

Project 2: PORTRAIT of a PERSON ••••• Due Thursday Mar 2, 10 am, COM 326
GROUPS OF 2 Make one video •••• SHARE CAMERA AMONG 2 GROUPS ••• 2 to 5 min.

What does someone “look like?” We might say that what we see of each other every day is *already* a representation; some contemporary theories of identity (particularly discussions of gender, racial, ethnic, sexual, national, and class identity) ask us to think about identity as a “performance.” Not that we necessarily consciously “act” like an actor on stage or screen acts (though often the metaphor of the “Stage” is used to describe the character of modern public or social space), but that we learn early in life, through the mechanisms of ideology (remember Althusser’s concept of *interpellation* from Fall quarter?), what identity categories we are expected to inhabit and the “proper” (socially legible) behavior for them. And, often, we do consciously “perform” on the public “stage” in certain ways in order to feel safe, be accepted, or even gain entry into certain situations or spaces. In this way, we can understand identity not as *inevitable, immanent, natural, or permanent*, but as *constructed and in process*.

There is also an interesting historical tension in Western culture between this idea that people are social actors and the idea that people are unique individuals (outside of history, social forces, ideology). Often those who struggle least with social/cultural norms or whose identities are most closely aligned with dominant or privileged identity categories don’t experience their identities as being socially constructed and can tend to see themselves as more “unique” or idiosyncratic, and their identity as more “essential” and unchanging.

Similarly, dominant conventions of Western documentary representation of people, particularly in portraits or profiles, tend to assume the need to depict the part of the person assumed to be most unique, and most indicative of the idea that we are seeing *that particular person*. Historically, this part has been *the face and the voice*, most specifically, and *the body*, more generally. Consider the techniques used in television and documentary film to disguise identity—blurring or darkening the face or body, and garbling or changing the pitch of the speaker’s voice.

So what is your task in this project? **Create a video portrait of a person. Your approach to the portrait should explore some of the ideas above.** Who is this person? What are the implications of creating a portrait of them? You might make a portrait in which the subject reflects on the act of having a portrait made of them. You might make a portrait in which you, the makers, are present in the piece reflecting on this process. Or you might make a portrait in which the style of the piece (the aesthetic language) “performs” a reflection on the process (is self-reflexive). Will the subject of the portrait be the only person in the piece? Will you include commentary or description of this person by others? Will we learn about this person by hearing them talk, by watching them do something, by looking at them or things or places related to them?

As in the self-portrait project, your task is not to figure out: *who is this person, essentially?*, but to proceed from the questions: *what are the possible ways this piece can explore what it means to be an individual, to be a subject, to be a body, a being in their skin, a person in this culture, world, in this moment?*