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Shroud of Turin, alleged <true> image of Christ, Royal Chapel, Turin Cathedral

«The face, the outermost border of the human body, has to be understood departing from the body. Both have in common that all their movements are gestures,» and: «We can detect among the world of things certain entities called faces. Yet they do not share the existence of things.» Both statements are from a compilation of Jean Paul Sartre's earlier essays known as *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Sartre, perhaps even involuntarily, pinpoints the double-faced nature of the face as a phenomenon that is virtually ubiquitous but hard to grasp. «The face» can be interpreted as a mere surface, an apparition in constant flux, but it is also intrinsically linked to the human body: Its core and substructure is the head, the skull, for which it serves as both a receptacle of impressions and a stage of expression. Yet the face appears to be neither a *thing*, nor an *object*, nor an *organ*. And although it is not an organ, the face can be (and has been) transplanted. It is exactly this initial set of complex ambivalences and a certain vagueness, which make the face such an intriguing study object.

This thematic issue of *kritische berichte* gathers analytical approaches to the «phenomenon face» from different disciplines: neurophysiology, philosophy of the body, cultural history, medicine, medieval history, and the history of art. In their contributions, the authors examine the face as medium and material, as *mise-en-scene* and matter, as mirror and membrane, producer and recipient – as a cultural construction and a human determinant. The essays are spurred by their authors' profound involvement in the question: WHAT IS A FACE? Along come other questions about what a face *meant* and *means*: culturally, socially, psychologically, physiologically, aesthetically, historically; what it might *look like* in the future; what we think it *represents*, but also what it means to lose one's face, have the wrong face, or live with someone else's face; and last but not least what the face tells about «us» – individually, culturally, and as a species.

The trick with faces is that they suggest connectivity. Faces look at us. They watch, smile and present themselves in private and public places – often enough for obvious seductive and commercial reasons. This makes sense because, physiologically speaking, the face possesses the most refined set of tools to structure and channel perception and transmit clues about the ways things are perceived and received.

Perception and imagination, the belief in images and image-making all overlap in the face. The face as a high-density system of physically operating sensory signals and their finely tuned choreography represents the person more than anything else. Often enough we think of a face *as* identity. And as such, faces occupy our minds.

The face is medial and representational, but it is also part of our material corporeality. It can be touched, kissed, colored, «made-up», altered and erased. It is considered a rather stable factor of identity yet it also changes: with age, bodyweight, emotional state, daytime, social context. Its ontological status as an image in motion in recent years has been promoted by a remarkable boom of facial surgery and body alterations. We either want our face to stay as it is when we feel at our most potent and radiating, or we aspire to make it look as if we were in such a state of lasting and intriguing beauty. The millions of patients undergoing aesthetic surgery knowingly *incorporate* the traditionally *excorporated*: one's ideal portrait and the controlled preservation of similitude.

This is different with medically indicated interventions. When in 2005, for the first time in the history of mankind, French facial surgeon Bernard Devauchelle, transplanted the lower parts of a donor-face to a woman who had suffered extreme facial damage, the outcome of this surgery was much discussed. The transplantation of a dead person's face to a living yet practically «faceless» person was understood both as groundbreaking pioneer work *and* a highly irritating act. It raised an array of ethical questions about the nature and condition of our face in relation to our «self» – of the important feedback between surface and depth in human appearances and the exact degree of identification between an individual and his or her face.

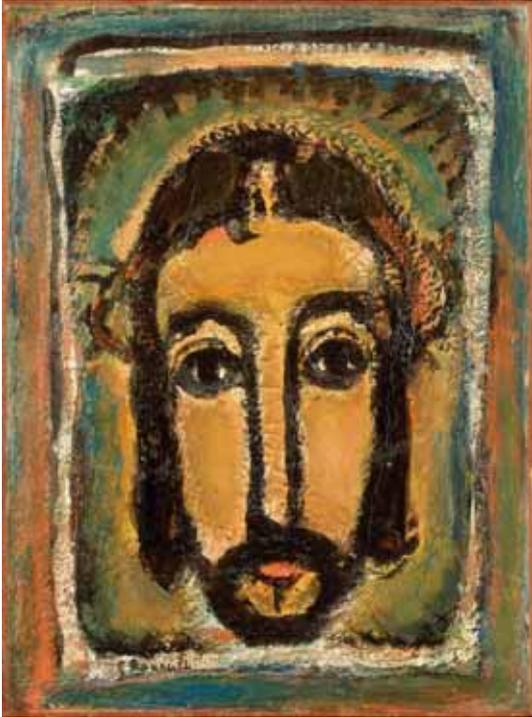
Somewhat surprisingly, the discourses within the humanities about questions of the body often times neglect the face as a subcategory of the body – perhaps a result of Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's milestone publication «A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia» (of 1980). Deleuze and Guattari define the face as primary childhood experience, a «strong organization» and a cultural code beyond organic factuality – a mixture of patterns of perception and psychological mechanisms of projection, and as a semiotic system of references. Interestingly, the human drive to «facialize» things that do not have a face in the strict sense is identified as a basically artistic operation, following the principles of figure-ground perception and the difference between line and picture plane. This approach has received much attention in media theory, for which it might have been intended in the first place. But it is of course an almost unduly reduction of complexities still worth pondering. What remains is the perhaps eternal question what a face actually is: an organ, a body part, a cultural construction, a media phenomenon, a highly codified (and perhaps over-interpreted) mechanism of signals – or merely the shop sign of our own identity-making?

If exhibition and publication titles are significant indicators, then the face seems to play a core role in recent approaches to art history and portraiture. In retrospect, research on portraiture in the 20th century is marked by the shift from an early interest in determining the sitter's identity towards questions of representation, social status and socio-political concepts of memory to their faces and bodies, their presence and agency as proxies and prompters of experience. Many exhibitions on portraiture of the past decade claim to be about «Faces.» Yet they are not about faces. They follow older and rather conventional ideas of portraiture and focus on faces – painted, drawn, sculpted, photographed, filmed – as manifestos of *concepts* of identity, gender and social status.

The booming *economy* of the face has not yet led to a comprehensive *history* of the face in western societies, let alone in a global perspective. It certainly requires more than a collection of essays to accomplish this herculean task, and the editors are well aware of it. One of the great challenges of writing a history of the face lies in its indisputable quest for transdisciplinarity (not to mention the breadth of historical knowledge it would take to write this book). It is exactly this challenge, or rather the *intellectual provocation* the face itself poses, that interests us the editors and authors in a profound sense.

Our small volume of *kritische berichte* is far from what it takes to write a history of the face. It does, however, embrace the necessity of integrating disciplines in the sciences *and* the humanities, while it is aware of the risk inherent to this challenge – the risk of incompleteness, of leaving more loose ends than we can tie up. That did not keep its contributors from believing that a start needs to be made and that its subject matter, the face, cannot be understood without thinking outside of the box and without gathering different viewpoints and stimulating intellectual exchange.

A face has many faces. Some of them are discussed here.



Georges Rouault, *Holy Face*, 1946

This collection of articles intends to reflect on the perception and construction of the face in an interdisciplinary perspective. Within this general framework, I would like to bring up and tentatively answer a set of questions from my own experience – with the intimate conviction that the general history of the face remains to be written, drawing on anthropology, the history of art, the history of physiognomy and yet other disciplines.

To think about the human face means to engage in an operation of reduction: reducing the body, or perhaps more appropriately, the person to one of its parts. This reduction is done through successive stages: From the body we distinguish the bust, from the bust we isolate the head, from the head the face, and from the face the look. It is a process of ‘zooming in’, which reveals a multitude of specific meanings and possibilities for new interpretations. One example: In their volume *Kopf/ Bild*, Jeanette Kohl and Rebecca Müller show interest in isolating and discussing the object *bust*: not only the head, but head *and* shoulders.² As is evident in some anthropomorphic bust reliquaries of saints or royal effigies of the Renaissance, together both head and shoulders convey meanings different from those of the whole body, the head only or any other body part, such as for example an arm in the case of arm reliquaries. The authors actually show that the inclusion of the bust, and not just the head, refers to the Platonic conception of the hierarchy of the cognitive functions within the body: If the skull is the seat of the intellect and the head more generally that of most of the senses, the inclusion of the shoulders and chest (while omitting the lower parts of the torso) so characteristic of the image concept of the bust reduces the represented individual to the seat of virtuous and re-enforcing desires. The authors also recall the etymology attributed by Isidore to the word *bustum*, which is most likely derived from *comburere*, to burn, and thus directly related to funerary urns. Hence, within the bust the tradition of the memory of the dead inscribes itself onto the representation of the individual.

For our purpose here, we will try to focus on just the face. The first question we need to ask is one of semantics and of lexical order. It leads to the observation that there is never just *one* single word for the face, and that each term presents different meanings, literally and *figuratively*. In German language, we encounter the words *Gesicht*, *Antlitz*, *Miene*. The first two refer to the look while the second term – with the ancient prefix *ant-*, whose modern equivalent is roughly *entgegen* – refers to the face as something that we see in front of us and that in turn looks back at us. The third word, *Miene*, which derives from the French *mine*, emphasizes the expressiveness of the face.

In French, we can distinguish the words *visage*, *face*, *figure*, *mine*, which are only partially interchangeable as each relates to its own specific semantic field:

visage is linked to the idea of seeing (*visum*), *face* to the idea of frontality, *figure* is derived from the verb *figere* (to shape, to feign, to represent, to produce a fiction), while *mine* refers to the expressiveness and communicative qualities of the face, for example in the phrase «*faire grise mine*» or «pulling a long face.» Each one of these words has not only its own proper meaning but a rich variety of figurative meanings (*sens figuré*) related to it: We find the word *figure* not only related to the face but also right in the heart of rhetorics, with expressions such as «figuratively» or «figure of speech.» *Visage* forms part of a wide range of metaphorical expressions, such as «*vis-à-vis*,» to characterize vicinity, «*a visage découvert*,» which implies openness, «*faire bon visage*,» to put on a good face, or «*changer de visage*,» which indicates blushing or going pale as a result of a sudden emotion. Similarly, for the word *face* there are variations within expressions like «*so voiler la face*» (to turn a blind eye, look the other way), which means refusing to look at reality, «*sauver la face*» or «*perdre la face*» (saving face or losing face), which are equivalent to maintaining or losing honor. The face, in these cases, is taken as a measure of a person's social value and behaviour. On the other hand, the derivative *faciès* (features) is often used in the expression «*délit de faciès*» meaning an appearance-based prejudice, the notion that facial appearances nourish a suspicion tinted with racism.

However different they may be, these words that are charged with a lot of semantic richness in modern languages, are also closely linked to one another: Starting from the face in the strict physical sense of the term they extend to a variety of social practices, representations and modes of perception. This was not much different in ancient languages, notably in Latin, from Antiquity throughout the Middle Ages. The works of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux on Greek and Florence Dupont on Roman theater, which are rooted in the anthropological tradition of Marcel Mauss and Ignace Meyerson, recall the importance of two partially equivalent words.³ In Greek, *prosopon*, denominates what is under our visual inspection, in front of ourselves, and it could mean both the face and the mask; this double meaning can be explained by the fact that the mask was not supposed to hide the actor's face; it rather assimilates it in order to reenact identity on the stage – the identity of the dead or of the Gods.

In classical Latin, the equivalent of *prosopon* is *persona*. This term signifies the theatrical mask, yet not the face, which is called *facies*. The lexical split refers to a different concept of dramatic action. In Rome, the *persona* or mask hides the actor's face, his voice resonates through it, which is the actual meaning of *per-sonare*. To further complicate things: Apart from *facies*, which refers to the identity of the «person,» Latin also has the term *vultus*, derived from the verb *volere*, to want. *Vultus* emphasizes the manifestation of man's will as expressed in his look. If in Rome the mask of theater by definition cannot have its own *facies* or face (since it is not a God or the dead appearing on stage, but the mask merely playing their roles), it has, on the other hand, a *vultus*, whose expressive power is staged and appreciated by the audience. Finally, *persona* is only connected with the mask of theater and not the funerary mask, which is usually called an *imago*. The *imagines maiorum*, ancestor masks and heads made of wax or terracotta, were displayed in the patricians' homes and venerated as objects of a domestic genealogical and funerary cult.

Beginning in the third and fourth centuries, Christianity and the Church gradually eliminated ancient theater in favor of the Christian liturgy. In ancient

pagan cult, ancestors fulfilled a function that was later substituted by the commemoration of saints. The entire vocabulary and the semantic field of the face and the mask experienced a profound reorganization. The term *facies* is largely adopted in the Vulgate's vocabulary, notably when the desire to see God face-to-face and the impossibility to sustain the godly shine of his look are addressed. Although rare, *vultus* is also present in the Bible. The word *persona* is now used exclusively to refer to the individual person. This vocabulary forms the basis of medieval Latin, with certain remarkable changes compared to antiquity. Thus, when the clerics denounced the antique calendrical masquerades, they did not use the term *persona* but *larva*, which originally referred to ghosts or phantoms and established a strong link with the world of the dead.

What made the term *persona* survive was its use and meaning within the Trinitarian theology. In order to translate the divine essence (*ousia*) and its three *hypostases* – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – the Latin authors chose the word *persona*, proof that its original link with the evil world of theater was no longer relevant. The advantage of this word was that it inherently expressed the ‘dual identity’ of the *persons* of the Trinity who, although they are three different ones are nonetheless each also *the one* God. Hence, the single and singular face (*vultus*) of the Son represented in his images his double nature, divine and human. Yet the word *persona* is also used in other contexts. Its strong presence in the narratives of medieval vision, including supernatural appearances, is particularly significant. Before being recognized as a saint or a deceased ancestor, the appearances are usually described as an anonymous *persona*, a kind of mask from the beyond.

Based on what we know about its complex semantical history and historical evolution, the face is simultaneously characterized as a support of identity, as a means and surface of expression and as an object of representation.

1. The face as a support of identity

The face is the entity by which we recognize a person most definitely, more than by his or her habits and manners and certainly more than by the voice. What matters most is the form of the face, male or female, the youth of traits or the marks of age, skin color, complexion, the look, shape and color of eyes, the hairstyle and color, pilosity: These and other features and characteristics taken together define an individual, render it unique and recognizable in the mass of all the others. At the same time, these characteristics invite us to compare faces – one on one as well as globally –, faces that resemble yet can not be confused with one another, faces that invoke family relationships («he has the eyes of his father,» and «she is all her mother»), and to explain these resemblances and its forms of manifestation, such as identical twins.

All of these observations need to be put into perspective, historically and culturally. In different times, cultures, and societies the notions of identity, of the face and its resemblance with other faces, necessarily differ and so do the concepts of what a person is, the values related to physical appearance and beauty, the sense of what is similar or different. We are still far from having valid answers to these questions in current anthropological and historical studies.

The history of physiognomy is one way of studying some of the changes related to our view and perception of faces over a long period of time: from ancient medical scriptures (Pseudo-Aristotle, Polemon Laodicea, Adamantios), their re-

ception by Arabic scholars (Hunayn ibn Ishaq, or *Kitab al-Mansoori* of al-Razi, or the *Secretum Secretorum*), the influence of the latter in the West since the thirteenth century (with Roger Bacon, Michael Scot, Pietro d'Abano) to the actual boom of physiognomy in the sixteenth century (with Della Porta's *De humana physiognomonia* of 1586) and its development in the seventeenth (under Charles Le Brun and Descartes) and eighteenth centuries (Johann Kaspar Lavater in his *Physiognomik* of 1775–1778).⁴ At the end of the Middle Ages, *Le Grant Calendrier et compost des Bergiers avecq leur Astrologie* concisely sums up the reception of this long tradition. In enumerating the «visible signs» in order to draw the proper conclusions about their «significations,» it starts with hair color, continues with the form and color of the eyes and the shape of the eyebrows, and then describes in detail all other parts of the «face»: the nose, mouth, teeth, but also the voice. Here is a glimpse into the *Kalendrier's* meticulous itemization of facial topography:

Item, a face that is neither too long nor too short, has not got too much fat and has a good color, signifies a person of truth, kind, wise and intelligent, helpful and good-natured and orderly in all things. A fat face, full of hard flesh, signifies gluttony, lack of care, negligence, harsh sense of understanding and intelligence. A long and pockmarked face signifies an anxious person in all measures of his works. A small and short face with a yellow tint signifies a deceitful person, not very loyal, contemptous, full of anger and audacity.⁵ It would be important to analyze to what extent such rigid interpretative schemes influenced perception, the look at one another (and «the other»), and to study the overlappings and interfaces between scholarly traditions and «popular wisdom», which both were equally fond of «the art» of physiognomy.

Here, one is reminded of the *Return of Martin Guerre*, the story of a (partially successful) attempt of substituting one identity with another, which Natalie Zemon Davis masterfully describes in a story about identities at various social levels of rural and urban legal culture in the sixteenth century.⁶

The history of documents of identity from the *Steckbriefe* of the late Middle Ages to the modern passports and identity cards with photo ID – of the *visage du face* – has recently caught scholarly attention by historians such as Valentin Groebner and Pierre Monnet.⁷ The question indeed seems to be an up-to-date and pressing one, at times when international and state authorities no longer satisfied with simple facial recognition practices turn to new proofs of identity, such as digital images of the eyeground, digital fingerprints, and especially DNA testing.

One also needs to point to another major event for our historical and anthropological reflections on the face: the first surgical transplant of a face, realized on the 27th of November 2005 by French surgeon Bernard Devauchelle. Up until then, it was possible to transplant internal organs, such as the heart or the kidney, as well as limbs, such as fingers or the hand – but never the face, the ultimate place and focus of an individual's identity. The media coverage of this event and in particular the statements made by the beneficiary of this world premiere, the patient herself, raise questions of great interest for our purposes. The patient is a woman whose entire lower face – nose, mouth, chin, cheeks – was torn apart by a dog while she was sleeping. In the emergency room, she underwent a first facial surgery, which, however, could not restore her looks and give her back her face. The comment she made after her second, life-changing surgery by Devauchelle and his team is worth quoting:

I could not breathe through the nose since I had none left. I had slipped into *another world*. I would not dare leaving my room. I already had trouble looking at myself, but to

impose it on others ... It was *monstrous*, traumatic, unpresentable. In front of the *mirror*, the impression that *this was not me* never left me [...] After a while, I put on a *mask*.⁸ It is striking to find in this commentary some of the oldest topics of debate including the term of the «mask», which conceals the face – or the little that remained of it in this case. The patient was lucky that the opportunity had come up so soon to graft onto her gaping wound the face of another woman who had just died. However, from this point on it was no longer the absence of her face that tormented the patient but rather the presence of a new and foreign one, the haunting idea of wearing a dead woman's face: «Another woman. Who would give me that thing *our identity* is really based on, *the place of all expressions*. Another woman who died. What family would accept such a gesture?»⁹

What soothes her before the surgery is that a face mold of the dead woman's face will be done before her face will be taken off, and thus «they would return to the family a body seemingly flawless, thanks to a *face mold*.»¹⁰

The surgery took fifteen hours, and despite the given risk of rejection it was successful. However, the obsession with wearing another woman's face, one who is *dead* yet *survives* by means of her face, to *be* this other woman by proxy, at least in a portion of her flesh, is a lasting burden:

She was dead, except that piece of her on my face that would *forever be our bond*. She is constantly in my thoughts [...] So, this face, *it is not me*. It will never be me. I often look at myself *in the mirror*; at first I would not stop. I was looking for my *old traits* and I could not look at my *former photos*. It was too painful. Now, I am getting use to it. And I desire more and more to *see my former pictures* [...] They have tried to convince me that I am not so different from before, but I am in the best place to judge! And the answer is: so *very different!* A part of me and my identity have disappeared forever. And I cherish in me the *memories of what I was*.¹¹

This dramatic testimony addresses almost all anthropological issues related to the face. Through facial appearance and identity shine the themes of death, memory and the visual relationship to others. At this point, we may summarize: The face is the place of identity par excellence. «I am my face,» one might say. If I change it, I become another. Either in the traditional and provisional way by putting on a mask, by what the Latins called *persona*: Thanks to the mask, I temporarily play a «character» of theater or carnival. Or in a whole new way, which until 2005 appeared to be from science fiction: by receiving a transplant, the face of a dead. Yet in this case everything is definitive: the death of another who gives you their face, the loss of your own past look (as painfully evidenced by photos and memory), the acquisition of a new face that you have difficulty adapting to because it contradicts your personal identity, which you continue to associate with the face that has disappeared. Also note the crucial role of the mirror, which we encounter here: It refers me back to my own image – as seen by others. I search in the reflection of the mirror the face as it appears to the gaze of others. There is no face without the «risk» of others seeing it – others who replace the reflection in the mirror or in the well of Narcissus, the youth who saw his face without recognizing it and drowned, a victim of his own seduction.

2. The face as a means and surface of expression

The privileged role of the face in the perception of a person is no surprise if we consider that it is the place where the essential bodily senses are concentrated

(sight, hearing, smell, taste – only the sense of touch partially eludes it), where the vital functions of respiration and nutrition are located and bodily means of expression as important as the look (through the eyes) and the voice (through the mouth) reside, while the eyes, depending on if they are open or closed, signify the alternation of waking and sleeping and the passage from life to death. No other bodypart is a bearer of senses to such an extent. One could say that almost every part of the face *signifies* by nature, amplifying the power and effects of our feelings, for example by making faces, sticking out the tongue, by rolling the eyes or frowning. Yet there is nothing *natural* about these forms of facial expression. To a very high degree, the face is subject to social codes, which inform even those movements that appear most natural and spontaneous, while they are actually ‘put on,’ in order to be read accordingly and to elicit proportionate responses. The history of the face has one proper place in the research on ‘silent language’ as initiated by Erwing Goffmann and Edward Hall and still pursued by a host of ethologists and anthropologists.¹² It is still a vast and open field within a historical and interdisciplinary anthropology of the face. A lot remains to be investigated about and around the face like the history of hair and its styles, the history of make-up (on the cheeks, lips, eyelashes and eyelids), the history of jewelry, of earrings, piercings¹³, the history of scarification or of the beard – for which we have an exceptional source from the twelfth century: the monastic treatise *De barbīs*, which shows how hair and beard functioned as a means of distinction and mutual identification among the monastic orders. Obviously, the subject matter of female veiling belongs here, the partial or total concealment of the face, which in the case of the *burka* only spares the eyes; and of course the question of masks and also of helmets, which hide the knight’s face thus introducing an alternative place of identity, the crest carried on the shield, the banner and on the caparison of the knight’s horse. All in all, the face in the first place acts as its own sign, then by what we add to it, and then by what it conceals.

It is above all the story of the look that still needs to be written, probably beginning with the myth of the Gorgon that was able to kill by her gaze. One would then continue to trace its echoes within a history of fascination, from optical speculations of the thirteenth century to the era of witchhunts, lasting from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century, and finally to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ fascination with hypnosis.

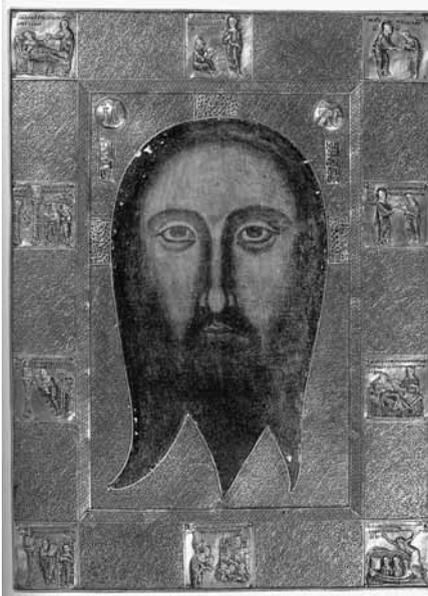
The face also acts as a sign through what we add to it: from facial paintings, ornaments, to veils, masks and glasses – clear or dark – whose use spreads from the thirteenth century on and whose depiction in paintings from the fifteenth century on often serves an ironic function against false intellectuals! The face finally ‘acts’ and gets in touch with others by what it conceals. Let us not forget that under the facial skin hides the skull – the sign of death in the guise of the living, the symbol of *Memento mori* in the heart of the world’s vanities.

3. The face as an object of representation

There are three ways to represent the face. The first way is by reflection, in the calm waters of the pond or fountain, or in the mirror – a theme widely exploited by didactic and religious literature (e.g. the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*), secular literature (e.g. the *Roman de la Rose*, which speaks extensively of Narcissus), and in painting (e.g. in the representations of melancholy).

The second way, less studied, is by imprint, notably in wax. It was used from the thirteenth century onward to sculpt funeral effigies, as shown by Dominic Olariu who in his recent thesis emphasizes the new desire for *resemblance* as expressed in royal and princely burials.¹⁴ The wax imprint is also related to votive practices, an aspect pronounced by Georges Didi-Huberman in his study of the sanctuary of *Sanctissima Annunziata* in Florence.¹⁵ In this case, the wish for an exact reproduction of the face taken from life is documented in an ex-voto made of wax and meant for display in the sanctuary. Both funerary and votive practices are actually very close. They aim to activate supernatural protection – against bodily diseases, sins or human oblivion – for an individual that can be recognized best if it is represented in the most exact way.

The imprint of a face can also leave its mark on a fabric. As Hans Belting has shown, we here touch upon the very myth of origin of Christian painting. The «Holy Face» and its imprint (or rather trace of an original imprint) is the prototype of the *vera icon*, the «true» image of the face of God incarnated in Christ (fig. 1). In addition, because it is the «true image» of God turned man, it justifies the paradox of monotheistic (and thus rather aniconic) Christianity, a religion that is, on the other hand, dedicated to images and their cult. Let us recall that in the Old Testament Yahweh showed Himself to Moses in the Burning Bush by fire and by voice, but without revealing his face. When God «saw Moses coming to take a closer look,» he told him to untie his sandals. And Moses «covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.»¹⁶ Medieval images, however, do not hesitate to illustrate this twice «faceless» situation by explicitly showing the face of God in the Burning Bush, yet not without adding the cruciform nimbus of the Son. Once again, it is the Incarnation of the Son that legitimizes the representation of the Father in Christian images. In the Gospels (Matt. 17:1–9, Mark 9:2–13, Luke 9:28–



1 Mandylion from Constantinople, Genoa, S. Bartolomeo degli Armeni



2 Volto Santo, Lucca, Duomo di San Martino

36), the disciples Peter, Jacob and John witnessed the Transfiguration of Christ: «His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as the light.» The images of the scene emphasize the contrast between the frontal appearance of the light and the posture of the disciples, who «fell face down on the ground,» unable to withstand the look of Jesus.¹⁷

The «true image» of Christ is *acheiropoietic*, «not made with human hands.» It claims to be the imprint of the face of Jesus Himself climbing Golgotha, or the painting that miraculously appeared afterwards on the fabric, or even the sculpture made by an angel of the *Volto Santo* after Nicodemus had begun to sculpt this large crucifix in the resemblance of Christ on the cross but failed to finish it (fig. 2). Legend has it that then the *Volto Santo* was miraculously transported to Lucca in Italy where it became the destination of an important pilgrimage. It is remarkable that here the sculpted image of the whole body is named after the face only, which again proves its metonymic value for the whole body.¹⁸

In all these miraculous manifestations, the face of Christ remains utterly paradoxical, since it is understood as an original trace yet also as a derivative image of a missing relic. The image is also deemed «not painted by human hands» and endowed with a miraculous power equal to that of the prototype. Although there are different iconographical types of expressing the *mise en abyme* between the image and its mythical prototype, they hold the same miraculous power. In the manner of the Eucharist itself, the Holy Face multiplies the possibilities of dissemination and reproduction. The text that best expresses the paradoxes inherent to the image is a well-known treatise by Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei*, alternatively entitled *Libellus iconae*. It dates from 1453 and was dedicated by its author to the monks of Tegernsee. It was accompanied by a small omnivoyant painting of Christ whose eyes followed that of the viewer to any standpoint. The viewer was thus prompted to meditate the gap separating the Creator from his creature as well as the actual aporia to picture God in an image. Here is what Nicholas of Cusa wrote to the monks:

If I strive to convey you by human means unto divine things, then I must do this through a likeness [*similitudine*]. Now, among human works I have not found an image more suitable to our purpose than the image of someone omnivoyant, so that his face, through subtle pictorial artistry, is such that it seems to behold everything around it. [...] I am sending to Your Love [such] a painting [*tabellam*] that I was able to acquire. It contains the figure of an omnivoyant [individual]; and I call it the «icon of God» [*eiconam Dei*]. Hang this icon somewhere, e.g., on the north wall; and you brothers stand around it, at a short distance from it, and observe it. Regardless of the place from which each of you looks at it, each will have the impression that he alone is being looked at by it. Moreover, if while fixing his sight [*visum*] upon the icon [a brother] walks from west to east, he will find that the icon's gaze proceeds continually with him; and if he returns from east to west, the gaze will likewise not desert him. [...] On the basis of such a sensible appearance [*apparentia*] as this, I propose to elevate you very beloved brothers, through a devotional exercise, unto mystical theology.¹⁹

Despite its prodigious faculties of omnivoyance, this image is in fact just the *appearance* of the look of God, whose attention nothing escapes, who is the «absolute vision,» without limits, way beyond human vision. However, in approaching the icon the monks will be prompted to cross the border of the image *as appearance* and the deficiency of their own limited bodily vision. They will thus begin to

understand the *distance* between the ineffable and unrepresentable power of God and their own humble selves. The image is like a mirror, which is at first deceptive, a threshold which we must inevitably cross in order to move towards the true vision of God. The true face of God does not show itself in the mirror but in the soul of the devotee:

When someone looks into this Mirror, he sees his own form in the Form of forms, which the Mirror is. And he judges the form seen in the Mirror to be the image of his own form, because such would be the case with regard to a polished material mirror. However, the contrary thereof is true, because in the Mirror of eternity that which he sees is not an image but is the Truth, of which the beholder is the image. Therefore, In You, my God, the image is the Truth and Exemplar of each and every thing that exists or can exist.²⁰

This unique text leads us to the core of the question of the face in Christian culture and its history. A history, which is of course a long one, leading back to the Holy Shroud of Turin, the ‹true false imprint› of Christ’s dead body on his shroud. In fact, the alleged Savoyard relic first fully appeared as an image (even if reduced in its most frequent form of presentation only to the imprint of the face) in the form of a negative of a photography taken in 1898 by the Italian physician Secondo Pia and instigated by the Holy See. Modern technology thus did its fair share to promote what was believed to be the true image of Christ, before, thanks to carbone-14-dating, the character of relic as a ‹forgery› was revealed: The object can not be dated any earlier than the fourteenth century. Without going into the details of this long history, I pass the word to Hans Belting who has contributed such fundamental insights for our understanding of the images of Christ and his face:

It is ultimately by the question of this face [of Christ] that the fragile identity of Christian religion has been tested, which explains that it constituted for other religions, for all different reasons, a subject of scandal [...]. Such *visag  it  * (faciality), as used by the two authors,²¹ might have been brought forth by the semantic insecurities prompted by the face of Christ. It ultimately meant for each human the *constraint to a representation with one’s own face, a sort of mask-enforcement, leading to the idea of the incorporation or incarnation of the mask since it is the face that stands-in for the whole body.*²²

The third way, finally, to represent the face, which cannot be separated from the previous two, is to paint or sculpt it. Here, we are above all confronted with the question of frontality as related to what Meyer Schapiro has called a ‹theme of state› (frontality) as opposed to ‹themes of action› (expressed by profile images or the three-quarter face, as they were en vogue in medieval painting). Frontality, in strongly suggesting immobility, which in turn expresses authority, lends the face the force of a massive presence. It is thus particularly apt for the presentation of the majesty of God, entirely centered on His sovereign face and appearance – as in the images of the *Pantocrator* in the monumental mosaics of the churches of Byzantine tradition or influence. Another remarkable form of image is the *imago clipeata*, which goes back to ancient funerary iconography. It superimposes a frontal face inscribed in a circle to the body of another frontal figure: Usually it is the face of Christ, which is carried and presented in this way by the figure of the Virgin/Church. But it may also happen that the positions within images are exchanged, for example in some representations of the Assumption, where the soul of the Virgin is depicted *en buste* with an orant gesture in a *clipeus*, which in turn is pictured in front of Christ’s body.

Other types of images spring to mind, such as the trinitarian representations of Psalm 109, «*Sede a dextris meis.*» Yet even in this type of representation it may sometimes happen that the Father's face is oddly concealed by a quatrefoil, which symbolizes the full transcendent power inherent to the *quaternitas divina*. Other contemporary images also express the intricate paradox of the figuration of the divine, a figuration that as necessary for contemplation yet aporetic in its representational choices. The *Rothschild Canticles*, produced in the early fourteenth century in a female devotional context, unfold this theme in a unique suite of visionary images of the Trinity. In a page that quotes Psalm 138:7, «*Quo ibo a spiritu tuo? et quo a facie tua fugiam?*» («Where shall I go far from your soul, where shall I flee far from your face?»), a man flees while turning back towards the vision of the divine «face» on the opposite page. This page shows an extraordinary assembly of intertwined circular lines and radiating flames, in the center of which appears God's bodyless face waving two disproportionate arms in the manner of large wings.²³

The majesty of God as depicted in his frontal and sovereign face serves as a model for the majesty of Saints and rulers, kings, emperors and popes. Indisputably, one of the most striking examples is the impressive reliquary statue of Sainte Foy of Conques with its particularly hieratic and authoritative posture, exceptional for this century, a three-dimensional cult image with a gold-coated face and a dazzling sparkle of the eyes – an object, which according to the *Liber Miraculorum sancte Fidis* already utterly fascinated its contemporaries, the pilgrims of the eleventh century. We find similar traits in the three-dimensional images, which are revived in Western portraiture in the fourteenth century. For the early fourteenth century, I am thinking of the statues, standing or enthroned, which Pope Boniface VIII ordered as his own effigies, like the one still on display in Bologna. While the kings of France (John the Good and Charles V) are readily depicted in profile, Emperor Charles IV of Bohemia commissioned for the triforium of the St. Vitus cathedral of Prague an imposing program of busts in frontal view or slightly turned to the side. This series unites his own effigy with the portraits of his four successive wives, his father John of Luxemburg, his mother Elizabeth, his son Wenceslaus IV and his son's wife Joan of Bavaria as well as Charles' brother John (fig. 3).²⁴ The series of busts and faces assumes a genealogical function of kinship yet also integrates court dignitaries and clergy of the cathedral, and even the architect of the latter. The program is all the more remarkable as these portraits are not meant to be seen from the nave but present themselves exclusively to the sight of God and his Saints and angels, between heaven and earth so to speak, a battalion of eminent guardians of the sacred building. The Prague series goes back to another one, that of the busts and faces of the patron Saints in the Chapel of Holy Cross Castle of Karlstein, painted by master Theodor, where they are standing guard at the relics of Christ's Passion.

Another famous face I would like to mention is that of Albrecht Dürer in his famous self-portrait of 1500. As has been noted frequently, the compelling frontal image assimilates the artist's face to the Holy Face of Christ. The artist posed in front of a mirror, which allowed him to paint his left hand as if it were his right as it reaches into his coat's lapel. The artist's identity is revealed in the monogram and in the Latin inscription, which specifies the date (1500), name, age and even the painter's geographical origin (*Noricus*: from Noricum, the Danube region). The



3 Peter Parler, *Bust of Emperor Charles IV*, Prague, St. Vitus



4 Jan Gossaert, called Mabuse, *Diptych of Carondelet*, 1517, Paris, Musée du Louvre

model Dürer follows is that of the Holy Face, the miraculously generated, *acheiropoietic* image. The painter appropriates the divine image in an innovative way and one might conclude that he shows himself as a new Creator. As Hans Belting has suggested that the portrait's minutely thought-out geometrical construction refers less to Dürer's own physical face as to the absolute beauty of God: «Dürer painted an image of his face that he himself created after the image (*in imaginem*) of God.» This portrait, in its singular and pronounced frontality does not exactly look at the viewer. Dürer rather looks *beyond* the viewer, as if he wanted to be reflected in the divine mirror, in accordance with what Nicolas of Cusa describes as «drawing the attention of the Creator to himself.»²⁵

The question of face and portraiture does of course not only refer to the face of God. It is also related to issues of memory and *memoria* in its funerary and liturgical sense in the Middle Ages. We still entrust our faces to the painter's brush (or to the photographer's lense) to suspend the passing of time and transcend the threshold of death. Few works of art show this as powerfully as the portrait of Carondelet, Dean of Besançon, painted by Jan Gossaert, called Mabuse, in 1517 (fig. 4).²⁶ Since it appears within a diptych, the portrait can be alternatively locked away or revealed to the intimacy of the private view of its owner, who at the same time is the model. When the diptych is closed, the portrait comes in immediate contact with yet another face: the Virgin's face of the Virgin and Child group on the opposite panel. The slightly oblique direction of Carondelet's eyes exactly meets the eyes of the Madonna. Even though the painting was executed during Carondelet's lifetime, it seems to have been produced with his death and *memoria* in mind, as indicated by the inscription that runs across the top of the frame: «*Representation of Messire Iehan Carondelet, hault Dean of Besancon, at the age of 48 years.*»²⁷ The use of the vernacular undoubtedly underlines the social function and worldly message. Yet the word «representation» bears funerary connotations; it also refers to *representationes* or funerary effigies as deployed during royal funerals. The term reoccurs in the inscription surrounding the Virgin and Child. Here, the invocation of the Virgin Mary is in Latin: «*Mediatrice nostra que es post Deum spes sola, tuo filio me representa.*» «Present me to your son,» pleads Ca-

rondelet. Such a «(re)presentation» makes sense only «in the face of death,» at the moment of the individual judgement of the soul, or at the end of time during the Last Judgement, in the face of the Lord and Judge.

When the diptych was closed, Carondelet could equally (but not simultaneously) contemplate one or the other external panel. Painted on the back of the Virgin and Child are the coat of arms and Carondelet's initials «I. C.» They are his individual emblems, the symbolic equivalent of the name written in full alongside the portrait. Painted on the back of his portrait is an impressive skull turned to the left with an almost completely broken off jaw shifted to the right. A loosely unfolded scroll of paper is painted above. On the frame, the inscription «*mors matura*» leaves no doubt that death will come. Yet Carondelet hopes it comes late and not prematurely – «*mors immatura*» – like the death of children, death by suicide or an unprepared death without the Holy Sacraments of the Church. The skull, stripped bare of its flesh and with the lower jaw already falling apart by the relentless ravages of time, shows us that the normal decomposition of the corpse is accomplished. The skull belongs to Carondelet, even though he is not yet dead. The image warns him of the world's vanities and reminds him that one day we all must die. «*Memento mori*» is what the pathetically dangling jaw seems to tell him, displaced like in Holbein's anamorphic image; it is an image of the metamorphosis of the body and face that will inevitably take place in the grave. The jaw seems to project out from its illusionistic niche, it precariously protrudes over its lower rim and towards the viewer – but first of all towards Carondelet, the principle beholder of this private piece, to whom it speaks very clearly of his own approaching death.

The last way to represent the face undoubtedly is the most troubling one: It tends to dehumanize the face and then transfer it to the animal world, such that either the resulting hybrid possesses a human face on a beast's body or vice versa. Such hybrid combinations or deformations intuitively remind us of caricature, but that was different in the Middle Ages, when these creatures deeply questioned the anthropological categories of Christian culture. We find this type of images, often referred to as «drolleries,» in large numbers in the misericords of choir stalls, the decor of painted ceilings and the gargoyles of churches; not to forget their frequent appearance in the *marginalia*, which have been in the subject of recent studies following Michael Camille.²⁸ Let me here again focus on images of the face, especially when the face is identified with or stands in for the entire body, as in the title of Katrin Kröll's and Hugo Steger's publication *Mein ganzer Körper ist mein Gesicht* (My entire body is my face).²⁹ In direct reference of its title, the book opens with an *exemplum* of the thirteenth century, which introduces a juggler. The story goes as follows: «*Histrion quidam, incedens totus nudus exceptis brachiis, obviavit cuidam querenti si frigus haberet. Respondit: «Non.» Immo ad visagium? «Certe,» inquit, ego sum totus visagium»* («A juggler, walking naked, except his arms, meets a man who asks him if he isn't cold. He replies: «No.» Isn't he at the very least cold on his face? «Yes,» he says, «for I am entirely my face.»).

The text allows us to link marginal images with the juggler's art and the fun part of medieval culture. It shows in a comic way the potential of the face to stand in for the whole person in medieval culture. And as the face normally is the bare part of the body, it is possible to say that the completely naked (except for the arms) juggler is nothing *but* face. Medieval manuscripts are full of grotesque

figures who are just faces – or nothing but the face. They usually escape precise interpretation to the point that even experts often see them as a free game of the scribe or painter. But we better look closely. Some fill the small initials and thus immediately contribute to the text's articulation; others, placed in the margins, serve as memory marks for the reader. The fact that they have the form of faces is not indifferent: They instigate a face-to-face communication with the reader, and as marks of intelligence they start a dialogue between image, text, author and reader. Other faces yet establish a mimetic relationship of gazes and mimic expressions within their respective pages, which produces a certain dynamic between text and image and sets in motion a gestural and speaking dialogue. The face here fully develops its expressive potential. Others again, in manuscripts and other media, are shown as hybrid creatures in a wide variety of anthropo-zoomorphic combinations and phantasies. These figures are of utmost importance for the understanding of medieval anthropology, insofar as they boldly transgress the limits between established species of the divine Creation.²⁹ In fact, they manage to show that virtually no combination is impossible within the creative realm of the power of the Almighty. We find them at the borders of the known world, where the Blemmyes (among an array of other odd races) reside, men without heads, who according to the *Liber de proprietatibus rerum* by Bartholomaeus Anglicus, carry their «eyes and mouth in the middle of the chest.»

In finally returning to the question of the mask, let me complete this inventory by invoking the multiple faces of the devil, which can fix themselves not only to the stomach but to the joints of the limbs, apparently under the influence of some sort of organic transmutation of the Evil. These diabolic faces have precursors: on the Romanesque tympana and on the stage of the liturgical drama, where the Maw of Hell devours the sinners. It is usually a hollow mask, depicted in profile and as such the exact opposite of the Holy Face of God. And it is noteworthy that again the face, the place of human identity and expression, was chosen to represent the evil fragmentation of the body in a diabolical reversal of head and stomach, of heaven and hell. All these images and their intellectual, cultural and religious underpinnings emphasize the exceptional role the face played and plays among all the bodyparts; they celebrate, in different ways, its irreplaceable metonymic value as a unique condensation of terrestrial and supernatural beings.

The face was and is a fascinating nucleus of crystallization for a multitude of diverging and interrelating questions about the nature of human beings, their images, their individual identity, their bodies, the boundaries between animality and humanity, the cultural implications of appearances, masking and mutilations, the expression of emotions, the role of looks, of beauty, and of religious imagination. It is safe to say that all disciplines and their forms of knowledge have something substantial to say about the face: medicine, history, art history, literary history, ethnology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, theology – to mention only a few. They will need to intensify their dialogue and collaborate if we want to formulate the right questions for the formation of a historical anthropology of the face – a story that still remains to be written. It will be a win-win situation if they all engage in the long history of the face from an intercultural perspective.

Annotations

- 1 Translation from French by Jeanette Kohl and Dominic Olariu.
- 2 *Kopf/ Bild. Die Büste im Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. by Jeanette Kohl and Rebecca Müller, Munich 2007 (I Mandorli, vol. 6), p. 9–30.
- 3 Jean-Pierre Vernant and Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *Dans l'œil du miroir*, Paris 1997; Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *Le Dieu-Masque. Une figure de Dionysos d'Athènes*, Paris/Rome 1991; Florence Dupont, *L'invention de la littérature, de l'ivresse grecque au livre latin*, Paris 1994, p. 93–96.
- 4 See the conference acts currently in press: *Physiognomonie. Arts et science du visage*, December 13–15, 2007, École Normale Supérieure, Paris.
- 5 *Le Grant Calendrier et compost des Bergiers avecq leur Astrologie*, Paris 1981 (paperback of the 1976 facsimile of the edition by Bertrand Guégan, Paris 1926), p. XLIII. Translation by Jennifer Cabral Poejo.
- 6 Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1983.
- 7 Valentin Groebner, *Ungestalten. Die visuelle Kultur der Gewalt im Mittelalter*, Munich/Vienna 2003; Pierre Monnet, «Pouvoir communal et communication politique dans les villes de l'Empire à la fin du Moyen Âge,» in: *Francia*, 2004, vol. 31, magazine 1, p. 121–139.
- 8 See the double page dedicated to this event in the newspaper *Le Monde*: Annick Cojean, «La femme aux deux visages,» in: *Le Monde*, Saturday, July 7 2007, p. 20–21, here p. 20. All italics regarding the article in *Le Monde* are by the author, all quotations of this article were translated by Jennifer Cabral Poejo.
- 9 Cojean 2007 (as in note 7), p. 20.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 12 As for example Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, organizers of an ambitious *Facial Aspect Program* and co-authors of *Unmasking the Face. A Guide to Recognizing Emotions from Facial Clues*, Englewood Cliffs (New Jersey) 1975.
- 13 One might mention the studies by Diana Hughes for the Renaissance and, more recently, those of medievalist Denis Bruna on facial coverings of the torturers of Christ in the representations of the Passion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: Diane Owen Hughes, «Distinguishing Signs. Earrings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City,» in: *Past and Presence*, 1986, vol. 112, p. 3–59; Denis Bruna, *Piercing. Sur les traces d'une infamie médiévale*, Paris 2001.
- 14 Dominic Olariu, *L'Avènement de la représentation ressemblante de l'homme. Une réinterprétation du portrait*, Bern 2012.
- 15 Georges Didi-Huberman, «Ressemblance mythifiée et ressemblance oubliée chez Vasari,» in: *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome (Italie et Méditerranée)*, 1994, vol. 106, 2, p. 383–432.
- 16 Exodus 3:4–6. Quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, Wheaton (Illinois) 1996.
- 17 Matt. 17:1–6. Quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, Wheaton (Illinois) 1996.
- 18 See my study «Cendrillon crucifiée. À propos du Volto Santo de Lucques (XIII^e – XV^e siècle,» republished in: Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le corps des images*, Paris 2002, p. 217–271 (first in: *Actes des congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur public*, 1994, vol. 25, p. 241–270).
- 19 Quotation by Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago 1997, p. 545 (Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich 1990). For this important text see also Olivier Boulnois, *Au-delà de l'image. Une archéologie du visuel au Moyen Âge, V^e – XVI^e siècle*, Paris 2008.
- 20 Belting 1997 (as in note 18), p. 545.
- 21 The author refers to the concept borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis 1987 (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Paris 1980).
- 22 Hans Belting, *La vraie image. Croire aux images? Paris 2005* (Hans Belting, *Das echte Bild. Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen*, Munich 2005), p. 115. Translation by Jennifer Cabral Poejo.
- 23 Jeffrey E. Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles. Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland, circa 1300*, New Haven 1990.
- 24 Klara Bensovska and Ivo Hlobil, *Petr Parler. Svatoviska katedrala 1356–1399*, Prague 1999.
- 25 Belting 2005 (as in note 21), p. 146–149.
- 26 Paris, Musée du Louvre. Each panel measures 42,5 × 27 cm.
- 27 Representation de messire Iehan Carondelet, hault doyen de Besançon, en son age de 48 ans.
- 28 Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge. The Margins of Medieval Art*, London 1992; Jean Wirth, *Les marges à drôleries des manuscrits gothiques*, Geneva 2008.
- 29 *Mein ganzer Körper ist Gesicht. Grotteske Darstellungen in der europäischen Kunst und der Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. by Katrin Kröll and Hugo Steger, Freiburg im Breisgau 1994.
- 30 *Adam et l'Astragale. Essais d'anthropologie et d'histoire sur les limites de l'humain*, ed. by Gil Bartholeyens, Pierre-Olivier Dittmar, Thomas Golsenne, Misgav Har-Peled, Vincent Jolivet, Paris 2009.

The philosophical tradition has bequeathed four major conceptions of identity, namely: numeric, specific, generic and qualitative identity. Each concept of identity presents strengths and weaknesses in its formulation. What we are attempting here is to link, in an original way, one type of identity with one corresponding theme in order to: 1) better apprehend its significance, and 2) give it «weight» and momentum by disseminating it into the «real world.» For example, qualitative identity can be linked with the theme of memory. Within this example, to understand memory as *the* key support of identity (qualitative identity) implies the risk of attributing to patients suffering from Alzheimer a loss of identity through degenerative memory processes typical of this disease.² Therefore, the potential solution would be the maintenance of memory, a maintenance attempted through advanced medical procedures:

Type of Identity	Theme	Risks	Solutions
Numeric	Designation/Nomination	Loss of differentiation	Cloning/similarity
Specific	Functions	Dehumanization	Hybridization
Generic	Language	Confusion of species	Difference of degrees/nature
Qualitative	Memory	Degeneration	Activation of the memory

The face – as we see by the enormous success of *Facebook* – is one of the main identity supports reuniting these four types of identity, ever since the portrait of the Renaissance.³ It is proof of both the uniqueness and the transcendence of others. If the face can neither be seen nor touched, it cannot be comprehended. It is a given, offering itself to others as a pure gift. I cannot help but interpret the signs of other faces *by myself*, from *my own* point of view. The face is the most visible part of man, both exposed and masked. I give to others what I want them to see. We are condemned to interpret others in the way they show themselves in their faces, yet they are not «contained» in their faces. Behind the face, there is a complex virtuality that escapes my understanding. The face is the expression of infinity. We cannot fully explore the face; it contains and encompasses an infinity of ideas, images and sensations. The face is always something that goes beyond me. There is no limit to the face. This infinity refers me back to the fact that the other escapes all objectification.

The face triggers questions of ethics and of respect for the other's body. I can «possess» the other's body, but not their face. A murder documents the total negation of another being, its intention is to erase the other's face, yet the only thing that Cain could not make disappear was Abel's face. The face is symbolic. We cannot annihilate the face, man's «signature.» There will always be someone to pose the question of the

face, of memory, and nomination. There is no such thing as «real dying» since even if we die, we do not fully disappear, as shown in contemporary culture by the permanence of our faces on social networks, even after our death. There is a strong ethic of nomination, of ritual, and of the cemetery. There is a common sense to preserve the individual face, even in virtual «spaces.» Everyone has the right to a tomb, to some form of commemoration, and this commemoration often times has a face.

1. Appearance-based prejudice: the fear of the hybrid

On the other hand: Faces of strangers scare us. They scare us to the point where we have developed a biometry of the face.⁴ Immigrant children, even if educated in our own society are hindered to succeed in hybridizing to this society. We all remain attached to a natural body, a body of origin, unaltered, as if a chimera of «virginity» conditioned our degree of social acceptance of others within our cultural norms. By retouching our faces surgically or through *Photoshop*, we document the urge to establish technical control of our self-image in the fight against aging.⁵ This is how racism as a «*délit de faciès*,» a facial delict, remains well present in our times.



1 Gérardin Lionel, *Study of a Face*, 2011, inks on paper, 25 × 25 cm, property of the artist

2 Orlan, *American Indian Self-Hybridization #1: painting portrait of No-No-Mun-Ya, One Who Gives No Attention*, with Orlan's photographic portrait, 2005, 48 × 60 inches



Let us intermingle and blend! The contemporary injunction of social diversity, sexual mixing, gender mobility, and globalization seems to invite each and every one to hybridization.⁶ The dogma of encountering «the other» transforms us into idiots of travel, into tourist hyenas who cannibalize and colonize the other without ever incorporating much of the differences.⁷ Such «alterity without alteration» prohibits hybridization in favor of maintaining a firmly established and impermeable identity. Without the necessary permeability and openness, hybridization is impossible to be accomplished, at least in the way traditional physiognomy conceived of man.⁸

Ethnic rape blatantly demonstrates this phenomenon – by forcing colonized women to give birth to children as half-Serbian, half-Croatian, or half-Algerian, half-French ... The «bastards» and «*marrons*» («browns») are the same kind of «bicultural hybrids» in which genetic recomposing produces an intermediary identity between two cultures, two countries, two languages. Behind the totalitarian «breeding programs» of the *Lebensborn*, these processes of hybridization gradually leveled skin colors by a controlled and fertile mixing of cultural «*mélangeisme*» (swinging).⁹ The comparatively «impure» skin color embodies the biocultural hybridization in the case of immigrant children, a color that national states would like to purge by exclusion for the purpose of their own notion of «liberalism.» Racial profiling and the underlying appearance- and name-based prejudices stigmatize skin color of «lesser worth,» dissected and singled out by the police's biometrics of electronic passports. The hunt for hybrids is underway, activating key words such as «employment,» «homeland,» and «territory» in order to identify and expel the «strangers» amongst us.

Approval of hybridity would in the first place mean to admit the double nature inherent to each of us, those of our two biological parents synthesized into one body, those of cultures incorporated and absorbed in habits and habitus, those of fundamental bisexuality. But: Such recognition of inherent hybridity does not conform to rules of social identification and economical norms, where the exchanges must be clear and evident. The hybrid creates trouble within us – and it disturbs



3 Olivier Goulet, *Protected Kiss (Chris + Phil)*, 2004, photograph, 40 × 60 cm, courtesy of the artist

the social order by doubting the definitive aspect of a self that is never truly one-self. To recognize oneself as hybridized (and hybridizing) requires a mobility and versatility of self-understanding, a permanent movement, a form of auto-nomadism – it requires surfacing and acknowledging this other part of the «self» kept safely within the realm of the repressed, the taboo, and the forbidden. The clearly drawn lines of its interior frontiers forbid perceiving and living hybridity – out of a massive fear of identity destabilization: The imbalance of hybridity, interpreted as schizophrenic by psychiatric tradition, plunges each of us into an «I is an other,» failing to contain one within the other. The hybrid unity is dynamic, it develops a mobility of being through action, movement, and performance.

The fear of the hybrid is firmly rooted in the constructed mono-identity of the Western «self.» As «in-dividual,» it does not accept any division that would be proof of a pathological weakness, failure or existential deficit. The «self» must be able to identify itself with a structure and any shortfall would redirect it to an intolerable split-up. We would need to have parallel lives in order to hybridize ourselves according to the multiple possibilities of being. Fear of self-hybridity produces a psychopathologic interpretation of paranoia, schizophrenia, and depression.

Unable to hybridize, exhaustion (burnout) and *fatigue of self-being* force the subject to disembodiment – often by help of psychological analysis –, being unable to think itself as plural, multiple, double and undefined.¹⁰ Our ego-psychology, in conceiving of us as unique, vocational, exceptional, heroic, comes to the point where by forbidding any hybridization it hollows out and deprives the sub-

ject of its possibilities of being (Fig. 3). The unification of self, the harmonization of the different parts in a personality, the social and personal identification with role models that should be incorporated, repetitive habituation – all these aspects of identity organization produce a unique child, an exceptional athlete, an irreducible individual.

At the point where nobody resembled anybody anymore, hybridization would turn into dissociation without fusion and refusal of any fusion without dissociation. Without the hybrid, body-to-body relations would be reduced to side-by-side relations, established by a radical estrangement of the other that guarantees his or her inviolability and extraterritoriality. The other would always be banned, fundamentally separated from me, and I would only be able to scratch its surface – whereas the hybrid accepts the other within one's self. This fear of the hidden (if not cursed!) part leads to the refusal of being someone other than the familiar self.

To hybridize is to accept, on the inside, that one is *not* whole, definitive, and complete. The idea of the linear development of self, characterized as progress, condemns any hybridization that provides networks, «thousand plateaus,» passages, and tunnels to become a self.¹¹

2. To de-face and re-face: identity hybridization

Cosmetic surgery is a soma technique, even transgender, which hybridizes biological identity of origin with parts of another identity in order to create a mosaic-like bio-subject.¹² Cosmetic surgery serves as a vector of metaphorical ideas and pretexts in order to advance a personal, professional but also universal history for everyone.¹³ It is an occasion, a visual outlet, for self-declared heroes to exorcise the fears and frustrations we all have. In TV shows about cosmetic surgery, such as *Nip/Tuck*, flesh and sex are directly exposed, pointing to the equivalence of surface and depth, appearance and being:

Here [in the TV show *Nip/Tuck*], the flesh is objectified by close-ups of filmed operations that serve as an outer layer, as an excuse, in opposition to moving bodies as expressions of the heart and its permanent thrust. The strangeness comes from this subtle pornography, pornography less of the body than of feelings, a kind of supreme exhibitionism that engulfs us and retains us, without ever overwhelming us ...¹⁴

In a similar way to the «speculum» that served Luce Irigaray as an analytic tool to discuss the role of feminism vs. Freudian psychoanalysis, the plastic surgeon's scalpel opens the body to analyze and vivisection the cult of the self and the relational aspects of the flesh in all its varieties: sodomy, swinging, mixing of gender, the «incongruity» of demands in plastic surgery (as epitomized in operations to incorporate and hide bags of heroin in female breasts, sex changes, removal of birthmarks from intimate parts, purposeful disfigurement, the reshaping of eyelids, two twins wanting to be different etc.).

I would here like to address the issue of «de-facing» oneself in the sense of changing face, the face of one's life, one's appearance as a human being, the modification of one's gender (fig. 1). Cosmetic surgery is imbedded in the human fantasy of abandoning one's natural body in order to construct for oneself a new «bio-subjective» matter: The face has commonly gained a practically «holistic» meaning as a representation of the entirety of a person's body – to such an extent that even the alteration of one small piece of flesh may trigger the illusion to look at an entirely new face (and person) in the mirror. To leave oneself behind

without actually leaving *from* one's body is the ultimate temptation of *Nip/Tuck*, by recomposing one's gender and sexual identity. Such confusion between identity of face and sexual orientations/preferences in the TV show appears as a representation of a global identity recomposing: Touching the face implies to touch one's gender, sexuality and attraction.

Faced with the two images of oneself, the reflection in the mirror and the mental representation, the surgical act

should only be performed if the alteration of self-image corresponds to an anomaly of the actual image. The objective is then to resynchronize these two images [...] It would be illogical to modify a self-image, by psychotherapeutic techniques, in order to allow for the adaptation to a sad reality.¹⁵

Isabelle Dinoire's disfigurement belongs to the past, the time before surgery; the disfigurement would only continue to exist if the transplant was rejected or became loose as result of an immune reaction.¹⁶ Thus, to remain in this state of 'adhesion,' of physical 'non rejection' of the new face may foster the illusion that the surgical intrusion could only lead to 'extrusion' yet never to an altered self-definition or a 'new self.' Isabelle Dinoire finds herself less in a state of 'in-between' than in the presence of two different 'me's' in her self: Her 'integrity' as a person is not split up in the sense of a discordant perception of her inner self, since her identity conflict caused by disfigurement – although it takes place in the sphere of the consciousness of self – is largely resolved by a newly recomposed identity on the level of a bio-subjective body perception:¹⁷

No. When I look at myself in the mirror, I see that this is not my real face. At first I avoided mirrors. Today, when I pass my reflection, I don't turn around as if it was not me that I have just seen. I have appropriated my new face, but I know that a part does not belong to me.¹⁸

Isabelle Dinoire further elaborates about this co-presence of different identities:

Is it only when I started to move it, to animate my tissue thanks to re-education, that I appropriated it for myself? I made room for my donor in this new face. We are two to make only one. I do not turn away from my self and I do not erase it, either.¹⁹

When the world premiere of this partial facial transplant took place in France in 2005, it was more than a symbolic act. This revolutionary surgical transplant was interpreted as a 'transplant of sense:' the sense Isabelle Dinoire's life regained. What it also was, is identity hybridization by insertion of a part of another person's face onto the patient's own face. Looking at herself after severe disfigurement demands from the patient to envision herself by recomposing the relation with her own body image, with the gaze of the others and in regards to the desirability of her body for others. To 'de-face' in the sense of wishing to change the own face is therefore different from facing oneself in the sense of envisaging one's future: Attempting to get rid of one's face, such as the hero of the movie *Police Python 357* did with acid, does not liberate oneself from one's incarnated history. Looking at herself meant for Isabelle Dinoire to accept the donor's face, its incorporation, at least in part, in order to face and envisage herself as being composed of 'other skins.'²⁰

On March 29, 2010, a thirty-year-old Spaniard, who had been disfigured by accident five years earlier after having pointed a gun at his face, woke up in the hospital Vall d'Hebron in Barcelona with a new face. Before this deeply traumatized farmer, whose identity remains a secret until now, only a dozen people

worldwide had received facial transplants. He is the first human ever to have received a «total face transplant.» His new face is that of a donor, victim of a cerebral death. Until this spectacular operation, conducted by a team of surgeons, anesthesiologists and nurses under the lead of Pere Joan Barrett, chief of the Department of Plastic Surgery of the hospital in Barcelona, the man had neither a nose nor a mouth. For Dr. Barrett, this operation was much more than just a transplant. «It's a total transplantation. He has a completely new and original face that does not resemble the donor's any more,» explained the surgeon who illustrates the feat in referring to the movie *Face/Off* by John Woo, in which Nicolas Cage plays a tough FBI agent who has his face surgically transformed into the one of a powerful criminal in order to sound out the criminal's brother for evidence.²¹ The surgery in Barcelona involved 30 people and took 22 hours, during which, according to the hospital, the patient had all facial skin and muscles transplanted as well as the nose, lips, upper jaw, teeth, palate, cheekbones and mandible. When a week after the operation the young man asked to look at himself in the mirror, he «reacted with tranquility, satisfaction and wrote that he was very grateful,» as Pere Joan Barrett stated during a press conference.²²

3. Western immersion in color

In the western world, as a result of a largely positivist and objectivistic tradition in the history of science, color does not exist «by itself» in nature; rather, it is perceived by our body through the cerebral operation of a neurocognitive decoding. Although the skin can also play a role in techniques like *Seeing with the Skin*, its importance is rather marginal and intended for specific groups, for example blind people. The possibility of using the skin as a channel for *pictorial* material has been explored through devices capable of presenting dynamic two-dimensional tactile images. They are sensory substitution systems that convert a visual image into a tactile one.²³ However, even if Jules Romain, in his book of 1924, defended the existence of an *Extra-Retinal Vision*, and taking into account that the skin actually develops from the same embryological ectoderm layer as the eyes, the dermo-optical perception depends of course on the stereognosis faculties: The sensory receptors of the fingers capture the stimuli and then transmit it to the brain.²⁴

Therefore seeing is still the most important sense for perceiving light and colors. What we can perceive of the light becomes a color in the visible spectrum: The perception of color is related to the presence of cones in the retina, sensitive to green, blue and yellow. The ocular performance depends on the degree of the image's perfection formed on the retina by the object reflecting light rays into the eye, permitting the perception of brightness, shapes, dimensions, position in space and, eventually, colors and movements. The human visual system can only detect within the light spectrum wavelengths between approximately 400 and 700 nanometers. Below these limits we speak of ultra-violet, above them of infrared. Our visual system perceives this range of frequency of light waves as a rainbow of colors. We call this range of light waves the visible spectrum.

A color is thus defined by its wavelength, or by a mixture of wavelengths. The perception of color by each human being on one hand depends on the color signal reaching the visual cortex (physical and physiological aspect), and on the other hand on how this signal will be interpreted. The color is an attribute of the

visual sensation, and we distinguish several steps in the treatment of color information, among others the photoreception assured by the cells of the retina, and the differential coding of signals assured by the central nervous system.

Everyone wants to get in touch through the body images of their faces.²⁵ Philippe Rochat has analyzed the importance of eye contact in empathy and the desire to share feelings with others: An absence or avoidance of eye contact produced a drop of body confidence of babies towards their mothers, referring the child back to itself as opposed to promoting intersubjectivity.²⁶ The merging intersubjectivity between mother and child constitutes itself through intense eye contact. Up to the age of two months, visual exploration of faces takes place as the scanning of their outer contours, thus developing an «externality effect.»

However, the development of skin techniques of coloration, that is the bronzing by natural or artificial sunlight and through chemical substances, acts now under the skin's surface.²⁷ These stimulations induce metabolic changes at the cellular level, particularly in the melanocytes responsible for changes in pigmentation. We can here distinguish:

Exocoloration / Body painting / Colors on the body

Pigmentation / Tanning / Body color

Endocoloration / Hybridery / Bodies of color

Exocoloration applies color to the body in an ephemeral way. Body painting colors the entire surface of the skin by attempting to draw, similar to henna applications, cultural symbols.²⁸ The tribal decoration remains a cultural practice that uses the social surface of the body to designate social roles through signs, lines, traits and shapes coloring the skin.

Pigmentation requires sun exposure and a slow metamorphosis of the skin, from sunburn to suntan, from bright red to bronze. Hence, the color of the body is an implicit color that reveals time and duration of exposure by the level of tanning. The differences in exposure to the sun since 1975 have become a subject of debate in regards to what would be the genetics of «races» while replacing the old «natural» classification by an analysis of skin types.²⁹

Endocoloration, finally, produces color by mechanisms of the body – making use of chemical receptors with an aesthetic goal in mind. Once implemented, the body will tan itself without any dependency on the nature's caprices – comparable to Botox® injections for facial improvement –, but rather depending on the implant's durability, such as Melatonan®.

4. Embodiment in images

The body as painted in images is an illustrative representation of bodily experience – and as such a coding of the flesh.³⁰ Cultural *codification* of the flesh suppresses it by subordinating it to a body image formed by stereotypes of the portrait, the mirror or imitation. The *representation* of the flesh codifies it by means of body culture, in creating variations for the staging and the significance of the stereotyped body images of the Virgin, of Christ – yet also of madness, of the harem, of nudity, illness or death.³¹ The art historian traces down such clues in artworks, clues that are embodied among the more explicit traits and intentions. The flesh does not present itself unless through a body image, the color of flesh tones, the arrangement of postures, the organization of light. Daniel Arasse has shown to what high extent Mary Magdalene's hair is a «condensed image,» which

epitomizes for a religious beholder the themes of temptation, seduction, prostitution, obscenity – in order to escape censorship, while at the same time it respects its conditions.³²

The flesh depicted in an image extracts a part of the body in order to «deform» it and thus become a representation of its pleasure, pain, and affect. This «imaginarization» of the flesh allows to materialize and literally «embody,» in parts of the body, fragments of representations and partial perceptions. The body image in art, in sexual, metaphorical or anatomical nudity, appears to show the color of the flesh. Through the act of visual representation, the image «crystallizes» the flesh while at the same time it questions the limits of representation. The anthropological interpretation of images, notably such of disease and death, underlines the possibility of «infleshing» representations of the body, that is to understand their particular meaning, since the suffering body in pictures «embodies our conflicting relations with the social and the intimate, and as such, is a polysemic prism of biological and cultural entanglement.»³³

Disfigurement can appear as both an aesthetic and a conceptual solution to show the body as an uncertain matter, to liberate it from the logic of truth or of verisimilitude. Francis Bacon – Gilles Deleuze is well aware of this – has carried disfigurement to its extremes, with the goal «to reveal» – a ruthless revelation beyond a normative display of anatomical shapes.³⁴ The bodily representation of flesh remains a codification of affect, sex and skin, as well as a symbolic clue of an imaginary activity. «Why do the affects need images to appear? The image is an indispensable link within the process that allows these affects not only to express themselves, but also to become understood and recognized.»³⁵

Le corps déchu, the «fallen» body since its appearance in nineteenth century paintings is a case in point epitomizing the questioning of traditional models of representation.³⁶ The flesh in an image, painted or performed, is often misunderstood as the exhibition of sex, like in pornography. Yet the aim of these images «incorporating» *le corps déchu* was less to show an organ or body part and its form than to visualize the «bodily experience of ecstasy.» The actor's simulation, the staging of the story and the scene – for example in body art performances – could create a make-believe suggesting that the presentation of the body's liquids, its orifices and its sexual positions might succeed in the actual illustration of the body's itself. The temptation is great to turn the body proper into an object of art in order to render the expressive relation of flesh and body visible.³⁷

The «disintegration of the body» – as it takes place in body performances – is another theme of «embodiment in images.» Body art performance is aiming to break the expressive logic by overinvesting the oeuvre with the body itself. It presumably delivers proof of a subject's aesthetic existence in the bodily act of the performance by fulfilling it in the externality of the material. The substance and material of the body itself becomes not only a *place*, but a *mode* of subjectivation in the staging of the self. Therefore, in the sense of Austin, the self preceding the act is another than the one during the act – the performance disembodies the self in order to «reinvent» it in the bodily act.³⁸

The intuitive liberation of the flesh during a performance explicitly sets free a natural inner self; this is the point when the performer has access to a «zero degree» of identity, an annihilation of his «self» outside of the performance. He melts into it, intuitively and less through *showing* corporeal matter/substance/material (blood,

semen, excrement, nudity ...) than through the immediate expression of a bodily *experience* of the flesh, of its ‹coming out.›³⁹ The expression of such existential corporeality in images of the ‹body in pieces,› the ‹stripped› body, liberates the flesh of its bodily constraints, of censorship and cultural restrictions – to visualize the intuitive awareness of personal experiences. It is the body in substantiality that expresses the experiences of the flesh, either by itself or by a performative procedure.

The performed flesh of *body art* takes ‹simple› *happenings* one step further: It not only questions social images of the body but also mental images.⁴⁰ It allows for a look behind the surface of the self.⁴¹ By inverting coded images through forms of transgressive body action and performance, a reversal takes place: The deliberate ‹endangerment› of a personal body questions traditional body schemes, patterns and images. Thus, questions about gender, identity, physical and intellectual limits, sexuality, coupling and the genesis of the individual can be addressed with and through the body. Polyexpressivity reveals the multiple, discontinued, and *living* dimensions of the flesh.⁴²

5. Conclusion

The post-human or trans-human deconstruction and alteration of the face does, in effect, *not* reintroduce human alienation. The augmentation of the role of the face by soma-techniques such as surgery, coloring or images on the face is a form of hybridization in itself, one that resolves in its own way issues of the mixing of nature and science, while at the same time posing questions about its risks and limits, about relative autonomy and issues such as TV surveillance. Ultimately, such hybridization is less a technique of perfecting than an immersion into a complex body-network – a network of and around bodies, which can be indefinitely recomposed by transversal acts of subjectivization (fig. 2). These connective subjectivities do not really place the subject within a ‹machine› (I pod, I Phone, cell phones, *Twitter*, *Facebook*) nor the ‹machine› within its body (grafts and transplants, nanorobots, implants, prostheses, chips). They rather locate the subject within a flux of subjectivized and thus ‹emancipated› body parts, with the face at the forefront (so to say), under a new paradigm of multiple variations of the self.

The contemporary body is multi-technical – and as such it defines a multi-potentiality of the face (stem cells, recalibration of body images, modification of body schemes). The current state increasingly encourages the subject to discover new modes and forms of performing identity. The ‹queer,› the ‹technotesto,› ‹doping,› ‹miscegenation,› ‹mixed gender,› ‹numerical interdisciplinarity› create new aptitudes within the subject, potentialities previously ignored, kept away and largely limited by the restrictive powers of ideological determinism and the dictate of socio-cultural habits. Hybridized immersion liberates the subject, sending it off to new territories. The appropriation of these territories reculturalizes the subject in reformulating its multiple identities. Virtual networks are our new pathways of migration; they reveal the composite, multiple and multifaceted quality, which is the beautiful mosaic of the permeable self.

Rather than becoming ultra-powerful or a heroic model, the ‹fluidity› of the hybrid face multiplies the bodily states by mixing different sensations of being (new hedonistic practices, sense of well being, self-healing, immersion into nature). It pushes the subject – forward, toward new modes of consciousness, of the self and of the others.⁴²

Annotations

- 1 Translation from French by Jeanette Kohl and Dominic Olariu. Bernard Andrieu is professor of *Epistemology of the body and corporal practices* at the Faculty of Sport at the University Henri Poincaré in Nancy; he is researcher of the group *Maladies chroniques, santé perçue et processus d'adaptation* (EA 4360 APEMAC/EPsA-Metz) and is associated member of the Joint Research Unit *Biocultural Anthropology* (UMR 6578 CNRS/EFS); bernard.andrieu@staps.uhp-nancy.fr. Silvère Lamaze is immatriculated as Master 2 in philosophy at the University of Nancy 2.
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During the last decades the face has reappeared in the labs of experimental research. This is due to a new ‘trading zone’ that has come up through the emotional turn in neuroscience. With his programmatic title *The Feeling of What Happens. Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (1999), Antonio Damasio provided the happy message that «the noticeable absence of a notion of *organism* in cognitive science and neuroscience» has come to an end because they have «finally endorsed emotion.»¹ Conversely, this ‘emotional turn’ in the neurosciences corresponds to a renewed greater status accorded to the brain in research into feelings, precisely in psychology, too.²

However, because emotions are not readily accessible to empirical methods, researching them depends on ways and instruments for grasping them indirectly. And here the face plays a prominent role as a physiological site of signifiers or indicators of emotions. Affects occupy the threshold of *soma* and *sema*, of the empirical and the semantic, of physiology and psychology, therefore its investigation touches a hot zone in the antagonism of measurement and meaning. Viewed as arousal, as physical or neuronal activities, affects can only be approached via indirect indicators such as pulse, blood pressure, hormone production and the like, while to study them as specific emotions, as phenomena of the soul or psyche, means that one must rely on interpretation – even when trying to decode the facial expression.

1. Emotions as medium between physiology and a psychological semantics

Image-generating methods at present describe the terrain of close interaction between neuro-physiology, anatomy of the brain and experimental psychology. However, due to the emphasis on the potentials of brain-imaging one often forgets that ‘neuronal maps’ do not represent emotions or feelings, but just measured and recorded brain activities that can only be endowed with meaning via secondary indicators. By means of visualization techniques, such as *Positron Emission Tomography* (PET) and *Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging* (fMRI), specific active or ‘fired’ regions of the brain are localized when the test persons undertake specific actions and intellectual activities. In addition, brain research has identified brain regions in the subcortical structures and the limbic system (*limbus* = seam)³ that are ‘responsible’ for feelings and sensations. Since then, the credo has been that cognition is not possible without emotion.

The transition between physiology and the semantics of emotions is not seldom hidden in the nomenclature chosen. For Damasio, for example, ‘feelings’ specify the subjective notice taken of changes in one’s own physical excitation; ‘emotions’ by contrast refer to distinct affect profiles: «When the body conforms to the profiles of one of those emotions we *feel* happy, sad, angry, fearful, dis-

gusted.»⁴ ‹Feeling› serves here to link a subjective physical state with the ‹profiles› of the traditional lineage of types of emotions, and is thus the medium that links physiological phenomena with culturally shaped, semantically distinct emotions. The ‹emotional profiles› refer here to the culturally codified modulation of affects that are defined as respectively distinct by means of language.

In a different context, I explored the concept of emotions/feelings as used in the contemporary neurosciences in terms of its cultural and conceptual preconditions against the background of the tradition of catalogs of affects since Aristotle, namely the shift in paradigm from *pathé* in ancient culture to *passion* in Christian societies and *sensibilité* during the 18th century.⁵ It became apparent that the current concept of ‹feeling› (or emotions) comprises the recurrence of a pathos-formula from the age of *sensibilité/sensibility*.⁶ Already in the 18th century, feeling was construed as a kind of intermediary between the poles of *sensibilité physique* and *sensibilité morale*.⁷

Today, the paradigm of ‹feeling/emotion› is located in the center of the ‹trading zone› of neurological brain research and experimental psychology – a fact, which is not least the result of an increased exchange of the development of instruments. Alongside ‹neuro-imaging›, the ‹facial gestures› – or respectively the ‹expressions of emotions› – play a key role as the physiological matrix for coding different feelings. The theoretical argument for suggesting that the movements of facial muscles can be taken as an indicator of feelings is based on the so called ‹efference-hypothesis›, according to which the stimuli of the central nervous system are passed on to the peripheral nerves of the organs. A more recent idea is the ‹facial feedback hypothesis›, assuming that ‹the control of facial expression produces parallel effects on subjective feelings.›⁸ While brain research takes the physiological ‹signs› of affects as correlates for mapping specific brain activities, psychological basic research increasingly uses neuro-imaging as a control study to identify indicators that cannot be grasped by statements of the test persons or by measuring other physiological correlates (such as pulse, blood temperature, skin temperature).⁹ The focus here is on somatic markers for specific affects (above all in the face or the autonomous nervous system). The experiments in question relate to a serious epistemological problem of neurosciences: the transition from *quantitative* practices (e.g., measuring the difference in ‹blood-oxygen level› between passive states and states of activity, called *BOLD*) to *qualitative* concepts (e.g., distinct feelings or emotions). It was exactly this incompatibility of epistemes that prompted Sigmund Freud to abandon his project of a neurological based theory of memory, in *Entwurf einer Psychologie*, and to dispense with physically localizing psychological processes.¹⁰

The very concept of the *image* in the practice of and discourse on neuro-imaging points to a complex problem, located on the interface between data iconology and data semantics. These new images may function like voyages of discovery into regions that up to recent times have remained invisible; yet what they achieve goes beyond representation and similarity. They do not depict things or occurrences, but functions, activities, features or matters recorded via specific indicators.¹¹ Only by transferring these data into mimetic images, that is into a seemingly natural, skull-shaped representation of the brain, do they gain such a suggestive power – suggesting that through them the inner labors and secrets of nature are emerging directly before our eyes. All the talk of an ‹iconic› or ‹pictorial turn› is misleading. What we are actually taking part in at present is a turn toward a visual culture *beyond im-*

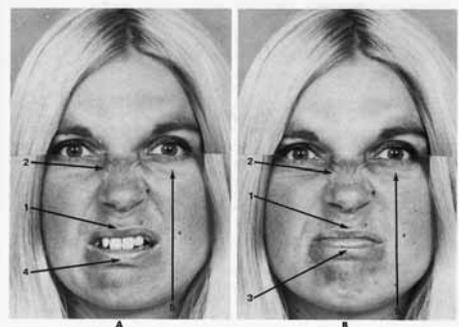
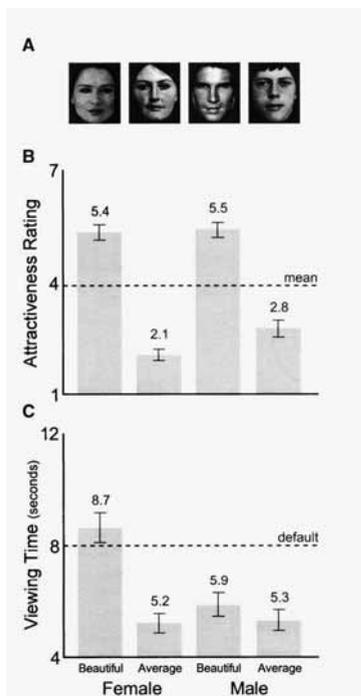
ages – namely to a point where in electronic culture script, image and numerals meet in one and the same vanishing point, in the digital recording system.

The iconic images on the user interface level conceal the fact that these new images are *ipso facto* data. In PET-technique (*Positron Emission Tomography*), active regions of the brain are visualized by injecting emission-active materials, e.g., radioactive dextrose. For fMRI (*Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging*), blood flow and oxygen activity are measured, the differences between the «normal status» (whatever its exact meaning) and the activity are computed, the data is then translated into a scale of different gray tones and finally inputted into the image of a brain.¹²

Measurements of the actions of facial muscles function exactly the opposite way.¹³ Here, the data is actually based on a physiognomic paradigm for interpretation. The key instruments of this kind of experiments include: (1) the *Facial Action Coding System (FACS)*, which classifies movements of facial muscles as an affective expression, (2) measurement and representation methods for the *Autonomous Nervous Systems (ANS)*,¹⁴ such as *Electromyography (EMG)* and computer-supported evaluation of video recordings,¹⁵ as well as (3) experiments on affective experience using visual stimuli (e.g., the *International Affective Picture System, IAPS*), combined with explicit and implicit statements by the test persons via questionnaires (e.g., *IAPS* in combination with *Self Assessment Manikin, SAM*) (fig. 1). While these experiments make use of the latest and most advanced techniques, the interpretative patterns that are quite literally inscribed into these techniques date back far into the 19th century. In the following I shall explore the development of these instruments¹⁶ to see how they organize the epistemological problem of the relation between physiological indicators and the semantic of affects, that is to say between measurement and meaning. At first I will refer to the more recent development of instruments during the last decades to analyze the underlying paradigms from a far older history of science.



1 Facial Action Coding System (FACS): Fear. See Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, *Unmasking the Face. A Guide to Recognizing Emotions from Facial Clues*, New Jersey, 1975.



2 (De-)Coding feelings or *Unmasking the Face*: Disgust in the Facial Coding System.

3 A diagram with comparative data from male and female test persons, and their brain activity in different regions of interest (ROI) when viewing images, recorded by functional magnetic resonance tomography (empirical study by a Massachusetts research team).

2. FACS – From coding facial expressions in psychology to measurement

Non-experts most likely will not find it easy to forge a link between photos from Ekman and Friesen's atlas of images of feelings published in 1975¹⁷ (from which the *Facial Action Coding System (FACS)* derives) and diagrams from a quarter of a century later, such as the empirical data from neuro-imaging from an assessment of *fMRI*, as for example provided by an article of 2001 entitled «Beautiful Faces Have Variable Reward Value. *fMRI* and Behavioral Evidence,»¹⁸ or by another group experiment from 2002 dedicated to the judgment on trustworthiness, in which both brain imaging and «facial emotional expressions» were used (fig. 2, 3).¹⁹

It is not just the list of six authors' names from five institutions (Neuroscience, Psychiatry and Psychology Departments, Center for Biomedical Imaging at Harvard and MIT) indicating that such research has entered a new era of «Big Sciences.» What is more significant here in methodological terms is that, thanks to the use of *fMRI*, the activation of different regions of the brain is measured and represented in order to combine the data with traditional instruments from experimental behavioral research (in this case a press-the-button experiment and an evaluation of images by the test participants). The experiment: Male and female test persons are shown photos of attractive faces whose attraction they (1) rate on a scale of 1–7, while (2) the time spent viewing each image (which could be varied by pressing a button) was measured and (3) brain activity, differentiated by localizing different «regions of interest,» was recorded. This way, the conscious evaluation by the test persons was correlated with an indirect indicator for interest (viewing time) and with localization of simultaneous neurological processes in the brain. While the psychologists could identify the impact of beau-

tiful faces on the test participants' attentiveness, the neurologists were able to improve their brain maps with localized specific functions; and the neuro-imaging technicians were able to test their methods. The experiment is one of the more rare examples in which the research interests of the fields involved ideally complemented one another. Often times, methods of experimental psychology are used as ancillary methods in brain research, where they are combined with neuronal maps, while conversely psychologists utilize neuro-imaging as ancillary tools to control by measurement the statements of test persons.

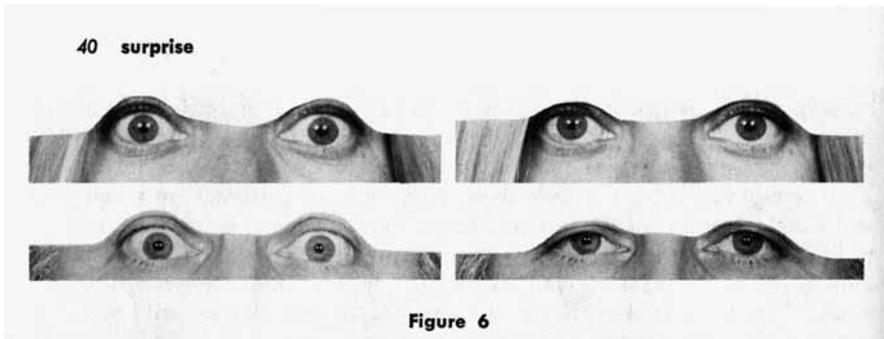
In the course of measurement techniques entering psychology, indicators of feelings were partly shifted away from visible signs interpreted by an observer to nonverbal and for the human observer almost imperceptible facial muscle movements. Like brain processes, these «covert signals» are now recorded by using «exact» methods, be it by *Electromyography (EMG)*, i.e. a technique of recording movement of the autonomous nervous system, or by computer-supported evaluation of video recordings of fast facial muscle movements such as blinking. However, since also the measurement of covert indicators ultimately refer to the same *Facial Action Coding System*, it is necessary to pay closer attention to this system and what it is.

The *Facial Action Coding System* used in all research and therapeutic contexts today is based on FACS, a system introduced in 1978: the *Facial Action Coding System* (1978) by Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen.²⁰ Therefore, in 2008 the *12th European Conference on Facial Expression* was dedicated to the celebration of 30 years of FACS. However, this manual for professional users has a forgotten predecessor. The system of reading the face was actually invented three years earlier, when both authors published a type of self-help manual offering training in reading the feelings of another person from their facial expression and controlling one's own face in front of a mirror: *Unmasking the Face. A Guide to Recognizing Emotions from Facial Clues* (1975) by Ekman and Friesen.²¹ While the main part of the book depicts facial signs of certain emotions, the authors also discuss basic scientific statements about the function and meaning of feelings and their visualization. Their underlying assumption that facial expressions are universal dates back to Charles Darwin's *Expressions of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). Although the authors, in contrast to the wide-spread notion that facial expressions are more sincere and straightforward than words, tend to believe that facial expressions can be controlled, distinguish between controlled and uncontrolled, voluntary and involuntary, true and false feelings. In distinguishing three types of signals, they describe facial expressions as a form of language with a communicative function that can be understood universally and across cultures: «The face provides three types of signals: *static* (such as skin color), *slow* (such as permanent wrinkles), and *rapid* (such as rising the eye-brows).»²² The linguistic paradigm inherent to their description of facial expressions is evident in the book's own metaphors, e.g., in the image of punctuation: «The rapid facial signals are used then to convey emotion messages and emblematic messages. They are used as *conversational punctuators*.»²³

The major part of the book consists of an atlas of images with facial expressions for six «basic emotions»: *surprise, fear, disgust, anger, happiness, sorrow*. In terms of the afore-mentioned three signal types, the photographs show that the coding system for the affects does primarily refer to the *rapid signals*, that is to physiognomic (or rather: facial) movements. The photos are the result of a remarkable scenario, as the two performing models, a scientist and an actress,

were precisely not told to mime particular feelings, but to move specific facial muscles in line with a kind of screenplay; this performance was then documented in the photos. The script of grimaces is based on a catalogue of movements, which comprises a summary of scientific knowledge on expressive gestures. For a start, the authors had compiled a tableau with statements on expressive phenomena by Charles Darwin, Duchenne de Boulogne, Ernst Huber (1931), Robert Plutchik (1962) and others: «We constructed a table which listed all the facial muscles and the six emotions, entering into the table what these men had written about which muscles were involved in what way for each emotion.» The authors had to admit that there were many gaps, «where no one had said anything about the involvement of particular muscle in a particular emotion,» gaps which they then filled themselves.²⁴ Four experiments were conducted to test the list of facial muscle movements: two in which they correlated the movements to other indicators of subjective experiences of feelings; and two others in which the focus was on assessing the social validity of the expression in communicative situations. The book devotes one chapter to each of the basic emotions and describes the facial movements, sub-divided into three areas: (1) eyebrows/forehead; (2) eyes, (3) lower half of the face with mouth and lip movements, and ends with a chapter paying tribute to its character as a self-help manual dedicated to «checking your own facial expression.»²⁵ The intensity of the facial movements is taken as the key indicator for deviation from the «normal» state. In order to prove the significance of the individual movements, the authors made photomontages combining image sections of all three regions. In this way, phantom images were created – in the literal technical sense of police Identikit pictures. Ekman and Friesen’s coding system for facial movements thus claims to be an atlas of images of basic emotions, whereas a media-theoretical and semiotically informed analysis makes clear that the images are the result of a montage. In summary, it can be said that FACS actually is the product of combining (1) a tableau of historical scientific knowledge of presumed physiognomic codes with (2) photographic recordings of their embodiment acted out by living models and (3) an *ars combinatoria* of physiognomic signifiers of the three sections of the face. This concept is in line with a traditional iconography of the face (fig. 4).

The physiognomic paradigm of the coding of emotions is – *qua palimpsest* – also present in those sets of instruments that were developed in the wake of FACS. In many empirical techniques developed after FACS the emphasis is, above



4 Phantom images or the *ars combinatoria* of FACS: pairs of eyes showing surprise.

all, on trying to eliminate the element of interpretation, namely the human observer who is defined as a «subjective factor» or a «sensitivity problem» and believed to disturb «objective» procedures: «This «sensitivity problem» has been diminished by the use of facial electromyography (EMG),» claim L. G. Tassinary and J. T. Cacioppo in their article on «Unobservable facial actions and emotions.»²⁶

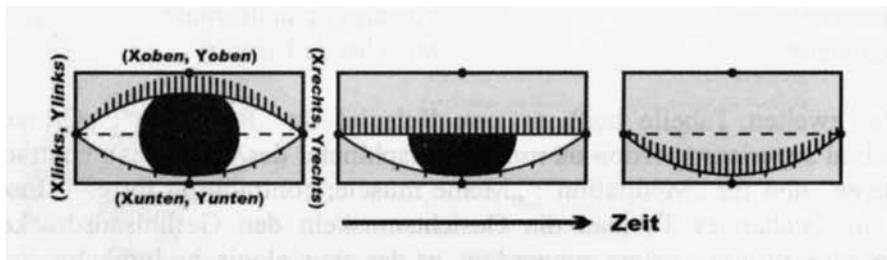
When replacing the iconography and semiotics of facial expressive movements by *Electromyography* a double shift takes place. Concerning the indicators, this means a shift away from visible «overt facial expressions» to the «covert somatic actions» of the facial muscles; concerning the recording technology, this means a shift away from photographic representation of physiognomic signs to a technical measuring, which records those physiological movements that are invisible on the outside. By means of *EMG* the activity of the skin, tissue and muscles of the face are recorded and measured even before they can be perceived by the eye.

Thus, by means of *EMG* scientists attempt to address a level prior to the modification of lines, folds, and shapes in the face that can be interpreted as a code, and in this way they seek to trace the emergence of expressive gestures in *statu nascendi*:

Overt facial expressions are the result of varied and specific movements of the facial skin and connective tissues caused by the contradiction of facial muscles. These movements create folds, lines, and wrinkles in the skin and the movement of *facial landmarks*, such as brows and corners of the mouth. Although muscle activation must occur if these facial actions are to be achieved, muscle action potentials in the face can occur in the absence of any overt facial action if the activation of the muscles is weak or very transient or if the overt response is aborted sufficiently early in the facial action. Methods designed to *measure* the muscle action potentials (rather than the overt effects of the muscle action potentials) can provide a more complete record of the facial response throughout its entire dynamic range.²⁷

Besides *EMG*, video recordings of facial expressions provide another instrument of measuring the rapid signals of facial movements. Whereas *EMG* is more suitable to detect the covert facial movement, the transient movement can be analyzed by computer-supported analyses of video-recorded faces, as for example in an experiment on «Automatic Recognition of Eye Blinking in Spontaneously Occurring Behavior (fig. 5).»²⁸

The objective of such measurement is to detect «unique *signatures* for specific emotions.»²⁹ In this way, the observer position is indeed avoided; yet the facial action retains its status as the code of a catalogue of emotions, as is highlighted by the metaphor «*signatures*.» The epistemic object has shifted from the lines and folds of *facial landmarks* whose status as a code is obvious, to the finer *signatures* whose



5 FACS! Measuring «FACS-units» through video recordings: *Eye action classification*.

semantic nature disappears as measuring techniques become more and more advanced. This substitution of interpretation by exact methods does not generate measured facial landmarks³⁰ but instead a sort of *seismography* of the «autonomous nervous system,» a notation system of involuntary actions of the face's muscles.

Yet, when technology attempts to throw the paradigm of interpretation overboard, it does not mean that the observer's position really disappears: Instead it is sublated in the physiological nomenclature of the anatomy of the face – sublated in the Hegelian sense of «retained» and «elided» – while the observer in question is one of 19th-century experiments. And indeed, the nomenclature of the individual muscles of the face dates back to Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne de Boulogne's *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine ou Analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions* (1862), where the face is described as a tableau of physiologically localized signs of feelings, and the names given to the individual muscles are derived from the feelings that they express on the surface of the face.

3. Physiognomic semiotics and anatomical nomenclature

The experimental electrophysiology of Duchenne de Boulogne, using electric stimuli to trigger contractions of the test persons' facial muscles, which were then taken as a «language of passions,» with the prompted facial movements and distortions recorded photographically, created an immediate connection of electricity and photography. His image atlas with the electro-photographically produced *expressions des passions* is part of an experimental culture, which forced through its use of recording techniques the rise of empirical methods and the victory march of the natural sciences at the end of the 19th century. And, similar to nowadays, it was already motivated by the wish to eliminate both language and the observer from scientific research. This shows just how strong the phantasm of a knowledge independent of language has driven and accompanied the development of experimental research and the norm of exact methods – while we can nevertheless discern a persistent reference to language both in the concept of a «language of the passions» and in the diverse alphabetical and semiotic metaphors used by Duchenne to describe facial expressions.

Duchenne's project goes back to Buffon's description of the human face as a «*tableau vivant*» – «Lorsque l'âme est agitée, la face humaine devient un tableau vivant» –, in particular when investigating the laws that rule expressions of human physiognomy by studying its muscle activity.³¹ These facial movements were conceptualised as a «language.» This is obvious in his declared objective to provoke contractions in the muscles of the face by electric stimuli «pour leur faire parler le langage des passions et des sentiments,» and to photograph this «language.» His photographic recordings concentrated on «les lignes expressives de la face pendant la contraction électrique de ses muscles.» The result was described by Duchenne as an «*orthographe de la physionomie en mouvement.*» He took up Buffon's concepts of *trait* and *caractère* – the facial *traits* as the expression of each and every movement of the soul and the *character* as an expression of each of its actions – and condensed them to «traits caractéristique,» – which means that the traits themselves become the characteristic signs. Duchenne thus reformulates the *tableau vivant* of the face as a tableau of signs whose expressive lines form the orthography of a physiognomy in movement (fig. 6).



6 Duchenne de Boulogne's anatomy of the facial muscles as a physiological semiotics of affects: equation of the nomenclature of the muscles and the semantics of the emotions

Duchenne's *Physionomie humaine* gains the quality of an exact method by dint of the fact that he (1) constructs an anatomy of facial muscles,³² conceptualized as a mean of expression, and (2) compiles a tableau of distinct *expressions*, which are distinguished both according to the muscles involved and to the intensity of their movements. This system functions via mutual attribution: In a «tableau synoptique,» he directly links the individual muscles to a list of movements denoting feelings and attributes them to certain zones of the face; conversely in a «tableau synoptique,» he presents a list of *expressions* linked to muscle movements by the different zones of the face.³³

In the second table we read, for example, under «reflection:» «Orbiculaire palpébral supérieur (portion du muscle dit sphincter des paupières); contraction modérée;» and for «meditation:» «Même muscle; contraction forte.»³⁴ His table thus offers an ideal coding system, in which the nomenclature of the muscles («muscle de l'agression,» «muscle de la douleur» or «muscle du pleurer») has the emotions represented by anatomy, without any detour, translation or disfiguration. As a result, the physiognomic markers function as clear signs of the affects. Since the anatomical nomenclature of the face invented by Duchenne remains valid up to this day, modern experimental psychology has inherited its simple interrelation between anatomy and meaning, including the indifference toward a distinction between *traces* and *signs*. It is, to a high extent, the anatomical nomenclature that enables the «problem of coding» to be forgotten and that contributes to the new measuring techniques being associated with the assumption that the

factor of interpretation could be excluded. When the underlying semiotic paradigm becomes invisible in recording techniques such as *EMG*, then the problem of semiotic constitution disappears in the phantasm of exact methods and the entire problem of a grammatology of feelings is being concealed, covered up.

However, against the horizon of a «grammatology» one might recall Derrida's maxim: «The trace must be thought before the entity [étant].»³⁵ This maxim calls to our attention especially those processes, which generate a specific semiotic system and its laws, which produce distinct meanings by producing «differences.» If we apply such a thought to the meaning of expressive movements/actions, then we have to focus on the threshold of translation between the physiological processes/somatic markers and the semantics of feelings, i.e., precisely that threshold which is at the heart of neuroscientific research into emotions.

4. Representation of the face – between sign, trace and image

In video recordings or *Electromyography* used to get evidence of facial actions otherwise not discernible to the human eye, this threshold is present in the form of a classificatory and a temporal difference: between the *still* invisible or the «covert signals» and the *already* visible, the «overt signals,» or as the difference between the volatile and the distinct movements, say of the eyelids and lips. This difference coincides with advances in the instruments used within empirical methods, a shift from interpreting to measuring. From the perspective of art studies and the theory and history of images, this transition corresponds to the relationship of material traces and iconography in images of the face: a relationship that touches the core of what the human image is. In fact, it addresses the very origin of Western iconography as discussed for example in Hans Belting's instructive study of the early images of Christ with the telling title «Face or trace.»³⁶ Belting describes the genesis of Christian iconography in terms of the complex transition from the corporeal remains of Christ's face in the «Veronica» to the pictorial representation of the face in countless paintings of Christ as *vera icon* (fig. 7).

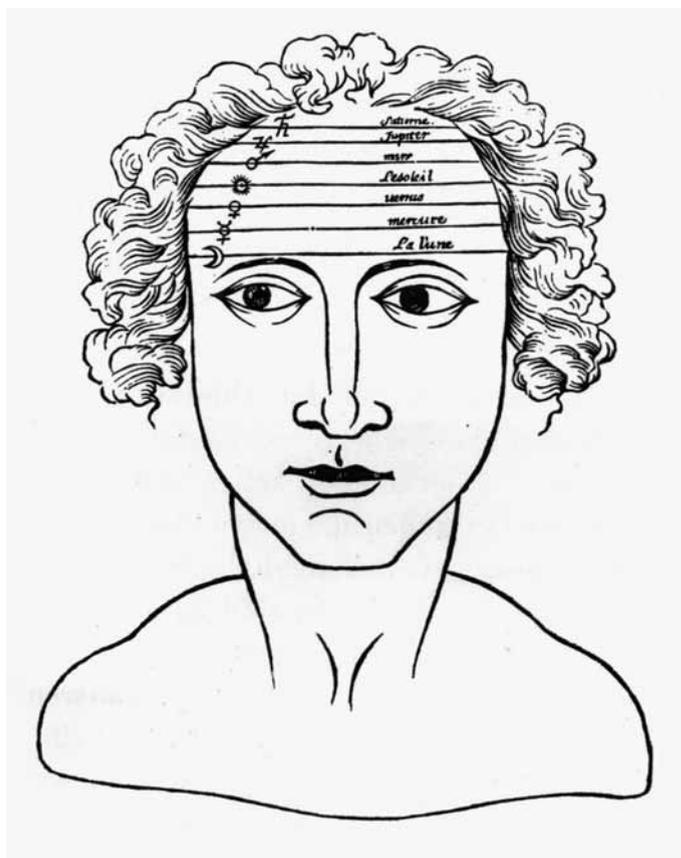
The transition from the material remnants presented to the viewer as testimony to the painted face of Christ entails the transformation of traces into the depiction of a person. What we witness here is a primordial scene in the Western concept of the image, the genesis of the iconic images. This picture is indebted structurally to the image in the form of a corporeal depiction being superimposed over those traces that preceded it. Concerning Peirce's distinction between three different types of images – icon, index, symbol – this means, that it makes no sense to analyze to which of these types a single picture belongs. Instead it is necessary to dynamize or temporalize his theory, that is to closer analyze the moments of transition between different forms of visual representations.

The same constellation between traces and iconographical depictions that constitutes the *vera icon* paradigm underlies all physiognomy, while its history developed the other way: with a shift from outer to inner actions, from static to fleeting lines and from signs to measured traces. All physiognomic concepts share their aim to understand the movements of the human face as a coding system, a conventionalized and decipherable semiotic system that corresponds to a list of affects or character traits.

When, in his book *Metoscopia* (1558) Girolamo Cardano sets himself the task of reading from the lines of a forehead, it is still obvious from his reference to the «lines



7 Master of Saint Veronica, *Saint Veronica with the Sudarium*, ca. or after 1425, painting on wood, 78,1 × 48,2 cm, Munich, Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, inv. 11866.



8 The emergence of physiognomy from the interpretation of facial lines as signs of character: Girolamo Cardano, *Metoscopie*, 1558.

and characters» of the face that physiognomy arises from an interpretation of those traits that shape the face and render it legible as a type or sign: the birth of physiognomy from the character in the double sense (fig. 8).³⁷ In the wake of this idea, the face became the «cabbalist center» of anthropology (see J.F. Helveticus, 1660).³⁸ And in the *Conférence sur l'Expression Générale et Particulière des Passions* (1687) by Charles Le Brun, the idea to read from the face was linked with the project to create a catalogue of affects. The faces in his drawings, distorted to the point of being unrecognizable, form a typology of «les passions:» *la colère* (rage), *le désir* (desire), *l'horreur* (fear), *la frayeur* (fright). In his explanations, Le Brun addresses that interaction of brain and face, which defines the model of research on feelings today (fig. 9):

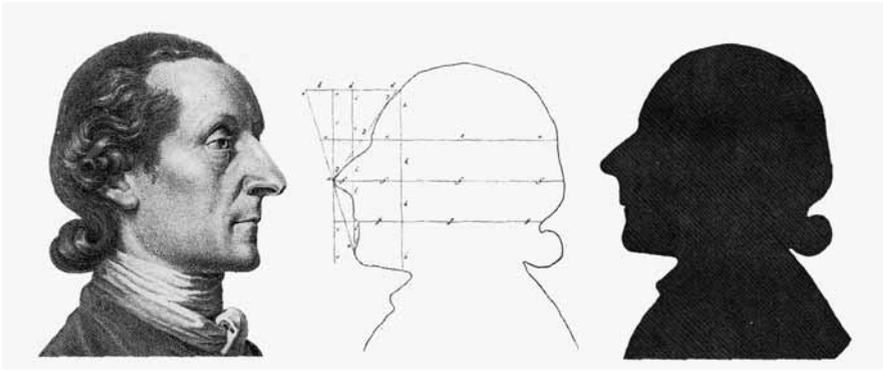
If it is true that there is a part of the body in which the soul is directly active, and if that is the brain, then we can likewise say that the face is the part of the body in which what it feels allows itself to be seen particularly clearly. [...] The muscles only move thanks to the nerves ..., the nerves first become active owing to the spirits contained in the cavities of the brain, and the brain receives these spirits specifically through the blood that constantly flows through the brain, where it is warmed and diluted such that a certain, very fine air arises that enters the brain and fills it out.³⁹



9 Charles Le Brun (1687), tableau with expressions of passions.

It was, in the first place, the moralization of the physiognomic model in the age of sensibility that developed the art of interpretation, which then turned physiognomy into a study of human character, with the goal of «discerning from someone's face/gestures and shape whether they were of a good or bad disposition,» as Johann Heinrich Praetorius puts it in his *Physiognomicum* (1715).⁴⁰ Then, with J.G. Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775), the interpretations of the forms and features of the face became that project of «fostering a knowledge of humanity,» namely the «ability to discern from a person's outward appearance his inner life, that which is not directly open to the senses, by means of a natural expression.»⁴¹ The physiognomic code, be it the basis of the traits and characters of the soul or the list of affects and expressions of emotions, thus focuses on deciphering the meanings associated with the face's physiological features (fig. 10). This concept even underlies those procedures in experimental psychology that today seek to avoid interpretations and to eliminate the «subjective factor,» measuring physiological indicators or «FACS units» instead.

Comparable problems of representation are to be found in the history of images of the brain.⁴² Unlike the *face*, the representation of the *brain* does not in-



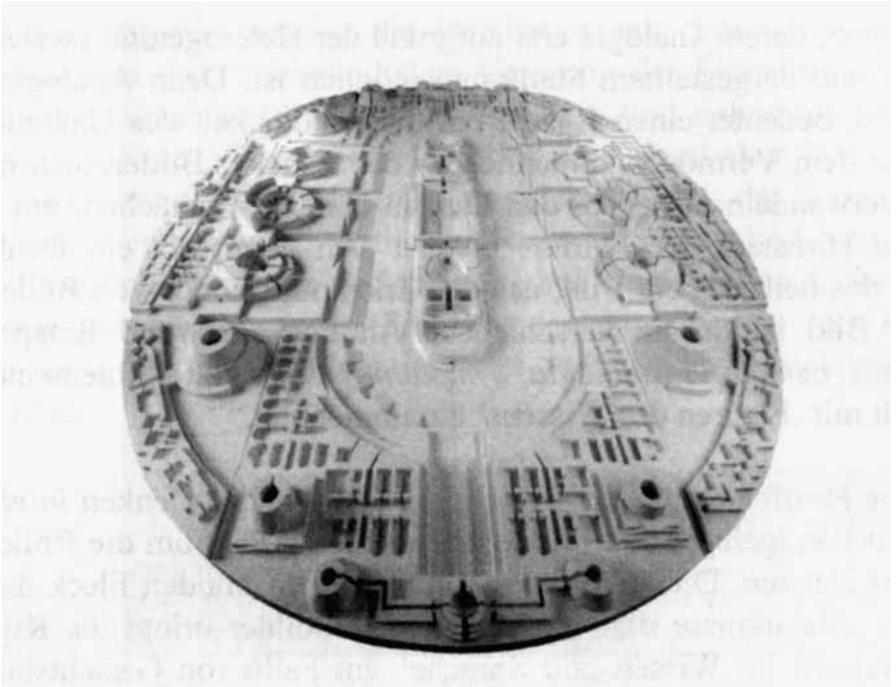
10 Coding of silhouette and permanent facial traits in order to determine character: Lavater (1775).

volve the problem of translating corporeal traces into signs, yet it does involve the problem of bridging the link, not accessible to empirical observation, between the behavioral sphere (actions, verbalization, affects) and the neurological processes (brain anatomy), i.e. that of the so-called 'black box.' To summarize: The material culture of research into emotions is shaped by a complementary, inverse constellation: by data appearing in the guise of images (brain-imaging and other image-generating techniques) and by recording techniques whose physiognomic interpretative paradigm is masked by measurement methods (*EMG*, electronic evaluation of videos).

5. Images of the brain and face in contemporary art

Interpretations of brainmaps and of 'facial emotional expressions' not only play a central role in the above-described array of empirical-research instruments; their pictures have long since seeped into the public sphere to become mass-medial icons. Against the background of this development the question emerges of how brain and face are treated in contemporary art and whether – or in what way – artistic insight into their significance differs from scientific insight. In what follows, I shall comment on some examples in which artists make use of images of brain and face, from either the iconographic or scientific repertoire. Let us first look at an image of the brain – a model of the *Mnemosyne* project of artists Anne and Patrick Poirier (fig. 11).

Created in 1991, the model has the title *Mnemosyne, first Excavation*. It represents an oval bas relief in whose surface structure both the form of a human brain and the topography of a city can be recognized. But no identity or similarity between the two is being asserted here;⁴³ it is rather the manner in which topography functions as a medium for complex processes of translation between cognitive space and external space – or, put differently: topography as a figure mediating between intelligible and spatial orientation. The artificial similarity between city and brain does not imply any identity. It presents itself as the figure of a correspondence whose analogy is only possible on the basis of the heterogeneity of cerebral physiology and represented urban space. As Barbara Stafford has observed, analogy signifies a struggle over the similarity of what is dissimilar⁴⁴ – comparable to the capacity of verbal or visual images to appropriate the



11 Topography as a conceptualization of cerebral and urban images: Anne and Patrick Poirier, *Mnemosyne*, 1991.

outer world or to adapt themselves to things in a process of re-appropriation. In this way, the Poiriers' cerebral city proves to be a conceptual image par excellence, which is to say: an image reflecting the perceptive mode of images. And symbolic forms have played a prominent role already in the founding process of cities and urban structures.⁴⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, in referring to Foucault's *The Order of Things*, puts it as follows: «The image is the general notion, ramified in various specific similitudes (*convenientia*, *aemulatio*, *analogia*, *sympathia*), that holds the world together with «figures of knowledge.»»⁴⁶

While brain research works with images that pretend to represent thinking *in vivo*, the Poiriers' artistic work revolves around the role of images within the process of thinking. Now as before, this question constitutes a blind spot in scientific research and knowledge. In the case of images of the brain, art thus allows an area of non-knowledge within scientific knowledge to «speak.» By contrast, in the case of images of the face, we can observe that many artistic works operate exactly on the same threshold where empirical research is relevant: the threshold where the significations of physiological traces emerge as expressive gestures. This is the locus of the transition from silence to speech, from corporeal movements to the semantics of feeling, from subjective impulses to communicative coding.

Jochen Gerz's installation in the *Museum am Ostwall* in Dortmund, entitled *The Gift*, consists of 700 photo-portraits comprising a physiognomic picture-atlas; covering the museum's walls, it enacts the development of an archive (fig. 12). Within the archive, the serial of individual likenesses form the body of a popula-



12 The corpus of a physiognomic photo-atlas, generated from various images: Jochen Gerz, *The Gift*, 2000.

tion. While, on first glance, the installation appears to represent something like a 'collective memory,' the myth of unity evoked by this idea is at the same time punctured and infiltrated by the process of the installation's production, which traces the portrait's complexity, disunity, and heterogeneous origin: The 'building' of the archive went along with a photo-exchange project, so that the public photo-atlas is at the same time a scattered private one.⁴⁷ As the installation operates with the transition between the different, non-uniform origins of the individual images and their formation into a serial archive of passport and mug shots, its iconography points to the closeness between demography and governmental administration of personal data. The installation thus plays with the circulation of medial pictures in a multiple exchange constellation, that is, of public space and privacy, individual and social body, visibility and invisibility. As such, the installation renders visible the disappearance of what is foreign within the shadow of what is private – and thus addresses the flip side of the public image and so-called 'collective memory'.

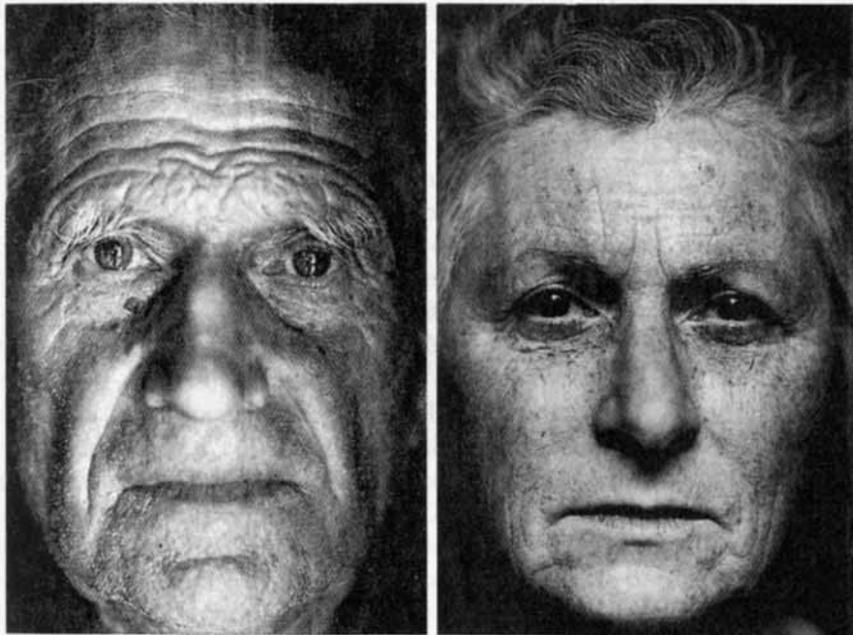
Images of various faces also form the material for Jochen Gerz's film *Die kleine Zeit vor der Antwort* (*The Small Time Before Responding*). The film presents faces of a



13 Jochen Gerz, *Die kleine Zeit vor der Antwort*, 2001.

special sort: caught in the moment preceding response to a specific request, that is, in the brief time before speaking – before emotion has formed itself into distinct expression (fig. 13). The silence and expressions of the faces thus capture precisely the unnoticeable or hardly noticeable movements preceding expressive physiognomic gestures. Clearly distinct from the electromyographic recording of ‘covert’ or involuntary facial gestures in experimental psychology, what is involved here is not an effort to exclude so-called subjective factors but rather to foreground them. The film, as it were, extracts silence out of a debate’s verbal flow – what was asked from the people in the film was a statement about the controversy over plans for the *Holocaust Monument* in Berlin. In this way it underscores just those moments of hesitation that usually vanish during the act of communication. Hence what is at stake here is rendering visible the affective traces preceding the code of discourse, exactly those ‘covert signals’ experimental research hopes to identify with the help of measuring the movements of facial muscles. But in focusing on recording ‘unique signatures for specific emotions,’ such research possibly fails to grasp the very moment of hesitation and indistinctness preceding and making possible, in the first place, the distinct meanings of the ‘physiognomic code.’

A yet more obvious limitation of empirical research on feeling emerges from its own matrix, the *Facial Action Coding System*, which only addresses the universals of physiognomy, the six (or more) so-called basic feelings. Although in art history portrait iconography presides over a far more complex and differentiated repertoire of expressive gestures,⁴⁸ this pictorial archive itself is not able to cover the broad range of traces that are engraved and inscribed into human faces. There exist traces of life and memory speaking an entirely different language – neither that of the muscular movement preceding expressive gestures



Wenn Augen sprechen: Zuei der Überlebenden des Massakers von Sant'Anna di Stazzema

Foto: Kataloe

14 Traces beyond language: photos of survivors of massacres in the exhibition *I Bambini Ricordano*, 2003.

nor that of the moment of hesitation participating in the discourse's formation and accompanying it as a sign, traces that have never been translated into language and will never enter communication.

Such mnemonic traces, representing language's «other», are visible in the facial features of individuals whose photos are displayed in an exhibition by Oliviero Toscani entitled *I Bambini Ricordano*, located in Sant'Anna di Stazzema – a village in the Apuan Alps near the Tuscan coast in the province of Lucca (fig. 14). The photos are of the few survivors of a massacre carried out by the Nazis in the village on August 12, 1944, in the course of which nearly all its inhabitants were murdered. Traces of the horror are inscribed in the faces, the folds and furrows of these survivors, who at the time were between two and eighteen years old: mnemonic traces located outside traditional affective catalogues and physiognomic sign systems.

This extreme example can serve as a conclusion. It may suggest how far more complex the affective meaning of facial traits really is, and how far more difficult to decipher than the semantics of feeling and the physiognomic encoding captured in various recording, decoding, and measurement processes, however «precise» these may be.

Annotations

1 Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens. Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, London 2000, p. 40.

2 There is an ancient tradition of locating the soul in the brain that was reanimated around 1800 by Soemmering and Gall and triggered a «change in perspective from the organ of the soul to the brain,» see Michael Hagner, *Geniale Gehirne. Zur Geschichte der Eliteforschung*, Göttingen 2004, above all chapter 2. In psycho-physics around 1900 the brain again played a key role in researching the «movements of the emotions,» among others in the work of Wilhelm Wundt. See Wilhelm Wundt, *Philosophische Studien*, 21 vol, Leipzig 1883–1902, vol. 6, 1891).

3 For an exact account of this system (the amygdala, hippocampus, etc.) see Gerhard Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit. Kognitive Neurobiologie und ihre philosophischen Konsequenzen*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, chapter 9, p. 178–212. See also Joseph Le Doux, *The Emotional Brain*, New York 1996; Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World. An Introduction to the Neuroscience of Subjective Experience*, New York 2002.

4 Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, New York 1995, p. 149.

5 In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle resorts to pleasure/pain to describe how the affects function like a matrix of affect modulation, while construing their exact profile in terms of a classificatory series: «By the emotions, I mean desire, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendship, hatred, longing, jealousy, pity; and generally those states of consciousness which are accompanied by pleasure or pain.» Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. Harris Rackham, Hertfordshire 1996, book 2, chapter 5, p. 38.

6 Sigrid Weigel, «Pathos – Passion – Gefühl. Schauplätze affekttheoretischer Verhandlungen in Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte,» in: id., *Literatur als Voraussetzung der Kulturgeschichte. Schauplätze von Shakespeare bis Benjamin*, Munich 2004, p. 147–172.

7 See Frank Baasner, *Der Begriff der «sensibilität» im 18. Jahrhundert. Aufstieg und Niedergang eines Ideals*, Heidelberg 1988.

8 Andreas Hennenlotter, Christian Dresel, Florian Castorp, Andres O. Ceballos-Baumann, Afra M. Wohlschläger, Bernhard Haslinger, «The Link between Facial Feedback and Neural Activity within Central Circuitries of Emotion – New Insights from Botulinum Toxin-Induced Denervation of Frown Muscles,» in: *Cerebral Cortex*, 2008, vol. 19, issue 3, p. 537–542.

9 See studies such as Robert F. Simons, Benjamin H. Detenber, Thomas M. Roedema and

Jason E. Reiss, «Emotion Processing in Three Systems. The Medium and the Message,» in: *Psychophysiology*, 1999, vol. 36, p. 619–627; Karen L. Schmidt, Jeffrey F. Cohn and Yingli Tian, «Signal Characteristics of Spontaneous Facial Expressions. Automatic Movement in Solitary and Social Smiles,» in: *Biological Psychology*, 2003, vol. 65, p. 49–66.

10 It was Sigmund Freud who extensively discussed the transition from the quantitative, neuronal paradigm and the «quality problems» from the epistemological and methodological points of view, in his attempt to develop a scientific theory of memory. See Sigmund Freud, «Entwurf einer Psychologie (1895),» in: *Gesammelte Werke. Nachtragsband. Texte aus den Jahren 1885–1938*, ed. by Angela Richards with the assistance of Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, Frankfurt am Main 1987. For an English translation see Sigmund Freud, «A Project for a Scientific Psychology,» in: id., *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, (The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud), 24 vol., 1953–1974, vol. 1 (1886–1899), London 1966, p. 283–387.

11 Examples from different disciplines are to be found in *Mit dem Auge denken. Strategien der Sichtbarmachung in wissenschaftlichen und virtuellen Welten*, ed. by Bettina Heintz and Jörg Huber, Zurich 2001. On the position of image-generating methods in the context of the active role of visual and linguistic images in knowledge see also Sigrid Weigel, «Bilder als Hauptakteure auf dem Schauplatz der Erkenntnis. Zur poiesis und episteme sprachlicher und visueller Bilder,» in: *Ästhetik Erfahrung*, ed. by Jörg Huber, Zurich 2004 (Interventionen, vol. 13), p. 191–212.

12 This is just to offer a simple description; the actual procedure is of course much more detailed and complicated.

13 For a survey see Andreas Hennenlotter, *Neural Systems for Recognising Emotion from Facial Expression*, PDF dissertation, Regensburg University, 2005, <http://www.opus-bayern.de/uniregensburg/volltexte/2005/544/> (January 27, 2012).

14 See Paul Ekman, Robert W. Levenson and Wallace V. Friesen, «Autonomic Nervous System Activity Distinguishes Among Emotions,» in: *Science, New Series*, 1983, vol. 221, no. 4616 (September 16, 1983), p. 1208–1210.

15 For example, Louis G. Tassinary and John T. Cacioppo, «Unobservable Facial Actions and Emotion,» in: *Psychological Science*, 1992, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 28–33.

16 I would like to thank psychologist Andreas Keil (University of Constance) for references and data on the instruments used in experimental psychology.

- 17 Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, *Unmasking the Face. A Guide to Recognizing Emotions from Facial Clues*, New Jersey 1975.
- 18 Itzak Aharon, Nancy Etcoff, Dan Ariely, Christopher F. Chabris, Ethan O'Connor and Hans C. Breiter, «Beautiful Faces Have Variable Reward Value. fMRI and Behavioral Evidence,» in: *Neuron*, 2001, vol. 32 (November 8), p. 537–551. See also Elizabeth A. Phelps, Kevin J. O'Connor, William A. Cunningham, E. Sumie Funayama, J. Christopher Gatenby, John C. Gore and Mahzarin R. Banaji: «Performance on Indirect Measure of Race Evaluation Predicts Amygdala Activation,» in: *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 2000, vol. 12, p. 729–738.
- 19 J.S. Winston, B.A. Strange, J. O'Doherty, R.J. Dolan, «Automatic and Intentional Brain Responses During Evaluation of Trustworthiness of Faces,» in: *Nature Neuroscience*, 2002, vol. 5, issue 3, p. 277–283.
- 20 Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, *The Facial Action Coding System. A Technique for the Measurement of Facial Movement*, Palo Alto 1978.
- 21 Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1975. For an advancement of their system see Ekman/Friesen 1978 (as in note 20); and Paul Ekman, «Facial Expressions of Emotion. New Findings, New Questions,» in: *Psychological Science*, 1992, vol. 3, issue 1, p. 34–38.
- 22 Ekman/Friesen 1975 (as in note 20), p. 10. Italics by the author.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 13. Italics by the author.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- 26 Tassinari/Cacioppo 1992 (as in note 15), p. 28.
- 27 *Ibid.* Italics by the author.
- 28 Tsuyoshi Moriyama, Takeo Kanade and Jeffrey F. Cohn, «Automatic Recognition of Eye Blinking in Spontaneously Occurring Behavior,» in: *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference on Pattern Recognition (ICPR 2002)*, conference Québec City, Los Alamitos 2002, p. 78–81.
- 29 Tassinari/Cacioppo 1992 (as in note 15), p. 30. Italics by the author.
- 30 As created, for example, through the use of biometrics around 1900, e.g., with the method of «geometric identification» developed by M. Mathews. See Milos Vec, *Die Spur des Täters. Methoden der Identifikation in der Kriminalistik (1879–1933)*, Baden-Baden 2002; Susanne Regener, *Fotografische Erfassung. Zur Geschichte medialer Konstruktionen des Kriminellen*, Munich 1999.
- 31 Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne de Boulogne, *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine ou Analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions* (1862), Paris 1876, préface; this and the following quotations p. XI–XII.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 1–4.
- 33 *Ibid.*, *Considerations générales*, p. 42–47.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 35 Jacques Derrida, *Grammatology*, Baltimore/London, 1997, p. 47.
- 36 Belting suggests that the image of Christ is unlike the image types known in Classical Antiquity, as it is neither the image of a dead, absent body like in traditional funerary images, nor does it fit into the line of images of Gods, of non-visible, supernatural, non-corporeal deities. Instead, the image of Christ has to refer to the enigmatic status of a mortal and yet resurrected body, of which there can be no representation, while the traces left by the dead body serve as the only documentation. Belting reads the project of turning these traces into an image of Christ's face as the enigma inherent to the image of Christ, which epitomizes the contradictions of Christianity itself. See Hans Belting, «Face or Trace? Open Question around the Prehistory of Christ's Icon,» in: *Chrysay pylai. Essays Presented to Ihor Ševcenko on his Eightieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students*, 2 vol, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 2002, vol. 1, p. 1–10.
- 37 This and the following quotations are taken from Elisabeth Madlener, «Ein kabbalistischer Schauplatz. Die physiognomische Seelenerkundung,» in: *Wunderblock. Eine Geschichte der modernen Seele*, ed. by Jean Clair, Cathrin Pichler and Wolfgang Pircher, exhib. cat., Vienna, Wiener Festwochen – Messepalast Wien, 1989, p. 159–179. Translations by Christine Kutschbach.
- 38 Iohannes Fridericus Helveticus, *Amphitheatrum Physiognomiae Medicum oder Runder Schauplatz der Artzeneyschen Gesichtskunst*, Heidelberg 1669, p. 11.
- 39 Charles Le Brun, *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière des passions* (1687), Verona 1751, p. 6–8. Translation from German.
- 40 Johann Heinrich Praetorius, *Physiognomicum*, Hamburg 1715, title page.
- 41 Johann Caspar Lavater, *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (1775), Stuttgart 1984, p. 21. Translation by Jeremy Gaines.
- 42 See Michael Hagner, «Hirnbilder. Cerebrale Repräsentationen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,» in: *Der Entzug der Bilder. Visuelle Realitäten*, ed. by Michael Wetzell and Herta Wolf, Munich 1994, p. 147.
- 43 For a discussion of the hypothesis of a similarity between the architecture of brain and city see, for example, Wolf Singer, *Der Beobachter im Gehirn*, Frankfurt am Main 2002, p. 200–210. Singer sees both analogies – through the assumption of fractal structures – and differences. One misunderstanding emerging in the reception of the Poiriers' cerebral city-model stems from the initial assumption that the model postulates an analogy between brain and city, then introducing scientific counter-

guments. See, e.g. the historian Egon Flaig, in an essay entitled «Spuren des Ungeschehenen. Warum die bildende Kunst der Geschichtswissenschaft nicht helfen kann» («Traces of What has not Transpired. Why Graphic Art Cannot Help the Historical Sciences»), in: *Archäologie zwischen Imagination und Wissenschaft. Anne und Patrick Poirier*, ed. by Bernhard Jussen, Göttingen 1999, p. 16–50. Interestingly, Flaig's plea for an ineluctable difference between those two realms is based on a misjudgment regarding their different modes of cognition and representation. For art objects do not lay claim to any explanation of how the brain or social memory function. Rather, they reflect the symbolic form of the relevant topography, which has been made use of in both the physiology of the brain (see the anatomical and neurological topography of cerebral regions) and in cultural memory, as approached in historical scholarship.

44 See Barbara Stafford, *Visual Analogy. Consciousness as the Art of Connecting*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1999.

45 See chapter 12 on topography as a cultural technique in the history of cities in Sigrid Weigel, *Literatur als Voraussetzung der Kulturgeschichte. Schauplätze von Shakespeare bis Benjamin*, Munich 2004, p. 248–284.

46 William J. Thomas Mitchell, *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago 1986, p. 11.

47 To explain this more in detail: Over a five-day period in August 2000, visitors to an exhibition in Dortmund's Zeche Zollern (a closed down coal mine now functioning as an industrial museum) were asked to let themselves be photographed. While a collection of almost 5000 photos – always taken from the same angle – gradually grew on the other museum's walls, the regional paper published the portrait collection's continuous history. The title *The Gift* is a play on the fact that in turn for leaving their own portraits to the collection, each of the photographed visitors received the photo of another visitor. Through this pairing with a «stranger» the collection now mounted in the Museum am Ostwall is tied symbolically to another collection scattered in innumerable private homes.

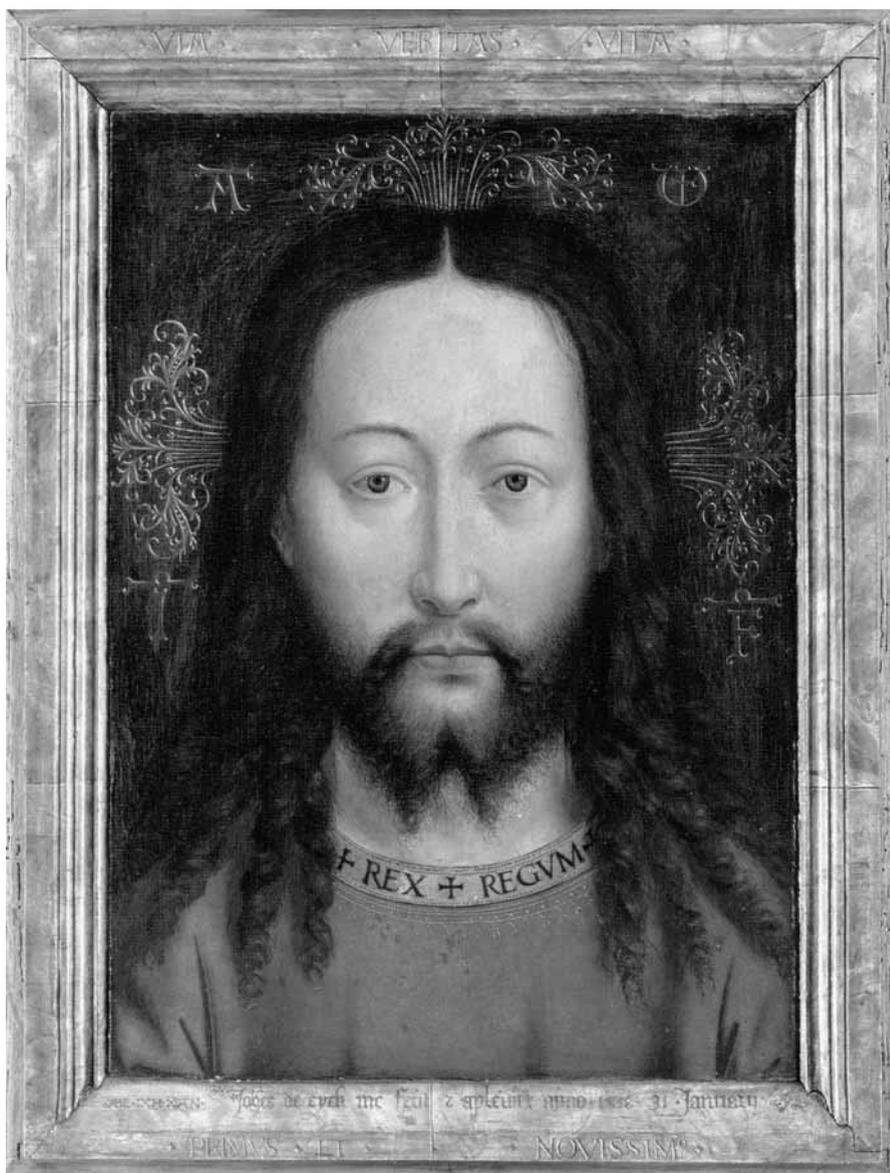
48 See for example *Das Antlitz des Deutschen in fünf Jahrhunderten Malerei*, ed. by Rudolf Kässner, Frankfurt am Main 1980.

1. Vestigium, or the imprint's dialectic

What is a ‹Holy Face› (fig. 1)? Reducing this problematic field to a cultural region (Byzantium or Rome) or even a historical period (the Middle Ages or the Renaissance) by no means simplifies the terms of the question. There is in each particular ‹Holy Face› a dense knot of references (Byzantine references in a Roman object, for example) and heterogeneous temporalities (medieval temporality in an object of the Renaissance, for example). Like any ‹prototypical› image of Christianity, like any image close to an incarnational dynamic, the ‹Holy Face› – each time again – is a critical image and a dialectical image: an image endowed with a dual economy, an image tangled up in seemingly insurmountable contradictions – but for that very reason exciting, powerful, fertile.² Among these contradictions, undoubtedly the most evident one concerns the specific character of the abyss – an abyss separating what a ‹Holy Face› is (*or rather what it is supposed to be*) and what it represents (*or rather what it is supposed to represent*).

Historians of art, by custom, are primarily interested in the question of representation. When they speak of a ‹Veronica,› they generally mean a picture – an etching, drawing, etc. – where the relic of the same name is depicted, and even more often what is said about that relic, that is to have originally shown the ‹authentic› aspect of the face of Christ. In being mainly interested in the ‹Holy Face› as a representation of Christ, art historians permit themselves a ‹luxurious› way of inquiry, but also a misleading one, as we will notice: Its theoretical framework emerges from a well known genre within the aesthetic tradition, the portrait genre; its visual material proves abundant and easily recognizable. Hence, the ‹Holy Face› appears as an extremely widespread and diverse and highly visible object: It is distributed widely and eventually imposes what must be called an iconography of the Christian face, in short, a set of ideal portraits of which Jan van Eyck's painting of 1438 must be considered as a particularly accomplished western example.³

By asking the question what is a ‹Holy Face,› we are confronted with problems that differ from those the art historian usually solves. The multiplicity of objects here gives way to an extreme rarity; the visibility of the images gives way to quasi-disappearances. The ‹Holy Faces› – Byzantine Mandylion, Roman Veronica, Shroud of Turin – are, as we know, venerated as relics of contact, as material evidence of the presence of the Divine Word incarnated in Jesus Christ. As such, they appear of course as unique. In addition, their quality of being extremely remarkable cult objects singles them out as relatively invisible – a phenomenon reported by many eye-witnesses. It is not only the invisibility resulting



1 Copy after van Eyck, *Portrait of Christ of 1438*, 1438, oil on wood, 44 × 32 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, inv. 528.

from the exceptional character of their rare display. It is first of all the invisibility that they always seem to present to the witnesses that were able to approach them and look at them from close by. There are only a few who can claim to have seen the Roman Veronica directly and clearly. Monsignor Paul Krieg of the Chapter of St. Peter is one of those, and he describes it as follows: «a slab of gold to which a threadbare veil has been fixed» («una lastra d'oro sulla quale è fissato un velo consunto»).⁴ In the late nineteenth century, Antonio de Waal already attempted to describe the relic by giving its exact measurements and examining its



2 G. Enrie, *Shroud of Turin* (positive of the face).

color and appearance closely. However, his attempts lead him to not much more – in terms of the representation, that is in regards to the portrait or the physiognomy – than a frank statement of failure, «[...] one sees absolutely nothing» (*non si vede affatto niente*);⁵ a phrase which directly echoes the exclamation heard at about the same time by Paul Vignon during an ostension of the Shroud of Turin: «[...] and this view effectuated a disappointment: one sees nothing (*non si vede niente*), I heard being said from all sides» (fig. 2).⁶

The concept of the «Holy Face» in its most paradoxical entrenchments poses the fundamental problem of likeness: What kind of likeness of Himself does a God concede to humans? However, this is not in the first place a problem of likeness in the sense of the effigy, of portraiture or the classical notion of «verisimilitude.»⁷ Before becoming an effigy, a recognizable appearance or a typical «portrait» of Jesus Christ, a «Holy Face» – from a material and ontological point of view – is nothing but an area of traces on a used piece of cloth, an antique face towel or *sudarium*, which supposedly was in immediate touch with the divine face. Thus, the question of the «Holy Face» can only be formulated on the basis of this «towel» or «handkerchief», on the basis of the paradox of the medium, the trace, and the image, where the very notion of likeness becomes insecure, disturbed, even subverted.

But how do we conceive of such an abyss? What immediately springs to mind here is the typology of relic/icon: relic refers to what a «Holy Face» is, icon expresses what it represents (or that it represents). On the other hand: such a typology, although of certain value, does not resolve much – as in front of each «Holy Face» one must ponder and question not the separation but the *intricate* entanglement of the two functions, their mutual «contamination» and reciprocity, and the consequences of this for the actual shape of the object. Marie-Madeleine Gauthier and of course Hans Belting have shown the crucial role, starting in 1204 in the West, of the «gradual assimilation of the Greek icon to the Latin reliquary,» to the extent that the image actually gained the efficacy of a cult object close to that of the relic, while at the same time the latter became mimetic or at least entangled into a figurative system that served as its framework or context.⁸

Should we then think of this abyss – or rather this «contradictory entanglement» – in «evolutionary» terms? The historical scheme elaborated for the Roman Veronica by Gerhard Wolf teaches us something essential: Namely that the semantic, conceptual (and also tactile/textile) field of the vestigium – a field largely conditioned by the reference to the *sudarium* as an area of traces of the body of Christ – predates the more optically defined of the effigies or *imago Christi* as established in the Middle Ages under the pontificate of Innocent III.⁹ Yet also this «evolutionary» scheme, as fundamental as it may be, does not resolve our question, given that the paradigm of the trace (as *vestigium*) subsists within the figurative institution of the relic (as *imago*). When we consult the texts on the Veronica collected by Ernst von Dobschütz and extend our readings to the wonderful *Diceria sacra* of Giovanbattista Marino dedicated to the Shroud of Turin, we notice that the original vocabulary – the vocabulary referring to the imprint – keeps returning, hence resisting the affirmation of the «Holy Face» as an image or portrait.¹⁰

The problem that arises – an unresolved abyss and the intricate entanglement of two heterogeneous models – essentially is one of «survival» or «return» of forms. Here, one is of course reminded of Warburg's *Nachleben*, this paradoxical principle stressing anachronisms in favor of evolutions. The problem therefore is in the first place a structural one, a problem of anthropological nature engaging with the *longue durée* inherent also to singular temporalities, where each object places itself in history.¹¹ All paradoxes are tied up within this structural problem, even if historical conditions usually tend to favor and stress one aspect at the expense of the other: a way of expressing that the gap between what is and what represents a «Holy Face» subsists within each object, giving it form and keeping

up its vivid dynamics. This perpetual movement or motion between what is and what represents – because it unfolds a structural capacity of conversion and exchange between heterogeneous orders of reality –, characterizes the particular dialectic of the image. This is all the more the case as the conversion at stake, if we further specify it, includes three parameters rather than two. We will call them trace, face and grace.

What enigmatic organism is a «Holy Face» made of? First there is, as we might put it, something less than an image: a field of marks, of vestiges (*vestigia*) hard to describe and barely visible, illegible in any case – vestiges not yet icons and to an even lesser extent signs or symbols. The concept of the imprint (*impressio*), which according to the legends determines the material constitution of the «Holy Faces», this concept implies a «beyond» or «beneath» in regards to any mimetic visibility and any wish to recognize appearances: It is of trace and contact that the Christian notion of the «Holy Face» speaks of in the first place. Yet, at a second level in both eastern and western Christianity the same notion also comprises something we might call the matrix of the notion of the image, its very truth and authenticity. Although, or *because*, it is a negative image, the «Holy Face» is the model for any notion of the image. It provides the prototypus or *charactèr* (we will return to these Greek terms, which in the long run forge the bond between the ancient theologies of the icon and the baroque reflections of a Marino, for example). In short, the «Holy Face» is the foundation of the incarnational legitimacy of the image. And it is from this status as matrix that we can think, in the very heart of the trace, the appearance of a divine's face.

But of what speaks this emerging face? Of what speaks this divine faciality that transfigures its own material field of apparition? It speaks – of grace. It turns the image into something more than an image, something that goes beyond the classical – mimetic – conception of the image. It presents itself as an operator, capable of converting the face per naturam to the face per gratiam, to use the terms of a similar polarity analyzed by Ernst Kantorowicz in another context.¹² This is a decisive conversion, which allowed the Christian theology and liturgy to conceive of the defect of the visible – the vestige and its mere virtuality of the aspect – as an authentic surpassing of the visible, an authentic gift of vision.¹³

It is important to understand that such an approach to the problem – a dialectical and critical approach – aims to displace, as far as possible, the two obstacles that render the comprehension of the phenomenon «Holy Face» so difficult: the obstacle of not seeing anything – in terms of what it is as a relic; and the symmetrical obstacle of seeing too much – in terms of what it represents, that is the iconography of the «portrait of Jesus Christ.» However, before we seek to define what a «Holy Face» is or what it represents, we need to understand how it proceeds, or how it is said to proceed, by means of both a comparative analysis of the Christian legends and the objects themselves. That is to understand how and in how far the imprint, this multi-functional operation, provides the only procedural model capable of legitimizing both the humble material trace – infra-visible, close to being formless –, and the glorious vision – supra-visible, beyond all form – providing the experience of a divine face-to-face.¹⁴

But we must also attempt a second displacement: Before even trying to understand what a «Holy Face» is or what it represents, we need to understand, in

front of its actual avatars, how it presents itself. This means to attempt to understand how, visually, it becomes capable of offering the «dialectic anchoring of the vestigium and the visio, of the trace and of the grace.

2. *Facies, or the mystification of the trace*

Aporia of presence, screen of representation – that means we must turn to the question of presentation first. What does this word tell us, «presentation»? That something stands in front of us, faces us as a body or as a quasi-subject. To feel that something presents itself in front of us – unlike a simple object that would be put or «placed» in front of us – means to experience its corporeality *en face*. It also means to endorse a visual relation with some anthropological if not anthropomorphic consistency. This eventually establishes a relation of quasi-presence, a relationship which, I repeat, is not identical with the «presence,» but is its fictitious construction.

This construction requires a manipulation of space or, more precisely, the instauration of a place. The space allows us to believe that it is describable, objectifiable, measurable – in short, that it is a correct assessment of what is seen. However, what we are talking about here pertains to a phenomenology involving the subject, subject of the gaze and of the «feeling», in the sense Erwin Straus understood the term, even before Merleau-Ponty.¹⁵ That means a space establishes itself between the face or rather the whole body of the beholder and the «Holy Face,» the face leaning toward him, watching him and having him bend his knees in worship – be this from the altar of the *Sacro Volto* in Genoa or from the pillar of the Basilica of St. Peter's, where the Veronica «appears». Something actually happens here, a subtle connection, an interweaving of far and near,¹⁶ an interlacing that also ties an optical dimension (what is seen) to a tactile dimension (what transforms the thing looked at from afar into an effective thing which approaches and «touches» the beholder).¹⁷

The hypothesis that I would like to introduce and put to the test here is actually a rather simple one: There would be no effective «Holy Face» – one that is capable of setting in motion the dialectic conversion of the trace into grace, of the vestigium into visio – if the proximity implied by the material process of generation (imprint, contact) were not presented as a distance. A proximity presented as a distance: I am of course paraphrasing a famous sentence, in which Walter Benjamin defined the aura of a thing or an image as «the unique manifestation of a remoteness, however close it may be» (*einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag*).¹⁸ This definition, I think, is far from being exhausted in its conceptual fertility. Apart from the historical inaccuracies of which Benjamin's text is not free, this spatial definition of the aura remains of central significance – a significance, which may be applied to actual objects and texts by taking into account the two other fundamental characteristics that Benjamin recognized in any auratic phenomenon: the first being its temporal dimension (the aura as «a gossamer fabric woven of space and time»¹⁹); the second being its inclusion in a dialectics of the look («The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us»²⁰).

To avoid misunderstandings: Such a hypothesis does not aim to apply a straightforward philosophical notion – one formulated in a context discussing

the modern period, particularly Baudelaire's poetry – in order to «explain» Byzantine or medieval objects. A strict conceptual application is all the more alien to me as my analysis will modify, as we will see, the Benjaminian concept of the aura (which he actually thought of as in opposition to the concept of the trace); what we are confronted with here is the conversion of the vestigium into gratia, and we will thus try to understand what the «auratisation» or «mystification» of the trace is and how it works.²¹ However, Benjamin's statement about the aura is particularly valuable in our context of the «Holy Faces,» because the cultic value of the objects – their anthropological efficacy and power, their theological legitimacy, their liturgical coherence – is expressed through a certain composition of space, a configuration defined by a specific relationship of proximity and distance. Benjamin's statement provides an efficient instrument to actually escape the patterns which art history often remains caught up in.²² In this sense, the cult value of images in fact does not appear as an added external value nor as an ultimate «content» for which images would, in the end, only be «forms» or passive carriers.

Let us thus examine this «unique apparition of a distance, as close as it might be» more closely. First of all, what does this mean from a narrative point of view? Two examples will suffice to show the importance of a dramaturgy of distance in the very constitution of the legends of the «Holy Face.» The first example concerns the Mandylion in the East: It is no coincidence that the legend of King Abgar takes place far from Jerusalem in a distance, which – for the formal requirements of the miracle – separates the referent of the imprint (namely the face of Christ) from its place of activity (an Asian population converted to Christianity by the power of images).²³ In the old version of Eusebius of Caesarea – where it is not yet an imprint of his face, but a written letter (*épistolès*) that Christ sends to the king of Edessa – the power to convert pagans is clearly expressed by this sentence: «Blessed art thou who hast believed in me *without having seen me*» – that is in the distance. «For it is written concerning me, that they who have seen me will not believe in me, and that they who have not seen me will believe and be saved.»²⁴ When finally King Abgar receives the image born out of the miraculous touch – the image that travelled a long way, through multiple twists of fate and the hands of a messenger –, it comes to him as an apparition from the distance: No matter how close, in his own hands, this apparition may seem – Christ is already dead and resurrected. The miracle of healing and subsequent conversion was certainly not conceivable without the proof of such a translation.

The Roman example of the Veronica is no less explicit in its narration to what must, henceforth, be called the «power of the distance,» an «action of the distance» specific of and belonging to the «Holy Face» itself. Once again, it is the distance that legitimizes the power of contact. In the version called *cura sanitatis Tiberii*, popularized by Jacobus de Voragine, the Roman emperor first asks his messenger Volusian to cross for him the distance that separates him from Christ: «Cross the sea as fast as you can, and tell Pilate to send this healer to me so that he may restore me to health.»²⁵ Then Veronica witnesses the «healer's» death, refuses – evidently – to sell the miraculous portrait (that does not yet bear her name), agrees to cross the distance so that the image will come to heal Tiberius, but insists to retreat back into the distance, once the miracle has worked:

Veronica answered: «When the Teacher was going about preaching and I, to my regret, could not be with him, I wanted to have his picture painted so that when I was deprived of his presence, I could at least have the solace of his image. So one day I was carrying a piece of linen to the painter when I met Jesus, and he asked me where I was going. I told him what my errand was. He asked for the cloth I had in my hand, pressed it to his venerable face, and left his image on it. If your master looks devoutly upon this image, he will at once be rewarded by being cured.» «Can this image be bought for gold or silver?» Volusian asked. «No,» Veronica replied, «only true piety can make it effective. Therefore I will go with you and *let Caesar look upon* the image, after which I will *return home.*»²⁶

What the legends express in the narrative element of the *translatio* – where distances are crossed only to create others – is mirrored in the liturgy by the more clearly phenomenological element of the *ostensio*. The liturgy of the «Holy Faces» always produces a visual paradox: There is of course *ostensio* in the sense of the etymological meaning of the verb *ostendere*, which means «to bring forth,» «to present,» but there is no *ostentation* in the sense of an explicit or ostentatious display. What is brought forth will at the same time be in some way removed, *what faces us will not have a face* at all, in the sense that we could recognize, describe, or simply distinguish its physiognomic traits. Such a dialectic – a face facing us yet keeping its distance – can be observed in varying degrees of intensity and complexity, be it the Veronica or its less prestigious copies (that of Il Gesù in Rome, in particular), be it the *Sacro Volto* or the *Santa Sindone*.

Within this context, we also notice that the representations of solemn ostensions found in the woodcuts of the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* of the fifteenth century are quite mendacious – or, at least misleading – from a phenomenological point of view. It almost seems as if the *representation* were aimed to precisely invert the sensory conditions of the *presentation*, at least in regard to some fundamental parameters (fig. 3). The frontality is certainly observed and a simple glance at the image makes us understand that the devout people were «placed under the look,» as we might say, of the «Holy Face.» What the woodcuts betray is the phenomenology of ostension. They *crush the distance* necessary to the liturgical protocol on the one hand while they *exaggerate the visibility* of the «Face» on the other – a face that inevitably escaped the view of the beholders, as all eye-witnesses confirm.

We also notice some kind of (undoubtedly structural) connivance, which links this *phenomenological characteristic of auratic presentation* to the *material characteristic of the procedure* which the «Holy Faces» are said to bring forth: the process of the imprinting, when applied to the face, does nothing other than distancing its referent – no matter how close the actual imprint might appear – by ruining its visibility and turning it into something reminiscent of the tortures of disfigurement. While an imprint of the hand restores correctly its contours in the sense of recognizability, an imprint of a face – one is prompted to think, despite the anachronism, of Jasper Johns' *Skins* – completely disfigures the latter, in particular because the face is a convex and complex volume.²⁷ Therefore, the imprint of a face renders it automatically formless and practically *invisible* – although of course not *non-visual*. The material procedure of the imprint in this sense concurs well with the symbolic procedure of the ostension: in both cases it is about *removing from sight* (although not from *vision*) that which presents itself to the eyes of the believers as the *trace of a contact*. In both cases, we are dealing with an «auratization» or «mystification» of the trace.

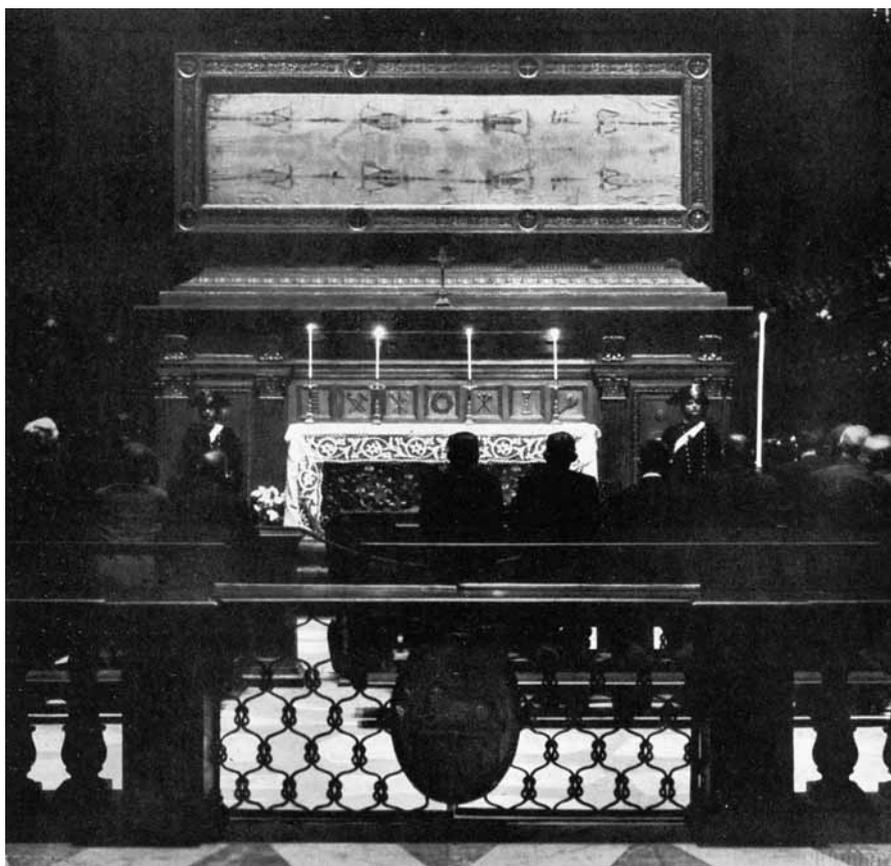


3 Stephanus Plannck (attr.), *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, ca. 1486, Rome, 11 January 1499, paper, 135 × 118 mm, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, St. Ross. 997.

An actual vicinity or an object of contact is hence presented as disappearing. The aura does not emerge from that disappearance alone: It derives from the fact – a subtler and more dialectical one – that *the disappearing quality visually appears* as such, that is as an «appearance of a distant.» The aura also emerges when the viewer bestows the power of vision, of looking up, on the «Holy Face.» Yet who looks at him from the «Holy Face» – I am speaking of the relic still, yet at the



4 Veronica, Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, Ms. 11060-61, fol. 8.



5 G. Enrie, *The Shroud exposed*, 1931, photography.

same time already of a phantasm of the *facies Dei* – *must not be visible* to him, must – at the cost of a manipulation of space – be withdrawn from him, belonging *visually* to the power of distance. This is the dialectic of the aura. This is the state of being in which any ‘Holy Face’ must *hold* its viewer: It takes place in the moment when the facial, frontal and almost tactile power of the object coincides with its withdrawal to a visually arranged distance.

We would need, beyond our basic introduction to the problem, a more specific study to determine how such a dialectic of the near and the distant, of ‘visually laid out withdrawal,’ is established in the iconography of each and every ‘Holy Face,’ denied or imitated, inverted or repeated. In any case, it is the representation – as we have already seen in the case of the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* – that redistributes the auratic game each time anew, modifying its spatial rules and converting the sensory conditions of reception. Let me briefly evoke three obvious configurations that reveal, within the labors of representation, a certain consciousness of the auratic presentability of the ‘Holy Faces.’

I will call the first of these configurations the black hole – obviously a tribute to Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s mode of addressing the problem of ‘face-ness’ – although the examples discussed here partly invalidate their approach to



6 King Abgar receiving the Mandylion, diptych, ca. 10th century, painting on wood, 28 × 19 cm, Egypt, Saint Catherin's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

the face of Christ.²⁸ The black hole above all relates to images of the relic proper, where the face withdraws, is both *detached* yet present, and thus shows itself as a *trou en avant*, a ‘hole in the front,’ a black stain on the veil’s white background. The contours are usually pronounced strongly, but they are just contours – those of the relic’s cadre – and no facial features as such. These contours only accentu-



7 Hans Memling, *Saint Veronica and her Veil*, ca. 1480, right wing of the Bembo diptych, painting on wood, 31,6 × 24,4 cm, Washington, National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection, inv. 1952.5.46.

Yet despite all appearances, these two symmetrically related configurations should not be narrowed down to the restricted logic of an evolutionary history of the «Holy Faces» over the course of time, from a non-naturalistic Byzantine type to one in accordance with the norms of classical portraiture. Both configurations gain a great deal if we conceive of them in terms of their inherent structural polarity, which the painters obviously have never ceased to play on (a way of making and letting the polarity work, in the heuristic sense of the word. In fact, the

most interesting figurations of the «Holy Face» manage to play both sides of the fence: They play off the mode of representation yet at the same time regain something from the presentation – a way of mystifying and lending aura to the representation of the trace. Artists for that reason create on the touchstone of the painting itself a double distance, identified by Walter Benjamin as the fundamental criterion for any auratic phenomenon.

This is the case when the «Holy Face» is represented in a frontality that is contradicted by the descriptive or narrative space. For example, when the *facies Christi* appears it presents itself as reaching out of its normal plane of inscription. We see this very early, in the Sinai icon representing the Mandylion of Edessa, and again much later in the Veronica, painted by Hans Memling (fig. 7).³¹ From there on, there is a fundamental contradiction between space and surface, between the veil's spatial plane and the face's *frontal plane*. A creative contradiction, since the face detaches itself as a protruding positive (the private devotion thereby gaining visibility and proximity) yet from an indistinct distance and often off-scale: floating in a naturalistic space like a butterfly, a monstrous object, a thing without place. Floating in the painting's proximity like the very appearance of a distance: face, near and distant, all at once.³²

Annotations

1 Translation from French by Jeanette Kohl and Dominic Olariu. This article was first published in French as: Georges Didi-Huberman, «Face, proche, lointain. L'empreinte du visage et le lieu pour apparaître,» in: *The Holy Face and the paradox of representation*, ed. with an introd. by Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf, Bologna, 1998, p. 95–108.

2 See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images. Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, University Park (Pennsylvania) 2005 (Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image. Question posée aux fins d'une histoire de l'art*, Paris 1990), p. 190–191.

3 For the iconography of the «Veronica» in general see Albert Chastel, «La Véronique,» in: *Revue de l'art*, 1978, no. 40–41, p. 71–82. For the painting by van Eyck see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago 1997, p. 430 (Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich 1990).

4 Quoted by Heinrich Pfeiffer, «L'immagine simbolica del pellegrinaggio a Roma. La Veronica e il Volto di Cristo,» in: *Roma 1300–1875. L'arte degli anni santi*, ed. by Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna, Milan 1984, p. 106–112, here p. 106, exhib. cat., Rome, Palazzo Venezia, 1984–1985.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 112. See also Stefano Pedica, *Il Volto santo nei documenti della Chiesa*, Turin 1960, p. 164–166.

6 Paul Vignon, «Réponse à M. Donnadieu,» in: *L'université catholique*, 1902, XL, no. 7, p. 368.

7 As seems to believe David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago/London 1989, p. 207–210.

8 Marie-Madelaine Gauthier, «Reliquaires du XIII^e siècle entre le Proche Orient et l'occident latin,» in: *Il Medio Oriente e l'Occidente nell'arte del XIII secolo. Atti del XXIV Congresso internazionale di Storia dell'arte, II.*, ed. by Hans Belting, 11 vol., Bologna 1981–1983, vol. 2, p. 55–69, here p. 60; Hans Belting, «Die Reaktion der Kunst des 13. Jahrhunderts auf den Import von Reliquien und Ikonen,» in: *ibid.*, p. 35–53. For the «relic images» see Joseph Braun, *Die Reliquiare des christlichen Kults und ihre Entwicklung*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1940 (new edition Osnabrück 1971), p. 61–69 and p. 380–458.

9 Gerhard Olaf, «La Veronica e la tradizione romana di icone,» in: *Il Ritratto e la memoria. Materiali*, ed. by Augusto Gentili, Philippe Morel and Claudia Cieri Via, 3 vol., Rome 1989–1993, vol. 2, p. 9–35. The development and a synthesis of this path of research are provided by the same author: *Schleier und Spiegel. Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance*, Munich 2002.

10 Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder. Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende*, 2 vol., Leipzig 1899, vol. 2, p. 273–335; Giambattista Marino, «La pittura. Diceria prima sopra la Santa Sindone,» in: Giambattista Marino, *Dicerie sacre e la Strage de gl'Innocenti*, new edition by Giovanni Pozzi, Turin 1960 (Turin 1614), p. 73–201.

11 Georges Didi-Huberman, «Pour une anthropologie des singularités formelles. Remarque sur l'invention warburgienne,» in: *Genèses. Sciences sociales et histoire*, 1996, no. 24, p. 145–163.

12 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, «*Deus per Naturam, Deus per Gratiā*. A Note on Mediaeval Political Theology,» in: Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Selected Studies*, Locust Valley (New York) 1965, p. 121–137.

13 For the incarnational basis of the dialectic see Georges Didi-Huberman, «La couleur de chair, ou le paradoxe de Tertullien,» in: *Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse*, 1987, no. 35, p. 9–49; *Id.*, «Puissances de la figure. Exégèse et visualité dans l'art chrétien,» *Encyclopaedia Universalis – Symposium*, Paris 1990, p. 596–609 (both reprinted in *id.*, *L'Image ouverte. Motifs de l'incarnation dans les arts visuels*, Paris 2007).

14 Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Empreinte*, Paris 1997, p. 15–190.

15 Erwin Straus, *The primary World of Senses. A Vindication of Sensory Experience*, New York/London/Toronto 1963 (Erwin Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne*, Berlin 1935).

16 *Ibid.*, p. 379–385, where the play of distance and proximity is defined as a «spatio-temporal form of sensing.» See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London/New York 1962, p. 243–298.

17 Gerhard Wolf addressed this problem significantly through a brief comment of the smile of Beatrice, in Dante's Paradise. See Gerhard Wolf, «*Toccar con gli occhi*. Zu Konstellationen und Konzeptionen von Bild und Wirklichkeit im späten Quattrocento,» in: *Künstlerischer Austausch – Artistic Exchange. Akten des XXVIII Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte*, ed. by Thomas W. Gaehtgens, Berlin 1993, p. 437–452.

18 Walter Benjamin, «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,» in: Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and other Writings*, trans. J. A. Underwood, introd. by Amit Chaudhuri, London/New York 2009, p. 228–259, here p. 235. (Walter Benjamin, «L'œuvre d'art à l'ère de sa reproductivité technique,» in: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1936, p.40–68). For a commentary of this formula and a comparison with other expressions used by Benjamin see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, Paris 1992, p. 103–123.

19 Walter Benjamin, «Brief History of Photography,» in: Benjamin 2009 (as in note 18),

p. 172–192, here p. 184. (Walter Benjamin, «Kleine Geschichte der Photographie,» in: *Die Literarische Welt*, 1931, no. 38, September 18, p. 3–4; no. 39, September 25, p. 3–4; no. 40, October 2, p. 7–8).

20 Walter Benjamin, «On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,» in: Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life. Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Harry Zohn, Cambridge (Massachusetts)/London 2006, p. 170–210, here p. 204. (Walter Benjamin, «Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire,» in: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1939, year 8, p. 50–89).

21 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, (Massachusetts) 1999, p. 447: «Trace and aura. The trace is the appearance of nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. Aura is the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura it takes possession of us.»

22 Georges Didi-Huberman, «Imitation, représentation, fonction. Remarques sur un mythe épistémologique,» in: *L'image. Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. by Jérôme Baschet and Jean-Claude Schmitt (proceedings of the conference in Erice, 1992), Paris 1996, p. 59–86.

23 Dobschütz 1899 (as in note 10), vol. 1, p. 102–196 and vol. 2, p. 159–249.

24 Eusebius of Caesarea, «Church History,» I, 13, 9, in: Eusebius Pamphilius, *Church History*, ed. by Philip Schaff, New York 1890, (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume 1), p. 100. For the destiny of this famous letter see notably Paul Devos, «Égérie à Édesse. Saint Thomas l'Apôtre, le roi Abgar,» in: *Analecta Bollandiana*, 1967, 85, p. 381–400. Italics by the author.

25 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints* (ca. 1260), trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vol., Princeton 1995 (London 1941), vol. 1, p. 212.

26 Ibid., p. 212. Italics by the author. For the textual traditions of the Veronica see Dobschütz 1899 (as in note 10), vol. 1, p. 197–262 and vol. 2, p. 273–335. A good resume of the topic is given by Wolf 1989–1993 (as in note 9), p. 9–12.

27 Didi-Huberman 1997 (as in note 14), p. 246–248.

28 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword Brian Massumi, London 2004 (cop. Minneapolis 1987) (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Paris 1980), p. 185–211.

29 Note, as examples, two Veronicas of the fifteenth century at the Bibliothèque royale of

Brussels (ms 11035-7, fol. 8 verso, and ms 11060-61, fol. 8) or, in another context, the *imago pietatis* of Domenico di Michelino in the Museo Bandini in Fiesole. Not to mention, for the sixteenth century, a rare example of the Veronica painted by Ugo da da Carpi «senza pennello,» and preserved today at the Reverenda Fabbrica of the Vatican: see Didi-Huberman 2005 (as in note 2), p. 194–200.

30 This phenomenon would have to be analyzed in reference to that analyzed, in another context, by Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative. The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, Doornspijk 1965 (revised edition, 1984), passim.

31 Kurt Weitzmann, «The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos,» in: *Cahiers archéologiques*, 1960, 11, p. 163–184.

32 In these few introductory pages – and also generally, no doubt – I am only giving a version of the first two parts of a lecture presented at the conference *The Holy Face*, held in May 1996 in Rome (Biblioteca Hertziana) and Florence (Villa Spelman), under the direction of Gerhard Wolf and Herbert Kessler. The other three parts analyzed more specific examples (notably in Dante and St. Bernard) before focusing on the notion of aura.

Nothing determines our perception of somebody or something as fundamentally as our position in space vis-à-vis what is perceived. Be it distant or near, from above or below, from the side or backwards – every change in vantage point has manifold consequences for the impressions we receive and the descriptions we invent.

Probably the most important spatial relation of all is the eye level vantage point, because communication with other creatures, whether human beings or animals, depends widely on our reading facial gestures and lip movements as precisely as possible while listening. Both face and lips can only be perceived accurately if looked upon from eye level. Moreover, looking at somebody from eye level is a precondition of meeting his or her gaze reciprocally. Nevertheless, this notion has hardly ever been reflected upon, with the notable exception of Walter Benjamin's early esthetic fragment on «painting and graphic».² This may seem surprising, especially in the field of art, since it is the observer's frontal view of the face in portraiture that serves as a precondition for the assumption of a reciprocal «gaze» of the person who is portrayed. But can we really say that eyes looking out of a portrait are actually gazing at us?

1. Eye level in the field of religion

Initial answers to this highly complex question can be found in the ancient dispute about the role of images in religion, specifically in the field of Byzantine Iconoclasm. Iconoclasm has become topical over the last few decades as an example of image psychology in religion: Visual culture theorist W.J.T. Mitchell makes emphatic reference to it in his recent publication *What Do Pictures Want?*³ It is to him and his theories that I will return to in my conclusion.

In his book, *Die Entstehung des christlichen Europa*, Peter Brown firmly embeds Byzantine Iconoclasm in the spatial policy of the time. In 726, pope Leo III (680–741) had the image of Christ above the Chalke Gate in Constantinople removed, thereby triggering Iconoclasm. He managed to convince his Christian soldiers that it was possible «to win battles without the help of icons.»⁴ The Patriarch of Constantinople followed the iconoclastic approach in 763, when he had images of Christ and the saints in the mosaics adjacent to the Hagia Sophia replaced by crucifixes. Yet despite this initial success, as Brown describes it, holy portraits were once again placed in the churches of Constantinople during the reign of the empress-regent Irene and after the Second Council of Nicaea (in 787), albeit far removed from the congregation and «hung deliberately high up on the walls of Constantinopolitan churches. They were allowed to speak only from a safe distance, «as though they were written texts.»» After a second iconoclastic wave under Leo V (813–820), Greco-Christian influence led to a decisive victory for the

iconodules, with the result that from 843 onward the veneration of religious images was successfully restored. Yet instead of being venerated from a great height, images were now displayed separately from one another and in close proximity to the viewer. Candles were lit before them and incense burnt. In keeping entirely with the treatises of Saint John of Damascus (published in 730), they called for obeisance and the kiss of faith from worshipers, and it is for this reason that they had to be placed at eye level. The Council in Trullo in 692 had already discussed the way pictures ought to be positioned within a particular space so as to be properly perceived and venerated. This also affected the sign of the Cross, which was henceforth to be recognized as a ‹true image.›

The sign of the cross was not to be placed on the threshold of houses as it had often been placed as a talisman [...] the cross must be placed at eye level so that the believer should offer to it conscious veneration, ‹in mind, in word, in feelings.›⁵

As outlined by Brown and described here, the ups and downs in the fate of religious icons ended at eye level. No wonder then that the question of image position had a direct bearing on faith itself. Just as Saint John of Damascus called for in his famous treatise, the face of Jesus, the Saints and the cross were supposed to become the object of intimate contemplation, with faith to be experienced first and foremost visually, as a matter of the heart rather than as an institutional act. Since then, one might say, all image policy has been closely related to eye level questions, and this has especially been the case with the invention of printed bibles and holy books, which allowed, through their illuminated portraits, that people gaze upon faces eye to eye and thus with the utmost intimacy.

2. Eye level in the interface

For a long time, the view of a perpendicular image at eye level has dominated and outstripped all other alternative viewing perspectives to such an extent that its own position in art history's subconscious appears to have become completely obscured. It is only thanks to broad reflection on the media in the past century that those questions from early Christendom have re-emerged once again. Interestingly enough, the renewed interest in continuous eye level perception was largely inspired by moving and not static images. The driving impulses did not come from cinema screens but rather from those monitors that have now come to dominate our visual life: television and computer screens.

Both have been converging for a long time and have now merged in the lowest common denominator – the cell phone or iphone. In an interview in February 2007, Bill Gates described the objectives of this avalanche in technical progress as part of a vision of growing intelligence for the future: ‹For example having the computer have a camera where it can recognize who's there. A mirror won't just be a mirror, it will be a digital mirror where you can try different outfits, get advice.›⁶ The computer will be designed to recognize us, and the bathroom mirror will greet us with the voice of a concerned mother, intoning: ‹Hey, you don't look so good today,› telling us what to wear. If possible, it should at some point also give us tips for our appearance in Afterlife and so on.⁷

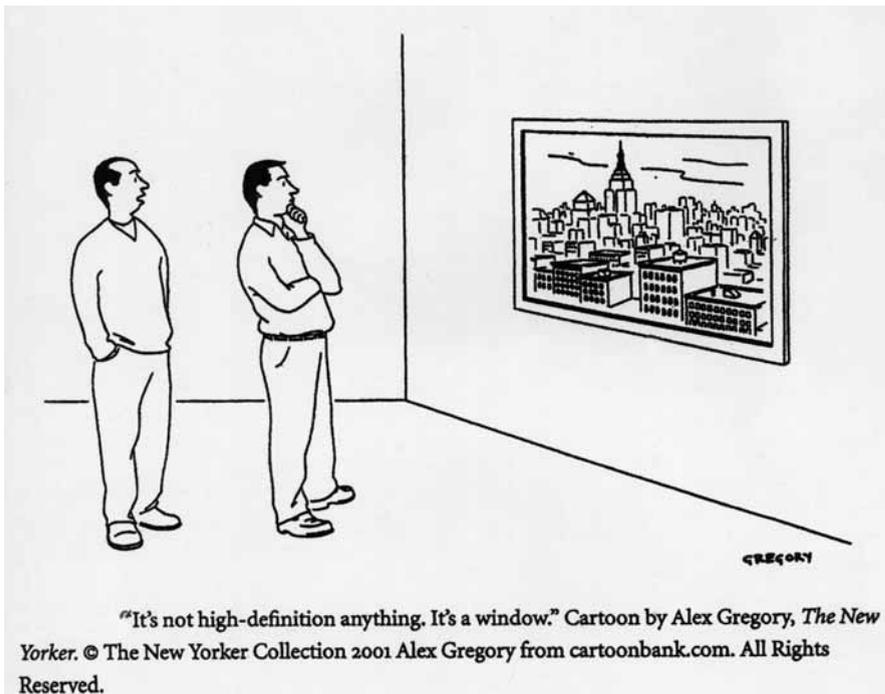
Gates envisages the computer as an ‹ersatz mother› and thus strikingly confirms what Peter Sloterdijk first established in the anthropological observations in his work *Spheres* (1998). There, Sloterdijk envisions the pairing of mother and child as the basis of all human development and conceives of their faces as an in-

verted double herma, with the mother as an informative, entertaining and communicative screen and the child as her mimic echo or mirror. Sloterdijk highlights this primary sociosphere between mother and child and stresses its absolutely crucial importance: It is only from this dual sociosphere that the human face, in its incredibly expedient form as a communicative surface, was able to evolve. Sloterdijk speaks of an «interfacial greenhouse effect,» which drives the process of «protraction» (the anthropological term for the growing frontality of the skull). In his argument, he then proceeds via modern art to the post-modern interface, which in his opinion ultimately aims at «detraction,» that is distortion:

It is not by chance that the most characteristic new place in the innovated media world is the interface, which no longer describes the meeting space between faces, but rather the point of contact between face and non-face, or between two non-faces.⁸

By contrast, Bill Gates, the proper inventor of this new eye level space named interface, pins his hopes on a smart technical version of the mother-child scenario, in which the digital mother, although inhuman, through its programmed mirror function could even compensate for the fallibility of the biological mother. A computer, for Gates, could be the better mom. Interactivity is guaranteed; only the motif of reciprocal intimacy and interpersonal warmth may go missing. Evolution tends towards a maximum of visualizing frontality.

Indeed, to keep in facial touch today means something different than it used to in the past. Today, portraits are only seldom used to aid memory, to venerate someone or something, or merely to raise our spirits. Instead, they are objects of a sense of curiosity that shows an unceasing hunger for information of all kinds. Nearly all facial images today have been formatted with the utmost uniformity by the com-



1 «It's not high-definition anything. It's a window.» Cartoon by Alex Gregory, The New Yorker

puter screen. It is the screen that simultaneously includes and delivers everything: computer work and television, cinematic film and games, entertainment, information, communication, work and research. The visually curious global public now only moves between rectangular picture screens. All screens display moving images, all have a rectangular form. Only two of them, the large cinema screen and the small cell phone, allow viewers to make slight up or down adjustments to the position of their heads. Otherwise, they all fundamentally assume an upright frontal position, such as we are accustomed to in museums and galleries.

Last but not least, and with the sole exception of the cell phone, all picture screens have been designed for the use of a seated viewers. This also means that none of the formats allows for information, entertainment and communication from behind; our eyes are, after all, positioned at the front of our heads. Not so the ears. This anthropological shortcoming is more and more compensated for by a growing audio culture, for we are able to hear things in any position we want, and we develop a far superior feeling of space by listening than by seeing. But what are the backgrounds of this development and what consequences arise from it (fig. 1)?

3. Eye level in language

The German word for eye level – *Augenhöhe* – has only recently been introduced into the vernacular. It derives from the specialized language of navigation and describes the calculable distance between the surface of the sea and the eye when measuring the visibility of lighthouses. Perhaps it then comes as no great surprise that the word's first use in literature stems from Franz Kafka, the insurance company employee, in his novel *Das Schloss* (The Castle). On one occasion, almost in passing, the land surveyor K., views a slit in the castle's wall «at eye level,» allowing him a glimpse inside, which requires him neither to strain upwards nor to bend down.⁹ The phrase «at eye level» here in principle excludes a shifting view. However, both directions, up and down, are known to have special social connotations. What we have little respect for we tend to view as beneath us, what we feel we ought to respect, we like to see as above us. «Eye level» thus has not only a spatial but a social significance, be it positive or negative. The slit in the wall in Kafka's castle also evokes the idea of balistraria, a threatening, slit-like architectural incision with connotations of violent death.

Today, in German as in English, the expression «talking eye to eye» with someone (*Auge in Auge mit jemandem sprechen*) can describe both an emotional as well as a «neutral» encounter. The phrase entails the fact of having a conversation with feelings of status and self-esteem, with notions of being equally important as or on a par with someone else (fig. 2 and 3).

The social history of eye level perspective is in fact much older than the technological one, and for at least two centuries it differed considerably, according to language. In German, the phrase «*Von Angesicht zu Angesicht*» (usually translated with «face to face», yet literally meaning «from countenance to countenance») comes from the Lutheran Bible. Consequently the formula is laden with religious overtones and existential connotations. It is not surprising then that the phrase lent itself to parody (fig. 4). The biblical phrase, to be sure, does not describe the equality of the partners, man and God, but the fundamental nature of their exchange. Whoever is privileged to «see God face to face» (Gen 31:32) belongs to the chosen few, while he who desires to force the Almighty to descend to his own level is blasphemous. The phrase acquired



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ACKERMANN'S REPOSITORY OF ARTS,

During the Illuminations of the 5th and 6th of November, 1813,

IN HONOUR OF THE SPLENDID VICTORIES OBTAINED BY

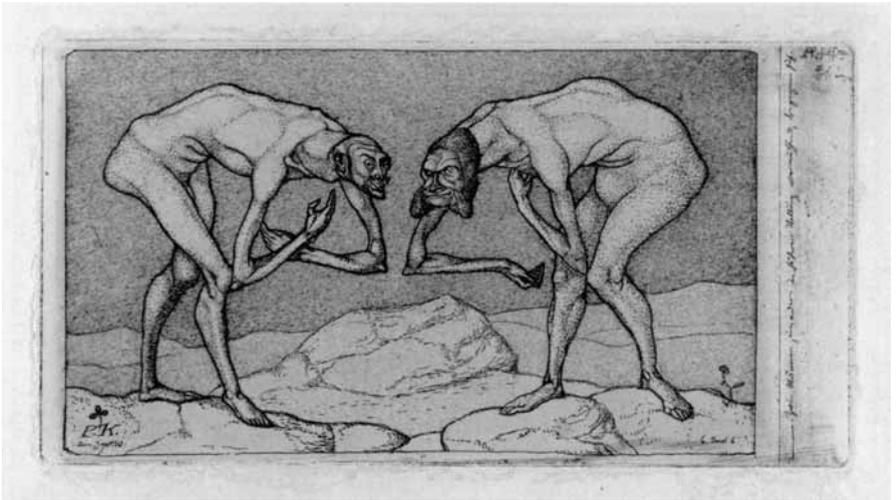
The ALLIES over the ARMIES of FRANCE,

AT LEIPSIC AND ITS ENVIRONS.

THE TWO KINGS OF TERROR.

THIS Subject, representing the two Tyrants, viz. the Tyrant BONAPARTE and the Tyrant DEATH, sitting together on the Field of Battle, in a manner which promises a more perfect intimacy immediately to ensue, is very entertaining. It is also very instructing to observe, that the former is now placed in a situation in which all Europe may see through him. The emblem, too, of the Circle of dazzling light from mere vapour, which is so soon extinguished, has a good moral effect; and as the Gas represents the dying flame, so does the Drum, on which he is seated, typify the hollow and noisy nature of the falling Usurper.

The above description of the subject appeared in the Sun of Saturday, the 6th of November. These pointed comments arose from the picture being transparent, and from a Circle, indicative of the strength and brotherly union of the Allies, which surmounted the same, composed of gas of brilliant brightness.



3 Paul Klee, *Two Men Meet, Each Believing the Other to Be of Higher Rank*, from the series *Inventions*, 1903, etching, sheet 11,7 × 22,6 cm, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 137.1946.

its political sense in German revolutionary prose. For example, in his 1817 pamphlet «*Keine Adelskammer!*» (or «No House of Lords!»), the Swabian poet Ludwig Uhland writes: «No one position in human intercourse should be ousted by that of another, everyone should stand opposite one another, eye to eye, as befits all mankind.»¹⁰

The situation differs in Anglo-Saxon countries and in English language and literature. The expression «face to face» implies some emotional meaning, but overall



4 Wilhelm Trübner, *Caesar at the Rubicon*, ca. 1880, oil on canvas, cm 48,5 × 61, Karlsruhe, Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Inv. Nr. 899.

conveys a more democratic idea of bodily proximity. To greet somebody «face to face» merely means to be present in a purely physical sense, to greet them personally. As a consequence, one finds the expression far more often in English literature, in Dickens for instance, than in German texts from the same period, the 19th century.

American sociology around 1900 adopted the practical implicitness of this expression on a theoretical level, too. One of the founding fathers of the discipline, Charles Horton Cooley, developed the theory of a «primary culture,» in which subjects lived «face to face» with one another, in a way similar to the social community (*Gemeinschaft*) as conceived by Ferdinand Tönnies, in which individuals naturally not only saw but also spoke and listened to one other.¹¹

In all these cases one never speaks of an exchange that occurs from «mouth to ear» or «ear to mouth,» but always of interaction occurring «face to face.» Facial perception generally entails virtual listening and speaking. One may say that we always experience things in our lifeworld as bodily facial images, of which the communicant's eye level status is part, since without it he or she would have no access to visual exchange.

4. Eye level in art history

Here, we turn to the art historical aspect of our topic. The eye level perspective is, of course, a central feature of the way art came to dominate space and it is an integral part of the concept of central perspective. Dürer, building upon Alberti, dedicated several works to the subject, the most famous of which was published posthumously (fig. 5). The artist places a framed screen of threads between himself and his model, the so-called «velum,» no matter how sensual (and seductive) the model may appear. Through this, he observes his object at eye level. He then transfers what he sees, square by square, onto the sheet before him, which is equally divided by squares. The screen serves roughly the same function as the artist shutting one eye – flattening out the image – yet with the ultimate aim of transcending flatness and creating a sense of spatial depth and perception of horizon. This pictorial invention not only came to dominate European art for nearly 500 years; it is also no exaggeration to say that Dürer's «velum» is the precursor to all those screens we use today to rearrange and frame our shifting perceptual world, which is in constant flux. One could say that we are frozen in the draftsman's pose, even when our screens do not present us with a transparent



5 Albrecht Dürer, *Draftsman Drawing a Nude*, ca. 1525, woodcut, 7,6 × 21 cm, *Manual of Measurement*, Kunsthalle Bremen.



6 Lavater's Silhouette Chair, illustration from Johann Caspar Lavater, *L'Art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie*, Paris 1806.

view of the outside world, but rather with moving images, as in Platonic hell.¹²

The history of this scenario is well known. Around 1800, the silhouette chair appeared in the field of physiognomy. It elevated a light source to the «level of the human eye» on the artist's side of the screen (fig. 6). Shortly thereafter came the light-sensitive glass plate, slotted vertically inside the photographer's camera, «eye to eye» with its subject. This device heralded the exclusive position of the one-eyed, flat mode of perception that would predominate until we reached what has been termed the end of the photographic age. Optical toys from the same period such as the panorama or the diorama played with this change from one-eyed to two-eyed stereoscopic perception and fixed the gaze in the context of each apparatus *at eye level*.

Technological and political progress in the name of a modern, democratic society acted as the catalyst for further innovations. In the first decades of the 19th century, eye level perspective became a subject that preoccupied museum and gallery curators. Whereas previously pictures had been hung like patterned wall-

paper in palaces, galleries and studios, with artworks tightly placed in multiple rows above one another, the individual picture was now given more space. Charlotte Klonk makes reference to this debate in regards to the National Gallery in London.¹³ In 1836, two years before its opening, William Wilkins, the architectural mind behind Trafalgar Square, called for a system of linear hanging, and in 1847, John Ruskin weighed in on the argument as well. The idea was soon taken up in France, where from 1867 onward the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel (1831–1922) displayed works by the Impressionists exclusively at eye level and with considerable space between them.

No matter how exclusively aesthetic the debate about hanging art may sound to us now, it of course also had strong social implications, just as was the case in Byzantine Iconoclasm. Suddenly everything was hung on one and the same level – the portrait of a monarch alongside a genre painting, a marine painting alongside an erotic sketch. The fact that the portrait played a decisive role in this development can hardly be disputed. Nothing has a more drastic influence on how we perceive pictures than the face in a portrait whose «gaze» meets our own face at eye level, even though in historical reality that gaze may have been focused on the artist as a fixed point on which the sitter had to concentrate. But what if the artist had just copied from another portrait? In fact, between Ruskin's appeal for and Durand-Ruel's implementation of the idea, London saw the opening of the *National Portrait Gallery* (in 1856), an event which also ignited a discussion in Germany. Several decades later, the director of the *Königliche Nationalgalerie* in Berlin, Ludwig Justi, pleaded to Emperor Wilhelm II for the formation of a German *National Portrait Gallery* and tried to convince him of the important role such an institution would play. In 1913, the gallery finally opened in the *Kronprinzenpalais*. It contained around 150 paintings – and the portraits were hung at eye level. In his exposé of 1912, Justi claimed that previous monuments to great Germans – emperors, kings and generals – had placed their faces too far above the viewer. As a result, the beholder did not get a proper impression of the subjects' countenance and thus could not become truly acquainted with them face to face. The question raised by Justi is not far from the one mentioned before in relation to Iconoclasm – and was motivated by perhaps equally «pious» considerations.¹⁴

On the other hand, Justi's opinion was clearly in line with the spirit of the photographic age. In the fifty years between the first plea for a display on eye level in museums, and the change in aesthetics that came with it, to Justi's statement of 1912, developments in the arts of photography and film had reshaped the history of portraiture. Those arts, above all, already anticipated what Theodor W. Adorno would later claim for the television image.¹⁵ Not the technique of reproduction but the miniaturization and domestication of the image, its inclusion into the living room and the family album, brings about this (all too) familiar way in which we deal with public portraits, even though such portraits are not expressly conceived as photographs but as paintings.

5. Eye level in cultural animism

In a flash of inspiration, the new awareness of such intimacy was expressed in the first analytical description of a «face to face» gaze: Georg Simmel's famous «Excursus on the Sociology of the Senses,» from his key work *Sociology. Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms* (1908):

Among the individual sense organs, the eye is applied to a fully unique socio-logical accomplishment: to the bonds and patterns of interaction of individuals who are looking at each other. Perhaps this is the most immediate and purest interactive relationship. Where otherwise sociological threads are spun, they tend to possess an objective content, to produce an objective form. Even the word spoken and heard still has an objective interpretation that would yet be transmissible perhaps in another manner. The most vital interactivity, however, in which the eye-to-eye look intertwines human beings, does not crystallize in any kind of objective formation; the unity that it establishes between them remains dissolved directly in the event, in the function. And so strong and sensitive is this bond that it is borne only by the shortest, the straight line between the eyes, and that the least diversion from this, the slightest glance to the side, fully destroys the singularity of this bond. There remains for sure no objective trace, as indeed, directly or indirectly, from all other types of relationships between people, even from exchanges words; the interactivity dies in the moment in which the immediacy of the function is abandoned; but the entire interaction of human beings, their mutual understanding and mutual rejection, their intimacy and their coolness, would in some way be incalculably changed if the eye-to-eye view did not exist – which, in contrast with the simple seeing or observing of the other, means a completely new and unparalleled relationship between them.¹⁶

Simmel's analysis appeared in 1908, just a few years after American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley's publication «A Primary Culture for Democracy.»¹⁷ Yet Simmel's thoughts differ considerably from Cooley's «democratic» notion of «face to face,» not only in his explicitly sensualist perspective, but also in his focus on the pure subjectivity and intimacy of a dual relationship created by the gaze between four eyes, and be it those of strangers or even animals.

Simmel's figuration of visual intimacy is a seminal text for the German intellectual history of this idea. Walter Benjamin certainly knew it, as did Martin Buber, the philosopher of existential dialogue between «I and Thou;» the same applies for Peter Sloterdijk. With his ideas published about ten years after the invention of the cinema, Simmel not only brings to light the aspect of intimacy between image and viewer. He also discusses, based on the moving image, the idea of climax and, related to this, the ancient animistic fallacy of the vivacity of the person being viewed. What seems to be an intrinsic part of everyday life could also apply to the images in art history. The movie picture's «dead» outward gaze seemed part of an immediate interaction within not only the religious but also the secular pictorial tradition. In 1928, the photographer Paul Eipper published a book of animal photographs entitled *Tiere sehen dich an* (Animals Look at You).¹⁸ That «totem phrase» remains appealing to this very day. The book, with its striking photographs, had a sweeping impact and it coincided with the burgeoning of silent movies and all their close-ups in the Weimar Republic. It also dovetailed with the many cultural and educational programs centering on photography that were established and pursued enthusiastically. For example, photographs of the faces of ancient sculptures were arranged into the relatively new format of the photographic catalogue, which readers held in their hands and viewed from an especially intimate face-to-face position. This not only helped to consolidate the deceit of an exchange of glances, but also increased the readability of pictures. In 1922, a book published by Richard Hamann's art history seminar, *Deutsche Köpfe des Mittelalters* (German Heads from the Middle Ages), contained photographic close-ups of church sculptures transposed into an unusually intimate, Simmelian short-dis-

tance.¹⁹ In 1926, a bestselling volume by Ernst Benckard containing photographs of death masks turned its subjects from the horizontal into an upright position, similar to what was done for mummy portraits from previous millennia.²⁰

The extent to which the propaganda of the Third Reich made efficient use of this gray area between intimacy and animism, with the aim of instilling the Führer's image into the population's consciousness, is well known. George Orwell was the first to analyze this fatal visual practice in his novel *1984*, where Stalin, not Hitler, gains visual omnipresence in the role of the seemingly caring but in fact brutally domineering 'Big Brother.'²¹

To be sure, no one studying the history of the portrait can ignore the completely different, traditional way of displaying images in collections. The differences are massive, partly because the hanging of pictures at eye level did not achieve full pre-eminence until well into the 18th century. Before that, portraits and statues were placed both well above and below eye level. From Ancient Greece with its life-size and sometimes over-dimensional statues to the pompous tombs and busts in the republic of Rome, from early monuments such the Pantheon to the tight rows of ancestral portraits on the walls of high palaces and castles such as the German Valhalla, in all these places the viewer was surrounded by heads and figures, which he either had to look up to or down upon. Both directions of view were equally important in the precursors of our modern-day museums, the 'Wunderkammern,' cabinets of art, natural wonders and marvels to be found throughout Europe.

6. And again the religious field

One could of course expand on the idea of a particular 'tyranny of intimacy' (Richard Sennett) that entrenched itself in the art of portraiture as a consequence of the preeminence of the eye level perspective.²² Yet perhaps the issue here is no longer really one of intimacy since, to return to our starting point, every screen we now look upon in our day to day lives presents us with faces, sometimes large, sometimes small, at eye level. The more faces appear on our screens, the more frequently a face to face situation is simulated and the more emphatically does this half-'democratic,' half-intimate form of encounter shape our social perception. But the influence does not stop there. The frontal view on the screen effectively places everything visible – people as well as products, animals as well as landscapes, images as well as texts, figures as well as tables – at eye level. Given that an image placed at eye level fosters the deceptive assumption that it can somehow look at us – then all these images view us as 'equals.' Everything can be scaled down or blown up to fit the same screen format and consequently, every object is accorded the power to see. Indeed, in turning to Ernst Cassirer we can once again step back from the mathematical space of the central perspective into the mythical one where all things simultaneously attain physiognomic value and begin speaking to us. A few years ago, Lorraine Daston organized a conference entitled *Things That Talk*; it focused on exactly this animistic aspect of our topic.²³ Her focus was very persuasive. There are no longer any pictures, just picture screens, and we increasingly feel observed in precisely the sense that the great innovator of computer images, Bill Gates, strove for in conceiving of the 'smart screen.'

This fact alone should mobilize thinkers in the realm of visual culture, if indeed it has not already done so. But will they be able to disentangle themselves from this trend? The most recent book by one of the founders of the discipline already

7 Byzantine Icon: Christ, miniature from an illuminated manuscript, Psalter and New Testament, Dumbar-ton Oaks, Washington DC, Byzantine Collection, D.O. Ms 3., fol. 39r.



features a frankly animistic title: *What Do Pictures Want?* – as if pictures actually possessed an anthropomorphic life of their own. The author, W.J.T. Mitchell, is probably the best-known theoretician of visual culture in the English-speaking world. He started this line of thought with an essay of the same title in 1997.²⁴ The book summarizes his efforts in the field and certainly is an almost exhaustive examination of pictures, including mental ones. Perhaps it is due to the immensity of the task that, after nearly twenty years of research, Mitchell returns to Byzantine Iconoclasm. Pictures, Mitchell states, with his eye set firmly on Saint John of Damascus, are living beings. They want to be loved with our eyes, lips and hearts, but above all with the lips. Even when Mitchell references Lacan, his eye remains focused on the Byzantine field of argument. He uses a Byzantine miniature icon from the 11th century to show that believers not only thought but acted in such a way as to satisfy the picture’s wishes (fig. 7). After taking in the miniature with their eyes, they kissed the face of Christ with such fervor that the picture ultimately faded from the paper.²⁴ Who knows? Perhaps the fate of such miniatures provides a sort of model for today’s studies in visual culture, conducted with no lesser fervor. Of all the tools that have developed in human expression, images have emerged as the most uncanny – and the most ‘insecure.’ It is as if they were driven by an unfettered evolution of their own. And it is certainly worth every effort to reflect – quite literally, in eye to eye fashion – on this notion.

Annotations

1 Translated with the help of Jefferson Chase, L. Anderson and Jeanette Kohl.

2 «A picture must be held vertically before the observer. A mosaic lies horizontally at his feet.» Walter Benjamin, «Painting and the Graphic Arts,» in: *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, 4 vol., Cambridge (Massachusetts), 1996–2003, vol. 1, 1996, p. 82.

3 W.J. Thomas Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago 2005.

4 Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1996, p. 240.

5 Brown 1996 (as in note 4), p. 244.

6 Richard Stengel, «10 Questions for Bill Gates,» in: *Time Magazine*, February 1, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1584815,00.html> (February 2, 2012).

7 Ibid.

8 Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären I. Blasen*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, p. 172–174 and p. 193–194. Translation Claudia Schmölders.

9 Franz Kafka, *Das Schloß*, ed. by Max Brod, Frankfurt am Main 1983, p. 99. Translation Claudia Schmölders.

10 Ludwig Uhland, *Keine Adelskammer! Eine Flugschrift*, 1817, http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/germanica/Chronologie/19Jh/Uhland/uhl_adel.html (February 2, 2012).

11 Hans-Joachim Schubert, *Demokratische Identität. Der soziologische Pragmatismus von Charles Horton Cooley*, Frankfurt am Main 1995; see also Charles Horton Cooley, «A Primary Culture for Democracy,» in: *Publications of the American Sociological Society*, 1918, vol. 13, p. 1–10.

12 Stefan Rasche gives a lucid account of this historical monumental status in Stefan Rasche, *Das Bild an der Schwelle. Motivische Studien zum Fenster in der Kunst nach 1945*, Münster 2003, p. 13–15. One early philosophical discussion of Dürer's «velum» is to be found in Uwe Poerksen, *Weltmarkt der Bilder. Eine Philosophie der Vi-siotype*, Stuttgart 1997, p. 148–150. Poerksen defines this instrument as «Besteck der Wirklichkeitsherstellung» that brings about a social deficit, because of its technical, i.e. nonhuman way of perceiving real life.

13 Charlotte Klonk, «Mounting Vision. Charles Eastlake and the National Gallery of London,» in: *Art Bulletin*, 2007, vol. 82, issue 2, p. 331–347, following extract from p. 335: «He called for the abandonment of the crowded hang in favor of the display of all pictures at eye level. «Every gallery could be long enough,» he asserted, «to admit of its whole collection being hung in one line, side by side, and wide enough

to allow for the spectators retiring to the distance at which the largest picture was intended to be seen.»

14 Claudia Schmölders, «Exzellente Gesellschaft. Zur Idee einer nationalen Portrait-galerie,» in: *Pour le Mérite. Vom königlichen Gelehrtenkabinett zur nationalen Bildnissammlung*, ed. by Katrin Herbst, Berlin 2006, p. 29–33.

15 Theodor W. Adorno, «Prolog zum Fernsehen,» in: *Eingriffe. Neun Modelle*, Frankfurt am Main 1963, p. 69–80.

16 Georg Simmel, «Excursus on the Sociology of Sense Impression,» in: id., *Sociology. Inquiries into the construction of Social Forms*, trans. and ed. by Anthony J. Blasi, Anton K. Jacobs and Mathew Kanjirathinkal, 2 vol., Leiden 2009 (Georg Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, Leipzig 1908), p. 570–600, here vol. 1, p. 571.

17 Cooley 1918 (as in note 11).

18 Paul Eipper, *Tiere sehen dich an*, Berlin 1928.

19 Richard Hamann, *Deutsche Köpfe des Mittelalters. Auswahl nach Aufnahmen des kunstgeschichtlichen Seminars*, Marburg 1922.

20 Ernst Benckard, *Das ewige Antlitz. Eine Sammlung von Totenmasken. Mit einem Geleitwort von Georg Kolbe*, Berlin 1926.

21 George Orwell, 1984, London 1949.

22 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, Cambridge 1977.

23 *Things That Talk. Object Lessons from Art and Science*, ed. by Loraine Daston, New York 2004.

24 W.J. Thomas Mitchell, «What Do Pictures Want? An Idea of Visual Culture,» in: *In Visible Touch. Modernism and Masculinity*, ed. by Terry Smith, Chicago 1997, p. 215–232.

25 Mitchell 2005 (as in note 3), p. 39.

You know me by my face, you know me as a face, and you never knew me in any other way. Therefore it could not occur to you that my face is not my self.¹

Milan Kundera

1. Introduction

Faces are before us the whole time, and we are all so expert in them that to ask what the face does seems unnecessary, even trivial. Our faces identify us as individuals and, of course, express our feelings or emotions socially.² All this is true, but it is my contention that to truly understand the ways in which the face defines us one needs to consider the experience of those with impairments of facial function. Within the narratives of those who are, for instance, blind (and lose the faces of others), autistic (and find faces difficult for a number of reasons), or live with immobile, inexpressive faces, are to be found insights into the face and how it defines us, unavailable elsewhere. Through these experiences of congenital impairment and acquired loss we may understand the face with a different, deeper perspective.

I will consider the effects of mature onset blindness, in which individuals who have grown up linking faces to people have sight – and the visual representation of others – taken away. Some become depressed not when they are blinded, but when their visual memories of their loved ones fade. I will consider those with autism who find faces represent others and so threaten them, but who also find facial expression too complex to assimilate. Lastly I will consider some of the consequences of living without facial expression from birth, in a rare syndrome called Möbius. But first I will briefly mention some other effects of this last condition which, like many other aspects of the face, we take for granted.

2. Openings; Möbius Syndrome

There are two cardinal features of Möbius Syndrome or Sequence; congenital palsies of two cranial nerves, the VIth which moves the eyes outwards, and the VIIth, or facial, which controls the muscles of the face, both for eyelid and mouth movement and for facial expression. People with Möbius cannot move their eyes well, express on their faces, shut their mouths or close their eyes.³

For younger children the initial problems are with the orifices. They cannot suck at the nipple and in earlier times many babies may have died as a result. One person, now in his 70's, was fed initially through a pipette made from the inside of a fountain pen. The problems with the mouth persist, making eating and drinking difficult throughout life, especially in public. These difficulties, however, are overcome and to see a skilled Möbian drinking from a cup, substituting

tongue for bottom lip, is amazing. Many with Möbius need speech therapy, since often the tongue as well and the lips are affected. Labial sounds, «M» and «B» etc., are especially difficult, which is ironic given the syndromic name. But again children seem amazingly skilled at finding alternative ways of enunciating. One teenager in the States is a sports commentator, and a woman in the United Kingdom, a singer. Talking over the phone one would not realize the extent of the problem, so clear are their voices.

The eyelids do not shut; the first memory of one girl with Möbius is of an operation, for squint, when she saw the anaesthetist's mask come right down onto her face. For young children at night, going to sleep with eyes open can be difficult. Some wrap scarves around their heads to darken the night. But without eyelids that close and bath the eyes in tears, the eyes can dry out and become vulnerable to corneal ulcers. In some with Möbius this seems less of a problem than one might expect – possibly the conjunctiva becomes more resistant to dryness, but it is nevertheless an enduring concern. Many need operations to sew eye lids a little closer together or to add small gold weights to the upper lids to help them close a little, as well as a daily need for artificial tears. These problems don't go away, and people in the 60's are still on good terms with their eye surgeons. Though these problems with mouth, eyes and speech are mechanical, their consequences for self-consciousness and self esteem can be profound as can be imagined. We will return later to some effects of their main impairment, the complete lack of facial expression.

3. The face as unique identifier; acquired blindness

With the exception of identical twins our faces are all different; they are our unique identifier. This is an extraordinary evolved characteristic confirming the importance of our individuality and its visible expression. We seem particularly sensitive to small facial differences, especially in our own kind. When I grew up we were told that all Chinese look alike. Patently they do not, but to those not attuned to Asian faces the subtle differences which underpin individuality are less evident. It works both ways, of course. A Canadian friend living in Vancouver once berated a Chinese colleague for walking past him in the street without a greeting. «But,» the Chinese man said, «you Canadians all look the same.»

There are several groups of people for whom the face does not allow such individuation. One, of course, is those who are blind. Within these there are two very different groups; those born blind (or with minimal sight of light and dark) who never have faces as identifiers of others, and who use voice far more, and those who go blind as adults. One man born blind said to me that he resides in his voice, as others do for him.⁴ So much is this within them that the greater journey is probably made by those who go blind as adults. One young man who went blind in his twenties once told me that the lucky ones are those born blind, so difficult were the adaptations he went through losing sight.

John Hull, in his book *Touching the Rock*, gave an astonishing account of his experience during the first few years following his loss of his sight, exposing the lack of imagination with which most of us sighted people approach the world of the blind.⁵ John first noted difficulty in seeing at the age of 13 due to cataracts. He had successful operations but then, four or five years later, a dark disc shaped area in his visual field appeared; the beginning of a far more serious problem –

retinal detachment. Despite further operations, the shadow reappeared. By 1973, he was using a magnifying glass to read; in 1977 he read his last novel. By 1983, at the age of 48, the last light faded and he began, finally, to disclose his feelings in the diary, which became his book.

In the first years of blindness, people fell into two groups: those with faces and those without; the people he had met before going blind had faces he could remember but those met since blindness had no visual representation. He found it very difficult to relate each group to each other. As time passed, his remembered visual imagery faded. Most distressing was that he began to forget what his wife and children looked like. However much he tried, even these precious images faded. He even lost what he looked like himself, as his diary notes on 25 June 1983: «To what extent is the loss of the image of the face connected with loss of the image of the self?»⁶ Sometimes he would ask friends to describe a new person, especially if the acquaintance was a woman. Was she pretty? What was she wearing? This, even though he was aware of the irrationality inherent in this; why should his feelings continue to depend on a visual appearance? He noted the consequences of loss of sight in minute detail; his diary entry dated 17 September 1983:

Nearly every time I smile, I am conscious of it [...] aware of the muscular effort: not that my smiles have become more forced [...] but it has become a more or less conscious effort. [...] It must be because there is no reinforcement [...] no returning smile.⁷

His young family learnt the pointlessness of trying out funny faces on Daddy; he found that making love face to face no longer had the same significance. But above all, he mourned the loss of the face as a defining icon of one's being. «The horror of being faceless, of forgetting one's own appearance, of having no face. The face is the mirror image of the self» (11 January 1984).⁸ With this came a desire to hide his own face; if he could not see others' faces, why should they see his? Around this time, he found himself descending into a depression, writing of how blindness is associated in art with ignorance, confusion and unconsciousness. He would hide under a blanket, alone for hours on end, trying to find solace.

Dreams became so important – both dreams with sight and dreams where blindness was present, and even, bewilderingly, dreams where both states existed, dreams about anything but, most of all, dreams with his family.

I had got out of bed [...] this little toddler came padding into the room. I could see her quite clearly in the dim light [...] the first time I had been able to see her. I stared at her, full of wonder, taking in every detail of her face as she stood there, wreathed in smiles [...] «So this is her, this is the smile they all talk about.» [...] I had a wonderful sense of a renewal of contact [...] then the dream faded (21 August 1984).⁹

As time went by, so he slowly left visual imagery behind, 13 October 1984:

The receding faces of Imogen and Marilyn [his daughter and wife] form a sort of fixed light at the far end, behind me. This provides a point of reference [...] [to] judge my continued travelling [...] this serves to exaggerate the time I have spent in the tunnel [...] as if during the first part of a journey through space the voyagers are aware of the speed with which they are parting from the still visible earth, but once out in the black vastness of space there is no longer the same sense of speed, or time. As long as there is a receding image, one is still aware of departing. [...] between that visual memory which mediates between us and my actual present life there is a deep black river of time, flooding the banks of my consciousness, [...] carrying us apart.¹⁰

Fortunately, over the next few years he came to terms with his new world imposed by blindness. He began to explore the voice and was amazed to find that all the emotion which is in the face was also in the voice; intelligence, colour, melody, humour, grace, accuracy, laziness and monotony, all were there. Crucially though, he was far more passive, and depended on people disclosing themselves through speech.

His book was concerned with describing the first few years after his complete loss of sight. I met him over ten years later; what of his familiar new world? I began by asking about the effect of losing the category of the face and of facial expressions.

What does continually strike me is the lack of commensurability between what the face looks like and what it feels like. [...] my little boy's face, my five year old, is such a beautiful face, and often I touch it [...] there is something curiously beautiful. [...] It is soft and flabby, there's a curious significance in all these nobs and little bits and pieces. It's a curious tactile thing that I don't think I ever enjoyed as a sighted person. [...]

Occasionally, people ask me if I want to feel a face and on the whole, I don't, but in women there is a curious oval quality about the female face, [...] something so characteristic, effeminate in the feel of the female face [...] It excites me. [...]

I've never talked to anyone about this before because it's never occurred to me but I do believe that I have been quite successful in reestablishing it. Its range is very limited and it is significant that I have spoken about the face of a child and the face of a woman. [...] It took me a long time to transfer pleasure from visual to the tactile. It is such a laborious ill-defined reconstruction, but I think that is what it is.¹¹

I moved onto his friends and colleagues. How did he construct personality and individuality without a face?

I no longer turn it into a visual image. I don't any longer know or care if they're tall, short, fat, thin, bearded or what, I don't give a damn. [...] Everything is in the voice. [...]

I instantly know what my closest friends are thinking and feeling because it's all in the voice – but they have to speak. There is a big problem with the child and the face. It's hard to tell moods. If my thirteen year old is taciturn a glance at his face would tell me how he was. Do you know what a dread I have? My fear is that my child would be killed or unconscious and I would be called to go to the hospital or the mortuary and identify my child *and I couldn't do it*. I would stretch out my hand and I would not know if it was my child or not. Or that I would be sitting beside my dead child, or my unconscious child, or my dying child, and I would not know, because it needs sight to know what the face under those conditions is doing. [...]

Anger, impatience, such emotions are more easily expressed in the voice than thoughtfulness or sadness. It is very difficult to detect sadness. The emotional range is narrowed. This is something I feel most acutely when I'm telling stories to my children and an even worse time is when I want to listen to music with them.¹²

I asked if he's suggesting that the face expresses emotion in the finest way:

Exactly. And with music it's not what you say afterwards, it's the little glances that you show as it reaches its climax and you know you're in the music together and there's no fellow feeling without contact with the face.¹³

It sounded as though he lived in a much more intellectual world.

That's true absolutely. When I'm on a business committee all that matters is the business. The sighted people look around, someone's looking at some woman's legs on the other side, or there's a fly crawling up the coffee pot, [...] and there are you remorselessly

chomping through it. I'm a marvelous chairman, once people get used to the technique. What I'm bad at is knowing when to back off.¹⁴

One never normally consciously constructs character and feelings towards someone – it just happens. I wondered if for John these constructions may have required effort and thought. I for instance, like Kundera, would find it difficult to imagine a character without a face.

Marilyn and I have sweated blood on this one because it was so difficult for the sighted person. [...] A year or two ago we had a visitor when Joshua was about three; when the friend had gone Marilyn said, apropos of nothing, 'What comes into your mind when I say Joshua?' I said, 'Well, Joshua.' And she said, 'What, what exactly is it?' 'Well, it's the memory running through my hand, the feeling, kicking, laughing body, of throwing him over my shoulder. Joshua's tummy when I put my hand on it in the bath and the things Joshua and I have done together.' 'Yes, but what of Joshua himself?' 'If you mean what does he look like – nothing.' 'I can't bear that, I can't bear to hear you say that because I feel that I'm closer to our friend who just left because she and I share the same Joshua.' I had to reply that I did not really know what she meant. 'Darling, but if we are going to say do we share the same Joshua, we might as well say 'Do we share the same world?' and in saying 'Do we share the same world' [...] there is a deep and important sense in which we do not. We do not share the same world. [...] the fact of the matter is that Joshua is a human being and Marilyn and I share the same person, love the same person, but in a different way.¹⁵

I wondered how he viewed himself.

I am not interested any longer in what I look like. [...] The category of 'looking like' has disappeared with me. I can remember passport photographs and things like that but they're irrelevant. [...]

Blindness is a great leveler. Occasionally I have a visitor from the Republic of South Africa and I can cause consternation by saying after a while 'Are you black or white?' Normally I know damn well from their accent but it disconcerts them that I neither know nor care.¹⁶

I asked John if he found himself having to think about smiling socially:

Do you find that you have to think 'I must smile now because it's expected?' Do you think a funny thought and think, 'Ah, now I'm smiling?'

That's such a good question. I am sometimes fearful that my face is becoming less expressive but Marilyn tells me this is not the case [...] but [...] I often feel that I'm thought to be too serious. It's hard for a blind person to have fun in a way because so much of the fun is visual, especially in the family. People making funny faces, teasing each other, and I can be out of it. It's so instantaneous, it can't be expressed in speech [...] I try to make up for that by hearing. Laughing together is one of the best things. [...] Not knowing about tears is worse than not knowing about smiling. Tears are silent. It's perhaps more important to know about tears than about smiles. Tears take longer, laughter is so ephemeral. I think there's no doubt that the loss of the face is a profound loss. A deeply dehumanizing loss.¹⁷

4. The face and the other; autism

The experiences of those who become blind show how important the face is in representing another person and in expressing mood. They also reflect the altered nature of reciprocity of expression and hence relationships between people, for faces allow such exchanges and conversations. When we look into another's face we expose ourselves to the other, and she or he to us. For Emmanuel

Levinas, the French philosopher, the uniqueness of the face is that it always remains the face of another, and so cannot be assimilated fully into oneself or fully grasped.¹⁸ For Levinas, it follows that there is something in the human face-to-face relationship that I cannot control, and in so far as it disrupts my control, it puts me into question or jeopardy.

This jeopardy is seen in those with facial disfigurement who sometimes hide away and shun social interaction altogether, so frightened are they by the reactions of others. There is another group who seem not to interact through the face; those with autism. When he originally described autism Asperger wrote:

A large part of social relationships is conducted through eye gaze, but such relationships are of no interest to the autistic child. Therefore the child does not generally bother to look at the person who is speaking [...] autistic children have a paucity of facial and gestural expression. In ordinary two-way interaction they are unable to act as a proper counterpart to their opposite number, and hence they have no use for facial expression as a contact-creating device.¹⁹

It was not clear from this whether people with autism have no use for facial expression, or were so bothered by others' faces that they avoided eye contact. Donna Williams, an author who has written extensively about her experiences with atypical autism, discussed her problems with faces with me via fax, not feeling able to meet initially, though subsequently we did meet.²⁰ Her autobiographical books had again and again returned to problems with faces.²¹ So I asked her why faces were so difficult.²² Her answer was:

My difficulties in looking at faces were a) to stand looking, b) to comprehend what I saw.

A. TO STAND LOOKING

These were based on several things.

1. Fear based on learning that looking would cause people to attempt to engage me in interaction – the fear of this was for three reasons in turn.

1) Such interaction would engulf my selfhood in a flood of «other».

2) Such interaction would evoke body sensation caused by intense emotion that would be beyond my ability to process, and therefore be confusing and frightening, and also be physically intolerable. [...]

3) Such interaction would generally be only inconsistently comprehensible and would soon cause information overload after a few minutes and be poured down onto to me with a total absence of my own social interest or want.²³

What she could make out from the face did not always correspond with the mood she discerned from their other actions and speech. This meant that for her the person's «real self was not accessible.» We all normally reveal and conceal with facial expressions, whether in poker, politics or daily life, and use our means of expression (face, voice, gesture etc.) in various ways, either together or contrasting, for effect. With her limited ability to interpret, Williams was unable to pick up on these games.

She told me that she and her partner, who lives with Asperger Syndrome, had got together despite neither of them being able to look at each other's face. They could take in an eye, or a mouth, but not a whole face or facial expression. Williams was also hypersensitive to the way in which the face of the other can be such an overwhelming presence that they almost bully. The uses by totalitarian states of huge photos of their leader come to mind, courtesy of George Orwell's «Big Brother.»

Though they do represent the other, paradoxically faces may also be too complex to decode for some with autism. Williams went on,

I could tell mood from a foot better than from a face. I could sense the slightest change in regular pace and intensity of movement of foot [...] that indicated erraticness and unpredictability. [...] Facial expression, by comparison, was so overlaid with stored expression, full of so many attempts to cover up or sway impression that the foot was much truer.²⁴ Others with autism also told me of how they could determine simple moods in their loved ones; «I know when my Mum is angry – her face goes red.» They could not read facial expressions but had learnt to rote learn the simpler aspects of expression. Williams continued,

B. TO COMPREHEND WHAT I SAW

I also avoided looking at faces because of the meaninglessness of their component parts. [...] I also did not like the shock of finding I had touched or stared at a part of someone's face and then realized that these parts belonged to the person. The jolt always disturbed me. [...] Another disturbance in looking at people was being echopraxic [mimicking their movements because they had taken over her actions], that I kept taking on their postures and facial expressions unintentionally, and this disturbed me and sometimes disturbed them. It disturbed me because I just wanted to keep my own body connectedness intact and not have to have it trail off like that, like a wild horse. Sometimes others had more control over my body than I did...²⁵

Here she described her realisation that looking was not one way, and that by looking she invited others to look back; that faces involve, and evolved, for conversations, to reduce the distance between people and allow them to explore each other. This was unsettling; as the other intruded, they «put her in question,» leading her to lose her fragile sense of self. Though particularly sensitive to this, such feelings may not be exclusive to some with autism. Many shy people, for instance, avoid eye contact and the other's intrusive gaze.

5. Living without facial expression

For the last part of this essay I will return to the experiences of those with Möbius Syndrome, for their most important impairment is probably that they are unable to move and express on the face.²⁶

In 1977, Andrew Meltzoff and Keith Moore showed that newborn infants can imitate facial expressions within one hour of birth, for 'big' facial gestures such as a wide open mouth or tongue protrusion.²⁷ They also showed that babies a little older, at 16 to 21 days, have a short memory of which facial expression to imitate. The ability to do this has to be innate and requires the baby to have seen others move, move themselves, and monitor their success through internal proprioceptive feedback, suggesting a sophisticated neural mechanism developed at birth, before the baby is able to move meaningfully in other ways. Why should facial expression have developed so early?

When I first became interested in the experience of Möbius Syndrome, I interviewed several adults with the condition, attuning myself to their prosody, speech and gesture. Then I went to a meeting of the United Kingdom Möbius Support Group and saw a young baby with the condition, being wonderfully and lovingly looked after by his parents. Nothing had prepared me to see this young baby. She lay there, with a few sounds and limited arm movements, but otherwise with nothing with which to communicate. A baby can cry, gurgle and

chuckle, expressing its needs for food or for a nappy change. But what is crucial for any baby's survival is not only to have these basic needs satisfied, but to build up interpersonal relatedness with its parents. For this, facial expressions seem crucial; before gesture and before speech and language, the face is arguably the most important channel for a baby to show the parents that there is someone home. More, by mimicking facial expressions between each other, child and parent share and exchange affective, emotionally embodied expressions and feelings, through vision, through the face, right at the beginning. Before I saw that baby with Möbius, I could not have imagined the force with which this became evident. Lovers gaze into each others' faces (their visible souls) endlessly during courtship and attraction can be – initially – a face thing as much as anything but, perhaps, even above this the face is most important in those early days.

One mother of a Möbius baby grieved for the loss of the child she had wanted; had there been a pre-natal test, she would have considered termination. Her baby made no facial or other response to what was going on around her, whether to a noise or to her – not a smile, not a grimace, not one of the funny faces most babies make. It was frustrating, lonely – and maddening; this little thing she loved so much didn't respond. At times she wanted to hit her just to get something back. How was she to know what her baby was thinking or feeling? How could she care for her and love her if she couldn't read her? Fortunately, as she grew, crawled and laughed, she showed her family through other means what a bright lovably child she was. When they were finally given the diagnosis of Möbius, when Sian was around 3, it came as a relief. Möbius Syndrome was a fairly minor thing compared with what they feared might be wrong.

Of course it is wrong to think that all people with Möbius or their parents will be the same. For another mother the birth of her son was a joyful celebration, with his Möbius a minor part only. «He looked into my eyes. I had no clue that babies move their faces; he moved his arms and legs, so? I talked to him all the time.» Weeks later she went round to a friend's house to see her baby and was slightly surprised. «I saw this friend's baby doing all these things with his face and I thought «Ugh, that's too much.» My friend just smiled and said, that is what they are supposed to do.»

Young children with Möbius have trouble with speech and often hearing too, they can drool because their mouths are open and, of course, they do not respond facially. They can also be slightly clumsy and have abnormal developments of the hands and feet, further impairing normal motoric development. It is therefore not surprising that they can have problems making friends. For many years, it was also considered that they have an increased prevalence of both learning difficulties and of autism.²⁸ More recent work, however, has not confirmed this.²⁹ It seems likely, instead, that recruiting bias and, in some cases, poor testing may have contributed to a falsely high prevalence of learning difficulty and autism in the past. There are, however, other reasons for this. George Padberg's group who found normal learning asked, in their understated academic prose, if the mask-like face, cross-eyes, drooling and speech difficulties may have contributed to the assumption of mental retardation in Möbius. They suggest that health care professionals should not presume that limitations in social and interpersonal interaction reflect learning or cognitive problems and in particular that a blank face means a blank mind.

The same reasons may underlie the suggestion that those with Möbius also have an increased chance of autism. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM IV*, categorises people with autism as having impairments in social interaction and communication, including impairments in eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body posture, and gestures, failure to develop peer relationships, lack of social or emotional reciprocity, and language delays.³⁰ All these might have been designed to show the consequences of the embodied features of Möbius. Testing for autism without taking account of the physical limitations consequent on Möbius seems partial and inadequate. Children with Möbius have to overcome poor sight, partial hearing, poor speech, physical limitations in movement and tongue and mouth control, as well as their problems socializing with others consequent upon their facial immobility. It is not surprising they need more support and more time. They live with, and in, a somatic straight-jacket, which needs to be recognized for what it is, with their difficulties in keeping up not simply assumed to be due to mental slowness or autism.

So much about Möbius has been determined by empirical and clinical research, but such approaches find it difficult to capture the first hand experience of the condition. In our recent book, Henrietta Spalding and I attempted, through a series of narratives, to reveal Möbius from the inside (Henrietta herself lives with the condition).³¹ One woman in her 30's was able to look back on her childhood without facial expression. As a child, she said,

I did not do ballet or horse riding, etc., I did hospitals and operations. I had the eye doctor and the foot doctor and a speech therapist, [...] and a face doctor. [...] My limitations were a fact of life. Not being able to see the blackboard, or not being able to see someone over there. [...] I never thought I was a person; I used to think I was a collection of bits. [...] I would see the doctors; this one, then that one «Celia» was not there; that was a name people called the collection of bits. I did not like my feet; I liked my spirit because I was strong as a child. I liked my brain; I knew I had a brain. I loved reading and read very early on. I liked that bit. I could think and dream and imagine. [...] Even though I was a collection of bits I always knew there was something strong inside that I had a mental dialogue with, but it was not the physical body; it was very separate from the physical.³²

Celia was a Cartesian child, with mind and body apart. She also found it difficult to communicate with other children:

Then, with adults, I would have a conversation but with children I was a bystander. Children had another language, a word language, a body language, a facial language. They run around and jump up and down and I could not do that because my legs did not work and because of my lack of balance.³³

Intriguingly she also had problems with experience as well as with expression.

I did not express emotion. I am not sure that I felt emotion, as a defined concept. At my birthday parties I did not get excited. [...] I don't think I was happy, or even had the concept of happiness, as a child. I was saddened by being in pain or having horrid things like a blood test.³⁴

Of course, this is of uncertain significance and is from one person only. But several we talked to about their Möbius had an emotional impoverishment. One man, in his 50's and a parish priest, said:

I have a notion, which has stayed with me over much of my life – that it is possible to live in your head, entirely in my head. [...] [When meeting my wife,] I think initially I was thinking I was in love with her. It was some time later when I realized that I really felt in love. [...]

I think there's a lot of dissociation. But I think I get trapped in my mind or my head. I sort of think happy or I think sad, not really saying or recognizing actually feeling happy or feeling sad. Perhaps I have had a difficulty in recognizing that which I'm putting a name to is not a thought at all but it is a feeling, maybe I have to intellectualise mood. I have to say this thought is a happy thought and therefore I am happy.³⁵

Fortunately for many of those who we talked with, emotional experience is gained as adults, as they learn to inhabit their bodies expressively. One woman described how at university she had for the first time reached out to others in conversation and learnt to mimic the gestures of those around her. Though she soon made lots of friends, she was not entirely sure that she actually felt what she was displaying. Another with a similar experience found that she began to really feel when she moved to Spain as a language teacher. There, the culture allowed emotion to be more publicly expressed than in the United Kingdom, and she began to experience emotion – here, at last, as she gestured, she felt.

Because of the cultural «up regulation» of feeling in gesture I learnt to feel. I am not sure how I mapped gesture and feeling onto my body, but I was starting to feel then. I could feel really ecstatic, happy, for the first time ever. Before, without the expression, I had found feeling difficult. Once in Spain I certainly had the means, the channel and the vehicle, and the feeling. Before, my thought was frigid or cold. I needed the continuation of a thought into real time expression within the body.³⁶

Maybe the emotional problems that some with Möbius experience are not part of the syndrome, not a manifestation of a lack of ability to experience or express emotions *per se* but, rather, related once more to their somatic problems and their interpersonal consequences. Perhaps we need to express, in a social, cultural milieu, in order to fully experience, and without facial expression, this reduces other emotional expression through the body, whether in gesture or voice prosody etc. I asked Celia why she had not used gesture as a child. She looked puzzled.

When I was a child, I could not gesture because I was a collection of bits. My body was not me, so expression in it, with it, would not be from me either. It was not a joined up feeling. There was a huge bit missing; with the lack of balance, mobility, and problems with coordination, you don't get a sense of self [...] I could see everything and wanted to communicate but I could not *do* anything. It makes you so different. The adults may have been trying hard but I could not give back. [...] All my gesture is voluntary, even now aged 46. Everything I do, I think about [...] All the things I am doing, whether turning my head or moving my hands, is all self-taught.³⁷

One must be careful, of course, in generalizing from small numbers of individual's experience. It is not clear if Celia and the others are unusual in Möbius in their experience, or in their eloquence. The small number of studies on the general resilience in adults with the condition have found differing results, with one from Germany finding more problems in adults than other studies from America, though whether this reflected selection bias, social factors or other differences is unclear.³⁸

6. Conclusions

Though not empirical studies, I hope that the experience of those with impairments of facial function allow insights into what the face does and how it relates to self and others. One main thread concerns identity. Interestingly, Isabelle Di-noire, the first person to have a (partial) face transplant, has said that,

I accept it as if it was my face, but when I talk about it I say «the» face or «her» face. She's [the original donor] there somewhere. She'll always be there. It will never be my face [...] it's a face without being mine.³⁹

But despite this, she accepts that the operation has been a success. She can now walk without being stared at, one major aim for those who look different, and campaigns for more transplants to be performed. Her original problem followed a failed suicide bid; now she has more confidence and new meaning in her life; the transplant has «[given] her back the will to live.»⁴⁰ Ironically her identity is now, to an extent, bound up with that of the transplant.

The other main facial function is in expression and emotion, and in interpersonal relatedness. We measure success by how others react to us. As Merleau-Ponty suggested, «I exist in the facial expression of the other.»⁴¹ If disfigured, for instance, you have to overcome the reactions of others each and every day, and have to reach out to others to reassure and show them how to react. This is similar to the early survivors from spinal cord injury. One of them, Albert Bull, wrote, in 1944, that «the first duty of the paraplegic is to cheer up his visitors.»⁴² Those with facial difference have to show others that there is a person behind the face, something in the United Kingdom which the charity, *Changing Faces*, does so well, with its public education as well as psychosocial support for those with visible difference.⁴³ If some of those with Möbius show some of the consequences of not being able to express, then the charity, importantly, has developed programs to help those with problems reach out to others to reduce isolation and improve social skills. An important message is that these can be taught effectively and in life changing ways. In Möbius, the use of gesture and prosody and encouragement of the expression of feelings seems key.⁴⁴

To try to understand the face from first person accounts of those with unusual faces requires a degree of imagination and empathy. Arguably, in turn, the very root of this social ability to enter others' experiences is through the embodied expression of emotions and feelings found in a mobile expressive face. Perhaps, then, empathy needs a face.⁴⁵ If we learn about face from those with facial problems, so we also learn the need for a creative empathy to see beyond the face to the person within. Ian McEwan once said that «imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and the beginning of morality.»⁴⁶

Annotations

Note: Quotations without footnotes are from the author's personal interviews.

1 Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, trans. Peter Kussi, New York 1991 (Milan Kundera, Nesmrteľnost, 1990), p. 8.

2 Here is not the place to distinguish between these two. For some people feelings are considered to be embodied experiences and emotions more inner brain states, though separating these seems dubious and to imply a degree of dualism.

3 Jonathan Cole and Henrietta Spalding, *The Invisible Smile. Living without Facial Expression*, Oxford 2009.

4 Jonathan Cole, *About Face*, Cambridge (Massachusetts)/London 1998.

5 John Hull, *Touching the Rock. An Experience of Blindness*, New York 1991.

6 Hull 1991 (as in note 5), p. 25.

7 Hull 1991 (as in note 5), p. 34.

8 Hull 1991 (as in note 5), p. 55.

9 Hull 1991 (as in note 5), p. 125.

10 Hull 1991 (as in note 5), p. 142.

11 For these quotes see also Cole 1998 (as in note 4), here p. 32–33.

12 Cole 1998 (as in note 4), p. 33–34.

13 Cole 1998 (as in note 4), p. 34.

14 Cole 1998 (as in note 4), p. 35.

15 Cole 1998 (as in note 4), p. 35–36.

16 Cole 1998 (as in note 4), p. 36.

17 Cole 1998 (as in note 4), p. 36–37.

18 See for example Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Dordrecht (Netherlands) 1987.

19 Hans Asperger, «Die 'autistischen Psychopathen' im Kindesalter,» in: *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten*, 1944, vol. 117, p. 76–136. For an English translation see Hans Asperger, *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, ed. by Uta Frith, Cambridge 1991.

20 Whether Donna Williams has classical autism, or whether her experience follows her abuse as a child, has been discussed for several years. I cannot claim to be an expert in this area; her experiences seem to reveal something about facial difficulties in autism.

21 Donna Williams, *Nobody Nowhere*, New York 1992; id., *Somebody Somewhere*, New York 1994.

22 Cole 1998 (as in note 4).

23 Cole 1998 (as in note 4), p. 93–94.

24 Cole 1998, (as in note 4), p. 96.

25 Cole 1998, (as in note 4), p. 95.

26 See Cole/Spalding 2009 (as in note 3).

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34 Cole/Spalding 2009 (as in note 3), p. 43.

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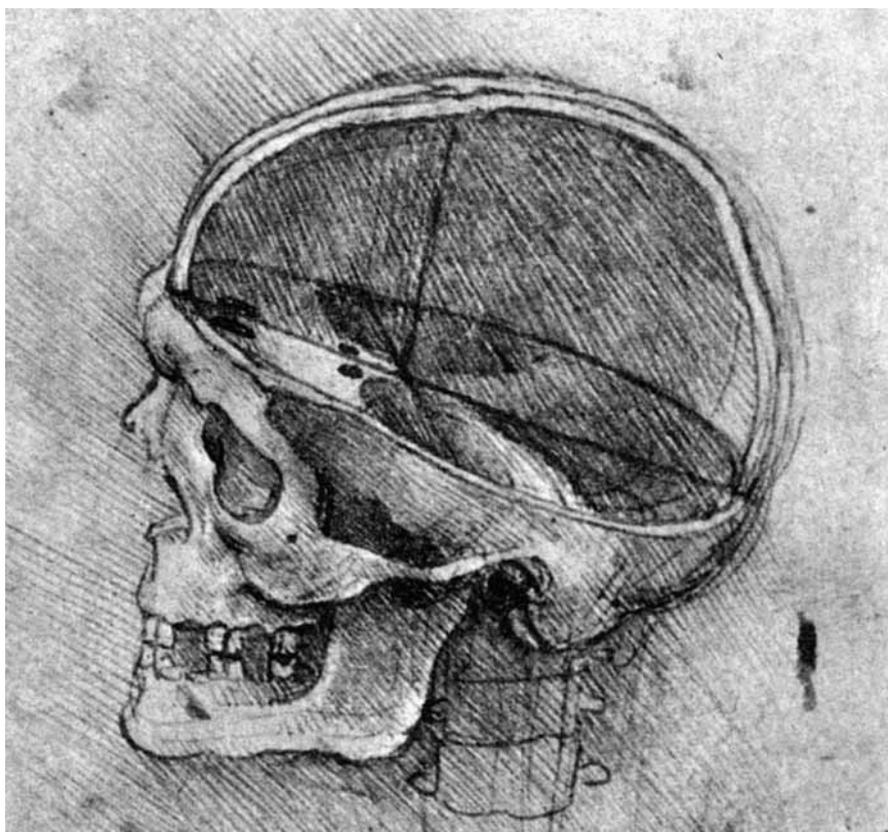
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The interview was conducted by Jeanette Kohl with questions from Jeanette Kohl and Dominic Olariu.

- J. K.** *French art historian and cultural philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman in his book Être crâne (Being Skull) describes the anatomist's and surgeon's work as an «anatomical excavation,» as an intrusion into foreign zones and paradoxical places.¹ For him the skull, even though a locked system, in that sense is an open space, a place of unpredictabilities and challenges. Does this viewpoint coincide in some way with your experience as a surgeon working within the skull?*
- R. S.** Naturally, it is ideal for a surgeon if there are no unforeseen situations whatsoever. A prerequisite to work on or within the skull is that you have exact anatomical knowledge and a certain amount of experience with the intricate spaces behind the face that you will need to reach and work in. The skull is symmetrical, to a certain extent it mirrors itself, so there are reference values and quite exact dates for the distances between different locations and for the appropriate routes of access. There are of course age related differences – for example between children and adults – that create variations with which the experienced surgeon is familiar. Surgery in my field and specialty usually approaches the skull-base from below, either from the visceral cranium or from the neck. In both places, the anatomy is complex, with vital nerve pathways and vessels. And then of course accidents and tumors can alter the anatomy. One important experience actually correlates to Didi-Huberman's non-medical interpretation of the skull is the fact that, yes, you run into deviant anatomies; but even then, when working in areas that are extremely hard to reach or show anomalies, you still have to create an open space where you can do the work.
- J. K.** *In his seminal study «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction» of 1936, Walter Benjamin compares the surgeon's work with that of a cameraman: «Magician and surgeon act like painter and cameraman. The painter, while working, observes a natural distance from the subject; whereas the cameraman, on the other hand, penetrates deep into the subject's tissue.»² How would you describe the relation of distance and closeness the surgeon experiences when working on and behind the human face?*



1 Leonardo da Vinci, *Section of a Skull*, ca. 1489, ink on black chalk, 18,7 × 13,5 cm, Windsor Castle, Royal Library, (Keele/Pedretti 43r – RL 12372r), detail.

R. S. There are different dimensions to this comparison. Closeness and understanding come into play even before the operation takes place, in discussing the possibilities and risks of a surgical intervention with the patient. It is important to develop a clear sense for the patient's needs and fears: You have to literally look behind his face. During the actual surgery on the other hand, it is important to create an emotional distance, which leaves a neutral environment for maximal concentration despite the physical proximity. In conventional surgery, a high level of such physical immediacy is involved – you actually penetrate someone's open face or skull with your hands. Something I would call tactile intelligence comes into play, an almost «blind» understanding through your hands – the German word *be-greifen* explains this phenomenon aptly. You actually feel, even through the gloves, what is there, if resisting or giving way. It is an act of coordinating tactility with surgical tools and with your analytical knowledge. To a certain extent, microscopy and endoscopy, the surgeon's camera tools, modify this immediacy. Working with these tools needs to be learned from scratch, in particular as it involves a decoupling of eye and hands; and it creates a whole different experience for the surgeon. Robot assisted in-

terventions are yet another story because they totally remove the surgeon from the patient, spatially and physically. In a Benjaminian sense, yes, the cameraman who penetrates (the real) through his lens, through that filter, in order to (reach) it, comes close to what the facial surgeon does.

- J. K.** *A cult movie from the 1960s describes The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner.³ How does the facial surgeon handle this loneliness when confronted with life and death decisions?*
- R. S.** During surgery, hardly anything can be postponed. The main goal of a surgical procedure is usually reached through a fixed sequence of ratable and interrelated steps. Sometimes it can be necessary to skip certain steps, to vary them or to take detours, yet hardly anything can be deferred.

It is part of our task to discuss the surgical procedures with the patient, to explain what kind of decisions might be necessary in different situations in order to follow the aim and a positive outcome of the operation. In case of unforeseen events, intra-operative decisions will be made in the interest of the patient. I guess that even in team effort it means that with responsibility comes a certain amount of ... solitude.

- J. K.** *One of the most influential and fascinating definitions of the face as a cultural and social phenomenon is in Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's milestone publication A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia of 1972.⁴ The authors understand the face as a (strong organization,) a pattern of perception related to evolutionary history, psychology, politics and media, between image and the imaginary. How does, on the other hand, the surgeon as the intruder define the entity (face)? Is it an organ?*
- R. S.** A face is a skin surface with a high density of units for sensory perception. In regards to the publication by Deleuze/Guattari: From my point of view, which necessarily differs from theirs, it is on the contrary a hard fact – though its perception might very well be an (invention) influenced by familiar patterns, wishes, desires and different patterns of intention. However, it has many unique functions but it is not an organ, which is defined as a tissue-structure with functions inside of the body.
- J. K.** *Are there any binding ethical principles in facial surgery, that is: Where do you set limits? We are thinking of a case like Michael Jackson, who knowingly and gradually underwent procedures that would ultimately not only change his facial features but would also eliminate his ethnicity and blur his gender identity – certainly a case that equally exemplifies psychological borderlines. What do you think about this?*
- R. S.** If you ask me personally, every surgeon should determine these limits for himself and in consultation with the patient. In our profession, one should act according to one's conscience, one's level of experience and abilities. The surgeon – in particular in the case of non vital aesthetic interventions – of course wants to meet the patient's expectations and ideas as precisely as possible; yet he also should realistically reject what he thinks are exaggerated expectations or absurd wishes. There is of course a fine line, and individual judgment is required. Psychological components are most difficult in the case of facial transplants. Those patients need intensive psychological care. They not only have to adapt to the face of someone else, they have to live with the face of someone dead. Such a paradoxical (living



2 Michael Jackson,
after facial surgeries.

presence of a formerly dead face through transplantation also asks a lot from the relatives of both the dead and the living person.

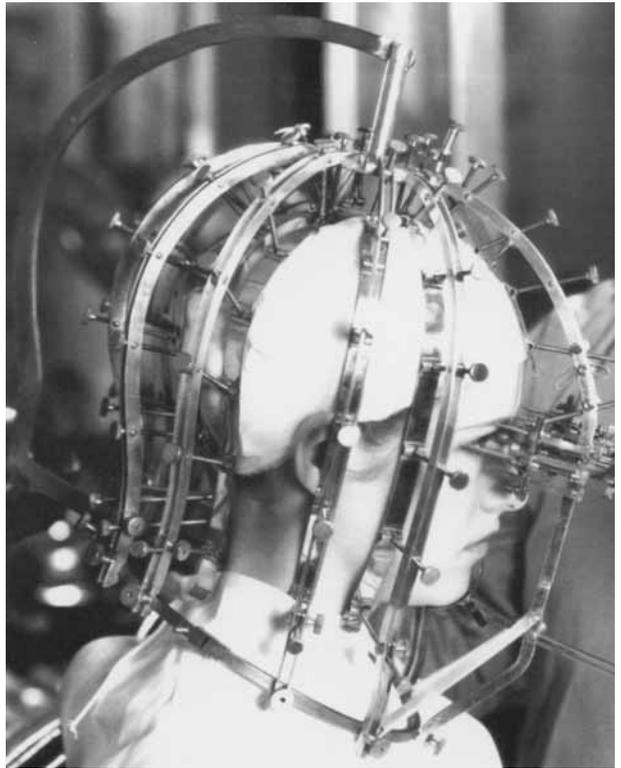
J. K. *Do you specifically refuse any particular forms of facial interventions?*

R. S. I refuse procedures that I assume will mutilate or do not correspond to someone's individuality and personality. After surgery, a patient should be able to recognize his face and feel a familiarity. I think I draw the line rather strictly. It is of course no problem to tighten the skin or improve the jawline, yet when a patient asks to change his face randomly just to make him more beautiful with any operation I become very hesitant, indeed. There are patients who bring cut outs of movie stars from magazines, often times with own drawings or written remarks in order to instruct the surgeon. They want to look like Tom Cruise or Demi Moore. In such cases, I usually recommend they consult a psychiatrist.

J. K. *This phenomenon of desired assimilation to an ideal, a star or a super-hero also raises the question of how significant gender differences are. Is there something like a trend towards approximation between male and female? Do men, for example, more often utter the wish to have softer features or does the trend go towards a prominent He-Man chin?*

R. S. There is a strong trend towards aesthetic surgery for men in general. We also see an increasing demand among males for eyelid reconstruction (blepharoplasty) in order to look younger, fresher, more present. Entire face-lifts are also becoming more popular with men, in particular minimal invasive biolifts. Here in Freiburg, we have only had one or two patients asking for a feminization of the male face. American male patients, for example, often understand a prominent and strong jaw-line not only as a gender specific feature but also as particularly 'American,' almost as a 'national' genetic trait. In Japan, on the other hand, one of the most frequent requests of women is the Caucasian eye-lid, which is commonly perceived as more attractive. More specific gender related aspects emerge in cases of sex transformation. In addition to adequate psychological counseling aesthetic surgery may contribute in a significant way to the patient's new self-esteem and to feeling comfortable with their new gender and the related aesthetic clichés. In female to male sex changes it may be indicated to render the chin more prominent and to adapt the angles of the jaws. We often use pre-formed implants made of biomaterials to remodel the jawline and the forehead around the eyebrows. We also have to decide whether osteo-

3 Max Factor *«Beauty Calibrator»*, 1932, a pseudo-scientific device to correct facial flaws with pancake make-up.



tomies of existing bone structures, augmentations or abrasions of bone with or without soft tissue work and if artificial materials give the most benefit.

- J. K.** *What is the most frequent request in aesthetic surgery and what are the common reasons behind it?*
- R. S.** One of the most popular wishes is the treatment of wrinkles by injection. It is an easy procedure with a high rate of satisfactory results and few possible side effects. As far as surgery is concerned, it is again blepharoplasty, where the surgeon in an outpatient procedure usually achieves very satisfactory results. The lower lid is a little more complicated than the upper one. Secondly, there is a lot of demand for simple face-lifts, mini-lifts, followed by more extensive lifts, which include tightening of the skin, aponeurosis and fasciae.
- J. K.** *In all of these procedures aiming at beautification, what role does the «average» play? Are faces commonly perceived as beautiful defined by average values, as many empirical studies suggest, or are there other individual factors at work, too? And, in relation to this, do you personally notice any shifts or changes in the concepts of beauty and in the wishes of patients who try to get closer to such «ideals»?*
- R. S.** In surgery average per se is not bad, it is what we are used to see, it relates to cultural standards of acceptance. As far as my profession is concerned and the actual work on and with a patient's face, it is largely in the sur-

geon's hands, literally, to choose the appropriate procedures and techniques to achieve the desired result. There definitely is something like an average in our own procedures and interventions for which each surgeon then has his or her own slight modifications. As for the individuality of the surgeon's work, this is largely a question of technique and if someone prefers more or less radical forms of surgery and how they are combined, for example just tissue modifications or tissue and underlying bone surgery. This indeed depends on the surgeon's own preference, style, and judgment as well as on the patient's wishes and how far they want to go. As for me, I tend to think that often times less is more and that it is crucial to design the outcomes of surgery in a way that maintains type and personality.

- J. K.** *In regards to the different stages of life, can one say that there is a preferred or ‹ideal› age? Do people usually find themselves physically more attractive when they are 20, 30, or 40 and is there a frequent point of reference for ideals and wishes of how to look, like: ‹I want to have the face I had when I was 30?›*
- R. S.** Interesting question. My observation is that older patients in their 40s and 50s often times find themselves in a basic way more attractive than younger ones. I guess in the process of aging you get used to your own face and its flaws, which increases acceptance. These patients often come see me because they want to look fresher. Younger people often have more diffuse but also more urgent and drastic ideas of actually changing their face. Physical attractiveness and conformity to ideals of beauty and perfection as they are disseminated through the mass media play a much important role in the age group around 20 and 30.
- J. K.** *What are the fundamental differences between aesthetics surgeries and reconstructive surgeries after accidents and tumors? And in the case of trauma surgery, what do you reconstruct: the face as it was before, an average, or even an improved face?*
- R. S.** ‹Aesthetic› surgery aims to optimize the face as it is. Accident and trauma patients hope to look similar to how they did before the accident or disease. However, there are some rare cases in which for example during a fracture treatment the crease of the upper lid can be used to perform blepharoplasty to improve the look of the eye. This can only be done if the patient is not in an immediate emergency situation and able to make clear decisions. In the case of extreme facial injuries we usually aim to reconstruct the face as good as we can to make it look ‹normal,› that means acceptable and presentable, the German term *ansehnlich* expresses this appropriately.

Some facial tumors require a removal of tissue plus bone, which changes the look of a face drastically. Here, we have developed reconstructive techniques where skin, muscle and bone material from other parts of the body are transferred to the face to substitute the loss. There are areas of similar skin color and texture like the skin above the shoulder blade that can be used for the face. These can be reanastomosed microvascularly under the operation microscope, meaning that a certain area of skin is transplanted including the arteries and veins, which are then connected with existing vessels on the neck in order to keep the transplanted area alive. You can



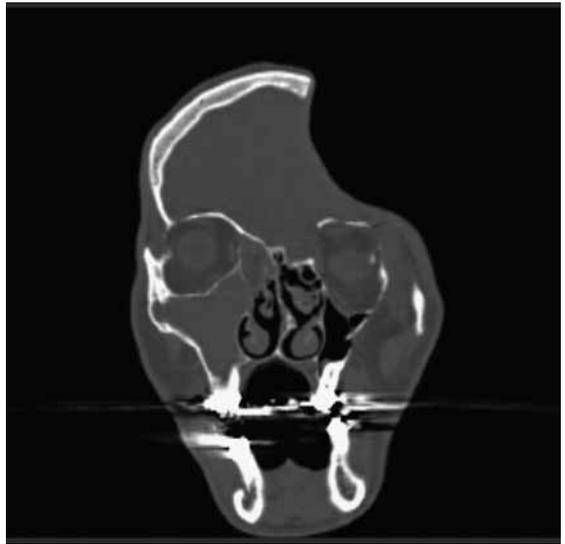
4 Repairing War's Ravages: Renovating facial injuries, 1914–18, London, Imperial War Museum.

imagine that in such cases even an approximation to what we would call «aesthetic normality» is a huge success. Also, we must explain to the patient that the initial appearance is not the final result yet. There is always swelling and sometimes soft tissue excess that will be reduced over time or will have to be surgically removed in smaller procedures.

- J. K.** *Let us come back to the hand: What role does it play in times of high tech medicine and highly predetermined surgical routines?*
- R. S.** Even with high tech appliances and instruments the tactile perception of tissue plays an important role – next to the eye. There is a notion that some surgeons have a better sense for bones, others for soft tissue. Some specializations are based on these particular abilities. It is a lot about the balance and the relation between bones and tissue. In the area of the face it is especially important to balance pros and cons of for example a profile changing intervention, such as orthodontic relocations of the upper and lower jaw or chin. Is a correction of the tissue enough or does the jaw have to be moved into another position? As I said before, it is one of the great challenges of a facial surgeon to be able to understand with his eyes and hands, in a tactile manner. With your hands you feel the texture of the tissue, its flexibility, movability. You have to palpate and grasp the mobility of bones against tissue, bones against bones. Robot assisted system can transfer movements from a workstation to the operation table with a high precision and advanced features such as tremor control. Yet what's missing is the tactile element, everything «feels the same.» This still needs to be refined. However, the surgeon's like the boxer's hands are irreplaceable tools. I think it was Muhammed Ali who described the hand as the most quick-footed embodiment of human intelligence. I really like this paradoxical simile.

- J. K.** *If the hand is that important, one would expect that there is also something like an 'individual handwriting' or a signature a certain surgeon leaves behind. Is it possible to identify a particular surgeon or a school by the outcomes of facial surgery? In Art History, Giovanni Morelli in the 19th century established a method or technique of identifying certain artists by a minute diagnosis of minor details, such as the form of the earlobes and nasal wings of sculptures. Is there anything like that in your discipline?*
- R. S.** I do not know of anyone who has tried to identify individual surgeons by their techniques and the resulting outcomes in a systematic way, although this would be quite interesting. To some degree, some clinics prefer specific techniques that correlate to certain results. For example, there are different incision techniques for cleft lip and palate situations or in trauma approaches as well as in aesthetic surgery, which result in specific forms of scars. So I guess you can say there is something like 'different schools,' but the procedures at present are much less dogmatic than in the past.
- J. K.** *By implication, could one say that every surgeon wants to be invisible, disappearing behind his finished masterpiece?*
- R. S.** I like that idea! To be invisible, yes, just like the accesses for surgery and the scars. To cut along one's natural lines and creases, parallel to the skin's stretching lines, under the hair, behind the lower lid, in the crease of the upper lid, from inside the oral cavity – to leave no marks, no traces, ideally. The main goal sure is to perform surgery that no one sees.
- J. K.** *In what ways have new imaging technologies changed the field and the actual work of the surgeon?*
- R. S.** Imaging and data processing technologies, such as high resolution CT, MR PET scans and combinations as well as navigation aided procedures and intra-operative 3D imaging have contributed largely to improve planning and preparation. We can simulate surgical interventions on the screen and get a much better impression of the expected outcomes. We are also able to perform segmentations of bones on the screen and perform virtual surgeries in order to ponder the possibilities of different accesses more precisely. Preformed implants can be virtually inserted into the orbital cavity with high precision to anticipate the accuracy of position and fit. During surgery, navigation procedures allow for highly accurate determinations of anatomical positions. The 3D CT image is on the screen while infrared cameras capture the exact position of surgical instruments, like the instrumental approach procedure in an airplane. We are thus able to visualize and see the precise position of an instrument working for example on the extremely intricate and complex skullbase. This certainly facilitates precision work in difficult areas.
- J. K.** *When Leonardo da Vinci was working on his anatomical drawings he invented a new kind of anatomy atlas. What do you think: Will software produced for digital imaging in facial surgery at some point in the future be used for computer and video games or in movie editing?*
- R. S.** I think there is a lot of potential for this. Today, the equivalent of his work would probably be a virtual atlas of head and neck anatomy in 3D.
- J. K.** *To come back to the relation of face and psyche, which of course has an intrinsic quality: What are your experiences with changes in personality after drastic facial interventions? It is pretty obvious that certain complexes and a low self-es-*

5 Ct scan of patient suffering from massive bone loss, orbital fracture and soft tissue injury following trauma.



teem can be improved through «better looks.» Is it possible that the «transformation» of one's face results in profound personality changes? In other words: Can a person with a changed face literally jump of out their skin?

- R. S.** Personality changes with looks, and looks change the personality – at least to a certain degree. Patients with so-called profile changing interventions often times behave and appear much more self-confident. They dress differently, more boldly, and women use different and more pronounced make-up. There is an interesting study by my colleague Knut A. Grötz in Wiesbaden. He showed images of patients with profile irregularities to a group of human resource managers; all kinds of irregularities such as protruding upper or lower jaw, prominent chin, retro-positioned – before and after surgery. The result is hardly surprising but telling: The managers generally preferred the candidates after surgery and judged them as more intelligent and energetic, in some cases they even thought that they were more honest. But to come back to your second question: I do not believe that people can jump out of their skin – it is more: «New skin for the old ceremony,» as Leonard Cohen put it. An aesthetically enhanced, refreshed face usually provokes positive reactions in those looking at that face, and these positive signals in return boost the person's self-esteem.
- J. K.** *How would you define the role the mirror plays? We are thinking of moments of self-confrontation after facial surgery.*
- R. S.** The first look into the mirror is still a crucial moment for the patient. Some really shine with joy while others are even moved to tears. For patients with a tumor history or significant facial injuries the point of time needs to be chosen carefully, and they might need company. I vividly remember the case of a little Russian girl who had been bitten by a dog and lost large parts of her cheek. In the aftermath of the incident she completely avoided mirrors. After we had performed surgery she became curious to see how

she looked and asked for a mirror herself. And she was very happy to see her face. Honestly, these can be very touching moments. Especially patients with a poor prognosis and for example malignant tumors have a special and intricate relation to mirrors. «Facing death, who would not hesitate in front of mirrors» – to paraphrase Paul Celan.

- J. K.** *About the future of the face and facial surgery: What is the role and impact of naturalness or rather 'artlessness' and (how) are we getting closer to the ideal of a face that underwent aesthetic surgery yet looks completely natural?*
- R. S.** Like most methods and techniques in medicine and aesthetic surgery, certain procedures in an earlier phase may be applied up to the limits of feasibility. With time, we usually experience a return to a 'healthy' dimension of what's doable. I rely upon this. As you know my credo is adequacy and reasonableness – of the procedures and in regards to the human individual. I believe that we will see a steadily increasing number of aesthetic surgeries yet with less excessiveness – as you brought up the example of Michael Jackson earlier. New biotechnologies will probably bring about further improvements in looking 'natural' after surgery – but honestly, a 60year old will not look like a 20year old, at least not in the near future. We might be pretty good already, but we don't work miracles.
- J. K.** *Do changed faces change our perception of beauty? In other words: Does aesthetic surgery actively change or manipulate a society's wishful thinking about what beauty is?*
- R. S.** This is a question with far reaching implications and one hard to answer. I think that surgically changed, beautified faces certainly alter our ideals of beauty, but in both directions. They define new visual standards, standards of presumed perfection, yet they also might give impulses for a return to the 'origins,' which could be a quest for more natural beauty. Who knows, maybe we will see such a backlash in the future. I have certain patients who come in at regular intervals for smaller procedures and I think we are able to keep up a natural as opposed to an operated look. It is really more about the charisma that you work on, from the inside and from the outside, if necessary.
- J. K.** *Do you see the problem that certain 'faces' and a level of beauty will only be affordable for the happy few while the average person will not be able to afford any of this, while at the same time the desire for surgical beautification is spurred by the media? Or will there be more 'open access,' also financially, that is: plastic surgery for everyone?*
- R. S.** I guess we already see this 'open access' happening, in particular in the US. However, I think that the desire for and the awareness of beauty is generally increasing in the more prosperous societies. This does not only concern the desire for a particular or a particularly beautiful face; it is about shaping our environments in a much more beauty- and design-conscious way. Aesthetic oral and maxillofacial surgery is just part of this larger phenomenon of increased aesthetic attention and 'styling.' Related to this is the strong quest for youth and a youthful appearance, the fight against aging, its downsides and its stigmata. We will see what the future brings on this front.
- J. K.** *To what extent are the dynamics of aging and the related visible changes predictable for faces that underwent surgery?*

6 From left to right, composite «most attractive faces» of black, white, Chinese and Japanese women. Photos courtesy of Dr. Seung-chul Rhee.



- R. S. Generally, the dynamics should remain the same as before surgery yet there is an altered tissue ratio due to scarring after surgery and the refixation of subdermal tissues.
- J. K. *Without asking you for an ethical statement about facial transplants that in the past years have caused quite a stir in the media: Is the pioneer work by Bernard Devauchelle and others really such a quantum leap for your discipline and mankind? And which accomplishments of the last 25 years in your field do you admire most?*
- R. S. Operations of the kind Devauchelle conducted are surgical and logistical masterpieces and ideally a minutely orchestrated cooperation between different individuals and disciplines. What comes with it are of course far reaching ethical questions about living with someone else's face, for patients as well as relatives and friends. We spoke about this earlier in the interview. These are very delicate ventures. If they work out in the end – then that's extremely gratifying. Currently, there are debates about «reconstruction vs. transplantation,» how much actually can and should be reconstructed and when it makes sense to transplant. The great achievement of Professor Devauchelle has probably raised more questions than it has answered, but that's a good thing.

In my view, other remarkable advancements are the more everyday possibilities for osteotomies in the craniomaxillofacial area such as putting maxilla and mandible in a new position after osteotomies with reliable fracture healing. Really important for my work as a maxillofacial surgeon are recent developments in the use of pre-formed implants made from bio-inert materials such as titanium meshes in the orbit and the mandible.

- J. K. *It seems that in the long history of facial surgery some of the most remarkable achievements were made in times of war, when extreme facial injuries occurred in large numbers, in particular during both World Wars. Obviously, these developments have shifted – despite many wars still taking place worldwide – into the prosperous societies.*
- R. S. Historically, this is indeed true. Otto Dix's images spring to mind, illustrating the pandemonium of World War I. Pure necessity caused huge leaps in the advancement of plastic surgery. For someone who has not seen any of these extreme wounds it is hard to imagine the horror nurses and doctors were facing during the wars. The movie *The English Patient* deals with one of these cases. Also, for the treatment of such a wide range of facial injuries it was very helpful to possess both the skills and knowledge of a surgeon and of an orthodontic – a combination that led to the common double medical license as DDS (Dr. dent.) and MD (Dr. med.) in maxillofacial surgery. Some of the techniques and principles for medical procedures developed during the wars are still practiced in the treatment of gunshot injuries and severe car accidents.



7 Isabelle Dinoire, patient who received the first facial transplant in the history of maxillofacial surgery, after surgery in 2005.

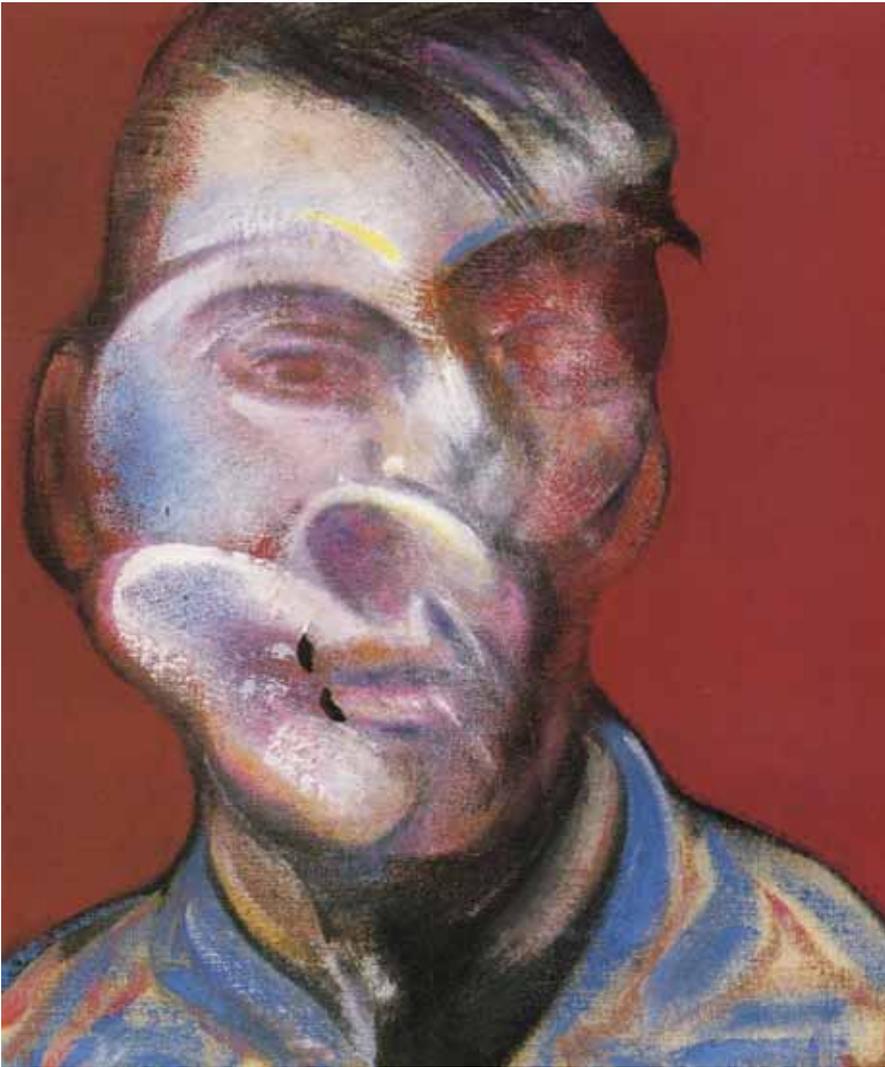
- J. K. During and after World War I there was a rather unique collaboration between a renowned British art professor, Henry Tonks, and the Queens Hospital in Sidcup, England. In a series of hauntingly expressive watercolor portraits, Tonks documented the horror of faces destroyed, burnt, shot through and deformed by war injuries. The patients, however, reacted utterly positive when they were confronted with Tonks' portraits. They reported that the artworks encouraged them. The simple fact that someone dared to look into their faces, not just briefly and reluctantly, but openly and with compassion and interest, in order to turn them into works of art, gave them hope. To be confronted with the ruins of what once had been their face in a work of art had a consoling effect and was easier than looking into a mirror. To us, the story seems significant as a possible future model for a fruitful alliance between the arts and reconstructive surgery. What do you think?*
- R. S.** Artworks like these certainly contribute to some extent to a 'normalization' of the horror of defacement. However, it will always be a shock to look into a deformed face like the ones we see here. Our definitions of what is normal and what is beautiful are turned upside down. I do find the idea intriguing that art may function as a sort of buffer or filter that makes such horrors more acceptable than, let's say, the immediate look into the mirror. In terms of psychological support it seems a good point of departure. An idea, we should pursue. Surgeons certainly benefit from a second, non-medical opinion by a person who is unbiased when looking at faces, someone who does not automatically ponder surgical possibilities or restrictions in outcome, someone who compares faces unbiased with what is regarded as normal, or beautiful, or both.
- J. K. Which leads us to the question of medical education. Wouldn't it be worthwhile to educate future facial surgeons in disciplines like classical aesthetics, art history, and psychology?*
- R. S.** What we are doing here at my clinic are interdisciplinary consultation hours with psychologists and psychiatrists for patients with severe facial injuries. If I may articulate a vision: It would be great to involve several additional disciplines for patient treatment, such as make-up artists, actors, artists, personal trainers. As for university education, yes, I agree, from an intellectual perspective the opening up of our discipline towards art history, the history of aesthetics and the history of the own discipline would be highly desirable as part of the education of young scientists and physi-



8 Henry Tonks, *Watercolor Portraits of Patients with War Related Facial Injuries Treated at the Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup*, 1916–1918, London, The Royal College of Surgeons.

cians, in particular but not only if they want to specialize in aesthetic surgery. If this is in any way feasible within the current system and its tight curriculum is another question.

- J. K.** *Will genetic engineering have a significant impact on facial surgery and are there already significant points of contact?*
- R. S.** As of now, I am afraid, to a much lesser extent than we wish for.
- J. K.** *Is the future of the face Caucasian?*
- R. S.** So far, subtle ethnic blends are often perceived as the most beautiful. I do not see this changing significantly in the near future and in a globalized world.
- J. K.** *Let us return to Walter Benjamin, who writes: «The audacities of the camera-man do indeed invite comparison with those of the surgical operator. [...] What elaborate sequences of the most delicate muscular acrobatics are not in fact required of anyone seeking to repair or rescue the human body?»⁵ Is the facial surgeon to some extent an «artist» – or more of a precision worker?*
- R. S.** The facial surgeon is a very conscious physician in the first place who ideally thinks and feels with the patient and accompanies him for a certain time – with the intention to heal. He also is a «repairman» who fixes human bodies, as Benjamin puts it, and may even save lives. Ideally he is a «repairman» with a certain amount of technical skills, experience and a good choice of materials, techniques and the right instruments and realistic goals. That's already a lot. If he also is an attentive listener and diagnostician, if he can «think through his hands» during surgical procedures and has quick reflexes and a certain amount of intuition – all the better. That makes a «whole,» well rounded representative of his species. Creativity is a surplus, but the space for experiments is really limited during surgery. Yet I believe that every excellent surgeon has a passion for what he is doing, and



9 Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Self-Portrait*, 1973, oil on canvas, 35,5 × 30,5 cm, London, Marlborough Fine Art, detail.

he is doing it for a purpose. The result is a highly visible and subtle work of surgery, which is on display for everyone. He works for the patient he is working on and who is going to be the first observer and critic of what he has done. So, yes, maybe there are parallels with an artist's work.

- J. K.** *We know that besides your passion for facial surgery you also have a passion for the arts. What is your favorite face in a work of art? A face that represents something extraordinary or strikes a chord in you?*
- R. S.** My favorite face is part of a triptych of self-portraits by Francis Bacon of 1973. The face, like the «self,» is a complex thing.

Annotations

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- 5 Benjamin 2009 (as in note 2), p. 276.

AutorInnen dieses Heftes

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Bildnachweise

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Schmölders

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