

The Outer Space Within the Inner World the Streets of Istanbul in the Photographs of Ara Guler

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Abstract: As a 19th century invention, after a long and tough journey, the photography has completed its technical invention when the first still image has been captured. Since the Camera Obscura, its birth, the photography has continued its “documenting humans through humans’ eyes” function and through involving not only the technique, but also the art and the meaning, it served the humankind as the most important witness, documenting our history and memories. As a documentarian and an art laborer, searching for this meaning, the most important name of the photography history of Turkey, Ara Guler is a man of action supporting this idea. As an opposition to lots of famous names, who call themselves as photography artists, Guler identifies himself as a “photo journalist”. As a modern documentarian and a great master, he had lots of contributions on advertising Turkish photography in the international arena. From the point of view of Guler, the event is important within the “moment” and as he has brought humans into prominence in his photographs, he has also captured the harmony between “Space and Light”. The aim of this declaration is to see the streets of Istanbul before the “urban transformation”, analyze them using semiotics and examine the streets of Istanbul through a photographers eyes in the means of space.

Key words: Photography • Space • Analyze • Streets of Istanbul • Ara Guler

INTRODUCTION

The very first drawings human beings have drawn on the walls of the caves show the urge of keeping the records of the times and places human beings have lived in. The frescos in Egyptian tombs that have survived until today still convey information of their era. Till 1839, the year the invention of photography have been announced worldwide, photography have passed many phases, optical, technical and chemical, since 4th century B.C. When looked closely, it can be understood that the invention of photography was not a mere coincidence, but a result of a true need. It’s known that Aristotle has reflected an image on a surface in the 4th century B.C. This surface is the wall of a dark room. The light coming from a hole at the center of the wall across the room has reflected an upside down image of the view outside on this wall (3).

In the 10th century, A.D, Arabian mathematician and scientist Alhazen has watched the bright view of the Persian Gulf all day long and recorded all the changes happened on the reverse reflection on the wall from sunrise to sunset. In 1420, Italian architect, sculptor and

mathematician Filippo Brunelleschi has researched the possibilities of using perspective accurately through copying an image reflected inside a big dark room. In 1544, German mathematician Gemma-Frisius has drawn the first schematics of a Camera Obscura. In 1550, Milanese Giralomo Cardano has discovered that more bright and clean image could be captured by installing a convex lens in front of the Camera Obscura. In 1604, Johannes Kepler have found the physical and mathematical laws of the reflection through mirrors. In 1620, he has drawn a picture by retracing an image, which he has reflected on a board by using mirrors through a Camera Obscura system, which was a tent he installed on a field. In 1725, German physicist Johann Heinrich Schulze, who had been studying the bronzing affect of the sun lights on human skin, has mixed chalk with a nitric acid including non-dissolved silver particles, while conducting researches on phosphorus. He have observed that the half of the white solvent, which was facing the sun has turned into black, while the other half has remained the same. This experiment has become a starting point for new researches [1-4].

In the 19th century, the chain reactions caused by the cumulative knowledge regarding science and technology in Europe 19, has raised the inventions of new technologies. The developing industrial age has brought small inventions that were in its service. Bicycle, typewriter, photography, telephone, etc. have passed into history within this era. As a 19th century invention, after a long and hard process, technical invention of the photography has been completed, when the first still image have been captured. The first still image have been captured by Joseph Nicéphore, who captured the image on a plate, after an 8 hours of exposure time by using a Camera Obscura at the window of his house in the city of Chalon-sur-Saône in France. The first photo taken in Ottoman Empire was shot by Abdullah Brothers and sent to Empress Augusta by Sultan Abdulaziz via the hands of Berlin Ambassador. In 1910, the first photography studio belongs to a Muslim, Resna, have been opened by Mr. Bahaeddin [4].

Space and Light: One of the most important elements, which affect the space sensation, is light. While effecting the perception, light is also what creates sensation. Within the space sensation, light fills the space with life. All the visual effects depend on light. Through the change in the type, power and direction of the light, the sensation of space also changes. Light relieves and obscures the borders; it hides and reveals a feature; decreases and increases the scale of the distances. The borderlines of silhouettes have very important visual features and these lines are created by the light.

The element, which gives the 3rd dimension to space and objects, is light. With its dynamic and unstable nature, natural/artificial light changes the effect on the space and objects. The most important part of the space sensation is created by the light, which relieves the borders of the space. Light is taken into space through the openings of the space. Spaces can be changed and even they can be recreated by light. Being partially lightened and partially shady makes a space has an effect through two separate tones. Therefore, by rendering the light and shadow, the effect of the space would change. As this new condition puts monotony away, it also adds a charm and a plastic view to space. In French Fugue, human is the active factor of the architecture. Above all, architecture shows itself on the artificial surfaces and spaces that are created by these surfaces. Architecture shows itself on mass and spaces and sizes of these, proportions, luminous effects, rhythm, colors, connections and segregations between constructional

components. Through the effect of light, architecture creates a plastic composition depending on the watcher's location and light/shadow conditions. According to physics, the definition of light has not been identified with certainty. But, there're theories that defines the light-related events. According to this, light is a form of energy like other energy forms. All objects-whether they're hot or cold-always yield energy through "radiation". Hot objects emit more radiation than cold objects. An object with a fixed heat also yields energy. But this object should absorb same amount of energy that it yielded to preserve its heat fixed. The energy yielded by objects spreads in the space in a wave form. The distance between the peak points of these waves varies within a wide range. This is called "wave length" and defines the type of the energy. Newton is a great physicist, who made great revolutions in science; in physics by developing Galileo's mechanics much further and identifying the universal gravitation law; in mathematics by discovering differential and integral calculus. The masterpiece of Newton is "Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica", where he formulated the universal gravitation law-"the system of earth" in his own words-and according to many science historian and philosopher it's the book that transformed the philosophy of nature into modern physics. In the book, which takes Euclidean geometry as the basis, in other words, where the thesis are proven mathematically by definitions and mathematical axioms taken as basis, earth is defined as a system, formed by still and moving physical objects in accordance with three axioms or the laws of motion. As the prerequisites or the elements that that form the general frames of the given laws, Newton presents absolute time, space, location and movement notions. These are the quantities that exist independently and make measurements of objects and their movements possible. While the absolute space and absolute time that he suggested are not observable entities, in his methodology he refused speculative hypothesis and defended the importance of use of experimental observation and induction. These system, book and ideas of his have great importance in several respects. First of all, with the power and prestige it gained all around the world, this point of view created a religion of mind and brought the concept for nature as a universal system of mathematical mind and order created by God and a universal machine. According to this idea, the nature or the universe was created and their laws were set by God and works like a great watch in accordance with these laws. The laws of nature are not ethical, but mathematical rules. Therefore, humans can understand nature through examining the relations

between force, mass and momentum, not some divine or cause final. Naturally, describing the nature as a clock or a machine means separation of earth related factual postulates from normative or ethical statements. And these ethical statements are what Ara Guler shows. He shows space with a luminous effect. The effect of light on art is used as in the meaning it gives to space-time. Natural space reflects us the one and only: "social life". According to Walter Benjamin, who described photography as one kind of reproduction, art should be considered as a social production form, for it serves political, theological and philosophical purposes. According to Benjamin, what's important is art's place in relations of production of its time, not where it stands according to them. According to him, the most important development and problem in the area of art within 20th century is art gaining totally new forms and new functions through the resolution and-accordingly-death of tradition. In other words, Benjamin has seen the progressive potential in expansion of mechanization and mass production to cultural area and he suggested that the reproduction of cultural works or artworks diminished the holy aura around the works of high culture by freeing them from rituals and tradition. He associates aforementioned improvement with masses that embrace the idea of universal equality of things and he evaluates this as potentially progressive. In other words, he claims that technological advancements has provided art and culture with lots of possibilities and he states that the improvements in the area of arts, like cinema and photography, made an art for the good of masses and open for their participation possible. According to him, mechanically reproduction of artworks changes the attitude of masses against art. A reactionary attitude towards a painting of Picasso turns into a progressive reaction towards a Chaplin movie. According to Benjamin, emancipatory sides of tradition and past culture should also not be forgotten.

Black and White World: Ara Guler's Istanbul:

Black and white technique brings the power of dramatization into prominence. Generally, it's used for eliminating colorful similarities and specifying the location of objects in a photo frame. Artistic signs turn into self perceivable things from technical point of view. From Proust-ian point of view, the superiority of artistic signs to other signs is that other signs being physical. Those signs are buried inside the objects that carry them.

If we make a Proust-ian analysis: the physical sources of those signs belong to humans and life. Only artistic signs are nonphysical.¹ The thing that brings the dramatic effect in Ara Güler's works is the nonphysical reality in the photograph. Ara Guler defines himself as a documentarian. For him, the photography is more of a document than an artwork. The black and white world in the photos taken by Ara Guler paints the memoirs of this reality. The stories that he paints in his photographs are the reflection of ordinary lives to the objective through a documentarian perspective. The streets of Istanbul, technically where he captures the light and shadow more effectively, give the feeling that those photos were taken in an overcast/cloudy weather and mostly look like a dusk and livid place in his photo-reality. This dusk and livid atmosphere is mostly reflected to us as a fantastic reality. Orhan Pamuk's comment in his book, *Istanbul*, on a street photography of Ara Guler defines this fantastic reality really good. Pamuk mentions the "pale light" that represents the consistence of the wooden house ruins and the streets of his childhood that is reminded by concrete apartments and wooden houses in desolate back streets. Pamuk says that he recalls the photos of Ara Guler, for they reflect the "black and white" feeling of Istanbul evenings, which gives Istanbul its uniqueness ². The black and white photographs of Ara Guler have the characteristics of a past-time photo album. As a city, where all streets change constantly, Istanbul is and will be saved in the photographs of Ara Guler with all its lost textures from now on. The most important element of city architecture, streets gains a new form and a new meaning when Istanbul is the subject. The streets of Istanbul that have a special place due to their historical identities and as living spaces, in photo frames they become a calling card that define identities. For Guler, who brings out the special moments of minorities and different beliefs through the light captured by his objective, city identity is told within stories. In photographs, street architecture, urban fact, urban furniture that gives each street an identity are shown along with the stories of people. The narrow streets that are used without any fiction bond with the sun light that filters through the empty spaces between rising buildings and bring forth the streets of Istanbul as living spaces. With its imposing-look and stone walls that rises as scraping the sky, the image of Galata Tower intersecting with its geometrical projection in the narrow street that reaches it, is reflected in the photography. From banquets to signboards, from facades

¹Orhan pamuk sayfa 41

²Marcel Proust. S.47

to technological improvements that creates a contradiction between past and current architecture, all components brings a different angle to the photo and also by amplifying the sensation supports an “a street architecture that leads to eternity” concept. Along with adding value to the architectural elements, this spontaneously shot photo shows the street identity which we have forgotten in our daily lives, but also are bonded with everything we got and the space regaining its personality during the sunset when the life gets quietened. People are the ones that make architecture meaningful. With its cobblestone pavements, stone walls, narrow windows to life, streets of Galata reflect all the lives they contained within, with all their courage [5,6].

The street, which is formed by the intersection of alleys that basically have direct relations and separate linear organizations, serves as a central point. The street, which fits in the term, hard space and signs the Galata Tower, essentially has the characteristics of a positive space and with this characteristic; it integrates alleys, which are aligned in a hierarchical order, in a uniform system in a wide frame. According to Ron Bennett,

photographic, dynamic, electronic and digital images that infiltrated all the parts of the daily life do not simply refer to a known world or reflect this world. Instead, they make an example of intersection and struggle that people of the western societies, who are in between imagination and creativity, daily engaged. When we examine the photography works of Guler, we see the opposite of it. Seeing the provisionality of people and spaces and the continuity of the daily life at the same time, within these photos is possible. The situation of the furniture and the people appears in front of us just at this above mentioned intersection point. The form of the streets, the only thing left from the Old Istanbul, reflects the own meaning of these districts. Between a street photograph that is shot in Beyoglu and the one at Nisantasi slope have a deep difference in “meaning”. Especially the morphology of these roads shows this meaning notably.

The roads that have radial organization of space are cut in a linear organization by the parallel streets. The facades cut this radial organization with a 90 degrees linear organization. All the window and door openings in the facades balance this organization.



Image 1



Image 1a



Image 2



Image 2a



Image 3

In this black and white photograph, textures draw the attention and in this simplicity, road, the main object come into prominence. Within this perfect composition, the only thing that looks like spoiling the balance of the angles is the tree, located on the left-hand side of the photograph. The tree that reaches along the street almost in a curve form, acts like a constructional component that carries the photo.

The composition in Image 2 can also be seen in Image 3. The buildings on the street, which has a radial organization, again appears as bordering and defining elements. The composition of the open space that leads to the sky and the light at the end of the street balances the depth, which is also balanced with the facades of houses with oriels. The open space that is balanced with branches and the antenna on the roof in accordance with fullness-emptiness principle, corresponds to the impressive cobblestone texture. Perception is mostly directed to the man and woman walking down the street, instead of the architecture of the street. These two people are photographed within the extent of the windows of the building that they pass by. In a projective sense, the 90 degrees angle corresponds with the linear and radial composition. The light that shines behind them points at these two people and strengthens the composition. In fact, the architectural texture and the black and white format of the photograph reflect the real life experiences [7,8]. The ages of the two people that walk down the street and located on the foreground support this theme. In this photograph, the buildings with contemporary architectural characteristics on the background counter the old buildings on the foreground that draw the attention. At the same time, sky also balances this new development and symbolizes a new life. Whether in the interior spaces or urban spaces, proportion has always been important for the formed organizations. The element of balance has importance in making an artwork beautiful or awful. In the photographs he shot, Ara Guler provides fullness-emptiness, positive-negative balances with his



Image 3a

point of view and shows the bonds between street and art, user and space and art and user with a simple composition.

CONCLUSION

The most important mission of the photography since from its invention is documenting. For almost two centuries photographers provide the physical sharing of everything that surrounds us. The life energy that photograph frames reflect often whips human's desire for immortality. The streets of Istanbul presented in the photographs of Ara Guler, where relation between the human-natural space traffic can often be seen, has been specifically chosen as a field of study. Istanbul is a city, which continuously changes and can absorb those changes. On the other hand, Ara Guler's Istanbul is a continuously changing Istanbul with the timid behaviors of people moved from the country. Especially, the streets in his photographs sometimes signs a man with a carriage coming down the street and sometimes signs a short rush of a person passing across the street. Images are concepts that think and reach an idea. Ara Guler's photographs turn imagery into philosophy. During the transformation of the imagery Istanbul turns into streets, streets turn into Istanbul and Istanbul turn into the past again. While proving that photograph is a kind of memory, Ara Guler, with his unique language that tells the stories of social life and social levels along with urban memory, also practiced Lacan's "to see ourselves we have to look at the others" idea. Throughout the last forty years, the period we experienced imagery identifications, through Istanbul streets that he has visualized with a sense of journalist, he has shown us that streets of Istanbul also belong to the others.

The conclusion reached at the end of this study is that the streets of Istanbul in Ara Guler's photographs, appear to be an identity and a mark. Every street has its own geometry, own architecture and people that just fits

that moment. The photographs of the livid Istanbul that dissolve within the black and white world have already reached the universality. But while representing this, he never ignores the multicultural structure of Istanbul. All districts and streets are the parts of the city that they reflect their differences within. Therefore, while making analysis, it should be considered that the inner worlds that are studied have their own, unique historical backgrounds.

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