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Abstract

When Orhan Pamuk was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2006, the Swedish Academy chose to announce the award by concentrating on Pamuk's memories of Istanbul in his autobiography, Istanbul: Memories of a City (2005).1 The book, a melange of Pamuk's autobiography and the history of Istanbul during the author's childhood combined with flashbacks to the Ottoman past of the city, concentrates on the author's and the city's melancholy, or to be more precise it focuses on the Turkish equivalent of the Western idea of melancholy, huzun. There are around two hundred photographs and illustrations in the text, from Orientalist images of the city to photographs by Turkish photographers and a collection of family photographs.

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GABRIEL KOUREAS

Nicosia/Istanbul: Ruins, Memory and Photography

> The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2006 is awarded to the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk who in the quest for the melancholic soul of his native city has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures. (Swedish Academy, 2006)

When Orhan Pamuk was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2006, the Swedish Academy chose to announce the award by concentrating on Pamuk's memories of Istanbul in his autobiography, *Istanbul: Memories of a City* (2005).[1] The book, a melange of Pamuk's autobiography and the history of Istanbul during the author's childhood combined with flashbacks to the Ottoman past of the city, concentrates on the author's and the city's melancholy, or to be more precise it focuses on the Turkish equivalent of the Western idea of melancholy, *huzun*. There are around two hundred photographs and illustrations in the text, from Orientalist images of the city to photographs by Turkish photographers and a collection of family photographs. However, the association between image and text does not stop here: chapters are given titles such as 'Black and White' (chapter 5) or Istanbul is described by Pamuk as a 'city that mourns over its loss of colour' (39). The main concern of this essay is to investigate the relationship between text and photography in order to reveal their symbolic and symbiotic relationship in understanding the clash and interlacing of cultures. In particular, the essay will concentrate on the memory of the Ottoman past of Istanbul that Pamuk dwells upon and its importance in understanding the past multiculturalism of the city in order to juxtapose this to Nicosia and its lost multiculturalism through the use of photography and text in the collaboration between the photographer Arunas Baltenas and the writer Niki Marangou in *Nicossiences* (2006).[2] The Baltenas and Marangou's text is written in three languages, English, Greek and Turkish, which divide the book into three sections and the photographs are not referred to in the text as in the case of Pamuk's book. What distinguishes both books is the use of ruins in the photography. My concern here is how the symbolism of ruins works in both books in order to reveal the precariousness of cultural realignments through the juxtaposition of word and image.

Fig. 1

The last photograph in the final chapter/photographic acknowledgment section in Pamuk's memoir shows him and the photographer, Ara Guler, whose photographs of Istanbul provide the majority of the illustrations in the book (Fig. 1). It is only at this point that the reader is partly informed of the relationship between the photographs and the author's narrative when Pamuk reveals that he relived the excitement and puzzlement of writing the book while choosing the photographs. This enthusiasm is evident in the smile on Pamuk's face who is seen sitting in front of a selection of slides and seems to be placing them in some kind of order, the process of which made him 'drunk with memories' (335). For Pamuk the photographs represented a projection of his 'own memory onto a screen'. This projection of screen memories made him want to 'capture and preserve' the dreamscape that each photograph represented and 'write about it' (335). The selection and ordering of the photographs and the intoxication that follows such a process, provide some indication of the relationship between photography, memory and the text in *Istanbul*.

My main concern here is to pose a number of questions that I hope will untangle what seems at first glance to be a very straightforward relationship. My first question is to what extent the temporality and spatiality of the photographic image, and in particular the image of ruins, presents a particular relationship to melancholia and memory that moves beyond the symbolic mode of the text? How does Pamuk use the two media in tandem in order to address questions of representation, mediation of private and public memory, and the possibility of an alternative model of cultural memory that departs from the cultural confines of borders? Finally, how can this transcultural model of memory help the reader understand the representation of the city of Nicosia with its divided and abject space.

The use of photography in autobiographies has become increasingly popular since the invention of photography, especially in a new kind of memoir / autobiography that Annette Kuhn terms 'revisionist autobiography' (180). The special relationship between photography and autobiography forms the main concern for Linda Haverty Rugg who argues that photographs in autobiographies, or even a reference to photographs, cue the reader into a complex play of signifiers that indicates the presence of a person upon whom text and images rebound (21). Discussions of the relationship of photography to text have largely relied on a binary relationship that sees photographs as lacking intentionality, with language providing the framing of the photograph and the construction of its meaning.[3] Contrary to this Jay Prosser argues most convincingly that photography in autobiography functions as a *memento mori* that makes real a loss and helps one to apprehend it by capturing a reality that might otherwise not be seen or most importantly, 'we would choose not to see', and it is exactly this intentional oversight that cannot be recovered by the text (Prosser 2, 9).

The city of Istanbul is remembered in the book through the writings, lithographs and photographs of Orientalist writers, artists, architects and photographers

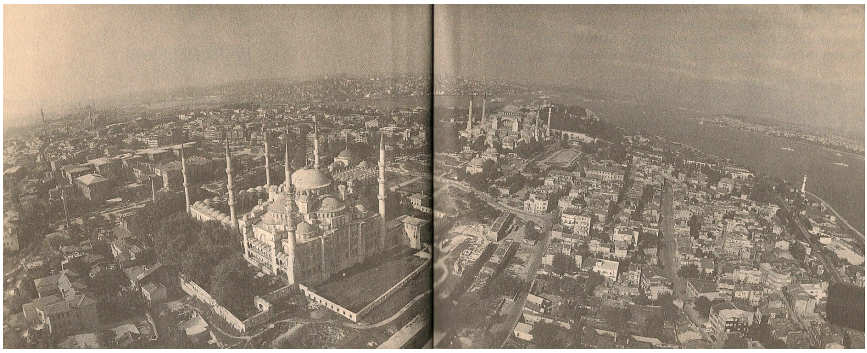

Fig. 2

like Gustave Flaubert, Le Corbusier, Gerard de Nerval, Melling and Theophile Gautier who construct the identity and, most importantly, the memory of the city that Pamuk wants to remember. These European artists engaged with the city before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and for Pamuk they offered the viewer / reader the variety of life that characterised the city before the Turkish republic was established and from which point onwards the 'world almost forgot that Istanbul existed' (6). For Pamuk the Istanbul in which he was born and lived all his life was a 'city in ruins' and most importantly, a city of 'end-of-empire melancholy' which he spent most of his life 'either battling' or 'making it my own' (6). How is this melancholy constructed through photography and its relationship to the text?

For some preliminary considerations on this relationship I want to consider two photographs that Pamuk uses in the first chapter. The first is a double spread panoramic view of Istanbul by Ara Guler (Fig. 2) and the second is another family snapshot of baby Pamuk in the arms of his mother (Fig. 3). Neither of these photographs is referred to in the text, as is the case with the majority of the images that punctuate, and to a certain extent puncture, the flow of the narrative. The panoramic view is of the historical part of the city, the Sultanahmet area with *Ayia Sophia* in the foreground, the Blue Mosque and the Bosporus in the background. It is very much a picture post-card image of Istanbul with its two main tourist attractions. What the photograph also represents is the two civilisations that inform the construction of the identity of the city: the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires and the clash of these two civilisations in the spatiality and psyche of the city. This image differs from the following images of the city in that a certain melancholy characterises most of the other images whereas this image is a more positive image of Istanbul. Another complication is that the photographer of the image, Ara Guler (who photographed most of the images of Istanbul in the book), is of Armenian descent. This fact is not revealed to the reader. The importance of this association is related to the fact that Pamuk himself was prosecuted under the anti-Turkishness law (Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code) by which law anyone who expresses views contrary to those advocated by the government is

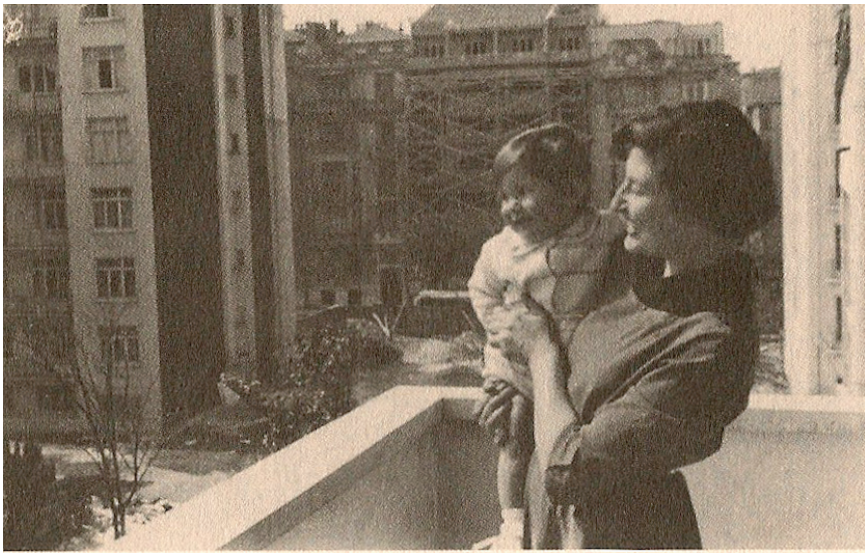

Fig. 3

liable to prosecution. Pamuk was prosecuted under these laws for mentioning the Armenian and Kurdish genocides[4] during an interview with the Swiss newspaper, *Tages Anzeiger*, in February 2005. The publication of the interview resulted in a public outcry in Turkey which culminated in the burning of his books and of his photograph, and with *Hurriyet*, Turkey's largest circulation newspaper, calling Pamuk an 'abject creature' (*Die Zeit* online).

I will now examine the relationship between text and photography in the first chapter where the above images are positioned in order to explore the screen memories that Pamuk claims photographs of Istanbul create for him and his relationship to the city which he describes as 'one of fate' (7). He accepts the city that he was born in although it is an 'ageing' and 'impoverished' city 'buried under the ashes of a ruined empire' (7). This conditional acceptance of the city provides the main connection to his relationship with the photographs. In the Turkish language, according to Pamuk, a special tense distinguishes 'hearsay from what we've seen with our own eyes' (8). This tense is used when relating dreams, fairy tales, or past events that were not witnessed. The distinction is a useful one according to Pamuk ,especially when one is narrating one's life, because we cannot remember our earliest memories since these are narrated to us by somebody else and are 'imprinted in our minds' to the degree that they 'end up mattering more than what we ourselves remember' (8). The formation of the self through these memories and experiences works in the same way that the identity of a city is formed through memories that are handed down through previous generations and, according to Pamuk, always depend on 'others' to tell the story: 'we let others shape our understanding of the city in which we live' (8).

What Pamuk is also engaging with at this point and throughout the book is the relationship between memory and photography and the argument put forward by Walter Benjamin and other commentators that photography creates a 'false' or 'counter' memory which results in what Sontag calls the replacement of memory by a photograph (Benjamin ([980]; Barthes; Sontag). The relationship of the two photographs to the text can then provide a third reading: the two images if read in conjunction can provide an allegorical meaning to the text; the motherly protection that baby Pamuk receives in the arms of his mother offers protection and comfort to the smiling young child looking over the balcony of their apartment at the world below in the same way that the photograph of the city provides a pacified coherent image of Istanbul that like the motherly love can also produce a symbiosis between the two religions, East and West as well as a number of ethnic groups.

This relationship of photography to memory also creates also the main problem for representations of Istanbul. Because of the absence of such visual representations from Islamic artistic tradition, Istanbul's identity and memory is established only through the images produced by Western travellers mainly in the nineteenth century. The question that then arises is what kind of cultural memory is produced in relation to a city that relies exclusively on the Western gaze. In the chapter titled 'Black and White', the city is described in photographic terms: the dark surfaces of the buildings, their texture and shading and the black and white crowds in the darkening streets during wintertime. Pamuk favours the winter darkness because it offers protection from the inquisitive Western gaze since it veils the 'shameful poverty of our city' (32). At this point a Guler photograph is inserted into the text (Fig. 4), so that the narrative refers not only to the literal

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

poverty of the city but also to the shame of the nation in the eyes of the West regarding the Armenian genocide. Pamuk says the photograph captures the back streets of his childhood where concrete apartment blocks stood next to old wooden houses. It is the chiaroscuro of the photograph, the 'chiaroscuro of twilight' (32), that best encapsulates the photograph as a representation of the city. Pamuk writes that it is not what is represented in the photograph — the cobblestone streets and pavements, the iron grilles on the windows or the empty, ruined wooden houses — but the shadows that the two people form in the photograph that provide the punctum: 'these two people who are dragging long shadows behind them on their way home are actually pulling the blanket of night over the entire city' thus metaphorically pulling a blanket over the city's inconvenient history (32). This blanket which will render the city invisible to the foreign gaze produces an oxymoron: a photograph is supposed to enlighten a situation through its presumed representation of reality and not bring darkness and veiling. What the photograph and the oxymoron it creates achieves in this instance is to bring to the forefront the immensity of loss that Pamuk is feeling in relation to his city and the nation as a whole. To see the city in black and white as in a monochrome photograph, 'is to see it through the tarnish of history: the patina of what is old and faded and no longer matters to the rest of the world' (38). The protection that the black and white offers can also be seen in the way the people dress (Fig. 5); they all wear 'the same pale, drab, shadowy clothes', something that Pamuk finds a deliberate act in order to make a moral point: 'this is how you grieve for a city that has been in decline for a hundred and fifty years' (39).

Fig. 6

Through this grieving comes the idea of *huzun* that Pamuk develops in chapter ten. Pamuk places importance on the distinction between the Western idea of melancholia and its Turkish equivalent, *huzun*. The word has its roots in the Arabic language and is meant to convey a feeling of deep spiritual loss. What is important, according to Pamuk, is the absence rather than the presence of *huzun*, which causes distress; it is the failure to experience *huzun* that leads to feelings of *huzun* and one suffers because they have not suffered enough. Hence, the melancholia that characterises the life and culture of Istanbul can be attributed partly to this idea of honour that one feels in experiencing *huzun*, but for Pamuk this is not a complete explanation of the melancholy that the inhabitants of Istanbul feel. In order to understand this melancholy one needs to place it within the social and historical context of the city following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the way in which this history 'is reflected in the city's "beautiful" landscapes and people' (82). It is through this positioning that *huzun* can be understood as a 'state of mind that is ultimately as life affirming as it is negating' (82). According to Pamuk, to feel this *huzun* is to 'see the scenes, evoke the memories in which the city itself becomes the very illustration, the very essence of *huzun*' (83).

It is exactly at this point that the relationship between the photographs and the narrative becomes clearer. The photographs convey to the reader the *huzun* of the city by making us see the scenes and by making the city the actual illustration. By seeing the city through the photographs the city becomes the illustration rather than the photographs. What this visualisation of the city through the photographic medium also achieves is a sensual encounter with the *huzun*. One can 'sense it everywhere' almost 'touch it' (89) (Fig 6). The tactility of the photographic image is transformed into the tactility of the *huzun* in the city. Photography, an imported Western medium, provides the evidence of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire that litter the city and which are 'reminders that the present city is so poor and

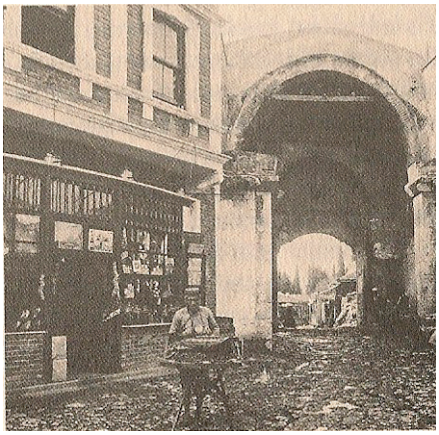

Fig. 7

confused that it can never again dream of rising to the same heights of wealth, power and culture' (91). Memory, writes Walter Benjamin, is not an instrument for the exploration of the past but rather its theatre, the medium of what has been experienced, as the earth is the medium in which cities lie buried in debris. Most importantly for Benjamin, 'facts are only layers, which deliver … the true assets hidden within inner earth: the images, which stand like ruins as the treasures in the prosaic chambers of our belated insights' (2006 40).

The *huzun* is presented visually through the many photographs of ruins and decay (Fig. 7 & 8). They puncture the text in order to remind the reader of the loss that Pamuk feels in relation to the Ottoman past of the city. What is also conspicuous about these photographs is the absence of life. Any contemporary visitor to Istanbul will be struck by the intensity of life in the city, the noises, the smells, the crowds of people moving constantly day and night along its main streets. Instead, the photographs Pamuk chose for his text are characterised by an eerie silence, the tranquillity of ruins and the melancholy of loss. When commenting on Atget's photographs of empty Paris streets, Benjamin writes that the 'city in these images is cleaned out like an apartment that has not yet found a new tenant' (1980 260). For Pamuk, like Atget, the empty streets of Istanbul stay empty after the expulsion of its multiethnic inhabitants following the demise of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century and the establishment of the Turkish Republic; and it is photography that conveys this loss in a much stronger way than the text. In the photographs that Pamuk uses, there is not the regenerative energy that usually characterises Atget's photography and enables the viewer to see the ordinary streets of Paris from a fresh angle and light; although for the Turkish reader the photographs might present an invitation to see their city in a different light — as haunted by the past.[5] These ruins, cracks and imperfections form the subject matter of the photographs that Pamuk uses to create, I would argue, an 'in-between space' in relation to the text and the photographs. It is exactly the same in-between space that Niki Marangou and Arunas Baltenas capture in their work on Nicosia. An alternative space is created in the text through the incorporation of photography which offers a possibility that exceeds the artificiality of boundaries and nationalist discourses.

Three photographs precede the English section of the book (Fig. 9, 10, 11). The first photograph is of a deserted, empty, ruined house which must have

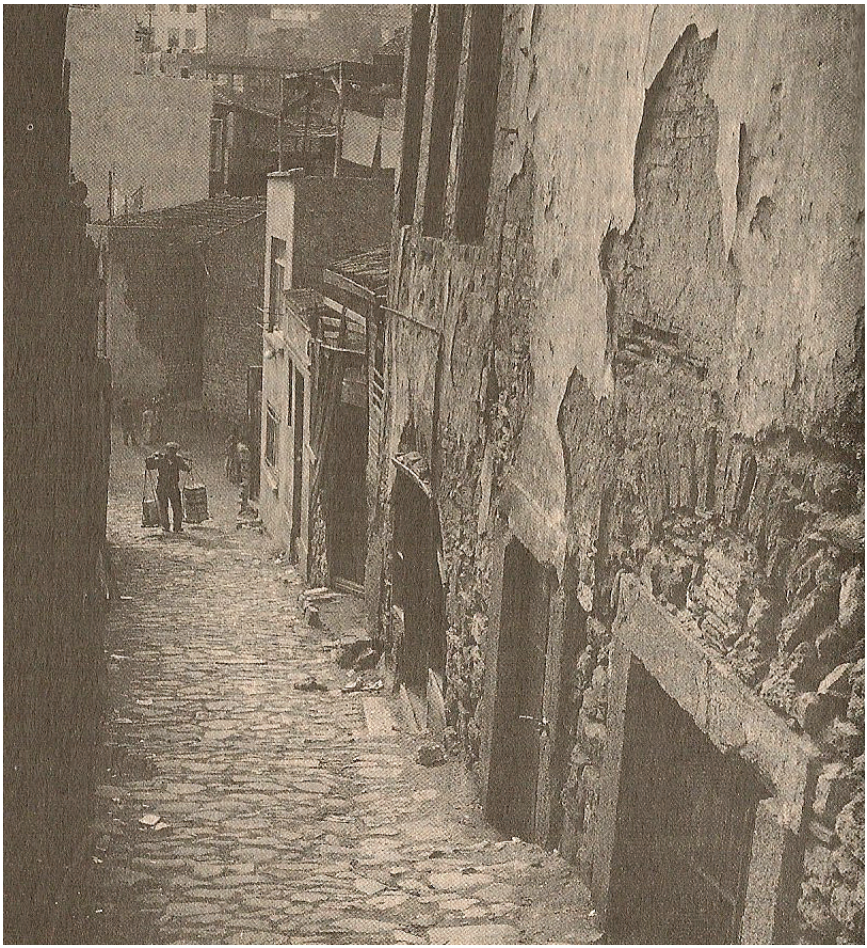

Fig. 8

been a mansion judging from the imposing staircase that is still arresting and is emphasised by the only source of light in the photograph that falls from above and onto the staircase. The second image provides a complete contrast to the photograph of ruins. It shows a Greek Orthodox wedding ceremony and it is the only photograph with a number of people in it. This photograph is followed by a deserted walled garden with an open gate under an impressive archway. Opposite, a house built in typical early twentieth-century architecture can be seen. Its façade is weathered and in need of attention and care.

Turning the page, the English text immediately introduces the reader to Nicosia's 'tension', the Green Line that divides the city into two. According to Marangou & Baltenas however, this artificial border is also the source of the 'passion' that

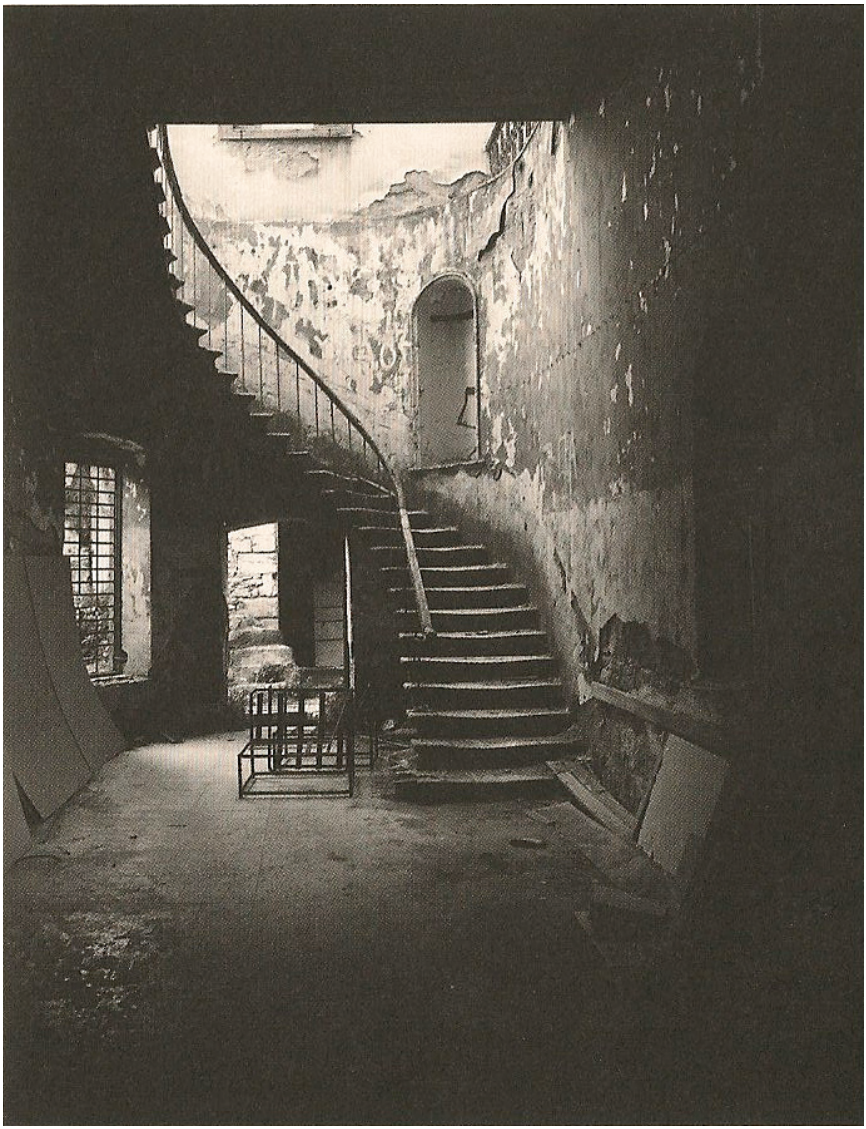

Fig. 9

characterises the city and which makes Nicosia more similar to Constantinople (the author uses the Greek name of Istanbul which I adopt from this point onwards) than to Athens. This similarity is stressed in the first page with references to the minarets of Ayia Sophia and the voice of the imam. This introductory page then leads to the narration of the author's early life in Cyprus, a life characterised by cosmopolitan interactions. This was a colourful life full of sounds, smells and tactile

Fig. 10

surfaces. The sensorial childhood memories are in sharp contrast to the black and white photographs which are devoid of life, like the photograph of an architectural detail (fig. 12) that interrupts the narrative at this point. Moreover, it is not only the Turkish community that used to fascinate the author but also the Armenian community of Nicosia with its colourful quarter and intriguing smells. Her daily rounds of the city would reveal hidden treasures, tokens of the rich history of the island and its cosmopolitanism.

During this period, the first roadblocks appeared as the author was growing up and finally the city was divided into two. At this point, another photograph punctures the narrative (fig. 13) showing two children in a deserted street in front of a semi-derelict old house. Their tiny figures provide a glimpse of hope, which however is immediately taken away by the next photograph of the front door of a crumbling house. The two photographs offer to the viewer a past and a present that co-exist and function in simultaneity. The past is in a state of virtuality and invites readers to place themselves in it if they are to have recollections and memory images. To remember, writes the philosopher Henri Bergson, is to throw oneself into the past, to seek events where they took place and to refuse to conceptualise space as a passive repository whose form is given by its content and instead, to see it as a moment of becoming and a passage from one space to another (187). The threshold of the door provides exactly this.

The text ends with a rejection of the new city of Nicosia that expanded beyond the old Venetian walls and is characterised by wealth. These new areas are according to Marangou 'drained of colour, the new houses with tall columns and endless rooms could be just anywhere' (Marangou & Baltenas n.p.). They lack the

Fig. 11

character of the old city where the crumbling walls of the houses convey a sense of history. It is in the old city that one can sense 'Nicosia's geographical location facing East' (n.p.). For Marangou the garden provides a microcosm where:

> I have planted roses in the garden this year
> instead of writing poems
> the centifolia from the house in mourning at Ayios Thomas
> the sixty-petaled rose Midas brought from Phrygia

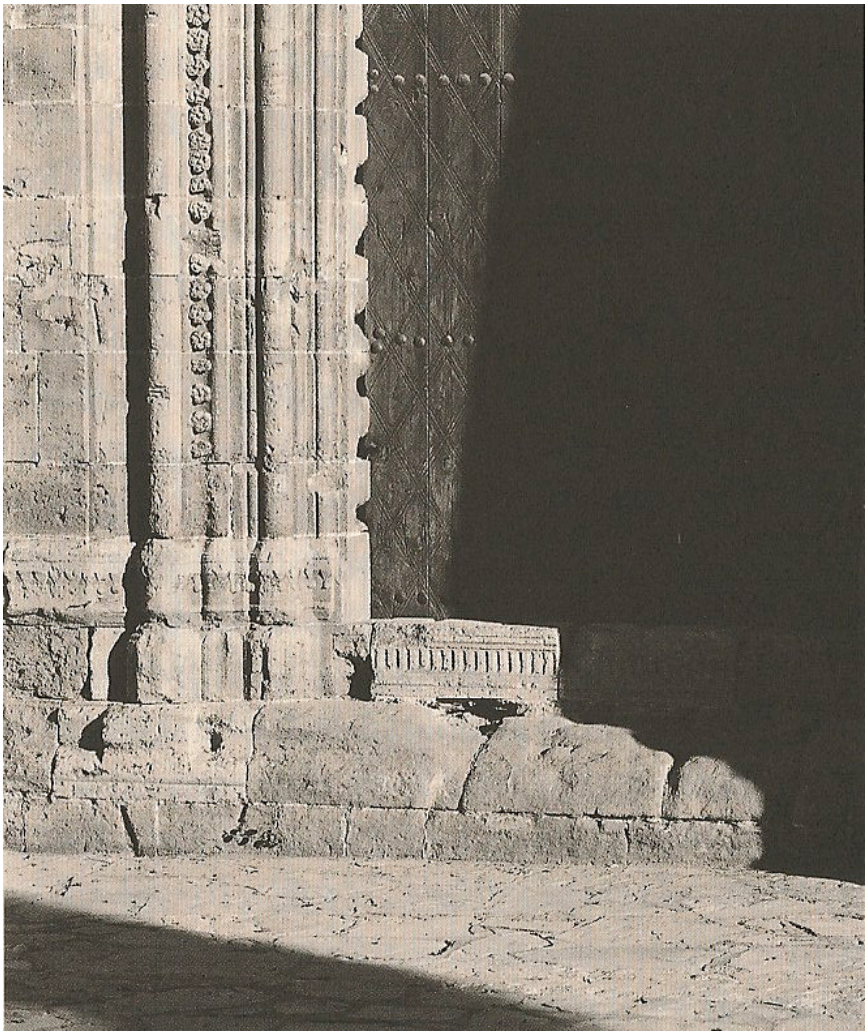

Fig. 12

the Bankisan that came from China
cuttings from the mouchette surviving
in the old city,
but especially Rosa Gallica, brought by the Crusaders
With the exquisite perfume
[…]
we shall be sharing leaves, petals, sky,
in this incredible garden,
both they and I transitory. (Marangou & Baltenas n.p.)

Fig. 13

The garden and its smells not only represent the embodiment of memories from different corners of the history of Cyprus but also offer the possibility of reconciliation. It is through these shared historical memories of smell that the 'I' can express itself as a subject and a Cypriot. The book ends with a photograph of a rose bush in bloom (fig. 14).

In many respects, Marangou proposes like Pamuk, a Deleuzian 'in between space': a space, which is at the intersection of two events or rather two series (Grosz, 91–105). The events / series that she represents are aligned in order to create

Fig. 14

a plane of consistence and coexistence. Her narrative is a process of becoming that transubstantiates memories through their encounters with history and the objects around them. This allows memories and objects to be released from the systems they belong to, in order to work for the whole rather than to function singularly. The process that Marangous' narrative instigates in relation to Baltenas' photographs endows memories and history with transforming possibilities in relation to the landscape that surrounds them.

Like Pamuk, it is exactly reflection that allows Marangou's and Baltenas' work to create an in-between space. This is a space without boundaries. It takes its form from the abject space of the dead zone which sits outside of the identity of those that constitute the enemy or the friend, in order to provide possibilities, realignments and openness, as opposed to cohesion and unity. This space is where identities can be undone and the binaries and dualisms that dominate Cypriot culture can be re-thought and contested. This space also allows the reconstitution of identities and the re-evaluation of what constitutes the other. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, 'any identity is always riven with forces, with processes, connections, movements that exceed and transform identity and that connect individuals to each other and to worlds, in ways unforeseen by consciousness and unconnected to identity' (Grosz 95).

Marangou and Pamuk juxtapose photography with text in order to reveal the complexities of memory, loss, trauma and space in relation to geo-political, aesthetic, and identity issues. Their constructed spaces, inspired by the ruins of Nicosia and Istanbul/Constantinople, become spaces where, through an interrogation of memory, they can reveal the interruptions of history in the

spatiality of the city in order to create another possibility of history. As Benjamin wrote: 'in the ruin history has materially distorted itself into the scene. And figured in this manner, history does not assume the form of the promise of an eternal life' (1977 177).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
All images from *Nicossiences* have been reproduced with permission from the authors.

NOTES

1 Pamuk, Orhan 2005, *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, Faber, London. All references refer to this edition

2 Marangou, Nikik & Arunas Baltenas 2006, *Nicossiences*, R. Paknio leidykla, Nicosia All references refer to this edition. No pagination

3 See Scott 62 and Mitchell 109, for two contrasting views.

4 The Armenian Genocide was centrally planned and administered by the Turkish government against the entire Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire. It was carried out between 1915 and 1918. The Armenian people were subjected to deportation, expropriation, abduction, torture, massacre, and starvation and the majority of the Armenian population was forcibly removed from Armenia and Anatolia to Syria, where the vast majority were sent into the desert to die of thirst and hunger. Large numbers of Armenians were methodically massacred throughout the Ottoman Empire. It is estimated that half a million Armenians died during this period. The Turkish government denies to this day that the genocide took place. See http://www.armenian-genocide.org/genocidefaq.html

In 1999 over 40,000 Kurds were killed during military operations in Turkey and according to figures published by the Turkish parliament, 6,000 Kurdish villages were systematically evacuated of all their inhabitants and 3,000,000 Kurds were displaced. See http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=13491

5 See Cadava for a discussion of ruins and photograph.

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