers to the dance itself as much as the place of the dance, so that «the measure of the dance floor was the dance itself. The place appeared with the dance and disappeared when the dance was over»<sup>11</sup>. It appears that for Daedalus and the ancient Greeks, the architecture of the place did not have to come before the activity itself. At a larger scale, this unfamiliar concept of architectural genesis suggests the notion of «a polis allowed to appear as a surface woven by the activity of its inhabitants: the sequential building of sanctuaries

6. David Leatherbarrow, «Leveling the land», in James Corner (ed.), *Recovering landscape. Essays in contemporary landscape theory*, New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1999, pp. 174-175.

7. Ibid., p. 174.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 174.

10. Ibid., p. 176.

11. Indra Kagis McEwen, *Socrates' ancestor. An essay on architectural beginnings*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1993, p. 63.

over a period of time, [...] to the subsequent ritual processions from center to urban limit to territorial limit and back again, in what can be seen as a kind of Ariadne's dance, magnified to cover a territory that was not called choros but *chōra*»<sup>12</sup>.

#### YERYÜZÜ+GÖKYÜZÜ//ZENITH+NADIR

This performance/drawing/weaving project took place in Izmir, Turkey, during the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013. The protests were initially aimed at the government's plans to redevelop Gezi Park, one of the last remaining green spaces in Istanbul, into a shopping center. The disproportionate and indiscriminate violence of the police response led to a much larger wave of protests throughout the country, voicing discontent with the autocratic and authoritarian attitude of the government toward public space and public life.

Over time, police violence against the mostly self-possessed and peaceful protesters occupying public space spawned many parallel, alternative forms of protest. These included actions on the edge of private and public space, such as banging pots and pans on balconies, and collectively flicking lights on and off at appointed hours. One of the most interesting of these was the «Duran Adam» (Standing Man) form of protest, invented by the choreographer and performance artist, Erdem Gündüz. Gündüz simply stood still in Taksim Square, with his hands in his pockets, facing the Atatürk Cultural Center. He declined to speak to anyone, as that could have been interpreted as forming an assembly. After a few hours, the policemen watching him decided to arrest him, just in case it might be a protest, but realized as they were taking him away that they did not have anything to charge him with, and eventually let him go.

Overnight, the Duran Adam protests spread throughout the country, with individuals taking whatever time they could out of their day to stand in a plaza, facing a monument. Though there might be only one, five, or a hundred people in a plaza, most took care to stand apart, and refused to speak even when accosted or taunted. What made this action interesting is its precision in arriving at the core of the question. If simply putting one's body in a public space can be understood as a protest, what then? As with the balcony protests, it utilized an ambivalent boundary between the public and the private, in this case between private thought and public space to confuse and thwart a violent response from the authorities. Standing upright, still, and silent in the plaza of a monument, each individual made themselves a part of the symbolic space of that monument, a *satellite monument*, connected to and yet distinct from it, as well as from each other.

In the midst of these events, *Yeryüzü+Gökyüzü//Zenith+Nadir* was centered on a clock tower in the city of Izmir. The Izmir Clock Tower was built in 1901, the clock mechanism itself a gift from Emperor Wilhelm II to Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who was known as a modernizer for his investment in building railroads as well as clock towers across the empire, connecting east and west spatially and relating them temporally. While the tower was intended as a symbol of modernization and westernization, as a symbol, it also problematizes this concept of progress, since Abdul Hamid II also abolished the fledgling Ottoman Constitution and Parliament in a return to absolute rule.

12. Ibid., p. 81.

The tower stands about 25m tall in the center of the Konak Plaza. Though it has gone through many physical transformations over the years, this plaza, surrounded by headquarters for the governor, the mayor, the police, and other government ministries, is still the center of political authority in the city. Over time, the plaza has been widened and completely pedestrianized, isolating the clock tower in the middle. The widening of the plaza opened up the alternative possibility that the clock tower could now also function in a more archaic manner, as a sundial, or menhir.

*Yeryüzü+Gökyüzü//Zenith+Nadir* took on the idea of a satellite monument as a way of engaging this charged public space around the Izmir Clock Tower, circling it and surveying the path of the sun across the sky on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, the summer solstice of 2013. I used the radial pattern of the paving in the plaza as regular intervals by which to circle the tower and record the shadow cast by a small, souvenir version of the tower placed on a surveying table. The drawing also utilized the same intervals to notate conversations with journalists, passersby, undercover policemen, and fortune-tellers on the plaza over the course of that day.

The satellite tower, and the drawing produced by the day-long performance, were later used to project the path of the sun across the sky during that particular day, using string to weave together the geometries of encounters, my revolution around the tower, and the earth's rotation around its axis<sup>13</sup>.

#### PERIPATETIC HORIZON

Shortly after the completion of *Yeryüzü+Gökyüzü//Zenith+Nadir*, in the summer of 2013, I relocated to Segovia, Spain. In contrast to Turkey, the intensity with which public space is occupied both formally and informally was immediately palpable. In the almost incessant cycle of parades and marches, one imagines that the numerous bell towers act as navigation points across the landscape, the plazas below structuring routes of procession, while the bells count time through day and night. As an outsider, these communal processions seemed to me to utilize the psychogeography of the city in a way that touched on something at its core, able to read or «play» the city as an old turntable plays a record.

Countless towns in Europe have prominent bell towers, but the topography of Segovia, with its tabletop landscape deeply carved by streams and rivers, creates a particularly interesting situation. The old, walled city sits on a ridge between two deep ravines, its many bell towers rising steeply up to prick the sky. The body of the city bridges between the feminine—Chthonic—condition of the wet, cool, and lush landscape below, and the masculine—Olympic—condition of the dry, sharp-edged skyline above. Inside the walls of the city, each bell tower is visible only from a limited area around it, whereas outside the walls, the tallest are visible from almost anywhere in the fields beyond the ravines. At times the entire city disappears below, its presence indicated only by the lonely figure of a steeple along the dry expanse of the horizon. It seemed to me that the towers and their bells were meant to address not only particular plazas (*choros*) below but also the landscape beyond the walls (*the chōra*). Being both a resident and an outsider in the city, it seemed appropriate

13. For more images of the project, see: <http://firaterdim.net/yeryzgkyz--zenithnadir>.

to invent my own processions around the steeples from this latter point of view, outside the walls of the city.

Each of these solitary processions was centered on a specific tower<sup>14</sup>. Most of the walks were complete circumambulations around the city, only one a direct procession toward it. Each walk was a drift across the landscape while tied to a steeple by the tenuous thread of a sightline. The walks were documented with photographs taken every 60 seconds, centered on the particular steeple being stalked.

The drawings that resulted from these walks are the accumulations of the horizon-line from each series of photographs, projected and traced sequentially. The process of tracing became a secondary walk, with pencil across the horizon. The forms of the architecture and the forms of the landscape seemed to recall and echo each other. Tracing only the line of the horizon created surprising juxtapositions: a tree merging with the outline of a tower, or a street sign erupting monumentally out of the landscape. Certain elements, appearing in each photograph in a different location, embroidered their particular rhythm across the landscape. Each drawing became an *automatic cartography*, where a central tower is articulated as a negative figure emerging from below the horizon and yet, in collaboration with the wanderings of a peripatetic figure, generates the fabric of the city around it<sup>15</sup>.

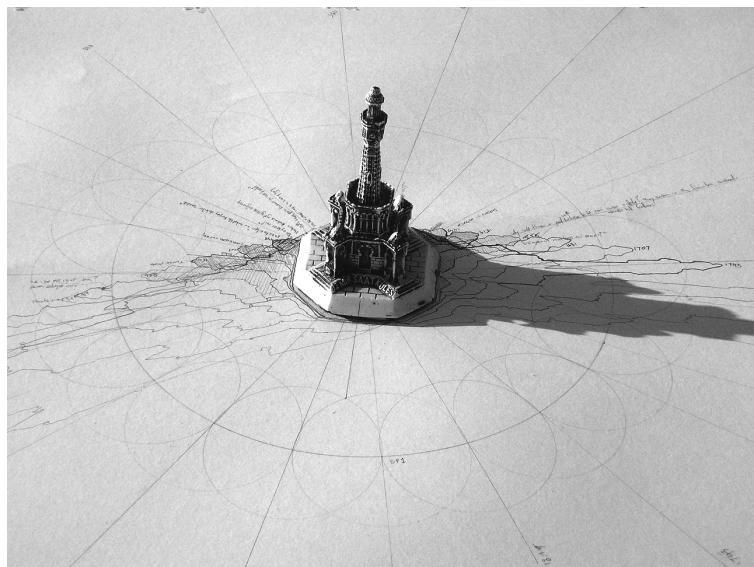
Although both projects utilized quasi-cartographic and proto-architectural methods, neither was aimed at an analysis or design of civic space. Instead, these methods were used to construct a specific and novel choreography in each case, aimed at revealing the relationships between the vertical figure and the horizon that encode its significance.

14. The three bell towers used were those belonging to la Catedral de Segovia, la Iglesia de San Esteban, and la Iglesia de la Vera Cruz.

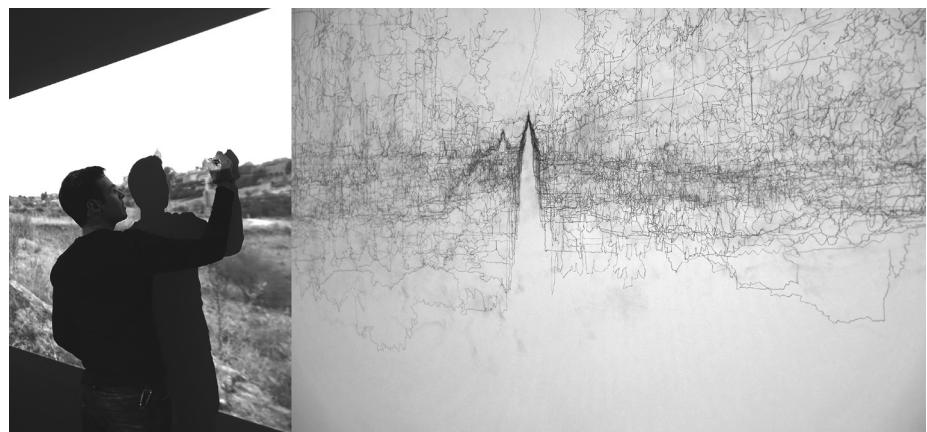
15. For more images of the project, see: <http://firaterdim.net/peripatetic-horizon>.



Firat Erdim, *Yeryüzü+Gökyüzü//Zenith+Nadir*, documentation of performance in progress.  
(Fuente: Imagen del autor)



Firat Erdim, *Yeryüzü+Gökyüzü//Zenith+Nadir*, documentation of drawing in progress.  
(Fuente: Elaboración propia)



Firat Erdim, *Peripatetic Horizon (Catedral de Segovia)*, documentation of drawing process, and detail view of completed drawing. (Fuente: Elaboración propia)