

Gecekondu as a state of disorder

About the palimpsestuous nature of their
disarray

Gecekondru as a state of disorder

About the palimpsestuous nature of their disarray

Nikki de Zeeuw

4431499

Delft University of Technology

Faculty of Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences

Borders & Territories

2022-2023

A blanket of materials covers the hillside; row upon row of concrete are molded and fused to the landscape, forming an abstract pattern of shades. These shades force the observer to contemplate a certain arrangement or plan, although this does not seem discernable. M. Christine Boyer¹ argues that this manner of disarray causes a certain reaction; one of discomfort, and even inquietude. This same discomfort can be wholly found in “Osiris und Isis” by Anselm Kiefer; an overlapping discomfort comprised of not just the visual impact, but also the concept of the visualization itself. A concept so inherently immoral to the human experience, that the subject intrinsically comes with a feeling of discomfort. For “Osiris und Isis” one interpretation of this concept translates to the German struggle with the national legacy after World War II², for the *gecekond* this means the fundamental failure to provide resources equitably and justly.

The precedent of “Osiris und Isis” is one of countless others; as this discomfort is a topic often idolized in the arts. Examples range from the works of Pollock, Rothko, and Bourgeois, to literature like “The Trial” by Kafka, and even music such as composer John Cage’s chance operations and indeterminate structures.

Through different manners of artistic expression³, artists communicate the sensation of being adrift and disoriented in a cosmos of entropy. They have used these techniques to elicit feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and even fear in the viewer.⁴

“Because it is without order, it destroys our self-confidence and it has robbed us of the power to make our experience coherent. When visual responses are warped, visual creativeness is impaired.”¹





However, it is noteworthy that the experience of disorder and uncertainty has the potential to be a catalyst for transformation and emancipation. Artists suggest that if we approach chaos with an unprejudiced disposition and a willingness to embrace the enigmatic, we can achieve personal development and a deeper understanding of the world around us⁵. Through their work, artists invite the viewer to confront the discomfort of chaos, to experience it directly, and to consider its potential for transformation. By exploring the themes of chaos and disorder, artists encourage us to question our assumptions and beliefs, and to embrace new possibilities. In doing so, they invite us to step out of our comfort zones and to confront the unknown, thereby challenging us to expand our perspectives and to consider new ways of being. As such, can we not see the builders of the gecekondus as artists in their own right; inviting us to revel in the discomfort of chaos?

This once again brings us to Kiefer's painting: Kiefer has built up the surface of the painting using a variety of materials. These materials are applied in thick, rough layers, creating a dense and complex texture that evokes a sense of decay and destruction.

The layers are arranged in such a way that they suggest the passage of time and the accumulation of history. Some of the layers have been left exposed, while others have been partially covered or obscured, creating a sense of fragmentation and incompleteness. The resulting effect is one of depth and complexity, as if the painting contains within it the residue of a thousand years of human experience.⁶ As such, the layering in "Osiris und Isis" is a key element in its ability to evoke a powerful sense of dislocation and disarray. This layering is something that cannot be separated, for the collective meaning of the piece would disappear through trying to understand the individual layers. This palimpsestuous reading is defined by Sarah Dillon as the antithesis to palimpsestic reading, whereby the different layers are separated, thus "unravel[ing] and destroy[ing] the palimpsest".⁷

Of a palimpsestuous nature

Thomas De Quincey's essay titled 'The palimpsest'⁸ introduces us, for a first time in literary history, to the notion of this new figurative entity, separated from its more pragmatic counterpart. De Quincey uses this metaphor to describe the layers of memory, experience, and meaning that accumulate over time, creating a rich tapestry of human existence. Through a reflection on reading a manuscript that had been erased and written over several times; he notes that even though the original text is no longer visible, its presence can still be felt through the faint traces and impressions left on the page. This leads him to reflect on the layers of experience and memory that shape our lives, and how they accumulate over time to create a complex and multi-dimensional reality. He argues that our memories and experiences are constantly being written over, but that they never truly disappear.⁹ Rather, they remain present, shaping our perceptions and understanding of the world. He suggests that the key to understanding the palimpsest of the mind is to embrace the complexity and richness of our experiences, and to acknowledge the importance of the past in shaping the present.

This layering is something that can in and of itself be found in the gecekondu as well in different manners. A complex layering of history and memory can be seen in the physical construction of these settlements. Gecekondu, often built gradually over time, are a complex palimpsestuous creation, composed of different architectural styles and building materials that reflect the changing tastes and preferences of the residents.¹⁰ Yet, the layering of the

gecekondu extends beyond the physical structure, as it is also evident in the cultural and social practices of their residents. These communities are often a mosaic of people with different cultural practices and memories, leading to a rich mix of traditions that manifest in the food, music, and other cultural practices of the community.¹¹

The layering of history and memory in gecekondu has important implications for urban planning and development. While the palimpsestuous nature of gecekondu is perceived to be an obstacle to development since they occupy valuable land that could be put to more productive use, the rich layering of history and memory in gecekondu represents a unique cultural heritage that should be preserved and celebrated. Thus, the value of gecekondu should not be solely based on economic productivity but rather on the value of cultural heritage and diversity, which they possess. This is a difficult endeavor however, because the sheer foundations of the gecekondu seem ungraspable in traditional urbanistic terms.

"What is slum in the city landscape is of spontaneous origin. This very spontaneity makes the definition of slums difficult. Slums appear to be planless and even antiplan."¹²

On the palimpsestuous nature of disarray

In the context of disarray, the palimpsest can be extended to refer to the complex layering of history, memory, and experience that is present in chaotic and disorderly situations like the *gecekodu*. Disarray can take many forms, from the physical disarray of cluttered or chaotic environments to the emotional disarray of traumatic experiences or difficult personal transitions. In all of these cases, the experience of disarray is marked by a sense of confusion, ambiguity, and uncertainty. This sense of disorientation can be disconcerting and uncomfortable, but it can also be transformative and liberating, leading to new insights and perspectives on the world.¹³

At its core, the palimpsestuous nature of disarray is rooted in the idea that every experience, no matter how chaotic or disordered, is built upon a foundation of previous experiences and influences. In other words, every experience is a palimpsest of sorts, containing multiple layers of meaning and history that have shaped the way we see and interpret the world around us.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the palimpsestuous nature of disarray is the way in which it can reveal hidden patterns and connections between seemingly disparate events and experiences. By tracing the layers of history and meaning that underlie chaotic and disorderly situations, we can begin to uncover the deeper structures that govern our experiences of the world. In this sense, disarray can be seen as a kind of hidden order, waiting to be uncovered and deciphered. This is something that cannot

be uncovered by simply separating the layers, as one might be inclined to do, but can only be experienced through the analysis of the situation as a whole.

Another important aspect of the palimpsestuous nature of disarray is the way in which it can give rise to new forms of creativity and innovation. When we are confronted with situations of chaos and uncertainty, we are forced to think in new and different ways, to question our assumptions and preconceptions, and to find new solutions to the problems we face. This kind of creative thinking can be transformative, leading to new ideas, new perspectives, and new ways of being in the world. Something that has already been prevalent in *gecekodu* so far, and begs to be further explored in further (re)development.

At the same time, the palimpsestuous nature of disarray can also be deeply unsettling and disorienting. When we are confronted with situations of chaos and uncertainty, we can feel lost, overwhelmed, and disconnected from the world around us.¹⁴ This sense of disorientation can be profoundly uncomfortable, leading to feelings of anxiety, fear, and even despair.

Despite these challenges, the palimpsestuous nature of disarray has important implications for personal growth and transformation. By confronting chaos and disorder with an open mind and a willingness to embrace the unknown, we can begin to uncover the deeper meanings and connections that underlie our experiences of the world.¹⁵

Depictions of disarray in architecture

Disarray, as a theme in architecture, can be approached in different ways, from the use of unexpected materials to unconventional construction techniques or asymmetrical design. Architects have explored disarray as a means of questioning traditional notions of order and beauty in the built environment, often using the theme to critique the excesses of consumerism, globalization, or industrialization.

One of the most well-known movements to embrace disarray is Brutalism. Brutalist architecture emerged in the mid-20th century as a reaction to the excessive ornamentation and ostentatiousness of modernist architecture. Brutalism was characterized by its raw, honest use of materials, particularly concrete, and its emphasis on functionality and economy. Brutalist buildings often feature rough, unfinished surfaces, heavy, sculptural forms, and a rugged, brutal aesthetic that emphasizes the inherent qualities of the materials used.



One of the most famous examples of Brutalist architecture is the Barbican Centre¹⁶ in London. Completed in 1982, the Barbican is a sprawling complex of residential towers, cultural institutions, and public spaces. The Barbican's Brutalist design is characterized by its heavy use of raw, exposed concrete, a material that is often associated with disarray and decay. The building's rough, unfinished surfaces and austere, sculptural forms convey a sense of strength and permanence, but also of coldness and hostility.

Another example of Brutalism is the Habitat 67 complex¹⁷ in Montreal, Canada. Designed by Moshe Safdie and completed in 1967, Habitat 67 is a housing complex comprising 354 prefabricated concrete units. The building's design features a series of stacked, interlocking cubes, which give the complex a sense of disorder and instability. The units are arranged in a seemingly haphazard way, with some jutting out at different angles, giving the building a disorienting, chaotic quality. Despite its chaotic appearance, Habitat 67 is widely regarded as a masterpiece of Brutalist architecture and a unique example of modernist urban planning.

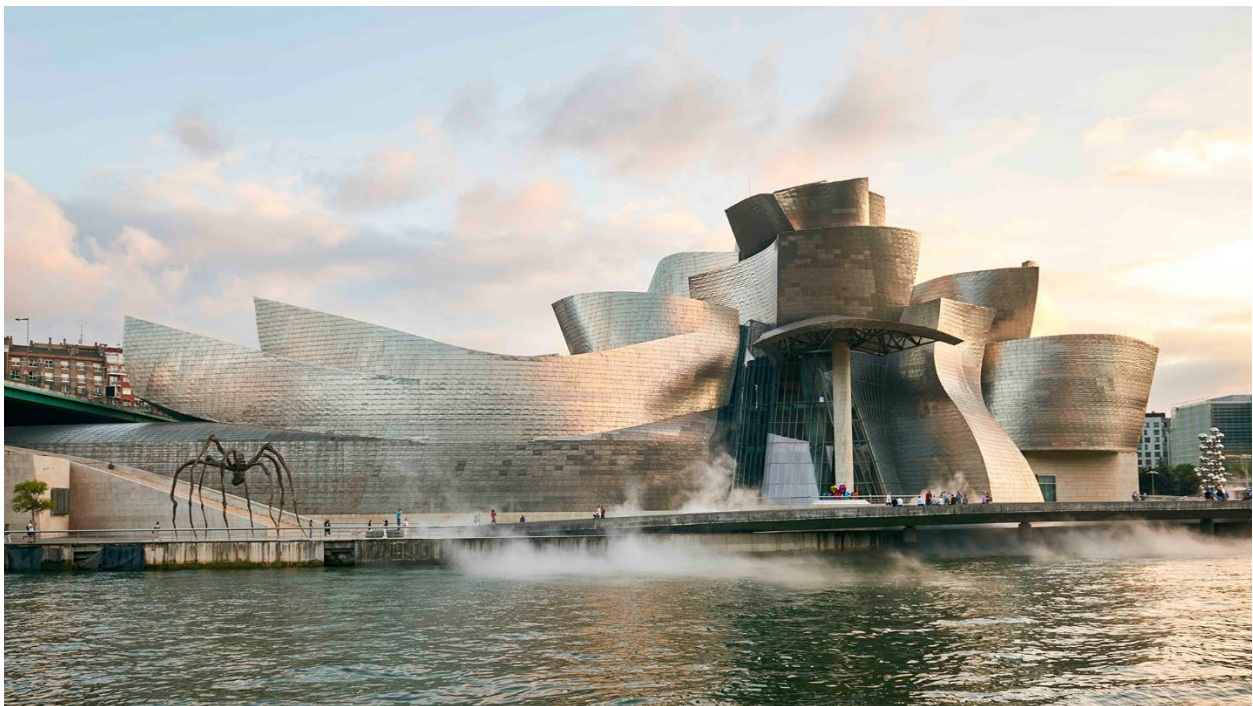


Another movement within the architecture of disarray is deconstructivism. From around the same time period as brutalism, deconstructivist architects sought to create buildings that would challenge traditional architectural conventions and disrupt the normative order of space.

One of the most iconic examples of deconstructivist architecture is the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao¹⁸, designed by Frank Gehry and completed in 1997. The museum's titanium-clad exterior is composed of curvilinear and angular forms that appear to have been randomly stacked on top of each other. The building's complex and irregular shape, as well as its use of industrial materials, stand in stark contrast to the city's traditional architecture, and the museum has become an emblem of the city's modernization and cultural transformation.

The Jewish Museum Berlin¹⁹, designed by Daniel Libeskind and completed in 1999, is another example of deconstructivist architecture. The museum's zinc-clad exterior is composed of fragmented and angular forms that jut out at odd angles, creating an impression of chaos and disarray. The building's interior spaces are also characterized by a sense of disorientation, with jagged planes and sharp angles that disrupt the viewer's sense of stability and order.

The Vitra Fire Station²⁰ by Zaha Hadid appears to be a chaotic and disordered structure. Its form is characterized by a complex interplay of geometric shapes and sharp angles, which create a sense of dynamic movement and instability. The building's main facade is a complex lattice of steel tubes and trusses, which creates a visual tension that is both dramatic and unsettling.





These buildings reflect the deconstructivist ethos of breaking down and rebuilding architectural conventions, creating disarray and a sense of fragmentation in the built environment. Through the use of unconventional forms and materials, deconstructivist architects sought to challenge traditional notions of what a building should look like and how it should function. The result is a form of architecture that is highly expressive, visually striking, and often disorienting.

While deconstructivist architecture has been praised for its innovative and experimental approach, it has also been criticized for being overly focused on form at the expense of function. Some have argued that deconstructivist buildings can be difficult to navigate and uncomfortable to occupy, which can make them less appealing to the public.



Concluding

As proposed the palimpsestuous nature of disarray can largely be found in the exploration of the uncomfortable; by not taking the individual layers apart, but viewing them as a whole and accepting this discomfort wholeheartedly. Many artists have used chaos and disorder as a means of expression and communication, evoking feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and even fear in the viewer; ranging from painters and sculptors, to composers and architects. By approaching chaos with an unprejudiced disposition and a willingness to embrace the enigmatic, we can expand our perspectives and consider new ways of being. Then we, again, come back to another proposition: are the builders of the gecekondu not artists in their own right, creating a complex palimpsestuous creation composed of different architectural styles and building materials? Their navigation of these intricate structure at least seems noteworthy in their own right.

Gecekondu settlements in Turkey are complex urban areas that have been shaped by a palimpsestuous process of overlapping historical and contemporary factors. The disarray in gecekondu areas can be understood as a result of multiple layers of social, economic, and political processes that have left their marks on these spaces. The palimpsestuous nature of these areas is characterized by the coexistence of formal and informal structures, legal and illegal practices, and public and private interests. The resulting disarray in these areas is not just a physical manifestation of minimal urban planning, but also reflects the social and economic disarray that exists in these communities.

To address the disarray in gecekondu settlements, it is necessary to develop comprehensive strategies that take into account the diverse and complex factors that have shaped these areas over time. This requires a multidisciplinary and participatory approach that engages the local community, acknowledges their needs and aspirations, and provides them with the necessary resources to improve their living conditions. Only by recognizing the palimpsestuous nature of the disarray in gecekondu settlements can we hope to develop effective and sustainable solutions that benefit the local communities and the broader society.

Sources

1. Boyer, M. C. (2006). The Body in the City: A discourse on cyberscience. *The Body in Architecture*, 26–47.
2. Rosenthal, M. (1987). Decoding Kiefer. *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, 19(4): 156-158
3. Münsterberg, Hugo. The Arts and Their Interrelations. Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948.
4. Virilio, Paul. Art and Fear. Continuum, 2003.
5. Langer, Susanne K. Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key. Routledge, 1953.
6. Biro, M. (2013). "Anselm Kiefer." Phaidon Press, 2017.
7. Dillon, Sarah. 2005. Reinscribing De Quincey's palimpsest: the significance of the palimpsest in contemporary literary and cultural studies. *Textual Practice*, 19(3): 243-263
8. De Quincey, Thomas. "The Palimpsest." Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings. Ed. Grevel Lindop. Oxford University Press, 1872. 276-290.
9. Connolly, Julian W. "The Palimpsest: Thomas De Quincey's Historical Imagination." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 52, no. 3, 1997, pp. 293-312.
10. McAdam, M., & Arsel, Z. (2013). Intergenerational consumption of transformation: The case of the gecekondü. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(4), 679-697.
11. Erol, R., & Tuncay, M. (2018). Reflections on the concept of urban memory and the case of Istanbul. *European Planning Studies*, 26(10), 1916-1931.

12. Stokes, C. J. (1962). A Theory of
Slums. *Land Economics*, 38(3), 187–
197.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3144581>
13. Tschumi, B. (1994). The Manhattan
transcripts. Academy Editions.
14. Lefebvre, H. (1996). Writings on
cities (E. Kofman & E. Lebas, Trans.).
Blackwell.
15. Ricoeur, P. (2006). Memory, history,
forgetting (K. Blamey & D. Pellauer,
Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
16. Safdie, M. (1967). Montreal.
17. Chamberlin, Powell, and Bon (1982).
London.
18. Gehry, F. (1997). Bilbao.
19. Libeskind, D. (1999). Berlin.
20. Hadid, Z. (1993). Weil am Rhein.