

REŞAT EKREM KOÇU'S İSTANBUL ANSİKLOPEDİSİ ; OR AN OBSESSIVE  
COLLECTOR'S ATTEMPT TO MAKE HIS PRIVATE NARRATIVE PUBLIC

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## Thesis Abstract

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This thesis is an interpretive study to analyse Reşat Ekrem Koçu's unfinished work *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*. The study attempts to reveal the relationship between the private narrative of the author and the collective narrative that he seeks to construct, with due emphasis on the implications of and meanings attached to the genre 'encyclopedia.'

After the observation that a certain urge to 'collect' underlies Koçu's encyclopedic project, the thesis concentrates upon the autobiographical quality inherent in the textual structure of *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*. Since the collecting activity implies the expression of one's self through a meaningful arrangement of a group of objects, it is perhaps justifiable that the entries constituting *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* may also be construed as object-themes that serve as the means to construct an autobiographical narrative.

A further suggestion of this study is that the intersection of the 'impartiality' of the genre of encyclopedia and the subjective content of the autobiographical narrative results in the articulation of a modern self. Finally, this study invites readers to see *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* as a transition from the private sphere of the collection to the public sphere of an encyclopedia. Through this transition, or metamorphosis, it is suggested, the articulation of a modern authorial voice is rendered possible.

Keywords: Encyclopedia, Collection, Autobiography, Self

## Tez Özeti

Reşat Ekrem Koçu'nun *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*; ya da Takıntılı Bir Koleksiyonerin Kişisel Hikâyesini Kamusallaştırışı

Mehmet Emre Ayvaz

Bu tez Reşat Ekrem Koçu'nun yarım kalmış eseri *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*'ni çözümleme ve yorumlama amacını taşıyan bir çalışma. Çalışma, 'ansiklopedi' janrına yüklenen anlamlara odaklanarak, yazarın kişisel hikâyesiyle kurmayı arzuladığı kolektif hikâye arasındaki ilişkiyi inceliyor.

Koçu'nun ansiklopedik projesinin temelinde bir 'biriktirme' arzusunun yattığı gözleminin ardından, tez *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*'nin metinsel yapısındaki otobiyografik boyuta geçiyor. Biriktirme eylemi, bir grup nesnenin anlamlı bir şekilde biraraya getirilmesi aracılığıyla kendiliğin dışavurulması olarak görülürse, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*'ni oluşturan maddeler de otobiyografik bir hikâye kurmayı mümkün kılan nesne-temalar olarak görülebilir.

Çalışmanın bir diğer iddiasıysa, ansiklopedi janrının 'tarafsızlık' özelliğiyle otobiyografik hikâyenin öznel içeriğinin kesiştiği noktada modern bir kendiliğin ifade bulması. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma okuyucuyu *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*'ni koleksiyonun özel alanından ansiklopedinin kamusal alanına geçiş olarak görmeye davet ediyor. Bu geçiş, ya da dönüşüm aracılığıyla, modern bir yazar sesinin dile gelmesinin imkan kazandığını iddia ediyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ansiklopedi, Koleksiyon, Otobiyografi, Kendilik

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Novalis, in his *Encyclopedia* (is it meaningless that his enterprise should have remained scattered in its first fruits? shredded around its pointed seeds?), explicitly poses the question of the *form* of the total book as a *written* book: an exhaustive taxonomical writing, a hologram that would order and classify knowledge, *giving place* to literary writing. ‘Everything must be encyclopedized.’ ‘Encyclopedistics’ will be ‘a kind of scientific grammar’ written according to a plurality of modes, ‘fragments, letters, poems, rigorous scientific studies’, each piece of the book to be dedicated to friends. The literal, the literary, and even the epistolary will find their lodging and their order of production in the biological body of this romantic encyclopedia. [...] But what does the non-completion of Novalis’s *Encyclopedia* signify about completeness as such? Is it an empirical accident?  
(Jacques Derrida, “Outwork”, in *Dissemination*, pp. 50-52)

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Nobody has ever studied Reşat Ekrem Koçu's *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, and the slim secondary literature on it consists of nothing more than a handful of obituaries and newspaper articles. The obvious reason for that is the 'haphazardness' of Koçu's work, in other words, being devoid of a 'scientific value.' That is indeed the very reason for the fact that *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* has not been reprinted since its first publication and it is a rarity nowadays. The general reader is unaware of its existence and the academic circles seem to ignore it. In these circumstances, it is not so easy to approach Koçu and his work. Moreover, an additional difficulty one experiences in such a study stems from the incapability of any theoretical framework to embrace the contents of the encyclopedia (11 volumes) in its entirety.

Apart from a quantitative approach (which I didn't appropriate) which would probably be based on detailed lists and tables of the entries; any qualitative method – as mine- would inevitably suffer from a certain degree of reductionism. Some entries are to be excluded, and some others are to be exaggerated. Given that shortcoming, a study like this thesis, in my view, should first of all accept its limitations and the fact of being only one of countless other possible readings. Hence the criterion should be a certain theoretical consistency rather than a one-to-one-correspondance with the subject material. The parable about cartography related by Borges and cited at the

end of the second chapter of this thesis may be read as a metaphor of such an expectation of ‘perfect correspondance.’

This thesis shall be based on two major concepts: collection and autobiography. These two can be illustrated as the roots and the complex web of branches in the body of a tree. ‘Tree’ has always been a widely used metaphor in the history of ideas, and if the cliché is forgiven, I wish to use it here. The root of the tree of encyclopedia –in the context of *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*- is a private collection: it enables the tree to stand. The branches in the upper parts of the tree constitute the autobiography: it endlessly grows and multiplies. The apparent similarity between the structures of the roots and the branches, the former being below and the latter being above the main body of the tree, reminds the observer of a closure, a totality, an inner order –which in turn leads to an argument that is in obvious contradiction with the well-known fact that *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* is an incomplete project.

One of the central ideas that I’m intended to develop in this thesis is that, despite the fact that *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* is an unfinished project, on a deeper level of meaning it is indeed a finished one. In the same line with Aristotle’s conception, one can detect the basic structure of a narrative in Koçu’s work: a beginning, a middle, and an end. I’ll try to make sense of the two fundamental positions with regard to this narrative structure: the reader’s perspective, and the author’s perspective.

What are the desires and intentions of the author? What kind of a reaction does he expect from me, that is, the reader? What are the determinations, expectations and disappointments of the reader? Do their expectations meet at any point? What does the author intend, and where does he end up? At which point does the reader feel lost or at home?

Since this thesis is neither a historiographical study, nor a literary analysis, I am not concerned with giving a full account of the encyclopedia's immense content. My concern is the tension between the desires of the author and the expectations of the reader. Through this kind of a reading, I hope, the interpretive movement among these different positions will be a bit more clear.

*İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* seems a strange book now, and already seemed one when it first appeared. Fluid, chaotic, endlessly digressive, it veers from one subject to another, from organizational scheme to organizational scheme. By tracing various phases of the metamorphosis of the authorial 'I' and the transition from history to story throughout the encyclopedia, I'll try to embrace that fluid and chaotic entity. As I said earlier, a certain degree of reductionism is inevitable, albeit the sample of material that I drew out of the encyclopedia is hoped to be more or less representative of the greater entity.

A very limited knowledge about the publishing history of *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* is available. I also try to tell this fragmented and 'off-the-record' story in the thesis.

## CHAPTER 2

### ENCYCLOPEDIA

Is it possible to consider Reşat Ekrem Koçu's *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* as an 'encyclopedia'? It is obvious that this incomplete project of eleven volumes is 'alphabetical', but is it possible to claim that it is 'encyclopedic'? Does an encyclopedia which is imprinted with the name "Reşat Ekrem Koçu" on each and every part of it (on the cover, the back, the first page, dedication, künye parts, in the entries), an encyclopedia that bears the imprint of a signature that insistently reminds us of itself, contradict with our commonsensical notion of 'encyclopedia' or not? What is an 'encyclopedia'? What are the implications of 'encyclopedization'? What does an 'encyclopedia' do with the things? What does Reşat Ekrem Koçu's *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* do, what does it intend to do, what is it that it cannot do?

By taking into consideration the frequently mentioned "arbitrariness" and "subjectivity" in *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, it can be easily asserted that the project deviates from the conventional description of 'encyclopedia.' Enis Batur accurately summarizes the conventional apperception of *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* in Turkey: "Positivist perception has judged Koçu's encyclopedia-making with not being sufficiently *scientific*, and the author's subjectivity has been regarded as odd."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, while mentioning this "being regarded as odd", again Batur implies that this subjectivity is an intentional strategy. He also assumes that İstanbul's

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<sup>1</sup> Enis Batur, *Alternatif: Aydın* (İstanbul: Hil Yay. 1985), p. 169.

‘specificity’ suffices to clarify Koçu’s ‘subjectivity’ by claiming that, “In İstanbul, life is based on a complicated equilibrium of content and form, which can not fit into science’s fixed approaches.”<sup>2</sup>

I shall elaborate on the issue of ‘subjectivity’ in the following chapters. But we should primarily concentrate on ‘intention.’ It would be difficult to claim that the ‘subjective tone’ in Koçu’s encyclopedia is an intentional strategy of narration. It is quite possible to find in Western intellectual history a good many examples for the questioning of the Enlightenment originated notion of ‘encyclopedia’: George Bataille’s *Encyclopedia Acephalica* project or *Pleiade Encyclopedia* headed by Raymond Queneau.

Even an anachronic and non-methodical attempt to compare Koçu’s encyclopedia with those examples would show that there are astonishing similarities between them. However, besides the poetic provocation of those similarities, these are projects which achieved alike consequences through radically unlike means. Koçu desired to construct an ‘encyclopedia,’ but what Bataille and Queneau were willing to do was destroy the ‘encyclopedia.’ Koçu, while willing to produce something in the line of ‘encyclopedia’ that Bataille or Queneau wanted to extinguish, ended up with something totally unexpected; whereas Bataille and Queneau attacked the very concept of ‘encyclopedia’ in order to achieve a radically different result.

Essential questions concerning *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*<sup>3</sup> should be: 1. Which motives fueled Reşat Ekrem’s desire to constitute an encyclopedic system? and 2. What kind of a structure was formed by the ‘deviation’ that is the unintentional result

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<sup>2</sup> Batur, *Alternatif*, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> From this moment on it will be mentioned as *İA*.

of those desires? There are also other questions that the latter one would make one ask: If we are mentioning a ‘deviation,’ where is the ‘center’ with regard to which that ‘deviation’ took place? Should we deduce a sort of inability, deficiency or lack, from the state of being unintentional? We might not know the ‘subject’s intention, but does it prevent us from commenting on the intentions of the ‘text’ we have before us?

### On the Preparation of an Encyclopedia

Even a random gaze at a volume of *İA* (a rarity nowadays) would probably make one feel like ‘there’s something *bizarre* going on here.’ *İA* is full of distractions, exaggerations, facts that are too ambiguous to be true, subjective evaluations, lengthy quotations (Koçu does not have the heart to shorten), stories, illustrations that do not seem to be related to an entry at first glance, and last but not least, themes that are presented to the reader’s view with a nearly obsessive insistence: men’s beauty, murders, sub-cultures, bizarreries, myths, etc.

Concerning *İA*’s preparation and publication stages, we do not have in hand anything more than a handful of witnesses and anecdotes that are spread all over *İA*. We know that Koçu accomplished the essential part of the job alone in his office at Ankara Caddesi, 50, Cağaloğlu; that he constantly commissioned entries and illustrations for the fascicles on which he was working as if he was preparing a periodical for monthly publication; and that he passionately excavated second-hand booksellers and newspaper archives in search of ‘material.’ Even the authors who had met Koçu in 1950’s, like Semavi Eyice, Kevork Pamukçıyan and Orhan Okay, cannot give much information except one or two personal anecdotes. Koçu assigned

entries about İstanbul's Byzantine and Ottoman architectural heritage to Semavi Eyice and those about Armenian community's history and culture to Kevork Pamukçıyan. Except the 'technical' issues that he commissioned to the group of experts and academics in his circle, Koçu obtained, explored, collected, and redacted all the material by himself.

It is possible to claim that those entries aside from the ones on 'technical' issues form *İA*'s main 'textual and textural body' (We do not know if Koçu has made editorial interventions to those entries and if he did, to what extent he modified them.) The reader comes across a grotesque structure when he looks at that body – that is, a body with unusual proportions, just like a medical curiosity. He notices a lack of proportion in the hierarchies within and among the entries. This is because, the taxonomical order on which the Western encyclopedic tradition had based itself since St. Augustinus<sup>4</sup> has an ambiguous status in *İA*'s cosmos. What kind of an epistemological hierarchy lies beneath the practice of compiling a vast amount of data under the heading 'İstanbul' and presenting it in an alphabetical order? What is the criterion of importance and immediacy that rules and orders that crowd of neighborhoods, buildings, streets, historical personalities, incidents and folcloric details? The same question can be posed about the entries' contents: How does the hierarchy *within* an entry operate? Which elements are regarded as more important or relevant than the others?

Umberto Eco, in his discussion about the relationship between 'encyclopedia' and 'dictionary', refers to a distinction made by Italian semiologist Patrizia Violi: "Violi distinguishes between *essential* and *typical* properties: it is essential that the

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<sup>4</sup> Richard R. Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 49.

cat is an animal; it is typical for it to meow. The second property can be deleted, but the first cannot.”<sup>5</sup> We may treat the entry ABDULLAH EFENDİ (Antakyalızâde) in Vol. 1, p. 39 of *İA* in these terms: “A famous spendthrift who lived in Istanbul in the eighteenth-century; his father was a scholar called Antakyalı Mustafa Efendi; he left Abdullah –who was an inexperienced youth that time- a considerable amount of inheritance. The young man (...) consumed the inheritance in fun and enjoyment; everything that his father left behind were gone in a short time. He lived the rest of his life in poor conditions. (...) Antakyalızâde, who had also written poems with the pseudonym Nail, died in 1715.”<sup>6</sup> Koçu refers to *Tezkire-i Şuara* of Salim as source in the little bibliography at the end of the entry, which means that Antakyalızâde is *essentially* a poet. ‘Mirasyedilik’ is his *typical* property. By turning the hierarchy between these two properties upside down, Koçu transforms Antakyalızâde into the form that he would be relevant in an encyclopedia about ‘İstanbul.’ Being ‘a famous spendthrift’ is a much more important property than being a poet with regard to ‘İstanbul’ in the context of *İA*. But a parallel reading of that entry with the one preceding it, will make a contradiction emerge: “ABDULLAH EFENDİ (Akhisarlı) – A scholar-poet of the eighteenth-century; after coming to Istanbul, he became first a student and then the son-in-law of Kara Halil Efendi, one of the preeminent scholars of the period; (...) He enjoyed reading, writing and concerning with his

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<sup>5</sup> Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus*, (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 236.

<sup>6</sup> “On sekizinci asırda İstanbul’un meşhur mirasyedilerinden; babası, ulemadan Antakyalı Mustafa Efendi isminde bir zat idi; tecrübesiz, havayü hevesine düşkün bir genç olan Abdullah’a nakit, mücevher ve mülk olarak mühim bir miras bırakmıştı. Delikanlı (...) babasının bıraktığı irad ve akarı sefahat yolunda mahvetti; baba ocağı, içindeki nadide ve nefis eşya ve kitaplarıyla beraber alacaklıları elinde kaldı. Ömrünün bundan sonraki kısmı, elim bir yoksulluk içinde geçti. (...) Nail mahlası ile şiir de yazan Antakyalızâde 1715’de (H. 1128) ölmüştür. (...)” *İA*, V. 1, p. 39.

pupils.”<sup>7</sup> The source is the same again: *Tezkire-i Şuara* of Salim. As a result of the ‘inversion’, the first Abdullah Efendi appears before us with his *typical* property in the context of Salim’s book, and with his essential property in *İA* (“A famous spendthrift who lived in Istanbul...”) But what about the second Abdullah Efendi? Does he have any peculiarity other than being a poet born and lived in İstanbul that makes his inclusion in *İA* relevant? Why does not Koçu make the same epistemological adjustment (inversion of the properties) in the case of the second Abdullah Efendi?

The reason for this contradiction, in my view, is that *İA* does not rely on a specific and defined taxonomical principle, not to mention the loose frame theme, ‘İstanbul.’ At this point I assert that, what we find in that gap instead of a given taxonomical principle are two synchronic desires which I shall elaborate on in the following chapters: the desire to be a social and historical ‘register’ (kütük) and the desire to inscribe an autobiographical narrative via that register. Thus, ‘Spendthrift’ Abdullah Efendi as a curious detail drawn out from the history of İstanbul, satisfies the collecting appetite of Koçu and in this way gains its relevance. The other Abdullah Efendi, who seems to have nothing particularly ‘interesting’ (except being an ‘İstanbullu’) is also relevant, for he satisfies the second desire at work in *İA*: the desire not to have any possible ‘İstanbullu Abdullah Efendi’ off the record. Inclusion motivated by a fear of careless exclusion.

I shall talk about ‘Koçu’s collector persona’ in the third chapter. For a better understanding of the ‘relevancy’ issue, we must first deal with two other concepts: alphabetization and taxonomy.

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<sup>7</sup> “On sekizinci asır müderris ve şairlerinden; (...) İstanbul’a geldikten sonra asrın derin ulemasından Kara Halil Efendi’nin talebesi, sonra damadı oldu; (...) Bütün ömrünce zevkleri okumak, yazmak ve talebeleriyle meşgul olmaktan ibaret kalmıştı.” *İA*, V. 1, p. 39.

## Alphabetization vs. Taxonomy

With alphabetical order we have access to a closed field as well as to a set of elements. Alphabetical order provides us with the convention of conventions, for it is a finite and fixed order that is both arbitrary and sequential. As French novelist Michel Butor has noted, “It is the only way to create a truly amorphous enumeration, to suspend all conclusions which might be drawn from the relations of proximity among the various elements on the page.”<sup>8</sup> Alphabetical order epitomizes the elimination of hierarchy, the leveling of the elements of the list. It provides a gesture of resistance to any attempt to interpret significance in the particular arrangement of textual elements. It presents us with a time without order, a sequence where before and after hold no hierarchical import.

Alphabetical order is what gives those two great enterprises, the dictionary and the encyclopedia, any pretense to formal integrity. The dictionary’s attempt to capture language and the encyclopedia’s attempt to capture knowledge are both forms of arrangement and rearrangement within a closed field. They are attempts to organize the world within the text analogous to the attempt to invent an all-inclusive mnemonic—they reduce the world to discourse. Susan Stewart gives the example of Red Queen in *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll, who says, “I’ve heard nonsense, compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary.” Then Stewart continues: “...her words have a profoundly ironic ring, for there is nothing that is so nonsensical as the dictionary, the telephone book, or the encyclopedia—all of them texts that arrange the world within the hermetic surface of an arbitrary

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<sup>8</sup> Michel Butor, *Inventory* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 47.

convention, a convention without the hierarchy or values of the everyday lifeworld.”<sup>9</sup> Rabelais and Borges have also made ironic comments about the nature of alphabetical order by constructing alphabetical arrangements of imaginary creatures: Rabelais in his alphabetical list of monsters in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, and Borges in his *The Book of Imaginary Beings*. The monster and the imaginary being are anomalous, things that do not exist because cannot be classified, because they stand ambiguously between categories or as the impossible merger of categories. Such creatures defy nature and the organization of nature that is culture. To then array them according to the arbitrary convention of the alphabet, a convention borrowed from discourse, is to emphasize their status as fictions and the very status of fictions as paradoxes of classification.

But Koçu’s comment on alphabetical order is not ironic. His conception of ‘metropolis’, connotations of which are far from being pleasant, necessitates a regulatory measure to be taken. Someone has to take control with a ‘panoramic view’ on behalf of ‘us.’ In order to have a sense of harmony and not to get lost in the chaos, one should have a user-friendly register of it at hand. But that register, which –on the surface at least- aims at imposing an order to the ‘chaos’, produces a derivative chaos –a chaos caused by the lack of a preset taxonomical framework.

‘Taxonomy’ refers to certain principles underlying a classification; it is a hierarchical grouping of objects and concepts with reference to a properly defined ‘center.’ When we look at Koçu’s encyclopedia, the ‘center’ which makes possible a taxonomical classification appears to be ‘Istanbul.’ But the branches spreading out of that center does not enable one to see any detectable hierarchical classificatory logic

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<sup>9</sup> Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 190-91.

at work. However, the problem is far from being the non-existence of a certain ‘taxonomical principle’; it just does not work in the place and by the means we presuppose. In the first pages of all volumes of *İA* we are presented an inventory-like thematical list which is easy to be confused with a tree of taxonomy:

“İstanbul’un: CAMİ, MESCİD, MEDRESE, MEKTEB, KÜTÜPHANE, TEKKE, TÜRBE, KİLİSE, AYAZMA, ÇEŞME, SEBİL, SARAY, YALI, KONAK, KÖŞK, HAN, HAMAM, TİYATRO, KAHVEHANE, MEYHANE... BÜTÜN YAPILARI... DEVLET ADAMI, ALİM, ŞAİR, SANATKAR, İŞ ADAMI, HEKİM, MUALLİM, HOCA, DERVİŞ, PAPAZ, KEŞİŞ, MECZUB, NEVCİVAN, NİGAR, HANENDE, SAZENDE, ÇENGİ, KÖÇEK, AYYAŞ, DERBEDER, PEHLİVAN, TULUMBACI, KABADAYI, KUMARBAZ, HIRSIZ, SERSERİ, DİLENCİ, KAATİL... BÜTÜN ŞÖHRETLERİ... DAĞI, BAYIRI, SUYU, HAVASI, MESİRELERİ, BAHÇELERİ, BOSTANLARI VE İLAH... BÜTÜN TABİAT GÜZELLİKLERİ VE COĞRAFYASI... SOKAKLARI, MAHALLELERİ, SEMTLERİ... YANGINLARI, SALGINLARI, ZELZELELERİ, İHTİLALLERİ, CİNAYETLERİ VE DİLLERE DESTAN OLAN AŞK MACERALARI... İSTANBUL HALKININ DEVİR DEVİR ADET, AN’ANE, GİYİM VE KUŞAMI... İSTANBUL ARGOSU... İSTANBUL’A AİT RESİMLER, ŞİİRLER, KİTAPLAR, ROMANLAR, SEYAHATNAMELER... İSTANBUL’A GELMİŞ YABANCI ŞÖHRETLER...”

And the following is the catalogue of Venetian collector Andrea Vendramin’s collection (1627):

“PICTURES; SCULPTURES OF DIVINITIES, ORACLES AND ANCIENT IDOLS; COSTUMES OF DIFFERENT LANDS; ANCIENT INSTRUMENTS OF SACRIFICE INCLUDING URNS AND LAMPS; MEDALS OF ANCIENT

ROMANS AND FAMOUS VENETIANS; EGYPTIAN RINGS AND SEALS DECORATED WITH SCARABS, EMBLEMS AND OTHER SIGNS ENGRAVED IN STONES AND GEMS; PURE, MIXED AND COMPOSITE NATURAL SUBSTANCES; WHELKS, SHELLS AND CONCHES FROM VARIOUS PARTS OF THE WORLD, BOTH EAST AND WEST; ILLUSTRATED BOOKS ON CHRONOLOGY, PRINTS, ANIMALS, FISH AND BIRDS; PLANTS AND FLOWERS.”

One of the many differences between these two lists is that, ‘encyclopedic ideal’ is inherent in Koçu’s as an unavoidable, given fact. Unlike Vendramin, Koçu separates things into certain groups. But the similarities between these lists shed light on an issue that I shall look in detail in Chapter 3: the obsessive collecting and the resulting collection underlying *İA*. But before that, I will examine the concept of ‘kütük’<sup>10</sup> (register) which time and again replaces the concept of ‘encyclopedia’ in Koçu’s mind.

### Encyclopedia or Register?

Koçu occasionally uses the word ‘kütük’ in *İA*. (“This huge register of the city that we call *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*...”<sup>11</sup>, “This encyclopedia which is both the register of its history and its social life...”<sup>12</sup>, etc.) Moreover, he does not seem certain whether there exists a difference between *Ansiklopedi* and *Kütük*. Sometimes he makes one

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<sup>10</sup> *Kütük* (*Kubbealtı Sözlüğü*): “Resmi bilgilerin kaydedildiği ana defter.”

*Kütük* (*Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*): “Yeniçeri Ocağı’na alınan efradın isimleri, künyeleri ve eşgaliyle yevmiyelerinin miktarı yazılı defter hakkında kullanılan bir tabirdir.”

<sup>11</sup> “*İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* adını verdiğimiz bu büyük şehir kütüğü...” *İA*, V. 6, p. 3318.

<sup>12</sup> “İstanbul’un tarih kütüğü ve toplum hayatı kütüğü olan bu ansiklopedi...” *İA*, V. 8, p. 4057.

think that they are used alternately, as if synonyms; sometimes he talks about “recording in an alphabetical classification.”<sup>13</sup> Sometimes there is an implication that the only difference between them is ‘alphabetization’, for he uses the idiom ‘Alphabetical register’; therefore we can conclude that ‘encyclopedia’, in Koçu’s conception, is that same old ‘kütük’, its only difference being the intervention of alphabetization. In his book *Yeniçeriler*, Koçu mentions “encyclopedic works and encyclopedias”<sup>14</sup>, which means that Koçu differentiates ‘being encyclopedic’ from ‘the encyclopedia.’ Furthermore, another conclusion can be drawn from Koçu’s pointing of the ‘overly subjective’ encyclopedic works of İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal (such as *Son Sadrazamlar*, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, *Son Hattatlar* and *Hoş Sada*) as predecessors of *İA* by calling them ‘kütük’s: Koçu sees himself as a part of the ‘tabakat’ (compiled short biographies) tradition, one of the last representatives of which was İbnülemin. His books, according to Koçu, are ‘encyclopedic’ but they are not ‘encyclopedias’; what is common between their works is, being ‘kütük’s.<sup>15</sup>

The two synchronic desires I mentioned above can be found in İbnülemin’s methodology as well: on the one hand the author desires collecting and presenting ‘all’ possible information in a predetermined field (desire of recording); and desires telling an autobiographical story on the other hand. As far as we know, besides having a passion for keeping, archiving and classifying, İbnülemin, in an early period of his life, had also done these things in a more ‘professional’ way: after the declaration of Meşrutiyet, he had been assigned to work in the commission that was

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<sup>13</sup> “Alfabetik tasnif ile kayıt.” *İA*, V. 3, p. 1390.

<sup>14</sup> “Ansiklopedik eserler ve ansiklopediler.” Reşat Ekrem Koçu, *Yeniçeriler* (İstanbul: Nurgök Matbaası, 1964), p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> “Milli kütüphanemizin büyük kütüklerinden olan *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*’nde...”, *İA*, V. 1, p. 89.

responsible for the classification of Yıldız archives. We have three main sources on İbnülemin: Ömer Faruk Akün's article in *İslam Ansiklopedisi* and two articles by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, one of which was written as a preface for a book of İbnülemin's with the title *Hoş Sada*.<sup>16</sup> The biggest part of our knowledge of İbnülemin's 'methodology' relies on what Tanpınar tells us about him. Somewhere in his second article, which was published after the death of İbnülemin, Tanpınar says, "What makes his books attractive for us is this Kitaplarını bizim için kadar çekici yapan taraflardan biri de bu olsa gerektir," and mentions the autobiographical dimension of İbnülemin's encyclopedic works: "İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal wrote as a witness that arrives ex post factum. For him, neither actuality nor polemics had a fixed limits of time. Hence no matter how the subjects of his books differ from each other, all of them give the impression that they are parts of his autobiography. *Son Sadrazamlar* is related to his self as much as the autobiographical piece that he added to *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*. Because it presents us Mahmud Kemal with his circle and context. The volumes of that bulky book concerned with Said Paşa are, in this sense, invaluable. (...) But one must be careful: the most important thing that we come face to face among the details of the political atmosphere and the life of Said Paşa is indeed the very self of İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal. At least it is a Said Paşa who is captured in his relationships with or betrayals to İbnülemin. In the later parts of the book, İbnülemin, that baroque combination, emerges with all his egocentrism and complexes."<sup>17</sup> Tanpınar's explanation for the reason behind İbnülemin's perception

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<sup>16</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, "Büyük Bir Muasır: İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal" and "İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal'e Dair", in *Edebiyat Üzerine Makaleler* (İstanbul: Dergah Yay., 1992), pp. 395-404.

<sup>17</sup> "İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal Bey, sonradan gelen bir tanık gibi yazardı. Onun için aktüalite veya polemiğin muayyen bir zaman hududu yoktu. Bu yüzdendir ki, eserlerinin mevzuu ne kadar değişirse değişsin, daima kendi tercüme-i hali imiş hissini verir. *Son Sadrazamlar*'ı, belki *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*'ne ilave ettiği kendi tercüme-i hali kadar şahsına bağlıdır. Çünkü bize, Mahmud Kemal

of others' biographies as a medium of writing his own autobiography, or in other words, being able to relate his own life story only through other lives, is 'egocentrism.' That is an impetuous and insufficient explanation, I think. In fact, the common ground for the autobiographical impulses (which I will try to analyze in Chapter 4) of Koçu and İbnülemin finds its proper expression in an other paragraph of the same article: "Collecting, classifying and keeping with care. As the collection forms, the blank spaces emerge by themselves. Then starts the process of searching and finding. His work formed around a curiosity and desire. He built a huge library by combining haphazard things just like some birds building their nests."<sup>18</sup> Tanpınar formulates (without being much aware of it) the main methodological principle that Koçu took over from İbnülemin: a structure forming around a collection which has been 'collected, classified and kept with care.'

Let's try to understand that *structure*: In the center, there's a pile of information which is collected with a very personal drive, and that pile constructs a fragmentary, discontinuous, and indirect autobiography. In İbnülemin's *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, that center is comprised of the biographies of poets who are in one way or another related to the life of author, or 'müellif.' Indeed these are carefully selected biographies which form a constellation around and shed light upon a nucleus, that is, İbnülemin's 'self': what I call 'center' is a sort of microcosm

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Bey'i içinde yetiştiği müessese ve etrafındaki insanlarla verir. Bu hacimli kitabın Said Paşa'ya ayrılan ciltleri ise, bu bakımdan emsalsizdir. (...) Fakat aldanmayalım, bu ciltlerde devrinin politik hadiseleri ve Sadrazam Said Paşa'nın hayatı arasında asıl karşılaştığımız şey, İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal Bey'in kendisidir. Yahut hiç olmazsa, Mahmud Kemal Bey'le olan münasebetlerinde yakalanmış, Mahmud Kemal Bey'e hizmet veya ihanet etmiş bir Said Paşa'dır. Eser ilerledikçe Abdülhamid'in kendi mizacına göre yarattığı bu vezirin arkasından, öbür barok terkîp, İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal Bey, yavaş yavaş bütün egosantrizmi ve kompleksleriyle, tıpkı kırılan kalıbın arasından asıl büstün çıkışı gibi çıkar." *Ibid.*, p. 401.

<sup>18</sup> "Toplamak, tasnif etmek ve dikkatle saklamak. Böylece koleksiyon yavaş yavaş teşekkül edince, boşluklar kendiliğinden meydana çıkar. İşte o zaman arama ve bulma başlar. Bir bakıma eseri zaman içinde bir merak ve ihtirasın etrafında kendiliğinden bir iskalaktit gibi teşekkül etti; (...) Bazı kuş yuvaları gibi en dağınık ve birbirine yabancı unsurları ifrazlarıyla birleştirerek, bütün bir kütüphaneyi hazırladı." *Ibid.*, p. 402.

constituted by a nucleus and a bunch of loyal satellites rotating around that nucleus. A good many little biographies come together and imply an autobiography; an autobiography expresses itself indirectly, through the biographies surrounding and serving it. But in the case of Koçu, what constitutes that centre is a heap of miscellany which is collected, classified and carefully kept in the direction of his interests, tendencies and obsessions. Koçu builds an autobiographical narrative through his collection ('others' biographies' constitute only a *part of* Koçu's collection, which is a crucial point of differentiation from İbnülemin's collection) which is a sort of self-projection.

There is a crucial difference between the two men: Whereas İbnülemin, from the beginning, had been intended to prepare a 'kütük' and filled the center of it with an autobiography; Koçu's had been more of a retrospective character. He had begun with the accumulation of data (his private collection) and after a while noticed the potentiality of a 'kütük' in that accumulation. In the first case an autobiographical 'kütük' is at stake; but the second one is first and foremost an autobiography, which had been transformed into a 'kütük.' That means, contrary to İbnülemin's, Koçu's is an autobiography which does not know anything about being a center. It constructs the narrative of which it will be the center, *ex post factum*; and becomes more the center of the narrative, the more it builds the narrative. For a collection accumulated, classified and kept solely for its own sake to turn out to be a 'publicly communicable' encyclopedia, the gaps in the center (the gaps between the fragments of the autobiographical nucleus) should be filled by a second, imported, and more 'objective' pile of information. Koçu's homosocial circle –with only a few exceptions, like his faithful illustrator Sabiha Bozcalı- come to stage at this point: They start to collect the information which would constitute the outer layer of the

collection. Koçu's collection does not originally include that kind of an information, but it needs to be embedded in that second layer, for the possibility of turning out to be an encyclopedia lies in the aura of objectivity provided by that impersonal, impartial, neutral layer.

But the autobiographical nucleus at the center should familiarize with that layer surrounding it, which is far from being easy. One of Koçu's authorial tactics to cope with that problem seems to be employing third person singular. All of a sudden, in the middle of an entry, a discourse coming out from the 'nowhere' of a presumed 'objectivity' starts to speak in Koçu's (the author's) behalf. Through this discourse, the autobiography attempts to be incorporated to the 'disinterested' outer body of the encyclopedia. That second layer forces the collection to stop murmuring and speak louder. It tries to break the self-referentiality of the autobiographical nucleus. In other words, the autobiographical narrative renders its own expression possible by calling for the help of a second narrative which covers it. The autobiography needs to be covered in order to be able to uncover itself.

That dual structure, which is much like a symbiotic relationship between two distinct narrative layers, consists of a certain violence. While the disinterested, neutral and impartial level tries to dissolve and 'impersonalize' the autobiographical nucleus, the nucleus in turn tries to break through the pressure of the wall confining it. We can find Koçu's 'encyclopedic ideal' in his employment of that second layer. And the main reason behind the 'weirdness' or seemingly 'disorderliness' of *İA*, is the permanent movement and struggle between these two layers. I shall elaborate on that 'textual tension' later on. Now, I want to return to the concept of "kütük", to the point that Koçu departs from İbnülemin, and to the construction of *İA* through a structural transformation. One of the major differences between the two 'kütük's

(İbnülemin's and Koçu's) is the fact that the latter baptizes itself with the title of 'ENCYCLOPEDIA.' With the importance it gives to the title, *İA* inevitably makes itself dependent upon the conventions and expectations of the encyclopedic discourse of Enlightenment.

### *Encyclopédie*

The *Encyclopédie* pioneered by Diderot and D'Alembert remains the most famous and influential of encyclopedic projects. Despite the contributions of Rousseau, Voltaire, the editors themselves, and a legion of notable peers, a conspicuous feature of the encyclopedic enterprise is that of a comprehensive book that writes itself out from under the coercion of authority and, by implication, releases itself from the charmed circle of authorship. The encyclopedia, then, is the 'text' that dispels onerous authorizations of the 'work' in Roland Barthes's sense.<sup>19</sup>

As programmatically addressed in the "Prospectus" to the *Encyclopédie*, "The tree of human knowledge could be formed in several ways, either by relating different knowledge to the diverse faculties of our mind or by relating it to the things that it has as its object. The difficulty was greatest where it involved the most arbitrariness. But how could there not be arbitrariness? Nature presents us only with particular things, infinite in number and without firmly established divisions. Everything shades off into everything else by imperceptible nuances."<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text' and 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Robert Darnton, 'Philosophers Trim the Tree of Knowledge: The Epistemological Strategy of the *Encyclopédie*', in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage, 1985), p. 195.

arbitrariness that concerns the editors is conceptual –concerning a final indeterminacy of nomenclature, of classification, or cognizance- but by a seemingly unrelated practical decision the arbitrary is instantiated as the governing principle of the *Encyclopédie* itself, in its alphabetic arrangement of topics. In the empirical universe of experimental science and technology sanctioned by the *Encyclopédie*, the sacred paradigm of the tree of knowledge is scrapped (retained only as a rhetorical topos, as in the passage cited above), and the resulting heap of data occupies a paradoxical condition: the subordination of knowledge to the categorical formatting of information renders knowledge strategically robust but conceptually ungrounded. “Information is knowledge fractured into bits and pieces that can be moved around easily but never really assembled successfully into an integrated whole,” writes Thomas Richards.<sup>21</sup> By the nineteenth century, the modern dispensation of arts and sciences was rapidly being consolidated within a circle of learning convened by Enlightenment encyclopedism. The winnowing out of ‘divine learning’ -which had still been a feature of Francis Bacon’s encyclopedic program- was a decisive step, escalated by Diderot and D’Alembert into a revolutionary principle.

But the encyclopedic impulse is not to be accredited strictly to Enlightenment rationality. Even within the *Encyclopédie* itself there are conflicting aspirations, as the phantasm of ‘order’ testifies to an underlying tension between technique and desire; between a positivist exposition of the emergent order of secular wisdom and a program of provisional confrontations with historical exigency; between *strategies* of accumulation and *tactics* of provocation.

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (New York: Verso, 1993), p. 76.

Wilda Anderson summarizes Diderot's encyclopedic dream as an *operational poetics*.<sup>22</sup> The mark of progress associated with the encyclopedia, she suggests, "comes not from accumulating content but from provoking an act of thinking."<sup>23</sup> Distinguishing the *D'Alembertian Reader* from the *Diderotian Reader*, Anderson characterizes the latter as moving in the "direction of increasing virtue (philosophical intelligence)" while the former's emphasis on accumulation of knowledge is merely "erudite stupidity."<sup>24</sup> The truly progressive function of the encyclopedia, then, is twofold: to introduce order and recompose it through an active engagement with disorder. So, it seems there is a dual legacy: accumulation (D'Alembert) and provocation (Diderot); the allure of 'master narratives' (with Lyotard's diagnosis of their serving as one more instance of their survival) and the countermotions of dissemination.

At first sight, Koçu's encyclopedia seems to rely on that inner economy as well: a strategy of accumulation, which is being permeated by a tactics of provocation. But a fundamental disparity embedded in the premises of Koçu's enterprise cause that economy collapse. We observe a radical difference between *Encyclopédie* and Koçu's work with regard to their organizing principles. Whereas Diderot and D'Alembert's project was literally a *project*, that is, a theoretical framework which precedes the dual process of accumulation and provocation; Koçu's enterprise, in my view, was the retrospective attempt of an always-already-existent accumulation to recontextualize itself as a *project*. In other words:

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<sup>22</sup> Wilda Anderson, *Diderot's Dream* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 257.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

*Encyclopédie* was the practical extension of a theoretical framework. But Koçu's problematic was about the theoretization of things already accumulated.

### *Bricolage*

Let us remember the two mental tropes, *engineering* and *bricolage*, coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind*: In the case of what he called *bricolage*, the process of creating something is not a matter of the calculated choice and use of whatever materials are technically best-adapted to a clearly predetermined purpose, but rather it involves a dialogue with the materials and means of execution. In such a dialogue, the materials which are ready-to-hand may “suggest” adaptive courses of action, and the initial aim may be modified. Consequently, such acts of creation are not purely instrumental: The *bricoleur* ‘speaks’ not only with things but also through the medium of things. “Consider him [the *bricoleur*] at work and excited by his project.” says Lévi-Strauss, “His first practical step is retrospective. He has to turn back at an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider or reconsider what it contains and, finally and above all, to engage in a sort of dialogue with it and, before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem. (...) the elements which the *bricoleur* collects and uses are ‘pre-constrained’ like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manouvre. And the decision as to what to put in each place also depends on the possibility of putting a different element there instead, so that each choice which is made will involve a complete reorganization of the structure, which will never be the

same as one vaguely imagined nor as some other which might have been preferred to it.”<sup>25</sup>

*Engineer's* operation, on the other hand, gives us more or less the mirror image of the *bricolage*: the engineer always tries to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular set while the *bricoleur* by inclination or necessity always remains within them. Lévi-Strauss sees a differentiation in the means of working employed by these two: *engineer* by concepts, *bricoleur* by signs. But the point made by Derrida concerning that very difference, is also worth noting here. In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida says: “If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one’s concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*. The engineer, whom Lévi-Strauss opposes to the *bricoleur*, should be one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth. A subject who would supposedly be the absolute origin of his own discourse and would supposedly construct it “out of nothing”, “out of whole cloth”, would be the creator of the *verbe*, the *verbe* itself. The notion of the engineer who had supposedly broken with all forms of *bricolage* is therefore a theological idea; and since Lévi-Strauss tells us elsewhere that *bricolage* is mythopoetic, the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the *bricoleur*. From the moment that we cease to believe in such an engineer and in a discourse breaking with the received historical discourse, as soon as it is admitted that every finite discourse is bound by a certain *bricolage*, and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of *bricoleurs*, then the very idea of

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<sup>25</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 18-19.

*bricolage* is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning decomposes.”<sup>26</sup>

While brilliantly melting one concept in the pot of the other for the sake of eliminating the binary logic at work in Lévi-Strauss’ conception, Derrida, in my view, does not aim at breaking with them. The core of the passage I cited above seems to be the claim that ‘*engineer* is a myth produced by the *bricoleur*.’ It is legitimate to say that Koçu too, as a *bricoleur*, produces his work by creating that kind of an *engineer myth*. When he saw the incompleteness of his encyclopedia as a ‘misfortune’, in fact, as Derrida claimed, Koçu was trying to stand on that absent platform of *the engineer*. In order to be able to have a better understanding of the *bricolage* underlying *İA*, we should take a closer look at the concept of ‘*kütük*’ and the particles that constitute it: ‘*kayıt*’s.

### Register of What?

For Koçu, written history is a list compiled of ‘things that are not to be forgotten.’ Information, in its written form, is a ‘record.’ Every record is a part of ‘reality’ that is prevented from being forgotten or diminished. This record may be a chronological information, or a detail from the life of a janissary who had fought ‘bravely.’ In *İA*, Koçu does not eliminate the information in any way, as long as the detail is at stake. In the midst of an immense battle scene, even one soldier amongst thousands is worth being remembered, ‘to be re-recorded’, provided his name is known. The most obvious quality of Koçu’s history-writing –or his style, if not methodology- as it

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<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, in *Writing and Difference*, (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 285.

appears in *IA* is this: he constructs a narrative that is hungry for grotesquerie, drama and potentiality of fiction. In the midst of a war told from the bird's-eye's point of view, a minor detail gains immense size and happens to deserve almost the same attention as the war itself. In fact, Koçu understands 'panorama' in this way: His book *From Osman Gazi to Atatürk: A Panorama of Six Hundred Years of Ottoman History* is a chronological assemblage of weird and fascinating anecdotes. Koçu changes his perspective when he realizes that the stories following each other harm the 'panoramic' quality of the view: "Now, for a moment, let's look at these events with a bird's-eye's point of view,"<sup>27</sup> he says. Koçu feels the urge to say something about totality, but this brief change in perspective in no way means that he abandons his belief that history is a collection of sequential anecdotes. For Koçu, attention is to be paid to the little pieces which constitute the totality (history); and he looks at the totality just to assure himself that they indeed constitute one. His mind is busy with individual experiences, and he feels the urge to differentiate his approach from the conventions of the historiographic tradition to which he belongs: "Ottoman Empire had had enlarged its boundaries by battles for castles and chaining military campaigns. However our historians often relate just a few details about these battles and campaigns; there does not exist one single war memoir written either by a commander or a soldier in our national library."<sup>28</sup>

There's a hunger for fictional potentiality here. The account of a historian whose experience of war is not direct would inevitably be 'mediated' and second-hand, hence, in Koçu's view, it can never replace the direct experience, testimony,

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<sup>27</sup> *Yeniçeriler*, p. 313.

<sup>28</sup> "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu zincirleme seferler ve kale cenkleri ile büyümüştür. Fakat, vak'anüvislerimiz ve müverrihlerimiz bu seferler ve muharebeler hakkında pek az tafsilat verirler; milli kütüphanemizde kumandan ve nefer kaleminden çıkmış tek harb hatırası yoktur." *Ibid.*, p. 127.

confession or autobiography. The story told by “I” is much more strictly anchored to reality compared to the story told in “I”’s stead; and if we do not have an “I” ready at hand (a first person narrative of experience) the option advised to be chosen is to impersonate the “I”, to imagine and record what the “I” could have said –not telling a story in third person singular. Koçu seems to assume that first person narrative has a power of closing the gap between the actuality and the past.<sup>29</sup> The ideal historian in Koçu’s imagery is not the man who presents the raw truth and untreated archival material to the reader behind a cold distance; but he’s the man who covers up the impossibility of testimony, the rawness and distance of truth, with the help of storytelling (which equips one with the magical ability to revitalize the experience) and ‘description.’<sup>30</sup> He tells ‘stories’ in the manner of a public storyteller who mimics and impersonates ‘the other.’ The duty and potential success of a historian lies in his skill to fill the gap between now and then (“We are doomed to be forever hailing someone who has just gone around the corner and out of earshot.”<sup>31</sup>), and in emphatically personifying various identities, voices and subjectivities. The real historian, for Koçu, is the man who can accomplish that impossible task attributed by Tanpınar to İbnülemin: “to be able to write as a witness who arrives after the fact.” Only details, vivid, true everyday details captured by the first hand experience can animate history before our eyes, as the art of film does. The mission of true historian,

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<sup>29</sup> Veronica Wedgwood, who is hailed by Anthony Grafton as ‘the greatest narrative historian of the twentieth century’, claims that ‘letters’ as first hand documents may close that gap: “Nothing seems to bridge the gap of the years so much as the folding and unfolding of ancient letters; sometimes minute particles of sand which had long adhered in some thick down stroke where the ink had been wet, detach themselves after three hundred years to blow away and join with yesterday’s dust.” Quoted in the “Introduction” by Anthony Grafton to C. V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2005), p. X.

<sup>30</sup> The importance given to ‘description’ by Koçu might have its roots in Ottoman lyric poetry.

<sup>31</sup> Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), p. 320.

according to Koçu, is to replace the absence of testimony with rhetoric and an imagination loyal to the ‘archival truth’ –the source of imagination being ‘of course’ not the mind of the historian. Imagination is to make the documents silenced under the dust of the archive be able to speak for themselves again. Koçu’s means to do that are ready: narrating, description and illustration. The past may be irretrievably lost, but once we have a record (kayıt) -or ‘clue’ in Carlo Ginzburg’s terms- of it, the life with all its tangible texture and as it seemed just before being lost can certainly be captured and saved within the confines of a picture or a story, just like a specimen kept within a bell jar, or a curious collectable behind the display window of a cabinet. In fact, the essence of ‘kayıt’ is keeping. The basic aim of ‘kayıt’ activity is ‘kayıt’ itself. Meaning of history, in Koçu’s mind comes to be the salvaging of every little ‘kayıt’ which ultimately make the completion of past-as-a-puzzle possible: the past, ready to be consulted by anyone, would wait out there, and perform its pedagogical functions of ‘reminding’ and ‘teaching.’

Koçu’s desire to ‘kayıt’ is similar to medieval mnemonic practices. It is a magical operation which stops the duration, prevents time from passing, and the historian is the man who is skilled and knowledgeable enough to accomplish this task masterfully. Somewhere, Koçu assigns the act of ‘kayıt’ to encyclopedia: “The heroic tales of our ancestors who had built one of the most magnificent empires in world history, form an epos of incomparable quality. It’s a pity that most of these heroes are nowadays forgotten and one cannot come across the names of these heroes even in encyclopedic works and encyclopedias published by single persons or committees.”<sup>32</sup> That quotation is from *Yeniçeriler* which was published in 1964. In

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<sup>32</sup> “Cihan tarihinin en büyük imparatorluklarından birini kurmuş olan ecdadımızın kahramanlık menkıbeleri, hiçbir milletin tarihinde görülmeyecek zenginlikte bir destan teşkil eder. Ne

1964, Koçu was preparing the seventh volume of *İA*, and as it is implied in the quotation above, he was thinking that the only encyclopedia among the entries of which one can find the ‘kayıt’s of those nameless heroes was his ‘opus.’ It was, he thought, the only ‘kütük’ that executes its mission properly.

I’m not sure if there’s any need to point out the obvious nationalistic emphasis in the passage. That nationalist rhetoric and excitement which is spread over all texts of Koçu has only one meaning that is relevant in my discussion: in the background of that discourse of ‘kayıt’ one senses the domination of a fantasy of ‘totality’ (which I shall talk about in the fourth chapter of my thesis.) That fantasy was based on the presupposition that there exists a collective history which should be saved as immediately as possible. Historical past was, in Koçu’s conception, just like a ‘panoramic’ landscape that is composed of little pictures; therefore the task of anyone was, without doubt, to find the little pieces one by one, put them to their respective places in the composition, and turn them back to their steady point of origin, their home. Of course, the ‘task’ had a pedagogical implication: the almost existential importance of remembrance –*true* remembrance- was assigning Koçu the mission to prevent forgetting from ever happening, on behalf of the ‘nation.’

In the fourth chapter of my thesis, I will try to show the critical point where that obvious ‘historicism’ splits. But before that, I shall say that the drive of ‘kayıt’ has a crucial function in *İA*; that it is the main wheel that makes encyclopedia both a ‘kütük’ and something more than ‘kütük’; and that ‘kayıt’ is exposed to a modification during the process in which the collection turns out to be an

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kadar yazıktır ki, bu kahramanların çoğu bugün unutulmuş bulunmaktadır ve ne kadar hazindir ki, şahısların ve heyetlerin kaleminden çeşitli isimler altında neşredilmiş ansiklopedik eserlerde ve ansiklopedilerde bile bu kahramanların adına rastlanmamaktadır.” *Yeniçeriler*, p. 109.

encyclopedia, in very much the same line with Lévi-Strauss's conception of *bricolage*.

### Antiquarian Research

Arnaldo Momigliano, in one of his essays<sup>33</sup>, attempts to sketch the portrait of a 'historian typology', that of 'antiquarian historian who is deeply mysterious in his ultimate aims': "As soon as the antiquarian leaves his shabby palace which preserves something of the eighteenth century and enters modern life, he becomes the great collector, he is bound to specialise, and he may well end up as the founder of an institute of fine arts or of comparative anthropology."<sup>34</sup> This is a man particularly interested in objects; he toys with the objects bearing the trace of a certain 'pastness', ruined monuments and documents in sepia tones; but there's something in his style that severs its connection with the profession of 'historiography.' He has an intimate relationship with the everyday, the street, the practical life: "His passion for ancient objects is the consequence of his interest in empirical observation and experiment in all fields." According to Momigliano, that has nothing to do with the 'profession' of the historian: "...the failure to create a clear and permanent terminological distinction between history and the other type of research does not imply that the distinction was forgotten or felt only vaguely. Local history, genealogy, chronology, mythography, study of ancient laws, ceremonies, names, etc., developed outside the main stream of historiography. Negatively these studies were characterised by a lack of prominent

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<sup>33</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, "The Rise of Antiquarian Research", in *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 54.

<sup>34</sup> *Loc. cit.*

political interests, by indifference to contemporary issues of general importance, and by a lack of rhetorical accomplishments. Positively they were characterised by an interest in the minute details of the past, by undisguised local patriotism, by curiosity for unusual events and monstrosities, and by display of learning as an end itself.”<sup>35</sup> Here Momigliano claims something parallel with Walter Benjamin, but also he pretends to forget that the very same distinction in almost the same terms had already been made by Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche, in his groundbreaking essay of 1874 with the title “Of the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life” –which would later be published as a part of *Untimely Meditations*- clearly differentiates three types of historians. One of them is the ‘antiquarian historian.’ Antiquarian history, according to Nietzsche, is history motivated primarily out of a spirit of reverence for the past and it can be valuable to contemporary individuals by helping them to appreciate their lives and culture. Nietzsche mentions the drive to going back to the origin, to the roots: “The possession of his ancestors’ furniture changes its meaning in his soul; for his soul is rather possessed by it. All that is small and limited, mouldy and obsolete, gains a worth and inviolability of its own from the conservative and reverent soul of the antiquary migrating into it, and building a secret nest there. The history of his town becomes the history of himself; he looks on the walls, the turreted gate, the town council, the fair, as an illustrated diary of his youth, and sees himself in it all –his strength, industry, desire, reason, faults and follies. ‘Here one could live,’ he says, ‘a one can live here now –and will go on living; for we are tough folk, and will not be uprooted in the night.’ And so, with this ‘we’, he surveys the marvellous individual life of the past and identifies himself with the spirit of the house, the family and the

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

city. He greets the soul of his people from afar as his own, across the dim and troubled centuries; his gifts and his virtues lie in such power of feeling and divination, his scent of a half-vanished trail, his instinctive correctness in reading the scribbled past...”<sup>36</sup> What Momigliano means by ‘shabby palace’ is the same place that Nietzsche calls ‘secret nest.’ (Momigliano avoids calling that man ‘historian’ and Nietzsche blames him. According to Nietzsche, the antiquarian researcher is a dreamer who runs away from the actual and sticks to the past not with a need arising from the necessities of actuality but in search of the romantic pleasure he derives from the monument, the ruin and the bizarre.) That ‘nest’ is where the antiquarian researcher mistakes his individual past for the collective; it is the place where he delves into the past in order to find the first in the second. He is in need of seeing the past as a picture before his eyes, for only by that way can he be convinced that it is his home. Let me quote Siegfried Kracauer’s claim about the ‘film.’ Films whose composition “varies according to place, people, and time,” Kracauer writes, “help us not only to appreciate our given material environment but to extend it in all directions. They virtually make the world our home.”<sup>37</sup> ‘Shabby palace’, ‘secret nest’ and ‘home’: all these three metaphors imply a sense of shelter and origin. In Chapter 3, I will try to show the deep connection between these metaphors and the ‘collection.’

‘Antiquarian historian’, as a typology, may function as a key in the way of understanding Koçu’s mentality; but we lack the help of this sort of a key in the case of ‘nationalism.’ It is apparent that Koçu imagines the Ottoman past as a ‘collective

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<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1949), pp. 25-26.

<sup>37</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 304.

memory' to be saved by being 'recorded'; and that he embarks on the quixotic attempt to remind his people of that past as a tale of victory and heroism in the form of a huge 'register.' However, contrary to possible expectations, it is not possible to claim that this 'mission' undertaken by Koçu relies strictly on a conception of nation that defines itself through the exclusion of 'the other' (at least on the surface.) His interest in 'minority cultures' and religious identities apart from Islam, without any apparent will to marginalize them, puts Koçu somewhere out of the borders of the 'national historiographic project' framed and criticized by Cemal Kafadar.

According to Kafadar: "National historiographic projects, European or otherwise, eliminated more than ethnic diversity of course. Cultural and social diversity of all kinds could be marginalized or 'otherized' and deemed to lie beyond 'us.'"<sup>38</sup> In spite of the fact that Koçu's assumption of 'totality', which is structured in an opposite direction to those projects, requires a modification in the terms of 'critique of nationalism', I think the context of 'antiquarian historiography' is still relevant. As a matter of fact, in *Human, All Too Human* –written shortly afterwards the *Untimely Meditations*- Nietzsche realigns the business of 'antiquarian historian', this time with an utterly different emphasis: "If genealogy in its own right gives rise to questions concerning our native land, native language, or the laws that govern us, its intention is to reveal the heterogeneous systems that, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity."<sup>39</sup>

Koçu conveys the characteristics of the 'antiquarian historian' emphasized in the two analyses of Nietzsche. His style bears the influence of the two men that he

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<sup>38</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (California: University of California Press, 1995), p. 159n20.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 162.

mentions as his ‘masters’, namely Ahmet Rasim and Ahmet Refik Altınay: an ear for the murmur of *everyday*; an insatiable desire to recount mythic and epic stories with paying regard to their verisimilitude; making use of rhetoric tactics in order to bring in the cold fact a certain vividness, liveliness.

Koçu paid homage to his masters by editing a book about each one of them in 1938. By voicing his gratitude to his masters in a woeful language in his introductory portrait essays to these books, which were published as parts of Semih Lutfi Erciyes’s highly popular “Son Devrin Meşhur Şair ve Edipleri” series in 1930’s and 1940’s and in which he occasionally tried to be analytical and distant, also documents the basics of his style and approach which places him closer to “antiquarian researcher” typology.

In praising Ahmet Rasim’s writings, Koçu says: “In Ahmet Rasim’s writings, Istanbul flows like a soloured and sound movie, with its streets, houses, monuments and public buildings, cafes and gambling dens, recreation spots, ships and boats, streetcars and automobiles. All the fishermen, fire brigadiers, bums, gamblers, celebrities, artists, etc. speak with their own idioms and voices in these writings.”<sup>40</sup> For Koçu, recording the liveliness of daily life through first hand witnessing, in the vivacity of a movie is a hard, great and important work which can be done solely by Ahmet Rasim. Thanks to his skill in forming dialogues, ear for everyday murmur and imagination taking its strenght from ‘everyday’ itself, Ahmet Rasim can record his imaginary or real stories that can be ‘real’ in either case and be a ‘scrivener’ for his readers. On the other hand, according to Koçu, Ahmet Rasim is the master of realizing and presenting the curious and grotesque situations and moments of wonder

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<sup>40</sup> Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *Ahmed Rasim: Hayatı, Seçme Şiir ve Eserleri* (İstanbul: Sühulet Kitabevi), 1938, pp. 3-4.

in the mundanity of daily life. Ahmet Rasim has taught him that there is a wonder hidden in mundanity which should not be allowed to fly away and that author's eye and tongue, while wandering in reality, should be tracking this wonder. He took the journalistic quality in Ahmet Rasim's style seriously and learned to see 'urban life' as a novelistic (even Rabelaisian) view consisting of sequences of scenes. The obvious parallelism between the sentences he forms while narrating the atmosphere of the works of Ahmet Rasim and the inventories at the beginning of each volume of *İA* clearly demonstrates how Koçu is influenced by his master.

The introduction Koçu wrote for the book he prepared about Ahmet Refik has a much intenser memoir tone than his book about Ahmet Rasim. Koçu was exposed to the 'full of vivid stories' books of Ahmet Refik, under whom he would work as an assistant in the future at İstanbul Darülfünun, as a child. Those books he read as a child and his personal acquaintance with Ahmet Refik in his juvenile years were influential for the formation of his identity as a historian: "In my idle childhood years, I was like the lead on a fisherman's hook, slipping in and out of the water from the pier opposite our Bosphorus *yalı* like a scaly fish and only years later in Konya did I recognize that the writer I knew during these childhood years as Refik was indeed the famous historian Ahmet Refik."<sup>41</sup> Koçu, in addition to learning the "techniques of presenting a historical story" (the articles that will be given in installments as newspaper addendums, regarding the engravings and drawings that will be copied from travel books and be used to 'ornament' these articles as a component of narration), also embraced the idea, both as a 'style' and as a useful

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<sup>41</sup> "Boğaziçi'nde, yalımızın önündeki rıhtımdan denize bir oltu kurşunu gibi fırlayıp sulardan pullu pullu bir balık gibi çıktığım avare çocukluk çağlarında tanıyıp sevdiğim Refik amcanın müverrih Ahmet Refik olduğunu, yıllarca sonra Konya'da öğrendim." Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *Ahmed Refik: Hayatı, Seçme Şiir ve Yazıları* (İstanbul: Sühulet Kitabevi, 1938), p. 3.

survival tactic for a Turkish author who knows that “not making ends meet is his fate”, that author is the one who is supposed to add vivacity to the ‘historical fact.’ Somewhere else, he states that Ahmet Refik “left a rich and valuable library called ‘Ahmet Refik.’”<sup>42</sup> Here we see that an impulse of Koçu, which I will focus on later in the fourth chapter and which is the significance he attributes to proper name and signature, is articulated for the first time. Koçu also dreams of having a library commemorating his own name and keeping a ‘record book.’ This is the impulse to leave an ‘oeuvre’ that will commemorate his name and that is imprinted with his name and signature: He dreams of presenting the collective story in a manner that renders it indistinguishable from the individual story, embedding the individual story in the collective story and building the narrative house that Momigliano and Nietzsche call ‘shabby palace’ and ‘secret nest.’

However, Ahmet Refik has a shortcoming that Koçu can not help pointing out: “Ahmet Refik who discovers his sources during his excavations in libraries and archives was a sensitive soul, a poet, a dynamic and generous man. He worked fast, did not always criticize the documents he found and as a result made mistakes, was sometimes content with the records at hand and his work proved superficial. But he has always been an authentic historian, and a great man of literature. He often made important points on Turkish history.”<sup>43</sup> The major ‘weakness’ of his teacher, in Koçu’s view, is ‘to be content with the records at hand.’ In this criticism, we find his

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> “Kaynaklarını, kütüphane kütüphane dolaşarak keşfeden Ahmet Refik; vesikalarını hazine-i evrakta, toz ve toprak arasında hafriyat yaparak meydana çıkararak Ahmet Refik, içli bir adamdı, şair adamdı, dinamik adamdı ve cömert adamdı. Onun için seri çalıştı, bazen kaynaklarını tenkid etmedi, bu yüzden hatalara düştü; bazen vesikalarını kafi buldu, bu yüzden sathi kaldı. Fakat daima, orijinal bir artist müverrih, bir büyük edib oldu. Türkiye tarihi üzerinde yer yer kuvvetli işaretler yaptı.” *Loc. cit.*

point which he would make again thirty years later, about Ottoman historians, in more clarified terms: The historian cannot and should not be content with the records that are not based on first hand testimony. The voice of the “I” should be revitalized by literary interventions, so that it will be possible to give the times that passed their liveliness back. What Koçu sees as the shortcoming of Ahmet Refik is, sometimes being unable to bring the historical past to life again.

These two men, with their lifestyles, personalities, methods, and gestures, hence the Nietzschean ‘antiquarian researcher’ as a related typology comes to be Koçu’s models. Bohemian and in the middle of daily life, like Ahmet Rasim; a frequent visitor of archives and fond of literariness, like Ahmet Refik: In these traits, we can see Koçu’s identity of ‘romantic collector’ which I shall elaborate later on in the third chapter. There’s a passage in his piece on Ahmet Rasim, which in a melancholy tone and ironically prefigures *İA*’s fate and reveals the theme of ‘completeness’: “His strong and fresh mind which has for long been dwelling in the confines of a body tired with a struggle of half a century, was suffering from bodily illnesses; and even in this case he was trying to serve Turkish language by creating a big Turkish dictionary. It’s a pity that Ahmet Rasim could only reach upto letter K in that dictionary.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Yarım asırlık bir mücadelenin yıpratdığı bir vücutta barınmakta olan yorulmak bilmez taze dimağı, vücut hastalıklarının ızdırabı ile kıvrılırken, Türk diline son hizmetini yapmaya çalışıyor, büyük bir Türk lugatinin tahakkukunu düşünüyordu. Ne kadar yazık ki, Ahmet Rasim bu lugati ancak K harfine kadar yazabildi.” *Ahmed Rasim*, p. 27.

## Modification of the Record

In the section “On the Preparation of an Encyclopedia”, I have already mentioned that the reason behind the inclusion of two different ‘Abdullah Efendi’s in *İA* is the differentiation of criteria with regard to each, and that those criteria actually hints at two different desires working in the background of *İA*. One of them was the desire to include all possible ‘İstanbullu Abdullah Efendi’s; and the other was a different kind of desire which, in the fourth chapter, will be called ‘autobiographical’; and claimed to be found in the self-projection embedded in Koçu’s collection, in the third chapter.

In my discussion of the concept of *Bricolage*, I said that the materials which are ready-to-hand may “suggest” adaptive courses of action, and the initial aim may be modified. Therefore my argument is that, in the basis of *İA*, there was the ‘collection’ constructed by Koçu, and every single piece in that collection was a ‘record.’ That collection did not consist of valuable and rare items as it could have been in the collection of a Renaissance prince, but of stories, anecdotes, portraits, engravings and ‘weird’ details. They were not ‘valuable’ in themselves, but they were charged with a ‘subjective value’ attributed to them in the process of forming Koçu’s private narrative. Koçu was using these selective pieces to constitute a new context by severing them from their original contexts (an old newspaper, a novel, a travelogue by a foreigner, a history book or a ‘şuara tezkiresi’) and separating them into groups. That collection had, as Susan Stewart mentioned, the structure of a personal narrative: “...the replacement of narrative of production by the narrative of

the collection, the replacement of the narrative of history with the narrative of the individual subject –that is, the collector himself.”<sup>45</sup>

As Lévi-Strauss teaches us, the modifications effected by the *bricolage* operation will eventually cause the objects used in the operation to be realigned. The pieces which formed Koçu’s collection, hence his personal narrative were also historical ‘records’, and these ‘records’ became exposed to a kind of epistemological modification in the process of ‘encyclopedization’ which gave the personal narrative a central and concealed status. Whereas the Abdullah Efendi who was mentioned under the pretext of his being ‘spendthrift’ implies the pre-encyclopedic status of the ‘record’; the other Abdullah Efendi implies the meaning of ‘record’ that is relevant in the collection that will turn out to be an encyclopedia. ‘Recording,’ in the context of encyclopedia, can no more be a ‘selective’ activity; it should henceforth be transformed into a much more inclusive, systematic and impartial operation. By the modification of the ‘record’ this way, Koçu desires to put the encyclopedic ideal of the Enlightenment into practice in his ‘kütük’, to turn it into an impartially reported, scientifically gathered and hence, publicly communicable body of information and to break with İbnülemin and all the tradition of ‘tabakat’ that he represents.

In *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss mentions the wall that surrounds the *bricoleur*: “It might be said that the *engineer* questions the universe, while the *bricoleur* addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours, that is, only a sub-set of the culture.”<sup>46</sup> Here, as Derrida emphasizes, we come across the myth of the *engineer* that is produced by the *bricoleur*: a condition

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<sup>45</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 156.

<sup>46</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, p. 19.

of cultural production that enables the ‘universe’ to be questioned without the necessity to address a sub-set. (‘Beginning’ and ‘End’, both standing on the two ends of a smooth line.) Koçu’s attempt to transform the material which is ready to hand (his collection) into a new entity (an encyclopedia) has as its predetermined aim a kind of ‘telos’: the completion of the encyclopedia, a textual closure. Koçu’s project, it can be speculated that, was doomed to remain ‘incomplete’ for a good many reasons: 1. Because Koçu was not trying to make an encyclopedia, but rather trying to make an encyclopedia *out of* a collection. 2. Because *İA*’s structure is based on the conflict and struggle between two radically different desires. 3. Because the register which is composed of ‘records in the first sense’ operates at the heart of the narrative, produces meaning and provokes the potential consistency of the narrative, although Koçu believes that ‘the record in the first sense’ has already been successfully cancelled by ‘the record in the second sense’ and the ‘encyclopedia’ operates properly. 4. Because, while he identifies himself with the *engineer*, in fact, what he actually tells is nothing other than the endless narrative of the *bricoleur*. The inversion of this claim about ‘non-completion’ gives us Derrida’s assertion about Novalis’s *Encyclopedia*: The ‘non-completion’ signifies something about the impossibility of ‘completeness’ and ‘totality’ as such.

The roots of the ‘strangeness’ of *İA* are thus both in the modification of the ‘record’, and in a more widespread modification lived by the overall narrative. The tension between the autobiographical collection at the heart of the encyclopedia which is shaped by Koçu’s curiosities, and the secondary layer that is conceived to be impartial and objective, leaves the reader with an ambiguous text unsure of its aims and fundamentals.

We read a narrative which is constantly trying to cover an other narrative. But that secondary narrative, that which tries to cover and conceal its predecessor, looks like a palimpsest that has lost some of its legibility for the traces of the original text still remain, or a cloth that is full of rips, or the battle of architectural details on the façade of an antique building, which unmasks the conflict between the new function attributed to it and the use it had originally been designed for.

The Map That Covers The Earth/

The Register That Covers The Past

The puzzlement that is experienced by any reader of *IA* calls to mind the Borges parable quoted by Michel Foucault at the beginning of *The Order of Things*: “This passage quotes a ‘certain Chinese encyclopaedia’ in which it is written that ‘animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.’”<sup>47</sup> According to Foucault, the gist of that list is that it “does away with the *site*, the mute ground upon which it is possible for entities to be juxtaposed.”<sup>48</sup> In what space would that single, inclusive division have *its* existence? Absurdity destroys the *and* of the enumeration by making impossible the *in* where the things enumerated would be divided up. Borges quotes that weird list in his book *Other Inquisitions*<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. xv.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

with the aim of criticizing the theory of universal language of a seventeenth century scholar, John Wilkins. After quoting the ‘Chinese encyclopaedia’, Borges adds that no classification can ultimately avoid being arbitrary, and claims that the reason for that is quite simple: we do not know what the universe is. However, in quoting the same passage, Foucault does not seem to be in favour of this kind of an epistemological relativism. If, he seems to say, we cannot make sense of the operating order in the Chinese encyclopaedia for it is radically distinct from ours, perhaps our logic of order might be just as incomprehensible for someone else as it is for us. There’s a scepticism about the soundness of a logic of order that aims at reflecting the positive truth inherent in things. However, Alan Sheridan raises an objection to the radical scepticism in Foucault’s thought that it is legitimate to construe Chinese encyclopaedia as the ideal model of all possible (rational or irrational) ways of classification, and claims that the principle criterion in this context should rather be ‘consistence’: an internal consistence is the sufficient criterion for one to prefer a given classification to the other; and in this sense, he concludes, the Chinese encyclopaedia is not a consistent one.<sup>50</sup>

However, the poetic attractiveness of the similarity between the Chinese encyclopaedia and *IA* should not be embellished. Reşat Ekrem’s *IA* is not ‘inconsistent’ in the way the Chinese encyclopaedia is; but a similar case can be observed with respect to its arrangement. If, as Foucault asserts, the point is the existence of a presupposed ground on which the dwelling of a group of things makes sense; then there will be a short circuit in our understanding of *IA*. Because the ‘taxonomic principle’ that dominates and constitutes the inner order of *IA* operates as

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<sup>49</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins”, in *Other Inquisitions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 104.

<sup>50</sup> Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 50.

a spectral mechanism satisfying both two fundamental desires (autobiographical desire and the desire of recording everything) forming it, rather than as a preconceived operational scheme. In this respect, despite the fact that the ‘strange’ aspects of Wilkins’ Chinese encyclopaedia can be found in *İA* as well, that does not come to mean that the reader’s reaction to *İA* can be explained in terms of Foucault’s analysis.

The reason for the impression that *İA* lacks an inner order, is that the taxonomic principle –which is not properly articulated anywhere- operates in the background rather than on the surface. The basic theme of *İA* that dominates each and every column and page of it, is ‘İSTANBUL’; thus the very first criterion according to which any reader would test the relevance of an entry is its relation to İstanbul. However, the problem –or the ambiguity that we are accustomed to see as a problem- is about the limits of this theme (both ‘Büyükada’ and ‘Tomato’ are somehow related to İstanbul.) The grotesque quality in *İA*’s arrangement becomes most observable when a certain entry (an ‘important’ one) is passed over lightly (in a few sentences) or, at the other extreme, another one (a ‘seemingly unimportant’ one) is held forth at great length. An apparent exaggeration, unbalance and disorderliness is perceived here. But, considered the twofold narrative structure I mentioned before, it can be claimed that the problem does not arise from a disorderliness or unbalance, but rather from the fact that Koçu frequently appears in the text both as a subject (like the protagonist in a fictional environment), and as a narrator (like the author of a fictional story.) That unstable perspective which appears as ‘disorderliness’, ‘unbalance’, ‘negligence’ or ‘exaggeration’ on the surface of the narrative, is in fact Koçu’s very ‘self’ which goes to and fro between the two narrative layers. What we leaf through is not an encyclopedia about İstanbul prepared

by an impartial observer; but the illustration of the relationship between the city of İstanbul and a subject whose fantasy of ‘impartiality’ is suppressed by his autobiographical impulse – and vice versa.

That relationship produces a narrow but insistent iconography of İstanbul –an iconography that is woven with the weird, the wonderful, the rare, the exotic, the gigantic and the miniature, underground cultures and myths, stories and legends, and non-generalizable, momentary and subjective experiences. At this point the double meaning of the ‘Register’ that is at work in *İA* appears once again: the part of the information that is recorded and presented to the reader who tries to make sense of it, is the part of the collection dwelling in the center of *İA* which had somehow succeeded to make itself a way out of the secondary narrative that tries to conceal it. What constitutes the iconography of İstanbul is, thus that partial narrative which is composed of Koçu’s selective records –his *collected items*–, rather than the secondary narrative that tries to conceal it. Therefore, if we interpret *İA* iconographically (just like Aby Warburg had interpreted Renaissance paintings), that is, separate the images that constitute the ‘İSTANBUL’ of *İA* from each other and analyze them respectively, we may perhaps reach the repressed autobiographical nucleus, the collection-as-self-projection operating at the heart of it (in a way that calls to mind Freud’s theories of dreams, jokes and lapses.)

Let us switch to an other Borges parable: “...In that empire, the art of cartography attained such perfection that the map of a single province occupied the entirety of a city, and the map of the empire, the entirety of a province. In time, those unconscionable maps no longer satisfied, and the cartographers guilds struck a map of the empire whose size was that of the empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following generations, who were not so fond of the study of cartography

as their forebears had been, saw that that vast map was useless, and not without some pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the inclemencies of sun and winters. In the deserts of the West, still today, there are tattered ruins of that map, inhabited by animals and beggars; in all the land there is no other relic of the disciplines of geography.”<sup>51</sup> That parable may help us to delve into the problematic that the Chinese encyclopaedia put before us: Cartography as a metaphor of the ideal of ‘absolute encyclopedia’ which Foucault claims to have left its mark on the so-called ‘classic episteme.’ So we can say that, the result of a thinking that tries to represent everything that is fit to be represented and reduces the meaning of language to representation, comes to be the destruction of that language just like the “tattered ruins of that map,” which is “inhabited by animals and beggars.” The ‘order’ seems to be obligated by the non-representable, torn apart like a map. At this point, there appears an issue that Foucault would reflect upon in an other text of his, “Lives of Infamous Men.”<sup>52</sup> That’s an unfulfilled project, which was planned by Foucault when he had been reading the prison records of eighteenth century. He tells that for a long time he thought about putting those brief records into order, systematizing them, but that then he gave up. These are records of ‘deviant’ existences which can only have articulation in a place where the language does not work. “I did not try to bring together texts that would be more faithful to reality than others, that would merit inclusion for their representative value, but, rather, texts that played a part in the reality they speak of –and that, in return, whatever their inaccuracy, their exaggeration, or their hypocrisy, are traversed by it: fragments of discourse trailing

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<sup>51</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitude in Science”, in *Collected Fictions* (London: Penguin Press, 1999), p. 346.

<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men”, in *The Essential Foucault* (New York: The New Press, 2003), p. 279.

the fragments of a reality they are part of.”<sup>53</sup> In order for some part of them to reach us, a beam of light had to illuminate them, for a moment at least. A light coming from elsewhere. What snatched them from the darkness in which they could, perhaps should, have remained was the encounter with the ‘power’; without that collision, it is very unlikely that any word would be there to recall their fleeting trajectory. The power that watched these lives, that pursued them, that lent its attention, if only for a moment, to their complaints and their little racket, and marked them with its claw was what gave rise to the few words about them that remain for us –either because “someone decided to appeal to it in order to denounce, complain, solicit, entreat, or because he chose to intervene and in a few words to judge and decide.”<sup>54</sup>

*İA* too can be regarded as an ‘anthology of existences’ of this kind. However, little life-stories are recorded not only in the instances of collision with power, but in such moments when the gaze and curiosity of an observer is momentarily fixed on them in the ephemerality of everyday life. The entry AHMED AĞA (Miskalî) in the first volume<sup>55</sup> is a powerful example of that. Although it is not about ‘infamy’, it still makes sense in Foucault’s framework. The tragic condition that Ahmed Ağa had been put through sheds light upon the bureaucratic mechanism of Ottoman Empire during the reign of Mahmud II. He deserves the right to an ‘afterlife through documentation’ at the precise moment that he comes face to face with the unappeasable formalism of the ‘power’: we learn from the entry that, Miskalî Ahmed Ağa is one of the oldest employees of the Topkapı Palace and gets retired when he is about eighty. Now it is time to leave the palace where he had lived since his

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281-82.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>55</sup> *İA*, V.1, p. 321.

childhood and to start a new life ‘outside.’ But since it was nearly impossible for a single man without a beard (employees of the Palace were not permitted to grow beard) to live in İstanbul of that period, Ahmed Ağa finds himself in a cul-de-sac. *İA* records that the old man ‘cried’ and asked to people around him ‘what to do now.’ Thus we catch a hint of the taxonomic principle operating in the background of *İA*: That entry gains its relevancy in the fleeting image of non-representable everyday that it reveals just for a little moment. We gather both the information about the story of Ahmed Ağa and the knowledge of power that can be produced out of it, through the double structure of *İA*: On the one hand, Koçu the collector includes Ahmed Ağa into his collection for he is the crystallization of a curious detail; on the other hand, Koçu the recorder records him for the sake of recording, for not to be recorded is one and the same with ‘oblivion.’ He brings a detail that waits for being discovered under the dust of the archive into life by recording it.

At a certain point of his meditation upon the relationship between archive and history (with reference to Derrida’s *Archive Fever*), Carolyn Steedman mentions Michelet’s experience in the archives: Michelet compares the inhalation of the dust covering all over the documents in the archive –and Steedman believes that it should officially be recorded as an illness into the medical literature: archive fever- with the inhalation of the dust remained from dead bodies. ‘Dust’, according to Michelet, is the trace of existence –the trace that proves that what no more exists had once existed. The people mentioned and talking in the documents are not alive, they do not exist anymore, they’re dead, but that non-existence is not the same with nothingness. Precisely that non-existence is the proof that some people have existed there before, that empty place was not always empty. Reşat Ekrem claims the same thing with no less a nationalistic sensibility: “I wiped out the dust covering the names

of the heroes lost in the pages of our historical sources with tears pouring from my eyes, and put these names in an alphabetical order side by side with great famous men.”<sup>56</sup> Michelet asserts that he brings out the dead from their graves of whom he feels the ‘spectral existences’ in the dust of the archive, and that he wants to give them a second life.<sup>57</sup> Although, as Steedman claims with reference to Jacques Rancière, this is obviously a ‘romantic illusion’, that claim should not obscure the very subject of ‘historiography’: to deal with that impossible void, the trace of that which had once existed.

For Koçu, as for Michelet, to breathe hard on the dust covering the records is the key for being able to salvage the past. His ‘romantic illusion’ is just that: The impossibility of a map that perfectly covers the earth; the impossibility of a ‘Register’ that fills the void of the past. ‘Romanticism’ as a disposition and intellectual way of dealing with things, will be mentioned in the next two chapters as Koçu’s method of building his ‘secret nest’ within the collective history.

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<sup>56</sup> Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *Tarihimizde Kahramanlar* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2005), p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p. 71.

## CHAPTER 3

### COLLECTION

In his penetrating analysis of Hieronymus Bosch's famous painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights*<sup>58</sup>, Michel de Certeau compares it with a museum: "It is a museum of natural and imaginary history combined with an anthropological museum." But this museum is far from being saturated with 'past': "[It] is also a journalistic presentation of current events and a plan for a city."<sup>59</sup> The first impression that *IA* makes on any reader would be similar to that: a museum full of curiosities, but one which is not content with a mere preservation of the past. It appears to be many things simultaneously. But the most apparent consequence of that comes to be the delaying of "what it actually wants to be." It finds and defines its task through its desire of being an 'encyclopedia', and in order to be able to assemble the bundle of material at hand, it searches for the limits of a "given" form (*encyclopedic* form.) It is a content longing for its form, and longing under the long shadow of the 'encyclopedic ideal.'

In my view, Bosch's painting and de Certeau's powerful analysis may serve metaphorically for a better understanding of *IA*. De Certeau's emphasis that Bosch's painting is a 'historical and anthropological museum' and 'a journalistic presentation of current events and a plan for a city' is crucial for my analysis, for he presents here a method of penetrating into the seemingly haphazard and chaotic bundle of material

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<sup>58</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>59</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable Vol. I: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 56.

assembled in *ÍA* as well. He cuts the painting into slices and creates some perspectives to see different layers of meaning which try to both conceal and unconceal each other.

I think that I can use these perspectives in a formal manner in the context of *ÍA*. In an attempt to make sense of Bosch's logic of transferring some elements from the outer world to his painting, de Certeau asserts that: "Taking up the signs that accommodate all the scientific curiosities of his time in his painting, Bosch makes them function *differently*, just as he does the various fragments of the world that he brings together in the non-place of his painting. He makes them into a garden. [...] A metamorphosis changes the status of terms. Another world insinuates itself into the same signs. The painting modifies these signs by assigning them the ambivalent capacity of still being understandable as fragments of meaning systems, even though they are already set within a different space, one that 'converts' them into an aesthetics."<sup>60</sup>

To 'compare' Koçu with Bosch will not make any sense. However, as I said before, to take a close look at Bosch's painting and use it as a metaphor may be helpful for a better understanding of *ÍA*. In this respect, I think, *The Garden of Earlyly Delights* sheds more light upon the collection underlying *ÍA*, than *ÍA* itself. But there's something crucial that one should keep in mind: Bosch was presenting his collection of fragments drawn out of the 'world' that surrounds his very self, displaying it, and offering it to collective experience. In other words: he was giving the assemblage that he derived from the world back to the world. Koçu's collection, on the other hand, was in need of a secondary operation, a 'recontextualization' for being able to express itself. Collection was the recontextualization of the fragments

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<sup>60</sup> De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, p. 58.

drawn out from the world, and the way of making it public as an encyclopedia was to re-recontextualize it. It was a ‘recontextualization in the second degree.’ That second recontextualization was at the same time the moment that made Koçu’s autobiography to have a public appearance. It was a way of displaying the collectables that decorated his interior space for the gaze and experience of the public, as an experience to be shared, as an ‘exteriority’ to be dwelled on altogether.

### Koçu And Collecting

Let’s take a look at that material which I call ‘Koçu’s collection. There are some considerable works on the psychological roots and structure of ‘obsessive collecting.’ On the other hand, we do not have enough information about Koçu that would render the use of a ‘psychological perspective’ legitimate. What we know is that he is told to have ‘a passion to collect things’ and that in the last years of his life, his apartment in Göztepe was as full as possible with a messed up bundle of ephemera which he loved to call ‘my private archive.’ If we combine that biographical knowledge with the clues that a close reading of *İA* would provide us, then we can have a more sophisticated insight into Koçu’s ‘collecting behaviour.’

The entry GEMİ MODELLERİ<sup>61</sup> is worth citing here with respect to both the inclusion of this kind of an entry in *İA*, and as a pretext for Koçu to articulate his private narrative: “The ‘Ship’ is indeed a beautiful thing. Various kinds of ships, if crafted by an artist, not only decorate houses but also serve as historical records. The model ships in the inventories of maritime museums are very interesting and there is a little collection of model ships in the Maritime Museum in Beşiktaş.” Then he

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<sup>61</sup> *İA*, V. 11, pp. 6094-95.

continues: “To have a full catalogue of model ships in private collections is nearly impossible. Some of the models that I could see are the following,” and he counts the model ships that he had a chance to see. The fourth ship in that list, we learn that, belongs to Koçu: “Kandilli Ship No. 12 of Şirket-i Hayriye – belongs to R.E. Koçu and made for him by the preeminent artist Behçet Cantok. It’s a beautiful model, 58 cm. in length, made in 1958. It was during these days that R.E. Koçu dreamed of establishing a gallery of models comprising all the ships of Şirket-i Hayriye and Seyr-i Sefain. He submitted an application to the Public Office of Maritime Bank with the photograph of the model that belongs to him and proposed the establishment of such a museum, but did not further pursue the application for he was confused with a commission agent.” We can diagnose a ‘collector’s behaviour’ in that story. In the entry ANTİKA, ANTİKA EŞYA, ANTİKACILIK, ANTİKACILAR<sup>62</sup>, after some information about the etymological roots of the word ‘antique’, we read Koçu’s own observations and experiences about the antique market in İstanbul: “It is a fact that one can often come across with some rare and valuable objects in the Bedesten, and it is also a fact that whereas an object worth to be displayed in a museum can be bought in a cheap price, a worthless piece can be immensely expensive that one can hardly afford. Indeed the professional knowledge about antiquities in the Bedesten is superficial.” Koçu regards museum as ‘the savior’ in both entries (model ships and antiques.) What makes model ships valuable is that they are ‘miniaturized models’ faithful to their originals; and the criterion of value for any ‘antique’ is its being ‘strange and rare.’<sup>63</sup> According to Hillel Schwartz, in the roots of the collector’s interest in the miniature lies the fact that the original cannot be ‘collected.’ Thus the

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<sup>62</sup> *İA*, V. 2, pp. 877-80

<sup>63</sup> *İA*, V. 2, p. 879.

collector would make his/her emotional investment to a ‘perfect copy’ rather than the object itself; and this very act in turn would elevate the ‘reality’ and ‘value’ of the original object to a higher level in collector’s mind.<sup>64</sup> Susan Stewart, on the other hand, emphasizes a different and deeper dimension of ‘miniaturization.’ According to Stewart, ‘Gigantic’ is that which has the power of containing us, hence the way of containing it is miniaturization: “Our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it ‘surrounds’ us. Our position here is the antithesis of our position in relation to the miniature; we are enveloped by the gigantic, surrounded by it, enclosed within its shadow. Whereas we know the miniature as a spatial whole or as temporal parts, we know the gigantic only partially. We move through the landscape; it does not move through us. This relation to the landscape is expressed most often through an abstract projection of the body upon the natural world. Consequently, both the miniature and the gigantic may be described through metaphors of containment –the miniature as contained, the gigantic as container.”<sup>65</sup>

The function of ‘miniaturization’ is like that in the context of Koçu’s collection; but in the process of the transformation of collection into an encyclopedia, ‘miniaturization’ is exposed to a modification just like the concept of ‘record’ has been: At a certain point, Koçu seems to decide to realize a project of ‘displaying things in a museum as a way of saving them’ in his collection. The image of ‘gigantic’ that has been contained in the confines of the collection, now demands to be ‘gigantic’ in a public sense. The relationship between the desire of

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<sup>64</sup> Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1996), p. 228.

<sup>65</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 71.

‘miniaturization’ and acts of ‘documentation’, ‘preservation’ and ‘power’ is a more or less apparent one. The person who miniaturizes a monument or owns it, tries to avoid the inevitability of ruination by documenting the transient just like photography and film does, and –as Stewart points out- wants to dominate that which is uncontainable, at the same time. Miniaturization is a means to translate ‘the public’ and ‘the shared’ into the language of the private sphere; it is inclusion of exteriority by the interiority, transformation of exteriority into a bibelot that decorates the interior space. As Didier Maleuvre states: “The bibelot instantiates the idyllic nature of miniaturization: it embodies real objects on a scale suited to their immediate domestication.”<sup>66</sup> Bibelot (the exteriority miniaturized to build an interiority) can be said to be the basic motif that shapes the collection process, and *ÍA* is, in a sense, the inversion of that process: While the collection turns out to be an encyclopedia, the miniatures collected by Koçu<sup>67</sup> to build his interior space, come to be founding stones of a structure which strives for monumentality, being an exterior, being able to contain in the manner of a private collection that gradually evolves into a public museum. Collection is Koçu’s ‘home’, his ‘interior space’, the place where he can form and live through his own private narrative. Encyclopedia, on the other hand, contains even his home; it is a monument aiming at an ultimate identification with its subject, İstanbul.

At this point, we’d better search for a suitable collector typology that we need for a better understanding of *ÍA* and the collection in its center. We might consider

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<sup>66</sup> Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 135.

<sup>67</sup> I use the word ‘miniature’ in a broader sense here; both as material objects like model ships, and as a kind of ‘miniaturized history’, that is, stories, anecdotes, little biographies and all kinds of archival material.

the three categories of collecting devised by Susan M. Pearce: systematics, fetishism, and souvenir collecting.<sup>68</sup> Systematics, according to her, is an attempt to represent an ideology. As an example, she cites the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford, England, which portrays the natural history of evolution. Fetishism, she says, is the removal of the object from its original historical and cultural context, and its recontextualization in terms of the collector's own interests. A good example would be William Randolph Hearst's accumulation of European decorative arts at San Simeon, his estate in southern California. Souvenir collecting is simply the gathering of objects on which the collector confers the mnemonic power to evoke personal memories of a place or time.

Koçu's collecting urge can be situated between the last two categories, I think. As I said before, since we do not know much about Koçu's inner motivations, it is difficult to analyze too closely the personal reasons for building his collection. But on the other hand, despite his pronouncements of its didactic intent, one also senses that gathering such a gallimaufry of stuff has been great fun for him. There are stories by others which convey the pleasure of the hunt that has animated his searches. He was obsessed with some peculiar themes, images and curiosities. Every record or quotable passage in the line of his curiosities that he came across was of immense value for him.

Relying more on printed ephemera than tangible objects, lacking "the materialism of a classic collector"<sup>69</sup> may make one think that Koçu was in fact far

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<sup>68</sup> Pearce's categories are mentioned in, John Windsor, "Identity Parades" in *The Cultures of Collecting*, John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.) (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 50.

<sup>69</sup> Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 162.

from being a fetishistic collector. But as Orhan Pamuk points out, after hitting the idea of turning his collection into an encyclopedia, “[Koçu] remained aware of the ‘thingness’ of his collection.”<sup>70</sup> John Forrester claims a similar thing about Sigmund Freud’s collection: “These collections of his started off as very individual and idiosyncratic examples of the genre: collections of jokes and dream texts must, without the benefit of hindsight, rank with stamp and bottle-top collecting as narrowly conceived and singlemindedly eccentric.”<sup>71</sup>

Koçu’s passion for a wide range of things also goes well beyond Pearce’s definition of systematic collecting, and suggests a fire within Koçu that both drives and transcends his didactic intent. The fetishistic quality of Koçu’s collection can be observed in his obsessive insistence on some specific themes as well: children; dwarfs; freaks and all kinds of medical curiosities<sup>72</sup>; grotesqueries<sup>73</sup>; details of ‘marginal’ cultures; scenes and means of torture<sup>74</sup>; murders; local epics.

All these fetishized stories, vignettes, quotations and little portraits have also a certain ‘souvenir’ quality. They come to be constitutive particles of a narrative of longing. Souvenirs are intrinsic parts of a past experience, samples of events which can be remembered but not relived. Their tone is intimate and bittersweet, with roots in nostalgic longing for a past which is seen as better and fuller than the difficult present. The spiral is backwards and inwards as the original experience becomes increasingly distant and contact with it can only be satisfied by building up a myth of

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<sup>70</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>71</sup> John Forrester, “‘Mille etre’: Freud and Collecting”, in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting*, p. 241.

<sup>72</sup> See Appendix II for an example.

<sup>73</sup> See Appendix III for an example.

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix IV for an example.

contact and presence. Souvenirs speak of events that are not repeatable, but are reportable; they serve to authenticate the narrative in which the actor talks about the event. They make public events private, and move history into the personal sphere, “giving each person a purchase on what would otherwise be impersonal and bewildering experiences. (...) The nostalgia of the souvenir plays in the distance between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience, experience as it might be ‘directly lived.’ The location of authenticity becomes whatever is distant to the present time and space; hence we can see the souvenir as attached to the antique and the exotic.”<sup>75</sup>

The inner constraint of the entries that make up the nucleus of *IA* is that they always-already possess a sense in the *collection* that they are drawn from, and this limits their freedom of manouvre. These souvenir-like collected miscellany which turn out to serve as entries in *IA*, “speak to a context of origin through a language of longing, for they are not objects arising out of need or use value; they are objects arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia.”<sup>76</sup> The inevitable partiality of these souvenirs renders the play of Koçu’s nostalgic desire possible by making the intervention of a supplementary narrative discourse possible. The fragments will not function without the supplementary narrative discourse that both attaches them to their origins and create a myth with regard to those origins. The gaps among these fragments which are waiting to be filled by the supplement, brings us back to de Certeau’s analysis of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*: “By the accuracy of its reconstruction, each one of the elements brought together within the space of this museum retains its value of being the recognizable *fragment* of a

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<sup>75</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

language. It is present there as one piece of a lacunary system. Thus it, in turn, generates a collector's need to complete it with what the painting does not show, to restore it to its place in the series from which it was extracted and which is outside of the painting. The encyclopedic variety of records upon which that cartographic composition is based encourages, with each detail, the proliferation of reconstructive undertakings. It moves the viewer to produce a profuse discourse born of the relation that the 'fragments' bear to the lacunae to be filled. A strange picture: a plethora of signifiers multiplies the number of lacunae, which leads to the endless account of missing elements."<sup>77</sup>

A strange encyclopedia in which it seems incomprehensible how some things are missing and why some other things are that much emphasized. At this point, leafing through some old books which may be regarded as 'premodern' predecessors of *İA* in their 'strangeness', would be helpful, for *İA* sometimes reads like as if it is, in Aby Warburg's terms, the embodiment of the 'spectral afterlife' of these books.

#### *Acaibü'l-Mahlukat* as an Encyclopedia

In the first half of 1950s –right after abandoning the first *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*-, Reşat Ekrem Koçu accepted an assignment for the daily newspaper Cumhuriyet. It was a serialized history of Ottoman Empire with the headline *From Osman Gazi to Atatürk: A Panorama of Six Hundred Years of Ottoman History* which was to be delivered as a free weekly supplement with the paper. Somewhere in that curious assemblage of facts, stories and bizarreries, Koçu alludes to *Acaibü'l-Mahlukat*, a medieval book of 'wondrous creatures' by Zekeriya of Kazvin. The little box with

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<sup>77</sup> De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, pp. 56-57.

the title ‘An Encyclopaedia’ read: “Rükniddin Ahmed, a fourteenth century scholar, had translated *Acaibü’l-Mahlukat* of Zakeriya of Kazvin from Arabic to Turkish during the reign of Mehmed I and also dedicated and presented it to him. That book was a sort of encyclopaedia about astronomy, geography, medicine, plants and minerals, drugs, and famous cities and towns.”<sup>78</sup>

*Acaibü’l-Mahlukat* was a kind of compendium in which tangible things that make up the world we experience were compiled and assembled. Those compendiums, of which *Acaibü’l-Mahlukat* was one of the well-known examples, were usually based on a certain taxonomical rule, that is a preconceived divine hierarchy among things, an ontological ladder which determined the respective position of things in that hierarchy. The epistemology drawn out from that self-evident ontological premise was also, in a sense, determining the very limits of ‘science.’

Adnan Adıvar, in a long footnote in his book *Osmanlı Türklerinde İlim*, describes *Acaibü’l-Mahlukat* and other similar books as ‘ridiculous’: “...that book full of absurd and haphazard information in the fashion of an Oriental *Acaibü’l-Mahlukat*...”<sup>79</sup> In the same book, on an other page, this time Adıvar mentions a second translation of *Acaibü’l-Mahlukat* into Ottoman Turkish in the seventeenth century (after the translation by Rükniddin Ahmed mentioned by Koçu): “...Before telling about the life of Kâtip Çelebi and his influence on science of his period, let us mention some books. One of these is the completed part of Sürurî’s translation of Kazvinî’s *Acaibü’l-Mahlukat* by Mehmed bin Mehmed Radosîzâde. If the two parts

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<sup>78</sup> Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *From Osman Gazi to Atatürk: A Panorama of Six Hundred Years of Ottoman History*, 1951, p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> A. Adnan Adıvar, *Osmanlı Türklerinde İlim* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1970), p. 167.

are compared, the state of Radosî's translation shows us the the tragic degeneration in the scientific world of Ottoman Turks from Sürurî to Radosî. The parts that are added by the translator are stupidly naive; for example, everything that he wrote about the emergence of mountains and rivers are meaningless things resulted from a teleological approach."<sup>80</sup> Although Adıvar's harsh criticism seems to be directed towards the translation rather than the book itself; in fact, as is obvious in the footnote cited above, its targets are *Acaibü'l-Mahlukat* and the other books of the genre. He understands the Ottoman 'commentary' tradition in which any kind of intervention to the original text was a legitimate part of the 'translation' activity, not in terms of 'cultural translation', but merely in the narrow terms of 'textual translation.' From Adıvar's positivistic point of view, possession of a text through personal intervention during the act of translation is 'absurd' and 'unscientific' for it results in a discrepancy between the original text and its translation. In fact, according to him, 'being unfaithful to the original text' and 'the original text itself', both bear the same absurdity. There is no difference between the book which is composed of 'inaccurate and haphazardly collected information', and the negligible fact that the translation deviates from that information by subtracting from or adding to it. Translation, in Adıvar's view, does not 'break' a text which is consistent –the original text is already 'broken.'

The reason for this 'brokenness' is that the text is devoid of a 'taxonomy.'

Knowledge of the world had not been classified in a scientific way yet, and in two

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<sup>80</sup> "Kâtip Çelebi'nin hayatı ve o zamanki ilim üzerine etkisini anlatmaya başlamadan önce, birkaç eserden bahsedebiliriz. Bu eserlerden biri, yukarıda adı geçen Kazvinî'nin *Acaibü'l-Mahlukat*'ının Sürurî tarafından başlanan çevirisinin Mehmed bin Mehmed Radosîzâde tarafından tamamlanan kısmıdır. İlk kısmıyla bu kısım karşılaştırılırsa, Radosî çevirisinin durumu, Sürurî'den Radosî'ye gelinceye kadar, Osmanlı Türklerinde ilim çöküntüsünü bize pekala gösterir. Hele mütercimim kendiliğinden kattığı parçalar oldukça böncedir; mesela dağların, nehirlerin nasıl meydana geldikleri üzerine ileri sürdüğü şeyler hep finalist (ereksel) bir görüşle yazılmış, manasız şeylerdir." Adıvar, *Osmanlı Türklerinde İlim*, p. 119.

different senses: it neither had been categorized, nor ‘cleaned out.’ Let’s give some more thought to the expression ‘inaccurate and haphazardly collected information’: What Adivar targets here is, in fact, a ‘premodern’ way of acquiring knowledge. His criticism is concentrated on the fact that none of the modern binary oppositions, such as real-imaginary, concrete-abstract, truth-fiction or history-myth are taken into consideration in *Acaibü’l-Mahlukat*. Furthermore, he is also not content with the knowledge being compiled without the limitation and violence of a certain classificatory and hierarchical logic. Besides the obvious anachronism that he falls into (blaming a period of not regarding the criteria he’s looking for, in spite of the fact that they are not relevant in that period) what I am essentially concerned with is the kinship between Adivar’s attitude towards *Acaibü’l-Mahlukat* and the reaction that had been raised against the ‘wonder sensibility’ and *Wunderkammer* (the philosophical route of which can be drawn as rationalism-positivism-neo-positivism-scientism) in the Western world from seventeenth century on.

The information compiled in the books of *Acaibü’l-Mahlukat* kind did not have a criterion of verifiability other than the intertwined authorities of the author, his commentators and the tradition that they appended themselves by making references to a chain of hearsays. According to Robert Irwin: “Such books were hugger-mugger compilations of improbable information about the stupendous monuments of antiquity, strange coincidences, the miraculous powers of certain plants, stones and animals, and feats of magic.”<sup>81</sup> In the chapter of his book where he analyses the famous ‘Sinbad’ story in *The Arabian Nights*, Irwin mentions the emergence of a new literary genre called *aja’ib* in the Islamic world with the rise of naval discoveries, and claims that the ‘newness’ coming out of these discoveries

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<sup>81</sup> Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 182.

shaped a sensibility of ‘marvel’ and ‘wonder.’ There’s a parallelism between Irwin’s and Stephen Greenblatt’s points, the contribution of the latter to the discussion being that it was not much different in the case of Western scholars. The nature, which appears before the eyes of the scholar always with new marvels, is an endless source to be ‘recorded’ in a state of ecstatic wonder.<sup>82</sup> Things just wait out there, in a ‘mysterious’ order, and present themselves to the astonishment of the observer. In Lawrence Weschler’s words, that astonishment, that state of wonder “was like the ‘startle reflex’ one can observe in infants: eyes widened, arms outstretched, breathing stilled, the whole body momentarily convulsed.”<sup>83</sup>

In my view, Adívar’s criticism was influenced by this reaction that has been reproduced systematically in the West against that state of ‘wonder.’ One of the forerunners of that criticism, Descartes, did not ignore ‘wonder’, but also warned that one should not go too far. He recognized the utility of wonder “in making us learn and hold in memory things we have previously been ignorant of.”<sup>84</sup> But this serviceable ‘wonder’ was to be distinguished from a stupefying ‘astonishment’, which “makes the whole body remain immobile like a statue, such that one cannot perceive any more of the object beyond the first face presented, and therefore cannot acquire any more particular knowledge.”<sup>85</sup> Whereas wonder stimulated attentive inquiry, astonishment inhibited it and was therefore, Descartes asserted, always bad. Francis Bacon similarly diagnosed excessive wonder as a thwarting of knowledge.

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<sup>82</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 28.

<sup>83</sup> Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 78.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature – 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), p. 317.

<sup>85</sup> *Loc. cit.*

He believed that the ‘broken knowledge’ of wonder also resulted from futile attempts to plumb the mysteries of God through the study of nature.<sup>86</sup>

The ‘broken knowledge’ of *Acaibü'l-Mahlukat*, according to Adivar, originates from two major failures: the author of that kind of a book falls into the trap of ‘wonderment’ and treats his subject as if it is ‘wonderful’, rather than maintaining his distance and cool-headedness with regard to his subject. What Koçu’s encyclopedia does is quite similar to that: It approaches the object of knowledge with ‘wonderment’ and presents it as a precious and rare piece of ‘wonder.’ The properties that Adivar looks for in *Acaibü'l-Mahlukat* in an anachronistic manner are the properties that he would not have been able to find in *İA* (this time without falling into anachronism): some modern acquisitions provided by the distance put between subject and object through the Weberian ‘disenchantment’, such as cool-headedness, being scientific, impartiality, and objectivity. The major target of the ‘early’ reactions of Descartes and Bacon –with whom Adivar agreed- were ‘cabinets of curiosities’ (or ‘wonder chambers’) which were meant to gradually transform into museums in the modern sense of the term. However, in approximately the same years that Adivar raised his criticism, in Europe, that very reaction was being questioned as a part of the ideology of Enlightenment.

Encyclopedic collections of fantastic and useful objects –minerals, shells, bizarre animal specimens, marvels of human art and science, clever machines, amazing toys- assembled in overflowing rooms (*Kunstkammern, Wunderkammern*) constituted a luxurious diversion for the European elite of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. This delightful erudition has been linked to a variety of institutions, scholarly pursuits, and subjective experiences: ancient memory theatres;

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<sup>86</sup> Weschler, *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder*, p. 51.

polymathic miscellanies; “cultural migrators” across the boundaries between “the natural” and “the artificial”; the princely or private urge to acquire rarities, antiquities, and sports of nature; the rise of professional dealers, scholars, and experts; the task of self-fashioning by the arrangement of an environment; and, perhaps most basic, the passion of wonder. The reaction against the ‘passion of wonder’ which was embodied in the ‘wonder chambers’, as I mentioned before, was to come face to face with a counter-reaction in the twentieth century. The encyclopaedic projects of Georges Bataille and other Surrealists of early 1940s can be seen as deliberate attempts to revitalize the ‘cabinet of wonder’ in a critical manner. They were aiming at mocking the ‘encyclopaedic’ endeavour itself; criticizing and destructing the very form of ‘encyclopedia’ which was underlying the enlightenment philosophy; shocking the audience, frustrating them.

But the means and works of another artist of the same period, Joseph Cornell, may be more helpful in having a better understanding of Koçu’s enterprise. Cornell differs from the Surrealists in that he never sets out to shock, and when he does shock, it is always a sign of a fault in the art. His art, which is based on obsessive collecting, contains within itself a history of the obsession to collect. It has its *Schatzkammer*, its *Kunstkammer*, and its *Wunderkammer* –its treasure chamber, art chamber, and wonder chamber. Here are jewels, here are portraits of princes and princesses, here are curiosities and marvels from the natural world –excepting that virtually none of it is real. These diamonds are ice cubes, these ice cubes are plastic, these paintings, even these illustrations, are photostats. Cornell and artists like him resurrected the spirit of the *Wunderkammer* while eliminating all of its intellectual basis, chucking out its meaning in order to allow new meanings to flow in.

## *Wunderkammer*

The prologue to Joseph Cornell may be swiftly related. It begins and ends in Europe.

The cathedrals and churches of Europe were first European museums, and not only for what was collected in their treasuries do they deserve the title. The ancient sculptures in metal and stone that were displayed in Pisa or in Venice were beautiful objects held by the church on the community's behalf. Curiosities could also find their way into churches – skeletons of whales or incredible fish. “The gems and cameos which Abbot Suger collected for Saint-Denis were the same class of object of which Lorenzo de' Medici made a collection.”<sup>87</sup> One cannot easily separate sacred from secular in the context of the *Schatzkammer*.

Next came the *studiolo* of the humanist prince – a small room, typically, devoted to the private contemplation of treasures- quiet distinct in meaning and function from anything that can be called a gallery. These rooms were like treasure chests turned inside out, with cupboards containing the treasure, or *trompe l'oeil* panels implying its presence, and the intimacy of the *studiolo* is what links it to the *Wunderkammer*. The Kunst that went into a *Kunstammer* was small, even miniature: the idea was to cram as much of it as possible into a small space, so that a single room, or even a single piece of furniture could contain material representative of the whole world.

In the type of cabinet called *Wunderkammer*, which appeared roughly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were included items of little or no beauty or

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<sup>87</sup> Bente Gundestrup, “From the Royal *Kunstammer* to the Modern Museums of Copenhagen”, in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (eds.), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (New York: House of Stratus, 2001), p. 181.

intrinsic worth, except as rarities or curiosities. *Wunderkammer* was an uncanny assemblage of these rarities, curiosities, marvels, wonders, and monsters in a beautifully haphazard fashion: every piece “acquired their truth and their authentic meaning only through their inclusion in the harmonic microcosm of the *Wunderkammer*.”<sup>88</sup> James Fenton presents a list of pieces in such a cabinet: “...skull, lens, convex mirror, medals, plaquettes, turned ivory balls-within-balls, corals, dried beetles, shells, bottled or dried specimens, antiquities, ethnographical curiosities, and an erotic painting.”<sup>89</sup> The ‘curiosity’ in the term ‘cabinet of curiosities’, or the ‘wonder’ in ‘the chamber of wonders’ referred both to objects displayed and the subjective state those objects inevitably induced in their respective viewers.

The Enlightenment made the *Wunderkammer* look foolish, both by the light it shed on its superstitions, and more importantly by the way it extended the sheer range of knowledge, to the point where the ambition to compress all natural knowledge into a single chamber seemed wildly absurd. Specialization split up the contents of the *Wunderkammer*: ethnography went in one direction, natural history in another, art, numismatics, and the other components all found their specialized environments.

The two volumes of the magazine called *Documents* (1929-30) produced by Georges Bataille and his Surrealist circle, constitute a rebellion against this specialization. It is a critical reinterpretation of the encyclopaedic spirit. Everything the authors considered was, in their conception, a “document”. They advertised a mixture of doctrines, archaeology, fine arts, and ethnography” –a rubric under which

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<sup>88</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “The Cabinet of Wonder”, in *The Man Without Content* (California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 31.

<sup>89</sup> James Fenton, “Monuments to Every Moment”, *The New York Review of Books*, vol. XLIV, no. 13, Aug. 14 1997, p. 28.

anything at all could be considered. High art could be mocked, the ephemeral exalted. Besides the self-conscious avantgardism of these mid-twentieth century European intellectuals, in fact, a sort of ‘instinctive’ return to the ‘cabinet of curiosities’ sensibility has almost always been a recurrent theme in the arts and literature of Europe in nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Didier Maleuvre, while trying to make sense of the desire of ‘including everything’ in Balzac’s life-long project *La Comédie humaine*, claims that his ‘antique shop’ ends up in a premodern bir cabinet of curiosity (*Wunderkammer*) contrary to its expectation to be an all-inclusive ‘encyclopedia’: “The odd mixture of the precious and the throwaway (works by Michelangelo and Rembrandt are piled together with a salt shaker, a crossbow with dry rot, and other detritus) recalls the baroque clutter of the old-style cabinet of curiosities.”<sup>90</sup> Moreover, according to Stephen T. Asma, historically speaking, the cabinets of curiosities proved in two distinct ideologies of display in Europe<sup>91</sup>: 1. Various kinds of museums (art, general history, natural history, etc.) based on ‘enlightened scientific classification principles,’ with which Michel Foucault deals as a form of disciplinary discourse in his *The Order of Things*. 2. Dime museums, the forerunner of which was that infamous master of money-making and entertainment, P.T. Barnum. “In the early years of the nineteenth century, an American museum was typically a miscellaneous collection of curiosities, a development of the European notion of the ‘cabinet of wonders.’”<sup>92</sup> Human freaks, exotic specimens, unbelievable curiosities of nature

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<sup>90</sup> Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>91</sup> Stephen T. Asma, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 84.

<sup>92</sup> Andrea Stulman Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (London: New York University Press, 1997), p. 21.

were classified with regard to ‘type of defect’ or ‘line of abnormality’ in dime museums.

That –to use Warburg’s term again- spectral afterlife haunts Cornell’s work in a quite similar way it haunts Koçu’s.

### Joseph Cornell’s Romantic Collection

The American assemblage artist Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) is best known by his boxes created from found objects. With their breadth of materials and careful packaging, Cornell’s boxes draw on such varied sources as the seventeenth-century *Wunderkammers* whose collectors amassed objects from the fine arts, science, and history to the botanical specimens of Victorian amateur scientists to the late nineteenth-century dime museums whose P.T. Barnum-like ringmasters hawked ‘quack’ spectacles and ‘freaks’ to their urban audiences. For Cornell, ever a wanderer (a perfect model of Baudelaireian/Benjaminian *flâneur*), these museums may have also been inspired by the shop window displays that enliven the city.

Ripped out of their original contexts, the fragments Cornell collects and institutionalizes only represent or refer to their former lives and eras; they enter the ‘afterlife’ of the museum, where they are forever preserved. This ‘afterlife’ or ‘second life’ is the museum’s ‘romance’; it is what causes Cornell to label box-size museums ‘romantic.’ In the artist’s vocabulary ‘romantic’ refers to any degree of pastness, although most often to the nineteenth century, owing to his strong interest in the culture of that period. Something from the past –something romantic- is, the artist explains, more genuine and authentic than anything that can be found in the present. After buying some nineteenth-century photographs, for example, Cornell

muses about the “humble nature of these neglected documents and the unsuspected treasure waiting to be revealed, discovered afresh.”<sup>93</sup>

Cornell consistently describes objects like these old photographs gathered on his expeditions for source materials as ‘romantic.’ In a diary entry recounting the day’s discovery of a nineteenth-century cargo ship account, engravings of fish, and a reproduction of a sixteenth-century map of the Western Hemisphere, Cornell calls attention to the gathered “flotsam and jetsam’s” “infinite legend and romance.”<sup>94</sup> In a similar vein, he considers how best to represent a New York “that has disappeared – one *could* buildup – develop – an exploration on one’s own – by recourse to various archives – (libraries, colleges, museums, etc.) the virtue of these explorations is the gut vibrant context in which they were evolved or just plain happened – much material in dossiers may prove superfluous, out grown, etc. Yet providing reminders of precious experience – persons, places, things- ‘marginalia’ of a sort – ‘bypaths of romance’”<sup>95</sup> This compulsion to romantically “buildup” goes well beyond his strictly museological works. Based as they are on the accumulation, collection, and aggregation of the archivist or curator, each box-construction might be thought of as a romantic museum.

At a certain point, Cornell began to see his collecting, which had long been a mere diversion, as a viable, if not critical, form of artmaking. Through a combination of research and chance, Cornell accumulated pictorial and textual materials that evoked his experience out-of-doors. Slowly but surely, he acquired “an array of

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<sup>93</sup> Cornell’s diary entry: May 1947, in *Joseph Cornell’s Theater of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters, and Files*, Mary Ann Caws (ed.) (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 143.

<sup>94</sup> Diary entry: April 1, 1943, *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>95</sup> Diary entry: January 8, 1964, *Ibid.*, p. 361.

magazine and newspaper clippings, reproductions of artworks, postcards, quotations from books read, descriptions of scenes in movies viewed, leaves and flowers, illustrations cut from childrens' fairy tales, scraps spied in flea markets or along city streets."<sup>96</sup>

What began as a simple effort at representation –through torn-out images and fragmentary sentences- took on, with Cornell's determination to continue, a life of its own. Cornell's activities were both mental, through a chain of associations, and physical, in a mad search for objects that would capture the sight or event. At one point Cornell chided himself for his inability to effectively discriminate, citing the need for "a discipline... acquired against the habit of too much piling up of unness. Material."<sup>97</sup> Through this "pile of unness" Cornell refined a form of accumulative assemblage that would come to define and characterize his entire oeuvre: "...a method may be worked out for the recording of other past experiences seemingly insignificant –a method for crystalizing experiences."<sup>98</sup>

In working out this method of collection and accumulation, Cornell invented systems of order to tame the ever-expanding morass, including chapters and chapter headings, plate sections, and a long list of related topics. Such ordering shows the tension implicit in his method: the attraction to fleeting ephemera combined with the compulsion to control, classify, and frame, the allure of the fragment mixing with the desire for the whole.

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<sup>96</sup> Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), p. 151.

<sup>97</sup> Diary entry: February 20, 1944, *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>98</sup> Diary entry: October 14, 1946, *Ibid.*, p. 134.

I do not mean to present these passages about wonder cabinets and Surrealists and boxes of Joseph Cornell as some steps in the path to understand the weird encyclopedia composed by a Turkish historian in 1950s. The social and historical context through which Koçu imagined a sort of ‘assemblage’ was obviously and incommensurably different from the assemblages in the story above. We can observe, if we can forgive the anachronism, a ground on which these two men stand somehow together, and I daresay that it is almost the same ground that the ‘medieval’ communication between Islamic and Western scholarships took place once. (One example among many is the famous dispute between Avicenna and Adelard of Bath in early twelfth century about the epistemological status of ‘wonder.’<sup>99</sup>) That common ground might be seen beneath the two men’s (Cornell and Koçu) feet as well, and the most peculiar aspect of that ground is ‘self-projection.’

### Self-Projection

In Chapter 4, I will try to look at *IA* as the log-book of one man’s personal impulses, a ‘diary’ in which the individual subject records his struggle to hold together a few meagre certainties in a world (in a city of a country in the world) that is being torn apart; as a self-portrait which is ruined the moment it is drawn.

It is amusing to observe that the urban scavenger does occasionally stumble across an exceptional find amid the dross. Whenever 1950s Istanbul yielded a treasure, Koçu would pounce. An echo of Baudelaire comes to mind: the propensity to isolate choice objects as foci of exotic (an ‘authentic’ one rather than ‘exotic’, in Koçu’s case) reverie. Like all ephemera collectors, like all curators of a cabinet of

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<sup>99</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, pp. 110-112.

curiosities, Koçu knows how to treat a rarity. The postcard given pride of place in the sixth volume (BÜYÜK HENDEK CADDESİ KARTPOSTALLARI) testifies to his eye for a ‘fine piece.’ Detailed portraits of some children selling newspapers in the streets of Istanbul and the voyeuristic quality inherent in the illustrations depicting each of them, in the eighth volume, seem to be ritual acts that sacralize and sublimate. Such a treatment of rarity, purity and authenticity evoke the journeys Koçu could make both in fantasy and in fact. They are like emblems of that bittersweet yearning directed across space and time that we call nostalgia.

Susan Stewart has said of the souvenir that “the possession of the metonymic object is a kind of dispossession in that the presence of the object all the more radically speaks to its status as a mere substitution and to its subsequent distance from the self.”<sup>100</sup> It may indeed be the case that a sensation of hollow longing is the underlying keynote of those entries constituting the ‘idiosyncratic nucleus’ of *İA*. Even as Koçu salvaged some ephemera from out of the flow of time as tokens of ‘actuality’, the fact is that, that actuality had already been extinguished. It may be more plausible to see them as alluring emblems of a situation and a circumstance which, even in the pivotal gesture of recovery (as the collector bends down in the street), were themselves perceived as beyond redemption. Emblems are substitutions, not actualities. As Joseph Cornell says in a diary entry, “the ticket collected is no longer the ticket that can be used on a real journey.”<sup>101</sup> So it is that the notion of metonymic immediacy may, after all, be obliged to yield to one of metaphoric suggestivity, the colour of distance.

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<sup>100</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 135.

<sup>101</sup> Diary entry: November 19, 1963, *Ibid.* p. 307.

The fundamental feeling snared by *İA* turns out to be one of sweet frustration, the yearning for the out-of-reach, for what fingertips can graze yet never grip –the untouchable, the unclutchable. In this sense, Koçu’s entries as non-fiction micro-narratives may in fact be shrouded in the ‘dust’ of a nostalgic illusionism (the ‘romantic illusion’ in Carolyn Steedman’s words), any pleasure they give us being a function of poetic suggestion (‘the conversion of fragments into an aesthetics’ –de Certeau) rather than historical authenticity. Koçu’s and *İA*’s is a yearning for a paradise entirely beyond historical reach. And while it may be true that Koçu was conscious of handling the myths and mirages that help soothe the collective libido, documenting the little gratifications of contemporary Istanbulers in an epoch of austerity, his compilations of old postcards, curious biographies, newspaper clippings about murders and detailed notes about the children he tailed and peeped can equally be read as a sublimation of private longings and grievings. Stephen E. Weil points out the diary-like construction of the narrative embedded in a collection, i.e. the collector’s self-projection: “If there is any ‘moral’ to the narrative of collecting, it must be that the collector who allows his desires free sway risks becoming the lonely inhabitant of a narrow corridor along which his finds are arrayed like successive diary entries: and yet it may be said that to savour one’s singularity (the collector’s coincidence with his unique serial system) while acknowledging one’s vulnerability (the mortal’s inability to outlive his collection) is really the best prelude to understanding one’s place within the ‘collection’ that is the human society of one’s age.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Stephen E. Weil, “The Deaccession Cookie Jar”, in *A Cabinet of Curiosities: Inquiries into Museums and Their Prospects*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, p. 141.

Koçu's 'coincidence with his unique serial system' gives us his vision of historicity as well. To see a 'kayıt' as a salvaged object henceforth removed from historical becoming turns it into a sacrament of history, a history so absolute as to be above historical being itself. The 'kayıt's in *İA* are crowned with a historical aura of such sacredness that history itself, in its becoming, cannot touch it: 'kütük' stops living the 'bad' history of historical becoming and attains the transcendental history of a historical invariant. This sublimation of history affects the material compiled in the 'kütük'. *İA* absorbs all particularities –passages severed from books, details taken out from the very context that make them meaningful, etc.- and makes them into precipitates of 'kayıt' activity.

Severing things from their original contexts is, according to Russell W. Belk, what underlies the 'collection.' Ordinary profane commodities are transformed into sacred icons. The terms 'sacred' and 'profane' are not used here in a vernacular religious sense. Instead profane is taken to mean mundane, ordinary and common, while sacred is taken to be extraordinary, special and capable of generating reverence. Collectors 'singularize' items enshrined in collections when they remove an item from the secular, profane, undifferentiated realm of the commodity, and ritually transform it into a personally and socially significant object. The sacralized item becomes a vehicle of transcendent experience which exceeds its utilitarian and aesthetic endowment

Although Koçu has occasionally implied the use of his material as a source of social narrative, there are other ways to read it as well. Mieke Bal has argued that collecting itself can be understood as a narrative activity: "I can imagine seeing collecting as a process consisting of a confrontation between objects and subjective agency informed by an attitude. Objects, subjective agency, confrontations as events:

such a working definition makes for a narrative, and enables me to discuss and interpret the meaning of collecting in narrative terms.”<sup>103</sup> While Bal’s theory of collecting as narrative is extremely useful in suggesting a way of reading the collecting process itself as a story, a means of interpretation which Koçu’s oeuvre as an account of his collecting career invites, her focus on fetishism as the basis of collecting limits the types of personal narrative that a collection might represent. Nonetheless, the idea that there could be a meaningful personal story embedded in the process of gathering that resulted in the *IA* is tantalizing.

Unlike most encyclopedias, *IA* was assembled almost totally by one man and represents his vision. This situation might be contrasted with that of the British architect John Soane, who filled his London townhouse in Lincoln’s Inn Fields with models, drawings, prints, and sculptural fragments that both idealized the classical world and served as an inspiration for his own architecture. Soane was both collector and consumer of his collection, which allows us to examine his motives as a collector in terms of the uses to which he put the objects he assembled. That is the very core of the problematics arising from a collection that is displayed for the public, or a collection like Koçu’s which is modified for *public-ation*: “Deceptively, collections, especially when publicly accessible, appear to ‘reach out’, but they in fact ‘reach in’, helping the collector –and to a certain extent, the viewer- to develop their sense of self while providing them with an ethical or educational alibi.”<sup>104</sup> It is surprising that a similar mechanism is at work in a Renaissance cabinet of curiosities: “... This transfer to the public gallery of sumptuous private property, paralleling a change in

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<sup>103</sup> Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting”, in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 100.

<sup>104</sup> Mieke Bal, p. 105.

its perception from souvenirs to the ‘great world’ metaphor, consecrated collecting as an expression of the worthiness of an individual life. Private biography was thereby magnified and projected through public exhibition.”<sup>105</sup>

Roger Cardinal’s allusion to Egyptian mortuary ritual in the context of Dadaist-Surrealist collector and collage maker Kurt Schwitters’s life-long project, *Merzbau*, is worth quoting here: “*Merzbau* amounts to a compendium of his [Schwitters’s] obsessions and caprices. The reverence with which things cropping up in his daily life were inserted into the multilayered design and even buried deep within it may suggest echoes of Egyptian mortuary ritual, as if the artist were cornering valued parts of his experience and embalming them in order to defy the ravages of time. [...] In this sense, *Merzbau* was not only Schwitters’s *Wunderkammer*, but also his mausoleum, a time-capsule, a refuge from history.”<sup>106</sup>

What we see here is the interplay between antiquarian’s urge to build his shabby palace/secret nest/home<sup>107</sup>, and the collector’s desire to display his collection. Koçu as an antiquarian-collector-historian was trying to accomplish two things simultaneously: 1. Building a house for himself with the material gathered from the world –the world which contains the house. 2. Building such a house which ultimately contains, if metaphorically, the very world that it is contained by. Koçu desired his project to become a monument: a monument that is able to ‘contain’,

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<sup>105</sup> Anthony Alan Shelton, “Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World”, in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting*, p. 187.

<sup>106</sup> Roger Cardinal, “Collecting and Collage-Making: The Case of Kurt Schwitters”, in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting*, p. 76.

<sup>107</sup> Walter Benjamin uses the analogy of ‘nest’ too: “The physiological side of collecting is important. In the analysis of this behaviour, it should not be overlooked that, with the nest-building of birds, collecting acquires a clear biological function.”, *The Arcades Project* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 210.

rather than being a mere miniature desperately waiting for being ‘contained.’ He desired to be collected by his encyclopedia, the monument to narrate his sculptor’s story.

Koçu desired to be contained by his collection, and the only way to reach that final point was making it public. In order to be a record, to be ‘salvaged’, to achieve immortality and recognition, he did not have any other way than being the collection of himself. To be contained by what he contains was only possible through an act of attributing himself to collectivity. His self was written in his collection, and the process through which the collection turned out to be an encyclopedic presentation was simultaneously the confrontation of his inner self with the collectivity at stake.

According to Russell W Belk, “through the collection, a nostalgic image of life is constructed as the identity of the region’s past.”<sup>108</sup> These two converging images are at the heart of antiquarian’s project. Early in the second chapter, I mentioned a recurring theme that can be traced in works of Nietzsche, Momigliano and Kracauer: Home. Home as a fantasized point of origin, as a private narrative of longing built by the bricks drawn out from the collective narrative.

‘Home’ functions as a metaphor in the service of ‘longing’ –longing for reliving the past, turning back to origins, having a shelter to run out from all that mess around. As Naomi Schor emphasized, that point of origin doesn’t have to be one’s place of birth.<sup>109</sup> One projects an image of origin to his collection. In this sense, Koçu’s is a ‘romantic’ activity, based on a search for purity and decay at the same time. The ruin and the dust, as traces of existence on the body of absence,

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<sup>108</sup> Russell W. Belk, “Collectors and Collecting”, in Susan M. Pearce (ed.), *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 322.

<sup>109</sup> Naomi Schor, “Collecting Paris”, in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting*, p. 259.

comprise the essence of his perception. During his strollings through the city in late 1940s and 1950s, Koçu was mostly in search of ‘pastness’ in all senses: archaeological, architectural, natural and cultural. Just like Cornell, in whose language the word ‘romantic’ referred to ‘any degree of pastness’, Koçu too was aiming at searching, capturing, registering and hence saving momentary flashes of ‘beautiful past’ in ruins: “It is more preferable to repair these coffeehouses than destroy them with regard to keep the picturesque oldness of this neighbourhood.”<sup>110</sup> İstanbul in these years was a city on the verge of a widespread renovation. But I will deal with the deep roots of Koçu’s reaction to this change in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 is going to be about the autobiographical quality of *İA*. I shall trace the tangled route of Koçu’s “I” in the narrative, and try to show the link between his romantic attitude and self-portrait as well as the city as a a collective entity and the individual experience of the city.

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<sup>110</sup> “Bu semtin pitoresk eskiliğini korumak bakımından, bu meşhur kahvehanelerin kaldırılmasından ziyade, büyük şehre layık bir güzellikte tamirine gidilmesi daha uygun olsa gerektir.” *İA*, V. 3, p. 1487.

## CHAPTER 4

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY

#### *Autobiographical Pact*

It is not easy to sustain the claim that the narrative of *IA* is structured as an autobiography. From Philippe Lejeune's perspective, *IA* would not be regarded as an autobiographical narrative. The first requirement, according to Lejeune, that an 'autobiography' is supposed to fulfill, is to make a *contract* with the reader. 'The autobiographical pact', in his terminology, is the name of that contract between author and reader in which the autobiographer commits himself to the sincere effort of coming to terms with and understanding his life. An autobiography always proposes a kind of pact, implicit or explicit, between author and reader, but the terms of this pact vary. Those terms fix the discourse or rhetoric the autobiographer will use in describing his relations with the past self he recounts, with his present self, and with the reader, where the rhetoric centers on the play between hiding and revealing.

In Lejeune's early writing the distinctive feature of autobiography lies in its *intention*. This external factor requires biographical knowledge which allows the reader to identify author with narrator and protagonist. Only later in his career did Lejeune become uneasy about the concept of pact, which depends on the principle of sincerity. Later he moved from an author-based perspective, according to which the genre is defined on the basis of the extratextual state of authorial intention, to a reader-oriented search for the signs of this intention in the text. In other words, Lejeune has moved to a reader-based poetics of autobiography, and the history of

autobiography has become the history of its mode of reading. He has written considerably about the nature of reference in autobiography as emerging from the identity behind the proper name shared by author, narrator, and protagonist. The proper name appears as a self-referential gesture within the autobiographical act textually postulating an identity.<sup>111</sup>

Lejeune wishes to establish the identity of the genre autobiography, and in order to do so, he has recourse to the identity of the proper name. The property or selfsameness designated by the proper name is in absolute congruity with the self-identity of the autobiographic subject abstracted from social relations and history, the isolatable genre autobiography detached from its undecidable and dialectical intermixture with all other genres, the self-enclosed circuit of reference guaranteeing unique meaning uncontaminated by expanding contextuality and an indefinite dissemination of reference (another name for which is history.) The main problem with Lejeune's postulation is that confinement of 'autobiography' behind the bars of a strictly defined 'genre', cancels the very condition of possibility of the adjective 'autobiographical' and deprives it of its conceptual fluidity. The noted historian of autobiography James Olney remarks that, "one never knows where or how to take hold of autobiography."<sup>112</sup> And according to Paul de Man, it is problematic to treat autobiographical texts as a distinct genre. "Autobiography," he says, "is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two

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<sup>111</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 112.

<sup>112</sup> James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction", in James Olney (ed.) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 3.

subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject. This specular structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding, but this merely makes explicit the wider claim to authorship that takes place whenever a text is stated to be *by* someone and assumed to be understandable to the extent that this is the case.”<sup>113</sup>

Koçu tries to secure both his authorship and ownership of *İA*. We see the signature “R. E. Koçu” everywhere throughout the encyclopedia (on its spine, cover, the first page, tag, dedication, etc.) Koçu desires making it certain that the man behind the text is him and nobody else, and makes a pact with the reader; however this is not the same with Lejeune’s ‘pact.’ This is a pact prepared by the ‘owner’ of a unique collection who publicly declares his ‘ownership.’ On the one hand he acknowledges that the pieces that make up his encyclopedia are pertinent to the collective memory and collective experience, that they address and concern everybody, that it tells everybody’s story; but on the other hand, the omnipresence of his signature like an imperial seal imply that these very fragments constitute his private narrative and interior space as well. The souvenirs collected by Koçu can be presented to the collectivity, for the totality (history) that they are drawn from is something shared; but at the same time, the very act of presenting those souvenirs in that order is an individual rather than collective gesture. As Susan Stewart claims, “A

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<sup>113</sup> Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement”, in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 70.

certain function of the souvenir is to form a compendium which is an autobiography.”<sup>114</sup>

Stewart, in another passage, points out collector’s ‘ownership’: “We might say that the capacity of objects to serve as traces of authentic experience is, in fact, exemplified by the souvenir. The souvenir distinguishes experiences. We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative. Through narrative the souvenir substitutes a context of perpetual consumption for its context of origin. It represents not the lived experience of its maker but the ‘second-hand’ experience of its possessor/owner.”<sup>115</sup> That’s because *IA* is essentially a *bricolage* –it has not been conceived as an encyclopedia at the beginning; it was an accumulation of material that would be transformed into an encyclopedia by a retrospective modification. A large amount of the entries in *IA* are –as in the aforementioned ‘record’- collected souvenirs that function as fragments of a private narrative; not some micro-narratives that are intended to represent the collective experience. Because of the tension between the two forms of ‘record’, the permanent struggle for domination between two textual layers and the textual symbiosis resulting from the inability of both layers to get the upper hand in that struggle, as Stewart emphasizes, the entries “represent not the lived experience of its maker but the ‘second-hand’ experience of its possessor/owner.” A passage quoted from a novel, an incident reported from an old newspaper or the reproduction of a detail drawn out of an engraving by a foreign painter –all these fragmentary pieces dwell in an ambiguous place between collective

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<sup>114</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 139.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

experince and private narrative, history and autobiography: this place is exactly the secret nest, shabby palace, or home that the antiquarian researcher builds for himself (with his name nailed on its door.) Collection's, as Stewart argues, "is a narrative of interiority and authenticity. It is not a narrative of the object; it is a narrative of the possessor."<sup>116</sup>

The subject of an autobiography is traditionally located in the difficult attempt to project a unified, autonomous self in its pellucid historical and social context. The key figure of what Walter Benjamin once termed his apprenticeship in German literature, Goethe, already recognized in his own confessional writing the difficulty of this autobiographical demand, what he calls "something nearly impossible to achieve," that is, "that the individual know himself and his century – himself, as a constant entity in the midst of all the circumstances."<sup>117</sup> This is a theoretically arduous task because autobiographical texts are more and less than the attempt to render a written account of a life story. In their self-reflexivity, these texts problematize the interrelation of the self (*autos*), life (*bios*), and the act of writing (*graphie*). Autobiographical language projects the image of a self that strives to come to grips with itself by manipulating the inscription of this or that chronology. The constructability, 'the subjectivity-effect,' is only guaranteed by the writer's proper name and signature. The reader is asked to enter this "autobiographical pact," to submit to a fiction which is then legalized, countersigned by the signature of an other, a reader. This temporary legalization permits the examination of a subjective

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<sup>116</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 136.

<sup>117</sup> Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *From My Life: Poetry and Truth*, (New York: Suhrkamp, 1987), p. 17.

consciousness that turns itself into an object, thematizing its own conditions of possibility.

Whether the ‘author’ tells his own story intentionally or not does not matter. According to Harold Rosen: “Perhaps nothing better illustrates the fact that any serious consideration of the nature of autobiography must take into account its pervasiveness than the way it crops up in the midst of other texts, even the most unlikely ones. None of us expects the life of the author to intrude itself into a physics textbook, although in principle, and perhaps one day in practice, there is no reason why it should not. Certainly much more often than is generally supposed, autobiographical material can be found in texts where we might least expect to come across it.”<sup>118</sup> Rosen gives the example of a geology textbook which perfectly illustrates the writer’s personal involvement in his/her impersonally presented subject matter: “A comfortable home for the blending of the personal and impersonal is a popularizing work by an expert in the field. The writer has to be someone with a certain kind of pedagogic intent, a desire to engage as closely as possible with his or her ‘pupils’ by attempting to mesh their experiences and his. Richard Fortey in his *The Hidden Landscape: A Journey into the Geological Past* (1994) tells us straight out that his ‘intention is to enrich the reader’s awareness of our extraordinary past’ which ‘makes my geology a more personal account.’”<sup>119</sup> Rosen calls that kind of an autobiographical narrative ‘embedded autobiography.’ In Patricia Meyer Spacks’s language, it is ‘informal autobiography’: “Collected letters have a special value as autobiography because they record not the distillation but the dynamic of experience.

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<sup>118</sup> Harold Rosen, *Speaking From Memory: A Guide to Autobiographical Acts and Practices* (Staffordshire, England: Trentham Books, 1998), p. 28.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Formal autobiography presents itself as the product of a life reflected upon. The sort of informal autobiography amassed in a published accumulation of letters represents the processes of life (and especially of relationship) rather than product.”<sup>120</sup>

It is possible to find in *İA* the aspects that both authors emphasize: Koçu is both a historian with pedagogical intents (hence often interferes in the text with his own voice), and an author who constructs his encyclopedic project as a logbook, as a private diary. From the beginning, *İA* -which is founded on a collection as a self-projection- implies an effort to construct a self-portrait, albeit in with varying emphases in every volume.

E.H. Gombrich mentions a statement of Aby Warburg about the autobiographical element dominating his work: “Warburg recognized early on that his interpretation of the mentality of the Florentine bankers in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s circle was influenced by his own experience of the bankers of Hamburg and, of course, by his ambivalent attitude towards his own milieu. Near the end of his life he wrote that astonishing note suggesting that it sometimes seemed to him that his interpretation of the classical tradition and of its polarities rested on what he called an ‘autobiographical reflex’, due to his own manic-depressive constitution; the manic element being represented by figures in rapid motion, such as the type he called the ‘nympha’, the depressive element by the recumbent rivergod.”<sup>121</sup> Koçu does not seem to be as aware of the private and personal character of his project as Warburg does. Koçu’s narrative is more of an enunciative kind than a self-reflexive one. However, the autobiographical element in *İA*, one can assert, is much more manifest

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<sup>120</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 93.

<sup>121</sup> E.H. Gombrich, “Relativism in the History of Ideas”, in *Topics of Our Time: Twentieth-Century Issues in Learning and in Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), p. 51.

than it is in Warburg's *Mnemosyne*. Koçu's depiction of a street, a murderer or the usage of an idiom peculiar to Istanbul, is much more influenced by his own experience of the city, compared to Warburg.

The narrative dynamic that makes *İA* autobiographical runs on two levels:

1. *The thematic level which operates on the surface*: Koçu inserts his personal experiences and memories in a good number of entries. Sometimes he makes additions or raises an objection to the information that he himself quotes from a source (a newspaper, an encyclopedia, a travelogue or a history book.) And sometimes we notice that it is not Koçu that interferes with the entry we're reading, but the entry is there precisely because it contributes to the sustainment of Koçu's private narrative. At the end of almost all of the entries of that last type there's a reference to a not-yet-written entry: (Bkz. İstanbul Ansiklopedisi)
2. *The deeper level that is motivated by the reiteration of some object-themes*: If collection is a narrative of self and if that kind of a collection underlies *İA*, then we can follow the trail of autobiography by concentrating on the object-themes that constitute the collection. Some of the chief themes that recurrently come to the fore are: murders, subcultures, children, freakery and beauty of men.

Let's take a look at that 'autobiographical reflex' this time from the point of view of modes of inclusion of Koçu's self to the narrative.

## Story of the “I”: Authorship and Ownership

I think we can see the ‘autobiographical narrative’ more clearly, if we make a map of the transformation that Koçu’s “I” lives throughout *İA*. The textual body of *İA* is haunted by the hesitant and shaky, but also insistent presence of a first person singular. So, only through a symptomatic reading of that “I”, which transgresses the veil of ‘authorial absence’, can we reach the desires in the background of *İA*.

That “I” either suddenly appears in the midst of an entry, or transforms itself into a seemingly fictional “He.” But these instances of narrating oneself as the ‘other’ are far from being mere gestures of modesty. Whenever Koçu starts to talk about doings of a certain Reşat Ekrem Koçu, as if he is someone else, we witness a moment of –in Paul Ricoeur’s words- ‘textual closure’ –that is, a narrative self-referentiality. For instance, what’s the author’s (in fact, a ‘quoted’ character, of whom we, the readers, are supposed to surreptitiously countersign the contract about the identity with the author) business in a person’s biography? Is that a mere intervention of the authorial voice in the midst of an entry? Or, does the entry serve as a pretext for the flow of such an autobiographical text? Is Koçu’s personal narrative just an occasional interruption, or rather a manifestation of the deep logic of *İA*?

In such instances, Koçu wants to generate a sense of ‘objectivity’ and ‘impartiality’ by mentioning himself as ‘he’, and simultaneously melts that objectivity in his subjectivity by spilling the attributes of that certain ‘he’ all out: no sooner does he decide to separate himself into two as a narrator and a character than he tries to prevent the reader from supposing that such a binary structure indeed exists.

The attributes that Koçu imputes to the character called ‘R. E. Koçu’ show us the ambiguity of the author’s status in *İA*. Koçu seems to be unsure of his position: he occasionally calls himself as ‘müellif’, ‘müdevvin’ and ‘sahip’. All of these three positions regarding one’s relation to his enterprise imply a certain kind of ‘ownership’. ‘Müellif’ means both ‘someone who is the writer of a text’ and ‘someone who is the editor of a text written by someone else’ –a more ambiguous adjective/noun compared to ‘muharrir’. ‘Müdevvin’ is close to the second meaning of ‘müellif’: the person who compiles texts written by others and makes a book out of them (a kind of collector, who curates collected fragments and create a narrative.) ‘Sahip’ (owner) is, on the other hand, directly related to the materiality of *İA*. (“Reşad Ekrem koçu, the owner and editor of this encyclopedia wishes to add these sentences to this biography...”<sup>122</sup>) Koçu is its owner with all implications of ownership –as an object and a legal right. Koçu’s inability to sustain an ‘impartial’ voice is partly caused by that strict emphasis on the ownership.

In the first page of all volumes of *İA* we come across the familiar and seemingly ordinary ‘copyright’ note, which reads as: “The right to translate into foreign languages and to publish in Turkish solely belongs to Reşad Ekrem Koçu.” The expression is the same except one volume. In the seventh volume, an additional expression that enhances Koçu’s ownership rights to a fantastic degree appears: “Because any other attempt to compile an encyclopedia about the city of İstanbul would be a plagiarism from İstanbul Ansiklopedisi, the legal rights concerning this case also belong to R.E. Koçu.” Does not Koçu make his ownership and authorship definite at the same time here?

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<sup>122</sup> “Bu Ansiklopedi’nin sahibi ve müdevvini Reşad Ekrem Koçu, bu hal tercemesine şu son satırları vicdan vecibesi olarak ilave ediyor...” *İA*, V. 8, p. 4215.

Authorship has already been secured by the invasion of proper name and signature. The insistence on the proper name and signature, combined with the emphasis on the ownership give us the connection between the collection and the autobiographical narrative. And as a result, the property of being written by ‘everybody and nobody’, the principle of authorial absence inherent in the encyclopedic ideal is eliminated. Author’s revealing himself instead of concealing can be construed as a modern moment: replacement of a ‘we’ that speaks on behalf of ‘I’, by another “We” that tries to voice as an “I.” Because of that, in my view, the key to understand the narrative of *İA* is, to observe the life of the “I” that imagines the “We”, rather than the “We” imagined by *İA*.

Besides telling its own story in a variety of ways, that “I” constantly tries to attach to the stories that do not have a direct connection to its. The entry DALLI (Ahmed) in which the words ‘sahip’ and ‘müdevvin’ are mentioned, is a good example for that.

The juxtaposition of an autobiographical passage with the first and last sentences exemplifies the narrative interplay at work in *İA*. From that story we can deduce that the reason why Ahmed Dallı deserved to be recorded in *İA* as an entry is that he serves as a valuable contributor to Koçu’s autobiography. But an other explanation is also possible: Koçu finds some spaces to embed fragments of his autobiography in the flow of entries which does not have any kind of ‘objective’ order other than an innocent alphabetization. In fact, that’s a two-fold process: he can utilize a certain entry in order to articulate his autobiography, and he can come across a fragment of his autobiography in an entry that’s not originally intended to be autobiographical. We can find Koçu’s proper name, sometimes in the form of “I” and sometimes that of “He” as fragments scattered all over the encyclopedia.

At this point, Jacques Derrida's claims on the positions of signature and proper name in autobiography are relevant. Derrida's formulation of the problem of the autobiographical has many ramifications; however, two in particular seem important here. The first is his rethinking of the role of the signature, the 'proper name' or autograph, and the way it inhabits that problematic borderline between life and work; the second, not unrelated, is his redefining of autobiography as 'thanatography', a writing not of a living but a dead author. For Derrida the question of the proper name or signature quickly takes on overtones of death since the name with which one signs will always outlive the bearer of that name. Indeed, to the extent that the proper name has a life of its own, it proclaims the death of its bearer every time it is used: "In calling or naming someone while he is alive, we know that his name can survive him and already survives him; the name begins during his life to get along without him speaking and bearing his death each time it is inscribed in a list, or a civil registry, or a signature."<sup>123</sup> Therefore, since autobiography doubles the attempt to live through the name by also taking the name into the title of the work, it also increases its own involvement with death. In attempting to make use of the name as a guarantee of self-presence, autobiography is deflected further from its aim, overrun by the death it releases through writing.

This 'death' is closely related to the "impossibility of self-portrait" which Derrida mentions in a different context and I will talk about later. Another issue that this 'death' is closely related, is the desire of being able to 'contain': That desire arises from IA in the form of a dream of afterlife. That's the point where ownership and authorship, hence collection and autobiography mix with each other. The

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<sup>123</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 49.

collector desires to disappear into his collection. He to whom the collection belongs, belongs also to the collection.<sup>124</sup>

This reciprocity points to an entanglement of subject and object found only in ownership. This, at least, was Benjamin's idea about ownership: "The phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner. Even though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the latter."<sup>125</sup> Amalgamation of an autobiographical interiority and an encyclopedic exteriority (for it is a *public-ation*) is what comes out of the symbiosis of the two textual layers of *İA*.

The expressive modes of interiority and exteriority change throughout the *İA*. In the initial volumes of *İA*, in other words, during the period covering late 1940s and early 1950s, in accordance with the consensus of Koçu and his circle of contributors, the mode of exteriority, that is the mode of authorial absence/impartiality seems to be the replacement of all proper names by a subject called 'İstanbul Ansiklopedisi.' Especially in the first, second and third volumes, 'İstanbul Ansiklopedisi' as a subject, 'warns', 'congratulates', 'hopes for the best', rewards the boy who became first in the apprenticeship course 'by recording his name in this city register'<sup>126</sup>, sends survey forms<sup>127</sup>, leaves those who destroyed Ayakapu Hamamı to the judgement of history<sup>128</sup>, records a significant note<sup>129</sup>, and

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<sup>124</sup> See Appendix V

<sup>125</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Collecting", in *Selected Writings Vol. 2 1927-1934* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 491.

<sup>126</sup> *İA*, V. 2, p. 975.

<sup>127</sup> *İA*, V. 3, p. 1305.

<sup>128</sup> *İA*, V. 3, p. 1380.

visits a mosque.<sup>130</sup> That subject called ‘İstanbul Ansiklopedisi’ was desired to be both everybody and nobody, collectivity and absence, and it implied that *İA* has not been produced by one man but a large staff, and by nobody, that is the unseen hand of the collectivity. What is signified here is that the ideal encyclopedic virtue is satisfied by the employment of the collective singular ‘İstanbul Ansiklopedisi’ as a mimic-subject that’s able to replace all other subjects –a voice that might belong to everybody.

However, especially in the last three volumes, that is during the period from late 1960’s to the publication date of the eleventh volume, 1973, after the subsequent departures of Koçu’s close friends, we observe a gradual increase in the frequency of the “I” in *İA*. *İA* becomes more and more its own encyclopedia. Collection turns out to be a self-portrait by containing its collector. But it is a self-portrait that starts to melt into air immediately after it is sketched, for its essence lies in its immediacy. If we take a closer look at Koçu’s experience of the city, we will have a chance to catch a glimpse of that self-portrait.

#### REK, Tour Note

The major source for almost all entries concerning ‘the streets of Istanbul’ in *İA* is the same: *REK, Tour Note*. A secondary source that is occasionally referred, *The City Guide of 1934* by Osman Nuri Ergin, seems to be leafed through by Koçu during his tours, rather than being a source to be consulted later. A great bunch of these tours were made in 1950s, mostly and solely by Koçu himself, and sometimes by the

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<sup>129</sup> *İA*, V. 3, p. 1424.

<sup>130</sup> *İA*, V. 3, p. 1678.

company of a close friend (Muzaffer Esen and Hakkı Göktürk are some of those close friends.)

Koçu's usual routine seems to be more or less like this: He schedules a tour to a certain neighbourhood and maybe makes a list of the streets and buildings to stop by as well. He goes there, makes a mental picture of his route and starts jotting down the curious details around.<sup>131</sup>

All these details jotted down have a sort of journalistic immediacy. Although the main reason for that seems to be some 'material necessities' as being bound with deadlines and the form of monthly fascicles, that explanation would be insufficient for making sense of the fact that the distance between the subject and the object of knowledge and the quality of knowledge are determined by such an immediacy. After being toured and recorded, some streets and buildings were toured one more time for further information, but usually the essence of an entry about such a street or building would have been the initial impression of the flâneur. An instantaneous image of the street or building spreads as if it is a timeless objectivity. A historical moment which Eco would call 'typical' ascends to the throne of 'essential.' The individual gaze directed towards the street or building covers the data and identifies with it: autobiographical impulse attempts to shape the knowledge pertaining to the

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<sup>131</sup> Here are some curious examples: "Üst başından vadideki bostanların, karşı yamaçların seyrine doyum olmaz." (1944), "Bu notların tesbiti için geçilirken sokakta futbol oynayan çocukların katıksız argo ve küfriyat konuştukları işitilmiştir ki, hazindir." (1946), "Bu semtin pitoresk eskiliğini korumak bakımından, bu meşhur kahvehanelerin kaldırılmasından ziyade, büyük şehre layık bir güzellikte tamirine gidilmesi daha uygun olsa gerektir." (1946), "...vakti ile kaba taş döşeli imiş, bakımsızlıktan toprak yol halini almış." (1960), "Mezarlık içinde bir çeşme ruha ferahlık verirken, bir kasabanın, mahallenin günlük hayatı içinde bu çeşme, duyabilene, ölümün kasvetini hatırlatmaktadır." (1961), "Bu ansiklopedi için mahalleleri tesbit eden değerli muhabirimiz bu satırların matbaaya tevdi edileceği son ana kadar bu mahallenin durumunu beyan eden notlarını getirmemiş bulunuyordu." (1963), "'C' şeklinde bir sokaktır; yerine gidilip şu satırların yazıldığı sıradaki durumu tesbit edilemedi." (1963), "Topkapı civarında idi; bu satırların yazıldığı sırada, 1947 Eylül'ü, yapıdan eser kalmamış, kaidesi kesme taştan, gövdesi tuğla ve gayet yüksek olan minaresi, şerefesinden üstü yıkılmış, bir sütun halinde duruyordu..." (1947), "Zamanımızda mevcut olmayan Emirgan Hamamı bu sokakta idi." (1966), "Günün erken saatlerinden geç vakitlere kadar kalabalık, sesli, hareketli, renkli bir yoldur, kendine has hüviyette bir pazar yeri, bir çarşı boyudur." (1968), "Zamanımızda Kazlıçeşme geniş bir gecekondu mahallesi olmuş, muhabirimiz bu sokağı yerinde de bulamamıştır." (1973)

collectivity. The author sees, feels, understands and records on the readers' behalf. The wanderer's personal experience in a street –which he lives and records- does not need to have a dramatic depth (a curious incident, an unexpected encounter, or an accident.) Just like a painter accomodating the images captured by his eye on the canvas, Koçu records momentary impressions, a landscape seen from a specific angle, amount of light and details of the perspective as 'the relevant encyclopedic information' regarding that street. In fact, we can observe a reflection of the two-fold structure in *İA*: Whereas this record form the autobiographical nucleus the entry about that street, the information transferred from extra sources like *The City Guide of 1934* constitute the secondary textual layer which covers the nucleus.<sup>132</sup>

The theme of 'childhood' is of crucial importance for Koçu's presentation of his individual experience of the city as the standard knowledge of it. "Perhaps" says Peter Fritzsche, "the most important expression of the layeredness of historical experience within individuals is the evocation of lost childhood."<sup>133</sup> Childhood, for Koçu, stands for a vast inventory of lost treasures. Thus the exploration of the past is the means to define himself, or as Carolyn Steedman puts it, "the dislocation is the loss that provides the aetiology of the self."<sup>134</sup> The figure of the lost child monitores the historicity of the self, something the unmistakable changes in material life and the increasingly historical forms of autobiographical narrative had clarified.

Nostalgia for lost childhood expresses the degree to which individuals construct their own identities out of a sense of displacement. In this regard, the

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<sup>132</sup> The entry ANKARA CADDESİ which comprises 24 full columns in vol. 2 is, in my view, the one entry in which *İA* is perfectly crystallized: it gives all dimensions of *İA* in a nutshell.

<sup>133</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 179.

<sup>134</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. ix.

autobiographer is more “enamored of distance,” to quote Susan Stewart, than concerned with the “referent itself.” As she puts it, “nostalgia is the desire for desire.”<sup>135</sup> The loss of childhood corresponds to a permanent itinerancy which, for better and worse, frees the self from the social bonds of home and enables it to examine the particular journey the reflective individual has undertaken.

The link between itinerancy and autobiography is a strong one. As Julia Kristeva points out, it is precisely the wanderer who thinks the life in biographical terms. Those at home are “perhaps owners of things, but the wanderer tends to think he is the only one to have a biography, that is, a life made up of ordeals –neither catastrophe nor adventure (although these might equally happen), but simply a life in which acts constitute events because they imply choice, surprises, breaks, adaptations, or cunning, but neither routine nor rest.”<sup>136</sup> Kristeva’s attention to the idea of the event is noteworthy, for the narrative of Koçu’s experience comes to be increasingly focused on exceptional moments, sudden upheavals, or revelations which break through the security of expectation. That which is mundane for everybody else, sparkles with vividness in the wanderer’s eyes. Koçu strolls through the city ‘on our behalf’ and these strollings result in an experience which has a curious affinity with what the German poet Heinrich Heine called ‘momentarism’<sup>137</sup>: the attraction to fleeting, momentary images. We may recall here the methodological paradox that Joseph Cornell lingered on, which reflects Koçu’s as well: The

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<sup>135</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 23.

<sup>136</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>137</sup> Michael Hamburger, *Reason and Energy: Studies in German Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 167.

attraction to fleeting things and the compulsion to control, classify and frame; the allure of the fragment mixing with the desire for the whole.

At this point a theoretical support from Walter Benjamin's profound analysis of 'city experience' would be helpful. The basic problem Benjamin deals with both in his incomplete life-long work *The Arcades Project* and in his writings on various cities, is to crystallize theoretically the 'modern moment' which is the point where the personal narrative and the collective experience of the city intersect and reproduce each other.

According to Benjamin, the modern city presents a momentary and fleeting image of itself, and one cannot observe but only catch a glimpse of it. So, how is the writer to capture the momentary and fleeting? How is he or she to express the ineffable, to represent the contingent? To give form to the modern –this task was for Baudelaire that of the poet of modernity. Benjamin is also concerned in his city writings with the problem of representation. His readings of the metropolitan landscape involve an attempt to overcome this problem through the development of an innovative and experimental literary style. A number of vital, interconnected textual imperatives run through Benjamin's representation and critique of the modern metropolis: an imagistic approach; a concern with perspective, a demand for immediacy and for immanence.

In his writings Benjamin is preoccupied with the visual and imagistic. The early cityscapes are 'thought-images', which seek to portray the city, be it Naples, Moscow or Marseilles, through a kind of journalistic reportage. But the Berlin texts are primarily composed of constellations of remembered images (autobiography and personal narrative are attempts to recapture the 'at first sight' of the city), and in *The Arcades Project* Benjamin stresses the visual character of history and the

methodological imperative of the dialectical image. The cityscapes are attempts, therefore, to translate the seen into the written, the picture into the word, to articulate what Susan Buck-Morss refers to in the title of her study as ‘the dialectics of seeing.’

Benjamin’s Berlin texts were theoretical and methodological experiments for *The Arcades Project*, models of historical analysis and writing which sought to explore the relationships between metropolitan environment, individual memory, and collective history. How does the city transform memory? How does memory give form to the urban complex? Could the narration of an individual past critically illuminate the history of an epoch? His ‘autobiographical’ fragments are thus exercises in critical historiography rather than wistful nostalgia.

In his “Introduction” to Benjamin’s *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, Peter Szondi contends that the key to understanding his urban studies is to recognize that they constitute attempts to “convey the experience of alienation and of being a foreigner.”<sup>138</sup> Benjamin draws upon impressions and images of the city from childhood in order to become a stranger, a foreigner once more, in a space he knows so well as an adult.

In his 1929 essay “Marseilles”, Benjamin states that “childhood is the divining rod of melancholy, and to know the mourning of such radiant, glorious cities one must have been a child in them.”<sup>139</sup> Benjamin ‘knows’ the city of Berlin, yet takes his reader back to the period of ‘not knowing.’ Peter Szondi comments: “...gone, therefore, is our familiarity with streets and houses, though they may still surround us; we see them with a doubly alien view: with the view of the child to

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<sup>138</sup> Peter Szondi, “Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin”, in Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* (London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 18.

<sup>139</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Marseilles”, in *Selected Writings Vol. 2: 1927-1934*, p. 234.

whom the city was not yet familiar.”<sup>140</sup> To know the city as a place of sorrow and wonderment, one must have been a child in it.

Benjamin’s ‘autobiographical’ writings on Berlin focus on the dialectic between the modern metropolis and memory. He seeks to give voice to the interplay between the city and the remembering subject through an exploration of the manner in which the urban setting shapes, and is in turn shaped by, the work of remembrance. The metropolis is a vital site for Benjamin’s archaeology, because it is within the city that one encounters those cultural forms and artefacts which seek to define the past and articulate its relationship with the present. In the urban setting a particular, persuasive version of the past is constructed and elaborated. History appears as progress, as continual development, the ever-new. The past is dead and finished, and is to be subject either to obliteration by the bulldozer or linear organization and display within the confines of the museum. The myth of history as continuous, as perpetual improvement, is bound up with that of history as triumphant procession. This vision of a sequence of glorious, heroic occurrences is given concrete form in the monument. In the metropolis, the past is to be eradicated, catalogued, or glorified.

In the discourse of *IA*, the past is eradicated; thus it is catalogued and glorified. Koçu, had been a child in Istanbul while it was still the capital city of an empire. But in 1950s, in the peak of its destruction, it was ceasing to be the city of his childhood; recording the last fleeting images of a city, at a certain point, came to mean salvaging his own past. He captured pieces of memory which had been parts of a lived experience once. We can observe an urge to find and record the traces of a

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<sup>140</sup> Szondi, *Ibid.*

mythic past in *IA* –to reconstruct the perfect image of the city from out of what have actually remained.

But in the Berlin texts, Benjamin endeavours to unmask that vision of the past as mythic. His archaeological practice is concerned to show that the past is not complete and unalterable, but rather that it is the task of the present to redeem the forgotten dead. Benjamin's 'spatialisation' of time rejects any notion of history as continuity, and instead reveals the past as broken and fragmentary, as labyrinthine not linear. History is not developmental but catastrophic in character, not glorious advance but sorrowful endurance. Benjamin redeems a series of personal memorials that give voice to a very different history, one which proclaims the sufferings of the past and the persistence of barbarism in the present. Individual remembrance of the past is, for Benjamin, the 'flipside of history.'

He endeavours to transform autobiography into history, memoirs into memorial. In *A Berlin Chronicle*, he mentions Léon Daudet as his precursor: "He sought to turn his own biography into a monument of Paris."<sup>141</sup> Benjamin's goal is to bear witness to the dead. But the act of individual remembrance provided an inadequate model for socio-historical analysis. The examination of nineteenth-century Parisian society would demand a different theoretical framework. In his letter to Gretel Adorno of 16 August 1935, Benjamin notes that: "...the ur-history of the nineteenth-century, which is reflected in the gaze of the child playing on its threshold, has a quite different face from that which it engraves upon the map of history."<sup>142</sup> In the 'Theses' of 1940, Benjamin advocates not the redemption of a

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<sup>141</sup> Walter Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle", in *Selected Writings Vol. 2: 1927-1934*, p. 597.

<sup>142</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), p. 280.

unique past, but a unique experience with the past. The labyrinthine structures of the Berlin texts, of the modern city remembered, remain as literary fragments or ruins of a critical experiment that Benjamin ultimately came to perceive as a failure.

Koçu, too, during the last years of his life, came to perceive *İA* as a failed, if not wrong, project. But the reader would not agree with Koçu about the reasons behind that failure. As Benjamin says in his essay on ‘book-collecting’, “for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object.”<sup>143</sup> The background of the ‘item’, that is, the ‘magical encyclopedia’, for Koçu, was not the one we read as a scattered register of the city; but the record of his own unique experience.

### Cataloguing and Glorifying

The narrative that Koçu constitutes seems somewhat awry from Benjamin’s perspective. Alongside a heroic and naive eulogy to a glorious past and a supposedly strong belief to progress, emerges the ‘sorrowful endurance’ of individual remembrance. Koçu inscribes the register of an eradicated past, but while cataloguing and glorifying it, he also dislocates the collectivity of which he is speaking on behalf and in the meantime his autobiography takes hold. With an imagistic gesture, he writes out the visual image of a fleeting moment. Whilst seeing the past which he thought to be preserved in museums but mangled by bulldozers, as a ‘unique’ past, he records ‘his unique experience with the past’ instead of this ‘unique past’ – which is quite paradoxical from Benjamin’s point of view. He looks

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<sup>143</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Collecting”, in *Selected Writings Vol. 2: 1927-1934*, p. 487.

at the city, and sees himself for a moment in the ephemeral, fleeting image of the city. He finds his individual past in what he seems to be proudly sure about being the unique collective past; his very subjectivity in the collectivity that he tries to speak on behalf of; and his autobiography in what he desires to be an encyclopedia. Encyclopedia comes to be Koçu's 'shabby palace', 'secret nest', and 'home' –a medium through which he searches for a sense of origin.

At a certain point of the entry BABIALI CADDESİ (Yeni) which is a repetition of the entry ANKARA CADDESİ in the second volume, Koçu says that he wants to record the changes in the period between the year when the former entry was written and the year when the latter was. He says: "There has been a good many changes in Babiali Street after 1951 as a result of public works; the changes that occurred in the nine year period up until today may be summarised as this (...)"<sup>144</sup> and then guides the readers all along the street. This time, however, unlike the former entry, he records 'destruction', 'absence' and 'loss'. In his tours, as well as in the pages of *The City Guide of 1934*, he sees only a vast turmoil: the streets which are remembered by him and mentioned in the guide are gone; old buildings, roads, bridges, shops and neighborhoods are replaced by new ones; the trees are chopped off; everything dear and memorable for a city-dweller are destroyed instead of being saved in a museum; the face of the cityscape is no more recognizable. While recording what was there, who were living and what they were doing before buildings were demolished, he gives the information that one of the buildings that were demolished throughout those nine years, the one that "once bore the door numbers of 15, 17 and 19" was "the historical building where the newspaper and

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<sup>144</sup> "Babiali Caddesi 1951'den sonra gerek şahsi teşebbüsler gerekse İstanbul şehrinin hâlâ içinde bulunduğu imar faaliyeti dolayısıyla simasını hayli değiştirmiştir; 1960 yılı Şubat'ında, dokuz yıl zarfındaki bu değişiklik şöyle tesbit edilmiştir (...)" *İA*, V. 4, p. 1759.

magazine of Servet-i Fünun had been published” and adds: “It was destroyed instead of being transformed into a museum.” The Camcılar Mosque in Aksaray was “a historical building which has been swept along by the huge disaster which has been called by some as development in the period between the years 1957-59.” Köprü Bath, cited in the fifth volume, which had once been next to the shop in which a handsome Albanian youth has worked “was an architectural masterpiece destroyed by the order of Menderes in 1958 or 59.” Koçu feels that this impulsive destructiveness and the fact that every corner is gradually turning out to be a ‘ruin’, fills the city day by day with a dangerous, uncanny chaos that threatens purity, and the first victims of that chaos are ‘children.

If the theme of ‘childhood’ is traced throughout *İA*, a quick theory of ‘melancholy’ can be drawn out of it. Koçu occasionally mentions his childhood memories, implies his loss of that childhood, and considers the relationship between ‘childhood’ and the ‘city’ as one of ‘abuse.’ Almost all of the 43 entries concerning ‘children’ are about the misdemeanours that they are threatened by in the urban environment. City is, for Koçu, simply and obviously, full of risk, mayhem, evil and horror for children. It can even be deduced from the titles of those entries.<sup>145</sup> Almost all of these entries are based on: 1. Koçu’s chats with children, 2. his personal observations, 3. scenes of everyday life that he recorded by paying close attention to romanesque details with a “feuilleton” technique he learned from Ahmet Rasim, 4. a melodramatic sensibility (“melodrama as a mode of excess” in Peter Brook’s terms), and 5. his voyeurisms which sometimes fuel polemics about his homosexuality.

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<sup>145</sup> Here are some examples: AİLESİZ, KİMSESİZ ÇOCUKLAR; AZGIN ANALARIN KURBANI ÇOCUKLAR; BABALARIN KÖTÜ KALENDER TERBİYESİ KURBANI ÇOCUKLAR; EVİNDEN KAÇAN ÇOCUKLAR; SOKAKLARDA YALIN AYAKLI ÇOCUKLAR; ÜVEY ANALARIN KURBANI ÇOCUKLAR; YURDUN HERHANGİ BİR YERİNDEN İSTANBUL’A KAÇAN ÇOCUKLAR; ÇOCUK DİLENCİLER; ÇOCUK HIRSIZLARI, ÇOCUK HIRSIZLIĞI; ÇOCUKLU AİLENİN KİRA İLE MESKEN BULMA ZORLUĞU, etc.

Even while describing the city as a dark well that spoils all kinds of naivety and cursing it, Koçu can not help peeping around and getting excited by any potential of melodramatic fiction. On the surface of the narrative, there is the gesture of documenting the sad truth and offering oral testimonies to official consciences. Nevertheless in the background of that narrative is a consciousness ready to be seduced by picturesque and journalistic details -and these are the central desires that which rule the narrative. This is exactly the place where the pedagogical aspect of *İA* tries to hide curiosity and encyclopedia tries to suppress the autobiography. Yet simultaneously this is also the place where we encounter Freudian lapses and joke mechanisms: even if the pedagogy curses, the very act of cursing itself, by its frequency of appearance, results in the permanent citation, description and eroticization of the cursed.

The entry DAVUTPAŞA İSKELESİ HAMAMI<sup>146</sup> is representative in this regard. Alongside the entry, there is an illustration –probably copied from a photograph- drawn by Koçu’s hardworking illustrator Sabiha Bozcalı. Beneath the illustration it reads: “Davutpaşa İskelesi Hamamı’nda Camekan.” However, what we see is more the young man on the foreground than the window. The composition of this illustration reveals *İA*’s visual language, order of images and the iconography it produces. This system should be read as illustrating a perspective and a preference instead of illustrating an entry. The relationship established amongst various elements of an image, disproportionate dimensions and allocation of emphases are significant. The signifying relationship between the inner hierarchy of the illustration and the expression under it is a clumsy one. Should not an illustration meant to be seen as the image of a window in a specific hamam in Istanbul contain that window

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<sup>146</sup> *İA*, V. 8, p. 4303 – See Appendix VI.

at the centre and refer to a property of that window specified in the entry? Yet what we observe here is that the “should” does not operate in the normative sense of the word in the context of *İA*: Here, that “should” is based on another desire which problematizes the issues of hierarchy, grotesque togetherness of entries and the issue of whether *İA* is an encyclopedia or not. While the window that ‘should’ have been on the centre appears as a secondary detail constituting the blurry background, a young man with arms crossed forms the centre of the image with the relative abundance of details and the relatively important space he fills. Moreover, the crucial point is that the illustration is there since it functions as a structural element that is necessary for the construction of the text’s internal structure –a function far from being a complementary one. It functions in the manner of a Derridaen ‘*supplement*’ rather than being a mere supporting element for the entry.

Another issue is that *İA* produces an iconography through the obsessive repetition of certain images that emerge in this illustration and are reiterated in a myriad of others. A perspective inherited from Divan poetry can also be found on that ground: describing a previously described landscape one more time with a different metaphor, and praising it. Koçu’s homosexual tendencies can be found here as well<sup>147</sup>, thus that ‘critical issue’ has already been articulated by Kevork Pamukciyan as an ‘exaggeration of pederasty’ that breaks the ‘harmony’ of the encyclopedia. But in what way does Koçu exaggerate pederasty? Is it by stressing the pederastic interests or by claiming that pederasty is a serious ‘urban threat’ that ‘children’ are threatened by? If we attempt to read Koçu’s moralist accents and warnings and his obsessive insistence in those kind of warnings in the light of ‘speech act’ theory, we may reach a clearer conception about both Koçu’s desires

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<sup>147</sup> Pamuk, *Istanbul*, pp. 151-169.

and the way the iconography, of which those images function as ‘keys’, operates. Whether in a cursing or a voyeuristic fashion, the repetitive utterance of some statements attracts our attention more to the enunciation itself than the concrete content of statements. Even if the phenomenon of ‘pederasty’ is recalled along with a ‘moral’ accent, the frequency of this ‘accent’ as an inseparable part of urban life itself makes the phenomenon an accentuated element of the iconography that *İA* produces. Unlike the others, for Koçu, the city is a place where ‘pederasty’ exists. Then what does Pamukçıyan mean by ‘exaggerating pederasty’? Is it about the fact that Koçu frequently points out to the phenomenon or –in an accusing and reproaching tone- the other probability that Koçu had a personal interest in pederasty and that he ‘contaminates’ this interest to *İA*? The answer may be “both of them,” because from an ‘enunciative’ perspective, Koçu does both of them. Both the half-naked youth figure standing in front of the building as the object, source and target of a voyeuristic pleasure, and the warning that the sinister gaze of a voyeur haunts the city like a ghost –these two conflicting gestures exist in *İA* side by side. Koçu exhibits the half-naked young man with the very gaze that he curses. He identifies with the voyeuristic perspective of the ‘evil’ which threatens ‘our children.’

This identification should be interpreted as the interference of the autobiographical reflex with the pedagogical aspect of *İA*, or in other words, as the resistance of the record in the first sense (that of collection and autobiography) to the record in the second sense (that of encyclopedia and pedagogy.) But the close affinity between the melancholy that motivates the process of cataloguing and glorifying and voyeuristic pleasure puts the reader into a position of hesitancy. There’s a bitter-sweet enjoyment in the melancholy (or ‘hüzün’, in Orhan Pamuk’s

words) of the encyclopedist who witnesses the destruction of his home city. The spectator feels that guilty pleasure in ruins.<sup>148</sup>

### Self-Portrait in the Ruin

We find the two-fold narrative of the illustration that I mentioned above in his recording of urban topography as well. While complaining about a collective problem, that is, a municipal issue or a social complaint, he actually records his individual experience. Indeed, Koçu sketches his self-portrait by these imagistic and momentary records. Most of the entries concerning a street, a district or a building are strictly anchored to the moment of their very composition: they come to be journalistic records. They are in the process of being the memories of themselves. Here, I rely on Jacques Derrida: “The ruin does not supervene like an accident upon a monument that was intact only yesterday. In the beginning there is ruin. Ruin is that which happens to the image from the moment of the first gaze. Ruin is the self-portrait, this face looked at in the face as the memory of itself, what *remains* or *returns* as a specter from the moment one first looks at oneself and a figuration is eclipsed. The figure, the face, then sees its visibility eaten away; it loses its integrity without disintegrating. For the incompleteness of the visible monument comes from the eclipsing structure of the trait, from a structure that is only remarked, pointed out, impotent or incapable of being reflected in the shadow of the self-portrait. So many

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<sup>148</sup> Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins: A Journey Through History, Art, and Literature* (New York: Vintage, 2002), p. 105.

reversible propositions. For one can just as well read the pictures of ruins as the figures of a portrait, indeed, of a self-portrait.”<sup>149</sup>

We can approach the inner separation that Koçu experiences while he looks at the façade of a building or a street, the separation which he performs in his encyclopedia in a formal manner, from this perspective: 1. While looking at the cityscape, Koçu realizes that himself as a child who once looked at the same cityscape is already lost. 2. While looking at the cityscape he also realizes that the city of his childhood, the city that he watched and wandered once is also gone forever. Therefore, he sees and cannot see two things simultaneously: his inner self and the city. He searches for his former self that does not exist anymore in the city and the old city that does not exist anymore in his own self. He sees the impossibility of a self-portrait in the inevitable ruination of the city, and ruin in his attempt to sketch his self-portrait.

In this regard, the explanation for the non-completion of *İA* cannot be restricted to the terms of ‘fate’ or ‘scarcity of resources’ (lack of money, time, or contributors.) The deeper roots of non-completion should rather be searched in the desires underlying *İA*’s narrative formation. The typical collector’s behaviour should also be considered: “Desire for completing a collection has also been taken as evidence of compulsiveness among collectors. Given notions of extended self, what is being completed, is really the collector. At the same time there seems to be a paradoxical fear of completing a collection. For if one is a collector and there is

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<sup>149</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 68.

nothing left to collect, who is one then? (...) A common strategy to avoid completion is to redefine or add new collecting interests as completion nears.”<sup>150</sup>

Koçu’s anchoring of his recording activity to the impossible topos of fleeting imagery, the ever-new, and the momentary, was the main reason behind *İA*’s non-completion. Benjamin’s thoughts about “completeness” are relevant at this point: “What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness. What is this ‘completeness’? It is a grand attempt to overcome the the wholly irrational character of the object’s mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressly devised historical system: the collection. And for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes. It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle, where, as a last shudder runs through it (the shudder of being acquired), it turns to stone. Everything remembered, everything thought, everything conscious becomes socle, frame, pedestal, seal of his possession. He loses himself assuredly.”<sup>151</sup> These socles, frames, pedestals and seals are the elements of Koçu’s ‘shabby palace’ which dreams not of being a palace in a city, but a palace containing the city.

The non-completion of *İA* is nothing other than the impossibility of a ‘perfect’ autobiography (which reminds one of Foucault, according to whom the

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<sup>150</sup> Robert A. Wicklund and Peter M. Gollwitzer, *Symbolic Self-Completion* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1982), p. 46.

<sup>151</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, pp. 204-5.

Western encyclopedic ideal was based on the theoretical impossibility of a ‘perfect language’): “The mask of this impossible self-portrait whose signatory sees himself disappearing before his own eyes the more he tries desperately to recapture himself in it.”<sup>152</sup> Koçu’s search for a purity in both historical past and everyday life ended up in a vicious circle: every image he came across, every ‘last thing’ that he could not help recording made the collection, hence the encyclopedia and the self-portrait begin anew.

In its never-ending quest for information, objects, quotations, and fragments and the impossibility of completion or fulfillment, the logic of the archive –that is, the impulse to collect- is also the logic of desire. The pleasure of desire, like that of the archive, is characterized by the perpetual tension between longing and futility. Both collecting and history-writing play on this impossibility: the historian collects fragments in an attempt to reach the past while the collector scans the walls of the city searching for signs of love and wishes that will never be fulfilled. Desire also accounts for the transformation that archived objects undergo. The creation of a second life for these objects, one that refers to the past or functions as a monument to history, is based on the desire of the collector or curator. The logic of the archive, the logic of desire, can be seen throughout Koçu’s oeuvre, from his earlier books that are specifically meant as collections of historical records to entries in *İA* filled with private memories, complaints, journalistic information and patchworks of endless quotations, as well as his working method and places of work (libraries, archives, streets, flea markets, antique shops, offices, etc.), mental and physical spaces of seemingly infinite accumulation and documentation. This conjunction of history-

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<sup>152</sup> Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, p. 69.

writing and obsessive collecting, archive and desire, autobiography and display, forms the very foundation of *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*.

Endeavoring to transform autobiography into history, memoirs into memorial and turning his self-portrait into a monument of Istanbul were lifelong *dreams* of Reşat Ekrem Koçu (1905-1975); and mine has been a humble attempt at searching for the desires silently operating in the background of the *dream-work*.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Besides being a personal account of collective history, *İA* can also be seen as a ‘modern’ gesture of ‘presentation.’ ‘Presentation’, as used by Walter Benjamin, is the act of making a private story public, to see the possibility of a shared meaning in the narrative of one’s inner self. It’s some sort of an externalization, expression, articulation.

With regard to the conventions of the ‘encyclopedic’ tradition that Koçu sees as his work’s roots (biographical anthologies called *tezkire*), *İA* can be said to be standing on a crucial turning point. Whereas the textual bodies of the previous encyclopedia-like compilations were ‘haunted’ by an authorial subjectivity; *İA* was ‘enhancing’ it. We can trace the textual invention and improvement of a subjectivity throughout *İA*.

What emerges as an occasional subjective intervention that violates the ‘impartiality’ of the text in the earlier volumes of *İA*, gradually evolves into a much more direct narrative of the author’s self. The hierarchy between the impartial body of knowledge presented in an entry and the subjective voice that accompanies it seems to be turned upside down in the later volumes: ‘entry’ as the building block of a collective information ends up in being the illustration of and a pretext for the ‘presentation’ of Koçu’s private narrative.

What is crucial here is the fact that by embedding his autobiographical narrative in the textual body of the encyclopedia, Koçu breaks off from the encyclopedic tradition that he points as his background. Moreover, he neither fulfills

the expected requirements of the Western ‘encyclopedic genre’, such as ‘authorial absence’, ‘impartiality’ and the proper execution of the rule of a certain ‘taxonomical tree.’ That ‘in-betweenness’, neither being a regular continuation of its predecessors, nor exemplifying the Western genre that it seems to idealize, is the reason for the reader’s surprise. The reader regards that ‘in-betweenness’ as a sign of failure – failure of being unable to satisfy both. It seems to end up with an unintended hybridity. But, in my view, the moment that *İA* is thought to cease to be an encyclopedia in terms of Western encyclopedism, is also the very moment that Koçu performs the modern gesture of presenting his private narrative.

The two constitutive desires, which I tried to categorize in the thesis as ‘the desire to include all’ and ‘the desire to construct an autobiography’, work hand in hand throughout *İA* and result in what may perhaps seem as ‘hybridity.’ But if one tries to interpret that hybridity as a sign of an active engagement with these two desires, rather than as a lack or insufficiency; if a critical approach to observe ‘what actually happens here’ is preferred to a reductionist investigation about ‘what its shortcomings are’, we may be able to trace various lines of movement among the discursive layers of the whole text.

The fundamental result that I reached through such a theoretical approach is that Koçu’s incomplete project is basically a retrospective attempt to recontextualize an always-already collected group of material under the name of ‘encyclopedia’, and since there has never been a preconceived idea of ‘encyclopedization’ inherent in that material, collection as a spectral desire dominated the ‘encyclopedic’ enterprise.

Consequently, what I deduce from these points is that, what seems as the incompleteness of *İA* with regard to the ideal of completeness as such, may as well

be read as the reflection of a 'modern' relationship between the subject and his object. In this sense it is justifiable to observe a textual closure in Koçu's enterprise.

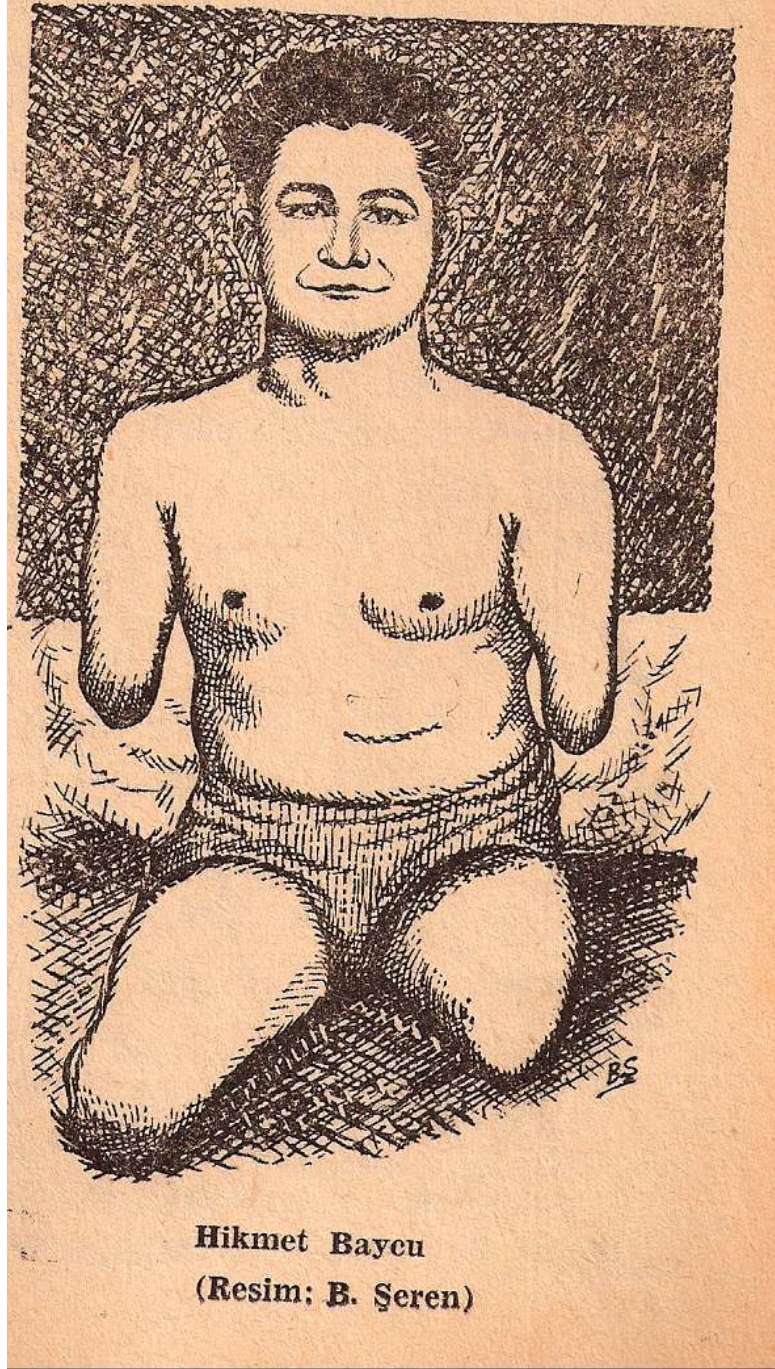
## APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A



*Hieronymus Bosch, "The Garden of Earthly Delights" (central panel), 1500-1505*

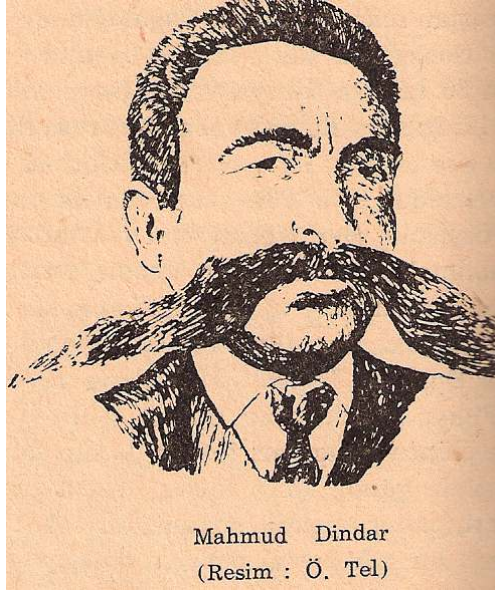
APPENDIX B



**Hikmet Baycu**  
**(Resim: B. Şeren)**

*İstanbul Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 4, p. 2273*

APPENDIX C

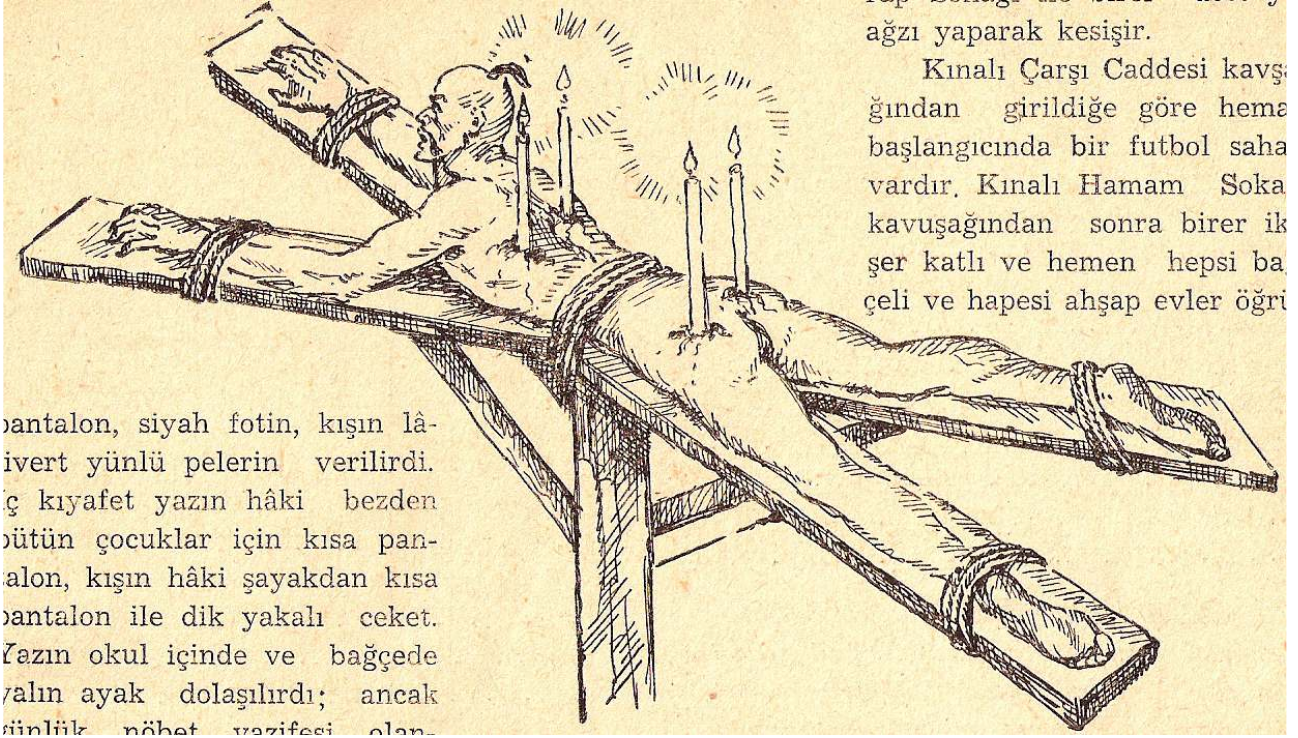


*İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 8, p. 4600



*İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 9, p. 4651

## APPENDIX D



... ağzı yaparak kesişir.

Kınalı Çarşı Caddesi kavşağından girildiği göre hema başlangıcında bir futbol sahası vardır. Kınalı Hamam Sokağı kavşağından sonra birer ikişer katlı ve hemen hepsi bahçeli ve hapesi ahşap evler öğri

... pantolon, siyah fotin, kışın lâ-  
... ivert yünlü pelerin verilirdi.  
... ç kıyafet yazın hâki bezden  
... bütün çocuklar için kısa pan-  
... alon, kışın hâki şayakdan kısa  
... pantolon ile dik yakalı ceket.  
... Yazın okul içinde ve bağçede  
... zalin ayak dolaşılırdı; ancak  
... ünlük nöbet vazifesi olan

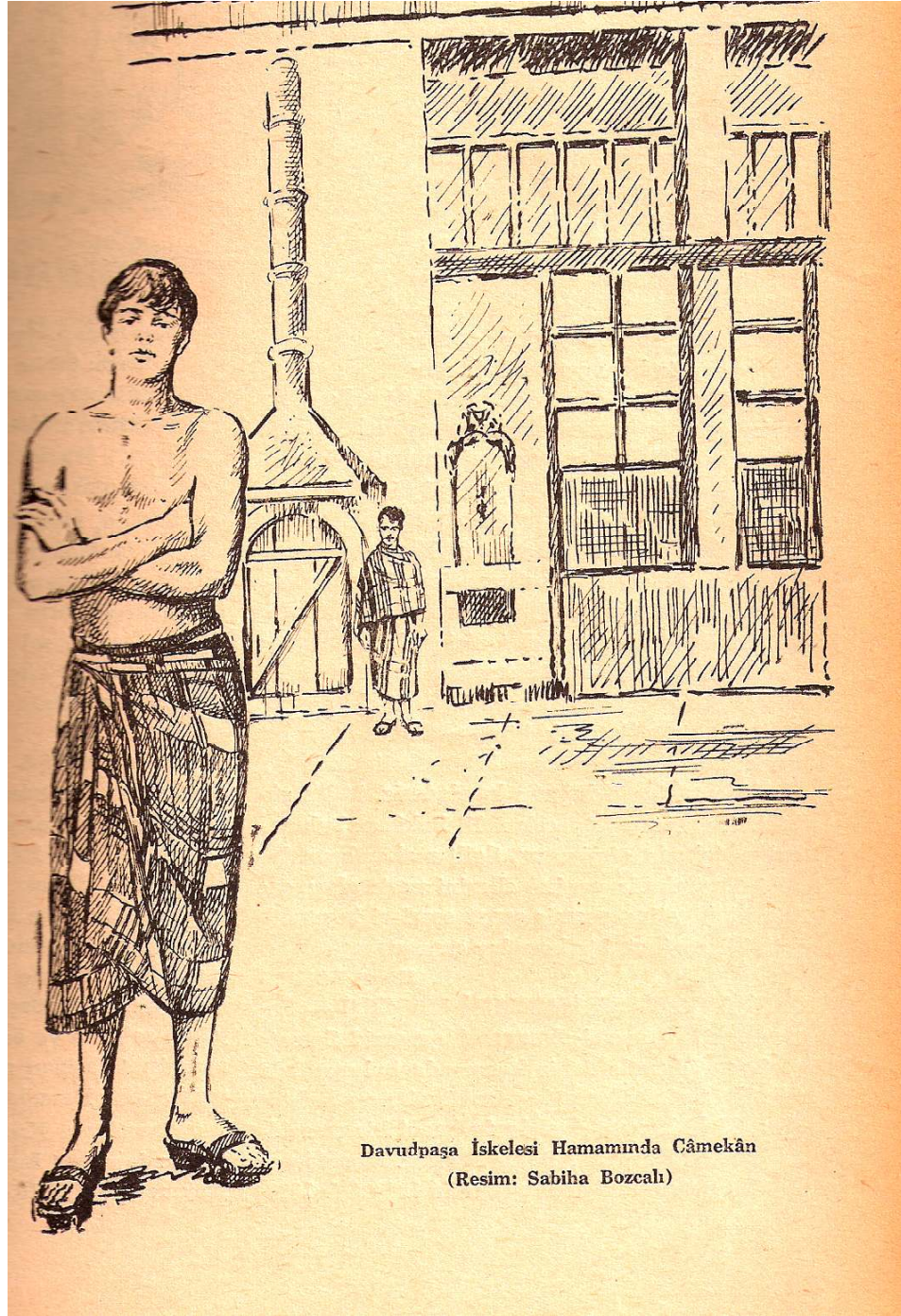
*İstanbul Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 4, p. 2059*

APPENDIX E



*Charles Willson Peale, "Self-Portrait of the Artist in His Museum", 1822*

APPENDIX F



*İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 8, p. 4303

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