

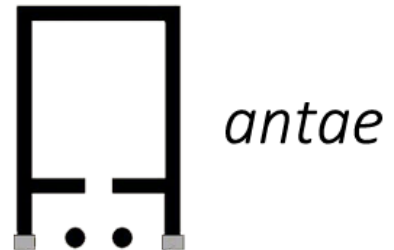
## Portraiture: Finding the Valid Fragment

Sergio Muscat

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## Portraiture: Finding the Valid Fragment

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Entirety is a conundrum. It is in itself something that no living creature could ever achieve, because it would involve the attainment of absolute knowledge and the end of mystery. Put quite simply, unknowingness makes life more interesting. Whatever we may think of - our life, our world - is part of a bigger picture we cannot see, which is why our understanding of things revolves around our being able to imagine them. The more this imagination is tantalised, the more we are interested and mesmerised, and conversely, we lose interest once a mystery is solved. Artists have often had to grapple with the problem of mimesis, and technical developments and changing conventions in the history of art can often be understood as attempts at reconfiguring the medium in order to attain what artists may feel is a just representation of reality. For this reason, the artist might decide to involve his vision or imagination, which might challenge the strict boundaries of mimesis, in order to attain that bigger picture, even at the cost of a strictly realistic representation.<sup>1</sup>

What we see and live every day are fragments, slices of information in time and space. Our brain is continuously filling in the gaps to *imagine* the greater picture. Gestalt theory is useful to this line of thought in that it clearly outlines the various exercises our brain performs by defining laws such as completion, figure-ground, isomorphic correspondence, and so on. In fact, Dempsey Chang, Laurence Dooley and Juhani E. Tuovinen specifically apply these theories to visual screen design.<sup>2</sup> In essence, however, these theories are the basis for all artistic compositions, be it photography, sculpture or painting. Although gestalt is applied mostly to the visual arts, it is also valid for other forms such as dance, music and literature:

This is so because these fields of expressive exchange make use of principles that are pervasive and fundamental in cognition and thus are involved not only in diverse forms of art but are in fact present in other tasks of conceptualization, in the process of making sense of reality and experience, and, not least, in the way language mirrors this process.<sup>3</sup>

The same definition of the word 'gestalt' indicates that a whole, when organised in a certain manner, can provide greater (or different) meaning (or value) than the random summation of the parts, while Gestalt theory itself focuses on how the brain extrapolates this whole from the summation of parts presented to it. We will refer to these parts, in

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<sup>1</sup> See Vilayanur S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein, 'The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6 (1999), 15–51.

<sup>2</sup> See Dempsey Chang, Laurence Dooley and Juhani E. Tuovinen, 'Gestalt Theory in Visual Screen Design: A New Look at an Old Subject', *Proceedings of the Seventh world conference on computers in education conference on Computers in education: Australian topics*, 8 (2002), 5–12, on <<http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=820062>> [accessed 11 December 2013]

<sup>3</sup> Ana Margarida Abrantes, 'Gestalt, Perception and Literature [Abstract]', *JLT Articles*, 2 (2009) <<http://www.jltonline.de/index.php/articles/article/view/103>> [accessed 10 May 2014], p. 1.

whichever context, as the *fragment*. The success or failure of the brain's extrapolation of a fragment into a whole depends on the quality of the fragment being perceived, and a successful fragment will from now on be referred to as a *valid fragment*. Within such a fragment lies enough information organised in such a way as to trigger a recipient (such as the viewer of an artwork) into imagining a whole. Notice that we refer to the extrapolation as *a* whole rather than *the* whole, since every recipient comes with their own baggage of experience and individuality which will inevitably inform the extrapolation itself, depending on the validity and representativeness of the fragment.

When we refer to a fragment, we inevitably also need to refer to a sense of order of the parts of that fragment. Indeed, in his essay 'From Chaos to Wholeness', Rudolf Arnheim outlines the importance of order required in achieving the desired wholeness.<sup>4</sup> He states that 'a forerunner of the present term "chaos" came into the scientific language as "disorder"'.<sup>5</sup> When pieces of a fragment act individually, they can be seen as themselves, but when placed in the right order or 'organised structure', they become part of a larger entity, allowing a bigger picture to form. This picture, however, is not whole in itself. It is like a jigsaw puzzle: when the pieces are spread out, there is no way of seeing them as more than just puzzle pieces, but as they take form, it becomes easier to identify where the next piece should fit, and what the final image will look like.

In real life, we never get to have all the pieces of the puzzle. We never stop being amazed by how little we know of the people around us, even the closest ones. Our parents keep surprising us by revealing aspects of themselves we might never have imagined, as do our potential partners or eventual children. Yet we do not see them as fragmented or incomplete. Rather, we build a mental image of a person's completeness from the day we meet them, refining it as we go along.

The concept of fragmentation is nothing new. One could easily observe this in Mondrian's journey through cubism and into what he described as *Neoplasticism*; as detail erodes, works become more clearly an organised collection of pieces.<sup>6</sup> This can be clearly observed through the development of Mondrian's tree. Similarly, one can observe such practices 'literally, in Rodin's practice of exhibiting broken-off sculptural parts instead of whole figures, or metaphorically, as ellipsis, in the way Degas segments figures and crops scenes to suggest a glimpse chopped out of a larger continuum'.<sup>7</sup> The concept of fragmentation originates partially from the industrial revolution, when technological development—and life in general—picked up speed drastically. It is undeniable, however,

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<sup>4</sup> See Rudolf Arnheim, 'From Chaos to Wholeness', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 54 (1996), 117–20.

<sup>5</sup> Arnheim, 'From Chaos to Wholeness', p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Sciam, 'Piet Mondrian, an Explanation of the Work', 2006, on <<http://www.pietmondrian.info/an-explanation/an-explanation-of-the-work-bis.html>> [accessed 16 December 2013]

<sup>7</sup> Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), p.109.

that photography also played an important role in the development of modernist ideas, at least from an artistic point of view, since modernism emerged in art a few decades after philosophy. Photography is thus intimately linked to the modernist concept of fragmentation: 'no longer required to provide a faithful depiction of *detail*, painters felt freer to interpret the appearances of the world...'<sup>8</sup> Artists thus were no longer tied to the restrictions of mimesis, and as such they were able to better represent, in a more abstract way, the wholeness of their concepts or views instead. Indeed, as we shall see later on, photography inspired many modernist painters, such as Degas, and it gave painting, amongst other things, a new means of 'sketching' as well as a new concept of cropping. We see this often in late nineteenth century paintings where people seem to be more naturally (albeit somewhat statically) caught in the middle of everyday action, and edges are cropped with a greater brutality when compared to the effort made in previous paintings to neatly include and encompass everything into the frame.

As Kirk Varnedoe shows, '[e]arly modernists like Mondrian or Brancusi held that the purified forms of twentieth-century art expressed an elevated idealism, by encapsulating the world's essences rather than dealing with illusory appearances'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, a valid fragment is achieved through the identification and removal of the superfluous, retaining only the organised essence of what is to be delivered. Picasso once stated that 'art is the elimination of the unnecessary'.<sup>10</sup> This ties in completely with the fact that a valid fragment contains a concentrate of information to the exclusion of that which is unnecessary or less important, thus retaining only the *essence* of the greater picture. Indeed, while the process of elimination is crucial, it must also be married to the initial process of collection and the subsequent and iterative process of organisation, the final result of which will contain the wholeness and prevent the fragment from dismantling into chaos. This ties in to the thoughts from early modernists, such as Picasso, which often involved a reflection on nature and the 'hidden order of things'.<sup>11</sup> For these artists, nature, therefore, does not deal with chaos, and although not initially evident, there is always a purpose for things to be. Later, the intention, particularly of more abstract styles such as action painting and formalism, would change to become 'devoid of any associative meaning', focusing purely on the viewer's experience in the present moment. Nature here takes second stage to the *process* of creating the artwork, with the artist becoming faithful only to the nature of the medium.<sup>12</sup> It would be worth mentioning here how postmodernism challenged some very crucial modernist ideas by claiming that modernism could lead to social practices that legitimate domination by a powerful few over the many, despite the modernist promise of equality.<sup>13</sup> This has greatly affected the production of art whereby artists do not feel the need to belong to any specific group or school of thought,

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<sup>8</sup> My emphasis, Sciam, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Varnedoe, p.103.

<sup>10</sup> See 'Pablo Picasso Quotes' <<http://www.pablocicasso.org/quotes.jsp>> [accessed 20 June 2014]

<sup>11</sup> Varnedoe, p.103.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> See Terry Barrett, 'Modernism and Postmodernism: An Overview with Art Examples', in *Art Education: Content and Practice in a Postmodern Era*, ed. by James Hutchens and Marianne Suggs (Washington: NAEA, 1997), pp. 17–30.

but produce their work individually. In a way, the whole field of art has become fragmented in itself, with its own, somewhat functioning order of things.

As we return to the fragment within the period of modernism, we cannot but mention the myriad of fields that make use of this concept; the visual arts are intimately interlinked with other areas such as literature. In one case, visual art is used in the English literature classroom to enable ‘students to see things contextually: they learn to see the world as a series of interrelated parts’.<sup>14</sup> Modernist painting fragmented reality as modernist writing fragmented the self, and figures such as Prufrock and Gregor Samsa immediately come to mind. Wulliger continues to observe the following:

Just as Picasso and the cubists fractured visual form, so Faulkner fractured the written form. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Benjy is like a Picasso painting: his narrative is broken and fragmented, revealing to the reader only the shattered parts of his life.<sup>15</sup>

The early tendencies of modernism can already be seen in the romantic movement of the early 19th century. Hall states that, ‘[a]s manifested in its journal *Athenaeum* (1798–1800), this interdisciplinary movement represented an attempt to transvaluate—through both critical analysis and poesis—traditional conceptions of art, literature, music, and philosophy’.<sup>16</sup> Writers such as Schlegel enjoyed using forms and techniques such as ‘intentionally fragmented structures as well as moments of contradiction, discontinuity, and opposition’, which reflect what would be developed within the visual arts, for which the best example would perhaps be the parallel between modernist literature and cubism.<sup>17</sup> This is evidenced by the fact that they both ‘provide the catalyst for an artwork’s truth content to emerge through endless recontextualisation’.<sup>18</sup>

One other interesting point of debate is related to photography, which emerged around the same time as artistic modernism itself. As has been previously stated, photography played a crucial role in the development of modern art, but this role may sometimes be underestimated. It is known that photographs were used by artists such as Degas, both experimentally, and as replacements for sketches.<sup>19</sup> As outlined in ‘The Witness’, an article in *Time* magazine, in reference to both photography and painting, ‘both crafts have profited: a Degas learned to crop his paintings from the photographer; a Steichen learned atmosphere from the impressionists’.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, one particularity of photography is its ruthless cropping of scenes, which is in itself a violent fragmentation of reality. While

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<sup>14</sup> See Marilyn Wulliger, ‘A Portrait of the Modernist: Seeing Modernism through Art’, *English Journal* (1992), 35–40 (p.35).

<sup>15</sup> Marilyn Wulliger, ‘A Portrait of the Modernist: Seeing Modernism through Art’, p.37.

<sup>16</sup> Mirko M. Hall, ‘Friedrich Schlegel’s Romanticization of Music’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42 (2009), 413–29 (p. 414).

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 416.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Natalia Brodskaja and Edgar Degas, *Edgar Degas* (New York, NY: Parkstone International, 2012), p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Anon., ‘The Witness’, *Time*, 1966, p.59.

paintings and sketches are developed across a vast span of space and time, photographs rather tend to crop both very harshly and make use of a very different set of skills to its more traditional counterpart. The 'incorrect' use of photography as the basis of paintings can, either inadvertently or otherwise, re-introduce a staticity in paintings that had been overcome over the years, as well as the appearance of figures cropped at the edges of frames. The latter feature in particular is not necessarily incorrect in terms of aesthetic norms, as is evidenced by its use by those considered great masters, yet it remains an attribute foremost belonging to photography. Over the years, great masters such as Cartier-Bresson as well as more contemporary photographers, such as Elliott Erwin and Steve McCurry, use this skill to create tension and mystery within images. This is due to the fact that photography is intrinsically a process of elimination rather than addition, whereby inclusion also entails exclusion. This important attribute makes photography (and photographers) highly skilful at generating valid fragments. Indeed, a successful photograph is the epitome of a valid fragment - it is the condensation of an infinity of information into a very limited span of space and time, organised in such a fashion as to trigger in the viewer a lengthy dialogue of observation and thought, up to the point where a wholeness can be perceived from such a miniscule fragment.

Particularly in portraits, the discussion often centres on whether it is at all possible to generate a character study within a single image. The initial reaction is often negative—how can anyone possibly condense the complexity and multifacetedness of a person's character into one image? One might juxtapose this to defining a person's character with a single word rather than a biography. And yet, time and time again we come across images which we feel are representative of a person, in the same way as Roland Barthes, while searching for images of his recently deceased mother, insists on finding a single image depicting 'the essence of her identity'.<sup>21</sup> He eventually finds it in an image of her as a five-year-old child which renders all the other photographs 'partially true, and therefore totally false' in his view.<sup>22</sup> Yet one single image seemed to depict 'the truth of the face [he] had loved', even though he acknowledges that it only has that meaning to him, having known, lived and cared for her throughout his life.<sup>23</sup> For Barthes, that single image was the valid fragment that represented the wholeness that resided within him; the valid fragment is thus a synecdoche for the totality of which it is only a part. We similarly tend to be able to associate adjectives to persons with relative ease and often find this sufficiently encapsulating. It is therefore important to identify the fact that not every fragment will be equally valid to different viewers, in the same way as a fragmented jigsaw puzzle might be easier to identify to a person who is familiar with what it depicts. Similarly, art can trigger different reactions or feelings, depending on the emotional baggage carried by the respective viewers.

This point begs the following question - what *is* a valid fragment, if such a thing exists at

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<sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), p.66.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 67, 65-71.

all? Firstly, we should consider the legitimacy of the second part of the question. A completed or partially completed jigsaw puzzle may provide enough information to enable viewers to identify its content, even if they are not familiar with it. An image of, say, an art nouveau building, still remains valid even if the viewer has never seen that particular architectural style before, so that it remains valid even if the viewer has no concept of what a building might look like. The validity of a fragment cannot therefore be measured holistically—an art nouveau building is still an art nouveau building even if we don't happen to know what an art nouveau building is. The question therefore becomes *how*, if at all, are we able to measure the validity of a fragment?

The answer appears to have been provided by Barthes himself. Validation becomes simply a matter of *asking the expert*. For someone who didn't know Barthes' mother, it would prove to be very difficult to identify the image which struck the right note in his memory, but Barthes, being the *expert* in the subject of his mother, was able to identify the single image that best represented her entire self. Other images did not reach the *minimum requirement* to achieve the objective, and as such might be considered as invalid fragments. Yet, another question arises: why should a fragment valid for an expert be considered equally valid for anyone else, even if it might not be identified as such? In order to approach this question, we may look back at the premise that an art nouveau building is an art nouveau building even if someone doesn't recognise it as such. When seeking fragments, one should not only seek a valid fragment. The entire jigsaw puzzle, even when missing one random piece, is still a valid fragment since it is very unlikely that a single piece of information holds the entire validity of the puzzle, and if that were so, then that single piece would be the valid fragment itself. One should therefore seek the most *efficient* valid fragment: the minimum amount of information necessary to achieve the goal of providing enough reference to the whole. The better experts on the subject will be able to identify the said subject with less information, in a fashion very similar to a medical diagnosis. One needs to then decide from there onwards whether further information needs to be added in order to reach a wider audience, and in what order. Using the same example, and assuming that the majority of the population would be able to identify a building when they see it, one would need to decide whether the aim is to depict any building, a recognisably art nouveau building, or whether it is to depict a *specific* art nouveau building, and so on. To give a more concrete example, the Disney logo depicts not only a building, but a castle, and even a specific one. Anyone who has been to Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany would require little effort to make the association, and yet, those who have not been there would still identify the logo as a depiction of a castle. On the other hand, the WWF logo intends to depict the panda bear, as opposed to a specific panda bear. The two logos aim to achieve different levels of specificity, and yet both are very valid fragments.

A fragment is therefore first and foremost an exercise in optimisation. Within any medium, we are always working within a finite space, the single image being the most restrictive.

We will in fact not focus on the single image, due to the reason that it might be too restrictive both for the purposes of this paper and for the purpose of creating an investigative form of artwork. We will instead look into a more generic approach towards achieving a valid and effective fragment. Indeed, any successful work of art partially owes its success to the ability of the artist to synthesise something very complex and wide into something very simple and focused, whatever the medium (or media) being utilised. Comparisons are indeed often made between the biographer and the portrait painter. In both cases, the artist is working towards condensing a lifetime of experience and characteristic facets into a discrete space. In both cases, the author's impositions are crucial to the final result, and even if the choice is made for the artists to be 'invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails', as James Joyce famously put it, there is no way the hand of the artist can be removed completely from the final result.<sup>24</sup> In any case, the construction of a portrait requires a disassembly (or fragmentation) of the original material, an understanding and interpretation of it, and a re-assembly into something new. As Anna Elizabeth Klumpke, in her 1940 *Memoirs of an artist*, states: 'Life is after all essentially a serial story [...] a chain of infinite possibilities out of which one selects, arranges and creates new combinations'.<sup>25</sup> In essence, the artistic process is a translation of the abstract into the physical, and that is always a subjective process, be it intentional or not. It is through this process that portraits, be they visual or literary, are created.

Of all the possible subjects to approach, the human psyche is certainly the most challenging. As has been previously outlined, we are in a constant state of discovery, both of ourselves and of each other. This is in fact one of the foundational assumptions of psychotherapy, and one which is central to the artistic approach to portraiture.<sup>26</sup> The late modernists, abstract expressionists, and in particular Jackson Pollock and his successors, would place great weight on the process of creation rather than the creation itself. The term *action painting* would resonate throughout the decades, following the example of the artist who had stated that 'most important to those who followed this procedure was not the development of subject or style, but the "role" they played while creating'.<sup>27</sup> The process of achieving an effective fragment, and indeed the creation of any artwork, is as much about the process as it is about the result achieved. It is this process, particularly the application of various methodologies throughout the various stages of creation that will be investigated throughout the rest of this paper.

Samuel Butler maintained that 'every man's work is a portrait of himself'.<sup>28</sup> Similarly,

<sup>24</sup> Sherry Velasco, 'Isabel de Liaño: Hagio/Biography as Self-Portrait', *Pacific Coast Philology* (1992), 124–132; James Joyce, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, (London: Urban Romantics, 2011), p. 193.

<sup>25</sup> As cited in Maria Tamboukou, 'Relational Narratives: Auto/biography and the Portrait', *Women's Studies International Forum* (2010), xxxiii, 170–79

<<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277539509001538>> [accessed 17 May 2014], p.171.

<sup>26</sup> Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 8th edn (Belmont, TN: Thomson/Brooks/Cole, 2009), p. 46.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen Landau and Jackson Pollock, *Jackson Pollock* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Stuart P. Sherman, 'Samuel Butler: Diogenes of the Victorians', <<http://www.bartleby.com/237/18.html>>



photographer Richard Avedon stated ‘my portraits are much more about me than they are about the people I photograph’, with the perfect example being his work entitled ‘The Family’, which is a series of portraits of powerful people in which the photographer had no verbal communication with the subjects but simply paced around with fixed gaze, resulting in images ‘in which the subject’s own presence was engulfed by the intensity of the photographer’s gaze’.<sup>29</sup> In criminal profiling, one of the major detractors from success is tellingly personal bias, which can cause deviation of the interpretation of facts from the optimum due to ‘a variety of subjective influences’.<sup>30</sup> In both the above cases, observers are projecting themselves onto the subject, making the matter of subjectivity one that, consciously or unconsciously, is a matter of entanglement between two selves, two identities clashing and merging and affecting each other. This is similarly and actively mentioned within the field of psychotherapy and counselling, in which an emphasis is placed on ‘the importance of being aware of unintentional bias’, lest it misdirect clients.<sup>31</sup>

In this present context, one should keep in mind the intention with which a portrait is approached. We have to assume, within this text, that the goal, or at least the intention, is to discover and represent the sitter in an effective and objective manner. This does not in any way exclude the interpretation of the artist, since it is neither practical nor desirable to remove the artist’s hand from the creation process. It is however important to become more aware of one’s biases in order to prevent them from affecting the interpretation of the subject being portrayed *unintentionally*. Indeed, one might decide to include intentional biases in the artwork, but this needs to be done consciously and very carefully, since such biases could lead to the exaggeration of certain qualities in the representation of the person being portrayed, which might mislead the viewers into focusing on such qualities at the expense of others, in very much the same way as a caricaturist would accentuate certain features which, in their view, identify a person. The caricaturist, of course, aims to distort personality, and as such, the caricaturist’s view and perception of the person is already distorted. The process of creating a valid fragment is therefore first and foremost one of active self-discovery, and only secondarily one of discovering and investigating the subject to be portrayed. That is, however, a separate discussion altogether, and something to be explored in more detail at a later stage.

Once a certain level of self-consciousness is achieved, the goal becomes that of investigation and synthesis. It is about the ability to collect as much information as possible and then eliminate the surplus information or condense that information into something that is more easily digested. The latter part is very much dependent on the ultimate spatial context which is to be filled, be it through a single image, a video, text or a

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[accessed 26 December 2013], p.25.

<sup>29</sup> Wisniak, Nicole, ‘An Interview with Richard Avedon’, *Egoïste* (1986), 26 – 31 (p. 26); Roswell Angier, *Train Your Gaze: a Practical and Theoretical Introduction to Portrait Photography* (Lausanne: AVA, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Brent E. Turvey, *Criminal Profiling: An Introduction to Behavioral Evidence Analysis*, 4th edn (Amsterdam/Burlington, VT: Academic Press, 2012), p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> Corey, pp. 45, 22.

mixture of these and other media. It is therefore important to keep this context in mind from the start of the endeavour, since it will influence the process significantly. The investigative part will also be influenced by the final context, albeit to a lesser extent, since it is more concerned with collecting information rather than eliminating it. Indeed, any investigation should commence with a strategy to collect information. While the intention of this text is not to establish a scientific approach towards the creation of art, it is useful to inform the process through the perspective of other fields that approach the same issues for different reasons. One such field is the aforementioned criminal profiling and investigation which, while very dissimilar in many ways, shares the goal of creating a valid synthesis of a person or situation. Brent E. Turvey discusses the process of investigation adeptly: 'The scientific method is a way to investigate how or why something works, or how something happened, through the development of hypotheses and subsequent attempts at falsification through testing and other accepted means'.<sup>32</sup> He continues by outlining the three steps in the scientific method: observation, hypothesis and experimentation.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the entire process, one must be aware of their own biases in order to avoid the *observer effects*, which are 'present when the results of [an] examination are distorted by the context and mental state of [the examiner] to include the examiner's subconscious expectations and desires.'<sup>34</sup>

It is useful to glance through a brief elaboration of the three steps being outlined:

The first step in the scientific method is observation. An observation is made regarding some event, fact, or object. This observation then leads to a specific question regarding the event, fact, or object, such as where or when an object originated or how an object came to possess certain traits.

The second step in the scientific method is attempting to answer the question that has been asked by forming a hypothesis, or an educated estimate, regarding the possible answer. Often, there is more than one possible answer, and a hypothesis for each one must be developed and investigated.

The third step in the scientific method is experimentation. Of all the steps in the scientific method, this is the one that separates scientific inquiry from others. Scientific analysts design experiments intended to disprove their hypotheses.<sup>35</sup>

While scientific experimentation is not a focus within the context of this paper, all three steps are certainly methods which, to varying degrees, are utilised within a diversity of disciplines, including art. The main difference between a scientific and artistic approach is possibly the intention of experimentation within the scientific method which designs experiments to *disprove* hypotheses rather than prove them. Indeed, it is very interesting to observe how similar techniques are used within disciplines such as psychotherapy and counselling. In the discipline of family therapy, Peter Rober talks about the therapist's

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<sup>32</sup> Turvey, p. 45

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Corey, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45.

‘inner conversation’, discussing how therapists should observe and listen, all the time constructing personal hypotheses which are subsequently challenged through questions posed back to their clients.<sup>36</sup> In the end, therapy is also about investigating into the lives and issues of people in order to develop a theory—a hypothesis—of what might be ailing them, and subsequently helping them overcome their hurdles. Rober does however go on to make a distinction on the use of the word itself:

A hypothesis [in the therapeutic sense], is not a theory that attempts to capture the truth, but a tool that the therapist can use in trying to open space for the not-yet-said in the conversation. The definition of hypothesis is very different from the way it is often defined as part of the process of scientific enquiry, in which it serves as a means of scientific evidence gathering through a process of verification or falsification.<sup>37</sup>

The question that naturally follows is, therefore, which definition of hypothesis is more valid within this specific context? The answer is that both are, because although Rober states that the definitions are very different, they both have a common ground and similar goals. It is firstly important to outline that art is not about seeking the truth in the scientific sense, but rather in seeking *a* truth, or rather a *personal* truth, constructed through the collaborative effort of the artist, subject and viewer. In this sense, art differs greatly from science, and the therapy-related definition of a hypothesis feels much more adequate to this discussion. However, a hypothesis remains, in all cases, something that is borne through observation and information-gathering, and needs to be verified or falsified through some kind of challenge before it can complete its life cycle. Even a hypothesis in the therapeutic sense can only become of some use if it is resolved, either through a challenge or through the availability of further information.

Hypotheses are crucial in the search for the valid fragment, mainly due to the fact that it is through them, and more specifically through challenging them, that synthesis occurs. They feature all throughout the entire process, from information-collection to post-production. It is through them that we learn about our subjects and ultimately home in on the desired result. This indeed brings us to another crucial point, that is, the need to learn about our subject. As mentioned earlier, in order to be able to easily identify a valid fragment, one must ‘consult the expert’. While the experts in such cases would be the persons closest to the subject, these are not usually available to the portraitist for consultancy, and as such it is the portraitist who, within the limits of possibility and time, should become an ‘expert’ on the subject being portrayed. In the same way as an architect or someone fascinated by architecture might be best suited to portray an art nouveau building, so would a person familiar with and fascinated by a portrait subject, as well as human psychology in general,

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Rober, ‘The Therapist’s Inner Conversation in Family Therapy Practice: Some Ideas about the Self of the Therapist, Therapeutic Impasse, and the Process of Reflection’, *Family process*, 38 (1999), 209–28 (p. 210).

<sup>37</sup> Peter Rober, ‘Constructive Hypothesizing, Dialogic Understanding and the Therapist’s Inner Conversation: Some Ideas about Knowing and Not Knowing in the Family Therapy Session’, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 28 (2002), 467–78 (p. 470).

be most suitable to execute the portrait. This complement of expertise is very important in the portraiture process, since it also carries with it a rarity of sorts, in the same way that patent attorneys are highly sought after due to their dual expertise in law and another (usually scientific) discipline. Similarly, an artist should dedicate the necessary time to become firstly acquainted with human psychology, and secondly, with each and every subject being portrayed. In order to achieve this, an empathic approach towards each subject being portrayed is crucial. A connection needs to be created between artist and sitter which allows, as Rober put it, 'to open space for the not-yet-said'.<sup>38</sup>

With all this in mind, we can start formulating a methodology towards approaching the search for a valid fragment. By returning to the aforementioned jigsaw puzzle analogy, we can identify three questions we should ask ourselves in this search. Firstly, what is the *minimum* number of pieces that can constitute the valid fragment? Which are the pieces that are *necessary* for the valid fragment? And finally, what *order* should the pieces take to form the valid fragment?

For simplicity's sake, we will hitherto refer to these questions as the *minimum necessary order* for fragment validity. Clearly, when approaching a portrait from this point of view, the questions will take a much more abstract form, although they still retain their validity. We must also consider the medium within which we are operating and the spatio-temporal properties which are associated with it. If we are working within the realm of videography, for example, one must consider an order which is more of a temporal nature. The chronology of the video as a medium might not necessarily facilitate the attempt to capture the valid fragment, and one might achieve a more valid fragment by reordering the timeline in a way which creates greater impact. In photography, by comparison, the temporal and spatial order is something which features more in the execution phase, although one should not neglect the importance of the selection phase. The similarities continue within other media such as literature, audio, painting and sculpture. Each of these media has its own set of characteristics which place the onus of when to ask each question on different points within the creation of the final artwork. In Anna Klumpke's 2001 'Rosa Bonheur: The artist's (auto)biography', the author uses a particular phrase which is striking in the way it brings both the visual and literary worlds together: 'Now I know that you'll draw me with your pen just as well as with your paintbrush. And you'll combine your own impressions of me with my life story.'<sup>39</sup> Without needing to go into the detail of each medium, we can thus state that these questions are generic enough to be used within each medium, which is the aim of this exercise in the first place.

The next question to approach is: what process should be utilised for the purpose of achieving the valid fragment? The answer to this lies within the three-pronged methodology of observation, hypothesis and experimentation. In general, the first stage involves the collection of information, whether it be through direct contact with the subject

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<sup>38</sup> Rober, 'Constructive Hypothesizing, Dialogic Understanding and the Therapist's Inner Conversation', p.470.

<sup>39</sup> As cited in Tamboukou, p.172.

or a separate investigation, depending again on the medium (or media) chosen. A video work, for example, would most likely involve a recorded interview, possibly featuring specific questions (which would be the subject of a separate discussion), while a photograph might involve one or more casual conversations which will lead to a series of hypotheses which in turn can be then experimented with during the portraiture session. In essence, one should view the creation of a portrait as being a micro-biography of the person being portrayed. It is a biography of the time spent together, and that time spent together should be engineered in such a way as to be as representative of the greater whole of the person's life as possible. At each stage, the artist is extracting meaningful facets—discrete chunks of information from the analogous whole—which he distils further until the superfluous is removed and a concentrate of information remains.

In this first stage, the communication with the subject is of utmost importance. As has been mentioned earlier, the intention is to 'open space for the not-yet-said', and this requires certain skills and methodologies which, while not necessarily straightforward to master, have been studied for decades. In order to create an empathic connection with a subject, one must be able to relate to such a subject, and in order to relate, one must understand the subject. Conversely, the subject must feel such an understanding and thus feel comfortable enough to open up. It is worth pausing here to consider the practice of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), 'a set of concepts and techniques to understand and change human behaviour patterns', which is often used in this context, and also used as part of law enforcement interview techniques.<sup>40</sup> In a brief paper by Vincent Sandoval and Susan H. Adams, an interview is described whereby an FBI agent approaches a woman in order to gain information.<sup>41</sup> The focus of the agent is on the interviewee's use of language, posture and expressions, all of which give indication of the character and the person's 'preferred representational system (visual, auditory, or kinesthetic)'.<sup>42</sup> Each of these representational systems would correspond to specific usage of language which the interviewer would reciprocate in order to make the subject more comfortable. By reflecting the interviewee's language and posture—as well as other nuances such as tonality, speed and volume—the interviewer is able to make the interviewee feel at ease and to build a rapport through which trust and openness can be attained. Such a rapport is important in order to bring out a true representation of the subject, especially since the starting point is usually, albeit possibly unconsciously, tension and guardedness.

Following the stage of information-collection, the second stage involves the construction, either mentally or physically, of a large valid fragment. This might take the form of a full length (or partially edited) video, a collection of photographs, a series of sketches, and/or simply a series of notes and mental images of the final product. The result of this stage should already start taking the form of a final work, although the ordering does not need to

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<sup>40</sup> Neil Shah, *Introducing Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) a Practical Guide* (London: Icon, 2011), p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Vincent Sandoval and Susan H. Adams, 'Subtle Skills for Building Rapport: Using Neuro-Linguistic Programming in the Interview Room', *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 70 (2001), 1–5.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p.4.

be precise since that can be optimised in the next stages. The final stages are in fact the optimisation steps which are intended to refine and condense the fragment into its minimum necessary order. It is at this point that for each piece in the fragment we must ask two questions: Is this piece necessary for the validity of the fragment? And is it in the correct order? If the answer to the former is no, then the piece should be set aside. If the answer to the latter is no, then a better order should be sought. Once all the pieces have been reviewed and the answer to each question is positive, the optimal valid fragment should be achieved.

It is important to point out that the process described above is not a scientific one. We must consider that there might be multiple valid fragments possible, and that it is part of the artistic process to decide which direction to follow depending on the final intention of the work, the observations made and the hypotheses which have been constructed throughout the process. One must also consider the participation of the viewers who will in turn contribute to the fragment in their mind, and how much freedom of interpretation the artist would want to give in this sense, for that is also an important part of the artistic process itself. Ultimately, the intention of creating a valid fragment must arise from all these considerations, together with the need to seek a just interpretation of the persons being portrayed, since in the end, the whole process revolves around them.

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