

*Akademie múzických umění v Praze*

*Filmová a televizní fakulta*

**Karol Sekta**

**Sally Mann and David Hamilton. Comparison in the  
context of nymphet archetype and its photographic  
representations.**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This power to see - *oculus* - the seeing eye - how it sometimes happens - need a specific ignition, the enlightenment, which leads a man to start seeing, so as we can say - distinguished perceiving. Photographers that we are going to talk about - David Hamilton and Sally Mann - have their deep beliefs coming largely from the literary experience. The breaking point for their personal style constitution was transforming the experience from the World of all arts to particular medium. The way they describe the World is based on their textual education, dialectical experience, and largely on the literary sources. The final product of their work is a photograph. But to become a photograph the thought has a long way through all kinds of media to finally stop as a visual, material, rectangular piece.

My work will concern issues of gaining the popularity and being apprehended in life experience of two photographers, who both touched the same topics of adolescence, nudity and maturity, innocence and sin, young girls issues, however using maximally opposite approaches. Thesis will concern influence of David Hamilton style, as an important photographer of 70s, on advertisement, movies, fashion and general aesthetics of his era. I will try to deconstruct the style of both artists. To find the common criterion of their work. To pass them by the same alembic.

There is going to be a specific description of what makes us sure, that we watch each photographers piece. What constitutes their style. What makes those pictures similar, and what indifferent them. I will go through many possible artistic influences that both of them could have been exposed to. I will point using particular examples how pictures of authors of my interest correspond with previous work and how they influenced the future epigones work. I will touch the problem of popularity and losing it with example of David Hamilton, whose pictures were bestselling all over the world during 70s, but later suddenly disappeared from the public space and finally returned, but as another quality for different recipients. I will try to emphasize the context of changing sensuality of eras. *In contrario* to Hamilton's silent era, I will point out Sally Mann's controversial way of playing with public relations, which lead here to be on the top of interest over 20 years after publication the best selling "Immediate family".

In the chapter concerning photography as an alternative I am going to show how the play with the past can be based on stealing the motives from previous artists, and generally playing with the contexts. It will mostly concern particular Sally Mann images (for example "Damage child") from this understandable reason, that Hamilton was rather more pure and - in the context of ekphrasis - even more "independent", as he rather kept the distance between his ideas and his inspirations. However his very defined and consistent aesthetics is coming from origins, that I would like to explore. Barbizon like backgrounds, and idealized figures of adolescent women are very close to what the French art was in the era of late XIX century. I am going to point out the paintings and texts that stirred in Hamilton heart, and analogical which shackled with Mann's soul.

## 2. STYLE AND CRAFT OF MANN AND HAMILTON

### 2.1. Sally Mann

- **My beautiful, naked children**

Sally Mann is best known for her intimate portraits of her own children done by antique large format camera in the playground of her summer farm. She gained the status of celebrity after publication of *"Immediate family"*<sup>1</sup>. Pictures of her children, often nude, or partially nude brought both the great admiration and a number of questions of possible artistic freedom in the field of child photography.

All her abilities in the field of photography have, as she claims, the strong base in great mastery of craft as such. She physically feels the condition of light and she can easily count what would be the relation of what she sees to what she would like to see on her photograph. She emphasises the material meaning of used medium. She finds the great relation between physicality of depicted situation and physicality of received images. As Ted Forbes says: *"It is some kind of material symbolism in use of a medium. While portraying her suffering from muscular dystrophy husband, she uses wet colodian, and partially accidental damages on plate in very sophisticated way represent the medical damage that person is struggling with."*<sup>2</sup>

He classifies her as one of those artists, for whom *"Final product of a hand-craft image"*<sup>3</sup> works as a landmark, as a crucial representation of all process. However, we need to point out the very special factor of her work, which does not concern any of technical or chemical tricks. If we want to understand those pictures, we have to reveal this amazing intimacy that worked as a starting point of any photographic action she did. She as a mother-photographer encouraged her children-models to act with no borders of fear or shame. Also, she did not have to force them to anything, because they entrusted her completely with everything about the image. We can imagine how close and warm the relationship between them was – a mother and children, if they could so easily and painlessly shift from familiar to artistic relation of photographer and her models. Finally, we can name her style of photographing as a documentary without the hunting factor. For Sally Mann's children being photographed was as natural as getting a sandwich before their way to school. And such circumstances let her be absolute perfectionist in receiving the effect that she concerned as rewarding.

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<sup>1</sup> (Mann, Immediate Family, 1992)

<sup>2</sup> (Forbes, 2014)

<sup>3</sup> (Forbes, 2014)

The psychological basis of all her efforts lays in her emotional life, in her very personal experience. First of all she had and has a great respect to her children. In an interview with Charlie Rose she speaks about them with a sort of thrilling sigh of love: *"They are unhingly beautiful!"*<sup>4</sup>. She admits that her attention is getting closer and closer to some kind of idolatry. *"I guess every parent thinks their child is the most amazing, marvellous thing ever on earth. I use my photographs to reflect that astonishment and gratitude"*<sup>5</sup>

So the secret power exudes from those portraits. Power that sometimes lays in apparent contradiction to circumstances that children were photographed under. For example there is a picture entitled "Wet bed", where Mann's daughter is photographed sleeping in bed flooded with urine.



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<sup>4</sup> (Rose, 2003)

<sup>5</sup> (Townsend, 1998)

Katarzyna Przyłuska-Urbanowicz is deconstructing the method of delicacy thanks to which Mann avoided any brutality or directness: *"Naked child laying on her back in dug bed in unprotected, almost infantile position. Under the girl's body, taking the upper part of a frame, so in the centre of the picture, a wet spot contour is a scratching - evidence of carefree, not subordinated to discipline, night body laxity. Photographic aestheticization of a scene(great work with chiaroscuro), for which stricter look would add features of discredit and fiasco, allows to touch the beauty in its most intimate, most fragile dimension: in annulment of category of fault."*<sup>6</sup>

Here is the crucial statement of her hidden style. And response to the majority of allegations. Sally Mann's pictures are not working as any kind of representation. She - the photographer - is being seduced with hearted refinement of her children. With affectionate respect to portrayed she cuts off the chain of references. Pictures start to live their autonomic life.

- **Personal experiences as a germ for Photographic image**

Not only the children, but also landscape or even death issues touched upon in the Mann's work have their origins deeply inside the personal experience with particular people and situations.

As she says, she is *"breathing life into the notice, that photographs, and sometimes good ones, could be made everywhere, even in the most seemingly commonplace or fraught moments"*<sup>7</sup>. She claims that situations from her everyday life have a giant impact on what we see on her photographs.

Everyday family life has its discrete, but also obvious patterns of universality, which are being transformed to the universal language of visuals. One of the thrilling landmarks of Mann's pictures is the permanent presence of death symbols in more than many of her pictures. Death, as a function of metamorphosis, is one of the most important topics in the photographer's work. It is present not only in the series directly connected to the history, so in her landscapes - pierced by dead man's scream, or in the project of photographing human corps in Body farm<sup>8</sup>. It is also and maybe - first of all- present in the pictures of children showed in sunshine of their youthfulness. This is a very discrete, very elegant sign, whose role is to remind that each moment has the character of ephemera. Passing away, and passing over, the transformation and incarnation - those are the notions which her photography is spinning around.



<sup>6</sup> (Przyłuska-Urbanowicz, 2015) p. 88

<sup>7</sup> (Mann, Hold Still, 2015) p. 111

<sup>8</sup> Body farm is a research facility where decomposition of human corps can be studied in a variety of settings.

"Death has become sort of unmentionable thing in society"<sup>9</sup> she says. When we speak about her "What remains"<sup>10</sup> project, how can we not mention those numerous situations of close encounter with danger, destruction, death itself. Real life situations work not only as a starting point for a general concept, but also as a groundwork for a particular, photographic action. Life creates those thrills indispensable to start shooting.

She uses photographic techniques to express delicately the brutal truths we all struggle with. In one picture from Body Farm (Part of "What Remains") moving maggots on cadaver's face, in three minutes exposure give the impression of undefined haze. We cannot see the particular insect, so we are not sure what envelopes the body.



In Charlie Rose interview she talks about dramatic action which took place just around her house in Virginia. *"Escape convict came to our farm with two pistols and shotgun, so he was a significant risk for me (I was by myself) That's sort of a material that really happened. He was running right directly in front of my house. There was a fire fight and he committed suicide right by our side. I have just come back from a <body farm> how that is called. I have been thinking about the death as a sort of earth caring of and my approach changed to thinking what death does to the landscape, what death does to the earth. It just shifted the frost of my inquiry."*<sup>11</sup>

She took a picture of this situation with her digital camera. That also shows, that the meaning of a picture as such - in critical situation - is more important than specific choice of photographic

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<sup>9</sup> (Rose, 2003)

<sup>10</sup> (Mann, What Remains, 2003)

<sup>11</sup> (Rose, 2003)

medium. And in these categories we can call her some kind of a "documentary photographer". Her landscapes - for example - on one hand very subjective, but on the other stay more concrete than thousands of other images pretending to be representations. Ted Forbes calls her in the context of her landscape studies: *"Not minimalistic at all, but creates minimal situations"*<sup>12</sup>.

There is even something more than simple devotion to a field of art, when Sally Mann starts to think about photographing the very moment of her third child's upcoming birth . *"Two weeks before Virginia's due date, I took my 8x10 to the birthing room and set it up, pressing into service as my stand in bewildered candy striper who lay on the bed in what we assumed would be my posture at delivery. I focused on her hands demurely pressing her skirt down between her legs, which were elevated in steel stirrups the way we gave birth back then. Leaving the camera bellows at exactly extension, I removed the camera from the tripod, and bent over my balance-destroying belly to make grace pencil circles on the floor where the tripod legs were. Then I packed carried the equipment to the car and went home to wait it out."*<sup>13</sup>

Photography is not just a part of photographer's life, it is becoming its essential warp. In a letter to Maria Hambourg she writes: *"There is at that time an almost mystical rightness about the image: about the way the light is enfolding, the way the kids eyes had taken on an almost frightening intensity, the way there is a sudden, almost outer-space like, quiet."*<sup>14</sup>

Sally Mann is a spy in her own house. She never let her vigilance to fall asleep. She has to be conscious all the time. She has to count. She has to be fast. She has to be delicate. She has to be persuasive. She has to understand. She is with all her soul devoted to the process of striking the image. Her photography - as butterfly hunting - touch the beauty and danger at the most primordial point. Her role is to capture the most essential moment, the most endangered species of her realm, fleeing uniqueness, the truth revealed in the margins of existence, the essence of the instant spell.

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<sup>12</sup> (Forbes, 2014)

<sup>13</sup> (Mann, Hold Still, 2015) p.108

<sup>14</sup> (Mann, Hold Still, 2015) p.109



## 2.2. David Hamilton

- All the Hamilton's girls

David Hamilton is also one of those artists, whose work brought equal amount of "blame and fame". Once he reached the top of commercial status in middle 60s - for almost a decade he played first fiddle in the World of Pictures for Sale. To introduce him, we have to try to define his - as Perry Hinton says - "*distinctive imagery*"<sup>15</sup>. We need to emphasize this surprising uniformity and clarity of pictures he had taken, which led him to create style so concrete that balanced on border of obviousness, but still so strong, that worked as a widely recognizable hallmark.

The key word for his opus magnum is French *fille en fleurs*, taken from Proust's novel title, hard to translate, and meaning girls in the time of florescence in the very beginning of their mellowness.

The typical Hamilton image is described by Hinton:

*"Hamilton's photographs were almost exclusively soft focus images of young women usually positioned against the light, in summer dresses and floppy hats, or partially nude, often with flowers, and photographed in the natural light of the morning or late afternoon sunshine. These young women appeared to relax in a hermetic world of their own, dreaming in the warmth of a summer's day."*<sup>16</sup>



It is important to add the specific, repeatable atmosphere of interiors where young ladies were being portrayed. Colonial style, full of empire's furniture, Art Nouveau mirrors, vases with flowers, all in pastels, velvets and ornamental draperies. Each particular matter builds this specific mise-en-scene, like if it all happened in one, dreamed movie.

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<sup>15</sup>Hinton, Perry R. „Remembrance of things past: The cultural context and the rise and fall in the popularity of photographer David Hamilton.“, 2016

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

David Hamilton, as a photographer and arranger, created the World of his photographs in the smallest possible details, so in the very beginning we have to deprecate any attempts of analyzing his work from the viewpoint of standards and status of reality. The crucial part of the thesis is my conviction that his pictures have no outer-art roots and stay in no relation to what is considered as socially engaged art. They are independent from political or intellectual discourse. Or at least they should be. If the problem of referentiality of those pictures exists at all, it plays at most the secondary role.

Maybe the recurrence of the dreamy representations of his imagery should inspire us to ask very different questions. Questions concerning not the referentiality, but the reduplication. Multiplicity is the crucial element of archetype. From the hundreds of pictures taken by one man, effigy of - in some measure - the very same creature emerges. Even though he used to place very different women in front of a camera - they all have been transforming to somehow one representation of Hamilton's realm.

Katarzyna Przyłuska - Urbanowicz is defining this reduplication in context of a nymphet motive: *"Character of a rapacious girl - like a persistent thought, intrusive melody, Freudian sleep - appears saying in different words - only in the form of an obsession: incessant encirclement of a mind, repetitiveness, rhythmical or melodious reversions belong to mode of operation of this figure; they are the way of appearing and acting on the viewer. For this reason none of substantiation of those imagery has the sample character and none is definitive. Gripping the special status of this figure becomes possible only in series - in the chain of variants - over and over interposing in the space of symbolic imagination."*<sup>17</sup>

In this chain of variants we discover meaning of Hamilton's neo-romanticism, which was mostly based on escaping from reality. Hamilton work does not trifle with standards, predecessors, or norms. It simply passes them by. It is based on aesthetic idea fixe, which within Hamilton's fate, can reconcile the contradictions between human passions, beliefs and feelings. An endless string of clearly defined visions of paradise, which aligned with the concepts of reality, become only the unspoken dream of blissful, but unachievable equilibrium.



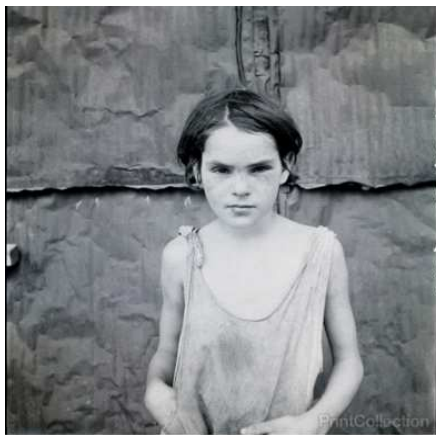
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<sup>17</sup> (Przyłuska-Urbanowicz, 2015) p. 9

### 3. ALTERNATIVE WORLDS IN FRAMES

#### 3.1. Bloody mother or a juggler?

There is a Sally Mann's picture (actually the first she did of her children) called "Damaged Child", which - in origin - depicts a situation with very defined and obvious reference to reality. Young author's daughter was bitten by an insect, so she had swollen eye and some allergic reaction visible on her face. Until that moment nobody would even think about writing the new scenario based on this situation, but since the photography is made - picture of a child's face, visibly hurt face, starts to act strictly new life - author uses it in a sort of unpleasant context, but continuously she does not define what exactly was her purpose to illustrate. Everyday trifle suddenly became an emblem of hard times matters or generally almost anything disturbing about suffering children. Obvious reference to Dorothea Lange's "Damaged child" shows the power of reinterpretation. Purely documentary picture, some kind of classical milestone of social documentary<sup>18</sup>, is being reshot and replaced by a highly accidental scene of home life. Visually both pictures have the very same structure and that is not accidental. They both show girl en face with a simple, texture background. With one move Sally Mann puts question marks before notions of reality, truth, solemnity, universality, and even authorship, but she never questions the importance of artistic quality. At that point she stays with very classical approach. She creates a picture that visibly could work instead of its leading inspiration, if only we provide a suitable context. No answer is attached to the picture.



*"It was also extremely controversial, because viewers of the piece worried about the girl. Was she abused? Did her mother hit her for the sake of the photograph? It is hard for the public to look at a photograph entitled, <Damaged Child> and not be concerned about abuse, especially when it seems actual child abuse is all too common in our society"<sup>19</sup>. Sally Mann, being inspired by the events of her daily life, started to create photographs, which in a very suggestive, sometimes exaggerated way reflected the specific conditions of observed moment, stigmatizing, appropriating and reinterpreting it. Average insect bite, in its practical dimension not harmless at all, causing just*

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<sup>18</sup> Dorothea Lange - influential American documentary photographer and photojournalist, best known for her Depression-era work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

<sup>19</sup> (Cox, 2009)

allergic reaction, become a contribution to the creation of psychological portrait of damaged child, which in its pronunciation differs significantly from backstage conditions.

Sometimes she shifted her approach from subtle game with possible references to quite brutal provocation. She explores the borders of her own freedom. In the picture called "Bloody Nose" it is quite obvious that the situation is going beyond any mystery and shows something that in the eyes of viewers might be seen as at least as disturbing.

*"The boy's face is cut off at the bottom of his nose so that you can't see his eyes. His mouth is open as if he were in complete disbelief. The picture seems to have been posed simply for the shock value. The blood is, in fact, raspberry juice. The notion that Mann would have her son smear raspberry juice over his nose and chest implies that Mann really did want to give people something to complain about. Mann loves to explore the boundaries of what is and what is not acceptable when it comes to portraying children. It seems that all of her work in portraiture was created in order to ask people to debate this idea."<sup>20</sup>*



From those two brief examples all secrets of her motivation emerge. Her photography strictly has to put question marks before the notions. Interacting with reality is her pictures essential role. Reading those photographs as beautifully created pieces of art, with all their figurative attractiveness, simultaneously we can find out that each of them has its strictly verbal inflection. Sally Mann photography with all its power enters the world of textual discourse.

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<sup>20</sup> (Cox, 2009)

Even if it occurs that all of the "disturbing situations" were somehow fake, still the impact of the misunderstanding transforms those acting scenes into the representation of what is possible and what we all should be aware off. The strength of those pictures is so touchable that, in fact, they displace actual circumstances of creation and replace them with presented idea. Picture starts its own, autonomic life.

From her very personal point of view there is also very convincing explanation of reason for this kind of interplay with brutal fiction and innocent reality. After her children's participation in a few dangerous situations she had a very strong incentive to go ahead the tragedy in order to avoid it. She says: *"I realised the image inoculated me to a possible reality that I might not henceforth have to suffer"* <sup>21</sup>

Chris Townsend explains: *"By representing the scars and marks of accidents, both minor and serious, which the child survives, the image protects against the intrusion of real trauma"* <sup>22</sup>

There is an aspect of alter ego of the depicted person, who no longer stays in pre-photography condition, but is being forced to - quoting Deleuze<sup>23</sup> - become again, thus enters the string of incarnations.



In the cover picture of "Immediate Family" there is everything about specific recreation, which is the essence of Sally Mann's craft. There is also everything what we can examine about those alternative children, born in the darkroom. What do they look like? Who are they? What defines them? Where are they? They are strong and beautiful. They function in a specific domain, imbued with discrete eroticism, in the sphere of Nietzsche's vitality and power. The person becomes an immortalised figure. Impression which turns into a symbol. Regardless of what these children were *per se*, what kind of people, what kind of characters, in this particular collection of works of art they become the emblem of a completely different form. They become mythological, fairy tale and sinful trio - ephebe and two nymphets.

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<sup>21</sup> (Mann, Hold Still, 2015)

<sup>22</sup> (Townsend, 1998) p. 16

<sup>23</sup> G. Deleuze, "Bartleby albo formuła", Warszawa 2009, p. 98

The method Mann uses when she is crossing out the personage of her actual children sometimes is as simple as ordinary stylization.

*"(She) stylizes their models for adults by handing them cigarette, suggesting a slightly more nonchalant gesture, or adorning them with jewellery. In most cases we cannot distinguish those strategies from each other. Children elusiveness shifts to adolescent one, natural - into theatrical, clean - into dirty, helpless - into predatory. However all the time beyond any fault and any punishment".<sup>24</sup>*

Hard to judge if the concept of playing with the very intimate factors of identity is more visual or more dialectical, since her images encapsulating universal truths about human emotions and motivations have all surprisingly familiar roots. She explain the origins of all this (human) family pictures in the few simple words:

*"These are pictures of my children... Many of these pictures are intimate, some are fictitious and some are fantastic, but most are of ordinary things every mother has seen. I take pictures when they are bloodied or sick or naked or angry. They dress up, they pout and posture, they paint their bodies, they dive like otters in the dark river."<sup>25</sup>*

### **3.2. Document as a distorting mirror**

What is real, what is being made up and what kind of fooling our mind have to go through during sessions of photographic dupery? On one hand photography records the visual fact - and there is no doubt here. On the other - each situation possible to document consist enormous variations of visual facts. And from this infinite possibilities photographer, the artist, has to choose the one to create representation of the very fact. But here the interference just began, because the photographer not only records those visual facts, she also interferes with them. In Sally Mann's case - this interference is especially touchable.

In the series presented in the book "At twelve"<sup>26</sup> she tries to deal with something closer to classical documentation, but still - even if she leave her playground - she does not leave any of her methods. Photography - at first the elegant document of a situation photographer had faced, still functions as a strong tool of Mann's dialectical arsenal.

There is a picture called "The three". Two young girls are having a rest under an old tree. The tree is wounded with a hole reminding woman's nudity . Mann is composing the scene, so the huge scarf on the tree starts to be the crucial part of the image.

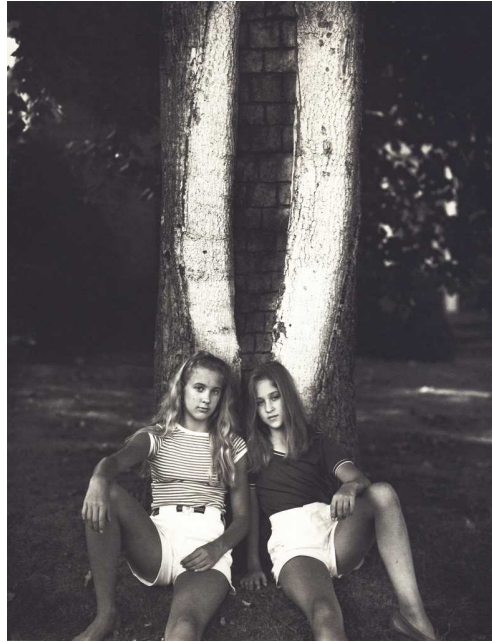
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<sup>24</sup> (Przyłuska-Urbanowicz, 2015) p. 89, 90,

<sup>25</sup> (Mann, Immidate Family, 1992), introduction

<sup>26</sup> (Mann, At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women, 1998)

As Betty Rose writes in the introduction: *"Though the girls probably did not see the sexual implications of the background, the photographer did, and because of that the viewer cannot help but interpret the girls in term of the tree."*<sup>27</sup>



Composition in the use of photographer's expectations, composition in the use of photographer's beliefs, functions as a distorting mirror. Nothing is more important than relation between objects and subjects in the area of the frame. It is some kind of piquancy that those young girls have absolutely no idea about. *"As adults we see what the children may not see"*<sup>28</sup>.

Each hero of each photography is understood in the terms of some nearby object, and that is getting her close to a very classical, figurative painting, where all surrounding was functioning as a treasury of symbols, motives and meaning, and where each object had a few layers of meaning.

Sally Mann - with the means of medium and completely out of the consciousness of her models - builds the alternative meaning of the encountered scene, therefore once we see her picture, we can't be sure what was the actual character of a situation she portrayed. We shouldn't even try to say a word about actual people she did photograph. She photographs less the people from blood and bones and more her thoughts concerning them.

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<sup>27</sup> (Mann, *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women*, 1998), introduction by Betty Rose,

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*,

On the other hand, Rose is writing: *"Once we label something as symbolic we are dealing with an abstraction, yet the reality of so many young faces seems so intense, so concrete, and the prints so clear, that we feel sure we have something real before us"*<sup>29</sup>.

Indeed "At twelve" is a book full of very physical, very real humans. In the book Sally Mann is giving us a very strong message. She touches upon the problem of girls on the border of adolescence living in harmful conditions, struggling with some pain and danger. By means of photography she is trying to say as much as possible. She wants to create pictures-emblems, pictures which speak not only about the people they depict, but also about the universal issues that they represent.

The series touches upon *"roles the girls are playing midway between the groupings of childhood and the rigors and regrets of adulthood"* and the girls are *"showed humorously or soberingly adult"*<sup>30</sup>



*"Seemingly harmless grip of an arm"*<sup>31</sup> as Betty Rose is saying. The man with darkened face -fallen in the shadow (how not to mention Rene Margritte's symbolism of hidden face), is holding a girl in a ridiculously small building, which works as a gate or emblem of girls' world that was somehow grabbed, somehow disturbed by adult presence. It is quite a clear meaning that at the age of 12 the sexual tension is growing rapidly and from the beginning of this very moment a child has to face completely new feelings. Appealing, but dangerous, so the girl cannot be certain how to act.

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<sup>29</sup> (Mann, *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women*, 1998), introduction by Betty Rose,

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*,



## 4. INTERPLAY OF MEDIA. LITERARY AND FILM INFLUENCES.

### 4.1. Roots of the photographic imaginarium

- **Southerned mind**

Reading Sally Mann's memoir - "Hold Still" - at some point we have to admit, that she is shifting her position from a photographer writing about her work to a writer writing about photography. The influence of her literary education caused deep literature connotations presented in every paragraph of her work. She explains her fascinations, aesthetics, and all sort of decisions connected with her well-known series using the terms coming from French and Russian literature, from American poetry, from sad, south United States romanticism. In the beginning of her artistic life - while studying literature - she was finishing her master thesis concerning Cantos series by Ezra Pound.

She calls herself Southern artist, as well as her erstwhile mentor and friend - painter Cy Twombly. She explains that South has this specific familiarity with death and all issues of dying, which is absolutely not present in the other parts of the country.

Quoting words of historian John Kegan: *"South retains for Europeans a trace of cultural familiarity, as the rest of the country does not...Pain is a dimension of old civilisations. South has it. The rest of the US does not."*<sup>32</sup> Sally Mann Clarifies it and indicates some examples: *"Such familiarity(with death)often lends southern art a tinge of sorrow, of finitude, and mourning. Think of the blues, for example, or early jazz, think of Faulkner, Welty, O'Connor, and others, think of the titanic triad of Rauschenberg, Johns, and Twombly in the visual arts."*<sup>33</sup>

If we talk about Twombly, she was working as his assistant and her style, as she admits: *"Over the years of my work in his studio changed from documentary to evocative"*<sup>34</sup>. He was not only her mentor, and master, but also a friend, constant visitor of her family farm, irreplaceable element of her familiar surroundings and last, but not least - a great interlocutor, the best companion for ritual afternoon tea discussions.

She emphasises the fact that her South land seemed to be empty of any practitioners of plastic arts, land artistically abandoned, because - as she's humorously speculating - temperatures are going too high there. *"Heat stultifies us"*<sup>35</sup>, as she say.

She feels organically attached to her land, to emptiness of the landscape, to sorrow of history, to character of people living there. But also in her affection there is sort of perversity hidden. She is talking about her surrounding: *"This community allows itself to be scandalized by me and by my work, but they love it. What else would they do if it wasn't for me? I take being iconoclastic sort of seriously. It's*

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<sup>32</sup> (Mann, Hold Still, 2015), p. 81

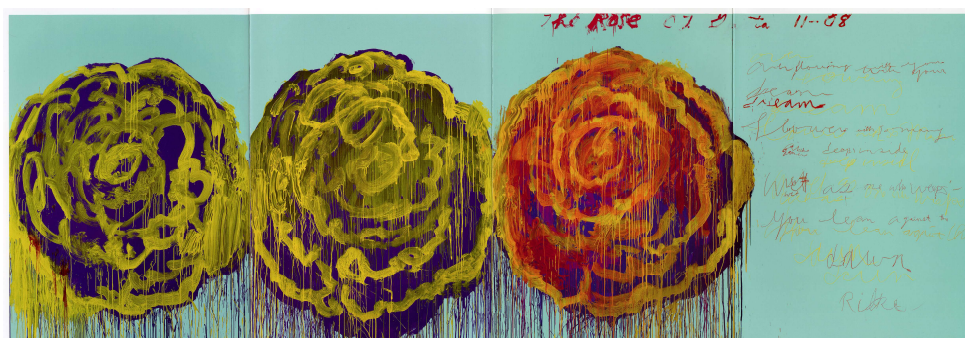
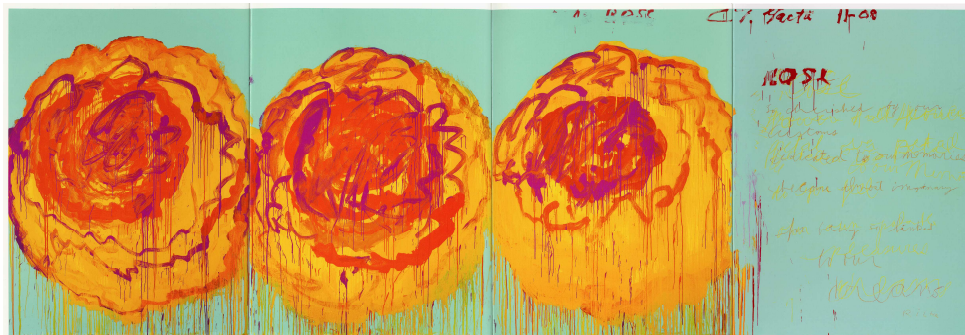
<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 82

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 67

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 69

my role here."<sup>36</sup> Even if she is acting extremely eccentric, and shock people around with her liberated behaviour, style and the way of thinking, in some cases she still stays - familiar, conservative, traditional, direct, country women (what has an impact on her art). She feels bound between her and the South, bound which nothing is able to rip.

Those artists who actually came from south and represent it, are endangered by many accusations. About the case of Twombly - in some eyes taken as naive or superficial - she say directly "*He wasn't naive and neither was his art*"<sup>37</sup>.



"Naivety in art is like the digit zero in math, its value depends on what it's attached to"<sup>38</sup> she explains dialectically, adding that all specific conditions that influence southern artists (of which she is one ), cannot be erased, but nevertheless - are not determinants of quality or even a style. They just

<sup>36</sup> (Mann, Hold Still, 2015) p. 72

<sup>37</sup> (Mann, Hold Still, 2015), p. 78

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 79

"inquire" topics an artist may deal with. For Sally Mann the South is like a birthmark. She summarizes its strength of impact quoting the ending of Joyce's *"Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"*, it's last three words: *"silence, exile, cunning"*.

- **Painting power**

What are David Hamilton predecessors? Have they existed at all? From where he got the strength and inspiration? *"Along with Joseph Nicéphore Niepce or Robert Demanchy, both of whom retouched their photos to add an artistic air, Hamilton shares the belief that photography should try to approximate the high art of painting. Out of this conviction he has produced still-lives after Morandi, Chardin and Caravaggio, and nudes after Balthus, Raphael and Degas."*<sup>39</sup>

He reiterates his special resemblance to Balthus, what - in my opinion - can be read as a wishful, but dangerous figure. *"He associated his work to Laclos, Balthus and Nabokov. Regardless of the inaccuracy of this association—for example, Balthus always claimed his work had a religious significance making this link further shifted the interpretation of his work in the direction of the morally unacceptable to a public concerned about such issues"*<sup>40</sup>. Although Balthus called himself *"religious painter"*<sup>41</sup>, Hamilton always stood outside of the sphere of metaphysics. The difference, which might seem glaring, in fact lays in the basic distinction between painter, who was strongly attached to all his predecessors and photographer, who not cutting the roots, but treated them very freely. When Balthus is very specific with defining influences he had been exposed to, Hamilton is doing as well, however he does not attach such importance to the hallowed by Balthus tradition. For traditional painter all history of figurative painting creates a path, that he should follow as a proud craftsman. For Hamilton, there are few briefly elected idols, inspirational for him, but not sacrosanct at all. Balthus call himself a craftsman and saying it with a proud. Hamilton call himself artist, with tone of obviousness. Pair of those people is illustrating how audacious popular culture (represented by the photographer) has become in comparison to the concept of traditionally taken artistic crafts. The core of the difference between those to (connected mostly with the essential subjects of their canvas), lays also - like Katarzyna Przyłuska - Urbanowicz is saying - specifically in Hamilton's approach. Photographer *"shows naked, juvenile bodies extracting from them mostly the potential of pretentiousness and persuasive power"*<sup>42</sup>. In this perspective, Hamilton art becomes maybe too easy, maybe too obvious, unbalanced and vulgarly usable. But with no doubt he is perpetuating, he is immortalizing the same figures that Balthus did. Hinton is expressing the great meaning of Hamilton's artistic exploration, his heritage, which *"becomes a reflection on the fragility of youth, its transient beauty and the sadness of its loss."*<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> (Verwoert, 2001)

<sup>40</sup> (Hinton, 2016)

<sup>41</sup> (Jaunin, 2004) p. 23-24,

<sup>42</sup> (Przyłuska-Urbanowicz, 2015) p. 90

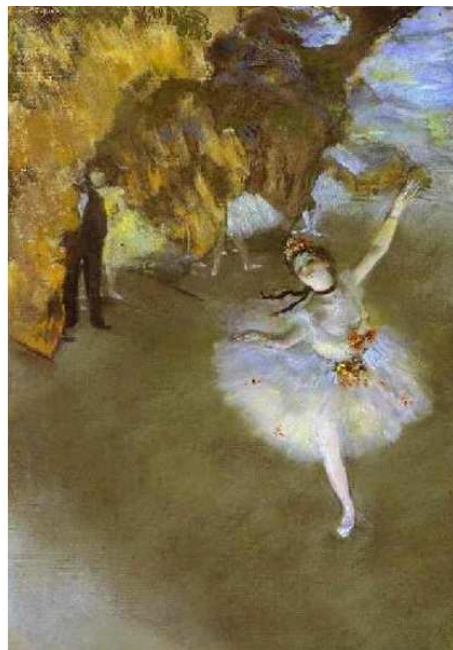
<sup>43</sup> (Hinton, 2016)



David Hamilton used to publish his works in "Twen" magazine. Innovative layout and liberal course that magazine had took, corresponded well with liberated scenes from his hazy dormitory. *"In 1961 Twen published its first color spread; right from the start a romantic, soft-focus technique was heavily in evidence. Preferred locations were the exotic (Java, Tahiti, Copacabana) and the atmospheric (romantic images of Paris in the autumn, white horses on the beach at dawn, nudes in a tropical waterfall), shot by a series of photographers that included Art Kane, Irving Penn and Will McBride. Everything was rendered in a dreamy haze of blurry color and back-lighting techniques, creating dazzling Impressionistic effects."*<sup>44</sup>

His associations with impressionists movement are deposited on intellectual step backwards, on negation of intellectual discourse in art. Both impressionism and Hamilton's "neo-romanticism" focuses on the exterior feeling, the transience of the moment, the mood, viewing angle, and first of all - lightning, the indispensable illumination.

There is one impressionist painter, whose heritage in very special way evokes Hamilton pictures. Edward Degas, because we speak about him, had a strong interest in adolescent hoofers. The special worship they both had for Ballet not surprise us. Flickering art of dancing queens must have arose a tender desire to froze the fleeting beauty, to capture the essence of their secret.



One of the great Hamilton's guru's was an Argentine, surrealist painter, Leonor Fini. Her very sensual art seems to be esoteric, showing those primordial states of human love, of Arcadian, sexual purity. It is an eroticism fighting with vulgar pornography, she is reducing human physicality to spiritual exultation. Eroticism deifying human intimacy. Hamilton, as it seems, took a great inspiration from her work. In such a context, here we are able to reveal maybe the only statement which emerges from David Hamilton's photography.

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<sup>44</sup> (Verwoert, 2001)

Showing the pictures of purity dancing with senses, pictures as fragile as creatures alongside them, he portrays the World deprived of any phallic violence. For Hamilton that is the basic measure of Utopia, he believes in. *"In August 1969, in a homage to Leonor Fini (whose paintings were reproduced alongside Hamilton's photographs), he staged a fashion shoot for Dior in a vintage train compartment with lace curtains."*<sup>45</sup> The series is a glary example (and I believe one of the very few) of the palpable correspondence of photographer with his predecessor.

*"Two (identical) androgynous models have fallen asleep; large floppy hats cover their eyes and the contours of their bodies dissolve in a mist of pastel colors. The subtitle reads: <A revolution of the witches and fairies, who embody sexuality, but still have nothing sexual about them>."*<sup>46</sup>

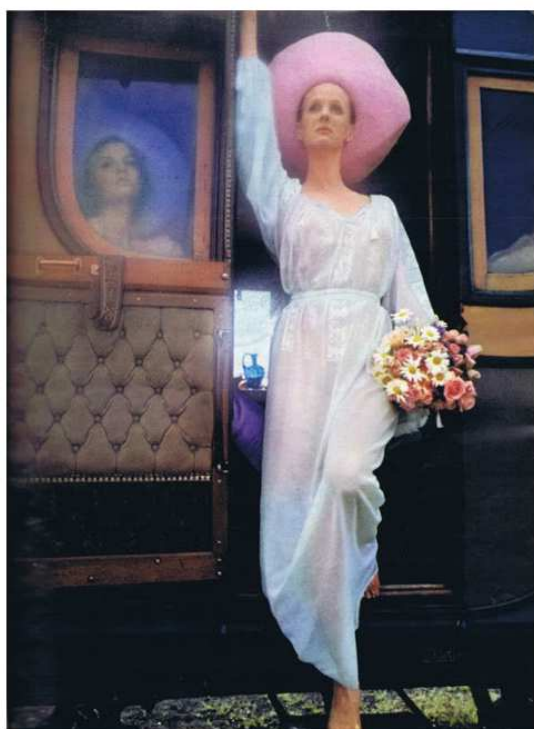
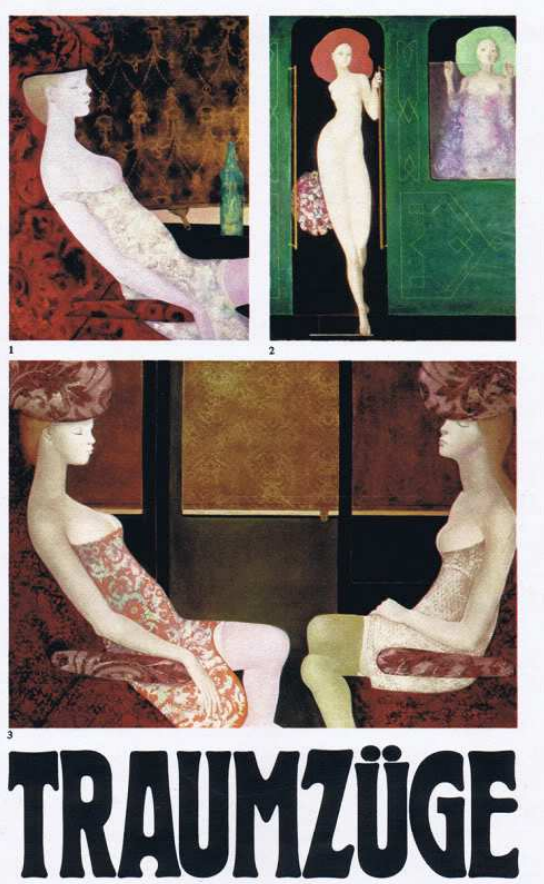
Those androgen faces, a return to the concept of Gnostic sorcery, physical power, metaphysical mystery, innocence intertwined with eroticism - it all brings to our mind the style of pre-Raphaelites painting and the Nordic type of a perfect women they were in love with. The stylistics of fashion photography of 70 took this kind of women as a exemplar of excellence.



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<sup>45</sup> (Verwoert, 2001)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



- **Nabokovian timelessness**

*Ubi amor, ibi oculus est*

With this Latin sentence Sally Mann starts one of a chapters of her recent memoir, in which number of pages fulfilled with the text is much bigger than number of photographs attached to it. Latin sentence means that where the love exists, there is also a power to see.

Sally Mann speaks about photography as the simple medium, for example much easier than literature. Even though she believes that it can express precisely motives, ostensibly attached to the writing. The common denominator for literary and photographic work is never ending hunting for transience. Transience and all its revelations, all its imponderables.

Sally Mann expressed very subtle truth, somehow dragging it into the light literally for the moment. What is hidden over sleepy moments of family life, suddenly bursts with magnificent clarity in those compositions frozen on a light-sensitive material, in those depictions of elusive haze of intimate experience.

When she succeeds in catching such a glimpse in a frozen frame of photography, she feels glad.



Under the picture entitled "Perfect tomato", she notes: *"A tenth of a second with the expansive, vertiginous properties of Nabokovian timelessness, while before me the brilliant angel no longer radiant with the sun snatches up the towel and heads to the beach..."*<sup>47</sup>

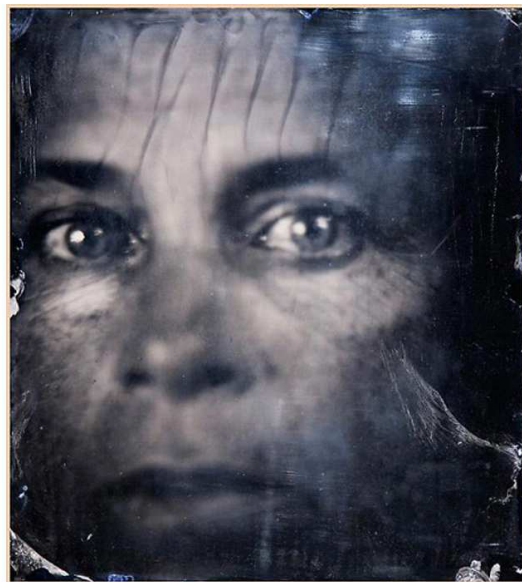
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<sup>47</sup> (Przytńska-Urbanowicz, 2015) p. 130



Vladimir Nabokov, is maybe the one who discretely, but mostly patronizes her in all her artistic foraging. Even if he is not in the number of people that she considers as her direct preceptors, I discover a secret bond between their aesthetics and discussed subjects. And that is not only working in the obvious field of representation (photographic or literal) of the nymphet, for which - however - they both gained the biggest fame. This kinship functions over all their achievements.

Vladimir Nabokov was especially interested in the phenomenon of seeing, and the studies of light, reflexion and representation, literary descriptions of what the things actually look like, it all takes a big part of his heritage. Motives of a young, seductive girls, but also the play with conventions in the field of each interests, the issues of death and metamorphosis - in writer's case metaphorically emphasized by butterflies time after time appearing in the text (We remember that Nabokov was also a well-known lepidopterologist), alternative realities and in the extension - dual personality problem, mockery, irony, provocation, erudition - all those issues and features are common for them both; significant for writer and for photographer. They operate with - so to say - same prefix, but extend it into the different forms. Their work is not variable, but for sure somehow supplementary.



There is also a surprising, somehow metaphysical similarity of motives used in nabokovian novels and situations from photographer's life. In particular place of her autobiography, at a very precise moment of her life time - crime and erudite blackmailer suddenly appears.<sup>48</sup> The man with the obsession of alliteration, literally deconstructs Sally's husband (Larry Mann) alter-names (he was a professor of philosophy in those days) in a deep need to prove their visible connection with suicide committed by Larry Mann's parents. So the play of words is supposed to decide about possible variations of facts, facts that could have determined all her life. The name and the word is a basic determinant of any action.

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<sup>48</sup> For example In Nabokov's "Lolita" - the Humbert's (main character) alter-ego - Quilty.

In Mann's, as well as in the Nabokov's work time is the secret not easy to reveal. They construct stories with strong reservoir of symbols of time passing and all its consequences. In "Memory - speak" Nabokov compares human life to light fissure (endlessly long, but infinitesimal) emanating of between two oceans of darkness. Eschatology is visible, touchable in every of Mann's picture, in every novel written by Nabokov. They both struggle with the questions of human final destinations. They show life in its most intense manifestations, but still in limbo, surrounded by darkness. They share elegant, discreet obsession with death. Passing time evokes upcoming horror of disappearance.



After that, somehow we can even think of Mann as a regular writer. Modesty and pride, certainty and doubt mixed maybe even too much in her novel-like memoir contain however all scale of literary attractiveness. The actual status of the author is not clear enough. She presents this *auto da fe* style of deep penetration of basic instincts, needs, beliefs and it all goes to general term of "sincere introversion", but the final outcome, the result remains in the form of the book, the novel, it is textual. So all of her past glances do not bring the explanation of what she really did as a photographer. She constitutes herself as a writer with ability of seeing, but not the photographer with the ability of writing, therefore we can call her work - quoting Urbanowicz - "optical treatment"<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> (Przyłuska-Urbanowicz, 2015) introduction

In the interview with Charlie Rose she speaks about her craft in which she feels very self-confident, but when it comes for explaining the choice of topic, she rings the bell of instinct, avoiding the answer for questions of reason. For what reason she has chosen such a theme to operate with? In many places she just admits that she was "absolutely certain" of what she does, and she was just following her strong beliefs.

- **The Good, The Bad and the Pretty**

*"I am a little like Flaubert - Sally Mann is saying - who when looked at a young girl saw the skeleton underneath. it's not morbid, it's just this awareness of antithetical aspect of every situation"<sup>50</sup>*

That is another very significant motive of Sally Mann Work. She is seeking ambiguity, or even prevarication. She constructs dualism, she exposes and highlights paradoxes, and emphasizes the opposites. Maybe it is the field, which mostly set her apart from Hamilton work. Because *in contrario* to what she said, in an interview with ..... he admits: *"Nudity and purity, sensuality and innocence, grace and spontaneity – we made contradictions of them. I try to harmonize them, and that's my secret, and the reason for my success"<sup>51</sup>*

So at the moment where she would place a disturbing question mark, he is filling the picture with the blissful, sensual uniqueness.

Ambiguity of Sally Mann images lies in the fact that she depicts children outside of the convention of sin, guilt and punishment, outside of standardized collection of children attributes. From the creatures with the children's bodies - demons are lurking. Demons not subject to social conventions. Treatment so similar to a trick from Nabokov novel "Ada or Ardour", where a pair of children-cousins perform a fiery romance outside the watchful eye of social control. At the same time - in the intellectual and - what is obvious - in biological field functioning just like adults. (And that is an euphemism, if we examine all their unbelievable erudition, intelligence and perversity)

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<sup>50</sup> (Rose, 2003)

<sup>51</sup> (Baetens, 1995) p. 110-115



If in Mann's case this ambiguity as such is warming the biggest controversy, Hamilton is shocking us with his attitude of explicitness and abruptness of his portraits. There is nothing secret about the meaning of the pictures, nothing dialectical. What is the secret, hardly bearable secret - is the subject of depiction. The Eden-rooted girl, or two, in bucolic, heavenly soft interiors, in the light out of this world. Those pictures are literally overcrowded with sensual love. In the case of this footage, this heritage, such sentence - used humorously - express however the essence of accusation. The World created by photographer vulnerability is getting so far away from any realistic content that for some people it starts to be clearly outrageous. Hamilton's beauty is so simple, so pure, so innocent, so perfect, so unaffected, and so safe - that for some reasons it starts to be simply disgusting.

Although we look into seductive eyes of appealing, dangerously young black angels from Sally Mann's world, or we inspect, embedded in the sunny haze, bodies of Hamilton's nymphs, we feel the same rapture delight of intercourse with beauty, beauty shown in two almost opposing variants.

- **Camp style movie**

*"From the clothes of the Nina Companéez in film *Faustine et le Bel Été*, 1972, set in a French summer, through to the dreamy mystery of Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging rock*, popular culture echoed the Hamilton style."<sup>52</sup> He was directing his movies as if their content odd to develop and fictionalize World of his photography, to complement it and explain. It would seem this will always strive to failure, as if the language of narration functioned only as impaired exegesis, it was a *"rape on the picture"*<sup>53</sup> how Urbanowicz says. His movies hallmarks in particular wouldn't withstand the criticism of modernity, but together they form an image of sentimental return to 70se - surprisingly authentic and significant to modern viewer expectations concerning the past. All the vexations of contemporary viewer more than easily can shift to the affirmation, if only we feed them with the conviction of cult status of particular piece.*

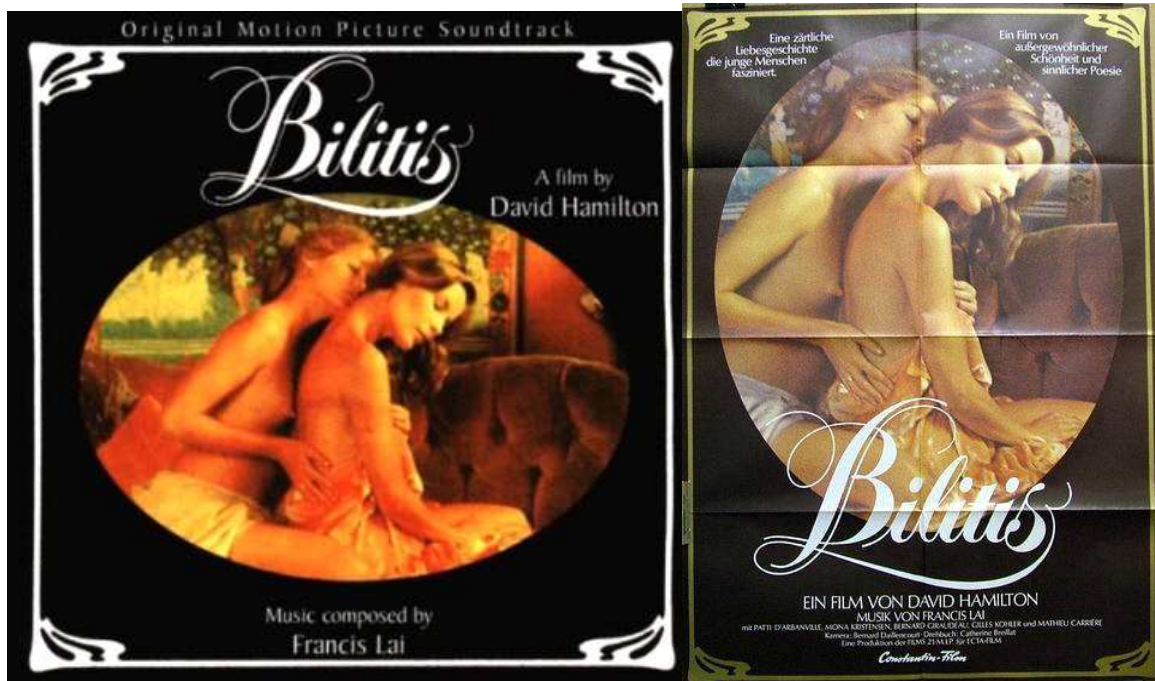
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<sup>52</sup> (Hinton, 2016)

<sup>53</sup> (Przyłuska-Urbanowicz, 2015) p. 75

What decide about this cult status, undeniable in Hamilton case? Maybe the best example of such phenomenon in general history of cinematography was the story of Ed Wood, the film director. He was directing low-budget horror stories, westerns and in the end - to earn money - some stinky porn movies. Despite his achievements, widely considered as tragically bad, after his death - fame of his movies started to grow. (Lately his character was recklessly played by Hollywood star Johnny Depp in biographical movie by Tim Burton) Something initially recognized as holdover, suddenly reflects a new tendencies and comes back into the favor.

Hamilton movies, ahead with "Bilitis", the primary one, have passed a somewhat different way. Firstly, during the 70s( Hamilton's years of glory) they were ecstatically admired. *"This idyll is captured in the key sequence of the film: the scene of Bilitis caressing Melissa. This was the image used on the poster accompanying the soundtrack of the film, and became an essential element in the decoration of teenagers' bedrooms during the late 1970s."*<sup>54</sup>



When the era of admiration has ended, movies (and photographs, of course) done by Hamilton became a weapon in the hands of his adversaries. For long years they were synonymous to notions of worst taste kitsch. Hamilton did not escape not only artistic, but also political accusations. The girls of his films, exultant in so infantile way - to the left-wing intellectuals - appeared as vivid characters of unacceptable, chauvinist vision of the world. (How we guess, completely opposite to what Hamilton actually wanted to say)

<sup>54</sup> (Verwoert, 2001)

What is this all about? Those are the movies, which "sublimate their sexual content as an erotic art form?"<sup>55</sup> In his dreamy stylistics Hamilton-director specialized in telling the stories of complicated love affairs, translating complicated sexual relationships, and all in accompaniment of poetic, golden light. He also had this strong, audacious conviction of creating himself the real pieces of art.

*"Naturally, this aspiration to 'high' art, as well as the strong presence of the decor, means that Hamilton's images appeal to Camp taste. This is aestheticism out of control: a whole world transformed into a soft-focus fantasy."*<sup>56</sup>, how Verwoert is analyzing.

Indeed, Camp sensibility explains the attractiveness of Hamilton opus in the most comprehensive way. It is being defined as aesthetic, stylistic convention, assigning a value to things because they are in bad taste, or because of their ironic pronunciation. As part of the anti-academic defense of popular culture in the 60th century, camp aesthetics became popular with widespread postmodern views on culture. Here, however in Hamilton case, Camp belligerence recedes into the background.

When the turbulence of opposing reviews ceased, only the movie remained. Movie, how it goes, done in so recognizable style, that now simply indispensable. Movie, that has remained as the most perfect location for sentiments, for memories of era, and for all abandoned lusts.

## **5. CONCLUSION. BATTLE OF LOLITAS**

Photographs that should have touched the problem or maybe rather the gift of sexuality often stay in opposition to what is decent in public opinion. Great loudness around Sally Mann publications is not accidental. This is the result of small revolution she provoked, of destroying the status quo of what can be portrayed, destroying however in very sophisticated way. She committed her own children to work to the glory of the fine arts. Surprising how professional was the cooperation between people who were respectively the parent and children, but worked as the basic arranger / director / photographer surrounded by full-time acting masters.

Roles, that Sally Mann transcribed for her children where played in a disturbingly perfect manner. Art and artifice not accidentally operate with the same prefix. If we look directly at heroes of those pictures, we will find a truth exceeding beyond any acting craft, any acting perfection, any artificiality at all.

Seemingly, the publication of David Hamilton "Age of Innocence" provoked some explosive protests of Christian Organizations. He unwillingly get into one war path with two enemies. For women rights activists he impersonated style of feminine objectification, for Christians he showed nothing more, nothing less, but documentation of children abuse. Some of the pictures, strictly sexual and obviously showing adolescents in sort of mechanical context, were also far away of trends in this kind of photography. To point as even Larry Clarke, with his series concerning some important issues of life of teenagers<sup>57</sup>, who was not being exposed to any of those critics, who found Hamilton meaningly outdated and simply deleterious.

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<sup>55</sup> (Verwoert, 2001)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> „Teenage lust“, Larry Clark

Sally Mann was not prudent at all. With all her juggling perversity she was fixing the fiction of misunderstanding. *"In my arrogance and certitude that everyone surely must see the work as I did, I left myself wide-open to journalism's greatest hazard: quotes lacking context or the sense of irony or self-depreciating humor with which they had been delivered."*<sup>58</sup>

Neither Mann, nor Hamilton stood anyhow watchful, conservative or simply modest. They both were certain of what they did and in a way highly arrogant. They both had something very special to say and they both were not properly understood. Discussion was fought more about the scope of photographers creative freedom, and less about photographed creatures, that he or she turned into legitimate nymphets.

*"Clichés tell us that fame is a prize that burns the winner"*

Ineed it often works. It works also with Hamilton case. In fact it really expresses what happened with him, but - how we can guess - it is just a play of words in Mann case, while she still receives reviews from most prestige art magazines and still place her position on the top of contemporary arts. In contrary to Hamilton she is not forgotten at all. Loudness of discussion is passing away, but what remains is her constituted fame. Even if we admit that the pick of her popularity was situated in middle of nineties, however she is still on a high point of interest in many circles. Her last memoir publication functioned as some kind of an intellectual event.

Hamilton created, imagined, portrayed Worlds so esthetically convincing, that the author was literally burned by his own child. In the context of this great success and even greater lose, we need to call his heritage sensual, but not intellectual at all. In the times of loud intellectual discourse, his work, pure as if done by illiterate, could not have been defended. His photographs were being watched through the calque of material reality. And chimerical effect of this comparison seemed to be shameful, unsavory, groundless, outdated, simultaneously anachronistic and subversive. In the times of politically engaged art, Bourgeois postcards out of this World, simply couldn't stand on the surface. There was no place for such a sweetness, when the bitter, political reflection was gaining its apogee. The world of teen age sexuality simply couldn't have been included in such a bucolic, fairytale form.

From my personal point of view, there is a one criterion to probe their photography. Criterion of reverie, in which I can fall, when I watch what they are showing to me. When I am around Hamilton girls, I feel imprudent vacuity. When Sally Mann children surround me, there is a fear and constantly growing admiration. Admiration close to the ravishment. Nevertheless we don't have to judge who of them stood a little closer to a place, which can be named artistic Olimp. We never can tell, because every deconstruction shifts slowly to become just one more attempt of interpretation.

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<sup>58</sup> (Mann, Hold Still, 2015) p. 157

## 6. LIST OF REPRODUCTIONS

Page 5: "Wet bad", Sally Mann, 1987

Page 6: "Body farm", Sally Mann, 2001; "Southern Landscapes" 1992-1996

Page 7: "Body farm", Sally Mann, 2001

Page 9: David Hamilton: 3 untitled pictures from "Dreams of a young girl", 1971

Page 10: Untitled picture from "Age of Innocence", 1995

Page 11: Dorothea Lange, "Damaged child", 1936; Sally Mann, "Damaged child", 1984

Page 12: Sally Mann, "Bloody nose", 1985

Page 13: Sally Mann, <Immediate Family> cover picture: Emmet, Jessie and Virginia, 1989

Page 15: Sally Mann, "Two girls sitting under the three", 1991

Page 16: Sally Mann, untitled, 1983

Page 18: Cy Twombly, 3 paintings: Rose I, Rose II, Rose III, 2008

Page 20: David Hamilton, Untitled picture, 1968; Balthus, "The Golden Years", 1945

Page 21: Edgar Degas, "Prima ballerina", 1876; David Hamilton, "La danseuse, homage a Degas", 1992

Page 22: Gabriel Dante Rossetti, "Lady Lilith", 1868

Page 23: Eleonr Fini: 3 paintings of "Le train" series, 1965; David Hamilton: Fashion shoot for Dior, 1969

Page 24: Sally Mann, "Perfect tomato", 1990

Page 25: Portrait of Vladimir Nabokov by Philippe Halsman, 1968; Sally Mann self portrait, 2006-2012

Page 26: Sally Mann, "Jesse and the deer", 1985

Page 27: Sally Mann, "Candy cigarette", 1989

Page 28: David Hamilton, poster for movie "Bilits" and the cover for music compilation from the movie, 1977



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