

**The shared experience and participatory
research in fashion photography**

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1 INTRODUCTION

This article aims to describe a set of photographic meetings performed between 2013 and 2021, in face-to-face and online formats, about fashion photographic narratives. The fashion editorial is a photographic narrative that encodes a fashion theme and makes it more accessible to the public, the stories are told through images and each photographer has his own way of capturing them.

In 2013, this author was invited by a group of photographers for a collective fashion photography experience. The event is called “photographic hangouts”. The quiddity of the proposal is to create shared opportunities for photographing, following the narrative line of a fashion editorial, where a theme is established and participants are supplied with references, inspirations and possibilities to materialize the suggested story in images. The participants are professional and amateur photographers who see, in the shared exercise, possibilities of knowledge, relationship and improvement of the photographic sight. It is believed that the study can raise a reflection on how to tell stories through fashion photography and find potential in the relationship built between the artist and the spectator.

How do artists find their own uniqueness in the shared photographic experience? It is necessary to understand the artist's willingness to share his photographic narrative and realize how much of the original idea can be leveraged through collective intelligence.

In order to understand the artist's ways of seeking his uniqueness in the face of the collectivity, case studies and participatory research are used. The aim is to create shared photographic practices and studies to establish consistency between the artist's experience and the sharing of ideas during the photographic creative process.

The term experience is defined as the act of experiencing and also as a form of non-organized, non-linear knowledge. Shared experience is the knowledge through the collective and collective experience happens when learning passes through the other, through relationships and surroundings, producing a type of intelligence enhanced by the exchange generated by the plurality of participants. For Lévy (2003, p. 28), collective intelligence is “[...] an intelligence distributed everywhere, incessantly valued, coordinated in real time, which results in an effective mobilization of competences”. The use of shared collective intelligence in photographic work recognizes in the other the skills that, if well distributed, enable narrative and learning.

Nicolas Bourriaud (2009a), in *Relational Aesthetics*, Claire Bishop (2012), with participatory art, and Grant H. Kester (2004), with socially engaged art, are authors who raise the issues of participation as complementary to the artist's intention. In different defenses, the authors point to the displacement of the artist, as the only creator of the work, towards a collaboration that produces situations, which later has its result decoded by the spectator. Far beyond didactic objectives, the photographic meetings elevate the participants' taste to the photographic editorial narrative. The experience leads to an elaboration of the technique and the construction of a portfolio.

Through virtual meetings with fashion photographer Bob Wolfenson, between June and July 2021, it was investigated how much of the photographic narrative commissioned by a vehicle or client allows the influence of the shared experience during the creative process of a fashion editorial. The meetings are part of a type of participatory research that, according to Thiollent (1986, p. 7 apud CARVALHO; DUARTE; MENEZES; SOUZA, 2019, p. 46), “[...] values not only the direct participation of subjects (in clear opposition to more objective and scientific methods in their most traditional way), but privileges what they produce in their discourses”. In this way, the meetings are based on cultural dialogue and shared action, which gives credibility to the ideas investigated in the article.

According to Wolfenson (2021), the photographer sees a scene, photographs it, throws it to the world and the work says “bye”. The piece is no longer theirs and the spectator interprets it as they wish. As Marcel Duchamp (1975, p. 74) defends: “The creative act takes on another aspect when the spectator experiences the phenomenon of transmutation; [...] the role of the public is to determine the weight of the work of art on the aesthetic scale”.

Seeking the artist's uniqueness in the photographic narrative of living, experience and collectivity is a continuous learning process. The artist uses the control of the order and the lack of control of the collectivity to sew his own patchwork quilt of references and inspiration, just as Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolé* needs Mangueira dancers's movement to exist as a work of art, the contemporary artist-photographer needs to master the technique, know how to assert control and understand that the lack of control is an ally.

When analyzing the experience of [photography hangouts], answers were sought out for the formulated hypothesis. The artist's willingness to share his photographic narrative was investigated and to realize how much of the original idea can be leveraged through collective intelligence. For an exchange to be possible, the artist's

willingness to share his work is necessary. The opening of the narrative to the other, more than a detachment on the part of the artist, takes place in the desire and courage to let what is inside out. Permission is the premise of the choice to be part of the exchange and create the content of transitivity.

It was possible and necessary to understand that the dialogue between the artist and the spectator cannot be shortened without considering a multitude of other negotiations that occur during the creative process. The photographic narrative with shared potential is based on reciprocity and has “being together” at its core. The collective elaboration of meaning passes through the binomial of exchange, where one shows something to the other, who gives them back in their own way, as defended by Nicolas Bourriaud (2009a) in *Relational Aesthetics*.

When asking: “How did artists find their own uniqueness in the shared photographic experience?”, it was possible to notice that photography professionals are resistant to the theme of how artistic practices can find fertile ground in new approaches and experimentation. The methodology showed that a fashion photographic narrative, supported by collective sensibility, became an invitation to the spectator, of co-authorship of the work. The artist who experienced this opening proved to be more creative and permissive in complementing his work with the opportunity for the participation of other professionals and the spectator himself.

In this approach, it is possible to observe that the development of the participant's singular look passes through the dimension of the other, the social exchange, the interference of the environment, as well as the learning situations that take place during the practical photographic process. Following Bakhtin's (1986) line of thought, when he says that signs not only reflect reality, but refract it, it is believed that photographic encounters refract the participant's reality, when he suggests that it is possible to find the artist's uniqueness in the shared experience. Etymologically, refraction is the change in the direction of a wave from one medium to another, originating from the Latin *Refractio*, meaning break, change of wave.

During the process, inspired by the collective, the artist's gaze was refracted, finding in the sharing of ideas a way to make the scene direction flow. The question was no longer how to interpret the commission, but how much of the agenda and theme would be in the next person.