

# Visionary Representation as an Anomaly

Indeterminate Trajectories in Early Republican  
Turkey's Art and Architecture Environment

avangard  
erken cumhuriyet türkiyesi  
güzelleşen istanbul  
kararsız izlekler  
vizyoner temsil  
**avant-garde**  
**early republican turkey**  
**güzelleşen istanbul (beautifying  
istanbul)**  
**indeterminate trajectories**  
**visionary representation**

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Citation: Kurtuluş, E. (2022). "Visionary Representation as an Anomaly" UOU scientific journal #03,  
82-91.

ISSN: 2697-1518. <https://doi.org/10.14198/UOU.2022.1.08>

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Date of reception: 01/03/2022  
Date of acceptance: 06/05/2022



Bu çalışma sanat-tasarım-mimarlık kuramı literatüründe çeşitli yaklaşımlar, üretimler, aktörler ve söylemler üzerinden ele alınan eleştirel-yaratıcı vizyoner/avangard tavrın Türkiye bağlamını tartışmayı hedefler. Gelecek ve yeni fikrinin, olası kültürler arası etkileşimin, hangi yerel temsiller üzerinden okunabileceğini araştırır. Bu kapsamlı önerme dahilinde, yukarıdan aşağı bir yaklaşım yerine bir takım varsayımlar/sezgiler üzerinden kurulan “kararsız izleklerin” tartışmanın odağındaki kavramlara ve bağlama dair potansiyel ilişki ve etkileşimleri görünür kılabilmesi; üst ölçekte vizyonerlik tanımının kendisi, temsil ve eleştirinin rolü ile birlikte özelde Türkiye bağlamına ilişkin açılımlar, tarifler ve tartışmalar açabileceği önerilmektedir. Araştırmanın içeriği ve yöntemi bir bütün olarak kurgulanmakta, öngörülen etkileşimler ve çağrışımlar üzerinden şekillenen izleklerin götürdüğü noktalar haritalanmaktadır. Bu metin, geniş bir araştırma/yoğunlaşma alanının bir parçası olarak kurgulanmış, söz konusu bağlam içinde “vizyoner” kavramının etkileştiği diğer kavramlardan “avangard”, bu çalışmanın kapsamı olarak ele alınmıştır. Bu bağlamda avangard temasıyla birlikte, tarihsel avangardın zamandaş Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi tartışma için zamansal bir izlek tariflerken, Güzelleşen İstanbul adlı kentsel/mimari propaganda kitapçığı temsil odaklı bir izlek sunmaktadır.

This paper aims to discuss the Turkish context of the critical-creative visionary/avant-garde approach, which is analysed through various approaches, productions, actors, and discourses in the literature of art and architecture theory. It questions which local representations can be instrumentalized to handle the idea of the future, new and cultural interactions. Within this large research question, as a methodology, “indeterminate trajectories” built on a set of assumptions/intuitions and associative networks make open-ended discussions possible offering alternative perspectives on the concepts and contexts rather than a top-down strategy. In this way, it is suggested that the re-definition of the visionary, together with the role of representation and criticism, can open up some discussions regarding the Turkish context in particular. The content and the methodology of research are designed as a whole, and conceptual extensions opened up by the trajectories are mapped. This paper may be considered as a part of a larger research or thinking process. Here, the trajectories formed by the relationship between “the visionary” and “the avant-garde” are deciphered and their conceptual extensions are discussed. In this respect, the Early Republican Period of Turkey, contemporaneous with the modernist avant-garde in Europe, defines a temporal trajectory for the discussion, while the propagandistic booklet *Güzelleşen İstanbul* (Beautifying Istanbul) presents a visual-imaginary trajectory.

## INTRODUCTION: INDETERMINATE TRAJECTORIES

In the mainstream literature of art and architecture theory, traces of visionary approaches can be observed through various thoughts, schools, actors, productions, and discourses. It is possible to say that this creative-critical approach which takes the “future” as a design input has a long history, even if it intensifies or fades in some specific times. From Boullée’s monumental structures to Constant’s New Babylon, from Piranesi’s inspirational drawings to Russian Constructivists’ provocative paintings, all these show prospective and visionary approaches (see Collins, 1968; Goodman, 2008; Spiller, 2008; Betsky, 2008; Witzgall and Stakemeir, 2017; Gadanho, 2017). However, within this fragmented continuity in time, it can be seen that visionary situations, activities, or designs related to the Turkish context do not easily find a place, and are often left out of mainstream theoretical discussions. Although this paper doesn’t make a claim to position the Turkish context within the aforementioned framework, it pursues traces of visionary approaches in Turkish art and architecture. This paper aims to decipher both the alternative methods and instruments for pursuing a creative-critical visionary approach in the

Turkish context from a bottom-up perspective. The questions such as “can we talk about the visionary-being in the art and architecture environment of Turkey”, “how this approach or tendency can be described”, and “which local representations can be instrumentalized to handle the idea of the future, new and cultural interaction” emerges as guiding questions for the research.

As a methodology, this research is based on a set of connected assumptions conceptualized as “indeterminate trajectories”, and paths, networks, extensions arising from these trajectories. To find a way within the larger research question, the proposed method of “indeterminate trajectories” makes open-ended discussions possible rather than a top-down approach. It seems to be a convenient method to infiltrate/deconstruct claims such as “defining the visionary in the art and architecture environment of Turkey” or “positioning the Turkish context within the mainstream discussions” by reconstructing the scale of the research within the scope of this paper.

De Certeau (1984) states that readers of the text or walkers of the city produce “indeterminate trajectories” that do not coincide with the predetermined setting of the text or the city. Both the reader and the walker create their own narratives and methods

of experience. Indeterminate trajectories that allow various associations, encounters, and anomalies also provide the production of new meanings and critical knowledge. This paper also adopts this concept in a similar sense. The trajectories described in this paper also strengthen the potential/possible expansion, and open-ended character of the research as well as providing descriptions of the concepts in question, such as “the visionary”, “the role of representation and criticism” or “Turkish artistic and architectural context”.

As a reflection of the bottom-up methodology, first of all, the relationship - or the potential of equivalence - with the concept of “avant-garde” has been examined in order to provide an opening to the concept of the visionary. With this assumption and an examination of “visionary is avant-garde”, the Early Republican period emerges as a temporal trajectory to discuss the visionary/avant-garde tendencies in the Turkish context. Then, with speculations on the power of visual representations as the channel where visionary approaches are most visible, the temporal trajectory deviates to a visual/imaginary trajectory focussing on *Güzelleşen İstanbul* (Beautifying Istanbul) booklet published in the 1940s. The content and the methodology of research are designed as a whole, and conceptual extensions opened up by the trajectories are mapped (Fig. 1).

This paper forms a part of a larger research or thinking process. Here, the trajectories formed by the relationship between “the visionary” and “the avant-garde” are deciphered and their conceptual extensions are discussed. Different from the “visionary-avant-garde” relationship or “visionary is avant-garde” assumption, it is also possible to establish different indeterminate trajectories and

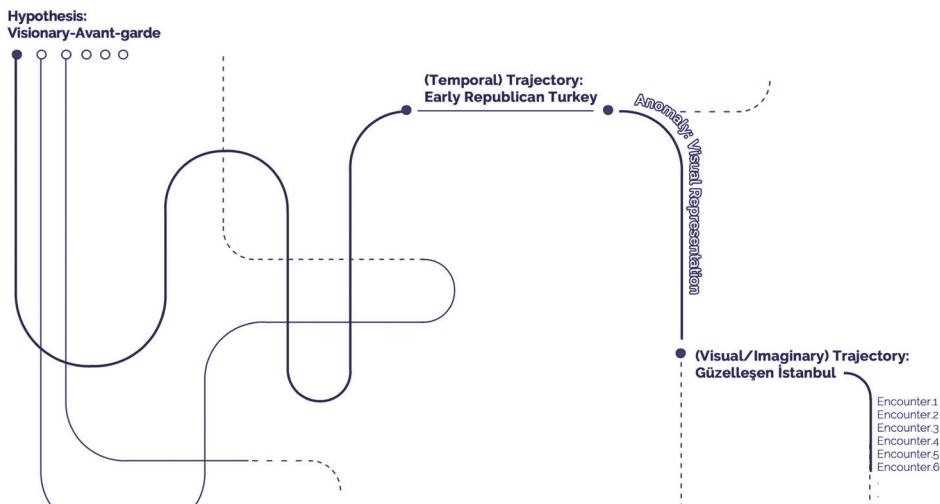


Fig. 1 - Diagrammatic Outline of the Paper.

alternative meaning frameworks based on alternative conceptual sets such as visionary-utopian, visionary-experimental, visionary-innovative.

## HYPOTHESIS: VISIONARY - AVANT- GARDE

Although the concept of “visionary” in the literature of art and architecture theory is frequently used as an adjective describing the pioneering and prospective approaches that started in the 1900s and flourished with the practices after the 1960s, the content of the concept itself is less discussed. On the other hand, “avant-garde”, which is another characterization of similar practices, is a concept with broad definitions. It is widely discussed and comprehensive theoretical frameworks have been produced. The fact that the concepts of visionary and avant-garde are used together in the definition of futurists, surrealists, dadaists, or Russian constructivists at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the followers of movements such as Situationism, Fluxus, and Pop Art after the 1960s, it might be possible to draw a general conceptual framework to define the visionary through the avant-garde concept.

According to the literary critic Bürger's (1984) definition, the avant-garde is a pioneering art movement that defends the autonomy of art and has a critical attitude towards authority. Bürger (1984) also asserts that the lifespan of the avant-garde is limited to the period between the two world wars. Avant-garde is described as a kind of art movement; thus, his rigid conceptualization is found problematic in that it imposes an “absolute beginning” and adopts a “finiteness”, despite establishing a comprehensive definition. In this respect, one of the harshest critics of Bürger's definition of the

avant-garde is Hal Foster. Defining the avant-garde as a shared expression of artistic and political forms, Foster (2009) proposes to “develop Bürger's theory by multiplying it with its ambiguities, and especially implying the temporal change between the historical and the new avant-garde with a complex ‘projection-reconstruction’ relationship”. Foster reconstructs the definition of the avant-garde by making it more universal and elaborating its content. As defined by Foster, the avant-garde appears as an approach or tendency rather than a movement. Considering that the concept of “the visionary” was used by many to describe the practices of architects such as Bouleé or Ledoux in the 18th century, or even for the Egyptian pyramids, it becomes possible to establish a stronger relationship between the definition of “Foster's avant-garde” and “the visionary”.

Considering the conceptual closeness established with the avant-garde, it would not be wrong to describe “the visionary” as including a pioneering role, a prospective and progressive character, an urge to produce the new, an inspiring power, a critical attitude, making use of representation. In this context, the assumption of “the visionary is avant-garde” or “the avant-garde is the visionary” is instrumentalized to question the Turkish context in a temporal dimension with the association of the Early Republican period.

## (TEMPORAL) TRAJECTORY: EARLY REPUBLICAN TURKEY

In the context of Turkey, it would not be wrong to say that the first decades following the establishment of the Republic defined the period in which a critical view of the past was most intense, where innovative approaches and reformations were embraced, pioneering

activities, actors and productions were appreciated, and hopeful visions of the future were strengthened. Therefore, the Early Republican Period, with the cultural-political climate it created, emerges as a temporal trajectory in which the visionary-avant-garde discussion can be directed. The establishment of the Republic created a disjunction in Turkish art and architecture, as it did in all social and cultural fields, and set the ground for a period in which every reminder of the old (together with the old state structure) was rejected and new ones proposed. It can also be argued that the “ideal” of the Republic to create a new civilization/ideology necessitated being “visionary” in a sense. Accordingly, various visionary groups and design approaches, which were also supported and promoted by the government emerged, because art and architecture have the power to transform and create areas/spaces in which society is directly involved.

On the other hand, the 1920s and 30s, immediately following the establishment of the republic, coincided with the period in which the modernist avant-garde movement in Europe matured and experienced its golden age. While a “government-supported” change/transformation project and criticism were being put forward in the new regime in Turkey, the avant-gardes in Europe opposed all kinds of authority, rejected power and declared the autonomy of art. As Bozdoğan (2001) emphasizes, “Given the nature of the relationship between modernism and the state under the unique circumstances of Early Republican Turkey, the extent to which young Turkish artists and architects constituted an ‘avant-garde’ is a contentious issue (...) The avant-garde had exalted the creativity of the freethinking individual, not that of the conformist. It had embraced the abstract and the universal

in art, not the figurative and the local. Such a celebration of art as an autonomous, individualistic, often unpopular creative act was anathema to the republican belief in art as an expression of national ideals” (Bozdoğan, 2001). As an illustration of this, in his articles published in RPP’s<sup>1</sup> magazine *Ülkü* (Ideal), leading art critic Ali Sami Boyar criticized the motto of the avant-garde movement, “art for art”, and expressed the dubious attitude of the republic toward the avant-garde in general. Boyar (1934), emphasizing the need for a national art, writes that “We need artworks that will manifest our national epics, determine our national honor, and engrave our revolution to the history”.

Like many other artist groups of the 1930s, Group D painters, led by artists such as Abidin Dino and Nurullah Berk, sided with the RPP’s cultural program and exhibited their formal and abstract experiments, featuring common folkloric and nationalist themes of the period, in the Revolution and Arts exhibition organized by the government (Bozdoğan, 2001).

Similarly, the tendency of young architects to secure their cultural-elite status and professional character by conforming to dominant political ideologies turned into an anti-avant-garde attitude. This attitude seems to have prevented the emergence of an organic avant-garde movement among Turkish architects (Baydar Nalbantoğlu, 1989). Therefore, there seems to be an intellectual opposition to the avant-garde movement. On the other hand, it was possible to observe that the cubist attitude became dominant in Turkish painting, where the geometrical arrangements of the Russian constructivists and the use of colors were emulated, techniques such as montage and collage were applied, and the paper space was diversified. Moreover, it became possible to read the spatial characteristics of the modernist avant-garde in civil and institutional Turkish architecture. Bozdoğan (2001) affirms this view by asserting that “In the favourable ‘revolutionary’ climate of the Kemalist revolution, the references that Turkish artists, architects, and intellectuals made

to technology, industry, and the ‘machine age’ often did evoke the aesthetic and theoretical premises of the modernist avant-garde”.

Although the cultural-political climate of the Early Republic rejected the concept of avant-garde, which it originally claimed to diverge from, it can be observed that the artists and architects of the Republican period adopted and even internalized the language used by the avant-garde in terms of representation. It can be said that these pioneering artistic productions of Turkish artists and architects intersect, resemble, and share in many points with the avant-garde art and architecture that they were supposedly opposed to (Fig. 2). A critical question emerges, “does visual representation create an anomaly with its position above culture and ideologies?”.

## ANOMALY: VISUAL REPRESENTATION

According to Patt (2010), images are unreliable productions built on slippery ground, but they are just as strong and open to interaction. They are fragmented and require interaction. They are achronic, even live, die, transform, change direction. They stimulate multiple trajectories, not a singular path. Images can simultaneously process both predefined and constantly reorganized information structures (Patt, 2010).

The representational language and the images used by the Early Republican artists and architects seem to reflect certain interactions and movements in the visual/imaginary cultural environment executed by the avant-garde approach. As a cultural production in which the new, desires, and dreams are revealed (even if its intellectual foundations seem to be opposed), representation creates a kind of anomaly in the context in question and diverts the discussion from a temporal

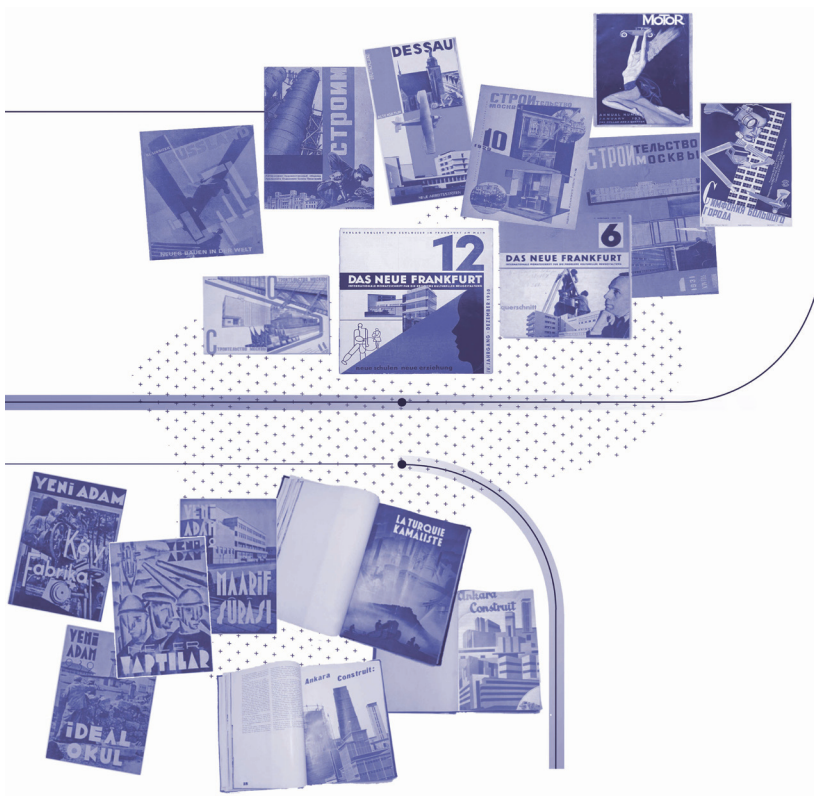


Fig. 2 - Intersections and Resemblances Between Republican Turkish and “Avant-garde” Visual Representations.

trajectory to an imaginary/visual one. So, what makes it meaningful to discuss the artistic-architectural practices of the Republic together with its contemporary avant-garde approaches in this context? On what basis can the claim to produce an "ideal" or "vision" be made?

## (VISUAL/IMAGINARY) TRAJECTORY: GÜZELLEŞEN İSTANBUL (BEAUTIFYING İSTANBUL)

It is possible to find traces of the avant-garde representational language in many visual representations produced in the Early Republican period. From artistic paintings to periodicals and propagandistic booklets, cubist, fauvist, or constructivist aesthetics became prominent. The paintings of artists such as Nurullah Berk or Fikret Mualla, cultural magazines like *Yeni Adam* (The New Man), and propagandistic magazines like *La Turquie Kémaliste* can be given as examples (Fig. 3). Within the scope of this paper, the emphasis on the contradictory nature of "the government-supported visionary/avant-garde" makes it plausible to focus on propagandistic publications as anomalous visual representations. The booklet titled *Güzelleşen İstanbul* (Beautifying İstanbul) can be scrutinized as a lesser-known propagandistic publication to decipher the relationship between Early Republican visual representational language and the visionary-avant-garde; it constitutes the visual/imaginary trajectory for the research.

Published in 1943 by Abidin Daver, Safa Günay, Mazhar Nazım Resmor, *Güzelleşen İstanbul* presents a broad perspective on urban scale operations carried out during the President İsmet İnönü's period. While it played a part in legitimizing the controversial

urban/architectural projects, it is also highly interesting as a form of visual representation in terms of using relatively new and visionary representational tools and approaches adopted by the avant-gardes in Europe; such as montage, collage, diagramming,

mapping, comparative photography and so on (Fig. 4). In addition, the fact that Resmor - who designed the graphics of the booklet - received an art degree in Paris during the feverish period of the avant-garde movement (such as Group D painters who



Fig. 3 - Examples of Common Visual Language of Early Republican Period.



Fig. 4 - Pages from *Güzelleşen İstanbul*.

were practitioners of the visionary attitude in Turkish art), makes this publication a focus of discussion.

Despite the fact that *Güzelleşen İstanbul* is designed as a propaganda booklet (with frequent bold expressions of respect to the president), the widespread use of representation techniques used by the avant-garde/visionary artists opposing the authority, once again reveals the ambiguous-contradictory situation that has been highlighted throughout this research. The role of representation as a binding and collaboration between opposite intellectual poles in producing “the new” and “envisioning the future” should be emphasized.

Following the trajectory that *Güzelleşen İstanbul* established in terms of representation through its visual and graphic productions makes different encounters possible and strengthens the argument of this discussion about “being visionary” and the “role of criticism and representation”. In this regard, techniques such as the use of paper space, montage, collage, diagramming, mapping, and comparative photography evoke the new in its context and reveal a critical view, for the visual/imaginary trajectory.

## ENCOUNTER.1: PAPER SPACE

*Güzelleşen İstanbul*, with its aim of political propaganda, aimed to create a holistic imagination for the reader about the situation that is wanted to be told, as well as the aim of expressing the content clearly. For this reason, it is possible to say that the page layout/paper space was established by assembling different narrative forms, and different sources related to the plot, which were brought together to capture a holistic image. Photos, drawings, collages, and blocks of text are juxtaposed, overlaid, and sometimes combined with a

hand drawing. In the background or in the parts where the paper space is bare, line sequences or colored backgrounds are used to complete the narrative graphically. The text/announcement from a newspaper is presented with the image of the newspaper itself. In the background of the text where the newly opened roads are mentioned, a long road is depicted as a blur.

The hybridization of textual and visually produced narratives and their transformation into a holistic narrative highlights the visionary attitude as strategies that increase the reader’s “imaginary/

imaginative experience” (Fig. 5).

## ENCOUNTER.2: MONTAGE/COLLAGAGE

Collages and montages produced analogously using different photographs appear as the shortcut technique frequently used in the booklet to give an image of the envisaged beautifying of Istanbul. In the Early Republican Period, the “cleaning” of the dilapidated buildings around the monuments and the “revitalization” of the monuments are common motifs of urban discourses. Photographs



Fig. 5 - Use of Paper Space.



Fig. 6 - Collage.

containing two different elements, such as dilapidated buildings and monuments, are separated, collaged, and an abstract representation of the new image is created by cutting these two characters apart or removing one of them completely. The building group cut from an old photograph is combined with a “modern” building produced with a drawing, and the urban image of the near future is manifested with the title “Istanbul tomorrow” attached to this combination.

Representational operations such as cutting, subtracting, separating, and combining relate to urban operations at a metaphorical level and reveal the imaginary experience of the “new” (Fig. 6).

### ENCOUNTER.3: DIAGRAMMING/MAPPING

Marking and indicating some specific situations in groups of photographs or drawings with hand-drawn arrows and lines are the common diagrammatical techniques which support the narrative content. Sometimes in an aerial photograph, for example, places that are planned to be demolished or rebuilt are marked, colored, and associated with another image placed nearby using an arrow or line. Some spatial relations that are not yet visible are made intelligible by this means and a conceptual planning/mapping of the spaces targeted to be produced is made.

The visionary role of diagrammatic representation, at the point of discussing the near future over the present situation, is made evident among the pages (Fig. 7).

### ENCOUNTER.4: MODELLING/RENDERING

As timeless playmakers of the



Fig. 7 - Diagramming/Mapping.



Fig. 8 - Rendering/Modelling.

narrative in architecture, visuals and models are representations that reflect the projections of architects/planners trying to

establish the clearest image of the near future together with the “ideal” life in it, is also used in *Güzelleşen İstanbul*. Models are



sources of pride and success for “government leaders” as ‘semi-built’ projects, and photos taken around the models of a project that may never be realized are published full-page. Similarly, such renderings take the reader into the image of the future by conveying the details of the project such as its atmosphere, color, texture, and so on (Fig. 8).

### ENCOUNTER.5: FIGURES/PAINTINGS

Architectural drawings depicting the future projects, supplementary figures, sketches, and paintings of the narrative are also included in *Güzelleşen İstanbul* (Fig. 9). These images, which at first glance obviously emulate avant-garde styles such as cubism or fauvism, create a wide range of representation techniques in the booklet. The drawings are juxtaposed with avant-garde productions, not only in terms of technique but also in terms of content and vision. As a reflection of the changing political regime in Turkey, the targeted social change, desired daily life, strong social structure, new individual roles, and ideal body are manifested through these figures and sketches arrayed between the pages. New spaces bringing about a new society and the individual.

### ENCOUNTER.6: COMPARATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

Places that have been “transformed”, “cleaned” or “revitalized” in the recent past are narrated with comparative photographs in *Güzelleşen İstanbul*, which conveys the state of Istanbul’s gradual “beautification” in line with its title. A photograph showing the dilapidated buildings in front of the New Mosque and a wide perspective photograph of the proposed emptied square are placed side by side and the



Fig. 9 - Figures/Paintings.



Fig. 10 - Comparative Photography.

transition from the old to the new is highlighted by an arrow. The elimination of a building group that is claimed to make pedestrian access difficult is also expressed

with the same technique. These comparisons, presented under the title “yesterday and today”, occupy a considerable space in the booklet.

Sense of reality and credibility created by the power of photography combined with the dramatic contrast in the presentation of the old and the new are the founding strategies of the "critical view" represented in *Güzelleşen İstanbul* (Fig. 10).

## EVALUATION: ARGUMENTS, DEFINITIONS, ASSOCIATIONS

In this paper, two interrelated trajectories - temporal and visual-imaginary - arising from the original conceptual relationship outlined between the avant-garde and the visionary, have been discussed in the Turkish context using *Güzelleşen İstanbul* to pursue the traces and modes of visionary-being. Possible extensions and potential interactions of the discussion are alluded to in this paper, with some concepts such as representation language, critical view, experience, spatiality, the new, and so on. Following the first hypothesis established on the visionary-avant-garde relationship and two trajectories that arose, some arguments become prominent for the visionary-being in the Turkish context.

*Güzelleşen İstanbul* showed that the prospective activities and projects are represented with both the visionary-avant-garde vocabulary of techniques/methods and content. Considering the discourses of Turkish artists or politicians, it can be seen that this is far from being of explicit political interest, but rather a cultural interaction or influence. The avant-garde visual language was still representing the new in Turkey decades after it was born in Europe and the Soviet Union. So much so that, while those avant-garde artists were rejecting authority, the Republic of Turkey instrumentalized their visual language and representation techniques almost as a

governmental policy to promote the new regime and socio-cultural environment in propagandistic publications. At this point, the visionary representation emerges as an anomaly that re-defines the opposition of poles by negotiating them. This shows that predetermined conceptual, temporal, and cultural frameworks or meta-narratives may not be functional or sufficient to reveal alternative intercultural networks.

Lastly, it should be emphasized that representation is an important component of visionary-being in terms of its prospective quality and relationship with an idea of the future. Visionary representation comes to the fore in putting the alternative against the rejected, the old government regime in the context of the Republic of Turkey. It should also be stated that the critical view is a driving force in visionary-being, because the claim of rejection contains an intellectual opposition, conflict, and criticism in itself. The visionary attitude is not completely independent of the socio-cultural and ideological context. It defines its existence through the situation that it frequently rejects/revises, at the same time as it exists with its negative. In this context, it can be claimed that the past has a founding role in the visionary issue as much as the idea of the future.

The open-ended structure of the research allows the establishment of different trajectories that allows us to expand and extend the definitions of the visionary. By this means, it is aimed to create multi-dimensional arguments where the meanings of some concepts are clarified and re-established. The main suggestion of the research is the establishment of a pluralistic discussion environment enriched by increasing the range of potential associations.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper is prepared in the "Visionary

Design and Architecture" PhD course instructed by Prof. Dr. Ayşe Şentürer in Istanbul Technical University, Graduate School, Architectural Design Program. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Ayşe Şentürer for her comments and support.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Founded by M. K. Atatürk, Republican People's Party (RPP) is the founding political party of Republic of Turkey.