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Florina Lucaciu   April 11th, 2017

The Photographic Portrait: Artistic Expression, Captured Humanity, Arrested Experience

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Abstract

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In "The Photographic Portrait: Artistic Expression, Captured Humanity, Arrested Experience," I examine portrait photography as placed at the nexus of art theory, practice, and bodily presence in art. My thesis discusses the roles that the photographic portrait has played in the history of how we conceive of aesthetics, selfhood, and representation in photography and in art more broadly. Engaging especially with the theoretical work of Walter Benjamin and Susan Sontag, I offer new readings of "street" photography by Vivian Meier, as well as novel interpretation of well-known photographic portraits by Dorothea Lange, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and others. In these discussions, I will focus not only on the details of artworks, but I will also attempt to provide a refreshing take on familiar works and pursue new lines of thinking about their form and their significance. I further contend that the human face is a medium for communication, for expression and for the visualization of a sliver of reality. The paper will look at how two important media platforms –photojournalism and artistic photography – employ the photographic portrait to convey meaning.

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Introduction

"The human face is the organic seat of beauty. It is the register of value in development, a record of Experience, whose legitimate office is to perfect the life, a legible language to those who will study it, of the majestic mistress, the soul," Eliza Farnham, nineteenth century American novelist and activist once said (Dell 104). Years of personal exposure to the multifaceted character of photography as model and as photographer (Figures 1, 2) have made me aware of the psychologically complex character of this three-fold relationship of model-camera-photographer, as well as its outcome on the photographer, the photographed, and the viewer.

Figure 1 – Loli Lucaciu by Joshua Posada, 2016   *Figure 2 – Callum Woolley by Loli Lucaciu, 2016*

Reflecting on the importance of photography as an illustrator of the past and the present and as a bridge of connection between people involved, as well as external, to the photographic process, I decided to research the theoretical aspect of it in order to accompany the practice of photography – in the end, theory influences practice and vice versa. Words and images go hand in hand, and throughout this paper, I decided to reunite these two platforms of expression and weave a common ground of interpretation and practice that would endow the photographic process the multilateral analysis it deserves. In a world saturated with images that people merely brush over, I wanted to write this paper as a means of slowing the process of looking and helping the viewer to truly see beyond the surface of a snapshot of a face. Little did I know that in shedding light on portrait photography for the common benefit of the readers, the process of researching would end up changing my own way of interpreting images and the world around me, and that it would strongly influence my artistic style as model and as photographer. Looking back at my photographic portrait project created before the process of researching and writing started – http://lolilucaciuphotography.tumblr.com/ – and then fast-forwarding to my work in the last few months – https://lolilucaciuphotography2.tumblr.com/ – I notice visible differences in concept, color and angle usage. This paper includes several examples of analysis of my own work as basis for a reunion of theory and practice, with the two websites above serving as multi-media reinforcements of my expressive vision.

What does the face of the subject express as the photo is taken – is it a sincere re-surfacing of a unique existence or a mask put on as a result of exposure to the gaze and to the world? Does the photographer capture the human face in a quest for beauty or for reality, or for both? How does the camera direct the photographer's intentions and incorporate them within the context of the subject's physical exposure to form a unique portrait? Portraiture, which is largely

defined as "a visual representation of a person" underlines human physical similarities – two eyes, a mouth, a nose, ears and hair – while also bringing out the differences in features and a myriad of ways of capturing them that rely on technology, technical choices and the subject's interaction with the photographer (Perich ix). "Of all the genres of photography, the most charismatic, and therefore the most difficult to resolve successfully, is the portrait. A portrait photograph immediately grabs the viewer's attention and triggers profoundly personal responses—emotional, paradoxical and not always rational. The issues raised are complex, challenging, even treacherous, revolving around the self and its representation, identity and immortality" (Badger 169).

Focusing on the importance of the human face as a medium for communication, for expression and for the visualization of a sliver of reality, the following paper will look at how two important media platforms–photojournalism and artistic photography–employ the photographic portrait to convey meaning. I contend that much of what is visible in a portrait can be analyzed and interpreted to derive significance beyond what is deduced from first impressions – and that connotative meanings are specific to each viewer individually, crafting the portraits themselves as multifaceted in their artistic expression. Photojournalism and artistic photography share elements that endow certain expressivity and consciousness to each image – e.g. the photographer's selection of camera angles, lens, color selection, light manipulation, shutter speed and post-editing techniques. However, these two branches of portraiture can differ in their creative purpose and manipulation of technical elements, and the final photographic products for each branch can impact the viewers in drastically different ways. Although both types of portrait photography tend to strike at the viewer's emotional response, photojournalistic portraits are intended to inform and provoke active reaction, while artistic photography usually employs the

onlooker's aesthetic sensitivity. A most key element in visualizing a portrait, be it photojournalistic or artistic, is that the image requires us to "interpret" what we see, and not merely trust in the truth of the recording.

Before delving into these specific areas of interest, it is important to delineate the more encompassing functions and implications of photography as a whole, as a medium and as a tool in the hands of a photographer. Why do we employ photography and why does it occupy an increasingly important role in our daily lives? Susan Sontag had a dynamic perspective on photography's purpose when she wrote that people take photographs in order to "turn experience itself into a way of seeing" (Sontag 24). Rather than focusing on the symbolic nature of a photograph, with its fixed moment in time, motionless subjects and emotional charge, Sontag considered the action of a particular way of seeing as the major draw to photography. Her pragmatic approach attaches a long-lasting character to the act of photographing – photography can now be a way of dealing with, and more particularly looking at, life's experiences. On the other hand, Brian Roberts suggests that photography functions as an illusion of control over daily life experiences, as a method of deriving sense out of the chaos of living and as a form of poeticizing mundane episodes.

> The "real" in our daily living confronts us as a "rush", a myriad of visual and other sensual experiences; we search for connections (and "rhyme") amongst these "happenings". We respond to the world through the construction of interpretive meanings by, for example, the "typification" of individuals, events and objects. These narrative-biographical meanings we associate with experiences in the social world, and transfer and adapt them to other individuals, situations, etc., deemed to be similar, to guide our actions. In

viewing photographs we refer to these previous "reserves of knowledge" that

shape action, adapting them to current experience and anticipated situations.

Through the act of photography (taking pictures of people, situations and our

environment) and viewing images, we seek to give form to experience and

structure to memories. (Roberts 10)

What Roberts calls "typification" of elements of our surroundings boils down to mentally labeling what we see, a uniquely personal process shaped by previous experiences and by an individual's moral compass. Through photography, one can more easily seize what is visually in front of him/her, stabilize its constant flow, package it into a neat photograph and stamp it with a label – this process makes the object more easily retrievable in the future. In an almost scientific way, the photographer becomes an alchemist transforming the flow of life into static researchable material that can be scrutinized during consequent analysis through the filters of history, personal and global, and through moral and emotional considerations. By means of these processes, the static photograph teaches the photographer as much about what he is looking at, as about how and why he is even observing it.

The act of "gazing" as a necessary precursor to capturing, is in itself influenced by numerous personal filters through which we look at our surroundings, from experience and social status, to emotional and ethical deliberations. Before we even take the photo and have a chance to analyze it or think deeper about its implications, we selectively employ time and space to focus our attention on a specific image or subject presented before us. As John Szarkowski keenly observed: "Photography is a system of visual editing. At bottom, it is a matter of

surrounding with a frame a portion of one's cone of vision, while standing in the right place at the right time. Like chess, or writing, it is a matter of choosing from among given possibilities, but in the case of photography the number of possibilities is not finite but infinite" (Sontag 192).
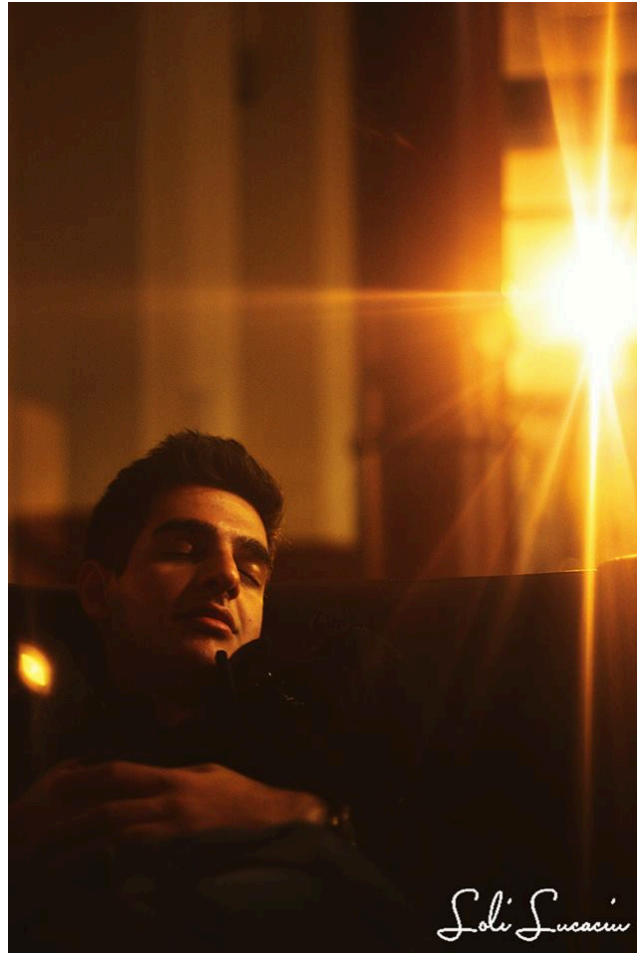

Figure 3 – Sifting, *Keywan Behbahani by Loli Lucaciu, 2015*

The photo above is an illustration of the importance of selective editing – if I moved just one inch to either side of my subject, the sun's rays would not have pierced through the window as they did, and they would not have illuminated Keywan's face in a tale-telling way. His momentary decision to rest allowed me to snap this photo without him noticing, my stance as a photographer unnoted. In this way, I made sure that his facial expression was truthful to his personal mood in that moment. The choice of waiting and of exact framing played with the other

elements of the photo – the subject and the sunshine. Sometimes, a sharp photographic vision involves the recognition of an imminent moment of beauty or expressivity that will deserve to be captured. The suitable preparation for noticing that moment once it arrives is essential and oftentimes, instinctual.

Photography provides an instant feeling of possession – a fragment of the world as it unfolds before the photographer's gaze is captured and then stabilized in the form of a tangible object, the photograph. Extending the life of a fleeting moment by means of capturing it and opening it to subsequent viewing and analysis is one of the ways in which one can feign possession – a subconscious "I saw it, so it is mine" becomes the basis for claiming a memory. Although the photographer can never "own" the human subject being captured in that specific moment, (s)he owns the specific image of it. The camera, as an extension of the human regard, captures the subjective memory of the photographer – although the subject photographed might be simultaneously observed by other gazes, the precise image of the subject is particular to the specific gaze of the snapper. "Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights. […] The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in the choice of subject" (Berger 10). Susan Sontag qualifies this inclination to possess the moment and its subject as "predatory": "There is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they can never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (Sontag 14). To classify the act of taking a photo as "predatory", one can imply a personal desire to claim. Therefore, photographing comes in as an extension of an initial selective process that places the photographed subject above other photographable options – the desire to capture a specific

image transitions from visual clue to active seizing. One can only wonder – what are some of the

driving forces behind capturing and "claiming" such a specific sliver of the surrounding present?

Answers can be found all around us.
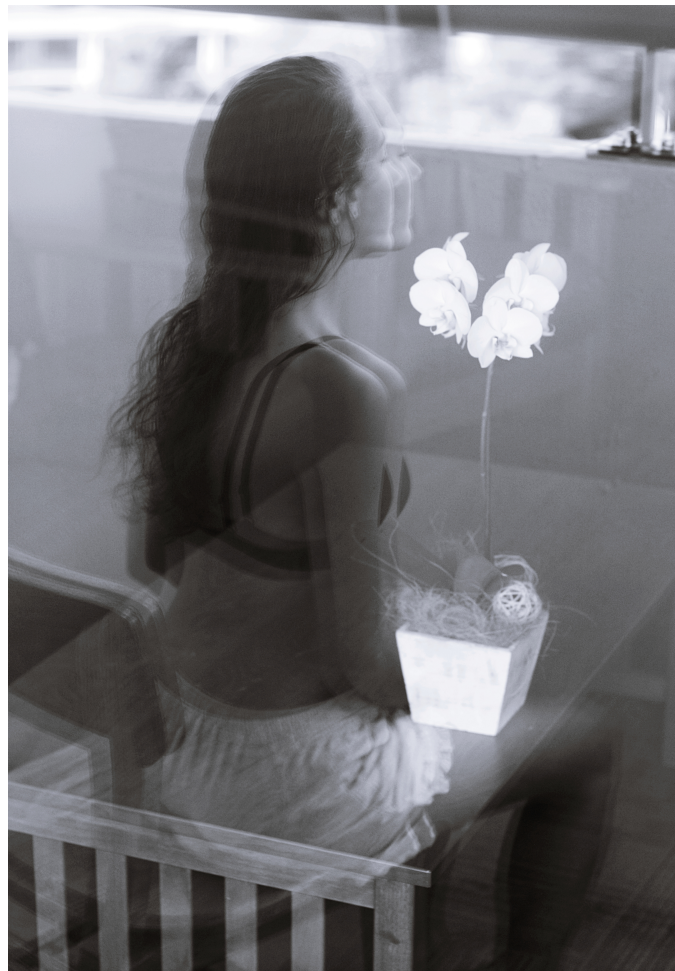
Figure 4 – Reflections, *Christine Ginalis by Loli Lucaciu, 2015*

During a late September afternoon in 2015, my roommate, Christine Ginalis, took her

usual seat on our shared balcony at Emory University. From behind the balcony glass, I noticed

the quietness and serenity of her quick moment of repose, and without her noticing me, I snapped

the photo above. In retrospect, I recall Annie Leibovitz as she said: "In order to get the best

possible pictures, one had to become part of what was going on. You're there and no one pays

you any mind and you can take the pictures you wanna take" (*Barbara Leibovitz*). The first impulse to seize the image was born out of aesthetic reasons: the familiarity of the scene, her beauty and her melancholic gaze touched me. However, as I was sneaking behind her, I noticed the reflection of our orchid playing against her shape. While in that instant I could not delineate the exact thoughts playing in my subconscious and drawing me to the image, I felt that the photo would subsequently become a token of my emotional attachment and contain a meaning much beyond its physical aspect. Andre Bazin tapped into one of my underlying motivations when he wrote that a photograph "helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death" (Bazin 6). Years down the road, when the constant physical and emotional presence of my best friend in my life might dwindle in the light of personal life shifts, the memory of her character and warm support will be renewed by means of this photograph. Her importance to me will be reinforced through my visualization and consequent remembering of our relationship as it was during the times this photo was taken.

As I "scrutinized" the photo a year after it was shot, it came to embody a plethora of memories, Christine's unique personality and charm, and the importance of self-sufficiency. It represented a symbolic representation of my recent memory of her. I indirectly labeled what was physically captured based on what it meant to me emotionally, aesthetically and morally at the moment of scrutiny. These interpretations of the image might fluctuate with changing personal standards and viewpoints that are shaped by the passing of time and through experience. While the photographer engages in a personal, heightened relationship to the subject and to the image (s)he captures due to the nature of the photographic act, it is important to note that labeling, however different its outcome, happens subconsciously in the case of any viewer of a photograph. My "typification", as mentioned above, of elements of the photograph –the human

presence, the concept of beauty and youth, the location and its meaning—might be utterly

different because of my relationship to the subject, my being the "gazer", and my own personal

history and values. Particular reasons linked to an individual's emotional and moral attachment

to the subject are difficult to delineate unless the photographer exposes himself/ herself. In the

example above, I provided context into my attachment to the specific image I captured –

however, in most instances, personal driving forces for "claiming" an image and its subject are

obscured behind the sheer proliferation of photographs and the multitude of visuals captured and

interests expressed by an individual. Unless labeled with a special meaning and brought forward

for further re-visualization by the photographer and/ or by others, the photograph can get lost in

the myriad of a personal collection and in the quietude of its personal impact on the

photographer.

Nevertheless, as in the case of the American photographer Vivian Maier, one might want

to keep the visual reflections of personal desires and interests and of moral and emotional maps

under wraps. An extremely private artist, Maier kept thousands of photographs – most of which

were portraits pertaining to street photography – undeveloped and unseen until her death in 2009

(*Finding…*). While she was recognized as a secretive personality, the fact that she hid her

stunning work from the eyes of the public reflects the highly personal character of the driving

forces behind her "predatory" photo capturing. The idea can be further supported by her furtive

hoarding habits – she preserved the massive amounts of her film rolls, newspapers and receipts

stacked away from the eyes of acquaintances. They became tangible structures of personal

intangible desires and of an interest in possessing what, in the fluidity of living and of time, was

escaping her grasp. While her associates suggested that a reason behind her extensive collection

of transparently humane photographs (Figures 4, 5,6,7) was her desire of social inclusion and

interaction, only Maier herself would be able to correctly gauge the personal drive pushing her to carefully press the shutter release button on specific subjects framed in specific ways.

One of photography's main paradoxes is this ability to play with the visible and the hidden. Ever since the first image-capturing device, the daguerreotype, was made available in 1839, the legitimacy and the "truth" of a photograph's captured reality have been constantly questioned. On the one hand, from behind the lens and from the photographer's point of view, there is personal mental and emotional work hidden behind the foundations of a photo, as underlined above. The choice of framing and subjects reflects some of the photographer's hidden self, a mélange of preferences, norms, desires and past experiences. On the other hand, taking into consideration the "reality" captured in a photo as it unfolds in front of the lens, there is much missing beyond the visible subjects and their environment. "The camera's rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses" (Sontag 23). The exact context of the photographer's capture is hidden to the knowledge of the ones looking at the photograph, prompting them to a natural response of curiosity and endowing the image with an unsolvable mystery. By looking at a photograph, one feigns knowledge of what happened in front of the lens – unless the one watching is the photographer himself. Sontag describes the complex magnetism of a selected sliver of reality by referring to it as "the surface" that invites the viewer to "intuit" what lies beyond it and what its circumstance is. "Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy" (Sontag 23). In the case of portraiture in particular, the face can only incite curiosity about the emotional construction, the character and the history of its subject.

> "With the eye as its chief organ, both performing and representing perception, the
>
> face gives 'intimation' by 'mirroring the soul'. […] Appearance would then

become the veiling and unveiling of the soul. […] A rhetoric of surface/depth and

penetrative seeing appeared at the beginning of portrait photography, and it

persisted through the long nineteenth century as a cardinal touchstone of the

medium. There's an inner essence, it manifests itself in facial "expression,"

something fleeting but capturable by the camera's powers of instantaneous

reproduction" (Trachtenberg 4-5).

Figure 5 – Blue:Irina *by Loli Lucaciu, 2017*

Figure 6 – Blue:Loli *by Irina Lucaciu, 2017*

The photos above were taken in March 2017 as my older sister was visiting me – I

suggested we created a visual memory of the visit in the form of the portraits above. As we met,

we were both under the pressure of work and the incertitude of a near future and the stress felt

almost tangible on our faces. As Irina took my portrait and I took hers, we decided to be present

in the moment and share that visual exchange/play as a token of a beautiful afternoon spent

together – we would keep the photos as recollections of that specific troubling period of our lives

that, however, we decided to go through together. The photos themselves, while they might not

mean much to viewers who do not know us because of lack of context and emotional

involvement, meant much to us. The profound feeling of familiarity involved in the photographic

process allowed for a transparent facial exteriorization that we could perceive upon changing our

previous roles of models/photographers into viewers. Later that evening, I decided to add a few

subtle post-editing touches to increase the expressivity of the shots. By focusing on the blue of

our eyes and shirts and by slightly fading all other tonalities, I brought forth one of the values of

the photo – our recognition of the fact that then and there we were feeling blue, our emotions explicitly contained in the chromatics of the photo.

The ability of a photograph to play with the visible and the obscured is strictly dependent on the photographer's and the subject's relationships with time. Time is of crucial importance to photography. The precision of the shutter decides the specific instant seized – capturing a moment is an instantaneous play with a fluid entity, hence the mystery and specificity of the picture. Walter Benjamin writes: "No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it" (Benjamin 510). What Benjamin calls "the tiny spark of contingency", famous photographer Henri-Cartier Bresson calls "the decisive moment" – this specific instant is able to reunite the three-dimensional values of time and endow the image with a magic that transports the viewer through his present reactive emotions, to past memories and to future hopes. As Benjamin suggests, time in photography can shape the already captured moment and function as a value-infuser in rapport to the viewer of the future, be it the subject, the photographer, or a stranger looking to understand the past. In the case of the latter, the photograph becomes symbolically a memento mori, an object reminding the viewer of death. Removing the photo from its contemporary context and detaching it from an attached viewer is going against protecting what Bazin called a "second spiritual death". With the passing of considerable time, the photo becomes a token of ephemerality and of societal change, a mark of historical value and a figurative recognition of personal mortality.

So how do the artist and his/her subject manipulate how the photo could be looked at and what meaning it is supposed to convey in the present and in the future? In the specific case of portrait photography, the intention placed in framing the body and the face and the environment in which the subjects are captured are both of crucial importance. While the surge of a myriad of interpretations of a photo is inevitable, and separating its aesthetic value and its semantic charge is not necessary, the present paper will delve into an analysis of two specific branches of photography –photojournalism and artistic photography—and the way the two employ the human figure to communicate diverse messages.

Chapter I – Photographic Portraiture in Photojournalism

Today's era, riddled with countless multimedia venues of expression, is dependent on visuals to tell stories. Photographic reporting goes beyond the written word to offer visual details that can impact the viewer in a way that words cannot. In "The Photographic Message," Roland Barthes argues for the importance of an initial separation of images and words that would allow for the understanding of each element by itself, before a consideration of their cooperation. "The structure of the photograph is not an isolated structure: it is in communication with at least one other structure, namely the text – title, caption or article – accompanying every press photograph. […] These two structures are co-operative, but since their units are heterogenous, necessarily remain separate from one another: here (in the text) the substance of the message is made up of words; there (in the photograph) of lines, surfaces, shades" (Barthes 192). Barthes further argues for a photo's two layers of meaning: its denotation, or "analogical plenitude" where meaning

comes from what is laid bare in the image, its content "as it is"; and connotation, "the imposition of second meaning on the photographic message proper" (Barthes 193). The connotation of the photo is to be produced by means of the specific choices photographers make in framing and portraying their subjects in specific ways, be it selection of angles, poses or post-editing cropping and additions of elements non-existent in the raw capture. The connotation is reliant on the photographer's set of technical choices and on the subject's own attitudes in rapport to self-portrayal in front of the camera, if the subject does notice the presence of the object. While looking at a journalistic portrait, there is quite a bit hiding behind what might be labeled as the "truth" of the capture. The elements of the photo, manipulated by the photographer or pertaining to the "reality" of the environment, are loaded with emotional clues intended to strike at the viewer's sense of empathy – this understanding goes beyond the rationality of interpretation and infuses the portrait with person-specific meanings. Through the multiplicity of layers of impact, interpretation and meaning, photojournalistic portraiture itself becomes an art and each individual photo an invitation to scrutiny, as if each capture was its own case study. This chapter includes a selection of a few of the most iconic photojournalistic portraits of all time and a discussion of their multi-layered significance. In my brief selection, I attempted to choose an assortment of images peppered across wide timelines and broad geographic locations, which showcase various technical choices and whose subjects come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. However, beyond all the close scrutiny, I am writing about important photos that speak of fascinating stories of humanity.

Whether a specific photo is used singularly, with a written news report or an explanatory caption, or as part of a photo essay walking the viewer through an event or a story, it is a modality of interpreting a sliver of reality as well as an encouragement to construct a narrative.

Photojournalism — reportage — shares the goals of traditional reporting in that it takes us on journeys beyond our physical constraints and previous knowledge, attempting to explain events and trends that we do not necessarily experience personally or of whose magnitude we are not aware. While it may represent a shard of over-simplified truth, a photo intended to inform can also be a manipulation of an instant of time or of a perspective, becoming more of a piece of fiction than a naked reality. In the words of Susan Sontag, photographs encourage a "reductive approach to reality that is considered realistic" (Sontag 21). One has to question the long-standing maxim "I'll believe it when I see it" and wonder what it is that they actually see within the limited visor of a tightly framed photo. "Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from not accepting the world as it looks. All possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no. Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph. Of course, photographs fill in blanks in our mental pictures of the present and the past" (Sontag 23).

There are two areas within the specific branch of "portrait photojournalism" to which I would like to call attention when discussing a photograph's meaning: sensationalistic journalism, which in the past was called "yellow journalism", and user-generated content (UGC). Sensationalistic photojournalism, akin to the notion of "paparazzi"-generated images taken sneakily or at "the right moment", feeds the public's curiosity and its desire for the shock factor. Most often met in today's plethora of tabloids, this type of photojournalism tends to often skew the truth and deliver subjective inferences or conclusions, frequently proven false and commonly targeting the character of the subject photographed. While manipulation of a photo's meaning is more prevalent in sensationalistic portrayals and is oftentimes achieved through aggressive post-editing methods, there are a few more "discrete" or "invisible" photographic techniques that are

vastly employed to influence any image produced and which will be underlined and discussed later in this paper as I examine specific shots. Referred to above as the "connotation" of the photo (Barthes 193), this set of "techniques of persuasion" includes exploitation of the camera angle, choice of color selection, light manipulation, shutter speed, lens selection, cropping and timing (Time-Life 94). It is important to note that the most "dangerous" photos and specifically portraits, are those that have a strong connotation linked to socio-cultural and economic beliefs and stereotypes and which are disguised under the veil of denotation, or what is believed to be "the reality, the way it is." An amateur consumer of photojournalistic material would not necessarily be aware of these specific choices when looking at a photo. "Where people and events are concerned, there is no such thing as an objective photograph. […] Though most are 'grab' shots, taken on the run as the event unfolded, they were grabbed in a particular way by men who chose to run in a certain direction, whose reflexes were grooved to certain responses, who had a particular lens or a particular kind of camera. All of these variables, whether chosen consciously or not, were still chosen. And choice inevitably colors" (Time-Life 96).

Choice is an important concept also present when scrutinizing user-generated content. As part of CNN's iReport team, I had to select and publicize images taken by amateur photographers who captured, among others, newsworthy moments that touched people. Frequently armed solely with their smartphones equipped with technologically advanced cameras, these happenstance witnesses make the choice of immortalizing what they see and posting it on their social media accounts – by means of this process, many news outlets are able to gather visuals without having photojournalists on the ground. Through cropping, various filters provided by smartphone applications and ease of manipulation of perspective – the phone's size makes it easy to place it strategically – these social media users can make their

material more appealing to news outlets looking for it. In one instance, a user posted a photo of a famous artist at a bar, conspicuously surrounded by women, none of whom was his wife – by choosing to contrast the tones and change the lighting of the photo after it was taken, the snapper darkened the man's hair and modified his overall look to the point where there was not much of a doubt concerning the identity of the artist. However, upon further research and conversation, our team found out about the editing of the photo and the location of the subject at that specific hour, somewhere hundreds of miles away. The man photographed in the bar turned out to be a look-a-like and thus the photo itself lost all its initial meaning. Both journalists and consumers of news should be aware of the misleading potential of such images and should remain skeptical when deriving conclusions from them.

Images pertaining to portrait photojournalism inform social norms and perceptions, develop new perspectives and spark emotion. In order for a journalistic story to gain an invested audience, it would need to effectively build on seven main values: impact (or how much the story matters to the public), timeliness, geographic proximity, prominence (whether it involves important individuals), novelty (how unusual it is), conflict (clashes that create dramatic situations) and emotional impact (Harrower 19). Whether the journalistic story comes as a written piece or as a photo or as a combination of the two, the seven pillars above still hold true. In the case of portrait photography alone, most of these features are derived from the expressivity found in the subjects' faces and bodies and the frequently tale-telling environments and situations in which these subjects find themselves. However, unlike written pieces, these story images have a more instantaneous effect on the viewer, rely less on the aspect of prominence and tend to have a stronger, oftentimes more benefic, relationship with time. As John Berger remarked, "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak"

(Berger 7). In regards to the aspect of prominence, a significant chunk of photojournalistic portraits place the "common folk" at the forefront of their story – this choice tends to attract the public at large, who identifies with individuals lacking public recognition. When it comes to time, iconic photojournalistic portraits tend to become yet more appreciated with the passing of time because they gain historical and cultural value, as well as an exotic, anachronistic character. However, when observing a photojournalistic portrait of the past, it is important to remember the concept of labeling that creeps into our scrutiny when placing the subject in a social, economic and cultural framework. It is also essential to notice the context by which the photo was published as well as a possible accompanying article and caption – who is the one telling the subject's story and what visual information could the photographer have emphasized at the cost of another? "We have spoken of the photograph principally as an interactive access point to the culturally deprived. In the same social situations, however, the photograph is no less a possible weapon of a dominant capitalism, inasmuch as it can brand its subject with pastness, inasmuch as the weak intentionality of the photograph can itself represent the weak social impetus of its subject, and inasmuch as photography genericizes its subject and thus categorizes it within a power hierarchy" (Scott 293).

The photo fittingly named Migrant Mother was taken by Dorothea Lange in a pea pickers' camp in Nipomo, California, in 1936. Lange was a photographer on assignment for the Resettlement Association (RA) that would transition to become the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Lange recounted that the photograph was one of six that she took in the camp and that her stop at that specific camp was a happenstance guided by her instinct. The photo was featured in the San Francisco News in the context of a reportage structured as a cry for help for famished pea pickers, who did subsequently receive relief. While Lange did not record

the name of the woman, her field notes included socioeconomic remarks such as "destitute pea

pickers" and "mother of seven children" (Hariman 53-54).

The photo was taken at a bleak time in American history. In 1936, the United States was

in the middle of what was called "The Great Depression," a period of economic downturn fueled

by the 1929 stock market crash. Unequaled unemployment rates and low industrial production

placed countless people in precarious living conditions – the situation would not fully improve

until 1939, when the beginning of World War II stimulated a high manufacturing demand and

created jobs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the country's president between 1932 and 1945,

ameliorated the situation by means of his New Deal program – however, unemployment rates

were still high enough to create a destitute population whose silent emblem became the "migrant

mother." Franklin Delano Roosevelt became famous for his phrase – "The only thing we have to

fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror" (Hariman 53) – the mother in the

photo above became a symbol of the fear itself, while also paradoxically becoming the emblem

of combatting it.

The composition of the photo is exquisite – first, the frontal shot matching the mother's

eyesight suggests a lowering of the camera, or of Lange herself, to the level of the subject. This

technical choice infuses the photo with a touch of empathy – the viewer is for a moment in the

gutter, with the mother. The symmetry of the photo, the mother placed centrally and flanked by

her two children, alludes to her responsibilities as the axis of strength and balance for her family.

Both children lean their heads on her shoulders: the extra weight of their attachment and

neediness weigh her further down. She is the only one captured facing forward and looking in

the distance, a sign of her unerring resilience in the face of trouble. She disregards the camera, as

if external factors cannot reach her within the realm of her inner despair. The children face away

from the camera as if shielding from the abuse of the poverty and of the troubles staining their daily lives. The mother's hand, anxiously placed at her chin, can be interpreted as a symbolic external crutch in her struggle to look forward and maintain her strength. The photo, more so, encourages important questions – why is the woman the representation of struggle and where is the masculine presence? How was the concept of the family affected during such difficult socio-economic times? Hariman goes as far as to suggest that the photo itself is a call for a male intervention. "The photograph follows the conventional lines of gender by associating paralyzing fear with feminine passivity and keeping maternal concern separate from economic resources. The mother gathers her children to her, protecting them with her body, yet she is unable to provide for their needs. She cannot act, but she (and her children) provides the most important call for action. More to the point, the question posed by the photo is, who will be the father?" (Hariman 64). Thus, the portrait introduces the idea of the concept of motherhood and its meanings. The image can be linked to literary portrayals of motherhood during the Depression era. In John Steinbeck's book *Grapes of Wrath* (1939), the character of Ma Joad is the "citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken." In the book, the mother shows strength of character and resilience superior to the father's; Steinbeck paints her physical portrayal by linking it closely to her psychological characteristics – her hazel eyes were reflecting the pain of poverty and constant socio-economic struggle. In a similar yet reversed way, Lange links the striking physical suffering of her subject to her living situation, all by exposing the depth of a despondent female gaze.

The profound value of the photograph is multilateral. Its emotional impact is present, as the apprehensive gaze of the mother seems to encompass the struggles of too many of the country's working class members. It is a brilliant photojournalistic piece in that it is a socio-

cultural mirror of a mental clash in American history – the hope of a people for an improved future and a deep despondence in regards to their present. "Photography has always been fascinated by social heights and lower depths. Documentarists prefer the latter. For more than a century, photographers have been hovering about the oppressed, in attendance at scenes of violence – with a spectacularly good conscience. Social misery has inspired the comfortably-off with the urge to take pictures, the gentlest of predations, in order to document a hidden reality, that is, a reality hidden from them" (Sontag 55). The immediacy of its publishing did serve the purpose of bringing awareness and relief, as donations are said to have poured in to help the destitute pea pickers. As the immediacy factor wore off, time served to infuse the photo with historical value, to make the Great Depression a more humane struggle rather than simply a remote event one reads about in a history book. Finally, the "migrant mother" transcended time to serve as a universal portrait of socio-economic deprivation.

The portrait in photojournalism often triggers emotional responses in the viewer. As human beings, we are naturally inclined to possess a certain level of empathy toward others due to experience and similarities. The face is recognized as a main illustrator of one's inner emotional state, while it also possesses enough subtlety to incite curiosity if its expressivity is not accompanied by words or gestures. "[The face] is the unique visible identifier, it shows our gender, age, something of our health and how tired we are, and often our underlying mood. It is the principal site for visible expression of emotion, so much so that facial expressions may often be thought of as being part of the emotion itself" (Cole 188). The detecting of such visible marks of emotion places the viewer in a paradoxical position of concurrent identification and detachment. One identifies with human feeling through the nature of being human, yet one is detached from the specific sentiment expressed by the one photographed in light of the lack of

identical contexts for the subject of the photo and the onlooker. In addition, seeing photos of people in distress or in unusual situations can trigger a shock response that might be accompanied by indignation. However, the repeated exposure to shock-inducing visual clues can anaesthetize reality, gradually toughening up the viewer against the real pain of existence – photojournalistic portrait photography and photography in general has a reductive character. "The vast photographic catalogue of misery and injustice throughout the world has given everyone a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem more ordinary – making it appear familiar, remote, inevitable. […] In the last decades, 'concerned' photography has done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it" (Sontag 21).

As in the case of "Migrant Mother", the portrait of the young "Afghan Girl" below prompted a wide public interest in helping the portrayed girl, Gula, and her family and other Afgan children in her situation and did not "deaden conscience", at least for a couple of decades. *National Geographic* set up a nonprofit organization, The Afghan Children's Fund, to provide educational opportunities for Afghan children; furthermore, the magazine and McCurry, the photographer himself, brought financial relief to Gula and her family in the years after her second portrait was shot. "For any image to become iconic, it needs to speak directly to the viewer, and to offer a connection both individual and universal. In this regard, the Afghan Girl was always more than just a photograph of a young schoolgirl. It was about the struggle of a nation at war, and the life of its people" (McCurry 79).

Figure 7 (left) – Afghan Girl. *Sharbat Gula, at Nasir Bagh refugee camp, 1984*
Figure 8 (right) – Sharbat Gula, with her daughter, 2002 – both photos by Steve McCurry (Magnum Photos)

In 1984, famous photographer Steve McCurry was sent to explore and photograph the refugee settlements along the Afghan-Pakistan border. From 1979 to 1989, Soviet forces and Afghan government forces – at that time, both entities were under communist rule – fought against Afghan anti-government insurgent groups called "the Mujahideen". The conflict forced the displacement of large numbers of people to refugee camps, one of which was Nasir Bagh refugee camp in Peshawar, Pakistan, where McCurry shot the iconic photo on the left. The portrait would become the cover of *National Geographic* magazine and one of the most recognized images of all times, referred to as the "modern Mona Lisa" (McCurry 71-76).

McCurry recounts that he was walking through the refugee camp when an amalgam of

children's voices in one of the tents attracted him inside – in the makeshift classroom, he noticed

the piercing gaze of Sharbat Gula and decided to photograph her.

> "She had an intense, haunted look, a really penetrating gaze –
>
> and yet she was only about twelve years old. […]
>
> There must have been about fifteen girls there. They were all very
>
> young and they were doing what school children do all over the world
>
> – running around, making noise and stirring up a lot of dust.
>
> But in that brief moment when I photographed Gula I didn't hear
>
> the noise or see the other kids. It was very powerful. […] I guess
>
> she was as curious about me as I was about her, because she had never
>
> been photographed and had probably never seen a camera.
>
> After a few moments she got up and walked away, but for an instant
>
> everything was right – the light, the background, the expression
>
> in her eyes" (McCurry 75).

The photo's value goes much beyond its striking visual character. It is shot in McCurry's

traditional portraiture style, up-close and frontal in regards to the subject. He explains this

technical choice in relation to the connection between photographed and photographer –

McCurry thinks that the eyes are a person's main source of expressivity and that by holding a

gaze with his subjects, he will serve as a momentary replacement for the viewers who will

consequently look at his work and will become the indirect recipients of the gaze. His technical

mastery extends beyond the framing of his subjects – he prefers working in low light with

shadows and chooses to underexpose his shots in order to obtain richer colors and a darker mood (McCurry 75).

The photo's worldwide appeal is partly condensed in the girl's mysterious expression. Looking at her large green eyes and serious expression, one can only guess her thoughts as she stared into McCurry's lens. What is certain is that her expression transcends the limits of her twelve years of life and that war and socio-economic struggles pushed her to develop a maturity beyond her years. In her ripped clothes and shy, wary gaze, one can see a reflection of her country's impasse – by looking at her photograph, the world could see a little bit of what every Afghan in the war zones felt. The photo above and to the right, taken by McCurry in 2002 – eighteen years after the iconic portrait to the left was shot – provides a further reinforcement of the plight of Sharbat Gula and in connection, of the Afghan refugee population. The woman, then in her early thirties, has physically aged to the point where she is almost unrecognizable. The photo, reminiscent of Lange's "Migrant Mother", displays a similar plight. Now also responsible for tending to the lives of her children, Gula continues to exercise her fortitude in the face of poverty, social constraints and continued political warfare throughout her homelands.

The photo of Vincent T. Paladino and Kyung Soo Lee, taken in 1953, shows an American Navy officer walking on a public street with his recently adopted child, a Korean War refugee (Kozol 167). The United States and the United Nations got involved in the Korean War (1950-1953) to aid South Korea's military forces that were fighting against the North Korean army backed up by the Soviet Union and China. The Korean War was further symbolic of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, a period of military and political tensions between the Western bloc (headed by the U.S) and the eastern bloc (lead by the Soviet Union). In a historical phase defined by conflict and division, the image above represents a reconciliation

of differences, a harmonious union between cultures, forged despite political and military anxieties; more so, it also questions the conventions of American post-war culture, a milieu that during the period was conflated by patriotic values.

It is important to note a few details in the photo that add to the image's symbolic value. First, the little boy is wearing a cowboy costume, emblem of the Western ideal of American values – his new father is dressed in the country's military garb, yet again a reinforcement of Americanism. The boy's clothing is representative of the idea of Americanization, of accepting this new culture as his own, of desiring to become part of an abstract entity previously unknown to him. The boy is joyously looking forward as if hopeful about his new prospects; he is hanging tightly to his father's arm for support, a gesture that implies the heavy reliance of the child on his new benefactor. The father's head is slightly turned toward the child and one can sense the feeling of protectiveness emanating from this subtle body language clue – the image invites reflection on the notion of masculinity and paternity. The photo is shot from a lower angle at the side of its subjects – the lowering of the lens shooting upwards has long been used to encourage a feeling of grandiosity attached to the people snapped and the lateral angle suggests voyeurism, a happenstance run into an extraordinary image. Susan Sontag writes: "The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the *flâneur* [saunterer; stroller] finds the world 'picturesque'" (Sontag 55).

Unlike the photo of the struggling migrant mother, this image is one of achieved hope – not even war can fully divide people who share a common humanity. The initial social conflicts presented in the photo, especially in its historical context, as well as the transparent joy on the

boy's face, were important factors for the primary impact of the photo on its viewers. Less discerned details, but crucial for the conception of the final image are also to be noted: the high shutter speed created the effect of the freezing of the action, which encouraged yet again reflection at the deeper meanings hidden behind the physicality of an observed instant in time. In addition, the manipulation of the light, although subtle, has an important weight in the composition of the image as a whole. The light reflecting from the back windows of a car in the background creates an aura around the head of the officer, which paired up with the low angle of the shot and the centrality of the man's body add an extra effect of grandiosity. Kozol writes about *Life*, the magazine that published the photo soon after it was taken: "Despite the powerful domestic ideologies encoded in *Life*'s narrative, its depictions of social change undermined the universality of one type of domesticity, and its association with national identity. Photographs enabled middle-class readers to perceive flaws in the social order as well as in domestic ideologies" (Kozol 176). While most photojournalistic portraiture employed the "real" as conducive to detecting flaws and inciting social change, some photos challenged exactly the concept of the "real" to question norms and people's perspectives.

Back in time and across the ocean, the Spain of 1933 was at the brink of a civil war that would shake the country to its foundations between 1936 and 1939. The image "Seville, Spain, 1933", shot by French photographer Henri-Cartier Bresson with his Leica camera represents almost a premonition of the violence to come. Bresson, who first started his artistic work as a painter, was an admirer of the Surrealist movement founded in 1924, which brought to the forefront ideas linked to the subconscious – and much of his later photography work expresses this interest, including the photo above. The multilayered image, uniquely valuable for its

abstract notes and ingenuity, showcases a group of children playing in the rubble. A few of them

are actively acknowledging the photographer, while others are undisturbed in their play.

The photograph is a documentary shot that was not intended for collective action or even

publication in a newspaper – shaped by Bresson's curious spirit and instinctive creativity, the

photo is a simple illustration of a moment in the life of children in Seville of that era. The shot

however, is exceptional not as much for its historical or social background story, as for its

exquisite composition. Bresson, who liked to play with perspectives and depth of field, became a

master at capturing images at the right moment, so as to maximize his use of space and convey

new angles of meaning. "His sophisticated eye instantly recognized objects in the world as

shapes and volumes on a rectangular negative, and he had a remarkable ability to anticipate the

instant at which the descriptive and formal elements of a scene would coalesce to create an

indelible image – 'the decisive moment', as it became known" (Hostetler 70). The photo above

surprises its young subjects in an environment that does not align with their age, in a space of

destruction that was most likely caused by the actions of adults. The space in the picture is

abstract – the right exposure and coloration creates areas of similarity so that the visual hole at

the top of the picture that delineates the sky becomes almost part of the foreground stuccoed wall

piece in the right corner. The outline of the destroyed forefront wall represents a symbolic

window into another dimension, as children in the background seem detached from the action

happening in front of the camera. The wall ridge separating the two dimensions gains yet more

interpretative value as the child to the right steps over it to approach the camera – the high

shutter speed freezes the moment and the child looks as if he steps out of his own reality to join

the reality of the photograph. "The photograph seems at first glance to be a collage of cut-out

elements rather than a photograph made with a single exposure. The white paint on the stuccoed

wall even blends with the photograph's white borders, suggesting that the four boys closest to the

camera have literally broken out of their world by tearing a hole in the print itself" (Hambourg

364).

   The image as a whole invites the question of whether the reality we see in front of us, or

in front of our lens, is truly what appears to be at first glance. By adopting a new perspective, by

looking at the world around us in a new way, our perception of it could change dramatically.

Bresson, who seemed to be well aware of the power of visual perception, chose his specific way

to look at the world around him. Lincoln Kirstein, an important contributor to the modern art

scene of the twentieth century, found value in Bresson's unique twist on photojournalism: "The

decisive part of Cartier-Bresson's particular process takes place not in the mechanism in his hand

but in the vision in his head; in that right eye which (he says) looks out onto the exterior world,

and that left eye which looks inside to his personal world. The vision fuses what he sees, where

and when, and how he feels about it" (Hostetler 71).

   Henri-Cartier Bresson's image, a photojournalistic portraiture photograph that makes use

of surrealist elements and artistic touches, serves as an effective transition between this chapter,

focused on photos intended to tell stories and to show "reality as it is" and the following chapter,

that delves into the topic of portraits in artistic photography and that analyzes images whose

elements and subjects are deliberately manipulated to achieve certain esthetics. It is important to

notice the oftentimes fine line between these two categories of portrait photography – the

purpose of the first category is mainly to inform and the goal of the latter mostly to inspire, but

information and inspiration are conjoined entities that do not invite exclusion to co-exist. As time

flows and photographs grasp tightly to moments, the photographer takes pictures of the multi-

lateral and colorful kaleidoscope that is life. Whether (s)he and the viewers identify objective

shapes and colors or choose to fantasize about the pattern, its fluidity and the possibility of its instant change, the decision will not modify the existence of the kaleidoscope itself.

Chapter II – Artistic Portrait Photography in the Context of Art and Commerce

In the attempt to define artistic portraiture, I would like to raise attention to the fact that portrait photography's diverse categorizations are extremely fluid. Photojournalistic portraits, as seen above, can also be aesthetic and can also sell ideas and goods, just as artistic shots. While the photographer might capture his/her subjects with certain objectives in mind, the results are difficult to clearly entrap into classifications. "Whatever the moral claims made on behalf of photography, its main effect is to convert the world into a department store or museum-without-walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted into an item for aesthetic appreciation. […] Bringing the exotic near, rendering the familiar and homely exotic, photographs make the entire world available as an object of appraisal" (Sontag 110).

For the sake of delineating concepts, I will present a few theoretical explanations for the specific types of photography above – a few definitions that have been proposed in different publications. To begin, artistic photography or art photography has been referred to in relation to the underlying idea "that the producer of a given picture has aimed at something more than a merely realistic rendering of the subject, and has attempted to convey a personal impression" (Jones, Bernard). Placed in opposition to representational photography, considered objective and under whose umbrella falls photojournalism, artistic photography is born out of the photographer's artistic vision and it acknowledges its subjectivity in ways photojournalistic portraiture does not. This type of photography is described as being in close relation to the

photographer's emotions -- "[Art photography is] photography that is done as a fine art – that is, done to express the artist's perceptions and emotions and to share them with others" (McDarrah).

Artistic portrait photography is multilateral in that it can serve purely aesthetic purposes as fine art, underlining the beauty of the human face and shape, while it can also be peppered with commercial intentions through advertising, by means of which the subjects captured are beautified by sellable products or captured in a way that would promote the buying of goods and services. One area that I will be analyzing that captures both these values – aestheticism and commercialism – is fashion photography. Fashion photography intends to sell certain aesthetics or standards of beauty by means of well-planned shots valorizing the human body, which is frequently placed in the context of carefully chosen locations, pre-planned looks and scrutinized technical picks. The finished image, oftentimes edited post-shooting, is intended to be striking and awe-inspiring by means of its glamour or aesthetic value. How do viewers tend to respond to this "glamourification"? Patrick Kinmonth, a multilateral contemporary artist, pinpoints the importance of the concept of stardom, and the surrealism of it in the context of artistic, staged fashion portraiture: "Some seek in star beauty a refuge or a hiding place. For them the virtual reality of a beautiful face in a magazine becomes a virtual necessity. They see stars as a luxurious, otherworldly relief from the mundane. Inhabiting a parallel universe free of the snags and sags that dog ordinary lives, they are a license to dream. Others avert their eyes, considering the contemplation of stars to be beneath them. Yet others find the very existence of stars objectionable, deeming them responsible for casting their own supposedly un-astral endowments into unflattering relief against a world obsessed by the beautiful, the thin, the toned and the talented" (Testino, "Seeing Stars"). Fashion portraiture reaches into the sensitivities of its viewers – its effects hold weight with the emotional and conceptual views of the ones buying

into it. Before delving into specific examples and scrutinizing the qualities of various artistic shots to derive meaning, I would like to look closely at the two concepts mentioned above, aestheticism and commercialism, in the context of the human face and body.

Aestheticism, an art and intellectual movement that originated during the late 19th century, focuses on beauty as the main source of value. However, what would be some of the characteristics of that elusive term, "beauty"? At a cultural level, beauty standards are highly influenced by a society and a specific timeframe with its politico-economic situations. At an individual level, it is known that beauty depends largely on the one interacting with it and his/her life experiences that shaped certain aesthetic penchants. However, how do photographers and the photographed manipulate what is considered beautiful in their own favor? What are some visual characteristics that might be more appreciated than others in the human body, and why so?

Research has found that there are a number of physiological factors at play when it comes to judgments of facial attractiveness. What might come as surprising, researchers have found that there is a high agreement on facial beauty characteristics across a variety of cultures – across the globe, there are certain features that are more appreciated than others and it can be largely due to biological configurations, rather than learning of cultural norms. It appears that people's preferences for attractive faces can be traced all the way to infancy – in a series of studies, babies as young as two months of age displayed adult-like preferences when it comes to facial attractiveness features and they also showed adult-like preferences for Caucasian male faces, Black female faces and faces of infants. According to further studies, a "beautiful" body is more likely to have three main features. First, the more symmetric it is, the more aesthetic value it possesses – "bodily symmetry is thought to be an indicator of developmental stability". Secondly, it is believed that averageness is ideal: "An influential theory of facial attractiveness is

that average facial configurations are optimally attractive. […] Average composite faces tend to have smooth skin and be symmetric; these factors, rather than averageness per se, may lead to the high attractiveness attributed to average faces." Thirdly, certain exaggerations in facial gender traits might be considered attractive. In the case of women, features that will garner more admiration include small lower faces, full lips, high eyebrows and a relatively flat mid-face – they are especially attractive to men because they indicate a woman's youth and reproductive health. In the case of men, "masculine" features, such as a large jaw and a prominent brow ridge tend to be more appreciated because they exude dominance (Penton-Voak, 220-225). These Darwinian influences are crucial for the interpretation of a portrait – more instinctual in nature, they point to the viewer's preferences and prove crucial in the photographers' selection of their models, especially in the fashion and arts industries. What is deemed "beautiful" can be powerful in the artistic realm, especially if paired with expressivity of features that can send visible as well as unconscious messages.

Beyond certain biological tendencies that might influence one's preferences when it comes to beauty, it is important to also consider the psychological factors that go into what is deemed "beautiful", for the photographer as well as for the viewer. I will begin with the artist – from personal experience and numerous anecdotes from fellow photographers, I could propose the idea that the artist does not necessarily seek a model's beauty as much as (s)he seeks expressivity. The photographer is interested in the expressive aesthetics of his vision rather than in the limited aesthetics of the subject: if the subject is not employed expressively to reflect the artistic thought, the photograph loses value in the eyes of the artist. Jonathan Friday, who studied extensively the aesthetics of photography, believed that the artist's vision and his/her ability to transfer expressive properties unto the subject was essential for the way the viewer perceived the

resulting shot. "For Friday, the role of the photographic artist is to single out their subject with a demonstrative representational thought embodied in the properties of the image that attribute to the subject certain global properties. In this way, the world is represented as under a certain expressive aspect. In return the viewer 'arrive[s] at an aesthetic interest in the representational properties of a photograph through an interest in the expressive qualities attached to them'" (Ground 450). The expressivity of a portrait is crucial in that it borders the realm of emotions. Expression requires a certain level of disclosure and allows the viewer to breach the closed shell of an aesthetic, stylized exterior. "[The face] is the principal site for the visible expression of emotion, so much so that facial expressions may often be thought of as being part of the emotion itself" (Cole 194). Jonathan Cole further proposes the idea of the self as attached to its image – his studies have found a profound link between the conception of the self and the importance of the visibility of the face: blind patients, for example, have a difficult time delineating their own image of the self as well as that of others, and find it difficult to detect emotional clues without visible facial clues. "The body is more than an instrument or a means, it is our expression in the world" (Cole 217). Therefore, facial expressivity and the possibility of its detection by viewers is crucial in interpreting photographs and the success of a fashion shot stands as much in its aesthetic qualities as in its expressive ones.

How can a photographer render visible the invisible? How can the artist's passion for a certain target population translate into expressive, story-telling shots that reach beyond the beauty of their subjects? Can the photographic eye develop a certain expertise? The renowned German photographer Peter Lindbergh appears to be the embodiment of a visual expert in capturing women and their female essences. One of the motivators for his work is to have models recognize themselves in their own portraits – for women to look at his captures and be

able to see themselves unmasked. "For me the best compliment that can ever be paid my photographs is when models say 'we recognize ourselves'" (Lindbergh 5). It is interesting to notice the agency that the male photographer receives in portraying his female models – in a generalized, rather paradoxical way, his authority is marked by the fact that the name of the photographer is always noted in online and print publications, while the model's rarely is. While the woman can assert her identity in front of the camera, she oftentimes does so under the perceived gaze of the photographer and his camera – if the photographer is male, the women's awareness of his presence can skew her expressivity in response to his masculinity. In portraiture work, oftentimes the male photographer's gaze serves as a vehicle of extraction of the female model's sexuality – involuntary or not, the model endows the photo with the "female essence" mentioned above, and the male photographer is the initial recipient of it.

Figure 9 – Loli Lucaciu by Alexander Sikwitit, 2017

The image above proves to be an example of the photographer-model dynamic I touched upon. I was aware of Alexander's gaze and yet the comfort of knowing him allowed me to overtly express my momentary feelings of tired submission to the process of art-making and to the tumult of the day. I was profoundly aware of my body and the possible ways in which it was seen through the lens. Through a verbal collaboration between Alexander and I, we decided to express something visually, without a need for words. In a non-explicit way, I underlined my femininity and momentary vulnerability by exposing my neck and jawline; in closing my eyes, I shunned away from allowing the photographer to understand my exact feelings and thus I only offered him a fraction of who I was in that moment. In this instance, the beauty of portrait photography laid in the fact that I was fully expressing myself, while in the same time offering the camera and the photographer only a part of that expression. Alexander's eyes and his camera lens were fully open and yet, because my eyes were closed, they could not fully read my inner emotional map. By offering a sincere "less," I encouraged the viewer's curiosity and interpretation, and in some way, I rebelled against the male gaze and its shaping of how I am to be perceived. The dark background, moody lighting and precise framing could only point in the direction of my inner turmoil. This photograph, taken as a single visual story, would certainly fit in the "mystery" category.

Figure 10 – Star without a script, *Jennifer Lawrence by Peter Lindbergh, 2016 (Vanity Fair)*

Figure 11 – Kate Moss by Peter Lindbergh, Le Toquet, 2016 (Vogue Italia)

The concept of story-telling is essential in portrait photography: while in photojournalism the stories are based on real accounts, in fashion photography the narrative would most likely be fictional, or at least beautified or poeticized to some level. Story-telling is most obvious in Lindbergh's portraiture work, as many of his photos have a feeling of instantaneous shots taken out of a film narrative. Technically, he does not shy away from unfocused subjects, granulated consistencies, and extreme cropping and zooming. His filmic approach and embracing of his subjects' natural flow have rendered him the target of advertising companies and documentary filmmakers. The relationship between flow and photographic stoppage is a sensitive one, and Lindbergh seems to have found the magic ingredient that allows him to show flow in this stoppage. His photos might be static, but they all pinpoint to a backstory, be it in the external environment and the past of the character played by the model, or in the history of the model herself, visible through emotional outpours marked by modified facial features. Expressivity is key in Lindbergh's work, and unlike other fashion photographers, he elicits sincere emotion from his models, rendering a "realness" to the portrait that resonates with viewers' sensitivity to emotional manifestations.

There are certain characteristics that make Lindbergh's work especially powerful in the realm of fashion photography. His way of offering visual stories is particular: most of his photos are in black and white, they capture androgynous women and they do not look to glamourize womanhood, but rather to show the beauty of its natural power and grace. He does not over-use post-editing techniques, preferring to keep aesthetic imperfections as signs of natural beauty. This artistic choice brings to mind the Japanese art of Kintsugi, in which broken pottery is glued back together with gold – the mends and seams are symbols of beauty and focus. Women, as imperfect humans, are oftentimes portrayed in Lindbergh's shots as powerful by means of their

life experience etched on their features and bodies. In addition, Lindbergh has a special penchant for playing with his environment to add suggestivity and mystery to the shots: as seen in the photos above, he constructs settings that add to the persona of the ones he photographs. "In most of Lindbergh's photographs we are offered more than just a garment and a woman. The models are sited before an intriguing backdrop and their relationship to the situations in which they have been located, or dislocated, is central to the reading of the image" (Lindbergh 6). The idea of "reading" an image is crucial for fashion portraiture and for Lindberg's work in particular – the lack of inference, curiosity or interpretation of a portrait is problematic, as it suggests a lack of emotional involvement with what is being shown. Fashion portraiture does not need to be void of emotions —springing from the photographer, the photographed and the viewer alike—merely because it treats of physical beauty. The divide between physicality and interiority does not need to be a break and Lindbergh is well aware of it. "It is frequently asserted that the best fashion photographs are photographs of people first and fashions second, though how many warrant this claim is open to debate. Among Peter Lindbergh's images, those which outlast their nominal function do possess qualities – concerning the emotional and psychological as much as the physical characteristics of the model – that are probably extrinsic to the basic requirement to illustrate styles" (Lindbergh 5). Lindbergh's models exude power and appear comfortable with exteriorizing feelings – this comfort with their sensitivity puts them in a position of charge, of equal footing with the photographer who is not merely a puppeteer. The models agree to at least temporarily share one of their most sincere human characteristics: their unabated presence. The artist underlines the importance of developing trust with the women he captures – this silent agreement of collaboration is visible in the models' gazes straight into the camera, as if trying not only to reach the photographer, but also the viewers and the world beyond. The rapport

among these three entities thus becomes magical, as if the models are trying to send a quiet message to the masses, employing their beauty as a vehicle for emotional transmission.

In fashion portraiture at large as in Lindbergh's work in particular, the relationship between creativity and self-expression is essential – how is the photographer expressing his artistic ideas in an aesthetic way that allows the model to express ingenuity and emotion? How can the photographer himself employ the camera and the humanity of his model to illustrate his own visions? The model and the artist have to negotiate their own personal past and experiences to make their artistic collaboration rich in meaning and sincerity. Lindbergh's art is in itself highly autobiographical and metaphorical, deriving its meaning and shaping its form from his childhood experiences in the industrial areas of Germany. Lindbergh, a believer in expressivity void of intentional "adjusting" writes: "Creativity is the basis of self-expression. […] Creation is the birth of something and something cannot come from nothing. If someone creates something […], the creativity comes from an idea, from a feeling, from emotion; or from a combination of ideas, feelings and emotions that are somehow "reborn" from all our experiences and perspectives" (Lindbergh 9). Beyond what fashion portraiture means to its artistic visionaries and the models involved, the type of creativity and self-expression that come with it further invite the viewers to create their own visions and dreamlands of the world around them; to employ their own feelings to respond to the ones shown in front of them; and to create new artistic expressions of feelings in the blank spaces of their psychological environments.

In the case of the viewer of a photograph, aesthetics are closely linked to visual perception. Jonathan Friday suggests that there are two types of "expressive perception" that might affect our interpretation of an image and indirectly, our perception of what is aesthetic. One of them relates to the "projection of the perceiver's psychological state unto the objects of

their visual experience" (Friday 358). Our mood, emotional state and recent experiences taint or

"color" the world around us: "[…] you can only see what you are ready to see – what mirrors

your mind at that particular time" (Sontag 197). The second factor that influences our visual

perception is related to our interpretation of specific features of objects or of subjects in a photo

and our attributing a specific meaning to these visual details (Friday 359). For example, a portrait

of a middle-aged lady dressed in a refined long dress and pearls and photographed in the context

of the background of a ballroom might trap our attention to details suggesting opulence and high-

class detachment – our expressive perception will not go as far as to infer that she might have

recently suffered heavy personal misfortunes because no visual clue in the image explicitly

suggests it. Oftentimes, in artistic photography or fashion photography, the emotional context of

the subject's history is disregarded in favor of the subject playing a pre-established role in which

he/she and the photographer manipulate visual clues to provoke the "expressive perception" of

the viewer.

Beyond the (often complex) aesthetic character of an artistic photographic portrait, one

has to also be aware of the multilateral insertion of commercial value in such shots. In the

specific case of advertising, commercialism and aestheticism go hand in hand – through aesthetic

manipulation, the viewer is sent capitalistic messages encouraging consumption of goods and

services. The messages are intended to play at the viewer's subconscious level: "They [the

messages] stimulate the imagination by way of either memory or expectation. The publicity

image belongs to the moment. Yet they [the publicity images] never speak of the present"

(Berger 130). This photographic manipulation of the viewers' perception of value in time plays

with one's personal set of standards and desires: by inciting melancholy for the past or

excitement for a brighter future, the glamorous shots of aesthetically pleasing individuals and

their environments lure the onlookers toward the pre-fabricated life of the photograph that is (supposedly) made possible through the use of the object advertised. John Berger underlines the similarity of commercial photography with painting and points to a few specific details worth considering when deriving meaning from these portraits. Some of these features include: "the gestures of models", "the romantic use of nature to create a place where innocence can be refound", "the poses taken up to denote stereotypes of women: serene mother (madonna)", "perfect hostess (spectator-owner's wife)", "sex object (Venus, nymph surprised), "the special sexual emphasis given to women's legs", "the materials used to indicate luxury: engraved metal, furs, polished leather, etc.", "the gestures and embraces of lovers, arranged frontally for the benefit of the spectator", "the physical stance of men conveying wealth and virility" (Berger 138).

These choices in the manipulation of the subject photographed are further reinforced by photographic techniques of production and post-editing that strengthen the sense of artistic portraits' otherworldliness or glamour. The same "techniques of persuasion" mentioned in the previous chapter on photojournalistic portraits (exploitation of the camera angle, choice of color selection, light manipulation, shutter speed, lens selection, post-editing techniques, cropping and timing) can be effectively molded to create the artistic photograph the artist envisioned – the difference here lies in the nature of the persuasion. The photographer is now appealing to the "expressive perception" of the viewers, to their artistic sensitivity responsive to aesthetics. They are no longer persuaded to notice and react to the objective "reality" of photojournalism, but instead they are enticed to a world of beauty, where the real becomes clouded in the smoke of hope and imagination. "To underestimate the possibilities of reconstruction afforded by the team of professional make-up artists, hairdressers and fashion stylists, the skills of the retoucher and

the alchemy of lighting, is to be ignorant of a transforming power as technically and aesthetically

exacting as anything that is achieved in a painter's studio" (Testino, "Seeing Stars").

Expressivity and bodily and facial meaning can be exuded naturally by the model's

exteriorization of the self– yet they can be intensified by careful technical handling, as seen in

Avedon's photo "Veruschka" taken in 1967.

Richard Avedon (1923-2004) was an American photographer that established himself in

the world of fashion photography at the young age of twenty-two when he was employed as a

freelance photographer for the magazine *Harper's Bazaar*. His signature work displayed certain

characteristics: most of his shots were taken by means of an 8-x-10 inch view camera against

white backdrops. Avedon believed that the focus should be on the subjects and the ways they

express themselves through personal style, clothing and movement. On his personal portraiture

choices, he said: "My photographs don't go below the surfaces. A good one is full of clues."

("Arbus, Avedon, and Winogrand: Photographs from the Collection" at the High Museum of Art,

Atlanta 2017).

Avedon's relationship with photographic meaning was a special one: unlike most fashion

photographers of his era, he approached his models in a humanist way, looking beyond their

aesthetic and valuing them as real people and "not just mannequins draped in elegant fabrics and

contemporary designs" (Perich 92). Growing up in New York in a creative environment – his

father owned a women's clothing store --, Avedon was interested in poetry and music and even

developed a close relationship with writer James Baldwin and won the title of Poet Laureate of

New York high schools. With such artistic inclinations and openness to beauty in its various

forms, it comes as no surprise that he remarked himself in the area of portrait photography.

"Avedon's interest in music and poetry had nurtured his understanding of emotional and

intellectual abstraction and lyricism. […] During Avedon's career, he became a superstar with a pantheon of intense, textured, and intriguing subjects" (Perich 92).

Avedon's artistic approach goes paradoxically enough against the traditions of fashion photography that glorify the outside human shell, beautified by tricks and products meant to be sold to a public in awe. The photographer refused to play with the norm and flatter his subjects, and instead looked to capture a resurfacing of inner emotions through movement and expressivity of body and face. It is interesting to look at Avedon's photography through the prism of the ego, placed in relation to the three entities that feed into every photograph's meaning: the photographer, the photographed, and the viewer. Naturally, fashion photography glorifies the external beauty of the subjects, feeding directly into the model's ego – by circumnavigating this technique and instead focusing on expressivity and emotions, Avedon takes the reins and minimizes the model's sense of contextual importance and instead plays on his own artistic ego, as he molds the pictorial representation of the person in front of him. In this way, the relation between photographer and photographed becomes one of collaboration, of emotional and psychological exchange beyond the simple technicality of pre-planned posing and directed capturing. The viewer is thus presented with an anomaly in commercial photography, as the models become beautifully human and not merely aesthetic wearers of sellable materials. In exhibition, the models are shown with flaws and incongruities that might at first startle the viewer, and yet they challenge his own perception of the ego as they are pictured as one of "us all". "At the same time the compelling subjects, strong graphic composition, and stark contrast of the photographs beckon the viewer to explore the emotional and psychological intensity and the landscape of physically aging bodies" (Perich 93).

The photo named "Veruschka" is a clear illustration of Avedon's artistic style. The model, set against a monochromatic, simple background is expressive by means of her body movement. Leaning to the right, her body is bent towards the filler light coming from the left, as if persuaded to reach for brightness. The symbolism of the photo goes beyond the lean, long, expressive body posture. As suggested by the ponytail in mid-air, the model is in movement, her dynamism rendering the photo a special charm. Avedon positioned himself strategically at the center of her gravity, the photo's framing denoting a balance that counteracts the model's flight. The long lines of the limbs and the contrasting directions of the body are best showcased by means of this positioning; in addition, Avedon captured an instant of longing on the face of his subject – the photo itself connotes meaning in addition to its being visually aesthetic and advertising certain clothing items. Avedon transformed his subject from a fashion marionette to a beautiful woman captured in a deeply psychological portrait.

Figure 12 – Breaking Away, *Charlize Theron by Annie Leibovitz,* 2011 *(Vogue)*

Annie Leibowitz has mastered the psychological portrait to remark herself in the editorial photography realm. Besides being a renowned fashion photographer, Leibovitz is one of the most appreciated visual chroniclers of our day. In the documentary on her work, *American Masters Annie Leibovitz: Life Through a Lens* (2008), Vogue editor Anna Wintour remarks about Leibovitz: "She puts such a stamp on a picture – you can look at her work and there's no way anyone else ever took that picture". Inspired by Robert Frank, the father of 35 mm film and by Henri-Cartier Bresson (mentioned in Chapter I), Leibovitz first experimented with film photography as she was travelling with her family to support her father's military career in the Air Force. She recalled that road trips encouraged her to develop a certain eye for her surroundings: "I had become accustomed to looking at the world through a frame. The frame was

the window of our family's car as we travelled from one military base to another" (Leibovitz 11).

As a young art student in San Francisco, she started working for the burgeoning rock star

magazine *Rolling Stone* and her journey as a photographer took off soon after – nowadays, her

photos are published by some of the largest fashion publications in the world, including *Vogue*

and *Vanity Fair*. However, Annie Leibovitz captures moments beyond the realm of the aesthetic

and posh – her collection includes numerous anthropologic and social shots taken all around the

world, during wars, presidential inaugurations and among poor communities. The depth and

width of her content render each shot limitless in its expressivity and power of suggestion.

While Leibovitz's work spans styles and techniques based on content, I would like to

bring attention to her fashion editorial work specifically and to the way she manipulates image

making to produce meaning. In general, editorials are used to illustrate a story, an article, a text

or an idea within the context of a magazine or they serve to embellish a certain theme visually.

The portrait above, shot by Leibovitz for the December 2011 issue of Vogue U.S., presents

South African actress Charlize Theron in an Alexander McQueen frock – the photo blends

human and nature elements together in an obvious harmony. While Leibovitz believed that

"every shoot has its own dynamics" (American Masters…) her editorial work seemed to rely on

at least four main pillars: timing, format of the photo, framing and environment. By manipulating

these technical aspects, she directed the dynamics of the shoot toward a specific goal that she

envisioned.

Leibovitz realized the importance of timing in the larger context of a photo shoot when

she was employed to shoot a campaign for the advertising company Ogilvy and Matter in 1986.

When asked how much time she needed to make impactful portraits, she established her formula

of having at least two meetings with her models: first one in order to meet them – "a

reconnaissance mission" – and the second one for the shoot itself. "The first day gave me room to observe and talk. Then I could go away and think about what I'd learned" (Leibovitz 67). In the specific portrait above, Leibovitz set an initial rapport with Theron so that the actress could feel comfortable and her image on the screen could be sincere and expressive. In an interview with Vogue, Theron remarked: "She [Leibovitz] is very aware of the body and the body telling a story. I feel like she knows me a little bit." As in the case of Richard Avedon above, breaking the wall between photographer and photographed and establishing a harmonious exchange is important for Leibovitz. When it comes to specific techniques, she finds value in framing subjects in horizontal formats, especially if the photos are directed for publication in magazines. As seen above, the photo is shot in a wide, vertical format, allowing the subject to be placed in the context of the beauty of the natural environment. The artist explained the importance of the environment and her penchant to place her subjects in their home settings, further increasing their sense of comfort in front of the lens. She prefers outdoors scenes and recognizes her distaste for plain backdrops. In the photo above, the agitated sea paralleled to the actress's lyric interaction with her surroundings –underlined by her body posture and expressive facial configuration – brought the wanted dramatic effect for the photoshoot, symbolically strengthening the written article's argument on behalf of Theron's recent cinematographic successes. Leibovitz also chose a particular framing, placing Theron to the left of the image; she explained this choice as dependent upon magazine formatting, where the gutter cuts a horizontal photo in two and where the malleability of the magazine page steals the focus from the center to the sides. "I used to take pictures where the center was very strong, but I had to stop doing that. You can never put anything in the gutter. It's like a third person. Or a canyon. When I'm editing pictures I sometimes pick them up and bend them. They might look better when they're flat, but

a picture in a magazine is a different animal. No one ever sees the picture flat" (Leibovitz 131).
What it is important to notice in the specific case of Leibovitz's portrait above is its contextuality
of meaning. The complexity of the elements that go into the photo, from the model, to the
location and to chromatics and framing, need to be perceived as part of the larger system of
magazine publishing and its capabilities and intentions. The photo garners new interpretations as
part of a visual editorial accompanying a story – without its literary context, its aesthetic and
expressive qualities certainly differ.

Figure 13 – Gigi Hadid by Mario Testino for Vogue UK, March 2017 (Vogue.co.uk)

The photo above is yet another instance of an editorial shot placed in a specific context that can influence its meaning. Captured by Peruvian fashion and portrait maven Mario Testino, the photo by itself is an ode to color and female strength and beauty. The interview with the model Gigi Hadid that is accompanying the photo skews the meaning in the specific direction of aesthetic imperfections and women's self-confidence. Hadid discusses her powerful 2015 letter on body shaming, reinforcing the idea that negative comments will not detract from loving her physique. An adjacent online Vogue article places the editorial in the same empowering context, discussing the beauty of Hadid's moles and glorifying the lack of post-editing techniques that would erase these personal marks (Mowbray). In light of these literary remarks, how did Testino bring his own artistic vision to the shot? How did he mold the expressivity of the portrait to encompass his own style while also making note of the literary denotation? Also, how did he allow Hadid to bring her own visual voice to the shoot?

In order to respond to these questions, it is important to offer some context into Testino's work and ethics. Alexandra Shulman, the editor-in-chief of Vogue U.K., writes about the photographer's specific style:

> All photographers need to establish in the viewer's mind what it is that they bring to the
>
> subject, to transform it from a simple depiction to something they have uniquely seen.
>
> reality. Both his male and female subjects looked the way that you might look, not in
>
> your wildest dreams, but at the remotest end of possibility. […] Mario pushed onwards
>
> with a light, confident, smart optimism, that shone through and looked fresh. […] There
>
> is something intrinsically Latin about what Mario brings to his photography. His subjects,
>
> for instance, often display acres of flesh, but in an exuberant and cheerful way. […] In

Mario's world people enjoy themselves whether they be partying wildly at a minutely

orchestrated shoot or carefully posed alone (Testino, Prologue).

The ability to blend personal artistic vision with people skills that would ensure that the

models are comfortable enough to be themselves offers Testino an ease of creation, a playfulness

in his rapport with photographic meaning. His interaction with his models sets the stage for an

exchange of exteriorization of self and personal vision coming from both photographer and

photographed – shooting portraits can be a very personal and sensitive endeavor, as to some

point the photographer is allowed to peak into the personality and personal desires of his subject.

A talented portrait photographer would be able to tweak these sensitivities into a powerful

portrait exuding sincerity and humanity. A talented fashion photographer would be able to select

the specific sensitivities (s)he wants portrayed in the image and in this way, the photograph

would become illustrative, while also artistic in its exclusion and indirect mystery.

" [...] The pleasure of being in his company gains him access where many others fail. As a

portrait photographer Mario ensures that his subjects first relax, drawing away their anxieties as

he distracts them with jokes and anecdotes, mimicry and admiration. His images are

characterized by the ease that this engenders but it would be wrong to think that there is anything

casual about them. He is rigorous in his vision. His work does not expose vulnerability, worry,

neuroses and conflict, because he edits the world that he wants to present and those aspects

aren't in it. He determinedly excludes who and what doesn't interest him, and tirelessly works to

bring out the life and laughter and beauty that he admires" (Testino, Prologue). Committing to

creating a strong portrait requires a genuine interest in the humanity of the one in front of you –

in the case of fashion, the beauty of the human body and its coverings should not eclipse a

certain expressivity that the model exudes naturally. If the human body is seen simply as a

carcass, the photo will lose a basic human essence that can move viewers. Testino once said: "I learned how to make someone look good out of curiosity because in the end nothing is as important to me as people and how beautiful the human body is. Everything I do has stemmed from there" (Testino, "Seeing Stars")

Testino's fashion portraits are remarkable in their style: oftentimes, he deliberately chooses to dramatize elements of the photo to make the human body stand out. In the case above, the chromatics of the photo – the blue of the dress and the eye-shadow, the aqua of the sea in the backdrop – and the intentional body positioning give Hadid an air of detached, natural power. Her arms, covering her chest and holding her thigh, suggest a fragility that paradoxically clashes with the power pose of the straight glance into the lens. The shot is at eye-level, in middle-close-up, allowing the model to be close enough to the lens to suggest a level of intimacy, yet far enough to be untouchable. The photo attracts the eye and invites to questions regarding what Hadid and implicitly, her photographer, might want to express. The cover's layout and the choice of font colors further harmonize with the photograph itself. In its aesthetic meaning, the photo is a complex, harmonious amalgam of clues well puzzled together.

Conclusion

Diane Arbus, the well-known American photographer especially noted for her portraits of marginalized people, once said: "If I were just curious, it would be very hard to say to someone, 'I want to come to your house and have you talk to me and tell me the story of your life.' […] But the camera is a kind of license. A lot of people, they want to be paid that much attention and that's a reasonable kind of attention to be paid" (Sontag 191). The photographer whose ultimate

goal is to capture people in their multifaceted humanity is privileged in being offered the chance to capture moments and expressions that are truly unique – humans provide the most fluid, singular and non-static aspect of life. It is a paradox that in capturing instances of this continuous human metamorphosis, portrait photographers also identify and retain something of a common thread across cultures and eras. Socio-cultural scenes and political situations might change – yet humans are tied together by a common emotional expression and successful photographers are able to capture this shared ground that allows photographed and viewers to identify with each other.

One might propose the idea that anyone could become a portrait photographer, that it only takes a camera well directed towards a subject to capture a glimpse of feeling. However, portrait photographers develop the technical knowledge and perception to note the emotions in fleeting seconds and to capture them in a way that exposes the inner world of the subject the most. Their photos invite to inference and curiosity about what could have caused the personal expressivity of the subject and about what the subject himself/herself might be like. Richard Avedon talked about this sensitivity to exposed humanity: "My eyes always zoomed in on what I was interested in: the face. […] I think I'm some kind of a reader. I used to love handwriting analysis. But that's nothing compared to reading a face. When I look for something in a face, I look for contradiction, complexity" (*Richard Avedon*).

In the book *The Essence of Christianity* (1843), Feuerbach proposes an idea that is especially pertinent to today's fast and furious digital era, which according to him, "prefers the image to the thing, the copy to the original, the representation to the reality, appearance to being" (Sontag 153). Photography is over-used today to oftentimes capture appearances, to record memories at the expense of real context – photos are footprints left by the reality of moving

bodies. However, the momentousness of watching a photograph, especially a portrait, and identifying with its models and their experiences makes it a valuable socio-cultural token – by identifying the footprints and remembering that you have your own unique marks on that shared sandy path makes portraiture worthwhile. In this sense, photography is similar to literature – the viewer is a reader of an interpretation of the world delivered by an author – the photographer. However, in order to decipher this interpretation, one has to realize the difference between the denotation – what is explicitly visible in the photo – and its connotation, what is inferred and contextual and what the photographer and the models brought to the instant captured. In his famous *Camera Lucida,* Roland Barthes proposes a few interesting views on this duality. "What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially" (Lucida 4). By means of our interpretation of an instant brushed against someone's features, we employ what Barthes calls a "secondary action of knowledge or of reflection" (Lucida 5). Perhaps that is what grants so much power to portraiture: the image is as much of the photographed as it is ours, the viewers deriving meaning and learning from it through identification, empathy and imagination.

Fig. 14 – Michael Justice by Loli Lucaciu, 2017

Fig. 15 – Loli Lucaciu by Michael Justice, 2017

Throughout this paper, I attach the idea of meaning in portraiture by heeding to three different entities – that of the photographer, the model and the viewer. Their interdependence is obvious, and yet analyzing each separately is fascinating. Even more so, experiencing them separately and then in their relationship to the other two brings an unprecedented awareness of physicality and objective and subjective points of view. In my quest to understanding portraiture, its creation and its consequent meaning to all three groups, I embarked on an experimental shoot with my photographer friend Michael Justice. Across the span of an entire afternoon, we took portraits of each other, attempting to allow the cameras and our individual technical choices speak about who we were. We attempted to be sincere to the shot and to each other in order to create the most transparent images possible. The blurring of the dissociation between photographer and photographed made it a fascinating experience – there were merely minutes separating us from the positions of artists and models. Michael preferred to take my portrait in his studio, being comfortable with his lighting system and environment and considering that such a familiarity would allow him to capture my "human essence" the most. As the model, the studio represented a new location for me; his simple directions to "look into the camera" seemed obvious and allowed me to be comfortable with the process. I had nothing to hide in my silence and yet I was much aware of the setting, his lens, and the filler light brightening my face from my left. I remember the excitement of that second, as I felt powerless over my own image, since I could not see myself through Michael's gaze and the lens. It was a vulnerability that I believe rendered sincerity to the shot. Looking back at the photo in the position of viewer, I realize that being looked at did subconsciously place me in a position where involuntarily I became a persona. I lent my image to the photographer for the sake of art and in that process, the awareness of this gift made me change my attitude toward my environment and the act of

photographing. As I was giving something of myself, I was receiving a new type of awareness of my physicality. Barthes makes a pointed distinction between the image and this inner self, aware of the presence of the image. "What I want […] is that my (mobile) image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with my (profound) 'self'; but it is the contrary that must be said: 'myself' never coincides with my image; […] I want a History of Looking. For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity. […] In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art" (Lucida 12-13).

When it was my turn to shoot his portrait, I chose to go outside and play with the affordances of the environment – as we were walking, the grey wall caught my eye as it would chromatically allow me to place more focus on Michael's features, blending in his grey coat with the backdrop, and bringing out the color of his eyes that was further reinforced by his matching shirt. My technical choices in chromatics, framing and lighting were momentary and yet deliberate – I chose how I wanted to look at Michael and how I would introduce him to consequent viewers. Yet his piercing gaze, whose source can be experienced by himself only, was in his power. Portraiture, including image taking and image giving, represents as much a gift as a realization of the miniatural size of the gift in the context of the complexity and magnitude of the human physique and spirit. This research paper includes a digital addendum in the form of my two photography portfolios, the "Faces of The World" series, which invite the reader to extend the knowledge provided throughout unto my own portraiture work. My first project, Faces of the World, on which I worked in 2015-2016, celebrates the beauty of diversity by underscoring a common humanity symbolically represented by means of my blanket usage of the

black and white post-editing effect. My second project, Faces of the World in Color, is a reunion

of my 2016-2017 portraiture work in color – it does not provide background information on the

models and invites each viewer to create his/her own interpretations. While my technical choices

are visible and the denotative meaning is hopefully more clear based on the analysis of the

photos above, I do not further discuss individual shots in the body of the paper as to encourage

viewers to focus on the other crucial side of deriving meaning from portraits – the connotative

interpretation. By allowing a viewer's lifetime of experiences and hopes to interact with a

portrait, the image itself takes flight and fulfills its purpose as messenger of meaning.

Photographic portraiture is as much about artistic vision as it is about illustration and

story telling. Meaning in portraiture is fluid – the viewer has to be open to noticing it and to

learning from it. Just recently – February 2017 – famed Chinese photographer Ren Hang died at

the age of 29, leaving behind an innovative collection of portraits challenging traditional

representation and forwarding the idea of photographic portraiture as art – all in the context of

his conservative home country, China. When photographic meaning is created within constrained

socio-economic and cultural norms as those offered by the Chinese communist state, such

portraits gain a special significance as objects of representation for a community encouraged to

stump its creativity and inhibit expressivity, especially if sexual in nature. Thus, photographic

portraiture can become a vehicle for liberation and its visual meaning, a loophole to concealed

truths.

Ren Hang / *Human Love*
Fotografiska 17.2–2.4 2017

Fotografiska

Figure 16 – Human Love by Ren Hang, 2017 (renhang.org)

Portrait photography – be it photojournalistic or artistic, informational or aesthetic, or a combination of these – has an intrinsic value in that it reflects on the people in specific geographical locations, times and sitautions. While photographs are fractions of specific realities, they still retain an important role in the visualization of worlds outside of our own. As vehicles for empathy and reflection, portraits are undeniable effigies on the effects of changing societies on their citizens, as well as reflections of a common humanity blanketed across times and cultures. Susan Sontag writes: "But the force of photographic images comes from their being

material realities in their own right, richly informative deposits left in the wake of whatever emitted them, potent means for turning tables on reality – for turning it into a shadow. Images are more real than anyone could have supposed. […] If there can be a better way for the real world to include the one of images, it will require an ecology not only of real things but of images as well" (Sontag 180). The concept of the real in photography will remain a topic deserving of attention and scrutiny and one can only be encouraged to look deeper beyond what portraits in particular, and photographs in general, have to offer. Beyond a theory of visual perceiving, there is a practical side of seeing, and these two skills can only be mastered through juxtaposition, experience and exercise. Once mastered, the action of photographing and the sharpening of visual observation can only embellish our daily experiences, allowing us to be more present in the moment while also offering us tangible/ conceptual souvenirs in the form of pictures. Understanding the complex meaning of a photograph can lead us closer to understanding the realities of our world and the multivalent ways of perceiving these realities. "The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality" (Lucida 119).

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