

Literature Review

Catherine Opie's photography is an example of romanticization that is arguably neither good nor bad. It depicts people, places, and events as worth documenting, not because they are any sort of "hidden gems" like those that are often used for inspiration porn but rather because they are unique in the way that every person and every instant in time is capable of significance.

Nostalgia is bittersweet because of its dependence on dissatisfaction with one's present and the resulting desire to experience something that can never truly be experienced again. It is an emotion that is sometimes contradictory because we remember the pain which accompanies the time we feel nostalgic for, yet it is nevertheless a cathartic feeling to wallow in. Would focusing on a specific source of nostalgia as the subject of a piece be liberating or psychologically detrimental?

Notes in the Margin of the Black Book pushes the definition of what can be considered art by taking a pre-existing work, adding context to it through interviews with academics, artists, and others, and exhibiting it as its one work of art. If context is the art, what sorts of mediums support it well? With reference to Ligon and Opie's works, it seems like the intersection of photography and text provides a mode of art capable of showcasing the artist's personal and specific involvement in the piece.

It is undeniably irresponsible to romanticize a person by pushing one's own wants and ideals onto them because it dismisses the person's humanity and puts them in a position to inevitably be disappointing; however, idealization to some extent might have just as much potential for good. Through positivity bias and giving others "the benefit of the doubt," we might be more willing to be patient with others and allow them more grace in certain situations. Idealization, in this case, promotes the assumption that people inherently want to do good and be

liked, which manifests in various positive and negative ways. A certain extent of idealization, therefore, may be good for interpersonal relationships both on personal and greater social levels.

According to Scarry, physical pain is often invisible and inexpressible; however, it is at least translatable to some extent through analogy and language that has been specifically repurposed to be used with in reference to pain. Psychological pain often accompanies physical pain and is arguably even more inexpressible. The English language alone does not have an extensive enough vocabulary to describe every specific, and often very niche, emotion like onism: the frustration of being stuck in just one body, that inhabits only one place at a time. When language fails, it is possible to convey the emotion through art, usually visually or musically.

Annotated Bibliography

"Catherine Opie in 'Change.'" *Art21*, 14 Apr. 2012, art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s6/catherine-opie-in-change-segment/. Accessed 27 Sept. 2021.

Catherine Opie's photography is described to serve as documentation. Much of what she photographs is considered mundane, like Lake Erie or unnamed people going to a football game, but they all have a certain charm that comes from the singularity of her subjects. Each person is an individual, each setting holds specific value, and each photograph captures an instant that has never been and will never be the same. There is a preciousness in her photography that is perhaps the result of romanticization; the emphasis of mundanity makes the viewer feel almost omniscient in their ability to witness a scene or person that has little social or cultural relevance.

Howard, Scott Alexander. "Nostalgia." *Analysis*, vol. 72, no. 4, Oct. 2012, pp. 641-50. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23359115. Accessed 27 Sept. 2021.

For the purposes of this article, Howard describes nostalgia as a current emotion, not just a fascination with the past, resulting from the want to relive a memory that is both more desirable than the present and also unattainable. Hindsight importantly allows one to recall memories through the filter of their younger self's naivety and from a situation in which their circumstance has changed unpredictably for the worse, by their own perception of it. It is possible for romanticized memories to truly have been better than the current situation, and the nostalgia is made worse by the understanding that we did not appreciate it enough in the moment. "[We] can imagine the present as the subject of a future

memory: one can be aware of the impermanence of one's present surroundings;" does this mean that we can/do experience premature nostalgia for the current situation because we know things will not always be this good? Nostalgia is motivated by one's dissatisfaction with their present situation and the notion they have somehow experienced better either in memory, dreams, or vicariously. However, it is important to recognize that nostalgia can be selective: we can feel dissatisfied with our present realities without preferring the past entirely and absolutely. Similarly, we can feel nostalgic for a time despite recalling negative and even traumatic aspects of it, given that it is somehow preferable to the present even against our better judgement.

Moorer, Michael, Jr. "A Contemporary Analysis of Glenn Ligon's", Notes on the Margin of the Black Book." *Mmoorer*, 12 Apr. 2020, www.mmoorer.com/glenn-ligon. Accessed 27 Sept. 2021.

Description: Overview of Glenn Ligon's *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* with images of the work and background information.

This piece is built around Robert Mapplethorpe's *The Black Book* which is a photobook of pornographic images of black men, most of whom were gay; Ligon's addition adds context in the form of quote plaques which display snippets of interviews Ligon held with various people including random queer people, philosophers, writers, and other artists including Robert Mapplethorpe, himself. *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* creates a discussion surrounding Black masculinity, beauty, queerness, and fetishization. Poignantly, it is revealed in

Ligon's interview with Mapplethorpe that about half of the men he photographed had since died of AIDS complications.

Murray, Sandra L., et al. "The Benefits of Positive Illusions: Idealization and the Construction of Satisfaction in Close Relationships." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 70, no. 1, 1996, pp. 79-98, citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.584.8875&rep=rep1&type=pdf. Accessed 27 Sept. 2021.

Disclaimer: This is specifically in relation to heterosexual couples.

Murray, Holmes, and Griffin question whether idealization of a romantic partner contributes to a happy and long-lasting relationship or if sets the couple up for disappointment. Clearly the latter is true when one person willfully ignores their partner's flaws; however, they "propose a related perspective on relationship illusions, arguing that a certain degree of idealization is critical for satisfying dating and even marital relationships." Throughout a relationship and even into marriage, a person may ignore their partner's flaws in an attempt to convince themselves that they are with the "right" person or to maintain gaps of knowledge about their partner's personality for the purpose projecting ideals onto them, as a form of wish fulfillment. The text provides the example of a woman interpreting her husband's stubbornness as integrity as opposed to egocentrism; she, therefore, constructs a narrative to highlight her husband's virtues and diminish his faults. It is important to note that this embellishment is typically rooted in reality, meaning that there is truth in the idealization but perhaps not to the extent that we perceive it. The authors posit that the "unconditional positive regard," which allows people to value and accept their partners despite their flaws, may be a significant element

in sustaining a romantic relationship. This appears to be dependent on how based-in-reality a person's perceptions are and how much their own desires permeate their image of their significant other.

Scarry, Elaine. Introduction. *The Body in Pain*. *Oregon Campus Compact*, www.oregoncampuscompact.org/uploads/1/3/0/4/13042698/the_body_in_pain_-_the_making_and_unmaking_of_the_world_-_introduction__elaine_scarry_.pdf. Accessed 27 Sept. 2021.

Physical pain is often invisible and intangible and is, therefore, impossible to convey exactly between people. "Physical pain does not only resist language but actively destroys it;" however, while pain may suppress structured language, the yells and cries it evokes also transcends language as a universal indication of suffering. Scarry points out that because pain often robs people of the ability to communicate, the language of pain is sometimes created not by the person in pain but the people who speak on their behalves. This creates a potential predicament where a person's own experience of pain is forced into language and is filtered through someone else. In medicine, language is provided to patients like descriptors such as "burning," "sharp," or "throbbing" pain or instructions to rate pain on a scale of 1-10. It is understood that all people experience pain differently, resulting in somewhat imprecise translations; however, we have to use it since it is the only means of pain communication we have access to. Despite the language available, pain is not abundantly visible, meaning we can not be aware of other people's pain, its causes, nor its severity. "To have pain is to have certainty; to hear about pain is to have doubt." Pain also appears to be somewhat traumatic and akin to torture, and as a result, the language we use to describe pain is often

incredibly violent, though hyperbolic. For example, we may describe our pain as feeling like we've been "hit by a bus" or "stabbed in the gut;" we often have a "mental habit of recognizing pain in the weapon."