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Museums of Experience: The Artist as Curator of Memory and Loss

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> *Is there such a cleavage between the "scientific" and the "artistic"? Isn't every human being both a scientist and an artist; and in writing of human experience, isn't there a good deal to be said for recognizing that fact and for using both methods?*
>
> — James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

You send a direct, but polite email to set the process in motion. You are answered quickly and given a window of four hours when you will need to be at home—a bit like setting up an appointment with the cable company. Finally, there's a knock at the door and a flood of relief fills your body cavity. Right on time Death Bear has arrived to take away the painful mementos of your last relationship. Measuring nearly seven feet tall, dressed in a black jumpsuit, black boots and an enormous hard plastic mask, Death Bear cuts an intimidating figure, literally, he darkens your door with promises to "absorb your pain into his cave."[1] He is methodical and serious when filling his black duffle with whatever you hand him, typically things like pictures in frames of happier days, clothing, jewelry, love letters, and souvenirs from trips taken together. Sometimes, though, more curious items, such as foodstuffs or office equipment are redolent with loss. Death Bear will take those too.

Here is Death Bear, in his own words:

> We all have someone or something we would rather just forget. Things fall apart. Love hurts. Dreams die. But when you summon Death Bear to your door, you can rest assured that help has come. . . . Death Bear will take things from you that trigger painful memories and stow them away in his cave where they will remain forever allowing you to move on with your life. . . . Death Bear is here to assist you in your time of tragedy, heartbreak, and loss.[2]

A creation of Brooklyn-based artist Nate Hill, Death Bear removes items—forever—often providing a catharsis for those he visits. While a symbolic ritual is undoubtedly performed, the focus is individualized. Hammering this point home, Hill states, "there is no empathy in Death Bear's face."[3] An appointment with Death Bear typically lasts only five minutes. The sufferer is relieved the

burden of a painful item, but is then left alone with that absence. While Death Bear's approach is an inventive way to handle loss and seems to be somewhat effective at dealing with psychological pain, an opportunity to make larger connections, both for the emotionally wounded and for the rest of us, is lost. What then could be done to address this particular kind of strain in a more sociological way? Consider the following options:

Option 1: Instead of tossing your relationship talismans into the rubbish bin or Death Bear's cave, together with your ex, create a museum where the flotsam and jetsam of your expired love can mix and mingle with other objects from failed relationships across the globe, allowing these objects to take on a larger social meaning, thus creating collective effervescence and emotional kinship across cultural boundaries. The Croatian artists Olinka Vištica and Drazen Grubišić have done just this with the Museum of Broken Relationships.

Option 2: Write a novel of nearly 600 pages outlining the vicissitudes, not only of love lost, but of decades of an intentionally secular, mostly Muslim country in the process of modernization, illustrating how individual lives and social flows assist and restrain personal choices, all the while showing how objects work as memory triggers, both collectively and individually. Then, collect physical objects of the sort described in the manuscript, create a museum, and put artifacts from the text and from mid-twentieth-century Turkey on display in the world for readers of the novel to visit. This is exactly the project of the Nobel Prize winning author Orhan Pamuk; the novel *The Museum of Innocence* has been on shelves since 2008, and the museum, which carries the same name, is set to open in 2011.

After the separation from a romantic partner, many succumb to the belief that the leftover items carry a patina of shame, so they are kept out of the public eye. Other times, artifacts symbolic of failed relationships are thrown away because the memories they trigger are too painful. Alternative options 1 and 2 resist the temptation to destroy or hide away the remaining objects from severed emotional ties. While creating a museum out of loss certainly requires more effort than the work of destruction, the rewards for doing so are great, not only for the originators of the museums, but also for the visitors who take part in the space. By curating museums for the brokenhearted, the artists go beyond individual solutions; they create a social space where it becomes obvious that large-scale social and historical changes affect even our most personal relationships, and that when the world shifts—economically, politically, culturally—*our worlds* shift as well. This is the power of the sociological and artistic imaginations dually wielded.

Although it is rarely acknowledged, some of the best work being done to make sense of our social worlds is created not by social scientists, but rather by artists.[4] Social scientists spend little time considering methodological practices outside of our own disciplines, whereas artists who make use of everyday objects in interdisciplinary ways to explain particular socio-historical moments often do so more effectively than sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists. Of course, not everyone has their blinders on; many prominent

social scientists have acknowledged the potential for hybridizing or even "hijacking" artistic mediums in the interest of social inquiry. For example: James Clifford describes one of his anthropological methods as *ethnographic surrealism*;[5] Guy Debord, who straddled both worlds of art and social theory, felt that practitioners on both sides of the fence should be able to make films, as well as compose text;[6] for Hayden White, history and literature share more than they do not;[7] and for Robert Nisbet, sociology is always already an art form.[8] Still, we stay on our department floors, write for our specialized journals, and attend our year-end meetings for our disciplinary associations. Yet, on the weekends we go to museums, we read novels, and we see movies, but rarely do we make the connection that these cultural forms are doing sociological work.

Rigorous discipline should not lead to disciplinary rigor mortis. As a gesture in a corrective direction, this chapter will focus on the Museum of Broken Relationships and the Museum of Innocence to show the potential for sociological insight and social change when an artistic imagination is tangled with a sociological one. In these extraordinary museums, knotted imaginations are on display, not through works of art, per se, but through the process of curation. The museums are extraordinary in that they are designed and curated by artists themselves, rather than by art world practitioners or museum professionals. I argue that in these cases the process of curation and the resulting displays are a form of critical theory in three dimensions. In addition, this chapter argues that *museums of experience* are not only the culmination of new museal practices, but that they create meaning and new social practices as well. The Museum of Broken Relationships and the Museum of Innocence inspire new ways of dealing with personal loss through the initiation of new social rituals. In time this could revolutionize the way we think about and deal with the end of romantic relationships, by placing personal troubles in context within a broader socio-political schema.

The Museum of Broken Relationships

> *If you enter broken relationship in any search engine and any world language, you will get a series of instant self-help instructions telling you how to get rid of the emotional burden the fastest and most efficient way, how to get rid of everything that mercilessly reminds you of the just broken relationship. In a nutshell, libraries and virtual space are flooded with prescriptions for efficient oblivion.*[9]
>
> —Olinka Vištica and Drazen Grubišić

Located in Zagreb, Croatia, the Museum of Broken Relationships displays artifacts from severed relationships of all sorts: platonic, romantic, familial, spiritual, and even citizenal (the break from one's country of origin). The

museum has traveled extensively, including stops in Central and Eastern Europe, Turkey, South Africa, France, Singapore, Manila, San Francisco, and even Bloomington, Indiana, collecting objects and stories at each location, making the project, not only "interactive," as Olinka Vištica and Drazen Grubišić refer to it, but also international. The objects on display range from the expected, such as letters and stuffed animals, to more unusual items: a prosthetic limb, pink fuzzy handcuffs, a silenced cell phone, and even an axe.[10] The museum is a modern *wonderkammer* where the objects are captivating because their aura exudes the sting associated with love lost. Taken out of context, the artifacts are both odd and ordinary. In context, working as images, they have something of Roland Barthes's *punctum* about them, where an association with the objects is created, which inspires a feeling that is entirely personal and individual to us. This individual feeling commingles with what Barthes calls the *studium*, which is the collective and more generalized association that we share with fellow visitors.[11] The objects in the Museum of Broken Relationships stab us through recognition: they reach out. They grab us. They register. The story of someone else's object connects with our own personal stories through recollection—the *punctum* and *studium* arrive with simultaneity—like a kiss and a hug delivered at the same time. In this way, the museum artifacts also smack of Marcel Proust's *mémoire involutaire* by conjuring our memories, our fears and desires without having to make any recollecting efforts, as is required with its opposite, *voluntary memory*.[12] Ergo, even though the objects are someone else's madeleine, the memory-inspiring tea biscuit from Proust's novel, we recall the taste.[13]

The idea for the museum was initially spurred as Vištica and Grubišić dealt with the wreckage of their own breakup after four years together. At first they were unsure of what to do with their "memory objects," the evocative material reminders of their expired romance. They had no trouble splitting up the tables and chairs, but struggled with what to do with the objects symbolic of their time together. They questioned what should be done, for example, with the plush wind-up bunny that traveled with either Vištica or Grubišia when they were not traveling together. The answer was to make the bunny the first exhibit in the museum collection: its patient zero.[14]

Beyond displaying their own memorabilia, Vištica and Grubišia set out to create a space for "collective emotional heritage."[15] As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out in her discussion of the heritage industry, "Heritage not only gives buildings, precincts, and ways of life that are no longer viable for one reason or another a second life as exhibits themselves. It also produces something new."[16] In this case, produced from the rubble of failed relationships are new emotions in the here and now that can be shared collectively by the visitors to the museum, as well as by those who contribute to the exhibitions in situ or through the virtual museum collection online.[17] The Museum of Broken Relationships is not meant to serve as a mere curiosity, an emotional train wreck to gaze upon, or a standard by which to measure our own love lives. Rather, the intent is to point out the void in understanding of these difficult life moments and to create an

empowering social antidote to the feelings of failure, alienation, and shame people often experience after the termination of a relationship.

This effort takes on even more weight when considering that the first incarnation of the Museum of Broken Relationships, which took place in Zagreb in 2006, displayed objects from failed relationships of the breakout nations of the former Yugoslavia.[18] The artifacts and their accompanying narratives, penned against the backdrop of war and ethnic strife, illustrated the interconnectedness between personal stories of romantic wreckage and the larger socio-political milieu. In one of the more unusual examples from the Museum of Broken Relationships we find a prosthetic leg of a veteran of the Bosnian War. The accompanying text reads, "In a Zagreb hospital I met a beautiful, young and ambitious social worker from the Ministry of Defense. When she helped me to get certain materials, which I, as a war invalid needed for my leg prosthesis, love was born. The prosthesis endured longer than our love. It was made of sturdier material."[19] It is "through the power of difficulty, the power of loss" that the artists seek to bring change by facilitating a space for recognizing a common humanity.[20]

The Museum of Broken Relationships has tapped into something universal, which goes beyond its complicated geographical origins, with audiences around the world responding and contributing to its collection. Since 2007, the museum has been on the move stopping at various points around the globe. At each location, the artists have collected narratives and objects. As of October 5, 2010, the museum has been granted a permanent home in Zagreb, Croatia, and its first week it received over a thousand visitors. According to the artists, "visitors [to the museum] fall into three categories . . . people who are merely curious, people who are suffering themselves and seeking catharsis through a visit, and a mixture of the two. It is the latter who usually end up donating things."[21] The donated objects organized and displayed in the museum setting move private history, whether real or imagined, into public time. For example, when the museum traveled to Singapore, a donated teddy bear represented all that remained of a clandestine relationship between a Malay woman and a Chinese man. The cultural taboos and social pressures against such a union were too much for the individuals to handle. From France, a French ID card rested alongside the note "The only thing left of a great love was citizenship." In San Francisco, a wall clock whose face read "we broke up on Skype" bore witness to the fizzling of a long-distance relationship that no amount of advanced communication technology could save.[22] Through these examples we can clearly see how large-scale events and social organization can disrupt personal lives, preventing certain things from happening, while at the same time creating new connections and possibilities. And in at least one case, for old connections to be made anew—at an exhibition in 2007 in Split, Croatia, after seeing their former "romantic object," a book that held some secret significance—one couple decided to reunite.[23]

New Social Rituals

A popular critique of the museum as a social institution, perhaps most famously articulated by the Frankfurt School cultural theoretician Theodore Adorno, is that the museum is a space that neutralizes the aura of the objects it contains. The museum is seen here as a pythonic space that squeezes the life out of its contents through mediation, selection, and curation. Adorno writes,

> The German word, "*museal"* ["museum-like"], has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association.[24]

The Museum of Broken Relationships silences this critique of the museal space, making it not a death chamber, but a space for resurrection; a place not to celebrate or condemn, but to slough off the weight of the past. Not a place where "fatigue and barbarism converge," but rather a place for creative effervescence and social solidarity to emerge.[25] In this way, the museum can be seen as "a refuge for things and people."[26] Vištica suggests that the Museum of Broken Relationships creates new social rituals that "offer healing, understanding, and compassion," that can "cross cultures." She goes on to argue, "museum collections and art practices in general can help us practice our own rituals, not withstanding those that are socially acceptable."[27] In other words, through art practices we can challenge norms and push social boundaries.

Unlike the types of museums that Adorno criticizes, the Museum of Broken Relationships is an example of a new type of museum that involves its visitors in both the creation and the consumption of the space. This move toward a more inclusive and participatory type of museum started in the 1960s alongside a deeper interest inside academia and within society at large in stories from groups previously ignored or marginalized. New museums began to take interest in women, minorities, and the working class, as well as in the quotidian and ephemeral nature of everyday life.[28] In the wake of these changes the museum has become another form of mass culture, such as television and the Internet, as opposed to its former role as a "site of an elitist conservation, a bastion of tradition and high culture."[29] As a mass medium the museum attracts a wider variety of people from across the socio-economic spectrum. The Museum of Broken Relationships, an example of this trend, has sought the widest audience possible. As a traveling museum it has been established in malls and community centers as well as in libraries and art galleries.

To describe the Museum of Broken Relationships, the artists quote Roland Barthes from his *A Lover's Discourse*, a book intended to confront the very

solitary nature with which failed loves are experienced: "Every passion, ultimately, has its spectator . . . . [There is] no amorous oblation without a final theater."[30] The "final theater" that the artists create is intended to do more, however, than to initiate a spectacle of loss; the museum is intended to create a practiced space for collective remembrance and collective ritual, where visitors can share in what anthropologist Kathleen Stewart calls "ordinary affects." As Stewart explains, these emotions are

> public feelings [that] begin and end in broad circulation but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of. . . . Rooted not in fixed conditions of possibility but in the actual lines of potential that a *something* coming together calls to mind and sets in motion, they can be seen as both the pressure points of events or banalities suffered and the trajectories that forces might take it they were to go unchecked.[31]

These "ordinary affects" link museum visitors in a shared emotional response, what Stewart calls a "*something* coming together."[32] The Museum of Broken Relationships works, then, as an antidote for amnesiac numbness by preventing what Vištica and Grubišić call acts of "affective vandalism"[33]—the complete erasure of memories of our severed relationships.

The silencing of the past robs us of the *something,* a connection with others that could potentially lead to deeper understanding, a knowing that is both individual and collective. In this case, self-awareness is only the first step. As C. Wright Mills argues, psychology and psychoanalysis are inadequate methods for truly understanding one's place in the world; what is required is a broader scope, a sociological imagination.[34] As Mills takes the atomistic nature of the therapist's couch to task, Vištica and Grubišić attack the "destructive self-help genre" and lack of rituals for the brokenhearted.[35] They point out: "our societies oblige us with our marriages, funerals, and even graduation farewells, but deny us any formal recognition of the demise of a relationship, despite its strong emotional effect."[36] The artists work to counter this effect by creating a space for individuals to come together to share in the experience of painful pasts. In doing so they create a place for ritual performances of loss and the practice of "bodily social memory."[37]

In his influential *How Societies Remember,* Paul Connerton argues for more focus to be placed on performance and ritual when thinking about collective memory. He argues convincingly that social frameworks for remembrance are based on communal practices that involve objects experienced in space. Remembering happens when bodies come together and focus on material things, which trigger temporal and social frameworks. Connerton's focus on performance and material culture is particularly applicable to the kind of work that Vištica and Grubišić are doing in their Museum of Broken Relationships. In order to spur memory work they strive to curate theaters of loss, where visitors move around and engage with objects and stories. The Croatian artists go further, however, than Connerton, who still continues in the tradition of

Durkheimian sociology by concentrating on glorious pasts or "good memories"; Vištica and Grubišić take on "bad memories." They offer a challenge to existing frameworks of dealing with failed relationships and offer a creative social solution for dealing with the past.

The work of the Croatian artists brings to light a lacuna in sociological inquiry, where much of the study of symbolic objects, ritual behavior, and collective remembrance grows out of a conservative Durkheimian tradition. In the Museum of Broken Relationships, objects work as vehicles to inspire social connection—not in the totemic Durheimian sense, where they represent the collective as a whole,[38] but in a more Benjaminian or fragmentary way, where as shards or ruins they inspire pause and recognition.[39] Typically, the field of study has focused on the remembrance of heroic artifacts and glorious pasts, not failures, ruptures, or painful moments in history. The sociologists Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz have aptly defined this issue as "the problem of commemoration."[40] Yet, thinking about these moments of loss and pain, what could be termed "bad memories" is as important as all the world's vainglorious celebrations. These events, what Vištica and Grubišić call "small dramas" and what Mills would define as "troubles," shape our lives, as much as large-scale historical events do. They are sociologically significant, an example of meaningful sociological interaction in the Weberian sense. Yet, as the artists point out: "Severed relationships barely seem to exist"; they rest, "like archaeological remains buried deeply in the memory of the former protagonists."[41] Therefore, the project of Vištica and Grubišić can be seen as an archaeological dig, an attempt to bring the past to the surface and rest it alongside the here and now.

The artists' approach is further revolutionary in that it provokes communal feelings out of individual losses. As Mills reminds us, "the facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and the failure of individual men and women."[42] While the twentieth century brought an upsurge in memorial museums and monuments to the tragedies of the last hundred years, such as the atomic bombings of Japan, the Holocaust, and the genocide of Rwanda, just to name a few, there have not been museal attempts to connect individuals through the experience of unique personal tragedies. Whether this approach will become more widespread in the twenty-first century remains to be seen; however, it has introduced a new way of thinking about remembering communities and museum curation.

The Museum of Innocence

I, too, could have something worthy of proud display, and the notion set me free.

— Orhan Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence*

With the Museum of Innocence, the Nobel Prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk has entered a new phase as an artist; he has become a museum curator. The museum, which should be completed by the end of 2011, will be located in the Çukurcuma neighborhood in central Istanbul. Authors and museums have been linked historically, although usually through the creation of a museum dedicated to an author and his or her works after the author's death. Often these museums preserve the author's home or study and are showcases of the writer's workspace, library, and eccentricities: Hemingway's feline-laden home in Key West, Flannery O'Connor's rolling hills and roaming peafowl, and Marcel Proust's cork-lined walls and brass bed are but a few examples. The Museum of Innocence is unusual in that it marks the first time an author has created a museum as a joint project along with a manuscript.

Pamuk has insisted that the novel and museum project were not two distinct efforts, but rather conjoined twins conceived together. For example, Pamuk has explained that his novel can be seen as "The boy meets the girl," as well as "a discourse on museums and collecting."[43] Discourse is then pushed off the page from the text of the novel into the physical world. Before the story begins, directly after the table of contents, the reader is presented with a map of Istanbul where the location of the Museum of Innocence is clearly marked. With the price of the book the reader also gains access to the museum: a ticket for "single admission only" is printed in the last pages of the volume.[44] Although the ticket is singular, the gesture invites the reader to a public place, a social space where both readers and curiosity-seekers can come together.

In 1999, at the same time he was developing the novel, Pamuk purchased a ramshackle house in the center of Istanbul and began collecting objects to fill the space. The four-story building, which is slated to be the Museum of Innocence, will house the artifacts discussed in the novel, objects that at first blush simply tell the story of the awkward romantic relationship between the two main characters, Kemal and his distant cousin, Füsun. However, like the Museum of Broken Relationships, Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* is far more than a simple story about love gone awry. The novel works as an ethnographic account, utilizing Geertzian-thick description to illustrate the modern and modernizing Istanbul of the late twentieth century.[45] The museum then provides a space for this past to be experienced by communities of tourists, history buffs, admirers of material culture, Istanbulus, Pamuk readers, and museum enthusiasts.

Beginning in 1975 and spanning thirty years of brisk social transition, the novel and the museum focus on a young, wealthy Istanbulu and his circle of friends in the upper echelons of Turkish society life. As the action unfolds, we learn that the main character, Kemel, is engaged to a member of his own class, the charming Sorbonne-educated Sibel. Of course this story is too neat: Kemel soon falls for Füsun, a shop assistant, who is of lower-class standing, and predictably an impossible love triangle emerges. Yet, there is much more to the

novel than the story of forbidden love—including the tensions between the new Western practices that are en vogue in Istanbul and the more traditional Turkish ways of being in the world, as well as the frequent violent skirmishes taking place in the streets between Nationalists and Communists. These events should not be viewed as mere historical backdrop or scene setting; rather, these large-scale historical events should be seen as intrinsic to the characters' navigation of their world, shaping individual trajectories and opportunities as much as their interpersonal relationships.

Ethnography of Istanbul

In Orhan Pamuk's study there is a note, written in capital letters on a small yellow Post-it note: "never forget the objects as you write."[46] The objects in Pamuk's text are as fully developed as characters in the novel; in fact, in many instances they drive the story. As if following this mantra of "never forget," the novel begins with an epigram from the notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a mediation on the connection between objects and memory: "If a man could pass thro' Paradise in a Dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his Soul had really been there, and found that flower in his hand when he awoke—Aye? And what then?" Through the novel and the museum, Pamuk sets out to create a collection of these "flowers," or memory objects that will provide evidence of and access to the past. However, these reminders will resonate socially, not merely individually. The items on display (including a tricycle, an earring, false teeth, and a quince grinder, just to name a few) will work as memory triggers, simultaneous reminders of moments from the text and from Turkish history.

In all there will be eighty-three display cases to correspond to the eighty-three chapters of the novel. In this way, the two "museums" evolved dialectically: sometimes the objects inspired writing, whereas other times Pamuk would go in search of an artifact that surfaced through memory. Pamuk relayed his process thus:

> As I wrote this novel over the past 10 years, I encountered everyday objects that would make their way into the story. At other times, the story would demand an object to keep it moving, so I would bring one in. When I am stuck, I cast about looking for ideas from objects around me. My perceptions, or you can say my tentacles, are wide open to everything in shop windows, in friends' homes, in flea markets and antique shops and so on. This is how the Museum of Innocence came about.[47]

What is striking about Pamuk's museum is the play between fictional lives and reality. Yet, it does not matter that these items on display, which at one time belonged to "real" people, are now attributed to fictional characters. The objects are meant to work as symbols, or "holograms," in the term Vištica and Grubišić suggest, where the items "possess integrated fields . . . of memories and

emotions."[48] However, these objects are not hyperreal; they are not the "absolute fakes" that Umberto Eco discusses.[49] Pamuk's memory objects are not re-creations. They are collected and found objects laden with the weight of history; everyday material things that bear the scratch and dent of real lives lived.

The objects from the Museum of Innocence spur memories in the readers/visitors that can then lead to a connection between group members through the remembrance of a shared past. The objects work as memory conduits, providing a view into the past that illuminates political and class distinctions. For example, in the Museum of Innocence, the display of a quince grinder will illustrate the overlapping of the personal and socio-historical. As Pumuk explains,

> While I was writing the novel, I saw this quince grinder in a thrift shop near my office and had to buy it. I wanted to write about the strange legacy of the 1980 military coup in Turkey. There were curfews back then, and it was incredibly hard to move around the city without getting stopped. In one scene, my novel's hero, Kemal, is carrying this quince grinder as he is stopped at a checkpoint. Obviously this is a suspicious object. Why in the world is he carrying a quince grinder in the middle of the night just after a coup has taken place? Is he making jam?[50]

Verging on the theater of the absurd, this episode reminds us of two points: the protagonist's lovelorn kleptomania and the military coup of 1980. Thus, it illustrates how objects work as pathways to draw our memories to the surface in order to map our personal experiences on temporal graphs. Yet, the quince grinder is also a symbol of the traditional practice of jam-making and of traditional life in general, which is a product of the same ways of thinking that prevent Kemel and Füsan from being together.

The quince grinder is a vivid example of the kind of objects that adorn the Museum of Innocence—objects that conjure thoughts of the ends of things—lives, relationships, emotional connections, and social practices. They are ordinary objects that are found in everyday life, but which take on special resonance as conduits to loss. They are thrown out of what Susan Stewart would call "the temporality of everyday life," which is "marked by an irony which is its own creation, for this temporality is held to be ongoing and nonreversible and, at the same time, characterized by repetition and predictability."[51] As ruins, they have an air of mystery about them, a hint of danger. As fragments and bits of narrative, they are unsettling. As synecdoche, they can be called upon to imagine a fuller history. Although, because they are incomplete, they may also appear as a puzzle, spurring on memory work that may not have been attempted had the full story seemed obvious from the beginning. The memory work encouraged by the museal space demonstrates the political potential inherent in museums as social forms. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has argued, the museum "puts people and things into a relationship quite unlike anything encountered in

the world outside. The museum brings past, present, and future together in ways distinctly its own."[52] So, while the objects mark the demise of certain relationships and ways of life, the museum space jilts temporal linearity, allowing for new ideas and for new perspectives on the past, as well as contemporary times, and possible futures. In this way the museum is not simply an escape from the world; the museum is also involved in "worldmaking."[53]

If Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* can be read "as a sort of ethnography of France,"[54] as he suggests, then Orhan Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* can be read as an ethnography of Istanbul. Throughout the novel, Pamuk explores and articulates (although not explicitly referring to the theories) the sociological concepts that Bourdieu refers to as the "field" and "habitus," where "field" refers to the social space in which the actors move, and "habitus" points to the proclivities and sensibilities that make up social actions, including mannerisms, accents, and tastes.[55] The quintessential example from the novel is how the upper-class Sibel is able to discern a fake designer handbag almost immediately, which Füsun, who is lower-middle class, sells completely unaware to Kemel.[56] Like Bourdieu, Pamuk's efforts show how class, gender, and spatial politics shape even our most intimate relationships and tastes.

Pamuk's novel illuminates the social mores, values, and contradictions of class that the characters must struggle against as they live their lives in the last decades of the twentieth century in the city of Istanbul. The novel exposes the different registers in which the characters (and all of us) live simultaneously: the personal, the social, and the historical. As Mills stresses in *The Sociological Imagination,* we must understand all three levels if we are truly to make sense of our lives and our place in the world.[57] With the *Museum of Innocence* Pamuk blends keen sociological insight with artistic ability by highlighting how the social structure and social expectations of the time shape individual relationships and opportunities. It is not insignificant that the protagonist refers to himself as an anthropologist in the text.[58] Pamuk writes,

> Eventually I thought about how I might describe what Füsan meant to me to someone who knew nothing about Istanbul, Nişantaşı, or Cukurcuma. I was coming to see myself as someone who had traveled to distant countries and remained there for many years: say, an anthropologist who had fallen in love with a native girl while living among the indigenous folk of New Zealand, to study and catalog their habits and rituals, how they worked and relaxed, and had fun (and chatted away even while watching television, I must hasten to add). My observations and the love I had lived had become intertwined.[59]

Pamuk's working as a curator in parallel universes of text and architecture makes use of the methods of a social researcher—particularly rigorous ethnographic work. Pamuk's literary catalog is characterized by this method, whereby the author obsessively collects and categorizes social types and symbolic objects of his native Istanbul.[60]

Initially, Pamuk thought that he might write the novel in the form of an annotated museum catalog, as he aptly notes that through this type of text "we are actually reading a story, a novel."[61] Instead, the author does something much more powerful: he actually creates a museum catalog in the world as an accompaniment to his literary effort. Through curation, Pamuk is able to add another layer to his project, whereby objects are employed to promote social understanding. In Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence,* the main character begins to "dream of telling [his] story through objects,"[62] and ultimately concludes, "I, too, could have something worthy of proud display, and the notion set me free."[63] The moment of liberation for Kemel comes when he decides to display the artifacts from his relationship with Füsun, when the collection becomes public. As this example shows, the museum is not just a place, but also a social practice.[64]

The museum is then envisioned not as a monument of individual obsession, but as a social space where the curator "could tell [his] story through the things that Füsun had left behind, as a lesson to us all."[65] The same could be said of Pamuk, who attempts through these dual fields of museum and text to communicate the experience of a generation of Istanbulus, and more broadly the experience of obsessive love and loss. As Pamuk writes, "What Turks should be viewing in their own museums are not bad imitations of Western art but their own lives. Instead of displaying the Occidentalist fantasies of our rich, our museums should show us our own lives."[66] Pamuk's museum works to preserve and interrogate what is unique about Istanbul and to make this legible both locally and universally. Pamuk's Museum of Innocence will also work as a political vehicle, by exposing historical obstacles and challenging the privileged positions of elites, the government, and structures of power in general.

Conclusion: On Imaginations

> *Without any qualification and if necessary with belligerence I respect and believe in even the most supposedly "fantastic" works of the imagination.*
>
> —James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

In a meditation on the surrealist painter Chirico, Ivan Chtcheglov wrote, "the absence of the object becomes a presence one can feel."[67] Through the Museum of Broken Relationships and the Museum of Innocence, this thinking is flipped on its head, where the presence of the object becomes an absence one can feel. This feeling of absence carves out openings into the past and gives museums a political flavor, by showing how power exercised by governments and elites effect and constrain everyday life choices and opportunities. In contrast to many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century museums, the museums discussed in this chapter do not celebrate triumphant pasts or

interpellate subjects patriotically; they actually promote structures of feeling across class and global boundaries in order to make sense of our worlds and to challenge apparatuses of power.

In addition, through the Museum of Broken Relationships and the Museum of Innocence, Vištica, Grubišić, and Pamuk help to bring an understudied realm of social experience to light by skillfully blending the sociological imagination with an artistic one, whereby the artists explore and examine through curatorial practices a social solution when dealing with events of individual significance. The artists set out to create a public venue of creative rebirth that allows those injured by love to anonymously display objects and stories of loss in order to connect with others and promote understanding, inspiring social solidarity and a type of Bataillean *creative effervescence*, a *bund* community based on creativity, ritual, and sacrifice.[68]

The artists discussed in this chapter are engaged in what C. Wright Mills would call "intellectual craftsmanship." This concept has been further elucidated by the sociologist Todd Gitlan who has described Mills's concept of "craft" as

> work done with respect for materials, clarity about objective, and a sense of the high drama and stakes of intellectual life. Craft partook of rigor, but rigor could not guarantee craft. A master of craft required not only technical knowledge and logic but a general curiosity, a Renaissance range of skills, a grasp of history and culture.[69]

Mills advocated craft over methodology, which he felt had become fetishized to the point of stasis. He saw the social science of his day as being overly attached to quantitative methods and welded to strict patterns of social examination. This approach smothered creative and political possibilities when conducting social research and prevented new strategies of analysis. Craft, by contrast, allowed for more flexibility where novel approaches could emerge. If methodology was a straight razor, slicing through with predictable results, craft would be a Swiss Army knife, ready to employ a variety of tactics for whatever the situation might require.

At work in the Museum of Broken Relationships and the Museum of Innocence is a reorganization of museal practices, where the artist as captain takes the helm, becoming curator of memory and loss. As museums of social experience, they are open to the public and encouraging of visitors to both consume and shape the gallery space. These museums should ignite a curiosity in contemporary social science and inspire its practitioners to open up the Swiss Army knife of sociological possibilities. As C. Wright Mills has argued, the sociological imagination should not be the sole property of sociologists, but rather a "quality of mind" possessed by all, which enables the understanding of one's place in the world within and against the "larger historical scene."[70]

The artists mentioned above employ this special quality of mind toward enriching our understanding of our relationships, our times, our places, and ourselves. By employing creative methods in a display of "intellectual

craftsmanship," Pamuk, Vištica, and Grubišić illuminate a gap in sociological knowledge and bring it to the forefront, making it available to established mnemonic communities, while also encouraging the formation of new remembering groups across social and cultural lines. Through the display of memory objects and narratives of loss these museums tell the stories of what happens when new boundaries are drawn, be they political, geographical, or emotional. In the aftermath of these changes and in the space of the museums, a possibility is created for new social rituals to emerge and new connections to be made, which can lead to "worldmaking" and social catharsis. It would behoove those of us in the social sciences to pay attention to these types of displays and to think seriously about the kind of work that collections of this sort can do toward explaining and changing our social worlds.

Notes

1. Nate Hill, "Death Bear," http://natehillisnuts.com/3/death-bear/ (accessed October 10, 2010).
2. Hill, "Death Bear."
3. Hill, "Death Bear."
4. I use the term artists here to encompass a whole umbrella of practitioners from painters to photographers to writers and beyond.
5. James Clifford "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23 (October 1981): 539–64.
6. See for example: Guy Debord, "Methods of Detournement" and "Cinema and Revolution," in *Situationist International Anthology,* ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 8–13, 297–98.
7. See Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory* 23, no. 1 (February 1984): 1–33.
8. Robert Nisbet, *Sociology as an Art Form* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2004).
9. "About," the Museum of Broken Relationships website, http://www.brokenships.com/about.php (accessed August 8, 2010).
10. And much more! See: http://www.brokenships.com (accessed August 8, 2010).
11. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), 27.
12. See for example: Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* (New York: Penguin, 1984).
13. Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*.
14. Xing Zhao, "All the Broken Ships Growing Green," *Zing Magazine,* http://www.xintiandi.com/english/zing_online.asp?aid=164&page=3 (accessed September 11, 2010).
15. "About," the Museum of Broken Relationships website, http://www.brokenships.com/about.php (accessed August 8, 2010).
16. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 150.
17. "Virtual Collection," *The Museum of Broken Relationships*, http://new.brokenships.com/en/join/virtual_collection (accessed August 8, 2010).

18. Re-created as a Socialist state in 1945 at the close of World War II, the Yugoslav Federation disintegrated in the 1990s. Ethnic tensions escalated until war broke out in Croatia, followed by Bosnia, where the ethnic cleansing of Muslims was practiced. War was formally ended in 1995 with the Dayton Agreement. The former Yugoslavia has now separated into seven states: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo (contested), Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

19. The Museum of Broken Relationships website, http://www.brokenships.com (accessed August 8, 2010).

20. Olinka Vištica, "Ready to Change?" paper presented at "An Experimental Forum on Culture and Social Innovation in Europe and in the Med Area," Ljubljana, Slovenia, December 2, 2010, http://vimeo.com/18426199 (accessed 27 January 2011).

21. "Museum of Broken Relationships Returns Home," *Croatian Times,* October 5, 2010, http://www.croatiantimes.com/news/Panorama/2010-1005/14165/Museum_of_Broken_Relationships_returns_home (accessed January 27, 2011).

22. "Museum of Broken Relationships," *The Telegraph,* 2011

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/howaboutthat/4175856/Museum-of-Broken-Relationships.html?image=5 (accessed January 27, 2011).

23. The object was on display in Split, Croatia, in 2007. E-mail exchange with Drazen Grubišić, February 11, 2011.

24. Theodor Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," in *Prisms,* trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 175.

25. Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," 176.

26. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett,"The Museum—A Refuge for Utopian Thought," in German translation in *Die Unruhe der Kultur: Potentiale des Utopischen,* eds. Jörn Rüsen, Michael Fehr, and Amnelie Ramsbrock. (Berlin: Velbrück Wissenshaft, 2004).

27. Olinka Vištica, "Ready to Change?"

28. See for example: John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 1990), 94-123; Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press,1991), 91.

29. Andreas Huyssen, "Escape from Amnesia: The Museum as Mass Medium," in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 14.

30. "About," *The Museum of Broken Relationships*, http://new.brokenships.com /en/about (accessed August 8, 2010); Roland Barthes, *Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (New York: Hill & Wang,1978), 43.

31. Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 5.

32. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum—A Refuge for Utopian Thought."

33. "About," *The Museum of Broken Relationships*, http://www.brokenships.com /about.php (accessed August 8, 2010).

34. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 12–13.

35. "About," the Museum of Broken Relationships website, http://www.brokenships.com/about.php (accessed August 8, 2010).

36. "About," the Museum of Broken Relationships website, http://www.brokenships.com/about.php (accessed August 8, 2010).

37. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge Press, 1989).

38. See Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

39. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

40. Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *The American Journal of Sociology* 97, no. 2 (September 1991): 376.

41. "About," the Museum of Broken Relationships website, http://www.brokenships.com/about.php (accessed August 8, 2010).

42. C. Wright Mills, *Sociological Imagination,* 3.

43. Corydon Ireland, "Museum of Innocence," *Harvard Gazette,* October, 15 2009, http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/10/museum-of-innocence/ (accessed October 21, 2010).

44. Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence,* 520.

45. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 3-30.

46. Negar Azimi, "The Objects of the Exercise," *New York Times Magazine,* October 29, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/01/magazine/01Pamuk-t.html?_r=2 (accessed October 10, 2010).

47. Azimi, "Objects of the Exercise."

48. "About," the Museum of Broken Relationships website, http://www.brokenships.com/about.php (accessed August 8, 2010).

49. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harvest Books, 1986).

50. Pamuk, qtd. in Azimi, "Objects of the Exercise."

51. Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 14.

52. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum."

53. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum."

54. Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), xi.

55. On habitus and field, see Pierre Bourdieu, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field," in *Comparative Social Research* 13 (1991): 1–44. On taste and taste making, see Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.*

56. Pamuk, *Museum of Innocence,* 13.

57. Mills, *Sociological Imagination,* 3–24.

58. Pamuk, *Museum of Innocence,* 496.

59. Pamuk, *Museum of Innocence,* 496.

60. This technique is employed most notably in Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories of the City,* trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Vintage, 2004).

61. Orhan Pamuk, quoted during the panel discussion "With the Museum in Mind," a panel discussion at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, October 14, 2009, http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/10/museum-of-innocence/ (accessed October 15, 2010). Leanne Shapton employs a similar novel-writing strategy in *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009).

62. Pamuk, *Museum of Innocence*, 496.

63. Pamuk, *Museum of Innocence*, 496.

64. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum."

65. Pamuk, *Museum of Innocence,* 495.

66. Pamuk, *Museum of Innocence,* 524-25.

67. Ivan Chtcheglov, "Formulary for a New Urbanism," *Situationist International Anthology,* ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (San Francisco, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 1–5.

68. See for example: Georges Bataille, "The Moral Meaning of Sociology," in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 103–12.

69. Mills, *Sociological Imagination,* 232.

70. Mills, *Sociological Imagination,* 4-5.

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