WHY DO WE TELL STORIES?
PERSONAL NOTES ON VISUAL STORYTELLING IN PHOTOGRAPHY
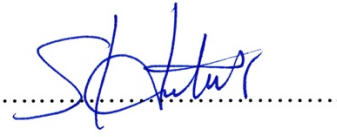
by
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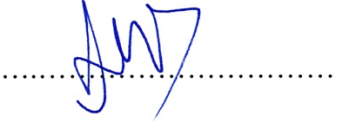
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WHY DO WE TELL STORIES?
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ABSTRACT

WHY DO WE TELL STORIES?
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ONUR ÖZEN

VISUAL ARTS AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN M.A. THESIS,
JULY 2019

Thesis Supervisor: Assist Prof. Hüseyin Selçuk Artut

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between visual storytelling and photography practice over the history, reasons and different approaches of storytelling. Besides, it aims to evaluate the role and effects of visual storytelling on my photography practice with examples from the history of photography and visual arts. During this evaluation, this study questions the reasons for choosing photography as a means of storytelling and explains the development along with the production process of my photographic series titled "Ida: The Story of a Mountain". This photographic study conducted through practicing a personal narrative approach, aims to experience that geography by means of photography in the context of the relationship between human and nature in the region of Mount Ida. This study, which spans three years in total and is still ongoing, does not aim to make determinations on the economic, political and sociological conditions of this geography. It examines the relationship I have established as a photographer in the context of the relationship between the guest and the host.

ÖZET

NEDEN HİKAYE ANLATIRIZ?
FOTOĞRAFTA GÖRSEL HİKAYE ANLATIMI ÜZERİNE KİŞİSEL NOTLAR

ONUR ÖZEN

GÖRSEL SANATLAR VE GÖRSEL İLETİŞİM TASARIMI YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, TEMMUZ 2019

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Hüseyin Selçuk Artut

Anahtar Kelimeler: fotoğraf, belgesel fotoğraf, hikaye anlatımı, görsel hikaye anlatımı, kişisel anlatı

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı hikaye anlatımının tarihi ve nedenleri üzerinden görsel hikaye anlatımı ve fotoğraf pratiği ilişkisini araştırmaktır. Görsel hikaye anlatımının, çalışmalarım üzerindeki rolü ve etkilerini fotoğraf ve görsel sanatlar tarihinden örnekler ve çeşitli yaklaşımlar ile değerlendirmenin yanı sıra, hikaye anlatım aracı olarak fotoğrafı seçme nedenlerimi sorgulamakta ve üzerinde çalıştığım "İda: Bir Dağın Hikayesi" adlı fotoğraf çalışmasının gelişim ve üretim sürecini anlatmaktır. Kişisel bir anlatım dili kullanılarak oluşturulması amaçlanan bu fotoğraf çalışması, Kaz Dağı bölgesindeki insan ve doğa ilişkisi bağlamında bu coğrafyayı fotoğraf aracılığıyla deneyimlemeyi ve bunun sonucunda oluşan izlenimleri aktarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Toplamda üç yıla yayılan ve halen devam etmekte olan bu çalışma, bu coğrafyanın içinde bulunduğu ekonomik, siyasi ve sosyolojik durumlar üzerine tespitler yapma amacı gütmemekte, misafir ve evsahibi ilişkisi bağlamında bir fotoğrafçı olarak oradaki yaşamla kurduğum ilişkiyi irdelemektedir.

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From the beginning of communication, using hand gestures to the present day, human societies built their heritages over stories which formed and transformed in various courses. Despite that storytelling is today associated with narratives in forms such as fairy tales, spoken words, literature, visual communication and arts, the history of storytelling dates back to the first communication attempts of humanity along with changes in the methods of narratives.

In his publication titled *"The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre"*, Jack Zipes explains that we have been telling stories since we had the ability to speak, and even before that by shapes of sign language (Van Pelt 2018) Despite the fact that we do not have any records of those ancient forms of stories, we have uncovered visual depictions of stories from the ancient era.

Since its exploration by a group of children in 1940, the site of Lascaux Caves contains the earliest proven form of storytelling (Groeneveld 2016) Cave paintings that can be seen in Lascaux as well as Chauvet in southern France, reveal forms of storytelling 30.000 years in advance. Those cave paintings illustrate some series of events and dramatic scenes in a very plain method. They depict different kinds of animals such as bison and deer, and reflect themes of survival like portrayals of hunting scenes. Daniel Kruger from the University of Michigan (Robson 2018) says*: "If you look across the cave, there will be a swathe of different images and there often seems to be a narration relating to a hunting expedition,"*. These cave paintings show not only the earliest forms of storytelling but also the first evidence of visual communication.

Figure 1.1. Lascaux Cave. Southwestern France.

Storytelling arose from visual communication as cave paintings then moved to the oral traditions built upon culture which can be traced back to various dates in history. There were songs, chants, myths and epic poems to tell stories inherited from the older generations. One of the earliest forms of oral tradition are fairy tales, a form of storytelling which survived for generations (Mendoza 2015) They were based on oral traditions and were never given titles, according to Jack Zipes:

> "Fairy tales were not created or intended for children. We cannot explain why the origins of the fairy tale are so inexplicable and elusive. But we can elucidate why they continue to be irresistible and breathe mimetically through us, offering hope that we can change ourselves while changing the world." (Zipes 2013, 20)

Traditional storytelling by word of mouth is still observed in our lives on occasions we socialize. It is one of the most significant and common forms of storytelling by its strong relation to the basis of communication. One of the most remembered and influential examples which can show the power of oral tradition is from between 7th and 6th century BC: a slave and also a storyteller named Aesop from ancient Greece, whose stories are still valid. Despite not having been put into writing in the times they were conceived, his fables have survived for hundreds of years. Until the transcription of those stories, his

fables were remembered, retold and transferred through generations (Mendoza 2015). After oral traditions shifted to the written symbols, the early written stories were copied out on stone, clay or paper. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and Homer's *Iliad* are the first recorded stories in history. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, i.e., the first printed story, was carved on 56 clay tablets and tells the story of the Uruk King Gılgamesh's quest for immortality, expanding from Mesopotamia to Europe and Asia. At the same time, the oldest surviving Greek epic poem *Iliad* covers a period of 51 days from the Trojan War. (Cannatella 2006)

Storytelling has taken on many different forms and methods throughout history. Passing down from generation to generation; myths, legends, fairy tales, fables, epic poems reflect the details of many cultures, define our humanity and link us to each other. We are probably the only animals that tell stories. But out of them all, why is it us who tell stories? We can try to answer this question with the help of psychology. Michael Murray (2003, 95) from Keele University writes as follows:

> "Narrative psychology is concerned with the structure, content and the function of the stories that we tell each other and ourselves in social interaction. It accepts that we live in a storied world and that we interpret the actions of other and ourselves through the stories we exchange"

Figure 1.2. Tablet V of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. 2100 BC, Mesopotamia. British Museum.

In his book *Narrative Psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* published in 1986, *Theodore* R. Sarbin introduced the term narrative psychology (Murray 2003, 97) He claimed that stories are the best way to understand the human conduct:

> "When we are concerned with understanding and communicating about action, we organize out observations according to narrative plots. Whether the target of our interest is random movement or geometric figures, the adventures of a person, the history of a social group or the evolution of the humankind, our understanding appears to be dependent upon our ability to construct a narrative and to tell a story."

As can be derived from the quote above, stories are about connection and association. They connect us to others through emotions. We share happiness, sadness, joys, fears and ideas into common ground. They help us to search and find meaning and purpose, to think through our experiences. They provide us with the opportunity to understand ourselves. They are basically how we think (Rutledge 2011). We see them as scripts, schemas, patterns and metaphors. Consciously or unconsciously, they are the first steps at the back of our minds by which we rationalize our decisions. Pamela Rutledge (2011) says:

> "To the human brain, imagined experiences are processed the same as real experiences. Stories are the pathway to engaging our right brain and triggering our imagination. By engaging our imagination, we become participants in the narrative"

It is a fact that when we receive information from a source or when we listen to a presentation even though it is not remotely interesting for us, certain parts of our brains become active. These areas in our brains are called Broca's and Wernicke's, which are the language processing parts in the brain. However, a story does not only activate the language processing areas in the brain but also other parts that we need to process and practice the events of the story (Widrich 2012). A story can require the entirety of your brain to work. It synchronizes brains by establishing a link between the storyteller and the listener (Gowin 2011).

It is obvious that we can trigger our brains better when we are listening to a story, and the reason behind that is the way we think. We create short stories every day in our minds for almost every activity we engage in. Our brains are full of stories and decisions. That is why when we hear a story our brains automatically relate that story to our existing

experiences. Considering that, this fact shows us the power the metaphors have on us. When the brain is busy trying to find similar experiences, a part called insula is activated and it relates those experiences to different emotions.

We all know that storytelling connects us to each other and provides a group association along with diverse roles of individuals under the umbrella of this group. Although the methods and contents are variable, the urge to tell stories and the joy of listening to them have never changed. Jonathan Gottschall (Popova 2019) says:

> "Human minds yield helplessly to the suction of story. No matter how hard we concentrate, no matter how deep we dig in our heels, we just can't resist the gravity of alternate worlds."

Noted should be that, it is also necessary to focus on the historical development of visual storytelling in the footsteps of visual expression, which continues to create the greatest effects on the masses throughout history and which has undeniable effects on the establishment and development of societies. From cave paintings to contemporary media tools, the experiences acquired in this process, have the greatest share in the formation of the cultures of societies through visual communication.

2. HANDS ON THE WALL

From the paintings on the rocks and cave walls, to the countless images surrounding our lives today, visual communication has evolved in different approaches and methods throughout the history. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the proven history of the visual communication starts with cave paintings and rock art mostly in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas. The oldest and most well-known of them are Lascaux, Altamira, Cueva de las Manos, Magura, Chauvet and Serra da Capivara (Hirst 2019)

Figure 2.1. Cueva de las Manos, "Cave of Hands". Santa Cruz, Argentina

The exact purpose of these cave paintings remains unknown. We have to bear in mind that the intentions behind these depictions of animals, hands and human figures may not solely be to communicate; they may also be part of a ritual or a shamanistic religious ceremony. David Lewiss-Williams (2012, 243)

Around 10000 BC after moving from painting to carving and incising, the universal language of visual communication was shaped in rock art as petroglyphs. They are thought to be a representation of a universal symbolic language and a pre-writing system to generate their messages before the emergence of pictographs and ideograms.

Figure 2.2. Luca Galuzzi. Rock carving known as "Meercatze". *April 7, 2007. Libya*

The methods of these systems were usually determined by the variety of rocks and availability of the paint and the tools. They were used by people for thousands of years and the oldest examples of them are usually found in caves and rock shelters where they were protected from the environmental effects. Certainly, the ones carved into rock remained steadier through time than the ones made by scraping away the surface of the rock, but we are still not able to date them precisely (King 2019)

After these various and obscure forms of communication that remain mysterious today, Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs emerged in history before the establishment/discovery of the modern writing system known as the alphabet. Cuneiform is a writing system based on images and considered to be the oldest in history. As a forerunner of hieroglyphs, cuneiform was a script applied to clay tablets making use 600 to 1000 characters, and it was employed by many great Mesopotamian civilizations until its abandonment to alphabetic script. There are many recorded languages that employed cuneiform, yet the most common ones were Sumerian and Akkadian.

In 1872, George Smith translated *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and this translation significantly affected our understanding of history. Joshua J. Mark (2018) says: "This translation allowed other cuneiform tablets to be interpreted which overturned the traditional understanding of the biblical version of history and made room for scholarly, objective explorations of history to move forward."

Figure 2.3. Jon Bodsworth. *Hieroglyphs from the tomb of Seti 1*. 2007

Evolved from Sumerian cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs are a writing system based on images and a combination of logograms and phonemes. They are known as the language of the gods in ancient Egypt and believed to have been a gift from Thoth, the god of knowledge and wisdom. They were used by scribes of pharaohs to record the attainments of their powerful reigns and had a role for sacred and decorative purposes. The ones found on monuments, temple walls and graves were believed to be a means of communication with the gods by the ancient Egyptians, and parts from the Book of the Dead were inscribed on sarcophagi and were believed to lead them in the afterlife. However, Hieroglyphs were not used by everyone in ancient Egypt. There was only one group called scribes who had the ability to write and read them after they had attended a special school for years. Around 2700 BC, another form of writing more similar to the alphabetic letters

called hieratic was introduced and it was then extensively used as a more practical form of communication until the appearance of the Demotic script in the 7th century BC.

 As an evolved form of the hieratic, Demotic script was simpler and a more understandable form of writing, which was in use as the everyday life script during the Greco-Roman period in Egypt (Hill 2015)

Figure 2.4. The Rosetta Stone. 196 BC. British Museum, London

Having taken three different shapes over the years, Egyptian hieroglyphs were abandoned after the imperium of the Roman Empire in the Egyptian nation. Converted to Christianity, Egypt adopted the Greek alphabet, and hieroglyphs remained undecipherable for 1400 years until Jean-Francois Champollion deciphered the Rosetta Stone in 1822 (Hill 2015) The stone is a document written in Egyptian and Greek, using three scripts; hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek. It was carved in 196 BC and found by French officer Pierre Francois Bouchard in a small village called Rosetta (Rashid) during the Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1799. The text on the stone was written by priests of ancient Egypt to honor the pharaoh and covers a praise of the achievements and success of his reign (Cartwright 2014) After its discovery, The Rosetta Stone played a key role in solving the secrets of Egyptian hieroglyphs and took its place in the history as one of the most significant archeological heritages.

Developed from Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs, the modern alphabet was formed by interactions of various scripts and ancient alphabets. As a foreground of the Greek and the Aramaic, The Phoenician alphabet is considered as the earliest significant form of alphabetic system. During the 5th century BC, the Greek alphabet, evolving out of the Phoenician, was adopted by Latins in the Italian peninsula. Because of the interrelations among the Mediterranean communities, the Greek Alphabet was transformed into the Latin Alphabet and spread around the world after the Roman Empire conquered a large part of Europe (Knott 2014)

After the development and widespread use of the alphabet, the invention of paper in China was a crucial improvement in the history of communication. Considering the difficulty and limitations of rock, leather, wood and clay as a surface for writing, paper was a greatly effective invention and a new level of improvement for the global culture. However, it took many years for paper to reach the Western world from China. At that time, unique, hand-crafted objects called Illuminated manuscripts emerged in Western Europe and generally addressed Christian practice and scripture as their subject matter. Utilization of gold and silver to illuminate the text and illustrations as decoration components was an important reason for them to be called illuminated.

Figure 2.5. Nizami Ganjavi. *Khamsah-i Nizami, Nizami's Khamsah (Five Poems),* 1539-1543. Tabriz, Iran. British Library.

Although, this technique was also seen in Muslim communities before that time, the term "Illuminated Manuscript" is in use to refer only to the works produced on Christian themes in Europe (Mark 2018, 1) After the introduction of paper to Arabic geography by Chinese merchants in the 7th century CE, Muslim writers produced authentic works of literature, poetry and science. They decorated their books with illustrations, detailed borders and various ornaments while cities such as Baghdad and Damascus were major centers for book production and paper (Mark 2018, 4)

As the beginning of modern storytelling, along with developments in various forms and many styles produced over the years, Illuminated manuscripts began to disappear in the history after Johannes Gutenberg's revolutionary invention in 1440. However, they remained popular among the wealthy class and continued to be produced and commissioned until the seventeenth century. Not long after the invention of the printing press, the printed books became popular, but they were despised since they were considered to have been cheap and fake imitations of the Illuminated manuscripts by those who can afford the unique hand-crafted books. In her book, *Illuminated Manuscripts: The Book Before Gutenberg,* Giulia Bologna writes *"Vespasiano de Bisticci claims that the great bibliophile Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, would have felt shame to have had a printed book in his library."* (Mark 2018)

Figure 2.6. H. B. Hall. *Benjamin Franklin's Printing Press.* Engraving Print, 1879.
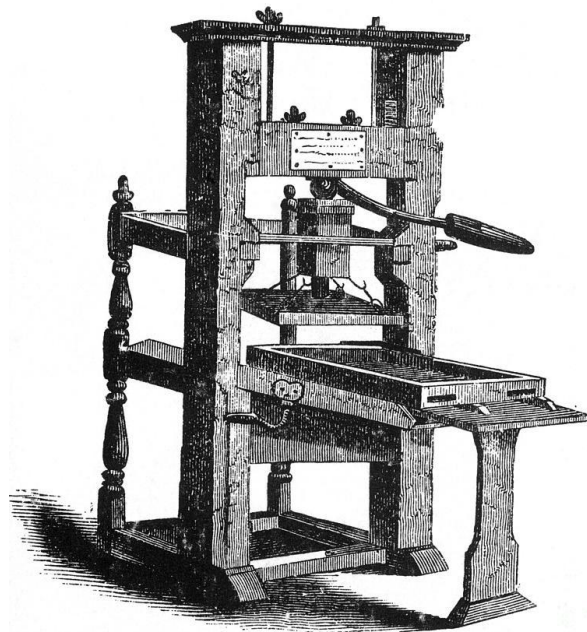
Long before Gutenberg's invention, a printing technique called block printing, in which texts and illustrations were carved on wooden blocks, was invented in China around 600 CE. According to the historical evidence, a mobile version of these blocks, though made of metal, was developed in Korea in the late fourteenth century. Elizabeth Palermo (2014) states:

> "But what really set Gutenberg apart from his predecessors in Asia was his development of a press that mechanized the transfer of ink from movable type to paper…For the first time in history, books could be mass-produced — and at a fraction of the cost of conventional printing methods."

Besides all this, the invention of the printing press was also one of the most important factors leading to the Renaissance movement. After its invention, millions of books were printed over the next 45 years. It opened new doors to a new era and changed the course of civilization. Books became affordable and more people learned to read and owned books. The easy distribution of knowledge and diffusion of new ideas by printed books caused the generation of brand-new thoughts and approaches in Europe (Rees 2006)

Figure 2.7. Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino. *The School of Athens.* Fresco. 1509-1511, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City

In the 14th century, along with the rise of the Renaissance, Europe entered a period in which many cultural, intellectual and social developments occurred. Throughout 300 years, these deeply-rooted developments led to the emergence of effective forms and expressions that had never been seen before in the field of visual communication and arts. In addition to the works where the academic, scientific and technical developments were transmitted in a visual manner, constantly changing and evolving forms of artistic expression styles evolved both formally and contextually with the influence of the artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Sondro Botticelli, Raffaello Sanzio and many more.

Figure 2.8. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce. *View from the Window at Le Gras* (manually enhanced version). Heliography. 1826-1827, Saint-Loup-de-Varennes, France

The artistic forms of expression and movements that emerged throughout the Renaissance apart from painting and architecture such as calligraphy, technical drawing, scientific illustrations and different techniques of printing, changed and continued to develop and diversify during the Industrial Revolution. Although these two periods differ in terms of thought and development, improvements were more focused on the efficiency of manufacture and economics during the Industrial Revolution. One of the most significant inventions of this period came out from France in 1826 by physicist Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, who was also interested in lithography.

After numerous experiments, with a process called heliography, he managed to project the light on a plate coated light sensitive chemicals by an early device, a forerunner of the camera called "camera obscura" which is invented by Ibni al-Haytam in the 11th century. After philosophers like Mozi, Al-Kindi and Aristotle studied the nature and effects of light, Ibn al-Haytam made the first description on the subject and changed the course of science by inventing the camera obscura as a result of his experiments (Who Was Ibn Al-Haytham 2019). Joseph Niépce produced world's first permanent photographic image as a result of eight-hours exposure. The image named *"View from the Window at Le Gras"* was a view of Niépce's courtyard of his estate and the first photograph in history of nature. It remained as the first product of one of the most significant inventions and is credited among the most important photographs of history.

Figure 2.9. Julia Margaret Cameron. *Annie.* Albumen silver print. January 1864, Isle of Wight, England[1]

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[1] Throughout her 11-year short career, Cameron was subjected to criticism in terms of her techniques. But after all, she recognized as one of the pioneers of portrait photography with her intimate and dreamlike photographs. "She inscribed the words: "My very first success in Photography." on the paper on which this print is mounted" (Annie 2019)

Throughout the nineteenth Century, Niépce's revolutionary invention followed by new techniques and inventions such as Daguerreotype, Calotype, Collodion process, silver bromide process and photographic film by Louis Daugerre, Henry Talbot, Scott Archer, Richard Maddox and George Eastman (Bellis 2018) By the end of the nineteenth century, these developments, which were the first steps of a new visual culture alongside with various artistic expressions, continued at an unpredictable pace during the twentieth century.

Figure 2.10. Louis Daguerre. *Boulevard du Temple.* Daguerreotype. 1838, Paris, France[2]

After all these crucial developments directly affecting the lifestyle of societies in various fields, the methods of visual storytelling diversified with the influence of other significant technical and technological inventions such as motion pictures, the television, the computer and the internet between the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century. While it is not possible to make definitive inferences on the future of visual storytelling in these days when we are just taking our first steps towards virtual reality and artificial intelligence, it is not difficult to predict that these rapid developments will also open the doors to new ways of expression and photography will continue to be the closest witness to these exciting developments.

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[2] *Boulevard du Temple* includes the earliest image of a person in a photograph. Due to long exposure time, the only steady person on the frame was a man who stood still in front of a shoeshine man in a busy street. This is the most distinguished example of the technique, Daugerrotype introduced by Louis Daguerre in 1839 (Photos That Change 2014).

3. SHOW ME A PHOTOGRAPH

"But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence... illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness."

Ludwig Feuerbach, 1841

Recently photography is one of the first forms of storytelling that comes to mind among the other methods in visual communication. In that case, can photography really be a storytelling method or is it just another buzzword in relationship with the term? Certainly, there are many approaches to the narrative features of photography besides technical remarks not related with storytelling. Therefore, I intend to examine the relationship between photography and storytelling while I restrain my research in three types of photography such as single image, series and sequencing images. Although photography is basically considered as documentary and art photography, it is evaluated within a framework that has no definite boundaries. Apart from many different approaches that are vague in terms of the beginnings and endings of their boundaries, the examples I attempt to examine here generally fall within the scope of documentary photography and different approaches to it.

With a great acceleration from its invention up to the present day, photography occupies more space in our lives than it has ever done before. It has been used in many different fields such as art, science, journalism and propaganda all through its rather short history. Throughout this process, the ways of expression also in photojournalism diversified after World War II and reached the areas where the terms documentary and fiction are intertwined and the term post-truth is studied today (Word of the Year 2016 2019)

Since the use of photography in mass media has become widespread and the camera has turned into the everyday object, the history is remembered by photographs that will never be forgotten by the masses. Susan Sontag explains the powerful influence and the role of photography in our lives as follows (2005 1):

> "The inventory started in 1839 and since then just about everything has been photographed, or so it seems…In teaching us a new visual code, photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe. They are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing. Finally, the most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads—as an anthology of images."

Figure 3.1. Malcolm Browne. *The Burning Monk.* June 11, 1963. Saigon, Vietnam

One of the most iconic and shocking photographs remembered by the masses belongs to Malcom Browne. Browne's 1963 dated shot shows a Vietnamese Monk: Thích Quảng Đức's self-immolation to protest the persecution of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government. John F. Kennedy remarked on this photo as: *"No news picture in history has generated so much emotion around the world as that one."* (Smith 2010)

Throughout the short history of photography, these iconic shots were watched by millions of people who knew the available reality behind them and who did not. Even if they are part of a series, the impact of these photographs, most of which are single frames, on the masses is undeniable. But even if some of them are news stories supported by texts, each viewer has appropriated and remembered the photo they saw independently of the story behind it. What I mean by appropriation here should be considered within the scope of our urge to tell and consume stories.

At this point, the viewer who has no idea about the beforemath or the aftermath of the shot, creates a new story by linking the photograph he/she sees and remembers with his/her her own experiences and feelings. This story, regardless of the statement of the photographer, is related to the experiences in the mind of the viewer and belongs to the person. Although the consumer of the story triggers the same mental action in other forms of storytelling, visual narrative is more effective in keeping the attention of the audience. For this reason, visual narrative methods are also actively employed in advertising, marketing and media management. These expressive and informative visual expressions, which have strong emotional effects, can also be misleading and manipulative. Especially when it comes to storytelling, it is necessary to focus on the word, narrative. As Jerome Brunner noted on narrative diachronicity in his article, The Narrative Construction of Reality (Brunner 1991, 6):

> "A narrative is an account of events occurring over time. It is irreducibly durative. It may be characterizable in seemingly nontemporal terms (as a *tragedy* or a *farce*), but such terms only summarize what are quintessentially patterns of events occurring over time."

Moreover, Sontag wrote on the relationship between photography and narrative in her book (2005, 17-18). She says:

> "Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy…Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph...In contrast to the amorous relation, which is based on how something looks, understanding is based on how it functions. And functioning takes place in time, and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand."

Figure 3.2. Robert C Wiles. *Evelyn McHale after her suicide leap from the Empire State Building*. May 1, 1947. New York City

Based on the characteristics of the narrative, it appears that photography cannot tell a whole story due to its nature. As a reflection of a single moment in time, photography can never be sufficiently descriptive as a narrative. It cannot describe the entire period and affairs which a story provides. It is only a key for the association of ideas, an invitation for the viewer. Perhaps this is where the power of single images against the motion pictures comes from. For instance, a photograph of Robert C. Wiles' has always been mysterious and intriguing for me. Long before I knew this was a photograph taken after a young woman named Evelyn Francis McHale took her own life (Cosgrove 2014) and I learned the story behind it, the woman in the photograph had been the subject of many different stories for me. It wasn't just the graphical features of this photo that intrigued me, but the sense of curiosity and mixed feelings origins of which I could not recognize.

Before I mention photo series, I believe the example given by John S. Rose (2018) through a photograph of Gregory Crewdson although it is a fictional work, might be a prime example for my complicated feelings on Wiles' photo above. He says:

> "We are meant to fill in the blanks here…And this is the thing with storytelling versus photography—in stories, the author gives us the context and in photography the photographer lets you go discover it on your own, either through history or imagination."

Figure 3.3. Gregory Crewdson. *Untitled.* 2001. Guggenheim Museum

Limitations of setting a narrative are not only related to photography. These challenges are also valid for the other fields that construct their expressions through single images such as painting, sculpture or illustration. Even if we encounter works that are said to tell stories from these fields, it is still impossible for them to be considered as narratives without knowing the story behind them. At this point, the only form in which photography can approximate storytelling can be photography series. In the sense that narratives require a sequence of events, a narrative is created in photo series by bringing the frames together in various sequences just like in the cinema. It is also responsible of how the viewer perceives the story.

However, one should not forget that a story may consist of many narratives. This feature of stories can be seen in films and literature more clearly than it can in photography. Akira Kurosawa's infamous 1950 film *Rashomon*, in which he in a way discusses the nature of lies and truth, tells the story of a murder, where different unreliable narratives are intertwined, is one of the best examples to this. In the face of the inconsistent stories told throughout the film, the viewer cannot make a definite decision and is constantly left in suspicion in regards which story is true and which is false. After the impact of this movie, which had a very innovative and original approach in the period it was released, the situations in which contradictory interpretations of the same incident are equally relevant have come to be known as the Rashomon effect.

Figure 3.4. Still image showing the bandit during his interrogation from the movie *Rashomon.* Directed by Akira Kurosawa. 1950

Considering the Rashomon effect, the 2012 documentary film *The Imposter* will as well be a valid example. Apart from the description of inconsistent statements, the film also diversifies its narrative through editing, drawing the viewer to an insecure ground against the statements of the characters and the sequence of events. Although the interviews are filmed in conventional methods of documentary, Frédéric Bourdin, introduced by the film

as the villain from the beginning, is the only character who looks into our eyes with all his self-confidence, even though he is the main subject of a story we have trouble believing in. With the narrative of traditional documentary and fiction forms, the film confronts the viewer with questions arising from the blurry line between lies and truth.

Figure 3.5. Still image from the documentary movie *The Imposter.* Directed by Bart Layton. 2012

Just like film editing, which is one of the most crucial stages of movie narrative, setting up a narrative with a series of photographs begins with juxtaposing images in a certain order. This selection may strengthen expression in various forms but can also completely change the meaning of the story. Rather than exhibitions or visual presentations, photographs presented especially in book format cannot be considered outside of the editing progress. Photographer Lewis Bush (2019, 4) states:

> "Books force you to think about narrative constantly…Place two or more photographs together, one after another, as one invariably has to in a book, and it becomes impossible not to create some sort of narrative, whether it is the action narrative of something visibly changing, or the more symbolic narrative of what cinema theorists calls the Kuleshov Effect."

Discovered by Lev Kuleshov in 1918, Kuleshov Effect is a phenomenon that shows how the way a film is edited affects viewer. After several experiments on sequencing the shots in different orders, Kuleshov discovered that following shots have an emotional impact on the perception associated with the feeling of the scene. Although the shots of the actor are identical, his discovery shows how the meaning of the scene changes in the perception of the viewer with the effects of subsequent frames.

Figure 3.6. Kuleshov Effect. Stills from the short film by Lev Kuleshov. 1918
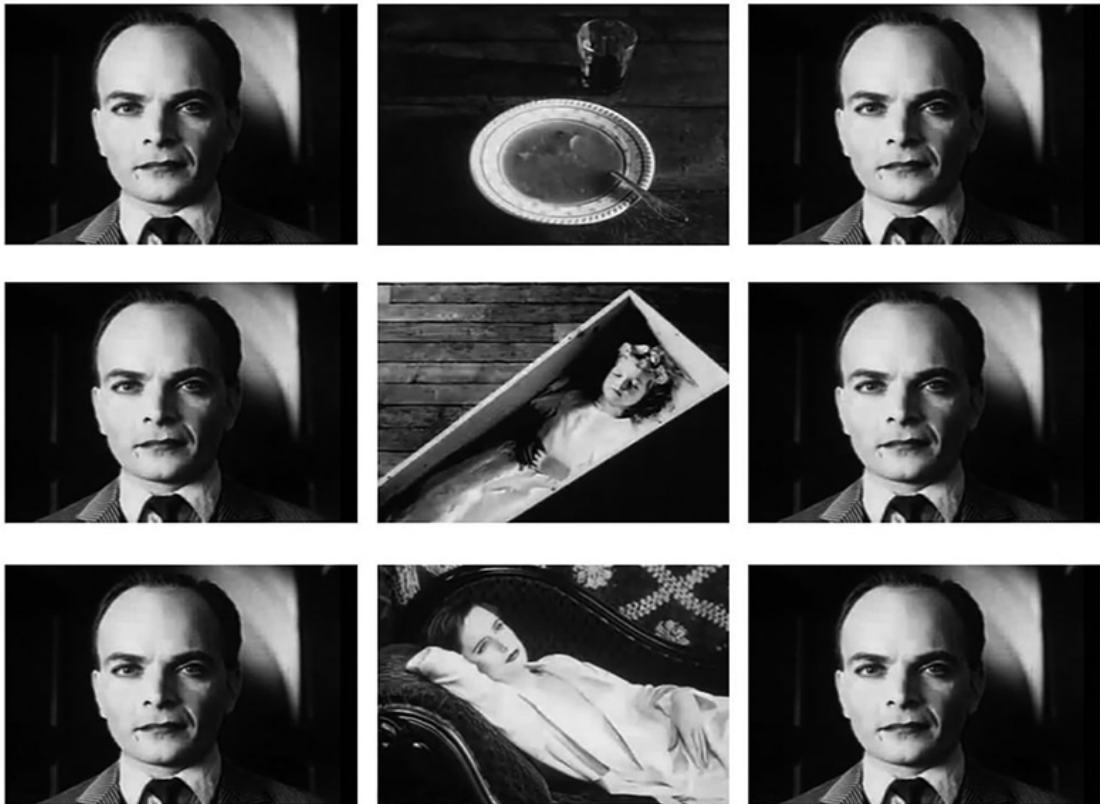
Considering the examples from Kuleshov and film editing, narrative forms in the books can basically be categorized as linear and experimental. Besides the open-ended nature of the experimental narratives, they can be diversified under the roof of these two formats such as the books with nonlinear narrative and the books with no constant narrative at all. As series within various narrative formats or as a single image, photography is one of the most extensive weapons to influence the emotions of the viewer by getting into various expressions. In this context, Alec Soth's thoughts on storytelling and photography will be appropriate. As a photographer who works on long-term projects and photobooks, he shares his thoughts on storytelling, through narrative and single images. In his blog, on Thomas Hoepker's controversial 9/11 photo, (Soth 2006) he says:

> "Photographs aren't good at telling stories. Stories require a beginning, middle and end. They require the progression of time. Photographs stop time. They are frozen. As viewers of the picture, we have no idea what those people on the waterfront are talking about… I have no idea what is going on in that picture. And I'm suspicious of anyone using it as proof of anything. You can't tell provide context in 1/500th of a second."

Figure 3.7. Thomas Hoepker/Magnum Photos. *Young people relax during their lunch break along the East River while a huge plume of smoke rises from Lower Manhattan after the attack on the World Trade Center.* Brooklyn, New York. September 11, 2001

In one of his conversations, he makes important inferences on narrative and points out to possible forms of expressions in photography series with his answer to the question, "Is that an important thing for the viewer to understand or is that elusiveness part of the work?". He says (A Conversation 2010):

> "I just think there's nothing more satisfying than the narrative thrust: beginning, middle, and end, what's gonna happen. The thing I'm always bumping up against is that photography doesn't function that way…So, it functions much more like poetry than it does like the novel. It's just these impressions and you leave it to the viewer to put together…"

Considering the relationship between photography and narrative, it appears that Chris Marker's 1962 short film *La Jetée* stands in an important place in the context of the photography, film editing and the book narrative intersections. This 28 minutes long black and white short film which was also published in book format as a ciné-roman, tells a story of a time travel experiment in post-nuclear war era and construct it's narrative almost completely from still photos.

Figure 3.8. Still image from the short film *La Jetée.* Directed by Chris Marker. 1962
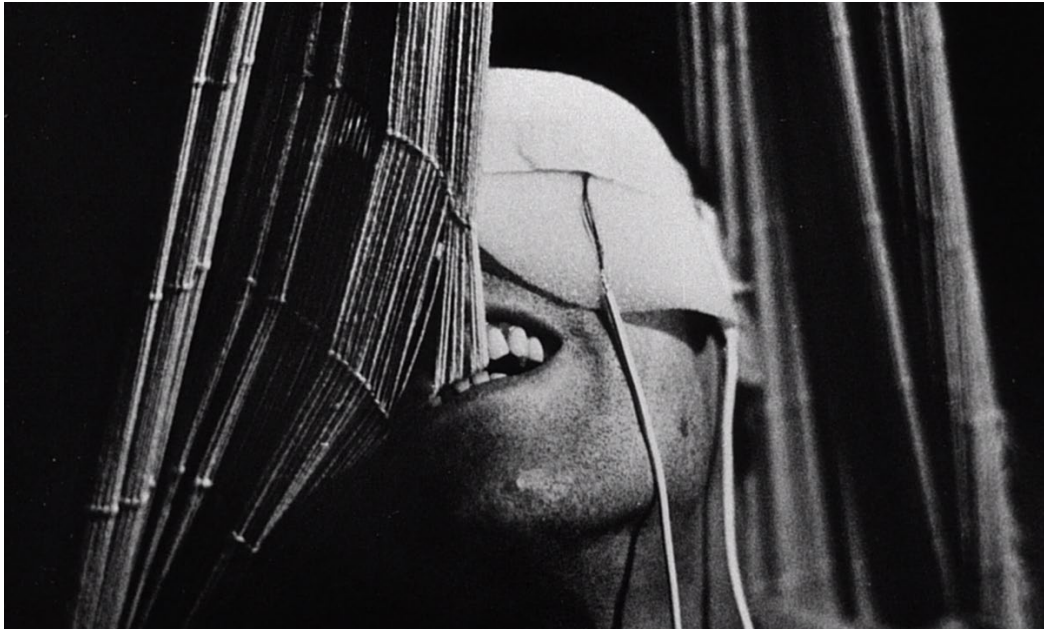
While exploring an unusual narrative with still images in film, it takes different approaches to narrative features of photography and turns into an experiment in which the audience is a part. Joanna Bicacro says *"It may be, originally, a single photographic shot, but its translation or conversion to cinema makes it an altogether different object."* (2015, 272-273)

Figure 3.9. Chris Marker. *La Jetée,* ciné-roman. Zone Books,1992
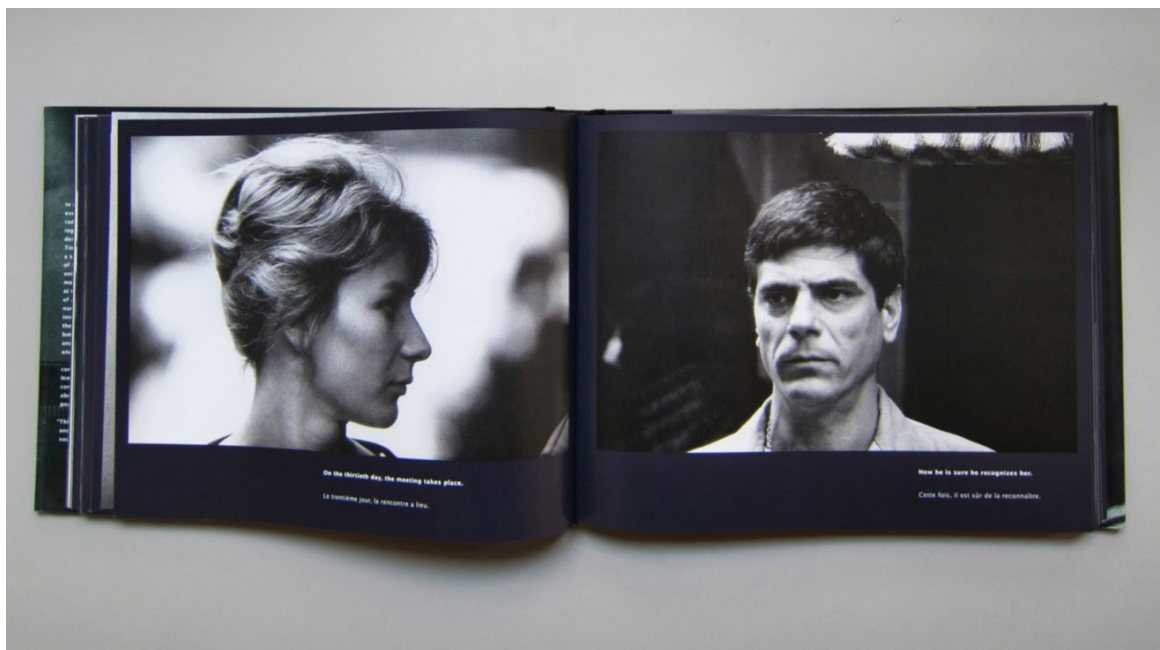
In the context of the relationship between photography and sequential narrative, Duane Michals' unique and poetic works, which have a very special place in the history of photography, traveled through the boundaries of the medium in terms of narrative and opened the door to new expressions. Staged scenes and juxtaposed images with texts on the margins formed the basis of his works. As a self-taught photographer, in the early days of his career, he became the target of criticism because of his unusual approach to photography. He opened the door for the others with his unique and boundary-breaking approach (Rouvalis 2014). Michals answers a question about criticism, trends of the medium and the development of his works as follows (Reznik 2014):

> "You could be Ansel Adams, you could be Robert Frank, you could be Cartier-Bresson…That was the definition of photography…I was the first person who, rather than photographing a corpse to capture death, rather than photographing in a funeral home or a cemetery—those are the facts—I want to know what happens when you die. I did *Death Comes to the Old Lady.* Critics didn't know what to write about it. It was conceived of as being flawed because there wasn't a decisive moment."

Figure 3.10. Duane Michals. *Chance Meeting.* Gelatin silver print. *1970.* Carnegie Museum of Art

Figure 3.11. Duane Michals. *Death Comes to the Old Lady.* Gelatin silver print. 1969.
The Parkinson Fund, Museum of Modern Art

Although a story can be conveyed with different narrations and mediums, it has always been associated with written material. These narratives, which are subject to the rules of literary genres today, constitute the first reflections of the word "story" in mind. Apart from these rules and different methods, photography is one of the most related fields of the term storytelling. Neither photography nor cinema as the art form closest to it, can reach the elaborateness, the power of description and the informative characteristic of the writing. Although some studies do not need a text, it would be wrong to ignore the relationship between photography and text. At this point, it is possible to see that some of the photographic works are understood with the text they are presented together and some of them are done in a way that is directly related to the text. In this context, I exclude different photographic works that do not contain or need text, and speculative ornate statements that are independent of the form and content of the work, trying to deepen the subject and make ambiguous statements.

While the text forms the basis of the narrative in certain approaches, it sometimes only exists as a fragment. At this point, Philip-Lorca diCorcia's "The Hustlers" and Jim Goldberg's "Rich and Poor" series can be important examples to show how short texts added to the photographs can strengthen the expression. These short texts, which are not explanatory footnotes, aim to strengthen the expression by becoming a direct part of these works.

Philip-Lorca diCorcia photographed sex workers, drug addicts and drifters in Los Angeles during the AIDS pandemic between the late 1980s and early 1990s. The works consists of cinematic portraits pointing to the intersection of documentary and fiction, which curator Peter Galassi describes as "operating in the space between postmodern fiction and documentary fact.", titled with subject's name, age, date of birth and the prize of their service (Bicker 2013).

On the other hand, Jim Goldberg pointed his camera to the social divide in United States of America between late 1970s and 1980s. He presented portraits of people from different social status, with striking handwritten texts from the subjects. This work, which is visually very similar to the works of Duane Michals, focuses on a sensitive subject in an effective manner with the use of text.

Figure 3.12. Philip-Lorca diCorcia. *Tim, 27 years old; Orange County, California; $30.* From the Series *Hustlers.* 1990

Figure 3.13. Jim Goldberg/Magnum Photos. *"This picture says that we are a very emotional & tight family, like the three Musketteers....Poverty sucks but it brings us closer together."* From the series *Rich and Poor.* San Francisco. 1979
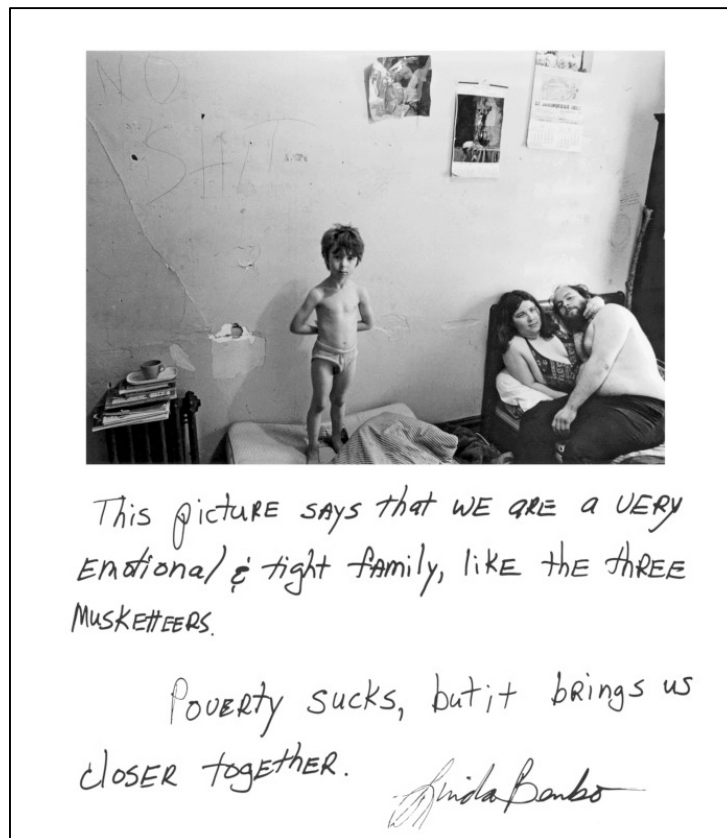
When it comes to using text in photography, it is clearly seen that the utilization of the text has a crucial role likewise on Duane Michals' narrative. At the intersection of literature and poetry, the expression and the meaning in his works were largely formed by this approach. As a result of this, he revealed the most striking examples where photography approached the narrative most in the storytelling axis. He states that *"If I took a picture of you…it would tell me nothing about you as a person. With somebody you know really well, it can be frustrating. Sixty per cent of my work is photography and the rest is writing."* (Bohnacker 2019):

Figure 3.14. Duane Michals. *This Photograph is My Proof*. Gelatin silver print with hand-applied text. 1967, Carnegie Museum of Art[3]

THIS PHOTOGRAPH IS MY PROOF

This photograph is my proof. There was that afternoon, when things were still good between us, and she embraced me, and we were so happy. It had happened. She did love me. Look, see for yourself!

On the other hand, Barbara Kruger used text directly as a means of visual expression by producing texts applied on photographs with screen printing and thus produced works within the framework of photography and graphic design. Coming from a background in design, in addition to photography, she also works in video, printing, and collage techniques while she deals with the topics such as gender politics, popular culture, and media. In her words: "I think that I'm trying to engage issues of power and sexuality and money and life and death and power. Power is the most free-flowing element in society, maybe next to money, but in fact they both motor each other." On her art practice at the intersection of images and words, she states (Napikoski 2017):

> " I always say that I'm an artist who works with pictures and words, so I think that the different aspects of my activity, whether it's writing criticism, or doing visual work that incorporates writing, or teaching, or curating, is all of a single cloth, and I don't make any separation in terms of those practices."

Figure 3.15. Barbara Kruger. *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground).* Photographic silkscreen on vinyl. 1989
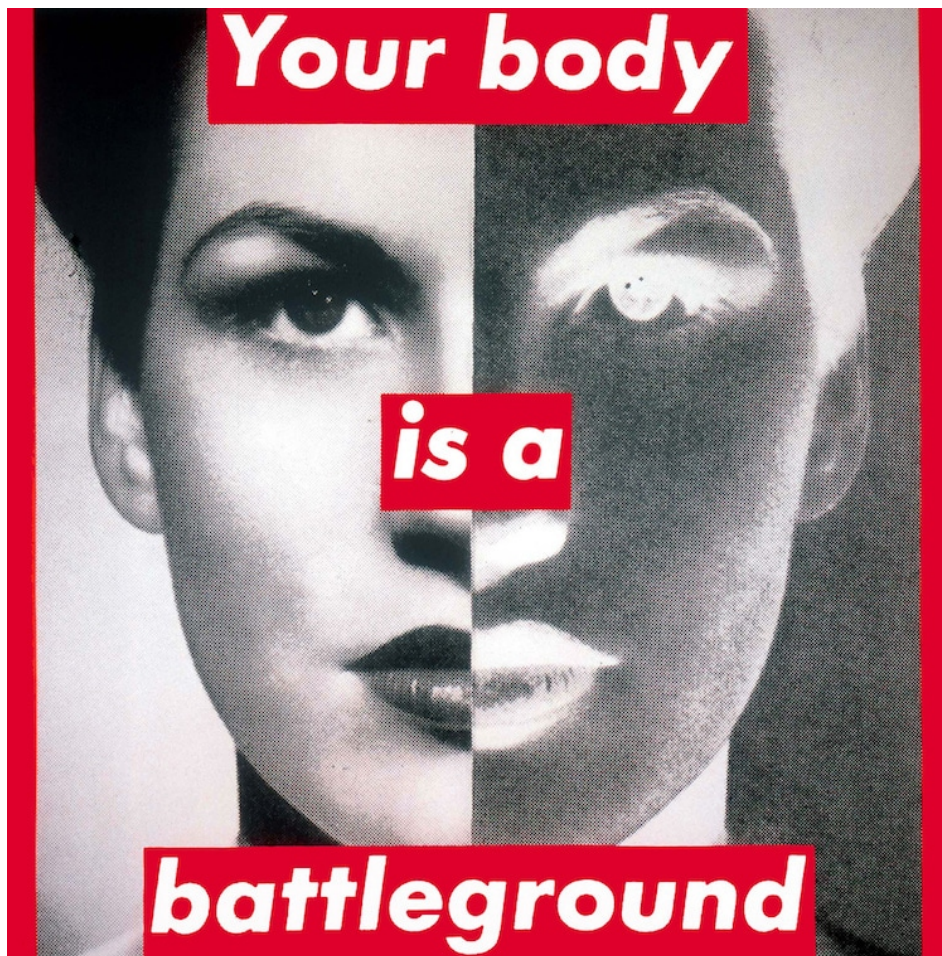
In addition to different interpretations of documentation, photographic expression, which evolved to different forms towards the end of the 20th century, diversified and drew different ways also in contemporary art. It has been debated whether it can be an art form since its invention; however, it became a means of different expressions, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly.

Artists like Cindy Sherman, Liu Bolin and Yasumasa Morimura made conceptual inquiries on identity and social cases by going beyond the known expressions in photography. Similar to Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman studies female identity as a social case in her famous series *Untitled Film Stills* that she produced between 1977 and 1980. While she places herself in the center of her works as different personas, she examines various stereotypes of femininity in films, advertising and media. As Sherman says *"My photographs aren't really about any particular story, but about roles."* (Major Photographer 2019)

Figure 3.16. Cindy Sherman. *Untitled Film Stills, 15.* 1978

Furthermore, Names like Jeff Wall and Christina de Middel turned their back to truth and explored the boundaries of documentary and narrative. As they play with the concepts of fiction and fact, Middel says *"For me, the fictional approach is more about raising questions than providing answers"* (King 2016) Besides, Jeff Wall deals with what memory is all about in his large scale "fictional" photographs while redefining photography in conceptual art. Although his photographs seem like documentaries, they were entirely produced as a result of what he had witnessed before and turns into a way of suggesting stories. On his famous pharase "I begin with not photographing", he says:

> "If I see something on the street, let's say, I don't photograph it. So, I could be looking and hunting for things…The actual event disappears as a photograph. It vanishes as a potential photograph. But, it doesn't disappear because I am the photographer. So therefore, what I do with it is still photography." (San Francisco Museum 2010)

Figure 3.17. Jeff Wall. *Mimic.* 1982

It is evident from the examples that the use of photography takes an important role also in contemporary art. It was used in different forms in the dilemma of art and documentary towards the end of the 21st century. As a form of expression, which has a quite short history, it is still being tried to be defined and put in a place in the history. In light of the different statements and various outputs, it is also clear that the words like contemporary or modern are still quite ambiguous in describing photography's role and styles in recent years. Daniel Rubinstein (2015) states:

> "21st Century Photography is not the representation of the world, but the exploration of the labor practices that shape this world through mass-production, computation, self-replication and pattern recognition. Through it we come to understand that the 'real world' is nothing more than so much information plucked out of chaos…In the 21st Century, photography is not a stale sight for sore eyes, but the inquiry into what makes something an image. As such, photography is the most essential task of art in the current."

Even though the classical and contemporary approaches intersect in the recent days, billions of photographs are shared every day for various purposes, and the photographer's identity is re-discussed with the dualities of the artist's identity; the works revealed are trying to find a place between the confusion of contemporary art and post-modernism. Despite all these rapid changes, and intricate and sometimes irrelevant criticism, from museums to the gallery walls and highly prized auctions to the social media posts, photography appears in daily life as never happened before, and it still remains to be one of the most powerful forms of expression.

4. STORIES AND A MOUNTAIN

"When you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else."

Margaret Atwood

Both the technical and stylistic development of photography have accelerated in an unpredictable way in recent years. Although the work I produced as a student in such a period was in an unstable motion, it was generally based on my own experience. I tried different forms of approach, but basically I used photography as a tool that allowed an experience rather than a narrative. Therefore, the series that I have been producing since high school have been shaped around my own life with many questions arising from my suspicions against the medium.

My interest in photography dates back to my high school years, where I did not have any technical or theoretical knowledge on photography. The series named *11-G* is a photographic diary which is one of the simplest and easiest forms of narration, written 8 years later with snapshots. Towards the end of my high school years, I just wanted to preserve some moments of that boring period. This series, which does not have a linear narrative, cannot go beyond the nostalgic emotions left behind the faces and moments that I have already forgotten. I do not exactly know what is left behind the threshold of youth and childish dreams, but when I look back, these photographs bear the first traces of my aesthetic concerns about photographing a moment. Since the photographs of this series do not have the characteristics of ordinary memory snapshots, I am not sure why I wanted to photograph ordinary moments of that period.

Figure 4.1. Onur Özen. Untitled from the series 11-G. 2005-2006

Figure 4.2. Onur Özen. Untitled from the series 11-G. 2005-2006

When photography started to occupy a considerable space in my life were the years when my relationship with this tool deepened and contextual questions emerged as well as a certain technical approach. After a period, in which I took photos without an aim to create specifically bound series, the series titled *Nocturnal Songs* began to appear. This series, consisting of photographs from the years when there were some changes in my life, crystallized after I started to photograph some days as sequential photos following the job I had in Istanbul. For almost three years, after I returned to my hometown from Istanbul, this series of photos of close friends and our everyday life has transformed from a group of people's photos into a story of a young woman and a cat. Again, my goal was to preserve only some moments, but this story, which acquired coherence over time, came into being independently of me. Susan Sontag discusses as follows on the desire to collect moments saying that "*Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood.*" (2005, 5)

Figure 4.3. Onur Özen. *Untitled.* 2009

After almost 3 years that spent with the production of these photographs, now everything turned into a hazy nostalgic story for me with some of the photographs I took and some of the moments I had collected in various ways. Italo Calvino writes (2017, 63):

> "The taste for the spontaneous, natural, lifelike snapshot kills spontaneity, drives away the present. Photographed reality immediately takes on a nostalgic character, of joy fled on the wings of time, a commemorative quality, even if the picture was taken the day before yesterday. And the life that you live in order to photograph it is already, at the outset, a commemoration of itself."

Figure 4.4. Onur Özen *Untitled* from the series *Nocturnal Songs.* 2009-2012

Considering these two series, no one whom I directed the camera have questioned me about taking their photographs for a long time. Both I and them were used to it, and I had never thought about the ethics of photographing others. However, in different circumstances, I had had to confront this question during the year I spent in Florence. Taking photographs of people whom I did not know in a city I was not familiar with was completely different from the condition and perception that I was used to.

Figure 4.5. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Florence: A City Diary.* 2013-2014

Figure 4.6. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Florence: A City Diary.* 2013-2014

These photographs, oftenly souvenirs of the moments when I walked aimlessly in the city, were initiated by the urge to understand the city and perhaps to find a place for myself there. But in this city, which cannot be considered independent of the countless people who live and pass through it, my aim was never to document it. My goal was to create my own city, independent of the general perception. These photographs enabled me to grasp the soul of the city as well as encouraging me to confront my own uncertainty about shooting people I am not personally acquainted with. At this point, taking photographs turned into a tool of experience as well as collecting moments. The following sentences of Italo Calvino will adequately describe the context of my indifferent but curious relationships with the city (Pile 2001, 56):

> "Cities also believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer, it gives to a question of yours, or to the question it asks you, forcing you to answer."

Figure 4.7. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Arno.* 2014

The works that I produced during this process were not only influenced by changing situations, but also by the sense of boredom brought on by the circumstances.

Commonly, boredom has always been considered as a condition in which you find yourself with having nothing to do or in being disconnected from what you are doing. Besides these perceptions, there are various approaches on defining boredom according to researches of science and philosophy. Therefore, we need to take into consideration while talking about boredom whether we base our arguments upon a scientific ground or, rather, upon a philosophical speculation. Science, firstly, has to derive its theories from evidences. However, to find evidence of boredom might prove to be difficult. How can you measure, observe or experiment on boredom? If we cannot do any of these, all we are left with is philosophical thought. And a quick look at the manifestations of "boredom" in the sphere of these approaches immediately brings us to the domain of existentialism, which is a philosophical school that emphasizes the priority individual existence, freedom and choice.

While we try to keep ourselves away from boredom constantly, we also try to busy our brain with something to dedicate ourselves to. This unconscious flow turns into a cycle that we devote our lives to as long as we feel satisfied. However, when that chain is broken, the empty space left behind when the cycle disappeared is the where boredom appears (Weir 2013) It is possible to consider the ways that we discover to escape boredom additionally trigger various concerns as a consequence of easily accessible technology—mostly smart devices—and overwhelming imagery. Trying to avoid boredom in our overloaded world leads us so that we busy our brains with unnecessary tasks. Whenever we feel a state of nothingness on the verge of existence, we instantenously start seeking something to do. In that sense, boredom turns into a desire to fill the emptiness. We try to find alternative ways to reach the full potential of our feelings instead of accepting the current flow of beings that falls short of satisfying them.

 We take ourselves away and fill our brains with nonessential acts. We are afraid of being alone and this appears as angst in our life flow--being afraid of solitude and searching constantly for pre-occupations.

Boredom has traditionally been associated with a range of negative outcomes and being bored has generally been seen as a harmful experience. However, it has been suggested that boredom can have positive outcomes, one of which might be increased creativity. While boredom forces your brain activity to search for information and different ways of thinking about things, it sets your mind free and opens it up for sense of all information. In both of these states, what ends up arising is that your mind getting in a situation for new ideas and solutions to come together. Scientific studies have found that boredom enhances creativity since it allows our minds to wander, something that doesn't happen usually in our fully occupied daily life. It motivates us to approach new and rewarding activities. In other words, a chance to be all alone with ourselves with an empty state of mind. It is one of the fundamental parts of what human being is. It is the reason that we take decisions on the side of escaping it whether taking benefits of these decisions or not. It can be a defense mechanism for many reasons in life, but it can also appears as a desire for risk-taking.

Boredom, has a purpose like many other emotions and, despite general perceptions about its negative connotations, there are potentially many benefits to being bored. After all various perceptions and approaches the term of boredom can be seen as a dual force that can be both destructive and generative, depending on how we approach it with many other questions in our minds.

From this perspective, considering loneliness as a healthy solitude is not only a concern for young people; it is an obvious fact that effects every individual and can be seen as a path to our relationship with boredom within the basis of loneliness. Taking benefits of that emptiness and coming face to face with ourselves is part of an essential task to empty our brains in order to give ourselves a chance to develop new ideas and perceptions, since the "inactive" brain will prepare itself for new challenges by making connections between ideas that are ostensibly unrelated.

In conjunction with these standpoints, the idea behind the series that I have been working on for three years named "Ida: The Story of a Mountain" began to emerge at the end of relatively boring moments. This photographic study conducted through practicing a personal narrative approach aims to experience geography by means of photography in the context of the relationship between human and nature in the region of Mount Ida within the borders of provinces, Çanakkale and Balıkesir.

After the year that I spent abroad, I realized that I missed this region, which I visited only on special occasions during my childhood and remained as a boring place in my memories after many years. Visiting this place, which is one hour away from Çanakkale, where I was born and grew up, and experiencing it by means of photography which is the most powerful tool in my hand, could open new doors for me in terms of the relationship I established with this region and in order to answer my questions of belonging. I thought that I could look at this feeling of incongruity, which I felt for many years because of my education and constantly changing way of life, from a different perspective through my visits there. In recent years, I have witnessed many questions to be answered in line with the migration from the city to the village and the various praises and criticisms that have emerged in the blurring lines of city and countryside. Although it was not possible for me to investigate these situations, which were the subject of a comprehensive sociological and geographical research, I could at least make an individual inquiry with the observation opportunities that photography would provide for me. This series, emerged as the idea of a photographic diary that I wanted to produce only in my fathers' village Bahçedere, gradually became the idea of photographing the whole mountain as a result of my inquiries on this geography.

This mountain, which is the main source of life of its region and hosts many mythological and historical stories, has been subjected to a difficult period in the grip of government's agricultural policies and mining companies established with uncontrolled authorizations for years. It is situated in southwest Turkey, although known with its ancient name "Ida", began to be known as "Kaz Dağı (Goose Mountain)" after the Turks started to live in this region. The exact origin and meaning of the word Ida remains unclear. However, as it mentioned in the *Iliad* of Homer and in various ancient resources, it is still seen as a spiritual place and continues to be the source of life for the region with its vast forest lands. The goose motifs also can be seen on the old buildings, which are the source of many stories told in the region, carry clues as to why this animal, which is accepted as sacred in some beliefs, named this region. Although the names of "Mount Ida" or "Goose Mountain" seem to depict a single mountain, the Mount Ida is the name of a mountain region consisting of many mountains and hills around it. In this region, where the economic structure is predominantly based on agriculture and animal husbandry, false agricultural policies that have been implemented for years not only by today's government but also by former governments stand out as challenges directly affecting the life of the

region especially in the context of the olive farming. These pressures and misapplications on agriculture have been followed by thermal power plants projects and mining activities that have collapsed into the region as a nightmare in recent years. The mines and power plants established in various areas of this mountain, which dominates a wide geography, threaten all life through underground sources of the region by ignoring the environmental impact assessment reports. Despite the objections of the civil associations and most of the residents of the region, these projects, some of which have been canceled, come back in various forms and with the support of the government they become the biggest threat of life by human hands. For this reason, it was impossible to ignore the difficulties of the region even though I aimed to establish my relationship with this mountain through my childhood and the phenomenon "home" in my mind through the lands where I was born and grew up.

At a time when the distinction between rural and urban is increasingly faded and definitions become difficult, I tried to explore the relationship between human and nature. Therefore, this relationship occurs in two ways: devastation and togetherness. Accordingly, I aimed to establish the conflict of this story based on this relationship thorough photographs that show human presence on landscape.

Figure 4.8. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2017

Certainly, it is possible to focus on the devastation of nature and to establish a narrative with photographs that show this directly. However, the way I prefer is formed in a more symbolic, metaphorical but not obscure language rather than a straightforward approach.

Figure 4.9. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2017

Although the devastation was clearly seen in some photographs, my goal was not to make direct inferences in the aesthetics of documentary nor the aesthetics of imperfection. I think the news and the public opinion about such an important issue is more descriptive and effective than the photographs in this project. While the form I intended because of this decision contains a very ambiguous and fragile structure in terms of the basics of storytelling, I think that this narrative allows an inner and an abstract approach to the case. In this way, I hope that changing roles in the minds of the viewers may allow different stories.

Andrei Tarkovsky shares his opinions on setting up a narrative and the relationship with the viewer through film editing as follows:

> "One doesn't need to explain in film, but rather to directly affect the feelings of the audience. It is this awakened emotion that then drives the thoughts forward. I am seeking a principal of montage that will allow me to expose the subjective logic – the thought, the dream, the memory – instead of the logic of the subject." (Gianvito 2006, 11)

Figure 4.10. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2018

At this point, as well as aiming a dramatic narrative, I think that the use of black and white and the effect of stable shots caused by technical challenges were important for me to achieve this relatively abstract and symbolic approach with a non-linear narrative that I aimed in these photographs. I believe that black and white can create an alternating universe that breaks reality in order to evoke emotions, so that the photographed scene evolves into an abstract form. In this process, I think that Swedish cinematographer Sven Nykvist's works, especially in the Bergman period, guided me in terms of both black and white tonality, use of natural light and the dramatic composition.

Figure 4.11. Still image from the movie *Nattvardsgästerna (Winter Light).* Dir. Ingmar Bergman. Cinematographer. Sven Nykvist. 1963

Starting from the abundance of connotation created by abstract forms in the minds of the viewer, I aim to establish an aesthetic that takes advantage of this efficient power of black and white images in my works. Before the "Ida" series, I also followed this approach in my non-linear video works; *Vanitas* and *Impressions No 1* that aimed to appeal directly to the emotions of the viewer with images that did not establish a contextual relationship with each other without following a specific timeline.

As this project developed, there was the possibility of creating a sense of timeless atmosphere in viewers' sense due to the spaces contained in many of the photographs. One of the aspects of working in the countryside is that one often encounters - abandoned or outdated spaces. With the sense of timelessness, I felt through these places, I did not hesitate to turn the camera into them.

Figure 4.12. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2017

However, I believe that this preference I made in order to create a timeless atmosphere is accompanied by the danger of being a nostalgic rural praise. Although this point of view fed by clichés may seem like a good-intentioned, emotional attitude towards the countryside, it can easily be the harbinger of an attitude that excludes it. These clichés, especially in literature and cinema, often depict the countryside as a distant and a mysterious place.

These ambiguous and hesitant attitudes, which may also arise in an area like photography, that is not narrative, but indicative, carry the risk of misleading. At this point, I think that approaching the spaces with an explanatory attitude around the human axis may be one of the most unreliable approaches in terms of these photographs. That is why I hope that the camera should be my emotions, instead of being my logic as the decision-maker, no matter what the object or moment I am looking to capture is. Moreover, in doing so, I face new questions that need to be answered as to where I stand in the context of urban and rural.

Figure 4.13. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2017

At this point, the first question I had to deal with before starting the project was how to approach this region. As a photographer from the city, making arrogant inferences through the countryside is the last thing I wanted to do, so I needed to spend a long time in the area and look for a place for myself. In this process, I started without making any shooting plans; my most important tool was walking. Here, I ignore the effects of walking on the body, its reflections on philosophy, or the increasingly different forms of participation in art and even the claim to be art. For me, walking was not the starting point of the different expressions I could make in the context of this project, but a method I employed to search for a place for myself. Further, it was not only a way of witnessing, but a meditation that triggered thinking, allowing for more consistent interrogations. Even though I thought that I knew the geography and that I was not a stranger there, I was a foreigner who finally came here with a camera and a purpose. If I was not sure where this process would lead me, the only thing I was sure of was that the relationship I had with this place would never remain the same.

Figure 4.14. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2018

Contrary to my previous series, I was going to a place with the purpose of taking photographs for the first time, and I had no idea what to do, how to meet scenes worth photographing. Therefore, I decided that I had to walk first and experience it from my own point of view, not the camera's. Walking with a camera, like a soldier, kept me on alert, and at every step, I remembered the function of the camera in my hand. In the context of this project, I think that taking photos with planning and targeting causes a fragile relationship between the photographer and the space and turns that moment into a matter of interest. But from my standpoint, if I feel that I am a part of the moment, I do not need to plan, so I can get rid of the search for a good shot, and the act of taking photos becomes an instinctive act for me. I do not think that this can be achieved intentionally, but I wish to have a perception that I can feel it when it comes. For this reason, I think the most efficient ones of these walks were the ones that I did without taking a camera with me. In this way, I think I may have the chance to experience the moment by moving away from the urge to take photographs.

Annie Dillard writes on the difference between walking with and without a camera:

> "The difference between the two ways of seeing is the difference between walking with or without a camera. When I walk with a camera I walk from shot to shot…When I walk without a camera, my own shutter opens, and the moment's light prints on my own silver gut. When I see this way, I am above all an unscrupulous observer." (Neill 2017)

Apart from walking and an approach that allows stability, I think that the equipment I used for this series has an important role in the formation of the visual language of this project in the context of my habits. In my former series, mostly because of the digital equipment I used, I was working quite fast and almost with a consumer approach. This fast working principle provided by the compact camera that I used especially in Italy and later, left its place to a very slow form in this project. Working with a medium-format analog camera allowed me to question the circumstances both before and after the shootings. Besides walking and my concerns of being in search of a photograph, I think that the slow working process of the camera, which I find quite difficult especially for focusing, helped me to evaluate the static and unpretentious moments I was looking for. After the days of shootings, I had the chance to stay with the landscape and people in the photographs due to the dark room and scanning processes and reevaluate the shots once again. As a result of this situation, which may be seen as harmful against the objective point of view, I sometimes tried to diversify my experiences by walking without taking photographs. In this way, I thought that I could evaluate the experience from different perspectives by taking my gaze away from the content of photographs. On the other hand, this stabile approach, carries the danger of becoming involved in some aesthetic approaches which presented as new but based on years ago, have become a trend in recent years in Turkey. I think that this aesthetic created from the ordinary and banal becomes a representation of some styles as cheap imitations coded in the mind, free from emotions. This aesthetics that are fed from this approach which is tried to be put forward in our country, can not be considered without the project statements. However, it is obvious that works that pursue only aesthetic trends and artist identities that are inconsistent with their statements have no use for photographers or the viewers. Considering these standpoints, the audience will decide where I stand in my own work, but my sole aim in the language I am aiming at is to be able to present a perspective without getting caught up in current trends.

For three years, I was fortunate to have a house to stay in during my long visits here. In this way, I did not have to spend days planning, and I could be a calm witness to life here in this space I created for myself. Diane Arbus noted that "the Chinese have a theory that you pass through boredom into fascination and I think it is true." (Sontag 2005. 33). Sometimes these idle times arising from the inert life of rural and boredom gave me the opportunity to evaluate my impressions from different perspectives. In this context, I think the following words of Joseph Campbell (1991, 122) are relevant in terms of these relatively meditative moments:

> "You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don't know what was in the newspapers that morning, you don't know who your friends are…This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be…At first you may find that nothing happens there. But if you have a sacred place and use it, something eventually will happen."

Figure 4.16. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2019

Figure 4.17. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2017
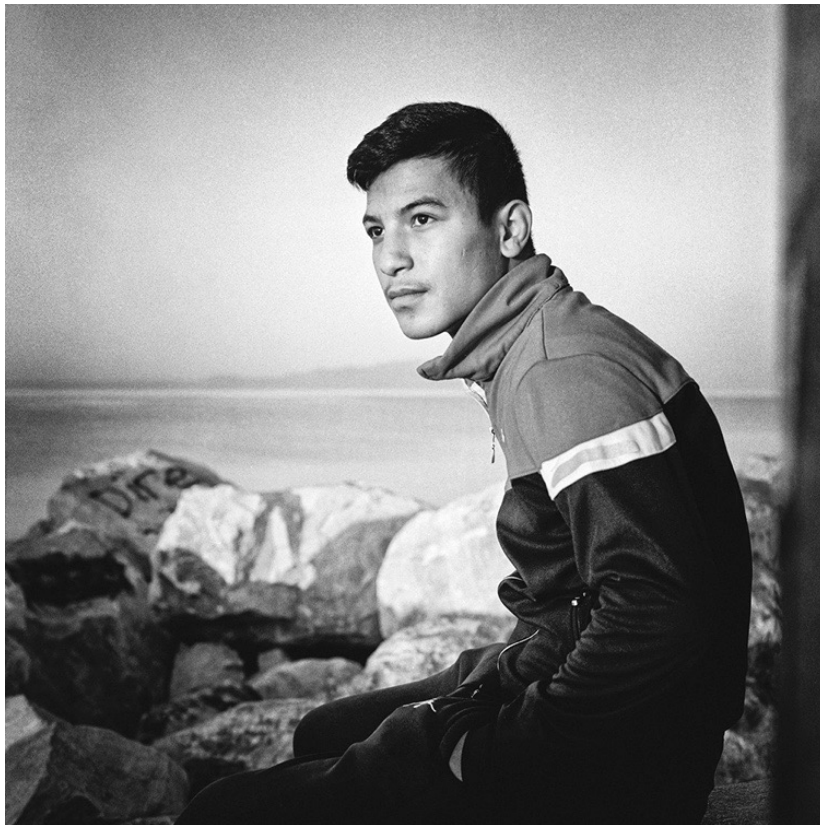
Throughout this project, the portraits that I needed in the context of human and nature relations began with the people I had known, but inevitably I had to approach those whom I had not been familiar with. At this point, I was confronted with the questions that arose in Italy again. As a stranger with a camera, how was I supposed to approach people? I had never been so indifferent to the people whom I photographed. I had seen photography as a means of preparing these relationships, and considered the camera as a permission. As Arbus wrote: "Photography was a license to go wherever I wanted and to do what I wanted to do" (Sontag 2005, 33)

Even though, I had similar drawbacks in the *Maloik* series before, I was finally able to get to know those people. In this series, which I aimed to create from portraits in the context of a certain music culture, in a city where I hardly knew anyone, it was very difficult to reach the people I would take photographs of and to tell them my purpose through various examples.

Figure 4.18. Onur Özen. *Giulia from the series Maloik.* 2014

My goal was not only to find and photograph the models, but also to listen to their stories and build a bridge through my own experiences. In the end, I was able to become friends with these people, shared my stories, and through photography, I had many experience worth to remember. In this way, those photographs fulfilled the task of being a tool for me and became the keys to various stories that took place both in my mind and that of the viewer's. In the context of the subject and the photographer, Susan Sontag (2005, 8-9) compares photography to a complicity.

> "Even if incompatible with intervention in a physical sense, using a camera is still a form of participation. Although the camera is an observation station, the act of photographing is more than passive observing…To take a picture is to have an interest in things as they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged (at least for as long as it takes to get a "good" picture), to be in complicity with whatever makes a subject interesting, worth photographing— including, when that is the interest, another person's pain or misfortune."
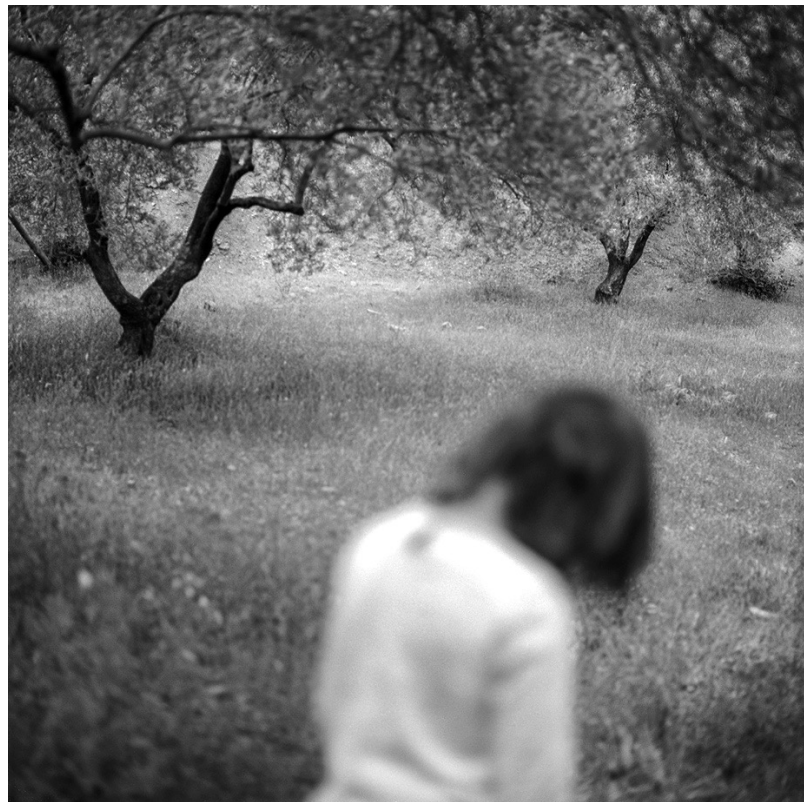
Figure 4.19. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2018

Figure 4.20. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2018

Figure 4.21. Onur Özen. *Untitled* from the series *Ida: The Story of a Mountain.* 2018

As I approach the end, I do not know how I can find the exact answers to the questions I posed and I was posed against during the process. In the context of the relationship that I established with the life in the region, I cannot say that I am positioning myself in a completely different place than before. I hope that these photos that came out at the end of these impressions do not reflect as if they were made with an arrogant perspective and as an outcome of just a matter of interest. My aim was to photograph the feelings I would get in this geography with a completely honest expression, not a method that tried to be different. I tried to ignore the impression that these subjective interpretations and methods would have aroused in the viewer and aimed at the experience that focused on the process rather than the result. Therefore, I use the statement, "experiencing the geography by means of photography". Regardless of the outcome, I am trying to keep in mind that the rest of this series of photographs will be only my experiences and I believe all these statements are not going beyond sharing what I see. As John Berger said on the common features of painting throughout the history (Hobbs 2011, 2):

> "Every painted image announces: I have seen this, or, when the making of the image was incorporated into a tribal ritual: we have seen this. The this refers to the sight represented. Non-figurative art is no exception. A late canvas by Rothko represents an illumination or a coloured glow which derived from the painter's experience of the visible. When he was working, he judged his canvas according to something else which he saw."

At a time when it is impossible to even define the truth, I believe that it is as ironic to try to find forms of expressions by means of a medium that is claimed to reflect reality. That may be why I am just trying to show rather then tell. In this way, I hope that the issue can be moved to a dimension that can evolve into conceptual ideas in the mind of the viewer independently of what I'm sharing through this photographs.

CONCLUSION

Although the ways of communication evolved from cave paintings to recent social media tools, and takes on a pretty fast consumed and forgotten form, the urge to tell a story, one of the most fundamental impulses of humanity, has never diminished. This genetic habit, inherited from our ancestors, has succeeded in finding a place in our lives by taking on various forms since the tribes gathered around fire. Storytelling, perhaps the only solution to people's loneliness in life, continues to connect people together in various ways and to create a universal collective consciousness. Sometimes it surrounds our lives with political lies for the benefits of strong and sometimes it occurs only with a personal narrative. The history of the masses continues to be written through networks of interconnected stories. Undoubtedly, photography has the greatest share in the production of this universal network.

Even though it is pointed out that photography has come to an end in the context of visual arts, by means of new media tools, it occupies a greater place in our lives than ever before. In an age of image overload, we are going through a period in which the identities of producers and consumers are re-evaluated. At this point, it is clear that we have more responsibility than ever, especially in the context of arts and visual communication. In the evaluations, we make within the scope of representations and various expressions of those represented, it is necessary to have a stance that does not turn our back on the things brought by our age in the light of the former disciplines. In this period in which the meanings are diversified and especially the doubts about the images increase, we should question more than ever what we see as not only producers but also viewers. Even though I could not reach the answers I was looking for, I was able to question myself once again on this geography. I hope that this study will be a resource that will shed light on my future work by asking new questions, as well as evaluating my previous works and looking for answers to my questions in the context of storytelling.

Even though putting forward the concepts in such a way as I intended, it is likely that they will encounter skeptical questions and the viewer will make the decision independent of me and the geography in the content. In this decision, I hope that feelings come before the intellect over these images. Only then, these photos can move freely in the mind of the viewer and be permanent.

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