

APPENDIX No.2

IMPACT

This appendix contains the following data and analysis:

1. Analysis of the 2018-19 questionnaires
2. Analysis of prison inmates' feedback
3. Analysis of the public's feedback on La Vie en Rose website

Other documents related to the above analysis can be found on the attached pen-drive, folder Appendix No.2, Impact.

1. ANALYSIS OF THE 2018-19 QUESTIONNAIRES

1.1. Overview

The 2018-19 questionnaires are based on previous feedback. They have been formulated using statements that participants have written in the open-ended feedback gathered from 2007 to 2017. I have used the psychological perspective¹ to formulate all questions and given statements, and to analyse participants' responses through the following concepts:

- The unconscious creative process
- The broadening of self-perception
- Effectiveness of SPEX in terms of self-esteem/self-awareness/empowerment
- Mirroring in others' images

The questionnaires were constructed before the theoretical framework of the *dispositif* was completed. This is the reason why there are no specific questions related to the dynamics of power in SPEX, which will be included in future questionnaires. However, the *dispositif*² as a research methodology, together with the psychological framework, have allowed me to examine the critical feedback in this data and ethically inform my future practice, as discussed in this appendix.

It was difficult to find negative statements in that data, probably due to the fact that participants wrote statements at the end of the workshop in my presence, and therefore lacking the detachment that would provide more thought and freedom of criticism. The result is that there are more positive statements than negative, but I have added a space for open-ended feedback in every question, which has been useful to obtain critical feedback. There is a wide range of variables that in hindsight impact on the respondents in the questionnaires. In the future I will consider how I structured the questions and how to formulate them.

As evidenced on the questionnaire, there are eleven questions that gather demographic information to create a profile for each respondent, and ten feedback questions about their experience during and after the workshop. The data I have collected is mostly based on participants' perceptions of SPEX's impact. I am therefore exploring how participants

¹ See section 1.2.3. The psychological framework.

² See section 1.4. The SPEX dispositif.

perceive their experience in the workshop, instead of attempting to measure how SPEX impacted on their attitudes and behaviours. The last ten questions have been analysed to find the highest level of responses, but not in relation to the profile of each respondent. This could be pursued in future research. However, I have statistically analysed the difficulty of emotional expression according to the gender of respondents by confronting results of both genders.

The 2018-19 questionnaires have been filled in in four languages³ by 181 respondents from July 2018 to March 2019, a low proportion of over 4000 participants. These results might not be statistically significant, but the data suggests trends which can support the theoretical statements of this critical appraisal. These trends are discussed throughout this appendix and in the conclusion.

Concerning the profile of the 2018-19 respondents, they came from twenty-one countries⁴ across five continents. 147 (81.22%) were women and 34 (18.78%) men. Creative professions count 32.04%; among these photographers are a majority with 16.57%; professions on the medical, therapeutic or social work, 24.31%; diverse commercial professions, 16,02%; education and research, 11.05%; media and communication, 6.63% and unemployed or retired, 5.5%. Workshops were held in 10 countries⁵ and online. The different workshops were: introductory (2 days, 45.3%), complete (6 days, 32%), individual sessions (2 hours, 13.8%) and facilitator training (14 days, 8.8%). Further research will consider these variables to examine the differences of gender, nationality, education, profession, year and kind of workshop.

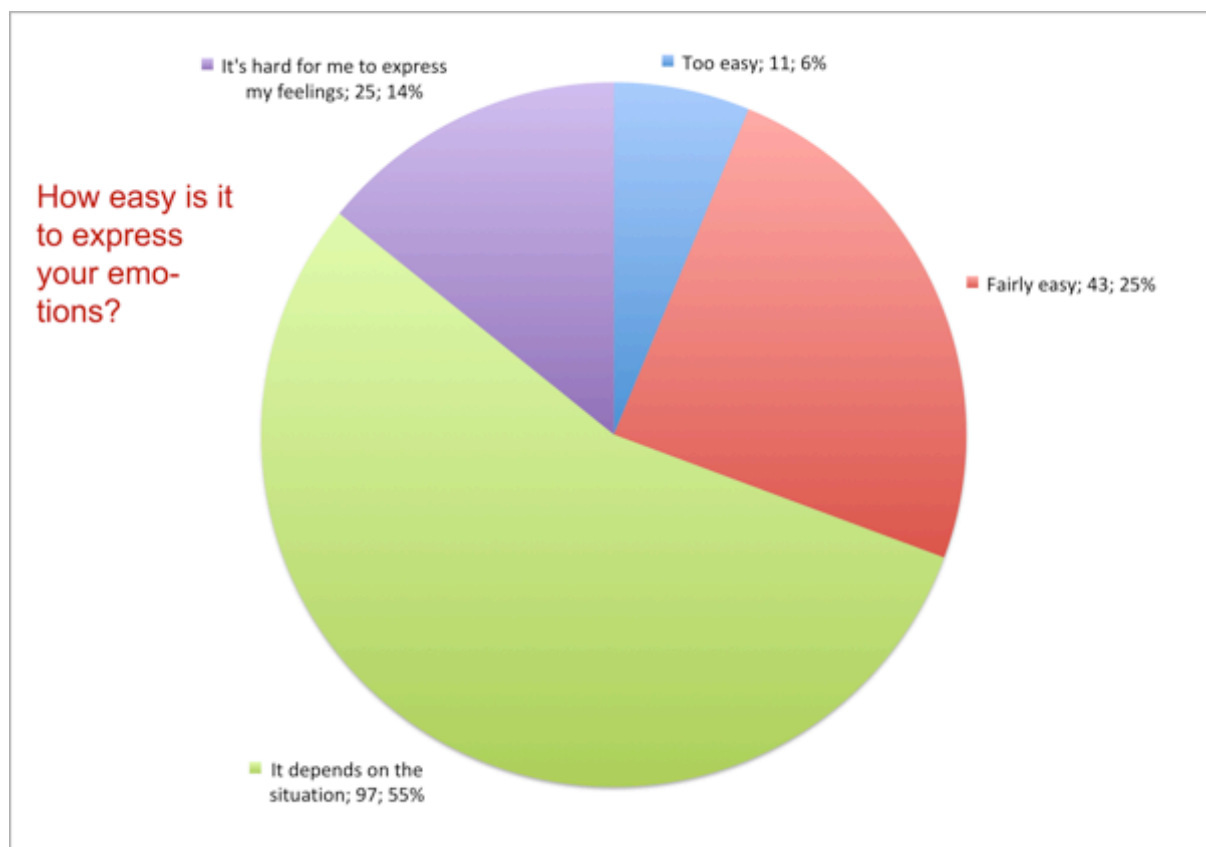
SPEX workshops were held from 2007 to 2019. The forms were not filled in right at the end of workshops, but in 2018 and 2019 and online, using Google Forms. A percentage of 66% of respondents participated in the last five years,⁶ 37% in the last three years and 4% in the six months prior to filling in the questionnaire. This difference in the lapse of time since the workshop might have provided further changes that have not been analysed here, due to time constraints. However, participants who experienced the workshop from 1 to 5 years ago might give more nuanced responses.

³ In order of number of respondents: Italian, Spanish, English and French.

⁴ Italy, Spain, France, UK, Germany, Finland, Poland, Switzerland, Norway, Latvia, Albania, Ukraine, USA, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Korea, Bangladesh, New Zealand, Algeria.

⁵ Italy, Spain, France, Germany, UK, Norway, Finland, Switzerland, Bangladesh and Korea.

⁶ From 2007 to 2010, 9%; from 2011 to 2014, 19%; from 2015 to 2019, 66%.



When asked, “how easy it is to express your emotions?” 55% answered, “it depends on the situation”; 25%, “fairly easy”; 14%, “it’s hard for me to express my feelings”; and 6%, “too easy”. Respondents here could choose only one response. The highest response is conditional and would need further exploration as to what circumstance would need to change for emotional expression to be facilitated. Only 14% of respondents find it hard to express their feelings, so this suggests that for the majority of workshop participants emotional expression is not difficult or problematic and at the same time that workshop participants are aware of and value emotional expression. Considering that 81% of respondents are women, and there is a similar percentage of female workshop participants, one could argue that women, due to gender differences in socialization, upbringing and education since childhood tend to “recognize other people’s emotions better, are more perceptive and have greater empathy” (Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2008), and could therefore be more interested in this kind of workshop, than men. But gender differences in this data suggests that for male and female respondents the difficulty in expressing emotions is very similar: 58% of women and 49% of men answered, “it depends on the situation”; 23% of women and 23% of men, “fairly easy”; 14% of women and 15% of men, “it’s hard for me to express my feelings”; and 5% of women and 5% of men, “too easy”. At the same time, a vast majority of female participants suggests that women could feel a higher need to work on their emotions and men might be less willing to attend, due to a variety of reasons that I will not discuss here. My question for future

research is, if women's need comes from issues of power, e.g., that female participants might feel they lack the power they would like to have, in their lives. Also, how much the fact that I am a woman attracts more women participants.

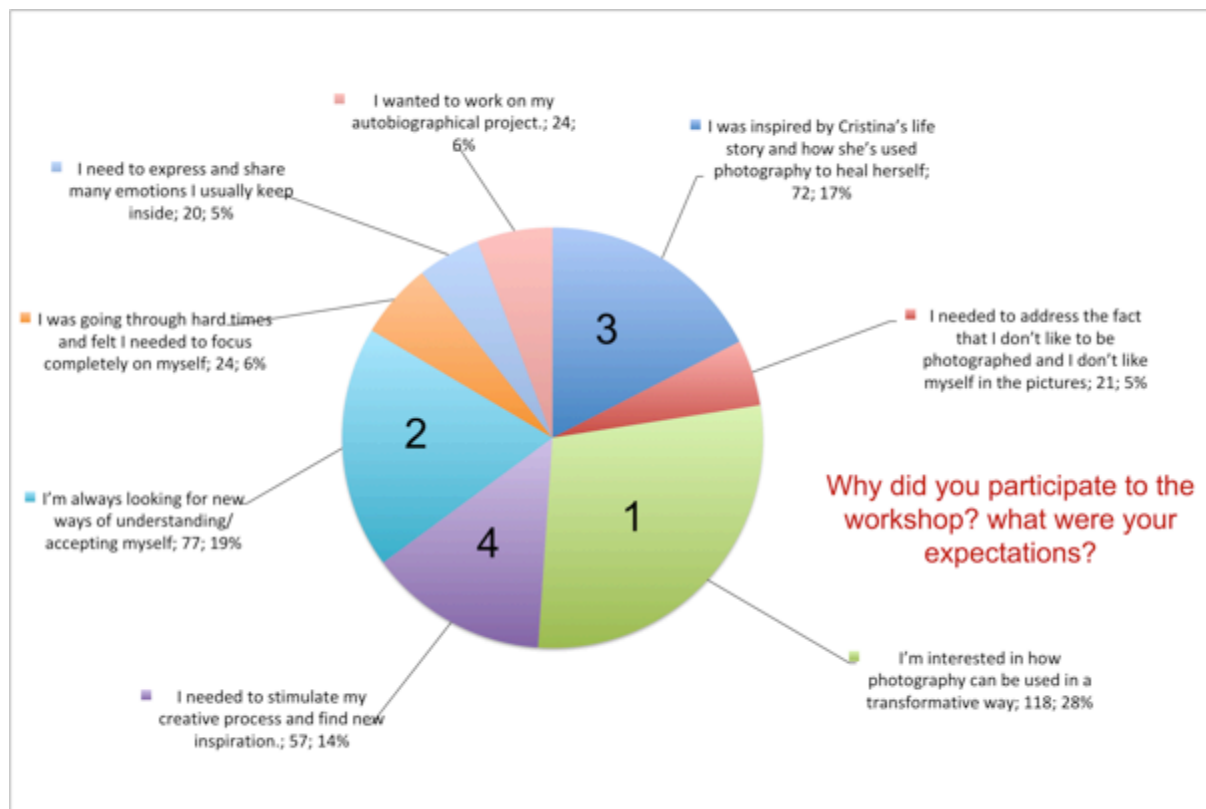
As evidenced on the questionnaire⁷, participants could choose two or three statements for each of the ten feedback questions. This allowed them to describe more accurately their responses and at the same time it allowed me to understand how much certain statements made by previous respondents (2007-2017) could be shared by other participants in 2018-19. Therefore, percentages mentioned in the ten feedback questions do not refer to the number of respondents but of responses.

1.2. Analysis of feedback questions

Following is the analysis for each of the ten feedback questions and the final conclusion. Attached to this document are all the open-ended responses, those written in the space 'other' under every question. From these, I have firstly analysed those responses which suggested new concepts, evidenced in yellow, which can support the theoretical framework in different ways⁸ or provide new concepts for the development of this research; and secondly all the critical responses, that is those which raise ethical or problematic aspects that need discussion or further research, evidenced in blue.

⁷ See the questionnaire in the attached pen-drive.

⁸ These are mentioned in the analysis of each question and in the conclusion.



Question 1: Why did you participate to the workshop? What were your expectations?

Highest response: “I’m interested in how photography can be used in a transformative way”. 28% of responses. In the last decade, the interest for the therapeutic use of photography has increased worldwide⁹ and a myriad of therapeutic photography practices and methods has emerged, especially in Italy, where I have started my self-portrait practice in 1988 and where the SPEX workshops first happened in 2004. In Italy back then, there were no other photography self-portrait workshops beside mine until 2010. Workshop participants mainly come from two different domains: the ‘therapeutic’/transformative –psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, etc.- and the photographic or artistic. Each of these seems to be interested in the other, and SPEX brings them together, using the unconscious creative process in the self-portrait with the aim of self-discovery through emotional expression, and following Benjamin’s concept about the power of photography to access the unconscious.¹⁰

Second highest response: “I’m always looking for new ways of understanding/accepting myself”; 19% of responses. This statement indicates the profile of workshop participants, whom I often refer to as “seekers”, people who regularly work on themselves and who are ready to experiment innovative methodologies, even if or perhaps because I am not a licensed

⁹ See <https://phototherapy-centre.com/who-is-doing-what-where/> .

¹⁰ See section 1.3.2. The unconscious creative process.

therapist. As mentioned above, about 80% of the questionnaire respondents are women, which could suggest that women tend to be more focused on self-acceptance and self-knowledge. But again, other variables might have influenced this higher percentage, such as the fact that I am a woman.¹¹

Third highest response: “I was inspired by Cristina’s life story and how she’s used photography to heal herself”; 17% of responses. This response suggests that the peer-to-peer approach can be effective, especially because I am not a licensed therapist. I must show my own long-term experience before I invite others to do likewise. This is also true with facilitators, who tell their own story before their workshops start. This statement can also be related to responses to the second question, which further show the importance of the disclosure of my own story.

Fourth highest response: “I needed to stimulate my creative process and find new inspiration”. 14% of responses. Artists, photographers and other creatives mainly chose this response which suggests one of the aims of SPEX is to stimulate the creative process, as supported by an open-ended response in question No.7. Nonetheless, there are participants with other professions who can stimulate their creative process with SPEX, even with no technical skills and produce what we refer to as artworks.

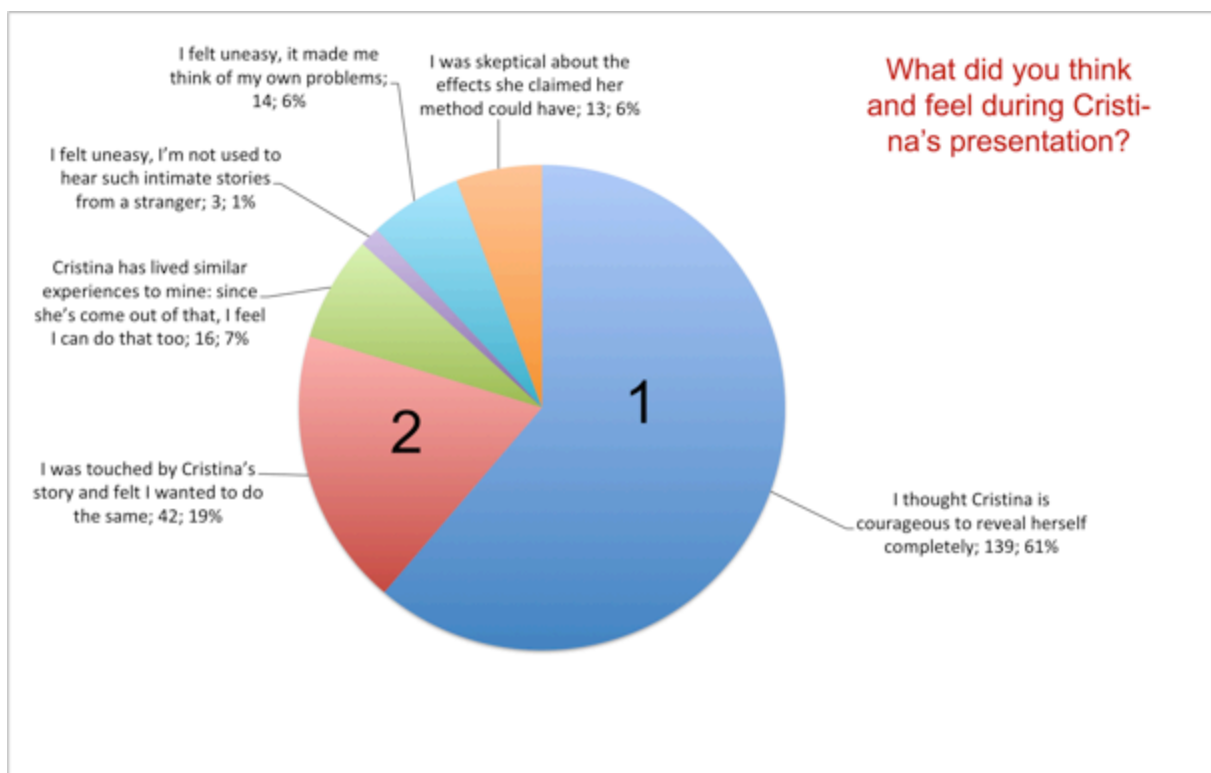
Open-ended feedback in the space ‘other’:

Among the twenty-eight open-ended responses to this question, ten of them add an important topic that the question’s statements lacked to describe: the professional interest in learning SPEX as a tool to be used in art projects, therapeutic/social practice or even as a tool “to learn to photograph people, their inner worlds”. Due to its focus on emotional expression, SPEX does attract photographers who are interested in showing their sitters’ inner world, as I am. Another response introduces a new idea: “to be seen by others and somehow be a protagonist”. This might be a way to subvert implicit social norms advising us to be understated, not to show off, not to be ‘narcissistic’, which is one of the labels often associated with the practice of the self-portrait and the selfie. But the self-portrait can respond to a licit human need, to sometimes be a protagonist in one’s own life, instead of always being of service or giving priority to others, of being invisible.

“I was emotionally confused at the time. I was looking for something new. I didn’t know I was supposed to work on myself. I understood this meeting Cristina.” I asked her about the

¹¹ See the overview of this section.

fact that she didn't know she had to work on herself, if she had enrolled in the workshop without reading the brochure¹². She said that she attended the presentation the evening before the first day of the workshop and didn't remember the presentation as anything unpleasant or shocking. She had enrolled inspired by the work I do with adolescents, not really thinking too much about working on her own emotions, despite the brochure making it very clear. But again, she had stated that she was confused. She said that with this comment she meant that she learned to work on herself in my workshop. Later she became one of the SPEX facilitators. I always make sure that no participants start the workshop without knowing that they have to work on themselves. My video-presentations are published online for anyone to see.



Question 2: What did you think and feel during Cristina's presentation?

¹² When promoting my workshops I always explain what SPEX is about with a short text as follows.

The Self-Portrait Experience allows anyone to trigger the creative process and transform their emotions and inner world into art. In self-portrait we are, at the same time, author, subject and spectator, and the powerful dynamic between the three roles stimulates our unconscious to speak with the language of art. The self-portrait does not label or define us, but expresses the wonderful multiplicity and plasticity of our identity. The objectification of our difficult emotions in a photo functions as a catalytic process, allowing us to pass onto another state of mind. Working on the multiple perceptions of the images we can see ourselves and others through new lenses and explore unknown potential. But we work on the self-portrait, not on the selfie... The selfie is a public image, controlled according to what we want to communicate to the world, while the self-portrait is an internal image, it is an open inner dialogue of self-discovery.

Highest response: “I thought Cristina is courageous to reveal herself completely”. 61% of responses, and second highest response: “I was touched by Cristina’s story and wanted to do the same”. 19% of responses. There might be some bias here too, in the sense that respondents might want to please me, since their email address appears in their response. The high number of responses to the first statement might suggest that participants might like to reveal their stories but feel they don’t have the courage to do that. The second highest response highlights this desire of self-disclosure. The aim of my presentations is to give the example myself, of what I’d like them to do with photography, to create a trustful relationship by exposing myself first. I intend to show that exposing our vulnerabilities we can touch other’s feelings and that our stories can work as a mirror.

Critical responses include “I was sceptical about the effects she claimed her method could have” (6%) and “I felt uneasy, it made me think of my own problems” (6%). I do expect some scepticism, since I am presenting a method I have created, I am not licensed or formally trained and I come from experiences such as addiction recovery: my knowledge can easily be ‘disqualified’¹³. The second one reflects on the uncomfortable mirroring process that often occurs with self-disclosure¹⁴.

Open-ended feedback in the space ‘other’ provides further concepts that the given statements lacked. ‘Generosity’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘empathy’ are perceived and valued by some respondents, in my autobiographical disclosure. This might be due to the exposure of my vulnerabilities and emotional pain, and the egalitarian peer-to-peer approach¹⁵. In question No.6, ‘authenticity’ is seen as providing safety, which is also mentioned in the response to question No.2: “I was interested in how Cristina used her experience to navigate a space in which others could feel safe to be vulnerable.” Vulnerability and authenticity might also stimulate closeness, personal involvement and a connection between participants, as suggested by the responses: “I felt involved and connected to other participants” and “I felt gratitude to be close to someone –Cristina- so open.”

Authenticity is further appreciated on question No.7 during the group work on the images: “The impact was very strong. Initially I was afraid of judgement, but when the group was looking at my images, I felt the strength of authenticity and truth in my pictures.”

Appreciation of my recovery is mentioned in the following responses to this question:

¹³ See section 1.4. The SPEX dispositif.

¹⁴ See section 3.1.2. The emotional face as a mirror

¹⁵ See section 1.3.1. The expression of emotions: *Someone to Love*

- I felt sympathy, trust and sensitivity, not just because of her story but for her quest and process.
- It must have been hard to go through that life, and she overcame it.
- Great respect for a woman who has come out of dramatic circumstances.
- The worst situations and strong and sometimes overwhelming emotions can be transformed in good energy and help you evolve.
- I think Cristina has transformed her extreme need to be loved in a creative and evolutionary action.
- I was (and still am) admired to see how Cristina has touched rock bottom and has managed to transform a terrible experience in a possibility of change.
- Hypnotized by Nunez's charisma; I will never forget her eyes, her gaze, that of someone who's been through hell and back.

A personal account of one's own recovery and resilience can show that personal evolution and growth are possible, and give participants hope and encouragement for any transformation of hardship into resources. "It's finding this incredible strength that has come out of triumph over adversity" as recovery activist Michaela Jones puts it in the film *Wonderland*. This is supported by the fourth statement in the above list, and by one of the given statements: "Cristina has had similar experiences to mine: since she's come out of that, I feel I can do that too". This might be the reason why some participants see my story of recovery as an act of generosity, and could therefore be considered as a positive bias. Another response gives value, not only to my personal recovery but to the whole transformative process: "It's very interesting to have found something which allows you to feel better, to transform it into a workshop and to propose it to others so that they can feel better." However, there could be a negative bias here: what has worked for me does not necessarily work for everyone.

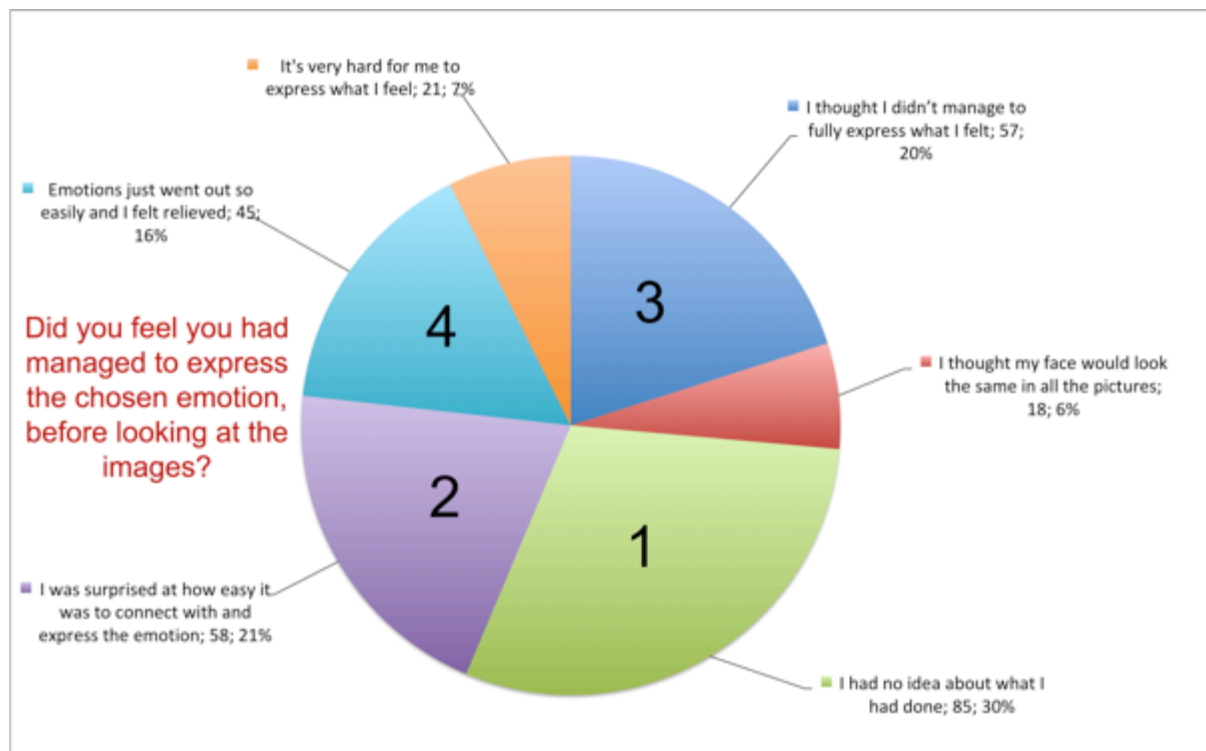
Critical responses:

"You are making a response induction". I later talked to the respondent, who is a psychologist, psychotherapist, family therapist, teacher and supervisor. She participated to an introductory and a complete SPEX workshop. She clarified that her response refers to the fact that positive given statements are much more than the negative in the whole questionnaire, providing a risk of bias. She perceives a tendency to suggest certain views on the experience. She didn't know that the given statements were based on previous participants' feedback.

However, she stated that when a practice is based on subjectivity and creativity, suggestions can be part of the dialogue and were also part of the workshop. She also opined that suggestions coming from participants weren't enough. This further confirms the need to increase encouragement for participants to subvert to my instructions and proposals, and make proposals and suggest their own views.

“Explanations were too quick and I didn't have enough time to assimilate them.” This is the first time I receive such a comment. I presume this might be due to learning difficulties, or a lack of emotional connection to my presentation, as if this participant could have mistaken it with an academic lesson. However, it suggests that participants learn at different paces, and that a more interactive presentation, encouraging participants to ask questions, would stimulate a deeper understanding and make the process more collaborative.

“Even though Cristina's experiences and needs are different from mine, and therefore her method is only partly efficient in my case, meeting her and talking to her about photography and the self-portrait has been incredibly useful.” This response is not exactly negative but introduces a new question: can the method be useful for everyone? Does its usefulness depend on certain particular needs and experiences? What exactly are the needs for which the method can be effective? Participants with very different experiences from mine participate to my workshops, but many connect with my emotions, my need to be seen, valued and loved. Nonetheless, this participant, who did a complete workshop, gives value to other aspects regarding the photographic self-portrait.



Question 3: Did you feel you had managed to express the chosen emotion, before looking at the images?

Highest response, “I had no idea about what I had done”, (30%) and second highest “I was surprised at how easy it was to connect with and express the emotion” (21%).

The first response indicates the unconscious creative process at work¹⁶. It can be surprising (second highest response), unconscious (they just ‘happened’ to connect, without controlling) and effective (they managed to express the emotion).¹⁷ The fourth highest response also relates to this: “Emotions just went out so easily and I felt relieved” (16%), adding the feeling of relief or ‘catalytic’ feeling. The third highest response, “I thought I didn’t manage to fully express what I felt” (20%) can also be connected to the first response on question Nr.9 on the effects of the method: “Now I feel there are many other emotions I need to express” (17%). This suggests that participants might become more aware of their emotions and the need to express them, because they have gone through the process of expressing emotions in pictures and working on the multiple and ever-changing perceptions of emotions in the images.

Open-ended feedback in the space ‘other’:

¹⁶ See section 1.3.2. The unconscious creative process.

¹⁷ See the prison case studies, in section 2 of this appendix: M’s photo session in Wad-Ras prison, Barcelona.

“Felt like I overdid it sometimes.” This response refers to the request to start acting or ‘representing’ the emotion, the performative dimension. Participants tend to discard images because they are ‘theatrical’ as Alistair comments in the film *Wonderland*,¹⁸ and as stated by a respondent in question No.4: “I think I overacted my expressions”. In SPEX the performative part is always connected to the experiential, as discussed in chapter 1.2.3.

The following responses refer to the experience of expressing emotions that one is not aware of expressing:

- I was surprised to express things I wasn’t aware of expressing.
- I thought my expression expressed better the chosen emotion, but it didn’t really. At the same time, I had chosen a very uncomfortable emotion.
- I tried to contact my anger but I found shame and fear.

In these statements, respondents have in mind what they later saw in the images, not exactly responding to the question, which refers to the moment after they took the pictures, before looking at them. However, these responses indicate an incongruity between the emotions they were feeling and those they or others saw in the images. This difference is often perceived in my workshops and it is often surprising, as also emerges from the prison questionnaires.¹⁹ These responses could support the concept of the unconscious creative process²⁰ that brings out other emotions that the subject is not aware of, when taking the pictures.

Another response resonates with the ‘authenticity’ perceived in my presentations, which stimulates participants to look for in themselves while taking the pictures, possibly due to the fact that we focus on our inner worlds: “I was interested in showing myself without make-up or social mask, with the lens as the only witness.” Taking out the ‘social mask’ can also refer to how we define the self-portrait as ‘inner image’ as opposed to the selfie, which we define as ‘public image’.

The following statement gives value to the visibility of one’s emotions in the images, as in Valentina’s comment²¹: “I was also surprised by the power and visibility of my emotions for better self-awareness and self-acceptance.” This statement could be also related to other comments in question No.4, which mention the possibility of looking at oneself ‘from the outside’.

¹⁸ See section 1.4. The SPEX dispositif, and the film *Wonderland*: <https://vimeo.com/171903022> minute 7.00

¹⁹ See the analysis of the prison questionnaires, in section 2 of this appendix.

²⁰ See section 1.3.2. The unconscious creative process.

²¹ See section 3.1.3. Humans need emotional expression

As for the critical statements, the same respondent who found it hard to follow the “too quick explanations” in the presentation, asserted in this question: “I think the method would need more meetings in order to be more efficient.” I always tell those who participate to the complete workshop that four months can be too short to produce a complete autobiographical project covering our whole lives. However, during the workshop they can learn the methodology and start their projects, to be continued in time, or produce a small project focused on one aspect of their lives. Time might also be felt short as an emotional process; in fact some participants tell me that they wait years before joining the workshop when they feel that they are ‘ready’. A response in question No.5 also refers to the need of more time to achieve transformation, but this is referred to the introductory two-day workshop: “A longer work than that of the introductory workshop is needed to achieve transformation.” Another statement in the next question suggests that a longer process might be more efficient for some: “A three-year sedimentation process was necessary for me to accept them and that others might see my pain through those images.” At the same time, it is my aim that the workshop can be affordable to most and there is the possibility to continue the process individually. Another issue is professional therapeutic support during the workshop, mentioned by a respondent in question No.9, who is surprised that he could express strong emotions in other settings than his psychotherapy: “it was interesting to find how outside the psychotherapy emotions were strong and I felt the need of my therapist to overcome the moment.” This regards the emotional safeguarding discussed in the ethical considerations.²² Other statements on this topic are analysed in question No.9 and No.10.

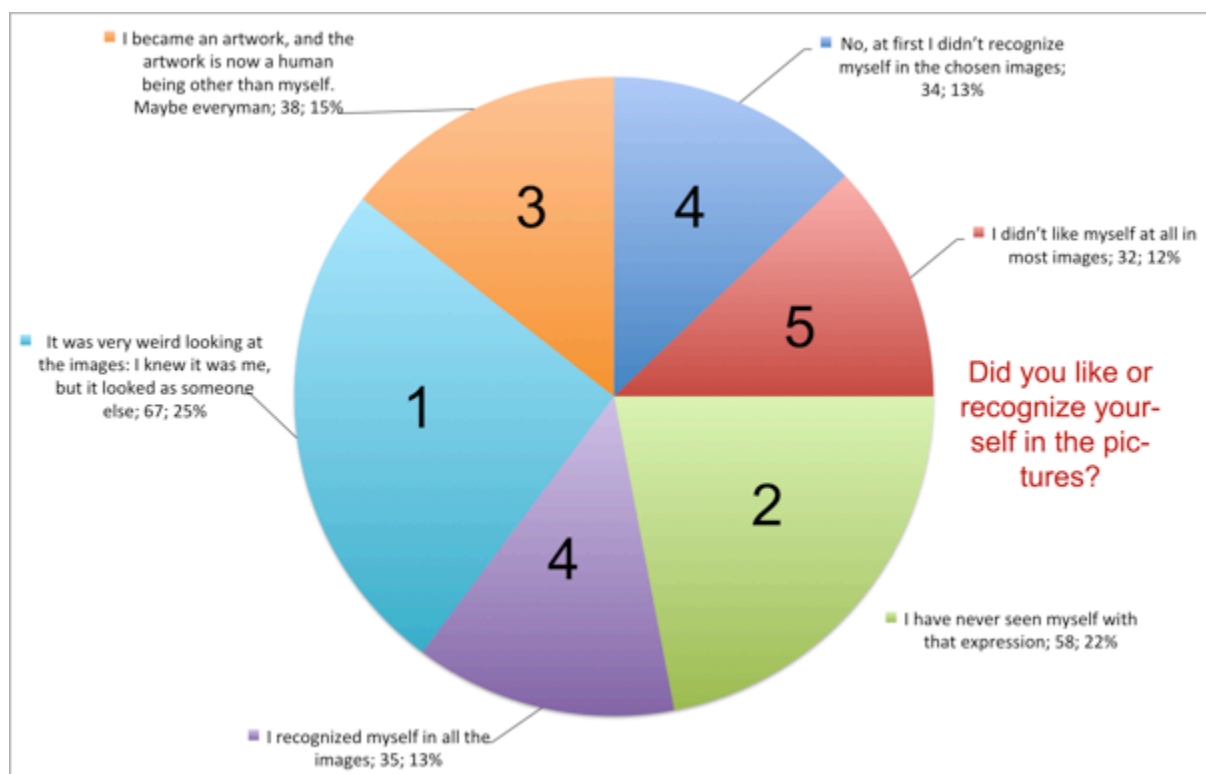
Another new aspect emerging in the open-ended feedback is the tiredness after the sessions: “After each photo session I felt tired, but proud and empowered” and again in question No.7: “When I photograph myself often I feel tired and lost.” This is not the first time I hear about the physical tiredness that the emotional self-portrait can bring, or other physical reactions. It resonates with Didi-Hubermann’s idea²³ that

when the emotion flows through us, our soul moves, trembles, agitates, and our body does all kinds of things we don't even know about (Didi-Huberman 2013, p.32, author’s translation).

²² See section 3.2. Ethical considerations.

²³ See section 1.3.2. The unconscious creative process

Further developments of this research might also focus on bodily reactions to the SPEX *dispositif* and its effects on physical health and disease.



Question 4: Did you like or recognize yourself in the pictures?

Most of the given statements in this question are biased towards people not recognising themselves in the images, but there is the option “I recognized myself in all the images” and the open-ended feedback, as discussed below. All four highest responses support my hypotheses that most participants do not recognize themselves in the images and that they detach themselves from the subject:

- “It was very weird looking at the images: I knew it was me, but it looked as someone else.” (25%)
- “I have never seen myself with that expression” (22%)
- “I became an artwork, and the artwork is now a human being other than myself. Maybe everyman” (15%)
- “No, at first I didn’t recognize myself in the chosen images” (13%)

These statements could suggest that looking at the images participants can perceive their unconscious expressions, which become visible. Detachment from the subject in the image is appreciated, as in the following question, to perceive it better. In another response in the fourth place participants affirm they recognized themselves in all the images. These

participants are photographers who regularly take self-portraits and are therefore used to seeing themselves in photographs, which show our face not reversed sideways as mirrors do. The fifth response, in which participants assert they didn't like themselves further support the idea that we usually don't like ourselves in the images in which we don't recognize ourselves, but this is often felt as a way to accepting oneself, as in the second highest response of question No.9 "working on the perception of those ugly images of myself has allowed me to accept them, and learn to love myself more" (14%).

Open-ended feedback in the space "other".

Two statements mention appreciation for seeing oneself 'from the outside':

- It's pleasant to see yourself from the outside. It was strange but pleasant to see yourself and let others see you.
- I was like finding myself. I knew it was me, but I had never seen myself from the outside, not in that situation.

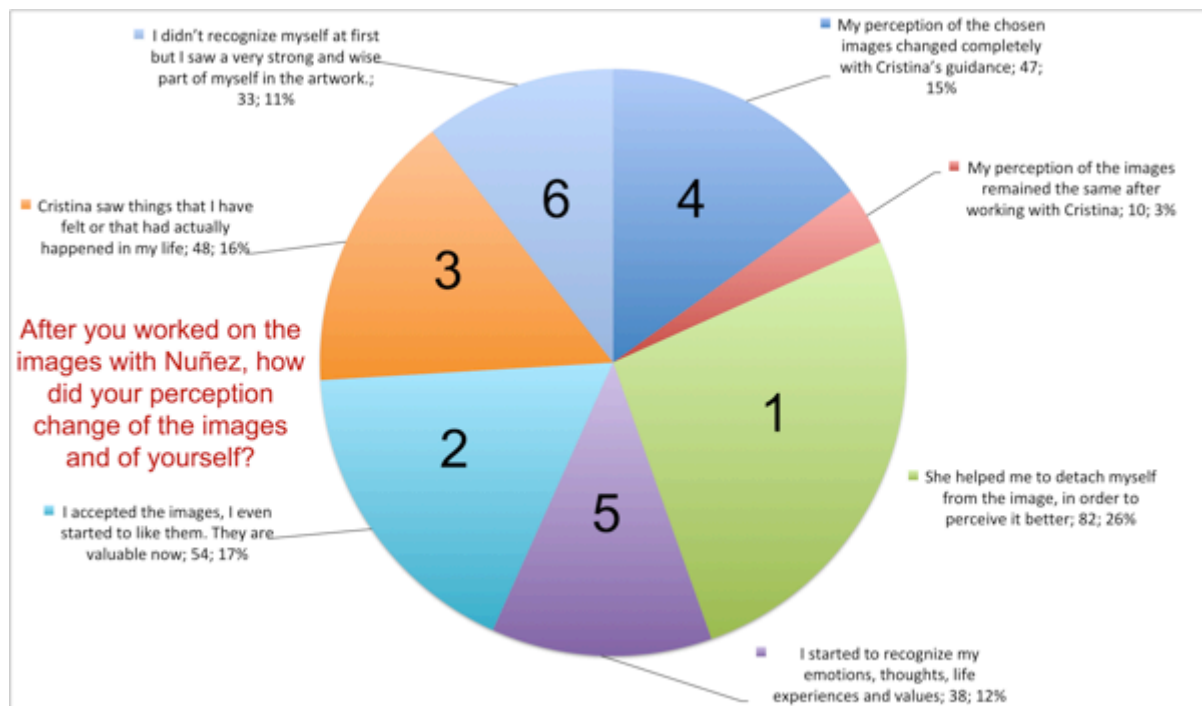
This is also related to the detachment from the subject in the image -above mentioned and further discussed in the next question-, in order to perceive it better. At the same time, one of the respondents asserts that "It was like finding myself", so this 'from the outside' or 'detachment' could then become closeness, as if the participant could take possession of this 'other' by recognising emotions and life experiences in the image.

Another statement refers to the fact that often participants see their relatives and ancestors in their images: "I can see in some way the pain and rage of my ancestors. Like a really old feeling not only mine." This hasn't been mentioned in this research, but I have already heard it from participants during workshops, since at times they recognize their family members and ancestors in their images. It is certainly an area for future developments.

Similarly, another respondent suggests that: "it's not important to recognize yourself in that one, because what counts is what it represents. Archetype, symbol or whatever you might call it." The *Higher Self* criterion²⁴ consists in epical storytelling inspired in the chosen image, often using archetypes, iconographies and symbols, which can provide new insight.

Iconological aspects are mentioned by Daniele De Luigi in his preface to my book *Higher Self*, and will be the subject of future research.

²⁴ See the book *Higher Self – The Self-Portrait Experience*, p.98-101.



Question 5: After you worked on the images with Nuñez, how did your perception change of the images and of yourself?

The wording of this question suggests unconscious bias, as assuming that participants' perception of themselves changed. But the option "My perception of the images remained the same after working with Cristina" got only 3% of responses, and open-ended feedback gives further nuances to the experience.

Highest response: "She helped me to detach myself from the image, in order to perceive it better" (26%) Detachment from the 'other' in the image is partly achieved by my using the pronoun 'he', 'she' or 'they' instead of 'you', explaining that we will talk about the subject as if it were someone else. On the other hand detachment happens due to the fact that most participants do not recognize themselves in the images, as discussed in the previous question. Thus, detachment can be useful to better perceive the images,²⁵ but another respondent in the open-ended feedback introduces the opposite: "She helped me to get closer to (not to distance myself from) the images, to be able to see them in a different way." Could we then affirm that the perceptive process involves both detachment and closeness to one's own image, that might happen in alternation and that participants experience this differently? Perhaps the alternation between detachment and closeness in the perceptive process allows participants to recognize their emotions, thoughts, values and life experiences, as discussed in this Critical

²⁵ See Valentina's statement on section 3.1.3. Humans need emotional expression.

Appraisal.²⁶

Second highest: “I accepted the images, I even started to like them. They are valuable now.”(17%) This statement already shows that there is often a change of perception, which is one of the effects that has emerged in other research projects.²⁷ Those ugly images can become likeable and valuable, after recognizing emotions, desires, life experiences and values, which emerges from the fifth highest response: “I started to recognize my emotions, thoughts, life experiences and values”. (12%)

Third highest: “Cristina saw things that I have felt or that had actually happened in my life.” (16%) This happens sometimes, not only with my vision of the images, but also with the group’s perceptions, as emerging from the next question. Our perception is always partly subjective, so we certainly project our own past experiences in the images we perceive, but on some occasions these perceptions seem to match the participant’s life. This could be an area for future research.²⁸

Fourth highest: “My perception of the chosen images changed completely with Cristina’s guidance”. (15%) Conscious bias here lies in that I was expecting a higher percentage of responses for this statement, because I had the feeling that I usually manage to completely change most participants’ perception of their images. This explains the biased wording – ‘completely’ - of the sentence. Nevertheless, responses to this question show that if there is acceptance, there is a change, perhaps not ‘completely’ but it seems it is an important change, when recognizing emotions, life experiences and values in images in which participants did not recognize themselves.

Open-ended feedback in the space ‘other’:

- I saw more value in images I had previously dismissed as mundane; I saw new potential.
- I got a new view to some of the pictures.
- Now when looking those pictures and after conversation with Cristina, I am more kind, more gentle and more respectful of my own feelings.
- Cristina helped me to broaden my perception of the images and of myself.

²⁶ See section 1.3.2. The unconscious creative process.

²⁷ See section 1.1.4.3. *Close to Me, Sono Io!*, projects with teenagers

²⁸ See section 4.2. Future developments.

- She helped me to accept myself and to empty myself.
- I learned to read faces in other ways. Acceptance, to feel that we are part of something bigger. I was fascinated by Cristina’s skill in reading images.
- Cristina’s gaze helped me to see what’s Human, Iconic, in the image I loved the least. I saw the strength, and I started loving this photograph.
- It’s been very constructive to get other points of view and sensations about my image. Many emotions emerged, different from what I saw and felt.
- Recognition wasn’t the most significant part, but to awaken the need to observe myself without judgment. This has allowed me to accept a figure that contains far more than I imagined. I’ve felt enriched and whole. Usually I escape my own image, because it shows me only my flaws.

These statements support the notion of a change of perception in different ways: ‘acceptance’, seeing ‘what’s human’ and ‘strength’, ‘other points of view and sensations about my image’, ‘observing oneself without judgement’ and seeing other than flaws in one’s images. The absence of judgement²⁹ can help overcome stigma and self-stigma by allowing acceptance and taking possession of all the possible ‘others’ who inhabit us.

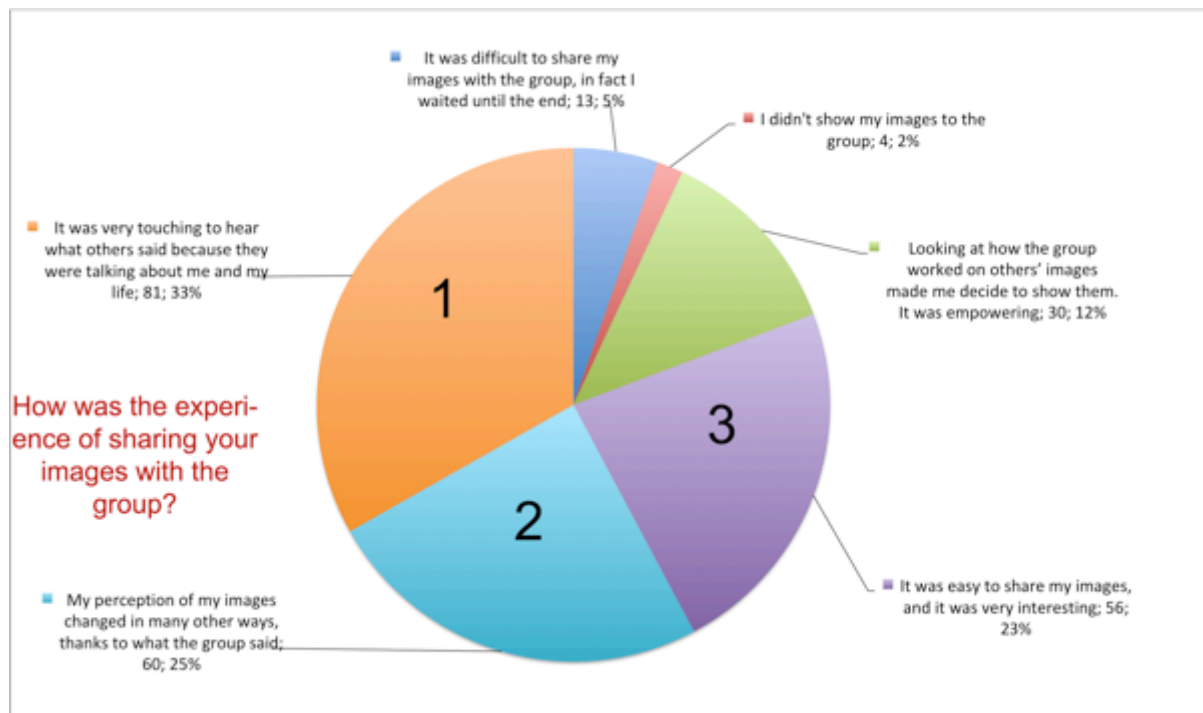
Critical responses to this question regard the perception of the images as ‘unacceptable’:

- I haven’t yet made peace with all those pictures I took.
- The image was strong, but impossible to accept in that moment. Looking back it looked beautiful but I never look at it because it does not represent me, despite its aesthetic power. The gaze, the tears. It was anger in me. The girl in the picture you chose is not me. I look straight forward, as if I had the strength, but there wasn’t strength, I was confused, lost, and I played the game I was expected to play...

I remember this participant well: I tried to object and say that perhaps she didn’t feel the strength, but she could have it somewhere within. Acknowledging people’s right to reject their images, I usually propose to think before deleting them, claiming that all images of ourselves deserve that we find value in them. But she was convinced that she didn’t have any strength and rejected the image. The same respondent asserted on question No.8: “I’ve only kept the picture which spoke to me the most, despite your different point of view. I think the image you chose can be beautiful but it does not touch me at all. It’s not me. It’s not ME. Aesthetics, but far away from me.” These are the plays of power and the possibility of recalcitrance.³⁰

²⁹ See section 1.3.1. The expression of emotions: *Someone to Love*.

³⁰ See section 1.4. The SPEX dispositif.



Question 6: If you did a group workshop, how was the experience of sharing your images with the group?

Highest response: “It was very touching to hear what others said because they were talking about me and my life”. (33%) Again, this response supports the idea in the third highest response of the previous question. The group’s perceptions, including archetypal or iconographical figures and storytelling on the images surprisingly often match the participant’s life experiences. Again, this connection emerges in Daniele De Luigi’s preface of my book *Higher Self*, and must be interrogated in future research:

While the re-usage of an iconography has always been an intentional artistic and intellectual action, (...) here it springs from a creative process in which, in the precise moment of the creation of the image, there is no control on its shape or composition. (...) Therefore, a connection is revealed between the protagonist’s character, his emotional state, their objectification in an image and the iconographic tradition (De Luigi, 2012, p.18).

Second highest response: “My perception of the images changed in many other ways, thanks to what the group said” (25%). Change of perception is further confirmed in the group

session. The group's perceptions could represent ways in which others see us, and this is surprising. It can change our own perception of ourselves.

Minor responses (in 5th and 6th place) suggest that showing the images to the group is felt difficult for some participants. It might be scary and exposing to hear what others see in our images. This resonates with an experience from one of my first workshops, in which a woman said that what others said were their issues, not hers, and that I was throwing them into the 'Lion's den' by exposing them to those perceptions. Indeed others' perceptions might be unpleasant to hear, as in the open-ended statements: "I haven't totally accepted the group's comments" and "I was disturbed by some comments about physical appearance, both in my pictures and those of other participants." Since then, I always prepare participants, before the group session starts, affirming that perception is partly subjective and that we use others' projections as stimuli for thought. Also, I introduce Jung's theory on the personal and collective unconscious and assert that images work in a similar way as dreams, often expressing things we don't in real life and therefore need expression. These explanations are introduced after working on the group's perceptions of my most recent self-portraits, so as to expose myself to the same process I'm proposing them to go through and show how I use those perceptions for my own self-interrogation.

Open-ended feedback in the space "other" is mostly critical in this question:

"Too much focus on negative": it is true that we focus on 'difficult' emotions and not on joy³¹, and some participants might find this not 'right'. 'Difficult' is probably not the right word, because joy can be difficult for some to express, but I will certainly not stigmatize them by calling them 'negative' emotions. 'Painful' or 'stigmatized' emotions could be more accurate adjectives.³² However, this is an on-going discussion about SPEX and it is the main reason why it is criticized.³³ My innate approach to my own painful emotions has always been to address them immediately and work on them until I had accepted them and myself, to spontaneously achieve a more 'positive' mood. If and when I tried to force, or talk myself into the 'positive' mood, I felt inauthentic. Over the years, and thanks to psychotherapy I have discovered that in my experience, this innate approach of focusing on the painful emotions led to an authentic wellbeing, empowerment and self-esteem. But this is not necessarily true for everyone.

³¹ See section 3.1.1. Humans need emotional expression.

³² See Michaela Jones' statement on section 3.1.1. Humans need emotional expression.

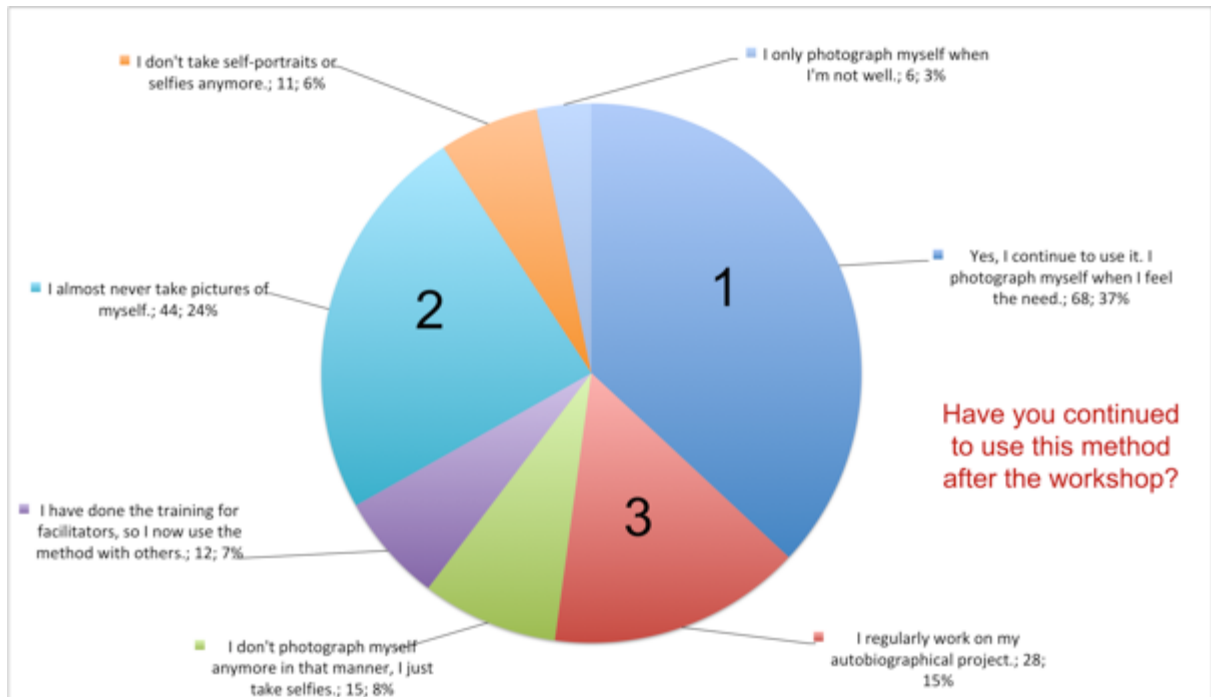
³³ See section 3.1.1. Humans need emotional expression.

“It was moving to hear our perceptions of our images, but sometimes I felt the stories that emerged were a bit too strong”: I usually encourage participants to create epic and mythical stories based on their perceptions, underlining their symbolic function and sometimes these stories can be extreme. As mentioned above, I always introduce and explain the group work with my own images, and explain the possible personal uses of those stories. Perhaps in this case the respondent was disturbed by some of them, but I do not know if these stories were inspired on her own images. As mentioned above, the use of the Higher Self criterion is material for further research.³⁴

“Sharing my images with my students is very difficult because you show yourself emotionally naked, forgetting roles and hierarchy”: this is the case of a high school teacher who decided to participate together with her students and another teacher. They both shared their images with the students, first in small groups and later with the whole group, but not in the public presentation for parents and the whole school. I have asked her if she felt free not to show them, and she replied: “I never had doubts about showing my images to the students, even though I felt it was difficult to show the emotional ‘nakedness’ of my images to anybody, not only to the students. I didn’t feel any pressure from you and felt I wanted to grasp the opportunity to do this work for herself too, but I remember it was hard to accept that you would always choose the image in which I looked terrible and that was a hard challenge, to look at yourself like that, when you’d like not to do so.” I asked her what were the consequences of this exposure on the student-teacher relationship, and she replied: “No problem. In that moment we felt in an egalitarian relationship and it worked well. This didn’t compromise our student-teacher relationship after the workshop: roles were respected. We experienced a moment of closeness in which students understood that teachers are human, that we all can feel pain, fear and sadness. After the workshop we knew more about them and they about each other and about us. This allowed more trust, more listening and more support.”

“It was difficult to show my images to the group, but I didn’t interfere with the order of presentation”: I was surprised to see this statement, since I always let participants decide if and when to show their images, with no order of presentation. However, this response is a further reminder to always allow participants to decide whether or not to show their images and not to follow my instructions.

³⁴ See the book *Higher Self – The Self-Portrait Experience*, p.96



Question 7: Have you continued to use this method after the workshop?

Highest response: “Yes, I continue to use it. I photograph myself when I feel the need” (37%). Participants seem to strongly continue using the method. This could suggest that the method is perceived to be effective and useful by these individuals, but they might also use it for other reasons. This can be also related to the most chosen response to the method’s effects: “Now I feel there are many other emotions I need to express” (17%). Effectiveness or usefulness might therefore refer to responding to a human need, namely, emotional expression.

Second highest: “I almost never take pictures of myself” (24%). A lower percentage of participants do not continue to use the method and seldom take pictures of themselves. Others only take selfies (8%).

Third highest: “I regularly work on my autobiographical project”(15%). This could be seen as another sign of the method’s effectiveness. These are participants who have gone through the complete workshop and built their autobiographical project.

The open-ended feedback in the space “other”:

Several statements mention the usage of parts of the method in other projects and in professional activities, after the workshop:

- No, it has been a very long time since I've photographed myself with your method. I did do an art therapy group, you may remember, in which participants used the method or a very similar one to yours.
- I haven't continued the method exactly, but I have worked in my autobiographical project I had started before the workshop, and I feel the workshop gave me important aspects to consider.
- I work on theatre and writing but the perceptive work has inspired me and helped me in my work.
- I have integrated some of the method's ideas in my autobiographical workshops with groups of psychotherapists and other care professionals.
- I haven't used the method in the little time passed after the workshop, because I haven't felt the need: the workshop has given me new creative stimuli to which I have fully dedicated myself.

This last response supports the idea mentioned in question No.1 that SPEX can stimulate the creative process. In my book *Higher Self* (p.58) Lebanese jewellery designer Margherita Abi-Hanna gives an account of her use of SPEX to create new jewellery collections. Open-ended statements in questions No.8 and 9 also support this concept.

Other statements refer to the feeling that SPEX has allowed some participants to overcome the fear or uneasiness of appearing in pictures:

- I am much more comfortable having my photo taken (which I have to do as part of my work)
- I continue taking self-portraits as I did before, but now I don't feel afraid to show myself.

Another way to continue the method could be just refraining from deleting the 'ugly' selfies and trying to see value in them, a message I try to divulge in all my presentations:

- I do a lot of selfies, more than before the workshop, and I don't delete them. I see something good and beautiful in them, even in the older ones I didn't like...

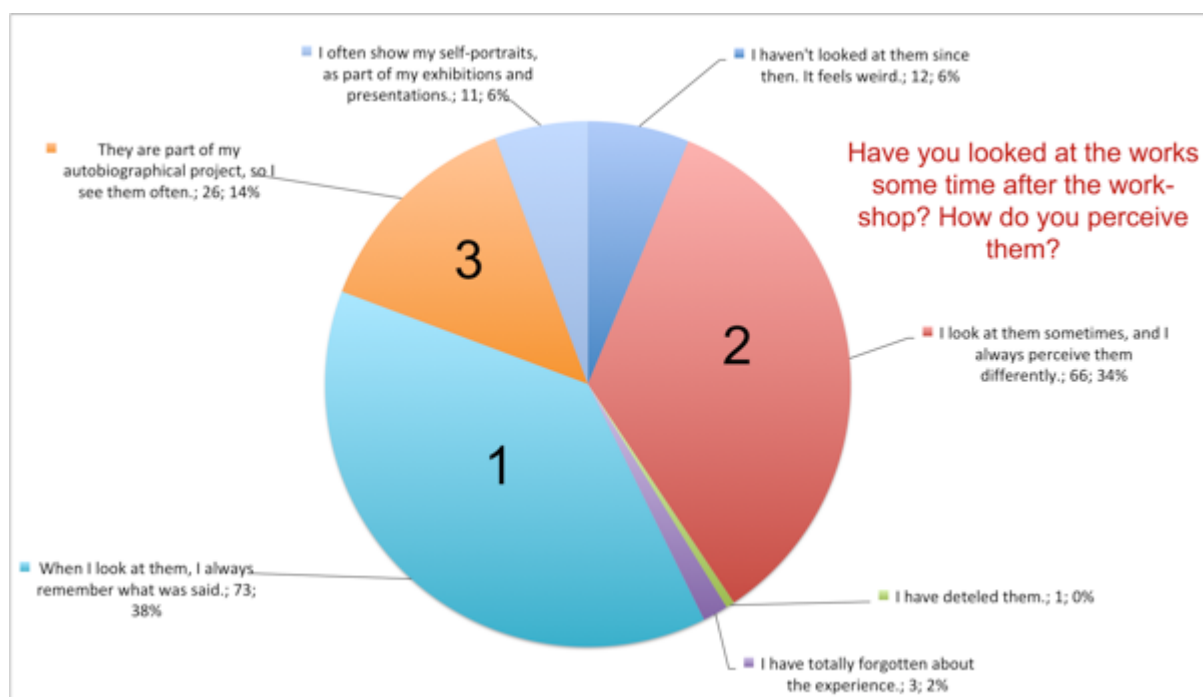
Another respondent continues to think about SPEX when looking at portraits:

- Even though I haven't used the method, I think about it every time I see my portraits and other people's.

More critical responses include the need for more time to learn the method, as mentioned in the analysis of questions No.2 and 3:

- I haven't had the time to go deeper into the method (meetings were too few and with too high a number of people) and to learn it in a more exhaustive way.
- I'm still working on my autobiographical project, even though not regularly. I feel I need maturation time and I know something is working within.

A respondent mentions the idea that the self-portrait is a narcissistic practice: "I've always believed that working on yourself (with photography) was narcissistic and affected, so I've always avoided this practice, despite I needed it so much." This is another common critique to SPEX and to me for exposing myself so much, for being a protagonist. In one of my presentations, a participant asked me if I did not consider this practice as a narcissistic one. There are different definitions and synonyms of narcissism, such as ego-centrism or even self-interest. The narcissistic personality disorder includes the persistent need for admiration and flattering, lack of empathy and selfishness. My response was that in SPEX the interest in oneself through images that are not at all flattering is aimed at addressing and accepting one's own imperfect image, body and painful emotions, fostering self-empathy. At the same time, when I started taking pictures of myself I thought it was vanity because I liked my looks, this is why it was a secret practice. But if this narcissism was a first step that would take me to explore my inner world, should we consider it negative?



Question 8: Have you looked at those images again, some time after the workshop? How did you perceive them?

Highest responses:

- When I look at them, I always remember what was said. 38%
- I look at them sometimes, and I always perceive them differently. 34%
- They are part of my autobiographical project, so I see them often. 14%

Participants tend to look at images again after the workshop, remember what was said, and see them differently every time. This supports my idea that images continue to ‘speak’ to us in time, given the ever-changing perceptions that the subject’s face stimulates.³⁵

Some participants (6% of responses) do not look at the images again, because “it feels weird”. Participants usually tell me that those images are uncomfortable to look at. In some cases participants prefer not to look at them, and this might mean the experience was in some way painful or unpleasant. This introduces the possibility of some follow-up with those whose experience has been more unpleasant.

Open-ended feedback obtained in the space ‘other’ includes other critical responses, which confirm that some participants continue to perceive these images as too uncomfortable or unacceptable, as mentioned in the analysis of question No.5.

- I don’t look all the time I looked once and that was it. As I said before it only brought further issues to the front of my mind.

This respondent was the one who mentioned the need of his therapist to overcome the experience, as cited in the analysis of questions No.3 and No.9.

- I saw them again, but now it’s a long time I don’t. Now it feels uncomfortable because I remember what was happening to me those days, outside the workshop.
- I don’t look at them. I have detached myself from my pain and my fears.
- I have not forgotten the experience, but I don’t look at the images.

One could speculate that participants who want to look at them again have probably managed to change their first perception better than others that decide not to look at them again. They might have seen the value and significance of the images so that they are not so uncomfortable anymore, this being the aim of SPEX.

The following responses mention the value of “having your story written” but “at the same time see(ing) something new”:

³⁵ See the book *Higher Self – The Self-Portrait Experience*, p.96

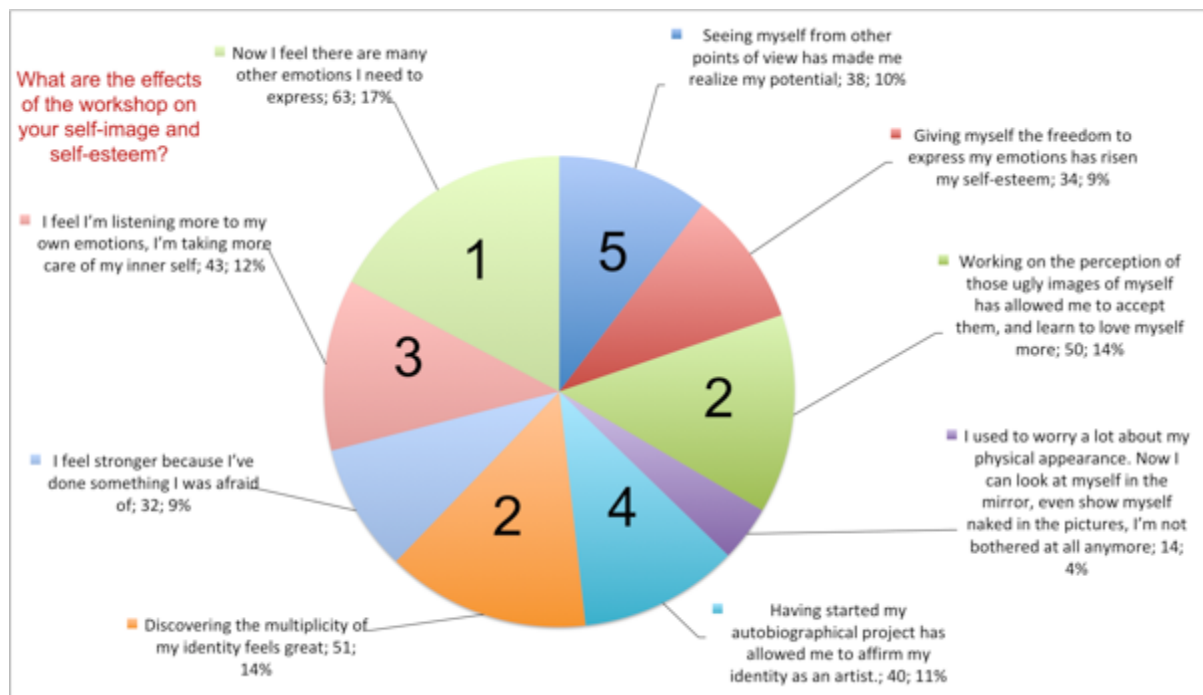
- These photos are my treasures. They are a part of me. I kept a journal of the experience and included other participants' feedback and copies of the images. I look at this whenever I feel the need to remind me of the woman I was then and still becoming.
- It's like having your story written. Those self-portraits allow me to remember and at the same time see something new.
- They make me laugh at myself.

The last statement introduces the self-irony that might emerge after one has accepted the images and the painful emotions, which is something I often experience but hadn't yet mentioned in my research.

“What was said allowed me to understand important things about myself, which guide me towards new creative and professional choices.” SPEX, aiming at broadening our perception of ourselves, can suggest new potential³⁶, which is useful to imagine new future perspectives.

“I've thought about printing my images and the family pictures, to show the inter-generational communication, but I still haven't done it.” This response refers to the 'roots' exercise, which involves the search of family pictures and a dialogue of these with our own self-portraits, as if we were communicating with our ancestors. This can be an emotionally powerful exercise that is pursued only in the complete workshop, when participants have already practised the self-portrait with their own cameras, and will be material for further research.

³⁶ See section 1.3.1. The expression of emotions: *Someone to Love*.



Question 9: What do you feel are the effects of the workshop on your self-image and self-esteem?

Highest responses:

- Now I feel there are many other emotions I need to express. 17%
- Working on the perception of those ugly images of myself has allowed me to accept them, and learn to love myself more. 14%
- Discovering the multiplicity of my identity feels great. 14%
- I feel I'm listening more to my emotions, I'm taking more care of my inner self. 12%
- Having started my autobiographical project has allowed me to affirm my identity as an artist. 11%
- Seeing myself from other points of view has made me realize my potential. 10%

This result is surprising to me, I thought the change of perception would emerge in the first place, but these results suggest that this method drives people to listen more to their emotions which need expression. Perhaps participants understand that SPEX can be used to accept and love themselves more, if they learn how to use it on their own. Discovering of the multiplicity of identity they can explore unknown potential, and this can be empowering. The affirmation of the creative self is important too, for creative people as for those who think they are not creative.

Open-ended feedback provides new concepts and critique:

“A bond has been created with the other participants that remains and still keeps us close, even if silently and at a distance.” This response supports one of the effects of SPEX, mentioned throughout this critical appraisal³⁷: the creation of significant relationships based on the lack of judgement and the empathic gaze, by sharing common feelings and experiences through the images and projects.

“It's not only that I listen more to my own emotions. I am able to really hear them and be able to communicate it clearly with others as well.” This respondent suggests that working on the expression and multiple perceptions of emotions in the images and with the group can also provide new skills in the communication of those emotions to others.

“I discovered that there is no connection between the image, the project and how I perceive myself.” This statement supports the incongruity between the image one has of oneself and the SPEX images,³⁸ one of the reasons why participants do not recognize themselves in those photographs. It is unclear if the respondent sees this as a problem or just a surprising discovery. As mentioned earlier, the SPEX images and projects may contain unconscious expressions, which might have never been seen before and therefore, they were not yet part of one's consciousness.

“Those pictures have allowed me to shut down that terrible moment of my life.” This statement supports the cathartic or catalytic quality of the SPEX *dispositif*, capable of giving expression to painful emotions and by doing so, liberating the participant.

“It was great to hear that others don't see me so ugly.” This is a new way to express the change of perception that happens in the group work: others tend to have a less judgemental perception than the participant appearing in the image. This happened again recently in a Swiss prison: a participant saw a ‘stupid face’ in one of his images, but was astonished to hear that the group perceived completely different things, such as surprise, sympathy and innocence.

³⁷ See sections 1.3.1. and 3.1.2.

³⁸ See section 2.1. The self-portrait in the digital era.

Several statements affirm that there was no change in their self-image or self-esteem:

- The workshop hasn't had effects on my self-image or self-esteem.
- It has increased my curiosity, but no changes in my self-image or self-esteem.
- Unfortunately I cannot appreciate the effects of the workshop on my self-image.
- It didn't have significant effects on my self-esteem.
- I experimented an approach I didn't know, but I can't say if it had an impact on my self-esteem.
- Since I did not work further with this method, the effects are minimal.
- I haven't found it 'therapeutic' as I expected (this statement is a response to question No.8).

Participants who only did the introductory workshop have written all of the above statements. Perhaps, as some respondent has suggested, a longer workshop is needed to achieve transformation or benefits such as improving self-esteem.

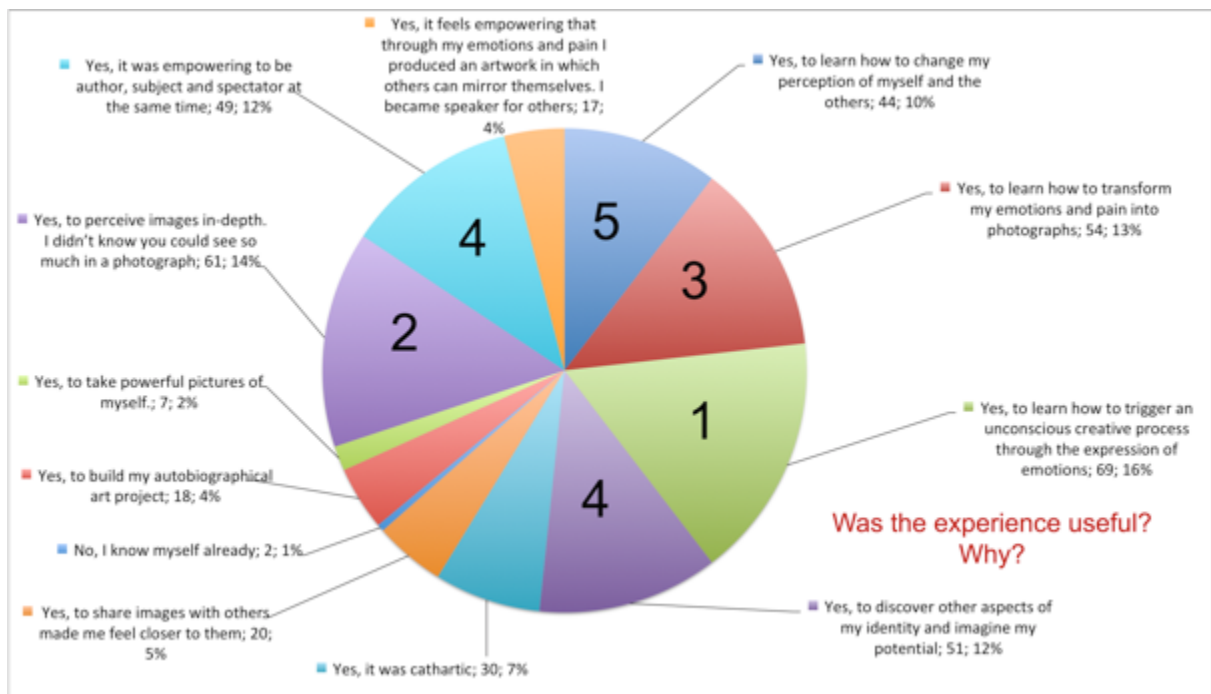
“I feel the project changed from being about me to become a story that wasn't about me, and that the story had its value for others, but not to me.” This response was written by a photography student in Oslo who had learned the method and then assisted me in my workshops in Norwegian prisons, for the project *We Exist*. I was quite surprised to discover that she didn't see the value of the autobiographical video she produced, which dealt with family problems. These might have been painful for her, which might be a possible reason for her not seeing the value. Nonetheless, she appreciated working in prisons and seeing the benefits the inmates obtained.

“I'd like to go deeper into the method, but I need to take self-portraits using less dramatic emotions, to photograph something profound and authentic, with no dramas.” This response refers to the above mentioned 'theatrical' or performative dimension in SPEX, which is functional to the process, as discussed earlier.³⁹ Emotions in the instructions and in many of the resulting images can be perceived as 'dramatic' but many other more subtle emotions do appear in the photographs. However, the comment introduces a need to explore her own emotions which are felt as non dramatic, and a dislike of the extreme emotions that often appear in SPEX images. This stimulates me to underline the possibility of recalcitrance and of expressing emotions as they choose. The performative dimension will always interact with the experiential.

³⁹ See section 1.4. The SPEX dispositif.

“It’s been important to be able to see my potential, but at the same time it was distressing to work on my identity, because it involved opening unknown ‘doors’ and elaborate on what’s behind those doors. It’s a life’s work, and it’s heavy to condense it, even in longer periods of time, without psychological help to elaborate on the contents of those doors.” This statement, as others in this appendix, raises issues of emotional safeguarding and the possible need of professional therapeutic support during the workshop, about which participants should be informed.⁴⁰

Another open-ended statement in question No.10 relates to issues of emotional safeguarding. It mentions the ‘opening of doors’ in a different way: “As a creative, introspective or healing process that it may be, this work with Cristina completely opens doors which should never be shut down. I think this experience provides great material to all those who try it, so that each can do what they want with it.” It is possible that this respondent felt more prepared than the previous one to open those doors. It is therefore ethically necessary to make sure that participants can deal with or have the adequate accompaniment to deal with what the workshop triggers.



Question 10: Was this experience useful? Why?

⁴⁰ See section 3.2.1. Emotional safeguarding

Highest responses:

- Yes, to learn how to trigger an unconscious creative process through the expression of emotions. 16%
- Yes, to perceive images in-depth. I didn't know you could see so much in a photograph. 14%
- Yes, to learn how to transform my emotions and pain into photographs. 13%

The three highest responses suggest that most participants were interested in the relationship between the expression of their emotions and the unconscious creative process. Secondly, they discover how much they can see in a photograph. I believe these two aspects are related to the original contribution: SPEX is a new *dispositif* which allows anybody to transform their emotions into photographs by triggering an unconscious creative process. This means that emotions that need expression will emerge without our control. On the other hand the *dispositif* involves a unique methodology of perception, with specific criteria, stimulating participants to experience the multiple and ever-changing perceptions of the images, aimed at broadening their perception on themselves.

Open-ended feedback in the space 'other':

The following comments were written by people who didn't tick any of the statements, not finding the experience useful for themselves but for other reasons.

- The most useful experience was to visit the jails and to bring this method to others.

This response was written by the Norwegian photography student mentioned in the previous question.

- Yes to see others getting many of the benefits above and to have experienced some of the method for myself and to know I can return to it if I need to
- It was interesting to go through the creative process of another artist however I feel we all need to find ours.

The issue raised here is whose creative process SPEX proposes and how a participant can be encouraged to find her own. Being involved in someone else's creative process might be interesting but make us feel we want to use our own. Here are the plays of power at work again, and the possibility of subversion. Participants of the complete workshop work with their own cameras and aesthetic choices, that is, with their own creative process. At the same time this respondent pursued an online workshop, so she always used her equipment and aesthetic ideas. In that case, her comment might refer to the sort of self-portraits SPEX

proposes, the expression of emotions, the methodology of perception and choice. Other artists use the self-portrait in completely different ways and she probably felt she wanted to work in another direction. However, this is another statement which underlines the need to be more conscious of the plays of power and the chance to rebel.

“It was useful, for me primary as a photographic experiment with the self-reflection as the added value. Most interesting was to see some works of others.” This comment highlights the added value of witnessing other participants’ processes, projects and benefits.

“I’m usually the photographer, not the subject. It felt uncomfortable being on the other side of the lens. I’ll continue with this process, I find it confrontational, but useful.” This comment resonates with the reversal of plays of power mentioned earlier. It is confrontational for a photographer to be, more vulnerable, on the other side of the lens.

- “Working with the self-portrait can be liberating, as long as it is done with a good accompaniment.”
- “I think I’m stuck on this kind of work, so I haven’t been able to make the most of the workshop.”
- “The experience has been too brief for me and I haven’t had the time or the way to correct the mistakes I made; I think the workshop should be longer and involve less people simultaneously, in order to be more efficient.”

These are other statements, as the one below, that raise ethical issues of emotional safeguarding and the possibility that participants might need professional support.⁴¹ What kind of accompaniment is needed? How long should the workshop be and should I involve participants in an individual follow-up process?

The following is a long and critical comment by a woman who spent six months in 2013-14 working with me as an intern, to learn my method.

- Cristina invited me to continue with her method after the introductory workshop, because I was suffering from thyroid cancer. The camera allowed me to feel stronger because I could communicate what I was going through, and when you get a disease you tend to isolate yourself, to shut yourself in a more intimate dimension. I have worked with video and I documented the internal process I was living, and I am still

⁴¹ See section 3.2.1. Emotional safe-guarding

working on those materials. At the same time I consider very dangerous, in Cristina's method, that she wants her participants to believe that it can be therapeutic. Unfortunately I must say that it is not therapeutic. It's a powerful activation tool, so it can make conflicts emerge, but there is nothing that helps you integrate them. No techniques are proposed to help participants integrate and re-balance what the body activates in those sessions. I have worked with her method over six months, but I didn't feel better. The pain I felt acquired a more defined shape, but the method did not propose efficient tools to transform all that. A year later I went through a new operation, and the cancer had spread to the lymph nodes. Then I did other practices and the cancer is gone, I'm ok and working on my autobiographical project. I think participants should be warned during her workshops, that it is a powerful experience, of self-perception and self-knowledge, but not therapeutic. Therapeutic is a misleading word, not true. Healing, in my case, did not happen through her method, although this doesn't mean it wasn't a useful and powerful experience. I think Cristina's method has a great power from an anthropological and social perspective, more than psychological. I think the freedom to express emotions that in daily life we must hide is like showing the part of the story you want to hide. The expression of the emotion is only a representation. The consequences of this representation, of its perception, can be beneficial, but also the opposite. This is important to consider, because the image by its nature is open. The multiplicity of interpretations that can emerge provides a different experience for each participant. This is why the self-portrait is an activating tool, a very powerful one. The method can be a tool to use within a therapeutic process.

I have never claimed to be a therapist, but over the years I have said that SPEX is a tool that can be 'therapeutic', using Judy Weiser's definition of 'therapeutic photography'. I have also discussed earlier why I have recently started to avoid using the word 'therapeutic', and use 'transformative' instead⁴². This participant argues that SPEX is not therapeutic because it wasn't for her, but one experience is not enough evidence to affirm that a method is or is not therapeutic or transformative. The same could be said of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis: there are surely experiences that have been perceived as useless or negative and this does not invalidate these practices. It might also be useful to differentiate two concepts 'curing/treating' and 'healing', to better understand what she meant with 'therapeutic'. SPEX

⁴² See section 2.3. Phototherapy and therapeutic photography.

cannot ‘heal’ an illness such as cancer, but it can be a tool that one can use to work on one’s emotions in the process, in order to improve self-esteem and quality of life.

However, her idea that SPEX works best integrated into a psychotherapeutic process is useful, as emerged from other statements discussed above. Also, her comment raises questions about how participants are or feel supported during and after the workshops and the need to remind them to ask for professional therapeutic support if needed.

This participant interrupted her internship due to a conflict with me. She felt that I was focusing too much on the ‘negative’ and needed to “go towards the light”. Back then, I felt she was not addressing her own conflicts, but now, the theoretical framework of this research, applied to this comment has allowed me to ask the following questions: Did I always allow her the possibility of recalcitrance? And further, how did I deal with her objections? I told her that she had to address difficult issues, expecting her to trust me and follow my guidance, but I should have trusted her needs and encouraged her to work on them, using the method and allowing her to guide the process. Emotional safeguarding would involve using the process for what they see as fitting their own individual circumstances. I talked to her again recently and she said that the artistic part of the process with me was very valuable, that she produced videos with my guidance that helped her a lot and that she is still using in her art projects. She also said that she needed to change, that she had grown too close to me.

I am currently following individually another woman with thyroid cancer, and although she has always shown enthusiasm about my proposals, I have asked her several times to feel free to express her rebellion to what I say and propose. She really liked this and although she said it was difficult for her to rebel, she immediately told me two things:

- I feel your approach is grim, somewhat brutal
- I wish I could lead a more peaceful and less complicated life

I respected her needs and proposed that she could photograph scenes of the peaceful and less complicated life she was yearning. The fact that she had already worked on painful emotions made me think she now needed to change the mood of her work. In fact this approach, exploring pleasant emotions when needed, is more coherent with the idea of the multiplicity of human identity⁴³. I also came up with my own subversion to my usual practice: I proposed her to take fashion pictures of herself as if she was a very elegant model. She hasn’t yet worked on these ideas but she said that it was important to express her wishes and needs: that the most important pictures are done, and that she appreciated that I always helped her see her

⁴³ See the book *Higher Self – The Self-Portrait Experience*, p.96

strengths in moments of weakness. She asserted that the initial discomfort of looking at images of herself has disappeared. She now shows these ‘tough’ pictures to her friends and says with pride, “this is who I am, this is how I feel right now, while fighting cancer”. This has empowered her more than she thought it would.

Conclusion

The above data suggests the following trends which support parts of the theoretical framework of this critical appraisal and at the same time, the *dispositif* as a research methodology has been useful to examine the critical feedback provided by the open-ended statements in the light of an ethical framework and code of practice.

Firstly, data would suggest that SPEX can trigger a partly unconscious creative process through the expression of difficult emotions. Most respondents appreciate having learned to transform their difficult emotions into photographs, as a catalytic and liberating process. Responses support the idea that participants generally do not recognize themselves in the images, and this can provide the necessary detachment to perceive oneself and a feeling of empowerment. The highest effect SPEX generally stimulates is to listen more to emotions that need expression, and this could be the reason why most respondents continue to use the method. An appreciation is evidenced of having learned to explore the multiple and ever-changing perceptions of the images. Lastly, SPEX is generally perceived to foster, both in the individual session with me and with the group, a broadening of self-perception, which can stimulate in some participants an increase of self-esteem. These results also evidenced in the prison data analysis.⁴⁴ However, critical open-ended feedback raises issues of emotional safeguarding, even though respondents are not considered as part of vulnerable collectives. An ethical code of practice must be formulated and further tested in future research, including a pre-workshop questionnaire⁴⁵, informing participants about the possible need of professional support during and after the workshops, and defining the boundaries of the liability placed upon the workshop leader.

⁴⁴ See section 2. Prison data analysis, in the following pages.

⁴⁵ See the pre-workshop questionnaire in Appendix No.3, Ethics.

2. ANALYSIS OF PRISON INMATES' FEEDBACK

Overview

I have held workshops in prison since 2009 in Italy, Spain, Norway and Switzerland with around three hundred inmates, both men and women. Most of my work has been in high security units for violent crimes and with those diagnosed with substance use disorder (SUD), often combined. Only two inmates who participated in my workshops came from a psychiatric unit. They appeared to be autonomous and in good health. I haven't worked with inmates with physical disabilities, although participation is open to anyone. I have no knowledge if participants to my workshops had learning disabilities. I didn't ask inmates what crimes they had committed but some wanted to tell me what brought them to confinement. Inmates from the sexual and the financial crime units did not participate in the workshops. The prison administration and social workers selected which inmates could participate in the workshop, according to their behaviour and mental health. All information about the backgrounds of the participants was supplied on a need to know basis.

From 2011 to 2019 I have gathered their feedback in different ways. The data here presented includes feedback from 148 inmates, as follows:

1. Open-ended general feedback about the experience (43 women, 2011)
2. A questionnaire with space for open-ended responses (105 respondents: 83 men and 22 women, 2015-16)

I have included four case studies (2009-2016): one of the three refers to an inmate who responded to the questionnaire, and is therefore included in the above 148. Two case studies refer to two women who did not give written feedback. And the fourth relates to a woman who served a six-year sentence and she followed the complete workshop and training for facilitators.

All respondents were serving long-term sentences over one year through fully confined detention; there were no participants on probation. Around 80 of the 148 respondents to 1 and 2 were in a high security prison or unit.

Gender of respondents: 83 men (56%) and 65 women (44%) = 148

Location of workshops: 18 respondents in Norway (Oslo area) and 130 in Spain (Barcelona area).

Nationalities: Europe: Spanish, Italian, Norwegian. Rest of the world: African, South-American, Asian. Data in my possession does not include specific nationality.

Years of workshops: 2011, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Length of workshops: 71% of respondents participated to a complete workshop in 5 or more days. For 83% of these, the workshop lasted 15 days over a period of three/four months. The workshop for the remaining 17% happened in three Norwegian prisons during an intensive 5-day week. 29% of respondents participated to an introductory workshop in 2 days. Workshops in Norwegian prisons had to be intensive for logistical reasons, given that I was then living in Spain.

Publication of images: most inmates who participated to the project *We Exist* in Norwegian prisons responded to the questionnaires and authorised the publication of their images in the online exhibit of the project: <http://r9b0334408.racontr.com/>

The questionnaire consisted in a series of questions⁴⁶ with space for open-ended answers.

Inmates were told that they didn't have to write their names in the forms, so they could feel free to give critical feedback. However many of them wrote their names anyway. This might be due to the peer-to-peer relationship, which usually brings some closeness: they might have felt proud to give me their writings and state it was theirs.

A high number of respondents have only answered yes/no to the questions. I have decided not to analyse these (quantitative) and but only those in which they write a sentence (qualitative), except for two questions regarding the broadening of perception of oneself and others. The reason for this is that I consider these two themes as the most important effect of the SPEX *dispositif*, which is especially useful in a prison context.

Possibilities of bias lie in several aspects:

- 1- Despite the possibility of anonymity, my assistants and myself helped some of them to fill in the forms, due to their difficulty in writing or with the language. This might have induced them to respond more positively than they would if on their own.
- 2- Inmates may have wanted to please my assistants and me or prove that they are 'good' participants.

⁴⁶ See page 31.

- 3- Inmates appreciated, as emerges from some statements, that our approach was non-judgemental, and this might drive them to be less critical of the workshop.

However, many of them gave critical feedback, which has been analysed below.

The questionnaire and all the inmates' responses can be found in the attached pen-drive, as well as two documents containing the feedback of the prison administration and educational staff.

I have here examined the most significant statements, grouping them by the concepts related to the two frameworks as listed below: firstly, the psychological and secondly, the philosophical/political.

The psychological framework interrogates the following concepts:

1. Broadening of self-perception and self-discovery.
2. Broadening of perception of others.
3. The cathartic expression of emotions.
4. The unconscious creative process and recognition of oneself in the images.
5. Effects on self-acceptance, self-esteem and wellbeing.

The philosophical/political framework will interrogate the following:

1. Plays of power: vulnerability as a way to subvert implicit prison rules, the peer-to-peer approach, stigma and self-stigma.
2. Knowledge: self-knowledge, knowledge of others and knowledge/discovery of the *dispositif*.

The psychological framework

1. Broadening of self-perception and self-discovery:

The results of the yes/no responses to the 8th question in the form, "Did you see yourself from a different point of view? Can you explain?" were:

- 80 of 88 respondents said "yes" (91%)
- 4 of 88 said "a little" or "maybe" (4,5%)
- 4 of 88 said "no" (4,5%)

As for the longer responses as sentences:

- 56 of 58 statements responding to that question expressed in different ways that they had seen themselves differently, or from another point of view. (96,5%)
- 2 of 58 expressed that they did not see themselves differently. (3,5%)

These results support the hypotheses that SPEX allows participants to look at themselves from a different point of view, which coheres with Porporino's views on how to encourage desistance suggestion in prison inmates by "developing programmes that don't aim to change offenders but rather aim simply to help them explore – to look at their lives through some new lenses" (Porporino, 2010, p.78). Looking at oneself through new lenses can foster the discovery of unknown potential, as one inmate puts it, "I have learned that anything is possible, if you put the energy on things." In prison, this could mean finding positive aspects in oneself: there are over 30 statements expressing the discovery of their "good sides" or qualities they didn't know they possessed. Following are some of them:

- I've discovered that I have more positive things than I thought.
- I have discovered that I have leadership skills and that I can be loved.
- It was useful to see and feel things I hadn't even thought about or imagined. I have seen good things in me, that I didn't see before.
- I loved to see things I didn't know about myself, to see things I didn't think I could express. I see I have things inside that I don't know. The woman in the pictures wasn't me! I have discovered that I am courageous, I'm a fighter, I'm stronger than I thought; and that I can be someone, I can be useful, I can be a good mother.
- I realised that I'm very strong, that I can deal with the dark side and make it lighter, that I don't give up.
- I have discovered that I am strong and very vulnerable at the same time. I have seen my inner self and my feelings. I thought I didn't have any.

N.'s case study⁴⁷ suggests an important change of self-perception with a visible modification of behaviour, which allowed him to break the spiral of violence.

2. Broadening of perception of others:

⁴⁷ See pages 27-30.

Responses to the question, “Did you see your fellow interns from a different point of view?” show similar results as responses to the previous question about the broadening of self-perception.

In the yes/no answers:

- 67 of 81 respondents said “yes” (82.7%)
- 8 said “a little” or “some, yes” (9.9%)
- 6 said “no” (7.4%)

As for the longer sentences *all* respondents expressed in different ways that the workshop allowed them to see their fellow inmates in a different way, and to discover “goodness” and other positive aspects in their peers, as evidenced from the following examples:

- I have discovered that my fellow inmates have more or less the same issues as me. This has allowed me to see them differently.
- In my fellow inmates’ photos I saw goodness, kindness.
- I’ve learned that everyone has a vulnerable side, even though they seem tough in person.
- I loved P.’s pictures, she looked like a warrior! And M.’s strength, and M.C.’s goodness.
- I realized, looking at the photos of others, that they are able to express and show details and gestures that I’d never seen in them.
- I’ve also seen my fellow inmates’ tender and human sides.
- I think I know them better, and I’ve become closer with some. Every one of them is unique, with many positive aspects.
- I have seen emotions in my peers’ photos, in their gazes. They have feelings. We all have feelings of guilt, sadness, anger and remorse.
- I now think that I shouldn’t judge others before knowing them.

Discovering that others can be different than they appear and perceiving their humanity through feelings can foster closeness and empathy. It is important to consider that relationships between inmates are frequently conflictive, and they often stigmatize one another. This could be due to the fact that they cannot express their anger of being confined towards authorities that have incarcerated them, since this would easily worsen their sentence. They have been judged, and judging others can feel as a release.

Perceiving vulnerability in others that seemed ‘tough’, after acknowledging one’s own, can loosen the tension and dissolve conflict. But, as one inmate states, one can feel exposed to others’ judgement when showing their pictures to the group: “It was hard that others could see

my vulnerable side.” I have often heard inmates saying that “you always have to be strong here”, lest others might take advantage of you. This is why especially in a prison setting it is crucial to allow them not to show their images to the group.

19 inmates have stated that the workshop allowed them to improve their relationships with some of their peers:

- It was very useful in my relationship to others, because now they see me differently. Before the workshop I was always on my own, I didn't relate to others. Now I feel better about myself, and I'm not so lonely.
- Yes, my relationship with them is closer. This workshop has helped us get closer to one another. We have talked a lot about it.
- We got more connection between us, beyond what each one of us feels and is. We left past issues behind and we tightened our bond by taking pictures together.

Instead, 10 inmates affirmed that relationships did not get better, as in the following examples:

- My relationships with others are the same. I don't really want to relate. I didn't come here to make friends. I am authentic, and others put some “make-up” on themselves.
- My relationship with myself has improved. Not with others, since I go my own way.

However, a longer workshop would be necessary to really improve their relationships.

The following themes have been analysed through the statements, not the yes/no answers, due to time constraints.

3. The cathartic expression of emotions.

Over 30 statements suggest in different ways the feeling of liberation through the expression of emotions. Following are some significant examples:

- This was a new experience. Before taking the pictures I felt hurt and in pain, but when I finished I felt satisfied and relieved.
- I felt very good with this photo activity, because I could express and let out everything I had inside.
- I could weep. As Arabs we are more coldblooded, we keep things inside.
- It was very positive, because I was able to throw my repressed emotions into the pictures.

- At first it felt strange, but little by little I felt emotions were emerging naturally. I felt it within, and then how it came out.
- It was good to be alone taking pictures, and emotions emerged quickly. I loved that. I expressed my anger and the fear of losing my son, who is ill with cancer.

The prison setting does not encourage or allow emotional expression, but long-term confinement, through the power dynamics, stigma, self-stigma and the separation from loved ones, can provoke very strong emotions that tend to be kept within. As one inmate asserts, “I saw myself differently and also others, because we never express emotions here.” And another, “To see the sadness in them was surprising. I don’t see that normally.” As mentioned earlier, most inmates try to be strong and avoid showing their vulnerabilities, except perhaps with psychologists/therapists. Providing an intimate individual space in which they can be on their own to let out their emotions, can certainly help and give a feeling of freedom. The case study of M.⁴⁸ suggests the effectiveness of the *dispositif* in facilitating the expression of strong emotions despite a life-long self-control: to her surprise, M. managed to express the pain about the death of her son, who had died 18 years before. But the process can be emotionally tiring as well, as one inmate who did a five day intensive workshop in Norway, asserts: “It was difficult. Every day I was emotionally tired.”

4. The unconscious creative process and recognition of oneself in the images.

A high number of statements, as seen in the examples below, suggest that inmates participating to SPEX workshops often discover things in themselves that they had never seen or known. This could support the idea that these things lied in an unconscious dimension, and that the *dispositif* can bring them to consciousness through the creative process.

- I have seen things I had never seen before in myself.
- I’ve discovered that I have other identities and personalities. I have realised that I am sensitive and sentimental.
- I liked to discover my other faces I didn’t know. They were hidden or it’s hard to express.
- It was useful to see and feel things I never had even thought of or imagined. I have seen I have good things in me that I didn’t see before.
- It’s the first time I see myself. I’ve seen myself in a very different way. I’ve seen so many emotions, fears, hope and insecurities.

48 Pages 25 to 27.

- I loved to see things I didn't know about myself, to see things I didn't think I could express. I see I have things inside that I don't know.
- This is innovative, because you can see yourself and see things that you had never noticed, or you had never stopped to observe.
- In this workshop you can learn things about yourself that you cannot see in yourself otherwise.

Other statements suggesting self-discovery and self-awareness⁴⁹ can further support that the SPEX creative process stimulates the unconscious to 'speak', as one inmate puts it: "I have learned that there is an inner self that wants to come out."

A high number of statements evidence that most inmates did not recognize themselves in some or all the pictures, as emerged from participants from other contexts in the 2018 questionnaires. This could support the idea that SPEX can bring unconscious material to consciousness, producing an image in which we don't recognize ourselves, or we've never seen ourselves like that. Following are some significant examples:

- It was surprising to see my picture: it didn't look like me!
- I saw myself in the photos as if they were all different people, not myself. People that think and feel several emotions.
- I didn't recognize myself; I had never seen myself like that. Also because I never take pictures of myself.
- I recognized myself, but I've never seen myself like that, I didn't know I could have that face and those gestures.
- In some of the pictures it's me, but in others it's a totally different person. But in all of them there's a little of me.
- I didn't recognize myself at all; it was a strange feeling, because that kind of pictures are the ones I would delete.
- At the beginning I didn't recognize myself, I didn't know that my face expressed so much sadness.

The last statement suggests the process from non-recognition to recognition of emotions, thoughts and life experiences that happens through perceptive work. Not recognising oneself refers to the discrepancy between the ideal and the real image of oneself, as one inmate suggests: "by looking at my pictures I realise that I am completely different from how I perceived myself." The second last statement "that kind of pictures are the ones I would

49 See in the attached document, the prison data, N.2., Self-discovery, self-knowledge.

delete” resonates with the selfie practice, as discussed in chapter 2.1. in that selfie-makers usually delete images which do not correspond to their ideal image.

5. Effects on self-acceptance, self-esteem and wellbeing.

A high number of statements illustrate different ways in which SPEX has provided wellbeing through self-discovery, self-confidence, perception of uniqueness, mastery of emotions, self-esteem, sex appeal, beauty, hope, improvement of life in prison, laughter, the feeling of freedom, and so forth. All of these aspects can help to contrast the strong self-stigma in prison populations. Here are some significant examples:

- I was impressed by the wisdom in my gaze. It gave me hope, and I feel better about myself.
- The workshop helped me build my self-confidence.
- I feel a lot better and I’m more of a master of my own emotions. I look at lot prouder. I have more self-esteem than I used to have.
- I’m not so embarrassed when I see myself now. When I want, I can be sexy. I see myself a little bit younger now in the mirror.
- The experience gave me hope, that I will recover my daughter’s love and trust.
- I think I take more care of myself; I give more value to myself. I listen to my moods and think about them.
- It was useful to improve my life here. To start anew, accepting things.
- This has helped me a lot in my self-esteem. Since I worked with you I feel happier, I’m laughing a lot and people ask me “hey what happened?” I’m proud to be myself. I have shown my pictures to my psychologist.
- I felt beautiful and human, and alive.
- I have discovered that I can cry. I’d never wept, not even with psychologists.
- I liked to do the group work and I realised that in the darkest days you can find rays of light. Although I wasn’t feeling good, this project improved my mood.

Feeling human, alive, and self-confident, suggests that we feel capable of “starting anew”, that in a dark experience such as imprisonment, we can find hope, the “rays of light”. And perhaps feeling human and alive can provide a feeling of temporary freedom, as one inmate puts it: “This workshop allowed me to get out of this hole for some moments, because working with you guys I felt good, freer.”

The philosophical/political framework

The methodology of the *dispositif* allows an analysis of the dynamics of power and knowledge, subjectification/desubjectification, and the performative and the experiential dimensions. These concepts are strongly implicit to this context, in which confinement is an act of power of the institution over the individual, the latter having previously subverted to societal norms. This establishes the main power dynamics, which remain constant and ever-present throughout the serving of a sentence, by means of surveillance.

The concept of the panopticon is present in the surveillance camera system, which can be found in most modern prisons, in every room we have used for the workshops. Older prisons in Spain and Italy did not have surveillance cameras but a small round window on every door so that guards could see the inside of the room from the outside. I once covered that window, to protect the photo studio from that control, but I was immediately told to uncover it. I also remember placing the strobe lights with umbrellas in a way that would prevent the surveillance camera from seeing the participant during the production of the images. However, inmates have become used to security cameras and didn't seem to be particularly inhibited by them, since not one of them expressed concern about this and most managed to express emotions. Nonetheless, some expressed appreciation of the possibility of being alone to take pictures expressing emotions, perhaps forgetting about the surveillance system:

- It was good to be alone taking pictures, and emotions emerged quickly.
- It was good to let out what I felt inside, because I was on my own.
- I felt at ease, because I was on my own taking my pictures and I could express my pain, my euphoria and my joy.

No inmate is ever left alone except those in isolation cells, who are nonetheless controlled by cameras. Even restrooms and showers have surveillance cameras to avoid drug consumption, violence, sex, suicide and so forth. Hence the importance of privacy, or at least of avoiding being seen by other inmates. Privacy can provide a sense of freedom in confined individuals:

- I loved the freedom to express what I feel, without words. I liked that nobody was forcing me to do anything, I felt free, and at ease.

The phrase “without words” recalls the performative process during the production of images, and being alone facilitates it, although it can cause uneasiness, as in Barthes’ “anguish of an

uncertain filiation: an image - my image will be generated" (1993, p.11). As one inmate asserts: "It was very tough to start taking the pictures." Uneasiness in the performative lapse of time before taking the picture is enhanced by the 10-second timer, as expressed by three inmates: "I didn't like that I pressed the remote control and had to wait for the picture to be taken" and "it was hard to wait those seconds for the picture to be taken, while you put yourself in position." Another reflected on the difference between his previous performative posing to look good and the lack of posing in the collaborative self-portraits: "I realised that when I see myself in the mirror, I make myself look good and I did so when I took pictures of myself before prison. But in these pictures I see that I look good anyway." The performative dimension can help us avoid uneasiness, as an inmate puts it, "I learned not to feel stupid in front of the camera." Feeling stupid is the experiential, more vulnerable aspect recalling Barthes' awkwardness but the practice of the self-portrait through its performative act can empower the participant and contrast discomfort. Performativity in photography can be used to fake an expression, as in this remark: "I was surprised to see that you can fool others with your expressions in pictures." However, this comment could express distrust of a fellow inmate, due to previous conflict and her not believing that this inmate could show a more positive side.

Another comment referring to the performative moment in the studio suggests that the studio setting and the presence of the camera can cause uneasiness: "I felt shy at first. It's like you're alone in a dark room and only the camera is with you." This is partly due to the traditionally imposing quality of the two apparatus, but in a prison setting it recalls the panopticon and perhaps reinforces subjectification. The camera can be perceived as aggressive and if we are alone in front of it, we could even imagine that we are being shot. But this was a temporary feeling –"at first"- and that inmate recovered her agency and managed to use the camera, doing and expressing whatever she wanted, thus shifting power roles and achieving subversion. Another inmate wrote the following: "Normally we look at pictures quickly, but now I know you can see a lot, even if the person in the picture knows that he will be seen by us." This comment introduces the idea that while they are taking the pictures, participants know that the group will see them. Their intention to give a certain image to others can influence the resulting images, but as this inmate is stating, the photographs express a multiplicity of things anyway.

Confinement and surveillance strongly transform individuals into subjects, who remain powerless, with little or no possibilities of recalcitrance. The immense power of the institution is everywhere surrounding inmates and never sleeps. SPEX's oscillating processes of

subjectification –becoming a subject- and desubjectification –breaking free from the subject position-, as discussed in chapter 1.4, facilitate possibilities of subversion, which can empower inmates. One of these possibilities could consist in giving value to one’s own vision and subjectivity through the work on the multiple perceptions of the images, as one inmate puts it: “I realised that others don’t see what I see.” Another act of recalcitrance could be being able to look at oneself, and be a “spectator of oneself” as opposed to only being watched and controlled: “I saw myself as a spectator of myself, discovering in my face the wise and experienced side and the naïve part at the same time. This was weird.”

Subversion can likewise be achieved through the expression of emotions and vulnerability in the prison setting, an area in which emotions are generally not expressed, as mentioned earlier. Inmates tend to build their own walls around them, within the prison’s imposing walls, perhaps due to the perceived hostility in peers and the institution. As one prisoner affirms, “I’m always on my own. I don’t want contact with others.” However, sharing their images with peers can invert the process in some, as an inmate states: “Many of them appeared different than I thought they’d appear. They opened up and let the walls fall down around them.”

Thus, expression, acknowledgement and disclosure of vulnerabilities can function as a way to subvert implicit rules of behaviour in the prison, as discussed above, and as emerges from the a high number of statements, such as the following:⁵⁰

- I saw myself differently and also others, because we never express emotions here.
- To see the sadness in them was surprising. I don’t see that normally.
- I discovered that we are all vulnerable and that our faces reflect things we cannot avoid, our most real and intimate being, no matter who you are.

And this subversion can give a sense of freedom:

- It was great to forget for a moment, that we are in prison. I liked what my peers said about my pictures, it was rewarding and made me feel free.
- I discovered new things about myself: that I was very attentive during the workshop, and free to be myself.

To be free to be oneself means to be free, even if for a moment, from stigma and self-stigma. The latter is mostly a consequence of the first, in that self-stigma is an internalization of society’s judgement of oneself. This is the reason why self-stigma is probably harder and

⁵⁰ See the full data in the attached document.

longer to overcome than stigma. Prison inmates are one of the most stigmatised groups in how they are perceived by society.

Breaking free from self-stigma can be achieved in different ways. The expression of emotions can provide a feeling of being normal, to contrast self-stigmatizing, as one inmate asserts, “I can cry and be normal, without fights and self-injuries. Also, that others can see me as a person.” Taking self-portraits and looking at oneself with the *dispositif*'s methodology of perception can contrast self-stigma: “Just the fact of taking the pictures and looking at myself is a big step forward. I think I’m letting my self-prejudice behind.” Authenticity can also reverse self-stigma, in which one might be afraid of being authentic, lest others might judge or condemn: “I see myself as more authentic now. It was important to see myself when I’m angry or thoughtful.”

Failure is also related to stigma, and inmates can feel or be seen as citizens who have failed society. Seeing oneself differently, acknowledging one’s vulnerability can, as noted above, stimulate the discovery of new potential to overcome failure, as N. –case study below- puts it: “It was useful to see myself differently; to know myself better; to not be afraid of failure and to not to give up. I could express my vulnerability.” As mentioned earlier, the power plays between the prison institution and the inmates are imposing and permanent. However, other plays of power happen among inmates and within the relationship with externals like myself, as happens with SPEX in all contexts. But N.’s case below introduces the possibility to use these latter power dynamics to break the spiral of violence and bring self-awareness, through my encouragement of the expression of vulnerability despite his initial unwillingness to do so.

Another inmate expresses the discovery of potential, in that she can “be someone, be useful” and “be a good mother” as a subversion to the idea of being useless, of having failed in society, and as a mother:

- I loved to see things I didn’t know about myself, to see things I didn’t think I could express. I see I have things inside that I don’t know. The woman in the pictures wasn’t me! I have discovered that I am courageous, I’m a fighter, I’m stronger than I thought; and that I can be someone, I can be useful, I can be a good mother.

Other comments support the idea that SPEX can be useful to reverse processes of stigmatization and self-stigmatization:

- I have discovered a lot of strength and peacefulness in my pictures, which I didn’t think I had before. Also self-criticism without self-punishment.

- It was hard to decide to share my pictures with the group, because I'm afraid of judgement and to make a fool of myself. But in the end it was good, I'm glad I did it.
- I have discovered that we mustn't put labels on others, according to our first impression. Every one of us has a good side, but perhaps he hides it because he's afraid that he'd be hurt.

C.R.'s case study shows a further reversal of stigma. She produced an image that was later chosen by the rest of participants for the cover of the collective booklet, despite the fact that she was stigmatised by her fellow inmates for her rebellious behaviour. Her self-portrait showed her expressing despair with her fist on her chest.⁵¹

Another way of reversing stigma and self-stigma is through passion and imagining the future doing passionate things. My own passion for this work can hopefully be contagious: "I have discovered my passion for pictures and film" and "I have discovered I have a talent for photos, and expressing myself. Now I know exactly what my new job is going to be." An extraordinary example of an ex-inmate who has passionately used the method and become a SPEX facilitator is D's case study below.⁵²

My peer-to-peer approach when holding SPEX workshops, by means of disclosing my drug addiction and prostitution and my recovery, is a further way to contrast stigma and self-stigma. As discussed earlier, revealing one's own shortcomings is what stigmatised individuals tend to conceal (Goffman, 1962), and recovery itself is a deconstruction of labels and stereotypes. Some statements by inmates express the effect that this disclosure had on them:

- This experience touched me very much, because I saw Cristina's strength while she was telling her story and her pride, despite all her suffering.
- I loved how you presented and how you have dealt with your life since your childhood until today.
- I was impressed about Cristina, she gave us the opportunity to see things in her life. Although I wouldn't do that, I find fantastic that she did.
- I was great to meet Cristina and know her story, that she has overcome terrible things.

Sharing with inmates my own "terrible things", narrate my recovery and analyse with them

⁵¹ See pages 13-25.

⁵² See pages 30-32.

my own and my assistants' self-portraits before asking them to expose theirs, can foster trust and an egalitarian relationship. The lack of judgement allows me to treat them as human beings, as emerges from their comments:

- I was impressed at the facilitators' interest in giving us trust, when they analysed their own self-portraits with us.
- I was surprised to be treated so well, in an egalitarian way, by people who are outside of prison. I thought they would behave with superiority.
- I was happy to be in contact with people from outside the prison, and treated as a person. It was good to know that people from outside can see us.
- It's been a relief to be able to talk without being judged. Here we are afraid to talk.
- I liked how the workshop was organized, and how photographers treated us.

N. –case study below- asked me “Do you guys think we are bad?.” Perhaps he had felt that my non-judgemental approach would lead me to say “no” and wanted to hear comments that would help him overcome self-stigmatization. Another aspect that allows me to create an egalitarian relationship is my interest in their subjugated knowledges. I could have been imprisoned for drug trafficking and prostitution, but I was never caught. Not having lived this experience I am curious to know what it means to be confined and I am very eager to be useful to them and give back my luck. A very high percentage among them comes from lower class families; they didn't have the financial and cultural resources that I had. The SPEX workshops and the dissemination of the images and projects, if they give their written consent and if the process of authorization is ethically correct⁵³, can work as an insurrection of disqualified knowledges, even more than my own, so that “people from the outside can see us”.

The production of new knowledge, to add to their own subjugated one, is multi-faceted when using the *dispositif* in a prison setting, as emerging from the inmates' statements: self-knowledge, knowledge of their peers and knowledge of the power of photographs to convey a multiplicity of meanings.

Self-knowledge appears in a high number of statements. Self-knowledge is discovering unknown aspects of the self; seeing oneself differently; identify other possibilities and qualities in oneself; and making one's own inner world visible, that is, “seeing yourself as you are” “from the outside” but “in a more profound way”. These results emerge from a vast

⁵³ See chapter Ethical considerations.

majority of responses in the theme N.1, Broadening of self-perception. On theme N.2, Self-knowledge and self-discovery, 23 statements explicitly express self-knowledge or discovering other aspects of oneself. Following are some of the most significant:

- I have learned more about myself in certain moments. I know more about my good side. This has helped me to know myself better.
- I have discovered a lot of strength and peacefulness in my pictures, which I didn't think I had before.
- It was useful to see what I have inside me, to know myself better; to see the anger, the courage and the strength. I see myself as mother courage.
- I had never noticed my own behaviour. I saw my aggressiveness, but also sincerity and the will to change. It was useful to see my inner and outer behaviour and to try and change it. The "bad" part. I feel more peaceful.
- It was useful to know my other self, because the face is the mirror of the soul, it's a psychological mirror, showing our positive and negative sides. Useful to know myself internally and externally.
- I have discovered my good and bad sides; that I'm not as harsh as I thought.
- I liked to know myself and to think I can improve things. I have discovered that I am strong and very vulnerable at the same time. I have seen my inner self and my feelings. I thought I didn't have any.
- It was useful to know my strengths and my weaknesses (this last was unpleasant to see), and to have more knowledge.

These inmates seem to express that knowing the strengths and weaknesses, the positive and negative aspects, internally and externally, is important. Some of them have discovered their positive sides, "I'm not as harsh as I thought", "the sincerity and the will to change", "the courage and the strength", the "peacefulness", the "serenity" and the "maturity". Others have felt it was important to look at their 'dark' sides and wanted to accept them, as emerging from theme N.3⁵⁴. Knowledge of oneself means being able to express, perceive and understand one's own and others' emotions, as one inmate affirms: I could see the others' feelings and the categories of feelings (sadness, anger, etc.).

A better knowledge/discovery of their peers is evidenced in a high number of statements in theme N.1.⁵⁵ Broadening of perception of oneself and others, as in the following examples:

54 See all responses on theme N.3, page 41.

55 See responses on theme N.1, page 32-38.

- I have discovered that my fellow inmates have more or less the same issues as me. This has allowed me to see them differently.
- In my fellow inmates' photos I saw goodness, kindness.
- I saw my fellow inmates expressing emotions, so I see them as if they were different people now.
- I've learned that everyone has a vulnerable side, even though they seem tough in person.
- In A.'s pictures I was surprised to see the Lioness, because I've always seen her very peaceful and intelligent.
- I realized, looking at the photos of others, that they are able to express and show details and gestures that I'd never seen in them.
- I've also seen my fellow inmates' tender and human sides.
- I could also better understand those around me. I discovered that they are very much like me. It's sometimes hard to be yourself, but we all connected and had fun together. I've learned a lot about others and myself.
- I think I know them better, and I've become closer with some. Every one of them is unique, with many positive aspects.
- I saw the others in a more positive way. I have kept inside their emotions and sadness.
- I have seen emotions in my peers' photos, in their gazes. They have feelings. We all have feelings of guilt, sadness, anger and remorse.

Getting to see their peers' emotions in the images was moving for some, provided more understanding of their behaviour and the perception that others feel similar emotions and have similar issues. Discovering vulnerabilities, emotions, weaknesses and the human or tender sides of their fellow inmates can foster closeness, as discussed earlier. Knowledge of themselves and of others provides empowerment, and can help inmates to be less fearful and open up.

A different kind of knowledge is the one referred to the power of photographs to express so much of oneself. This discovery has been almost unanimous, with over 60 statements expressing wonder about how much one can see in a photograph of a face: "intimacy, secrets, feelings, and you can invent stories". A high number of these, comment on the discovery that the two sides of the face can express very different emotions and attitudes.⁵⁶ Another high number asserts that the experience was something new that they had never done before and

⁵⁶ See section 1.3.2. The unconscious creative process, and my book *Higher Self – The Self-Portrait Experience*, p.96

that they will look at pictures in a different way. “I never imagined you could use the camera this way,” says an inmate. Following are significant examples:

- Before the workshop I looked at pictures, now I study them. I now see both sides of the face and I’m impressed. Looking at the gaze is like looking at your soul, your true inner self. It was very surprising because every emotion and gaze in a picture can express so much.
- It was good to be able to see the pictures in-depth. I have discovered emotions and things that I didn’t perceive before. I was good to discover this technique, and that you can work psychologically on people’s profile through the pictures.
- It was surprising to see what each side of the face can express or what you can perceive in it.
- I was surprised to see that we have many emotions at the same time.
- Looking deeply at photos I see things that I didn’t see before. It’s surprising that photography can be used psychologically to study people. I’m glad to have discovered this technique.
- Since the workshop, I look at the two sides of the face in all portraits I see, even with people I’m talking to, I have surprised myself looking at the two sides of their faces to see what they say to me.
- It was useful to discover that a photograph expresses much more than we usually think, and that people have different perceptions of the same image.
- I liked to recognize emotions in faces, to analyse and discuss together about pictures that we don’t like, but that speak a lot. It gave me good feelings.
- The experience was surprising. I would have never thought of looking at myself and analysing myself in photos this way.
- It’s useful, because you never see your face like that in the mirror. You don’t see your emotions, but in the pictures you see them so well.
- This workshop taught me things that I have never seen in my life. For example looking at both sides of the face, there is a lot of meaning. The pain, the fear, the fury, the anger, the sadness, and a lot more.
- Photographs show us the inner and outer lives of women in prison. The pain, love, the future, our values and our strengths, intelligence and personal intimacy.

It is surprising to see that we can express different emotions at the same time, as one inmate affirms, because we can consciously feel one at a time, but the unconscious shows other feelings. Another inmate says that is surprising to discover that people have different perceptions of the same image, and another that the pictures we don’t like “speak a lot”. The

idea in this statement might encourage some of them not to delete pictures they don't like and try to study them, to know themselves better. One inmate says that you can't see so many emotions in the mirror, but you can in the pictures. I would add that we can see a lot of emotions in some images, not in all: those I refer to as artworks, which can be produced by anybody.⁵⁷ The last statement summarizes this woman's overall experience of studying her and her peers' images: "Photographs show us the inner and outer lives of women in prison. The pain, love, the future, our values and our strengths, intelligence and personal intimacy." Most inmates have learned to use the SPEX *dispositif*, including its methodology of perception, and feel they can use it with their own cameras and pictures.

Most inmates have a few of their own family pictures with them and cherish them as treasures. When these images include themselves with loved ones, it allows them to build their self-image as belonging. However, one inmate says, "I don't have pictures of myself, only those the police took. I had never seen myself like that (referring to the workshop image). It was a good experience." This raises a question; If inmates don't have photographs of themselves, other than mug shots, upon what foundations do they build a self-image?

Other critical feedback:

Most responses to the question "What is it that you didn't like, or liked less?" concerned the short time dedicated to the workshop and to the production of images, and the long lapse of time –in some cases, two weeks- between the sessions. Some inmates felt they needed more time to learn the methodology of perception.

The following comments raise ethical issues about exposure of difficult aspects in oneself and emotional safeguarding of participants:

- It was hard to see the ugliness and the malice in my expressions. These are hidden things I've never shown; I've always kept hidden.
- I have seen my dark side, but I cannot accept it.
- A very interesting experience but I don't agree with the comments they made about me in the pictures.
- It was hard that others could see my vulnerable side.
- I didn't like to see myself in one picture; I looked like a junkie.

⁵⁷ See chapter 3.1.5. Anyone can produce art with SPEX.

In the group sessions, I always introduce the perceptive work with my own images, so that they see how it works, and then I ask, “who wants to show their images?” so that those who don’t feel comfortable in sharing them can avoid doing so. However, it is possible that this inmate accepted to show them without knowing what her peers would say and then was hurt by their comments. Although I repeatedly remind participants that what is being seen and said by others is their own subjective perception and that others’ perceptions are useful to think ourselves differently, it is difficult for self-stigmatized groups not to be hurt by others’ ‘negative’ comments. A more ethical practice could involve a longer discussion about showing their images to others or not, in the individual session. The last comment refers to something the inmate saw in the image, because his eyes were half closed. He had been a junkie in the past and was hurt to see himself look like a junkie in a recent picture. I told him that it was the effect of the strobe lights, and insisted in proposing other meanings to his gaze in that picture, so that he could change his perception. He managed to see other things, but the idea of the junkie remained as a sign of self-stigma. This workshop was held in 2013: since then I have become more cautious, allowing participants to reject images they don’t want to look at.

One inmate wrote another comment that raises issues of emotional safeguarding⁵⁸:

- It was useful to externalized things I kept within. It was like a session with the psychotherapist, but three times heavier, stronger because you see it in the pictures. You really see what’s inside you. And it’s necessary to see yourself in order to know yourself.

SPEX has been perceived as too strong or heavy by some participants, because seeing oneself in emotional self-portraits, in which one does not recognise oneself, can indeed be felt as ‘heavy’. As discussed in chapter 3.2, participants need to be more accurately informed about the experience. However, this inmate understood that seeing oneself with an uncompromising gaze is necessary for self-knowledge.

In the following statements inmates express disappointment about the pictures or the choice of the ‘artwork’:

- I didn’t like my photos because they don’t express the sadness of being here. That’s why in the chosen picture I look somehow shielded, because I was waiting for the

⁵⁸ See chapter 3.2.3. Emotional safeguarding in vulnerable groups.

picture that would liberate me. That's how it was, and I said it very clearly.

- I loved the pictures, but I wanted to choose another one and they changed it.

Wanting to express the sadness of being in prison, and feeling disappointed that the pictures do not express that sadness, suggests that this woman understood the SPEX method. She really wanted a photograph that could acknowledge that feeling and could liberate her of the sadness.

The second statement comments on the choice of the 'artwork'. Three pictures are directly chosen by the inmates, printed and given to them. During the individual session they can work on the pictures they prefer, but I also tell them my choice and we work on the perception of that image. My choice can be disturbing, since it is normally the image in which they don't recognize themselves. During the group work, they will choose to show their images or not. In the second comment, "they changed it", could refer to the group's choice.

One woman wrote a comment that was not related to the workshop: a desperate cry, an expression of how she feels in prison. I see this as another way to subvert the prison confinement by sending a message out there, perhaps stimulated by the workshop:

Here we are manipulated, conditioned, we are like robots. The timetables, the limits. We completely depend on the guards. We can't even speak loudly. We are like crammed in cotton. I want to break the routine. Every day is the same. When will this bitterness end?

I can't take it anymore, I want to laugh but I can't. You get to a point that they let you fall, you fall nosedive and you can't get up again.

This is unbearable, nobody knows what happens inside here. You can hate someone but you never wish them something like this to happen. My brothers punished me without visiting.

Other critical situations

These are critical situations that have happened in prison. There are no comments about them in inmate's feedback: these are my own recollections. In Lledoners penitentiary centre in Barcelona, one of the exercises of the workshop consisted of working on family pictures. During the group work I proposed inmates if they wanted to show their autobiographical projects. One of them accepted and his family snapshots were shared with his self-portraits. However, after the session other inmates were upset and complained that it was not a good

idea, because they were afraid that other inmates might recognise family members and might want to harm them when they got out. I then accepted that these images would never be shown, and my assistant produced drawings reproducing the pictures, to substitute photographs in the projects that would be shown to others.

Another critical situation happened in Bredtveit prison for women in Oslo, when I showed the inmates *La Vie en Rose* trilogy. A lively discussion followed, in which some complained about the nudity and the emotional content of the work. Social worker Ola Skarstein wrote the following in an email, which raises issues of emotional safeguarding:

As I can see from the model releases a lot of them wanted to share their pictures, and from what they have told me most of them had a really good experience. Still there were some discussions and situations I heard. Of course things happen, but there are always things we can do to prevent those situations. One thing was the second video - the one that I hadn't seen before. As you know it was too much for some of them. Some found it provocative or offensive. And of course - that's art! But our women are often more vulnerable than others - and they are kind of stuck in the situation... On one hand it created some interesting discussions, but on the other hand it also created some resistance to the project for some. For some of them it was just too much nudity - and especially combined with, how to say it, upsetting emotions. I think it is a good thing that you discuss this with the officers in the other prisons before showing it.⁵⁹

La Vie en Rose, as emerges from the data analysis in this appendix, causes mirroring and identification through emotional expression. As Ola asserts, women in prison are more vulnerable than the general public, because of their situation. They probably are not used to see art projects involving nudity and strong emotions. I hadn't shown him the video before showing it to the inmates. Some of them felt resistance to the project because of this. However, they all participated until the end and wanted their images to be published. Most of them had a good experience.

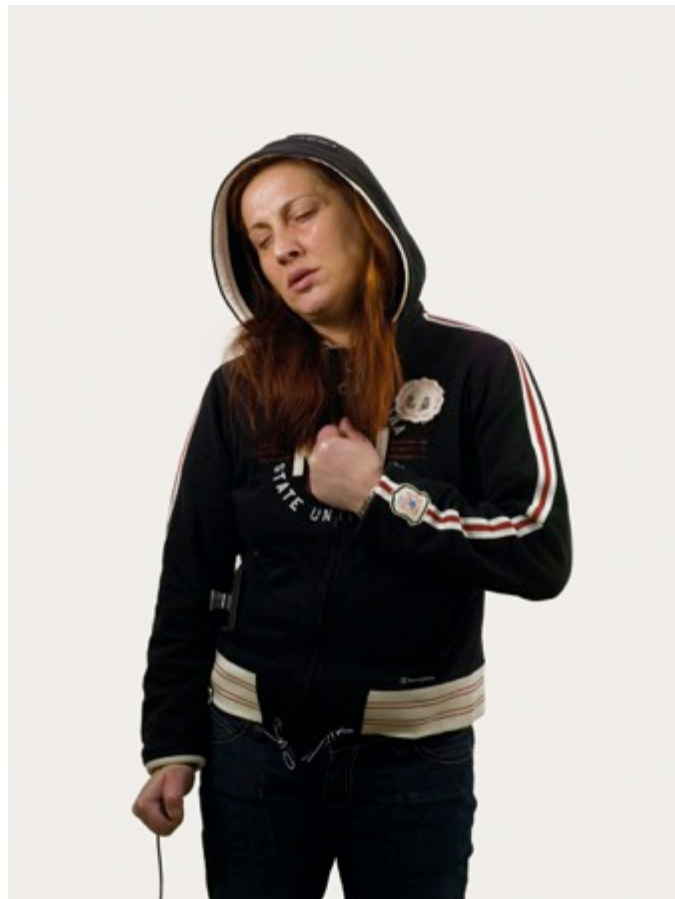
Prison case studies

⁵⁹ Email from Ola Skarstein Tennes, social worker of Bredtveit prison for women in Oslo.

C. R. – San Vittore penitentiary, Milan, 2009

In 2009 I held my first workshop in prison, in the women's unit of San Vittore penitentiary, a pre-trial detention prison in Milan. Eleven women participated to the first part of the workshop and ten continued until the end. The workshop lasted seven days and involved individual and relational sessions in the studio to produce collaborative portraits, individual and group work on the perception of the images and the construction of a small collective booklet of the experience.

During my presentation and first meeting with the group of women inmates, inmate C.R. said she was very impressed by my story, because she identified herself with me. C.R. had been a heroin addict for over 20 years, and a prostitute as well. HIV positive, she had been in and out of prison for over 17 years. As a child, she also felt unseen and unwanted, and continued to feel this throughout her life. I was told that C.R. was rebellious and had conflict with most fellow inmates, most of whom did not like her. She couldn't participate to the group work on the images a week later or to the relationship self-portraits, since she was sent to a high security prison.



But she took the compelling image above in the individual session on the expression of emotions. At the end of the workshop, the ten remaining women chose C.R.'s self-portrait unanimously for the cover of the collective booklet, as the most emblematic of all and perceiving her as a *madonna*. I was surprised at this choice, since her relationships with the others were not good, but I understood that the fist on her chest was a powerful gesture that could communicate a significant message to the others. In my perception, she was expressing *mea culpa*, an assumption of responsibility for whatever she had done and her fellow prisoners appreciated her unusual attitude. Perhaps they unconsciously needed to express *mea culpa* themselves, in a situation – before their trial- in which they probably felt they couldn't.⁶⁰

As subjects of the self-portrait artworks we can all become speakers for others, “every self-portrait is also our own self-portrait”, as Ferrari (2012, p.14) states. Such a photograph can become a “pattern which connects”. As Bateson asserted, the individual knowledge of any organism of the system is "a small part of a wider integrated knowing that knits the entire biosphere or creation" (Bateson, 1979, p. 88). C.R.'s subjugated knowledge desperately needed expression, and through the creative power of her rebellion and her identification and trust in me, she produced an image that contained the power of her personal knowledge. Thus, her self-portrait allowed her to reverse the power roles among the group of women and despite being the most marginalised among them she became a valuable speaker for all of them.

I saw her again three years later in another prison in Venice, where I held a presentation. I was very moved to meet her, and talked to her about the importance of the work she had done. I have never seen her again since then.

M. – Wad Ras prison, Barcelona, 2011

Fifteen women participated to my workshop in Wad Ras prison in Barcelona in 2011. After my presentation M. decided to join the workshop. She was then in her sixties. Before entering the photo studio she told me that she didn't feel any emotion such as anger, despair or fear, so she would like to try with ‘euphoria’, which I had included in the instructions. I told her that if she wanted, she could also try to express a past emotion. She spent a long time alone in the

60 Nuñez, C. (2011), Video “Higher Self”: <https://vimeo.com/47436147>

studio taking the pictures, around 25 minutes, which is unusual. But we had time so I allowed her to take her time. When she came out she was astonished, red in the face and eyes. She said: “What’s this? How can this be? I’m a cold person. My son died eighteen years ago and I’ve never cried. Now I’ve wept like I’ve never done before. I have managed to cry for his death. What a liberation!”

When we looked at the pictures, we were both astonished to perceive a process of empowerment, from her feeling so vulnerable, liberating herself of the pain and then making homage to herself putting on her blue scarf.







Then, during the group work, her fellow inmates chose the first picture, in which she puts her hand on her breast. That was the picture that both she and I preferred, so this was also surprising for her. She didn't have much relationship to the other women, and she had never told them anything about her life. When we were working on the perception of that image, one of the inmates, who was part of a little group of gypsy women, said, "She's crying for her son, because she touches her breast, the breast that has nurtured him." I saw her flabbergasted face, and when the group work had finished she came to me saying, "I cannot believe this. These women have 'powers'!" I replied smiling, "we all do."

Regarding the position of the subject, different from most *Higher Self* images, I had changed the frame so that they could sit on a cushion on the floor. The reason for this was simply creative. Since I was holding many sessions a day, I wanted a change, to keep my aesthetic research alive. Participants are usually not involved in the aesthetic choices of the collaborative self-portraits, since this would take more time and would lessen the number of possible participants. Their collaboration lies in the performative minutes when they are alone in the studio taking the pictures.⁶¹

⁶¹ See chapter 1.2.3. The SPEX *dispositif*.

N. participated to my workshop at the Quatre Camins penitentiary in the Barcelona area in 2015. The workshop lasted 16 full days and involved individual and relational (in pairs) collaborative self-portraits, and the construction of individual projects in the form of small books, which were printed for each inmate. 45 men participated, of whom 42 continued until the end. Of these, 25 were in the high security unit. Beyond the self-portraits produced in the studio set up in the prison theatre, inmates brought family pictures and chose landscape images from my archives to complete their projects.

N. was then in his forties, and had spent ten years in prison. He entered the prison for a small offence but his violent behaviour inside worsened his sentence, so he was put in the high security unit. The first time he came to the workshop he bragged about the fact that he had set another inmate on fire as a vengeance. When he was present in the group, everybody was silent, but he was constantly going in and out of the room, so the group felt more free to talk when he was away. In the first self-portrait session he chose ‘euphoria’ and managed to avoid showing any vulnerability, due to his performative skills and he left before we were supposed to look at them individually. Unfortunately I lost those pictures. In the relationship sessions I proposed them to feign a fight, without hurting each other, in order to study the emotions involved in the process of violence.



In this series I finally saw some vulnerability, and he was finally present when the group worked on those pictures. The group was discussing who would win the battle, and after studying their expressions on close-up, they all agreed that it looked like N. (left) was losing and his companion (right) was winning. When he heard this, N. left the room and he didn't come back to the workshop for a while. His violent behaviour and the power plays between us intrigued me and stimulated me to try my best to bring him back to the workshop, since I believed that it could help him break the spiral of violence. After a couple of weeks I saw him sitting on the corridor floor with his head in his hands. I sat beside him and we had a chat. He had had more problems with the guards and he had been punished. I reminded him that he left the group when others saw his vulnerability, but that if he could share his emotions he could become stronger and perhaps less violent. He came back to the workshop and since I had lost the first photos he'd taken, he accepted that I would take some portraits of him, not self-portraits. Photographing him allowed me to use my own non-judgemental gaze towards him, and at the same time I thought he could be more vulnerable if I was present.



When we finally managed to work on the perception of those images he looked astonished and vulnerable, like a completely different person. When asked what did he see, he didn't know, and he asked me what I saw. I told him I saw different emotions and qualities. On his left side I saw the vulnerability, and he seemed as if he was remembering a distant past,

perhaps his childhood. These memories could be pleasant, as if he was thinking about someone he loved, feeling nostalgic. On his right side, I saw as if he had just discovered something surprising, important and valuable, that could change his life, his future. He didn't talk much and still looked astonished, a bit lost. Then I looked again in the picture and saw him as if he was being looked at in a very different way, and it's a new feeling, a good feeling. I think he was surprised that anyone could see him as a human being, without judgement, because he then asked me, "do you think that we are bad?" I reminded him of my past, that I had also committed illegal actions. I said, "even recently, I have sometimes felt a huge anger, as if wishing to kill someone. The only difference is that you have put your anger and violent desires in action, whereas I haven't. So no, I don't think that you guys are bad, only actions can be bad when they damage others. We all have a dark side."

This is the feedback he wrote:

I liked the unexpected ending of the workshop. I was sorry not to have participated more, because I didn't understand its purpose. But I was really surprised with the result. I expressed my vulnerability. I have seen myself and others from a different perspective. I have become conscious of my difficulty to express and show my emotions and of the fact that we are not so different. It was surprising to learn that you can work on your emotions using photographs. It was difficult to share my images with the group because it's hard for me to express myself and those with whom I find it easier, don't really help me.

This experience has been useful to see myself differently, to know myself, not to be afraid of failure and not to give up. I don't know if my relationships with others have changed, I think I'll know in time, but I hope so. I saw myself in my artwork, especially in the little details...

N.'s initial reluctance to show any vulnerability could have been reversed by four factors. Firstly, the relationship self-portrait showing his possible failure touched him emotionally provoking fear, as suggested by his feedback. Secondly, group's courage in disclosing their perceptions of his vulnerability and possible failure in the battle prompted him to leave the room. Thirdly, punishment by the prison security functioned as a concrete failure, thus touching him emotionally. And four, the plays of power between us and my wish to facilitate a process of discovery and self-knowledge in him probably stimulated his trust in me. The portrait I took of him presented a conscious and wise N. capable of love and empathy, someone trustworthy, and this was new to him.

D's story is an inspiring example of desistance, recovery and resilience. She is a woman who spent six years in prison accused of collaborating with Basque independentist armed group ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna means Basque Country and the Freedom). While in prison in Spain (700km from her home) and after being imprisoned in appalling conditions for two years, she met the prison's therapist O. He showed her my autobiographical video *Someone to Love* and told her about my work with others. She was so struck that as soon as she got out of prison she wrote me an email saying she wanted to go through the whole training for facilitators to use SPEX with others. I was very moved by her resilience, and the possibility of such a life change, similar to mine but even more extreme. When working in prisons I have always hoped that some inmate would follow the complete workshop after serving their sentence, and I often mentioned the possibility to them. Her determination and willpower allowed her to complete the whole process in only one year and she has been the first facilitator to hand in her thesis⁶² and the only one to have done so for four years.⁶³ She produced her dissertation even before the training was over, since she was about to give birth to her first child. The father of her son is in prison in Spain, 900 km from her home, condemned for being a member of ETA. Not being able to work in prison due to Spanish laws concerning ex-inmates⁶⁴, she held a workshop with a group of alcoholics, a section of a foundation focused on the prevention and treatment of drug and other addictions called Proyecto Hombre. Her choice was led by her sister's successful rehabilitation from heroin addiction in this foundation. Sadly, her sister died of AIDS in the 1990s. In her workshop, supervised by myself during her training, she immediately introduced her own innovations to the method by using Tarot cards as archetypes to stimulate participants during the production of the images. For example, she printed the last card of the Major Arcana, the World, and displayed it in the studio while the group of participants were taking their group self-portrait. She then told them to concentrate, while taking pictures, on looking at the World, and then on the World looking at them.

Facilitators' innovation of the method has usually emerged after completing the training, so

⁶² SPEX facilitators produce a dissertation at the end of their training, based on their own experience with the SPEX method and a detailed account of their work with others, including participants' feedback and a research on the effects of their workshops.

⁶³ All the other facilitators were using the method without having produced their dissertation. Not having a formal institution with staff, it has been difficult for me to deal with this. However, I believed they were able to use the method and wanted them to do so.

⁶⁴ Ex inmates cannot work in state prisons in most cases, especially those who have been involved in revolutionary groups.

her learning speed has been surprising. In terms of power dynamics between us, I can certainly affirm that her strong-willed determination has often made me feel vulnerable and lost. Before my awareness of power dynamics in the *dispositif* and in my own behaviour as a trainer of facilitators, I mostly held the power in my relationship with facilitators, so I believe this has been a significant and ethical evolution.

In her workshop at Proyecto Hombre she gathered participants' feedback using the very similar questionnaires as mine, and this data reflects very similar results as mine concerning the broadening of perception of the self and of others; the cathartic process of emotional expression; the surprising discovery of how photography and the self-portrait can say so much about us; and the effects on participants self-knowledge, self-esteem and empowerment. One of her participants, a woman in her fifties was initially sceptical about the method, not being scientifically approved. When she worked on the perception of the images with D and then with the group, she was astonished to discover emotions and issues that had never emerged in years of therapy. She was empowered in the process by looking at herself in a completely different way, which can help her to overcome self-stigma.

D also asked the therapists of the centre, who decided to participate to the workshop, to fill in a special feedback questionnaire. She did so on her own initiative, since I don't usually interview professionals. One of the two therapists said that it was surprising and extremely useful to see in participants' images unknown aspects that had never emerged in years of therapy. The other affirmed that the fact that therapists also took pictures of themselves and shared them with the group fostered a new and closer relationship with them.

When I asked her about the effects that her autobiographical storytelling had on participants, she said that most of them feel gratitude, empathy, understanding and peace. She said that she had felt in a similar way when watching *Someone to Love*. "When you hear someone talk about their own emotional pain, you connect with your own in a solidary way, in an egalitarian way. There are no scales to measure pain, and I hope there will never be."

D is currently working on a project about the consequences of violence in the Basque Country, interviewing people who have suffered from the violence of the Spanish state or of ETA, and proposing collaborative self-portrait sessions to allow a cathartic emotional expression and to solace and transform the pain into photographs. This process has fostered especially close relationships between these people and herself, despite the fact that the origin of the violence was often from the opposite political side.

I believe D's successful desistance and resilience lies, firstly, in the fact that her political position regarding the Basque Country's fight for independence has prevented the internalization of stigma, self-stigma. She's proud of being a Basque survivor, of speaking her language and belonging to the most ancient civilisation in Europe. Secondly, her strong-willed pragmatism has allowed her to get rid of the unnecessary guilt, having paid for what she had done. She has found a creative and transformative way to contribute to the Basque political conflict resolution and to attempt to heal the vast and profound emotional wounds of decades of violence in the Basque Country.

My own experience

I love working in prisons because inmates are the most stigmatised individuals in society. In my experience, inmates are usually grateful about my non-judgemental gaze and peer-to-peer approach, as emerges from this data. This often fosters a very special relationship between us. Workshops in prison are emotionally tiring for me as well; this is why I generally work two days a week or even four days a month. What is emotionally tiring is the prison context with its imposing power dynamics, not the relationship with the inmates themselves. I often feel the need of my therapist to elaborate my feelings and needs. However, the experience of shared humanity with them empowers me and raises my self-esteem. Best practice guidelines should consider these issues in the organization of workshops and the advisability of professional supervision for facilitators.

Feedback from prison administration and professionals

Although I have gathered plenty of feedback from inmates through questionnaires, up to 2018 I never asked prison professionals to fill in questionnaires or give written feedback. Nonetheless, I have had comments by the prison administration in Barcelona. A letter was written by Xavier Buscà Huertas, head of penitentiary services of the prison administration in Catalonia⁶⁵. Its aim was to support a new SPEX workshop in Quatre Camins penitentiary in Barcelona. The letter was sent to Obra Social La Caixa, the foundation which funded all my projects in Catalan prisons. Following is the translation of this letter:

⁶⁵ See in the attached pen-drive, Appendix Impact, in the folder Prison Data.

From the General Directorate of Penitentiary Services we inform that:

- We know the project that artist Cristina Nuñez will present to the funding bids of Obra Social La Caixa 2014.
- Cristina Nuñez has already produced a series of self-portrait workshops in three penitentiary centres, for female inmates in Brians 1 and Dones Barcelona and for male inmates in the units of participation and coexistence at Lledoners penitentiary centre, in a previous funding bid, with very good results.
- We positively value her proposal to hold a new workshop at Quatre Camins penitentiary centre and we value very highly the contents and the methodology of intervention that she proposes.
- We consider that the project adds innovation to the centre's course supply and meets the educational needs of inmates in Catalan prisons.

This summer 2019 I held a workshop for fifteen inmates at La Stampa penitentiary. Luisella De Martini and Marlene Masino of the educational staff, asked me to adapt my methodology, given that this workshop was part of an educational – not therapeutic - programme about communication awareness.⁶⁶ They asked me to focus on inmates' communication. This is the reason why, instead of facilitating self-portraits, I decided to take portraits, which I consider as public images, considering that I am present while the photographs are taken. I also avoided giving the usual instructions for the expression of emotions as in the SPEX collaborative sessions. The instructions consisted in listening to their feelings and expressing whatever they needed to express. They also asked me not to disclose my past as an addict. When I was told this, at first I didn't understand, since I give the highest value to my peer-to-peer approach. But they explained that they wanted a lighter approach, and I accepted the challenge. Nonetheless, it was hard for me not to unconsciously subvert this rule, since my relationship with inmates has always been based on the peer-to-peer approach. As staff comments on their feedback, they understood that it was hard for me, and assert that the two occasions in which I revealed small parts of my past did not compromise or create problems during the workshop. They expressed their overall satisfaction of the workshop and mentioned the efficacy of SPEX in several ways. Among these, they introduced the idea that broadening inmates' perception of reality could be useful to contrast violent behaviour:

We believe that the method The Self-Portrait Experience is very interesting, especially

⁶⁶ See La Stampa – Feedback of educational staff, in the attached pen-drive, Appendix 2 Impact, folder Prison Data.

because it allows inmates to train their ability to perceive the image of the Self and of the Other, and therefore their behaviour, from different perspectives. This facilitates a wider vision of reality, to contrast the rigidity of judgement and prejudice, which can often stimulate violence in thoughts and/or actions.⁶⁷

Conclusion

The data gathered during my workshops in penitentiary contexts suggests the effectiveness of SPEX in the prison milieu in the following aspects. Firstly, the *dispositif* allows inmates to transform their emotions into photographs as a cathartic process, considering that inmates' emotions are particularly intense but not easily expressed. Secondly, the individual and group perceptive work on the images can broaden their self-perception, fostering self-knowledge through the acknowledgement of emotions and the discovery of unknown aspects of the self. These can be useful to contrast stigma and self-stigma, increasing self-esteem and wellbeing. Moreover, the broadening of perception of self and others can be useful to contrast the rigidity of judgement and prejudice which often causes violent thoughts and behaviours. Thirdly, the group perceptive work can provide a change of perception of others through the visualization of emotions and vulnerability, in a context where the latter tends to be concealed. This can result in more closeness and empathic relationships between inmates. Fourth, the discovery of photography as a tool to express and perceive emotions and inner worlds with the aim of self-knowledge can stimulate participants to continue using the method on their own. Fifth, the peer-to-peer approach subverts the power roles inside the prison and can create a trusting relationship between the facilitator and each of the inmates, thus making the process more effective. Lastly, the possibility that inmates use SPEX after prison, as D does, can allow them to use their painful and stigmatising experience to facilitate other people's recovery from stigma and self-stigma. Future developments of this research could include, firstly, working on a permanent basis in a prison in my area and on probation to explore the effects of a long-term use of the SPEX *dispositif* in a penitentiary context.

⁶⁷ See La Stampa – Feedback of educational staff, in the attached pen-drive, Appendix 2 Impact, folder Prison Data.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC'S FEEDBACK ON *LA VIE EN ROSE*

Overview

*La Vie en Rose*⁶⁸ (2012 – present) is an artistic revision of a dating application, an autobiographical on-going project using video and performance with the objective of finding an ideal partner. Instead of concentrating on my qualities, as most people do on dating sites and in the common selfie practice, I confess my defects and weaknesses in a temporal and geographic journey, both intimate and public. Exposing my vulnerabilities is an attempt to challenge stigma and self-stigma thus causing plays of power between the public and myself to emerge, a further experimentation of the SPEX *dispositif*,⁶⁹ and to find authentic love, capable of transparent and shifting power roles. By using video and performance instead of photography I was exposing myself further, driven by the constant need of new challenges in my autobiographical work.

The project was published online in 2015 allowing viewers' feedback, which provides the data analysed in this appendix. Viewers' comments have allowed the project to become participatory. The social activist intention of *La Vie en Rose* lies in the call and response as an emotional exchange with the public, to possibly attain reciprocal identification and authentic connection with unknown others. This resonates with Adrian Howells' work discussed in this Critical Appraisal⁷⁰, whose innovative model of autobiographical performance was premised on exchange.

Most of the feedback was not spontaneous. Since there were very few comments, I had to use ad hoc approach by asking peers (people who could be interested in such a project) to participate. I published the project on my Facebook page asking viewers to make comments. I have around 5000 Facebook contacts, most of whom know my work but do not know me in person. I also asked workshop participants to view the videos and make their comments. A group of filmmakers of Filmarche in Berlin responded to my request as an exchange for the free workshop I would later hold in their school. This raises possibilities of bias, since some respondents knew me or my work. The filmmakers might have felt forced to see the videos, as discussed below in 1.3. However, most of the feedback seems honest and not conditioned

⁶⁸ <http://lavierose.eu/>

⁶⁹ See chapter 1.4. The SPEX *dispositif*.

⁷⁰ See chapter 2.2. Emotions and affect in contemporary art

by the knowledge of my work or this exchange, and most respondents also give critical comments.⁷¹

Other possibilities of bias lie in the fact that the questions are intentionally leading and emotive to foster a very personal response and a connection with me as the artist. Thus, the data has been gathered by my subjective position in the role of the artist, not at all detached of my emotional being. The analysis of the data has also been permeated with subjectivity, since responses have stimulated my feelings and informed the practice itself. Nonetheless, I have analysed the data five years after the comments were written. Revisiting the work after time has provided the necessary distance from the project itself, and at the same time, increased the transformative effect, as discussed below.

However, the aim of this research is to examine the connexions between subjectivities that can occur through the mirroring process fostered by *La Vie en Rose*, and how these connections can become social actions. I have here analysed the data to support my ideas on social activism through the exposure of intimate and emotional autobiographical videos, as discussed on chapter 3.1. Social Activism. In this research frame I am examining the mirroring that can occur by sharing authentic vulnerability and painful emotions through an artistic project, and the different reactions to the mirroring. The intertwinement and lack of boundaries between life and art is what strongly provokes mirroring. A video-art curator⁷² once saw one of the videos, in which I express authentic despair. She then advised me to solve my problems before showing them to the public, that a separation between life and art was necessary. But as an artist and as a person, I am interested in exploring what can happen if these boundaries are absent?

Up to date, thirty-four viewers have given written feedback, both on individual videos and responding to the following questions with open-ended responses. This is a small number of respondents, thus not statistically significant.

- What were your feelings when watching this video or these videos?
- And your thoughts?
- Did you see yourself in what Nuñez expresses?
- What do you think of Cristina Nuñez as an artist?

⁷¹ The filmmakers of *Filmarche* are Juliette, Natalia, Jens, Paul, E.T, N.P. and Ialo.

⁷² The curator prefers to remain anonymous.

- And as a person?
- Would you choose her as a partner? Why?
- Do you think she'll find her partner this way? Why?
- What advice would you give her?
- Tell us about your own love stories.
- Tell us about your wishes and desires, concerning love.
- Would you like to search your perfect partner like Nuñez?

In the attached pen-drive there are pdf files of all the comments written by viewers. I have analysed the data according to the topics outlined below:

1. Mirroring effects of the videos.
 - 1.1. Identification and telling their own stories
 - 1.2. Feeling rejection or uneasiness
 - 1.3. Self-centeredness
 - 1.4. Giving advice
 - 1.5. Pearls of wisdom
2. Reality or fiction?
3. Exposing oneself by showing one's weaknesses
4. Art criticism and interpretation of meaning

1. Mirroring effects of the videos.

Autobiographical storytelling, including the revelation of one's own painful emotions and problems and the search for romantic love, can stimulate mirroring, as discussed earlier⁷³. The effects of this intimate disclosure can be manifold: affect caused by identification, uneasiness, rejection, perception of self-centeredness or egomania and so forth. Some respondents have given advice, responding to my specific request, as discussed below. Similarly, other respondents attempt to provide solutions to the problems by drawing from 'pearls of wisdom', which are aimed at revealing what I am doing wrong or how I should look for love.

⁷³ See chapter 3.2.1. The emotional face as a mirror and 1.3.1. The expression of emotions: Someone to Love.

Perceptions of provocation and voyeurism, questioning about the reality or fiction in the videos and reactions to the idea of exposing oneself by showing one's weaknesses, are other critical topics emerging from the viewers' responses. Finally, some respondents are also artists, providing their own art critique and interpretation of the works, despite the fact that I didn't ask for them.

1.1. Identification and telling their own stories.

Twelve (35%) of thirty-four viewers disclose their own experiences. Of these, five (14,7%) openly and lengthily express painful issues and feelings. Considering that this is an online platform, one could assume that these five people have been courageous to expose themselves. Despite the fact that nicknames appeared instead of real names, and only one of them displayed her profile picture, publishing one's emotions and shortcomings is something that most people would not do. As Esteban writes, "Why do I tell you all this? I don't know if I should write this in public." This could be driven by a need to share these emotions and participate to the experience, as a response to what I have done. Three of these five viewers have participated to my workshops, having experienced that disclosure can be liberating. One of the most touching accounts is the one made by 'Katnip' from the Philippines, who expresses her 'shared mutual understanding' about our common 'eternal quest for love' despite the distance:

It's 3 PM and my desk is littered with cigarette butts. I have just started a self-portrait project on being alone and I stumble upon Cristina Nuñez who so effortlessly mirrors myself. I am a 25 year old female living in the Philippines, hundreds of miles away, yet I cannot escape this feeling of a shared mutual understanding. As love stories go, I have had dozens. Each tug at my heart with different shades of emotions that make up who I am today. Anger, despair, regret, abandon, fulfilment, surrender...

In my eternal quest to find love I have decided to forget it and in turn search for me – the me that I have lost in the process, the me that I have forgotten, the me that I have not loved.

I hope you find your true love, and in the dark seedy motel rooms of Manila, I hope I find what is left of me.

We didn't know each other or ever had any contact, but a reciprocal identification happened, since her decision to look for her lost self is what I have been doing all my life. This has

stimulated me rethink my own quest and my feeling lost. I ideally hoped the project would trigger such connexions, especially with people from different backgrounds and cultures. Her words create such a powerful filmic imagery, the “desk littered with cigarette butts” and the “dark seedy motel rooms of Manila”, that I first thought it was a made-up comment. These are similar doubts on reality or fiction as those expressed by other viewers about my work, as discussed below. In this case, the mirroring provoked identification in both ways, by means of the sharing of painful emotions and moods.

Ghita is a jewellery designer from Lebanon, had participated to one of my online workshops and another workshop in Milan years ago. She had used her experience to design two collections of jewellery, as narrated in my book *Higher Self*.⁷⁴

The Young Lover video is exactly what I needed today.

It is 10:00 pm and it just put the first smile on my face for the day.

I just lost the man who I thought was the love of my life to unknown reasons and the more I try to make sense of things the deeper the grief

I feel.

I have been stuck in this never-ending cycle for 3 months now and I am unable to get answers. I have lost faith in love, in people, in myself.

This video gave me a sense of freedom, a sense of hope.

The video she comments on had been filmed the morning after I had met Abril, my young lover who appears in other videos. *La Vie en Rose* also expresses feelings other than pain, since it's supposed to document my inner life and the events happening to me. However it is unusual for me to express joy in my work and to inspire hope through the joy. This is therefore an act of subversion against my usual intention to focus mainly on painful emotions. But Ghita's account shows that the video provoked her smile and solaced her pain. This is a more authentic process than the one provoked by social norms that compel us to show happiness and hide our shortcomings, in order to achieve success in life.

Esteban provides significant comments, identifying himself in my work and disclosing his own painful thoughts. He writes,

⁷⁴ See the book *Higher Self – The Self-Portrait Experience*, p.58.

If these are your worst problems, it's not so bad. I have experienced much worse. I didn't feel pity or embarrassment for you. I saw your humanity. I have issues about relationships to others. I need people's approval. I have a distorted image of what happens around me. I know people are often scared of me, don't understand me, feel contempt towards me, and infantilise me. But I have a narcissistic and exhibitionistic side, with a bipolar sense of derision. I am very vulnerable. What a mess...

I need love from others. Who will want to give it to me? I feel I need a long hug, affection, to cry and let go of everything, to be listened to for hours. Perhaps this is much more than what anyone can really give me. Now I feel like crying, I feel the tears in my eyes. Why do I tell you all this? I don't know if I should write this in public, but these are thoughts that you and your work have triggered.

Esteban's highly emotional comment shows that *La Vie en Rose* can stimulate viewers to publicly disclose these intimate needs and desires. I consider this to be one of the cathartic and perhaps transformative effects of the project. I also feel identified when he says people are often scared of him or feel contempt towards him, and with his being narcissistic and vulnerable. Similarly, Ialo left long and very exposing comments throughout the platform. She writes,

I feel very grateful for your work, although we never met and you don't know anything about me yet, I felt so many emotions during this journey with you through your videos. I sorrowed and smiled, and cared for you more and more with each video, it has been a very valuable and important experience for me. What I liked most about your work is your honesty, showing and accepting your emotions, being real and true to yourself. It made me trust you and earnestly care for you.

A journey with me, leading viewers to care for me: she has put into words my unconscious intentions, my real needs.

This feeling of intimacy with a person I never met, I felt it before with my favourite writers, feeling like I know them, I think it is so powerful! So powerful to achieve this as an artist.

Ialo can definitely understand and feel the aims of my art practice, to achieve an emotional connection with viewers I have never met. She continues:

So powerful and brave to open up to true encounters. Such a great act of rebellion against the “dating” sites and techniques, the shallow advertisement text people write in order to sell themselves on the “love market” as beautiful and perfect with Photoshop portraits of themselves.

She has found the sense of the project as subversion against the implicit rules in dating sites.

La vie en rose made me wonder about intimacy, about feeling “connected” to somebody. I realized many of my loved ones never shared so much intimate things as you, and although I never met you, I feel so close to you at the moment. It made me reflect about what a “true encounter” means to me, about my expectations about intimacy in relationships. It made me want to open up, made me want to scream, “don’t be afraid to love and be loved!” to everybody I met after watching your videos!

This passionate and caring voice moved me deeply. This is what I was hoping to trigger in a potential lover.

I realized I never allowed me to fully dream and think about what kind of “love” I wanted. I always stop myself as soon as I start, thinking I’m unrealistic, too demanding, that I can only be disappointed and that it won’t last anyway. I always think I am the one that must change and learn to love less, not to scare people off with my flood of emotions. What a joyful comforting feeling to know somebody else has a yearning too for really true intense caring honest loving relationships and that every emotion is welcome and even necessary to get to know somebody, to achieve a feeling of intimacy.

Intimacy, for both Ialo and myself, can only be achieved when we are free to share all emotions and life experiences. These words were written in 2016, and I now realize that I myself was probably overwhelmed with her ‘emotional flood’ and did not respond to her. She could have been the lover I was looking for, and perhaps I missed an opportunity.

In a different way, Toni also talks about frustrations related to his looks, inspired by the video *I’m an old woman*:

In my case, I have always had a strange relationship to my body and my looks. It's not that I see myself very ugly or abnormal. I am used to how I look. However I see it as an important obstacle, an inconvenience when thinking about meeting someone with whom I can share something, an afternoon, one night, a journey, you know. It's as if, my physical appearance discards me from the beginning. And this hurts, especially with those people with whom you feel close, you have affinities and you'd like to talk about them. Someone whose tastes you think can match yours, or you are simply interested in their character. It seems they impose distance, discarding any possibility of physical contact. Why don't they ask themselves, "why not try?" This is something that after some time is making me bitter. I believe in life and in people but I find that there are such a few people who are ready to make an effort for me. And I'll never know if I'm the one who is not making it clear or who is not showing himself as he should. That's why I find your project so valuable, because it would be really healthy for me to find the way to say what I'm writing here. To communicate all my fears about this, directly and simply, exposing myself to the dialogue. At least that would be a beginning.

Toni is the only viewer who explicitly mentions a desire to do exactly what I do, out of despair. In a way, as Toni later suggests, my intention was not to convince anyone of anything, but to "scream out there and see what happens." Cindy, a psychotherapist, does not speak about herself, but recognises the social aim of the project:

Her vulnerability is universal, and anyone watching these videos can find something to relate to. She is interested in her own pain, expressing it, and (obviously) interested in the responses of others.

At the end, she says that she wants to be useful to society, and there are many lessons we can take away from this public art project. The universality of emotional pain and longing is certainly one of them.

Aldo perceives the universality as well, answering to the question, "did you see yourself in what Nuñez expresses?"

I see anybody.

Painful emotions are indeed universal and their expression, often kept within, can subvert the widespread belief that one should always be positive, happy, strong and nice to others. Positive thinking can be stigmatising, leading some people to self-stigma, that is, to believe that they are wrong, inadequate or problematic for feeling emotions other than happiness.

1.2. Feeling rejection or uneasiness.

Other very different reactions to the videos include uneasiness and rejection.

Juliette writes,

The first reaction that reached my brain when I watched the first movies and before, when I saw the catalogue of all the movies in front of me, was refusing to want to watch more of them. At the same time, there was some curiosity, attached to the beauty of your pictures, that didn't let me go.

I might have felt repelled by the sadness of the videos in the first place. There was this person – you – that I did not know and that just told me all this very personal feelings that I suddenly had to deal with.

Yes, the expression of these very personal feelings can be uncomfortable: firstly, because you don't know this person, and secondly, because you suddenly have to deal with those emotions yourself. This could mean that she has mirrored herself in my feelings or that she felt obliged to react by consoling me or helping me out. This idea could reveal another unconscious aim, a cry for help, comfort and consolation, which can indeed be annoying in the viewer.

1.3. Self-centeredness

Perception of self-centeredness or egomania could be another reason why some viewers refuse to watch the videos. As Juliette explains:

Why refusal? Well, I think in times of selfie-mania all over the internet, I am kind of annoyed by the exhibitionistic people all around that need to show their faces in the “mirror“ of the internet, where the whole world comments on them and judges over them without knowing the person behind.

This is the most common criticism, not only on selfie-mania, but on self-portraiture and autobiographical art as well. It's seen as solipsistic and narcissistic; it's all about the artist. But, as Heddon and Johnson assert in their book about Adrian Howell, "personal experiences (...) can be understood as the result of historical, cultural and structural conditions and therefore are not personal at all, (...) but shared and political." Howells responds to this criticism "with an innovative model of auto/biography premised on exchange"(Heddon & Johnson, 2013, p.16-19). The online platform is not so immediate as live performance, but viewers' comments complete the artwork in the emotional exchange, and even rejection is part of it.

Juliette then expresses a shift of her attitude towards the work and gets the point.

But finally I felt touched by it, by you being honest and so open. And I felt somehow connected to you, even that I never experienced the things you mentioned. I think in some points, everyone can understand your approach from its own point of view. I guess a lot of people (if not all) are seeking love: the one person that knows them and accepts them as who they are.

Juliette was part of the Filmarche group in Berlin. If Juliette didn't feel obliged to give feedback as part of the exchange with the participation in my workshop, one could assume that she could have easily stopped watching the videos before this change of perception. Having received little spontaneous feedback, I imagine that some people have been put off by the 'egomania' or the emotional heaviness and didn't continue to watch the videos.

1.4. Giving advice

I have explicitly asked viewers to provide advice because I don't like that people think I need it to solve my problems. Also, I believe that when someone tells you about their problems, giving advice can be way to avoid mirroring oneself in those problems by putting oneself in the role of the 'helper' or one who knows how to avoid and solve problems. As one of the respondents, Esteban says, "Those who are disturbed and reject this are probably hurt, but they don't want to or cannot feel." So asking viewers to give advice was a way to allow people to escape mirroring if they wish to, and at the same time challenge myself by hearing their perhaps useful advice and think about it.

Six of the viewers gave advice. Ialo says that she doesn't think I need any. Paul gives his advice but says that he thinks that I could give him advice instead. The viewer that gives most

advice is M.J. Alós, a Mexican artist who collaborated with me on a project. Firstly, she commented on the video *Alone*, which is part of a series of videos I took with my I-phone, aimed at documenting my daily emotions by capturing them immediately and easily. This immediacy helped me to avoid theatricality.

When you say depression and loneliness you do so tragically and drama which sound like prejudice to me. I ask myself, why don't you look for others? You have two daughters, you've had several partners and you probably have friends.

I also noticed a conspicuous and repetitive tendency to bring yourself to these very negative states, of a low frequency. It would be good to explore other ways. Just breathe, walk, exercise, think about what you like, so that when really tough moments come you have more strength and solidity to overcome them. They are natural and a part of life.

Psychologists say that if you change your frequency and decide to look at what you like, to detect beauty, to accept the good side of things, it's easier that we find similar things. But if we stay on the bitterness, complaints, what we don't like, what we don't want, it will become a tendency that will attract and call itself.

Another viewer, Paul, thinks in a similar way, suggesting:

Simply let things happen, with a positive outlook because I firmly believe good thoughts (or energy or karma or whatever we can call it) project good things. I don't believe in karma in the way that good things happen to good people and the opposite but I do think good attracts good and vice-versa.

I often feel these emotions tragically, dramatically. M.J.'s comment resonates with the sentence "too much focus on the negative" in the 2018-19 questionnaires. As discussed in the analysis of that comment and as Paul opines in the above statement, there is a general belief that one should make efforts to be positive in order to attract positive events. M.J. backs her idea with psychologists' opinions. However, I usually breathe, walk and exercise, which in fact makes me stronger. But my focus on the negative is aimed at self-expression to attain a cathartic and more positive outcome. Moreover, it is the intention of my social activism: to

raise awareness of human suffering in a society which is mostly focused on its avoidance and stigmatisation.⁷⁵

Another viewer, Laura R. sees the value in what she perceives as “intelligent and melodramatic monologues.” An artistic view of this work could explain the dramatic quality as part of an artistic intention, which in my case was unconscious.

Then M.J. mentions judgement:

There is too much contradiction in you, too much judgement, too much thought.

And on another video:

I feel it's good for you to concentrate in what you can change, what you already are, to be less judgemental of others.

My aim in these videos was to disclose all my defects and problems, one of whom is my perception of the world as hostile, which includes judgement of others and of myself. This seems contradictory with my non-judgemental approach⁷⁶ in my work with others. However, this contradiction explains the fact that SPEX responds to my need of connecting with others through their emotions and vulnerability, in order to see that some people are not hostile.

Mercedes gives some advice too, this time about independence:

I suggest you not to look outside yourself; don't expect anything from anybody in order to feel good. At our age it is not healthy to look for relations involving emotional dependency to feel relatively good. I suggest you to pamper yourself a lot, to really love yourself, to take care of yourself on your own, to work on your emotional self-sufficiency, to be enough for yourself, above all.

Again, one of my problematic tendencies is and has been dependency: addiction and depending on others in several ways. Making and publishing these videos is a way to overcome this tendency by putting it out there for others to reflect. It is also a way to pamper myself and accept myself. However, Mercedes also recognises this process:

⁷⁵ See chapter 3.1. Social activism.

⁷⁶ See chapter 1.2.2. Learning and facilitating methodology and the Prison data analysis in this Appendix.

Others go to the therapist or actually become therapists. What you have chosen is another option, perfectly valid, I guess: integrating emotions and life trajectory with a peculiar way of bringing them into an art project. Go ahead! You have what it takes. Each one of us must find our ways. We have the right to do so.

1.5. Pearls of wisdom

Others do not give advice by directly suggesting what I should do, but try to help or give critical feedback by providing what I refer to as ‘pearls of wisdom’, insightful sayings or moral precepts. These are usually in contrast with the ‘problems’ I talk about or something they have seen in my videos. Following are some significant examples:

Mercedes says,

Be honest to yourself, and satisfied with what you do, no matter if it transcends or not. That is, be content of your process, more than of results. Because only we can control the process, but not results. And great creativity lies in the adventure of the process, the honest process, by doing what we feel we must do.

I am slightly disturbed by this advice, because *La Vie en Rose* is an attempt to be honest to myself and to enjoy the honest process, doing what I feel I want to do. I think this should be evident in the project. Antonello, from Italy writes,

I don’t know if it’s right to search for love. I think we must practice the awareness of a profound, intimate freedom, a complete acceptance. This is love.

Here is another example I cannot relate to, perhaps for its unreal and grandiloquent quality. I don’t believe in total acceptance or a profound and intimate freedom. Instead, Carole, from France, provides a different comment:

Love is everywhere around you. Maybe try to be a better listener to see love.

This definitely is a useful pearl of wisdom and a good reminder for someone who has the lifelong tendency to perceive the world as hostile. And of course it's hard for me to really believe that love is everywhere. But I know it's true. I once participated to the Free Hugs day in Milan, and wandered through the city with a big sign saying "Free Hugs". I looked at people faces and eyes when passing, and smiled, and most of those who looked at me ended up by asking for their 'free hug'. It was incredibly moving and a totally different vision of the world. I sometimes think I should probably be doing this regularly.

2. Reality or fiction?

Some viewers express doubts about the reality or honesty of the project, perhaps because the intertwinement, the lack of boundaries between art and life in *La Vie en Rose* is indeed unbelievable. Mercedes starts her long comment by saying:

What a complex and peculiar project! Where is reality and where is the fiction?
You are provoking yourself and us in a shared adventure from the screen.

Aldo says:

Is she exaggerating everything to actually hide herself better? (Although it seems she is showing her most inner feelings! That might be a great paradox, that when you try to show the most is when you hide yourself better...)

Arco Lee, whom I know well, also asks me if I exaggerated:

Why when you see yourself as a lover, you have to be so shit? You exaggerated it, didn't you? You have never been angry or so demanding in front of me. You have been a kind person to me as my landlord, my friend, my client and my photography mentor.

Despite the possible bias, a response from someone who knows other, more public sides of me, can also inform this research. Arco had made himself an idea of who I was, but in *La Vie en Rose* he discovers a completely different side of me and even seems to get angry. Perhaps when we know someone we tend to create a fix idea about that person. These videos intend to depict my innermost feelings, those I am ashamed of; those I don't easily express in daily

relationships, and ours was not particularly close. What do we do with those difficult emotions? I make them public. As Juliette says, understanding the whole point of the project,

I like the idea of getting literally “naked“ in front of the audience, making a real soul-strip so that the possible “lover“ would not buy (as we say in German) “the cat in the sack” and knows who he/she is dealing with in advance.

Arco continues with significant remarks:

For me, seriously, if what you depicted yourself in this project is the TRUE YOU. I cannot take a lover like you. How can I leave a bomb in my home everyday and don't know when it explodes. Some people may find it fun though. Love to me is a positive energy to be created with effort and for that commitment comes into play. Seemingly in your case, you just keep looking for a perfect partner that can take you unconditionally. So you will pass all your inner negative energy to your partner, so he has to do another project to release his inner sufferings.

These are probably the remarks that potential lovers could make when looking at the videos, and therefore deciding that they are not interested. This project has allowed me to avoid other relationships with partners who would judge me for these feelings. Perhaps an ideal partner would be one who feels or has felt in a similar way and understands that one cannot separate the positive energy from the negative. This understanding allows a caring relationship in which difficult emotions don't need to explode if they are dealt with, one one's own and/or together. The fact that I expose them in these videos doesn't mean that I would burst them onto my partner; it is a way to let them out possibly without hurting anybody. But the judgement of a partner who would never want to see them or deal with them at all could provoke an explosion.

Other viewers perceive the fiction and ask themselves if this is real or not:

I see parts of herself as a staged production.

I did not understand this project as a realistic attempt to find true love, more like an artistic exercise.

Even watching the videos I questioned at first if this was real or true at all. It would also be a very interesting project if it were fake.

Although I can feel something in this video and have a lot of empathy for CN, I do not really believe her. I can imagine that she was in a situation that made her feel lonely but I think her verbal reflection of this feeling seems to be exaggerated. Loneliness is a feeling that you do not normally express with words. This makes this video difficult for me. It seems to me that she acts – what she does as she would not express this feeling without the camera. Her smile at the end of the video underlines my impression although I like it in this video. It gives me some sort of hope.

These comments resonate with the blend of the experiential and the performative dimensions in SPEX, as discussed in this Critical Appraisal⁷⁷. These are self-portrait videos, not a documentation of my feelings captured by someone else. I expose my feelings in these videos as a dialogue with the camera and by extension with the world. The camera is always present and a best friend who can take anything of me without judgement. The intention to communicate these emotions and thoughts by creating aesthetically significant or pleasing images, involves staging them. The last comment is on my video *Alone*, discussed earlier in this Appendix, in which my feelings were real though communicated to my friend the camera, and my smile was spontaneous, one of complicity.

However, other viewers see honesty, real emotions and authenticity, as on the following comments:

I have a feeling that the artist really tries to open herself without playing roles. On one hand she reveals a lot of things from her private life. On the other, she is full of mysteries and built curiosity around her person.

The honesty coming from her voice makes it even addictive. Once I started to watch videos, I just couldn't stop it.

She is not only open but made a peace with herself. Otherwise, she wouldn't be able to say out loud about her inner problems, family's secrets, hurtful moments and failures.

⁷⁷ See chapter 1.4. The SPEX *dispositif*.

The multiplicity of different reactions is sometimes surprising: one viewer found it hard to see the videos, but another found them even addictive. I'm not sure that I have made peace with myself, but saying my inner problems out loud gives me some peace.

3. Exposing oneself by showing one's weaknesses.

Other comments regard the exposure of one's weaknesses and raise issues about privacy:

What about your privacy? The Internet is a big space where everything and nothing happens. In times where everyone is fighting data protection etc., I find your project a brave thing to do in a way.

A video like this one, displaying truths and authenticity makes me think about the virtual memory we all leave behind us, with or without pseudonyms. What will your young children say when they will one day find this video on the Internet?

An artist might be ethically free to do whatever she wants with her own emotions and life, and publish it on the Internet, but this comment raises ethical issues about my own children. Both my daughters, now 18 and 28, have known about the project from the beginning and have felt at some point that this exposure was too much. However, they have learnt to put limits on their contribution to my projects and protect themselves.

Another viewer comments on the lack of distance between the artist's life and her work, which is a cornerstone in my work, as discussed in this *Critical Appraisal*:⁷⁸

I had a problem with the exposing character of the videos. There is no real distance to the video-diary with parts/thoughts about her life so this makes me kind of uncomfortable because I do not know the person/artist.

The embarrassment about someone else, often called 'Spanish shame' is when the protagonist does not seem ashamed of exposure, but a viewer might feel that shame instead. Perhaps this is due to identification, or imagining oneself to be in the position of the exposed:

Like watching furtively someone's intimacy: I feel the pain of the person who I

⁷⁸ See chapter 1.3.1. Someone to Love

am watching and, at the same time I feel embarrassed about her.

4. Art criticism and interpretation of meaning.

Some of the viewers are artists, filmmakers or photographers, and have provided their own views on the artistic quality of the project and at the same time, given their own interpretation of the possible meanings conveyed by the videos and the project at large.

As discussed above, Juliette felt an initial rejection of the videos:

At the same time, there was some curiosity, attached to the beauty of your pictures, that didn't let me go.

My attempt to create beautiful images was instinctive, but as in the rest of my work, the search for beauty can trigger the unconscious creative process and attain the cathartic effect. Moreover, it is a way to give value to painful thoughts and emotions.

Carole makes an intriguing suggestion:

Try to show us a large image of you not only a close-up.

I understand that she speaks figuratively, because in many videos my figure is fully seen and immersed in the landscape. But it could be that she only saw videos on close-up. In case it is a metaphor, she could mean that she would be interested in seeing how I live, my surroundings and my relationships, instead of my inner life. My work responds to my needs, not to an idea of how my project should be. However, a documentation of my public life could be thought provoking, by showing the difference between the emotional and private, and the public life. It might as well be useful to complete my portrait.

Arco sees the project as a beautiful self-destructive project. It will destroy itself when it has reached its goal:

What comes to my head is the status that you are looking for a lover is actually very great for you as an artist because those feeling inside you creates infinite energy and intention to keep this project running. What if one day you find a

person who is your perfect partner? This project will be closed. There is this very subtle tension which is very beautiful. I can see that the goal of this project is contradictory to the aim of this project. Beautiful self-destructive project!

Aldo, an artist who knows my work, suggests something similar:

What would she do without her pain? She seems to need it to DO.

I think he's right. I create from my need to deal with my emotional pain. And as a social activist I am interested in it. What would happen if I found my lover? The project could end but it could continue with my lover, if he/she would accept to participate. I could also continue to document my inner world on my own during the relationship. The project was published in 2015 and in 2017 I stopped promoting it. I still haven't found love and I am determined to continue.

Jens understands the project as an artistic revision of a dating application, although this idea was never published anywhere or written on the website:

The Internet as a platform to find love (or a lover) has increased the last year. I kind of saw these videos as a reflection or a new approach to it. It seems as if the artist forms her own personal brokerage event with very intimate content.

Natalia, a filmmaker, comments on the 'temp mort' of the editing:

Great montage! Videos are full of temp mort that on one hand builds suspense, on the other gives opportunity to rethink the image.

Again, these choices were instinctive. Another viewer sees it as meditative: landscapes are often beautiful natural settings. I myself needed to breathe and perhaps I was trying to take care of myself. However, I feel that the viewer could also want to breathe and meditate in a beautiful location, having to see and listen to someone else's shortcomings and painful emotions. Paul seems intrigued by the idea of the art project as responding to a need:

I also recognise the need to show my ugly insides and convey it through an artistic expression. I think it is brave and very interesting artistically.

Arco suggests that instead of looking for a lover I am looking at myself:

This project, instead of say looking for your lover, I would say it is more looking at yourself – to see who you really are! That lover has been imaginative so far.

N.P. has the same insight, about the video *Escaping the pain*:

Again, CN speaks about others but actually speaks about herself. The others are the ones who escape the pain, but she is the one who deals with it. Right now, in front of the camera. I guess she knows that this is a generalization of everyone as she is reflecting on it and corrects herself. It hurts her because she chose the way to deal with her pain, because she was escaping her pain when she was younger. In this video I realize, again, that the self is just a product of others. How can you know who you are without having the others?

As in dreams, the unconscious creative process expresses things that concern us, even if we are talking about someone else. Perhaps the self is just a product of our relationship to others and I am stubbornly trying to create a self on my own, excluding others.

E.T. contributes to the idea of isolation:

Loneliness is part of being human. On the other hand the need for community is as well.

It is remarkable that you have a strong will to be honest in relationships and not to “surrender” to the need of community. Nevertheless I am not sure if this pursuit of personal or individual standing might not be an illusion that leads to a modern form of isolation and unrelatedness. There has to be a third way.

E.T. could be right. I have a tendency to isolate myself. I need to relate to people that can understand me, with whom I can be free to share what I feel and what is happening to me. The modern form of isolation in many young and not so young people could be due to similar needs and to the feeling of inadequacy in a society that does not generally welcome emotional expression.

Conclusion

La Vie en Rose responded to my need to express my painful emotions and my desires and dreams about a love relationship. I wanted to show my inner self laid bare with the aim of finding someone who would love me as I am. The data shows that a high number of respondents are affected by my work, due to the exposure of real vulnerabilities and mostly painful emotions through video artworks. The intertwining and lack of boundaries between art and life in *La Vie en Rose* strongly stimulate mirroring and possibly a human connection with the public. This interweaving of the personal and the artistic is sometimes perceived as false, as an artistic construction, perhaps because it is indeed surprising.

Viewers' identification could support the idea that the expression of painful emotions through online videos can be a political act. It can stimulate human connection through emotional exchange and reciprocal identification, in a society focused on competitive and thus dividing relationships between people. Mirroring oneself in someone's autobiographical disclosure can be uncomfortable, challenging viewers to feel and think about their own emotions and life experiences. This is achieved through the subversion of implicit social norms that demand always being happy in order to achieve success.

In the last three years I haven't promoted the project or uploaded new videos, despite having continued to film myself and some of my life experiences. Analysing viewers' comments five years after the publication of the project has been an emotional and transformational experience for myself as well. It has stimulated me to look at myself and my life experiences from another perspective. This has inspired me to continue the project.