

January 14th 2015



Photographic Topic: Portrait & Documentation

## Topic 1: Given Photo: Analyzation and story of the photo ,Meryl Streep' by Annie Leibovitz



When I got the picture for the presentation some of my first impressions were like: is the woman on the picture wearing a mask? Is this even a real person or maybe a puppet? Also it made me think of the famous Joker-figure from the Batman movies, probably because of the white face and dark eyes she has. I think when looking at this picture one can feel a bit frightened, but I was also curious why she's looking like that and why she is doing this pose with her hands and face.

So my next step was to do some research about the two persons involved in the photograph: the woman pictured and the photographer. The woman we see is Meryl Streep, an American actress who started her acting career in 1977 and she was pretty successful in doing so right from the beginning. On the picture, taken in 1981, she was 31 years old and just received an Oscar as best supporting role for her play in the Drama ,Kramer vs. Kramer'. Today Meryl Streep is also known for starring in movies like ,The Devil Wears Prada' or ,The Manchurian Candidate'. The roles she plays were always described as women who aren't very emotional but cold and inhuman. At least that's what her critics said. And to some extent, I think the photo transfers these characteristics.

The photo was taken by Annie Leibovitz. Annie Leibovitz is an American photographer, born in 1949 and one of the most well-known photographers today. After studying painting & photography she became the main photographer for the American ,Rolling Stone', a magazine for Pop Culture & Rock Music. The image actually was the cover picture of the Rolling Stone in October 1981. Annie Leibovitz also does Advertising and Reportage Photography. But she is most famous for her portrait-pictures of celebrities like the above or the well-known photo of John Lennon and Yoko Ono.



The idea for the picture came developed when Streep didn't feel very comfortable with all the attention she got from the public as an actress. She said she's just a nobody, an actress who plays roles. By the time Streep came to the photoshooting (the first appointment had to be cancelled as Streep didn't want to do the shooting for the afore mentioned reasons at all) there were some books of clowns lying around in Leibovitz' studio. As soon as they had the idea to work with the white make-up Streep felt comfortable again because she now could play a role and ,hide' behind the white face.

They created a classic close-up portrait. The white textures on Streeps face make her dark eyes and lips stand out. Also the dark background and neutral shirt help to focus on her face. As eyes are the most important part and show the most emotions in a humans' face they are used as the most common technique to get the attention of the viewer. Also this photo can be seen as a metaphor of Streeps acting career, the movement she does with her hands represents her versatility as an actress. Finally the lighting isn't used in a special way here (I think we have one main light from the front and maybe one additional light for the background) as her face stands out a lot and ,does the job'.

## Topic 2: Concept

After having a brainstorming about ideas of how to do portraits we thought I'd be a good concept to take some photos of the construction workers outside the HdM. Since our study group was a combination of portrait and documentation, we tried to consider both aspects and thought it'd be nice to do construction site shots. Also at that time there were a couple of building sites around the university, so we should've found some people to portrait there. Another idea was to expand this concept to different professions, like professors or secretaries at the HdM. Unfortunately since the main day to do our assignment was a Saturday (December 13th), we realized there won't be much construction workers or other employees to take photos of in or around the HdM. This is why we finally chose to go to the HdM library and focus on documenting the new building. As suggested by Prof. Thissen another aspect we were looking for were 'the mysteries of the library'. While taking photos we felt this cold and inhuman atmosphere of the library, also knowing it hasn't been perceived well by the students. So our focus shifted towards capturing the coldness and some deficits of the building. Saturday turned out to be the perfect day to do this since there were virtually no students in the library at all.

Unfortunately this also destroyed our plan for the portrait aspect, where we initially thought about picturing the students and library employees. We have only met three students in about three hours, working alone and learning, so we didn't want to disturb them. Also the lone employee at the library wasn't really into the idea of getting her picture taken, so we just took some portraits of each other in the library environment.

*Note: more about my concept on the next page ,Topic 3: Discussion'*

### Topic 3: Discussion

As mentioned in Topic 2 on December 13th we focused mainly on having some documentary photos of the empty library taken.

To fulfill the portrait task I had the idea to go to the library again when it's more crowded. I wanted to do this with a concept, so I came up with the idea to tell different students about my photography course and ask if I can take a photograph of them. Additionally I asked them to write on a little signboard I brought how they feel about the new HdM library. To emphasize the ‚coldness‘ of the library and improve the connection of all photos a reduction of colour has been used in the later post processing of the photos. For a common look all pictures have been taken with a focal length of roughly 50 mm, a low aperture number (meaning little depth of field) and with the person standing on the left or right side of the picture frame.

The first portraits of this kind were taken in the library on December 17th. I asked about seven random people in the library, told them about my concept and almost everybody I asked was willing to participate in the project. I told them to write down one or two words, but didn't influence them in their decision what to write down. Unfortunately I wasn't that happy with the results: when developing the RAW files in Adobe Photoshop Lightroom one day later I noticed the pictures I took were partly out of focus and also the light situation wasn't very good that day.

On December 19th I created the Instagram account required for the seminar, uploaded my first picture and looked for other members / photos with the hashtag ‚hdmphoto‘. Afterwards I also commented on some of the other participants photos.

More photos in the library have been taken on December 22nd. Now I knew what factors to consider and the results on this day were much better than before. I developed the new pictures with joy and tried to transfer the same image language I created before onto these new photographs. When commenting and publishing two more photos on my Instagram on December 27th I decided not to use the portrait-pictures due to the rights of the pictured persons. That's why my Instagram account shows some of the earlier documentary shots only.



Some early portrait photographs, not used as final results in Topic 5

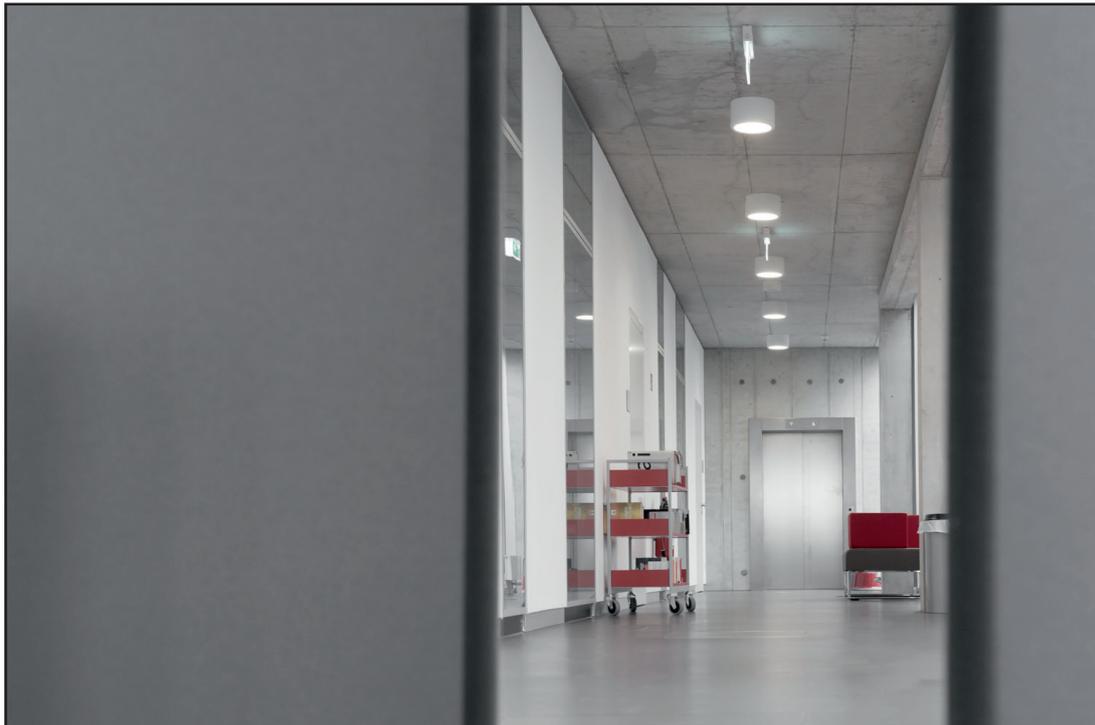
Another Instagram contribution of documentary pictures of the library and some comments on the other seminar participants photos were made on January 3rd and on January 11th each.

Conclusion: As the photography seminar is in english language, it would've been nice to have the pictured persons write their respective words also in english on the signboard. In contrast a nice and surprising experience was to see how many of the students had a good opinion about the library, as I actually expected a more of a negative response.

Additionally I think Instagram wasn't the best decision for the seminar. The pictures are getting cropped to a 1:1 format and also I felt the image quality is getting worse when putting a photo online. My impression of Instagram is: It is more a fun thing for photos taken with a mobile phone, rather than for pictures taken with a good DSLR camera. Using another service, like Flickr for example, would've given us the extra advantage of protecting our pictures with a password and thus being able to put portrait pictures online.

Another idea for the seminar in the future could maybe be to organize a little exhibition inside the HdM building of all the photos taken during the class.

## Topic 5: Results



58 mm, 1/30 sec, f 5,6, ISO 500

### »Narrow path«

I think this picture represents the HdM library how I perceive it pretty good. It shows a long hallway with empty walls and little to no furniture, giving a cold feeling to the beholder. The walls in the foreground support this impression further. The chosen perspective is a classical vanishing point perspective, meaning all lines meet in one imaginary point.



50 mm, 1/15 sec, f 9,0, ISO 500

### »Book carrier«

Also for the documentay aspect, this photo shows one of the baskets used to carry around books in the library. I was fascinated by its structure. I made the experience, that people don't really know what this is when seeing it for the first time. Photographed in a birds eye view perspective I tried to balance this object visually with the white wall on the bottom of the picture.



58 mm, 1/8 sec, f 6,3, ISO 1250

### »Functional«

This is my favorite picture from the little portrait series. I like the balance between the person in the foreground and the background isn't overloaded. It gives a nice impression of the HdM library without taking the focus away from the pictured person. Also her signboard regarding the library saying 'funktional' gives room for interpretation because you can't clearly say if it's ment in a good or in a bad way.



58 mm, 1/6 sec, f 6,3, ISO 800

### »Nice Design«

I like the simplicity of this picture. The person is dressed pretty simple and the background is a plain wall with some reflections in the window behind her, putting the focus clearly on the woman and her signboard. However opposed to the other pictures of this series this one doesn't show much of the library in the background, so this is definitely something I'd try to improve when taking this picture again.



50 mm, 1/10 sec, f 6,3, ISO 500

### »Undisturbed«

I think the pictured person has a nice neutral but friendly look on her face going very well together with the sign saying ,undisturbed'. Maybe the red walls in the background are a bit dominant here (also the lines of the table board go visually right „through her head“ which isn't that nice), but I like the filled frame and the fact some books can actually be seen in the background.



60 mm, 1/13 sec, f 6,3, ISO 500

### »Comfortable«

This was the last photo taken for the portrait series and it also offers a nice impression of the library with its working environment in the background and a strong personality in the front. I feel her sign saying ,comfortable' is a bit ironic, because the pictured part of the library on the right side doesn't look to be comfortable at all to me.

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