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**Historical Traditional and Cultural Values  
are Commodified to Create an Identity:  
*Preferences of Architects and Middle  
Income Consumers for Single Family  
Mass Housing Examples”***

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Since the 1980s through creating image dependent products, advertisement industry of housing in metropolitan towns of Turkey has been in the service of new kind of tastes through making collective identities promising ‘a different lifestyle’. Either images in the forms of the past or images of different cultures have been constructed and offered to claim a better future in the social network of consumption. Some of the types, housing typologies and even some architectural terminologies have been consumed. The condition of house production, however are formed by the merchant builders, mostly with little involvement of architects. Most of the architects in housing business try to satisfy the state, private enterprises and the customer, as they behave according to their intents. Architects have almost no chance to design in their own preferences. In fact, it is the era of flexible accumulation and consumer society is ready to digest what will be offered to them. In the case no architectural identity claimed to the consumer, the ones which has some connections to the history or look different than what the people have would be most likely to be preferred. As a result, by different social classes of a society, historical, traditional and cultural values might be commodified in the name of creating an identity. In that context, the paper has focused on the interpreted image of the single family mass housing itself. As suggested in this paper, high income group members are not the only ones who are impressed through these images, but middle income consumers can also be influenced by the appearances some of which criticized by architects as collage, kitsch, etc. The paper presents the differences and similarities between the perceptions of the architects and the middle income consumer groups.

## **Introduction**

Post-modernism as a contemporary cultural condition brings society a different intelligence. Connecting with the political and economic transformations of capitalism and the relation with the changes of the organization of production in the twentieth century, the intelligence of the consumption is changed, too. This makes all the social values, attributed with a consumption value.

While post-modern theorists celebrating the breakdown of authorizing cultural hierarchies in favour of cultural difference, at the same time culture, as well as social relations and identity formation, is exposed to the effects of consumption and lead cultural consumption. Dunn<sup>11</sup> states that within the post-modern condition, an eclectic and adaptable consumerism has weakened the class identities and loyalties in favour of more ephemeral identifications with corporate-based images of leisure, pleasure, and celebrity, in which a regime of regulated and institutionalized taste is replaced by a system of commercially mediated and highly fluid lifestyle.

According to Chapman<sup>2</sup>, under post-modernity, capitalism has produced new social relationships where people's personal identities are not so much shaped by their family origins, neighbourhood, friends and local culture, or the work they do, but by what they choose to consume. Within this perspective consumption of goods becomes a mean that serves to maintain social status or social prestige. Therefore consumption gain additional functions other than satisfaction of true needs.

Baudrillard focuses on the competitive condition of modern society, which invades every aspect of human existence in his work 'The Consumer Society', and claims that the consumption of goods is a part of competition for prestige. He defines consumption according to its functional aspects:

'(1) as a functional practice of objects- possession, etc., or (2) as a mere individual or group prestige function, but (3) as a system of communication and exchange, as a code of signs continually being sent, received and reinvented- as a language'<sup>3</sup>

As Baudrillard mentions, consumption is a system of signs and consumers consume signs rather than commodities. Commodities are no longer defined by their use, but by what they signify, thus the appearance has become more important than reality itself. The manipulation of signs by consumption 'becomes central to late capitalist society where sign and commodity have come together to produce the 'commodity-sign''<sup>4</sup>

Within such a cultural medium, it is understood that post-modern architecture, which displays a fragmented reality composed of a multiplicity of architectural paradigms, is exposed to the impacts of consumer culture and become a producer of 'commodity-signs'. The diversity of trends, which is defended as a search for a pluralist and populist vocabulary of architecture, has placed architecture on a ground of total liberation where consumption is legitimized.

## **Consumer Culture and Architecture**

Güzer discusses the impacts of liberation process in 'post-orgy' in relation to architecture:

The architectural carnival of the 80s has been replaced by the bewilderment of 'post-orgy'. The liberation process, growing out of Modernism, yet promoting itself as a revolution against Modernism, not only did free the suppressed architectural language of modernism but also attempted to legitimize single or various architectural styles distinguished by media values based on such liberation idea. Architecture re-established its values on the ephemeral everyday taste, exposed itself to images degenerating reality, and to eclecticism determined by consumer culture. Priorities were rearranged according to values of the consumer society. In 90s 'orgy' was no more a mere fantasy but the ultimate lifestyle.<sup>5</sup>

Production process transforms in to reproduction process in which every form of culture and society is reduced to representations that produces simulations and hyper-reality. From now on, the limits between production and reproduction, reality and the model of reality are blurred as Colomina mentions:

Today, in a stage of late capitalism, production and reproduction stand as two terms within a continuous cycle, their roles overlapping.... The product (the 'original') and its reproduction (the 'copy') are confused with each other. The relations between maker and the object, object and user (or viewer), are now those of producer, product, and consumer (or audience), determined by their respective position in the continuous process of production (reproduction)<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand according to Balamir<sup>8</sup>, liberal discourse, which is introduced by Postmodernism, became the new 'direction' of architects against the indefiniteness that is formed with the discourse of 'the end of ideology'. She states that architects, who have the ability to conform every alterations of paradigm, frequently change their positions and became the militants of every new ideology. Such architects concretize the changes in the cultural and political dilemmas. In this perspective architects become the consumers of architectural values and incline towards to fashionable and popular values that collective acceptance in consumer society. In other words in the context of consumer culture, image or imitations may become as valuable or valid as the original.

The second characteristic of post-modern culture is the dissolution of dichotomy of high culture and popular culture. Urry defines post-modernism as a post-cultural condition that the symbolic limits between academical culture and daily, popular culture dissolve. This dissolution and its impacts on an architectural practice can be discussed within the conceptual frame of the works of Robert Venturi. He criticizes the modern architecture and urban uses of 'high'/ elite architectural language became of its limited respect to its users and the abstractionist attitude that rejects the values and perceptions of different social groups. Therefore he celebrates an architecture destroying the limits between high and populist vocabularies of architecture.

Venturi mainly argues the symbolic meaning and the communicative role of architecture, concentrating on the necessity of the dissolution of the cultural dichotomy in architecture. According to him architecture should not be exclusivist and elitist, but should communicate with the different tastes, the values of different classes. He claims that the 'cliché', 'ugly' and 'ordinary' have the potential to communicate:

... the way of the ugly and ordinary in architecture can lead effectively to that of pretty and ordinary..... where the aesthetic in the art of architecture is read at many levels, by children and the learned, and where architecture as an everyday background for living in communities can be appreciated by many kinds of people at once: elitist architecture in this context is an oxymoron<sup>7</sup>

Within this context, cities become the place for the aestheticization of everyday life and the development of consumer culture. This situation leads the formation of 'consumer culture dream worlds' including the residential complexes that utilize from the language of Post- Modern architecture.

## **Housing as Commodity**

The architecture begins with house and it is the unique space where personal beauty can be reached. For its user, provides the means of self- expression and reflection on the other hand for its architect it provides an experimental ground where the volumetric and spatial attributes and conceptions are tried and erred.

House has a relatively divergent function to other consumption objects. When space and settlement relations are considered, a house might have differentiating meanings.

It means to some people a lot than a shelter. <sup>8</sup>

However, the differentiating feature of house was the symbol of the house ownership's social status. It becomes the expression of the market.

When 'sociability' gets squeezed in a corner in a single room in the house, individual space becomes equipped with various accessories like private pool, private bath or private prayer space, resulting in never efficient sizes that generate 750-1200 metre square houses. Everyone holding the capital demands the same and so is commodified the house.<sup>9</sup>

So the fetishisation of the house enables the integration with the commodities of the hypermarket and the media.

## **Coming To the Post-modern Stage in Turkey**

The conditions and characteristics of architectural production of house are interacts with the social, cultural, socio-economic and political structure of the society. After the establishment of the new Republic, there was a rapid transformation of economical and social revolutions in the society. In this period; the dual cultural structure was come out with the dilemma of nationality and universality. The comprehension of reaching the level of western civilization; forms the modern architecture in Turkey. And the comprehension of the modern architecture was not the reminiscent of the past which were imitating, coveting the European standards, and life styles. This manner emerges the 'First National Architectural Style'. It is the basis of using the forms of a rejected past.

The general characteristic of the early Republican period was to impose the western life and western house to our lives. Because of the lack of modernization background in the society, people were not ready for these novelties. Yakup Kadri defines this modernization in his novel as;

'Coaches like dentists' chairs, seats like operation tables, sofas resembling the interior of automobiles, octagonal tables, closets like gain storages, display windows and finally, scattered all over these, some weird, grotesque knick knacks; naked walls, naked floors.... And a clinical gloss on everything' <sup>10</sup>

Coming to 1940s 'Second National Architectural Style' has emerged.

'The eclectic approaches, which are based on the representation of some idealized interpretations of traditional Turkish House, can be evaluated as the search for a national and regional identity in architecture' <sup>11</sup>

Under the conditions of nationalistic and economical influences, the same plan types, eaves and hipped roof are used again in Architecture.

Between the years 1950 and 1980, the populist and the pluralist tendencies in Architecture is occupied. The importance of this period was came the transition from the single party regime to a multi party regime. So that, these social and economic transformations brings the society populist and the pluralist tendencies.

'Related to the transformation of economic policy market, the economy has started to emerge as a dominant force in every field. The unstable economy and devaluation formed a new high income group who accepted American life as a model. Oktay evaluates 1950's as a period of transition to populism. Exploring the popular magazines of the period he underlines some characteristics that affect the social structure<sup>11</sup> These characteristics are;

- Exclusion of the ethics of working instigation of entrepreneurship and Opportunism.
- The function of entertaining gain priority whereas the aim to acquaint and to enlighten becomes secondary.
- Popularization and vulgarization of the high-cultural products. Decrease in discussions and criticisms
- Increase of the wish to articulate the dominant class ideology'<sup>12</sup>

In the post- 1980s of Turkey, the housing architecture has a variety of housing types such as council housing, squatter housing, and cooperative housing. But this study will focus on high income residences called as 'villas' represents the last point of the consumption and production. The production and the consumption are the important factor of shaping the life of human being in modern culture. As Firat mentions,

'in every moment of the production there is something to consume and with each consumption there is something to produce.'<sup>13</sup>

The overall aim of postmodernism in the 1980s was not the mass production and consumption, but a flexible production targeted to the different segments of the growing market. This flexible accumulation regime within the organization of production necessitated rapid changes in today's consumption patterns and heightened the competition among the sectors of economies. The regime has resulted the formation of

"high middle class" as a new societal stratum. This new stratum found a chance to constitute totally different life style in which the themes of individual consumption, ephemerality and fashion became the dominant motives in all consumption patterns including architecture such as housing. In the housing market, as in other patterns, 'image and symbolic values' were more important than the 'use value'. Within the context of contemporary culture, perceiving house as an object of consumption, more than an architectural product, has become a dominant tendency. The archetypical sheltering image of house is now replaced by the post-modern images of display and status. As Güzer<sup>5</sup> mentions, the houses do not give any reference to elitist culture as it is referred in architectural culture and incline towards to values and expectations of market instead of disciplinary values and expectations. Therefore, the problems related to housing or lack of quality in architectural terms could be passed over or hidden by interfering housing with non-architectural facts.

This study has focused on the period after the 1980s as the Turkish economy experienced a radical shift called as 'LIBERALISM'. The paper has dealt only with the interpreted image of the single family mass housing itself, connotative meanings laypersons infer from various home-styles, but not the lifestyle as a whole (a fantasy world in an urban context proposed through overall commercial adverts). Brunswik<sup>15</sup> suggests that socio-cultural groups with different environmental experience might differ in the symbolic inferences they made from architectural styles. Others have shown that people of different education, income, and social class view certain aspects of housing differently (Royse, 1969; Michelson, 1976; Wethman, 1968). Groat<sup>16</sup> compared architect and accountant responses to Post-Modern buildings and found that the two groups used different criteria for evaluating the buildings. The accountants, unlike the architects, did not distinguish between the 'high' styles and 'vernacular' styles. In their work Devlin and Nasar<sup>17</sup> have found distinct differences in the characteristics of popular and high styles. According to their findings, the architects preferred the 'high' styles to 'popular' while the non-architects preferred the 'popular' to the 'high'.

This paper does not attempt to prove the differences between layperson and the architects, actually given in some papers (Brown & Gifford, 2001; Devlin & Nasar, 1989; Hubbard, 1994), but to suggest the similarities between different income groups. In fact it is suggested in the paper that high income group members are not the only ones who are impressed through post modern images, but middle income group members can also be influenced by the appearances some of which criticised by architects as collage, kitsch, etc.

## **Method**

Totally 50 middle income people accommodating in Çayyolu Suburb of Ankara rated 20 pictures (10 of them are popular style examples, planned by developers for the popular market and the other 10 are high style examples designed by architects for peer values) in terms of preference and the friendliness and status of residents. The houses were selected such that they were similar in view, size and height. The pictures were numbered and they were shown to the participants in black-and-white form not to affect the preferences from the colour. The participants were told that this was a study of housing evaluation. They were shown the pictures and informed that there were no rights or wrong answers.

The questionnaire was occupied with three main questions that are “preference”, “friendliness” and “status”. The questions were designed with a scenario. For the perceived friendliness, they were told to imagine having a flat tire on the street with these 20 houses. They were asked to rank the 2 of the houses in terms of which they would feel most comfortable approaching for help. For perceived status they were told to assume that the residents were living together at the same housing estate and they will choose a leader for this site. They were asked to rank two of the house in terms of which residents would be the director of this housing estate.

## Data Analysis and Results

Regarding the 50 participants joining the research, 52% of them was male and 48% of was female. Almost half of the subject was young, around the age of 25 to 35 (58%) and the rest was above 36 years old and more (42%).

The participants were asked to rank 20 house pictures shown to them according to their own aesthetic criteria’s. House 17 was the most liked one (26%), House 19 was the second (14%) and House 5 was the third one (12%) liked primarily (Table 1 and Figure 1).

**Table 1.** Primary preferences of the participants

House Number	F		%	
1-2-7-8-12-14-16-20	1 (1x8)	8	2 (2x8)	16
4-10	4 (4x2)	8	8 (8x2)	16
5	6 (6x1)	6	12 (12x1)	12
9	2 (2x1)	2	4 (4x1)	4
13-18	3 (3x2)	2	6 (6x2)	12
17	13 (13x1)	13	26 (26x1)	26
19	7 (7x1)	7	14 (14x1)	14
Total	50		100	

*F: Number of participants %: Percentage value*



**Figure 1.** The primary preferences of the participants

When the participants asked to rank to choose the second liked one the results were as: House 4 16%, House 5 16% and House 10 was 16% (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The secondary preferences of the participants

Primarily, House 2 never liked with 46%. House 8 followed with 12% and House 18 with 10% (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Table 2. Primary preferences of the participants for a house that was never liked

House Number	F		%	
1-6	2 (2x2)	4	4 (4x2)	8
2	23 (23x1)	23	46 (46x1)	46
3-15	3 (3x2)	6	6 (6x2)	12
7-12-14-16-19-20	1 (1x6)	6	2 (2x6)	12
8	6 (6x1)	6	12 (12x1)	12
18	5 (5x1)	5	10 (10x1)	10
Total	50		100	

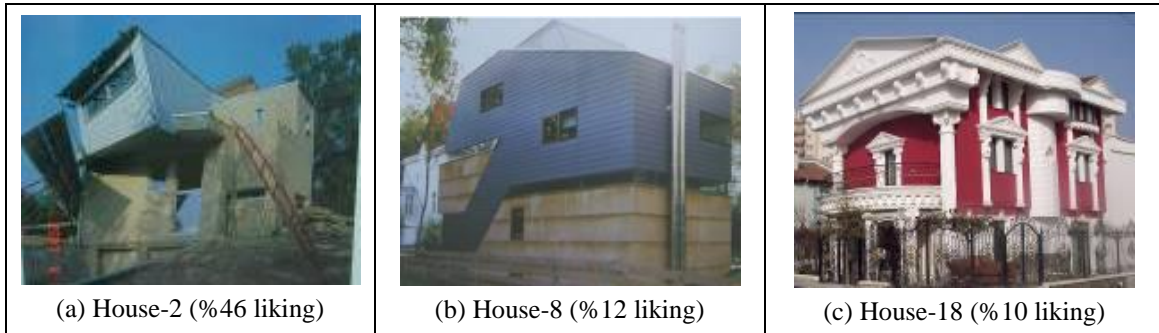


Figure 3. The primary preferences of the participants that was never liked

Each participant asked to choose a second picture disliked. House 3 was the first disliked one (18%). House 1 was the second in the list with 16% and House 2 was the third with 14% (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The secondary preferences of the participants that was never liked

The participants were asked to choose two of the houses in terms of which they would feel most comfortable approaching for help. Table 3 shows the primary preferences of the participants which were found comfortable approaching for help.

**Table 3.** Primary preferences of the participants for the house which they would feel the most comfortable to approach for help

House Number	F		%	
1-7-10-12-15-16-19	1 (1x7)	7	2 (2x7)	14
2-4-18	2 (2x3)	6	4 (4x3)	12
5	9 (9x1)	9	18 (18x1)	18
6-9	4 (4x2)	8	8 (8x2)	16
13	12 (12x1)	12	24 (24x1)	24
14	3 (3x1)	3	6 (6x1)	6
17	5 (5x1)	5	10 (10x1)	10
Total	50		100	

House 13 was ranked 24% as the one most comfortable approaching for help. Following this result, House 5 was the second in the list with 18% and House 17 was the third with 10% (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** The primary preferences of the participants which found the most friendly

Each participant was asked to rate for a second house picture for a comfortable house appearance to ask for help. House 5 and House 17 were the first two pictures with 10%, House 4 was with 8% (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** The secondary preferences of the participants which found the most friendly

By looking at the pictures, participants were told to assume to choose two of the residents living in these houses as a director of this housing estate. So the identity of the houses could be read clearly. House 17 was preferred with 14% as the first impressive appearance. House 10 and House 19 followed this with 12% each (Table 4 and Figure 7).

**Table 4.** Primary preferences of the participants for the house which can the owner be a leader: Statute indication

House Number	F		%	
1-13-16-20	1 (1x4)	4	2 (2x4)	8
2-5	3 (3x2)	6	6 (6x2)	12
4-6-7-12	2 (2x4)	8	4 (4x4)	16
10-19	6 (6x2)	12	12 (12x2)	24
14-15	4 (4x2)	8	8 (8x2)	16
17	7 (7x1)	7	14 (14x1)	14
18	5 (5x1)	5	10 (10x1)	10
Total	50		100	



Figure 7. The leader houses of the participants which were the primary preferences

On the contrary, the assumed owner of House 2 (34%) could never lead a community. House 8 and House 18 were the second with 16% each (Table 5 and Figure 8).

Table 5. Primary preferences of the participants for the house which can the owner never be a leader

House Number	F		%	
1-3-6-11	2 (2x4)	8	4 (4x4)	16
2	17 (17x1)	17	34 (34x1)	34
5-12-13-14-17-20	1 (1x6)	6	2 (6x2)	12
8-18	8 (8x2)	16	16 (16x2)	32
19	3 (3x1)	3	6 (6x1)	6
Total	50		100	

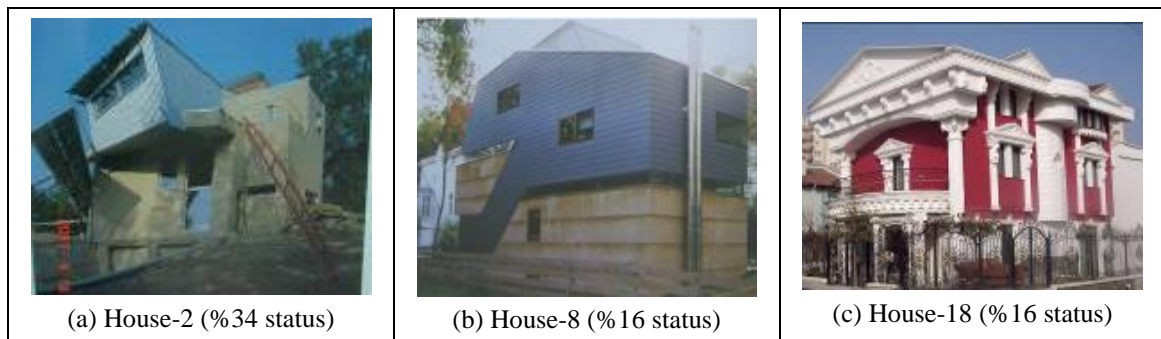


Figure 8. The primary preferences of the participants that will never be the leader

## Conclusions

Today no one can deny that it is the era of flexible accumulation and consumer society is ready to digest what will be offered to them. In the case no architectural identity claimed to the consumer, the ones which has some connections to the history or look different than what the people have would be most likely to be preferred. As a result by different

social classes of a society, historical, traditional and cultural values might be commodified in the name of creating an identity.

As presented, the paper has shown the preference of middle income respondents on some amount of high style and popular style examples. It has been understood that although popular style examples consumed by high income groups in the popular market remarkably, they are also admired by the middle income residents. Actually the aim of the work was not only to bring out layperson's general interests for the popular style but to stress the danger that is given to consume and taken away. However, as understood from the analysis, some high style examples (such as House 5) might also be 'liked' and named 'friendly' by the middle income. Interestingly the high style examples in the category of deconstruction were listed as never liked ones (such as House 1, House 2, House 3, and House 8), and not mentioned in the list of the participants as an indication of symbolic status to represent an assumed community leader.

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