# THE
# URBAN GAZE

Exploring Urbanity through Art, Architecture, Fashion and Media

Silvia Mazzucotelli Salice

# The Urban Gaze:

# Exploring Urbanity through Art, Architecture, Fashion and Media

**Edited by**

Silvia Mazzucotelli Salice

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# Urban-Architecture as a Battleground of Socio-Cultural Struggle

## Murat Çetin

**Abstract**

Architecture is closely yet paradoxically connected to the two basic and complementary human instincts; to construct and to destruct, in other words to live and to die. Therefore, architecture and urbanism can be considered as the spatial dimensions of an ideological war of different interest groups in cities. Such a war mainly manifests itself as the polarisation between corporate sector and public sector, global and local, modern and traditional. Planning acts as a means of capitalist control over the urban (public) space under a macro-orthodoxy approach despite the public reaction via manipulation of public space through; micro-urbanism in urban-leftovers and queer-spaces, reclamation of landfills, and ephemeral architecture. A large body of community seem to resist through guerrilla war tactics of architecture against the comprehensive strategic war plans, techno-scientific artillery, and devoted and well-trained troops of neo-liberal corporate bodies. Who will survive in such a relentless spatial war depends largely on the development of counter-strategies and accurate calculations based on game theory. The chapter will address the issue of reconstruction and resilience of cities with particular reference to the case of Istanbul, her transformation zones and conservation areas. Hence, the study will focus on urban paradigm shift and complexity of Istanbul as a multi-cultural, multi-layered metropolitan city in a post-modern era. The article intends to develop alternative strategies towards reshaping urban environment via architecture primarily by analysing the morphology of new urban spaces and emergent forms of life. Consequently, architecture of cities is argued as a para-military instrument for the tactical deployment of conflicting ideologies into an ongoing state of socio-cultural battle between opposing parties of the city.

**Key Words:** Urban, multi-cultural, spatial, morphology, architecture, third space, queer space.

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## 1. Urban-Architecture as Ultimate Dilemma: *Construction vs. Destruction*

Architecture is directly yet paradoxically related to the two basic and complementary human instincts; *to construct* and *to destruct*. These instincts are deeply rooted in human psyche through subconscious attitudes developed towards the dilemma between life and death. In other words, architecture and urbanism are seen as collective and multi-dimensional activities whereby the life is conceived as a struggle for survival. Hence this eternal war between existence and absence on earth reflects itself in architecture and city making like all human activity.

Moreover, ramifications of this struggle can also be seen among the parties who share (and thus struggle for) the urban realm. Therefore, architecture and urbanism can be considered as spatial dimensions of an ideological war[1] of different interest groups within cities. Such a war manifests itself as polarisation between corporate and public sectors, global and local as well as between modern and traditional.

In this context, urban transformation appears as a spatial war between those who have power and those who do not. Hence, the professional disciplines as organized bodies and the public seem to be polarized because of their different interests in distributing and sharing urban space. In various locations around the world (e.g. South America, Mid-Asia, Middle-East, particularly Turkey etc.), the current incidences of urban transformation displays the general characteristics of gentrification whereby urban poor is continuously been pushed away from valuable areas of cities for the benefit of urban elite. Unfortunately, professional bodies which plays central role in shaping of built environment in cities inevitably and indirectly, if not deliberately, serves the global processes of cruel gentrification in the name of urban transformation.

Having defined this struggle as its problem area, the chapter is structured around the central argument that suggests a paradigm shift in the role of architecture whereby it turns into a weapon for para-military reactions by public against ongoing means of urban transformation and being exploited by urban elite to exclude the urban poor by manipulating urban spatial configuration in favour of those who have advantages in terms of socio-economic status and political power. Such a paradigm shift requires a shift in the mind-set of the professional bodies from being advocate of power to that of public.

The chapter will explore dualities to which urban form addresses. It will elucidate the disciplines of architecture, urban design and city planning, on the one hand, and the initiatives of individuals as well as NGO's on the other. While the discipline appears to serve the intentions of those who have the power to control the urban realm, the individual initiatives emerge as efforts to reclaim urban space for public benefit. Following this struggle through its spatial traces will constitute the main axis of discussion along this chapter.

## 2.  Planning as a Means of Controlling Public Realm in Urban Space

Planning acts as a means of capitalist control over urban (public) space under a macro-orthodoxy approach despite public reactions via manipulation of public space through micro-urbanism.

The city, and thus urban space, is obviously, the focus of global economic system. Particularly today, with their role as economic value generators, public spaces are increasingly seen as essential means of speculative developments particularly in real-estate sector.[2] Such commodification of public space refers to the recognition of public realm as a commodity to be bought and sold.[3] Commercialisation of public space means that public realm is used to produce

profit rather than to improve the quality of public space and life.[4] Both commodification and commercialization of urban space necessitate a deliberate control of urban space. Obviously, as Akkar Ercan says, such strict control measures result in generation of highly ordered and disciplined public spaces.[5] Such an organization of urban space inevitably produces a very sterile and stratified urban environment.[6] She says:

> Under strict control of public and private security forces, these public spaces do not welcome everyone, particularly the urban poor. While, on the one hand, variety in design is strongly promoted in so-called new urban landscape, on the other hand, variety in users and activities[7] is not desirable. In contrast, through design and management policies, undesirable members of urban population are deliberately pushed out of these public spaces through mechanisms of gentrification. In this sense, such public spaces serve for 'social filtering',[8] 'social segregation' and therefore cause gentrification.[9]

The promotion of social filtering and gentrification is also encouraged by city-marketing and re-imaging policies.[10] As Akkar Ercan says referring to McInroy:[11]

> Public spaces which are produced under the pressure of city-marketing policies undermine the needs of local communities for the sake of private interest.[12]

Moreover 'the privatisation, commodification and commercialisation of public spaces, increasing control over them, and consequently the imbalance among their roles',[13] certainly constitute a major problem in city and its administration.

Akkar Ercan asserts:

> 'The dilemma of today's public spaces is a consequence of not only the neo-liberal policies but also the capitalist culture in general. Complex capitalist relations under the hegemony of transnational capital power are currently spatially and socially shaping, managing and controlling public spaces of the postindustrial cities'.[14]

Public spaces, however, is the center of a significant ideological position. Public spaces in cities are considered as places where everyone encounters the other.

Within the framework of the relationships between power and urban space,[15] the ongoing processes of urban transformation and urban gentrification works against the true nature of cities. As Habermas[16] theorizes, in the public sphere, structures of power should be accessible to all social formations, such as poorer segments, lower classes as well as minorities.[17]

The current context of capitalist economy and global system inevitably forces lower segments of the society to battle over the urban space so as to reclaim their share from this distribution. Architecture seems to have taken position on the side of power throughout the ages. This process seems to have been accelerated as the end user had been gradually distanced from the making (particularly decision making processes) of architecture. Dovey's[18] argument on the relationship between power and architectural (*thus, urban*) space insinuates that architecture as a discipline and architects as both professionals and intelligentsia of the society should re-position themselves for a fair reversal of the ongoing process.

## 3. Urban Space as a Battleground for Spatial War in a Global Capitalist Era

Since urban context can be conceived as a battleground for a socio-cultural struggle between urban elite and urban poor, each party on the different ends of this bipolar scale develop their own strategies to succeed in increasing their share.

While the former deploys the economic and legal instruments to gain the control over urban space, the latter responds through illegal or ad-hoc solutions to reclaim public realm. A large body of community seem to resist through guerrilla war tactics of architecture against the comprehensive strategic war plans, techno-scientific artillery, and devoted and well-trained troops of neo-liberal corporate bodies. Who will survive in such a relentless spatial war depends largely on the development of counter-strategies and accurate calculations based on game theory.

The polarized nature of this struggle could be explained through the concepts of Global City Hypothesis which argues that the economic restructuring of the new global economy produces highly uneven and polarized employment structure in urban society.[19] This puts urban space into the center of discussions where the actors of the urban context are divided into two on the basis of economic income.

In other words, urban space becomes the scene for the economic struggle to increase the share from urban space simply because urban spatial configuration is the reflection of how urban wealth is distributed. Akpinar explains the spatial consequences:

> The significant increase in international investment and the arrival of the multi-national corporations along with the major accounting, advertising, and marketing firms and the fashion, design and entertainment industry causes changes both in spatial and demographic configuration and the internal structure of large metropolitan cities.[20]

While, as Akpinar asserts, 'the social consequence of the economic restructuring is class polarization characterized by a number of high income professionals and a vast population of low income causal, informal and temporary segments at the bottom',[21] its spatial consequence is the socio-spatial segregation of the parties within the city. The effects of liberalization policies resulted in unprecedented fragmentation and polarization.[22]

The chapter discusses the impact of globalization on reconfiguration of the sociospatial segregation trends in global cities. It can be considered as an attempt to explain the increasing segmentation and growing socio-economic inequalities brought by the the world economy. This makes the study, to some extent, closer to the wider perspective suggested by Bourdieu in which the social field is evaluated according to the societal relation within the multidimensional space position.[23] In the study, the characteristic of the social field is not defined by the attributes of the occupying social-economic classes rather it is defined by the patterns of societal relations formed within the society[24] Akpinar says:

> The dimension of inequality between different social blocks, their sociospatial distribution, and the relationship between the material culture and symbolic inequalities in the context of globalization is analyzed and discussed for mapping the inequalities.[25]

According to her, the effects of the crisscross between the class position and urban spatial characteristics are potential urban studies topics.

In capitalist system, the *real-estate market* is intrinsically a structure of *power*, in which the possession of certain attributes for some groupings of individuals is relative to other.[26] Thus, the market is a system of economic relationships built upon relative *bargaining* strengths of different groups. Stratification refers to the structured inequalities inherited in the capitalist's societies as a consequence of the class relationships.[27] Class based segregation suggests that social and spatial distance is overlapped. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the growth of the urban areas was correlated with the social relation. Chicago School suggested that the spatial/physical distance could easily be mapped with the social distances.[28]

Besides the highly pronounced effect of socio-spatial segregation by designing the new kind of inequalities in the post-structuralist era in the winds of the globalization, in parallel with wider intellectual debate about post-structuralism and post-modernism in general.[29]

## 4. Architecture as a Para-Military Instrument for Spatial Reconciliation

The city as an organism develops not only urban problems as described above but also their anti-theses, that is to say counter-architectural initiatives. All actions by powerful segments of the society are usually counter-balanced by reactions

from the other parties in the city. Some of these counter actions could be spatial whereas the majority is related to the usage of the spatial interventions that are implemented by their opponents. Therefore, these struggles within the city could easily be observed in the social re-production of space.

As accentuated above, this chapter discusses the issue of reconstruction and resilience of cities with particular reference to the case of Istanbul, its transformation zones and conservation areas. Hence, it focuses on urban paradigm shift and complexity of Istanbul as a multi-cultural, multi-layered metropolitan city. It was intended to develop alternative strategies towards reshaping urban environment via architecture has hitherto been not developed. There have been several attempts to transform certain locations within the city. However, these initiatives have not been planned and implemented by sufficiently and meticulously analysing the morphology of new urban spaces and emergent forms of life. Consequently, these initiatives not only failed but also developed their counter-architectural formations as para-military instrument for the tactical deployment of opponent ideologies into the ongoing state of socio-cultural battle between conflicting parties of the city. The case studies below best exemplify the socio-cultural struggle among different classes as well as their spatial ramifications.

## 5. Istanbul as a Battleground between Rich and Poor or Elite and Plebite: Cases of Tarlabasi and Sulukule

Istanbul has lived through two major growth booms (1950s and 1980s) during 20th century that have determined its urban shape. Currently, the city is facing the latest boom, particularly with the recent law popularly known as urban transformation law. This boom has been much more centrally planned (designed, financed, implemented and controlled) and mostly through formal housing settlements developed by both the public and private sectors en masse associated with a massive population increase. Nonetheless, the way decision makers, in other words, powerful segmentrs of the society who are able to centrally control current transformation has put gentrification in the center of their efforts.  In Istanbul there are a number of inner city slum areas that have experiencing different patterns of urban transformation. This chapter will look at two specific areas that are undergoing urban transformation processes; Tarlabasi which is mainly dominated by Kurdish immigrants and Sulukule which is primarily is a settlement for gypsy population in Istanbul.

After the opening of Tarlabasi Boulevard at 1986, the area has been disconnected from its urban context. The area was already run down and was housing lower-middle class families and immigrants. The area was quickly marginalized and became a district for the very low-income people who live in extremely crowded spaces. The area also started to be associated with crime so overall deterioration accelerated. Meanwhile Beyoglu area was facing a process of

renewal by becoming a hub for nightlife. Real-estate values have risen significantly in the area. Nevertheless, the extreme conditions of urban poverty and physical deterioriaration remained. Istanbul and Beyoglu Municipalities initiated the intervention in Tarlabasi, but since the area in question is vast, it is difficult for the public to finance the process of renewing hundreds of buildings. Thus, private sector was invited and preliminary projects are designed. Once this project is executed, it is believed that private owners in the vicinity will have the economic motivation to renew individual buildings. The current and projected values of the properties are calculated; the owners are presented with a priority to buy into the project if they can afford to pay the differnce amount. The project has attracted major public criticism and resistance mainly because of concerns over the close relationship of the developer company with the government. Chamber of Architects insists that there is no public benefit in the project and should be stopped. Public criticism also stresses that the project will result in a complete gentrification of the area. The implementation is about to be completed and major protests are expected to occur.[30]

Sulukule is a very striking example among the urban transformation projects in Istanbul. the area located just near to a part of the city walls of Istanbul had been inhabited by a Romani (Anatolian Gypsies) community for quite a long period of time. It is known that this period stretches back to Byzantine times. Unlike Tarlabasi, the buildings in Sulukule consisted of some temporary structures.

The area was well-known for its underground and marginal nightlife, attracting visitors from Istanbul as well as other cities. The area has great touristic and commercial potential not only because of its proximity to major historic landmarks but also because of the salient characteristics of the community. The renewal and transformation project was initiated and financed by Fatih Municipality. The area has been cleared off from its original inhabitants and all buildings are demolished despite the protests held in 2010. The original inhabitants who lived in squatters in the area are re-located into fringes of Istanbul. The project has drawn major criticism from the public not only because of the complete gentrification of the area but also due to the urban cleansing based on ethnicity and socialeconomic status. The proposed architectural design consists of repetitive blocks, completely ignoring existing urban pattern.[31] Moreover, the area had social problems caused by extreme poverty. The municipality presents problems such as crime, drug trafficking, and under-age prostitution as justifications for undertaking the project.[32] Instead of addressing the possible solutions of social problems, the proposal chooses the easiest path of removing the consequence from the sight. Doubtlessly, major motive to remove these people from their roots is the increasing property values around the area.

As discussed above, the word urban transformation is becoming quickly synonymous with gentrification and political corruption in the eyes of the public in Istanbul. Inner city areas that have been neglected for so long have become

fashionable again and are under great (economic and political) pressure for redevelopment by powerful segments of the society.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

As mentioned above, architecture is closely yet paradoxically connected to two human instincts; to construct and to destruct associated with the dilemma between life and death. The most striking and clear example of the manifestations of these instincts is urban development and transformation through gentrification of urban space. The phenomenon of transformation through gentrification plays the role of ostracizing the other for the benefit of the self in urban space. In return, the spatial response of the other, as a survival technique in urban realm, creates micro-spatial formations, and various temporary and transitory spaces. Here, architecture and urbanism emerge as the spatial dimensions or weapons of an ideological war between different interest groups in cities. Here, planning appears as a strategic instrument of capitalist control over the urban *public* space at macro-scale despite the public reaction at micro-scale.

Having focused on the current urban paradigm shift and complexity of Istanbul as a multi-cultural, multi-layered metropolitan city in our post-modern era, the article developed alternative strategies towards reshaping urban environment via architecture primarily by analysing the morphology of new urban spaces and emergent forms of life. The chapter showed the results of gentrification projects in Istanbul with reference to specific cases of Tarlabasi and Sulukule. In result, architecture of cities, which is argued as a para-military instrument for the tactical deployment of conflicting ideologies into an ongoing state of socio-cultural battle between opposing parties of the city, is suggested as a counter-weapon or a counter-strategic instrument to implement the spatial aspects of a civic environment in a city.

## Notes

[1] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'*, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, ed. Louis Althusser (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 121-76.
[2] See, for example, Ian H. Thompson, 'Landscape and Urban Design', *Introducing Urban Design*, ed. Clara Greed, Marion Roberts (Essex: Longman, 1998), 105-115 and also Ali Madanipour, 'Public Space in the City', *Design and the Built Environment* ed. Paul Knox, Peter Ozolins (New York: John Wiley, 2000), 117-125.

[3] See, for example, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, 'Private Production of Public Open Space: The Downtown Los Angeles Experience', (PhD diss., University of California, 1988); Madanipour, 'Public Space in the City'.

[4] Francis Tibbalds, *Making People-Friendly Towns* (Essex: Longman-Boyer, 1992).

[5] Muge Z. Akkar Ercan, 'Public Spaces of Post-Industrial Cities and Their Changing Roles', *METU JFA* (2007): 115-137.

[6] See, for example, Loukaitou-Sideris *Private Production of Public Open Space*, 1988; Anastsia Loukaitou-Sideris, 'Privatisation of Public Open Space: Los Angeles Experience'. *Town Planning Review* (1993) 64-2, 139-167 and also Darrel Crilley, 'Megastructures and Urban Change: Aesthetics, Ideology and Design', *The Restless Urban Landscape,* ed. Paul Knox (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), 127-164.

[7] Crilley, 'Megastructures and Urban Change'.

[8] See, for example, Trevor Boddy, 'Underground and Overhead: Building the Analogous City', *Variations on a Theme Park,* ed. M. Sorkin (New York: The Noonday Press, 1992), 123-153 and also M. Christine Boyer, 'The City of Illusion: New York's Public Places', *The Restless Urban Landscape,* ed. Paul L. Knox (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), 111-126; Crilley, 'Megastructures and Urban Change'.

[9] Muge Z. Akkar Ercan, 'Public Spaces', 130.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Neil McInroy, 'Urban Regeneration and Public Space: The Story of an Urban Park', *Space and Polity* 4/1 (2000): 23-40.

[12] Muge Z. Akkar Ercan, 'Public Spaces', 130.

[13] Muge Z. Akkar Ercan, 'Public Spaces', 131.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Kim Dovey, *Framing Places Mediating Power in Built Form* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Kim Dovey, *Becoming Places: Urbanism/Architecture/ Identity/Power* (London: Routledge, 2010); Kim Dovey, On Politics and Urban Space', *Debating the City: An Anthology,* eds. Jennifer Barrett and Caroline Butler-Bowden (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of NSW and University of Western Sydney, 2001), 53-69.

[16] Jürgen Habermas, *Kamusallığın Yapısal Dönüşümü* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1997).

[17] Muge Z. Akkar Ercan, 'Public Spaces', 131.

[18] Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008).

[19] Figen Akpinar, 'Sociospatial Segregation and Consumption Profile of Ankara in The Context of Globalization' *METU JFA* 1, (2009): 1-47.

[20] Akpinar, 'Sociospatial Segregation', 1.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Introduction: Reading the Fragments', *Fragments of Culture* , (London-New York:  I.B. Tauris and Co. Publishers, 2002) ed. D. Kandiyoti and A.Saktanber.

[23] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique  of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984).

[24] Murat Guvenc and Tansi Senyapili, 'Crisis Segregation and Consumption Profile of Ankara', *METU JFA* 1, (2009): 44-8.

[25] Akpinar, 'Sociospatial Segregation', 4.

[26] Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism. Vol. 1. Power, Property and the State* (London : Macmillan, 1981).

[27] Richard Scase, *Sınıf: Yöneticiler, Mavi ve Beyaz Yakalılar* [Class: Managers, Blue and White collars], tr. by B. Şarer, Rastlantı Yayınları (İstanbul, 2000).

[28] Akpinar, 'Sociospatial Segregation', 5.

[29] Fiona Devine and Mike Savage, 'The Cultural Turn, Sociology and Class Analysis', *Rethinking Class: Culture, Identities and Lifestyles*, ed. Fiona Devine et al. (Palgrave: McMillan, 2005).

[30] Arda Inceoglu and Ipek Yurekli, 'Urban Transformation in Istanbul: Potentials for a Better City' (paper presented at the Enhr Conference 2011, Toulouse, France, July 5-8, 2011).

[31] Ibid.

[32] Libby Porter, *Whose Urban Renaissance?* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

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# THE URBAN GAZE

Designed to introduce readers to the interactions and crossovers between culture and the city, this volume in fact intends to investigate urbanity as a cultural form on the basis of a broader and geographically representative collection of case studies. In particular it offers a stimulating range of inter-disciplinary perspectives showing that urban space manifests itself as an interpretative gaze, anchored in human life not just as something to look at but as a cultural form to live in socially.

The essays illustrate the real and imaginary ways that we interact with the cities through the portal of the arts. The authors seek to expand and enhance our understanding of how Art, Architecture, Music, Fashion, Film and Media critically engage with urban space and actively contribute to the creation of original cityscapes thus revealing various cultural models of development.

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She is primarily concerned with the interplay of art and urbanities. To date she has found public space a rich site for sociological inquiry.