

Chapter 18

Aestheticization Through Representation of Power in Built Environment: Urban Public Spaces as Site of Display

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ABSTRACT

The concepts of power, aesthetics, and fear beyond the boundaries of art reveals tangible and intangible existence through urban space, and public space stands as the centre of attention due to its transforming meaning and spatiality reflecting the global-local thresholds of economic, political, and social compositions of different time periods. The research aims to unfold the layers of 'power' that are capable of manifesting through built environment using state apparatuses, that is, urban planning, land-use changes, architecture, securitization, and pacification of symbolic and socially constructed meanings and connotations of particular urban spaces, each of which upholds its own aesthetic formation that is unstable, sensational, and perceptual. Turkey is chosen for its rich and yet complex social and political history as the case concentrating on Kızılay Square in Ankara due to its potential of reflecting a rich historical passage starting with a modernisation implication of a new capital to tyranny of forms of institutional, political, and representational power at display.

INTRODUCTION

Cities, having administrative boundaries therefore dependant on statutory formalities and governmentalities in hierarchical form, in their essence are socially constructed, complex-living organisms prone to constant reproduction of space, where each reproduction process reveals various representations in numerous forms of economic, political and social relations. Echoing this explanation, urban public spaces, due to their claim of publicness as opposing to private-ness, positioned somewhere between society and state (Arendt, 1958), have always been the most explicit stage of those representations particularly in

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reflecting power and relations of power. Urban public space therefore, act both as the producer and the product of these relations through their socially constructed contexts and their ideological, institutional and economical spatiality.

Power, on the other hand, when simply expressed means the capability to do something; is an elusive concept (Booher and Innes, 2002) manifested in a process that can be adjusted to the situation in a carefully detailed, transformed, organized way rather than being a naked reality or an institutional right (Foucault, 1982: p. 792). The relation of power with urban space to exemplify resembles an analogy to the relationship between the wall and the picture stated by Percey as “pictures efface walls” (1974: p. 39), where the built formation of urban space – like the “picture” – efface power – like the “walls” given that the power performs at its best when disguised and least observable (Lukes, 2005). It is therefore, *space* “is fundamental in any exercise of power” (Foucault 1991: p. 252). However, what makes space as the main concentration is not its spatiality per se, but rather its relationality to the representation of relations of macro and micro-politics built in space ascribed to secure the trilogy of hegemony, discipline and government (Brighenti, 2010). In this sense, the story of urban space told by the organisation of power constructs a rather complex representation through constant reproduction relations of power and simultaneous reproduction of urban space.

Similar to power, the concept of aesthetics and its acting form of aestheticization is also a tricky one, which vitally requires an avoidance of descriptive explanations and rather necessitates a recognition of its multifaced, sensual, perceptual nature and therefore is highly capable in potential for establishing suitable grounds for power to operate and manipulate. The chapter therefore, puts forward a particular focus in the relation of power and aesthetics and their operating capacity on urban space generating permeable hinterlands and targets to achieve on the basis of dominant ideology of the politics and market. However, since the reflection of authorization of ideology and growth on urban space through aestheticization hinges throughout global and local qualities and attributions, an investigation towards power and urban space requires context dependant particular cases to exemplify, unfold and magnify in detail and to provide international outcomes.

The nature and relationship between the public and private in the socio-spatial production and management of built environment has been altered. Particularly for contemporary cities, it has been recently argued that, the cities have been dealing with the phenomenon of segregation, social stratification, exclusion and lack of publicness, which can be seen from residential areas to public spaces (Graham, Aurigi, 1997; Mitchell, 1995) remarking the threat to the integrated structure of the society (Iveson, 1998, 2003; Zukin, 1995). Therefore, the issue of public space has been seen as one of the most problematic one in academic discussions regarding urban space because of its complex structure and greatly claimed decline (Sennet, 1977; Sorkin, 1992; Boyer, 1996; Mitchell, 1995, Zukin, 1995). Therefore, this chapter targets to elaborate an analysis of aestheticization, face lifted by the relations of power reflected on urban space stretched between its concrete and abstract terms. In doing so, the initial mission of this chapter to unfold the layers of ‘power’ that is capable of manifesting itself through built environment by using state apparatuses i.e. urban planning, land-use changes, architecture, securitisation and passivization on both spatial and symbolic and socially constructed meanings including connotations of particular urban spaces each of which upholds its own unstable, sensational and perceptual formation. However, the relation between power and urban space that this research intends to dismantle is not limited to the one constructed by aestheticized buildings of concrete and brick displaying the power of architecture, and architecture as an art; instead objects to attract attention towards the recognition of power as a veiled concept capable of manipulating the collective connotative meanings of those spaces while disguising itself through the

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