

The Architectural Representations of Two Buildings in Nişantaşı in the Context of Postmodernism

“Capitalism cross-cuts all the web of natural, social, sexual and cultural powers, all languages and their codes.”

Jean Baudrillard

What’s happening?

The meaning of the prefix “post” forces the concept of “postmodernism” to form a relationship with its past as a subrogee. This is why we have to begin with accepting the fact that postmodernism is to be defined by the thinking systems and the solid facts of modernism. Seen from this aspect the prefix “post” manifests the state of depletion and diminution, and finally the decadence of modernism. We are talking about a situation that is derived from the contemporaneity model called “modernism”. Whilst this new era has been theorized by a number of intellectuals, Nietzsche and the some of the noticeable thinkers of the last century had been classified as the founders of the philosophical infrastructure of this new situation.

Regardless of the date we consider that the modernism begins, we can see its dramatic effects on the versatile communal and cultural fields. The superstructure associations such as arts, politics, law, and education, nearly all of them, had been struck by the differentiating effects of this transformation. However postmodernism showed its cultural effects mostly in architecture and this has put architecture and city planning in the core of its constitutional discussion. Considering that this is not a coincidence, even when we try to understand this exceptional situation of architecture, we will find a lot of opportunities to analyse this post-modern situation.

The architectural discipline has always been one of the most paradoxical crafts for the manufacturers of the modern era. It has never been understood that architects themselves, besides being the most estimable of the elite creators, were also the most weak and fragile group. While the glorious steel-glass structures rise through the sky, the new simple formats that have been influenced by the idea that crafts aesthetics out of functionalism formed in the Bauhaus School. This entire progressive utopia, as Mies van der Rohe highlighted, the thought of architecture as being the only *thing* that reflects the “essence of its time”¹ by generating its own form, could only be unfolded by the discussions about the postmodern architectural styles. This style was the expression of a communal background that only has enclosed its era and concurrently the architects were, besides being the most effective designers who has given a shape to communal fields and culture, were said to be the most ineffective artists. Considering that the architecture is combined of arts, science and industry; although it will be hyperbolic to say that the architect has

¹ “Zeitgeist” is originally a German expression that means "the spirit of the age", literally translated as "time (Zeit) spirit (Geist)". It describes the intellectual and cultural climate of an era. In German, the word has more layers of meaning than the English translation, including the fact that Zeitgeist can only be observed for past events. It is best known in relation to Hegel's philosophy of history.

become a figurehead, expecting an architect to develop an avant-garde artistic and revolutionary language for the community will be precisely wrong. The architects, at every era of capitalism, have made an early peace with the rulers of their time who controls the capital and thus has become ineffective in their destructive/constructive roles in the society.

In the post-modern era, with the help of the conditions that has been accelerated by the change in the society, this ineffectiveness may be stated as the reason of the new state of architecture. As the Jameson (1994) mentioned, because of its indirect relationships with the market, architecture seems to be the most pertinent cultural production field to the context and therefore post-modern effects appeared mostly in architectural production. Considering that there are a lot of dynamics that are in interaction with each other, instead of using a determinist simplification and say that in fact the architect is merely a figurehead, it will be wise to state that this role has its limits. From this aspect, Jencks' preference of post-modern architects rather than the architects of the modern period who used to have a cold attitude that looks down on subjects, clearly states the transformation of the role of an architect. This transformation of attitude indicates to a situation in which architect's – as a persona – relationship with the market has been narrowed.

At this point the basic parameter of the transformation from modernism to postmodernism is defined as the new era in capitalism and this multinational “progressive capitalism cultural logic” may be defined as postmodernism. This is also the basic system through which we can accept the cultural expansions either in Lyotard's (1994) “language games” or in Baudrillard's (2005) “visual games”. Consequently the result of this situation, as Harvey (1996) abridged as the communal effects of the transition from fordist to post-fordist production type, and as also defined above; is since the beginning of the modern era the economy/production field is nearly combined with the cultural field which is said to have its autarchy. From this aspect in the modern era, the conflict in cultural field was to conquer the implements that opposes the system (In the Marxist Theory cultural fields were many times seen like a mantle covering the economical relations), but now with the post-fordist production style (or the consumer capitalism) the cultural production has become the most powerful element itself. As Baudrillard (2005) stated the cultural field is merged.

“Indicated and indicator are extinct for the sake of the game of the indicators; for the sake of a generalized formation in which the code no more refers to an objective or subjective reality but rather its own logic.” (Baudrillard, 2005)

Thus, the term “reification²” used by first Lukacs and later by Frankfurt School in the context of commodity fetishism of the Marxist Theory emerges in an inextricable fashion as a social reality.

² Reification emerges in the capitalist production style as a result of the projection of commodity relations in the form of human relations into the society. Materialized human relations in a capitalized production environment make the being to feel in a natural environment and due to this integrity disappear; instead the thought and belief that there are things and powers existing independently prevails. At this point, human society and its history and its products seems as if they are not products of social acts but rather products of

İstanbul, Nişantaşı:

İstanbul is affected from the emerging modernism in the West gradually as being a central city of the peripheral region of the West (Balkans and Middle East). This interaction began with the transfer of changing social structure in the West especially the military institutions into İstanbul rather than as a natural result of being neighbour of a state in the European States system. Not a coincidence the region where Nişantaşı is located first recognized by Selim the Third whom made several reformations that can be considered as the first modernization movements in Ottoman Empire. Selim the Third puts the name of the region by using two range stones (which can be seen in the courtyard of the mosque) in order to shoot an egg from a distance of 1500 feet. During the ages of Mahmud the Second and Abdülmecid this tradition continues by means of the range stones built as memories in the sultan weddings that had held in this region. At the era of Abdülmecit this region was permitted for settlement (1854) and grew consistently with the growth of Istanbul after the second half of the 19th century. Its popularity increased both it attracted royal family members and high rank government officers because sultans moved to Yıldız Palace after Dolmabahçe Palace and its proximity to Pera (Beyoğlu) which is the modernist part of İstanbul on those days.

Until 1930's Nişantaşı was the district of mansions but as of those years Nişantaşı became one of the fastest "apartmentized" districts of the region. This period continued as an exclusive settlement style and became residence for the elite class and high income ranked people. At 1970's as a result of İstiklal Street lost its eligibility make famous brands attracted by Nişantaşı. Today Nişantaşı is still both a heavy trafficked, live, crowded residence area and also distinct quarter of İstanbul with its shops, galleries, restaurants and elegant showcases. From the times of the first settlements almost never lost its value, Nişantaşı becomes the focus of attention of the capital coteries after İstanbul became more popular in 2000's in the context of globalization. Especially, its structural similarity between Western cities and having qualified buildings of the styles from "art nouveau" to "postmodern" makes Nişantaşı more attractive in the context of the references of the super-ego ideals of the people.

Two Buildings in Nişantaşı

Potentially limited open spaces of Nişantaşı utilized by means of several architectural projects due to the reasons given above. Two of these projects will be comprehensively discussed in this article and their architectural representations based on the context of modernism-postmodernism both their social implications and stylistic characters will be evaluated. These buildings are "National Reassurance Building and Its Side Establishments" and "City's Nişantaşı" which have not opened yet. The common points of these projects are they took the current identity of Nişantaşı as a base reference and they constructed as of using the empty parcels in a region where building continuity

immaterial powers or laws of nature which imposes themselves to humanity. The same disintegration process attacks to the consciousness of the being which is the subject of the production. As of now being is extracted from the state of being master and put into a mechanical system as a mechanic part. Mobility in human acts increases while thinking decreases; individual starts to obey the rules of the mechanical system.

exists. From these aspects both building reserves to be considered on the basis of their settlement of the environmental data and their approach to this settlement. The production process of these buildings also discussed nevertheless, comprehensive discussion of the settlements of the two buildings in the basis of the indicators they carry in the context of the postmodernist view described above gives us multi-dimensional ideas, objectifies the realities of the universe as the consequences in the local scale.

National Reassurance Building and Its Side Establishments

National Reassurance Building was designed as a competition project proposal by the Architects Şandor Hadi and Sevinç Hadi between the years 1985 – 88. Building, projected for National Reassurance A.Ş. won the National Architecture – Project Branch Succession Prize in 1992. Having not so many projects, works of Hadi Couple carries traditional modern architecture understanding.

National Reassurance Building designed between a two narrow streets in Maçka with a distance of 100 metres apart from each other. Building consists of general directorate superior administrative offices and officers work department of the company and also includes the Assurance Institute, resting facilities, conference and exhibition halls, library and museum, a bank office, rental offices and a marketplace. The starting point of the design was the idea of creating a refreshing urban space to the narrowest part of the street which has an entrance at this narrow and crowded part of the city. For this purpose, a bridge following the street line from above built and neighbouring space in left to the street which was named as "eyvan" (iwan) by the architects. The aim was creating an architectural structure where in upper floors working areas are located and in the down floor a passage is located which connects the two streets and attracts the pedestrians and also rhythmical with the surrounding architectural aspects. The historical residence block next to the area (the fifth floor moulding of the Maçka Palas) defined the height of the iwan thus reflecting an empty space over the filled mass of Maçka Palace as a balance element and creating a symbolically strong surveying benchmark point.

City's Nişantaşı

The building that will be opened at January 2008 was designed by Arch. Sinan Kafadar one of the partners of the Metex Design Group. Building concept was defined by two main functional groups named as "Fashion Centre" and "Life Style Centre". Structure was planned as a building consisting shopping places especially for the high income class targeted textile and fashion industry products and service spaces of cafes, pubs, restaurants and cinema halls. Building has an important underground parking lot space.

Metex Design Group came forward as a design team especially for theme based tourism buildings of recent years. Thus, it is proper to say that they specialized on these theme based tourism building where postmodernist style unfolds itself at best.

Two Buildings – Two Conditions

Comprehensive analysis of these close distant and similar sized buildings offers possibilities of evaluating the last 30-40 years period in which we passed from modernism to postmodernism and especially from the point of architecture which is a cultural production field having the obvious indicators. Many epistemologists and thinkers reflected on these two eras with systematically contrasted and differentiating concept pairs. Some of them considered this differentiation objectively as objective results of capitalist development and objectively annotating the negative sides and created potencies while some of them developed a critical language for the arrived point and development. It is thought that the differentiated cultural indicators that those thinkers considered found their identities in these projects.

Reality Principle X Simulation (Hyper-reality)

The characterising features of modernity formed by rationalism with the understanding of progressive history and science especially during the age of "enlightenment". This era is taken shape by the desire of acquiring the truth, erasing the dogmas and dominating the nature which is as strong as it was not in any other time of the history. From this point of view, architecture also took its structural elements from the technological developments, the buildings which are structured from concrete, steel and glass blessed. Simple design of geometrical forms borrowed the simplicity and severity of the Protestant Europe where capitalism and industrialization lived at its peak; it was intended to emphasize the context that has its power from the functionality rather than the upper-meanings of architecture. From this point of view, National Reassurance Building as tied to these principles by its design can be considered as a distant building from expressing its own reality and presenting indicator variety by language games via architecture. It is shown clearly that the building is an office by means of all the elements of facade and user/viewer is not left in doubt. From this fact it is easy to say that it is an official building by looking the gray granite façade covering, back and smoke-coloured woodworking and windows; it makes the viewer to feel the official standing of a big capital group company.

According to Baudrillard simulation is one of the best concepts explaining the postmodernist status. In this era reality left its place to simulation via the images given to the consumer societies. In fact, to what extent we can accept reality was problematized since Kant. This problem was considered as apparently an unknown by philosophers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and whole reality understanding of enlightenment was reduced to a big nonsense. Besides these philosophical approaches Lacanian psychoanalysis theory which tied itself to Freudian tradition define reality as a system which cannot be grasped by the individual whose is non-conscious structured as language. Thus, our modernist reality delusion left its place to hyperreality in postmodernist era and it is right to say that it hunts down the societies with all of its individuals. As Baudrillard states;

“Comparison field mixes the reality and the model. There is no more a critical or speculative distance between the real and the mental. In fact, there is no design of the models in reality. ...there is the transformation of the real into the model in the field analysis, in here and now. A fantastic short circuit: real becomes the super-real. Neither became real nor became ideal but became a super-real. Super-real is not demolition of the real by force but its demolition by elevating it to the model. Expectation, deterrence, repressive transformation, etc: model acts as a field of reality absorbing.”
(Baudrillard, 1991)

In this context, City’s Nişantaşı gains an apparent expression by carrying the basic elements of this so called hyperreality; the screens to its façade. From this point, even the façade of the building is covered with some kind of produced images and in a sense removed from our normal understanding. It presents the reproduced images of the advertising sector before the architects own expression. It astonishes us that the billboards that used to be the cover material of the visually defected places now become the structural forerunners of a prestigious building. Again the design in the small bottom corner screens of the building represents a respectful view of the communication elements of the era; screens are almost arranged as monuments.

All architectural character of the building is also has a language that makes the person to experience atrophy. Façade that has no reference for the environment neither for structural nor style has an un-identified gesture rather than having a clear reference to any part of the world. In an environment that has a strict pattern integrity this building having no trace and stays as came from sky puts the user in to an unconscious confusion.

This or That X This and That

The foundation of the modernism which feeds from contrasts and conflicts expresses itself especially based on the incredible opposition between the previous. From this point the principle that can be simplified as constructive-deconstructive works as a spiral that progress within. Hence, what is modern finds its most powerful state in its negation. Regarding this point modern architecture intensifies itself and its identity in the historical texture and also gains a respectful view for classicism.

National Reassurance Building with its geometrical form, simple and emphasized faces in horizontally and vertically stays close to the language of the modern architecture and gains an opposition expression by the other historical buildings it stands next to. The emptied front facade of the building is also creating a contrast in the 3rd dimension against the fullness of the nearby buildings. Building has a consistent language by its integral structure elements, hard squared effect contrasts with rounded lightening elements.

City’s Nişantaşı stands as a mixture that affected from everything as we see in the manner of postmodernist architecture; neither different, nor contrasted rather an open interpretation. First of all it neither breaks off from the nearby buildings nor unites with them. The ornamentations within sometime show a classical approach, sometimes present

a kind of abstraction and sometimes a modernist approach thus putting it into the mood of a big top. Soil coloured stone texture mixing into astonishing red window shades and bright woodwork while the self changing colour and form of billboards and screens makes the building to gain a multiple expression.

Depth X Surface

Modern architecture always has a certain stand even for its superficial indicators. Spatial identity that derives its content from its function at least will have a sincere expression. Besides this simple stand modern architecture connects to a designing understanding that pay attention to space quality, original ratios and functional system of the space. As a result building gains an equal function in every point of its three dimensions, the condition was outside is ruled by inside. This is also a consistent situation with the reality principle discussed before. From this aspect, National Reassurance Building works in depth between the streets that building gives facade and from the other side vertically crossed as a result opens to the sky. Dark coloured window glasses reflect the environmental images and give a sense of depth while giving a certain degree of transparency thus allowing the inside and outside stay in touch.

Postmodernist architecture defined as a certain type of surface architecture by Harvey (1996). The reason for this lies in the manner that building brings front and pays attention to the facade features, treating the as scenery. Both Venturi and Jencks and also other theorists and architects that like surface richness of the postmodernist architecture praise this condition and think that it is the regaining of the symbolical power that architecture lost. Lyotard (1994) claims that modernism tried to press the legitimate forms based on expression. For him, the principle of being scientific that underlies the modernism is not connotative but rather denotative. For this point, has a teleological ground. However, advanced capitalism logic that underlies postmodernism removed this teleology and put it into a utilitarian ground thus giving function to the language that scientific understanding tried to erase. Postmodernist architecture turned back as giving back its yelling right to architecture whom told to speak quietly or whom was silenced for decades. Of course the pronunciation of the yelling recruited the equation of the architect designing according to the client.

City's Nişantaşı carries all these surface features on it. The street side facade of the building consists of surfaces that are not opening to the street but just communication visually by means of showcases. The holes except the customer appealing main entrance of the building are designed as parking lot entrance and exits. Showcases gain value with their visibility and thus proofing that the language of the building is based on consumption society.

High Culture X Mass Culture

Modernism considered an evolution theory that ends in perfection and great expectations for the future of the human as aim for the elite culture production. Enlightened human will reach to scientific, artistic and technologic developments. While this hopeful process rises on the shoulders of the heroic elite culture producers' masses will follow them and progress in the path of freedom. From this aspect even modernism showed itself in different practices the baseline equation was this idea. This approach underlies an architectural language that look down on the masses and that becomes authority. This language becomes obvious especially in the urban scale and unfolded in the realization of the physical spaces where people can sometimes alienate. This condition especially became problematic in the course of modernist transformations of low-developed agricultural communities, creating a pathologic relation between the elite culture producers and people masses.

Modern architecture also showed these cultural symbols of elite culture as realization of a power area. This case points out a basic controversy of modern architecture. A careful reader will realize that in the context of "Depth X Surface" differentiation the interpretation that says the scientific principle of modernism is symptomatic brings teleology to a problematic point. The underlying principles of this differentiation also create a power framework thus creating serious question marks about where the aim of modernism goes. Like Adorno said "*It is barbarism writing poetry after Auschwitz.*"

National Reassurance Building is a building that carries these elite cultural symbols. Modernist space fiction already shows itself, the plaza on the Teşvikiye Street side of the building represses the user. Upper floors where the administrative offices are, gains a proper status for administrative jobs and having a privileged status. The tunnel like entrance to the inner courtyard is not attractive but rather a tunnel like cold place which puts a certain degree of margin between inside order and outside order. While architectural language gains an abstract expression it also looks down on to the traditional and local cultural elements.

The basic differentiation of the postmodernism is the expansion and domination of mass culture or interaction with elite culture which is a result of post-fordist production style. Popular culture became a dominant fact that wide masses become target consumers and cultural areas' passing through to commodity categories. This consumption as it is said above clearly shows itself in architecture at most.

City's Nişantaşı derives its design logic from the sub-conscious references to the consumer masses. From this perspective the attractive sides of the fictive forms that are being referenced by mass communication devices like television or cinema which imposes Western originated (especially from USA) false identity ideals are calculated thus it has been thought that a group of people who planned to feel that they are privileged can become one with this language. The architectural language of the building thus based on the codes carried by mass communication tools meaning that mass culture devices stands beside the design of the building.

Authenticity X Imitation

Elite culture of the modernism brings the obsession of authenticity with the same motivation that is authentic to modernism which imposes to demolish the previous in order to create the new. The universalistic approach of the modern architecture often criticized as it brings uniformity but the fact is different. This universal language rather authenticates with a sophisticated design intelligence and produce elegant differentiation than easy differentiations of the showy emphasises. From this respect National Reassurance Building is one of the most authentic and memorable building of İstanbul. While the surface architecture of the building is based on geometrical repeats this repetitive approach breaks with simple differentiations and small details thus creating a language that does not tires the user and viewer.

On the other hand, City's Nişantaşı rather than being authentic is seen as a collage of different structural models. From this respect what it gains is a form that is a synthesis of mimesis than an authenticity. Functional design of the building uses the fashion culture of the Nişantaşı as a differentiation point however it recalls a small model of shopping malls that have been increasingly built in İstanbul.

Public Place X Shopping Mall

Throughout the history public places always be the important spaces of social life, according to Habermas (1997) especially transformation in these places be the basic organizer of the modern social and political formations. For this respect while Hasan Bülent Kahraman emphasizes the power hierarchy of the modernism built on the nation-state Habermas finds the free nature of the public places that emerged in the 18th century. Both approaches see the modern era public place as a mediator in the relation of the authority and mass and criticizes from this point. Hasan Bülent Kahraman (2005) emphasizes from the Turkey example:

"In Turkey, the history of modernization defined by monuments and statues in case of art and culture; in case of architecture it was defined by squares and monumental buildings... Not just modernity, every power and ideology adopted these and desired the works that are believed to be the representative of them to be shown to the people, to the masses publicly."

Public areas never broke this cold image of itself in any system. In state centred modernization processes governments affected the power structures while in capitalist cities (building open plazas isolated from peoples like in New York) some of the public areas are opened to the power functionality of big capital powers. From this aspect National Reassurance Building created a public place as an example for this situation. The open area created in a place like Nişantaşı which lacks open areas in extremely cold. On the other hand the hot passage areas that consists of places like cafes or restaurants connected to the pedestrian system.

However City's Nişantaşı obviously proofs the thesis of Baudrillard which states that in the postmodernist era public places becomes the indoors of the shopping malls. Even in an area like Nişantaşı which has a certain potential and actual culture of street shopping, it is aimed to attract peoples attention to the indoors of a shopping mall where consumers will face with a bombardment of commodity. Even the shops neighbouring the street has entrance from the inside thus all the circulation is created inside.

More and Conclusion

These paired conceptual comparisons can be multiplied by adding many of them. The difference between the alienation in the modernist subject and the disintegration in the postmodernist subject shows itself in the amphibian indicators of postmodernism that replaced the stable indicators of modernism; in the nature of the modernism based on the synthesis from the contrasts in the dialectic and nature of the postmodernism that feeds the togetherness; in modernism the basic psychological factor over individuals and societies was suppressing defence where as in postmodernism the dominant defence is conditions of schizophrenia which may reach to identity disorders.

It emerges through an architectural system and forms as the mirror of social systems. From this point although it is hard to answer whether we can reproduce social space from psychical-spatial design like Lefebvre like we did in this article it is clear that we can read "*Zeitgeist*" from produces psychic-spatial environments with different methods. Thus, concrete basis for normative fields of architectural theories can be created.

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