

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's *Beş Şehir*: An aesthetic approach to urban transformation

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the themes of preserving the architectural heritage, cultural contextualization, and the methods of reconstruction in Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's prose work, *Beş Şehir* (1946). This study approaches the term, urban transformation thematically, using the theories of modernity and modernization in evaluating the themes of demolition and reconstruction, loss and novelty, transformation and preservation. By keeping Tanpınar's essays as reference point, I argue that Tanpınar provides an insight into complexity of the modernization practices in Turkey, which should inform our discussion of current urban strategies.

Keywords

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Beş Şehir*, Modernity, Tradition, Henri Bergson.



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In 2014, The Istanbul Tanpınar Literature Festival hosted Argentinian author Alberto Manguel, who took a literary tour for the “Five Cities in the Footsteps of Tanpınar” event, tracing Tanpınar’s footsteps across five Turkish cities (İstanbul, Ankara, Bursa, Erzurum and Konya); all of which are subjects in Tanpınar’s 1946 collection of essays *Beş Şehir*. This project was important in the sense that it created a form of dialogue between two cultures, by bringing together two authors from different geographies and displaying their unique observations of these five cities. The project also highlighted the lasting importance and contemporaneity, after many years of publishing, of *Beş Şehir*’s prose writing for today’s literary world. The question is then, what makes this work important and well-read for readers not only in Turkey but also abroad.

The main theme of *Beş Şehir* (2011) is the “sadness we feel after things disappear from our lives and the strong desire to seek novelty” (p. 9), says Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar in his foreword to the second publishing of *Beş Şehir*. It may be this feeling of loss that is familiar to most contemporary readers in so many diverse contexts. The experience of various forms of loss constantly takes place in so many lives around the world: the cultural heritage of cities is demolished relentlessly for the sake of political interests, historical neighborhoods are converted to pave the way to the artificial urbanization, and through this urbanization the bond between a living habitat and culture has gradually been impaired.

However, the feeling of loss is only one aspect of this rich text. Alongside making loss an object for his aesthetic endeavor, Tanpınar’s *Beş Şehir* also emphasizes the necessity of preservation, recollection and continuity in matters of architecture and cultural heritage. In fact, Tanpınar sees these notions as vital to the modernization process of Turkey. Even though Tanpınar problematized these issues in the middle of the last century, Turkey continues dealing with the same modernization issues of Tanpınar’s era in the year 2016. In that vein, Tanpınar’s *Beş Şehir* provides an insight for the contempo-

rary reader, allowing a view of modernization as compatible with these above-mentioned notions, which were regarded by some intellectuals as signs of conservatism only. Tanpınar’s work demonstrates the possibility of both cherishing and engaging with the past, appreciating its cultural heritage while still striving to be modern.¹

Nevertheless, Tanpınar also acknowledges that modernization process is also inherently about loss, fragmentation, and alienation. Therein lays Tanpınar’s paradox: as he attempts to recreate a sense of continuity and wholeness, and mend the broken chain between the past and the present created by modernization itself, he is also aware that the losses pertained to modernity cannot be stopped nor recuperated any more. This article traces this paradox in Tanpınar’s collection of essays, *Beş Şehir*, hoping to manifest how this discussion can be useful in re-thinking urban transformations that have been taking place in the Turkish urban scene for over a century now. In order to do this, it is imperative to understand how Tanpınar conceives modernity and modernization, and how his conception can inspire us to re-think urban planning strategies, architecture and transformation in the present.

Tanpınar did not come up with his own theory of modernity, but as a well-informed intellectual about Western literature and arts, he complicated and worked on the theories and ideas offered by the great literary modernists; such as Baudelaire, Valéry, Proust, Bergson, and Freud, most of whom he saw as mentors. Therefore, instead of giving a thorough definition of the concept of modernity, he wrote on the outcome and the effects of modernity, and tried to situate his writing within a socio-historical trajectory of the effect that modernization brings about.

Matei Calinescu’s (1987) definition of the bourgeois idea of modernity in his *Five Faces of Modernity*, can help us better understand one aspect of Tanpınar’s conception of modernity: as a natural product of scientific and technological progress of the historical transition Turkey had been going through since late 19th Century. Cali-

¹The translation belongs to Erdağ Göknaar. For the discussion of the themes such as, the persistence of the past, the divided selves, and continuity and synthesis in Tanpınar’s novel, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler*, see Göknaar’s article: “Ottoman Past and Turkish Future: Ambivalence in A. H. Tanpınar’s *Those outside the Scene*” (pp. 647-661).

nescu outlines the key values of the bourgeois idea of modernity; which during the first half of the nineteenth century in the history of Western civilization were said to be centered on “[t]he doctrine of progress, the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, the concern with time [...] the cult of reason (p. 41).

According to Karl Marx, the doctrine of progress was already inherent in the bourgeoisie’s own impulses and needs. He argues that the same feature would bring about the end of bourgeoisie itself:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them all the relations of society...Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones (quoted from Berman, 1988, p. 21).²

In other words, the bourgeoisie is acting against itself in the process of its modernization; in that the doctrine of progress invokes all types of uncertainty and agitation and disturbance. Even though Tanpınar was aware that Turkey had never developed the Western type of bourgeoisie, he was still a supporter of an urban modernity that would function according to the doctrine of progress and scientific reason.³ Envisioning that the new regime needed an industrialization and a scientific agenda for its future, he therefore offered industrial development plans, city planning solutions, and discussed how the country under the new regime could progress in light of Western science and reason, especially now that the new country increasingly turned its political face to the West.

However, Tanpınar’s writing on these subjects is also critical with the discernment of a “new wave of barbarism,”⁴ disguised as “progressive modernity”. Accordingly, not only does he draw attention to the disproportionate progress in the world that ended with two subsequent world wars, but he also pointed to another form of barbarism: the ruthless renewal projects and reforms at home that did not take heed to the preservation of Ottoman and

Seljukian culture, all for the sake of adopting the “New”.

An example of a ruthless renewal project would be the case of İbrahim Paşa Palace, which was brought to public attention by Tanpınar in a newspaper column of November 6, 1947. The case is about the renovation of the historical palace, but the reader is led to understand that the “renovation” actually means annihilation of the palace. One of the rare examples of civil architecture dating from 16th Century, the renovation disregards this historical import of the building for the sake of constructing a courthouse instead. Tanpınar reacts to this plan by articulating the importance and meaning of this historical building for the nation. His defense of the palace also reveals the core of his ideas on architecture, modernization and urban transformation. First, he argues that architecture and urban design are the vital elements in conceptualizing a national identity. He states that each historical building is a “protector of national life, and once we lose these buildings the community will lose its sense of continuity” (Tanpınar, 2000, p.198).

The notion of continuity is important in Tanpınar’s lexicon, and how it connects generations of the past and future, enabling the society to imagine a national identity across various shifts and changes to the cultural and political landscape of Turkey. Tanpınar argues that if we are to talk about a modern Turkish civilization, then it has to be found first in the accumulated culture, preserved architecture and heritage of the Turkish city. What endures as a result of this accumulation is carried out by the elements that make up the fabric of culture and aesthetics. İbrahim Paşa Palace then can only be an example of successful urban transformation when it is re-introduced and made part of city life in a preserved form.

Beş Şehir should also be read under this light: highlighting the importance of preservation and recollection, it revitalizes lost or unpreserved works of architecture, historical buildings and habitats, vanished from collective memory. Monumental trees are included into the objects of cultural heritage as well. Tanpınar mourns for

²Besim Dellaloğlu (2012), in his *Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar: Modernleşmenin Zihniyet Dünyası* states that we usually have the wrong impression when we think that conservatism is a form of backwardness. He argues that Tanpınar was not a conservative, but progressive, and that hegemonic mindsets are liable to view him as such (pp.115-119).

³This famous passage is from Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, “The Communist Manifesto.” I have used Marshall Berman’s translation in *All That is Solid Melts into Air*.

⁴As a parliament member during the years 1943-46, and as an active supporter of the newly found Republic’s revolutionary agenda, Tanpınar has always been loyal to Atatürk, and his reforms, and to İsmet İnönü, Atatürk’s successor.

the disappearance of century-old trees, and makes a correlation between a tree and a monument, both of which are left to deterioration:

The death of a tree is like the loss of a great work of architecture. Sadly and inevitably, for a century or even more we have become used to the loss of both. One after another, before our very eyes, masterpieces crumble into a heap of dust and ashes like a heap of salt that has fallen into the water; all over Istanbul, in every quarter there are columns toppled, roofs collapsed, old religious colleges full of rubbish, and charming little neighborhood mosques and fountains in ruins. It would take little effort to restore them, but they deteriorate a bit more every day. They lie prone on the ground like the dead in an epidemic whom the living have not the strength to remove. The day that we realize true creativity begins with preserving what already exists will make us happy (Tanpınar, 2000, p.162).⁵

It should be noted that even though Tanpınar emphasizes preservation of the past heritage, he is not nostalgic about it. He does not aim to preserve “all” about the past, nor does he yearn to return to the past. In fact, as a modernist writer, or as a writer who desires to produce modernist texts, he is aware that modernism is foremost related to the idea of representing the present.

His understanding of the temporal present rests on a continuum, though not a seamless continuity of the past into the present. The continuity necessitates constant recreation and transformation of the previous life forms, which Tanpınar reflects in the pithy and chiasmatic statement, “To continue through change and to change through continuity” (Tanpınar, 1962, p.14). Therefore, when Tanpınar states in *Beş Şehir* that “Our biggest issue is this; where and how we are going to connect to the past; we are all offspring of consciousness and identity crisis” (Tanpınar 2011, p. 214), we should understand that in Tanpınar’s past-present-future nexus, the past is necessarily brought into the present. However, the past is not preserved as it was: it needs to be revised, re-introduced, and only living elements about the past should persist as living components of the present. Thus the present should be a dynamic site, where the past, the pres-

ent and the future intermingle.

In this “presentness” Tanpınar hopes to find the “unique self” or what belongs to “our own.” “The past does exist. We have to settle and come to terms with it in order to live a genuine life” (Tanpınar, 2011, p.10), Tanpınar states in his foreword to *Beş Şehir*, and he underlines that *Beş Şehir* is meant to be a dialogue born out of this need. The cultural heritage, historical buildings and neighborhoods are meant to be living components of the present then; preserving them engages us in a dialogue with our past, but for the most part, it gives meaning to our present.

The question of how the present, that is, the socio-cultural, historical, economic and political scene of the country should be constructed occupied all the early intellectuals of Turkey, and as such, constructing a modern Turkey was the primary agenda after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. As a young student Tanpınar was inevitably influenced by the sweeping ideas generated by these intellectuals during the revolutionary Turkish setting of the early 1930s, especially by a group of intellectuals, who called themselves “Bergsoncular” (Bergsonists) (İrem, 2004, p. 80). Gathered around the journal *Dergah* (1921-4), Turkish Bergsonists adopted the French philosopher Henri Bergson’s theory of creative evolutionism as a nationalist argument. They transformed Bergson’s key terms such as tension, creation and spontaneity in a context of creating a spontaneous modern society that they identified with the Turkish society, which has experienced “flows of change” in its transition from a traditional religious formation to a modern secular one (İrem, 2004, p. 89).

Henri Bergson came to be influential among the Turkish intelligentsia around the same years he became popular in Europe. Besim Dellaloğlu (2012) explores the cause of this particular influence on the Turkish intelligentsia and claims that the theories of the French philosopher might have become popular amongst Turkish intelligentsia, because his oeuvre provided them with the theoretical perspective to claim modernity while enabling them to preserve their memories and

⁵Calinescu (1987) uses this expression for Baudelaire, who according to Calinescu was against progressive modernity, since in Baudelaire’s view it was threatening the foundations of human creativeness (*Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 58).

identities after the radical break with the Ottoman Empire and with the advancement of modernity (p. 89). Bergsonian time-consciousness expressed through his interpretation of duration (*la durée*), the prolongation of the past into the present, apparently allowed these intellectuals to move freely between the past and the present, and appeased the pains of the rupture of modernity in this transitional period.

Bergson's notion of duration allows the linking of current and past experiences in such a fashion that the two reflect upon each other: "the present experience is rendered comprehensible by comparison with a previous experience, and the past is renewed and altered by its contact with the present" (Gillies 1996, p. 114). Based on this formula, Turkish Bergsonists realized that modernity does not necessarily mean forgetting the past, but rather that tradition and memories can still be preserved even under the destructive force of modernization.

Bergson's notion of duration was introduced in Bergson's doctoral thesis *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, written in 1889, and elaborated further in his successive works. In this book, Bergson defines the pure duration as "the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states" (Bergson, 2002, p.60). Thus, one needs to think of her consciousness in a flow and let her mind live in a continuum, so that both the past and the present states form into an organic whole. According to Bergson, successive stages of emotions such as desire, joy, sorrow, pity, to state a few, correspond to qualitative changes in the whole of our psychic states, and they are not divisible and measurable.

As it is clear from the above definition, Bergson's theory of duration in *Time and Free Will* is grounded on psychological experience, and the perception of duration is subjective. According to this description, living things are without consciousness and the material world remains out of the duration (Yucefer 2006, p.27). In Bergson's understanding, to think of time as it is in

itself, one must "ask consciousness to isolate itself from the external world, and, by a vigorous effort of abstraction, to become itself again" (Bergson, 2002, p.55). Thus, the duration belongs not to the external world, but to the conscious mind. According to Merleau-Ponty, this finding was a great novelty back in 1889 since it displays the concept of duration as it presents itself as an understanding of time in relation to, and as, "the self" (Merleu-Ponty 1964, p. 183). This suggests that Bergson's articulation of duration is an articulation of the self as a becoming subject enduring in time.

As such, in his successive book, *Matter and Memory*, Bergson traces this ontological approach to develop his first definition of duration, which renders the cosmos and the material world as part of the duration. Bergson elaborates on the connection between the temporal present and bodily existence in cosmos by emphasizing that what one understands of the present consists of the consciousness one has of her body (Bergson, 2002, p. 127). The body extends in space, experiences sensations, performs movements and becomes therefore the "centre of action" and the "actual state of my becoming, that part of my duration which is in process of growth" (Bergson, 2002, p. 128). This can be read as an attempt to differentiate between time and space in a human's perception of her own existence in relation to the flowing mass of the material world, which is in a continuous becoming. Within the given cosmos, a person's state of "becoming" suggests a continuing process of "what is being made;" hence "the movement must be linked with the sensation, must prolong it in action" (Bergson, 2002, p. 127).

Bergson concludes that one's consciousness of the present is "already memory" since the person perceives her immediate past in every present moment. Therefore, the person becomes a component of universal becoming; a part of her representation is "ever being born again, the part always present, or rather that which, at each moment, is just past" ((Bergson, 2002, p. 131). The body, being an image that persists amongst other images, con-

stitutes at every moment, “a section of the universal becoming” and therefore becomes a connecting link (Bergson, 2002, p. 131-2).

The faculty to become a connecting link in an expanded present may help one to imagine the society in a continuum as a form of duration. The society itself moving in a continuous expanse of time would not be a pure image of duration, as many other elements have a role in shaping the society. However, Bergson’s emphasis on the importance of dependency for an organism, on what happened before its creative evolution is compatible with Tanpınar’s visualization of the present in the modernizing Turkey in a constant recreation informed by its past experience.

Bergson stresses in his *Creative Evolution* that it is not sufficient for the organism to find its present moment in the moment immediately before, but rather “all the past of the organism must be added to that moment, its heredity – in fact, the whole of a very long history” (Bergson 1983, p.182). Tanpınar’s formulation of culture and society in an expanded present necessitates duration, but the ultimate purpose of this process should be to build new life forms, which suggests, in line with Bergson’s creative evolution, continuous cessation of some aspects and construction of new ones.

Tanpınar’s notion of the “new life” must have been inspired by the spectrum of ideas the “presentist” philosopher Bergson articulated, and the former generation of Turkish Bergsonists transmitted. The mentor figure in Tanpınar’s 1949 novel *Huzur*, İhsan, who represents Bergson’s views in the novel, emphasizes the spontaneity of this “new life,” which is about to be created. He contends that once “we establish a new life particular to us and befitting our own idiom,” it will take its own form: “Life is ours; we’ll give it the form that we desire. And as it assumes its form, it’ll sing its song” (Tanpınar, 2008, p.106). The gist is that the “unique self” (*bize ait*) finds its source in what endured out of “the real heritage” of the past and projected into the present and the future in the form of new creations.

This new form of life points to “a third source: the reality of the nation,” which does not involve the Turkish culture and tradition only, but is a symbiosis of the East and the West and yet distinct from each. Tanpınar writes:

We can consider the East or the West only as two separate sources. Both exist for us, and quite extensively; that is to say, they are part of our reality. However, their presence alone can’t be of any value, and remaining [separate] that way, they are an invitation to create a vast and comprehensive synthesis, a life meant for us and particular to us. For the encounter and fusion to be fruitful, it must give birth to this life, to this synthesis. And this is possible by attaining the vital third source, which is the reality of the nation (Tanpınar, 2000, pp. 42-43).⁶

His vision of the new form of life is thus a recreation of the tradition with the new perspective adopted from the West. Therefore, the question as to how to modernize specifically deals with the question of how to create a modernity of one’s own based on the “reality of the nation”. But it also indicates that it is yet to be searched and found out. In his essay, “Asıl Kaynak” (The Essential Source) (1943), Tanpınar emphasizes his earlier statement that the “reality of the nation” exists “neither in the past nor in the West; but in our lives which rests ahead of us like an unsolved puzzle” (Tanpınar, 2000, p. 43). Clearly, terms such as “the unsolved puzzle,” “the real heritage,” and even the “new life,” address the ambiguity of this search’s destination. In other words, the unique self and the unique modernity lie in the obscurity of the present, which needs to be excavated.

Tanpınar’s vision of the modern self (and “reality of the nation”) accordingly dwells in between the past, from which experiences can be incorporated into the present, and the future of expectations, which points to the “not-yet” and “to be discovered.” The duration is the mode of this transmission, accommodating various correlated terminologies in Tanpınar’s essays and novels, such as, “tradition,” “collection,” “preservation,” “accumulation,” “endurance,” and “recollection,” all pertaining to imagining modernity in a continuous becoming; whether it be in

⁶The translation belongs to Ruth Christie, “Three Sections from ‘İstanbul,’” (p. 463)

community, in culture, or in aesthetics.

In many circumstances, however, modernity has been equated with the present without taking into account its historical or past connotation. Susan Friedman calls this perspective a relational approach to modernity, which suggests severing the present from other temporal dimensions: “relationally speaking, modernity is the insistence upon the Now – the present and its future as resistance to the past, especially the immediate past” (Friedman, 2001, p.503). Friedman criticizes this approach for creating an illusionary myth of the new that is dissociated from its historical roots and that refuses to acknowledge “the presence of the past in the present and future” (Friedman, 2001, p.504). She stresses that “the new cultural and institutional formations of modernity are themselves the product of historical process,” and thus refusing the principle of historical continuity means denying its own production as a historical formation (Friedman, 2001, p.504).

Tanpınar also prioritizes the acute sense of the present as the source of aesthetic experience in modernity, and insists on the “now,” and what it promises for the future. “We are not even now, we are tomorrow,” (Tanpınar, 2000, p. 42) he says hoping that the modernities of tomorrow will meet the needs of today even better. However, unlike the relational approach to modernity, he does not take the present as a point of origin that marks a new departure. Since, for Tanpınar modernity is not all about “making it new,” but instead inescapably refers to the past, ensuring an expanded “true present,” which also involves the past and the future.

In other words, Tanpınar attempts to historicize modernity in a continuum, and present it as a historical formation. Therefore, his conception of the present in the context of modernity may provide us with a more insightful understanding of the relation between history and modernity that the relational take on modernity dismisses. It is remembrance and continuity, re-assessing the past and establishing a dialogue with the past that comes to the foreground in Tanpınar’s understanding of a present time, that is in his con-

ception of modernity.⁷

Tanpınar’s understanding of urban modernity with its emphasis on progress does not seem to contradict his understanding of cultural modernity, which requires re-employment of the past in the present. According to Tanpınar’s understanding of cultural modernity, modernity should recognize the connection between the culture of the past and the present. Referring to the Western history of modernization, and how it dealt with past events and traditions such as Renaissance and Reform, Tanpınar claims that Turkish modernity, following the Western example, must reconcile its past, revise, and re-introduce its living elements in order to call this new experience modernity. Tanpınar’s handling of cultural modernity demands such a form of continuity in time linking the past with the present.

This continuity and connection between past and present should not, however, mean an amalgamation or a co-existence of the “old” and the “new.” In Tanpınar’s past-present-future nexus, the past is necessarily brought into the present, but it is not preserved as it is: it ought to be revised, re-introduced, and only the living elements of the past should be the living components of the present. The protagonist of *Huzur*, Mümtaz, voices this concern stressing the need to find a particular method to create a bond with the past: “I’m no aesthete of decline. Maybe I’m searching for what’s still alive and viable in this decline. I’m making use of that” (Tanpınar, 2008, p.172). Tanpınar’s present is a dynamic site then, where the living components of the past are made as an organic part of the present.

Thus, for Tanpınar, modernity signifies understanding, confronting and problematizing the tradition. This process does not necessarily mean coming to terms with the past, but involves, rather, a certain crisis in handling of the past traditions and culture. However, Tanpınar also discussed another form of crisis, which he terms as *buhran* to describe the economic and socio-political global crisis prevailing in the first half of the twentieth-century. *Buhran* addresses a lack of sense and direction, feeling of homelessness,

⁷The Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk claims that if one supposes that modernism opposes the traditional and the sense of collectivity, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar should not be considered as a modernist writer since he speaks of an “us,” as a collectivity with a certain culture, a sure sign that he is the ideologist and the voice of a community. Moreover, in Pamuk’s view, he did not sever the representational ties that traditional literature insinuated (435-448). Tanpınar, I argue, represents a crisis as a symptom and a configuration of the present, which in itself is one of the principal issues the modernists were concerned about.

disintegration, ambiguity, and the destruction of wholeness on a global level. Nonetheless, in his compilation of essays, *Yaşadığım Gibi*, Tanpınar distinguishes buhran that addresses the global crisis and its influences at home from the crisis that specifically characterizes the Turkish experience of “the abrupt transition from one civilization to another” (Tanpınar, 2000, p. 34), by which he implies the transition from the Ottoman culture to the modern Turkey. Buhran, in this second usage, indicates a transitional phase in his terminology, which characterizes Turkish modernization from the late 19th Century onwards.

While the process of finding one’s own modernity and a unique self involves a crisis that addresses that culture’s “unique, internal time” (Harootunian 2007, p. 482), the crisis (buhran) addresses estrangement with one’s past. It suggests that the link between the past and the present is forever broken, and that it is not possible to find a “unique self,” or a modernity of one’s own based on the continuity between the past culture and the present. In other words, by referring to buhran, as a specific Turkish experience that describes the abrupt transition from one culture to another, Tanpınar suggests that none of the objectives pertaining to what he seeks to find in the ideal modernity have taken place.

The notions of disquiet and crisis are only expected to juxtapose with the notion of continuity. In that sense Tanpınar’s understanding of modernity reveals a paradox, which can be compared to the image of Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history.” In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin depicts the paradox in which the individual finds herself in the modern world through the symbol of the “angel of history.” He interprets the angel figure in Paul Klee’s painting “Angelus Novus,” as the angel of history, whose face is turned toward the past. According to Benjamin’s interpretation, the angel of history would like to stay and recuperate the broken chain with the past. It is, however “irresistibly propelled into the future” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 258) like the individual human being who lost control of time in

modernity with the ceaseless chain of historical events, which “keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 257). As the tentative image of the angel of history looks back to make sense of the continual passage of time, Tanpınar, in a similar motive, attempts to re-introduce the past, and make it part of the present. He is yet aware that the modernization process itself brings a decisive split with the past.

As the angel of history looks back to make sense of the continual passage of time, Tanpınar, in a similar motive, re-presents the past in *Beş Şehir*, trying to weld it into the present. However he is aware that it is no longer possible to rest in the moment, and that the modernization process itself brings a decisive split with the past. *Beş Şehir* is therefore, an attempt to recuperate the broken chain with the past, even though Tanpınar is aware that the loss cannot be brought back. The loss however, can only be recovered aesthetically. This may be the reason why Tanpınar emphasizes in his foreword that he approached his subject matter as a “man of heart” instead of an engineer.

“Heart” or Tanpınar’s frequent use of the word “soul” (ruh) in his other works refers to aspects of culture that lingered throughout history. According to Tanpınar, Bursa has that soul; quoting Evliya Çelebi he remarks that Bursa is the city of the soul (“ruhaniyetli bir şehirdir”) (Tanpınar, 2011, p. 95) and as if to identify the architecture with this soul, he says, “Our ancestors were not building, but worshipping. They had a soul and belief that they insisted on carving on the material. The stone was becoming alive, turning into a piece of soul” (Tanpınar, 2011, p. 113). Tanpınar’s understanding of the “soul” is correlated with Bergson’s notion of intuition, since it speaks to that which cannot be perceived by human reason alone.

Time perceived through intuition refers to a different medium, which is not measured by clocks. In his *Time and Free Will*, Bergson articulates that the consciousness does not take place in space but in time, and time is immeasurable and qualitative. This means pure duration is also qualitative and not measurable unless symbolically

represented in space (Bergson, 2002, p. 104). Bergson argues that the mind in real duration is already alive with intuitive life and it will perceive “the continuous fluidity of real time which flows along, indivisible” (Bergson, 2002, p. 246).

This “indivisible” time is what *Beş Şehir* is after. When Tanpınar states Bursa has another sense of time, which is separate from the time that measures our lived experience, he points to this “other” time, the time of intuition, which can only be expressed through aesthetics. The recuperative and the reconstructive mirror of art provides “the most beautiful Bursa of the world” (Demiralp, 1993, p. 144) instead of Bursa of loss.

Therefore, in depicting all of these five cities, the reader realizes that Tanpınar, like Benjamin’s angel of history tries both to recreate continuous time (the other time that can be perceived by intuition) and aesthetically recover it, and yet he is also aware that the loss cannot be recuperated. In Konya, he traces the Seljukian heritage, or in his own words, “Seljukian renaissance” of the city by depicting the architecture, culture, and history of Seljuks, and vividly framing it with their stories. Architecture and the soul are intertwined forming a “soul climate”, which brings together “the hours of the city dwellers” with that of Mevlânâ, Şeyh Galib, Seljukian architecture, music, folklore, and thus creating a home for the alienated writer himself.

Tanpınar visited Erzurum three times, once in 1913 when he was a child, and then during 1923, and finally during the last years of Second World War. The wealthy Erzurum of 1913, with its lively commercial life, an established culture Tanpınar observed when he was a child, disappeared after the First World War and the Independence War of Turkey. The loss in this instance is not only economic, but also takes place in all other areas of life. In order to reveal what this loss was about, Tanpınar draws a cultural portrait of the early Erzurum with its customs, music, and life of its city dwellers during different occasions. During Tanpınar’s third visit, the city had regained its economic flourish; the new Erzurum

has been built of apartments, and the city itself provided many economic opportunities. However Tanpınar cannot help mentioning that the warmth of the previous Erzurum is lost forever. As the city lost its cultural wholeness and warmth of life, Erzurum’s architecture also began to cut its ties with life. This problem takes place in a wider geography. According to the author, various works of architecture and monuments in different geographies are not in a dialogue anymore. Iznik’s, Edirne’s, Istanbul’s architectural works do not correspond to the ones in Erzurum; famous residents of the past, Ulu Camii, Lala Paşa Camii, Çifte Minare lead a life of their own, split from the life right beside them, and do not reflect a continuity with other works of architecture (Tanpınar 2011, p.151).

Nevertheless, Tanpınar attempts to draw a connection between works of architecture and continuity between traditions in the İstanbul chapter, a city, which he calls “one of our soul adventures” (Tanpınar 2011, p.129). He chronicles how the city of İstanbul metamorphosed in time, and he concludes that what endures and never gets lost in time can only be sought in the architecture that survives in the present. Because of this, he writes about different facets of İstanbul created by different perspectives provided in the diverse architecture of the city, spanning centuries upon centuries of change. According to him, architecture in İstanbul reaches a perfect synthesis, “as if shaped by a gem in the hands of a good diamond cutter” (Tanpınar 2011, p.139), working to combine all the architectural traditions he observed in the other four cities.

As he does when depicting other cities, he talks about these architectural and urban forms, together with their cultural backgrounds: Mosques, tombs, fountains, gardens, and even trees come up from the past with their own stories and with the stories of their creators. Tanpınar compares these architectural forms with other the works around them, writing about how they are influenced by each other, and he goes on to give precise details about their craftsmanship. In the city’s contextual dialogic of works with oth-

er works, he finds the ideal way to re-adjust these items of the past into the present life, by making them alive once again. This is ultimately how Tanpınar imagines modernity and urban transformation in modern life; and sets out how it should be approached as well: by coming to terms with the past through engaging with it.

Tanpınar frequently wrote about the transition period Turkey has gone through. One might say that he approached the notions of reconstruction, loss, novelty, transformation and preservation from this vantage point. However considering that the issues he contemplated are still relevant in our discussion of urban strategies today, not only does *Beş Şehir* provide an aesthetic insight into contemporary studies of urban transformation, but it also reminds us that the notion of urban transformation is necessarily informed by the inexhaustible debate on how to modernize as far as architecture, current urban strategies, and aesthetics are concerned.

Tanpınar's inexhaustible theory on the preservation of culture in designing new cities and transforming the existing ones should inspire contemporary architects and designers. Urban transformation is surely a part of Turkey's ongoing modernization process as rapid urban transformation that takes place all over Turkey including five cities subject to *Beş Şehir* exemplify. Therefore, contemporary architects and designers first must know the modernization history of Turkey, which extends into present, and secondly, they need to keep in mind that their new projects as part of the ongoing urban transformation are necessarily informed by this modernization process. Having such an awareness would endow them with a critical approach and a wider scope in both understanding and appreciating the existing historical sites and a fresh insight as to how one can create new sites and buildings that are in dialogue with the past culture.

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