

An Insistent Subject: The Countess de Castiglione Facing the Lens

by

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ABSTRACT

An Italian aristocrat renowned for her spectacular beauty, the Countess de Castiglione (1837-1899) arrived in Paris in 1855 and became a short-lived star in Napoleon III's *fête impériale*. For a considerably longer period, between 1856 and 1895, she staged more than four hundred portraits of herself in collaboration with the commercial photographer Pierre-Louis Pierson (1822-1913), creating an elaborate and anomalous corpus in the context of the history of photography. This dissertation examines how at the hands of Castiglione photography became a productive means for the figuring of the feminine subject in nineteenth-century France. The study argues that Castiglione's consistent and considered relationship with the medium of photography has much to offer in terms of expanding our understanding of how photography provided particular inroads for women's authorship and agency in the period.

The medium of photography and the early photographic portrait have been understood to objectify photographic sitters and Castiglione's corpus has historically been interpreted to represent vivid proof of this process. Rather than focusing on the objectifying function of the camera, it is suggested that photography's status as an autogenic medium—one in which the subject inscribes itself in the image—provides a compelling metaphor for Castiglione's creative practice. By attending to a series of significant trials involving Pierson's firm that sought to define photography as art under

French law, this study analyzes how photography's indeterminate status as an art or an industry enabled Castiglione to mobilize the medium for her own ends.

As a subject who figured prominently in the popular press, Castiglione employed photography as an autobiographical means through which to formulate counter-narratives about herself. While the corpus is usually described as a private collection of images that she compulsively created to satisfy her narcissistic desires, three series of costume portraits that had important public purchase are examined. This dissertation proposes a correspondence between Castiglione's photographic practice and memoir culture in Second Empire France (1852-1870). It argues that Castiglione's photographic strategies and practices bear witness to an artistic agency and urgency for self-expression that reconfigure our understanding of female subjectivity in the context of nineteenth-century French photography.

INTRODUCTION

On December 25, 1855, an eighteen-year-old Italian woman, Virginia Verasis, Countess de Castiglione (1837-1899), arrived in Paris with her husband, the Count di Castiglione, and their eight-month-old son Giorgio. Born in Florence to an aristocratic family from the Ligurian city of La Spezia, Virginia [née Oldoini] was well educated, coddled, and admired for her unparalleled beauty since her childhood.¹ Ostensibly in the French capital to pay a visit to her relatives, Virginia was in fact sent to Paris by her cousin, Count Camillo Cavour, to seduce and sway the French Emperor toward the cause of Italian unification.² For a brief period of time, the story goes, the Countess de Castiglione became the favorite mistress of Napoleon III and a sparkling star of his *fête impériale*, never hesitating to make a scene with her spectacular beauty and provocative costumes.³ This short-lived favor soon faded into a commonplace—and compromising in terms of

¹ Although it sounds sensational, it is difficult to exaggerate the extent of the admiration Castiglione received on account of her beauty. Alain Decaux quoted the Countess Walewska who told the Count di Castiglione that if he secured Virginia's hand in marriage he would have as his wife, "la plus jolie femme d'Europe!" *La Castiglione, dame de coeur de l'Europe: D'après sa correspondance et son journal intime inédits* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1999), 21. In a letter to Virginia written on the occasion of her birthday, Castiglione's mother fondly remembered that it was seventeen years ago that she made the masterpiece that is the countess: "C'est justement midi et il y a dix sept ans que j'ai fait ce chef d'oeuvre." The letter is preserved in the Archivio di Stato in Turin, Italy, *Carte Castiglione, Archivi Privati*, Mazzo 1.

² I discuss this history in greater detail in Chapter One.

³ Castiglione did not readily admit to her liaison with Napoleon III. In an 1892 interview in the journal *L'Évenement* (April 22), Castiglione claimed that Cavour sent her to France as part of his mission to "make Italy" and reported that the French emperor received her with the same tenderness that he had shown her upon meeting her as child while he visited Italy. "Cavour mon cousin, voulut faire l'Italie et il m'envoya à la cour de France où votre empereur m'accueillit avec la tendresse de son ancienne affection pour la petite fille qu'il avait fait lui aussi sauter quelquefois dans ses bras. Il avait conservé la douceur voilée et le mélancolique souvenir des jours d'exil. Dans la prospérité, il se plaisait à dire que j'en étais le doux et souriant témoignage."

her reputation—entry in the annals of Second Empire gossip. In part as a result of such “affairs,” Castiglione quickly separated from her husband and eventually from her son with whom she would continue to have a troubled relationship. The Count di Castiglione and Giorgio would tragically predecease her in 1867 and 1879 respectively. With the exception of a few years intermittently spent in Italy, Castiglione would continue to live alone in Paris in quite consistent isolation until her death in 1899.

In his sensational chronicle devoted to *Napoleon III and the Women He Loved* (1913), Hector Fleischmann offered the following florid and unforgiving opening lines in his chapter devoted to Castiglione:

The words said by Saint Theresa, in the rocky and sad city of Avila, in Old Castile: ‘God in his favour made me: I have always been looked upon with pleasure wherever I have been,’ might have been said by Virginie Marchesa [sic] di Castiglione at the time when her beauty was gone, and she retained only the bent and melancholy grace of her former self. And truly, beauty was the *Deus ex machina* of her adventures, and is the only reason for writing about her to satisfy human curiosity. She was the incarnation of foreign poison, the element of cosmopolitan decomposition, inoculated into the veins of Imperial France, of that society en fête from 1852-1870, which prepared with such magnificent gaiety the coming of the Barbarians. She was the voluptuousness of Italian languor personified, of those oppressive gardens which surrounded the perfumed lakes, and which reflected under the blue Italian sky the Tuscan yew trees and the Florentine cypresses. Her very name called forth memories of radiant times of long ago, magic and sublime, and her beauty, with her fairness of her skin, her languor, her hauteur, superb and disdainful, made her the symbol of that land towards which all hopes and desires turned.⁴

If they are exceptional in terms of their extravagance, Fleischmann’s words are nevertheless representative of the fanatical tenor in which Castiglione was generally described. Her purported physical perfection, glamorous liaisons, and idiosyncratic temperament provided endless fodder for such accounts, but in addition to the plethora of

⁴ Hector Fleischmann, *Napoleon III and the Women He Loved*, A.S. Rappoport, trans. (London: Holden & Hardingham, 1915), 157-158. Originally published in French in 1913.

portraits created by others, the *Divine Comtesse*, as she was known, was also actively involved in her self-mythologizing.

While the French Emperor became only temporarily enamored with the countess, in Paris another paramour permanently captivated Castiglione. In the context of the history of photography in France, the year that Castiglione arrived in the capital has been characterized as a momentous one.⁵ Napoleon III hosted the 1855 Universal Exhibition, which introduced photography to a broader public than ever before. In anticipation of and in response to the widespread interest in the medium, the first great photographic portrait studios opened their doors. Like many of her contemporaries, Castiglione was not immune to photography's aggressively advertised charms. What is unusual in her case, however, is that over the following forty years, from 1856 to 1895, Castiglione developed a collaborative creative relationship with Pierre-Louis Pierson (1822-1913), a co-owner of Mayer and Pierson, one of those first luxurious photographic firms. Throughout her adult life the sitter and photographer produced more than four hundred distinct photographic portraits of Castiglione. This singular corpus presents not only the most extensive collaboration in the history of photography, but in the history of portraiture, period.⁶

This dissertation is structured around this complex oeuvre of portraits. Given her unprecedented investment in the medium of photography in a time and place that was comparatively inhospitable to women practitioners, Castiglione's relationship with

⁵ See, André Rouillé, *La Photographie en France: Textes & controverses: Une anthologie, 1816-1871* (Paris: Éditions Macula, 1989), 10.

⁶ Pierre Apraxine, "The Model and the Photographer," in Apraxine and Xavier Demange, eds., "*La Divine Comtesse*": *Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000): 23-51, 28.

photography certainly provides good reason for writing about her—to satisfy art historical curiosity, if not human curiosity at large.⁷ Her photographs bear a complicated relationship to issues of authorship and particularly to questions concerning opportunities for women’s self-representation. In the chapters that follow I argue that Castiglione’s photographic strategies and practices bear witness to an artistic agency and urgency for self-expression that reconfigures our understanding of authorship and female subjectivity in the context of nineteenth-century French photography.

It is widely accepted that while Pierson executed the images, it was without a doubt Castiglione who directed the work: she determined the poses, costumes and props that shaped the rhetorical effect of the images.⁸ Throughout Castiglione’s corpus it was the sitter who staged the photographs, casting herself, for example, in fancy dress in the role of the Queen of Hearts, as Lady Vengeance, and as a Carmelite nun, her alter ego, the Hermit of Passy. The photographic studio proved to be a stage on which Castiglione could memorialize her forgotten triumphs, enact her fantasies, and even document her ageing. Like her self-imposed retreat into her own Parisian apartments, Castiglione’s frequent visits to Pierson’s *atelier* offered this woman who was subject to especial public scrutiny a private space in which to construct herself far from the madding crowd. Or, as

⁷ For a discussion of women photographers in nineteenth-century France, see: Françoise Condé, “Les femmes photographes en France: 1839-1914,” unpublished Master’s thesis (under the direction of Michelle Perrot, Université Jussieu – Paris VIII – UFR d’Histoire, 1992).

⁸ For example: Robert de Montesquiou described Pierson as “admiratif et docile” in the face of Castiglione’s whims, *La divine comtesse*, 60. Abigail Solomon-Godeau described Castiglione as “the architect of her own representations.” “The Legs of the Countess,” 67.

Martina Corgnati aptly put it, the photographic studio afforded Castiglione a self-representational “room of one’s own.”⁹

Historiographically, however, the medium of photography and the early photographic portrait in particular have often been interpreted to function to objectify photographic sitters, leaving little room for self-expression or subjectivity on their parts. Likewise, the Second Empire in France (1852-1870) has been understood to represent a stagnant period in terms of women’s artistic agency since the regime systematically repressed women’s rights and feminist activities, and aggressively regulated women’s “respectability” while it actively appropriated representations of women for its own propagandistic ends.¹⁰ In her formidable article, “The Legs of the Countess,” published in 1986, Abigail Solomon-Godeau suggested that the contiguity between the medium of photography and the message of the Second Empire’s objectification of women was especially evident in the photographs of the Countess de Castiglione. Throughout her argument Solomon-Godeau aligned Castiglione’s practice with three objectifying and submissive “avatars of femininity” that were ubiquitous in nineteenth-century France and which figured prominently in photography in the period: the nude, the prostitute, and pornography.¹¹

Indebted to and formed in part in response to Solomon-Godeau’s study, my project situates Castiglione’s corpus with respect to self-constituting and assertive

⁹ Martina Corgnati, “La contessa di Castiglione fra passato e presente,” in *La Contessa di Castiglione e il suo tempo*, Martina Corgnati and Cecilia Ghibaudi, eds. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2000):13-23, 15.

¹⁰ See, Kirsten Elisa Morrill, “Politics, Prosperity, and Pleasure: Fashioning Identity in Second Empire Paris, 1852-1870,” for an account that challenges such historiographic assessments of the period. (Unpublished dissertation, Department of History, Duke University, 1998).

¹¹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” *October* 39 (Winter, 1986): 65-108, 94.

categories of specific relevance to women's lives during the Second Empire: the theater, fashion, and the memoir. In an analogous methodological move, throughout this dissertation I examine the significant relationship these traditions had with the burgeoning medium of photography. By approaching Castiglione's portraits from the vantage point of these agentic practices I offer an alternative perspective on women's engagement with photography throughout its early history in France. Instead of assuming that women were not equipped to negotiate the forces of photography's objectification in the second half of the nineteenth century I argue that in significant cases, and most notably in Castiglione's case, photography afforded a novel and productive space for the figuring of the feminine *subject*.

The Solitary Subject

In his 1984 study of the first century of portrait photography in France, photographic historian Jean Sagne provided the following description of the effect that photographic portraiture has on the subject:

Photography accelerates the process of individuation. It isolates the subject, detaches it from its context, affixes it onto the pristine surface of the white background or the perspective of the painted backdrop. This tearing away from the self and from others autonomizes one, makes one conscious of one's singularity, hollows out an abyss of solitude around the subject. Photography makes concrete the danger that Tocqueville foresees in democracy, 'it throws [one] back forever upon [one]self alone, and threatens in the end to confine [oneself] entirely within the solitude of [one's] own heart.' But in one's image, by means of one's image, the subject measures the extent of his or her force and power, becomes aware of his or her potential reach.¹²

¹² "La photographie accélère le processus d'individuation. Elle isole le sujet, le détache de son contexte, le plaque sur la surface immaculée du fond blanc ou sur la perspective du rideau peint. Cet arrachement à soi et aux autres l'autonomise, lui fait prendre conscience de sa singularité, elle creuse autour de lui un gouffre de solitude. Elle réalise le danger que Tocqueville pressent dans la démocratie, 'elle le ramène sans cesse vers lui seul et menace de le renfermer enfin tout entier dans la solitude de son propre cœur.' Mais dans son

According to Sagne's characterization of it, the photographic portrait exerts a kind of alienating violence on the sitter, while it also holds the potential to assuage and empower the subject. It induces isolation, causes detachment, and imprisons one in solitude. On the other hand, or perhaps as a paradoxical result of these effects, it emancipates the subject and inspires a consciousness that can extend outward. Sagne's powerful and poignant statement betrays some of the key tensions and contradictions that are central to theorizations of photographic portraiture, and which are also inevitably at the heart of this study.

As a particularly prolific photographic subject, Castiglione is appropriately positioned to serve as a model for such theorizations, but as suggested, her case is complicated. While the corpus is extensive, it was also largely a private practice. With a few notable exceptions, Castiglione kept the images for her own collection and contemplation and distributed only a small fraction of meaningful portraits to friends and family. Although she was often discussed in the popular press and figured prominently in her contemporaries' memoirs and in sensational literature during her lifetime, her photographs were rarely discussed except for very brief mentions in her private correspondence.¹³ It was not until Castiglione's death and the subsequent auctioning off

image, par son image, le sujet mesure l'étendue de sa force et de son pouvoir, prend conscience du champ d'action qui s'ouvre à lui," Jean Sagne, *L'Atelier du photographe: 1840-1940* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1984), 310. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted. In the above citation I referred to Henry Reeve's translation of Tocqueville: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America. Part the Second, The Social Influence of Democracy*, Henry Reeve, trans. (New York: J. & H. G. Langley, 1840), 106.

¹³ In Chapter Three I discuss some of the memoirs Castiglione appeared in as well as mentions of her in the popular press. As Apraxine and Demange noted, Guy de Charnacé's *Femmes d'aujourd'hui* (1866) marked Castiglione's first appearance in literature. The book was comprised of "a series of portraits of society ladies, each thinly disguised under a pseudonym. In the character of Heliodora, the Countess is described as a femme fatale who lives only for her beauty." "*La Divine Comtesse*": *Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, 19.

of her belongings at an estate sale in Paris in 1901 that the full scope of her photographic enterprise was revealed. On this occasion many of her belongings, including 434 portraits—nearly all of which were photographs—were acquired by the writer and aesthete, Robert de Montesquiou.¹⁴ An ardent admirer of the Countess, Montesquiou would spend the next several years drafting his biography of Castiglione, *La divine comtesse : étude d'après Madame de Castiglione*, which was published in 1913. From his privileged perspective of having most of her images in his possession, Montesquiou was able to describe the scope and content of the corpus while he simultaneously satisfied his own aesthetic curiosities and sensibilities. Although he wrote about the photographs fairly comprehensively, his biography offers interesting anecdotes and impressions rather than providing any form of analysis. Writing in 1986, Abigail Solomon-Godeau was effectively the first scholar to critically examine Castiglione's relationship to photography.

Any critical analysis of Castiglione's corpus is necessarily selective given the sheer number and variety of images it contains. Solomon-Godeau's title reveals her focus on a series of images of Castiglione's legs, which she read as especially apt representatives of the overall fetishizing nature of the entire body of work. In particular, she identified three fetishisms that together exerted their influence over the photographs:

the psychic fetishism of patriarchy, grounded in the specificity of the corporeal body; the commodity fetishism of capitalism, shrouded in what Marx termed the 'veil of reification,' and grounded in the means of production and the social relations they

¹⁴ In his biography of Castiglione, Montesquiou mentions the painted portrait of Castiglione by Giraud (ca. 1857, as per Apraxine and Demange's catalogue, its "present whereabouts are unknown," 169), the oil portrait by George Frederic Watts (1857, private collection), two small pastel oval portraits, and the sculpted terracotta portrait by Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse (1864), which I discuss in Chapter Three. The remaining images in his collection of 434 portraits are photographs. Robert de Montesquiou, *La Divine Comtesse: Études d'après Madame de Castiglione* (Paris: Goupil & Cie, 1913), 49-53.

engender; and the fetishizing properties of the photograph—a commemorative trace of an absent object, the still picture of a frozen look, a screen for the projective play of the spectator’s consciousness.¹⁵

In 1992 Naomi Schor categorized Solomon-Godeau’s approach to the corpus as contributing to a formative trend in theoretical discourse on photography, which Schor described as the “ideological mode.”¹⁶ Schor cited “The Legs of the Countess,” Allan Sekula’s “The Body and the Archive”—which was published in the same edition of *October*—, and John Tagg’s, Roland Barthes’s, and André Rouillé’s work as important examples of this mode.¹⁷ These studies were united by an impulse to interrogate and uncover “how photography does the work of ideology,” whether from a feminist perspective, such as Solomon-Godeau’s, a Marxist approach, such as Rouillé’s, or with reference to Foucauldian and Althusserian discourse in Tagg’s case.¹⁸

Schor also admitted being indebted to this body of literature but was equally concerned with the fact that it could be “totalizing” and “stultifying” in terms of the absolute authority it attributed to the power of ideology. She described Tagg’s understanding of this process as follows: “For Tagg, photographic representation carries the leaden burden of ideology because it is an essential element in the setting-into-place of the disciplinary system, which comes to adhere to the social body like Deianira’s robe, a suffocating all-enveloping second skin.”¹⁹ In her own words and in terms of

¹⁵ Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” 67.

¹⁶ Naomi Schor, “*Cartes Postales*: Representing Paris 1900,” in *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Winter 1992): 188-244, 190. Schor posited the ideological mode in opposition to a formalist mode.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Sekula, *October* no. 39 (Winter 1986: 65-108; Rouillé, *L’Empire de la photographie: Photographie et pouvoir bourgeois, 1839-1870* (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1982). Importantly, the central focus of all of these studies is photographic portraiture.

¹⁸ Of course there is overlap in each of these approaches as the above indented quote from Solomon-Godeau proves.

¹⁹ Schor, “*Cartes Postales*,” 191.

Castiglione's images specifically, Solomon-Godeau expressed it thus: "Like the conventionalized femininity she was believed to incarnate, the edges of the photographic frame are a Procrustean bed to which body and soul must accommodate themselves."²⁰ If the photographs of Castiglione's legs, as fragmented and fetishizing as they are, support this deterministic logic, throughout my dissertation I have selectively focused on specific images, which as I see it, provide a way out of this totalizing fixation on fetishism.

Jean Sagne's reflections on photographic portraiture cited above were written in the same period as Solomon-Godeau's (et al.) writings on photography in the "ideological mode." My selectivity in my selection of Sagne's text betrays my own biases because the paragraph that follows the citation in fact fits neatly alongside the stultifying quotes from Tagg and Solomon-Godeau.²¹ However, I find the tensions built into Sagne's contradictions especially pertinent in Castiglione's case. She seems to have sought out autonomy and solitude and to have reveled in the ability to "measure the extent of her force and power." The fact that photography enabled this is significant and has been overlooked in favor of other theoretical interests. By recontextualizing Castiglione's photographs with reference to alternative metaphors of photography—as opposed to fetishism and objectification, for example—; by considering the legal status of the author of photographic images in the period; and by focusing on those images within the corpus that had public purchase or that demonstrated a thoughtful engagement with the medium, I examine how photography became a personal, pliable and productive device at the hands of the countess.

²⁰ Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," 105.

²¹ "La photographie constitue le sujet en capital 'moral,' définit les modalités de sa circulation dans la sphère sociale. Elle intègre l'individu aux échanges d'objets, de biens, projette en lui le modèle du système de production, le lui fait incarner." Sagne, *L'atelier du photographe*, 310.

Chapter Contents

Chapter One of this dissertation defines key terms and concepts that are central to the entire scope of the project. I begin by examining the significance of photography as a new representational paradigm and question the medium's ontological dependence on objectification in the context of photographic portraiture. I analyze contemporaneous sources that reveal anxieties over the mimetic failures seen as particular to photography, especially when the medium was tasked with representing women. By unpacking notions of objectification, the concept of autogenesis—the photographic process whereby the image reproduces itself—and agency, I posit that contrary to previous assessments, photography and the photographic studio could be self-productive spaces for nineteenth-century women.

This chapter also contextualizes the commercial and creative climate in which Castiglione's practice flourished in terms of primary sources, imagined expectations, material realities, and metaphorical possibilities related to photographic portraiture. I elaborate on the nature of Castiglione's relationship with her photographer/collaborator, Pierre-Louis Pierson, and with photography more broadly. Rather than focusing on photography's mimetic failures and casting Castiglione as an unwitting victim of this representational process, I suggest that feminist theorist Hilary Robinson's concept of

“productive mimesis” can help us understand the significance of Castiglione’s corpus and can better account for her role as a creative subject.²²

Chapter Two shifts focus from Castiglione to a thorough examination of a series of legal trials involving Mayer and Pierson, which resulted in the 1862 French Supreme Court ruling that photography could be defined as art. I describe the ways in which various attempts to argue for the artistry inherent in photography around mid-century came to depend quite significantly on the artistry practiced by the feminine photographic subject. My argument is made with reference to art vs. non-art debates that emerged in response to Mayer and Pierson’s photographic portraits and in particular those of two tragic actresses, Rachel Félix and Adelaide Ristori. My analysis of these images, trials, and debates involves a feminist rereading of Bernard Edelman’s *Ownership of the Image: Elements for a Marxist Theory of Law* (originally published in French in 1973). I situate these issues as a pre-history to Castiglione’s photographic agency as Rachel and Ristori represent influential precedents who engendered the possibility for Castiglione’s subjectivity to manifest itself photographically.

Chapter Three explores the theoretical relationship between photography and (auto)biography (both historical and contemporary) and proposes a correspondence between Castiglione’s photographic practice and memoir culture in Second Empire France. I analyze the autobiographical statements Castiglione made through three significant fancy dress costumes that she wore to important events and which she commemorated photographically. By contrast to the largely private corpus it is especially

²² Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006). Robinson’s notion of “productive mimesis” is itself a product of her rereading of Irigaray.

significant that Castiglione sanctioned the public exhibition or circulation of these images. I examine the motivations behind this impulse and suggest that they are rooted in Castiglione's desire to actively formulate counter-narratives about herself in the face of those already widely circulating about her in the popular press. In the conclusion to this chapter I return to my argument about "productive mimesis," which is introduced in Chapter One, and suggest that the images discussed in this chapter demonstrate how Castiglione's productive mimetic practice was achieved by means of the strategic manipulation of fashion and photography.

The final chapter of this dissertation is structured around the most iconic photograph of Castiglione, *Scherzo di Follia* [Game of Madness, 1863-1866], in which she holds an oval frame over her eye and looks directly out at the viewer. I argue that this image can be read as an allegory of her relationship with photography, as her poetic gesture of framing vision suggests a dialogue with a meta-discourse on the medium. Throughout my reading of the image I compare it to nineteenth- and twentieth-century images that have thematized vision and explore the gendered implications of such thematics. Specifically, I analyze the image in the context of three relevant categories that are in and of themselves ontologically fundamental to theories of photography, and which more pointedly have haunted interpretations of Castiglione's corpus: hysteria, narcissism, and the concept of the gaze. Coming full circle to face a complicated dialectic that pervades my entire study, I suggest that the confusion between subject and object that has been identified in this iconic image—and the corpus at large—should be read in more generative terms.

My own reading of this complex corpus is motivated by the long legacy of feminist art historical scholarship that has interrogated questions of agency in representation. In their historiographically significant anthology devoted to this issue, *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism* (published in 2005), Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard described that “the first casualty of poststructuralist gender studies was the possibility of women’s agency.”²³ They pointed out the prevailing “critical emphasis of recent decades on the cultural impasse for women” that is evident throughout a body of literature that “portrays women as paralyzed within and by an abstract system of social relationships and representational constructs.”²⁴ As an alternative they proposed the need to move away from the postmodernist, Lacanian, and “postfeminist” theoretical conceptions of “female artistic agency,” which “jointly postulated the impossibility of women’s subjective agency in a symbolic order dominated by a masculine universal and in a discourse of power in which, as Others, women have no speaking position.”²⁵ Their practical suggestion that would enable a way out of this rather hopeless position was that scholarship seeking to do so should “recognize and claim the power and agency that women have had and continue to exercise.”²⁶ I situate this project within this historiographic tradition.

In her more historically and geographically specific study, *Women and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century France: 1800-1852* (1998), Gen Doy expressed her desire to “examine the place of women within French visual culture, as material agents rather

²³ Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds. *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 1. This is the third volume in a series of anthologies that have been central to feminist art history. The first two volumes were *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (1982) and *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (1992).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

than theoretical conceptualizations of ‘Otherness’ and ‘difference.’”²⁷ Given that categorizing Castiglione explicitly as an artist might be problematic to some minds, I find the designation of “material agent” particularly useful in thinking through her role as a creative subject.²⁸ Women’s “material agency” in Second Empire France—the period directly following the era explored in Doy’s volume—has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest in recent years. The major touring exhibition “Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity” (2012-2013), in which Castiglione in fact played a small part, was a testament to the significant role women played, in part as artists but also as consumers and innovators of fashion, in the context of the trajectory of artistic modernity.²⁹ Alison McQueen’s thorough analysis of the Eugénie de Montijo’s overlooked role as a significant patron of the arts throughout her lifetime, *Empress Eugénie and the Arts: Politics and Visual Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (2011), is another example of a recent reconsideration of a significant historical figure’s varied practices of material agency throughout the period. This study focuses on one woman’s engagement principally with one medium, photography, which has had its own enormous impact on modernity, not to mention theorizations of it. I would argue that the Countess

²⁷ Gen Doy, *Women and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century France: 1800-1852* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), 1.

²⁸ It is important to note that Doy specifically wanted to “return to an investigation of the material embodiment of conscious subjectivity by moving beyond individual female bodies and subjects to a theoretical model which incorporates these into a wider materialist framework, which dialectically understands the interaction of the individual and the wider social and economic contexts which produce that female embodied and gendered individual not just as material but as *oppressed*,” *ibid.*, 14. Throughout my dissertation I argue that individuality is especially important in Castiglione’s case.

²⁹ The exhibition opened at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris in 2012 and then traveled to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and The Art Institute of Chicago. See the catalogue: Gloria Groom, ed., *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012). One could also cite Susan Hiner’s *Accessories to Modernity: Fashion and the Feminine in Nineteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) as contributing to this knowledge but this volume is very much dedicated to the agency of the fashion object. However, Hiner does explicitly argue that “mastery of the system—the proper deployment of fashion accessories—was the most nuanced and powerful path to individual distinction, and that by working the system, the fashion virtuoso could potentially disrupt the center from the margins,” 4.

de Castiglione's complex and even at times conflicted material agency as manifested through this medium has much to tell us about photography and the underexamined place of women in its history in France.

CHAPTER ONE

A Paragone: Painting, Photography and the Perils of Representing Femininity

Et voilà encore un des écueils de la photographie, les portraits de femme!
[And here again, one of the pitfalls of photography, portraits of women!]
~*L'Illustration*, Nov. 3, 1860

Problematizing the New Paradigm

With the advantage of hindsight, theoreticians and historians of photography have reflected on the profound impact that the introduction of the medium has had on society, particularly with respect to the proliferation of photographic portraiture. Whereas portraiture had previously been the privilege of the few, photography, it has been claimed, democratized the image—for better or worse—by making portraiture accessible to the many.³⁰ While attempts have been made to place photography generally, and photographic portraiture more particularly, within a tradition of reproducible technologies that abounded in the first half of the nineteenth century, other approaches have stressed the cleavage that photography wrought, as a new and inherently distinct representational

³⁰ Photography's "democratizing" of the image is rehearsed in several historiographies of the medium, most notably in Gisèle Freund's "Photography During the Second Empire," in *Photography and Society* (Boston, David R. Godine, Publisher, 1980): 53-68, and John Tagg's, "A Democracy of the Image: Photographic Portraiture and Commodity Production," in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993): 34-59. Concurrent with this democratization, historians often stress the oppressive and repressive consequences of photographic portraiture and its complicity with surveillance. For example, see, Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," in *October*, vol. 39 (Winter, 1986): 3-64. Sekula offered an illuminating account of how "photography subverted the privileges inherent in portraiture" and provided a groundbreaking study of photography's intimate history with and horrifying instrumentality in developing "repressive" systems of criminal identification.

regime.³¹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, for example, asserted that “photography produces a wholly different visual paradigm from that of the older graphic arts,” and advised that, “it is precisely the differences in this paradigm that we need to acknowledge in any discussion of the medium and its uses.”³² Emphasizing photography’s ontological dependence on objectification has been a fundamental way in which scholars have approached the complex task of accounting for the representational paradigm shift that photography effected, and untangling the ideological workings of the function of objectification with respect to the sitters of photographic portraits has proved particularly troubling.

This study further complicates this medium specific interpretive problem by reexamining the implications of “the medium and its uses” in the context of women’s self-representation in nineteenth-century France. Solomon-Godeau has analyzed this issue and this period as exemplary of photography’s objectifying function in various studies, specifically in her interpretation of the Countess de Castiglione’s (1837-1899) corpus of photographic portraits. By their nature as collaborative representational efforts, these images problematize notions of authorship and the photographic sitter’s position as subject and/or object.³³ Solomon-Godeau’s argument will also be analyzed throughout

³¹ A primary example of scholarship accounting for photography as a continuation of nineteenth-century reproductive technologies would be Stephen Bann’s *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) and his *Distinguished Images: Prints in the Visual Economy of Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

³² Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 232. Likewise, Michael North has noted that Roland Barthes “consistently referred to the advent of photography as if it were a major epistemological break,” “Authorship and Autography,” in *PMLA*, vol. 116, no. 5 (Oct., 2001): 1377-1385, note 5, 1384. North refers his readers to Nancy M. Shawcross, *Roland Barthes on Photography: The Critical Tradition in Perspective* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1997), 27.

³³ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” *October* 39 (Winter, 1986): 65-108.

subsequent chapters but can be briefly summarized here. Solomon-Godeau arrived at the conclusion that within the context of the strictures placed on femininity in nineteenth-century France, and given Castiglione's complicit adherence to them, the Countess's efforts at self-representation, which depended, as we shall see, quite thoroughly on photography, yielded completely to objectification and left no room for subjectivity. The argument assumes that to some extent there was in the period a kind of contiguity between constructed conventional femininity, as little more than a limited type of representation, and photography, as a severely limiting representational device. In other words, as Solomon-Godeau eloquently put it—extending the logic beyond the period and proposing a kind of general truth—“like the conventionalized femininity [Castiglione] was believed to incarnate, the edges of the photographic frame are a Procrustean bed to which body and soul must accommodate themselves.”³⁴ In contrast, I argue that photography was decidedly more protean than this interpretation allows. Instead of assuming that women were not equipped to negotiate the forces of photography's objectification in the second half of the nineteenth century, the following chapters examine a particular culture of creativity that informed the Countess de Castiglione's photographic practice, wherein photography, in some of its guises, became bound to the feminine *subject*.

This chapter contextualizes the commercial and creative climate in which Castiglione's practice flourished. By considering primary sources that shed light on the nineteenth-century woman's photographic experience in terms of imagined expectations, material realities, and metaphorical possibilities, I lay the groundwork for the subsequent

³⁴ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” *October* 39 (Winter, 1986), 105.

chapters, which take up these themes from different perspectives. Given the unfortunate dearth of direct accounts by women themselves, the experience in the photographic studio—which in later chapters will come to be read as a productive and generative space for Castiglione—must be recreated with available sources. Although firsthand impressions written by women are lacking—throughout Castiglione’s correspondence she provides frustratingly few mentions of photography—, contemporaneous articles from the satiric, popular and photographic press provide illuminating accounts of women interfacing with photography. Throughout these descriptions, whether comic or concrete, there emerge common critical topoi that fixate on an anxiety over the mimetic failures inherent in photography when the medium is tasked with representing women. After an introduction to and analysis of these sources, the implications of this anxiety will be examined with respect to the culture of feminine creativity in which Castiglione and others actively participated.

Contextualizing through Caricature: Inside the Photographer’s Studio—An Experiential Narrative

Under the auspices of comedy the September 6, 1856, edition of the Parisian *Journal amusant* presented a satiric manifesto of sorts that underscored the representational rupture effected by photography, the divisive new medium that had recently taken the French capital by storm.³⁵ Charles Philippon, who had in previous publications “waged an

³⁵ Photography was not precisely a “new” medium, its invention having been formally announced nearly twenty years earlier; however, 1855 has been historiographically characterized as a watershed year in introducing photography to the French public. André Rouillé identified three significant events that took place in 1855, which contributed to what he termed “the impulsion of 1855,” photographically speaking: the founding of the *Société française de la photographie*, the *Exposition universelle* held in Paris, and the launch of what would prove to be prolific photographic studios specializing in portraiture, namely those established by André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri and Mayer and Pierson. *La Photographie en France: Texts*

unprecedented and relentless war of attrition against Louis-Philippe and the July Monarchy,” was by this point the editor of the *Journal amusant*.³⁶ This Second Empire journal directed its censored attention to the comedy of social manners—the author of this caricature’s satiric specialty. The caricaturist in question, Marcelin, whose real name was Émile Planat, was a prolific satirist of “the elegant life” who also worked for *L’Illustration* and who would go on to found his own journal in 1863, which likewise took as its subject—of interest and of derision—the ever-fascinating doings of *La Vie parisienne*.³⁷ Photography was enlisted by Marcelin as an amusing lens through which to observe Second Empire social mores on numerous occasions in the *Journal Amusant*, including installments of what he titled “photographic fantasies,” wherein people of various ages and social strata were depicted awkwardly interacting with photographs and/or photographers.³⁸

The September 6, 1856, caricature, however, took a more pointed approach. In this series of illustrations and narratives, the contested and colliding values of tradition and modernity, mythology and reality, and arts and industry were brought into relief explicitly by means of representations of women. Marcelin’s task was to describe “how

& controversies: *Une anthologie, 1816-1871* (Paris: Éditions Macula, 1989), 10. The final section of the 1856 caricature explicitly satirizes photographic portraits by Mayer and Pierson—among others—exhibited at the 1855 universal exhibition. I discuss one of these in Chapter Two.

³⁶ David Kerr, *Caricature and French Political Culture, 1830-1848: Charles Philipon and the Illustrated Press* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 2. Under the July Monarchy Philipon owned and edited *La Caricature* and *Le Charivari*. He was the original author of the image in which Louis-Philippe is metamorphosed into a pear. By 1860, Nadar, the notorious caricaturist and photographer, would become the editor in chief of the *Journal amusant*.

³⁷ Henri Bérauld, *Les graveurs du XIXe siècle : Guide de l’amateur d’estampes modernes*, vol. 9 (Paris: L. Conquet, 1885-1892), 212-213. Bérauld characterizes Marcelin’s interests as follows, “A lui l’homme et la femme du monde de 1860, l’Opéra de la rue Lepelletier et les Italiens, les premières représentations et les soirées, les bals des Tuileries et les revues, les uniformes des guides et des chasseurs de la garde, les fêtes et les plaisirs, Bade et Trouville,” 213.

³⁸ Marcelin’s “Fantaisies photographiques” are included in the August 9, 1856, and February 21, 1857, issues of the *Journal Amusant*.

the portrait of a pretty lady was made in times past” and “how the portrait of a pretty lady is made today.”³⁹ Intriguingly, and of particular interest to this study, the pretty woman and her portrait became a *medium* for Marcelin’s general reflections on two *media*—she and her image were usurped as vehicles for gauging painting’s and photography’s respective potentialities and limitations.

The position Marcelin assumed with respect to this representational debate was not so subtly proclaimed by means of his triply-exclamatory title, “Down with Photography!!!”⁴⁰ Furthermore, the extended argument that followed was prefaced by a large, two-part image that visualized the dichotomies at stake in Marcelin’s vitriolic critique [Fig. 1.1]. This introductory image pictures an oval diptych, splayed open like an exposed secret locket, or perhaps more pointedly, a daguerreotype case, revealing two contending representations of women under the general heading “portraits.” Respective alliterative inscriptions, “autrefois” and “aujourd’hui,” are placed above the individual figures, alerting Marcelin’s readers to their temporal bearings. On the left-hand side, we learn, we are privy to the mythic realm of *autrefois*—“formerly,” “in the past,” or perhaps more appropriately, “once upon a time”—, an indistinct and fabulous historical moment, while on the right we are firmly placed, whether we like it or not, in the bleak symbolic space of 1856’s “today.”

Through their portraits, Marcelin’s competing comic protagonists succinctly embody the purported representational discrepancies born of these temporalities. On the

³⁹ “Comment se faisait le portrait d’une jolie femme autrefois” and “Comment se fait le portrait d’une jolie femme aujourd’hui,” in Marcelin, “A bas la photographie!!!,” in *Journal Amusant*, no. 36, (September 6, 1856): 1-5.

⁴⁰ “A bas la photographie!!!,” Marcelin, “A bas la photographie!!!”

left, the woman of yesteryear, a voluptuous Diana, with her lunar tiara, delicately handled hunter's arrow, and strategically placed *mouche* or two, rests daintily on an abundant bed of clouds.⁴¹ Opposing her, today's *dame* sits straight-on and immobile against a uniformly black background, wearing a creased and frowning expression on a head that is slightly too small for the rest of her body, and which contrasts most obviously with her large, awkwardly placed hands. This woman on the right, Marcelin's contemporary, is as oppressed by the corseted dress that covers her from neck to foot as her ancestral counterpart is liberated in her loose and exposing robes, the ends of which billow gracefully in the celestial winds.

In the lower register of the image, bridging our space and that of the fictive images, are two *putti* engaged in a representational face off. The nude cupid of former times paints the finishing touches on his canvas with his mahlstick and box of oils as aids, while the contemporary cupid disappears, wings excepted, under the black cloth covering his photographic apparatus. Marcelin's unequivocal title and forcefully contrasted imaginary portraits conspicuously indicate the victor in this aesthetic showdown, as the painterly picture-making cupid clearly triumphs over his photograph-taking rival. Whereas the woman in the past seems to have benefited from the "pictorial license" available to the painting putto, the woman in 1856 suffers similar indignities to those imposed upon the photographing putto: she is painfully positioned and obscured in front of the lens, as he is behind it; she is bereft of any allegorical import in her image, as

⁴¹ The *mouche* or facial beauty mark, often made of silk or taffeta, was a popular adornment in aristocratic circles throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and a common decorative motif in painted portraits of women from the period.

he is deprived, through the limits of the device producing her image, of any option of representing her thus.

If this neat pictorial summary were not compelling enough, part I of “Down with Photography,” “how a portrait of a pretty lady was made in the past,” elaborates on these differences by describing the circumstances under which the artist of former times worked and yesterday’s woman posed. As has been noted, before the technological and sociological developments that popularized photography, commissioned painted portraiture of a particular scale and quality was by and large only accessible to the upper echelon, which Marcelin caricatures with gusto. In this first *textual* portrait, the reader is placed in the perspective of the viewer of the work. The portal to “autrefois” is a painting—most likely to be of Marcelin’s invention—purportedly from the second half of the eighteenth century and hanging in the Musée de Versailles. The image, as Marcelin ekphrastically describes, pictures a vast gathering of noble figures typical of a pre-revolutionary grand salon. Leisurely princes and princesses, literati, painters and musicians people the scene. The text goes to great lengths to describe the sumptuousness of the setting and then zeroes in on a corner of the image. A painter, identified by Marcelin as “Latour,” works on an image within the image, as he completes the portrait of Madame d’Egmont, who reclines on a sofa all the while being entertained by the Prince de Rohan and Marmontel. Such conditions, apparently typical of *autrefois*, transported the artist, Marcelin claimed, so that he might in turn productively transform the sitter; they made it easy for the artist to perceive “a graceful masterpiece in this

charming model who posed freely before him, to see in a woman, a divinity!”⁴² In addition to the textual description, Marcelin provides an illustration of this particular scene wherein the “real” Madame d’Egmont, in all her material and physical abundance, is juxtaposed with Latour’s painted rendition of her featuring corresponding distortions and departures [Fig. 1.2]. The painted d’Egmont appears significantly younger and more slender than her real-life model—indeed she is idealized to nearly the same degree as Marcelin’s prefatory portrait from times past, even sharing her mythological pedigree as the attributes of the bow and crescent moon diadem metamorphose the Madame into a goddess.

Part II of Marcelin’s text expands upon the temporal shift from times past to contemporary life in Paris in 1856, as it describes the modern-day trials and tribulations of having a photographic portrait taken. Rather than offering this account from the perspective of viewer or producer of the work, here Marcelin fashions an experiential narrative in the second person. The “you” in this case, far removed from Madame d’Egmont’s privileged status as a “goddess” of former times, is a pretty *petite bourgeoise* who wants to have her five francs portrait made. The economical photographic experience stands in contradistinction to the extravagant ritual of having one’s portrait painted. As opposed to the luxurious eighteenth-century salon full of royalty, plush fabric, melodious music, and charming artists, the photographer’s studio is described, in keeping with contemporaneous satiric characterizations, as a perilous industrial trap: “a sort of glass cage, precariously projecting from a roof, where the wind blows and the rain

⁴² “un chef-d’oeuvre de grâce dans ce charmant modèle qui posait devant lui sans contrainte, de voir dans une femme une divinité!” Marcelin, “A bas la photographie!!!,” 2.

pours in winter and the sun blazes throughout the summer.”⁴³ You, the pretty lady, even have to work to get there; you climb six flights of stairs and arrive out of breath, only to be met with and harnessed to a bizarre mechanical contraption reminiscent of a dentist’s chair.⁴⁴ While the past painter’s graceful surroundings engendered a painted mythological paradise in the form of the completed portrait, today’s photographer’s desperate attempts at creating any sense of “atmosphere” are rendered impotent by the phony backdrop, wilted flowers, and other pathetic props that clutter the studio.

“Today,” instead of posing comfortably on a couch for the charming court painter, you are man-handled and violated by the photographer, who is a complete stranger to you—Marcelin dramatizes the indignity of the photographer’s violent manipulation of his sitter in an accompanying illustration wherein the oft-depicted torturous mechanical contraption is replaced by the claw-like clasp hands of the photographer himself [Fig. 1.3]. Despite the disconcerting mechanics and speed with which your portrait is realized, you hold out hope that what you are paying for will provide the promised “masterpiece of likeness.”⁴⁵ Finally, your subjection to the photographic take and subsequent encounter with your own photographic image are beyond disappointing. You learn that like the triple exclamation in the caricature’s title, upon witnessing the final product you will exclaim not once, but three times: “Horror! horror! horror!” The photographic “proof” offered none of the divine grace and beauty that had been the hallmark of painted

⁴³ “une sorte de cage vitrée, prise en saillie sur un toit, où le vent siffle et la pluie ruisselle en hiver, où le soleil darde en été.” Ibid.

⁴⁴ The frightening apparatus (*appui-tête* or headrest) that kept photographic subjects still throughout the long exposure times was a popular subject in early caricatures of photography. The photographer usually guides his terrified subjects to the chair, which is topped off with a contraption fitted with large drill-type implements or other sharp devices intended to restrict movement in order to ensure a focused image.

⁴⁵ “Chef-d’oeuvre de ressemblance.” Marcelin, “A bas la photographie!!!,” 2.

portraiture, but instead reflected back at you a brutal verisimilitude, a truth that you would rather not have witnessed.

Marcelin's "pretty woman" suffered a photographic experience that was all too common throughout the mid-nineteenth century, according to the caricatural press. Although it may be surprising that the 1856 woman was so thoroughly horrified by the results of a medium that had already existed for nearly two decades, this type of visceral response to the encounter with one's photographic portrait was repeated in the press for some time to come.⁴⁶ The pretty woman, as Marcelin recounted, was traumatized by the mimetic failures of the photograph as she asked herself, while staring at the image in disbelief: "What! This black thing, charred, this ghost in a cave, this drawn face, these dead eyes, these deep wrinkles, this big nose, these giant hands, these big knees, it's me?"⁴⁷ Marcelin's distraught woman then goes home and stuffs the image in a box deep in a drawer where she happily forgets about it until one fateful day when she absentmindedly reaches into the drawer and touches the box in which her portrait is buried. In recognition, she/you—as we are still in Marcelin's second person narrative—"feel your heart seize as if you were touching a tomb...that of your illusions!"⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The experience of horror upon seeing one's photographic portrait was not limited to women, but was certainly more often characterized as such. See "Alexandre Dumas on Photography," in *The Photographic News* (August 10, 1866): 379-381, for a man's recounting of his horror upon witnessing his own image and the indignities he suffered as a sitter. Interestingly, this narrative is told in the context of Dumas' visit to Vienna from where he reported that "photography is generally practiced by women," 379. Dumas suggested that women photographers produced better portraits of men, and men better portraits of women and asked why women in Paris did not take up the trade.

⁴⁷ "Quoi! cette chose noire, charbonnée, ce fantôme dans cette cave, ce visage tiré, ces yeux éteints, ces rides dures, ce gros nez, ces grosses mains, ces gros genoux, c'est moi?," Marcelin, "A bas la photographie!!!" 2.

⁴⁸ "vous sentez votre coeur se serrer comme si vous touchiez un tombeau...celui de vos illusions!," Ibid.

The pretty woman's disillusionment, although invested in narcissistic disappointment, mirrors the author's own grievances over photography's representational faults as his comic tract forcefully concludes with a summation of photography's greatest misdeeds. Whereas Marcelin allows that photography's failures can be forgiven with respect to representations of monuments and landscapes, for example, what he claims is "unforgiveable, impious, sacrilegious; what makes photography a public calamity, a social scourge, is the photographic profanation of the pretty women and great men of our time."⁴⁹ What Marcelin ultimately laments is something akin to what Baudelaire would experience at the Salon of 1859—the first to include photography in its hallowed halls. In his nostalgic reflections on portraiture, which were informed by his own vicious critiques of photography, Baudelaire would find himself, "while contemplating M. Besson's living and luminous portraits [...] dreaming of all the grace and devotion which artists of the eighteenth century put into the pictures which they have bequeathed us of their favourite *goddesses*."⁵⁰ Painted portraiture facilitated idealization whereas photography was purportedly responsible for a "profanation" of the very ideals that had supported all that was "divine" in art.⁵¹ The camera had corrupted the proscribed ideal femininity that had been appropriated as a symbol of artistic ideals.⁵²

⁴⁹ "impardonnable, impie, sacrilège; ce qui fait de la photographie une calamité public, un fléau social, c'est la profanation photographique des jolies femmes et des grands hommes de notre temps," Ibid, 4.

⁵⁰ Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1859," *The Mirror of Art*, Jonathan Mayne, trans. (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), 277, original emphasis.

⁵¹ Baudelaire refers to the "divine art of painting" and acerbically describes photography as a new *industry* that "contributed not a little to confirm stupidity in its faith and to ruin whatever might remain of the divine in the French mind." "The Salon of 1859," 230.

⁵² Note that what the camera failed to capture was women's beauty and men's character, if we follow Marcelin's logic of "pretty women and great men." This will be problematized in terms of Castiglione's case in Chapter Three.

Objectivity, Autogenesis, Agency: Photography and the Photographic Studio as (Self-)Productive Spaces

I have undertaken an extended rehearsal and reading of Marcelin's caricature as a preface to my own project with several purposes in mind. In concert with Marcelin's concern with the status of photography as a representational medium bound to a specific time, place and purpose, I examine the corpus of photographic portraits of the Countess de Castiglione made in Paris, the earliest of which date from 1856. As was Marcelin, I am interested in analyzing the nature of the photographic experience from a particular woman's perspective, although in this case the veritable woman's encounter with the photographer and her relationship with her photographic image complicate the narrative of victimhood that Marcelin presents. While the caricaturist has erected neat binaries in his *paragone* between painting and photography, my account integrates the interstices and interactions between these and other media and examines the way particular women—albeit those with privileged social and economic status—were compelled to reckon with them. In some cases photography impelled women to renegotiate the terms of their self-representation in actively creative, rather than passively insipid, ways. In the caricature, whereas painting is configured to honor and idealize its aristocratic subject, the technology of photography tragically horrifies and reifies the unsuspecting sitter. Bearing in mind that exaggeration is one of the caricaturist's essential rhetorical tools, I invoke Marcelin's hyperboles because he concisely, if comically, mimics a method of interpreting early photographic portraits of women, one that was not only *de rigueur* in *his* time, but that persists as a critical approach to *this* day—one that, as mentioned, I hope to trouble.

The critical method itself, in a fundamental and self-conscious way, replicates the basic mechanical function of the medium of photography. Mirroring photography's status as the objectifying medium *par excellence*, there is a proclivity in interpretive approaches to read photographic portraits, and those representing women especially, as "reproducing" the objectifying function of the camera. This method follows an undeniable logic that accounts for the particularities of photography as a purportedly "unmediated" reproductive or representational medium quite unlike any that preceded it—hence the emphasis on the radical break between the present paradigm in which photography exists and the previous representational reality of past times. As André Bazin pointed out, in the French language the significance of this operation is reflected in the very vocabulary tied to the essential instrument of the photographic process—*l'objectif* being the French word for lens—and thus the title accorded to the apparatus reflects the ontological status of the entire medium.⁵³ Inherent to the critical approach that acknowledges this kind of medium specificity is a redoubling of the significance of objectivity as it functions in photography: the portrait resulting from the photographic process not only objectifies its subject but also inevitably and perhaps most significantly, reifies the ideology of objectification. Marcelin's pretty woman's shattered illusions, while presented satirically, seem to point toward a depressing cognizance of this process. Its significance becomes all the more amplified when one compares the class discrepancies inherent in the comparison between Madame d'Egmont and the pretty *petite bourgeoise*.

⁵³ André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," Hugh Gray, trans., in *Film Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Summer, 1960): 4-9, 7.

The relevance of this approach to readings of photographic portraits of women in Second Empire France is supported by the fact that, in the hands of the Empire's propaganda machine, women were appropriated as images more systematically than they were valued as subjects. It has been well rehearsed that Napoleon III's politics depended on spectularity but it has been further argued that the imperial regime specifically depended on "images of alluring women" as instruments of its political propagandizing.⁵⁴ It can be argued that the political regime and the representational medium of photography, which first flourished as a mass medium precisely in this period, both functioned to reduce women to and reproduce them as objects. Thus, approaching the veritable paradigm shift that resulted from the introduction of photography from this perspective seems entirely apropos.

Women existed in social discourse in this period principally as objects rather than as agents; as representations rather than those positioned to actively represent themselves. Anne Higonnet described how throughout the nineteenth century "the idea of genius gendered creativity."⁵⁵ In terms of these contemporaneous "conceptions," women's creativity was essentialized as being rooted in procreation: "Against the conflated values of activity, imagination, production, and masculine sexuality are pitted the similarly indivisible values of passivity, imitation, reproduction, and feminine sexuality. Men create original works of art; women recreate themselves in their children."⁵⁶ However, Higonnet proposed that the invention of photography complicated this binary as it

⁵⁴ Morrill, "Politics, Prosperity, and Pleasure," 8. For spectularity as an overarching strategy see: Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and the Fête Impériale, 1849-1870* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁵⁵ Anne Higonnet, "Image—Appearances, Leisure, and Subsistence," in *A History of Women in the West: IV Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, eds. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1993): 246-305, 249.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

“relaxed definitions of authorship.”⁵⁷ She cited Julia Margaret Cameron as an example of a woman who was able to establish herself as a serious practitioner of photography precisely because of its insecure place between art and industry or science. Furthermore, she even underscored that “in the photographer’s studio the relationship between artist and model could almost be reversed; the photographer might be passive while his subject staged herself, fashioning an identity for the camera’s machinery to record.”⁵⁸

Interestingly, following this remark Higonnet mentioned Castiglione, along with hysterics from the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris who were photographed by Jean-Martin Charcot and his staff, and Hannah Culwick.⁵⁹ While she identified photography as providing an inroad for women’s creative authorship, in Castiglione’s case she described that the countess presented herself “as an outrageous courtesan, spectacle of sexuality and object of desire,” rather than as an active creative agent.⁶⁰ She asked in the context of the three cases cited above: “Were these women expressing or exploiting themselves? Were they asserting the validity of marginal identities or were they trapped by roles their images sealed?”⁶¹ In response Higonnet proposed that “the contradictions of their self-

⁵⁷ Ibid., 258.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Charcot, the Salpêtrière, and the photographing of hysterics will be discussed in Chapter Four. Hannah Cullwick (British, 1833-1909) was a domestic worker who eventually married a barrister named Arthur Munby. Munby had an intense fascination with women laborers and often sought photographs of them. Cullwick obliged this fascination (and others throughout their sadomasochistic relationship) with a seemingly eager willingness and had a series of photographs of herself made as she performed manual labor, crossdressed, etc. Both Cullwick and Munby kept diaries that recorded their lives together. See: Liz Stanley, *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1984); Barry Reay, *Watching Hannah: Sexuality, Horror and Bodily De-Formation in Victorian England* (London: Reaktion, 2002); Leonore Davidoff, “Class and Gender in Victorian England: The Diaries of Arthur J. Munby and Hannah Cullwick,” in *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 86- 141.

⁶⁰ Higonnet, “Images,” 258.

⁶¹ Ibid.

representations clarify by exaggeration the tensions inherent in all women's identities in a modern industrial consumer culture."⁶²

As I have suggested, there is no question that these tensions and contradictions exist. However, existing scholarship on Castiglione in particular has favored one side of these equations at the expense of acknowledging the other: exploitation has overridden expression and the sense that Castiglione is trapped by representation has triumphed over interpreting these images as creative assertions. To allow for more agency on the part of the countess, I strategize a shift from a perspective that interprets photographic portraiture through a mechanical model or metaphor that governs the operations intrinsic to and behind the camera—and thus imposes “objectivity” and at times objectification on the photographic results—to one that considers a metaphorical and literal point of view that better accounts for the goings on in front of the camera, that is, from the sitter's perspective. In what follows I argue that the concept of autogenesis provides a compelling interpretive metaphor for a category of photographic portraits throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

Autogenesis, a term appropriated from scientific discourse, can be defined as: “origination with no external cause; self-generation.”⁶³ The concept of autogenesis is also ontologically linked with the medium of photography, and to a more complicated degree with objectification, in that from the outset of the announcement of the invention of photography it was understood that the photographic subject constituted *itself*. In 1839 in France, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre concluded his announcement of the invention of

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ “autogenesis, n.” OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/13425?redirectedFrom=autogenesis> (accessed April 03, 2014).

his and Nicéphore Niépce's reproductive process to the public by proclaiming: "the DAGUERREOTYPE is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; on the contrary it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself."⁶⁴ As Steve Edwards has noted in a chapter examining the implications of autogenesis in English photography, William Henry Fox Talbot distinguished his invention, the photographic camera, from the camera lucida and the camera obscura, by similarly claiming that in photography's case "it is not the artist who makes the picture, but the picture which makes ITSELF."⁶⁵ While Edwards discusses autogenesis and objectivity as they were understood to relate to photography by "men of science," it is difficult to account for the extent to which such notions circulated as common conceptions.

Caricatural visual culture can provide some insight into this phenomenon. In J.J. Grandville's epic fantastical satire, *Un autre monde*, one illustration features a scene that depicts, as the original French caption from 1844 stated, "la lune peinte par elle-même" [the moon painted by herself] [Fig. 1.4]. The moon, personified as a young woman with a "full moon" face, hovers on two massive floating cushions over a body of water. As in the myth of Narcissus, the moon-woman appears to be enamored of her image, which gets reflected back at her. Three years later, in the 1847 German edition of Grandville's work, *Eine Andere Welt von Plinius dem Jüngsten*, the caption for the same image has

⁶⁴ Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, "Daguerreotype," in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980): 11-13, 13. Daguerre's originally published in 1839.

⁶⁵ Talbot wrote this in a letter to the editor of *The Literary Gazette* on January 30, 1839 (published February 2, 1839). Steve Edwards quotes Talbot in his fascinating chapter, "'fairy pictures' and 'fairy fingers': the photographic imagination and the subsumption of skill," which links notions of autogenesis to the "masculinization of reproduction," as conceived by Talbot. In, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 31.

been modified, significantly, to read, “the moon daguerreotyping herself” [Fig. 1.5].⁶⁶

Three years after its original publication, the self-generated image in Grandville’s illustration is understood in terms of photography rather than with reference to painting.

It is reasonable enough to assume that a general awareness of the potential agency of the subject in the photographic process existed in a dramatically different way from the way it had for sitters of painted portraits. Ultimately, however, agency in self-representation in the photographer’s studio and in the photographic portrait was not a universal right but rather the particular privilege of those with means. Those without monetary means also were bereft of any significant degree of representational wherewithal in the context of photographic portraiture.

In an article titled “The Machine’s Dialogue,” Steve Edwards pointed to the thriving theoretical trend in the 1980s of identifying the photographic studio as a “site of ideology.”⁶⁷ Edwards’ argument confronted and pointed out efforts to bridge the competing frameworks of post-structuralism and a kind of humanism, which respectively see the studio—never mind the medium itself—on the one hand as a controlling and appropriating ideological apparatus and on the other, as a space for a potentially more balanced exchange between photographer and photographic subject. Edwards reconfigures the structuralist/humanist debate in terms of the Bakhtinian school’s notions of Dialogue and Monologue. Briefly stated, the dialogical model, which might be said to operate on a more humanistic level, acknowledges that “we orientate upon the other’s

⁶⁶ “Luna sich selbst Daguerreotypirend.” This comparison is identified by Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget Ann Henisch in *The Photographic Experience, 1839-1914: Images And Attitudes* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 6-7.

⁶⁷ Edwards, Steve. “The Machine’s Dialogue.” *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1990: 63-76, 63. I thank Robin Kelsey and Susan Siegfried for directing me to this essay.

word, we incorporate it into our utterance which only takes shape in relation to it.”⁶⁸

Dialogue, as its etymology suggests, is conversational, characterized by reciprocity and exchange. Monologue, on the other hand, conforms to structuralist interpretations of the ideological power of the photographic studio and is more generally understood as an “utterance to which we are unable to formulate a reply.”⁶⁹ It is singular discourse and refuses the other while it might speak *for* it.

Edwards proceeds to argue that the photographic studio “constitutes a monological site; for the photographer it operates as a space in which to assert mastery over the object of fascination.”⁷⁰ The studio operates according to a logic of dominance imposed by the photographer and the camera onto the subject: “the camera turns the subject of the photographer’s fascination into an object which is, by definition, dumb.”⁷¹ The dynamics particular to these opposing discursive modes, as proposed by Bakhtin and applied to the studio by Edwards, also mirror the divergent modes of artistic production satirized by Marcelin. The painted portrait of past times mutually benefits painter and patron and the creative environment is literally sonorous with dialogue between the sitter and those around her. The photographer’s studio, by contrast, is explicitly decorated with instruments of repression and control and the photographic take produces an image that is at odds with the subject’s self-conception, effectively transforming her from a person into a horrifying object.

⁶⁸ Edwards, “The Machine’s Dialogue,” 64.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Although his argument is forceful in its insistence on the studio as a monologic site, Edwards makes allowances for alternatives. In an attempt to strengthen the analogy between linguistic power dynamics and more somatic ones at stake in the studio photograph, Edwards invokes André Rouillé's categories of subject-body and object-body. The difference is neatly summarized by Edwards as follows:

The distinction that Rouillé makes is between those bodies which display themselves and those which are revealed. This is an issue of matching different types of power relationships between photographer and subject. Subject-body pertains above all to the bourgeois portrait while the object-body relates to those who appear powerless before the camera, certain kinds of women, dominated peoples and classes, and so on.⁷²

The subject-body forms its image in dialogue with the photographer, while the photographer singularly constitutes the object-body. Edwards make the distinction yet more explicit:

The bourgeois portrait, in this sense, proves to be the exception that demonstrates the studio's monologic rule. Here the object, or more specifically in this instance, the subject of the camera's gaze, the individual bourgeois, acts as co-author. In the 19th-century portrait, these powerful subjects collaborate with the photographer to determine the codes of their own appearance, producing a self-image invested with confidence and contentment.⁷³

If we give any credence to Marcelin's caricature as nevertheless indicative of a kind of cultural truth, then Edwards' generalizations about the bourgeois photographic portrait are overemphatic. The pretty woman was certainly not privy to any kind of "confidence and contentment" and Marcelin even suggested that "great men" suffered indignities through the photographic process. Despite Marcelin's comic claims, there is, as Edwards suggests, a meaningful way in which the invention of photography and the dynamics of the photography studio called the passivity of the model into question. The Countess de Castiglione seized photographic agency with an unrelenting enthusiasm and it is to the

⁷² Ibid, 68.

⁷³ Ibid.

significance of this particular figure and her creative endeavors that this accumulated argument about photography now turns.

Reconstructing a Real Woman's Experience: The Countess de Castiglione *chez* Mayer and Pierson

In July of 1856, only a few months prior to Marcelin's caricature, a real young woman, the nineteen-year-old Virginia Oldoini Verasis, Countess de Castiglione, would have made her first trip to a leading Parisian photography studio, Mayer and Pierson, to have her portrait taken by Pierre-Louis Pierson (1822-1913), a well-respected photographic portraitist and co-owner of the photographic firm. Castiglione shared with Marcelin's fictional pretty lady the very contemporary desire to have her likeness materially preserved by the nascent medium that had captivated the industrial world, and Paris in particular, especially following the *Exposition universelle* of 1855. Marcelin's invective explicitly responded to that exhibition, wherein Mayer and Pierson had exhibited several photographs to great acclaim.⁷⁴ Despite the shared inclination toward photographic portraiture, the similarities between Marcelin's contemporary protagonist and the Countess de Castiglione were few and far between.

Although Marcelin provides very little information about his pretty woman of "today," based on the information he does offer and given the type of photographer she

⁷⁴ "A bas la photographie!!!" contains a section that describes actual exhibited photographic portraits of celebrities, comparing the pathetic photographic results with the glorious originals. Although identified by italicized caption below the satiric illustrations as "*Chez Meyer* [sic]," several of these photographs placed under scrutiny by Marcelin were in fact by Pierre-Louis Pierson, including portraits of the great French tragedienne, Rachel, which will be examined in the next chapter. Despite the caricaturist's claims against their aesthetic merit, Mayer and Pierson received high praise for these portraits in the photographic press following the 1855 exhibition. See Ernest Lacan, *Esquisses photographiques: À propos de l'exposition universelle et de la guerre d'orient* (Paris: A. Gaudin et frères, 1856): 126-129.

visits—a “five francs” portraitist—it is clear that she was among the class of Second Empire *petites bourgeoises*, although Marcelin never explicitly names her as such. The petty bourgeoisie’s “confidence and contentment” was phantasmagorically promised under Napoleon III’s reign, but materially elusive, and this disconnect was made manifest in the narrative and images corresponding to her bleak photographic experience. This helps us understand why she would likely be excluded from Edwards’s/Rouillé subject-body category—she was precisely one of those “certain kinds of women” who were “powerless before the camera.”⁷⁵

“Today’s” woman’s likeness would have ranked among the flood of portraits made possible by the invention of the daguerreotype, which was responsible for, in one observer’s eye, “one of the most deplorable, among the numerous epidemics, which, in these recent times, have taken Parisians as their prey: *portraitureomania*.”⁷⁶ *La portraitureomanie* was characterized by its detractors as a sickness given its viral spread among the masses who had encroached upon a representational terrain foreign to them, resulting in a “diseased” desire for photographic portraits that feigned importance, but reflected back “an internal turgidity, a naïve and comic self-importance.”⁷⁷ Castiglione would endure an altogether different photographic fate, despite the fact that she would come to suffer from a chronic case of *portraitureomania*, if ever there were one, and notwithstanding that she has been characterized as embodying precisely those qualities

⁷⁵ Edwards, “The Machine’s Dialogue,” 68.

⁷⁶ “l’une des plus déplorables parmi les nombreuses épidémies qui, dans ces derniers temps, ont fait leur proie du Parisien: la portraitureomanie,” Victor Fournel, *Ce qu’on voit dans les rues de Paris* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1867), 400. This kind of rhetoric equating the interest in and desire for photographic portraits with sickness and disease is earlier and most famously articulated by Baudelaire in “The Salon of 1859.” Note some of Baudelaire’s terminology: “deplorable symptom,” references to infection, “madness,” etc.

⁷⁷ “un gonflement intérieur, une importance naïve et comique,” *ibid.*, 415.

reiterated in the photographic portraits that were described by the neologist who coined the timely term.

Castiglione, as a Countess, was firmly a member of the aristocratic class and a great deal is known about her biography. Her life was almost farcical in its intrigue and eccentricity and certainly reads as the stuff of legend. Born in 1837 to an aristocratic family from La Spezia, in northern Italy, and raised in Florence, Virginia Oldoini, or “Nicchia,” as she was affectionately called, was adored and indulged by her parents and widely admired for her keen intelligence, strength of character and extraordinary beauty, long before she would be secularly beatified as “La Divine Comtesse.”⁷⁸ Under the guidance of her maternal grandfather, Antonio Lamporecchi, a prominent Tuscan jurisconsult, Virginia received a thorough education, becoming an accomplished linguist and habituated to the company of foreign dignitaries who regularly visited the Lamporecchi villa.⁷⁹ There were high aspirations for the young Florentine and no shortage of suitors vying for the hand of the “most beautiful woman in Europe,” as she was reputed to be.⁸⁰

At sixteen, Virginia was married to Francesco Verasis, Conte di Castiglione (1826-1867), of Turin, a minor attaché in the court of Vittorio Emanuele II—then King of

⁷⁸ This designation is continually used to describe Castiglione and forms the title of Robert de Montesquiou’s biography, *La Divine Comtesse: Études d’après Madame de Castiglione* (Paris: Goupil & Cie, 1913). Montesquiou notes that moniker was not a posthumous invention but that it was used throughout Castiglione’s lifetime.

⁷⁹ Foremost among the distinguished figures frequently cited as visitors to the Lamporecchi villa, were members of the Bonaparte family who periodically stayed at the villa during their exile. This period would have marked the first encounter between Virginia and Louis Napoleon. See: Giles Stephen Holland Fox-Strangways Ilchester. *Chronicles of Holland House, 1820-1900* (London: J. Murray, 1937), 414, and, Gygès, “La Comtesse de Castiglione,” *L’Événement* (April 22, 1892).

⁸⁰ Alain Decaux, *La Castiglione dame de coeur de l’Europe : d’après sa Correspondance et son Journal intime inédits* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1999), 21.

Sardinia and Piedmont—a union that earned her the title, Contessa di Castiglione. In December of 1855, shortly following the birth of what would be their only child, Giorgio, she and her husband departed for Paris, ostensibly to pay a visit to her cousin, Countess Maria Anna Walewski, and her husband, Count Alexandre Walewski, the illegitimate son of Napoleon I, and Minister for Foreign Affairs under Napoleon III. The actual purpose of her visit to the French capital, which history would reluctantly reveal, was to fulfill a rather voluptuous diplomatic mission. Her cousin through marriage, Count Camillo Cavour, then minister of finance under Vittorio Emanuele II, had sent Castiglione to Paris as an unofficial agent in his quest for Italian unity. Having identified Napoleon III's weakness for beautiful women, Cavour directed her to “flirt” and “seduce,” if need be, in order to convert the French Emperor to the Italian cause.⁸¹ By some estimations she did succeed, but the precise nature of her maneuverings became a matter of speculation, arousing a great deal of published gossip. For a brief period, then, Castiglione became the mistress of Napoleon III and a sparkling *vedette* of his *fête imperiale*, never hesitating to make a scene with her spectacular beauty and provocative costumes.

⁸¹ Proof of Cavour having mandated this “mission” is scant. Biographers have offered corroborative evidence in the form of letters by Cavour describing Castiglione's role and outlining the terms of a verbal contract. Robert de Montesquiou cites a letter by Cavour to Count Luigi Cibrario confirming a deal made by Cavour promising Castiglione's father a diplomatic post in Saint Petersburg if she should succeed in convincing Napoleon III of the Italian cause, *R. de Montesquiou: son oeuvre poétique et littéraire publiée: La Divine Comtesse: étude sur la Comtesse de Castiglione: édition originale, première partie* in *Vie de Robert de Montesquiou: cent-cinquante-huitième volume*, NAF 15169, 1913, 156. Cavour's letter from February 1856, states: “I inform you that I have enlisted in the diplomatic ranks the beautiful Countess di ... [sic] inviting her to *coqueter* and seduce, should it be necessary, the Emperor. I promised her that if successful, I will ask that her father receive the post of secretary in Saint Petersburg. Yesterday, in the concert at the Tuilleries, she discretely began her role.” [“V'avverto che ho arruolata nelle file della diplomazia la bellissima contessa di ... [sic] invitandola a *coqueter* ed a sedurre, se fosse d'uopo, l'imperatore. Le ho promesso, che ove riesca, avrei richiesto per suo padre il posto di segretario a Pietroburgo. Essa ha cominciato discretamente la sua parte nel concerto delle Tuilleries di ieri.”] In *Il Conte Luigi Cibrario e i tempi suoi: memorie storiche di Federico Odorici con documenti* (Firenze: Stabilimento Giuseppe Civelli, 1872), 116. Castiglione's father was eventually posted to Saint Petersburg.

Initially, the Second Empire's policy of ostentation, which relied on the spectacularity of its female citizens, suited as much as it welcomed her. The beautiful Italian's exoticism was well received and her eccentricities tolerated for a time. Despite having been admired and in some circles embraced, Castiglione remained an outsider, at first actively taking advantage of the relative freedom associated with her foreign status, but eventually suffering from exclusion and isolation as a result of both her actual and perceived improprieties. Quite early in her "career," Castiglione was briefly banished from the French court following an assassination attempt against the Emperor as he was leaving her Paris residence at three in the morning in April of 1857.⁸²

By this time her husband had become frustrated with her reluctance to perform her "wifely duties," shamed by her libertine behavior and reputation and bankrupted by her profligate spending habits; the couple separated that same year.⁸³ The Count returned to Italy where the Countess took refuge for a brief period of time until she was able to return to Paris, the city that she proceeded to adopt as her home for the rest of her life.

Despite the Count's urgings that the Countess reform her behavior, restore her religiosity,

⁸² This episode is recounted in *The Memoirs of Count Horace de Viel Castel: A Chronicle of the Principal Events, Political and Social during the Reign of Napoleon III from 1851 to 1864*, Charles Bousfield, trans. (London: Remington and Co. Publishers, 1888), 36.

⁸³ The terms of separation between the Countess and the Count are recorded in a letter that is quoted in Etienne Ader, ed., *Correspondance inédites et archives privées de Virginia Vérasis Comtesse de Castiglione* (Paris: Frazier-Soye, 1951). As the terms are both telling and entertaining, they are worth quoting in part here: "Parmi les motifs de separation, le comte retient ceux-ci: '1 Refus de la part de la Cse de se soumettre aux devoirs naturels du mariage sous prétexte qu'elle ne veut plus être grosse une 2ème fois, ce qui oblige le mari à des scenes ridicules et ennuyeuses pour obtenir ce qui lui est légitimement dû; 2 Manque d'obéissance complète envers son mari que la Cse traite sans cesse avec la plus grande dureté, ayant toujours l'air, meme devant des étrangers, de le regarder comme un imbécile qui n'est bon à rien; 3 Manque complet de religion puisque depuis plus d'un an la Cse n'a pratiqué aucune pratique de religion et que le dimanche ce n'est pas sans peine que le mari obtient qu'elle aille à l'Église pour la seule messe; 4 Conduite souvent blamable surtout dans les apparences, la Cse affichant sans cesse avec tel ou tel autre une intimité qui, quoique innocente peut-être, dans le fond, lui fait du tort surtout aux yeux du monde, ce qui ne convient pas au mari; 5 Luxe effrené dans sa toilette et mille nécessités qui coûtent cher et ne sont pas en rapport avec la fortune du mari [etc.],' 16."

and resume her marital and maternal commitments, the Countess remained obstinate in her independence. Tragically, the Count di Castiglione died in 1867 after having been accidentally trampled by a horse at a royal Italian wedding. Although the Countess had a conflicted relationship with her son, his own premature death from smallpox in 1879 would trigger the by then habitual melancholic's perpetual mourning. Until her death in 1899, Castiglione would live in Paris in quite consistent isolation, only rarely leaving her modest apartment at night to walk her two beloved dogs, as legend would have it.

As a singular figure of drama and intrigue, Castiglione's glamorous liaisons, idiosyncratic temperament and unparalleled beauty inspired the pens of journalists, satirists, diarists, novelists, biographers, the brushes of painters, and the chisels of sculptors. During her lifetime and after, these chroniclers often took advantage of the opportunity to craft sensational stories that would have compromised her reputation and appealed to an era obsessed with women's respectability.⁸⁴ Near the end of Castiglione's life, there is evidence that she began to write her memoir, which could have presumably served the purposes of confirming her political legacy and instrumentality in securing Italian unity, which she perceived to be grossly underestimated; "correcting" rumors circulating about her, with which she took exception, and on occasion actively intervened to set straight in the press; and generally commemorating her daring and fascinatingly unconventional life.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ For a thorough account of the respectability debate and its impact on women's lives throughout the period, see: Morrill, "Politics, Prosperity, and Pleasure."

⁸⁵ In an unforgiving article from 1903, Charles Foley reported that Castiglione began to dictate her memoirs to her friend, General Estancelin, because her "scribbling was indecipherable." Foley claimed, according to Estancelin's reports, that she confused dates, exaggerated her importance, omitted painful memories and denied her affair with Napoleon III, claiming it to be a platonic relationship. A clipping of this article

Notwithstanding her intention, her written memoirs never materialized. However, it can be argued that Castiglione's photographic corpus was bequeathed to history through collaboratively executed yet nevertheless tightly monitored and controlled *self-articulation*. Furthermore, given the consistency with which Castiglione frequented Pierson's studio to produce these photographs, the variety of poses she assumed, and the expanse of (life)time that the photographs attend to, the corpus can productively be read in concert with recent theorizations of the significance of women's memoirs throughout the period. Castiglione's remarkable biography became the fodder for many chroniclers, detractors more often than admirers, to the extent that her life played out on a compromising public stage. By contrast, the private space of the photographic studio provided a retreat from the public scrutiny to which she was subject to the extent that creating the photographs became a kind of diaristic practice. In her strict control over the production and distribution of her photographic portraits, Castiglione provided a self-fashioned framework from which to measure the myth of the "Divine Comtesse." The implications of the "visual memoir" with respect to Castiglione's corpus will be thoroughly examined in Chapter Three. Before the photographs themselves are analyzed in subsequent chapters, the significance of Castiglione's choice of Pierson as a collaborator and her experience in this particular studio will be analyzed in greater depth.

Castiglione's experience in Mayer and Pierson's photographic studio in 1856, very shortly after her initial and pseudo-diplomatic arrival in Paris, would have been quite different from Marcelin's poor *jolie dame's* five francs sitting. Climbing only two flights of stairs, as opposed to the pretty woman's six, the Countess would have followed

appears in the Fonds Montesquiou at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF 15170, 63, but its source is not identified.

in the footsteps of Mayer and Pierson's illustrious clientele who frequented their lavish establishment at 3 boulevard des Capucines, one of four of Paris's fashionable *grands boulevards* and home to several other "temples of photography," including those owned by Nadar and Gustave Le Gray.⁸⁶ Mayer and Pierson's newly renovated studio had opened its doors a year earlier in time to capitalize on the surge in interest in photographic portraiture following the 1855 universal exhibition. A brief note in the photographic journal, *La Lumière*, reported the King of Portugal's and his brother's visit to Mayer and Pierson's new studio in 1855, describing their experience as follows: "After having crossed their splendid waiting room, their workshop and their magnificent gallery, a veritable museum of photography, the king and his brother posed for their portraits, which were admirably executed."⁸⁷ An engraving of Mayer and Pierson's studio from 1858 pictures the vast and finely decorated space of the reception room wherein refined gentlemen and one elegant woman are gathered and a formal portrait of Napoleon III is prominently displayed on the right wall [Fig. 1.6]. The long hall, precociously described in *La Lumière* as a museum of photography, recedes through the archway in the right background of the image. Rather than being decorated with mirrors, the studio's hall's visitors are presented with a massive reflection of French high society in what appear to

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Anne McCauley describes the conditions of the Mayer brothers' and Pierre-Louis Pierson's merger, which was marked by the opening of an expansive and expensive new studio in 1855. The Mayers and Pierson "paid 10,000 francs per year to rent several suites of rooms on the second floor facing the street and the third floor overlooking the courtyard. They also had to convert a tailor's shop into a studio by adding a cast-iron and glass room, covering a terrace overlooking the boulevard, and enlarging the windows of one of the apartments. In addition, they cut through an outside entry from 35 rue Louis-le-Grand for a total construction bill of 9,000 francs." McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 64. Jean Sagne characterizes these studios as "les temples de la photographie" after contemporaneous accounts describing them as such. See, Sagne, *L'atelier du photographe (1840-1940)* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1984): 154-158.

⁸⁷ "Après avoir parcouru leurs splendides salon d'attente, leurs ateliers et leur magnifique galerie, veritable musée de photographie, le roi et son frère ont possé pour leurs portraits, qui ont été admirablement réussis." *La Lumière*, 1855/06/09, 93.

be hundreds of hanging and framed photographic portraits. Mayer and Pierson's exclusive new photographic firm spared no expense in separating itself from the caricatured bleakness of the type of commercial studio operated by Marcelin's "five francs" portraitist.

While the Mayer frères, Frédéric and Ernest, had already established themselves as popular photographers to the fashionable elite—by 1854 Napoleon III had officially named the brothers "Photographers to His Majesty the Emperor"—Pierson's entrance to the firm presented the advantage of appealing particularly to female customers. If we are to believe the photographic press, this he accomplished precisely by averting the pitfalls of photography that were satirized in Marcelin's caricature. A glowing review of Pierson's particular aptitudes published in *La Lumière* in 1854 pointed out women's penchant for his work: "M. Pierson is one of the artist-photographers whose colored prints please the public the most. Women especially love the graceful quality of his work, wherein the truth, sometimes a little too brutal in photography, is softened by a spiritual and gallant paintbrush."⁸⁸ Although the author goes on to extol Pierson's untouched photographs, his retouched and painted work apparently greatly pleased those women seeking refuge from the unforgiving harshness of the unadulterated photographic image. By 1860, Mayer and Pierson's success had become so contingent on satisfying such desires that it was reported that out of their sixty employees, no fewer than twenty were painters who produced "watercolors" executed with great artistry.⁸⁹ Mayer and Pierson

⁸⁸ "M. Pierson est un des artistes photographes dont les épreuves coloriées plaisent le plus au public. Les femmes surtout aiment la grâce de ses portraits, où la vérité, parfois un peu brutale de la photographie, se trouve adoucie par un pinceau spirituel et galant." *La Lumière* (11/17/1854): 183.

⁸⁹ "L'établissement de MM. Mayer et Pierson occupe soixante employés, dont vingt peintres pour les aquarelles qui ne sauraient être faites avec plus d'art." Pawla Bogdanoff, *L'Illustration* (11/3/1860): 310

had managed successfully to bridge the discrepancy between the previous paradigm of the glorifying and idealizing painted portrait and the new brutal reality of the photographic portrait, which, at least according to the comic and the photographic presses, offended many women's sensibilities and expectations in terms of what this new and accessible "art" might offer them.

While Marcelin's caricature was a particularly cogent articulation of women's purported aversion to seeing their "true" image reflected back at them through the photographic process, the press was replete with similar tales. Even Mayer and Pierson poked fun at their female clients at a banquet celebrating the firm's achievements in 1859:

If photography has its charms, it can also boast of having its inconveniences and annoyances. If you only knew what tortures we were subject to by certain clients [*clients et clientes*]!... For example, the latter accuse us of always making the nose too short, the mouth too small and the eyes too big, the waist too thin, the hands too small, etc. In short, it would need be that our instrument made each woman [*cliente*] a Venus de Milo or de' Medici. I assure you that I'd rather take the portraits of fifty men on horseback or even of five Auvergnats.⁹⁰

Although the speaker, Frédéric Mayer, is ironically cataloguing inversions of common photographic "mistakes"—usual complaints were that the hands appeared too big, the eyes too small and squinted, etc.—he acknowledges women's particular preoccupation with and expectation that they conform to a mythic ideal that had been canonized by other representational media, whether it be painting, in Marcelin's account, or ancient sculpture, as alluded to in Mayer and Pierson's banquet speech.

⁹⁰ "Si la photographie à ses agréments, elle peut se flatter d'avoir aussi ses désagréments et ses agacements. Si vous saviez à quelles tortures nous sommes exposés par certains clients et clientes !... Ainsi, par exemple, ces dernières nous accusent de leur faire toujours le nez trop court, la bouche trop petite et les yeux trop grands, la taille trop fine, les mains trop petites, etc. Bref il faudrait que notre pauvre instrument fit de chaque cliente une Venus de Milo ou de Medicis. Je vous rassure que j'aimerais mieux faire les portraits de cinquante hommes à cheval ou même de cinq Auvergnats." Pauline Bauchet, *La photographie Mayer frères et Pierson aux Frères-Provençaux, 8 février, 1859—Compte-rendu du banquet photographique* (Paris: Imprimerie Centrale de Napoleon Chaix et Compagnie, 1859), 15.

In electing to sit for Mayer and Pierson in 1856, the young Countess de Castiglione could have felt assured, while placing herself before Pierre-Louis Pierson's lens, that the results would honor her image rather than do violence to and disfigure it, as they were otherwise liable to do.⁹¹ Rather than being relegated to a forgotten mass of pathetic photographic portraits, Castiglione might have imagined that hers would one day rank among the exceptional images inducted into Mayer and Pierson's "museum of photography." As it turned out, as opposed to being horrified by her likeness, Castiglione so thoroughly embraced her photographic experience with Pierson that she would continue to commission him to execute her portraits throughout her life. Rather than returning to the studio intermittently to get her portrait taken, as was customarily done by most people at this time, Castiglione's portraitomania got the better of her and she developed her unusual collaborative relationship with Pierson. Over roughly a forty-year span, from the initial encounter in the studio in 1856 until approximately four years before her death, with Pierson behind the lens, and Castiglione in front of it, eventually assiduously staging and directing the outcome, the pair collaboratively produced somewhere in the region of four-hundred distinct photographic portraits of the Countess.⁹² The remarkable corpus represents a breadth of production that is virtually unprecedented in the period.⁹³

⁹¹ I use the word honor deliberately, following Allan Sekula's discussion of photography's double function in operating "*honorifically* and *repressively*" (his emphasis), "The Body and the Archive," 6. Edwards's "The Machine's Dialogue" is indebted to Sekula's scholarship while it offers an alternative point of view with respect to photography as conducive to dialogical collaborations between photographer and sitter.

⁹² The total number of photographic portraits of Castiglione produced by Pierson is difficult to ascertain. Montesquiou collected as many portraits of her as he could locate following her death, as he was compiling a kind of *catalogue raisonné* to complement his biographical study of Castiglione and finally decorate his *Pavillon des muses*. At the beginning of his chapter, "Effigies et atours," he claimed to possess 434 different portraits of Castiglione—this included a limited number of painted portraits, pastels and

While a great portion of the photographs the pair produced are prosaic and conventional studio portraits, as the nature of the collaborative practice shifted from an impersonal contract between a commercial photographer and privileged client, to an elaborate project of self-representation directed by Castiglione, the duo extended their practice to the experimental and the risqué. As early as 1857, Castiglione's name had ceased to appear on official Mayer and Pierson client registers—she had evidently become a “private” and very particular client of Pierson's.⁹⁴ Throughout the corpus, the photographer and model memorialized Castiglione's spectacular appearances at costume balls, accommodated her fantasies, commemorated—and under only one circumstance commercialized—her single public appearance in a *tableau-vivant*, and even documented her ageing. In addition to straightforward portraits, she commissioned more complex portraits in fancy-dress, and “enacted” portraits representing theatrical roles and imagined dramatic situations. Castiglione also commissioned portraits of her son, some of which intriguingly and rather disturbingly present him as a diminutive version of herself, as well as photographs of her exposed legs and feet, which would have been scandalous in their time, and have been analyzed by Abigail Solomon-Godeau in her groundbreaking article, “The Legs of the Countess.”⁹⁵

sculptures, most of which were based on photographs within his collection. Montesquiou, *La Divine Comtesse*, 49.

⁹³ Although there were others who engaged in projects of serial photographic (self-)portraiture throughout the century (celebrities such as actresses, or, interestingly, often male painters, for example, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, William Holman Hunt), the close collaboration between Castiglione and Pierson and the extraordinary quantity of images they produced seem to have been exceptional. In terms of the breadth of production, again, curiously, the only roughly contemporaneous figure I am aware of whose photographic portraits surpass Castiglione's in number is another male artist/author, Mark Twain, who is said to have staged more than five-hundred distinct photographic “self images.” See, Linda Haverty Rugg, “Illumination and Obfuscation: Mark Twain's Photographic Autobiography,” in *Picturing Ourselves: Photography & Autobiography* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997): 29-78.

⁹⁴ Apraxine, “*La Divine Comtesse*”: *Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, 26.

⁹⁵ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” *October* 39 (Winter, 1986): 65-108.

Photography and “Productive Mimesis”: Rereading Irigaray

Solomon-Godeau’s “The Legs of the Countess” provided a rigorous reading of Castiglione’s photographic legacy and remains the most theorized interpretation of Castiglione’s portraits. Solomon-Godeau acknowledged that the corpus of photographs offer a promising witness to Castiglione’s potential agency and manifest subjecthood and allowed that Castiglione was the “architect of her own representations.”⁹⁶ Ultimately, however, in Solomon-Godeau’s account, the images come to be read as a “melancholy excursus on the conundrum of feminine self-representation.”⁹⁷ For Solomon-Godeau, the Countess’s “total embrace and identification with the look of the other [man/patriarchy],”⁹⁸ as pictured in the images, exemplifies, or more accurately, embodies, Luce Irigaray’s notion of “subjectivity denied to woman.”⁹⁹

Solomon-Godeau critically accounted for, and effectively dismissed, the agency in Castiglione’s entire oeuvre by interpreting it through the “lens” of the photographs of Castiglione’s legs—in fact a small, and, somewhat anomalous, category of image within the corpus. These images function arguably more than the other portraits to objectify the Countess as they compositionally dismember her. Several photographs picture a figure cropped from the shoulders down seated or standing leaning against a chair with a heavy dark skirt delicately raised to reveal the provocative fleshiness of undressed calves,

⁹⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁹⁹ Luce Irigaray, “Any Theory of the ‘Subject’ Has Always Been Appropriated by the ‘Masculine,’” in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Gillian C. Gill, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1985), 133.

ankles and feet [Fig. 1.7].¹⁰⁰ These few headless figures, Castiglione stripped of her identity, Solomon-Godeau convincingly places somewhere between the mode of the fetish and the forensic. They are made to stand in metonymically for an oeuvre that, according to Solomon-Godeau's account, systematically denies subjectivity, prohibits agency, and renders Castiglione "less an author than a scribe."¹⁰¹

While Solomon-Godeau's essay is sustained with an expansive reading of the photographs of Castiglione's legs and their relationship to other fetishizing photographic practices established throughout the Second Empire, she concludes by invoking the most iconic of Castiglione's portraits, *Scherzo di Follia* [*Game of Madness*—the image will be discussed at length in Chapter Four], as a theoretical lynchpin. Solomon-Godeau grouped *Scherzo di Follia* within a category of images that isolate Castiglione's gaze whether it be through the *passe-partout* frame, as she describes it, or by means of a handheld mirror. In a group of images with nearly identical poses assumed by the photographic subject, Castiglione is pictured seated with her head in profile holding an oval mirror that faces outward [Fig. 1.8]. While her profiled right eye looks forward, according to her orientation, to the right and away from the lens, the strategically placed mirror reflects back either a single eye or both eyes, depending on the image, in order that they answer

¹⁰⁰ Solomon-Godeau situates these images with respect to the Second Empire phenomenon of fetishizing women's legs that grew out of the wide circulation and commodification of images of ballet dancers' legs after the invention of the *carte-de-visite*. As succinctly explained in the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition catalogue, "The advent of the *carte-de-visite* format helped to popularize images of women's legs. From 1855 onward, portraits of young music-hall dancers, posed with their skirts raised, were the rage [...] When the Countess took it into her head to have her legs photographed by Pierson, she was following a fashion which the vagaries of the crinoline had already sanctioned for some time. Her innovation was to show her legs bare, without stockings, as only low-class prostitutes and artists' models dared to do." Pierre Apraxine and Xavier Demange, eds., "*La Divine Comtesse*": *Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 184.

¹⁰¹ Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," 67.

the viewer's gaze face-on. Whatever the answer potentially embedded in Castiglione's gaze, for Solomon-Godeau, again, it is not constitutive of agency or any kind of authorial power.

Solomon-Godeau first acknowledges the inclination to read these photographs as expressions of critical distance on the part of the Countess, and then proceeds critically to dismantle the validity in this approach. In the closing paragraphs of her essay, she analyzes the images wherein Castiglione isolates her gaze as follows:

The profound ambiguity of this gesture [the framing of the look in *Scherzo di Follia* and the images with the handheld mirror], the confusion of subject- and object-positions it occasions, might be said to expose the very reification it enacts. The appeal of such an interpretation lies in its presumption of a critical space, however minimal or problematic, from which the woman can speak herself.¹⁰²

However, Solomon-Godeau concludes that in the case of the photographs of the Countess, no such space existed. Ultimately, her argument forges an analogy between the message and the medium, equating "conventional femininity" and photography through her metaphor of the "Procrustean bed," as previously mentioned.¹⁰³

In her zeroing-in on the photographs of legs of the Countess, Solomon-Godeau aligned these fetishized portraits (and by extension, the Countess's entire oeuvre) with three wholly objectifying and submissive "avatars of femininity" especially current in nineteenth-century France: the nude, the prostitute and pornography. By contrast, as I have suggested, I situate Castiglione's photographic performances with respect to different self-constituting and assertive "feminine traditions" of specific relevance to women's lives during the Second Empire: the theater, the memoir, and fashion, while

¹⁰² Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," 108.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 105.

examining the significant relationship these traditions held with respect to the burgeoning medium of photography.

While situating Castiglione's practice in the context of these historically specific traditions, I will also read Luce Irigaray's theory of the female subject back on the images to claim, contrarily, that Irigaray's notion of mimesis, or "productive mimesis," as Hilary Robinson terms it, is in operation throughout the Countess's self-photographing and self-fashioning.¹⁰⁴ Briefly, for Irigaray, a positive potential for mimesis involves the re-presentation of the feminine in order to expose and destabilize the patriarchal definition of "woman." In her reading of Irigaray, Robinson identifies two forms of mimesis available to women, which she terms *maintenance mimesis*, or *non-productive mimesis*, and *productive mimesis*. Maintenance mimesis is "bound up with verisimilitude, investigation of original truth, repetition, replication—maintenance of what has gone before."¹⁰⁵ Expressed in other terms, one could say that maintenance mimesis constitutes the preservation of patriarchal notions of femininity. Productive mimesis, on the other hand, "involves a subtle double movement [...and] it is here that Irigaray locates 'the possibility of a woman's writing.'"¹⁰⁶ Productive mimesis must involve playfulness—a type of play that undermines normative cultural constructs: "To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Catherine Porter, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.

Attempting to account for these images critically does prove to be something of a “game of madness” considering their number, variety and most significantly, the frustrating position Castiglione occupied as a provocative, eccentric, and independent woman in France throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Castiglione’s corpus has been understood, in keeping with contemporaneous caricatures of women’s very limited and victimized engagement with photography throughout the Second Empire, as a facile outlet for her chronic narcissism. Again, a certain equivalency has been erected between the medium of photography—its ostensibly unmediated reproduction of “reality,” its highly problematic but at least supposed inherent *objectivity*, and *objectification* of its subjects—and Castiglione’s own superficial obsession with commemorating her ideal beauty. Castiglione’s complicity with the photographic imperative and alleged willful ignorance of its brutalizing objectification has even been interpreted as a pathology, not only symptomatic of narcissism, but also bordering on hysteria. Although photography could certainly accommodate narcissistic tendencies, and, as Georges Didi-Huberman has shown, helped codify hysteria at the Salpêtrière hospital, the asylum for women where the troubling condition was “invented,” it might also be interpreted as a more productive and generative medium if we consider its other metaphorical potentialities. I endeavor to reorient the analysis away from madness and victimization and direct it toward a reading of the productive playfulness that gets instantiated at various points throughout Castiglione’s photographic corpus.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Photography has been metaphorically linked to narcissism since its inception, perhaps most famously by Baudelaire, in his criticism of the “The Salon of 1859,” which was the first to accept photography. Charles Baudelaire, “The Salon of 1859,” *The Mirror of Art*, Jonathan Mayne, trans. (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956). The relationship between photography and fetishism is examined by Christian Metz in, “Photography and Fetish,” *October*, no. 34 (Fall 1985), 81-90; and Victor Burgin, “Photography,

On the surface, nineteenth-century photography, even photography more generally, would seem to be antithetical to “productive mimesis,” and much more closely aligned with “maintenance mimesis.” As described by Irigaray and Robinson, “maintenance mimesis” seems to function quasi-photographically in its verisimilitude, search after truth, repetition, and replication. “Productive mimesis,” on the other hand, is bound up with “the possibility of a woman’s writing.”¹⁰⁹ While I do not deny that a great portion of Castiglione’s photographic corpus reproduces stereotypes of the feminine, I posit the possibility of Castiglione’s playful authorship—here expressly invoked in its more literal definition—of her photographic portraits. I postulate a calculated maneuvering on the part of the Countess, a maddening game negotiated through the prohibitive nexus of patriarchy and proscribed femininity in the Second Empire, but one intermittently played, in great part thanks to photography, according to her rules.

During the decades following its invention, when Castiglione actively began creating her photographic corpus, the definition of photography as a technology capable of creating a self-generating image, one dependent on autogenesis—to recall a point made earlier in this chapter—, was a powerful if problematic reconfiguration of what constituted “art.” The mechanized process of image making practically obviated the privileged hand of the artist, placing the onus of creation on light—hence the etymology of photography, *photos*, light, and *graphos*, writing—and quite significantly on the subject of the photograph—hence photography’s indexicality (to use a term that carries

Phantasy, Function,” in *Thinking Photography*, Victor Burgin, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1982), 177-216. The history of hysteria and its interdependence on photography is explored by Georges Didi-Huberman in *L’Invention de l’hystérie: Charcot et l’iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (Paris: Macula, 1982).

¹⁰⁹ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 131.

considerable weight in contemporary theorizations of the medium), its status as a literal “emanation of the referent.”¹¹⁰ Discussions surrounding the relationship between photography and autogenesis were the purview of “men of science.” However, the basic understanding that the subject manifested *itself* in the image would not have been lost on the average sitter for a photographic portrait. I believe that Castiglione internalized some variation on this concept. It was precisely photography’s position at an interstice between art and industry that facilitated not only victimization or control over sitters, but also offered them a possible inroad for authorial intervention, should the desire be there and should the material conditions be available to them. The self-generating image provided not only a metaphor, but also potentially a practical mechanism for self-*inscription*—to stretch the etymological implications of *graphos* and link it ultimately to “the possibility of a woman’s writing”—on the part of the photographic subject. Castiglione’s collaborative relationship with Pierson was precisely positioned to take full advantage of such an offering to the extent that it can even be understood as having enabled a kind of “productive mimesis.”

Photography as a Female Revolutionary? Where There’s a Will, There’s a Way

¹¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80. But also contemporaneously, in terms of Talbot’s conception of his photographs as *archeipoietai*, images “not made by human hands.” Alexandre Dumas used strikingly similar terminology in an address given in honor of Daguerre in 1866. Dumas praised photography as providing “new and unexpected pleasures experienced in collecting the cherished resemblance, which seems like an emanation, even, of the person loved, admired, or mourned.” See, “Alexandre Dumas on Photography,” in, *The Photographic News* (August 10, 1866): 379. The notion of indexicality originates from Charles Sanders Peirce’s theory of signs (icon, index and symbol being the three types) and has been applied to theories of photography by a number of practitioners. For a discussion of the historiography of indexicality as applied to photography and its implications, see, James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007): 130-155 and 220-244.

In his examination of the early history of English photography, Steve Edwards analyzed the medium through a materialist framework that focused on the allegory of labor as central to mid-nineteenth-century debates around photography. Edwards discussed the significance of autogenesis to William Henry Fox Talbot's understanding of "photographic drawing as a kind of masculinization of reproduction."¹¹¹ Edwards rehearsed how photography was often configured as a servant, or more explicitly, a maidservant, to art, and claims that "photographers had to work against this conception to create a manly space for their practice."¹¹² Conceiving of photography as self-generating and therefore not dependent on artistic skill—something that Talbot himself acknowledged he lacked—allowed for the substitution of a machine for manual labor, which Edwards argued was not only outside of gentlemanly purview, but also very much aligned with working class women. Intriguingly, Edwards suggested that workingwomen were conceived of as "synonymous with automatic production—akin to machines—mere bodies without a will," which, like the photographic machine, the camera, "passively served the master's desires."¹¹³

In France, the *production* of photography was certainly a masculine enterprise, but as in England, women were particularly active in the *consumption* of photography. However, whereas Talbot and his contemporaries were preoccupied with masculinizing the practice of photography, Marcelin, in his 1856 caricatural dismissal of the medium—which was in and of itself highly charged in terms of class and gender—personified photography as a female revolutionary [Fig. 1.9]. In an illustration accompanying a

¹¹¹ Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories*, 42.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

textual section that addressed the absurdities of “artistic photography,” Marcelin depicts “Photography” as a mistress who is anything but passive. The woman’s hat is labeled, identifying her as “La photographie.” She stands swaggeringly with her right hand on her hip in a defiant and distinctly “unfeminine” affront to a quiet classical contrapposto. The female photography is further “masculinized” in that she smokes a pipe.¹¹⁴ She dons a dress featuring a skirt decorated with a multitude of photographs and with a shortened hemline that exposes her feet and ankles. Her left arm rests on and embraces a camera, positioned on its tripod, which will undoubtedly serve her clearly articulated will. The clouds of smoke that billow out of the pipe form a thought bubble that spells out her violent threat against the masters of the past representational paradigm—painting: “I’m burying Raphael, Titian, Van Dyck, etc.”¹¹⁵

When Robert de Montesquiou, the Countess de Castiglione’s first thorough biographer, wrote about the 434 images of Castiglione that he had collected after her death, he remarked upon the surprising fact that so many of them were photographs: “what at first is very astonishing, when one has not gotten to the bottom of the cause (we can only suppose, deduce from some kind of reasoning), is that with few exceptions, and those not very interesting, her portraits are all photographs.”¹¹⁶ Montesquiou’s powers of supposition and deduction were not put profoundly into practice in the rest of his text, as he never quite gets to the bottom of Castiglione’s obsession with photography.

¹¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Marcelin also published an entire volume of caricatures devoted to *Le tabac et les fumeurs*. Bérardi, *Les graveurs du XIXe siècle*, 213.

¹¹⁵ “J’enfonce Raphael, Titien, Van Dyck, ect. [sic]”

¹¹⁶ “ce qui étonne tout d’abord beaucoup, lorsqu’on n’en a pas démêlé la cause (on ne peut que la supposer, la déduire d’un raisonnement), c’est que, à de rares exceptions près, d’ailleurs pas très intéressantes, ces portraits soient tous des photographies.” *La Divine Comtesse*, 50.

Marcelin's female personification of photography was a well-played joke and women would playfully appropriate her costume in decades to come, becoming living personifications of photography through fancy-dress [Fig. 1.10]. As far as we know, Castiglione never donned such a costume, but she did radically interface with photography in her own way. Although she happened preternaturally to embrace and embody ideals of feminine beauty, Castiglione's "femininity" on the whole was in fact rather far from conventional. Castiglione did not sit passively for many painters throughout her life and allow them to inscribe their interpretations of her into paint. In fact, as an active subject she moved the interest in portraiture from painting to photography. There is a telling, though likely apocryphal, story, which recounts that Castiglione asked Paul Baudry to paint her only to tear the canvas to shreds with scissors in an act of iconoclasm and then throw it into a fire—allegedly because she grew jealous of the painted masterpiece and viewed it as a rival to her own perfection.¹¹⁷ The dynamic between Castiglione and Pierre-Louis Pierson was such that if anyone lacked a will, it was Pierson rather than the countess. Montesquiou described Pierson as being "admiring and docile" while working with his most demanding client.¹¹⁸ We might finally recall Michael North's understanding of Barthes' way of describing the autogenic nature of photography:

For Barthes [the] picture is ultimately made by light and, what is more important, by light proceeding from the subject: 'The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here' [*Camera Lucida*, 80]. The subject, in other words, inscribes itself on the film. The role of the photographer has been attenuated in this account to that of the briefest

¹¹⁷ The story is told in an article in Italian by Augusto Ferrero written in 1900. It is included in Montesquiou's archives held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, but its source is not identified. *Vie de Robert de Montesquiou – cent-cinquante-neuvième volume, nos. 259-261 (suite) – « La Divine Comtesse » Étude sur la Comtesse de Castiglione. Édition originale. Deuxième partie* (NAF 15170), 59.

¹¹⁸ "admiratif et docile." Montesquiou, *La divine comtesse*, 60.

agency; as much as possible of the photographer's body is removed from the all-important circuit between the person who poses and the one who later looks. For Barthes 'the Photographer's organ is not his eye [...] but his finger' [*Camera Lucida*, 15], which does nothing more than initiate the inscription.¹¹⁹

In Chapter Three I will more fully account for the ways in which Castiglione's "subject-body" was particularly expressive and self-inscriptive in her photographic portraits. Here I have laid the groundwork for understanding how through the autogenic process of photography she created a space for productive self-representation. The next chapter examines important precedents for this practice that are rooted in the photographic performances of two tragic actresses, Rachel Félix and Adelaide Ristori, and in disputed definitions of art and authorship that circulated around Mayer and Pierson's photographic portraits in the photographic press and in the French courts throughout the early 1860s.

¹¹⁹ North, "Authorship and Autography," 1379.

CHAPTER TWO

Actuating Subjects and Why Photography Mattered as Art

Introduction

The idea that English photographers needed to create a “manly space for their practice” and to define their medium and its mechanisms as more than mere maidservants to art, as Steve Edwards put it, resonates strongly with the French photographic climate in the 1860s—particularly at the intersection of photography and the law.¹²⁰ Motivated by economic perhaps more than aesthetic interests, French photographers fought to have themselves defined as authors and indeed artists under French law, in order that they be lawfully understood as the owners of the photographs they produced and so that they might capitalize on them to the fullest extent possible. But the gendering of photography in France in this period presents a more complicated dialectic than has previously been acknowledged. In attempting to account for the precedents that engendered the possibility for Castiglione’s “subject-body”—as discussed in Chapter One—to manifest itself photographically across her corpus, this chapter aims to unpack a more complex push and

¹²⁰ Edwards, *The Making of English Photography*, 14. Discussed in Chapter One, 55. Edwards has also recently addressed distinctions between English and French definitions of legal authorship in his article, “‘Beard Patentee’: Daguerreotype Property and Authorship,” in *Oxford Art Journal* (36.3, 2013): 369-394. As the title suggests, the article addresses questions of authorship with respect to English patent law in particular. Edwards argues that “the patent created a particular form of authorship and identity, specific to capital,” 393. He describes how English patent law voided out the author, or at least his (in this context) personality and subjectivity—by contrast to French law, which had to prove that the “imprint of personality” existed in photography (see what follows). In the case of English patent law, Edwards describes how the author was replaced by “capital itself—a Capital-Subject,” *ibid.* For another comparative analysis of these issues, see: Anne McCauley, “‘Merely Mechanical’: On the Origins of Photographic Copyright in France and Great Britain,” in *Art History*, vol. 31, no. 1 (February, 2008): 57-78.

pull between the male practitioners of the medium and their female sitters. In what follows I examine the ways in which various attempts to argue for the artistry inherent in photography around mid-century came to depend quite significantly on the artistry practiced by the feminine photographic subject.

Prior to a series of important legal proceedings involving Mayer and Pierson—which succeeded in establishing photography as an art under French law in 1862—and concurrent with accounts in the satiric, popular, and photographic presses, which either comically or seriously lamented the mimetic failures of the medium when tasked with representing women, paradoxical arguments were put forth by photographers and photographic critics. In advocating for photography as an art those crafting these arguments surprisingly presented women’s photographic portraits as evidence in support of their claims. The argumentation centering on Mayer and Pierson’s photographic output depended crucially on two tragic actresses, Rachel Félix (1821-1858, known simply as Rachel) and Adelaide Ristori (1822-1906), before it became legally caught up with portraits of Lord Palmerston (1784-1865) and Count Camillo Cavour (1810-1861), whose photographs were those at stake in the series of official trials.

It is hardly incidental that the rationale put forth by photography-as-art’s supporters initially depended on photographic subjects who were *a priori* types of artists themselves. It would have been more difficult to convince detractors of photography of the artistry involved in standardized portraits of public figures such as Palmerston and Cavour or other statesmen, whom Mayer and Pierson photographed frequently. On the other hand, persuading the public that photographers were creatively able to capture the

inherent and already widely admired talents of great tragic *artistes*, such as Rachel and Ristori, would have been understandably less daunting, setting up a more organic conceptual leap in conceiving of the photographic portrait as an art form, and as a result presenting effective rhetorical ammunition against photography's naysayers.

Crucially, however, in formulating these types of arguments the defenders of photography would walk a fine line between trying to substantiate the artistry performed by the *photographer* throughout the photographic process and appearing to advocate for the creative agency of the *subject* of the photographic portrait. In the mid-nineteenth century, photographic portraiture was by and large a commercial enterprise governed by sets of practical limitations and pictorial conventions that were indeed quite antithetical to creative expression. Mayer and Pierson's repetitive photographs of the representatives of the 1856 Congress of Paris would be a case in point [Fig. 2.1, a., b. and c.]. In commemoration of the important conference, which resulted in the Treaty of Paris and the end of the Crimean War, and in order to promote their enterprise, Mayer and Pierson gave an album containing these portraits to Napoleon III. The fifteen portraits—which included the very portrait of Cavour that would take center stage in the later legal proceedings—presented the various representatives with very little variation in terms of poses, props, and points of view.¹²¹ Pictorial convention and decorum were required in the case of these formal portraits of illustrious men. On the other hand, photographic

¹²¹ Sylvie Aubenas, ed., *Des photographes pour l'empereur: Les albums de Napoléon III* (Paris: Galerie de photographie, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2004), 146. The catalogue entry on this object cites an interesting quote from Nadar criticizing Mayer and Pierson for their lack of artistry: "Sans s'occuper autrement de la disposition des lignes selon le point de vue le plus favorable au modèle ni de l'expression de son visage, non plus que de la façon dont la lumière se trouvait éclairer tout cela, on installait le client à une place invariable et l'on obtenait de lui un cliché, terne et gris, à la va-comme-je-te-pousse," *ibid.* The source of the quotation is Nadar, *Quand j'étais photographe* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1994, originally published in 1900), 238.

portraits of actresses from the period forced creative expression into the photographic frame, especially when they depicted these stage stars in their great theatrical roles. Performers caught by the camera, particularly actresses, whose effigies were especially popular in this period, brought the expressive arsenal of the theatrical method with them into the photographic studio, which then aimed to accommodate the diversity of gestures, variety of costumes and range of sentiments that were the hallmark of their roles. Effectively, rather than registering the mimetic failures of the medium, as described in Chapter One, the images of these talented women in fact expanded the mimetic possibilities of photography.

Castiglione's practice was directly inspired by these photographic performances. She was by no means a professional actress, but she did greatly admire both Rachel and Ristori.¹²² Castiglione also envisioned herself as a kind of unrecognized tragic heroine and examples of her photographically positioning herself as such will be examined in the next chapter. In the nineteenth century, the tragic stage was one of the few, and importantly, one of the most visible, representational spaces that allowed for and indeed depended on women's agency.¹²³ When photography began to provide a more widely proliferating platform for the re-presentation of these heroines "in the flesh," Castiglione

¹²² In 1893 Castiglione staged a series of twelve portraits, which she collected together and titled "Sainte Cécile et Rachel," after the actress, Apraxine and Demange, "*La Divine Comtesse*," 186. When she asked the painter Jacques-Émile Blanche—who was also the son of her friend and physician, Dr. Antoine-Émile Blanche—to paint her portrait she provided him with one of these photographs of her looking melancholic in a black dress wearing a veil, *ibid.* Blanche only completed the painting, which is very faithful to the photograph, twenty years after her death around the time that Montesquiou's biography was published. The painting, *The Countess de Castiglione: Souvenir of 1893* (1914), now hangs in the Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

¹²³ See, for example, Michael R. Booth, John Stokes and Susan Bassnett, eds., *Three Tragic Actresses: Siddons, Rachel, Ristori* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For a pre-history of such themes, see the recent exhibition catalogue, Gill Perry, Joseph Roach and Shearer West, eds., *The First Actresses: Nell Gwyn to Sarah Siddons* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011). For a discussion of this in the context of nineteenth-century Germany especially, see, Susanne Holschbach, *Vom Ausdruck zur Pose: Theatralität und Weiblichkeit in der Fotografie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Reimer, 2006).

took note. While her own photographic performances in some cases drew on the repertoire established through these dramatic portraits, they were not all simply playful appropriations or reenactments of pre-scripted theatrical roles. For a variety of reasons, the countess's performed portraits were in certain cases transformed by their subject into personal and autobiographical statements that accommodated Castiglione's creative agency, which is the focus of Chapter Three. What follows here examines the aesthetic, practical, theoretical, and indeed legal implications of important precedents to and coincidences with Castiglione's photographic "performativity."

The Law Subject to Photography: A History in Two Acts

In the conclusion to their book, *La photographie considérée comme art et comme industrie*, published in 1862, Mayer and Pierson declared: "So today in the eyes of the law, as in the eyes of artists and the general public, photography is an art, to reproduce a photographer's work is to counterfeit."¹²⁴ This concise and confident statement seems straightforward enough but of course it was hardly possible to support as a *general* truth in the period since the status of photography continued to be hotly contested. As a legal fact, it was difficult to contest, because through this publication Mayer and Pierson were explicitly promoting their final victory after a series of trials at various levels of French jurisdiction. The string of lawsuits ultimately resulted in the French Supreme Court judgment decided on November 28, 1862, in the case of *Mayer and Pierson v. Betbéder*

¹²⁴ "Aujourd'hui donc aux yeux de la jurisprudence, comme à ceux des artistes, et de l'opinion publique, la photographie est un art, la reproduction des oeuvres d'un photographe est une contrefaçon." Mayer & Pierson, *La photographie considérée come art et comme industrie: Histoire de sa découverte, ses progrès, ses applications—son avenir* (Paris: Librairie L. Hachette et Cie, 1862), 217.

and *Shwalbé*, which affirmed that in terms of the two portraits executed by Mayer and Pierson that were at the heart of the legal disputes, “photographic portraits could be considered to constitute works of art.”¹²⁵ The clearly conditional tense of this ruling contradicts the definitive tone of Mayer and Pierson’s concluding declaration, but despite these obvious discrepancies, there is no question that the case constituted not only a landmark in the history of photography, but also in French legal history.

One of the first, and certainly one of the most influential, scholars to address the historical importance of this case and others like it was the French legal historian, Bernard Edelman. Edelman’s *Ownership of the Image: Elements for a Marxist Theory of Law* (1973) relied on the Mayer and Pierson cases and related trials as evidence in support of his argument that the advent of photography placed significant ideological pressure on the legal system. Edelman was not examining the impact that the law had on photography, but rather the shock or “surprise,” as he put it, that photography inflicted on the law—hence the notion that the law was subject to photography, rather than the other way around. This idea was reflected in the original French title of Edelman’s book, *Le droit saisi par la photographie: Éléments pour une théorie marxiste du droit* [The Law Seized by Photography: Elements for a Marxist Theory of the Law]. John Tagg usefully summarized Edelman’s argument as follows:

The juridical problems thrown up by the technical and economic irruption of photography revealed, in this apparently specialized and insignificant area, ‘the entirety of the law in condensed form’; at the same time, revealing and forming the aesthetic, philosophical and economic questions in juridical concepts. The discourse of law was surprised or, in the

¹²⁵ “des portraits photographiques ont pu être considérés comme constituant des oeuvres d’art,” “Art. 870. Photographie.—Portraits.—Contrefaçon.” in L. Pataille and A. Hugué, eds., *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire: Journal de législation, doctrine et jurisprudence Françaises et étrangères en matière de brevets d’invention, littérature, théâtre, musique, beaux-arts, dessins, modèles, noms et marques de fabrique*, tome VIII, 1862 (Paris: Bureau des annales, 1862): 419-433, 420.

original title of Edelman's work, 'seized' by photography, and, in this critical moment, in the process of absorption of this new mode of apprehension of the real, the functioning of the law was revealed. At the point of confrontation of photography and the law, at this historical frontier of legal practice, we see how property is created, how the creator is designated as subject in law, and how the domain of exchanges between owner subjects is designated as 'civil society.'¹²⁶

Specifically, what interested Edelman was an "*historical stage*, that of the *juridical birth of photography and the cinema*," which according to his account did no less than force "*the juridical production of the real*."¹²⁷ Edelman pointed out that this history necessarily unfolded over "two acts." The first act was an inevitable phase in which "the law's resistance first passe[d] through the *denegation* of the subject in law," wherein the work of the photographer was considered to be a "*soulless labour*" and the photographer was considered under the law to be a mere "man-machine."¹²⁸ The second act consisted of "*the transition from soulless labour to the soul of the labour*," by which point the photographer could ultimately come to be conceived of as the "subject-creator," as Edelman termed it.¹²⁹

The first cases that Edelman addressed in his discussion of the first act, including those launched by Mayer and Pierson, demanded a reconsideration of copyright or

¹²⁶ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 107-108.

¹²⁷ Bernard Edelman, *Ownership of the Image: Elements for a Marxist Theory of Law*, Elizabeth Kingdom, trans. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1979), 44-45, 37, original emphasis. Edelman's argument is exceptionally complex but the implications of "*the juridical production of the real*" are finally, in his analysis, that the real becomes a commodity under the law in response to the pressures that photography and the cinema—where the real is appropriated as private property—placed on legal categories such as ownership and authorship. It should be noted that Edelman's method involves conflating many trials about photography and the cinema, both from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, into one legal history, rather than treating cases individually.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 44, original emphasis. Edelman's term, "man-machine," is derived from a dictum written by Alphonse de Lamartine: "The photographer will never replace the painter; one is a Man, the other a machine. Let us compare them no longer." Cited in Edelman, *Ownership of the Image*, 45. The quote originally appeared in Alphonse de Lamartine, *Cours familier de littérature*, vol. VI (Paris: On s'abonne chez l'auteur, 1858), 411.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, original emphasis. There is an interesting resonance between the notion of a "subject-creator" and Rouillé's "subject-body," which is discussed in Chapter One.

“author’s rights” laws, as they are referred to in the French legal system. In the early days of photography, judgments depending on authorial rights rested on a law signed on July 19, 1793, which granted exclusive ownership to “authors of writings in any genre, musical composers, painters and designers” who produced any works “of the spirit or genius which belong to the fine arts.”¹³⁰ With the introduction of photography into the law, if not society at large, the question became whether or not photography could be considered to be a work of the mind, of the creative spirit, or a labor of the soul: in other words, could photography be a fine art?

This question was problematic for reasons that, despite the November 28, 1862, ruling, continue to plague the medium. In the *Mayer and Pierson v. Betbéder and Shwalbé* case, the *Cour de cassation* ruled that photography *could* be art but in order to arrive even at this rather indeterminate conclusion, the court had to be led through a series of arguments that both established the rightful owner of the photographic image and in the process essentially redefined “what is an author.”¹³¹ According to Edelman, these ownership/authorship questions with respect to photography revolved around a concept which he designated the “*over-appropriation of the real*.”¹³² As it was understood, an author of non-photographic works necessarily imbued his/her creative product with some kind of spirit since what was ultimately on offer was an individual *interpretation* of something. This type of author, Edelman’s “subject-creator,” had rights

¹³⁰ “Auteurs d’écrits en tout genre, des Compositeurs de musique, des Peintres et des Dessinateurs”... “de l’esprit ou de génie qui appartient aux beaux arts.” “Loi Relative aux droits de propriété des Auteurs d’écrits en tout genre, des Compositeurs de musique, des Peintres et des Dessinateurs. Du 19 Juillet 1793,” in *Lois, et actes du gouvernement. Tome VII. Avril 1793 à Vendémiaire an II.* (Paris: L’Imprimerie Impériale, 1807): 211-212.

¹³¹ See Molly Nesbit’s important article, “What Was an Author?,” in *Yale French Studies*, no. 73, *Everyday Life* (1987): 229-257.

¹³² Edelman, *Ownership of the Image*, 38, original emphasis.

under the law because the property they *created* was irrefutably theirs; it had “mixed with the subject, [which had been] re-presented and transformed through his creative labour.”¹³³

A producer of a photographic image could not initially be conceived of under these terms because the “man-machine” metaphor triumphed in the court of law as well as in the court of popular opinion. Edelman suggested, quite indisputably, that moving into act two of this juridical history, the motivations for the changes in this perception were economic. At a certain point, not long after photography’s introduction into the vicissitudes of the legal sphere, “*the relations of production* [would] *demand*” that the photographer be legally granted a soul.¹³⁴ While the interests may have been economic, the case had to be made on more or less aesthetic grounds. In order successfully to support the claim that photography could accommodate and contain the work of the mind and the spirit, it had to be proven that the photographic product under consideration bore the traces of the “imprint of *personality*” of the photographer, and that it involved some kind of creative appropriation, rather than simply a reproduction, of the real.¹³⁵

Curiously, the photographs that were conceded to bear traces of the imprint of their authors’ “spirit and genius” in the 1862 trial that afforded Mayer and Pierson’s

¹³³ Paul Hirst and Elizabeth Kingdom, “On Edelman’s ‘Ownership of the Image,’” in *Screen*, vol. 20, (no. 3-4, 1979/1980): 135-140, 137.

¹³⁴ Edelman, *Ownership of the Image*, 49.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 51, original emphasis. The phrase “imprint of *personality*” comes from the proceedings of the April 10, 1862, and November 28, 1862, Mayer and Pierson trials. The April judgement cited the terms under which a photograph could be considered a work of art. A long list of variables was dictated followed by the summation that they entailed “toutes choses abandonnées au sentiment artistique et qui donne à l’oeuvre du photographe l’empreinte de sa personnalité.” J.P., “Art. 787,” in *Annales de la propriété industrielle artistique et littéraire: Journal de législation, doctrine et jurisprudence françaises et étrangères en matière de brevets d’invention, littérature, théâtre, musique, beaux-arts, dessins, modèles, noms et marques de fabrique*, 1861 and 1862: 113-118, 117. Hérold, Bethbéder and Schwalbé’s lawyer, would then quote from this previous judgment in the November trial.

conditional ultimate victory were quite standard portraits of the two aforementioned foreign political leaders, the British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston [Fig. 2.2], and the Italian Prime Minister, Camillo Cavour [Fig. 2.3]. Like the photographs of the other Congress of Paris representatives, these much-disputed portraits adhere to the conventional standards of the formal portrait. The photograph of Lord Palmerston is a full-length portrait of the aging dignitary who stands quite casually holding a black top hat in one hand and a cane in the other. The English head of state wears a black, buttoned coat over a white-shirt and cravat, and rather loose fitting and visibly wrinkled trousers. Contrary to his powerful position, his countenance is suggestive of confused distraction rather than commanding authority. Palmerston is positioned against a pale backdrop into which the top of his head and his white hair seem to nearly dissolve. Next to this figure, on the right of the composition, is a white balustrade, an extremely common photographic studio prop that lends a modicum of visual interest to the scene.¹³⁶

The portrait of Cavour is only slightly more interesting. Cavour had died on June 6, 1861, at the height of his career, having only that year been named Prime Minister of a newly unified Kingdom of Italy by Vittorio Emanuele II. The Italian leader—Castiglione’s cousin—is represented in full length, seated on an armchair. His legs are unceremoniously crossed and his right hand appears to be placed in his pocket while his left arm rests on a table covered in a cloth—a pose that was mirrored in several other representatives’ portraits in the album Mayer and Pierson presented to Napoleon III. Cavour’s round face is bespectacled and he directly meets the viewer’s gaze. The portrait

¹³⁶ Henry Peach Robinson humorously remarked that “78 percent of all carte portraits made in the early 1860s contained either a balustrade or column,” and that he also suggested that “it would be a great service to photography [...] if all these columns could be collected and set alight,” as quoted in Edwards, *The Making of English Photography*, 76.

suggests relaxed authority, security, and contentment, and most unusually for the period, Cavour appears to wear a faint smile. On the surface of things and in light of the countless other photographs like them, these two portraits seem like odd candidates to have succeeded in establishing photography as an art under French law. However, the stature of the men they represented became a key “selling point” in Mayer and Pierson’s argumentation. In the deciding case, Mayer and Pierson’s lawyer, Ambroise Rendu, rhetorically elevated these seemingly uninspired photographic portraits to the level of history:

Seeing this casual pose, this slight smile of the great Italian, this rigidity of carriage and this controlled irony of the illustrious Englishman, we recognize the flexibility, the spiritual bonhomie, the unparalleled ease of the one man amidst formidable complications; the phlegmatic nature, the tenacity and the haughtiness of the other. These two portraits, gentlemen, are history.¹³⁷

Rendu’s oratorical maneuver presented the portraits not only as artistic, but also as belonging to the highest possible category in the hierarchy of the arts. By this logic, the portraits of Cavour and Palmerston were comparable to skillfully painted portraits of great men, but based on Rendu’s convincingly argued claims, they even potentially stood their ground with history painting.

The “Third Act” as Enacted by Two Tragic Actresses

The more detailed argumentative acrobatics that unfolded over the relative artistry of these rather unremarkable portraits of two remarkable men are instructive and will be

¹³⁷ “A voir cette pose abandonnée, ce fin sourire du grand Italien, cette roideur de maintien et cette ironie contenue de l’illustre Anglais, on a reconnu la souplesse, la spirituelle bonhomie, l’aisance incomparable de l’un au milieu de complications redoutables; le flegme, la ténacité, la hauteur de l’autre. Ces deux portraits, messieurs, c’est de l’histoire.” “Art. 870. Photographie.—Portraits.—Contrefaçon.” in *Annales de la propriété industrielle artistique et littéraire*: 419-433, 429.

analyzed in more detail in what follows. What is of equal interest in terms of the complicated gendering of photography and its authors, is the way in which aspects of Bernard Edelman's important argument about the subject in the law—which depended upon Mayer and Pierson's legal battles—might be appropriated in order to account for the significance of an alternative but related history concerning photography's troubled position with respect to art and industry around mid-century. This alternative history is still concerned with efforts to make a “man” out of the photographer, but it reveals how in doing so Mayer and Pierson came to depend crucially upon the feminine photographic subject. If Edelman's story was told in two acts, which were performed in the theater of the French courtroom, the history I relate here constitutes a third act wherein the leading roles were performed by veritable actresses: the great tragediennes Rachel and Ristori.

From Edelman's theoretical perspective, the move between his two acts from “man-machine” to “subject-creator” or from “*soulless labour*” to “*the soul of labour*” was motivated by economic interests but was *actualized* by the legal acceptance of a particular concept: that of the “imprint of *personality*.”¹³⁸ This concept was successfully argued with respect to the photographic portraits of Palmerston and Cavour—Mayer and Pierson's creative imprint was conceded to be identifiable in these portraits—and by Edelman's account, the personal imprint was ultimately what was responsible for “wrest[ing] photography from the machine and [...] bring[ing] it into the domain of the actuating subject.”¹³⁹ What I identify as an alternative act, which will unfold in what follows, suggests an intervening phase in this process whereby the notion of the “actuating subject” was not yet a concept central to the *operator* of the photographic

¹³⁸ Edelman, *Ownership of the Image*, 51

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

process, but which, in the context of Mayer and Pierson's photographic practice, first developed with reference to the *subject* of the photographic portrait.

Therefore, this third act does not follow chronologically after Edelman's two acts; rather, it is more correctly a pre-history that unfolded outside of the courtroom: first on the unprecedentedly public stage of the *Exposition universelle* of 1855, and then across debates in the photographic and popular press and other venues, which will be examined. This act represents a yet more particular *historical stage* when in making the case for the artistry of photography, the photographic industry, and Mayer and Pierson specifically, first depended on the artistry of the feminine "actuating subject," which originated through and was actualized in photographs of Rachel and Ristori.

Photographic Profanation and the Proliferation of Performativity

In the 1856 caricature in the *Journal Amusant* discussed in Chapter One, Marcelin opened his argument by summoning two fictional women, the painted pretty woman of yesterday and the photographed pretty woman of "today," in order to demonstrate the mimetic failures of photography. The caricaturist concluded his case by providing evidence in the form of comic illustrations and descriptions of existing photographs of actual celebrities unkindly caught by the camera. Marcelin supported his claims about what he called the "photographic profanation of the pretty women and great men of [his] time" by comparing the "natural" constitutions of actresses, artists and famous writers to their perverted photographic portraits, which, in a moment of comic self-reflexivity, he

described as “solemn caricatures.”¹⁴⁰ This closing argument allowed Marcelin to tangibly reinforce his indictment against photography by again underscoring the medium’s ineptitude as a faithful representational technology—not to mention completely undermining its disputed claims to the status of art—and to account for the disturbance caused by these paltry simulacra that were increasingly being displayed in the windows of photographic studios in the streets of Paris.

The first concrete example that “A bas la photographie!!!” provided was a description of Ristori, the great Italian tragedienne who had made her Parisian theatrical debut to great acclaim only a year earlier—the same year that Castiglione arrived in the French capital, dispatched on her mission to influence Napoleon III. In fact, Cavour also took advantage of Ristori’s influence, and as in Castiglione’s case, there is evidence suggesting that she performed casual diplomatic duties for him as well.¹⁴¹ Whereas Castiglione’s presence in the French court would have undoubtedly threatened the Empress Eugenie, inciting a rivalry between Napoleon III’s wife and his eventual mistress, Ristori’s arrival prompted immediate comparisons with the reigning queen of

¹⁴⁰ “[L]a profanation photographique des jolies femmes et des grands hommes de notre temps”; “caricatures sérieuses.” Marcelin, “A bas la photographie,” 4.

¹⁴¹ In a letter cited by Susan Bassnett in “Adelaide Ristori” in *Three Tragic Actresses*, Cavour urged Ristori to “continue in Paris your patriotic apostolate. You must go into the midst of heretics in order to convert them,” 130 (the letter is dated April 20, 1861). As Bassnett describes, Cavour praises the actress’s success in the French theater and suggests that this will put her at an advantage when presenting the Italian case: “Use that authority to serve our country, and I will applaud you not only as the greatest actress in Europe, but also as a highly effective collaborator in our diplomatic negotiations,” *ibid.* Bassnett notes that the original unpublished letter is held in the Museo Biblioteca dell’Attore, Genova, but she does not provide a call number.

the French stage, Rachel. It will become obvious that the rivalries specific to these two pairings of women were also registered photographically.¹⁴²

“After nature,” Marcelin proclaimed, Madame Ristori could be described as possessing “the most beautiful visage in which antique majesty and modern passion are united.”¹⁴³ But “in photography,” he continued, Ristori is reduced to appearing “sullen, morose, a bored nutcracker figurine, Madame de Guignon-Guignol.”¹⁴⁴ And here Marcelin pointedly identified the photographer who was guilty of committing the profanation of the actress’s likeness by indicating that the print in question was produced “chez Meyer,” a thinly veiled reference to Mayer and Pierson’s studio. Marcelin paired his textual summation of Ristori’s photograph with a satirical illustration of the image he described [Fig. 2.4].

Marcelin’s satire mimicked the photographic portraits that were prominently displayed both inside photographer’s reception rooms in their studios and on the streets in vitrines around Paris in order to attract clients: he pictured a full-length haggard female figure clad in a classical white costume against a completely black background.¹⁴⁵ The folds abounding in the actress’s plain peplos and veil are echoed by the wrinkles so

¹⁴² Elizabeth Anne McCauley also provided a brief discussion of the role Rachel and Ristori played in the history of the *carte de visite* particularly in *A.A.E. Disdéri and the Carte de Visite Portrait Photograph* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁴³ Ibid. “D’après nature: Le plus beau visage auquel il ait été donné de réunir la majesté antique et la passion moderne.”

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., “Rechignée, morose, une figure de casse-noisette ennuyé, madame de Guignon-Guignol.”

¹⁴⁵ The interesting phenomenon of these very public photographic display cases is discussed by Hélène Bocard in her unpublished dissertation, “Les expositions de photographie à Paris sous le Second Empire et leur réception par la critique,” (Ph.D. in the History of Art under the direction of M. Bruno Foucart, Université Paris-Sorbonne, May 2004). Bocard cites an article by Aurélien Scholl that appeared in the January 30, 1862, issue of *Le Figaro*. Scholl’s critique of these displays is explicitly gendered: “Tout photographe qui ouvre boutique expose fatalement à sa porte une douzaine de portraits en pied et un quarteron de profils—qui sont les mêmes un peu partout. Le passant s’arrête rêveur et troublé devant ces femmes exposées. C’est ainsi que se gaspillent les forces d’une nation. Chaque Parisien perd en moyenne un quart d’heure par jour pour contempler les photographies, ce qui fait 90 heures à la fin de l’année,” 49.

evident and exaggerated on Ristori's long neck and frowning face, which possesses none of the majesty of her described natural state. While Ristori was renowned for the communicative power of her poses and was in particular praised for the efficacy of her "picture-acting," in the caricatured photograph the tragedienne holds her veil up limply with one arm and lifelessly raises the other to her head in an uninspiring attempt to replicate the forcefully dramatic gestures and extended poses that were the actress's trademark.¹⁴⁶

The implications of the 1856 caricature were that photography could not possibly capture the dignity that celebrities such as Ristori both possessed and personified in "real life," despite photography's claims to objectivity and advertised declarations that it could produce a masterpiece of "likeness." The early photographic studios would defensively strategize against such condemnations of photography's representational failures, which were not particular to this specific comic attack, but which were widely repeated in the profusion of arguments against the burgeoning medium. Critics were attuned to the fact that photographers profited massively from the interest in and sale of such celebrity portraits, which generated the unstoppable enthusiasm of the broader public for photographic portraiture. While the comic press relentlessly caricatured these crude promotional portraits, the photographic press, inversely, eagerly promoted them as the most vivid testaments to photography's status, not as an industry, but as a legitimate form of art. Significantly, the critical rhetoric around Mayer and Pierson's photographs

¹⁴⁶ Ristori wrote of the methodical importance of prolonged pauses of deliberately impactful poses, which she described as "picture-acting" throughout her own memoir, *Adelaide Ristori: Studies and Memoirs*, (London: W.H. Allen & co., 1888). Susan Bassnett cites and discusses a review in *The Musical World* on July 11, 1857, that praises Ristori for precisely these pauses and poses, attesting to their contemporaneous relevance. Bassnett, "Adelaide Ristori," in *Three Tragic Actresses*, 146.

exhibited at the 1855 *Exposition universelle* held in Paris—itsself an event that incited the art vs. non-art debate with respect to photography—relied heavily upon the exhibited photographs of the Italian Ristori and her French rival Rachel, in order to support the intensely contested position of photography as an art.

Mayer and Pierson and Rachel and Ristori: Photographic Performances at the 1855 *Exposition universelle*

Of the triumvirate of causes that contributed to the aforementioned photographic “impulsion of 1855,” the Parisian *Exposition universelle* was the event that ensured the most publicity for the medium. The exhibition provided an excellent opportunity for Napoleon III to promote France’s achievements after England’s spectacular display of its industrial might in 1851 at London’s Great Exhibition. Throngs of visitors flocked to see the accomplishments of the still quite new and exciting medium of photography prominently on display at this lavish Parisian world’s fair. Those interested in observing technical as well as aesthetic photographic advancements would have been directed in their art vs. non-art judgments by the systematic categorization of the exhibition. In a bold move, meant to demonstrate France’s *cultural* as well as industrial ascendancy, this second international exposition was the first to include art as well as industrial products—London having reserved its displays only for the latter. In Paris in 1855 these opposing realms were kept not only categorically, but also physically separate, as the

material deemed “artistic” resided in the *Palais des beaux-arts*, while the industrial goods were housed in the *Palais de l’industrie*, both purposely built for the fair.¹⁴⁷

At the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, photography had not been accorded its own section in the Crystal Palace, but was grouped under “Class X (instruments, clock making, surgical, musical, philosophical) [...] in the department of ‘machines and instruments.’”¹⁴⁸ At the 1855 Parisian *Exposition universelle*, photography was given slightly more independence within the domain of industry, being allotted to the twenty-sixth industrial class, “Letter and Block Printing, Photography.” Nevertheless, the medium was kept distinctly separate from the fine arts, sharing exhibition space instead with “steam engines, gloves, animal skins, lacework, ironwork [and] food.”¹⁴⁹ However, under the recently ascended Emperor, the Parisian *exposition* enabled France to showcase its achievements and advances in photographic technology, which had been rapidly accomplished since the public announcement of its invention only sixteen years earlier, and considerably improved upon since the 1851 British exhibition.

In London the two principal photographic processes that were exhibited were the daguerreotype and the paper negative print. The wet collodion process, which combined the benefits of the nearly infinitesimal detail of the daguerreotype with the reproducibility of the paper negative process, was only invented around 1850, too early for it to have been exhibited in London. The collodion process along with the albumen process would

¹⁴⁷ John Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography: Volume 1* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2008), 512. To be more precise, painting was not exhibited in London, but sculpture, engraving, and architecture were because they were seen as instrumental to industry, *ibid.*, 615. See also, Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 615.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 513.

effectively replace the earlier formats given the potential for reproducibility and other practical advantages presented by these processes in terms of speed and portability. By 1855 in Paris, images produced through the wet collodion method dominated the photographic displays. In the *Palais de l'industrie*, photographs that could be categorized as “scientific and documentary aids,” and those with “industrial and commercial uses” were exhibited; however, in addition to these “useful” images, photographic portraits by the most prominent French photographers, André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri, Nadar, and Mayer and Pierson among them, were displayed. In some cases these portraits were appreciated for their aesthetic merits, which were in part attributable to industrial developments such as the collodion process.¹⁵⁰

The photographic press closely attended to technical developments, as it existed in part as a resource to help photographers develop their trade. The 1855 bulletin of the *Société française de photographie* (SFP) contained roughly thirty articles expressly addressing the collodion process, among other scientific developments, but photographic literature also became increasingly devoted to advocating for the aesthetic merits of photography. The French Photographic Society and its bulletin were avowedly dedicated to both the scientific and the artistic aspects of photography. Article two of the society’s statutes stated the goals of the organization:

The French Photographic Society is founded on the goal of reuniting under one association, which is purely artistic and scientific, men devoted to the study and the practice of this branch of art and of science, which has as its object, to reproduce and to fix by the spontaneous action of light, images of external nature.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ “La *Société française de photographie* est fondée dans le but de réunir en une association, purement artistique et scientifique, les hommes voués à l’étude et la pratique de cette branche de l’art et de la

Their mandate was explicitly contradicted by the organization of that year's *Exposition universelle* and a review of the exhibition in the 1855 bulletin even caused one of the SFP's members to question photography's artistic merit, despite the unequivocal declaration of its dual role as a science as well as an art throughout the society's statutes.

In this review, Paul Périer responded at length to photography's classification as an industry at the 1855 exhibition. His article judiciously considered both sides of the art vs. non-art debate and allowed that the medium's legitimate status as an art was compromised by its vulgar commercialization. Périer warned that to assert definitively that photography in general warranted the label of art might be a symptom of the increasingly common phenomenon in photography of "*sutor ultra crepidam*," or the cobbler thinking himself above the sandal.¹⁵² The classificatory decision made by the directors of the exhibition caused him to consider whether photography was "an art or a business."¹⁵³ Predictably, he argued that while the majority of photographic production could not be considered art, that would not necessarily mean that categorically the medium could never attain such a status. Périer did not particularly focus on the technical processes that the "artistic" photographer would have to engage creatively, but rather constructed his argument around the artistic *judgment* intrinsic to those few photographers who could be considered "fine artists." The mechanical aspects were neglected in favor of the mental acumen possessed by only the finest practitioners.

science qui a pour objet de reproduire et de fixer par l'action spontanée de la lumière les images de la nature extérieure," *Bulletin de la Société française de photographie* (Paris: Mallet-Bachelier, 1855), 5.

¹⁵² Paul Périer, "Exposition universelle, 2e article," in *Bulletin de la Société française de photographie* (Paris: Mallet-Bachelier, 1855): 167-176, 167.

¹⁵³ "La photographie est-elle un art ou un métier?," *ibid.*

In another article in the SFP bulletin reflecting on photography at the 1855 exposition, Périer addressed the photographic portrait specifically.¹⁵⁴ His entry opened by providing a short lesson on the history of portraiture—we witness here again the pressures that photography and its complex modernity placed on past traditions. Périer reflected on the fact that a few centuries earlier, portraiture existed only as a great luxury exclusive to the noblest households of Europe. “Today,” on the other hand, he noted the mania for portraiture among the masses and questioned whether or not photography’s ability to accommodate their desires was contributing to the corruption of art.¹⁵⁵

Périer admitted that he himself practiced portrait photography, but seemed relieved to suggest that that was not how he was forced to earn his living. Although portraiture was undoubtedly the most popular manifestation of photography in 1855, Périer lamented that when it came to the vulgarization of art, nothing was more culpable in contributing to its multiplication than the photographic portrait.¹⁵⁶ However, Périer also claimed that the SFP was founded to promote the advancement of photography as an art and therefore offered the names of several practitioners whose photographic portraits he thought qualified as artistic accomplishments. In doing so, he aimed to separate the regretful lack of taste that abounded in the general public—and materialized in their mundane photographic portraits—from the admirable aesthetic judgment that a few photographers possessed, and which could be discerned in their photographs.

¹⁵⁴ Paul Périer, “Exposition universelle, 5e article.—Photographes français,” in *Bulletin de la Société française de la photographie* (1855): 256-274.

¹⁵⁵ This rhetoric runs a close parallel to the opening of Marcelin’s caricature in the *Journal amusant*, which was analyzed in Chapter One and of course to Baudelaire’s later ruminations on “The Modern Public and Photography.”

¹⁵⁶ Périer, “Exposition universelle, 5e article,” 261. “Il faut avoir le courage d’avouer que rien ne saurait plus compromettre et reculer le sens artistique du vulgaire que la majorité des faits et gestes photographiques, à l’heure où nous sommes, en ce qui touche le portrait.”

Périer named M. Tournachon (Adrien, Nadar's brother) as preeminent among artist-photographers. He noted that Tournachon was an artist above all else and suggested that he was a photographer second; for Tournachon photography was nothing more than a medium used to express his artistry. Likewise, Périer noted that while M. Legray (Gustave Le Gray) was not professionally preoccupied with the portrait, his innate artistry translated over to his few photographic portraits. In these estimations Périer erected a hierarchy of artistry as superior to photographic practice, the latter being a mere practical application for these men's talents. Périer would go on to name several other exhibitors of photographic portraits at the exposition, mentioning, but not describing their respective works, before pausing on a work by "M. Meyer" [i.e. Mayer of Mayer and Pierson], which was a portrait of Rachel.

With respect to this particular work, Périer claimed, "M. Meyer had what all artists would consider to be a good fortune, the figure and the *statue* of Rachel before one's eyes" [Fig. 2.5].¹⁵⁷ The logic suggested that in Mayer's case, the artistic quality that inhered in the portrait was the gift of the *photographic subject* rather than the artistic accomplishment of the *photographer*. As Périer put it, "if the portrait is really beautiful, this is due in large part to the great actress, who would be yet as matchless in a bathrobe."¹⁵⁸ While the average photographer struggled to favorably represent his clients—especially his female clients, it was often claimed—in this case Mayer was

¹⁵⁷ "M. Meyer a eu ce que tout artiste tiendrait pour une bonne fortune, la figure et la *statue* de Rachel devant les yeux," *ibid.*, 268.

¹⁵⁸ "si le portrait est vraiment beau, bonne part en revient à la grande actrice, qui serait encore incomparable en peignoir de bain," *ibid.*

exceptionally fortunate to have Rachel as a model.¹⁵⁹ Périer implied that Rachel's majesty was photographically hard to miss: "what could one not accomplish with this animated marble?" he asked.¹⁶⁰ As a stage actress, posing was not only Rachel's profession, but was an art in which she excelled. She presented little opportunity for the photographer to mistranslate her magnificence as she stood before his lens with all the composure and elegance of a statue.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, Périer complained that Mayer had in fact missed the mark given that the background of the composition was too light.¹⁶² The photographer had failed to take advantage of his good fortune; the artfulness was the province of the photographic subject and the "imprint of *her* personality" was what distinguished the image.

Ernest Lacan, a prolific writer on photography and editor of the photographic journal *La Lumière*, published his *Esquisses photographiques* in 1856, wherein he provided a more favorable review of Mayer and Pierson's achievements in photographic portraiture at the 1855 exhibition. Lacan singled out Mayer and Pierson as among the most accomplished of portrait photographers. The first of the firm's photographs that Lacan praised was the same portrait of Rachel that Périer had characterized as failed good fortune. Lacan described it as follows:

¹⁵⁹ It is worth recalling from Chapter One that Mayer and Pierson explicitly jested at this in the speech given at their 1859 banquet; see page 45 above.

¹⁶⁰ "Que n'aurait-on pu faire avec ce marbre animé?" Périer, "Exposition universelle, 5e article," 268.

¹⁶¹ John Stokes described the happy synchronism between the actress's art and the photographer's as follows: "In the middle of the nineteenth century the relation between photography and theatrical realism was reciprocal. Early photographers, tied to long exposure times, were more interested in recording a significant pose than the instants of arrested motion that preoccupied their successors, and the codified gestures of nineteenth-century acting provided suitable subject matter. Performance, in due course, had to match the new means of representation with a display of the living body that possessed all the tension, the human intelligence, that an acutely detailed photographic portrait might convey. This is why the photographs of Rachel, while disappointingly muzzy, are significant. Their very staginess is the point," "Rachel Felix," in *Three Tragic Actresses*, 76.

¹⁶² "mais le fond, trop clair, n'est pas compris," Périer, "Exposition universelle, 5e article," 268.

Represented in full length, in the role of Phaedra, the great tragedienne wears a diadem on her forehead, and drapes herself magnificently, like an antique statue, in her purple mantle, which is studded in gold. The hand that she presses convulsively on her chest seems to want to contain the painful movements of an adulterous love. As for the physiognomic expression, it is admirable. There is in the worried crease in the brow, the bitter smile across the lips, and above all in the fixity, sadness, and the impassioned expression of the look, all the eloquence of Racine's verse.¹⁶³

While Lacan, like Périer, adumbrated the artistry that was inherent to Rachel—she “drapes *herself* magnificently,” for example—, by contrast he explicitly presented this in the context of Mayer and Pierson's exceptional ability in turn to artistically transform her.¹⁶⁴

The second portrait to be praised was that of the great Italian actress, Ristori, which Lacan noted Mayer and Pierson strategically exhibited beside that of her French rival, Rachel—“Mirra next to Phaedra,” Lacan pointed out, one great tragic heroine next to the other:¹⁶⁵

The daughter of Ciniro wears neither diadem nor imperial purple. Her beautiful body is shown in simple white drapery, and some flowers, carelessly placed in her hair, are the only ornaments. The expression on her face is sadness rather than remorse, tenderness rather than passion. We find Ristori in her entirety in this beautiful print.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ “Répresentée en pied, dans le rôle de Phèdre, la grande tragédienne porte le diadème au front, et se drape magnifiquement, comme une statue antique, dans son manteau de pourpre étoilé d'or. La main qu'elle presse convulsivement sur sa poitrine semble vouloir y comprimer les mouvements douloureux d'un amour adultère. Quant à l'expression de la physionomie, elle est admirable. Il y a dans le pli soucieux du front, dans l'amer sourire que contracte les lèvres, et surtout dans la fixité, la tristesse et l'expression passionnée du regard, toute l'éloquence des vers de Racine.” Ernest Lacan, *Esquisses photographiques: A propos de l'exposition universelle et de la guerre d'orient* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 127.

¹⁶⁴ Lacan introduces Mayer and Pierson as “habiles artistes” before examining their specific works, *ibid.*, 126.

¹⁶⁵ “Myrrha, à côté de Phèdre,” *ibid.*, 127.

¹⁶⁶ “La fille de Cynire ne porte ni diadème ni pourpre. Son beau corps se dessine dans de simples draperies blanches, et quelques fleurs posées négligemment dans sa chevelure en sont les seuls ornements. L'expression de son visage est plutôt la douleur que le remords, la tendresse que la passion. On retrouve la Ristori tout entière dans cette belle épreuve,” *ibid.*

In the case of this image, Lacan's admiration of the portrait is also in part attributable to the charms of the actress and the pathos of her performance, but the implication was that Mayer and Pierson somehow captured more than this.

The beauty of the portrait went beyond the fact that it successfully captured Ristori playing the demanding part of the tragic heroine who ultimately kills herself to escape the impossible incestuous love she has for her father.¹⁶⁷ This role marked the introduction of Ristori to French audiences and according to Susan Bassnett, "provided Ristori with a vehicle through which she could mount a challenge to the great Rachel," whose reputation was well established. Mayer and Pierson commemorated not only the magnificence of Ristori's Mirra; they conveyed at once what was exceptional about the actress and the woman herself in all her "entirety." If Ristori's personal imprint was reflected in her adaptation of Alfieri's character, through the art of their photography Mayer and Pierson transmuted this to something yet more moving and meaningful, making the traces of their creative labor evident in the image, according to Lacan's reading of it.

From Candies to Cavour: Claiming the Case for Photography as Art

Five or so years after the 1855 Universal Exhibition, arguments over the relative artistry of Mayer and Pierson's photographic portraits were officially taken up in the French courts, just as they continued to be discussed in the satiric, popular and photographic

¹⁶⁷ Alfieri's adaptation of Mirra (1786) was based on Ovid's telling of the myth in *The Metamorphoses*. In Ovid's account Myrrha does not commit suicide, but is transformed into the myrrh tree. This part became one of Ristori's principal roles.

presses. It was over the course of these cases that the photographers’ “imprint of personality” really had to be proven. In the first of these, in the July 26, 1861, judgment in the case of *Mayer and Pierson v. Siraudin*, the *Tribunal civil de la Seine* awarded the photographic firm two hundred francs in damages in a rather comic case of copyright or “authors’ rights” infringement. Over the next few years this initial and seemingly trivial trial would be followed by a series of suits launched by the firm that would ultimately do no less than result in the definition of photography as an art under French law.¹⁶⁸

Mayer and Pierson’s series of lawsuits depended on a precedent set by a case decided on June 10, 1856, in the *Tribunal de commerce de la Seine*. Adrien Tournachon (Nadar jeune)—the photographer first praised by Périer in the *SFP Bulletin*—sued Arsène Houssaye—then the editor of the journal *L’Artiste*—for having published a counterfeited reproduction of his photographic portrait of the recently deceased poet, Gérard de Nerval.¹⁶⁹ In these circumstances the tribunal ultimately ruled that, “a portrait obtained by nature through photographic procedures can, as well as any other work of art, constitute private property,” and awarded Tournachon fifty francs in damages.¹⁷⁰

The report of the case published in the *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire* was appended by a series of observations on its significance by one

¹⁶⁸ Brief discussions of these trials can be found in Anne McCauley, “‘Merely Mechanical’: On the Origins of Photographic Copyright in France and Great Britain” and *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994): 30-34; Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974): 149-154; and André Rouillé *La photographie en France: texts & controverses: une anthologie, 1816-1871* (Paris, Macula, 1989): 390-401. As previously stated, these cases are also central to but collapsed in Edleman’s *Ownership of the Image*.

¹⁶⁹ In an added layer of representational complexity, *L’Artiste* had not simply published an illicit copy of the photograph itself, but had published an engraving re-producing the photographic image.

¹⁷⁰ “Un portrait obtenu sur nature par des procédés photographiques peut, aussi bien que toute autre oeuvre d’art, constituer une propriété privée,” “Art. 99,” in L. Pataille and A. Huguet, eds., *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire: Journal de législation, doctrine et jurisprudence françaises et étrangères en matière de brevets d’invention, littérature, théâtre, musique, beaux-arts, dessins, modèles, noms et marques de fabrique*, tome I and II, 1855-1856 (Paris: Bureau des annales, 1856): 202-205, 202.

of the editors of the annals, H. Pataille. Pataille pointed out a paradox that would come to inform the subsequent suits launched by Mayer and Pierson and that can to some extent account for the back and forth in the various tribunals' rulings on these later cases.¹⁷¹ The Nerval suit depended, as the ruling suggests, on defining who had the right to claim the portrait as their private property. The plaintiff, Nadar jeune, claimed ownership of the image, and the tribunal ultimately supported his claims, but the question remained as to where the portrait *subject* fit into the legal equation. Pataille asserted, with reference to the ruling, that according to the law, "the portrait of a person living or dead constitutes private property, not only as a moveable good [*objet mobilier*], but also as a work of art, either profiting the original proprietor, or any concessionaire of reproduction rights."¹⁷² But Pataille also noted that a new problem was introduced by this particular case given that the image under consideration was a *photographic* portrait. While the judgment decided that this photograph of Nerval could be considered Tournachon's private property, the case also raised the question of whether or not photographs could be considered to be works of art entering under the protection of the 1793 law pertaining to the property rights of authors in any genre, but which, given its date, did not include photographers.¹⁷³

The 1861 case launched by Mayer and Pierson was brought against Paul Siraudin, a successful confectioner with a background in the theater. An article from an 1862 issue of *L'Artiste* told that each day Siraudin invented both a vaudeville and a new candy and

¹⁷¹ The cases pursued by Mayer and Pierson were tried at various levels of jurisdiction ranging from the *Tribunal civil de la Seine* to the *Cour de cassation* (the French Supreme Court).

¹⁷² "le portrait d'une personne vivante ou morte constitue une propriété privée, non-seulement comme objet mobilier, mais encore comme oeuvre d'art, au profit soit du propriétaire de l'original, soit de tout concessionnaire du droit de reproduction." "Art 99," 204.

¹⁷³ "Loi Relative aux droits de propriété des Auteurs d'écrits en tout genre, des Compositeurs de musique, des Peintres et des Dessinateurs. Du 19 Juillet 1793," in *Lois, et actes du gouvernement*, 211-212

noted that he was widely known for uniting his two passions by marketing his confections with dramatic flair.¹⁷⁴ An English journal, reporting on the thriving *bonbons* industry in France, devoted considerable space to describing Siraudin's establishment, detailing the place and mode of manufacture, and pointing out the particular innovativeness of his marketing strategies:

If the bonbons themselves are in some degree works of art, the bags, baskets, and boxes made to contain them are still more so. Some of these are reproductions of antique *chefs-d'oeuvre*, notably the beautiful casket of Anne of Austria preserved in the Museum of French Sovereigns; others of modern invention are models of taste and elegance: for instance, the panier Watteau, formed of fancy straw, satin, pearls, and flowers, the bottom of which was covered with a rich lace pocket-handkerchief, as though it were simply some graceful addition to the mauve or rose satin lining; but this handkerchief costs a thousand francs or so; and thus we are enabled, when sending a lady seemingly only a few score of delicious bonbons, to make her a handsome present in the most delicate possible way.¹⁷⁵

Siraudin, it seems, had a habit of making something more precious and desirable of his sweets by packaging them elaborately and imaginatively, appealing to “tastes” in more than one fashion.

Mayer and Pierson sued Siraudin for having counterfeited and profited off of their work when he began selling his candies wrapped in paper decorated with medallions that featured photographic portraits of actresses and celebrities from their *cartes de visites* collection. The *beaux-arts* baskets, then, had their more lowbrow predecessors in these photo wrappers, which capitalized on the *cartomania* craze. The case ended in a minor victory for the photographic firm, but in order to secure even their paltry award, Mayer and Pierson were tasked with staking what were essentially intellectual property claims in

¹⁷⁴ Charles Coligny, “Le monde comme il va: Voyage dans le pays des étrennes,” in *L'Artiste: Beaux-arts et belles-lettres*, January 1, 1862: 14-18, 16.

¹⁷⁵ “Bonbons,” in *The Chromolithograph*, January 9, 1869: 201-203, 202.

a juridical climate that had not yet acclimatized to the particular pressures that photography placed on the legal definition of “art.”

By implication, Frémard, Mayer and Pierson’s lawyer, had to argue under the assumption that the celebrity portraits were indeed works of art—despite the 1793 law’s necessary failure to include photographers as authors—in order to prove that the plaintiffs were in fact the rightful owners of these images and that Siraudin had illegally counterfeited them. According to the summary of the case in the *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire*, Frémard’s argument was structured as follows: 1) Frémard asserted that Mayer and Pierson’s “artistic industry” was routinely compromised by counterfeiters;¹⁷⁶ 2) he explicitly stated that the photographers were the proprietors of the photographic portraits that they produced, including those of Cavour and Rachel;¹⁷⁷ 3) Mayer and Pierson’s original demand for five thousand francs in damages was not inflated since the manufacture of “artistic prints” was an unusually costly and time consuming enterprise.¹⁷⁸ At this point Frémard launched into a lament about the pains that the photographic subjects inflicted upon the photographers—Mayer and Pierson were forced to accommodate the artists’ schedules and comply with all their various whims and demands, and here Frémard made the pointed pronouncement that “when it comes to women especially, all this is no small affair.”¹⁷⁹ Frémard finally claimed that after all of these costs and troubles, such counterfeiting, as practiced by Siraudin, would mean “a

¹⁷⁶ “industrie artistique.” “Art. 772: Portraits photographiques. – Reproduction partielle. – Enveloppes de bonbons,” in *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire*, 1861: 64-66, 64.

¹⁷⁷ Given the explicit naming of these two figures it is possible that Cavour’s and Rachel’s portraits numbered among those that appeared on Siraudin’s wrappers although the literature only refers to “actresses” generally.

¹⁷⁸ “épreuves artistiques.” Ibid, 65.

¹⁷⁹ “lorsqu’il s’agit de femmes surtout, cela n’est point une petite affaire.” Ibid.

veritable ruin for the photographer,” and asked that the tribunal grant Mayer and Pierson “the fair indemnity which [was] their due.”¹⁸⁰

In response, Siraudin’s lawyer, Truinet, offered a series of retorts. Truinet began his rebuttal by claiming that photographers, not candy makers, had been taking advantage of celebrities by profiting from their photographic portraits. He posed an important question, which would recur as a theme in the subsequent suits filed by Mayer and Pierson: “if it is a matter of defining the rights of the photographers,” Truinet asked, “could we say that they are the owners of physiognomy?”¹⁸¹ His answer, of course, was no, that the physiognomy depicted in the portrait logically belonged to the sitter who at any point could go pose elsewhere, and that likewise the photographer had no right to claim ownership of the costume, which was the property of the designer. By implication, according to this argument photography did not involve any creative invention, which excluded it from qualifying as art under the law. The ability to produce an image through the photographic process depended on nothing more or less than “a flick of the wrist,” as Truinet put it.¹⁸²

The two hundred francs the tribunal ordered Siraudin to pay was ultimately less meaningful than the other penalties that made up the ruling. Truinet had attempted to claim that Siraudin’s use of the images could hardly count as counterfeiting. He noted that among the collection of photo-candies were bust-length portraits of dancers and went so far as to suggest that Siraudin’s method of “quotation” of a part would actually

¹⁸⁰ “une véritable ruine pour le photographe”; “la juste indemnité qui leur est due,” *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ “S’il s’agit de définir les droits des photographes, dira-t-on que ceux-ci sont propriétaires de la physiognomie?” *ibid.*, 65

¹⁸² “le tour de main,” *ibid.*, 66.

encourage candy consumers to purchase the original photographic whole. The tribunal did not buy this argument. The ruling forbade Siraudin any further use of “reproductions” of Mayer and Pierson’s portraits in the sale of his goods, either in part or in whole, and demanded the restitution of the seized portraits to the photographic firm.

Although the tribunal never officially defined the photographs as art in their judgment, they did explicitly grant Mayer and Pierson authorial rights over the photographic portraits. Therefore, with this case an important legal precedent was set to the extent that it seemed as though the tribunal had allowed that photographers might possibly be added to the list of artists referred to in the 1793 authors’ rights law. This ruling presented a significant inroad for future legal efforts to establish photography as an art, but the path would not be paved without some detours.

Several months after their victory in the Siraudin case, Mayer and Pierson would return to court pursuant to a suit they launched against two defendants whom they claimed had counterfeited their photographs. In this case they would be less successful. Mayer and Pierson accused MM. Thiébault and Betbéder of counterfeiting the portrait of Cavour and M. Schwabbé [elsewhere spelled Shwalbé] of counterfeiting the portrait of Palmerston. The judgment decided by the *Tribunal correctionnel de la Seine* on January 9, 1862, determined that “prints obtained by means of the daguerreotype and photography cannot be considered works of art entering under the protection of the law of the 19th of July 1793.”¹⁸³ In the course of the trial, Betbéder admitted to knowing that his firm’s image of Cavour was based off of the Mayer and Pierson portrait, but he claimed that his

¹⁸³ “Les épreuves obtenues à l’aide du daguerréotype et de la photographie ne constituent pas des oeuvres d’art rentrant sous la protection de la loi du 19 juillet 1793,” “Art. 775. Propriété artistique. – Portraits photographiques,” in *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire*, 1862: 71-75, 71.

studio had employed an artist to retouch the original portrait—a standard practice in photography, which he implied generated a new image altogether. He also suggested that because the portrait under question was one of a public figure, “everyone had the right to imitate and even copy it, and that to modify the accessories even a little would suffice in sheltering one from reproach.”¹⁸⁴

Frémard, once again advocating on Mayer and Pierson’s behalf, responded by invoking some of the same arguments he had made in the previous case. He cited the “great sacrifices” his clients made in terms of time and money in order to create such an image.¹⁸⁵ Referring to the Siraudin and Nerval precedents, he claimed that under the law Mayer and Pierson’s rights as owners of this property was “incontestable”—that in this case “the counterfeiting was yet more direct and prejudicial” since the portraits were reproduced on cards of the same size as the originals and their modifications were negligible.¹⁸⁶ Pataille, acting on Betbéder’s behalf, retorted that if Cavour had paid for the image, then therefore it was his property and only he could rightfully accuse another of counterfeiting. As it stood, Pataille claimed, Mayer and Pierson would have to prove that Cavour had ceded reproduction rights to them. Ultimately this was proof the plaintiffs could not provide.

In their ruling against Mayer and Pierson, the tribunal cited the following lines from the 1793 law: “these productions of art [by artists], these fruits of the spirit, of the imagination and of the genius that serve as the ornament and glory of a nation, [...] are

¹⁸⁴ “chacun avait le droit de l’imiter et même de le copier, et qu’il suffisait de modifier plus ou moins les accessoires pour être à l’abri de tout reproche,” *ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸⁵ “grands sacrifices,” *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ “incontestable”; “la contrefaçon est encore plus directe et plus préjudiciable,” *ibid.*

worth even more as property to the man to whom they belong more immediately and are even in some ways a part of him.”¹⁸⁷ The court recalled this definition because it obliged them to distinguish between property belonging to the fine arts, which could rightfully belong to authors, and property belonging to the industrial arts, which could not. The former, they specified, “are the results of thought and intelligence,” while the latter “demand above all manual labor or the use of machines.”¹⁸⁸ Given the dismissal of Mayer and Pierson’s claims, in the verdict the court had to explain why photography was an industry rather than an art and therefore stood outside the purview of the 1793 law. The tribunal provided the following definition of the medium in accordance with their judgment:

Given that photography is the art of fixing the image of external objects by means of the camera obscura and diverse chemical processes; and that this is a purely manual operation, requiring, without a doubt, practice and great ability, but coming nowhere near to resembling the work of the painter or the draftsman who creates, with the resources of his imagination, compositions and subjects, or reproduces, with his own feeling, images after nature; — While recognizing the services [that photography] has rendered to the fine arts, we cannot give it a place among the latter; — In effect, photography does not invent and does not create; it merely obtains negatives and then produces prints that reproduce slavishly the images placed before the lens; — That such works, produced with the assistance of mechanical means, cannot in any case be assimilated with works of intelligence and no ownership resembling that belonging to the artist who invents and creates can be conferred to the industrialist who manufactures them [...] On these grounds, [the complaints made against Betbéder, Thiébault and Schwabbé are null and void and they are exonerated].¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ “ces productions des arts, ces fruits de l’esprit, de l’imagination et du genie qui servent à l’ornement et à la gloire d’une nation, et qui sont des propriétés d’autant plus chères à l’homme qu’elles appartiennent plus immédiatement et sont en quelque sorte une partie de lui-même,” *ibid.*, 74.

¹⁸⁸ “les uns sont le résultat de la pensée et de l’intelligence”; “les autres exigent surtout le travail de la main ou l’emploi des machines,” *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ “Attendu que la photographie est l’art de fixer l’image des objets extérieurs au moyen de la chambre obscure et de divers procédés chimiques ; que c’est là une opération purement manuelle, exigeant sans doute de l’habitude et une grande habileté, mais ne ressemblant en rien à l’oeuvre du peintre ou du dessinateur qui crée, avec les ressources de son imagination, des compositions et des sujets ou reproduit, avec son sentiment propre, des images d’après nature ; — Que, tout en reconnaissant les services qu’elle a rendus aux beaux-arts, on ne saurait lui donner rang parmi ces derniers; — Qu’en effet, la photographie n’invente et ne crée pas ; qu’elle se borne à obtenir des clichés et à tirer ensuite des épreuves reproduisant servilement les images soumises à l’objectif ; — Que ces ouvrages, produits à l’aide de moyens mécaniques, ne peuvent en aucun cas être assimilés aux oeuvres de l’intelligence et conférer à l’industriel qui les fabrique une propriété semblable à celle de l’artiste qui invente et qu’elle crée [...],” *ibid.*, 75.

Interestingly, in further support of their judgment, the tribunal also referred to the fact that Daguerre had sold his invention to the state and therefore it would be “against the rules” to bestow a privilege of ownership upon those who are already profiting from his discovery.¹⁹⁰

Although the case seemed conclusive, Mayer and Pierson persisted. In early April of 1862 the case was brought before the *Cour d’appel de Paris*. On this occasion the judgment was more favorable for Mayer and Pierson, but less determinate in its definition of photography. The court of appeal did not entirely agree with the criminal court’s [*Tribunal correctionnel*] exclusion of photography from the domain of the fine arts. This court made an equation between photography and drawing, referring to photographs as “photographic drawings [in the sense of designs],” and therefore suggesting that they might be protected under the terms of the 1793 law.¹⁹¹ Ultimately the appeal court claimed:

Considering that photographic drawings do not necessarily, and in every case, have to be considered to be devoid [*destitués*] of all artistic character, nor ranked among purely industrial works [*oeuvres matérielles*]; — That in effect, these drawings, even if they be obtained with the aid of the darkroom and under the influence of light, can still, to some extent and to a certain degree, be the product of thought, of the spirit, of taste and of the intelligence of the operator; — That [the photographs’] perfection, independent of the ability of the hand, depends in great part, in the case of landscape, on the choice of the point of view, on the combination of effects of light and shade, and, moreover, in the case of portraits, on the pose of the subject, the arrangement of the costume and the accessories, all things depending on artistic sentiment and through which the photographer bestows upon his work the imprint of his personality.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ “contraire aux règles,” *ibid*.

¹⁹¹ “les dessins photographiques,” “Art. 787. Propriété artistique. — Portraits photographique,” in *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire*, 1862: 113-118, 116.

¹⁹² “Considérant que les dessins photographiques ne doivent pas être nécessairement, et dans tous les cas, considérés comme destitués de tout caractère artistique, ni rangés au nombre des oeuvres purement matérielles ; — Qu’en effet, ces dessins, quoique obtenus à l’aide de la chambre noire et sous l’influence de la lumière, peuvent, dans une certaine mesure et dans un certain degré, être le produit de la pensée, de l’esprit, du goût et de l’intelligence de l’opérateur ; — Que leur perfection, indépendamment de l’habileté

The ruling opened up the conditional possibility that photographs could be considered works of art, leaving the case-by-case decisions to the courts. This judgment specified that it determined that the imprint of the photographer's personality was discernable in Mayer and Pierson's portraits of Cavour and Palmerston and resolved that Betbéder pay them damages in the amount of 200 francs and Schwalbé in the amount of 100 francs.

In November of the same year the case was tried before the French Supreme Court. Given the importance of the proceedings at this level of jurisdiction, the *compte rendu* in the *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire* was much more thorough.¹⁹³ M. Hérold, acting on Betbéder and Shwalbé's behalf, described in more detail the adjustments his clients had made to Mayer and Pierson's portrait of Cavour. He reported that they had first enlarged the image and then retouched it in particular places to the extent that they had changed the position of the legs. They also enhanced the background by adding a bookcase and other accessories. In addition to pointing out these modifications, Hérold again emphasized that among photographers it was widely understood that portraits of illustrious men, such as Cavour, were in the public domain and therefore free for photographic appropriation. Given all of the above, Betbéder invoked the Roman legal maxim, *Feci, sed jure feci* [meaning, roughly, "I did it, but I acted within my rights"], admitting an offense but denying the crime.

de la main, dépend en grande partie, dans la reproduction des paysages, du choix du point de vue, de la combinaison des effets de lumière et d'ombre, et, en outre, dans les portraits, de la pose du sujet, de l'agencement du costume et des accessoires, toutes choses abandonnées au sentiment artistique et qui donnent à l'oeuvre du photographe l'empreinte de sa personnalité," *ibid.*, 117.

¹⁹³ "Art. 870. Photographie. — Portraits. — Contrefaçon.," in *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire*, 1862: 419-433.

The defendants then had to counter the argument that the portraits of Cavour and Palmerston revealed any artistry effected by Mayer and Pierson. Their strategy was to discriminate in terms of the genre of photographs the court had in evidence before them. While Hérold allowed that certain photographs could be works of art, the portraits of Cavour and Palmerston were photographs “obtained after nature”—nature being these two men—and could not be considered to be original or artistic compositions.¹⁹⁴ This rhetorical move was particularly well played because under the prototypical image of Cavour, Mayer and Pierson had placed an inscription that was commonly applied to photographic portraits of celebrities: “Guaranteed after nature.”¹⁹⁵ The argument then entered into a lofty discussion centering on the Sisyphean task of answering: “What is art?”

Hérold noted the need to distinguish between two definitions of art: the aesthetic sense of the term and the legal sense. While he admitted that art could be found anywhere, in the domain of the fine arts—where he said it could also be absent—art implied the “*perfection* of a product.”¹⁹⁶ In the legal sense art “belong[ed] to certain categories and fulfill[ed] certain conditions.”¹⁹⁷ Specifically, those categories were stipulated in the 1793 law and foremost among them was the notion that art was “a product of the spirit or genius” and that it “constituted a creation.”¹⁹⁸ The defense then repeated the definition of photography-as-art provided in the April 10th ruling (cited on page 94). They pointed out that the artistic maneuvers the tribunal had identified as

¹⁹⁴ “obtenu d’après nature,” *ibid.*, 422.

¹⁹⁵ “Garanti d’après nature,” *ibid.*, 421.

¹⁹⁶ “la *perfection* du produit,” original emphasis, *ibid.*, 423.

¹⁹⁷ “l’oeuvre d’art est celle qui appartient à certaines catégories et qui remplit certaines conditions,” *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ “production de l’esprit ou du genie”; “constitue une création,” *ibid.*

possibly put into practice in photography were actually intrinsic to *all* photographs (i.e., point of view, handling of light and shade, pose of the subject, arrangement of costume and accessories). The ruling, they claimed, did not address the question of the perfection of the product; it failed to take into account the aesthetic sense of art. Hérold then described the process of painting a portrait—one defined by artistic transmutation and creation—and the process of executing a photographic portrait—one involving taste, perhaps, and a certain degree of intelligence, but always exercised in the context of mechanical operations. Photography could never be an art, Hérold declared, but he was emphatic that this was not his personal opinion, but an estimation that came with exceptional reinforcement.

Hérold presented a document signed by none other than preeminent artists who objected to photography's designation as art. Their protestation, crafted in appropriately legal language, read as follows:

Considering that, in recent circumstances, the tribunals have been seized by the question as to whether or not photography can be assimilated into the fine arts, and its products protected on equal standing with the works of artists;

Considering that photography boils down to a series of manual operations, which require, without a doubt, some ability in terms of the manipulations that they entail, but given that the prints resulting from such operations cannot, 'under any circumstances,' be equated with works born of intelligence and the study of art;

On these grounds, the undersigned artists protest against all equations that might be made between photography and art.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ "Considérant que, dans de récentes circonstances, les tribunaux ont été saisis de la question [it could be that Edelman's French title derives from this text] de savoir si la photographie devait être assimilée aux beaux-arts, et ses produits protégés à l'égal des oeuvres des artistes;

Considérant que la photographie se résume en une série d'opérations toutes manuelles, qui nécessite sans doute quelque habitude des manipulations qu'elle comporte, mais que les épreuves qui en résultant ne peuvent, 'en aucune circonstance,' être assimilées aux oeuvres fruit de l'intelligence et de l'étude de l'art;

Par ces motifs, les artistes soussignés protestent contre toute assimilation qui pourrait être faite de la photographie à l'art," *ibid.*, 427. The letter was signed by Ingres, Flandrin, Robert Fleury, Picot, Nanteuil, Henriquel-Dupont, Martinet, Jeanron, Calamatta, Philippoteaux, Eug. Lepoitevin, Troyon, Bida, Hipp. Bellangé, Jalabert, Philippe Rousseau, Gendron, E. Lequesne, Isabey, Français, Emile Lecomte, Puvion de Chavannes, Vidal, L. Lassalle, J. Bourgeois, Lafosse, Em. Lafon, and Lalaisse.

This authoritative declaration provided a powerful anchor for Hérold's closing argument as none other than the nation's great undersigned artists themselves collectively refuted photography's designation as art.

Rendu's opening statement emphasized the historical significance of the trial. He intimated that he was arguing less on behalf of Mayer and Pierson and more properly on behalf of photography at large, which the firm was representing in this trial. Rendu expressed his desire to put an end to the anarchical jurisprudence that had exploded over this series of trials. Rendu reminded the court and others in attendance of their timely and consequential duty:

In the state of our civilization, we must recognize that all work offering through its form and figure a type of personal imprint by its author, that all such work deserves to be called a work of the human spirit, is legally a work of art, regardless of whether it is an object reserved for people of taste, or whether it be a work that appealed to industry for its elevation and embellishment.²⁰⁰

Rendu pointed out what he quite optimistically described as a "happy and fruitful alliance between art and industry" in his time.²⁰¹ He reversed the commonplace assumptions about this complicated union by claiming that the meeting of these worlds would not mean a cheapening of art, but would result in an ennobling of industry.

Then, following the logic of the trial, Rendu proposed his own definition of art, which broke down this rather abstract category according to a series of classifications that he presumably hoped would put the legal mind at ease and quell the judicial anarchy. He

²⁰⁰ "Dans l'état de notre civilisation, on a dû reconnaître que toute oeuvre offrant par sa forme et sa figure un type empreint de la personnalité de son auteur, que toute oeuvre digne d'être appelée une production de l'esprit humain, était légalement une oeuvre d'art, soit qu'elle fût appliquée à l'industrie pour la relever et l'embellir," *ibid.*, 428.

²⁰¹ "une heureuse et féconde alliance entre l'art et l'industrie," *ibid.*

said the world of the intelligence was made up of three elements: the true, the beautiful, and the useful.²⁰² Science, he claimed, was the manifestation of the true, art the manifestation of the beautiful, and industry the manifestation of the useful. These three elements provoked three separate sentiments: science incited curiosity and the desire for knowledge; art motivated admiration; and industry responded to wellbeing and to the satisfaction of needs. Rendu claimed that all art combined human intelligence with material means and that it was human intelligence that in all media directed its instruments, whether they be material, such as paint or stone, or industrial, in the case of photography.

Photography, he claimed, left plenty of space for the work of the spirit. In order to prove this Rendu described the method practiced by the painter when tasked with representing a mountainous landscape and equated this explicitly with the method employed by the photographer when approaching a similar scene. The brush was the instrument of the painter's thought, just as the camera was the instrument of the photographer's spirit or intelligence, he implied. Rendu then presented the court with an almost comical comparison. The "masterpiece of masterpieces in painting," he claimed, was Raphael's *School of Athens* (1509-1511). He pointed out the sublimity of the arrangement of figures in the composition and then compared it to a photographic group portrait of the members of the representatives of the Congress of Paris [likely, Fig. 2.6] by Mayer and Pierson. Although he tempered his language, not daring to describe the latter work as sublime, Rendu analyzed the poses of the figures in the photographic

²⁰² In presenting these particular categories, Rendu was drawing on Victor Cousin's lectures on "Du vrai, du beau et du bien" [On the True, the Beautiful and the Good, 1836]. See: McCauley, "Merely Mechanical," 66.

composition and suggested that Cavour's placement by the photographers was an artistic presentiment of his importance. He then opined on the notion of the pose, which he claimed was the product of the intelligence of the artist, and represented art at its highest form of expression. After a monologue explaining the significance of the pose in painting and photography, Rendu launched into his previously cited readings of the portraits of Cavour and Palmerston wherein he equated them with history (see page 71).

In order to ensure disambiguation with respect to the status of photography, Rendu proposed that there was "an assured *criterium*" that could be used to judge the case.²⁰³ The hallmark of the work of a machine was uniformity, whereas "what distinguishes the work of man is variety, diversity and progress," he claimed.²⁰⁴ Any subject reproduced photographically had an infinite number of possible outcomes, which would depend on the nature or quality of the work of the man who executed them. "Photographic portraits of the same person display enormous differences in terms of artistic value," Rendu pointed out—a fact which by reason of logic proved that they could be defined as art.²⁰⁵

Rendu then addressed the letter signed by celebrated artists protesting photography's equation with art. Hérold's secret weapon became Rendu's punching bag:

The feeling of art is so inherent to photography, so essential to its success, that all elite photographers are painters or sculptors. Our most eminent artists have more than once borrowed the support of photographers for their compositions, and I am shocked to see in a protestation by famous painters [writing] against the pretense [that photography is an

²⁰³ "un *criterium* assuré," *ibid.*, 431.

²⁰⁴ "Ce qui distingue l'oeuvre de l'homme, c'est la variété, la diversité, le progress," *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ "Les portraits photographiques de la même personne ont une différence de valeur artistique énorme," *ibid.*

art], the names of certain among them who were not too proud to reproduce photographic portraits executed by my clients.²⁰⁶

On account of this hypocrisy on the part of these artists, Rendu asked the court to dismiss the letter. He closed his argument with an appeal to the court to uphold justice and put a stop to the regrettable counterfeiting that so harmed the honest and illustrious photographers that he represented.

Rendu's aggressive argumentation ultimately won out. As previously described, the November 28, 1862, ruling came with the conditional affirmation that the two photographic portraits of Cavour and Palmerston by Mayer and Pierson "could be considered to be artistic works," and stated that, "they must benefit from the protection afforded by the 1793 law to works of the spirit or of genius belonging to the fine arts."²⁰⁷ Ostensibly, the "anarchy" ended and the ambiguity was laid to rest. Rendu had—at least in the case of these two photographs—surmounted the Sisyphean task of defining photography as art.

The Return of the Repressed: Tragic Actresses and the Actuating Subject

According to Bernard Edelman, the trials centering on Mayer and Pierson's portraits of Palmerston and Cavour marked the transition in conceiving of photography as a "*soulless labour*" to designating the photographer as a "subject-creator" and being able to identify

²⁰⁶ "Le sentiment de l'art est tellement inhérent à la photographie, tellement essentiel à son succès, que tous les photographes d'élite sont des peintres ou des sculpteurs. Nos plus éminents artistes ont plus d'une fois emprunté les secours des photographes pour leurs compositions, et je m'étonne de voir dans une protestation de peintres célèbres contre la prétention de la photographie les noms de certains d'entre eux qui n'ont pas dédaigné de reproduire des portraits photographiques obtenus par mes clients," *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ "peuvent être considérés comme des productions artistiques," "ils doivent jouir de la protection accordée par la loi de 1793 aux oeuvres de l'esprit ou du genie appartenant aux beaux-arts," *ibid.*, 433.

in his work “*the soul of the labour*.”²⁰⁸ According to the French Supreme Court, by the end of 1862 the photographer was more than a mere “man-machine.” Mayer and Pierson’s own justifications for considering photography as art in their related publication—although destined for a very different audience—echoed to some extent the arguments Rendu and others made in support of their cases in court. Out of the roughly two hundred and fifty pages that make up *La photographie considérée comme art et comme industrie*, however, only fifteen pages are explicitly devoted to “Photography from the point of view of art.”²⁰⁹ If art inspires admiration, as Rendu claimed, in this section Mayer and Pierson went so far as to suggest that certain photographs seize, impress, and inspire the soul as deeply as the *Mona Lisa*—a comparative strategy that echoed Rendu’s invocation of Raphael’s *School of Athens*.

One of Mayer and Pierson’s more original and meaningful recourses to equating photography with art was curiously to return to the rhetoric that circulated around their photographs from the 1855 Universal Exhibition. They invoked the great actress Rachel and used her as justification for claiming the artistry inherent in photography. Their discussion of Rachel was also framed by the fact that her life had been cut short as she died of tuberculosis in her mid-thirties in 1858. The tragic actress had met a tragic end and France lost a great talent. But Rachel would be remembered and photography would play an instrumental role in preserving her legacy, they argued. In an exhibition catalogue devoted to images of Rachel, Laurence Sigal-Klagsbald poetically suggested that the

²⁰⁸ Edelman, *Ownership of the Image*, 44.

²⁰⁹ “La photographie au point de vue de l’art,” in *La photographie considérée...: 95-110*. Other sections address the invention of photography, a biography of Daguerre, considerations of particular photographic processes, a discussion of the potential artistic applications of photography, photography from the point of view of industry, etc.

actress “was the star who appeared at the dawn of the age of reproducibility.”²¹⁰ John Stokes more explicitly noted that Rachel was “among the very first performers to be systematically recorded by the camera.”²¹¹ Not only did photographs of Rachel circulate widely, but some of the most important paintings of her were also based on photographs—as in the case of Jean-Léon Gérôme’s portrait of *Rachel personnifiant la Tragédie* (1859) [Fig. 2.7], which was purportedly derived from a portrait of the actress by Nadar. Furthermore, Jules Janin’s biography, *Rachel et la tragédie* (1861), which was published shortly after her death, was one of the earliest biographies—not to mention books—to include photographs of its subject. The book was a luxury volume that included ten portraits of “Mademoiselle Rachel in her principal roles,” which were executed by Henri de la Blanchère and heavily retouched [Fig. 2.8, a. and b.].²¹²

In their publication, *La photographie considérée comme art et comme industrie*, published following the court cases and after Janin’s biography, Mayer and Pierson acknowledged Rachel’s photographic legacy, which they had helped to secure. In their discussion of her proclivity for turning to the photographic portrait as a means of self-representation, they suggested that the great actress recognized the medium’s supremacy over painting for her purposes; conveniently, she was not there to refute it. The passage on Rachel is worth quoting at length:

Once Rachel, after having unsuccessfully sought health—which had been spent on the emotions under the floodlights—from the waters of the Nile and the gentle climate of Cannes, [once she] felt that she would die and that nothing else was left of her but the

²¹⁰ “Elle est l’étoile qui apparaît à l’aube de l’ère de la reproductibilité,” *Rachel: Une vie pour le théâtre (1821-1858)* (Paris: Société Adam Biro, 2004), 8.

²¹¹ John Stokes, “Rachel Felix,” in *Three Tragic Actresses*: 66-116, 76.

²¹² “Ouvrages orné de dix photographies représentant Mlle Rachel dans ces principaux rôles,” Jules Janin, *Rachel et la tragédie* (Paris: Amyot, Libraire-Editeur, 1861).

memory of her triumphs, she wanted to leave more durable witnesses of her passage to the dramatic arts, and charged photography to reproduce her in all her roles.²¹³

Rachel, it is suggested, knew that photography would offer the most permanent and compelling record of her accomplishments. Significantly, it could also, thanks to its reproducibility, accommodate representations of her multiple roles and provide an inventory of parts of her history rather than one iconic painted image that fixed her in one position or personification, as Gérôme's painting did.

Mayer and Pierson then explicitly aimed to persuade their readers that this record was not only a lasting witness, but that it was a masterpiece:

Who today, could without profound emotion, look over these plates that show us this so real incarnation of the great tragedienne in *Phaedra*, in *Hermione*, in *Camille*, in all these immortal types created by the genius of tragedy which had never seen a more great, a more faithful interpreter?²¹⁴

Were Mayer and Pierson implying that photography would in turn make Rachel immortal, a heroine in her own right? Perhaps, but they clearly pointed out the source of the *admiration* that her photographs inspired, which according to Rendu's categories, would define them as art:

There is art in these reproductions, and she knew it, the great artist, that the daguerreotype alone could seize this particular air, this attitude, this flame of the look, this rapid eloquence of the gesture which vanishes from the comedienne's features with the word that falls from her lips, and with the feeling that stirs her, and [she knew] that even the paintbrush was powerless to reproduce the skillful elegance of the folds of the

²¹³ "Lorsque Rachel, après avoir vainement demandé une santé usée par les émotions de la rampe, aux eaux du Nil et au tiède climat de Cannes, sentit qu'elle allait mourir sans qu'il restât autre chose d'elle que le souvenir de ses triomphes, elle voulut laisser à l'art dramatique des témoignages plus durables de son passage, et chargea la photographie de la reproduire dans tous ses rôles," *La photographie considérée comme art et comme industrie*, 105.

²¹⁴ "Qui pourrait aujourd'hui, sans une émotion profonde, parcourir ces quelques planches qui nous montrent cette incarnation si vraie de la grande tragédienne dans *Phèdre*, dans *Hermione*, dans *Camille*, dans tous ces types immortels créés par le génie tragique qui n'avait jamais trouvé de plus grande, de plus fidèle interprète?" *ibid.*, 105.

draperies which vary according to the movement that the situation, the thought, or the passion, inspires in the body.

Only the daguerreotype acts with enough rapidity to seize all these fugitive details, which together constitute likeness.²¹⁵

Curiously, despite the claims that had been made on their behalf in court, which ultimately led to their hard-fought and historically significant legal triumph, in this context Mayer and Pierson effectively reversed the terms of the creative agency in the photographic image. Rather than proclaiming their own spirit or genius and rather than proving that the “imprint of their personality” was evident in these images, they reverted to the kind of argument proposed by some members of the photographic press in 1855, which actually acted against them and in favor of the actress. In the passage quoted above, which is emphatically made in the chapter describing “photography from the point of view of art,” Mayer and Pierson reinforced the point that it was in fact *Rachel’s* art that the images represented. While photography could effectively seize Rachel’s artistry—the daguerreotype responded effectively to the photographer’s “flick of the wrist”—the art in the image rested not in Mayer and Pierson’s “personal imprint,” but in *her* air, *her* attitude, *her* look, gestures, feeling, thoughts and passion.

While seeming to continue to dig their own graves in terms of their status as artists, Mayer and Pierson proceeded to more thoroughly contrast photography and painting. In the same section they asserted: “photography does not have a manner of its

²¹⁵ “Il y a de l’art dans ces reproductions, et elle savait, la grande artiste, que le daguerréotype seul pouvait saisir cet air particulier, cette attitude, cette flamme de regard, cette rapide éloquence du geste qui s’évanouit sur les traits du comédien avec le mot qui tombe de ses lèvres, avec le sentiment qui l’agite, et que le pinceau était même impuissant pour reproduire cette savante élégance des plis des draperies qui varient suivant le mouvement que la situation, la pensée ou la passion inspirent au corps.

Le daguerréotype seul agit avec assez de rapidité pour saisir tous ces détails si fugitifs dont l’ensemble constitue la ressemblance,” *ibid.*, 106.

own, and for the portrait especially, this is no insignificant advantage.”²¹⁶ They described that while portraits painted by Frédérique O’Connell or Ingres—both had portrayed Rachel—, for example, could be charming representations and sometimes masterpieces, they resulted in *types* inspired by the artist’s soul, which could be found in all of his or her work. They represented the figure as *transfigured* through the artist’s manner; “only photography does not have a manner,” they claimed, “it is the truth.”²¹⁷

In the September 11, 1858, edition of the photographic journal *La Lumière*, an article on “Rachel et la photographie” praised the illustrations accompanying Janin’s biography. Like Mayer and Pierson, the author claimed that motivated by her approaching end, Rachel set out to photographically commemorate her great roles. The author praised the images, proclaiming upon seeing them, “here, Rachel lives.”²¹⁸ The photographs had achieved an ultimate aim of artistic likeness: vivification. They were not representations that spoke to the talent or manner of the photographer; rather, they were mechanisms that actuated the genius of the subject—“true” and “useful” means for representing what was “beautiful” in her. What moved the soul and inspired admiration was the revived spirit of the great artist whose “personal imprint” lived on in the images. In their invocation of Rachel in *La photographie considérée comme art et comme industrie*, Mayer and Pierson had curiously undermined the artistry of photography.

²¹⁶ “la photographie n’a pas de manière à elle, et pour le portrait surtout, c’est là un inappréciable mérite,” *ibid.*, 106.

²¹⁷ “La photographie seule n’a pas de manière, elle est la vérité,” *ibid.* 107.

²¹⁸ “Là, Rachel est vivante,” “Rachel et la photographie,” in *La Lumière* (09/11/1858), 146.

Conclusion

If Rachel's trajectory coincided with the dawn of the age of technological reproducibility, Ristori's career persisted well into its maturity. Whereas Rachel's contemporaries had consistently compared the actress to a classical statue while praising her talents as an actress, an interesting and potentially medium specific shift happened when Ristori rose to fame.²¹⁹ Sarah Betzer noted that Rachel was often "described as drained of modern life, as if she were frozen, timeless, in a remote historical moment."²²⁰ As in Périer's review of Mayer and Pierson's photograph of the actress exhibited at the 1855 Universal Exhibition, "in such descriptions, Rachel exceeded the statuesque to become a statue."²²¹ On the other hand, the Italian, Ristori, was prized for qualities such as "womanly tenderness," which distinguished her from her French rival.²²² If Rachel represented a static timelessness, Ristori aimed to present her own brand of historical specificity through her dramatic method.

Bassnett described that in her *Memoirs*, Ristori "claim[ed] that the representation of nature in a living, truthful way was the hallmark of what she term[ed] the Italian school of acting."²²³ Ristori reflected on her method at length in her memoirs and Bassnett also noted the actress's exceptional attention to detail in terms of her

²¹⁹ For a thorough discussion of Rachel's relationship to the sculptural, see, Sarah E. Betzer, *Ingres and the Studio: Women, Painting, History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012). Betzer discusses the sculptural principally as it pertains to Rachel's acting methods and painted portraits of her. John Stokes also points out the sculptural rhetoric associated with Rachel and cites interesting passages from Théophile Gautier and Arsène Houssaye, among others. "Rachel Felix," in *Three Tragic Actresses*, 75.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Three Tragic Actresses*, 8.

²²³ Bassnett, "Adelaide Ristori," in *Three Tragic Actresses*, 143. Ristori was a patriotic promoter of the so-called "Italian school."

commitment to presenting “precise historical reconstruction of characters in period,” which was in part achieved through references to “contemporary paintings.”²²⁴ If Rachel was seen as sculptural in her comportment on stage, Ristori also intentionally lingered in her poses to the extent that her technique came to be described as “picture-acting.”²²⁵ The method proved popular and although inspired by painting, Bassnett suggests that the effect “would have an almost *photographic* impact on the spectators,” as the scene would develop before their eyes and imprint itself in their memories.²²⁶ The Italian’s purported “tenderness” and commitment to representing a living truth on stage translated into a Galatea-like effect. The transition from Rachel to Ristori might have marked the timeless sculpture being brought to life; the “marmoreal morbidity”—to borrow a term from Betzer—of the former was startled awake by the latter’s passionate performances, which, ironically nearly always climaxed in a tragic death or deaths. As was the case with Rachel’s statuelike poses, Ristori’s “picture-acting” was easily translated into photographs, which were filled with the pathos that characterized her roles.²²⁷

Despite their differences, the photographic records of both actresses left lasting testaments to their individual legacies. While the images served Rachel’s and Ristori’s reputations, they also were instrumental in securing Mayer and Pierson’s reputation as photographers of talent. The complex oscillation from the 1850s to the 1860s and beyond, between trying to argue for the artistry effected by the photographer while appearing to more accurately describe the artistry central to the actress, created

²²⁴ Ibid., 145.

²²⁵ Ibid., 146. According to Bassnett the term first appeared in a review of Ristori’s acting in the June 7, 1856, issue of *The Spectator*, 609.

²²⁶ Ibid., my emphasis.

²²⁷ See, for example, Fig. 2.9, which shows four cartes de visite by Disdéri of Ristori in the role of Legouv e’s M ed e.

competing “actuating subjects,” to borrow Bernard Edelman’s term, who asserted arguable levels of creative agency throughout the photographic process. This competition played out not only in the images, but also in the photographic and popular presses, and especially in the courts in Mayer and Pierson’s case. While photography certainly “seized” the law and troubled its definitions of authorship in this period, these actresses also seized photography for their own ends, and were in turn seized by it, as the medium’s advocates struggled to secure its status as art.

The next two chapters examine the ways in which Castiglione seized photography in order to become an “actuating subject” in her own right.

CHAPTER THREE

The Countess de Castiglione's Light/Life Writing

Introduction

Consisting of hundreds of images ranging from the conventional, to the creative, to the controversial, the Countess de Castiglione's photographic corpus is on one hand unwieldy and amorphous and on the other remarkably contained and defined. Given the resolute centering on Castiglione as the sole subject of interest throughout the images, much has been made of the sitter's self-obsession and undeniable narcissism. It has been vilified in her time and thereafter. It has been praised and appropriated posthumously—most notably by the aesthete, Robert de Montesquiou, who wrote Castiglione's biography and saw in her an intriguing compatriot of style- and self-obsession. It has been to some extent theorized by scholars such as Abigail Solomon-Godeau, who characterized the countess's photographic corpus as an extended project of self-fetishization, and Heather McPherson, who compared the portraits to another contemporaneous and vast body of photographic portraits of women—those captured and codified by Jean-Martin Charcot in the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* [Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière].

In her chapter on the Countess, McPherson stated, “the [photographic] representation of hysteria [at the Salpêtrière] was an ideologically grounded, gendered

discourse in which hysterical symptoms came to exemplify the pathological traits of women in general,” and suggested that likewise, Castiglione’s photographs, “in their variety and multiplicity [...] register her strange beauty and her pathological narcissism more effectively than the painted and sculpted portraits.”²²⁸ The implications of the interesting relationship between photography, as it functioned with respect to portraits of purported hysterics, and the way it was utilized by Castiglione, will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter Four. This chapter, on the other hand, reorients the countess’s relationship with the medium away from characterizing it as narcissism without need of explanation, as something other than evidence of a willing submission to fetishization, and as apart from the pathological, the abnormal, and the anomalous. Photography’s distinctiveness will be examined, but its pliable nature as an additive medium will also be explored. It is a medium that could accommodate authorial intervention on the part of astute and invested sitters like Castiglione, and this material agency in photography could even get translated into painting and sculpture, as we shall see.

What follows offers an analysis of the correspondences between photography and autobiography—another autogenic mode of making meaning—in Castiglione’s corpus. I propose a fundamental link between the medium, as it was manipulated by the Countess, and the genre of the memoir, which, like photography, flourished under the Second Empire. This alternative, constructive, and historically specific vantage point enlarges and enriches our understanding of her practice and ultimately reveals how photography

²²⁸ Heather McPherson, “La Divine Comtesse: (Re)presenting the Anatomy of a Courtesan,” in *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 38-75, 68 and 69.

facilitated Castiglione's "self-inscription" or autogenesis, to return to the term elaborated upon in Chapter One, and encouraged "productive mimesis" on her part.

Gender and Genre

As a series of photographic studies of the self recorded over the course of four decades, in function if not form the Countess de Castiglione's oeuvre bears obvious parallels with a kind of diaristic practice, a fact that has been hinted at in previous literature. Xavier Demange, an historian of nineteenth-century Europe and one of the editors of the exhibition catalogue, "*La Divine Comtesse*": *Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, titled his chapter in the volume, "A nineteenth-century photo-novel," calling attention to the potential resonances between Castiglione's corpus and a particular—if hybrid in his designation of it—literary genre.

Demange characterized Castiglione's collection of photographs as "a sentimental album stored with fleeting memories, a keepsake that she created to record the most important moments of her life."²²⁹ This description suggests an organizing principle or even apparatus—an album—which did not consistently exist in Castiglione's case the way it did more systematically in the practices and pastimes of other aristocratic women who were creatively invested in photographic portraiture. Especially with the invention of the *carte de visite*, the collection, construction, and manipulation of albums as creative keepsakes became a popular pastime among the aristocratic set, particularly in England. Recently analyzed and exhibited examples of these types of albums demonstrate how

²²⁹ Xavier Demange, "A nineteenth-century photo-novel," in "*La Divine Comtesse*": *Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000): 53-73, 53.

Victorian women assembled photographs of themselves and their peers into imaginative scenarios through photo-collage, often enhancing the compositions with their own drawings and painted designs [Figs. 3.1 and 3.2].²³⁰ Motifs common to these more elaborately crafted albums included the arrangement of portraits among hand-illustrated playing cards, envelopes, fans, spider webs, and in drawing room scenes.

Despite the individual creative enterprise involved in this type of undertaking, it has been argued that women's engagement with photography at this level involved less individual expression than might be expected. Rather, Elizabeth Siegel has claimed that the combined oeuvre of these types of albums should be interpreted as a "collective self-portrait of aristocratic women in Victorian England."²³¹ Indeed, even the repeated themes in the albums emphasize not individual action or import, but stress sociability through references to parlor games and rooms designed for entertainment, through more literal suggestions of communication and correspondence, and more abstracted or metaphorical allusions to networks or "webs" of connectivity, as listed above.²³²

While Castiglione gifted her photographs to select peers, and in certain cases arranged her photographs in albums, on the whole they are bequeathed to us without a

²³⁰ See, Elizabeth Siegel, *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage* (New Haven and London: The Art Institute of Chicago with Yale University Press, 2009), and, Patrizia di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Another fascinating example is the album collected by a contemporary of Castiglione's, the Empress Elizabeth of Austria (1837-1898), known as Sisi. Especially obsessed with her physical appearance and with that of others, the Empress collected an album of photographs of "beauties" among her aristocratic peers. Some of the portraits collected in this album are particularly comparable to Castiglione's portraits. See: Brigitte Hamann, *Sisis Schönheitsalbum: Private Photographien aus dem Besitz der Kaiserin Elisabeth herausgegeben von Werner Bokelberg* (Dortmund: Harenberg, 1980) and Olivia Gruber Florek, "The Modern Monarch: Empress Elisabeth and the Visual Culture of Femininity, 1850-1900" (PhD dissertation, Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, 2012).

²³¹ Siegel, *Playing with Pictures*, 14.

²³² However, it is important to note, as Siegel acknowledges, that these arrangements often creatively played with and subverted individual rank and social status—an understandable impulse given the intense social stratification that characterized the Victorian era.

sequential structure suggested by her arrangement of them.²³³ All we have as an organizing principle is her unremitting focus not on sociability, but on the self, paradoxically, in all its troubling multiplicities. Demange concluded his introduction by expanding on the meaning behind the hybrid pictorial/literary form he proposed in his title: “from the more than four hundred photographs Castiglione left as her legacy emerges the shadow of a story, the story of a life as *dreamed* by a woman who, rather than writing her memoirs, left an intriguing photo-novel of her uncommon destiny.”²³⁴ Similarly, in her chapter on “La Divine Comtesse,” McPherson asserted, “for the comtesse, the photographs became an arena for self-fashioning and fictionalized autobiography, functioning as both pictorial archive and *dream* factory.”²³⁵ Both Demange and McPherson stressed the fantastical nature of Castiglione’s many photographically commemorated guises: Demange, by characterizing the corpus as a photo-novel—an inventive alternative to her memoirs; McPherson, by explicitly emphasizing that Castiglione’s visual autobiography is fictionalized; and both, interestingly, by referring to her practice as a figment of her imagination—as *dreamed* and more curiously, as a *dream* factory, respectively.

Later interpreters are wont to establish Castiglione as a precocious if not entirely intentional progenitor of a particular type of predominantly women’s photographic practice, one that explores the surreality of the self and prioritizes the instability and

²³³ The most complete extant example of an album Castiglione constructed is the album she gave to Count Costantino Nigra, an Italian diplomat, around 1860-61. The album contains twenty-five photographs of Castiglione, which chronicle and commemorate her first stay in Paris around 1856-1857 and her brief return to Italy from 1858-61. Pages from the album are presently exhibited at the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento Italiano in Turin.

²³⁴ Demange, “A nineteenth-century photo-novel,” 54, my emphasis.

²³⁵ Heather McPherson, “La Divine Comtesse: (Re)presenting the Anatomy of a Courtesan,” in *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 38-75, 51, my emphasis.

constructedness of gendered identity at the deliberate expense of any notion of an integrated, coherent—in these cases, feminine—subject.²³⁶ The triumvirate in this trajectory is often identified as the Countess de Castiglione, Claude Cahun (1894-1954), and Cindy Sherman (b. 1954).²³⁷ There is certainly a tempting logic to these claims, and the images provide undeniable proof that Castiglione enjoyed the freedom the medium of photography afforded in terms of allowing her to act out fantasies and experiment with a range of subject positions.

However, what I trace as an important and under-acknowledged aspect inherent in some of her most significant portraits is how complexly and even radically autobiographical these images are. Beginning more generally, with recourse to both contemporaneous and current critical accounts, I will point to an historically situated and enduring theoretically articulated link between photography and autobiography. Secondly, I delve more specifically into the significance of the autobiographical genre of memoir writing as practiced by women in nineteenth-century France. Finally, I examine three particular instances in which Castiglione creatively labored, not only to produce dreams or enact fantasies, but to engage in inventive strategies of self-representation that align her practice, in a complex yet clear way, with memoir culture. I will demonstrate how these significant moments throughout her pictorial archive, which even Demange admits, “record the most important moments of her life,” do much more complicated work than simply make of her an object, a fetish, or a spectacle. Through these publicly

²³⁶ The significant scholarly interest in such tendencies in artistic practice was inspired by and surged significantly after Judith Butler introduced the concept of gender performativity in 1990 in her hugely influential book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

²³⁷ See, for example, Amelia Jones, “The ‘Eternal Return’: Self-portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment,” in *Signs*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Summer, 2002): 947-978, and Elisabeth Lyon, “Unspeakable Images, Unspeakable Bodies,” in *Camera Obscura*, vol. 8, no. 3 (24: 1990): 168-194.

circulating images, Castiglione endeavored to challenge public opinion, to regain ownership over not only her image but also her reputation, to emphasize her political role, to playfully trouble gender roles, and to undermine social expectations.

Photography and (Auto)Biography

With the advent of commercial photographic portraiture, Steve Edwards claimed, “for the first time, portraits appeared severed from the framing discourses of biography.”²³⁸

Edwards highlighted the discrepancy between the previous paradigm of the privileged market for the painted portrait and the popular clientele of photographic portraits by separating them into two spheres of experience: “while painted portraits of grand persons took their place within narratives of public lives, the modernity of the *carte de visite* hinged on its privatizing character.”²³⁹ It is a particularity, not only of the Countess de Castiglione’s class, but also of her creative involvement in the creation and circulation of her portraits, which will come to the fore in what follows, that her own experience inevitably straddled these two paradigms. While her photographic practice might be understood as diaristic—given the “quotidian” frequency with which she commissioned her portraits, and given that she reserved most of the images for herself—we also know that she had hoped to exhibit a selection of them at the 1900 *Exposition universelle*, envisaging for them a very public life and one explicitly meant to commemorate and

²³⁸ Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 76.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

celebrate hers.²⁴⁰ While this retrospective was never actualized, three significant and public “narrative moments” emerge from her photographic archive, which, through photographic means, fit into and form their own counter-narratives around this complicated and much discussed public figure.

While Edwards posited that after the invention of the *carte de visite* specifically, portraits suddenly operated outside of the biographical, nineteenth-century writers on photography at times presented opposing claims. Whereas the “framing discourses of biography” accompanied personages inclined to have their portraits painted, even those being photographed—the rhetoric went—should expect that their successfully executed portraits would convey something of their character, and even tell a story of their lives. In the 1855 *Panthéon de l'industrie*, A.A.E. Disdéri, the inventor of the *carte de visite* and official photographer of the 1855 *Exposition universelle*, published a tract on photography, offering “indispensable advice to the exhibitors,” wherein he explicitly constructed a link between photography and biography.²⁴¹ In explaining the particular difficulties faced by the photographic portraitist, Disdéri elaborated:

The portrait must not simply be a *facsimile* of the figure, it must possess, in addition to material resemblance, moral resemblance.

It must be, that with an ease of execution, firstly the expression pierces, it must be that the model assumes a pose full of ease and naturalness, that he forgets that he is before the lens; it must seem as though he is talking, questioning, answering, as though his arms have movement, as though each muscle tenses in its place, as though we feel, in a word, the veritable palpitation of life.

²⁴⁰ Pierre Apraxine, “The Model and the Photographer,” in “*La Divine Comtesse*”: 23-51, 49.

²⁴¹ A.A.E. Disdéri, “Photographie. Avis indispensable a messieurs les exposants,” in *Panthéon de l'industrie: revue encyclopédique des manufactures, fabriques et usines publié par une société d'hommes de lettres* (Paris: Typographie de Gattet et Cie, 1855): 1-35 . Disdéri identified himself as the “Photographe de l'Exposition universelle de 1855” in the *Panthéon*. For the motivations behind and means of securing these rights, see: Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *A.A.E. Disdéri and the Carte de Visite Portrait Photograph* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 38. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

It must be that we can guess who he is, guess spontaneously his character, his private life, his habits; it must be that the photographer does more than *photograph*, he must *biograph*.²⁴²

In an article by an unidentified author in the same volume titled “Photography—Portraits on Plate and on Paper,” the writer reviewed photographic portraits included in the 1855 *Exposition universelle*, reserving all his praise for a photographer named Vaillat. Echoing Disdéri’s exact words²⁴³ the critic claimed: “all the persons who pose before M. Vaillat’s lens are full of expression, of movement and of life; in seeing their prints, we could say who they are, guess their character, their private life, for M. Vaillat does more than photograph, he *biographs*.”²⁴⁴ Disdéri’s and the anonymous author’s emphases on photography as biography are heavily vested in the desire to elevate photography to the status of art and they place the onus to “biographize” explicitly on the photographer.

This kind of critical rhetoric anticipates the argumentation later put forth by Mayer and Pierson’s lawyer, Ambroise Rendu, in the November 28, 1862, case of copyright infringement analyzed in the previous chapter. In arguing for Mayer and Pierson’s claims to authorship and ownership of the image, Rendu eulogized the photographers’ capacity to capture and condense into single images Cavour’s and

²⁴² “Le portrait ne doit pas être seulement le *fac simile* du visage, il lui faut, outre la ressemblance matérielle, la ressemblance morale.

Il faut que, sous une exécution facile, l’expression perce tout d’abord, il faut que le modele ait une pose pleine de naturel et d’aisance, qu’il oublie qu’il est devant l’objectif; il faut qu’il semble parler, questionner, répondre, que ses bras aient le mouvement, que chaque muscle se tende à sa place, qu’on sente, en un mot, la vraie palpitation de la vie.

Il faut qu’on puisse deviner ce qu’il est, deviner spontanément son caractère, sa vie intime, ses habitudes; il faut que le photographe fasse plus que de *photographier*, il faut qu’il *biographie*.” Disdéri, “Photographie,” 11-12. Original emphasis.

²⁴³ The author could well be Disdéri although one would imagine that if that were the case he would have surely also praised his own photographs.

²⁴⁴ “Toutes les personnes qui posent devant l’objectif de M. Vaillat sont pleines d’expression, de mouvement et de vie; en voyant leurs épreuves, on pourrait dire ce qu’elles sont, deviner leur caractère, leurs habitudes, leur vie intime, car M. Vaillat fait plus que de photographier, il *biographie*.” “Photographie—portraits sur plaque et sur papier” in *Panthéon de l’industrie*: 33-35, 34.

Palmerston's complexities of character. Arguing against their statuses as mere "likenesses," Mayer and Pierson's photographic portraits were emphatically equated, not only with the art of painted portraiture, but also with the genre traditionally ranking highest in the hierarchy of the arts: history painting. By attaining the status of history—in Rendu's estimation at least—the photographic portraits not only embraced the framing discourses of biography, but also exceeded them. This potential transcendence of the biographical marks an interesting antithesis to the mimetic failures that photography's detractors claimed plagued the medium, which were analyzed in Chapter One. In fact, such pro-photography arguments seem to suggest that there is something inherent in the medium that might allow it to achieve this *extra*-biographical status.²⁴⁵

More recent discussions of photography and (auto)biography partake in this nineteenth-century rhetoric with recourse to theorizations of photography's indexicality.²⁴⁶ Especially since Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), the analogy between the shared referential status of photography

²⁴⁵ Of course, it is also important to note that this critical rhetoric mimics a long-standing western tradition of referring to works of art (particularly portraits) as "living images" and praising particular artists' mimetic capacity for "vivification." The rhetoric is obviously complicated by the particularities of the medium of photography. For an excellent discussion of the history of notions of "lifelikeness" and its critical codification in sixteenth-century Italy, see: Fredrika H. Jacobs, *The Living Image in Renaissance Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁴⁶ The term indexicality originates from Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics first articulated in 1867 in "On a New List of Categories," in which he divided signs into a triad of icons, indexes, and symbols. The three categories distinguish themselves by means of their statuses as signs with particular relationships to the objects to which they refer: for icons the relationship is based on likeness, for indexes the relationship is direct and metonymical—"an 'index' is a sign connected to its referent along a physical axis such as a thumbprint"—and for symbols the relationship is conventional. Sabine T. Kriebel, "Theories of Photography: A Short History," in James Elkins, ed. *Photography Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2007): 3-49, 26. Peirce categorized the photograph as both an index and an icon but later writers, especially after Rosalind Krauss, have focused on the medium specificity of photography's indexicality rather than its "iconicity."

and biography has been developed.²⁴⁷ In this seminal text Barthes undertook an exceptionally personal examination of photographic meaning in an effort to relieve an overwhelming “‘ontological’ desire,” as he put it. Barthes confessed at the outset: “I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was ‘in itself,’ by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images.”²⁴⁸ In keeping with its status as an index, Barthes came to the conclusion that “every photograph is a certificate of presence,” after reconciling himself with photography’s ontological difference through the discovery of the portrait of his mother at age five, which he called the “Winter Garden Photograph.”²⁴⁹ In witnessing the “Winter Garden Photograph,” Barthes became convinced that the image “collected all the possible predicates from which [his] mother’s being was constituted [...] it achieved for [him], utopically, *the impossible science of the unique being*.”²⁵⁰ Like Rendu before him, Barthes invested the photograph with an *extra-biographical*, in his case even “impossible,” potential to inscribe the human subject.

In part in response to *Camera Lucida*, a body of literature developed around possible parallels between photography and biography. In 1983 French photographic historian, Gilles Mora, and photographer, Claude Nori, published a *Manifeste photobiographique*, in which the pair proclaimed that photography is fundamentally linked not only to life, but that it also “constitutes [...] an *amplifier of existence*.”²⁵¹ John

²⁴⁷ For a discussion of the shared *problematic* history of photography’s and autobiography’s referentiality, see: Timothy Dow Adams, “Introduction: I Am a Camera,” in *Light Writing and Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

²⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 3.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 70-71. Original emphasis.

²⁵¹ “constitue [...] un *amplificateur d’existence*.” Gilles Mora, “Manifeste photobiographique” in Danièle Méaux and Jean-Bernard Vray, eds., *Traces photographiques, traces autobiographiques* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 2004). Originally published in Gilles Mora and Claude Nori, *L’Été dernier. Manifeste photobiographique* (Paris: Éditions de l’Étoile, Écrit sur l’image, 1983): 10-15.

Paul Eakin, the author of *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (1985), which argued that “the self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure,” decided to “reopen the file on reference in autobiography,” as he put it, in his 1992 publication, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography*.²⁵² The inspiration for this reopening was the discrepancy between what has been categorized as Barthes’ “anti-autobiography,” *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1977), and his arguably inherently autobiographical “reflections on photography” in *Camera Lucida*.²⁵³ While firmly grounded in literary analysis, it is nonetheless significant that Eakin’s—and as Eakin would argue, Barthes’—approach to the field of autobiography was reinvigorated by theorizations of photography.

Likewise, Linda Haverty Rugg’s *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* (1997) and Timothy Dow Adams’s *Light Writing and Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (2000), which both frequently refer to Eakin, approach the crossroads of photography and autobiography from distinctly literary perspectives. Rugg analyzed “four literary authors whose autobiographical texts and photographs express a consciousness of the problem of referring to the self in language and in image,” while Adams devoted two-thirds of his volume to authors who either include or invoke photographs in their autobiographical works, a third to studies of photographers who wrote autobiographies, and only concludes “by moving from photography in

²⁵² Paul John Eakin, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 4.

²⁵³ Eakin invokes Germaine Brée’s notion of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* as “anti-autobiographical” and alternately refers to the book as “the quintessential postmodernist autobiography.” *Ibid.*, 20. For Brée’s interpretation of *Roland Barthes* as “anti-autobiography,” see: *Narcissus Absconditus: The Problematic Art of Autobiography in Contemporary France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978). Eakin relies on Gerald J. Kennedy’s interpretation of *Camera Lucida* as autobiographical: Kennedy, “Roland Barthes, Autobiography, and the End of Writing,” in *Georgia Review* 35 (1981): 381-398.

autobiography to autobiography in photography.”²⁵⁴ Adams’ conclusion involves less thorough analysis and instead lists off a number of twentieth-century photographers whose photographic practices can be categorized as (auto)biographical. In addition to considering photography as autobiography more generally, Adams invoked several literary sub-genres that more specifically describe different tendencies in “photobiographic” work—the journal, the confession, the memoir, and the diary—and also pointed to the fact that “many photographers with an autobiographical impulse have combined words and images.”²⁵⁵

Although not devoted exclusively to photography, the essays in the volume edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (2002), explicitly engage the inter-sections/facings of the visual and textual in women’s autobiographical artistic practice. In the process of “theorizing the autobiographical,” Smith and Watson identified memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency as “five terms that are foundational for an engagement with women’s acts of self-representation in twentieth-century narratives.”²⁵⁶ While the first four terms are indeed instrumental in understanding the Countess de Castiglione’s *nineteenth-century* interfacing with image and autobiography, I would like to specifically address Smith and Watson’s notion and definition of agency and bring it to bear on Castiglione’s practice. They write:

²⁵⁴ Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2. Timothy Dow Adams, *Light Writing and Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xviii.

²⁵⁵ Adams, *Light Writing and Life Writing*, 239.

²⁵⁶ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 9. Smith and Watson first identified and discussed these terms in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

If selves and self-knowledge are constituted through discursive practices, then the process through which autobiographical subjects assume agency—that is, control over the self-representations they produce about themselves—become particularly complex. We need to consider how, within such constraints, people are able to change existing narratives and to write back to the cultural stories that have scripted them as particular kinds of subjects. Moreover, we need to consider how narrators negotiate cultural strictures about telling certain kinds of stories, visualizing kinds of embodiment.²⁵⁷

As suggested in my Introduction and in Chapter One, contrast to its objectifying function and characterization as a “procrustean bed,” I will argue that photography—particularly as an additive medium—became the principal process through which Castiglione “assumed agency.” As Smith and Watson suggested, in arguing for the agency inherent in Castiglione’s practice, I will have to defend my case against “two widely held suspicions about women’s recourse to the autobiographical in visual and performance media [...]—that it is a transparent mirroring and that it is narcissistic self-absorption,” two accusations that for obvious reasons have previously been rehearsed, are often leveled against photography in particular and which have specifically been applied to Castiglione’s relationship with the medium.²⁵⁸

Much of the existing literature on photography and autobiography approaches the interaction of the two fields not only chiefly from a literary perspective, but also from a twentieth-century perspective—one profoundly influenced by Barthesian and generally postmodernist/poststructuralist notions of the dissolution of the subject. As such, I am tasked with more thoroughly uncovering the “autobiography in photography” in Castiglione’s case and in doing so will invoke a literary category of especial relevance to women’s lives in nineteenth-century France: the memoir.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 8.

Women's Memoir Practices in Second Empire France

While throughout the nineteenth century there was no established genre of the photographic memoir, the genre of the written memoir has been analyzed as having gained particular currency under the pressures of the Second Empire's repressive regime, as it provided an outlet for individual expression.²⁵⁹ Although women as well as men actively produced memoir literature, historiographies of the period have typically dismissed women's contributions, given both their preoccupation with what are deemed to be less significant themes, and given that the Second Empire is viewed as a stagnant interval in the progression toward women's rights, and as a period notable for the suppression and resultant decline of feminist activities. However, in a dissertation titled "Politics, Prosperity, and Pleasure: Fashioning Identity in Second Empire Paris, 1852-1870," Kirsten Elisa Morrill stressed the productive potential in examining women's agency from outside the limiting perspective of the norms governing their lives and behavior, and encouraged analyses from the point of view of women's "deviance and eccentricity."²⁶⁰ Morrill argued that the pressures placed on Second Empire women by the regime's monitoring of women's respectability, and the polarizing definitions of femininity into two camps, *le monde* and *le demi-monde*, in fact generated an influx of self-representational strategies on the part of Second Empire women from both

²⁵⁹ Later in the century, photography became a more commonly used tool to complement written biographies of artists, actors, and other celebrities. Although these relied most heavily on the textual element, Michèle Hannoosh has argued that there was a shared "photographic approach in text and image" in Théophile Silvestre's *Histoire des artistes vivants: Études d'après nature* (1853-1856), for example. Hannoosh, "Théophile Silvestre's *Histoire des artistes vivants*: Art Criticism and Photography," in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (Dec., 2006): 729-755, 731.

²⁶⁰ Morrill, "Politics, Prosperity and Pleasure," 30. For a broader account of the implications of eccentricity in the period, see, Miranda Gill, *Eccentricity and the Cultural Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

categories. By examining memoirs written by “exceptional” women from both spheres of experience—by women who problematized binary definitions of femininity by activating ambiguities—Morrill posited that the Second Empire “represented a turning point in women’s lives [...] because traditional ways of imagining and representing female identity became destabilized.”²⁶¹ Memoirs, as a site ripe for the articulation of identity, presented Morrill with a primary source from which to gauge women’s historical agency.

As the century progressed and the genre proliferated, rather than simplistically proving to be a period that only allowed for the repetition of patriarchal definitions of “woman,” Morrill concluded that “the Second Empire [was] a pivotal moment in the conceptualization of female identity [and that] increasingly, women expressed autonomy in formulating identity rather than defining themselves according to a larger social role.”²⁶² In her reading of women’s memoirs, Morrill uncovered recurring topics of interest that were instrumental in articulating individuality. Irrespective of a woman’s class or social position, the memoirs tended to revisit, in response to respectability debates, “concern[s] over fashion, social activities, the theatre, and proper female behavior.”²⁶³ There is in fact a particular homology between written memoirs and visual self-fashioning in the period. That written memoirs were so conspicuously invested in women’s “appearances,” whether it be literally, in their obsession with other women’s beauty and dress, or figuratively, in terms of cataloguing their compatriots’ behavior, is not incidental.²⁶⁴ As Morrill described, Napoleon III’s *fête imperiale* relied on spectacular

²⁶¹ Morrill, “Politics, Prosperity and Pleasure,” 10.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁶⁴ In fact, several of the memoirs that Morrill analyzes mention Castiglione’s beauty, catalogue her appearances in fancy dress, and speculate as to her disreputable behavior. These include the memoirs of the

and seductive images of women to assert its legitimacy, ascendancy, and prosperity.

Although they were certainly objectified and used as political tools, middle- and upper-class women also actively engaged in crafting personal and “political” statements through recourse to fashion and fancy dress. The phenomenon of making political statements is perhaps best exemplified by the Empress Eugénie who described her public costumes as “toilettes politiques,” as Morrill pointed out; however, in the context of these costumes, the Empress was certainly acting as an instrument for the Empire.²⁶⁵

By contrast to the Empress’ particular political role, the Countess de Castiglione’s rather awkward status as an aristocrat with privileged entry to court life, yet a known mistress to the Emperor—among others—, put her in an especially ambiguous position from which to productively play with and trouble a range of definitions of “femininity.” While she did not embrace the genre of the written memoir, Castiglione mobilized photography to her advantage. The sub-categories of self-expression delineated above and available to Second Empire women figure prominently and consistently throughout her corpus and an analysis of the images reveals her preoccupation with and creative manipulation of these same themes. In a similar vein as the Empress, though with

Countess de Tascher de la Pagerie, Princess Caroline Murat, and the Princesse de Metternich. Predictably, Castiglione also makes appearances in many memoirs and published journals written by men in this period. See, for example: Général Comte Fleury, *Souvenirs* (Paris: Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1897-1898); Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, vols. I and II (Paris: Fasquelle and Flammarion, 1956); Joseph Alexander Graf von Hubner, *Neuf ans de souvenirs d’un ambassadeur d’Autriche à Paris sous le Second Empire, 1851-1859* (Paris: Plon et Nourrit, 1901); Henry d’Ideville, *Journal d’un diplomate en Italie, Turin, 1859-1862* (Paris: Hachette, 1872); Horace de Salviac, Comte de Viel-Castel, *Mémoires du comte Horace de Viel-Castel sur le règne de Napoléon III (1851-1864)* (Paris: Tous les libraires, 1883).²⁶⁵ Morrill claimed that Eugénie’s *toilettes* “were implicitly political in several senses: first, dressing lavishly satisfied the emperor’s social program of featuring female beauty; second, excess in dress promoted commerce, setting an example for others to follow.” “Politics, Prosperity and Pleasure,” 56. S.C. Burchell also noted the “military flavor” of Second Empire fashion: “Zouave jackets, Garibaldi shirts, new colors like magenta and solferino from the Italian campaign, shades like Crimean green and Sebastopol blue—not to mention Bismark brown.” *Imperial Masquerade: The Paris of Napoleon III* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 66.

divergent aims, we will also see how through photography Castiglione took advantage of fashion's "political" potential.

Castiglione's "visual memoir" presents an opportunity for analyzing one "exceptional" woman's agency in self-formation and self-representation throughout a period when images of women were highly circumscribed and regulated. Her exhibited portraits, while undeniably narcissistic, are vested with concerns that extend beyond the narcissistic desire for the exhibition of beauty. Just as it would have been possible to respond to insinuations and allegations against her character in her unrealized written memoir, three publicly circulated images, crafted by Castiglione herself through the collaborative and additive practice of photography, functioned as re-writings of the Countess's reputation.²⁶⁶

Exhibitionism at the 1867 *Exposition universelle*: Crafting the Queen of Hearts

In the organized maze of the 1867 universal exhibition palace in the Champs de Mars, among the works of 650 international exhibitors in Class 9, "Photographic Prints and Equipment," throngs of visitors would have encountered a photographic portrait so heavily over-painted in colored gouache as to obscure its original medium. Relative to the standards of mid-nineteenth-century photographic portraiture, it was an exceptionally large-format image, standing at roughly 28.5 x 23 inches framed.²⁶⁷ The portrait

²⁶⁶ For her unrealized memoirs see Chapter One, page 42.

²⁶⁷ Photographic portraiture was well represented at the 1867 exhibition, as it had been at the 1855 *exposition*. As Hélène Bocard has noted, in the portrait genre in 1867 there were fewer *carte de visite* images being exhibited as they were being replaced by the new format of the *portrait-album* or "cabinet

presented a full-length female figure in a resplendent costume signifying, according to its title, *The Queen of Hearts*. The subject of the manipulated photograph was none other than the notorious Countess de Castiglione [Fig. 3.3].

Ostensibly exhibited to showcase French achievements in the rapidly expanding industry and art of photography, the portrait of Castiglione drew admirers motivated by other interests. Castiglione's celebrity was bound up with her purported spectacular beauty and risqué reputation and Pierre-Louis Pierson, under whose name the work was exhibited, could only increase his renown by presenting the exhibition-goers with the privilege of a memorable window onto her splendor.²⁶⁸ As Frédéric Loliée proclaimed, "the appearance of the Countess de Castiglione in full dress, and especially in fancy dress, was a social event in Paris," and in this case the photographic pavilion extended this social luxury, offering to the public at large voyeuristic access to this otherwise restricted experience.²⁶⁹ Loliée continued to describe the precise nature of the image's impact on the fair's attendees: "[*The Queen of Hearts*] had become at once a landmark and a goal for all visitors. It was the picture of the year; the sensation of the moment. Crowds collected constantly before it; scarcely had one group moved away than another still larger took its place. Amongst the spectators there was a continual thrill of admiration."²⁷⁰ The thrilling image of Castiglione, barely recognizable as a photograph,

portrait," which was twice the size of the carte de visite. Given that the standard size of the carte de visite was roughly 3.5 x 2.125 inches, even the cabinet portrait was miniscule by comparison to this over-painted portrait. Hélène Bocard, "Les Expositions de photographie à Paris sous le Second Empire et leur réception par la critique," vol. I (PhD dissertation, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2004), 95.

²⁶⁸ The work is also signed by Aquilin Schad, the over-painter, who was under Mayer and Pierson's employ.

²⁶⁹ Frédéric Loliée, *Women of the Second Empire: Chronicles of the Court of Napoleon III*, Alice M. Iviny, trans. (New York: John Lane Company, 1907), 45.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

would have been a great boon for Pierson's reputation, but it would have something to say about Castiglione's as well.

The very fact that the over-painted portrait was exhibited at all meant that it had been deemed to be of a high caliber. As Ernest Lacan reported in a November 1866 issue of *Le Moniteur de la photographie*, the *Exposition's* admission committee had decided to refuse painted proofs or heavily retouched images unless they were found to possess "real artistic merit."²⁷¹ Undoubtedly bolstered by the 1862 Court of Cassation decision, which ruled that Mayer and Pierson's portraits of Cavour and Palmerston should be defined as art, in his admission request form Pierson did not shy away from presuming that his photographs would again be found to possess such merit. On the official document Pierson explicitly listed that he wanted to expose, in addition to life-size portraits and cartes de visite, "photographs painted in watercolor on canvas, painted in oil and those disposed to be painted in oil and on ivory miniatures."²⁷² However, as was the case with Rachel Félix's and Adelaide Ristori's retouched portraits exhibited under Mayer and Pierson's name at the 1855 exhibition, in the case of *The Queen of Hearts* portrait it was arguably the *sitter* who was responsible for the "artistic merit"—not to mention the public interest—in the image, rather than the photographer or the over-painter. If the photograph succeeded as an artistic portrait that was able to "biographize," to suggest a palpitation of life, and communicate a story about its subject, how did the image achieve this?

²⁷¹ "un merite artistique réel." Ernest Lacan, "Revue photographique," in *Le Moniteur de la photographie* (November 1, 1866), 121. As cited in Bocard, "Les Exposition de photographie à Paris sous le Second Empire," 87.

²⁷² "photographies-peints a l'aquarelle sur toile peintes a l'huiles et disposés pour être peintes a l'huile et sur ivoire peintes en miniatures." Pierre-Louis Pierson, "Demande d'admission" original document in Archives nationales de France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, F/12/3037.

In *The Queen of Hearts*, Castiglione had recourse to neither Racine's nor Alfieri's tragic language, as Rachel and Ristori had in their portraits, which were discussed in the previous chapter, but instead infused her image with a vernacular of her own: the semantic potentiality of fashion. While exhibited in 1867 and executed sometime between 1861-1863, the portrait commemorated the appearance Castiglione made at a ball held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on February 17, 1857, scarcely a year after her arrival in the French capital.²⁷³ At the time the dress was a sensation, and as a memoirist might, though with different means, Castiglione crafted what would become a public commemoration of her particular sartorial triumph. While in and of itself a Queen of Hearts costume may not have been an altogether original conception in 1857, the design and implied symbolism, as it pertained to Castiglione's particular position within the court of the Tuileries, nevertheless held a distinctive and audacious significance, which Castiglione strategically capitalized on in the exhibition portrait.²⁷⁴

Castiglione's arrival in Paris in 1855 did not go unnoticed, which was precisely to the point, since, dispatched on her covert diplomatic mission, Cavour expected her to use the arsenal of her beauty to woo the French Emperor toward the Italian cause. In a passage in her memoirs corresponding to June 1856, the Countess Stéphanie de Tascher de la Pagerie, Napoleon III's cousin, took note of Castiglione's particular presence in

²⁷³ Given the impossibility in dating most of the photographs, I defer to Apraxine and Demange's dates. In this case they place the portrait later than the ball based on Castiglione's coiffure and the dress's neckline. They claim the square neckline did not come into fashion until 1862-1863. Additionally, they point to the fact that the image does not appear in the Nigra album, which dates to 1860. "*La Divine Comtesse*," 170.

²⁷⁴ By 1879 in England, the idea for a similar costume, a "Pack of Cards," is cited in Ardern Holt's *Fancy Dresses Described*, as a "favourite dress." The particular suits' queens are described remarkably in keeping with Castiglione's costume's design: "The Queens of the several packs wear long velvet or silver lisse dresses of mediaeval make, or white ball-dresses, or quilted skirts, with velvet tunics, and bodices, and powdered hair; the insignias of the several suits appearing in velvet, or jewels about the dresses, on the head, and as ornaments." Ardern Holt, *Fancy Dresses Described: Or, What to Wear at Fancy Balls* (London: Debenham & Freebody, 1880), 21 (first published in 1879).

court life, noting that the young Italian had earned an enviable position among “the most beautiful of the beauties.”²⁷⁵ While Tascher de la Pagerie agreed that Castiglione was indeed exquisite “from head to foot,” she qualified this by opining: “I call this type of woman an *objet d’art*, it adorns and occupies the idle in a salon, but does not inspire the soul, nor scarcely the heart.”²⁷⁶ Despite, or perhaps because of such estimations, Castiglione succeeded in becoming one of Napoleon III’s “favorites,” although, as already noted, the favor was short-lived.

By November of the same year, the *Chroniqueur de la semaine* reported: “in Paris, each winter has its queen”—recently tending to be foreign, he pointed out—and that “last winter’s queen was an Italian, the Countess de Castiglione.”²⁷⁷ While the author, Mondion, teasingly noted the efforts undertaken by the public in order to witness “this new majesty who employed such coquetry in order to remove herself from view,” he declared that she had presently been dethroned.²⁷⁸ For these fifteen minutes, Mondion said, Spain had taken over the throne in the figure of Madame Serrano, the wife of the Spanish Ambassador, Castiglione now being relegated to the rank of the “dowager-queen.”²⁷⁹ Mondion concluded by predicting, “Italy will avenge Spain’s *coup de Jarnac*,”

²⁷⁵ “les belles des belles.” Countess Stéphanie de Tascher de la Pagerie, “Souvenirs glanés,” manuscript journal, département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Naf 19953-19998: 19954, 164. The Countess’s journal is published in three volumes under the title, *Mon séjour aux Tuileries* (Paris: Ollendorf, 1893). I quote from the manuscript because it is more comprehensive.

²⁷⁶ “de la tête aux pieds”; “J’appelle ce genre de femme objet d’art, ça orne et occupe les oisifs d’un salon, mais ça n’inspire pas l’ame, à peine la cœur.” Ibid, 164.

²⁷⁷ “A Paris, chaque hiver a sa reine.” “La reine de l’hiver dernier était une italienne, la comtesse de Castiglione.” Mondion, “Mercredi, 5 novembre,” in *Le Chroniqueur de la semaine*, Tome 1, 1856 (Paris: La Librairie d’Alphonse Taride, 1856), 179-180.

²⁷⁸ “cette majesté nouvelle qui mettait tant de coquetterie à se soustraire aux regards!” Ibid., 180.

²⁷⁹ “la reine douairière.” Ibid.

elevating the court's private intrigues to the level of "international affairs," though in rather antiquated and gallant terms.²⁸⁰

At the February 17, 1857, ball hosted by her cousins, the Walewskis, Castiglione was presented with an opportunity to execute her brand of revenge, not only against Madame Serrano, but also against a higher standing Spaniard, the Empress Eugénie, and against claims such as those made by Tascher de la Pagerie in her memoirs. The popular press reports on this high society event recorded a predilection for historical costumes. Madame Serrano went dressed as a medieval chatelaine, for example, while other guests donned costumes from the time of Henry II, Charles IX, and particularly well-represented were those commemorating the taste for the rococo during the reign of Louis XV.²⁸¹ Castiglione's cousin, the Countess Walewska, is reported to have disguised herself as Diana, the mythological huntress who symbolized chastity, though was traditionally scantily clad. In this case the press was careful to make note that "the grace and good taste of this costume rescued it from mythological exactitude, so that we cannot reproach it for its scantiness."²⁸² Contented with her costume, Walewska even had a small painted

²⁸⁰ "L'Italie se vengera du coup de Jarnac de l'Espagne." Ibid. A *coup de Jarnac* is an expression that translates roughly as a "treacherous blow." See, Arthus L. De Lozier, "A List of French Similes," in *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 21, issue 2 (January, 1937): 264-271, 271. It derives from the last judiciary duel held in the town of Jarnac, France, in 1547.

²⁸¹ For an extended account of the interest in the Rococo in the period, see, Allison Unruh, "Aspiring to *la vie galante*: Reincarnations of Rococo in Second Empire France" (PhD dissertation, Institute of Fine Arts: New York University, 2008).

²⁸² "la grâce et le bon gout de ce costume en sauvaient l'exactitude mythologique, sans qu'on pût rien reprocher à sa légèreté." The Countess Walewska would also become one of Napoleon III's "favorites." Ernest Louet, "Chronique des salons," in *Le Journal monster: Bulletin et courrier des familles* (March, 1857): 2-4, 2. In her memoirs chronicling *Life in the Tuileries Under the Second Empire*, Anna L. Bicknell recited an interesting story about the Empress Eugenie having to decide whether or not it would be suitable to appear as Diana at a costume ball that took place around 1860: "The Empress had intended to appear as a conventional Louis Quinze Diana, with powdered hair and a profusion of diamonds, but there had been much discussion as to whether or not she ought to wear this dress. There was no impropriety in the arrangement of the costume itself, which I saw, on another occasion, worn by the young and very pretty Princess Anna Murat, to whom the Empress had given it, after being reluctantly persuaded that it was

portrait commissioned as a private souvenir in commemoration of the event [Fig. 3.4].

The quite saccharine oval ivory miniature by Francois Meuret depicts a bust-length, three quarter portrait of Walewska looking demurely off to the right. Her costume consists of a dress with a low décolletage, as was customary if not required of court ladies, which is enhanced by strings of pearls, while her mythological identity is given away by the attributes of the lunar diadem and quiver full of arrows, which hangs over her left shoulder. Despite Walewska's delight in the design, Castiglione's costume definitively stole the show.

La Presse littéraire declared outright that Castiglione's *Dame de coeur* dress was "the most original costume," while *Le Journal monstre* likewise praised its originality, claiming that its "splendor attracted all the looks."²⁸³ While Walewska borrowed from classical mythology, the "uninspiring" *objet d'art* fashioned a mythology of her own making. Reputedly designed with the assistance of the celebrated Italian tenor, Mario, Marchese di Candia, Loliée, in typically florid fashion, described the costume as follows:

The intrepid Florentine [Castiglione] had invented the most suggestive and fanciful costume ever put together. Partly Louis XV and partly Second Empire, the dress was startling. She wore no corset; and the beautiful curves of her bosom, in its proud independence of all artificial support, were left wholly exposed by the light drapery of gauze. Her skirt was raised and caught back in the fashion of the eighteenth century, showing the under petticoat; and over both skirt and bodice was thrown a chain of large hearts. With her abundant hair falling round her shoulder, Madame de Castiglione may be said to have carried in her train all the hearts she had thus daringly symbolized.²⁸⁴

unsuitable to the dignity of her position. It was not easy to make the Empress understand that she could not do what other people did, and that many things must be abstained from—though unobjectionable in others." (New York: The Century Co., 1895), 72-73.

²⁸³ "Le costume le plus original était celui de la belle comtesse de Castiglione en dame de coeur."

"Nouvelles," in *La Presse littéraire: Echo de la littérature, des sciences, et des arts* (March 1, 1857): 287-288, 287. "l'originalité et la splendeur attiraient tous les regards." Louet, "Chronique des salons," 2.

²⁸⁴ Loliée, *Women of the Second Empire*, 15. Loliée invokes "the Marquis de Fraysseix's authority for stating that the Countess's dresser on this occasion was no other than the celebrated singer, Mario di Candia, the handsomest of Almagivas, and the spoilt darling of duchesses. It was his hand that had arranged the suggestive hearts which drew all eyes and inspired libertine suggestions." Interestingly, di Candia's obituary in the *New York Times* notes that he "scandalized the critics and admirers of 'local

While Loliée characterized the costume design as a collaborative effort on the part of the Marchese, who would bring to the dress the advantage of his theatrical flair, and Castiglione, who possessed the necessary attributes of audaciousness and “beautiful curves,” he posited Castiglione as not only the carrier but also the inventor of meaning.

An untouched albumen silver print, which was the source image for the over-painted *Queen of Hearts* portrait, exposes the similarities and differences between the exhibited painted image and the unaltered photograph, which celebrated the muted magnificence of Castiglione’s costume in warm sepia tones [Fig. 3.5]. As Loliée accurately described, the outfit featured a formfitting bodice with a pronounced décolletage, again, in keeping with court regulation, while the lower portion consisted of a full skirt of an *ancien régime* dress complete with an abundant floral garland. The short sleeves, square neckline, and hem of the skirt were all trimmed in a darker fabric punctuated by hearts. Castiglione stands luminously, as if miraculously generating her own light, against an unadorned wall in the photographer’s studio. The figure and her dress are foregrounded at the expense of all else: there is no standardized or atmospheric backdrop, as there would have been in a formal photographic portrait; there are no props surrounding the figure; the image is even awkwardly framed on the left by an intruding column. The carpet on which Castiglione stands and reveals her left shoe, it too adorned in a heart, is buckling under her foot, the care not even having been taken to smooth out its surface. This untouched print, produced several years after Castiglione’s actual appearance in the gown, is a photographic figure study destined for greater things.

color’ by persistently refusing to wear the costume allotted by French historians to the mythical ‘Governor of Boston’” in Verdi’s, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, the opera, which was meaningful to Castiglione (see Chapter Four). “Mario, Marchese di Candia,” in, *The New York Times* (Dec. 13, 1883).

As she did for at least five other portraits, Castiglione sent this photograph to Aquilin Schad, a Bavarian-trained overpainter who was employed by Mayer and Pierson's studio, together with instructions as to how to enhance the image with paint. In providing Schad with the photographs to paint over, Castiglione also included proofs on top of which she had in many cases both painted and annotated instructions to give the professional a clear sense of her intentions in terms of the design of the final image. Although we have no record of her annotations and mark-ups on *The Queen of Hearts* proof, another set of images gives a clear sense of the process of her creative intervention in the production of the final object. In an image titled *Fright* or *L'Incendie* [*The Fire*], Castiglione appears again lavishly outfitted in a white satin dress and trepidatiously posed in the photographer's studio [Fig. 3.6]. In this image the countess assumes a somewhat fearful expression, glancing leftward while her figure and the imposing pyramidal form of her expansive gown slopes diagonally from the bottom left through the top right of the composition. Though she is recoiling from something at the left of the frame—in this preparatory image it appears to be the collapse of the photographic backdrop—her poise is the picture of grace: the diagonal crescendo of the dress culminates in a frightened yet beautiful physiognomy adorned with an immaculate coiffure.

Castiglione, painting over the photograph with a watery gouache, has overlaid her hair with an elaborate black-blue headdress. She has further enhanced the whiteness of the dress and has framed her shoulders and offset the stark line of the back of the gown with a delicate garland of green and brown leaves and purple grapes, which leads to the elegant and cautious gesture of her preciously posed left hand. On the reverse of the print, Castiglione wrote:

The remains of a ball where a fire has broken out. A chandelier on the floor, everyone in flight. Shining white satin gown, black and red grapes with dark green and red leaves; omit hair at the temples; replace with vine; same movement to stop at top right; cover all the right-hand side of the hair with ground color.”²⁸⁵

As Corgnati and Ghibaudi have suggested, the adorned detail of the grape-vine garland may have been inspired by illustrated fashion plates of the period, which Castiglione, as a woman so invested in her fashion statements, would have surely consulted [Fig. 3.7].²⁸⁶

The compositional placement of these details and the Countess’s written directives underscore the extent to which these fashion accessories function as aesthetic elements that work in concert with her overall conception of a visual narrative. While Aquilin Schad executed the “final” painted version of *Fright*, which is now lost, an extant copy of Schad’s work attests to the fidelity the painter paid to the Countess’s visual and written instructions [Fig. 3.8].

The professionally painted image of *Fright* pictures a lushly fleshed out garland and ornate headpiece in the precise fashion that the Countess’s sketch describes. The image is cropped on the left and right, zeroing in on the figure. The train of the white satin dress is cropped at the lower left of the frame. In the upper left register the painter has actualized Castiglione’s narrative: while subtle clouds of smoke creep around the large pillar placed behind the central figure of the Countess, the frantic ball-goers in the distant scene run in flight from the fire. Their chaotic stumbling provides a marked contrast to Castiglione’s poise: a redheaded woman in a dark gown tumbles into the mid-

²⁸⁵ Les debris d’un bal où le feu a pris. Un lustre par terre, tout le monde en fuite. Robe satin blanc, brillante, raisins noirs et rouges, avec feuilles vert foncé et rouge. Oter cheveux boules à tempe; remplacer par vigne; même mouvement fini, à droite, en haut; couvrir avec le fond tout le côté droit de la coiffure.” As quoted in Montesquiou, *La Divine Comtesse*, 57. Translation taken from Apraxine and Demange, “*La Divine Comtesse*,” 173.

²⁸⁶ As suggested in Martina Corgnati and Cecilia Ghibaudi, eds., *La Contessa di Castiglione e il suo tempo* (Piemonte: Silvana Editoriale, 2000), 233.

ground just above the tail-end of Castiglione's garland, while the cautiously collected Countess gently lifts her voluminous skirt to ease her movement, revealing her dainty foot. In the case of these two versions of *Fright*, which indicate the development from a photographic "sketch" to a completely worked and "exhibition worthy" painted image, we can trace Castiglione's sustained involvement in the creative process.

In the exhibited painted image of *The Queen of Hearts*, as in the untouched albumen print, Castiglione's costume maintains center stage. As in *Fright*, it becomes emboldened through color and enlivened by the introduction of narrative. The heavy colored gouache emphasizes the richness of the white fabric by revealing a fine shimmering gold pattern, which was washed out in the original.²⁸⁷ Whereas the hearts are at points barely discernible in the untouched photograph, their plenitude is amplified both in color and in number in the painted photographic portrait: the complimentary contrast of the green-bordered trim with the accenting and repeated deep red hearts is discovered; the crown encircling Castiglione's bouffant hairstyle reveals itself to be a halo of serial hearts; a necklace, bracelet and anklet of gold hearts, all absent in the original, compliment the gold belt of hearts over her hips, from which hangs a larger tasseled heart. In this "finished" image, the carpet is unfurled and the nondescript background of the untouched photograph is replaced with a specific and articulated venue. Here Castiglione's luminosity is set within a dark but palatial solarium wherein the gloomy vines that surround her contrast with the colorful blooming flowers that adorn her dress,

²⁸⁷ Horace de Viel-Castel wrote of the dress in his memoirs, confirming that the entire costume "glistened with gold." *Memoirs of Count Horace de Viel Castel*, vol. II, Charles Bousfield, trans. (London: Remington and Co. Publishers, 1888),18

the garland gathered on her skirt having been brought to life through the verisimilitude of the white and pink roses and green foliage.

A distant scene to the right of the figure reveals a crowd of partygoers in another room, who, though finely dressed, exhibit none of the splendor that Castiglione embodies. As in *Fright*, on the cusp of the entrance to the solarium, bridging Castiglione's foregrounded space and the populated background, on the extreme right of the image, there stands a heavily shadowed male figure, dressed in red, who turns his back on the crowd and instead directs his attention toward the triumphant Queen. Although his features are indistinct, the figure is quite clearly a thinly veiled impersonator of Napoleon III, as he appears to wear a dark goatee and an exaggerated "imperial" mustache. Given that by 1857 Castiglione was a known "favorite" of Napoleon III, her costume would have been a calculated and unsubtle allusion to her relationship with the Emperor, all the while provoking her two Spanish rivals, the Empress Eugénie and the Emperor's current favorite, Madame Serrano. Ten years later at the 1867 *Exposition*, in front of an audience much larger than ball's attendees, she would playfully remind her onlookers of this episode in her life and her intimate alliance with their figurehead who was well known to "prefer pretty girls to pictures."²⁸⁸ The exhibition goers who gathered in throngs before the painted photograph would have revealed not only in the extravagance of Castiglione's costume, but would also have been privy, through these painted embellishments, to the pluck with which Castiglione presented herself.

²⁸⁸ Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 33.

Among the many possible stories about Castiglione that may have been brought to mind by the image, was the oft-repeated anecdote about how the Empress reacted to Castiglione's costume when confronted with it at the ball. In response to the Marchese di Candia's decorative arrangement of the many hearts, the Empress is rumored to have said, pointing to one of the largest among them, which was strategically placed over her sex: "your heart seems a little low."²⁸⁹ Robert de Montesquiou described the costume as "elementary in its allegory," and while on some level this is difficult to take issue with, in other respects the meanings denoted by the dress were manifold. While Castiglione scandalized her contemporaries with such allusions as suggested above, given that her reputation as imperial seductress preceded her, the Queen of Hearts costume could also signify an affront to characterizations of her as a *femme froide* (cold woman) or more appropriately, a *femme sans âme* (woman without a soul) or *femme sans coeur* (woman without a heart), all of which, as Miranda Gill described, were coded terms for "courtesan."²⁹⁰ As Gill has analyzed, during the July Monarchy and throughout the Second Empire, ideal femininity was understood to operate according to the principles of "self-effacement" and "self-abnegation."²⁹¹ Individuation was the prerogative of acceptably and even admirably eccentric men, whereas women who laid their claims to the territories of self-constitution ran the risk of being pathologized or during the Second Empire, being associated with the *demi-monde*, which would have more seriously compromised their reputation.²⁹² Castiglione's precarious position with respect to the *demi-monde* was a source of constant consternation to her, but she would radically

²⁸⁹ Roger L. Williams, *Gaslight and Shadow: The World of Napoleon III, 1851-1870* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), 146. The anecdote is reported by Montesquiou and many others as well.

²⁹⁰ Miranda Gill, *Eccentricity*, 85.

²⁹¹ Gill, *Eccentricity*, 81 and 100.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 100-101.

dismiss the enjoiners to publicly practice self-erasure or deny her individuality. There were limited venues through which Castiglione could exercise individuality and engage in “self-making” or what we might again refer to as a form of autogenesis. Photography, in some ways as a result of its precarious position with respect to art, its occupation of a liminal space between art and industry, and its ostensible negation of the artist’s hand, allowed for the more ready intrusion of the self-forming subject.

At the 1866 Salon, like Pierre-Louis Pierson, Claude Monet had also exhibited a monumental—for his medium—portrait of a woman in a fashionable, though not fancy-, dress to great acclaim. *Camille*, the oil on canvas portrait of Monet’s young mistress of the same name, was unusually large in scale (91 x 59.5 inches) given that it depicted an unknown personage [Fig. 3.9]. In fact, Monet’s canvas capitalized on “Camille” as a type, as painters of “modern life” had done and would continue to do with increasing zeal, turning to the anonymous and fashionable figure of the *fille* or the *Parisienne* rather than the individual for inspiration.²⁹³ Though titled after a woman, *Camille* is more properly a portrait of a dress. The voluminous green and black striped skirt with its crinkled train and the black fur-trimmed *paletot* have been rendered with painterly delight and take up nearly the entirety of the canvas—the skirt even extending beyond its frame. While the costume echoes the specificity of the most *à la mode* iterations from contemporaneous fashion magazines, the model becomes abstracted and less individualized as she is turned away from the viewer, making of the woman and the dress

²⁹³ See Gloria Groom’s discussion of this work in her essay on “Camille” in the exhibition catalogue, *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012): 44-51.

“an indivisible unity,” as Baudelaire advised the painter of modern life to do in his 1863 essay.²⁹⁴

While Castiglione’s painted photograph is also a costume portrait of *The Queen of Hearts*, the impression made is undeniably that she wears the dress rather than the other way around; to put it another way, in the image, the cards are definitively in her hands. Castiglione did not demurely defer to the dress as a portrait subject, nor did she shy away from rumors and accusations leveled against her. In crafting *The Queen of Hearts* she faced them head on, even playfully appropriating and subverting them. Castiglione looked defiantly out at her viewer demanding that they recognize the palpitation of life in the *femme sans coeur*.

Setting Straight the Salammbô Scandal

Between 1858 and 1861, Castiglione briefly returned to Italy after having been banished from France on account of an attack by Italian *carbonari* against Napoleon III outside her Parisian residence.²⁹⁵ This period of advised, if not precisely enforced, exile, coincided with the Countess’s and the Count di Castiglione’s separation. As the Countess’s provocative and “dishonorable” behavior became less tolerated by her husband, and her “respectability” became more generally questioned, she briefly retreated to Villa Gloria, near Turin, with her son, Giorgio. In 1861 Castiglione returned to Paris and took up residence in Passy, where she became Pierre-Louis Pierson’s neighbor. Throughout the

²⁹⁴ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in Jonathan Mayne, ed., *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2008), 31.

²⁹⁵ Apraxine and Demange, “*La Divine Comtesse*,” 18. Despite the shared nationality, Castiglione had nothing to do with the plot against the Emperor.

rest of her life she made few public appearances, and with this particular move, began to cultivate an alter ego, which she named *L'Hermite de Passy* [The Hermit of Passy]. On February 9, 1863, however, Castiglione took a break from her hermitic life to attend a costume ball at the Tuileries. On this occasion she fashioned for herself another regal costume, but one with more specific historical reference than *The Queen of Hearts* as she designated it *The Queen of Etruria* [Fig. 3.10].

In its conception and particularly in light of the prominent jewels and accessories that she wore along with it, Castiglione's costume was participating in the craze for the Etruscan style brought on by the recent French acquisition of the Marchese Giovanni Pietro Campana's collection of Etruscan, Greek, and Roman jewelry. The collection was destined for the Louvre but was first exhibited on a grand scale at the *Palais de l'industrie* in 1862. According to Vincent Meylan, this display of archeological treasures inspired a renewed interest in the old, and after its public unveiling, "the elegant swore only by the ancient."²⁹⁶ Taking advantage of this trend, Castiglione assumed the guise of "an imaginary character," according to Apraxine and Demange, "mixing historical references (the Infanta Marie Louise of Spain, the queen of the ephemeral kingdom of Etruria created by Napoleon I) with allusions to the founding myth of the Roman empire."²⁹⁷ The costume consisted of a "black velvet peplum over a crinoline skirt in orange moiré."²⁹⁸ Compared to *The Queen of Hearts*, this dress was wide but shapeless, as the black "peplum" was essentially a thick cape that hung loosely over Castiglione's shoulders, falling around her knees, and even lower in the back, covering everything but

²⁹⁶ "Depuis les élégantes ne jurent que par l'antique." Vincent Meylan, *Archives secrètes Boucheron* (Paris: Éditions SW Télémanque, 2009), 12.

²⁹⁷ Apraxine and Demange, "La Divine Comtesse," 171.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

one arm [Fig. 3.11]. The dress was accessorized with an extravagant “copper-gilt Greek-key pattern suite of tiara, pendant earrings, and necklace,” inspired by the Campana jewels, but enlarged and theatricalized for the purpose of the costume ball.²⁹⁹ In her hand Castiglione held a fan made of peacock feathers and on her feet she wore Greco-Roman cothurne sandals, which she evidently took delight in as she had them photographed separately [Fig. 3.12].

Maria Luisa of Spain (1782-1824), the veritable historical character referenced, was for a brief period the Queen and then Regent of Etruria (modern Tuscany) from 1801 until 1807. In 1814 she published a slim volume of memoirs in Italian, which were immediately translated into French and English, and which Castiglione would quite possibly have read. An embittered pawn of Napoleon Bonaparte, Maria Luisa would have been an intriguing figure to Castiglione not least because she once reigned over the Countess’s birthplace. The Spanish Infanta became Queen of Etruria, the capital of which was Florence, before she was twenty years old and was widowed by twenty-one. She was exiled from Etruria in 1807 when Napoleon made his sister the Grand Duchess of Tuscany. After several years living under strict watch in France, Maria Luisa had planned to escape to England but was intercepted and imprisoned in a monastery outside of Rome. In 1814 she narrated her “disastrous history,” which the editor of the English translation claimed was, “written by herself, in order to vindicate her conduct from the aspersions which her enemies, and the advocate of Buonaparte, had thrown upon it; and to tell the world a part of what she suffered from the ambition of that bad man, and the

²⁹⁹ Susan Weber Soros and Stefanie Walker, eds., *Castellani: Italian Archaeological Jewelry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 322.

malevolence of his partisans.”³⁰⁰ In her own words, Maria Luisa described the motivations behind publishing her memoirs when she was only thirty-two as follows: “It will be seen, what have been the vicissitudes of my fortune, that I have been the unhappy victim of the blackest treacheries, the foot-ball of that tyrant, who has made his sport of our lives and properties; and, that I am, even now, afflicted, degraded, abandoned.”³⁰¹ To some degree she must have made her case, because after the Congress of Vienna she was granted the Duchy of Lucca. She assumed her position as Duchess in 1817.

While by 1863 Castiglione had presumably grown accustomed to and wary of aspersions, vicissitudes of fortunes and favoritism, and certainly at times could well have felt afflicted and degraded, Maria Louisa’s words are eerily predictive of the fate that would befall Castiglione *after* she wore *The Queen of Etruria* costume. The precise extent to which the costume was meant to reflect the historical subject is difficult to determine. What it undoubtedly also intended to underline, however, was Castiglione’s cultural heritage and the important historical role that she considered herself to have played in Italian unification. In trying to determine her debated “*rôle politique*,” Montesquiou referred to the words of Castiglione’s friend, Louis Estancelin, who unlike many detractors, was willing to admit the following:

Italian by birth, she certainly rendered great services to her country. — Did she *make* Italy, as they say? It’s possible; I don’t know.

What I *know*, is that *it was her* who enabled *Cavour to enter the Congress of Paris*, securing therefore, for Italy, a place at the center of the Great Powers, and having therefore initiated the formation of the Kingdom of Italy.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ *Memoir of The Queen of Etruria, Written by Herself* (London: John Murray, 1814), 1.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁰² “Italienne par sa naissance, elle a certainement rendu de grands services à son pays.— A-t-elle *fait* l’Italie, comme on le dit? C’est bien possible; je l’ignore. Ce que je *sais*, c’est que *c’est elle* qui a fait *entrer Cavour au Congrès de Paris*, donnant ainsi, à l’Italie, place au milieu des Grandes Puissances, et ayant commencé ainsi la formation du Royaume d’Italie.” Original emphasis. Estancelin as cited by Robert de

Thus, the “allusions to the founding myth of the Roman empire” implied by *The Queen of Etruria* costume resonated strongly with this very recent and historically vital role that Castiglione envisioned herself to have played on the stage of international affairs of the utmost importance. Unfortunately, these historical references and political allusions got lost in translation from concept to cloth as Castiglione’s appearance at the 1863 ball was widely discussed but also nearly universally misinterpreted.

Immediately after the ball, the popular press began reporting that Castiglione had appeared dressed as the fictional title character from Gustave Flaubert’s very recently published novel, *Salammbô* (1862), which was set in ancient Carthage. The novel’s plot follows an ill-fated romance that takes place during the mercenary revolt in the third century BCE. Salammbô, the daughter of a Carthaginian general, is a priestess who enchants Matho, the leader of the mercenaries. In an act of defiance, Matho steals the sacred “zaïmph” or veil worn by the goddess Tanit, who protects Carthage. Salammbô is tasked with retrieving it, which she does, but fulfilling the prophecy—which foretold that anyone who laid eyes on the sacred garment would perish—both Matho and Salammbô die by the end of the novel. While he distanced his pen from modern life in this novel, Flaubert did not forgo his powers of realist description, despite the romanticism at the

Montesquiou in *La Divine Comtesse*, 26. Montesquiou does not identify the source. See also Castiglione’s marginal comments on an article published in *L’Éclair* on April 6, 1892. The article takes the form of an interview with Mme. Carette who purportedly reported first-hand on Castiglione. Montesquiou found Castiglione’s copy of the article and cited Carette’s quotations as well as Castiglione’s annotations: “‘On a prétendu qu’elle avait joué le rôle d’un *agent politique*...[Carette’s words]’ — En regard, il y a: ‘Il est bien placé, ce mot *prétendu*, pour tous ceux qui savent. Attendez l’Histoire d’Italie, et vous verrez [Castiglione’s words.]’” *La Divine Comtesse*, 41. Interestingly, on the advent of the 150th anniversary of Italian unification, a chapter was devoted to Castiglione in a publication celebrating *Protagoniste dimenticate. Le donne nel Risorgimento piemontese*, Daniela Adorni, ed. (Turin: D. Piazza, 2011).

heart of the tale.³⁰³ Given the centrality of the veil or sacred zaïmph to the plot, it is no surprise that significant descriptive work in the novel centered on describing powerful costumes and fabric, which would have certainly appealed to Flaubert's contemporaries.³⁰⁴

According to Herbert Lottman, none other than “the Empress Eugénie turned to Flaubert [...] to ask if he could provide details of a costume worn by Salammbô, since she [wanted] to wear it at a ball.”³⁰⁵ As Lottman described, Flaubert took the task seriously and requested the assistance of the painter Alexandre Bida in the preparation of a sketch that he would then submit to Eugénie. After all the effort, “Bida was to be told by Princess Mathilde, however, that Her Catholic Majesty could not go out in a skin-tight dress.”³⁰⁶ Given the vogue for the ancient and the success of *Salammbô* it was inevitable that other women would have the same idea as the Empress as well as fewer sartorial restrictions to stop them from wearing such a costume.

As was the case with nearly every high society costume ball, after the event at the Tuileries on February 9, 1863, press reports circulated describing the costumes worn by several of the attendees. This ball was the occasion of the much discussed “dance of the bees [Fig. 3.13],” in which four women dressed as balletic embodiments of the insect

³⁰³ Interestingly, René Gouriou even claimed that “Flaubert écrit des pages descriptives de *Salammbô* devant un daguerreotype.” *La Photographie et le droit d’auteur: Études de droit comparé* (Paris: Librairie generale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1959), 2.

³⁰⁴ For interesting interpretations that focus on fabric and costume as central literary devices in *Salammbô*, see: Sima Godfrey, “The Fabrication of Salammbô: The Surface of the Veil,” in *MLN*, vol. 95, no. 4 (May, 1980): 1005-1016, and, Mary Orr, “The Cloaks of Power: Custom and Costume in Flaubert’s *Salammbô*,” in *Nottingham French Studies*, vol. 36 (Sept., 1997): 24-33.

³⁰⁵ Herbert Lottman, *Flaubert: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 173. Lottman quotes from the Goncourts’ *Journal* wherein they wrote, “The Empress was so impressed by it [*Salammbô*] that she wishes to dress as Salammbô in a masquerade ball, and has asked to meet the author.” *Ibid.*, 174.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

emerged from decorative “hives” in order to “dance in tribute to the Emperor.”³⁰⁷ Nevertheless, other costumes garnered as much if not more attention. *La Sylphide* reported that the Empress wore “a magnificent Egyptian costume,” but also claimed that “one of the most splendid creations [...] was that of the costume of the Carthaginian *Salammbô*.”³⁰⁸ The literary-inspired costume was described as follows: “a floating nacarat velvet tunic, held in place by a simple fastening of jewels.”³⁰⁹ The author proceeded in an effort to conjure up an image of the dress and its effect in the mind of her readers: “just imagine seeing bare arms, leading to splendid shoulders, escaping [from the tunic]; add to this that the costume was worn by one of the beauties of our court, the Countess de Castiglione, whose bare feet were fitted with gold sandals.”³¹⁰ On the same day, likely inspired by the commentary in *La Sylphide* or another such report, the writer Prosper Mérimée wrote to an English friend telling him that Castiglione had presented herself at the Tuileries in an “astounding costume, BEYOND NAKED [...] It appears,” he continued, “that *Her Majesty* became a little irate and that *His Majesty* did not pay any attention, which is much worse.”³¹¹ Two days later in the “Nouvelle du jour,” *La Presse*

³⁰⁷ Joanna Richardson, *La Vie Parisienne: 1852-1870* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), 65. Bees were the symbol of the Bonapartes and henceforth, were all the rage. Richardson quotes from the diarist Henri Dabot: “people are putting bees everywhere and it is the most difficult thing in the world to prevent the couturiers from attaching bees to their customers’ clothes,” *ibid*.

³⁰⁸ “un magnifique costume d’Egyptienne,” “l’une des plus splendides création [...] c’est celle du costume de la Carthaginoise *Salammbô*.” Louise de Nogarel, “Modes: la folle du logis,” in *La Sylphide: journal de littérature et de modes* (February 28, 1863): 87-89, 87, 88. The Empress’s dress was described as follows: “Le bas de sa robe était en satin, couvert de hiéroglyphes; le long voile de Sa Majesté était, dit-on, semé de larmes de sang,” *ibid*.

³⁰⁹ “une tunique flottante en velours nacarat, retenue par une simple agrafe de pierreries,” *ibid*, 88.

³¹⁰ “Figurez-vous vous s’échapper des bras nus faisant suite à de splendides épaules; ajoutez à cela que ce costume était porté par l’une des beautés de notre cour, la comtesse de Castiglione, don’t les pieds nus étaient chaussés de sandales d’or,” *ibid*.

³¹¹ “un costume ébouriffant, PLUS QUE NUE [...] Il paraît que *Her Majesty* [sic] s’en est un peu courroucée et que *His Majesty* [sic] n’y a pas fait attention, ce qui est bien plus grave.” M. Cermakian and Fr. Achener, eds., “Dix lettres inédites de Prosper Mérimée à Edward Ellice,” in *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France*, no. 1 (Jan.-March, 1963): 1-28, 21. The editors also note that on March 7, 1863, Mérimée wrote to Eugénie, saying, “On parle encore de l’apparition de Mme de Castiglione en *Salammbô*, les

likewise claimed that Castiglione had appeared as Salammbô.³¹² Such missives and reports, compromising Castiglione's reputation, also reached the Count di Castiglione who was once again decidedly unimpressed by his wife's purported provocations.

A series of letters written by the Count to the Countess with respect to this affair are preserved at the state archives in Turin, Italy. On May 17, 1863, the count wrote to his wife noting that he was waiting for a case of photographs that she had sent him to arrive. While he reported that he awaited certain of these with pleasure, he expressed his particular displeasure with and disapproval of her having appeared at court in the Salammbô costume. The count reprimanded Castiglione for becoming fodder for gossip journals and reminded her of something he assured her she knew very well: "I still have the right to ask you to account for your actions."³¹³ Three days later he wrote again and affixed a copy of a "cursed article" about the countess that appeared in a journal titled, *L'Italie*, which presumably was the source for the count's received version of the Salammbô story.³¹⁴ On this occasion the count became more direct and threatening in his accusations against Castiglione's alleged indiscretions: "I only warn you of one thing, that is if you put yourself again in the position to make others talk of you in such a way in

jambes nues, ayant des bagues aux doigts des pieds et les cheveux épars flottant sur les plus belles épaules du monde," *ibid*, note 3.

³¹² "Mme la comtesse de Castiglione était en Salammbô, cheveux épars, un diadème d'or, les bras et les pieds nus dans des sandales d'or." Anonymous, "Nouvelle du jour," in *La Presse*, February 11, 1863. 2.

³¹³ "j'ai encore le droit de vous demander compte de vos actions," original emphasis, Francesco Verasis, letter to the Countess de Castiglione dated May 17, 1863. Archivio di Stato di Torino, Carte Castiglione, Mazzo 2.

³¹⁴ "un maudit article," Francesco Verasis, letter to the Countess de Castiglione dated May 20, 1863. Archivio di Stato di Torino, Carte Castiglione, Mazzo 2. I have not been able to locate the article from *L'Italie*.

the journals, I will take Georges away from you immediately and I will have nothing more to do with a woman who delivers to the public her nudities.”³¹⁵

The Count di Castiglione’s letters to his wife bear the traces of frustrated male authority over an unwilling subject. The count’s avowal to “have nothing more to do” with the countess evidently disturbed Castiglione, and she was likewise not immune to the wider implications of the allegations against her. The countess replied to the count apprising him of the facts. The press had got it wrong: it was Madame Rimsky-Korsakov who had appeared as Salammbô at the ball while Castiglione attended costumed as the Queen of Etruria. Both the count and the countess wrote to the editors of *L’Italie* demanding a retraction, which was quickly granted, but which did little to quell the rumor mill.³¹⁶ In an effort to restore her reputation, at least with respect to this debacle, Castiglione turned to Pierson and the authority of photography, which she imagined could provide unquestionable testimony in support of her case.

In the letters that Castiglione sent to *L’Italie* requesting the retraction she noted that a photograph of the Queen of Etruria costume had not yet been made. She suggested that she had not thought that the “infamy merited any evidence,” ironically implying that her costume was entirely appropriate, but the ensuing scandal evidently changed her mind.³¹⁷ Shortly after the ball and the press reports, Castiglione arranged a session at

³¹⁵ “Seulement je vous préviens d’une chose, c’est que si vous mettez encore dans le cas de faire parler de vous de cette manière dans les journaux, je vous retirerai Georges ausitôt et je n’aurai plus rien de commun avec une femme qui livre au public ses nudités,” original emphasis, *ibid*.

³¹⁶ In a letter dated May 26, 1863, the Count di Castiglione writes to the Countess that he has attached the retraction that appeared in *L’Italie* on the same day. Again, the letter exists in the archives but the attachment is lost, *ibid*.

³¹⁷ “il n’en existe pas de photographie, car je n’avais pas pensé que l’infamie méritait des preuves.” Letter from Castiglione to a correspondent of the journal *L’Italie*. Cited in Etienne Ader, ed., *Correspondance inédites et archives privées de Virginia Vérasis Comtesse de Castiglione* (Paris: Hotel Drouot, 1951), 57.

Pierson's studio where the pair produced a series of portraits of Castiglione as the Queen of Etruria. A page from an album assembled by Castiglione features four poses from this session [Fig. 3.14]. In the photograph on the upper left of the album page Castiglione stands with her back to viewer before a *psyche* that reflects her face and bust. In the mirror image she is shown adjusting her elaborate headpiece or crown as though performing a final inspection before departing for an event. The portrait on the upper right depicts Castiglione standing languidly in the voluminous costume with her bare arms casually resting by her sides and her sandaled foot carefully exposed. In the portraits arranged on the lower half of the page the languor is taken to the extreme as Castiglione lounges—in the image on left she almost slithers—on the studio floor in a manner reminiscent of a harem scene. The curtains framing these scenes serve to intensify their voyeuristic feel, which Castiglione appears to both relish and playfully respond to as she meets the viewer's gaze while fanning herself with her peacock-feathered accessory in the image on the right. Such playful positions, however, belie the seriousness with which Castiglione publicized her portrait as the Queen of Etruria.

Other poses are decidedly more regal in their representation of Castiglione as the Etrurian Queen. In a photograph once again over-painted by Aquilin Schad, Castiglione assumes the guise with gravity rather than lightheartedness [Fig. 3.10]. With an expression of practiced melancholy, her gaze is slightly averted and she stands casually yet with confidence as one hand rests on her hip. It is from such examples, rather than those from the album page, that the sculptor Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse worked while completing his commissioned terracotta portrait of Castiglione [Fig. 3.15]. Carrier-Belleuse's three-dimensional portrait mimics the hand-on-hip pose of the over-painted

photograph but Castiglione's physiognomy is romanticized and rendered more youthful while her head is "saucily thrown back," according to June Hargrove's reading.³¹⁸ While in the photographs the velvet cape largely obscures the contours of her body, the sculptural folds emphasize ample breasts on the terracotta figure.

This slightly more flippant and sensualized sculpture nevertheless existed as solid testimony to the fact that Castiglione had not appeared as Salammbô at the Tuileries ball. Castiglione had several plaster casts of the sculpture made and kept one for herself while she sent others to friends of influence including the Count de Nieuwerkerke, the Superintendent of Fine Arts, the Duke d'Aumale, and Dr. Blanche, her friend, neighbor and personal physician, among others.³¹⁹ In an article in the journal *L'Événement*, in which Castiglione is interviewed in response to a defamatory article written about her in an earlier issue of the journal *L'Éclair*, Castiglione corrected the false legend about her having appeared dressed as Salammbô by explicitly referring to the existence of Carrier-Belleuse's sculpture. She assured readers that despite the claims made by Mlle Bouvet with respect to the indecency of the Salammbô costume, the Queen of Etruria dress was, as she described, "very long, very decent, and my feet were not nude and did not make clinking sounds caused by any type of ring, [they were] enclosed in the traditional cothurne."³²⁰ As further testimony beyond simply her word, she advised her interviewer

³¹⁸ June Ellen Hargrove, "The Life and Work of Albert Ernest Carrier-Belleuse," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (New York University, Department of Fine Arts, 1976), 125.

³¹⁹ Apraxine and Demange, "*La Divine Comtesse*," 171.

³²⁰ "Je portais ce soir-la un costume de 'reine d'Etrurie' très long, très décent, et mes pieds, qui n'étaient pas nus et qui ne faisaient craquer aucune espèce de bagues, étaient enfermés dans le cothurne traditionnel." Gygès, "La Comtesse de Castiglione," in *L'Événement* (April 22, 1892). The article is written by Gygès but takes the form of an interview with Castiglione. An oft-reported detail provided in evidence of the "scandalousness" of the Salammbô costume was that Castiglione apparently wore many rings on her exposed toes, which made clinking sounds as she moved, adding yet another layer of sensory offence to the outfit.

that Carrier-Belleuse had represented her in this very guise and further suggested that if they were to go to the Duke d'Aumale's in Chantilly, they would be able to read on the sculpture's pedestal the supporting statement: "Carrier-Belleuse's statuette which represents Mme the Countess de Castiglione in the costume that she wore to the ball at the Tuileries in 1863."³²¹

Hargrove has noted how odd it is that despite the "mania for costume balls [...] amazingly few women were portrayed in guises, in contrast to the eighteenth century when such portraits were common."³²² She singled out Castiglione as one of the few who was depicted in a costume portrait but trivialized the countess's motivations behind such a commission. Hargrove characterized Castiglione's motives as "incredibly vain," but conceded that the effect of Carrier-Belleuse's work "is so majestic that the statuette might have been a monument; as it is, it is an exquisite study of the personality and elegance of this difficult beauty," she claimed.³²³ Hargrove not only wrested any artistic or self-representational agency from Castiglione, which is unsurprising since she failed to mention the existence of the photographs, but she also undermined Castiglione's intentions and neglected to take into account the significance of the Etrurian costume and the Salammbô scandal.

From Salammbô to *La Source*: Clothing the Countess de Castiglione

³²¹ "Statuette de Carrier-Belleuse représentant Mme la comtesse de Castiglione dans le costume qu'elle portait au bal des Tuileries en 1863." Ibid.

³²² Hargrove, "The Life and Work of Albert Ernest Carrier-Belleuse," 124.

³²³ Ibid., 125.

In the midst of the Salammbô ordeal, the Countess Stéphanie de Tascher de la Pagerie—the same memoirist who had opined that Castiglione was a soulless *objet d'art*—was organizing a charity event in the form of a series of tableaux vivants that were to be staged at the home of the Baroness von Meyendorff. Having witnessed a series of such performances at Compiègne, Tascher de la Pagerie was inspired to bring the practice to the capital in order to “tempt the Parisian public” into buying tickets to the event.³²⁴ And tempted by the thought of society women displaying themselves for the delectation of an audience the public would prove to be. With the dates set for three evenings from April 14-16, 1863, more than nine hundred tickets to the spectacle were sold. Tascher de la Pagerie had trouble securing willing participants because “mendacious gossip” began circulating speculating that women would appear as antique statues that were “scarcely clothed.”³²⁵ Instead of cancelling the event, Tascher de la Pagerie resolved to stage tableaux that would correct this “willfully ignorant gossip.”³²⁶ The organizer described the good chance she had in convincing the Countess de Castiglione to participate. Given that the Countess appeared very seldom in public by this point and by virtue of her “vogue as a leading beauty,” Castiglione’s “apparition would be the focus of the event and the bait for the selling of the tickets.”³²⁷

In her effort to correct the crude chatter, Tascher de la Pagerie planned a program that would include representations of biblical heroines inspired by paintings such as Horace Vernet’s *Judith and Holofernes* (1829) and *Rebecca at the Well* (1835), and *The*

³²⁴ “tenter le public parisien.” Tascher de la Pagerie, NAF 19971, 1863, book 19, 120.

³²⁵ “A Paris une nouvelle combinaison jettée sur le pavé des conversations journalières germe, mais sans jeter de racines, elle se propage et est répétée pour descendre au plus mensonger des cancans.” ; “fort peu vêtues.” Ibid., 122 and 121.

³²⁶ “ces bavardes ignorants de volonté.” Ibid., 122.

³²⁷ “car ce montrant peu et ayant la vogue comme première beauté, son apparition serait le point de mire de la soirée et l’appas pour la vente des billets.” Ibid., 127.

Toilet of Esther after Jean-François de Troy's version (1738), which had been translated into a Gobelins tapestry that hung in Compiègne. When she was assured that Castiglione would participate, she paid her a visit in her residence in Passy in order to discuss potential tableaux for Castiglione to perform.³²⁸ By contrast to the biblical subject matter of the other planned tableaux, Tascher de la Pagerie reported that the pair had decided on two secular scenes for Castiglione to enact: Desdemona singing the willow song from Shakespeare's *Othello* (IV. iii.) and a more general tableau which would feature Castiglione as a Druidess or sybil in an antique costume.³²⁹ The role of Desdemona would have appealed to Castiglione given the Shakespearean heroine's Italian heritage and also her tragic fate, which was impelled by false rumors and accusations, while the role of a wise antique woman would have likewise suited Castiglione's self-pretensions, not to mention her taste in costume.

Despite Tascher de la Pagerie's and Castiglione's initial consensus, these tableaux would never be realized. The vague gossip associated with the event, which Tascher de la Pagerie alluded to in her memoirs, was most pointedly directed at Castiglione once word spread that she would participate. Specifically, a rumor began to emerge that Castiglione was set to appear on stage as a living image of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's sensuous and celebrated nude: *La Source* (1856) [Fig. 3.16]. The very thought that an actual woman would publicly adopt the pose of this classicized, abstracted, and

³²⁸ Tascher de la Pagerie reported being shocked at the conditions in which Castiglione lived: "Je m'attendais à la trouver dans une petite villa qui marcherait de paire avec l'élégance de ses habitudes [...] quel fut mon étonnement de ne voir qu'une maison plus que modeste et bourgeoise, mal meublée, presque pauvre." Ibid., 143-144.

³²⁹ Tascher de la Pagerie does not mention source paintings for these two tableaux options as she does for the biblical scenes. Eugène Delacroix painted two renditions of *Desdemona cursed by her Father* (ca. 1852, Brooklyn Museum and Musée des Beaux-Arts, Reims). Curiously, both versions feature a peacock feather fan remarkably similar to the fan Castiglione carried as part of the Queen of Etruria costume. Théodore Chassériau also represented Desdemona in several paintings.

allegorical nude was as offensive to Castiglione as it was titillating to the increasingly eager audience, and the mere suggestion of it caused Castiglione to reconsider her representation.

Instead of appearing on all three evenings, as originally planned, Castiglione notified Tascher de la Pagerie that she would only be performing on the final night. When she arrived on April 16 at the venue, which had hosted the four other tableaux on each of the two previous evenings, Tascher de la Pagerie reported that Castiglione demanded a dressing room of her own and refused to see anyone or to leave the room before the scheduled moment of her performance, which was to be the last act.³³⁰ When she finally emerged, Castiglione revealed the hitherto revised scene in which she would “expose herself” to the public gathered for the event at Meyendorff’s. Like Ingres’s *La Source*, Castiglione decided to set herself within a grotto, but in this case one of her own design. As the curtain lifted the scene would turn out to be set by a painted backdrop depicting a cave-like space framed by rock formations and suggestions of trees and foliage, which was reminiscent enough of Ingres’ painting. The central focus of the tableau—the living component—however, could not have been more different. Instead of presenting a delectable frontal nude frozen in permanent exposure, this particular grotto featured a figure fully “concealed by the graceless folds of a baize dress” [Fig. 3.17].³³¹ In answer to the expectation that she would appear brazenly naked in these performances, Castiglione replied by confronting the public in the form of her alter ego, “L’Hermite de Passy,” in

³³⁰ Tascher de la Pagerie, 158.

³³¹ Loliée, *The Romance of a Favourite*, Wm. Morton Fullerton, trans. (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1912), 103.

the resolutely covered costume of a Carmelite nun.³³² The grotto, it turned out, was not a space for self-exposure, but a safe-haven, a place for retreat from public scrutiny—a veritable hermitage—and the sign over the cave’s entrance, “Ermitage de Passy,” left no doubt as to its purpose.

Castiglione commemorated this appearance through a series of photographs in which she restaged the tableau vivant in Pierson’s studio. The three extant images show Castiglione standing (as above), kneeling in prayer before an altar outfitted with a small crucifix, a candle and flowers [Fig. 3.18], and seated with her hands folded across her lap while “confronting the viewer with an unfathomable gaze,” as Apraxine and Demange described [Fig. 3.19].³³³ In support of the charity for which the event was staged in the first place, Castiglione sanctioned the sale of the photograph of the standing image of her in the role of the Hermit of Passy. Robert de Montesquiou procured this image shortly following Castiglione’s death and reported that on the verso of this print, which she had owned, Castiglione had written:

This is the exact firm pose, [held] three-quarters of an hour before a theater audience in revolt, booing me, whistling at me, [throwing] apples, pears (or stones) because for six months, I *had to* appear as Ingres’s *Source*, at Duchatel. And the poor, the wounded, benefitted that night, 40 to 50 thousand francs, for one single appearance [...] It was hard, to resist it with serious airs, without frowning, nor throwing to this dishonest and discourteous public, *Sister Eliza’s* cord, for them to take!³³⁴

³³² This is a persona that the Countess cultivated for herself, which referenced her self-imposed exile and seclusion in her apartment in Passy, which Tascher de la Pagerie described. Etienne Ader noted that she signed letters under this pseudonym. See *Correspondance inédites et archives privées*, 58.

³³³ Apraxine and Demange, “*La Divine Comtesse*,” 172.

³³⁴ “Celui-ci est celui exact de pose ferme, trois quarts d’heure devant un public de théâtre en révolte, me huant, sifflant, pommes, poires (ou pierres) parce (que) depuis six mois, je *devais* paraître en *Source* d’Ingres, à Duchatel. Et les pauvres, les blessés ont bénéficié, ce soir-là, 40 à 50 mille francs, par une seule comparution [...] Ça a été dur, y résister avec figure sérieuse, sans froncer sourcils, ni jeter, à ce public malhonnête et grossier, la corde de *Seour Élize*, pour le prendre!” Montesquiou, *La Divine Comtesse*, 83-84. Montesquiou recounted that the image was given to him after being passed over at Édouard Delessert’s estate sale: he had arrived late and all that was left was this one object that was “without interest, utility or

Although the tableau vivant “died” as the performance at Meyendorff’s ended—Frédéric Loliée reminded his readers that “tableaux vivants had the ephemeral life of all fashions”—Castiglione’s photograph lived on.³³⁵ In fact, this is the only identifiable image of Castiglione that she ever willingly placed “on the market.”³³⁶

Conclusion

Robert de Montesquiou was the first to identify the three costumes considered above—the Queen of Hearts, the Queen of Etruria, and the Hermit of Passy—as significant events in the life of the Countess de Castiglione. In *La Divine comtesse* he justified treating them as distinctive moments with the following argument: “[the three costumes] generated discussion about themselves, even determined certain scandals, much unmerited; they are minor retrospective trials that play an important enough part in the history of our marvelous woman. We owe it to them, and we owe it to ourselves, to gather together the pieces and documents [relating to the costumes] in order to pass final judgment on them.”³³⁷ Montesquiou did thread together the narrative networks surrounding these images and in this chapter I have elaborated upon them with recourse to contemporaneous accounts in many cases unaccounted for in Montesquiou’s biography.

beauty,” the organizers claimed, and they offered it to him free of charge. Montesquiou avowed that this rejected memento was, in his words, “the most beautiful gift I would ever receive in my life.” Ibid., 88, 89.

³³⁵ Loliée, *Romance of a Favourite*, 105.

³³⁶ See, Luce Irigaray, “Women on the Market,” in Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 170-191.

³³⁷ “ces trois costumes [...] ils ont fait parler d’eux, même déterminé certains scandales, bien immérités; ce sont petits procès rétrospectifs qui jouent un rôle assez important, dans l’histoire de notre Merveilleuse. Nous lui devons, et nous devons, d’en rassembler les pièces et les documents, pour les juger en dernier ressort.” Montesquiou, *La Divine comtesse*, 77.

In granting agency to the costumes, however—“they generated discussion about themselves”—, rather than explicitly to the Countess, what Montesquiou did not emphasize, or recognize even, was the *autobiographical* nature of these guises, nor did he attempt to explain the decisive role that the autogenic medium of photography played in securing their status as significant self-representations. By actively engaging and intervening in these trials, Castiglione may not have precisely crafted a memoir in her own words, but she did offer significant autobiographical and sartorial speech acts, if you will, which functioned as self-statements through fashion and photography.

In *Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography*, Timothy Dow Adams pointed to the difficulty in conceiving of photographic self-portraits in concert with the genre of the memoir, “because memoir is usually thought of as existing somewhere between autobiography and biography, focusing as much inwardly on the life of the narrator as outwardly on other people.”³³⁸ Castiglione’s portraits were consistently focused on herself—as the images’ narrator, reciting a kind of monologue for her viewers, perhaps—evincing an undeniable narcissism, but I would also offer that narcissism was to some extent a necessary maneuver on her part. Given that her life unfolded on the stage that was the *fête impériale*, that she existed so frequently as a fodder for gossip, as a figure in memoirs and biographies written by others, her drive to construct herself as a subject was not without outward purpose, as she would aim to influence these accounts through her own counter-narratives and self-presentations.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau claimed that “the countess’s obsessive self-representations are less an index of narcissism [...] than a demonstration of a radical

³³⁸ Adams, *Light Writing & Life Writing*, 232.

alienation that collapses the distinction between subjecthood and objecthood.”³³⁹ While she acknowledged that “it is tempting to see [Castiglione’s] relation to photography as a bleak parable of femininity attempting its own representation,” she pointed out the inevitable irony, as she saw it, that “the fetishized woman attempts to locate herself, to affirm her subjectivity within the rectangular space of another fetish [...] the ‘the mirror of nature.’”³⁴⁰ Photography’s mimetic failures once again rear their head, but I would like to recall the more productive understanding of Irigarayan mimesis proposed by Hilary Robinson and introduced in Chapter One.

Robinson’s term “productive mimesis” might well be applied to Castiglione’s three costume portraits discussed throughout this chapter. As Robinson and other Irigaray scholars have pointed out, the issue at the heart of Irigaray’s writing is the notion of women’s relationship with and potential for subjectivity. Solomon-Godeau introduced her article with an epigraph from Irigaray’s essay, “Any Theory of the ‘Subject’ Has Always Been Appropriated by the ‘Masculine.’” The sentence by Irigaray that opens the argument reads: “Subjectivity denied to woman: indisputably this provides the financial backing for every irreducible constitution [of her] as an object: of representation, of discourse, of desire.”³⁴¹ In seeking to identify ways in which women’s subjectivity might actualize itself, Irigaray invoked, problematically, the figure of the hysteric who “exposes the normal masquerade of femininity.”³⁴² The hysteric is a problematic figure because Irigaray inevitably faces the problem of “transforming the hysteric’s symptomatic

³³⁹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” 76.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁴² Dianne Chisholm, “Irigaray’s Hysteria,” in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whiford, eds., *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 263-283, 265.

inarticulateness into subversive discourse and finally into women's speech [*parler-femme*].³⁴³ In an effort to rescue Irigaray scholarship from this problem and in turn productively apply it to women's artistic practice, Robinson read Irigaray through Paul Ricoeur. Rather than view mimesis as mere replication, Ricoeur reoriented it so that mimesis "only takes place within the area of human action, or production, or *poesis*."³⁴⁴ Robinson renamed this "productive mimesis" because in this case "mimesis does not seek to maintain something already given, but it is 'an augmentation of meaning in the field of action.'"³⁴⁵

As Irigaray claimed, "To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it."³⁴⁶ Bearing this in mind and recalling from Chapter One that for Robinson (and Irigaray) "productive mimesis" must involve a type of play that undermines normative cultural constructs, I would like to point out both the productive playfulness and transformative *poesis* that went into Castiglione's publicly circulating self-representations. From heartless ice-queen to the Queen of Hearts, from courtesan to Carmelite nun, in her public photographic appearances, those few that were actually "on the market," Castiglione constructively challenged those discourses that attempted to define her other than how she desired to be seen. I do not wish simply to invert the binary of object/subject, but to suggest that photography offered Castiglione an interstice between these defining modes of being.

³⁴³ Ibid., 268.

³⁴⁴ Cited in Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray*, 47-48.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 48.

³⁴⁶ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Catherine Porter, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes described the psychological transformation at stake in having his photographic portrait taken: “the Photograph (the one I *intend*) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I experience a micro-version of death.”³⁴⁷ I would argue that for Castiglione, something akin to the reversal of this more nuanced process happened when she faced the lens: it allowed her to feel herself becoming a subject, to represent herself—autogenically. Rather than effecting her micro-death, light writing effectively brought her story to life.³⁴⁸

In the following final chapter I explore in more detail the complexities of her subject/object position through a close reading of Castiglione’s most iconic photographic portrait, *Scherzo di Follia*.

³⁴⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 14.

³⁴⁸ This resonates also with Apraxine’s ending to his essay, “The Model and the Photographer” in “*La Divine Comtesse*”: “One feels that Castiglione, with a prescience attuned to her time, knew somehow that the medium of photography would one day ensure her immortality. And indeed the portraits, on which she lavished so much care, have brought her back to life,” 49.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Parergon: Reframing Castiglione's Photographic Corpus

Introduction

Interest in the Countess de Castiglione's relationship with photography has been reinvigorated since the 1980s. Abigail Solomon-Godeau's 1986 article, "The Legs of the Countess," recovered Castiglione's self-images from relative obscurity. The essay simultaneously offered a conclusive reading of the photographs, casting them as archetypal illustrations of Luce Irigaray's concept of "subjectivity denied to woman," as previously discussed, and posited photography as the most apropos—almost inevitable—medium to ensure this denial.³⁴⁹ More than a decade later, the exhibitions that gathered Castiglione's extensive and dispersed photographic corpus together provided a comprehensive survey of the images that opened up the possibility for more complex readings of the relationship between the medium and the subject to emerge. The cover images chosen for the accompanying catalogues (published in French in 1999 and in English in 2000) are telling.

The image on the cover of the French catalogue, corresponding to the exhibition staged at the Musée d'Orsay, "La Comtesse de Castiglione par elle-même," is

³⁴⁹ Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," 65.

a photograph of Castiglione, which she titled *The Assassination* [Fig. 4.1].³⁵⁰ Castiglione is pictured in the center of the composition as if emerging from behind a heavy curtain that frames the right edge of the image. The tip of Castiglione's left foot is just touching the ground, as if she is in the process of quietly stepping forward. Her heavy dress trails behind her, further suggesting that the figure has been caught in motion. The costume appears to be a white satin dress with a saw-toothed hem, overlaid with what may be a paisley patterned cashmere shawl that is tied around her waist. A crown of leaves tops her head, which is also framed in a tulle veil. Castiglione's expression is one of malicious concentration, befitting an assassination scene; her slight frown and very nearly furrowed brow accompany a dagger-like gaze. This fierce expression is even more menacing because in her right fist Castiglione clenches an actual dagger. The surreptitious movement and violent intent apparent in this image led the editors of the catalogue to compare Castiglione to "Judith entering Holofernes' tent."³⁵¹

The English catalogue, corresponding to the exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "La Divine Comtesse: Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione," has an image Castiglione had titled *Vengeance* on its cover [Fig. 4.2]. *Vengeance* pictures Castiglione in the Queen of Etruria costume discussed in the previous chapter. By contrast to other photographs of this costume, in this image both of Castiglione's arms are completely covered by her velvet cape, rendering the outfit even more modest than it would have been with one arm exposed. The subject's expression is slightly more menacing than the one she assumes in *The Assassination* and in this case she also holds a

³⁵⁰ "The Countess de Castiglione by Herself," or "The Countess de Castiglione by the Countess de Castiglione." The awkwardness in translating the title might account for the difference between the French and English catalogue titles.

³⁵¹ *'La Divine Comtesse': Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, 173.

dagger in her hand—the dagger’s blade extends from her ringed fingers, its glistening sharpness emphasized by its contrast with the soft, dark fabric of her costume. The original portrait from which this cover derives is quite large, at 24.4 x 19.2 cm, and like several other of her costume photographs, was also over-painted in colored gouache. Part of the same series of portraits that Castiglione commissioned in response to the Salammbô scandal—also discussed in the previous chapter—, this print served a particular purpose. On the card to which the image is mounted Castiglione appended a handwritten dedication: “Au comte de Castiglione / Reine d’Etrurie.”³⁵² While her intentions cannot be known for certain, her posture in this image is a provocative response to the threats the count had made to the countess after hearing that she had worn an indecent costume at court.³⁵³ Irrespective of this biographical detail, in the context of exhibition catalogue covers, both *Vengeance* and *The Assassination* present Castiglione as a subject who faces her photographic legacy fearlessly. She is not represented as a victim subject to Solomon-Godeau’s proverbial “procrustean bed” of the photographic frame in these portraits; rather, she appears as a femme fatale who exerts control over her representation and an almost hypnotic power over those destined to view her images. Although these portraits inevitably evince more aggressive agency on Castiglione’s part than the photographs of her legs, for example, they still perpetuate the well-worn stereotype of the femme fatale.

³⁵² “La Divine Comtesse,” 171.

³⁵³ Ibid. See Chapter Three for details relating to their correspondence.

More recently, Castiglione has appeared on the cover of books in a different guise, that of the most iconic image of her, *Scherzo di Follia* [Fig. 4.3].³⁵⁴ Literary historian, Nicole G. Albert, published a biography of Castiglione in 2011, which included a cropped image of *Scherzo di Follia* on its cover [Fig. 4.4].³⁵⁵ The Musée d'Orsay published *A History of Photography: The Musée d'Orsay Collection, 1839-1925* in 2009, which also featured the image on its cover [Fig. 4.5].³⁵⁶ In this case, the iconic portrait of Castiglione was chosen not only to represent a volume dedicated to her, but to introduce a volume dedicated to the history of the medium of photography itself. Also recently, contemporary artists have appropriated this image of Castiglione for their own ends. For example, the artist Pushpamala N. recreated this portrait, replacing Castiglione with herself as the photographic subject, as part of a series of three images she created for the exhibition "Paris – Delhi – Bombay..." held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2011 [Fig. 4.6]. The Italian illustrator, AleXsandro Palombo, included an image of the cartoon character, Marge Simpson, assuming Castiglione's curious posture in his 2013 series in which he had Marge reenact iconic moments in fashion from the last one hundred years [Fig. 4.7]. As far as we know, *Scherzo di Follia* did not have a public life during Castiglione's lifetime, but its afterlife has been especially vibrant.

Scherzo di Follia resonates with contemporary audiences for any number of reasons. It has been presented as a symbol of voyeurism and compared to Brechtian epic

³⁵⁴ Apraxine and Demange described that "since the 1960s [*Scherzo di Follia*] has been an icon of photography," "*La Divine Comtesse*," 183.

³⁵⁵ Nicole G. Albert, *La Castiglione: Vies et metamorphoses* (Paris: Perrin, 2011).

³⁵⁶ Françoise Heilbrun, ed., *A History of Photography: The Musée d'Orsay Collection 1839-1925* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009). Originally published in French (*La photographie au musée d'Orsay*) in 2008.

theater, to name just two examples.³⁵⁷ The preeminent fashion photographer and portraitist, Richard Avedon, had “one of only two known early prints” of *Scherzo di Follia* in his personal collection, prizing, it has been suggested, the “wit, flair and [the] nod to the artifice of the creation,” that Castiglione’s portraits demonstrated.³⁵⁸ The multiplicity of meanings that are read into this portrait is a testament to its richness as an image. In providing my own reading(s) of *Scherzo di Follia* in what follows, I argue that the image can be interpreted as a multivalent allegory of Castiglione’s relationship with photography. I analyze the image and its allegorical possibilities from four perspectives. I begin by providing a formal analysis of the image and examine the allusions built into it through iconographic details and Castiglione’s titling of the portrait. I then examine the image with respect to three relevant themes, which generally are in and of themselves ontologically fundamental to theories of photography, and which specifically have haunted interpretations of Castiglione’s corpus: hysteria, narcissism, and the concept of the gaze. Throughout this analysis I will argue that this studio portrait, which might stand as a metaphor for Castiglione’s corpus at large, can be read as registering a self-productive space for this visually articulate photographic subject.

The Icon: Scherzo di Follia

³⁵⁷ *Scherzo di Follia* is not the cover image, but it is the first illustration in the exhibition catalogue for *Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010). The exhibition was presented at the Tate Modern, London, and then travelled to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. In her unpublished dissertation, “Performing Photographs: Memory, History, and Display,” Melanie A. Kitchens compared *Scherzo di Follia* to Bertolt Brecht’s concept of epic theater (PhD dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2008).

³⁵⁸ See, Philip Gefter, “In Portraits by Others, a Look that Caught Avedon’s Eye,” in *The New York Times* (August 27, 2006), AR7. Avedon had 18 photographs of Castiglione in his collection. Gefter noted that this was “considered the most important collection of this series in private hands,” *ibid.*

It was during one of her habitual visits to Mayer and Pierson's commercial photography studio in the 1860s that Castiglione posed for the portrait that would become an icon in the history of photography [Fig. 4.3]. The photograph, an albumen silver print with characteristic warm sepia tones and soft contrast, pictures Castiglione in three-quarter view from the waist up at an unusually close-range.³⁵⁹ Centered within the composition, Castiglione confronts the viewer with a monocular gaze that she effects by holding a small dark frame up to her face. An anomalous item in the limited repertoire of props for nineteenth-century photographic portraiture, here the frame assumes the guise of an improvised accoutrement for a costume ball, an event that as we have seen was a customary and meaningful activity for the Italian countess who some years earlier had relocated from Turin to Paris and become an infamous fixture in Napoleon III's *fête imperiale*.³⁶⁰

Within the photograph, the areas of sharpest focus are dictated by the subject's unconventional posture, as Castiglione's right arm extends upward through the central vertical axis of the composition, her fingers delicately holding the frame in place over her

³⁵⁹ By and large the extant photographs of Castiglione show her in full figure. Those few that are not full-figure portraits (others from the waist-up, photographs of her legs) tend not to frame her as closely as she is depicted in *Scherzo di Follia*. In 1930 an enlargement of the original negative was produced. This later image "zooms in" to the extreme by framing only Castiglione's head, the top of her shoulders, and her raised hand, cutting out the rest of her torso and the background. See, Apraxine and Demange, "*La Divine Comtesse*," 183-184.

³⁶⁰ There are examples of portraits from the period in which sitters appear behind empty picture frames, but these tend to be larger frames and I know of none that exclusively frames the eye. Apraxine reproduced such an image in his catalogue essay. The photograph features two women, one seated on a chair and the other seated next to her on the ground of the studio. The woman seated in the chair holds an oval frame over the other woman's head creating a portrait within a portrait. Apraxine, "The Model and the Photographer," Fig. 9, 30. Castiglione's more unusual gesture could very well cite a fascinating tradition of painted "eye miniature portraits" that first flourished in England in the late eighteenth century and died out by 1850. See, Hanneke Grootenboer, "Treasuring the Gaze: Eye Miniature Portraits and the Intimacy of Vision," in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 88, no. 3 (September, 2006): 496-507, and *Treasuring the Gaze: Intimate Vision in Late Eighteenth-Century Eye Miniatures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). This phenomenon and Grootenboer's theorization of it will be discussed later in this chapter.

resultantly masked face. Her cascading curls, strings of pearls and one-shouldered cape fall softly out of focus as they recede into space. The t-shape formed by her pose, as the length of the black frame and its extended support are bisected by her exposed arm, is echoed in the left background, by the hastily obfuscated form of the photographer's *appui-tête* or headrest, a regularly caricatured device designed to hold the photographic subject's head still throughout the then extended take.³⁶¹ This repetition, and the attempted editing out of the postural apparatus, calls attention to the fact that the internal structure governing the image is decidedly embodied by the Countess herself, rather than simply mechanically manipulated by the tricks of the photographer's trade. Through this iconic image, Castiglione again took her photographic fate into her own hands, so to speak, as she had done with the costume portraits discussed in the previous chapter.

Throughout the series of hundreds of photographic portraits that she staged and directed over her lifetime, Castiglione was never one to shy away from a direct look, often answering her viewer's stare with a practiced and melancholic hostility, as in the Queen of Hearts exhibition portrait, or in *The Assassination* or *Vengeance*, as described above.³⁶² In this particular image, however, Castiglione's gaze is further emphasized and activated by the creative framing device. Given its style, shape and size, the frame was likely designed to hold a photograph, but here Castiglione positions its elongated oval opening over her own almond-shaped eye, establishing a decidedly literal "focal point" within the image. This playful positioning of the frame, which resonates with

³⁶¹ See, for example, Honoré Daumier's 1856 lithograph depicting a photographer taking a portrait of a couple clamped into two *appui-têtes*/torture devices. Daumier's caption ironically reads: "Photographie: Nouveau procédé employé pour obtenir des poses gracieuses."

³⁶² Castiglione cultivated the melancholic quality in these images. Under an image she titled *Beatrix*, she wrote, "En voyant la Douleur si belle, / Qui pourrait vouloir du bonheur?," in Montesquiou, NAF, 15171, 81.

contemporary viewers, perhaps more than it did with Castiglione's contemporaries, seems to emblematically engage a theory of the gaze, which I will discuss more thoroughly below. Although distinctly aware of her position as Pierson's subject, Castiglione simultaneously posits herself as the framer and the framed, the seer and the seen. The countess returns the gaze of the photographer—her look through her prop mirrors Pierson's look through his camera's lens—and this poetic gesture of framing vision suggests a dialogue, at the very least, with a meta-discourse on the medium of photography. The mechanics of vision, so central to the medium through which she is represented, are brought into focus.

This image, which Castiglione titled *Scherzo di Follia*, or *Game of Madness*, is conspicuous within the context of the extensive corpus of photographic (self-)portraits that she collaboratively produced with Pierson in its iconicity in several respects. The photograph's *mise en abyme* of framing vision not only offers a precocious attentiveness to the medium which she embraced so thoroughly, but also imaginatively personifies and plays with the subject/object dialectic that is symptomatic of portraiture generally, and photographic portraiture particularly, and that so specifically vexes interpretations of her work. The assigned title derives from Giuseppe Verdi's opera, *Un ballo in maschera* [A Masked Ball, 1859].³⁶³ Castiglione undoubtedly identified with what would have been

³⁶³ The opera has a complicated history. It was originally meant to tell the story of King Gustav III of Sweden who was assassinated at a masked ball. Because of the recent assassination attempt against Napoleon III (among other political motivations), the opera was censored. The location was moved to Boston and the leading character became a count rather than a monarch. See, Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). The plot follows Riccardo, Count of Warwick, Governor of Boston, who falls in love with Amelia, the wife of his adviser, Renato. Riccardo and his officers visit Ulrica, a prophetess who is facing banishment, at her establishment where Riccardo witnesses Amelia seeking counsel in curing her love for Riccardo. Ulrica advises Amelia to consume a magic herb that would cure her and restore her love for Renato, which she must procure herself in the dead of night. Riccardo decides to meet her where she sources the herb, but meanwhile his

personally relevant themes in Verdi's opera—political conspiracy, love, and betrayal—and would surely have appreciated the setting of the dénouement, which took place on a stage all too familiar to her: that of a masked ball.

In Act One of the opera, the principal character, Riccardo, the Governor of Boston, visits Ulrica, a prophetess facing banishment whose fate he must rule on. He decides on a lark to meet with the fortuneteller and in order to do so covertly he disguises himself as a fisherman. Not recognizing him as the governor, Ulrica offers him her own prophetic ruling: Riccardo will be assassinated by the first friend of his whose hand he shakes. Taken aback by her prediction and blissfully unaware of the plot for his assassination, Riccardo proclaims, "It is a joke or it is madness, / Such a prophecy."³⁶⁴ To my knowledge there are no extant notes relating to Castiglione's choice of title for this image, nor to any of the several other photographs that she titled after fancy-dress costumes, theatrical characters, or her alter egos; however, one can assume that Ulrica's powerful and predictive gaze and "game of madness" inspired something in the Countess. In Act One, Scene Two, Ulrica is presented as summoning the spirit who grants her powers. Once she feels him within her she proclaims, "He has smiled on my spell; / He makes it flash: / Nothing more, nothing more, nothing / Can be hidden from my gaze. / Nothing can be hidden."³⁶⁵ Fascinatingly, these lines contain photographic metaphors in their reference to an all-seeing eye. Once Ulrica provides Riccardo with her prophecy and

fortune is read by Ulrica, who predicts his death by the hand of a friend. Renato's commitment to protect Riccardo from an assassination attempt is thwarted once he suspects an affair between the Count and Amelia. Ultimately out of jealousy Renato kills Riccardo at a masked ball.

³⁶⁴ "È scherzo od è follia / Siffatta profezia." *Un Ballo in maschera*, Act One, Scene Two. See, "Un Ballo in maschera," in William Weaver, *Seven Verdi Librettos* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1975), 222-223.

³⁶⁵ "M'arrire al mio scongiuro, / Rifolgorar la fa: / Nulla più, nulla più, nulla ascondersi / Al guardo mio potrà. / Nulla ascondersi potrà," *ibid.*, 212-213.

he begins to question her seriousness and her sanity by repeating the lines above, the other characters present proclaim in awe of Ulrica: “A thunderbolt is her gaze.”³⁶⁶

Inspired by these lines, Castiglione’s gesture in *Scherzo di Follia* seizes Ulrica’s powerful vision as it plays with the madness it represents. In the photograph, what confounds is the agency in Castiglione’s omnipotent gaze, which extends actively outward toward the viewer, like a(n impossibly) calculated *punctum*, through the oval frame.³⁶⁷ The frame, which is designed to hold things in place—like the *appui-tête*—, to limit and to contain, functions, paradoxically, to at once disembody or fragment and to enliven and lend authority to the one-eyed gaze. This monocular stare seems to look out knowingly at us and foresee the interpretive quagmires that it succinctly symbolizes in one image, but that preside over Castiglione’s entire photographic corpus.

Hysteria: “Madwomen” vis-à-vis the “Game of Madness”

If only because it represents a vast photographic archive of portraits of women produced in nineteenth-century France, the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (IPS) might be compared to Castiglione’s photographic corpus of roughly four hundred images. Published in three volumes from 1876-1880, and illustrated with 119 photographic plates, the collection of texts and accompanying photographs was amassed to document and classify the symptoms and stages of illness of “hystero-epilepsy,” as they apparently

³⁶⁶ “È fulmine lo sguardo,” *ibid.*, 222-223.

³⁶⁷ “A calculated *punctum*” is an impossibility according to Barthes’ definition in *Camera Lucida*. However, this gesture is precisely what “pricks,” and “pierces” many viewers of the work, despite it being put there intentionally, like a *studium*—although, perhaps not deliberately by the photographer, but in this case by the sitter, which complicates Barthes’ explanation: “Certain details may ‘prick’ me. If they do not, it is doubtless because the photographer has put them there intentionally.” Incidentally, Barthes also calls the *punctum*, “lightning-like.” *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans., Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 47, 45.

afflicted female patients at the Paris hospital.³⁶⁸ As Georges Didi-Huberman has discussed, the renowned neurologist and director of the Salpêtrière, Jean-Martin Charcot, was accused of inventing hysteria. In part in response to such suspicions, he produced this ostensibly objective typology, which subsequently generated more questions as to the authenticity, not only of the disease, but also of the patients' performances and the doctors' manipulations of them. In his defense, Charcot employed photographic "metaphors." In his course notes corresponding to his Tuesday lesson plans at the Salpêtrière, Charcot met the accusations of fraudulence by positioning photography as an "instrument of truth":

Behold the truth. I've never said anything else; I'm not in the habit of advancing things that aren't demonstrable. You know that my principle is to give no weight to theory, and leave aside all prejudice: if you want to see clearly, you must take things as they are. It would seem that hystero-epilepsy exists only in France and only, I might say, as has sometimes been said, at the Salpêtrière, as if I had forged it through the power of my will. It would be truly fantastic if I could create ailments as my whim or fancy dictate. But, truth to tell, in this I am nothing more than a photographer; I inscribe what I see.³⁶⁹

While presented metaphorically, Didi-Huberman noted that "this was no metaphor" since Charcot literally undertook this vast photographic enterprise alongside his medical practice.³⁷⁰ It was through photography that Charcot inscribed what he saw over the bodies of women. Although roughly a quarter of the patients at the Salpêtrière were men,

³⁶⁸ The veracity of these images was called into question. Charcot himself referred to them as "staged observations." See, Elisabeth Lyon, "Unspeakable Images, Unspeakable Bodies," in *Camera Obscura*, vol. 8, no. 3 (24: 1990): 168-194, 181. Art historian Natasha Ruiz-Gomez is currently completing a manuscript examining the intersections of objectivity and artistry in these and other images associated with the "Salpêtrière School."

³⁶⁹ Jean-Martin Charcot, *Leçons du mardi à la Salpêtrière. Polyclinique* (Paris: Progrès médical/Delahaye & Lecrosnier, 1887-1888), 178, as cited in Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, Alisa Hartz, trans. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 29. Didi-Huberman's fascinating and complicated analysis considers "hysteria, insofar as it was fabricated at the Salpêtrière in the last third of the nineteenth century, as a chapter in the history of art," 4.

³⁷⁰ Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria*, 29.

only women were represented in the IPS.³⁷¹ Didi-Huberman described the hospital as “an improbable place of femininity,” and in the curious confluence of photography and femininity at the Salpêtrière, Heather McPherson, among others, has identified more specific parallels between these images and Castiglione’s corpus.³⁷²

In her chapter on Castiglione in *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France*, McPherson suggested that both Castiglione’s corpus and Charcot’s IPS present women as pathological specimens.³⁷³ She claimed that the photographs of Castiglione and those of Charcot’s hysterics “manifest an oddly nonexpressive expressivity in which physiognomy and gesture are disembodied and function as pathological signs.”³⁷⁴ McPherson applied this reading to the collection of Castiglione’s images as a whole, but also specifically to *Scherzo di Follia*, which she acknowledged ranked among the most intriguing of the countess’s portraits. Like Solomon-Godeau, McPherson stressed the fetishizing function of the camera in this context: “by framing the gaze (both her own and the viewer’s), [Castiglione] signals the fetishization of her own body and underscores the function of the eye itself as the organ of seeing.”³⁷⁵ As I see it, such a “signaling” indicates a critical or at least a creative maneuver on the part of the subject, but McPherson, following Solomon-Godeau, does not allow for such strategies in Castiglione’s case.

³⁷¹ See Ulrich Baer, “Photography and Hysteria: Toward a Poetics of the Flash,” in *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1994): 41-77, 44.

³⁷² Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria*, 13. In addition to McPherson making equations between Castiglione’s corpus and the IPS, see also, Elisabeth Lyon, “Unspeakable Images, Unspeakable Bodies.”

³⁷³ Heather McPherson, “La Divine Comtesse,” 62. McPherson described how the impulse to present women as such pervaded scientific thought, social thought, as well as art and literature, 65. See also: Dorothy Kelly, *Reconstructing Woman: From Fiction to Reality in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

According to McPherson, like the images of hysterics, there is nothing productive, playful, or funny about Castiglione's mimetic game of madness. She continued in her own critique of Castiglione's pose: "[Castiglione's] countenance is obscured behind the frame, creating a peculiar optical illusion in which the comtesse's eye appears magnified and seemingly detached from her face. The neck brace behind her head, commonly used to immobilize the sitter in the early days of photography, further objectifies the sitter and underscores the artifice of the pose."³⁷⁶ She then equated the image with other photographs that zero in on Castiglione's arms, legs, and feet, and suggested that while they pay homage to her "anatomical perfection," they also "evoke the anatomical museum, or the morgue where bodies are dissected and anatomical specimens are analyzed under the clinical gaze."³⁷⁷ In this reading, Castiglione's intriguing gesture in *Scherzo di Follia* only does violence to her representation.

If *Scherzo di Follia* allegorizes anything for McPherson, then, it is the processes of fetishization and objectification. In other words, it is the voiding out of the subject who becomes merely an object under the authority of the photographic *objectif*. In his studies of the relationship between photography and hysteria at the Salpêtrière, Ulrich Baer has proposed that certain of the photographs of hysterics within the IPS might be read as allegories of photography. His allegorical reading is informed by (as mine has been), "feminist analyses of photographic representation," which emphasize that photography presented a "new technological process of objectification."³⁷⁸ Baer

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 58.

³⁷⁸ Baer, "Photography and Hysteria," 43. Specifically, Baer cites Abigail Solomon-Godeau's suggestion that "all discussion [of photography] must proceed from the recognition that photography produces a wholly different visual paradigm from that of the older graphic arts," which I address in Chapter One.

described how Charcot wanted to reveal the existence of a “rift between self and body in the hysterical patient.”³⁷⁹ He examined a series of images that captured what the IPS termed “flash-triggered catalepsy” [Fig. 4.8].³⁸⁰ In these cases, the flash of light generated the hysterical symptoms—mainly bodily contortions—, which the photographic process then conveniently captured, lending particular irony to Charcot’s claim that he could not create ailments according to his whims. Curiously, Baer and Didi-Huberman both described how Charcot conceived of his patients/photographic subjects as “homme[s]-machine[s],” as “mechanical contraptions void of any cognitive dimension,” or, we could say, as functioning objects represented as devoid of subjecthood.³⁸¹

While Charcot was explicitly referring to the work of Julien Offray de La Mettrie, in the context of Baer’s analysis—and Didi-Huberman’s, for that matter—it is interesting that the reference also resonates with the way *photographers* were conceived of as “man-machines” in popular thought and initially under French law, as discussed in Chapter Two.³⁸² If the photographs documenting catalepsy induced by the flash allegorized or demonstrated “photography’s structural affinity with hysterical trauma,” according to Baer, he singled out another image that he claimed “does not allegorize the process of photography, but rather imitates the photographic apparatus itself” [Fig.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 57.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Baer cites Didi-Huberman who cites Charcot. “Photography and Hysteria,” 62. *Invention of Hysteria*, 186. Charcot originally makes this reference in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Progrès médical/Lecrosnier & Babé, 1886-1893), 337.

³⁸² Charcot’s remark was made in response to a hypnotized patient who performed hysterical symptoms on command on stage in front of an audience. He said, “What we have here before our eyes is truly, in all its simplicity, the man-machine dreamed up by La Mettrie,” *ibid.* La Mettrie’s *L’homme machine* was published in 1747 and as a product of La Mettrie’s atheistic and materialistic philosophy, proposed that the soul was not separate from matter.

4.9].³⁸³ This photograph, like Castiglione's *Scherzo di Follia*, is a bust-length portrait of a woman, in this case of a sixteen-year-old patient of Charcot's named Hortense J. Hortense is presented "clinically" frontally in the image. Her head with her haphazardly pulled-back hair rests atop her broad shoulders, which are covered by the dark, high-collared jacket that she wears. Her posture is somewhat slouched and she faces the camera without any apparent pretense. The portrait looks rather like a mug shot, aside from the fact that the figure's left eye is closed while the right eye remains open. According to its caption in the *Iconographie*, the image is meant to document the symptoms of "hysterical blepharospasm," which is defined as the "involuntary tight contraction of the eyelids."³⁸⁴ Rather than simply recording this condition, Baer posited that in the image Hortense is doing something more than simply suffering from this particular ocular disorder. He claimed that (presumably whether voluntarily or not) in the gesture of her eyes she "simply imitated what she saw, namely, the lens of a camera, [and further suggested that] her symptoms correspond to an understanding of the body as a machine."³⁸⁵ Throughout his analysis Baer referred to Hortense's condition as "photophobia." If the images of catalepsy allegorized photography as trauma, the image of Hortense literalized it. If her gesture is to be read as a wink to anything, it is to the fact that we should observe in it that she had internalized those aspects of photography that

³⁸³ Baer, "Photography and Hysteria," 70, 66. Elsewhere Baer described the flash-triggered images as those of figures "disclosing, like a human hieroglyph, the shared temporal structure of trauma and photography." A revision of the essay "Photography and Hysteria" stands as the first chapter in Baer's book *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 55.

³⁸⁴ "blepharospasm." In *Concise Medical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2010) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199557141.001.0001/acref-9780199557141-e-1162>.

³⁸⁵ Baer, "Photography and Hysteria," 69. Baer described how Hortense became an exemplary patient of Charcot's hypnosis and that he could manipulate her body at his will while she was in this state.

correspond to objectification, fear, trauma, and its potential to transform her into a mere machine.

These particular “poetics” of photography, as Baer called them, certainly resonate with the images of hysterics subjected to Charcot’s clinical gaze, but I question their relevance to Castiglione’s case. Whereas Hortense might be understood to have suffered from photophobia, whether medically, or simply in Baer’s reading of the IPS portrait, Castiglione relished in her photophilia. I would argue that Castiglione’s form of mimicking the photographic apparatus in *Scherzo di Follia* is decidedly un-hysterical—that her embodiment of photography’s “poetics,” if we want to call them that, is intentional rather than unconscious, and reflective rather than simply a reflex. If certain of her images register as self-fetishization and objectification, others demand to be read on different terms, as I have suggested is also the case with her publicly circulating costume portraits. Likewise, *Scherzo di Follia* introduces an alternative poetics, or representational space, where photography and femininity meet on more mutually beneficial terms, outside the asylum.

Narcissism: Self-Centered and Autofocused

Reading Castiglione’s “Game of Madness” alongside Hortense’s “photophobic” portrait yields interesting insights into different manifestations of women’s relationship with the medium of photography in nineteenth-century France. In another vein, and relative to an affliction of a different order, there is something compelling in the anachronistic comparison between the iconic photographic portrait of the countess and the 1971 video

Centers, by contemporary American artist, Vito Acconci [Fig. 4.10]. Acconci's twenty-two-minute video presents a live-action frontal portrait of the artist from the shoulders up against a plain backdrop. As the tape begins it quickly resolves the startup static characteristic of early video formats and reveals Acconci's face centered in the shot. Within a few seconds Acconci raises his arm and assumes his position. Despite the close-up framing, throughout the rest of the video Acconci's face is largely obscured by his own arm, hand and index finger, which, in extreme foreshortening, point concertedly but with increasing difficulty toward the center of the visual field of the screen, as he struggles to maintain the posture for the duration of the unedited take. While the effect produced suggests that Acconci points out at us, the viewers of the work, in fact, throughout the process of filming the video he was pointing at a mirrored image of himself reflected back at him by the apparatus of the video monitor. This paradoxical result is summed up in Acconci's own words: "I'm looking straight out by looking straight in."³⁸⁶ Recalling the placement of the curious frame in *Scherzo di Follia* and considering that Castiglione likely reserved this image for her own contemplation—she may have looked through a similar actual frame into this image, turning her own gaze back on herself—there is something anachronistically akin to Acconci's video "feedback," as Rosalind Krauss described it, functioning in Castiglione's portrait.

In her seminal article on video art published in 1976, Krauss opened with a reading of Acconci's *Centers*, which, for her, came to stand in metonymically for the entire medium. While Krauss admitted that through *Centers* Acconci was cleverly "parodying the critical terms of abstraction," which prioritized formalism, his video,

³⁸⁶ Vito Acconci, quoted in Lori Zippay, ed., *Electric Arts Intermix: Video* (New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, 1991), 12.

ironically, “by its very *mis-en-scène*, [...] typifie[d] the structural characteristics of the video medium,” as Krauss interpreted it.³⁸⁷ She argued that Acconci’s intricately staged gesture and configuration of the gaze embodied the psychological condition that constituted video art, which was then still an emerging genre. Krauss confessed, “in that image of self-regard is configured a narcissism so endemic to works of video that I find myself wanting to generalize it as *the* condition of the entire genre.”³⁸⁸ By her account, Acconci’s game with formalism revealed that the mechanics inherent to video are psychologically rather than materially or technologically “centered,” so to speak. Krauss suggested that this ontological dependence on narcissism is something that was both new and particular to video art.

Krauss’s argument rested on a nuanced theoretical interpretation of the equivalency between narcissism and video art particular to video’s ability to simultaneously record and transmit the image and its resulting bracketing out of the object—its “feedback” function. On a more basic level, her interpretation of this psychical medium specificity relative to Acconci’s *Centers* is nevertheless evocative in terms of its relationship to photography, which metaphorically, if not so precisely ontologically, has been linked to narcissism since its inception. Most famously, Baudelaire, in his criticism of “The Salon of 1859,” which was the first to accept photography, in the subsection on “The Modern Public and Photography,” offered his own brief allusion to the psychological impulse behind photomania in Second Empire France. According to Baudelaire, photography was inextricably bound to industry; its mechanical reproduction of nature and of things offered only an impotent imitation of

³⁸⁷ Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” in *October* 1 (Spring, 1976): 50-64, 50.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, original emphasis.

Truth, at the expense of the poetic power of eternal Beauty. Parallel with the emergence of this modern invention, Baudelaire's modern public was characterized as an ever-expanding "idolatrous mob" that since the technology of photography became readily available, "rushed, Narcissus to a man, to gaze at its trivial image on a scrap of metal."³⁸⁹ Baudelaire saw a correlative relationship between the medium and the message; the mechanical function of the camera effectively produced a maniacal and narcissistic desire for the mirroring of the self.

Could such an explanation account for Castiglione's brand of medium specificity, as Solomon-Godeau and others have suggested? While her vanity and self-interest was unquestionable, Castiglione's relationship with her photographic images was much more complex than a straightforward case of narcissism that sought relief through a medium apparently perfectly equipped to soothe its symptoms. *Scherzo di Follia*, for one, may not be precisely as self-conscious of its own internal logic, or quite as explicit in providing a meta-commentary on the subject's chosen medium for self-representation and self-reflection as Acconci's *Centers*, but the iconic image nevertheless evinces a practiced relationship with its medium. If Acconci might be understood to be playing with the internal dynamics of video, Castiglione was also to some extent engaging the "poetics" of photography.

In her discussion of Castiglione's portraits, which she situated relative to photographs of hysterics and to Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* series (1977-1980, in which Sherman assumes the roles of clichéd feminine stereotypes from imagined

³⁸⁹ Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1859," in *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies by Charles Baudelaire*, Jonathan Mayne, ed. and trans. (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956): 220-304, 230.

Hollywood-esque films [for example, Fig. 4.11]), Elisabeth Lyon suggested that what the three subjects share is an investment—to different ends—in feminine masquerade. By contrast to a simplistic form of narcissism, Lyon claimed that “as images of feminine masquerade and hysteria [the photographs of Castiglione, Augustine—another favorite hysteric model at the Salpêtrière—and Sherman] visualize—mime—femininity as a relation of the subject to the other.”³⁹⁰ Lyon argued that as *photographic* images they must be “read as at least an unconscious wish for a kind of photographic sociality.”³⁹¹ As *photographic* images, she pointed out, they are by nature reproducible and have an inbuilt possibility for circulation, and further suggested that “the posed identities in these photographs may well have been staged not only through miming the other but for others.”³⁹² This more social understanding of the photographic presents an alternative and productive perspective by contrast to the “closed circuit” view of photography as narcissism.

In a seemingly contradictory move, however, Lyon contended that among the fundamental differences between Castiglione’s and Sherman’s work was the fact that “Sherman’s explicitly mimetic recycling of ‘found’ identities [in the *Untitled Film Stills* series] re-presents as a feminist strategy what was for the countess an eccentric and privatized activity.”³⁹³ In the previous chapter I argued that three of Castiglione’s more public photographic performances should be read as autobiographical statements—as examples of “productive mimesis” rather than “maintenance mimesis,” or guileless masquerade. Lyon would surely posit Sherman as a practitioner of “productive mimesis”

³⁹⁰ Lyon, “Unspeakable Images,” 170. “*Photographic*” is Lyon’s emphasis.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 190.

as well—recalling Hilary Robinson’s via Irigaray’s definition of the term—given her categorization of Sherman’s work as a “re-presentation” involving “a feminist strategy.” Again, although Castiglione’s strategies cannot be accounted for in such intentionally feminist (or postmodernist) terms, that does not exclude the possibility of our reading her performances through feminist frameworks that afford her (self-)representational agency.

What might the difference be between Castiglione and Augustine, Hortense, or another hysteric? As Robinson suggested, “the difference between the woman playing with mimesis and the hysteric’s self-defeating mimicry is that the hysteric, in attempting to wrest control of the production of her ‘feminine’ subjectivity, also allows herself to be reduced to it.”³⁹⁴ Castiglione’s “Game of Madness” offers more than an endless loop of self-centeredness and more than a “feminine” subjectivity that has been reduced to objectification. While she may be “looking straight in,” she is also “looking straight out,” and by playing with these terms of *photographic* representation she demands reflection and response on our part. I will now consider how, by photographically engaging the gaze, Castiglione constructively became “a *subject* of her own looking,” to borrow a phrase from Griselda Pollock.³⁹⁵

An Agent of Vision

As described in Chapter One, Abigail Solomon-Godeau argued that the gesture in *Scherzo di Follia* demonstrates a “confusion of subject- and object-positions.”³⁹⁶ If

³⁹⁴ Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray*, 42.

³⁹⁵ Griselda Pollock, 258.

³⁹⁶ Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” 108.

Castiglione might be understood to be even a confused agentive subject, Solomon-Godeau rhetorically asked, “of what does her subjectivity consist if not [...] her obedience to a scopic regime which inevitably undercuts her pretended authority as orchestrator of the look?”³⁹⁷ By considering contrasting and comparable visualizations of hysteria and narcissism, “disorders” that have been equated with Castiglione’s practice, I have argued implicitly that in *Scherzo di Follia* Castiglione is embodying her own and more productive kind of “scopic regime.” By analyzing this image more concretely alongside theories and visualizations of “the gaze,” I will further unpack the complicated dialectic that the iconic image presents and suggest that we read the inherent confusion between subject and object in the image in more generative terms.

Scherzo di Follia’s iconicity rests to some extent on its unusualness as an image. Castiglione’s gesture of framing her eye is so striking in part because it seems without precedent in terms of early photographic portraits. Hanneke Grootenboer, however, has convincingly suggested that the image might represent a photographic revival of a peculiar and short-lived genre of painted portrait known as “eye miniatures.”³⁹⁸ From approximately 1785 to 1830, initially in England and then throughout Europe, the eye miniature became a popular form of intimate portrait that was exchanged among lovers and loved ones. Although they varied in form, the miniatures generally depicted a single eye looking directly out at the viewer [Fig. 4.12]. These eye miniatures corresponded in proportion to regular portrait miniatures, with the size of the

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 105.

³⁹⁸ See: Hanneke Grootenboer, *Treasuring the Gaze: Intimate Vision in Late Eighteenth-Century Eye Miniatures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Grootenboer, “Treasuring the Gaze: Eye Miniature Portraits and the Intimacy of Vision,” in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 88, no. 3 (Sept., 2006): 496-506; Graham C. Boettcher, ed., *The Look of Love: Eye Miniatures from the Skier Collection* (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art and D Giles Limited, 2012). I thank Susan Siegfried for introducing me to this literature.

painted eye ranging from “the size of a lentil [to] that of a penny.”³⁹⁹ They were often framed in oval settings whether as pendants, brooches, or rings, or inset on small boxes, and sometimes included details beyond the eye and eyebrow, such as curls or traces of hair on one side of the image. As Grootenboer noted, if one were to excise the *passe-partout* frame and do away with the rest of the photograph, Castiglione’s own eye portrait in *Scherzo di Follia* would fit the genre perfectly, despite the difference in media.

Grootenboer’s extensive study of the genre is rooted in the notion that eye portraits exist as “theoretical objects”—a term she borrowed from Mieke Bal—, which can be defined as “works of art that are capable of articulating theoretical thought by deploying their medium as such.”⁴⁰⁰ Inasmuch as *Centers* was a theoretical object for Krauss, and eye miniatures are theoretical objects for Grootenboer, *Scherzo di Follia* is also deserving of this designation. Given its demonstrable formal connection to the tradition of the eye miniature, it is worth exploring the theoretical work that Grootenboer attributed to these painted eyes.

Just as Solomon-Godeau asserted relative to Castiglione’s image, Grootenboer claimed that in eye miniatures “the demarcation lines between subject and object are difficult to draw.”⁴⁰¹ Grootenboer pointed out the “paradoxical nature of the [eye] portrait’s subject matter [as] an object that is in fact a subject looking out at its viewer who is also a subject.”⁴⁰² Those implicated in this perplexing game of viewing were

³⁹⁹ Grootenboer, *Treasuring the Gaze*, 18.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 9. Mieke Bal articulated this concept in *Louise Bourgeois’s Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) and in a different form in *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 3.

participating in what Grootenboer called “intimate vision”—a form of looking that certainly resonates with Castiglione’s “Game of Madness.” The “intensification of the look” in the eye miniature is the “foundation of intimate vision,” according to Grootenboer, but this closed or in any case very limited circuit of viewing is not a phenomenological stalemate—like narcissism, perhaps—, but in fact has a productive dimension.⁴⁰³ Significantly, it is in the “space of solitude” afforded by intimate viewing that Grootenboer located an “intimacy with the self from which subjectivity is born.”⁴⁰⁴

Grootenboer specifically identified *Scherzo di Follia* as a poignant agent of “the eye portrait’s afterlife.”⁴⁰⁵ While she described the earlier genre of the eye miniature as “prephotographic,” in her reading of Castiglione’s curious portrait she convincingly argued that the “transition of portraiture from painting to photography occurred *through* miniature.”⁴⁰⁶ In this interpretation, *Scherzo di Follia* comes to stand in for the “intimate vision that forms the basis for small-scale photography,” which was the predominant form in which people interacted with photography throughout the nineteenth century—with the daguerreotype, the carte de visite, etc.—and indeed manifests itself as by far the most common form of our present-day engagement with photographic portraiture and the medium at large.⁴⁰⁷ Grootenboer referred to Solomon-Godeau’s conclusion that in

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 180. Grootenboer also described the genre as “prephotographic” in “Treasuring the Gaze: Eye Miniature Portraits and the Intimacy of Vision,” wherein she claimed that they “imply a reversal of the object and subject of seeing and should be considered as (prephotographic) instances of ‘being seen’ rather than of seeing. As such, they stand at the foundation of an alternative, reciprocal model of vision, exemplified by the camera,” 496.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. Grootenboer makes a compelling comparison between the viewing experience associated with eye miniatures and our close looking at photographic portraits on mobile phones, for example. By engaging with such ubiquitous images, she claims, “we reenact not the mode of the looking solicited by the grand examples of portraiture’s monumental tradition but the looking-touching of treasuring a miniature portrait,” 179-180.

Castiglione's problematic confusion of subject- and object-positions she was left bereft of any "space, language, or means of representation for any desire that might be termed her own."⁴⁰⁸ By contrast to this negation of Castiglione's agency, Grootenboer affirmed that the countess's photographs "give the impression that she is completely in charge of both sides of the gaze, holding some kind of power over her visibility, guarding it in that respect. She seems less interested in the other's looking at her or for her and more in her looking at herself via her own gaze."⁴⁰⁹ While Grootenboer still confined Castiglione to a kind of scopic narcissism, which certainly reveals itself in the image, she nevertheless set this within an agentic and generative framework of "intimate vision" wherein subjectivity is not negated, but is born. As in the case of her painted predecessors, Castiglione's framing of her own eye crucially enabled her to position herself as both the "representation [of] and [the] agent of vision."⁴¹⁰

"A Thunderbolt is her Gaze"

In addition to existing as an instantiation of the afterlife of eye miniatures, Castiglione's portrait can also productively be contextualized relative to more contemporaneous images that engage the gaze. It has been well rehearsed that women were seldom presented with the opportunity to be authoritative agents of vision in nineteenth-century France.⁴¹¹ Much

⁴⁰⁸ Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," 108. Cited in Grootenboer, *Treasuring the Gaze*, 177.

⁴⁰⁹ Grootenboer, *Treasuring the Gaze*, 177.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴¹¹ See, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Other Side of Venus," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996): 113-150. On the other hand, Jann Matlock has written about tensions and literal trials concerning women's vision in the period in "Censoring the Realist Gaze," in *Spectacles of Realism: Gender, Body, Genre*, Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast, eds. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 28-65.

more readily, they were subjected to the position of becoming the object of the male gaze.⁴¹² An 1844 lithograph by Jean-Ignace-Isidore Gérard Grandville, *The Cynosure of Every Eye*, offers an intriguing articulation of this phenomenon [Fig. 4.13].

The print presents a young woman at the opera sitting alone in a theater loge looking toward what we might imagine is the venue's actual stage and intended performance, although this is not depicted in the image. The figure's fantastically sloping bare shoulders and décolletage, manneristic long neck, and dainty face peer out from her box, the edge of which functions as a coincidental pedestal for this living bust as she becomes the unquestionable object of desire. On her pedestal she is raised above the crowd of fellow theatergoers who are seated below her balcony in front of and beside her. These other audience members are all men dressed in suits. Like her, their bodies face outward toward the presumed stage. Each of their heads, however, has been replaced by a single grotesque head-sized eye that is directed away from the stage and that gawks instead at the impromptu *objet d'art*. Grandville's caricature certainly reflected reality, as caricatures are wont to do, as theaters increasingly became, especially during the Second Empire, not only spaces for the public appreciation of professional performances, but also settings for the spectacular display and consumption of femininity among members of the audience—places to both see and be seen.⁴¹³

⁴¹² See, Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," first published in *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Autumn, 1974): 6-18.

⁴¹³ Solomon-Godeau analyzed this image in "The Other Side of Venus" wherein she claimed: "Grandville here explicitly and literally renders the aggressively phallicized terms of the male gaze while situating it within the historic and material specificity of the social and cultural spaces where feminine spectacularity was both promoted and enacted, in this instance, the Opéra loge where society women, marriageable daughters, and courtesans participated in intricate rituals of exhibition and display," 128.

In its title and through the pose represented, *Scherzo di Follia* also references such spaces of spectacular display. Castiglione's title connects the image to both the opera and the masked ball, which is also creatively alluded to in her gesture of framing her eye. However, by photographically enacting a form of "intimate vision," Castiglione positions herself quite in opposition to Grandville's optically preyed-on operagoer. The surreal disembodiment of the eye serves a distinctly different purpose in Castiglione's manifestation of it from the one in Grandville's print. Whereas the freakish Cyclopes belong to a mass of mindless oglers, Castiglione arrogates and subverts their gazes into her singular gesture. The countess's "thunderbolt of a gaze" projects out at us, rendering us conscious of the fact that we are being looked at while we also do the looking.⁴¹⁴

In many other cases throughout her corpus Castiglione certainly had more in common with Grandville's *objet d'art* than she did with *Scherzo di Follia*'s subversion of "it." In a particularly consonant image, Castiglione commemorated her "Sculptural Shoulders" [Fig. 4.14].⁴¹⁵ Like the illustrated figure in Grandville's print, Castiglione's anatomy seems to defy nature as her milky white shoulders slope at an angle that seemingly represents an aesthetic ideal rather than a physical possibility. The low neckline of her off-the-shoulder dress only emphasizes this anatomical "feat." Unlike Grandville's figure, Castiglione does not face outward in this image, but turns her back on the viewer so as to advertise not only her shoulders but also her impossibly intricate coiffure. By turning her back on the viewer, she positions herself on full display without the possibility for a return of the gaze. The fact that her body seems to dissolve into

⁴¹⁴ While I would not claim that this is necessarily an intentional allusion, it is worth pointing out that it was the Cyclopes who provided Zeus with his thunderbolts.

⁴¹⁵ Apraxine and Demange noted that Montesquiou referred to the image under this title. In this case it is unclear whether Castiglione titled the image herself. "*La Divine Comtesse*," 184.

negative space and float like a fragment within the photograph only further contributes to the fetishization of her form. This backward-facing image explicitly invites voyeurism as much as *Scherzo di Follia* critically confronts it.

I recall this image of “Sculptural Shoulders” here in recognition of Castiglione’s complex position relative to photography and objectification. Solomon-Godeau saw Castiglione’s “collusion in her own objectification” as emblematic of “the aporia of women and their representations.”⁴¹⁶ In response to this very point, Francette Pacteau in turn pointed out that such a “judgment [...] intimates that the Countess could somehow have *escaped* representational conventions, to become the sole and solitary subject—*sujet à part entière*—of her own image.”⁴¹⁷ Pacteau’s considered skepticism is tempered by the following nuancing of this supposed representational deadlock:

This option [becoming the *sujet à part entière*] is not open to any of us, whether in the nineteenth century or today. Nor is acknowledging this to relinquish all autonomy. Here, it is important to refuse the choice between two forms of reductionism: on the one hand, the delusory voluntarism of total liberty; on the other hand, the petrifying hopelessness of total determinism.⁴¹⁸

Castiglione undoubtedly found herself faced with an aporia when it came to the strategies of self-representation available to her, and indeed her complex corpus is a testament to this. The range of roles she assumes throughout her photographs—from her submission to and evident delight in being an object, to her more complex engagement with refuting stereotypes and assumptions made about her, to her observable exercises in formal self-consciousness—speak to her own recognition of the room for maneuver between determinism and liberty. In my emphasis on Castiglione’s under-examined agency in

⁴¹⁶ Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” 70.

⁴¹⁷ Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1994), 185. Original emphasis.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

self-representation I am not proposing a diametrically opposed alternative to her perceived lack of a subject position, but I am laboring against the categorical denial of a positive potential for her subjectivity to manifest itself photographically.

Analogous arguments have been made with respect to paintings of subjects that resonate with the subject matter central to *Scherzo di Follia* and Grandville's image. In her oft-referenced chapter "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" (1988), Griselda Pollock provided a compelling reading of key differences in terms of the treatment of the gaze and of gender-specific subject positions in Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *La Loge* (oil on canvas, 1874) and Mary Cassatt's *At the Opera* (oil on canvas, 1878) [Figs. 4.15 and 4.16, respectively]. As in Grandville's print, both paintings feature a prominently positioned female figure in a loge at the opera.

Renoir's image presents a frontal portrait of a young woman dressed in a black and white striped dress [Fig. 4.15]. One of her white-gloved hands rests demurely on the ledge of her opera box and delicately holds a pair of small golden binoculars. The figure leans forward ever so slightly in anticipation of the spectacle, such that in turn her body tips toward our space and she becomes the conveniently displayed and splendidly adorned spectacle before our eyes. The low décolletage of her dress is in the approximate center of the composition and the many strings of luminescent pearls that the figure wears further draw our attention to this passage. At this emphatic point of visual interest we can marvel at Renoir's handling of paint. It becomes tantalizingly difficult to tell where

flowers and fabric end and where flesh begins.⁴¹⁹ Behind this woman in the shadowy right background of the opera box, a male figure in a matching black and white—but fully buttoned—suit, holds his own distinctly larger black binoculars over his eyes. The man’s covered and mechanically empowered gaze is directed toward the upper right corner of the image at an unknowable attraction outside the frame.

Cassatt’s painting likewise presents a female and a male figure as the two central foreground and background protagonists in a theater scene that is populated by several other audience members [Fig. 4.16]. As in Renoir’s image, a woman leaning over the edge of her opera box occupies the foreground of the composition. While inevitably also on display for the viewer, Cassatt’s woman is seen in profile wearing a black dress with long sleeves and a high neck—her spectacularity is decidedly disavowed by comparison to Renoir’s figure. She looks with concentration through her binoculars toward the left outside the frame, and given her position, presumably at the theater’s stage. As the edge of the balcony curves in the distance we see a male figure mirroring her posture as his elbow leans against the balcony’s edge. Like her, he seems to hold a pair of binoculars to his eyes, but in facing outward toward the viewer, we recognize that rather like a mirror image of us, he is looking at this woman dressed in black.

According to Pollock, “the mark of difference between the paintings by Renoir and Cassatt is the refusal in the latter of that complicity in the way the female protagonist

⁴¹⁹ Tamar Garb provided a wonderful reading of the conflation between surface and flesh in Renoir’s painting in “Gender and Representation,” in *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993): 219-289, 228-229.

is depicted.”⁴²⁰ In Renoir’s image, Pollock claimed, “the spectacle at which the scene is set and the spectacle the woman herself is made to offer, merge for the unacknowledged but presumed masculine spectator.”⁴²¹ By contrast to this merging, Pollock argued that what informed Cassatt’s painting was a juxtaposition of two looks: that of the male’s gaze and that of the woman who is “actively looking.”⁴²² This fact of a pictorial representation of a woman’s active looking, which Pollock described as no less than remarkable, “prevent[ed] her being objectified” and meant that Cassatt’s figure was being positioned as “the subject of her own look.”⁴²³ Tamar Garb likewise took up this comparison and claimed that Cassatt’s painting “seems to subvert the gendering of looking encoded in *La Loge*.”⁴²⁴ In the intensity of her expression and the austerity of her costume, Garb argued, Cassatt’s operagoer evinced none of the “signs associated with luxurious seduction which ‘women on display’ were meant to embody and for which painting had invented an elaborate sign language.”⁴²⁵ Even in those instances in which Cassatt seemed to revel in the spectacularity of her feminine subjects—Garb cited the example of *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* (1879) [Fig. 4.17]—Garb allowed that in Cassatt’s case of “painting as a woman,” she sought to “seize for [her] female protagonists an active engaged look, a knowing, desiring gaze.”⁴²⁶

While Castiglione played with the possibilities of presenting herself as spectacle and even refusing her sensuous spectacularity—as in the case of *The Hermit of*

⁴²⁰ Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988): 50-90, 75.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid., 76.

⁴²⁴ Garb, “Gender and Representation,” 262.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 264.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 267. The subsection of Garb’s essay under which these images are discussed is titled “Painting as a Woman.”

Passy—she also in her most iconic image seized an active and engaged look, a knowing and perhaps desiring gaze, becoming at once, as Grootenboer would say, a representation and an agent of vision. If some of her contemporaries, who were “painting as women,” could productively mobilize their medium and subvert painting’s elaborate (misogynist) sign language, I would argue that through photography Castiglione was able to do the same—if not always, then at least on those occasions that she chose to do so. In *Scherzo di Follia* she positioned herself not only as the object of contemplation subject to the male gaze, but she found a productive space of femininity and established herself as a “subject of her own looking,” an agent of vision who was a force to be reckoned with. To some extent it was precisely the protean practice of Second Empire photography and certainly Castiglione’s active engagement with it that enabled this agency.

Directorial Debut?

In Chapter One I proposed that Steve Edwards’ discussion of the differences between monological and dialogical modes of photographic practice might be usefully applied to my interpretation of the power dynamics at stake in Castiglione’s corpus.⁴²⁷ As an empowered and aristocratic “subject-body,” Castiglione was able to create her self-images very much in dialogue with her loyal photographer, Pierre-Louis Pierson.⁴²⁸ Given the medium’s still awkward occupation of a space between industry and art in the period, Castiglione was able to claim exceptional creative agency in the photographic

⁴²⁷ Edwards, Steve, “The Machine’s Dialogue.” *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1990: 63-76. See pages 34-36 of Chapter One.

⁴²⁸ For Edwards the “bourgeois portrait” was the exception to the studio portrait’s monologic rule. In the particular configuration of her relationship with Pierson, and given her status and wealth, Castiglione certainly had infinitely more power than your standard bourgeois subject. Again, “subject-body” and “object-body” are terms that Edwards derives from André Rouillé.

process. While the category of dialogic image making is helpful in thinking through her subject position, photographic critic A.D. Coleman's notion of the "directorial mode" might also further explain the nature of her creative role.

In "The Directorial Mode: Notes toward a Definition" (1976), Coleman proposed the term "directorial" to account for a mode of constructed image making in photography. This mode exists apart from an "informational," or "authentic" mode of image making in which events appear, at least, to have been *captured* by photographers.⁴²⁹ Images produced via the directorial mode, on the other hand, represent events or scenes that have been intentionally *created* by photographers. As described in the previous chapters, Castiglione was undoubtedly the creative agent behind her various photographic self-stagings, directing, as she did, her own poses, costumes, and props. Coleman suggested that before his designation of it, there was "an extensive tradition of directorial photography."⁴³⁰ According to his definition, "the arranging of objects and/or people in front of the lens is essentially directorial," thus, he included "most studio work, still life, and posed nudes, as well as formal portraiture, among the varieties of photographic imagery which contain directorial elements."⁴³¹ Although in most cases the photographer producing the image plays the directorial role, in a dialogical relationship such as Castiglione and Pierson's, it is possible for the photographic subject to assume the position of the director of the image.

⁴²⁹ A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Notes toward a Definition," in Vicki Goldberg, ed., *Photography in Print* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988): 480-491.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 485.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

Castiglione's unusual but adamant assumption of this role appears now to have foretold some of the most vital directions in photographic practice, which place the deliberately staged performance of the self at the heart of artistic expression. We now might recognize not Castiglione's victimization at the hands of photography, but her precocious mobilization of the medium for her own self-representational ends. In the same volume dedicated to the history of photography that placed *Scherzo di Follia* on its cover, the editors paid explicit homage to Castiglione's directorial determination. The two illustrations inside the volume, again *Scherzo di Follia* and a photograph in which she appears behind a black mask in a voluminous white dress [Fig. 4.18], are captioned indicating that while Pierre-Louis Pierson is the named photographer, they have been "directed by Virginia Verasis, countess of Castiglione."⁴³² In a compelling case such as Castiglione's it is useful to apply somewhat anachronistic categories to this type of artistic intervention. In doing so we can more fully appreciate and understand the complex creative role that Castiglione played in her photographic practice.

Curiously, I would also like to point out an uncanny resonance between an oft-used author's portrait of A.D. Coleman and Castiglione's *Scherzo di Follia*. In a portrait of Coleman by Nina Sederholm and Peter Guagenti, the critic is presented from chest up against a black background [Fig. 4.19]. He leans forward in a sunlit, pocketed T-shirt and faces the viewer directly. In his right hand he holds a circular lens over his face, which is obscured behind his hand and the distorting optical device. The lens acts like a magnifying glass enlarging Coleman's left eye so that it gains a surreal prominence within the composition. The portrait serves as an appropriate visual introduction to a

⁴³² Heilbrun, ed., *A History of Photography: The Musée d'Orsay Collection 1839-1925*, 182-183.

figure whose profession is to look closely at photography. If Coleman's "eye portrait" signals his professional status and engagement with the medium through which he is represented and on which he turns his own critical lens, then *Scherzo di Follia* might also alert us to Castiglione's intimate and indeed at times critical engagement with the medium of photography as well.

Conclusion

As a "theoretical object" *Scherzo di Follia* has engendered many interpretations and a legion of imitators. As an image with inbuilt contradictions—framer vs. being framed, seeing vs. being seen, subject vs. object—it positions the figure in the portrait at an awkward interstice between these binaries. It is precisely this potentially problematic position that makes Castiglione's corpus so fascinating. Throughout my reading of this image and her larger body of work I have positioned my own interpretation on the tightrope connecting those extremes between, as Pacteau put it, "total liberty" and the "hopelessness of total determinism." Although I would prefer to hover in the fine balance of the interstice that I believe Castiglione inhabited, I have often moved toward the more liberating edge of these polarized interpretative structures in an effort to articulate the agency in the image which has been written over in favor of its voiceless and deterministic other.

EPILOGUE

On January 16, 2008, the French Ministry of Culture and Communication announced the acquisition of an album of photographs of the Countess de Castiglione destined for the Musée d'Orsay. The banking institution HSBC France donated the album containing eighteen portraits of Castiglione to the museum under the terms of the reformed "Aillagon Law," which, thanks to generous tax benefits to gifting corporations, "created favorable conditions for works recognized by the advisory committee of national treasures as having significant cultural interest to enter into public collections."⁴³³ The Musée d'Orsay was pleased to receive this particular patrimony because before the bequest only eleven original photographic prints of Castiglione existed in public collections in France, while the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York had inherited Robert de Montesquiou's collection of nearly three hundred images.⁴³⁴ Furthermore, this donation was of especial historical significance because it marked the first time that a

⁴³³ "Ces disposition [...] relative aux musées de France, créent en effet des conditions favorables à l'entrée dans les collections publiques, grâce au mécénat d'entreprise, d'oeuvres reconnues d'intérêt patrimonial majeur par la commission consultative des trésors nationaux," in "L'acquisition d'un album de photographies de la Castiglione constitué par Christian Bérard," press release by the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/actualites/conferen/albanel/dpcastiglione.pdf>, 3. The law is formally known as *La loi française relative au mécénat, aux associations et aux fondations* and was passed on August 1, 2003. Works designated as having OPIM (oeuvres d'intérêt patrimonial majeur) status—as was the case with the Castiglione album—granted their corporate donors an income tax reduction equal to 90% of the total value of the donated gift.

⁴³⁴ The original eleven works in France are held in the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Château de Compiègne. As previously mentioned, the original Mayer and Pierson negatives are held at the Archives départementales du Haut-Rhin in Colmar but the prints within that collection are reprints.

photographic work categorized as an “oeuvre d’intérêt patrimonial majeur” was acquired by a public institution under this law.⁴³⁵

This acquisition marks an odd kind of canonization that brings my study full-circle. A subject not historically understood to have much agency, creating in a medium initially understood as a non-art, enters via eighteen photographic portraits into a major public institution under the legal pretext that her images are national treasures. This is perhaps a felicitous consecration that speaks to the prescient nature of Castiglione’s engagement with photography. But this particular album presents additional problems. The provenance of the album was not only registered on its pages, but also was understood to have contributed to its cultural significance. In her notes on the patrimonial interest of the album, Françoise Heilbrun, Chief Curator at the Musée d’Orsay, described how the eminent French artist and designer Christian Bérard originally acquired the portraits of Castiglione in 1930 from his art dealer at the Druet Gallery in Paris.⁴³⁶ His partner, Boris Kochno, related that one morning, after “returning at dawn from Jean Cocteau’s,” Bérard began to assemble an album out of the photographs of Castiglione.⁴³⁷

Bérard affixed the images of the Countess to black paper and arranged them, presumably, according to his liking. He prefaced her portraits with three of his own illustrations, which were inspired by Castiglione’s images. The title page contains the inscription “Madame de Castiglione,” accompanied by objects evocative of Castiglione’s corpus such as a loosely sketched purple fan, what appear to be white gloves, and also a

⁴³⁵ Previously, works by artists such as Rosso Fiorentino, Eugène Delacroix, and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres were gifted to institutions such as the Louvre under the law.

⁴³⁶ This information is included in the “Dossier d’oeuvre” corresponding to the album in the documentation department of the Musée d’Orsay.

⁴³⁷ Boris Kochno, *Christian Bérard* (New York: Panache Press, 1988), 30.

macabre skull positioned on a chair, which together have the effect of transforming Castiglione's vanity project into a surreal vanitas [Fig. 5.1]. This macabre motif is carried over to the second page where the skull seems to be wearing a curly wig reminiscent of some of Castiglione's elaborate coiffures [Fig. 5.2]. The third of Bérard's illustration is an adaptation of *Scherzo di Follia*: we see a very loosely sketched female figure—Bérard's interpretation of Castiglione—seated holding a frame over her face in one hand and an eye mask that might be worn at a costume ball in the other [Fig. 5.3]. A floating woman's bust—presumably another portrait of Castiglione—accompanies this seated figure in the upper right corner of the composition. This bust's hair is rendered with the same squiggly brushstrokes used to describe the skeleton's wig. The rest of the album consists of the eighteen portraits of Castiglione attached to individual black sheets. In the black background of the first ten portraits Bérard inscribed a poem that he composed, which was also inspired by Castiglione [see, for example, Fig. 5.4].⁴³⁸

Bérard's poem reads as a surreal exercise in stream-of-consciousness free verse. Most of the lines are devoted to describing a dream that Bérard is having. The poem opens by setting the scene; the drama unfolds on an actual stage as the first line describes that a "black curtain opens on a set of night-time landscape."⁴³⁹ Several lines are devoted to the sights and sounds that populate the stormy scene, which is haunted by violent winds. Among the sounds emerge those of heavy footsteps and we are told that a pale creature arrives illuminated by fiery moonlight. The creature is described as a

⁴³⁸ See the appendix for a full transcription of Bérard's poem.

⁴³⁹ The theatrical dreamscape is fitting since Bérard was a renowned set designer. I rely on Kochno's translation of Bérard's poem in *Christian Bérard*, 30-31 (see appendix) but will also provide the French original transcribed by the Musée d'Orsay and available through the inscriptions notes under the index of works entries for this album on their web site (each page has its own entry). "Un rideau noir se lève sur un décor de paysage de nuit," http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&numid=149777.

“wonderful monster” wearing a “huge dress” and possessing an expression in the eyes that is “like fires reflected on armour.”⁴⁴⁰ The creature, we are told, holds a sickle in one hand and a bottle of Chianti in the other. At a given moment two gamekeepers arrive on the scene. They are wearing lamps on their heads, which reveal the creature in the landscape. The hunters become immobilized by the scene before them. Bérard’s verse becomes more obscure at this point but we learn that the creature becomes frightened and also frozen and drops her bottle of wine, which then fractures and reveals “countless frames and pictures.” This shattering ultimately has the effect of “spreading everything out on the ground [before the monster] with the precision of / tarot cards beneath the eyes of a fortune-teller.”⁴⁴¹ After this scene Bérard tells us that he immediately wakes up, as does La Castiglione, to find Boris watching both of them. Bérard proclaims that he knows that Boris is “the voyeur who looks on in profile at Diana’s bath and who is called Actaeon.”⁴⁴²

Bérard’s bizarre homage to Castiglione is replete with allusions to seeing and being seen and explicitly cites a myth that disciplines the male gaze, as according to the myth, Actaeon’s punishment for his visual trespass is that he is transformed into a stag and ultimately killed by his own hunting hounds. The poem plays with its characters being immobilized upon seeing things or upon the discovery of being seen. The creature/Castiglione is described as “immobile” just as the hunters have become immobile upon seeing her. Bérard has hit upon the complex “game of madness” that Castiglione’s corpus seems to inspire. But Castiglione is not positioned as a helpless

⁴⁴⁰ “monstre merveilleux”; “immense robe”; “ils sont comme les feux / reflétés par une armure,” *ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ “multiples cadres et tableaux”; “où s’étendent sur le sol aussi prévoyant qu’ / un jeu de tarot sous les yeux d’une voyante,” *ibid.*

⁴⁴² “car je sais que tu es le curieux / qui regarde de profil le bain de Diane / et qui s’appella Actéon,” *ibid.*

pawn in this game. With her fiery eyes she seems to surreally command authority, incite fear and admiration, and inspire poetic reflection.

It is an odd coincidence that two of the most significant collections of Castiglione's portraits now in public institutions were collected and to varying degrees configured by men. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's nearly three hundred works were originally acquired by Robert de Montesquiou following Castiglione's death and it has been difficult to distinguish Montesquiou's inscriptions from Castiglione's markings. The Musée d'Orsay's album was entirely curated and re-crafted by Bérard who literally inscribed his own narrative over Castiglione's images. In an added level of patriarchal provenance, Bérard's album was the same album that was subsequently acquired by Richard Avedon.⁴⁴³ It is of course impossible to say how Castiglione might have felt about these appropriations but it is also undeniable that both Montesquiou and Bérard seem to have embraced some of the same photographic practices that were originally employed by Castiglione throughout her corpus. In their assigning of titles to the images or in the attribution of narratives—whether real or invented—and in Bérard's use of collage and decorative enhancement, the two collectors' interventions mirror Castiglione's manipulation of her own photographs. These collections are now bequeathed to us through Montesquiou's and Bérard's respective lenses but their own enterprises were motivated by their fascination with Castiglione's unusual creativity.

My aim throughout this study has been to shed light on the nature of the means through which Castiglione represented herself. Indeed they are many and they can be frustrating in terms of their inherent tensions and contradictions. While I allow that on

⁴⁴³ HSBC was able to purchase the album from Avedon's estate after his death.

many occasions she enjoyed objectifying herself, I have gone against the grain of standard interpretations of her work in order to argue that in Castiglione's case the photographic *objectif* presented a paradoxical opportunity for creative self-expression. As an invested material agent Castiglione was able to mobilize the medium of photography to inventive, effective, and in some cases prescient ends. While photography, like other representational media, has the capacity to reduce the subject to an object, it also holds the potential to register subjectivity in varied and in significant ways. In the context of this significant figure in history and in the history of photography we should acknowledge the ways in which photography offered a pliable and productive representational space in which Castiglione could constructively collect and configure her self.

FIGURES

A BAS LA PHOTOGRAPHIE !!!



TEXTE ET DESSINS PAR MARCELIN.

In conspectu meo stetit sol.
(Un photographe.)
La photographie est un cas pensable.
(Une jolie femme.)



Figure 1.1
Marcelin, "A bas la photographie!!!," *Journal Amusant*, September 6, 1856



Figure 1.2
Marcelin, "A bas la photographie!!!," *Journal Amusant*, September 6, 1856



Figure 1.3
Marcelin, "A bas la photographie!!," *Journal Amusant*, September 6, 1856



Figure 1.4
J.J. Grandville, "La lune peinte par elle-même," in *Un autre monde*, 1844



Figure 1.5
J.J. Grandville, "Luna sich selbst Dabuerreotypirend," in *Eine Andere Welt von Plinius dem Jüngsten*, 1847

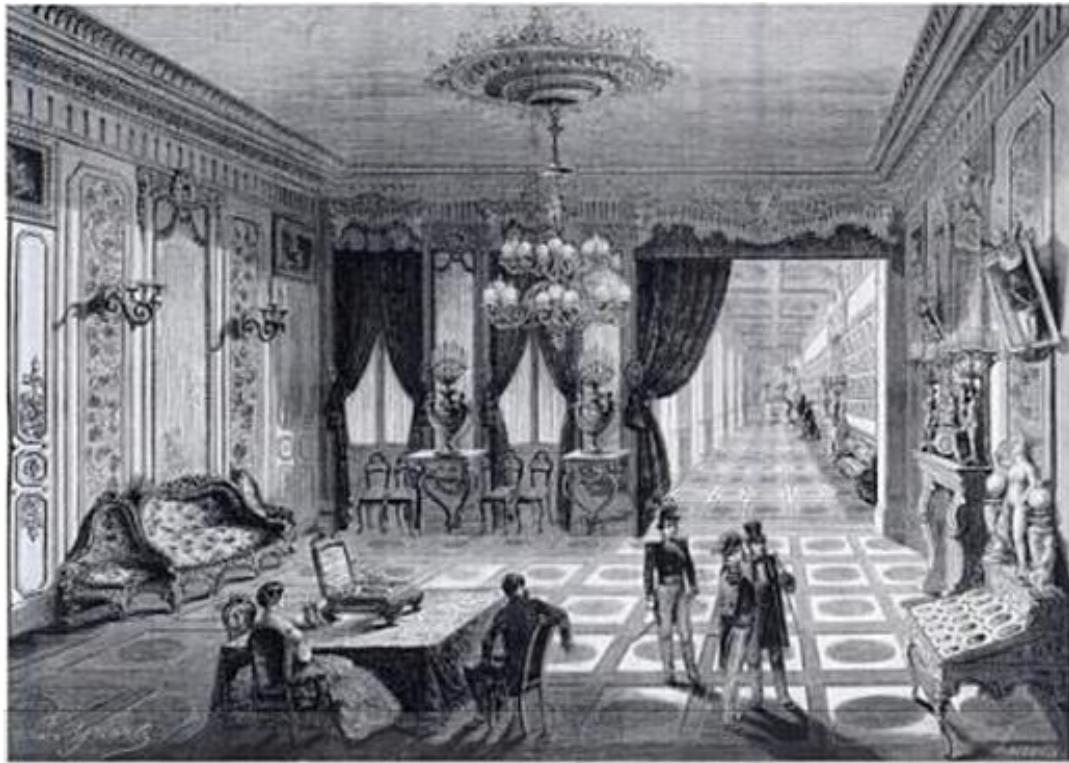


Figure 1.6
Yriarte and Lavieille, [Mayer and Pierson photographic studio main hall], in
L'Illustration: Journal universel, 1858



Figure 1.7
Pierre-Louis Pierson, [Untitled, Study of Legs], 1861-1867, albumen silver print from
glass negative, 11.4 x 13.7 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New
York



Figure 1.8
Pierre-Louis Pierson, [The Eyes], 1863-1866, three albumen silver prints,
16 x 12.1 cm, 16.1 x 12.2 cm, 21.9 x 19 cm,
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 1.9
Marcelin, "A bas la photographie!!!," in *Journal Amusant*, September 6, 1856



Figure 1.10
William Notman, *Miss Stevenson, as "Photography," Montréal, QC, 1865*, 1865, silver salts on paper mounted on paper (albumen print), collection of McCord Museum, Montreal

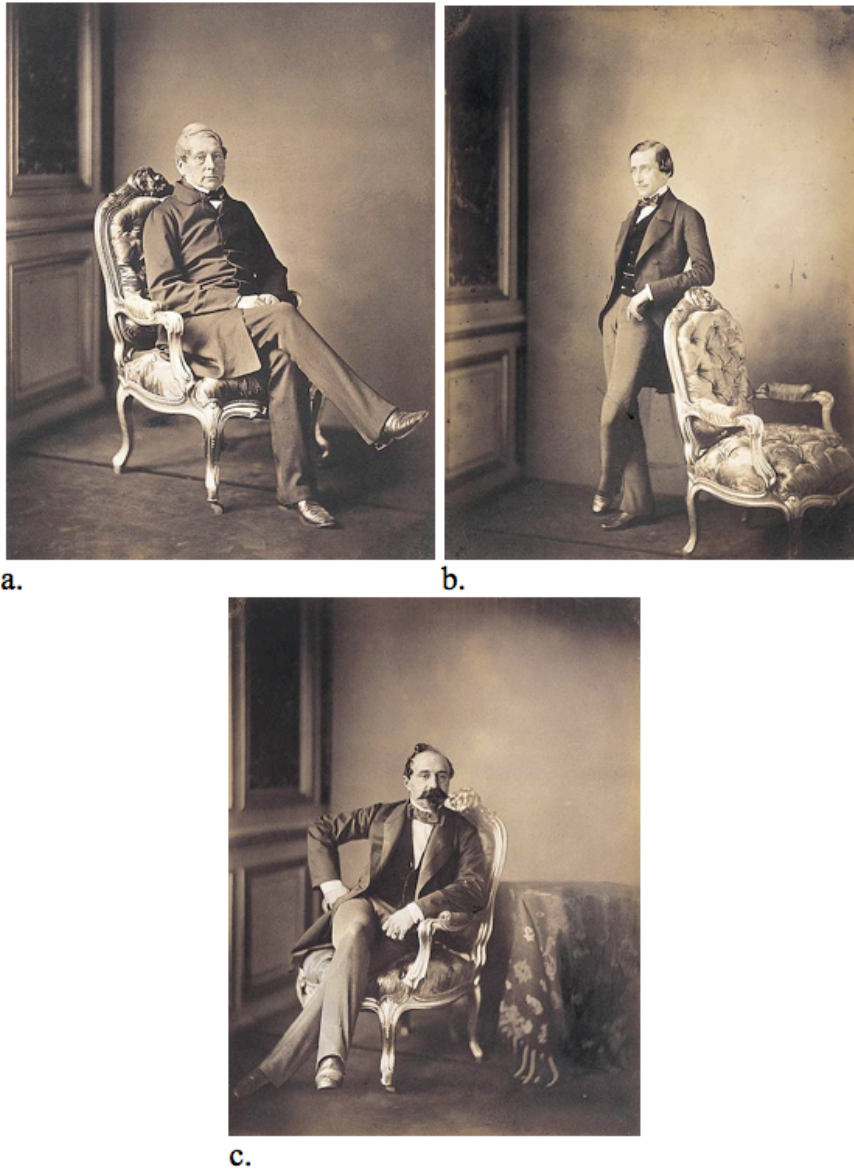


Figure 2.1
 Mayer and Pierson, *Portraits des membres du congrès de Paris*, 1856,
 salted paper prints from collodion glass negatives,
 from an album containing sixteen prints,
 a. Plate II, *Charles Fredinand, comte de Buol von Schauenstein*, 30.1 x 23.2 cm
 b. Plate III, *Baron Hubner*, 33.1 x 25.2 cm
 c. Plate XII, *Marquis de Villamarina*, 30.1 x 23.3 cm,
 collection of Château de Fontainebleau, France

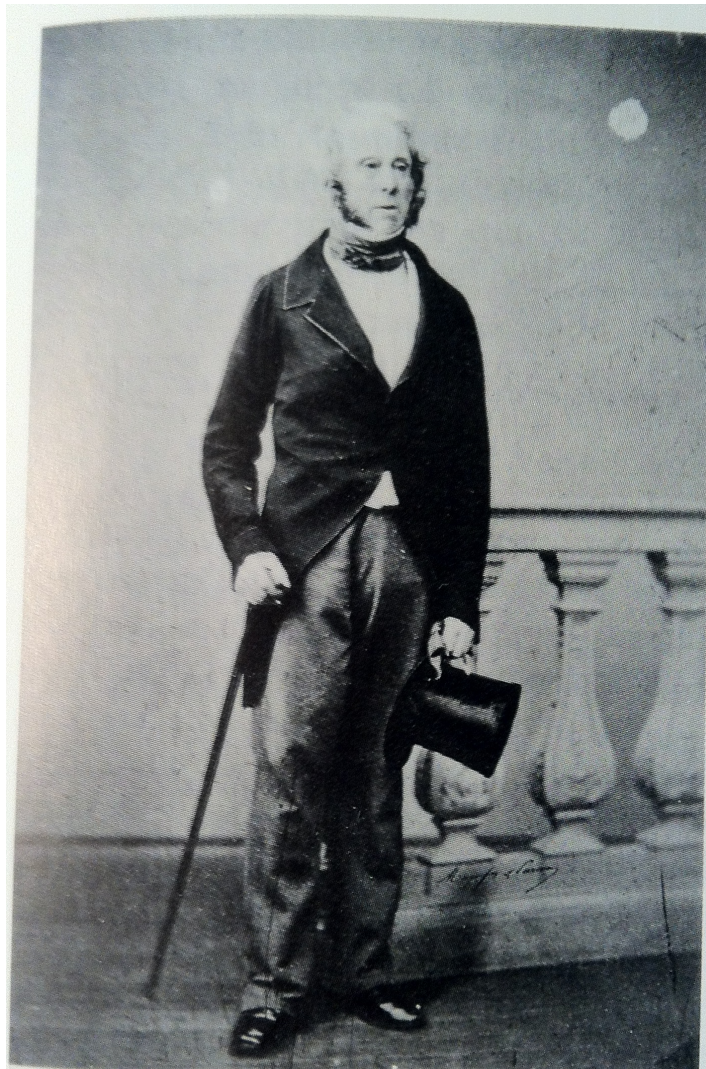


Figure 2.2
Mayer and Pierson, [Carte de visite photograph of Lord Palmerston], 1861



Figure 2.3
Mayer and Pierson, [Carte de visite photograph of Camillo Cavour], 1861



Figure 2.4
Marcelin, "Madame Ristori," in "A bas la photographie!!!," Journal Amusant, September
6, 1856



Figure 2.5
Mayer and Pierson, [Rachel in the role of Phèdre], 1850s,
albumen print on paper, 5.2 x 8.5 cm,
collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 2.6
Mayer and Pierson, [Members of the Congress of Paris], 1856



Figure 2.7
Jean-Léon Gérôme, *La Tragédie*, 1859,
oil on canvas, 160 x 245 cm,
collection of La Comédie-Française, Paris



a.

b.

Figure 2.8

- a. Henri de La Blanchère, [Rachel as] *Monime*, 1859, retouched salted paper print,
- b. Henri de La Blanchère, [Rachel as] *Hermione*, retouched salted paper print, collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 2.9
André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri, Ristori in *Médée*, cartes de visite, ca. 1858, from an album containing representations of *Artistes dramatiques de Paris*, collection of the Département des estampes et de la photographie, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris



Figure 3.1
Georgina Berkeley, [Untitled page from the *Berkeley Album*], 1867-71,
collage of watercolor and albumen silver prints,
collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Figure 3.2
Georgina Berkeley, [Untitled page from the *Berkeley Album*], 1867-71,
collage of watercolor and albumen silver prints,
collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 3.3
Pierre-Louis Pierson and Aquilin Schad, *The Queen of Hearts*, 1861-1863,
salted paper print painted in gouache, surrounded by a gilded passe-partout
also painted in gouache, 72.3 x 59 cm,
collection of Réserve du département des estampes et de la photographie,
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris



Figure 3.4
Francois Meuret, [Countess Walewska as Diana],
ivory miniature.



Figure 3.5
Pierre-Louis Pierson, *The Queen of Hearts*, 1861-1863,
albumen silver print from glass negative, 10.5 x 7.4 cm,
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 3.6
Pierre-Louis Pierson, *Fright*, 1861–1867,
salted paper print retouched with gouache by the Countess de Castiglione,
12.7 x 15.2 cm,
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 3.7
Fashion engraving of an evening dress by the Maison Gagelin
from *Les Modes des parisiennes*, 1859,
collection of Musée Galliera, Paris



Figure 3.8
Anonymous Painter, *Fright*, 1861-1867,
salted paper print painted in gouache,
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 3.9
Claude Monet, *Camille*, 1866,
oil on canvas, 231 x 151 cm,
collection of Kunsthalle, Bremen



Figure 3.10
Pierre-Louis Pierson and Aquilin Schad, *The Queen of Etruria*, 1864,
salted paper print painted in gouache, 59 x 42.3 cm,
Private collection



Figure 3.11
Pierre-Louis Pierson, *La Reine d'Étrurie*, 1863-1867,
albumen silver print from glass negative overpainted and retouched by an unknown
artist, 10.5 x 8.3 cm,
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 3.12
Pierre-Louis Pierson and unknown, [Cothurnes], 1861-1867,
albumen silver print from glass negative, painted and retouched, 5.4 x 7.5 cm,
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 3.13
M.L. Moullin, *Bal costumé donné au palais des Tuileries le 9 février –
Danse des abeilles*, from *L'Illustration, journal universel*

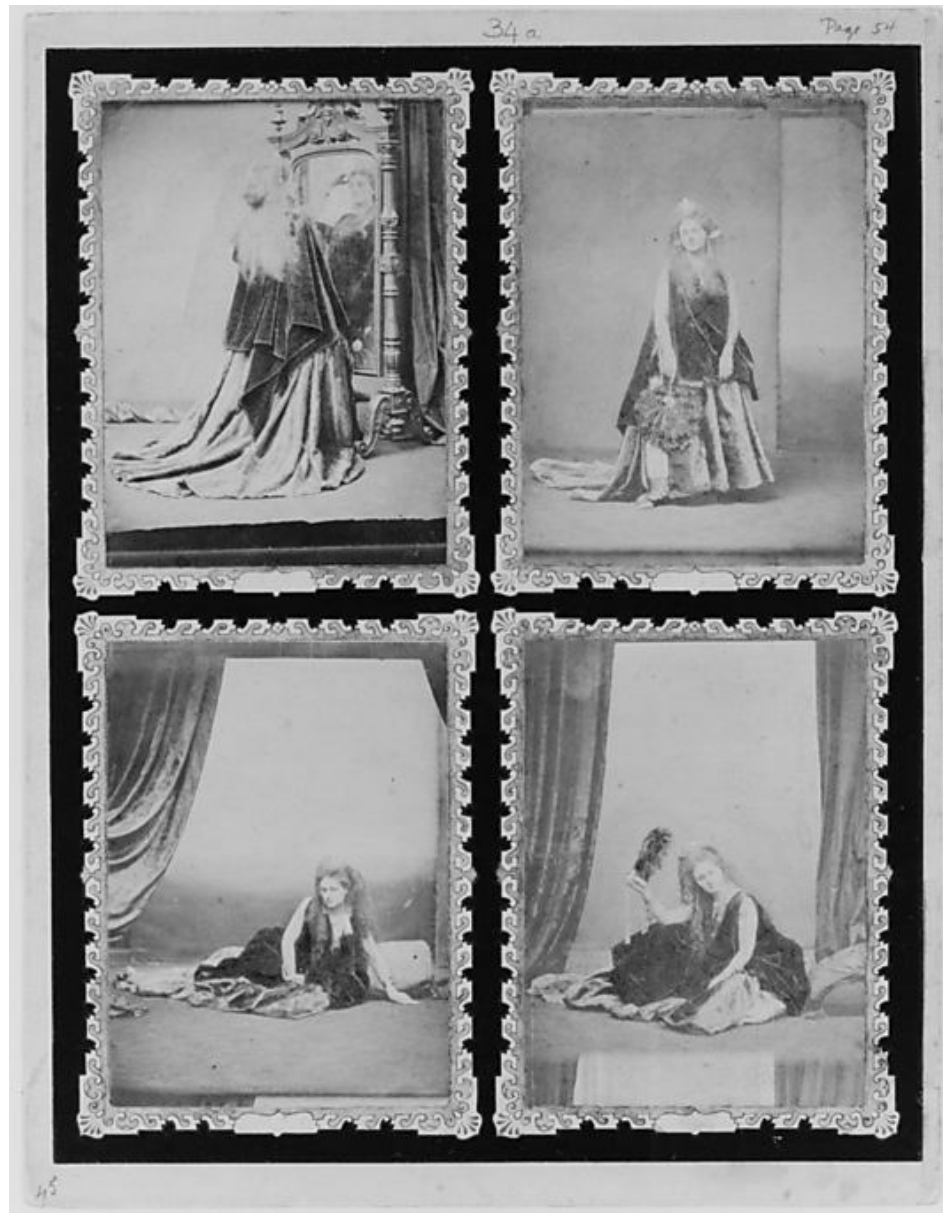


Figure 3.14
Pierre-Louis Pierson [Four pictures of “The Queen of Etruria”], 1863-67,
four albumen silver prints painted in gouache, mounted to a black album page, each print
set within a decorative border, each photograph 12.6 x 8.9 cm, 29.8 x 22.7 cm (page),
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 3.15
Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse, *The Queen of Etruria*, 1864,
patinated terracotta with bronze-colored highlights, 71 x 32 x 25 cm,
Private collection



Figure 3.16
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Source*, 1856,
oil on canvas, 163 x 80 cm,
collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 3.17
Pierre-Louis Pierson and unknown artist, *The Hermit of Passy*, 1863,
albumen silver print, painted and retouched, 12 x 8.5 cm,
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 3.18
Pierre-Louis Pierson, *The Hermit of Passy*, 1863,
albumen silver print, 12 x 8.5 cm,
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 3.19
Pierre-Louis Pierson, *The Hermit of Passy*, after 1863,
salted paper print retouched in charcoal and watercolor, 80.8 x 58.5 cm,
collection of Musée national du Château de Compiègne



Figure 4.1
Cover of Pierre Apraxine and Xavier Demange, eds., *La Comtesse de Castiglione par elle-même* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000)

Source Image:
Pierre-Louis Pierson, *Assassination*, 1861-67,
modern print by Christian Kempf from the original glass negative,
30 x 23.9 cm

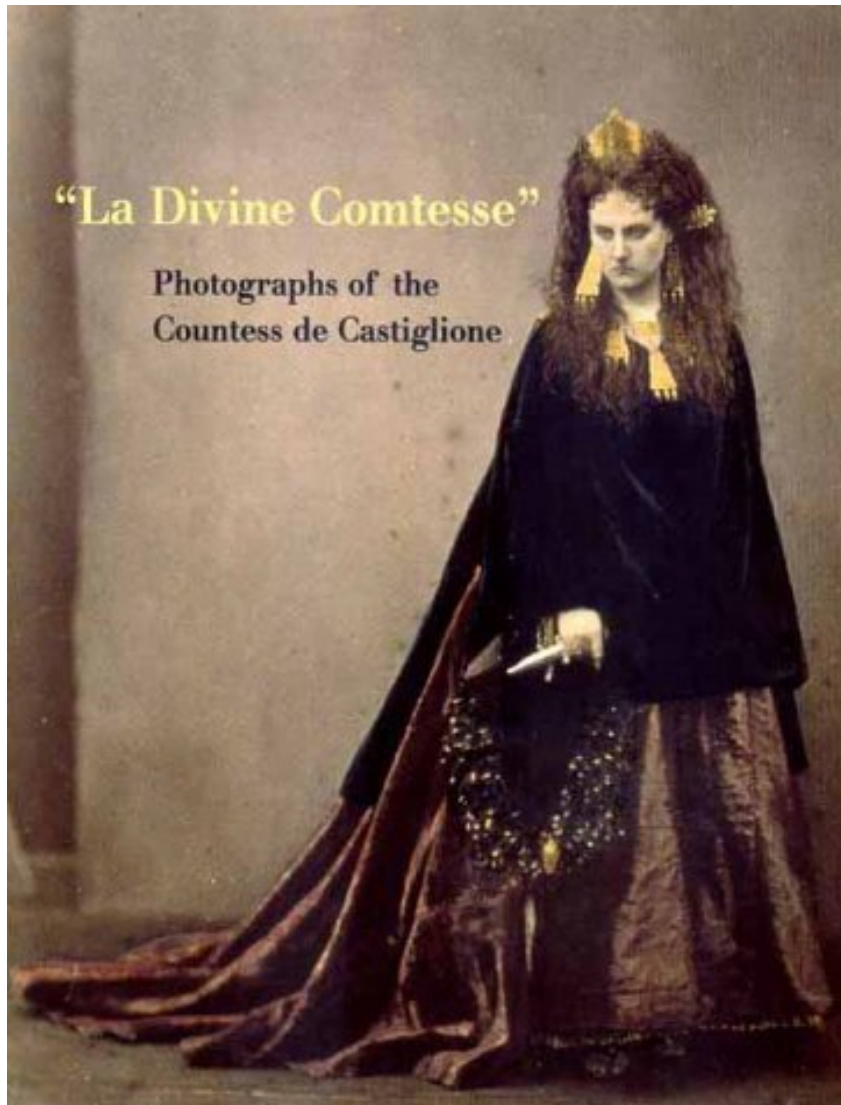


Figure 4.2

Cover of Pierre Apraxine and Xavier Demange, eds., *“La Divine Comtesse”*:
Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000)

Source Image:

Pierre-Louis Pierson and Anonymous painter, *Vengeance*, 1863-67,
albumen silver print partially painted in gouache, 24.4 x 19.2 cm,
collection of Martini di Cigala Collection, San Giusto a Rentennano, Siena



Figure 4.3
Pierre-Louis Pierson, *Scherzo di Follia*, 1863-66,
albumen silver print, 15 x 11.5 cm,
Private Collection



Figure 4.4
Cover of Nicole G. Albert, *La Castiglione: Vies et metamorphoses*
(Paris: Perrin, 2011)
Source image: Figure 4.3

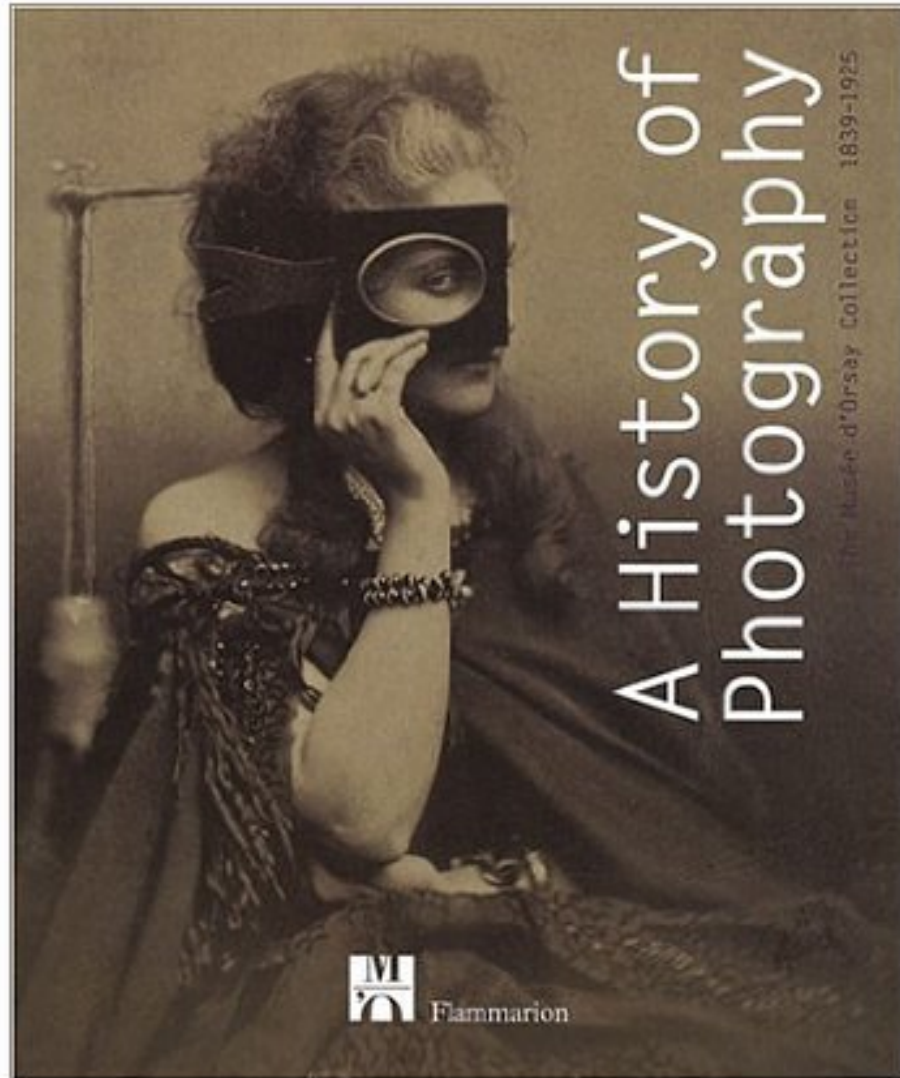


Figure 4.5
Cover of Françoise Heilbrun, ed., *A History of Photography: The Musée d'Orsay
Collection 1839-1925* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009)
Source image: Figure 4.3



Figure 4.6
Pushpamala N., *The Spy (After 19c Photograph of Countess Castiglione by Pierson)*,
2009,
inkjet print on Baryta Hahnemühle paper, 100 x 80 cm,
collection of the Artist



Figure 4.7
AleXsandro Palombo, *Marge Simpson as Virginia Oldoini, Countess of Castiglione*,
2013



Figure 4.8
Paul Régnard, “Catalepsie provoquée par une lumière vive” [“Catalepsy Provoked by a
Bright Light”], 1879-1880
Photolithograph (from the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, Volume 3,
Plate 17), 11 x 7.8 cm (image),
collection of Yale University, Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library,
New Haven

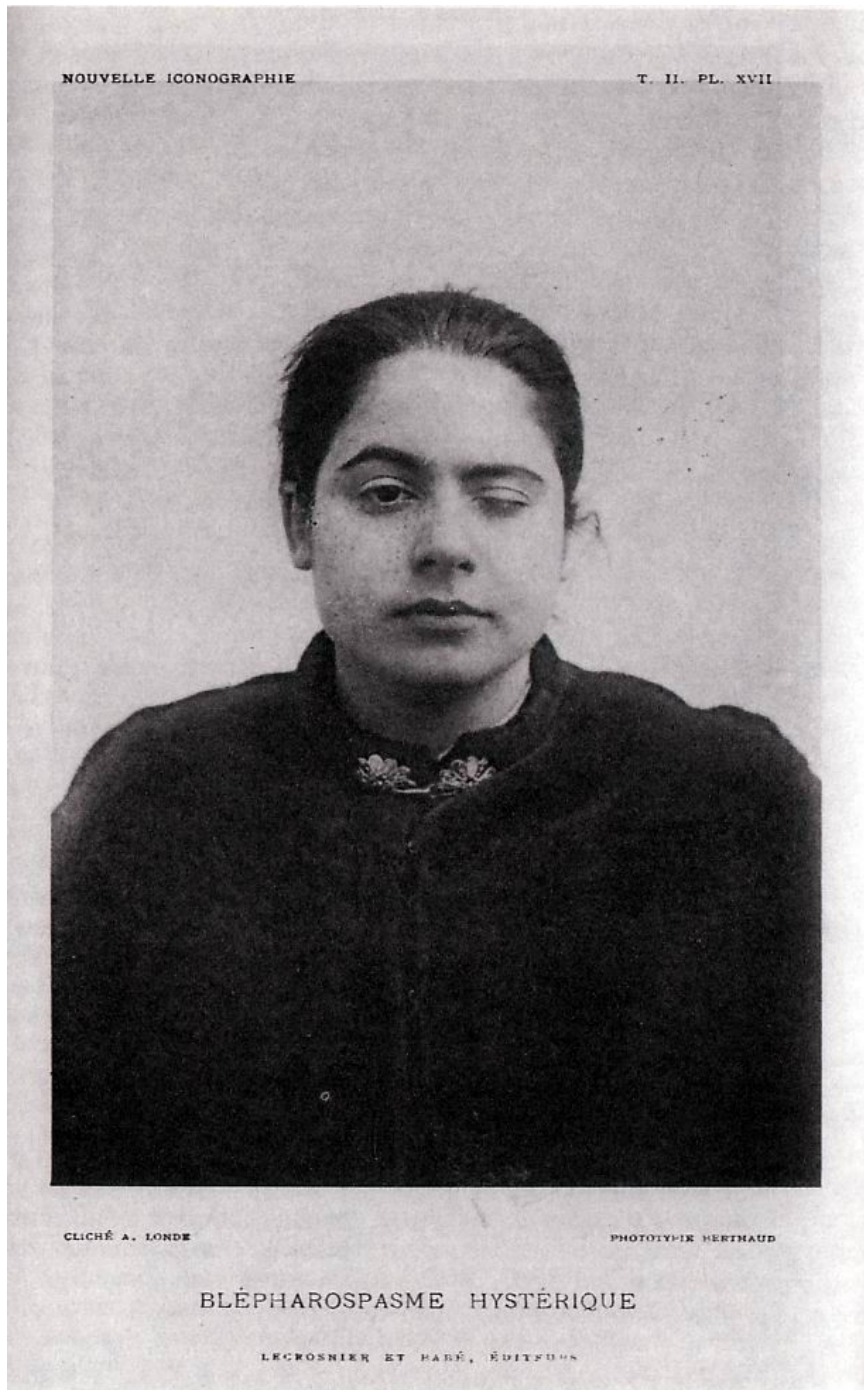


Figure 4.9
Albert Londe, “Blépharospasme hystérique” [“Hysterical Blepharospasm”], 1889
Photolithograph (from the *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*,
Volume II, Plate XVII),
collection of Yale University, Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library,
New Haven



Figure 4.10
Vito Acconci, *Centers*, 1971,
video, 22:28 mins., b&w, sound (still)



Figure 4.11
Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #7*, 1978,
gelatin silver print, 24.1 x 19.2 cm,
collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York

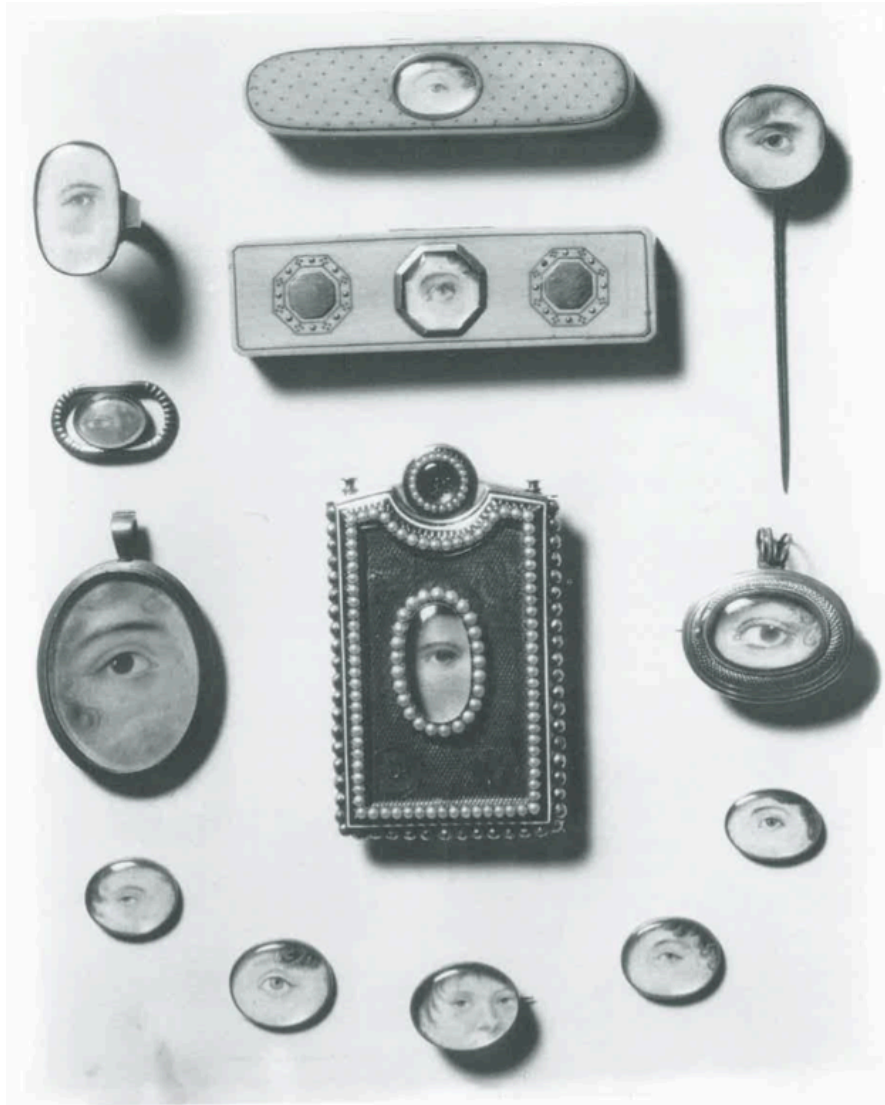


Figure 4.12
Various eye miniatures, ca. 1800,
collection of Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia
From: Hanneke Grootenboer, *Treasuring the Gaze: Intimate Vision in Late Eighteenth-
Century Eye Miniatures*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 19.

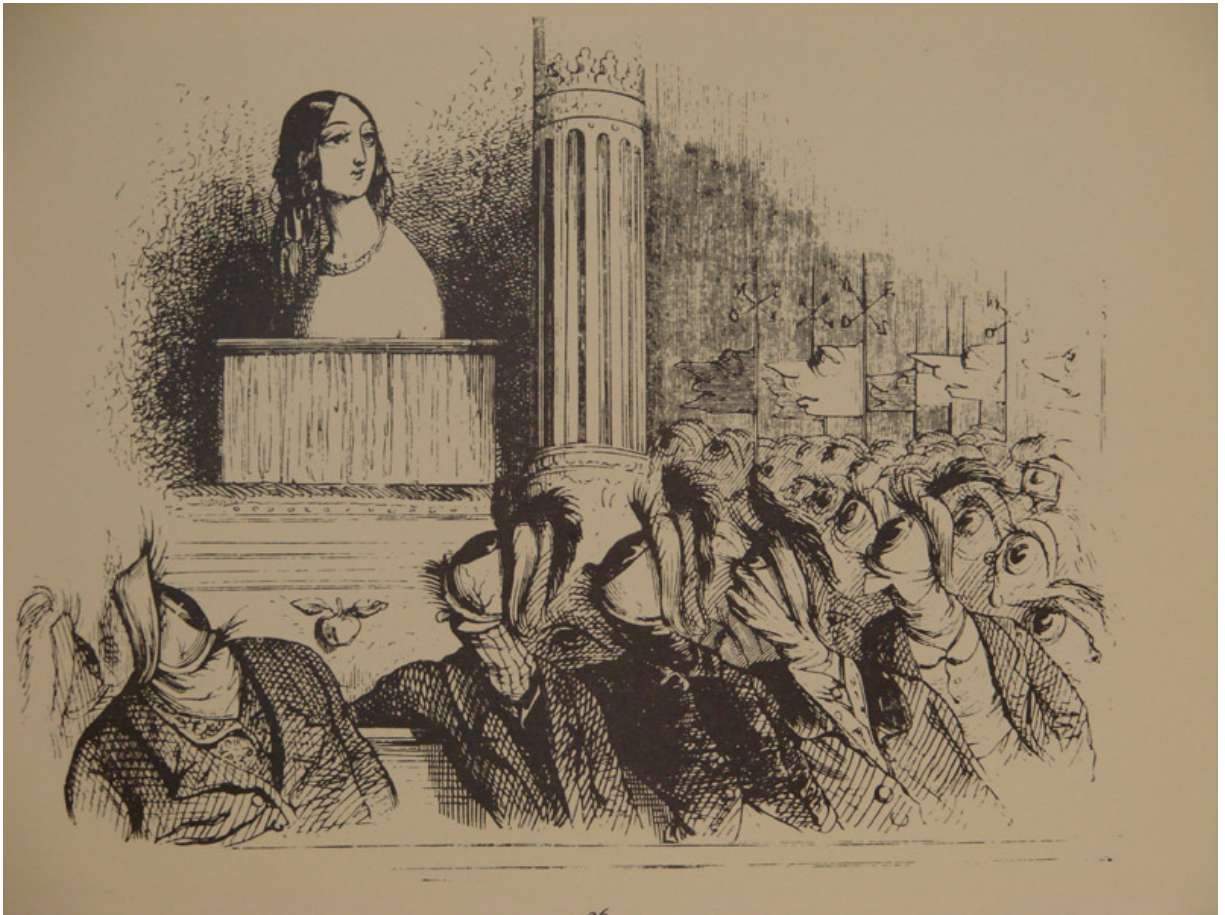


Figure 4.13
J.J. Grandville, *The Cynosure of Every Eye*,
from *Un autre monde*, 1844



Figure 4.14
Pierre-Louis Pierson, [Sculptural Shoulders], 1861-1867,
albumen silver print from glass negative, 12 x 8.5 cm,
collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 4.15
Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *La Loge*, 1874,
oil on canvas, 80 x 63.5 cm,
collection of The Courtauld Gallery, London



Figure 4.16
Mary Cassatt, *In the Loge*, 1878,
oil on canvas, 81 x 66 cm,
Collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Figure 4.17
Mary Cassatt, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*, 1879,
oil on canvas, 81.3 x 59.7 cm,
collection of Philadelphia Museum of Art



Figure 4.18
Virginia Verasis de comtesse Castiglione, Pierre-Louis Pierson, Christian Bérard, *Un dimanche*, ca. 1861-1866,
albumen paper print from a collodion negative, 13 x 14 cm,
collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 4.19
Nina Sederholm and Peter Guagenti, *A.D. Coleman with lens*, 1995



Figure 5.1
Christian Bérard, *Madame de Castiglione* [Album of photographs of the Countess de Castiglione, title page], 1930,
gouache on black paper, 23 x 29 cm,
collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 5.2
Christian Bérard, *Madame de Castiglione* [Album of photographs of the Countess de Castiglione, 2nd title page], 1930, gouache on black paper, 23 x 29 cm, collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 5.3

Christian Bérard, [“La Castiglione en buste tenant un cadre devant son visage (inspiré par la photographie intitulée Scherzo di Follia) et en haut à droite, tête de la Castiglione” / “A bust of Castiglione holding a frame in front of her face (inspired by the photograph titled Scherzo di Follia) and on the upper right, the head of Castiglione”] [Album of photographs of the Countess de Castiglione, illustrations after the title page], 1930, gouache on black paper, 23 x 29 cm, collection of Musée d’Orsay, Paris



Figure 5.4
 Christian Bérard, Virginia Verasis de comtesse Castiglione, Pierre-Louis Pierson,
Scherzo di Follia [Album of photographs of the Countess de Castiglione, plate II], 1863-
 1866, mounted in 1930,
 albumen paper print from collodion negative, glued on black cardboard, with inscriptions
 in white gouache, 15 x 11 cm (image), 23 x 20 cm (support),
 collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris

APPENDIX

Christian Bérard's text inspired by Castiglione (1930)

A black curtain opens on a set of a night-time landscape—there are no stars but a moon as it appears during an eclipse—a parquet floor which has just been sprinkled, a bench—a stool—a hedge seemingly bent by a terrible wind—this is Chateaubriand's *lande*, or some Dutch landscape by a painter who, shut up in his room, dreams of a journey but knows nothing except the view from the few windows which overlook his street.

We must dwell on this scene—which is not silent because one hears the wind howling and some crackling noises, perhaps from the bushes in the hedgerow. More than these natural noises, there is the heavy, heavy sound of footsteps, and the heart stands still. And then comes a Creature, her pallor illuminated by the moon—and suddenly she turns scarlet in the light of the moon which is red and glowing like a ball of flames. The noises cease, and nothing can be heard but the vague rustle of the huge dress—which sweeps along the ground—I want to describe this wonderful monster for you—I used to have art manuals that taught how to construct a face, first with an oval, then with a line for the nose, then the arches of the eyebrows, then two eyes, then the mouth. The rules are all the same, in all museums, in all countries—but in this stillness I see the two eyes—from so far away, from my gallery seat, I can see the expression in those eyes without my opera-glasses, they are like fires reflected on armour, the fires of the burning of Amfortas's palace, of the Tuileries if Courbet had started the blaze in the attic of that palace—by the glow of that moon which two stagehands light behind the backdrop, burning in their hands.

The monster is wearing a full domino cloak which covers the crinoline and the coiffure's immense scaffolding. This character stalks near and far—from under the cape emerges a hand holding a sickle and the other hand which gently, slowly appears holding a bottle of Chianti—at exactly this moment, from stage left and right—courtyard and garden, there enter two Gamekeepers dressed in green corduroy and wearing caps; in the silence which is only broken by the rustle of the dress—we are startled by the silence of their steps, by their high boots—so voluminous—sewermen's boots for when they go down into the cisterns, or the boots of Dante and Virgil as they walk across the rotting corpses of the bodies in hell. They have miners' lamps attached to their caps, lamps with a green light which brightens the sky above their faces. They stop, freeze before this shape which has gradually come to a standstill and in fear of the ultimate sleep, drops the bottle, which smashes, and countless frames and pictures, thus diminishing the volume of

the cape—spreading everything out on the ground with the precision of tarot cards beneath the eyes of a fortune-teller.

At this moment I awake from my dream, as does La Castiglione, to see you, Boris, watching us...because I know you are the voyeur who looks on in profile at Diana's bath and who is called Actaeon...

I flee and she flees, from the marks you make on the mirrored wardrobes, the ashes that you leave in the rooms. But I am sure we will stop to watch you help a drunk in the street stand up, and we will forgive you.

C.B.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁴ Boris Kochno, *Christian Bérard* (New York: Panache Press, 1988), 31-32.

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