



PRACTICE IN CONTEXT. DISSERTATION PROPOSAL.

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Pictorial Content :

Image 1: *Still Life*, daguerreotype by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, 1837; in the collection of the Société Française de Photographie, Paris.

Image 2: James Gordon Bennett, founder of the New York Herald. Photo by Mathew Brady

Image 3 digital photography, Surma Boy by daniele romagnoli

Image 4: Not a selfie: *Rembrandt Laughing* (detail), about 1628, Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn. Oil on copper, 8 3/4 x 6 3/4 in. The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2013.60

Image 5 The Dream, albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, by Julia Margaret Cameron, 1869, Isle of Wight, England

Image 6: Kim Kardashian. *Selfish*. 2016.

An Independent Research Document Proposal.

Photographers initially struggled for artistic recognition, today photography is one of the most important mediums for artistic expression.

It was not until the Paris Universal Exposition of 1859, twenty years after the invention of the medium, that photography and “art” (painting, engraving, and sculpture) were displayed next to one another for the first time. However, separate entrances to the exhibition spaces preserved a physical and symbolic distinction between the two and there were elitist values underpinning this separation: ‘Since art was deemed the product of imagination, skill, and craft, how could a photograph (made with an instrument and light-sensitive chemicals instead of brush and paint) ever be considered its equivalent? ‘(Khan Academy)

After all, photographs are mechanically reproduced images: Kodak’s marketing strategy (“You press the button, we do the rest,”) points directly to the “effortlessness” of the medium. How could photography ever compete with fine art?

So what transforms the perception of photography in the early twentieth century from a poor relative to the denizen of artistic form that it is today? This dissertation seeks to trace its journey through scientific invention, photographic technique and societal change in the context of photographic portraiture.

This research proposal explore these three key factors, which will be supported by exemplar illustrations and analysis. Within this research I wish to and link the key developments in portraiture to the history of portraits, composition and lighting and then move into the

contrast between new and old portraiture to form a final question for the independent research documents, this will include critical examination of portraiture and its construction. Photographic Portraiture is very different entity to what it was when it was first created and invented in the 1830s. This was because at its inception it was not seen as an art form whereas, today it is one of the most important mediums for artistic expression.

With the tap of a finger and a mechanical whirl, a perfect portrait is formed within seconds and revealed to the world in an equally short length of time which would astound our early photographer ancestors with their painstaking and lengthy developing processes and meticulously choreographed images.

Portraiture photography became a big thing in the 1800s, it turned the art world on its head with a process which allowed the common man to see his image in solid form, a lasting image to pass down the generations, diminishing at a stroke the domination of paintings in oils and water colours, which only the fabulously wealthy and fortunate individuals could commission and offering something which most individuals could access affordably.

One of the first photography techniques to be used, created in the 1830s, was named after French inventor Louis Daguerre in collaboration with Nicephore Niepce, called daguerreotype. Daguerre was an accomplished panoramic scene painter for the Paris opera as well as being a physicist, whilst Niepce, had been attempting to create permanent pictures through the action of sunlight before teaming up with Daguerre to create Heliography (www.theartstory.org). They had been introduced to each other in 1824, by Charles Chevalier, an early optician and inventor of the achromatic lens, who supplied them both with lens for Cameras Obscura.



Figure 1.

The daguerreotype is a direct-positive process, which succeeded where the earlier cameras could not, creating highly detailed images onto a sheet of copper plated with a thin coat of silver without the use of a negative. The process required an enormous amount of patience and care. This process was a complex and time consuming which required skilled technical ability beyond the common man. These innovation caused a sensation with the public in 1839, particularly in America so clearly commercial was the project, the French Government purchased the patent rights to the process in return for a life-long pension for the sons and heirs of Dageurre and Niepec.

Portraits based upon daguerreotypes appeared in popular books and magazines. James Gordon Bennett, the editor of the New York Herald, posed for his daguerreotype at Brady's studio and an engraving, based on this daguerreotype later appeared in the *Democratic Review*.



figure 2.

The earliest cameras used in the daguerreotype process were made by opticians and instrument makers, like Chevalier, sometimes they were made by the photographers themselves. The most popular cameras utilized a sliding-box design. In the early cameras laterally reversed image would be obtained later these cameras were fitted with a mirror or prism to correct this. When a sensitized plate was placed in the camera, the lens cap would be removed to start the exposure. (JH Davis).

Within the portrait of Gordon Bennett's daguerreotype are all the classic elements of fine art As Martiniques observes "Early photographic portraits followed the conventions of the painted portrait. With traditional backdrops used in painting, early photographic portraits indicated a person's societal status or occupation through clothing, setting or the surrounding objects."

From the pen of the English photographer and father of photomontage Henry Peach Robinson comes this advice "I shall bear in mind the Italian proverb, "He is a fool who does not profit by the experience of others", and shall not hesitate to avail myself of hints from

any author.....illustrating my remarks with engravings from works of well-known painters.....in which the principles defined by the art of composition have aided the photographer.” (Henry Peach Robinson 1869).

With the development of equipment and the possibility to move it out of the studio, a widening gap started to occur between these conventional and more documentary portraits. “By the late nineteenth century, many photographers have rejected these traditional settings and surface impressions.” E Martinique (2016)

Photography like all art forms needs contrast of for the work to express the artist thoughts, ideas and meaning. A photo captures texture more convincingly than other mediums as by using the correct lighting and overseeing the way the lights and shades fall it makes the image look touchable and enticing. The lighting always must be a high quality and must always be one of the first thing a photographer considers when they are wanting to show that texture within their image to release those different types of the identifications and indentations and ideas of the subject. Artists like Daniele Romagnoli use a high contrast in his images to portray that story we are all looking for, the meaning and the entertainment that a photo is meant to bring us, this high contrast black and white gives suspense and the way it uses Spatial composition is particularly an important aspect in this image. Krages (2005) explains this relationship as *“the mind perceives the whole image without having to first analyse the parts”*. Without the technical side to each image the meaningful messages that artists want to get through to their views would be a lot harder.



Figure 2.

“Composition is arguably the most important element of a photograph. Composition, after all, means what the photograph is made up of.(Carren 2015)

Within photography the artist themselves can not portray what they want too effectively if they do not have an idea for a composition. This is defined by controlling the order of different elements in the work, so it achieves a clear communication. When there is a clear understanding of a photographic composition/ principle, the photographer can be improving their ability to communicate. There are rules to do with this that help keep this easier and more understanding, these are to do with patterns that frequently appear within work of the artists and being aware of these patterns is a massively helpful part of understanding composition. These rules are not something that is learnt or universal as if that rule does not help the artist to express their ideas, it must not be used, and they can break the rule. An impressive and creative photographer will not follow the correct or classic rule that is applied when thinking about composition, these rules are more like guidelines that are pared together when using a camera to channel the expression of the work.

“I shall bear in mind the Italian proverb, “He is a fool who does not profit by the experience of others”, and shall not hesitate to avail myself of hints from any author.... illustrating my

remarks with engravings from works of well-known painters.....in which the principles defined by the art of composition have aided the photographer.” (Robinson 1869)

Contrast between portraiture and the selfie

Civilization has passed through so many different hallmarks when trying to capture the art of the human face, from the elite paintings of the rich and famous through the photo-realism of the two world wars and the post-war opulence of beauty captured in the highly stylized images of Vogue, experimental era of post-modernist portraits to today’s digital revolution manifest in the “selfie”, which can be seen as a mockery of photography in some aspects: those qualities of photography like the deep - rooted history, techniques and artistic specificity which define photography, can become easily disposable.

The selfie and self-portrait/ portraiture are two very different entities, even though there is overlap: both have ways of establishing identity.



Figure 3.

“Portraiture in art is a process of representation through which the artist recreates the subject of the image, interpreting nuances of physicality and personality through artistic elements such as line, colour and composition” (JH Davis). A portrait is created through measured observation with control and technique.

If Rembrandt was re-incarnated in the 21st century and chose to create portraits as we do today, it would not be anachronistic, his self-portrait would be different to his selfie, it would remove the story and the emotion vivid in his paintings, and reduce them to a moment in time, a selfie is simply a memento. Rembrandt’s artistry would be more in tune with the early history of photographic portraiture which indicated societal status (E Martinique 2016). The Selfie is a kind of self-representation, it’s simpler and quicker (and cheaper) than having a photographic sitting, it mirrors the image, but it misses out on contextual, artistic meaning. Leaving it wide open to different interpretations and readings creating the potential for social interaction and discussion but not the depth of artistic discourse.

A photographers' portrait is a public representation, whereas, a selfie is an intimate private moment, the latter can be an uncomfortable disclosure: so much more personal, the former, created as art is intended for universal gaze.



Figure 4:

Art portraiture's tradition purpose was to reproduce details precisely, and from nature, how could photographs be acceptable if negatives were "manipulated," or if photographs were retouched? Because of these questions, amateur photographers formed casual groups and official societies to challenge such conceptions of the medium. They—along with elite art world figures like Alfred Stieglitz—promoted the late nineteenth-century style of "art photography," and produced low-contrast, warm-toned images like *The Terminal* that highlighted the medium's potential for originality. (Khan Academy)

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-79) is an artist who excelled on the close ups, she focused on the expressions of emotions which ignited and transformed photography from scientific to spiritual. The models she uses in her up and close portraits are as modern as any models from now, the 21st century. (J.Brown) this image above is known as a "Astonishing piece of

high relief- she is absolutely alive.(Hershel, JFW). People use selfies to provoke a response much like Cameron in her photography with this very subdued portrait of a female looking to the side, giving us a story, a query about what is happening. This is not a bad thing that people use selfies to provoke a response as in reality the whole history of portraiture has been to get a response. It is simply something that this generation like all generations have done, as they want to be seen in a certain light and this has become something that is far more accessible through phones and social media.

The selfie argument

Selfies can be more than just a picture, selfies provide a different type of lens, in which shows people a version of self and a glimpse into identity. As with all art, there are critiques of the selfie, Maddox (2017), suggests they display a form of exhibitionism Taylor (2019) , using Social Comparison Theory, claims they display Narcissism, Envy and Self-Promotion traits.

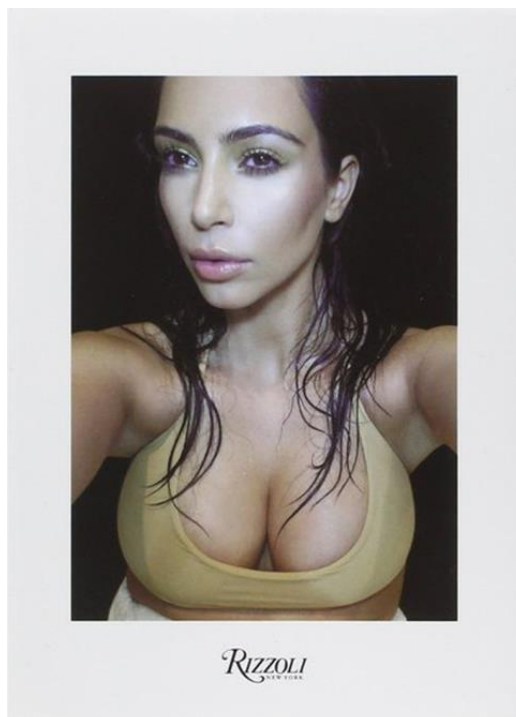


Fig.5

Universally acclaimed Kim Kardashian is a ‘pro’ when it comes to taking a selfie. This image, from her book “Selfie: How the West has become self-obsessed” is a voyeuristic journey into the celebrity’s life via 445 selfies, all previously posted on the Kardashian social media accounts.. She controls the subject matter, curation and perspective. The book is a testament to the universality of digital media: everyone can pick their phone and create a picture. It may be the ultimate universal art form.

A selfie is a way for people to take a picture the way they want it instead of someone coming in and taking a photo of you and not add in their baggage to your photo or portray you in a different light than you want. Technology and nostalgia have become co-dependent: new technology and advanced marketing stimulate ersatz nostalgia—for the things you never thought you had lost—and anticipatory nostalgia—for the present that flees with the speed of a click. (Svetlana Boym, 2007)

Does this revolution detract from the profession of photographer? Does it to the history of art and in particular, photographic portraiture? Does it meet the criterion set by the early photographers: “If a picture is to be successful, it must have a oneness of purpose or intention, a oneness of story, a oneness of thought, a oneness of lines, a oneness of light and shade. Everything must have a meaning, and the meaning must be the object of the picture.” (Robinson 1869)

This study sets out to address this question: Has Technology and the rise of the selfie made portraiture photography as dangerous and disposable as plastic ?

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