

Prestented in this book is the
theoretical submission and the
documentation of the work
produced for the degree of
Master of Fine Art over the
period 1990 to 1993.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my thanks to the staff of the School of Art, and in particular my supervisor Mr Rod Ewins, for their assistance throughout my course of study.

Michael Edwards, February 1993.

PROPOSAL FOR MASTER OF FINE ARTS
PROGRAMME

I intend to develop a programme that is an extension of my undergraduate submission, namely portraiture. The portraits are a statement about the person, not a quest for likeness. This approach often leaves the individual no more important than the act of drawing, or the construction of the image with regard to the history of portraiture in Painting and Photography. As a development the person may come to dominate the image, or conversely, by nature of working an image in a series, the figure may be obliterated leaving only clues for identity.

Part of the rationale for continuing to work this way is it will allow further exploration of the graphic potential of the lithographic medium. Part of this process would involve working with other print media as an end in itself, and as a method of stimulating ways to approach lithography. The subsequent product would be the production of colour lithographs.

Michael Edwards 5.12.89

'LA BELLE NOISEUSE' IN FRONT OF THE LENS

Under the prescribed topic 'Problems in Practice,' this paper discusses problems relating to the representation of the identity of an individual by counterpointing Roland Barthes 'four image repertoires' with the Balzac novella 'The Unknown Masterpiece'. It discusses Barthes paradigm in the context of his chapter 'He Who Is Photographed' and investigates the novella with reference to a structural analysis by Barthes of another Balzac novella, 'Sarrasine'. It concludes such a representation is not tenable because of the nature of identity.

A reading of Honoré Balzac's 'The Unknown Masterpiece' and the section of Roland Barthes' 'Camera Lucida' titled 'He Who is Photographed' provide two different entrances into the problem of locating the individual subject in order to construct a representation. The core of this topic is the identification of what constitutes the subject's identity, and its transference to another mode of presentation, be that photographic, written or painted. The proposition that a somehow complete representation of the particular individual is possible involves an acceptance of the notion of the 'essence' or the 'soul,' and its transliteration into another form, another medium. The writings of Balzac and Barthes demonstrate significantly (though Barthes provocatively steps outside this position) that the first requirement of the proposition is unattainable, that is the existence of a somehow unified identity.

In 'Camera Lucida,' Roland Barthes cites 'four image repertoires', which circumscribe and release the complexities of representing the identity of the subject in photography.

In the section titled 'He Who Is Photographed' Barthes refers exclusively to the act of being photographed and knowing it. This awareness causes the subject to respond instantaneously with the process of 'posing'. The process is seen as an active attempt to transpose the body into an object to be viewed as an image. 'I don't know how to work on my skin from within.'¹ The photograph has the potential to create or humiliate the body. Barthes couples this experience, however fleetingly, with anguish. But the subject's motivation to control the body extends beyond the risk of stress or mortification, or the additional message of a social game: the

¹ Barthes, Roland *Camera Lucida* (trans Richard Howard) London, Fontana, 1984; 11

subject poses, is aware of this, and wants the viewer of the image to apprehend the game.

It is the subject's desire to be represented as more than merely an effigy which motivates awkward attempts at anatomical manipulation. What is important to the subject is the 'essence' of his individuality, who he is. The subject requires that the image, taken from innumerable shifting potential photographs, is one which coincides with the profound self. Barthes laments the body's inability to locate its 'zero degree', a body which signifies nothing. The photograph, despite its static nature, always assigns the body an expression.²

The shift in viewing the self as an image after the advent of photography is notable. The photographic image created the potential idea of self as 'other', which Barthes explains as a 'cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity'.³ Unlike the reflection in a mirror, where the image is never transfixed, or the portrait painting, where the intervention of the artist and the concerns of the medium interfere regardless of verisimilitude, the static image printed by light was able to transform the subject into an object. Though this shift occurred, it is notable that, because of the long poses required, early figurative photography subsumed many of the conventions of painting, developing its own language and simultaneously imitating another.

In front of the lens, the intended photograph causes the subject to experience a subtle shift, he is neither subject or object, but a subject in the

² see Gombrich E.H. *The Image and the Eye*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1982;106. This notion is seemingly tautologous as the body is never devoid of expression, even in death, 'the whole configuration of the face is in perpetual movement, a movement which somehow does not affect the experience of physiognomic identity...';

³ op.cit. Barthes; 12

process of becoming an object. Barthes equates this experience with a 'microversion' of death. The photographer, purportedly aware of this phenomenon, attempts to engage the attention of the subject, or alternatively modifies the *mise-en-scene*, with the intention of producing an effect that is 'lifelike'. However the product, the photograph, renders the subject an object, which dispossesses the subject of himself. At the same time the portrait photograph inevitably creates a doubling, the genesis of the image of 'the other'. At this point the subject becomes part of the audience much the same as any other viewer, unable to influence or control what other spectators see in the image, and often the context in which the photograph is seen.

At the centre of this process are the difficulties of attempting to locate and create a representation of the subjects identity. Barthes four image repertoires succinctly encompass the complex actions of the subject and photographer in their attempt to record the person.

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.⁴

It is precisely in front of the camera that the subject has to act on his/her beliefs, either incorporating or disregarding pre-existing notions of the self and the relationship to the photographer or the mechanical device. In identifying the categories as repertory, the allusion is to the vast and complex nature of each category.

The first category, 'the one I think I am', ostensibly refers to the 'self', by nature private, and of prime importance to the subject. Personal identity

⁴ ibid.; 13

is a construction of attitudes about the self, informing the subject who he/she is. It is not a static construction, but is constantly fluctuating and capable of change, it is subject to the arrangements of memory and thus the vicissitudes of time.

The 'the one I want others to think I am', corresponds to the subject's social identity. Again it is a construction of attitudes, from which the subject projects to other people who the subject is. It is by nature public and necessarily more flexible than the 'self', as it assists the individual to manoeuvre through the intricacies of society. As the individual moves from one milieu to another, the shift of the persona allowing the individual to function in different situations may be quite dramatic, yet unnoticed. The plurality and the functions of social identity are best exemplified and most exposed by the conflict experienced when two or more milieus, therefore personae, clash.

The third category, 'the one the photographer thinks I am', transfers the activity from the subject to another, the photographer, who can represent all other people in relationship with the subject, and can include viewers of the photograph. The category refers to the social perception of the subject, that is the subjects' personality. It is that identity which is constructed by the receiver (photographer) independently from the subject's own set of attitudes. Personality is composed from the total behavioural and mental characteristics observed, by which the subject is able to be recognised as a unique individual. Though it more likely develops through diverse and unrelated impressions from which the observer constitutes some form of a coherent identity of the subject, despite incomplete or inadequate information. It is also contingent on memory, and is potentially as variable as the people surrounding the subject. The formation of

personality presumes that display characteristics are usually truthful, though personality, the word, derives from the Latin 'persona', which translates as mask.

The fourth condition in Barthes' model, 'the one he makes use of to exhibit his art', identifies and establishes an element potentially completely outside the subject and the subject's own interests. It represents the photographers'(artists') intention. It also allows an interpretative role for the photographer, subsuming notions of the photograph as an illusion of some sort of objective truth, or the element of chance, and the aesthetic intervention of the photographer. At the same time it hints at a possibility that the photographer may have a hidden agenda, either unconsciously, such as unrecognised ideological, cultural or class biases, or even consciously, a controversial image may facilitate the photographers career. As the object, the photograph, progresses to the site for viewing, the intentions of the photographer may be enhanced or subverted by others, curators or publishers, working to their own agenda. How the audience responds to the image, regardless of their awareness or disregard for the presenters intentions, is open and uncalculable. Barthes concludes the passage by protesting on behalf of the subject 'It is my *political* right to be a subject which I must protect.'⁵ He was responding to an image of himself which he felt had been misappropriated and used in a context which completely changed the reading of the image.

The potency of the 'four image repertoires' goes beyond their apparent simplicity and, as noted, the complexities of each of the categories. The categories are not specifically named, to do so would have been to foreclose the reading. Each category is not finite: the interdependence and

⁵ ibid.; 15

overlap cause the four nominated sections to become indistinct, to blur. It is where shifts occur, as the four components react against each other and within, that we know precisely the point where Barthes paradigm works, we recognise what is being demonstrated, but ultimately are unable to name it, represent it, completely.

'Camera Lucida' is essentially the work of a writer. It is Barthes' intention to disrupt the distinction between criticism and literature. Rosalind Krauss acknowledged this project, invoking the term 'paraliterature' to describe a form of writing which is neither criticism nor a literary work. 'The paraliterary space is the space of debate, quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation; but it is not the space of unity, coherence, or resolution that we think of as constituting the work of literature.'⁶

Within his paraliterary text Barthes illustrates and acknowledges the complex ethos of the postmodern individual and consequently his representation, but at the same time counters this by accepting in a single image the representation of the fundamental character of a person. It may well have been his scheme to frustrate the 'serious' reader, as he was wont to work against his own previous writings, and these texts were often too playful to confirm a definite conclusion.⁷ Or perhaps it was the sheer enormity of attempting to reconcile the intelligence of the senses and the rational intellect⁸ which rendered the writing inconclusive. I suspect Barthes recognised the potential of leaving the text open in his writing, therefore its inconclusiveness allowed many possible readings.

⁶ Krauss, Rosalind 'Post Structuralism and the Paraliterary'; *Originality of the Avant-garde: A Postmodernist Repetition*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Pr., 1987, 292.

⁷ Culler, Jonathan *Roland Barthes*, New York, Oxford University Press 1983.

⁸ Sontag, Susan *Under the Sign of Saturn*; New York, Farrer, Strauss, Giroux, 1972; 173.

Paradoxically although this should seem to conceal, not disclose, the figure in the text (the author, presumed dead), instead it seems to reveal the complex workings of a man bent on constructing his own public identity. From 'Camera Lucida' the reader is left meditating the elusive but possible (photographic) image that contains within its surface the truth of the subject.

In 'Camera Lucida' Barthes presents another paradox. In the section 'He Who is Photographed' he seems to be making the claim that to try to capture on film the particular human identity is unviable, because of the temporal and multiple faceted nature of the persona; an entity which can never be circumscribed by a moment. Yet later in the work he seems to be presenting 'The Winter Garden Photograph' as a work which accomplishes this feat.

The particular photograph, of his recently deceased mother as a child, displayed what Barthes termed 'the impossible science of the unique being'.⁹ He artfully transferred to other photographs of his mother their capacity to provoke only something of her identity, never her truth. The 'Winter Garden Photograph' was somehow essentially different, the constant inference was that this image contained her essence, her soul. Barthes manoeuvred around any declaration, stating the photograph only existed for him, and discounted resemblance as merely a constructed effect of identity. For him truth required the subject in an eternal form, he spoke of the disappointment of other photographs of his mother, except for that one image of the child he could not possibly have known.

⁹ op.cit. Barthes; 71

About 150 years earlier, Balzac was constructing the conversations and thoughts of fictitious painters with a not dissimilar issue in mind, the ultimate revelation of the (perfect) figure in paint. The novella, 'The Unknown Masterpiece',¹⁰ ends conclusively, the master painter commits suicide, signalling the failure of his representation.

A reading of 'The Unknown Masterpiece' is readily influenced by Barthes' 'S/Z,' a sustained structural analysis of another Balzac novella, 'Sarrasine.' The analysis promotes the role of the reader as the repository of conventions and thus the producer of meaning. The reader is constituted as a 'plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)...'¹¹ In 'Image Music Text,' Barthes' conception of 'the birth of the reader' is the effect of the 'death of the author', he continues,

'...the text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message of the 'Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture,'¹²

The meanings generated by the text are concatenations invoked by the reader (Barthes speaks of the 'I'), however this reader has not yet buried the author. For it is interesting that an author of the period cannot reconcile

¹⁰ The story, set in 1612, involved the arrival to Paris of a talented young painter, Poussin and his beautiful innamorata, Gillette. Poussin seeks out a teacher, one Master Porbus, and while at Porbus' studio makes contact with Master Frenhofer, a worldly old artist with superlative knowledge and unimagined painting skills, a supreme master. It transpires Frenhofer has been working in secret, for ten years, on a single painting, 'La Belle Noiseuse', which by his account will transcend his other work and its own materiality to represent the perfect image of a woman, after Catherine Lescault. Poussin and Porbus offer the services of Gillette for a model, in return for a viewing of the Masterpiece. Frenhofer agrees. On comparing the painting to Gillette he declares the painting finished and allows the others to view it. The Masterpiece is found to be a cacophony of unintelligible paint, except for the beautifully formed foot of a woman which has survived in a corner of the painting. The same night the old artist destroys the painting and then commits suicide.

¹¹ Barthes, Roland *S/Z* (trans Richard Miller) New York, Hill and Wang, 1975;10

¹² Barthes, Roland *Image, Music Text* (trans Stephen Heath) New York, Hill and Wang, 1977;146

the greatest artist of his era, the fictional Frenhofer, with an ability to create or represent, in the medium of paint, the superlative form of a (specific) woman. Then, more than now, the classical novel could have accommodated the production of such a painting, a unique masterwork. The narrative cleverly provides a discussion of the potentials of the medium, illustrating both accomplishments and unsuccessful attempts, and the reasonings for both. The ultimate painting reveals the tragedy of one man's obsession with his own life work, and his subsequent failure to master in paint his 'La Belle Noiseuse'. To accept a parabolic reading of the failure of the master's neurosis is too simplistic, and does not allow either the text, or the author's considered ruminations on painting, their lively potential for exposing the representation of the particular (absolute, perfect) figure, as a myth.

In his analysis of 'Sarrasine,' Barthes divides the text into 'lexias' (fragments) and systematically identifies one of the five essential codes each lexia operates on. The 'proairetic code' is a series of models of action which allow the reader to establish details into plot sequences. The reader's own stereotypical model of actions allow the placement of details as the text develops. The 'hermeneutic code' controls mystery and suspense, helping the reader identify enigmas and thus arrange details towards a possible solution. The 'semic code' supplies cultural stereotypes, models of character types, thus assisting the reader to select relevant information to enable the development of the characters. The 'symbolic code' assists the development of symbolic interpretations from details in the text. The 'referential code' is a system of other cultural codes providing information on which the texts rely. In literature these codes are derived from other texts. These codes '...which turn culture into nature, serve as the foundation of the real, of

"Life"¹³ By allocating the codes and noting their functions, it is possible to see the novel as an 'intertextual construct', rather than the revelation of what the reader presumes to be Balzac's definitive intention.

By apportioning the characters of the novella, it will be possible to extract coherent units and (hopefully) retain some sense of the whole parable. (For the sake of this paper it seems the simplest method of investigating the terms of the novella.) In 'The Unknown Masterpiece' the characters, as much by their designation (semic code), as by their actions (proairetic code) determine the narrative. The relationships created by their discussions and positions serve to query and validate the allegorical masterpiece. Each character is a product of combinations of recurring semes (the units of the signifiers), which can be relatively stable, involving a repetition of semes, and simultaneously complex, overlaying more or less contradictory figures.

The first of the two sections of the novella is titled 'Gillette' (symbolic code), in acknowledgment of Poussin's young lover. Though introduced at the end of the section her function is to present an object, a specimen of the perfect body. She is also an emblem of exquisite femininity, of youth, charm and beauty. Though beauty can never be readily explained, unlike ugliness, it is realised through an infinity of codes. These referents for beauty in the novel include Venus, Raphael's model and Ariosto's Angelica. Frenhofer confirms her absolute beauty when he accepts the perfect body above the reconstituted body of the models of Turkey, Greece and Asia. In the eyes of the painters Gillette remains an object, even Poussin trades her for a view of the 'Masterpiece'. The text however allows the development of a fuller character, as Gillette is also the embodiment of the 'real'. The perfect body

¹³ op. cit., Barthes in *S/Z*; 206

knows love, perhaps she is not pure, virginal. By her actions; she '...stood before him in the simple, artless attitude of an innocent, shy young Georgian girl, a blush of shame tinged her cheeks,'¹⁴ (semic code), yet was aware of her own potency, 'She was queen, she felt instinctively that the arts were forgotten for her.'¹⁵ (symbolic code). It is not so much the specific actions or codes that determine the reader's acceptance of Gillette's 'reality,' but the potential range of actions or codes that may exist in the shift from one code to another. For example Gillette's humiliation (proairetic code) after being exposed for comparison to the 'Masterpiece,' 'I should be a vile wretch to love you still, for I despise you. - I admire you, and you make me shudder! I love you, and I believe that I already hate you.'¹⁶ It is the reader's attempt to accommodate all the possible emotions, actions, implications, characteristics (codes), which may occur between the extreme declarations of love and hate, which work to make Gillette a more replete figure. It is precisely where the shifts occur that the character is experienced by the reader as being real.

The youthful neophyte, Poussin, guides the activities of the plot, the proairetic codes, initially by fate and then by his inexperience and actions. It is his quest for knowledge which fully invokes the discussions of the masters; the dilemma with his motives for trading his love for life (Gillette) with his love for art, which underwrites the hermeneutic codes; and finally his youthful naivete which allows him to declare openly 'But sooner or later he will discover that there is nothing on his canvas!,'¹⁷ thus destroying Frenhofer's dream. When the novice signs his drawing, revealing his identity as Nicolas Poussin, the naming invokes a historical (referential)

¹⁴ Balzac, Honore de, *The Unknown Masterpiece* London, The Claxton Press, 1899; 38

¹⁵ *ibid.*; 30

¹⁶ *ibid.*; 45

¹⁷ *ibid.*; 44

code, strangely authenticating the presumed fictional character. The novella, set in 1612, would have the French classical painter as an unknown 18 year old youth. It is this minor importance which gives the historical character its measure of reality, for if Poussin was presented in full historical glory, the effect would be paradoxically less real. By functioning alongside the fictional characters, this figure acts in an absurd way, by blending history and fiction, to produce immoderate effects of the real.

Master Porbus is a successful painter, it is he who Poussin seeks out initially for guidance. At the same time Porbus' deference to Frenhofer serves to indicate the greatness of the latter's skills and intellect. A 'sickly looking' man (semic code), Porbus moderates between the novice and the master, his painting 'Marie the Egyptian' providing the basis for much of the discussion of the nature of painting. His function is that of the interlocutor, while he listens attentively to the master, he also cautions the novice, 'Sublime painter that he is, he was unfortunate enough to be born rich, which has made it possible for him to go astray; do not imitate him! Work! painters ought meditate only with brush in hand.'¹⁸ Porbus also is the 'go-between' in his and Poussin's scheme to extract a viewing of the undisclosed masterpiece.

It is the mind and art of Frenhofer which is central to the novel. The old master is a wealthy and worldly man (semic code). In criticising, then offering solutions for Porbus' paintings, then demonstrating his superlative skills (proairetic code), he establishes his identity with Poussin and the reader as the supreme painter, a true master (symbolic code). The privilege of this wealth and skill was his pursuit of the masterpiece. For ten years Frenhofer worked obsessively on a single painting, away from the eyes of

¹⁸ *ibid.*; 27

any other person. Thought of by Poussin as a 'supernatural genius,' and admired yet suspected by Porbus of falling victim to neurosis, '...if rhetoric and poetry quarrel with the brush, we reach the doubting stage like the goodman here, who is as much a madman as a painter.'¹⁹ When Frenhofer finally decided the masterpiece to be complete, agreeing to compare it to the perfect body of Gillette, then Poussin, Porbus and the reader witness the alternations of the confused realisation of the Master. He rants 'I am naught but a rich man who, in walking, does nothing more than walk! So I shall have produced nothing!'²⁰ , but then claims the painters are jealous and their denial is an attempt to steal the painting from him. Though his dialogue is uncertain, his actions are not, during the night he destroys the Masterpiece and then himself.

The subject of the Masterpiece is mentioned by her full name only once in the text, just as the first section of the novella is titled 'Gillette', the second is titled 'Catherine Lescault'. In the text Catherine was identified as a famous courtesan (semic code) known as 'La Belle Noiseuse' (symbolic code), the latter name being the usual reference for the Masterpiece. Although Catherine Lescault may have been a flawless model, 'La Belle Noiseuse' came to represent the idealisation of the perfect woman, indicating a distance, and sometimes confusion, between the actual (fictional) figure and Frenhofer's memory or idealised conception of her as perfection. The Master's incidental reference to Pygmalion, therefore Galatea, incites a replication of codes, symbolic and, especially, referential codes, as the reader invests cultural information (other texts, histories and mythologies) relating to the creation of a perfect woman. Frenhofer's insistence on 'La Belle Noiseuse's' perfection places her figure outside the reader's expectation for the real. Perfection is one end of the code, either

¹⁹ *ibid.*; 26

²⁰ *ibid.*; 45

origin or terminus, it stops the replication of codes and the shifts which occur between them. Barthes explains, '...and since this distance (shift) is part of the human condition, perfection, which annuls it, lies outside of anthropological limits, in supernature.'²¹ However, the naming of Catherine Lescault nominates something else of this composite figure, she did exist, the enigma (hermeneutic code) remains engaged.

Balzac's construction of the figure of Catherine Lescault/La Belle Noiseuse is notable because nowhere does the text demonstrate the figure by the listing of details in an attempt to outline the subject. This inevitability of text to list details, an accumulative register of the body, in order to portray the whole (what Barthes refers to as the 'Blazon'), presumes a complete inventory can reproduce the total body. Catherine Lescault/La Belle Noiseuse is presented in the text almost exclusively through the often confused mind of Frenhofer, her creator. She is the embodiment of partial qualities of many supreme women, Galatea, Dante's Beatrice and '...that undiscoverable Venus of the ancients, some of whose charms we find now and then scattered among different persons.'²² She is also the female body anatomically fetishised, 'the bosom,' 'respiring flesh,' 'that cheek,' and 'moist eyes.' In order to know her the reader must reassemble the fragments, the figure exists in the spaces between these clues, she is who the reader makes her. In an attempt to know the whole it is necessary to reinvestigate the parts, and the reader is ultimately left looking, along with Poussin and Porbus, at that fragment, the 'living foot,' in the masterpiece.

The awareness of the fragmented body is established through Frenhofer's commentary of the figure of the saint in Porbus' 'Marie the

²¹ op. cit. Barthes in *S/Z*; 71

²² op. cit. Balzac; 25

Egyptian,' '...here it is a woman, there a statue, and there a corpse.'²³ His criticism was directed at the painters inability to invest the total figure with the 'palpatating life,' the truth, evidenced in some details of the saint, in order to obtain the unity which corresponds with an essential condition of life.

Having established the flaws in the painting of the saint, the master identified the problems Porbus encountered in representing the truth of a figure. His dialogue revealed the purpose of art is not mimesis, but to be expressive, it is not enough to make an accurate copy, 'Effects, effects! why, they are the accidents of life, and not life itself.'²⁴ He also located Porbus' attempt to amalgamate two irreconcilable systems of working; the stiff precision of the drawing of the old German Masters and the warmth and eagerness of the Italian painters. In analysing Porbus' figures he reveals a shift from the actual subject to the artists preconceived ideas of what the subject might be, his realism does not copy the real, it copies a copy of the real. Curiously, unlike the shifts in the literary codes, this transference denies life, the truth, in the figure represented, 'You draw a woman, but you do not see her!...Your hand reproduces, unconsciously on your part, the model you have copied in your master's studio.'²⁵ When the accurately realised copy is achieved it may still lack that 'indefinable something,' the soul. In demonstrating the investment of 'life' onto Porbus' figure the old master revealed that which seems very similar to spontaneity, the most fakable of signifieds²⁶ , '...it's only the last stroke of the brush that counts. Porbus has made hundreds, I add but one. No one gives us any credit for what is underneath. Understand that.'²⁷

²³ *ibid.*; 10

²⁴ *ibid.*; 12

²⁵ *ibid.*; 13

²⁶ *op. cit.* Krauss;167.

²⁷ *op. cit.* Balzac; 18

For Frenhofer that which was most important in the painted representation of the figure, the truth, was an intimate knowledge of the form of the subject and an absolute truthfulness to the form in the painting. His truth to life was revealed in his dictum that the artist '...should not separate cause and effect, which are inextricably bound up in each other!'²⁸ This was his struggle. To entertain a false system of reproduction was foolishness, he declared drawing, which abstracts from nature where there are no lines, as such a system. His dream was to represent forms, Catherine Lescault, in a natural roundedness (truth) on the flat canvas. His dream was for the viewer to somehow be able to enter the picture, as though it were three dimensional space, to move around the flesh of the painted figure, so as to confirm its authenticity, 'Is it not the self same phenomena presented by objects that swim in the atmosphere like fish in the water?...Does it not seem to you as if you could pass your hand over that back?'²⁹

The failure of Frenhofer's dream occurred when the masterpiece is viewed by others, Poussin and Porbus, for the first time, the point where all the hermeneutic codes, all the references to the painting, thus the enigma, were closed down. The painting was disclosed; the mysterious pursuit of the monomaniac was a shapeless chaos of colours, lines and tones; an unrecognisable, unknowable language of paint, revealing only its surface and the fragment of a foot (symbolic code). In his endeavour to understand absolute representation, to go beyond appearance, Frenhofer fell victim to a desire to find the meaning, truth in the painting. The attempt by the realistic artist to go into the model, behind the canvas, in order to examine its interior, its back, is aligned to the idealistic principle which recognises secrecy with truth; this compulsion inevitably leads to failure. He failed to

²⁸ *ibid.*; 12

²⁹ *ibid.*; 41

realise, as Plato did, that the simulacrum can never be anything but a false copy, by artificial means (painting) he copies a subject (Catherine Lescault) whose materiality the object (painting) cannot possess. The figure is an illusion precisely because the object, the painting, is empty.

As the hermeneutic codes would have Frenhofer's hallucination gestating over the decade, the development was in fact decomposing. Truth in the narrative is what is at the end of expectation. As a structural function of the hermeneutic code 'truth' is avoided. As the subject (the masterpiece) had always appeared incomplete, its truth was predicated when the enigmatic subject was provided with its compliment. In revealing the painting the old master's dialogue became increasingly deranged, he confused the proposed figure in the painting with an actual woman and his obsession is revealed, 'For ten years past, I have lived with this woman, she is mine, mine alone; she loves me.'³⁰ and 'You are in the presence of a woman and you are looking for a picture.'³¹ (proairetic code; the reader having discovered the artist's delirium). 'La Belle Noiseuse', the painting begins to blur, all that has escaped the implausible, gradual, progressive destruction is that fragment of Catherine Lescault, the 'lovely, living' foot. This remnant represents the form (therein the identity) of the woman presumed to be Catherine Lescault.

Through the inexhaustible phenomena of optical experience, the possibility of each incident to be recorded in innumerable variations, is the predicament of the realistic painter. Out of this plethora of visual arrangements and rearrangements Frenhofer pursued an effect of coherence; the foot is all that remains, as evidence of his abject failure. A testament to his neurosis was the painfully slow and systematic

³⁰ ibid.; 34

³¹ ibid.; 41

annihilation of his passion, the immaculate representation of his ideal woman. The one clue in the painting informs the viewer (reader) the image had gradually resumed its own true nature, that is as a two dimensional wall of paint.

A classic text is loaded and complete with meaning, the failure and destruction of the painter and his dream signalling the end of the novel, but the terms of the classic novel requires the text also carries supplementary meanings, implicit messages whose function is to leave the reader in a state of suspension. What this classic novel does not reveal, what the reader is left with, is locatable in the (obvious) structure of the novella, the two halves (chapters) titled 'Gillette' and 'Catherine Lescault.' The structure and the text set the two female figures up in an opposition, Gillette a symbol of the perfect 'real' body and Catherine Lescault a model of the ideal woman. The hermeneutic codes and the proairetic codes conspired to bring the two figures together. When Frenhofer compares Gillette with the masterpiece the outcome is never fully revealed. (At that same point the action of the destruction of the painting and its creator is set in motion.) Frenhofer's delirium requires that the value of the truth of the painting is (impossibly) that the form of the painted figure of Catherine Lescault/La Belle Noiseuse coincides with the form of (the body of) Gillette. The unestablished comparison, the overlaying of the figures of 'Gillette/Catherine Lescault/La Belle Noiseuse', is the suspension left by this classic novella. Curiously when all these character sectors combine the figure produced coincides with the 'I' in Barthes' (four image repertoire) paradigm.

Gillette indicates what could be construed as her personal identity when her thoughts reveal an attempt to value herself against Poussin's

love for art. Concurrently the fluctuations in her compliance to his request for her to pose for Frenhofer reflect back on the non-static nature of her valuation, therefore herself. Nothing of Catherine Lescault's identity, either personal or social, is disclosed in the text, except perhaps the reference to her being a courtesan, the only instance this figure is encountered in the semic codes. Although this clue is too generic to disclose much of the unique figure.

The reader can formulate something of Gillette's social identity from both the semic codes and proairetic codes. When she speaks (the only space in the text where she operates from the grammatical first person) she is revealing herself to others, that most of her dialogue is concerned with the dilemma of whether or not to pose and her love for Poussin it is (naturally) indeterminate from aspects of personal identity. Also her actions in experiencing joy or humiliation serve to confirm the person the text is constructing.

The third aspect of Barthes' model, the subjects' personality, is abundant and easy to locate in the text with the figure of Gillette. The function of the semic codes in establishing stereotypical character types, act to locate Gillette's personae, this occurs through the figure of the author (narrator) and the observations and discussions of the other characters. With all this various information, detailed in the grammatical third person, the reader creates the figure's personality; she is both the 'glad hearted' girl and the whimpering wretch abandoned with her humiliation. Catherine Lescault enters the model only through Frenhofer, the reader knows she is a courtesan, and the only other reference which leaves her intact, whole, is the reference to her beauty, a condition which operates outside the figure, beauty is conferred on her. It is in Frenhofer's confusion of Catherine

Lescault with *La Belle Noiseuse*, the painting, that the reader is unwittingly found constructing an identity for the figure, as the reader is often unaware if it is the figure or the painting being referred to. This is the potency of the enigma that is Catherine Lescault/*La Belle Noiseuse*.

La Belle Noiseuse is exactly the 'one he makes use of to exhibit his art', and because the figure of Catherine Lescault is not extractable from the painting it is impossible to locate where any distinctions lie. Frenhofer's intrusion on the figure of Catherine Lescault is total, the reader knows nothing of the whole figure except she existed, and is being re-presented as a painting, through which she is discussed as a profile of fragments. The complexity of the plot is demonstrated when the figure of Gillette is involved to somehow justify the painting. She acts as a proxy Catherine Lescault in a strange establishment of the terms of this fourth condition. The two figures, created in an opposition to each other, combine to destroy the masterpiece.

The oppositional relationship between the two female characters is essential to the undoing of Frenhofer's dream, their combined totality demonstrating both the implausibility of his quest and the complexity of the representation of the figure, the particular figure. Just as Catherine Lescault is always presented as the fragmented woman, nowhere in the text is Gillette described by any method other than as a whole (wholesome) body. While Catherine Lescault's beauty is prescribed by external references (referential codes) and a detailing of segments of the body, a fetishising of (always) erotic sites; Gillette's beauty is prescribed also by referential codes, but the purity of the object (body) remains intact. As Gillette's identity is revealed through a complex shifting of the codes, defining her figure as 'real,' Catherine Lescault is never any more than the composition of

Frenhofer's memory and painting, with no persona available to the reader, she reveals only the old painter's desires. When the 'real' figure and the idealised figure are brought together in the studio, the two parts paradoxically work together to symbolically signal the impossibility of the absolute representation of the form of Catherine Lescault, in the artist's terms, what she was in herself.

Should the painting 'La Belle Noiseuse' have been constructed as a 'successful' painting it would have coincided in many ways with the 'Winter Garden Photograph.' As the failure of the painting was emphatic, the photograph remains a curiosity in terms of both 'The Unknown Masterpiece' and Barthes' own 'four image repertoire' paradigm. Both texts elaborately locate many of the complexities of the individual in the act of representation. They both conclusively indicate the temporal and multifaceted nature of human identity, an identity which never fully coheres into a single presentable form. A structural reading of 'The Unknown Masterpiece' allows meanings to be extracted, however it remains intriguing that during his time Balzac was able to manufacture a text which is able to subsume much of the dilemma of the modern subject (figure). If Balzac's intention was to reveal something of the human subject, and idea he had no other way of expressing, or whether it is a fortuitous reinvention of the text, both are moot points when considering Catherine's lovely living foot.

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ANOTHER SIDE OF LOOKING: THE SCOPOPHILIC MIRROR

This paper, written under the guidelines of 'the work in its context', discusses the work of Eric Fischl and Cindy Sherman alongside my own work. The three groups of images are linked by cultural codes carried by a narrative form. The structure of the images predetermines their meanings. It makes the viewer aware of their own location and uncomfortable with their own scopic engagement.

Constantly I have been referred to the work of Cindy Sherman and Eric Fischl by people on viewing the work I have undertaken for this programme. My initial response to the comparisons being that it was fairly superficial, in that the respondents were referring to Sherman's 'kind of portraiture' and Fischl's apparent voyeurism, and the obvious representational and figurative basis of the work. However the initial reluctance on my part gave way to what I now believe is the connection; being the (active) involvement of the viewer in response to the image. The work of both artists calls attention to the fact that the viewers are 'looking', and the meanings generated by the images are very much influenced by this.

In 1982 Fischl accompanied a show at the Edward Thorpe Gallery in New York with a statement,

I would like to say that central to my work is the feeling of awkwardness and self-consciousness that one experiences in the face of profound emotional events in one's life. These experiences, such as death, or loss or sexuality cannot be supported by a lifestyle that has sought so arduously to deny their meaningfulness, and a culture whose fabric is so worn out that its attendant symbols do not make for adequate clothing. One truly does not know how to act! Each new event fills us with much the same anxiety we feel when, in a dream, we discover ourselves naked in public.¹

A prophetic declaration for work he was yet to produce, and one which aligned the artist with the alienation he recognised as a condition of his audience. Though the work would place Fischl squarely in middle-class suburban America (a national identity for an international art scene) he

¹ Schenjdahl, Peter *Eric Fischl* (ed David Whitney) New York, Pantheon Book, 1984

was simultaneously able to invoke the universality of the themes of Eros and Thanatos. This statement, alongside the knowledge of his development from abstraction through the constructionist glassine drawings to the paintings, informs us that the work which appears existentialist and contrary to 'dehumanised' art, in fact exists with no opposition to modernity.

Fischl's constructions of everyday reality have to do with disclosure and discovery. His viewpoint, consequently the viewer's position, is very evident in the composition of the images. The selection and placement of details indicate an acute awareness of the psychological function of everyday objects. The hierarchical relationships with the figures deftly contain the narrative without ever dictating a narrow meaning. It is the viewpoint which controls the reading of the image, the viewer is left feeling as though they have unexpectedly walked into a room, or have looked up from a book and suddenly become aware of something in passing. Constantly the viewer is able to locate their own position in the image, always as a witness.

In the painting 'A Woman Possessed' 1981 (fig. 1), Fischl depicts a woman passed out in a driveway discovered by an adolescent boy on his way home from school. The mottled afternoon light and the placement of objects, the car and the spilled glass of the woman and the boy's school books and bicycle, dictate the situation. On the boy's face is expressed an embarrassed disbelief. It is the attendant pack of dogs that confound the blatant drama. Fischl often uses dogs symbolically: domesticated yet outside society they provide both an animal innocence and an instinctual depravity. Usually in his paintings the dog invests a potentially disparate group of figures with the condition of 'family'. In 'A Woman Possessed' the pack of dogs, some neutral, some excited, some aggressive, offer a dark ambiguity between the



Fig. 1 Eric Fischl 'A Woman Possessed' 1981



Fig. 2 Eric Fischl 'Year of the Drowned Dog' 1983

potentials of familial concern and the perverse spectre of a bestial orgy. The viewer's recognition of their own awkward social transitions is revealed through the eyes of the embarrassed and confused adolescent.

So it is Fischl's strategy to force the viewer to witness the poignant moment or incident in the image from the position of the artist, and the artist is seeing the scene through the mind of a pubescent adolescent, specifically a boy. Invariably the adolescent is presented in the act of apprehending the adult world, engendering a potent flux of erotic ambiguity which signals both a loss of innocence and a developing self awareness. It is interesting how this attention to viewing, looking, imposed on the audience is somehow subversively turned back on the viewer so that they become aware, either consciously or unconsciously, of their own viewing of the image. Simultaneously, the viewer's memory is activated to recall a comparable experience to the scene, heightening associations of fascination or guilt or awkwardness in the act of looking.

It is no accident that Fischl's subjects are almost always engaged in the act of looking, or are about to look; combine this with the overt sexuality of the images, and connotations of voyeurism are inherent and inevitable. But to concentrate on this aspect of the images is too simple both in terms of voyeurism and the full potential of scopophilic vision.

Presented as traditional figurative easel paintings, the earlier paintings, each a self-contained dialogue of glances and psychologically loaded objects extracted from the banality of the everyday, raise the problems of realistic portrayal. Fischl dismisses concerns with realism: his interest is primarily in the construction of narratives, which he develops by constantly reworking an image till it arrives at a pregnant moment. The narratives

Fischl constructs are readily understood as non-linear texts, implicating the viewer in an unfixed plurality of meanings. The structure of the signs; figures, objects and locations, belong to possible narrative networks rather than issuing a single meaning, though often they seem to converge in a single potential story.

Fischl's 'Year of the Drowned Dog' 1983 (fig. 2), is a portfolio of six etchings which form a composite montage of a beach scene. The different panels allow unlimited re-organisation of the separate sections to create a potential single image and accompanying narratives. A logical structure for an assemblage is provided by the horizon in the largest unpeopled panel. The subsequent arrangement of the five smaller etchings, which are differently sized, and the different frames which indicate different attentions to each particular incident, allow the viewer to shift their position across the scene. The two key panels are the print of the boy bending over the drowned dog, the tragic incident, and the smallest print of the man walking towards the viewer. The size of the latter image forces a deep space on an relatively flat image, but more importantly the figure is the only one facing the viewer, threatening to disrupt the viewer's secret position in the act of watching. However it is not any single pictorial arrangement which is critical, it is the potential for different images which circulate around an idea of temporally different moments. This filmic device allows the viewer to move around the scene, evoking the sense of time alluded to in the title.

Fischl's method of working allows an indulgence in the qualities of paint and etching, and the concurrent development of his sense of their expressive possibilities. At the same time there remains a filmic quality in the work, because of the narrative and a tension between his 'naturalistic'

representation and the photographic image, often a direct or indirect source for the image sections. Fischl spoke of the relationship of his painting to photography, indicating how this may effect the reading of the image,

'Painting is a frozen moment. Its frozen, to some extent, the way photography is frozen, except - and it makes all the difference - that photography is mechanistic in a way that doesn't allow the audience to fully believe the poignancy of the frozen moment because they know it's completely changed in a split second. The photograph has edited the moment down. That leads to some suspicion of it. In painting, you always sense the painter building up to the moment and its possible meaning, so that you identify with the maker, finding yourself with him at the point of revelation.²

The relationship of my own work to Eric Fischl's is obvious and absurd at the same time. The work is both figurative and constructed from memory and photographs, and is worked up through the respective medium of lithography. Similarly, the work is formulated with the audience or the particular viewer in mind. However in my prints the narrative is deliberately hidden or obscured, as opposed to Fischl's exposed narratives. His non-linear narratives are finely honed to introduce the audience to a public exposition of the human condition. The narratives in my images are conceived as dialogues, private messages for a particular individual. But as they are presented in a public arena, and because of the inevitability for a viewer to attempt to deduce meanings, the narrative element is often constructed with false or hidden clues, or is simply designed not to reveal enough information; the viewer is kept partially out. Fischl makes the normally private public, whereas my portraits, usually a public presentation of an individual, are made private. Fischl's figures are individualised only for their value as an entity in the narrative.

² Kuspit, Donald *An Interview with Eric Fischl* New York, Random House, 1987; 38

The value of the objects included in my work varies greatly, some objects are neutral: they function to invest false codes to confound any narrative meaning prescribed by the viewer. Other objects may be of specific value to the subject and carry an exclusive code, or the object may be hidden in the image, a further secret. The particular clothes of the figures are indicative of the subject, be it a particular garment, or type of garment, or use of pattern or colour. By selecting the common objects and placing them in relation to a figure loaded with gesture, the codes conspire to reveal a nervously humorous critique on conventions of manners and taste.

It is satisfying for me to note that despite the abundant availability for negative meanings to arise from the sexual, racial or even sexist images by Fischl, he makes no attempt to dissociate himself from the unpleasant associations inherent in his compositions. While it is very important for me that I do not offend the subject or moralise to them (as often the work is located on the boundaries of the friendship) I am reticent to apologise for the conflict a viewer may bring to an image.

Since 1988 Sherman's series of 'history portraits' undertake both a witty, yet incisive, review of the genre of (historical) portraiture. The images are photographic recreations of classic styles and particular paintings. These often grotesque images imply that imitation and appropriation, specifically a photographic rhetoric which masquerades as imitative, are not simply gestures which compliment the source material. It would seem she is intent on exposing and exploiting the conventions of the tradition for the purpose of reconsidering both the genre and the implicit ideas of gender.

As with Sherman's historical portrait photographs the lithographs I have produced are constructed in such a way that they seem to refer more to

painting (and photography) than to any tradition in printmaking. The method of working, rejecting trichromatic or key-stone and colour plate methods, involves a layering of colours reminiscent of painting. In my later prints the viewpoint is very close to the subject, not in order to investigate the subject or any inherent formal qualities. Rather it is a method of retaining an artist/subject dialogue while inviting the audience in, only to reveal less. In this sense the images relate to photographic investigation of an image, the image begins to disintegrate as the truth of the photograph is disclosed.

The composition, lighting and attention to details in the images by Sherman combine to convey a painterly feel reminiscent of the portraiture simulated. Initially the photographs appear as reproductions of the paintings, but she is not interested in mere replication. The fakeness of the image is always accentuated by plastic prostheses and props, such as the artificial grapes in image #224,1990 (fig. 3), a remarkable simulacrum of Caravaggio's 'Bacchus'. Sherman's figure is not the (mythical) youthful bacchanalian reveller of the original. She presents the festive god of wine as though he were the victim of too much alcohol, a sad reminder of his own event. The noticable detail of a dirty thumb nail invites an idea of what Sherman may have considered the truth of the original model, Caravaggio himself, a sordid and squalid man. What is most intriguing in this image is 'his/her' arm, the incredibly muscular limb disturbs what could simply be credulous androgyne, immediately arousing concerns of gender. Undoubtedly Sherman's acute understanding of the complexities of representation allows her to produce these images, which call into question the way we look at the representations of the past and the present.

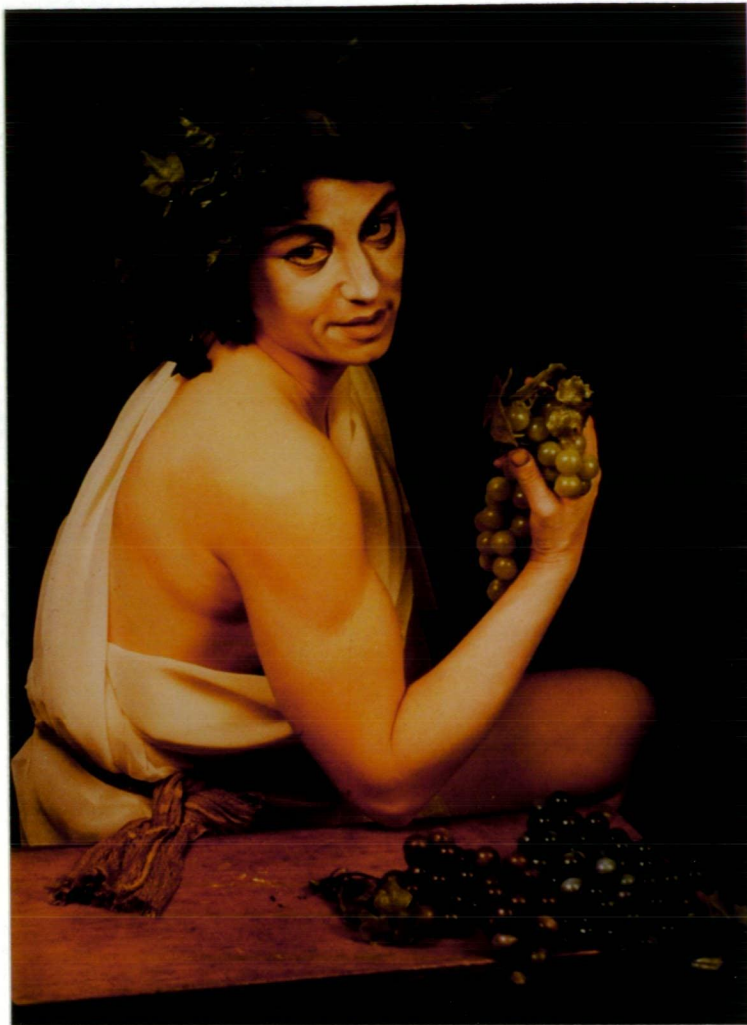


Fig. 3 Cindy Sherman #224, 1990



Fig. 4 Cindy Sherman, 'Untitled Film Still #83', 1980

To regard Sherman's continual use of herself as the model as narcissistic would be simplistic. To do so would ignore the nature of the relationship of the model to the subject, and the relationship of the subject to the representation. Through her chameleonic ability to re-present herself, so as to impersonate a variety of men and women in the manner they were once presented as portraits, Sherman is able to emphasise the stereotyping and (forced) conventions used in the paintings. When doing this she cleverly counterpoints the codes of the past with those of the present, and simultaneously causes us to re-examine our categorical notions of the artist and model, and the viewer and the viewed.

I remember clearly, after first seeing Sherman's 'Untitled Film Stills' series, reading an interview where she stated part of her intention was to make the audience feel guilty for looking, for looking when they shouldn't be. When constructing my images I am very conscious of my relationship to the particular subject portrayed, and by analogy would state that I am in the room with them. At the same time I am aware of the spectre of the audience, the viewer. The attempt to somewhat disclude the viewer is both a recognition of the futility of the representation of an identity, and also a concession to the fact the images are produced without the subject's prior knowledge. This awareness translates in the composition by indicating to the audience their position for viewing, setting up the rules for a scopic engagement. At the same time the portraits refuse to reveal enough of the subject, and the exclusion and discomfort experienced by the viewer is partially a result of this.

Some of the discomfort and awkwardness in my images is a result of the laboriously slow process of colour lithography. An idea of the complete

image exists only in my mind as the print is gradually (sometimes painfully) pieced together. The choice of turgid synthetic colours also exacerbates the discomfort. An insistence in many of the images of an undercurrent of 'trash' is an attempt to nudge towards the grotesque, simultaneously couching a dark humour and allowing the subject a potential for baseness. A code used effectively by Sherman in her later 'historical portrait' series to re-invest the particular subject with human proportions. Georges Bataille traced the birth of such awareness to mankind's recognition of its own mortality, in doing so he divulged the inherent ironies aroused by the linkages of laughter and death, laughter and eroticism and death and eroticism.³

Accusations of voyeurism regarding my work are, I believe, possibly the viewer's recognition of their position in looking. Some of the discomfort or even repulsion felt by the viewer is attributable to this realisation, along with an acknowledgment of the codes which indicate privacy. The inherent eroticism in the lithographs compounds the viewer's suspicion of my intentions. The excessively rendered figures are draped or even tightly bound by their clothes or cloth, always emphasising the form of the body, and the sense of material against skin. The folds and limits of the material conceal a naked body, or frame a fetishised neck or thighs. The deliberately tight drawing offends the usual gentle excess expected of the erotic.

Notions of voyeurism are easily locatable in Sherman's 'Untitled Film Series', most of her figures are photographed at a distance where they are out of reach, but may be seen. Rarely is the figure engaging in any way with the audience, except for an occasional image where the figure looks directly into the camera lens, as in 'Untitled Film Still #17'. Yet there is always the

³ Bataille, Georges *The Tears of Eros* (trans Peter Connor) San Francisco, City Lights Books, 1989; 23/54

feeling of a presence just out of the frame, indicated by the presence of the camera, subsequently the viewer/voyeur. At the same time Sherman has made each scenario into a photograph, an object, which in turn can be the object of the gaze of the viewer/voyeur. The pleasure of the voyeur is not directly derived from the scopic drive, by seeing. The perversion requires the viewer (the subject) looks *past* the object (the photograph) through a loop, which returns and terminates with the viewer.⁴ Sensations of surprise or guilt occur with the completion of this partial drive. The object for the voyeur is in fact the gaze itself, the photograph becomes merely an accomplice.

Sherman's 'Untitled Film Series' provides objects which allow, even invite, the completion of the voyeuristic 'loop', by setting up conditions which ultimately leave the viewer aware of their own act of looking. This occurs by reminding the viewer, who inadvertently has become the subject of their own looking, of incidents where they have experienced voyeuristic delight upon viewing, usually accidentally or fleetingly, a situation they were not meant to see, a scopic engagement in the private space of another.

Sherman's complicity in this process disrupts the voyeuristic game. This occurs at both the level of the production of the object (the photograph) and often uncannily through her performance as a character. In interviews Sherman does not go beyond discussing her attention to the creation of the particular character she is seeking, and something of this attention is often visible in the face of the character in the image. Her complicity is also exposed as the character involves the viewer at another level. The viewer is able to recognise something of the persona via a sharing of codes which

⁴ Lacan, Jacques *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (trans Alan Sheridan) chapter *The Partial Drive and its Circuit* Middlesex, Peregrine, 1986;174/186

are not always specific. Although these codes are not properly negotiated (shared) symbols, the viewer is still able to understand something of the character.

In the photograph 'Untitled Film Still #83', 1980 (fig. 4), the timelessness of the formal elegance of the image is disrupted by the figure itself, which is about to quickly move out of a secondary frame created by the almost symmetrical placement of the buildings, trees and vertical posts. The viewer recognises a stolen glance of a woman, the codes (gestures, clothes, demeanor etc) invoke a series of meanings by which the viewer constructs an identity (possibly stereotypical) for the woman. The figure's malaise is indicated by her left arm supporting her downward head, she is not watching where she is going, aware only of herself. This self awareness is emphasised and confounded by the knowledge Sherman is concentratedly constructing this woman. An open magazine she is absentmindedly carrying and her apparent pace also conspire to help locate something of who she may be and what she is doing there. The image also invites the viewer to locate themselves in the scenario, the viewer's attention to the figure may be simple curiosity, but the image lingers. The figure's belt and the parted coat conspire to reveal more of the woman, the glimpse may be erotically charged, the lingering memory, held fetishistically, reminds us of other stolen glances.

Sherman's later work relies on a 'cooler' indirect response from the viewer, but it nevertheless makes the viewer re-examine their position alongside the machinations of (historical) portraiture. It does this by exposing the codes and laying them at the feet of the collusive viewer. Her earlier works, like Fischl's paintings, are less compromising: by employing the codes embedded in a cultural veil, and locating a position for the

viewer, they force the viewer to acknowledge their apprehension of the scenario derived from their act of looking. It is my hope that in presenting the private portraits it is in fact the viewer who is partially isolated.

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DOCUMENTATION

VERISIMILITUDE

In attempting to write on this topic there was a genuine attempt to locate what I experience as a stubborn production problematic, namely a constant working towards or away from 'likeness.' I regard my images as operating as a dialogue with the particular subject, but the unending need to locate the identity of the subject results in the work falling into the portrait genre. Advice to disregard the notion of the portrait to eliminate the problem dismisses what is a major motivation for me: that is the specific person, therefore the private, and thus the subsequent partial exclusion of the viewer.

I began by investigating the history of portraiture. Two aspects of historical portraiture retained a fascination for me: the notion of the portrait as a document, and the funery portrait. Neither aspects were related to any preceding or intended work. Further reading caused a shift in both aspects, which were in retrospect only historical curiosities, at best peripheral to my own work. The transfer from the idea of the funery portrait is straightforward to the idea of, or desire for, immortality. The shift from the 'portrait as document' through a pursuit of the notion of identity refocused my attention with the idea of 'likeness'. It was my original intention to remove or ignore 'likeness' in my schema, but as I nominated the topic 'portraiture' it is a logical subject to tackle. It is also exceedingly difficult to combine identity and imagery and somehow avoid this subject.

The painting which introduced to me the idea of a portrait as a document was Jan van Eyck's portrait of Giovanne Arnolfinni and his wife Jeanne de Cenarme at their espousals. Van Eyck was present as the official witness and testified in writing to the same, in fact his self portrait is painted as a reflection in the mirror. The painting had the value of a legal document, its 'realism' being the decisive element from a legal point of view. The value of the portrait was its 'truthfulness' to the physiognomies of its subjects. Since the Renaissance, and the rise of the individual, what mattered in portraiture oscillated between mimesis and idealism, in an attempt to locate an identity for the subject.

This counter play of idealism and mimesis is traceable to the Aristotelian theory contrasting history - embodying the presentation of truth, and poetry - the idealisation of truth. The comparative equilibrium between 'history' and 'poetry' which the portraits of the Eighteenth century had reached and maintained broke down in the following century, as a consequence of the bourgeois-realistic tendency bumping against photography and Impressionism.

Nineteenth Century photographers (and their clients) were convinced the scientific objectivity of the new medium could translate the external world with apparent accuracy, i.e. it represents some form of truth and was therefore not liable to the distortion of interpretation inherent in the painted portrait. The failure of this illusion of objectivity is stock in trade for twentieth century art criticism, and is well recognised by modern portrait painters, such as Alice Neel, and photographers like Richard Avedon who stated, 'The moment or 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.'¹

The notion of likeness presupposes some degree of difference between the things compared, otherwise they would be identical and no question of likeness would arise. The portrait is not the subject, though it can represent the subject. As Plato realised it can never be anything but a false copy. Perhaps falsity is an essential element of 'likeness', or even a consciously false element relative to the subject, in order for a portrait to be valid as a work of art. So on the one hand portraits are false to assert their independence, yet to be a portrait they are dependent on their subject, because if there was no visual relationship between the subject and its representation it would not be a portrait.

Personal identity and social identity are constructions of attitudes about the self, the former informs the subject who they are, the latter is that which the subject projects who they are to other people. The subject's personality is that identity which is constructed by the receiver independently from their own set of attitudes. Roland Barthes illustrates this in 'Camera Lucida' with the 'four image repertoire' model, 'In front of the lens, I am at

¹ Rosenberg, Harold *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present* (ed Vicki Goldberg) New York, Simon and Schuster 1981;476

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.'

As an image, the quality and insight of the reference rather than the accuracy of depiction defines the merit of the portrait. The degree of 'likeness' (some measurement of resemblance) can vary without limitation, and without being dominated by the particular physiognomy, because of the changing constructions of personality, identity and also the artistic representation. The changing nature of identity requires the function of memory to allow some coherence in the production of both identity and 'likeness'. Derek Parfit explains, 'Likeness is ... an imprecise but value laden term whose legitimate reference is not the embodied subject, materialized in time, but to the compositions of memory from which identity, required of all portraits, arises.'²

I recently heard a recorded voice of someone close to me who had died. I was profoundly disturbed by this, nothing had prepared me for the experience, even though the recorded voice is an everyday occurrence. However the tyranny of the visual has, I believe, prepared me better, and no matter how disturbing or horrific an image, I will know it as an image, and any response will probably refer more to a response to an image from the past, from when I could relate more directly to that image. The intensity of the experience would have been predicated by how real and lifelike, or known, the subject was.

Historically, verisimilitude has always been with us but was never quite respectable. Critics have always been uncomfortable with the veritable portrayal of a subject, which is at the same time very accessible and potentially extremely complex. John Berger, in his article 'The Changing View of Man in the Portrait'³ predictably located the rise of photography and the dissipation of the individual in a complex 'multi-dimensional' world as being crucial in the obsolescence of the still portrait image. What Berger failed to recognise was the continuance in art practice of the production of images that contained identified figures, many of which resembled various aspects of the particular mask or form of the actual model, the particular person. Andy Warhol's grotesque society portraits and the proliferation of

² Parfit, Derek *Reasons and Persons* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984; 322

³ Berger, John *The Moment of Cubism* London Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1969; 41/47

self portraiture since the developments of conceptual art in the 1970's are substantial examples of such practice.

David Freedberg in his book 'The Power of Images' identifies a reluctance by modern observers to equate the image and the original it depicts. He posits that we are capable of responding to images in ways usually attributed to others who are regarded as primitive, infantile, and even the pathologically distressed. He states 'We too feel a 'vague awe' at the creative skills of the artist; we too fear the power of the images he makes and their uncanny abilities both to elevate us and to disturb us. They put us in touch with truths about ourselves in a way that can only be described as magical, or they deceive us as if by witchcraft. But because we have been educated to talk and think about images in ways that avoid confronting just these kinds of effects, the only way we can be frank is to attend to the responses and reports of those whom we regard either as simple, unsophisticated, or provincial.'⁴ The possibility that we may equate image and original, or choose not to acknowledge the equation is suppressed, in an inadvertently deceptive way, by the repressive overlay that civilized education has given us.

MID SEMESTER CRITIQUE 1991

The work for this program is centred around the notion of the portrait. I regard the images as a dialogue with each particular subject. They are often private, necessarily excluding the audience. The subjects are all long-known friends, and in each case the dialogue approaches the limits of what I perceive to be the boundaries of the friendship. Whilst there is an element of provocation for the subject and the audience, there is no intention on my part to offend or moralise. My interest in their identity has a pathological tendency rather than an emotive one.

The earlier prints attempted to remove the figure from the portrait, with the result being a confusing amalgam of objects relating to the subject via an

⁴ Freedberg David *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* Chicago, The University of Chicago Press 1989; 42

association with an event or ritual. These images only bemused the audience, and instead of evoking any notion of the figure or absence of the figure, they could only be read as trite dramas. It became necessary to reintroduce the figure.

The reinstatement of the figure has introduced the 'problem of verisimilitude'. This is not an element that I regard as a requisite of my notion of the portrait, it is however something I am constantly working around. The dilemma is closely aligned to the fact that I do not generally seek permission from the subject. The obvious solution has been to obscure the face and locate the figure in a space that is recognisable. However I am concerned about some of the implications of obscuring the face - ie. is it to be understood as an act of violence or denial? This is an aspect that needs to be addressed. My position in the process can be described by the analogy of a viewer (voyeur?) sitting with his back to the audience.

31.7.91

THE EARLY WORK

The first two lithographs, 'sorry, sorry,' and 'Frog Dreams,' were both based on observations of aspects of the particular person which were not generally acknowledged by mutual friends. Although there is a sense of the viewer evident, my intention was to leave the message 'I know something.' I was satisfied with the images, though they are more innocent than they may appear. There were also aspects of the prints I did not like. The particular drawing of the former image relied heavily on and consequently called up the work of other colour lithographers with whose work I was familiar. In the latter image the printing was poor, especially the yellow (a colour which continued to give me problems). Also the aspect of denying or obscuring the face, the logical method of not revealing the figures identity, was bothersome in that I was uncertain of the implications of such an action - I was uncomfortable.

In attempting to remove the figure from the image I changed to a triptych format in an attempt to control a dialogue using three singular icons; a

decomposing dog, a wedding dress and a figurine. Each a private metaphor working alongside the others to imply the dialogue. Whilst denying the audience remained important to me, this triptych may have only confused them. Before I completed printing the triptych I also realised the hidden joke, the secret, was in fact not humorous but nasty. The print was abandoned.

Because of the slow nature of the process, coupled with the fact it was necessary to edition the image 'as I go', concerns of not producing enough work influenced me to develop an idea of producing a series of prints around a dinner party. This would allow me to relate a group of potentially disparate identities in a ritualistic setting, and concentrate on how individuals reveal (or disguise) themselves in such a situation. The investigation of identities could disclose social thresholds, ranging from ideas of discretion through to imprudence, encapsulating the machinations of friendship and the establishment of identity in the given situation. The first print 'Conversation', was terribly clumsy and again took some time to complete. Because of this I decided to switch to working only with two colours, to increase the rate of production of images. Aspects of the print 'Diner #1' were satisfying; the clarity of the graphics were not lost in the over-printing, retaining the image as it was drawn, but this was also dissatisfying because the directness lacked the density of the earlier prints, and the harsh colours were simply repulsive rather than disquieting. On completing this print I felt the idea for the 'dinner party series' was too forced and also simplistic. More importantly it seemed I was unable to address/retain enough of the identity of the individual in the forced/false scenario. The dialogue relied too heavily on me, it was no longer a dialogue. The idea was abandoned.

In the lithograph, 'Shrine,' the figure was required by the dialogue to not be there. Consequently my attempt to remove the figure from the portrait at last seemed possible. The dialogue would reveal to an aging relative that I knew, and had therefore been in the room which no-one was permitted to enter, a shrine for her dead husband. The feel of the room and the large yellow glass container were a testament to my trespass. But in some ways this image exists outside the other work, essentially in how it allows the audience so little, and the (absent) figure was replaced by a room.

The previous print reassured me to continue pursuing 'portraits' in which the figure was removed. I switched to making etchings, the black and white medium permitted faster completion of images and by removing the complications of colour it also allowed an indulgence in my pleasure of textures. The dialogue with the individual was centred around particular key incidents, and especially ritualistic feasts, as often our commonality is confirmed by such an activity. The images were constructed by presenting the subject symbolically through the selection of forms and the careful arrangement of objects. In hindsight the etchings are little more than an escape from the difficulties incurred by my preferred method of lithography, and a final exploration of an attempt to remove the figure from the portrait. Though the prints are often elegant and/or bizarre, the images are little more than prosaic *mise en scenes*, suggesting only a confused drama to the audience. In removing the figure I had succeeded in almost completely denying rather than eliciting something of the particular person, the intended subject. The absent figure was nowhere to be found.

It is very evident looking across the early work of the uncertainties of what I was attempting to do. The decision to return to characterising the subject as a figure was in fact desirable. By locating the figure in an environment that was recognisable, and loading the dialogue by use of gesture and selection of objects it was possible to construct the private dialogue. Through locating my position in the environment (an inherent control of the viewers position) with a partially revealed subject the audience was able to access something of the narrative, yet simultaneously be partially discluded, causing the evocation of feelings of awkwardness and/or disturbance. The choice of colours and the perversity of the laborious method of production worked to compound the discomfort and thus the intrigue. My humour was sated.

GESTURE

Gesture is the arrest of any movement, the subject may hold their body in a particular configuration as a displayed gesture, to emphasise or draw attention to their action. It is temporality which is the significant distinction between the gesture and the act.

In the scopic field (which is the site of imaging) the 'arrest' of a gesture occurs not by a suspension necessarily intended by the subject, it more likely

occurs when the gaze of the viewer interrupts and holds the movement. Lacan identifies two distinct 'things' which overlap at the point of seeing, the dialectic of identificatory haste and the time of the terminal arrest of the gesture, one is initial and the other terminal. What attracts the viewer in looking is the desire for the *petit a* (roughly translatable as the 'lost object'), the action of the identificatory haste and terminal arrest are simply a fascination attached to the pursuit of the unattainable *petit a*. In looking at a realistic image the audience recognises the gaze of the artist, they are also looking at the gazes of other audiences, though not in attendance these other gazes are behind the image.⁵ It is here the viewer also begins to invoke meanings from a sharing of cultural codes, loosely negotiated signs attributable to the gesture.

SECRETS

'The secret... ..is one of man's greatest achievements. In comparison with the childish stage in which every conception is expressed at once,... ..the secret produces an immense enlargement of life. The secret offers, the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world; and the latter is decisively influenced by the former.'⁶

Whether a secret exists between two individuals or groups, or is a confidence held by two or more persons against a third party, the value of the secret is always established by the intention of hiding counterplayed against an intention of revealing. This occurs regardless of the significance of the content of the evasion, be it important or trivial. The existence of a secret, even if not known by both parties, characterises and modifies any existing relationships, and as such is also an indicator of the boundaries of the relationship. The fascination of secrecy lies in its exclusion of outsiders, therefore the exclusive possession of the 'knowledge' is the privileged position of the few. For the outsider the mystery, that is the secret, is intensified by imagination, this occurs alongside a belief that the unknown must therefore be important, profound or essential. At the same time an inherent tension contained in the secret can be dispelled at the moment of

⁵ Lacan, Jacques *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (trans Alan Sheridan) see chapter *What is a Picture* Middlesex, Peregrine, 1986; 105/119

⁶ Simmel, George *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (trans and ed by Kurt H. Wolff) The Free Press 1964; 330

its revelation. The moment of betrayal allows many complex reactions, such as enjoyment, power, release, fate or even sensations of destruction.

It is in the consciousness of the potential for betrayal that one individual holds power over another as he twiddles playfully with the bounds of the others character, their relationship and the limits of discretion; fascinated by the danger of the edge.

THE BODY AS A SITE

'I am searching the other's body, as if I wanted to see what was inside it, as if the mechanical cause of my desire were in the adverse body (I am like those children who take a clock apart in order to find out what time is). This operation is conducted in a cold and astonished fashion; I am calm, attentive... Certain parts of the body are appropriate to this *observation*: eyelashes, nails, roots of the hair, the incomplete objects. It is obvious that I am then in the process of fetishising a corpse. As is proved by the fact that if the body I am scrutinizing happens to emerge from its inertia... ..my desire ceases to be perverse, it again becomes imaginary, I return to an Image, to a Whole... . I was fascinated - fascination being, after all, only the extreme of detachment...'⁷

Traceable from the dialogues of Plato and Aristotle, and the roots of the word 'psychology,' is a common connotation that the soul and not the body is the object of science. Aristotle's theory admitted that the soul was not a substance in it own right, but the substantial form of an organic body, man is a single substance. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, 'But man is no more an angel than he is a brute. He is separated from the one by his body as from the other by his reason.'⁸ Enlightened man continued to regard the body as subservient to the soul and the intellect. Georg Simmel regarded property as an extension of personality, defining property as that which obeys our wills, he stated 'This expression occurs, earliest and most completely, in

⁷ Barthes, Roland *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (trans Richard Howard) London, Penguin Books, 1990; 71/72

⁸ Aquinas, Thomas *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon* (ed Robert M. Hutchins) London, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc, 24 Ed, 1982; 8

regard to our body, which is thus our first and most unconditional possession.'⁹

In his articles 'The Body and the Emotions' and 'Some Expressions of the Body (in Four Movements),' F. Gonzalez-Crussi lucidly expounds upon historical and metaphysical enquiries into how the body works upon the psyche.¹⁰ Constantly his texts locate bodily parts which work directly on particular emotions. The totality of these *corpse morcelé* infers that the whole body is not reducible or extractable from the (total) person. We are in fact a product of our own corporeal existence. The splendour and misery of each body is a fundamental aspect of the identity of the individual.

HUMOUR

'...laughter has no object; it is an expression of being rejoicing at being. When moaning a person chains himself to the immediate present of his suffering body (and lies completely outside past and future), and in this ecstatic laughter he loses all memory, all desire, cries out to the immediate present of the world, and needs no other knowledge.'¹¹

There is a constant element which remains somehow inextricable from images I have produced since my adolescence. This ever present humour re-appears even when I deliberately attempt to expel or avoid its occurrence, though it is often shrouded in the image. Whatever pleasure I derive from its construction or appearance is equalled by the knowledge that viewers who know me or my work will respond invariably by laughing. They recognise the humour, though the laugh may disguise a diverse range of actual responses, not always favourable. Viewers who are unfamiliar with myself or the work do not usually respond in this manner

⁹ op. cit. Simmel, 344

¹⁰ Gonzalez-Crussi, F. *Three Forms of Sudden Death: And Other Reflections on the Grandeur and Misery of the Body* London, Picador, 1986; 139/192

¹¹ Kundera, Milan *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (trans Michael Henry Heim) London, Penguin 1983; 57

In attempting to locate something of the source of this humour and its pleasure I was reticent with Freud's explanation that it derives from '*an economy in the expenditure of affect*.'¹² The economy of whichever emotion (be it pity, anger, pain or tenderness etc.) is the site of the derivation of pleasure, the humour originates from a technique comparable to displacement. Whilst I am able to recognise some of the myriad forms of disavowal embedded in each incident, there is still a sense that something else is driving the need for this humour. There is a vein of misanthropy which runs through the humour. This is bound up in a (perverse) view that is able to accept in the individual that which I do not accept of the society, and conversely and simultaneously, I can accept in the society that which I will not tolerate in the individual. While this would seem to make my subject's expendable, it is an extremely important intention that I do not moralise. The humour allows a complex action of revelation and disclosure overlayed in the same incident, as Freud would have in the action of a lewd joke, '...the spheres of sexuality and obscenity offer the amplest occasions for obtaining comic pleasure..., for they can show human beings in their dependence on bodily needs (degradation) or they can reveal the physical demands lying behind the claim of mental love (unmasking).'¹³

THE TELL WOMAN

There was a girl, a woman and a crone. The girl was tall and moved like water, clothes could not disguise her body. The woman was wise beyond lived experience yet retained a passion to indulge. The crone was nothing more than a hideously sculpted mask with a sharp eye for wounds, be they gaping or old and hidden. They travelled in unison, through cities, across deserts, over seas; they sought the weak, the famous, the ordinary, the rulers and other travellers. To work alongside peasants, eat with cannibals and drink with Prime Ministers was their way, always leaving their gift, their stories. They were one.

¹² Freud, Sigmund *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, (trans James Strachey) Vol VIII London, The Hogarth Press 1960; 229

¹³ *ibid.*; 222

The girl would pine for her family, but was fearful of the crone. The woman would worry of the girl's fear but allow her need of kin. The crone would delight in the girl's vulnerability, on which she could work from within. The happy girl would recount for hours the tales of her travels and the people she found, and the woman provided wondrous food and comfort for all. The crone bided for her times, which were plentiful. As her existence occurred only in reflection, the strange vain creature had encrusted her world with mirrors. The poor girl could not resist to see herself, but should her eyes meet on the glassy surface the crone could begin, and a story with no beginning or end would fill the room.

The spectacle of the girl or the woman talking to herself would bemuse an initiate, till the crone would deign to weave them into the story. Each in their turn would be drunk by her soft flattery and fathomless insight. A half filled room ignored the stranger, I think he was a fisherman. Nothing in the delivery would allow a newcomer to suspect the raconteuse was working towards their own wounds. She despised weakness in others, and favoured some. Her tale could gently lick the hurt and glow the new skin. Or run like warm vinegar over proud flesh, just to confuse a pain and a pleasure. Then would she likely seduce the weakness, only to expose it, taunt it, and bleed her game. A warm miasma of immolation and bursting life, keening the nostrils, wafts among those present. The hag working from the inside, coaxing, cajoling, soothing or burning her audience. When the crone tired, she would barb the girl and the woman some, then dissipate, leaving a group of proselytes or estranged acquaintances. Sated, no-one noticed the stranger or the girl leave the room.

To be cherished by the girl and the woman was both wonderful and necessary. But to continually escape the vehemence of the crone was far more terrifying than to occasionally rub against her brusqueness. To be spared was to be spared what for. Ever the exempt would touch their own scars, absent-mindedly inflaming the hurt, testing it, trying to locate something of the humiliation, knowing even if the crone did favour them, she had inadvertently or knowingly caused the story to eat them. That knowing of their story, the terror of which throbbed against the lingering irritation of the wheal. They knew it, she knew it. What was she waiting for. Did she have a plot or was she waiting for something yet unknown. Was her love lost in the game. She did not love herself and countenanced

her disciples to wear their offences brazenly and proudly. The game with the few seemed the cruelest. Over and over imagining a story, working the possibilities ever into the same story. Chewing the wounds, working it harder and harder till the pain is drained of sense, as are the words. The manipulations become confused with meanings.

Her disappearance at last noticed, I look for her amongst the velvet night, and find her in the car of a man who will never return. Lit by the damp light of the house, her soft, sure figure is seated opposite the rigid figure of the stranger. Pinioned against the door his terror appears ludicrous beside the soft murmur of the woman. She peers past his shoulder to the mirror. Visions of the girl talking to the glass invest innocence in the terror. Her pale skin hiding the same blood as mine. In that mirror she knows something I am unable or unwilling to know, and that something is as much a denial of herself. It's secret is not a secret we share. The story of herself, in another's presence, is as calculated as its out of control. The young girl, the woman and the crone are as one. Lost in the same story, the original joke is long forgotten.