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The People That My Mother
Forces Me to Meet
Nazlihan Agaç

09/2020

Nazlihan Agaç; The People That My Mother Forces Me to Meet

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Nazlıhan Agaç Neves da Cruz

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Trabalho de Projeto

Mestrado em Comunicação Audiovisual

Especialização em Fotografia e Cinema Documental

Orientação:

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Vila do Conde, Outubro de 2020

Nazlıhan Ağaç Neves da Cruz

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ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

This project is a practice-based study, which emerges from its author's personal story.

As the project arises with an artistic intention, the scope of the investigation is shaped mostly after the artistic work is undergoing. Although there is always an intention in the beginning of an artistic project, chance, luck, obsession and curiosity tend to play an important role in its development and on the way, it is shaped along the research process. The idea to this project came somewhere between while I was thinking about personal narrative in visual art and my relationship about me and my mother. Therefore, the main theoretical interest in this study is concerned with the use of personal life as a source of artistic inspiration within contemporary art practice. To do that, I analyse the concept of confessional art, and artists use of their lives as a subject matter.

*The first part of the thesis looks at the practice of art and interpretation through the artistic practice of Tracey Emin and Sophie Calle. The second part reflects upon my own practice while developing the project *The people that my mother forces me to meet*.*

The practice results in a number of photographic portraits, each one accompanied by a story that relates the author with the person portrayed. These photographs and the stories are accompanied with objects offered by the People my mother forces me to meet and images from my family albums. The artwork will be shown in the form of an exhibition in the Casa Museu Abel Salazar and in a book.

Keywords: confessional art, family photography,

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INTRODUCTION

“Conducting research is an active form of self-(re)creation.” (Suominen, 2003).

*The first thing that gave birth to the concepts I would theoretically examine was the project itself. To explain the connection between the practical and the theoretical part, I must first write about the emotions that brought this idea to my mind. Three years ago, I moved to Portugal right after I graduated from university. Like every immigrant, I went through not only a social adaptation to the cultural differences of a new country, but also some severe emotional and psychological processes. After a while, I realised that these processes are in motion. Every time I go to my home country and every time I come back, the ideas about myself and my thoughts about life, change. So, this study is very versatile in terms of emotional expansions. I have handled both my sense of belonging and my sense of identity through something that my mother ‘forced’ me to do: to try and approach a ‘reality’ humorously. This whole process, as a mature student and someone excited about artistic creation, has led me to the world of artists who produce artworks based on their own life. Just like in literature, I was fascinated by visual art that acts boldly and honestly while retelling the artist’s own story. That is why I was so excited when I first contacted with Sophie Calle’s work. The first artwork that I came across was *Take Care of Yourself* (2007), a work about a breakup email sent to Calle from an ex-boyfriend, an email that she forwarded to 107 women so that they could interpret it according to their different professional backgrounds. I was fascinated by how a simple situation about her life could be the foundation for an artwork. This was the beginning of my exploration of the visual and textual forms of art that explore the fragments of personal life.*

As the title of the work suggests, the project includes 12 portraits of people that my mother forces me to meet every time I visit Turkey. This demand, based on my mother’s judgment as well as in the yield of Turkish culture, made me examine this relationship more deeply after I moved to Portugal. After deciding to do the project, I went to Istanbul for a month as planned and took the portraits of them during my visit.

To reinforce the story to be told, the objects given by these people were collected and later on photographed in ESMAD’s studio. Not just a story was written for each photograph, but also old pictures provided by these people were included to reinforce the story. The artwork is produced to be both exhibited and presented on a book format. Detailed information about the study is given in the second section.

*The main work that inspired this project was Calle’s *True Stories* (1994) book, where she exposes herself in a range of different topics about her life. In the book, for each case, Calle uses one photograph next to a small text. The book, which consists of 50 short stories, is divided into three titles, “The husband”, “Monique” and “Bob”, respectively, after the first 24 stories. In the context of this project, each story written in the work has a connection with a portrait.*

The thesis consists of two main parts. In the first part “The Self in Art”, the first chapter argues about the relationship between art and interpretation. This section focuses on examining the interpretation of art rather than seeking answers to what it is. The second chapter analyses the relatively new definition of autobiographical art. Outi Remes (2005) first defined the term ‘confessional art’ in her PhD as being closely associated with autobiographical visual art and literature. It contextualises the artist as a subject from various aspects. As the main theoretical interest is the intersection between personal life and artistic practices, subchapters 2.2 and 2.3 analyse two artists who approach art with an autobiographical scope: Tracey Emin and Sophie Calle. Both their ways of approaching their art is emotionally close to my work. A detailed explanation of the different stages and decisions of the project will appear in the second part of this document.

The chapters are theoretically (i) influenced by Cynthia Freeland’s (2001) art theory; (ii) embedded in contemporary culture critic by Susan Sontag (2015); (iii) recognise the partial nature of philosophical knowledge from Ortega Y. Gasset (2017); (iv) and take into consideration studies of contemporary photography by Mark Durden (2014) and Charlotte Cotton (2014).

The main goal of this thesis is to explore how the private self is used as a source for artistic practice. Although the project does not have an attitude pointing to any specific question, it focuses on analysing the ways the self is represented and explored through autobiographical art. The intention is to reach a deeper understanding of the way personal narrative can be used in art.

Previous Research

The use of personal narrative in art has a long story behind it. There have been multi-dimensional researches regarding autobiographical art and as well as many different definitions of the use of self in art practice. Therefore, the scope of my research has often shifted to cultural studies.

Although the focus was on the concept of ‘confessional art’, it is necessary to acknowledge this term highly refer to autobiographical art. Therefore, this concept has been analysed under different terms such as self-narrative, self-representation, narrative art (Sunngrén-Granlund, 2016), contemporary autobiographical art (Smith, 2012), autobiographical art (Mackenzie, 1978), phototherapy, autobiographic narrative (Olsen, 2014), postmodern auto-ethnography (Suominen, 2003).

The theoretical focus of this research is based on the analyses of Sophie Calle’s and Tracey Emin’s artworks and practice. Both Calle’s and Emin’s artistic practices, as well as their personalities, have been investigated by many scholars. During the research process, I could not stop thinking about the apparent difference in the interpretation, by theoreticians and critics, of the two artists. Despite the 10-year difference between them, they are two crucial contemporary artists that share similar artistic strategies. Their conceptual approach is different. However, both artists use psychoanalytic ideas, sexuality and their life as auto-fictional subject matter. They both use found objects, photography, writing and installation. They both represented their country in the Venice Biennale in 2007, Emin for Britain and Calle for France.

Even though it did not attract as much attention as Emin's *My Bed* (1998), Calle also exhibited her bed. The work is constituted by a photograph and text.



Figure 1 - Sophie Calle, *Autobiographies (The Bed)*, 1988

In the text next to the photograph it is written:

The Bed

It was my bed. The one in which I slept until I was seventeen. Then my mother put it in a room she rented out. On October 7, 1979, the tenant lay down on it and set himself on fire. He died. The firemen threw the bed out the window. It was there, in the courtyard of the building, for nine day (Calle, 2013:26-27).

Emin's bed is presented in the form of an installation.



Figure 2 - Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, 1998

It might be said that Calle's artwork is more consensual in comparison with Emin's. At some points, in the articles and thesis written about Emin's work, it looks like the authors are trying to justify her practice. Some of the critics towards Emin will be discussed and analysed in chapter 2.2.

PART 1 – The Self in Art

1 – Art / Interpretation

“Art is magic delivered from the lie of being truth.” (Adorno)

“You can understand nothing about art, particularly modern art, if you do not understand that imagination is a value in itself.” (Kundera, 1988)

Because art has been a part of human nature for centuries, it is possible to encounter many subjective, creative and pragmatic definitions about what art might be. In one of his interviews, John Berger describes feeling pity as a starting point for art making. For Berger, feeling pity is a part of what constitutes human nature. He explains feeling pity as the first act of imagination, which initiates not only ethics but also art. In the words of Berger, feeling pity allows for human beings to find “the steps towards getting into someone else’s skin” (1995).

At the same time, it is necessary to consider that, when defining art, the concept has taken various forms in different historical contexts. As Cynthia Freeland observes, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gardens are not considered as ‘art’ in Western society today, but instead they are more associated with craft than with art (2001:60). It is instructive to recall that many artists whose artistic geniuses are unquestionable today - such as Proust, Matisse, Monet – were not readily accepted in their time. It is possible to see today that the perception of documentary photography has changed in the process of time also. Abigail Solomon Godeau presumes that one hundred years after the invention of photography, the term ‘documentary photography’ is more valid historically than ontologically (1991). The irony is that, what is called now as ‘art’, was called ‘document’ before the 1920s (Solomon Godeau, 1991). Hence art is not static and art changes as the world changes. What we call art changes as well. Thus, we might argue that the way we interpret art is more important than its definition.

As a less emotional and more direct definition than Berger, Freeland assumes that art is what the art world agrees for it to be (2006:63). In her book, Freeland (2001) argues clearly and perceptively about what art is, its cultural meanings in different contexts and why we value it. There are many different art theories such as ritual theory, formalist theory, imitation theory, expression theory, cognitive theory, postmodern theory and so on. Since the purpose of this study is not to define art, and although it would be a great effort to explain all these theories and discussions, I intend to focus on a few approaches that can be helpful in exploring the relationship between art and interpretation.

*Freeland (2001) presents a theory from Arthur Danto, who has begun to write about contemporary art after he first came across Andy Warhol’s Brillo Boxes (1964). Danto’s controversial essay *The Artworld* (1964) asserts a “reality theory”, which assumes Warhol as an ambassador of a new aesthetic reality that did not*

distinguish between 'high' art and mass culture. The idea behind Danto's argument is that, in the contemporary situation, the distinction between art and non-art can be only cultivated by the community of art professionals, associated with several institutions. After ten years, Danto's essay induces George Dickie to define the "institutional theory of art" (1974), which similarly means that social institutes such as galleries and museums have the power to dictate what is art and what is not. However, according to Freeland, Danto objected to this view. Instead, Danto argued that the artworld provides a background theory which, given its historical and institutional context, allows for the artist to create something that might be understood as art. To sum up, Danto resolves that an artwork is an artefact that gives form to meaning. "Nothing is an artwork without an interpretation that constitutes it as such" (Danto in Freeland 2001:57).

Although Freeland has recognised Danto's analysis, she claims that he did not adequately explain how artwork communicates its message. According to Freeland, "saying that something is art is not at all the same saying that it is good art" (2001:58). Ignoring the fact that Freeland's assumption debates that all artwork contains messages, the question is, what does qualify an artwork as good art?

Susan Sontag speaks of interpretation as a revenge of the intellect upon art (2015). In the late 1880s, Nietzsche wrote: "There are no facts, only interpretations." (Nietzsche in Sontag, 2015:6). Nearly a century later, Sontag defined the act of interpretation in a way that goes beyond the methods of critique, critical theory, and ideological criticism. She stated interpretation as: "...a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain 'rules' of interpretation" (Sontag, 2015:7).

In her famous essay, Sontag discusses the division between formalist fruition and content-based interpretation. She considers the modern way of interpretation as disruptive, and she claims that contemporary critics focus on their own intellectually constructed abstractions like "form" and "content". It digs "behind" the text, to find a sub-text that reveals the truth (Sontag, 2015).

In most modern instances, interpretation amounts to the philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone. Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable (Sontag, 2015:10).

Academically, researches about artists require a contextualisation of the artist life, an analysis of their artwork, the reading of interviews, documentaries, etc. Ultimately, we criticise, analyse and interpret the artist's body of work considering her/his cultural context in a specific timeframe. However, these determinations, inferences, comments, and even what the artists say in time, do not reflect the essence of the artwork/artists as a whole. In an interview in 1986, Werner Wögerbauer says to Thomas Bernhard "You are always presented as a kind of a loner in the mountains, the man from the farm..." and he answers:

What can you do? You get a name, you're called 'Thomas Bernhard', and it stays that way for the rest of your life. And if at some point you go for a walk in the woods, and someone takes a photo of you, then for the next eighty years you're

always walking in the woods. There is nothing you can do about it (Bernhard, 1986).

As Sontag points out, interpretation, as a modern way of understanding something, is inevitable. Today, in a society where intelligence became a commodity fetishism, it would be very optimistic to ask for erotic of art.

Kundera says there are two basic contexts in which we can position a work of art (2017). He characterizes them as small context, namely the history of the nation, and supranational history in a large context. "The job of art is not to record all the upheavals, changes, and repetitions of history like a big mirror. Art exists to create its own history." (Kundera, 2017)¹ Therefore, at this point, although the criterion varies according to the phenomena such as art theory, understanding of art, historical context, art will find the criterion for writing its own history in the artist himself, whom he takes from his subjectivity.

2 - Looking to the self through confessional art

"...It was the worst poem ever written, it was indeed the beginning of spring, and you were flying alone in Grove Park when you heard the warmth of the sun on your face in the newly blooming grass, and you felt the need to express this joy in words, written, rhyme" (Auster, 2013)

Paul Auster draws a portrait of his childhood through early adulthood in his book, which he calls *Report from The Interior* (2013). He uses second-person narration which will form the book with detailed explanations regarding self-analysis of actions and feelings of his childhood. Besides Auster, who has been using his own life story as material in his novels in different contexts, many writers created their works based on a confessional way of writing. In this sense, compared to visual arts, the relationship between literature and the concept of confession is somehow familiar to the reader. A confessional voice can characterise Jean Genet's, Jack Kerouac's, Charles Bukowski's, John Fante's and Bernhard's writing. Their writing almost invariably refers back to themselves and their life experiences.

Traditionally, confession is associated with autobiographical literature, a therapist's session, a police investigation, or a religious ritual of forgiveness (Remes, 2005:1). In the Cambridge Dictionary, the meaning of confession is the act of admitting that you have done something wrong or illegal. (n.d) However, as Outi Remes noted, there can be different aspects of confession. Confessional art is not necessarily referring to something illegal or criminal, but it relates to something intimate, private or unexpected. According to Jackson, it encourages an intimate analysis of the artist, the artist's subject of the spectators intimate, and often controversial experiences and emotions (Jackson, 2010:123). In the words of Remes, "confessional art promises to reveal more" (2005:8).

¹ Free translation from the author.

2.1 Confessional Art and The Author

Confessional art emerged in the late 20th century and is a form of contemporary art that focuses on an intentional revelation of the private self (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). Despite the simplicity of the definition, it can be said that the root of confessional art is a bit complicated. Throughout the process of writing this dissertation, I felt confused about the concept of confessional art. In essence, it is about the author and uses the author's own life as a subject. Therefore, inevitably, the essence of the concept has been investigated under different contexts by different scholars, artists, and educators, as mention earlier: self-narrative, self-representation, narrative art (Sunngren-Granlund, 2016), contemporary autobiographical art (Smith, 2012), autobiographical art (Mackenzie, 1978), phototherapy, postmodern auto-ethnography (Suominen, 2003).

According to Jackson and Hogg (2010), it is first defined by Outi Remes in her PhD thesis in *The Role of Confession in Late Twentieth-Century British Art in 2005* (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). In terms of describing the art of confession and on how to blend it in today's culture, the introduction of the thesis gave a considerable contribution to this research.

Remes, in her thesis, conceptualised the term confessional art and discussed it in multiple perspectives. Confessional art is not simply a sub-product of confessional reality television and tabloid culture but deserves serious, consistent attention (Remes, 2005:8). In order to define it, she suggests the use of autobiographical literature as a guiding element. Moreover, she situates confessional art as a subcategory of autobiographical art.

Confessional art is mostly focused on revealing conscious and intentional self-related thoughts and feelings, events or memories. The theoretical meanings of confessional and autobiographical art are closely related. Therefore, Remes suggests that confessional art promises to reveal more in comparison to autobiographical art (Remes, 2005). She continues:

Characteristically, it proposes to share the subject's most intimate and private experiences, events and emotions with the viewer. It reveals something that is traditionally only revealed to a close friend, a therapist or a priest at confession (Remes, 2005:8).

Remes, in order to strengthen her argument, says that, when compared to autobiographical art, confessional art reveals more than the viewer wants to know, more than the viewer experiences as being 'safe' (Remes, 2005:9).

When we look at the etymology of the word 'confession', it is necessary to project some kind of 'truth', in order to make the word meaningful. Foucault's *History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (2016) argued about the role of confession as a way of producing truth. He predicted that the expression of the confession is crucial to understanding, developing, and modifying the sexuality to create self and identity. According to Foucault:

Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth: the codification of the sacrament of penance by the Lateran Council in 1215... helped to give confession a central role in the order of civil and religious powers. .. next to testing rituals, next to the testimony of witnesses... The confession became the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth... Confession has spread its effects far and wide: in the judicial system, in medicine, in pedagogy, in familial relations, in amorous relationships, in everyday life and in the most solemn rituals; crimes are confessed, sins are confessed, thoughts and desires are confessed, one's past and one's dreams are confessed, one's childhood is confessed; one's diseases and problems are confessed (Foucault, 2016).

*For Foucault, the relation between Western sexuality and confession is binary. However, any kind of confession, even one intended to be truthful, may not be right. Confession naturally relies on memories, but memories are not reliable. Brooks in *Troubling Confession* (2000) notes that the truth status of psychoanalytic insights was rarely demonstrable. (in Remes, 2005:4)*

In confessional art, the main interest is not to be truthfully honest. Confessional artists are inspired by memories, not by the facts of the past. (Jackson & Hogg, 2010:125) Although the art of confession does not require ultimate accuracy, it may vary depending on the artist's goal, method and intention.

The interpretation of confessional art also led the popular press and the art critics to a tense debate and, to some extent, the reception of confessional art was negative. Mostly associated with this confessional approach, Young British Artists (YBA) have been criticised for "taking advantage of the superficial, sensational, and commercial media obsessions of violence, sex, child abuse in order to respond to the recession in the art market" (Jackson & Hogg, 2010:125). Tracey Emin (b.1963) comes from a generation of YBA, and she undoubtedly is one of the most controversial artists who gained a strong position in the international contemporary art world of the 1990s.

2.2 Being Emin

"So much of people's life is not there in what they do, they have a veneer over their work and no association to it apart from the fact that they do it. I'm different. The climate has changed more toward my way of thinking – everything is more personal – things have caught up with me." Emin in Durden, (1997)

"Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry." Eliot, (1919)

Emin has been a hot topic around confessional art and, more generally, in contemporary art. Not just her art but also her father, her tits, low-cut top's, educational background, her intellectual capacity, her accent, underage sex, her abortions. She has been criticised for being "too stupid to be a good conceptual artist" (Remes, 2005:72). Many scholars and critics argued whether her work is art or not. It can be said that her art has not been taken seriously until the early 2000s, as a result of Emin's assertive statements, which have taken many places in the media, since her highly personal traumas constituted the main subject matter of her art. Emin's drunk participation in a live broadcast television programme, her collaborations with Vivian

Westwood and the sponsorship deal with Beck, her public appearances in the media with stories of sexual promiscuity and depression has contributed to her public reputation as the “bad girl of current British art” (Medina, 2014:58). Aside from all these collaborations and their arguable outcomes in the art world, she is one of the best-known contemporary British artists. She was in the Art Review’s list as one of the most important people in the art world (Remes, 2005:71).

The articles about Tracey Emin generally focus on establishing truth with the confession in narrative and authenticity of her art. While some authors see the personality she displays as an artistic strategy, some writers rebuke this and claim that her art is a debasement for the art world. Some scholars are claiming that her work is generally misinterpreted based on personal assumptions about Emin’s character. Miguel Angel Medina asserts this claim in the following words:

That unchaste exhibition of weaknesses, fears, traumas, and obsessions have supported the negative critical judgment from all those who erroneously underestimate Emin's talent, identifying her as an impudent exhibitionist or a vocational provoker (2014:56).

Similarly, Fanthome argues that Emin’s sincerities about traditionally taboo subjects such as rape, sexual abuse and promiscuity, are key to the public response she causes, “which spans the spectrum from shock and abhorrence to intimacy, resonance and intense shared meaning” (Fanthome, 2008:229).

On the other hand, others like Mark Durden (2020), and Ros Gray (2002) are solidly questioning her persona and her relation to contemporary art. They do not seem to underestimate Emin’s talent. On the contrary, from a broad perspective, they evaluate the relationship of Emin’s art through the culture that prevails today.

Perhaps, her most famous installation is *My Bed* (1998) –the one that gave her the nomination for the Turner Prize in 1999–, defined as an icon and described as a “monument to the heartache of relationships breakdown” or a “portrait of a younger woman” (Ellis-Petersen, 2015). It was mentioned as “one of the most controversial ready-mades ever created” by Jonathan Jones (Sunngren-Granlund, 2016).

My bed is an installation showing Emin’s actual bed, after a relationship breakup, with dirty sheets, cigarettes, condoms, vodka bottles, period-stained clothing, a pregnancy test, and other belongings. According to Durden, *My bed* has shown a deterioration and decline in both the art world and the media (Durden in Kokoli, Cherry, 2020:19-20).

The article *Rethinking Tracey Emin: Life into Art* (2020) by Mark Durden is an enlarged version of the article named *The Authority of Authenticity* which the author wrote in 2006. Durden has an obdurate stance on Emin’s art. There is nothing Emin does well enough in Durden’s point of view. According to Durden, the personal objects that Emin uses are useless, banal and need for self-aggrandisement; and the monoprint drawings are made with hastily. Emin’s subjective outpourings are cliched expressionist forms which are

repeated. Moreover, he asserts that it can be hard to get off from 'the confessional thing', because of the way her life and art are intertwined. Durden argues that Emin art, through her strategy of using her life as a subject matter combining with media's attention, is only self-promotion.

For Durden, by "using herself as subject matter, Emin's art invites accusations of being nothing more than self-promotion, vacuous PR" (2020:19-20). He also relates Ray's Laugh series from Richard Billingham with Emin's art. For Durden, what gives the popularity of Billingham's family pictures, like Emin's art is "the voyeuristic pleasure of 'slumming it'" (2020:19-20).

From another perspective, Medina (2014), argues about the construction of an artist's image in her essay. She sees Emin's reiteration of the "famous artist" pose as a strategy of self-promotion which previously cultivated artists such as Salvador Dali and Andy Warhol. Medina continues: "However, where Dalí played the world for laughs and Warhol and Hirst are plentiful in irony, Emin is devoid of irony and seems to take it all very seriously indeed" (2014:58). Medina is not the only comparing Emin with Warhol. According to Remes, Warhol's and Emin's public personas are similar, and both are products of the same voyeuristic and confessional culture that is obsessed with the process of revealing private experiences to the public (Remes, 2005: 77).

Emin uses her personal history as the subject for her artwork. Moreover, her history includes personal traumatic events such as unreported rape, public humiliation, sexism, abortions, alcoholism, and promiscuity. This attempt to transform her inner emotional and psychological experiences, memories and feelings, was often described as confessional art. According to Fanthome,

The confessional art through which she appears to explore, analyse and evaluate her own identity arguably touches a wider public, provoking questions around issues of self-identity and lived and imagined experience, whilst striking at the heart of the human condition (2008:226).

As stressing the heart of the human condition in Emin's art, later in her article, Fanthome suggests that Emin's confessional art should be interpreted as a starting point for spectators to decode her art (2008:229). Emin can articulate painstakingly detailed stories of her life through a wide range of media.

As Smith states, Emin's art "exposes that confessional truth-telling can be, and often is, a form of storytelling" (Smith, 2017:300). Smith strongly emphasises the mastery tactics that Emin's narrative uses, one that is familiar from all great storytelling. For her, Emin's confessional tale, immerse the audience just like Grimm's fairy-tales, Dickens' novels or Netflix's series would do (2017:304). Assertively, Emin is aware of the importance of words for her art:

I don't think I'm visually the best artist in the world, right? (...) But when it comes to words, I have a uniqueness that I find almost impossible in terms of art - and it's my words that actually make my art quite unique (Emin in Durden, 2020:18).

Why I never became a dancer (1995) is an excellent example in this matter. The video, which was transferred from a Super 8 camera, is a six-minute video that uses footage of Margate, Emin's hometown. The narrative starts with her voice and explains the artist's early teenage years, the boredom of the seaside town, Margate, and the sexual experiences with older men from an early age. She mentions that they would buy fish and chips before going off into an alley, a park or "even a hotel". During the narrative, she makes judgements about the men she slept with. Her tone is bright and confident; she says: "The reason why these men wanted to fuck me, a girl of fourteen, was because they weren't men. They were less, less than human" (Emin, 1995).

By the time she was 15, the thrill of sex was gone, and her real passion becomes dancing. And she got her "real kick, on the dance floor" (Emin, 1995). The narrative continues about her dream to escape to London; once she wins the finals of the local disco-dancing competition, she could compete for the British Disco Dance Championship of 1978. And there she was. As she started to dance, people started to clap. She was confident that she was going to win, and nothing could stop this except the humiliation by a group of local boys, most of whom she had slept with "at some time or other" (Emin, 1995). They were shouting her as Slag-

The chant becomes (sic) louder and louder: 'Slag, Slag, Slag.' Until in the end, I couldn't hear the music anymore or the people clapping. My head was spinning, and I was crying. I'd lost it. I ran off the dance floor, out of the club, down the steps to the sea. And I thought, I'm leaving this place, I'm getting out of here. I am better than all of them. I'm free. And I left Margate, and I left those boys. (Emin, 1995)

As the film approaches the end, music becomes more noticeable. While the music becomes louder, the film shows a fast-moving shot of the city, obviously shot from a moving car which indicates that Emin was finally getting away from Margate. Emin completes her voiceover: "Shane, Eddy, Tony, Doug, Richard, this one's for you". The video concludes with the artist's first appearance in the film, dancing alone cheerfully, in a large empty room with a song by Sylvester called "You Make Me Feel".



Figure 3 - Tracey Emin, *Why I never became a dancer*, 1995

The formal quality of the video is not a high definition image. The image is 'trashy', which connects to the content that is being depicted. She is not interested in having beautiful images. Since Emin uses her own life as artistic content and reveals the stories of the traumas she has experienced in her life, Emin's work is often addressed through pain and trauma. Durden, for instance, claims that Emin's work is mostly attached to a "certain content and a certain state of misery and pain" (2020:21). However, Tracey Emin argues against this idea since the beginning of her career. In 1997, she stated that "People think my work is about pain, but it isn't; that's just the part people hook onto. The part they choose to remember" (Emin, 1997).

Considering *Why I never became a dancer*, undoubtedly, there is a traumatic side to Emin's story. Nevertheless, there is also a therapeutic side to it. It shows the emotional victory of an abuse. In my understanding, besides the rarely vocalised honesty which Emin delivers, the story also was created with a subtle sense of humour. The construction of the story converges with verbal and visual details. For instance, "As Lorna Healy has noted, when Emin speaks about grabbing a man's balls, the metal claw of the Big Dipper arcade machine seizes a teddy bear" (Smith, 2017:304). By watching the video, we witness the humiliation of a girl in her teens. While the story can be perceived as 'sad' in many ways, it is funny that Emin was cheerfully dancing in the end, for Shane, Eddy, Tony, Doug, and Richard, inside an empty room.

Heather Diack argues "that humour is a means not of escaping reality, but of confronting it and of engaging with the very questions that characterised the advent of conceptual art in the first place" (2012: 78). The way Emin constructed her narrative correlates with his argument. When she talks about her underage sex experiences, she confronts them with the action; she turns the humiliation into an artwork.

Early in her career, she clearly states that "being an artist isn't just about making nice things; it is also some kind of communication, a message" (Emin, 1997). In response to what is that message, she says:

It's about very, very simple things that can be really hard. People do get really lonely, people do get really frightened, people do fall in love, people do die, people do fuck. These things happen, and everyone knows it, but not much of it is expressed. Everything is covered with some kind of politeness, continually, and especially in art, because art is often meant for a privileged class (Emin, 1997).

Another example, *Strangeland*, published in 2005 is a collection of memoirs divided into three sections: "Motherland", "Fatherland" and "Traceyland". In this book, she writes about her early childhood and teens, her hometown Margate, poverty, sexual abuse, intimacy, and love. Although the context of her text is referring to her previous interviews, drawings and installations, Fanthome (2008) asserts that her writing adds a new dimension to the text.

In the review of this book, Alev Adil writes, "as an 'autobiography', *Strangeland* fails abysmally" (2005). She describes Emin as a neglected and needy child and directly criticises her personality as self-obsessed and unperceptive. Interestingly, in the review of the autobiographical book, Adil says "Tracey has little to tell us

about anyone but herself” (ibid). The author claims that, out of their multimedia context, these writings lose qualities. Disparately, what gives Emin’s practice a meaning is the story behind it. As Durden puts it:

Even when the form of the work is without words, as in the series of ready-made objects – things from her life that have been exhibited and sold as art, such as her bed and a dilapidated wooden beach hut – their significance and import have a dependency on what she has told us about herself (2020:18).

In ‘Articulating authenticity through artifice: the contemporary relevance of Tracey Emin’s confessional art’ (2008) Christine Fanthome is explaining why confessional art is relevant for today’s audience through exploring the art of Tracey Emin. The article provides a descriptive introduction of the transmission of the postmodern culture audience. Fanthome is arguing about what is the attraction of confessional expression in today’s contemporary audience. The author stresses that in Emin’s success, the key is her ability to connect with her audience, in her ability to articulate and express her personal innermost feelings through a range of media. (Fanthome, 2008:232) In the article, it is given an attention to the part about a birthday party to which Emin was not invited to:

‘I’m afraid you’re not invited. You don’t have an invitation.’

I waited outside the school for as long as I could. Then I hid the jewelry [present for the birthday girl]. I went home. Mum asked,

‘Did you enjoy the party?’ I said, ‘Yes, it was lovely.’

That night, I layed in bed and cried. I cried myself to sleep. And in the morning, I asked, ‘Mummy, what’s an invitation?’ (Emin in Fanthome, 2008:232).

Mostly, Emin has been accused of playing the role of the victim. However, I think her work indicates that she repeatedly denies this role. Despite her polemic, assertive, partly aggressive, personality and her artworks which seem impossible to distinguish at some levels, I was fascinated with the way she reveals some emotional story of her life, not necessarily about the confessional way but the vulnerabilities behind the stories. Here, I would like to underline the similarity between Emin’s party rejection story and one from Sophie Calle’s book *True Stories* (1993):

I was two. It happened on a beach - Deauville, I think. My mother had entrusted me to a group of children. I was the youngest, and they had to get rid of me: that was their game. They huddled together, whispering, then burst out laughing and scattered when I tried to come near. And I ran after them, shouting: ‘Wait for me! Wait for me!’ I can still remember. (Calle, 1993: 91)

We can feel pity or laugh at the protagonist, but ultimately, it is the vulnerability in the narrative that draws the audience. The mortification in both quotes is quite similar. However, with the commentary accompanying not only the way the story is constructed, but also Emin’s personality, allows us to look at it differently from the way we look at Calle’s. With the attention of media in the early years of her career, Emin’s pouring out all her emotions like unfiltered vomiting, sparked much controversy. In my opinion, what makes her artwork interesting is not the shocking honesty with which she shows her traumatic past but the way she constructs the stories and how she connects with the audience.

2.3 Construction of the idea: Sophie Calle

“Ultimately, my excitement was stronger than my hesitation” (Calle in Neri, 2009)

“I realised I was better than anything that I had made.” (Emin, 2001)

Unlike Emin, born in Paris in 1953, Sophie Calle grew up in an intellectual house. Her mother, Monique Sindler, was a book critic and press attaché. Calle later described her mother as “the wildest mother, who was always centre stage” (Michalarou, n.d.). At the end of her life, Monique Sindler became central to Calle’s work with the thirteen-minute video *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* (2007). It was exhibited at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007. The work showed a loop from her mother’s final moments. *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort*, while morally and ethically questionable, it may be the outcome of many basic debates about what art is within the scope of conceptual art.²

Although her mother took up space in the artist’s different works, her main motivation to be an artist was her father. Robert Calle was an oncologist, an art collector and the former director of the Nimes’ Carré d’Art, a contemporary art museum. In several interviews after the year 2000, when answering the question “why you became an artist”, Calle said: “To seduce my father” (Jeffries, 2009). However, in an early interview, she stated “I did not think about becoming an artist when I began. I did not consider what I was doing as art” (Calle, 1993).

Calle’s first artistic project started in 1979, when she returned to Paris after seven years of travelling through China, Mexico, and the United States. She found some establishing rules and that following them was restful. As she says in different interviews, she did not know what to do with her life at the age of 26, and she was bored. Then she decided to follow people. She says: “If you follow someone, you don’t have to wonder where you’re going to eat. They take you to their restaurant. The choice is made for you” (Calle in Jeffries, 2009). Looking at Calle’s work, we can say that the emotion in the quote is reflected in her other works. She uses her own life as a subject matter, but rather than reflecting on her feelings about occasions; she makes a game in which she sets her own rules. She lets others make choices for her.

It can be said that her detective-style approach to the projects has a confessional vein to it. Her passion comes from her curiosity, her fantasies, her boredom, her excitement, the fear of missing things, which ultimately is coming from herself. Moreover, Calle does not hesitate to disclose not only her own life but also the life of others. The strange world of Calle constantly plays with control and freedom, choice and compulsion, intimacy and distance, private and public, place and identity.

² For further reading about this, see Sophie Alexandra Thorn thesis entitled ‘The abuse of power and indiscretion’: Identity, Mourning and Control in the work of Sophie Calle (2010). Thorn takes as her starting point Calle’s work named *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* (2007) and discusses its moral and ethical dimensions. She sees this work as a unique piece for us to understand the characteristics of Calle’s work and her working methodology and style. Divided into four chapters, this master thesis deeply analyses key themes in Calle’s work, such as the role of identity, mourning and control. Each chapter frames Calle’s artistic production within some particular theorists. Thorn points out that Calle’s works revolve around the idea of power, control and subversion.

In her first work, *The Sleepers* (1979), she invited strangers to sleep in her bed. And she wrote down everything they said. In the following years, she got a job as a chambermaid in a Venice hotel to photograph guests' belongings. The result was *The Hotel* (1981), a two-part framed work comprising of photographs and text.

In the *Suite Vénitienne* (1980), she followed a man from Paris to Venice and recorded his activities for 13 days, with photographs and text. *Suite Vénitienne* was published in a book with an afterword by the theorist Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard is an early influence on Calle, often seen as a part of the post-structuralist Ecole. Sophie Alexandra Thorn, in her master thesis, gave attention to Calle's relationship with Baudrillard. This idea will be developed further down.

According to Thorn, what makes Calle's works so intriguing is the engagement with notions of subjectivity and universality. Thorn argues that by doing that, Calle "finds common ground between the artist and the audience" (2010: 6). The author built this argument around three artworks: *Suite Venitienne*, *Unfinished* (1988-2003) and *Exquisite Pain* (2003). I would like to focus on what Thorn called the "ideas of a constructed identity and subjective reality in Calle work" concerning French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard (Thorn, 2010: 9).

Baudrillard was Calle's lecturer at the university. He also helped Calle to trick her father: Baudrillard placed Calle's name on another student's work so that her father thought she had finished university. Baudrillard's theories about seduction and his concept of simulacra are essential to explain Calle's work.

The idea of simulation in Baudrillard is based on the questioning of the concept of reality in today's Western societies. Possibly inspired by Guy Debord's *La société du spectacle* (*The Society of the Spectacle*, 1967), Baudrillard claims that images, signs, and symbols no longer relate to reality in our current society. However, in this new simulation universe, there is no need for a 'truth' to be simulated. Now, the 'simulators' have taken the place of the truth. It is not an imitation or a copy that replaces the truth. On the contrary, it is mentioned that the difference between 'reality' and 'imitation' or 'reality' and 'imaginary' disappears and that reality no longer has any real value.

In her thesis, Thorn, analyses Calle's work based on Baudrillard's concept of simulation. She considers Calle's artwork a subversion to the issues of identity and authorship, she suggests that "Sophie Calle, the artist, becomes itself a simulacrum" (2010: 13). According to Thorn, "like a simulacrum, Calle's references a simulation of reality, this 'Sophie Calle' artistic persona, another identity, and thus makes herself completely compliant with the postmodern society that Baudrillard describes" (2010: 13).

In my understanding, referring to Calle as a simulacrum ultimately indicates the connection and tension between her art and her life. In each work, Calle positions herself with different identities. She can enter any role such as chambermaid, stripper, journalist, stalker, anthropologist, photographer, writer, editor,

detective, lover, daughter, victim, perpetrator. The circulation between these identities is clarified by setting rules and then proceed according to them. As she says: "I like being in control and I like losing control. Obedience to a ritual is a way of making rules and then letting yourself go along with them" (Calle in Thorn, 2010: 64).

We can say that Calle's artworks come from the pursuit of questions that arise from her curiosity. This curiosity sometimes originated from situations happening in her own life. Other times it was based on emotions or thoughts from others. It cannot be said that she is looking for a specific answer to these questions. Rather than only expressing her own emotions, she observes, insists on, follows, takes photographs, makes videos, writes. She makes the rules, and often she does not consider moral entailment.

For instance, in Adress Book (1983), she assembles a portrait of a man from which she found an address book in the street. Right after she photocopied it and sent the original back to its owner, she contacted the people from the address book to get to know him better. She published the results of the work in the French newspaper Liberation. The man, Pierre Baudry, who is a documentary filmmaker, was not pleased and threatened to sue Calle for the invasion of his privacy. Calle says:

He was very angry. And I did feel bad about it, yes. I was disappointed. All his friends were willing to speak to me about this man. They were all sure that he would love the project. I liked the man, I liked his books, his restaurants, his friends. I started to be in love with him. I thought we would fall into each other's arms and live a love story. I didn't see it coming. So, I felt very guilty, although my commitment to a project is stronger than my sense of guilt (Calle in Duguid, 2009).

Another example, Exquisite Pain (1984-2003) is intriguing when read in terms of blurring the difference between art and life. Exquisite Pain is about the end of a love affair. Her lover from Paris failed to meet Calle, as planned, in a hotel in New Delhi. Then he broke up with her on the phone. This break up was the most painful feeling she experienced at that time. After returning to Paris, deeply distressed by the breakup, Calle began asking others the question "When did you most suffer?". The final artwork was only finished and shown twenty years after, in 2004. Besides the answers to the experiences of pain from others, she wrote the ninety-eight version of her broke up. The photograph of the phone on which she received the news of the separation (while on the bed) accompanied the narrative with the suffering stories of others.

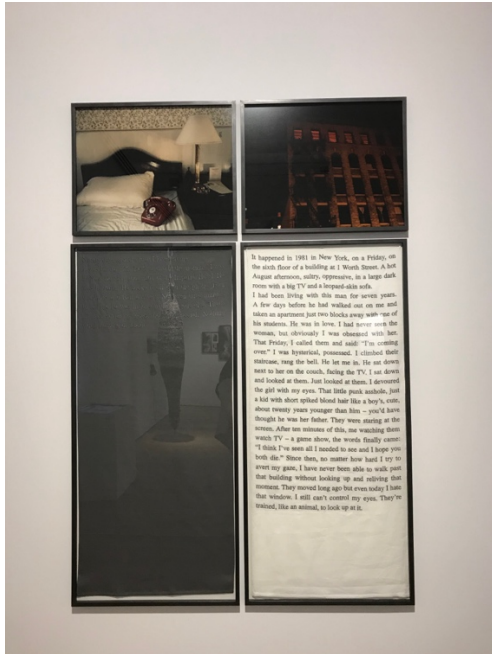


Figure 4 - Sophie Calle, *Exquisite Pain* (1984-2003), In the exhibition of Arter, İstanbul.

As can be seen in this artwork, the idea comes from something that happened to her and is juxtaposed with moments of suffering from strangers. Calle subverts her pain into a story, into art. Was it done to be an artwork? She is not sure about that.

At the time, I took on this project more for therapeutic than for artistic reasons. I can't remember whether I was planning to use it all later on, as material - I think it must have been because I conducted the process seriously and with rigour. I knew the project would stop when I got bored with talking about my pain or when I became disgusted and ashamed of the way that my banal love affair was nothing compared to the stories of greater unhappiness, they were telling me (Calle in Gentleman, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, *Exquisite Pain* also meets the emphasis Thorn has made on subjectivity and the universality of Calle's work. Although *Exquisite Pain* got some attention because of the universality of the pain, soon after, it started to be about the subjectivity of the stories. They are simple, honest, and creative.

In *Take care of yourself*, Calle decides to interpret a breakup email she got from an ex-boyfriend, with the help of 107 women. Differently from *Exquisite Pain*, in *Take Care of Yourself*, Calle asked the women to interpret her letter through their eyes, with their own professional background. It took two days, as she said, to transform this breakup email into a work of art (Calle in Chrisafis, 2007). In an interview, she explains how the idea emerged: "I showed the email to a close friend asking her how to reply, and she said she'd do this or that. The idea came to me to develop an investigation through various women's professional vocabulary" (ibid).

We do not know what Calle thinks about the breakup. However, the audience is drawn into her universe. Because, inevitably, we put ourselves in Calle's place: we try to interpret the mail, or we think what we

would do if we got a similar one. It is as if she is suggesting the audience to live the experience with her. In the end, the audience becomes part of her 'game'.

In Calle's works the interaction between text and image is often present in either installation or book format. To complement her work, she also uses film and other objects. *Take Care of Yourself* was exhibited at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007. Calle, as the representative for France, was given the entire French Pavilion to use (Thorn, 2010: 2). The show had a large number of videos showing performances of many of these 107 women, photographs of women with their analyses next to them.

As a result of the interaction between text, video and image, *Take Care of Yourself* is a comprehensive book that comprises all the interventions to the email, alongside with DVD's with the videos. According to Thorn, "through using these particular elements Calle draws attention to not only the physical aspects of her work but also temporal aspects that inform her strategies of presentation" (2010: 33)

When I did my project, I did not know much about Calle's work. I came across it through Charlotte Cotton's book *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (2014). Cotton, besides other things, mentioned Calle's collaboration with the writer Paul Auster. Since I am a strict fan of Auster's books, before seeing Calle's works, I read the book *Leviathan* (1992). In *Leviathan*, the character named Maria was based on Sophie Calle. Auster described the character, Maria, as follows:

whose work had nothing to do with creating objects commonly defined as art. . . Ideas would take hold of her, she would work on projects, there would be concrete results that could be shown in galleries. But these were caused by the desire to throw their obsessions, passions, and to live life as they wish, rather than the desire to make art. Living was ahead of everything (Auster, 2018: 78).³

Soon after, I was amazed by Calle's artwork, her simple ideas, her creativity, and the way she deals with her pain. The inspiration for my project came from her books *True Stories* (1994) and *Take care of yourself* (2007), which are the works that I explored before starting my project.

Once she has constructed the idea, it is not important if it is fiction or real life. In my understanding, Calle does not try to convince the audience nor the art world. She exerts chapters of her life in a wide variety of creative ways. Calle makes rules for her games and plays by them. She works meticulously, subjectively and intelligently. Her works suggest more than a feeling. In another interview about her motivation, and related to the way she works, Calle says that she is not obsessive, opposing to what she is always referred to. She continues:

But I am rigorous. If I have decided that there is this rule or that rule, then I am very committed. I don't get bored. I think I have the ability because I believe in the construction of the idea. If it's a good idea, then it's exciting. I am interested in how it will stand on the wall (Duguid in Calle, 2009).

³ Free translation from the author.

PART 2 – Work Methodology

1 - The people that my mother forces me to meet.

The practical component of this research project explores a relationship between photography and text. Throughout the process, multiple changes and additions were made. The things I thought while preparing the project, the difficulties encountered during its development and the continuous research, inevitably affected the work's outcome.

The book Take Care of Yourself (2007) lead me to consider the use of people that are part of my life or ones that are related to situations that are not comfortable to me, as sources for my artistic creation. It happened at the end of April 2019, near the end of the first year of the master's degree. I had one idea for a final project, but I kept thinking about other possibilities. By that time, I had a muscle problem in my knee, and I could not walk. It was painful, and I was worried about the summer. I had a dilemma: stay in Portugal or go to Istanbul because I missed my family so much. But, while there, I would have to stay an entire month at home, to recover from the knee injury. I kept thinking that it would be very boring to always be with visitors at home, without being able to go out. In the middle of a conversation, my husband Tiago Cruz suggested I could take pictures of those visitors. I loved the idea and started to think about it. After a while, my knee problem was solved, and the idea of the project was gone.

I went to İstanbul completely healthy, enjoyed the summer, and even started to research for the other project's idea.

But I always have some sort of problem when going back to İstanbul. I must visit many people that my mother suggests, insists, and sometimes forces (psychologically) me to see. This gap between what I expect and what I encounter when I'm in my hometown, creates a kind of an alienation. There is always something going on that I should join: dinners, missing birthday celebrations, receiving visitors, going out for visits. When meeting members of my family, I always repeat the same answers when they repeatedly ask the same question: "How is your life in Portugal?" The unpleasantness of these repeating answers made me come up with the idea of working around "The people that my mother forces me to meet".

The starting point of the project was to make portraits of these people. However, aside from these portraits, this project is also a story about me and my relationship with them. In that sense, the stories and the project's title are an exposure of the authors self and the relation she has with her mother. Rather than simply saying "no" to her, I want to challenge her expectations through photography and text. Therefore, the objective, through to use of mixed media tools, lies around the exploration of self-representation, intimacy, and vulnerability.

2 - Exposing Vulnerability

Brené Brown (2017) describes the vulnerability precisely as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. If we agree with this definition, it seems reasonable to say that storytelling is about being vulnerable. In my view, what is interesting about vulnerability, is how it connects with truth and to how subjective truth can be. In a way, in front of the people that my mother forces me to meet, my 'self' is perceived in different ways. This aspect is part of the work presented in the stories connected to each image. The meaning of these stories changes according to the reader's interpretation. Therefore, in a quest to emphasize the polysemy of the project, I decided to explain a memory about them along with the images. Those memories can be seen as indications of constructed identities. By doing what my mother suggests me to do I invite the readers to question their relationship with their surroundings and themselves. (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Eisner & Powell, 2000 in Suominen, 2003: 26)

Suominen (2003) suggests seeing identity as a "subject positioning" to understand the notion of a relational self. "Because of this constant placement and displacement of 'who' we are, we can think of identities as multiple and as contextual, contested, and contingent." (Scott, 1993 in Suominen, 2003:31) In this sense, in the context of my project, my positioning was something that changed according to the context and the person involved. The relational nature of my 'self' creates a different persona for different situations which, in turn, is perceived in different ways by the people who I work with.

As the idea of the project developed, I decided to take photographs of gifts and similar items that these people gave me. Besides these items and the portraits, I had access and decided to use old photographs of them. The intention behind this action is to amplify the scope of the work and to open polysemic pathways to the audience. These old photographs play with my own memories of these people and the ones they have of themselves. Consequently, this project gives the viewer the possibility to look at the stories from four different perspectives that, in turn, complement each other:

- The portraits of the people that my mother forced me to meet;*
- My stories about these people;*
- The gifts and items these people gave me;*
- Old images of these people's family albums.*

2.1 - The photographs

The plan was to take portraits during a four-week visit to Istanbul. Although it was uncertain, the intention was to produce between ten to fifteen portraits. It was decided that these portraits would be taken in the places where I usually visit the subjects. Some shooting sessions were repeated to accomplish so that there were different compositions in different light conditions. In the end, fourteen people were photographed, but only twelve portraits were used.

Besides the portraits, the work gathers objects that these people gave me. They contribute to the creation of more layers of meaning between the stories and the text. It seemed more appropriate to take photos of these objects in ESMAD's photographic studio, after arriving in Portugal. A different approach between portraits and objects seemed more dynamic and appropriate. The intention was to show the objects in a more isolated way than their context by taking photographs in a studio with professional equipment. The dynamic is related to the contrast between the portraits made on location, which conveys a sense of natural environment, and the objects photographed in the studio, which by opposition conveys a sense of artificiality. On the other hand, it is more appropriate because there is an intension to emphasize the difference in our relation with objects and with people. All the images can be seen in [Appendix A](#).



Figure 5 - Example of object image, Simit



Figure 6 - Example of portraits, Blind love

In Turkey, while exploring the memories and stories regarding these people, I requested them some of their old photographs from their family albums. I wanted these old photographs to complement the narrative and to give the viewer access to their photos taken by others in the past.

These old images are essential to potentiate and intensify the role of memory. Orhan Pamuk, in his autobiographical book *İstanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir* (2003), writes about our first life experiences. He says that maybe we all have experienced something similar while looking at our childhood photographs, something that makes us ask our family questions about ourselves. Later on, we think we “remember” these experiences. Pamuk calls these infancy memories.

This sweet feeling, which reminds us of the pleasures of seeing ourselves in a dream, then places a habit that will poison us throughout our life: we will learn to learn the meaning of what we live in - even the deepest pleasures - from others (Pamuk, 2003:16).

He emphasises that, what others say about the things we do in life, does not only turn into our own idea of us but also becomes more important than what we have experienced (ibid). Pamuk elegantly connects the experience of learning about one ‘selves’ through photographs, to the shaping of one’s identity. He foregrounds photography as a starting point for the stories you learn about yourself. The connection between image and memory relates to the mental and perceptual image⁴.

For instance, before the start of the practical phase of the project, there were images in my mind related with the way these people looked like in the past. After gathering the old photographs, I was surprised. They were different from my mental image. Present and past images are presented in this project with the intention to trigger a reflection around the role of mental images in the construction of a perceptual image. By reading the story, the audience creates a mental image of the subject that will be in contrast with the subject’s old photographs.

American artist Larry Sultan (1946-2009) is among the artists who was researched during the process of pre-production, in order to gather photographic references. Sultan’s photobook *Pictures from Home* (1992) is a combination of film stills from home movies, photographs of suburbia, and texts from his journal. Accompanied with a remarkable text where he questions notions about representation through his parent’s photography, Through the use of light, perspective, and colour, the simplicity of a couple’s everyday life intimacies emerges in Sultan’s photographs.

⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell examines the use of the world’s image in a number of institutionalized discourses. In the context of this article, he defines an overview of all the perceptions of the image: there are ‘graphic (pictures, statues, designs), optical (mirrors, projections), perceptual (sense data, “species”, appearances), mental (dreams, memories, ideas, fantasmata), and verbal images (metaphors, descriptions, writing) (1984:505)



Figure 7 - Larry Sultan, Chess Game, 1985

The work includes portraits of his parents in daily routines. “Some of the photographs are posed, and Sultan describes these as images he traded or negotiated with his parents as he won their agreement to be photographed while they undertook household chores” (Cotton, 2013:161).



Figure 8 - Larry Sultan, My mother posing for me, 1984

Sultan's photographs are interesting in terms of how photography can be a vehicle for representing intimacy and privacy. The photographs invite us into his home, into his family's daily routine. Sultan questions what drives him to continue to photograph his parents. He concluded "it was more to do with love than with sociology, being a subject in the drama rather than a witness" (Sultan in Traub & Heller & Bell, 2006:50).

2.2 - The texts

The group of people that my mother forces me to meet and the relation I have with them reflects the mixed feelings I have as an immigrant. This group includes close members of my family, such as my grandmother and aunts, but also the baker from our neighbourhood and the cheese monger from the bazaar where my family goes shopping for the last twenty years. The obligation of seeing certain people is not solely related to a Turkish cultural requirement, but also to my mother's values. According to her, respect and love should also be shown to all the people we know and love for a long time, including neighbours and acquaintances (not only close family members). The problem of this innocent requirement is that it makes me feel all the time like a "guest" in my own country. I started to think about what these people mean to me. This 'alienation feeling' lead me to focus on which exactly is my story with them.

Rather than gloomily expressing this emotion, I chose to approach it with humour. I am aware that the title can be indelicate for those people. It was indelicate also for my mother. When I talked to her about the project, she got offended and accused me of insulting her. She interpreted it as if I did not like those people.

However, making the title more “kind” would not change the fragility of the subject for the people concerned. Furthermore, the fact that she is forcing me to meet them does not mean I do not like them. On the contrary, I have several memories with some of them, memories that probably helped to shape my identity. Therefore, I want to use mixed media to explore the topic in a subsidiary way.

The only intention is to tell the story, not to create a specific feeling. However, particular emotions will emerge from the stories as a consequence of the process of interpretation. According to Ranci re “The interpretation of the information is dependent on the discursive access that the individual perception and reality definition” (in Olsen, 2014:30). The stories that I am telling are based on events that happened in a certain time and place. However, that is not important because stories can engage with their readers, regardless of whether they are truthful or not. All the stories can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Sophie Calle's book *True Stories* (1994) is a good example regarding this matter. It is particularly interesting in relation to my project because it explores in a similar way the building up of the story, is. It includes texts and photographs, set out in a chronological order, corresponding to various incidents in Calle's life. The book is composed by various reflections on subjects such as a bed, a shoe, a love letter, her husband, her pictures, etc. She wrote a short autobiographical text about each image which depicts her reflections on the memories. The texts are sometimes erotic, intimate and provocative, other funny or sad.

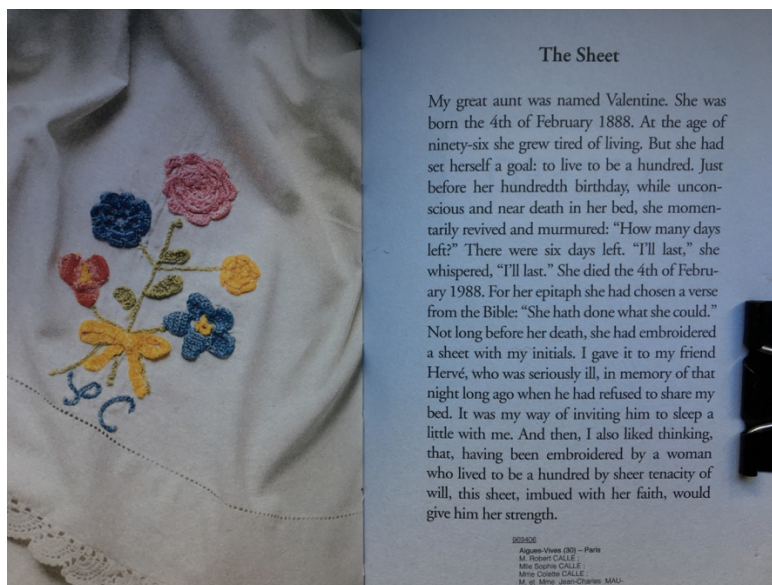


Figure 9 - Sophie Calle, detail from *True Stories*, 2003

In my stories, I have provided some insight into my memories of them. The stories were not written with the intention of being judged by the readers. In artistic terms, my concerns were that the stories should be clear, understandable, and attractive. I wanted them to tell something intimate and sincere about the subjects and me. It can be said that stories have a common denominator in terms of revealing vulnerability. As I suggest in the beginning of the chapter, storytelling needs vulnerability to happen in a convincing and engaging way.

In my project the stories were written in an exercise of exposing me and the other in a similar way. By being, or allowing me and the other, to be vulnerable. The danger of hurting people's feelings, family or acquaintances, is a result of this exposure. However, the stories were written with the consciousness to avoid judging their actions, feelings and thoughts. On the other hand, by keeping judgements aside, the polysemic power of the stories increases, and the humour is intensified.

2.3 - The book and the exhibition

*As mentioned before, the work is designed both as a book and as an exhibition. The function of the book is to give more material about the people represented. The book gives a sense of privacy and intimacy. In the design of the book, I collaborate with a designer in order to address the issues presented previously. The title of the work *The people that my mother forces me to meet* is not a complaint. It was created to be funny and attractive. For that purpose, different colours and typefaces seem suitable for my purpose. The titles with different colours, based on a selected colour palate, reflect an informal and humorous attitude. While the approach may suggest a disconnection between the stories, it also emphasizes the sense of humour.⁵*

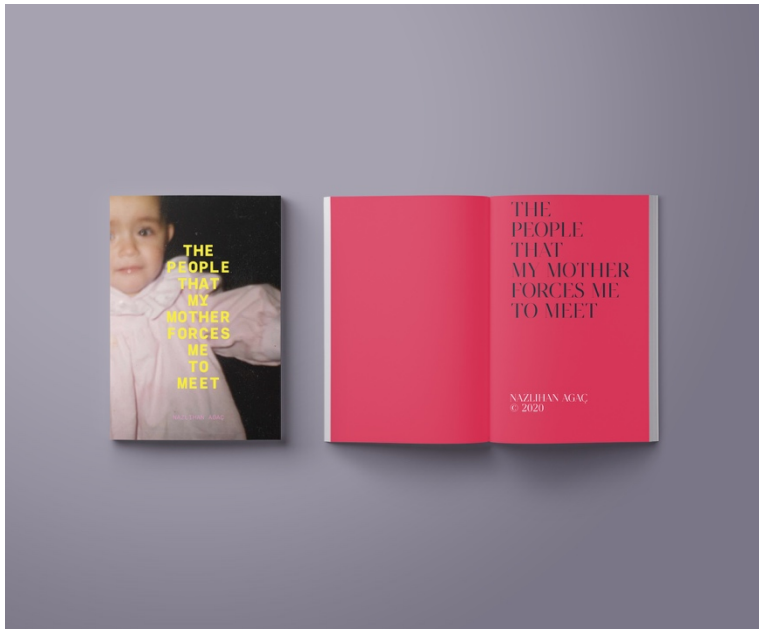


Figure 10 - Book mockup sample

In the book, the narrative is linear. The text comes before the images. It was aimed to explore the mental image created by the viewer, in the moment of reading the text, in contrast with the image presented afterwards.

⁵ The book can be consulted in a PDF file attached to the submission.

On the other hand, there is the exhibition. with the intension of creating a different experience for the audience and to introduce multi linearity in the understanding of the artwork. The exhibition of this installation was planned as an indoor experience. The viewer can move from one media to another as they please building a personal narrative themselves. The exhibition also includes the real objects that the portrayed subjects gave to me.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the exhibition place was a difficult task to complete. Hence, the layout of the exhibition will be made as the exhibition is being set up. If there is no delay due to covid-19, the work will be on display at Casa-Museu Abel Salazar, in São Mamede de Infesta. The final exhibition will be shown in a house that once belonged to a scientist, researcher, teacher and artist. The place has many of Abel Salazar's own artworks. Part of the challenge of constructing the exhibition layout, will be to establish a dialogue between his work and my own. One that can show this project in an intelligible way while respecting the house and what is inside it.

CONCLUSION

Trust me, I am telling you stories. ... I can change the story. I am the story.

Jeanette Winterson (1996)

Never trust the teller, trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it.

D.H Lawrence (1923)

On 'Confessional art'

According to literature, the concept of confession art begins with the use of the artist's memories of their own lives. Although it requires exceptional honesty, it is not presenting factual account, but it manipulates and fabricates subjective and edited memories. "Confessional art explores the elements that influence the spectator's perception" (Jackson & Hogg, 2010: 125). Although it is difficult to come up with a clear definition of confessional art, as Remes suggested, it is expected to reconsider the relationship between commodity culture and high art. In order to achieve this, confessional art reconsiders the artist and viewer position (2005:17).

As it was discussed earlier in [chapter 2.1](#), Remes states that confessional art reveals more than the viewer experiences as 'safe' (2005:9). In this matter, I do not see why "autobiographical art" would not be enough to explain self-revealing art in both literature and visual art. If we speak about literature, it can also reveal the most intimate and private experiences, which may be shocking or sensationalist to the reader. One could easily say that writers such as Genet, Bukowski, or Kerouac also revealed more than the viewer wanted to know.

This type of categorising is characteristic of Western culture (Solomon-Godeau, 1991 in Suiminen, 2003:22), but the problem with this is that it is necessary to discuss how categorization affects interpretation, that is, perception. Beyond dispute, the critic of any kind of art should consider the artist's and viewer's position in their culture. In my opinion, the addition of a new category, might add more noise to the term 'autobiographical art', not contributing to its clarification.

On Emin and Calle

Even though their approach to their own work is strategically different, in terms of transforming the issues arising from their own lives into artistic material, they have similar motivations. Sophie Calle either has interesting and intimate stories to tell – as it is in *True Stories* (1994) –, or she transforms boring ones into something interesting to convey into an artwork, as it can be seen in *Take Care of Yourself* (2007). This is also the ingredient for Calle's being such a successful conceptual artist. After researching a considerable number of her artworks, while considering her perfectly constructed artist personality, Calle strikes like a

novel character. She is like a sincere crook, one that plays with ethics in a questionable way, but being honest and frontal about it. Thorn in the second part of her thesis analysed the concepts of control, authority, and responsibility on Calle's artwork in which she appropriately concluded that: "The rules to the rituals that Calle performs are of her own invention not chance; they are strategies for dealing with chance" (Thorn, 2010:73).

Tracey Emin's artwork is more rebellious and challenging. This might be connected to the strong critics she has encounter from British media in her early career, her artistic persona, the tragedies she experienced and the way she uses them as subject matter.

They grew up in different cultural climates which and this makes their motivation to become an artist, completely different. But, although they have different approaches, both used their personal life as a source of artistic inspiration within contemporary art practice in many creative ways.

On The people that my mother forces me to meet

In the conclusion of her thesis Pettersson writes that if someone intents to tell a story through artistic means, "it opens up for the possibility of it to be told in a different way to the one you, or others, might have expected" (2017:30). This possibility also applies in the context of this project. During the analysis and exploration of the collected materials and after some discussions with people that are external to the project, I realised that these materials can be used in different ways to tell different stories. In terms of motivation regarding photography and documentary, this is a very relevant aspect for me.

As stated at the beginning of the thesis, the idea of the project arises incidentally. Therefore, it is more about telling a story with a documentary approach, than exploring a purpose or a problem. Hence, there is no result in terms of reaching or solving a particular goal or question. The research allows us to have a personal experience the topic. The developing of the practice and the theoretical support came by intuitively, with a joyful interplay between reading, thinking and doing.

When I decided to do the master degree in Documentary Photography, I knew that photography interests me both practically and in terms of visual culture, but I did not know what kind of photograph I wanted to produce. Taking a camera and going out into the street was far from my personal comfort zone. Although the value of the photograph can be high regardless of its meaning, I was interested in its context in terms of production and consumption.

The people that my mother forces me to meet is focused on an autobiographical exploration of personal memories between past and present of my close family members and acquaintances. The production of meaning can happen in the entwinement between images and texts. As the title suggests, I am fulfilling my mother's demand. The stories intend to show our connections and disconnections.

One of the most struggling situations during the process of the work was related to the intimacy, privacy and personal nature of the project. The question that was arising frequently was if the project could have any

interest to an audience or not, as well as some interest and meaning to myself. This made me question the work, its concept and ideas, as well as the interminable debate of what art and its interpretation is. This is the reason behind adding the section on art and interpretation at the beginning of the work. From all the authors analysed in terms of this subject matter, Sontag's essay *Against Interpretation* (1966) was one of the most important references that gave an insightful perspective and responded the most questions.

In Sultan's remarkable text from *Pictures from Home* (1946-2009), he argues the conflict notions about his mother representation against his father. Sultan's father is accusing him of having a stake in making them look older and more despairing than they really feel (Sultan in Traub & Heller & Bell, 2006:50). In this context, I saw myself in Sultan's feelings in face of my own experience.

After I decided to do this project and shared the decision with my mother, she initialised a process of convincing me about how much these people loved me. While completing the project, my mother naturally said that she was always curious about the stories I wrote. She seemed to be waiting to understand whether I love them back or not. And this was the biggest challenge I faced while writing the stories: get away from my mother's expectation, try to focus on the story I wanted to tell and look at myself as a character.

The relation between the narrator, the story, and its interpretation, will always be interesting. In some ways, this can be linked with the anxiety of seeking the 'truth'. In the future, the intention is to continue photographing people in their context and to deepen the research on the nature of art as something inherently autobiographical.⁶

⁶ "Art as inherently autobiographical" taken from Fia Matsson article title, for more information see: <https://entkunstung.com/art-as-inherently-autobiographical/>

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APPENDIX

Appendix A – Final images of the project

Portraits



Figure 11 - Zehra Eroglu (Grandma)



Figure 12 - Ayla Ilaslan (Ayla)



Figure 13 - Bekir Ozdemir (Bekir)



Figure 14- Süleyman Ağaç (grandpa)



Figure 15 – Köksal (Köksal Brother)



Figure 16 - Ismail (Ismail Brother)



Figure 17 - Neriman Kaplan (Gold Bracelet)



Figure 18 - Nuray (7x8)



Figure 19 - Ömer (Green Eyes)



Figure 20 - Sevgi Özdemir (Cat Story)



Figure 21 - Ugur Eroglu (Ugur)



Figure 22 - Zeynel Kaplan (Uncle Zeynel)

Objects



Figure 23 - The underpants given by Sevgi Ozdemir.



Figure 24 - Turkish delight given by Nuray.



Figure 25 - The book and notebook given by Nuray.



Figure 26 - Turkish money given by Zehra Eroglu.



Figure 27 - Simit given by Ismail and Koksal.



Figure 28 - Turkish tea given by Ugur Eroglu.



Figure 29 - Cheese given by Omer.



Figure 30 - Turkish carper given by Sevgi Özdemir.



Figure 31 - Turkish carpet given by Zehra Eroglu.



Figure 32 - Pajama Set given by Sevgi Ozdemir.

Old photographs from family albums



Figure 33 - From Ayla's family album



Figure 34 - From author's family album



Figure 35 - From Bekir Ozdemir's family album.



Figure 36 - From Zehra Eroglu's family album.



Figure 37 - From Neriman Kaplan's family album.



Figure 38 - From Zehra Eroglu's family album.



Figure 39 - From Zehra Eroglu's family album.



Figure 40 - From Zehra Eroglu's family album.



Figure 41 - From Zehra Eroglu's family album.



Figure 42 - From Zehra Eroglu's family album.



Figure 43 - From Zehra Eroglu's family album.



Figure 44 - From Neriman Kaplan's family album.



Figure 45 - From Neriman Kaplan's family album.



Figure 46 - From Nuray's album.



Figure 47 - Ömer's family album.



Figure 48 - From author's family album



Figure 49 - From author's family álbun



Figure 50 - From author's family álbun



Figure 51 - From author's family album



Figure 52 - From author's family album



Figure 53 - From author's family album



Figure 54 - From Neriman Kaplan's family album.

Appendix B – Stories

Uncle Zeynel

That day our teacher announced that an inspector would come to the classroom tomorrow. He told everyone to behave well, set the places, the class was cleaned. The inspector could ask us random questions. The inspector was coming to our class for the first time, I was taking this job very seriously, I was nervous. I wanted the inspector to love my teacher and the class. The next day, he came. It did not look like someone to be afraid of. Still, I didn't want him to ask me questions. We came eye to eye, and I smiled. "Tell me, what is your name?" he asked me. I said that my name is Nazlihan. He asked me about the person who gave me my name, mom, or dad? I replied that it was my uncle Zeynel. The investigator laughed and asked me why I got my name from my uncle. I do not know, I said.

Blind love

I used to go to my grandmother in the summer when I was little. During the day, my aunt, aunt in law and grandmother drank tea together, water the hydrangeas, sweep the floors. They would talk about the woman of the grocery store, and I would listen. At night we used to sit on the balcony with my grandmother. She would not let me eat watermelon because she was afraid that I would piss myself in bed. I was in love with Onur. I used to tell my grandma how much I loved him. One day, she called my mom and said she was worried. She thought I felt blindly in love. I was just 8 years old.

7x8

Teacher Nuray was sitting in front of our apartment. Her apartment was on the third floor, but she often went to visit the old woman down on the 1st floor. She used to sit near the window and talk to the children. She was the only teacher in our neighbourhood. She would ask the children the question I hated most: "How is mathematics?" She would not ask me the same question because she knew that I was bad in maths. When she saw me, she would ask directly about the multiplication table. I was eight or nine, so I used to get this question all the time. I would act like I am thinking about the answer. As if I knew and forgot. But I would never know the answer. One day, at the window, she said: "I always ask you the same question, don't you wonder about the answer at all?" I was very embarrassed when I heard this. I went home and looked right away at the multiplication table on the last back page of the math notebook. The answer was 56. I never forgot.

Green Eyes

Since I know myself, we are buying cheese from Ömer. I saw him first in the Bazar. When I was very little and during my childhood, I often went to the Bazar with my mom. It was colorful but so crowded, I would not like it. I would not like to walk in the crowd. But I would love Ömer. He was beautiful, he was always

lovely. He had beautiful green eyes. He had the best cheese in the world. Me and my sister, we would only eat the cheese bought from him. In the Bazar, he would talk with me and offer some cheese to eat. Although, when you are little, a little piece of cheese certainly would go better with a piece of bread. If he gave it to me, I would always eat it even if I was not in the mood. I would think of how it would be if he was my father, would I have green eyes too? We would not have to buy cheese anymore.

Later, when I moved Eskişehir to study, he kept sending me cheese through my mother and never let me pay for it. All the friends that came to my place, must have eaten his cheese. After I moved to Portugal, I also continued to carry cheese. One day at the airport, the security wanted me to open my suitcase. I opened the suitcase and it was full of baklavas, various Turkish snacks, tarhana, and a lot of cheese in vacuum. The officer told me that I am not allowed to carry cheese. You are allowed to carry cheese inside Europe provided that it is not liquid. But I was coming from İstanbul. I was afraid that this could have happened, but I took the risk for Ömer's cheese. I told the officer: "You would understand me if you could only taste the cheese." He let me in, but he did not taste the cheese.

Granpda

My mother never forced me to meet with grandpa. When I was little, the only thing I was jealous about my older sister was that she met with our grandfather. She does not remember that because she was only 9-month-old when he died. But I remember hearing that he bought her diapers and some fruit. It made me sad that he never knew me, he had never bought me anything. My parents used to say that my forehead looked like his. I have a big forehead and the only thing I like about it is that it is similar to his.

Cat Story

That day my aunt was in our home, she came over to see me. I was with a flue, laying down in the side of the couch. My mother and she were talking about a friend of my aunt's. My aunt's friend was in a troubled time, she was leaving her husband, having problems with money and no one was supporting her. On top of these, her son was in a depression. He quit law school." After he learned about the cat, it got worse" my aunt said. I asked what is about the cat to her." His father told him that his cat did not run away, her mother put the cat on the street because it was dirty and told him it got lost" she said.

Gold Bracelet

My aunt Neriman had a special fondness for my sister. Of course, she loved all of us, all her nephews, but since she took care of her for a while when my sister was born, she loved her separately. We all knew that. She gave my sister more money on holidays, bought her more gifts, made my sister's favorite soup when we went to her home. She would cook my favorite soup if I wanted to, but there was no soup I liked. My aunt often gave us the advice to make sure we were all well and healthy. It was very important for her that women had an education. She used to say: "Wear your gold bracelet on your sleeve, then you will get

married.” The gold bracelet meant to finish college. One day we were talking about my sister in the garden. My sister had quit her job, my aunt was worried. At one point in the conversation she turned and said to me: “You were an idiot as a kid, but look, you entered college. You have a gold bracelet on your sleeve.” I said: “True.”

Köksal Brother

Köksal brother is one of the owners of the bakery at the beginning of the street. He runs the bakery with his older brother İsmail. My mother also sees them as her brothers, and although we do not have a blood bond, we have a bond. Every time I visit Istanbul, I stop by the bakery on my way home and come back with simit, cookies, and dessert in my hand. On the way back to Portugal, they make a special box for me, containing various Turkish snacks, cakes, and pastries. And never let me pay for it. But since the thing I miss simit the most. I asked Köksal that morning: “If I took the simits to Portugal, put them in the freezer, and eat them whenever I feel like it, would they taste good?” He said they are good when they are fresh. İsmail was not in the bakery when I went to take their portraits. I told Köksal brother about the project and asked when İsmail would come. Later on, my mother told me that I was confusing brothers names. In the next two days, I did not stop by the bakery because I was ashamed.

İsmail Brother

We were in Istanbul with my husband Tiago for the Christmas holiday. Tiago was with pharyngitis. He needed antibiotics. We went to a health center near the house. When they told us the money Tiago had to pay because he was a foreigner, and saw the queue inside, we went out. It made more sense to go to a private hospital. On the way back, we stopped by the bakery. İsmail brother was there, I explained the situation. He prepared a pack of snacks. Two buildings away, he told me there is a dentist. “Give this package and ask him to prescribe antibiotics for pharyngitis”, İsmail said that his brother also sends greetings. I did what he said.

Ayla

Because my hair was thin when I was a baby, my mother often shaved my hair to make it stronger. On my first birthday, Ayla gave my first pink dress as a gift because I looked like a boy. Over the years, she gave me my backpack when I first started school, my first bra when my breasts began to appear, my favourite red sweater as a child, and my first Mickey Mouse watch at the age of 11. I drank apple juice for the first time in my life at her house. It was her birthday party. We were in the kitchen. As a kid, the apple was my unlimited source of sugar, I had eaten hundreds of apples until that day, but it was the first time I was drinking its juice. I was enchanted by this taste. I asked her to fill the glass a little more, she poured the rest into her glass and said: “You will drink more apple juice, I’m getting old!” and drank it. Sounded like the truth. Besides, it was her birthday.

Ugur

While studying at the university in Eskişehir, I decided to leave the house where I lived for a few months before the contract date expired. The apartment I rented was far from the main door of the school. I chose this house because it was a little cheaper. I went to the real estate agent where I found this house with reference to someone who I don't remember now. The middle-aged man who owns the real estate store rented his house to me, so I felt grateful to the man for avoiding the plus 1 deposit, and constantly felt obliged to be polite. According to the students living in the city center, their store was in a place considered far from the center. I used to get on the tram and pay the rent by hand every month. Because I signed the deed for 12 months. One day I called him and said that I was in a difficult situation and that I should spend the summer in Istanbul. Since I could not pay the rent of the house, I asked him, if I would leave the house, could he help with the contract? The man clearly stated that he could not help me, we had a contract and his lawyer would meet me if I do not pay. I was in a very difficult situation because I did not have the money to pay the rent, and my mother remembered my Uncle Uğur. He was also a real estate agent. I called my uncle and explained the situation, my uncle asked for the man's phone number. An hour later, I got a message from the landlord saying that I can evacuate the house whenever I want.

Bekir

I remember, when I was little, I could not quite understand who he was. His wife, my aunt, was very close to my youngest uncle. I used to think the two of them were married. As I grew older, I realized I had misunderstood the situation. I remember my uncle Bekir slept late at night. Because he would watch movies until late. He read a lot. He was very good at history. Mathematics too. He played football very well when he was young and did not continue due to an injury. That is why I thought he did not continue to study. The last time we were together, I learned that the reason he did not attend university was that the girl he liked could not enter the school he entered. What made my uncle special as a kid was that he liked both mathematics and history. Because I did not know anyone around me who loved both mathematics and history. In my world, people were divided into lovers of math/science and history/literature. I was nine or ten years old. He agreed to help me with my mother's suggestion because I had difficulty in math. That day he was talking about problem-solving. He explained the solution to the same problem three times. After each lecture, he wanted me to do it by myself. I couldn't, and I was so embarrassed. I was talking to Allah inside of me. I was giving him an opportunity to help solve the problem if he really did exist, but it wasn't working. In the end, uncle said you don't want to solve the problem. "It is impossible for you not to understand it."