

The Interior World of Books, Browsing, and Collecting Inside the City

Alison B. Snyder

Pratt Institute
USA

Abstract

A most desirable and collectable material object is the ubiquitous book. A bound composite of printed pages with words and images, it contains a microcosm of myriad narrative viewpoints, experiences, and imaginations. Metaphorically, a book compactly conceals a kind of interior space that protects the provocative lives of people, their character, ideas, and explorations, thus communicating different scales of interiority. Book collectors, called bibliophiles, revere and covet books as their object of desire. The bibliophile as seeker-collector-seller partakes of simple and complex transactions that essentially protect the lives of the books. This essay concentrates on two main book browsing locations within the urban context of Istanbul, Turkey, and the everyday interior spaces of the sahaf, the secondhand bookseller, who continues a tradition of selling new, pre-owned or secondhand ordinary or rare books. Its text moves between historic information and first-person narrative based on fieldwork to express and expand views of interiority theory, through reality and metaphor. The many scales of individual and collective impulses found inside the city streets and their inserted passage structures are exemplified by the significant simultaneity of the desire for the hand-held object and its hand-to-hand exchange.

Keywords: bibliophile, books, Istanbul, seeker-collector-seller, urban interior microcosm

Introduction: Everyday Urban Impulses to Browse and Collect

People seek, covet and, sometimes, collect. However much we admire, with no necessity to collect, how shall we consider this impulse? What does this solitary desire signify; is it a means to knowingly or subconsciously construct a part of our identity? The keys to answering these questions are multi-faceted and relate to our interactions within the urban domain. Consider the hunt or serendipitous browse to find the important, beautiful or everyday idiosyncratic object, that we personally exalt, while we take refuge in the comfort or pride of ownership. We may also revel in the psychological aspect of travel—both physical and phenomenological—to appreciate the time and possibility of the search, and we can also realise the energy that arises through the interaction of the seek/ sell/ buy exchange, as we feel a part of the system of created things. Architectural professor, Ben Jacks, writes about the practice and potentiality of walking in the city. “The drift is an intentionally aimless walk, involving both structure and chance, designed to provide a fresh encounter with the city and uncover its fragmentary nature” (Jacks, 2006, p. 69).

I covet and collect urban spatial experiences. With intention, I seek the incongruities, revel in the serendipity of choice, the discomfort of not knowing exactly where I am, and the hopefulness that comes from wandering and finding or noticing something unexpected. These are some of the key points, it turns out, that urbanist Richard Sennett writes about in *Building and Dwelling* (2018). Perhaps idealistic, Sennett (2018) advocates for having freedoms in the open city and explains, “Ethically, an open city would... specifically free people from the straitjacket of the fixed and familiar, creating a terrain in which they could experiment and expand their experience” (p. 9). In relation to browsing a city in search of experiences or things, Sennett’s words strike me as an explicit way to reinterpret norms that are associated with the systems that interweave the options associated with city life.

The inserting of the first-person narrative at various points in this text purposely mixes the free flow of an essay, with more formal research. The added personal side is meant to present the intimacy of my urban fieldwork research observations alongside several authors and scholars of many backgrounds, in order to connect the theorising of city pursuits in different scales, within a layering of what interior can mean. Indeed, the social critic, Walter Benjamin and Orhan Pamuk, one of Turkey’s most celebrated authors, both wrote about the complexities of urbanity in the modern era and the moods of its inhabitants. The philosopher, Jean Baudrillard

and, the anthropologists, James Clifford and Arjun Appadurai add perspectives about our understanding of objects and their place in our lives, as building our personal and collective material culture, as well as recognising that our things are also, just things.

For years, I have looked at and studied what we must call urban interiors. I use streets and street culture as my subjects, immersing myself in seeing how seemingly insignificant entries or thresholds create a connection to a myriad of internal places and spaces, as well as the defining of spaces within spaces (Snyder, 2011). At the same time, I pay close attention to scale and consider how we all, together and alone, take up space, and might interact or merely pass by, in the open public zone of the city.

Within the context of city traversing and seeking, I am curious about how we physically and psychologically experience the liminal, or how the notion of the threshold that mitigates innumerable simultaneous urban conditions and activities we can participate in, such as browsing. One way of understanding the spatiality of thresholds as urban artefacts comes from reading architect and professor, Stavros Stavrides, in his *Towards a City of Thresholds*. He says, "...spatial artefacts are the terms introduced in order to focus on the act of crossing which essentially creates thresholds and activates threshold potentialities" (Stavrides, 2010, p. 19). So, these conditions experienced in the place of streets, with their numerous interiors, make up a part of my and our collective, united as heterotopic personalities shaping our identities. Thus, one's interiorities are shaped by the action of inhabiting and searching the city to engage and connect with its spaces and objects.

The City of Istanbul, as Context and Site for Acquisition

One place where my collection of experiences has grown over time is inside the city of Istanbul, Turkey. Istanbul has a long history of trading, collecting and selling. The everyday, ordinary activities comprising the Middle-Eastern bazaar exist together forming a space to interact: browsing the new or pre-owned daily objects presented by and for collectors, naming your price and negotiating, taking part in the back and forth. Even throughout the streets of residential and commercial neighbourhoods inside the city, we see and hear those who walk and call out while they haul items such as scrap paper; or, collect and hawk non-working household objects. Thus, the rarefied object's value is comparatively assessed—such as with old maps, art papers, carpets, antiques, and even broken yet meaningful objects of all kinds—whether it exists simultaneously in the everyday spaces of the street, or within, for example, the historic

Covered Market, or many other contemporary smaller bazaars, across this city. My desire to, over time, immerse myself in a few of these urban interiors, has resulted in what I can now begin to call, a collection of stories consisting of small interior universes.

To identify or categorise some of the fascinating contexts of these universes, I document the avenues, streets, and alleys that provide the context for a specific building type designed to draw people through them—with paths that seem to beckon, or at times, repel. In Istanbul, these often odd-shaped *passages* offer refuge or a multitude of curiosities within the crowded city. Two of my favourites, located in distinctly different neighbourhood districts, support the tradition of inviting people to pass through them, with a surprising focus on sustaining knowledge or education, due to valuing a particular object: the book. I am attracted to the bibliophile, the person who acquires or collects the book as their object of desire; and, the person whose livelihood is based upon promoting the meaningful action of collecting and selling these objects in the urban milieu. I am obviously not alone.

I believe that the seller and the buyer have both produced a *need* to keep the new or previously-owned book alive. An iconic early bibliophile who started collecting in the late 1800s, William Harris Arnold (1923), wrote with delight in his *Ventures in Book Collection*, “My start as a book-collector was sudden and without conscious premeditation; I cannot fully account for it” (p. 1). He came to collect a certain type of book of first imprint editions, signed by previous owners; he created his own honouring of this object that was not nostalgic nor based on topic, he just relished the search and find of the rare, particular book, and assembled a large library.

Architect and professor, Frank Jacobus, writes at length about how the printing of, and subsequently the reading of books provided a literate foundation of information that was essentially divorced from the first-hand experience, yet allowed for an expansion of knowledge. Thus, the concretising of communication gained a kind of permanence with the written record, and the “emergence of print media, was the vehicle by which the book altered constructed material environments” (Jacobus, 2018, p. 227). We can assume, this means not only libraries (the main subject of Jacobus’ work), but also archives, exhibitions, and of course, much smaller shops and their displays. The contemporary notion of coveting, trading and acquiring the book, represents perhaps, a different kind of method for understanding “cultures and ideas that were previously disjointed by space and/or time [that] were now being connected through [*newly re-acquiring*] books,” (Jacobus, 2018, p. 228) thus

resulting in a different kind of object-based learning, and one that informs a making of new meanings. In this hyper-digital world, these phenomenological and physical stories are the subjects and objects of this essay concerned with the space of books, their acquiring, and how they expand our knowledge of what composes an interior and the notions of interiority.¹

The Need for the Turkish *Sahaflar* and the Ascribing of Value

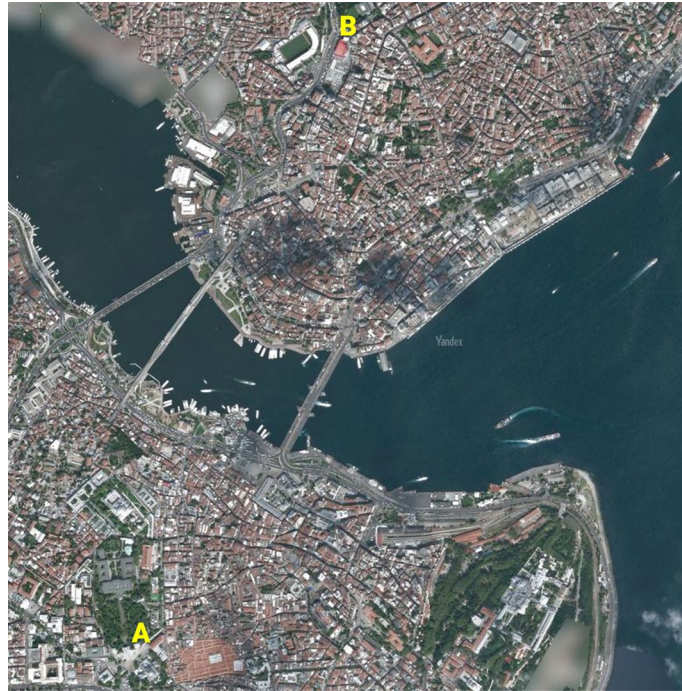
Bibliophiles, booksellers and acquirers are collectors who browse, seek and hunt. These interactions are sometimes silent and sometimes exuberant. This layered personal and collective activity is also basically explained through Walter Benjamin's words. In his *Arcades Project*, he wrote: "Collectors are beings with tactile instincts...it would be interesting to study the bibliophile as the only type of collector who has not completely withdrawn his treasures from their functional context" (Benjamin, 1999, pp. 6–7). And, considering scales of urban interactions, looking for books as "material objects and artefacts" point to "the urban field of perception" as a means "to occupy space differently" (Coombs, 2015, p. 93). While each individual has their own reasons for being in the profession or interested in acquiring, it must be said that their main interest is in actively protecting the lives of the books as well as their use.

In the space and time of the mid-Ottoman Empire in the 1700s, books became an important mode of transporting international knowledge and trade. In the later 1800s, the *sahaflar*—a network and series of contiguous storefront shops, where the secondhand bookseller, the *sahaf*, shares their extraordinary collection of acquired knowledge of historic and modern published topics, as well as exhibiting their tangible collection of bound printed matter. They took on an important urban role in Constantinople, and that this tradition continues today; may be surprising to some, yet to those who know and frequent these places. It is clear that education and

¹ I would be remiss, if I did not state that the COVID-19 pandemic that has plagued our lives since at least December 2020, has obviously changed the way we manage ourselves in any city. Yet, it is purposeful that this essay does not reference the pandemic because my research on site in Istanbul last took place in Summer 2019, prior to the outbreak. Today, both *sahaflars* remain open, yet I can assume that Istanbul's foot traffic is quieter than usual—as is the worldwide norm, and per my informants who remind there are nightly curfews. How the vendors are doing is unknown, especially if touching the book freely, is questionable. Surely some booksellers have gone out of business or have switched to online services. The photographs, here, are from 2019, or a few years prior; and two photographs are courtesy of colleague, Kimberly L. Hart who kindly took them in January 2020, at my request.

intellectual curiosity continues a kind of collective, cosmopolitan awareness. With browsing being a distinctive urban activity and collecting a part of a system of organisation that reflects the ancient pace of the Middle Eastern bazaar, these actions are associated with the global city's modernity, signalling that selling books is more than just a commodity.

Figure 1
Sahaflars in
 European side
 density: Sahaflar
 Çarşısı, The Old
 City (A); Aslıhan
 Pasajı, Beyoğlu
 (B) (Image by
 author over
 Yandex Map)



Though independent *sahaf* booksellers are sprinkled throughout the European and Asian sides of Istanbul, in this essay, I introduce two primary *sahaflars* (plural) located in two distinctive and important districts—both of which are inside the European side of the city with an approximately 40 minutes-walk between them. The Sahaflar Çarşısı (A) (*çarşı*, or *char-shuh*, means market) is an open-air passage located in the historic Old City, and the newer enclosed market passage, called Aslıhan Pasajı (B), is located in the so-called “modern district” of Beyoğlu (say *Bay-oh-luh*), as illustrated in the map of *sahaflars* in situ (Figure 1). Both *sahaflar* exhibit the many historic and contemporary printed subjects that interest collectors and readers wanting to stay informed about philosophical, social, cultural and political issues in Turkey. Both expose their books to reveal instructive knowledge, sometimes as aesthetic objects, showing that the *sahaflars* give space to fortify personal interests, while also offering a kind of refuge even with the longstanding

authoritarian government censoring opinions, and many academic freedoms.²

In the specific case of Turkey and locating authors and books from other countries, the renowned Turkish author, Orhan Pamuk, expressed opinions concerning Turkey's mid-20th century inability to house what was needed for educating oneself easily, with military coups locking down or censoring libraries and educational institutions for periods in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, as well as current era's restrictions and blocking of freedoms. He states in *The Guardian*,

I have not been able to shake off the enlightenment idea that books exist to prepare us for life... imposed by the literary cliques and literary diplomacy, and enforced by stifling prohibitions—I was going to have to build my own great library. (Pamuk, 2008, para. 7)

James Clifford (1994) writes, "The critical history of collecting is concerned with what from the material world-specific groups and individuals choose to preserve, value and exchange" (p. 261). This notion of value relates to Jacobus' interest in how the book created different levels of coveted knowledge and it dovetails with philosopher Jean Baudrillard's (1968) deployment of ideas concerning a functional *system of objects*, where we can assume a system of value does exist and periodically gets re-examined by its constituents. Following this line of reasoning, English professor and poet, Susan Stewart suggests that one's longing for activities to do with object acquisition can also be structured. A taxonomy of desire can be defined and this affects the subject-matter of the collection and its personal worth. She writes of personal collections, "The collection's space must move between the public and private, between display and hiding" (Stewart, 1994, p. 255). Pamuk (2008) would add to these ideas of privacy by musing, "it was after I turned 40 that I learned that the most powerful reason for loving my library was that neither Turks nor westerners knew about it" (para. 14). My basic interpretation of Clifford, Baudrillard, Stewart and Pamuk's points of view is that choosing what books we collect and how we collect, equals a theorising of value, that builds personal meaning.

So, book acquisition brings up the notion of subjectivity and how we ascribe personal value. What makes a collection if the desire will never be made public—the assessment of the personal library as

² Related to the notion of supporting erudition in Istanbul and the need for places to acquire this, Turkish author, Kaya Genç (2017), writes in an October 2017 blog essay about private libraries and archives in Beyoğlu, supported by large banks and holdings in Istanbul. He says, they have been places of refuge that connect Turks to the outside world and act as "saviors of culture" (para. 12).

a collection, comes into question here—does it matter? Benjamin and Pamuk, ascribed the quality of the learned person in society, to their library. Yet, philosopher Ralph Shain (2016) discusses in *Benjamin and Collecting*, that Hannah Arendt critiqued Benjamin declaring, “...collecting has no public significance...” (p. 72). But, Shain (2016) referring to Eckhardt Kohn who quotes another, also says, “...The collector reaches the highest level, [Jacob] Burckhardt says, gradually, by living with the objects; this resonates with Benjamin’s view that the most important effects take place at the subliminal level” (p. 55). These beliefs have complex consequences for defining interiority as simultaneously public, and also decidedly private.

Finally, analogies can be made about the singularity of interest in any object, and, of any worth; collecting for oneself, by reading some of the discussions that took place between Jean Baudrillard and architect Jean Nouvel, when they spoke about what they called in their small book, *The Singular Objects of Architecture*. Baudrillard said, “Anything can be appreciated...you can have an affect for any object whatsoever that singularises it for you. But at some point what’s needed is a different kind of awareness” (Baudrillard & Nouvel, 2002, p. 67). Nouvel’s retort was, “...an object is ugly...yet it can become in itself an entity that is absolutely essential. By that very fact, the object will become beautiful” (Baudrillard & Nouvel, 2002, p. 67). Social critic and philosopher, Walter Benjamin (1968), wrote in *Unpacking My Library* that, “...a collector as he ought to be—ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them” (p. 67). Thus, the collector-owner simply signifies what importance there is, and what constitutes one’s own collected and acquired small world.

Collectors’ Work, Their Spaces, the Book, and the Metaphor of the Interior

As Baudrillard (1994) relays in the essay *The System of Collecting*, “anything can be possessed, invested in, or in terms of collecting, arranged, sorted and classified” (p. 11). The vendors in the sahaflar are in the business of collecting—or acquiring, knowing and telling. Like a good librarian, the seller knows a bit about everything they own and house. Secondhand booksellers specialise in types and themes, not as typical as disciplines (i.e., anthropology, design, history, politics). Their knowledge represents a microcosm of titles related to known and obscure periods of art, science, religion, protest, poetry, urban ideals, fiction, travel and more. They have chosen to pile and shelve, display or possibly hide; all in an attempt

to hold the outside world near and far, through the many languages and a multi-layered temporality (Figure 2). As the browser sifts through the knowledgeable vendor's particular and often cluttered place, several scales of tangible and psychological interiority may be transferred through the holding or locating of a singular book, as well as through the dialogue that ensues, concerning the seeker-collector's interest.



Figure 2
Exhibiting the typical, classic, political fiction/history taste of browsers in Istanbul (Photograph by author)

The metaphor of the microcosm is also carried through the book itself. As a spatial object, its bound contents are concealed on its pages, and the compact container, then, offers an infinite series of possible layered interiors, their ideas and stories actually opening through words, personalities and illustrations that invite interpretation and possible delight. The miniature storerooms of hidden chapters of information might also influence opinions or connect to expressive interpretations that are shared or stored further.

Indeed, Pamuk is known to push the idea of the story within the story, or the spaces within fictional microcosms, as found inside his novel, *The Museum of Innocence*, and his resulting *Innocence of Objects*. He writes in the latter's introduction, "I wanted to collect and exhibit the "real" objects of a fictional story in a museum and to write a novel based on these objects" (Pamuk, 2012, p. 15). Though seemingly convoluted, he used the objects written into the story to express the exhaustive movements of the obsessed protagonist. My reasoning for bringing up the details of this very private and particular book is meant to be an analogy to the private and public urbanistic actions that arouse the scales of intellectual curiosity, kept alive through focusing on collecting and exhibiting parts of ourselves in our seek and find.

Working the metaphor further, we can add the accumulation regarding the intention of collection, and the resulting notions of private and public interiority. First, by re-visiting the individual *sahaf's* stall and display, we notice how it re-presents a mass of book interiors, with their stories that overlap or collide. Multiplying this by the hundreds or thousands of books a vendor owns, with their ages and covers, the concept of multiple interiors begins to grow. Inside the larger urban context, consider the two *sahaf*flars, with their network of secondhand sellers and their many tangible external and internal stall displays, we easily can witness both the literal and imagined phenomenon of an uncountable number of private and public interior spaces, ready to be browsed through, sold and acquired. When we add to this, the knowledge base held in the minds of the sellers, along with the possibly known and unknown particular amassed collections of so many seeker-buyers, located somewhere in the city, we become fully lost in the endeavour to conceive of the scale of information known, or, the pages comprising the many interior worlds sitting somewhere inside the city.

Figure 3
Filled, tidy,
untidy—the
obsessed
collector's stall
is a personal
window into
a microcosm
(Photograph by
author)



Baudrillard (1994) wrote that the object is “divested of its function and made relative to a subject” thus becoming part of a system that is a piece of the “personal microcosm” that the possessor—the collector, brings together” (p. 7). So, concerning the untidy, organised, or obsessive concerns of working with books as objects that make up the *sahaf*flar and the imagined collections (Figure 3), the writer-thinker George Perec (1997) wrote about provisionally definitive locations and methods for “ways of arranging books” and listed the reasons why some are “difficult to arrange” (pp. 152–154), as one can easily imagine.

Two Anecdotes: Passing through Sahaflar Çarşısı and Aslıhan Pasajı

In many ways, these two places in opposite parts of the noisy and vital, densely populated city, exist expressly for the life of books and those that seek and sell them. Their locations with their somewhat hidden entries, or the portals set between streets and alleyways, could not be more different, yet both maintain everyday interior urbanism that is unexpected and vivid (Figure 4 and Figure 5).



Figure 4
The entries/ exits of Sahaflar Çarşısı differently conceal or announce (Left and middle: Photographs by author; Right: Photograph by Kimberly L. Hart)



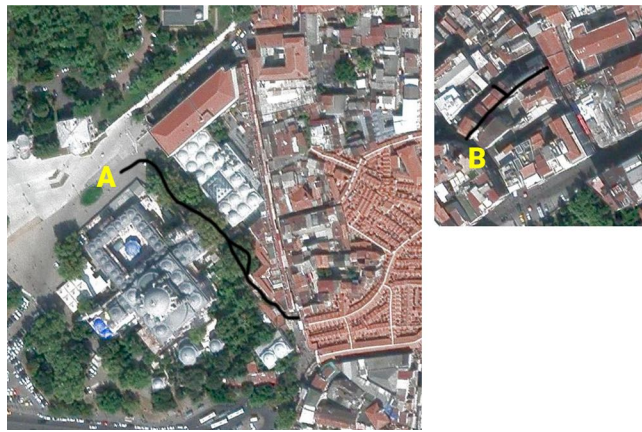
Figure 5
The entries/ exits of Aslıhan Pasajı differently conceal or announce (Photographs by author)

Sahaflar Çarşısı (say: Sah-hahf-lar Char-shuh-suh)

A combination of where it is located, what you expect, and how you find it, surprises you. The Sahaflar Çarşısı, the market of the secondhand booksellers, with its timeless power, still sits between the centuries-old Istanbul University, Sultan Beyazit's mosque and the Grand Covered Market. Its masonry perimeter make-up today dates to the early 1950s—a replacement for the fire-ravaged historic set of earlier structures. Yet, it retains the formation and place of an ancient Byzantine book and paper market that gained even more prominence in the 18th century, with the legalisation of printing in the Ottoman Empire, when the booksellers came

to dominate this place. In the 19th and early 20th century, the *sahaflar* was again one of the main places of book distribution (Sumner-Boyd & Freely, 1972). While today, over twenty stalls are crammed with religious, history, art and other topics, along with a much smaller secondhand following, it is still one of the most visited places because of its interstitial city locale, with its picturesque and silently palpable, palimpsestic qualities. The *sahaf* booksellers make good use of their stall spaces set between education, religion, and tourist/ local retailers—a perfect place to tempt the passing browser or consuming collector (Figure 6 left).

Figure 6
Maps with
passage paths:
Sahaflar Çarşısı
(left); Aslıhan
Pasajı (right)
(Images by
author over
Yandex Map)



As many of my early forays around the city were like mini-adventures, Istanbul seemed to be full of hidden places. I encountered the *sahaflar* during my first time researching in Istanbul in 1988. I was told to find the Sahaflar Çarşısı and ask about the topics I was working on to see if the booksellers could find published tomes that were not in libraries or commercial bookstores. The notion of hunting for out-of-date, or self-published books and professionally photo-copied small runs, was new to me.

I found my way to the Old City and the well-traversed area called Beyazit. This was, of course, pre-cell phone, Wi-Fi, and google maps, so I carried a printed map and relied on people to point since my speaking Turkish was rather limited at the time. In future visits, I came to know what to look for, but the urban journey to browse and possibly collect, was alluring. The first landmark was the large entry plaza in front of the impressive walled Istanbul University; the second was heading northeast to the Mosque for Sultan Beyazit II, an early 1500s single dome structure with its attached courtyard and small cemetery and other surrounding buildings. The small alleys and plazas around it were not clear to me in this non-gridded urbanism, but I gradually found a smaller paved plaza that was

lined with little tables and stools, and cloths set on the ground near some trees. Mostly men were selling old coins and watches and pins, cigarettes and brewed black tea, amidst other miscellaneous momentos; and, a few women tended to children. I began to notice this was a pass-through zone with people seeming to be on the way to somewhere else.

Just beyond, a stern masonry archway announced the entry to the *sahaflar*. As I entered the portal, the aura of the threshold washed over me—I felt there I had stepped into an air of unknown age—a feeling that would recur at every visit. A kind of splayed-out u-shaped layout showed the specialties of the open book and manuscripts stalls facing and enclosing a small cobbled courtyard that contained a few trees, and a bust of a man who, it turns out, had introduced the Ottoman Empire to the printing press in 1727. At the far end, I could see stone steps took visitors down to the last stalls and another thick masonry archway that led to the busy and confusing streets of the ancient Covered Market beyond. The paths through the *sahaflar* are affected by the materiality of ground paving, the muddle of carts and shelves, and short roofs with extended awnings covering over the books and items for sale in the sun or clouds. The small amounts of colouration come from the books, the window frames outlining small offices and the flat signs naming the vendors with twinkling light fixtures aligning them. The sensation is quiet and calm, even though the plaza and the streets surrounding are bustling with a flow of people and commerce (Figure 7).



Figure 7
The aura of Sahaflar Çarşısı stems from local history, spatial variety, and particular materiality (Top: Photograph by Kimberly L. Hart; Bottom: Photograph by author)

No prices were listed as used book value was ascertained by need and how many volumes existed. There also seemed to be levels of pricing if you were a local or teacher, yet I saw no reason to haggle—the prices were cheap for printed matter in Turkey in those days. I was studying how light entered and was used in centuries of Ottoman mosques, and to my amazement, a small black and white printed book by a Turkish architecture professor was self/institutionally published on his similar research from the 1960s. As the collector-desirer, I was treated to the “old way” of doing business and making connections, and I felt beholden to my new vendor and contact—the man who would now remember me as I came in, perhaps because I was a westerner, or perhaps more likely because this is how they work for you. These urban cultural lessons taught me to return to the place of the bookseller, again and again; this book remains one of the key prize acquisitions in my collection.

Passing through to the *sahaflar* over many years, it all felt stable, but at some point in the 2000s, the *sahaflar's* flavour and personality changed. It subtly became more religious, less helpful for art, design, urban issues and architecture, and it seemed, less full of tidbits of information. I still visited, but I learned to locate other booksellers to track down what I needed. For a few years, I would still see a volume of the first book I purchased, but it has long since become unfindable. Yet, the quest still reminds me of the city that has changed so much since then.

***Aslihan Pasaji* (say: Ahz-lih-han Pah-sahj-uh)**

In 2004, I spent more time in Istanbul and began to ponder a new study that was to be interwoven with fieldwork concerning the ongoing conditions of 19th and early 20th century, public urban spaces. I focused on the Central Beyoğlu District that was settled since the 14th century as a merchant center, it became a test case in the late 19th century Ottoman Empire to become the most “modern” part of the city. Always welcoming the most diverse population, it was re-organised with a mixture of Turkish-European thinking—seen in infrastructure, eclectic building styles and local lifestyles. With the Republic formed in 1923, the transformation continued.

Beyoğlu's central avenue and side street alleys date to 18th and 19th century growth. Today the main pedestrian avenue, called İstiklal, follows an even older path, but its dominant structures were inserted into the city fabric from the 19th century on. Called a passage or *pasaj* (said with a French accent, *pah-sahj*), they are interspersed between many other multi-storied, varied structures from different periods. A browser in this part of the city starts to

realise that the passage can be quietly tucked away or announced grandly, taking an internal or roofless form.

In one of my journeys mid-way down Istiklal, I entered a well-known historic, straight-through passage called Avrupa Pasajı (Europe Passage) tucked between a busy fish market and a vehicular cut-through road. Just beyond it was a passage, I had missed before, because the architecture is not expressive in any way. Entering under almost hidden, uneventful signs announcing Aslihan Pasajı, a beguiling *sahaflar* was contained with many vendors situated all along with the surrounding street levels (Figure 6 right). Composed on several floors, the unusual place of Aslihan became a prime subject of my browsing. A complex structure to document and understand, it is part of my larger passage typology study group (Snyder, 2020).

It is hard to guess the age of this three-sided entry passage building, composed of a reinforced concrete frame with masonry infill and inserted metal and glass storefront window frames. According to insurance parcel maps, its four entry/exit doors tie to three or four land parcels. The non-descript set of buildings that describe Aslihan today actually marks the location of an earlier passage from the 1800s called Krepen Pasajı, known for its household and textile items, and also internal bars where locals and poets met (Kultur Servisi, 1987). It obviously holds many fragmented memories and past feelings.

After Krepen had a fire in 1960, it remained closed, according to vendor interviews, until the site was eventually rebuilt in the 1970s/1980s and become known as a *sahaflar* in the mid-1980s/1990s. Many seller-collectors have had stalls for over twenty-five years, and a few shops on the lowest level still sell the original Krepen items.

Though there is no worthy architectural detail inside or out, I believe the structure's somewhat confusing and interesting character is owed to the unusual cross-sectional qualities that address the local hilly topography with four different spatial thresholds providing the much-needed separation from the well-used side streets. Upon typically entering from either of the two main ends, one passes through inset entry doors that are five feet from the street on one end, to fifteen feet on the other. Entering from the third side offers a choice through two doorways—one is a narrow level corridor leading directly to some booksellers and the other includes a long narrow flight of stairs to the lower level of cosy stalls (Figure 8).

Once inside the main two levels, the irregular-shaped passage zones are flanked by a series of cellular units of varying odd-shaped stalls. Lining the passage, they are bursting with many bins and

Figure 8
Aslıhan Pasajı's
many delights
are felt when
squeezing
between
intriguing
book worlds
(Photograph by
author)



Figure 9
Aslıhan Pasajı
leads browsers/
collectors
through its
surprising
levels, bursting
with books
(Photograph by
author)



Figure 10
An intimate
collector-seller
stall atmosphere
projects the
metaphor of
layered interiors
(Photograph by
author)



tables of books set against the mildly decorated storefronts (Figure 9). The types of books displayed signal the personality of the vendor-collector and how the *sahaf* protects both their outer and inner worlds. In some, the most interior of spaces contains not only a workspace and shelves of important books for sale but also their framed photos of Atatürk, the father of the Turkish Republic, amidst other personal objects (Figure 10).

Similar to searching for research aid at the Beyazit Sahaflar, I have asked many of the Aslihan *sahafs* for help with locating unusual urban architectural journals and books on Beyoğlu, knowing each seller is eager to show what they have, or they will refer to another seller a few stalls down. They continue to amaze by knowing their stock, down to exactly where an odd piece of literature, history or photograph exists on a shelf or in a pile.

The rest of the Aslihan building tenants are also an unusual bunch. Over the years, I discovered building nooks and stairs inside the piecemeal structure that led to higher floors with a language study office, a small tea house with a man who serves all of internal clientele and visitors, and a double-level masjid (very small mosque), offering great views of the alleys below while set atop several floors above one of the main entries.

Aslihan Pasaji has become one of my main urban homes acting as a friendly informant, that points to the life of the passage building type inside the quickly changing local built environment. Its wonderful diverse community is enhanced by the unique, intersecting, spatial cross-section relaying its quiet and dynamic urban story containing many worlds of interiority.

Conclusion: Why Book Collecting Matters Inside the Everyday

Books have power. They represent stories, levels of knowledge and many little worlds, both private and collective. Acquiring them brings pleasure and speaks of valuing the containment. Halil Bingöl, a secondhand bookseller in Aslihan Pasaji said about books, “I say they are alive, if there is not any relationship, if you do not love, would you buy anything? A relationship between you exists in such a way” (Aytemiz, 2005, p. 131).

An analogy to book interest and acquisition is the ongoing meaning held by the printed word and the act of keeping or sustaining histories of information and commentary in the hand while turning the pages, enjoying the smell, or the weight, and the design; thus, the hand-to-hand exchange still has meaning. Bookselling, as an enterprise, depends on intimate tactility that is met by the intellect,

imagination, and sensorial pride. So, the actions of the give-and-take, or the search-and-buy sustain the effort to cleanse the over-mechanised (urban) world.

Today, we know that collecting can be done remotely through the Internet (such as through eBay or other auctioneers, and a multitude of large and small bookstore websites), but the act of browsing in this way is so obviously different with no wandering the city per se, no-touch available, and all taking place within a different sense of time and space. Yet even online, ascertaining personal or collective value by possibly trading or purchasing, still bolsters the essential need for the bound printed matter to remain a continued expression of societal value.

I am advocating for always being a seeker and browser to celebrate what the city has to offer, in physical and phenomenal forms. Identifying and signalling the sahaflar as a place full of special spaces for collectors, or the passer-by illustrates a means to continue the older methods of interacting at a human scale within the asynchronous world of contemporary urban life. Thus, the spaces of the city act as urban interiors everyday—an argument for taking part in considering the metaphor of their internal separate or combined stories. This realisation and choice is part of being a person who is free to roam in public.

Arjun Appadurai (1988) writes in the *Social Life of Things*, that “value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged” and “commodities, like persons, have social lives” (p. 3). Re-use keeps the notion of the social life of the book in circulation, while its reverence is maintained, no matter how small, difficult to translate, or even full of visual images—serious or funny. Susan M. Pearce (1994), a professor of museum studies, reminds us that “all collected objects begin life outside a collection” (p. 2) and the “perpetual play of signification and signifier” (p. 28) expresses how we ascribe meaning and value. She says, “a particular semiotic approach, broadly that of [Ferdinand de] Saussure, [helps us to] analyse the way in which individual objects accumulate meanings as time passes” (Pearce, 1994, p. 19). Thus, layers of ownership imprint the book with its secondhand lives, adding to its personality, while forming a tangible palimpsest. The touch of the previous owners, and seeing their names, scribbles and notes add to the intimacy, and a layered creation of storied and stored interiority. Thus, the book and its interior spaces allow past private qualities to become re-collected, re-owned, and engaged within a fresh manner. The experience is surprisingly transferable and powerful; it is dependent on the ongoing life of the object to help us construct ourselves.

Many of us, who are committed to expanding and deepening the theoretical basis of the discipline of interior design, and its shared and related conditions with interior architecture, see a necessary means to carefully explain our work as redefining the professional and academic edges with a conscious decision to blur the lines, and celebrate the overlaps. For example, the exterior is traditionally assumed to be the domain of architecture, landscape, or urban design, while the interior is largely relegated to specific internal spaces, surfaces, materials, light, furniture and material objects, etc. But, just as we can ascribe value to the scale of an object while also describing its interior relationships, we can, at the same time, ascribe value at the scale of urban space from the standpoint of the interior.

So, I argue conspicuously for the necessity to include and describe every public place of varying scales—from street to plaza to passage, and all of their analysable thresholds, boundaries, and edges—as containing several interiors. These include the spatially and behaviourally-motivated interactions, along with the sensory or phenomenological. I refer to streets and passages as part of the interior domain and make no apologies for recognising that traversing these spaces at the same time as browsing within the scale of a bookstall or shelf; the book's pages with narrative or visual elements inside, are all interior spaces.

Thus, to explain the conceptual notion of the interior is to understand that the levels of interior urbanism put forth here call for the pedagogical dialogue surrounding the realm of the interior, to depend on a multi-scalar and multi-disciplinary point of views, as evidenced by the words of not only architects and designers in this essay, but also those of urbanists, literary authors, museum studies experts, sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, social critics, book collectors, and local informants. The inclusivity of collecting, browsing and revering the book in the city opens up a collective possibility for the unlimited experiences and realisations. The term interiority, in reference to the individual and this collective, is shifting, now taking on even stronger potentialities inside the urban domain. We will see where this leads us in the future.

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