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(Inter)faces,
or how to think faces in the era of cyberfaces

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Across cultural history, the face has figured both as a site of intimate familiarity and radical unknowability.* On the one hand, the face is the most immediate and recognizable marker of identity: an organic surface upon which interiority is projected and displayed. The pioneer of psychobiological theory Silvan Tomkins, for example, defines the face as the primary site of affects, making a significant equation between the face and the human being (1995, 263). On the other hand, the face emerges as a mask, a simulacrum, and an unsettling site of dissimulation, rejecting the causal link between external appearance and inner essence rooted primarily in the 18th-century physiognomic tradition. While the physiognomic discourse understands the face's exteriority in terms of a semiotic surface that faithfully reflects the mental or cognitive state of the human subject, recent scholarship has brought about not only a critical reassessment of such determinism, uncovering its devastating historical consequences, as tellingly suggested by the title of Richard Gray's work *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (2004), but also radically different conceptions of the "cyberfaces" now inhabiting internet landscapes, undermining ideas of facial resemblance and likeness (Belting 2017).

The recent exhibition "Gesicht" at the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden (2017), curated by literary scholar Sigrid Weigel, illuminated these multiple and ambivalent approaches to the face, foregrounding the eminent importance of further research into the face amid current sociopolitical and technological shifts. Exploring the affective and technological dimensions of the face from the point of view of both cultural history and contemporary neuroscience, the exhibition attested to the face's call for interdisciplinary exploration. From the ubiquity of Facebook and Instagram, to the politics of identity, to innovations in plastic surgery, to the "uncanny valley" inhabited by robots' faces, the face continues to constitute a site of contestation, resistance, transformation, and plurality which demands to be thought in greater diversity. How do literature, the visual arts, and cinema invent and explore the manifold aesthetic, political, and socio-cultural dimensions of the face? How does the face fit specifically within discourses of embodiment? How do faces catalyze new modes

of aesthetics, society, and sociality in the contemporary moment as well as across technological and posthuman futures? Framed by these questions and situated in both the recent debates around the face in humanities and its contemporary uses in various aesthetic forms and cultural practices, the premise of this issue of *World Literature Studies* is to think the face beyond the boundaries of the classical subject and its interiority.

So, let us begin with one of the major contestations, embedded in the key notion of this issue: "(Inter)faces". In his recent transdisciplinary account of the cultural history and anthropology of the face that serves as a recurrent reference across our essays, *Face and Mask: A Double History* (2017), Hans Belting announces a new era of digital faces which rejects any traditional claim of "true" resemblance and likeness of a real human being, marking a shift to a condition in which the relation between the face and the subject is more than ever before grounded in a radical disembodiment: "We find ourselves in an unprecedented situation: new digital technology has dissolved the connection of the image to the face that it seeks to document and placed the pictures completely at our disposal" (2017, 166). Instead of the real, tangible, and verifiable human faces we become at once surrounded by and a part of a "digital masquerade" crowded with artificially generated or biotechnically morphed *cyberfaces* that "are not faces but rather digital masks with which the production of faces has reached a turning point in the modern media" (239, 241). Belting's cultural diagnosis could not be more precise. The current flood of digital facial images, be they of CGI (computer-generated image) origin, enhanced, morphed, photoshopped or else modified – which is more often than not a common practice of social media users posting their selfies on Facebook, Instagram, or Tinder (and thus creating a new sort of non-identity pictures that we might call a "post-portrait") – or a result of the cutting edge, and over the last decade much debated, technologies of the FRC (Facial Recognition System), indicates that there is, indeed, a problem of a facial dissolution when the face as a guarantee of a recognizable identity simply disappears.

Without any doubt, this situation when myriads of faces are no longer physically approached, viewed face to face, overtly or secretly scrutinized during the real-time encounters, or, eventually, fantasized upon watching their features imprinted into the analogue photography or film, but are rather evaluated, selected, and venerated via cultural practices of swiping, liking, hashtagging, and filtering, can easily provoke confusion. At best, the virtual facial torrent leads to a skepticism over the faces' anthropologic value; at worst, the world of synthetic faces could entice a "facephobia" of a kind: a critical attitude that would articulate this state of "digital masquerade" as a mere loss of identity, body, and, even worse, humanity. Without being pessimistic, something of a suspicious tone against the artificial facial universe appears in Belting's work, especially when he explains that the aforementioned cyberfaces "no longer represent *faces*, but only *interfaces* among an infinite number of potential images, whose closed loop separates them from the outside without the interposition of any physical bodies" (240). Rather than pursuing such a dystopian trajectory, this special issue proposes a somewhat less somber perspective whereby the face functions as a media and aesthetic interface.

Certainly, this (inter)face leaves an alleged stability of postromantic and modernist subject behind, but this shift from subjectivity, interiority, and identity has an important conceptual payoff that allows the face to be explored *relationally* – as a constitutive part of a dynamic network and within various modalities of its linking, connecting, overlapping, and interlacing. In other words, once we venture to dismantle the faces' metaphysical baggage – and thus to turn down the traditional and hackneyed metaphor of the face (specifically the eyes) as a window to the soul – the face becomes a specific yet non-exclusive cultural *object*, one whose semantic, aesthetic, and conceptual forces are coextensive with the role and position it maintains within operative chains with other cultural objects. When Sigrid Weigel aptly suggests that "the history of the face is first and foremost a history of media" (2012, 6 [Belting 2017, 4]), it seems useful to add that the mediality of the face exceeds by far an intentional expression, the subject's self-representation, and interpersonal communication and is, in fact, on the way to becoming a medium in its own right. One that instead of serving as a mere tool for the transmission of meaning and representation, works as a conduit that helps us "*activate* our senses, our reflexivity, and our practices" (Casetti 2015, 5). The first premise of this issue is therefore to think the face as a cultural object in its various mediations, aesthetic constellations, cultural uses, and theoretical conceptualizations beyond the confines of the traditional subject.

Another reason why we deem useful to shed positive light on this shift from a face as a guarantee of the subject's identity and expression to the face as one among many other cultural objects is to prevent a nostalgic label of the "post-face" era which would repeat the same rhetoric of mourning which was recently described by Vinzenz Hediger and Miriam de Rosa in relation to the discourse of post-mediality (2016). Rather than indulging in an elegiac tone, let us try to connect the face to existent cultural circuits and then we can figure out whether or not there is any actual loss to be lamented.

The present effort to think the face as a cultural and media interface has its important recent precedents that deserve to be acknowledged here. The majority of them appear in this issue's essays, such as the groundbreaking collected volume edited by Joanna Woodall (1997), Ernst van Alphen's work on the contemporary visual portrait (2005), Noa Steimatsky's *Face on Film* (2017), and Jean Luc Nancy's two seminal works *Le Regard du Portrait* (2000) and *L'Autre portrait* (2014). Others are present implicitly as important conceptual interlocutors, such as the compelling book *Inventing Faces* edited by Mona Körte et al. (2013), Sigrid Weigel's *Gesichter* (2013) but also the special issues of the journals *Kunstforum* "Gesicht im Porträt, Porträt ohne Gesicht" (2012), edited by Judith Elisabeth Weiss, and *Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaft*, entitled "En Face: Seven Essays on the Human Face" (2012). While the key question the editors of the latter volume, Jeanette Kohl and Dominic Olariu, asked was "What is a face?" in order to examine what "a face *meant* and *means*: culturally, socially, psychologically, physiologically, aesthetically, historically" (3), the present analytical inquiries attempt to probe what the faces – always plural, always different from each other – *do*, how they *operate* within media and theoretical con-

stellations and what kind of linking modalities they offer. Exploring these operations and modalities from the intermedia and transdisciplinary point of view is a main goal of this journal issue entitled *(Inter)faces* whose contributions can be divided into three trajectories, following distinct, yet interrelated facial objects: (1) hyperfaces, (2) plastic faces, and (3) portraits.

The opening essay of this issue could be read as a conceptual unfolding of Belting's notion of cyberfaces that lays productive ground for future research into the digital configurations of facial images across the internet. Both political and aesthetic avenues are carefully explored by Pietro Conte's article "Mockumentality: From hyperfaces to deepfakes" whose emphasis on the cultural history of *prosopon* shows how the principle of "deepfake" was an always already underlying element of representation and performativity of the human face. According to Conte, hyperrealistic replicas of the human face owe their documentary value to the belief that they result from mechanical reproduction, which functions as a guarantee of their truthfulness and reliability as well as an aura of authenticity. But what happens when the link between hyperrealism, mechanicalness, and truthfulness is disentangled? Drawing on the case study of a 2017 art-political event, when French artist Raphaël Fabre successfully applied for an ID card using a computer-generated picture where the real face was, in fact, an artificial, synthetic mask, his essay tackles the issue of the increasing overlapping of actual reality and digital (un)reality, particularly focusing on the concerns raised by the confusion between faces and masks caused by the rapid spread of so-called deepfakes in a world that speeds from documentality toward what Conte proposes to call *mockumentality*.

INDEXICALITY IN CRISIS: THE FACE AS A FORMAL PROBLEM AND A DISPOSITIF

Once we decide to approach the face as a medium, an analogous problem arises, observed originally by film scholars in relation to the post-media condition: the problem of indexicality and its dissipation. For the face, which is always mediated, conditioned, and constituted by a given situation and spatiotemporal coordinates, figures as a surface of different indexes relating to both the individual and collective bodies. To be sure, this indexicality has been substantially shattered by the historical experience of disfiguration during the two 20th century world wars. As succinctly noted by Suzannah Biernoff: "Both portraiture and physiognomy rely on the premise that the face is a reliable index of gender, age, social and familial identity, ethnicity, emotion, and much more besides. However, beneath the face we are meat […]" (2017, 12–13). The same holds true for the modernist aesthetic experience: from a mere glance at the visual works of Alberto Giacometti, Wols, Arnulf Rainer, Francis Bacon, or Cindy Sherman, it becomes apparent that the traditional view of the face as an indexical surface of subjectivity and self-expression becomes substantially undermined. Both experiences then, once again, seem to confirm Belting's observation that "there is no stable relationship between the face and the self and no reliable likeness. In fact, we are always practicing self-expression anew with our gaze, voice, and expressive gestures" (2017, 27).

However, there are at least two ways to turn this crisis of indexicality into a productive reversal and think the face as both a media dispositif and a formal problem. The former position is taken up by the recent work of Noa Steimatsky whose 2017 book endeavours "to think *through* the facial image, which means that it does not posit its object at arm's length but assimilates it as a *dispositif*" (3), i.e. as "a flexible configuration of attitudes, relations, and discourses, comprising the very consciousness of the medium, that guide and frame critical attitude" (3). Building upon Steimatsky's proposition that the face can work as "both a compelling iconographic and discursive nexus and a way of seeing, a critical lens, a mode of thought" (3), the second premise of this issue posits the face as a *theoretical figure*. The latter possibility is to conceive of the face as a formal problem, a cultural object that generates aesthetic formations and transformations. In this vein, Jean-Luc Nancy announces the face in visual portraits as "a moveable play of reflections and angles, an essential instability that is always effacing or transforming itself" (2018, 99). To analyze the face in its functional connections and networks, one needs to bypass the perpetual vocabulary of the individualizing and expressive side of the face and to undertake its formal close reading.

Both approaches inform the second part of this issue which is structured around the filmic face. While Abraham's Geil's essay explores the question of (inter)faces as a problem of mimetic form in the work of Sergei Eisenstein, Bernhard Siegert's article delves into the media archeology of Expressionist cinema. In his article "Plasmatic mimesis: Notes on Eisenstein's (inter)faces," Geil suggests that while Eisenstein's early theory of attractions emphasizes the production of audience effects through "motor imitation", his later writings appear to depart from this model for sake of a notion of "ex-stasis" that would transport the spectator out of her or his current state. These two sides of Eisenstein's thought are then brought together in the concept of "plasmatic mimesis", which Geil explores through the figure of the face in several of Eisenstein's theoretical texts and his first film *Strike* (1925). By taking up the device most associated with the face in Eisenstein – typage – and reading a specific instance in *Strike*'s superimposition of animal and human faces, the aim of Geil's essay is to decenter the face as a privileged site for mimesis-as-mirroring in cinema and audio-visual media. Thinking the face through the concept of "plasmatic mimesis" makes it into one form among others but in doing so it frees the face to assume the principle Eisenstein calls "formal ecstasy": the capacity of all form not simply to mimic but to ex-statically stand beside and beyond itself.

If Geil aims to decenter the face as a privileged site for mimetic representation in cinema, then Bernhard Siegert (re)turns to the face as a site of ecstatic, scientific spectacle in film. He also turns not only to these representations of the face, similarly to Geil and Jirsa, but also to the real, corporeal, tangible faces of corpses in scientific experiments. Following the trajectory of the face beyond an individual expression, Siegert's essay "Post mortem performances: On Duchenne de Boulogne, or physiognomy in the age of technical media" reconstructs the genealogy of the electro-physiognomic experiments, which Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne conducted in the second half of the 19th century, and highlights their impact on the media dispositif of the

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early 20th century. The photographs in Duchenne's *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine* (1862) are discussed as part of an epistemological shift from the semiotic regime of expression to the media regime of switching by which they are indissolubly connected to the history of galvanism and electromagnetism on the one hand, and to the history of hypnotism and Expressionist film on the other. Due to this perspective, a main focus lies in an archaeology of Duchenne's special feature of the gliding cardboards that introduces the on/off operation of switching into both photography and "the body", and its echo in expressionist films like *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919–1920) or *Frankenstein* (1931).

The face in cinematic media and visual culture thus offers potent analysis, allowing Geil and Siegert to explore the face as a site to be manipulated mechanically and scientifically not only through film editing but also by means of electrical experiments. The face bends, gurneys, and contorts, becoming unnerving and shocking for the viewer. The face becomes bestial, monstrous, and a surface upon which the potential violences of human nature are expressed and represented. The gothic, ghostly films Siegert analyses in expressionist cinema and the factory strike bloodshed Geil studies in Eisenstein's *Strike* are to be viewed with more attention to the face and how it becomes a cipher for much more than the simple assumption that it represents an individual's interiority. In the following section, three contributors explore the assumptions about the face, and what is stands for, in portraiture, taking to task the fields of music videos, literature, and visual art.

RECONFIGURING THE PORTRAIT

Even a fleeting glance at the historical, aesthetic, social, philosophical, and political groundings of the face suffices to acknowledge that it is nearly impossible to arrange all these dimensions into well-ordered categories. Jean-Claude Schmitt's contribution to the general history of the face is useful wherein he proposes a threefold differentiation of the face: 1) as a sign of identity, 2) as a vehicle of expression, 3) as a site of representation (2012, 7). These functions, however, are essentially short-circuited not only in the aesthetic strategies of contemporary art but also in many other cultural practices. However, in his argument for intercultural perspectives and a historical anthropology of the face, Schmitt proposes an intriguing semiotics of the face based on its etymology, which is rooted in the German word *Gesicht* and the French word *visage* (coming from the Latin word *visum* denoting both seeing and being seen), and which links the seen object to the very act of seeing, while referring to the face as "something that we see in front of us and that in turn looks back at us" (7).

Both the seen object and the object that sees creates the third axe of this issue which is framed by the theoretical and analytical inquiries into the portrait. In his essay "Faces without interiority: Music video's reinvetion of the portrait", Tomáš Jirsa suggests that no matter how contemporary music videos differ across genres, aesthetic styles, and production background, they usually focus on the performer's face. Exploring its opacity and agency, Jirsa argues that contemporary music video production replaces the face as an expression of the subject's interiority and identity with a media-affective interface whose main function is to amplify the video's work

of audiovisual forms, performative mechanisms, and atmosphere. Through a close reading of the hip-hop video *Chum* by Earl Sweatshirt (dir. Hiro Murai, 2012), his essay demonstrates how it generates the face as an audiovisual screen that absorbs, intensifies, and gives rhythm to both the moving images and sounds. Such desubjectification opens a way to rethink portraiture within the music video genre as a media operation undermining the traditional notions of representation, interiority, and identity in favor of unfolding its technological and affective links between sounds, moving images, and lyrics.

While Jirsa explores the portrait in the contemporary audiovisual medium of the music video, Mieke Bal returns to the iconic figure of Cervantes' Don Quijote. He has been studied across different fields of scholarship and remains not only a hauntological, iconic figure in Hispanic patrimony but also a key part of Western modern speech. The quixotic Quijote is a reason to return to the face of this unknowable, mysterious figure. Bal's essay "Facing the face: To be or not to be Don Quijote" presents a "preposterous" updating of *Don Quijote*, in the face of trauma, contemporary slavery, and the importance of a social face-to-face, or interface, to help people to come out of their isolation inflicted on them by violence. Her argument begins with the "updating" of a literary monument, an instance of cultural heritage that never lost its relevance for whatever era in which it functions. The focus on trauma makes this particularly necessary, since those on whom the stagnation and isolation violence causes has been inflicted, must be helped socially. Bal's essay is structured around her own video installation *Don Quijote: Sad Countenances* where some characters discuss the value and possibility of history, the authorship of Cervantes' novel, and the importance of the literary imagination, while the figure of Don Quijote, in front of a large mirror, exposes himself to an artist-photographer who tries to capture his face.

Bal's literary analysis and video project that aim to capture Quijote's literary, extra-textual, and mythic face, or at least to nuance the impossibilities of this endeavour, are efforts sustained by Timea Andrea Lelik in her essay analyzing the distorting and dissipating faces of Francis Bacon's portraits. In her article entitled "Blurred boundaries: Francis Bacon's portraits", Lelik explores Bacon's portraiture and his resistance to the mimetic, identitary portraiture so common in classical art history. Through his large oil paintings, often exhibited behind panes of impenetrable yet reflective glass, Lelik analyses Bacon's implicit critiques of portraiture and the potential for the viewers' portraits to be reflected back into the paintings. She argues that Bacon, with his facially and bodily distorted portraits, is hinting at the fact that portraiture sacrifices the subject for the sake of representation. She also posits that Bacon was claiming that portraiture as a genre needs to re-determine the conditions that originally shaped it. In her analysis of the way in which Bacon depicts his subjects, particularly their faces, Lelik further argues that his portraits blur the boundaries between object and subject, portrait and viewer, in order to remodel conventional notions of portraiture. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's theory on Francis Bacon, she reinterprets Bacon's works through the prism of Buddhist philosophy, arguing that understanding the works through Buddhist practices opens the possibility of a com-

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plete transformation of pre-existing concepts which traditionally shaped portrait making. Her study, while focused on a relatively static visual art genre, suggests that there is a dynamism and movement being evoked in Bacon's paintings, thus linking her to the other contributors who have explored different kinds of media such as film, music videos, scientific experiments, and video projects.

These varied and interdisciplinary studies that span topics from different eras, countries, and languages aim to critique the primacy of the face in terms of representing identity while delving into the performative and aesthetic modalities, generated and sustained by the face. They also probe the supposed primordiality of the face in various media and bring our attention to the ways in which this dominance has been nuanced, questioned, and even subverted. This journal issue thus adds to growing scholarship and popular cultural awareness of the fallibility of the face as a vector for identity and notions of truth, honesty, and sincerity. As we stated at the beginning, we are living in the age of cyberfaces and deepfakes when traditional, conventional assumptions about the face and the identitary claims it makes, are being – rightly – scrutinized. We should thus actively question our ideological assumptions about the face as something familiar and knowable, and instead, learn to attentively watch, observe, touch, and connect it to cultural interfaces. There is no longer one conception of the face and its function; instead, we are in the age of interfaces and cyberfaces, so we must learn to criticize and confront the (inter)faces that face us.

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Mockumentality: From hyperfaces to deepfakes

PIETRO CONTE

In April 2018, a video went viral that appeared to show Barack Obama insulting Donald Trump and saying increasingly nonsensical things. At about the halfway mark, the clip suddenly turned split-screen, with the former U.S. President on the left and filmmaker Jordan Peele on the right revealing the ruse: it was a digitally manipulated version of real footage obtained by merging Obama's face with the lips of the Oscar-winning director. The speech ended with an admonition to the viewers to not believe everything they read or see: "This is a dangerous time. Moving forward, we need to be more vigilant with what we trust from the Internet. It is a time when we need to rely on trusted news sources. Stay woke."

The threat which Obama/Peele warned against has a name: deepfake, a technique for human image synthesis that employs artificial intelligence and deep learning technology to produce false yet deceptively realistic images and videos. Typically, deepfakes involve a superimposition of human masks on top of original footage in order to produce quasi-faces that "belong to no one but exist only as images" (Belting [2013] 2017, 240). The part of the body that should naturally guarantee the individual identity comes to be replaced by an artificial product that can be modified at will, and this, in turn, generates suspicion and mistrust in the reliability of even the apparently most faithful replicas of reality.

As novel as they seem, deepfakes are, in fact, only the most recent chapter of a far longer story in which face and mask, traditionally opposed to each other as truth and falsity, tend instead to overlap. It is the story of a specific kind of "masks" that I propose to call "hyperfaces," that is, hyperrealistic artifacts that replicate or seem to replicate an individual's appearance to the point of being regarded as *equivalent* to real faces.

CHARAKTÉR: MASKS AND FACES, MASKS AS FACES

Every day and several times per day we look at our reflection in the mirror, and what we see is ourselves. Our; selves. Invariably regarded as the most recognizable and noticeable part of our body, the face is the outer image that we attach to our inner sense of self, to who we truly are and how we fit within the social world. By expressing emotions and communicating meanings, it confers (and constantly confirms) an irreducible personal identity, while at the same time it opens to the outside world by introducing the individual into the company of other people. As the ancient Greek

word *prosopon* suggests, the face is the palimpsest of our biography, the medium through which we present ourselves "before (*pros*) the others' gaze (*opsis*)": face and being-faced are therefore one (Frontisi-Ducroux 2005, 19–20). Yet the same term – *prosopon* – also denotes a mask. The Greeks did not distinguish between face and mask like we are all too used to doing. The mask was the face of the actor who wore it, being "always 'presented' to the audience, telling the story of the character": each performer in a masked play became "an individual on his own" (Hall 2000, 34).

A radical differentiation between face and mask only took place with the Romans. They used the word *persona* to mean "mask", whereas they had different words to refer to the face, none of which could also designate the mask: *os* (meaning, literally, the mouth); *facies* (referring to the natural, anatomical appearance of the face); and *vultus* (indicating a vehicle for expressing feelings and personality traits) (Bettini [2000] 2011). Despite this seemingly clear-cut distinction, there was still one particular case where the Romans thought a mask could serve much the same function as a face: the famous *imagines maiorum*, death "masks"[1] made of wax that were generally kept in the *atria* of the houses belonging to noble citizens, but on the day of a family member's funeral were taken out of their shrines and worn or carried by actors (*mimetai*) who resembled the dead in terms of size and carriage and were dressed up in clothes corresponding to the social rank of the deceased that they personified. In the *Naturalis Historia* (XXXV, 6), however, Pliny the Elder does not use the term *persona*, but *vultus*, to describe the *imagines*. This suggests that at least for the entire duration of the funeral, these so-called "masks" were to be considered not as masks but as the real faces of the dead. Being not meant as representations but rather as presentifications,[2] they were "'enacted', playing a performative role which consisted in arousing once again the *presence* of the deceased ancestors" (Bettini 2005, 202). Face and mask coalesced to bring the absents once again present.

What is it that allowed a mask to be regarded as a face preserving the identity – or, as Julius von Schlosser ([1911] 2008, 184) significantly put it, the *Persönlichkeit* – of an individual intact beyond the point of physical death? According to Polybius (VI, 53, 5), the most impressive feature of the *imagines* was their "striking resemblance" to the facial traits of the ancestors, achieved through the use of wax casts from molds, most probably in plaster. Although it is still a matter of debate whether this technique was always and by rule employed (Dasen 2010, 111), the cultural fact remains that the *imagines* were celebrated for their remarkable lifelikeness attributed to (if not actually obtained through) the mechanical process of reproduction. They seemed to best embody the literal meaning of the Latin word for "to portrait", that is, *retrahere*, which denotes the act of *trahere*, a material "taking the imprint" and "drawing it away from" the subject portrayed. It was precisely this idea of mechanical objectivity that made a mask be regarded as a face, the former being considered not just as *similar*, but rather as *equivalent* to the latter. The use of cast made it possible to produce faithful replicas that could act as veritable surrogates of the models just because they stemmed (or, as we shall see, they were supposed to stem) from a *direct contact* with them.

A tradition of funerary masks similar to that described so far spread in Renaissance Florence, where, as reported by Vasari in *The Lives of the Artists* ([1568] 1998,

239–240), an "infinite number" of posthumous wax portraits, often reworked from plaster casts, were placed "over the fireplaces, doors, windows, and cornices of every home". Framed, incorporated into wreaths, or applied to prefabricated faceless busts, those pictures bore such a startling resemblance to their models that "they seem[ed] alive". And again, this resemblance was associated to a mechanical process of reproduction, as demonstrated by Vasari's entirely fictional assertion that Verrocchio was the inventor of plaster death masks (Didi-Huberman 1994).

Famously, the use of lifelike replicas of the faces of the dead reached its extreme in the tradition of the "double funeral" as developed in France and England between the 14th and the 17th centuries and taken up afterwards by Venetian doges until the end of the 18th century (Kantorowicz 1957; Giesey 1960; Marek 2009). In the royal prescriptive funerary and burial texts, terms like "picture", "personage", and "cast" were often used synonymously to describe the full-length robed effigies paraded atop the coffins of the deceased monarchs, and more particularly their hyperrealistic masks (but we should say their faces, given the equivalence for the whole duration of the ceremony between the real corpse and its faithful replica). This vocabulary raises, once again, the question of the ambiguous relationship between the image and its referent, between presentation and representation, similarity and identity, duplication and substitution, briefly: between the mask and the face.

Over the centuries, the pursuit of the most accurate imitation of the individual facial features by means of mechanical replication evolved according to different needs and scopes, but the basic idea remained the same: the conservation of the individual's personality, of the "character" – a term that derives from the ancient Greek *charaktér*, which means, not coincidentally, the imprint, the cast, the mark made by pressure. One need only think of Marie Grosholtz's early work at the beginning of the 19th century, when she was asked to make casts of the faces of famous people executed by guillotine during the French Revolution. The future Madame Tussaud was clever in making visitors believe that her wax portraits were actually derived from death masks taken "immediately after execution", as the exhibition catalogs and newspaper advertisements emphasized (Kornmeier 2008, 75).[3] In this case, too, the concept of mechanical, contact-based objectivity was used to pass masks off as faces; and again, it is not relevant whether the story with which Madame Tussaud's visitors were presented was true. Instead, what matters most are the cultural implications of this story, namely the idea that the final portrait resulted from direct contact, via the inside of the original plaster mask, with the individual's body:

> His or her face has left an actual, physical trace in the material, the mask representing the visual evidence of that trace. The shape of this trace belongs so closely to the sitter that it can be considered a body part in its own right. Therefore, the portrait based on a face cast is a representation of a person's face not because of its resemblance to the face but because it is part of the face (75–76).

The (often mythical) reference to techniques of mechanical duplication imbued a mask with the aura of a face. Right about the same time Madame Tussaud's enterprise began to gain momentum, a different use of anatomical modeling came to the fore which once more insisted on the mechanic nature of the procedure: the mou-

lages, that is, life-size, three-dimensional, colored, and stunningly realistic pictures of diseases in wax. The word comes from the French *mouler*, meaning – again – "imprint molding". Contrary to 18th century highly idealized, mainly hand-modeled anatomical waxes like the famous "Venuses" or the *écorchés*,[4] the moulages were conceived to document the characteristic signs of the particular disease of a particular individual.

As a specific subset of moulages, molded faces were much in vogue in late 19th century criminal anthropology (Pick 1989). In 1892, Cesare Lombroso opened a museum in Turin where he collected, among other specimens, labeled skulls and wax replicas of the faces of "madmen and criminals" (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Wax face of a "counterfeiter". Courtesy of the Museum of Criminal Anthropology "Cesare Lombroso", University of Turin. (Photo by Paolo Giagheddu)

These wax models had been conceived by Lorenzo Tenchini, whose work was entirely in the spirit of Lombroso's assumption that criminality was an inherited trait revealing itself in the individuals' visible features. By seeking to isolate the "natural born criminal" as a deviant type of human being, the founder of the Italian school of anthropological and positivist criminology focused on the face as a telltale mirror of the self, convinced as he was that the physical features could provide access to personality traits and, therefore, indicate whether an individual was prone to crime or madness. Through comparison of many facial characteristics, Lombroso meant to reveal the criminal types underlying them. Thus, the hyperrealistic masks (or rather, the faces) hosted in his museum are to be regarded as a hybrid form of anatomical

modeling: on the one hand, they strove (like moulages) for maximum adherence to an individual physiognomy, while on the other hand they were supposed to be (like wax Venuses or *écorchés*) representatives of general human categories. Paradoxically enough, in Lombroso's museum *individual* faces turned into *typified* documents of "the degenerates".

DOCUMENTS OR MOCKUMENTS?

Despite the motley diversity of form and context, the examples discussed so far have one thing in common: they all refer to what can be labelled "hyperfaces", that is, facial images purposely conceived to give the impression of maximum adherence to reality while constituting visual signs meant to coincide with the signified and to conflate the picture with the depicted entity. This hyperrealistic allure goes hand in hand with the notion of objective truth: those images were passed off as produced through mechanical replication without further manipulation.

The idea that a picture results from an automatic process of imprint taking is enough to generate in the viewer a *belief* in its truthfulness and reliability, thus contributing to giving images an aura of authenticity and to creating the myth of pure objectivity. Unsurprisingly, at the dawn of the 20th century, Schlosser ([1911] 2008, 287) drew a parallel between ceroplastics and photography, predicting that the latter would have rapidly extinguished "the last flickering pulse" of the age-old tradition of wax modeling. He theorized that photographs, rather than the old-fashioned wax figures, would have best satisfied the need for providing a most "faithful", "living", "true" picture of the subjects portrayed. Suddenly photography became the symbol of truthfulness and mechanical objectivity. According to Rosalind Krauss' famous thesis, its "undeniable veracity" (1977, 59) rests on the indexical nature of the medium: photographs are light imprints on the film, marks made directly by the referent, *documents* of a physical trace like finger- or footprints. This special character of photography had already been emphasized by Ernst Jünger's remark that "the original German word for 'to photograph [*Photographieren*]' was 'to seize, to take away [*abnehmen*]'. One takes away an outer layer, the outward appearance of a human face, as though it were a mask" (1974, 471).[5]

From the *imagines maiorum* to photographs, the "evidentiary" value of hyperfaces is rooted not only in the highest degree of resemblance to the originals, but also and foremost in the *belief* that such resemblance results from direct impression without further manipulation. It is precisely the (actual or alleged) mechanicalness of the production process that makes an artifact be regarded as equivalent to a flesh-and-blood face. Life or death masks, moulages or photographs are deemed not to represent, but rather to presentify the individuals portrayed. Accordingly, hyperrealistic faces have been considered over the centuries the best candidates for assessing and validating personal identity: their (purported) quality to guarantee a perfect match between the image and its referent confers them a *documentary* value.

As underlined by André Bazin ([1945] 1960, 7), the production of pictures by automatic means "has radically affected our psychology of the image". The tendency to consider hyperrealistic likenesses as pure replicas of reality in the flesh, untainted by subjectivity, is basically a *psychological* fact stemming from the need to satisfy

"our appetite for illusion by a mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part. The solution is not to be found in the result achieved but in the way of achieving it" (7). The same argument was put forward by Kendall Walton, who observed that the remarkable realism of photographs is considered to derive "not from what they look like but from how come about" (1984, 261). The ontology of all the pictures produced (or supposed to be produced) by automatic means gives them "the irrational power […] to bear away our faith" (Bazin [1945] 1960, 8). No matter how grainy, distorted, or lacking in informational content an automatic image may be: its documentary value results from the fact that it shares, "by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model" (8).

In Peircian terms, two paradigms need to be put in contrast here. While the first one considers images as indexes, the second one accounts for them as icons. Indexicality is based on physical causality: it presupposes a real connection between the picture and its referent. On the contrary, iconicity stands on resemblance and analogical quality. To be sure, we invariably tend to classify hyperrealistic images among mechanically-obtained pictures and, therefore, among indexes.

Yet this psychological fact – the belief that hyperrealism per se is a guarantee of adherence to reality and objective truth, as if the visual aspect of an image were enough to testify to its reliability – can be exploited for precisely the opposite purpose, namely, to give the *false* impression that what is actually a hand-modeled object was on the contrary obtained by means of automatic, purely mechanical reproduction. Indeed, the traditional and almost taken-for-granted association between hyperrealism, mechanicalness, and objective truth has often proved to be unsteady and ambiguous. To refer only to some of the above-mentioned examples: famous death masks like, for instance, those of Friedrich Nietzsche, William Shakespeare, or the so-called "Inconnue de la Seine", were drastically retouched to make them convey a predetermined message (Hertl 2002). The wax models collected by Lombroso are all but "innocent" replicas of the criminals' real faces. And Madame Tussaud's supposed "casts" are actually "portraits" that deviate significantly from merely mechanical reproductions, given that they did *not* stem directly from an impression of the sitters' faces; on the contrary, they were taken from intermediary, embossed clay models, then remodeled and exhibited according to a carefully devised plan. One can thus conclude that what appears to be a naturalistic depiction is, in fact, "a realistic representation of a reality that does not exist", and this demonstrates "how little the verisimilitude and feeling of authenticity […] depend on a truthful representation. […] *When an image looks so real that it speaks for itself, it does not necessarily follow that what it says is the objective truth*" (Kornmeier 2008, 80; emphasis added).

This is a crucial point. The simple fact that a picture "looks so real" evokes in the observer the idea that it must have been mechanically produced, and this, in turn, immediately generates the belief – the faith – in its objective truth. As a result, the image achieves the status of a reliable document. However, this train of thought can be not only, as shown above, misleading, but also dangerous. A recent example will help clarify this issue.

NEITHER INDEX NOR ICON: RAPHAËL FABRE'S *AN-ICON*

On April 7, 2017, French artist Raphaël Fabre successfully applied for a national identification card by submitting a computer-generated, hyper-realistic portrait of him instead of a photograph (Figs. 2–3).

Figs. 2–3: Raphaël Fabre: *CNI* (2017). Courtesy of the Artist.

The digital image met all the requirements for ordinary ID pictures: it was recent and clear, it was set again a plain background, and it complied with the specific parameters of framing, lighting, contrast, and size. Under the write-up for his project dubbed *CNI* (the acronym for "Carte Nationale d'Identité"), Fabre explains:

> The photo I submitted for this request is actually a 3D model created on a computer by means of several different software and techniques used for special effects in movies and in the video game industry. It is a digital image, where the body is absent, the result of an artificial process. […] The document validating my French identity in the most official way thus presents an image of me which is practically virtual, a version of video game, fiction (2017a).

Importantly, to ensure his headshot was as artistic as possible, Fabre chose to model it by hand using a 3D software toolset named Blender instead of a laser scanner. Starting from a basic cube, he shaped it into a rudimental human head; he then refined the model, added lights and shades, and used complex particle effects to generate fake hair, eventually converting the 3D render into a 2D image to make it look like it was snapped in a photobooth.

What is key here is that the picture which should guarantee a unique and secure identity is, in fact, an artifact, that is – etymologically – an *arte factum*, a thing "made by art". This picture *is* (ontologically) no longer a photograph, but it *looks* (phenomenologically) *exactly like* a photograph. Hence the age-old contrast between "being" and "being perceived" reappears in a new guise. Fabre opted not to use a scanner precisely because it would have produced a *mechanical* three-dimensional imprint of his head. Scans are photocopies, that is, a subset of photographs. They belong to the tradition of casts, molds, and traces.[6] As such, they are anchored in the paradigm of the "mere register of presence" (Harvey 2018, 23), no matter if it has long been recognized that this paradigm is often but a myth. The automatic process of

reproduction gives these images their evidentiary or documentary value. According to the ontology of social reality, documents count as a particular kind of traces, for they represent their subjects by relying "upon some direct causal link connecting the represented subject to the trace itself, and upon the capacity of the person that perceives the trace to trace back along this causal link" (Terrone 2014, 164). In the case of photographic portraits, this "tracing back" has become an almost automatic process precisely because we are accustomed to associating the fact that photographs are, indeed, mechanical imprints, to the non-fact that they always have a documentary value. Their reliability in authenticating someone's identity does not derive from their alleged objective truth but from our hard-to-eradicate belief in their objective truth: "If a fake passport appeared to be in order and to belong to the bearer, then the traveler would be allowed to pass. Passports work on trust, not on truth" (Buckland 2014, 182–183). Passports and identity cards are meant as evidentiary devices within a specific system of control: their (objective) validity rests upon the fact that they are (subjectively) considered valid, and this holds also true for Fabre's ID card, which *is* a document because it has been *recognized* as such.

What can strike us as most interesting in Fabre's artistic experiment is that while document validation presupposes mechanical fidelity and "noninterventionist objectivity" (Daston and Galison 2007, 123), the picture he presented was anything but the result of a mechanical and noninterventionist process. The artist emphasized that he "sculpted" and "re-sculpted" the cube from which he started to finally obtain a basic human head; then he used a texture from photographs of himself, which were subsequently "painted" by projection on the model (Fabre 2017b). The vocabulary used clearly refers to ordinary artistic activities such as sculpting and painting: what appears to be a photograph is, in fact, the result of a meticulous hand-modeling process.

One might be tempted to find a precedent to Fabre's artwork in the late 1960s and early 1970s American photorealism, more specifically in Chuck Close's first portraits like the famous *Big Self-Portrait* (Fig. 4). However, it must not be overlooked that Photorealism never aimed at just fooling the eye of the observer (Lindey 1980, 16–21), if only because photorealistic paintings have always found their natural "habitats" inside museums and art galleries. These so-called "institutional frames", like all frames, generate expectations in the sense that the visitors, when crossing the threshold of the museum entrance, inevitably assume that they will be confronted with images, i. e. with representations that, as such, must reveal their pictorial nature regardless of how strikingly realistic they may be. For this to happen, however, the images must immediately be perceived *qua* images, and the fact that they are framed within a museum helps achieve precisely this goal: "The stability of the frame is as necessary as an oxygen tank is to a diver. Its limiting security completely defines the experience within" (O'Doherty 1999, 18). When observing a photorealist painting, viewers are always aware that they are looking at a painting.

Not so in the case of Raphaël Fabre's artwork, though. *CNI* tends towards *unframedness*, aimed as it is at being not recognized as a work of art but, instead, as part of the life-world – as an ordinary document.[7] The structure of so-called "documentality" include "first of all, a physical support; then an inscription […] which

determines its social value; finally, something idiomatic, typically a signature (and its various variants, such as digital signatures and PIN codes), which guarantees the authenticity of the document" (Ferraris 2006, 13–14). If so, then Fabre's ID card must be considered as a fully legitimate document, but this is precisely what makes it, paradoxically enough, a work of art. The computer-generated image looks so realistic that it is immediately deemed to be a photograph; consequently, indexicality is also taken for granted. Yet that picture is a hand-made portrait: it is not an index but an icon, or more precisely an "an-icon" – a word recently introduced by Andrea Pinotti (2017) to define an icon (in the sense of the Greek word *eikon*, meaning "picture") purposely made to conceal its true nature of icon.
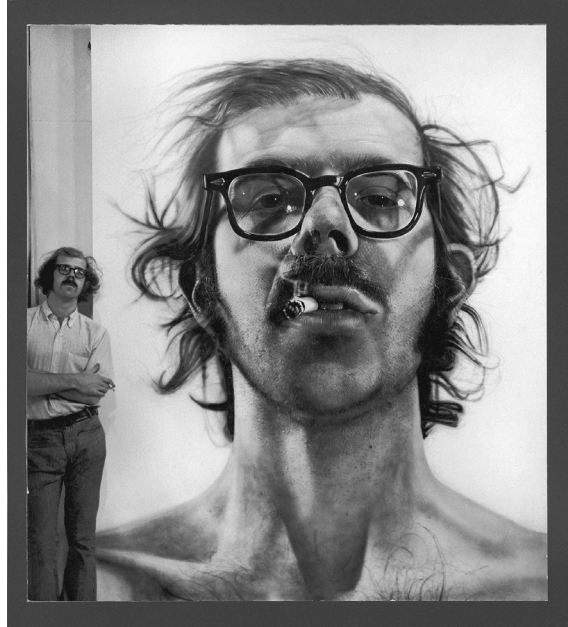

Fig. 4: Chuck Close: *Big Self-Portrait* (1967–1968), Walker Art Center. Courtesy of the Pace Gallery.

Dependent as it is on photographic convention, Fabre's self-portrait has been officially validated because of (or thanks to) the presumption of its mechanical adherence to the original. *CNI* has, of course, several socio-political implications, but it first concerns aesthetics, for it challenges the traditional opposition between the *mechanical* process of imprint taking (which generates copies that can serve as documents) and the *creative* process of hand modeling (which is an essential part of the "genius" and "originality" that we use to ascribe to all works of art). By unexpectedly coupling free modeling with mechanicalness, and by making it impossible for the naked eye to distinguish a hand-made portrait from a photograph, Fabre plunges photography (and, more generally, mechanically-obtained pictures) into an abyss of *mythical* indexicality. No matter whether analog or digital, photography maintains a link to physical reality, which is "captured" (a telling word) either by means of light-imprint on a light-sensitive material or by translating the light impulses into the electronic binary code. Fabre's digital sculpture disentangles precisely this link: it is deprived of

indexicality, although it retains referentiality to the real world in that it still refers to an existing individual, in this case, the artist himself. It belongs to what I propose to label "pseudographs", meaning all images that – contrary to photorealistic paintings *à la* Chuck Close – fool the naked eye into believing it is confronted with ordinary photographs.

Inasmuch as forging ID cards and passports means crime, it is also important to understand the *legal* issues raised by *CNI*. In the case of Fabre's work, the severity of the infringement is attenuated by the simple fact that it was not at all conceived for identity fraud. At the end of the day, the hyperrealistic portrait he created is (almost) identical to a real photograph of him: in both cases, the depicted person is the same, so that the question, from a legal perspective, becomes rather unproblematic. All the more so as most of recent IDs contain biometric information and security features that allow to ascertain personal identity with a much higher degree of certainty than a photograph.

But what happens when a purported photograph does not only lack indexicality, but also referentiality with respect to the real world? In other words: what about a pseudograph portraying a person who does not even exist?

GANS: THE DARK FACE OF THE FACE IN THE AGE OF DEEPFAKES
On 25 October 2018, a Christie's auction in New York caused a great sensation. A portrait of a fictional man created (or rather generated) by artificial intelligence and printed on canvas was sold for the staggering amount of $ 432,500, nearly 45 times the initial high estimate (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5: *Edmond de Belamy, from La Famille de Belamy* (2018). Image from Wikimedia Commons.

The title of the artwork, *Edmond de Belamy*, is a tribute to machine-learning researcher Ian Goodfellow, whose surname can be roughly translated into French as

"bel ami". The only element added to the "painting" (if it can technically be called so) is the curious "artist's" signature on the bottom right, which reads "min G max D Ex[log(D(x))] + Ez[log(1-D(G(z)))]", a formula corresponding to the core section of the algorithm's code of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), a concept in deep learning introduced by Goodfellow in 2014.

GANs are deep neural architectures comprised of two nets pitting one against the other in the attempt to synthesize artificial samples (such as images, digits, pieces of music, speeches) that cannot be distinguished from authentic samples. The *generative* network produces candidates to be submitted to the *discriminative* network, which, in turn, compares the computer-generated samples to the real ones and tells the generator how far off it is. The contest operates in terms of data distributions, with the generator automatically trying to "recognize" patterns and regularities in streams of input, then modeling analogous textures and eventually combining them in order to generate new samples that could plausibly have been drawn from the original dataset. It is the discriminator's task to evaluate whether each instance of data it analyzes actually belongs to the original training dataset or not. Thus, the generative network can be thought of as analogous to "a team of counterfeiters, trying to produce fake currency and use it without detection", while the discriminative network is comparable to "the police, trying to detect the counterfeit currency" (Goodfellow et al. 2014, 1).

As for the portrait (or rather quasi-portrait) of *Edmond de Belamy*, artificial intelligence was trained by Obvious, a French art collective that fed the system with a data set of thousands of portraits painted between the 14th and the 20th century. The generator net made new images based on the original set and submitted them to the discriminator net, which tried to spot the difference between these pictures and the human-made paintings. *Edmond de Belamy* fooled the discriminator into thinking that it was confronted with a real-life portrait. This poses a problem in terms of authorship, for it is hard to tell whom the "painting" should be really attributed to: to the program, to the programmers, or to all the human artists whose works were used to train the artificial intelligence?

Yet GANs raise far more urgent issues when the original data set consists of non-artistic, extremely realistic pictures, especially photographs. In this case, neural networks can create artificial worlds uncannily similar to our own. In particular since the publication of Goodfellow's pioneering article, the generation of fake faces has been obsessively pursued, and the impressive results of this chase for the perfect forgery can be followed daily on the website thispersondoesnotexist.com, which uses Nvidia's algorithm "StyleGAN" to create an endless stream of new facial images from scratch. Despite being often indistinguishable from real photographs, these pictures – unlike Fabre's *CNI* – do not refer to any existing or existed people: they are artificial, synthetic, hyperrealistic combinations (or rather reconfigurations) of thousands of different facial traits like skin and hair color, blended together so as to create what (merely) looks like to be an entirely new person (Fig. 6).

The ancient paradigm of mechanical images has been corroded *from the inside* and turned upside down. Indeed, despite all the differences, and if no post-process-

ing occurs, both analog and digital photographs "reflect" reality – even if it can be, of course, a *staged* reality (van Alphen 2018) – by virtue of the process of imprint-taking through an optical apparatus. On the contrary, in the case of GANs-generated images the artificial intelligence merely "intends" the probability distribution of pixels of the photographs that it has been fed with, in the attempt to decode the statistical law at the core of the original samples and to make of it a specific visual "style" that can be used to produce what can be considered as a subset of pseudographs: automatic, machine-based pseudographs, or, in other words, "digigraphs" (Mercuriali 2019).

Fig. 6: GANs-generated fake face from thispersondoesnotexist.com (August 3, 2019).

However astonishing, the results that can be achieved through the Generative Adversarial Networks are but a step in the increasing invasiveness of the digital to reality in the flesh. After supporting GANs' creator Ian Goodfellow through a Fellowship in Deep Learning, Google continues to be at the forefront not only of enhancing GANs architectures, but also of exploring different ways to generate hyperrealistic synthetic images.[8] In a recent paper, DeepMind researchers Ali Razavi, Aäron van den Oord, and Oriol Vinyals (2019) showed that Vector Quantized Variational AutoEncoder (VQ-VAE) – a generative algorithm alternative to Goodfellow's – can produce samples with quality that rivals that of state-of-the-art GANs, while not suffering from GANs known shortcomings such as lack of diversity (the generator being able to produce only limited varieties of samples).

We have thus entered the era of *mockumentality*, a term that I introduce here to describe the turn from the psychological fact of the belief that hyperrealism, mechanical replication, and objective truth are intrinsically linked together (even though we can often prove the opposite), to the equally psychological fact of the growing

mistrust in any correspondence whatsoever between the images (however realistic they may be) and their referents. Artificial intelligence raises great hopes as well as serious concerns about malicious applications of human image synthesis, as is being made more and more evident by the recent advancements in the creation of deepfakes. Manipulated footages can be used to catfish people on social media, to swap celebrities' faces onto the bodies of actresses in pornographic videos, or to circulate misinformation and fake news.

Experts are already committed to find new ways for authenticating digital images, and some solutions have been recently launched, like stamping pictures with geocodes to verify when and where they were taken or making forensic tools available online that analyze metadata in order to verify whether the images are genuine or fabricated. As in a kind of cat and mouse game, the same neural networks that generate deepfakes can be used to automatically detect them. The battle between artificial intelligence fakery and image authentication has just begun, and one of the key battlegrounds will certainly be how to credit facial reproduction as a legitimate way to *document* personal identity at a time when the threshold between actual reality and artificial (or virtual) reality is dramatically blurring. As pinpointed by Hans Belting ([2013] 2017, 240), "cyberfaces exist in fundamental contradiction to the history of portraiture; they no longer represent faces, but only interfaces among an infinite number of potential images, whose closed loop separates them from the outside without the interposition of any physical bodies. [...] The interplay of face and mask – defined as opposites in the history of the face – is nullified." Things seem to be coming full circle, as if we were dealing again with the ambiguous overlapping of face and mask once epitomized by the Greek *prosopon*. One would be tempted to say that the clash between the face and the mask has moved from reality in the flesh to cyberspace, if only the distinction between the two fields were not so rapidly becoming more and more vague, blurry, and questionable.

NOTES

[1] I put the word in inverted commas because the aspect and function of the *imagines* as masks, busts, or even full-size effigies is still a matter of debate (see Dasen 2010).

[2] I use this term to indicate the peculiar agency of an image that is considered to *embody* and *replace* its referent rather than being just *similar* to it.

[3] As pointed out by Kornmeier (2008, 75), "this notion is perpetuated even today, when visitors see in the exhibition the waxwork of a young Marie Grosholtz casting a guillotined head".

[4] The *écorchés* ("flayed") are drawings, paintings, or sculptures representing the human figure with the skin removed to display the muscles and vessels. By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, wax was the most popular material for creating *écorché* statues.

[5] "Photographieren hieß früher 'abnehmen'. Man nimmt ein Äußeres, den Schein des Menschen, wie eine Mask ab."

[6] For a detailed analysis of the analogies and the differences between traces and documents, see Terrone 2014.

[7] This holds true even if Fabre, *after* obtaining his ID card and unveiling its true nature of artwork, has presented CNI in several museums and exhibitions.

[8] In 2018, Andrew Brock, Jeff Donahue and Karen Simonyan submitted a paper (https://arxiv.org/

pdf/1809.11096.pdf) in which they presented a modified version of traditional GANs model called BigGAN that immediately set the new state of the art in class-conditional image synthesis. Only one year later, in a revised version of the paper, the authors introduced BigGAN-Deep which outperforms its previous generation.

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Mockumentality: From hyperfaces to deepfakes

Pseudographs. Digigraphs. An-iconology. Unframedness. Hyperrealism. Deepfakes.

Hyperrealistic replicas of the human face owe their documentary value to the belief that they result from mechanical reproduction. The idea that a picture is automatically produced through a process of imprint taking is often enough to convince the viewer of its truthfulness and reliability, thus contributing to giving images an aura of authenticity and to creating the myth of pure objectivity. But what happens when the link between hyperrealism, mechanicalness, and truthfulness is disentangled? In 2017, French artist Raphaël Fabre successfully applied for an ID card using a computer-generated picture where the real face was, in fact, an artificial, synthetic mask. Starting from this case study, the essay tackles the issue of the increasing overlapping of actual reality and digital (un)reality, particularly focusing on the concerns raised by the confusion between faces and masks caused by the rapid spread of so-called deepfakes in a world that speeds from documentality towards what I propose to call *mockumentality*.

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Plasmatic mimesis: Notes on Eisenstein's (inter)faces

ABRAHAM GEIL

> Why are my drawings, despite a complete lack of anatomical feasibility, humanly physiologically disturbing for viewers? Would it not seem that "non anatomical" means "not imitative"?
>
> Sergei Eisenstein: *Notes on Drawing* (1932)

In a late essay looking back at his formation as a director, Sergei Eisenstein recounts seeing a young boy, the son of an usher, furtively watching one of his rehearsals at the First Proletkult Workers Theater in the early 1920s. On this child's rapt face, he claims to have glimpsed a simultaneous imitation of the total spectacle on stage:

> I was struck by the way this boy's face mimetically reflected everything happening on stage, as though it were a mirror. And it was not only the mimicry or actions of one or more of the characters working on stage, but of all and everything simultaneously (2010c, 285–286).

Eisenstein invests this face with the force of an epiphany arriving, he says, like Newton's apocryphal apple, "at the dawn of my creative activity" (285). If Newtonian physics united the mechanics of terrestrial with celestial bodies, Eisenstein's theory of attractions would seek to unite form with effect, an artwork with its influence. Concentrated in this anecdote is the matrix of ideas out of which that famous theory emerged: the mixture of biomechanics, reflexology, and experimental psychology that saturated leftist avant-garde Russian theater during the revolutionary period. Taken as a figure for Eisenstein's idea of the spectator as the "basic material" (2010a, 39) of theater and cinema, the face of the usher's son suggests an eminently malleable substance, less a face perhaps than a bundle of nervous tissue or unconditioned reflexes ripe for training.[1] The naked appearance there of the mimetic influence he calls "motor imitation" is but the visible clue to what could be accomplished with the application of a little force to the harder heads of adult spectators. Here we may invoke all the provocative metaphors the young Eisenstein liked to use for his aggressive stance toward the audience: its psyches must be "plowed" like a field, "forged" like iron, or, if it proves inflexible, its skulls "cut through" by the kino-fist of his cinema of attractions.

Yet this anecdote of the usher's son also marks a distance in both time and thought from that period, even as it evokes it. If we linger a moment on Eisenstein's descrip-

tion of this child's face, conjured up after a quarter century and across the span of his entire filmmaking career, we see that the figure of the spectator it presents is not finally reducible to Eisenstein's early metaphors of the audience as raw material. To begin with, it is a figure with a determinate (albeit generic) form – the face – and not a metaphorical lump of matter to be worked up. What makes this figure so astonishing, however, is that it assumes this form as the bearer of an image that strains the limits not just of facial anatomy but of representation in general. What face, real or imagined, could contain the *simultaneous* imitation of several actors and their expressive gestures individually and together in the total arrangement of the *mise-en-scène* – including, he even suggests, all the inanimate objects on stage? In what sense would it still be a face?

We should recall that by the time Eisenstein fashioned this anecdote, he had long since abandoned his explicit theory of attractions and developed in its place his ideas of "pathos" and "ex-stasis", effects central to his late writings from the late 1930s to his death, particularly *Nonindifferent Nature* and his luminous notes for a study on Disney. Placed in the context of these later conceptions of effect, the face of the usher's son appears less a figure for "attractional calculation" than an instance of what Eisenstein will come to call "formal ecstasy" (2006, 126). At its most elemental, Eisenstein's idea of ecstasy is synonymous with a pure power of becoming: "a sensing and experiencing of the primal 'omnipotence' – the element of 'coming into being' – the '*plasmaticness*' of existence, from which *everything* can arise" (130). In *Nonindifferent Nature*, ecstasy names the state into which a pathos construction transports the spectator. As such it is at once a fusion of the subject with the object and, at the same time, a dissociation or splitting within the subject itself – "in a word," he writes, "it is everything that forces the viewer to 'be beside himself'" (1987, 27). In tracing the line of Eisenstein's thought from attractions to pathos and ex-stasis, we might posit something like an axial turn away from the effort to calculate audience effects and toward questions of form, but this turn must be understood as a complex double movement: it is not a matter of Eisenstein simply abandoning the question of effect and the spectator, rather, he continues to pursue it as a matter internal to the problem of form.[2]

Along these lines it might be tempting to read the anecdote of the usher's son as a parable for Eisenstein's encounter, at the cusp of his departure from theater, with the mimetic capacities of the film medium: cinematic mimesis conceived, that is, as the radically non-differentiating capacity to register all aspects of the visible world equally on a single representational plane. We might go further in this vein to locate Eisenstein's anecdote within that lineage of film theorists – from Béla Balázs to Leo Bersani – who have described the face in cinema as a reflective surface analogous to a photosensitive plate, taking the close-up of a face on screen as a kind of immanent expression of its own reverse shot (Balázs 2010; Bersani and Dutoit 2004). But there are good reasons for not assimilating Eisenstein into this tendency to make the face in film an emblem for cinema's perceptual/expressive conditions of possibility. As Noa Steimatsky points out, the face itself is not "a concept that Eisenstein seems to want, or need" (2017, 43). It does not present a privileged instance or site of cinematic specificity, as we find in the early film theories of some of his European contempo-

raries like Jean Epstein in France or Balázs in Germany. Nor is there a conceptual identity between the close-up and the face in Eisenstein, as we find for example in Gilles Deleuze (1986, 99).[3] Rather, the face is one aesthetic figure among others for Eisenstein, even as it is central to several of the traditions – physiognomy, caricature, *commedia dell'arte* – that he draws upon heavily in both his writing and his filmmaking. Arguably, it is through his transformative appropriation of the representational strategies of those pre-cinematic traditions (among others) that Eisenstein developed his approach to the face in film.[4]

What then should we make of the primal scene of mimetic "inter-face" between a spectacle and its reception crystalized in Eisenstein's anecdote of an accidental spectator's face?[5] Reducible neither to an allegory for medium specificity nor to the effect of "motor imitation" on the side of the spectator, this scene points to a singular conception of mimesis, one animated by the protean principle Eisenstein calls "plasmaticness." As this essay aims to show, the paradox or tension inherent in such a conception of mimesis lies in the fact that it depends for its efficacy – its power of "attraction" – on a principle that radically destabilizes the tendency toward imitation or mirroring. One implication of my reading of Eisenstein in this essay is, I hope, to complicate recent attempts to align his theory of attractions with certain conceptions of mimesis in contemporary neuroscience, as though he were, for example, a discoverer of "mirror neurons" *avant la lettre* (see Belodubrovskaya 2018; Plantinga 2009; Tikka 2008). Against the static repetition implied in such notions of mirroring, *plasmatic mimesis* posits a kind of metastatic asymmetry between form and effect.

Eisenstein refers to just such an asymmetry in the epigraph above about his idiosyncratic style of contour drawing. The question he poses there and in much of his later writing is how such forms can nevertheless produce a mimetic effect of attraction. His answer is that they are "protoplasmatic, avant tout" (2006, 186). Eisenstein provides his typically capacious genealogy of examples of this "protoplasmatic" quality: from 19th century etchings of Geishas with elastic "many-metred arms" by the Japanese woodcut maker Toyohiro to the German cartoonist Walter Trier who illustrated Erich Kästner's children's book *Arthur mit dem langen Arm* (Arthur with the Long Arm, 1931) and literary examples from Balzac's image of "shrinking skin" in *La Peau de chagrin* (1831) to Alice's potion-induced shrinking and growing in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) (95–103). Such images of "plasmaticness" are, Eisenstein claims, at once "profound in thought and irresistibly attractive and exciting in form" (101).

> And you cannot help but arrive at the conclusion that a single, common prerequisite of attractiveness shows through in all these examples: a rejection of once-and-forever allotted form, freedom from ossification, the ability to assume dynamically any form (101).

The face, of course, is one such possible form. But it is also a privileged site for mimesis-as-mirroring in cinema and audio-visual media generally. Thinking the face through Eisenstein's principle of "plasmaticness" means not only decentering this privileged status but also opening it up to the horizon of "formal ecstasy". Seen as one form among others the face assumes the capacity of all form not simply to mimic but to ex-statically stand beyond and beside itself.

THE AUDIENCE: FROM CALCULATION TO EX-STASIS

Although Eisenstein dramatizes his anecdote of the usher's son by presenting it as a scene of chance discovery, he had in fact systematically integrated the direct observation of audience reaction into his production methods at the Proletkult theater. One of his students there later recalled how Eisenstein would "sit with his back to the stage, facing the audience, and proceeding from the dramaturgy of the production to observe the spectators in order at the proper moment to give them a portion of tears or an armful of laughter, and occasionally force them to leap out of their seats in horror. This is how the famous theory of the Montage of Attractions came into being [...]" (Levshin 1996, 170). Indeed, this story itself engages in a bit of Eisensteinian mythmaking in that the practice was not Eisenstein's invention. The attempt to calculate the reactions of the audience through direct empirical observation was a widespread practice in Soviet theater and film productions of the period. During the 1924/25 season of Meyerhold's theater, for example, analysts prepared charts for each play on which they would note the correlation between concrete stimuli and a set of audience reactions (standardized into categories ranging from "silence" or "laughter" to "leaving the auditorium" or "climbing up on stage"), noting as well the social composition of the particular audience (i. e. "students" or "workers," etc.) (Kleberg 1982, 232–233). And already in 1920, Lenin's "Directives Concerning the Work of Agitational-Instructional Trains and Steamboats" had ordered officials to "[p]ay attention to the necessity of painstaking selection of films and the calculation of the action of each film on the public during its projection" (Nesbet 2003, 51).

In "The Method of Making a Workers' Film", Eisenstein reports the results of his own informal attempt at empirical audience research after screening his film *Stachka* (*Strike*, 1925) in a worker's neighborhood. He notes in particular the "hilarious failure" (2010a, 65) of the sequence at the end of the film, in which footage of a bull being slaughtered is intercut with a staged scene in long-shot of striking workers gunned down *en masse*. Although it proved scandalously effective for bourgeois censors – Eisenstein claims it was "responsible for 50 percent of the opposition to the film" (2010a, 63) – on the audience of workers "the slaughter *did not have* a 'bloody' effect for the simple reason that the worker associates a bull's blood above all with the processing plants near a slaughter-house!" (65). With that audience, the attraction missed hearts for stomachs: rather than creating its intended impression of brutal repression, the documentary images of slaughter brought to mind "beef and cutlets" (quoted in Nesbet 2003, 48).

At this point in his thought in the mid-1920s, Eisenstein uses the episode to demonstrate the necessity of aligning attractions to an audience on the basis of "class character" (*klassovost*). He acknowledges the difficulty of achieving such alignment; even within the working class he notes the existence of finely grained differences, such as between the reactions of metal versus textile workers to an identical show in a club. The only sure solution to the unpredictability of heterogeneous reception was for the audience to be "known and selected in advance for its homogeneity" (2010a, 41). Eisenstein describes his technique of typage in terms of such an alignment between attraction and audience: "in typage you invariably present a particular

audience with a face that expresses everything on the basis of social experience (and not only social but also biological experience)" (2010c, 9).[6] We will return below to the curious addition of "biological experience", but for the moment I want to focus on the function of "social experience" here.

We can see how this works by comparing typage to a proximate concept in Marxist theory – Lukács's idea of "typicality" – first elaborated as part of his account of class consciousness during the same period as Eisenstein's theory of attractions. In *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923; *History and Class Consciousness*, 1971), Lukács interpolates "type" and "typicality" into Lenin's definition of classes from his famous *Great Beginning* pamphlet of 1919 (Eiden-Offe 2011). In this way, Lukács (re)describes classes as "clearly distinguished basic types whose characteristics are determined by the types of position available in the process of production. Now class consciousness consists in the fact of the appropriate and rational reactions 'imputed' to a particular typical position in the process of production" (1971, 51). The perfect calculation of an attraction would require a work precisely suited to the set of dispositions and capacities "imputed" to these fixed social types. To succeed, typage would require not only the representation of social types but also the social typing of the audience for whom those representations would have the calculated effect.

No doubt, the very idea that it is possible to calculate precisely and in advance the effect a work will have on an audience is highly questionable (as the necessity of verification through empirical observation betrays). And in pondering Eisenstein's abandonment of "attractional calculation" one could certainly speculate on the impact on his thought of the failure of his films to ever attract a truly popular audience in the Soviet Union. But it is perhaps more fruitful to consider how that abandonment might be seen as an immanent, if not inevitable, outcome of a deeper tension in his thought. What would it mean for the artwork to align perfectly with an audience? Such an adequation of form to spectator would entail precisely the kind of static effect that Eisenstein finds anathema to artistic production: "It is only a dull, sterile, feeble, parasitic art form that lives by exploiting the existing stock of associations and reflexes, without using them to create chains of new images which form themselves into new concepts" (2010b, 261). In the very attempt to bridge the interval between form and effect, the calculation of attractions risks reifying it as a purely external relation between artwork and spectator, which at its height can only achieve a parasitic mirroring of the pre-given consciousness – repetition without a difference. The question for art is how to create a *transformative* attraction.

In the following section, I will trace one answer to that question along a rather serpentine line linking Eisenstein's use of animality and superimposition as a strategy of typage in his film *Strike* to his fascination with Disney's style of animation, which utilizes "the continuous transformation of the 'animated' contour line" (Kleiman 2006, 81). Significantly, he calls this "writhing" style of animation "a plasmaticness of contour" (125). One of his accounts (among many) of the attractiveness found there identifies two distinct sources: one social, the other biological. The social account concerns the specific attraction of Disney in American society, namely that the plasmatic "diversity of form" is appealing precisely as the anthesis to a "social order with

such a mercilessly standardized and mechanically measured existence" (103). That is, rather than fixing its audience into a standard set of social types, as we saw above, the attraction of Disney depends upon a "formal ecstasy" which transports the audience beyond and beside itself. The biological account, on the other hand, taps into a deep, animal level of affinity with the plasmatic image. Here Eisenstein posits the idea of a "cellular" memory capable of recalling its own existence at every stage of its evolutionary development. Taken together, these two sources of plasmatic attractiveness suggest a radically different reading of Eisenstein's claim that in typage the face expresses everything on "the basis of social experience (and not only social but also biological experience)" (2010c, 9). That is the reading I will turn to now.

ANIMAL TYPES: ZOOMORPHISM AND SUPERIMPOSITION IN *STRIKE*

"As soon as I crossed over into cinema," Eisenstein recalls in the early 1930s, "I threw myself into typage" (2010c, 11). In fact, his first film *Strike* (1925) is not only populated by types, its entire construction is a form of typage. As critics have long noted, the six-part structure of *Strike*'s plot "schematizes the typical stages, tests and crises through which a strike must pass" (Bordwell 1993, 11) and in so doing organizes itself as a kind of manual or guidebook. Undertaken in what Eisenstein calls "the 'how to make' a *revolution* mode" (2016, 247; emphasis in the original), *Strike* follows *The Communist Manifesto* to the letter in its designation of the parts the bourgeoisie, the workers, and the lumpenproletariat play within the class struggle. Each of these classes receives its own typage treatment from Eisenstein. In what follows, I will focus on a sequence early in the film in which the criminal members of the lumpenproletariat are introduced to perform their role in the class struggle assigned to them by Marx and Engels as "a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue" (1978, 482).

Tasked with infiltrating the factory district, an official of the secret police examines a photo catalogue of private agents. As a page of this catalogue appears in full screen with four portraits mounted in the style of a rogue's gallery, the officer's hand enters the frame and taps each portrait in turn with a pencil. Like a magician's pledge, this gesture demonstrates for the audience that this is indeed an ordinary sheet of still photographs (Fig. 1). An intertitle then assigns animal monikers or "totems" to the figures pictured there – The Monkey, The Bulldog, The Fox, The Owl (Fig. 2). When the film cuts back, these portraits suddenly burst into motion, their faces miming manic expressions as their heads and torsos jut forward and side-to-side, breaking through the flat plane of the page (Fig. 3). Throughout *Strike* Eisenstein delights in the use of intertitles to pun upon visual metaphors – we can think, for example, of the scene when the factory director kicks his chair off of a balcony in disgust followed by the line, "[t]heir thrones rest on the labor of the workers," or when ink spelled over a map of the factory district is followed by "the streets running with blood." Likewise, the animation of the agents in the rogue's gallery is readable as what he sometimes calls a literalized (or "reverse") metaphor – the animal totems in the intertitle acting as a catalyst for the *animistic* transformation of still to moving image.
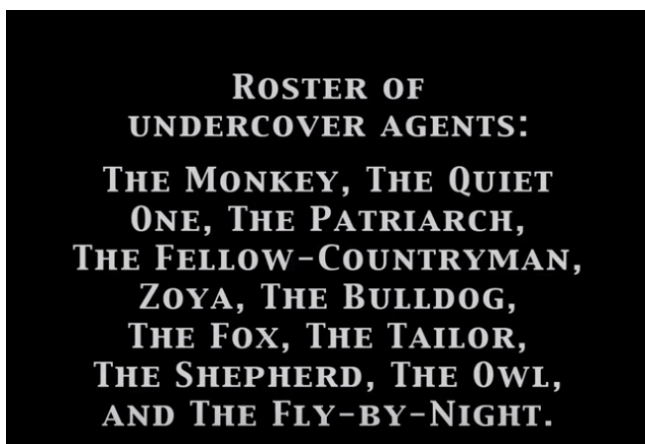
Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

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In the sequence immediately following, *Strike* pursues the optical procedure of literalizing metaphors through a series of lap dissolves that superimpose medium close-ups of human faces over shots of animals. The quasi-diegetic motivation for this sequence is Bulldog's visit to a pet shop directly following his appearance in the office of the secret police. Arranged by an establishing shot into the tableau of a bestiary (Fig. 4), the pet shop displays live incarnations of the animals used as totems for the agents. Each is singled out in its turn by the camera and fused with its human analogue. First, we see the face of a fox dissolve into the face of a young man with foxlike features (Figs. 5–7). After an intertitle repeats his moniker, we see "The Fox" in a room busily disguising himself as a blind beggar in order to eavesdrop on the workers as they meet in the street to organize. The pattern repeats for "The Owl", who rouses himself from bed and perches on a roof overlooking a workers' meeting place, "The Monkey", who poses as a peddler of shaved ice and approaches a group of workers conspiring on a sidewalk curb, and finally, "The Bulldog" himself, whose purpose for visiting the pet shop is revealed, at the end of the sequence, as procuring a performing bear to serve as his own pretext for mingling among the workers.

Fig. 4

This sequence in *Strike* makes recourse to one of the oldest representational strategies of physiognomy – the morphological comparison of humans and animals. Zoological physiognomics has a pedigree in Western thought traceable to the very origins of physiognomy in fifth century B.C. Already in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle mentions the technique of a physiognomist who reads human faces according to the purported simpler structure of two or three basic animals. This classical zoological strain reaches an aesthetic apotheosis in Charles Le Brun's great *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (1698) (Magli, 1989). In terms of Eisenstein's own formation, we can place the animal typage in *Strike* in a series that includes his own childhood drawings, "In the World of Animals" (see Fig. 8) as well as his lifelong fondness for the animal epos and the caricatures of Grandville. Eisenstein's appropriation of this established strain of physiognomy poses our central question with a renewed force. That is, how does an attraction like typage function not simply as a form of static repetition, rein-

forcing rather than transforming the responses of an audience? To glimpse the political stakes of this question, one has only to recall the history of zoological physiognomy in the production of the most heinous racist and antisemitic forms of caricature.

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

In its didactic/agitational function, the animal typing in the bestiary sequence of the film begs comparison with that other, more infamous association between humans and animals at the end of the film: the abattoir sequence in which the slaughter of striking workers is cross-cut with the slaughter of a bull, which Eisenstein called a "hilarious failure" when it was screened for an audience of workers. As we have already seen, the failure of that latter sequence to produce its calculated effect can be understood in terms of a misalignment in the external relation between a specific attraction and a given audience. The chain of associations in this case merely provoked hunger rather than the intended outrage. Without making any empirical claims about the comparative effects of the bestiary sequence on audiences, it is worth lingering on its difference as a formal operation from the association between humans and animals produced in the abattoir sequence. While the latter montage utilizes cross-cutting, the former produces its association through superimposition (specifically, a lap dissolve). As a technique for producing a "montage of association", the cross-cut always entails the possibility that the related associations will misalign in the spectator's mind. In the superimposition of a lap dissolve, the association produced is internal to the shot and, moreover, at the midpoint both images are equally exposed so that the features of animal and human combine in a single heterogenous ensemble (see Fig. 6).

Fig. 8: Eisenstein's "In the World of Animals". Riga 1913–1914.

Without wanting to overdetermine the meaning of any particular film technique for Eisenstein, it is worth noting that he would go on to conceive of superimposition

itself in terms of a (reversible) genetic progression from animal to human. Nearly a decade after making *Strike*, he composed a short, occasional essay on the technique of superimposition entitled "Georges Méliès's Mistake" (1933) as the preface for a book by Vladimir Nilsen on trick photography. He begins the essay by likening the storied origin of superimposition – Méliès's fortuitous "mistake" of double exposing a strip of film – to the accidental coupling of a horse with a donkey that produced the first mule. Just as the mule endured because it happened to meet the economic needs of the social structure, the accident of superimposition became part of cinema's visual repertoire because of its expressive relation to the "structure of our process of perception in general" (2010a, 258). Thus Eisenstein tells this moment of invention in the history of cinema as a story of a contingency becoming necessity. On one level, superimposition is simply one technical device among others, catalogued under "special effects" (2016, 172) in his unfinished *Notes for a General History of Cinema* (1946–1948). On a higher level, however, it is nothing less than the basis for the *Urphänomen* of film, the theory of which Eisenstein began to develop in "Beyond the Shot" (1929) and explored much more elaborately in "Montage 1937". In that latter work, Eisenstein observes that the "depiction of phylogenesis inevitably summons up an autogenetic image" (2010b, 49). His little essay on superimposition, written several years earlier, provides a stunning example of just such an image, in which the phylogenetic evolution of human perception is depicted via an autogenetic image of facial morphology:

> The eyes of a fish stare motionless to the side in diametrically opposite directions. Since its two fields of vision never cross, a fish is deprived of the opportunity of perceiving space stereoscopically. It would have to pick its way painfully through the scale of the evolution of species so that, when it reached the half-way stage of the ape on its way towards mankind, its eyes would move from the side of its head to join in the middle of its snout and form a face (258).[7]

To achieve stereoscopic perception is to grow a face! Superimposition is the counterpart, on the side of the image, to this same phylogenetic process: "As we can see, the method of superimposing one image upon another is like a copy of all the progressive stages in a single historical process towards the assimilation and realization of reality" (260). But unlike stereoscopic cinema, a superimposed image does not directly mimic the apparatus of binocular vision by reproducing the three-dimensionality of natural perception. Rather, an image of superimposition bears the same relation to stereoscopic cinema as a multiphase drawing does to the cinematic illusion of movement. Just as the multiphase drawing presents the principle of movement in cinema without its direct impression, a superimposed image gives us the principle of stereoscopic vision without the experience of 3D. In order to make that principle available to the higher faculty of "speculative representation", superimposition "is forced to slip back into the deconstruction of a three-dimensional body into two flat images" (259). Readers of Eisenstein will likely recognize in this dyadic structure of simultaneous progression and regression a variation of what he will come to call the *Grundproblem* of art.[8] In the case of the superimposed images of human and animal faces in *Strike* we have a precise enactment of this dynamic. Once again, Eisenstein's writings on

Disney provide insight here, specifically what he considers to be their distinguishing capacity to reverse anthropomorphism into "zoomorphism". The attraction of Disney's Bambi is not so much that she is a "humanized deer" but *Rückgänglish* [conversely] a 'redeerised' human" (2006, 148). The point is not to project the qualities of the animal onto the human but to produce an image of the deer *in* the human.

What Eisenstein apprehends in Disney's animated line – and the elective affinity he finds with his own contour drawing – is not ultimately about the representation of animal or human figures *per se* but rather a peculiar formal capacity to present, at once, both a definite form *and* the protean principle to assume any form:

> An ability that I would call "plasmaticness," for here we have a being represented in drawing, a being of definite form, a being which has attained a definite appearance, and which behaves like the primal protoplasm, not yet possessing a "stable" form, but capable of assuming any form and which, skipping along the rungs of the evolutionary ladder, attaches itself to any and all forms of animal existence (2006, 101).

We can understand this double capacity in the terms of Luka Arsenjuk's recent theorization of Eisenstein's major cinematic concepts as "unities concretized through the form of contradiction" (2018, 18). The Eisensteinian concept in question here is movement. Plasmaticity names the apprehension of movement as primary and non-external to the figure, as a protean force of sheer change and becoming from which figures coalse and dissolve. And yet, "[s]omething of the figure resists" (34); there is, as Eisenstein asserts above, "a being represented […] which has attained a definite appearance". Eisensteinian movement, in Arsenjuk's brilliant conceptualization, is "both something absolute, a pure *figurability* or indeterminancy of things, and something that must necessarily take the shape of a determinate visible *figure*" (18).[9]

Something like that constitutive contradiction – which puts the "figure-in-crisis" (23) – is essential to the notion of an asymmetry between form and effect that I've tried to elucidate here in the paradoxical concept of "plasmatic mimesis". Indeed, just as it is possible to imagine the alignment or misalignment of a static form with a static determination of the audience, it is also possible to imagine a mimetic interface that would consist of a seamless mirroring of infinite malleability on both sides. This too would be a kind of repetition without difference. Yet (to allude once more to Arsenjuk): something of the interface resists. To illustrate, I want to turn now by way of conclusion to another one of Eisenstein's anecdotes about audience response that recalls the story of the face of the usher's son with which we began.

CONCLUSION: PLASMATIC MIMESIS

Like that story, this anecdote takes place in the theater and is told retrospectively by Eisenstein long after he had crossed over into cinema. It is not centered on an individual face, however, rather on a collective of gesturing hands. During a 1935 lecture on expressive movement he recalls for his students seeing a silent performance of a play in which both the actors and the audience were composed entirely of "deaf-mutes". He provides no details as to the time, location, subject matter, or name of the play itself. As with the usher's son, his attention is focused not on the stage but on

the audience in which he witnesses "the most passionate expression of emotion […] through its agitated silence" (1996b, 198).

> That was an astonishing spectacle (not so much the actors as the audience) […]. Hundreds of flashing hands synchronically shooting out and going back. It made the audience look like that narrow band of the Pacific Ocean shoreline somewhere on the Mexican coast where millions of birds are flying about, reminding us with their thousands of flapping wings of an unending whirlpool (198).

This remarkable scene brings into direct contact his early work on expressive gesture and his late discussions of drawing and ecstasy. Significantly, Eisenstein conjures Mexico, the place where he found time and space to pursue his youthful habit of drawing with renewed intensity (Goodwin, 1993, 19). Indeed, this image brings to mind precisely what Eisenstein identifies as the essential attraction of his own contour drawing and of Disney alike: the figuration of human hands as birds in flight recalls the plasmatic capability "of assuming any form and which, skipping along the rungs of the evolutionary ladder, attaches itself to any and all forms of animal existence" (2006, 101). Thus, we might well count this "astonishing spectacle" of mimetic interface among Eisenstein's instances of "formal ecstasy" – the image of an audience standing beside itself as a plastic organic form, one that leaps illogically from "hundreds" of human hands to "millions" of birds with "thousands" of wings all moving together like an "unending whirlpool".

If we posit something like a speculative superimposition of this scene with the earlier image of the usher's son at Proletkult, what image, or rather, what concept of mimesis emerges? An ensemble of gestures that ecstatically transform the determinate codes of sign language into an array of natural figures. A face that simultaneously mimics every object and action on stage while somehow remaining a face. Individually and together, these impossible images put into play at the level of interface the essential contradiction Arsenjuk identifies between figurability and figure. In so doing, they enable us to think a plasmatic concept of mimesis that exceeds mere mirroring.

NOTES

[1] In his 1924 manifesto "The Montage of Film Attractions", Eisenstein declares that theater is "linked to cinema by a common (identical) *basic* material – *the audience* – and by a common purpose – *influencing this audience in the desired direction* through a series of calculated pressures on its psyche" (2010a, 39).

[2] Perhaps the most radical recent attempt to make effect a problem internal to form is Eugenie Brinkema's *The Forms of the Affects* (2014). Indeed, Brinkema takes this trajectory to its limit by bracketing the question of the spectator entirely in her astonishing readings of film forms.

[3] "There is no close-up of the face. The close-up is the face […]" (Deleuze, 1986, 99).

[4] Indeed, Eisenstein's entire approach to the medium of film stands out in the so-called "classical" era of film theory for what Mikhail Yampolsky has described as his "radical denial of the usual notion of cinematic mimesis" (1993, 177).

[5] For a rather different reading of Eisenstein's conception of mimesis crystalized in this scene, see Rancière 2006, 23–24.

[6] For a fuller account of Eisenstein's theory and practice of typage during the span of his career, see Geil 2016.

[7] This image is in fact a facialized variation upon the conquering of the vertical posture that appears in "Montage 1937": "The animal, as it climbed up the evolutionary ladder, straightened out its spine and stood up on two legs in the vertical position" (2010b, 49).

[8] Eisenstein provides his first full formulation of the *Grundproblem* in his 1935 address to the All Union Creative Conference of Soviet Filmworkers: "The dialectic of a work of art is constructed upon a most interesting 'dyad.' The effect of a work of art is built upon the fact that two processes are taking place within it simultaneously. There is a determined progressive ascent towards ideas at the highest peaks of consciousness and at the same time there is a penetration through the structure of form into the deepest layer of emotional thinking" (2010c, 38).

[9] In an analogous vein, see also Hannah Frank's (2019) complication of any simplistic association of plasmaticity with a notion of an infinite mutability of motion in her book on classical-era animated cartoons.

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Plasmatic mimesis: Notes on Eisenstein's (inter)faces

Sergei Eisenstein. Mimesis. Spectatorship. Face. Typage. "Strike" (film).

This essay explores the question of (inter)faces as a problem of mimetic form in the work of Sergei Eisenstein. While Eisenstein's early theory of attractions emphasizes the production of audience effects through "motor imitation," his later writings appear to depart from this model for sake of a notion of "ex-stasis" that would transport the spectator out of her or his current state. These two sides of Eisenstein's thought are brought together here in the concept of "plasmatic mimesis," which is explored through the figure of the face in a number of his theoretical texts and his first film *Strike* (1925). By taking up the device most associated with the face in Eisenstein – typage – and reading a specific instance in *Strike*'s superimposition of animal and human faces, this essay ultimately aims to decenter the face as a privileged site for mimesis-as-mirroring in cinema and audio-visual media. Thinking the face through concept of "plasmatic mimesis" makes it into one form among others but in doing so it frees the face to assume the principle Eisenstein calls "formal ecstacy": the capacity of all form not simply to mimic but to ex-statically stand beside and beyond itself.

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Post mortem performances:
On Duchenne de Boulogne, or physiognomy
in the age of technical media

BERNHARD SIEGERT

The physiognomic experiments which the French physician Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne performed in the 1850s mark the culminating point of a dispositif that emerged in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Duchenne's experiments and the now-famous photographs of facial expressions produced by electromagnetic currents can be traced back to the conjunction of the guillotine and galvanism, which undermined the 18th-century knowledge of how to read physiognomic signs. Guillotine and galvanism – both inventions (or discoveries, respectively) of physicians – re-organized the way the signs of the body can produce knowledge, since they combine the knowledge of physiognomic signs with an experimental dispositif which focuses on the dead body, or, more concisely, on the question of how to define a corpse. It is a new ambiguity of life and death, a newly introduced unreadability of the signs of death, and the possibility of a technical resuscitation of the dead body, which gave birth to Duchenne's photographs as post mortem performances which intervene on both the levels of the signified and the signifier.

Famously, one line of reception of Duchenne's electro-photographic experiments leads to Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Motion in Man and Animals* (1872); and perhaps Darwin's non-teleological concept of nature owes something to Duchenne's technical reproduction of expressions (see Darwin 1872, 355). But apart from this line, which would reduce Duchenne's photographs to a mere footnote in the history of the life sciences, I would rather highlight the impact his experiments had on the media dispositif of the early 20th century. In what follows, the way Duchenne's (and Adrien Tournachon's) photographs are discussed is therefore not so much determined by questions that ask for their role in the history of the life sciences, and their connection to aesthetics, or to the history of the portrait in general. They are looked at rather as part of an epistemological shift from the semiotic regime of expression to the media regime of *switching* by which they are indissolubly connected to the history of galvanism and electromagnetism. Their place in a history of portrait photography and the moving image is defined by their connection with this media regime of switching. From this perspective, my analysis is led to concentrate on Duchenne's special feature of the gliding cardboards that introduces the on/off operation of switching into both photography and "the body".

EXPERIMENTAL PHYSIOGNOMY

In the beginning of the 18th century, "the Literary" – according to a thesis of Rüdiger Campe – emerged from the superposition of rhetoric and physiognomy (1990, 68). The electro-physiological experiment in the 19th century substitutes the deciphering of signs as expressions of inner motions by switching operations and measuring instruments. A soul, the motions of which established the grounds for the representation of physiognomic signs, is thus replaced by the technical unconscious of the media: alternating current and photography. The art that constituted an ingenious actor like the "great Garrick" in the 18th century was the virtuoso reproduction of physiognomic expressions, which Garrick at times used to demonstrate offstage, as Diderot reports in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1830; *Paradox of Acting*, 1883):

> Garrick will put his head between two folding-doors, and in the course of five or six seconds his expression will change successively from wild delight to temperate pleasure, from this to tranquility, from tranquility to surprise, from surprise to blank astonishment, from that to sorrow, from sorrow to the air of one overwhelmed, from that to fright, from fright to horror, from horror to despair, and thence he will go up again to the point from which he started (1883, 38).

The face of the actor, which became the paradigm of the new theatre of expressions in the 18th century, is a living anatomical atlas, which not only recorded the whole spectrum of possible expressions but is also able to browse through it (see von Herrmann and Siegert 2000, 69).

This art became subject to technical reproduction in the 19th century, which coincides with photographic reproduction in the *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine* of Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne in 1862. Duchenne, born in 1806, started his scientific career in 1835 under the auspices of the era of alternating current, which had just begun. Legend has it that every morning, after having completed his studies of medicine, he would wander through the hospitals of Paris, looking for cases (and corpses) that were appropriate to serve his aim (see Anonymous 1876, vi), that was to change the function which electricity already had since the 18th century – the function of a medical remedy – into the function of a research tool. In order to create an *anatomia animata* (Albrecht von Haller's term for physiology), Duchenne wished to replace the classical instrument of the anatomist, the scalpel, with alternating current, which originated from Michael Faraday's discovery of induction and was produced by rotating machinery.

The precondition for this replacement of the scalpel by alternating current was a functional equivalence of both, and it was the pioneering work of Duchenne to achieve this. The scalpel is an instrument whose role is to articulate by cuts an isolated object that becomes real in the realms of visual and analytical language. Duchenne's first work, which appeared in 1855, *De l'électrisation localisée et de son application à la physiologie, à la pathologie et à la thérapeutique* (From Localized Electrization and its Application to Physiology, Pathology and the Therapeutic), demonstrates the successful efforts of its author to transfer this role from the scalpel to the alternating current, that is to address every particular muscle of the body by electricity. "I succeeded," Duchenne boasted his innovation, "to create some sort of living anatomy; I have

determined exactly the isolated and individual action of every muscle" (1855, vii).[1] The replacement of the scalpel by the rheophore allowed Duchenne to circumvent a taboo: experimenting with the living human body, or in other words: vivisection.

Duchenne's physiognomy is not concerned anymore with either characterological interpretations of a "physionomie en repos" or the semantics of the inner motions that display themselves through the variable expressions of the face. Instead, it is trying to establish a grammar according to which the lines of expression can be connected. One might argue that Duchenne, in his field, is continuing a project that was first sketched out by Christian Wolff and later worked out by Johann Heinrich Lambert: the establishment of an "Art of Connecting Signs" (Verbindungskunst der Zeichen). Such an art is concerned not with the representational value of signs but with their *operationality*, that is their ability to link with each other in a mechanical way. To make his case, Duchenne distinguished between completely expressive muscles and incompletely or complementary expressive muscles, which led him to a corresponding hierarchy of simple and complex expressions. Thus, there are four muscles which act as elementary signifiers of inner motion: frontal muscle (attention), supra orbital muscle (thoughtfulness), eye brow muscle (pain), and the pyramidal muscle of the nose (aggression). Together with the expressions of crying, joy, laughter, mendacious smile, irony, sadness, contempt, doubt, and disgust (produced by combined contractions) they form a class of the "expressions primordiales". By combining those primordial expressions one can then form second order expressions: these are the "expressions complèxes", that reach from surprise, fear, and anger to ecstasy. This hierarchical order of physiognomic signs which is based upon the degree of complexity of the muscles involved is made possible by stimulating the muscles by the electric current independently from any motion of expression.

Physiognomy is not read anymore, it is written. Physiognomy is no longer a hermeneutical art but an experimental technique that no longer treats physiognomic signs as expressions of various states of the soul, but as pure signifiers detached from any affections or psychological causations. And it is precisely the inherent combinatorial logic of these signifiers what constitutes the subject of Duchenne's investigations. Duchenne was able to combine muscle contractions as if they were pure signifiers, that is without restriction to those combinations that would make sense. On the contrary: combinations of contractions that differentiate and carry meaning do exist only in relation to the set of all possible permutations and combinations. Therefore, there is a physiognomic term which is equivalent to noise, because it signifies the superposition or co-existence of all signifiers: the grimace. Duchenne could combine expressions on the faces of his test subjects that corresponded to passions which otherwise contradict each other; in those cases, "the physiognomy was not only more or less grimacing, but left the mind of the spectator in a great uncertainty about their real significance" (1876, part 1, 28). Since Duchenne's groundbreaking work, physiognomic signs are to be regarded as selections from a grimace.

Let me thus put forward the following theses: First, that this a-semantic grimace is at the origin of Duchenne's photographs; second, that the face into which this grimace and all other kinds of "passions" are written belongs to a living dead; and third, that the

media dispositif that stands behind the electro-photographic experiment is therefore fundamentally related to a disarticulation, and transgression, of the borderline between life and death. Moreover, only a genealogy of the grimace, that will lead us back to experimental resuscitations of dead persons and the conjunction between guillotine and galvanism, can explain why the series of passions in Duchenne's book starts with the strange passion "attention" and how this "passion" is photographically introduced.

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The grimace is among all physiognomic signs the one that points to the absolute Other of physiognomy. It cannot be understood as a sign that indicates the presence of a soul and its motions that are accompanied by consciousness. What it points to is, in fact, a monstrous unconscious, that goes – at least in literature – by the name of Frankenstein.

> It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning […] when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.
> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch […]? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! […]
> Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance (Shelley 1969, 57–58).

This "catastrophe" in Mary Shelley's novel is no science fiction but a somehow authentic report of a freak show that in the 19th century starred victims of executions in front of those sciences which, according to Michel Foucault, let death and make life instead (1991, 37–61).[2] Certainly, there is a tradition of corpses of criminals ending up on the tables of anatomists, but from now on these tables could become real stages for the post mortem performances of those criminals.

In November 1818, the year Shelly's *Frankenstein* was published, the Scottish chemist Andrew Ure "galvanized" the corpse of the murderer Mathew Clysdale.[3] The result, according to an eyewitness report, is giving evidence to Frankenstein's just quoted "spontaneous" reaction:

> In the third experiment, when the supra orbital nerve was touched, the muscles of the face were thrown into frightful action and contortions. The scene was hideous; […] many spectators left the room; and one gentleman nearly fainted, either from terror, or from the momentary sickness which the scene occasioned. In the fourth experiment, from meeting the electric power from the spinal marrow to the elbow, the fingers were put in motion, and the arm was agitated in such a manner, that it seemed to point to some spectators, who were dreadfully terrified, from an apprehension that the body was actually coming to life (Anonymous 1824, 295; see Sappol 2002)

As did Duchenne later, Ure attached the poles of the voltaic column by means of rheophores to the muscles of the face. The effect was that Clysdale's face went through the complete physiognomic repertoire in a sort of time-lapse show:

The face of the dead man expressed all emotions – hate, and love, joy, pain, despair and so on – in such a fast and sudden alternation that the people who stood around were shivering; some left, some fainted. One of those, who were present at the scene, was seized with fear by the terrible show so deeply that he could not forget the sight for the rest of his life and went insane in the end (Vogt 1896, 124–125).

Ure reportedly believed that an achievement like that of Victor Frankenstein was within his reach: "Dr. Ure seemed to be of the opinion, that had not the incisions been made in blood-vessels of the neck, and the spinal marrow been lacerated, the body of the criminal might have been restored to life" (Anonymous 1824, 295).

However, it was not Andrew Ure who provided the model for Frankenstein, but Giovanni Aldini (see Siegert 2003, 277). Aldini, a nephew of Luigi Galvani, toured Europe in the years 1802–1803 trying to convince the physiological and medical community that Volta was wrong in claiming that the electricity Galvani had discovered would originate from the contact of heterogeneous metals, and was not a natural sign of the life process itself (as Galvani had claimed).[4] In Bologna Aldini was permitted to use the corpses of two decapitated criminals for his experiments. When he attached the electrodes to the ears of one of the heads, he observed in the first place "the strong contractions of all face muscles which were distorted in such an irregular way that they imitated the most horrifying grimaces" (1804, 70).[5] When Aldini arranged the heads of both executed persons in such a way that the cutting surfaces touched each other and attached the electrodes to the left ear of the one and the right ear of the other head, "it was marvelous and scary at the same time to see how these heads made faces at each other in such a way that some of the spectators who had not expected any results of this kind were truly shocked" (72).[6]

The living corpse is a figure that puts an end to the reading of physiognomic signs and transports them into the age of media technical reproduction at the same time. This is literally true in the case of Duchenne's favorite test subject, an old man, who was particularly suited for his kind of experiments because his face was practically insensitive. "He was struck with a complicated aneasthesia of the face. I could experiment on this region without him feeling any pain, right up to a degree where I could make his particular muscles contract with the same precision and reliability as if I was experimenting with a still irritable corpse" (1876, part II, 7).[7]

What made the old man an ideal test subject is the fact that the alternating current reproduced expressions on his face with the same fidelity as on the face of a corpse. Only on a dead man's face the experimenting physician, "armed with rheophores," can "paint like nature the expressive lines of the motions of the soul" (14). On faces that are alive, the "expressive lines" that one wants to "paint" (say, joy) will always appear only mixed with expressions of pain that are produced by feed-back loops between experiment and test subject. Duchenne admits that the face of the old man is only a substitute for a dead man's face. "I could choose, it is true, between this man and the face of a corpse which I often had the opportunity to animate in our numerous hospitals performing the local electrical excitation in every muscle and on which I could paint the passions with the same truth as on the living face" (131–132).[8]

The alternating currents that Duchene applied, fixated those physiognomies that were produced incessantly under the discharges of the Voltaic battery but could never be made permanent. The "electric brush" Duchenne used subjected the representation of anatomic signs to the paradigm of auto-recording even before the process of photographic fixation took place. The rheophore, like photography, hence stands for what Henry Fox Talbot famously dubbed the "pencil of nature". Instead of being a surface on which the soul writes its elusive signs, the skin is now a sensitive film layer on which the contractions of the muscle record themselves.

> The localized electrization […] allowed me to watch how even the smallest radiations of the muscles traced themselves under the instrument [de voir se dessiner sous l'instrument]. Their contraction reveal their direction and their position in a better way than it could ever be achieved by the scalpel of the anatomist (Duchenne 1876, part I, 15).

"Se dessiner": the muscles plotted themselves. One can photograph the electromagnetically produced expression because it is itself a photography discovered by the alternating current in a dead man's face.

EXPERIENCE YOUR OWN DEATH

The fact that grimacing and convulsive corpses appeared on the stage of knowledge around 1800 is a consequence of a discourse that introduced the difference between an apparent and a real death in the course of the 18th century (Ariès 1982, 504–517). "Death is certain, and it is not," Benigne-Winslow wrote in his dissertation from 1742 (41), distinguishing thus between death as an a priori truth concerning humans as mortal beings and death as an empirical fact that concerns the arbitrary circumstances of dying. What made the reliable signs that indicated death disappear, is the fact that death itself entered the paradigm of contingency or accident, respectively. Ways to die like drowning or suffocation became fashionable in the 18th century in an equal proportion to the disappearing of the representational visibility of death. Aldini himself occasionally linked his experiments to the problem of re-animation of dead persons that died from suffocation. When on January 17, 1803, Aldini conducted experiments in London with the corpse of the murderer George Forster, who had just been hanged, he proclaimed that the aim of his experiments was now "to call the suffocated back to life [rappeler les asphyxiés à la vie]" (1804, 227). On the place of execution in Newgate and in front of the members of the Royal Surgical College Aldini attached the poles of a Voltaic battery to the mouth and the ear of Forster, producing thus the effect that "the cheeks and the muscles of the face were terribly contracted and the left eye opened up" (228). And when he applied the conductors both aurally and rectally the activity of the muscles was enforced in such a way, "that it seemed to have a look of re-animation [qu'il semblait y avoir une apparence de réanimation]" (229).

The so-called "sudden death" could always corrupt the natural signs of death and therefore called for the authority of a physician to generate experimentally the signs that would allow for telling apparent from real death. As soon as the signs of death became artificial signs, generated experimentally by the physician, death itself was subjected to the rule of the physician: "On peut guérir la mort (Death can be cured)",

one can learn from the article "Mort" of the *Encyclopédie* (Ménuret de Chambaud 1765, 726).

The guillotine finally stripped death of all means of representation as it suspended any possible knowledge about the moment of death. This semiotic vacuum was the domain which the experiment, that replaced the proper reading of the signs of death, would fill and thus establish its rule in physiognomy. It is the technology of the guillotine, which reduced the moment of death to an imperceptible short moment, thereby taking the uncertainty about how to determine when apparent death turns into real death to its extremes, and thus opened up the stage for the grimace to appear. Aldini knew about it: "I do not want to renew the question whether galvanism is able to cause pain, when it is applied to the limbs of an executed person after his decapitation" (1804, 140). Pain presupposes consciousness. Aldini alludes to the debate about the question whether death coincides with the exact moment of the instantaneous amputation of the head, or not, which was still going on in 1803. It was started by the anatomist Samuel Thomas Soemmerring in 1794 and divided the community of anatomists and physicians into two distinct camps (Arasse 1987, 49–55). According to the surgeon Sue, persons who were executed this way experienced their own death. Soemmerring even thought it might be possible that, "these heads would speak, if the air would circulate in a regular way through the undamaged organs of the voice" ([1844] 1986, 275). But what could have these heads said other than what constitutes the classical example for a performative self-contradiction, namely the phrase "I am dead"?

Galvanic resuscitation and the investigation into the survival of one's own death in an execution by the guillotine came together on November 21, 1803, in Mainz. That day, the robber and murderer Johannes Bückler, who was notoriously known in Germany by the name of "Schinderhannes" (because he used to skin his victims), was executed outside the town together with twenty members of his gang. Only 150 steps away from the place of execution the Private Medical Society of Mainz had established a provisional laboratory, housing an electrostatic generator and a Voltaic battery as well. Only four minutes after the falling of the guillotine's blade the bodies lay on the table close to the battery (see Anonymous 1804, 3). The second test was dedicated to the theatre of soulless physiognomy.

> The contractions of all facial muscles which changed with highest speed together with the grinding of the teeth represented instantaneous, quickly passing, very different physiognomies of the same face; a play of expressions, that was imitated with the lifeless body by means of the still excitable organs and which was able to deceive and frighten the uninformed (4).

At the same time "two promising adolescents", the gentlemen Pitschaft and Grösser, students of medicine, were commissioned a special research project, namely to inquire into the "sensation and consciousness after decapitation" which took them directly under the guillotine. As soon as the head of the Schinderhannes fell from the scaffold, one of them took it in his hands and looked attentively into his face while the other one shouted alternately into one ear and into the other. But what would an ambitious life science have to say to a disembodied criminal consciousness? Nothing; it just wants to make sure that the signal reception works. "Can you hear me?" went

the words that were shouted into the ears of the Schinderhannes (Anonymous 1804, 49). But whether he actually did not hear or just did not want to, "neither did one notice any movement of the eyes nor did the head show any other signs, which might have expressed the reception of the shouted words" (49). In calling a consciousness lying beyond the threshold of death one sign becomes primordial to all other signs of physiognomy: a sign that confirms not the reception of a message but the reception of a signal. But you do not contact the dead with acoustic signals; you contact them either with mesmerism (which is the subject of Edgar Allan Poe's 1845 "Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar") or with electricity.

THE UR-SEQUENCE OF FILM

The primordial call "Can you hear me?" of 1803 checks whether there is or is not a channel between sender and receiver. It is a phatic signal that relates to the technical status of the channel of signal transmission as such; it does not concern some kind of message but rather information on the capacity and quality of the channel itself. In case the reception of a return signal is zero, the channel has ceased to exist. Hence it governs Duchenne's hierarchy of passions, too. It is the story of the grimace as part of the story of the living corpse and the resuscitation of the dead, which explains why the series of passions in Duchenne's book starts with "attention", which is an expression one hardly finds in the repertoires of baroque doctrines of affections (such as Descartes' *Passions de l'âme* [1649; *The Passions of the Soul*, 1989] or La Chambre's *L'Art de Connoistre les Hommes* [1660; The Art of Understanding Men]). Attention is neither an affection nor a passion, it is the condition that makes affection possible in the first place: the stand-by-condition of the soul. Prior to the documentation of all the electrically reproduced expressions, Duchenne had to document a switch-on operation. This afforded a transgression of the media limits of photography (see Fig. 1).
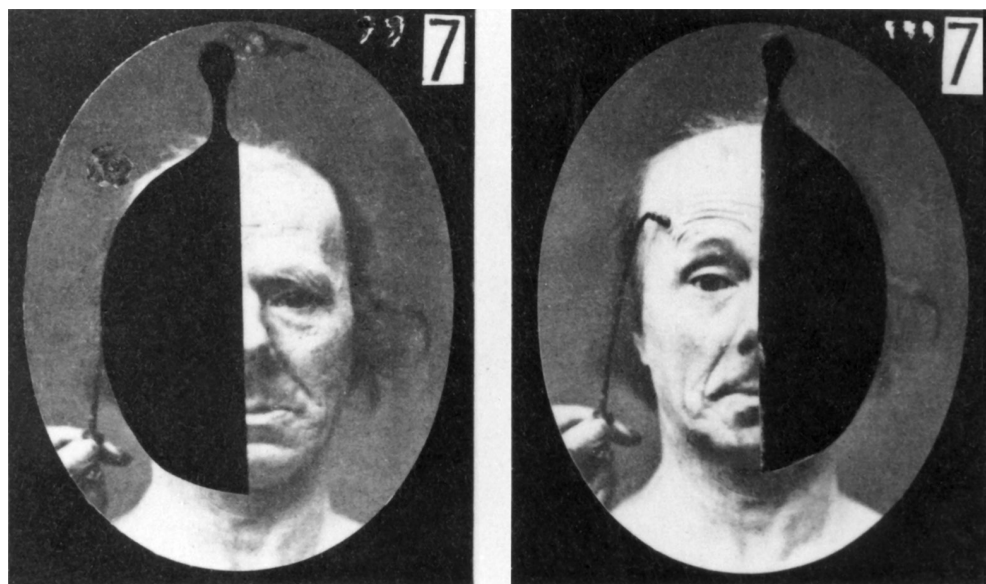

Fig. 1: *No.s 7" and 7'''*. Image from Duchenne's *Mécanisme, vol. II: L'Album* (1876, 2).

Mask the right side of figure 7 with a piece of cardboard, so that one can see only the left side of the face. You will see in the first place the deep darkness, which envelopes the eye and the orbit of this side, a darkness that spreads over the whole cheek. Now make the cardboard glide quickly from the right to the left – what an astonishing contrast shows up between the two sides of the face! […] Here darkness, the dullness of the features, the inner calmness, the most complete indifference. There, in contrast, the light that lights up the eye and the orbit, it shines over the whole cheek at the same time. […] What a marvelous transformation of the physiognomy! This is the awakening of the spirit (1876, part II, 17).

That's the way the spirits awakes. Not once, but again and again. What the "promising adolescents" Pitschaft and Grösser could not achieve with the head of the Schinderhannes, Duchenne achieves with the head of his favorite test subject. He achieves it by reproducing an operation, which takes place in time, on the pages of his photographic atlas. Making the cardboard suddenly glide from one side to the other of the photograph produces a minimal cinematic effect of the binary code: before/after, dark/bright, death/life. Thus, the "switch-image" that sprang into action in a photographic atlas touched the borders of film.[9] The border between life and death was transformed into the endless repeatable play of on and off, away and there – the last curtain is replaced by an on-off-switch. As a result, the cardboard operation simulates in the field of photography nothing else than the *switch-on operation* of electricity, the elementary discrete operation of the media age.

The cardboard operation by which Duchenne implements and operationalizes the binary code of death and life is the "ur-sequence," a transcendental original scene of all the animation and resuscitation scenes in so-called "expressionist" films like *The Golem* (dir. Paul Wegener, 1920), *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Nosferatu or Metropolis* (or films in this tradition like *Frankenstein* and its sequels), which are therefore nothing but metaphors of cinematography itself. In reproducing the transcendental operation of Duchenne's electro-physiognomy, the awakening of the spirit, expressionist film switches from narration to media archaeology. The reproduced and in many ways varied "original scene" links expressionist film to the history of how the experimentation of the life-death-distinction had shifted physiognomy from semiotics to technical media operations. It reveals that in a technical perspective film is not only part of a history of optical toys but part of the large dispositif that connected galvanism, electromagnetic media of communication, the body, and the rise of digital switching logic in the 19th century.

Let us look briefly at four examples. Firstly: the somnambulist Cesare in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919/20) who has been in a "death-like trance" for twenty-three years – and therefore is a true descendant of the apparent dead of the 18th century – is awakened by the call "Cesare!!! Do you hear me?!" (Hörst du mich?!). It is exactly the same phrase by which the two students of medicine, Pitschaft and Groesser, tried to evoke the signal of the ready-for-reception condition on the face of the decapitated Schinderhannes. Where Pitschaft and Groesser failed, Caligari triumphs – thanks to Duchenne's technologizing of the situation under the guillotine in 1803 by translating its acoustic setting into a media dispositif composed of alternating current, photography, and an insensitive face.

Secondly: in Fritz Lang's *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933) a sequence in the madhouse where Mabuse is kept cuts to a close-up of Mabuse's face after a physician has told the director of the madhouse that "Mabuse has stopped writing. He sits there like a living dead." One eye-socket of Mabuse is bright, the other one is dark – like in Duchenne's ur-sequence of the awakening of the spirit. "Only his eyes are alive…," the physician comments.

Thirdly: The experiment that the inventor Rotwang is carrying out in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), in order to turn the "Machine-Man" into a doppelganger of Maria, combines a Frankenstein-like set of electric machinery with a galvano-plastic procedure. The operation of the cardboard, which covered first the left and then the right half of the face, that re-enacted the electric switching-on operation on the pages of Duchenne's book, is now translated into the filmic operation of *cross-fading*: in the moment before Marias's doppelganger opens her eyes, and the head of Maria tilts over to the side, the face of the Machine-Man is superimposed by the face of Maria. Switching on the spirit of the Machine-Man is paralleled by switching off Maria.

Robert Wiene's *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* features the ur-sequence of film, the resuscitation scene, explicitly in the context of hypnotically controlled somnambulism. Fritz Lang's first two *Mabuse* films place the moment in which a person awakes from death-like trance in the context of hypnosis. In *Metropolis* Rotwang awakens the Machine-Man from some kind of hypnotic trance, too. The reason for this is that the film's reception of Duchenne's proto-filmic ur-sequence in his *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine* was not a direct one but one that was mediated by the hypnotic-photographic experiments of the Salpétrière.

Jean-Martin Charcot's application of hypnosis in the investigation of hysteria is a direct consequence of Duchenne's experiments which takes up the cultural semiotics of convulsions. In spasmodic convulsions the body does not express a movement of the soul, but is turned into an instrument of an alien will. Traditionally, convulsion had always been the sign by which one recognized true or false ecstasy. Convulsion was the sign of (divine or devilish) spirit possession. In the Salpétrière the roles of God and devil are taken over by the psychiatrist and hypnotist. Hypnosis transforms the hysterical body into a "trigger-body" (Didi-Huberman [1982] 2003, 196) like Duchenne's alternating current did before. Charcot got especially interested in the way a certain facial expression was completed by a corresponding gesture of the body, thus extending Duchenne's field of operation, which had been the face only, to the whole body. Charcot drew on Duchenne directly:

> A fine means was found to mark the physiognomy with different expressions and the way was smoothed for the skilful experimentator. We fell back on local faradisation of the facial muscles, according to the procedure, which Duchenne (de Boulogne) applied in his studies of the mechanism of physiognomy. […] We have seen already in our first experiments how the proper gesture is following the expression, which the electrical excitation has left in the physiognomy (1890, 442).[10]

Faradization or hypnosis, respectively, "transformed the test subject" into an "expressive statue" (443). As soon as the expression had been produced that was "stamped" into the face, it was recorded like on a photographic layer.

Once produced, the movement imprinted into the traces of the face does not disappear, even when the cause, that has produced it is not active any more, after one has taken away the electrodes. The physiognomy stays immoveable in catalepsis as well as the position and the gesture that accompanied it. […] The immovability of the positions thus achieved is of an excellent value for photographic reproduction (442–443).[11]

The psychiatric discourse formulates explicitly what the electro-physiognomic discourse could only indicate implicitly: that the "electric brush" turned the face into a photography that precedes the actual photographic act.

In the final example, from James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), Duchenne's ur-sequence is shifted away from the moment the monster comes to life. We encounter it when we see Boris Karloff's face for the first time: Karloff walks backwards through a door and turns around; light falls on the half of his face in close-up, thereby reproducing Duchenne's switching operation with the cardboard by means of pure light control. Film thus turns the "transcendental" code of the electrical switch-on operation into a diegetic code of shadow and light, while the format of the portrait, the close-up, which is the format of most of Duchenne's photographs, remains connected to the transformed scene. That the media-ontological status of the monster is always already that of a photograph that precedes the actual filming of the scene, is revealed by Frankenstein, who informs the diegetic and extra-diegetic spectator in the preceding sequence that the monster had been kept to this moment in complete darkness. "So far he's been kept in complete darkness. Wait, 'til I bring him into the light!" Thus, the monster appears as an allegory of the film material itself, which – like the monster – has to be kept in darkness until it is exposed to light in order to become the condition of possibility of movement – or life. With James Whale's monster, the post mortem performances that started with Mary Shelley's reception of Aldini's technical production of grimaces and that turned into switch-images and switch-bodies in the experiments of Duchenne and Charcot have come full circle.

NOTES

[1] All translations are by the author if not mentioned otherwise.

[2] See in particular p. 52, where Foucault speaks of the production of the living, "de fabriquer du monstre", as one of the excesses of bio-power in the 19th century, which eventually led to the fabrication of uncontrollable viruses.

[3] Ure was an apologist of the Industrial Revolution, and mainly known on account of his *Philosophy of Manufactures* (1835), one of the main sources which Marx used for the Kapital. In 1830 he invented the thermostat.

[4] Aldini's experiments, which aimed at proving the existence of animal electricity, were repetitions of Galvani's experiments without any metals involved (see the first part of his *Essai* from 1804). The invalidity of these experiments was already noticed by Volta. Emil du Bois-Reymond finally judged cold and merciless: "His experiments are completely worthless" (1848–1849, vol. I, 95).

[5] "de fortes contractions dans tous les muscles du visage, qui étaient contournés si irrégulièrement, qu'ils imitaient les plus affreuses grimaces."

[6] "Il fut merveilleux, et même effrayant, de voir ces deux têtes faisant à-la-fois d'horribles grimaces l'une contre l'autre; de sorte que quelques-uns des spectateurs qui ne s'attendaient pas à de pareils résultats, en furent véritablement épouvantes."

7 "Il était atteint d'une affection compliquée d'anaestésie de la face. Je pouvais expérimenter sur cette région sans qu'il en éprouvât de la douleur, au point que je faisais contracter partiellement ses muscles avec autant de précision et de sûreté que sur le cadavre encore irritable."

8 "Je pouvais opter, il est vrai, entre cet homme et la face du cadavre que j'avais souvent l'occasion, dans nos hòpitaux, d'animer devant de nombreux témoins, en localisant l'excitation électrique dans chacun de ses muscles, et sur laquelle je peignais les passions avec autant de vérité que sur le vivant."

9 I borrow the term "switch-image" from Lorenz Engell, who has introduced it in the context of television theory (see Engell 2019; Engell 2020).

10 "Pour imprimer à la physionomie des expressions variées, le moyen était tout trouvé et la voie ouverte par un habile expérimentateur. Nous avons eu recours à la faradisation localisée des muscles de la face, suivant les procédés employés par Duchenne (de Boulogne) dans ses études sur le mécanisme de la physionomie. […] Dès nos premières expériences nous avons vu l'attitude, le geste approprié suivre l'expression que l'excitation électrique avait imprimée à la physionomie."

11 "L'immobilité de ces attitudes ainsi obtenues est éminemment favorable à la reproduction photographique."

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Post mortem performances: On Duchenne de Boulogne, or physiognomy in the age of technical media

Physiognomy. Galvanism. Photography. Resuscitation. Hypnotism. Expressionist film.

This essay reconstructs the genealogy of the electro-physiognomic experiments which Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne conducted in the second half of the 19th century, and highlights their impact on the media dispositif of the early 20th century. The photographs in Duchenne's *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine* (1862) are discussed as part of an epistemological shift from the semiotic regime of expression to the medial regime of switching by which they are indissolubly connected to the history of galvanism and electromagetism on the one hand, and to the history of hypnotism and Expressionist film on the other. Due to this perspective, a main focus of this article is the archaeology of Duchenne's special feature of the gliding cardboards that introduces the on/off operation of switching into both photography and "the body," and its echo in films such as *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919/20) or *Frankenstein* (1931).

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Faces without interiority:
Music video's reinvention of the portrait

TOMÁŠ JIRSA

> In point of fact, all the portrait ever does is manifest approximate allures of absence.
>
> Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Look of the Portrait* (2000)

When Hans Belting dubbed Rainer Maria Rilke's only novel *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910; *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, 1990) a modernist farewell to the face (2017, 23), he was not alluding to the uncanny passage wherein an anonymous woman in a Parisian street abruptly tears off her own face, thus letting the narrator's horrified gaze split between a faceless head and the hollow facial skin in her hands, but to another dazzling, albeit strongly ironic fragment that stages the face discarding any sign of a personal identity.

> For example, it never occurred to me before how many faces there are. There are multitudes of people, but there are many more faces, because each person has several of them. There are people who wear the same face for years; naturally it wears out, gets dirty, splits at the seams, stretches like gloves worn during a long journey. They are thrifty, uncomplicated people; they never change it, never even have it cleaned. It's good enough, they say, and who can convince them of the contrary? Of course, since they have several faces, you might wonder what they do with the other ones. They keep them in storage. Their children will wear them. But sometimes it also happens that their dogs go out wearing them. And why not? A face is a face (1990, 6).

Leaving aside the surrounding traumatic pace of the urban modernization resonating throughout Malte's narrative, this fragment is striking for its consistent inversion of the then popular physiognomic discourse, for its shift to an anti-essentialist aesthetic gesture articulating the face as a replaceable and transposable object. In other words, the privileged site of subjectivity and interiority and the proverbial pathway to the soul is replaced with a mask, a dense facial object leaving behind any metaphysical baggage, a removable form that cuts off the alleged semiotic liaison between the external and the internal, and travels freely between different subjects (human and non-human alike). Consequently, the fragment poses both a conceptual and a formal problem to the aesthetics of the face, one that I will argue has been taken up almost a century later in a different medium, obviously impossible for Rilke to even envision and yet intimately close not only to the continuous integration of the visual arts into his poetics but also to the artistic synthesis of Gesamtkunstwerk widespread in his period: namely, the music video.[1]

No matter how contemporary music videos differ across genres, aesthetic styles, and production backgrounds, the face emerges in the majority of them as a peculiar object that can hardly be overlooked. Shot and edited in a great variety of angles, light, duration, color filters, and positions, the facial close-ups endorse a specific video atmosphere while operating in either lip-sync or out of sync mode according to a particular directorial choice. The music video might well have "killed the radio star" – as the first piece released by MTV in 1981 announced via The Buggles' eponymous song – but the video stars themselves owe their post-media revival mainly to the foundation of the global video-sharing website YouTube in 2005, the platform that has since circulated, distributed, and promoted myriads of performers' faces all over the world and eventually confirmed the dominant place of the face in the aesthetics of the entire genre.

Yet there is a catch with such a ubiquitous facial exhibition; the more frequently a performer's face appears, the less it reveals about its owner, ultimately blurring the connection between the performer, the music, and the lyrics. Within the music video genre that provides a whole array of mask-faces that individual artists can pick up and discard at will, Rilke's assertion that there are "many more faces" than people gives us an important lead as it privileges the logic of circulation and proliferation over the autonomy of an individual. This *opacity* of the face begs a couple of questions that will frame the following inquiry: What is the agency of these overexposed, multiplied, and yet de-subjectifying faces? How do they operate within the music video structure? And what are their media and aesthetic functions? Building upon recent theories of non-mimetic portrait in the visual arts (esp. Nancy 2018) and the concept of formal affect (Brinkema 2014) while also drawing on some of the leading voices of the ongoing music video turn (Vernallis 2013; Korsgaard 2017; Shaviro 2017), this essay argues that contemporary music video production replaces the face as an expression of the subject's interiority and identity with a media-affective *inter-face* whose main function is to amplify the video's work of audiovisual forms, performative mechanisms, and atmosphere.[2] Through a close reading of a video from the contemporary hip hop scene, Earl Sweatshirt' *Chum* (2012) directed by Hiro Murai, I demonstrate how it uses a strategy of objectification and exteriorization to generate the face as an audiovisual screen that absorbs, intensifies, and gives rhythm to both the moving images and sounds of the music video. The main goal of this essay is to explain how a contemporary music video opens up a way to rethink the portrait as a media operation undermining the traditional notions of representation, interiority, and subjectivity in favor of unfolding its technological and affective links between sounds, moving images, and lyrics.

EXPOSING THE FACE: MORPHINGS, TEARS, INTERFACES

The meandering trajectory of the face becoming opaque is intricately connected with the golden age of music video which spans from the 1980s until around the mid-1990s, also known as the MTV era. In the final extradiegetic sequence of the legendary video *Black or White* by Michael Jackson (dir. John Landis, 1991), the facial mediality in the process of desubjectification is enabled by and reflected through

the latest technology. Jackson's plea for racial equality, spelled out via the lyrics and enacted by the multicultural dancing scenes across the globe, is further played out by means of CGI (computer-generated image) processes consisting in visually morphing one face into another. Staging a playful circulation of the faces of all kinds of ethnicity, color, age, and gender that nod to the rhythm of the song while seamlessly transitioning, the setting also offers a timely meta-commentary of the music video genre in its technological development and collaborative thrust. Back from the video's diegetic world, the action takes place within the mise-en-abyme space of the studio where the dominant presence of the singer is taken over by the video crew, extras, and the apparatus getting the cameras and computers in the spotlight. As a result, the overall scene covering both the digital rendering of countless visages through the computer graphics and the studio "control room" foreshadows the music video faciality that moves past any humanist claim to interiority toward the transformative operation of morphing (Fig. 1). By establishing the digital technology as a prerequisite of the visible identity in flux, the video rephrases Friedrich Kittler's famous techno-ontological dictum from 1990, "Nur was schaltbar ist, ist überhaupt" [Only what is switchable is at all] (2017, 5), into an epistemological formula posing that only what is *transformable* is at all.[3]

Fig. 1: John Landis: *Black or White*, 1991. Image from computerhistory.org.

While Landis' self-disclosing aesthetics parses the face as a result of computational technologies, John Maybury's video for Sinéad O'Connor's song "Nothing Compares 2U" (1990) demonstrates that the face is anything but an easily readable emotional surface and psychological index referring to the performer's inner depths. Against the backdrop of the slow-paced pop song melody and the dominant atmospheric synthesizers, the close-ups of the singer's pale face entirely fill the black frame, her eyes turning alternately right to the camera and away in the second person address whereby her shy look oscillates with her forceful singing. In the second part of the video, these close-ups are juxtaposed with the cross-fades of neoclassical statues and the long shots of the singer walking around them in the Parc de Saint-Cloud.

According to Steven Shaviro, these atmospheric shots "balance the sheer intensity of O'Connor's face by giving us a somewhat more distanced objective correlative for the sadness expressed in her singing" (2017, 68–69). While standing for a dominant surface upon which the interaction between music, voice, moving images, and lyrics is played out, the singer's face yields another meta-genre reflection and, indeed, a deconstruction of the music video's fundamental facial function, the *lip-syncing*: instead of conventionally "simulating" a temporal harmony between the present moment of the singing and the now of the story unraveled through the voice, she performs the song lyrics in a depersonalized fashion as a kind of voice-over, lip-syncing the preexistent text precisely and yet distantly in the manner of a Brechtian estrangement. So even though this performance matches the key definition of the music video given by Mathias Bonde Korsgaard as "a dual synesthetic remediation between sound and image through which music is visualized and vision musicalized" (2017, 86), the face sustains this specific two-way process with a hardly negligible dose of irony.

Despite its nakedness and exposure, further scenes intensify the illegibility of the face even more, precisely when the shots of the neoclassical statues and their torsos enhance a plasticity of the human face. The exteriority of the facial object, which is constructed and *sculptured* rather than "naturally" given, is then attested by a tear which – as precisely argued by Eugenie Brinkema – does not come about as a manifestation of an emotional economy, but rather as an "affective exteriority", voiding its relation to interiority while disclosing "a formal affectivity of shape, structure, duration, line, light" (2014, 23). It comes as no surprise, then, that when the lyrics of the song go "Nothing can stop these lonely tears from falling," the singer's two tears come too late without any red-rimmed eyes and corresponding facial expression, insofar as the tear takes up the role of an auto-referential index whose only function is to signal that at this moment of climax a tear *should appear* (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: John Maybury: *Nothing Compares 2U*, 1990. Vimeo. Screenshot by the author.

There is a lot of weeping and tears shed in the music videos which more or less consciously allude to this audiovisual "arche-tear" – such as Janelle Monáe's *Cold War* (dir. Wendy Morgan, 2010),[4] FKA Twigs' *Water Me* (dir. Jesse Kanda, 2013),

Kodaline's *Shed a Tear* (dir. James Fitzgerald, 2018), or a direct tribute to Maybury's video in Miley Cyrus' *Wrecking Ball* (dir. Terry Richardson, 2013) – but what aligns them is the overwhelming facial exposure and the peculiar distance between a shedding tear and a masterfully controlled voice.

As both examples of the experimental exploration of the facial *dispositif* show, the self-conscious aesthetics of the face within the music video genre effectuates various operations, dismantling a conventional assumption of a semiotic surface that reflects an inner self and emotional essence of the subject. First and foremost, the face acts as a choreographic core, both visual and sonic *membrane*, and a rhythmical center around which the music and the images revolve, take off from, and return to. Such rebounds, however, are a far cry from a narcissistic self-exposure of the performer's persona inasmuch as they do not exhibit the face as an embodiment of a unique individual. A similar point is made by Carol Vernallis; although she repeatedly claims that one of the main functions of the music video is to "showcase the star" and thus provide a kind of "foregrounded portrait" (2013, 249), she also argues that "[t]he hyperfocus on the face is complemented by today's musical arrangement, lyrics, and production" (222).[5] The traditional idea of a self-contained image of the face thus arises as a conceptually more compelling part of the whole audiovisual network. Neither an idealist face-in-itself, nor a modernist face-for-itself, but rather the operational *face in-between*, forward, and along. Existing only due to and through the labor of the *ex-position* of the subject – which, as Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us, does not mean to reveal or reproduce but instead "to pro-duce it: to bring it forth, to draw it out" (2018, 14) – the face becomes *index*, though once again, not of a performer's ineffable interiority but of its media transformation into an audiovisual relay. What both Landis's morphing faces and Maybury's emotionally illegible facial object indicated and what the following analysis will demonstrate is that in place of representing a preestablished subjectivity, a sort of "artist on demand", this indexical face performs a task of the *interface* that conducts both the aural and visual motion while amplifying the interpenetration of sounds, moving images, and lyrics.

A FACE THAT LOOPS: *CHUM*

How to combine the frenetic pace of Earl Sweatshirt's rap with the existential lyrics about his missing father and dubious friends, an aimless roaming through a hostile city, and the painful plodding on the paths of languishing psyche? You put them together into a piano loop consisting of two minor chords and hectic staccato drums in the slow 4/4 tempo of 80 bpm. Only rarely does it happen that the chorus of a song is not just referentially – explicitly or symbolically – illustrated but that, instead, the rap flow penetrates and shapes the whole audiovisual movement of a video, as is the case of the black and white *Chum* directed by Hiro Murai for Sweatshirt's song from his first studio album *Doris* (2013).

From the intro onward, the video's articulation of sequence discloses its strategy of *desubjectification*, showing clearly that were there any meaningful link between the subject and its face, it arises mainly as a question of how the former should disappear behind the latter. Before encountering the rapper, who is both the narrator and key

protagonist of the entire nocturnal scene, we are surrounded by a rustle filled with the backdrop sounds of cicadas' chirping and passing cars in the distance and faced with a croaking frog in total indifference both to the spectators and the subsequent events. The darkness, the animal, and the non-human sounds thus open up and continue to inform the video's rhythm as well as the mode of its reading. Importantly, the initial dissolve brings Earl to the fore not frontally, but in a vertigo-provoking, swinging position which is fully coextensive with the chorus and the lyrics' major figure of *pendulum*.

> Something sinister to it
> Pendulum swinging slow, a degenerate moving
> Through the city with criminals, stealth, welcome to enemy turf
> Harder than immigrants work, "Golf" is stitched into my shirt
> Get up off the pavement brush the dirt up off my psyche
> Psyche, psyche

Right after the chorus giving rhythm to the fast cuts on Earl's revolving face, the pivotal role of the animal is confirmed by a camera track in to a close-up of the frog's eye – and not the protagonist's one, as an anthropocentric view would expect – wherein a streetlight is reflected. The contrast of the direct light, flashy reflections, and shadow play complements another disproportion in the mise-en-scène: whereas the performer is always in both horizontal and vertical motion, the multiplying animals remain static and grotesquely majestic throughout the video. What reinvigorates the fading glow of the protagonist's face and the emerging blurring city lights behind it, is the continual movement during which Earl's body floats among the shopping carts that gradually carry on the street homeless fires, while recounting how his fatherless existence left him in ashes (Figs. 3–4).

Figs. 3–4: Hiro Murai: *Chum*, 2012. Vimeo. Screenshot by the author.

As if to confirm that memory is only one of many other hybrid images, certainly not a reliable testimony of the past but more a product of the present moment, the camera shortly cuts to a children's toy, the merry-go-round with rocking horses. While this hint to a personal (*qua* subjective and intimate) story is nothing but a trap for symbolical reading that always seeks some narrative causality behind the forms, the formal reading I propose avoids the lure of an emotionally charged plot and, instead, probes the countermovement between what the music video forms *show* and what they actually *do* – and the name of this both audiovisual and affective operation is *loop*. In this light, the sequence is governed much less (if at all) by narrative coor-

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dinates than by the logic of affects involving and combining doubt, confusion, and grief. And since the "affects take shape in the details of specific visual forms and temporal structures" (Brinkema 2014, 37), instead of being represented and hence used to "move" the spectator, they are triggered by and further elaborate the formal work of a loop which oscillates and curves within the aural, textual, and visual repetitions.[6]

Consider, for instance, the successive shots of the performer–dog–performer–drummer–toy–and performer again, which appear at the same staccato pace as the piano tones of Eb minor and G minor chords and with the hasty cadence equal to the drum strokes. Throughout the song, we simultaneously hear and see the loop that drives the beats, pitch, melody, and rap lines while at the same time structuring the drifting mise-en-scène. Enacted by the textual motif of the pendulum and repetitive piano pattern, the performative operation of this loop frames the overall audiovisual composition. The swaying movement of this loop reaches its climax when the rapper is turned upside down while the rest of the scene remains on the ground. Being literally *suspended* – in both meanings of the word, hanged upside down by the director's crew but mainly postponed and delayed – the subject is put in suspense and hence in doubt (Fig. 5). Yet every loop needs a hook to be tightened around, and in this case it is provided by the moving image that is undoubtedly the most exposed one: the face.

Fig. 5: Hiro Murai: *Chum*, 2012. Vimeo. Screenshot by the author.

In fact, there are two kinds of faces, the animal and the human, neither of them belonging exactly to whom they show. In its motionless indifference, the frog face corresponds to the expressionless mask which suddenly appears on the gloomy head of a dog. The same way the main protagonist is floating to the beats of the soundtrack, this skeleton-like mask travels throughout the video only to finally land on the back of the drummer (Figs. 6–7). Emphasizing its *replaceability* and *transposability*, the animal face ceases to stand for an animal and becomes a mask which freely switches between the subjects while being continually juxtaposed with the face of the rapper. Having therefore nothing to do with a Deleuzian-and-Guattarian "becoming-animal" (2004, 258–287), the video's take on the face engages in a *short-circuiting* of animal through a cheap Halloween-like mask, ultimately rejecting the romantic essence of

otherness in favor of employing the animal's face as a musical element. Instead of expressing some mysterious non- or beyond-human dimension, the video's mute barking and loud croaking, emitted via the animal faces, become a sounding board of the dominant piano loop.

Figs. 6–7: Hiro Murai: *Chum*, 2012. Vimeo. Screenshot by the author.

If the animal face reifies en route to become a removable mask, the same direction toward objectification and exteriority is taken up by the human face as well. The position of Earl's head hanging upside down in the manner of a pendulum is but one in the overall sequence of facial and skeleton masks' transpositions between the dog, the drummer, and the rapper himself, implying that despite the dominance of the rapper's performing role his face becomes gradually replaceable. These shifts in the faces' positions and roles call for a reading that would be in line with such spatio-temporal transpositions. Instead of a naïve decoding of the emotional, personal, and symbolic propriety of an inner self lying behind a transparent face, the vertiginous movements of the camera and the face's role of a "loophole", constantly switching not an expression but the position and light, make the face a "moveable play of reflections and angles" (Nancy 2018, 99), revealing absolutely nothing about the subject's interiority. By no means does this desubjectification mean that the face loses its importance. Quite the contrary, its sequential ordering, frequency, and transpositions make the face, as aptly suggested by Abraham Geil, an "opaque but nevertheless *readable* surface[s]" (2017, 67) and transform it into an affective-media interface that enhances the video's atmosphere while amplifying the performative work of the audiovisual mise-en-scène. To read this interface is to probe its connectivity, operationality, and movement.

To make this shift from a conventional transparency to the readable opacity, the video boldly unhinges narrative ordering, as is tellingly summarized by the sign on Earl's hoody sweatshirt which likely speaks for a viewer's confusion: "What the Fuck is Really Going on?" The narrative uncertainty is further underscored by a diegetic interruption achieved by the interposed views on a nocturnal street that function more as photographic stills than some durational sequences, the only motion belonging either to the camera or to the frogs' throats. What activates these fixed murky images is nothing but the musical structure of the loop, grounded in *repetition* and (inter)facial circularity, by means of and through which the video's dark atmosphere operates. To navigate the non-narrative reading toward the formal work of affects

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and audiovisual atmosphere is also very close to Murai's own reluctance toward any storyline synopsis (an omnipresent element especially inside YouTube fans' discussions), as he put it in an interview: "because to me what happens in the video isn't really the point. It's more of a tone thing, or you should just experience it in conjunction with the music" (Klinger 2012).

So there is, after all, a positive answer to the sardonic question stitched into Earl's sweatshirt: it's about the loop, and it's about the face; and these are arguably serious topics – with no less serious conceptual implications – for one short video. Without necessarily clinging to their geometric analogy, the loop resembles the facial *object* on the basis of repetition. As James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow argue in their brilliant contribution to the current sound studies, due to the capacity of the loop to repeat a sonic event, "the sound *becomes* an object for the listener" (2019, 10). Given this objectifying force of repetition – the essential principle of hip-hop sampling at that – it might be suggested that the face emerges as the audiovisual interface between the aural loop and the audience.

Far from being confined by the specific aesthetics of *Chum*, the affective and media interfaciality emerges in other collaborative videos of Sweatshirt and Murai, especially in the murky visuals of *Grief* (2015) where the previous facial opacity is inverted and turns into an extreme luminosity by means of thermographic cameras and heat lamps. Surrounded by and immersed in the wobbling basses, sluggish phrasing, and grim reverberations, Earl and his entourage appear as spectral figures whose paralyzed motion faithfully echoes the song's stifling soundscape, not just in terms of a "sonic envelope which surrounds a listener in a certain place or space" (Breitsameter 2017, 52) but also as an aural condition that has the potential to reconfigure the entire visual scene (Figs. 8–9). The performer's face is overlit to the point of blindness which, in turn, covers the surrounding obscure space. Instead of being imitated, the perspective of grief – the major affect which drives both the lyrics and the mise-en-scène – is performed through the activity of both musical and visual forms which themselves acquire the spatiotemporal qualities of this affect. What gives structure to the affect of grief and establishes the dominant atmosphere of disorientation is Earl's spectral face.

Figs. 8–9: Hiro Murai: *Grief*, 2015. Vimeo. Screenshot by the author .

The face thus plays an equally crucial role as in *Chum*: constituting both the affective and audiovisual center of the video, it acts as a rhythmical membrane that absorbs the song's atmosphere and amplifies it within the music video composition.

It is, however, important to note that this media-affective interfaciality could hardly achieve its operational effects without a formal technique of the *close-up* which is not only a landmark in the history of cinema but also its major strategy for it "embodies the pure fact of presentation, of manifestation, of showing, a 'here it is'" (Doane 2003, 91).[7] In her groundbreaking study building upon Jean Epstein, Béla Balász, and Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's notion of defacialization, Mary Ann Doane explains how the close-up dismantles the usual view on the face as the "privileged receptacle of affect" due to both its overwhelming scale and proximity and "pushes us beyond the realm of individuation, of social role, and of the exchange that underlies inter-subjectivity. This is why the face is indissociably linked with the process of efface-ment, a move beyond codification […]" (95–96). The key difference lies in the fact that whereas in the film close-up, as Doane argues, the facial image becomes "an image rather than a threshold onto a world" (91), in the music video close-up a face becomes both the material and affective link to that world of which it makes a consti-tutive part, since the face actually exceeds its own image on the way to becoming an audiovisual medium. When the camera continually tracks in to a close-up of Earl's face, this movement exposes that face not so much as a "sign, a text, a surface that demands to be read" (94) but rather as an interface requiring to be linked in.

UNHINGING THE SUBJECT, PERFORMING THE PORTRAIT

The semiotic loop of Rilke's sentence "A face is a face" that underlies the present reading has, in fact, a double face. Along with the circular structure articulating its empty center – whence the temptation to a representational reading of the face as a sign of something *beyond* it, be it subjectivity, interiority, or an emotional maze – it emphasizes, to use Jacques Derrida's term, its *supplementary* quality: a face that can be added to someone is also the one replacing someone, a face that depersonalizes. This second course is undertaken by Murai's videos which undo the subjectivity of the face while creating the interface that does not reveal or reproduce a self under-neath but, instead, connects the subject into a media-affective network. The face that shows while hiding, manifesting its present absence, is another name for the portrait.

In order to make this conceptual premise clearer, let us now take a closer look at a theorization of the portrait elaborated by Jean-Luc Nancy in his recent work dealing with this manifold genre in both classical and contemporary visual arts. Exploring the position and structure of the subject in relation to the look that constitutes the central problem of portraiture, Nancy, in his 2000 essay *Le Regard du portrait* ("The Look of the Portrait", 2018), observes a situation of the modernist subject which is no longer "the self-evidence of an interiority held within itself by the suspension of the world," since this subject threw off "resemblance and recollection understood in terms of humanism, intentionality, and representation" (2018, 40–41). In his more recent book *L'Autre Portrait* (2014; published in English together with the former essay in 2018) Nancy fleshes out the oft-dismissed and yet crucial etymology of the French verb *portraire*, a composite of the prefix *por-* (for) and the verb *traire* (to draw, e.g. a line). Within the regime of figuration and representation, "the prefix *por* (originally *pour*) marks an intensification: the line, the outline is applied or carried

forth and its intensity sends it in the direction of a substitution of the drawing of the thing drawn" (47). The gesture of *substitution* – a visual stroke, or a line, surrogating a singular *trait* and hence putting one trace in place of another – that activates the supplementary operation of replacing a pre-existing subject while adding a new one, is therefore an always already present condition of the genre of portraiture, no matter whether those mimetic lines that outline and construct a new figure belong to photography, cinema, fine arts, or music video. The portrait thus fundamentally and always follows the logic of supplement.[8]

Responding to the tendency within contemporary figurative art to account for the loss, absence, and disappearance of the human figure, Nancy applies a fitting notion of the "other portrait", the function of which is no longer to reproduce a living person but instead to *evoke* its distanced and uncertain identity: "The other portrait is other than the portrait that proceeds from a presupposed identity, one whose appearance must be rendered. On the contrary, it proceeds from an identity that is hardly supposed at all, but rather is evoked in its withdrawal" (94). This founding moment of withdrawal takes us back, once again, to the genre's etymological inflections: in its Italian designation, *il ritratto* signifies not only portraiture but also retreat, retraction, and withdrawal. Since the relationship between the portrayal and the person portrayed cannot be accounted for within the regime of identity, representation, and reproduction, what comes to the fore in the portrait is always "the other" who "withdraws in showing itself; it makes a retreat within its very expression" (49). This other is hence not a new ontological entity, but the one who dwells in the dynamic of a present absence, emerging *in absentia*, and disappearing while appearing.[9]

Applying Nancy's notion to the audiovisual domain, it seems productive to step beyond the received ideas of a presupposed causality and unity between the performers' faces, seen in the music videos, and their hidden interiority. What Murai's videos propose, instead, is a *non-representational portrait* that exposes the subject less in its self-contained autonomy than in its withdrawal, in a particular retreat that underscores the subject's mediality. Transforming a face into the media-affective interface can thus be understood as the music video's attempt to reassert the supplementarity of the portrait into the audiovisual field.

This takes us back to the opening account of Landis' CGI experiment that pre-echoed the digital music video as a new media "laboratory for exploring numerous new possibilities of manipulating photographic images made possible by computer" (Manovich 2001, 311). Accordingly, it is important to consider a media dispositif of music videos by which I do not mean a mere technological environment (studio, audiovisual equipment, computer hardware, and postproduction software) and online circulation which enable their final shape, but also the ontic operations that their audiovisual forms carry out. In his post-hermeneutic media theory of cultural techniques that "reveal the extent to which the human actor has always already been decentred *by* the technical object", Bernhard Siegert (2015, 193) opens up a path by which the portrait can be thought less as a mere art genre transferred between images across different cultural contexts and historical periods, and more in terms of a productive concept, one that allows to shift the focus from an autonomous – portrayed – subject

to its media operations and affordances. Given that cultural techniques involve the "chains of operations that link humans, things, media and even animals" (Siegert 2013, 48), it can be argued that the music video portraiture works precisely as a cultural technique that blurs the boundaries between the performer's face and its environment while transforming a face into the audiovisual interface.

Surviving in the current audiovisual forms while being continually reinvented by them, this music video trajectory of the portrait composes the face without interiority. It does so through the act of desubjectification that ties together Murai's aesthetics of the facial exteriorization, Nancy's moment of withdrawal, and Siegert's operative chains. This supplementary operation of exposing the subject while removing it allows a rethinking of the portrait as a media operation undermining traditional notions of representation and identity in favor of unfolding its technological and affective links between sounds, moving images, and lyrics. To understand Rilke's gesture of separating the face from an inner self, a gesture that finds its extension in the music video's portraiture, one only needs to take seriously its formal work and movement through which the subject is not revealed but performed and linked. For what is performed in music videos is not merely the individual subject or artist persona but their links to the entire media ensemble that produces them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES

[1] For an illuminating account of Rilke's intermedia poetics, see Dürr (2006, 36–50).

[2] I am using the term atmosphere in line with the recent theoretical unpacking of the concept by Jan Slaby. In his Heideggerian and Hermann Schmitz-inspired view "atmospheres are manifest as tangible, forceful, qualitative 'presences' in experiential space" and constitute "a type of *affordance*: prepared occasions for affective engagement, for absorption and attunement" (2020, 274–275).

[3] Although I am well aware of the serious problems of the race and identity politics underlying not only Jackson's video but also the history of the music video in general, I decided to bracket them in my analyses, proposing that the two pieces in question actually *undo* the identitarian logic of race. By shifting the focus from the racialized face as a sign of identity to the media problem of its opacity and connectivity, both Landis' and Maybury's videos pose the color as a means of performativity, not an object of representation. An insightful overview of the issues of race, gender, and identity in the recent music video is provided by Railton and Watson (2011, esp. 87–107).

[4] For a brilliant analysis of this video, see Shaviro (2017, 67–75).

[5] Accordingly, Julie Lobalzo Wright notes that "the face and body become sites where performance is conveyed" (2017, 70). It would be worth its own study to consider the grotesque, cunningly weird, the notions of subject and identity deconstructing, and both race- and gender-bender usage of the per-

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former's face in Aphex Twin's videos made by Chris Cunningham, *Windowlicker* (1999) and *Come to Daddy* (1997).

6 For a recent assessment of cultural affect theory and the concept of affective triggers, see van Alphen and Jirsa (2019, 1–14).

7 On the particular rhetoric of the music video close-up, see Vernallis (2004, 47–49).

8 Taking Nancy's etymological reflection one step further, it would not be difficult to see how the supplementary logic of portraiture absorbs another Derridean term, the one of "differance". As the *OED* reminds us, the word portrait comes from the Latin *pro-trahere*, meaning to draw forward, to reveal, to extend, to prolong, *to defer*.

9 Nancy's account makes an organic part of a broader scholarly tendency to refuse the face as a guarantee of identity and to understand the portrait as a generative work of the subject's transformation, absence, and disappearing. See esp. van Alphen (2005, 21–47); Weiss (2013); Belting (2011, 9–36; 2017, 91–105).

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Faces without interiority: Music video's reinvention of the portrait

Face. Portrait. Opacity. Media-affective interface. Hiro Murai. Earl Sweatshirt.

No matter how contemporary music videos differ across genres, aesthetic styles, and production background, they usually focus on the performer's face. Exploring its opacity and agency, this essay argues that contemporary music video production replaces the face as an expression of the subject's interiority and identity with a media-affective interface whose main function is to amplify the video's work of audiovisual forms, performative mechanisms, and atmosphere. Through a close reading of the hip-hop video *Chum* by Earl Sweatshirt (dir. Hiro Murai, 2012), I demonstrate how it generates the face as an audiovisual screen that absorbs, intensifies, and gives rhythm to both the moving images and sounds. Such desubjectification opens a way to rethink portraiture within the music video genre as a media operation undermining the traditional notions of representation, interiority, and identity in favor of unfolding its technological and affective links between sounds, moving images, and lyrics.

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Facing the face: To be or not to be Don Quijote

MIEKE BAL

Addressing the viewer. (Photo by Jeannette Christensen)

INTRODUCTION: THE PAST IS TODAY

In the late 16th century, a young Spanish soldier was captured by corsairs and sold into slavery in Algiers. This was, so to speak, common practice in the Mediterranean area; primarily a commercial endeavour. From 1575 to 1580, the young man had no idea if and when he would ever get out. Imagine the feeling – or rather, the incapacity

to have any. His parents did not have the money to redeem him. A few texts have been written by eyewitnesses or fellow slaves, describing the everyday life in the *baño*, the confrontations with cruelty as well as benevolence. But by lack of personal writings, not much transpires about how the detained experienced their situation. We can only imagine. Indeed, we need the imagination, in the face of such un-representable events and situations that we call "traumatic". Captivity is not only a horrific experience, but the worst of it is, I would think, not knowing if there will ever be an end to it. Time loses its meaning. And it stretches endlessly. Into today. This harrowing temporality is at stake in my video project *Don Quijote: Sad Countenances* (2019), staged to create a confrontation between it and the temporal liberty offered to the visitors. The project is an instance of what is currently called "artistic research", although that term has its own downside. I call it "image-thinking", with "thought-images" (*Denkbilder*) as its result (see Vellodi, in press).[1]

That young soldier was Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616). He wrote one of the world's first bestsellers after experiencing five and a half years of captivity as a slave in Algiers. The novel, in two parts – the first published in 1605, the second in 1615 – at first sight reads like a parody of medieval epics and romances, and that is how it has been mostly interpreted. It can also be seen as a precursor of later novels that mock adventure stories, such as 18th-century *Jacques the Fatalist and his Master* (Denis Diderot) and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Lawrence Sterne). But it also resonates with postmodern novels of the 20th century. Most importantly, and for me the motivation that drives the project, *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* stands out in its intensity and creative expression of prolonged hopelessness, leading to, or already caught in what is termed trauma. This notion has recently been over-used and hence is in danger of losing its specific meaning, and consequently, the social recognition and the possibility to help traumatized people. In this project, "trauma" is considered as a state of stagnation and the impossibility of subjective remembrance that ensue from traumatogenic events, not the events themselves. The distortion of time and its forms constitute trauma, rather than the original events of violence.[2]

If such a literary work has achieved and retained the world-wide status as a masterpiece it has, it is primarily because it has not lost any of its actuality. *Its* time, too, stretches into the present. Not coincidentally, the novel is based on what the great specialist of Cervantes, María Antonia Garcés, has called, in the subtitle of her 2011 edition of a contemporary witness statement, "an early modern dialogue with Islam" (Sosa 2011). Formerly, in deep history, things happened that still happen, or happen again, today. Hence, "the past is today". With the research group in colonial and post-colonial studies at the Linnaeus University in Växjö, co-producer of this work, we could call it "concurrences".[3]

Every epoch knows of such situations that push human beings out of humanity. The novel carries not only the traces of the absurdity and madness that suggest the inevitably traumatic state in which its creator must have been locked upon his return to Spain, as transpires in the stories told but also in the novel's poetics. It also foregrounds this consequence of war and captivity in the madness of its literary

form. The sheer-endless stream of "adventures" makes all film adaptations practically hopeless endeavours. One can barely read, let alone watch all those pointless attempts to help others, the repercussions of which involve cruelty and pain. Repetitiveness overrules narrative.

On the interface between literature and visuality, I explore the self-doubt of one of the emblematic characters from world literature, Don Quijote. Although the literary character never existed, we all think we know what he looked like, and invariably "recognize" him. Doubtlessly due to the many portraits painted and drawn throughout history, enhanced by the popularity of the images by book illustrator Gustave Doré (1863), old, lean, and mad are the features we "see" when thinking of this character. Yet, he himself is not so sure, changes his name all the time, and ends up taking on a less-than-flattering pseudonym, "the Knight of the Sad Countenance" (1950, 146), in other words, sadness is his face. In scene I, 9 of the novel, where authorship is proposed as contested, the author claims to have found the manuscript written by an Arab historian. Hence, the identity of this figure may be clearer for us than for himself, for he is very much in self-doubt. Below I present one episode out of sixteen from the video installation *Don Quijote: Sad Countenances.*[4]

HISTORY IN THE FACE OF THE INVISIBILITY OF SLAVERY

Several scenes address the issue of slavery, and the difficulty we have, even today, to see it, whereas so many million people live in it, invisibly. Here, however, I will refrain from unpacking what we have done to make slavery visible without voyeurism. Instead, my emphasis is on the power of the face to undo its mortifying, subjectivity-destroying effect. In the video installation based on Cervantes's novel, the author's traumatic experience of captivity, and an inserted novella, one episode is specifically devoted to the question of Don Quijote's face, how others see him, and how he sees himself. This scene is for me the emblem of the *interface* as a tool for social help toward the de-socialized traumatized. In this scene, an artist and a narrator, simultaneously, are describing and photographing the portrait of Don Quijote – as a historian and as a fictive figure. This scene accounts both for *Don Quijote*'s world-wide fame, but as a novel; and for his looks, which have become so emblematic, in spite of the fact that as such he never existed. It is also a commentary on the relationship between fiction and reality.

The scene is staged as follows. During a voice-over about the need for truth in the work of historians, an artist with a large camera, shot in close-up, is trying to capture the Knight Errant's portrait. The figure of the actor as Don Quijote with an ambiguous identity is facing the artist as well as a mirror, a little more distant, slowly changing his face. Every time the artist looks up, the figure's face is dramatically different. The artist frantically starts anew every time he changes, visibly a bit annoyed. The final one is the "sad Countenance". The artist looks happy, in contrast with the sadness Don Quijote's face expresses. She/he now "got it".

Meanwhile, the figure ruminates his names. Cervantes, Saavedra, Don Quixote, the Captive's name, Ruy Pérez de Viedma, DQ's real name, Alonzo Quixano, Quixotiz, Quijada, Quesada, Cid Hamet Ben Engeli. He tries them all, as if tasting them, in

front of a mirror. Constantly we see DQ doubled and, counting the photos, tripled. A mirror image without ego, an anti-narcissus. Then he redresses himself up and tries: Knight of the Sad Countenance. Knight of the Lions. Then, sagging again, back to Alonzo Quixano.

Don Quijote is a fictional being, imagined and imaged by the brilliant writer, the ex-slave who considers himself the knight's father. Yet, few literary characters have such a distinguishing face in the cultural imagination to the extent that we think we know what he looked like. Partly this is due to the Doré engravings, but there is more to it than a cultural memory of an artwork. People sometimes even recognize the actor as Don Quijote in the street. Many people compliment me on the casting, not realizing that the actor had himself initiated the project. How do we know what he looked/looks like? This may have something to do with the wavering scraps of descriptions between portraiture and self-portraiture, inserted in the narration throughout the adventures. The novel is astonishingly visual, but not at all extensive in portraiture. There are also passages that insist on the need of telling the truth, especially in chapter nine of the first volume. Facing the figure to actively look him into returning to social existence, while the discussants stipulate the importance of the truth including the imagination, entices him to face himself and thus, in the interface created, to repair the social bond that was broken by the trauma. In this reflection on the fourth episode I connect these issues.

In episode 1 of the 16-channel installation, "Don Quijote Reading", we can look at the figure's face for a long time. He reads for minutes on end. But then he begins to get agitated, and the face is withheld from our quiet contemplation. His agitation becomes close to hysterical when he takes the synaesthetic aspect of reading literally, or rather, corporeally, and caresses, smells, and in the end, eats the pages. After that, when the Priest and the Housekeeper intervene and begin to take away the books they consider damaging for the figure's mental health, he looks ahead with a catatonic look in his eyes, until he leaves. Apart from the first few minutes of reading when he is absorbed in his book and never looks up, we are not given access to the act of facing his face.

Episode 4, "Who is Don Quijote?", instead, raises the question of portraiture, of history, of truth, as all intertwined. I contend that portraiture – the attempt to depict an individual human face – is more strongly than other visual genres, albeit ambivalently, connected to the question of history, the possibility to reconstruct the past, and the issue of truthfulness. Each society, along with all its institutions, has its regimes of truth, its discourses that are accepted as rational, and its methods for ensuring that the production, conception, and maintenance of "truth" are policed. Studying these regimes of truth is an integral part of the task of cultural analysis, but can only be done through close, political looking, in the triple sense of facing that leads up to the remedial interface: looking someone in the face, encouraging them to face their trauma, and communicating. This is the point of the project. I have shaped the installation in order to deploy theatricality in an attempt to shift museum practice from distant, one-sided looking to close, mutual looking. Such an analysis of regimes of truth is not new. For example, anticipating what visual culture analysis ought to see

as its primary object, Louis Marin analyzed in 1981 the strategic use of the portrait of Louis XIV in 17th-century France, in a visual regime of political propaganda in a book-length study (1988a). The portrait as propaganda: this makes sense when we realize that for a long time, mostly the rich and mighty had their portraits made, boasting their power.[5]

Portraiture is truth-based in the historical sense, since the sitter has existed, whether or not the likeness portraiture presupposes has successfully come off. It is not, however, the physical likeness that matters; in most cases we cannot verify that. Instead, the sitter performs a role, as Louis XIV played his role as a powerful man, according to Marin's analysis. The sitter puts on a mask, showing the face he or she wishes to show to the world. It is that role, that mask that is visible. But then, there is that other, affiliated genre, the self-portrait. In the case of self-portrait, the portrayed cannot look at the viewer, since a mirror serves to paint the self. The performance (role-playing; the mirror) and performativity (effect of make-believe; the mask as persuading us) of the two genres go together; the mirror and the mask are coextensive (Blostein and Kleber 2003).

The elements "portrait" and "self" hang together. If the individual reigns and is sanctioned by portraiture, then the self is just such an individual, although in self-portraits it is the artist, not a patron. Self-portraiture within the humanistic tradition is considered as a "more involved", more profound genre that parades as a sub-genre of portraiture. But there is a crucial artistic difference: the mirror. This mirror is most often made invisible, or, as Bonafoux (1985, 7) elegantly put it, "conjured away", made invisible but for the structural definition of the self-portrait that it keeps in place. This structure can leave a figurative trace in the represented easel from which the painting artist quickly looks away. That glance can become deictic; a sign of address, gnawing at the ostentatious "first-personhood" of self-portraiture, with the symptom of "second-personhood", the dependence on others to acknowledge, sustain, and possibly change places with the self. The contemporary painter Marlene Dumas does paint self-portraits in which the figure looks at the viewer. But that is only possible because she never paints from live models, only from photographs. Paradoxically, it is only by means of indirectness, then, that the artist can make eye-contact with the viewer, and thus engage in a dialogic look.[6]

The episode "Who is Don Quijote?" makes the elements I just mentioned explicit, yet ambiguous. The mirror is ostentatiously present, the face doubled. But due to Mathieu Montanier's brilliant acting, it is not always clear if the figure is practicing for his self-presentation or is playing his character; whether he is steeped in the real world of before, or the fictional one of after the camera starts rolling. And hence, there is a strange ambiguity – dread of what lies behind or in front, past or yet to come – of the faces he shows. Alternatively, the glance can become the figure of apostrophe, the address to the viewer as an allegorical abstraction. If the viewer is able to overcome that abstraction and puts herself in its place, the illusion of connection over time, space, and social world can be signified, and the flat image receives the benefit of the doubt.[7]

Between the mirror and the mask. Is this Mathieu pondering Don Quijote how to play the scene, or reflecting on his identity as a knight errant? (Photo by Jeannette Christensen)

PORTRAITURE: (RE-)MAKING THE SELF

"Any artist when making his own likeness is much more personally involved than when treating any other subject", as one dictionary definition has it (Osborne 1996, 1057). Something about psychology, personality, depth, self-analysis, and intention is implied in this entry. The "self" is the core of the genre; the self-portrait is a sign. And signs can have many different meanings, according to a dynamic conception of the semiotic process, or semiosis. Jon-Ove Steihaug's brilliant analysis of Munch's 1926 *Self-portrait in Front of the House Wall* is entirely based on the knot of self-depiction and abstraction. But such a semiotic formulation and attitude go against the grain of the assumptions underlying portraiture (2013, 12–24).

There, the sign (or sign-event) is supposedly the "occasionality" – the reality "behind" the sign, the referent – of the documentary mode, as art historian Richard Brilliant (1991), following philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, has it in his study of the genre. It is also possible, therefore, to argue for the opposite taxonomy. Portraiture of others-than-the-artist can be considered a subset of self-portraiture. Whether or not the self is explicitly portrayed in the image, traces of the self as well as of the self's position in the circuit of exchange between first and second person remain. This would be the implication of Louis Marin's speech-act theory of painting and the positioning of the viewer therein. He writes: "The sitter portrayed in the painting is the *representative* of enunciation in the utterance, its inscription on the canvas screen, as if the sitter here and now were speaking by looking at the viewer […]" (1988b, 68; emphasis added).

The portrait here is a representation of a communication situation, in which the enunciator – the "I" – is either figured by or temporarily exchanged for a stand-in, or "other half", who is the depicted figure. This would be a derivation from the situation

in which the enunciator is the painter-"speaker" or rather, its fictionalization. The "occasionality" or documentary frame of viewing yields to a semiotic one that fictionalizes the scene. This suggests that narcissism lies at the heart not only of self-portraiture but of portraiture in general.

For the question of what/who the "self" is, this makes sense. Narcissus's story is not only about self-love, but about alienation. Whereas portraiture assumes recognition, Narcissus's fate was sealed because he did not recognize himself and engaged himself as other. The two presuppose each other, however. Bonafoux begins his book on self-portraiture with two formulations, each of which addresses one of these aspects. The first is, "I paint him-myself, the sitter". The portrait remains of another person. The second is, "We may ask if the self-portrait is nothing other than the recurrent portrait of Narcissus, a monotonous repetition" (1985, 8). Both formulations imply estrangement in self-portraiture. They also propose a continuity between self-portrait and portrait.

These critical thoughts on a traditional genre in Western art were the basis of the dramaturgy (the arrangement of the dramatic elements of a text to make them stageable), the scenography (the artistic arrangement of practical, material, and visual elements on the stage) and the cinematography (the motion-picture photography) of "Who Is Don Quijote?". The thoughts in the thought-image that the image-thinking of this episode has yielded bind the wavering between portrait and self-portrait, through the staging of an artist-photographer (played by Jeannette Christensen) who attempts to capture the figure who cannot be captured because he is ambiguously situated between portraiture and self-portraiture. The mask and the mirror are unstable, constantly swapping positions. Meanwhile, the question of truth, history and the question of authorship are kept present in the discussion among three "historians" and a fourth figure, a narrator, who recites the fictional acknowledgment of the true author as an Arab historian, and reads passages from the famous story in which Jorge Luis Borges ([1939] 1962) has a later French author literally transcribe Cervantes's text on the subject of history and truth.

This is a literary mirror-or-mask element, played out in front of another mirror and around a table with a shiny black glass top. The dizzying play with mirroring doubles up the staged artist who is not a painter but a photographer, who supposedly captures the sitter's face perfectly. As Ernst van Alphen writes in "The Portrait's Dispersal" (1997), however, this is not at all the case:

> Although a camera captures the appearance of a person maximally, the photographer has as many problems in capturing a sitter's "essence" as a painter does. Camera-work is not the portrayer's ideal but its failure, because the essential quality of the sitter can only be caught by the artist, not by the camera (240–241).

The photographer in the video is enacted by a real-life artist. Hence, her position is comparable to that of the figure-actor. Both are ambiguous in relation to the fiction-reality issue, brought up by the discussion going on at the other side of the room. Both parts of the scene, in different yet related ways, concern facing.

But the face as a specific body-part, emblem of human individuality, projection screen of racist and sexist positions, and recipient of dubious attempts to gain access

to other human beings: how can we consider it today, and bring it in connection to the title of this *World Literature Studies* special issue, with the word "interface" as a willfully ambiguous helpmate of thought and of social repair? Traditionally, the face is considered a window to the soul. But to deploy the face for the purpose of turning it into an inter-face requires the elimination of an oppressive sentimentalist humanism that has appropriated the face for universalist claims in the following threefold way: as the window to the soul; as the key to identity translated into individuality; and as the site of policing.

While the problems of the individualistic and potentially oppressive second and third use of the face are easy to see, the window-to-the-soul assumption harbours presuppositions that are highly problematic without being so evident. The obvious one is the expressionistic essentialism. Not only is the idea of a soul – "inside" the body – based on a classical religious idea; it has also been the basis of sculpture from after classicism, as Rosalind Krauss (1977) has famously argued. Play-acting as such counters this idea, and the very special acting by, especially, Montanier (but also the other participants in this project) is particularly telling in this respect. It is relevant, also, as a demonstration of the aforementioned image-thinking. Another assumption is the universalist logic of this idea. Common origin is a primary ideology of universalism. Creation stories around the world tend to worry about the beginning of humanity in terms of the non-humanity that precedes and surrounds it. Psychoanalysis primarily projects on the maternal face the beginning of the child's aesthetic relationality. The discourses of humanism, psychoanalysis, and aesthetics show their hand in these searches for beginnings. Here, combining the first and the second presuppositions mentioned above, I oppose an individualistic conception of beginnings.[8]

ORIGIN, BEGINNING, AND OTHER ILLUSIONS

Instead, and also in an attempt to avoid the evolutionist view of chronology, I consider "programming" in the sense of designing a possible alternative to include futurality. A few years before his path-breaking book *Orientalism* (1978), the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said wrote a book on novels of the Western canon, titled *Beginnings: Intention and Method* ([1975] 1985). In this book he demonstrated that the opening of a literary work programs the entire text that follows, its content and its style, its poignancy and its aesthetics. Origin, always in the past, is a forward-projecting illusion, whereas beginning, in the present, is the inevitable starting point of what follows. Therefore, in this installation I wished to explore a different sense of the beginnings – not in motherhood but in inter-temporal and inter-cultural connections, by means of interfacing as an act. With this focus, I aim to invert the latent evolutionism in the search for beginnings, and, in the same sweep, the focus on children, specifically on babies, inherent in that strange contradiction, individualistic-universalist theories of the subject.

Today, with many authorities and other unthinking people displaying high anxiety over the invisibility of the Islamic veiled face, we cannot overestimate the importance of the ideology of the face for the construction of contemporary socio-political divi-

des. Confusing, like so many others, *origin* with *articulation*, in his study of the portrait – the genre of the face – Richard Brilliant explains the genre with reference to babies:

> The dynamic nature of portraits and the "occasionality" that anchors their imagery in life seem ultimately to depend on the primary experience of the infant in arms. The child, gazing up at its mother, imprints her vitally important image so firmly on its mind that soon enough she can be recognized almost instantaneously and without conscious thought […] (1991, 48, n. 9).

Art history here grounds one of its primary genres in a fantasmatic projection of what babies see, do, and desire, as psychoanalysis tends to do. It is worth noting that these acts by babies are not knowable. Both disciplines can and must be challenged for their universalism couched in a story of origin.[9]

A second unquestioned value in Western humanist culture elevated to universal status is documentary realism. Here, too, the cinematic and its relation to acting is an important source for reflection. Brilliant's shift operates through the self-evident importance attributed to the documentary mode. The point of the portrait is the belief in the real existence of the person depicted, the "vital relationship between the portrait and its object of representation" (8). The portraits that compose "Who is Don Quijote?" challenge these joint assumptions of baby-based individualism and realism, as well as their claim to generalized validity. Montanier stages the tension put forward already by Diderot's "paradox of the actor" (published posthumously in 1830), a beginning text of theatre studies, with particular lucidity in the second episode, "Getting Ready, Setting Up, Setting Out" in which he seems disturbed by the real-life questioning of the actor playing Sancho Panza (Viviana Moin), who refuses to do his bidding without a contract. Here, the enacting of reality and of fiction are no longer clearly distinguishable. Montanier wrote this scene himself, in collaboration with Moin, as one of the postmodern, self-reflective moments of the project.

Video and cinema are not only visual arts, since the audio element cannot be separated out. There is another distinction to face in this episode: that between silent-looking as facing and listening to what others have to say. Like looking, listening is a practice, but as with all practices, before we can practice it, we must learn to listen. In the noisy world of today, this demands serious commitment. In an acoustic whirlwind, we must learn (acoustic) distinction, between voices, languages, tones and moods. Only then can listening be a socially useful practice; a critical one. The politics of listening runs parallel to the politics of looking. The objects of study of the humanities have the unique potential to "teach" us that practice. In their complexity and subtlety, artworks, but also other cultural practices and even, simply, languages and their uses, can help us move beyond simplistic slogans and picking up their alleged meanings overly quickly.

The use of a variety of languages in all my video work comprises a statement about this crucial multilingualism of the world. The casting of an Argentinean woman for the role of Sancho has allowed specific experimenting with the languages. This occurred in different episodes in a variety of ways with distinctive issues, including Sancho's abundant use of proverbs, which Don Quijote critiques, and the squire's use of wrong words, which sometimes make communication impossible. In episode 2,

"Getting Ready", the dispute between life and art is doubled by a dialogue in French and Spanish. Listening with distinction is, here, a task for the visitor, whereas between the two characters the bilingual dialogue seems "natural".

Dialogue is the basis, indispensable to achieve interfacing. The object of analysis takes part in that dialogue; through analysis, objects gain the agency of subjects. When making an argument about an artwork, we often quote passages or print images. I have frequently explained in my teaching the need for listening as a method by putting forward the idea that "the object speaks back". Quotations should not be used to confirm what the student or scholar argues, but to complicate that. If we make a habit of always looking back at a quotation and carefully check to what extent it confirms our point, we will frequently notice that this is rarely entirely the case. Instead of panicking, however, thinking we are wrong, or worse, repressing the differences, this complication helps us move beyond what we (think we) already know. Listening carefully to the object, treating it as a "second person", an interlocutor, instead of a mute "third person" *about* which we speak, is the apprenticeship of listening as a critical practice. This is how cultural analysis differs from other approaches. It is also how non-academic visitors can demonstrate their freedom-in-effort to understand the artwork.[10]

But how does the face become an actor, agent, willing and ready to inter-act, rather than a depiction of interiority? A first step to contemplating the questions of the face, identity, history and truth as intertwined is to perform a triple act of *facing. Facing* sums up the aesthetic and political principle of this video work that is an attempt to reflect on this severance and its consequences. Through this installation, and in particular the episode on Don Quijote's identity, I attempt to shift two common, universalist definitions of humanity: the notion of an individual autonomy of a vulgarized Cartesian *cogito*, and that of a subjecting passivity derived from the principle of Bishop Berkeley's "to be is to be perceived". The former slogan of the alleged Cartesian dualism has done damage in ruling out the participation of the body and the emotions in rational thought by cleaving the body and its affects from the perceived superiority of the "mind". The latter is recognizable in the Lacanian theorization of the reversibility of vision which places primary significance on being seen and observed (rather than being the subject of the seeing), and in certain Bakhtinian traditions. Berkeley's slogan has thus over-extended a sense of passivity and coerciveness into a denial of political agency and hence, responsibility.[11]

INTERFACING AS A SOCIAL REMEDIAL ACT

In conclusion, I wish to propose, as I have sought to (audio-)visualize in the Don Quijote project, that art can stretch out a helping hand to the many traumatized people that inhabit the same space as we all do. My concept of inter-face sums this up as the knot where this re-bonding, this de-isolating of the traumatized subject can happen. Presenting viewers with the pressing, almost inescapable urge to do this, is the goal of the video project as displayed in theatrical mode in a museal space where visitors are on stage and full participants. The scene as I have constructed it lays at the heart of that endeavour.

Portrait, Self-Portrait, Interface. (Photo by Jeannette Christensen)

As I have mentioned before, *facing* consists of three things, or acts, at once, and through integrating these, we can achieve *interfacing.* Literally, facing is the act of looking someone else in the face as an illocutionary act. It is also, coming to terms with something that is difficult to live down, by looking it in the face, instead of denying or repressing it. This is the difficult, indeed without help, impossible task for the traumatized subject, yet indispensable for healing. Thirdly, and this is the helping hand, facing is making contact, placing the emphasis on the second person, and acknowledging the need of that contact in order, simply, to be able to sustain life. Instead of "to be is to be perceived" and "I think, therefore I am", facing as interfacing proposes, "I face (you), hence, we are". For this reason, facing is my proposal for a performance of contact across divisions, that avoids the two traps of universalist exclusion and relativist condescendence. For this purpose, I first make the move from the two universalist views of humanity – Descartes' and Berkeley's – to a merger that replaces both; from *Esse est Percipi* to *Cogitote Ergo Sumus*. Berkeley's formula *Esse est Percipi* as elaborated to exhaustion by Samuel Beckett in his *Film* (1965), is agony-inducing. And, as it happens, linguistically this shows already in the mere fact that the formula defines being in non-personal forms. If being is only thinkable in the passive form, not much is left of the agency we need to actively engage with the world. Beckett's *Film* explores the agonizing feelings that result from a consciousness of being through being perceived. The figure played by the aging Buster Keaton flees from the notion of

perceivedness, in the "action image". The sets of eyes that watch him and that he systematically eliminates show us the limits of what Deleuze calls the "perception image", and the ending, the close-up of the "affection image" translates affect into horror only.[12]

In my earlier video installation, *Nothing is Missing*, I have tried to shift these views in favour of an inter-cultural aesthetic based on a performance of contact. In order to elaborate such an alternative, I have concentrated the episode "Who is Don Quijote?" on the bond between speech and face as the site of the performance of a universal: the possibility of contact. Speech, not just in terms of "giving voice", but as listening, and answering, all in multiple meanings; and the face, turning the classical "window to the soul" into an "inter-face". But then, inter-face as the beginning of an action, an agency to face in the three senses mentioned, and from that beginning on, endorsing and contributing to the improvement and enjoyment of a social texture where encounters can take place across divisions.

Locked up behind bars, in the project's poster image (a superb photograph by Ebba Sund), or with chains on his feet, in Cervantes's literary novella, that inserted story's main character, the Captive, cannot tell his story. This is what the photograph suggests. Visually, his mouth is hidden, muzzled by the bars that, as a layer over his face, impedes him from speaking. But his eyes, sharply looking at the viewer, are exuberantly "telling". They do not express any particular mood or emotion. But with the agency that cannot be entirely taken away from humans, they are focusing on "us", they beg for our attention, for our empathy. "Look" or "listen", they say. They embody a gentle but intense imperative mode, in an injunction to pay attention to the fate of those deprived of the possibility of telling their story. For that is the consequence of trauma. In this essay I have brought narratological issues to bear on the examination of how art, those allegedly refined and subtle cultural expressions, can effectively counter the fierce brutalities of the world. The case is made for a community-creating effect of art that helps repair the broken social bond that has resulted in trauma, so that narrative becomes possible again.

(Photo by Ebba Sund)

NOTES

1 Ernst van Alphen proposed the concept of "image-thinking" as a counterpart to "thought-images", an idea for which I am very grateful (personal communication 2019).

2 The best succinct explanation of trauma in relation to narrative is provided by van Alphen (1999). The most widely-known publication on trauma as unrepresentable is Caruth (1996). In psychology, see van der Kolk and van der Hart (1995).

3 On Cervantes's captivity, see Garcés (2002). On the concurrences between past and present, and the subsequent methodology of colonial and postcolonial studies, see Bryson, Forsgren, and Fur (2017). "Concurrences" is the group's alternative term for what cannot be called "postcolonial" for the simple reason that the world is still too steeped in colonial relations. I share the resistance again the use of the preposition "post-".

4 For a description of the sixteen scenes, see Bal (2019).

5 For excellent discussions of the issues the genre of portraiture raises, see the collective volume edited by Joanna Woodall (1997), especially the contribution by van Alphen (1997, 239–258).

6 For my understanding of second-personhood I am indebted to Lorraine Code's book (1991).

7 For a lucid presentation and analysis of the concept of "apostrophe" see Culler (2015). Culler discusses poetry, but the concept has more general validity.

8 A more in-depth discussion of this idea, in relation to space, can be found in van Alphen (2005, 71–95). This book as a whole explores the idea of "image-thinking" (without using the term).

9 "Occasionality" refers to the reality depicted; in the case of the portrait, it refers to the sitter. Brilliant took this concept from Hans Georg Gadamer's 1960 phenomenological methodology.

10 This idea was further developed and demonstrated in my book *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (2002).

11 I have been so bothered by the dismissal of Descartes as a dualist that I devoted a video project to him. See http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/reasonable-doubt/.

12 The most succinct formulation of these three types of "movement-images" is in Deleuze (1986, 66–70). For an extensive discussion of facing, see my article "In Your Face: Migratory Aesthetics" (2015). The "image-thinking" on which that article is based is my video installation *Nothing is Missing* (http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/installations/nothing-is-missing/). For a lucid analysis of Beckett's Film, see Uhlmann 2004. The qualifier of "agony-inducing" comes from that essay.

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Trauma. (Self-)portraiture. Historical truth. Authorship. Remedial interface. Don Quijote.

The article presents a "preposterous" updating of Don Quijote, in the face of trauma, contemporary slavery, and the importance of a social face-to-face, or interface, to help people to come out of their isolation inflicted on them by violence. The argument begins with the "updating" of a literary monument, an instance of cultural heritage that never lost its relevance for whatever era in which it functions. The focus on trauma makes this particularly necessary, since those on whom the stagnation and isolation violence cause has been inflicted, must be helped socially. Taking seriously not *that* but *why* some people seem "mad" is a collective task for humans. We can all contribute to that remedial interfacing. Through its special complexity, subtlety and temporality, art can facilitate this. The video installation *Don Quijote: Sad Countenances* presents an attempt to do this. Especially the episode "Who Is Do Quijote" is central in the article. There, some characters discuss the value and possibility of history, the authorship of Cervantes' novel, and the importance of the literary imagination, while the figure of Don Quijote, in front of a large mirror, exposes himself to an artist-photographer who tries to capture his face.

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Blurred boundaries: Francis Bacon's portraits

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Traditionally the genre of portraiture relied on mimetic representation of the unique subjectivity of the person portrayed. Portraiture assumed that there was an implied unity between the sitters' outer expression and their inner essence, an illusion that dictated the construction of the traditional portrait. This meant that mimetic representation of the subject remained the main goal of the genre, attempting in this manner to capture the true essence of the sitter (Woodall 1997, 1). In the late 19th century, avant-garde artists challenged the conventional notion of the mimetic portrait, arguing that physical appearance was not representative of the inner essence of the subject. For this reason, at the turn of the century, portraiture became referential (where the subjects were evoked by referential symbols and not portrayed in a mimetic manner), rather than representational (van Alphen 2005, 25). Nevertheless, the genre still aimed to bring forth the unique subjectivity of the sitter, meaning that portraiture claimed for the subject a clearly graspable identity that could be fully understood by the viewers. This led to a standardized way of interpreting portraiture, where the viewers received concrete, comprehensible information about a stable subject.

When looking at Francis Bacon's portraits, one does not immediately recognize the subjects depicted. Moreover, while there are visible traces left of elements reminding of the subject's appearance (in Bacon's own words he wished his pictures looked "as if a human had passed between them, like a snail, leaving a trail of a human presence" – Peppiatt 2008, 10), Bacon's works are far from mimetic depictions. Through a close reading of selected portraits, I will argue that by evading conventional mimetic representation through the use of specific visual tools, Bacon blurs the boundaries between object and subject, the portrait and its viewer, in order to remodel conventional notions of portraiture which relied on mimetic representation and likeness to evoke subjectivity. I will first analyze the significance of the genre of portraiture in Bacon's works and will further draw on Ernst van Alphen's theory of the "loss of self" (1992) experienced by the viewers when looking at Bacon's paintings. Referencing Gilles Deleuze's book *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation* (1981; *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* 2003), I will re-interpret this theory through the prism of Buddhism, arguing that understanding the works on the basis of Buddhist practices opens up the possibility of a complete transformation of preexisting con-

cepts that traditionally shaped portrait making. I will specifically analyze similarities shared by Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon's works and Buddhist philosophy and how the reading of these Bacon compositions through these lenses exposes a new functioning potentiality for the genre of portraiture.

FRANCIS BACON AND PORTRAITURE

In this first section I will explain the role of portraiture in Bacon's work by elucidating what it is not. In his book *Face and Mask: A Double History* (2017) Hans Belting clarifies that in a traditional Western portrait the represented face is reduced to a fixed state, and therefore transformed into a mask (78). Diminished to a rigid format that can no longer change expression, the face is exchanged for a façade. He further argues that as the real face is ungraspable, fleeting, transitory, and multifaceted, the mask can never become a living face. When portraits become masks, they reference an outer state that they cannot reproduce. Belting considers that the first time the mask became a self-referential object was at the end of the nineteenth century when the new death mask emerged (78). In this case, the face became the image by referring just to itself, as it had nothing else to represent (given that its original face model was absent after the making of the death mask): "only when the face is transformed into its own mask can it become – and remain – entirely an image" (78). In this way, clarity has finally been reached through a stability that was missing from the face of the living. "The death mask became a totemic object that permitted the creation of a nostalgic cult of the timeless, authentic face" (78). Belting elucidates this concept of the death mask as an object that can become self-referential (and therefore not relying to an outside reality) discussing *L'Inconnue de la Seine* (Unknown Woman of the Seine) (1900), whose death mask was countlessly reproduced in plaster and photographs around 1900 due to the apparent beauty and deceptive smile it carried. This death mask, again, was not alluding to the deceased but was rather an image of death itself (80). Belting quotes Maurice Blanchot in saying that "in the otherness of the corpse one could also see that of the image, which produces a new kind of similarity, by referring to nothing more that itself" (80). In the context of a time when the face's claim to authenticity was being questioned, this type of self-referential image offered a new refuge (80).

In opposition to the mask, most of Bacon's portraits are painted in (a deforming) motion rather than a fixed state. I will explain at a later moment what is being depicted through that motion in these portraits when discussing Gilles Deleuze's theory about Bacon and the depiction of bodily sensations. Nevertheless, not all works are made through utter deformations. In stark contrast to other portraits of the time, Bacon's series of death masks after William Blake's life mask (mask that has been cast while Blake was still alive) are the only ones that do not seem to have undergone significant bodily deformations. As noted by Belting, Bacon did not change much from the original when painting the mask. However, everything seems to have come out different in his works. In a similar vein, van Alphen argues that Bacon's representation seems to be imbued with life rather than death through such details as expressivity, the mouth slit, and the eyelashes (1992, 105). While Blake's mask freezes

life in a rigid state, Bacon's works revolt against the mask and through his signature style they create the appearance of life (Belting 2017, 156). Bacon's works therefore are not traditional portraits that transform faces into masks, but through motion and blurring, they transcend a rigid fixity on the way to create a new type of portraiture.

To further the understanding of Bacon's relationship to the genre of portraiture, I will also draw upon van Alphen's analysis of *Two Studies for a Portrait of George Dyer* (1968), a work depicting a dressed version of George Dyer posing in front of a canvas that shows a nude version of himself. Van Alphen explains that by presenting the resulting portrait of the posing Dyer as naked and pinned down to the canvas, Bacon hints at the fact that Dyer has been sacrificed for representation. The naked painted portrait in the background seems to suggest the sacrificial nature of portraiture, and hence that of conventional representation (van Alphen 2013, 70).

Three Figures and Portrait (1975) is another example which supports this reading. The three moving figures are seen in clear opposition to a nailed down portrait: while the figures seem alive, the representation is static and immobilized by a nail in the wall, figuratively pinning the subjects within the canvas space. These examples seem to suggest that portraiture, through representation, attempts to pin the body down. The nails hint at the sacrificial nature of portraiture, meaning that portrait depictions sacrifice something of their sitter. The sacrifice in this case is that of subjectivity, as traditional portraiture promised to deliver a representation of the unique subjectivity of the sitter. Consequently, the genre of portraiture – with its traditional conventions – is not able to completely render subjectivity. For this reason, portraiture as a genre needs to re-determine the conditions that originally shaped it in order to be able to construct a novel manner in which portraits can be understood.

While Bacon's works critique mimetic representation – and therefore traditional portraiture – as an attempt to annihilate subjectivity, his works still make use of the genre. Why does he fall back on portraiture if portraiture is not able to render subjectivity (keeping in mind that Bacon's aim was to render someone's "emanation")? Bacon himself offers a first hint at how to interpret his works by referencing Diego Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus* (1647–1651): "If you don't understand the *Rokeby Venus,* you don't understand my work" (Bacon 2018). He therefore suggests that his works – in a similar fashion to the *Rokeby Venus* – cannot be read in a straightforward manner, but rather require a careful visual contemplation.

To this day there are several interpretations to Velazquez's masterpiece hanging in the National Gallery in London, but it is a well-known fact that at first most viewers do not fully grasp the painting's subtle details. The scene shows Venus lying in her bed with Cupid holding up a mirror in front of her. Given the way in which the mirror is being held as well as the pink decorative elements, there is no doubt that the mirror is used for grooming or vanity purposes. "The problem is that the vantage point from which the scene is represented (as well as the vantage point of the viewer, were they to differ) is different from the vantage point of Venus. Therefore, if we see Venus' face nicely framed inside the mirror, she must see something quite different. If the painter reproduced what he saw, then the model must have seen the painter in the mirror" (Bertamini, Latto, and Spooner 2003, 593–599). This means that Venus is looking at

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the viewer who is looking at Venus, thus the whole works revolves around the act of looking and being looked at. This same principle operates in Bacon's works as well. Van Alphen explains the use of the motif of the mirror in Bacon's work through a close reading of *Study of a Nude with a Figure in the Mirror* (1969). While the female nude is exposed to the viewer in a similar fashion to traditional nude representations, the mirror on the right side of the figure is also turned towards the viewer. This positioning seems to create an analogy between the seated figure reflected in the mirror and the viewer. The exposed female nude, however, replicates the same leg position as the male figure, meaning that these two figures share the same feature. The viewer does so analogously, whose function is represented by the male character (2013, 69). Thus, the viewer becomes contaminated and part of the composition, the cycles of looking and being looked at.

This situation is further complicated by Bacon's specific instructions on always presenting his works behind glass (Sylvester 2000, 23–24). When looking at the works, the viewers at first see themselves. It takes effort and good positioning to see the figures behind the glass, and even so, the onlookers are continually confronted by their own reflection. I will refer to this aspect of Bacon's practice (in the same manner as I have done when discussing Munch's hybrid portrait genre) as "framing the viewer" (2019, 133–153). Reflection theory as well as the physical reflection of painting behind glass is a crucial tool for interpreting Bacon's portraits. It is through such devices that Bacon frames the viewers to become part of the compositions and eventually identify with his figures.

In *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (1992) van Alphen explains the identification of the viewer with the figures through the theory of the "affective" quality of Bacon's works in terms of violence done to the viewer by the works: the particular moving quality, in a literal sense (11). Van Alphen argues that Bacon's works oppose narrativity in a story-conveying sense, however they do not fully rid themselves of narrativity. He argues that Bacon's works focus on the activity of the narrative process: "This process is not repeatable; it cannot be iterative because it takes place, it happens, whenever 'story' happens" (28). He further argues that while the paintings are not narrative, they are experienced as such because they appear to be in motion: "Bacon's narrativity, the illusion of narrative his work arouses, does not so much involve the representation of a perceived sequence of events, but the representation of perceiving as a sequence of events, which are embodied, not illustrated, by the figures" (30). Therefore, the viewers experience the figures in motion, in such a way that they are "moved" in the same way as the figures.

The mirror and the lamp in Bacon's works are not used in accordance with Western traditions of representing these elements. Regarding the problematic reflection of the mirror images, van Alphen discusses the possibility of negative hallucination, either from the viewer or the subject itself (75). Nevertheless, the uncertainty about the experience of the hallucination fosters an instability of vision and thus instantiates an instability of identity. "Identity, selfhood, seems to depend on who sees what. When the mirror image is stable, the figure has a demarcated identity. Identity gets blurred when the mirror image cannot be identified as mirror reflection" (75). This

identity crisis is further reflected in the motif of the double, the "Doppelgänger": because there are two identical figures there is too much identity (van Alphen 2019, 174). "In opposition to the lack of identity between mirror reflection and mirrored object, and the eroded identities of the deformed dissolving bodies, the motif of the double can be read as an artificial strategy for establishing or reinstating identity" (1992, 76).

Identity overall is unachievable for Bacon's subjects. They are confined to closed spaces and positions that do not allow them to see their own bodily (self) perspective in the surrounding world. Due to fragmentation – bodily and spatial, that of the space that surrounds the body – Bacon's figures cannot be perceived as whole by the viewers. As wholeness depends on the gaze of the other, as soon as one is seen by the other, one becomes whole. Since in this case neither figures nor viewers can become whole, they both equally experience a loss of self. "He leaves figures, as well as onlookers, with their lack of self, which is paradoxically the only situation in which the idea of self, not defined by others or by the surrounding space, can be felt and kept alive" (162). This suggests that a way of maintaining one's subjectivity is clear delimitation from the other by "loss of self." As long as one is at a safe distance from the other's unifying and at the same type stereotyping gaze, they are able to maintain their own subjectivity. Nevertheless, I propose here an alternative manner of sustaining subjectivity, not by escaping from the other, but rather by *identifying with the other*.

When discussing Munch's strategy of "framing the viewer" I have argued that through carefully chosen compositional devices such as the insertion of landscape into portraiture, Munch frames the viewers to directly interact with the subject of the composition. The landscape in these paintings is intelligently constructed around the subject in such a way that it propels the figure into the arms of the onlooker. In Bacon's case when dealing with landscape and portraiture, van Alphen has argued that there is no delimitation between the figure depicted and the surrounding landscape. In works such as the studies for Van Gogh's portraits, both figure and landscape are executed with large strokes of thick paint, whereas normally Bacon clearly delineates between the figure and its perfectly smooth surrounding. Van Alphen argues that in these compositions Bacon makes the space that surrounds Van Gogh a metaphor of the body – "the landscape is in fact a bodyscape" – where the two form one continuity. The lack of difference between body and space blurs the line between the conceptual categories of inside and outside (142–147). "The space of representation is an ambiguous zone. Just as the line between inside and outside cannot be drawn, so also the distinction between model and representation is fluid" (152). As there is no homogeneous space that could give form and identity to the subject within it (152), a clearly definable and graspable subjectivity cannot be represented in such a composition. I will argue at a later stage however that it is at the convergence of inside and outside where pre-conceived concepts of a stable and depictable subjectivity can be completely re-modeled.

The ambiguity of ontological dimensions in Bacon's work can be elucidated through a close reading of *Portrait of Henrietta Moraes on a Blue Couch* (1965). In this composition Moraes is depicted on a blue couch that seems to be at the same

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time inside and outside of the opening door (a door that is also made of two parts). There is also a circular object on the pillow that could represent a mirror. Even if it does not reflect anything, it could possibly allude to Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus*. Here again we are brought back to the act of looking and being looked at, but in this case the viewers cannot tell whether the subject is inside or outside of the painting they are viewing. As the work is behind glass, the viewer sees his or herself projected on the canvas, factually becoming part of the composition, through his or her representation inside the glass of the picture frame. Depending on the angle, the gallery space where the painting is hanging is also reflected back into the work, creating the impression that the reclining female figure is in the same physical space as the onlooker. Bacon therefore frames the viewers to appear in the same ontological space as his figures: the viewer's image appears next to the image of the figure or the figure appears next to the onlooker. *They are both in the portrait meaning that they are in fact both portraits.*

Bacon sees mimetic representation as sacrificing the subject, therefore he evades this by representing his subjects in motion. In addition to the moving bodily deformations experienced by the figures, Bacon manipulates the way his figures are perceived by onlookers. Nevertheless, he does not stop here, but rather further stages a direct identification between the figures and the onlookers, making the viewers part of the compositions. The viewers become the subjects of the portraits. But what do these portraits depict and how do they influence and manipulate the perception of the viewer?

GILLES DELEUZE, FRANCIS BACON, AND BUDDHISM

In my argument I will further refer to Gilles Deleuze's book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2003) to explain the states experienced by the subjects in Bacon's portraits. Deleuze explains that in his works, Bacon avoids the illustrative in order to escape narrative stories that would appeal to the intellectual understanding of the viewer. Bacon appeals instead to the "figural", where he isolates the Figures (when referencing Bacon's works Deleuze capitalizes the word figure in order to make a clear distinction between Bacon's Figure and the figure seen from a representational, figurative approach in painting) in large fields of uniform colors that co-exist on the same level with the Figure. Their common limit, the Contour, is the place of double exchange between Figure and Structure. This exchange results in movements that are real passages and states, physical and affective and which constitute sensations and not imaginings. Bacon's goal therefore consists of recording the fact, what Deleuze names the "sensation", which is transmitted directly to the senses, avoiding the detour of the story which passes through the brain. When the Figures experience sensations, a zone of indiscernibility arises. According to Deleuze this creates a moment of deep identity with the Figure, more profound than any sentimental identification, which is the process of *becoming*. He concludes that what is rendered in Bacon's works are invisible forces made visible and which need to be acknowledged and accepted rather than being distracted by them. Through this visibility the body affirms the possibility of triumphing over these hidden forces.

There have been previous attempts at reading Deleuze's philosophical writings through the prism of religion. Few studies have made a parallel with Buddhist philosophies however, Simon O'Sullivan traces similarities between these two philosophies in his article interpreting Deleuze's reading of Bergson and Spinoza (O'Sullivan 2014, 257–261). He starts by explaining that Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative book *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (1980; *A Thousand Plateaus*, 2004) has explicit resonances with contemporary Buddhism. With the emphasis on pragmatics, as "*A Thousand Plateaus* is a book to be used and not just read, advocating for the subject's transformation which affirms *Becoming* over Being" (257). O'Sullivan's definition of Buddhism builds upon concepts such as the ontological conditions of existence and the transitory state of beings, rather than a strict religious doctrine indebted to a Buddha (or any other form of God or Divinity). "Buddhism offers an ethical programme aimed, ultimately, at a kind of self-transcendence, at least of a self that is fixed and set against the world" (258). O'Sullivan links this modus operandi to Deleuze's ideas from *Différence et Répétition* (1968; *Difference and Repetition*, 1995) and brings these ontological terms together under the concept of immanence: "In Deleuzian terms we might say, Buddhism provides instruction on how to access – and in a sense determine – this groundless ground of our being: meditation, for example, that allows for a contact with an infinite potentiality that lies behind our habitual, and finite, being" (259). He further states that Buddhist meditation allows access to an outside realm from which our subjectivity has itself been formed and it is at the convergence of the inner and outer domains that meaning is produced. In Deleuze's reading of Bergson it is suggested that this point can be accessed through the gap between stimulus and response.

This in-between point – between action and reaction – is the key moment when the cycle of self-repeating unsatisfactory actions can be broken. Meditation cultivates awareness of the bodily sensations occurring continuously and at any given time, and the mindful observation of events called insight or *vipassana* is what leads the meditator in liberating their selves from an ongoing world-process (Prebish and Keown 2010, 120). By not reacting to the sensations, or "hesitancy" to reaction in Bergsonian terms, a certain creativity replaces the old impulsive-reactive modes of behavior, liberating the organism from predetermined patterns of action.

> Buddhist meditation, this time as insight practice (*vipassana*), allows an experimental encounter with this other place – of forever changing elations of intensities – that in itself produces a self-overcoming […]. This "knowledge" – of impermanence–insubstantiality–interconnectedness – is not solely intellectual but is, precisely, bodily. It is a direct experience, registered on the body – of the rising and fallings, the comings and goings, of sensation (Prebish and Keown 2010, 261).

Deleuze interprets the bodily deformations in Bacon's works as reaction to sensations experienced by the body. Buddhist practices always advocate for a conscious engagement in the observation of the sensations acting on the body. In Deleuze's reading, the experiencing of these sensations creates a zone of indiscernibility which has a transcendental potential (between man and animal, but also between the viewers and the Figure, as the viewer identifies with the Figure, meaning that the viewer

has the same experiences as the Figure). Similarly, in Buddhist practices, meditation allows an experimental encounter with another place that in itself produces a self-overcoming. Thus far, Deleuze's reading of Bacon's works shares many similarities with certain Buddhist concepts.

In another essay comparing writing on art and the Buddhist *puja*, O'Sullivan proposes a case study of what the puja *does* rather than what it is (a concept similar to Deleuze and van Alphen's understanding of Bacon's works in terms of what they do rather than what they mean) (2001, 115–121). The puja is a ceremony centered around an arrangement of objects related to the figure of the Buddha. It is a ritual but also an immersive space, where all senses are engaged, and one that attempts to operate as a portal to other worlds in which the invisible (that which lies outside the human register) can be made visible (116–117). Besides sensations, the puja also involves becoming. Buddha, understood as a presence, "works as a border guard/ guide between worlds and also as a manifestation of the possibility of moving into these other worlds. […] The Buddha then is the possibility of what we can become (a vision and aspiration). […] Human but also *trans*human" (117). Meditation, the grounds for the arising of "Enlightenment," leads to self-overcoming that is the goal of the puja. In this ritual there is a certain surrendering of one's self to that which lies beyond oneself. The puja "celebrates this line of flight from the self as an affirmation of the potentiality of all beings to become more than what they are (to transform themselves)" (118). What the puja and Buddhist practices add then to the possibility of self-overcoming is the potentiality of complete change/transformation, a moment of complete creativity that allows re-writing and re-determining of the old self.

To return to Bacon's works, Deleuze's identified state of indiscernibility achieved in Bacon's works corresponds to the key moment in meditational practices between action and reaction when the cycle of self-repeating unsatisfactory actions can be broken. Both refer to a self-transcendental (self-overcoming) potential. In Buddhist practices, this point between action and reaction goes a step further, asserting that this is the moment when pre-determined conditions can be re-determined. At this point one can create him or herself anew, no longer accepting previously created and accepted values or assumptions. As Bacon's works are mostly portraits, it is the portrait in his œuvre that offer the possibility of self-overcoming for both subject and object. What is added to the genre of portraiture in Bacon's works when reading it through the prism of Buddhist practices is the opening up of the potential of complete transformation of pre-determined conditions of the genre.

FRANCIS BACON'S PORTRAITS AND BUDDHIST MEDITATION PRACTICES

If we analyze Bacon's works through Deleuze's interpretation and its similarities to Buddhist practices, we understand that the figures' bodily deformations are a result of their experiencing the continually arising and passing sensations which occur in all beings at any given time. The deformations, just as the sensations, are continuously changing and therefore materialize as diverse bodily distortions. The whole body – or "emanation" as described by Bacon – is a continuous flow of energy.

The body, as a mass of energy, is in continuous interaction with the outside world through its sense organs – interactions which trigger a bodily reaction. Once a sensation has occurred – of aversion or pleasure – and has been interpreted as positive or negative, an immediate reaction will follow (I hit my leg and as a result I will scream out in pain). If this reaction were to be represented in painting, it would be narrative, a narrative sequence, as whatever would be painted would be the direct effect of a cause. The reaction would entail a movement that would lead to a logical course of action. As Bacon's figures seem to be in movement, they are interpreted as reacting to a situation that they are experiencing in the moment. Bacon's figures, however, are not responding to external actions. As explained by Deleuze, the movement they are undergoing is due to the sensations exerted upon them from the inside. Nevertheless, they do not engage in coherent action. The facial expressions and grimaces the figures display inform the viewers about the type of sensation they are experiencing.

Bacon seems to have depicted a great number of figures experiencing sensations that create aversion, hence the screaming and grinding of teeth so often encountered in his paintings. Nevertheless, these expressions are in fact motionless: they are mute screams; screams that only mimic the action of screaming. Deleuze explains: "What fascinates Bacon is not movement, but its effect on an immobile body: heads whipped by the wind or deformed by an aspiration, but also all the interior forces that climb through the flesh. "To make the spasm visible" (Deleuze 2003, XI). In such works as *Landscape with Pope/Dictator* (1946), *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (1950) or *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) – the scream is immobilized on the figure's face through the act of representation. When one screams in pain one's face will be contorted to accommodate the very physical action of screaming. Bacon's figures however only open their mouth to show the way a scream would occur. These figures seem to receive the sensation, they evaluate it, yet they do not act out fully the reaction. Moreover, at times Bacon's figures seem to experience positive sensations as well. In the portrait *Study for Head of George Dyer* (1967) the depicted head has a peaceful expression. Numerous forces are acting upon this face, creating contortion, deformation, and movement, nevertheless the head seems to be at peace in this moment, with the eyes closed, in what seems to be a serene moment of contemplation on the forces being exerted upon it. Regardless of its positive or negative nature, it is this moment of intense sensorial experience and observation that is depicted in Bacon's works.

The question certainly remains why such figures in *Study After Velazquez* (1950) or *Study for Head* (1952) seem actively engaged in the act of screaming, with contracted facial muscles completely absorbed in the action. Deleuze explains that "in the end, Bacon's Figures are not racked bodies at all, but ordinary bodies in ordinary situations of constraint and discomfort. A man ordered to sit still for hours on a narrow stool is bound to assume contorted postures. The violence of a hiccup, of the urge to vomit, but also of a hysterical, involuntary smile…" (x). When comparing this reading to Buddhist meditation practices, one knows that while complete awareness and equanimity are desired in meditation, physical pain, even if closely monitored,

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can still act out. These are the moments during meditation when one changes position, sneezes, coughs, cries, or laughs. These works could therefore be interpreted as studies that capture the moment of distraction that escapes close scrutiny and allows for the acting out or experiencing of the sensation exerted upon the body.

As one advances in the meditation practice and becomes more familiar with the technique, one gains more control over the reaction process and becomes less distracted by strong sensations. In the 1940s and 1950s, Bacon's figures seem to be at the beginning of their meditative process, as they are depicted blurrier, murkier and agitated. By the end of Bacon's career his figures become much clearer in execution (such as *Study for a Portrait of John Edwards*, 1988, or *Two Studies for a Portrait*, 1990), with less distortions, contractions, and movement. It seems that with the passing of years, Bacon depicted figures that have more control over their reactions and can remain neutral despite their bodily sensations. Deleuze explained this as the affirmation of the possibility of victory over the deforming invisible forces that are now visible, and therefore graspable: "When the visual sensation confronts the invisible force that conditions it, it releases a force that is capable of vanquishing the invisible force, or even befriending it" (62). Befriending, therefore, can be seen in Bacon's case as an acceptance of the forces acting upon the body at all times.

BLURRED BOUNDARIES

To further develop my argument, I propose considering this common moment of in-betweenness the figures are caught in as the very moment when transformation can occur. The instance that Deleuze identifies as the moment of becoming and which in Deleuze's reading of Bacon's works concerns a deep identification between man and animal/Figure and viewer, in Buddhism corresponds to a point of maximum awareness, where self-transcendence can be taken to a further level. This is not only a self-transcendent moment of interaction with another, as Deleuze suggests, but also a moment when one can access an outside realm from which subjectivity has itself been formed; it is at the convergence of inside and outside where pre-conceived concepts of a stable and depictable subjectivity can be completely re-modeled. When one looks at a portrait, one tries to understand this based on a pre-supplied set of rules for understanding a portrait. Nevertheless, in this moment of becoming there is a possibility of re-determining the way a portrait can be understood. The re-determining begins at first at a formal level where the Figures are neither figurative nor abstract; they are rather in a state of indiscernibility. Before Bacon there were no portraits where the subjects were captured in this in-between moment, which transforms the work into what Deleuze also calls neither subject nor object. In Bacon's works the figures are not presented in a moment that speaks of their individuality, neither are they caught in a moment of complete absence of individuality, but rather in a state of transition, of becoming. As neither subject nor object, the portrait enters a state of in-between where its pre-determined parameters can be re-determined. In this moment it does not need to represent or evoke for the viewer, nor to solely engage and interact with the viewer. The portrait does not now consign the Figure to immobility but, on the contrary, renders apprehensible a kind of progression, an

exploration of the Figure's potentiality. In this moment of re-determination the portrait in Bacon's works does not fall back on the concepts of clear distinction between portrait and viewer, rather it becomes one with its viewer.

In his essay "Making Sense of Affect" van Alphen explains that the invisible reality made visible in Bacon's works touches the viewer as much as the Figures, through affects: "that is, by the surface layers, which are senseless as such, but are put into motion by the painter in such a way that they touch us" (2013, 67). Affects and percepts activate and stimulate the viewer's senses to a point where the "viewers are touched directly and almost violently by the material presence of his paintings. It is as if our skin is penetrated by affects generated by the presence of what we see: not a mediated story, but the material reality of the painting" (66). The deformations going on in the painting are therefore not only directed to the Figures, but also to the viewers, where the deformations are brought onto the Figures and the viewers alike. Van Alphen further explains that "how he wants to affect the viewer imply that the figures in Bacon's paintings can be seen as representing viewers: the bodies in the paintings exhibit the kind of responses that the viewer is also intended to have. His figures are hit by sense perception in the same way as the viewers of Bacon's paintings are" (73). Bacon's works therefore become portraits of the viewers who are intended to experience the same bodily sensation as the figures depicted.

Consequently, the portrait does not just represent – it creates. Through entering the painting (similar to entering the puja) both the viewer and the Figures have the capacity to transform themselves – to become more than what they already are. The portrait is no longer a fixed point, a reassuring mirror of (one's own) subjectivity, but an experiment in exploring what lies beyond a fixed subjectivity. The portrait is a zone of transformation, an aesthetic zone in which boundaries between subjects and objects are blurred. In Bacon's works as well as in Buddhist practices, interest lies in affects rather than meanings, experience rather than understanding, and transformation rather than representation. All of this is a call for participation in accessing something outside one's own boundaries of subjectivity. This does not limit the de-coding of the portrait but rather opens it up for further interpretation. The portrait becomes an *event*, where determinate relations between the portrait and the viewer disappear.

Subjectivity is therefore rendered in the process of transformation as one has no stable identity. We can only hint at the changing nature of identity through change – one needs to transform, to become, in order to realize this. One can only grasp transformation via transforming oneself: through the process of becoming, while viewing these portraits. Portraiture therefore does not remain a stable composition that can render certainty, rather it becomes a fluid process that adapts alongside the viewer. These portraits show subjectivity in transformation in order to reflect reality. There is no such thing as a portrait that fully encapsulates inner features or characteristics. The portrait is something in continuous change, which cannot be pinned down. The only way to create a truthful portrait is to render the change. The only way to understand the change is to identify with it. Through becoming – in a Buddhist sense – one transcends his or her own self. One no longer perceives subjectivity as something

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stable, belonging only to oneself, but rather understands it as being ungraspable and in continuous change.

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Blurred boundaries: Francis Bacon's portraits

Portraiture. Francis Bacon. Gilles Deleuze. Buddhism.

In his oeuvre Francis Bacon hints at the fact that portraiture sacrifices the subject for the sake of representation. For this reason, portraiture as a genre needs to re-determine the conditions that originally shaped it. Through an analysis of the manner in which Bacon depicts his subjects I will argue that his portraits blur the boundaries between object and subject, portrait and viewer, in order to remodel conventional notions of portraiture. Through Gilles Deleuze's theory on Francis Bacon, I will reinterpret Bacon's works through the prism of Buddhism, arguing that understanding the works through Buddhist practices opens the possibility of a complete transformation of preexisting concepts which traditionally shaped portrait making.

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Narcissus taking a selfie – post-socialist literary representations of "whiteness" in the Balkans

MIRNA RADIN-SABADOŠ

Exposure to massive migrations due to different political and economic influences in the past twenty years appears to have had a profound effect on the societies of the West, transforming them into ever more complex cultural hybrid environments but also outlining the sharp contrasts and contradictions. These processes cannot be observed simply as cultural blending, since we also see the reverse actions at work, those constructing gaps or divisions commonly recognized as "othering". These actions still remain predominantly detectable in the treatment of the concepts of race, class, gender and culture while the global literary scene equally projects the fears of the hosts and the hopes of the newcomers, often pointing to the directions which current politics and media systems appear to deliberately avoid. Deeply within the flux of migrations, South-East Europe is, however reluctantly, very much involved in the processes constructing new alliances and divisions. Because of its geographical position, it is inevitably a space of transit. Because of its economic status, it cannot become the "target space" for non-European migrants and thus it fluctuates between solidarity with the migrants and rejection and denial. Its cultural production refrains from adopting perspective of a "host culture" and appears determined not to recognize its own dormant or active impulses of "othering". Though rarely acknowledged, the processes of "othering" can be traced as literary production goes beyond the conventional patterns. In the newly-recognized negotiations of class, race and gender, the already established subjectivities of the European fringe require to be confirmed, deconstructed or re-constructed, acknowledging the contradictory forces at work.

The post-socialist contexts of South-East Europe since the break-up of Yugoslavia appear to be moving towards emphasizing cultural homogeneity and national emblems of independence, which primarily put forward the urge to articulate a clean break with the Yugoslav heritage. It is heavily reflected in the Serbian literary scene, which the critic Tatjana Rosić (2013) declares to be (non)existent, and for the most part "transitional" as is the present society. She believes that "the neocolonial spirit of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries fatally impacted Serbian culture" (242), since what follows the vacuum left after the 1980s Yugoslav literary postmodernism is the formation of a transitional culture polarized between the desire to revive the esthetic community and the lack of faith that such a community would have a real social and critical impact in an environment unable to generate dialogue.

As a consequence, the literary scene was generated through what may be described as two major formative influences – the first one originating from the imperative of commercialization of cultural production, and the opposing one stemming from a demand to create a literary system of values independent from the market imperatives but operating within a market economy, which Tatjana Rosić perceives as rather unsustainable. The restructuring of the literary scene that followed from these demands generated two major thematic clusters which Rosić maps as "reading as fun" and "writing about reality" and describes as "tense, dramatic and at times extremely divided" (2013, 246). Rosić presents the current Serbian literary scene as dominated by a gender gap where the commercially successful portion of literary production, profiled as "reading as fun", is the domain of writers who are predominantly women, yet ideologically are on the opposite side of the spectrum from feminist writers, which is why Rosić labels them as "female writing" and observes this production as a hallmark of the postfeminist era instigated by the "media promotion of female authors" (247). In terms of topics, this production is an imported concept and follows a cliché: a love drama or thriller, with a hint of the exotic or mystical, focused on what is considered to be a "commercialized female experience" (247). It sells well, but carries a persistent undertone of shallowness and repetitive, schematic and uninventive writing. Rosić further elaborates on the liaisons between the "repression of the universalist literary-critical speech and academic social practice on the one hand and the implacable commercial demands of the market, on the other" (249).Using Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence of the patriarchate, she explains that critical-literary discourse caters to the market and media boom of "female writing," promoting it as "diversity" in an environment so saturated by it, that it remained as the only visible option in a time marked by the defeat of feminism (249).

The other part of the literary scene, involved in issues related to creating a new canon and dealing with issues related to "reality", Rosić sees as a dominion of male writers, whose production perhaps is not as commercially successful as that of "female writing", yet theirs are the works which receive most of the literary awards and are recognized as having cultural value. Most literary debates on the "new Serbian literature" being generated from this part of the literary scene, agreed that it should "thematically and ideologically focus on transition and post-war traumas that have befallen us" while the layers of difference appear to be established precisely in the ideological interpretation of the nature of "our" presence in the trauma or the war itself resulting in the "opposing presentations of wartime, postwar and transition-era 'realities' in Serbia'" (258). Although such a division is superficial and allows for exceptions to the rule, it is also symptomatic of the transitional re-patriarchalization and does carry a pretext for the reception of a literary work. This in itself is evidence that Serbian literary production has generated several filter lenses of cultural reality which often allow processes of "othering" to remain invisible.

The novels analyzed here cannot be comfortably assigned to any of the defined slots in the post-socialist literary scene in Serbia and represent rare examples of venturing beyond the introspective gaze. They challenge the compartmentalization of the literary scene on the one hand, while they also provide a broader context for cul-

tural influences and the issues pushed into the background. Above all, they open the issue of negotiation of one's subjectivity beyond the closed-off space of the Balkans, but also offer some understanding of how "othering" operates in the cultural space which stands somewhere in between.

The novel *Dangete, duša koja se smeje* (Dangete, the smiling soul, 2011) by Tijana Ašić had a rather difficult task in addressing its potential audience. This partly auto-biographical first-person, narrative about challenging life choices and their conse-quences shows the personal development and maturing of its protagonist, as well as an account of a failing love affair in a rather unwelcoming, though exotic environ-ment. As the story evolves, it sheds light on matters usually not recognized or spoken about in the Balkans: what are the key elements in our perception or representation of our own identities in terms of race, class and gender in contexts outside the region? In addressing such issues, the novel resists classification and challenges both readers and critics by subverting expectations.

The second novel discussed here, *Tai* (Thai, 2013) by Goran Gocić, offers a view of contemporary "reality" exposing the process of "othering" much less subtly than *Dangete* and offering, perhaps not quite intentionally a rather unflattering self-image of its protagonist. The protagonist comes across as a man in a severe midlife crisis, struggling with social pressure to be recognized as financially and personally success-ful which allows for an initial discussion on patriarchal, as well as neo-liberal ideas of success. He appears deeply dissatisfied with his life in a setting he finds overbearing with absurd contradictions about what it means to be a man in the Balkans. His quest to resolve internal conflicts takes a rather unexpected turn – he takes a leisure trip to Southeast Asia and gets involved in a relationship ridden with paradoxes, with a woman in the Thai sex industry. For much of the novel the protagonist struggles to make the readers believe he has found love in its purest form and that he would in that relationship eventually discover a formula which would counter the effects of emptiness dominating his understanding of his own existence. The novel unfolds as an introspective journey through the protagonist's worldviews which present him as selfish and bigoted, mainly unable to come to terms with the social and racial ste-reotypes which his actions only validate or even deepen. Although the novel stands outside the mainstream discourse of contemporary Serbian literature, despite shar-ing some perspective with Michel Houellebecq's *Platform* (2001), in many respects it speaks out about contemporary issues. It gives insight into the alliance of the media and the hegemonic interests which generate a desirable perception of identity for individuals as well as for entire geographical areas. In terms of reception, the novel got the NIN award in 2013 (a prestigious literary award in Serbia) and found a place in the prestigious edition of the contemporary Serbian prose in English translation, allowing it to potentially reach a much wider audience.

What both novels share is the embedded perspective of the narrators, which is firmly grounded in the understanding of their Balkan identity as troubled and ambiguous. In order to establish their perspective in the process of negotiating who they are or who they need to be, both narrators make a symbolic double movement. They either willingly or reluctantly align their positions with those they assume are

dominant in western cultures, in order to establish a point of reference with respect to the discourses of race, class and gender. Only then they are considering their position in the cultural space of the Other, of Asia or Africa, and the subsequent interaction appears to reinforce their already established identification, instead of allowing them to negotiate or explore and assess the difference against what they perceive as the Other. However, the process is not irreversible; inconsistencies and contradictions create fractures and fissures in the blocks of the assumed identity which open alternative interpretations and prevent the protagonists to dominate or manipulate their own narratives.

REPRESENTATION OF "WHITENESS" AGAINST THE BALKAN UNDERSTANDING OF RACE AND GENDER

As Catherine Baker explains, the overwhelming focus on ethnicity, nation formation, forced migrations and genocide in the former Yugoslavia foregrounds an ethnopolitical and religious interpretation of issues, leading to the firmly rooted preconception that the "Yugoslav region […] apparently has nothing to do with race" (2018, 12). The region's lack of a colonial heritage and its position on the eastern edge of Europe "proper", never brought mass migrations of people whose identities would be racialized as non-white. However, in everyday life, as well as in the broader historical contexts, there is ample evidence that race as a cultural practice is very much present. Baker points out "identifications with 'Europe' as a space of modernity, civilization and […] whiteness, but also analogies drawn between 'Balkanness' and 'blackness' in imagined solidarity, as well as the race-blind anti-colonialism of Yugoslav Non-Alignment" (13). Baker further argues that it is no longer possible to maintain the position that the "Yugoslav region stands outside race" and that it is imperative to determine "where it stands, and why that has gone unspoken for so long" (13).

Baker's account of the issue of *whiteness* in Eastern Europe draws on Anikó Imre's statement that it is still perceived as morally transparent due to the lack of an colonial heritage (Baker 2018, 20), along with Charles Mills's explanation that race is not only linked to the violence of colonialization, but to "the construction of spatialised hierarchies of civilization/backwardness around people(s) and territories" (25). In addition, Baker contends that the evidence of the bonds that tie the Balkans to the global racial order despite lower rates of migration may be readily found persisting in the popular culture in the "fantasies and desires of colonial exoticism" (27).

Both novels in question correspond to the formal features of travel narratives, each being a quest for the narrators to establish "negotiation between Self and Other that is brought about by the movement in space" (Thompson 2011, 9). However, the common point of reference for both authors is the paralyzing fixation on the images they negotiate with – the rather archaic dichotomy of the Occident and the Orient and their desire to appropriate the identity of the West by consuming rigid stereotypical images of the Self and the Other, elaborating on the series of binaries in what they assume to be the core of the Other of the Third World. In the process, although from different gender perspectives and social roles, protagonists manipulate their own

reflection the most, leaving the reader struggling both with the distortion of their subjectivity and with the image of the remote space and culture as an (un)desired reference point. Their motivation to do so, which comes across as a defense mechanism, opens the possibility of interpretation. The protagonists insist on focusing on the kind of difference which functions as a tool for validating their perception of themselves; their "belonging" to the West, but in doing so, paradoxically they also reassert what Milica Bakić-Hayden has termed "'nesting colonialisms', discourses through which post-Yugoslavs distance themselves from the 'Third World' just as the EU and other Western institutions seemed to be pushing the region into it" (123).

The resulting self-indulgent images of the protagonists can be examined through Richard Dyer's focus on "the representation of white people in white Western culture" (1997, iii). Dyer explains that whiteness is a category claiming universality and invisibility, which assumes its status of maximum power by applying the category of race only on non-white peoples, therefore excluding white people from being racially seen or named, making them function as a "human norm" (1997, 1). Dyer links cultural constructions of race to the interaction "between body and spirit as revealed in Christian culture" (1997, 19), but also to the political development of Europe from the 16th century, identifying populations as those inside and outside the boundaries of centralized rule. He contends that the category of *whiteness i*mplies a symbolic boundary to be crossed, but also an internal hierarchy of privilege to be climbed, since this is a construct which operates together with categories of class and gender. Understanding the experience of whiteness is predominantly limited to the representation originating in the Western world – male dominated, capitalist and exploitative, while the role of "non-white subjects is reduced to a function of the white subject, without allowing for the recognition of similarities or the acceptance of differences except as a means for knowing the white self" (1997,13). In this context, the model images of whiteness present the key elements in the process in which the protagonists of the two novels seek to know themselves against the backdrop of the faraway spaces they temporarily inhabit.

Dyer emphasizes that the embodiment of whiteness is firmly grounded in the Christian concept of the split between mind and body (15), and that gender ideals rely on the figures of Mary and Christ. The resulting female ideal models of behavior thus promote "passivity, expectancy, receptivity […] motherhood as the supreme fulfillment of one's nature […] constituting a given purity and state of grace" (17), while the male ideal is based on the "divided nature and internal struggle between mind (God) and body (man), and of suffering as the supreme expression of both spiritual and physical striving" (17). Those ideals are considered not as identifications, but rather models to "aspire to be like and yet what one can never be" which is in turn a construct of a temporary and partial "triumph of the mind over matter". Although the protagonists' understanding of themselves is to an extent blurred by the ambiguities of the Balkans and their personal rebellion, these models are clearly present in their self-fashioning.

THE PALE GHOST OF KAREN BLIXEN

All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them [quote attributed to Karen Blixen]. I came to Kenya in order to find a man who will be brave, interesting, educated, distinguished and unpredictable like the adventurer and hunter, English nobleman Dennis Finch-Hatton, and who would be much more unusual, intelligent, ambitious and successful than him. I have not found such a man in Ken (Ašić 2011, 110).

In Tijana Ašić's *Dangete, the smiling soul*, the protagonist sees her subjectivity as pieced together from a series of different identities in fragments of three, collected as places, objects, languages and people. The narrative is also a confession of her sorrows: the failing marriage, the struggle to cope with the expectations of an exotic faraway country, loneliness and the paralyzing fear forcing her into compliance and passivity on the one hand and motivating her to struggle to set herself free against the odds on the other. Although Africa features in her story as a place in which she lived for a while, her story corresponds to the mode of telling characteristic for travel writing. As is almost always the case with travel literature, her account of the people and places she encounters offers the reader an insight into her own thoughts and identity, rather than creating a window into the new culture from a point of view of a disinterested observer. The protagonist's emotional involvement makes it rather difficult to approach her story as an objective account of contemporary Africa, therefore somewhat undermining her reliability as a narrator. On the other hand, *Dangete* shares a very specific perspective, since travel writing used to be a genre where women's voices were rarely heard. Although there are records about women travelers and about written records of their travels dating as early as the 14th century, "[u]ntil well into the twentieth century travel writing was often defined as a masculine domain, a showcase for contemporary norms of masculinity, heroism and virility" (Bird 2016, 35). This assumption was challenged in the 1990s in Billie Mellman's *Women's Orient* (1995), which in addition to exposing gender bias in the genre, spoke about the often-omitted issues of complicity and negotiation of women with imperial ideology and administration (Bird, 36). Yet, as Bird points out, the expectation that the women travel writer should exhibit a sense of solidarity with other women she encounters is very much present in current criticism (36) since women travelers are perceived as "already somehow Other or *ex-centric* in their own culture, therefore occupy a privileged position of 'otherness' within the host culture and so can identify with the equally marginalized native women beyond cultural and class boundaries" (Fortunati and Ascari 2001, 5 [Bird 2016, 36]). As the novel *Dangete* confirms, such a proposition is rather naïve and reductionist, since it first assumes an experience of gender understood as a type of universal "bond of sisterhood," secondly it reduces the women in the host country to the function of a mirror "set up to reflect the experience of the European traveler" (Bird 2016, 37) and finally, it may fit only those who correspond to the specified gender profile. The protagonist Tina's position fluctuates between deliberate transgressions and conscious retreats – while the women she encounters in Kenya facilitate her transformation and in some cases act as catalysts in the process of assuming the active role, she finds herself both complicit and lacking. Although race as the topic in the novel appears to be unavoidable, the treatment of

issues pertaining to race is not consistent. On the one hand, it reflects "race-blind-ness" in the observations about social and personal relationships; however, in the self-fashioning of the protagonist, establishing the discourse of race does rely on pro-moting feminine ideals of whiteness as defined by Dyer: passivity, receptivity, moth-erhood as a supreme fulfillment of one's nature, given purity and the state of grace.

Tina's character is first contrasted to the character of her husband's sister, whose position in Tina's husband's household would be challenged by her arrival. Women travel writers "are arguably in a position to explore new textual constructions of fem-ininity precisely because no fixed paradigm exists" (35). However, Tina enters into a female hierarchy of her husband's Kikuyu family where she alone, as a new bride, occupies the position of *Other* and where her background, education or racial fea-tures apparently would not contribute to the improvement of her status: "A young, inexperienced, skinny half-woman-half-scientist wishes to marry an older experi-enced African intellectual and businessman who already has to acknowledge a few pounds extra […] we must point out horrible mistakes she would undoubtedly make if it were not for our care for her wellbeing and for her dignity" (Ašić 2011,10). All the information in the novel comes from the narrator, therefore the interpretations also function as a characterization procedure directed at the narrator. In Tina's view, the "care" is not a genuine concern, but a means of maintaining control and the positions of power. What is more, she gradually realizes that her future position is a part of a carefully designed construct within the patriarchal hierarchy which overarches the female one. She presents herself as conditioned by the roles and symbolic references her future husband wishes to assign to her and his interest in her appears to be lim-ited to the "model wife" he was creating for the purpose of his own social advance-ment. She becomes a "flat character, a paper doll with an important role in his social promotion" (17). Although she is aware of it and she is emotionally affected, at the end of the first chapter she explains her own willingness to put up with it, evoking a deeply troubling period of insecurity in the Balkans which is accurately summa-rized in one half sentence – he was so very different from the young men in Serbia "completely destroyed by the wars in the region, mothers in the house and the omni-present Sloba-Sloboda [i. e. Slobodan Milošević]" (14). While at the time she believes she chose her future husband for his will for life, she later finds his achievements to be superficial and inferior and herself deluded and manipulated.

Whether or not seen as plausible, revealing her true motivation becomes the ini-tial point of her apparent identification with the representation of *whiteness* in the ideal of a woman. It is hinted to the reader almost as an afterthought – she chose to go to Africa because she would become a mother to her husband's child by his first wife.

The role of selfless motherhood Tina preserves as an element she deeply believes to be genuine and uses it as a parameter for comparing and contrasting herself to other women while trying to determine her own social status, whether in the rather rigid social setting of Switzerland where she is a foreign Ph.D. student in linguistics and socializes with a little girl, occasionally playing the role of her would-be-mother at the time when she meets her future husband, or in Kenya's various and traditional social circles. From the pompous and snobbish ones, represented in the character

of her sister-in-law, prone to theatrically emphasizing her would-be-supreme motherly qualities, to the slums of Nairobi's second center haunted by the hungry eyes of children and their mothers' empty gazes, or the rural setting of her husband's family village, the image of motherhood she assumes is the basis of the construct of herself. It allows her to maintain what she perceives as the "purity or the state of grace" which opens the space for her individuality to develop in the environment otherwise closed off and unwelcoming to any kind of female individuality. In Switzerland she models herself as "traditional," expressing disdain towards her student colleagues who present themselves as feminists in order to secure financial support from various groups promoting "gender equality" (Ašić 2011, 36–37), but equally towards those who trade their bodies and minds in order to gain a more or less respectable place in Swiss society. Being traditional, however, she does not deny herself the right to agency. The decisions to go to Africa, as well as to leave, she claims as her own (69), yet she uses the image of motherhood as a means to justify her transgressions against loyalties she feels she owes, first to her family left behind in Belgrade and excluded from her "new life", and then to her husband, when she finally decides to leave him and Africa behind. The actual state of motherhood, when she has her own son in Kenya, paradoxically becomes her only foothold in a marriage in which her position gradually deteriorates and she is stripped of her financial independence. In letting her husband control her income and savings, her freedom of movement becomes very limited, because she gradually grows afraid of the people in the city around her and since the loyalty to her child was paramount, her agency appears to be blocked. At the same time, she seems to have fully realized that racialization is as present in Africa as it is in Europe, although in a form she might not have been familiar with, and that her decisions now have real consequences:

> I did not go to the Black continent looking for an exotic-sexual-humanitarian experience. In the first place, I wanted to get away from the world in which I suffered because I was different. I also wanted to find a new, better and more honest universe and […] an exceptional brave man in it. My expectations failed me twice, Africa and Africans are not better or healthier than Europe and Europeans and the man I chose was poorly chosen (177).

Her disappointment perhaps can be interpreted as a consequence of her own prejudice and the lack of better judgment, but on the other hand, it can also be due to her initial sense of displacement which created a need to construct a perfect "better and more honest universe" at any cost that made her reject the imperfect world she encountered. An accidental encounter with two women of mixed race who recognize the language Tina is speaking on the phone makes her realize that, like other women of European and Asian descent married to Africans, she would always remain a social outsider. Although she never sees her marriage as a "racial combination" (56) for her husband the appropriation of a white woman is a step into *whiteness,* and she is forced to accept the symbolic value of a white woman by allowing him to present her as his prized possession. On the other hand, his understanding of her purpose depends on her refraining from personalizing the experience of *whiteness*, and her Slavic roots, Balkan origin and especially Orthodox Christianity are carefully concealed, since in the system of values *whiteness* operates, those features reduce her

value. Having served her limited purpose, she suspects she would become a prisoner of her love for her children like other women she knew, "condemned to sit around the house waiting for the ever-absent husband, drink evil Kenyan brandy and stare at the blank screen" (88) until she is replaced by some other "less annoying" female. From that point on, she directs all her abilities to silence and cunning, rather than to open rebellion, in order to escape, taking her child with her.

By opening her story to usually unspoken topics, Ašić demonstrates that she is aware of the conventions of the Serbian literary scene dominated by commercial writing described by Rosić (2013) as "female". She deliberately constructs the narrative so as not to comply with the assumed generic patterns of an exotic romance. She breaks the novel's chronology, allowing the reader into the story at a point when the possibility of a romantic love affair no longer exists. The manner in which her subjectivity as a woman is structured in the novel rests on the sequencing of the events from different moments in the chronology of the narrative which all refer to this initial balance of power established in the first chapter.

Although this story is a record of an experience of living in a foreign country, rather than a typical travelogue, we may trace the pattern of storytelling according to which the travel writer often records their adventure following a preconceived idea about the place they visit. Tina's expectations of Kenya rely on the romantic account of Africa acquired through Karen Blixen's writing and on the superficial conversations with affluent women of Geneva and Paris who thought Europe to be unbearably boring, and "yearned for a life in Africa, where everything is fresh, exciting and beautiful" (115). Tina's situation or her racially blind background cannot compare to either Blixen or wealthy Western European women, thus what she actually encounters is in sharp contrast to expectations. Her reaction is a revolt against the sanitized scenery offered to tourists and equally against the "ugly reality of Africa" which she describes as the swarming anthills of people left to fend for themselves (114) in the "second downtown" of Nairobi clogged by cardboard shacks and desperate people sleeping on the ground. However, one of her greatest disappointments is not to find freedom, which she only finds by escaping Africa and returning to the Balkans and Europe. Tina's experience of class and race, her own perception of her *whiteness* against African social hierarchies, produces an experience which directly contradicts that of Blixen, who thought Kenya to be the embodiment of ultimate freedom. On the contrary, for Tina "the shackles Ken chained my little wrists and ankles with were heavier than anything I experienced until then" (108). Paradoxically, Tina's readiness to transgress or disregard boundaries, which had brought her to Africa, also forced her to experience the limitations of cultural and social stereotyping governing the realities of Africa, Western Europe (Switzerland) and the Balkans which forces her to acknowledge her own weaknesses: "Sometimes I think I finally know myself and the secret of my existence, that I bathe in life as if it were the clearest water, and sometimes my soul appears as a deep well full of poisonous sludge rising from the bottom of this world" (194). The novel ends by alluding to the myth of Sisyphus – the stone is at the top of the hill, and her story is over – her motherhood remains the only stable element of who she became. In the interchanging images of Africa and Europe, Ašić

presents an interesting parallel: her heroine is allowed to see as her own reflection only frozen images of discourses on race and gender, not leaving much room for otherness of any kind, which at the point she realizes she participates in it, makes her tragic.

THE WILLINGNESS TO TAKE UP THE "WHITE MAN'S BURDEN"

The novel *Thai* (2013) is a story about a journey told by a man in his mature years, confronted with existential crisis and haunted by the sense of loss and wasted life. The structure of the novel is rather complex; the text often backtracks and is almost suffocated by digressions about the narrator's aspirations, desires, losses, disappointments and forced affections. This makes it very difficult to reconstruct the chronology and to understand the characters' motivation. The protagonist is the loudest (if not only) voice in the novel claiming to search for the "knowledge of himself" by daring to step out of the ordinary or, as he believes, to experience life to the full extent. This attempt takes him on a journey to Thailand motivated by his instable emotional state following the death of a friend, which exposes a "void" in him that he believes is present in all "Western" people trapped in the chase for success. He naively hopes to find there a world made on principles ultimately different from those of Western European neoliberalism and capitalism, a pure world of mystic and raw forces driving life itself. In the end, he returns to his "Westerner's" life and his void remains happily nested inside him while his journey completes the full circle and brings him back to deliberations about the fragility of human life (Gocić 2013, 273).

The reader encounters the protagonist in a crowd in Bangkok arriving from the airport. After a brief exchange, when he immediately imagines a possibility of a relationship with a woman he noticed in the crowd, as a fulfillment of his quest for true love, the protagonist ventures into Nana, the sex trade district of Bangkok, in order to find the woman and to offer "to save her" as his personal sacrifice. The subsequent "relationship" develops in a manner which emphatically foregrounds dualism: the opposition between the protagonist/narrator modeled after a colonial matrix of male travelers, and "the object of his desire" he claims to fall in love with, whom he labels Lady Thai but never names nor allows her to speak. The narrator's account of his personal relationship with the woman is dominated by the contrast between his apologetic attitude to prostitution and the social hypocrisy both of the Western and of the Thai culture, and his personal urge to "rescue, protect and improve" the object of his desire, seeing her as "a damsel in distress" (26), regardless of what her wishes might be. In this situation the reader recognizes the protagonist's true motivation – more than anything, he desires an "ultimate emotional experience which would validate his (white) privilege" (Cole 2012), even if it means disguising the evils of the sex trade with sentimentality and exchanging his desire for the experience of a full life for the "white savior complex". Although the protagonist appears to be aware of the power relations and colonial worldviews projected through this affair, he never contests them; instead, he himself plays a game of immersion into the "girlfriend experience" which is known as a kind of service, an alternative client – service provider relation-

ship, enjoying, praising and exploiting the submissiveness of "his" Asian woman as if it was not an exchange requiring payment in money.

The image of the "farang" (foreigner) conditions the image of Thailand, as the construction of authority is central to travel writing (Thompson 2016). He clearly understands what facilitates his privileged outsider position: "Here the farang's power comes from his euros, his pounds, his dollars, his yen. The power provides relevance to the insignificant whims. Power is the ultimate passion." (Gocić 2013, 169). Thai was expected to be a "revelation read… a text that would provide authentic details to lead us into the atmosphere of an unknown country which very few readers might hope to see with their own eyes" (Arsenić 2014). However, the setting offered in the novel repeats the toponyms and descriptions omnipresent in the media, especially "first-hand experience" blogs and forums, aimed at affluent white men fascinated by the Thai sex trade. The author seems to be following the strategy of travel writing's structuring of authority (Thompson 2016, 4) by introducing a third character into the story as his guide. The protagonist exchanges emails with him, his voice is presented as seemingly reliable and competent, and he is the one who feeds the protagonist the data from the media. However, although this idea could have produced "interesting intertextual connections" (Arsenić 2014), very soon the reader realizes that the expert witness's voice brings no contrast to the narrator's, and it produces an adverse effect – instead of contributing to the construction of a specific chronotope, this repetition deepens the impression of the lack of authenticity.

In addition, the narrative in its structuring also consistently recreates a stereotypical Orientalist discourse, insisting on an essayist manner, emphasizing generalized binary oppositions between the East and the West, instinct and reason, mysticism and clarity, seen as "its topos, Thailand, Love and Thailand. A woman, sensuality, demystification of the protagonist […] a lesson for the self-absorbed Westerner how to resist his hubris looking up to the complaisance of the Easterner" (Bobičić 2014, 157). This certainly evokes the 19th-century colonial discourse which often defined travel writing as "a showcase for contemporary norms of masculinity, heroism and virility" but also promotes the "privileged locus of self-fashioning for men" and a presentation of the male ideal of *whiteness* absorbed in the struggle of the dichotomies of stereotypical masculinity "asserting facts rather than indulging feelings, announcing heroism rather than admitting cowardice, accumulating heterosexual conquests and eliding homosexual exploration" (Bird 2016). Instead of the "archetypal figure of masculinity impregnated with 'the exotics of adventure'", the reader encounters the protagonist who prefers a diegetic over mimetic mode, who frequently overwhelms the text with his endless banal declamations and inconclusive commentaries mostly aimed at celebrating his own broadmindedness (Arsenić 2014). What is more, he repeatedly declares himself a model "Westerner" (Gocić 2013, 19, 55, 71, 179, 185, 225) and attempts to adopt the cultural norms of Western Europe that has much less in common with the Balkans than the protagonist would like to admit, and which itself promotes a widespread stereotype about a white male sex-tourist in Thailand. In appropriating the colonial stance and the "European fantasy of full possession of the Orient", the protagonist seems to be desperate to cloak himself in a particular kind of hegemonic *whiteness:*

Compared to the Balkan excitement with machismo, with the female demands to bring them stars from the sky like a dog would run and fetch a stick, compared to the Balkan madness of emancipation in domestic life and traditionalism when it comes to breadwinning – the simple desire of the Thai women for material security, while they would take care of everything else, seems like fair play to me (181).

For the most part, this does not fit his circumstances or heritage which is why he comes across as powerless, delusional and pathetic (137–140, 230–238). Engaging the Western European discourse with a character from the Balkan cultural space assuming whiteness as a unifying factor (Dyer 1997, 19) inevitably creates an (unintended) ironic effect since it activates a series of deeply contradicting stereotypes: the Balkans is the fringe of Europe, often considered not "white enough", or not Christian enough, inadequately drenched in paganism or Byzantine and Orthodox mysticism (which was precisely the experience of the protagonist of the novel *Dangete*), a part of the "totalitarian" or "communist" Eastern Europe behind the Iron Curtain, retrograde, violent, patriarchal and, before all, not rich enough to be fully accepted within the boundary of the Western hegemonic representation of *whiteness.* In addition, whiteness cannot override the historical and cultural differences – the imperialist heritage of Western Europe is directly opposite of the socialist and anti-colonial background of Yugoslavia. Gender discourse in the Balkans must acknowledge the abundant patriarchal heritage and traditionalism, which especially in the post-socialist period, contributes to the widespread current regression (and repression) of women's rights rather than emancipation, and the omnipotence and benefits of the liberal market in the Balkans are restricted to the smallest elite – all these points remain unaddressed in the novel, although they could be used instead, as points of similarities with Thailand, including these ambiguities in the equation and making Thai culture more accessible and understandable for Balkan readers.

The novel ends in a rather blunt crash into reality. The protagonist labels it his "return to monologue" (Gocić 2013, 271) aimed at addressing the consequences, which is rather ironic, since the entire novel is ultimately a monologue. For the protagonist, the quest for love having failed, possible consequences remain on the surface – the alleged emotional risks he has taken in this relationship seem to have done very little to initiate any kind of transformation or personal growth, but he does express concern for his physical status. Luckily, the anxiety because he was not practicing safe sex in a relationship with a prostitute he declares resolved having received the three stamps on a piece paper confirming his "negative" status – to HIV, hepatitis B and C. Contrary to his relief at his narrow escape and "survival", his alter ego, the alleged acquaintance and the authority on Thailand, returns to Europe to discover his health irreversibly ruined by the "hedonist lifestyle" in Asia, and the protagonist's thoughts are again directed to the "limitations and fragility of human life" (275) he claims to motivate him in finding his new purpose by channeling his emotional experience through "saving, protecting and improving". The protagonist falls short of his own expectations although he appears pleased with the self-image he chose for himself. The entire enterprise, although elaborate and burdened by over-thinking, does not generate change: the protagonist's travel does not facilitate any kind of negotiation,

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he remains introspective and closed off to outside influences. The world he encounters as a tourist turns out to be exactly what it can be – a ready-made version of an adult entertainment park with the attractions tailored to extract currency. The "love affair of his life" remains futile and he is forced to pick up where he left off in the life he tried to escape.

CONCLUSION

In post-Yugoslav literature, distant lands are not a common topic of interest, and the two novels presented here create a niche which would allow the Serbian literary scene to expand in time. Travel is understood as an encounter between the Self and the Other that becomes possible by movement through space, while travel writing records the negotiation between the known and the unknown or between the desired and undesired which takes place in the encounter (Thompson 2011). The protagonists of the novels *Dangete* and *Thai* touch upon the painful questions of constructing a self-image while struggling with cultural norms governing gender, class and race layered in at least three different contexts. In their desire to find a purpose, they expose some of the contradictory aspects of the Balkans as a region between the West and the global South (or the so-called "Third World," of which non-aligned Tito-era Yugoslavia was itself a part). In addition, by initiating a literary discussion on the post-socialist understanding of race as a cultural construct in the Balkans, they open the space for Serbian literature to be visible in the context of Europe undergoing change under the pressures of migration.

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Narcissus taking a selfie – post-socialist literary representations of "whiteness" in the Balkans

Whiteness. Serbian literature. Post-Yugoslav literature. Travel writing.

The novel *Dangete, duša koja se smeje* (Dangete, the smiling soul, 2011) by Tijana Ašić is partially an autobiographical story presented as an encounter with East-African cultural norm. On the other hand, the novel *Tai* (Thai, 2013) by Goran Gocić is set in Thailand and presented as a story, or rather as a project, "of a self-aware man […] who seeks to protect a woman", but also "as a lesson given to a complacent Westerner, with the intention of curing his haughty ego by succumbing to the East". Both novels correspond to the formal features of travel narratives, and their common point of reference is the paralyzing fixation on the images their protagonists are pressured to negotiate with – those of the South Eastern Europe caught between dichotomy of the Occident and the Orient.

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World literature and the future of comparative literature from the point of view of the XXII Congress of the AILC/ICLA

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When Libuša Vajdová reported to *World Literature Studies* about the preceding comparatist congresses taking place under the aegis of International Comparative Literature Association (AILC/ ICLA), she symptomatically called her article "Is Comparative Literature Dead?" (2013). It was a paraphrase of the sceptical statement of Susan Bassnett from her *Comparative Literature. A Critical Introduction* (1993, 43) in which she formulated natural concerns regarding the permanent deconstruction of the subject and methods of comparative studies, "diffusing" its research core in neighbouring disciplines. If Paris 2013 focused on the study of translation as a relevant source of intercultural comparisons and literary theory itself, Vienna 2016 meant a return of comparative studies to literature and language, to European traditions and the past of this traditional discipline (Vajdová 2016). From this point of view the XXII International Congress AILC/ICLA in Macau under the name *Literature of the World and the Future of Comparative Literature*, which took place on 29 July–2 August 2019, can be marked as a breakthrough, since it confirmed that the search for various models and aspects of world literature has its justification and real research perspective and that in comparative literature there is not only one way and type of research. At the same time, the congress emphasized the well-known fact that theoretical and methodological discourse goes on in various languages and various power relations. As if this optimistic vision of a comparative future, preferring a field of value reflections linked with the aspect of "comparing" to strictly regulative ideas, were a continuation of the final, summarizing panel of the Vienna congress called "Theory of World Literature and the Politic of Translation," where the main speakers were the recognized American comparatists David Damrosch and Emily Apter from New York and Harvard. Emily Apter in her introduction referred to her publication *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013) in which she considered the study of world literature, like the Italian comparatist Franco Moretti (2000), to be problematic and non-solvable in the context of literary scholarship itself, due to the plurality and vagueness of its research object and linguistic disintegration. Although subscribing to the idea of the "world republic of letters" as a virtual "interliterary network" without borders and barriers, as claimed by the French scholar Pascale Casanova in her famous work *La République mondiale des Lettres* (1999; *The World Republic of Letters*, 2004), Apter criticized the concept

of universal literature as a set corpus of texts transcending the national, political and linguistic horizons. Similarly, David Damrosch, famous in the Anglo-Saxon context for his work *What is World Literature?* (2003), began his speech in Vienna by a probe into the history of theoretical thinking and world literature where he included, alongside the reduced Euro-American context, also the Orient and Latin America. Quite ununderstandably, he left out the Slavic comparative literature from Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Even though the name of his book directly copies the title of the Slovak scholar Dionýz Ďurišin's monograph *Čo je svetová literatúra?* (What is World Literature?, 1992), one will not find there a single reference to it, which holds true also for the Czech, Russian, Polish, Bulgarian as well as Slovenian comparatists. Nor does he mention the Austrian comparatist of Serbian origin Zoran Konstantinović's *Weltliteratur. Strukturen, Modelle, Systeme* (1979) influential in the German speaking context. Unlike Emily Apter, Damrosch saw world literature as an elliptic refraction of national literatures, as a text that gains in translation, and, at the same time, not as a fixed canon, but as a specific type of reading based on an experience from the world outside our time and space.

If we have pointed out a certain conceptional as well as contextual discontinuity of the discussion in Macau with previous congresses, then this statement is true especially for the reflections about world literature which made up the central thematic axis of most of the relevant papers. The title itself implied the fact that world literature need not be a priori rejected or negated, if its status and the consequent interpretation does not correlate with a concrete discourse. The same is true for the future of comparative literature, since its impact and methods are differently practiced in different countries. What is typical then, alongside the calls for new theories, is also the prefiguration and circulation of comparatist conceptions in time and space, when, for example, traditional terms appear in a new environment determined by the specificity of local or regional borders. If we were to provide a list of some essential moments at the Macau congress, it would include, first of all, a departure from the American concept of world literature perceived as a specific experiential way of reading created in our mind by the circulation and reception of literary texts resulted from translation. After all, the presence of translation (i. e. traductology, as it was labelled at the congress in Paris by French comparatists) was not so intensive, compared with Vienna in 2016. Translation remains the universal instrument of research into culture, however not basic and the only one: it is rather a mediating, "denoting" form, not the essence of world literature understood as a methodologically definable category. On the other hand, it is not possible to substitute the classical comparative literature with the study of world literature, as it commonly happens at many American universities. Dorothy M. Figueira in this relation ironically speaks about a new incarnation of the Pentagon construction of area studies, when "[u]nder the guise of democratizing and moving away from Comparative Literature's supposed 'elitism', World Literature theorists claim to engage the world in a serious fashion, but only if that world speaks English or is translated into this idiom" (2019, 71).[1] Despite this limit, the Congress confirmed the fact that world literature could be theorized through concepts and terms which

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may be semantically ambiguous, but still are situated with local connotations in a concrete epistemological framework.

One of the questions that emerged at the Congress was the definition of the function and future of comparative literature, which should preserve its autochthonous essence, but also overlap to other, maybe even exact sciences. The second aspect of the future of comparative literature may be seen in a more radical deconstructing of the Euro-American view of the texts aspiring to be "world texts", i. e. in the territorial, geopolitical or linguistic-ethnic transfer from traditional continents (Europe and America) to other continents. There are differences in theoretical thinking about comparative literature not only between Europe and America, but other parts of the world, such as South America, Pakistan, India, Japan, and especially, China, logically enforce different concepts of world literature for which it is evident that terminological equivalents with a changeable semantic content need not be value synonyms. At the same time, it seems that one cannot apply here either Tieghem's traditional French understanding of literature, the compared and comparative one, or the newest American idea of "world literature" as a virtual network of texts translated into English, with every new reading, according to H. Saussy, being in essence already a new translation (2004). Therefore, we are left with a question of whether world literature is realized as universal or global, planetary, transnational, without knowing in advance what these concepts exactly mean. Such basic concepts as world, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, postcolonialism, national literature, migration, interliterariness, exoticization, domestication, and so on, age differently or are innovated in different ways in different parts of the world. Another problem associated with this is the fact that there is no binding type of comparative research with a canonized method and subject and that comparative literature, like all literary studies, are of a narrative nature. The question then is this: Is it necessary to keep returning to the redefinitions of the essence of world literature and ask permanently about its definition, function or moving borders? Is it not that comparative literature creates its fictional worlds, moving in a speculative space of metalanguage and metatext? Is there a sense, in this "multivocality", in a space in which "incomparable" confronts us, for example, to write a history of world literature, which would in fact be a discipline drawing only on the available translations of various texts into English? The individual congress discussions also showed, with reference to the official ICLA/AILC project of the editors J. Neubauer and M. Cornis-Pope entitled *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 18th and 20th Centuries I–IV* (2004–2010), that although the traditional history of world literature is written "internationally", it is essentially in a form of national history related to other territories and analyzing the interactions among individual literatures through a principle of rational binarism. The calling for some "relational" or "transnational" character of world history should overcome the traditional opposition between "the domestic" and "the foreign" and concentrate, in addition to the search for general models and laws of development, also on the uniqueness of the theme or problem seen from a "non-national" perspective. The essence of the history of world literature thus can be derived from the study of interliterary and intercultural process in its spatial and

relational frameworks, not in pre-defined national categories and units. The concentration on relations and processes in the form of "networks" and "maps" must relativize the existing models of world literature and create conditions for its study in its semantic multivalence and syntactic variability.

The venue of the Congress, Macau – the former Portuguese colony and now Special Administrative Region of China – was not selected accidentally, since it had already been organized in the neighbouring Hong Kong in 2004, just seven years after its transfer from the United Kingdom to China. In both cases, the place expressed the powerful dominance of unified China in politics and economy as well as in science, essentially evoking an impression of a "congress within a congress". During the last two decades, Chinese comparative literature dominated at the AILC/ICLA congresses with the number of participants, themes, panels and the cleverness of its back-room politics which brought successful nominations to executive organs for several Chinese scholars. One of them, Longxi Zhang from Hongkong, who had also taught at Harvard, was in 2016–2019 President of the ICLA (Longxi 2015). The Chinese Comparative Literature Association, founded in 1985 with its seat at the Institute for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies of Beijing Language and Culture University, headed by Wang Ning from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, sponsors several specialized prestigious journals, including Comparative Literature in China (Shanghai International Studies University), International Comparative Literature (Shanghai Normal University) and Comparative Literature and World Literature (Peking University Press). The Congress discussions were held in English as well as in Chinese, though quite often one could hear also Portuguese, one of Macau's official languages, and French as the traditional language of comparatists. It was quite common, however, that individual panels were held in Chinese language only, dealing with purely "national" or regional topics. The "Chinese" character of the XXII Congress was also highlighted by the fact that the ICLA's meeting of the executive committee took place on 25–27 July 2019 in the neighbouring Shenzhen, which, however, is situated in mainland China.

The central idea of the Congress *Literature of the World and the Future of Comparative Literature* was divided into 15 thematic areas: 1. Conversations across Differences, 2. Diverse Languages of Comparison, 3. Literary, Cultural, and Temporal (Un)Translatability, 4. The Multiple Histories of Comparative Literature, 5. Canons, Genres, and Media, 6. Interdisciplinarity in Comparative Literature, 7. Theorizing the Literary across Cultures, 8. World Literature and China, 9. Global Humanities from an Eastern Perspective, 10. Internationalization of Chinese Literary Studies, 11. Immigrant Literature, 12. Circulation of Information in East Asia: Journalism, Fiction, and Electronic Textuality, 13. The "Sinophone" as a Counterdiscourse, 14. Memoir Literature in East Asia in the Modern Period, and 15. The Obsession With International Literary Prizes: For Whom Is the Reward Important? Of them, more than one third, as the list demonstrates, was affected by Chinese "influence". Even greater dominance of Chinese comparative literature could be seen in the 34 workshops and round tables where more than half of the themes had in their names either the word "Chinese" or "East Asian".

The beginnings of comparative literature congresses go back to the mid-twentieth century when a significant role in their origins was played by the American scholar of Czech origin and member of the Prague Linguistic Circle, René Wellek (the 1st congress took place in 1955 in Venice). The congresses, organised in regular three-year intervals, unquestionably belong to the most representative manifestations of the state and methods of literary-theoretical thinking and participation in them is considered highly prestigious (Zelenka 2013, 241). All the more positive then was the election of some Central European comparatists, chairpersons of national associations, creating a symbolic Slavic "mini-bloc", for the members of the Association's executive committee (R. Gáfrik – Czech Republic and Slovakia, A. F. Kola – Poland, and M. Juvan – Slovenia). The Czech Republic and Slovakia were represented by the joint paper of Anna Zelenková and Silvia Pokrivčáková (presented by Anna Zelenková) entitled "Some Comparatist Notes on the Categories of 'the national' vs. 'the world', 'the historical' vs. 'the present', 'one's own' vs. 'foreign'", in which the authors used two Slovak prose works, J. Záborský's *Faustiáda* (Faustiad, 1864) and P. Vilikovský's *Večně je zelený…* (1989; *Ever Green is…*, 2001) to reinterpret the sometimes challenged category of "national literature" in the background of the Central European context, which can be understood in the form of an "interliterary network" as a problematic "story" of modern, ethnically complicated (Slavic – non-Slavic) societies with numerous parallels, turning points and "blank spots".

In addition to the presentation of the joint paper "Image of Remote Countries in the Literatures of Central and Eastern Europe: On the Theoretical Starting Points of Intercultural Comparative Studies" (Pokrivčák and Zelenka 2019, 3–15) as well as participation in several congress discussions, Anton Pokrivčák (Slovakia) and Miloš Zelenka (Czech Republic) had also prepared, as editors, a monographic issue of the journal *World Literature Studies* entitled "Images of Remote Countries in the Literatures of Central and Eastern Europe", as a joint contribution of the Czech and Slovak Comparative Literature Association to the Macau Congress. The journal's objective was to attempt to define methodological approaches to intercultural problematic from intercontinental perspective. In its preparation, the editors methodologically drew on the theory of interculturality and comparative imagology, which nowadays modify traditional exploration within East-West Studies towards comparative intercontinental literary studies as a certain value norm in the reflections on multinational literature as such. This epistemological framework can contribute to a de-ideologized understanding of cultural "otherness" treated in wide universal circumstances. It is not only about the knowing of exotic topoi of remote and "non-similar" texts, but, above all, about a deeper understanding of Central and Eastern Europe, since it represents, with its geographical-cultural areas, sociocultural systems with a great measure of exogenous processes where specific cultural constructions, images of identity and otherness, are formed. The impulses of the West and, especially, the East here always worked in a modified form, since the mediating function of cultural value had a "self-referential" nature and therefore was an instrument of national identity, an instrument of the way to state and national sovereignty. The editors who in the selection process gave preference to the texts of analytical, problematic and theoreti-

cally inventive nature based on basic research, aimed at finding out how the image of remote countries and cultures is reflected in Central European and Easter European literary-critical discourse as well as to what extent the image of the radically "other" is able to change this discourse, for example, its semantics and terminology. In other words, whether it is possible to transfer, for example, imagological conceptions historically created in a certain context to a typologically and structurally different cultural area. With the capturing of ethnic, biological or material difference – especially in the binary opposition "metropolis" x "colony", either in the past centuries or under the postmodern conditions of globalized provincialism – is also related the revision of critical procedures dominating in the so-called Western literary studies, that is, to permanently ask the question of the sense of defending or refusing the ideological principles of Orientalism, post(de)colonial studies, cultural and social studies, deconstruction, comparative imagology, theory of interculturality as certain selective forms of research into a complicated and multi-layered phenomenon of world literature. The Czecho-Slovak monographic issue of *World Literature Studies*, appreciated by such comparatists as Peter Hajdu, Haun Saussy, and Theo D'haen, was distributed among the individual participants of the Congress.

As far as other papers are concerned, we will restrict ourselves just to the ones on the basis of which one could draw certain more general conclusions about the spirit of the Congress, since due to a great number of participants (approx. 2000) and variability of thematic scope, it would not be possible to analyze all interesting details. As has already been mentioned, perhaps the most persuasive impression, identifiable in most papers, was an effort of individual literatures and cultures, differentiated according to national, ethnic or gender principles, to situate themselves into a particular space of the literature of the world. It is interesting that the concept "literature of the world" was much more frequent (appearing also in the name of the Congress) than the traditional concept of world literature. It is probably associated with the fact that "world literature" implies a more intensive homogeneity, an idea of a certain standardized canon of great works which in contemporary thought on comparative literature "draws on fashion", while the concept of the literature of the world is less elitist. This could be seen in Haun Saussy's plenary lecture on the first day of the Congress ("Literature With and Without Borders") which pointed out that if we look at literature just from one cultural and theoretical aspect, it is a limitation. In his opinion, literary scholars are used to discuss just one group of theorists or particular genres or concepts and forget that under other cultural conditions there exist other theorists, concepts and genres with other content. So, if in biology scholars work with the so-called "model" organisms, in literary studies there are, according to Saussy, also such "model organisms". However, in biology a model does not mean universality, but rather an expectation of heterogeneity. It should mean the same, then, in literary studies. Therefore, if we speak about the epic or tragedy, we should not assume that their model elaborated by Aristotle is the only one and universal. The same concepts, he continues, have different content, for example, in Chinese or other literatures. A similar situation occurs when the category of the novel is discussed, since its definition based on European criteria may be challenged by,

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for example, *The Tale of Genji*. What does all this mean for comparative literature regarding its future? Would it bring a readerly or theoretical disintegration? Certainly not – rather a challenge for further research to fuse the particularities into something which would transcend them, into world literature. Here it is necessary to note that without world literature comparative literature would be impoverished, it would lose its natural tendency towards something supranational, supra-ethnic. Naturally, also world literature can be looked at from several points of view. Saussy here contrasts Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*, with European and German culture being in its natural centre, and Meltzl's conception seen as an example of the democratization of world literature.

Re-evaluation of the traditional approach to comparative literature, and, consequently, the essence of what makes world literature a world phenomenon, occurred in several other thematic units and workshops. In the thematic block "Theorizing the Literary across Cultures", Herrad Heselhaus from the University of Tsukuba discussed the so-called "relational studies", that is, a method which emphasises a holistic approach to the experiencing of a literary text at the expense of traditional objectivization of the parts of literary process as well as interpretation of a literary work exclusively from the aspect of the text, context or the reader. The traditional theoretical scope of relational studies was applied by Heselhaus to the teaching of literature across different cultures, i. e. she tried to highlight the heterogeneity of the personal perception of literature determined by different experiential complex of readers. The accent of otherness in relation to the sense of literariness occurred in other papers of this thematic block, including the already mentioned paper. While Anders Pettersson, for example, was speaking at a more general level about the conceptualisation of the difference of literary phenomena, Adia Mendelson Maoz analysed Israeli representations of Palestinian otherness and Jayshree Singh drew attention to the differences in perceiving the concepts of subject and freedom in Western and Eastern poetics.

In the thematic block "The Multiple Histories of Comparative Literature," Chengzhou He from Nanjing University in his paper "How to Do Things with Drama: A Comparative Approach to the History of 20th Century Chinese Drama" (most probably an allusion to the famous work by John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*) highlighted the differences in understanding the symbolism and realism of things between the European and Chinese aesthetics. An innovative approach to something so traditional as literary period characterized the presentation of Svend Erik Larsen from Aarhus University entitled "Landscapes of Realism: Ideas and strategies of a new project on Realism" in which many countries participate. Its aim was to newly read local literatures in a global perspective through the prism of realism as a European phenomenon with global impact, to re-evaluate literatures from a postcolonial perspective, to re-evaluate cultural exchange as a non-hegemonistic process, and, finally, to re-evaluate contextualisation of literatures in a wider mass media space. Larsen noted that realism is not the depiction of reality, but its experimental reconstruction through literary strategies taking into account the impact on readers. What is important for realism is not only something what is behind the text

(reference to be represented), in the text (the representation itself), but also something what is in front of the text (the reader's perspective). All the three aspects are, according to Larsen, important. The conceptions customary in Europe, for example the concepts of literature, world literature, or the traditional understanding of Anglophone literature, was challenged by Stefan Helgesson from Stockholm University in the paper "Note Towards a Decolonial Conceptual History of Literature". As a relevant presentation for this thematic block could be considered the attempt to look at the world history of literature from the aspect of slavery by Karen-Margrethe Simonsen.

Many workshops discussed another significant phenomenon closely associated with comparative and world literature, namely translation. As has already been mentioned, translation is in a certain sense an essential condition for the existence of world literature, since without it we would definitely miss many significant works written in languages we do not understand. Since no one speaks all the languages of the world, some works must be translated. However, translation also creates some essential problems, especially the unbalance with regard to what is global, and thus the importance of some and localness of other languages. Pascale Casanova (1999), for example, claims that what is global and universal in literature was embodied in the French language and in Paris – the literary capital of the world in which many authors lived. Paris, according to Casanova, became a gate to their success at an international scene, which they entered through an important factor – the translation of their works into one of several main "literary" languages. Translated works, however, evoke discussions as to whether the aesthetic qualities of the original were preserved, or whether the target text contains unacceptable semantic shifts, etc. According to Damrosch, however, the shifts in translation cannot be condemned, but accepted as inevitable and enriching for the given cultures and languages, as well as with regard to the possibility of unveiling the depth of meaning of a certain work through its interpretation in national as well as international context. In other words, if something is lost through the depth and quality, it may be substituted by extent and distance (Damrosch 2003). At the Congress, the above-mentioned general problems of translation were confronted especially in the workshops analysing translations between the culturally and ethnically distant languages, with an indication of the relation between the artistic translational methods and cultural identities emerging in the process of transcultural transfer.

To conclude, we may state that despite the fact that from the European perspective the Congress took place almost on the other side of the world, it was close via its inclusiveness, that is, its effort to present individual cultures and literatures as parts of a greater whole. This was symbolically expressed already in the introductory speech by Zhang Longxi, the still acting president of the ICLA, who quoted the Chinese philosopher Confucius: "Isn't it a great pleasure to have friends coming from afar?" One place discussed as the venue for the next congress was the University of Tbilisi, but, paradoxically, Georgian comparatists were not present in Macau, so they could not personally support their proposal. A more promising proposal, however, was the one presented by the American Princeton University whose representative Sandra

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Bermann was not only present, but also unanimously elected as the new president of the International Comparative Literature Association.

NOTES

[1] In English: „What Do We Do When the Other Speaks Her Own Language: Returning to the Ethics of Comparativism" (*Rocznik Komparatystyczny* 6, 2015, 9–23; https://wnus.edu.pl/rk/pl/issue/283/article/3943/).

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World literature and the future of comparative literature from the point of view of the XXII Congress of the AILC/ICLA

XXII Congress of the AILC/ICLA. Comparative literature. World literature. "Literature of the world". Theory of translation. Postcolonialism and intercultural imagology.

The study is an analysis of the XXII Congress of the AILC/ICLA *Literature of the World and the Future of Comparative Literature* which took place between July 29 and August 2, 2019 in Macau. As its name indicates, the lectures and workshops emphasised the concept of "literature of the world", which is considered less elitist than the traditional, and more homogenous, concept of "world literature". The idea that the (world) literature cannot be approached only from one cultural or theoretical point of view also permeated the joint Czecho-Slovak issue of the journal *World Literature Studies* entitled "The Image of Remote Countries in the Literatures of Central and Eastern Europe" published on the occasion of the Congress. Using various literary materials, the issue attempted to discuss modern methodological approaches to intercultural problems from the imagological intercontinental perspective.

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PHILIP LEONARD: Orbital Poetics. Literature, Theory, World
London – New York – Oxford – New Delhi – Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2019. viii + 204 pp.
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Space exploration, driven by the rapid advancement in technology in the past century, is generally regarded as one of the greatest achievements of mankind. Significantly, space technology has also brought the images of the Earth from space and thus strongly changed the way we look at our planet. In his new monograph, Philip Leonard, professor of literature and theory at Nottingham Trent University, explores conceptions of the world from the orbital perspective. He focuses on the relationship between orbit and writing. Literature, both imaginative and philosophical, not only discusses space travel and the circumnavigation of the Earth, but, what is Leonard's primary concern, it also offers a space which makes them possible. It creates the orbital perspective of the world even before the modern technology in the form of satellite images.

As we well know, the human conception of the world has undergone a tremendous change in the course of millennia. Leonard starts his exploration with the speculations of ancient Greek philosophers and claims that satellite photography confirmed their vision of the shape of the Earth. However, more importantly, it is the philosophical significance of these satellite images that concerns him. For Heidegger, he says, they provide "visual evidence of a humanity that is no longer thinking about what it is but is instead captivated by the impression that it has conquered space" (18). He disputes Heidegger's claim that satellites function exclusively as tools of remote tyrannical governance and tries to offer an alternative conceptualization of the world observed from space. He argues that the images from space and related imaginary imply something different, i.e. that "the world cannot

be contained as an entity that occupies in its own space" (24).

Leonard sees a significant moment in the transformation of the conceptualizations of the world in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Echoing Erich Auerbach, he asserts that in this work, "the world comes into view for the first time" (47); as seen from above, as if through God's eyes. Leonard is able to find a link between Dante's narrative poem and Thomas Bergin's poem "For a Space Prober", the first piece of poetry launched into orbit in 1961. In it, Bergin, himself a translator of *The Divine Comedy* into English, reproduces Dante's idea of humanity rising above its earthly home. Poetry launched into orbit represents for Leonard world literature because it literally, i.e. as an artifact, leaves the geographical and cultural space of its origin.

In the seven chapters of the book, Leonard discusses various topics related to the orbital perspective of the world: electronic literature and its association with satellites, calculable order and the current debates on the system of world literature (Moretti), orbit as a place of disaster, etc. It is a challenging reading because he pursues the discussion in dialogue with many important thinkers of the 20th century such as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Sloterdijk, just to mention a few. This is also the reason why it is difficult to adequately summarize and evaluate the rich array of ideas and material he examines.

Leonard refers to Edward Said's questioning the universality of Western European humanism and historicism (43), but he does not subject his own vision of the world to it. His is a world of Western European intellectualism. The way he construes history and humanity is Eurocentric, and non-Eu-

ropean conceptualizations of the world and their contribution to mankind do not figure in it. The stream of knowledge flows from the ancient Greeks to modern Western Europe. This issue is particularly significant because the blurb of the book opens with the following set of questions: "What do we do when we talk of 'world literature'? What does a global, even a planetary view reveal to us about literature, culture and being?" In my opinion, if we do not move intellectually beyond the confines of the perimeter of Western culture, we have still not stood up to the challenge of the orbital perspective of the world. We are just likely to reproduce the vision of our territorial space and our hegemonic ambitions in the orbital gaze. Leonard himself notes that the terrestrial perspective is incomplete and contaminated, and almost apologetically adds that "it must be carried into orbit if the world is to be seen at all" (157). I believe that in the post-Saidian world the impossibility of achieving completeness should not prevent

us from taking up the intellectual responsibility of widening our scope and looking beyond Europe when we talk about the world. As a matter of fact, Leonard does mention some non-Western writers. He discusses the works of Haruki Murakami, who managed to succeed on the global English book market, and Vandana Singh, who writes in English. However, their works are arguably examples of writing which throws the cloak of Western sensibilities over their native cultures.

Despite my above-mentioned reservation, I think that Leonard's *Orbital poetics* is a fascinating book. It definitely does what a good academic book should do: it opens new horizons and provokes thinking. His erudite and philosophical exposition of the interplay between literature and orbit is an ingenious contribution to the debate on literature from the "global" perspective.

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ANDREA RIZZI – BIRGIT LANG – ANTHONY PYM: What is Translation History? A Trust-Based Approach
Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. 140 pp. ISBN 978-3-030-20099-2

The reviewed publication was written in collaboration between a historian of the Italian Renaissance (Andrea Rizzi), a cultural historian specializing in Germany and Austria (Birgit Lang), and a translation scholar/historian (Anthony Pym). Since the authors take pains to communicate their respective disciplinary positionality and consider this factor important in their program for an interdisciplinary translation history, it is of note to mention it. The book was published as the first and programmatic publication of the new Palgrave Macmillan series called Translation History, launched in 2019, whose aims are in line with the approach discussed in the book itself: "This new series is the first to take a global and interdisciplinary view of translation and translators across time, place,

and cultures. […] Translation History aims to become an essential forum for scholars, graduate students, and general readers who are interested in or work on the history and practice of translation and its cultural agents (translators, interpreters, publishers, editors, artists, cultural institutions, governments)." (See more at https://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/15957)

The book synthesizes newer interdisciplinary approaches to translation history research which since the 1990s have displayed a tendency toward using sociological concepts and methodologies (most notably in Pym's 1998 *Method in Translation History*) and since the early 2000s shown ever greater conceptual and methodological affinities to historiography (as seen in the 2006

Charting the Future of Translation History, ed. G. L. Bastin and P. L. Bandia; or the 2010 *Translation Under Fascism*, ed. K. Sturge and Ch. Rundle). The present book, however, is not a mere overview and discussion of past methodologies, but rather an attempt at an informed, discursive, interdisciplinary, and synthetic approach to charting out the methodology of translation history research. The methodology outlined in the book could lead the (sub)discipline to a greater (methodological) autonomy, create a new interdisciplinary language (one that the authors would perhaps call a "pidgin", with translation and interpreting studies terms and concepts combined with terms and concepts from sociology, cultural and art history as well as print and book history), provide an informed analysis of the translation historian's epistemological and disciplinary positioning, and present sets of guidelines and/or benchmarks for further interdisciplinary historical research. These complex points and aims make for an important, albeit at times very challenging book.

The authors answer the question from the title in a very well thought-out and systematic manner, following a unified approach. I find it important to comment on their definition of translation and trust, two key topics discussed in the first, introductory, chapter. They consider translations in both the oral and written form and define them in historical terms as products of material culture, cultural and economic capital, patronage, and social networking (17). The authors are convinced that such a sociological view of translation can best "address issues of complex social causation that enable or hinder intercultural communication" (1). The latter major concept used in the book is trust which they explore in a non-essentialist manner as a phenomenon that can not only help describe and evaluate social encounters in mediated communication but also construct them. Thus, trust is viewed as a historical, changing category which materializes in three interconnected types: interpersonal, based on personal bonds of accountability;

institutional, carried by beliefs in the trustworthiness of social institutions; and enacted by regime, which the authors view as systems of conventions or practices adopted by translators and expected from them by their readers or patrons (14). This nuanced view of trust enables the authors to interpret various and diverse cases of historical translation products and processes (mainly from western pre-modern but selectively also Chinese and Japanese translation history) as matters of trust and context-dependent mediatory agency.

Apart from the comprehensive first chapter which outlines the main concepts and methodology, the book contains three other chapters. In chapter 2, titled "On Relationality: Trusting Translators", the authors aim to explain and interpret the three types of trust as viable research options for looking at real historical cases of translations and translation practices. Additionally, they also attempt to interpret the translator's signaling of trustworthiness (rather surprisingly and, for me at least, anachronistically) as cases of Aristotelian ethos. They also outline two methodical ways how scholars can engage with historical material. The authors also discuss the possible material for the historical research of trust in translation. What is most positive about this chapter, though, is that authors do not only show how the methodology they have developed can be used in real research instances, but, doing so, they also point out and discuss the deficiencies of older, more traditional approaches to translation history. Such a take on research methodology is immensely useful.

The third chapter, named "On Relativity: Trusting Historians", focuses on the possibilities and epistemological burdens the translation historian is faced with. The authors advocate a more provenance- and position-dependent approach to translation history by claiming outright, "What we say as historians depends in the first place on where and why we are doing history" (62). By highlighting the trust element behind social relations which produce translation, the authors

uncover surprising complexity between the intercultural and spatial-temporal concepts pertaining to translation which we translation scholars thought we understand so readily. For instance, when viewed as a historical case of trust, the relation between "self" and "other" in intercultural communication can no longer be described as a mechanistic dialectics of getting to know the other and ourselves, but rather as a relative, historically bound case of network resonance and finding interpretative certainty. This trust-based relationality enables the authors to view translation as one of the many social institutions that have developed throughout history. Interestingly enough, though, they argue against the feasibility of microhistories of translation by claiming that "[t]here is no actual dialogue with the past, since the past is only a construct based on things in the present" (66).

The title of chapter 4 is self-explanatory: "On Interdisciplinarity: Trusting Translation History". The chapter, based on examples of interdisciplinary research on the roles of translation in science history, is the most reflective one. Quite tellingly, the authors see interdisciplinary research of translation history as yet another venue for trust and seek to outline its possibilities. Using physicist Peter Galison's metaphor of "trading zone", they come up with an interesting interpretation framework for the analysis of interdisciplinary discourse based on mixing of disciplinary "languages". The conclusion the authors draw is very telling: in every interdisciplinary research of translation history, all people involved need no only to trust each other but also be aware of what *kind* of interdisciplinarity they aim to do.

This argumentative book is well written and systematic, and I would argue that the authors in fact managed to show the possibilities for further expansion of translation history into history proper. Their final thoughts on the name of the subdiscipline are quite indicative of this: "Yet the collocation 'translation history' takes us even further, suggesting a particular way of doing history *or*

a historical perspective *or* a project in which translators, interpreters, diplomats, traders, and other intermediaries or go-betweens are foregrounded and studied" (110). The only major challenge (I am unsure whether to even call it a problem) of the book is what I would call its interdisciplinary thoroughness. The authors demonstrate that they are well-versed in their research fields and their disciplinary traditions, and, by collaboration, they present us with a complex book which is a cross-pollination of many concepts and traditions. I would not say that most of their concepts and the methodological issues they bring up are new – rather, they are reworkings and syntheses of ideas and problems more or less known to experts in the field of translation history – but the depth in which they discuss and contextualize them in cooperation with other disciplines might perhaps seem rather daunting to a not-so-well-versed reader. To sum up, I would say that this book is one of the most important contributions to translation history in 2019.

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MAGDOLNA BALOGH (ed.): Szomszédok a kirakatban: A szlovák irodalom recepciója Magyarországon 1990 után [Neighbors on Display: The Reception of Slovak Literature in Hungary after 1990]
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*A*lthough Hungary and Slovakia share a nearly thousand-year-long common history, for a long time their mutual past figured as an obstacle further separating the two nations rather than bringing them together. It is no wonder, then, that despite their geographic proximity, Slovaks and Hungarians know very little about each other even today. Whilst prior to the fall of Communism, Czechoslovakia and Hungary as friendly nations tried to incentivize cultural mediation between the two countries, Slovak artists were not only eclipsed by their Czech counterparts, but also the dominant ideology of the era largely supported the mediation of art that had no real significance outside the conceptual matrices of Marxism. After the end of an epoch that opposed any constructive engagement with national history and as the two nations sought to come to terms with their past, historical traumas were revived, often with the support of the newly-elected political elites, thus impeding any constructive intercultural dialogue. Hence, in the 1990s, the reception of Slovak literature in Hungary was nearly non-existent. It was only around 2005 that Slovak authors became regularly translated into Hungarian and readers gained some familiarity with Slovak literature. The next stepping stone was the 23rd Budapest International Book Festival in 2016, at which Slovak literature was the guest of honor. The publication under review grows out from the success of the book festival and is the product of the mutual effort between the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of World Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

Szomszédok a kirakatban (Neighbors on Showcase) is a pioneering undertaking – for there has not been any previous publication on the reception of Slovak literature in Hungary after 1990. In this sense, the book puts forward a number of texts that open up and maintain a dialogue about the reception of Slovak literature in Hungary, and thus *Neighbors on Showcase* becomes the agent of intercultural mediation.

The collection is divided into two parts. The first section takes a holistic approach and engages with the institutional and cultural background of the reception of contemporary Slovak literature in Hungary. Taking a more particularistic approach, the second part of the book examines the dilemmas of the previous section through the lens of particular authors and works of art.

The first section entitled "The cultural and institutional background of reception" begins with Renata Deák's text "Good book, good neighbourhood". Taking an important role in organizing the 23rd Budapest International Book Festival, Deák not only offers insight behind the façades of the festival but also contextualizes and highlights its cultural significance. Having touched on the possible reasons for the sorry state of Slovak literature's reception in Hungary, Deák insinuates that the book festival had a positive effect on intercultural mediation between the two countries: not only was an unprecedented number of Slovak works translated into Hungarian but also meaningful cultural relationships were established between the two countries. Yet, as Deák correctly observes, whether it will be possible to build on this success remains to be seen.

Gábor Hushegyi's article approaches the 23rd Budapest International Book Festival from the perspective of cultural diplomacy. According to Hushegyi the success of the book festival is an exception rather than the norm. He implies that the systematic deficiencies of Slovak cultural diplomacy are

rooted in the failure of the Slovak political elites to recognize its importance in maintaining diplomatic ties. By sketching out a new model for cultural mediation, Hushegyi invites us to imagine a future where culture plays an organic role in Slovak foreign affairs.

Anikó Dusík's chapter, building on the concepts of Pascale Casanova, George Steiner, and Jan Assmann, sheds light on how the residues of a shared cultural past manifest themselves in the contemporary texts of Slovak writers. Dusík's argument is premised on the assumption that the binary opposition of us and them is not only present in our cultures but also plays an important role in constructing our identities. In this respect, Dusík suggests that the memory of a distant past still shapes contemporary Slovak experience.

Magdolna Balogh focuses on the important role of the Kalligram publishing house in cultural mediation between Hungary and Slovakia. As Balogh writes, the publishing house through the act of cultural mediation seeks to create a regional sense of identity so as to counter nationalist, ethnocentric ideologies. In this sense, Kalligram by seeking to construct a central European identity has created a new mode of cultural mediation in the region.

In "Tranculturalism and contemporary Slovak literature: expat, migrant and dissident", Zoltán Németh suggests that in the East Central European cultural space, cultural, ethnic, and national boundaries are not as clear-cut as many would have us believe. Thanks to globalization, migration, and the advance of informatics every culture has become hybridized. In this respect, the features of transculturality – which Németh locates in the texts of contemporary Hungarian and Slovak authors – suggest that cultures in East Central Europe are not monolithic but heterogeneous and inherently intertwined.

Lívia Paszmár examines the Hungarian translations of Slovak works in the period between 1990 and 2015, focusing on the institutional and social aspects of cultural mediation. Paszmár implies that the 2006 foundation of the Anasoft Litera literary award was a turning point with regards to the reception of Slovak literature in Hungary. That is, according to the author, the literary award acquired a canonizing function as well as functioning as a reference point for Hungarian publishing houses with regards to Slovak literature.

Taking a more particularistic approach, the second part of the book begins with Judit Görözdi's paper that deals with the Hungarian reception of Pavel Vilikovský. In it, the author goes beyond the scopes of the traditional parallel to Péter Esterházy, and she seeks to draw attention to the similarities of Vilikovský's works with those of Péter Nádas and Pál Závada. Nevertheless, Görözdi correctly observes that, as the power of Vilikovský's texts lies in their linguistic ingenuity, recognizing these commonalities as well as the author's reception is premised on the quality of the translation of his works into Hungarian.

In his study, Tibor Gintli seeks to reevaluate Vladimír Balla's dominant perception in Hungary that usually associates his works with those of Franz Kafka. In so doing, Gintli compares the absurdity of the human condition that is so apparent in Balla's writings to the work of Thomas Bernhard. In this connection, for Balla the only authentic response to unstoppable decay (our human condition) is the melancholic acceptance of our inevitable finitude.

Sarolta Deczki's chapter "Accidental traitor" focuses on Daniela Kapitáňová's *Cemetery Book*. The central character of the novel, Samko Tále, a mentally and physically disabled man who cherishes hatred and ill-will towards the community he lives in, becomes an informer for the communist regime thanks to his desire for order. Consequently, he inadvertently engages in the construction of his own demise. Deczki asserts that the novel's positive perception in Hungary has to do with the fact that Kapitáňová's novel taps into the social self-reflection Hungarian society was going through at the time of the novel's publication.

In "Fragmentary worlds", Judit Dobry provides an insight into the difficulties and dilemmas a translator faces when recreating the works of Veronika Šikulová in Hungarian. Dobry asks if a family narrative is conceivable solely from fragments as well as she explores the depths of how such a multifaceted linguistic world can be transferred in its totality into another language.

Tímea Pénzes also focuses on questions of translation and cultural mediation. Looking at Monika Kompaníková's novel *The Fifth Boat*, Pénzes is particularly interested in how the metaphorical microcosm of the twelve-year-old protagonist Jarka is reprodu-

ced in Hungarian, considering the difficulties that stem from the cultural and linguistic differences and suggesting solutions to these issues.

The eleven articles that comprise the publication open up a novel, multidimensional discourse about the reception of Slovak literature in Hungary after 1990. Consequently, *Neighbors on Showcase* may provide the foundation on which a larger intercultural dialogue could be premised, although whether this will be so remains to be seen.

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MARIA SAAS – ŞTEFAN BAGHIU – VLAD POJOGA (eds.): The Culture of Translation in Romania/Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien

In the foreword of the volume with the promising title *The Culture of Translation in Romania/Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien*, its editors emphasize the ambitious main motivation of its creation: "an attempt to signal the need for a shift in Romanian scholarly and public perspectives on translation". The volume represents the results of a collaborative Romanian and German project "Writers and Translators" focusing on Romanian literature, in particular on the Romanian perspective on foreign literature, co-financed by the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu and the Romanian National Cultural Fund Administration. It is divided into three thematic sections according to methodologies and the degree of distance taken in the analysis.

The first section, titled "General Analysis and Quantitative Studies", has a broader, especially historical/chronological focus, and presents contemporary insights into translation. As Andrei Terian argues in his study "Translating the World, Building the Nation: Microtheories of Translation in Romanian

Cultural Criticism (1829–1948)", translation studies as a standalone discipline in Romania are "of a fairly recent date": before 2000, translations often fell into the field of interest of linguistics, comparative literature, and cultural studies. Moreover, the interest in the theoretical aspects of translation has so far focused on two crucial periods (from the 16th to mid-19th century and after World War II), thus leaving out the ideologically and theoretically varied period of the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. Terian therefore tracks the period from the publication of the first Romanian literary periodical (1829) to the establishment of the communist regime (1948), focusing on the critical and ideological views of translation. Unlike other theorists who called this period "proto-" or "pre-translation studies" (G. Lungu Badea), he speaks of microtheories and distinguishes three phases: the phase 1829–1866 focused on translating the classics with the aim to enrich the expressive potential of Romanian literature; the phase 1866–1918 of ample "directional criticism" focused on

translating Romanian literature for a foreign readership and translating the peripheral and world literatures; and the phase 1918–1948 of the increasing need of systematic editorial series (G. Călinescu) and the category of the "Untranslatable" (E. Lovinescu).

Previous analysis is particularly deepened by Cosmin Borza's chapter "Translating Against Colonization. Romanian Populists' Plea for Peripheral Literatures (1890–1916)". Despite the fact that populist, ethnic-nationalist (*semănătorism*) or national-specific (*poporanism*) movements promoted the isolationism or protectionism of autochthonous values, the author shows that both their leaders and sympathizers were among the most active translators and reviewers of foreign literature. In contrast to the prevailing interest in "major" literatures, however, they favoured translations from "minor", peripheral literatures (e. g. Czech, Hungarian, Scandinavian, Polish, Lithuanian, South Slavic). Translations from major literatures focused on social realism (Dickens, Gorky, etc.). Borza pleads for the political interpretation of this shift: not seeking a new model, nor establishing a relationship with "exotic" cultures, but resisting colonization by large cultures was its main reason.

There are three studies based on quantitative research methods. Emanuel Modoc's "Travelling Avant-Gardes. The Case of Futurism in Romania" investigates the reception of Futurism in Romanian cultural space of the first half of the 20th century. The study is based on meticulous analysis of the existing vast bibliographies of relations between Romanian and foreign literatures in periodicals (1859–1944) (Beiu-Paladi, L., Brezuleanu, A.-M., Lupu, I., Ştefănescu, C., Preşu, C. 1980–1985. *Bibliografia relaţiilor literaturii române cu literaturile străine în periodice (1859–1918)*, vol. I–III. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România; Brezuleanu, A.-M., Mihăilă, I., Nişcov, V., Şchiopu, M., Ştefănescu, C. 1997–2009. *Bibliografia relaţiilor literaturii române cu literaturile străine în periodice (1919–1944)*, vol. I.–X. Bucharest: Editura Saeculum I. O.) and

reveals, on the methodological basis of Said's concept of traveling theories and geographic dispersion and later Bal's traveling concepts, the reception of the phenomenon of futurism in Romania. The author concludes that despite its strongest presence among modernist movements in the Romanian interwar press, futurism did not have a direct aesthetic impact on literature, but rather was a fact of intercultural exchange.

In his chapter "Strong Domination and Subtle Dispersion: A Distant Reading of Novel Translation in Communist Romania (1944–1989)", Ştefan Baghiu uses quantitative methods (based on Franco Moretti's concept) to generate three graphs that reflect the variations and dynamics of translation. In the author's opinion, translated literature can serve as a barometer for world-system dynamics, even if the surveyed renditions are produced in and for peripheral cultures. Baghiu designates four main periods of translation dynamic in the communist era: the domination of Soviet literature between 1948–1955; the East-West Equalizer between 1955–1964; the domination of the West between 1964–1975; and the proportionate Equality and Sub-Production between 1975–1989. He notices the interesting fact that although "inconvenient texts" were translated, e.g., translations from Western European literatures, they were mostly accompanied by introductions, so-called interpretative instructions. It should be underlined that such research has been made possible by the existence of the *Chronological Dictionary of the Novels Translated in Romania (Dicţionarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România (1793–1989)*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei române, 2005), that the author does not cite in his bibliography.

In the third study of quantitative analyses and literary geography, "A Survey of Poetry Translations in Romanian Periodicals (1990–2015)", Vlad Pojoga offers thirteen graphs of poetry translations in five chosen Romanian literary magazines. The resulting database contains 1810 entries and is interpreted from the chronological (quantities over time,

poetry translation rates, and gender proportionality) and spatial perspective.

The central concern of Alex Goldiş's analysis "Literary Interferences in Subversive East-European Prose under Communism" is the construction of a pattern of the evolution of subversive narrative strategies, by considering the permanent tension between themes and means of expression. Using Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and his concept of repertoire, Goldiş illustrates the socialist realist literature with highly limited repertoire, and the literature in the Thaw period as one marked by the writers' initiative to expand this repertoire. These system constraints have led to the emergence of subversive literature; and "the notion of subversive prose can only be defined in context, because the limits of permissiveness have permanently changed from 1948 to 1990" (88). The repertoire was enriched with translations and the recovery of the modernist tradition. There were two modalities of realist subversion: the so called "distance effect" – starting in the mid-1960s and ending in the late 1970s – when fiction writers took refuge in remote times or in faraway places, or, after denunciation of Stalinism, when they described the "obsessive decade"; secondly, "the formalist subversion", partially caused by language artificiality, the rejection of reflecting poetics, and deconstruction of the truth-telling function of literature. This interactionist model of literature saw the relation between author–reader as one of coder–decoder, but reading became, in the words of Eugen Negrici, a "paranoid reading". As Goldiş concludes: "The complex of interpretation that included the writer, the censor and the reader created a specific form of literary production that transformed every written word into the object of complex negotiation" (94).

The second section of the book, "Close-ups of Literary Translation", contains more specific studies focusing on one author or genre, such as Stefan Sienerth's chapter (in German) about the German writer and translator from Romania, Wolf von Aichelburg; Maria Sass's contribution (in German) about George Coşbuc, the Romanian writer from the turn of the 19th and 20th century, formed in the Transylvanian German environment, whose translation activities from English, Spanish, Chinese, and Sanskrit literature were based on German renditions; Ioana Constantin's chapter (in German) on Romanian translation of Goethe's *Faust* from the point of view of covert/overt translation theory and the theory of equivalence.

Anca-Maria Simina's chapter "Foreignizing Shakespeare's Bawdy Miltilingual Puns in Communist and Post-Comunist Romania" is a comparative study of Romanian translations of Shakespeare's bawdy wordplay with the aim of pointing out different approaches to the so-called foreignizing concept (L. Venuti). The subject of comparison are two Romanian translations – Mihnea Gheorghiu's editions from the communist era and George Volceanov's present-day editions.

Cătălina Stanislav in her chapter "Sexual Language in Translation. An Analysis Based on Male v. Female Authored Novel" analyses the differences in the portrayal of sexual acts, depending on the gender identity of the author and the translator. Based on Luise von Flotow's *Translation and Gender* there exist "interventionist feminist translations" that adapt texts and strive to separate female and male language. Stanislav shows, with a variety of examples, the ways translators handle sexual and erotic language. She describes the discrepancies in translation language realisations when sex scenes of a novel are translated by a heterogeneous author-translator pair: "more often than not, female translators are more attentive to gendered phrases, insults or appellatives than male translators, because they usually involve their own body parts" (195). Stanislav states that the explicit language of the novel causes offense to women, therefore woman translators often redact it by using euphemisms. And she concludes that "something in the female translator's brain always takes different types of precaution to distance herself when she feels in any kind of discomfort or anxiety" (201).

Andreea Coroian Goldiş builds her article "'Editorial Fiction': Local Issues and Global Relevance in French and Romanian Literature" on the postulate of the post-2000s declared crisis of national (in this case French) literature in the international dynamics of cultures. The solution to this crisis should be a kind of internationalization, universalization of culture and literature in particular, a concept of literature that reflects the global dimension of humanity (see also the French Writers' manifesto "Pour une literature-monde en française"). Coroian Goldiş rejects this postulate as surpassed already at the time as it was declared, proof of what is already known in European literature as "editorial fiction": "Editorial fiction brings together autofiction, a narrative style focused on the construction of intimacy […] and social or journalistic prose style, which draws on the rhetoric of engagé authors" (206). She describes both French (M. Houellebecq, Y. Haenel) and Romanian (D. Lungu, A. Şchiop) authors of editorial fiction or "literature/prose for export" (the Romanian designation and notional bridge between the topic of this study and the topic of the whole book).

Case and material studies on translation are represented by Iulia Elena Gâţă's "Chinese Literature in Romanian Translation: Fidelity v. Artistic Coherence in Yu Hua's Huózhe", Ovio Olaru's quantitative comparison of German and Romanian markets and translations of Nordic noir bestsellers, and Alex Ciorogar's axiological study on the current status of the translator/translatorship "Beyond Print and Invisibility: 'Translatorship' in the Age of Digital Globalization", which I would have preferred to see included in the first section of the volume.

The third section, "A Translator's Perspective: Language, Discourse and Meaning", opens with Georg Aescht's axiological study (in German) on the status of the literary translator in the era of globalization and profit-oriented societies and his/her role in transporting Eastern Europe literature to the West. It continues with case studies:

translations of Paul Celan's poetry (George State), translation concepts of Ezra Pound's texts (Radu Vancu), translating poetry, tales, non-fiction and preservation of the Romany language heritage by the so-called "Roma Princess," Luminiţa Mihai Cioabă (Sunhild Galter; in German), the humor and social criticism in the fiction of Romanian writer Radu Paraschivescu (Nora Căpăţână, in German), and the presentation and German translations of Doina Ioanid's poetry in prose (Doris Sava, in German).

The volume presents the latest Romanian thinking about translation, based on international methodological approaches. It introduces studies by scholars and PhD. students mainly from two university centres – Sibiu and Cluj – so it cannot be considered fully representative of Romanian translation studies. If I began this review by emphasizing the declared pioneering status of this study, I need to conclude with the caveat that Romanian translation studies had existed before (see e. g., the recent studies by Georgiana Lungu-Badea, Magda Jeanrenaud, Mihaela Ursa, but also the older volumes by Gelu Ionescu). However, *The Culture of Translation in Romania* opens Romanian translation studies to international audiences, which is of great benefit and merit.

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