

# The Anonymous Portrait: A Creative and Critical Investigation of Diaspora, Portraiture, Subjectivity

by

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# Abstract

This thesis proposes a viewing of portraiture through the conceptualisation and consciousness of diaspora. The thesis is divided into two sections: a creative body of original artwork and a supporting exegesis.

The practice-based part of the thesis presents collective, non-essentialised portraits in the form of installations comprising works-on-paper and artist's books, while the exegesis investigates artistic and intellectual perspectives on portraiture in light of some contemporary thinking on diaspora theory and experience.

Together, the two parts of the thesis propose a re-visioning and “rethinking” of the relationship between portraiture, diaspora and subjectivity that shifts the function of the portrait from a referential to a performative role, finding significance not in the fixed identity of a sitter/subject, but in the relational and collective subjectivities forged between artist, subject and viewer.

By positioning portraiture alongside diaspora, I have explored notions that arise from shared experiences of diaspora, drawing on the critical vocabulary of postmodernist cultural discourses of globalisation and dispersion while examining how contemporary portraiture can reflect such an understanding of the world, and in particular how it interacts with and “thinks through” notions of identity, subjectivity and representation.

# Doctor of Philosophy (Creative Arts)

## Declaration

I, Gali Weiss, declare that the PhD (Creative Arts) exegesis entitled *The Anonymous Portrait: A Creative and Critical Investigation of Diaspora, Portraiture, Subjectivity* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work.

Signature: Gali Weiss

Date: 8th August, 2009

# Acknowledgements

Many people participated in this thesis. As a creative thesis that relied in particular on sitter/subjects, it involved the collaboration of a large number of people, thirty in all, whose images were used in the portraits. I thank each and every one – family members and friends – who gave of their time with generosity and interest to take part in this process.

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# Introduction

The research I have undertaken proposes a viewing of portraiture through the conceptualisation and consciousness of diaspora. Such a viewing moves the purpose of a portrait from a referential role to a performative one, so that its significance lies not in the fixed presence of a sitter/subject, but in the relational and collective subjectivity forged between artist, subject and viewer. In positioning portraiture alongside diaspora, I have explored notions that arise from common experiences of diaspora, drawing on a vocabulary used in postmodernist cultural discourse on globalisation and dispersion, while examining how contemporary portraiture reflects such an understanding of the world, and in particular how it interacts with – that is, how it both “thinks through” and experiences – identity and subjectivity.

I had been questioning the function of the portrait in my own art practice well before my current project, though it is hard to pinpoint the precise time in which the problematics of portraiture first arose for me. Did they arise with the depictions of my father in the series *Aaron*, 1999–2000 (Figs I1, I2)?<sup>2</sup> One of my main concerns then was how to depict the expanse of my father’s lifetime in a singular image. The more I drew his face and the more details I placed on the paper, the more insignificant the details became. My layered charcoal applications were in effect erasing underlying details, yet I could not stop revisiting those details, for they seemed to me in constant change. I decided to “ground” the image by using the photograph to convey his image stilled, in play with the action of the drawings. When I reviewed these images, it made sense that the viewer’s first impression of *Aaron* was not to be a clear one; though the “presence” of the man remained the same,



**Figure I1**

Gali Weiss

*Aaron #1*, 2000

56.5 x 76 cm

Photocopy transfer, charcoal, graphite.



**Figure I2**

Gali Weiss

*Aaron #5*, 2000

56.5 x 76 cm

Ink wash, photocopy transfer, charcoal, graphite.

his details presented ambiguously. The portrait series of Aaron became one of multiple and fluid images, for there was no one total reality that satisfied me – each drawing of Aaron reflected a different subjectivity, whether due to my differing interpretations or my perception of his different moods.

Alternatively, perhaps my questioning began with the works of *Claire As Naomi*, 2003, in which I positioned the sitter/subject with the biblical character of *Naomi*. I did not “dress my sitter up” as the biblical character. My interest was in approaching her as if she were someone else’s story, though at the same time it was inescapable that I was working with the image of Claire; there was nothing to indicate in the image that this subject was *as Naomi*. The only indication was in the title of the work. Theorising this work retrospectively, it seems that I was experimenting with notions of identity in the representation, questioning what actually constitutes identity in the image.

This exegesis has shaped itself as a theorisation of my practice but, like my practice, it contains threads of the personal. Many of the artists whose work I have chosen to inform my practice – my material and theoretical thinking – have featured in different times and places in my life. For example, Orlan features in my writing for her relevance to my central argument, but she also has a place in my history. On one of my visits to Israel, a colleague of mine had organised Orlan’s visit and lecture at his art school, and had invited me to participate in the audience. That experience is indelible in my mind; I could not take my eyes off the horns on her head, and I can still hear her French accent in turn with the translator’s struggle to translate succinctly. The room was packed with people, desire and revulsion dominated the ambience. Similarly, the memory I have of a particular corner in a room in my past contains colour and melancholia, due, I am sure, to the strikingly blue reproduction of Warhol’s *Kafka* that I had framed and hung there. Apart from explaining the personal context of my choices, these examples demonstrate how works of art can take

on meaning in relation to a social context or a period of time, and as their afterlife, as much as producing meaning themselves as objects of contemplation. Likewise, the imprints of the twenty-six people whose faces I imprinted in my artist's books comprise for me, for them, and by implication for the viewer, not only the marks on paper working together to form a particular narrative, but also the experience of their making in place and time. As Paul Carter (2004) writes, "Making art is an act of self-realisation (individually and collectively) at that place and time".<sup>1</sup> Here, perhaps, the artist differs from other researchers in that an artist's research necessitates a language of personal exposure together with academic analysis and critique.

I began this project with what seemed to me a simple proposition: to experiment with notions of identity in flux by the play of the image of one person over the image of another. What evolved from this initial supposition was a conceptual and material agency within my studio practice and exegesis, one that exposed me to the complexities inherent in contemporary notions of subjectivity, identity and representation when framed within a genre whose traditional *raison d'être* is challenged by these very notions. The research has reflected back to me the enormous implications of diaspora subjectivity and representation not only for my own sense of self and approach to art and life, but also its relevance to our times as a mode of thinking about, and experiencing, ourselves and others.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Carter, *Material Thinking*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 2004, p. xiii.

# 1 MOVING

## On diaspora

The field of diaspora research and theorisations of diaspora is vast. My intention here is to enter into the realm of diaspora discourse through notions that are relevant to a stream of contemporary portraiture within which I position my own work.

### *Diaspora* the word

As a descriptive term, *diaspora* is one of those words used in contemporary settings that is both anchored in very specific usages in the past but has also taken on new related and expanded meanings through its ability to evoke past narratives in new contexts. It is both iconic and deconstructive. Until only a few decades ago, *diaspora* was likely to refer to either the dispersion of Jews from their original homeland over 2000 years ago, or (less commonly) perhaps to the centuries-old dispersion of Armenians from their original and then fragmented homeland. The Jewish Diaspora, in particular, was considered the primary paradigm of diaspora experience.<sup>1</sup> While, as Braziel and Mannur (2003) point out and as I will demonstrate in this chapter, the idea of diaspora has grown and changed considerably

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<sup>1</sup> *The Australian Macquarie Dictionary* (revised third edition) lists *diaspora* and *Diaspora*, the first defined in general terms of dispersion of a people, the latter specifically referring to the dispersion of Jews. Rogers Brubaker notes that George Shepperson, who introduced the notion of the African diaspora in 1966, did so through engaging with the Jewish experience: “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, January 2005, pp. 1-19. Khachig Tölölyan writes that until the late 1960s Western scholars related to the Jewish diaspora as the paradigm example of a dispersed people: “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment”, *Diaspora* 5:1, 1996, p. 9. Robin Cohen notes that the diasporic experience of the Jews “provides a source for most characterisations of the diasporic condition”: *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, UCL Press, London, 1997, p. xi. William Safran details why the Jewish Diaspora can still be considered the archetype of the concept in many ways: “Deconstructing and Comparing Diaspora” in Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tölölyan and Carolin Alfonso (eds), *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004, p. 10.

since the last half of the twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> one of the things that continues to define all diasporic communities in common despite other kinds of differences is an emotional allegiance to the “old country” (Cohen 1997).

The word *diaspora* originates from ancient Greek, (*speiro* – to sow, *dia* – over) meaning a scattering or sowing of seeds over a wide area. For the ancient Greeks, the term was used to describe the colonization of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean in the Archaic period 800–600 BCE,<sup>3</sup> referring not to those dispersed by colonisation and imperial conquest but to the vanguards of empire who migrated in order to assimilate the conquered territory to the culture and practice of the conquering power. In Western culture, however, the notion of diaspora has its earliest origins in religious discourse, with the evocation of catastrophic exile in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 28: 58-68): “If you do not observe and fulfil all the law ... the Lord will scatter you among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other ... Among these nations you will find no peace ...”<sup>4</sup>

The narrative and cultural history of the Jewish diaspora possibly begins with what Robin Cohen calls the “central folk memory” of the tradition of enslavement, exile and displacement that was a consequence of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE, when the majority of Jews living in Jerusalem were forced to abandon their “God-promised” land and enter Babylonian captivity. Babylon would become emblematic for Jews, and later for Africans, as a symbol of captivity, exile, alienation, and isolation. However, Cohen suggests that a rereading of the Babylonian exile beyond this experience of collective trauma reveals a period of great cultural wealth and development for these

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<sup>2</sup> As Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur note in the introduction to their (ed) *Theorizing Diaspora* (Blackwell Publishing, UK, 2003), “In the last decade, theorizations of diaspora have emerged in area studies, ethnic studies, and cultural studies as a major site of contestation. Since the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* was inaugurated in 1991, debates over the theoretical, cultural, and historical resonances of the term have proliferated in academic journals devoted to ethnic, national, and (trans)national concerns”, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, UCL Press, London, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen, p. 1.

Jewish communities – descendants of those first uprooted Judeans – outside their natal homeland, in places such as Alexandria, Antioch, Damascus, Asia Minor and Babylon.<sup>5</sup>

Tracing the genealogy of the term, Stéphane Dufoix (2007) writes that the first appearance of the word “diaspora” occurs in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint.<sup>6</sup> Yet the Greek usage of *diaspora* was not a translation of the Hebrew word *gola* or *galut*, which in modern Hebrew refers to the Jewish Diaspora, or the place of Jews’ existence outside Israel. The Hebrew word for “exile” (*gola*, *galut*) was instead translated as “captivity”, and *diaspora* referred to the divine punishment of dispersal. Dufoix argues that the uses and meaning of *diaspora* in the Septuagint are to be understood not in a historical sense, as in the Babylonian exile of the Jews, but rather as the divine punishment that would be inflicted on those who did not abide by God’s commandments – that is, to be dispersed throughout the world.<sup>7</sup> Dufoix makes the point that in this sense, *diaspora*’s meaning is theological, not historical; “the dispersal, as well as the return of the dispersed, is a matter of divine, and not human will.”<sup>8</sup>

The point at which this changed to become historically rather than theologically significant, according to Dufoix, came after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, when the Jewish priests interpreted their exile from the Holy Land as the fulfilment of the divine punishment mentioned in Deuteronomy. It was at this point that *diaspora* became synonymous with *exile* or *galut*, describing the state and the space of dispersal as well as the population of the dispersed, and it is this latter meaning that came to dominate the usage of the term in the Christian world.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cohen, pp. 3-6.

<sup>6</sup> The Septuagint, begun in the third century BCE, was made for the Hellenising Jewish community in Alexandria, and was the medium through which most early Christians learnt about Jewish law, the prophets and other writings. (John Durham Peters, “Exile, Nomadism and Diaspora”, in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, media, and the politics of place*, Routledge, New York & London, 1999, p. 23.)

<sup>7</sup> Stéphane Dufoix, “Diasporas” in *Encyclopedia of Globalization*, vol. 1, ed. Roland Robertson and Jan Aat Scholte, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Dufoix notes that *diaspora* was not limited to the Jews; it was later used by Christians to describe the Church similarly as at once exiled from the City of God and dispersed over the Earth, and later still even in the context of the Protestant Reformation.

Similarly, in a more contemporary vein, the word *Holocaust* (from the Greek *holo* – *kauston*, meaning a burnt offering),<sup>10</sup> or *Shoah* (literally “catastrophe” in Hebrew) used to describe the extermination of Jews by the Nazis, has been adopted and adapted in the past fifteen years to describe other events, while continuing to evoke the symbolism of its original usage: for example, an economic shoah, an ecological shoah, a moral shoah.<sup>11</sup> The word *apartheid* – literally “apart-hood” in Afrikaans – is yet another example of a word loaded with meaning and symbolism that has now gained new and broader meanings but which nevertheless relies strongly on the highly specific origins of the term. Originally denoting the former South African policy of racial segregation implemented between 1948–1993, one now hears the phrase in examples such as *Muslim apartheid*, *cultural apartheid*, *technological apartheid*, and even *residential apartheid*.<sup>12</sup> The word *ghetto* is a further example of this relationship between the specific origins of a term and the development of new applications/expansions of meaning. Originating in the Venice ghetto of Jews in Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, then applied to the institutionalisation of ghettos in Eastern Europe, it came to be used by African-American and Hispanic groups as a term of empowerment that inverted the disempowering connotations of a ghetto as an impoverished slum on the margins of a city, becoming instead a claim to community and ethnic/racial solidarity based on shared identity, space, culture and political (mis)fortunes. Hence one sees the use of “ghetto culture” vocabulary indicating not only place but a way of being, with “ghetto” as adjective, as in ghetto soul, ghetto blaster, ghetto girls.<sup>13</sup> From

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<sup>10</sup> A Delbridge, J R L Bernard, D Blaire, S Butler, P Peters and C Yallop (eds), *The Australian Macquarie Dictionary*, rev. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Macquarie University, North Ryde, NSW, 1997, p. 907.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman, Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1991, p. 434.

<sup>12</sup> The latter two examples indirectly refer to racial and cultural segregation. Technological apartheid refers to the intentional exclusion of Third World and developing nations from the advancement of Information Technology that generates and accesses wealth, power and knowledge, according to Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium*, Blackwell Publishing, USA, 2000, p. 92.

<sup>13</sup> For a greater depth of analysis, see Cora Daniels, *GhettoNation: A Journey into the Land of Bling and Home of the Shameless*, Doubleday, New York, 2007.

this, the usage broadened even further to denote any kind of contained and marginalised social space: the rural ghetto, the gay ghetto, the student ghetto.

As this brief excursion into semantics has shown, the history of words like *diaspora* supports the way in which a term that originated to describe a highly particularised moment or set of circumstances can become paradoxically distinctive for its multiplicity, fluidity and diversity as its new and accumulated meanings broaden and adapt, influencing the way we view the world but being influenced by that world as well.

Thus it is critically important to take into account the various transformations of *diaspora* from its original meaning. Before the mid-twentieth century, “*diaspora* was originally a common (indefinite) noun that was later singularised as a religious proper noun, de facto limited to Jews, Catholics, and, later, Protestants”.<sup>14</sup> Following World War II, however, another major transformation occurred when the term began to be used in the social sciences, and eventually the vocabulary of politics and media, in a wider, secular way, shifting from “*the diaspora* to *a diaspora*”.<sup>15</sup> Dufoix emphasizes that the various meanings of *diaspora* throughout the history of the word do not replace one another, but rather coexist simultaneously.<sup>16</sup>

Braziel and Mannur (2003) support this notion of the coexistence of meanings when they write that theorizations of diaspora should not be divorced from historical and cultural specificity; contemporary diasporic movement is not so much a “postmodern turn from history” but “a nomadic turn in which the very parameters of specific historical moments are embodied and – as diaspora itself suggests – are scattered and regrouped into new points of becoming.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dufoix, p. 312.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Braziel and Mannur, p. 3.

The increase in the movement of people and populations throughout the world since the mid-twentieth century has seen a corresponding growth in the use of the term *diaspora*. In particular, movements of mass migration due to crises of war and natural disasters, political asylum seekers and the re-configuration of nation-states in the post-Cold War era, together with the revolution in global communications, have contributed to new patterns of migration that include formations of diaspora communities.<sup>18</sup> Edward Said (2000) claims that the state of exile has become a “potent, even enriching motif of modern culture.”<sup>19</sup> It is the scale of this movement that is distinctive to our times, as Said observes: “Our age – with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers – is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration.”<sup>20</sup> Refugees, writes Said, are a political creation of the twentieth century, implying large numbers of people displaced from their homes and needing international attention, while the word “exile” implies the solitary and spiritual state of the outsider. Living as an exile is living with difference. It is not a rejection or loss of the natal “home”, but a depth of connection to it, that justifies the exile’s identity: “What is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both.”<sup>21</sup>

Khachig Tölölyan (1996), editor of the journal *Diaspora*, has written that dispersed communities that were once called exile groups, overseas communities, ethnic and racial minorities, etc., have since the late 1960s been re-named as *diasporas*.<sup>22</sup> Tölölyan argues that various theorisations and discourses around the notion of diaspora have contributed to the transformation, or renaming, of communities as diasporas: the growth in diaspora formations is thus not only due to migration or to the re-configuring of ethnicity,

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<sup>18</sup> Van Hear claims this change in migration has gained particular momentum since the late 1980s. Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Edward W Said, *Reflections on Exile*, Granta, London, 2000, p. 173.

<sup>20</sup> Said, p. 174.

<sup>21</sup> Said, p. 185.

<sup>22</sup> Khachig Tölölyan, “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment”, *Diaspora* 5:1, 1996, p. 3.

transnationalism and globalisation, but to “rapid and major changes in discourse that have both responded to and reciprocally shaped the impulse to re-name various forms of dispersion and to attribute new, ‘diasporic’ meanings and values to them.”<sup>23</sup>

Fluid adaptations and expansions of *diaspora* can be found within interdisciplinary and “populist” uses of the word, for example, the gay diaspora, the white diaspora, the liberal diaspora, the terrorist diaspora.<sup>24</sup> This is not limited to descriptions of race or culture or a community group; I have come across terms such as “environmental diaspora” and “moral diaspora”.<sup>25</sup> I myself am entering into what William Safran (2004) calls “an academic growth industry” in my examination of portraiture through notions of diaspora.<sup>26</sup> Rogers Brubaker (2005) refers to the wide and varied, academic and populist, use of the word as a dispersion of the actual meaning of the term, a “diaspora” diaspora; “as the term has proliferated, its meaning has been stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted.”<sup>27</sup> For Brubaker, the term is in danger of becoming ineffective, losing its power of discrimination, when it applies to any population that is described as dispersed: “The universalisation of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora”. Brubaker himself advocates an expansion of the category of diaspora by suggesting it be regarded not as an ethnically bounded entity, “an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact,” but in terms of “diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on”.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, January 2005, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Scott Campbell, “Planning: Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities? Urban Planning and the Contradictions of Sustainable Development”, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, (Summer), 1996, pp. 296-312, viewed 5 August 2008, <<http://utcsd.org/docs/campbell.pdf>>. In the *Washington Post*'s online discussion with author Francis Fukuyama on June 28, 1999, the commentator notes: “These (Asian) countries ... have remained in their own cultural and moral diaspora”, viewed 14 July, 2008, <[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/zforum/99/fukuyama062899.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/zforum/99/fukuyama062899.htm)>.

<sup>26</sup> William Safran, “Deconstructing and comparing diaspora” in Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tölölyan and Carolin Alfonso (eds), *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Brubaker, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Brubaker, p. 13.

## Defining Diaspora

As I have suggested above, the notion of diaspora in terms of collective cultural identity has expanded and evolved as scholars have attempted to explore the contemporary meanings of diaspora as a movement of migration and migratory experience. Its complexity is evident not only in the range of definitions that are currently in circulation, but in the variety of diasporas now identified, and the variables within each of these.

Attempting to limit “diaspora” through defining it remains problematic, however. Though in the past the word was used to describe specific communities and histories, the term today is both widely used and widely contested.<sup>29</sup> It is instructive to note the variations in criteria and characterisations of diaspora communities in the scholarly literature even over a relatively brief span of two decades, illustrating Dufoix’s point above concerning the coexistence of the various meanings of diaspora. Tölölyan seems to equate diaspora with transnationalism,<sup>30</sup> writing of diasporas with the “vocabulary of transnationalism” to include the immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, and ethnic community, although he also recognises the problems in using *diaspora* as synonymous with these states of being.<sup>31</sup> Braziel and Mannur (2003) differentiate diaspora from transnationalism; diaspora is transnationalist, but not synonymous with transnationalism, because it refers specifically to people movement from one or more nation-states to another.<sup>32</sup>

Gérard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau (1995) suggest that what predominantly defines diaspora is forced migration due to catastrophic occurrences: “A diaspora is defined as *the collective forced dispersion of a religious and/or ethnic group*, precipitated by a disaster,

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<sup>29</sup> Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tölölyan, Carolin Alfonso (eds), *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004, p. 2. See also Braziel and Mannur, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> The name of the journal he edits, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. Braziel and Mannur (op. cit.) define *transnationalism* as “the flow of people, ideas, goods, and capital across national territories in a way that undermines nationality and nationalism as discrete categories of identification, economic organization, and political constitution,” p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Khachig Tölölyan, “Rethinking Diaspora(s)”, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Braziel & Mannur, p. 8.

often of a political nature”.<sup>33</sup> Nicholas van Hear (1998) and Robin Cohen (1995) however, remind us that not all diaspora formations are the result of negative crises; populations can disperse and regroup as a result of force or choice, or even a combination of both. The classical Greek diaspora, suggests van Hear, could be said to have been formed cumulatively, even if at times traumatically, through colonisation and conquest, while the Jewish, African and Armenian diasporas could be seen historically as forming out of acute episodic as well as cumulative collective trauma or catastrophe. However, “subsequent movements by choice or force may lead to further dispersal and add to, reinforce or consolidate diaspora communities already existing ... Moreover, forced migrants may opportunistically make the best of a migration crisis; they are not simply victims, but are active within the circumstances in which they find themselves.”<sup>34</sup> For Cohen, communities often developed to a greater extent in exile than those which stayed in the homeland, as the Babylonian period of exile demonstrates; this period was not solely experienced as a collective trauma, but also as a period of cultural wealth for the descendants of those first uprooted Judeans. While the concepts of homeland and return were central beliefs for the exiles, many Jewish communities throughout the Hellenic world flourished as centres of civilisation, culture and learning in pluralistic surroundings.<sup>35</sup>

William Safran argues that using the term *diaspora* to cover any migrant group or individual “has denuded the concept of much of its historical meaning and led to a conflation of the term”, making it indistinguishable from other kinds of minority communities and reducing the concept to a “useless metaphor”.<sup>36</sup> Cohen (1997) in a scholarly engagement with Safran’s 1991 writings on diaspora, defends the use of metaphorical levels of meaning for diaspora, however, as recognition of new approaches in

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<sup>33</sup> Gérard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau, *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas*, Penguin Books, USA, 1995, p. xiv.

<sup>34</sup> Van Hear, p. 47.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Safran, p. 10.

diaspora discourse and the complexities inherent within them. Writing in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* in 1991, Safran wants to restrict the term diaspora to populations dispersed from an original “centre” to two or more peripheral regions who retain a collective memory of the homeland; who are partially alienated from the host society; who aspire to return to an ancestral homeland; who are committed to the maintenance or restoration of that homeland; and who derive a collective consciousness and solidarity from a relationship to the homeland.<sup>37</sup>

Cohen amends these points, noting that a collective memory of a single traumatic event will often accompany dispersal from an original centre, and that memory becomes the folk memory of historic injustice that binds the group together. Secondly, Cohen adds to “maintenance or restoration”, the *creation* of a homeland. Additionally, Cohen emphasises that conceptions of diaspora are not always of the commonly perceived catastrophic tradition, and a more “relaxed” definition may be appropriate to accommodate the diversity of diaspora’s meanings. Diaspora encompasses many kinds of different movements and settlements, with transnational bonds no longer limited to territorial claims or migration; “in the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artefacts and through a shared imagination.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> William Safran, “Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return”, *Diaspora* 1:1, 1991, p. 83.

<sup>38</sup> Cohen, pp. 25-26.

## Diaspora Continuity and Difference

### *Difference between*

Most critical attempts at characterising diaspora refer, whether explicitly or by implication, to a centre or home of origin – historic, current or imaginary. All immigrants come from a “home of origin”.<sup>39</sup> However, not all immigrant groups or individuals create diasporas. Many migrants, while not necessarily wishing to give up their cultural identity, will eventually discontinue or reduce contact with their past and their home of origin.<sup>40</sup> Tölölyan differentiates diasporic self-representation from ethnic collective identity with the example of Italian-Americans; he argues that as an ethnic group with a strong cultural presence in the US, they nevertheless are not understood as diaspora communities because they are not politically or socially committed as an organised whole to the homeland or to kin communities in other countries.<sup>41</sup> In other words, they are not united by a sustained reference to the home of origin. At the same time, it should be noted that Tölölyan recognises that ethnic groups and diasporas are not exclusive of each other; “the lines separating (them) shift in response to a complex dynamic”<sup>42</sup>, as will be discussed further in this chapter.

### *Continuity*

Diasporas are often referred to as minority groups.<sup>43</sup> A number of scholars (Cohen 1997:24, Safran 1991:83, Tölölyan 1996:14, Brubaker 2005:6) attribute the definition of diaspora communities as minority groups to their resistance to assimilate with the host

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<sup>39</sup> “Home of origin” may involve a complex and layered meaning, especially in terms of migrant families, when people’s movement incorporates a number of moves throughout a number of years, involving different generations of the same family.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Marienstras, “On the Notion of Diaspora” in *Minority Peoples in the Age of Nation-States*, ed Gérard Chaliand, Pluto Press, London, 1989, p. 125.

<sup>41</sup> Tölölyan, “Rethinking Diaspora(s)”, pp. 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> Tölölyan, p. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Marienstras, “On the Notion of Diaspora”; Gérard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau, *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas*.

country's majority population. Brubaker adopts the term "boundary-maintenance", that is, self-segregation, whether intentional or not, as characteristic of diasporas.<sup>44</sup> For him, maintaining boundaries from the majority population enables diaspora communities to maintain a specific and distinctive identity and to link with kin communities in other regions as a "single 'transnational community'."<sup>45</sup>

However, other scholars distinguish between a "minority group" and a diaspora, arguing that whereas minority/majority frameworks are governed by the size of such groups, diasporas are alternatively defined by time (duration) and space (territorial relations). For some, a minority group's ability to continue its relationships to homeland and kin communities as a diaspora can only finally be determined through its resilience as such over time. What makes a minority group into a diaspora, then, is the self-awareness of its identity as defined by "a relationship, territorially discontinuous, with a group settled 'elsewhere'."<sup>46</sup> Marienstras (1989) claims it is a community's longevity rather than size that will ultimately prove its existence as a diaspora; the outcome cannot be predicted for it is an "adventure", one that is dependent on "the fortunes of history and fate."<sup>47</sup> Brubaker seems to agree, writing that it is to be expected that migrants maintain boundaries, but what is relevant to the existence of diaspora is how or whether these boundaries are still maintained by second, third, and subsequent generations.<sup>48</sup>

But are we restricted to grouping individuals within the binaries of assimilated immigrants or segregated diasporas? What do we make of differences and fluidity between and within diaspora communities?

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<sup>44</sup> Brubaker, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Marienstras, p. 120.

<sup>47</sup> Marienstras, p. 125.

<sup>48</sup> Brubaker, p. 7.

### *Mobility and change*

Stuart Hall (1990) offers an alternative view. Rather than understanding diasporas through their *cohesion*, as do the previous arguments, Hall suggests experiencing diaspora through notions of *difference*. He argues that diaspora experience can be defined through its heterogeneity, diversity and constant renewal, “by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference: by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformations and difference.”<sup>49</sup> Here we may be reminded of Tölölyan’s assertion that the boundaries between diaspora and ethnic groups need not be clear-cut and fixed; ideally, individuals and communities move in and around ethnic and diasporic identities in different phases of their lives.<sup>50</sup>

Likewise, individuals and communities move in and around their diaspora and the dominant cultural identities that are available to them and in which they intervene. Diasporas and their members, I propose, may be viewed in contexts of responses and relationships, not only as bounded ideologies and adherents. Arjun Appadurai (1990) problematises the transmission of culture by families and small groups as they attempt to “reproduce” themselves and their cultural forms, arguing that the search for steady points of reference can be even more difficult today in a world in which both points of departure and points of arrival are in cultural flux: “It is in this atmosphere that the invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship and other identity-markers) can become slippery.” Over generational time,

as group pasts become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Bourdieu would have called a *habitus* (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena of

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<sup>49</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in Braziel and Mannur, p. 244.

<sup>50</sup> Tölölyan, “Rethinking Diaspora(s)”, p. 18.

conscious choice, justification, and representation, the latter often to multiple and spatially dislocated audiences.<sup>51</sup>

It is this space of conscious choice and representation that comes under examination in Anny Bakalian's study of Armenian-Americans and their negotiated identity. In her study of Armenian identity in the United States, Bakalian (1993) claims that Armenian-Americans, people who live in the US and trace descent from ancient Armenia, are on the one hand significantly assimilated into US society and culture, and on the other continue to maintain high levels of Armenian identity and a sense of unity in their people-hood.<sup>52</sup> These processes of assimilation and ethnic identity are not contradictory, she claims, but in fact go "hand-in-hand" because "Armenianness changes in its form and function"; it becomes "symbolic".<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the traditional Armenianness of the immigrant generation as demonstrated through language and religious and cultural practice, "symbolic Armenians" relate to their ethnic identity more through emotion than through behaviour: "The generational change is from 'being' Armenian to 'feeling' Armenian."<sup>54</sup> Symbolic ethnics identify with their ethnicity by choice; they consciously preserve their culture and interest in homeland and its history, but do so voluntarily and selectively, according to their convenience.<sup>55</sup> Bakalian's study raises the question of whether it is the resilience of an organised, unambiguously self-represented diaspora community over generational time that will secure its identity as a diaspora, or whether its continuity as a diaspora lies in the ability of future generations to find relevance in the relationship between their diaspora identity and their country of residence.

For Stuart Hall that change in "form and function" to which Bakalian refers is more than merely symbolic or to do with "feeling". More than a negotiation between assimilation

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<sup>51</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" in Braziel and Mannur, p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> Anny Bakalian, *Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 1993, pp. 5-6.

<sup>53</sup> Bakalian, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Bakalian, pp. 44-46.

and convenience of ethnicity, the future existence of diaspora identity is in its continual re-creativity, re-being, that is, in its “becoming”:

Cultural identity ... is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past ... Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power ... Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.<sup>56</sup>

By viewing diasporas in terms of responses and relationships, then, we can examine differences between and within diaspora communities as what Hall terms, the continual “production” of identities.<sup>57</sup>

Diasporas are often represented as homogenous groups, both by the dominant culture and from within diasporas themselves. However, when conceptions of identity break away from a unified representation, notions of authenticity and of an identity predicated solely or primarily on origin are challenged. Hall claims that the position of homogeneity looks at cultural identity as a unified people-hood, a collective “true self” based on shared histories and cultural practices that provide stability and meaning through unchanging and continuous frames of reference. Within this position, Hall presents the conception of “Caribbeanness” (in the context of the Caribbean black diaspora) as an essence, a unifying truth of black experience, whose “home of origin” or “centre” is Africa.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, Hall goes on to theorise Caribbean cultural identity as a complexity of multiple presences and absences, and the “doubleness” of sameness and difference. Caribbean identities, he argues, are to be understood as a “dialogic relationship” between two simultaneous axes; one of similarity and continuity with the past, the other of

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<sup>56</sup> Hall, p. 236.

<sup>57</sup> Hall, p. 234.

<sup>58</sup> Hall, pp. 234-236.

difference and rupture caused by slavery, transportation, colonisation and migration, which encompassed different experiences from different countries, languages, beliefs, etc.<sup>59</sup>

Difference in diaspora discourse has often been understood in terms of the racial or cultural difference of the diaspora community from the dominant culture of the “host” country, what Grossman (2007) calls “inter-difference”.<sup>60</sup> The idea of difference that Hall presents is not so much that of “other” to the dominant culture/discourse, but “other” from within a particular construct of cultural identity, or “intra-difference”,<sup>61</sup> as the way we see ourselves, different to our origin because of a break from that origin, a discontinuity from the past. In this way, cultural identity is constructed not in a linear fashion but as a “positioning”, a “politics of identity ... which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’.”<sup>62</sup>

Lisa Lowe expands on Hall’s argument in her viewing of Asian-American representation. Rather than thinking of “culture” through the lens of an anthropological model of “ethnicity” that is passed from generation to generation, Lowe suggests that the construction of culture and cultural identity be thought of as process: formations and productions that are worked out “horizontally” among communities as well as passed on “vertically” through generations in unchanging forms.<sup>63</sup> Asian-American identity is made up of practices that are partly inherited, partly modified, and partly invented. Additionally, it includes practices that are the result of a dominant culture’s “exoticism” of Asian identities, “practices that emerge in relation to the dominant representations that deny or subordinate Asian or Asian-American cultures as ‘other’.”<sup>64</sup> Asian-Americans have been

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<sup>59</sup> Hall, pp. 236-237.

<sup>60</sup> Michele Grossman, “Broken Skies: Australian Stories of Sudanese Diaspora Identity and Belonging”, unpublished paper, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Hall, p. 237.

<sup>63</sup> Lisa Lowe, “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian-American Differences” in Braziel and Mannur, p. 136.

<sup>64</sup> Lowe, pp. 136-137.

constructed by American national culture as a homogenous group that is different, that is “other” than white Americans.

However, from the perspectives of Asian-Americans, their cultural identities are different and diverse in relation to countries of origin, generational cultures, parental heritage, language, fluency of English, immigration status, and class. The way Asian-Americans are viewed and view themselves is in a state of continual change and challenge, “complicated by intergenerationality, by various degrees of identification with and relation to a ‘homeland,’ and by different extents of identification to and distinction from ‘majority culture’ in the United States.”<sup>65</sup> Lowe argues that a viewing through difference, through the concepts of heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity, is a useful way of understanding the conditions of Asians in the US, and of destabilising the dominant racialist construction of homogeneity. On the other hand, Lowe argues for Asian-American self-representation, for the “necessity to organize, resist, and theorise *as* Asian-Americans”, while at the same time warning of relying on the construction of sameness and the exclusion of differences.<sup>66</sup>

## Place

Lowe’s viewing necessitates a negotiated positioning between diversity and particularity: in other words, a positioning that is neither about choosing one or the other, nor about fluidity between the two, but about the simultaneity of sameness and difference. While the act of defining something creates a separatism of sorts, an “inside/outside” distinction, we can at the same time recognise the inconsistencies and differences that take part in that construction.<sup>67</sup> In the words of Homi Fern Haber, “unity (the requirement that a thing be

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<sup>65</sup> Lowe, p. 137.

<sup>66</sup> Lowe, p. 139.

<sup>67</sup> David Morley, “Bounded Realms” in Hamid Naficy (ed), *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place*, Routledge, New York and London, 1999, p. 165.

at least minimally coherent enough to be identified and redescribed) does not necessitate ‘unicity’ (the demand that we speak with one voice)”.<sup>68</sup>

However, although diasporic communities may be viewed as simultaneously the same and different, from within these communities at the level of individuals and sub-groups, between kin diasporas, and even in relation to the dominant culture, the doubling of sameness and difference can also produce the tension of ambiguity.

One of diaspora’s ambiguities is that while it indicates communities of people dislocated from their homeland and is on one level always to do with the movement of people, it is not about non-place, non-specificity. It may be useful at this point to view the movement of people as framed by Van Hear’s schemata of the five essential components of migratory movement:<sup>69</sup>

1. *Outward* movement, common to all migrations, from a place of origin to another place.
2. *Inward* movement, arriving at another place.
3. *Return* to the place of origin or previous residence.
4. *Onward* movement to some other place.
5. *Staying put*, or non-movement – those left behind.

A sixth point may be added, that of *recursive movement* – the continual moving backward and forward between places.

Diaspora is articulated in all the above categories of movement. Avtar Brah (1996) claims it is precisely the paradox “of and between location and dislocation that is a regular feature of diasporic positioning.”<sup>70</sup> Diasporas and their members can be seen as “other” in their host nations, and even in their home of origin, yet they nevertheless belong to both.

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<sup>68</sup> Homi Fern Haber, *Beyond Postmodern Politics*, Routledge, New York and London, 1994, p. 120.

<sup>69</sup> Van Hear, pp. 2-3.

<sup>70</sup> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p. 204.

Brah theorises that notions of *diaspora*, *border*, and the *politics of location* intersect as *diaspora space*, inhabited not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but also those who have remained in the home of origin, who are “constructed and represented as indigenous.”<sup>71</sup> Diaspora space is the conceptual space made up of the relationships between all categories – social, political, economic, gendered, etc. – involved in the construction of diaspora, and all the other categories that are marked by it. In other words, it is the space occupied by those who stay and those who return, as much as by those who leave.

As a diaspora community undergoes its own lived experience within a host country, its particularity evolves as a collective distinct from its kin communities elsewhere, and indeed distinct from the “old country” as well. While all these groups of people – members of the network of diasporas as well as the home of origin – share common parameters, each diasporic community is unique, historically contingent and different.<sup>72</sup>

If, then, the concept of *diaspora space* is constructed by the interaction between multiple positions, including traditional or “purist” ones, how do we understand diasporas in relation to centres and nationhood? Diasporas and their members have often been regarded as reflections or imitations of their homelands and people; as “the bastard child of the nation – disavowed, inauthentic, illegitimate, and impoverished imitation of the originary culture.”<sup>73</sup> However, recent theories of diaspora have offered different ways of understanding hierarchies of nation and diaspora. Pnina Werbner (2002) conceives of the “place” of diasporas as a location of time – simultaneously of the past and of the future – rather than of territory. New diasporas, she claims, are deterritorialised imagined communities that recreate ties to a place of origin and a shared history, and thereby also to

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<sup>71</sup> Brah, p. 209.

<sup>72</sup> Pnina Werbner, “The Place Which is Diaspora: Citizenship, Religion and Gender in the Making of Chaordic Transnationalism”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, January, 2002, p. 131.

<sup>73</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, “‘Bombay, U.K., Yuba City’: Bhangra Music and the Engendering of Diaspora”, *Diaspora* 4:3, 1995, pp. 303-22, cited in Braziel and Mannur, p. 8.

a sense of common destiny.<sup>74</sup> The extent to which the location of some of the most powerful diasporas goes beyond “merely an abstract, metaphorical *space*” may be found in the place created by what Werbner terms as their *co-responsibility* across and beyond national boundaries. This co-responsibility is manifested through performatory action, as in the exchange of material and cultural goods, and philanthropic and political support and interaction.

Werbner argues that as dispersed, uncontained and uncontainable minorities, diasporas challenge the hegemony and boundedness of the nation-state; they exist beyond fixed boundaries and “clearly defined categories of inclusion and exclusion, of participatory rights and duties, (and) citizenship and loyalty.”<sup>75</sup> British Pakistanis in Britain have re-centred Britain as a place of diasporic action, for apart from creating a strong nationally derived and ethnic-based Pakistani diaspora in Britain, they have also redefined themselves as a *Muslim* diaspora, and as such use their location to openly act in support of minority Muslim communities as well as to dissent from Islamic and Western centres throughout the globe.<sup>76</sup> As Werbner notes:

The invisible organic intellectuals of diasporic communities engage in constant practical ideological work – of marking boundaries, creating transnational networks, articulating dissenting voices, lobbying for local citizenship rights or international human rights – at the same time that they re-inscribe collective memories and utopian visions in their public ceremonials or cultural works.<sup>77</sup>

Diasporas, then, are not governed by a centralised structure, yet paradoxically they may recognise a centre and acknowledge a “moral co-responsibility” towards both this centre and to kin diasporas.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Werbner, pp. 121, 131.

<sup>75</sup> Werbner, p. 121.

<sup>76</sup> Werbner, p. 130.

<sup>77</sup> Werbner, pp. 128-129.

<sup>78</sup> Werbner, p. 123.

## Home and Return

Locating the idea of *home* seems to require a twofold presence in diasporic consciousness: home as the sense of belonging to an originary home, and home as belonging to a chosen or allocated location. A closer examination of the idea of home where diasporas are concerned, however, can unfold multiple meanings even within singular categories that in fact change with shifting contexts.<sup>79</sup> Reference to a “home of origin” is not necessarily to a singular homeland, nor to an ancestral home. The homeland, claims Safran, may be another diaspora, as in the case of West Indians living in London who may regard Jamaica rather than Africa as their homeland,<sup>80</sup> or Jews who “return” to their ancestral homeland, the Land of Israel, yet who may also feel an emotional connection to their Russian or Moroccan heritage or birthplace.

The complexities of “home” are demonstrated in Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim’s conversational explorations on the subject of “feeling at home”:

*Barenboim:* I feel at home in a certain way in Jerusalem, but I think this is a little unreal, a poetic idea with which I grew up ... So what I mean to say is that I feel at home in the *idea* of Jerusalem ...

*Said:* One of my earliest memories is of homesickness, of wishing that I was somewhere else. ... When I return to where I grew up in the Middle East, I find myself thinking about all the resistance I feel to going back.<sup>81</sup>

Said continues to reflect that Palestine, his place of birth and childhood now under Israeli rule, does not feel like home because it is so different to the place he left. However, in his adopted cities of Cairo and New York he can feel at home. Barenboim points out that having been born and brought up in British-ruled Jerusalem and Cairo, then migrating to America, Said has actually been shaped and informed by a European sensibility: “The

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<sup>79</sup> Cohen, p. 5. Safran, “Deconstructing and comparing diaspora”, p. 17.

<sup>80</sup> Safran, “Deconstructing and Comparing Diaspora”, p. 13.

<sup>81</sup> Daniel Barenboim and Edward W Said, *Parallels and Paradoxes*, Bloomsbury, London, 2003, pp. 3-4.

things that matter to you the most ... are European in origin.”<sup>82</sup> This reflection implies that the way we experience “home” is more to do with the processes of inclusion or exclusion than about geographical place.<sup>83</sup>

As discussed previously, it is generally perceived that diasporas are distinct from other communities in that their members are connected to a “spiritual, emotional, and/or cultural home” that is outside the place in which they reside.<sup>84</sup> It is the tension between the desire for “home” and the desire for locating a home that mobilises a process of identity formation. Whether reference is to an imaginary home, what Avtar Brah refers to as “the mythic place of desire”, or/and the place of the “lived experience of a locality”,<sup>85</sup> diasporas are multi-locational “within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries”, and diasporic identity is plural and continually in process.<sup>86</sup> Brah argues that the relationship between the differing desires for “home” as origin and as destination is subject to the politics in play under particular circumstances, “the configurations of power which differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another.”<sup>87</sup>

The connection to a home that is other than where one is situated, and thereby a return or quest for a return of sorts, is at the heart of diasporic consciousness. “Return” signifies in the structure of the individual or collective imaginary not necessarily as the remembrance of an actual experience of place, what Safran calls “homeland nostalgia”, but as symbolic expression. While “return” can be an expectation of physical return when possible, whether occasional or permanent, it is often realised in symbolic terms, through a spiritual and emotional connection to “home” that evokes an imaginary return. “Return” can be an active and regenerating relationship (locating the place of “homeland” within the

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<sup>82</sup> Barenboim & Said, p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Brah, p. 192.

<sup>84</sup> Safran, “Deconstructing and Comparing Diaspora”, p. 13.

<sup>85</sup> Brah, p. 192.

<sup>86</sup> Brah, p. 197.

<sup>87</sup> Brah, p. 183.

“hostland”) through reproducing social practices, for example in custom and language. “Return” can also occur through an active relationship with the “homeland” at particular points in time. Safran writes of “triggering events” that occur either in the homeland or the hostland that revive individuals to “return” to their diasporic identity by taking action on behalf of, for example, the ethnic “homeland”.<sup>88</sup> The realities of the “home country,” claims Safran, are often less positive for the returnee than those of the imagined form; often one nostalgia is replaced by another, so that desire for “home” is transferred to a longing for the “real” home in the diaspora.<sup>89</sup> It could be said then, that the idea of “return” can be understood variously as return to the memory of a time and a place, whether imagined or actual, as well as “return” to a heightened awareness of diasporic identity while remaining physically situated outside the homeland. From the place of diaspora, “return” – where “return” is understood as a place remembered – is always compromised, never complete, and always involves some melancholy of loss – lost time, lost presence, lost belonging.

“Can one ever go home again?” asks Safran.<sup>90</sup> Salman Rushdie seems to suggest an alternative state of return, or rather, an acceptance that no return is possible, while proposing a version of Indian identity that exists in another place, the place of the British Indian writer:

Our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind... my India was just that: “my” India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions ... I knew that my India may only have been one to which I (who am no longer what I was, and who by quitting Bombay never became what perhaps I was meant to be) was, let us say, willing to admit I belonged.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Safran, “Deconstructing and Comparing Diaspora”, p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticism 1981–91*, Granta, London, 1991, p. 10.

For Stuart Hall, too, a metaphoric use of the past can form a different way of thinking or looking at cultural identity.<sup>92</sup> We can use the past, not literally to return to it, but with the creation of symbols and metaphors that can be used and reused in the telling of our stories, of our identities:

Who has not known ... the surge of an overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for “times past”? And yet, this “return to the beginning” is like the imaginary in Lacan – it can neither be fulfilled nor required, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery.<sup>93</sup>

“Return” in this sense can be experienced through evolving customs, rituals and festivals, and through language in ways that connect to the past rather than replicate it. In her video *Just Like Home*, 2008 (Fig. M1) Lisa Hilli revisits her Papua New Guinean heritage through the portrayal of her mother preparing a traditional dish from her suburban Brisbane home. Hilli’s mother “returns” to her PNG culture by preparing *I gir* (e gee-rrra), a traditional culinary practice of the Tolais people of Rabaul, Papua New Guinea. *I gir*, which means “to steam with hot stones”, is traditionally prepared with banana leaves, but Hilli’s mother has adapted the recipe to suit her adopted home and new resources by using tin foil. To emphasise the imperative for difference within the context of continuity, Hilli has created an installation to accompany the video, which recreates the banana tree symbolically into a giant foil sculpture: “A shining monument to the continuation and adaptation of this specific Tolais cooking tradition within Australia, and a celebration of cultures’ capacities to respond to shifting circumstances.”<sup>94</sup>

Marks of the past, then, come into line with present lived experience, as potential for new formations and experiences. Sophia Lehmann (1998) argues that for diasporic communities whose cultural identity resides elsewhere than in national identity, language is

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<sup>92</sup> Hall, p. 245.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> *Next Wave Festival* 2008 catalogue, viewed 8 June, 2008, <<http://2008.nextwave.org.au/festival/projects/24-just-like-home>>.



**Figure M1**

Lisa Hilli

*Mama Bilong Mi*, 2005

Image from *Just Like Home* video

a “place” where home can be located. People in a diaspora who share a history and experience use language to create a sense of identity and cultural continuity. This can go beyond the promotion and use of the language of the “old country” to unify the connection between kin diasporas as well as with the “home of origin” – the transnational and transcontinental tongue of Yiddish is one historical example of this, while areally dominant languages such as Sudanese Arabic as the lingua franca of Sudanese refugees from many different tribal and geographic language groups is a contemporary instance. Lehmann proposes a view in which language is recreated in order to represent both cultural history and a lived cultural experience. She claims, for example, that Caribbean and Jewish Americans each use “tribal language” within English in an attempt to mould English into a new language that functions as both an international language and a “tribal” language: “Creating a mother tongue which incorporates both history and contemporary culture and experience is tantamount to creating a home within the diaspora.”<sup>95</sup>

This viewing can be extended to the way language is used in text by diasporic writers. Salman Rushdie writes in defence of the use of English by the diasporic writer, whom he implies uses English in a way that creates a new expression of diasporic identity:

The British Indian writer does not have the option of rejecting English ... His children, her children, will grow up speaking it, probably as a first language; and in the forging of a British Indian identity the English language is of central importance. It must, in spite of everything, be embraced. (The word “translation” comes, etymologically, from the Latin for “bearing across.” Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.)<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Sophia Lehmann, “In Search of a Mother Tongue: Locating home in diaspora”, *MELUS*, USA, 1998, viewed 1 April, 2008, <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2278/is\\_4\\_23/ai\\_55909804](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2278/is_4_23/ai_55909804)>.

<sup>96</sup> Rushdie, p. 17.

## Diaspora as a way of viewing the world

Diaspora discourse and theorisation offer a critical space for thinking about the mass movements of people that have defined the twentieth century and continue to do so into the present.<sup>97</sup> More significantly for my project, that space is also about thinking of how notions of diaspora signify the way we experience, view, articulate, and aestheticise ourselves and the world at the onset of the twenty-first century.

How does an understanding of diaspora contribute to the way we conceptualise or respond to the world around us? For a number of scholars, diaspora seems to be a relevant social formation for framing our times. Arjun Appadurai (1990) describes the contemporary world as characterised by *imagination as social practice*. He uses the term *imagined worlds* to describe the “multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe.”<sup>98</sup>

Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin (2003) propose that diaspora is the only social structure that allows cultural identity to survive in a globalised world. They introduce the term “diasporized” identity as disaggregated identity, using it to describe identity that holds together seemingly contradictory positions,<sup>99</sup> including those that are gender-related.

In terms of subjectivity, Avtar Brah proposes a viewing through a “politics of identification” as opposed to a “politics of identity” that can accommodate the different identities we inhabit that interweave through relations of race, gender, class or sexuality.<sup>100</sup> Drawing on Benedict Anderson, she describes “imagined communities” as the people and groups we feel connected to without necessarily encountering face to face, so that we

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<sup>97</sup> Braziel and Mannur, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> Appadurai, p. 31.

<sup>99</sup> As contradictory positions of identity, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin write of “an Egyptian Arab who happens to be Jewish, and a Jew who happens to be an Egyptian Arab”. Relating to gender, they argue that “rather than the dualism of gendered bodies and universal souls ... – the dualism that the Western tradition offers – we can substitute ... bodies that are sometimes gendered and sometimes not. It is this idea that we are calling diasporized identity.” Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Diaspora”, in Braziel and Mannur, p. 109.

<sup>100</sup> Brah, p. 93.

identify with their experiences and thereby are able to “appreciate the ‘particular’ within the ‘universal’ and the ‘universal’ within the ‘particular’.”<sup>101</sup>

If we accept a concept of diaspora that goes beyond definitions of particular minorities, then how are notions of diaspora placed within creative production? How do we use the “language” of diaspora and its inherent ambiguities to both “read” and aestheticise notions of identity? Rushdie writes of a particular way that “diasporized” writers have of viewing the world, one that contributes a particular perspective to our understandings of how we live:

If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles.... Indian writers ... are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of “whole sight.”<sup>102</sup>

The “stereoscopic vision” referred to by Rushdie can take the form of “an idiom, a stance, a claim” rather than being understood in substantialist terms as a bounded entity. When understood as a “category of practice”, diaspora can be used “to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties ... It does not so much *describe* the world as seek to *remake* it.”<sup>103</sup>

Does the artist/writer/filmmaker need to experience diaspora in order to create that perspective? Or can diaspora consciousness be understood metaphorically as an approach to contemporary consciousness? Listing a variety of words that describe social mobility – pilgrims, tourists, travellers, immigrants, circus people – John Durham Peters (1999) points out that “each of these labels may have named a particular population or way of life at some point, but each has had a rich afterlife as a metaphor.”<sup>104</sup> Similarly, Stuart Hall

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Rushdie, p. 19.

<sup>103</sup> Brubaker, p. 12.

<sup>104</sup> John Durham Peters, “Exile, nomadism and diaspora” in Hamid Naficy (ed), *Home, Exile, Homeland*, Routledge, New York and London, 1999, p. 18.

theorises identity as “constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak.”<sup>105</sup>

Diaspora, and particularly the profusion of diasporas in the past few decades, has affected both metaphorically and materially the way in which we understand notions of identity, individualism, boundaries, etc. With this approach in mind, we can speak of the role of artistic representation as not so much a reflection of who we are, but as a performative mode of agency that engages us and involves us in a positioning/negotiation with and as a subject. Ernst van Alphen claims that art can act as agency for cultural discourse; it has the power to transform the ways in which cultural issues are being conceptualised as well as represented.<sup>106</sup> It not only reflects cultural philosophy, but provides us with a way of understanding this so that art can be “a mode of thinking.”<sup>107</sup> We can see, then, that both diaspora and art can be viewed as ways of framing cultural studies/philosophy, not only as historical products.

In this context, looking at a portrait as an *imaginary world* and as a variety of *imagined community* can offer a site and a mode of viewing through Avtar Brah’s proposed “politics of identification”, as opposed to a “politics of identity”. I believe that in portraits such as the performative portraits in which I am interested here, the viewer can encounter an image of a person which, through both the materiality of the object and the act of representation itself, invites an identification with an *imagined* experience: that is, an experience with the image that evokes a relationship with the image as an experience of a being/a life, rather than the particularity of a human identity. In that way, the experience of

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<sup>105</sup> Hall, p. 245.

<sup>106</sup> Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005, p. xiii.

<sup>107</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. xv.

perceiving a human image can produce the experience that what and who one sees is familiar, without necessarily being recognisable or named.

When we talk of the self-perception and representation of diasporas as evolving and fluid collective identities, we are looking at a mode of collective existence that is *responsive* – to history, culture, politics, etc – and is also particularised in that response.

As Avtar Brah observes, diasporas

resonate with the meaning of words such as immigrant, migrant, refugee and asylum seeker. This does not mean that the term diaspora is a substitute for these varying conditions underlying population movements. Not at all. Rather, the concept of diaspora signals the similarity and difference of precisely these conditions. I have stressed that the study of diasporas calls for a concept of diaspora in which historical and contemporary elements are understood in their *diachronic relationality*.<sup>108</sup>

I have found this to be a common notion inherent in all versions of diaspora's meanings. It is, in fact, *dependent* on relationships and on negotiating positions. Diaspora cannot be regarded only in terms of space, of place and of dispersals but also, and as significantly, in terms of time – of past, present and future.

There are, then, many unknowns in determining the definitions and meanings of diaspora. Diaspora is not clearly separate from other definitions of the movement of populations, it cannot necessarily be defined within the limits of geography, it implies an identity of both outsider and insider, it is defined by difference and sameness, diversity and particularity, and can exist as a minority yet large-scale in scope. The one constant is a relationship with a homeland, and therefore, a continuity of belonging or reference. It is this relationship, that “inescapable link” to a history, that I find parallels my approach to portraiture; more precisely, the ability to maintain some form of connection, imaginary or actual, with a past presence (of the genre, that is, its history, and of the portrait subject), while evolving new meanings and futures.

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<sup>108</sup> Brah, p. 197.

Framing notions of identity and representation within theorisations of diasporic consciousness opens a way of viewing and experiencing art, and in my case, the contemporary portrait, within the ambiguities inherent in both diaspora and portraiture: the tensions of stillness and fluidity, stability and movement, difference and sameness, singularity and multiplicity, presence and absence.

## 2 FACING

### On portraiture

#### Identifying portraiture

Portraiture in Western art is a genre whose credibility traditionally has depended on notions of authenticity; conventions of portraiture claim referentiality as the element that differentiates it from all other artistic genres (Brilliant 1991). Informing the traditional portrait is the relationship of its imagery to a particular individual outside the representation. A largely accepted view of portraiture is that a successful portrait reflects authenticity and uniqueness in the subjectivity of the portrayer as well as that of the portrayed,<sup>1</sup> as an excerpt from the text accompanying a National Portrait Gallery of Australia 1999 exhibition on contemporary portraiture illustrates: “The success and interest of a portrait cannot be separated from its success in artistic terms.”<sup>2</sup>

Discussions of the terms of portraiture, however, range from clear definitions and boundaries to thinking that challenges the genre’s conventions of presence and authenticity. For Richard Brilliant portraiture is like no other genre in art. What distinguishes it, he claims, is its imperative to referentiality; for a portrait to be a portrait, its imagery should refer to a specific human being outside the portrait. Brilliant draws from the twentieth-century philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s reasoning of *occasionality* – the claim to meaning of a portrait is in its occasion, that is, its intended relation to the original

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Sayers, “Introduction” in *The Possibilities of Portraiture*, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, 1999, p. 5.

person represented.<sup>3</sup> Brilliant makes the point that for Gadamer, the significance of the portrait is in the artist's intention and not the viewer's interpretation: "The viewer's awareness of the art work as a portrait is distinctly secondary ... because it is the artist who establishes the category 'portrait'."<sup>4</sup> This suggests that the function of the portrait is to fix the presence of its referent, and the success of the artist to do so lies in her capacity to recognise and "capture" an essentialised form of that presence.

Sandy Nairne, Director of the National Portrait Gallery in London, emphasises the necessity of particularity in the portrait, even when the subject is "anonymous", that is, unnamed or unrecognised by the viewer. In the introduction to his book on contemporary portraiture, Nairne alludes to the notion of the "inner essence" of the portrayed: "A true portrait still reaches towards an understanding of the sitter."<sup>5</sup> The director of the Australian National Portrait Gallery, Andrew Sayers, expands the boundaries of these definitions further by abstracting the concept of referentiality in the portrait to the "presence" of a human individual. For Sayers, a good portrait "tells us something valuable or revealing about a person" by its "ability to go beyond likeness to presence."<sup>6</sup>

## **Portraiture challenged and challenging**

Portraiture has had a history of complying with social, cultural and artistic authority. It has reflected the cultural and national "face" of the time, and as a result has gained the reputation of being a conservative genre. However, a significant change is that contemporary portraiture can be viewed both as a specialised territory that references artistic and historic sources, and as a site in contemporary culture and art-making for exploration and critique. It can be seen, therefore, as a practice that is at once conservative

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<sup>3</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall, Crossroads, New York, 2nd rev. edn, 1989 (1969), pp. 144-145.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991, pp. 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Sandy Nairne and Sarah Howgate, *The Portrait Now*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Sayers, "Reflections on portraiture", in *Portrait.13*, Spring, 2004, pp 22-23.

and radical, conventional and marginal (van Alphen 2005). As Ernst van Alphen points out, many artists are exploring subjectivity and representation in ways that question those notions of authenticity that have defined the conventions of this genre, thereby proposing portraiture as a cultural area of “habit and debate”.<sup>7</sup>

The very terms by which we discuss what constitutes a portrait are an evolving discourse, just as the terms of identity are in continuous change. Joanna Woodall (1997) writes about the changes in concepts of personal identity as a critique of dualism, where dualism is “a division between the person as a living body and their real or true self.”<sup>8</sup> Both Woodall and van Alphen refer to this tension as the problematics of dualism in traditional Western portraiture, in which the separation of subject and object has existed since the Renaissance. Challenges to dualist subjectivity, claims Woodall, have existed from the mid-nineteenth century, with social influences such as Karl Marx’s historical analysis of the individual shaped by society, Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, Freud’s psychoanalytical theories on the “unconscious”, Edmund Husserl’s theories of phenomenology, Jacques Lacan’s theories on the role of language in identity, and political liberation movements of oppressed groups such as women, blacks, homosexuals.<sup>9</sup> All challenged the belief in the objective existence of an essentialist identity. For Jacques Derrida, writing in the late twentieth century, identity is not a fixed entity, but a process which interacts with other subjects. “In the field of portraiture,” writes Woodall, “the interplay between viewer, artist and sitter, or amongst written texts in which portraiture exists as literature, can all now participate in an identity inseparable from representation.”<sup>10</sup>

If we look at the portrait as re-presenting the identity of the person depicted, it is likely then that an examination of portraiture historically will reflect changes in beliefs on

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<sup>7</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. vi.

<sup>8</sup> Joanna Woodall (ed), *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1997, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> J Woodall, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> J Woodall, p. 13.

personal identity. An overview of the artistic and cultural place and role of portraiture since times of antiquity can illuminate some aspects of these changes.

## **The Portrait in History**

### *The ideology of “type”*

Portraits representing individuals have been central to Western art since antiquity. Naturalistic representation in portraiture as physiognomy existed in antiquity and the early Christian world in the form of statues, busts and herms, coins, sarcophagi, and wall-paintings.<sup>11</sup> The ancient Greek portrait statues of c. 480–146 BCE (Fig. F1) that represented individuals did so through depictions of type and themes – the military strategist, the sovereign citizen, the orator, writer and philosopher – so that individuality was manifested more in the accompanying inscription than in the features of the portrayed.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of the portrait statue was primarily for religious ritual and to memorialise the deceased. Conceptually, an understanding of character in the Greek portrait was to do with the social position of the subject in the Hellenic world, and this was articulated by means of a naturalistic depiction. Andreas Beyer (2003) describes the Greek portrait as a balancing act “established, on the one hand, by the urge to depict nature and, on the other, by the no less driving need to immortalize the individual temperament, the individual character.”<sup>13</sup>

The Roman portraitists from the Hellenistic Era (c. 146 BCE–330 CE) were extremely able at naturalistic portrayals of individuals, possibly as a result of the skills gained through the practice of making death masks of their ancestors. The role of the portrait, however, developed at this time as a political medium, utilising those skills of

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<sup>11</sup> J Woodall, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Andreas Beyer, *Portraits: A History*, trans. Steven Lindberg, Harry N Abrams Inc., New York, 2003, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

naturalism for the purpose of creating a collective “type”. Family resemblances, in particular those of the emperors (Fig. F2), were often used in the portrait (in the form of wax busts and coins) as a means of articulating power and ideology, not only in reference to noble and sovereign lineage, but in creating a model of “likeness” in the subjects; the subjects in private portraits would often be depicted in the fashions, and even the very physiognomies, of the ruling house.<sup>14</sup> The Roman understanding of “likeness” in a portrait was of physiognomic type, as Beyer demonstrates with the example of portraits that exaggerated the appearance of old age, to justify the “‘ideology of nobility’ that had developed within the gerontocratic structure of the senate’s upper strata.”<sup>15</sup>

Our knowledge of the particularity of the individuals portrayed in these wax portraits is found in the information inscribed on surviving pedestals. In contrast, our understanding of the individual identities behind the *Fayoum Mummy Portraits* (Fig. F3), the Roman portrait panels of the first to the third century CE that were found in Egypt, relies solely on their realistic visual depiction. These panels are paintings of live sitters, and after the sitter’s death were fitted over the mummified body. Paradoxically for the historian Beyer, these portraits seem to be faithful, realistic depictions of individuals for the purpose of *aide-memoires*, yet their individual identities and stories – that is, their histories – are “silent”. As “anonymous” portraits, claims Beyer, we can relate to them only on aesthetic terms. If, as Beyer argues, losing the context of reference to what it once meant places the portrait at risk of losing both its “face” (that is, its identity) and its history, then I believe it is the nature of the subject of the portrait that comes into challenge. As this exegesis progresses, I will put forth arguments that contest Beyer’s claim that the “anonymous portrait” as an “autonomous” artwork “can cause the portrait of a unique individual to become a commonplace of aesthetic experience”.<sup>16</sup> The question of knowledge – of what constitutes

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Beyer, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Beyer, p. 21.

### Figure F1

*The Kritios Boy*, attributed to Kritios,  
ca 480 BC  
Marble, 1.17 metre high  
Archaeological museum of the Acropolis,  
Athens.



### Figure F2

Medallion of Diocletian & Maximian,  
Trier 293 (?)  
Gold, diam. 4.2 cm; 54.45 gm.  
The American Numismatic Society,  
New York.



### Figure F3

*Fayum Portrait of a Man (Mummy Portrait)*,  
A.D. 120–30  
Encaustic, 36 x 18.5 cm  
Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, N.Y.



the viewer's "informed" or "uninformed" gaze, and of the concept of artist-as-viewer – is one that is constantly raised within my studio practice, and one which I will return to further below.

### *Symbolic and stylised identities: Portraiture from Early Christianity to the Renaissance*

In Early Christian art (c. third century to the sixth century CE), sculptures of significant people were generally stylised images constructed through a particular vocabulary of imagery, while the subjects of mosaic portraits (Fig. F4) were generally depicted as frontal, stylised images of authority (Mann 2005). In rejection of idolatry, that is, the worship of images, the Church discouraged monumental sculptures, and portraits conveying outward likeness gave way to more impersonal images of spiritual ideal.<sup>17</sup> Beyer suggests that portraiture nevertheless had a place in "Christian pictorial theory" through the notion of having been made in God's image; in this context, the relic of the *vera icon*, the facial features of Christ imprinted on Veronica's veil, can be said to represent the first Christian portrait.<sup>18</sup>

### *"Rebirth" of the individual ideal*

During the Medieval period (500 CE to around 1500), apart from images of Christ and the saints which were considered to be true likenesses, the individual was not generally represented by naturalistic portraiture.<sup>19</sup> Rather, a person's identity would be represented by symbols of social function and status, such as a coat of arms. Joanna Woodall points out that it was not until the fourteenth century that representations of donors and sovereigns were increasingly being depicted through their physiognomic likeness. However, during the Renaissance period (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), with its ideas of individualism, self-

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<sup>17</sup> H W Janson, *History of Art*, Thames & Hudson, UK, 1995 (1962), p. 223.

<sup>18</sup> The legend of the *vera icon* tells of Veronica who offered Christ her veil to wipe his brow, and when returned, his face had left its impression on the cloth. Here, Andreas Beyer makes an interesting analogy to photography, "in which physical touch, in the form of a chemical trace, retains the presence of the ur-image." Beyer, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> J Woodall, p. 1.

awareness and humanism, portraiture turned to naturalism in a way that marked a “rebirth” in the history of the genre. The Renaissance portrait referred both to the natural world and to the idealisation of classical images of ancient Greece and Rome. This is clearly demonstrated by the work of the fifteenth century Flemish artist Jan van Eyck, a distinct and influential painter of the time, who painted acutely observed naturalistic portrayals of “elite” subjects<sup>20</sup>. His portrait *Man in a Red Turban*, 1433 (Fig. F5), embodies the union of naturalism and idealism through the precisely detailed painting of a man’s face, so evenly balanced that it displays a “stoic calm” that, according to historian H. W. Janson (1962), “reflects (the artist’s) conscious ideal of human character.”<sup>21</sup> By the sixteenth century, portraiture’s assimilation of the real to the ideal gave it an ideological role in noble culture, enabling an individual to “personify the majesty of the kingdom or the courage of a military leader.”<sup>22</sup>

### *The naturalistic “type” of authority*

Joanna Woodall asserts that the sixteenth century saw the consolidation of a visual repertoire that continued in naturalistic portraiture for the following three centuries and beyond.<sup>23</sup> Subjects were often contextualised; the sitter’s status and authority would be emphasised by the placement of surrounding objects and secondary subjects (Fig. F6). Subjects such as the cleric, who were identified by their particular positions, became associated with particular portrait formats, attributes and pictorial languages. Woodall claims that “this method of characterisation by imitation of a recognisable iconographic type still takes place in conservative portraiture.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> J Woodall lists Van Eyck’s subjects as “clerics, sovereigns and great nobles, statesmen, native citizens and foreign merchants, his wife and probably himself.” J Woodall, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Janson, p. 420.

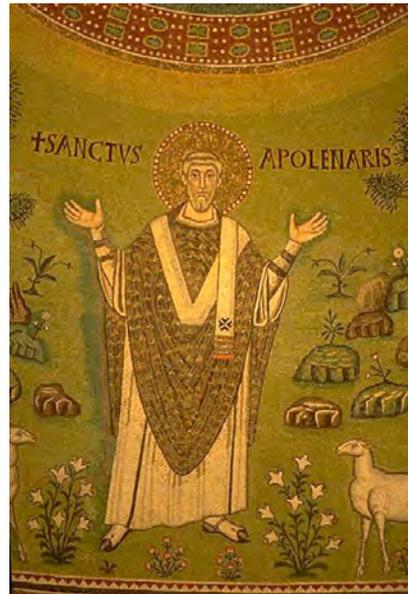
<sup>22</sup> J Woodall, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> J Woodall, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> J Woodall, pp. 2-3.

**Figure F4**

Sant' Appolinaire in Classe interior,  
Detail of apse mosaic,  
549 AD  
Ravenna, Italy.



**Figure F5**

Jan Van Eyck,  
*Man in a Red Turban (Self-Portrait?)*,  
1433  
Oil on panel, 26 x 19 cm  
The National Gallery, London.



**Figure F6**

Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio)  
*Pope Leo X with Giulio de' Medici and  
Luigi de' Rossi*, c. 1518  
Oil on panel, 154 x 119 cm  
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



Woodall argues that by emulating a prototype with a “realistic” image, an identity was formed that imbued the sitter with authority, respect, honour, and even love in such a way that the portrait acted as a substitute for the sitter. Its purpose was to personalise the relationship between the subject and viewer so that virtuous idealisation was imaged as a reality. A similar understanding of the Renaissance portrait, and in fact of portraiture in general, is proposed by Richard Brilliant’s description of Donatello’s bust of the saint *San Rossore*, 1422–27 (Fig. F7). It is irrelevant whether the bust actually resembles the saint’s “real” physicality, claims Brilliant; what is significant is that the bust *looked* so convincingly realistic to its audience that “it gave flesh to the dry bones and brought the saint and the devout beholder closer together in a more personal relationship. And that is what portraits do.”<sup>25</sup> Brilliant claims that the subject–viewer relationship is made possible through the “social relationship” or “bond” between the artist and sitter. It is the artist–sitter relationship that enabled an artist like Sebastiano del Piombo in the sixteenth century to portray his subject Claudio Tolomei in such a way that even Tolomei himself had an enlightened understanding of his self as that image. In a letter to the artist, Tolomei reflects that that image is the result of the artist–sitter bond: “In (the portrait image) I shall see you and me together.”<sup>26</sup> In fixing an idealised nature of the portrayed, the portrait established the sitter’s identity as a worthy presence.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the portrait both authorised and gave authority to the portrayed.

*Character of expression: the growing interest in the face*

The seventeenth-century Baroque period saw a further expansion in portraiture, especially in Court portraiture, whose subjects consisted of members of the monarchy and nobility of the Spanish Habsburg, English and French courts, as well as aspiring upper bourgeoisie.

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<sup>25</sup> Brilliant, p. 128.

<sup>26</sup> Brilliant, pp. 128-129.

<sup>27</sup> Brilliant, p. 129.

**Figure F7**

Donatello  
*San Rossore* (detail), 1422–1427  
Gilded bronze  
Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa.



**Figure F8**

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn  
*Self-Portrait*, ca 1662  
Oil on Canvas, 82.5 x 65 cm  
Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne.



With the expansion of portraits came a growth in the number of portraitists, artists who specialised in representing a style and type associated with the different courts (Woodall 1997, Barbillon 2005). However, the Baroque portrait differed from the reserved and idealised portrayals of the Renaissance, as artists became interested in expressing personality and human emotions through facial expressions. Rembrandt van Rijn's self-portraits (Fig. F8) can be seen in this light, as explorations of emotion and character in the human face; Beyer suggests that Rembrandt's self-portraits were in great part character studies for other portraits.<sup>28</sup>

In the secular Republic of Netherlands, portraits of individuals and family groups were often depicted in contexts and styles other than the conventions of aristocratic portraiture. Interest in the head was taking precedence over the body. Non-aristocratic portraiture was moving away from the full- and half-bodied depictions of the elite to images emphasising the head and hands, thus valuing those areas associated with thought and personality over the corporeal blood connections of hereditary nobility.<sup>29</sup>

### *The group portrait as social place*

Group portraits such as the "guild portrait" and "civic guard portrait" also became extremely popular at this time in Holland. Distinct from family portraits, the bourgeois group portrait was a way of portraying individuals in their own right and as belonging by choice to a group, joining "a society of free will and self-determination."<sup>30</sup> Beyer writes of this type of "*corporate portrait*" as focusing "not on the isolation or hierarchy of the painting's elements but on a linear structure that promotes the autonomy of the various parts while assimilating them into a secure network of relationships."<sup>31</sup> At the same time, Beyer notes in an example by Frans Hals, *Banquet of the Officers of the Saint George Civic Guard*,

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<sup>28</sup> Beyer, p. 221.

<sup>29</sup> J Woodall, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Beyer, p. 191.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

1616 (Fig. F9), each person within the group is represented in their individual particularity through physiognomies, attitudes, and gestures. Each sitter is known by name.<sup>32</sup>

### *Portraiture as cultural practice*

The eighteenth century produced an even greater number of portraits, particularly in France and England. Subjects were often depicted within narrative situations, from refined domestic “conversation pieces” to pastoral or mythological-styled naturalised fictions, or even through conventional sittings with sitters adopting roles for the purpose of their portrayal.<sup>33</sup> Rococo artists such as François Boucher and Thomas Gainsborough excelled at the “refined” portrait, and chronicled the opulence of eighteenth-century life through their attention to details of dress and texture. Female artists such as Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Angelica Kauffmann (Fig. F10) gained particular prominence within the genre.<sup>34</sup> Woodall suggests that it was at this time that portraiture became understood as a cultural practice beyond mere technical representation. This was in part to do with the use of print to disseminate images of portraits through both traditional images and caricature. However, it was also the popularity of commissioned portraiture and its exhibition that contributed to this understanding: “Sitting to a fashionable portraitist entered into literary discourse as a self-conscious, socially prestigious interaction and the exhibition of portraits invited public discussion.”<sup>35</sup>

### *The portrait as critique*

In the world of art theory and at times in practice, portraiture had often been regarded as of minor artistic importance due to the perceived limitations to artistic freedom implied within the genre. According to Beyer, the Spanish artist Francisco Goya dispelled that

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> J Woodall, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Judith W Mann, “Portraiture”, in *Encarta Online Encyclopedia*, Microsoft Corporation, 1997–2008, p. 2, viewed 8 January, 2008, <[http://encarta.msn.com/text\\_761559633\\_29/portraiture.html](http://encarta.msn.com/text_761559633_29/portraiture.html)>

<sup>35</sup> J Woodall, p. 5.

**Figure F9**

Frans Hals  
*Banquet of the Officers of the  
Saint Georg Civic Guard, 1616*  
Oil on canvas, 175 x 324 cm  
Frans-Hals-Museum,  
Haarlem.



**Figure F10**

Angelica Kaufmann  
*Portrait of Johann Joachim  
Winckelmann, 1764*  
Oil on canvas, 97.2 x 71 cm,  
Kunsthaus Zu Gallery,  
Zurich.





**Figure F11**

Francisco José de Goya Y Lucientes  
*The Family of Charles IV*, 1798  
Oil on canvas, 280 x 336 cm  
Museo del Prado, Madrid.

perception. His portrait *The Family of Charles IV*, 1798 (Fig. F11) breaks the convention of state portraiture with its attention to artistic themes rather than allusions to grandeur, and demonstrates how portraiture has in fact been a site for “radical innovations and pictorial inventions.”<sup>36</sup> Goya used his skill and wit as an artist to reveal the individual human elements, physiognomic and psychological, of the members of this royal family in what Janson refers to as “pitiless candour”. It is owing to Goya’s artistic genius, suggests Janson, that this painting was acceptable to the members of the court because that is how they saw themselves, while in fact it exposed the unflattering “truth” of their selves.<sup>37</sup>

### *Realism and “truth” in the nineteenth-century portrait*

The artists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, influenced by the ideology of the Enlightenment, sought new subject matter, and new methods and rhetoric in their work. The Neoclassical artists, such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867) (Fig. F12), emphasised painterly realism by the use, for example, of dramatic light effects to accentuate the sharpness and roundedness of faces and limbs. The Romantic artists of the first half of the nineteenth century chose to paint emotive portrayals of inspired leaders and agitated subjects, as demonstrated by Théodore Géricault’s portraits of mental patients in 1822–1824 (Fig. F13).<sup>38</sup> In contrast to the “role-playing” sitter of the previous century, the artist’s search for the sitter’s characterisation was attempted through depictions of “inner qualities” that were deemed to justify the sitter’s socio-political position.<sup>39</sup> Subjects of leadership and heroism expanded to include scientists and explorers, and the bourgeoisie, emboldened by their purchasing power and socio-political aspirations, and driven by the desire to validate their success for posterity, became major clients of portraitists.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Beyer, p. 278.

<sup>37</sup> Janson, p. 660.

<sup>38</sup> Mann, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> J Woodall, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> C Barbillon, “The Portrait: Painting and sculpture in France between 1850 and 1900” in *Musée d’Orsay Service Culturel*, trans. F. Troupenat and E. Hinton Simoneau, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, 2005, p. 3.

### Figure F12

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres  
*Louis-François Bertin*, 1832  
Oil on canvas, 116 x 95 cm  
Musée du Louvre, Paris.



### Figure F13

Théodore Géricault,  
*The Madman*, 1821–1824  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm  
Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent.



### Figure F14

*Emily Everett Abbot &  
Mary Susan Everett Abbot*, ca. 1852  
Photographer unidentified  
sixth-plate daguerreotype  
Daguerreotype collection,  
Library of Congress, Washington D.C.



### *Democratising the portrait: photography's new vision*

By the 1850s, large numbers of bourgeoisie were having their portraits painted and sculpted. They were also having their likenesses represented in the photograph. Photographic studios became widely established and popular at this time, especially in America. Photography brought with it the democratisation of the portrait, a progression from the ideals of the American and French revolutions<sup>41</sup> – any ordinary person could have his or her portrait taken quickly and cheaply, and people who would previously not have been considered worthy of immortalising themselves in the painted portrait could have their features recorded for posterity in the photograph (Fig. F14).<sup>42</sup>

Photography began a new age not only in portraiture, but in visual perception. William A. Ewing puts forth the idea that the “frenzy” accompanying photography in its early years was possibly due to a lack of visual self-awareness; it was only in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries that mirrors began to be commonplace in ordinary homes, “and photography was the best kind of mirror ever invented.”<sup>43</sup> “Likeness” at first became valued over ideal representation, but by the end of the nineteenth century, claims Ewing, people were seeking something more expressive than visual information gathering. By 1900, art photography had become aestheticised as an art form.

Both physiognomy of the late eighteenth century and photography of the nineteenth century lay claim to science as truth, albeit in different ways. Physiognomic portraits, employing signs that supposedly interpret a person’s character, claimed to consolidate “external” likeness with “internal” reality, while photography was believed to scientifically close the gap between “external” likeness and the person being depicted, for the material “external” likeness with “internal” reality, while photography was believed to scientifically

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<sup>41</sup> Janson, p. 699.

<sup>42</sup> J Woodall, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> William A Ewing, *Face: The New Photographic Portrait*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2006, pp. 16-18.

close the gap between “external” likeness and the person being depicted, for the material outcome of the portrait was not a representation of the sitter, but rather the actual, or trace of, the sitter.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, the camera was able to objectify the sitter. Resemblance, as an indexical quality of the portrait, was determined by the optical and mechanical processes that depend on the coincidence of time, subject and photographer.<sup>45</sup> This, together with the ability of photographic technique to record physical “imperfections”, meant that photography was used in the identification and investigative aspects of criminology and other sciences. On the other hand, photography was by the latter nineteenth century being defined and critiqued by the cultural institutions of art, “institutions designed to address art rather than science or industry.”<sup>46</sup> It could pose a threat to other art forms of representations by imaging the “real” better than either painting or sculpture, while at the same time attaining the effects of painting in, for example, colour and blurring of outline.<sup>47</sup> Photography thus implicitly challenged and problematised portraiture’s claim to absolute truth and to a certain mode of humanism.<sup>48</sup>

As the interests, philosophies, and artistic methods of late nineteenth-century artists were changing alongside notions of truth and visual perception, so too was the portrait moving within those changes to position itself “in the politics and theory of art.”<sup>49</sup> Paul Cézanne’s 1866 portrait of his father (Fig. F15) is a painting in which pictorial composition and form take precedence to the sitter’s character and likeness. The artistic freedom to do so, largely as a result of photography’s ability to represent the “real”, was to change the meaning as well as the role of the portrait within art.

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<sup>44</sup> J Woodall, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Catherine M Soussloff, *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Soussloff, p. 86.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> J Woodall, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Beyer, p. 332.

The democratisation of portraiture not only opened opportunities for the bourgeoisie, but for artists themselves to choose subjects that they considered worthy of portraits beyond commissions and studies, and not because of their public identity. Subjects were often chosen for their relationship to the artist, implying a “lived intimacy between painter and sitter” that would be reproduced imaginatively in the viewer’s relationship to the painting.<sup>50</sup> This, as Woodall suggests, posed a challenge to the conventions of the portrait transaction, for it blurred the distinction between portrait sitter and artist’s model. The identity of the woman depicted in Renoir’s *Alfred Sisely and His Wife*, 1868 (Fig. F16) is ambiguous; it is unclear whether it is the artist’s model Lise Trehot, or Eugenie Lescouezec, Sisley’s companion. As an unnamed portrayal, it raised questions that were to touch portraiture throughout the next century and beyond; specifically regarding this portrait, was Renoir’s motive to “memorialise” the specific couple in a “marriage portrait”, or was he using his subjects as models for a genre painting of the figure in the outdoors?<sup>51</sup> In more general terms, does the anonymity of a subject’s identity change the nature of a portrayal to preclude it from the genre, or does it contribute to transforming the nature of the genre?

The subjects in Vincent van Gogh’s portraits, too, seem to have been chosen for reasons other than the traditional motivations attributed to portraiture (Fig. F17). Van Gogh aimed to reach a truth, though that truth was neither to be sought nor found nor searched for in an objective sense of the visible real. The dominance of van Gogh’s mark-making and choice of colour in his portraits and self-portraits is such that the portrait is as much, if not more, about the artist’s emotional content as it is about that of the subject. Here, the portrait had clearly moved away from the role of artistic documentation to the viewing experience of subjectivity.

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<sup>50</sup> J Woodall, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Beyer, p. 335.

**Figure F15**

Paul Cézanne  
*Portrait of Louis-Auguste Cézanne,  
The Artist's Father*, 1866  
Oil on canvas, 198.5 x 119.3 cm,  
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



**Figure F16**

Auguste Renoir  
*Alfred Sisley and His Wife (Sisley and Lise?)*, 1868  
Oil on canvas, 105 x 75 cm  
Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne.



**Figure F17**

Vincent Van Gogh  
*Portrait of Armand Roulin at the Age of Seventeen*, 1888  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 54.1 cm  
Museum Folkwang, Essen.



### *The dualist paradigm in portraiture*

Van Alphen argues that the traditional portrait not only gives authority to the self portrayed but also to an assumed “essence” of the sitter that has been captured by the artist. Since the portrayed exists as a person outside the work, then that essence, which remains consistent through time and space, presumably exists in the person outside the work as well.<sup>52</sup>

The dualist conception of identity, which differentiates between the person as a living body and the “real” or “true” self, can be discerned in seventeenth-century portrait practice, for example, in Rembrandt’s portraits which are commonly understood as revelations of the sitter’s interiority. The crucial point, claims Woodall, is that dualism stressed the distinction between identity and the material body.<sup>53</sup> Dualism in its oppositional sense began formally in Western thought with René Descartes’s (1596–1650) concept of the thinking self, the mind–body dualism. Identity in dualist terms was defined as the pure, divine intellect of the mind as opposed to the mechanical, material body. As such, the concept of “likeness” in a portrait refers not only to the body as material form, but to the sitter’s inner being. What proves the authenticity of a representation in a portrait in dualist terms is the ability of the portrait to present what Hans-Georg Gadamer refers to as an “increase of being”.<sup>54</sup> Gadamer claims that the artist has the capacity to identify the sitter’s essential quality: “What comes into being in it is not already contained in what his acquaintances see in the sitter.”<sup>55</sup> In the dualist paradigm, the “increase of being” is what differentiates the successful art portrait from the photographic documentation of a

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Brilliant implies this conception of “essence” when he claims that “memory transcends divisions of time, obscures physical change, and collapses the disparate stages of human existence, making possible a holistic conception of one’s life.” Brilliant, p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> J Woodall, p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Van Alphen discusses Gadamer’s text on the “increase in being” which, according to Gadamer, is found in the portrait more than in any other genre. Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 23.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

person's face; a successful portrait authenticates the person outside the portrait, and increases our understanding of him/her.

### *Representation and subjectivity in challenge*

From the mid-nineteenth century, however, the integrity of dualist notions of identity was being questioned. By the end of the century, essentialist views of the human subject were being disrupted, for example by Charles Darwin's (1809–1882) biological theory of evolution on the nature of human origins, and Karl Marx's (1818–1883) social analysis of personal identity as a construction relative to social conditions, and not an autonomous, given truth.<sup>56</sup> At this time, the shift of artistic preoccupation from the portrayed subject to the artist's own inventiveness and approach towards the artwork as a whole was of major importance to the modern understanding of the portrait. Even though artists continued to create portraits within the traditional streams of "likeness", by the end of the nineteenth century, notes Beyer, the "innocent" view of a depiction – whether of a society or of the artist's self – had been irretrievably lost.<sup>57</sup>

By the twentieth century, the identity of the subject was no longer the sole motivation behind the creation of a portrait. The artist's subjectivity became of equal and at times greater value than the presence of the sitter, making the representation of identity at times ambiguous. The rejection of figurative imagery in the early twentieth century had its repercussions on the concept of the naturalistic resemblance of the model as necessary to the representation of identity.<sup>58</sup> Autonomous portraiture in art, that is, portraiture that was not reliant on commission to a client and thereby was at risk of undermining artistic freedom, was dealing with concepts of materiality, culture and philosophy that were to do with representation itself, as well as concepts of personal identity and social commentary.

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<sup>56</sup> J Woodall, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> Beyer, p. 341.

<sup>58</sup> J Woodall, p. 7.

The function of the portrait was changing, and alongside it, naturalistic portraiture did not so much disappear within progressive art movements in the twentieth century as re-direct its meaning and purpose.

The problematics of twentieth-century representation and interpretation in general, and in particular in portraiture, are theorised by Andrew Benjamin (1991) in his essay on Lucien Freud's self-portraits.<sup>59</sup> Benjamin discusses the problematic of representation as the crisis of Modernism. He explains that in a straightforward relationship between the signifier and the signified in a representation, where the signifier represents the signified, the two unite as a sign. This unity is based on an essential homogeneity of the signified, and the sign must represent the signified's singularity. Even though the signifier and signified can never be the same, in this conception of the sign the relationship between the signifier and signified is one that validates its authenticity, for a challenge to that unity would "render the relationship inauthentic".<sup>60</sup> From Picasso's Cubist portraits, to Andy Warhol's portraits of ironic mythification, to Cindy Sherman's self-portraits of images of stereotype, the homogeneity and authenticity of the portrayed falls apart when the unity of signifier and signified is challenged.<sup>61</sup>

The desire of modernism for unity or homogeneity excluded the possibility of "overdetermination" or heterogeneity; "the work of art could only frame the singularity of intent".<sup>62</sup> The crisis of modernity, then, can be seen as the recognition of an irreconcilable split between the signifier and signified, that is, the recognition of the impossibility of homogeneity. One positive aspect of this crisis, argues Benjamin, is that it allows for the distinction between works that seek unity, homogeneity and "pure presence", and those that recognise the impossibility of that attempt. This does not mean that the latter works

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<sup>59</sup> Andrew Benjamin, *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde*, Routledge, London and New York, 1991.

<sup>60</sup> A Benjamin, p. 62.

<sup>61</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>62</sup> A Benjamin, p. 63.

simply reject tradition, but rather that they recognise the refusal to repeat. It is in this space that Benjamin locates and goes on to interpret Lucien Freud's self-portraits (Fig. F18): "These paintings can be divided such that they enact the division that marks the consequences of the crisis of modernism."<sup>63</sup>

Van Alphen continues Benjamin's argument by framing the conception of art within two notions: the expressive and conceptual, and the performative notion in which "ideas and values, the building stones of culture, are actively created, constituted, and mobilized."<sup>64</sup> In the first, art is historicised as the product or reflection of a historical period or person, while in the second, it acts as social agency, mobilising our examination, discussion, and therefore rethinking of social practice. This seems especially challenging and relevant to the practice of portraiture, which relies so heavily on representation – representing a presence.<sup>65</sup> Such a framing presents the possibility of representation in the portrait that aspires to agency and is not confined to the referential aspect of the object of representation. As an example of this, van Alphen cites Douglas Crimp's discussion of the way art historians have tried to fit Andy Warhol's work into art historical conventions, without focusing on the central issues his work addresses within and in relation to other contexts: "Far from abandoning history, cultural studies works to supplant this reified art history with other histories."<sup>66</sup> Instead, art historians tend to discuss the issues raised by Warhol as themes rather than intervene or participate in them.<sup>67</sup> This way of participating in the work of art as social relations is demonstrated by Paul Carter in his book *Material Thinking* (2004), in which he presents a model of what he terms "creative research"; that is,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. xii.

<sup>65</sup> "Representation involves presence. It gives presence to what had hitherto not been presented." Benjamin, p. 61. Joanna Woodall explains naturalistic representation in Aristotle's sense of substituting something present for something absent. She claims that in a portrait as representation, what is mobilised by the artist is the viewer's act of recognition. J Woodall, pp. 8-9.

<sup>66</sup> Douglas Crimp, "Getting the Warhol We Deserve: Cultural Studies and Queer Culture" in *Visible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Studies*, 1999, p. 12, cited by Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. xiv.

<sup>67</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. xiv.



**Figure F18**

Lucien Freud

*Reflection (self portrait)*, 1981–82

Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.4 cm.

writing that engages with the work of art as a collaboration rather than a reductive form of interpretation. Carter writes that “creative research, respecting the materiality of thought ... studies complexity and it defends complex systems of communication against oversimplification. It explores the irreducible heterogeneity of cultural identity, the always unfinished process of making and remaking ourselves through our symbolic forms. Its success cannot be measured in terms of simplification and closure.”<sup>68</sup> Relating to the challenges faced with writing on art, Carter argues that the goal is not to write *about* art but to write *of* and *as* creative research, and in his case, to document the making of a new set of social relations through a concomitant act of production.<sup>69</sup>

Van Alphen points out that objects and practices from popular or mass culture can be discussed within the same framework as high art and literature, because they arise from and attempt to deal with similar issues. In the case of portraiture, referentiality, for example, is not so much rejected as rethought. Thus it is not a matter of one approach over the other, but rather adopting an interdisciplinary approach in which one weaves into the other. According to van Alphen, artists who choose to challenge the originality and homogeneity of subjectivity, or the authority of mimetic representation, often do so through the portrait:

The portrait returns but with a difference, now in order to expose the bourgeois self, historically anchored and naturalized, instead of its authority; to show a loss of self instead of its consolidation; to shape the subject as simulacrum instead of as origin. The specificity and intimacy of the visual representation of the face in its assumed uniqueness constitutes a powerful, and powerfully specific, reflection on this disabused status of the individual. Only visual art is able to merge the two senses of reflection – intellectual and specular – so effectively that the resulting agency affects, rather than merely influences the viewer at the threshold of awareness and sensation.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Carter, *Material Thinking*, Melbourne University Press, Victoria, 2004, p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> Carter, p. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. xvii.

## **Foundations of my portrait work**

Within the problematics of twentieth-century representation, my own artistic consciousness was being formed and developed. My art education of the 1970s comprised a tension. On the one hand it was shaped by a European-centred perception of the world as a totality and the corollary goal to strive for a “total” work of art. On the other hand, it also involved an American-centred art world of social critique and investigations of identity through, for example, feminism and explorations of the body in conceptual and performance art. In my case, one view never seemed to override the other. As my education progressed, I can now identify works of art that have been pivotal to my understanding of the world and thereby my practice. For the purpose of my exegesis, I have chosen to discuss such works, and in particular the work of those artists who have contributed to shaping perceptions of what it means to portray a human being as a portrait.<sup>71</sup> I have chosen to discuss particular works by artists who have provided foundations for my work both in their philosophical and methodological approaches and also through their artistic vocabulary. These works are by no means to be seen as iconic representations of modernist and postmodernist portraiture. Rather, my aim is to explore approaches that have shaped my own work within my own artistic history, and that may shed light on the direction I am taking in my practice, as much as diaspora has shaped my history and reflects the questions I am posing in the thesis.

I begin with the work of three twentieth-century artists for whom portraits occupy a central place in their artistic practice: Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, and Christian Boltanski.

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<sup>71</sup> The work of other artists such as R B Kitaj and Lindy Lee has influenced my more mature work, while the work of yet others still exemplifies aspects of my current work, aspirations, and arguments; these artists will be mentioned throughout the exegesis.

*Pablo Picasso, Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, 1910 (Fig. F19)*

In 1910, Picasso painted the portraits of the publisher and dealer Ambroise Vollard, the poet Uhde, and his friend and dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, representations that are often said to have marked the “death of portraiture”,<sup>72</sup> but are also referred to as heralding radical new perspectives for the portrait.<sup>73</sup>

If the identity of an individual portrayed involves recognition, then these portraits posed challenges to the realm of portraiture, a genre traditionally characterised by notions of *likeness* and *truth*.<sup>74</sup> Picasso’s cubist portraits were not mimetic representations of the portrayed, but rather explorations of forms and their relationship to each other, as signifiers of the sitter. For van Alphen, this marks a new mode of representation in which “no signifier forms a fixed unity with a signified”, and forms can be viewed as interchangeable (sometimes seen as a mouth, sometimes a nose, for example).<sup>75</sup> Referring to Yve-Alan Bois’s description of Picasso’s cubist portraits, van Alphen writes of Picasso’s representational signs as entirely virtual and nonsubstantial, with the subjects portrayed shaped mainly by “the differential process between the signifiers used.”<sup>76</sup> This is exemplified in *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, 1910, in which Picasso’s use of splintered forms of faceted grey and brown hues is so tonally subdued that the painting’s near-monochrome nature renders the representation of the sitter almost indecipherable as a body.<sup>77</sup>

Yet the portrait ultimately is decipherable, and arguably recognisable, as a named and particularised individual. Van Alphen points out that while this may be so, it is the formal construction of the illusion of subjectivity that has become dominant rather than the presence or “essence” of the individual portrayed. This, then, problematises the portrait in

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<sup>72</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, “Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the Ends of Portraiture” in Melissa E. Feldman (ed), *Face Off: The Portrait in Recent Art*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, 1994, p. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Beyer, p. 353; Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 25.

<sup>74</sup> Marcia Pointon, “Kahnweiler’s Picasso; Picasso’s Kahnweiler” in J Woodall, p. 190.

<sup>75</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> H W Janson, *History of Art*, Thames & Hudson, UK, 1995 (1962), p. 770.



**Figure F19**

Pablo Picasso

*Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, 1910*

Oil on canvas, 101.1 x 73.3 cm

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

its role of authenticating presence not only in mimetic representation but in the representation of individual authenticity. Picasso's *Kahnweiler* offers a conception of the subject as "simulacrum instead of as origin", depicting a "loss of self instead of its consolidation."<sup>78</sup>

If Picasso's cubist portraits can be said to challenge the traditions of portraiture in its authenticating role, Marcia Pointon offers a viewing in which *Kahnweiler* nevertheless produces identity or likeness and truth in the portrait. Pointon argues that the event of a portrayal sets up a relationship between artist and sitter, affecting both artist and sitter in a perpetual oscillation between observer and observed. The resulting image, she claims, recognises the naming of two individuals, not just the one portrayed. Here, Pointon aptly applies Paul de Man's observation on the work of the anthropologist to the artist; the more intense and "truthful" the oscillation process between the observed subject and the observer grows, "it becomes less and less clear who is in fact doing the observing and who is being observed. Both parties tend to fuse into a single subject as the distance between them disappears."<sup>79</sup>

With this notion of oscillation in mind, the resulting image comprising two individuals and the dynamic between them can be said to be irreplaceable with any other genre, thereby carrying uniqueness of meaning as a portrait. The portrait, however, does not end with the resultant image as product. It comprises the relationship of the artist and sitter, but it also extends to the afterlife of the image, including what is written about it. It is the combination of fiction and reality that Picasso has employed in *Kahnweiler* – "the avoidance of *all but* the slightest trace of resemblance" – that allows for the entry of that afterlife, that

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<sup>78</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn, introd. W Godzich, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983 (1971), p. 10, as cited by Pointon, p. 193.

“empowers Kahnweiler (the dealer/writer/friend) to portray his portraitist and, by so doing, to insert his own self-portrait into the arc of the oscillating pendulum.”<sup>80</sup>

Despite seeming to be a generic representation that is so removed in resemblance from the individual it claims to represent that it has “lost face”, Picasso’s *Kahnweiler* is linked to an inheritance of portraiture in ways beyond style and technique alone. This is demonstrated by the example of Ingres, one of France’s most distinguished nineteenth century portraitists. Pointon draws parallels between Picasso’s *Kahnweiler* and Ingres’s portraits of Charles-Joseph-Laurent Cordier (1811) and of M. Bertin the elder (1832). In artistic terms, the depictions share common elements of emphasis; the male subject in three-quarter length body, the triangular compositions, highlights of the face and hands, and a heaviness of image on the lower half of the canvas. In cultural terms, Ingres’s portrait of M. Bertin is one of France’s best-known national portraits. Besides being regarded as a deeply psychologically penetrating depiction, Bertin the man represents the ideal of French bourgeois masculine strength.<sup>81</sup>

The oscillatory relationship in the contract that exists between Ingres and his subject is implicated in the oscillatory relationship between Picasso and Kahnweiler. Pointon claims that by linking Picasso’s painting with a type of portrait by Ingres,

I am reinstating both the “Frenchness” and the “portraitness” that are mobilised in the coming together of the Spanish Catalan artist and German Jewish dealer ... It is the portrait as genre and the academic French tradition (a tradition to which Cézanne, as precursor of Picasso, is also indebted) that are called upon as a language of grand gesture in an image that was through these invocations “canonised” and ensured an afterlife.<sup>82</sup>

Pointon presents Picasso’s *Kahnweiler*, then, as a shared experience of subjectivity, a constant oscillation between sitter and artist that culminates in a composite representation of identity, and is firmly linked to the authority of the genre.

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<sup>80</sup> Pointon, p. 194.

<sup>81</sup> Pointon, p. 195.

<sup>82</sup> Pointon, p. 196.

*Andy Warhol, Marilyn Diptych, 1962 (Fig. F20)*

On August 5, 1962, Marilyn Monroe died of an overdose of sleeping pills. During the next four months, Andy Warhol created a body of work based on a publicity photograph of the actress from the 1953 film *Niagara*. The photograph was directly converted into a silkscreen and the image repeatedly imprinted in grid formations on canvases, the multiple Marylins evoking strips of motion-picture film with each frame slightly different from another (Bourdon 1989).

David Bourdon describes the process of creating the *Marilyn Diptych*, also known as *100 Marylins*, as semimechanical. Warhol screened 50 images of Marylins in black onto one canvas, and another 50 in intense colours on another panel, in a way that was repetitious but not identical or uniform; Marilyn's face varies from a crisp to a smudged image on the black-screened panel, while the brightly coloured images appear slightly off-register. In so doing, writes Bourdon, a new kind of painterly technique was created out of a mechanical process that achieved "the look of autographic touch." Bourdon adds, "Admirers found such discrepancies (that is, the accidents that occurred between each manually squeegeed print) to be a virtue, claiming these minor variations made his art subtly expressive."<sup>83</sup>

It is significant that Bourdon writes "the look of" autographic touch. Just as Warhol undermines the presence of a singular true self of the traditional portrait by his 100 representations of Marilyn – all the same but slightly different – so too his own presence as artist, of individuality and uniqueness is effaced. Moreover, the power relationship between sitter and artist is now a less democratic relationship between artist and object (the photograph of the portrayed) rather than between artist and subjectcs. Van Alphen argues that when the subject in a Warhol portrait takes on explicit mythical proportions, the subjectivity of both the portrayer and the portrayed disappears:

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<sup>83</sup> David Bourdon, *Warhol*, Harry N Abrams Inc., New York, 1989, p. 126.



### Figure F20

Andy Warhol  
*Marilyn Diptych*, 1962  
Acrylic on canvas,  
2054 x 1448 x 20 mm.  
Tate collection, London



### Figure 21

Andy Warhol  
*Ten Portraits of Jews of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 1980  
Portfolio of ten screenprints on Lenox Museum Board,  
101.6 x 81.3 cm  
Printer: Rupert Jasen Smith, NY.

Warhol's individuality, his painterly performance, is systematically absent. His photographically based, mechanically produced portraits leave no room for the illusion of the unique self of the portrayer. But the portrayed sitters are also bereft of their interiority. They are exhibited as public substitutes for subjectivity. They are represented in the public mode and myth of the "star". We see not a unique self, but a subject in the image of the star, totally modelled on this public fantasy of "stardom".<sup>84</sup>

Cécile Whiting, too, makes the point that Warhol's portrayals are not about real people but about their "public image in its purest form".<sup>85</sup> Whiting claims that we immediately recognise the women in Warhol's paintings without needing to read their titles because their images have already been typecast so successfully by the mass media that their "brand-name" is an immediately identifiable face and figure.<sup>86</sup> Warhol emphasises the exteriority of that "brand-name", or in Whiting's term "brand-face" in *Marilyn* by exaggerating the surface features of the public self we recognise; Monroe's red lips and blue eye shadow are larger than the areas of makeup, and her blondness is represented in a defined yellow patch. Her identity is that of a type named *Marilyn*, but her interiority or private self is non-existent.

In this way, Warhol's portraits undermine the core of the traditional portrait, which exists by virtue of its reference to a person outside the portrait: "They refer to mass media-produced stereotypes, simulacra, or masquerades that function as screens that block a transparent view of reality or individuality."<sup>87</sup> This idea of "stereotype" becomes problematic, however, with Warhol's *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century*, 1980.

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<sup>84</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 28.

<sup>85</sup> Cécile Whiting, "Andy Warhol, the Public Star and the Private Self?" (special issue on *The 60s*), *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1987, p. 58.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 37.

## Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century, 1980 (Fig. F21)

In the early 1980s, I had a picture of Andy Warhol's *Kafka* hanging on my wall. It was the deep blue tones of Kafka's face differentiated from the black background by a few essential outlines, and the contrasting yellow slit-like form across the lips, that appealed to my own creative melancholy at that time. I had cut the image out of a magazine reproduction promoting Warhol's *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century* that was being shown at the Jewish Museum in New York, and which, in addition to Franz Kafka, comprised the portraits of Albert Einstein, Gertrude Stein, Martin Buber, George Gershwin, Sarah Bernhardt, Louis Brandeis, the Marx Brothers, Golda Meir and Sigmund Freud. Each of the portraits was based on photographs that were themselves iconic of the Jewish figures, all of whom were dead.<sup>88</sup>

The art dealer and gallery owner Ronald Feldman commissioned Warhol to create a print portfolio of ten Jewish icons who had contributed to twentieth-century civilisation.<sup>89</sup> Feldman had noticed that Warhol was changing his approach from serialising a subject with identical-like prints, as in the Marilyn series, to serialising different aspects of his subject matter. For example, the Muhammad Ali series of 1978 was made up of four different views of Ali's head or hand, thereby creating a fractured image of the person.<sup>90</sup>

This series was not made up of multiples of the one image as in the *Marilyn* series, but rather ten aspects of a singular subject, and it is this that contributed to the controversy surrounding the exhibition at the Jewish Museum. Hilton Kramer wrote in the *New York Times* that "the way (the series) exploits its Jewish subjects without showing the slightest

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<sup>88</sup> Catherine Soussloff makes the point that this referencing of photographs acts as a kind of documentary proof of identification, and thereby validates the "exteriority and truth claim" that characterises conventions of the genre of portraiture, Soussloff, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> Warhol later extended this project by producing three near identical series of large silkscreened paintings of these images.

<sup>90</sup> Beth Schwartzapfel, "Warhol's Tribe", *The Jewish Daily: Forward*, Feb 23, 2007, viewed 19 March, 2008, <<http://www.forward.com/articles/10159/>>.

grasp of their significance is offensive”.<sup>91</sup> Carrie Rickey, the art critic reviewing the show for *Artforum* magazine, first responded to the concept of the show as “Jewploitation”, whose “only raison d’être was to penetrate a new market: the Synagogue circuit.” Yet “somehow this segregated ethnic segment – as offensive as it does sound – provided Warhol with enough referents to make the work successful,” she wrote. “The paintings of Jews had an unexpected mix of cultural anthropology, portraiture, celebration of celebrity, and study of intelligentsia – all at the same time.”<sup>92</sup> Roberta Bernstein notes that while Warhol’s portrayals of “surface” fit an interpretation of the “glamorous celebrities and socialites, its appropriateness for historical figures of the type in this portfolio [of the twentieth-century Jews] is questionable,” and lack his “unique ability to make insightful selections.”<sup>93</sup>

In her exploration of Warhol’s *Ten Jews*, Bluma Goldstein claims there is nothing in the portraits that reveals the cultural or social significance of the subjects’ “Jewishness”.<sup>94</sup> This seems a valid expectation from the point of view of the traditional portrait, which claims the successful portraits reveal some insight into the person portrayed, or his story. However, the point is also being made that Warhol’s surface approach to portraying celebrity can result in a cliché, rather than reflection of a cliché, when applied to subjects whose fame is not grounded in their images.

In an article that concentrates particularly on the Warhol portrait of Kafka, Goldstein argues that by artistically altering and separating Kafka’s face from the context of the rest of the original photograph, or even from the abridged image used in the public arena, Warhol obscures more complex understandings of Kafka’s life and writings: “Warhol’s

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<sup>91</sup> Hilton Kramer, “Art: Warhol Show at Jewish Museum”, *New York Times*, Sept. 19, 1980, cited in Bourdon, pp. 384-85.

<sup>92</sup> Carrie Rickey, “‘Andy Warhol: Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century’, The Jewish Museum”, *Artforum*, vol 19, no. 4, Dec. 1980, p. 72.

<sup>93</sup> Roberta Bernstein, “Warhol as Printmaker” in Frayda Feldman and Jorg Schellmann (eds), *Andy Warhol Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné*, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, 1985, p. 18, cited in Bluma Goldstein, “Andy Warhol: His Kafka and ‘Jewish Geniuses’”, *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, Fall 2000, p. 128.

<sup>94</sup> Bluma Goldstein, “Andy Warhol: His Kafka and ‘Jewish Geniuses’”, *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, Fall 2000, p. 129.

artistic application seems clearly directed toward articulating a distinctive interpretation of the represented figure, albeit a conception that was and largely remains virtually a commonplace, a veritable cliché, and one that I find very problematic.”<sup>95</sup>

As suggested above, the *Marilyn* portraits, through their “branding”, deplete the portrait of the private self or reference to the “real” person behind the public image. Goldstein claims that in Warhol’s *Kafka*, however, the opposite takes place. The “public exterior aspect of the figure in the original photograph is effaced or erased to reveal an interior life, an existential self, that bears almost no reference to the public image.”<sup>96</sup>

In other words, it could be said that Warhol is stereotyping his own style to create an image of Kafka’s inner self. If the allusion is indeed to an inner self, then the “inner self” becomes a stereotype, inviting a surface reading or engagement. Here, it may be that Warhol’s choice of subjects, emphasised in the series’ title, raises viewer expectations to engage with some kind of insight into the subjects’ genius or Jewishness. This expectation differs from the “star” branding of Marilyn and other celebrity portraits whose images are central to their fame rather than their cultural/social contributions.

What are the implications of applying the stereotype or surfacing that was used for celebrity, to ethnicity? Is Warhol inadvertently, or consciously, feeding into the image of a Jewish stereotype – for if this series is seen as a singular portrait, it is not so much ten aspects of the same subject, but ten versions of the iconic Jew? While these Jews are famous, the question may arise whether the subject is their fame, or their genius, or their Jewishness. Or is the subject of these portraits actually the public? Or is it about Andy Warhol? Rather than providing answers, it seems that Warhol’s portraits mobilise debate and explorations in our thinking about social and cultural contexts and concerns.

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<sup>95</sup> Goldstein, p. 130.

<sup>96</sup> Goldstein, p. 131.

*Christian Boltanski, Le Lycée Chases, 1987–1991 (Figs F22, F23, F24)*

The first time I encountered the work of Christian Boltanski was at a friend's home in the late 1990s. My friend handed me, with ritual-like care, a large and very thick book. Each of the hundreds of pages of that book, or so my memory has distilled, was a close-up photograph of a face with no accompanying text naming or situating the person photographed. As such, the blurred faces and “silent” narratives seemed familiar yet unrecognisable, and the story behind the face was left to my imagination. The effect of that mystery was of solemnity, of the sense that these were pictures of dead people, or at least a dead time. What was left was to imaginatively and emotionally engage with an abstracted face. In retracing that book for the purpose of my research, I now know that what I was looking at was Boltanski's *Kaddish* (1998), and that it in fact included photographs of objects and buildings, as well as family album-like photographs. But what remained dominant in my memory were the faces. To me, the sheer number of close-ups of faces represented in the book and the allusion to a past transported my imagination towards an effect of ghostliness, and of genocide, or what Ernst van Alphen calls the “holocaust-effect”.<sup>97</sup>

We can see this demonstrated in the memorial-like work, *Le Lycée Chases*, in its various installations in the years 1987 to 1991. Boltanski based this work on an original school-class photograph of the 1931 graduating class of the Jewish Chases High School in Vienna, enlarging and re-photographing the individual faces till no detail remained. He first exhibited them perched over stacked, rusty biscuit tins, the photographs not so much illuminated as obscured by harsh, reflected light from desk lamps clipped onto the portraits.<sup>98</sup> The resulting portraits, while alluding to specific identities, blur the detail of features and have consequently become anonymous identities. It is not only the blurring of

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<sup>97</sup> Ernst van Alphen, “The portrait's dispersal” in J Woodall, p. 248.

<sup>98</sup> Lynn Gumpert, *Christian Boltanski*, Flammarion, Paris, 1994, pp. 102-103.

**Figure F22**

Photograph of the graduating class,  
Chajes high school, 1931  
Vienna.



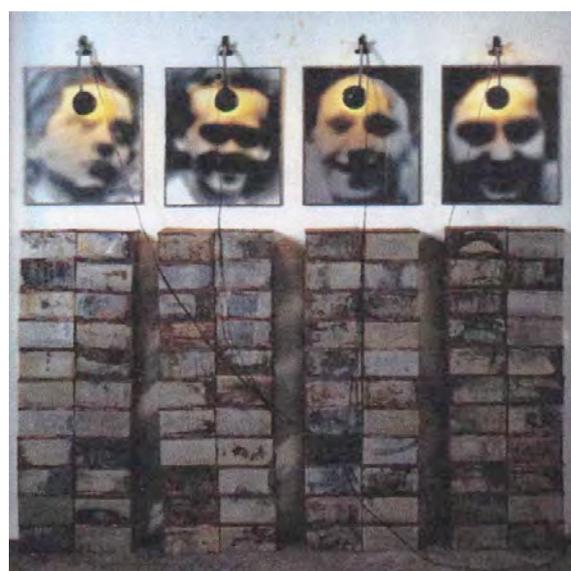
**Figure F23**

Christian Boltanski  
*Le Lycée Chases*, 1991  
1 of 24 photogravures, a portfolio  
in a metal box  
Sheet: Each 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
Image: Each 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ "  
Printer: Daria Sywulak  
Publisher: Crown Point Press  
Edition 15.



**Figure F24**

Christian Boltanski  
*Le Lycée Chases* (detail), 1987–1991  
Black-and-white photographs, tin  
boxes, clamp-on lamps,  
Installation.



their features that abstracts their identities, but also the absence of their surroundings. Martin Golding (1999) writes that by removing the context of place, that which contributed to their identity is absent. We recognise that these faces which are familiar to us as snapshots as ordinary as our own, belonged originally to a place no longer known: “They are unmistakable, but at the same time they are nowhere.”<sup>99</sup> The faces imply a history by manipulating our knowledge of images that refer to specific narratives, thus affecting our emotional perception.

The mystery created when Boltanski’s iconic memorials imply a history devoid of the specifics of events but charged with emotive memory is what Ernst van Alphen terms the “holocaust-effect”. Van Alphen writes that where photographs are conventionally storages of memory, referring to someone and making that person present, Boltanski’s photographic images have been abstracted to the extent that they signify “absence” rather than “presence”. Despite the actual subjects not being Holocaust victims, the blown-up photographs remind us of images of Holocaust survivors with their hollow, lifeless appearance of sunken eyes and deathly-pale faces. Van Alphen claims that this way of representation undermines the idea of “presence” in the portrait of an individual: “All the portraits are exchangeable: the portrayed have become anonymous, they all evoke absence.”<sup>100</sup> Boltanski’s portraits evoke the absence of the referent outside the image, for the artist is representing the people as dead, and, with no characteristics that may reveal an essence of an individual, the portraits evoke an absence of the conventional “presence” within the image. The portraits are not about referencing or reconstructing the identities of the young people of the original photograph, but about the “re-enactment” of a process, “the process of loss of self.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Martin Golding, “Memory, Commemoration, and the Photograph”, *Modern Painters*, vol. 12, no. 1, Spring 1999, p. 93.

<sup>100</sup> Van Alphen, “The portrait’s dispersal”, p. 248.

<sup>101</sup> Marita Sturken, Review of Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography and the Holocaust in Afterimage*, May 1999, no page specified, viewed 19 March, 2008, <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2479/is\\_/ai\\_54869106](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2479/is_/ai_54869106)>.

When words such as *absence* and *anonymous* enter into discussions of presence and subjectivity, it becomes clear through the work of artists like Boltanski that during the latter decades of the twentieth century, portraits were no longer unambiguously situated within the boundaries of an established genre. By the twenty-first century, portraiture has become a site for examining conceptual paradoxes, and for challenging conventions and perceptions beyond the context of art and history, within cultural contexts of representation, of place and identity.

## 3 SEEING

### On visuality

In 1972, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* demonstrated to the public the power of images in our lives. In the BBC series and the accompanying book, he analysed the relationship between what and how we see, and our social and political understandings; while we explain our world with words, he claimed, "it is seeing which establishes our place" in it.<sup>1</sup> Berger's ideas on the viewing and contexts of art were largely based on Walter Benjamin's ground-breaking essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), which in turn built on Paul Valéry's writings on aesthetics in the 1930s: "For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art."<sup>2</sup>

Benjamin's influential essay marked the aesthetic and political repercussions of the advent and advance of mechanically reproduced art – in particular film – and problematised the authority of authenticity and origin in the art object. Mechanical reproduction changes not only our modes of viewing, claims Benjamin, but the very purpose of art. The advent of photography, for example, caused a profound change in public perception, for not only is it able to reproduce works of art for all to view in any context, it also holds a place as an

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<sup>1</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, BBC and Penguin Books, London, 1972, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, Pimlico, London, 1999 (1955), p. 211.

art process on its own merits. The authenticity of the art object, then, comes into question when authenticity means the presence of an origin:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.<sup>3</sup>

Benjamin writes of the notions of “trace” and “aura” as terms relating to the work of art, and how they work to either possess or distance the viewer:

The trace is the appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. Aura is the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura it takes possession of us.<sup>4</sup>

The “aura” that exists in an image outside the painting as a visual phenomenon in the natural world is defined by Benjamin as a distance, where the scope of what one experiences in reality is beyond one’s reach or existence.<sup>5</sup> The “aura” as uniqueness that exists in a painting, or by implication “in the domain of tradition”, is absent from the mechanically reproduced object.

Comparing painting as a vision of totality, with film as an assemblage of multiple fragments, Benjamin notes that techniques in film used to represent the natural world reveal an entirely new way of visualising and therefore perceiving our environment. For example, the use of close-ups of the things that are normally hidden from our sight in reality expands our sense of space, while with slow motion, movement is extended. “The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. So, too,

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<sup>3</sup> W Benjamin, p. 215.

<sup>4</sup> Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin, Critical Constellations*, Polity Press, UK, 2002, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> W Benjamin, p. 216.

slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones.”<sup>6</sup>

The social significance of film, claims Benjamin, is that it is able to destroy the traditional value of cultural heritage. This new perception threatens the stability of traditional authority:

The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind.<sup>7</sup>

The “contemporary decay” of the aura by means of the reproduction is due to the growing collective “sense of the universal equality of things”, the desire to bring things “closer” and to overcome the overwhelming uniqueness of every reality.<sup>8</sup> Benjamin writes that mechanical reproduction changed the reaction of the masses toward art, and film in particular has been powerful in doing so. For Benjamin, film, more than painting, is able to represent reality by penetrating the viewer’s consciousness through technique without the viewer’s awareness of that technique. The public becomes both critic and participant at the same time: “The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.”<sup>9</sup> Film, claims Benjamin, can present an object for viewing as a simultaneous collective experience, in a “direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert”,<sup>10</sup> in a way that painting cannot.

Over thirty-five years later, John Berger expands on Benjamin’s ideas on art reproduction and its political and social repercussions from the perspective of the age of

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<sup>6</sup> W Benjamin, pp. 229-230.

<sup>7</sup> W Benjamin, p. 215.

<sup>8</sup> W Benjamin, pp. 216-217.

<sup>9</sup> W Benjamin, p. 234.

<sup>10</sup> W Benjamin, p. 227.

television. Berger, like Benjamin, argues that the camera, and in particular the movie camera, changed the way we viewed the world. Our visual perception changed from the conventions of perspective that had existed since the early Renaissance and which structured all images of reality to a centred eye, a single spectator, so that the viewer of an artwork using perspective became the unique centre of the world. The camera offered a different way of viewing that saw things relative to the viewer's position in time and space. The eye of the camera enabled the viewer to see images in constant movement, in complex variations of speed and viewpoints unavailable to the viewer in the natural world, thus freeing the viewing from the boundaries of time and space and demonstrating that there is no centre.<sup>11</sup>

While today we are living with and using imagery in the multiple, fragmented, and virtual ways that both Benjamin and Berger realised but could not have experienced at the time of writing, their ideas resonate with me when I recall the portrait of Zinedine Zidane that I viewed in 2006 (Fig. S1). My understanding of just how deeply the moving image has penetrated into public/social consciousness was all the more illuminating because I was viewing a work that claimed connections to a traditional genre by defining itself as a portrait, yet offered not so much a new take on portraiture, nor so much a representation of portraiture in a medium other than the one most likely to be associated with it. Rather, this portrait reached out to a collective viewing that lives the language of moving images and will therefore understand and take pleasure in the subject as a portrayal.

*Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait* (2006) is a film portrait of the footballer Zinedine Zidane by the artists Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno. The film, at 92 minutes long, is a real-time feature of a match between Real Madrid and Villarreal on April 23, 2005. Yet the game is not the focus of the film, but is its context. The subject is Zidane, and

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<sup>11</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, pp. 17-18.



**Figure S1**

Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno  
*Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait*, 2006  
Documentary film, 92 minutes.

seventeen synchronised cameras focus only on him throughout the match. The footage shots abruptly change, showing him in stillness and in action, in close-up shots so intimate we see a sweat bead forming on his earlobe and at a distance in wide-shots in front of a vast crowd of 80,000, surrounded by players in “the strangest and most public form of isolation.”<sup>12</sup> We see him, in other words, through multiple perspectives that are unattainable to us in the natural world. While the eye of the camera is centred on Zidane, the space of our experience is extended through sound – the varying volume and mix of the soundtrack music, crowd noise, sounds from the pitch, media commentary, breathing, padding boots on the turf – and text in the form of subtitles of Zidane’s quotes from previous interviews.

Reading reviewers’ comments, it seems that the “aura” of the painting has returned, albeit not as object, but as experience of presence:

It’s a reflective, meditative, hypnotic work; an extraordinary portrait of an activity and an individual.<sup>13</sup>

Zidane’s charisma accumulates and the film becomes a hypnotic experience to which you must simply abandon yourself ... This movie is a must-see for everyone interested in football, and anyone interested in how cinema is capable of stillness and portraiture, how it can do without the various conventions of fiction or documentary.<sup>14</sup>

*Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* washes over the audience in a combination of light, sound and emotion, somehow encapsulating everything that is great about soccer into a single man, in a single game.... It’s both a revelation and a simple confirmation of everything you’ve ever believed, and an incredibly powerful, deeply emotional experience.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Philippa Hawker, “Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait”, *The Age*, Melbourne, 22 March, 2007, viewed 13 July 2008, <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/film-reviews/zidane-a-21stcentury-portrait/2007/03/22/1174153235204.html>>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Bradshaw, “Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait”, *The Guardian*, UK, 29 September 2006, viewed 13 July 2008, <[http://film.guardian.co.uk/News\\_Story/Critic\\_Review/Guardian\\_review/0,1882995,00.html](http://film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_review/0,1882995,00.html)>.

<sup>15</sup> Martha Fischer, “TIFF Review: Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait”, *Cinematical*, 14 Sep 2006, viewed 13 July 2008, <<http://www.cinematical.com/2006/09/14/tiff-review-zidane-a-21st-century-portrait/>>.

Not only the greatest football movie ever made, but one of the finest studies of man in the workplace – an ode to the loneliness of the athlete, the poise and resilience of the human body.<sup>16</sup>

Paradoxically however, in this case aura rather than being destroyed by reproduction, seems to be generated by it. As suggested above, the emotional response of awe to the mythologised subject of Zidane is not due to seeing him, but to experiencing him through the vision of the camera – a vision that is beyond the possibility of the ordinary. Our experiencing of, or identification with the subject is made possible through the multiplicity, repetition, scale, and timing of the filmic viewing, and it is this process that possesses us.

Paradoxically again, the viewing that possesses us can also distance us:

Many people will hate this film. People will find it boring, monotonous and lifeless and find themselves heading for the exit door after 20 minutes of watching *Zizou* sweat, spit, mumble, run, pass and stand still doing absolutely nothing at times.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, the contrasts throughout the film that reviewers such as Dave Calhoun note – action and stillness, the epic and the intimate, the loner and the crowd, that make the film paradoxically mesmerising and boring, fascinating and frustrating – could be said to be precisely the process by which we experience the complexity that is the subject of the portrait.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the portrait is performative. At the end of the film portrait we still do not “know” Zidane as an essential self,<sup>19</sup> but we have followed Zidane intimately, and it may be said we have imaginatively mirrored him in that following. Rather than capturing a singular essence of Zidane, the portrayal is one that offers us an insight into the world of Zidane, without explanations or interpretations, for in a way, we become the artists just as we become the subject – through a process of identification. The viewer has become

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<sup>16</sup> Chris Paine, “Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait”, *ABC Sport Online*, 10 March 2007, viewed 13 July 2008, <<http://www.abc.net.au/sport/columns/200703/s1868492.htm?football>>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Dave Calhoun, “Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait”, *Time Out London*, Issue 1884, 27 September–4 October 2006, viewed 13 July 2008, <[http://www.timeout.com/film/newyork/reviews/83715/Zidane-A\\_21st\\_Century\\_Portrait.html](http://www.timeout.com/film/newyork/reviews/83715/Zidane-A_21st_Century_Portrait.html)>.

<sup>19</sup> Leigh Singer writes in his *Channel 4* film review that even Zidane’s subtitled thoughts “do little to illuminate the man”, Leigh Singer, “Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait Review”, *Channel 4*, viewed 13 July 2008, <<http://www.channel4.com/film/reviews/film.jsp?id=158199>>.

simultaneously the eye of the camera and the critic (the commentator/interpreter) – at once the insider and the outsider.

The portrait of Zidane is articulated in what John Berger describes as a “new language of images”, used “to confer a new kind of power”, within which we “define our experiences more precisely in areas where words are inadequate.”<sup>20</sup> But is the intent behind the portrayal nevertheless a portrayal of “likeness”, implying the traditional function of portraiture to immortalise the portrayed by universalising the moment of portrayal into an essential “likeness”? What better proof of that likeness, than when the portrayed returns his gaze to the portrayal and recognises himself as the familiarity of “home”: “I feel so close to the image that I’m seeing, that I look like my brother talking to my mother in the kitchen late at night.”<sup>21</sup> For the artists, the link to the traditions of dualism through “likeness” seems to credit the film with its presence as portraiture: referring to Zidane’s statement, the artist Douglas Gordon claims, “It doesn’t get any better than that, in terms of traditional portraiture, when the subject sees something in your image that you could never have imagined.”<sup>22</sup>

In this way, can it not be said that the “aura” returns to the film, since as a portrait, a uniqueness or an essential truth is being claimed to exist somewhere in the portrayal? Is this the same “aura” that Benjamin describes as distancing in the painting?

If “aura” distances the viewer, it is problematised when the work of art is positioned within traditions of portraiture that place the human being at its centre, but when the work itself is produced through a performative process involving the viewer in a “new language of images” that by its nature is non-centred and involves the intimacy of trace. Is this film, then, a reenactment of the traditional portrait, albeit in a different language? Or does the

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<sup>20</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> The artist Douglas Gordon quoting Zidane’s recorded response to seeing six minutes of the film, with the music soundtrack, in Philippa Hawker, “Self-possession”, *The Age*, 2 March 2007, viewed 13 July 2008, <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/film/selfpossession/2007/03/01/1172338765830.html?page=fullpage>>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

difference of language create a difference in viewing, as Benjamin claimed, and thereby in meaning, including difference in the way “aura” can be understood? Perhaps it can be said that if an essence of being or a sense of authenticity, or even a certain “reverence” is to be found, it is not within the portrait as object or history, but experientially, in an affective process of discovery. It is a “becoming”, and is relative, dependent on the process of the viewer’s positioning and identification.

In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger suggested that if reproductions were to be used other than to promote the illusion of a democratic appreciation in what was once privileged territory, the “new language of images” would gain power beyond that of personal experience. It would allow us to experience history in a way that is meaningful to our lives, to try “to understand the history of which we can become the active agents.”<sup>23</sup> He makes the point that the way we view art, and thereby the way we view the past, is a political issue, not an issue that is isolated within the reading of personal experience or disciplines of art history.

Berger highlights the gap between the study of art as history, and art and representation as culture, as language, as a way of viewing the world. My own experience as an art student at the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem suggests that by the mid-seventies, there was a growing realisation that artmaking could not be restricted to the boundaries of the traditional disciplines offered in art schools. In my third year at art school, students took “revolutionary” strike action, and demanded that the school’s structure accommodate the kind of art that was being produced – conceptual, performance, installation – which did not fit into the restrictions of representations in the disciplines of “drawing”, “painting”, “sculpture” and “printmaking”. The result of that action was the formation of a new department in the school called the “Interdisciplinary Department”.

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<sup>23</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 33.

Catherine Soussloff (2006) writes that the monodisciplinary approach to art prevalent in modernism, consisting of iconography, connoisseurship, and critical formalism, was mainly due to the idea of art and art history “without the social subject.”<sup>24</sup> Examining portraiture as an approach to viewing, Soussloff argues that the significance of twentieth-century portraits in any concept of representation of what it is to be human lies not only in their existence as fictions (insomuch as works of art are fictions), nor as documents that give evidence of an individual’s appearance and existence, but in their particular mode of engagement. They have given us a way of engaging with representation as such “at the most acute level of historical significance: the human, or subjective level.” That subjectivity is triangulated – the viewer’s, the artist’s, and the person’s in the portrait – giving us “the ways that others have represented themselves to us, just as they show us ourselves in the world created by representations of others.”<sup>25</sup> Building on the theories of the Viennese artists and historians in the early twentieth century, Soussloff argues that in this approach, the portrait becomes understood in relational terms rather than as a narrative or an historical event, in the way that film or montage can bring together multiple shots and movement of points of view to engender a new idea or consciousness rather than a narrative position of viewing. Viewed as a relational positioning, the portrait in the form of a still image gives us a way of understanding visual representation as multiple in its points of view, mutable depending on context, and contingent depending on viewer.<sup>26</sup> In Soussloff’s words, this approach takes us away from the passive statement “It is painted” to the complex action of “I see another.”

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<sup>24</sup> Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2006, p. 117.

<sup>25</sup> Soussloff, p. 120.

<sup>26</sup> Soussloff, p. 122.

## Visual culture

During the 1980s and 1990s, the study of art, history, and culture were overlapping and weaving into each other's disciplines. Art was being recognised as social practice, and the study of art was expanding beyond its disciplinary history and into a new area – visual culture. The visual arts were being “disentangled” from their traditional objects of inquiry such as painting and sculpture, and positioned not only within the fine arts, but along a broader continuum of the visual, thus foregrounding a new discourse on the nature of contemporary visibility itself.<sup>27</sup>

Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998) defines visual culture as an understanding of visual existence that is concerned with visual events in which the consumer seeks information, meaning or pleasure through visual technology; that is to say, through anything that is designed to enhance natural vision, whether it be a painting or electronic media. Visual culture takes into account the image, its production, and its cultural reception.<sup>28</sup>

Over the last five years, scholars such as Susan Buck-Morss (2004), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (2008) have been calling attention to the aesthetic, social and political relevance of visual studies in the academy:

Viewed through a new optic, texts, films, buildings, urban form, popular festivity, and other phenomena normally regarded as remote from the study of the visual and performing arts reveal their performative character. Seen in these terms, such phenomena require more than a contextual approach – studying art in a society way and society in an aesthetic way – if we are to illuminate their constitutive capacities, that is, not only what they say and how, but also what they do and to what effect.<sup>29</sup>

Visual Studies can provide the opportunity to engage in a transformation of thought on a general level. Indeed, the very elusiveness of Visual Studies gives this endeavour the

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<sup>27</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (eds), *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, “What is Visual Culture?” in his (ed) *The Visual Culture Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Karp, p. 1.

epistemological resiliency necessary to confront a present transformation in existing structures of knowledge, one that is being played out in institutional venues throughout the globe.<sup>30</sup>

While the area of visual culture studies need not be seen as replacement for or displacement of Art History, it nevertheless poses challenges to the discipline. Buck-Morss writes that “on the one hand the discipline of the History of Art as traditionally practiced is most vulnerable to the challenge of Visual Studies; on the other, as the most authoritative domain for the modern study of the visual, it can lay strong claim to be its legitimate home.”<sup>31</sup> Likewise, one can draw parallels between both portraiture and diaspora to the contradictions in Art History’s position facing Visual Studies; new diasporas both challenge and incorporate ideas and traditions of nation-states as well as of traditional diasporas, while a performative multi-centred approach to portraiture can be seen as both challenging and located within an historical, centred viewing of an individual’s representation. In other words, in both areas, the challenges to the conventions of authority do not merely reject traditions but are embedded within them. Diaspora and portraiture both connect to their traditions, and in fact need their traditions, not in order to nostalgically repeat them, but to relate to the past as relevant, as living and active through change.<sup>32</sup>

### *Diasporic visual culture*

An emergent area within visual culture studies is that of diasporic visual culture, where diaspora culture is based on mutual diasporic experiences. Nicholas Mirzoeff recognises the paradoxes in diaspora representation, since by their nature contemporary diasporas cannot be fully known, seen, or quantified: “A diaspora cannot be seen in any traditional

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<sup>30</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, “Visual Studies and Global Imagination”, *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 2, summer 2004, p. 1, viewed 16 September 2008,

<[http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/publications/papers/journal2/acrobat\\_files/buck\\_morss\\_article.pdf](http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/publications/papers/journal2/acrobat_files/buck_morss_article.pdf)>.

This paper was presented by Buck-Morss at the Tate Modern in London, 3 June, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Benjamin refers to such a space that is non-nostalgic when he describes the notion of “the affirmative”. See Andrew Benjamin, *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde*, Routledge, London and New York, 1991, p. 63.

sense and it certainly cannot be represented from the viewpoint of one-point perspective.”<sup>33</sup> As discussed in the chapter *Moving* above, the space of diaspora exists in time and place, encompassing those who leave as well as those who stay and those who return. It is multiple, fluid, and at times paradoxical. It is about the future as well as the past. While diaspora identity can be understood in terms of “double consciousness”, as a tension in belonging, or in Mirzoeff’s words, as a dialectic between past and present, it may also be rethought in terms of an indeterminate future to come.<sup>34</sup> In this light, Mirzoeff sees Derrida’s notion of *différance* relating to his Jewishness, as opposed to Judaism, as one of being “open to a future radically to *come*, which is to say indeterminate, determined only by the opening of the future to come.”<sup>35</sup> Mirzoeff adds that by weaving the notion of the future into diaspora identity, the consciousness of diaspora expands, including the possibility of a re-evaluation of diasporas, past, present and future. Explorations of diasporic visual culture, then, can enter such a discussion not only through representations of diaspora, but through a “diasporic” approach to representation.

In the late 1980s, the artist RB Kitaj published a text that laid a foundation for thinking about diasporic consciousness in relation to the artist and artistic production. Extending the definition of the diasporic identity beyond the dispersed nation-state, beyond ethnicity or race, to include “Jew, Black, Arab, Homosexual, Gypsy, Asian, émigrés from despotism, bad luck, etc,”<sup>36</sup> he presents the notion of the “diasporist painting” that mirrors a “diasporist” state or “mode” of existence. In his *First Diasporist Manifesto* (1989) (Fig. S2) Kitaj argues for such an approach as a “Diasporic Vision, Jewish and not; Diasporist painting of all things.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed), *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> By “double consciousness” Mirzoeff refers to W. E. B. Dubois’s (1989) concept of doubleness. Mirzoeff, p. 4.

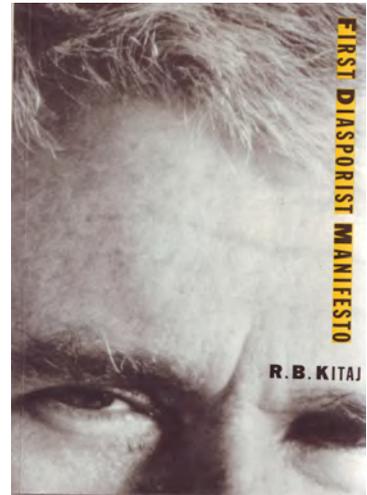
<sup>35</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1996, p. 70, as cited in Mirzoeff, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> R B Kitaj, *First Diasporist Manifesto*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1989, pp. 75-76.

<sup>37</sup> Kitaj, p. 13.

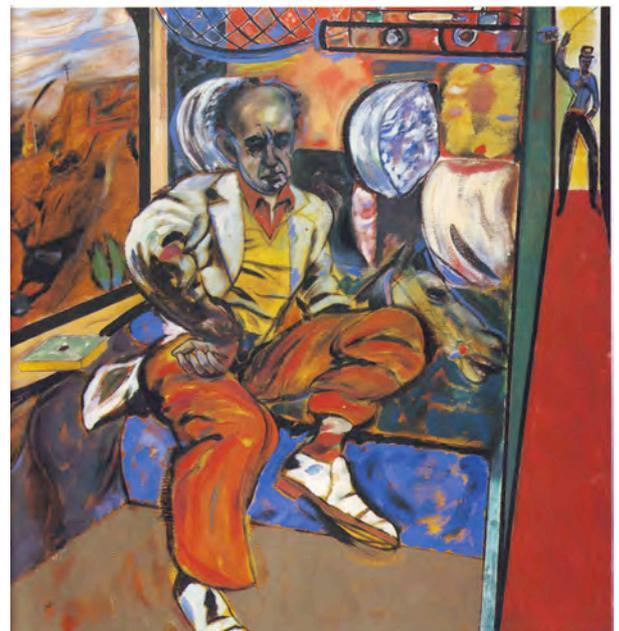
**Figure S2**

R B Kitaj  
*First Diasporist Manifesto*  
(front cover), 1989  
Thames & Hudson, London  
Frontispiece: Sandra.



**Figure S3**

R B Kitaj  
*The Jewish Rider*, 1984–85  
Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm



A number of scholarly interpretations of Kitaj's artwork recognise the diasporic elements his work presents in a postmodern context. Andrew Benjamin interprets the paintings as a site that brings up "the space of paradox – space that contains the past but which moves toward the future; the space of process rather than stasis."<sup>38</sup> Carol Zemel (2008) writes of the ambivalent and multiple subjectivities that are raised by work such as Kitaj's *The Jewish Rider*, 1984–85 (Fig. S3), those qualities that are the hallmark of diaspora's "double consciousness".<sup>39</sup> Kitaj himself writes that diasporist art welcomes multiple meanings and interpretations, and meanings that change over time:

There are very real shifts of received meaning among the audience of even the most sophisticated painting, even from beholder to beholder. Meanings in my own pictures change over the years, like the way you understand your child during certain years, and then you both grow older and you mean different things to each other ... Indeterminacy of meaning is quite compatible with truth and meaning.<sup>40</sup>

However, it is not my intention here to analyse Kitaj's artwork but rather to engage with his writing. I have been moved by Kitaj's work since well before first reading his *Manifesto* in the mid-1990s. Perhaps this has been due to an affinity with his Jewish themes, or his fragmented, at times fluid imagery, or perhaps with his drawing skills and style, which have influenced my work and which I continue to value and admire. However, for the purpose of this exegesis, what interests me is Kitaj writing as artist. Kitaj's writing is similar in style to his paintings – fragmentary, metaphorical, allegorical, and at times contradictory. In the spirit of his *Manifesto*, in which he declares the all-importance of ideas for his art, and in light of his prolific texts, I relate to his ideas and his expression through his writing as inseparable from his painting, that is, as part of his practice.

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<sup>38</sup> A Benjamin, p. 96.

<sup>39</sup> Carol Zemel, "Diasporic Values in Contemporary Art: Kitaj, Datchor, Frenkel" in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Karp, p. 177.

<sup>40</sup> Kitaj, p. 63.

In his writing, Kitaj seems to be attempting to be understood, on the one hand, and to be claiming that meaning is indeterminate on the other. This, I believe, is another facet in the relationship to “home” of diaspora, that is, the anxiety to be understood. The possibility of being understood, or “at home”, may be found, Kitaj suggests, in the collectivity of the diasporist situation itself:

The Diasporist pursuit of a homeless logic of *ethnie* may be the radical (root) core of a newer art than we can yet imagine ... those of us who think we can relate our past experience of Diaspora to a present understanding of it in painted, hopefully universal, pictures which may speak to many people.<sup>41</sup>

This paradoxical situation is indicative of the contradictions and problematics within diaspora, as well as in Kitaj’s Diasporist painting, and Kitaj admits that the futurity of diaspora as life and art incorporates the inevitability of change:

You can never be sure how well assimilated the Diasporist painter is in the Man’s country and so, as people do in ordinary life, the Diasporist does in our very extraordinary painting life. He blends and he does not; he breaks and trips over rules and molds assumed by the clairvoyants of assimilationist aesthetics.<sup>42</sup>

Diasporist art can be inconsistent, as can life in diaspora, for consistency implies settledness. Diasporist art, inseparable from Diasporist ideas, is fluid; “any exciting life of the mind will keep changing one’s art.”<sup>43</sup> There is restlessness in that process, an inheritance of exile:

Ill and good winds blow through Diaspora and breathe on the Diasporist’s artistic upbringing. I always know I may have to move on, to get out before it’s too late, and so I daydream about other places while I’m painting. One dream leads to another and changes the aspects and direction of the picture if exilic longing moves the brush from beyond.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Kitaj, p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> Kitaj, p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> Kitaj, p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> Kitaj, p. 61.

For Kitaj, art and life are “married”. While he suggests the possibility of a collective vision of Diasporist art, a movement like those of Cubism or Surrealism, Kitaj is presenting *his* Diasporist art, the particularity of the personal, based on his heritage, his Jewishness and his family’s diasporic state, and the recognition of both these aspects within himself in his later years:

Diasporism is my mode. It is the way I do my pictures. If they mirror my life, these pictures betray confounded patterns. I make this painting mode up as I go along because it seems more and more natural for me, so natural that I think I’ve been a Diasporist painter from the start without knowing and then slowly learnt it in a twilit period, until it began to dawn on me that I should act upon it. Diasporist painting is unfolding commentary on its life-source, the contemplation of a transience, a *Midrash* (exposition, exegesis of non-literal meaning) in paint and somehow, collected, these paintings, these circumstantial allusions, form themselves into secular *Responsa* or reactions to one’s transient restlessness, un-at-homeness, groundlessness.<sup>45</sup>

Kitaj’s diasporic consciousness is double, as a Jew and as an artist. It was realised within his art through picture making, often in symbolic and imaginative visual narratives, as well as through literary exegeses. The *idea* was of the utmost importance for him, as he declared in his *Manifesto*. In terms of my own practice, since my artwork is object-based, it is the viewing experience in negotiation with the materiality of the object that is just as important as the idea that has motivated the production of that object or that is apprehended as a result of it. It is the experience and possibilities of visuality, within the studio and beyond it – what Mirzoeff refers to as the sensual immediacy of the visual, those “moments of intense and surprising visual power” that can evoke “admiration, awe, terror and desire”<sup>46</sup> – that brings about the thinking/feeling processes that I find reflect characteristics of diasporic consciousness.

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<sup>45</sup> Kitaj, p. 31.

<sup>46</sup> Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader*, p. 9.

## Visualising the copy as a tool for new thinking

Susan Buck-Morss claims that what is powerful in an image is not its ability to represent, but its ability to generate meaning. As previously suggested, the authenticity of the image as art-object may matter in terms of Art History, but within Visual Studies, the reproduction takes on meaning in new ways beyond the idea of origin: “The image disconnects from the idea of being a reproduction of an authentic original, and becomes something else.”<sup>47</sup> Buck-Morss calls reproduced images, specifically through digital technology, “tools of thought” that mediate between things and thought. “To drag-and-click an image is to appropriate it, not as someone else’s product, but as an object of one’s own sensory experience ... The image is frozen perception. It provides the armature for ideas.”<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps this is the approach taken by Hélène Cixous when she writes of Roni Horn’s photographic portraits: “These are not photographs, these are portraits of looks that don’t allow themselves to be taken, snapshots of instants, series of winks of an eye.”<sup>49</sup> Roni Horn’s photographic portraits, despite the repeated imagery of the individual photographed, do not represent that individual, claims Cixous. Horn’s *Portrait of an Image 2005. Isabelle Huppert impersonating herself in her film roles* (Fig. S4) is a series of 100 C prints in 20 sequences of 5 images each, installed as a continuous horizon on the four walls of a room.<sup>50</sup> The viewing position is a face-to-face engagement with the image of face. As the title implies, the artist’s intent does not seem to be to depict the “real” Isabelle Huppert. Cixous explains how this series challenges the referential purpose of the portrait:

*Portrait of an Image (with Isabelle Huppert)* therefore deconstructs the entire traditional unthinking approach to the thing called Portrait, the use made of the word Portrait, when it is referred to people.

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<sup>47</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 20.

<sup>49</sup> Hélène Cixous, *A Kind of You*, ACCA, Melbourne, 2007, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Catalogue of the exhibition *A Kind of You*, ACCA, Melbourne, p. 64.



**Figure S4**

Roni Horn

*Portrait of an Image* (detail), 2005

*Isabelle Huppert impersonating herself in her film roles*

100 C prints in 20 sequences of 5 images each

Installed as a continuous horizon on the four walls of a room

31.75 x 38 cm

For this to happen the Portrait must personify the image. The difference between an image and a face: the face sees you. The image does not see you. Is seen. The gaze of the Portraitist gives a figure to the image.

If the image has a portrait, this is because it has eyes: the portrait eyes the image. Opens its eyes. And the image gives itself up to life. To reveal the portrait of the pearl hidden under the image, to allow one to hear the silent cry of the messiah locked in the Cabinet of<sup>51</sup>

The image alone is not the portrait, and the person used in the image provides only a fragment of the subject. It is the artist's gaze that creates the possibility for the image to become face, that consequently engages the viewer to discover the "pearl" that is the portrait. The portrait is a matter of relationality.

## **From photograph to portrait**

How much is the photograph, or reproduction, in itself evidence of the "realness" of an original? I have discussed previously the problematics of photography as truth in the work of Christian Boltanski. The digital age has shown us that the filmed or photographic image can be manipulated, and images can be created that are virtual, referring not to the reality of nature outside the image, but to the *idea* of a reality. How can authenticity remain a value in a genre whose credibility traditionally relies on notions of authenticity, when the repeated employment of reproduction seems to distance the original further and further away from the viewer?

My own processes of artistic production may be said to be using the image as a process of thought. The portraits in this thesis comprise two referents – one whom I term the sitter, who has come to my studio to sit for the portrait. The other part of each portrait is the photograph of a parent or child of the sitter, from a time beyond the perimeters of

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<sup>51</sup> I have reproduced this and subsequent quotes by Cixous as they appeared in the catalogue with the understanding that the visual representation of the text, including grammatical omissions, are congruent to Cixous's meaning. Cixous, pp. 12-13.

this project. In self-critique, I ask how can I use the photograph as a portrayal equal in human presence to the sitter whose presence I have experienced beyond the image? In answer, I remind myself that it is not the essence of the human behind the photograph that I am portraying, but the image of an absent person whom I know has a presence in some way through their relationship with the person visiting my studio. The portrait is relational; it comprises my relationship to the sitter and the image, in knowledge of and identification with the relationship between the two subjects. I am attempting to portray the particularity not so much within the facial features or expression of the person depicted, but in what the image of the person evokes within my own artistic narrative. I am using the photographed image within my creative narrative in a relationship to the image as animated, as alive. Roland Barthes (1981) describes his relationship to a photograph that moves him:

It animates me, and I animate it. So that is how I must name the attraction which makes it exist: an *animation*. The photograph itself is in no way animated (I do not believe in “lifelike” photographs), but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure.<sup>52</sup>

Mine is not only a visual relationship with the photograph, but a material relationship with the transferral of the photograph as I have seen it, to the paper as I re-produce that image physically/materially. With that manipulation of the image, and its subsequent relationship with the sitter’s image, I hope to have created a site that offers another relationality – that of the viewer’s.

Barthes regards the singularity of the photograph as its referentiality – no photograph can exist without its referent. Despite Roger Brilliant’s (1991) similar claim for portraiture in any medium, for Barthes, “no painted portrait, supposing that it seemed ‘true’ to me, could compel me to believe its referent had really existed.”<sup>53</sup> For Barthes, the indexical reference of the photograph is a material evidence of a past reality:

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<sup>52</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1981, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> Barthes, p. 77.

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.<sup>54</sup>

The photograph itself does not exude an “aura” – “what matters to me is not the photograph’s life” – but is, rather, a material connection to the photographed body in a particular time.<sup>55</sup>

## **The image; the photocopy**

Materially, the photograph presents me with the stillness of past time captured. The photocopy of the photograph becomes what Barthes calls a “unary Photograph”, one that “can ‘shout’, not wound”<sup>56</sup> – a tool for thought. It presents me with possibilities for present and future imaging and imagining. The copy of the photograph is transferred onto paper, at times in several layers with differing manipulations. What is left is the trace of the photograph. It is the trace of the photograph, which had the trace of the subject, captured at one particular time and place.

By using the (photo-)copy, I am not aiming for a representation of the absent referent, nor for a representation of the photograph. My intent, rather, is to release the referent from the context of photograph to a new imagery, in order to interact with him/her as animated presence. One could say that I am setting up a challenge – to diffuse the “deadness”<sup>57</sup> of the posed subject, to diffuse the distant “other”, both through my material interactions, and/or by the relational positioning of that image to the image of the

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<sup>54</sup> Barthes, p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> Barthes, pp. 81-82.

<sup>56</sup> Barthes, p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> Here, I use the meaning of the term “dead” that Barthes gives to the subject position of the photograph, as the person poses for the camera, thereby creating him/herself as other, and thus transforming him/herself into an image: as “a subject who feels he is becoming an object, I experience a kind of death.” “I have become Death in person.” Barthes, p. 14.

sitter. It is the continual interaction that contributes to that presence, by interacting not with the “pose”, that is the face’s expression or place, but with the evocation that dialogue with a human face as subject can bring up. The copy mediates between the “real” stilled subject and myself as artist because the image comes alive as subject in my narrative, and my artistic process of production.

In this way, the portrait is not the iconic object that has a life-presence of its own, nor does it represent the uniqueness or essence of the person outside the portrait. Rather it becomes a site of mediation and negotiation, a site of relationality. It is therefore, I suggest, a site of collective presence in subject, material production and viewing production. In the words of Buck-Morss, who argues for a collective agency of sensory perception in an “anaesthetized” world: “The task is not to get behind the image surface but to stretch it, enrich it, give it definition, give it time.”<sup>58</sup>

## **Familial looks**

The portrait in the manner of a collective viewing, as suggested above, can at the same time incorporate a personal viewing. In *Family Frames* (1997), Marianne Hirsch is concerned with how family photographs “shape and reshape” our identities individually and collectively within family ideologies. She explores the familial looks that we find in family photographs that are not only to do with inherited likenesses, but with the exchange of looks involved in the family album photograph. Like Barthes, Hirsch employs a strategy of the personal, that is, using fragments of her own “prose picture” life story to theorise notions of memory and history, identity and visualisation. In her review of *Family Frames*, Maria Sturken remarks that readers may find Hirsch’s self-reflexive exposure too personal for comfort, “but that is

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<sup>58</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 25.

exactly the point, in a certain sense, of this book's ambition; it attempts to interfere with the alleged distance of theoretical criticism through autobiographical strategies."<sup>59</sup>

Hirsch weaves passages from Barthes's *Camera Lucida* throughout *Family Frames*, relating to his reading of photographic reference. The basis of this reference is his relationship to a photograph of his mother at five years old – the Winter Garden Photograph – a time before his existence. For Barthes, his mother's identity can never be separate from his own, and, paradoxically, this photograph is the one that most authenticates her presence to him. It encompasses both his mother's being and his grief at her death, for here, the little girl and the frail old woman whom he nursed through her illness – who became his "child" – are unified; in the photograph he recognises not only his mother but the qualities of their relationship.<sup>60</sup> Barthes is not remembering his mother but connecting to her.

Barthes's and his mother's identities are connected here more than through family resemblance, through an exchange of looks; between the mother as child and her (unseen) onlooking parents as she is being photographed, between the mother as child and her son the viewer of the photograph, between the son's projection of himself as her life and of his own death. Hirsch notes that our own gaze is excluded from Barthes's photograph of his mother, as he has not reproduced it in his book, thus claiming it as a personal visual experience that is private, that can reveal only to him an intimate understanding of himself, "a discovery of a self-in-relation."<sup>61</sup> Our entry into the Winter Garden Photograph is through Barthes's word narrative, what Hirsch calls his familial story in "prose picture" – his textual description of and response to the photograph of his mother.

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<sup>59</sup> Maria Sturken, "Imaging postmemory/re negotiating history", in *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism*, a publication of the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York, May–June, 1999, viewed 5 May 2008, <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2479/is\\_/ai\\_54869104?tag=artBody:coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2479/is_/ai_54869104?tag=artBody:coll)>.

<sup>60</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Harvard University Press, USA, 1997, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Hirsch, p. 2.

## Postmemory

Barthes has written that the photograph does not restore the past – it does not “restore what has been abolished (by time and distance)” – but attests to its having existed.<sup>62</sup> It is not a memory that is called up but a past state, simultaneously the past and the real, a ghostly revenant. As ghostly revenants that emphasise the past’s “immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability”, photographs are situated between memory and postmemory.<sup>63</sup> Postmemory, explains Hirsch, is a particular way of relating to the past through an imaginative investment and creation. It “characterises the experiences of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.”<sup>64</sup> The photograph, in particular the family album photograph whose images and narratives extend well into subsequent generations, facilitates this transference. It can be read as trace; as the trace of the photographed person or place, as an “outline” trace of their materiality, and as the trace of time that no longer exists. It signifies both life and death, for it shows evidence of the object that was photographed and at the same time, we recognise the sense of the “ça a été”, the “having-been-there” of the photograph that creates the sense of loss in the viewing.<sup>65</sup> It both blocks memory because it is not reviving a recollection, but attests to its past reality.<sup>66</sup> The function of the photograph as postmemory is as a site that mediates between the past and present.

Hirsch has developed the notion of postmemory in relation to Holocaust survivors, but considers it useful in describing the process of cultural memory beyond that of the Holocaust, as a way, for example, of understanding the continuity of collective memory in

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<sup>62</sup> Barthes, p. 82.

<sup>63</sup> Hirsch, p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> Hirsch, p. 22.

<sup>65</sup> Hirsch, p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Hirsch, p. 82.

situations of diaspora. The notion of memory as public and private history is integral to the “diasporic vision”, for it shapes and marks it. It forms the basis of traditions and practices for diasporic communities, and the basis of their existence. Without the shared memory of the home of origin and of a collective if diverse past, even if mythologised or conceptual, diaspora would not exist. Hirsch investigates the inheritance of history as “postmemory”, distinguishing it from memory as recollection “by generational distance, and from history by deep personal connection.”<sup>67</sup> Photographs can connect first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory, for they represent what has been and what no longer is, but also what continues to be from the position of those who are viewing.<sup>68</sup>

What is particularly meaningful in family photographs beyond documentation is not in representation, but in the performative function of the “affiliative” gaze. “The affiliative look” is a term that Hirsch uses to argue that there is a particular kind of viewing identification with the familial image:

Recognizing an image as *familial* elicits ... a specific kind of readerly or spectatorial look, an *affiliative look* through which we are sutured into the image and through which we adopt the image into our own familial narrative. Akin to Barthes’s move from the studium to the punctum, it is idiosyncratic, untheorizable: it is what moves us because of our memories and our histories, and because of the ways in which we structure our own sense of particularity.<sup>69</sup>

My practice sources the personal – family photographs, traces of tactile imprints, the reactive gesture – to explore possibilities beyond the familial, of portrayal as a particular way of mutual looking. Additionally, my use of the familial relationship of my subjects involving the photograph, the photocopy, and drawing, proposes a construction not only of a singular familial subjectivity, but of a relational portrait that is simultaneously self and other. Roberto Cuoghi’s portrayal of his self as “other”, that is, as his father-self discussed below in the chapter *Being*, transfers the stillness of the photograph to the agency of

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<sup>67</sup> Hirsch, p. 22.

<sup>68</sup> Hirsch, pp. 22-23.

<sup>69</sup> Hirsch, p. 93.

performance, in an experiment that internalises the familial gaze through an enactment of postmemory. As such, his performance, I believe, is able to move the “observer” (or “reader”) through an affiliative gaze – or thought – of identification.

This is not a gaze that is restricted to “knowledge” of, or about, the subject, but one in which identification is aligned with the particular intimacy of a familial look or exchange of looks. The affiliative look is defined by its collective sense of intimacy and familiarity, and it is the search for *recognition of experience* rather than *recognition of identity* that guides the artistic choices in my portraits.

## 4 BEING

### On subjectivity

#### **The problematics of naming**

Writing on the subjects of portraiture and diaspora, it is inevitable that the question of “Who?” arises. “Who is the who that is being represented?” asks Richard Brilliant.<sup>1</sup> Brilliant concedes that the very concept of portraiture as a meaningful representation is challenged when the positing of a singular identity existing beyond its social context is denied. In other words, concepts of personal identity that deny the existence of the “personal” and “inner” uniqueness of being (apart from genetic uniqueness) “confound the very concept of the portrait.”<sup>2</sup> For the artist attempting to portray an individual, according to Brilliant, the denial of singularity would present an impossible situation. For while “the allegedly irreducible nature of human beings may present a dilemma to philosophers, resolvable only by an extended metaphysical speculation about the ‘beingness’ of the ‘someone’ embodied in the person, let alone secondarily represented by a portrait ... portrait artists may not often concern themselves with metaphysics.”<sup>3</sup> For Brilliant, these philosophical discourses would make the role of portrait artists, concerned with capturing the uniquely personal, or “personality”, redundant.

Who is the “who” representing the complexities of diasporic identity? Avtar Brah relates a story that demonstrates how representation of identity as non-singular is not confined to philosophy or metaphysical discourse as Brilliant suggests, but occurs in the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Brilliant, pp. 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> Brilliant, p. 13.

course of social practice. Brah writes of being interviewed for a scholarship to study in the USA. Born in the Punjab and spending her childhood in Uganda, she was asked by a panel member, “Do you see yourself as African or Indian?” While placing herself within the borders of a recognised, particular identity by answering, “Ugandan of Indian descent”, her unease is clear:

But, of course, he could not *see* that I could be both. The body in front of him was already inscribed within the gendered social relations of the colonial sandwich. I could not just “be”. I had to *name an identity*, no matter that this naming rendered invisible all the other identities – of gender, caste, religion, linguistic group, generation....<sup>4</sup>

By singling out one identity over other identities that were linked yet categorically distinct, “naming” here paradoxically leads to “anonymity.”

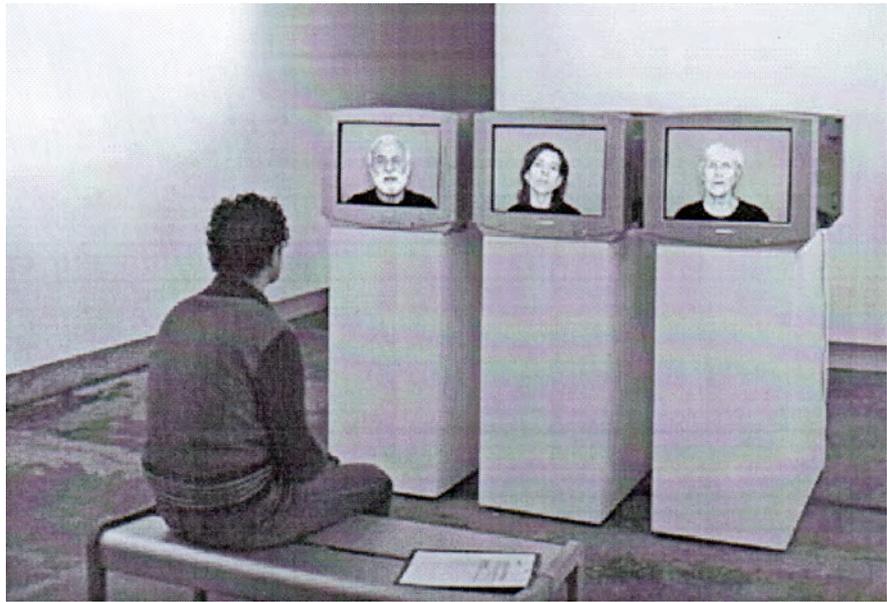
The text below exemplifies again the problematics of the name in the context of diaspora identity. It is an extract from the video titled *Accent Elimination*, 2005 (Fig. B1) by the New York artist Nina Katchadourian. The following dialogue enactment, scripted by Katchadourian’s mother as a typical conversation in her life, demonstrates the complexities of diaspora and the expectations of locating identity through naming:

SK: Hi, I’m Steena Katchadourian.  
NK: Katchadourian...that’s an unusual name. What is it?  
SK: It’s Armenian.  
NK: But you don’t look very Armenian.  
SK: Well, I’m actually Finnish. My husband is Armenian.  
NK: Finnish... So is Steena a Finnish name?  
SK: Actually, it’s more of a Swedish name.  
NK: I see, so you actually have Swedish?  
SK: No, I’m Finnish, but I come from a minority group in Finland that speaks Swedish.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, pp. 2-3..

<sup>5</sup> This extract is part of an audio interview with Nina Katchadourian by Sian Prior on ABC Radio National’s program *Lingua Franca*, broadcast on 17 May, 2008, replayed on <<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/linguafranca/>>, as viewed 22 May, 2008. For a further description of the project *Accent Elimination*, see Nina Katchadourian’s website, viewed 17 May, 2008 <<http://www.ninakatchadourian.com/language/translation/accent.php>>.



**Figure B1**

Nina Katchadourian  
*Accent Elimination*, 2005  
Video installation.

I can relate my own story to do with naming, this time in the portrait's representation. Some time into my research, I presented my visual work to a seminar of other creative-based research candidates. After my oral presentation of the portraits I had created, a discussion took place surrounding aspects of my work, such as my use of multiple imagery and the photocopy, and the installation of the work. After a time, a question was asked which seemed at first to be a very simple one to answer, but my reply to which, as I later discovered, would intervene in and complicate the viewing experience of the group: "*Who are these people?*"

What did that question mean? *What are the names of these people? What are their stories?* I had introduced my portraits by identifying the subjects as "mother-daughter", "mother-son", and "father-daughter", but the question was not *Who are your subjects?* but *Who are the people behind your images?* None of my portraits were identified by proper names in reference to the people whose images we were seeing. Despite having discussed the reasoning behind the use of anonymity in my portraits, the expectation by the viewer in this case was that naming would fix and reveal more about the identity portrayed. As the art historian Catherine Soussloff notes, the expectation of the genre of portraiture is a given: to recognise. In my example, the viewer's attempt to recognise was through language, or narrative, through the naming.<sup>6</sup>

When Sandy Nairne describes portraiture as "the conscious depiction of particular individuals" he is able to include concepts of anonymity within that definition, albeit under the terms of specificity. In other words, for Nairne, the portrayal of a particularised person who is anonymous in name can still be legitimately called a portrait as opposed to a generic human image. In fact, Nairne categorises the anonymous portrait as a genre in itself,

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<sup>6</sup> Catherine M Soussloff, *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2006, p. 23.

referring to the prevalence of portraits of anonymity, of unknown yet particular individuals, as portrayals that are symbolic of contemporary human experience.<sup>7</sup>

However, I propose that anonymity in the portrait can be used not only as a metaphor for human experience, but as a means by which a portrayal can be experienced. Catherine Soussloff makes the point that René Magritte's paintings, in which text and image are mismatched, do not preclude us from recognising the objects denoted. Likewise, she argues, our recognition of the subject in portraiture is not to do with its identity but with our subjectivity. Recognition is found in the relationship between our own subjectivity and the image; it "depends on *us* putting our *own* subjectivity into a direct and continuing, insofar as these material objects exist in historical time, relationship with the image depicted."<sup>8</sup>

## **Portraiture as "culture"**

I am relating to subjectivity in the portrait in terms other than those concerned with the portrayal of specificity and "truth", or "knowledge", about the persons portrayed. My primary intention has not been to necessarily replace those notions of referentiality and "authenticity" that inform the conventions of portraiture, even though my approach may challenge those notions. Rather, my intent has been to investigate further possibilities of meaning which the site of portraiture can offer, exploring the "rethinking" of the portrait alongside other current "rethinkings" of constructions of culture, identity and representation.

Avtar Brah suggests that cultures be perceived as processes instead of "reified artefacts".<sup>9</sup> Her argument suggests a parallel viewing of portraiture itself as a culture, where

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<sup>7</sup> Sandy Nairne and Sarah Howgate, *The Portrait Now*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Soussloff, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> Brah, p. 92.

the genre can be seen to have a history, a genealogy, an authority and conventions of language and practice. Thus portraits that act as social agency or that are performative, or portraits that are anonymous, for example, are not marginal in their difference within the genre, nor are they defined as absolutes, but can weave through, even while critiquing, approaches that are historical and essentialist. As Brah explains, “How we work with and across our ‘differences’ would depend upon the political and conceptual frameworks which inform our understanding of these ‘differences.’”<sup>10</sup> Lucien Freud’s portraits, for example, can be viewed within the conventions of modernist portraiture as mimetic representations that create an “increase of being”, articulating the presence of the sitter’s body through the materiality of paint on canvas.<sup>11</sup> However, Freud’s paintings can be understood, or rather proposed, within deconstructive notions: his application and scraping of paint draws attention to the surface of the painting as a mark of activity, and this action of paint that reveals its processes of reworking can be seen to question the assumed temporality of representation, and presents the painting as a painting of portraiture itself, “the process, rather than the simple representation of a portrait, stasis.”<sup>12</sup>

The site of portraiture can accommodate works created within the mode of repeating unity, homogeneity and pure presence, and those that recognise the futility and impossibility of that attempt. In this way, the space of portraiture can parallel the space of diaspora, when, as Benjamin argues with his formulation of “the affirmative dimension”, a space can exist in which an understanding of works enacted within the desire for unity can co-exist with works that recognise the desire of not repeating or re-presenting fixed and unified positions, but that at the same time are not concerned with a rejection of

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<sup>10</sup> Brah, p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed reading of Freud’s self-portraits, see Andrew Benjamin’s chapter “Betraying Faces”, pp. 64-74 in his *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde*, Routledge, London and New York, 1991, p. 67.

tradition.<sup>13</sup> Hence portraiture can be understood not so much as a genre within the borders of a territory that includes or excludes, but rather as a cultural site that contextualises the desire for, in Brah's words, a "politics of identification" as opposed to a "politics of identity."<sup>14</sup>

## **Constructing identities**

Contemporary artistic challenges to essentialist notions of subjectivity are often made within the genre of portraiture, which has traditionally derived its meaning from the subject. The following works by Cindy Sherman, Orlan, and Gillian Wearing can be viewed as self-portraits in the sense that the artists are using their own bodies in the images of the portraits. Yet one may question what investigation of self these artists are proposing; is it about their own selves or about the notion of self? How do we "read" such portraits of ambiguities? Are the portraits about the artists' femininity, or about the construction of female identity? What is the relationship of body to identity, representation, and the gaze? Can the ambiguity inherent in these portrayals be viewed as dealing with the anonymity as well as the multiplicity of self, or with the unknown, never-to-be-known, "true" self? Are we seeing a multiplicity of difference in identity, or its impenetrability? Are these portraits about the self at all?

Such questions, by their very posing, are already shaping possibilities. I am presenting these questions about the portraits' subjectivity to demonstrate that artists like Sherman, Orlan, and Wearing provoke us to examine and thereby re-think identity through the artistic possibilities they present, rather than the absolute, fixed portrayals of, for example, female identity. Why do these artists choose the portrait as the form in which to explore these issues? All three deal with the construction and representation of identity. It is

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<sup>13</sup> A Benjamin, pp. 63-64.

<sup>14</sup> Brah, p. 93.

therefore logical that they should frame their explorations within a genre that has a long tradition of complicity in the construction of subjectivity and the representation of identity. As van Alphen observes of the work of Cindy Sherman: “If the portrait has been one of the main frameworks in which the notion of ‘real’ femininity had been advocated, it is of course the most relevant space for a deconstruction of that notion.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Cindy Sherman*

Cindy Sherman is simultaneously the subject and the object of her work, for she both photographs herself and acts the role of subject. Amada Cruz (2003) describes Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills* of 1977–1980 (Fig. B2) as photographic records of performative accounts of filmic images:<sup>16</sup> they are “simultaneously and inseparably photographs and performances.”<sup>17</sup> While using techniques of realism, it is obvious that the scenes are staged and “unreal”. Sherman is role-playing.

She reverses the relationship between subjectivity and representation in the portrait, when what is referred to in the portrayal is a representation and not a person portrayed by the portrait: “We see a photograph of a subject that is constructed in the image of representation.”<sup>18</sup> In the *History Pictures*, 1989–1990, Sherman has shifted her role-playing to “high” art. The series of thirty-five photographs mimics the look of “Old Master” portraits, and is mostly not direct reproductions. *Untitled #204* (Fig. B3) is, according to Rosalind Krauss (1993), a composite projection of three of Ingre’s most celebrated sitters.<sup>19</sup> Sherman’s depictions, then, are of *types* from the genre of history portraiture. She role-plays the sitter, assuming characters of nobility, mythological heroes, and madonnas that were the subjects of court painters of the past.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> Amada Cruz, “Movies, Monstrosities, and Masks: Twenty Years of Cindy Sherman” in Amada Cruz, Elizabeth AT Smith and Amelia Jones, *Cindy Sherman: Retrospective*, Thames & Hudson, New York and London, 2003 (1997), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Danto, *Cindy Sherman: Untitled Film Stills*, Rizzoli, New York, 1990, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Cindy Sherman 1975–1993*, Rizzoli, New York, 1993, p. 174.

<sup>20</sup> Amada Cruz, p. 10.

**Figure B2**

Cindy Sherman  
*Untitled Film Still #56*, 1980  
Black-and-white photograph  
20.3 x 25.4 cm  
Edition of 10.



**Figure B3**

Cindy Sherman  
*Untitled #204*, 1989  
Colour photograph, 151.8 x 135.3 cm  
Edition of 6.



With much irony, she transforms herself with the aid of elaborate costumes, wigs, and artificial body parts that at first look opulent, but on closer inspection often project the tackiness of old costumes and fake hair and prostheses, including a number of comic and at times grotesque details. In this way, Sherman creates images that seem familiar, yet are disturbingly strange.

Sherman has taken quintessential portraits – the Old Masters portraits – that are recognisable more for *being* representations rather than for the people they represent, and she re-enacts them not in a re-telling, not as an interpretation, not only in parody. They are a given, taken out of their historical context and interacted with or performed in the present, and Sherman invites us to enter their framing through her play. Amelia Jones (2003) proposes that it is the modes of production, the exaggerated textures of the “subject” of the History Pictures, that absorb the viewer into the picture in a performative relationship with the subject:

Like the body/self of the depicted subject, the viewer becomes both fully embodied and fragmented, artificial. Far from being a “façade” with a “formless” interior, our embodied subjectivities become dissolved *in relation to each other* (the History Pictures’ subjects are opened to the subjects of viewing: we constitute one another). That is, moving away from the structures that explore or confirm an external gaze that defines the (female) subject as object, here, the pictures, with their almost sculptural but artificial “deep space,” propose subjects that point to the fact that we are never coherent in ourselves but always take meaning from the others whose significance we in turn project.<sup>21</sup>

The history that has been formative is here being unsettled. Sherman is not making a “cut” with history, but integrates her subject through difference as well as sameness. This is about difference in the sense of Derrida’s *différance*, that is, not pure “otherness”, but, as Stuart Hall explains, a marker setting up “a disturbance in our settled understanding or

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<sup>21</sup> Amelia Jones, “Tracing the Subject with Cindy Sherman” in Amada Cruz, Elizabeth AT Smith and Amelia Jones, *Cindy Sherman: Retrospective*, Thames & Hudson, New York and London, 2003 (1997), p. 44.

translation of the word/concept. It sets the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the trace of its other meanings.’<sup>22</sup>

### *Orlan*

Orlan has transformed her image in a performative portrayal of self. It is the process of her transformation and its afterlife that is the work, the portrait. In the series of nine performances (1990–1993) which are part of her ongoing self-portrait *Carnal Art* (Figs B4, B5), Orlan underwent surgery as an act of recreating and re-presenting her “likeness”; or, in her words, to modify the body and engage in public debate.<sup>23</sup> The intent behind her surgery was to transform herself by adopting the features of idealised representations of women from art history; the chin of Botticelli’s *Venus*, the eyes of Gerome’s *Psyche*, the forehead of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*, the mouth of Boucher’s *Europa*, and the nose of a School of Fontainebleau *Diana*.

Orlan directed a process aimed at constructing an identity of self, made up of concurrent multiple identities, none of which is identifiable as her original self. These identities were chosen not only for their idealised beauty, but for their mythological content.<sup>24</sup> Thereby, a negotiated space was created as a new identity of self; a hybrid, or what Homi Bhabha calls an opening of “something new” that is an effect of a dialectic between “oppositional principles”, something that cannot be returned to them. That “something” becomes a different space, in which we make different presumptions and mobilise emergent, unanticipated forms of historical agency.<sup>25</sup> This kind of hybridity can further be likened to diaspora communities and individuals as cultural identities that may have similar points of historical reference or character both amongst themselves and to

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<sup>22</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (eds), *Theorising Diaspora*, Blackwell Publishing, UK, 2003 (1990), p. 239.

<sup>23</sup> Orlan’s website, viewed 12 February, 2007, <<http://www.orlan.net/>>.

<sup>24</sup> Barbara Rose, “Orlan: Is it Art? Orlan and the Transgressive Act”, in *Art in America*, vol. 81, no. 2, February 1993, pp. 83-125, viewed 12 February, 2007, <<http://www.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Orlan/Orlan2.html>>.

<sup>25</sup> Homi Bhabha interviewed by WJT Mitchell, “Translator translated”, in *Artforum*, vol. 33, no. 7, March, 1995, pp. 80-84.

**Figure B4**

*Orlan: Carnal Art*, 2002  
Directed by Stephan Oriach  
Image from the film  
35 mm, 75 mins.



**Figure B5**

*Orlan: Carnal Art*, 2002  
Directed by Stephan Oriach  
Image from the film  
35 mm, 75 mins.

their home of origin, but whose existence is also significantly defined by points of difference that are constantly negotiated and transformed.<sup>26</sup>

Orlan links the performances of her transformations to the tradition of portraiture: “Carnal art is self-portraiture in the classical sense.”<sup>27</sup> She defines them as self-portraiture in the classical sense, where the body is being used as the canvas of twentieth century technology. By positioning herself within the genre of portraiture, by claiming her work as authentic portraiture, she challenges both the terms and the function of the genre. She is questioning whether our self-representations are about capturing an essence, any essence, interior or exterior, or whether they are contrived fabrications for marketing purposes in the media and society.<sup>28</sup> She provokes her audience to question what is real and what is fake in self-representation.

### *Gillian Wearing*

Gillian Wearing’s *Self-Portrait at Three Years Old*, 2004 (Fig. B6) questions the essentialist perception of identity by depicting the subject as a composite of selves.<sup>29</sup> Authenticity is problematised in the photographic portrait of the artist-subject’s “real” self looking through a mask, which is in fact a prosthetic replica of a photograph of her young self. By foregrounding and objectifying her past self as a mask, and by representing her subjective self as the eyes gazing in the internal-ground behind the mask, Wearing displaces our perceptions not only of temporality and of photographic “reality”, but also of identity as singular and unambiguous.

Wearing is at once her “self” and a construct of herself, within reach and out of reach, penetrating and distanced. Her appearance as the representation of her child-self, together

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<sup>26</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, p. 236.

<sup>27</sup> Orlan, *Carnal Art Manifesto*, viewed 12 September, 2006, <[http://www.dundee.ac.uk/transcript/volume2/issue2\\_2/orlan/orlan.htm](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/transcript/volume2/issue2_2/orlan/orlan.htm)>.

<sup>28</sup> Rose, pp. 83-125.

<sup>29</sup> Nairne and Howgate, p. 13.



**Figure B6**

Gillian Wearing

*Self-Portrait at Three Years Old*, 2002

Digital C-print, 1820 x 1220 mm

with the gaze of her current adult self, is a transformation that is never complete. It acts as a supposition, an enactment of mimetic authenticity, an enactment of disclosure, where notions of representation and authenticity themselves are contested. At the same time, her incomplete transformation is in itself a statement of representational completeness, or what Stuart Hall calls a “closure” of sorts, “the necessity to meaning of the end of the sentence”. Referring to this closure as provisional, it is a kind of “wager” which is not eternally or universally true, but “... just now, this is what I mean; this is who I am.”<sup>30</sup>

Wearing is constructing a portrait representing herself as a photographic reproduction of her current self masked by a copy of her past self as object: in other words, a copy of a copy of a copy. Similarly, the photographic portraits of herself behind masks of various family members displace the viewer’s perception of the unique and the copy; in fact they reinvent the copy as *authentic* in itself because its function in the newly constructed identity is no longer as duplicate.

Like the diaspora identity who is perceived as both a familiar “type” and an unknown other, and who subjectively belongs to both past and future simultaneously, the copy does not duplicate Gillian Wearing at the age of three, nor is it a return to the self of the three-year-old, that is, Gillian as “Gillian.” Rather, it is a portrait of self as adult inseparable from another form of self as adult. This doubleness of similarity and difference is “the internalization of the self-as-other” that Hall writes of in reference to the politics of representation.<sup>31</sup> In the same way that masculinity has historically constructed femininity as the simultaneous double of Madonna and Whore, Hall demonstrates that racism constructs the black subject as both noble savage and violent avenger. In this configuration, fear and

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<sup>30</sup> Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves” in Lisa Appignanesi (ed), *Identity: The Real Me*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1987, p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities” in James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds), *Race, Culture and Difference*, Sage Publications in association with The Open University, London, 1992, p. 256.

desire double for each other and in so doing complicate the politics of the structures of otherness.<sup>32</sup>

Wearing's representation is also a doubling, at once one and the other, where the viewer is both drawn to and repelled by the subject. It displaces what is interior and what is exterior, and thereby unsettles the convention of the representation of an essence of the human being portrayed, whether it be mimetic likeness or interiority. The transformation that results from Wearing's representation of her self as child with the gaze of her adult self is necessarily incomplete, for the shifts between the "same" and "other" are fluid.

Cindy Sherman, Orlan and Gillian Wearing mobilise a particular form of social agency through their art. They also mobilise a participatory relationship with the viewer. More than making social comment, they invite participation in that commentary. In fact, they invite participation in the portrayal itself – in the construction of the "who" in the portrait. These portraits, then, are performatory; the viewer is invited to take part in Cindy Sherman's experimentations with stereotype perceptions of subjectivity, in the performance of Orlan's carnal art, and in the play of recognition and estrangement through Wearing's doubled gaze.

## **Relationality**

It can be said that all three of these artists are re-constructing their "selves" as diasporic-like representations that comprise, at least in part, an "other". This viewing of self as containing other identities is not so much a masquerading of self as a composite of self, presenting possibilities of "othered" lives. Alternatively, their subjects can be viewed as simultaneously "at home" and displaced in their representations: in my own reading, the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

subjects of the portraits of all three artists seem to be inhabiting a space, or a situation, of “self-as-other”, yet, as opposed to a hybrid representation of self, there is an uncomfortable sense that one “self” does not completely belong with the “other”.

The diasporic identity at once belongs and does not belong to both the home of origin and to the adopted home. Diasporic consciousness involves a sense of difference and multiplicity of belonging, a sense of “otherness”, and hence of displacement. The identity of the displaced is thus not “complete” as a singular, fixed identity, but, in the words of Zygmunt Bauman (2004), is “wholly or in part ‘out of place’ everywhere, not ... completely anywhere ... nowhere will one be fully ‘at home’.”<sup>33</sup> The portraits above all exude a feeling of unsettledness, of “not-quite-right”-ness. The portrait as presented here is no longer the “home”, the conclusion, of self-representation.

At first glance, my own portraits may be understood as hybrids, or composites of two people. As my work evolved, I began to recognise the complexities of my proposed subjects both as representations and in their referentiality. I had complicated the notion of the portrait’s indexical quality by using a doubling of reference, where one reference was to the portrayed sitter who came to the studio and the other was a person related to the sitter, referenced through representation in a photograph. The photographic representation was used as a photocopy and subsequently transferred onto paper, so that reference was made not to the origin of “person” but to the origin of “photograph”. Additionally, new subjectivities and relationships were being constructed through the multiple images of the doubling of the subject.

Thus, while my portraits can be viewed as composites or hybrids, and perhaps began with that intent, my own experience as maker and viewer simultaneously is of the portrait

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<sup>33</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, Polity Press, UK, 2004, pp. 13-14.

as a meeting point, a meeting point of two individual subjects connected by a shared history, a heritage, family, and myself as artist/viewer.

As artist/viewer, as both mark-maker and mark-observer, I am relating in turn to a relationship that is re-established imaginatively on paper by enacting possibilities for “meeting” within representation. This “meeting” in the representation of the image’s facial features will never be a unified whole, but the making and identifying with the process of production – the mark-making and trace – can present a *possibility* of “oneness” or completeness.

Identifying with the process of production does not mean interpreting the signs of the mark-making, but rather re-enacting the processes of materiality that are open to be imaginatively engaged with. In this way, the viewer is invited to enter into that process of possibilities through identification, rather than by “recognising” an identity.

The search of contact by the artist to the other, *in* the image and *through* the image (to the viewer), is described poetically by Hélène Cixous (2007), relating to the work of Roni Horn. Horn’s portraits, she writes, are not so much about the person portrayed, nor the image itself, but about the artist’s own search for connectedness, for looking at herself “in the mirror of another face”.<sup>34</sup> Horn’s search for the “who” is not in the person she signifies, but in Face:

Who are you, Face, you who I am, whom I follow, you who look at me without seeing me, you whom I see without knowing whome [sic], you in whom I look at myself, you who would not be without me, you whom I envelope [sic], you who seduce me and into whom I do not enter, who are you, who is this being promised subjected to my gaze, to my objective, this being docile to my law, and who remains totally impenetrable for me? What is you? Who am I, you?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hélène Cixous, *A Kind of You*, ACCA, Melbourne, 2007, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## The subject position

From the viewer's or critic's perspective, Catherine Soussloff offers an approach to understanding portraiture other than through the desire to name, or the "question of who". She writes that "portraits also demonstrate an engagement with representation as such at the most acute level of historical significance: the human, or subjective level."<sup>36</sup> She claims that twentieth-century portraits have given us representations that both show how others represent themselves, and that mirror us through representations of others, but further, also construct a space for human interaction. This "visual interaction" between the viewer, the artist, and the person in the portrait, which she calls "the triangulated engagement with subjectivity" does not rely on the narrative or historical event behind the portrayal; rather, "this form of visual representation is first a relationship between another and myself."<sup>37</sup> The visuality and materiality of the portrait that involves the face, the body, the artist's gestures, the texture of the charcoal, the contrasts and diffusion of light in a photograph, and so forth, provide visual signs that construct the relationship between the viewer and the subject in art "prior to language".<sup>38</sup> The triangulated engagement with subjectivity is in large part the result of the artist's thinking, where that thinking is visual and not based on language.<sup>39</sup>

Homi Bhabha (1996) theorises this subject positioning when he writes of the "narrative address" in art, where narrative is the discourse of self-disclosure, the

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<sup>36</sup> Soussloff, p. 120.

<sup>37</sup> Soussloff writes of this approach as "the radical perspective of the subject in the portrait" first put forward by the Viennese artists and art historians of the early twentieth century, "that provided then, and continues to provide even now, a way of understanding visual representation as dependent on a multiplicity of points of view, as mutable depending on context, and as contingent depending on viewer." Soussloff, pp. 120-122.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Van Alphen argues that considering art as a form of thought is useful in the "cultural environment at large", referring to Hubert Damisch's ideas (*Théorie du nuage*, 1972) on painting as an act of thought: the significance of paintings is not as products of a specific culture or history, nor of the artist's intention, but of the reflection of the painter's thinking in her paintings as "the active definition, as an act of thought." Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 2.

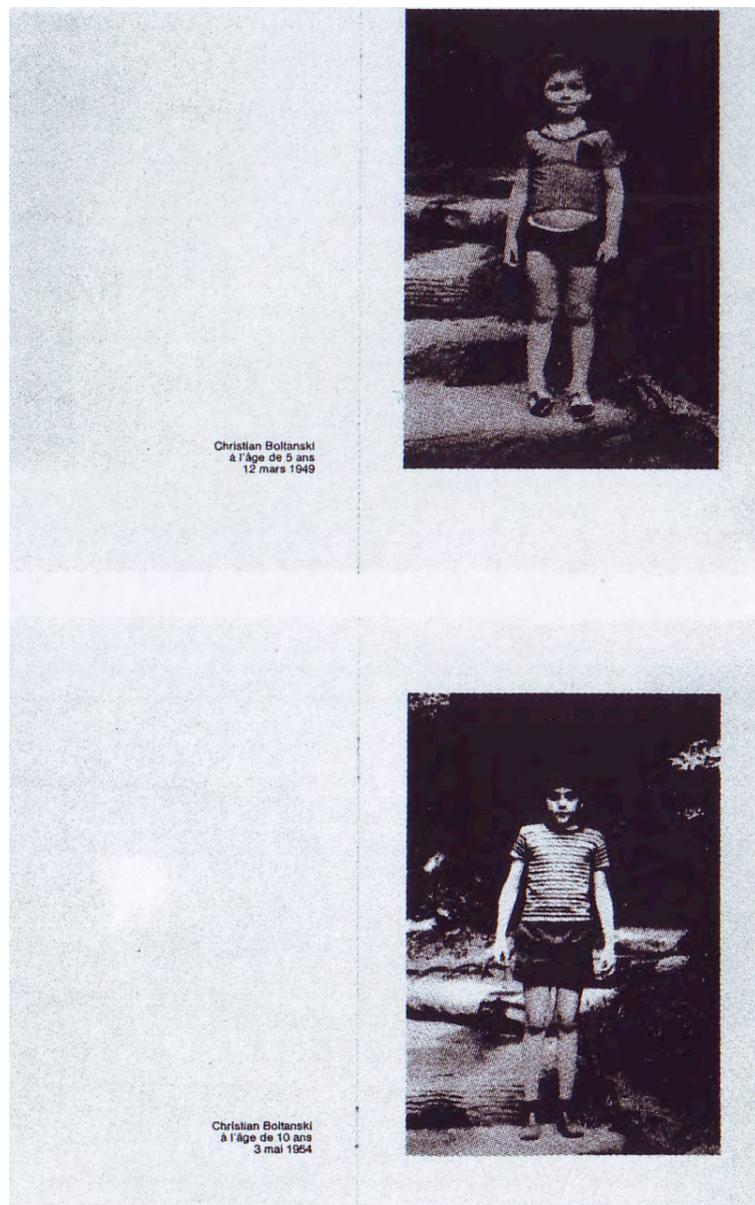
production of subjects and the positioning of spectators.<sup>40</sup> When a portrait is non-essentialist and performatory, it invites the spectator to negotiate the subjectivity of vision, poetry, and memory. The spectator becomes an integral part of the identity of the portrait, not by recognising the specific individual behind the portrait, but through recognising a relational experience of identification – through the mark-making or artistic medium, through openness or transience of image, or “deferred” image, through concept and poetic imagination.

### **Anonymity in the work of Christian Boltanski**

A portrait, then, can be viewed in terms of both identity and identification; the recognition of an identity and the recognition of an experience of subjectivity. In the portrait whose subject is anonymous, however, one may ask, whose identity is being foregrounded, whose subjectivity? Christian Boltanski’s use of the anonymous subject raises precisely these questions as ambiguities inherent in representation, particularly those of loss and mourning. An early work, the artist’s book *10 Portraits photographiques de Christian Boltanski, 1946–1964*, 1972 (Fig. B7), demonstrates Boltanski’s play with notions of exposure and concealment, the authentic and deceptive, the body and interiority. The book is made up of photographs of boys at different ages, with captions ostensibly identifying the photographs as *Christian Boltanski, aged ...*, and the date. What at first glance seems to be a straightforward portrait documentation of Boltanski from childhood to manhood, on closer inspection is revealed to be a collection of photographs of boys of different ages standing at the same location, only one of whom is Boltanski himself. Throughout his practice, Boltanski has continually drawn on material of his own life without seeming to reveal much “truth” about himself. Lynn Gumpert (1994) observes that there is a motive in

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<sup>40</sup> Homi K Bhabha, “Aura and Agora: On Negotiating Rapture and Speaking Between” in Richard Francis (ed.), *Negotiating Rapture*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1996, p. 10.



**Figure B7**

Christian Boltanski

*10 Portraits photographiques de Christian Boltanski, 1946–1964*  
(detail), 1972

Pages from the artist's book.

this dealing with self beyond that of self-obsession. She writes that Boltanski's self-portraits that are composed not only of images of himself, but of French children, Austrian adolescents, Russian Jews, and Swiss bourgeoisie, who are "anonymous players in his drama of 'self-revelation'... The overwhelming anonymity of their nameless faces contrasts sharply with Boltanski's own face. Having seen it so often in his early work, we recognise *his* face among the countless others, but the recognition only delays our realization that we do not, in fact, know him."<sup>41</sup> For Gumpert, Boltanski's work mirrors the viewer while ostensibly portraying the artist.<sup>42</sup>

It is this absence, or loss of presence, that features so strongly in all of Boltanski's work. Commenting on his class photograph of 1951, which he used for the cover of his first book, *Recherche et présentation de tout ce qui reste de mon enfance, 1944–1950* (1969), Boltanski observed,

Of all the children, among whom I found myself, one of whom was probably the girl I loved, I don't remember any of their names, I don't remember anything more than the faces on the photograph. It could be said that they disappeared from my memory, that this period of time was dead. Because now these children must be adults, about whom I know nothing. This is why I felt the need to pay homage to these "dead," who, in this image, all look more or less the same, like cadavers.<sup>43</sup>

Boltanski's use of anonymous portraits to invoke memorials and monuments of mass mourning can be viewed as a way of questioning notions of authenticity, in particular the impossibility of art to represent and fix presence in the face of death and mass genocide. The ambiguities within notions of presence and remembrance challenge authenticity in a number of aspects: authenticity in terms of identity of the original referents of the portraits, authenticity in photography's claim to truth, authenticity in the emotive living experience of subjectivity by the viewer. Andrea Liss (1998) writes that the use of nameless referents, as

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<sup>41</sup> Lynn Gumpert, *Christian Boltanski*, Flammarion, Paris, 1994, p. 152.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Gumpert, p. 83.

in *Autel Chases*, 1987 (Fig. B8), enables Boltanski to represent memory and trauma as “antimonumental memorials,” at once intimate and distanced, authentic and deceptive. Liss writes: “Boltanski’s mixed desire not to name or explicitly picture his evoked referent may well be appropriate to a move toward the formation of antimonumental memorials. It is an act toward circling around rather than smothering memory and the trauma of its representation.”<sup>44</sup> Boltanski uses anonymity not metaphorically, but as a device that at once distances and allows a perception of intimacy. These representations, as the absence of presence, cannot engage visually as personalities with the viewer. Liss describes the sense of impossibility of re-presenting the truth of the people, the dead, behind the photographs: “The faces refuse to enact retrospective documentary gazes. Boltanski positions them to stand in as illegitimate witnesses – that is, as faces that have seen but cannot bear witness. They testify, nonetheless, that something has happened.”<sup>45</sup>

What is left is identification without identity, yet Boltanski nevertheless sets up devices for eliciting emotion. For Liss, Boltanski is being provocative by referencing both the sentimental and the inauthentic “precisely to implicate the ease with which the viewer gets trapped in a universalised quasi-ethereal and quasi-somber nostalgia.”<sup>46</sup> Boltanski himself does not seem to give too much away. However, he has maintained the value of questioning<sup>47</sup> – “it’s very hard to separate the true from the false” – and sometimes the false grows into the true – “it was a truth that I’d been hiding from myself, and which I could only admit to myself via the cover of a game.”<sup>48</sup>

Boltanski’s doubling – his effort to “create identification between the viewer and the pictured and its simultaneous nullification”<sup>49</sup> – problematises not only the portrait as the

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<sup>44</sup> Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography, and the Holocaust*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1998, p. 49.

<sup>45</sup> Liss, p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> Liss, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> Boltanski observes, “Some paintings invite you only to communion and prayer; others ask you questions. I see myself as closer to the latter ... I’m scared of an art that tries to impose itself on others”. In Gumpert, p. 176.

<sup>48</sup> Gumpert, p. 176.

<sup>49</sup> Liss, p. 49.



**Figure B8**

Christian Boltanski

*Autel Chases* (detail), 1987

(Altar to the Chases High School)

Black-and-white photographs, tin boxes, clamp-on lamps.

revelation of an inner truth, but the notion of authenticity itself. Thinking about the portraits as referencing the specifics of the Holocaust, the work becomes problematic in its collusion with notions of deception and generalisation, and ultimately of inhumanity. Yet, while Boltanski's theatre of memorialisation cannot bring us to re-experience the actual deaths, nor the horrors of mass death, it does set up a means for mobilising emotions, not "authentic" in the sense of emotions responding to the realness of the people behind his photographs, but emotions that are nevertheless relational to other human beings, including one's self; in other words, a space for an emotion of self within a collective place.

Loss of presence, both temporal and spatial, features strongly in diasporic consciousness. The prevalence of human movement and displacement, and the consciousness and current theorising raised by this has entered and expanded our understanding of the contemporary world, in a way not dissimilar to the Holocaust's penetration of the Western World's consciousness. The sense of loss of self through displacement, the separation from people and contexts, the paradoxes of belonging to place, all endure in the diasporic consciousness even through subsequent generations.<sup>50</sup> Loss of presence is not limited to experiences of diaspora, but can exist in identification with displacement, from the mother-child relationship to one's relationship with death. What is common to all these senses of loss is not only the loss of an original presence, or "being", or home, but that they are relational; they are fluid and change according to positions taken. Here we may be reminded of Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity as one of "becoming" as well as of "being."<sup>51</sup> It is not necessary, I believe, to find the contextual particularity in Boltanski's portraits for them to be identified with, or to elicit a genuine emotional response in the viewing experience – "genuine" in the sense of emotion

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<sup>50</sup> See the section "Postmemory" in the chapter *Seeing* above.

<sup>51</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (eds), *Theorizing Diaspora*, Blackwell Publishing, UK, 2003 (1990), p. 236.

as affect, as a non-narrative response, even while knowledge may come into play. Emotion has been given a space to be experienced, whatever its origins or sources.

## **Time and becoming**

Portraiture has traditionally claimed to immortalise the individual portrayed by fixing the portrayed's image in a particular time, thus seemingly arresting the advance of time. The paradox inherent in this claim is the impossibility of fixing time to represent a living being, where the idea of a "life" is inseparable from the experience/duration of time. By "fixing" time in the representation, the traditional portrait has largely represented a past.

Elizabeth Grosz (1999) presents time and becoming as "a concept of the new", privileging the future. This concept, she argues, defies the linear model of the arrow of time, that is, a homogenised, measurable movement of "clock time" that "imposes rather than extracts a unity and wholeness."<sup>52</sup> In light of Bergsonian theories of virtuality, Grosz offers an understanding of the future as open-ended rather than as the realisation of possibilities, "understanding the processes of production and creation in terms of openness to the new [and therefore difference and unexpected change] instead of preformism of the expected [the planned]."<sup>53</sup>

Discussing the opposition of knowledge (as "causal, statistical") to this open-ended concept of the future, Grosz proposes that perhaps other modes of knowing need to be used to cope with and produce the new. She refers to Eugene Minkowski's analysis of lived time, in which knowledge has a place when regarding the past, but functions as a mode of resistance to futurity, or life: "As for memory, it always concerns recorded events or things

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<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Grosz (ed), *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, NY and London, 1999, pp. 17-18.

<sup>53</sup> Grosz, p. 28, my parentheses.

heard. It is much closer to knowledge than to life and consequently can occupy only a secondary place in an analysis of lived time.”<sup>54</sup>

How does openness to futurity relate to diasporas whose core “being” and identity is based on knowledge of and commitment to the past? John Rajchman, in an examination of the place of minority politics within the philosophical considerations of “other futures” and “becomings”, writes from a Deleuzian perspective that a minority is never a given identity, but always a becoming, “a becoming-other”.<sup>55</sup> Minority politics, he claims, is often a politics of recognition that relies on or assumes the model of the nation-state. This concept of a “people” outside the parameters of a nation-state presupposes another concept of territory, and what it is to be a “native” of a territory. Complex and layered subjectivities are created for people of diasporas, or *diaspora space*, to use Avtar Brah’s concept, who find themselves in situations or circumstances in which the narratives of their origins are no longer linear. Their narratives become constructed through superposition or juxtaposition rather than through development or progress. They then become “originals” without origins. Rajchman writes, again referencing Deleuze, that this “kind of ‘synthesis of time,’ complicating our sense of ‘time,’ ... shows a minority to be a ‘future people,’ a ‘virtual People,’ a ‘people to come.’”<sup>56</sup>

Avtar Brah problematises this understanding of futurity within the tensions between discourses of “home” and “dispersion” and what it means to be “native” to a place, discourses that inscribe “a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins”.<sup>57</sup> Diasporas are long-term and often permanent community formations, even though individuals and households may be moving elsewhere. Diaspora space, however, is inhabited by those who have migrated and their descendants, as well as those

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<sup>54</sup> Grosz, p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> John Rajchman, “Diagram and Diagnosis” in Grosz, pp. 50-51.

<sup>56</sup> Rajchman, p. 51.

<sup>57</sup> Brah, p. 193.

who have stayed. It is what Brah calls an “entanglement of genealogies”.<sup>58</sup> Diasporas invoke images and narratives of past traumas and separation and dislocation, but are also potential sites of “becomings”, of hope and new beginnings: “They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure.”<sup>59</sup>

### *Roberto Cuoghi and “becoming”*

In his Deleuzian philosophical interpretation of the concept of a people outside their nation-state, Rajchman claims that “in some sense, we all have our ‘minorities,’ our ‘becomings’ that take us from the ‘lands’ of our determinations.”<sup>60</sup> In this light, the performance work of the Italian artist Roberto Cuoghi (Fig. B9) can be viewed as an experiment with the possibilities of a Deleuzian-like “synthesis of time”, in a transformation which entails Cuoghi’s “becoming” of his father. Cuoghi was twenty-five years old when he assumed his father’s persona. He dyed his hair grey, grew a beard, put on weight, wore his father’s clothes, and adopted his father’s gestures, rhythm, and habits for the duration of a year. Very little documentation exists of this performance; its product is the lived experience of Cuoghi and all who encountered him during this time, and in the lore that remains.

As the performance of a portrayal, Cuoghi’s transformation once again raises the question of “who?” Who is this portrait of? Whose gaze are we witnessing? Whose essential truth is being referred to, Cuoghi’s or his father’s? Is the purpose of this portrayal to authenticate, or even locate, the essence of another by enacting or copying the other? Is this a living attempt to arrest time in a synthesis of past, present and future? I suggest that Cuoghi’s performatory portrayal is a portrayal that speculates rather than fixes.

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<sup>58</sup> Brah, p. 181.

<sup>59</sup> Brah, p. 193.

<sup>60</sup> Rajchman, p. 51.



**Figure B9**

Roberto Cuoghi as his father, c. 1998

Seven-year performance

Image accessed:

<[http://theartists.org/artist/Roberto\\_Cuoghi.html](http://theartists.org/artist/Roberto_Cuoghi.html)>

Viewed 28 Oct 2008.

Cuoghi challenges the dualism of signifier and signified by contextualising his self within his father's identity, from his own position of subjectivity. His father's persona has become a context for his own presence. Moreover, his action seems to challenge a linear understanding of time. Cuoghi can be seen to be challenging his relationship to the experiences of his father by attempting to actively experience his father's life, as his father, in the present, thereby creating his own memories or history through his father's (imaginary) body. In the deconstructionist terms of *différance*, meaning is deferred by the play of signification.<sup>61</sup> Cuoghi's portrayal is less to do with the "essence" of individual self, than with a positioning of self.

The portrait of Cuoghi-as-his-father is not solely to do with Cuoghi's link to an origin, as for example in a subjective memory, nor of his father's origin, nor of Cuoghi's origin in his father. This portrayal has no fixed origin, to quote Hall, "to which we can make some final and absolute return."<sup>62</sup> Hall claims that when we talk of "cultural identity" that is not a fixed essence, the past no longer addresses us as a simple, factual "past", since our relation to it is always-already "after the break." It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth: not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental "law of origin."<sup>63</sup> Cuoghi himself can no longer return to the self of the past, for his past is now marked and screened by his constructed self-portrait.

One of the initial questions I posed in my research was whether the conceptual, stylistic and practical choices made in my depictions were dictated by my heritage as much as by my lived history. What Cuoghi's portrayal foregrounds for my purposes here is the place occupied by familial inheritance in the construction of our representations, as well as our choices of representation.

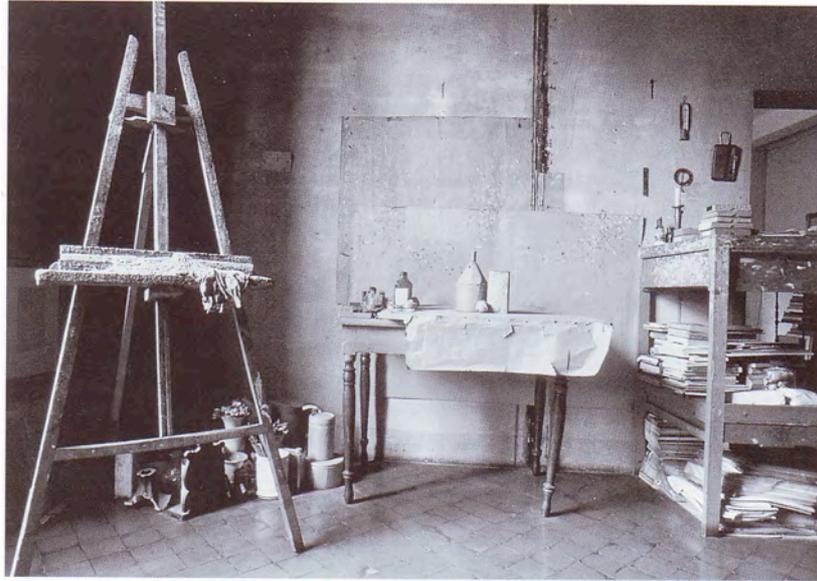
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<sup>61</sup> Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000 (1982), p. 32.

<sup>62</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", p. 237.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## 5 ERASING



**Figure E1**

Morandi's studio in via Fondazza, Bologna  
Photograph by Luciano Calzolari.

There is a scene in W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1996), in which the German-Jewish artist Max Ferber struggles with the elusiveness of portrayal. Sebald describes a relationship between presence and absence through the exhaustive attempts by the artist to “excavate” a satisfying depiction in the portrait through the act of erasing. Ferber's erasure involves dust; the natural build-up of “dust of decades” in his studio, as well as dust resulting from the break-down of his own making or unmaking, that is, the particles that result from scratching, smudging, and rubbing the surfaces of his paintings and drawings. Dust in Ferber's studio is both a material product of his act of erasing, and a layer that acts as erasure by concealing objects, to the point where “matter dissolved, little by little, into

nothingness.”<sup>1</sup> Dust as a layer re-presents objects covered by it as traces of what they were. Similarly, Ferber’s erasures mark traces of previous images, thereby recreating the images rather than eradicating them. Sebald writes of Ferber’s portrait imagery:

And if he then decided that the portrait was done, not so much because he was convinced that it was finished as through sheer exhaustion, an onlooker might well feel that it had evolved from a long lineage of grey, ancestral faces, rendered unto ash but still there, as ghostly presences, on the harried paper.<sup>2</sup>

The role dust plays in Ferber’s studio is reminiscent of Giorgio Morandi’s (1890–1964) compulsion with dust (I recall once reading how Morandi forbade his sister to clean the bottles and window panes in his studio). However, where it seems that Morandi related to dust that accumulated on his objects and his windows as a source for light and form for his artwork, Sebald describes dust as an outcome derived from Ferber’s artistic process. For Ferber, the particles created by his erasures are “the true product of his continuing endeavours and the most palpable proof of his failure”;<sup>3</sup> Ferber’s dust, as an outcome of his artistic inquiry and testimony to the impossibility of his attempts at representation, itself becomes the object of art.

Erasure in art can be understood as both a metaphoric and material practice. Both the symbolism of the act of erasing, and the function of erasing as part of the material production of an artwork, carry meaning and significance. How do we understand erasure under these terms, then, when it features in portraiture, whose very reason for being is the representation or evocation of a presence? In its attempt at imaging and making “permanent” something that is ephemeral, that is, the “life” in the living person, Magdalene Keaney notes that portraiture deals with presence in the shadow of absence.<sup>4</sup> Looking at a portrait is constantly being aware of the absence of its subject; in recognising

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<sup>1</sup> W G Sebald, *The Emigrants*, The Harvill Press, Great Britain, 1996, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Magdalene Keaney, “Portraits and Absence” in *The Possibilities of Portraiture*, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, 1999, p. 9.

what is there one simultaneously registers also what is not there. Yet deconstructionist theory shows us that binary oppositions such as presence and absence are not in absolute opposition, and that the traces of one are inherent in the other.<sup>5</sup>

## The act of erasure

Erasure in conventional drawing is the potential of fully obliterating something, making it absent, rendering what has been there as undecipherable: effacing it. Yet, an erasure in a drawing is not purely the reduction of something material to a non-material state. Its meaning relies on the thing that exists to be erased, some form of materiality that can be eliminated. In turn, this erasing of materiality creates another materiality in its place. This was demonstrated clearly when Robert Rauschenberg famously rubbed out a drawing by Willem De Kooning, and subsequently exhibited it as his own work titled *Erased De Kooning Drawing* in 1953 (Fig. E2). Quite often in drawing, erasure that does not seek to conceal itself exhibits itself not only as an act, but as the marks of the action it performs, i.e. the rubbing, scratching, smudging and general distressing of a surface. The action becomes a mark, and marking alludes to materiality, demonstrating the contradiction inherent in the process of erasure – namely, that erasure is at the same time a construction. Rauschenberg's erasure was both a symbolic act of self-assertion and a newly constructed material artwork.

The act of erasure, where that act is both the making and the unmaking of the subject, can be understood as an attempt to excavate a materiality of absence. It is an act of mark-making through mark-effacing, leaving traces, like Ferber's dust, of both itself and that which it erases.

In a deconstructionist reading, the materiality of erasure I described in drawing is no longer an erasure, since it is also always-already a mark. Rather, it is “under erasure” (*sous*

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<sup>5</sup> This notion will be expanded further into this chapter.



**Figure E2**

Robert Rauschenberg

*Erased de Kooning*, 1953

Traces of ink & crayon on paper,  
with mat & label hand-lettered in ink,

64.14 x 55.25 x 1.27 cm

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.

rature), a condition in which neither presence nor absence is definitive. Writing “under erasure”, the written word, inaccurate in itself, has been crossed out, and appears in print as the crossed-out word – simultaneously the word and its deletion.<sup>6</sup> Rauschenberg’s (exploitative) and Ferber’s (obsessive) acts of erasure illustrate the paradoxical situation for the artist who is attempting to re-present – the simultaneous existence of presence and non-presence. This is why Ferber cannot reach a definitive end with his portraits.

Diaspora is about both the presence and absence of subjectivity and place, spatially and temporally speaking. Concepts of erasure feature in diaspora and diasporic consciousness of difference, being and belonging, in which identity can be said to be “under erasure”. Diaspora is a state that implies continuity of presence – of identity within time if not of place. Diaspora communities, are thus also resonant with the risk of discontinuity as immigrants become included into their adopted culture, at times at the expense of their cultural identity of “home of origin”. For Richardine Woodall (2007), Caribbean diaspora identity in Canada, or *presence Caribbean*, is always fracturing and transforming; it is “a site of crisis” that is always in the process of becoming, a space that is temporal, contingent and historical.<sup>7</sup>

Drawing on Stuart Hall’s work, Woodall describes *presence Caribbean* in Canada as consisting of those of the black diaspora whose identity is constituted through similarity – a shared blackness and ethnicity – and who maintain strong connections to their country of origin. Moreover, it also includes those for whom Caribbean identity is not due to the presence of black skin: “Caribbean cultural identity is being displaced from the signifier “black” onto some other socio-cultural category” produced by education, income and

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<sup>6</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translator’s Preface” in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1980 (1976), p. xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Richardine Woodall, “(Re)Thinking my ‘-Ness’: Diaspora Caribbean Blacks in the Canadian Context”, *Shibboleths: A Journal of Comparative Theory*, vol. 1, no. 2, June 2007, p. 120, viewed 28 September, 2008, <<http://www.shibboleths.net/1/2/2.htm>>.

occupation together with racial characteristics.<sup>8</sup> Woodall claims that cultural identity constituted by race and the sense of “back home” is most under erasure for the black middle class who experience more inclusion within Canadian culture than the working class, and equally for second and subsequent-generation diaspora Caribbean blacks for whom cultural and racial identity is not fixed, but is exchangeable and negotiable according to specific needs and situations; the condition of dual identities makes an essentialised, “true self” more elusive.<sup>9</sup>

Discussing case studies of Caribbean-Canadian youth adopting different identities in different circumstances, Woodall examines the perception that *presence Caribbean* needs to be repressed for successful integration into Canadian culture: one interviewee expresses a sense of fragmentation of self when she reports that non-Caribbean Canadians “don’t realize the unrevealed side of yourself – your alternate personality – this side you adopt living here, your Canadian self. Like you are two personalities, two cultures. You show the adopted self.” Another interviewee who was born in the Caribbean expresses her alienation from other diaspora Caribbean youth raised with what she terms as “white” identities, claiming “blackness is not so much even a sense of skin, but how you can identify yourself culturally with people.”<sup>10</sup> The category of “black subject”, argues Woodall, is erased when there is no recognisable identification with black Caribbean culture.<sup>11</sup> In her own experience of integration into Canadian identity, Woodall claims that being accepted into white Canadian culture, in which her “black-ness” is forgotten by people after they get to know her, means that she becomes complicit in the very ideologies that deny her, that in

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<sup>8</sup> R Woodall, p. 122.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> These case studies have been cited from Frances Henry, *The Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto: Learning to Live with Racism*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994, pp. 257-258, in R Woodall, p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> R Woodall, p. 122.

her words, sequester, alienate, and hate her: “I have so perfected my *Canadian-ness* that I script my absence and erasure.”<sup>12</sup>

It may seem that the use of the hyphen can act as an equaliser to representations of dual identity so that one is not privileged over the other.<sup>13</sup> Woodall, however, posits the hyphen as a signifier of the gap between identities. She suggests that the hyphen that marks her identity – of her *black-ness*, her *Caribbean-ness* and *Canadian-ness* – symbolises the fragile and tenuous nature and continuity of the black Caribbean diaspora in Canada. The “-ness”, she argues, denotes the space of “home” and the possibility of return, but the hyphen placed before the “-ness” signifies the gulf separating her from constructing a home fully in either the Caribbean or in Canada, and “that home as a site of original grounding is displaced and can never fully be recouped.”<sup>14</sup>

## **Erasure in return**

The notion of “home” as memory in tension with “home” as lived experience, and the personal internal struggle of coming to terms with the impossibility of return, is also demonstrated by the character Josef in Milan Kundera’s novel *Ignorance* (2002). Prepared for seeing the places of his past as a person changed by time and distance, Josef was nevertheless unprepared for the absence of the markers of his past identity that were now themselves “under erasure”:

Before leaving Denmark he had considered the coming encounter with places he had known, with his past life, and had wondered: would he be moved? cold? delighted? depressed? Nothing of the sort. During his absence, an invisible broom had swept across the landscape of his childhood, wiping away everything familiar; the encounter he had expected never took place.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> R Woodall, p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> R Radhakrishnan, “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora” in Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (eds), *Theorizing Diaspora*, Blackwell Publishing, UK, 2003 (1994), p. 121.

<sup>14</sup> R Woodall, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, Faber & Faber, London, 2002, p. 52.

... The gigantic invisible broom that transforms, disfigures, erases landscapes has been at the job for millennia now, but its movements, which used to be slow, just barely perceptible, have sped up so much that I wonder: Would an Odyssey even be conceivable today? Is the epic of the return still pertinent to our time? When Odysseus woke on Ithaca's shore that morning, could he have listened in ecstasy to the music of the Great Return if the old olive tree had been felled and he recognized nothing around him?<sup>16</sup>

Josef no longer recognises what he sees, or rather does not see, any more. Moreover, he does not hear language the way it had existed in his past. The forms of expression that he thought he could return to no longer exist. Josef cannot return to a part of himself that had for twenty years been suppressed or inexpressible in the context of his adopted Denmark. As he listens to the conversations around him at his hotel restaurant,

It was the music of some unknown language. What had happened to Czech during those two sorry decades? Was it the stresses that had changed? ... Over the centuries the music of any language probably does change imperceptibly, but to a person returning after an absence it can be disconcerting: bent over his plate, Josef was listening to an unknown language whose every word he understood.<sup>17</sup>

Subjective time for Josef had been experienced in another place, so that those twenty years of absence had erased his “becoming” alongside the “becoming” of his homeland. Yet “under erasure”, his past belonging is there as trace, as is his absence of belonging. Though the past cannot be returned to or retrieved, it is its trace that gives meaning to Josef's current space of being. This space, then, if we can refer to it as the space of diaspora, relates to the space of time as well as to physical place, and also the space of memory which links time and place. Josef inhabits the space of diaspora; his identity is no longer defined by one place alone or the other, but by the multiple positions and relationships, past and future, of all the aspects involved in constructing his identity.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Kundera, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> Kundera, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> I have expanded on the notions of space and place of diaspora in the chapter *Moving*. See Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p. 209.

## Nostalgia

Perhaps before his return, Josef had remembered his “home of origin” nostalgically, creating in his mind what Salman Rushdie (1991) calls an “imaginary homeland” that never was. For Rushdie, it seems that the wish to return through “imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind,” risks a nostalgia that produces the homeland as a fantasy of the past as opposed to memory of the past.<sup>19</sup> Nostalgia in the twentieth century is often perceived as a form of amnesia, a reactionary situation that is “out of touch” with reality.<sup>20</sup> John Su (2005) points out that many contemporary writers like Rushdie reject nostalgia as a legitimate response to political and cultural crises. Su, while aware of the ethical risks of employing a strategy of nostalgia that at worst can lead to the extremes of fascism, proposes a re-thinking of nostalgia in our time as “an existential life choice”; rather than implying an effort to escape present reality or a deception of the past, a contemporary mode of nostalgia can be viewed as representing “an existential life choice for individuals who admire ideals associated with premodern societies.”<sup>21</sup>

Historically, nostalgia describes the pain (-algia from the Greek root “algos”) in the form of illness that was experienced in the longing for the return home; nostalgia as a term dates back to the seventeenth century when European military conscripts, in response to being taken far from home and alienated from the reasons for fighting, became ill with nostalgia.<sup>22</sup> Nostalgia can therefore be viewed, claims Su, as an historical phenomenon that is a response to specific forces, and in particular a response against the modern idea of time and progress. Su quotes Svetlana Boym, according to whom “the nostalgic (person) desires

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<sup>19</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticism 1981–91*, Granta, London, 1991, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> John Su, *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 3, viewed 1 October, 2008, retrieved from Ebook Library database.

<sup>21</sup> Su, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

[...] to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition.”<sup>23</sup>

Su’s argument draws from contemporary novels that describe social dilemmas of fragmentation and displacement and use nostalgic narratives as alternatives to these conditions, not so much by envisioning a better or more utopian world, but as a space for exploration and hope:

In these novels, fantasies of lost or imagined homelands do not serve to lament or restore through language a purported premodern purity; rather, they provide a means of establishing ethical ideals that can be shared by diverse groups who have in common only a longing for a past that never was.<sup>24</sup>

The transfer of attachment from a physical “real” to an imaginary homeland as an ideology is exemplified elsewhere within the history of the Jewish Diaspora. Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin (1993) refer to the Pharisee rabbis, whose identity was formed in the conditions of diaspora. Their position was that they could not return to the Land until the final redemption: “In an unredeemed world, temporal dominion and ethnic particularity are impossibly compromised.”<sup>25</sup> It is not that the rabbis erased the land from their lives; the land was renounced but at the same time transferred to the space of memory. To transcend their loss, the Pharisees needed to detach their loyalty from place to memory of place. Moreover, the authors suggest, this displacement of loyalty enabled the loss of the Land, for gaining political domination over the Land would have posed a threat to the continuity of Jewish cultural practice and difference, and “would necessarily have led either to a dilution of distinctiveness, tribal warfare, or fascism.”<sup>26</sup>

For many living in diaspora, the transfer of belonging from real to imaginary homelands is a strategy for survival at the point when we recognise our diasporic identity

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<sup>23</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York, 2001, p. xv, cited by Su, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Su, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity” in Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (eds), *Theorizing Diaspora*, Blackwell Publishing, UK, 2003 (1993), p. 107.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

not as loss of place, but as a new or rather different understanding of place. Different to erasure as a mode of forgetting, the mindset of the shift of belonging recognises the traces of place and also the traces of the past. A number of artists who deal with identity “under erasure” and the shifts of belonging within time and place, use the idea of portraiture because of its own identification with human presence (and absence) and a collective imaginary.

### **Layered erasure: Zhang Huan**

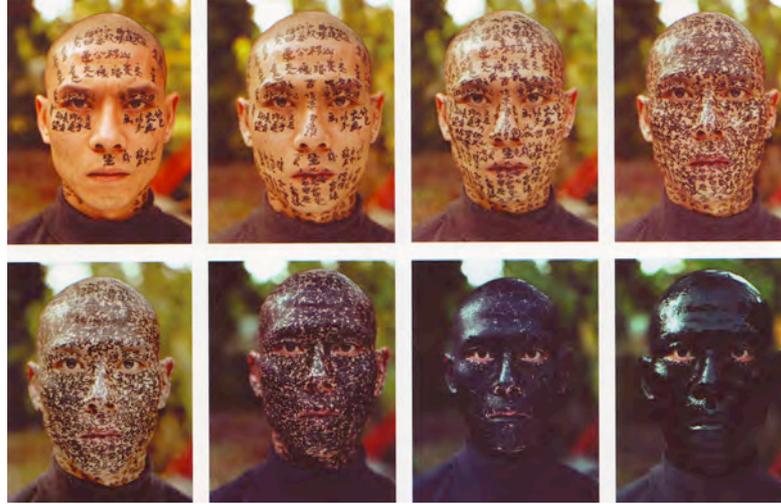
The work of the artist Zhang Huan can be viewed in light of diaspora space even within the homeland, where the notion of self and of family is displaced from the place of ancestral origin. Zhang Huan lived and worked in Beijing before moving to New York in 1998. His performances have been expressions of his relationship with his birth country China as well as the world at large, and in many of these he has used his body to react to physical situations of endurance and abasement.<sup>27</sup> His performance/photographs, *Family Tree*, 2000 (Fig. E3) and *Shanghai Family Tree*, 2001 (Fig. E4) can be viewed as explorations of becomings on the artist’s body, which is inscribed with the knowledge of narratives. These are narratives of the past that subsequently erase their meaning in the formation of a new “skin”. *Family Tree* is a sequence of nine images of the face of the artist, photographed and made at regular intervals from dawn until dusk on the one day. Three calligraphers were instructed to transcribe in black ink names, personal stories, learned tales, and random thoughts as described by Zhang Huan throughout the day, onto his face.<sup>28</sup>

Internal thoughts and inherited narratives become subjectively processed, then interpreted into text and externalised onto the artist’s body surface. By the end of the day

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<sup>27</sup> Isobel Crombie, *Body Language: Contemporary Chinese Photography*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Thom Collins, “Zhang Huan” in *Witness*, ed. Rachel Kent, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia, 2004, pp. 34-41, viewed 27 May, 2008, <<http://www.zhanghuan.com/ShowText.asp?id=17&sClassID=1>>.



**Figure E3**

Zhang Huan  
*Family Tree*, 2000  
 Type C photographs  
 8 images  
 127 x 101.6 cm each.



**Figure E4**

Zhang Huan  
*Shanghai Family Tree*,  
 2001  
 Type C photographs  
 9 images  
 76.2 x 50.8 cm each.

we are seeing the inked text so densely layered that a unified “second skin” has been formed.<sup>29</sup> The ink finally overwhelms both the body and the text, suggesting erasure of individuality and language, or knowledge. A new skin is now formed, black with the trace of the past, and anonymous or unrecognisable to/as its future.

In the catalogue accompanying the 2008 exhibition on contemporary Chinese photography at the NGV, Isobel Crombie likens the faces of the three family members in *Shanghai Family Tree*, 2001 to the pages of a book on which words in their multiplicity become oppressive and weighty.<sup>30</sup> With each layer of words, the materiality of the ink changes the recognisable features of the faces, gradually erasing those features that have humanised and fleshed out the images of the people represented. Gradually, the gazes of the faces, too, become obscured – they can be seen to evolve from intimate to veiled to threatening to absent. Our own gaze as viewers can no longer be positioned in an imaginary exchange of gaze. By the final photograph, these ghostly presences are no longer represented by their faces, but by their context, itself unrecognisable in specificity. This family has lost its individuality of face, of narratives, and of place. What began as the portrait of a family has become a commentary, a portrait of “family”.

## **Repetition and Lindy Lee**

Another space of diaspora consciousness is occupied by the work of Chinese-Australian artist Lindy Lee. Lee has used repetition of images throughout her years of artistic practice, from her early works using photocopied Renaissance portraits in the 1980s, to her current work of 2007 and 2008, in which she uses Chinese Buddhist images and images of past generations of her family. Jon Cattapan writes in the catalogue to her exhibition in Sutton Gallery that Lee references the photograph, yet is not a photographer. Rather, she uses the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Crombie, p. 12.

photograph as “a kind of talismanic source material (that) has allowed a deceptively simple serendipitous continuity of language – hers is the kind of art where persistent image-making and image-finding bleed into the one harmonious continuum.”<sup>31</sup> Many of Lee’s 1990s works incorporate repeated images of photocopies of European Old Master portraits positioned in grid or linear formations, and in differing variations of visibility and colour tone. At this time, Lee’s work was informed by a consciousness of diaspora, using the copy as a metaphor for “unbelonging” or cultural displacement. Lee, who was born in Australia of Chinese heritage, has stated: “I had always felt a fraud – a copy, and a flawed one at that ... I was counterfeit white and a counterfeit Chinese.”<sup>32</sup>

In another interview, she compares herself, a “bad copy” of Chinese heritage, with reproductive art, for reproductive art does not fit into an ideal.<sup>33</sup> Photocopies enable an image to be repeatedly reproduced. In *An Ocean of Bright Clouds, An Ocean of Solemn Clouds*, 1995 (Fig. E5), Lee uses twenty-five photocopies of a singular image in varying degrees of exposure so that the face in the work appears and disappears in tone and in form, but is decipherable through repetition. Yet the repetition of the same face does not enhance its particularity, but reduces it to anonymity, enhancing the power of presence/absence, not of individuality. Similarly, portraits such as *Fortuity*, 1991 (Fig. E6) seem vaguely familiar to the eye acquainted with European art, yet are unidentifiable.<sup>34</sup>

Melissa Chiu (2002) points out that by adopting the copy as a methodology, Lee was attempting to locate herself within the Western art-historical canon, at the same time disrupting that tradition by transforming the notion of the original into the anonymous and

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<sup>31</sup> Jon Cattapan, *Lindy Lee, Paul Knight, Simon Terrill, Michelle Tran; Every Day I Make My Way*, text accompanying the exhibition, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 1 March 2007–14 April 2007, viewed 21 August, 2008, <<http://www.suttongallery.com.au/exhibitions/exhibitioninfo.php?id=22>>.

<sup>32</sup> Melissa Chiu, “Struggling in the Ocean of Yes and No” in Benjamin Genocchio and Melissa Chiu, *Lindy Lee*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 2001, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Kohn, “Lindy Lee and Robert Scott-Mitchell”, in *Wide Format On-Line Publication*, viewed 2 October, 2008, <<http://www.wideformatonline.com/content/view/153/58/>>.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Colless, “Lindy Lee”, *Artcollector*, Issue 26, October 2003, viewed 2 October, 2008, <[http://www.artcollector.net.au/files/Artist%20profiles/Issue%2026/Issue26\\_Oct2003\\_lee.pdf](http://www.artcollector.net.au/files/Artist%20profiles/Issue%2026/Issue26_Oct2003_lee.pdf)>.

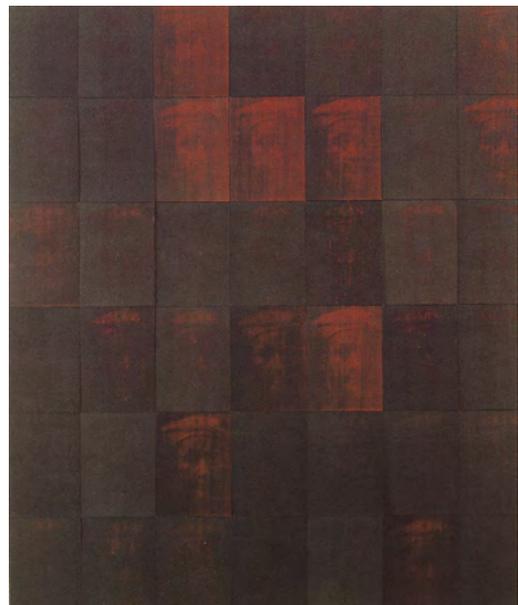
**Figure E5**

Lindy Lee  
*An Ocean of Bright Clouds,*  
*An Ocean of Solemn Clouds,* 1995  
Photocopy & acrylic on board,  
205 x 143 cm.



**Figure E6**

Lindy Lee  
*Fortuity,* 1991  
Photocopy and acrylic on  
Stonehenge paper,  
198 x 168 cm  
Collection Sarah Cottier & Ashley Barber,  
Sydney.



reproducible. Lee's use of repetition in the different versions of the original on each panel is not structured as a progression or narrative but as an entity. Here, repetition is used to suggest how identity differs according to time and context in "a state characterised by moments of flux and uncertainty."<sup>35</sup>

Edward Colless (2003) suggests that seeing Lee's 1990s portraits from the position of cultural tradition has implications for Australian culture as a version or "copy" of European culture. Colless views these portraits that simultaneously obscure and delineate the face as metaphors for displaced cultural memory:

These plaintive ghosts from an Old World hang forever at both a temporal and geographical distance from us. Looking at Lee's appropriated portraits we lose and partially recover images from the past, but images of a cultural tradition that was never really our own. Perhaps we are condemned to see them this way – those original works of art – as remote and speechless icons, because we are their false descendants. Just as the artist considers herself a false descendant of European art, producing false copies of that art as her own.<sup>36</sup>

A copy, however, as Colless points out, can only be regarded "false" or "bad" when it is compared to the original. Lee's art produces a new sense of original by deviating from what it has copied while nevertheless relating to it as the basis of its being.

While these works could be claimed to be self-portraits of sorts, relating to cultural memory and artistic ancestry, Lee has in recent years turned to more direct forms of personal history and family ancestry.<sup>37</sup> Her 2003 installation *Birth & Death* (Fig. E7) comprises one hundred concertina books of eighteen panels of family-album images of enlarged faces, journeying across the floor of the gallery space. The gallery becomes inhabited with Lee's Chinese family, past and present, alive and deceased, in stillness and in movement. The installation is at once a collective portrait and a singular self-portrait, a family genealogy and a moment in time.

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<sup>35</sup> Chiu, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Colless, <[http://www.artcollector.net.au/files/Artist%20profiles/Issue%2026/Issue26\\_Oct2003\\_lee.pdf](http://www.artcollector.net.au/files/Artist%20profiles/Issue%2026/Issue26_Oct2003_lee.pdf)>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



**Figure E7**

Lindy Lee

*Birth & Death*, 2003

Photograph: Rob Scott-Mitchell.

The works by Zhang Huan and Lindy Lee exemplify the fluidity between presence and absence, and the ambiguities inherent in individual, inherited and collective identity. Magdalene Keaney claims that artists who consciously deal with absence and death highlight the paradoxical notion that absence (and death) can be implied in a portrait by the presentation of the face (as we have seen in Lee, Huan and Boltanski's work), but equally, a subject can be represented but not physically seen.<sup>38</sup>

## Ghostliness

This is what occurs in Gary Simmons's *Wake*, 2005, an interactive artwork located on the Web<sup>39</sup> that echoes his previous chalk erasure drawings. In this work, human presence is experienced through sound, context, and imagination, but remains unseen. As the double meaning to its title alludes, *Wake* is to do with both the emergence of presence and the mourning of loss. Simmons photographed the empty interiors of nine ballrooms, in a style, writes Sarah Tucker in her introduction to the work, reminiscent of portraiture.<sup>40</sup> Each ballroom is never seen completely; at the same time as one part of the image appears, another part disappears, for the images have been programmed to appear and disappear in fragments as the viewer passes the computer mouse across the screen. In this way, the act of erasure is performed by the viewer, not the artist. The sound accompanying this performative work is the voice-over of a man and a woman's voices humming songs popular in times past, imbuing the lifeless interiors with the intimacy of the personal, a somehow familiar though not recognisable presence, a ghostly presence. Sarah Tucker

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<sup>38</sup> Keaney, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Gary Simmons, *Wake*, The Dia Art Foundation, 1995–2008, viewed 6 May, 2008, <<http://www.diacenter.org/simmons>>.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Tucker, *The Dia Art Foundation*, 1995–2008, viewed 6 May, 2008, <<http://www.diacenter.org/simmons/intro.html>>.

claims that “the act of imagining the people who might inhabit these objects and spaces invites a speculation ultimately more unsettling than facing any corporeal presence.”<sup>41</sup>

The idea of spectrality is used by Derrida to demonstrate the ambiguities of binary oppositions such as presence and absence, body and spirit, past and present, life and death.<sup>42</sup> Buse and Stott (1999) note that in deconstruction, these terms are not clearly oppositional as each contains some trace of the term it is meant to oppose. Ghosts can be seen as emblematic of the ambiguities contained in the separation of past and present, for they are neither alive nor dead, are both (or neither) present and absent, and are part of the past and the present. It can be seen as problematic to separate these terms as independently opposed notions, as each term possesses a trace of the term that it seemingly opposes. Past and present in the ghost are inseparable as the present is always constituted through the difference and deferral of the past, as well as anticipations of the future.<sup>43</sup> Derrida calls this dual movement of return and inauguration “hauntology”:

Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it hauntology.<sup>44</sup>

The ghost’s temporality, note Buse and Stott, is paradoxical as it at once both “returns” and makes its apparitional debut. The ghost can be said to be “under erasure” in terms of both time and space, for as a thing of non-fixity, it is defined by both its repeated reference to an originary being and moment, and its independence from that originary state, both defining and denying history and identity.

It could be said that inherent in all portraiture is a revenant that is a simultaneous trace of life and death, past and present, presence and absence. Elisabeth Bronfen (1993)

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Buse and Andrew Scott (eds), *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, Palgrave Macmillan, Great Britain, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, New York and London, 1994, p. 10.

parallels mimetic representation with the revenant, as the substitution for an absent object and therefore representing something that it both is and is not. Bronfen argues that the resemblance that mimetic representation is based on involves similarity and difference, where “the second body” stands in for but is not identical with its model. She gestures toward the idea of hauntology in the image of portraiture when she writes that “resemblance ... topples all categories of oppositions that distinguish model from copy, the animate from the inanimate; it makes signs semantically indeterminate, meaning undecidable.”<sup>45</sup>

## Doubling

However, it is Bronfen’s discussion of repetition, or the idea of return, as doubling in Edgar Allen Poe’s “Ligeia” (1838) that I find directly relevant to my own use of the doubled image. The protagonist in Poe’s story has lost his beloved, his “soulmate”, to death, and attempts to refind her in the embodiment of a second woman “whose death ends this plot of mourning and detection.”<sup>46</sup> In Poe’s story, then, repetition is used as an attempt to counteract absence, loss, and death, when a living body stands in for an absent or dead one. Paradoxically, this attempt at doubling emphasizes the difference between the two wives, and it is through this difference that the protagonist finds meaning in the love for his first wife: “It is the difference of Rowena that allows the narrator to delineate and thus realize the meaning Ligeia has for him. Only in the presence of his utterly different second wife can he reassemble the memory image of his first wife.”<sup>47</sup> Finally, the attempt at re-finding what is lost or absent can only come about through erasure of the second

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<sup>45</sup> Bronfen is drawing from Sarah Kofman’s analogy of representation and revenants in *Quatre romans analytiques*, Galilée, Paris, 1973. Elisabeth Bronfen, “Risky Resemblances: On Repetition, Mourning, and Representation” in Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (eds), *Death and Representation*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1993, p. 117.

<sup>46</sup> Bronfen, p. 106.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

woman. This erasure culminates finally in her own death, pointing “simultaneously to the re-finding of a lost object, with its ensuing erasure of death, and a perfect repetition as the presence of death.”<sup>48</sup>

My work similarly uses two subjects in the representation of one portrait, albeit made up of a number of parts. These parts have in turn been made up of variations of repeated images of the two subjects. However, in my work, the intent of doubling (that is, the portrait of two people as one) is not as “return”, or as an attempt to substitute one being for another. Rather, the oscillation between and shifting emphasis of imagery surrounding the two subjects calls into question the hierarchy of one subject overlaying or displacing the other; the image as well as the subject is at the same time unified and separate, lost and found, present and absent.

## **Inheritance**

Ultimately, the attempts of Poe’s protagonist at substituting one life or body for the spiritual essence of another failed. No “living” portrayal could re-present the past. No returned life could be had by the living body overwhelming the absent other, only death. Return, however, can be “in the manner of inheritance”, for an inheritance, like the ghost, “is also that which the dead return to the living, and that which reestablishes a kind of unity between life and death.”<sup>49</sup> Pierre Macherey, in his essay on Derrida’s *Spectre of Marx* (1999), claims that the significance of the spirit of Marx lies in the reproduction of Marx’s injunction anew through interpretations that reveal what is still alive in it. That is to say, this spirit exists not only in understanding or finding relevance in legacy, but in finding something new in that legacy that can only be recognised when it is brought to the present, as Derrida claims: “If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal,

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<sup>48</sup> Bronfen, p. 113.

<sup>49</sup> Pierre Macherey, “Marx Dematerialized, or the Spirit of Derrida” in Buse and Scott, p. 18.

if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it.”<sup>50</sup> In Macherey’s understanding, “one inherits from that which, in the past, remains yet to come, by taking part in a present which is not only present in the fleeting sense of actuality, but which undertakes to reestablish a dynamic connection between past and future.”<sup>51</sup>

What I am proposing in my work is a similar play with layered possibilities of appearance and disappearance, presence and absence, from a premise of inheritance, both the legacy of the genre of portraiture and the legacy of my chosen subjects who are all repeatedly absent in one way or another. Like traditional portraiture, the intent is for the images of the portrayed to “come alive”, but the investment is not in a “return” to an origin but rather in the relational possibilities of their production and construction, whether artistic or viewing. The intent in my work is not to memorialise the dead or absent in a new representation, but to enact a relationship with the representation of absence that is both formal and temporal, and, through this positioning, to create imaginative possibilities or opportunities for a dynamic portrayal. I believe this approach allows for an authentic portrayal of presence in a “still” representation, where the idea of presence incorporates change, that is, *becomings*, as well as a simultaneity of difference and sameness.

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<sup>50</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> Macherey, p. 19.

## 6 DRAWING

Both John Berger<sup>1</sup> and Jacques Derrida<sup>2</sup> – the first comfortable with the language of drawing, the second at odds with his lack of draughtsmanship – write of their compulsion to draw their parent at the time of death. “Drawing always returns,”<sup>3</sup> writes Derrida. How is it that drawing offers itself within such a private moment? Perhaps at such a time, drawing becomes a site for intimacy as a place that allows for “touching” the subject when actual touch is at once desired and confronting. What is it about drawing that is so simple and immediate, yet so powerful in meaning that it can substitute for words, even for the wordsmith? Drawing is at once descriptive and experiential; as Berger notes, the nature of drawing is that it reveals the process of its own making, its own looking; even an unaccomplished drawing reveals the process of its own creation.<sup>4</sup> Despite the frustration with his drawing, I speculate that Derrida’s temptation to draw his dying mother was not only to capture her likeness, but to capture his sight of her, alive before death.

### **From presence to absence to presence: drawing, memory and change**

In his essay “Drawn to that moment,”<sup>5</sup> Berger relates that in drawing the face and head of his dead father directly from observation, he was conscious that what he was seeing was going to be seen for the last time. In realising that the drawing of this last sighting was what

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<sup>1</sup> John Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, Vintage International, New York, 1985, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1993, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, pp. 146-151.

was to remain, it is reasonable to presume that his action would be emotionally charged. Yet Berger claims his intent was to capture an objective rendering, a true “likeness” of his dead father’s face. Each drawing, he claims, was the site of a departure, for he was documenting a face that itself was now only documenting a life. The result was an unmistakable “likeness” of his father as dead.

Living with one of the drawings, now framed, Berger continues to relate how the drawing changed in meaning. Over time, his subjective relationship with the drawing grew richer, to become the “immediate locus” of his memories of his father. Instead of marking the site of a departure, the drawing “began to mark the site of an arrival,” one that was inhabited rather than deserted.<sup>6</sup> The drawing was changing from a drawing marking the object of absence – a memento – to one inhabited by the spaces in between the forms marked: “For each form, between the pencil marks and the white paper they marked, there was now a door through which moments of a life could enter.”<sup>7</sup>

Berger explains this as a doubling of image of his father – it both draws out the past in the memories of the son, and projects the future in the image that continues to grow in familiarity. “My father came back to give the image of his death mask a kind of life.”<sup>8</sup> So that now, looking at the drawing, he sees aspects of his father’s life, even though someone else will still see a death mask. In other words, his subjective relationship to the drawing has changed both its content and its function. In a deconstructive reading, the subject, or presence as the portrayal of the sitter/subject, exists as an exploration of the differences or binary meanings within that portrayal, and an acceptance of non-conclusive interpretation by the artist and the viewer. As Christopher Norris writes, in deconstructionist terms, the extent to which “differ” shades into “defer” in *différance* “involves the idea that meaning is

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<sup>6</sup> Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, pp. 147-148.

<sup>8</sup> Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, p. 148.

always deferred, perhaps to the point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification.”<sup>9</sup> Thus meaning is in constant movement, resisting a conclusive completion.

In *Memoirs of the Blind* (1993), Jacques Derrida explores drawing through the notions of the visible, the invisible, blindness, and representation. He relates to drawing itself as “blind.” One aspect of this is the observational drawing process, in which the model cannot be seen by the artist at the same time as the artist draws the image. The mark relies on memory of what was seen, and when memory is invoked, the artist is blind to the sitter. There exists, then, a continual movement between absence and presence. Derrida writes of the self-portraitist: “As soon as the draftsman considers himself, fascinated, fixed on the image, yet disappearing before his own eyes into the abyss, the movement by which he tries desperately to recapture himself is already in its very present, an act of memory.” In my work, I have complicated that transfer of model to image so that on the paper are not only the marks of the memory of my mirrored self, but the return gaze – or receding gaze – of my mother’s image. Likewise, with the other portraits, when I draw from the live sitting, my paper has a printed image of someone other than the sitter. As I look at the sitter, and carry on the memory of what I’m to draw onto the paper, when I do place that memory on paper, I am looking not at the paper but at the person-other-than-the-sitter’s gaze looking back at me. At the same time, the return look has intervened in my memory of the sitter, and thus the two subjects, while separate, are placed in narrative with each other. Memory here, then, is multiple, the spectre doubled. Rather than an “infirmity” that stands in the way of representing precisely what I see, it has become a necessary tool for marking my search to see, optically as well as theoretically.

Perhaps it could be said that my work attempts to exploit memory, or blindness, in order to open the scope for identification/projection of the viewer. The idea of the viewer

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000 (1982), p. 32.

includes the artist as viewer, so that each meeting with the image presents a potential for different and deferred entries, narratives and meanings. The viewing narrative can identify with, or relate to, the marks of representation as well as the artist's trace, but also to the marks as autonomous identities. The viewer is invited to negotiate meaning through the multiple identities of marks and representation, and in the spaces of imagination between marks. In other words, the viewing itself can be a possibility/potential for collaboration in the image-making, as another form of mark-making, not solely as an observation or perception of a point of view.

I would like to stress that I do not mean to suggest to a viewer of my work how to respond, nor to presume to know whether a viewer will indeed have the desire to engage with the work, let alone develop a relationship or "narrative" with it. Rather, it is a matter of my own approach to and relationship with the portraits, and my own experience of artist-as-viewer. The artist Marlene Dumas has talked of positioning herself as viewer of her work, describing this mixture of detachment and empathy as feeling "like a third person". Explaining her approach to portraiture, she has said:

There are artists who want to possess their images. Often those who make portrait paintings say they want to catch the spirit, or to possess the being, capture the essence. These are ways of talking about images that I find quite scary; they sound so authoritative. It's not about possession; on the contrary, you have to take distance from the work.<sup>10</sup>

My own experience with my portraits during their production has been that of spending a disproportional amount of time viewing the work to touching or marking it, positioning myself at a metaphorical distance in anticipation of a new "narrative" before entering the space of visual engagement, each time.

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<sup>10</sup> Marlene Dumas in conversation with Barbara Bloom: Dominic van den Boogerd, Barbara Bloom and Mariuccia Casadio, *Marlene Dumas*, Phaidon Press, London and New York, 2004 (1999), pp. 27-28.

## The autonomy of marks: chance and intentionality

Justine Clark expands on this performatory role of viewing by reflecting on the meaning of accidental smudges and smears in architectural drawings, which, like portraits, refer to a body outside the representation. When unintentional marks such as smudges and smears appear on architectural drawings, they refer to the actions of process (whether on the building site or the office desk) rather than to the building represented. Smudges that are the consequences of action and do not describe in the sense of re-presenting also involve action in the viewing experience, promoting an “involved viewer, one who constructs and is constructed and stained by the image.”<sup>11</sup>

Clark claims that by suggesting the accidental, smudges disrupt figurative representation, interrupting the representational continuity of the image.<sup>12</sup> Chance-related smudges, and similarly smudges that are the result of erasures, stand out as “counter image” to the figure/object represented. These smudged marks are ambiguous, for they are ill defined, shifting and slipping between line, blur and erasure, between presence and absence.

Clark claims that the clouded image of the smudge directs us to the materiality of the drawing, so that the drawing itself exists as an architectural object as well as the representation of an object. She likens the paper to a body, on which the smudge leaves its caress of matter, and on which the pressure of erasure bruises.

The notion of paper as body describes the sensual possibilities of paper, as a “surface of bruises and blushes, tingles and scars.”<sup>13</sup> In my work, the “residue of body” that Clark refers to extends from the marks of the hand that mediates sight, to the body of the subject

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<sup>11</sup> Justine Clark, “Smudges, Smears and Adventitious Marks”, *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, Issue 4, 1995, p. 4, viewed 20 August, 2008, <<http://www.architecture.auckland.ac.nz/common/library/1995/11/i4/THEHTML/misc/conframe.htm>>.

<sup>12</sup> Clark, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Clark, p. 4.

who leaves the trace of skin directly onto the paper to perform the image (*MotherDaughter, his/her*). At other times, the paper as body rubs (the photocopy transfer), scratches and is scratched (sandpaper), absorbs through its surface (*closed book open book*), and covers (*FatherDaughter*).

In terms of the portrait, the materiality of the drawing in the process of at once looking and touching can be said to provide the “ça a été” as a sensory, material witness to presence – the traces of the artist’s response to the subject’s presence: in Clark’s words, “the coincidence of touch and visuality, material and theory.”<sup>14</sup> Drawing as evidence of its own making, as evidence of the way an object is being seen or examined, offers the image to be shared, rather than discovered. Recognition is instant. Examination of sight takes time.<sup>15</sup>

Clark writes that “smudges are unstable, partial, coincidental, one cannot read them within structures of intentionality.”<sup>16</sup> The marks that occur in my work, however, are not accidental, although chance has a say into their outcome. In my work, a site is created for marks involving chance, and opportunities are followed up. The marks are not accidental in their intent – but rather in their demarcation.

## **Ambiguity in gesture and meaning: the drawings of Marlene Dumas**

How can chance marks figure beyond description of themselves, or beyond decoration as representation, as contributions to the presence of the portrait as form without necessarily deferring to mimesis? The art of Marlene Dumas explores figuration as shifts of presence and absence of form, within gestures of chance and intentionality. In particular, her

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<sup>14</sup> Clark, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, p. 150.

<sup>16</sup> Clark, p. 5.

drawings, she says, address (if nothing else) a “vitality of gesture, speed and action”.<sup>17</sup> The ink drawings have been likened to the containment of fluid on a paper towel, “trapping all at once the contours of nebulous liquid within a flimsy fibrous grid ... it’s often impossible to locate where a gesture begins and where it ends” (Fig. D1).<sup>18</sup> Dominic van den Boogerd describes Dumas’s way of working as one in which “chance and surprise provide unexpected twists of meaning.”<sup>19</sup>

Dumas’s gestures are often ambiguous marks that are not easy to distinguish in contour and tone, or between interior or exterior form. Her marks imply shadow or tone, rather than literally representing these. In her *Models*, 1994 series (Fig. D2), Matthias Winzen reads the “accidental flow of the watery paint” as anticipating “the physiognomic distortions of old age even in the most beautiful of faces.”<sup>20</sup> Ambiguity exists not only in the image, but in the materiality of drawing; colour that is also line, drawing that is also painting.<sup>21</sup> The stains both seduce and repel; as Johanna Burton describes the doubleness of meaning in Dumas’s images, “every innocent face threatens to coagulate into a less benign version of itself.”<sup>22</sup> Just as Dumas’s subject-matter of themes which deal with difference and stereotype – pornography and religion, strippers and saints, portraits of fashion models and mentally disturbed people – is not presented as singular and authoritative in meaning, so too her mark-making shifts between controlled gestures and autonomous gestures of chance that dissolve any rigidity of conventional structure. Winzen suggests that Dumas uses the paper surface, which she often compares to skin, as a border, “an area that separates and brings into contact, as a communicative, metabolic membrane

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<sup>17</sup> Marlene Dumas quoted in Johanna Burton, *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing*, Phaidon Press, London and New York, 2005, p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> Johanna Burton, *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing*, Phaidon Press, London and New York, 2005, p. 82.

<sup>19</sup> Dominic van den Boogerd, “Hang-ups and hangovers in the Work of Marlene Dumas” in Dominic van den Boogerd, Barbara Bloom and Mariuccia Casadio, *Marlene Dumas*, Phaidon Press, London and New York, 2004 (1999), p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> Matthias Winzen, “Sensitive Surfaces, Clear Thinking: The Work of Marlene Dumas” in Michaela Unterdorfer and Matthias Winzen (eds), *(In Search of) The Perfect Lover. Works by Louise Bourgeois, Marlene Dumas, Paul McCarthy, Raymond Pettibon from the Sammlung Hauser und Wirth*, Hatje Cantz, Germany, 2003, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> Burton, p. 82.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

**Figure D1**

Marlene Dumas

*Chlorosis* (detail), 1994

Ink wash, watercolour on paper, 24 x 19 cm each  
Series of 24 drawings.



**Figure D2**

Marlene Dumas

*Models* (detail), 1994

Ink wash, watercolour on paper, 60 x 50 cm each  
Series of 100 drawings.



between inside and outside (the image).”<sup>23</sup> The paper surface could be said to be that liminal territory of the abject that Julia Kristeva (1982) describes as a state that is neither subject nor object, “not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing.”<sup>24</sup> The stained paper surface is not entirely part of the image, but is neither apart from it. It belongs on and to the border of the inside and outside of the image, but is not entirely of the image nor entirely outside it. As Kristeva writes abjection “disturbs identity, system, order”.<sup>25</sup> Both control and chance in Dumas’s art, then, work towards the creation of presence that moves between abstraction and figuration, between open and closed boundaries.

## Drawing subjectivity

During the 1990s Dumas produced several large series of drawings of faces in ink washes called “Portrait Heads”. These included *Black Drawings*, 1991–92, *Models*, 1994, *Betrayal*, *Rejects*, 1994, *Chlorosis*, 1994, *Jesus Serene*, 1994, and *Underground*, 1994–95. Each series is made up of a large number of portraits – *Models*, for example, consists of one hundred faces of models, contemporary and historical.

*Models* displaces conventions of portraiture that aspire to represent and essentialise the individual and the group. Ernst van Alphen argues that Dumas’s series cannot be understood in the same way as group portraits, for groups are composed with a centre, foreground, a background, and margins: groups or group portraits “create outsiders and insiders”. Nor can Dumas’s portraits be looked at as enclosed, individual portraits, for they are positioned (though in non-hierarchical orderings) and therefore seen in relationship to each other. For van Alphen, *Models* is not a single portrait, nor is it a group portrait, but a

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<sup>23</sup> Winzen, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, New York, 1982, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Kristeva, p. 4.

group of single portraits.<sup>26</sup> At first viewing, he claims, *Models* seems to form one group identity of womanhood, but on closer inspection, there are so many variables between the individual portraits, including ambiguity in gender, differences in race, in references to elite culture and mass culture, recognisable and anonymous personalities. Van Alphen suggests that this group of portraits, which consists of representations of representations, are explorations of the relationship between representation and subjectivity, rather than representations of women.<sup>27</sup>

In the *Black Drawings* (Fig. D3), Dumas has layered black ink washes with slight variations in sepia, green and blue colour, wet into wet, to construct 112 separate and different “black” faces. As both van Alphen and Dominic van den Boogerd point out, *Black Drawings* can ambiguously mean drawings in the colour black and drawings of black people; not only does Dumas engage with the nuances of the colour black, but also of black identity viewed as a Western, media-promoted stereotype.<sup>28</sup> Van Alphen claims that these portraits do not produce a “holocaust-effect” as do the faces of Christian Boltanski’s enlarged photographs of children, nor is their intent to evoke original subjectivities. Rather, this conception of subjectivity is based on “variety and diversity” not referring to an original presence, but in relation to each other. “They are subjects because they are all different. This is why they all deserve their own panel within their collective portrayal.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Ambiguity in the decipherable mark**

As discussed above, one of the ways in which marks become ambiguous is when their meaning shifts between representation and non-representation. Following Derrida’s ideas on the blindness of drawing, marks that are representational in intent can paradoxically

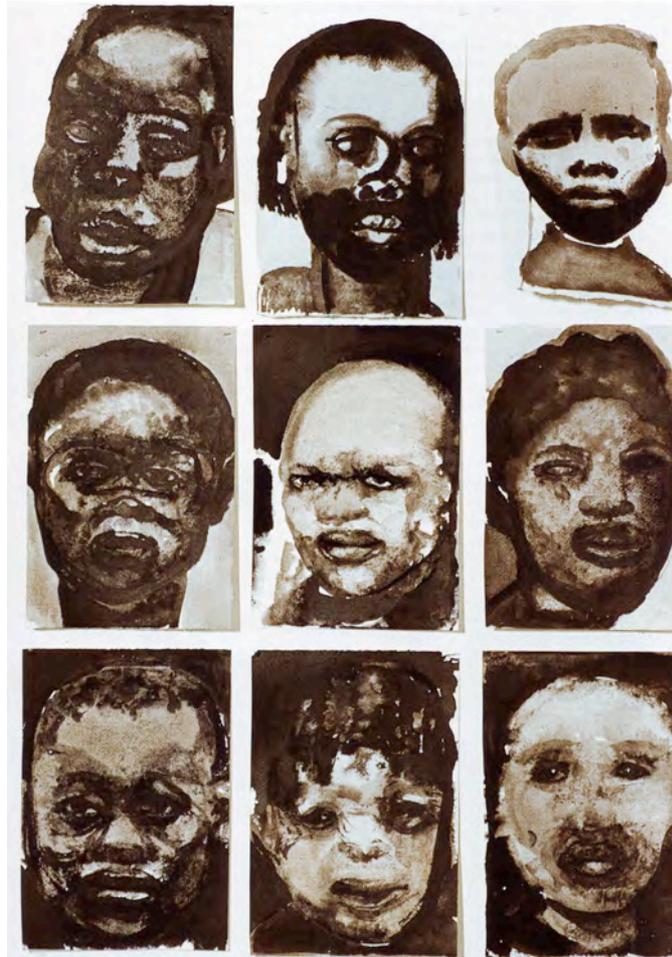
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<sup>26</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 140.

<sup>27</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 146; Dominic van den Boogerd, p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, p. 44.



**Figure D3**

Marlene Dumas

*Black Drawings* (detail), 1991–92

Ink wash, watercolour on paper, slate,  
25 x 17.5 cm each

Series of 111 drawings and 1 slate.

emphasise absence, while non-representational marks that are traces of action exist as evidence of presence.

There is ambiguity too in the representational mark as blind, as lifeless, and the blurred or undecipherable mark of potential – the potential to be imagined. The eye of the sitter/subject, drawn from life in its full representation, marks something that no longer exists in body and in time. It is a mark of loss. It represents a past engagement with the living eye, the stillness of a particular time that is frozen in the representation, and it represents one viewpoint. Moreover, as Derrida points out, when we exchange a look or gaze with another, we lose sight of the body of the eye, whereas when there is no reciprocal exchange, we are more engaged with the eye as form: “This body of the eye ... I can easily stare at in a blind man”.<sup>30</sup> The blurred or “incomplete” eye, on the other hand, is open to be constructed imaginatively.

## Drawing time

John Banville, in his novel *The Sea* (2005), writes: “Memory dislikes motion, preferring to hold things still.”<sup>31</sup> Remembering Rose, the governess of his childhood love Chloe Grace, the art historian Max Morden draws a tableau of memory:

Of the three figures in that summer’s salt-beached triptych it is she, oddly, who is most sharply delineated on the wall of my memory. I think the reason for this is that the first two figures in the scene, I mean Chloe and her mother, are all my own work while Rose is by another, unknown, hand. I keep going up close to them, the two graces, now mother now daughter, applying a dab of colour here, scumbling a detail there, and the result of all this close work is that my focus on them is blurred rather than sharpened, even when I stand back to survey my handiwork. But Rose, Rose is a completed portrait, Rose is done.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> John Banville, *The Sea*, Picador, London, 2005, p. 221.

<sup>32</sup> Banville, p. 224.

The stillness of the memory tableau that Banville describes can be likened to the stillness of drawing that, as Derrida has argued, is enmeshed within memory. Memory and recognition are integral to looking, for what we see at a particular moment in time is the result of multiple previous momentary appearances.<sup>33</sup> For John Berger, the stillness of a drawing encapsulates the traces of many glances – assembled moments – seen together as a whole rather than as fragments.

Berger claims that drawing presupposes a particular view of time, different to the captured moment of the photographic image. The drawn image reveals the experience of looking, and thereby, through its process critiques appearances. Drawing reminds us, writes Berger, that the visual is always a construction with a history. Whereas the photograph has stopped time, the drawing reveals the process of its own creation, and thereby it encompasses time.<sup>34</sup> It is this ability of drawing to expose the artist's visual and material exploration<sup>35</sup> that opens up possibilities for the affiliative gaze of the viewer beyond identification with the representation as image. For this reason, drawing offers a space for return.<sup>36</sup> The photograph, as Barthes has argued, is evidence for what was. In the experiential space that drawing offers, the subjective familial gaze of the artist can become the affiliative gaze of entry. When the viewer takes the time to stop and enter the time-space of a drawing, he/she can move within it, rather than move the image in our memory within our lives as we do with photographic images.<sup>37</sup>

The use of the photographic image in my work began a number of years ago as an attempt to rid myself of what I felt was an idiosyncratic style of drawing. At the time, I was

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<sup>33</sup> Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, p. 148-149.

<sup>34</sup> Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, p. 149.

<sup>35</sup> As opposed to painting, which is able to disguise the process of its making. See Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, p. 149: "The imitative facility of a painting often acts as a disguise – i.e. what it refers to becomes more impressive than the reason for referring to it."

<sup>36</sup> "Every day more of my father's life returns to the drawing in front of me": Berger writes that his father's return into the space of the drawing is beyond the function of a memento, for the drawing encompasses a life-experience. *The Sense of Sight*, pp. 149-151.

<sup>37</sup> Berger, *The Sense of Sight*, p. 149.

drawing the dead head of a calla lily, chosen for its shrivelled form that resembled the dynamics of a human body. Drawing this object, stilled at the end of its process of dehydration as if in mid-movement, evoked an expressionistic drawing reaction that I felt was more revealing of me than my object of contemplation. My gestures seemed to be creating a boundary between me and my subject. Or rather, the futurity of my subject, for I felt that my subjectivity was interfering with my ability to relate freshly and progressively to the object I was drawing.

Transferring the photographic image of the object was a strategy for placing on the paper the stilled presence of reality which I could animate in my drawing. I chose the most available means of doing so by “photographing” the lily in a photocopier and transferring the image onto paper. Needless to say, the result, as a transferral by hand, was not an objective or “still” image. The emphases of my rubbing, the amount of solvent used, the layers of photocopies, the different toner qualities within the photocopies, the texture of my paper, the speed with which the wet photocopy was lifted off the paper – all the materials, actions and considerations of the process did not result in an objective image, but in a new kind of subjectivity. Here I was able to use the photograph as image, as evidence of a time that was, and at the same time approach it materially as a drawing.

My current work continues to explore this way of experiencing the image and the subject, the paradoxes of the animated and the still.

## **The Anonymous Portrait: The visual work**

### *The subjects*

All the portraits on paper are made up of one absent subject and one subject who has been present in the studio as “sitter”. The absent subject is represented in a photograph, which I have reproduced in photocopy and transferred onto paper. In two of the three portraits, the other subject is drawn from life. The exception is in Mother-Son, in which I have used the photocopies of both subjects. However, the subject whose presence I experienced was drawn in the studio in preparatory drawings, then photographed by me and photocopied.

### *The paper*

The conceptual and material qualities of the paper I have used have been integral components of my work. The Reflex photocopy paper that does not absorb the photocopy ink has allowed me to use solvent over the ink in a particular way, and whose process of production engages in negotiated unpredictability and immediacy. The imprint of the photocopy on the Arches paper at times creates an image that penetrates the paper, and at times “sits” on the paper. At times the paper is surface, at times it allows for an illusion of depth. At times the paper seems to situate itself between both surface and illusion, as itself another layer in the formation of the image.

The placement of the papers are constructed as rhythms, as phrases in a sentence, as part of the drawing or the portrait as a whole. There are no firm boundaries between the papers, nor within the face. The installation portrait attempts at inviting both stillness and movement. What the work requires most is time.

### *The artist's books*

The artist's books have been approached as both narratives and installation works. They require the viewer to move through them. The artist's book as form and as artefact references textuality and history, but as installation, it references time past, present and future. The idea of "book", however, remains present in both form and content as "home".

## **Description of the Works Exhibited**

### *Touch*

#### ***MotherDaughter (as self-portrait)*** (Fig. D4)

Six works, 75 cm x 75 cm each, watercolour and ink wash, charcoal, graphite, photocopy transfer, on Arches 300gsm.

Each image is made up of my mother's photographed face as an enlarged photocopy transfer, and the observational drawing of parts of my face positioned over parts of her face. Areas surrounding the face have been sandpapered in an attempt to create a physical reality of form, at least at some points.

#### ***MotherDaughter II*** (Fig. D5)

One work made up of 15 images, 30 cm x 37 cm each, watercolour and ink wash, charcoal, graphite, eye-shadow powders, photocopy transfer, on Arches 300gsm.

At times, traces of the image of my mother's face have been erased off the paper surface by sandpaper, thereby reconstituting the paper into a soft texture. Parts of my own face have

been covered with coloured make-up and pressed onto the paper surface where my imagined mother is, followed at times by responses to the new marks with further drawing by hand.

### *Skin*

#### ***MotherSon*** (Fig. D6)

One work made up of 15 images, 30 cm x 37 cm each,  
black and coloured photocopy transfers, on Arches 300gsm.

All the images in these works are made up of the same two photographs that have been photocopied and transferred, in various layers, sizes, and emphases. What has intervened to change the appearances of the original photographs or photocopied faces is not the mark-making of traditional drawing, but the artistic choices of material application together with chance action.

#### ***MotherSon II*** (Fig. D7)

One work made up of 8 to 13 images (the exact number to be decided at the time of exhibition installation), 60 cm x 40.5 cm each, black and coloured photocopy transfers, on Arches 300gsm.

Expression of the faces are not through features, but through the material action and placement; the border of a stain, for example, affects the expression of a feature of the face.

#### ***MotherSon III*** (Fig. D8)

One work made up of 6 images, 60 cm x 40.5 cm each,  
black and coloured photocopy transfers, on Arches 300gsm.

The photocopies are applied to both sides of the paper. The image that is exhibited is the visual result of both sides of the paper. I relate to the paper as a curtain or a virtual wall, at once material and non-material, existing to separate, and existing to incorporate. The transferred materiality of the images I relate to as “stain”. The stain leaves the marks of its movement.

### *Gaze*

#### *FatherDaughter* (Fig. D9)

One work made up of fourteen images, 37.5 cm x 52.5 cm each, ink and watercolour wash, photocopy transfer, charcoal and graphite, on Arches 300gsm.

In the original photograph of the absent subject, a photograph very small in which the subject is posing from a distance to the photographer, the eyes of the subject are in shadow. The marks of drawing are through observational drawing in my studio of the daughter, herself a similar age to her father at the moment of being photographed. While much of the drawn focus is on the eyes, my gaze and look is not limited to the eyes but extends to the whole installation and viewing experience. My interaction with the gaze and the look is multiple, for I am dealing with looking and the return look, the spaces between the forms of the individual faces, and across as well as within the viewing trajectories of the installation as a whole.

### *Artist's books*

The books in the *bis/her* series are presented as an installation, a collective portrait that simultaneously acknowledges the same-but-different narrative within each individual book. The *Closed Book* series is presented as a particular installation. While the books can take

on different structures and formations, under the title *Closed Book*, they are presented in this particular structure.

Though as books these works are narratives, they are “small time” narratives, alluding to a real-time passage or journey. They can be understood, perhaps, as “phrases” rather than statements.<sup>38</sup> There is no grand knowledge attained at the end. In fact, the end can just as well be the narrative’s beginning. They are presented as narratives that are possibly but not necessarily part of “a patchwork of little narratives”.<sup>39</sup>

It could be said that I have used a diasporic approach to the artist’s books presented, for as “books” they relate to the place of textuality, history, and authority, while as “artist book” objects that can be moved through and possibly reconstructed, they both break away from their tradition and reference it as “home”.

### *his/ her* (Fig. D10)

Twenty-six bound books, 25 cm x 23 cm x 1.5 cm each when closed, letterpress text and facial imprints (eye-shadow powders), charcoal, on Magnani Velata Arvorio 210gsm.

This work comprises two series of books, each series made up of thirteen books laid out in sequence. Each book is open at a consecutive page.

The books contain prints marking, or rather leaving trace of, features of a face. Each book contains the imprints of parts of an individual person’s face, from the crown on page one to the mouth on page 12, culminating in the last page as text and the trace of itself.

As a construction, the books, opened on different pages but in consecutive sequence, can be “read” as a narrative that traces the face as would an eye or a pointer, journeying

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<sup>38</sup> Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*, Routledge, London and New York, 1991, p. 65.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

through the features of a face. As a whole, the resulting conceptual face is a collective one, made up of parts of 13 different people.

The text's function is multiple; within the meaning of the word; as an image to be viewed; as an image to decipher, to draw the viewer into a position of intimate engagement; and as a mark, a smudge that has its own consequences.

The subjects in these portraits are family members and friends of the artist.

*Closed Book* (Fig. D11)

Ten books comprising 10 to 12 drawings, 16.5 cm x 8 cm each image, photocopy transfer, charcoal, on Arches 300gsm.

These books take the form of ten series of drawings. Each row is made up of ten small images folded in the centre as in a book, and that are in a progressive process of folding and unfolding. The first and last drawings are fully folded closed, and reveal a reversed image that has saturated through from the other side.

The subjects in this series are family snapshots of mothers/grandmothers and daughters of four generations.

# Migrations



**Figure D4**

Gali Weiss

*MotherDaughter* (detail), 2008



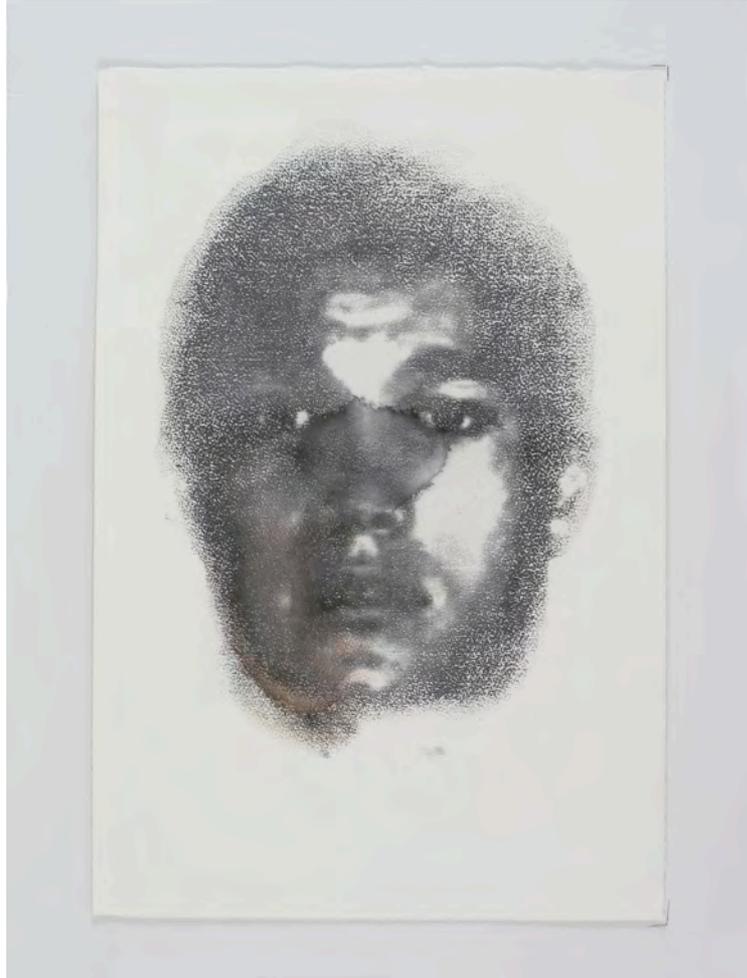
**Figure D5**

Gali Weiss  
*MotherDaughter II* (detail), 2008



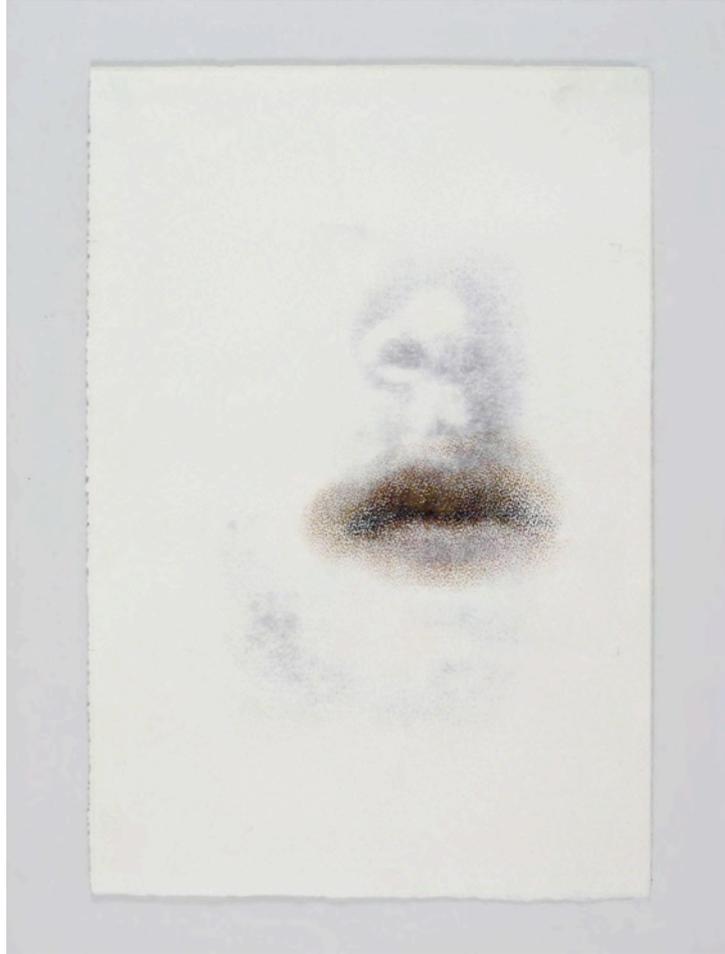
**Figure D6**

Gali Weiss  
*MotherSon*, 2008



**Figure D7**

Gali Weiss  
*MotherSon II* (detail), 2008



**Figure D8**

Gali Weiss  
*MotherSon III* (detail), 2008



**Figure D9**

Gali Weiss

*FatherDaughter* (detail), 2008



**Figure D10**

Gali Weiss

*bis* (his brow), 2008



**Figure D11**

Gali Weiss  
*Closed Book* (detail), 2008

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