

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Photography as an Expression of Crisis: The Self-Portraits of Ahmet Öner Gezgin

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October 2025

Special Issue: Crisis Entangled – Reimagining the Social in Turbulent Times

DOI: 10.26466/opusjr.1772161

Abstract

This article conceptualizes the notion of crisis through psychological, social, and cultural forms, examining how photography in Turkey after September 12, 1980, particularly through the medium of self-portraiture, transformed into an indirect, allegorical, and multi-layered form of expression. The study analyzes symbolic imagery forms such as shadow, silhouette, void, layer, and reflection, which emerged as a result of the abandonment of socialist realist documentary photography due to censorship and suppression, through the self-portrait photographs taken by Ahmet Öner Gezgin between 1980 and 1988. A qualitative analysis based on iconographic reading, which focuses on the conceptual dimension of self-portraiture, was used as a method; the use of elements such as cups, pocket watches, curtains, glass, mirrors, and shadows was interpreted in the context of the uncertainty of time, the blurring of space, and the existential positioning of the subject between visibility and invisibility. The findings show that Gezgin's self-portraits are based on a practice that merges the subjective with the political rather than a narcissistic presentation; the photographic representation surface itself is transformed into a kind of battlefield consisting of a diagnosis, expression, confrontation, invitation, and challenge related to the crisis through elements such as tears, marks, shadows, and reflections. In conclusion, the study argues that Ahmet Öner Gezgin's self-portraits after 1980 serve both as an archival record of society and as a means of subjective expression; that they highlight the transfer between personal memory and collective memory; and that self-portraits played a foundational role in the transition of Turkish photography from documentary to conceptual/fictional narrative.

Keywords: Crisis, Photography, 1980 Coup, Self-Portrait, Ahmet Öner Gezgin

Citation:

Yelmen, M. F. (2025). Photography as an expression of crisis: The self-portraits of Ahmet Öner Gezgin. *OPUS–Journal of Society Research*, Crisis Entangled – Reimagining the Social in Turbulent Times, 69-86.

Öz

Bu makale, kriz kavramını psikolojik, toplumsal ve kültürel formlar üzerinden kavramsallaştırarak, 12 Eylül 1980 sonrasında Türkiye’de fotoğrafın özellikle özportre türü aracılığıyla nasıl dolaylı, alegorik ve çok katmanlı bir ifade biçimine dönüştüğünü incelemektedir. Çalışma, toplumcu gerçekçi belgesel fotoğrafın baskı ve sansür sonucunda terk edilmesiyle ortaya çıkan gölge, silüet, boşluk, katman, yansıma gibi sembolik imgesel ifade biçimlerini Ahmet Öner Gezgin’in 1980-1988 tarihleri arasında gerçekleştirdiği özportre fotoğrafları üzerinden çözümlemektedir. Yöntem olarak, özportrenin kavramsal boyutunun esas alındığı ikonografik okumaya dayanan nitel analiz kullanılmış; fincan, köstekli saat, perde, cam, ayna, gölge gibi unsurların kullanımları, zamanın belirsizliği, mekanın bulanıklaşması ve öznenin görünürlük ve görünmezlik arasındaki varoluşsal konumlanışı bağlamında yorumlanmıştır. Bulgular, Gezgin’de özportrenin narsistik sunumdan ziyade öznel olanı politik olanla kaynaştıran bir pratiğe dayandığını; fotoğrafik temsil yüzeyinin bizzat kendisinin yırtık, iz, gölge, yansıma gibi unsurlarla krize dair bir tespit, ifade, yüzleşme, davet ve meydan okumadan oluşan bir tür mücadele alanına dönüştüğünü göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak çalışmada, 1980 sonrası Ahmet Öner Gezgin’in özportrelerinin hem topluma dair arşivesel hem de öznel ifadeye imkan sağlayan bir işlev gördüğü; kişisel hafıza ile kolektif bellek arasındaki aktarımı belirgin hale getirdiği ve Türk fotoğrafının belgeselden kavramsal/kurgusal anlatıma geçişinde özportrenin kurucu rol oynadığı ileri sürülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kriz, Fotoğraf, 1980 Darbesi, Özportre, Ahmet Öner Gezgin.

Introduction

Koselleck (2006, p.358) stated that the concept of crisis comes from the Greek word "krisis," meaning "to decide" or "to distinguish." Ülken (1969, p.181), however, considering the concept to have both economic and sociological aspects, used the word "Depression." He stated that economic crises generally occur in societies in transition between two cultural environments, when the balance between production and consumption is lost in all or individual institutions. He stated that these crises are experienced in beliefs, moral behavior, artistic taste, etc., resulting in a loss of social balance and the destabilization of institutional cohesion. For example, Öztürk (2005, p.307) stated that capitalism, as a historical system, has always existed with crises, that crises in capitalist production are an essential component of the capital accumulation process, and that while crisis points to the contradictory nature of accumulation, it also provides the opportunity to overcome these contradictions and create more favorable conditions for accumulation.

Hançerlioğlu (1978, p.200), who explains the concept with the word "crisis," states that, according to existentialism, humans are responsible for creating themselves, that this great responsibility causes humans to feel distressed, and that he who cannot escape this distress turn to other actions. However, despite this explanation, he writes that the real cause of crisis is the idea that existentialism, which defends the existence of the individual, ultimately leads to the end of that existence and the fear of death. It is understood that, especially when considered in the context of social sciences, the concept of crisis refers to extraordinary situations that disrupt the ongoing flow, shake the existing balance and order, and deeply affect individuals or society. In addition, it can be said that crises can occur at every level, from the individual to the social, and can have both short-term and long-term consequences.

As a process, crises can be thought of as the intense emotional tension that individuals experience when faced with unexpected, stressful, and threatening situations from a psychological perspective. During such processes, the individual may experience intense emotional reactions such as anxiety, helplessness, or anger, as their sense of

self, identity integrity, and coping mechanisms are challenged by the circumstances that constitute the process. The crises in the aforementioned psychological context can leave lasting effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, while also creating a turning point in the individual's life and triggering personal transformation.

The social implications of crises include their effects on social institutions, the economy, politics, and cultural structures. Examples of such situations include wars, economic collapses, epidemics, and mass migrations. Social crises have the potential to reshape a society's value system, collective memory, and forms of social solidarity, much like the effects of a crisis on an individual's psychology.

In a cultural crisis, not only the material production processes of individuals and societies are affected, but also their processes of meaning production. In other words, societies can question their existing narratives, symbols, and rituals during times of crisis and bring forth new forms of expression and layers of meaning. Cultural production areas in all art disciplines that construct culture and serve it, such as literature, music, cinema, and photography, can become important tools that both bear witness to crisis periods and play a healing role for individuals and society involved in the process. In this context, cultural productions should be evaluated not only as a means of record-keeping but also as part of the process of coping with and making sense of the crisis.

The Relationship Between Photography and Crisis

Since its invention, photography has been one of the most powerful visual tools in human history, serving both as a witness and a recorder. In particular, crisis representations in photography have left a deep mark on visual memory and become a turning point in the formation of collective memory with the first photographic records of human crises in the mid-19th century, such as wars, natural disasters, accidents, social protests, murders, etc. In this context, documentary photography occupies a special place. As an example The American photographer Dorothea Lange took the picture at a time when the United States was in the

throes of an economic depression of never before experienced dimensions, and the international economic crisis even proved to be traumatic for Europe (Honnef, 1999, p. 70). Dorothea Lange's iconic images taken during the Great Depression as part of the Farm Security Administration are early examples of photography's power to raise social awareness. Such works not only documented crises but also brought about calls for social change.

When considered as a type of documentary photography, war photography can be regarded as one of the most striking and controversial representations of crisis. Photographers working on war, particularly Robert Capa, have provided visual testimony to violence, destruction, and human drama. However, such images shared with the public have come to the fore not only for their informative function but also for sparking ethical and aesthetic debates. Frequent exposure to uncensored images of suffering carries with it the danger of desensitizing people to such images. While documentary photography plays an important role in recording crises, the subjective approaches of photographers are also highly valuable. For example, "Due to the destruction of a large part of the archives and artworks during the period following the Russian Revolution, it is not easy to trace the history of avant-garde art that emerged in Russia in the early 20th century" (Hodge, 2020, p. 124). In this sense, "photography in the Soviet Union was the vanguard of the movement that encouraged radical social change" (Smith, 2018, p. 23). Lewis (2018, p. 54) notes that revolutionary photography in the Soviet Union was guided by constructivism, and that artists and designers such as Gustav Klutssis, El Lissitzky, and Alexander Rodchenko introduced new approaches to photography to spread socialist ideology. These statements show that during times of crisis, artists have taken on the role of depicting, protesting, and shaping the period. Among these artists, El Lissitzky and Alexander Rodchenko, in particular, used photomontage to convey their political messages to the masses through their self-portraits.

Self-Portrait and Subjective Expression

As a form of expression, self-portrait is a visual narrative in which the artist reflects their physical appearance and inner world, including part or all of themselves, with the subject also acting as the object. Kal (2006, p. 4) states that artists began their journey of immortalizing the subject of their paintings with portraits, and later included themselves in their works, which led to the emergence of self-portraits. The origins of self-portraits in painting date back to the Middle Ages. During the Renaissance, self-portraits became an important genre with the increase in individual self-awareness. Artists have produced works that convey both their personal identities and the spirit of the era in which they lived by using their own faces or other parts of their bodies. The greatest opportunity for this was provided by mirrors. Hall (2014, p. 38) states that the first mirrored mirrors were made around the 15th century. In Jan van Eyck's painting "The Arnolfini Marriage," a married couple poses facing the viewer. Behind the couple is a mirror, and Jan van Eyck's reflection can be seen in the mirror. Above the mirror is written, "Jan van Eyck was here." Öztürk (2024, p. 6) states that in self-portraits, the body as an object is both the subject and the subjectivity of the artist, the content is the artist himself, the self-portrait is an external expression and presentation of this, and finally, this situation is considered valid for self-portraits produced in all art disciplines.



Figure 1. (Left) Self Portrait of Robert Cornelius (Source: Library of Congress. (2025). Robert Cornelius, self-portrait; believed to be the earliest extant American portrait photo. Retrived September 25, 2025 from <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004664436/>), (Right) Self Portrait of Hippolyte Bayard (Source: Wikipedia.org. (2025). Retrived September 25, 2025 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippolyte_Bayard)

Examples of self-portraits in photography became widespread in the 19th century with the development of technical capabilities. Robert Cornelius's self-portrait from 1839 is considered one of the earliest known examples of this genre (Figure 1). The realism offered by photography has, over time, transformed the self-portrait from a mere representation of the face into a powerful tool for documenting the individual's identity, emotions, and experiences. For example, Hippolyte Bayard, whose work on the invention of photography was overlooked, photographed himself in 1840 and titled his work *Self-Portrait as a Drowning Man*. According to Hacking (2015, p.20), Bayard's self-portrait reflects the disappointment of being marginalized in the public eye. In this sense, the pose of the photographer becomes important. According to Bate (2013), "Pose and poise surround the personality (mental, physical, social, etc.) of the depicted character with connotations from all angles" (p. 118). Similarly, Leppert (2020, p.238) emphasizes that poses and gestures are not culturally empty signs, but rich and powerful discursive factors.

In terms of subjective expression, self-portraits allow artists to represent themselves not only physically, but also emotionally, psychologically, and even philosophically. Indeed, Bonafoux (1985) underscores the significance of this subjective dimension, stating that "there is nothing important in the artist's gaze in a self-portrait" (p. 84). In this respect, self-portraits can be used as a tool for identity research in a conceptual context, and for internal dialogue or the visualization of moments of crisis in a psychological context. In times of crisis, self-portraits can serve as both a means of expression and a method of coping with the crisis.

With the transition from the analog era to the digital age, the concept of self-portrait, whose production form has changed, has undergone another transformation with the influence of social media. This transformation is the act of recording one's own image together with the place and time in which it is located, and rather than an artistic form of expression, it is a selfie (self-portrait) act that fulfills the functions of memory and proof. This situation has democratized individual forms of representation by massifying them, while also bringing

about a debate on visibility. Aksoy (2021, p.101) defines selfies, which have become popular enough to define the age we live in, as a form of self-portraiture used by everyone.

The Visual Language of Art and Indicators of Crisis

In photographic compositions of crisis representations, dramatic effects can be created through asymmetrical arrangements, intensive use of space, tight frames, and multi-layered montage images obtained through conventional or digital manipulation, leaving the viewer with a feeling of unease and anxiety. The position of objects or figures within the frame can direct the viewer's gaze and increase emotional intensity. However, the meaning and feeling that emerge can also be interpreted as a way out of the crisis. Bürger (2019, p.132) writes that montage requires reality to be fragmented and describes the process of creating the work. According to this idea, reality is fragmented, and thus the perception of reality is shaken. The use of light and shadow in photography is also a decisive factor in the construction of a crisis atmosphere. As Turani (2020) notes, "universal light in the Renaissance began to come from a single point in the Baroque period" (p.21). According to this idea, for example, "Rembrandt used light and shadow to dramatize the scene he created in his paintings" (Gombrich, 1976, p.338). In this context, the use of high-contrast light and shadow can create a harsh, depressive atmosphere, while low light conditions can create an atmosphere that emphasizes melancholy and uncertainty. In other words, the direction, angle, harshness, or softness of the light used can directly determine the psychological effect of the photograph. If the photograph is color, the choice of colors can determine the emotional tone of the photograph. Cool tones such as blue and gray can evoke feelings of alienation, loneliness, or hopelessness, while warm and intense colors such as red or orange can emphasize tension, danger, or anger. In monochrome, or black-and-white, photographs, the viewer's attention is directed toward form, texture, and contrast, allowing the theme of crisis to be transported to a more timeless and universal dimension.

Symbolic elements such as broken objects, empty spaces, masks, mirror reflections, blurred silhouettes, etc., which can be found in photographs or paintings related to crisis, can create the aforementioned layers of meaning that can convey the feeling of crisis without directly showing the event itself. Rideal (2005, pp.55-57) states that roses represent love, children represent fertility, palettes and brushes represent creativity, dogs represent loyalty, food represents temporary abundance, and oysters represent aphrodisiacs; the chain for painting, the star for the three kings who set out to see the baby Jesus, curtains to express devotion to saints, the rider on a horse to evoke a sense of obedience in the viewer, the bird as the greeting of angels, the reins and whips as symbols of love specific to married couples, the juniper branch believed to provide protection against early death, the burning bushes for a flawless pregnancy, the apple as a reference to expulsion from paradise and a warning against sin, the peacock promising paradise, the dry tree for death, the wig as a sign of nobility, the hat for an artist or someone interested in literature, and group portraits personalized by painters as symbols of loyalty. A similar situation is also accepted in the art of photography. Clarke (2017, p.124) writes that the photographer Edward Steichen achieved a symbolic narrative by using elements related to himself in many of his self-portraits. In his self-portrait, in which he painted himself in a convex mirror, Mannerist artist Francesco Parmigianino expressed himself in a distorted form, with his hand growing larger toward the center and his head shrinking, thus playing a decisive role (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Francesco Parmigianino, Self Portrait, 1524,
(Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parmigianino>)

Symbols are important in creating a deeper impact by allowing the viewer to interpret the work. In summary, visual language in crisis-themed photography should be evaluated not only as a set of aesthetic preferences but also as a strategy for establishing an emotional and intellectual connection with the viewer. It can be said that these elements are fundamental tools that the artist may need in order to convey his own crisis experience in the most straightforward and striking way, especially in the context of self-portraits.

The 1980 Coup and the Crisis Environment in Turkey

After 1975, economic crisis, rising unemployment, high inflation, and foreign debt burden increased significantly in Turkey, and the country began to go through a difficult period. The economic problems that became apparent as a result of the crisis were compounded by ideological divisions and polarization, followed by ideological conflicts, ethnic problems, and the actions of various radical organizations, which became an almost routine part of daily life. Between 1978 and 1980, thousands of people lost their lives for political reasons, and clashes frequently occurred in universities, workplaces, and public institutions. In such an environment, on September 12, 1980, the Turkish Armed Forces, led by General Kenan Evren, the Chief of the General Staff, seized power in what is considered the third military coup in Turkey's modern political history. Unlike the interventions of May 27, 1960, and March 12, 1971, this coup led to fundamental changes in the political, social, and economic structure.

Following the intervention, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey was dissolved, political parties were banned, and their leaders were arrested. Martial law was declared throughout the country, trade union activities were suspended, and censorship was imposed on the press. The process of drafting the 1982 Constitution took place under the supervision of the military regime; this constitution was formulated as a framework that expanded executive powers, restricted political participation, and enshrined military tutelage in the constitution. The post-coup administration closed down the

Demokrat, Aydınlık and Hergün newspapers (Topuz, 2014, p. 257). After the 1980 coup, the effectiveness of civil society in Turkey weakened, trade union movements declined, and political pluralism narrowed. In addition, the transition to a free market economy accelerated; this economic orientation was shaped by the adoption of neoliberal policies and the withdrawal of the state from economic activities. However, this transformation also brought about consequences such as increasing income inequality and the decline of the welfare state. The coup should not be regarded as merely a military intervention. This process also became a turning point that affected the paradigms of Turkey's political, economic, and social structures. Attempts to restore lost political stability through authoritarian methods linked to military intervention had a negative impact on the development of democratic culture in the long term.

The 12 September 1980 Military Coup and Art of Photography in the Context of Crisis

As mentioned above, the military coup of September 12, 1980, was a process that deeply affected the political and social order. The next target of the coup regime was people involved in cultural and artistic activities, and thousands of these people were punished with various penalties, with many stripped of their citizenship (Karpas, 2013, pp. 213-214). After the coup, repressive policies were implemented in many areas, and censorship mechanisms were activated, seriously restricting freedom of expression. This situation directly affected the forms of artistic production and the themes chosen.

In line with the decisions and practices of the coup regime, control mechanisms were tightened in the fields of theater, cinema, music, and literature, including written media. "In 1980, with the military regime, as bans and controls began to be applied effectively and decisively, sex films disappeared on the one hand, while socialist realist films faced restrictions on the other" (Esen, 2000, p. 41). Works had to be approved by committees established by the military regime before they could be published, distributed, exhibited, or performed;

content deemed objectionable was banned, censored, or altered. This situation led to widespread self-censorship among artists, thereby suppressing the critical and oppositional nature of art.

In the period before the coup, topics such as social realism, labor movements, revolutionary ideals, and discourses of freedom were frequently addressed in art. However, after 1980, this was replaced by more individual, metaphorical, and allegorical narratives. Artists have sought to continue their social criticism through imagery, symbols, and indirect narrative techniques rather than direct political discourse. This situation has crystallized in the transformation of themes in literature, poetry, and the plastic arts. With official art institutions under control, the emergence of independent art initiatives became inevitable. From the mid-1980s onwards, independent exhibitions and performances held in apartment buildings or workshops in major cities such as Istanbul and Ankara facilitated the development of an alternative artistic language in a crisis environment where freedom of expression was restricted. This process, which began with the creation of alternative art spaces, can be considered to have laid the foundations for contemporary art practice that continued into the 1990s. Although the impact of the September 12, 1980 coup on the art scene in Turkey is generally accepted as short-term repression, bans, and restrictions on freedom of expression, it can be argued that in the long term, it indirectly contributed to the development of alternative art practices, contemporary art movements, and interdisciplinary forms of production. Indeed, both artists of that period and younger generations of artists have occasionally addressed the crisis brought about by the coup in their artistic works.

Before the coup, photography in Turkey focused primarily on documentary and social memory functions. In the preface to Fikret Ötyam's book *Photographs*, Demirel (1978) wrote, "The photographer should be at the service of society and devote himself to such a service". This situation was severely restricted in the period following the coup. "Media outlets were subject to censorship under martial law; photographs documenting social movements such as rallies, strikes, and protests were either banned or manipulated as a result of

censorship. Photographers's freedom to take pictures in public spaces was restricted, and police and military intervention in such situations became commonplace. Thus, political pressure directly affected the effectiveness of photography's documentary function and made it difficult for both journalists and documentary photographers to document social events such as protests, strikes, and rallies through photography. This situation led press photographers such as Ara Güler to focus on projects that were less about current events and more about historical textures, cityscapes, and people (Figure 3). Kutlar (1994) wrote in the text for Ara Güler's book *Eski İstanbul Anıları* (A Photographical Sketch On Lost İstanbul) that one of the most striking things about Ara Güler's photographs is the abundance of human faces and that he could not imagine anything without people. Güler's photographs of İstanbul compensated for the lack of political documentation during that period, but they did not offer a directly critical visual memory.



Figure 3. Ara Güler, *An Old Hill in Kandilli*, 1985, (Source: Ara Güler *Eski İstanbul Anıları*)

One of the important themes of photography, such as labor movements, rural-urban migration, and political struggle, which were directly documented with political content, has now been replaced by photographs that use artistic, metaphorical, symbolic, and indirect narrative techniques

based on aesthetic concerns, focusing on more individual and everyday life. Thus, after 1980, the concept of aesthetics began to be reinterpreted in the art world, and individualization began in terms of meaning and form in expression with different perspectives (Susup, 2016, p.43). Of course, photographers did not completely abandon their sensitivity to social criticism, but rather continued their work by developing a more closed, interpretive visual language through images, rather than presenting the subject matter in an explicit manner. This indirect narrative approach based on censorship can be considered one of the fundamental elements that shaped the aesthetics of photography in the post-1980 period. On the other hand, the repressive environment caused by the coup led many photographers to emigrate and choose a life abroad (Susup, 2016, p.43). Thus, Turkish photography entered international circulation through foreign exhibitions, magazines, and biennials. This process of increased international interaction also transformed the aesthetic understanding of photographers. Artists have become acquainted with more conceptual and contemporary approaches to art compared to socially realistic works. Gezgin (1989), reflected on the condition of higher education after 1980, noting that while universities are meant to be places where knowledge and experience are generated and shared, scientific activity had, in many ways, come to a halt during this period.

As a summary, after 1980, photography started to breathe differently. Many photographers grew tired of repeating the same social realist patterns and began searching for something more personal, more open. They looked beyond familiar borders for inspiration and turned to their own lives as a source of meaning. This shift led to a more experimental and expressive way of making images, a clear break from the old, descriptive documentary style. That turning point still lingers in how photography speaks today (Gezgin, 1995, pp. 531-535).

Self-Portraiture in Photography in Post-Coup Turkey

As will be recalled, self-portraiture is a visual form of expression that historically allows individuals to

question their own existence, represent their identity, and transform themselves, thereby making visible the relationship that positions the artist as the subject and/or object. After September 12, 1980, this genre began to function not only as a form of personal confrontation for artists in Turkey, but also as a form of internal resistance against social oppression. Due to the censorship and prohibition of visual representations with explicit political messages, artists turned to individual representation. In this sense, self-portraits have enabled artists to express their mood, the pressure they feel, and their identity crises without directly conveying a political message.

At this point, it is important to explain the reason behind the choice of term in the title of this study. This is the difference between the terms "self-portrait" and "auto-portrait." Although there is generally no difference in usage between the terms *autoportrait* and *self-portrait*, there are slight differences in their connotations and, consequently, their meanings in terms of the content and meaning they represent. In French, *auto-portrait* is a portrait made by a person themselves (Çakaloğlu, 2001, p. 2). In English, "self-portrait, on the other hand, is the artist's depiction of themselves through their own portrait. Therefore, 'self-portrait' has a broader meaning that also includes 'auto-portrait'" (Ertürk, 2007, p. 19). Rideal (2005, p. 7) has stated that self-portraiture, the most personal form of expression for an artist, offers an opportunity for self-reflection, self-expression and self-presentation; that it is the most fundamental way of analysing oneself; and that, while generally repeating familiar traditions in portraiture, it also carries dimensions that allow for complex interpretations. Atay (1999, p. 11), however, has stated that the *auto-portrait* is a narcissistic expression, a legitimised exhibitionist fantasy, an aestheticised form of self-gratification, and a crystallised manifestation of egocentrism. According to artist Gezgin's (personal communication, August 16, 2025) statement influenced the choice of terms used in this study: "I would like to emphasize that *auto-portrait* and *self-portrait* are not the same thing. *Auto-portrait*, which is the act of making one's own portrait, is based entirely on personal reasons. In a work that uses self-portraits, there is

a more meaningful metaphorical distance between the viewer and the image." For this reason, in the commentary sections of the artist's photographs, the term "self-portrait" has been used instead of "auto-portrait" to take into account the meaning expressed by Gezgin. In this sense, while every self-portrait can be an *auto-portrait*, not every *auto-portrait* is a self-portrait.

Although artists whose works include self-portraits can be found in various collective publications or exhibition catalogs in our country, the number of artists whose works include self-portraits in photography books other than these is quite limited. Among these, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, with his album published in 1987 and his retrospective album *Pasajlar*, published in 2024, which also includes his self-portraits from after 1980, and Ahmet Öner Gezgin are of particular importance.

This study will analyze the self-portraits of Ahmet Öner Gezgin, who attracted attention with his experimental works in Turkish photography after 1980. Although there are other photographers with experimental works from this period, Gezgin chose self-portraits as a specific subject, making him the subject of this study.

Ahmet Öner Gezgin's Life and Artistic Approach

Ahmet Öner Gezgin graduated from the Textile Department of the İstanbul State Academy of Fine Arts (İDGSA) in 1970. He then received a state scholarship to study at the Kunst Hochschule Kassel (Germany / former Gesamthochschule Kassel), where he completed his specialized education in "experimental photography" and "graphic design" in 1977. In 1975, he participated in seminars organized by Europhot in Chalon-Sur-Saon (France) and, in 1981, attended photography seminars and workshops at the Salzburg Summer Academy as a guest of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research. Gezgin began his academic career as an assistant at the Graphic Design Department of the İstanbul State Academy of Fine Arts in 1978, and was promoted to associate professor in 1987, professor in 1988, and full professor in 1998. He served as Vice Rector, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, and Head of the Photography Department at Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts;

Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Head of the Department of Fashion and Textile Design at Işık University, and Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at İstanbul Arel University. He is one of the most important pioneers of experimental photography in Turkey, defending its philosophy and producing works in line with this approach (Gezgin, 2025).

Gezgin doesn't see photography as just a way to document what's in front of the camera. For him, it's a space where imagination, dreams, and subconscious impulses come together to create something personal and deeply felt. He treats photography almost like a stage - a place where he can build his own reality and, as Man Ray once said, let everything forbidden unfold freely (Gezgin, 2000, pp. 70-71).

The artist expanded the boundaries of photography in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s, breaking the conventional patterns of traditional photography and thus establishing interdisciplinary communication. In his works, he has provided the viewer with concepts about humanity and the key to understanding how humans view the world. The unchanging reality of his photographic signs contains a structure that raises awareness of existential issues of humanity through the concept of "us." Mentally connecting the past, present, and future, the artist creates his photographic signs based on images and concepts (Gezgin, 2024, p. 8).

According to Gezgin (2011), although many concepts and disciplines acquired definitions, interpretations and evaluations beyond the conventional in the transition to the contemporary order after 1980, the rigid structure of the pre-1980 period delayed the transition to the contemporary art environment and the interdisciplinary flow of knowledge.

Method

This study was conducted using a qualitative-interpretative research design. Interpretations were made through iconographic/iconological reading and visual discourse analysis, focusing on the conceptual dimension of self-portraiture. The aim of this study is to identify the situation of the photographer as a subject in the crisis conditions follow-

ing the coup d'état of September 12, 1980. This assessment focuses on how visibility, invisibility, memory, permission, and individual or political tensions are visualized. In this sense, formal indicators such as light-shadow, framing, etc., and elements such as cups, chained clocks, curtains, glass, mirrors, shadows, torn surfaces, and silhouettes with antennas, etc., have been referenced in the analysis. In iconographic reading, what is shown in an image, such as objects, situations, figures, subjects, objects, gestures, spaces, etc., is identified. In iconological reading, the reason for the use of these elements and how they are used within a political perspective, the internal meaning of the image, and its historical-cultural dimensions are interpreted. Panofsky (2012, p. 25) sees iconography as a branch of art history that deals with the subjects or meanings of artworks in relation to their forms. Rona (1997, p. 837) defines iconography as "the scientific identification, classification, and evaluation of subjects, symbols, and themes in visual arts." According to Sözen and Tanyeli (1992, p. 2014), iconography is a field that studies the typified or religiously themed forms and patterns of religious artworks, even to the extent of being fixed. In summary, iconography can be defined as "the science of explaining and identifying icons" (Akalin et al., 2005, p. 950). Keser (2009, p. 166) has defined iconography as the pictorial representation of a subject. Tepe (2023, p. 2), on the other hand, has stated that a more accurate definition would be to interpret iconography as the depiction of the conceptual analysis of images and visuals. In Erwin Panofsky's iconographic description, elements such as lines/forms, composition, light-shadow distribution, tonality, depth of field, direction of gaze, framing, tears, scratches, collage, and other surface interventions, printing techniques, horizontal-vertical format, etc., found in the photograph are taken into consideration. In the iconographic analysis section, the possible layers of meaning are conceptualized by naming objects and signs. In the iconological interpretation section, the deeper meaning of the image is examined in relation to the mentality of the period, the political and social context, and the modes of production. In visual discourse analysis, images are treated not only as representations but also as discourse-producing

practices. For example, the relationship established by the figure in the photograph with the viewer through direct or indirect gaze can be interpreted as confrontation or avoidance. In addition, both the content context and the period and conditions in which the photograph was produced are taken into consideration. It should not be forgotten that, due to the subjective nature of expression in art, all layers of meaning and feeling are multifaceted and, in other words, do not contain absolute certainty. Indeed, Dönmez (2009, p. 8) states that the traditional use of symbols in European painting is largely based on the Old and New Testaments, drawing on the mythological elements of pagan religion, and that religious symbols form the source of Western painting as a supporter of the Church. However, she also states that while many of the symbols used by painters are understandable today, some of them remain unsolved.

Universe and Sample

The universe of the study consists of self-portraits produced by Ahmet Öner Gezgin between 1980 and 1988. In the study, five works that intensively convey the concept of crisis were selected as a purposeful sample, and detailed readings of these works were conducted in the article. The first is a 1980 composition featuring a table, a cup, a cigarette, and a pocket watch; the second is a 1981 shadow self-portrait titled "Salzburg"; the third is a 1983 pose of a thinker against a plain background; the fourth is a 1987 work depicting a torn sky surface and a city silhouette; and the fifth is a self-portrait consisting of a silhouette and shadow on a curtain, taken in 1988. The primary data in this study are based on images in a printed book and on the artist's personal website, which contain digital reproductions of the artist's works, and other data are based on statements made by the artist in correspondence on August 16, 2025.

Findings

According to Panofsky's pre-iconographical description, the 1980 self-portrait depicts two white cups placed on a dark, probably black, circular table (Figure 4). One cup is next to the photographer,

the other opposite Gezgin. The artist's head is not visible; the frame begins below his chin. Chest hair is visible through his partially unbuttoned striped shirt. One hand holds a cigarette on the table, while the other remains hidden beneath it. A watch and chain are positioned between the cup and the hand.



Figure 4. Ahmet Öner Gezgin, Selfportrait, 1980, (Source: Gezgin, A. Ö. (2025, 25 September). <https://www.ahmetonergezgin.com.tr/>)

The reflective surface of the table mirrors these elements, creating multiple layers within the composition. The scene in the photograph is evenly lit. Accordingly, soft and diffused light has been used here. Sharp shadows have been minimised. Surface details such as the texture of the white shirt and the reflective tabletop are emphasised. The composition is symmetrical. The viewer's gaze is positioned on a vertical axis from the foreground towards the model. The fact that the shirt and cups are white and the table is black or a dark colour makes the tone contrast between the shape and the background more pronounced. In terms of composition, the fact that the model's entire head is not included in the frame suggests anonymity due to the lack of details about their identity, and introversion due to the fact that their face is not clearly shown.

According to Panofsky's iconographical analysis, two cups, one full and one empty, are placed side by side. This image can be thought of as serving as a visual metaphor for presence and absence, communication and silence. The cigarette, with its

accumulated ashes, symbolises the passage of time and existential fatigue, while the watch clearly links the image to the passage of time. The concealed face has the potential to symbolise anonymity and the erasure of subjectivity. The reflection on the table can also be read as a symbolic dilemma, evoking repressed memories and the presence of the absent interlocutor. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes (1996, p. 104), portrays photography as a strangely complex medium: while it can mislead our immediate perception, it also affirms the undeniable reality of a moment that has passed. A photograph carries with it a quiet, shared *illuso*, the subject is no longer present, yet its trace remains visible. In this way, the photographic image holds a subtle tension, existing both as something separate from reality and as a powerful reminder of its former presence. In Gezgin's photograph, the paradox of one of the two cups being empty, the absence of any trace of the owner of the empty cup, the possibility that the clock might have stopped despite the cigarette ashes indicating the passage of time, and all the contradictions and question marks, such as the presence of the body but the absence of the face, are in harmony with Barthes's views.

According to Panofsky's iconological interpretation, at the third level, it can be said that a political statement is made through personal objects in the image. By refusing to show his face, Gezgin seems to allegorically express the subject silenced under authoritarian control. The duality of the cups presents an allegory of interrupted dialogue; this can be read as a sign of both personal and collective trauma. In this respect, the self-portrait goes beyond mere documentation and takes on the function of a silent but powerful political testimony symbolising the indirect discourse of post-1980 Turkish photography.

According to Panofsky's iconographic pre-explanation of this image, Gezgin stands in the centre against a plain background (Figure 5). Compared to the *mise-en-scène* in Figure 4, the photograph appears to be an ordinary photograph taken in front of a plain background. However, as Marien (2015, p. 81) points out, "Whether it is a painted backdrop in a photography studio or the landscape behind the main subject, the background of a photograph is an essential part of it." Therefore, it must

be said that the background is an important element that constitutes the meaning of this *mise-en-scène*.



Figure 5. Ahmet Öner Gezgin, *Selfportrait*, 1983, (Source: Gezgin, A. Ö. (2025, 25 September). <https://www.ahmetonergezgin.com.tr/>)

He wears glasses and a contrasting t-shirt. The photograph ends at waist level, with a large empty space above his head. A circular halo of light surrounds his upper body, and he rests his hand on his chin, looking away from the camera. In the photograph, an intense spotlight has been used. Accordingly, there is a controlled lighting arrangement in the background, and a circular area of light has been created on the wall behind the subject. This creates a strong contrast between the figure and the background. The composition is shifted slightly downwards from the centre, so that the interplay of light and shadow occupies a large area of the frame. In this black and white photograph, the texture of the subject's face, glasses and clothing is particularly emphasised.

Drawing upon Panofsky's iconographic analysis, the halo-like studio lighting, isolating the artist's figure from the neutral ground, evokes a staged, theatrical space. Berger argues that the way an image is composed through lighting, pose, and spatial framing—actively constructs how the subject is perceived. He notes that "the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (Berger, 1972, p. 8), and that images are never neutral but "a way of seeing the world" (Berger, 1972, p. 10). In this sense, the halo-like studio lighting functions not merely as illumination but as a theatrical device that directs the viewer's gaze and frames the subject within a specific meaning

structure. Based on this information, Gezgin's contemplative pose recalls traditional representations of intellectual reflection. The emptiness above his head reinforces this sense of spatial and psychological suspension. In this context, Arnheim reminds us that when we look at a picture, our sense of space doesn't just happen by chance. Artists, often without even thinking about it, use certain visual principles to help us read depth and distance. As viewers, we bring our everyday experiences into the act of seeing — we know, for instance, that a larger figure in an image usually feels closer than a smaller object behind it. But artists can't rely only on what we already know. To make sure we see the space the way they intend, they use light, scale, and other visual cues to gently guide how we perceive what's in front of us. (Arnheim, 1974, p. 234). In the photo, Gezgin's glasses, his resting hand, and the partial shadow above his head evoke both an intellectual stance and a sense of inner questioning in the viewer.

According to Panofsky's iconological interpretation, this work visually expresses the intellectual isolation experienced after the 1980 coup. Gezgin is staged not as a political agitator, but as a thoughtful subject questioning his role in a silenced society. The empty space surrounding him becomes a metaphor for the shrinking space of public discourse and the artist's retreat into internalised intellectual thought.



Figure 6. Ahmet Öner Gezgin, Selfportrait, 1988, (Source: Gezgin, A. Ö. (2025, 25 September). <https://www.ahmetonergezgin.com.tr/>)

According to Panofsky's iconographic pre-explanation of this image, in the vertical-format photograph, a patterned curtain occupies the right side, and the silhouette of the artist holding a camera emerges from the left (Figure 6). His face is not directly visible; instead, a shadow falls sharply against the curtain. The entire composition is dominated by strong contrasts between light and darkness. In the photograph, a single light source has been used. A distinct shadow silhouette is projected onto a patterned curtain. This use of light is based on the chiaroscuro lighting technique. This relationship between light and dark creates a layered spatial effect between the figure and its shadow. The composition is designed vertically, and the subject is slightly offset from the centre. This creates a balance between the patterned surface on the right and the dark negative space on the left. The black and white photograph features sharp tonal contrasts.

In line with Panofsky's iconographic framework, the floral motifs on the curtain signify domesticity and ordinary everyday life, while the artist's silhouette and the deliberate play of shadow emphasize absence as presence. Chiaroscuro has been used in this photograph. Chiaroscuro, is the "Term describing the effects of light and shade in a work of art, particularly when they are strongly contrasting" (Chilvers, 2004, p. 147). This use of chiaroscuro detaches the body from individual identity, transforming it into an anonymous trace.

From the perspective of Panofsky's iconological interpretation, through the effacement of his face, Gezgin inscribes the political erasure of subjectivity onto his own image. The interior setting symbolizes a refuge from oppressive external forces, echoing how many artists of the era resorted to covert narratives. His self-representation as a shadow foregrounds the paradox of visibility and invisibility experienced by intellectuals under censorship, creating a poetic yet critical image of survival.



Figure 7. Ahmet Öner Gezgin, Selfportrait, 1987, (Source: Gezgin, A. Ö. (2025, 25 September). <https://www.ahmetonergezgin.com.tr/>)

As articulated through Panofsky's iconographic pre-explanation of this image, the lower part of this vertical composition depicts roofs filled with television aeras (Figure 7). This landscape gradually darkens towards the upper part. In the upper middle section, the Gezgin's hands and face are visible through a torn surface. The photograph is in black and white tones. The sky appears to have been captured using a gradient filter. It can be said that the exposure was taken at a time when there was little light, as a darkness prevails in the overall atmosphere of the photograph. There is a tear in the middle of the sky, and the artist's face appears from there. This expression is surreal in style. The artist has photographed the photograph.

In accordance with Panofsky's iconographic analysis, the antennas symbolise mass communication and the ideological mechanisms of the state, because at that time antennas were devices necessary especially for television broadcasts. The torn surface disrupts the continuity of the image, creating an opening, a literal and symbolic rupture. Gezgin's direct gaze at this rupture brings about a counter-movement against the closed system in

question. This image brings to mind Foucault's concept of the panopticon. "The panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (Foucault, 1995, pp. 201-202).

According to Panofsky's iconological interpretation, the tearing of the image surface represents a symbolic act of resistance against the hegemonic narratives of the coup regime. The gaze emerging from the rupture is not only personal but collective, expressing an intellectual effort to reclaim space for opposition. Here, the artist performs a visual act that intertwines personal subjectivity with collective political critique. Gezgin (1995, pp. 48-54) has noted that, despite many concepts and disciplines acquiring definitions, interpretations and evaluations that are unconventional or beyond the norm during the transition to the contemporary order, the breaking of the habit of seeing only the pure truth, as proposed by the naturalist and/or realist approach in photography, occurred in the 1980s. This aligns with the artist's transition from direct documentary photography to an allegorical, metaphorical visual language in the post-coup era.



Figure 8. Ahmet Öner Gezgin, Salzburg, 1981, (Source: Gezgin, A. Ö. (2025, 25 September). <https://www.ahmetonergezgin.com.tr/>)

The photograph taken by the artist in Salzburg in 1981 is referred to as "Salzburg" in his book Pasajlar (2024, p. 104). However, since the shadow of Gezgin is used in the composition as a conscious choice, it can be considered as a self-portrait as

well. Through the lens of Panofsky's iconographic pre-explanation, this square-format photograph shows a narrow street framed by two contrasting buildings: one classical with symmetrical windows, the other modern with rounded edges (Figure 8). Gezgin's shadow is cast prominently on the ground in the foreground. Natural light was used in the photograph. The facades of the buildings are bright, while the streets are dark in comparison. The resulting contrast also serves as an axis in terms of composition. The symmetrical framing of the two buildings creates a balanced architectural structure. The artist's shadow adds a timid human presence to the static scene. The black and white tones emphasise the architectural lines and spatial depth of the building. The tonal contrasts offered by black and white can direct the viewer's gaze from the shadow in the foreground to the vanishing point between the buildings. It can be said that the photograph has a visually balanced composition.

According to Panofsky's iconographic analysis, the architectural contrast introduces a temporal and stylistic dialogue between past and present. The shadow functions as a self-referential signature, as a discreet way of embedding the photographer into the image just like its the unconscious part of Gezgin. "The ancient Greeks believed that when we departed from the real world, we continued to live as shadows among the shadows" (Gombrich, 2020, 35). Just like this, Gezgin also continues to exist through his shadow. On the other hand, the shadow, as Jung (2009, p. 168) also pointed out, the shadow is not the entirety of the unconscious personality. It represents the unknown or little-known characteristics or qualities of the ego - characteristics that are mostly personal and may also be conscious. The blocked perspective at the end of the street prevents the gaze from extending outward, evoking a sense of spatial enclosure.

Within the scope of Panofsky's iconological interpretation, the artist's shadowed presence, rather than full visibility, speaks to the restricted subjectivity imposed on artists and intellectuals during the post-coup period. The architectural opposition mirrors the tension between continuity and rupture, between historical persistence and the silenced individual. "A typical example of symbolic

art is architecture; particularly architecture in which the ideal content is symbolically represented in its external form" (Bozkurt, 1995, p. 143). This indirect self-portrait uses urban space as a metaphorical landscape of crisis, confinement, and muted resistance.

Conclusion

This study examines the September 12, 1980 coup in Turkey as a crisis. Approaching the concept of crisis as a multi-layered socio-cultural phenomenon, the study demonstrates how photography, particularly self-portraits, became a form of expression in Turkey during the crisis period through the photographs of Ahmet Öner Gezgin. The crisis phenomenon is exemplified in psychological terms in the context of the shock to the self and identity caused by the coup; in social terms in the context of the loosening of institutional ties, internalization of surveillance and self-censorship; and in cultural terms in the context of the re-examination of forms of meaning production. It can be said that, in the process, the direct discourse of the documentary tradition has been replaced by figurative, indirect, and allegorical strategies, thus undergoing an aesthetic transformation. In this respect, self-portraiture has gained importance in times of crisis as a genre that can express both the fragility and resistance of the subject. What makes self-portraits privileged in times of crisis, for example, compared to the documentary genre, is that the fictional nature of self-portraits allows them to serve as a permeable threshold between the subjective and the political. In this sense, self-portraits are not only photographs that have been taken, but also photographs that have been designed.

The findings of this study reveal that the self-portraits produced by Ahmet Öner Gezgin between 1980 and 1988 consist of content that has the potential to refer to the crisis caused by the coup in both individual and social contexts. The headless body in the 1980 work, the symbolic representation of everyday objects such as two cups, one empty and the other full, a cigarette, and a pocket watch; the subject in the 1983 work, who is socialized but also limited by a kind of isolation; the representation of the paradox of visibility and invisibility

through the silhouette falling on the curtain fabric in 1988; the fragmentation of the representational surface in the composition where the sky seems to be torn; all these expressive strategies, such as the use of shadow as a trace in the Salzburg example, point to an expression form in which the crisis is not merely a simple subject but is embedded in the visual language and practice of seeing itself. Gezgin's self-portraits are not narcissistic self-presentations; they can be seen as a counter-discourse practice in which the subjective mimics the political, the political mimics the subjective, or the boundaries between the two become blurred, crystallizing examples of the indirect political language of the period. Among the findings, the idea that Turkish photography after 1980 is not merely a tool for documentary testimony but also a medium for producing thought is also significant. This is evidence of the existence of visual thinking in Turkish photography. Whether this ability has been transformed into a language is a subject for other studies. In addition, thanks to the artist's retrospective book, it is an important observation that collective memory is still active in a historical sense and that the artist, who continues to produce self-portraits, establishes a connection between the past and the present. Thus, Gezgin's self-portraits have become a form of expression that is not composed of individual images but spread over a certain period of time.

This study on self-portraying can be considered alongside Melike Öztürk's 2024 master's thesis, *Contemporary Photography Art and Self-Portrait Aesthetics*, which conceptualizes self-portraying, and Bahar Susup's 2016 study, *Turkey from 1980 to the Present*, which focuses on Ahmet Öner Gezgin in the context of staged photography. In Bahar Susup's thesis, positions Gezgin, one of the leading actors of the experimental/fictional line in Turkey after 1980, on an abstract-expressionist axis that combines experimental photography with different techniques through his education and practice. With a crisis-focused approach, the viewer expresses Gezgin's aesthetic and formal approach through local-historical and emotional dimensions in the context of crisis, trauma, and memory produced by post-coup socio-psychopolitical fractures. Bahar Susup's work focuses on Gezgin's

construction of a subjective reality by combining images through imagination and the unconscious. In my work prepared in the context of crisis, this subjective construction intersects with time as the wound caused by the crisis and witnessing this situation: self-portrait is not only considered as fiction, but also as a tactic of subjectification and protection; as a memory tool and a means of recording social memory. In this context, the study prepared on the crisis has acquired a complementary quality.

In Melike Öztürk's master's thesis titled "*Contemporary Photography Art and Self-Portrait Aesthetics*," it is conceptualized self-portraiture within an interdisciplinary framework, defining the face and body as "anthropological surfaces." According to this, the components of the production process include elements such as pose, clothing, decor, space, and light/composition. Additionally, the study emphasizes the relationship between aesthetics and form, establishing an analogy between photography and performance, positioning the photograph within a performative context. Öztürk relates this to the avant-garde and experimental line in the historical context of Soviet Russia, the Weimar Republic, and Paris, as well as the effects of the political conjuncture. In the study, when it comes to the contemporary period, self-portraits are divided into types and discussed with various examples. In contrast, self-portraits related to crisis are focused on Turkey after the 1980 coup in a geographical and historical context. Self-portraits are interpreted through the concepts of crisis, trauma, and memory. The iconographic/iconological and visual discourse analysis method was applied to the self-portraits of Ahmet Öner Gezgin. Accordingly, it has been demonstrated how a language that can be perceived as more avant-garde and experimental compared to the pre-1980 period has transformed alongside a local historical rupture. Thus, Melike Öztürk's typology-based approach, which encompasses a broad perspective, has been analyzed through a more local and crisis-focused interpretation. In Öztürk's thesis, the concepts of subject, performance, and role are considered together with the identity of the "actor-photographer." In this sense, self-portraiture is interpreted as a kind of performance, a theatrical event based

on staging and scripting. In addition, the work discusses anti-narcissism as a self-perception that oscillates between narcissism and anti-narcissism, and discusses the sub-types of anti-narcissism based on psychological strategies such as concealment, uglification, and staying in the background, as well as their effects. In the context of crisis, the study discusses how self-portrait reveals the ontological structure of the subject, the time-dependent development of the crisis, and its traumatic aspects, as well as its social, psychological, and political effects. Accordingly, self-portrait is not merely a role but a traumatic self-witness and a strategy of resistance and subjectification. This situation has deepened Öztürk's performative typology in the context of the production conditions of crisis.

As a result, in the theoretical dimension of the work, it can be said that self-portraits take on the functions of leaving a mark, recording, and reminding in times of crisis. In this way, reference is made to the representation of the unrepresentable due to censorship caused by the crisis, and thus trauma is symbolized and put into circulation. In addition, the idea has emerged that the frame and composition themselves have been transformed into a formal field of struggle with tears, shadows, silhouettes, and reflections. The elements that make this struggle possible can be evaluated not only as aesthetic preferences but also as attempts to recognize the crisis in visual terms, to oppose it, to disrupt it, and to reconstruct it. Finally, it can be said that in self-portraits, the subject stands in a blurred position between withdrawing from the scene by becoming completely anonymous and centering themselves by declaring their identity. From this perspective, it can be argued that the authority that constructed the coup also stands in a blurred position. Of course, the scope of this study is limited to that of an article. The analysis focused on specific works in terms of sampling, thus preventing a broader and more comparative analysis. It would also be important to compare other artists who worked on self-portraits and self-portraits after 1980, but this issue has been left to future texts as a subject for independent study. In conclusion, this study has determined that the crisis that emerged after the September 12, 1980 coup led to

the emergence of the artist's subjectivity in the context of self-portraits. It has been concluded that Ahmet Öner Gezgin's self-portraits do not merely represent the crisis; they also express the conditions and possibilities of the crisis in a fragmented, multi-layered, and open-to-interpretation language, in the same way that the crisis itself is fragmented, multi-layered, and open to interpretation. In this sense, these works are able to transform personal testimony into collective memory. Thus, a vision that is introspective yet intense, indirect yet assertive, fragile yet persistent has been identified in Gezgin's photographs. This vision is recorded as a decisive, experimental, and fictional contribution to Turkish photography after 1980 through the medium of self-portraiture.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval: This article does not involve any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author; therefore, ethical approval was not required.

Informed Consent: Not applicable.

Data Availability: No new datasets were created or analyzed in this study. The visual materials discussed (published reproductions and publicly available images on the artist's website) are openly accessible; additional analysis notes are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI Disclosure: No artificial intelligence-based tools or applications were used in the conception, analysis, writing, or figure preparation of this study. All content was produced by the author in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles.

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