

# PORTRAITURE

Facing the subject

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# Introduction: facing the subject

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The first image was a portrait. In classical mythology, a lovely youth named Narcissus lay beside a pool gazing in adoration at his own reflection. Ignoring the loving attention of the nymph Echo, he wasted away, died and was metamorphosed into a flower bearing his name. Another myth tells of the Maid of Corinth who, wishing to capture her lover before their separation, drew around the shadow cast by his head on the wall of a cave. In the Bible, St Veronica compassionately pressed a cloth against Christ's face as he stumbled to Calvary, and found His true image miraculously imprinted into the material. Christian legend relates that St Luke became a painter because, having experienced a vision of the Virgin Mary, he was inspired to produce a faithful portrait of her.

## A story of portraiture

### THE HISTORICAL CONTINGENCY OF LIKENESS

These stories indicate the centrality of naturalistic portraiture, and in particular the portrayed face, to western art. By 'naturalistic portraiture', I mean a physiognomic likeness which is seen to refer to the identity of the living or once-living person depicted. The genre existed in antiquity and the early Christian world, in the form of statues, busts and herms, coins, sarcophagi, wall-paintings. In the medieval period, however, physiognomic likeness was not the primary way of representing a person's identity. The position and status of a nobleman, for instance, was conventionally symbolised by his coat of arms. Nevertheless, examples of naturalistic portraiture do survive and images of Christ and the saints were considered to be true likenesses. During the fourteenth century, physiognomic likeness was increasingly employed to represent 'donors' and sovereigns.

The 'rebirth' of portraiture is considered a definitive feature of the Renaissance and marks the beginning of the period covered by this book. More precisely, the early fifteenth century saw the adoption of intensely illusionistic, closely observed facial likeness, including idiosyncrasies and imperfections, to represent elite figures, including artists themselves. The work of Jan van Eyck, executed in a sophisticated oil technique, was extremely influential. His clientele was wide:

clerics, sovereigns and great nobles, statesmen, native citizens and foreign merchants, his wife and probably himself. By the turn of the sixteenth century, the 'realistic' portrait was widespread. However, other artists, particularly in Italy, reconciled attention to the physiognomic peculiarities of the subject with more generalising visual devices, such as the profile view (especially for women), or the analysis of face and body in smooth, consistently lit geometrical shapes. Such techniques were traditionally understood to attribute universal and ideal qualities to figures.

#### EMULATION OF EXEMPLARS

With a few exceptions, the majority of individualised portraits in oil produced during the fifteenth century were bust or half-length, or full-length figures in reduced scale (see, for example, Figure 3). During the first third of the sixteenth century, the life-sized, whole-length figure was accepted as a paradigm for images of secular rulers. Technically, this change was connected with the wider use of canvas supports in place of panel, which facilitated the transport of large-scale portraits between distant courts. Iconographically, the full-length, standing figure *without* physiognomic likeness had previously been associated with genealogical series and universal exemplars: figures whose transcendent qualities or achievements merited emulation. From the mid-fifteenth century, the union of this traditional, 'idealising' format with 'realistic' likeness personalised the articulation of socio-spiritual authority.

Collections of exemplary portraits, including 'beauties', were increasingly amassed by intellectuals and rulers, following the lead set by the humanist Paolo Giovio at Como. Such collections of 'famous men' were often included in the universal exemplary collections known as *Kunst- and Wunderkammern*, constituting personal identity as a product of divinely produced nature and human self-fashioning. The genealogical collections of naturalistic portraits which also became widely established amongst the titled and aspirant nobility were based on ancestry rather than achievement. In both types of collection, however, the identity of the owner was produced through identification with authoritative predecessors.

The association of the full-length format with images of sovereigns was also part of a wider process of emulation. During the sixteenth century, a visual repertoire was established which was emulated in naturalistic portrayal for the following three centuries and beyond. During this period, the courtly console tables, wooden chairs, curtains, columns, helmets and handkerchiefs repeated in countless later works were introduced into the portrait repertoire. Subordinate figures such as dogs, dwarfs, servants, jesters and black attendants were strategically placed to render the sitter's elevated status and natural authority clearly apparent.

Furthermore, recognised positions, such as the high-ranking cleric, the military leader, the prince, the scholar and the beautiful woman, became associated with distinctive portrait formats, attributes and even pictorial languages. To take one example, the cleric was conventionally identifiable not only by his gorgeously rendered attire and ring of office but by the employment of a three-quarter-length, usually three-quarter-view of the sitter enthroned in an upright, rectilinear chair. One might think, for example, of van Dyck's portrait of Cardinal Bentivoglio (1623),<sup>1</sup> or Velazquez's image of Pope Leo X (1650).<sup>2</sup>

This method of characterisation by imitation of a recognisable iconographic type still takes place in conservative portraiture. It involves visual reference to

precedents, often including an authoritative prototype. For example, a generic resemblance can be traced between the van Dyck or the Velazquez and Raphael's famous image of the maecenas Pope Julius II (1511-12).<sup>3</sup> Such pictorial 'founding fathers' of a 'visual genealogy' seem to have been authorised by the renown of their painter as well as their sitter. Titian and Raphael were important in this respect, as was van Dyck. Minor variations and major deviations from the informal and flexible iconographic lineages could be exploited to characterise particular people in relation to the conventional expectations of their role. Portrait imagery was also responsive to the social and political circumstances of the sitter. For example, a portrait might refer to the sitter's marriage, or a commander's victory in a battle.

#### PORTRAITURE AND ARISTOCRATIC IDEOLOGY

Portraiture thus became central to noble culture during the sixteenth century, although many citizens were also depicted, often in marital pendants. Specialist portraitists began to be employed at courts and reference was made to the antique exemplar of the Emperor Alexander's intimate relationship with his portraitist Apelles. These elite specialists included a few women, such as Sophonisba Anguissola at Philip II's court in Spain. The metaphor of the body politic meant that portraiture played a vital ideological role. By silently assimilating the real to the ideal, naturalistic portraiture enabled a particular human being to personify the majesty of the kingdom or the courage of a military leader.

Portraiture also articulated the patriarchal principle of genealogy upon which aristocratic ideology was built. The authorising relationship between the living model and its imaged likeness was analogous to that between father and son, and processes of emulation presumed identity to be produced through resemblance to a potent prototype. The subject was situated within chains or hierarchies of resemblance leading to the origin of Nature herself: God. Indeed, this mechanism for establishing a form of personal immortality fits into a larger ideological regime in that it can be compared with the identification between the Son and the Father in the Catholic understanding of the Mass. The assimilation of image to prototype, sign to referent, was the source of salvation.

Furthermore, an understanding of portraits as direct substitutes for their sitters meant that the circulation of portraits could mirror and expand the system of personal patronage whereby power, privilege and wealth were distributed. Their uses included arranging dynastic marital alliances, disseminating the image of sovereign power, commemorating and characterising different events and stages of a reign, eliciting the love and reverence due to one's lord, ancestor or relative. Because of these crucial functions, portraiture had to be theorised as unmediated realism. Yet although explicit invention or idealisation was problematic, the *raison d'être* of these images was actually to represent sitters as worthy of love, honour, respect and authority. It was not just that the real was confused with the ideal, but that divine virtue was the ultimate, permanent reality.

#### COURT AND CITIZEN PORTRAITURE

If the sixteenth century saw the consolidation of visual motifs and signifying principles fundamental to the genre, the seventeenth century can be associated with an expansion in portrait types and numbers. This was in part a consequence of Protestant objections to religious imagery, which encouraged people to turn to other genres, including portraiture. At the same time, Protestantism articulated a

profound change in the relationship between image and prototype which affected the conception of portraiture.<sup>4</sup>

The expansion of portraiture was, however, also connected with the aspirations of monarchy and the assertion of noble values. Some courts were identifiable with distinctive, quite consistent portrait modes, associated with prestigious and well-paid portrait painters: the restrained virtuosity of Velazquez's images of the Spanish Habsburgs, for example, or the shimmering coloured drapery, dynamic 'grace' and frequently outdoor settings of the van Dyckian manner in England. On the other hand, portraiture at the increasingly influential French court was comparatively diverse, drawing on a number of traditions. The obverse to honorific portraiture was caricature, which was accorded a degree of aesthetic validity in the wake of Leonardo, and began to gain a wider distribution through political prints.

The enrichment and enhanced confidence of elites outside the hereditary noble order was associated with the continued increase in portraiture of these clientele. This was especially marked in the Dutch Republic. A wide range of portraits was produced, from individuals to married couples, family groups and civic bodies. Some of these images emulated previous or current court models, while others emphasised qualities and activities which justified the distinct position of non-hereditary elites. Some of Frans Hals's images of Haarlem citizens, for example, depicted responsive communicativeness, rather than the personal autonomy conventionally attributed to the hereditary, landed nobility (see Figure 54). More generally, there was a tendency to emphasise the head and the hands of the non-aristocratic body, rather than the trunk and genital area which conventionally characterised nobility of blood. Thus sites associated with the origin and execution of thought, spirit, personality were stressed at the expense of bodily regions associated with physical prowess and the generation of a lineage. Reduced-scale portraiture, appropriate to more modest interiors, became more popular and the distinction between such portraiture and genre painting became less clear.

The eighteenth century was in some respects the apogee of portraiture in England and France. A huge number and variety of images were produced, ranging from refined domestic 'conversation pieces' to images of professionals alluding to progressive intellectual endeavour (see Figures 29–33), or overwhelmingly large and splendid evocations of monarchs and great lords. Visual reference to classical prototypes, such as the Apollo Belvedere, became popular as part of a more general appeal to antique authority. Grand portraits with an implied heroic, historical narrative were paralleled by naturalised fictions in pastoral or mythological mode (see Figures 10–15). These became, respectively, increasingly gendered masculine and feminine. Beside a strong adherence to the restrained and convincing depiction of sitters in their social personae, masquerade gained unprecedented importance. This involved not only the adoption of roles by conventional sitters especially for portrayal, but also an interest in the depiction of actors (see Figures 53, 55 and 56).

The vast print culture enabled honorific images to be widely disseminated. Chronicles of events were structured through portrait prints, most famously in the massive work of James Granger.<sup>5</sup> The exemplary and genealogical principles of traditional portrait collections were here combined with textual authority to support a powerful history of 'great men'. On the other hand, the economy of portrait prints also encompassed a vigorous, scatological and topical genre of personal caricature.

In addition to its established aristocratic functions, portraiture became crucial to the cultivation of civility in commercial society. This was achieved by pictured affection and communication, or by the similar formats and group display of portraits depicting figures united and defined by their civility, such as members of the Kit-Kat club in London.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, portraiture was increasingly recognised as cultural practice as well as effigy. Sitting to a fashionable portraitist entered into literary discourse as a self-conscious, socially prestigious interaction and the exhibition of portraits invited public discussion. Academies and salons facilitated debate on issues such as the nature and limits of likeness.

In contrast to this vigorous portrait culture, the status of the genre within art theory was low. Portraiture occupied an anomalous and therefore debased position within an academic hierarchy based on the degree of invention demonstrated in a work of art. This was because its ideological conviction depended upon an elision of image and 'reality' which denied any fabrication on the part of the artist. Portraits could either be theorised as exact, literal re-creations of someone's external appearance, or as truthful accounts of the artist's special insight into the sitter's inner or ideal self. Both could be assimilated to the concept of realism.

#### THE AUTHORITY OF LIKENESS

Issues of realism and truth were central to nineteenth-century portraiture. In portraits of men, overt role-playing was abandoned in favour of attempts to reconcile a convincing characterisation of the sitter's socio-political position with depiction of the essential inner quality which was considered to justify his privileged place. The honorific elite eligible for portrayal was expanded to incorporate new heroes such as scientists and explorers. Old iconographies of scholars and soldiers were respectively adapted to suit these different kinds of intellectual and conqueror. By means of the exemplar, change and 'progress' were thus assimilated to the authority of precedent.

From the mid-nineteenth century, this broadened conception of the portrayed exemplar came to serve contemporary political ideology through the establishment of national portrait galleries. Here the communal body of the polity was historically constituted through images of the agents deemed responsible for the formation and advance of a rich, distinctive national identity. A narrative of change which looked forward and upward to ultimate fulfilment existed alongside received belief in a natural, permanent order looking backward and upward to God. Although the constituency of exemplars was wider, the right to representation remained exclusive in that responsibility for change was attributed to the inspired ideas of exceptional individuals, rather than to structural shifts involving everyone.

Except for ceremonial and unorthodox figures, an authoritative palette of black, white and neutral shades dominated masculine imagery. The shimmering colour which had previously become associated with aristocratic portrayal was now largely restricted to images of women. This gendered difference seems somewhat more exaggerated in portraiture than in surviving dress, or in genre or contemporary history painting. It can be associated with the authority of *disegno* over *colore* in academic art theory, which was in turn based upon a distinction between the certain, immutable qualities attributed to the mind and the deceptive, transient, changeable body. Black and white was a 'modern' aesthetic in the sense that it could be related to an urban, working environment and sober, disciplined lifestyle. At the same time, reference back to the widespread employment of black and white

in seventeenth-century Dutch burgher portraiture accorded this virile bourgeois identity a putative heritage of community and spiritual uprightness. The price of black and white authority was a certain visual uniformity, which both set off and offset the nineteenth-century conception of identity as unique, personal individuality, articulated in the face.

The mode of depiction was also a significant factor in nineteenth-century portraiture. For example, a transparent visual rhetoric was broadly seen to privilege truth to the appearance of the subject over the painter's mediation. It likewise linked portrayal with genre painting: the depiction of unnamed, 'ordinary' people enacting stories authorised by general cultural norms rather than a particular text. In Ingres's *Madame Moitessier* of 1856,<sup>7</sup> the combination of transparent treatment with simplification of form and an abstract, decorative linearity created a feminine persona which seemed both vividly present and a universal ideal. At the same time, it was unmistakably 'an Ingres'. By comparison, 'virtuoso' brushstroke could be seen directly to embody the insight of the artist, rendering articulation of the inner spirit of the sitter inseparable from the genius of the painter. In the work of the Impressionists, by contrast, visible and varied brushstroke became part of a visual mode which subverted the distinction between sight and insight, object and subject.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the authority of the depicted likeness as a representation of the sitter's identity was often guaranteed by recourse to the science of physiognomy. Physiognomic treatises provided systems whereby a person's character could be deduced from his (and less commonly her) external appearance. Such systems had existed since antiquity, but in the late eighteenth century they acquired a more empirical basis and renewed popularity, thanks largely to the work of J. C. Lavater (1775-8).<sup>8</sup>

Physiognomic explanation claimed scientific objectivity, but was in fact justified by the ancient, naturalised hierarchy which subjected individuals to the supposed divine-bestial balance within humanity as a whole. Facial features and aspects were compared to anthropomorphised animals, such as the courageous lion, crafty fox or stupid cow. They were also positioned within modes of visual characterisation descending from the angelic to the monstrous. At the summit were tall (or long), smooth, symmetrical, contained geometric entities; at the base lay squatness, unevenness, openness, roughness, irregularity. These visual languages respectively connoted the ideal and the grotesque; the recognised and the caricatured; the honoured or the denigrated.<sup>9</sup> Physiognomic principles were invoked not only in portraits of 'great men', but in images of pathological and insane individuals by, for example, Goya and Géricault.<sup>10</sup>

The need for a transparent, scientific likeness also seemed to be met by photography, which was considered to guarantee an inherent, objective visual relationship between the image and the living model. As a technology, photography was the culmination of prolonged experimentation with mechanical devices. As a visual mode, it emerged from the use of visual and verbal 'reportage' to characterise more ordinary people. It soon admitted an unprecedentedly wide clientele to portraiture, enabling people who could not previously afford, or were not considered worthy of, painted immortality to have their features recorded for posterity.<sup>11</sup> Photographic portraits were, for example, soon commonly circulated as calling cards and collected into albums by the middle-class intelligentsia.

At the same time, the objectivity attributed to photography quickly led to its

use in the identification or investigation of criminal, insane, diseased, orphaned and otherwise 'deviant' individuals. This was because the camera objectified the sitter and the photographic technique tended to record imperfections and physical idiosyncrasies which were, according to the idealist precepts underlying honorific portraiture, indicative of the accidental and animal elements of humanity. The particularities of personal appearance had, for instance, been regarded as 'defects' by Sir Joshua Reynolds.<sup>14</sup> By exposing the conceptual hierarchy within which portraiture signified, the advent of photography implicitly challenged and problematised portraiture's claim to absolute truth.

#### QUESTIONING THE PRINCIPLES OF PORTRAYAL

Physiognomic interpretation was predicated upon a 'symptomatic' relationship between external appearance and an invisible, internal self which was the ultimate subject of interest. The work of Courbet, Manet and the Impressionists interrogates this presumed identification between individualised physiognomy and a distinctive, interiorised identity. The disturbing power of images such as Manet's *Bar at the Folies Bergères* (1881–2),<sup>15</sup> for example, derived in good part from its dialectic with received notions of portrayal.

Portraits depicting the friends and family of the artist had existed since at least the fifteenth century, but in the late nineteenth century 'avant-garde' portraiture was markedly confined to uncommissioned images of these categories of sitter. This enhanced the authority of the artist by making worthiness to be portrayed dependent upon one's relationship to him or her. It implied a lived intimacy between painter and sitter, imaginatively reproduced in the viewer's relationship to the painting. The distinction between portrait sitter and artist's model became less clear, challenging the normal politics of the portrait transaction. In van Gogh's portraiture, for instance, the images referred primarily to the identity of the artist, as opposed to that of the sitter. All this, together with unconventional, informal compositions, leisured outdoor or domestic settings, and the assertive, opaque materiality of the paint, implied a self distinct from the abstract, interior identity which justified orthodox public recognition.

#### THE DEATH OF THE PORTRAIT?

In the twentieth century, the status of naturalistic portraiture as a progressive form of elite art has been seriously undermined. Commissioned portraiture, long discussed as a source of artistic subservience, has become widely regarded as necessarily detrimental to creativity. More fundamentally, the early twentieth-century rejection of figurative imagery challenged the belief that visual resemblance to a living or once-living model is necessary or appropriate to the representation of identity (whether such identity is attributed to the sitter or the artist).

Yet naturalistic portraiture has never entirely disappeared from the 'progressive' arena. Images recognisable as their own faces remained significant in the work of many artists, such as Joan Miró (Figures 58, 59, 65) or Elizabeth Frink. Lucien Freud's paintings can be considered in terms of a preoccupation with the relationships between paint as a material substance, figurative images of particular individuals, and personal identity. In Marc Quinn's *Self* (1991),<sup>16</sup> a mould taken from the artist's head was filled with his own blood and frozen. The resulting effigy questions the idea of the portrait as a lifelike representation of essential identity: the quintessence of the sitter in flesh and blood.

Cindy Sherman's popular and influential photographs of herself in the guise of 'old master' paintings subversively exploit conventional techniques of portrayal. Physiognomic likeness to an unchanging self is effaced, despite the use of photography. The self-dramatising, parodic identification with a wide variety of different pictorial models unravels characterisation through resemblance to a patriarchal prototype. Yet Sherman's images can, paradoxically, be situated firmly within the tradition of naturalistic portraiture, in that a supposedly realist technique vividly represents the dynamic, unstable and relativised identity claimed for the female artist-sitter.

Besides elite work like this, everyone is seemingly surrounded by naturalistic portraits. It is not just that there is still a flourishing market for honorific portrayal, ranging from board-room paintings to drawings by street artists. Portrait-like physiognomies also embellish our stamps, coins and banknotes. Images of the writer frequently accompany books and articles, to authorise and amplify the text. Pictures of celebrities are widely employed to endorse products by imbuing them with the star's qualities – a contemporary twist on the old idea of the exemplar. Caricature continues to flourish. Above all, the cheapness and ubiquity of photographs corresponds to a seemingly insatiable desire to fix and preserve the appearance of those we know, love and admire. The same medium is universally employed for purposes of identification and arrest: on passports and identity cards, bus and library passes, some credit cards.

## Portraiture as representation

### PORTRAYAL AS PARADIGM

The desire which lies at the heart of naturalistic portraiture is to overcome separation: to render a subject distant in time, space, spirit, eternally present. It is assumed that a 'good' likeness will perpetually unite the identities to which it refers. This imperative has been appreciated since antiquity. For Aristotle, portraiture epitomised representation in its literal and definitive sense of making present again: re-presentation. According to him, our pleasure in seeing a portrait consists primarily in recognition, which is the process of identifying a likeness with what it is perceived to be like, of substituting something present for something absent. For him, a proper illusion of the bodily self necessarily entailed a sense of the presence of the person depicted.<sup>15</sup>

Leon Battista Alberti, in his groundbreaking and influential treatise *On Painting and Sculpture* of 1435 (first printed 1540), agreed with Aristotle:

Painting contains a divine force which not only makes the absent present, as friendship is said to do, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive. Even after many centuries they are recognised with great pleasure and great admiration for the painter. Plutarch says that Cassander, one of the captains of Alexander, trembled all through his body when he saw a portrait of his King ... Thus the face of a man who is already dead certainly lives a long life through painting.<sup>16</sup>

This account makes portraiture a paradigm for naturalistic painting's divine capacity to overcome the separations of absence and death. Portrayal is attributed an inherent quality or force, linking the image of Alexander with his actual presence. The portraitist's admired role is to mobilise that power; that of the viewer

is to appreciate it. Alberti thus locates portraiture at the centre of Renaissance painting's marvellous, newly realised capacity to produce vivid illusions of a world focused on humanity. He implicitly assumes that illusionistic portraiture involves the sitter's identity. Indeed, for Alberti, identity is inseparable from the sense of presence achieved through mimesis. Speaking semiotically, the signifier (the painted portrait) is conflated with both the referent (the living presence of Alexander) and the signified (Alexander's identity as a monarch).

#### PORTRAYAL AS PROBLEMATIC

Naturalistic portraiture no longer consistently achieves these effects for us. It does not always work as re-presentation. For example, although the quest for a 'good' photograph of someone – an image that satisfies us that the depicted person is present to us – is known to all who have eagerly sifted through a newly developed film, the ineffable sense of disappointment which generally follows such a search is perhaps equally familiar. We are even less willing to attribute 'presence' to the many photographs made for purposes of identification, as if this function somehow precludes the perception of identity. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes related that he could find no photograph which captured the image of his dead mother until he saw 'her' in a picture taken when she was a child, before his relationship with her began, and when she did not much resemble the person he had known.<sup>17</sup> While the status of photography as the fetishised trace of someone's existence persists here, the quality of 'likeness' has become elusive, and personal to the viewer rather than the sitter.

Today, the fixed, immovable features of a portrayed face can seem like a mask, frustrating the desire for union with the imaged self. In looking at a conventional portrait, we no longer have implicit faith in a moment of phantasised unmasking, of release, the carnival's conclusion when one can 'call things by their real names'. This phrase seeks the union of language (representation) with the things to which it refers. It comes from a striking passage in Hermann Broch's *Esch the Anarchist* (Vienna, 1928–31) which makes clear the frustration aroused by the sense that it is structurally impossible to remove portraiture's mimetic mask and make her communicate.<sup>18</sup>

### Concepts of identity

#### DEFINING DUALISM

I suggested at the beginning of this introduction that a portrait is a likeness which is seen to refer to the identity of the person depicted. If this is the case, then the history of portraiture will be closely connected with changes in beliefs about the nature of personal identity, and in ideas about what aspects of identity are appropriate or susceptible to portrayal. The sense of frustration expressed by Esch the anarchist results in part from a 'dualist' conception of identity. In such a view, there is a division between the person as a living body and their real or true self. An insistence upon this opposition means that a vivid physiognomic likeness cannot represent the identity of the sitter in the satisfying way claimed by Aristotle and Alberti. Bodily resemblance comes to seem a barrier to union with the sitter, rather than the means whereby it can be achieved.

When did this sense of separation occur? The notion of the body quickened by an individuating life-force dates from the dawn of civilisation. However, this did

not necessarily mean that the two were seen as distinct, even in the realm of meaning ultimately addressed by portraiture: the attainment of some form of immortality through the denial of absence and death. In traditional Catholic belief, immortality was guaranteed by individual virtue, but this was not an entirely abstract, spiritual concept. Resurrection on the Last Day involved the body as well as the soul. Furthermore, the nobility's claim to the virtue which justified honour and fame in this world and immortality in the next was founded upon a mysterious, quasi-mystical but at the same time bodily quality called 'blood'. From a 'noble' point of view, the object (the body) is an incarnation of the subject (the virtue of the person depicted). Like Jesus Christ, whose great virtue enabled Him to defy death, the persona whose virtue rendered him or her worthy of immortalisation in paint was *both* matter and spirit.

We now conceive portraiture primarily as a representation of 'personality', rather than virtue, and an interest in what would now be described as psychology can be discerned in Renaissance portraiture. Cranach the Elder's c. 1503 images of the humanist Johannes Cuspinian and his wife Anna Putsch, for example,<sup>19</sup> contain symbolism relating to the theory of the four humours and astrology. It is notable, however, that such systems explain psychology in physiological terms. Different humours were considered to be the result of the amount of black bile in the system and the impact of astrology on personality was physically grounded in the moment of birth. Furthermore, the psychology of gender was explained in terms of the proportion of the four elements in the body. Men were spiritual, passionate, intellectual and active because they were made up primarily of air and fire. Women, on the other hand, were liable to animality, material concerns and lethargy because they were constituted mostly of earth and water.

A sense of the *difference* between an inner, abstract subjectivity and an objectivised, material body has been discerned in portrait practice from the seventeenth century. Rembrandt's work, for example, is celebrated for its visualisation of the sitter's interiority. Historically, this separation between the body and identity corresponds with the consolidation of the Protestant Reformation, which asserted a space between sign and prototype. It also has to do with the increasing importance of non-noble elites, which located virtue not in 'blood' but in abstract qualities such as talent, genius and acumen. The definitive formulation of dualism in its oppositional sense is credited to the French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650), for whom personal identity was located in a concept of the mind or thinking self. As pure, divine intellect, the mind was quite separate from the machine-like, material body. Others would define identity in terms of the soul, virtue, genius, character, personality, subjectivity. The crucial point about dualism was the stress on the distinction between identity and the material body.

#### DUALISM AND LIKENESS

If identity and body are opposed, there is a problem about how the portrayed body can re-present someone's identity, however this may be defined. Likeness in the sense of a perceived visual resemblance between the image and the embodied model is now separable from likeness in the sense of a perceived link between the image and the sitter's 'inner' identity.<sup>20</sup> An increasingly dualist perspective on portraiture is the main reason why likeness became such a contentious issue from the late eighteenth century.

relationships between 'external' likeness and 'internal' identity, provided a supposedly scientific way of closing the gap which had opened up between them. In photography, on the other hand, the idea was scientifically to close the gap between 'external' likeness and the depicted person her- or himself. This resolved the dualist problem to the extent that the portrayed body no longer *represented* the sitter, it was the (trace of the) sitter, so that difficult questions of the relationship between personal identity and the body simply did not arise. The iconic (imaging of) identification between photograph and living reality was supposedly guaranteed by the passage of light waves from the sitter's body to the photographic emulsion.

Despite the difficulties which it posed, dualism preserved the notion of a self capable of existence after physical death, which is crucial to the efficacy of portraiture as re-presentation. Some kind of eternal or persistent dimension to identity is necessary if the viewer is to be satisfied that the absent person depicted is *present*, at least in a 'good' or 'authentic' likeness. In dualism, it is as if the immortal subject retreated from the body into an abstract realm, in order to preserve its integrity in the face of the need for an increasingly scientific, materialist understanding of the body. Yet the portrayed body remained an adequate symbol for an identity conceived in this coherent, self-contained way, because notions of identity proposed within a dualist paradigm until the mid-nineteenth century were, like the imaged body, characteristically consistent, unified and autonomous.

#### DUALISM AND PORTRAYED FEMININE IDENTITY

The dualist subject was implicitly masculine. For example, during the eighteenth century, treatises on human character articulated a conception of femininity which was, although absolute, the very opposite of the developing dualist ideal. It was the *lack or absence* of the personal uniqueness, constancy and interiority which constituted true virtue. Feminine virtue was ultimately a contradiction in terms, a fragile alliance always liable to fall apart and release its erotic, self-engulfing opposite. In the production and discussion of feminine portraiture, these negative and negating conceptions of feminine identity were often linked with oppositions associated with academic art theory. *Colore* was liable to be considered more appropriate than *disegno*, idealisation preferred to objectivity, flattery to resemblance, myth to reality, frivolousness to exemplarity. Questions of likeness and authenticity, which became so crucial to portraiture's continued capacity to re-present an immutable, immortal self, lost their urgency and significance when applied to figures whose femininity denied them the true, fully realised humanity claimed by the dualist subject.

#### THE DUALIST SUBJECT DENIED

From the mid-nineteenth century, however, the reality and integrity of this dualist subjectivity was challenged. This meant that the 'objectively' portrayed body became a less appropriate means of visualising the self. The historical analysis of society developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883), for example, assumes personal identity to be neither autonomous nor true to the way things actually are. The 'Marxist' self does not exist immutably, outside history, but is related to the changing socio-economic arrangements in which it lives (feudalism, capitalism or revolution, for instance). The concept of ideology, which has been described as 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence',<sup>21</sup> posits a 'false consciousness' or set of delusions whereby people make sense of, and reconcile themselves to, their material situation.

Psychoanalysis, the influential psychological theory and treatment developed by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), also involves complex, divided models of identity. For example, the Freudian concept of the ‘unconscious’ locates the driving force of identity in repressed sexual instincts and experiences, leaving the cognisant mind no longer ‘master in its own house’. Freud’s critical disciple Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) reconciled this sexualised self with Marx’s socially produced identity by emphasising the role of language in the constitution of identity. For Lacan, the young child’s entrance into speech produces subjectivity by structuring his or her libidinous energy like a language. Selfhood, far from being autonomous, unique and permanent, thus depends upon engagement in a shared system of signs.

Lacan also understands desire, as articulated in the gaze, to play a constitutive role in the formation of sexual and social identity. Looking in a mirror, the child, before it is able to speak, is supposed both to mistake the image for itself and to take the image for a unified, autonomous self, after which it strives.<sup>22</sup> The reflected image is thus identified with an idea(l) of the self whose integrity and consistency are at odds with the incoherent, disjointed experience of embodied selfhood. It is notable that naturalistic portraits have, historically, routinely been compared with images seen in a mirror and Lacan’s account of the ‘mirror stage’ begs comparison with the ‘aristocratic’ understanding of portraiture as both truthful re-presentation and virtuous exemplar. Significantly, however, Lacan regards this picture of the self as an immature, alienated distortion.

The breakdown of the hegemony of received, ‘essentialist’ views about the human subject has been articulated in many other ways. For example, the philosophical innovations pioneered by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) under the heading of phenomenology questioned the basic Cartesian distinction between intellectual subject and material object in the constitution of knowledge about the world. The theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin (1809–1882) rent religious and scientific truth asunder and began a process whereby physical individuality has been reduced to a set of impersonal, genetic blueprints. In the overtly political field, movements to liberate oppressed groups – women, blacks, homosexuals – have understood the claim to an inviolable, unchanging and purposive self as a justification for the exercise of power. They emphasise relativised, protean and playful experiences of selfhood, deploying them to undermine the belief that essentialist identity has a natural, objective existence.

#### RETHINKING THE BODY

Such challenges to the idea of the subject as an abstract, autonomous entity have necessarily involved recognition of the body as a site of rich and complex meanings, not just a material fact. Human embodiment has been recognised as a fundamental and inescapable factor in the formation of beliefs about the world (knowledge) and interaction with it (behaviour). Recent critical analysis rejects Descartes’s conception of the mind as the thing we have in common with God, and the body as the thing we have in common with animals. This implicitly assumes the natural hierarchy descending from the divine to the bestial – a hierarchy which can be ascended through identification with and emulation of recognised superiors. The body is now being defined in ways which subvert the consequent oppositions between intellect and matter, the ideal and the materially real, virtue and vice.

Instead of being the source of a confusion between apparent (sense-based) and real (mathematical) properties, the body becomes ‘that area where life and

thought intersect'.<sup>23</sup> This lived process involves differing and changing senses of being in the world. It also implicitly questions belief in an existence separate from the living body; an identity which continues beyond death. These positions clearly undermine appreciation of naturalistic portraiture as a form of immortality in the traditional sense. However, they also make it possible to analyse historically the ways in which portrayed bodies articulated ideas and beliefs. In contemporary culture, the artist's own body is widely used to guarantee 'presence' in representation. The French artist Orlan, for example, repeatedly performs plastic surgery to shape her body in ways which conform to her lived sense of her own (ideal) identity. She thus becomes a living, honorific portrait, using flesh and blood rather than canvas and paint to create a likeness.

#### THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–) has deconstructed the idea of identity as a separate, bounded entity. He sees the notion of the subject as a unique, autonomous essence as *dependent on*, rather than *opposed to*, the objectification and subordination of everything perceived to lie outside that self. This excluded realm includes the body, 'nature' and marginalised social groups such as criminals, blacks and Jews. Such repression, however, always involves a haunting trace of the suppressed other. In a Derridian view, identity is defined not as a fixed entity but an ongoing process, enacted through language, between subjects. Activities such as creating, perceiving, describing, remembering and borrowing become part of this 'text', replacing a notion of re-presentation as a unifying, revelatory encounter between subject and object. In the field of portraiture, the interplay between viewer, artist and sitter,<sup>24</sup> or within the psyche of the artist-sitter,<sup>25</sup> or amongst written texts in which portraiture exists as literature,<sup>26</sup> can all now participate in an identity inseparable from representation.

### A critique of dualist accounts of portraiture

#### SUBJECT AND OBJECT

Oppositions between subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity, are fundamental to the interpretation of portraiture within a dualist paradigm. Knowledge of what someone is like 'internally' (the sitter as subject) is supposed to be guaranteed by a faithful likeness of that person's external appearance (the sitter as object). The interdependence of these two kinds of knowledge is evident in Ludwig Burkhardt's famous description of the onset of the Renaissance, when naturalistic portraiture re-appeared:

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness – that which was turned within as well as that which was turned without – lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an *objective* treatment of the state and of all things in the world became possible. The *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis: man became a spiritual individual, and recognised himself as such ... [A]t the close of the thirteenth century Italy began to swarm with individuality; the ban laid upon human personality was dissolved; and a thousand figures meet us each in his own special shape and dress.<sup>27</sup>

In this account, published in 1860, the existence of a self-conscious, spiritual self is yoked to the possibility of exact observation: 'an objective treatment of ... all things in the world'.<sup>28</sup> The existence of the human subject is dependent upon the ability to produce a separate, distinctive object. Spirit and body are divided from one another, yet potentially re-united by a notion of objective truth. While the object in itself is worthless and dispensable as mere physical matter, objectivity is a means whereby the subject can be recognised as spirit – something infinitely and eternally valuable. In a Derridian sense, the privileged term (the subject) is thus constituted by what it suppresses (the object).

The dualist separation of subject and object has some pernicious consequences. In the archive of facial resemblance, it naturalises an absolute distinction between subjects worthy of celebration and commemoration and those objectified in 'mug-shot' images produced to facilitate social control or arrest. What is actually an ideologically loaded opposition between ideal virtue and deviant imperfection is represented as a neutral account of the way things inherently are. As Allan Sekula has argued in relation to nineteenth-century photographic practice, an awareness of the continuity between the respectful and the repressive archive of types of personae subjected to visual record is essential to a critical understanding of the portrayed self: 'every proper portrait has its lurking, objectifying inverse in the files of the police'.<sup>29</sup>

The denial of a fully realised subjectivity to the objectified other, while simultaneously asserting the possibility of objective representation, can result in physical oppression. Actual violence against women, homosexuals, blacks, Jews, the 'disabled' depends upon the exclusion of these groups from the honoured realm of the subject, together with the elision of image and reality upon which portraiture depends. If this identification of the signifier with the signified is taken seriously, its terms can be inverted and living, breathing people situated in the repressive visual archive. They thus become caricatures, base types, mere mug-shots with no reference to the divine subject. As such they are *both* dispensable objects *and* symptomatic of the threatening other which, within a dualist paradigm, needs to be obliterated in order to purify and perpetuate the self. The Jewish holocaust and 'ethnic cleansing' become in this perversion a kind of appalling, displaced iconoclasm, perceived by its perpetrators in similar terms to setting light to a photograph of a hated enemy, or tearing up the image of a lover who needs to be forgotten.

#### LOCATING DUALISM HISTORICALLY

Burkhardt's analysis presumes a fully fledged dualism to be a definitive feature of the Renaissance. Yet it has been argued above<sup>30</sup> that in the fifteenth century the body was not clearly distinguished from the self in portraiture and related fields of knowledge and belief. Furthermore, in Alberti's 1435 discussion of portrayal,<sup>31</sup> the vivid illusion of Alexander's physical presence was equated with recognition of his identity as a sovereign. For Alberti, portrayed bodily resemblance was thus not only inseparable from the self, but the self was conceived in terms of the role or position in society which Burkhardt ascribed to a primitive, medieval identity.

One reason for Burkhardt's assimilation of Renaissance identity to nineteenth-century values was the dualist conception of the inner self as a transcendent and absolute fact, an objective reality which denied or trivialised any other version of personal identity. If the true self was immutable, permanent and independent of

historical change, it was unthinkable that it could have been genuinely different in the Renaissance. Any other conception of identity had to be explained as an inability to see the truth through Burkhardt's veil of 'faith, illusion and childish prepossession'.

#### BOURGEOIS INDIVIDUALITY VERSUS NOBLE STATUS?

A second reason for Burkhardt's anachronistic interpretation of Renaissance identity was the strong link between the dualist subject and a heroic story of the rise of the bourgeoisie, starting in the Renaissance. The irreducible subjectivity produced by a fully fledged dualist view was aptly named the in-dividual. When Burkhardt was writing in the mid-nineteenth century, both this notion of the self and realism in its various forms were identified with the non-hereditary urban elites whose position had been greatly enhanced by industrialisation and the symbolic defeat of the titled aristocracy in the French Revolution. By tracing such individuality back to the supposed rebirth of classical and naturalistic culture, liberal accounts such as Burkhardt's authorised bourgeois identity as a fundamental truth of western civilisation and the foundation of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The visual individualisation associated with Renaissance portraiture continues to be associated with bourgeois individuality. For example, Norbert Schneider's sophisticated 1994 account of early modern portraiture claims that the idea of human dignity asserted by Renaissance philosophy legitimated 'the self-regard of a bourgeoisie whose confidence was already enhanced by technical and economic progress, as well as ... geographical expansion and social mobility'. This intellectually sanctioned bourgeois identity was in turn articulated by 'images of individuality' which focused on the inner self, as opposed to the rank and power characteristic of aristocratic identity.<sup>34</sup>

In this account, individuality ultimately remains a natural, objective attribute of the bourgeoisie, rather than a historically conditioned ideological stance. The bourgeois self is inherently autonomous, interior, self-conscious, active and unique, whereas aristocratic identity is socially and politically determined. The (masculine) bourgeois thus claims 'true' subjectivity, while the aristocrat is deluded, feminised, objectified.

It is, however, arguable that in the history of portrayal individuality actually has a considerable amount in common with nobility, in that both have long been reliant upon notions of exemplary virtue. From their beginning in the later fifteenth century, collections of exemplary portraits included both members of the hereditary nobility and the non-noble elites which ultimately became identified as bourgeois. As exemplars, they all signified admired qualities or achievements which rendered them worthy of immortalisation in paint and inclusion within an honorific archive. Possession of an honourable and enduring identity (enacted virtue) was thus common to both groups. Within an exemplary framework, portrayed noble and 'bourgeois' identity were therefore not opposed but complimentary constituents of the honoured stratum of society, distinguished from the rest by its claim to re-presentation and thus, implicitly, immortality.

The humanist elites (including artists) which emerged in Italian cities from the fourteenth century, and were regarded by Burkhardt as the origin and sign of individuality, could thus equally be regarded as an alternative kind of nobility. They certainly made strenuous claims to noble status, asserting that their virtues of personal genius, talent and originality were derived directly from God, rather than

bestowed by God's lieutenant, the monarch. Viewed in this way, individuality becomes just another category of virtue-inspired social behaviour, even if it is a category which consists of only one person.

Noble and non-noble virtue differed not in *kind* but in *content*. It is this difference which explains the correspondence between the 'rise of the bourgeoisie' and the dualist distinction between identity and the body. The hereditary nobility's reliance upon blood and family genealogy rendered noble identity inseparable from the body. By contrast, that of humanist and commercial elites was necessarily detached from the body in order to justify a position of honour not dependent upon biological inheritance. Family genealogies were replaced by 'inspirational' lineages consisting of influential figures. It was important, furthermore, that non-noble groups should deny any dependence upon the physical, manual work which was the hallmark of their subordinate position within established aristocratic ideology. It is notable, however, that these 'bourgeois' responses signified within received noble parameters: identification with authoritative precedent and the naturalised, divine–bestial hierarchy.

#### THEORY AND PRACTICE

Another reason why portraiture from the Renaissance onward has been explained in terms of dualist individuality has been art historians' heavy reliance upon the theory of art to authorise interpretation. This in itself involves a dualist privileging of the intellect ('theory') over the body ('practice'). Distinctions between mental and mechanical work, head and hand, idea and execution, and thus, potentially, mind and body were established very early in Italian theories of art in order to justify the artist's claim to nobility. By the mid-sixteenth century, the work of art was theorised as creative imitation in which the essential or ideal character of things is rendered visible by the genius of the artist. This sort of intellectual, noble imitation (Italian: *imitare*) was distinguished from mechanical imitation (Italian: *ritrarre*), which was defined as the unmediated copying of external appearances.

Initially, these two types of imitation were not seen as mutually exclusive. A good portrait could thus be both exact resemblance and an ideal likeness, man in the likeness of Man, as Aristotle had put it.<sup>11</sup> Such a conception allowed the portrayed body to function both as absence made present and as an exemplar of virtue. Increasingly, however, works of art were theorised as ideal imitation as opposed to mindless, mechanical reproductions. While this successfully promoted the position of artists as intellectual, innovative figures rather than mere craftsmen, it did not account for the complex relationship between bodily and personal presence assumed in portraits. Furthermore, the ideological requirement that a portrait should be taken as a true representation of the sitter meant that, in the discourse of art, portraiture could only be explained as the exact, literal re-creation of someone's appearance (*ritrarre*), or as the accurate record of the artist's special insight (a particular form of *imitare*). Both positions implied a dualist conception of the self, a separation between body and mind, the materially real and the abstract ideal.

In other, more 'practical' fields of discussion, however, portraiture was conceived in quite a different way. In their recent surveys of early modern portraiture, both Lorne Campbell and Norbert Schneider point out that the reference of the terms 'to portray' and 'portrait' was not limited to the human subject until the mid-seventeenth century. They report that Villard de Honnecourt's thirteenth-century

*Livre de Portraiture* included representations of animals, and that fifteenth-century usage of the terms included city views, religious subjects such as saints, and even heraldic devices.<sup>14</sup> A portrait (Italian: *ritratto*) originally meant a visual reproduction which conveyed the specificity of the item under scrutiny. Use of the term for an image of a lizard, or of the piazza and church of San Marco in Venice, suggests that, while certainly concerned to individualise, a 'portrait' was not concerned with the 'individuality' of the subject in a fully fledged, Burkhardtian sense.

Seen in crudely oppositional terms, employment of the visual rhetoric called portraiture seems initially to have prioritised visual *identification*, over insight into an interior, essential, personal *identity*. From this perspective, Renaissance portraiture might seem to have more in common with the modern passport photograph than with the 'artistic portrait',<sup>15</sup> which seems to convey some insight into the sitter's subjectivity. The concept of the portraitist as camera has, indeed, resulted in a number of attempts to explain the intense illusionism of early Renaissance portraiture by analogy with the requirements of identification by a legal witness. The most famous of these is Erwin Panofsky's interpretation, published in 1934, of Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Marriage* as legal evidence of a marriage, and in 1994 Norbert Schneider intimated that the entire re-adoption of visual resemblance for the representation of personal identity was connected with the adoption of Roman Law by the social elite, which rendered identification or recognition 'existentially significant in everyday life'.<sup>16</sup>

This view of things is in fact the other side of the dualist coin. If Renaissance portraiture did not refer poetically to an inner subjectivity, it must be an objective record of an externalised, visual reality. Yet if we re-read Alberti's 1435 account,<sup>17</sup> it is evident that portraiture is seen as paradigmatic not only of the mimetic power of painting, but also of the painter's art. Recognition of a visual resemblance is *inseparable* from a sense of its subject's living presence as a social being and explicitly connected with admiration for the portraitist who created it. Furthermore, in mentioning the pleasure which results from such recognition, and drawing an analogy between mimetic re-presentation and the bond between friends, Alberti distinguishes the interests of the viewer from those of the artist and the sitter. Mimetic painting, epitomised by portraiture, thus involves a relationship between three distinguishable personae or voices.

The friendship alluded to by Alberti was a humanist ideal: an ongoing, lived, multiple and normatively homosocial connectivity articulated primarily through the circulation of verbal and written texts. This 'friendship' model of interpretation can be distinguished from the later, dualist notion of a single, disembodied eye, simultaneously the mind's eye and the camera eye, in a one-off, penetrating and appropriating encounter with a feminised image whose reference oscillates, uneasily, between extreme subjectivity and a dehumanised object. Indeed, it bears more resemblance to Derrida's understanding of identity as an intersubjective process enacted through the word than to Burkhardt's dualist subjectivity, exposed and encountered through visual objectivity.

If dualism does not provide an adequate account of individualising likeness at the outset of the Renaissance, why was naturalistic portraiture re-adopted? It was no doubt connected with the development of the technical capacity to fulfil the desire for vivid, illusionistic representation. However, this still begs the question why that desire had previously been suppressed. It may have been because of a fear that a 'graven image' risked a damningly pretentious identification with the divine,

following the great Byzantine controversy about mimesis of the eighth and ninth centuries. The initial confinement of portraiture to truncated or reduced-scale figures seems to bear witness to such a concern. Similarly, the attention paid to physiognomic specificity may have acknowledged human imperfection and fallibility, since it functioned within an established, idealising hierarchy which equated symmetry and smoothness with the divine. The avoidance of the idealising, full-length format suggests that at first no claim was being made to belong to the pantheon of immortal virtue.

Devout imitation was, however, a means of ascending the hierarchy from the bestial to the divine, so that a portrait could be rationalised as an act of faith. The inscription 'Léal Souvenir' (Loyal Remembrance) on van Eyck's portrait of 'Timoteos' (1432)<sup>38</sup> thus both verified the all-too-human likeness and signified the sincere, perpetual commemoration by artist and viewer which was considered to help elevate the faithful believer towards heavenly immortality.

# 5

## Photographic likeness

JOHN GAGE

Until twentieth-century psychoanalysis and its modern theoretical offshoots – so well represented in the essays in this collection – discarded the notion that human character may be inferred from external, and especially facial, characteristics, the representation of ‘likeness’ was seen as one of the most important tasks of portrait art. Thus, in his official tribute to the lately deceased Gainsborough, given at the Royal Academy in 1788, Sir Joshua Reynolds pointed ruefully to the gift for ‘striking resemblance’ for which his rival had been celebrated, and which was usually denied to Reynolds himself; and he identified the formal means by which Gainsborough had demonstrated this gift in a particularly vivid way:

The likeness of a portrait ... consists more in preserving the general effect of the countenance, than in the most minute finishing of the features ... Gainsborough’s portraits were often little more in regard to finishing or determining the form of the features, than what generally attends a dead colour [under-painting]; but as he attended to the general effect, or whole together, I have often imagined that this unfinished manner contributed even to that striking resemblance for which his portraits are so remarkable ... It is presupposed that in this undetermined manner there is the general effect; enough to remind the spectator of the original; the imagination supplies the rest, and perhaps more satisfactorily to himself, if not more exactly, than the artist with all his care could possibly have done.<sup>1</sup>

Reynolds is here assuming that judgements of likeness are available only to the immediate circle of the subject portrayed; but it is clear that, even for posterity, the search for authentic likenesses of historical figures has always stimulated the collecting of portraits. We need look no further than the careful sifting of iconographical evidence in the modern catalogues of the National Portrait Gallery in London. Yet Reynolds also suggested that viewers who knew Gainsborough’s subjects personally would project this knowledge onto the vacant schemata of his painted heads, which often make us see a generalised and ‘family’ likeness in so many of his unrelated figures. This capacity for projection may also account for the great popularity of the humblest of portrait-types available in Gainsborough’s time, the silhouette, which by its very nature offered the minimum of information about the features, and yet so often gave a striking impression of life.<sup>2</sup>

Although many silhouettes were cut free-hand, the making of this type of

usually profile portrait was soon simplified by mechanical devices which made it one of the most significant ancestors of the portrait photograph; a mechanisation which in both cases was assumed to guarantee precision of likeness, but which also, precisely because they were mechanical, were seen to remove these humble styles of portrait from the realm of art. The portrait had long occupied an ambiguous position in the history of visual art because it did not simply use imitative skills in the service of higher imaginative ends. Its end was itself imitation, and mechanisation seemed to put this end more firmly within the range of the least skilled artisan.<sup>3</sup> Among the devices for taking portraits which precede the development of the portrait photograph were the Physiognotrace, introduced in Paris by G. L. Chrétien in the 1780s, which produced modest profile portraits related to the silhouette, and the Graphic Telescope, patented by the painter and scientist Cornelius Varley in 1811, which could take profile, three-quarter and full-face views, and was thus particularly useful in the making of studies for bust portraits in three dimensions.<sup>4</sup>

The sense of authenticity conferred by these 'objective' techniques and their photographic successors did not displace but simply reinforced the process of projection. One of the many 'dodges' described to the journalist Henry Mayhew by a street photographer in the East End of London in the 1850s was to fob off customers in a hurry with ready-prepared images of other people. The 'mechanical' process and some persuasive patter could thus make a young woman enthusiastically accept the photograph of an old widow as a likeness of herself, and a sailor that of a carpenter. The photographer explained his success in terms very reminiscent of Reynolds on Gainsborough: 'The fact is, people don't know their own faces. Half of 'em have never looked in a glass half a dozen times in their life, and directly they see a pair of eyes and a nose, they fancy they are their own.'<sup>5</sup>

It is true that the use of mechanical devices was not always seen as intrinsically antithetical to artistic pretensions, it remains that it was the 'portrait-like' element in the portrait – the demand for exactness – which made it uncongenial to generations of portrait artists whose ambitions lay elsewhere. Gainsborough, for example, felt that the 'Face-business' would drive him crazy, and longed to escape from his portrait commissions to study landscape in the country.<sup>6</sup> The photograph was similarly launched, around 1840, on a rhetoric of 'naturalism' which, in spite of the manifest artificiality of photographic representation and the aesthetic concerns of many photographers from the beginnings until our own day, is still widely thought of as its most significant characteristic. From Henry Fox Talbot's *Pencil of Nature* to Roland Barthes's 'message without a code', photography has been promoted chiefly as a neutral tool of exact reproduction.<sup>7</sup> And this has led to the devaluation of the photograph as an aesthetic object very much on the same lines as the portrait itself had earlier been devalued. As Roger Fry wrote in his introduction to an anthology of portrait heads by the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron:

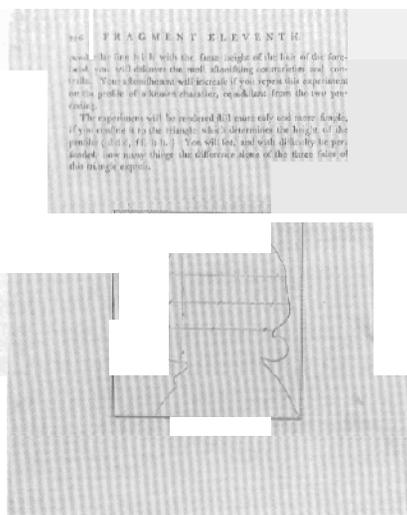
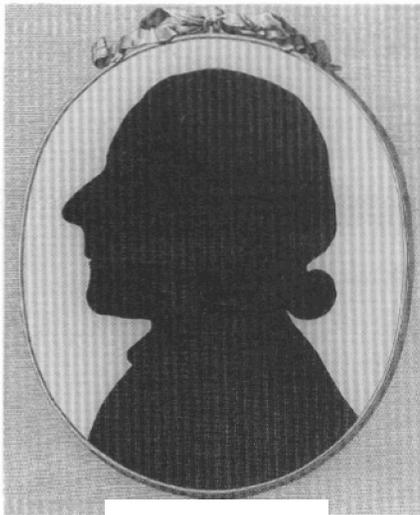
The position of photography is uncertain and uncomfortable. No one denies its immense services of all kinds, but its status as an independent art has always been disputed. It has never managed to get its Muse or any proper representation on Parnassus, and yet it will not give up its pretensions altogether.<sup>8</sup>

120 These positions in the understanding of portraiture and the portrait photograph are nevertheless particularly rich in paradox, for if the best portrait was the

most 'like', what was it like? And what did that paradigm of visual objectivity, the portrait photograph, add to the notion of 'likeness'?

The generation of Reynolds and Gainsborough was in a good position to give a positive answer to the first question because theirs was not only the first period when portraiture began to be a serious topic of aesthetic enquiry,<sup>9</sup> but it was also the period when the ancient science of physiognomy began to draw its raw material very substantially from images of real people. The *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789–92) of the Swiss pastor and moralist J. C. Lavater, which had begun their long publishing history in German in the 1770s, drew on some very early strands in this science, including the interpretation of character as a function of four 'humours' or temperaments – choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholic – and the rather more visually interesting comparison between human and animal features. But the most novel thrust of Lavater's publication was in the analysis of the portraits of known individuals which, where they were not his contemporaries, friends and collaborators such as the German poet Goethe or the Anglo-Swiss artist Henry Fuseli, he was able to assemble readily enough because of more than a century of intensive portrait-making in the form of easily collectable prints.<sup>10</sup>

But Lavater's physiognomical approach to character analysis was also congenial to the generation of Reynolds and Gainsborough because it was an idealising approach. Lavater made much use of the silhouette (Figure 35) because the silhouette was usually limited to a profile view of the head and shoulders, and the profile view was, for him, the most significant view, since it revealed those features most salient for the interpretation of character, the brow, the nose and the chin, whose size, angle and shape could be measured against an ideal scale (Figure 36). The profile view is rather rare among eighteenth-century painted portraits – one notable example is Reynolds's thoroughly classicising full-length of Mrs Lloyd (1776; private collection)<sup>11</sup> – although it is common enough in relief-sculpture and, of course, on coins and medals where distancing was usually a function of respect.



35 Silhouette of Johann Caspar Lavater, from J. C. Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*. London 1792, II, facing p. 225.

36 right] J. C. Lavater, Analysis of Figure 34, from *ibid.*, p. 226.



37 Francis Galton, *Composite Portraits of Three Sisters*, c. 1880.

One of the many reasons for this rarity was precisely what commended the profile so much to Lavater: that it offered the head for objective study, undisturbed by the mobility of features so expressive of social interaction; the glances of the eyes and the movements of the mouth by which, for the most part, we learn to recognise our fellow human beings.<sup>12</sup> So Lavater was setting up a highly specialised concept of 'likeness'.

It was also a highly classicising one. Not only did it highlight the more or less permanent and stable features which interested other contemporary commentators on the classical beauty of the human head,<sup>13</sup> it also devalued the mouth and the jaw – the basest animal features – and even the eye which had, since classical times, been especially appreciated as the 'window of the soul'. In this Lavater's physiognomical system had the backing of most eighteenth-century painted portraiture. If the distant profile view was a rarity, the mobile, socially interactive glance was hardly less so: the features were usually composed, and the attention of the spectator was not often directly engaged. The many portraits of that early super-star, the actor David Garrick – a subject of Angela Rosenthal's essay in this collection – are revealing in this respect: in character Garrick was often given a distinct expression, but as a private person, although he sometimes looks out directly towards the viewer, their eyes rarely connect, and he has no more than a faintly mocking smile.<sup>14</sup> It was perhaps with Garrick in mind that Gainsborough complained in a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth that the portrait painter was obliged to convey character without recourse to the actor's repertory of expression:

Had a picture voice, action, etc. to make itself known as Actors have upon the Stage, no disguise would be sufficient to conceal a person; but only a face confined to one view and not a muscle to move to say, 'Here I am' falls very hard upon the poor Painter who perhaps is not within a mile of the truth in painting the Face only.<sup>15</sup>

Nor did Lavater's system make use of the signs of age or illness which must have confronted him so often in eighteenth-century subjects, perhaps because the portrait images he drew on also made so little reference to them.<sup>16</sup> Portrait artists can hardly be expected to have revealed what cosmetics were often – perhaps usually – at pains to disguise.<sup>17</sup>

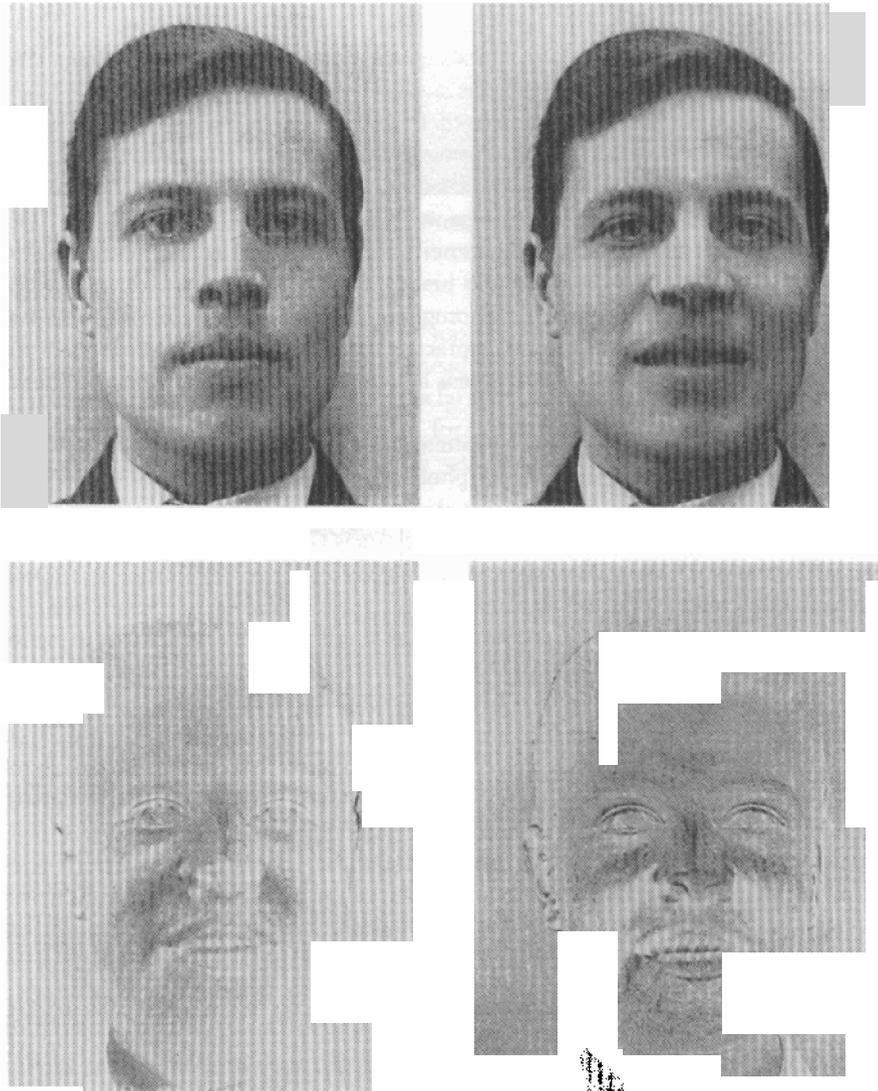
Photography might well have been thought to tip the balance decisively away from this idealising conception of likeness. Portrait painting worked by an additive method in which features were progressively painted into the image until it was agreed that a satisfactory likeness had been created, and, as the case of Reynolds and Gainsborough has suggested, the concept of 'satisfactory' was a very fluid one. Photography, because of its more passive procedures, provided from the outset a more or less complete tally of surface features, some of which, in order to constitute an ideal 'likeness', would have to be – and often were – edited out at some stage of the process, by a cunning lighting of the subject, or focusing of the lens, or by using a particular type of photographic emulsion, or by controlling the exposure or development times or, as a last resort, by more or less extensive retouching after the image had been fixed. It is clear that even the earliest and least manipulable of the commercial photographic processes, the daguerreotype, offered no 'standard' degree of surface detail;<sup>18</sup> and practitioners of later and coarser techniques, such as the calotype, were able to work with very broad, soft-focused effects. Not to mention the general unfeasibility of colour photography before the early twentieth century. So just as the format, poses, lighting, backgrounds and accessories of the early photographic portrait were borrowed from the traditions of painted portraiture, so, in practice, it did not seek to transcend or even to modify the idealistic notion of likeness laid down long before the development of the photographic technique.

As it happens, one of the earliest attempts – perhaps *the* earliest attempt – to harness the specific potential of the photographic method in the interest of a wholly new conception of 'likeness' was also conceived within the framework of an idealising aesthetic. In the 1870s and 1880s Francis Galton, the statistician, inventor and, *most notoriously*; *the father of eugenics as a social programme*, developed an ingenious method for the identification of types, of 'family likenesses' within various groups and classes of people: siblings (Figure 37), members of the same profession, notably convicted criminals, sufferers from the same diseases and members of some ethnic groups. Galton's method was to superimpose the photographic negatives taken from sometimes dozens of individuals in each group, and re-photograph the resulting 'composite portrait' in order to establish the common features which might help to identify members of these various families or classes beyond the boundaries recognised hitherto.<sup>19</sup> Galton began his investigations with convicts in the prison service, where the use of photographs for identification had been common for some time; and his interest in the taxonomy of criminal types belongs to a substantial tradition of physiognomical typing for the purposes of social control.<sup>20</sup> What his ultimately inconsequential experiments demonstrate is that the profile view is less susceptible to generalisation than the full-face which, even when made up of tens of individual components, may still have a convincingly individual look.

Galton was also interested in identifying the individual (he was a pioneer in the technique of fingerprinting); and he later experimented with what he called the 'analytic portrait', which reversed the methods of the composite portrait by using

multiple negatives to cancel out common features and isolate those peculiar to each individual or, in one of the few surviving examples (Figure 38), those peculiar to a particular expression of the face. He attributed the signal failure of this line of enquiry to the fact that the resulting images did not give 'an intelligible idea of the peculiarities, the non-essentials being as strongly marked as the essentials, and the whole making a jumble'.<sup>21</sup>

So Galton had a strong *a priori* sense of salience in the features of his subjects for analytical portraits; and his repeated observations that the composite portraits were 'more regular and handsome' or 'refined and ideal' than their individual components points to a mind schooled in the eighteenth-century aesthetic of idealism.<sup>22</sup> Galton was a cousin and a close friend of Charles Darwin, who was himself



38 Francis Galton, *Analytical Portrait*, from K. Pearson, *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, Cambridge, II, 1924, p. 312.

familiar with (and influenced by) Reynolds's neoclassical theory of the 'central form', as it had been outlined especially in Discourse III of 1770.<sup>23</sup> It may well have been Darwin, who had himself made an important physiognomical use of the photograph in his 1872 book. *The Expression of the Emotions in Men and in Animals*, who kindled his cousin's interest in the significance of these central, typical features. What Galton did was to use the modern, ostensibly individualising technique of photography to validate an essentially neoclassical view of the face, and to reinforce the notion that 'likeness' meant likeness to a type.

That Galton's composite portraits in profile are relatively unconvincing suggests again that we as spectators are readier to frame our ideas of likeness – of what constitutes resemblance – on the basis of the features we observe in social intercourse, rather than from what we learn by the dispassionate scrutiny of profiles which, especially if they are our own, we may discover inadvertently with horror and disbelief. But social transactions tend to focus on the eyes and, as Angela Rosenthal has demonstrated vividly in her discussion of Vigée-Lebrun (see Chapter 7), eye contact is dangerous. In portrait-representations before the era of photography this contact had been rare, confined for the most part to the mirror-images of the self-portrait, which became especially obsessive in Romantic art, or, in an engaging sub-genre of the portrait miniature, to the many representations of a single eye of the beloved.<sup>24</sup> What the photographic camera did was to replace the susceptible eye of the artist with a purely mechanical 'eye'; the photographic artist, who could operate the shutter at a distance, need no longer be in direct or prolonged contact with the subject. The psychological problem of negotiating social space and time, which had led earlier portrait painters and sculptors to make sittings many and short, was no longer a problem. Certainly the photographer no longer had any need to look the subject in the eye. All the personal risk of close confinement with another person, perhaps of the opposite sex, was now displaced from the artist onto the viewer, and ceased to be a risk because the spectator had not a person, but only the image of a person, to contend with.

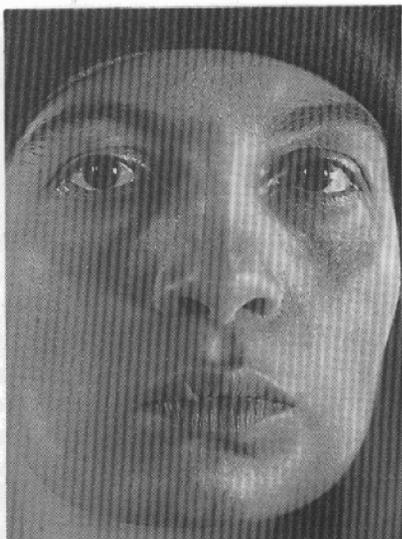
Thus from the earliest days photography brought a sense of liberation to the portraitist, and one of the most striking evidences of this is a new type of confrontational portrait (Figure 39), especially cultivated among artists and writers and, for example in a remarkable group of male heads taken in the 1860s by Julia Margaret Cameron, across the genders. These isolated and closely framed heads imply a proximity which would have been unthinkable without the psychological distancing of a mechanical device. And yet, as Cameron's work as well as many modern examples show, direct confrontation in the photographic portrait has been perfectly compatible with an abstract treatment of surface through soft focus and the use of very grainy film.<sup>25</sup>

In this century the confrontational portrait has become a very common type both in photography and in painting. But apparent intimacy has not brought any inevitable penetration of character; rather it has helped, again, to redefine what it is we mean by 'likeness'. The German photographer Helmar Lerski (Figure 40) and the American photo-realist painter Chuck Close (Figure 41) have both provided the viewer with more than enough detail to make an identification, were there to be an opportunity for comparison. But at the same time they have both deprived the viewer of the means of making a judgement of resemblance, of reading the head as a portrait. Lerski's and Close's figures do not usually even have identifiable names. Lerski's *Köpfe des Alltags* (Everyday Heads) of 1931 were made under highly

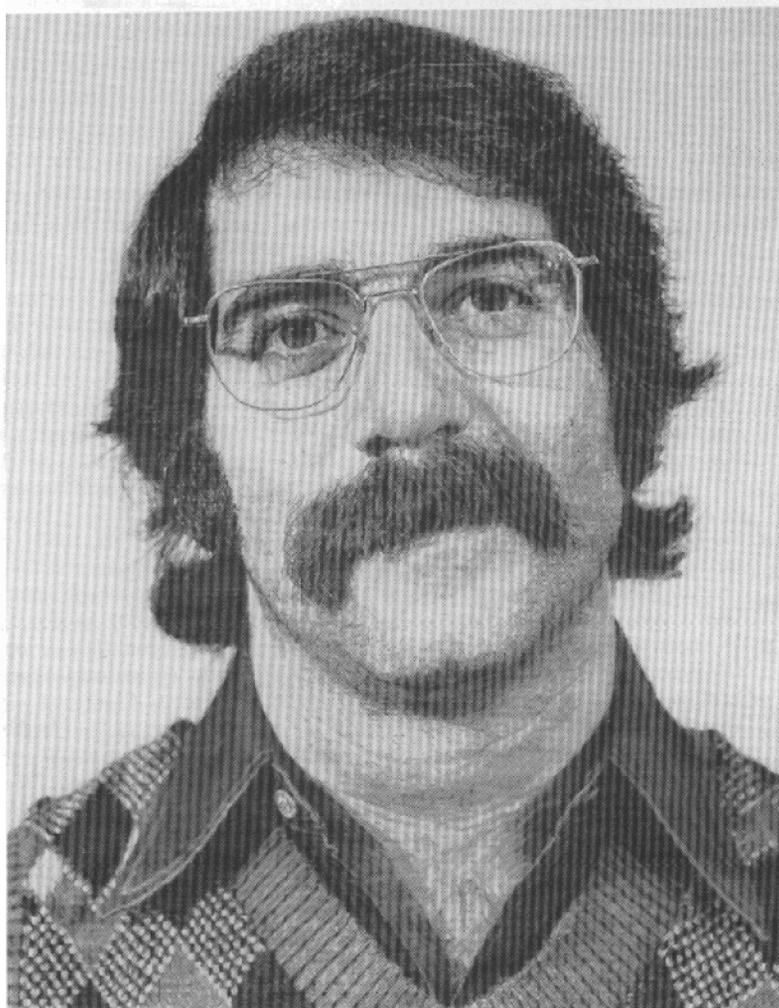
artificial studio lighting and with two-hour sittings, in order to present the head as a sort of still-life. Most of his subjects were hired through the Berlin Labour Exchange.<sup>26</sup> Close, working in the radically formalistic atmosphere of 1960s America, argued that his vast and overwhelming painted images of his friends, which might take as much as a year to complete, were less images of people than of the photographs, which he attempted to represent with the greatest possible fidelity, down to the slight out-of-focus blurring at the edges of the forms. Likeness, said Close, was only a by-product of the way he worked.<sup>27</sup> And yet these images give us an unprecedented range of information about the individual surface features of these men and women. We can follow each shift of contour, each line and crease; we can note where a matt area of skin changes to shine; we can almost count the hairs, the pores or the puckers of the lips. This is a view of the head usually



40 Helmar Lerski, *Frau eines  
Chauffeurs* (Chauffeur's Wife),  
c. 1928.



41 Chuck Close, *Robert*, 1973-4.  
Acrylic on canvas, 9 x 7 ft.



permitted only to lovers or hairdressers, beauticians, doctors or undertakers, whose job it is to gloss over these unrelenting facts. Lerski's heads give us a sense of extraordinary intimacy, but, unlike lovers, we are not able to look into their eyes; and Close's frontal, passport-like poses are equally uninviting.<sup>28</sup> They deny us that sense of person which is perhaps the fundamental requirement of access to the figure through portraiture, and they thus make the assessment of likeness an irrelevance.

This new repertory of surface effects domesticated by photography was soon appropriated by a whole range of portrait painters. Shiny noses, eyelashes, blotchy complexions, freckles: all have become the stock-in-trade of twentieth-century portraiture, and must be seen as essential ingredients of modern 'likeness'. It is as if, like the picture of Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's story, all the residual blemishes of character have been drained out of the sitters and into their representations. But, if they help to identify, these surface features throw little light on 'identity' beyond showing that, in contrast to the spectators of earlier centuries, we no longer interpret them as outward signs of inner deficiencies, and they need no longer be concealed.

The human head is the chief vehicle of social intercourse, through expressive conversation; and we usually expect the representations of heads to embody such lively qualities of the features as would be conveyed to us in real life. This is what we interpret as 'likeness', and what turns an effigy – a mere aggregation of surface features, as in a wax-work – into a portrait. The unprecedented advantages of the photograph as an aid to identification have thus had little direct impact on the notion of likeness, and portrait photographers have usually used far more traditional means of coaxing an identity from the subjects presented to them. Even Dorian Gray's portrait showed his progressive deterioration of character not so much by the accretions of the ageing epidermis as by changes of expression.

## Notes

- 1 Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses*, ed. R. Wark (New Haven and London, 1975), p. 259.
- 2 For a brief history, S. McKechnie, *British Silhouette Artists and their Work, 1760–1860* (London, 1978).
- 3 For some early criticisms, J. Loquin, 'La lutte des critiques d'art contre les portraitistes au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Archives de l'Art Français*, 7 (1913), pp. 309–20.
- 4 For the Physiognotrace, H. Gernsheim, *L. J. M. Daguerre* (New York, 1968), pp. 62–3; for the Graphic Telescope, M. Pidgley, 'Cornelius Varley, Cotman and the Graphic Telescope', *Burlington Magazine*, 114 (1972), p. 782; A. Potts, *Sir Francis Chantrey, 1781–1841, Sculptor to the Great* (London, National Portrait Gallery, 1980), no. 20.
- 5 H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 2nd edn (London, 1861–2; repr. 1967), III, p. 209. Many of the swarm of popular street-photographers had begun their careers as silhouette cutters: see 'The penny profile cutter', *ibid.*, p. 12.
- 6 Gainsborough wrote to a patron in 1770, 'the nature of face painting is such, that if I was not *already cracked*, the continual hurry of one fool upon the back of another, just when the magot bites, would be enough to drive me crazy ...' (M. Woodall, *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1963, p. 167). See also the letter to William Jackson about landscape painting, *ibid.*, p. 115.
- 7 H. Fox Talbot, *Select Texts and Bibliography*, ed. M. Weaver (Oxford, 1992), p. 48, and p. 61 for the manipulation of the image. For the unreality of photographs, J. Snyder, 'Picturing vision', in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *The Language of Images* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 224–34. R. Barthes, 'The photographic message', in *Image, Music, Text*, selected and trans. S. Heath (London, 1977), p. 7. Barthes is of course talking of photo-journalism, but he underestimated the artifice of this genre, too. For his later, less categorical stance: *Camera*

*Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. R. Howard (London, 1982), pp. 76, 100–3.

- 8 R. Fry, 'Mrs Cameron's photographs', in *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women*, with introductions by Virginia Woolf and Roger Fry (London, 1926), p. 9. Fry claimed that Cameron's sensitive artifice made nonsense of this characterisation of photography.
- 9 The most thoroughgoing early examination of portraiture in English is perhaps in chapters XV and XVI of Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* (London, 1753).
- 10 Lavater's large collection of portrait prints, with his commentaries on them, is now preserved in the Austrian National Library in Vienna. For the extensive section devoted to Goethe, S. Schulze (ed.), *Goethe und die Kunst*, exhibition catalogue (Frankfurt, Schirn Kunsthalle/Weimar, Schlossmuseum, 1994), nos 141–57. For the fashion for portrait-print collecting in the eighteenth century, M. Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 1993), pp. 53–78. For useful modern assessment of Lavater's work in English, J. K. Stemmler, 'The physiognomical portraits of Johann Caspar Lavater', *Art Bulletin*, 75 (1993), pp. 151–68.
- 11 See N. Penny (ed.), *Reynolds*, exhibition catalogue (London, Royal Academy, 1986), no. 103.
- 12 On recognition, see especially E. H. Gombrich, 'The mask and the face: the perception of physiognomic likeness in life and in art', in *The Image and the Eye* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 105–36. See also P. J. Benson and D. I. Perrett, 'Extracting prototypical facial images from exemplars', *Perception*, 22 (1993), pp. 257–61; E. Brown and D. I. Perrett, 'What gives a face its gender?', *ibid.*, pp. 829–40.
- 13 See, for example, A. Cozens, *Principles of Beauty relative to the Human Head* (1778), reprinted in K. S. Sloan, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens: The Poetry of Landscape* (New Haven and London, 1986), pp. 63–8. Lavater singled out Cozens for his unnatural and characterless treatment of the classical profile in *Essays on Physiognomy*, II, 1792, pp. 38of.
- 14 For a useful anthology of Garrick portraits. E. Wind, *Hume and the Heroic Portrait* (Oxford, 1986), pls 27–34.
- 15 Woodall, *Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, pp. 51–3.
- 16 The Scottish portraitist Allan Ramsay was one of the very few eighteenth-century artists to show some of his subjects 'warts and all'; and in the cases of Dr Richard Mead or Mary Adam, as in the case of Lely's portrait of Oliver Cromwell which established the idea, there may have been some private justification for this treatment (see A. Smart, *Allan Ramsay 1713–1784*, exhibition catalogue, London, National Portrait Gallery, 1992, nos 28, 41). The frequent inclusion of wrinkles and blemishes in bust sculpture was probably a function of their derivation from Roman portrait conventions. Pointon (*Hanging the Head*, pp. 141–51) has raised the important question of smallpox scars in the case of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu but, as I have suggested in a review of her book (*Art History*, 16 (1993), p. 665), the identification of 'authentic' portraits of Lady Mary is still problematic.
- One of the many desiderata in the history of portraiture is a thoroughly documented study of cosmetics. For a recent survey, P. Rovesti, *Alla Ricerca dei Cosmetici Perduti* (Venice, 1975).
- 18 See the very different treatments of Edgar Allan Poe and Samuel Morse in nearly contemporary plates: Gernsheim, *Daguerre*, pls 114–16.
- 19 Galton described his method at length in *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (London, 1883, repr. 1907), pp. 221–41.
- 20 See, for example, the remarkable collection of early nineteenth-century portrait busts, made for physiognomical purposes, in the Dundee Art Museum. This aspect of Galton's work has been studied by D. Green, 'Veins of resemblance: photography and eugenics', in P. Holland, J. Spence and S. Watney (eds), *Photography/Politics: Two* (London, 1986), pp. 9–21.
- 21 F. Galton, *Memories of my Life* (London, 1908), pp. 261–3.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Darwin cites the neoclassical theorist G. E. Lessing on the distinction between beauty and expression in *The Expression of Emotions in Men and in Animals*, 2nd edn (London, 1890), pp. 15–16.

- 24 An example of an (anonymous) English eye-miniature in the Victoria and Albert Museum is reproduced in J. Murdoch *et al.*, *The English Miniature* (New Haven and London, 1981), col. pl. 35d.
- 25 See, for example, Hugo Erfurt's portrait of the painter Max Beckmann, in London, Hayward Gallery, *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties*, 1978–9, no. 287.
- 26 On Lerski and his methods see K. Macpherson (1931) in D. Mellor (ed.), *Germany: The New Photography 1927–33* (London, 1978), pp. 65–8.
- 27 See his interview of 1972 in E. H. Johnson (ed.), *American Artists on Art, from 1940–1980* (New York, 1982), pp. 160–4. Close's early photo-realist heads were painted in black and white.
- 28 Close said, 'I don't want the eyes to follow you like in a traditional portrait, but I also don't want them to be staring through people. If the camera is about six feet away from the subject, it turns out about right.' *Ibid.*, p. 161.

## She's got the look! Eighteenth-century female portrait painters and the psychology of a potentially 'dangerous employment'

ANGELA ROSENTHAL

On Tuesday 18 April 1775 James Boswell recorded in his diary an exchange with Samuel Johnson:

Our conversation turned on a variety of subjects. He [Johnson] thought portrait-painting an improper employment for a woman. 'Publick practice of any art, (he observed,) and staring in men's faces, is very indelicate in a female.'

Although rarely put so explicitly, Samuel Johnson's opinion concerning the female portraitist corresponded to a widely held view. Portraiture, as Johnson observed, is a public art practice. It entails a social encounter between the artist and his or her sitter as well as, in the eighteenth century, guests, friends and relatives.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the meeting necessitates a particularly (in)tense visuality: the eye/I of the artist fixes the sitter, 'staring' and recording.

Eighteenth-century European, metropolitan society developed an elaborate ideal of femininity, constituted by notions of private, domestic virtues, and culturally regulated through literature, conduct books and other media.<sup>3</sup> Within the discourses governing female behaviour, dominant gaze politics were more rigorously defined along gendered lines.<sup>4</sup> The ideal woman could not direct a prolonged, searching look at a man without impropriety. That is, women who did not conform to such cultural limits were excluded from polite society, and considered either uncultured, unnaturally powerful or immoral.

Within such an imbalanced visual economy, portraiture was a problematic professional pursuit for women to whom such ideals of comportment were thought to apply; and because the behavioural codes focused upon the ocular submission of women to men, especially troublesome to the female portraitist was the heterosexual encounter. This is not to say that the homosexual encounter was seen as unproblematic. But these problems were suppressed in the dominant discourse; anxiety was more explicitly expressed regarding the heterosexual portrait event.<sup>5</sup>

Yet at the same time that portraiture as a profession was perceived as too public a practice for genteel women, the genre was also, paradoxically, especially associated with them. In contrast to the explicitly public functions of history painting, portraiture was always concerned with individual likeness. In this respect it was perceived to appeal particularly to the vanity of female sitters. Women artists

were thought to lack the ability to abstract, a quality required in rational pursuits such as history painting.<sup>6</sup> But this assumed deficiency regarding abstraction implied a heightened mimetic ability. Unable to pull away from reality, women were granted a privileged proximity to it. Moreover, in the course of the eighteenth century portraits came to be valued for their effectiveness in framing sitters in terms of individual and private virtues – a domain coded as feminine. It was along these lines that August von Kotzbue (1805) praised Angelica Kauffman:

The female artist entirely lacks the power for heroic subjects ... To the contrary, in portraiture she possesses her greatest strength; and perhaps females are, if they want to become painters, particularly suited to this branch of art, since truly they have received from nature a fine instinct to read physiognomy and to convey and to interpret the mobile gestural language of men. It is a gift which nature has preferred to grant them as a weapon of the weaker.<sup>7</sup>

In the eighteenth century, women wielded this weapon in increasing numbers.<sup>8</sup> The international success of portraitists like Rosalba Carriera (1675–1757) early in the century, and later Dorothea Therbusch (1721–1782), Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749–1803), Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755–1842), Catherine Read (1723–1778) and Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807), flew in the face of the moralists' objections to a woman 'staring in men's faces'. Eight years after Johnson asserted the impropriety of the female portraitist to Boswell, he himself sat for his portrait (Figure 50) to Frances Reynolds (1729–1807), sister of Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), for 'perhaps the tenth time and I sat nearly three hours', as he wrote to Mrs Thrale.<sup>9</sup>

To grasp the socio-historical and cultural importance of the female portraitist in the eighteenth century it is necessary to address the apparent contradiction she embodies, between a domestic art of mimesis and a dangerous, indecorous visibility. A critical awareness of the historically specific formation of the gaze can help explain this paradox: why, in a society with a developed ideal of womanhood associated with the private sphere, did women emerge in public as portrait painters?

In suggesting a way to answer this question, the portrait, rather than being considered as an end-product, disconnected from its production, will be seen as a process. Rather than a *reproduction* of a pre-existing self, the portrait is seen as the *production* of sitter and artist, and of the relation between them determined by mobile factors such as class, race, age, and gender. Attention is shifted from the stasis of the supposedly finished work towards the intersubjective encounter from which it emerged, and via the gaze, specifically towards the gender positions embedded in the image and its reception. The portrait painter's studio is understood, moreover, as a cultural space for the discursive formation of sexual and social identities. Societal expectations regarding gender and vision problematise this space and the heterosexual portrait event. But it was, oddly, precisely this problematic construction that enabled female portrait painters to produce in their studios particular social encounters, and in their art a new means of representing a virtuous masculinity.

This essay first considers the psychosexual discourses concerning the exchange of gazes in the portrait studio in comparison to the life-class. I shall then set William Hazlitt's perception of the encounter between the male portraitist and his female sitter in his essay, 'On sitting for one's picture', beside Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's record of the reverse gender role positioning – the two studio situations highlighting differing tensions.

The next part of the essay moves away from the discourse on the intersubjective studio-encounter towards the reception of a portrait. An extract from a text on the Salon of 1767 by the French art critic Denis Diderot, in which he discusses a portrait of himself by the German artist Anna Dorothea Therbusch, reveals how the female portraitist's sex might determine the reception of her work.

The final part of the essay concerns itself with a single portrait event: the painted document of the intersubjective exchange between Angelica Kauffman and the actor David Garrick. I argue that this painting bears traces of the culturally coded tensions generated by an encounter between a female portraitist and her male sitter.



50 Frances Reynolds (attributed), *Portrait of Dr Samuel Johnson*, c. 1783. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm.



51 Johann Zoffany, *The Assembly of the Academicians of the Royal Academy*, 1771. Oil on canvas, 100.7 x 147.3 cm.

For our understanding of the portrait event it is particularly relevant to compare the gaze-control and the gendered power structures of the portrait studio to the life-class. Both the academic life-class and the portrait situation demanded the direct encounter of the painter and his/her model and thus entailed the latter's awareness of being object to the gaze of the former. Yet there is a considerable difference. For in the academic life-class the model's dependence upon the artist is hierarchically and economically pre-structured. Representational, and therefore ocular, power is possessed by the painter who pays his model to serve as the object of investigation. Tamar Garb has argued for the nineteenth century that 'the primary reasons for excluding women from the life-classes was in fact for the protection and preservation of masculinity'.<sup>19</sup>

Johann Zoffany's painting of *The Assembly of the Academicians of the Royal Academy* (1771, Figure 51) is not only an icon of exclusion – of Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser, the two female founding members relegated to portraits in the background – but the painting can also be read as bearing signs of an unconscious anxiety about female transgression. I am referring to the triumphant and provocative placement of the stick of Richard Cosway, the gentleman in the right-hand corner. Falling square on the belly – or womb – of the fragmented, naked female sculpture, the stick cannot be dismissed as incidental. Rather, the violence of the gesture against female form can be read on a psychic level as a sign of male anxiety, and particularly anxiety concerning woman's mastering and desiring gaze.

In contrast to the life-class, where the control of the gaze and the power over the definition of gendered positions were so rigorously seen as pertaining to the male artist, the portrait studio was a cultural space where such power was, to a greater degree, subject to negotiation. Economic power shifts toward the represented, with

concomitant effects upon the social, psychical and visual economies of the studio. The portrait was not a result of the ideally autonomous academic eye, but a product of the exchange between two subjects: the artist and the sitter.<sup>11</sup>

Of the known eighteenth and early nineteenth-century texts, commentaries and satires dealing with the psychological situation of the portrait painter's studio and its suggestions of licentiousness and vanity, William Hazlitt's 'On sitting for one's picture' is of particular relevance in this context.<sup>12</sup> Hazlitt recognises that the portrait event was in effect a reciprocal process, in that both painter and sitter were responsible for the success or failure of the work. He characterised the ideal interaction as possessing a 'mild sense and tone of equality'.<sup>13</sup>

This balance is disturbed, however, by a woman. Hazlitt writes:

The relationship between the portrait-painter and his amiable sitters is one of established custom; but it is also one of metaphysical nicety, and is a running double entendre. The fixing an inquisitive gaze on beauty, the heightening a momentary grace, the dwelling on the heaven of an eye, the losing one's-self in the dimple of a chin, is a dangerous employment. The painter may change to slide into the lover – the lover can hardly turn painter.<sup>14</sup>

As opposed to the sociability of the exchange between men, the (male) portrait painter runs a risk before a female sitter. This sensual experience of portrayal is, significantly, reserved for the male viewer-artist. It is he who, in beholding the charms of his implicitly female sitter, transforms her into his object of desire. Portrayal of a woman is not merely the taking of an impression of the sitter, nor only the construction of her identity, but is also, as Peter de Bolla has formulated, a 'construction of his [the artist's] own selfhood through the resistance to and articulation of his desires'.<sup>15</sup> In order to proceed as a painter, he must control such desires and resist temptation. This self-control can, however, be achieved through his art. By transferring his sexual impulses directly onto the canvas, the painter creates an image upon which he can now project his desires and wishes.

In a Pygmalionesque vein, Hazlitt writes:

The health and spirit that but now breathed from a speaking face, the next moment breathe with almost equal effect from a dull piece of canvas, and thus distract attention: the eye sparkles, the lips are moist there too; and if we can fancy the picture alive, the face in its turn fades into a picture, a mere object of sight. We take rapturous possession with one sense, the eye ...<sup>16</sup>

Displaced, the erotic prerogative of the male artistic gaze is endorsed through aesthetics. Moreover, Hazlitt's discourse on the studio prohibits any response to his desiring gaze from the supposed female sitter. Her gaze was not directed at him but turned upon herself: 'the finest lady in the land is as fond of sitting to a favourite artist as of seating herself before a looking-glass'.<sup>17</sup> Although directed away from the male artist, her gaze can also be one of pleasure, albeit a narcissistic one. Hazlitt concludes that this pleasure can be more fully satisfied by a portrait painting than an actual mirror: 'as the glass in this case [referring now to the artist] is sensible of her charms, and does all it can to fix or heighten them'.<sup>18</sup>

The construction of a narcissistic female sitter, caught in self-love, equips the artist with a reflective armament – a highly polished discursive shield – with which to deflect the potentially disturbing female gaze, and permits him immediate and voyeuristic access to his object of depiction and desire.

Reversing the gender roles of artist and sitter, this reflective shield becomes,

however, transparent. The *male* sitter cannot wish away the female artist's probing eye. As with Johnson, the reversal of these assumed heterosexual gender roles and gazes in the portrait studio disturbs Hazlitt: 'the sitting to a lady for one's picture is a still more trying situation, and amounts (almost of itself) to a declaration of love'.<sup>19</sup>

Sigmund Freud and Sandor Ferenczi, in essays concerning the 'Medusa's Head', address the issue of the threat posed by female visuality directly in psychoanalytic terms, drawing a connection between the gaze and sexual potency. For Freud and Ferenczi it is not the gaze of the woman as such, but rather the man's awareness of his being the object of a lustful and judgemental female eye, that presents a threat of loss. In Freud's terms this threat of loss means castration anxiety, against which the man can only protect himself by reconfirming his masculinity. Medusa is thus a symbol of castration anxiety. With her petrifying looks and phallic snakes, she disempowers her male subject.<sup>20</sup>

In the writings of the eighteenth-century French portraitist Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun we can discern traces of such a powerful and threatening female vision not to be found in Hazlitt's text. In 1833 Vigée-Lebrun, reflecting upon her long and successful career, began to write her autobiographical *Souvenirs*, her textual self-portrait. In this text she recorded, or rather (re)constructed, the studio dynamic between herself and her male sitters, describing the ocular exchange from the other side of the conceptual shield. She relates how the portrayal of a man ('especially if young') requires viewing him, standing upright, for a few moments 'before one begins to capture the general characteristics and outer appearance'.<sup>21</sup> This preliminary objectification of the male sitter served to redress the cultural norms of gaze polity, positing the male as bearer, and woman as object of the gaze.

In order to reduce the psychic tension brought about by this reversal of social conventions, the male sitter in Vigée-Lebrun's portrait studio might thus have felt compelled to re-establish his masculinity by reclaiming ocular power. And indeed Vigée-Lebrun relates that while she painted them 'several admirers of my face threw amorous glances at me'.<sup>22</sup> Confirming her ability to attract the erotic attention of her male sitters – the essence of womanhood as defined in positive terms by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Emile* – interfered with Vigée-Lebrun's control of the gaze polity in the studio.

This slippage of power over the gaze away from the female artist is commented upon by Thomas Rowlandson in a satirical drawing entitled *The Mutual Attempt to Catch a Likeness* (Figure 52).<sup>23</sup> In the drawing a female artist portrays a male sitter – the phrase of catching a 'likeness' refers to the practice of portrait painting. She is deeply absorbed in her activity, turning her 'Medusan' gaze away from her living model towards the stone of an antique bust above her sitter's head. Taking advantage of her averted glance, the unattractive and significantly older, corpulent lawyer takes pleasure in the artist's charms, her revealed breasts receiving the erotic attention of his gaze.<sup>24</sup> Like Hazlitt's ideal sitter, and Vigée-Lebrun's flirtatious sitters, Rowlandson's lawyer – possibly a 'judge' of female beauty – cannot but view the situation as sexual. Denied power over the gaze, men reassert their ocular control, and therefore their masculinity, as lovers. This, in turn, denies the female artist power over the gaze: her attempt to catch a likeness is impaired.

The reclamation of ocular control for the female portrait painter – such as Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Angelica Kauffman, and others – required of her a definitive riposte. In order to do this, she had to bring her gaze into harmony with contemporary ideals concerning the language proper to the female gaze. Both

conduct literature and popular novels (through the paradigmatic etiquette of their heroines) addressed the ideal gaze-response of women.<sup>25</sup>

*The Whole Duty of Women*, a popular comportment primer, warns its female readership that 'the Language of the Eyes [is] the most significant and the most observed';<sup>26</sup> Women, therefore, should have a 'perpetual Watch upon their Eyes', and 'remember that one careless Glance gives more Advantage than a hundred Words not enough considered'. Moreover, proper moral behaviour ('modesty') is defined as prohibiting a woman responding to a male gaze in like terms: 'The Female Sex ought to maintain a Behaviour towards Men, which may be secure to themselves without offending them ... Looks that forbid without Rudeness, and oblige without Invention.'<sup>27</sup>

Vigée-Lebrun's text is informed by such recommendations. She writes:

You can easily imagine that many admirers of my appearance had me paint theirs in the hope of gaining favour with me; but I was so absorbed in my art that nothing could distract me. Moreover, the moral and religious principles my mother had taught me shielded me well from the seductions with which I was surrounded.<sup>28</sup>



52 Thomas Rowlandson, *The Mutual Attempt to Catch a Likeness*, c. 1790. Brown ink and watercolour on paper, 23.8 x 23 cm.

Lebrun, in order to forestall any further reversal of control, bleaches her own gaze, sanitising it morally. But before returning in her text to the studio situation, she seizes moral high-ground and amasses proactive vindications of her own practice. In this excursus, she explains that she never read anything but the school books of her brother and prayer books. Poignantly, she records that the first novel she read was Richardson's *Clarissa*, but by then, she explains, she was already married.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, she makes it clear that the space in which she worked was always sanctioned by maternal presence. Having cleansed her gaze of all sexual impropriety, the artist then mentions a strategy she employed to maintain her control over the ocular exchange:

With regard to the gentlemen, as soon as I realised they wished to make eyes at me, I painted them with gaze averted: which prevents the sitter from looking at the painter. At the least movement of their pupils in my direction, I would say: 'I'm doing the eyes.' That would annoy them a little, as you can imagine; my mother, who was always with me and whom I told about this, laughed secretly.<sup>30</sup>

While Hazlitt's implied male artist, displacing his own desires onto the canvas, armed himself with a conceptual mirror against the female gaze, the female artist, in contrast, protected herself against the visual advances of her male sitters, effacing her Medusan gaze through moral self-fashioning, and finally subterfuge.

Vigée-Lebrun's claim that she painted her forward male sitters with 'gaze averted' does not suggest that her goal was to gain voyeuristic access to the male sitter and thus reverse the configuration in Rowlandson's studio scene. Rather, in deflecting male eyes, the artist blunted their passion, and then registered this deflection in the portrait.

By controlling and displacing the visual advances of her male sitters, Vigée-Lebrun creates an image of manhood which conforms to her desires and wishes – or at least to those which were expected from a woman who had internalised the rules of popular opinion as registered in the conduct literature: that is, a man whose erotic passions are defused.

The effectiveness of such an image should be clear. The intersubjective exchange produced the image of an individual male sitter as 'civilised' regardless of whether he had incorporated these ideals and virtues himself. Thus, a pictorial representation of internalised virtue existed before these qualities were actually internalised by men in society, the portrait painting allowing the depicted man to recreate himself according to these ideals. The constructed civility of the female portraitist's studio which rendered such civilising images was, however, only seemingly stable: the annoyance of the male sitter and the secret laughter of the conspiring women in Vigée-Lebrun's studio speak of continuing tension. The psychic anxieties of the ocular reversal were not dispelled. Vigée-Lebrun, moreover, seems to have been aware of the fact that her visual power was not without a darker, uncivil aspect: she writes in her *Souvenirs*:

One day somebody said to me, 'when I look at you and think of your fame, I seem to see your head encircled by radiating beams of light'. 'Ah', I added, sighing, 'there are however little snakes among the beams'.'

Both the civilising and disorienting aspects of the studio are present in Denis Diderot's discussion of his sitting for his portrait to Anna Dorothea Therbusch in Paris.<sup>32</sup> Writing of the Salon of 1767, the 57-year-old Diderot felt it necessary to

comment upon Therbusch's portrait of himself. Diderot is only briefly concerned with the completed painting which shows him 'naked to the belt'.<sup>33</sup> Rather, owing to his nudity, he is at considerable pains to explain the circumstances and intersubjectivity of the portrait sitting itself, and thus to promote an 'appropriate' reception of the image. Indeed, his text is an elaborate justification of his actions and moral position in relation to the painting and its development. Such a textual vindication was necessary. Diderot himself writes of how the 'poor philosopher [Diderot], whose lively interest was interpreted against him ... was denounced and regarded as a man who had slept with a not exactly pretty woman [Therbusch]'.<sup>34</sup> The 'poor philosopher's' defence turns upon two factors: the immanent quality of the artist's work and his version of the intersubjective exchange in the studio.

Thus, we learn from Diderot's discussion of Therbusch's genre painting, *A Man with a Glass in His Hand*, that the technique of the artist is bold and manly and that she is 'courageous to appeal to nature and study her'.<sup>35</sup>

Analogously, it is her scientific interest which leads her to study anatomy, for (Diderot is careful to record) 'she was not of the opinion, that vice alone should have the right to undress a man'.<sup>36</sup> Thus couched in comfortably masculine and rational language, Therbusch's painterly style could stand as proof of the propriety of her practice. Immediately afterwards, Diderot reveals what one did not find in Therbusch's studio; she did not correspond to his ideal of 'beauty' and she did not attempt to attract the senses through 'coquettish behaviour'.<sup>37</sup> Diderot also tries to exclude the possibility of an erotic reception by explaining that he, regardless of her behaviour, had already overcome his drives during the portrait event, upon which he comments at length. He (re)wrote, thus:

When the head was done, the neck was of concern, which was hidden by the collar of my suit – this disturbed the artist a little. In order to undo this irritation, I went behind a curtain and undressed myself and appeared before her as an academy model. 'I did not dare to propose it to you', she said to me, 'but you have done well, and I thank you'. I was naked, entirely naked. She painted me and we chatted with a freedom and innocence worthy of the first centuries. Since the sin of Adam, we cannot command all our bodily parts like our arms: there are some which are willing when the son of Adam is not, and those that are unwilling when the son of Adam is willing indeed. I would have – if this incident had occurred – recollected the words which Diogenes spoke to the young fighter: 'My son, do not be afraid, I am not as wicked as him there!'

Diderot takes care to note that it was not the request of the artist that resulted in his disrobing, but rather his own charitable volition. He was not placed under academic scrutiny, but placed himself before the artist's eye. His ensuing commentary upon his corporeal control is offered as proof of his mental and moral strength. In sitting, naked, to Therbusch for his portrait, Diderot would have it that he put himself to the test. The image, revealing Diderot only 'naked to the belt', does not show him 'entirely naked', as his comments suggest. The absence in the painting resulted in an ambiguity no doubt uncomfortable to Diderot. In overcoming his drives, and controlling the uncontrollable, he could characterise himself as a philosopher, albeit one to be pitied, and insert himself into the history of those thinkers who also set their minds against and over matter. But in so doing, he contradicted his explicit denial of eroticism in the encounter, which he framed as an academic exercise.

In 1764, three years before Diderot sat for Therbusch, the famous English actor David Garrick (Figure 53) while travelling in Italy was portrayed by the Swiss-

born artist Angelica Kauffman at Naples.<sup>39</sup> The painting, which is now at Burghley House, has been treated in two different ways. First, as an important historical document: exhibited at the Free Society in 1765, it heralded Kauffman's arrival in London in 1766 where she remained for the next fifteen years. In the second place, the work has been subject to iconographic analysis. Desmond Shawe-Taylor has drawn attention to the Dutch roots – specifically in the work of Frans Hals (Figure 54) – of Garrick's pose: regarding the viewer over the back of his chair.<sup>40</sup>

Here the painting shall be examined not as an idiosyncratic marker of personal contact, but as the result of an intersubjective exchange, and as a fixing of cultural and psychic tensions. As beholders and interpreters, the position of the female artist constructing the exchange is offered to us as a privileged site for reception. This is not to argue that the viewer's position is absolutely predetermined by the image. Receptions can be plotted on many possible axes, including



156 53 Angelica Kauffman, *David Garrick*, 1764. Oil on canvas, 83.8 x 69.2 cm.

sexual preference, age, class, and race. I am, in this instance, concerned with the 'being' of the female viewer in the painting.<sup>41</sup>

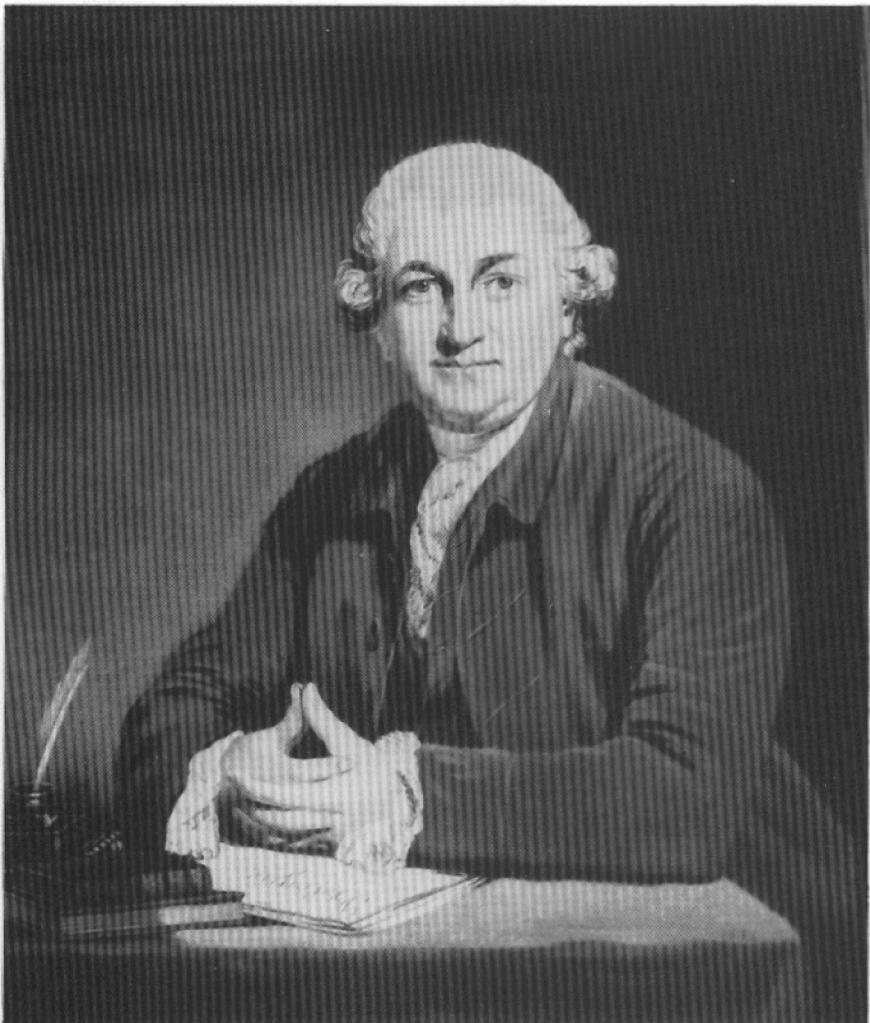
At first sight, the painting appears to deny the possibility of such an interpretation. Apparently devoid of narrative cues and structure (despite a certain iconographic heritage), the image seems to lack the social texture upon which interpretation can take purchase. These absences can, however, become legible if read against those references that are normative to portraiture.

By casting Garrick in a dramatic role and portraying Garrick as 'Kiteley', Joshua Reynolds chose an obvious solution to the problem of portraying the renowned actor.<sup>42</sup> In this painting, the character approaches the beholder as the jealous husband from Ben Jonson's play, *Every Man in His Humour*.<sup>43</sup> The sitter is thereby characterised by his profession. Garrick acts for the viewer, who is asked to imagine herself as witnessing a performance.<sup>44</sup>



54 Frans Hals, *Seated Man with a Tilted Hat*, c. 1660–5. Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 66.5 cm.

The contrast to Kauffman's portrait is telling. In her painting, no hints of Garrick's profession are to be detected. Furthermore, Kauffman did not choose to depict Garrick in a 'particular and special function in his life', as Reynolds does in another portrait of Garrick, this time not as an actor but as a writer of prologues (Figure 55). In this calm portrait – here shown in a mezzotint by Thomas Watson after the painting – Reynolds depicted the actor seated in front of a desk with sheet of paper upon which the word 'Prologue' is discernible, a glass of ink, a quill and two books.<sup>45</sup> But it is not the lack of a particular theatrical role or reference to Garrick's profession that makes Kauffman's portrait exceptional. Thomas Gainsborough, in a portrait in the National Portrait Gallery in London (Figure 56), also liberates the actor from any particular professional or avocational role. But the image does anchor Garrick socially in a manner not seen in the Kauffman. As Edgar Wind pointed out, Gainsborough manages to represent Garrick in a public role, in 'his position



55 Thomas Watson, after Joshua Reynolds, *David Garrick as a Prologue Writer*, published 1779. Mezzotint.

as a man of society'.<sup>46</sup> Gainsborough's 'Garrick', elegantly dressed and wearing a grey, powdered wig, bends slightly forward over a ledge, addressing us – the viewers – with a friendly smile. The thumb of his left hand rests between the pages of the small book, which, it seems, he has just closed in order to initiate a conversation. Closing the book, he opens himself to the viewer. His raised right eyebrow and the light smile playing upon his lips suggest a readiness to converse, perhaps about the lines he had just read. Garrick's ready smile and suggested openness help characterise him as a true Shaftesburian gentleman, capable of 'polite conversation' and willing to conduct well-mannered interchange with his social peers.<sup>47</sup>

It was for this reason, and not only to effect a certain physical mimetic success, that Gainsborough explained in a letter that the portrait was conceived, and was to be seen, at eye-level.<sup>48</sup> It is the striking immediacy of the image that draws spectators, men and women alike, into a polite, civil society.



56 Thomas Gainsborough, *David Garrick*, exhibited 1770. Oil on canvas, 75.6 x 63.2 cm.

Kauffman also represents Garrick in striking immediacy, but she removes him from this 'civil' field of reference. Her painting can rather be seen as a deconstructive process, in which societal conventions and expectations are reversed so as to reveal their artificiality or superficiality. Kauffman strips Garrick of societal conventions and presents an apparent lack. It is precisely this 'voidedness' that aims at registering the presence of a supposedly more authentic self, a man existentially and naturally present. Needless to say, this nature is hardly natural, and is itself artificially wrought.<sup>49</sup>

The room, which would allow us to fix and define Garrick in the fictive world of the image, is swallowed up in the atmospheric gloom. Only the back of the chair serves to register a break between the viewer's space and the depicted space, anchoring Garrick in the latter. Nonetheless, the back of the chair is pulled so close to the picture plane that Garrick's arm, resting over its back, creates the illusion that he emerges from the canvas and into our space. As mentioned above, Shawe-Taylor has drawn attention to the Dutch, and especially Halsian roots of the motif of a sitter confronting us, arm slung over the back of a chair.<sup>50</sup> But in which way does Kauffman's image differ from this proposed prototype? Frans Hals's *Seated Man with a Tilted Hat* (Figure 54) now in Kassel can be taken as representative of the genre. In this image the male sitter is cast as an amicable companion, while casting his glance out at the viewer. The stability of the chair upon which the man rests his arm is not certain. It perhaps tilts, playing off the flamboyantly cocked hat that dominates the top third of the picture plane. The play of angles and the shimmering paintwork combine to supplement the acknowledged immediacy of the relationship between sitter and beholder. Not only immediate, the exchange is also momentary – caught in the redundancy of eternal ephemerality and orality.

Kauffman construed a visual dialogue with her sitter which, though intimate and immediate, can be characterised as conforming neither to the polite society of Gainsborough, nor to the banter of Hals. The dialogue crafted by Kauffman is of another order. In her portrait, the face of Garrick, though illuminated clearly, is modelled in mild gradations. The tilt of his head does not, as in the Hals image, add to the instability of the represented body; rather, Garrick's head balances the turn of his torso: his pose is static. The dialogue into which the viewer is drawn is hardly a conversation except in the most metaphorical sense. Garrick's penetrating gaze fixes his opposite in an ocular and emotive exchange.

The composed and steady visage of the actor is at odds with what we hear of the man from other sources. Fanny Burney recorded a conversation with Samuel Johnson, in which the latter described Garrick's face as 'never at rest; when he speaks one minute, he has quite a different countenance to what he assumes the next; I don't believe he ever kept the same look for half an hour together in the whole course of his life'.<sup>51</sup>

Kauffman, unlike Reynolds and Gainsborough, has gone out of her way to eliminate the lively mutability of her sitter. Timeless, motionless and contemplative, Kauffman's 'Garrick' does not seem to play a role. Rather, 'he' appears to be just sitting for his portrait. This is itself, however, very much a form of acting. Here the sitter is, as Hazlitt points out, 'as anxious to make good a certain idea' he has of himself, as if he was 'playing a part on the stage'.<sup>52</sup> Goldsmith complicates the issue in respect to Garrick when he writes in his *Retaliation*: 'On the stage he was natural, simple, affecting; 'Twas only that when he was off, he was acting'.<sup>53</sup>

role of a man sitting for his portrait to a female artist, and it is as such that Kauffman portrayed him.

As an actor, Garrick was accustomed to being object of the audience's attention. But while performing a role on stage Garrick was controlling the gazes of his public. Shielded in the anonymity of vicarious enactment, such gazing that touched his own subjectivity was unthreatening. In the studio, under the light of professional scrutiny by a female artist, the gaze he had to bear was pure, immediate and direct. Although Garrick is depicted as gazing straight out at the beholder, and thus as an active participant in the imagined visual exchange, the consciousness of his objectification by the female artist appears to be a formative and constitutive part of the image.

That this particular drama was not without tension ought to be clear from the discussion of Johnson, Hazlitt, Vigée-Lebrun, Diderot and Therbusch. But in Kauffman's rendition of the drama one can read beneath the serene surface, a troubling and inexorable psychic undertow.

What is then troubling? At least one contemporary, writing in the *Public Advertiser* of 15 May 1765, thought the likeness disabled through the very size of the sitter as represented: 'This gentleman is Mr. Garrick of whom the portrait would be a very good likeness if it was not larger than life.'<sup>54</sup> The painted figure, however, is not especially large, but rather life-size. There is no pressing problem of size, but perhaps of scale. Kauffman appears to have suppressed the diminishing effects of distance.

Troubling, then, is the spatial proximity fostered between Garrick and the viewer. Moreover, precisely at that boundary between the personal spaces of the participants in the dialogue, Kauffman's portrait registers a tension. Compared to the relaxed, careless hand of the sitter in Hals's portrait (Figure 54), Garrick's hands are remarkable for their taught expressiveness. They do not communicate in rhetorical gestures, but cluster about the chair-back. Belying his calm countenance, his hands are more garrulous. Reaching over the wooden barrier, his left arm in the image clamps, not tightly, but decisively, upon the chair. His hands grip the wood, his left reinforcing the horizontal element, and his right buttressing the vertical. It is not a casual pose. Given what has been said about the potential disempowerment of the male sitter before a female portraitist, the fence-like chair-back seems comforting to Garrick. With his hands he steadies the material barrier, his shield. It is, however, a permeable defence. Sandwiched between the plane defined by the chair and the wooden stretcher of the canvas itself, Garrick is pictured in an uncomfortable virtual squeeze.

Penetrating the chair-back is a small piece of Garrick's blue waistcoat, pushing out beyond the wooden frame, teasing us with the possibility that his left leg actually passes through the chair-back. Seen not simply as a formal pictorial element, the vertical frame with which Garrick struggles, and the knob which he grasps tightly with his right hand and thumb, is not without phallic overtones (as such it is analogous to the expressly phallic scroll held by the lawyer in Rowlandson's drawing [Figure 52] discussed above). Garrick's subjecthood, as represented, is constructed on the psychic scaffolding of the chair.

The spatial compression implied by the chair is accompanied by analogous psychic dynamics. On the one hand, the depicted Garrick is brought into that dangerous intimacy feared by Johnson, Hazlitt and others, while on the other, he is contained and, like Diderot, armed against his own erotic response. Lacking a narrative – 'detextualized' – the image constructs a visual dialogue, founded almost

exclusively upon ocular exchange. If the portrait is constructing the subjectivity of the sitter, it is here built upon the relationship to the person beyond the frame, in this instance a viewing position modelled by the female artist. This lack or hollowness can, in Freudian terms, be designated as a fear of castration, and is determined in this case by the lack of control felt by a male sitter before the scrutiny of a female artist.

Fortunately we have another document concerning the studio situation. Extant is a stanza composed by Garrick and dated 1764. The verse was published in the English press in 1767. The lines address Kauffman, and were, presumably, sent to her in reference to 'their' portrait. The poem furnishes us with a record – a textual image – of the other voice in the studio dialogue:

While thus you paint with ease and grace,  
And spirit all your own,  
Take, if you please, my mind and face,  
*But let my heart alone.*<sup>55</sup>

Recalling Hazlitt's claim that sitting for a woman was almost an open declaration of love, Garrick's response to sitting for Kauffman refashions the artist as the active partner, seeking Garrick's heart. In so doing, the retextualisation of the image redresses, for Garrick, a vestigial imbalance, and thus restores equilibrium to the system.

The immediacy of the intersubjective studio event is caught in the syntactical meeting between the first-person, direct speech of the narrator/Garrick and the female artist addressed. 'Take, if you please, my mind and face'. Deprive me of these, Garrick writes, but not of my 'heart'. Garrick's self-fashioning, as the victim of the female eye, which robs him of mind (rationality) and face (identity), and threatens to deprive him of something he calls heart, obscures the production of the self effected by the painting. Hazlitt, too, thought the act of portrayal to include a certain disempowerment, a loss of subjectivity:

the second time a person sits, and the view of the features is determined, the head seems fastened in an imaginary vice, and he can hardly tell what to make of the situation. He is ... tied down to certain lines and limits chalked out upon the canvas.<sup>56</sup>

Sitting for a female portraitist, Garrick is specific in telling what is, for him, under threat: not his already commercialised face, nor really his rational mind, rather it is his heart. In textualising this potential loss of control over his emotions, Garrick refigures the studio situation as one steeped in traditional amorous tropes. In doing so, Garrick reframes his disempowerment in a familiar topos, unthreatening to his sexual identity. Diderot, facing a similar problem, sought first to defend the scientific, academic gaze of Therbusch, and thus nip all improper rumour in the bud, and then to bind himself to a philosophical mast and thus protect himself from the inevitable ocular challenge of the sirenic female portraitist. Garrick, in composing the poem, followed Diderot's second response.

Sitting for a female portraitist, the male sitter ran a risk. The studio situation was defined as sexually wrought, and the female artist as potentially dangerous. But why, then, was the danger worth enduring?

The studio meeting between a female portraitist and a male sitter was not only 'trying' (as Hazlitt described it), it also provided the potential for the type of intersubjective exchange seen in the eighteenth century as formative of the

civilised man: a man not defined by exterior attributes, but through internal qualities, moulded by a new form of 'feminine' heterosexual desire. Kauffman's portrayal of Garrick, I argue, bears formal traces of this civilising struggle.

In confronting the medusan danger of the female portraitist, male sitters could be seen both as vulnerable, and yet able to withstand the potential danger of the situation. Portrayal by a female portrait painter objectified this intersubjectivity, and represented men as freed from their erotic 'nature'.

## Notes

This paper has profited from the comments of Andreas Haus, Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, Alexander Perrig, Joanna Woodall, John Brewer and especially Adrian Randolph. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

- 1 J. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill, 2nd edn, 6 vols (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1934–64), II, p. 362.
- 2 On eighteenth-century studio practices see D. Mannings, 'At the portrait painter's. How the painters of the eighteenth century conducted their studios and sittings', *History Today*, 27 (1977), pp. 279–87; M. Pointon, 'Portrait-painting as a business enterprise in London in the 1780s', *Art History*, 7 (1984), pp. 186–205; and M. Pointon, *Hanging the Head. Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 36–52.
- 3 Among other texts see K. Hausen, 'Die Polarisierung der "Geschlechtscharaktere" – Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerb- und Familienleben', in W. Conze (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas, Neue Forschungen* (Stuttgart, 1976), pp. 363–93; B. Duden, 'Das schöne Eigentum – Zur Herausbildung des bürgerlichen Frauenbildes an der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert', *Kursbuch*, 47 (March 1977), pp. 125–40; N. Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1987); U. Prokop, 'Die Konstruktion der idealen Frau', *Feministische Studien*, 1 (1989), pp. 86–96; and V. Jones (ed.), *Women in the Eighteenth Century. Constructions of Femininity* (London and New York, Routledge, 1990).
- 4 See, for example, T. Kleinspehn, *Der Flüchtige Blick. Sehen und Identität in der Kultur der Neuzeit* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1991), pp. 160–84.
- 5 Other positionalities are discussed in my book *Angelika Kauffmann: Bildnismalerei im 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, Reimer Verlag, 1996).
- 6 J. Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986), ch. 12, esp. pp. 66–8.
- 7 *Erinnerungen von einer Reise aus Liefland nach Rom und Neapel*, 3 vols (Berlin, H. Fröhlich, 1805), II, pp. 401–2.
- 8 Statistical examinations have shown that the number of female portrait painters increased in the eighteenth century. Anne Sutherland Harris pointed out that most of the women who achieved fame and public recognition were born into or had early contact with artistic circles. See A. Sutherland Harris and L. Nochlin (eds), *Women Artists: 1550–1950*, exhibition catalogue (New York, 1977), p. 20 n. 38, and p. 41. See also V. Schmidt-Linsenhoff, 'Gleichheit für Künstlerinnen?', *Sklavin oder Bürgerin. Französische Revolution und neue Weiblichkeit, 1760–1830*, ed. V. Schmidt-Linsenhoff, exhibition catalogue (Frankfurt a. M., 1989).
- 9 Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, IV, p. 229 n. 4. Boswell also wrote in his journal: 'JOHNSON. Miss Reynolds ought not to paint. Publick practice of staring in men's faces inconsistent with delicacy', (*Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle in the Collection of Lt.-Colonel R. H. Isham*, ed. G. Scott and F. A. Pottle, 18 vols [Mount Vernon, NY, W. E. Rudge, priv. print, 1928–34, VI, p. 41]). Yet Johnson was of the opinion that Frances Reynolds's mind was 'very near to purity itself' (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, II, p. 362).
- 10 T. Garb, 'The forbidden gaze', *Art in America*, 79 (1991), p. 148.