



A multilayered approach on urban experience through parallax view

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Abstract The paper presents a one year study that deals with the emergent multiple character of the urban environment of metropolis. Besides examining the city, discourse of this research has an intention to initiate a new understanding for the cities that we live in, adopt and transform through multi-layered character of the parallax view with an aim to explore the urban experiences. In order to represent the differences rather than the similarities in the city, the study approaches to the interrelation of the city and the urban dweller, underlining multi-layered conditions and the diversity through multiple experiments of urban experiences that have taken place in Istanbul case.

Three parallel experiments were held respectively real-time, collaborative and literal for the same site to collect multiple views of urban dwellers. In real-time experiment 6 participants walked around the site with a recording camera. In collaborative experiment, participants marked the traces of their experiences of the same site on a non-layered common online map. And finally in literal experiment, novels of Orhan Pamuk are examined for his fictional and real memories of the same site.

Since these specific experiments have an intention to transform the multiple urban data without a reduction but with an interpretation, it is clear that the study favours the subjectivity of urban life (Fig. 1). The reproducible and transformable outcomes and methodology of the suggested experiments imitate this subjective and multiple behaviour of urban environment, expecting to lead similar design behaviours.

Fig. 1 Subjectivity of Urban Life



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Parallax and Urban Experience

Parallax, in astronomy, is the apparent displacement of an observed object due to a change in the position of the observer. Steven Holl defined parallax as *"the change in the arrangement of surfaces that define space as a result of the change in the position of a viewer"* (Fig. 2), and he indicated that *"it is transformed when movement axes leave the horizontal dimension"*. According to Holl, *"vertical or oblique movements through urban space multiply our experiences"* (Holl, 2000). Parallax multiply our experience, nevertheless, is not only concerned with a variety of physical movements. In addition to horizontal, vertical or oblique movements, parallax includes situations that multiply our experience such as gathering, light, time, sound, communication, interaction, sharing, preference, coincidence, routine and etc. during urban encounters. Thus, parallax constitutes a basis for a multi-layered study, in other words for multiplicity, in order to attain actual information on urban experience for understanding the dynamics of the city.

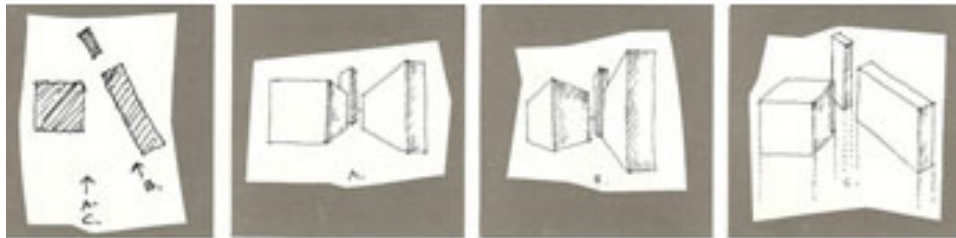


Fig. 2 Diagrams of Steven Holl for Parallax (Holl, 1988)

There are different approaches on attaining and relaying information. Generally, the data, that is being gathered for certain periods, is eliminated and reduced to static representations such as statistics, maps, and aerial photographs. However, there is a parallaxic shift between a multilayered data derived from multiplying experience and a reduced data gathered from a planar view. The data reduced through existing representations has an intention of achievement to an absolute, whereas the urban experience multiplied by the parallax view manifests the opposite. In this way, the delusion of the absolute resigns for actual encounters. Correspondingly, the understanding of achieving the absolute is opposed to contemporary thinking and living. This understanding is transformed to the encounters of multiple conditions, multiple realities observed from multiple points, relativity and awareness of the delusions. The view should also be multiplied like multiplied conditions inevitably. In this context, the study acts as a guiding principle by the means of comprehending the contemporary city and rethinking the established approaches and representations.

The research about the parallax view is conducted through series of experiments in order to reveal differences rather than similarities, by focusing on actuality of everyday life. The experiments are held respectively real-time, collaborative and literal for the same study area in Istanbul to gather multiple views of urban dwellers. These experiments provide a basis for the methodology of the research and are open-ended for future works. All the experiments actualized with the contribution of volunteer locals, graduate students, architects, exchange students, visitors and foreigners.

Parallax Experiments

According to urban sociologist Robert Park, *"The city is man's most consistent and on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart's desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself"* (Park, 1967). The city and the man are attached existentially and man reinvents and recreates the city with himself continuously. For this reason, the city should be evaluated as a field of experiment in order to understand the everyday life of man and vice versa. In this sense, the parallax experiments are conducted with a main purpose of

discussing the city and attaining information about everyday life of urban setting through urban dwellers and visitors. However, it was never easy to collect that kind of information for representatives in order to generate transcendent values of the future of the city. Besides, collecting singular information without a reduction to achieve the plural was not even a purpose of the representatives.

Architectural historian and theorist Bülent Tanju refers the state of crisis as an emergent engine of discrepancy: *“Disintegration in representations that sustain the illusion of the existence of transcendent values creates a crisis for all practices, production of practices and subjects that are reproduced within these practices. In this sense, crisis is an emergent engine of discrepancy production”* (Tanju, 2008). If we consider crisis as a design concern, the transcendent values regarding design problem, for instance, 2D city maps representing future projections of the municipality or the urban scale enforcements of the government may create an illusion of achievement of an absolute truth. They may act as rules to obey or goals to attain. Nevertheless, upper scale plans became inadequate without daily social interactions.

Parallax experiments are formed for revealing the differences of everyday life rather than its similarities in order to oppose the reduction of information as it is mentioned above. To that end, there were three parallel experiments held with parallax view for the same site: real-time, collaborative and literal. Real-time experiment is held for a closer investigation of the urban behaviors, collaborative experiment is held for reaching plural, multi-layered information and literal experiment is held for obtaining long-term information about the site. These parallel experiments with different characteristics have a potential for attaining multiple information with multiple viewpoints and they also match with the multiplicity of our daily lives.

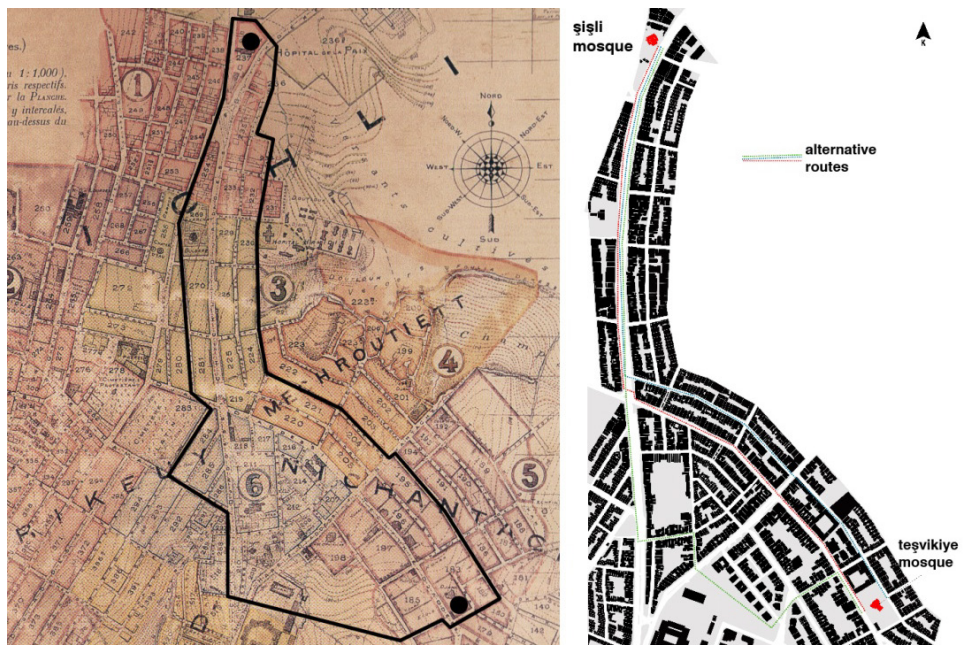


Fig. 3 Experiment Site

Urban behaviors are unpredictable. In a metropolis, for our case in Istanbul, there are various urban settings and different urban settings with different characteristics show different results. By virtue of this variety, selection of the experiment site is performed randomly, with an encouragement of further studies within different urban settings. The selected experiment site is

in Şişli (Fig. 3), which was developed in Istanbul as a middle class residential district of elites and minority communities in the late 19th century with an influence of French culture. *Şişli was one of the first areas supplied with tramlines, electricity and gas. Besides, first apartment buildings were constructed in the beginning of 20th century in the same area* (Şişli Municipality, 2013). Thus, Şişli was one of the main districts where the westernization movement of the period emerged. Today, Şişli is one of the main districts of shopping and dwelling for middle and upper-middle class in Istanbul. There are also wholesalers in side streets, art galleries, and historical, educational, military and commercial buildings. The start and end points of the experiment site are determined with two landmarks in the area: Şişli Mosque and Teşvikiye Mosque. Teşvikiye Mosque is a neo-baroque building which is constructed in 1854 during the period of Sultan Abdülmecid I. Şişli Mosque is constructed in 1949. The buildings are not only standing as religious buildings but they have been used as meeting and reference points by citizens.

Collaborative thinking and sharing is needed in order to remark the differences among urban dwellers. For this reason, an open-source blog site is conducted as one of the parallel experiments. An interactive Google map with defined start and end points is integrated to the blog site. Participants were asked to draw their usual route and mark the places that they had an interaction before. This interaction could be commercial, residential and educational moreover it could be a presence, a notice or even a glance in the place. Participants also described the places and explained their history about the spaces with a note saved on the map. In this way, all the information (routes, marked places and their explanations) accumulated on a 2D map. There were 13 participants for the time experiment evaluated.

In collaborative experiment, as it is named, the aim was to reveal how different the participants perceive and trace the urban space between the start and the end point of the experiment site. Most of the participants traced similar routes with different sides of the streets, made different comments and marked different places. Five different routes determined among 13 participants. Food and beverage shops, banks, public buildings, schools, historical buildings and transportation hubs were the most popular places among participants. As a matter of fact, there were some overlaps among participants, however, the differences among them accumulated and represented the multiple character of the living environment through its inhabitants. Despite the fact that these accumulations may be neglected in regional scales, they correspond to a remarkable source of information for the city (Fig. 4).

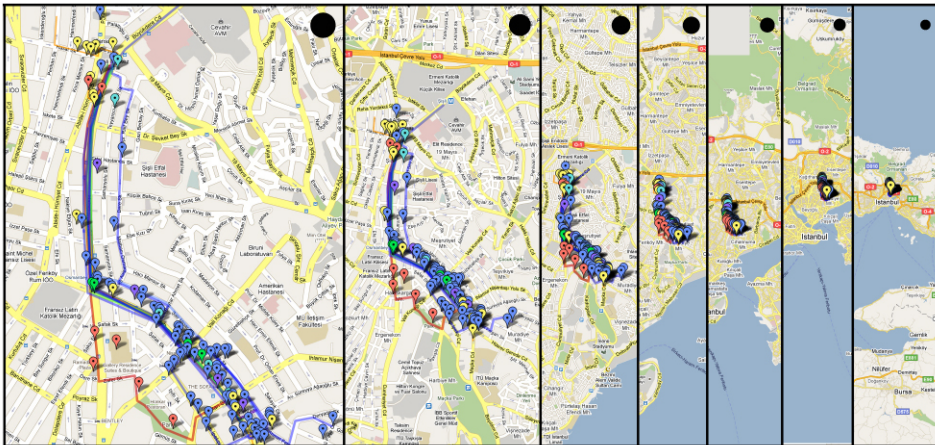


Fig. 4 Collaborative Experiment Outputs In Different Scales

Instant situations that are occurring during daily encounters are the most valuable resources for understanding urban circumstances. Moreover, the visibility of the daily encounters requires a certain distance. Michel de Certeau mentions these encounters through the walking in the city, which is happening “*down below the thresholds at which visibility begins*”. He considers “*walk as an elementary form of experiencing the city*” and he defines “*bodies as parts of the urban text that they write without being able to read*”. The walkers are drifting in the city; “*they’re making use of spaces that cannot be seen*” from above that threshold (Certeau, 1984). Thus, for experiencing the city, walking is the most important action for a rich content and decided to be considered as the most important part of the experiments, and is called as real-time experiment.

In real-time experiment, participants were asked to record their drifting experience with a camera during their walk through the route they trace between the start and the end points of the experiment site. There were six participants different from each other in reference to their age, occupation, familiarity to the site, history within the city and many other specialties. The participants determined the route they trace with their own initiatives. All the information they recorded is utilized for determining locomotion and information thresholds of their routes. The spaces and situations related to their view and their walking rhythm are determined and prepared as graphs (Fig. 5). The participants aged 20 to 59, walked their route in 20 to 30 min. periods and perceived a variety of spaces and situations. It should be reminded that the main purpose of the real-time experiment is to present how different the walkers are interacting with the city instead of comparing them to each other.

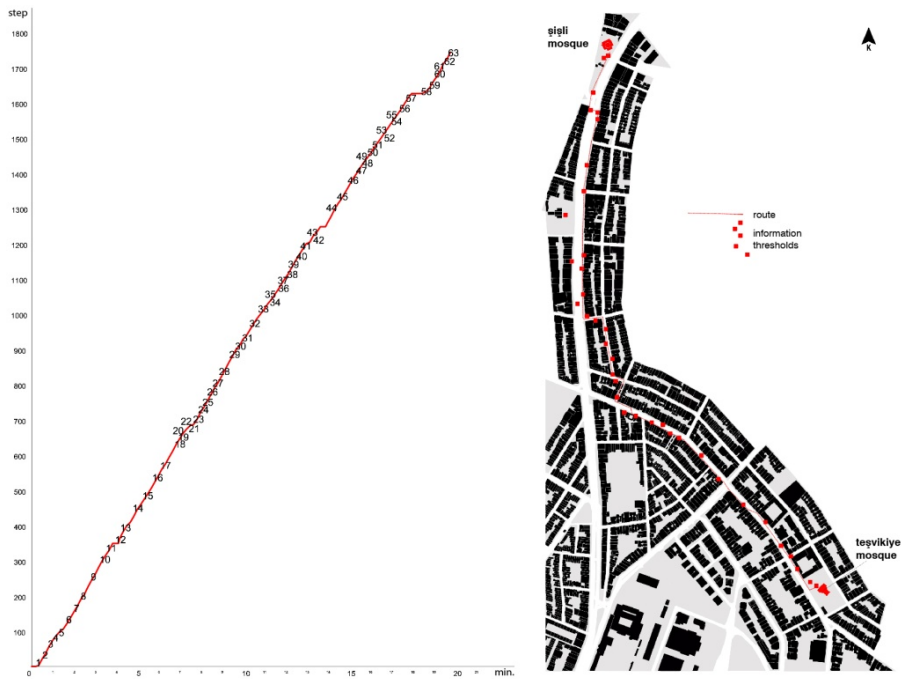


Fig. 5 Graph Outputs of a Real-time Experiment

History of the site also enriches the urban setting hence the potential outputs of the experiments. Similarly, memoirs of the dwellers and the visitors are personal histories that emerge within the daily encounters and offer a rich seam of information that is mostly neglected by most of the studies. For this reason, a literal experiment of memoirs is conducted to the parallax experiments. Fictional stories and memoirs of the famous writer Orhan Pamuk, who has been

living in the same district as a son of an upper-class family, constituted an input basis for the literal experiment. His memoirs and stories are such information that grew for a lifetime period with a diversity of layers. He lived most of his life to date in Teşvikiye as it can be seen in his own book: “*He has been living in Pamuk Apartment in Teşvikiye since 1952, except 3 years in New York*” (Pamuk, 2010). Then, scenes from Teşvikiye, which is a neighborhood in Şişli, could easily be traced through his childhood memories, mentioned in his novels.

Orhan Pamuk has lived in Pamuk Apartment (a) and Varol Apartment (o). He shopped from Alaaddin (b), who collects merchandise all around the city and sells anything you could ever need. There was a 70 year old sycamore tree (c) in front of his window. He went to Işık High school (d). The mosque of Teşvikiye (e) was the landmark of his neighborhood. Habitants of the neighborhood felt the summer breeze of the north wind (f) along Teşvikiye Street. He made his laundry stiffen in Teşvikiye Square (g). His family shopped from Tikveşli Market (h) owned by a family which will establish Tikveşli Company afterwards. Maçka Palas (i) was one of the initial apartments in Istanbul. Lebon (j) was a discotheque, which was dark and out of their bounds. The millinery in the corner (k) was selling village egg, beside socks, perfumes and cologne. Vedat Tek house (l) was significant for him. They ate often in a restaurant (m) in Akkavak Street. Next to Pamuk Apartment, there was Aydın Apartment (n) standing which was designed by architect Vedat Tek and demolished “cruelly” afterwards. Nişantaşıspor which was an amateur league basketball team was training in the court (p) behind the Şişli Prefecture. Police Station (r) has been never changed since his childhood (Pamuk, 2008, 2010) (Fig. 6). The information relayed by Orhan Pamuk is very subjective and partly fictional. Though, his observations, statements and imaginations are not only includes his lifetime but also beyond. So, within past experiences of a site there are also future extensions.

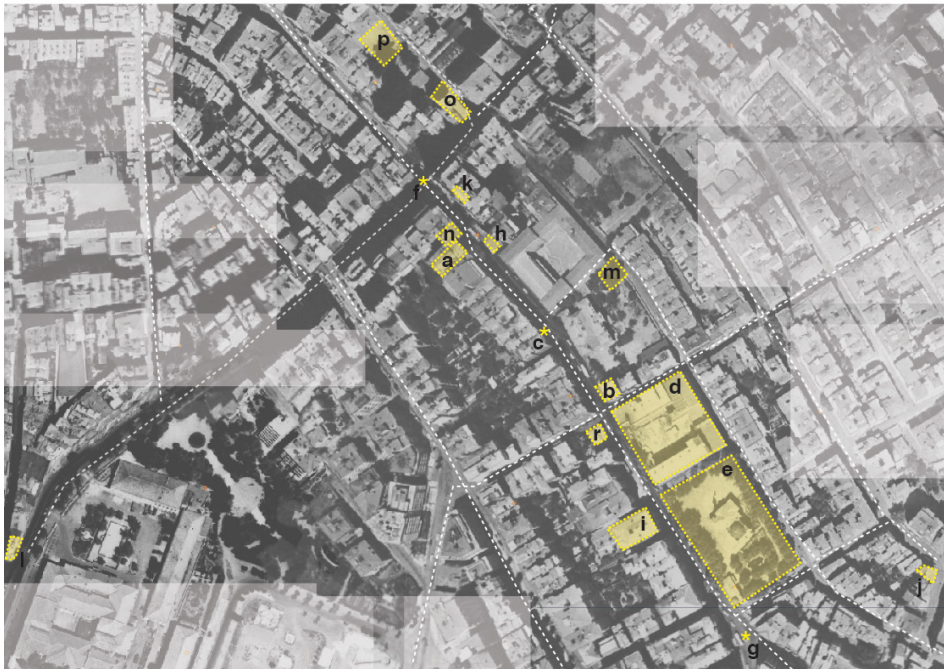


Fig. 6 Literal Experiment Outputs on Aerial Photograph of Istanbul taken in 1966

Three parallel experiments held for revealing the differences in multiplicities by underlining the subjectivity of urban life. The experiments differed among their durations, accumulations and information they present. All of the results of the experiments are open-ended and they cannot be united or reduced to a common ground. This condition is the most powerful aspect of urban life which also provides its richness.

Conclusion

As is known, the representations of the cities consist of reduced data sources such as maps. These sources include different time periods; however they are unable to show instant happenings such as daily encounters. Yet, daily situations form the life in the city and should lead the data flow of urban environment. The difference between the two data flows, which are reduced data and daily data, is defined as parallax shift.

Various perceptions emerged during urban experience enable various definitions of it. This variety cannot be gathered and equalized for an induction. Such an attempt would make the urban experience meaningless and unreadable. In fact, every single individual and their experiences on city have their own narratives. This study aims to reveal the differences through multiple readings, rather than traditional and statistical methods that are neglecting the variety of everyday life. Besides, to present the parallax shift between the multiplicity of information and existing representations; to discuss this shift and to encourage new ideas are other goals of the study.

The conceptual background focuses mainly on individual, metropolis and parallax as it also covers many subjects such as mobility, ambiguity, non-linearity, experience, contemporary existence, global city, urban interaction, multiplicity, consumer aesthetics, social movements, reality, swiftness and virtual space. Parallax, as a multi-layered view, plays a key role for underlining differences and it inspires for suggesting multiple experiments. Three different experiments, which are collaborative, real-time and literal, are distinct from each other in accordance with their extent. In collaborative experiment, the duration is open-ended, real-time experiment's duration is instant and literal experiment has a lifelong duration. Internet network, the city itself and novels were used as experiment settings respectively. Furthermore, subjects of the experiments participated in person, interactively and indirectly. In other words, all the experiments are different according to their durations, settings and modes of participation. Thus, the accumulation of this information cannot be evaluated with induction or reduction.

The study attempts to show that there are alternative methods to existing ones and they have broader visions. The alternative methods underline the situations such as connection, interaction, sharing, preference, orientation, familiarity, encounter, coincidence and routine and they are emphasized as a significant input for decision-making periods in cities. At this point, the representation of the gathered data is also very important.

This study is not suggesting a new method but indicating that the methods with regulations and phases are incapable of understanding the interrelation between the city and the individual. To better understand the city, the practices of everyday life should be uncovered through broader views. This uncovering requires a continuous and dynamic shift.

In consequence of all the research outputs taken into account, the question of how the data gathered by parallax view is going to be utilized for an urban intervention arises. The question is another research topic for further studies. However, it would be wise to ground on the interacting relation of the city and the individual for decision makers. In this way, urban dwellers could be the contributors for urban interventions.

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