

WARMING

Güliz Ger

Making the New Familiar and Moral

As the adage goes, the only thing that does not change is change itself. In the contemporary world of global interconnections, change is even more significant. New objects, spaces, and procedures emerge incessantly. If “a universal human need is familiarity” (Tuan 1993: 113), these ever-changing life worlds pose a challenge. Faced with ongoing change and pervasive novelty, how do individuals cope? I will argue that the process of warming provides one way through which people negotiate change and stability, the new and the old, the unfamiliar and the familiar. In the cold, insecure, and risky (post)modern times, warming is a strategy which individuals use to make their daily lives more romantic, cozy, hospitable, inalienable, and authentic.

While much has been written on aesthetization of life, the feelings that are part and parcel of aesthetization have not been emphasized. However, the feeling of warmth is an aspect of aesthetics: the aesthetic experience involves not only sensory beauty but also feelings. Warming makes material culture humane. This essay claims that warming is crucial in shaping habitats, that is, warm aesthetics underlie the beautification of spaces. I discuss how people warm their spaces in order to make themselves feel at home in a changing world. Modern subjects shape their living spaces to make them romantically and nostalgically warm.

One example of warming appeared in a study of families who moved from the village to the town of Alaşehir in Turkey (Ger & Balım 2005). For mi-

grants to the town, the decoration of the home was not merely a visual beautification or a functional endeavor, but rather it entailed making the home both modern and warm. The homemakers refer to the ideal home as *güzel*, which literally means beautiful and good. A home is considered *güzel* if it is both modern and warm. These homemakers, keen on expressing their new urban identity, were also keen on maintaining their links to the village and what they considered to be the “warmth” of the old rural ways. Warming serves to connect life in Williams’ (1973) city of progress, modernization, and worldliness to the country of the past, old human and natural ways, and simple virtue, peace, and innocence.

The transition from the country to the city is negotiated by warming the modern urban home in various ways. One astonishing sight to us, researchers from bigger cities, was the abundance of embroideries, crocheted doilies, and laces in Alaşehir flats – much more than anywhere else we had seen. There were many more such covers in Alaşehir than in the village, to adorn the many modern goods in these city flats. These textiles, decorating the kitchens, bathrooms, and the rooms in both the rural and urban homes, provide a continuation of “tradition” in modern lives. Handmade laces, which are from a woman’s dowry, make the home in the town inalienable. The dowry entails textiles and other objects that mothers make and buy for their daughters. While modern kitchen appliances are nowadays also included in the dowry, the most important are the knit or embroidered textiles such as laces and pillow

covers.

Dowry links the generations as mother and daughter make many pieces together, or pass them along as heirlooms. It also links friends, relatives, and neighbors: daughters and mothers embroider with others, while they socialize in various homes, and embroideries are contributed as gifts by a large circle of people. The dowry thus records social relations of girlhood. And even though the contemporary dowry also includes electronics and modern furniture, the cherished handmade textiles epitomize “our customs” and embody the memory of social relations and things left behind – girlhood and village life.

Each and everything of value, such as crystal, china, decorative objects, gifts, souvenirs, encyclopedias, television, music sets, and appliances are placed on or covered with laces. Tables, show cabinets, sofas, and armchairs are also decorated with handmade textiles. Cold and “naked” factory-made electronics, from food processors, telephones, computers and televisions to washing machines, are dressed with doilies and embroideries. Delaney (1991) suggests that covers serve to conceal the naked materiality of objects which must be bound and kept in place. However, doilies are also used to reveal and display: for example, the modern glassware and trinkets in modern show-cabinets are displayed standing on lace. Thus, laces and embroideries seem to do more than conceal naked materiality. They warm valued, but cold objects from the market.

Furthermore, coordinated sitting and dining sets, which provide a modern aesthetic readymade by the market, are dressed up with lace or pillows with embroidered cases. Thus, doilies and embroideries that mark and remind about social relations and the past are used to cushion, trim, beautify, and personalize, and essentially to warm the modern. What Hetzel and Schuman (1999) refer to as the “aestheticization of the present using the past,” not only aestheticizes but also warms the present.

Perhaps such decoration is as much a self-communication of achieved urbanity/modernity as a display to the public. The self as an agent in decoration gets subsumed into displays, which are about relationships with urban friends and rural relatives, as well

as about the public recognition of urbanity. Feeling confident in being a possessor of modern objects and a modern urban life, the modern subject draws from the past and the rural in order to make her new space warm and thus familiar.

Warming fuses the new and the old, the unfamiliar and the familiar. The aesthetics of the novelty of urban life and its things are warmed by the aesthetics of the old, by the nostalgically and socially warm textiles. While the new is aspirational, the old is the identity: the traditional provides a sense of warmth because it is both distant, and at the same time constructed to be “us,” “our customs.” The traditional is wistfully warm; these informants becoming modern wish to leave the peasantry and the past behind, but they feel nostalgic when they do.

Warming also moralizes the uncertain and risky new. The word *güzel* (beautiful and good) for the ideal home is noteworthy. A home is to be made both beautiful and good. This term resonates with the view that “[c]ulture ... is a moral-aesthetic venture, to be judged ultimately by its moral beauty” (Tuan 1993: 240). “... [T]he good and the beautiful, the moral and the aesthetic, are inextricably intertwined – doublets, deeply rooted in common human experience and yearning” (Tuan 1993: 226). “Relationship with the other is at the heart of morality... Material culture ... plays a necessary role in the invention, elaboration, and maintenance of structures of moral behavior” (Tuan 1993: 241). Laces and embroideries of the past/country that warm the modern objects of the market, serve to make these new/urban objects and hence their newly urban owners/users moral.

The emphasis on warmth emerges precisely due to the focus on the modern in the process of becoming urban. Beautification of homes seems to entail the key struggle of modern life – to retain both a sense of authentic locality and claim rights to a global modern status (Miller 1998) or the struggle of “seductive globalism and authentic localism” (Wilk 1999: 248). In their struggle to become modern, the informants warm the modern. Then this new modern becomes inalienable to those who create it. And it implies a modernity that entails continuity rather than a clean break with the past.

If we live in an era of rapid flows of people, in a mobile world, in transition from one way of living to another, faced with choosing or ending up with new lifestyles in new places (Appadurai 1996), and if familiarity is a human need (Tuan 1993), then making our new world, lives, and spaces familiar is an ever-more important (and challenging) task. On one hand, the present is laden with aspirations, uncertainties, contradictions, every-day problems, and the mundane. On the other hand, other times and spaces, for example, the past and the distant country provide a romantic, idealized, utopian image (Illouz 1997; Williams 1973). Romanticizing and construction of utopian images come in handy to deal with the new and the present. Williams (1973) argues that creating idealized images is a means of coping with the present and providing a sense of stability. Experience of romance affords a secular access to the experience of the sacred and utopian visions of romance appeal to the past of our lost authenticity, and to the lost pastoral simplicity, innocence, and intimacy (Illouz 1997).

Material culture, such as handmade textiles, objectifies (see Miller 1987) a sense of the familiar other – distant and bygone times and places as well as social relations with people of the bygone and distant times and places. If utopian images help us cope with the present and provide a sense of stability, then warming entails using things that objectify the utopian “once-us-other” to make the present familiar. Warming requires the creation of a remembrance of things past; it draws on the idealized objects that embody the nostalgia for a romanticized time, space, and social relations.

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