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REFLECTIONS ON PORTRAITURE: UNIFYING THE FACE AND PLURALIZING PERSONALITY

Hans Belting's book *Face and Mask: A Double History* (2017) deals with the face as a history of images and objects, that of the portrait and of masks.¹ The portrait is considered as a representation of the face and the mask as a "facsimile, a disguise and a means of concealing the face."² Still, it is strange that 'portrait' is not part of the title as 'mask' is; for they both relate to the face, albeit in different ways. Although seen as a representation of the face and not as a real face, the distinction between them is not really clear as if focusing on the face means automatically the study of the portrait. Portraits are seen as the result of an interpretation of the face. The reality of the face, however, is a given as, in the words of Sigrid Weigel: "a medium of expression, self-representation, and communication."³ Belting refers to Georges Didi-Huberman, who warns against any "'history of the face' restricted to a historical grammar of facial expression." According to Didi-Huberman, the difference between face and image recapitulates the difference between presence and representation, for representation implies that the face itself is absent."⁴ Belting's objection is as follows:

¹ H. Belting, *Face and Mask. A Double History*, trans. by Th.S. Hansen and A.J. Hansen, Princeton and Oxford 2017.

² Ibidem, p. 3.

³ S. Weigel, quoted in Belting, *Face and Mask*, p. 3; "Das Gescicht als Artefact", *Trajek-te* 2012, 25, pp. 5–12.

⁴ G. Didi-Huberman, "La Grammaire, le chahut, le silence: Pour une anthropologie de visage". In *de Loisy*, 1992, pp. 15–55, pp. 23.

And yet the living face produces an expressive or masklike representation in order to show or conceal the self. Human beings engage in the representation of their own faces. Thus, we all embody a role in life.⁵

This objection demonstrates how Belting conceptually conflates the face with the portrait (and the mask). The face is not considered as a presence but as a representation, like the portrait and the mask.

In this paper I will not consider the face as a representation of the self but as a presence. I will not reflect on the face as a subject's self-representation, but as living objects we look at and relate to. For artists who make (self)portraits do that by looking at faces or in the mirror at their own face. I will first ask the question what one sees when one looks at a face. This implies a phenomenological approach of the face instead of an art-historical one. Although art history does not exclude a phenomenological approach, the starting point is here not the image but the face: I will not try to better understand the image through phenomenology, but I will try to understand the difficulty of looking at faces and how portraits help us do that. This brings with it a deconstruction of conventional notions of the portrait, because this approach imposes the conclusion that the portrait differs fundamentally from other image genres. The image is always secondary in relation to what it represents; the portrait is, however, primary, because it is only in the portrait that we see someone's face for the first time as a unity.

Next, I will pay attention to diverse examples of photographic portraiture to deconstruct further conventional notions of portraiture, especially the role of likeness and the idea that a successful portrait captures the authentic personality of the portrayed person.

Portraits scrounge on reality, for they are not images in which we recognize what is familiar to us. When we accept this bold statement, it means that a similarity between the portrayed face or person and the portrait is not the central criterion based on which we should evaluate portraits. A successful portrait *makes* a face, and it does this for the first time because we never see a face as unified, for we cannot look at faces like we do at objects, a view, or a landscape. In their book *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that a face is always a 'pierced surface'. The gaze that looks at us from a face is not the expression of the soul, not a clear image of a subject or subjectivity, but the presence of nothing/nobody, of a presence without identity. This is why the gaze as the center of the face is a kind of black hole, a pierced and perforated surface.⁶

⁵ Belting, *Face and Mask*, p. 5.

⁶ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword by B. Massumi, Minneapolis 1987; see especially chapter 7: *Year Zero: Faciality*.

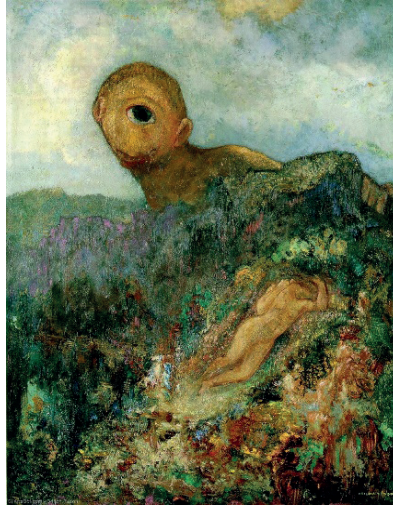
This phenomenology of the face explains that when we try to look at both eyes in a face, we soon get lost, we see one eye, a nose, the mouth or other parts of the face. It is impossible to focus on the face as such, and this impossibility makes the face attractive or fascinating, but also protects it against the gaze of others. For Deleuze and Guattari the face is like a black hole, but Belgian philosopher Bart Verschaffel has argued that the face in fact consists of two black holes.⁷ The mythical figure of the cyclops is so effectively enchanting because it has only one eye. The face is much more confusing and more difficult to focus on than a cyclops. Because the face has two eyes, the gaze that looks at them wanders over the face instead of being drawn into it, into the black hole that is.

Odilon Redon's painting *The Cyclops* demonstrates very well negatively the problem of how to look at faces (ill. 1). Because the giant creature called cyclops has only one eye, it is much easier to focus on it. His one eye is the only center of this face, which enables the viewer to see the whole face in one glance. The photographic portrait by Dutch artist Juul Kraijer, in contrast, has three black holes and makes the impossibility of looking at the face more emphatic. The wandering gaze goes from one hole to the next and, thus, this looking takes time without coming to a closure (ill. 2).

While the face is never visible in its entirety, in a successful portrait the face comes to a synthesis. In the portrait, the dispersed face is unified. In that respect, the genre of the portrait differs fundamentally from other image genres. The image is always secondary in relation to what it represents; the portrait is, however, as I said before, primary, because it is only in the portrait that we see someone's face for the first time as unity.

The portraits of Francis Bacon by French artist Yves Oppenheim are a good example of a face that has not yet been fully unified into a portrait (ill. 3). The gaze that looks at Bacon's face is still wandering and, as a result, the two eyes are very different, located at different levels of the face. While looking at these portraits, it is extremely difficult to focus; one's eye keeps wandering from side or eye, from one to the other. Although it clearly belongs to the genre of the portrait, it shows the making of the portrait not as painterly process but as a wandering gaze that seeks to focus on the face and unify it. The fact that Oppenheim made three portraits of Bacon suggests that he was aware of his failure to unify his face. Though not as clear and emphatic as Oppenheim's Bacon portrait, a similar kind of observation is sometimes made regarding Dürer's famous self-portrait, now housed in Munich. While the whole composition and especially Dürer's face is utterly symmetrical, the two eyes are

⁷ B. Verschaffel, *What Artistry Can Do. Essays on Art and Beauty*, Edinburgh 2022.



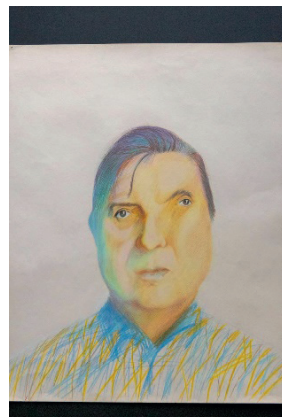
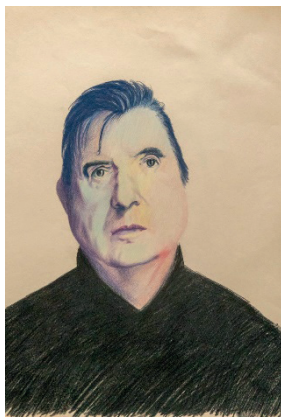
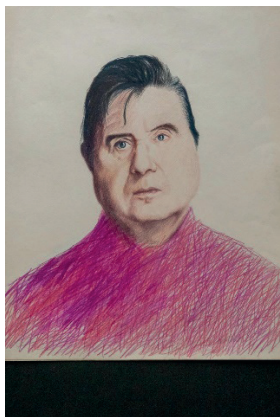
1. Odilon Redon, *The Cyclops*, 1914, oil on canvas, 65,8 × 52,7 cm, collection Kröller Muller Museum, Otterloo



2. Juul Kraijer, *Untitled*, 2016, photograph, 16,5 x 12,5 cm, courtesy of the artist

slightly different. When one imagines Dürer looking at his own face in a mirror, focusing first at one eye and then the other, one immediately understands the difference between looking at a face and making a portrait of that face.

It is especially in photographic portraiture that one can recognize specific devices that enable the unification of the face into a portrait. Looking through



3. Yves Oppenheim, Three portraits of Francis Bacon, 1974, crayon on paper, 45,2 x 32 cm, collection Antoine Rozes, Paris

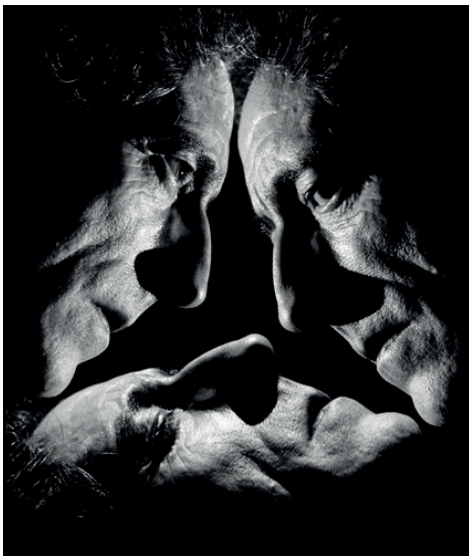
a camera is emblematic of the difficulty of looking at a face; the camera may frame the face, but it is not yet clear where the eye of the photographer should focus. It is impossible to focus on the whole face, so the devices used in photographic portraiture help the viewer to do so. A good example is the photo Man Ray made of Jean Cocteau (ill. 4). Having met him in late 1921 in Paris,



4. Man Ray, portrait of Jean Cocteau, photograph, 1921, 12,1 x 9,6 cm, courtesy of the Man Ray Trust Archive, New York

Cocteau became one of Man Ray's first portrait subjects, who made this photograph in the drawing room of the house where Cocteau lived with his mother. However, it was Cocteau's suggestion to place himself centrally within the picture frame; his portrait thus echoes the sculpted portrait behind him. The literal framing of Cocteau's head shows the unification of the face that takes place in portraiture. In particular, when the face is in the center of the frame, it directs the gaze of the viewer in such a way that the face can be overviewed, instead of seen in one glance, and becomes a portrait.

In surrealist photography it was, however, rather common to show the impossibility of unification in the portrait. The two images of Jean Cocteau by American surrealist photographer Philippe Halsman show fragmented portraits of Cocteau, titled "*The Versatile Jean Cocteau*" (1949), suggesting the impossibility of unification in the portrait genre (ill. 5–6). It is only by means of the artificial device of the frame that it can be done successfully, as another Halsman image of Cocteau suggests. We see here Jean Cocteau and the dancer Leo Coleman framing the actress Ricki Soma in the act of transforming her into a portrait (ill. 7). The portraitist Cocteau is also partly visible within the frame because it is his act of portraiture that is responsible for this transformation of face into portrait.



5. Philippe Halsman, portrait of Jean Cocteau, 1949, photograph, 34,3 × 26,7 cm, courtesy of the estate of Philip Halsman



6. Philippe Halsman, *The Versatile Jean Cocteau*, 1949, 34,3 × 26,7 cm, courtesy of the estate of Philip Halsman

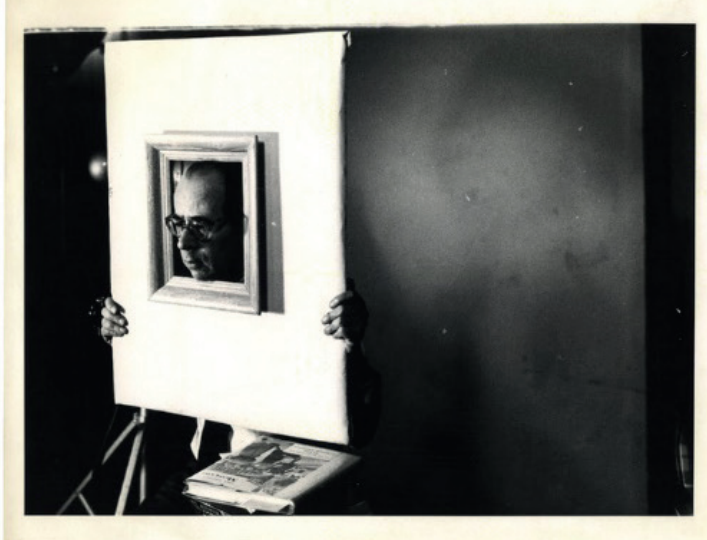


7. Philippe Halsman, portrait of Jean Cocteau, Leo Coleman framing the actress Ricki Soma, 1949, photograph, 15 x 15 cm, courtesy estate of Philip Halsman

In surrealist photography, one is highly aware of the impossibility of a unified face and that it could only be performed by artificial means. Two portraits of Philippe Halsman, this time by his fellow American photographer Weegee, demonstrate how the use of frames within portraiture became an almost conventional device for the deconstruction of the portrait-as-unified-face (ill. 8). We see Francis Bacon using the same device in his painting *Study of a Portrait* (1987).

Verschaffel discusses another important characteristic of the portrait genre. It is not only a representation of a face but of a face that is aware of being portrayed.⁸ That is why a portrait is only really convincing when it functions as a personal pronoun and addresses the viewer. The portrait should do the same as the face does: looking. It is this looking that provides *presence* to the portrayed person. The details that create the presence of the model should prevail over the details that *tell* about the model and provide information. This criterion explains that portraits that are entirely similar to the model can still fail to be good portraits, because the portrayed person is not “present”. And the opposite holds: many portraits of Francis Bacon bear little resemblance to the model, but still they create the illusion that the person being portrayed is present. Recognition of the portrayed person is based on presence, instead of on telling details that

⁸ Verschaffel, *What Artistry Can Do*.



8. Weegee, Portrait of Philippe Halsman, 1940–1950s, photograph, 21 x 34 cm, courtesy of the estate of Weegee

create similarity. These two criteria, likeness and being present, are rather conventional, but one could say now that presence is more important than likeness.

In what follows I will discuss photographic portraits that deconstruct the two criteria just examined, likeness and presence. These two criteria for evaluating portraiture can be best understood in photographic portraiture, because according to common sense notions of this media, photographic representations result in a maximum likeness and make persons or objects that belong to the past present again. Both criteria entail a specific notion of subjectivity (authenticity, one moment, time), and of representation. But let us first reflect on the criterion of presence, and what exactly it means or implies. I will use a photographic example of portraiture because it gives a very specific meaning to the idea of presence. This example suggests that presence can be understood as composure: the pierced surface of the face and of exposed subjectivity is unified by composure and by taking on a particular posture. Composure is an effective means of unifying the black hole of the face and of subjectivity because it brings about a state or feeling of being calm and in control of oneself. This controlled calmness is a condition in which the portrayed person dares to show himself or herself and be present; a loss of composure excludes the emanation of presence in a portrait.

The daguerreotype medium required long posing for its images and as a result presence of mind and composure. One should be in control of one's emo-

tions and actions. American abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) understood this required composure as a form of self-possession, symbolically announcing freedom and the end of slavery. Today known particularly for his autobiography *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), Douglass also wrote several speeches explaining the social importance of photography, especially of daguerreotype images.⁹ For him, there is a vital link between art in general and reform, and more specifically between photography and freedom. Photography is important for achieving freedom and uprooting racism. Also, there is no other figure in nineteenth-century American history of whom so many photographs exist, especially daguerreotype images. He frequented photographers' studios and sat for his portrait whenever he could.¹⁰ Now 160 photographs of him remain, all with distinct poses, including nine daguerreotypes and four ambrotypes: in the nineteenth century, only members of the British royal family had more photographic portraits taken of themselves. One of the reasons why Douglass appreciated these images so much has little to do with the image as such, but with the fact that they were relatively inexpensive so that people from all classes could have their image recorded: 'The ease and cheapness with which we get our pictures has brought us all within range of the daguerreian apparatus.'¹¹ Daguerre had converted the planet into a picture gallery, claimed Douglass. 'Daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, photographs and electrotypes, good and bad, now adorn or disfigure all our dwellings.'¹² This has the effect that 'Men of all conditions may see themselves as others see them', because it was only in mirrors that one could see oneself through the eyes of others. According to Douglass, photography makes people independent of other people's gazes, and as a consequence, of their prejudices. It enables people to look at themselves and free themselves from those prejudices. Of course, this is only the case when the portrayed person instead of the photographer is in control and is able to stage his own portrait. Ethnographic photography in nineteenth-century colonial times demonstrates a photographic practice that established and confirmed racial stereotypes.

Photography thus made one independent of other people's gazes, whereas engraving and painting did not. When an engraver had made a portrait of him with a slight smile, Douglass was outraged. His portrait had 'a much more

⁹ See e.g., F. Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures", in: J. Stauffer et al., eds., *Picturing Frederick: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American*, New York 2015.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. ix.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 128.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 127.

kindly and amiable expression than is generally thought to characterize the face of a fugitive slave'.¹³ Although no longer a slave, he wanted the look of a defiant but respectable abolitionist. For a painted or engraved portrait one depended completely on the maker of such portraits. He explained as follows why it would never work for a black person to have his portrait done in painting or engraving:

Negroes can never have impartial portraits at the hands of white artists. ... It seems to us next to impossible for white men to take likenesses of black men, without most grossly exaggerating their distinctive features. And the reason is obvious. Artists, like all other white persons, have adopted a theory respecting the distinctive features of Negro physiognomy.¹⁴

Because of preconceived ideas about what black people look like, it is impossible for white people to draw or paint them with 'impartial' likeness. Photography's assumed faithfulness should afford impartial likeness. But more important is that the required posing gave the sitter control over the resulting portrait; photographic portraits provide dignity to the sitter. When someone's picture is taken, 'there is even something statue-like about such men':

See them when or where you will, and unless they are totally off guard, they are serenely sitting or rigidly standing in what they fancy their best attitude for a picture.¹⁵

Douglass suggests that posing for a portrait performatively produces dignity. The image is not seen in terms of its likeness to the sitter, but as actively producing a truth about the sitter that results from his posing and other aesthetic elements of the image. The sitter for the portrait discovers this truth of having dignity when he sees the image taken of him. In Douglass' own portraits the dignity is not only bestowed on him by his statue-like pose, but also by his bourgeois middle-class outfit. He considers this production or revelation of truth the social force of pictures. This makes it understandable that he gives this long lecture on daguerreotypes and other photographic portraits in a speech which is supposed to be about the abolition of slavery.

¹³ F. Douglass, "American Slavery is America's Disgrace" (1847), quoted in J. Stauffer et al., *Picturing Frederick Douglass...*, p. xxiv.

¹⁴ F. Douglass, 'A Tribute for the Negro', *The North Star* 1849, 7 April, quoted in J. Stauffer et al., *Picturing Frederick Douglass...*, p. xv.

¹⁵ F. Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures", in: J. Stauffer et al., *Picturing Frederick Douglass...*, p. 128.

Douglass literally performed for the photographer and determined many formal features of his portrait. Although he had his image taken by a great number of different photographers, his images have many formal features in common, which suggests that Douglass himself had outspoken ideas about how the image should look. The vast majority of his portraits are closely cropped or vignetted. This draws all the attention to Douglass himself, not to the context of the studio in which the photograph was taken. Compared to other studio portraits of that time, there are almost no props to distract the viewer. Elaborate backdrops like painted scenes of landscapes are missing. The images should concentrate completely on the portraiture of black masculinity and citizenship. The only variations in the huge number of portraits taken of him concern different angles, different gestures and the adjusting of his clothing, hairstyle and facial hair. 'The changes in his appearance indicated his status as a "self-made man".'¹⁶ This status of self-made man was performatively produced by the images he had taken of him, by his posing, and by how he himself determined what his image would look like. That is why his portraits are in fact self-portraits, although taken by someone else, a photographer.

Because it is performative, the act of posing is also political. As Stauffer remarks, for Douglass posing marked a break from his experience as a slave.¹⁷ In a speech from 1847 he confesses the following:

[...] dissatisfaction was constantly manifesting itself in the looks of a slave. [I have] been punished and beaten more for [my] looks than for anything else—for looking dissatisfied because [I] felt dissatisfied—for feeling and looking as [I] felt at the wrongs heaped upon [me].¹⁸

His stern, dignified facial expressions when posing for his many portraits give him the power he did not have when he was still a slave (ill. 9).

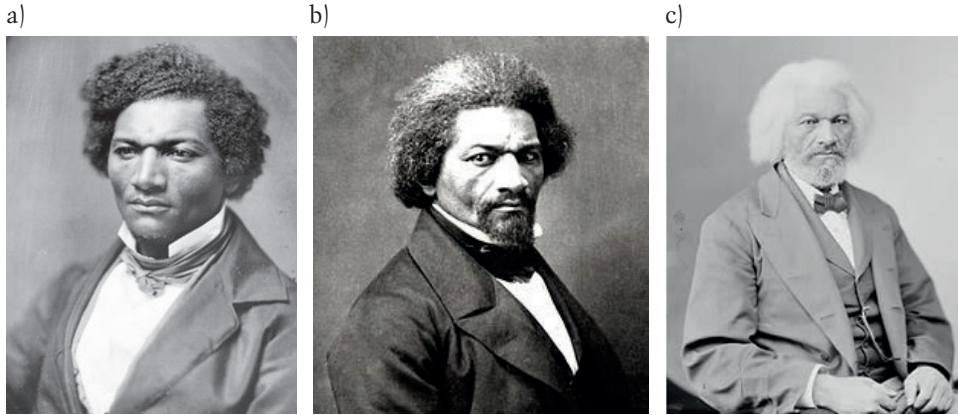
They also shed interesting light on the many daguerreotypes and other kinds of photographic portraits of himself that he had produced. He confesses that vanity is part of it: 'A man is ashamed of seeming to be vain of his personal appearance, and yet who ever stood before a glass preparing to sit or stand for a picture without a consciousness of some such vanity?'¹⁹ But this

¹⁶ J. Stauffer et al., *Picturing Frederick Douglass...*, p. xxvii.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. xxvii.

¹⁸ F. Douglass, "American Slavery is America's Disgrace" (1847), quoted in J. Stauffer et al., *Picturing Frederick Douglass...*, p. xxiv.

¹⁹ F. Douglass, 'Pictures and Progress', in: J. Stauffer et al., *Picturing Frederick Douglass...*, p. 166.



9. Three photographic portraits of Frederick Douglass, author unknown, a) 1843, b) c. 1858, c) c. 1877, ca 7 x 5 cm, Library of Congress, Washington

embarrassing vanity is the price one has to pay for the 'gratification of the innate desire for self-knowledge', which can be fulfilled through sitting for a daguerreotype portrait. In that sense, his portraits are all of his own making. Although he was not the photographer, he was the author of his own portraits. Having these portraits made of him is 'a process of soul-awakening self-revelation'.²⁰ As a former slave, Douglass repeatedly needed this self-confirmation through portraiture.

RONI HORN; AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IDENTITY

The many (self) portraits of Frederick Douglass show that the 'presence' of the portrayed person is the effect of a specific device, namely composure; presence is constructed and is not symptomatic of the inner personality of the sitter.

I will now draw attention to the photographic portraits of Roni Horn and Tom Callemín in order to further deconstruct conventional notions of portraiture, this time especially the idea that a successful portrait captures the true personality of the person portrayed.²¹

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 169.

²¹ In my essay "The Portrait's Dispersal: Concepts of Representation and Subjectivity", in: *Portraiture. Facing the Subject*, edited and introduced by J. Woodall (Manchester University Press, 1997), I argue that the portrait genre relies not only on specific genre conventions but also on specific notions of the human subject.

In contemporary art, the portrait genre is often reflected upon conceptually. It not only deploys the genre, but by the way it does this, the work becomes at the same time a reflection on the genre that it embodies. Roni Horn's *Portrait of an Image* of 2005 is both a good and significant example: it forces us to reflect on assumptions on which the conventional portrait relies (ill. 10).



10. Roni Horn, detail from *Portrait of an Image*, 2014, different sizes, Kunsthau Zurich

Portrait of an Image is a series of a hundred photographic portraits of the French actress Isabelle Huppert, whose face reflects a wide variety of emotions. Isabelle Huppert is a world-famous actress, she is an icon, an image. The fact that she is an image suggests that her iconicity brings with it stability, a stable image, that is. But "Horn photographed the actress in twenty sequences of five photos each. In each sequence, Huppert briefly slips into one of her film characters so that her face expresses personalities that do not exist in reality but only in the film. Roni Horn's photographs show studies of physiognomy in the finest variations in which the individual is always a plurality."²² The basic attitude that permits access to Roni Horn's work is her idea of an encyclopedia of identity. Central to her series and pairs are the notions of diversity as the basis of personality and identity, the capability of transformation and the impossibility of a permanently defined personality.

²² Description of *Portrait of An Image*, R. Horn, Hauser and Wirth, Zurich 2006.

Max Hollein writes in his Foreword to the catalogue *Roni Horn: Portrait of an Image* the following²³:

No fewer than 100 photographic images arranged in sequences testify to the extreme diversification and mutability and incompleteness of human facial expressions, which also shape our communication with others. [...] In raising the question as to whether this is one and the same person, they suggest that there is no such thing as a pure form of identity. (49)

Portrait of an Image challenges the conventional notion of the portrait, according to which the referent of a successful portrait is the unique, authentic essence of a person, her or his personality. That is considered to be even more important than the external looks of a person. This explains the possibility of negative judgments of photographic portraits. Although a camera captures the appearance of a person maximally, the photographer has as many problems in capturing a sitter's 'essence' as a painter does. Camerawork is not the traditional portrayer's ideal but its failure, because the essential quality of the sitter can only be caught by the artist, not by the camera.

The idea of a unique, authentic personality captured in one single image, a portrait, also brings with it a specific notion of time: it is not a slice of time, as in a snapshot, but it is long duration of time condensed within one image. What *Portraits of an Image* suggests, however, is that an authentic personality cannot be captured in one single portrait. Each of the hundred images of Huppert's face show another emotional expression, which undermines the idea that a person has an essence that can be recorded in one portrait. And even worse, some of the images do not show Huppert's emotional expression but that of a character she has played. This deconstructs the idea of authenticity in yet another way: Do we really own the emotions we show on our face? For sometimes our emotions are the result of transmission of affect from one person to another.

This point requires some explanation: the transmission of affective intensities or energies has a physiological impact. Affects can arise within a person, but they also come from without. They can be transmitted by the presence of another person, but also by an artwork, or a (literary) text. They come from an interaction with objects, an environment, or other people. Because of its origin in interaction one can say that the transmission of affect is social in origin, but biological and physical in effect (3).²⁴ The experience of affect is

²³ M. Hollein, "Foreword", in: *Roni Horn: Portrait of an Image*, Frankfurt 2013, pp. 33–35.

²⁴ T. Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, Ithaca 2004, p. 3.

usually seen as a kind of judgment. The person who receives the affect has to do something with it. It will be projected outwards or it will be introjected. This projection or introjection of a judgment is the moment when the transmission takes place.

The notion of affect has had such an uncomfortable place in Western, eighteenth-century Enlightenment culture, because the Enlightenment's individualism is peculiarly resistant to the idea that our affects are not altogether our own. Affects are not necessarily our own because they may have been transmitted by somebody else or by an object or environment. We are then "possessed" by emotions that have their origins elsewhere or in somebody else. When the person to whom the affect is transmitted does not "project" the affect outwards, but "discerns" it, at that moment the affect is given content. The affect then feels like depression, anger, or anxiety. But the way a transmitted affect is signified differs from person to person. The same affect can be given a completely different content by another person. Although affects are social, that is, they are the result of an interactive process from without, the linguistic or visual contents or thoughts attached to that affect belong to the person to whom the affect is transmitted.

Since the same affect can evoke very different feelings or thoughts in different people, the thoughts, feelings or images evoked by affects are not necessarily tied to the affects they appear to evoke. A transmission of affect between two persons can result in the two people becoming alike; for example, someone's depression is transmitted to someone else, who will then feel depressed as a result. This form of transmission is usually called *entrainment* (Brennan 9). This term stems from biology and means that a rhythm or something which varies rhythmically cause another gradually to fall into synchrony with it. But it can also be the case that as a result of such a transmission, people take up opposing or different positions in relation to a common affective thread. This is the case when, for example, somebody's depression gives rise to feelings of anger in the person to whom the affect was transmitted, or when somebody's hyperactivity makes another person feel depressed.

This rather long digression on the transmission of affect enables me to formulate conclusions about Roni Horn's *Portrait of an Image*. Huppert is an actress and is acting some of the facial emotions she shows in the *Portrait of an Image*, because in some cases she is recreating the characters she has played; these images are evident cases of emotions not owned by the person who expresses them. But the phenomenon of transmission of affect implies that it happens all the time that the emotions we express are not owned by us. This insight undermines the belief in an authentic essence or personality that the conventional notion of the portrait relies on. When we accept Roni Horn's

notion of diversity as the basis of personality and identity, the capability of transformation and the impossibility of a permanently defined personality, portraiture must reinvent itself. But that is exactly what Roni Horn has done in her *Portrait of an Image*. A personality is not stable nor unique and this assumption underlies conventional portraiture. One person can have several personalities, some of which are even not her or his own.

While Roni Horn's *Portrait of an Image* deconstructs the general idea that a successful portrait captures the authentic essence of the portrayed person, the Belgian photographer Tom Callemin specifies this deconstruction by adding a temporal as well as spatial dimension to it. In some of his works he asks the model to come back after a month or two months and pose or sit in the same way as last time. In his work *Double Take* he made a portrait of the same sitter two months apart (ill. 11). There are many slight differences between the two portraits, which are noticeable but almost impossible to describe. What do these slight differences mean exactly? Has the sitter changed over time, in the two months in between the two images were taken? Or is the sitter just not able to take exactly the same pose and expression? In this case, it is temporality that undermines the conventional idea that the authentic essence of person can be conveyed by one shot or one single image. Although the differences between the two images in *Double Take* are slight and reside in minor details, the personality that comes across in each image is very different. While the lighting of the face is exactly the same, the expression of the eyes and of the mouth is very different.

In a more recent work, simply titled *Portrait*, Callemin used a similar procedure, but with the differences that there is a three-month period in between



11. Tom Callemin, *Double Take*, A photographic portrait and its reconstruction created two months apart, 2017, courtesy of the artist and Gallery TegenBoschVanVreden

each image, and the portrait (in the singular) consists of twelve parts. Callemin took the photographs in his studio, the landscape in the background is painted, as was a common practice in photo studios. Again, although the differences in expression are very slight, the effect of these differences are enormous: a different personality arises from these differences.

In his work *Circular Portrait* Callemin makes a portrait by using three different cameras simultaneously, creating three different perspectives at the same single moment (ill. 12). In this case it is not temporality but spatiality that undermines the belief in the authentic personality. And the diversity of personalities does not reside in the pose of the sitter but in the diversity of camera positions. Though taken at the same moment, the expression of each image is again slightly different. In the first image the head is straight up, whereas in the third, the head looks slightly bent over, which expresses a very different personality, slight as the difference is.



12. Tom Callemin, *Circular Portrait*, Three different cameras record a portrait simultaneously, creating three different perspectives at the same single moment, 2017, courtesy of the artist and Gallery TegenBoschVanVreden

Felix Gonzalez Torres' work *Untitled (Portrait Michael Jenkins)* from 2010 is an even more radical example of conceptual portraiture, because it does not rely any more on the looks of a sitter or model, in this case Michael Jenkins. This work belongs to the genre of what Gonzalez-Torres himself calls a "word portrait". He conceived of his word portraits as a way to bridge personal and communal experience. Composed of a series of seemingly unrelated texts referencing specific events and dates, Gonzalez-Torres's word portraits record occurrences that are both highly personal to the portrait's owner (whether an individual or institution) and historic in nature, underscoring the importance of shared experience in the shaping of identity. The Art Museum of Harvard University owns that work and they installed it within the context of an instal-

lation of ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern art. This installation draws particular attention to the ways in which events of the past shape our understanding of the present. It includes the following words: Porch Swing 1961, School Bus 1970, Backstreet 1982, Xmas 1987, Coffee Table 1979. Of course, for most visitors what these events at those years and locations concern is an extremely enigmatic question, as is how they have shaped Michael Jenkins. But that is not important; the point is an identity or personality is shaped by events.

Earlier I explained the enlightenment background of individuality and of the belief that emotions are necessarily our own. Gonzalez-Torres' word portraits distance themselves from the idea of individual identity; instead, he stresses the idea that subjectivities are shaped by shared experience and are historic in nature. This makes the portrayal of the appearance of a person superfluous; decisive historical events in relation to more personal events tell us more about the portrayed person. The rise of the bourgeois class is usually seen as the beginning of the portrait genre; it is not by accident that this historical period also gave rise to the birth of individualism and is also called the Enlightenment. With the works of Roni Horn, Tom Callemín and Felix Gonzalez Torres the genre of portraiture has not come to an end, yet the credibility of individuality and of a notion of portraiture that relies on individual subjectivity has perhaps come to an end. But this closure gives a new future to portraiture.

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REFLECTIONS ON PORTRAITURE: UNIFYING THE FACE AND PLURALIZING PERSONALITY

Summary

Two assumptions play an important role in the study of portraiture 1) Studies of the portrait are usually based on the idea that the face that is shown in the portrait is also a portrait in its own right, namely, a portrait of the soul of the portrayed person. 2) The main function of portraiture is to portray or even capture the unique, personal identity of a person; that identity is an essential and stable entity.

In this paper, both assumptions will be challenged. As a result, portrait and face should not be conflated and arguments on the face have a quite different status than those on portraits. Concerning the second assumption, surrealist portraits and contemporary portraiture suggest the opposite of an essential personality that does not change over time: when portraits are remade after some time, different personalities present themselves. This does not mean that a unique personality or identity does not exist per se, but that portraiture cannot be used to make this claim.

Keywords: portrait, face, personality, identity, essence, mask, Hans Belting

