

REVEALING THE SENSE OF PLACE IN ARCHITECTURAL THINKING

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It is something different that I am longing for,
Neither like a tree, nor a cloud.
It is not like here the place I am going,
The sea is a different sea,
The breeze a different breeze.
Yeni Türkü.

Our perception of the surrounding world cannot exist separated from our life situations which contribute to the fulfillment of human life. Among all the works of man, architecture has the fundamental potential to embody the conditions of our experience.

It is the peculiar character of our perceptual experience which leaves us with a unique sense of place. This involves our memories, hopes, intentions and our imagination as well as our tactile, audio and visual senses. Although drawing is the preferred vehicle for representing architectural potentials, it falls short of revealing the human reality of a place.¹

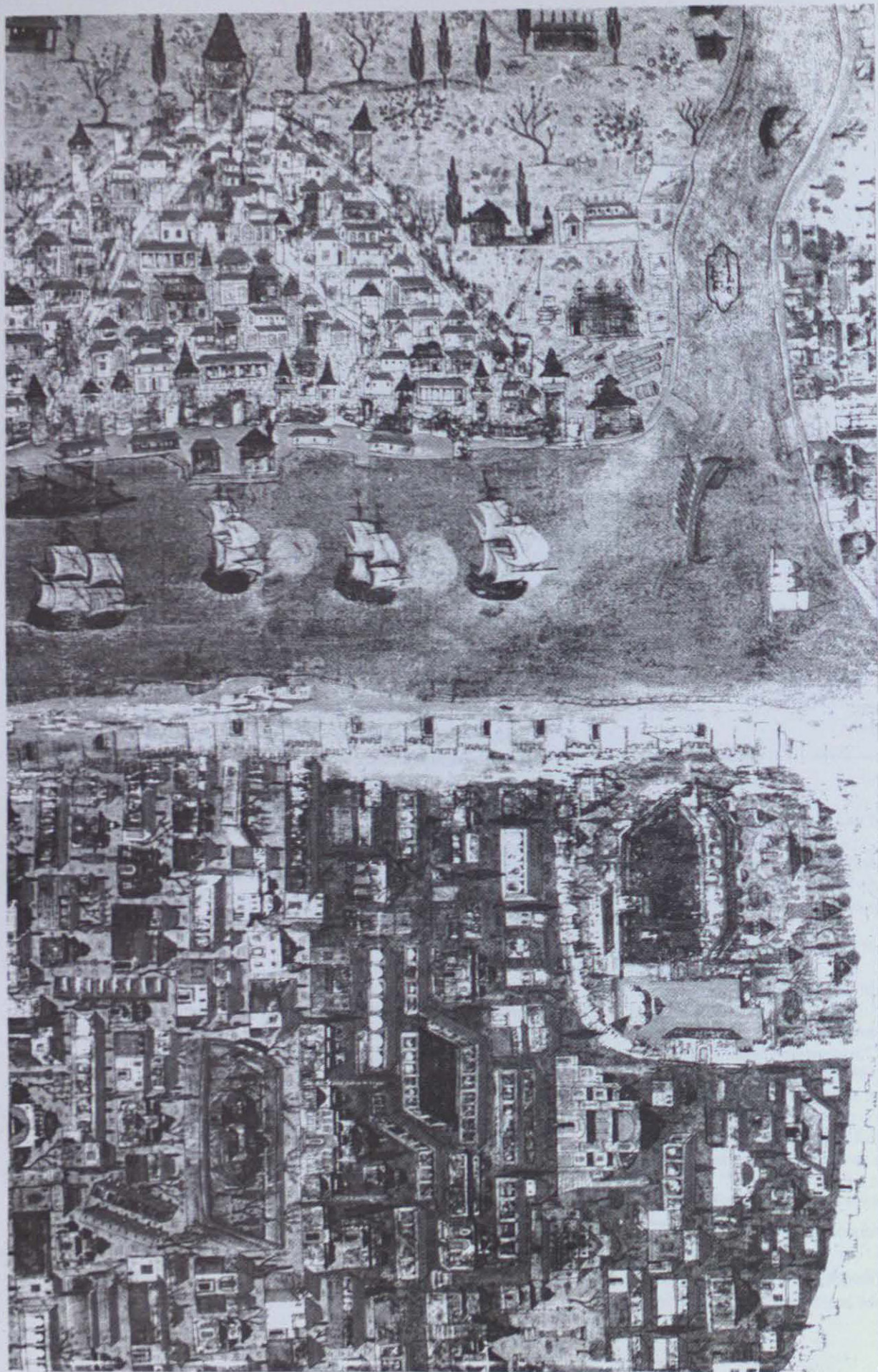
The prevalent understanding that drawing is a basic instrument of architectural practice restricts its use to planning and implementing the construction of a building. While I do not deny the necessity of meticulous working and construction drawings, there is no question that simple line and coloured drawings that are put in front of us² cannot approximate the intensity of our experience. Neither can they evoke a proper sense of that time and place which we inhabit.

Our experience of places in the world -- a shaded colonnade, a quiet seashore, a busy street, a bright, sunny room-- become diminished when architecturally represented as uniform lines on a piece of paper. Moreover, it is the current tendency in architecture to intentionally neglect the human reality of the place and focus solely upon the drawing itself.

However, more than simply an instrument, drawing is "architectural thinking"³. This understanding of the drawing mitigates against the deception separating reality and appearances. Consequently our conception of place in architecture is not reduced simply to the visible, to the flat reality of a line drawing in itself.

If we discount this notion that drawing is architectural

by Filiz Öngüç



"Istanbul," miniature drawing by Matrakçi Nasuh,
16th Century, Istanbul University Library.
Written by Filiz Öngüç, in memory of a distant place that
I feel close to...

thinking and accept the diminished reality of our current understanding, then "...this whole of experience becomes alienated into an object of aesthetic judgement."⁴

This aesthetic approach to drawings has a tendency to represent the world by its fixed outside surface. However, it is not the contour of the forms nor their surfaces alone which reveal to us the sense of a place. Rather, there must be recognized a latent "internal animation" as the living essence of visible things.⁵

The critical issue is to understand representation in terms of "presencing"⁶, i.e. the sense of the place as it presents itself to us. It is the openness inherent to presencing which frees drawing from being framed by the representation of things as they are known. The purpose of the drawing then becomes the revelation of things as they are perceived.

The belief that drawing is architectural thinking releases us from the otherwise constricting grip of perceiving it as nothing more than a tool of visual representation. Pleasing the parallel ruler and the set square is not enough to give us a pleasant sense of the places we experience. My adamance in pursuing this understanding of drawing is to try to prevent architecture from ignoring its profound relation to different "human places".

"We are in danger of losing our distinctively **human** places. This turn of events, which corresponds to the standardization of motility, is pathologized in our life-world as an experience of displacement, exile, homelessness, and anomie."⁷

This suggests that a simple drawing of what is materially present must be integrated with self-understanding if it is to properly connote a sense of place. Even though all places are made of essentially the same stuff, the breeze we feel in one place is different in another setting. The crucial task is to capture that breeze within a drawing.⁸

Notes:

1 My concentration on revelation of the sense of a place within architectural drawing is to gain a deeper understanding of representation of our reality through architecture. It is not my intention to give a chronologically or philosophically detailed study of the use and abuse of architectural drawing that would be taken as an answer for the deficiencies of architectural representation today.

2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, The Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie, (Evanston: Northwestern University press, 1964) p. 178.
"After all, the world is [in and] around us, not in front of us."

3 Dalibor Vesely, "Architecture and the Poetics of Representation", *Daidalos*, (Sept, 1987) pp. 24-36.

4 Hans George Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful: and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 23.

5 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" in *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 180.

6 David Michael Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Post Modern Situation*, (New York, London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc, 1988) pp. 51-152.

7 David Michael Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) p. 279.

8 I am aware of the many crucial points left untouched in this short article but they are to be explored at length in my thesis.