It was a summer day when Marco Polo appeared before Kubilay Khan. The emperor, certain that the Venetian would be describing some unheard of city that morning, said: So, tell me. Martin Polo, in his voice still bearing the impressions of the city from his most recent travel, begins his narration:

This city is from the future. It’s called The Exploded City. Those who live there have emigrated from faraway lands, with dreams of traveling to the future. When they realized that there was no finding the future, they decided to build this city. It is said that hundreds of different languages, such as Otesian, Bonnian, Albanian, Kurdish, Castilian, Irish, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Urdu, Anglo-Prussian, and other Saami, Altai, and Slavic languages are spoken in this city. These people who don’t speak each other’s language, instead of creating a lingua franca, have learned to communicate through looking into one another’s eyes. Not before long, they taught me this eye language as their own tongues, and through which disparate lands are connected—are also implicated in the logic of this city becomes apparent, where these sites of terrorism and violence have been reconstructed together in the moments before their devastation.

Like many artists working today, Ahmet Öğüt conceives projects flexibly across a range of media that cycle through his consciousness without some self-consciousness. But acts of terrorism and violence are episodes in which the connections between places, between politics and daily life, between the individual and the larger world, nationality and war, are thrown into sharp relief. And we are made to see those places that for most of us never existed in our consciousness, and how they connect to ourselves, in concrete terms collapsed in our consciousness, and how they connect to ourselves, in concrete terms.

When we speak of the world, as Exploded City does, we cannot speak of collective consciousness without some self-consciousness. But acts of terrorism and violence are episodes in which the connections between places, between politics and daily life, between the individual and the larger world, nationality and war, are thrown into sharp relief. And we are made to see those places that for most of us never existed in our consciousness, and how they connect to ourselves, in concrete terms collapsed in our consciousness, and how they connect to ourselves, in concrete terms.
Ahmet Ögüt: video still from Things We Count, 2008; dvd, 6:20 min.; courtesy of the artist.

Ahmet Ögüt: Exploded City, 2009; scale model buildings, vehicles, mixed materials; 49 1/4 x 89 x 63 in.; installation detail view from Pavilion of Turkey, The 53rd Venice Biennale; courtesy of the artist. Commissioned by Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (iksv).