ENG365 – Assignment One

Short Analysis of *La Brava, (*pp. 141-42)

There is an interesting clash of perspectives presented in this passage. From the perspective of the art critics it seems advantageous to use the photographs to leverage them into a position of high society. Jean Shaw and LaBrava provide counterexamples to each other in representations of authenticity and originality in art and high culture. Their dialogue explores the conflict between perspectives vs. reality as artists being defined by their medium, and their assumed intention.

This passage says a lot about perspective when viewing art. The gallery viewers that LaBrava quotes are the embodiment of artistic pretension, ‘It’s obvious he sees his work as an exorcism, his forty days in the desert’ comparing his photographs to epic moments from the bible, attributing millenniums of interpretation through moments of observation. Through their critiques they prove to be in the service of the commenter, rather than for LaBrava, elevating themselves in social standings through false insights and seemingly deep intellect. Similarly the quote from the paper, ‘The aesthetic subtext of his work is the systematic exposure of artistic pretension’ illustrates the hypocrisy in over-assuming an artist’s intention. Analyzing LaBrava’s photo as the rejection of pretentious artistry with pretentious vocabulary completely voids the statement of authenticity. When LaBrava makes the statement “I thought I was just taking pictures,” he embodies the antithesis of unauthentic art and culture, responding in a way that reflects upon his subjects as unassuming and regular.

LaBrava contrasts the certainty of the art critics in both of his quotes by adding  “or somebody” after the quote. This small addition discredits the statement to a degree that makes it more approachable and just average. LaBrava wants to represent the circumstance that he photographs, but in a way that is original. As Jean Shaw questions the meaning behind his photos, he in a tone of slight sarcasm quotes Walker Evans, however through the comments of the critics seems to be attracted to the same subjects, and in a way explains the tone of sarcasm and distaste that he develops through his dialogue with Jean Shaw. LaBrava represents the perspective of artists who respect originality and authenticity.

Jean Shaw is the vehicle of inauthenticity that, through her interrogation, allows LaBrava to expose his perspective on art culture. There is a tone of uncertainty that is set by Jean Shaw attempting to attribute purpose behind LaBrava’s photos as emphasized by her pause; “Simplicity. It is what it is.” Then paused. “And what it isn’t, too. Is that what you’re saying?” She is searching for what LaBrava wants to hear; she is just like the subjects of LaBrava’s photos, “They try to pose, and not knowing how they reveal themselves.” She is posing, and reveals her intention to please rather than pose an original, or perhaps unpopular thought. This becomes ironic as it becomes clear through the vocabulary of LaBrava that what he wants is authenticity. There is a air of humour the comes from Jean Shaw’s analysis of his photos as she comments, “some of them look like actors. I mean like they’re made up, costumed.” Which he replies, “I know what you mean.” LaBrava makes it very clear that he is referring to the artificiality behind the artistic critiques of his work. LaBravas attitude towards her comments become explicit as he thinks ‘He didn’t want her to try so hard.’ As she continues to question him about the meaning behind his

photos, he responds with only motives of simple technique: ‘No tricky angles.’ If beauty is art in the service of nothing, then he is trying to explore what it means to be beautiful. Through LaBrava’s perspective real beauty is represented as being without ulterior motives and intent.

To LaBrava it’s about how one is perceived, from the language and tone of the man who said, ‘I think he takes pictures to make a buck and anything else is fringe.’ LaBrava was perceived to be to taking photos either for money, or for the sake of taking photos, by a man that resembles the subjects of his photos. This meets his definition of beauty and draws resemblance to Walker Evans. This is strengthened, as it is said as counter to an art critic, who has called him ‘dispossessed, and unassimilated,’ which from his perspective missed the point of his work. Finally ending the section, “I would’ve kissed the guy, but it might have ruined his perspective.” The differing perspectives of this man, Jean Shaw, the art critics, and LaBrava allow for the exploration of the reality of beauty and art. The clashing perspectives of high vs. low society, and necessity vs. purpose explain the need for authenticity in art; being in the service of one's self, and ultimately the appreciation of beauty.   
 This passage illustrates the complex perspective that LaBrava offers on the subject of interpreting artistic works, finding appreciation in beauty without motive. This is also contrasted with the perspectives of Jean Shaw, through her interrogation she exposed her interest in having the most appeasing ideas and as a result her flaw of unoriginal opinions, really playing as a reflection of LaBrava’s photographs. These varying perspectives allow for a deeper understanding of the reality of LaBrava’s world, and his interpretation of beauty.

“They say, ‘His work is a compendium of humanity’s defeat at the hands of venture capital.’

“They say, ‘It’s obvious he sees his work as an exorcism, his forty days in the desert.’ Or another one, ‘they’re self-portraits. He sees himself as dispossessed, unassimilated.’

“The review in the paper said, ‘The aesthetic subtext of his work is the systematic exposure of artistic pretension.’ I thought I was just taking pictures.”

Jean Shaw said, “Simplicity. It is what it is.” Then paused. “And what it isn’t, too. Is that what you’re saying?”

He didn’t want her to try so hard. “I heard one guy at the gallery—it was his wife or somebody who said I was dispossessed, unassimilated, and the guy said, “I think he takes pictures to make a buck and anything else is fringe.’ I would’ve kissed the guy, but it might have ruined his perspective.”

Jean Shaw said, studying a print, “They try to pose, and not knowing how they reveal themselves.”

He liked that, that wasn’t bad.

“Your style is the absence of style. Would you say?”

He said, “No tricky angles.”

“Some of them look like actors. I mean like they’re made up, costumed.”

“I know what you mean.”

“When you’re shooting them, what do you see?”

“What do I see? I see what I’m shooting. I wonder if I have enough light. Or too much.”

“Come on. Tell me.”

“I see ‘images whose meanings exceed the local circumstance that provides their occasion.’”

“Who said that?”

“Walker Evans. Or somebody who said he did.”

*La Brava,* pp. 141-42