SELF-PORTRAITURE AND FUTURE: 
AN EXAMINATION OF A 
PHOTOGRAPHER’S CREATIVE IDENTITY

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Luciana Vasques Barbosa
Bachelor of Photography 
[SENAC University]

School of Media and Communication 
Design and Social Context Portfolio 
RMIT University 
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ABSTRACT

“Self-portraiture and future: an examination of a photographer’s identity” is a study of the genre of self-portraiture as a mode of creative reflective practice within the field of photography.

This thesis aligns theories of photography, art, art therapy and psychology to constitute a multidimensional dialogue around representation, imagination and transformation – as it relates to self-portraiture as a mode of creative reflective practice.

The thesis locates the necessary definitions for the genre of self-portraiture within art history and criticism. It reflects on the theories of representation that enable a study of meaning for photographic self-portraits from the point of view of reception. The thesis also refers to literature that advances the value of the practice of self-portraiture for the photographer, from the point of view of production.

The thesis posits that therapeutic photography can be considered a framework of practice, by establishing self-knowledge as essential in the development of one’s creative identity. This assertion is supported by a theory of the performative, whereby photographer acquires a triple role (author, subject and spectator of himself), thus dynamically exchanging between creating, being and looking. This complete experience of the photographic medium is said to have transformative potential as it nurtures a process of gaining awareness of how one creates technically and conceptually.

This character of transformative learning is further explored by developing photographic self-portraits that seek to develop the author’s visions of the future as intentional outcomes of creative practice. In order to achieve this, the author tentatively adopts a Jungian approach to her practice of self-portraiture; that is, the photographer is provided with a methodology that allows visions of future to emerge. By interacting with these visions on a mental level and through further establishing a photographic dialogue with the symbologies and emotions perceived in them through self-portraiture, the photographer reflects on her creative practice within a broader context of reflexive self-portraiture.

The researcher/photographer’s outcome asserts that self-portraiture as reflective practice, is a model of creative inquiry that should not be overlooked in the education of a photographer. It provides the photographer with tools that nurture the creative
self through a spontaneous and personal process of experiencing the photographic medium.

The outcome implies that a reflective practice of self-portraiture focused on imagination is a valuable method of assessing the present and past, freeing one up to reclaim a desired future, which is a powerful tool that can promote transformation in our society.
DECLARATION

I certify that except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in the whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

"A man trains himself to see like a camera, it is only more appropriate that he uses a camera to record his seeing." (White, 2006, p. 24)

Introduction to the study

This document examines the nature of photographic self-portraiture as a reflective practice and assesses its value as a method of creative inquiry. It is informed by empirical evidence observed in my own practice as photographer and photography educator, as well as of other photographers.

Different key theorists and practitioners from the fields of photography, art, art therapy and psychology have been brought together. Thus a dialogue and a pathway of creative inquiry has emerged through a multidimensional discourse around imagination, representation and transformation.

Photographic self-portraiture that seeks to develop the author’s visions of the future is a practice that this study seeks to posit as an empowering methodology. This method can be employed by any individual who seeks awareness and further development of their artistic authenticity in the light of the use of the photographic medium.

Background

This research project seeks to bring a long-term personal and academic investigation of the practice of photographic self-portraiture to the attention of a wider audience who may possibly resonate with my deepest passion for photography, creativity and self-knowledge.

Self-portraiture has always played a major role in my own practice as a photographer. In trying to analyze why I am so attached to such experience, I have come to realize some important facts: I have been attracted to the concept of self-knowledge since very young, before I knew art would take a leading role in my life; I have always considered myself to be creative but I struggled with finding my creative voice during my first year taking a Bachelor degree in photography; and that I have always been passionate about the complexities and splendor of people and life.
When I first experienced self-portraiture as a conscious creative act during my second year officially studying photography at university, art finally became alive for me. At the time, I was curious about the idea of exploring voyeurism in my photography and found self-portraiture to be the most viable solution to get the project started. Once I did it, I experienced an overwhelming feeling of clear understanding of the medium I had chosen to study, of both roles of photographer and photographed. I had just taken Minor White’s (2006, p. 25) saying “the photographer projects himself into everything he sees, identifying himself with everything in order to know it and feel it better” to the extreme.

“Voyeur”¹, a series of 33 self-portraits, explored my insight into the possibilities of the voyeuristic male gaze. What I felt at the time as a mere playful act that would result in an expected aesthetic outcome and audience reaction I set for the project, turned out to be a model of artistic activity. I constantly went back to self-portraiture whenever I wanted to gain confidence in an idea for photographic experimentation. In other words, practicing self-portraiture constantly gave me directions, inspirations, and counsel as I interacted with my human figure, my ideas, the camera, and the images I created (McNiff, 1998).

As I continued designing my projects around plays with self-representation, I dived into the works of renowned photographers in search for creative connections with my own drive for this matter. It was not a hard task at all. Not only did I find numerous photographers with published self-portraits, but self-portraiture also featured as a common and current practice among the students of my course. However, as much as these images were easily found in the domain of photography as art, I seemed to struggle finding writings or notes from photographers that would resonate with my sense of self-portraiture being a unique and powerful tool towards my understanding of my creative process in photography.

When I became a photography educator a few years later, encouraging students to turn the camera to themselves featured as a natural characteristic of my teaching. Results demonstrated to me once again the strength of the process of self-portraiture: students would also experience the development of a further closeness to the medium as well as to their creative process. Furthermore, students reported the process of self-portraiture to equally have a positive affect on their personal lives, as the feeling of being in charge and capable of making art was especially beneficial for their self-esteem.

¹ This work and its connection to this research project are further illustrated in chapter 4.
It was at this point of resonance between my own experience and that of my students’ that I clearly realized the therapeutic character of the practice of self-portraiture. Developing photographic self-portraiture work had helped us engage with our inner selves in a different and empowering manner. There was something intuitive or spontaneous about doing self-portraiture that allowed us to realize something new about ourselves. The resonance of our experiences towards the practice of photographic self-portraiture brought a new level of meaning to my own artistic practice and opened up a new field for research: therapeutic photography.

I was already familiar with art therapy as a specialized field of knowledge, but not with art therapy practices that were specialized in the use of photography. When I came across the field of therapeutic photography, I found myself to belong to a family of photographers. Their discourses and bodies of work are mainly concerned with unconsciousness raising, where through self knowledge it is possible to move beyond the idea of ‘perfect image’ (Spence, 2005). The following excerpt illustrates the process of unconsciousness raising from the perspective of a photographer who worked closely with Spence:

“Allowing myself to concentrate on the playing out of various images for the camera gave me an immense amount of information about myself. Apart from the fun we had from this, I began to conceive of myself as a set of signals or signs, all of which ‘meant’ something to the viewer [including myself], which I could begin to control more by emphasizing or de-emphasizing as I wished. When these signs [of me] had been transferred into photographs the ‘meanings’ changed depending on the context in which they were used.” (Dennet, as cited in Spence & Martin, 1986, p. 95)

This process of unfolding new knowledge that comes from an immediate awareness of perception of an experience is a transcendental phenomenon. This phenomenon is a commonality that stood out from my immersion into both art therapy-related practices and self-portraiture practices developed by photographers. These artists find that in unfolding this new knowledge, they reach a state of freshness and openness, which is personally and artistically empowering. Art therapy theorist McNiff (1992) explains that this is due to the conscious exploration of the creative process leading them to experiment and find styles and methods of expression that resonate with their natures and the needs of soul, what he calls artistic knowing.

* Unconsciousness raising refers to one accessing new knowledge of oneself (self-knowledge) through photographic depiction of the personal (Spence, 2005).
* See chapter 2 of Moustakas (1994) for a comprehensive explanation of transcendental phenomenology as conceptual framework.
* In the context of this research, the definition of ‘empower’ is to make [someone] stronger and more confident (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011).
Thus the empirical evidence observed in my own practice as photographer and photography educator, as well as of other photographers’, support my proposition that active engagement with self-portraiture as creative process is a empowering method of inquiry that leads to artistic knowing. This research project seeks to verify and assess the value of this process through its application in the development of my own body of work.

**Organization of document**

In the form of literature review, chapter 2 seeks to establish the nature of self-portraiture as photographic practice. You will become acquainted with how self-portraiture has been defined by art historians and critics as a genre in the field of photography. It evidences the value of examining self-portraiture as a reflective photographic practice. This is explored through key concepts and artists who have contributed to the construction of an intrinsic fabric of self-portraiture as a mode of therapeutic photography. It is also in this chapter where I explain how and why I decided to concentrate on developing my visions of the future for the purposes of this project, a differentiated intake I have created among the already established therapeutic photography practices.

Chapter 3 describes my own methodology by establishing boundaries for the development of my own personal photographic journey through a Jungian approach. The concept of active imagination³, described by psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, is brought forward as a framework to develop my ideas of future. The aim of applying this framework is to examine its potential as a method of creative inquiry when combined with self-portraiture.

> “In the wakened state the conscious mind can fully engage with the unconscious material and the possibility for transcendence to a new attitude arises. The attitude of the conscious engagement is crucial for success. ...Successful active imagination leads to a deeper sense of authenticity.” (Jones, Clarkson, Congram, & Stratton, 2008, p. 21)

The development, presentation and discussion of my own body of work, found in chapter 4, allows the meanings and essences of my proposed methodology of photographic self-portraiture to indeed emerge as transcendental phenomenon in the light of its intuitive and self-reflective character (Moustakas, 1994). My narrative explores the clarity of my perception towards an internal experience of entering my

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³ Active imagination is a technique that promotes synthesis between image and ego. See Matthews & Liu (2008) for thorough understanding of concept and its validation when applied in education.
consciousness as both photographer and human being as I prompt myself to give visual form to my own personal symbologies\(^6\), therefore examining not only how I create but also where creativity bears from in my case.

I aim to demonstrate how this self-portrait mode of creative inquiry prospects the alignment of the process of gaining new awareness of the self with the development of one’s abilities and capacity to engage with the photographic medium. I argue that the exploration of this perspective, even from the simplest starting point, allows the photographer to engage with a complete and very personal photographic experience. The process of performing for and with the camera productively transforms the image making according to one’s own authentic self. In a continuous process of learning and discovery that gradually permits the creative self to bear from a natural or spontaneous method of production, the photographer’s confidence builds up as one learns to listen to and reflect on the nature of their own practice.

A research problem

The empowering dialogue originated between my practice of active imagination and the production of my actual photographic self-portrait images is the starting point for my final chapter. Chapter 5 also encourages further reflection concerning the education of a photographer. As highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, in 1966, in one of his most important writings, renowned photographer Minor White already pointed to the need of fostering a training of photography that evidences one’s capability of communicating his or her seeing instead of the technical capabilities of the camera. I question what kind of learning experiences are promoted in academic environments that facilitate or even foster the photography student’s perception of the camera as this instrument of self-evidence. In other words, how does a photographer learn how to establish an authentically personal connection to his or her use of the camera?

Today, photography is an aesthetic force in the hands of the masses (Bianchi, 2007). Within this context of such democratic use of photography, it seems important to rescue reflection on artistic inquiry as a step towards developing an authentic photographic aesthetics. This study posits imagination as primordial in this process of finding one’s own gesture and voice as photographer. Identifying specific needs or desires pertinent to the realm of the artist is an empowering result possible to

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\(^6\) Personal symbologies here relate to the meaning that is primarily created by us during our process of perceiving a visual stimulus as well as making sense of it through artistic representation. See Weiser (1993, p. 2).
achieve through the practice of self-portraiture. It can significantly shape one’s awareness towards their own politics and ideologies of representation.

I hope to possibly illuminate photographers, educators and photography students to make new and further connections for one's own use of the photographic medium. This could take the form of freeing oneself from pre-determined ideals of image-making; discovering a personal pathway towards similar and already known or established genres; understanding one's own aspirations as an artist; or even gaining comprehension of one's own surroundings. May many people benefit from this methodology of reflective photographic self-portraiture that mediates an entire world of possibilities for journeys of personal discovery.
CHAPTER 2
SELF-PORTRAITURE AS PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE

"A contemporary self-portrait must show the artist, it must explore the concept of identity – either the artist’s own or something more broad or universal – and it must offer the viewer a tendentious point of view or contemplation about the self." (Bright, 2010, p. 12)

This chapter is divided into three sections in order to establish the nature of self-portraiture as photographic practice for the purposes of my research. The first section is concerned with how the practice has been defined by art historians and critics as a genre in the field of photography. It points to the importance of examining self-portraiture as a reflective photographic practice, which is a mode of therapeutic photography. The second section presents the work of two photographers whose contributions evidence how engaging with this perspective on self-portraiture contributes to the development of the artist. In the third section, I present the gap of knowledge I have identified as a focus for my project.

Photography and self-portraiture

The substantial record of artwork produced by photographers who turn themselves to the camera since the 1840’s (Billeter et al., 1986) is in itself a point for departure when attempting to study the nature of the practice of photographic self-portraiture. The readiness of the photographer serving as his own model has “encouraged experimentation with self-portraits from very early on” (Mora, 1998, p. 174) and it is safe to say that “a photographer or artist who has never taken a picture of himself or herself is a rarity” (Bright, 2010, p. 9).

A common question raised around self-portraits is concerned with what they represent. The self-portrait being first and foremost a portrait, indicates that it is a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity (Tagg, 1988). In the world of photographic creation, the self-portrait indeed has long been a game played around identity. Photographers like Claude Cahun in the 1920’s, Cindy Sherman and Robert Mapplethorpe in the 1980’s; and contemporary Tomoko Sawada, have developed such important bodies of work revolving around gender and social identity issues, that their photographic self-
portraits have taken central roles as case studies in research even outside the art’s world. Whether national, sexual, racial, personal, or artistic – issues of identity are key subjects in the self-portraiture work of these and many other photographers until this date.

Is it possible though to identify what the ‘self’ in self-portrait actually means [Bright, 2010]? Until the late 1980’s, art historians and critics considered the photographic self-portrait to be an act of introspection – a search of the truth of the self [Lingwood, 1986]; a record of a mentally experienced state, or the assumption of a role as a means of concealment or revelation [Billeter, et al., 1986]. Recent literature, on the other hand, indicates contemporary photographic self-portraiture has been seeing more and more of a fabricated self, which testify the artist’s power of invention [Gaston, 2010]. What ends up being represented in the self-portrait is:

“… not an individual or a visual depiction of an inner existential being, but rather a display of ‘self-regard, self-preservation, self-revelation, and self-creation’ open to any interpretation imposed upon it by each individual viewer.” [Bright, 2010, p. 9]

As a viewer it is possible to examine self-portrait images and derive all possible meanings from them, it is even possible to analyze what they represent of the photographer’s technical and conceptual abilities. While this knowledgeable literature points to the history of self-portraiture and a theorization of meaning for its practice, the question that still remains is: what else is in there for the photographer? Why do photographers keep going back to addressing self-portraiture across their entire professional lives? Does the practice of self-portraiture have a role in the development of a photographer’s body of work or his creative self?

Self-portraiture is a significant and dynamic practice that explicitly makes visible something particular of the photographers’ creative identity [Barbosa, 2010]¹. My own experience and that of my former students tell me that self-portraiture does affect one’s art making process. I question if the self-portrait image can transcend its structure as representation and be performative rather than representational [Bolt, 2004]².

The system of fabrication that constitutes the practice of self-portraiture is based on a complete and very personal photographic experience. When a photographer does self-portraiture, he has to perform for and with the camera. The whole photographic

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¹ For further investigation on the revealing parallel that can be traced between self-portraits and a photographer’s body of work, see Appendix B for my formative article published in 2010.

² See author Bolt [2004] for a comprehensive understanding of her theory of art beyond representation, whose argument is based on a performative logic of practice.
experience of self-portraiture is mediated by the photographer himself who acquires a triple role: he is, at the same time, author, subject and spectator of himself (Bond et al., 2005). This dynamic exchange between roles allows the photographer to be, to create and to look; a performance that goes beyond the representational character of the self-portrait image itself.

Once self-portraiture is examined as performative creative practice, rather than representational, it emerges with transformative potential (Bolt, 2004). In fact, self-portraiture holds such a transformative power that it is recognized as an important art therapy practice. Photographic self-portraiture is a symbolic art expression, and as such, it “gives form to feelings that otherwise might resist translation into conscious or verbal investigation” (Weiser, 1993, p. xiv). Within this perspective, it is possible to treat the entire photographic experience of self-portraiture as an agent of transformation.

A photographer may simply engage with a practice of self-portraiture in a spontaneous manner and stop there, once a conceptual, technical or aesthetic expected outcome is achieved. However, if one reflects back on the experience by first acknowledging that something very personal of the self came across the process; and secondly, that the resulting photographic image might have embedded meanings that were not consciously produced; the experience of doing self-portraiture can indeed be transformative.

Unfortunately, despite how common of a practice self-portraiture has been proved to be among photographers across centuries, very few have formally published their findings and thoughts on how self-portraiture impacts their creative and personal awareness. Even Cindy Sherman, who is iconically renowned for her production of self-portraits, has failed to contribute significantly to the understanding of the fabric of self-portraiture as a reflective photographic practice, acknowledging it as such only at a much later stage of her career:

“This is the only work I’ve ever done that was consciously autobiographical. It’s embarrassing to look back, especially at this work that was so personal, so raw. It’s corny, sincere, and obvious, yet makes so much sense in how my work has developed, the similarities as well as differences.” (Sherman, 2007, p. 4)

Therefore, for the purposes of this research, it is crucial to examine photographers who have deliberately contributed to the understanding of the nature of self-portraiture as a reflective photographic practice. Photographers Jo Spence and Cristina Nuñez provide critical and straightforward evidence of self-portraiture’s
transformational character as reflective practice. Their different approaches to self-portraiture come together as empowering outcomes of very personal quests for self-knowledge and awareness. Their personal narratives, explored in the next section of this chapter, provide a clear framework of what has been defined as therapeutic photography with a specific focus on self-portraiture.

Therapeutic photography: transcending autobiography

“Therapeutic Photography techniques are photographic practices done by people themselves [or helpers] in situations where the skills of a trained therapist or counselor are not needed, where photos are used to increase their own self-knowledge and awareness, ... sharpen visual literacy skills, enhance education, promote well-being, ... and produce other kinds of photo-based healing and learning.” (Weiser, 2001)

Therapeutic photography utilizes art media, images and the creative process to trigger reflections of an individual’s development, abilities, personality, interests, concerns, and conflicts, in the same way as art therapy does (NCCATA, 2009). What discerns therapeutic photography from photo therapy (art therapy practice based on the use of photography) are two important characteristics: the whole therapeutic photography process is created and reflected upon by the photographer himself; and therapeutic photography values the aesthetic character of the outcome.

It is important to note though that the healing sought after in both therapeutic photography and photo therapy can be, but is not necessarily clinical. It is for anyone who is “desensitized or ignorant about their heart, their senses, their creativity, their spontaneity, their playfulness, and their relationship to the earth and the cosmos.” (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001, p. 58). Healing here mirrors a process of awakening, when one gains self-knowledge and awareness.

For the particularities of my research, therapeutic photography with focus on self-portraiture has become a central framework for discussion as it strongly emphasizes this transformational process of awakening. The idea that it is through others that we discover who we are is a way of knowing that underpins self-portraiture as a mode of therapeutic photography. McNiff (1992) explains that we learn that by stepping aside and watching ourselves. The photographers examined in this literature review elucidate this pathway of discovery through the examination of personal histories and involvement with the creative act.
Jo Spence: beyond the perfect image

British artist Jo Spence was a crucial artist in debates of photography and the critique of representation in the seventies and eighties (Ribalta, 2005). She was interested in questioning the documentary practice as a dialogue in which we all learn from each other. Her artwork and debates resulted in the conceptualization of therapeutic photography and her creative process can be quite well investigated through her public writings.

Spence believed photography to be a political and educational tool. Coming from a working class in England, she collaborated with photographer and writer Terry Dennett, among others in her community, to establish projects such as *Photography Workshop* in the early 1970’s. Through the discussion of the use of photography in mass communication media, and the development of ‘community photography’ on *Women and Work*, she helped generate political awareness towards the image of the woman, thus her importance on feminist debates until this date. *Photography Workshop* ideological character also fostered awareness towards technological struggles invisible to standard histories of photography. Throughout the time of the workshop, the project *Survival Photography* saw an archive been built to contain sources of alternative photo technology that would encourage a “self-reliant, non-fetishistic, low-cost approach to the tools and materials of photography” (Spence, 1986, p. 64).

Spence’s work is deprived of enigmatic conceptual layers and artistic hierarchies. For example, the first thing that came to my attention when viewing Spence’s work for the first time was the straightforwardness of her images. The essentially autobiographical nature of her work is delivered with the same rawness of her photographic aesthetics (fig. 1). There is no glamour and she does not make an effort to look pretty. In fact, it is from the exploration of the ordinariness of her own body and informal artistic methods that she seeks to inform the audience: “the most simple pictures can be used to start off a chain of ideas, or to contradict notions of what we think we know” (Spence, 1986, p. 13).
Her findings on the potentialities of the use of self-portraiture as a means to raise educational, political and emotional awareness are quite compelling (Barbosa, 2010). From very early on in her practice as a high street photographer, when she photographed families and actors, she would question who and what the pictures were for. She found people would have preconceived ideas of how they should look. This taught her, for the sake of professional success, “the art of visual stereotyping” (Spence, 1986, p. 26). Later on she worked as a freelance documentary photographer and it was after spending most of her working life trying to visually represent other people that she began to think about how she had been represented by others. She also credits feminism and becoming more politicized to reaching this point, a clear connection with Photography Workshop.

The following excerpt of her writings allow her avidly critical voice to be absorbed unmistakably:

"I changed my role from being behind the camera to being in front of it and became at the same time an active rather than passive subject. Not only did I take more control over what I presented of myself to the camera, but I also decided what techniques I wanted used on me. ... Those ‘happy’, ‘serious’, ‘loving’, ‘miserable’, but always passive visual moments which do exist, those moments which only show surface information about me, give no indication at all of the wider social, economic and political histories of our disgusting class-divided society. They are rendered invisible within my ‘family album’. (But then this is normal to most families, who are encouraged only to photograph their leisure, their consumption, or their ownership and to show the ‘harmony’ of their lives.) I began to reverse the process of the way I had been constructed as a woman by deconstructing myself visually in an attempt to identify the process by which I had been ‘put together’. ... And I realized that I had to reject the whole of my learned photographic practice because it had made me visually represent others in ways not necessarily in their class interests in order to earn my living as a photographer: ... The personal is political. There is no way I could have understood fully the political implications of trying to represent other people (however well intentioned) if I had not first of all begun to explore how I had built a view of myself through other people’s representations of me.” (Spence, 1986, pp. 82-83)

If only more photographers made public such important reflections on the development of their practices, it would be possible for photographers to learn from each other’s process. This excerpt makes visible the birth of Spence’s process of engagement with self-portraiture as reflective photographic practice. It informs the
reader on how she felt uncomfortable with the standards of the practice of portraiture at the time. Her realization of the process of construction of identities behind what would remain in family albums as truthful documents led her to question both her own identity and role as photographer. Her consequential body of work focused on the re-enactment of family album photographs and her own documentation of her struggle to overcome a generalized poor health condition.

“The Picture of Health?” (fig. 1) posts the breast as a metaphor for women’s struggle with beautification and expectation of being the object of the male gaze (Spence, 1986). This work went straight to the point of taking control over the representation of her self by attempting to deal with her feelings towards the situation and giving them visual form. She not only addressed breast cancer and the medical treatments she undertook, but also criticized the poor health care system she found herself subjected to.

While still confronting this stage of her life, a close collaboration with Rosy Martin generated the idea of photo therapy, or the use of photography to heal themselves. Their photo therapy revolved around re-enacting family album photographs. The effort to produce for themselves an opportunity of reconstructing or reinventing buried memories and their fragmented selves allowed them to integrate that knowledge at a deeper, unconscious level, to transform it into an inner wisdom in the form of self-acceptance (Spence & Martin, 1986). At a later stage, they moved from re-enacting family album photographs to actually imagining their mothers and themselves in different stages of their lives and photographing one another acting as such.

For the photo therapy sessions, Spence and Martin worked closely together in a studio setting. Having a close relationship as friends, their sessions resembled a co-

*It is important to acknowledge that while Spence and Martin defined photo therapy as a framework for their practice, they were not qualified therapists. Their practice has recently been framed as therapeutic photography instead, as pointed out at the beginning of this subchapter. For a comprehensive guide through PhotoTherapy, facilitated by qualified therapists, see Weiser (1993).
counseling experience that would explore one another’s ‘in memory’ images of themselves (fig. 2). The main goal was to document their process of transcending the re-enactment of those memories. Moreover, they would digress from the experience by reflecting on the printed results, which they considered to be as important as the photographic sessions themselves. The process of accessing a wide range of possible selves allowed them to ‘reframe’ the self that was told through family photographs (Martin & Spence, 1985), which they considered to be extremely empowering. Spence’s work elucidates a bridge between self-exploration and personal healing that led her to the development of a heightened awareness of her role as photographer. Her body of work evidences self-portraiture as key reflective practice in the development of her artistic making. This capacity of allowing the autobiographical to become art was made visible through her public writings and has encouraged me substantially to reflect on my own practice of self-portraiture.

**Cristina Nuñez: the self-portrait experience**

Cristina Nuñez is a “professional artist-photographer who has been taking self-portraits since 1988 as a form of self-therapy, to explore her personal and creative identity and to raise her self-esteem” (Nuñez, 2008c). She has developed a method called “The Self-portrait Experience”, through which any individual can learn how to convert difficult emotions into art.

I will never forget how I came to know Cristina Nuñez. I was attending the 2008 International Conference on PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography in Finland. One of the conference organizers identified how my impressions about the creative power of self-portraiture were very similar to that of this Spanish artist. The big differences were that Nuñez had at least one more decade of experience with the practice ahead of me, and that I had never incorporated pain or negativity into my artistic work.

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10 “New Portraits for Old: The Use of the Camera in Therapy” (Martin & Spence, 1985) featured in Feminist Review explain in detail how the two photographers conceptualized photo therapy at the time and make an important remark on the low-cost character of the process and how any woman whose household had a camera could benefit from it. The feminist discourse, so present in the work of Spence and Martin, has generated extensive academic literature about their photographic practice, however this research is not concerned with this aspect of their contributions.
Knowing the importance of self-portraiture as a reflective photographic practice, she has published her methodology (Nuñez, 2008a) in order to emphasize its attainable nature for any individual.

“Standing alone in front of the camera is the easiest way to stimulate our deepest emotions and transform them into artworks... By objectifying our ‘dark side’ in a photograph, we separate ourselves from what’s painful and open ourselves up for catharsis or renewal... It is a sort of meditation. Introspection is essential to find inspiration and fill my mind and heart once more with new ideas and projects.” (Nuñez, 2010)

Through her long-dated practice with self-portraiture, she has come to find that a self-portrait does not define the sitter. The self-portrait simply is what needs to come to light at the time it is taken, like a voice of the unconscious that tells the individual what he or she needs to know. What she believes to be cathartic in her method is verified through the transformation of the sitter's mood from one shot to the next (fig. 3). It is this process that allows healing to start immediately.

In her method, facilitated in the form of workshop, she encourages the individual’s expression of emotions (‘myself’), as well as the exploration of his or her relationships (‘myself and the others’) and place in the world (‘myself in the world’). In a very similar manner to that of Spence, she highlights the likelihood for creative expression to happen in simplicity of the process: technique should be unpretentious and any camera can be used. “If all your attention is directed to the inner experience, you will always be successful, because the photographs will express your humanity” (Nuñez, 2008a).

Fig. 3: Nuñez reported in her blog that Salvatore, who was very sick with AIDS, was very proud of his collaborative self-portrait: “He wanted the world to listen to his rage and despair” (Nuñez, 2008b). Clearly, making his rage visible through self-portraiture had an empowering outcome.
As important as the actual self-portrait sessions, is the creative storytelling generated from the chosen image of the participants, which allows them to detach from their usual self-image and acquire an imaginative vision. She reports that this vision often triggers new discoveries regarding one’s own identity and its unknown potential, which result in the subject’s immediate empowerment.

The most valuable lesson taken from Nuñez’s experience is that she relies on the practice of self-portraiture as a means of artistic renewal. She does not make any parallels between the aesthetics of her self-portraits and the rest of her body of work. On the other hand, self-portraiture represents for her an empowering practice to always refer back to when she wants to explore her creative self and generate new series of artistic projects. It is this nature of creative transcendence that emerges from the simple act of doing self-portraiture that evidences once again its importance as a reflective photographic practice.

**Envisioning the future: a gap in therapeutic photography**

The techniques of therapeutic photography presented here all have in common the capacity to promote awareness of the self through a reflective practice of self-portraiture. Re-enactment of past and exploration of present emotional states have proved to be successful methods that lead to personal empowerment. However, the efficacy of working with future ideas has not yet come to my attention as a methodology.

Taking into account the knowledge that has already been generated in the field of therapeutic photography, my endeavor for this research project has become elaborating my own methodology. My methodology presents the new intake of working with imagination in order to stimulate the production of ideas of future. I aim to verify the empowering value of therapeutic photography when deliberately applied to raising artistic awareness. My proposition is that by exploring my imagination and giving visual form to my ideas of future through photographic self-portraiture, I will be able to challenge my technical and conceptual proficiency to the same extent that it will allow me to gain a new awareness of my creative self.

My methodology is described in the chapter that follows.
“The challenge facing the human science researcher is to describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection.” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27)

“I and future”

As seen in the previous chapter, the practice of self-portraiture as a mode of therapeutic photography has proven to be a successful approach for different photographers as it leads to empowerment. Jo Spence and Cristina Nuñez, whilst having very different bodies of work, have both found the practice of self-portraiture to be a tool that allows them to perceive themselves in a different manner. By engaging with a new perception of self through photography, Spence was able to gain awareness of her role as documentary photographer; and Nuñez discovered a way of triggering her creativity; thus the sense of empowerment towards their art making.

Since my aim with this research project is to gain a new awareness of my creative self as an attempt to further develop my artistic authenticity as photographer, Spence and Nuñez have provided me with the necessary knowledge and inspiration to create my own methodology. In order to add to the body of knowledge in the field of therapeutic photography focused on self-portraiture, I have come to identify working with future ideas to be a potential target for framework. “I and future” would combine the personal with the creative, as well as potentially challenge my technical proficiency as photographer in order to bring these ideas or mental images to the physical world.

Spence and Nuñez works provide very clear frameworks of methodology. Spence’s framework at the earlier stage revolves around re-enactment of situations and emotions lived in the past, to then later on documenting her illness as it happened. Nuñez’s framework is based on a character of immediacy, or the very moment in which the photographic self-portrait takes place and the sitter comes to self-realization and a release of creativity. What I have mainly borrowed from their processes is the act of documenting the exploration of my emotions. What I have brought into therapeutic photography as a new intake is the exploration of my
imagination. Therefore, instead of re-enacting past emotions or spontaneously exploring them, I have enacted my visions of the future and the emotions attached to them.

In order to structure a point for departure for seeds of ideas of future to emerge, I had to identify a tangible technique I could work with. The concept of ‘active imagination’ of psychologist Carl Gustav Jung provided me with a technique to generate mental images directly related to my self. The next section of this chapter explains the core of this technique and how I explore it for the purposes of my project.

Active imagination: a Jungian approach

Whilst establishing boundaries for the development of my own personal approach to therapeutic photography by seeking to develop my ideas of the future, I have encountered active imagination, a technique evolved by psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, to be a natural point for departure.

In order to fully engage with active imagination, one needs to first understand the difference between fantasy and active imagination:

“A fantasy is more or less your own invention, and remains on the surface of personal things and conscious expectations. But active imagination, as the term denotes, means that the images have a life of their own and that the symbolic events develop according to their own logic – that is, of course, if your conscious reason does not interfere.” [Jung, 1955, para. 397]

It had always been clear to me that what I most enjoy doing as a photographer is to give birth to images that somehow I see, that are somehow synthetized in my mind. Once I became familiarized with Jung’s concept of active imagination, I realized that most definitely these images were products of my active imagination. I had never managed to pinpoint where they were coming from. I had only being aware that these mental images, which I call visions, were usually born in my mind in moments of relaxation and often, of joy. Due to my recognition of active imagination being a natural method of engaging with my own creativity or in Jung’s words, the imaginal world, active imagination became a suitable method to work with ideas of future.

Jung goes further to explain that working with the imaginal world is a way to integrate

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11 According to Raff (2000), Jung established that the ego is the center of consciousness while the self is the center of the whole personality. Personified as an inner figure, the self embodies an individual’s essential nature. The self pushes one to the experience and expression of one’s own uniqueness by creating symbols of the archetypal world. The archetypes are part of the collective unconscious, “a biologically given, common-to-all [‘collective’] configuration of the psyche” [Jones, et al., 2008, p. 5], thus the symbols they produce are universal. The central tenet of Jung’s model is that one must become one’s self by consciously dialoguing with these symbols. As hard as the task sounds, indeed an individual might never reach that point, but he can definitely get closer to it. Active imagination is a technique that fosters this experience.
the psyche. The functional process of this synthesis between image and ego is called transcendent (Jones, et al., 2008). From this perspective, it can be gathered that when the process of active imagination takes place, the personal (ego or conscious mind) and the creative (imaginal world or unconscious material) interact. In the integration of the conscious and unconscious a new way of being emerges from constructive insights. Thus the practice of active imagination being a potentially significant methodology to be applied by one who is trying to reach new understanding (transcendence) of one’s own creative self and what makes it authentic.

The transcendent function, which is the expected result of a successful engagement with active imagination, can be reached through practice, a process that author Raff (2000) has divided into seven main stages: preparation, intention, unconscious activation, interaction, reflection, resolution, and integration. I have used these stages in order to establish a framework for the practice of my project.

Preparation consists of quieting and centering the conscious mind, “so that the ego has the opportunity to receive the message from the unconscious” (Raff, 2000, p. 33). Although practices like meditation and breathing exercises are recommended in order to achieve this state of mind, the actual method is not important, and one should aim at whichever methods he feels comfortable with.

Once the ego invites the unconscious to communicate with it by reaching a state of inner repose, it is crucial that the individual establishes his intentionality with the practice. The intention serves “to focus the unconscious in a definite way” (Raff, 2000, p. 33). What I found of most important once in this stage is that it is only necessary to keep the intent in mind until something begins to occur. Having found that engaging with active imagination is a very natural experience for me when I am relaxed, I decided to establish which aspects of future ideas I would focus on, and then just wait for this intent to communicate with my unconscious.

For the purposes of accomplishing the project within a timeframe, specific approaches for exploration of the self were selected for the intention stage. Taking into consideration Nuñez’s method and Corbit and Fryrear’s Jungian approach to photo therapy (1992), I have come to establish three themes: “I”, “I and others”, and “I and nature”. “I” refers to my attempt to locate the ego within my inner true self. “I and others” is intended to provide me with better understanding of myself as a social being, or what determines the nature and outcome of my social interaction with others. With “I and nature” I aim to get in contact with our natural history, or the natural wisdom inherent in us that is kept away by our rationalism.
It is important to make a remark here on the importance of exploring these three different approaches to the self in the temporal dimension of future. Successfully engaging with active imagination with this intention would be enough to allow the transcendent function to happen. However, by engaging with “I and future”, I intend to push the boundaries of my imagination as well as my technical and conceptual proficiency as photographer in order to actually give visual form to my experience of active imagination.

The third stage, *unconscious activation*, refers to experiencing “an affect, a bodily sensation, a voice, or a strange thought” (Raff, 2000, p. 34). In my case, I aim to explore the mental images I am used to experiencing when active imagination takes place. I refer to these images as visions, which are the main sources for the actual development of the photographic work of self-portraiture done in this project. Engaging with my visions of future through self-portraiture means engaging with the *interaction* phase of active imagination. The *interaction* stage being work that is required to occur outside the active, it reinforces the appropriateness of using photography as means.

The interactive phase is coupled with the *reflection* phase. At this point, there is a necessity to think carefully about the outcome of the *unconscious activation* (visions) as well as the experience of interacting with it. It is during this process that I establish a mental and photographic dialogue with the emotions and symbols that were brought forward in the visions. Each vision containing an array of emotions, and elements that signify them, first I have to enlist all of them and reflect on the meaning they hold for me. Then find appropriate locations, clothes, objects; as well as the right photographic techniques that would enable the development of the self-portraiture work. Photographically depicting each vision and editing the images further contribute to the process of unconsciousness raising. Only by making sense of the symbols is that it is possible to access new knowledge about one’s self, thus reaching some conclusions, which is called the *resolution* stage.

The core process explored in my personal narrative in chapter 4 lies in the *interaction*, *reflection* and *resolution* stages described above. I focus on the interplay between accessing visions of the future and turning them into photographic self-portraits. My narrative describes the process of how I gained a new awareness of my creative self through this process, thus verifying the empowering character of this methodology of creative inquiry.

Writing this exegesis could not be more appropriate to mirror the last stage in the practice of active imagination, *integration*. “At the point at which the ego gains an
insight, it must make a total effort to integrate that insight into its outer life” (Raff, 2000, p. 36). I hope that by making this research project available to others and by exhibiting my self-portrait images, I have the opportunity to engage with feedback as well as contribute to the body of knowledge in order to reach a complete practice of active imagination.
Fig. 4: "I" (The mirror collector)
Fig. 5: “I and others” (We are all healers)
Fig. 6: “I and nature” (Night creatures)
CHAPTER 4
MY CREATIVE SELF:
TOWARDS A NEW AWARENESS

“Ideas are the seeds of imagination. They are mental images that stimulate us to bring them into the physical world. But in order to take material form, the idea must go through a process that produces an amalgamation between the purely mental image and the physical action of creation. Sometimes the end result closely approximates the original idea, and often the final outcome bears little resemblance to the starting point. ... The things that we do in service of an idea generate new ideas, and the process goes on and on. ... The act of creating is a partnership between ideas and the physical qualities of art making. One thing leads to another.” (McNiff, 1998, p. 14)

My personal narrative described in this chapter explores my process of engaging with my visions of future as intentional outcomes of a practice of active imagination. It is focused on the interaction, reflection and resolution stages of the practice of active imagination.

The first section describes my process of interacting with the visions on a mental level. After accessing visions of “I”, “I and others” and “I and nature”, I went through a process of deep reflection on the essence of meaning each of them carried for me. In order to give visual form to these visions through self-portraiture, I consequentially established photographic techniques and a production of location and props that together would signify the visions appropriately.

In the second section I have allocated each vision as separate case studies. The aim is to describe each vision and how interacting with each of them separately through photographic self-portraiture generated specific insights towards my creative self. This process of reflection is directly related to interacting with the symbols present in each vision and making sense of their meaning.

The resolution stage is embedded in the narrative of development of each vision. However, in order to achieve further clarity of perception, I have created a third section that summarizes my conclusions. It describes how this methodology of creative inquiry has helped me gain an empowering awareness of my creative self.
From unconscious activation to photography: a mental dialogue

Within a couple of months after setting out for a framework of intention for my practice of active imagination, my unconscious activation took place and I had three very clear visions to work with. They were clear to such an extent that almost instantaneously I had titles for them. “I” was “The mirror collector”, “I and others” became “We are all healers” and “I and nature” was simply “Night creatures”.

Very interestingly, one of the first challenges I encountered was not coming to a technical and conceptual resolution for the photographic depiction of each vision. Instead, it was entering the right emotional state of mind that would push me into taking the step to actually photograph. My aim with the doing of the self-portraits was not to simply represent the emotions I encountered in each vision, but to enact them – present my body encountering the emotions that were brought forward in each vision. As I would have to truthfully engage with exploring very different sets of emotions and physical movements, feeling ready to go through this process required a great deal of confidence and preparation.

I was also strongly attached to ensuring that I had perfectly gathered all the props I needed. They represented essential symbols that I needed to interact with during the development of the self-portraits. I also knew that once I decided to go on with a shoot to enact a vision, I was not likely to be willing to redo it. Enacting demanded a high level of emotional engagement; and my experience as photographer to date had already taught me what I considered to be a successful shoot. The dynamics of exploring an idea to its fullest during a shoot was the equivalent to intuitively working with the camera until achieving “the” image. Thus I would only redo an image in the case of unexpected incidents made it impossible to happen. Otherwise, I wanted to do everything I could to engage with the process as organically and spontaneously as possible.

In this process, I found myself questioning the complexity of my own photographic process. More to the point, I questioned whether my fixation with photographing images that demanded so much production was: truly a reproduction of my creative capacity and projection of my authentic imagination; or if it was simply an excuse, a complex invention of my fearful ego that disguised the simplicity of the act of photographing, making me static and incapable of believing in my proficiency as photographer.

Curiously, I actually felt very confident with my conceptual proficiency and was consciously looking forward to challenging my technical capabilities, which included developing my digital workflow skills. I had no difficulty in asserting the mood of each
vision and how I would bring it to visual form through lighting: "I" required daylight, "I and others" the technique of light painting with flashlights, and "I and nature" strobe lights. Each of these represented different degrees of challenge for the development of my technical proficiency, with "I and others" having the highest of all for being the one technique I had very little practice with. However, what was truly revealing was that apart from "I", the concepts of light and composition asked for something new in my practice of self-portraiture: the use of a tripod and a wireless remote shutter release system.

“To not use a tripod and always activate the camera through its timer has established a parameter in my language of self-portraiture. The relationship of distance between camera and scene is dictated by the 10 seconds of the timer. This ends up personifying the author of the image as an observer, someone who’s truly intimate or at least curious and audacious enough to capture revealing images from so close (Fig. 7). The possibility of using a wireless remote control means taking this perspective over the subject to a magnification of its relationship with the world. The images that I have been conceptualizing, especially the one directly related to nature, contain a human figure in relatively small dimension to the surrounding landscape. I can see within this rationale a very sharp change in the development of my personal way of thinking the subject in photography. ... I have always felt compelled to photograph everything from close and I see an almost obvious but sincere willingness of mine to participate in everything with such enthusiasm, that I end up seeing in the geographically close the necessary intensity to demonstrate to others my genuine interest. It’s almost like I need to ‘contaminate’ the space of the other with my presence. Perhaps, as a matter of fact, I lack comprehension of how distancing can become a new learning tool. A visual study of simple character, yet, it characterizes a new type of technical challenge with the potential for room for future insights.”

(Excerpt from my diary dated from 26 April 2010)

Fig. 7: “Voyeur”, which I credit to being the eye-opener project for my creativity in my early days as photography student. These sample images point to the concept of intimate subject explored in the excerpt above. At the time I did not own a tripod, neither a remote control; thus the camera would stay on my hands or I would position it in whichever surface (e.g. a stool, the floor, a shelf) was available. My priorities were: finding an angle from where I could access the viewfinder in order to be able to work on my composition; and being close enough so I could release the shutter on timer mode and have the time to enter the frame and act out.
After going through this rationale, it was clear to me that I would do this entire project with a tripod and a wireless remote control. Although many photographers have produced provocative self-portrait images with a cabled shutter release, it has always been of critical importance for me to not provide the spectator with an evidence of the image being a self-portrait. Personally, doing self-portraiture serves the purposes of research and creative development; but my desire as artist is to communicate something universal and I would rather leave it to the audience to wonder if my images are self-portraits. The use of the tripod figured as a crucial step towards asserting the depiction of the visions. By gaining absolute control of the position of the camera, I would be able to control the concepts of composition for each of them.

My narrative until this point makes clear that even before photographing, I had already achieved new questioning and constructive insights towards my practice as photographer. Yet, the actual process of turning each vision into a self-portrait generated even more, specific and deep insights.

**Self-portraiture and future: a photographic dialogue**

My interaction with each vision is described in chronological order of photographic shoots. These narratives are not concerned with explaining the photographic techniques applied in the process of doing each self-portrait. The purpose of the case studies is to demonstrate how my methodology of practice of active imagination mediated by self-portraiture has helped me gain new awareness of my creative self as photographer and human being.

"I and others" (We are all healers)

In the vision of "I and others" I saw myself in an open outdoor area within the city at night. It looked like a party or social gathering. There were buildings surrounding the space. Everybody was concentrated over this lawn area and there was a bonfire. Most people were interacting within small groups, including me, and just a few people were on their own.

I saw myself joyfully listening to my friends’ stories. At the same time, I saw myself multiplied, interacting with other people I did not know, but who were visibly distressed, in need of emotional care. I was standing by their sides, sending them a focused healing energy that was visible to me as beams of light. I would surround one with the energy as in a spiraling beam around the body; another with a straight beam
towards a specific part of the body; I interacted differently with each individual. It was as if I had split myself in many and, within the same moment, I was with my friends and with others, sharing with them my healing energy. Nobody could see my other selves all around.

What struck me the most was a strong sense of hope for a future in which we, human beings, would have learned how to use our faculty of healing, and would be constantly watching out for one another. That whenever we sensed someone around us was in need of emotional care, that we would step in and actively share our healing power without having to actually meet that person or establish a personal bond with him or her. It was more a matter of taking ownership for our collective health as society and manhood, of caring for one another’s well being for the sake of building harmonious communities.

This vision carried a strong sense of evolution for me. Imagine how amazing if we had the capacity of actually healing one another by channeling and directing our inner energy. A future less based on external technologies and more connected to broader capacities of the human body itself.

“We are all healers” would demand a great degree of technical proficiency in order to bring it to a visual form. Right away I knew I would have to experiment with multiple exposure and light painting. Being a night scene, my vision would graciously benefit from this technique that required dark environments, and it was the most accurate way to record light in the form of a beam, which would convey the healing energy. Multiple exposure figured as a logical solution to record the same person many times within different parts of the same frame, and fortunately my camera held that function, I only had never used it.

I would also need to find people who would be willing to collaborate. They would need to be good at standing still for a long exposure while I performed the healing in different areas of the scene. My idea was to show my multiple selves as semi-transparent figures compared to the others in the scene. I instantly thought of a location at the university campus that had the same particularities of the one I saw in the vision – it would come down to being allowed to have a bonfire in there.

But before involving a whole group of people in the making of the image, I decided to experiment with the technique with just my partner as collaborator. He had empathized with my description of the vision and was excited to collaborate. So, on an ordinary mid-of-week evening during summer, we just felt like going for it. I had gathered enough flashlights that could potentially lead to successful results – their warm-color bulbs resonated with my vision of healing energy.
This day I learned something fascinating about the symbiosis of materials and how a creative performative practice can take a life of its own. The fact that I set the shoot as a test, as an opportunity to experiment, left me in a state of openness that allowed something very transcending to happen. Instead of concerning myself with achieving the perfect depiction of my vision, I was intuitively experimenting with the technique. I was aiming at simply evoking the sense of energy and separating the layers of still and moving human figures. I also did not feel bonded to work in a specific location. We simply started in our living room, then moved outside – to a small garden/park area behind a very old church two blocks away from home, then back inside in our bedroom. And then the one thing I was not consciously expecting to happen – an actual healing process, ended up revealing itself.

The first images taken show the two of us in a quite serious mood, with spots of light above our heads that are quite abstract. They resemble ‘confused’ or ‘annoyed’ cartoonish graphic symbols (fig. 8). When we were outside, what I was trying to symbolize with the light kept changing (fig. 9). In this trial and error process, what was most exciting was how much it required from me to involve him in the technical process, which turned out to become a completely collaborative shoot. The more he understood how to accomplish the image technically, more he contributed creatively as well. We kept constant dialogue, especially to define each one’s position within the composition of the frame. Having the digital camera was an incredible aid. Because we could preview the images, it reassured us that what we felt was working, truly was. All went very spontaneously – he knew what we were aiming for with the image, so we just kept doing it. By the time we were feeling close to getting to an asserted use of the technique, we had to return home because the camera had run out of battery.

![Fig. 8: during the first set of tests in our living room, I was mainly working with the light to see what kind of shapes I could create. I also needed to find out the right length for the exposure that would capture the light painting effect.](image-url)
Fig. 9: the idea of going to this location close to our home came up at the time of the shoot. Until then, I had not even considered this place. However, when I remembered it, it was clearly resonating with my vision (a lawn area surrounded by buildings). It is striking for me how our body language kept changing according to getting closer to asserting the enactment of the emotions embedded in the vision.
With the spare battery at hand at home, we went to the bedroom – I suddenly knew exactly what to do. I envisioned him lying down in bed and I would be behind him sending the healing energy. The idea was to symbolize that he was not aware of my presence and I felt strongly inclined to work with the shape of a heart to symbolize the healing energy. By this point, we were working with a double exposure. In the first exposure, he stayed still and I would do the light painting to illuminate him and make the heart. In the second one, I would take my position and he would illuminate me with the flashlight for less time so I would look slightly transparent. The big thing was managing to get the heart to come out right and in the direction of my hand (fig. 10).

When we finally got to the one perfect image, we were physically tired but with an empowering feeling of having given birth to a stunning image. It just felt so real that we were dealing with healing. I know that for both of us, agreeing on collaborating to create this image was a creative partnership first and foremost. However, in order to achieve the emotional level we wanted to make visible, we ended up accessing our own very experience of pain and healing through enactment. A few days later we were reviewing the results once again and it hit us that we had so personally explored those emotions that without thinking about it, we had just given visual form to a whole year of struggle of him going through a serious health problem in his lower back. In the photo, he had taken the same, only lying position that was bearable for him to stay when he was sick. His staring eyes, fixed for the entire 30-second length of the first exposure, symbolizing his despair – six months of wait for a surgery in chronic constant pain. Gradually we became aware of his symbolic position and my sending of a loving energy, the healing through the heart.

It is very intriguing for me that this vision was the first one I decided to depict after all. I had only prioritized it because I was concerned with having enough time to assert the technique. It turned out to be therapeutic in a way that I simply did not expect. Moreover, it enabled me to see a transformation from a very complex vision into a simple but universal, highly symbolic and emotional image about healing. Right away, by interacting with one of my visions, I learned a huge lesson on letting go of perfectionism when photographing. I learned to trust in the act of creating as an intuitive partnership with the camera and whatever materials are available when I am photographing. It also pointed out a new way of establishing dialogue with a sitter in my practice of portraiture, where collaboration becomes an active agent of transformation.
Fig. 10: this sequence demonstrates how my idea of working with the heart progressed. Together we kept reviewing the images as they were taken. When we got to the highlighted image, at first we thought the light spot that showed up at the top left seemed like a fault. But then we realized that it became an interesting counterpoint to the energy of the heart that was so precisely coming out of my hand – something interestingly abstract for viewers to draw meaning on their own.
"I and nature" (Night creatures)

Vigilant, a feline-like human figure acting as part of nature, not different from it as it had its own nature – they are one. In my vision, I was a powerful being, but more than that, I was powerful because I was nature itself. I walked on all fours back and forth continuously. At times, I would stop and gaze at the night sky. In a state of watchfulness aimed purely at protection, there was no feeling of repression or subdue behind it, and neither I was in attack mode.

Together, the environment and my appearance conveyed a strong sense of bareness. The moonlight revealed a natural environment with few bushes and trees sparse over the land. My body was covered in a dark rudimental type of body suit. As rudimental as it was, it did not look like any scrap of clothing, but a well thought garment that was minimal and utilitarian, one that allowed for a stretched range of movements. Hands and feet were bare. My hair looked very natural with no apparent grooming.

A moment in future when human beings would have rescued their primal connection to nature. A moment when we would be acting less as supreme intelligent beings on the top of the hierarchy and more as just animals. There were so many layers to rescuing my animal essence and connection to nature though, that it was hard for me to comprehend this vision fully. It seemed so simple and yet, it was so profound. Who were these night creatures of the future after all? It was clear to me that I would only come to a resolution once I enacted the vision.

This was also the vision that represented the most physical challenge for me. Walking on all fours, gracefully like an animal, was definitely not part of my repertoire of movements. Not long after the vision, I found myself naturally desiring to build up my physical strength and flexibility. I went back to swimming and yoga, and started taking feldenkrais classes. I felt strongly inclined to engage with practices that would help me gain more awareness of my body. I wanted so much to understand further what was brought forward in the vision, that preparing myself physically to enact it became essentially a source for self-knowledge.

The night I set out to enact the vision, I was feeling extremely open to just work with the environment and move my body continuously until it encountered the emotions I envisioned so profoundly. I put a lot of effort into not rationalizing much. After I tested the light and made sure I was framing the environment in such way that would allow me to move quite broadly in front of the camera, I let go of thinking. I set my radio remote control to take sets of 10 shots, one new shot every 15 seconds, and

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12 Feldenkrais facilitates learning through lessons that explore movement, posture and breathing in order to reeducate the nervous system, increase movement awareness and improve motor ability. See “The Feldenkrais method” (IFF, 2011).
concentrated on just moving (fig. 11).

Fig. 11: through my tests, I aimed at using a single strobe light in order to emphasize the darkness around my figure in a way that merged my clothes with the shadows. This first series depicts the beginning of my enacting journey, where I am on all fours. The first image already carries the state of watchfulness I wanted to depict, however the play of shadows onto my face in the subsequent images further enhanced the sense of human creature.
I managed to move away from rationalizing so much that towards the end of the shoot I was grabbing leaves and barks from the ground and playing with them for no apparent reason (fig. 12). The more I let go of rationalizing, more I could feel my body and my facial expression changing instinctively. Slowly, I started feeling the impact of the darkness around me, and I heavily felt the camera taking the role of an oppressive interlocutor. There was something territorial about that relationship. After a sequence of 50 photographs, I did not feel I was accessing anything different any longer and I immediately started itching from probable insect bites. I did not know if I had produced a perfect image to convey my vision, but I had just gone through an intense process of bringing to light movements and feelings I was unaware of until that point. And one thing I knew straight away: feeling one with nature did not belong to my cultural realm.

Fig. 12: the sequence where I am playing with leaves and a found piece of bark depicts the peak of my instinctive enactment. At the end of the shoot I was already feeling part of that environment, and there was a strong feeling of oppression. I was not thinking at all. It felt like I was accessing an internal void.
When viewing the images, I noticed how my movements resemble very different personal references. Mostly, I could see a mix of indigenous ways of interacting with the land, such as ‘listening to the Earth’; with low movements, certainly similar to those of mammals but not necessarily of a specific animal. I can see how this was my way of accessing a protective state or the state of being watchful for nature, which is embedded in my knowledge of indigenous people’s respect for nature; and at the same time accessing the animal in me, which essentially is a mammal. What is interesting though is to comprehend that the feline-like figure of my vision carried a sense of strength and power that I did not manage to enact (fig. 13). Instead, at the peak of my instinctive enacting, I look much more like a frightened or subdued dog (fig. 12), which is probably the one animal I have been in more contact with my whole life. At that point, I see in my gaze a mix of feeling terrified but at the same time trying to scare the other for my own protection and the protection of my food, symbolized by the bark in my mouth. What a blatant difference between the emotion I envisioned in that creature and the one I managed to enact, it feels like I accessed what animals might feel nowadays in relation to us, human beings.

This vision was the one I least produced for as there was no important object to be depicted. It was only I in black clothes that would cover my whole body, in a scenario with nature, at night. At first I wanted to shoot it in the bush but after enacting the first vision, I knew it would be possible to achieve a symbolic image without having to travel. Hence, once again, I did the shooting within my surroundings, more to the point, in a small park just next to the building where I live. I credit the familiar surrounding to have provided me with the easiness I needed to be able to concentrate on encountering such complex emotions.

Night creatures of the future. I mentioned in one of my diaries, right before deciding what to do for this research project, that I felt strong about starting to incorporate darkness into my work for the sake of learning from another spectrum of emotions. It is fantastic to realize how my intention came about in this vision. It took me enacting the vision to truly understand the essence of meaning behind a metaphor for darkness, or the absence of light. The dark night I thought to be resonant with the watchful creature of my vision, in fact symbolizes our leaving behind completely the most primitive knowledge that belongs to humankind, our natural wisdom. I wonder if our species will have to drastically face the strength of nature in order to learn how to respect and protect it once and for all. Perhaps if we have to crawl and creep, and be left to darkness ourselves, the human being will finally move away from a hierarchical pattern of behavior and will become one with nature again.
Fig. 13: this selected series of images depicts my instinctive process of engaging with my personal references of a possible creature connected to its nature, a process of letting go of rationalization and just enacting according to my vision. The spectrum of movements and emotions I encountered when dealing with the darkness and myself as simply animal made me realize the depth to how apart from the natural world we are. It is not a surprise to encounter this resolution, but I have gained profound understanding of what rescuing this connection means if we are interested in producing a better future for our world, not only for ourselves. During the editing process, I decided to select a sequence of images instead of one single image as an attempt to convey the emphasis on movement of the watchful creature I envisioned. The fence at the background was not part of my vision but it became an important symbol for the urban reminiscences that could exist in the future for our species when left to darkness. I also made the decision to crop the final images to a panoramic format in order to further enhance the focus on my expressions since the tree trunks, grass and fence would still be recognizable after the cropping.
"I" [The mirror collector]

So there I am, almost six months after I had the vision about ‘the mirror collector’.

A vision of the future that started as my willingness to share a hope for a day when people, not only women, would just be ok with themselves the way they are. They would find the human being beautiful, they would understand that the way they look is absolutely credited to who they are and the experiences they have had. If they loved sweets, that their curves were felt as a memory of pleasure. If they had a scar, that they remembered they survived little or big battles.

A need to see myself like that, taking ownership for my own bodily look, and feeling satisfied, happy with it. In my vision, I saw myself framed from the back, right above the knees; the fragmented reflections over several mirrors, and the mirrors themselves, were crucial to telling the emotions I envisioned. “The mirror collector” would embody a woman of the future who is my ideal of self-acceptance:

"… she is serene and happy. She sees herself as the result of several generations. She understands/feels the beauty of life and accepts herself for just being, exactly the way she is, with the marks that have stayed and the ones she’s created. This scene is made to the most beautiful morning light that takes over a white room, shining through her collection of mirrors and making their diverse colors, shapes and textures vibrate." [Excerpt from my diary dated from October 2010]

It took me months to feel satisfied with my collecting of mirrors and go ahead with the shoot. In order to produce the image, I needed to gather a substantial set of mirrors that covered old, present, and futuristic trends. I decided to ask my friends to give me mirrors for my birthday through an email where I explained what their role was in signifying my vision. I also contacted a specialized shop in order to complete the collection. I managed to gather 13 mirrors. Everybody who collaborated demonstrated to sincerely care to support me – read my art practice, and looked forward to seeing the final photograph.

I also bought myself wigs and new make-up as I recalled part of my vision was strongly related to portraying a ‘raver’ of the future and I was trying very hard to embody that aspect as well. The more I thought about this though, more of a blur it became – I could not exactly visualize that part and in fact, none of my diary notes mentioned it. At the back of my mind, while producing all the props, it struck me that if this image was strongly about self-acceptance then I had to be naked.

I did my own nude for the first time and it felt natural. I left the session feeling good about it but something was puzzling me. I did not experience the bodily sensations I
am used to when creating and feeling at the peak of it, I felt simply comforted and looked very much forward to viewing the results.

The photo that I ended up liking the most was taken towards the end of the session. I had intuitively raised the angle of view to higher than the eye level, which is where it was before (fig. 14a and 14b). This move incorporated more of the window’s outlook view. The exposure of light became less contrasted between inside and outside, which allowed a roof and a tree to show in the exposure. It also framed the camera in one of the mirrors. When first viewing the images from this part of the shoot, I loved the results; but almost immediately set them apart as not suitable since neither the camera, nor the outlook view, were originally part of my envisioned mirror collector scene. After some ‘sitting with’ the photos, I realized that nothing could be more complete to show my true self. For me, the world and I are interconnected; we are part of each other, an extension of each other. The camera is another set of mirrors, most importantly one that defines who I am in so many ways. Very intuitively, I had included aspects of myself into this vision of the future that empower me on my everyday (fig. 15).

One week after I photographed and enacted the mirror collector, I found a small piece of drawing on EVA foam that I had done during a chat with my mom, who I was helping work in one of her crafting projects. I drew a fat (not chubby), interesting, stylish looking, smiling lady. When I finished drawing it and made a cut out piece of it, I told my mom I thought I had just given visual form to my self-image. It is incredibly revealing for me to realize that when I had my vision of the mirror collector, I still felt my self-image like that. I felt reasonably comfortable with being overweight but it disturbed me to have so many good friends that, influenced by external standards of beauty, really thought they would feel better with themselves if they changed something physical in them in order to be ‘perfect’.

Very curiously then, after I had the vision, I found myself naturally taking more care of my body. I learned that in order to feel absolutely (not just reasonably) comfortable with my self-image, I had to fully engage with my physical health. Integrating this aspect into my life would simply resonate better with my way of being: happy body, even happier self. My point of transformation towards self-acceptance became eating healthier – I finally had discovered my way of nurturing a loving connection to my body.

I was visiting my family in July. I had my vision about the mirror collector in September. I photographed in April. In order to embody my self-accepting ideal of woman in the future, I have grown to be more self-accepting than ever in my life.
Fig. 14a: the image on the top is the first image I took, which included more of the room than I thought was needed to depict the vision. I find interesting the expression of freedom it depicts. The following images already are set within a smaller area of the room but without taking away from the eye level viewpoint. They depict how at the beginning of the process of enacting the vision, I was still very connected to a stereotypical depiction of sexiness. Although I consider all of them effectively symbolic images due to the combination of body positioning and reflections, none of them portray the emotions I felt during the vision.
Fig. 14b: This last sequence happened right before moving the camera away from eye level viewpoint. I was still not happy with the emphasis on ‘being in love with the mirror’, which was too much of a literal sense for self-acceptance. Since I had taken innumerable photographs already and was not getting to what I envisioned, I simply decided to play with the camera a little bit as an attempt to refresh the shoot. This is what I call intuitive creative performance, which I have learned to trust even more throughout this project.

Fig. 15: Immediately after changing the camera angle, I took the photograph I have selected as final. Within this series it is possible to observe how this image emphasizes my serene expression reflected on the mirrors on the left. I feel that once I finally forgot the mirrors around me and gazed outwards, enjoying the daylight and the view, everything came together. The nude body became secondary in the image and I found the expression of my hands to be intriguing as they leave room for interpretation for the viewer. I also really liked the way the heart-shaped mirror on the right framed my far-from-perfect belly; and the square mirror on the left created a cubist effect over my core, transforming it into a non-recognizable gender figure. I found the next image to also have a good combination of figure and reflections as the facial expression is only revealed through the reflections, but I still found the image to be too unreal for being on top of the dressing table. The following two images on the bottom demonstrate how I subsequently started to fall into a pattern of poses again. It was at this point that I realized that I could go on forever with this shoot as the setting in itself had potential to produce endless symbolic combinations of reflections; but having taken more than two hundred photographs, I knew I certainly would find one that would depict my vision with strength.
A new awareness

I am not an imagemaker, I am a photographer. Is that really right to say, I ask myself. Would the fact that I consider producing for my photographs (location, objects, costume) to be one of the most defining aspects of my creative process, make me an imagemaker over photographer? Perhaps what I understand of the concept of imagemaker today does not relate to producing. Not when everything I do happens before the image is taken. Interestingly enough, I actually refer to my photographs always as images. I understand the contemporary imagemaker as someone who through technique, especially digital, transforms images through merging, treating, collaging, and so many hundreds of other filters and tricks, in order to create the ‘perfect’ one. I highly value this type of work, but I see it as incredibly different from making photographs. That is it – I make photographs.

Very often, the imagemakers I just described are photographers by formation, and they might as well find this a defining creative practice for themselves. The more I photograph, though, less I want to edit my results. The pleasure I take in creating with the camera and myself, and others, and the material available world, including of course light, is what moves me to create through the photographic medium.

In this sense, according to what Shore proposes (2010), I feel my creative process is more aligned with that of the painter than the photographer: I start with a blank canvas, which is the photographic frame, and fill it deliberately with what I want, instead of simply imposing an order on a scene that stands before me. This is why if I were to experiment with other media, which I want to, I would go with organic gestures. I would like to paint, to collage by hand, to build sculptures. These practices have far more potential to be revealing for the artist in the making of the art than clicking a mouse for thousands of times; it is a matter of moving through the body, of immersion in the state of play that works more directly on both the body and mind, such a benchmarking characteristic of art therapy practices (McNiff, 1998).

I do not think that every kind of digital art making lacks therapeutic potential. In fact, the use of tablets in creative classes such as of fashion design, illustration, language of color, animation, and others, allows the students to experiment with body gestures and gain another type of awareness towards themselves. The use of tablets already features as a top-of-the-edge teaching resource worldwide (Wacom Australia, 2011). I see this as a very positive sign of interested artistic minds in action, bringing forward ways of keeping or even rescuing organic gesture in the teaching of art.

I can see now that what attracts me is putting together pieces to form an image [construct]. I do not deconstruct several images in order to make one. I believe this
reflects the way I want to interact with an audience. I praise my audience and like to share with them something interesting enough for them to connect affectively with the image. I do not expect them to always know exactly what I am trying to portray, however I do expect to give them enough signs so they can question the image or relate to it somehow without having to put enormous intellectual effort into it. I do not intend to do postmodernist photography, which “is less about representation than about representations of representations, about symbols whose meaning can never truly be deciphered” (Grundberg, 2006). I want my art to achieve a bigger, but not less capable, audience, one that will resonate with what I present.

What I want, at the end, is to be able to share my creativity with others in my most authentic ways so others feel encouraged to create as well. Sharing is the word. Art is a way of knowing that can help an individual [self] understand not only oneself [ego] but also the other through understanding the symbols of the collective unconscious [psyche], which pertains to all of us (Jung & Franz, 1964; Raff, 2000). Any individual who practices active imagination can gain this knowledge. The transcendent function happens when the ego, fully awake and aware, experiences unconscious contents or products [active imagination] and dialogues with them. If one attempts to give visual form to an image resulting from active imagination through the photographic medium, for instance, one will dialogue with the unconscious, therefore transcending the ego knowledge, which is called individuation (Fryrear & Corbit, 1992).

Working with my active imagination has definitely been a real journey of discovery towards individuation. Unquestionably, depicting and enacting my visions of the future went beyond my ego knowledge to engage me with investigation of the behavior and identity of the human being – a practice that has brought forward profound insights on my vocation as artist. I feel empowered to be able to consider that I am producing authentic contemporary self-portraiture: I am exploring my point of view, on a universal concept of identity, through myself (Bright, 2010). My practice also fits within the discourse of contemporary photography itself as I address imagination and emotion as points for departure and signification in the development of my photographic work (Grosenick & Seelig, 2007).

If developing intention is considered to be essential in order to become an artist (Haynes, 2003), I feel closer to that than ever. By developing a practice based on my methodology of reflective photographic self-portraiture through active imagination and future, I have exercised pure transcendence. I feel strong about my vocation as visionary artist through which I can propagate ideas about self-knowledge, healing and the power of imagination as means to envision and create a better future and a more integrated world.
"Committing ourselves to self-transformative work is also a social practice. ... Because the self is not separate from society, to engage in trying to change the self inevitably leads, even in modest ways, to the need to transform society."

(Haynes, 1997, p. 226)

Summary

"I in the future" is a multidimensional methodology around imagination, representation and transformation. Imagination is used to generate personal ideas of future. Representation is concerned with giving visual form to those ideas of future through photographic self-portraiture. Transformation is the expected outcome from the process of doing self-portraiture and reflecting upon it as a creative process.

By gathering historical data on photographic self-portraiture, it was possible to identify its nature as creative practice. My own experience with self-portraiture as well as of my photography students and other photographers led to the understanding that self-portraiture affects one's art making process, thus evidencing the need to further explore its relevance as reflective practice. In order to establish a framework for investigation of reflective photographic self-portraiture, successful therapeutic photography methods focused on self-portraiture were brought to light as they emphasized self-portraiture’s transformative character as reflective practice. The analysis of the work of two different artists, Jo Spence and Cristina Nuñez, demonstrated the capacity of their empowering methodologies towards promoting awareness of the self and how they contributed to their development as artists. Working with ideas of future for this research project was identified as a gap in the body of knowledge of therapeutic photography methods focused on self-portraiture, which allowed for a pathway through imagination to emerge.

Once the essence for a benchmarking framework of reflective photographic self-portraiture was established – self-portraiture and future, it generated the need to identify an appropriate technique that would facilitate ideas of future to bear in my mind as researcher and photographer. Carl Gustav Jung’s technique of active imagination was brought forward as a point for departure due to my recognition of active imagination already being a natural method of engaging with my own creativity. It also featured as being a potentially significant methodology to be applied by one who is trying to reach new understanding of one’s own creative self and what makes
it authentic as a successful engagement with active imagination leads to constructive insights that bear from the integration of conscious and unconscious.

Adhering to a Jungian perspective allowed me to describe the whole methodology for the development of the self-portraiture photographic work. I was able to plan for a complete practice of active imagination by dividing it into seven main stages (preparation, intention, unconscious activation, interaction, reflection, resolution, and integration). Also, a specific set of approaches for exploration of the self in the future was selected for the intention stage, which became "I", "I and others" and "I and nature". The interaction, reflection and resolution stages were then set as the core process to be explored through the data presentation and analysis of the research project’s photographic self-portraiture work.

My personal narrative explored my process of engaging with my visions of future as intentional outcomes of a practice of active imagination. Through interaction with the visions on a mental level and through further establishing a photographic dialogue with the symbologies and emotions I perceived in them through self-portraiture, I was able to reflect on how I create and where creativity bears in my case.

Right at the start, after my unconscious activation took place and I had clear access to the three visions I would work with, I found myself questioning the complexity of my own photographic process. I was really confident with my conceptual proficiency since I did not encounter any difficulties with enlisting the right photographic techniques and what was needed (production of props, location and clothing) in order to depict my visions. On the other hand, I realized this demand for production became a fixation that took me away from simply photographing – I was highly concerned with having a perfect production before moving on to actually shooting the visions. Enacting also became a process of preparation that challenged me into feeling emotionally and physically ready for the shooting of each vision.

During this process of mental dialogue and planning, I had a technical revelation towards my photographic language. I was able to identify that my way of conveying the intensity of my interest in a subject was positioning the camera geographically close to it. I could relate this to my use of the camera timer in my former eye-opener self-portraiture work. In comparison, my visions projected a different, more distant, relationship between subject and camera, which generated something new in my practice: learning to create with a tripod and a wireless remote shutter system.

The process of gaining deep insights into my practice as artist and photographer progressed further as I went into the photographic self-portraiture dialogue with my visions of future.
"I and others" (We are all healers) was the first vision that pushed me into photographing due to the technique it required. I had very little practice with light painting and multiple exposure, thus my concern with having enough time to assert their use in order to convey the symbolic visual effect of healing I envisioned. Essentially, through setting me out to test the techniques, this vision taught me straight away that letting go of perfectionism is essential for the evolution of a truly creative practice. I learned that my creativity and intuition are more important to a successful shoot than an ideal production of props and location, and trusting this process frees me to actively practice photography on a more regular basis. This vision has also engaged me with further exploring collaborative self-portraiture as a mutual process of creative and technical learning that can transcend our own individual levels of consciousness.

As predicted by Fryrear and Corbit (1992), by examining my relationship to nature, I have come to “feel more ‘in tune with’ nature and appreciative of our natural history” (p. 7) through coming to know more about my psyche through the age-old symbols of nature itself. By enacting a watchful creature of the night, I was able to understand how a natural phenomenon such as night can symbolically be an expression of my inner psyche. In this case, darkness became a powerful visual metaphor for the primitive knowledge, our natural wisdom that we, as human beings, have left completely behind us. This was further highlighted by the process of opening up for intuition, which allowed me to enact transformation (from watchfulness to fear) through a spectrum of movements [on all fours] that do not belong to that of a human being. Advocating for the rescue of our connection to nature has crystalized as a life priority, a vision that I certainly look forward to sharing and continuing to explore through my art.

Very interestingly, in order to enact the vision intended to locate my own ego, I had to first enact my relationship to others and nature. I only realized that there was a spontaneous reasoning to this pathway after finishing the whole process. What I thought to be priorities based on technical and physical challenges, I realized later to actually be the easiest challenges as they were external to me; whereas confronting myself from the point of view of self-acceptance represented a truly internal battle that needed to come to a resolution in order to take visual form. So I started with the vision that bore the relationship I was most familiar with but carried the most technical challenge; then went through insightful understanding of the power of the symbols of nature, which took my conceptual understanding of visual language to another level, as much as my understanding of the nature of the human being; and I finished with the most transformative relationship but the creative visual process that
I had been most familiar with. I can see how "I" (The mirror collector) encompasses all the knowledge I acquired throughout the whole process. It was the one vision I let grow and transform the most according to my intuitive process of dialoguing with its realm of symbolic meaning. Through photographing myself naked, which was not how my vision presented itself, I have come to truly embody self-acceptance as a human being and as artist by fully embracing the unexpected.

Being able to gain a new awareness of my creative self as photographer and human being has proven to be an empowering methodology of creative inquiry. As overarching outcomes of this project, it stood out to me that: engaging with active imagination focused on future is a valuable method of assessing the present and past, and it frees one up to reclaim a desired future; enactment is an effective strategy of accessing and dealing with real emotions, one that should be employed in any practice of portraiture that seeks to explore the sitter’s authenticity; I am not as interested in digital technologies as I am in organic artistic gestures, which promote a more holistic, experimental and intuitive integration between body and mind; and, most importantly, creating is a way of healing through self-knowledge. It is the awareness of this capacity that has removed my fear for external validation towards my value as artist, and that I want to nurture as artist and educator in order to promote active transformation in our society.

Implications

Self-portraiture as reflective practice is essential in the education of the photographer. Anyone who is exposed to a practice of this character will invariably become aware of one’s authenticity as artist sooner than later. Learning how to create authentically should not be overlooked in relation to learning technique – it is the character of creation in the application of technique that determines the validation of the use of the medium and the signification of the work of art.

Academic learning of arts should start incorporating therapeutic methods in order to engage students with an ethos for their practice that resonates with their needs. To the same extent, a reflective practice of imagination could become a powerful tool of transformation in our society if it were promoted as a source for collective intention.

Furthermore, art as a way of knowing should belong to the realm of any person as it promotes healing and empowerment. Demystifying the need for talent in order to be able to create, and replacing it for something that can be learned, could become a way of education where men and women are creators of culture by coming “to see
the world not as static reality but as reality in the process of transformation” (Freire, 2003, p. 12).

Recommendations for future research

The exhibition of this work in a public sphere may be valuable to the extent that I, researcher and photographer, would be able to assess the level of resonance of a bigger audience with the work. It would also be valuable to exhibit the images that inform my creative process along with the finished, selected pieces. This would be a direct way of assessing what kind of relevance the audience would see and how it would affect their reading of the work.

Due to the lack of literature on the creative process of photographers, a number of possibilities for further research exist. This study with its exact methodology could be expanded to application within formal academic environments or other types of learning environments where the learning of photography takes place. It could be applied to social and community work. Photographers who already have experienced self-portraiture and its transformative character could publish their findings. All the new public data would help strengthen scopes for curricula and more asserted artistic career outcomes.

There is also plenty of room for investigation of other methodologies within the realm of art therapy practices and reflective practices aimed at exploration of imagination. It would be interesting to identify what other reflective methods can facilitate gaining self-knowledge and awareness in the learning of photography as art. “In a little over 150 years, photography has come to inform everything we do in modern society” (Traub, Heller, & Bell, 2006, p. xvii) so it is reasonable to start prospecting more research that goes beyond gathering historical data and analyzing meaning of the actual photographic pieces; and that explores the realm of photographers themselves as a way of promoting consciousness as an agent of transformation.


SELF-PORTRAITURE AND FUTURE:
AN EXAMINATION OF A PHOTOGRAPHER’S CREATIVE IDENTITY


APPENDIX A

Figures in high-resolution for viewing purposes.