

The City in Black-and-White

Photographic Memories

İPEK TÜRELİ

Writings on “media memories,” or memories recorded by and recollected through media technologies, have touched upon the deliberate and relative uses of black-and-white visuals, especially in the cinema.¹ Yet, there seems to be relatively little reflection in terms of the media memories of cities.² This essay is concerned with the recycling and circulation of old, mono-

- 1 There is a growing scholarly conversation on the role of media representations on memory; e.g. Huyssen, Andreas (1995), *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, New York: Routledge; Sobchack, Vivian C. (Ed.) (1996), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, New York: Routledge; Grainge, Paul (2002), *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger; van Dijck, Jose (2007), *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age: Cultural Memory in the Present*, Stanford: Stanford University Press; Misek, Richard (2010), *Chromatic Cinema: A History of Screen Color*, Chichester, U.K. and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- 2 There is a significant body of work on the media images of cities, especially on “cinematic cities;” e.g. AlSayyad, Nezar (2006), *Cinematic Urbanism*, New York and London: Routledge; Mennel, Barbara C. (2008), *Cities and Cinema*, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge; Shiel, Mark and Tony Fitzmaurice (2001), *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell; Clarke, David B. (1997), *Cinematic City*, London and New York: Routledge.

chromatic or black-and-white images of the city.³ Black-and-white photography of “Old Istanbul” is viewed today by all generations in Turkey with tender regard because it shows how much the now booming city has moved away from its poorer and relatively provincial past.⁴ Above all, however, it is Armenian-Turkish photographer Ara Güler’s (born 1928) work from the 1950s and 1960s that stands out, and is best known among enthusiasts of the city in Istanbul, Turkey, and abroad. I argue that the photographs’ black-and-whiteness contributes to their popular recirculation and reception. This representational mode helps situate photographs far away in time and turns them into an album of the past that can be recalled to imagine the future of the city as a diverse and colorful place. Professional curators, commentators, and ordinary citizens posting on Facebook alike commonly state that Güler’s black-and-white pictures show how colorful the city was once upon a time. They refer to the quality and texture of social life, of course, and not to the physical sense of the term. Color here is a metaphor for social life, and paradoxically black-and-white ends up signifying color (diversity). Since the 1990s, the re-circulation of Güler’s photographs has become part and parcel of the new life of black-and-white as a “nostalgia

3 The discussion of color (or the lack thereof) continues to attract scholarly attention. In addition to Misek (2010), *Chromatic Cinema*, and Grainge (2002), *Monochrome Memories*, see, for instance, the special issue on color in *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6 (3), 2012, edited by Margaret Hillenbrand. Saskia Sassen (2002) takes up black-and-white as a representational mode in her essay on Sebastiao Salgado in “Black and White Photography as Theorizing: Seeing What the Eye Cannot See,” *Sociological Forum* 26 (2), pp. 438-443.

4 In a similar vein, black-and-white Turkish films from the 1950s and 1960s, mostly shot in Istanbul, are recycled in various formats. Türeli, İpek (2012), “Istanbul in Black and White: Cinematic Memory,” online component to *Ars Orientalis*, Freer and Sackler Galleries, (<http://www.asia.si.edu/research/articles/Istanbul-in-black-and-white.asp>, accessed 18 June 2014). Türeli, İpek (2010), “Istanbul through Migrants’ Eyes,” in *Orienteering Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?*, ed. Deniz Göktürk, Levent Soysal, İpek Türeli, London: Routledge, pp. 144-64.

mode”; the lack of color signifies a distant period in the past rather than a specific time.⁵

Originally produced for journalism as photographs printed in local newspapers and illustrated magazines, often accompanying news reports, Güler’s Istanbul photographs made a comeback first in the local scene, and then internationally, as art prints in exhibitions on the city held in Istanbul and abroad since the 1990s.⁶ Known among his followers as “the eye of Istanbul,” or “the last poet of Istanbul,” Güler is perhaps the most widely known and beloved photographer of the city.⁷ Güler’s black-and-white photographs of Istanbul from the 1950s and 1960s have become synonymous with nostalgia for Istanbul’s past. Nostalgia, here, denotes a collective feeling, “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed.”⁸ This yearning arises from dissatisfaction with the present. Just as for a place, it can also be a yearning for a different time.

Local critics have been praising Güler as an artist—a label he has never fully accepted, preferring to call himself a “witness” or a “visual historian,” arguing that photography is not autonomous like art (in the modernist sense).⁹ Despite these assertions, newspaper and television reports claimed that Güler was not pleased when an exhibition of his Istanbul work, “İstanbul’da Alınteri” (Sweat of the Laborer in Istanbul), was mounted in the Taksim subway station in the spring of 2008. Reportedly, Güler had supplied the photographs but was not informed about how they would be exhibited. He was quoted as saying that the photographs in the show, organized jointly by the Chamber of Trade and the Istanbul Municipality, needed to be exhibited in an art gallery, and that ordinary metro passengers

5 Misek (2010), *Chromatic Cinema*, p. 116. Also, Jameson, Frederic (1984), “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146, pp. 53-92.

6 Türeli, İpek (2010), “Ara Güler’s Photography of ‘Old Istanbul’ and Cosmopolitan Nostalgia,” *History of Photography* 34 (3), pp. 300-313.

7 Güler, Ara and Enis Batur (2003), *İstanbul’un Son Şairi Ara Güler*, Istanbul: Yapı Kredi. I make the suggestion that the photographer is “loved” based on the circulation of his news in media and social media (e.g. fan pages).

8 Boym, Svetlana (2001), *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic, p. xiii.

9 Tavlaş, Nezi (2009), *Foto Muhabiri: Ara Güler’in Hayat Hikâyesi*, Istanbul: Fotoğrafevi.

who walked by his photographs in the station would not understand them.¹⁰ The irony, of course, is that most of these photographs had originally been taken for newspapers and illustrated magazines, not for exhibition in galleries.

Güler's career as a professional photographer took off in the context of an expanding print media, and in relation to the dramatic physical and social transformations in the city of the 1950s, a decade marked by urban renewal and rapid population growth with internal migration. However, the recent reframing of Güler's work through a selection of his earlier photographs documenting the changes on the streets of Istanbul has a much different purpose. The photographer has by no means been a passive observer in this process. This reframing intends to promote a popularized longing for the multi-ethnic, multi-religious past of the city, the loss of which the photographer also laments, as he explicitly states in interviews.¹¹ Güler's pictures are powerful today because they embalm the city in a way that is particularly useful to nostalgic accounts of the city's cosmopolitan past. The work is significant not only because of the photographs' content but also due to its re-circulation in a variety of media, ranging from books and exhibitions to the built environment.

The revival of Güler's work made his name synonymous with urban nostalgia that was amplified by the realm of popular consumption of visual cultural products in the early 1990s.¹² It corresponded with the beginnings of an official government effort to transform Istanbul into a "capital of culture"—reflective of the global turn from managerial to entrepreneurial city governance and the concomitant efforts to use "culture" to market cities.¹³ More precisely, it is possible to date Güler's revival to 1992, when

10 "Ara Güler'den, Belediye'ye Sergi Tepkisi," CNNTürk, 6 March 2008 (<http://www.cnnturk.com/2008/kultur-sanat/diger/03/06/ara.gulerden.belediye.sergi.tepkisi/435105.0/index.html>, accessed 18 June 2014).

11 Kinzer, Stephen, "Turkey's Passionate Interpreter to the World," *New York Times*, 13 April 1997.

12 Boym (2011), *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. xiii.

13 The literature on this topic is vast. For an earlier and succinct account of this transformation, see this classic article: Harvey, David (1989), "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in

Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism declared 1993 to be the "Year of Istanbul," and recruited the History Foundation to manage and organize the celebrations. One of the self-designated missions of this foundation, a then newly established non-governmental organization composed of prominent Turkish social scientists and historians, was to challenge official historical narratives by focusing on the everyday social and cultural history of Istanbul from a minor history perspective.¹⁴ As part of the celebrations, it organized Güler's first Istanbul exhibition, "Istanbul, an Endless Reportage," his twenty-second solo show.¹⁵ A coffee-table catalogue, *A Photographical Sketch on Lost Istanbul*, subsequently presented Güler's selected Istanbul work in print in 1994.¹⁶ Many other photographic exhibitions and books followed in this vein, all with the intention of reproducing the lost Istanbul Güler had captured.

The irony in the valorization of photography as an art of the original, the photographers as artists in the modernist sense, and the move of documentary, news, and even scientific photography (e.g. topographic views) into galleries and museums in the 1980s was problematized early on by art critics such as Christopher Phillips, Rosalind Krauss, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau.¹⁷ Douglas Crimp observes that photographs which may have pre-

Late Capitalism," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 71 (1), The Roots of Geographical Change: 1973 to the Present, pp. 3-17.

- 14 See the website of the organization for a list of founders and activities: www.tarihvakfi.org.tr/ (accessed 18 June 2014).
- 15 This information is based on the list of exhibitions provided in Ara Güler's book of photographs (Güler, Ara [1994], *A Photographical Sketch on Lost Istanbul, Istanbul: Dünya Yayınları*). The list covers exhibitions until 2008, in the seventh printing (2008) of the book that I own.
- 16 Ibid. Güler's book was published simultaneously in English, and Turkish, the latter with the title, *Eski İstanbul Anıları* (Memories of Old Istanbul).
- 17 Phillips, Christopher (1982), "The Judgment Seat of Photography," *October* 22, pp. 27-63. Kraus, Rosalind (1982), "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal* 42 (4), The Crisis in the Discipline, pp. 311-319. Solomon-Godeau, Abigail (1991), "Canon Fodder: Authoring Eugène Atget," in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, ed. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 28-51.

viously been illustrations in books, and organized in the space of the library by topic, came to be classified by the “artists” who made them, leading to, for instance, photography that was formerly characterized as “urban poverty” to recirculate as shows by Jacob Riis (1849-1914) or Lewis Hine (1874-1940).¹⁸ Echoing such developments, Güler’s photographs of the poor urban working classes taken in the 1950s and 1960s were recalled from the archive, detached from their original presentations in the media, typically as accompaniments to texts, and moved into exhibition contexts. The recirculation (and popularity) of these photographs since the 1990s meant a small section of his work came to be characterized as his artistic signature. However, his work has a larger scope and range, both in terms of topic and technique. The photographs featured in a recent Smithsonian exhibit, for instance, are high-definition gelatin-silver prints of historic monuments in rural landscapes such as that of an (unpeopled) Ishak Paşa Palace in Doğubayazıt in Eastern Turkey.¹⁹

What kinds of meanings are attributed to the images of the urban poor of Istanbul when they are taken from their original contexts and then recirculated in the present? In a previous article, I focused on a detailed comparative reading of the circulation of different sets of photographs from this earlier phase of the photographer’s work.²⁰ I argued that those that do not touch on politically sensitive topics, such as the dispossession of non-Muslims, and those that instead reflect on urban poverty, rural-to-urban migration and the challenges of rapid urbanization, are more likely to recirculate. Contemporary re-circulation is also revealing in that it shows the centrality and utility of the photographs to advance cosmopolitan nostalgia.²¹

A typical example is Güler’s photograph of two boatmen, dated 1956, and which adorns the cover of his 1994 *Lost Istanbul*.²²

18 Crimp, Douglas (1993), *On the Museum’s Ruins*, Cambridge, MA: MIT, p. 74.

19 “Ara Güler’s Anatolia,” exhibition in Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Museum of Asian Art: Washington DC, United States, 14 December 2013—21 July 2014.

20 Türel (2010), “Ara Güler’s Photography,” pp. 300-313.

21 Ibid.

22 Güler (1994), *Lost Istanbul*.



Boatmen in the Golden Horn, Old Galata Bridge and the New Mosque. Ara Güler, Turkey, 1956 (Ara Güler/Magnum Photos).

This photograph also features on the cover of another author's book that tries to recover the memories of a multi-religious, multi-cultural city.²³ Neither the book's title, "Yesterday's Istanbul: The Dissolution of a Multi-religious, Multi-linguistic Mosaic," nor its content are about these boatmen. The photograph does not communicate in itself anything specific about the two people, their religion or language. The viewer can hardly make out the figures' physical features; they are backlit, and discernable only as silhouettes. The figures' postures and attire only suggest their socio-economic status: working class and poor. Their loose jackets and flat caps (as opposed to rimmed hats) situate them in a loose temporality.²⁴ The figures can

23 Eksen, İlhan (2002), *Dünkü İstanbul: Çok Dinli, Çok Dilli Mozağin Dağılışı*, İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık.

24 Between 1925, when the Republic's "hat revolution" encouraged men to give up their fez and other traditional hats, and 1950, men were rarely seen out and about without a hat.

be identified as boatmen because of their positioning in front of the two small boats, the silhouettes of which merge with the boatmen's. This dark foreground is set against a grey middle ground consisting of the Golden Horn and the Old Galata Bridge crossing it, and a background of Yeni Camii, hovering right above the figures with its domes and minarets yet veiled by a heavy fog. This is a city where small boats still operate, a city where electric streetlights may not have yet arrived. Consumed today, the photograph is nostalgic of a bygone era, but it is not precise in its message. Whatever or whichever time one is nostalgic about, the photograph allows the viewer to project on it. The appeal of Güler's photographs is not necessarily derived from their relation to an original subject or from the texts that may or may not accompany them, but from their potential to evoke human compassion without commitment for change. Güler's recycled photographs do not lend themselves to a programmatic reading. They do not contrast the old and the new, in favor of the new; nor do they show their subjects in passive poses that invite the intervention of the viewers.

PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE EXHIBITION

Güler's well-known Istanbul photographs have been reproduced in many forms, and their inclusion in exhibitions, magazines and books has provided varied opportunities for imagining "Old Istanbul." Some commercial ventures have gone even further, advertising physical environments in which customers may immerse themselves in Güler's work. Two striking examples are the Ara Café, located in a building owned by Güler in the district of Beyoğlu (a building that also houses his studio), and Point Hotel, a boutique hotel in the district of Talimhane where Güler was born. These two commercial spaces have been likened to "museums" in promotional reports.²⁵

25 MacEacheran, Mike, "Istanbul's New Museum Manifesto," *BBC Travel*, last modified 20 December 2012 (<http://www.bbc.com/travel/feature/20121217-Istanbuls-new-museum-manifesto>, accessed 18 June 2014).

It was Güler who chose the black-and-white photographs from the 1950s and 1960s to be placed in these spaces.²⁶ Photographers visiting Istanbul on the occasion of the Magnum exhibition, “Turkey by Magnum,” at the Istanbul Modern Museum were hosted at the sponsoring Point Hotel, and allegedly, they too marveled at the museum-like feeling of the hotel’s decor where rooms, restaurant, lobby and other common spaces are adorned with Güler’s works.²⁷ Güler further helped promote the hotel, e.g. by posing in front of his photographs on the walls.²⁸

At the nearby Ara Café, customers eat on paper placemats on which Güler’s well-known Istanbul photographs are printed, while they study large-format reproductions of his images on the walls. This gives the café customers the possibility to imagine that at any minute the photographer himself may come down from his studio to join them. Indeed he is often spotted there, and he has given many of his interviews in this space.²⁹

The exhibitionary aspect of these two spaces may be linked to the growth of new private museums and alternative exhibition spaces in the city during the past two decades. Looking beyond Istanbul, however, it is difficult not to notice that the use of black-and-white or monochrome prints in cafes, bars and similar commercial collective spaces emerged also in the 1990s as a “signature of designer chic” in metropolitan centers.³⁰ The doubling of these two commercial spaces, Ara Café and Point Hotel, as exhibition spaces is indicative of how the reframing of Güler’s images is part of a broader, transnational cultural and commercial production.

As with most constructions of memory, this process of evoking “Old Istanbul” entails remembering and forgetting in a dialectical relationship,

26 Özarslan, Sevinç, “Talimhane’de Bir Ara Otel,” *Zaman*, 14 October 2006 (http://www.zaman.com.tr/newsDetail_openPrintPage.action?newsId=793265, accessed 18 June 2014).

27 “Turkey by Magnum” was held at the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art 17 February—20 May 2007. The Point Hotel was the “exhibition accommodation supporter.” (http://www.Istanbulmodern.org/en/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/turkey-by-magnum_166.html, accessed 18 June 2014)

28 Özarslan (2006), “Talimhane’de Bir Ara Otel.”

29 E.g. Adigüzel, Hacer (2003), “Ara Güler ile Sanat, Fotograf ve İstanbul’a Dair,” *Istanbul* 8: pp. 36-39.

30 Grainge (2002), *Monochrome Memories*, p. xiv.

where memory and history are entangled rather than oppositional, as Pierre Nora argued in his famous work on *lieux de mémoire*.³¹ The relationship between photography and memory is also complex. Photography is popularly conceived of as an act of remembrance, despite the fact that some of photography's best-known critics, such as Siegfried Kracauer and Roland Barthes, argue that photography and memory "are at odds," and that photography "blocks memory."³² In contrast, the historian of photography Geoffrey Batchen has suggested that photographs are not necessarily produced to bring the past to the present but to situate the self in relation to an unknown future.³³ In the context of Istanbul, the recalling of old photographs from the archive serves a similar purpose. In a city under the strain of economic neoliberalization, an older or other time and place can be treated as a *belle époque*, a time when citizens were imagined to be more civilized and tolerant toward each other. This is a vaguely defined temporality, early to mid-twentieth-century, as signified in the photograph of the two boatmen. Güler's photographs have thus been instrumental in imagining a more harmonious past as the basis for an "open city" of the future.³⁴

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- 31 Nora, Pierre (1989), "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, pp. 7-24.
- 32 The first quote is from Kracauer, Siegfried (1995), "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 50, cited in Batchen, Geoffrey (2004), *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, p. 16. The second is from Barthes, Roland (1982), *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, London: Vintage, p. 91, cited in Batchen, *Forget Me Not* (2004), p. 15.
- 33 Batchen (2004), *Forget Me Not*, p. 98.
- 34 In contemporary urban planning literature, the term "open city" is sometimes invoked to describe a lack of growth controls that might otherwise be used to divert unwanted migrants. As such, "open city" represents an ideal at the opposite end of a spectrum from what Richard Sennett has called the "brittle city"—a closed, over-determined system that denies chance encounters, narrative possibilities, and growth over time. Sennett, Richard (2008), "The Open City," in *The Endless City*, ed. Ricky Burdett and Dejan Sudjic, London: Phaidon. See also: Rieniets, Tim, Sigler, Jennifer and Kees Christiaanse (Ed.s) (2009), *Open City: Designing Coexistence*, Catalogue of the 4th Architecture

Photography is one of several mediums through which “Old Istanbul” is curated. Areas of Istanbul are being transformed into images of idealized pasts, as can be seen in the manufactured streetscape of what used to be known as Algeria (Cezayir) Street, now “French Street,” a themed touristic environment.³⁵ Amy Mills’ work on Kuzguncuk, a Bosphorus village in Istanbul, reveals that the nostalgic rendering of the district as a traditional cosmopolitan Istanbul neighbourhood in both media and individual narratives is highly selective, obscures past tensions, and even wipes out the actual histories of non-Muslim displacement.³⁶

This process of curating the past for the present is not exclusive to Istanbul. Many cities are undergoing similar processes. For instance, in the context of Eastern Europe, Svetlana Boym has observed that “the urban renewal taking place in the present is no longer futuristic but nostalgic; the city imagines its future by improvising on its past.”³⁷ But among other media, photography has proved particularly instrumental because of its indexicality, or truth claim due to the physical relationship between the object photographed and the photograph. In relation to Damascus, anthropologist Christa Salamandra discusses the revalorization of the “Old Damascus” among the Damascene elite in the 1990s. She explains, “Photographs are among the most important means of reconstructing a lost place of the past.”³⁸ Many exhibits about Old Damascus were sponsored by The Society of Friends of Damascus, established in 1977 and characterized as an elite group established for socialization more than activism aimed at preservation. Here, appreciation of Old Damascus provided a loose group

Biennale in Rotterdam, held from 24 September 2009 to 10 January 2010, Amsterdam: SUN Architecture.

- 35 Prehl, Susanne (2008), “Whose Space, Whose Culture? Struggle for Cultural Representation in ‘French Street’ of Istanbul,” in *Public Istanbul: Spaces and Spheres of the Urban*, ed. Frank Eckardt and Kathrin Wildner, Bielefeld: Transcript, pp. 299-318.
- 36 Mills, Amy (2010), *Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul*, Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press.
- 37 Boym (2001), *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 75.
- 38 Salamandra, Christa (2004), *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 79.

boundary or “distinction” à la Bourdieu despite the fact that the group’s members did not live there.

In relation to Harbin in China, anthropologist Yukiko Koga explains that the colonial era under Russia is nostalgically embraced to differentiate Harbin as a tourist destination.³⁹ Destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, the Russian-built St. Sophia Cathedral was restored in the mid-1990s as part of a Beijing-originating national effort to protect historic sites. It then became the “face of the city.” Inside the building, a popular photographic exhibition of “Old Harbin” celebrates “Western” buildings from the early twentieth century, although it provides limited information on the buildings and edits out the Russian invasion. This contrasts sharply with some of the nearby museums that seek to educate the public about past atrocities and imperialism. Koga observes, “Nostalgia for Old Harbin is a displaced form of social criticism of contemporary Harbin.”⁴⁰ Comparably, the appreciation of “Old Istanbul” emerged as a means of group distinction, as well as displaced social criticism. It tied in well with official agendas of city marketing.

What do individuals find in Güler’s photographs? In his introduction to *Ara Güler’s Istanbul* (published by Thames and Hudson, 2009), novelist Orhan Pamuk explains, “The Istanbul of the 1950s and 1960s [...] is nowhere as well documented, preserved and protected as it is in the photographs of Ara Güler,” echoing a popular sentiment that dominates the reception of the work.⁴¹ Despite the resistant nostalgia (here, the resistance is to change), which the photographer’s fans may project onto individual photographs, there is an official desire to incorporate the body of work into economic and political projects. Güler has become the quasi-official photographer for city administration and publicity efforts toward city and country branding in Europe. In fact, the Thames and Hudson volume was the English edition of a French-language publication that followed an exhibi-

39 Koga, Yukiko (2008), “‘The Atmosphere of a Foreign Country’: Harbin’s Architectural Inheritance,” in *The Entrepreneurial City: Image, Memory, Spectacle*, ed. Anne M. Cronin and Kevin Hetherington Consuming, New York: Routledge, pp. 221-53, p. 229.

40 Ibid, p. 232.

41 Pamuk, Orhan (2009), “Foreword,” *Ara Güler’s Istanbul: 40 Years of Photographs*, Thames & Hudson: London.

tion of the photographer's work in 2009. It was part of the Turkish Cultural Season in France. This nine-month "season," intended to introduce Turkey's culture to France, was planned during the presidency of Jacques Chirac but was ironically realized during that of Nicolas Sarkozy, who was known for his anti-Turkey rhetoric vocalizing anxiety over Turkey's increasing presence and influence in Europe.⁴²

One of the most recent occasions in which the government turned to Güler was immediately following the Gezi protests. The Beyoğlu (District) Municipality advertised in July 2013 that Güler shot the "Photograph of (A Mind at) Peace," of a Ramadan *iftar* (fast-breaking) dinner on the very site of the protests on Taksim Square.⁴³ Public Ramadan feasts had been set up on the Square in previous years as well, but this time the sit-down dinner with guests including representatives of religious minorities was staged in official defiance of the Gezi protests.⁴⁴ The photograph attributed to Güler and released to the media was in color, taken from a raised central stage and showing the many dinner tables on Taksim square radiating out. The image was a somewhat ordinary photograph resembling a wedding photograph, and overtly promotional. It was circulated by the government in government-leaning mainstream news media. This was in part a response to the documentation of the protests by a new generation of activist photographers, such as those of the collective Nar Photos documenting the protests and showing government and security forces' violence perpetrated on civilians, and circulating in social media.⁴⁵

42 See <http://www.digitalbridges.eu/?p=21> (accessed 18 June 2014).

43 "Taksim'in 'huzur fotoğrafını' Ara Güler çekti," *Sarıyaşam*, 31 July 2013 (<http://haber.stargazete.com/yasam/taksim-huzur-fotografini-ara-guler-cektil-haber-777650>, accessed 18 June 2014).

44 This time, municipally organized Ramadan fast-breaking dinners were challenged by those organized by the group "Anti-capitalist Muslims" in the form of *yeryüzü sofraları*, or earth dinners, spread on the ground and attended by Gezi supporters from all walks of life.

45 Devrim Gürsel, Zeynep, Interview with Nar Photos Collective, "Covering Gezi: Reflecting on Photographing Daily Life during Extraordinary Events," *Jadaliyya*, 24 June 2013 (<http://photography.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12390/covering-gezi-reflecting-on-photographing-daily-li>, accessed 23 October 2014).

In this case, it was not the black-and-white photographs from the 1950s and 1960s that were shown in government-initiated marketing-oriented “Old Istanbul” exhibitions, but the photographer’s very persona that was claimed and incorporated by conservative politicians and their media apparatus. As a citizen of Turkey of Armenian ethnicity, the photographer was called in to stand in as evidence of the tolerance of the current government under *Justice and Development Party* (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP). In fact, the AKP has frequently featured non-Muslims in its promotional efforts to present Istanbul as a cosmopolitan city.⁴⁶ The photographer’s fans were in shock that Güler would take such a photograph, and this led to discussions in social media and write-ups in mainstream print media, both underscoring how Güler’s work is received and read as a form of resistance.⁴⁷

THE AESTHETICS OF BLACK-AND-WHITE

Black-and-whiteness as a representational mode is an important aspect of Güler’s work and its reception. Black-and-white photography is mostly theorized in the realm of film studies. Black-and-white footage is often

46 E.g. *I’m Istanbul/Ben İstanbulum* (2007), Istanbul: Istanbul Büyük Şehir Belediyesi Kültür A.Ş. In this book, supposedly representative Istanbulites provide short write-ups about the multiculturalism in the city based on personalized narratives. Aret Vartanyan says in the first piece: “I am proud to say, ‘I am from Istanbul. My family has lived here for centuries,’ when I was asked about my home country [...] It was inevitable to have colorful and unforgettable childhood memories as my father is Armenian, my mother is Greek, my grandmother is Jewish, my grandfather is Russian, and my cousins are Muslim.” All but one of the selected contributors to this publication bear non-Muslim minority names, a misleading overrepresentation of members of the now dwindling non-Muslim minority population.

47 Eğrikavuk, Işıl, “Taksim’in Huzuru Resmini Kim Çekti?” *Radikal*, 5 August 2013 (http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/isil_egrikavuk/taksim_in_huzuru_resmini_kim_cekti-1144905, accessed 18 June 2014). See the comments of disappointment under a Facebook posting by another famous local photographer: <https://www.facebook.com/muratgermen65/posts/10152068145359409> (accessed 18 June 2014).

associated with alternative reality: dreams, fantasies, memories, or the historical past. In art films, directors may also use black-and-white or desaturated imagery to create a sense of “truthfulness,” rather than “reality” (as in the work of the Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan or the Russian director Andrei Tarkovski).⁴⁸ Art critic Anne Hollander suggests:

[...] early combinations of printed words and pictures helped the association between black-and-white printed representations and unadorned truthfulness that gives the term “graphic” one of its meanings. We have built on this association the idea that if a picture is in black and white, it can be apprehended more clearly, even though it may be enjoyed less. By extension photographs and movies in black and white are considered good because they are so true, not because they are so real. Their often brilliant beauty rests on this. “Living color” may be more lifelike and more delicious, but, like life itself, it is also more distracting, entrancing and misleading.⁴⁹

Black-and-white imagery alludes to the veracity of inner worlds—in contrast to a more accurate, and perhaps more enjoyable, chromatic reproduction of the external world. The association of black-and-white with truth is also based on a deep suspicion of the medium’s heightened indexicality with high definition color photography.

The common association of black-and-white with “pastness” is a post-1960s phenomenon. It reverses, in fact, the relationship initiated in Hollywood’s classical period with the use of color imagery to connote fantasy-as-inner world.⁵⁰ Most memorable may be the association of color with fantasy in the *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), where Dorothy’s real black-and-white life in Kansas contrasts sharply with the colored world of Oz. Had it been shot today, real life in Kansas would most likely have been shot in high definition colour with Oz in monochrome.

Although color photography was invented in the 1860s, and color was used in film as early as the 1920s, black-and-white photography remained

48 Johnson, Vida T. and Graham Petrie (1994), *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 188-89.

49 Hollander, Anne (1989), *Moving Pictures*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 33.

50 Misek, Richard (2010), *Chromatic Cinema: A History of Screen Color*, Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell.

the norm for motion pictures (including newsreels and cinema, etc.) until the 1950s (the 1970s in Turkey). This is what produced the early association of black-and-white with reality. However, now that high-definition color media saturate everyday life so completely, black-and-white imagery has shifted to connote something closer to “truth” (and the inner world) as opposed to “reality.”

Paul Grainge’s discussion of “monochrome memories” is particularly useful in thinking through the aesthetics of black-and-white in the 1990s, and when and why black-and-white is preferred over color. He suggests black-and-whiteness emerged as a “visual discourse” in the 1990s.⁵¹ The use and experience of monochrome surged across a range of mediums and forms—not only news photography but also corporate advertising and commodified designer chic.⁵² Through a close reading of the editorial choices in *Time* magazine to use black-and-white or color in its cover designs, Grainge makes the argument that monochrome or black-and-white transform news into chronicle. In the era of online news and instant communication, the news magazine has had to reinvent itself as provider of in-depth stories rather than news: black-and-white was used to “chronicle” while color was used for breaking news.⁵³ A related argument, echoing Susan Sontag’s work on photography and Frederic Jameson’s on film, is the valorization of black-and-white as a nostalgia mode. In the context of Istanbul, Güler’s work has to be understood not only in terms of representational content, but also through its circulation among a broad range of nostalgia modes for “Old Istanbul.” The revival of Güler’s work and its popular reception is connected to transnational developments in the image regime.

GÜLER’S CONVERSATIONS WITH STREET PHOTOGRAPHERS

It may sound peculiar to anyone familiar with the history of the technology of the photographic medium that black-and-white is associated here with the 1950s and 1960s, despite the fact that by that time, color had become

51 Grainge (2002), *Monochrome Memories*.

52 Ibid, xiii-xiv.

53 Ibid, pp. 67-97.

the standard in photography, cinema, and TV broadcasting in North America and Europe. Contextualizing Güler's work transnationally is necessary here. His approach to photography is part of the genre "street photography" in vogue from 1930s to the 1960s, and which developed in connection to the small format camera.⁵⁴ Like earlier social documenters, street photographers remained suspicious of color and adhered to black-and-white.⁵⁵ Güler's photographs foreground individuals, men and women going about with their usual business or activity, while acknowledging the photographer's presence. Children pose for him with excitement. The background is the old city, the dilapidated wooden houses, and crooked streets. The reception of his photographs, however, needs to be considered in relation to other albums of urban nostalgia, such as "Old Paris," as invoked by Sontag.

A distinction between documentary and street photography may be useful here. Documentary photographers approach their topics with the intention to document or chronicle a social type, e.g. the poor or oppressed, or a historical condition (e.g. The Great Depression in the US, 1929) and with the intention to incite certain responses in their more privileged viewers in order to encourage change. Jacob Riis (1849-1914) chose as his subject matter crowded and unsanitary interiors, alleys and courts; Lewis Hine photographed laborers and recently arrived immigrants; Weegee (Arthur Felling, 1899-1968) photographed the extremes of the urban crowd (e.g. murder victims, muggers). Street photographers also concern themselves with everyday life but lack the reformist tone; they instead seek to invoke self-reflection.⁵⁶

In his work, Güler celebrates street life with compassion, yet his photographs lack the reformist zeal. In his position as the photographer of his city, Güler can be compared with Eugène Atget (1857-1927). Self-admittedly much influenced by "the pictures on the run" (*images à la sauvette*) of Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004), one of the co-founders of the famous Magnum photo agency in Paris in 1947, Güler experimented

54 Clarke, Graham (1997), *The City in Photography*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

55 Scot, Clive (2007), "The Street-Photographic and the Documentary," in *Street Photography: From Atget to Cartier-Bresson*, ed. Clive Scot, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, pp. 57-89.

56 Ibid.

with many different approaches to street photography over the years.⁵⁷ Güler's photographs reveal conversations with the works of prominent photographers of his day, as well as his awareness of seminal precedents.

In order to explain why Güler's work aligns with street photography, Riis' "Street Arabs at Night" (1890) can be contrasted with Güler's "Wooden houses and children in the Gypsy quarter, Şiřhane" (1969) as both feature children as central characters.⁵⁸



Street Arabs at Night. Jacob Riis, USA, 1890 (The Jacob A. Riis Collection, Museum of the City of New York).

57 Cartier-Bresson, Henri (1952), *The Decisive Moment*, New York: Simon and Schuster. Also see: Tavlař, Neziř (2009), *Foto Muhabiri Ara Güler*, İstanbul: Fotoğrafevi Yayınları, pp. 112-116.

58 The Riis photograph illustrates the seventeenth chapter with the same title of the Riis' (1890) *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York*, with illustrations chiefly from photographs taken by the author, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.



Wooden Houses and Children in the Gypsy Quarter, Şiřhane. Ara Güler, Turkey, 1969 (Ara Güler/Magnum Photos).

In Riis' famous shot, the bundling of the children at the rear accentuates their need for space. They are passive (sleeping), and not engaging the photographer or using space—such composition and framing invite the viewer into the space of the photograph to act. In contrast, Güler's photograph depicts a decaying inner-city neighborhood.⁵⁹ Children inhabit the foreground of the picture. Poverty does not seem to weigh on the children or the few women in this environment. One of the boys almost throws himself at the photographer; with his eyes fixed on the camera, he is ready to become its subject. The viewer is thus invited to take an interest in the subjects, but not necessarily to get to know them or to take action. The photograph, by itself, does not even try to persuade its audience to conclude

59 Güler's photograph is the first photograph of a 10-day photo essay, entitled "Al İřte İstanbul," and originally co-produced with author Çetin Altan for the local daily *Akřam*. For a more detailed discussion, see Türelı (2010), "Ara Güler's Photography."

that such conditions should change. All it does is evoke a generalized compassion. While his compositions and subject matters are varied, in general, Güler's human subjects have agency; they do not call upon the viewer to act on their behalf.

One of Güler's famous photographs, from 1956, entitled "Winter arrives in the Sirkeci district of Istanbul," is reminiscent of Alfred Stieglitz's (1864-1946) famous photograph "The Terminal" (1893) because of the subject matter: the horse-drawn carriage on a snowy, difficult day in the city.



Winter Arrives in the Sirkeci District of Istanbul. Ara Güler, Turkey, 1956 (Ara Güler/Magnum Photos).

In the Stieglitz shot, a Harlem streetcar is waiting for passengers in front of the Post Office while the driver is watering the horses.⁶⁰ In the Güler shot, a basic horse-drawn cart, with a single horse to transport goods is moving on

60 View the photograph on Getty Images: <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=69262> (accessed 18 June 2014).

the tram-track while pulled by the driver; this is a portrait-oriented photograph; the sides are framed by apartment buildings on both sides of the already narrow street, accentuating the tightness of the space, and furthermore, a tram waits right behind the horse cart stressing the immediacy of the moment. Yet, this is not a modern-versus-primitive vehicle photo, and it does not suggest that the horse cart is old and needs to move out of the way of the more modern tram: the tram will not replace the horse cart. Both are seen as old fashioned. They share the same road or path, and in fact, fate, because they will both be decommissioned in a few years as part of the drive to motorize the streets of the city with new roads and urban renewal.

Just like Cartier-Bresson's, Güler's images were sometimes out of focus, lacking in contrast, distorted in angles, and less determined in composition—the city was a realm of contingencies. Güler was recognized by Cartier-Bresson and his collaborators, and invited to become a member of the famous Magnum (cooperative) photo agency in 1962.⁶¹ The 1950s and 1960s is considered the golden age of photojournalism as a way of story telling; it was partially driven by the magazine market, which declined by the end of the 1960s. *Hayat*, the Turkish equivalent of *Life* magazine, was crucial to Güler's exposure at home and abroad by employing him as staff photographer, and by connecting him to international partners such as *Life* and *Paris Match*.

As many cities began deindustrializing, and as the magazine market and its photographic commissions began declining in the late 1960s and 1970s, inner-city experiences ceased to be a point of attraction for photographers. Istanbul's deindustrialization would start much later, but the local magazine market would also enter a decline in the 1970s. Correspondingly, Güler turned to new interests, such as portraiture. He also started taking pictures in color film, although he remains best known for his earlier work in black-and-white.

PHOTOGRAPHIC MEDIA AND MEMORY

When looking at old black-and-white photographic reproductions of the city's past like Güler's, viewers are transported to a past they did not necessarily experience, or, reciprocally, this other Istanbul moves toward pre-

61 Tavlaş (2009), *Foto Muhabiri*.

sent-day viewers and touches them. Black-and-white images act as “melancholy objects,” to borrow a phrase from Susan Sontag, who was one of the earliest critics to connect photography to nostalgia, referring to the black-and-white work of Eugène Atget (1857-1927) and Brassai (Gyula Halász, 1899-1984) in documenting the disappearing “Old Paris.”⁶² She says,

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. The moody, intricately textured Paris of Atget and Brassai is mostly gone. 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.⁶³

This connection to the family album is remarkable. Just as a child who comes to “remember” moments captured in photographs because of viewing and re-viewing the same images in the family album, but may have no other lived memories of the continuum of events leading to and following the shot, certain city photographs come to substitute for actual lived memories. Another thinker to discuss black-and-white as “nostalgia mode” early on in the context of film was Frederic Jameson. Writing in 1984, Jameson defined “nostalgia mode” as a symptom of a crisis in postmodern thought about historical imagination. He explains, “‘historicism,’ namely the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past” modifies the actually lived past.⁶⁴

In contrast to this negative interpretation of media memories, where nostalgia is equated with forgetting or amnesia, scholars have since pointed

62 Emphasis mine. Sontag, Susan (1977), *On Photography*, New York: Picador, pp. 15-16. Later in the chapter entitled “Melancholy Objects,” she explains, “Photographs turn the past into an object of tender regard, scrambling moral distinctions and disarming historical judgments by the generalized pathos of looking at time past.” (p. 71).

63 Ibid, 16.

64 Jameson (1984), “Postmodernism,” pp. 53-92.

out the futility of drawing dualistic boundaries between real and virtual memories, and have begun exploring the relationship between media and memory. Marianne Hirsch coined the word “postmemory” to suggest that the perceived ideal of family photographs can be powerful for both personal and cultural memory.⁶⁵ Others have suggested that media and memory are constitutive, or that memories are mostly mediated and in fact, media feeds memory “fever” (hence the intensified desire to record lived experiences through technological reproduction, memorials and museums).⁶⁶ In turn, personal or mass media provide layers of memory that the postmodern experimental self can flexibly draw from.⁶⁷ Building on Celia Lury’s notion of “prosthetic culture,” Alison Landsberg has adapted the term “prosthetic memory,” to make an optimistic argument that mediated memories can be progressive, allowing individuals to potentially make counterhegemonic readings of mass media representations, and to develop empathy for other peoples’ conditions, which may in turn become the basis of new counter-publics.⁶⁸

Güler’s photographs of “Old Istanbul” have thus turned into mediated memories through circulation in publications, exhibitions, book covers, as decorative prints in cafes and domestic spaces. Pamuk admits: “I have seen some of Güler’s photographs so many times that I now confuse them with my own memories of Istanbul.”⁶⁹ Yet, this statement is too similar to another the novelist makes in his memoir *Istanbul*, in relationship to old

65 Hirsch, Marianne (1997), *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

66 Huyssen (1997), *Twilight Memories*. Van Dijck (2007), *Mediated Memories*.

67 Celia Lury argues that a shift is currently underway from aesthetic culture to “prosthetic culture.” She believes that a plural society, ordered by variety, is being supplanted by a post-plural society, ordered by diversity. In this new society, the self as possessive individual is being replaced by the experimental self, which requires media representations, especially photographs, for its narration. Celia Lury (1998), *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory, and Identity*, New York: Routledge.

68 Landsberg, Alison (2004), *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press.

69 Pamuk, Orhan (2009), “Foreword.”

black-and-white Turkish films, again from the 1950s and 1960s, that are being recycled on private television channels.⁷⁰ The circulation of old black-and-white Istanbul pictures, be it photographs or cinema films, in contemporary media provide the “prosthetic memories for imagining “Old Istanbul” since the larger public may not have personal or transmitted lived memories of that Istanbul, and have to rely on technologically reproduced representations such as photographs, films, museums, theme parks, and other simulations to experience it.⁷¹ In both cinematic and photographic works, the recirculation of old black-and-white images of the city reflects an effort to affirm that Istanbul has left behind its provincial, poorer past, has moved on, and that it is ready for its future as a colorful European city.⁷² It is also in this sense that the Turkish state, in its various branding agencies, turn to Güler’s work to promote Turkey in Europe.

Pamuk is cognizant about the role of black-and-white, and elaborates on it in a layered manner in his *Istanbul* memoir-cum-urban history, in a chapter entitled “Black and White.”⁷³ Here the novelist introduces the notion of seeing the city in black-and-white. He suggests: “[t]o see the city in black-and-white is to see it through the tarnish of history: the patina of what is old and faded and no longer matters to the rest of the world.”⁷⁴ This mode of seeing metaphorically registers the city’s loss of (cultural) color, that is, its former multicultural, multicongressional, and multilinguistic complexity.⁷⁵

Pamuk’s is “autobiography as cultural criticism,” a genre where the intellectual writes of his earlier life and meshes that with broader interpretations of class, culture, and history.⁷⁶ In discussing the novelist’s use of

70 Pamuk, Orhan (2005), *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, trans. Maureen Freely, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

71 Landsberg (2004), *Prosthetic Memory*.

72 Fatih Akın’s film *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005) uses the musical scene of Istanbul to argue for the diversity or colorfulness of the city, as discussed by Özlem Köksal in this volume.

73 Pamuk (2005), *Istanbul*.

74 Ibid, p. 38.

75 Ibid, p. 39.

76 Miller, Nancy (1991), “Getting Personal: Autobiography as Cultural Criticism,” in *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*, New York: Routledge, pp. 1-30. Haverty Rugg, Linda (1997), *Picturing*

photographs in the context of such autobiographies, Gabriel Koureas explains “photography has become a key characteristic of revisionist autobiographies” to help distinguish between different selves, e.g. Orhan in the photograph, Orhan the author—pointing to the role of photography as a prosthesis for the experimental self.⁷⁷ Pamuk includes Güler’s Istanbul photographs in his memoir (yet does not take issue with their prevalent recirculation and commodification). The memoir is generously illustrated with photographs, many (to my count, 62 of 200) by Güler, the last one being a photograph of Pamuk and Güler in front of a slide table. This collaboration expands into Pamuk’s house museum—where the gift shop sells only Pamuk and Güler’s work.

While it is palpable how “experimental” subjectivity works in Pamuk’s memoir with the aid of photographs, it is less so at a cultural, societal level. Does Güler’s work fulfill Landsberg’s optimistic argument about prosthetic memories? Do these black-and-white photographs that came to represent a colorful “Old Istanbul” in fact make the city more diverse, or at least open to diversity?

Non-Muslim citizens of the city are, in their absence, central to Istanbul’s imagined and marketed societal color. As part of the 2010 European Capital of Culture events in Istanbul, the city’s multicultural past was once again on display. Interestingly, to coincide with this year of celebration, Ara Güler published a new book of 56 selected photographs, entitled *Armenian Fishermen at Kumkapı*. It was produced as a single volume in three languages: English, Turkish, and Armenian.⁷⁸ The novelty was that the persons in the photographs were identified as Armenian citizens in a fishing community, soon to be displaced by urban renewal. One may argue that this is staged multiculturalism, that the book still does not explore what hap-

Ourselves: Photography & Autobiography, Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press.

- 77 Koureas, Gabriel (2012), “Orhan Pamuk’s Melancholic Narrative and Fragmented Photographic Framing—’Istanbul, Memories of a City’ (2005),” in *The Photo Book, from Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond*, ed. Patrizia Di Bello, Collette E. Wilson and Shamoan Zamir, London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 211-232.
- 78 Güler, Ara (2010), *Kumkapı Ermeni Balıkçıları (Armenian fishermen at Kumkapı)*. *Gumgabui hay dzknorsneré: 1952*, introduced by Murat Belge, Istanbul: Aras.

pened to Armenians or to this particular Armenian fishing community. The photographs and the accompanying essay had originally been published in local Armenian-language newspaper *Jamanak* in 1952 as a six-day series.⁷⁹ In contrast, the photographer's prior books such as *Lost Istanbul* and exhibitions on the city had decontextualized the photographs and their original contexts and subjects. The publication of *Armenian Fishermen* does not yet parallel an improvement in the lives of the already-dwindled numbers of non-Muslim citizens in the city today. Yet, it points to a political opening molded very much by nostalgia. Quiet unexpectedly, black-and-whiteness as a nostalgia mode allows media memories of the city to open space for Armenians, and gives viewers (not only the viewers of the book but also readers of its reviews in mainstream print media) the opportunity to develop empathy for the subjects of the photographs.

Güler's black-and-white photographs of "Old Istanbul" have been instrumental in imagining the future of the city as a socially and culturally colorful, open city. The photographer's active curatorial intervention or engagement is key to the limited number of photographs that recirculate from his earlier oeuvre. There is a tension in the reception of the work; by critics and enthusiasts, the work is viewed and consumed as a means of resistance to rampant urban transformation. Yet, by city marketers and governments, it is a picture-perfect depiction of how much the city has improved. Through dissemination in books, exhibitions, and exhibitionary spaces, the photographs have turned into mediated memories of moments viewers may not have necessarily experienced in person. Thus, the photographs have been put to many different uses, including the narration of new selves. What is perhaps not readily recognized is how black-and-whiteness as a representational mode contributes to their reception. In fact, Güler's work has gained meaning in tandem with other exhibitionary sites mediating "Old Istanbul," at the local level and at the transnational level, with the valorization of black-and-white as a nostalgia mode.

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79 Ibid.

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