

**PHILLIP J. BARRATT**

**STRATEGIES OF LIKENESS**

**(TWO VOLUMES)**

**M.F.A. UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

**1988 - 89**

**STRATEGIES OF LIKENESS**

**VOLUME 1**

Presented in this book is documentation of the work produced during 1986-89  
within the Masters of Fine Arts course at the Tasmanian School of Art,  
University of Tasmania.

Name: Phillip J. Barratt

Date: November 1989

Book No.:

Volume 1

## Contents

Volume 1.                      Theoretical Submissions

Seminar Paper 1

Seminar Paper 2

(Volume 2).

Section            i            Course Proposal

ii            Amendment

iii            Documentation of work

iv            Work Processes

# I

## Strategies of Likeness

©Phil Barrett 1989

### Introduction

Contained within this volume are Papers One and Two. Both use as a central structure a quotation from Roland Barthes' book *Camera Lucida* - *Reflections on Photography*.

The portrait-photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image  
repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front  
of the lens, I am at the same time:  
the one I think I am  
the one I want others to think I am  
the one the photographer thinks I am  
and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art.<sup>1</sup>

What the quotation really identifies, is the nature and the deduction of human behaviour that is a determining factor in any portrait process, whether it is photographic, painted or filmic.

Paper One, therefore establishes the process where, as a witness to someone's behaviour, we arrive at a deduction that assesses who and what they are - their personality.

By appropriating Barthes' quotation, four major areas are investigated:

- 1) the 'self' we think we are
- 2) the 'self' we present to others
- 3) the 'self' interpreted by others (society)
- 4) the 'self' that is physiognomically determined.

By expanding the concerns of Paper One, the second paper examines photographic portraiture and those artists who continue to believe they can reveal the soul - the personality of the sitter.

---

<sup>1</sup> Barthes, R *Camera Lucida, Reflections on Photography* (translated by Richard Howard) Fontana Paperbacks, London 1984; 13.

## STRATEGIES OF LIKENESS

### Paper One

Roland Barthes' article "Photography and Electoral Appeal" in *Mythologies* prepares the way for this enquiry. In this essay Barthes analyses the politician's electoral campaign, that uses the photographic portrait.

The effigy [Barthes says] establishes a personal link between the politician and the voters; the candidate does not only offer a programme for judgement, he suggests a physical climate, a set of daily choices expressed in a morphology, a way of dressing, a posture...

What is transmitted through the photograph of the candidate is not his plans, but his deep motives, all his family; mental, even erotic circumstances, all his style of life of which he is at once the product, the example and the bait.<sup>2</sup>

Barthes is suggesting that the political portrait becomes an anti-intellectual device where the photograph is beyond policies and speeches and through the 'look', the face can epitomise the very essence of the man. Barthes therefore addresses the concept that, the psychic depth of a person - their persona - can be made up entirely of surfaces. This pre-supposes a number of important conditions.

One, that there exists a system of non-verbal communication, where gesture, posture, facial expression, costume and physiognomy indicate thoughts, feelings and personalities; that is, the outward physical sign-codes are manifestations of inner physical or psychological states.

Two, that display characteristics are in the main truthful, - where gesture, costume and personality are not an act or performance for pre-determined effect and the expressive entities have an isomorphic relation to something going on within the subject and the observer is sensitive to

and relates to the 'presumed' inner state of the subject. It becomes obvious this proposal assumes there is an exact correspondence between the expressive behaviour of the subject and their inner state and the interpretation put on it by the observer.

Research into this area by biologists, sociologists and psychologists has been extensive, but so variable has the response been to the interpretation of visual information that much investigation has become involved in the perceptual problem of the accuracy and reliability of the judgement.<sup>3</sup>

An alternative model was proposed. What is enacted is a presentation. The behaviour is presented to be seen and to have a predetermined effect on the observer, whether conscious or unconscious. That is, there exists a tenuous link between the inner state and the perceived state.

Surely this is the implication of the photographic campaign image identified by Barthes, where there exists a possible dislocation between the projected image and the actual personality of the politician. In other words, the photograph is a carefully orchestrated 'drama', replete with signs, that has little basis in fact.

The significance of this forces us to investigate whether the 'persona' - the identity shown or expressed, is any indication of the 'real' person when there is evidence enough to suggest people display not one identity but many identities.

As an example, consider the different clothing styles in our own wardrobes - each designed for a particular look or occasion that is far removed from any practical function of warmth; for we put on more than just body adornment; we become and are seen as representative of the

---

<sup>3</sup> Spiegel, J. and Machotka, M. *Messages of the Body* The Free Press, 1974; 6.

clothes we wear, that 'may' place us both socially, economically and culturally.

So what is personality then?

None of us would deny the existence of personality. Our daily functioning in society requires the ability to establish criteria for judgement, and yet in trying to specify in some precise objective way the nature of personality, the identification becomes vague and ill-defined.

An example of this can be seen in the Funk and Wagnall Dictionary:

Personality: "the collective attributes and qualities which characterise a person as distinguished from impersonal existence. The sum total of traits necessary to describe what it is to be a person."

In any estimation of the word, this definition is severely limited and rather vague. For this reason, I sought a more definitive explanation.

The word 'personality' is derived from the Latin persona.

Originally this denoted the masks worn by theatrical players in ancient Greek dramas and was eventually to encompass the actors' role as well. Therefore, the initial conception of 'personality' was that of the superficial social image adopted by the individual in playing life-roles - a public personality that we display to those around us. This view is consistent with that of the contemporary interpretation that equates personality with charm, poise, popularity, physical attractiveness, and a host of other socially desirable characteristics. We hear in everyday language such comments as, 'he has a terrific personality' or 'she has a lot of personality'.

Within the field of psychology the definition of personality remains vague. There is sufficient disagreement about the meaning that Larry H. Hjelle and Daniel J. Zeigler - say:



There may be as many different meanings of the term 'personality' as there are psychologists who have tried to define it.<sup>4</sup>

For the purposes of this paper a more definitive analysis is not possible.

However, I feel S.R.Maddi offers a concise and useful introduction:

Personality is a stable set of characteristics and tendencies that determine those commonalities and differences in the psychological behaviour, thoughts, feelings and actions of people that have a continuity in time and that may or may not be easily understood in terms of the social or biological pressures of the immediate situation alone.<sup>5</sup>

To this analysis, I propose that any personality theory must necessarily allow for the four concepts of the self:

- 1) the concept of 'self' - what the individual believes their personality to be.
- 2) the personality we choose to exhibit to others.
- 3) the personality that is interpreted by others - which in turn is dictated by the observer's personality, race, culture, age and even the idiosyncratic feelings of the observer's observation on the day.
- 4) the personality that is physiognomically determined.

What is to be established is whether there is any perceivable relationship between the inner state of the individual, the character or personality that is projected, and the interpretation put on it by the observer.

Society I believe, requires or maintains a perceivable link between these possible personality distortions, as the concept of the 'split personality' is something we may be able to grasp intellectually, but rarely is it conceivable emotionally.

---

<sup>4</sup> Hjelle, L. A. and Ziegler D. J. *Personality Theories, Basic Assumptions and Applications* McGraw Hill Book Company 1981; 6.

<sup>5</sup> Maddi S. R. *Personality Theories - Comparative Analysis* Dorsey Press, 1976.

### Concept 1 - The Self.

The concept of the self is vague, but most of us have some definite notion of who or what we are.

Katin and McPortland, in 1954, found the concept of the self first addressed the defined roles through which the individuals saw themselves i.e. female, Catholic, black etc. followed by the character traits of generous, friendly, humorous and so on.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of the 'self', addressed scientifically, becomes difficult. However, an overview of the writings of Sigmund Freud, Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead, offer an introduction to the concept of self with the emphasis that the self is learned through social interaction.

### Freud's Theory (1856-1939)

Freud's major contribution to personality theory was that the motives for much of human behaviour are unconscious; that we are often unaware of the real reasons for our actions. He argued that early childhood experiences are often lost in memory but can often have a significant effect on the development of personality.

Freud believed that the individual is born in an essential conflict with society and that it is in society's interest to suppress and direct these conflicts with particular attention to the basic drives of sex and aggression.

Personality, Freud saw, could be divided into three basic interacting parts:

The id is the reservoir of drives present in the individual at birth and throughout life; it is entirely unconscious and demands continual and instantaneous satisfaction. Because the id, particularly in the child, cannot be always satisfied

---

<sup>6</sup> Krech D, Crutchfield, R.S, Livison, N *Elements of Psychology* 2nd ed. 1969; 797

and must often be repressed, there emerges the ego, the conscious part of the self that rationally tries to balance the demands of the social environment and the urges of the id.<sup>7</sup>

The social demands on an individual establish a super ego, where the influence comes particularly from the parents, which in the individual becomes roughly equivalent to a person's conscience.

Cooley's Theory (1864 - 1929).

The central concept of Cooley's theory is that society is the 'looking glass'; the mirror in which we can observe the reactions of others to our behaviour. The concept of self, 'who we are', is derived from this reflection.

It is only seeing the attitudes of others that we can learn whether we are attractive or ugly, popular or unpopular, respectable or disreputable. By observing the response of others - or by imagining what their response would be like to some behaviour we are contemplating - we are able to evaluate ourselves and our actions. If the image we see or imagine in the social mirror is favourable, our self-concept is enhanced and our behaviour is likely to be repeated. If the image is unfavourable, our self-concept is diminished and our behaviour is likely to change.<sup>8</sup>

There is the possibility of a misinterpretation, a mis-reading in the reactions of others and, as has been pointed, 'out whether our reading in the looking glass is accurate or not, it is through this interpretation that we

---

<sup>7</sup> Robertson. I *Sociology* second edition, Worth Pub., 1977; 112.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.; 13.

learn our identity: there is no self without society, no 'I' without a corresponding 'they' to provide our self-image.'<sup>9</sup>

Like Freud, Cooley believed the concept of the self was formed early in childhood and remains more stable and lasting than those influences later on in life.

### Mead's Theory (1863 - 1931)

George Herbert Mead (1934) elaborated Cooley's theory by introducing the concept of symbolic interaction, the interaction between people that takes place through symbols such as gestures, facial expressions, and above all, language. Language is socially learned and is essential for all but the most simple forms of thoughts. In this, the mind - through which we interpret our own behaviour and that of others - is a social product.

Mead pointed out that a vital outcome of socialisation is the ability to anticipate what others expect of us and to shape our behaviour accordingly. This capacity is achieved by role taking - pretending to take, or actually taking, the roles of other people, so that one can see oneself from this viewpoint. In early childhood children are able to internalise the expectations only of the particular other, that is, specific other people such as parents. But as they grow older they learn to internalise the expectations of the generalised other, the attitudes and viewpoint of society as a whole. This internalised general concept of social expectations provides the basis for self evaluation and hence form self concept.<sup>10</sup>

Mead pointed out that socialisation is never perfect or complete. There remains in man two entities - the 'I' which is the spontaneous,

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.; 114.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; 115.

unsocialised self and the 'me' which is conscious of the norms and expectations of society.

Unlike Freud, who believed man was essentially in conflict with society, Mead maintained there were times in any person's life where the socialised 'me' was not always in control of the 'I'.

It could be concluded that the concept of the self as pointed out by Freud, Mead and Cooley, is basically seen as a social product that is modified through extensive interaction with other people. The socialised self is within the boundaries of hereditary possibilities, dependent on the family as the most significant single contributing factor where the school and the peer group are additional, powerful reinforcing agents. There does however remain a further agency which is gaining attention as a significant factor in the development of the self - the media.

### **The Mass Media - Advertising and Identity.**

The impact the mass media has on the individual society is hard to judge. To find that 95% of homes in Australia have a television set and the average Australian between the ages of three and sixteen spends more time in front of the television than in the classroom, the impact must be considerable on the individual.

John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* believes that so significant is advertising in the formation of an identity that no longer does the audience merely identify with the stereotypical depiction of the advertisement, but the advertisement actually begins to prescribe the identity. For Western women, Berger says, 'the publicity image steals her love of herself as she is and offers it back to her for the price of the product.'<sup>11</sup>:

---

<sup>11</sup> Berger, J. *Ways of Seeing*; British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books; 134.

Rosalind Coward in *Female Desire - Womens' Sexuality Today*, supports Berger's claim. Coward believes the exploitative potential of the advertising medium has actually created a number of psychological conditions in the woman that is tangled up in the narcissistic construction of the woman as an object of the look.

Advertising images don't initiate a happy state of narcissism for the woman, but one of discontent.<sup>12</sup>

Judith Williamson in *Decoding Advertisements* suggests that not only do advertisements aim to persuade large numbers of people to buy a product, but they also tell you what you are like and who you are. The advertisement addresses you personally and intimately and by creating a window into the world, it creates a space out in front of itself into which the reader can step.

You move into the space as you look into the ad and in doing so 'become' the spectator, you feel the 'hey you' really did apply to you in particular<sup>13</sup>

That is, you deny or exchange your own self for the person who is addressed in the advertisement. Williamson argues, they tell you what you are like and who you are.

Hence the Coca-Cola commercials tell you you, are someone who drinks Coke.

You don't drink to become someone, you drink Coke because you already are that person. But it is the advertisement that has constructed you as that identity.<sup>14</sup>

John Bryden Brown in *Ads that Made Australia* provides the remark

---

12 Coward, R. *Female Desire - Women's Sexuality Today* London Granada, 1984; 79.

13 Williamson, J. *Decoding Advertisements, Ideology and meaning in advertising* Marion Boyers, London, 1978.

14 *ibid.*

Coca-Cola has consistently presented itself as a way of life based on fun and pleasure. So successful was this advertising that teenagers since the 1950's weren't part of their own way of life if they didn't drink Coke.<sup>15</sup>

As persuasive as these observations are, it is hard to believe that advertising has reached such ideological powers in the construction of a personality or identity, when obviously we don't all drink Coca Cola or buy the multitude of products advertised everyday. However if there is something in what John Bryden Brown has said, maybe 'we' no longer buy Coca-Cola but have appropriated the image and left the product behind.

The millions of dollars spent not only on the making of advertisements but the motivational research, through the sciences of sociology and psychology, must contribute to the development of personality. We are all to some degree, a product of advertising's success, though some aspects of its internalization are more overt than others. I close this enquiry through the example of the expanding participation and interest in aerobics.

The success of the aerobics formula in monetary terms is in the billions. The more extraordinary thing is where Coca-Cola, once alluded to life style; aerobics has manufactured a total package that tells you how to live, both bodily and spiritually. It tells you what to eat, how to dress both during and after exercise. It even suggests possible holiday destinations; holiday packages for those who want to continue to 'work out', ie. ski holidays, health clubs and holidays by the beach and exhibit the vital body, to participate in the vigorous health.

Aerobics has created a self perpetuating and immensely profitable consumer industry that predominantly plays on the constructed vanity of

---

<sup>15</sup> Brown J.B. *Ads That Made Australia* Double Bay, Sydney, 1981; 83.

the affluent Western female. With a society very conscious of 'how one looks', aerobics has created its own prophets who become a walking, talking advertisement of 'its success'. It is a cult image and whilst we are not all fanatics, we cannot help but to become influenced by its overt message - look young and be happy.

## Concept 2 - The 'Self' you Present to Others

Whatever you consider your 'true' self to be, you cannot deny that the self you present to others varies from one situation to another. The nature of society requires that we present different aspects of ourselves in different situations.

If everyone behaved in exactly the same way to everyone else, social chaos would result. We would be unable to fulfil our various roles as teachers, students, sons, daughters, employers, workers and so on.<sup>16</sup>

This does not mean we are habitually insincere. Insincerity arises only when we present a self in which we do not believe. But so familiar do the roles become, we are usually not even aware we are playing them. It is merely a part of an everyday routine. However, only when we go to a job interview or are introduced to a stranger do we become more conscious of our actions and the impressions we try to make. The job interview is a time when people are totally conscious of what they say, how they say it, how they act and the clothes they wear.

The critical role of first impressions supports this point. There is ample evidence to show that first impressions can be sufficiently powerful as to dominate all future perceptions.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> op.cit. *Sociology* ; 135.

<sup>17</sup> Kretch D., Crutchfield R. S., Livson N. *Elements of Psychology* 1969; 749.



Erving Goffman (1959) extends the well-known principles of first impressions when he takes the concept of 'acting' a role seriously.

Loosely based on the claim that all the world's a stage, he applies a 'dramaturgical approach' to social interaction, studying it as though we are all actors in a theatre, playing various parts and scenes. People, Goffman argues, are deeply concerned with impression management. The scenery on the 'set' may perhaps extend to the posters on the wall, or a lavishly illustrated book on the coffee table. Personal 'props' like the pipe or the briefcase, or a particular college insignia on a tie, add to a wardrobe of effects. People are careful to wear appropriate clothing for the occasion, presenting a different self by dressing fashionably to go to a party or more formally for a job interview.

Goffman further suggests, we have a 'front' stage and a back stage for our performances. The role we exhibit as a school teacher in front of the class is different from the role we have among fellow teachers in the staff room.

Impression management in the way that Goffman indicates, must remain credible only when the performance is well practised and rehearsed. But there are times when the audience becomes aware of the impression the actor 'gives' deliberately and the impression 'they' give off without intending it.

Umberto Eco's article "Strategies of Lying" documents well one such incident.

In a scandal that was to become known as Watergate, Eco investigates President Nixon's televised speech on the 30th April 1973. The speech sought to quell the rising suspicion generated by the press, who at this time, had no specific proof of its allegations.

Eco cites Nixon's speech as an undeniable masterpiece in rhetoric and concludes:

The narrative construction would have been perfect had the discourse been a written text. But it was "spoken". And every muscle of Nixon's face betrayed embarrassment, fear, and tension. Nixon's speech was the visual representation of insecurity, acted out by the guarantor of security. It was this fear that the Americans perceived on their television screens.

What happened? Before the televised speech a small percentage of Americans distrusted Nixon, yet after it the figure increased enormously, and exceeded fifty percent.<sup>18</sup>

To conclude, briefly, Concept 2 - the Self You Present to Others, Figure 1 is a useful example.



Fig. 1.

An Englishman with a bowler hat, a three piece suit and an umbrella describes his probable social status, probable education, probable voting preferences and possible personality.

As this suggests, it is not with complete certainty that we can ascribe all the attributes from the clues available. However, whether the summation about his personality is correct or not, the image stereotype is sufficiently powerful to embed this man in a total picture that talks of the utterly conservative English middle-class man.

The interpretation of the image stereotype and the accuracy of the interpretation introduces our third concept - the personality that society will construct from persona clues.

### Concept 3 Social Perception

In forming an impression of someone, we more or less consciously take note of their physical appearance, their actions, voice, expression and other clues that may be psychologically meaningful. From the evidence in front of us, we formulate a fairly detailed concept of their personality - what they are like, their thoughts, feelings and needs.

Kretch, Crutchfield and Livson in *Elements of Psychology*, suggest that from what might appear diverse and unrelated impressions, the observer has a strong tendency to form a coherent identity of another person based on inadequate and incomplete data.

To cite the reasons why we do this could suggest the notion that our daily existence requires an over-all impression of someone that permits us to interpret and predict their actions, or it might simply be to organise and categorise the unknown and therefore make life more predictable. The reasons why we do this are not particularly important but it is significant

that from a few clues there is a strong tendency for the perceiver to invent attributes that serve to fill in the gaps in what they see and hear.

The ability and, it seems, need to construct a 'personality type', can be shown from this abstract example.

S.E.Ash at Brooklyn College, 1946, found from the seven words, ironical, inquisitive, persuasive, energetic, assured, talkative and cold, that students could write down a full bodied impression of an unknown person, even to the extent the students filled out the picture describing the person to have a sense of humour.<sup>19</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, this example may be a little obscure but it does support the significant claim that identity or personality is based on a lack of information where the skeleton must be fleshed out from a person's own implicit theory of someone else.

If we rely on an implied theory in constructing a personality type, there must exist the potential for an inaccurate deduction of someone's personality. The deduction relies firstly, on the assumption that personality-character type, is not an 'act' fabricated for the occasion. Secondly, the spectator must be well-acquainted with both the verbal and non-verbal language-codes of the behaviour. Thirdly, we must be aware that our own idiosyncratic feelings or thoughts (even on the day), or our cultural bias that can mis-interpret or re-interpret the available information.

The second and third points can be briefly expressed through an example of a cultural difference in an awareness of personal space. On meeting an Arab the experience is that they speak considerably louder and more aggressively than the average Australian. Not only do they speak louder, but they stand very much closer when in conversation.

---

<sup>19</sup> op. cit. *Elements of Psychology* ; 797.

By appearing to violate one's 'personal space', the Australian will probably feel uncomfortable and ill at ease. The simple and uninformed deduction of this experience could find Arabs to be generally loud, overbearing and rude. Smell and spittle, can contribute further attributes that quite mistakenly, can get in the way of the other personal qualities of these people.

The authors of *Elements of Psychology* do not address the misinterpretation of available personality clues other than to say

Provided people generally share the same general culture, our implied theory will tend to portray the personality of those around us. However, when confronted with persons who are not of our own immediate group or culture, the customary notions of what goes with what are not applicable. Under these circumstances, we fall back on a set of stereotypes.<sup>20</sup>

### Stereotypes

Clearly it could be seen the identification with the stereotype permits society an economy of effort in scrutinising the 'persona'. All forms of classification by which we quickly summarise the social information of human encounters we assume is to render social life predictable, or at least less chaotic. Social types are theoretically subject to correction and individualisation as we get to know individuals through direct contact. But here we meet some differences between stereotyping and other forms of social typing. Everyday typing characteristically grows out of an interaction with individuals, whereas stereotypes, particularly racial stereotypes (that may have historically preceded these individuals) is often the function of a physical or social distance between them and ourselves. Consequently, we may simply never get close enough to the people we

---

20 Ibid.; 801.

stereotype, to correct or modify the original typification. In other words, as long as we fail to perceive the true characteristics of the person and in some way distort or eliminate evidence that would challenge our stereotype image - there is no need to modify our judgement.

And yet, so powerful is the stereotypical image and cultural maintenance in its construction and perpetuation, that the prejudices and typification are enormously difficult to break down. This point is reinforced by Ian Robertson's book *Sociology*. As he says:

Should a prejudiced person find that an individual member of a group does not conform to the stereotype for the group, this evidence is simply taken as the exception that proves the rule and not as grounds for questioning the original belief.<sup>21</sup>

There does however remain another side of the stereotypical coin. People sufficiently internalize the expectation or role of the stereotype, they appear to become the 'pure' example of it. There are sayings such as "he is so much like the typical 'cop' or 'Italian', it simply can't be true."

All I can say of the 'cop', is that given the conditioning process of the academy, the role is so internalized, that the police cannot help but be partly a product of the institution that formed them. This may provoke the saying and feeling, "once a cop, always a cop."

The point that must be emphasised is that the stereotype is only in part based on fact, the remainder relies on conjecture and speculation. However, the power of the stereotype should never be underestimated as the stereotypical image can live independently of the victim, as in the case of racism. In other words, what is seen is what the spectator wants to see and the prejudices or stereotypes deny the evidence that is there in front of them.

---

<sup>21</sup> op. cit. *Sociology* ; 44.

The importance of clothes is the final point upon which I conclude this section on stereotype. I think you will generally agree that by selecting a particular jacket, dress or jeans, people begin to make quite specific statements about themselves. They declare themselves as individuals but they simultaneously indicate the extent to which they belong with other sets of individuals. Everyday clothes are in a very real sense distinctive uniforms conveying to other people important messages about the identity of the wearer.

As an aside to this and without wanting to attempt an answer, I propose the question: Are you the same person dressed in different clothes and therefore projecting a different image, or, is the projected image in fact modified by the clothes chosen for the occasion eg. the wedding dress the ball gown, the suit and tie?

The power of the institutional gown, whilst it does not relate to the question asked, is an interesting example that shows the extent to which clothes obscure or appear to deny the individual.

In 1988 the Family Law Court in Tasmania decided to revert from civilian clothes to the formal wig and gown whose origin dates back to the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Why?

Because it has been found that the number of reprisals on barristers and judges from irate divorce participants has been significantly reduced since the reintroduction of this archaic tradition. The wig and gown, it seems, sufficiently displace the particular identity of the barrister, as they are recontextualized as merely legal administrators in the institution of the law.

#### **Concept 4 Physiognomy**

In the 1990's, the belief in the divination of character from bodily features (also known as somatomacy) as a significant factor in an assessment of personality, is a concept viewed not only with scepticism by many but with hostility, particularly by many social scientists, as is evident in the reading of Ian Robertson's *Sociology*.

This is understandable in view of the charlatanism that has characterised the field and in view of the implication of hereditary determinism.

My position is clear, as I believe the individual is born with a physical and hereditary potential which is developed within the possibilities of environmental and cultural factors. However, I cannot help but admit that physiognomy can be a determining factor in directing a personality deduction.

John Casper Lavater in the 17th century was the first man to plead in the name of science the ability to read the personality in the face and figure of a man.





Fig.2. John Caspar Lavater by Thomas Holloway.

Throughout his writing, his tone was defensive and pleading as he reiterated the claim that the inner state of man could be translated from his outer appearance on the basis of universal principles.'

Nothing is more necessary, than to pay attention for a few days to what we hear, or read, respecting the human character, in order to collect Physiognomical decisions pronounced by the very Adversaries of the Science. "I read that in his eyes - It is sufficient to see him - He has the air of an honest man - I prognosticate good from that face"...I would trust him merely on his Physiognomy - If that man deceive me, I will trust nobody hereafter....Even Anti physiognomical decisions confirm, as exceptions, the universality of the sentiment from which I contend. "His physiognomy is against him - I could not

have suspected that from his look - He is better, or, he is worse than he appears etc.<sup>22</sup>

Through the new technology of engraving Lavater illustrated his books with drawings from life and from old masters as exercises in physiognomical character analysis (see figure 3).

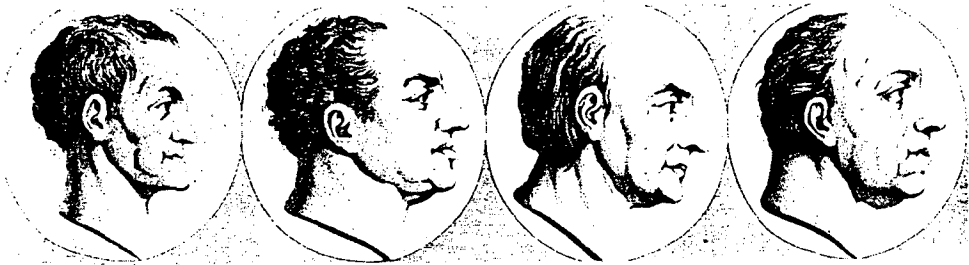


Fig.3. Page from Lavater's Essays on Physiognomy

In expressing his aims Lavater says:

My chief aim is to encourage the Reader himself to engage in the career of observation - Let us begin only by collecting a sufficient number of observations, and endeavour to characterise them with all the precision, all the accuracy of which we are capable.

The principal point in question is, to discover what is evidently determined in the features, and to fix the characteristic signs, the expression of which is generally acknowledged.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Polhernus, T. and Benthall, J. *The Body as a Medium of Expression* New York Dutton, 1975; 44.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; 45.

Lavater was sufficiently confident to believe in the analogy between physiognomy and language:

I do not promise, for it would be the height of folly to make such a promise, to give entire the immense alphabet necessary to decipher the original language of nature, written on the face of man and on the whole of his exterior; but I flatter myself that I have been so happy as to trace a few of the characters of the divine alphabet, and that they will be so legible that a sound eye will readily distinguish them wherever they occur.<sup>24</sup>

E. H. Gombrich - 'On Physiognomic Perception' - sees Lavater's method of physiognomic intuition as nonsense saying that Lavater 'explores his own response, but he treats it like an infallible oracle that is in no need of corroboration.'<sup>25</sup>

As Gombrich implies and popular wisdom warns us; do not rely on first impressions and do not judge a book by its cover.

Charles Darwin in *Expression in Man and Animals*, found physiognomic perception lacking. However, he felt that should humans by their disposition be generally sad or generally happy, these lines would become permanently etched into the face.

Physiognomic perception, once advocated as a parlour game in the 1700's, still has some currency today. It is no accident that advertising and movies use the faces they do, or even the voices dubbed in commercials and radios.

The voice in itself can be particularly descriptive of a projected physiognomic type. It can be in utter disbelief that I hear and then see the same person; something like hearing a person on the radio and then

---

<sup>24</sup> Spiegel John and Machotka Pavel Messages of the body The Free Press, 1974; 10.

<sup>25</sup> Gombrich E. H. *Meditations on a Hobby Horse, and other essays on the theory of art* London and New York, Phaidon, 1963; 49.

meeting them. An observation that in practice, can clearly deny any relationship between how one looks and speaks. Any dislocation between what we hear and then see, is usually amended as further evidence becomes available.

As Gombrich suggests, it is in part through physiognomic perception that we arrive at an hypothesis of deduction. But it is a system that must allow for modification and we destroy the value of that instrument if we overrate that initial groping, our first move in the effort to make sense.<sup>26</sup> He goes on to say:

The person with a gloomy face will alert us to the possibility of other gloomy symptoms; but as soon as his voice or his smile refute this expectation we forget or ignore our first impressions and adjust the category in which we place him.<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION.

We have seen through the four strategies of likeness that we are at the same time the one we think we are, the one we want others to think we are, the one society thinks we are and the one that time, context, race, sex, education and any number of other variables will ultimately determine.

As could be envisaged, to reach any form of conclusion as to the relationship between these likenesses is immensely difficult. It can be seen however, that there exists, or can exist, a tenuous relationship between the inner self, the persona mask and the observer's perception. The persona is an immensely complicated system of relationships between the individual consciousness and society. Whilst the persona purports to be a mask, to carry out an assigned role or function, I think there is a point at

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; 50.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; 50.

which the persona informs the inner self and is sufficiently internalised to become intractably part of the inner self. Both John Berger and Rosalind Coward write of this image dislocation, in particular for Western women, as generated by advertising. Similarly, Jung in *Selected Writings*, believes that the denial of the self through an appropriated image-persona is to a degree possible. However, he goes on to say:

[The] soulessness of such an attitude is, however only apparent, for under no circumstances will the unconscious tolerate the shifting of gravity....When we examine such cases critically, we find that the excellence of the mask is compensated by the 'private life' going on behind it<sup>28</sup>

'The socially strong man' is, in his private life often a mere child where his own states of feeling are concerned'. Whilst Jung identifies the persona mask as the single identity expressed in public, he neglects to mention the multiplicity of roles that we play in everyday life, roles that are in the main, sufficiently internalised that we are rarely aware of their occurrence, and the effect this has on the psyche. This invokes a further question - the concept of the 'split' personality. Whilst I am not proposing a 'split' personality as envisaged by Robert Louis Stephenson (Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde), I believe that there can exist a plurality of personalities in a single individual. One need only observe people closely as they move from one milieu to another to be aware of an alteration of personality.

Two quite different environments may demand two totally different attitudes, one that may be in accordance with social conditions and requirements and the other in accordance with the domestic situation. It

---

<sup>28</sup> Jung, C. *Selected Writings* (Selected and introduced by Anthony Storr), Fontana Press, 1983.; 95.

becomes immensely difficult, if not impossible, to assess which is the 'true' character, or the 'real' personality.

This brings us to the question of perception. Perception is largely a product of our own social, educational and cultural bias. As Robertson's book *Sociology* suggests, provided people generally share the same culture, the deduction of character/personality is generally correct. This observation is simplistic and, I believe, generally incorrect. The facade/persona offers little insight into the true character/characters of the personality. The neoplatonic idea where it was believed the eyes could penetrate the veil of mere appearances is no longer credible. We do not share the same impression or deduction about an individual, and within the realm of perception, a virtually infinite number of possibilities exists. Reality, it seems, has become an inexhaustible phenomenon where we can no longer trace its beginning or end.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barthes, R *Camera Lucida, reflections on photography*  
(translated by Richard Howard), Fontana  
Paperbacks, London 1984.
- Barthes, R *Mythologies* (selected and translated by  
Annette Lavers), Jonathan Cape, 1972.
- Berger, J *Ways of Seeing* BBC & Penguin Books,  
1972.
- Bryden-Brown, J *Ads that Made Australia* Double Bay,  
Sydney, 1981.
- Coward, R *Female Desire - Women's Sexuality Today*  
London, Granada, 1984.
- Eco, U. *Strategies of Lying* (edited by Marshall  
Blonsky).
- Krech D., Crutchfield R. S.,  
Livson N. *Elements of Psychology* Second edition,  
1969.
- Goffman, E. *Gender Advertisements* London  
MacMillan, 1979.
- Gombrich, E. H., Hochberg,  
J., Black, M. *Art Perception and Reality* John Hopkins  
University Press, 1972.
- Gombrich, E. H. *Meditations on a Hobby Horse, and other  
essays on the theory of Art* London,  
Phaidon Press, 1965.
- Jung, C. G. *Selected Writings* (Selected and introduced  
by Anthony Storr), Fontana Press, 1983.
- Maddi, J. R. *Personality Theories - a comparative  
analysis* Dorsey Press, 1976.

- Spiegel, J. and Machottea *Messages of the Body* The Free Press,  
1974.
- Polhemus, T. and  
Benthall, J. *The Body as a Medium of Expression* New  
York, Dutton, 1975.
- Robertson, I. *Sociology* (second edition), Worth Pub.,  
1977.
- Williamson, J. *Decoding Advertisements, Ideology and  
meaning in Advertising* Marion Boyers,  
London 1978.



**STRATEGIES OF LIKENESS**  
**PAPER 2**

To introduce Paper Two, I briefly refer to a recent photographic commission that identifies many of the issues addressed in the paper.

I was employed to make a portrait of a woman, who would in turn give this portrait to her fiancée. I was surprised as my client was insistent that, as an artist-photographer, I should get to know something of her personality and armed with a verdict, I could reveal through the photograph her 'essence', her 'truth'.

It was with difficulty that I looked into the face before me, thinking and asking "Who is she? What is she? What is she to become?" This photograph was to be more than just a platitudinous record of her physiognomy. The image was to signify love, devotion and an impending marriage.

The history of portraiture of course preceded me; where it was claimed the eyes of the artist's genius could penetrate the veil of mere appearance and reveal the truth - the soul of the sitter. And yet, I could not escape Roland Barthes' identification in *Camera Lucida*, of the four image repertoires that oppose and distort one another, for in front of the camera as subject, you are at the same time:

The one you think you are, the one you want others to think you are, the one the photographer thinks you are, and the one he - the photographer makes use of as his art.<sup>1</sup>

The four image repertoires could not be denied, I was to become incalculably aware of the strategies that could be employed to reveal any number of her personality traits, or projected traits. The image would rely on my virtuoso skills as a photographic technician, and as a person who could project trust and an understanding for the needs of my client. But it was an image where there must remain a dislocation between what my client believed I could reveal and

---

<sup>1</sup> Barthes, R *Camera Lucida, Reflections on Photography* (trans. Richard Howard) London, 1984;

what I would actually reveal, - an image that would hinge unequivocally on what she would be able to 'project' or would choose to 'project'. The final arbiter in these stratagems of 'surface' and 'show' would rely on the one image chosen from the multitude that would 'live' or 'die' under the scrutinizing glances of her lover. An image where the success or failure of the marriage might in the end contribute a yet unknown strategy to the final reading of the photographic portrait.

This was to become the foundation on which this paper is based, but such was the diversity of the enquiry, it has evolved into two parts - A and B.

**Part A** identifies the invention of the photographic medium, in light of painters who asserted the camera was but a machine and recorded the mere surface of a thing - a debate that endeavoured to prove the painted portrait was infinitely more valuable than the photograph, as the painter had greater access to the divination of the soul of the sitter, and largely denied any intuitive flexibility of the camera operator.

**Part B** challenges the validity of those artists who assert that the photograph can reveal the soul of the sitter. Supported by *Camera Lucida* and Barthes' four image repertoires, it shows there is no objective truth in the surface of a thing as every surface is contextually bound.

## Part A

It is generally acknowledged that the camera obscura paved the way for the development of photography. But an observation by Gisele Freund in *Photography & Society* is an interesting one and pre-emptes some of the historical debates below. For Freund continues to perpetrate the myth that the painter has some divine intuitive power, over and above any machine that was tied by its automation.

It was the invention of the physiognotrace, a device based on the pantograph, says Freund, that was the ideological predecessor of photography. 'The physiognotrace was larger than the pantograph and was held upright so that the features of the sitter could be traced. Fitted with an eyepiece in place of a dry stylus, this device could transcribe the outlines of the face with near precision'.

Freund speaks of the vulgarity of the physiognotrace as the portraits obtained were only of documentary value.

They generally show the same flat, stylized, frozen expression,[that lacks expression because] it has not been executed with an artist's intuitive feeling for character. The works of miniaturists [painters] one can always see more than a simple likeness between model and copy for the artist is free to emphasise whatever characteristics he chooses, and thereby can evoke the spirit of the sitter as well.<sup>2</sup>

Freund observes, that only with the impersonal technique of photography was portraiture completely democratised. Freund's observation for the democratization of portraiture through photography is certainly validated, as in Paris alone it was said that in 1849, 100,000 daguerrotype portraits were taken - a modest figure if we consider a contemporary source which claimed in 1847 half a million photographic plates were sold in Paris. However, Freund's

---

2 Freund, G *Photography and Society* (trans John Shepley) New York 1974; 18.

support for the artistic merits of the miniature portrait has little credibility when applied outside a limited number of remarkable images produced by painters of excellence. In fact the majority of miniatures were produced within an industry which suffered from restraints in having to provide a portrait that was both affordable and satisfied an established criteria of social decorum. Freund's support for the miniature is further eroded by the writing of both John Berger - *The Moment of Cubism* and Ernst Gombrich *Art Perception and Reality* - on which I will expand later.

However, the traditional concerns with the camera obscura, a device employed by both figure and landscape artists as early as 1558, and other implements including the physiognotrace, certainly helped prepare the way for the acceptance of the photographic image and accommodated the growing conviction that it was to be the machine that was to be the final arbiter in the search for truth.

Imagine both the delight and consternation in the publicised invention of photography in 1839, in England with Fox Talbot's calotype and with the daguerrotype in France. For today we could scarcely imagine the profundity of a device that enabled nature to register its own image.

This was reflected in the names and terms coined to describe the new process. Camera images were called 'sun pictures' and were said to be 'impressed by nature's hand'. Fox Talbot's illustrated book in 1844 - *The Pencil of Nature* perpetuated the idiom.

Even the church became involved in an article that appeared in a German newspaper *Leipziger Standtanzeiger* in 1839.

To try to capture fleeting mirror images is not only an impossible undertaking, as has been established after thorough German Investigation, the very wish to do such a thing is blasphemous. God has created man in his image and no human machine can capture

the image of God. He would have to betray all His Eternal Principles to allow a French man in Paris to unleash such a diabolical invention upon the world.<sup>3</sup>

This article not only prophesied photography's impending utilization to promote today's consumerism, but also spoke of a certain pompous arrogance of the German church and nation.

Western Europe prided itself on mechanical achievements; the simultaneous development of industry and technology, with an art which increasingly pushed towards an objective representation, coincided with the product of photography. Art was becoming inextricably bound to the philosophy of positivism and its faithful reproduction of an objective reality. As a result many people saw photography as a direct threat to art.

However, numerous articles attempted to reassure artists there was little concern as the daguerrotypes were only in black and white and needed excessively long exposures (twenty minutes in full sunlight the earliest days of photography were not uncommon with devices invented like the appui-tete, where a metal brace attached to a chair held the skull securely from behind and remained hidden from the camera lens).

As improvements in photographic techniques became available (as when exposure time was shortened to 4 to 5 minutes), the Art Union in 1841 assured artists

They need not fear this innovation would injure them, for while a photographic portrait was inexorably faithful, none knew better than themselves how rarely a very close resemblance pleased the sitter.<sup>4</sup>

However, this attitude was short-lived. By 1842 Richard Beard patented a method for applying colour to daguerrotypes. By 1846 reversing its earlier

---

3 Ibid.; 69.

4 Scharf, A *Art and Photography* Penguin 1968; 19.

position the *Art Union* praised Claudet's coloured daguerrotypes as truly and undoubtedly works of art.<sup>5</sup>

The poet Lamartine at first asserted that "photography was this chance invention which will never be art, but only a plagiarism of nature through the lens." However, he later changed his mind after seeing Adam Salomon's photographs.

Disturbed by the charlatanism of those who dishonour photography by their countless copies, I had anathematized the art. The photo is the essence of photography. Once I have admired Adam Salomon's marvellous portraits taken in a burst of light, I can no longer call it a trade, it is an art. It is more than art; it is a solar phenomenon in which the artist collaborates with the sun.<sup>6</sup>

It was with the painting 'school' of Realism 1850-59 and with photography increasingly seeking affirmation for its own artistic pursuits, that we begin to see a clash in an enquiry as to the nature of art and reality, and its relationship to photography. Through these debates the adverse opinion of photography became known as well as the qualities that were said to prove that the painted portrait was infinitely better than the photograph.

The first realists believed in an impartiality of vision, to paint only what the eye sees, rejecting imagination as being non-objective. Gustave Courbet in protest to ideas maintained by the Academicians, stated his intent as "to paint only what the eye sees - to translate the customs, ideas, the aspects of my epoch according to my understanding."<sup>7</sup>

He, who did not paint an angel because he never saw one.

---

5 Ibid.; 20

6 op cit. *Photography and Society* ; 77.

7 *Colliers Encyclopedia* Volume 18 of 24 volumes, Crowell-Collier Educational Corporation 1970; 319.



Consequently Courbet's paintings and those of other realists were often equated with photographs and confirmed the opinion that photography and realism were the same thing. Courbet's painting *Return from the Fair* exhibited 1850-51 was described as ;  
a banal scene worthy only of the daguerrotype.<sup>8</sup>

This was further compounded by the fact that many artist's works were affected by photography, either indirectly through a growing familiarity with photographic images or directly through utilizing photographs as reference material.

The criticism against the daguerrotype was the power of the photographic image in referring them to the 'thing itself'. The camera was seen as an eye; an eye records and what is seen, is what is. The photographer was not seen as the mediator or author of the image, as both photography and the artist's hand were invisible.

So the debate became twofold.

On the one hand there were the academicians who felt photography and Realism were the same thing and photography had become a symbol of vulgarity - a weapon with which to slander the advocates of Realism. As a typical opinion expressed in 1856 by Henri Delorede showed,

Photography gives us a brutal reality. By its own character it is the negation of the sentiment and the ideal. It produces sad effigies of human beings, without style and resulting today in what is called Realism.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand the debate by the Realists was to show photography and Realism were not the same thing.

---

8 op cit. *Art and Photography* ; 96.

9 Ibid.; 97.

In the Realists' defence Champfleury took issue with the criticism that attracted the label 'daguerrotype'.<sup>10</sup> The daguerrotype was a machine he insisted; the artist is not or could not be. The reproduction of nature by man will never be a reproduction or an imitation, it will always be an interpretation'. To prove this Champfleury proposed that if a landscape artist and a photographer were to make pictures of the same view, then each of the paintings would reflect the particular mood and temperament of the artist. Accordingly each would be different. The same could not be said for photography. Therefore "it is easy to affirm that man isn't a machine and cannot render objects like a machine."<sup>11</sup>

Proudhon in his book *Concerning the Principles of Art and its Social Destiny* further justies the merits of realism.

If one thinks the aims of the artist is to reproduce the material appearance of things in imitation of nature, a copy, a forgery, it would be better that the artist abstain. Artistic expression is the excitement to a sensitivity resemblance, but requires as well the character, the thought, habits, and the passion of the subject: those things which art will give you better and more surely than the daguerrotype which can only seize a face instantaneously and consequently with the minimum of idealization.

The portrait made by the artist in a series of sittings by long observation, gives one week, months, years of life to his subjects. *A man is much better known through painting than through photography.*<sup>12</sup> (my emphasis)

To Proudhon and others like him, the portrait painters like Reynolds and Laurence who needed up to fifty sittings must have justified their ideological position.

---

10 Ibid.; 103.

11 Ibid.; 107.

12 Ibid.; 104.

The photographer was thought to be an acute, but non-interfering observer - a scribe but not a poet. But people quickly discovered that no two people take the same photograph of the same thing. The supposition that cameras created an impersonal objective record yielded to the fact that photographs are evidence not only of what is there but of what an individual sees, not just a record but an evaluation of the world.

By 1859 the French Government conceded that photography was indeed an art and authorized yearly exhibitions to be held in the Palais de l'Industrie. It was in this year that Baudelaire was to reproach the smallmindedness of both public and artists alike who believed in the artistry of the photograph, and the realists with their obsessive love of nature.

In these lamentable days a new industry has risen, which contributes not a little to confirming stupidity in its faith and to ruining what might have remained of the divine in the French genius....As far as painting and sculpture are concerned the current credo of the sophisticated public, above all in France...is this: "I believe in nature and I believe only in nature....I believe that art is and cannot be other than the exact reproduction of nature. Thus the industry that could give us a result identical with nature would be the absolute form of art.

A vengeful God has granted the wishes of this multitude. Daguerre has been his messiah. And now the public says to itself:

Since photography gives us all the quantities of exactitude that we wish (they believe the idiots) then photography and art are the same thing." From that moment squalid society, like a single Narcissus, hurled itself upon the metal, to contemplate its trivial image....These new worshippers of the sun.....It must return to its real task, which is to be a servant of the sciences and of the arts , but the very humble servant, like painting and shorthand which have neither created nor supplanted literature.<sup>13</sup>

Baudelaire's anti-naturalistic position was the direct consequence of the emerging and powerful position that photography had assumed in the art world, further accentuated by its entrances into the Salon. Baudelaire's critique must be seen as an influential turning point in the development of painting.

To conclude part one, I refer initially to the writings of John Berger and F. H. Gombrich that essentially deny that the painted portrait revealed a psychological insight of the sitter.

John Berger reinforces this premise in his article "The Changing View of Man and the Portrait".

If we ignore the exceptional unprofessional portraits by Raphael, Rembrandt, Goya etc, the function of portrait painting was to underwrite and idealise a chosen social role of the sitter. It was not to present him as an 'individual' but rather as an individual monarch, bishop, landowner etc. Each role had its accepted qualities and its acceptable limit of discrepancy. "14

E H Gombrich in "Art Perception and Reality" asks to what extent does the tradition of the painted portrait represent types or masks and how far are they individual likenesses? He sees the difficulty as lying in the fact that we are trapped by the mask and therefore find it hard to perceive the face.

We have to make an effort to abstract from the wig to see how far these faces differ, and even then changing ideas of decorum and deportment, the social masks of expression make it hard for us to see the person as an individual.<sup>15</sup>

The premise on which to conclude Part A is twofold.

Firstly, Berger and Gombrich recognise the history of portraiture is predominantly a gallery of poses, stiff in their social decorum and idealization.

The myth that painters could reveal the soul of the sitter came as a direct

---

14 Berger, J 'The changing view of man in the Portrait' in *The moment of Cubism and other essays* London 1969 p.

15 Gombrich, E., Hochberg, J., and Black, M. *Art, Perception and Reality* London, 1972.

consequence of the photographic medium and the insecurity this elicited; a skilful marketing strategy that was perpetrated to oust its rival competitor.

The second point hinges on the 'nature', the 'genius' of the photographic medium, where the photograph leads the mind to the actual world; if it is of a nude, we will think of women not art. Whilst photographers tried to deny the apparent objectivity of the medium and assert their objective as being the same as those of the painters, they were to deny what the second part of this paper, Part B, aims to argue; that no longer can a person be explained or understood from one point in time and there is little truth in the surface of a thing.

## PART B

In an age that once believed in Positivism in philosophy and Naturalism in art, with the photograph thought to be true to nature, it was once not unreasonable to think that some psychological truth may have been recognised in a person's bodily form. The speculations of Lavater (see Paper 1) on the subject of physiognomy must now however be considered speculative or absurd.

Part B therefore shows that no longer can objectivity be a sure criterion of knowledge and that the camera machine, whilst it still asserts its apparent transparency, allows for every possible imaginary distortion. The photographic portrait hinges unequivocally on Barthes' four image repertoires:

The one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am and the one the photographer makes use of as his art.

I further qualify Barthes' fourth image repertoire as, the one that time, context and audience will ultimately determine.

Such is the multiplicity of conflicting and divisive strategies at work within any portrait, that a viewer can never arrive at a conclusive understanding of who someone is. Therefore the soul/character of the sitter is an infinite equation of possibilities and a fabrication within the spectator's projected image.

Whilst much of Part 2 of this paper is based on Roland Barthes' book *Camera Lucida*, that essentially denies the ability of photography to reveal the soul, I pre-empt Barthes with the quotes of four contemporary and well known photographers who, like the painters before them perpetuate the myth that they can reveal the 'essence' - the character - the soul of their sitter. Only Richard Avedon, the fifth quote cited, speaks candidly and with some regard for the exploitative potential of the photographic portrait. Avedon denies any intuitive divination of the sitter's character for Avedon's portrait is a self-portrait.

1. I have tried more and more to make photographs of people be biographies - to bring to light in each photograph the essential personality which is designated as temperament, soul, humanity.<sup>16</sup> (Kasebier)

2. The most difficult thing for me is a portrait. It is not the same as photographing someone who is not conscious of being photographed. And the same thing happens when a biologist looks through his microscope; the thing studied does not react in the same way as it does when it is not being studied. And you must try to get your camera between the shirt and the skin of someone, which is not easy. The strange thing is that through your viewer you see people in their naked form. You are stealing something, and sometimes it can be very embarrassing.<sup>17</sup> (Bresson)

3. Should I dominate in a subtle way; should I give myself up to 'luck', if such a thing exists, in that moment when my camera is ready and the person reveals himself(*my underline*), and seize the fraction of a second without any chance to change the result?....The greatest difficulty in photography lies in the necessary concurrence of the model's expression, the photographic performance and the quickness of the camera ....But when the perfect spontaneous combination is achieved - a human document - the very essence of life is laid bare.<sup>18</sup> (Weston)

4. The photographic portrait is an experience between the photographer and the subject. If I photographed you, I would observe every one of your aspects - the light of your cheek, the way your finger curves against your cheek, the lines on your forehead. Maybe when you were a little girl your mother looked at you with that intensity, but you have probably not been looked at with that intensity since then.. When photographers are good, they reveal people's secrets.<sup>19</sup> (Welpott)

---

16 Kasebier, G quoted by Ben Madow in *Faces* Boston 1977; 204.

17 Cartier Bresson, quoted in *ibid.*; 453.

18 Weston, E *The Flame of Recognition* (ed.by Nancy Newhall), London 1975; 37.

19 Jack Welpott, *Faces*; 469.

5. A portrait photographer depends upon another person to complete his picture. The subject imagined, which in a sense is me, must be discovered in someone else willing to take part in a fiction he cannot possibly know about. My concerns are not his. We have separate ambitions for the image. This need to plead his case probably goes as deep as my need to plead mine, but the control is with me.

A portrait is not a likeness. The moment an emotion or a fact is transformed into a photograph it is no longer a fact but an opinion. *There is no such thing as inaccuracy in a photograph. All photographs are accurate. None of them is truth.* [my emphasis]<sup>20</sup> (Avedon)

Avedon comes closest to the very real poignancy of the photographic portrait and it hinges on those last sentences -

There is no such thing as accuracy in a photograph. All photographs are accurate.

None of them is truth.

Avedon does not propose that his portraits reveal the soul and the character of the person, for his portraits are an opinion, where one surface has been elicited by the photographer and manipulated for his own ends.

Roland Barthes identifies in *Camera Lucida* the mimicry between his profound self and his effigy as created by the camera. For Barthes denies Gertrude Kasebier's belief (cited above) of "revealing the essential personality" of the sitter, or Cartier Bresson's ability to "get beneath the shirt and the skin of a person". The social game of posing must in no way alter "the precious essence of my individuality", writes Barthes:

What I am apart from my effigy. What I want in short is that my mobile image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and with age, should always coincide with my (profound) self; but it is the contrary that must be said: 'myself' never coincides with my image, for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it) and myself which is light,

---

20 Avedon, R *In the American West* London 1985.



divided, dispersed....If only photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body, a body which signifies nothing! Alas I am doomed by (well-meaning) photography always to have an expression; my body never finds its zero degree.<sup>21</sup>

Barthes identifies two things in this quotation. The first is that no 'still'-photographic image (and it might be speculated that no image, painted, photographic or filmic), could equate with Barthes' profound self -(a problematic and unarguable point).

However, the second point has more scope for enquiry, as Barthes believes the expression captured by the camera never reaches its zero degree. Barthes however, contradicts himself as he later says:

For what society makes of my photo, what it reads there I do not know (in any case there are so many readings of the same face).<sup>22</sup>

I pursue the point further by first referring to facial expression, where the ambiguity of the arrested face draws from a multiplicity of possible readings in real life; where it can be seen a tenuous link exists between what the face actually expressed and what it appears to express.

The most famous example is of course Leonardo's painting of the *Mona Lisa*, whose smile has been the subject of many fanciful interpretations. It is said to "stir up repressed desires - mocks you with her smile - a painting said to have survived because of its mystique, subtlety, and aura of indefinability"<sup>23</sup>

The Mona Lisa draws from life where expressive movements are movements and once we lack the explanatory sequence to determine from where this configuration started and where it leads, the ambiguity can increase to an unexpected extent. This can equally be seen in the contorted face of a wrestler that may look in isolation like an expression of laughter, while a man

---

21 op cit.; Barthes; 12.

22 Ibid.; 14

23 Boas, G *Wingless Pegasus - a handbook for critics* Baltimore 1950; 4-26.

opening his mouth to eat may appear to be yawning. Laughter it is said, is close to tears, and there may be some doubt about whether a person is weeping or amused.

Samuel Fernberger, a modern psychologist, claims that it is impossible ever to diagnose emotion from the facial and body expression alone unless given a clue from the situation and context from which it arises.

Within the history of portrait painting the stock formalisation of culturally determined expressions predominate in the ritualised gestures of prayer or greeting, represented in early Renaissance painting. Expressions of both the body and facial expressions were clearly limited in an effort to be conceptually clear and unambiguous.

Charles Darwin in *Expression in Man and Animals* (who claimed to show that our ways of expressing feeling and emotion have an evolutionary origin), hoped to gain much from the great masters in painting and sculpture and said "but with a few exceptions (one) has not thus profit. The reason no doubt is that, in works of art, beauty is the chief object and strongly contracted facial muscles destroy beauty."<sup>24</sup>

Whilst on the one hand I speak of the ambiguity of expression, there are a limited number of expressions that are replete with signs and photography, like painting before it, uses these to great effect.

I refer in particular to the political poster, but it must be made very clear, that the expressive devices tap into culturally current and meaningful codes of communication and we realise in fact, we know nothing of the person depicted other than that which the political machine wants us to know. In addition, the apparent transparency of the photograph contributes an inestimable strategy in the whole procedure.

---

24 Darwin, C *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* Chicago 1965; 14.

I refer initially to the photograph of Winston Churchill (see figure 1) where the proliferation of this one photograph taken by Yosef Karsh has become synonymous with not only the physiognomic identity of Churchill but his personality as well.



Fig.1. Winston Churchill, photographed by Karsh, Ottawa.

We are told by Karsh how unwilling Churchill was in 1941 to pose for the photograph and how he allowed only two minutes as he passed from the chamber to the anteroom. As Churchill approached with a scowl, Karsh snatched the cigar from his mouth and made him rather angry. However, as indicated, that expression we now equate with Churchill was no more than a passing reaction to a trivial incident and yet, was perfectly suited to symbolize the leader's defiance of the enemy.

(Yosef Karsh - *Portraits of Greatness*, Edinburgh 1959).

Roland Barthes in - "Photography and Electoral Appeal" (briefly referred to in Paper One) does in addition refer to the expressive strategies that have been used in political posters.

A full face photograph underlines the realistic outlook of its candidate, especially if he is provided with scrutinizing glasses. Everything there expresses - penetration, gravity, frankness: the future deputy is looking squarely at the enemy....A three quarter face photograph, which is more common, suggests the tyranny of an ideal: Its gaze is lost nobly in the future, it does not confront, it soars and fertilizes some other domain....An almost three quarter photo is ascensional, the face lifted towards a supernatural light which draws it up and elevates it to the realm of a higher humanity.<sup>25</sup>

Having said this, I refer back momentarily to the enigmatic smile of the Mona Lisa, the way she seems to smile with only the left part of her mouth. Maybe the apparent ambiguity of the expression may have after all agreed with a piece of advice given to Renaissance women by Agnolo Firenzulo in a book on beauty, where he suggested,

From time to time close the mouth at the right corner with a suave and subtle movement, and to open it at the left side, as if you were smiling secretly...this is not affectation, if it is done in a restrained and graceful manner and accompanied by innocent coquetry and by certain movements of the eyes..<sup>26</sup>

An expression once learned and utilized in life, one might imply, becomes as equally puzzling and intriguing as the smile of the Mona Lisa. Given this it is interesting to speculate whether the enigmatic smile was a particular mannerism indicative of the Mona Lisa, or learned, as Firenzulo's quotation may indicate; or merely a painting technique utilized by Da Vinci; - a technique where to paint slightly contradictory expressions in an effort to animate a portrait was, by the

---

25 Barthes, R *Mythologies* (trans by Annette Lavers) London, 1972; 93.

26 Devane, J *Drawing and Painting The Portrait* New York 1983; 19.

18th century, to fall into a crass and familiar formula. The possible scenarios that a single expression can evoke are limited only by the context in which they are seen.

As Susan Sontag in *On Photography*, 1977 asserts only that which narrates can make us understand and as this function takes place in time, it must be explained in time.<sup>27</sup>

And yet such is the apparent transparency of photography as the unmediated copy, or the mechanical transcription that the facts as it were are infinitely mutable by theory or point of view. Once given a point of view by context or audience, they are convincing as anonymous and authoritative evidence, (the same premise with which the historical debate tried to come to terms at the time of photography's invention, to ascertain if photography was in fact art).

As the photographic example of Robert Doisneau's portrait of a man and a woman drinking in a Paris cafe shows, (see Fig 2) the meaning of any photograph is dependent on the context in which it appears. As this photograph was published in four different contexts, radically affecting the ways in which it was interpreted.



Fig.2. Robert Doisneau, *At the Cafe, Chez Fraysse, Rue de Seine, Paris, 1958.*

27 Sontag, S *On Photography* New York 1977; 108.

The first was part of a photographic essay on Paris cafes in a mass circulation magazine, *Le Point*. Sometime later, without Doisneau's consent it appeared in a brochure on the evils of alcohol published by a temperance league. Later still, and again without Doisneau's consent, it appeared in a French scandal sheet with the caption 'Prostitution in the Champs Elysees'. This provoked a court case in which the man in the photograph sought and was awarded damages and compensation. The fourth context in which it occurred was in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Szarkowski offering the interpretation of "secret venial sins of ordinary individuals - a potential seduction."<sup>28</sup>

The point becomes particularly poignant when referring to photographic works seen on museum and gallery walls. Often the only information accompanying the work is the photographer's name, the date of the photograph; with the words *Untitled* or an equally innocuous title, like - *Man with a stick*. For it is precisely because of the lack of context and the infinite possibilities of readings this allows, that many photographers continue to utilize this strategy.

Pursuing this point, through the photographs Richard Avedon took of his father consolidates many of the points addressed so far. Avedon's portraits are conceived and exhibited as art with virtually no title or caption, that essentially diffuse or deny the personality of its sitter, for the subject is a pawn in Avedon's quest for self expression.

Avedon was to write about the six photographs of his father who was dying of cancer:

Whenever he poses for me he smiles and becomes benign, gentle, . . . somehow wise.

He's interested in looking sage. My photographs show his impatience.<sup>29</sup>

(Avedon's aim is to photograph people as they never see themselves.)

---

28 Barrett, Terry in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*: Vol. 19, No. 3, fall 1985; 52.

29 Rosenberg, H *Portraits/Richard Avedon* New York 1976.

What do these six photographs of Avedon Senior show the author of this paper?

On the one hand, they depict the imminent death of an old man wasting away through either age or sickness (for we are not told of the cancer except by associated texts). They are powerful not because we feel we know Jacob Isral Avedon but because it shows what someone looks like as they are about to die; it is horribly prophetic as we anticipate our own death.

But they also speak of device - the white backdrop, the cumbersome camera, a technique that allows for little candour, the emptying out of biographical props. It is a portrait that says stand here whilst I make a portrait. Don't smile, look here - look into the camera.

It is a portrait that has reached Barthes' zero degree, not by the devices of capturing a flickering expression but by a non-expression - a face that is a product of nature, environment, age, and an impending death.

Offered as art, little or no information accompanies these pictures. They live within a field of potential where I know audience, context and time will irrevocably play their part. It's as if the photograph has become the stage - the cinematic screen where the actors have become the audience and their performance is any number of visions projected onto the neutral image.

A further quirk or twist is that these images are said to testify to the greatness of an artist who could offer his father to the world. When asked, "What kind of a man could take such pictures?" Avedon responded that the photographs did not represent his father, but what it is to be any one of us.<sup>30</sup>

As is demonstrated, captions and contexts have a persuasive effect on what is seen in a picture. By altering the context in which it is shown, or by adding text, the same photograph can support very different points of view, or even contradictory readings. So powerful is the power of the caption in

determining the reading, it gives a somewhat different perspective to the old dictum - pictures speak louder than words - for words and context can very well speak louder than pictures.

It is at this point I return to Barthes and the second part of *Camera Lucida*, where all that has been said appears to be undermined by one photograph that was to Barthes to reveal the very essence - the soul of his mother. Whilst Barthes reiterates something of Part A and the genius of the photographic medium, he established an ideological position which cannot be contradicted for it is linked unqualifiably to a private history.

Barthes is well aware of the fiction of the photograph as he says photography is not truth because it can lie about the meaning of a thing, but he identifies something more: that it cannot lie about the subject's existence.

The photograph is literally an emanation of its referent; from the real body which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me who am here.<sup>31</sup>

Both Susan Sontag *On Photography* and Rosalind Krauss "Photographic Conditions of Realism" speak of this phenomenon. But for Barthes it becomes lacerating in its madness, a condition perpetuated by love and loss. Searching among photographs after his mother's death "struggling", says Barthes, "between images partly true and therefore totally false,"<sup>32</sup> he then found her in this one photograph, *Winter Garden*. His mother was five and her brother seven. He writes that "it achieved for me utopically the impossible essence of the unique being."<sup>33</sup>

For here photography and only photography was to lay bare an essential essence of his mother as Barthes wanted to remember her and yet an image that was far removed from any of Barthes' lived experience.

---

31 op cit. *Camera Lucida*; 80.

32 Ibid.; 66.

33 Ibid.; 77.



Barthes identifies the essence (for we can no longer speak of truth) as belonging to two genres - one of gesture and the other as the name of photography - 'that-which-has-been'.

Firstly to gesture:

The distinctness of her face, the naive attitude of her hands, the place she had docilely taken without either showing or hiding herself and finally her expression, which distinguished her, like Good from Evil,...the figure of sovereign innocence, all this had transformed the photo pose into that untenable paradox which she maintained all her life; the assertion of a gentleness.<sup>34</sup>

And secondly every photograph is somehow co-natural with its referent.

I can never deny that the thing has been there; there is a superimposition here; of reality and of the past. And since this only exists for photography, we must consider it by reduction as the very essence, the name of photography.<sup>35</sup>

All the photographs of my mother which I was looking through were a little like so many masks; at the last, suddenly the mask vanished: there remained a soul, ageless but not timeless.<sup>36</sup>

I passed beyond the unreality of the thing represented, I entered crazily into the spectacle into the image, taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst Barthes speaks of love and the crippling effects of loss that hinge painfully on a single distant photograph, Barthes identifies this chasm between the private and the public photograph.

Barthes' picture is 'tenuously' linked to a private history, a context - a memory. It is tenuous because it is a picture that describes the physiology and an expression of a young five year old girl - a little girl Barthes could never

---

34 Ibid.; 69.

35 Ibid.; 76-77.

36 Ibid.; 109.

37 Ibid.; 117.

have known and yet was in the photograph to contain the very essence of her being.

It is unknown face excepting the speculative claim that might concern the 'aria', that shadow, that genesis of what she was to become. *The Winter Garden* photograph remains difficult and yet is securely placed within a private history.

Why did Barthes never give the reader of *Camera Lucida* the *Winter Garden* photograph, where, as a viewer, one could search for the truth of this one image amongst the untruth of the others? Because it would have been a pointless enquiry.

It exists only for me. For you it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'...at most it would only interest your studium; period clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound.<sup>38</sup>

Doisneau speaks of the depth of a photograph as dependent on the perceptiveness of the viewer - the beholder's share; and as we have seen *Paris Cafe* was a photograph that was equally powerful in its ability to support four different contexts.

The poignancy of Doisneau's words speak very clearly, given the earlier example of Paris Cafe -

The person who looks at the photograph must be allowed to travel that visual trail. *We must always keep in mind that a photograph is also made by the person who is looking at it...*speaking of the path that one undertakes when experimenting with photography. We must let the spectator untangle himself and be liberated for the journey. The seed is offered and the spectator lets it grow inside himself. For a long time I thought I should tell my public the whole tale. I was mistaken.<sup>39</sup>

(my emphasis)

---

38I Ibid.; 72.

39 Schnaith, N 'Looking Into Another Look' in *Photovision* 3, 1981; 58.

have known and yet was in the photograph to contain the very essence of her being.

It is unknown face excepting the speculative claim that might concern the 'aria', that shadow, that genesis of what she was to become. *The Winter Garden* photograph remains difficult and yet is securely placed within a private history.

Why did Barthes never give the reader of *Camera Lucida* the *Winter Garden* photograph, where, as a viewer, one could search for the truth of this one image amongst the untruth of the others? Because it would have been a pointless enquiry.

It exists only for me. For you it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'...at most it would only interest your studium; period clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound.<sup>38</sup>

Doisneau speaks of the depth of a photograph as dependent on the perceptiveness of the viewer - the beholder's share; and as we have seen *Paris Cafe* was a photograph that was equally powerful in its ability to support four different contexts.

The poignancy of Doisneau's words speak very clearly, given the earlier example of Paris Cafe -

The person who looks at the photograph must be allowed to travel that visual trail. We must always keep in mind that a photograph is also made by the person who is looking at it...speaking of the path that one undertakes when experimenting with photography. We must let the spectator untangle himself and be liberated for the journey. The seed is offered and the spectator lets it grow inside himself. For a long time I thought I should tell my public the whole tale. I was mistaken"<sup>39</sup>

(my emphasis)

---

38I Ibid.; 72.

39 Schnaith, N 'Looking Into Another Look' in *Photovision* 3, 1981; 58.

In conclusion, all human expressions captured by the camera, have a multiplicity of meanings that go beyond the explicit meaning of either the sitter or the portraitist. For the photograph lives or can live in a field of potentiality. The portrait is not only what the photographer wants to detect and what he detects without knowing it, it is what the model wants to show, and show without knowing it. It is also what the spectator sees without necessarily suspecting it, it is what context and art will ultimately make of it. The camera shutter severs the connection, ends one experience and begins another.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Avedon, Richard      *The American West/Richard Avedon* Thames and Hudson 1985.
- Barthes, Roland      *Camera Lucida, Reflections on Photography*(translated by Richard Howard) Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1984.
- Barthes, Roland      *Criticism and Truth* translated by Katrine Pilcher Keuneman, University of Minnesota Press 1987.
- Barthes, Roland,      *Mythologies* (Selected and translated by Annette Lavers), London, J. Cape, 1972.
- Berger, John,      *About Looking* London 1980.
- Berger, John,      *Ways of Seeing*, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972.
- Boas, George,      *Wingless Pegasus - a handbook for critics*, John Hopkins Press 1950.
- Darwin, Charles,      *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, University of Chicago Press 1965.
- Devane, John,      *Drawing and Painting and the Portrait*, Phaidon Press 1983.
- Faces*, Chantecle Press, Boston 1977.
- Freund, Gisele,      *Photography and Society*(translated by John Shepley), New York, Abrams 1974.
- Gombrich, Ernest, Julian Hochberg,Max Black,      *Art, Perception and Reality*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1972.
- Rosenberg, Harold,      *Portraits/Richard Avedon* essay 1st ed. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1977.

Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1977.

Schnaith Nelly, "Looking into Another Look", in *Photovision* 3, 1981.