

A photograph of a hallway. In the foreground, a wooden chair with a curved back is centered. To the left, a tall, thin, bare tree in a dark cylindrical pot stands against a white wall. The hallway leads into a darker room where a person is visible in the distance. Sunlight streams in from the right, casting shadows on the floor. The text 'Borgo Portrait Booth' is overlaid in white serif font, and 'Photography as Conversation as Community Building' is overlaid in a smaller white serif font below it.

# Borgo Portrait Booth

Photography as Conversation as Community Building

P e t e r N y l u n d



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Photography as Conversation as Community  
Building

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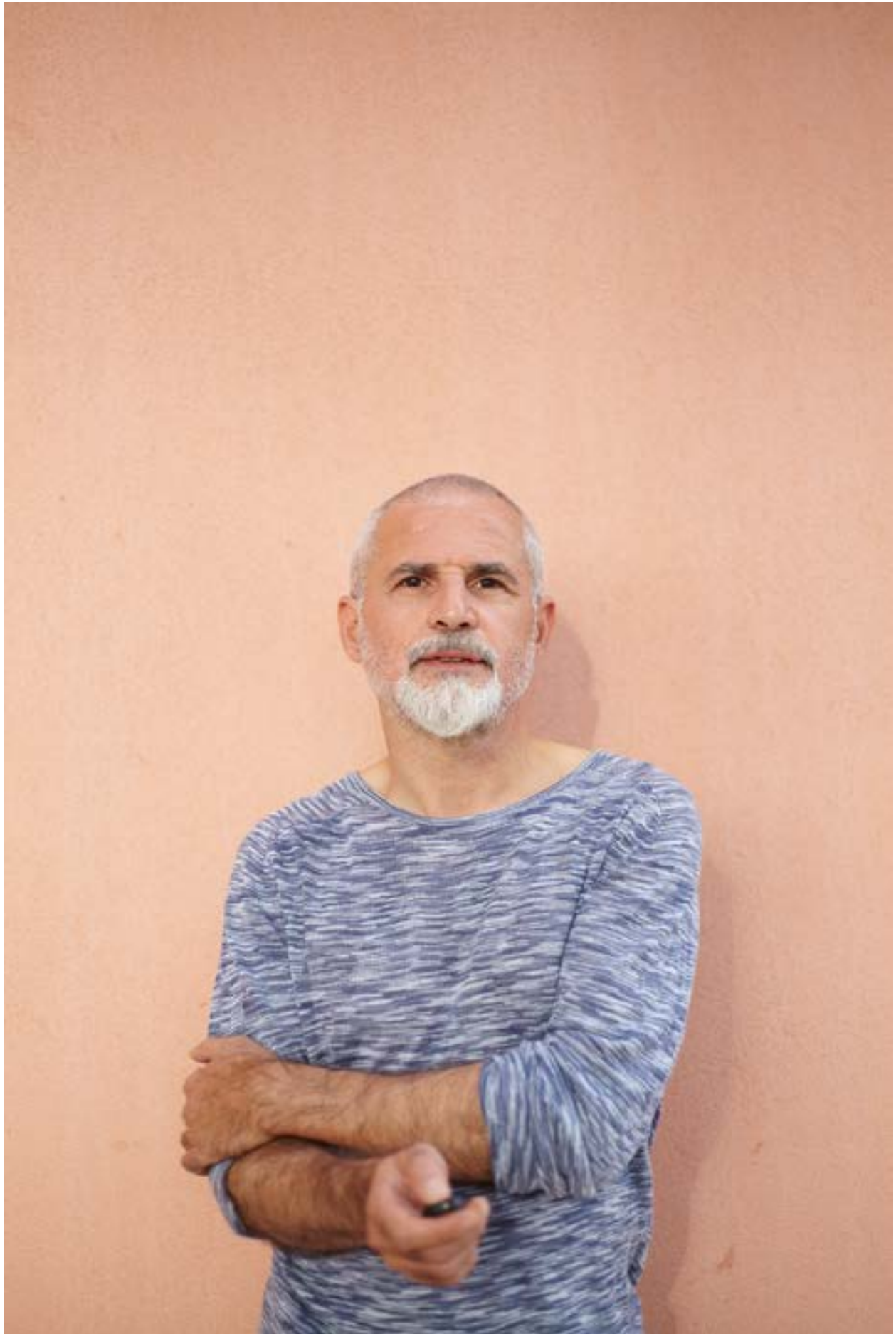


In the first iteration of the Difficult Heritage Summer School in 2021, I started to think about how I could further my prior master thesis work in the politics of the photograph and the power relations that are inherent in the photographic situation when interacting with the Borgo and the community that we were building in, around and alongside it. The techniques that I sought to develop further aims to disturb the order and the relationship between photographer and sitter, and moves the photographer from behind the camera and hands over the famed and crucial “decisive moment” to the photographic subject. Being highly aware that the term “photographic subject” is tinged with colonial overtones, its use here can be seen as an acknowledgement of the intricate relationship between the camera, photographic practice and coloniality, which this work ultimately is seeking to counter. With this set of power-sharing techniques, the photographer’s role becomes one more of a conversation partner, a technician and co-director, as the portraits are made in- and through conversation with the sitter. From demonstrating to the sitter how the technique is to be performed, to giving examples of postures if needed as an act of knowledge-sharing, the role of the photographer is renegotiated and re-evaluated. In Borgo Rizza, I had to answer how I could employ this method at a larger scale than I had managed previously, which had been limited to one person, one day, in an environment I had significant if almost not total, control over. How would the method change when taken away from the safe confines of the photographer’s studio, and set up in a temporary public space? (The term “public” here understood as “a public” being created in and through the Summer School interventions.) And how could I, in the absence of relying on studio strobes, best respond to the shifting lighting conditions as the day(s) moved on?

During these first interventions into the Borgo in September 2021, I experimented with the employment of this method in order to document the faces, persons and personalities of who were involved and was willing to participate in making their portrait together with me. I limited myself at this time to a small group of local community participants from the Car-lentini area with which I had established contact during the week and some trust through familiarity was present. I was seeking to give greater freedom of expression to each person sitting in front of the camera and to hand over more control in the creation of their image to all who wanted to participate. I learned that my approach can be considered with suspicion by many, since the photographer's role and prescribed behavior is broken with.














# 2022

To further this investigation, during the second Summer School in September 2022, I set up a provisional “photo booth” inside the old school building at Borgo Rizza. This old school building became the focal point for my research over this week, and I engaged with it in different ways, and thought much about it, its history, and the possibility for uses that could break with the intentions it was first built with.

The use of the old school building in our intervention(s) interested me a lot, and it seemed that to use it as an exhibition space was highly appropriate for the Summer School, since The Difficult Heritage Summer School exists and operates in the tension between the university and the search for alternative and formerly/currently disavowed forms of knowledge. This choice of building laid bare these tensions without trying to “solve” them, but let them become visible. Further, if we look at “the school” as a place of indoctrination into (no matter what political color or wing may control the agenda at the moment, a school is, sociologically speaking, a place where the values of the country and culture is taught to children) and transmittance of the currently prevailing society’s norms and standards, then symbolically the use of this building for hosting a showcase of our ongoing research and to hold workshops aiming to decouple from the ideas that was the purpose of the building in the first place, can be seen as highly appropriate. Maybe even subversive.



A photograph of a narrow hallway in an old school building. The hallway is dimly lit, with the primary light source being a window at the far end. The window has a dark green frame and is divided into four panes. To the left, a white door is slightly ajar. To the right, there is a tall, narrow white cabinet or partition. The walls are a light, neutral color, and the floor appears to be a dark, polished material. The overall atmosphere is quiet and somewhat somber.

As my contribution in creating this discursive exhibition, after a few attempts in different places inside the old school building, I chose to set up in the end of a narrow hallway, with one window as the only source of light, to be the place for this intervention in photographic portraiture. This after having tried to stage the “photo booth” inside the main exhibition hall among the other works being shown, to gain more focus and a somewhat greater sense of privacy for the persons sitting in front of the camera.









































































































A sense of trust between myself and the sitter had to be built up in a matter of seconds, or if time permitted, a few minutes, and this forced me to give myself completely to the process. When a new person approaches the booth, I have a few seconds to make them feel safe and relaxed. Then the coaching part begins. Some were satisfied after only very few presses of the shutter, others took significantly longer time to work out and put forth the image of themselves that they want to showcase. The method is therefore not suitable for a larger-scale intervention as it was this time, but is rather much more useful when employed at a smaller, and thus more intimate, level.



