

The House: Beyond Residing

On the Book by Seyhan Kurt *From Household to Home State: Architecture, Arrangement, and Practice in “Turkish House”**

Ahmet Testici**

Translated by Ahmet Testici and Ali Tacar***

The house means much more than protection from the dangers of the outside, satisfying our daily needs and giving material meaning to its existence as a means of status or as an economic value. Whatever type of residence we live in, from the reasons we prefer this place to how we arrange it, from the colors that we choose for the interior to our economic strategies, from our preferences for evaluating time to how we host guests, all of these indicate that this place has meaning for us beyond just “living.” All objects, large and small, used in a house that is ready to be settled or settled, the ways they are arranged, their colors, sizes, weights and positions, give us substantial clues about the social, cultural, psychological and political orientations of the persons who live in the house.

When we step into a house, the smell or odorlessness gives us an idea about the daily life of the people of the house. Examples include how often cleaning and cooking are done, the regular activities in the home, the eating habits and economic status of the people who live there, whether the person has an obsession with hygiene, or whether the house is used as a motel just to spend the night. As it is seen most things are largely understandable by means of the smell of the house. Such tips, which help us to realize whether the household adopts a traditional or modern lifestyle, may not be enough to understand the complex cultural patterns of some societies.

Seyhan Kurt’s book *From Household to Home State* traces the image of the “Turkish house,” which dates from the 19th century to the present day, historically, anthropologically, sociologically, architecturally, and economically. According to Kurt, this image has a direct relationship to collective memory. Therefore, the “Turkish house” has a meaning that refers to daily life here, as well as to

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** Mathematician and Literary Critic

*** Poet and Translator

architecture. The resources utilized by Kurt, who focuses on daily life as the center of his work, cover a wide range of topics, from art history to literature, anthropology to architecture, cinema to ancient Greek and Roman history. With this consciousness, the author has tried to reveal, using different disciplines, that the Turkish house cannot be understood under only material conditions, and he has approved an interdisciplinary method at each stage of his work.

From Household to Home State consists of three main chapters. However, before these chapters the author investigates the concepts of “while” and “time” by giving examples from Anatolian life, Turkish literature, thought, and cinema under the title of “In Respect of While, Time and Urban Space.” According to him, these basic concepts are some of the most important arguments in comprehending the historical, social and economic processes that a society goes through. In Istanbul and eventually in Anatolia, clock interiors of the household type and clock towers in the town square since the end of the 19th century have transformed the world of thought and individual-city relations. How this process occurred, including encountered problems, is explained comprehensively by using the texts of significant writers and thinkers, such as Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Ahmet Haşım, Norbert Elias, Jacques Ranciere, Orhan Pamuk, Georg Simmel, Theodor Adorno and Richard Sennett.

The first chapter of the book “Traditional Life: Architecture, History and Daily Practices,” describes in detail how traditional life practices affect structural elements and architectural forms. The author introduces a broad perspective by taking into account social relations and how the relations of the people who live in the house with nature and climate affect the building elements of the house, such as the windows, doors, roof, and bay windows. He studies why traditional Turkish houses have a “picturesque” appearance unlike other Mediterranean (Italy, Greece, etc.) houses. The subtitles in the main section mention the interior of traditional Turkish houses; the functions and arrangement of each room, such as the “hall,” “main room,” “selamlık” (the portion of a house reserved for men), “bridal room,” and “bathroom,” the daily activities here; and historical, architectural, and anthropological processes. The bathhouse and cuisine culture are investigated to the smallest details by making comparisons with other Mediterranean cultures. In other important subtitles, from the 19th century to the 1970s, courtyard and garden culture in various regions of Anatolia, daily activities here, wedding and funeral ceremonies, art history, anthropology, architecture and philosophical arguments are discussed.

The second chapter explains how modern houses are used and arranged in Turkey under the influence of urban life and modernist/post-modernist tendencies, consumption tendencies and habits, and domestic relations, supported by field studies. The author especially concentrates on the kitchen and living room, because these two places give shape to the social, cultural, and economic cycle in today's Turkish homes. The material qualities and conditions of daily life are especially reflected on for these two places of the house. According to Kurt, all these elements contained in the phenomenon of consumption, from the choice of furniture to the color preferences of the walls, from the use of a microwave oven or coffee table to the use of curtains, give some information about the mental, political and socio-cultural tendencies of the people who live in the house. In the other subtitle, the author attaches importance to the arrangement of the house and economic strategies in immigrant houses, especially people of Turkish origin who live in France and Germany. It is explained that immigrants economize in foreign countries where they have stayed and how they contribute to their homes in Turkey, by giving examples of market and grocery shopping, the items which they use at home. The important point that Kurt draws attention to is that immigrants continue saving until they are retired, and this behavior of saving is directly related to the plan of securing themselves with the investment they will make when they return to Turkey. For this reason, immigrant houses are simply arranged, for the most part.

In the third and final chapter "Urban Ambiguous: Street, Neighborhood and Balcony," the author begins by drawing up a general framework of the relations between 19th-century street life and domestic life. According to Kurt, streets, especially situated in large cities, have not been an economic (rational) and cultural determinant of daily urban life in Turkey. Nevertheless, the usual phenomena and events of life, such as politics, business, gossip, weddings, funerals and births, have reflected representative and traditional characteristics that separate the street from other places of the city and give shape via tools like language. Regarding the present day, one of the important findings that the author discusses is that streets with changed physical conditions affect the function of the house and neighborhood relations in a more rational way. The author mentions that the "natural" formation of streets began to disappear when gated communities and shopping centers replaced the streets in today's cities, and he observes that the city (in view of the neighborhood concept) has developed a static nature. Another crucial issue in this section is how the functions and forms of balconies

have changed in so far as the opportunity of urban life diversifies, multiplies, and affects the time spent at home.

Art and architecture historian Dr. Jale N. Erzen, who regards this book as “one of the closest to human and richest books I have read about architecture in recent years,” notes that the author looks at Pierre Bourdieu’s “habitus” from various perspectives when writing the transformation of “Household” into “Home State” with scientific evidence, poetic comments, and philosophical thoughts. Not only special ritual situations such as deaths, births and weddings, but also the most simple and intimate phenomena of everyday life are illustrated in photographs, while comments of various thinkers from around the world are also presented. The most general and most special as well as individual and social elements of life are investigated deeply in this work. According to Prof. Erzen, an important emphasis of the book is the discussion of body-space-object relations from the point of view of architectural quality.

Seyhan Kurt’s book *From Household to Home State* is expected to be a classic book for readers who want to learn about the transformations, the activities, arrangements, and consumption tendencies of Turkish houses. Besides, it is attractive also for those who want information about “to be resident” or “nomadic life,” how functions of the house have changed, and what the house and the space mean today. Briefly stated, this work has successfully clarified how the boundaries of tradition and modernity have become blurred in the house and what the house and the space mean for those living in contemporary or past times.