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ALIENATION AND THE CITY, OR, HOW TO FIND AND LOSE YOURSELF IN BERLIN AND KARS

By William Fysh

In Konvolut M of the *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin comments instructively on the duality of the city as experienced by the *flâneur*. He writes: 'the city splits for him into dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room' (Benjamin, trans. Eiland and McLaughlin, 1999, 417). The implications of this are several. The dialectical poles are on the one hand spatial - indicators of the flexibility of self-location in the city. However, they are also metaphysical and meta-poetic. The city offers the possibility for a blending of personal and collective memories; for an opening of the mind to a 'landscape' of social interaction or a retreat of the soul into its own isolated 'room'; for the injection of a creative impulse or the projection of psychological and experiential stagnation. This study examines the impact of these dialectical poles on ideas of selfhood, loss and memory in Cees Nooteboom's *All Souls' Day* and Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*. Both novels have thus far received very little scholarly attention, and journalistic reviews have frequently appeared narrow-minded if not misguided. Picking up on Pamuk's own commentary – '*Snow* is my first deliberately political novel' (Smith 2004, 34) – literary reviewers have labelled it as just that, all but ignoring the novel's investigation of aesthetics and the nature of literary creativity.[1] Ian Almond has treated *Snow* as little more than national allegory, as 'an authentic view of contemporary Turkish society with its current conflicts and problems' (Almond 2003, 76). On its first publication in English in 2002, *All Souls' Day* provoked mixed responses, some particularly vitriolic. Stephan Atzert, for example, lamented 'this buffet lunch of Eurocentric clichés' (Atzert 2002, 206); Julie Myerson complained about the central character, Arthur Daane, who 'mooches about filming "a series of fragments" [...] for a solipsistic project no one will ever see' (Myerson 2002). But these are both critiques of intentional fallacies. The Eurocentrism and solipsism of character and novel are emblematic of an implosion, or a condensation, of memorial and identifying reference points. It is precisely this capturing of an ordinary history which no one will ever see, this preservation of fragmentary, everyday experience which formulates a creative attempt to reconnect the individual with his environment, to establish new ways of viewing sites of memory, and to find one's proper place in the city.

Both novels are intimately concerned with the flexible relationship between identity and the occupation of physical space in the city. Michel de Certeau has elucidated the complexities associated with this relationship as one moves through the urban landscape:

> [T]he moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place – an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into tiny countless deportations, compensated for by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric. (de Certeau, trans. Rendall, 1984, 103)

In this way, the meeting points between different absences paradoxically create a form of presence, a tangible spatial entity which, through its very permanence, testifies to a transitory sense of self-location. This paradox draws attention to the nature of the city as a space in which the dislocating experience of the self sits uneasily both with the transient group identity of the crowd and with the unstable collectivist effect of the material urban structure, a system of signs which 'ought to be,

[1] For example, David Robson notes: 'in the excellent, sardonic Pamuk, they [the Western readers] have a first-rate guide to the social tensions of provincial Turkey' (Robson 2004).

ultimately, the place but is only a name, the City' (de Certeau, trans. Rendall, 1984, 103). *All Souls' Day* develops this unease particularly acutely. Leaving an art gallery in the centre of Berlin, Arthur sees the statue of the golden angel of Victory: 'High above the palace dome, balancing on a golden globe, she danced in the cold, her bare breasts lashed by the snow [...]. Female symbols, whether they represented Peace or Victory, were always placed as high and as far away as possible' (Nooteboom, trans. Massoty, 2002, 43). The angel is doubly ironic: its monumental permanence evokes an irrecoverable distancing, a problematic which is analogous to that of the photographs of Arthur's dead wife and child, photographs 'whose images seemed more remote every time he looked at them' (Nooteboom, trans. Massoty, 2002, 2); but the physical permanence of the angel also constantly projects a public form of the absent signified – the final victory over Europe that never was. This piece of urban fabric, as a result of its position far off the ground and dislocated from the world below, symbolises the questions which are the subject of Arthur's creative impulse: how can the individual accommodate and remember absences and loss? How can individual memory be located within the collectivist urban experiences and material structures which struggle to hold meaning beyond the immediate conditions of their construction?

Snow, in particular, attempts to answer these questions through a display of the interaction between textual and urban spaces. When Ka is listening to Blue describe the torture and assassination that has taken place in Kars after the infamous night at the theatre, the narrator recounts Ka's method of dealing with disquieting communal experience: 'when a good poet was confronted with difficult facts that he knew to be true but that were also inimical to poetry, he had no choice but to flee to the margins. It was, he said, this very retreat that allowed him to hear the hidden music that was the source of all art' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 232). Just as Ka has fled to the marginal urban space of Kars to discover a sense of beauty absent amongst the frigid society of Turkish exiles in Frankfurt, so he must flee to the border of the page in order to create something distinctive and poetic from the prosaic, shared politics of loss. In this way Ka reflects what Pamuk identifies in *Istanbul: Memories and the City* as the chaos which can ensue when one attempts to 'read' the city. Pamuk recalls occasions when, swamped by terrorising crowds and an oppressive noonday sun, he has been confronted with a 'hybrid, lettered hell' in which the language of the city appears as a kind of lament:

> RAZORSPLEASEPROCEEDATLUNCHTIMEPHILIPSLICENSEE-
> DOCTORDEPOTFOLDTHECARPETSPORCELAINFAHIR-
> ATTORNEYATLAW.
>
> (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2005, 288)

The narrator of *Snow* claims that his inability to understand poetry creates a wall that divides him not only from the melancholy city depicted in Ka's notes, but also from the impoverished place he was seeing with his own eyes (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 387). Comprehension of poetry and comprehension of the city are mutually dependent. Yet, at the same time, to reconcile personal and urban spaces and memories requires a certain distance. As Pamuk observes, it is when he watches old black and white Turkish films of the streets, the old gardens and the broken-down mansions, that he sometimes forgets he is watching a film: 'stupefied by melancholy, I sometimes feel as if I'm watching my own past' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2005, 33). To remember one's own experience as part of a collective experience demands an imaginative focus, a layer of artistry which at once allows the writer the distance for observation and the proximity for identification. This demand for simultaneous distance and proximity is writ large throughout *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, a collection of thoughts which are part autobiographical, part journalistic and part fictional. In this collection, Pamuk's identification of a historical self is always merged with the constant presence of a constructed writer figure.

Snow identifies the problems that ensue when personal and collective experiences are denied any imaginative focus. When the narrator visits Frankfurt, he comes across an underground mosque and shopping complex, a stifled, sterile place in which Turkish exiles are crammed into collective identification. Réda Bensmaïa has argued that the modern, westernised, 'neutral' urban space, in which the individual must conform to a set of common measures and standardised prices, can be contrasted with the labyrinthine medina whose 'uncertain geography' merges with an equally uncertain geography of thought, 'initiating the passerby into what they are seeking', without 'necessarily showing them what they had expected to find' (Bensmaïa, trans. Waters, 2003, 28-30). However, in this bastardised medina in Frankfurt, the narrator finds something altogether different. Crowded with men in 'dark and dirty shops [...] idly watching television', surrounded by 'cases of Turkish fruit juice, Turkish macaroni, Turkish canned goods' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 260), and disturbed only by the occasional movement of someone shuffling over to the 'makeshift fountain' to perform his ablutions, this city within a city offers the most predictable geography of thought, showing Turkish expatriates precisely the parochialism they expected to find. There is no room for imaginative focus; there is only the kind of solitude that Paul Valéry felt on London Bridge when he beheld not a 'crowd of individual beings, each with his own history [...] his interior monologue and his fate but a flux of identical particles, equally sucked in by the same nameless void' (cited in Benjamin, trans. Eiland and McLaughlin, 1999, 453). The only difference here is that there isn't even any flux: the individuals merge to form a conglomeration of identical particles, a collective non-identity. In this way, the Turks who frequent this underground complex appear to suffer the effects of a perverse form of urban modernity, inasmuch as modernity, according to Victor Burgin, is 'at the origin of the social isolation in [...] the death of the street as a social interaction, and the practice of "zoning", which establishes absolute lines of demarcation between...cultural and commercial activities' (Burgin 1998, 60). The bastardised medina becomes a demarcated zone of claustrophobic cultural and commercial inactivity, set up as a subterranean island of social stasis cut off from the streets above.

Consequently, in *Snow*, imaginative faculties play a crucial role in avoiding such sterility, formulating the complex process of mapping the city, the poetic corpus and the self. Rummaging through Ka's notebooks, the narrator discovers a picture of a snowflake on which Ka has mapped his collection of nineteen poems written in Kars. The three axes of the snowflake are labelled 'Imagination', 'Memory' and 'Logic'; at the centre of the structure is the poem 'I, Ka', the nexus at which these three faculties meet. Earlier in the novel, we are told in the final lines of 'I, Ka' that 'he mapped out a vision of himself and his place in the world, his special fears, his distinctive attributes, his uniqueness' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 220). In this way, the poetic product of self-location acts as the epicentre of the 'deep and mysterious' underlying structure of things, binding the poems, and the memories of the locations in which those poems were composed, to an idiosyncratic geography.[2] Consequently, Ka asserts his belief in the usefulness of the snowflake as a means of coming to terms with selfhood and with the way in which the individual relates to his environment. He becomes convinced that 'everything that made him the man he was could be indicated on the same set of crystalline axes [...] a snowflake [...] mapped out the spiritual course of every person who had ever lived' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 383). Concurrently, he believes that as the form of each snowflake is determined by the exact nature of its conditions – wind, temperature, 'and any number of other mysterious forces' – 'snowflakes have much in common with people' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 383). Thus the snowflake offers a necessarily abstruse representation of both the self and the creation of the self.

The primary threat to creativity in both *All Souls' Day* and *Snow* lies in the desensitisation of the masses through television. Arthur describes this as a permanent distancing effect which alienates the viewers from the witnessed events, 'as if we're looking down from some great height at the

[2] A linkage which is emphasised linguistically in the original Turkish: Ka - *Kar* (snow) – Kars.

camps, the mass graves [...] mentally turning away as we watch [...] the facts, the act of looking at them, has become a kind of armour that shields us from the suffering' (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 89). Arthur's concern is a particularly Benjaminian one: television news is presented as mere information, 'already shot through with explanation', as Benjamin once wrote, received and disposed of in one movement which cannot benefit the storyteller. This is information which, unlike the creative potential of the story, 'does not survive the moment in which it was new' (Benjamin, trans. Zorn, 1999, 89-90). But whereas *All Souls' Day* exposes television as an instrument for man's alienation from the collective experiences of the wider world, *Snow* focuses on the potential alienation of a civic collective from the city itself. Throughout the city of Kars, cafés are full of unemployed men grouped around silent televisions. The televisions themselves become constant reminders of urban demise and poverty, underlining a depressing sense of social interiority whereby all the streets of the city are emptied at four o'clock in the afternoon, every inhabitant settling in to watch the soap *Marianna* (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 246). In this way, Kars experiences a daily death of *flânerie* and a daily re-birth of the stagnation of creativity. Since, as Edmond Jaloux observed, the act of walking through the city entails the freedom 'to follow your inspiration as if the mere fact of turning right or turning left already constituted an essentially poetic act' (cited in Benjamin, trans. Eiland and McLaughlin, 1999, 436), the bodies huddled around silent televisions in Kars signify domestic entrapment and a denial of the poetic act.

However, in the case of *Snow*, there is a sense in which the melancholic desolation of Kars is itself a fundamentally creative force. When Ka first arrives in the city, we are told that the decrepit Russian buildings, shanty towns and empty, snow-covered squares 'spoke of a strange and powerful loneliness. It was as if he were in a place that the whole world had forgotten; as if it were snowing at the end of the world' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 10). This establishes an important connection between the writer and the city, a connection which Pamuk reveals most profoundly in an exploration of the word *hüzün*, the Turkish word for 'melancholy', in *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. *Hüzün* has a communal meaning, according to Pamuk: it is a concept 'in which we see ourselves reflected, the *hüzün* we absorb with pride and share as a community. To feel this *hüzün* is to see the scenes, evoke the memories, in which the city itself becomes the very illustration, the very essence, of *hüzün*' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2005, 84). Thus a personal sense of melancholy is mirrored in the collective urban melancholy of 'broken seesaws in empty parks [...,] mosques whose lead plates and rain gutters are forever being stolen', and 'cinemas, once glittering affairs with gilded ceilings, now porn cinemas frequented by shamefaced men' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2005, 84-6). Reminiscent of the personification of Melancholy in Dürer's *Melencolia I* (Figure 1), the Istanbullu finds himself as a memory collector surrounded by collectible memories. Beatrice Hanssen's observation on Dürer's piece is apposite here: 'at this juncture [...] the state of melancholia as mere alienated self-loss also turns inside out to reveal itself to be a mode of knowledge, disclosing the extent to which the outside object at once proves constitutive of the self' (Hanssen 2002, 181). This collective melancholy is an epistemology that allows the citizens to arrive at a sense of self in the city, giving them their particular civic identity.[3] As a result, Pamuk suggests, the destitution of the city can become a positive force for its inhabitants: '*hüzün* rises out of the pain they feel for all that which has been lost, but it is also what compels them to invent new defeats and new ways to express their impoverishment [...]. *Hüzün* does not just paralyse the inhabitants of Istanbul; it also gives them poetic licence to be paralysed' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2005, 92-3). Melancholy provides the creative spark for the poetic act.

[3] Since melancholy is fundamentally a way of describing the relationship between the ego and the surrounding objects of loss (conceptualised by Freud as an ongoing, never-ending interaction), the simultaneous projections of selfhood and self-location as attempts to accommodate loss are inherent in the idea of melancholy. As David Eng and David Kazanjian have commented, 'It is precisely the ego's melancholic attachments to loss that might be said to produce not only psychic life and subjectivity but also the domain of remains. That is, melancholia creates a realm of traces open to signification, a hermeneutic domain of what remains of loss' (Eng and Kazanjian 2002, 4).

In fact, the feeling of melancholy can become so strong as to be transcendental. This particular aspect of *hüzün* derives from its use in Sufist thought. Pamuk claims that in addition to the word's meaning as the loss experienced from an over-investment in worldly pleasures and material gain, *hüzün* also describes a Sufi tradition of melancholy – 'the spiritual anguish we feel because we cannot be close enough to Allah, because we cannot do enough for Allah in this world' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2005, 81). This aspect is important because Ka misappropriates Sufi transcendentalism in *Snow*. When he embarks upon his first solitary walk through the city of Kars, he describes how he moved with sad determination to the poorest neighbourhoods where 'the desolation and remoteness of the place hit him with such force that he felt God inside him' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 19). Rather than experience the Sufi distance from God, Ka, the westernised Istanbullu newly arrived from Frankfurt, experiences a fantastical and novel sense of belief and proximity to God which will gradually erode as the novel progresses and as Ka comes to acknowledge the ultimately irretrievable distance between himself and the Islamic faith.

This process of self-isolation manifests itself both physically and spiritually. Although the presence of the snow at the start of the novel appears to mitigate the dirt and misery of Kars, we are informed later on that 'just the sight of it made Ka feel lonely' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 27). When Ka thinks of what his father would have said about his son kneeling before a village sheikh and talking with tears in his eyes about his faith in God, the narrator records: 'outside, the snow had started falling again; the snowflakes he could see from his window were large and dreary' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 180). The physical conditions which once allowed Ka to dare 'to believe himself at home in this world' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 4) end up symbolising spiritual exile. But the snow, the physical reminder of personal loneliness, also functions as the agent of civic isolation – it is because of the snow that all the roads are shut, that the city seems 'forgotten'. This sense of being at the end of the world brings about the fear of communal irrelevance, the anxiety, as the Islamist student Fazıl puts it, that 'our wretched lives have no place in human history', that 'we'll spend the rest of our days here arguing what sort of scarf women should wrap around their heads and no one will care in the slightest' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 294).

All Souls' Day exhibits a more philosophical concern about being alienated from history. Rather than worrying about his life having no place in the history books, Arthur fears an age in which historical minutiae might disappear completely from modern culture. As he shows Elik the *Todesstreifen*, the death strip between East and West Germany which is now nothing more than 'a stretch of sandy dirt', we are told: 'if she had come here by herself, she wouldn't have noticed a thing [...]. What had happened had been real, and now not only was it no longer real, but it looked as if it had never been real at all' (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 177). In this way, Arthur displays a Benjaminian anxiety about the ways in which an unsubtle historicism can alienate a society from its own past. Boyer describes Benjamin's critique of a bourgeois preoccupation with monuments and the reconstruction of history 'according to a completely fabricated architecture', a preoccupation which leads to a purely superficial appreciation of the past, denying the occasion for discrete historical events to 'violently collide [...] so that the present may achieve insight and critical awareness into what once had been' (Boyer 1994, 5). Like Benjamin, Arthur attempts to reinvigorate society's relationship with history and offer what he sees as a more genuine connection: 'I want to preserve the things that nobody notices, that nobody ever pays attention to. I want to capture the most ordinary things and keep them from disappearing' (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 235). To recapture a proper sense of communal experience is to reconsider oblivion, to re-examine and 'blast open the continuum of history' (Benjamin, trans. Zorn, 1999, 254) constructed by tourist-viewing platforms which tell people where to look and what they should find when they look.

Through this process, *All Souls' Day* interrogates the construction of memory and the agency of that construction. The need for such an interrogation is founded upon a central question which

pervades the novel: 'how much past could a person actually accommodate inside himself' (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 115)? The overbearing weight of history and memorial power must be borne by other means, in this case by the city itself. When Arthur spreads a map of Berlin out on the floor, the narrative suggests that the individual does not have to remember the resistance and suffering that has taken place in the city – 'the city did it for you, in the form of monuments, neighbourhoods, names' (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 159-60). In this way, the city operates both as the site and the agent of memory. And within the structure of the city, a single statue, such as the one of Pallas Athena encountered by Arthur, can act as a powerful mnemonic, provoking a feeling that the 'whole world was a reference, everything pointed back to something: owl, helmet, and spear, laurel wreath, necklaces, traces that clung to him, schoolteachers, Greek, Homer' (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 115). The architecture of the city sparks a continuous process of historical *différance* in which memories themselves and their meanings are constantly deferred, constantly in a state of being constructed as related objects rather than autonomous subjects.

In *Snow*, this uncontrollable field of memory is precisely what Ka hopes he can abandon when he returns to Germany. And yet, 'walking the streets of Frankfurt, he couldn't go five minutes without seeing a woman in the distance whom he mistook for İpek [...] he'd spent hours every day musing on the happy moments they'd spent together' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 422-3). Memory for Ka is inescapable, a 'film repeatedly playing in slow motion' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 423) in which he is trapped as an unwilling protagonist. However, these memories imprison not only Ka but the narrator, Orhan, as well. In describing Ka's love-sickness to Ipek, he acknowledges, 'I realised with horror that I wasn't pleading my friend's case but my own' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 423). In this way, *Snow* exemplifies a trend which Walter Andrews has observed in Pamuk's novels – the examination of 'the stuff, the objects of memory and how these objects are creatively reconstructed into the narratives we think of as "our" memories' (Andrews 2006, 27). In Kars, personal and collective memory appear to blend so that the narrator recounts: 'as I had walked through the streets [...] talking to the same people Ka had talked to, sitting in the same tea-houses, many times I almost felt I *was* Ka' [his italics] (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 420). Unlike the Berlin of *All Souls' Day* which absorbs the impossible burden of collective experience on behalf of the individual, Kars refracts that weight of communal experience, an experience which infiltrates the autonomy of the individual and undermines memorial agency.

These problems of ownership over memory form part of a wider disruption of selfhood which takes place in Kars. Baudelaire famously described the empowerment of the *flâneur* whose experiences lifted him out of the parochialism of his individual existence: when the citizen becomes a *flâneur*, he becomes 'a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, with each one of its movements, represents the multiplicity of life' (cited in Benjamin, trans. Eiland and McLaughlin, 1999, 443). But *Snow* attempts to expose this empowerment as false consciousness. Ka initially subscribes to this illusion when, whilst walking through the snow-covered streets of Kars which 'could lead a man to fall in love with life and find the will to love', he realises that 'he was also enjoying his proximity to power' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 201). However, he begins to sense the folly of his pride when he reveals his plan to meet Blue in order to secure a safe exit from Kars for İpek and Kadife. Embarking on his mission, he turns around 'to savour the power he felt he now possessed over both sisters, only to see them locked in a silent embrace' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 323). An act of masculine self-assertion simply highlights his isolated impotence. Yet whilst isolation problematises the projection of selfhood in *Snow*, resulting in a fleeting illusion of interconnectedness, in *All Souls' Day* any privileging of the individual is mitigated by a sense of inescapable causality. After an argument with Elik, we are told that Arthur comes to the realisation that 'some of the decisions that had a bearing on your life had been made in other lives [...]. They lay dormant, like germs, waiting to be passed on to someone else...pathogens waiting to strike at any moment [...]. No one was immune, everyone got a share' (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 322-3). Unlike Ka's belief in the hidden symmetry of things which preserves power precisely by remaining

abstruse, Arthur's acknowledgement of the ostensible, relational structures of thought offers a revised interpretation of the modern *flâneur* as the kaleidoscope endowed with consciousnesses, an interpretation which is all too suddenly impossible to bear – 'What he had to do was get out of here, out of this city' (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 322).

In this way, both Ka and Arthur become irreparably alienated from their urban environments. Marx's description of alienation is particularly instructive here. He observed it as a phenomenon by which man's 'own creativity appears to him as an alien power [...,] the essential link which unites him to other men appears as an unessential link [...;] his mastery over the object is in fact the mastery of the object over him' (cited in Levine 1977, 6). Ka and Arthur experience this very caricature of proper social interaction. The former is plagued by the inadequacies of self-assertion and the latter by a perverse notion of causality as the dominant relationship between the present and the past. In both cases, the idea of the 'voiceful' city plays a central role both as cure for and symptom of this alienation. In *All Souls' Day*, Victor emphasises the inclusive nature of the city as the space in which all the voices of the past are preserved and given a home (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 123). But for Arthur, the idea of a voiceful city breeds a kind of horror. He describes the terrifying power of this multitude of voices, this 'white noise audible to only the most sensitive of ears, ears which no human being ought to possess because the incessant hum made cities, especially this city, unbearable' (Nooteboom, trans. Massotty, 2002, 124). In *Snow*, Ka's inclusion in the voiceful city suffers a more gradual disintegration which begins to take hold when Ka watches İpek persuade her father to talk to Blue. Noting her duplicity, Ka 'could assume only that this was just another way of transmitting the same message. Only much later would he realise that [...] everyone he met in Kars spoke in the same code, and so harmoniously that they seemed almost to comprise a single chorus' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 249). In this way, Ka's growing understanding of the voiceful city mirrors the sisters' embrace, which invites Ka's self-assertion whilst signalling the impotence of his egotism. This urban conversation, to which he can contribute very little, belies Ka's sense of inclusion whilst reducing him to a peripheral figure who must constantly try, but not quite succeed, to crack the code of the city.

This process of exclusion is completed at the end of the novel when the narrator, Orhan, leaves Kars. In sharp opposition to Ka's bus journey at the beginning of the novel, where, looking out the window and seeing the snow he 'dared to believe himself at home in this world', Orhan recalls how he sat down next to the window on the train, 'looked through the snow at the orange lights of the last houses of the last neighbourhoods, at the shabby rooms full of people watching television', and 'began to cry' (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 4; 436). The exclusion of Kars from the rest of the world, and the self-exclusion of the city's inhabitants, becomes both a sight and a site of loss. Michel de Certeau delineates the relationship between the traveller on a train and the world outside as an experience which involves 'two complimentary modes of separation' (de Certeau, trans. Rendall, 1988, 112). The first, the mode of seeing through the windowpane, creates the spectator's distance: 'you shall not touch; the more you see, the less you hold'. The second, the mode of being moved through space on predetermined tracks, 'inscribes, indefinitely, the injunction to pass on [...]: go, leave, this is not your country, and neither is that' (de Certeau, trans. Rendall, 1988, 112). Whereas Ka, we are told, 'succumbed to optimism' as he passed through the 'wretched little shops [...] and broken-down coffee-houses' in a 'long-awaited reverie' promising personal progress (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 4), Orhan finds himself confronted with a Benjaminian nightmare in which he adopts an impotent subjectivity disturbingly reminiscent of Klee's *Angelus Novus*. Benjamin describes Klee's angel as follows:

> His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling on wreckage upon wreckage. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is

> blowing from paradise [...]. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, trans. Zorn, 1999, 249)

Like the angel, Orhan looks out and suddenly comprehends the magnitude of desolation in Kars, the summation of urban alienation, and simultaneously recognises that there is no remedy. Propelled into an unknown future – no fixed temporal or spatial end point – Orhan must both view and experience the stuff of 'progress'. He mirrors the unemployed men watching television in those shabby rooms at home, having scrimped and saved to buy white dishes that beamed free films from all over the world – 'the only new development in the city', according to Fazıl (Pamuk, trans. Freely, 2004, 433). Like them, he is kept at an irrecoverable distance from what he is watching, constantly being made aware by the foreignness of the images that 'this is not your country, and neither is that'; like them, he is reduced to a state of torpid reception, alienated even from a sense of participation. For Orhan, the act of viewing, by which he achieves a temporary ocular domination over what is observed, ironically reverses its power relationship. The temporary ocular domination is simultaneously replaced by a more permanent domination of the observed over the observer: internalised as memory, this sight/site of loss can only now alienate its memorial agent in the very act of being recalled. Even in the act of leaving Kars, losing the city, the city finds and loses him.

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Figure 1

Albrecht Dürer – *Melencolia I* (1514)[4]

[4] Image taken from:
<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/18/D%C3%BCrer_Melancholia_I.jpg/464px-D%C3%BCrer_Melancholia_I.jpg> (accessed 21 October 2008).

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