

CHANGING CONVENTIONS OF LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY IN TURKEY:  
FROM ARA GÜLER TO NURİ BİLGE CEYLAN AND SEÇİL YERSEL

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## Thesis Abstract

Balca Ergener, “Changing Conventions of Landscape Photography in Turkey:

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This thesis aims to investigate the conventions of contemporary landscape photography in Turkey by analyzing selected work by three artists, Ara Güler, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Seil Yersel and discussing them in the context of the canon of the landscape image, and landscape photography in the international contemporary art scene. A historical account of the landscape image, its historically and culturally specific conditions of emergence in the West, and its relationship with traveling and tourism is provided. Landscape is studied as a specific kind of relationship between humans and the physical world, which entails a distant viewer, looking and visually framing a physical environment rather than participating in it; and the transformation of a physical environment composed of multiple multi-sensory elements into a coherent, aesthetic object to be visually consumed. Ceylan’s and Yersel’s photographs make the distance and alienation intrinsic both to the notion of landscape and the practice of photography visible. Ara Güler’s proximity to his subjects, his engagement with documenting the contingent experiences of people specific to places and times and capturing fleeting moments result in fragmentary compositions of dynamic and inhabited landscapes transformed by and with people. Ceylan and Yersel’s distance to their subjects resulting in wide and exhaustive views that resemble paintings more than photographs because they are static and closed compositions resist appropriation and presenting ready meanings.

## Tez Özeti

Balca Ergener, “Türkiye’de Manzara Fotoğrafının Değişen Konvansiyonları:

Ara Güler’den Nuri Bilge Ceylan ve Seçil Yersel’e”

Bu tez Ara Güler, Nuri Bilge Ceylan ve Seçil Yersel’in fotoğraflarından derlenen bir seçkiyi manzara imgesi geleneği ve uluslararası güncel sanatta manzara fotoğrafı bağlamında inceleyerek Türkiye’deki güncel manzara fotoğrafı konvansiyonlarını araştırmayı amaçlar. Batı’da ortaya çıkışının belirli tarihsel ve kültürel koşulları ve yolculuk etmek ve turizmle ilişkisi irdelenen ‘manzara’, insanlar ve fiziksel dünya arasında kurulan belirli bir ilişki şekli olarak ele alınır: fiziksel çevresine aktif olarak katılmak yerine uzakta duran seyirci görüntüye bakar ve onu çerçeveler; çok sayıda farklı duylara hitap eden öğelerden oluşan bir fiziksel ortam, görsel yolla tüketilen bağdaşık ve estetik bir nesneye dönüştürülür. Ceylan ve Yersel’in fotoğrafları, hem manzara kavramına hem de fotoğraf pratiğine içkin olan uzaklık ve yabancılaşmayı görünür kılar. Ara Güler’in fotoğraflarını çektiği şeylere yakınlığı, zaman ve yere bağlı deneyimleri belgelemeye ve geçici anları yakalamaya olan ilgisinin sonuçları insanlar tarafından ve onlarla birlikte dönüştürülen dinamik ve yaşanan manzaraların yer aldığı, kısmi kompozisyonlardır. Ceylan ve Yersel’in fotoğrafladıkları şeylere uzaklığı, ve statik ve kapalı kompozisyonlar oldukları için fotoğraftan çok klasik resimlerle benzeyen geniş ve kapsayıcı manzaraları ise yakınlaştırmayı ve hazır anlamlar sunmayı reddeder.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate the conventions of contemporary landscape photography in Turkey by analyzing selected work by three artists, Ara Güler, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Seil Yersel. It does not provide an exhaustive survey of the production of landscape photographs in the national context, but intends to suggest and define certain conventions which become effective in determining the aesthetics and content of landscape photographs produced in Turkey. By discussing the three artists' work comparatively, in the context of the canon of the landscape image, and landscape photography in the international contemporary art scene, some dominant practices and alternative possibilities will be identified.

With this aim, in the second chapter I will ask the question what is a landscape and what is involved in the transformation of the physical world into a scenery, a spectacle. Landscape will be studied as a specific kind of relationship between humans and the physical world, which entails a distant viewer, looking and visually framing a physical environment rather than participating in it; and the transformation of a physical environment composed of multiple multi-sensory elements into a coherent, aesthetic object to be visually consumed. Visual representations of landscape that produce and are the products of such a relationship have defined the conventions of picturesque or later photogenic scenes. I will provide a historical account of the landscape image, its conditions of emergence, its relationship with traveling and tourism, and its dominant forms. As a Western concept the emergence of 'landscape' is a historically and culturally specific phenomenon closely related to the transformations in Europe, which took place between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cosgrove, 1998) – the most significant being the

transition to capitalist economies, the separation of the rural from the urban, colonialism, the formation of nation states and the scientific and industrial revolutions. I will also refer to the role of the European gaze in the representations of landscape in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, where the emergence of the landscape image defined as such required the adaptation of Western visual conventions and representation techniques the most important being linear perspective.

In this light, I will look into how photography promoted a similar, distant and detached relationship with the world, the camera separating the viewer from the world and participating in its transformation into a spectacle by framing it and by enabling more people in the world to possess representations of landscapes that become interchangeable with the sites themselves.

In the third and fourth chapters I will analyze a selection of landscape photographs by three artists working in Turkey – Ara Güler, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Seçil Yersel. When analyzing the images my main concerns are trying to discover what each photographer considers a scenic, picturesque view; what kind of habits of seeing and experience of viewing do the photographs correspond to and condition; how they attempt to convey this experience and what kind of a relationship do they depict between the photographer, the human figures that appear in the photographs and the landscape itself.

Ara Güler's landscape photographs belong to the tradition of photojournalism and instantaneous photography epitomized by small and fast Leica cameras and the photography of the moment. Beginning in the 1930s and until the 1960s-1970s, when photography began to enter art galleries and became acceptable as an art form, this tradition defined the dominant style of traveling and photographing the world. I

believe it remains effective today, especially in Turkey where most contemporary photographers follow Ara Güler's lead and therefore his style has been determinant in the formation of the visual imagery of the landscape of Turkey. Ara Güler's photographs characterized by fragmentary and unplanned compositions resulting from the photographer's proximity to his subjects claim to communicate a time-specific experience of the physical environment. Thus they make use of two functions of photography that differentiate it from other forms of image making or other arts in general: capturing reality (objectivity), the moment and movement. Alternatively, I will argue that Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs formally resemble earlier renditions of landscape imagery and adopt viewpoints closer to classical paintings rather than photographs with a disregard for what is considered to be specific to the medium of photography. I will question the results of these preferences and I will try to situate the three artists' work in the canon of landscape imagery and contemporary art photography.

Seçil Yersel's and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's photographs were taken in İstanbul and different parts of Turkey within the past ten years and were shown in national and international contemporary art venues. There are certain similarities in the formal characteristics and the subject matter of the work produced by the two artists, which is why I have chosen to study them together. By looking at what their photographs reveal about and how they comment on and question our relationship with landscape and photography I will try to frame a trend in contemporary landscape photography, which I think diverges from mainstream practices and illustrates alternative possibilities.

Three major distinctions drawn between Güler's and the latter two artists style will be: A claim to bring closer what one is distant and separated from, versus

an emphasis on detachment and alienation; a desire to preserve intact what is momentary and transitory versus a portrayal of the irretrievability of what is lost and refraining from including in the images markers indicating the passage of time; the depiction of subjective viewpoints and the contingent experience of the photographer, and an approach where the photographs are framed to achieve exhaustive views of their subjects to portray them in all their obscurity; stressing what is unique to a location and time on the one hand, and what is unchanging and banal on the other.

I believe Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs resist dominant practices in photography such as the obsession with capturing the momentary, the authentic, the local, the conventionally beautiful (natural or tourist attractions). The artists refrain from being the photographer who is a knowing and interpreting subject providing ready meanings about or revealing the ironies of the external world. Instead they make visible what is common in the nature of photographic seeing/practice and the transformation of nature into landscape and the world into a spectacle – distance, contemplation, non-participation, estrangement and therefore loss, melancholy and solitariness.

## CHAPTER II

### THE IDEA OF LANDSCAPE

Landscape photographs have existed since the beginning of the history of photography. At the time of the invention of photography landscape painting had developed as an independent genre in Europe and viewing landscapes had become a specific aesthetic and leisure time activity on its own. The word 'landscape' denotes both a physical environment, the view of a physical environment from a particular point, and an image of it. Whereas the term originally denoted a physical area, its current meaning dates back to the late sixteenth century when it was first used to denote paintings of natural scenery by Dutch artists.

According to the 'official' history of Western Art, the genre of landscape painting emerged in Western Europe in the late sixteenth century and flourished in the nineteenth century. The first 'pure' landscape images were painted in Holland in the late sixteenth century. According to *The Oxford Companion to Art* (1997) what differentiated these paintings from earlier renditions of natural or pastoral imagery found in Egyptian, Byzantine, Romanesque, Greek, Chinese, Japanese and Mediaeval Western art is that in these earlier renditions nature or other physical environments were represented in 'conventionalized' or 'symbolic' forms and/or landscape was a secondary element, a background or a mere decoration in larger compositions.<sup>1</sup> These first 'pure' landscape paintings depicted the Dutch landscape - Dutch urban and rural scenes - which constituted the main theme of the paintings, in a naturalistic manner, devoid of religious or traditional symbolism. They were products of empirical observation and a desire to represent the scenes 'realistically'.

The emergence of landscape as an independent genre was only possible when artists

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<sup>1</sup> The same source locates the first appearance of landscape as the main theme in Roman and Hellenistic art, hence drawing a Western lineage for the genre. (Mitchell, 2002)

“gradually” learned to “see nature as a scene” for: “It seems that until fairly recent times men looked at nature as an assemblage of isolated objects, without connecting trees, mountains, roads, rocks, and forest into a unified scene” and “the vocabulary of rendering natural scenery gained shape side by side with the power to see nature as scenery.” (p.12)

My goal in this chapter is to investigate what it means to see nature (and any physical environment, independent of the degree of human interference with it<sup>2</sup>) as a scene, to look into the conditions of emergence and contemporary manifestations of landscape as a historically and culturally specific construction, and to discuss photography’s engagement with it.

### The Transformation of the Physical World into Scenery

The most evident implication of such an experience of the physical world is a separation and distance between the human being and the environment, where the environment is constituted as a separate aesthetic and visual object. Catherine M. Howett (1997) describes the perception of landscape, which was conditioned by and produced landscape paintings: “Landscape paintings had, in fact, composed an artistic genre singularly suited to the notion that a landscape was best appreciated when contemplated at a distance by an observer outside of the actual scene being depicted.” (p.89) And she quotes Berleant:

The desideratum seems to be to regard the painting as a totality, visually objective and complete. Division, distance, separation and isolation are equally the order of the art and the order of the

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<sup>2</sup> When I use the term ‘physical environment’ I will be referring to one’s surroundings in general, except in places where I will discuss issues specific to natural environments – that is areas, which at least appear to have not been interfered by humans – or rural and urban environments.

experience, for the features of the painting shape the character of our perception. (pp. 89-90)

The environment is constituted as an aesthetic object, and its experience is purely visual, therefore excluding the experience of it with other senses. At the same time, the placing of the 'isolated objects' in the environment in a coherent scene, the achievement of a unifying gaze requires distance, and thus non-participation in the environment viewed and represented. The viewing of landscape is an individual experience, and it does not concern itself with landscape as a social production.

(Cosgrove, 1998) The viewer is a passive figure who contemplates and records the environment rather than an active figure who is involved and in interaction with it.

Lukacs (1971) posits the artist's distance to nature as the condition of possibility of its becoming a landscape:

When nature becomes landscape – e.g. in contrast to the peasant's unconscious living with nature – the artist's unmediated experience of the landscape (which has of course only achieved this immediacy after undergoing a whole series of meditations) presupposes a distance (spatial in this case) between the observer and the landscape. The observer stands outside the landscape for were this not the case it would not be possible for nature to become a landscape at all. If he were to attempt to integrate himself and the nature immediately surrounding him in space within 'nature-seen-as-landscape', without modifying his aesthetic contemplative immediacy, it would then at once become apparent that landscape only starts to become landscape at a definite (though of course variable) distance from the observer and that only as an observer set apart in space can he relate to nature in terms of landscape at all. (pp. 157-158)

To clarify, we are speaking of two kinds of distance, which overlap in many occasions: a physical, spatial distance enabling a unified, coherent, totalizing view (rather than a fragmentary one) and an experience-based distance, as opposed to participation. A detached observer remains passive in view of the landscape, does not actively engage with the physical environment and does not take part in the collective actions that shape the landscape such as working and living in it.



In classical landscape paintings (and photographs applying the same viewpoint) rendered with perfect linear perspective and portraying a wide, totalizing and orderly view, the obviousness of the former kind of distance, makes the latter more recognizable. On the other hand, in paintings produced later in the history of landscape imagery and in photographs adopting a closer point of view yielding to a more fragmented view of space the latter kind of distance is less obvious, although inherently existent. For instance, in *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (1981) Peter Galassi exemplifies the different uses of perspective in two paintings adopting very different viewpoints: A wide, symmetrical, orderly view of an Italian town (Fig. 1) and an “oblique” look at the interior of a church (Fig. 2). In the second painting the painter’s viewpoint is close to his subject, producing a fragmentary view of the environment he is photographing. I will elaborate on the implications of these different viewpoints in the context of photographic conventions in the second and third chapters. The point I am trying to make here is that this physical proximity does not annihilate an experience-based distance – that the painter has distanced himself from this interior environment to create a visual representation of it.



Figure 1. Circle of Piero della Francesca, ‘An Ideal Townscape’, c.1470.



Figure 2. Emanuel de Witte, 'Protestant Gothic Church', 1669

When the technique of linear perspective identified by Denis Cosgrove (1985) as “the most enduring convention of space representation” in “the European visual tradition” (p. 48) is used, objects in a painting are rendered from a single viewpoint; and all elements of the painting are placed on linear rays directed to a single center, a sovereign eye outside the painting. This spatial distance, and the unifying gaze grant the viewer a feeling of control and possession over the landscape. At the same time, viewing and representing a landscape implies a power relationship where the viewer/artist has the power to “compose the view and to see the painting. Landscape implies mastery and possession of the scene and of its representation.” (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998, p.120) In other words, the viewer/artist of a landscape is passive in the sense that he/she is not actively engaged with the environment, but is active in composing the view, which renders the objects in it passive: “The eye, however, tends to relegate objects to the distance, to render them passive. That which is merely

*seen* is reduced to an image – and to an icy coldness.” (Lefebvre, 1998, p. 286)

The sense of sight, which has always had a privileged place in Western history as a mediator between humans and the external world (Urry, 2003a), gained a superior status over the other senses in modernity. The eye was accredited with the quality of objectivity, while the data and sensations provided by the other senses lost their validity and importance. On the subject Macnaghten and Urry (1998) quote Martin Jay: “[...] with the rise of modern science, the Gutenberg revolution in printing and the Albertian emphasis on perspective in painting, vision was given an especially powerful role in the modern era” and remark that “there have been intensely complex interconnection between this visualist discourse and the very discovery of and recording of nature as something which is separate from human practice.” (p. 111) Perspective creates a ‘realistic’ illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. And landscape viewing and representation as detached and purely visual activities, reduce physical space, which is a ‘multi-sensory medium’ composed of different elements to a unified visual scene: “[Landscapes] reduce the complex multi-sensual experience to visually encoded features and then organize and synthesize these into a meaningful whole.” (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998, p. 120)

The emergence of the concept and perception of landscape and the ways of experiencing and representing the external world outlined above were closely related to socio-historical changes affecting Western Europe after the Renaissance and I will try to briefly touch upon some of the most important changes below.

## Socio-historical Conditions Effective in the Emergence of ‘Landscape’

In his work *Consuming Places* (2003b) John Urry writes:

[...] there are four main ways in which societies have intersected with their respective ‘physical environments’: *stewardship* of the land so as to provide a better inheritance for future generations living within a given social area; *exploitation* of land or other resources through seeing nature as separate from society and available for its maximum instrumental appropriation; *scientisation* through treating the environment as the object of scientific investigation and hence of some degree of intervention and regulation; and *visual consumption* through constructing the physical environment as a ‘landscape’ (or townscape) not primarily for production but embellished for aesthetic appropriation. (p. 174)

In this thesis I will study the concept of landscape – the emergence of which is intricately bound with the second and third ways described by Urry in the quote above – as a historical construction, indicating a specific kind of relationship between humans and their physical environments which presupposes a separation, indicates an aesthetic engagement and possibility, and enables the consumption of these environments visually. Moreover, in the context of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic I will briefly comment on how as a Western construction it provided conventions of viewing, visually depicting and therefore visually consuming non-Western environments, which diverged from local visual traditions and forms of relationship with physical environments in certain ways.

In the period between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries the transition from feudal economies to capitalist economies led to the transformation of land into an exchangeable commodity. In pre-capitalist societies land’s productivity was one of its vital qualities, and land was seen as a source of life. The transition was from “land as use for the reproduction of human life to land as commodity for realising exchange value.” (Cosgrove, 1998, p. 161) Hence land was constituted as a separate

object possessed, controlled and manipulated by humans. And “landscape remained a distanced way of seeing, the outsider’s perspective which, for all its appeal to direct human experiences, articulated them ideologically.” (Cosgrove, 1998, p. 161)

With the scientific revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, physical nature was constructed as an object of study and manipulation, and the observer subject was separated from it. Nature became a ‘dead matter’ and its study involved the observation and discovery of its material constitution. In this way, a more organic form of relationship between humans and nature was disrupted and nature’s instrumental use and exploitation was justified. (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998, Cosgrove, 1998) The forms of interference with nature changed during this period and the instrumental use of land and exploitation of natural resources increased in a monumental scale. These developments were effective in the constitution of certain environments as aesthetic objects in two significant ways. The new scientific methods of studying nature were based on observation and classification of visual data. For this reason, the accounts of mere travelers to different environments lost their scientific status. And ‘travel as such,’ was differentiated from scientific travel, and became focused on the connoisseurship and aesthetic comparison of different environments. (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998)<sup>3</sup> At the same time, with the strengthening of the opposition between industrialized towns and rural<sup>4</sup> areas interfered less by humans, the latter were constructed as leisure sites and aesthetic sights.

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<sup>3</sup> Yet travel as such remained as one of the ways to gather knowledge about the world. In the Orientalist discourse – in the production of the Orient “sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said, 1978, 1995, p. 3) – the accounts of travelers to the East, artists, photographers, tourists as well as archeologists, anthropologists and ethnologists played a role.

<sup>4</sup> Marx (1974) posits the separation of urban from rural as a product of the division of labor in a nation: “The division of labour inside a nation leads at first to the separation of industrial and commercial from agricultural labour, and hence to the separation of town and country and to the conflict of their interests.” (p. 43) And “The greatest division of material and mental labour is the separation of town and country. The antagonism between town and country begins with the transition from barbarism to civilization, from tribe to State, from locality to nation, and runs through the whole

The countryside had constituted a place of escape from the populated cities since the Renaissance. In Renaissance Italy, members of the ruling class had villas built on the countryside, adorned with landscape paintings and with views of the countryside. After the industrial revolution, the pollution and the population of urban centers became much more intense. And the countryside surrounding urban centers in countries like Britain and France became a center of attraction among the upper classes for visits and building country estates. The urban/rural and nature dichotomy is partly based on a perception of the countryside as a non-mechanical, less organized space where freedom of space can be felt. In contrast, by the nineteenth century the modern city was a dense environment, overly populated with people, commercial centers, images, visual signs, advertising signs and shop windows; a hectic amount of movement and momentary impressions. Correspondingly, visual representations of the urban gained a more fragmentary character, in search of capturing the fleeting and transient impressions of modern life.

Further more, in contrast to the industrial urban centers; the countryside was also thought to embody a more traditional lifestyle and less human intervention in nature. With the influence of the Romantic tradition in literary and visual arts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, areas of wild, untamed nature became appealing to people because they offered the possibility of experiencing nature again, in all its immensity and power far away from the hazards of industrialization. Hence the instrumental use of nature was differentiated from non-utilitarian uses which involved the aesthetic consumption of landscape, recreation and leisure: "Beyond the cities then, the physical environment came to be understood as scenery, views, perceptual sensation and romanticized." (Urry, 2003a, p. 4)

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history of civilization to the present day." (pp. 68-69)

Two important visual discourses, which shaped the aesthetic experience of the rural/natural landscape<sup>5</sup> in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and were part of the Romantic tradition in Europe, were those of the sublime, and the picturesque. They both promoted the activity of viewing a landscape as an emotional and delightful experience. Cosgrove (1998) writes that in nineteenth century Britain:

Visitors to the Royal Academy tended rather to favour in their landscapes conventional images either of an ordered and contented countryside – a denial of rural realities in the decade of machine breaking, rick burning and Captain Swing – or of grandiose, often biblical themes set against a dramatic and mannered sublime nature. (p. 241)

Both discourses participated in the transformation of nature into scenery, a sight of leisure, tourism and entertainment. The desire for both sublime and picturesque views involved the search for physical sites that resembled paintings and a connoisseurship of artworks produced in these traditions was necessary in order to appreciate these landscapes. Hence paintings produced in these traditions which provided the conventions of visually consuming certain environments both promoted a cultured and informed appreciation of sights similar to the ones depicted by the artists and at the same time participated in the domestication and familiarization of many environments as well as the pollution and destruction of many areas by visitors. (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998)

### Traveling and the Search for Si(gh)tes Resembling Paintings and Photographs

The discourse of the sublime in literary and visual arts advocated a spiritual and emotional experience induced by the horror and excitement felt in the face of the immense, overpowering character of wild nature such as views of mountains, the

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<sup>5</sup> Cityscapes depicting dramatic industrial scenes like factories were also produced in the romantic tradition.

seaside, waterfalls and gorges. Followers of the sublime aesthetics traveled to natural areas looking for this experience and sights resembling paintings.<sup>6</sup> Andrews (1999) quotes a traveler's remarks about his trips in the Alps in the late eighteenth century:

On our travels it sometimes happened that both of us would cry out at the same time: Salvator Rosa! Poussin! Saveri! Ruisdael! Or Claude (Lorrain)!, according to whether the subjects before our eyes reminded us of the manner and choice of one or other of the masters named. (p. 131)

While the discourse of the sublime had a spiritual and moral claim about the relationship between humans and nature and involved a reactionary approach to the degeneration of this relationship due to industrialization, it was effective in the aesthetization and domestication of wild natural areas, which were previously considered to be fearsome and barren and the positing of nature at the margins of civilization and everyday life. (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998)

The aesthetics of the picturesque focused on more small-scale and controlled scenes of wild and rural nature. The picturesque, is defined in the *Landscape and Western Art* volume of *Oxford History of Art* (Osborne, 1997) as follows:

The Picturesque view of nature is one that appreciates landscape in so far as it resembles known works of art. At the same time, Picturesque taste favors natural scenery for its untouched status, its remoteness from the world of art and artifice... As Picturesque taste, drawing on models of landscape beauty from Italian and Dutch seventeenth century painting, absorbs and reproduces its favorite material, in paintings and garden design, what was strange and wild becomes increasingly familiarized and commodified. Uncultivated natural scenery is, as it were, domesticated – it is accommodated within our daily experience both as an artistic experience and as a tourist amenity: it is aesthetically colonized. (p. 129)

According to Batchen (1997) the picturesque was parallel to the emergence of the desire to photograph. Prior to the invention of photography, instruments such as the

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<sup>6</sup> The sublime experience was not purely visual, but audile sensations such as the sounds of storms, waterfalls were part of it. (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998, p. 114)



camera obscura, the camera lucida and the Claude glass<sup>7</sup> were used as aids to view and draw the landscape according to the conventions of the picturesque. The camera obscura, which provided a reflection of the view, also framed the view and provided a fixed viewpoint to aid its representation. The camera lucida created a superimposition of the view on the drawing material. The Claude Glass was a tinted convex mirror that brought forms closer together and blended colors into each other. It bent the edges of a given view providing a natural frame, and it made it possible to focus on both the foreground and the distance. In eighteenth century Britain people equipped with these instruments traveled to find scenes of nature concurrent with the picturesque aesthetic. Certain sites were called ‘beauty spots’ and according to Batchen these were the ‘precursors of postcards.’ (Batchen, 1997, p. 73) Peter Osbourne, the author of *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture* (2000) writes: “Primary uses of the word tourist in fact denoted the traveller who sought pleasure in viewing ‘picturesque’ landscapes, and tourism’s earliest practices were concerned with the organizing and standardization of such traveller’s activities.” (p. 80) The developments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which first took place in England, then in Western Europe and North America, and “served to constitute the new and distinctive discourse of the ‘visual consumption of nature’” increased travel to new places:

Infrastructures developed which permitted many environments to become sites for ‘scenic travel’ on a mass scale. Especially important was the railway, which involved the subduing of nature and the new aesthetic of the swiftly passing countryside. Guidebooks, travel maps, landscape paintings, postcards and snapshots all led to an increasing visual objectification of an external and consumable nature, one in which the poor, agricultural labourers and environmental ‘eyesores’ were generally excluded. (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998, p. 113)

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<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the different subjectivities these different instruments correspond to see Crary (1999).

While the connoisseurship of aesthetic landscapes and the activity of traveling to picturesque sights and producing paintings were initially a privilege of the higher classes, mass travel and photography – both promoting a detached experience of physical environments and claiming to provide access to them (travel by making distant environments accessible and photography by enabling their possession in the form of images) – democratized this experience. The building of mass traveling infrastructures enabled more people to travel to different places around the world and to be able to make aesthetic comparisons between the landscapes and townscapes they saw during their travels.<sup>8</sup> Urry also argues that the increase in car travel and infrastructures enabled ordinary people to see even more places because, unlike train travel, cars allow people to travel to places away from main destinations, and to be spontaneous in designing their own journeys. Tourism is mostly based on the visual consumption of the world and the majority of tourist activities concern traveling to picturesque or photogenic sights and bringing home their photographs: “The objects then of cameras and films serve to constitute the nature of travel, as sites turn into sights, and have also helped to construct a twentieth century sense for what is worth going to sightsee.” (Urry, 2003a, p. 4) The photographic camera democratized both the choice of what makes a photogenic view (Urry, 2003a, p.4), and the possibility to possess views of landscapes. According to Sontag (1990) photographs:

[...] convert the world into a department store or museum-without-walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted into an item for aesthetic appreciation. [...]

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<sup>8</sup> Not undermining the price differences and the social hierarchy between different tourist infrastructures and the fact that in the West not everybody can afford to travel around the world and visually consume landscapes. Urry (1998) writes: “As travel became democratized so extensive distinctions of taste came to be established between different *places*: where one travelled to became of considerable social significance. The tourist gaze came to have a different importance in one place rather than another. A resort ‘hierarchy’ developed and certain places were viewed as embodiments of mass tourism, to be despised and ridiculed. Major differences of ‘social tone’ were established between otherwise similar places. And some such places, the working-class resorts, quickly developed as symbols of ‘mass tourism’, as places of inferiority which stood for everything the dominant social groups held to be tasteless, common and vulgar.” (p. 16)

Bringing the exotic near, rendering the familiar and homely exotic, photographs make the entire world available as an object of appraisal. (p. 110)

The invention of photography satisfied the desire to frame, view and record picturesque landscapes on travels for this purpose. Macnaghten and Urry (1998) quote Adams in describing photography's role in the dominance of the sense of sight in our relationship to the world in the twentieth century: "The eye of the camera can be seen as the ultimate realization of that vision: monocular, neutral, detached and disembodied, it views the world at a distance, fixes it with its nature, and separates observer from observed in an absolute way." (p. 116) The photographic camera, a mediator, like the other optical instruments listed above, separating the viewer from the landscape has participated in the spectacularization of the world and its turning into an aesthetic object. All these mediatory materials have been effective in the determination of the historical conventions of what is considered a 'picturesque' view, and the in the case of photography a 'photogenic' view.

Hence photography shares with other instruments mentioned above a preference of looking and image making over experience. Susan Sontag (1990) writes: "A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing – by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir." (p. 9) I have so far articulated that seeing, a landscape (as a condition of the desire to create a representation of it through painting, photography or other media) – that is, instead of seeing nature and separate objects, seeing an image of them – necessitates not being in the space seen, not participating in it, but being separated from it, viewing it from a distance and judging its aesthetic value in comparison to other images of it. And the representation according to which it is judged precedes it and becomes interchangeable with it.

I had previously noted that the distant and unifying gaze adopted by classical landscape imagery, and especially the direction of everything included in a perspective painting to a single, sovereign eye endows the viewer with a feeling of possession and control over the landscape. What's more, when oil painting and painting on canvases became the norm in painting beginning in the Renaissance, paintings became exchangeable commodities distributed throughout Europe. John Berger (1972) writes: "To have a thing painted and put on a canvas is not unlike buying it and putting it in your house. If you buy a painting you buy also the look of the thing it represents." (pp. 83-84) And Martin Jay (1999) elaborates on Berger's account of the relationship between the invention of perspective and the use of oil painting:

It was [...] no accident that the invention of perspective virtually coincided with the emergence of the oil painting detached from its context and available for buying and selling. Separate from the painter and viewer, the visual field depicted on the other side of the canvas could become a portable commodity able to enter the circulation of capitalist exchange. (p. 9)

According to Berger (1972) photography was oil painting's successor as the dominant form of visual image circulated. With the discovery of photography and its availability to 'masses'<sup>9</sup>, creating and possessing representations of landscape became widespread.

The camera allows the possession of the world in the form of images, and this also means mastery and control over the world. Macnaghten and Urry (1998) quote Wilson on the 'familiarizing' aspect of photography: "[...] the snapshot transforms the resistant aspect of nature into something familiar and intimate, something we can

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of 'mass', used in mass travel, tourism and media, is a modern construction assuming a 'homogenous' group of people with similar tastes and values (such as moral and national values): "Central to modernism is the view of the public as an homogeneous mass, that there is a realm of correct values which will serve to unify people." (Urry, 1998, p. 87)

hold in our hands and memories.” (p. 116) There have been different ways to deal with this resistance as well as the distance intrinsic both to the notion of landscape and the practice of photography and I am going to discuss Ara Güler’s, Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s and Seçil Yersel’s photographs in this context in the following chapters.

### Commodification, Consumption and Homogenization

The transformation of the world into an image as in photographic seeing; the desire and the possibility to possess mimetic representations of landscape in the form of paintings, photographs and postcards; and forms of tourism in search of what is represented in these forms are based upon and reproduce the commodification of landscape. According to Mitchell (2002), landscape as a medium involving “symbolic forms capable of being invoked and reshaped to express meanings and values” has a ‘semiotic structure’ like money:

Like money, landscape is good for nothing as a use-value, while serving as a theoretically limitless symbol of value at some other level. At the most basic, vulgar level, the value of landscape expresses itself in a specific price: the added cost of a beautiful view in real estate value; the price of a plane ticket to Rockies, Hawaii, the Alps or New Zealand. Landscape is a marketable commodity to be presented and re-presented in ‘packaged tours,’ and object to be purchased, consumed, and even brought home in the form of souvenirs such as postcards and photo albums. In its double role as commodity and potent cultural symbol, landscape is the object of fetishistic practices involving the limitless repetition of identical photographs taken on identical spots by tourists with interchangeable emotions. (pp. 16-17)

As a ‘fetishized commodity’ landscape does not have a fixed price or value, but an ‘inexhaustible spiritual value’ most of the time independent of its material qualities. And in conventional and touristic representations of landscape, signs implicating its materiality such as the real estate price or pollution spoil its aesthetic enjoyment.

Commodification<sup>10</sup> of ‘landscape’ (e.g. postcards or tours) has led to the obliteration of the differences between landscapes and of their uniqueness, since now what was crucial for them was ‘to become available’ for consumers. Tourists view and collect sights from disconnected places.

In *The Rail Way Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th century* (1986) Wolfgang Schivelbusch discusses how train travel brought distant places closer to each other, annihilated spaces in between these destinations and reduced the notion of time to a linear progression determined by departure and arrival times. Because of the homogenization and synchronization of space-time, local spaces and times were reduced to abstract space-time and localities, which were out of reach and unfamiliar, became commensurable with each other and available to the traveler. Mass tourism was enabled by mass transportation through rail travel. Schivelbusch argues that the becoming accessible of remote places with tourism was a “[...] preparation for making any unique thing available by means of reproduction” and he proposes that we can understand this process with Benjamin’s concept of ‘the loss of the aura.’ (p. 42) With the opening of remote regions to mass travel, which made them accessible and diminished spatial distance, they lost their spatio-temporal singularity. Schivelbusch states that: “For the twentieth century tourist, the world has become one large department store of countrysides and cities.” (p. 197)

On the other hand, as I will elaborate further in the fourth chapter, modern forms of travel have determining effects on how the world is experienced and perceived. Macnaghten and Urry (1998) propose that it is “train-passengers, car

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<sup>10</sup> According to Marx, when any object becomes a commodity, its use-value, which constitutes the singularity of the object due to its incommensurability, turns into an abstract notion of exchange-value which renders the object commensurable with other objects. In other words, an object should be abstracted from its peculiarity and should be subjected to “logic of equivalence” in order to be exchanged with other objects in the market and thus become “available”.

drivers and jet plane passengers who are the heroes of the modern world” rather than “pedestrian strollers” (*flaneurs*). (p. 164) The viewing of the world framed by train and car windows as well as on cinema and TV screens, as a series of ‘swiftly passing panoramas’, a linear series composed of quickly passing images of different places in the distance, like the moving panoramas found in nineteenth century metropolises which offered urban residents the experience of traveling the world without moving from their seats has been effective in the spectacularization of the world and homogenization of different places.

Furthermore, ‘landscapes’ in the modern era, have not only been subjected to the ‘logic of Capital’, but also that of ‘Nationalism’ in the sense that they have been utilized in the construction of the imagination of the Nation. For instance, as Edensor (2002) writes, it is impossible to imagine a nation without invoking a rural landscape. Landscapes have ideological functions in the sense that they are loaded with symbolic values and stand for national virtues. Edensor writes:

Specific geographical features may provide symbolic and political boundaries, natural borders formed by seas, rivers and mountains, that forestall invasion and contain culture and history, sustaining, mythical continuities. Out of the transformation of raw nature has emerged the most treasured national attributes, and the agricultural means by which the nation has been nourished. (p. 40)

In other words, in the imagination of the Nation, the rural has been a locale for the self-realization of the nation and affirmation of its ‘authenticity’. And it has been constructed as the other and the predecessor of the ‘urban,’ which symbolizes ‘inauthenticity’ due to its supposedly becoming corrupt, polluted and degenerate with industrialization. The rural has been depicted and imagined as that in which the national spirit resides, and thus provides the sense of belonging to the Nation.

Therefore, very similar to the logic of Capital, rural localities lose their singularities and become commensurable. And, this ideological function produces

prototypes of rural photographs in which, for instance, there are women working in farms, men on tractors and women weaving carpets. These prototypes obliterate what is incommensurable and irreducible in the rural localities according to the logic of the Nation, which is based on a unifying homogenous empty time (Anderson, 1991). In contrast to this, the urban landscape is depicted as chaotic, artificial and crowded.

Since the prototypes of landscape and tourist photographs are appropriations addressing ‘nationalizing’ and ‘consuming’ gazes we cannot see any consciousness of the effect of ‘alienation’, constitutive of the concept of landscape, in these photographs. In the following chapters I am going to look into how the photographs of the three artists I have chosen relate to the concept of landscape and its uses I have summarized above, and I will analyze their photographs in the context of contemporary landscape photography in Turkey and the international art world. Evidently the development of the concept and aesthetics of landscape in Turkey did not follow the same path I outlined in this chapter. Analyzing the development of the landscape idea and representation in this context deserves an in depth archival study of visual culture beginning in the Ottoman times. In the following paragraphs I will try to hint briefly at some important points, which I believe are relevant to my analysis.

#### Notes on the Evolution of ‘Landscape’ in Ottoman and Turkish Contexts

The styles of Western visual culture and painting were adopted in the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period of ‘modernization’ and ‘Westernization’ involving different fields such as science, technology and politics as well as the arts. Prior to this, depictions of landscape were found in miniature



paintings, where representation of space was ‘symbolic’ rather than geometric and ‘realistic’. Miniature paintings were not produced using the technique of linear perspective and the proportion as well as the relative positions of different elements in the landscape were determined by other factors, such as hierarchical relationships between people and relationships between people and objects. (Özkan, 2001)

Linear perspective was first used by Ottoman painters in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the emergence of landscape painting dates back to the same period. In an article focusing on the relationship between people and the world of objects in Ottoman culture, Doğan Kuban (1984) claims that seeing the external world as an object outside human relationships is not an aspect of traditional Ottoman culture. The method of painting using perspective and the way of seeing required by it was something Ottoman painters had to learn to master the technique. Military painters studied arts in Europe and were educated in Western traditions and techniques of art. On the other hand, in the nineteenth century photographs were used as aids to paint in perspective, mostly by artists who were not educated in the West. In any case, the adjustment to Western styles was not an easy transition. In his essay on Şeker Ahmet Paşa’s ‘Woodcutter in the Forest’ painted in late nineteenth century, John Berger (1991) refers to the difficulty the painter faces in rendering a scene from nature, a forest scene in perspective and proposes that this difficulty arises from his inability to distance himself from the forest and to see it as a scenery. (p. 91)

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, landscape gardening became fashionable in the palaces and among upper class administrators. In an article titled ‘İstanbul Gardens and the Evolution of the Concept of Nature in Turkish Culture’ Ekrem Işın (2001) argues that such an experience of nature promoted by the upper classes, which made possible the passive viewing of nature from a distance as a

scenery, created a contrast to the middle classes' collective experience of the city, where nature was a more organic and functional part of everyday life. Another aspect of landscape in the city in the nineteenth century were the increased kiosks and palaces built on both sides of the Bosphorous by the royalty and upper classes, and the leisure activities on the Bosphorous such as watching the moon collectively on small boats, which were epitomized in Divan poetry.

Coming to the subject of landscape photography, needless to say, the European gaze has been effective in shaping the tradition of landscape photography both in the Ottoman and the Republic eras. Not only were Europeans the first to photograph the Ottoman landscape, but local artists produced photographs addressing this gaze – either satisfying an Orientalist search for the exotic, different Orient; or in their efforts to represent the modernized Empire and later the Republic for the West. Stephen Sheehi (2007) writes:

The relationship between photography, modernity, and the East appeared almost simultaneously with the apparatus' debut in Europe. Egypt and Palestine were among the first destinations for French-government daguerreotype missions to visually document antiquities. Character types, landscapes, and tableau vivant genre scenes – particularly useful for postcards and exotic tablature – soon made up a large portion of the output of studios run by expatriate Europeans... (p. 178)

European travelers – painters, writers, ambassadors, archeologists, architects, engineers – with an interest in archeological sites, architectural monuments, holy sites, views of İstanbul and Eastern local cultures began photographing the landscape of Ottoman Empire beginning in the 1830s. With the advent of tourism in the nineteenth century, the number of travelers and amateur photographers looking for exotic images of the Orient increased. Local commercial photography enterprises established in the nineteenth century printed landscapes and cityscapes for tourists

reproducing the same outsider gaze. (Özkan, 2001, pp. 43-44) On the constitution of Egypt as a site of visual consumption Urry (2003a) writes:

Egypt became scripted as a place of constructed visibility, with multiple, enframed theatrical scenes set up for the edification, entertainment and visual consumption of 'European' visitors. This produce the 'new Egypt', of the Suez Canal, of 'Paris-on-the-Nile', of Thomas Cool and Sons, of a cleaned-up 'ancient Egypt', of the exotic oriental 'other' and of convenient vantage-points and viewing platforms. (p. 4)

On the other hand, there were attempts both during the Ottoman reign and the early Republic years to represent the country photographically. In the nineteenth century court photographers produced photographs of the empire to be exhibited in world fairs in Europe, which included the scenic beauties of the country as well as everyday life scenes. In the 1930s Vedat Nedim Tör, the Directorate General of Press at the time, asked Austrian photographer Othmar Pfershy to travel throughout Anatolia and photograph it and his photographs were later published in Germany in a book titled *Turkey in Photographs*, which aimed to introduce to the world images from the young republic. In an article on the developments of photography since the foundation of the republic Güler Ertan writes:

After the proclamation of the Republic, one of the most important responsibilities of photography and photographers was promoting Turkey. The creation of a visual history went side by side with the promotion of the natural beauties and the historical treasures of the country. (p.1)<sup>11</sup>

We could speak about an Occidentalist fantasy informing these endeavors, which aims to receive a confirmation from the imaginary Western gaze.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Cumhuriyet'in ilanından sonra fotoğrafa ve fotoğrafçıya düşen en önemli görevlerden biri, yeni Türkiye'nin tanıtılması idi. Bir yandan yurdun doğal güzellikleri ve tarihi zenginlikleri tanıtılırken diğer taraftan ise görsel tarih oluşturma kendiliğinden ortaya çıktı." (<http://www.fotografya.gen.tr/issue-4/guler.html>)

<sup>12</sup> Here I am referring to the meaning of Occidentalism suggested by Ahiska (2003): "I argue that the term *Occidentalism* can be best understood as describing the set of practices and arrangements justified in and against the imagined idea of "the West" in the non-West. On the one hand, it signifies a projective identification with the threatening power of the West. On the other hand, it implies a demarcation of internal and external boundaries." (p. 366)

Since then landscape photographs depicting Turkey as a country filled with natural beauties, traditional countryside views, archeological sites, historical monuments, and inhabited by a colorful diversity of people, have been important tools in the construction of the image of the nation and the promotion of it as a tourist location. In this study my intention is to investigate the changing conventions of contemporary landscape photography in Turkey by analyzing selected works by Ara Güler, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Seçil Yersel. None of the three artists work focuses on photographing the conventional/popular and touristic landscape image described above. Their photographs are not decorative depictions of natural, rural or urban scenes intended for mere aesthetic enjoyment or to be collected in an album of places visited, but they are products of certain artistic and intellectual undertakings – and in the case of Ara Güler documentation of social realities is a priority. Yet at the same time they engage with these conventions in certain ways, appropriating them and at times subverting them and I will try to reveal the implications of these choices in my analysis.

CHAPTER III  
PHOTOJOURNALISM, ‘THE DECISIVE MOMENT’  
AND LANDSCAPES IN ARA GÜLER’S PHOTOGRAPHS

Having discussed in the first chapter the concept of landscape and the landscape image in the context of the relationship between the viewer/image maker and the physical environment, in this chapter I will begin my selective analysis of contemporary landscape photography in Turkey by looking at the appearance of landscapes in Ara Güler’s photographs. The work of none of the artists focused on in this study contain representations of landscape that conceal the interventions, the coexistence or the mediation of people. Still, using the term landscape photography is even more complicated when looking at Ara Güler’s photographs because most of his work focuses on human figures. In an interview with İlker Maga published in *A Tribute to Ara Güler* (1998) Güler clearly puts forward his approach to photography: “Everything [in the world] is for the human being that is why I always take their pictures.” (p. 36) He says when he photographs a site such as Sinan’s architecture (where people are absent or are not the focus of the photographs) he is only reproducing the work of another artist and communicating an experience of it whereas he can call his photojournalist or ‘reportage’ or interview photographs, where he photographs people ‘mine’.

In the same interview Güler asserts that for him “documentation is more important than aesthetics” and that he sees himself more as a photojournalist than a photographer because unlike artists who work with fiction, photographers “write visual history” and a photograph “reflects historical facts most precisely because the

camera cannot lie”. (p.37) About the accreditation of the press photograph with a ‘factual’ quality Robert L. Craig (1999) writes:

[...] (In the late nineteenth century U.S.) the ideology of journalistic objectivity began to emerge and eventually limited the kinds of images that appeared in the press. Art illustrations, whose rhetorical qualities could editorialize as well as report, were relegated to the status of editorial cartoons. Natural photographs – that is those that appeared not to be manipulated, retouched, or set up or those that set out to code referents “faithfully” – became accepted as factual. (p. 36)

This distinction Ara Güler makes between a photograph and the work of an artist is based on a conception of photography as a medium that can produce objective representations of the world because after the shutter is released the photographic camera records what is in front of it without human intervention and therefore there is an indexical relationship between the photograph and its subject. In other words, the photographic camera is different from painting (and most other artistic media) because it creates a representation of the world through a physical and chemical (or digital process) where the light falling upon the objects in front of the lens make it possible for them to leave their traces on the film: “Unlike any other visual image, a photograph is not a rendering, an imitation or an interpretation of its subject, but actually a trace of it. No painting or drawing, however naturalist, *belongs* to its subject in the way that a photograph does.” (Berger, 1980, p. 54) And this line of thought where cameras do not lie and therefore are testimonies of reality make photographs interchangeable with their subject:

Photography *seems* to be a means of transcribing reality. The images produced appear to be not statements about the world but pieces of it, or even miniature slices of reality. A photograph thus seems to furnish evidence that something did happen – that someone really was there or that the mountain actually was that large. (Italics in the original) (Urry, 1998, p. 139)

There are several reasons for including Ara Güler in this study on landscape photographs by contemporary artists working in Turkey, even though the focus of his work is people, he considers himself a photojournalist rather than an artist, and he is among the first photojournalist hired by Turkish newspapers in the 1950s. Apart from the fact that Ara Güler's photographs have been exhibited in art exhibitions and galleries, I believe Ara Güler's photographs are representative of a style belonging to the tradition of photojournalism and photography of the moment that is still effective internationally and dominates a major part of photographic production in Turkey. In the following text I will try to elaborate on this style within the conceptual framework introduced in the first chapter, which will allow me to make a comparison between Güler's work and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's and Seçil Yersel's photographs.

### The Photographic Moment and Photojournalism

In her book titled *Photography in Turkey* (1999), Engin Özendeş divides photographic practice in Turkey into different categories and she includes Ara Güler among photographers of the 'Significant Moment' and in the group she titles 'The Poetry of Anatolia as Seen in Photographs'. On the other hand, she groups new trends in photography, including Nuri Bilge Ceylan's photographs under a heading 'Photo-Graphics and Experimentation.' About Öner Gezgin's works, which she deems to be experimental she writes: "Gezgin tried to portray his own personality in his exhibitions through photographs of his own observed or wished-for images rather than trying to capture 'the moment'." (p. 29) Hence in a way she divides contemporary photographic practice in Turkey into two categories: The photographers of the moment and experimental photographers. Even though I find

‘experimental’ to be a vague term to define a range of photographic practice I believe this categorization is significant in the sense that by defining all other conventions and styles in photography she deems to be expressionistic rather than documentary as experimental, it defines photography of the moment as the norm.

Echoing his friend and a founding member of the Magnum foundation Henri Cartier Bresson’s famous ‘decisive moment’ Ara Güler tells İlker Maga: “In my opinion the moment is very important and it should not be missed.” (p. 37) The decisive moment refers to a momentary arrangement of the elements in a photograph where the composition of the forms reach a balance that satisfies the photographer, and enables him to capture the meaning of the subject of the photograph in the best way possible.<sup>13</sup> The moment has become the ‘specific object of photography’ (Bonitzer, 2005) since the development of 35 mm fast cameras, and high sensitivity film, which made photographic process instantaneous. And this technological development coincided with the experience of the modern world as a flux of ever changing, transitory and fragmentary momentary impressions, which was central to modern art. Bonitzer describes the feeling of danger strengthening this urge to capture the moment especially after the II. World War:

Framing (cadrer) is a bull fighting term: Immobilizing the bull before hitting the last deadly blow with the sword. In the same manner, the photographic shutter immobilizes the instant and strikes the last fatal blow. When Brassai was secretly photographing pimps at night and running away to save his life when they noticed him for his *The Secret Paris of the 30s* series; when in that famous shaky photograph Capa recorded that warrior being hit in the Civil War, when he somehow captured that moment of being hit by a bullet, that moment when a human being stumbles towards death, that blurred, impossible and meaningless moment; that is only when the term ‘framing’ takes on its meaning burdened with urgency and danger in a world where everything is movement and everything constantly changes. (2005, p. 163)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For an insightful discussion of ‘the decisive moment’ see Samih Rıfat’s essay on Bresson’s photography. (Rıfat, 2006)

<sup>14</sup> “Çerçevelemek’ (cadrer) bir boğa güreşi terimidir: Kılıçla son öldürücü darbeyi vurmada önce



In his essay titled ‘Urbanity, Fragmentation, and the Everyday: Theoretical Dispositions’ (2000) Steven Jacobs refers to Baudelaire’s interpretation of modernity as “the realm of the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and immutable.” (p. 15) And he writes:

The entwined notions of modernity and fragmentation also make up the modern – or, should we say more accurately, modernist – art. [...] It is exactly the juxtaposition, accumulation, or succession of fragments, evoking the rhythm of everyday shock experiences, that induces the intoxicating or phantasmagorical experience of the metropolis so characteristic of the avant-garde. (p. 16)

Beginning in the 1930s armed with their 35 mm Leicas, which became prolongations of their body, photographers went on to capture and freeze these fugitive moments.

The production of small-format cameras and fast lenses also made possible the immediate capturing of events to be published in illustrated papers and magazines. In the Introduction to the book *Magnum Stories* (2004), Chris Boot dates the beginning of ‘modern photojournalism’ and the ‘reportage’ technique used by photojournalists to 1928’s Germany:

Between a relatively small group of publishers, editors and photographers, a new language of photographic record was invented. Sequences of photographs, usually focused on human subjects caught informally, and made without the use of flash or artificial light, published over several pages of the *Berlin Illustrierte* or *Münchener Illustrierte*, became the new medium of mass communication known, at this stage, as ‘reportage’. (p. 4)

And he refers to Tim Gidal’s words on the relationship between ‘reportage’ and the human condition: “Here was a new language of the real, taking its cue (according to Tim Gidal, one of the earliest leading reportage photographers) ‘not from art or

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boğayı hareketsiz bırakmak’. Fotoğraf enstantanesi de anı böyle hareketsiz bırakır ve ona son darbeyi vurur. Brassai, 30’ların Gizli Paris’i dizisi için gece vakti habersizce pezevenklerin fotoğraflarını çekip, fark ettikleri anda kaçarak canını kurtarıken; Capa, İspanya Savaşı’nda vurulan savaşıçıyı tespit ettiği ünlü titrek fotoğrafında o kurşunu yeme anını, bir insanın ölüme doğru tökezlediği o flu, imkansı, anlamsız anı kimbilir nasıl yakalarken; işte ancak o zaman, çerçeveleme terimi, her şeyin hareket olduğu, her şeyin her an durmaksızın değiştiği bir dünyada, aciliyet ve tehlike yüklü anlamını kazanır. ‘An’ böylece fotoğrafın özgül nesnesi olur ve askıya alınmış an olarak büyük tutkunların fetiş haline gelir...”

literature, but from the many and varied aspects of the condition humaine itself”.

(p.4)

Boot notes that photojournalism was used as a tool of nationalist propaganda in Europe and the United States and refers to the words of the founder of the infamous *Life* magazine about promoting the American values and ideals throughout the world. Magnum, a cooperatively owned photographic agency Ara Güler is associated with was founded in 1947, by a group of photographers who desired to work on their independent projects and to “free themselves from bonds of loyalty to any particular journal and its brand of propaganda” (Boot, 1999, p.5) Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the founders of Magnum and considered the father of photojournalism and street photography, defines the mission of the cooperative to be photographing and therefore recording and interpreting the contemporary world:

I wish to remind everyone that Magnum was created to allow us, and in fact to oblige us, to bring testimony on our world and contemporaries according to our own abilities and interpretations. When events of significance are taking place, when it doesn't involve a great deal of money and when one is nearby, one must stay photographically in contact with the realities taking place in front of our lenses and not hesitate to sacrifice material comfort and security. This return to our sources would keep our heads and our lenses above the artificial life, which so often surrounds us. I am shocked to see to what extent so many of us are conditioned - almost exclusively by the desires of the clients... (Magnum Photos Website)

The practice of members of the Magnum agency is defined as a mix of photojournalism and art – the photographers aim to document what is contemporary around the world with an aesthetic sensibility which allows them to portray not simply what is in front of the lens, but to wait for the right moment and to choose among the many viewpoints available: “[...] the idiosyncratic mix of reporter and artist that continues to define Magnum, emphasizing not only what is seen but also the way one sees it.” (Magnum Photos Website)

In a disdain for an ‘artificial’ world full of images, and the ‘artificial’ poses adorning magazines taken by photographers who worked on paid assignments, the founders of the Magnum engaged with a leftist critique of the world, worked on their self-given assignments where they went after the ‘real’ and the ‘natural’.<sup>15</sup> Their efforts were both motivated by a curiosity and a desire to document and exhibit the post-war world. (Magnum Photos Website)

According to Boot the photo stories of some of the Magnum photographers committed to the founding ideals “[...] continue to address the issues of society and to be anchored by an idealistic hope that in revealing their subjects, their pictures might contribute to a better understanding of the world.” (p. 8) In her essay concerning Holocaust Photography, Barbie Zelizer (1999) refers to the responsibility of the photojournalist (and reporter) to ‘bear witness’ – “to take responsibility for what was seen and respond.” (p. 102) She notes that when Gen. Dwight Eisenhower visited the concentration camps after liberation he “was horrified, and commanded the press to ‘let the world see.’” (p. 102) Güler (1998) also speaks of the responsibility of the photographer and says: “[...] it is more important that the sufferings of the people are also known to future generations. A photo serves as a means of recordings things and it should tell the drama so that a conclusion can be drawn from it.” (p. 37) Hence this responsibility is based on the belief that creating an awareness of the sufferings of people, or the reality of the world in general may facilitate change. In a way he defines himself as an invisible, but well-informed and therefore attentive and objective eye that records the dramatic moment “without changing reality.” (p. 44) He says, “People shouldn’t be aware of the approaching

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<sup>15</sup> The ability of photography to capture what is real and natural is questioned by many members of the agency today, among whom are photographers like Martin Parr and Lise Sarfati who ironically question this quest of photo-journalism in their photographs. See *Magnum Stories* edited by Chris Boot (2004) for a comprehensive look at the work of the members from the founders to contemporary artists.

photographer. Otherwise you lose naturalness. [...] A photograph must work like a silent witness” (p.43) And that, “[...] a photo-journalist must be a cultivated person. He must be aware of the world. [...] He must know the world and travel a lot.” (p. 46)

Magnum photographers and photojournalists in general photograph people and events – significant people, important events and ordinary people, everyday life in different parts of the world with an emphasis on what is contemporary. Hence we could say that most of the time landscapes appear in their photographs in one of these contexts, mostly not as an object of contemplation, but as a background, a setting for the events or the people. On the other hand the results of their work exhibited publicly in newspapers, magazines and other media form the visual repertoire through which these different settings are identified with. Photojournalistic photographs create access to different parts of the world through images and participate in the transformation of different parts of the physical world into visual images. The aesthetic conventions of photojournalism, which vary in time with an increasing concern for producing photographs with artistic value rather than quickly captured moments, become effective in how people perceive the world visually.

Similarly Güler’s photographs of Turkey are among the most widely circulated images of the nation and are an important part of the visual imagery of the Turkish landscape. In the remaining text I will analyze the appearance of landscapes in a range of Ara Güler’s photographs I chose from different sources for the purpose of including in this study. His oeuvre spanning over more than fifty years is immensely extensive. Therefore this is not a comprehensive look at his photography, but an attempt to discover some general attributes of how landscape is depicted in his photographs.

## The Contemporary versus the Past



Figure 3. Ara Güler, 'Roman forum in Aizanoi. Çavdarhisar-Kütahya', 1983

In his book *All The World In Their Faces* (1995) Güler titles a section, which includes landscapes that contain archeological ruins and human settlements “On being inside as well as totally outside time.” (Fig. 3) What makes these places out of time is the archeological ruins and what makes them in time is the human settlement in and around them. Apart from commissioned projects, historical or archeological sites seem to appear in Güler’s photographs as long as they are situated in inhabited



areas (Fig. 4) or as backdrops to the everyday, creating a contrast to it like the misty old city silhouettes behind the hectic İstanbul views (Fig. 5).



Figure 4. 'City Walls and Vegetable Gardens, Merkezefendi, 1993'



Figure 5. Ara Güler, 'People on the wooden Salacak dock trying to bathe in the sea, The Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia in the background', 1969

Güler's understanding of creativity, originality and the responsibility of the photographer is interlinked with the subjectivity of the gaze directed towards what I am going to speculatively call 'dynamic landscapes' – that is contemporary landscapes where the drama of everyday takes place. His work concerns mainly the present and this idea of the present based on a linear understanding of time and excludes the past – the past survives in the present only in the form of monuments, or souvenirs such as photographs. Güler's everyday scenes are not banal, boring or repetitive, but take the form of 'fresh encounters'<sup>16</sup> filled with action and often work.

The concepts of 'the moment' and 'drama' are very important notions when looking at Güler's oeuvre. In his landscape images Güler's subject is the aesthetics of the everyday specific to locations and its representation involves documenting – selecting and cutting out – unique moments and bringing them together. The photographic moment can be described as a momentary desired arrangement of elements – such as expressions, actions and objects –, an arrangement that is worth taking a photograph of and hence is distinct from those preceding it and coming after it; an arrangement that requires an effort by the photographer, to search for it, to wait for it, to recognize it and to capture it. The moment is always transitory, fleeting and the photographer strives to capture it before it vanishes. The result is a representation of a contingent view: how things were seen from a certain point at a certain moment.

When looking at Güler's photographs today it is difficult to engage in this notion of contemporary and fleeting moments because his photographs have become clichés representing a historical period in Turkey. Apart from portraits, his photographs depicting nostalgic scenes - fishermen and their boats in the

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<sup>16</sup> "The badge of the Cartier-Bresson mythology was the 35mm Leica camera. Armed with a Leica or two, the photographer roamed at large, prizing instinct over calculation. In theory, each new picture was the fruit of a fresh existential encounter, a durable image plucked from the flux of experience..." (Galassi, 2001, p. 12)

Bosphorous, farmers working in fields in different parts of Anatolia, women weaving carpets – are much more widely circulated than his more recent images depicting for example skyscrapers, concrete residential compounds, or highway structures. Enis Batur (2000) writes that Güler was a witness of a past era: “[...] it should be noted that Ara Güler stands today as a witness of an era devoured by a hungry Time Machine.”<sup>17</sup> (p. 8) Here the term ‘bearing witness’ takes on another meaning: to bear witness to a time that is bound to pass by, freezing appearances of it in photographs, and documenting what it looked like visually. There is a relationship between the effort to capture the moment before it vanishes, and photographing and therefore immortalizing the photograph’s subjects before they disappear, or are buried in the past. In this way, the past is preserved in photographs. Ara Güler’s approach to certain landscapes such as İstanbul bears the mark of this danger of loss. In interviews he often mentions that he has documented a city that is now lost. Hence his photographs are unique photographs of moments that are going to pass by and landscapes that are going to change. On the relationship between photography and its desire to preserve what is disappearing Susan Sontag (1990) writes:

Cameras began duplicating the world at that moment when the human landscape started to undergo a vertiginous rate of change: while an untold number of forms of biological and social life are being destroyed in a brief span of time, a device is available to record what is disappearing. [...] Like the dead relatives and friends preserved in the family album, whose presence in photographs exorcises some of the anxiety and remorse prompted by their disappearance, so the photographs of neighborhoods now torn down, rural places disfigured and made barren, supply our pocket relation to the past. (p. 66)

The important point she is making here is that photographs produced with the desire to document and preserve landscapes before they are transformed, turn the images of what once these places looked like into retrievable and imaginarily revisitable

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<sup>17</sup> “Ara Güler’in, aç bir Zaman Makinası’nın öğüttüğü bir çağın özel tanıklarından biri olarak önümüzde durduğunu eklemek gerekir.”



objects. Hence they separate the current landscape from the past one in an absolute sense, as if there was once something there, which no longer exists, but is preserved intact in photographs. The photograph showing an old Ottoman mansion next to a tall building (Fig. 6) included in another section of the same book *All the World in Their Faces* titled ‘On the changing and unchanging’ may seem to be an exception because it shows the coexistence of the ‘changing’ and the ‘unchanging’, however it can also be argued that by pointing to an obvious contrast between the two buildings the photograph supports the same dichotomy between the old and the new.



Figure 6. Ara Güler, ‘Old Ottoman mansion with modern buildings behind, Altunizade- İstanbul’, 1993

## Uniqueness, Specificity and Representation

The idea of uniqueness is emphasized by the titles of Güler's photographs, which give detailed information about the date and the location of the photographs. The titles are like small descriptions of his images, at times almost naively telling the viewer what he/she is seeing. Barthes (1985) writes: "[...] all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others" and that "polysemy poses a question of meaning [...]" (p. 197) He proposes that a caption accompanying an image yields a 'linguistic message', which is a technique used to "[...]to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs" (p. 197) in an image, and one of its functions "commonly found in press photographs and advertisements" (p. 198) is 'anchorage': "At the level of the literal message, the text replies - in a more or less direct, more or less partial manner – to the question: what is it?" and;

When it comes to the 'symbolic message', the linguistic message no longer guides identification but interpretation, constituting a kind of vice which holds the connote meanings from proliferating, whether towards excessively individual regions (it limits, that is to say, the projective power of the image) or towards dysphoric values... (p. 197)

In a similar manner the titles of Güler's photographs make the images simple and often create ready meanings. This method can be the product of an effort to distance oneself from an artistic practice, which works with symbols, metaphors, associations and fiction. Rather than inviting the viewer to contemplate on the details of the images and make associations, the titles point at the elements constituting the intended meaning of the photographs. The images also often contain iconic elements that are associated with the dominant representations of the location of the

photograph: the old city silhouette, the minarets, the city walls, the commuter boats, the bridges, the trams, the traffic jam and the crowds in İstanbul; the factory in Karabük... (Fig. 7, Fig. 8) The issue of uniqueness is mentioned by Ara Güler in the introduction to a collection of his İstanbul photographs (1995). The feeling of loss that is included in the title of the book is expressed by Güler in his fear about İstanbul becoming a city just like any other in the world. Hence in a way, by using descriptive titles and by including the iconic symbols associated with the identity of the locations he photographs Güler both aims to differentiate them from other places and to produce images of them that claim to be similar to ‘miniature slices of reality.’

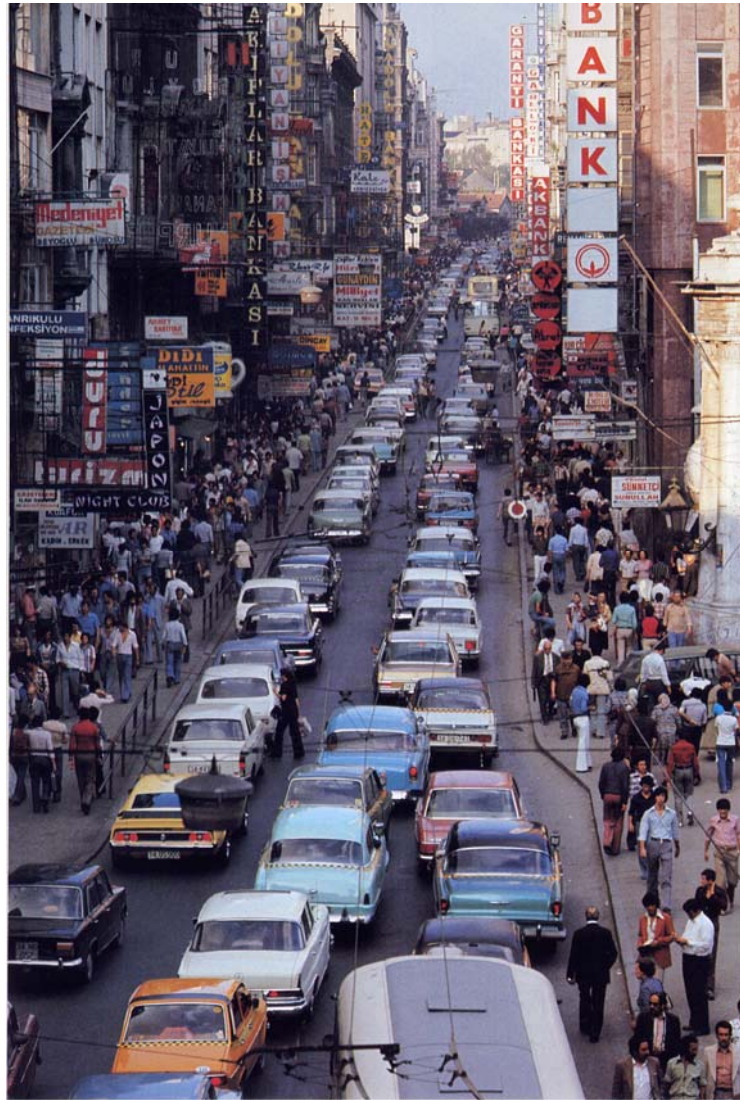


Figure 7. Ara Güler, ‘İstiklal Caddesi, going from Taksim to Galatasaray. Beyoğlu’, 1965





Figure 8. Ara Güler, 'A mine worker going home in Karabük', 1968

Such an emphasis on the unique and the ability of photography to capture and represent its subject can be contrasted with the anonymous quality of a certain kind of popular landscape imagery widely available in Turkey.<sup>18</sup> Popular images that one comes across in middle class or working class houses, offices, apartment buildings, coffeehouses, restaurants mostly in the format of poster reproductions or affordable oil paintings, are most often not of specific areas, or widely recognized natural wonders, but of more small-scale, harmonious and 'refreshing' natural views, such as

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<sup>18</sup> I believe these kinds of images are also produced in other parts of the world, but I haven't performed a research, which would enable me to make a comparison between these and the ones available in Turkey.

a waterfall, a seaside, a valley, or a mountain edge. A lot of the time the locations these images reproduce remains anonymous, or they are labeled with the name of the larger area they are located in, such as the name of the village, the small town or the city. In the case where the sites in these images are the hometowns of their viewers, such as where a coffeehouse owner hangs images of his hometown, his village, we can say that they are objects of nostalgia for the hometown. In other cases, such images may participate in a longing for the ‘natural’ in the midst of the industrial city, as I discussed in the previous chapter.



Figure 9. Anonymous.<sup>19</sup>

On another level, I think in such nature photographs the anonymity or the indefiniteness of the locations is interesting. John Berger (1991) makes a distinction between private and public uses of photography. He writes that a private photograph “[...] lives in an ongoing continuity” because it is not severed from its context. Conversely the public photograph “[...] is torn from its context, and becomes a dead

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<sup>19</sup> Typing the word ‘landscape’ in the graphic search option of a search engine on the internet yields to millions of anonymous digitized landscape photographs their content similar to the images described above.

object which, exactly because it is dead, lends itself to arbitrary use.” (p. 60) And these objects are appropriated and given meanings to in different locations and times. Due to photography’s claim to represent reality, such public photographs are treated as if they represented the original. Yet, in the representations of nature I described above there does not seem to be a desire to represent the reality of a certain place, as if it were obvious that the images have been severed from their contexts. This is partially due to their being stereotypical images resembling each other, making every mountain, lake and village resemble each other. They ignore the specific visual aspects, which might serve to differentiate one place from another. At the same time they do not exhibit any attempt to exhibit a proof, a trace of having been there.

Alternatively, the formal characteristics of Ara Güler’s photographs, which emphasize that the image coincides with the view point of the photographer specific to a location and a time, work as traces of his presence and therefore confirm the claim of the photographs to document reality. I believe that Güler’s firm belief in the ability of photography to record and document reality has led him to produce images, which attempt to emphasize the reality of the experience by freezing movements and creating compositions that are framed imitating the view point and perspective of a person in movement- limited, distorted and fragmentary. Many of Güler’s compositions contain out of focus and partial objects, which transmit to the viewer the feeling that this frame is taken from one of many viewpoints available to photograph from, it is a fragment of a larger picture and in a moment it is going to change: the people, the boats, the smoke, the tram, the donkey will move. The photographer’s preference of documentation over aesthetics is meaningful in this respect. He is a photographer who does not contemplate when looking, but records a

new experience each time. He records a movement that might disappear of his sight if contemplates for too long on the aesthetics of the frame.

### Proximity and Participation



Figure 10. Ara Güler, 'Field of Poppies in Thrace. Tekirdağ', 1985

These formal aspects of Güler's images reveal the *proximity* of the photographer to his subjects. Even in a landscape photograph depicting an open field, in the foreground is a close up and out of focus image of the flowers behind which extends only a portion of the field. (Fig. 10) Unlike Ceylan's and Yersel's panoramic views that physically require a distance between the photographer and the subject, Güler's photographs indicate proximity. And most of the time the results of this proximity are a lack of a broad perspective; absence of depth of field and flattened images; vertical framing to limit the view and perhaps to cut out intrusions. The photographs portray what the people in the photographs see, or what a person would see if she/he

stood right where the photographer as a participant in the dynamics stood, and as I suggested earlier this creates a reality effect.

I think compared with Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs, Ara Güler's images convey an intricate relationship between the landscape, and the objects and the people who occupy it at that moment; including the photographer who is sometimes an inhabitant like in the case of İstanbul and sometimes a visitor. Often there is a similarity between the sizes of the landscape elements in the composition and the objects and the people that occupy it, thus creating a sense of embracement of them by the landscape. For example, a vertically framed photograph showing a woman walking down a hill (Fig. 11) doesn't convey a feeling of loneliness or alienation like images that have similar subject matters produced by the latter two artists. The depth of field that has been flattened make the woman appear as a part of the landscape, not as a small figure that simply rises on a small portion of the large field, but occupying the same space as the trees, the houses, the sea and the sky. The same thing can be said for photographs of villagers working in the landscape alone. (Fig. 12)

Unlike the emptiness in Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs the proximity of the photographer to his subject and the fragmentary compositions lead to a certain feeling of chaos and abundance in the frames, but it is not alienating or overpowering. There is an entanglement of people, objects and the landscape, a certain coexistence, simultaneous work and movement. Therefore a dominant feeling induced by Ara Güler's landscape images is a landscape in transformation rather than a still, overpowering one. In many photographs of İstanbul the silhouette of the old city creates a contrast to the rest of the city in motion.



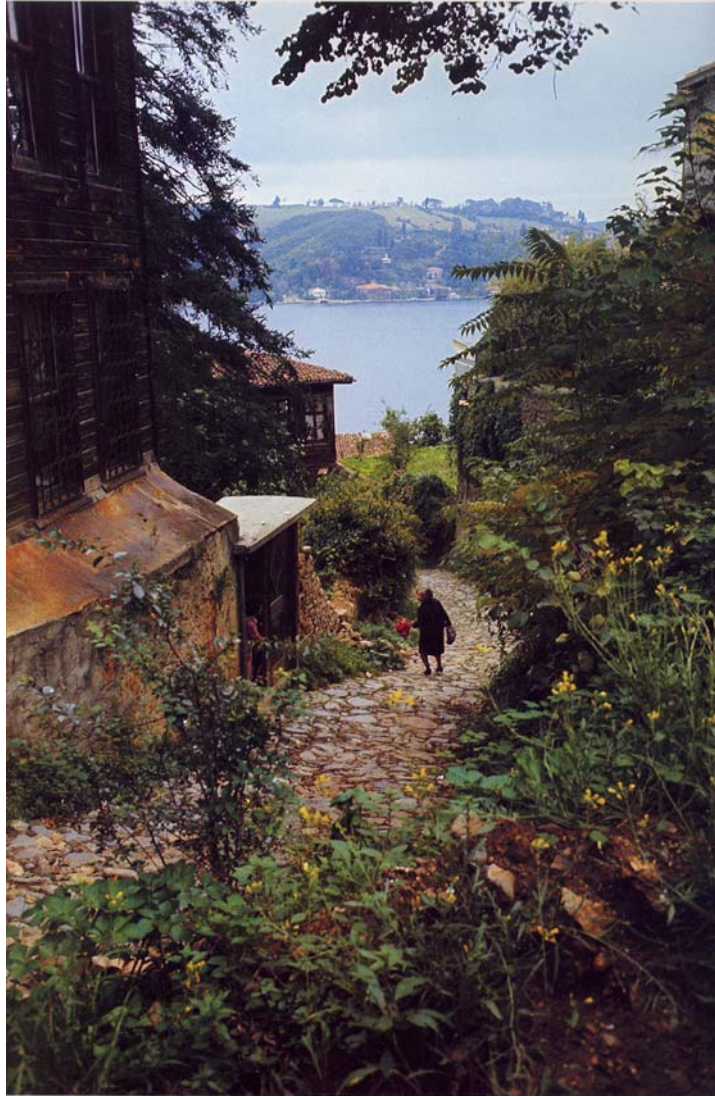


Figure 11. Ara Güler, 'A hill in Rumelihisarı', 1962

The people, the workers, the villagers most often constitute the main theme of Güler's landscape photographs. A wharf is not photographed without the people at work and a factory not without a worker, the sea not with fisherman or commuter boats, ruined buildings not without people collecting pieces to sell (Fig. 13) or people who used to occupy those buildings once, a graveyard not without children playing around.





Figure 12. Ara Güler, 'Peasant working in the field in the mountains of North-Western Anatolia. Zigana', 1959



Figure 13. Ara Güler, 'Pillagers who came to collect pieces of wood and iron right after the demolitions in Eminönü. Eminönü', 1986

His focus is rarely scenes of ‘natural’ beauty by itself, but especially in his photographs of rural areas, environments where human figures, natural beauty, and good lighting coexist making it possible to create beautiful compositions. (Fig. 14, 15)

Hence people are definitely a part of Güler’s aesthetics of the landscape. Urry (1998) writes: “To photograph is in some way to appropriate the object being photographed. It is a power/knowledge relationship. To have visual knowledge of an object is in part to have power, even if only momentarily, over it.” (pp. 138-139) Güler also speaks of the importance of the knowledge of the photographer about his/her subject matter. Hence on the one side there is the photographer as an informed, cultured figure who looks and makes sense of his/her surrounding, knows what is worth documenting and its meaning, and on the other side there are the human figures who are being looked at while they are occupied, mostly working. Moreover in some of Güler’s images, except for some urban views the people themselves are not looking at the landscape in the background. Most of the time the scenic view rises behind or above the people who are photographed when engaged with other activities than looking. (Fig. 14, 15)

On the other hand, Güler’s proximity to the human figures and his refusal to portray them as another small element in the landscape, but focusing on them and pointing to how they move and work in the landscape complicates this relationship. The photographs often imply a direct and not estranged relationship between the people and the landscape and emphasize the land’s use value. Güler’s photographs of rural do contain elements in conformity to mainstream representations of the country, mainly defined by their contrast to hectic, crowded and polluted urban scenes. His rural scenes depict more open space, natural areas with less human intervention,



vernacular architecture and traditional motifs. Still, the physical environment of country is not transformed into an aesthetic object or a setting providing a refreshing spot for the town dweller, where the appearance of workers or technological machinery disturbs its enjoyment. Due to his interest in the human condition Güler photographs the rural with people working in it, using and transforming the land.



Figure 14. Ara Güler, 'Woman spreading out red peppers on the roof of her house in the village of Kale at Kekova. Antalya', 1984



Figure 15. Ara Güler, 'Shepard with his sheep on the plain with Great and Small Mt Ararat in the background.' *Doğu Beyazıt*, 1989

Even though the photographs do seem to claim having a larger, more detached view of the environment than the human figures appearing in them, Güler is interested in portraying the experience of the people in the photographs and to emphasize how much they shape the landscape itself. I believe Güler's photographs aim to portray his contingent visual experience of an environment at a specific moment, which most of the time corresponds with the experience of the people appearing in the photographs due to his proximity to them. For instance there are some photographs that depict small size human figures in country landscapes. The vertical framing both reduces the feeling of isolation and loneliness; and attempts to communicate the experience of being among high mountains, or under vast skies. (Fig. 16)



Figure 16. Ara Güler, 'Village on the skirts of Mt Süphan and tractor. Van', 1983

By emphasizing the social and collective production of landscape Güler resists the conventional depiction of landscapes explained in the second chapter. At the same time, we can speak of a romanticizing depiction of the country in his photographs – the reason for Engin Özendeş' inclusion of Güler under the title 'The Poetry of Anatolia as Seen in Photographs' – addressing a nationalizing gaze. Moreover, Güler's aesthetics do not vary between his photographs of Turkey and other parts of the world. In compliance with the ideals of the Magnum members explained earlier, Ara Güler's photographs exhibit an interest in the global human condition, and of

course the global circulation of images of distant places. Onat Kutlar (1995) claims that Güler embodies both İstanbul and Turkey and the world:

Ara Güler is not only İstanbul, he is all of Turkey, he is Anatolia. From Kars to Edirne, Anamur to Sinop there is no single piece of land that has not gone through Ara Güler's lens, that his eyes haven't touched. [...] Ara Güler is a large Turkish nation. And Ara Güler is a resident of the world. With a devotion, enthusiasm and curiosity characterizing Magnum photographers he is a member of, wherever a leaf moves in any part of the world, Ara Güler is there. In Bangladesh, in Borneo, in Africa, in the Steps, in Indonesia. He can't even remember all the countries he has traveled to, the events and people he has witnessed like a contemporary Marco Polo. You know these days people speak of the world as a large village, Ara Güler is the 'muhtar' (headman) of that village. Yes, Ara Güler is İstanbul, Turkey and the earth. (p. 6)<sup>20</sup>

On the one hand Güler's photographs seem like they are slices of a world turned into a series of photographs. The fragmentary quality of his photographs suggests that another possible photograph begins where his frame ends, or that if he had turned his head he would have photographed the subject from another viewpoint. On the other hand, both the photographer and the human figures seem to be active participants in the physical environments because the photographs convey visually contingent – specific to a moment and view point – experiences of being in these environments. I suggest that we think of this claim to represent participation and the associated desire to grant the viewer a sense of participation in the same environment as a form of appropriation aimed to compensate for the distant and alienated relationship with physical environments embodied in the landscape image.

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<sup>20</sup> “Ara Güler sadece İstanbul değildir. Tüm bir Türkiye, bir Anadolu'dur Ara Güler. Kars'tan Edirne'ye, Anamur'dan Sinop'a Ara'nın gözünün dokunmadığı, objektiflerinden geçmeyen bir karış toprak yoktur. [...] Kafayla, gözle ve yürekle. Ara Güler, koca bir Türkiye ülkesidir. Ve bir dünyalıdır Ara Güler. Kendisinin de üyesi bulunduğu Magnum fotoğrafçılarının inanılmaz bağlılığı, coşkusu ve merakı ile dünyanın neresinde bir yaprak kıpırdasa, Ara Güler oradadır. Bangladeş'te, Borneo'da, Afrika'da, Stepelerde, Endonezya'da. Onun çağdaş bir Marco Polo gibi dolaştığı ülkeleri, tanıklık ettiği olayları, insanları kendisi bile artık oturup sayamıyor. Günümüzde dünyadan hep büyük bir köy olarak söz ediliyor ya, o köyün muhtarı Ara Güler'dir. Evet, hem İstanbul hem Türkiye hem de yeryüzüdür Ara Güler.”

About participation and landscape image Cosgrove (1998) writes:

Landscape distances us from the world in critical ways, defining a particular relationship with nature and those who appear in nature, and offers us the illusion of a world in which we may participate subjectively by entering the picture frame along the perspectival axis. But this is an aesthetic entrance not an active engagement with nature or space that has its own life. (p. 55)

In the next chapter, I will describe and discuss the ways through which Nuri Bilge Ceylan's and Seçil Yersel's works resist such forms of appropriation and offering the illusion of participation described by Cosgrove.



## CHAPTER IV

### ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF PHOTOGRAPHING LANDSCAPES

Before beginning to discuss Nuri Bilge Ceylan's and Seil Yersel's landscape photographs I would like to come back to the discussion in the first chapter related to the two paintings 'An Ideal Townscape' and 'Protestant Gothic Church (Fig. 1&2), which I believe will inform the comparison I will make between Ara Gler's and the two artists' work. These paintings are taken from Peter Galassi's book accompanying an exhibition with the same name *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (1981). In the book Galassi problematizes the traditional accounts of the relationship between painting and photography by demonstrating how the invention of photography was preceded by changes in conventions of 'realist' and 'authentic' pictorial representation in Europe beginning as early as in the seventeenth century and flourishing in landscape sketches made by prominent painters in the nineteenth century. He argues that the painting 'Protestant Gothic Church' by De Witte is a forerunner of the transformation of visual conventions of realistic painting, and that the syntax of the painting is closer to that of photography than of earlier perspective paintings. In 'An Ideal Townscape' the subject of the painting is depicted in an ideal manner – from an appropriate distance, in clear and even lighting, providing a symmetric and whole view and a logical ordering of the elements. In this painting the axis of vision is determined according to the subject, whereas in the second the framing and the point of view are arbitrary in relation to the form of the subject of the painting. Rather than providing a whole view of the church, the second painting provides a fragmentary image of it based on an arbitrary viewpoint at an arbitrary moment and lighting situation. Galassi argues that in this later conception of

the perspective system “the world is accepted first as an uninterrupted field of potential pictures” (p. 16) and the artist chooses where to begin and end his framing.

Therefore:

[...] the earlier work is formed in the service of its subject’s absolute order, while the later submits to the disruptive influence of an ostensibly arbitrary viewpoint and moment in time. We stand outside the Italian view, admirers of the timeless perfection of the imaginary townscape; in de Witte’s picture we are participants in the contingent experience of everyday life. (p. 14)

According to Galassi, in the first painting the frame and viewpoint are determined first and elements of the picture are arranged inside to provide a comprehensive view of the subject whereas in the second painting the painter’s viewpoint “plays an active, decisive role” and the framing is arbitrary in relation to the subject. (p.17)

There are two subject positions at stake here. In the former painting, the painter constructs a comprehensive and ordered view of his subject, to provide an ideal and therefore universal view of it. In the second case, the painter’s chosen viewpoint and contingent experience become effective in the constitution of a particular view. This notion of photography where a reality effect is created by making visible the contingencies of the photographer’s visual experience unique to a place and time, as well as the contingent conditions of the physical environment was discussed in the previous chapter in the context of Ara Güler’s photographs. Galassi states that such an image makes its viewers participants in the everyday experience of the physical environment portrayed, rather than providing an idealistic image of it. The distinction he makes between the content of each painting – an ideal and ordered landscape, and a mundane, everyday scene – does not concern us at the moment, because as I will further elaborate, the photographs of all three artists in this study contain everyday scenes, rather than ideal, or even extraordinary ones. Still, on a general level we can say that the difference between the formal characteristics of Ara Güler’s and the

latter two artists' photographs resembles the difference between the two paintings Gallassi uses in his argument. Both the photographs in Ceylan's 'Turkey Cinemascope' series, which I chose to look at in this study, and a majority of Yersel's photographs, are panoramic images and they contain wide views shot from a distance. They are not fragmentary like Güler's images and most of them are closed, symmetrical compositions containing whole and self-contained views of landscapes and townscapes.

In the first chapter, I had explicated that the concept of the landscape implicates (both for the viewer and the artist) a detachment, a distance and a non-participation in the physical environment represented. And the becoming of the world a series of pictures to choose from is precisely what produces and is produced by this non-participation and visualization. I will argue that Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs make the distance and alienation intrinsic both to the notion of landscape and the practice of photography visible. The first and the most easily recognizable way in which they do this is by preserving a physical distance from the landscape they are photographing. Furthermore, both photographers deal with the mediation and the process of spectacularization involved in the notion of the landscape and its representation. Both artists have photographed people viewing the environment that appears in their photographs, thus emphasizing the nature of landscape as a viewed scene and decentralizing the gaze of the photographer. Yersel also investigates the concepts of the 'spectacle' in her photographs by looking at places designated for spectacular and visual consumption. Then again, Ceylan's photographs almost always make us conscious that we are looking at a two-dimensional representation of an environment, either because they render it with a

perfect classical one-point perspective, which tells us that the extensive depth of field is only an illusion; or because space becomes a two-dimensional abstraction.

What's more, I will argue that Ceylan's and Yersel's images of landscape reveal the possibilities of producing photographs, which question the commodification of landscape, the promotion of certain destinations – urban centers, natural wonders, tourist attractions – and their availability through photographs which become interchangeable with the sights themselves and therefore conceal and annihilate their distance and singularity as well as the status of the photographer as a sovereign subject who understands, interprets and represents the place.

### Distance, Alienation and Travel

About the landscape scenes in Ceylan's films Asuman Suner (2005) writes<sup>21</sup>: "The nature scenes in these films are very different from the landscapes we often come across in nostalgia films, which are aesthesized using special lighting and filters, resemble postcards and could almost be defined as 'touristic' (or to put it in Barthes's words 'visitable'). (p. 133)<sup>22</sup> She refers to the distinction Barthes (2000) makes between 'habitable' and 'visitable' landscapes: "For me photographs of landscape (urban or country) must be habitable, not visitable." (p. 38) One possible characteristic that defines a 'vistable' landscape and is definitely an object of the tourist gaze is the 'extraordinary' landscape. In *The Tourist Gaze* (1998) Urry argues that tourists search for landscapes and townscapes that are different from those

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<sup>21</sup>Ceylan is also a film director and the influence of his experience and engagement with photography is discernable in his cinema. However, comments on his films cannot be directly applied to his photographs, at least in the context of this study. This observation by Suner was quoted because the distinction she makes provides a useful tool for my analysis of the two artists' photographs.

<sup>22</sup> "Bu çekimlerdeki doğa görüntüleri, nostalji filmlerinde sıkça rastladığımız özel ışık ve filtre kullanımıyla estetsize edilmiş, kartpostal benzeri, neredeyse "turistik" denilebilecek (ya da Barthes'in deyişiyle "ziyaret edilebilir") manzaralardan çok farklıdır."

confronted in their ordinary lives and everyday experiences. As a leisure activity, which “presupposes its opposite, namely regulated and organized work”, tourism involves a temporary “departure” from “the everyday and the mundane.” (p. 2) Therefore, it is landscapes and townscape that have distinct and relatively extraordinary qualities that are the objects of the tourist gaze. Yersel’s and most of Ceylan’s landscapes are definitely not visitable or extraordinary in this sense. They are photographs of what seems like frontal encounters with the ordinary, photographed as they are seen in the everyday. Perhaps Ceylan’s photographs like ‘Village in Capadoccia’, ‘İshak Pasa’ or ‘Lake Meke’ (Fig. 17, 18, 19) where it seems like he found a favorable high angle (a bird’s eye view) and preferred dramatic lighting to photograph these picturesque tourist or natural attractions from may constitute exceptions. However, even in these photographs where nature retains its distant and alienating aspects resisting appropriation, the dark and gloomy skies, the snowy hills, the absence of people, the emptiness and the photographer’s distance to his main subjects distinguish them from mainstream images.



Figure 17. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, ‘Village in Capadoccia’, 2003



Figure 18. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Lake Meke', 2003



Figure 19. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'İshakpaşa Palace', 2005

On the other hand, neither of the photographers depicts habitable landscapes. In the previous chapter it was argued that in Ara Güler's photographs a non-estranged relationship between land and people occupying it was depicted because formally the photographer's proximity to his subjects resulted in fragmentary and not overpowering images of physical environments and because the content of his photographs show people living and working in and transforming the land. Conversely, the distance and alienation part of all of Ceylan's and Yersel's works, the emptiness and stillness of their images, the small proportions of the sizes of the human figures in comparison to the wideness of the landscapes, and their avoidance of giving clues as to the involvement or the relationship of the people who appear in their photographs with the place they are photographed in or with the viewer are some of the aspects resisting the sense of the inhabitable. Particularly in Yersel's case, the world, especially the urban landscape is a site of displacement where due to

commercialization and urban planning city residents are left with no public spaces to inhabit. Construction sites, muddy streets, torn down pavements, barren fields, trashcans, signs of an uninhabitable world frequently appear in her photographs. If Ceylan's landscape photographs are at all 'habitable' in certain instances, it is partially due to his style of photographing where he remains as unobtrusive as possible towards his subjects. He permits his subject to exert itself in the image for him to record as much as possible. And the results are images of the everyday abundant with detail.

Another way in which Ceylan's and Yersel's photography comment on a phenomenon that is closely related to the concept of landscape is the aspects of their photographs that allude to or are related to travel. In the second chapter it was noted that seeing the world through train and automobile windows played an important role in the transformation of the physical world into images. The landscapes that constitute the subjects of Ceylan's photographs are similar to views seen from train or car windows when traveling in and between urban centers in Turkey - country roads, train tracks, small villages, open fields... Traveling by automobile and viewing the scenery from a windshield is the subject of some of Seçil Yersel's landscape photographs.



Figure 20. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Country road at dusk', 2003



Figure 21. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2000

Travel is one of the most important experiences, which has historically shaped the contemporary relationship of humans to landscape and travel and photography have developed interdependently since the nineteenth century. Having mentioned that looking for picturesque views was a cause of travel in the eighteenth century and a premature form of tourism, I will try to give an account of how modern forms of travel have changed our relationship with the landscape; what kind of an experience conditioned by these kinds of travel constitutes for the most part our everyday experience of landscape, and how this becomes an aesthetic possibility for the two photographers.

Schivelbusch (1986) discusses how railway travel has transformed our perception space. Different from pre-industrial forms of transport, the train traveler did not experience the landscape as a 'living entity', but as a series of pictures because: On the leveled railroad the traveler does not experience the alterations in the land such as high and low lands; the traveler is in a passive sitting state, it seems like



it is not the train that is moving, but the landscape passing by it; the window which separates the traveler from the landscape frames the view like a tableau; the train's velocity blurs the foreground view and makes visible only the background, makes it impossible to see details and therefore contemplation or observation; and creates a series of similar distant views, which "in their original spatiality belonged to separate realms." (p. 60) Hence bringing together and naturalizing the fragmentary view of space in a successive linearity like montaged images in a film which "[...] brings things closer to the viewer as well as closer together." (p. 42)

He refers to Sternberger's account on the panoramization of the world by railroads:

Sternberger observes that the vistas seen from Europe's windows had lost their dimension of depth; this happened first with the vistas seen from the train compartment window. There the depth perception of pre-industrial consciousness was, literally lost: velocity blurs all foreground objects, which means that there no longer is a foreground – exactly the range in which most of the experience of pre-industrial travel was located. The foreground enabled the traveler to relate to the landscape through which he was moving. He saw himself as part of the foreground, and that perception joined him to the landscape, included him in it, regardless of all further distant views that the landscape represented." (pp. 63-64)

Jonathan Crary (1999) explains that modern forms of movement involving mechanical and speeding vehicles was one of the experiences leading to the emergence of the idea of 'persistence of vision' and he quotes Nietzsche: "With the tremendous acceleration of life, mind and eye have become accustomed to seeing and judging partially or inaccurately, and everyone is like the traveler who gets to know a land and its people from a railway carriage." (p. 111)

Schivelbusch notes that in the nineteenth century the experience of train travel was perceived to be very different from car travel and quotes Proust, who contrasts car travel to train travel. Traveling by car, Proust writes, allows one to feel

the “surface of the earth”, to grow tired on the road and hence to become conscious of the “difference between departure and arrival” and unlike a train which travels from “one name to another name”, any desired location on the car journey can be the a point of arrival. (pp. 39-40) Even if I find this distinction to be useful, it is important to note that not only this notion of car travel has changed with the proliferation of highways (highways, also level the land, and bypass local centers and everything else remaining between departure and destination points) but at the same time, the car window like the train window transforms landscape into an aesthetic object of the gaze.

In the article titled ‘The Aesthetics of the Windshield: Proust and the Modernist Rhetoric of Speed’ (2001) Sara Danius claims that Proust’s purpose in writing the article ‘Impressions de Route en Automobile’ published in *Le Figaro* in 1907 is “[...] to depict how the motorcar catapults through space and how speed transforms the surrounding landscape into a phantasmagoria.” For Proust the motor car is a vehicle of visual perception like the Claude glass because like the train window, the windshield delimits and frames the views passing by the speeding car like a “mobile panorama.” (p. 113) Similarly Paul Virilio has said in an interview with Jonathan Crary: “What goes on in the windshield is cinema in the strict sense.”<sup>23</sup> (1988, p. 188) Thus the windshield like the train window separates the traveler from the landscape and turns the world into a spectacle composed of successive images in a linear and speedy succession.

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<sup>23</sup> In his essay titled ‘The Moving Landscape’ (2003), Mitchell Schwarzer claims that the contemporary experience of landscape is characterized by a passive, comfortable, seated person watching disparate places in a speedy succession through the window of a train, a car, an airplane or the screen of a TV, a computer. It is not people who move in the landscape or contemplate it in concentration, but the landscape moving past them: “[...] things seen slowly in the flesh and things seen flashing at a distance.” (p. 90)

Shivelbusch compares the perception of the world from the train window characterized by increased amount and speed of visual stimuli to ‘urban perception’ analyzed by Georg Simmel (1997):

The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli... With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life. The metropolis exacts from man as a discriminating creature a different amount of consciousness than does rural life. Here the rhythm of life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and more evenly. (p.175)

Shivelbusch adheres to the idea that the emergence and the fascination with photography after the industrial revolution, was due to its making possible to freeze and see in close up in detail the fleeting sensual impressions caused by modern urban life and modern forms of travel: “Thus the intensive experience of the sensuous world, terminated by the industrial revolution, underwent a resurrection in the new institution of photography. Since immediacy, close ups and foreground had been lost in reality, they appeared particularly attractive in the new medium.” (p. 63)

As stated above, I think among both Ceylan’s and Yersel’s works there are photographs, which are or resemble views from train or car windows. However, most of the time in their photographs we don’t see anything closer than we would from a train or car window. They reproduce the same viewing experience of these in-between spaces as images seen from a distance and they do not attempt to reveal any further information about these environments or to restore their locality. According to De Certeau (1988) the ‘speculative experience of the world’ from the train is the cause of melancholia:

The train generalizes Durer’s Melancholia, a speculative experience of the world: being outside of these things that stay there, detached and absolute, that leave us without having anything to do with this

departure themselves; being deprived of them, surprised by their ephemeral and quiet strangeness. Astonishment in abandonment. However, these things do not move. They have only the movement that is brought about from moment to moment by changes in perspective among their bulky figures. They have only *trompe-l'oeil* movements. They do not change their place any more than I do; vision alone continually undoes and remakes the relationships between these fixed elements. (pp. 111-112)

Some of Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs invoke this melancholia and by preserving these quiet views, they provide the viewer the opportunity to look at these images as long as desired, to control the duration. However, the photographs do not heal this melancholia, or feeling of abandonment, but strengthen them because the sights are photographed in the same detached and distant manner as they are seen from train or car windows.

I referred to a feeling of loss in relation to Ara Güler's photographs and suggested that his photographs aim to survive as documents preserving the past. And I noted that the desire to capture the moment before it vanishes and to document an environment in photographs before it changes are products of an understanding of time proceeding in a successive linearity. Feelings of loss and melancholia also touch Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs, the distant and empty environments convey a sense of abandonment and loss. Svetlana Boym's (2001) distinction between 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia is useful in understanding the different approaches of Güler and Ceylan and Yersel to the past and loss:

*Restoration* signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment. The past for the restorative nostalgic is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot. [...] Reflective nostalgia is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. *Reflection* suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis. The focus here is not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and passage of time. [...] Nostalgics of the second type (reflective) are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition.

This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future. Through such longing these nostalgics discover that the past is not merely that which doesn't exist anymore [...] (pp. 49-50)

Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs do not claim to fix, restore or compensate for what is lost. Instead they offer the viewer the possibility of to contemplate on the details of their photographs, which do not offer 'anchored' or ready meanings, but remain polysemous (all of Yersel's photographs are untitled), and provoke a work of imagination. Also, in their photographs there are no markers indicating the passage of time. In the catalogue of a photography exhibition titled 'Surface' Michael Mack (1996) writes:

The photograph has long been associated with the freezing of a moment, an abstraction of time which eliminates sound and isolates movement. But numerous image-makers now challenge notions of a decisive moment being the temporal limitation of the photograph [...] Grek Hilty has pointed out that such photographs concentrate on 'moments' in which "nothing can really be said to have happened; [...] snapshot(s) not of the instant, but precisely of duration, of the slow impact of history.

While Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs do bring to halt the flashing and disappearance of landscape, they are still images resisting the experience of life as an array of fleeting sensuous impressions which can be frozen and immortalized by a camera, which according to Sontag strengthens a feeling of loss: "Our oppressive sense of the transience of everything is more acute since cameras gave us the means to "fix" the fleeting moment." (1990: 179)

### The Representation of the Urban and the Rural in the Two Artists' Work

Coming back to the representations of the urban, in Ceylan's and Yersel's images of İstanbul, we don't see the portrayal of an experience of the metropolis as described

above. In fact, there is no difference between their portrayals of the rural, natural or the urban in this sense. In the second chapter it was noted that especially since the beginning of the nineteenth century representations of the urban landscape became more fragmentary, parallel to the increased density of the modern city, and the transitory experiences it created. And these fragmentary and momentary depictions, created a contrast with the depiction of the rural with still and wide reaching scenes. Moreover, as was mentioned earlier, representations of the city often included visual imagery produced for urban planning and commercial purposes such as traffic signs, advertising signs, shop windows and shop signs.

While in many contemporary images, this distinction between the representations of the two environments persists, Steven Jacobs (2000) writes that contemporary metropolises are no longer defined by a density of fragments, but fragments that are set apart from each other constituted by ‘monofunctional zones’ – “office zones, gentrified neighborhoods, ghettos, and commercial and tourist districts that have been converted into veritable theme parks.” (pp. 18-19) Besides, because both the center and the periphery have been subject to fragmentation, hybrid landscapes have come into being where the “[...] the distinction between city, suburb, and countryside is no longer self-evident” (p.18):

Posturban space, amalgamating the former periphery and the former metropolis into a vast patchwork, presents fragments as autonomous entities. The physical proximity of crowds, buildings, functions, and signs that characterized the modern perception of the metropolis, has given way to a different kind of discontinuity, behind which the logic of the post-Fordist order, impenetrable to the individual, may be detected. (p. 20)

And Jacobs explains that these changes in the structure of the metropolis resulted in changes in the representation of the metropolis in arts and photography:

The modernist preoccupation with metropolitan phantasmagoria or intoxication, which corresponds to Simmel's intensification of the *nervengleben*, has arguably been exchanged for an interest in the emptiness, repetition, monotony, and boredom of the contemporary urban landscape. (p. 21)

Ceylan's and Yersel's representations of the city are not formally different from their representations of rural (or natural areas). They depict wide, empty, still environments with the sky occupying large portions in the compositions. Nor do their images include any commercial or other kind of signs or images, which seems like a deliberate omission because it requires a specific effort. And this omission as well as the other factors I just mentioned result in urban images that resemble images of small towns or suburbs rather than big metropolises.



Figure 22. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Small harbor in winter, İstanbul', 2004



Figure 23. Seçil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2003

In most of their work both Ceylan's and Yersel's focus are the periphery or residual areas and not urban or rural centers, or monumental sites. In most cases it is difficult to discern whether one of their photographs was taken in İstanbul, or in a smaller settlement. One more point where Ceylan's and Yersel's photography diverges from Ara Güler's photographs as well as touristic landscape photographs is their disinterestedness in the unique, distinctive qualities of landscapes, and their emphasis on the same and the generic. Most of the time their photographs do not contain any references to the location and even when they do they are not dominant. The viewers can only recognize the places they photograph, if they are a part of their everyday lives. Hence they refrain from including signs these locations are generally identified with. However it must be emphasized that these generic and banal qualities in their photographs are not simply results of commercialization and consumerism. In this way, their practice also differs from the work of photographers who comment on the commercialization of the metropolis and its periphery through including in their photographs juxtapositions of commercial imagery and residential and public spaces as well as works emphasizing the homogenization of different environments through the application of similar looking commercial structures, which become iconic symbols of consumer societies. Ed Ruscha's work 'Twentysix Gasoline Stations' (1962), which includes twenty-six images of gasoline stations located on Route 66 – the highway connecting Oklahoma to Los Angeles in the United States - photographed in a frontal and minimalist manner is one of the precedents of this kind of work.

Yet, the work of artists like Ed Ruscha, who concentrated on the banal and the unchanging rather than the momentary or beautiful paved the way for the emergence of a different style of photographing landscapes in the art world.





Figure 24. Ed Ruscha, 'Twentysix Gasoline Stations', 1962

In the 1960-70's a new movement in art photography resisting both landscape photographs depicting seemingly wild, untouched, natural beauty (Ansel Adams one of the most famous photographers representing this tradition in the USA) and the photojournalist/street photography approach described in the third chapter emerged. An exhibition titled 'New Topographics: Man Altered Landscapes' organized by William Jenkins in Rochester New York, which collected the work of artists such as Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher and Stephen Shore brought together for the first time the work of artists working in this style. As made clear in the title, the work in the exhibition focused on the transformation of landscape

through human intervention. The photographs of the artists listed above focused on various aspects of this issue, such as the residues of industrialization on the landscape, the peripheries of the urban and the borderline between nature and civilization and city. (Jacobs, 2000, p. 40) Detached and wide viewpoints, as well as unpopulated, empty and banal landscapes were characteristics of their images. Another factor common to the practice of the New Topographers was their preference of large format cameras, which distinguished their aesthetics from that of photojournalism and snapshots. Planned compositions, static and detailed images resembling paintings were among the results of this preference.

While Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz and Stephen Shore worked in the United States and their work was exhibited in contemporary art galleries, the Bechers working in Germany trained and influenced many photographers in Europe, Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth among the most famous. The Bechers' style consisted of an almost encyclopedic documentation of the residues of industrialization in the German landscape. Their oeuvre contains series of various artifacts photographed in different settings, in the same frontal and static manner and similar lighting conditions. (Galassi, 2001) In the section of his book on Andreas Gursky where he discusses the influence of the Bechers' on the artist's work Galassi writes:

The power of the Bechers' work [...] depends on a rigorous suppression of that suppleness-on the exclusion of any specificity belonging to the encounter between photographer and subject, so that the specificity of the picture seems to belong to the subject alone. [...] The originality and distinctness of the Bechers' work lies in the rare thoroughness with which the contingent conditions of photographic perception have been disciplined. (p. 16)

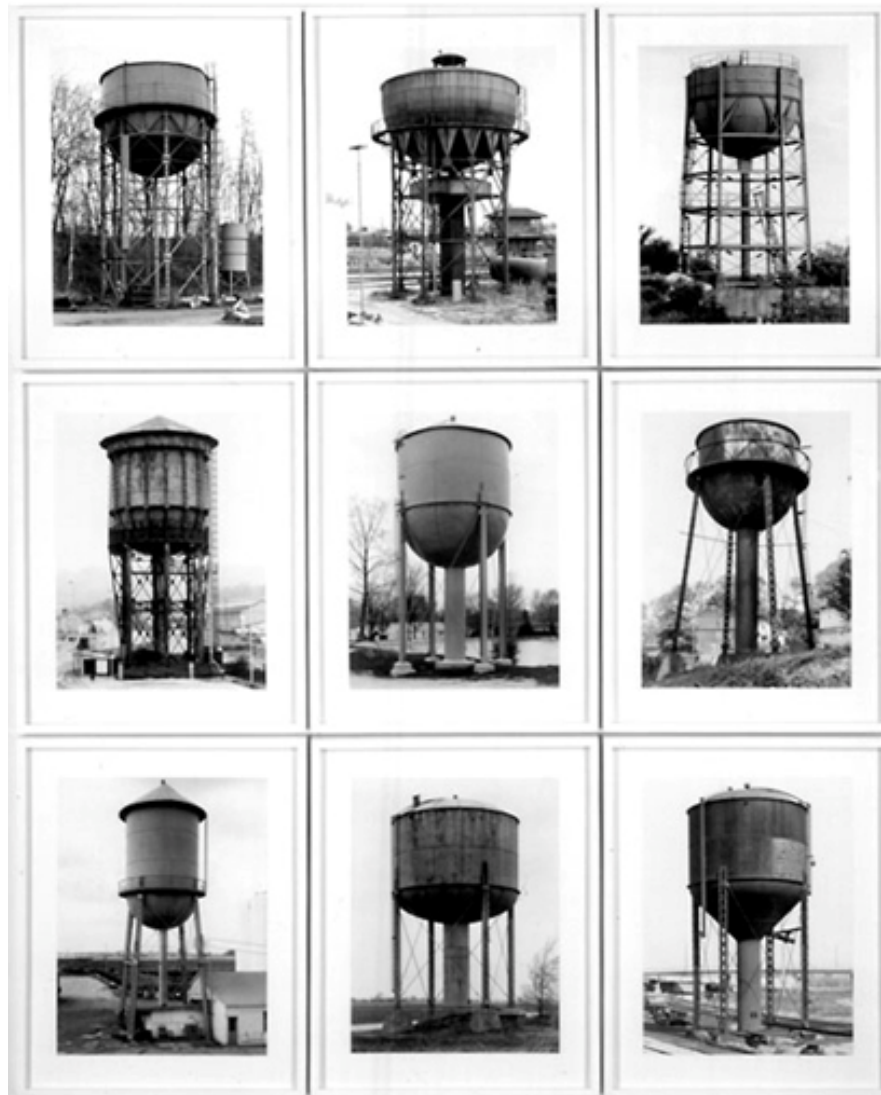


Figure 25. Hilla, Bernd Becher, 'Water Towers', 1980

I have already discussed some aspects of Ceylan's and Yersel's photographs that are common with the work of The New Topographers – such as the elimination of the contingencies of the photographer's viewpoint – and I will further elaborate on them when I discuss each artists' work separately. Of course, artistic photography has evolved since the 1970s and different conventions and approaches have developed. Ceylan's and Yersel's work can be discussed in relationship to the work of numerous contemporary photographers. Yet I believe, their work was influenced by these changing conventions in international photographic practice and the increase in the number of large international exhibitions around the world and the increased

participation of artists based in Turkey in the international art scene have played an effective role in this. Hence I don't mean to say that they are strictly followers of this tradition<sup>24</sup>, but that we can find traces of this kind of aesthetics in their photographs.



Figure 26. Andreas Gursky, 'New Year's Day Swimmers', 1988

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<sup>24</sup> In fact there are certain differences between the work of the artists described above and Ceylan's and Yersel's work. One immediately noticeable difference is that while The New Topographer's and their followers compositions are mostly defined by geometric and rigid lines, more organic forms and fluid lines appear in Ceylan's and Yersel's compositions.

## A Discussion of Nuri Bilge Ceylan's Landscape Photographs

### Affinities with Landscape Painting

All the photographs in Ceylan's 'Turkey Cinemascope' (2003-2006) series are panoramic images organized in balanced and often symmetrical compositions abundant with details. Due to Ceylan's use of a wide lens, probably a large format camera and his preference of wide views, the focus is sharp throughout the photographs recording a plentiful amount of detail. There are some photographs where the depth of field is extensive and the objects in the back disappear into the horizon. In these cases there is a powerful illusion of three-dimensionality and the photographs are reminiscent of classical perspective paintings. (Fig. 27) In other photographs, where the background does not extend to infinity because a piece of land occupies most of the frame, and/or the sky is merged with the ground because of various reasons such as fog or snow, there is an abstraction and the two-dimensionality of the photograph is foregrounded. (Fig. 28) In both cases the photographs reference the canon of landscape painting.



Figure 27. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Railroad in winter', 2003



Figure 28. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'The village', 2004

Ceylan's photographs contain planned and finished compositions, which induce a feeling of wholeness and finality as if each photograph exhausts the view available at a certain location. They are 'closed' compositions with little implication to the space outside of the frame. When framing his photographs Ceylan does not leave room for accidents, almost no objects are cut in the middle and all the elements included are in harmony with the others and the whole. Hence they are far removed from the aesthetics of snapshots or instantaneous photography, and closer to classical painting. We have already suggested a formal resemblance between Ceylan's photographs and the Renaissance painting 'An Ideal Townscape.' One important difference between the two is that Ceylan's photographs do not involve the creation and ordering of ideal views. Considering the distance of the photographer to the scene and the abundance of small details in the photographs, it is impossible for Ceylan to have seen everything depicted in his photographs at the time of photographing, and to have voluntarily included them in his compositions. Hence many of the details remain incidental, which means Ceylan allows whatever is included in the wide view he is photographing be recorded and his photographs give him and his viewer the opportunity to see these details that remain unnoticed or indistinct from a distant viewpoint. He does not focus on a specific element, drawing the viewer's attention to that part of the landscape.



In most of Ceylan's photographs there are no high, low or oblique angles, but frontal views. The relative proportion of each object occupying the space is accurate and realistic. Most of the time the composition includes a line of horizon separating the sky which occupies about one third or half of the frame and the ground, which occupies the rest. It is as if Ceylan chooses to photograph from the optimum point which is just far enough to make a balanced and symmetrical composition placing his main subject(s) or more crowded areas in the center and leaving the sides emptier; and just close enough to make almost all objects and figures discernable and recognizable hence inviting the viewer to contemplate the details of the image. While centering the main theme of an image is a characteristic of classical painting, "extensive landscapes and huge skies" were distinctive qualities of seventeenth century Dutch paintings. (Andrews, 1999, p. 89)

In most photographs the lighting is even and low and no expressive shadows or sources of light enter the frame. Choosing to photograph in even and low lighting conditions is a technical solution. When different amounts of light fall on objects, or when the sky is bright, the photographer either has to make different exposures for different parts of the image, or has to compensate, which may result in loss of details due to over or under exposure. Moreover, differently lit parts in an image such as shadows and bright areas create different planes and areas of focus whereas with even lighting there is a unity and consistency in the image and elements of the photograph blend into each other. Low lighting situations require high film sensitivity or longer shooting times. Longer shooting times for Ceylan is not a sacrifice since his subjects are still. In most of his images the clouds or sometimes a fog masks the sun. A cloudy sky creates a natural and favorable contrast in the whole image accentuating the contours, the colors and the textures of the objects, hence

creating clearly defined forms and disclosing as much detail as possible. Silver and black tones touch the objects and reveal the darker tones in the colors of the objects. On the other hand the same modest contrast level and the same lighting throughout the images and the matte finishes of the photographs create more banal images compared to shiny high contrast photographs. Even lighting and clouded skies make it impossible to understand the time of the day the photograph was taken at, while the seasons are often discernable from the details. These same gray and sunless skies in Ceylan's photographs help to conceal the time-specific contingent experience of the photographer and therefore make his gaze less obtrusive and more permissive towards his subject.

Thus most of Ceylan's landscape photographs are symmetrical, static, balanced, unified and closed compositions. Another aspect of his photographs, which makes them resemble classical paintings, or photographs from the beginning of history of photography is their static nature. As I previously noted, photography has long been associated with capturing the instantaneous: "The photograph involves an emphasis upon instantaneous results rather than upon process. There is minimization of performance, compared with other ways in which nature can be represented (such as through music, sketching, painting, singing, sculpting, potting, and so on)." (Urry, 1998, p. 117) Ceylan's photographs on the other hand, may as well have been created in a time frame of hours like a painting for not much would change in the image if Ceylan took the photograph one or more seconds later. His photographs almost deny the existence of the moment of 'augenblick' defined by Pascal Bonitzer (2005): "In photography, that moment when the shutter release makes the 'click' sound, that



moment of nothingness, which is always there even though there is almost no going back, that is the photographic Augenblick.” (p. 167)<sup>25</sup>

### Static Environments and Images of Duration

Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s work is not about representing what changes within the course of a moment even if the scenes he chooses to photograph may be of the kind that are mostly seen momentarily by many people. I proposed earlier that his photographs resemble views of ‘in-between’ environments one sees momentarily from the window of a speeding vehicle. What Ceylan does is that he goes to a location where such a view is available; he sets up his camera and photographs it. Therefore I will suggest that his work is concerned with preserving the momentary, providing the opportunity to contemplate on that, which could be momentary in daily life. When we think about the insignificance of the passing moment together with Ceylan’s whole (not accidentally cut) and closed compositions, which make what extends beyond the frame of the photograph insignificant we can conclude that the photographs imply sameness from one moment to the next and for what lies beyond the frame.

This is partly due to Ceylan’s spatial distance to his subjects and his preference of wide views. For one thing his distance conceals any movements of the small figures present in the photographs. At the same time, because of the positioning of the figures in the wide compositions with scarcer sides remaining at the edges of the frames, their movement is not enough to create a dynamic compositions. For instance, the photograph titled ‘Football players near Mount Ağrı’

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<sup>25</sup> “Fotoğrafta bu, deklanşörün tık dediği, neredeyse dönüşü olmayan ama yine de her zaman orada olan o yokluk anı, o fotografik Augenblick’tir.”

(Fig. 29) depicts a few football games going on in a large snowy field and Mount Ararat lies in the background. In this case the photographer's distance to the players results in a composition where the mountain and the players occupy the same distant plane. The human figures are like small specks part of the landscape. On the left there is a man and a donkey, who are about to walk out of the frame. Yet the photograph does not create a sense of movement, but stillness. Perhaps this is due to a sense of entrapment that shows the limits of the possible motions. Because the whole mountain fits in the frame and in front of it lies a vast plain empty field, the viewer knows that no movement or change in the landscape can alter the composition drastically, but only in detail. Similarly in the photographs titled 'Sheep near Çaldıran' (Fig. 30), the sheep, the donkeys are moving, but at such a distance that the composition remains static.



Figure 29. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Football players near Mount Ağrı (Ararat)', 2004



Figure 30. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Sheep near Çaldıran', 2004

The static nature of some photographs is emphasized by the portrayal of symbols related to movement in the same static manner. Train tracks or roads, which appear in some photographs, are placed in the center of the frames and they disappear into the horizon with no other destinations in the proximity. (Fig. 31) Usually there are no trains or other vehicles present. In ‘Suburban train, İstanbul’ (Fig. 32) there is a train that is probably waiting at the station because there are people and birds walking close by.



Figure 31. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, ‘Dog crossing the road’, 2005



Figure 32. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, ‘Suburban train, İstanbul’, 2004

In the same way the city views are still like the rural views. Hence there is no hint at movement, but a halt. To better understand the role of his distant viewpoint in creating static images, we can look at the photograph titled ‘On the beach’ (Fig. 33),

which induces a feeling of movement because in this case the photographer is close to his subject, he is not viewing the scene from a distance but he is inside it and therefore experiencing the same place. Such photographs closer to Güler's aesthetics are very few in the series.



Figure 33. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'On the beach, İstanbul', 2006

#### Human Figures Mirror the Photographer's Gaze

In the series we can talk about two different kinds of photographing human figures. In some of the photographs like 'Football players near Mount Ağrı' they are tiny, unrecognizable figures, hardly distinguishable details among the many. In this case they are mostly photographed when involved in an activity in the landscape, be it playing football, shepherding or contemplating the landscape themselves. They are either photographed from the back or they are so distant that their faces are not visible which implies that they are probably unaware of the fact that they are being photographed.

In some photographs human figures are positioned in or close to the foreground looking directly at the camera. (Fig. 34) Some of these compositions are closer to portraits because they are separated into two different planes and the landscape is in the background. In these photographs where human beings appear in the foreground, their bodies are positioned in the same frontal and still manner as the

rest of the objects in the frame, and mostly they are placed in the center. Different from the photographs where they are photographed from a distance, they are not working or moving in the landscape. They are not a part of it or involved with it, but are standing up right and looking directly at the camera with indecipherable, but suggestive expressions, which means they have stopped what they were doing and have taken the time to pose for the camera. Their expressions and body positions do not give the impression of a momentary halt before they go on to what they were doing, but a deliberate pose and stare into the lens.



Figure 34. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Two men by the road, Ağrı', 2005

I think except for the photographs like 'Football players near Mount Ağrı' described above where human figures are included in the same distant plane as the landscape, Ceylan's photographs including human figures work like mirrors. In the photographs where human beings are aware of being photographed, they directly look at the camera hence mirroring the camera's and therefore the photographer's gaze directed at them. Similarly, in photographs like 'Courtyard at dusk, Doğu Beyazıt' (Fig. 35) and 'Old city of Ankara' (Fig. 36), where human figures are seen from the back, they, like Ceylan are facing and contemplating the view that appears in the photograph. In this way, the photographer, the camera and the viewer also become objects of the gaze.





Figure 35. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Courtyard at dusk, Doğu Beyazıt', 2004



Figure 36. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Old city of Ankara', 2004

These straightforward photographs of people do not claim to represent the human beings in any way. They are unexpressive and unjudging. Most of the time they do not claim to reveal any information about the human beings except for their mere presence in the location and the details of their appearance. They are permissive in the sense that they permit the human figures to pose and therefore decide how they are going to appear in the prints. Their refractory gaze back at the camera, the photographer and consequently the viewer resists a condescending approach to the subjects of the photographs and subverts the relationship between the voyeur and the subject common in the tradition of landscape imagery and elaborated by Claudia Bell and John Lyall (2002):

There was clearly a class dimension to looking: Those who looked were not those who tilled the soil or got tired backs or got their hands dirty (e.g., the high-country farmers who actually scaled these heights in their daily work). In these picturesque landscape paintings the individuals who engage the real landscape in their daily lives become picturesque characters positioned in the foreground, coding the actual indigenes as quaint. (p. 33)

These indiscernible gazes do not claim to reveal any inner truth about the people photographed. There is no intimacy in the gazes, they are opaque and unrevealing. At the same time, there are no markers indicating class, occupation or ethnicity or juxtapositions, which could narrate stories about the individuals. The photographs do not provide settings or markers, which would give the keys to how we are supposed to interpret the people's relationship with the locations.

The work titled 'Railroad controllers' (Fig. 37) may seem to constitute an exception because of its title and because it shows two men standing on a railroad track in the middle of a field. One of them is holding on to a small wooden ladder and the other has a white plastic bag in his hand. This photograph tells us nothing about these two men or about what their occupation entails except that it involves for some reason being in the middle of a vast field with no trains or a train station or passengers in the proximity. And like in the rest of the photographs these two men are staring back at us. Not exhibiting a performance of the way they work with the railroad.

Similarly in the photograph titled 'Donkey and women carrying water' (Fig. 38) there are two women figures carrying baskets in the background and there is a donkey in the foreground. This time it is not the women but the donkey who is looking back at the camera. This image is closer to a stereotypical depiction of women in the country. The almost iconic placement of their hands on the baskets above their heads, which is a stereotypical image of a working woman in the country; their clothing and the donkey in the foreground tells us that they are in a rural area. However even in this case that is all we learn. Their being in the country does not give us any other information about their relationship to the landscape. Again we don't know why they are walking in this snowy field with no places of

residence or work close by. In other words Ceylan does not let the viewer make conventional inferences about the relationship between the person's clothing, profession or location which would yield to endowing the person with an essential identity – the stereotype of a woman working in the country, the stereotype of a worker...



Figure 37. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Railroad controllers', 2003



Figure 38. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Donkey and women carrying water', 2004

Ceylan photographs the rural and his photographs of the rural are neither exotic, nor do they claim to be authentic. He photographs the rural from a distance and refrains from familiarizing or aesthesizing it. In his photographs, the rural, as well as the urban is not familiar, or inhabited. Like he photographs views which seem like they are located on a road side, rather than in a central area or a destination; in most of his photographs the human figures seem to be away from a community, they are outside and alone: a little girl standing on railroad tracks (Fig. 39) just off a settlement, a boy



standing on a snowy plain away from his home, (Fig.40) the railroad controllers in the middle of a vast field... In the same manner, in the photograph titled 'Returning home, Ardahan' (Fig. 41) home is a small grey spot, barely visible if it weren't for the tiny warm light inside, in the middle of an empty field (except for the three trees standing alone) covered with fog and snow.



Figure 39. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Girl on the railroad', 2003



Figure 40. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Boy with a sling', 2004



Figure 41. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 'Returning home, Ardahan', 2004

Steve Jacobs (2000) writes about Gursky's work: "[...] as an artist he still knows how to lend the grandeur of a Canaletto to a banal place without having to exchange the everyday for spectacle." (p. 46) Gursky's later work in particular contains photographs containing exhaustive views of immensely large areas such as a ski slope, Tokyo Stock Exchange or Times Square. Ceylan's photographs do not involve such ambitious attempts, but there is definitely a grandeur quality to them very close to Gursky's. This is why his photographs look like the painting 'An Ideal Townscape', but have very different content.

#### A Discussion of Seçil Yersel's Landscape Photographs

In this section I am going to be looking at a selection of landscape images from Seçil Yersel's photographic works. Many of Yersel's photographs are taken using a panoramic camera and one formal aspect common to most of her photographs is their horizontal framing. Like Ceylan's, Yersel's compositions contain horizontal, distant, wide and symmetrical views and her subjects are empty and static landscapes. Although some of her photographs are closer to Ceylan's because she photographs the eye level view from a distance, at other times her use of a panoramic camera leads to concave and sometimes convex distortions based on the angle she is photographing from. (Fig. 42, 43) This concave effect strengthens the wholeness and self-containment of the views – thus marking the edges of the frames, and leaving out the possibility of the continuation of the images beyond them.



Figure 42. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2007



Figure 43. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2004

### The Photographer's Body

As was previously suggested, Yersel's photographs, like Ceylan's formally resemble classical landscape paintings because of their qualities mentioned above. However, one aspect of some of her photographs that distinguishes them from the detached and distant perspectival gaze is the implications about the presence of the photographer's body. Martin Jay (1999) notes that the viewing eye in Alberti's perspective is both "singular" and is "understood to be static, unblinking and fixated, rather than dynamic" (p.7) and that the perspectival gaze is disembodied: "The moment of erotic projection in vision was lost as the bodies of the painter and viewer were forgotten in the name of an allegedly disincarnated, absolute eye." (p.8) Yersel's gaze can be

likened to an unblinking eye because mostly there is no movement or dynamism in her photographs, but it is not disembodied.

While in some of her photographs Yersel adopts a similar detached and frontal viewpoint like Ceylan, in many of her photographs the traces of her contingent experience of the physical environment she is photographing are visible in the photographs. And this has two reoccurring causes. For one thing, in most of her landscape photographs the ground occupies a larger portion of the image than any other objects or the sky. (Fig. 44) This results in the implication of Yersel's corporeal presence in the place she is photographing and also adds an unsettling feeling to her photographs because at times, due to her use of a wide lens, it seems like the piece of ground we see is very close to the spot she is standing, but we cannot see her body. At the same time it invites the viewer to identify with her voyeuristic desire to watch and photograph what is visible further in the distance.



Figure 44. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2003



Another aspect of some of Yersel's photographs that provide information about her contingent experience of the environment is the effect of different lighting situations. Yersel does not always prefer even lighting and shoots at different times of the day. Therefore the lighting in her photographs is not the same throughout her compositions. In some photographs the edges of the frame are washed out, and certain details are obstructed. (Fig. 45) This effect of overexposure caused by sunrays directly falling on her subjects indicates that her view and representation of the scene was structured by her subjective vision. What's more, the appearance of sunrays and washed out sections in the photographs activates other senses besides the visual. For instance, the viewer imagines the heat that was a part of the photographer's experience.



Figure 45. Seçil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2003

On the one hand, these large spaces occupied by the ground and the varying lighting conditions do work in a way, like in Ara Güler's photographs and create a reality effect because they communicate to the viewer that Yersel was inside this environment to take a photograph of it, and therefore emphasize her position and viewpoint and the time she took the photograph – for instance when the sun was shining directly on this spot. However, because she still remains distant from the

main subject – what is above the ground and below the sky – she preserves a detached approach. And this spatial distance results in whole and static compositions rather than fragmentary ones. Hence, she does not claim to be a participant in the subject of her photograph and therefore does not let the viewer to feel as a participant. Instead, the photographer's (and the viewer's) presence as a solitary voyeur is emphasized.

### Empty, Silent and Still Environments: The Urban and Its Vicinity

Another characteristic of Yersel's photographs that stresses the feeling of solitariness is the barrenness of her images. Yersel's photographs are scarcer than Ceylan's images, not filled with as many details and textures. There is a stranger feeling of emptiness and estrangement induced by them. The amusement park is empty as well as the balconies looking over it. (Fig. 46) There are very few human figures and when they are included in the frame they are photographed from a distance, probably unaware of being photographed. Most of the time they are photographed from the back, strengthening the sense of voyeurism. They are not among the crowds, but either alone or in small groups. Simmel (1997) points at the "brevity and scarcity of the inter-human contacts granted to the metropolitan man." (p.183) He defines the social attitude demanded by the modern metropolis as 'reserve' and he writes: "As a result of this reserve we frequently do not even know by sight those who have been our neighbours for years." (p.179) Similarly, in Yersel's photographs most of the time human's being together in the landscape is coincidental: neighbors in high risers (Fig. 46); in adjacent phone booths (Fig. 47); people waiting at the train station, the

port (Fig. 48, 49) fishing next to each other (Fig. 42, 43, 57); or on the beach far away from each other (Fig. 50).



Figure 46. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2003



Figure 47. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 1999



Figure 48. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 1997



Figure 49. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2000



Figure 50. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2003



While Ceylan mostly photographs the rural, Yersel's focus is on the urban and its vicinity. We mentioned earlier that the work of the New Topographers focused on the periphery rather than the center, and on emptier environments, rather than action filled urban scenes. Steven Jacobs (2000) notes that, even though the appearance of empty urban scenes in photography dates back to the medium's early years, prior to the development of high speed film and fast cameras, because early photographers preferred to shoot the city when it was empty to avoid blurs caused by movement, the emptiness in the work of later photographers and contemporary art is the sign of an alienation caused by the metropolis:

[...] the image of the empty city grew into an aesthetic convention, symbolizing, as in other artistic disciplines, the loneliness and alienation inspired by the modern metropolis.... It is an emptiness preeminently constituting the stage for the banality and the rituals of the everyday. (p. 43)

Yersel's photographs depict an urban landscape that has been structured by different forces – industrialization, commercialization and urban planning – and in a way that does not take into consideration the practices of its inhabitants. She shows the failures of urban planning: poorly planned sites resulting in ridiculous juxtapositions, large portions of land in the city where construction work is going on, places that are not looked after, places yet waiting to be built. (Fig. 51, 52, 53) Therefore her aesthetics involve the juxtaposition of seemingly disparate objects, the industrial and the natural; the highway, industrial sites, small residents, lamp posts and clouds; the amusement park and the apartment buildings; a muddy field, a few barren trees and a street lamp, a bulldozer and a bench with two human figures facing the sea across which rises the urban view; a worn out grass field in the playground and two industrial chimney like figures to the right; little pieces of grass in a construction site, wires lying around, long vehicles and a caravan....



Figure 51. Seil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2003



Figure 52. Seil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2001



Figure 53. Seil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2006

### Urban Planning, Displacement and Abandonment

In Yersel's photographs the city is a site of displacement, construction and planning. She photographs construction sites displacing residents. The transformation and construction work going on in the city destroys public spaces, and denies city residents the possibility of inhabiting these areas. There is very little room left for performing activities that are not planned according to the requirements of modern life such as idleness or unplanned leisure activities. For regulated leisure activities, which for the large part involve spectacle and fantasy, there are amusement parks, beaches, playgrounds, amphitheaters and a hot balloon providing a panorama of the city. (Fig. 45, 46, 54, 55, 56) An important issue related to the urban condition indicated by Yersel's photographs is a contrast between these sites that are structured by planning authorities and designated for community use and other places where people perform various unplanned activities despite the obstacles created by planning work. The former sites, built for the purpose of entertaining specific activities that form a counterpart to ordinary life and work remain empty, or Yersel photographs them when they are not used (probably during work hours, not at a designated leisure time like a weekend or a holiday).



Figure 54. Seçil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2002





Figure 55. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2007

Rather, Yersel's focus is the everyday, what the city looks like during the day. In the introduction to a work titled *Everyday Urbanism* Margaret Crawford (1999) writes:

The concept of everyday space delineates the physical domain of everyday public activity... Everyday space stands in contrast to the carefully planned, officially designated, and often underused spaces of public use that can be found in most American cities. These monumental public spaces only punctuate the larger and more diffuse landscape of everyday life, which tends to be banal and repetitive, everywhere and nowhere, obvious yet invisible. (p.9)

Yersel's photographs depict the conflicts in the urban space and how residents engage in spatial practices transgressing, ignoring, or going around the planned and permitted actions. In a photograph, there are people fishing and contemplating the sea view leaning against iron bars and in the foreground is the torn down pavement. (Fig. 42) There is a human figure, whose bent down body is almost totally emerged in the in the heaps of sand and stone the others are standing in. The distortion in the photograph creates an anticipation that the human figures are going to be swallowed

up by the concavely curved ground. It seems like urban residents dwell in wherever they can find some place left over or yet unnoticed by urban planning: People fishing on a narrow piece of land on the sea (Fig. 57), sitting on a bench in a bulldozed park (Fig. 51), sitting in a car parked by a single tree on an empty field (Fig. 58).



Figure 56. Seçil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2004

Further more, there is a strange feeling of estrangement induced by Yersel's photographs. Her landscapes convey a feeling of abandonment. Some images show forgotten and empty places that have yet to be built on, or sometimes in decay waiting to be rebuilt. About the calculated time of the modern metropolis Simmel (1997) writes: "[...] the technique of metropolitan life is unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and mutual relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule." (p.177) In Yersel's images what we see is neither markers indicating the passage of time, nor scheduled activities. In these landscapes the photographer and the people appearing in the photograph have stopped, they are not in motion, but they are waiting and looking. In some of her photographs, like the ones showing people fishing, or the women sitting on a bench, it seems like the time of the metropolis is not longer applicable. In other photographs she catches people on a mandatory break in their daily schedules, for instance when waiting for a commuter

boat, perhaps to go back home after work. And at other times she reverses the gaze in environments constructed for spectacular consumption, like the balloon, the amphitheater, the balconies and the beach. And when we think about these images along with the photographs showing people contemplating a landscape – from a car, or from a bench, Yersel’s photographs reveal the transformation of the world into a spectacle in landscape images. The ground occupying a large portion of most of the images reminds us that this is what the photographer is doing as well; she is watching the world turn into images.



Figure 57. Sevil Yersel, 'Untitled', 2003

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

I began this study with a curiosity about how at times the world becomes a series of images – what is going on when a person defines a view to be like a ‘photograph’ or a ‘film’, or when as a photographer I begin seeing possible photographs when I look around. Framing devices like the photographic camera and its viewfinder internalized by the photographer’s eye, as well as windows turn the world into pictures by framing a section of it like a painting or a photograph. In the case of train and car windows the effect is stronger, because these framed images of the world pass by like a filmstrip in front of the passive and comfortable viewer, who often is not occupied with much, but looking out of the window. My initial intuition was that contemporary conventions of photography – popular photography, postcards, ads and other images surrounding us as well as art photography – played a role in the recognition of certain scenes as photogenic sites. Both the formal characteristics of a given view, for instance a particular lighting condition, a panoramic vista; and its content – to give random examples, the seaside or railways have been attractive photographic subjects for a long time – can be reminiscent of photographs, or landscape images produced with other media. On the changing conventions of the ‘photogenic’ Susan Sontag (1990) writes: “Photographs create the beautiful and – over generations of picture-taking – use it up. Certain glories of nature, for example, have been all but abandoned to the indefatigable attentions of amateur camera buffs. The image-surfeited are likely to find sunsets corny; they now look, alas, too much like photographs.” (p. 85) And: “Bleak factory buildings and billboard-cluttered

avenues look as beautiful, through the camera's eye, as churches and pastoral landscapes. More beautiful, by modern taste.” (p.78)

With these questions on the spectacularization of the world and the contemporary conventions of the ‘photogenic’ in Turkey I first looked into the emergence of canonic and popular landscape imagery: Landscape paintings produced between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe, which continue to be effective in the aesthetic conventions of landscape imagery and photographs produced by or addressing the tourist gaze today. What I found out through my research and analysis and tried to show in this study is that the idea of landscape is the product of a separation with the physical world, and its appropriation as a visual and aesthetic object. Hence, judging the aesthetics of a view of the physical world according to other representations of it is inherent in the idea of landscape. In the second chapter, I discussed briefly different ways through which humans are separated from their environments, and how the physical world becomes objectified, commodified and consumed in different ways: the invention of the linear perspective system where space is construed as a geometric entity, ordered according to the monocular vision of a looking subject; the transformation of land into an exchangeable commodity in capitalist economies; the construction of nature as a material object of scientific study; invention of mass transportation systems which homogenized different locations, by bringing centers closer and making them easily accessible, and by transforming the periphery in between into distant and rapidly passing panoramas; the division of the rural and the urban, leading to the aestheticization of the country and natural environments and their construction as sites of leisure; and the structuring of the urban through urban planning and commercialization.



With an interest in the conventions of the photogenic landscapes and contemporary art in Turkey, in the third and fourth chapters I chose to look at a series of work by Ara Güler, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Seçil Yersel. I had two main reasons for choosing to compare Güler's photography with the latter two artists' work, which I find to be similar. One of them is that he is one of the most famous photographers in Turkey and his photographs constitute a large part of the popular imagery of the country. On the other hand, his style, which I believe has influenced many other photographers in Turkey, defined by a social realism and aimed at capturing the dynamic moments of the everyday specific to locations and times, stands in stark contrast to Ceylan's and Yersel's style both formally and content wise. While Ara Güler's belief in the necessity of being close to his subject and capturing a contingent experience results in fragmentary compositions of inhabited landscapes transformed by and with people, Ceylan and Yersel's distance to their subjects resulting in panoramic photographs that resemble paintings more than photographs because they are static and carefully composed images, convey detached and alienating landscapes resisting appropriation.

The aim of this study is not providing an exhaustive analysis of the three photographers' oeuvre, or to provide a general look at the practice of landscape photography in Turkey, but to investigate the different styles and conventions in contemporary art photography by discussing the three artists work comparatively and in relation to the canonic and popular styles of landscape imagery. I believe, while Ara Güler's photographs promote an experience of the world as a series of images that can be preserved as ready memories of passed moments, and claim to provide access to and create an understanding of their subjects, Ceylan's and Yersel's work

question the estranged, distanced and objectifying nature of a relationship with the physical world as an image, a landscape.

In trying to situate the three artists' work in relation to international photographers I have suggested that Ara Güler's work can be thought of in the context of the tradition of photojournalism, documentary photography and instantaneous photography, and that the influences of the New Topographers movement transforming landscape photography in Europe and the United States in the 1970s can be discerned in Ceylan's and Yersel's work. I believe, it would be useful to also discuss their work in relation to contemporary artists working in different parts of the world today, as well as with the work of other artists based in Turkey.

On the other hand, in this study I discussed landscape imagery as a specific kind of relationship with the world emerging as a historically and culturally specific construction in the West. My discussions on Turkey and the Ottoman Empire were only related to the appropriation of this gaze. I think it would be very interesting to trace the evolution of the landscape concept and imagery, and its convergences and divergences with the West in the context of the visual culture in Turkey.

As a final note, I would like to say a few words about my motivation in writing this thesis. Photography continues to be the topic of academic discussions on a variety of issues such as realism, memory, representation, media saturation and voyeurism, to give a few examples. However these discussions usually refer to general themes regarding photography and do not involve a close analysis of a range of photographs. Moreover, writings in photography can be found in art books and exhibition catalogues because it is still a widely used medium by contemporary artists. While these essays often situate photographs in the context of the conventions

of international art photography and they discuss the works in relation to issues such as the ones listed above, they usually do not describe what these conventions entail in detail. As I previously noted, I tried to describe and discuss the formal characteristics and the subject matter of these three artists in a conceptual framework regarding the landscape image, with a desire to understand what these conventions that become effective in determining what is considered photogenic or sometimes cliché views in different places and times entail formally and content wise.

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