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English Composition I: Achieving Expertise

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Photograph - "Tragedy in Turkey by an explosion in a mine" by AFP and Infobae. 14/5/2014.

Mamihlapinatapai<sup>1</sup>: The Experts' Gaze

*They were married yesterday  
Two lovers danced the night away  
Words could never touch what their eyes convey  
No, words cannot touch what their eyes say  
Mamihlapinatapai, mamihlapinatapai, mamihlapinatapai  
Ronny Cox, 2004 (Cox)*



Figure 1. (AFP) Infobae. 14/5/2014. Photograph of the tragedy in the coalmine of Soal in Turkey. The snapshot captures the moment when a mineworker comes out from the mine using equipment to aid him in breathing and while a man kiss him.

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<sup>1</sup> From Yagan (Zárraga and Saiter Muñoz), the indigenous language of the Tierra del Fuego region of South America. This word, Mamihlapinatapai, of difficult meaning and considered as the "The most challenging word for any lexicographer to define briefly" (Matthews and McWhirter 392), has been translated in several ways always implying a wordless yet meaningful glance shared by two (see (Camilla) for an example.) Nowadays, Cristina Calderon is the last native speaker of the language Yagan and declared "Living Human Treasure," within the framework of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 2003.

An explosion occurred last Tuesday 13 May inside the coal mine of Soma, in the State of Manisa in western Turkey, resulting in —while these lines are being written— 302 dead bodies. Infobae (AFP) —an Argentine news agency— published a graphic report of several images and this essay has interest on one photograph from that set (see [figure 1]). The snapshot will give support to the idea of expertise, but is compulsory to say that the report honors the victims and families despite the covered subject.

The figure 1 is a documentary photograph that record an instant of the event in which the background is largely blurred with plenty of people without conformation while two characters, that are frontal and center aligned, fit in the foreground. The first wears a helmet as well as a mask to breathe oxygen and the face, wholly covered with soot, shows a disconcerting glance. We presume he is a mineworker getting out alive from the excavation after the explosion. The second person is affectionately holding and kissing to the miner, perhaps, is a relative or a friend; again, we guess that is a loved one. Both characters spread horizontally into a well-lit scene with reflectors that light up, from back and left, the outdoor working zone and give to the whole scene a sturdy texture, sharp contour from the backlight, strong contrast from lateral glare, full colored and dramatic impression.

Within the snapshot befalls a couple of ideas that are a substantive quota of the image. They are an essential part to understand this specific photograph and are going to provide help in, understanding that with the expert's photographic work one views the image and additionally one can visualize something shared with the author, that somehow both realize it through the gaze. The first is the miner's shocking look submerged so deep at the distance. We understand that though the coalminer is by now released from the inferno inside the mine after the

explosion, he still prisoner of such a terrifying experience. The second is the moment when the impetuous loved one gives a strong hug and a tight kiss once he can reach the mineworker outside the mortal coal face. We embark on the idea of an agonizing wait to see the loved one alive. These two simultaneous happenings contrast sharply with each other as a counterpoint<sup>2</sup> between the two experiences. The former is the immediate result of the horror experienced inside the mine. While the latter is the result of living, day after day, waiting for a loved one returns home from a dangerous job susceptible to take them away at whatever time.

Those shines, those approaches, those felling; they all appearing together inside a tiny piece of frozen time. How is there so much within so little? The notion of expert merges two concepts; experience and knowledge (Merriam-Webster; Wordnet) though, I will argue that is necessary something more to add to the experience and to the knowledge to understand the complete sense of skillful in photography.

We can all recognize at a look, that the author of the showed photograph has made an excellent snapshot. Additionally, and without much effort, we could also say that the photographer knows these arts. He verified lots of experience to know where to find the right place to focus his camera just when the rescued miner gets out and with an extensive knowledge of the lenses and depth of field to capture any vestige of light that contributes to the strength of the image that we have observed.

So far, all this cumulus of expertise and knowledge is no guarantee to make us visualize the prison where the miner was or envision the anguish experienced by the loved one in his interminable wait to reunite with the mineworker. Jonathan Schroeder (Schroeder 208) state

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<sup>2</sup> Musical form involving the simultaneous sound of two or more melodies.

“Photographs represent the gaze through subject matter and its relationship to the viewer and photographer.” The author of [figure 1], an expert photographer, has had the ability to make us accomplices of his own gaze, showing the story beyond what the image tell. This extra is what we needed before to complete the idea of expert. Now we know that what we needed was the enhancement given by Mamihlapinatapai “...”

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