

**Undoing Recognition:  
A Critical Approach to Pose in Photography**

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

By

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**September, 2006**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Undoing Recognition: A Critical Approach to Pose in Photography**

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This study aims to give an account of the act of posing in photography in terms of the self/image relationship in order to foreground an unexplored aspect of the pose that is its potential to question (self-)recognition and/or (self-)identification. By departing from an analysis of portrait photographs belonging to different cultures and historical periods, this thesis attempts to provide a critical approach to the act of posing through a productive communication between visual and theoretical texts and provides a new approach to the subject/image relationship.

**Key Words:** Posing, Photography, Representation, (Self-) recognition, Portraiture  
August Sander, Ergün Turan

## ÖZET

### **Tanımayı Bozmak: Fotoğrafa Poz Verme Anına Eleştirel Bir Yaklaşım**

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Eylül, 2006

Bu çalışma, fotoğrafa poz verme hakkında, öz/imge arasındaki ilişkiyi göz önünde tutarak, poz vermenin şimdiye kadar vurgulanmamış olan, öz-tanı(n)ma ve özdeşleşme'yi sorgulamasına değinmektedir. Farklı kültür ve tarihlere ait portre fotoğraflarının incelenmesinden yola çıkarak, görsel ve teorik metinlerin yapıcı bir şekilde bulunduğu bu çalışma, poz verme anına eleştirel bir yaklaşım sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Poz vermek, Fotoğraf, İmgeleme, Öz-tanı(n)ma, Portrelemek, August Sander, Ergün Turan

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>



Fig.1

There's something disturbing about this image (Figure 1). Like many disturbing things, this one is hard to localise, to point out easily. One needs a certain time of communication with the image in order to figure out what really is disturbing, so, let's start with a close analysis of this photograph.

To start with, what strikes one in this photograph is the coexistence of two different attitudes vis-à-vis the camera and the moment of this picture being taken. Two persons, whose physical traits have things in common and who therefore create the impression that they may be a mother and her son, are looking at the camera. But it seems as if they are seeing different things.

The woman, staring at the camera straight, has the expression on her face of someone, whose eyes are fixed on an invisible point without seeing anything, as if hypnotised. The fact that her eyebrows are high as if a little surprise has left its trace, and the way her mouth is nearly going to open itself, not to talk but rather to lose control, increases this sense of being hypnotised. The pattern of her dress seems to speak in her place because of its contrast with her inexpressive face. She seems to be either thoughtless or completely trapped in her thoughts.

In either case she seems to be only physically there, in this moment. She is like a puppet put on a chair, her hands lying heavily on her knees. A detail from her dress, the dark vertical line, right in the middle of her upper body, like a thin black stick, (either a shadow or a fold of her dress), increases this impression of being a puppet. This is so because it may also remind us of an expression used to describe people who are not natural, and who pretend to be someone else: "Someone who swallowed a stick".

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of the introduction and Chapter 1 were written in 2002 during my preliminary graduate studies at The University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

All these details and impressions about the way she is situated in front of the camera give the feeling that she is forced to immobilise herself to the point of becoming frozen, to the point of becoming unresponsive to what is happening around.

But is posing not an act in which the subject is aware of his or her posing? In order to pose doesn't one pretend to "be"? And is pretending not an act of self-consciousness? Rather than being self-conscious this woman seems to be hypnotised, to have lost all power over herself. Although she probably chose to sit there of her own will, it seems that something must have changed when she faced the camera.

The boy standing next to the woman has a different kind of stare. First of all his eye level is higher than the level of the camera lens. Unlike the woman, he has to look down a little, with his head slightly inclined to the right. Whether he is forced to look at a point indicated by the photographer or whether this stare is his own choice, he looks as if he is aware of what he is looking at because he seems to choose to orient his eyes according to this indication. This lowering of his eyes and the gentle air of his face, created by the beginning of a smile gives him also an air of obedience.

Although compared with the woman he is in a much more difficult position, since he has to stand up instead of sitting, he seems nevertheless more relaxed. The way his shoulders are slack, the curvilinear folds on the arms of his coat, the way his coat is unbuttoned and the fact that his right foot extends slightly beyond his left foot increases the impression that his body is much more subtle, ready to loosen its forced position.

Two things that seem to contrast with this subtlety and that seem to be imposed on him are the flowers he is holding with his fingertips and the way his arm is folded while holding them. Like the handkerchief in the pocket of his coat, the flowers seem to be put there by convention. Like the handkerchief, the flowers do not belong there. The handkerchief, as a sign of seriousness, contrasts with the casualness of the coat. The

flowers contrast with the ineptness of the hand holding them. It is as if any object could be in the place of these flowers. One may have the impression that his hands are not holding the flowers; they are just acting as if they are holding them in a pantomime.

Considering all these details we can say that the boy doesn't look like he really believes in his pose. He looks like a mediocre actor because his body bears some traces of casualness, creating a contrast between the imposed pose (most probably by the photographer) and the performance of that pose. Although he seems to have an impression of being obedient, this obedience is not total one because he still looks as if he hasn't been able to assimilate these instructions.

As to the woman, she seems as if she hasn't even made an attempt to appropriate a pose. She looks like she is not responding to what is happening at that moment. She seems not to be aware of, or to understand what is going on. She seems to look at us from a different level. These two different attitudes in the moment of taking the photograph have however an important similarity to each other: Both the woman and the boy are having difficulties in assuming a pose.

Departing from this analysis we can say that this photograph shows what different reactions a photographic camera can encounter. One may be hypnotised and unable to assume a pose; another may try but not manage to assume a pose. These different reactions are the starting point of my inquiry about the nature of posing. I am interested in these reactions because they may open up the question of the attempt at (self-) recognition and (self-) identification.

Despite the power of the photographic camera to confer an identity upon the poseur<sup>2</sup> at the expense of his or her being, posing in front of a camera can preclude the impact of this power by preventing the posing subject from assuming a specific identity.

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<sup>2</sup> I am using the word "poseur" to mean "poser" in this thesis to emphasize the artificiality of the pose.

The purpose of this thesis is thus to analyse in detail the moment of posing and reveal the ways in which it can be considered as a moment that brings into question the notion of subjectivity.

### **1.1 Purpose of the study**

More specifically, the purpose of this study is to establish an account of the pose in terms of the self/image relationship, in order to foreground an unexplored aspect of the pose: that is, its potential for inducing in the subject a sense of alterity and thus providing him/her with a *productive look* that leads to a questioning of (self-) recognition and/or (self-)identification.

The expression *productive look* was coined by Kaja Silverman in her book The Threshold of the Visible World (1996). It refers to the possibility of seeing productively, in other words, a way of conceiving the “self” and the “other” in a productive way that is not determined in advance by the social codes of recognition and identification.

This thesis is thus re-considering the act of posing (generally conceived as a way of appropriating the ideal image of the “self”, imposed by culture, and as an attempt to be affirmed by social norms), as an act in which the subject is reminded of his/her abyssal emptiness and through which he/she can have a critical distance to the normative ways of (self-) representation and (self-)recognition.

### **1.2 Methodology**

To produce an analysis of the act of posing, one can consult one’s personal experiences or the experiences of others, of the moment of posing. But the aim of this work is not

simply to provide an account of the pose from the viewpoint of the posing subject but rather to explore the nature of the pose through a close analysis of the images of posing subjects.

Since it might be superficial to reduce every act of posing to an act of *productive looking*, because not all expositions of the act of posing can lend themselves to this kind of theoretical analysis, this thesis bases itself on some specific instances of the pose where the posing subject, despite his/her efforts to secure his/her identity, appears to fail to conform to the cultural codes of (self-)recognition and (self-)representation (the *cultural screen* in Silverman's terms). The motivations behind the choice of the objects of research will be mentioned more in detail below in the next section.

One of the best instances of such a failure occurs after the invention of the photographic camera in contrast with portrait painting, because a new kind of relationship is established between the subject and its image. Therefore this thesis bases itself on an analysis of a corpus of photographic portraits from a range of cultural and historical perspectives. It thus analyses images emerging both from the Western and non-Western *cultural screen* but also belonging both to the early period of photographic practice and to the recent practice of portraying through photographic means.

Therefore, this work focuses on an analysis of photographic portraits where in each analysis photographs are analysed and confronted with theoretical texts, in order to contribute to the questioning and re-conceptualisation of the act of posing.

### **1.3 Limitations and objects of research**

This thesis covers a subject that is wide in its practice. Posing has indeed been an intrinsic part of many artistic practices. But both for reasons of limiting my work and

because of the photographic image's specificity claiming an incontestable power over its referent, I want to base my argument on a study of photographic portraiture.

One of the important figures in portrait photography is a man who dedicated his life to the documentation of "expressive and characteristic features, which circumstance, life and times have stamped upon the face"<sup>3</sup>. He is the German photographer, August Sander, who photographed subjects from all walks of life and created a typological catalogue of more than six hundred photographs of the German people. This life-long photographic project is called *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*. Aspiring to record the historical physiognomic image of a whole generation, these portraits became an accumulative image of an entire social order since Sander portrayed a world of individuals defined through their public roles.

However, despite his desire to categorise the various strata of German society, his photographs bare traces of incongruities and contradictions in the self-projections of the poseurs. Therefore this corpus not only constitutes a long-term documentation (since it consists of portrait photographs taken between 1892 and 1952) but also provides interesting examples for the possible questioning and reconsideration of the act of posing. Therefore the motivation behind my choice of Sander's project lie on the fact that his project provides specific examples of the posing subjects who expose some paradoxes and contradicts with the assumed aim of the project.

In order to facilitate an engagement between the past and the present and between the Western and non-Western cultural realms, and because of its connections with Sander's project in different levels, my second object of inquiry is a more recent but similar Turkish photographic project entitled "Biz" ("Us"). This project is executed

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<sup>3</sup> Sander quoted in August Sander: Citizens of the Twentieth Century London: 1986 p.13

by the young Turkish photographers Süreyya Yılmaz Dernek and Ergün Turan and published as a book under the same title, Biz (2002).

In their project Dernek and Turan invite people from different social and economic backgrounds to take off their “masks” and try to capture them as freed as possible from assumed poses. Their method is to take photographs of the multitude of faces in Istanbul streets, by asking the passers-by to stop their daily life for a few minutes of posing in front of a mobile dark background that they carry with them to different districts of the city. With this project they thus attempt to expose both the uniqueness of each individual, as well as their familiarity, by letting us participate in an encounter with a wide range of faces that nevertheless seem to carry with them the common characteristics of human existence: the quest of filling their emptiness.

The main motivation behind the specific choice of these objects of research lie on the fact that both of the projects have similar concerns about portraying individuals such the as the desire to provide a “national identity”, but nevertheless failing in framing, fixing or categorising the “subject”. Moreover, a part from their similarities, these projects have also some contradictions in the way they approach to the framing or “representation” of the “subject” that will be revealed while analysing these projects in the fourth and fifth chapter.

Overall, an analysis of these two main objects of study will not only provide the reader with both an enlarged scope of photographs belonging to different periods of time, as well as present two ways of portraying individuals within different societies, but also, provide a comparable ground in which the posing subject seems to reveal, encounter or face the impossibility of such a framing. In other words these projects are specifically exemplary in providing the space for questioning the notion of subjectivity.

## 1.4 Structure

The overall thesis engages with Kaja Silverman's critical approach to the process of (self-)identification and (self-)recognition in her book The Threshold of the Visible World (1996). Therefore this book is used as an important source of reference and inspiration among the other sources that will be mentioned in detail below.

The chapter entitled "Portraiture and early photographic practice" introduces a general overview of the period of the emergence of photography in Western culture, focusing particularly on the observable changes in the act of posing after the invention of photography, in contrast with painting, especially in the field of portraiture.

To do this, it starts by providing an introduction to portraiture in general and then discusses the particularity of photographic portraiture by referring to some photographs of that specific period. My aim in this chapter is to argue first of all that portraiture is a problematic and paradoxical means of representation, already questioning the relationship between the subject and its image.

Secondly, it claims that there is a change in the conception and execution of portraiture after the invention of photography according to which photography establishes a new kind of relationship between the subject and its image: in its desire to put an end to the paradoxes of portraiture, photography claimed at the very beginnings of its practice to be a "scientific" and "objective" representation, exercising a power over its referent.

Lastly, by focusing on the act of posing and analysing some photographs belonging to the early years of photographic practice, this chapter claims that, despite the power of photography to confer an identity upon the posing subject, the poseurs of some early portrait photographs seem to fail to conform to the social codes of (self-) recognition and (self-) identification and are unable to assume any identity.

The main conclusion in this chapter is that there existed in the portrait photographs of the early period some clues about the impossibility of seeing it as an entirely successful act of self-appropriation.

After this introduction to portraiture and the discussion about the particularity of portrait photography with an emphasis on the poses of the sitters, the next chapter discusses in more detail the act (of posing) itself, enlisting the help of some psychoanalytical and philosophical approaches to the problematic of (self-) recognition and/or (self-) identification.

Thus, it starts by referring to Jacques Lacan's assertion that identity is a visual construction, achieved through visual identification, in his famous article "The Mirror stage as formative of the function of the I" while stressing the paradoxes of (self-) identification and/or (self-)recognition.

It also presents the re-readings of "The Mirror Stage" by Kaja Silverman and Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen who base their arguments on the different accounts of some other psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud, Paul Schilder and Henri Wallon, and who argue that the formation of the "I" (or of the ego) is based not only on the presence of an external image (the mirror image) but on an incorporation of that image that necessitates the agency of bodily sensations, (the *proprioceptive ego*).

After giving an account of the relationship between the *proprioceptive* and *exteroceptive* egos<sup>4</sup> and foregrounding the paradoxical existence of the "self" that is "constituted" through a conjunction of the external image with bodily sensations, this chapter analyses the act of posing and tries to reveal its particularity by referring to Kaja Silverman's, Craig Owens' and Roland Barthes' accounts of the pose.

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<sup>4</sup> These terms will be explained in the section entitled "The 'self' in between body and image" of Chapter 3, section 3.2, pp. 49.

Following this, it tries to demonstrate that the act of posing is an act which dramatically reminds the posing subject of the gap existing between his/her bodily sensations (*proprioceptive* ego) and his *exteroceptive* (self-)image. This chapter thus mainly argues that unlike in the “mirror stage”, the posing subject might not experience as powerfully the momentary satisfaction and illusion of the coincidence between his/her bodily sensations and his/her image.

Departing from this argument the last part of the chapter will try to show how posing can be considered as an uncanny act that reveals the impossibility of (self-)identification in which the poseur’s subjectivity is endlessly deferred.

To be able to show this, it will first provide a reading of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s Portrait de l’Artiste en Général (1979) where he questions (self-)identification through an analysis of Urs Lüthi’s photographic self-portraits and foregrounds the impossibility of recognising and/or identifying the “self”. Secondly it will provide an account of the Freudian uncanny in order to argue that the moment of the pose is a moment of uncanniness because “the uncanny” is an anxiety born out of the impossibility of representation.

The next chapter, entitled: “August Sander’s poseurs: towards a possibility of questioning the “self” in conflict/paradox will try to consolidate the arguments proposed in the previous chapter, this time through an analysis of August Sander’s photographs. After providing an introduction to Sander’s work and historical background, it attempts to reveal the ways the poseurs of Sander’s photographs may contradict his entire project (which might be considered an attempt to give an objective and hierarchically categorised image of the German people at the time).

In order to achieve this, this chapter introduces first how the subject’s relationship to photography and to the photographic camera can constitute the way

he/she apprehends, recognises his/her “self” and how photography can categorise and frame the “subject”, as in the case of Sander’s attempt. Therefore it introduces and opens up Kaja Silverman’s concepts of the (cultural) *screen* and *dominant fiction* in order to see whether the act of posing can be a moment of questioning/challenging our perspective vis-à-vis (self-) identification and/or (self-) recognition.

It also provides a detailed analysis of Sander’s photographs, referring to Leo Rubinfién and Graham Clarke’s reading of Sander’s photographs in order to argue that Sander’s poseurs expose the “self in conflict”, most specifically in the sense that they seem to exhibit some contradiction and incongruities between the “public” and the “private” manifestations of the “self”.

This chapter thus aims to reveal some of the ways the subject can assume a critical distance on the social norms and normative ways of (self-) identification and of (self-) recognition by analysing and foregrounding the contradictions and the conflicts Sander’s poseurs’ exhibit at the moment of the pose.

The next chapter, entitled: “‘Biz’ (Us): the pose as a *Productive look*” focuses on my second object of inquiry while introducing the name Silverman gives to this critical distance that is the *productive look*. Thus, this chapter aims to introduce my conclusive argument by trying to give an answer to the question of how the act of posing can induce in the subject a *productive look*. As a possible answer to this question it will try to argue that the subject’s specular encounter with his/her “self” at the moment of posing is an encounter with “discontinuity” and “otherness”.

In order to consolidate this argument this chapter will on the one hand re-introduce Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s philosophical approach to (self-) representation in photographic portraiture, in terms of the self/other problematic, and on the other hand, it will analyse Dernek and Turan’s photographs in the light of Lacoue-Labarthe’s

notion of the “allo-portrait” (that is, the presence of the self as “other”, both as *personne* [in the sense of nobody] and as the “other” that is externally given to be recognised).

The conclusion this chapter will lead towards is the argument that the act of posing can provoke in the subject an encounter with “discontinuity” and “otherness” and thus it can provide the ground or the space for a productive model of relationship between the subject and its “self”. In other words, this chapter will try to argue that the act of posing might expose the impossibility of self-sameness and aims to provide a ground in which self-recognition and self-identification are questioned. Departing from an analysis of Dernek and Turan’s poseurs, this chapter thus reveals that the moment of posing can be considered as a moment of the *productive look* that prevents a definition, recognition and/or affirmation of subjectivity according to the parameters of self-sameness.

### **1.5 Positioning of the project in the academic field, relations to recent developments in the field.**

In recent critical writing, the question of the pose has not been approached specifically. Therefore this thesis constitutes an important reference for those who want a more specific account of the pose. Moreover, the very few texts that take up the pose, as their problematic seem to approach it from a limited perspective.

One approach that is stressed in Craig Owens’ “Posing” (In Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture (1992)) is a social approach that tends to define posing as a reaction to the surveillance of society by the agencies of the State. This approach which, according to Owens, is supported by critics such as Homi Bhabha (who indirectly refers to the pose while discussing mimicry in colonial

discourse) and Dick Hebdige, regards the pose as a defensive act against the penetration of society into the private sphere.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to this approach, Craig Owens and Kaja Silverman consider the pose, in their respective works “Posing”(1992), and The Threshold of the Visible World (1996) as a way of offering oneself to the social gaze, already in the guise of a particular picture, that is to say, they see it as an act that is driven by a desire to create an “image” of oneself in order to be affirmed and thus constructed by the social norms as well as a mechanism through which the subject enters into the social realm.

However, it seems to me that all these approaches miss the potential of the pose to question these aforementioned social norms and to provide the subject with a *productive look* towards his/her (self) identification and (self-) recognition.

This thesis is thus analyses the act of posing from a perspective that reveals its importance as a paradoxical moment in the relationship between the “self” and its image, reminding us that it can be a moment of the manifestation of the human condition of emptiness as well as a moment of questioning the process of (self-) identification and (self-) recognition.

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<sup>5</sup> In Homi Bhabha’s, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” October 28, 1984 and Dick Hebdige’s “Posing... Threats, Striking... Poses: Youth Surveillance and Display” SubStance 37/38, 1983.

The face is a reality par excellence, where a being does not present itself by its qualities.<sup>6</sup>

**Emmanuel Lévinas**, *Difficult Freedom*

Isabelle stares into the camera. It is like looking into herself, a strangely disconnected feeling.

**Helen Humphrey**, *Afterimage*

The thing that must seem inhuman or even immortal in the Daguerreotype is that, it forced to look at a machine (long time in fact) that was receiving the image of man without returning his glance.<sup>7</sup>

**Walter Benjamin**,  
*On Some Baudelairian Themes*

## 2) Portraiture and early photographic practice

### 2.1 The origins and paradoxes of portraiture

Since the first attempts at visual representation, mankind has had a tendency to believe in the presence of an essence that characterises human being, and it searched for the manifestations of this essence, be it the soul and/or subjectivity, on the human face. In fact, the face, as the border between the interior and the exterior, was considered a mysterious site where human



Fig.2

<sup>6</sup> “Le visage est une réalité par excellence, où un être ne se présente pas par ses qualités”, Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficile Liberté*, Livre de Poche : Paris, 2003. My Translation.

<sup>7</sup> “Ce qui devait paraître inhumain, on pourrait même dire mortel, dans le daguerréotype, c’est qu’il forçait à regarder (longuement d’ailleurs) un appareil qui recevait l’image de l’homme sans lui rendre son regard.” Walter Benjamin, *Sur Quelques Themes Baudelairiens*, *Poesie et Revolution*, Paris, Denoel, 1971. My translation.

essence was believed to manifest itself. Ergun Kocabiyik, describes the mystery of the face in his book Yazılı Yüz (The Written Face) as follows:

At some period of our lives, we discover the uniqueness of our face and we are awed by its truthfulness. This feeling leads us to find the answer to some questions we had consciously asked. What is this face reflected in the mirror? This question stands up in front of mankind as a problematic of essence it has to solve. The face is like an illegible text written in an unknown language; it is the secret into the debts of which we continuously return to (1997, 9).<sup>8</sup>

The face is thus believed to be a mystery that both hides but also reveals some truth about human nature, and many artistic and scientific traditions have devoted themselves to the pursuit of capturing the face, through portraiture.

Related to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century French word *portraire*, meaning: “The line which one draws to shape the outline of something.”<sup>9</sup> (Pommier, 1998, 15-16), portraiture was initially used to refer to a visual description and/or inscription of an object on a surface, by drawing its contour or its shadow with the help of light.

However, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the term becomes more specific. As it appears in the dictionary of artistic terms of André Félibien, the usage of the word *portraire* is limited to the representation of the human subject:

The word *portraire* is a general word that can point towards anything that has to do with forming the resemblance of something. However, we don't use it for any sort of subjects. We can say the portrait of a man or that of a woman, but we cannot say the portrait of a horse or of a house or of a tree. We say the figure of a horse, the representation of a house, the figure of a tree.<sup>10</sup>(Felibien quoted in Pommier,1998, 16).

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<sup>8</sup> “Yaşamımızın bir döneminde kendi yüzümüzün biricikliğini keşfeder ve onun gerçekliği karşısında şaşkınlığa uğrarız. Bu duygu bizi bilinçli olarak sorduğumuz bazı sorulara yanıt aramaya doğru sürükler. Aynada yansılanan o yüz nedir? Bu, insanın karşısına çözmesi gereken bir varlık sorunu olarak dikilir. Bilinmeyen bir dilde yazılmış; okunaksız bir metin gibidir o; durmadan içine, derinliklerine döndüğümüz bir sırdır”. My Translation.

<sup>9</sup> “Le trait qu'on tire pour former le contour de quelque chose”. My translation

<sup>10</sup> “Le mot de *portraire* est un mot général qui s'étend à tout ce qu'on fait lorsqu'on veut tirer la ressemblance de quelque chose; néanmoins on ne l'emploie pas indifféremment à toutes sortes de sujet. On dit le portait d'un homme, ou d'une femme, mais on ne dit pas le portrait d'un cheval, d'une maison ou d'un arbre. On dit la figure d'un cheval, la représentation d'une maison, la figure d'un arbre” My translation.

One of the main reasons for such a shift in the definition of *portraire* was not only the desire to make it a specific term of the artistic terminology, but also to relate the origins of portraiture to that of drawing and painting.

For André Bazin, the origins of painting and sculpture lie in the Egyptian and Greek traditions of preserving the human body in order to save it from the flow of time. The first Egyptian statue, the mummy, was a form of insurance against the passage of time and other representations such as terra-cotta statuettes put near the sarcophagus and the drawings of kings made on the walls of the Pyramids, might replace these bodies if they were destroyed. All these representations, which can be considered to be the first portraits, permitted, according to Bazin, the preservation of life by a representation of life (1967, 10).

Similarly, there are many myths in Western culture that tell us how portraiture and painting were originally born from mankind's desire to overcome death and separation. Raphael Pinset and Jules D'Auriol in their book Histoire du Portrait en France, refer to a Greek myth which explains the origin of portraiture. According to this myth, the daughter of the potter Dibutade, from Sicyone, was separating from her fiancé who was leaving for the army, when suddenly under the gleam of the lamp, the silhouette of the man appeared on the wall and the girl had the idea of tracing his contours with the help of charcoal. Later on, Dibutade filled this contour with clay and made out of it a low relief in order to preserve forever the memory of the young man (1884,8).

Eduard Pommier in his introduction to his book Théories du Portrait, points to the derivation of the same myth in other contexts, referring to one of the poems of Charles Perrault, entitled La Peinture. In this poem, Perrault also presents the

invention of painting as a reaction to separation, this time of a young shepherdess who will be separated from her lover (1986,22)<sup>11</sup>.

However, the desire to keep a commemorative copy of oneself and of loved ones was not the only desire that motivated the art of portraiture. Portraiture was also seen as a technique that would provide an immediate depiction of the traits of a man, which could not possibly be given by words. The famous physiognomist J.C. Lavater points to this aspect of portraiture when he says:

What is the art of *Portrait Painting*? It is the representation of a real individual, or part of his body only; it is the reproduction of an image; it is the art of presenting, on the first glance of an eye, the form of a man by traits, which it would be impossible to convey by words (Lavater quoted in Brilliant, 1991,35).

It seems that, for Lavater, one singularity of portrait painting lie in its ability to represent a “real” individual, in its immediacy to vision, which is not comparable to a description in words. This immediacy can also create the impression that any visual portrait has the power of giving the beholder a more fixed and accurate image of the model’s appearance.

However, although it seems that at the origins of painting and portraiture lies the desire to imprint one’s physical appearance in order to immortalise oneself or to give him/herself an immediate accessibility, later on, portraiture was conceived as more than an imprint, or a shadow of the human figure. According to Richard Brilliant, anyone who analyses the imagery of the portrait in Western art will discover that portraits are not merely recognisable faces and bodies, nor even likenesses. One

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<sup>11</sup> Eduard Pommier also refers to the gravures of Joachim Von Sandrart which illustrate these myths of the birth of painting (see Figure.2)

Fig.3

example from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which shows how portraiture is not an imitation, is Luigi Miradori's portrait of a child, *Sigismondo Ponzone* (Figure. 3).

In this painting, the child captures our attention by holding in his hand a piece of paper on which is written: *Padre, Che nel formarmi havesti parte prendimi hor riformato ancor*



*dall'arte*.<sup>12</sup> Pommier argues that the ambiguity which characterises the art of portraiture is illustrated by this sentence because the portrait of Sigismondo Ponzone seems to oscillate between being a copy, a double of the child and being a reformation of him, in the sense of a transformation, transfiguration or even amelioration. For Pommier this painting illustrates one of the oldest debates around portraiture, which centers on the question of likeness. As he asks, "Is the portrait a virtuoso and thus deceptive copy of the model? Or the work of a creative power which is capable of separating itself from the real in order to correct and keep its model in accordance with its ideal vision?"<sup>13</sup> (1998, 27).

Raphael Pinset and Jules D'Auriore ask a similar question concerning the relationship between the portrait and its model. They argue that although portraiture was seen as an inferior genre compared to other genres of painting, it nevertheless needed more effort in order to be successful, because unlike history or still life painters,

<sup>12</sup> It is translated in Pommier as: "Pere, qui avez pris part a ma formation, prenez-moi maintenant, reformé encore par l'art." (p. 11) and which can be translated as: "Father, you who have taken part in my formation, take me now, reformed again by art."

<sup>13</sup> "Le Portrait est-il copie virtuose, et donc trompeuse du model? Ou bien oeuvre d'un pouvoir créateur qui est capable de se détacher du réel pour le corriger et le rendre conforme à sa vision idéale?" My translation.

the portraitist should give the glint of liveliness and intelligence to an immobile subject. In that sense, it is not sufficient for a portrait to be a physical resemblance conceived as a faithful reproduction of purely physical elements, as the portrait should also attain a moral resemblance. Pinset and D'Auriore ask in fact: "In which way would a painter who is content with this type of success (pure physical resemblance) differ from an agile craftsman or from a good drawing student whose well exercised hand excels at reproducing an ornament, or an academy? No, it is the moral resemblance one must reach. It is the entire man, which one must represent" (1884,5).<sup>14</sup>

It seems thus that what makes a portrait successful is also its capacity to "represent" the moral resemblance, which is the resemblance of the portrait to the inner morality, the inner and invisible appearance of the model. A good portraitist is then the one who is capable of representing this invisible core, by using his insight and imagination.

This idea that portraiture is an art rather than a copy of external features, was also widely held among some critics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as can be observed in Théophile Gautier's text "Salon de 1859". In this text, Gautier argues: "The painter should reveal the soul behind the mask of the face; he is set a higher goal, going beyond that which is merely individual to resume an entire period, an entire cast in a simple head standing out against an indeterminate background." (Gautier quoted in Vaisse, 1994, 120).

In addition to all this, Hans-Georg Gadamer's account of portraiture in his book Truth and Method emphasises the portrait as a representation in which the subject comes forth and is transformed. As observed by Nicholas Davey in his article "Sitting

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<sup>14</sup> "En quoi un peintre qui se contenterait de ce genre de succès (ressemblance purement physique) différerait-il sensiblement d'un habile ouvrier ou d'un bon élève de dessin dont la main exercée excelle à reproduire un ornement ou une académie? Non c'est la ressemblance *morale* qu'il faut atteindre, c'est l'homme tout entier qu'il faut représenter". My translation.

Uncomfortably: A Hermeneutic Reflection on Portraiture”, Gadamer is against relegating the artistic status of the portrait. For him portraiture is one of the most perfect manifestations of the function of art, that is, transforming and raising “reality” into its truth. He argues thus that a portrait is “...an intensification of what constitutes the essences of all pictures. Every picture is an increase of being and is essentially definable as representation, as coming to presentation” (Gadamer quoted in Davey, 2003, 234).

Up to now we have seen that the conception and definition of portraiture has changed historically. Portraiture has been considered both as an immortal “trace” of one’s appearance and as a representation that is always more than an imitation, requiring the touch of the artist to (re)present the totality (both inner and outer) of its model.

From these two main conceptions we can also deduce that portraiture is embedded within a paradox. On the one hand, portrait images, more than any other genre of visual representation, require an analogy between themselves and the person portrayed. The viewer of any portrait has a tendency, a desire to recognise and identify the model, as portraiture had always had this connotation of being a “trace” of a person and thus created a sense of certainty that it refers to “real” individuals.

On the other hand, even though portraiture can aim to achieve a faithful likeness, this aim would not be possible if there were not an assumption of difference between the portrait image and the actual person. It is perhaps because of such a duality existing at the heart of portraiture, and because of the cultural ideals of the time that the portraitists of 17<sup>th</sup> century, such as Pieter Pauwel Rubens, Antony Van Dyck and the previously mentioned Luigi Miradori, believed that the power of a portrait does

not reside in its likeness to the model but rather in its capacity of elevating, ameliorating and transforming it.

Jean-Luc Nancy in his book Le Regard du Portrait brings another dimension to this paradox, by arguing that, although the singularity of portraiture lies in its being the only genre which has a well-determined aim, the likeness (resemblance) to the individual singularity, there is always an impossibility of recognition of this likeness, because, in order to recognise any subject of a portrait, we need to compare the portrait with its model at the very moment of contemplation. He argues that although the existence and identification of a model is necessary for making portraits, its recognition is not necessary for the art of portraiture. We can admire portraits without recognising them.

He also adds that although the aim of portraiture was to represent its model and unveil its essence, this unveiling is never an imitation but rather a production of a “subject”. In fact, for Nancy, *pro-duire* means in French, to bring to the surface, to take it outside, to expose, and in that sense portraits are not imitations but exposition/production of their models.

Although this new argument about portraiture seems thus to focus on the limitations of considering the portrait as a mere copy of a human being, stressing that the act of portraying is also an act of pro-duction, there had however been a period in history where the nature of portraiture was again put into question by the proliferation of new techniques of “representation”.

## 2.2 Portraiture after photography

If the invention of painting and portraiture is, as the myths would have it, motivated by a desire to conserve and thus immortalise the traits of a loved one, one can also note that the techniques and desires that lie at the origins of portraiture and painting seem to be similar to those that governed the origins of photography: the desire to imprint one's appearance with the help of light.



Fig.4

Two techniques of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that precede the development of photography, Silhouette Portraiture, invented by Etienne de Silhouette and Physionotrace, invented by Gilles Louis Chretien, are based on the same idea of imprinting. The former required merely the ability to trace a cast shadow: a light source was placed in front of a subject, and the outline of the subject's profile was traced onto a paper placed behind it (see Fig.4). The second technique was not so different from the first except with the advantage that the result was an engraved copper plate from which duplicates could be printed. Both of the techniques were popular with the growing middle class of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who on the one hand wanted the production of cheap portraits, which did not require any artistic training, and on the other hand, wanted their image to be infinitely duplicable.

These techniques, which were valued because of their being an imprint of their model, can also be considered as the testimony of a desire to have an "objective" representation of one's self. It might thus be argued that when photography appeared around 1839, it was also the result of such a desire.

At this point we might however ask why, if the desire for photography was already present before its invention, photography appeared so late and what is the particularity of the photographic image?

Indeed, according to Geoffrey Batchen, who examines accounts of photography through a detailed analysis of the medium's recent conception, as soon as we ask the question of the origin of photography we are faced with a mystery. Batchen in his book Burning with Desire cites Helmut Gernsheim who argues that the circumstances for inventing photography were already present before its invention:

“Considering that knowledge of the chemical as well as the optical principles of photography was fairly widespread following Schulze's experiment (in 1725)...the circumstance that photography was not invented earlier remains the greatest mystery in its history...It had apparently never occurred to any of the multitude of artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who were in the habit of using the camera obscura, to try to fix its image permanently.” (Gernsheim quoted in Batchen, 1997, 24).

In fact, long before the invention of photography, camera pictures were made in the Renaissance. In order to solve the perspective problems in visual representation, artists used the *Camera Obscura* (darkened room), described by Leonardo Da Vinci, as a mechanism where light enters in a minute hole of the darkened room and forms on the opposite wall an inverted image of whatever lies outside. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the actual room grew smaller and a lens was fitted into one end of the box and the other end was covered with a sheet of frosted or ground glass so that the image cast on the ground by the lens could be seen outside of the camera.

This machine which, according to André Bazin, was the first scientific and mechanical system of reproduction, creating the illusion of a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, became the standard equipment of artists. Francesco Algarotti in his essay “On Painting”, written in 1764, devotes a chapter to the *Camera*

*Obscura* and says: “The best modern painters among the Italians have availed themselves greatly of this contrivance; nor is it possible they should have otherwise represented things so much to life” (Algarotti quoted in Newhall 1964, 11).

But it is with the discovery of the action of luminous rays on certain substances, notably salts of silver, the *holides*, sensitive to light, that photography differentiated itself from all other methods of “representation” by claiming to solve the problem of fixing and multiplying the image of the *Camera Obscura*. This discovery, which was first established by the German physicist Johann Heinrich Schulze in 1725, provided a way to trap the elusive image of the *Camera Obscura*.

Later on, in 1839, the invention of two distinct photographic processes, the daguerreotype by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre and the negative/positive process by William Henry Fox Talbot, were almost simultaneously announced in France and England. Daguerre’s process produced an image on a silver-coated copper plate while Talbot’s was a paper based negative/positive process that could produce multiple prints from a single negative.

Although the other techniques developed just before the invention of photography such as *silhouette* and *physionotrace* also permitted the multiplication of images, photography brought a greater freedom and precision to the images. It freed the image-making process from the manual intervention of the artist and thus added the sense that it partook of a more scientific character.

Indeed, Bazin points out that the photographic lens, which is considered to be the basis of photography, is called “objectif” in French, and the objectivity of the photographic camera comes, not from its ability to reproduce images but from its ability to form images with limited human intervention. For Bazin, photography, unlike

other forms of visual “representation” that are based on the presence of man, seems to derive an advantage from its absence. The photographic camera seems thus to offer a more accurate and objective image, creating a feeling of certainty about the thing it captures.

For Roland Barthes, this certainty that a photograph produces in us, is not a certainty in the sense of restoring what has been abolished by time or distance, nor in the sense of exactitude and perfect resemblance, (since the first photographic images lacked colour information and details), but rather in the sense of certifying that, what is seen on the photographic image has existed. For him photography cannot lie about the existence of its referent and it is this particularity which makes it also distinct from painting.

Of course, as we have seen, painted portraits can also create in the beholder the feeling that they represent a “real” person. However, this impression becomes less secure if we consider the “artistic” touch of the painter on the image. What changed after the invention of photography is thus the reduction of this artistic touch and the tendency for photographs to be seen as “scientific” evidence, claiming an objective and accurate representation. As a result, photographic portraiture was not immediately seen as an artistic representation but rather conceived as an objective and scientific tool of recording.

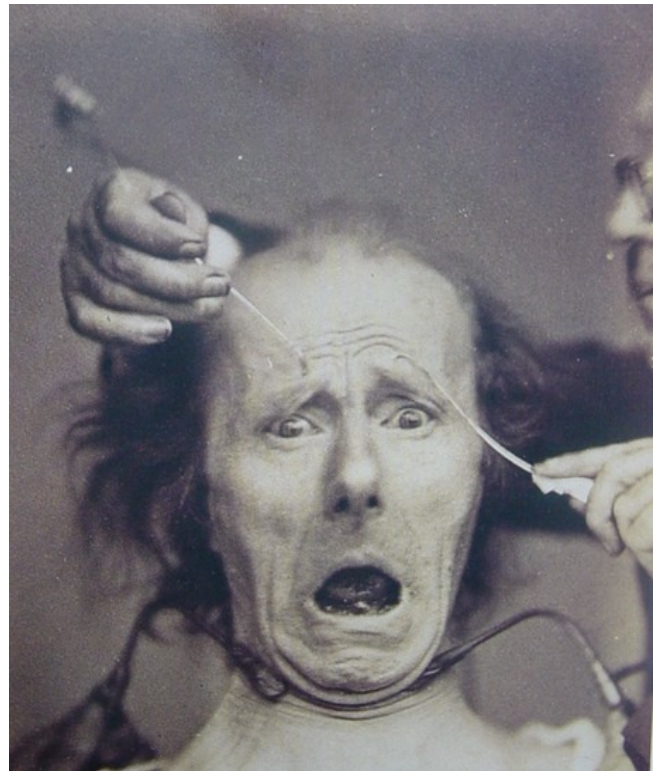


Fig.5

One of those names who used portrait photography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for his scientific purposes was Duchenne de Boulogne. He was one of the first photographers to use photography not for artistic portraiture but for illustrating his research on the electro-physiological analysis of the human expression (Figure 5).

Indeed, analysing the human expression and face in order to have access to the inner character of a human being, was an earlier desire, manifested in the proliferation of two scientific disciplines that emerged between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Physiognomy and Phrenology. Physiognomy, systematised by Johann Caspar Lavater, was a science seeking to isolate the profile and the various anatomic features of the head, such as forehead, eyes, ears, nose, chin, in order to have access to the individual character, while Phrenology, which emerged in the researches of the Viennese physician Franz Joesph Gall, sought to analyse the topography of the skull in order to reveal the correspondences between the skull and the mental faculties seated within the brain. Both of these scientific disciplines reduced an entire range of human diversity into specific categories.

Allan Sekula, in his article “The Body and the Archive”, refers to the coincidence between the emergence of photographic practice and those disciplines that categorise, archive and control the individual body. For him, photography subverted the privileges inherent in portraiture. As a result photographic portraiture began to perform a role no painted portrait could have performed in the same fashion. This role did not come from the old honorific portrait tradition but from the imperatives of medical and anatomical illustration that established and delimited the terrain of the “other”. Sekula adds that photographic portraiture was a double system of representation, functioning both honorifically and repressively.

On the one hand, photographic portraiture, unlike the traditional 17<sup>th</sup>-century portraiture that provided a ceremonial presentation of the bourgeois self, was popularised and extended to all realms of society. As a result it democratised the honorific functions of bourgeois portraiture. As quoted by Sekula, Jane Welsh Carlyle describes the inexpensive portrait photography as a social palliative:

Blessed the inventor of photography. I set him even above the inventor of chloroform! It has given more positive pleasure to poor suffering humanity than anything that has been 'cast up' in my time- this art, by which even the poor can possess themselves of tolerable likenesses of their absent dear ones (Carlyle quoted in Sekula, 1989, 347).

However, this usage of portraiture was not separated from its repressive use. Beginning as a cheap aesthetic pleasure, photography became later a utilitarian social machine which created a social archive, containing and creating the traces of the bodies of "betters" and "inferiors", and thus providing a list of heroes, leaders, moral exemplars, celebrities, as well as of the poor, the diseased, the insane, the criminal, the non-white and the female. Those identities were created through different social institutions of the period and photographic camera played an important role in that process.

Thus, as early as 1843-44, police departments all over Europe started to use photographs in research into criminality. Hugh Welsh Diamond was photographing the countenance of the insane in Great Britain. The ethnographer Louis Agassiz was having daguerreotypes taken of American slaves. And society portraitist André-Adolphe-Eugene Disdéri was patenting his *carte-de-visite*.<sup>15</sup>

For Robert Sobieszek all these medical, psychiatric, anthropological/ethnographic, scopophilic and judiciary agendas of the period used

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<sup>15</sup> A pocket-sized card bearing a small and full-size photographic likeness in place of the person's name.

portraiture to present the appearance of a certain individual or type, without the flattering or idealising goals of artistic portraiture. I want now to focus in more detail on this repressive aspect of photographic practice, through a close analysis of some photographs belonging to specific discourses of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in order to delve later into an analysis of the act of posing and its ability to question this power of the photographic camera.

### 2.3 The particularity of posing for photography

Here is a photograph (Fig. 6) that is characterized by an unusual, frightening atmosphere, which makes the image hard to grasp. This frightening atmosphere mainly comes from the unexpected presence of the hand that seems both to hold and to control the head of the woman. The fact that the body belonging to the hand is left out of the frame makes the presence of the hand impersonal and



Fig.6

even monstrous as this hand can also be seen metaphorically as a divine power, a divine hand coming from above.

Moreover, what is also disturbing in this image is the indifference of the woman to what is going on. It seems as if she is not aware that her photograph is being taken since she maintains no communication with the camera. Together with her indifference one also gets the impression that she is controlled and can easily be manipulated by anything coming from the outside.

What creates this impression are the white hat and apron she is wearing and that make her look like a baby; her loose elbows and, her eyes directed downwards. Yet there is something that goes beyond that submission, something that seems uncontrollable. This thing that seems to escape any power is not easily describable. Perhaps it is related to the expression on her face. It seems that the muscles of her face are out of her control. The loosely hanging muscles of her cheeks, the half-open lips and her nearly closed eyes, make her face look like the face of a person who has some problem with controlling her facial muscles.

In fact, if we check the title of this photograph we can see that it is from Henri Dagonet's book (1876) entitled Nouveau Traité Élémentaire et Pratique des Maladies Mentales.<sup>16</sup> It is thus one of those photographs used for the delineation of insanity. This woman could be a "mentally ill" person whose movements were fugitive and erratic so that an attendant was needed to hold her in order to prevent any movement that could cause blurs in the photograph. Because of her expression, which lacks any glimpse of consciousness and self-control, she also looks like a corpse. The hand holding her head increases this impression, as if she would fall back if the hand was not there.

Without knowing the title of this photograph the whole scene could also easily be read as an attempt to take the picture of a dead person, known as *post-mortem* photography. Initially made to memorialise the dead as part of the mourning process, *post-mortem* pictures played an ambivalent role in the embodiment of death and its denial and they offered a last chance for the remaining family to record an image of the departed one. According to Hur Suhjung *post-mortem* photographers made every effort

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<sup>16</sup> The New Elementary and Practical Treatise of Mental Illnesses. My translation.

to make the death look "natural" or the dead seem agreeably alive, and this photograph could easily be seen as a continuation of that tradition<sup>17</sup>

However, it is also obvious that the woman is not a dead person in the physical sense because her eyes still seem to look at something, though she might be considered dead in the symbolic sense because she seems completely under the control of the hand holding her head.

Considering all these points, this photograph seems to illustrate some of the questions that Michel Foucault raises when he discusses the relationship between bodies and power. Does this image represent how power acts upon a body by at the same time crafting that body? Does it reveal the emergence of the complex strategic situation of 19<sup>th</sup>-century western societies, where power is diffused into a micro-level, into the gestures, actions, discourses and practical knowledge of everyday lives?

We may argue that the presence of the hand makes this photograph self-reflexive because it points to or rather repeats the power of the photographic camera. In other words, the authority of the hand symbolises that of the camera. Both of them try to objectify and fix subjects through exposing, shaping, and controlling. Through this symbolisation this photograph shows the very process of how labels and identities, such as the label of being insane are produced by discourses that create *régimes* of truth.

John Tagg in his book The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories argues that the evidential character of photography cannot be separated from the new practices of observation and record-keeping of late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century European societies (1988, 78-81). These practices play an important role in the development of a network of disciplinary institutions such as the police, prisons, asylums, hospitals, departments of public health and schools, and they secrete new and

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<sup>17</sup> Hur, Suhjung. *The Quickening of the Dead and the Dying of Death: Postmortem Photographs from*

strategically connected discourses which function as tools of power producing new objects and identities.

Tagg, referring to Michel Foucault, gives some examples of the effects of that new power, such as the reconstitution of homosexuality as illness in the medical and psychiatric analyses of the 1870's, the discovery of "mental illness" in the workings of the asylum and the evolution of the new pseudo-discourses of criminology. For Foucault this new type of power that is inseparable from knowledge is neither violence nor ideology, neither coercion nor consent, but rather a power situated at a different level, bearing directly and physically upon the body.

As an example of this new power Tagg mentions how the development of photographic practice in England went hand in hand with the introduction and development of the police service in the country. With the realisation that photography could be an important tool for the purpose of identification, Central Criminal Record Offices and Regional Record Centres started to take standardised portraits of prisoners using specific lightings and settings shown in Figure 7.



Fig.7

This image consists of a strange series of photographs. First of all it is hard for the beholder to focus on the central figures, the prisoners, because of the mirrors put next to them in order to reflect their profiles. This coexistence of both frontal and profile view of a person in the same image creates a feeling of division that is repeated in the overall composition. The fact that all the photographs have the same composition, the same size and the fact that they are put together in a series, recreates the atmosphere of a prison: prisoners are put into numbered cells, next to each other, gazed at by the guardians (the photographer and/or the camera) but unable to see each other.

John Tagg argues that this kind of setting with the isolation of the body in a narrow space, its subjection to an unreturnable gaze, the sharpness of focus, the names

and number boards, are the traces of power, repeated countless times whenever the photographer prepared an exposure, in police cell, prison, consultation room, asylum, or school (1988, 85). For him this repeated pattern in late-nineteenth-century photographic practice is another version of Foucault's metaphor of the Panopticon.<sup>18</sup>

The Panopticon was Jeremy Bentham's plan for a model institution in which each space and level would be exposed to the view of another, establishing a perpetual chain of observations, which culminated in the central tower, itself open to public scrutiny. Foucault took this as a metaphor for a process of proliferating local tactics and techniques which operated in society on a micro-level seeking to produce the maximum effect for the minimum effort and manufacturing docile and utilisable bodies. The traces of such new techniques of observation is also inherent in the photographic practice of late 19<sup>th</sup> century as it is exemplified in the previous photograph of the prisoners.

If we return now to this series of photographs and try to analyse them in terms of their posing we can remark that what is common in all these photographs is that the poseurs are no longer submerged in the pose imposed on them. Rather, they look as if they are questioning the instructions and requirements of the photographer, with different expressions on their faces such as that of shock born perhaps out of fright, and they all seem unable to assume and/or appropriate a pose.

Moreover, some of the prisoners look at the camera with a look of resistance. The man numbered 3496 and the woman numbered 4318 wear on their face the expression of someone who is trying not to lose his/her personality, who is trying to be

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<sup>18</sup> On Panopticon see Foucault, Discipline and Punish, pp 200-9

strong and resisting as if they silently say: “You can capture my body but never my soul”.<sup>19</sup>

What is surprising in all of these attitudes is that, despite the attempt of the police to classify, control, fix and expose the prisoners by imposing on them the same posture and by putting them into the same setting, each prisoner has a different, uncontrollable and often ambiguous facial expression in front of the camera.

To all these inconsistencies, the ambiguity of the positioning of their hands is added. Although the purpose of making visible the hands was probably to give as many details as possible about the prisoner, these hands facing their chest may connote different things. They may, for example, make these prisoners look as if they are accepting their crimes, as if they want to say: “Yes, I am guilty; I am the one who committed that crime”. However, if we read this gesture of self-reference together with some of the facial expressions, such as that of number 965 or number 4448, another voice-over comes to mind: “Am I guilty? Me?”

All these different narratives coming from the different meanings attributed to the hands and their gesture increase the ambiguity inherent in the poses of the prisoners. Although the aim of these photographs is to make the body of the prisoner an object, to make it docile, separated and individuated, to attach to it the identity of “prisoner”, they also reveal the impossibility of such an attempt by exhibiting the paradoxical reactions of the prisoners to this act of objectification.

Even though these prisoners didn’t have any other choice than obedience; it seems thus that they can still escape from the effects of the power of the camera.

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<sup>19</sup> While analyzing these photographs I am obliged to refer to the prisoners through their classification numbers because the quality of the photographs does not permit me to read their names. This way of referring creates an effect of objectification that I will consider in more detail in pp. 37-40.

Before examining this possibility of escape in more detail, I want now to clarify how the photographic camera has a power that creates or produces a narrative of subjectivity.

In the fourth chapter of her book, The Threshold of the Visible World, Kaja Silverman develops an argument about the separation of the camera from the eye and its subordination to the gaze. Following film theorists who argue against the reduction of the cinematic spectatorship to the identification of the spectator with the camera, and expanding Jonathan Crary's argument about the discontinuity that exists between *Camera Obscura* and photographic camera, Silverman argues that the latter is not only separated from the eye but also displaces the eye from the seemingly privileged position it occupied in the Renaissance.

For Silverman the camera is prosthetic rather than analogous to human vision. Departing from such a distinction, Silverman argues that because of its freedom from the imperfections of a human eye and because it is associated with true and objective vision, the camera has been installed ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the primary trope through which the western subject apprehends the gaze. Departing from this association, she also argues that when a camera is trained upon us, "we feel ourselves subjectively constituted, as if the resulting photograph could somehow determine 'who' we are" (1996, 135).

Moreover, while discussing the colonial deployment of the camera/gaze in the section "How to Face a Camera", Silverman refers to the example of the identity photographs of Algerian women in Harun Farocki's 1988 film, *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*. For Silverman the reason for the French colonial authorities to take "identity" pictures of Algerian women lies in their desire to be empowered and to rule, since to rule is to render "visible" and "legible", she argues.

This power of the camera/gaze has some consequences for the subject facing the camera, and in the case of Algerian women Silverman mentions that there is “the horror of being photographed for the first time” (1996,148). Although this horror can be explained as the horror born out of a confrontation between two different cultures and the imposition of one cultural framework (the western framework of women as spectacle, for example) on the “other”, it can also exist in the moment of facing the camera in general, be it the first time or not. In fact, if we return to the photographs of the prisoners (Fig.7) we can see that most of the prisoners such as number 5499, 971 and 4488, have on their face a trace of such a horror.

Building on both Roland Barthes’ and Christian Metz’s argument that photography has the characteristic power both to preserve and to destroy the referent, Silverman points out that in the case of the subject’s relationship to the camera, the camera, like the gaze, has the power to provide the subject with a specular body, while at the same time abolishing his or her existential body. In this sense the photograph confers an identity upon the subject only at the expense of his or her “being”. Perhaps the horror that appears on the faces of the prisoners is the horror born out of the awareness of that loss of being.

While examining previously the expressions of the prisoners in front of the camera we could also think about our own reactions, or feelings of insecurity, not only in front of a camera but also in front of any other technologies of objectification. Let’s think for example of the times when we go for a health check-up, put ourselves into the hands of doctors and focus particularly on the moment when they impose on us a difficult pose while taking our x-ray pictures. At this moment we can feel alien to ourselves.

On the one hand, we can try to obey the instructions of the doctors by holding our breath and by trying not to move. But on the other hand, we might feel clumsy because at that moment we are confronted with a strange apparatus that pushes us to reconsider our subjectivity.

At that moment it is possible that we are reminded again of the full presence of our body, the body we are used to forgetting, to repressing in everyday life. We may feel that our body becomes an object of knowledge and to know it better we may try to see it from the perspective of the un-localisable eyes of the x-ray machine that oddly sees something we could never see (but yet can never feel and experience it, like we do). It is our bones. In front of that machine we can imagine what bones look like. We may be curious and impatient about seeing them, like small children who want to see their photograph as soon as their picture is taken.

This act of impatience is perhaps the impatience of putting an end to the feeling of confusion, emptiness and pain, coming from a momentary loss of what we believe to be our subjectivity. This pain is mainly caused by the realisation of the impossibility of recognising our “self”, since the thing we used to call “ourselves” always incorporates something that we can never really grasp. Although we may desperately want to recognise ourselves in the x-ray picture, how can we recognise something we have never really seen before? Can we recognise our bones? We may thus realise that although our pose in front of the x-ray machine is for the purpose of clarifying our body’s condition, with the resulting image we will also be reduced to our bones, we will exist as bones for the doctors who will inspect our x-ray picture. We will exist as something we won’t be able to recognise.

The experience described above, although it belongs to a different realm from that of photography, may in some respect resemble the moment of posing in front of the photographic camera when we may also experience a similar anxiety and confusion.

Indeed, such a moment of anxiety is very similar to Roland Barthes' description of his own feelings in front of the camera. Having been the subject of photography many times in his life, Barthes reveals that posing in front of a camera is a moment of shifting impressions of oneself: "...the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art" (1981,13). These impressions lead to another feeling that our image never coincides with our "self" because the image is heavy, motionless, and stubborn while our notion of our "self" is light, divided and dispersed. Whether in front of an x-ray machine or in front of camera, the moment of posing can thus be considered as a moment at which the subject is momentarily detached from what he/she believed to be him/ herself; when he/she questions his /her recognisability.

This aspect of posing in front of a machine that is ready to objectify you was indeed more powerful in the early period of photographic practice because unlike in painting, posing was an inevitable part of early photographic practice. Because of the limitations of early photographic technologies in which the time of exposure could reach eight to ten minutes, posing was a necessity.

Due to this, the models posing for photographs were also named "sitters" because it was necessary to keep the models immobile in order to obtain a non-blurred image. For this reason, the act of posing was much more important in photography than in painting. There were even some devices or prostheses invisible to the lens which supported and hold the body in its passage to immobility, such as headrests that would hold the head of the sitters from the back, so that they would remain steady. Posing was

not then a luxury and it reminded the sitter of the technological aspect of their picture being taken. As a result of this, the reactions of the sitters were different from those of the poseurs for paintings, because they were more directly exposed to the objectification of the camera.

As we have seen, this objectification can occur at different levels. On the one hand, posing in front of the camera creates a moment suspension, a break in the continuity of everyday life in order to highlight a moment. Even the French verb “poser” denotes the idea of “to put”, “to place”, or “to position” an object and thus reminds us the act of positioning, placing the sitter in front of the camera.

Moreover, if we consider that in order to take the first portrait photographs the subject had to assume long poses in photographic studios and was “statuefied” under the headrests, we can say that the moment of posing in front of the camera also turns the poseur into a museum object, the headrest becoming the pedestal.

In addition to this, although there is always a person (namely the photographer or the operator) behind the photographic camera, this person’s stare does not generally meet with that of the model at the very moment of shooting. The camera can hide the face and the stare of the photographer, creating thus an uncanny combination between the photographer and his tool. This lack of communication between the photographer and the model may even be more dramatic if we consider that most of the time the photographer was not behind the apparatus but next to it at the moment of shooting. This would create in the sitter the impression that the photographer’s role was unimportant at the very moment that the picture was taken and that he/she was leaving the model alone with the camera, especially while he/she was forcing the model to look at the lens instead of him. Being face to face with a machine would thus create nervousness in the model.

Colin Ford, in fact, argues that in the early periods of photography, being photographed must have been a nerve-racking experience, and he adds that: “Cameras were large and awe-inspiring, and their operators had a disconcerting tendency periodically to disappear under a dark cloth in order to adjust the focus” (1983,11).

Moreover, as also stated by Roland Barthes, photography also creates the feeling that the subject becomes an object at the disposal of others: others can have one’s photograph, can reproduce it, or print it in other objects such as books, and while doing so they make one’s image an object available for others. As a result of these two different levels of objectification, posing in front of the camera can create in the sitter a state of nervousness and can possibly push him/her to question this very moment of posing.

Helen Humphrey, in her novel Afterimage, provides some descriptions of the moment of the pose in front of the early photographic camera as she tells us the story of a young woman photographer, Isabelle, who is a character inspired by the famous the late 19<sup>th</sup>- century woman photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron. While describing the state of the sitters in front of the camera, she explains the difficulty of maintaining a unified self and the anxiety of being objectified as follows:

To be who we think we are. To look to someone else how we feel to ourselves. How hard that is to align. Cook’s sister might never have her photograph taken again. For people who don’t know her she will only ever be this stiff woman, her body so rigid in the photograph that there is nothing to read into it, into her. There’s no crooked elbow to suggest a casual ease with life, no chin tilted upwards to show interest in the world (2000, 78).

I would like now to finish this chapter with an analysis of a photograph, belonging this time to another important discourse of western society, that of the family. Below is a

photograph by Charles Evans entitled *Portrait of a Girl with Doll Holding Mother's Hand*.

(Fig.8)

In this picture everything seems tranquil unless we see the hand holding the child. Not only is its being cropped disturbing but also its very existence in the image makes the child look as if she needed support while her picture is being taken. Probably the mother of the child was steadying and comforting her child for her portrait sitting which, as already mentioned, can be a very difficult and annoying moment if we consider not only the immobility required but also the strangeness for a child of being face to face with a machine.

Is she capable of assuming a pose, or is she too disturbed or stiff to give a relaxed pose? She seems to obey the directions of either her mother or the photographer because in her face there is a trace of the seriousness of someone listening and trying to pay attention. Perhaps in this moment she was incapable of hiding herself behind a pose because posing needs also a certain self-confidence and an ability to adapt oneself to the pose. It is clear that she is not caught in an unexpected moment. She even seems to be too aware of the external forces that push her into her unnatural position. But neither is she totally in control of her external appearance. She rather looks as if she is



Fig.8

questioning what is really happening at that moment. What gives us this feeling is her gaze (concentrated towards the left of the camera), which is that of someone who is

caught in between trusting and not trusting what she is facing. There is no grimace or any other trace of feeling on her face. She rather looks with an air of emptiness, as if she is questioning what is happening.

In fact, “se poser”<sup>20</sup> in French means also to raise a question to oneself, to address a question to oneself. In that sense posing may perhaps connote the moment in which the sitter, in his/her immobility may also raise questions about his/her own being exposed. This moment of questioning might be a moment of indecision between posing and refusing to pose, between believing in and forgetting our appearance, between trying to resemble what we believe to be our “self” and our awareness of its impossibility. It is perhaps in that moment of indecision caused both by the disruptiveness of the presence of the camera and its extensions (the flash, the headrest, the tripod etc), and by the indifference of the camera to our exposition that, we begin questioning our recognisability.

Judith Butler, re-reading Foucault in “Bodies and Power Revisited”, argues that one’s fundamental attachment to oneself that passes via recognition is both engendered and constrained in advance by social norms. In a way, the subject is not recognisable without conforming to these norms. Can posing be a way to challenge those norms and to question the power of the photographic camera?

Butler argues that Foucault’s concept of power is a form of power which categorises the individual and which imposes on him a law of truth, which he must recognise. For her, this formulation specifies the mechanism by which power acts on a subject and transforms a human being into a “subject”. Thus, power shapes and produces the subject by attaching it to its own identity through norms.

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<sup>20</sup> “Se poser” is the intransitive verb in French that can be used to define someone who is posing for his/her picture being made. However, it can also refer to the act of asking oneself a question, of raising a question.

However, Butler adds that the production of the “subject” is not the only effect of power. Power also produces as one of its effects a resistance to itself.

The emergence of photographic practice in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century might be considered as one of these norms which produces new identities and, for Butler, to challenge the norms by which recognition is conferred is to risk one’s very being, one’s very recognisability. This implies that to question the norm is to suspend the satisfaction coming from the belief that we can be identical with that part of ourselves framed by the norms. She also argues that the moment of resistance, the moment of opposition, emerges when we question the promise of those norms that permit our recognisability.

This chapter has tried to find some clues about the existence of such a pain, by focusing on the moment of posing during the early years of photographic practice, to argue that posing in front of the camera in an era when the camera was a powerful instrument that established the criterion of identity, may be one of those painful moments of (self-) questioning when the subject takes a critical distance on the terms that decides its very being.

Perhaps the little girl with her doll and the prisoners were all experiencing and revealing one of those moments where one has a chance, as Giorgio Agamben says, of facing one’s own face in its impropriety (2000, 97). The next chapter will try to analyse such a possibility from a psychoanalytical and philosophical perspective in order to consolidate the argument that the act of posing is a moment that questions, and uncannily shatters (self-) recognition.

My gaze slid by chance towards the massive mirror hanging in front of us and I uttered a cry: in this golden frame our image appeared like a painting and this painting was marvellously beautiful. It was so strange and so fantastic that a deep shiver seized me at the thought that its lines and its colours soon dissolve like a cloud.

**Leopold Sacher-Masoch**, *Venus in Furs*

Man cannot bear his portrait. The image of his limit and his own determination exasperates, panics him.<sup>21</sup>

**Paul Valéry**, *Notebooks*

Which body? We have several<sup>22</sup>

**Roland Barthes**,  
*The Pleasure of the Text*

### 3) Towards a theorisation of the act of posing

“Is it possible to meet oneself?”(1991, 43).

Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen starts his article “The Statue Man” with this intriguing question, departing from Freud’s own account of his encounter with his own image in a reflection in the looking-glass of a wagon-lit compartment. He argues that at the moment of that encounter Freud failed in recognising his own image, his double, and took it to be a real person. The story that Borch-Jacobsen refers to is an anecdote from Freud’s famous article, “The Uncanny”:

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<sup>21</sup> “L’homme ne peut supporter son portrait. L’image de sa limite et de sa détermination propre l’exaspère, l’affole”. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers 1894-1914* Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri, Judith Robinson Valéry, Gallimard : Paris, 1987. My Translation

<sup>22</sup> “Quel Corps? Nous en avons plusieurs”. Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte*, Seuil :Paris, 1982. My Translation.

I was sitting alone in my wagon-lit compartment when a more than usually violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing-gown and a travelling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realised to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance (Freud quoted in Jacobsen, 1991, 43).

Jacobsen points out that what is happening in this encounter is not only a failure to recognise one's own image but also a feeling of "dislike" born out of the uncanniness of facing one's own image. He adds that nothing is more agonising and dislikeable than someone who resembles oneself. But why is facing our image so unbearable? What happens in this paradoxical relationship between our image/appearance and our "self"?

This chapter will try to find some answers to these questions by analysing the act of creating a self-image: the act of posing, from a psychoanalytical and philosophical perspective. But in order to delve into such an analysis let's first give an account of our relationship with (self-) images.

### **3.1 The subject and its image**

One's first encounter with one's visual appearance can be considered as one of the most crucial moments of human subjectivity, as for many psychoanalysts this encounter plays an important role in the formation of the ego. According to Jacques Lacan, the human child, as early as the age of six months, is able to relate to his own image reflected in the mirror in a more appropriative way than the chimpanzee, despite the fact that the chimpanzee is more advanced than him, in terms of instrumental intelligence.

Unable yet to walk or to stand up, the child is nevertheless able to relate to his own image in the mirror by fixing his attitude, his posture, in order to hold it in his gaze. For Lacan, this relationship brings forward a particular function of the image, that of establishing a relationship between the child and its surroundings, between the child's fragmented uncoordinated inner sensation of his body and the outside, the surrounding world, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*<sup>23</sup>.

Lacan gives the name of "the mirror stage" to this relationship and defines it as an identification, "a transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (2, 1997). This transformation is a transformation from a fragmented bodily sensation to a "form" of its totality. Lacan calls the latter a "mirage" of a totality given to him as a *Gestalt*<sup>24</sup>, "an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted" (1997, 2).

Indeed, for Lacan the mirror stage is an important phase in the human ego's development as he proposes that the ego comes into existence at the very moment when the infant grasps this *Gestalt* image of its body in the mirror. This observation about the formative aspect of the specular image emphasises the fact that the mirror image is sufficient to generate an apprehension of the self in the child.

However, this generation passes through a crucial paradox. As also stated in Kaja Silverman's reading of Lacan in The Threshold of the Visible World, Lacan paradoxically insists upon the coexistence of the "sameness" and the "otherness" of the mirror image within which the child finds or appropriates its "self".

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<sup>23</sup> Lacan refers to these Freudian concepts in "The Mirror Stage" p.4. But he does not translate them. Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen interprets them as the "organism" and its "reality". I would rather interpret them as the subject's "inner world" and its "environment".

<sup>24</sup> Form or shape. It also connotes the idea of unity.

On the one hand, the child experiences a *méconnaissance*<sup>25</sup> in his encounter with his specular reflection, because he identifies with an image, an object outside of himself. On the other hand, what he sees when looking into the mirror is literally his “own” image. In other words, he is both directly related to but also different from his image.

I want to argue that this paradox might be related to a specific problematic within the discussion about the nature of the ego. From what exactly is the ego derived? From the body itself or from the representation/image of the body?

### 3.2 The “self” in between body and image

In “The Ego and the Id” Freud claims that the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego. Moreover, in accordance with his general attitude, he adds that the ego is not merely a surface entity but it is the “projection” of a surface. However, Silverman notes that despite Freud’s initial claim that the ego is derived from the body, Freud tends to separate the body and the psyche in his other works.

She also adds that Lacan insists more emphatically upon this disjunctive relationship, especially when he connects Freud’s conception of the ego as the “projection” of a “surface”, to his account of the ego as being specularly formed in the mirror stage.

This insistence by Lacan on the fictiveness and the exteriority of the image which forms the ego is nevertheless not sufficient according to Silverman because, unlike animals, the human subject is characterized by his ability to identify with his own image that is to “recognise” the image as the self. That “belonging-to-me” aspect of our identification with the mirror image is indeed opposed to any other perception

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<sup>25</sup> *Méconnaissance* is a term frequently used in Lacan’s literature. It can be translated as mis-recognition.

of the mirror image, such as perceiving the image as just another member of the same species.

Silverman concentrates thus on the fact that, in order to appropriate the image reflected in the mirror, one must inevitably establish a relationship between one's own bodily sensations and the image, which will always remain somehow outside them. Therefore the initial paradox that Lacan refers to points to the possibility that the ego takes its direction not only from its specular representation, but also from the "sensational" body. The subject, in order to appropriate the image in the mirror as his/her own, needs to pass through a convergence (matching) of his/her bodily sensations and the image he/she perceives in the mirror. In that sense bodily sensations play also an important role in the formation of the ego.

One psychoanalyst who emphasises the part played by the bodily sensations in the emergence of the ego is Paul Schilder. According to Silverman, in his book The Image and Appearance of the Human Body, Schilder recognises the importance of the image of the body in the formation of the "self". However, he also adds that this image represents only one of the self's components. Therefore the ego also has a corporeal aspect that Schilder calls the "postural model of the body" (Schilder quoted in Silverman, 12). It includes all tactile, cutaneous and kinaesthetic sensations that are experienced as pertaining to one body, graspable in totality. For Schilder, the picture of our own body, which we form in our mind, is strongly related with these sensations, which are the impressions (such as thermal or pain impressions) that we experience with our body.

Moreover, he also adds that this experience of the form or totality of the body is conferred upon the subject from outside. It comes from a relationship between the

body and the world of objects. The form of the body can thus be perceived only if it comes into contact with surfaces other than itself.

Basing her argument on Schilder, Silverman emphasises that, like the specular image that forms the basis of the Lacanian ego, cutaneous sensation is conferred upon the subject from outside. She also stresses that for Schilder this perception of the corporeal ego by the subject is not simply the outcome of physical contact but is also shaped by the desires of the “other” addressed to it.

Schilder argues in fact that: “the touches of others, the interest others take in different parts of our body is not the simple product of physical contact, but it is also profoundly shaped by the desires which are addressed to it and by the values which are imprinted on it through touch” (Schilder quoted in Silverman, 13).

Departing from these accounts, Silverman concludes that one’s apprehension of the “self” is induced by both a visual image and by certain bodily feelings whose foundation is less physiological than social and therefore both visual and sensational perceptions are necessary for the formation of the sense of self. She thus points to a different approach to the Lacanian theory of the formation of the “I”, by emphasising the role of the bodily sensations and their inevitable relationship to the visual (mirror) image, in this formation.

Indeed, Silverman’s conclusion finds its roots in another psychoanalyst, Henri Wallon, who had already claimed a different interpretation of the ego’s development, before Lacan’s famous “The Mirror Stage”. In his, Les Origines du Caractere Chez l’Enfant (1934), Wallon puts forward a different theory of the mirror stage. He argues that a lengthy period intervenes between the child’s first introduction to the mirror and the moment he or she incorporates the image, whereas in Lacan, the infant’s confrontation with its specular reflection is punctual rather than an ongoing process.

As Silverman also points out, in Lacan's narrative, the mirror image is sufficient to induce an apprehension of the "self" in the child. However, for Wallon, the visual image is always distinct from the sense of self that is more derived from a delicate combination of the corporeal ego and its visual projection. That's why, in contrast to the Lacanian child who immediately misrecognizes himself as his image in front of the mirror, Wallon's child embraces its reflection not as himself but as something other, a rival, or love object. As Silverman argues, Wallon's exemplary children are either astonished when they touch the mirror image and come into contact with cold glass instead of warm flesh, or they prefer to look into the mirror image upon hearing their name, rather than responding to it.

All this suggest indeed that the infant responds to the reflection of its body as a separate thing or as something it can relate to (as in the example of the child who looks at the mirror when hearing his name called), but is never totally able to incorporate that image immediately.

Silverman adds that because of this lack of immediate recognition, the mirror image offers only an "identity-at-a-distance" (1996, 15). This "identity-at-a-distance" is not an identity in the sense of being the same but entails precisely the opposite, the condition or quality of being "other". This opens up the possibility that the subject has access to himself by passing through the "otherness" within and/or outside the self, and this point will be elaborated later while discussing the act of posing in the section 3.3.

The mirror image or the visual image, in Wallon, represents what he calls the "exteroceptive ego" (1996, 14) but as we have seen, it is not the only component of the ego. There is also what he calls the "*proprioceptive* ego", and for Wallon it is in relation to the *proprioceptive* ego that we are able to perceive the specular image as being "outside" us. Wallon's "*proprioceptive* ego" is similar to Schilder's corporeal ego

and I want now to focus in more detail on this particular aspect of the ego in order to relate the subject/image relationship to the act of posing. Because, as we will see, the act of posing is an act that is strongly related to the *proprioceptive* perception of the body.

For Silverman *proprioceptivity* derives etymologically from two different sources *proprius*, which can mean “personal”, “individual”, “characteristic” and “belonging to”, and *capere*, meaning “to grasp”, “to conceive” and “to catch”. It thus generally implies “the apprehension on the part of the subject, of his/her ‘ownness’” (1996, 16). As we have seen above, for Silverman and Wallon, *proprioceptivity* is distinguished from identity that depends upon the image remaining always outside us. Silverman’s reading of Wallon emphasises *proprioceptivity* as being a non-visual mapping of the body’s form, and similar to Schilder’s sensational ego, the *proprioceptive* ego is also derived from the interaction between the body and its cultural environment.

Moreover, Silverman stresses that the *proprioceptive* ego is not simply a deployment of musculature but it’s more of a posture (a position of the body, of bodily parts, or a characteristic way of bearing one’s body: carriage), the body’s sensation of occupying a point in space, “a deployment of the body’s muscles for the purpose of fitting it...within an imagined spatial envelope” (1996, 16). Silverman adds, based on Foucault’s Discipline and Punish, that posture is a result of coercion induced for the benefit of work and education, such as the cultural manipulations which every child experiences in the process of learning to sit, stand, walk, etc. Posture is thus the manner of being, of behaving, that is culturally inscribed in every subject. But how can posture be inscribed on the subject? What is the role of the “image” (of the body) within this inscription?

For Wallon, although the “mapping” of the body is not merely visual, there is however a relationship between the *proprioceptive* ego and the *exteroceptive* ego. The *proprioceptive* ego is not only the fragmented sensations related to the body, it is also an apprehension of the body that separates it from the immediate experience, and gives the body the impression of belonging to “me”, and this apprehension or appropriation, is only possible through an *exteroceptive* image.

As also noted by Borch-Jacobsen, for Wallon the “body” in general is the representation/idea of the body in the mind of the subject. It is an “image” of the body. And Wallon adds that to perceive, define, our body, we need to separate it from everyday experience, as he argues:

Between the immediate experience of things and their representation, a dissociation necessarily intervenes that detaches the qualities and existence proper to the object from the impressions and the actions in which it is initially implicated, by attributing to the object, among other traits, those of exteriority. Representation is only possible at that price. The representation of the body proper insofar as it exists, necessarily satisfies that condition and can be formed only through self-exteriorization...The whole work [of the child] therefore consists in the child’s giving himself images of himself” (Wallon quoted in Borch-Jacobsen, 1991, 47).

Having a posture, posing, grasping the body in its totality, seem to be thus very much related with “imagining” that body, representing it as an image, and not as any kind of image but as a visual image. The posture of the body is thus influenced by and even depends on the visual representation of the body in the mind of the subject. But more than that, a visual mapping of the physical sensations of the body is thus necessary to appropriate the body as the self. This imagination is a *projection* and it is inevitably necessary in the act of recognising, appropriating the visual reflection of the self on the mirror.

Indeed, Borch-Jacobsen's comparative analysis of Freud, Lacan and Wallon leads us to an evaluation of Lacan's "mirror stage" not as a stage per se, but rather as an *ek-statis*<sup>26</sup> that projects the ego before itself. As both Freud and Lacan state, a unity comparable to the ego does not exist from the beginning. Unlike animals, man is premature at birth, and if the ego projects itself before itself, it is because it does not have any unity, it does not hold itself upright. Therefore it can erect itself as a stable ego only through imaginary anticipation. As Borch-Jacobsen says:

...the infant, delivered as he is into a sort of primordial "dehiscence"<sup>27</sup> anticipates his bodily unity and mastery in an image...in this sense the unity of the ego is fundamentally imaginary-that is both fundamentally illusory...and fundamentally visual. Indeed only through vision, can the ego arise itself before itself as a self – enclosed totality. The erection of the ego is always the erection of a statue that I see over there- triumphant, unshakeable, fixed for eternity (1991, 49).

Borch-Jacobsen starts pointing here to Lacan's connection with the speculative dialectics of Hegel. He also confirms this connection in the following paragraph, by saying: "Indeed that there is no 'possible representation' except at the price of an initial 'exteriorisation' and of dissociation from 'immediate experience'-isn't this what Hegel says of the Absolute and its 'reflection in the otherness within itself?'" (1991, 50).

He also states later on: "Nothing is less 'speculative' in the Hegelian sense than the 'precipitation' that 'forever' stops, fixes and blocks the ego in the form in which it fictitiously anticipates itself" (1991, 51).

From all this we can see that Borch-Jacobsen pays extended attention to the traces of speculative ontology in Lacan's text and he argues that, despite Lacan's desire to criticise the Cartesian conception of the subject (since Lacan declares at the

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<sup>26</sup> Borch-Jacobsen refers here to Heidegger's vocabulary. Ekstasis is the Greek word from which the English word ecstasy is derived. It means to be outside oneself. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekstasis>

<sup>27</sup> Spontaneous opening burst.

beginning of “The Mirror Stage” article that the formation of the ego [“I”] is an experience “ that leads us to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*” [1977,1]), the mirror stage prolongs and even completes this philosophy by exhibiting one of its major presuppositions in broad daylight.

In fact, what “The Mirror Stage” suggests is that the ego is outside itself from the very beginning, always already represented and ex-posed in front of itself, and the subject is conceived in terms of vision. That is for Borch-Jacobsen what lies at the heart of the modern metaphysics of “subject(iv)ity”<sup>28</sup> as it seems that the Lacanian “subject” is nothing other than the Cartesian “subject” whose evidence comes from “posing-oneself-*before oneself*” (1991, 55).

For Borch-Jacobsen, the Cartesian *Cogito*, supposes from the very beginning a spacing of the “before-oneself” and he adds that the metaphysics of subjectivity bases itself on the self-evidence of the self (ego) which can only grasp and see itself from a distance. He also adds that: “The Lacanian ego is the ego as it theorises itself, never as it feels ‘itself’ or experiences ‘itself’” (1991,57).

So, we can say that the *proprioceptive* mapping of the self is dependent on the projection of the *exteroceptive* image on the body because it is through that projection that the body and the “self” become separated from everyday experience and thus can be represented, thought and conceived as a *Gestalt*. Posture is one of the outcomes of such a projection as it is one of the ways a certain image, gesture, or pose is inscribed on the body.

Up to now we have seen that (self-)identification, (self-)recognition requires not only an encounter with our (mirror) image but also an incorporation of that image. Therefore the subject’s bodily experiences and corporeal sensations are also crucial in

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<sup>28</sup> Borch-Jacobsen’s emphasis.

that identification, as there is an unavoidable relationship between the *proprioceptive* and the *exteroceptive* identification of the self.

We have also seen that any incorporation of the (self-)image necessitates a projection of a mental image of the body's totality, a posing oneself-before-oneself, that is also a distancing from the self, a separation of the self from its immediate experience and even perhaps, in my interpretation, a becoming "other" to the "self". Let's see now how this separation/distancing brings with it the possibility of questioning/shattering the very act of (self-)identification and (self-) recognition which, I hope to show, reveals itself perfectly in the act of posing.

### 3.3 Posing

In its simplest sense, posing can be considered as the way in which the "subject" responds to the (implied) presence of the beholder. It is, assuming a posture, an imaginary self, in front of any captivating gaze. It can thus be considered as a representation, an attempt of (re)formation of the "subject", like in the mirror stage.

When in front of the photographic camera (which, as we saw in the previous chapter, can be considered another form of the gaze), posing can be seen as a response to and defence against the camera's "deadly" capture. The camera has indeed been considered since its invention as a tool which "shoots" (as we say "shooting" to mean taking a photograph) the subject and "kills" him/her in the sense that it turns him/her into a frozen image, an object available for others. In other words, the photographic camera was believed to be an apparatus that claims a power over the subject it shoots, in the sense that, it turns him/her into an image over which the subject has no control. It also creates in the subject the feeling of being "constituted" and (re)formed as we already mentioned in more detail in the previous chapter. As a

result, the act of posing in front of the camera can be considered a protective response against the camera's "gaze".

Indeed, for Craig Owens, posing is also an act of self-protection in the sense that the posing subject seems to "kill" himself before being "killed" by the camera, as he/she becomes a frozen image. Similarly, Roland Barthes, who extends the pose to inanimate things, describes it as an "instant, however brief, in which a real thing happened to be motionless in front of the eye" (Barthes quoted in Owens, 210).

It seems thus that the act of posing is a perfect example of the subject apprehending and/or protecting itself by transforming itself into a frozen image, imitating, projecting, the image he/she has in his/her mind, on his/her body. It is a moment of becoming an "image".

Moreover, by referring to Lacan, Owens argues that there is a splitting that the subject experiences during his/her pose. This splitting occurs because there is separation of the "self" from everyday life's continuous flow. In other words, the subject is split because its body becomes a picture, a semblance, a "separated" image, in order to perform beforehand what the photographic camera will do to him/her that is, condemning him/her to death. He also adds that this "separation" connotes both the idea of dressing oneself, but also the idea of defending oneself, (to provide oneself with what one needs to be on one's guard) and, the idea of being engendered<sup>29</sup>.

In short, for Owens, posing is a protective response to the camera/gaze that both punctuates (arrests, suspends) and punctures (pricks, wounds) the "subject". So, if in posing for a photograph the "subject" freezes, it is not in order to assist the

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<sup>29</sup> "To separate" comes from Latin *separat-*, the past participle of *separare*, which is formed from the prefix *se-* "without, apart" and *parare* "make ready", "prepare something by parting it from something else" - pretty much what we mean by the verb to *pare*. We first encounter *separate* in written English in the early 15th century. The Indo-European root of *parare* is *pere-* which can mean, "to produce, procure", and "to protect" which also gave us the words like *parade*, *parachute*, *parasol*, *pare* etc. (<http://www.takeourword.com/TOW182/page2.html>)

photographer and/or the camera but in some sense to resist him, to protect itself from his immobilising, deadly gaze by becoming a frozen, “dead” image before being captured. And he calls this act an *arrêt de mort*<sup>30</sup>. Owens points out that *Arrêt de mort* means in French both a death sentence and a stay of execution. In that sense the posing subject seems paradoxically to condemn him/herself to death and at the same time wards off death by an ambivalent forestalling. Owens asks: “What do I do when I pose for a photograph? I freeze...as if anticipating the still I am about to become; mimicking its opacity, its stillness; inscribing, across the surface of my body, photography’s ‘mortification’ of the flesh” (1992, 210).

Silverman offers a similar account of the pose when she claims that posing is not simply imitative of a pre-existing image, but rather, it is imitative of photography itself, as she says that the pose does not only arrest the body, “hyperbolising the devitalising effects of all photographic representation” (1996, 202), but also resembles three-dimensional photography. She also adds that it is the assimilation of *proprioceptivity* to *exteroceptivity*, corporeality to image.

Moreover, Silverman argues that in the field of vision the subject does not passively wait for the camera/gaze to photograph him or her. On the contrary he/she “may give him or herself to be apprehended by the gaze in a certain way, by assuming the shape of... a desired representation” (1996, 201). When this happens, the subject tries to anticipate the imaginary photograph by approximating its form. In other words, the posing subject “performs” the photograph (especially its stillness) he/she will be into, before-hand. It is in this sense that it resembles three-dimensional photography.

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<sup>30</sup> He takes this term from Jacques Derrida’s terminology in “Living on border lines” in Deconstruction and Criticism, trans James Hulbert, ed. Harold Bloom, New York: The SeaBury Press, 1979, pp.75-176.

Considering these accounts of the act of posing we can argue that posing is not an imitation of a specific image. Rather it is a re-enactment of some qualities pertaining to photography. Moreover, Silverman argues that if posing resembles anything it resembles mimicry, and mimicry is not a simple imitation.

Silverman refers to Jacques Lacan's description of the phenomenon of mimicry in his Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis and argues that for Lacan, although mimicry is a behaviour found in certain species of insects, which seem to adopt the shape, and the natural colour of their environment for protective reasons, it is more an attempt to become part of a particular picture rather than an attempt to imitate a pre-existing image.

Basing his argument on Roger Callois's Méduse et Compagnie, Lacan argues that mimicry can be considered a behaviour in which the being gives of him/herself (and receives from outside) something that is like a mask, an envelope, a thrown-off skin, to frame its shield. However, this behaviour does not serve merely a protective function.

Lacan, by referring to Callois (who specifically analyses the crustacean called "caprella", living among the "quasi-plant animal" known as bryozoaires), remarks that the caprella imitates the bryozoaires's intestinal loop, but it fails to deceive its predators. He adds that, the caprella's disguise represents rather an attempt to become part of a particular "picture".

In fact, Callois in his paper "Mimicry and Legendary Psychastenia" also argues that the function of mimicry in the insect is not to ensure the survival of the species through camouflage because most predators rely on the sense of smell rather than visuality.

Moreover, according to Elizabeth Grosz, who observes the relationship of body and space in her article “Lived Spatiality (The Spaces of Corporeal Desire)”, Callois also likens the insect’s ability to mimic its environment to a psychosis that Pierre Janet describes as “legendary psychastenia”, which is a psychosis in which subjects are unable to locate themselves in position in space, where the subject is no longer the origin of his coordinates, and thus he/she cannot know where to place him/herself. In addition to this, the subject is dispossessed of its privileged connection between his/her consciousness and a particular point in space. In other words, the condition under which the subject has a perspective on the world and on himself is collapsed. Grosz adds that, in that case, the subject “feels himself becoming space” (1993, 192).

In accordance with this account, Silverman points out with reference to Wilem Flusser’s Towards a Philosophy of Photography, that mimicry is “a reproduction in three-dimensional space with solids and voids: sculpture-photography” (Flusser quoted in Silverman, 201). What is significant in all these accounts is that, if we consider posing as a form of mimicry we can argue that while posing, the subject is not really imitating. Rather he/she is threatened by a loss of the sense of self and he/she mimics the stillness of photography.

Moreover, in some other contexts mimicry is conceived as a form of framing and defending the self but at the same time collapsing, shattering its totality. While writing on mimicry in colonial discourse, Homi Bhabha tends to identify mimicry as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. By this, he means that defining the colonised “other” as “a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite”<sup>31</sup> (he gives the example of difference between the

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<sup>31</sup> In Homi Bhabha “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”  
<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/wyrick/DEBCLASS/bhab.htm> p.4

Anglicised and the English), is a manner of appropriating this “other” in a way that recognises it only partially. He reveals that mimicry is the representation of a difference in such a way that it disrupts the initial authority. But it is only through such mimicry that the coloniser can endure its power and secure its own identity. In that sense Bhabha argues that mimicry is a "metonymy of presence". It is a strategy of authority in colonial discourse as it rearticulates presence, in terms of its “otherness”.

Departing from this account we can argue that mimicry seems to be a form of defence in the sense that it can be a form of defending oneself, by appropriating the "other", the unknown. It is a defence against the disappearance, against the non-existence of the "other", where one defines oneself by defending and differentiating oneself against the "other". This defence is a form of existence, a form of presence, which depends on the existence of a displaced and appropriated "other". Mimicry is thus a form of framing, which can frame and secure one’s identity and power. But it has at the same time the potential to disrupt its totality, its unity and continuity by reminding us that it is inevitably based on a certain splitting and difference.

Departing from all these accounts we can argue that the posing subject seems to experience a similar experience to that which he/she experiences in front of the mirror. Posing seems to be strongly related to a splitting of the subject in between his image and his “self”, both to re-generate oneself and to protect oneself from the captivating gaze of the camera. This splitting of the “subject”, as we have seen, seems to be for Lacan the necessary condition of becoming a “subject”.

But there is also one big difference between the act of posing and the act of contemplating the self in front of the mirror. When we pose (in front of the camera) we can never “see” ourselves. We cannot confirm or appropriate our image as we do with our mirror image. Unlike the experience in front of the mirror, we cannot see the

end result of our pose immediately. It is perhaps because of this that some people might impatiently want to see their own photograph after posing. Perhaps we want to feel ourselves completed after encountering our photograph. The pose can thus be seen as a *proprioceptive* sensation, separated from its *exteroceptive* component.

The fact that there is such a potential gap between the *exteroceptive* and *proprioceptive* at the moment of the pose may perhaps reveal the possibility that, despite all the classical accounts of the act of posing (that seem to focus on its potential to frame the subject, be it in the form of affirming or protecting the self), the act of posing can be conceived as a moment that puts into question this very framing of the “subject”.

Thus, although posing, like self-recognition in the mirror stage, can be considered an assimilation, an over-layering of the *exteroceptive* onto *proprioceptive* perceptions of the self, the fact that the gap between those two perceptions can be felt and experienced more dramatically in the moment of the pose, may give us some opportunity to reconsider the act of posing as a moment that renders (self-) recognition impossible.

Perhaps it is possible to argue that while posing, the poseur cannot finish/affirm his/her (self-)identification? Perhaps there is an endless deferral of the self at that moment? In order to focus on such a possibility I want now to go into another analysis of the act of (self-)identification and/or posing, basing my argument on Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s effective questioning of the notion of identification through his reading of Urs Lüthi’s photographic (self-) portraits.

### 3.4 Questioning (self-) identification and/or (self-) recognition

In order to reveal the mechanism of identification and resemblance, Lacoue-Labarthe starts with an essential question that will not only provide some insights into the nature of art, but will also offer a challenging account of the relationship between the subject and its image by basing his argument on photography. This question is: “Can art identify itself?”

For Lacoue-Labarthe, this is a question endlessly asked by art itself. In his book Le Portrait de L’Artiste en Général<sup>32</sup>, he opens up this question by departing from a comparison between art and photography and thus by returning to the classical debate about the place of photography within the artistic realm. To do this, he departs from a series of nine photographic self-portraits of Urs Lüthi exhibited by the Stadler Gallery in Paris in 1974, and embedded in between the nine chapters of Lacoue-Labarthe’s book.

This work (see figure 9) entitled *Just Another Story About Leaving*, consists of a succession of nine photographs of Lüthi in which we see on the one hand a progressive degradation, growing old, of Lüthi’s face, and on the other hand some photographs belonging to different places, (an interior, a tree-lined road etc.), all giving the impression of being connected with the portraits since they are juxtaposed to them. Indeed, these photographs are nearly all blurred, which gives the impression that they are taken during a movement, perhaps the movement of leaving.

In his facial degradation, Lüthi seems also to play on the signs of sexual difference by showing us an oscillation between his feminine and masculine sides. Indeed, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that Urs Lüthi is an artist who is catalogued in the margins of “corporeal art”, among the transvestites.

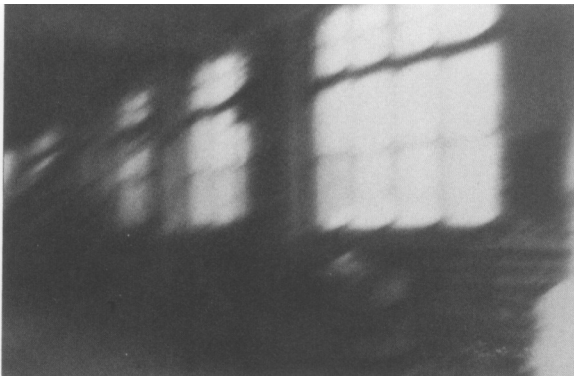
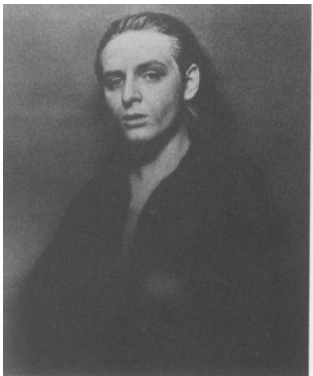
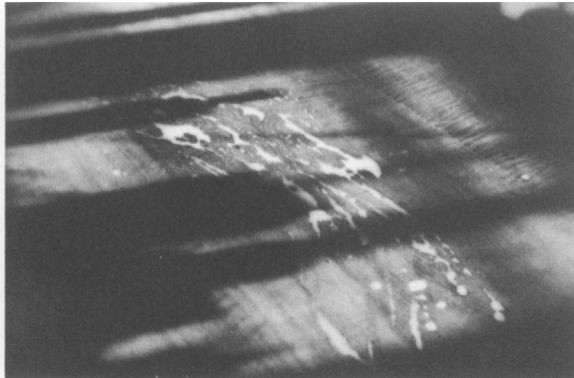
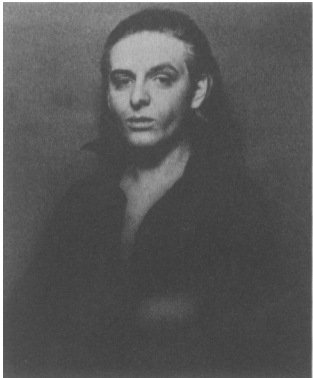
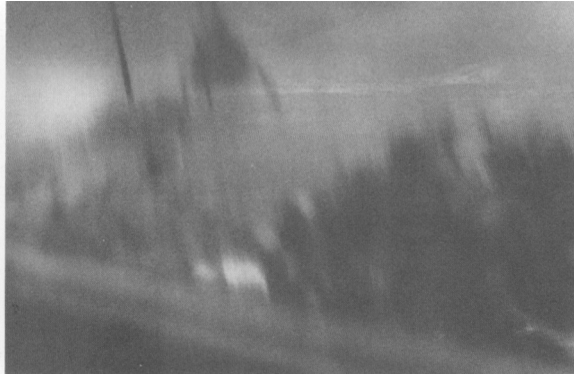
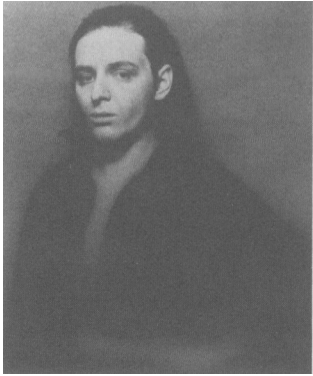
For Lacoue-Labarthe “Just another story about leaving” is indeed “another” story about leaving (in the sense of dying). But it is also a story of life, about living. But what is exactly happening in these self-portraits? What might be the relationships of these photographs or of photography itself, with the problematic of identification and the pose?



Figure 9

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<sup>32</sup> *The Portrait of the Artist in General*. Lacoue-Labarthe quotes this title from Baudlaire’s autobiographical fragments *Mon Coeur mise a nu*.





Lacoue-Labarthe starts his analysis by emphasising that if we follow these photographs linearly we can see a transformation in the face of Lüthi (a transformation that is made possible with make-up). There is indeed a transformation happening in these photographs at two levels.

First of all, we can see that Lüthi plays with the traces of masculinity and femininity on his face. In the first photograph, for example, we can recognise him as a male subject but we can also see some female characteristics on his face, and as we follow the photographs, we might fall into doubt about the nature of his sex.

Secondly, these photographs are not only the mimicry of becoming (simultaneously?) male and female but they also represent a mimicry of becoming old as we see that towards the end of the series, Lüthi's face degrades and becomes old. For Lacoue-Labarthe, at first sight, this work can be considered as a projection by Lüthi of his history. It is an anticipation, an imagination of his becoming old.

But the important thing here is that, through this degradation there's an oscillation between differences (young/old, masculine/feminine). As Lacoue-Labarthe observes: "...la 'dégradation' donc, qui dans un premier temps, masculinise (ou re-masculinise) le visage, à la fin, par on ne sait quel rotation interne immobile...laisse transparaître aussi le visage d'une vieille femme, laquelle comme certaines vieilles femmes en effet, aurait quelque chose de masculin"<sup>33</sup> (1979, 37).

Lacoue-Labarthe argues later on that, on the eve of death, the history in appearance stops in time and the face of the "other" becomes to resurgent but there is no way to decide which "other" it is. By this, he means that when one approaches one's own death, the "other" appears on one's face. Referring to Lüthi's photographic self-portraits he argues indeed that in these portraits, any possibility of resemblance collapses because Lüthi's face becomes an image only identical to itself. Like Blanchot's *corpse*, it becomes free from the "figure" (we cannot figure out whether he is male or female, for example).

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<sup>33</sup> ...the degradation thus, which, at first masculinises (or re-masculinises) the face, at the end lets also appear the face of an old woman who, like some old women in fact, has something masculine.

For Lacoue-Labarthe, in this history of Lüthi's face, we see the degradation of the monumental, the collapse of the "type", and the effacement of the epitaph. The death thus, does not sanction, which means that neither life, nor death; neither masculinity, nor femininity can be deciphered in these photographs because there is an oscillation between the same, and self-same (auto), which troubles the stable, fixed and assured separation between the presence and the absence; between the masculine and the feminine; between the lively and the lifeless.

Together with this analysis, Lacoue-Labarthe draws our attention to the epigraph of these photographs: *You are not the only one who is lonely*. For him this sentence, (which can be considered as Lüthi's signature) summarises in a way the whole problematic of the project that can be formulated as follows.

On the one hand, such a (performative) usage of photography in Lüthi's work makes us doubt the very claim of photography (the use value assigned to it, according to which it may be, documentary, mnemonic, illustrative, testimonial etc.). On the other hand, this project reveals that it is not always possible in the reproduction (from illustration to duplication) of the evoked subject, for identification can be guaranteed between the signifier and the signified.

He adds: "C'est pourquoi, il est vrai, vous (qui?) n'êtes pas le seul à être seul, c'est-à-dire à courir le risque de ne plus pouvoir 'vous' reconnaître, si dans la solitude 'essentielle', comme dit Blanchot, 'la dissimulation tend à apparaître'"(1979, 24)<sup>34</sup>. In other words, for Lacoue-Labarthe, Lüthi addresses the spectator with this sentence and says in a way that "you are not the one who is lonely in not recognising yourself". He thus points to the impossibility of (self-)recognition in general.

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<sup>34</sup> That's why it is true that you (who?) are not the only one who is lonely which means that you are not the only one to take the risk of not being able to recognise yourself, if in absolute solitude as Blanchot says, "the dissimulation tends to appear."

In other words, Lüthi's self-portraits not only put into question the very possibility of the self-portrait (can we really recognise ourselves/others in our/their self-portraits?) but also problematise (self-)identification itself by also putting into question the assumed objective and duplicative character of photography.

Moreover, in these photographs, Lüthi seems to perform his self-portrait in such a way that he explores the capacity of the self-portrait to foreground the "I" as "other" to itself, in the sense that it always escapes from itself. While doing this, he also uses and questions (at the same time) the desire of photography to capture, to maintain the past in the present, to freeze its subject. These photographs, instead of delivering us an image confirming our unmediated access to the "authentic" (if there is such a thing) meaning of the subject (Lüthi's sexual identity for example), reveal the impossibility of attaining such access. I want to argue that the act of posing is also one of those moments that reveal the impossibility of attaining such a fixed, secured access to the self because it is a moment that also reveals an oscillation, a splitting of the subject caught in between incorporating and not incorporating his/her (*exteroceptive*) image, between recognising and becoming "other" to the self.

Amelia Jones, in her article "The 'Eternal Return': Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment", defines the act of posing (for the photographic camera) as an act which predicates a freezing of bodily motion where a death of the subject is enacted. However, she also argues through an analysis of self-portrait photographs of contemporary artists such as Cindy Sherman and Hannah Wilke, that, although posing represents an immobility projected onto the past (in Barthesian terms), this immobility "can after all be transformed into a sign of eternal life...sustained via deferral through the other" (2002, 956). A few paragraphs later she also adds: "...the performative

posing of the self, whether photographically documented or “live” is always already a performance of the other” (2002, 965).

As Lacoue-Labarthe also observed through Lüthi’s photographs, Lüthi’s (self-) performance or pose defers his identity through an oscillation of the “other” within the self. That is what he calls the “allo-portrait” that is, the presence of the self as “other”, both as *personne*<sup>35</sup> (in the sense of no one) and as the “other” that is externally given to be recognised. This concept of Lacoue-Labarthe’s will be given more detailed consideration in my last chapter. But for now I want to end this section by returning to my starting point, claiming that this deferral of the “I” is the reason why the subject feels so uncanny about encountering/ (mis-)recognising his “self”.

We have seen throughout this chapter that the act of posing is a very paradoxical act, uncannily disturbing the myth of the “subject”. On the one hand, it is an act which is suspended between a bodily sensation of the self and its scopic projection but hardly permitting the subject totally to reach the plenitude that he/she seems momentarily to reach in the mirror stage. On the other hand, the act of posing has the potential to reveal the otherness within the “I”, not to confirm it or to appropriate it, but to defer the “I” to the point of preventing its recognition.

Although Lacoue-Labarthe is cautious about recognising in this process the uncanny, (as he says: “il ne faut pas se précipiter, tout d’abord, à identifier” là le sacrosaint *Unheimliche*-pour le rabattre aussitôt, comme de juste sur la non moins sacro-sainte castration” [1979, 49]. )<sup>36</sup>, I still want to end this chapter by attempting to answer the question that Freud’s quotation opens up at the very beginning: why is encountering our image (which we saw in this chapter, is not necessarily an encounter with our actual

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<sup>35</sup> This is itself a paradoxical term meaning both “person” and “no one” in French.

<sup>36</sup> One should not hasten, first of all, to “identify” it with the sacrosanct *Unheimliche* for folding it back at once, on the not less sacrosanct castration.

image in the mirror but may be our encounter with our “imagined” self during the moment of the pose) so unbearably uncanny? My answer to this question is: because the uncanny is not only an anxiety born out of facing the unfamiliar and/or the return of the repressed but is also related to the impossibility of representation.

### 3.5 The pose as an uncanny relationship of the self to its image<sup>37</sup>

The classical Freudian conception of the term “uncanny” bases itself on two lines of argument. Freud, in his famous essay “The Uncanny”, starts first by analysing the complex definition of the German word *das Unheimliche*, translated as uncanny but literally meaning unhomely. In fact, although unhomely is the opposite of what is familiar and homely, the term “uncanny” for Freud is not simply what is unfamiliar and this is due partly to the ambiguity of the term *das Heimliche* (the homely).

Basing himself on two nineteenth-century German dictionaries, Freud demonstrated that “among its different shades of meaning, the word ‘*heimlich*’ exhibits one, which is identical with its opposite, ‘*unheimlich*’” (1955, 17). On the one hand, *heimlich* is related to what is familiar and agreeable and, on the other, to what is concealed and kept out of sight, such as the *unheimlich*, since *unheimlich* can also include everything that ought to remain secret and hidden but has come to light.

Bearing this in mind, Freud argues that *unheimlich* can be considered as a sub-species of *heimlich* because there is an inevitable inclusion of the unfamiliar in the familiar, or rather the unfolding of the homely into the unhomely. The uncanny isn’t thus something new or foreign but something familiar or well established, estranged by the process of repression.

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<sup>37</sup> Parts of this section are inspired by a previously unpublished work of mine entitled Composition and The Uncanny: A Methodological Account of Composition in Visual Arts, and submitted as an MFA Thesis to the Institute of Fine Arts, Bilkent University, 2001.

In fact, Freud draws on E.T.A.Hoffman's story "The Sandman" to relate the uncanniness of the story to the return of the repressed castration anxiety and to the question of the double. In this story the figure of the Sandman plays an important role. This figure that reappears at key moments in the story is highly ambiguous. He is originally a dreadful character that comes to children when they won't go bed, in order to throw sand in their eyes so that they will leap from their sockets and he will collect them to feed his children. He is thus related with a fear of losing one's eyes. Fear of losing one's eyes is, according to Freud, a substitute for a fear of being castrated because there is a substitutive relationship between the eye and the male organ that exists in dreams, myths and fantasies. So, one of the reasons for the uncanniness of this story lies in a return of repressed castration anxiety, which is made strange by repression.

But Freud was also aware that the feeling of uncanniness was a feeling that arises in different situations and not everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition of undergoing repression and returning from it. Thus, the second line of argument bases itself on other instances of the uncanny when one finds oneself in inexplicable situations, such as the sense of *déjà vu* and the mysterious repetition of things (such as numbers) in particular place or date, coincidences and instances of wish-fulfilment. In these cases it is as if one is reminded that something in one's life seems to confirm some surpassed mode of thought, such as the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts, or in secret injurious powers. In these instances of the uncanny there's not exactly a repression which returns in another form but rather a confirmation of the continuing persistence of surmounted beliefs. The reality one believed is turned upside down and one loses one's confidence in one's beliefs. Freud says that here is a "conflict of

judgement as to whether things which have been surmounted, and are regarded as incredible may not after all be possible" (1955, 19).

The difference between these two main instances of uncanniness lies in the fact that in the first case, the uncanny stems from the infantile complexes and is concerned with a repression of some content of thought with a belief in the reality of such a content. In the second case, there is more a questioning of a situation, of a content, which was believed to be real but has deceived us. Freud is not sure whether these two categories can converge if we include the notion of surmounting in the term repression. He argues in the case of the repression of infantile anxieties that what is repressed is an ideational content while in the other case of surmounting the animistic beliefs; there is a repression of a belief in the reality of content.

Although towards the end of his essay Freud separates these two categories of the uncanny, he concludes in a paradoxical way that these two classes of the uncanny experience are not always sharply distinguishable. This paradoxical conclusion can lead us to argue that the origins of an uncanny experience cannot be fixed and most importantly uncanniness is also related to an impossibility of representing. In fact isn't the fear of losing one's eyes in Hoffman's story another version of the fear of losing any possibility of representing the world, of interpreting it?

Indeed, Freud also argues that the sense of the uncanny is often produced when the distinction between fantasy and reality is blurred, when something we regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality or symbols take over the full functions of the thing they symbolise. I think with this argument he opens up the possibility that uncanniness can point to the impossibility of representation. In fact, if we analyse the

meaning of the term we find out that “uncanny” also means “beyond knowledge”<sup>38</sup>. This aspect of the uncanny is also mentioned in Samuel Weber’s re-reading of Freud’s text “The Uncanny”.

In his article “Uncanny Thinking” Weber departs from a re-analysis of the castration anxiety and shows that castration anxiety is an anxiety born from the very fact that it is never fully graspable. He believes that it is impossible for castration to be a visible theme, since it is based on a negative vision of sexual difference.

So, the relationship that exists between castration anxiety and the uncanny is a relationship based on the impossibility of desire reaching its object and having a determinate representation, and a dislocation of an object of perception. In other words, castration anxiety is related with the impossibility of having a representation of the self. In that sense the uncanny becomes inseparable from questions of identification. Weber argues that uncanniness is “that which affects and infects representations, motifs, themes and situations which...mean something other than what they are and in a manner which draws their own being and substance into the vortex of signification” (2000, 234). He also argues that it is through an enactment of a temporality that is discontinuous and suspended between “coups” and shocks of recognition as misrecognition, that the uncanny takes place. I want to argue that this discontinuity is no different from the discontinuity that exists within the subject who is split at the moment of the pose. As we have seen in this chapter the moment of the pose is a moment where the “subject” may be disturbed by the failure of his desire to have a unified self.

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<sup>38</sup> From Anneleen Masschelein’s “A Homeless Concept: Shapes of the Uncanny in Twentieth-Century Theory and Culture” <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/uncanny/anneleenmasschelein.htm>, 2003.

Departing from this, we can perhaps claim that although the origins of an uncanny experience cannot be fixed, the uncanny may denote the relation that exists between the subject and his conception, imagination of his/her “self”.

If we return back to the very first question of this chapter, (why is our double, so uncanny, so irritating?), we can thus argue that this doubling is so irritating because of a paradox that is inherent in this very act of doubling. The ego (which is driven by a desire to survive, as Freud says) sees itself outside itself once represented. But this double, this representation, does not permit it to feel infinite, to feel deathless. On the contrary, it remains the reminder of death because this double image is separated, detached from everyday life and it is paradoxically “other” to the self.

“What had been one’s own living identity (or identification) becomes, once represented, an expropriated, deadly resemblance-a frozen mirror, a cold statue...” says Borch-Jacobsen (1991, 45). It is perhaps because of the paradox of facing the possibility of our metaphorical death (because our “representation” is in a way a reduction, a death of who we are, into a frozen image) while trying to overcome it that we feel so uncannily disturbed by our double, be it a reflection, or a (projected) image.

As we have seen in this chapter, one example of experiencing such uncanniness happens at the moment of posing. The next chapters will continue to emphasise this aspect of the act of posing by focusing this time on a close analysis of some visual texts in order to come to the final conclusion that this uncanniness might be one of the ways the subject can have a *productive look* towards him/herself.

We know that people are formed by light and air, their inherited traits, and their actions, and we recognise people and distinguish one from another by their appearance. We can tell from appearance the work someone does or does not do; we can read in his face whether he is happy or troubled, for life unavoidably leaves its trace there.

**August Sander**, *The Nature and Development of Photography*

#### **4. August Sander's poseurs: towards the possibility of questioning the "self"**

##### **4.1 A short introduction to August Sander's work and background**

August Sander (1876-1964) is a German photographer who can be considered as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most important portrait photographers. According to Ulrich Keller, who provides a detailed introduction to Sander's work and life in the preface to August Sander: Citizens of the Twentieth Century, although Sander started his career as a commercial portraitist, his best-remembered photographs were taken after 1910, when there is a shift from once flattered and beautified subjects, to a more analytical, and detailed capture of the human condition. As emphasised in Leo Rubinfiel's article, entitled "The Mask behind the Face", after 1910 Sander's photographs epitomised one side of what in the Weimar period would be called the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

This term is explained by George Baker (who effectively analyses Sander's photographs in "Photography Between Narrativity and Stasis: August Sander, Degeneration and the Decay of the Portrait") as follows: "Less a movement than a shared set of cultural attitudes, the term *Neue Sachlichkeit* (roughly, New Objectivity or

Sobriety) seems to have been coined by Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub as the title for a 1925 exhibition at the Mannheim art gallery, consisting of art that rejected the fragmentation of Impressionism and Expressionism in favour of, as Hartlaub put it, 'loyalty to a positively tangible reality'" (1996, 75-76).

Indeed, the term *Neue Sachlichkeit* has been used for a very wide range of German art and literature in the aftermath of World War I, including artists like Thomas Mann, George Grosz and Sander's friend, Otto Dix. It has often meant "reportorial", indicating a seemingly more "objective" work than the High German Expressionism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in photography it was characterised by sharp focus, clear lighting, the absence of distortions and emotions.

Sander worked mainly in Cologne and its environs. Although he also photographed landscapes and factories, he is valued primarily for his portraits which for Ulrich Keller "touched concerns central to German life in the Weimar and early Nazi periods, and through them, some of the central paradoxes of modern life" (Keller quoted in Rubinien, 97).

Indeed, Sander was both concerned with classifying his poseurs into "types" and "archetypes", and in portraying them as universal and transparent, (avoiding making any visible connection between the people he portrayed and the social context in which they are photographed). Thus, his project paradoxically aimed at a certain objectivity and neutrality without taking into consideration the living conditions of the Weimar period during which German society suffered from poverty and political violence.

In 1929 Sander published 60 portraits under the name *Antlitz der Zeit* whose usual English translation is The Face of Our Time, but which could also be translated as Rubinien argues, The Face of the Times or The Face of Time. As those titles indicate,

Sander's desire was not to satisfy his clients' order but rather to record the physiognomic image of a whole German generation. That's why in The Face of Our Time Sander withholds the names of his subjects, leaving it uncertain which photographs were commissions and which were made for his own documentary purposes.

Departing from The Face of Our Time, Sander envisaged a much more massive project, entitled *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Citizens [or people] of the Twentieth Century). It was intended to be a seven-volume work that would consist of portraits made between the early 1900s and the 1950s and aimed to give a synoptic view, a photographic index of German society, organised in both professional and non-professional groups (e.g. "Businessmen", "The Sick", "Farmers", "Workers", "Artists" etc.). Each photograph was thus intended to be situated in relation to a larger and definitive classification: a social hierarchy fixed through a series of seemingly objective images of representative figures or types.

This project was never published during Sander's life. Indeed, most of Sander's work, including The Face of Our Time, was banned, confiscated and destroyed without explanation after the Nazis came to power. Thus, the chance of realising *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* under the Third Reich became very slight. But Sander went on refining the project in private and continued to photograph in the later 1930s and 1940s, increasing the number of pictures in *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* and adding such groups as "The Persecuted" (Jews) and "Foreign Workers".

Moreover, in the later 1930's, Sander's oldest son Erich, who had been seized by the Nazis as an active Communist, sent a number of pictures of his prison inmates to his father, who included some of them in his project as "Political Prisoners".

Sander's political position at that time was not so clear. However, after the death of his son in captivity, Sander showed concretely his contempt for the Nazis by writing in his postwar letter that the Nazis were "subhuman" (2004, 97). Also, as a furious gesture of protest, he displayed the raw head of a pig in the shop window of his studio in Cologne. Despite the fact that he had little chance to express himself safely through his work, and despite the loss of 30,000 negatives in a fire in 1949, Sander resumed publishing and exhibiting after the war, and the last collection to appear in his lifetime was *Deutschenspiegel* (A German Mirror, 1962).

His major posthumous books are *Menschen ohne Masken* (Man without Masks), published in 1971, and the abridged *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, published in 1980. All of the photographs included in my study are taken from a 1981 edition of *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* and will be analysed throughout this chapter in close detail.

But before going into an analysis of Sander's photographs, I first want to give a more detailed account of how our relationship to photography and to the photographic camera can constitute the way we apprehend/recognise ourselves. In order to do this let me first introduce two important concepts used by Lacan and Silverman -namely the *screen* and the *dominant fiction*- in order to understand better the ways in which we are related to ourselves and to each other through images.

#### **4.2 The *screen* and the *dominant fiction***

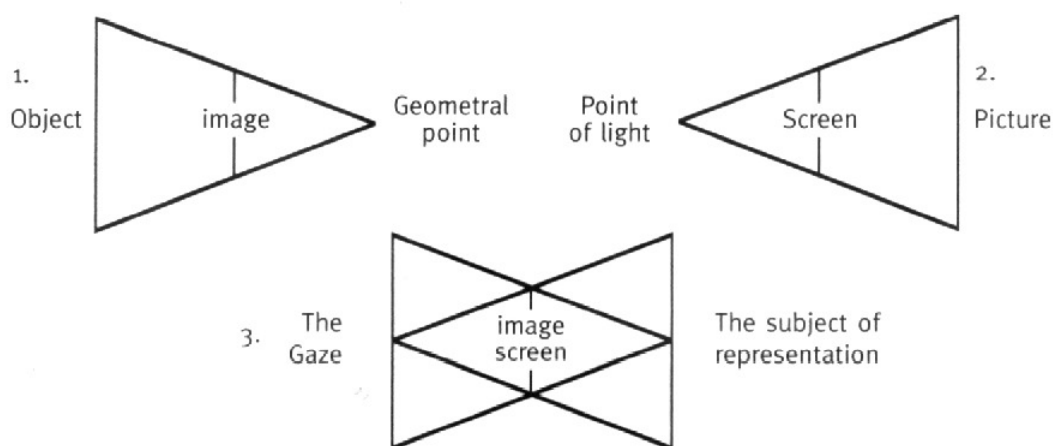
In my first chapter I mentioned how the photographic camera can be seen as a metaphor for the gaze by referring to Kaja Silverman's re-reading of Lacan and Jonathan Crary. In the second chapter, I introduced the Lacanian "mirror stage" and the paradoxical subject/image relationship. I now want to continue to deepen our understanding of our understanding of our relationship to images and how we are constituted and recognised

through/by them by explaining the Lacanian concept of the *screen* that is not only very fundamental to my project but also will provide a better understanding of how and why photography can be a medium for categorising, identifying, fixing human subjects, as is the case with Sander's attempt.

After providing an account of the *screen*, I will also introduce a sub-category of the *screen*, namely the *dominant fiction* (that is the normative representations through which the subject can both affirm/recognise him/herself and others) in order to examine later on by departing from a close reading of Sander's photographs, whether the act of posing can be a moment of questioning/challenging our perspective vis-à-vis the *dominant fiction*. Let's start then by giving an account of what is at stake in the field of vision, which plays an important role in the ways we constitute our identity and relationship to ourselves and to others.

#### 4.2.1 The Gaze and the subject in the field of vision

Fig.10



In The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, Lacan elaborates the field of vision and the role/place of the gazing/looking subject in it, basing his model of vision on the philosophical tradition inherited from Sartre in order to expand his ideas. He first of all provides a Cartesian account of vision, in which the subject surveys the world from a transcendental position. (See Figure 10.1)

In this figure the “Geometral point” is the place where the subject gazes on the world from an authoritative position. This figure represents the unilinear perspective of Leon Battista Alberti, in which the Renaissance artist surveys the object to be depicted through the mediating frame of the image which is metaphorically a transparent pane of glass through which he sees the object and turns it into a canvas on which he paints the outside world. This account of vision, separating the subject from the object it observes and providing him with a sense of superiority, presents vision to us as something transparent.

In the second diagram (10.2) however, the “image” of the first diagram is turned into the *screen* and in this case the observer is observing the object not from a transparent frame but rather he/she can only see the object in the guise of the image (picture). More importantly, Lacan situates the subject now at the site marked “picture”, and the gaze on the side of the “point of light”. In this case both the “subject-as-spectacle” and the “subject-as-look” are situated outside the gaze and therefore cannot lay claim to any of the epistemological authority implicit in the first model.

Therefore the gaze in Lacan’s account is not only separated from the human eye (it is inapprehensible) but also the subject is now not the one who gazes but the one who is looked-at. In other words, Lacan reveals that we depend upon the “other” not only for our meaning and desires but also for our very confirmation of the self. Lacan

also argues that in the second diagram the *screen* is opaque and the subject is now a picture seen through the screen. In other words the subject cannot be apprehended *per se*. He/she is mediated by the *screen*.

The next diagram (figure 10.3) represents the conflation of the previous ones, summarising Lacan's account of the field of vision and giving us the schematisation of the "spectacle of the world" in which the subject-seeing is also the subject-in-sight. He or she is named now as "the subject of representation", representing, interpreting and seeing the world but also being gazed at, represented, and interpreted by the inapprehensible gaze inherent in the field of vision.

In the Lacanian field of vision the subject is thus shuttling back and forth between "being seen" and "seeing", and is unable to occupy either of these positions with any stability or authority. Once again, the relation between the terms on the left and the terms on the right is mediated by the image/screen.

In addition, Kaja Silverman, points out that, although Lacan begins with a Sartrean definition of the field of vision, he differs from Sartre in an important respect. Lacan argues in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* that the gaze (which represents for Sartre a "pure" or "absolute" subject) escapes the category of the subject. He thus de-anthropomorphizes the gaze by associating it with both the function of light and the function of seeingness. This "function" precedes any individual act of looking. In that sense, the gaze can be considered as the manifestation of the symbolic within the field of vision. It is indeed in that sense that it can be associated with the camera because both the gaze and the camera are working secretly and powerfully in capturing, framing us, as well as attaching, projecting on us an identity. As stated by Silverman:

“When we feel the social gaze focused upon us, we feel photographically ‘framed’...the converse is also true: when a real camera is trained upon us, we feel ourselves subjectively constituted, as if the resulting photograph could determine ‘who’ we are” (1996, 135).

In other words, the camera/gaze is an apparatus whose function is to put us “in the picture”, by “re-presenting” us. But how can the camera/gaze perform such an act?

For Silverman, the camera/gaze cannot have such a power alone as she argues that:

It [the gaze] does not determine what the picture will be, nor what it will mean for us to “be” there...How we are “photographed” and the terms under which we experience our specularity, are the result of another agency altogether, as are the values which we impute to the gaze (1996, 168).

And the agency she refers to is the *screen*, as she adds:

The Screen represents the site at which the gaze is defined for a particular society and is consequently responsible both for the way in which the inhabitants of that society experience the gaze’s effects, and for much of the seeming particularity of the society’s visual regime (1996, 135).

Considering all these ideas of Silverman, we can thus say that what constitutes the ways in which we see, and are seen, the terms under which we are constituted as subjects, is not the result of the camera/gaze per se but is the product of the screen. Or more specifically, our “identity” and “identification” within a society depends on what the society does with the camera/gaze, and with the values it confers to it.

Although Lacan does not clearly define the *screen* (he also refers to it as the screen/image), he is however aware that it intervenes between us and our seeing/representing of the world, between us and our (self-)recognition. According to Norman Bryson who gives a detailed account of Lacan’s concept of *screen* in “The Gaze in the expanded field”, the *screen* is what is inserted between our retina and the world. It is the *screen* of signs: “a *screen* consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into

the social arena” (1988, 92). For Lacan , because of the opaqueness of the *screen*, we can never have transparent access to ourselves and to the world. We are always mediated. But what exactly is the *screen*? What is it constituted of?

For both Silverman and Lacan the *screen* is a repertoire of images, of assumptions, of accumulations, (within our memory), through which subjects are constituted, defined, affirmed or rejected. In other words, it gives shape and meaning to how we are “seen” by others but also how we see/recognise ourselves.

Moreover, the *screen* inhabits each of us as much as language does. For Silverman this means that when we apprehend another person or object, we inevitably do so via the *screen*. As she also says, the *screen* is a “large, diverse but ultimately finite range of representational coordinates which determines what and how the members of our culture see-how they process visual detail and what meaning they give it” (1996, 221).

In other words, the *screen* is also like a curtain that both makes things visible and also prevents us from seeing the world and each other “as such”. Bryson adds that the screen “casts a shadow” and Lacan sometimes calls it “scotoma”, sometimes stain. For when we look through the *screen* what we see is caught up in a network that is greater than its individual agents. So the point at which one learns to see socially is when one articulates his/her retinal experience with the codes of recognition that come from one’s social milieu.

Vilem Flusser in Towards a Philosophy of Photography describes our relationship to images in a very similar way.

Images are meant to render the world accessible and imaginable to man. But even as they do so, they interpose themselves between man and the world. They are meant to be maps, and they become screens. Instead of presenting the world to man, they re-present it, but put themselves in place of the world, to the extent that man lives as a function of the images he has produced. He no longer deciphers them but projects them back into the

world “out there” without having deciphered them. The world becomes image-like (1984, 7).

Giorgio Agamben also provides an account congruent with that of Flusser when he argues in Means without Ends that human beings, unlike animals, tend to appropriate their own exposition, their being manifest, by separating images from things and by giving names to images. In other words, they put images in between themselves and the world. That’s why they are so interested in mirror images since they want to recognise themselves and take possession of their own appearance. The *screen* is thus constituted of such images and it can be considered as this matrix, whereby the human subject is recognised, apprehended, appropriated and projected.

Silverman questions the *screen* and argues that it is a “culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which subjects are not only constituted, but differentiated in relation to class, race, sexuality, age, and nationality” (1996, 135). Moreover, by arguing that the camera is a metaphor for the gaze, Silverman extends her definition of the *screen* to be something more than a repertoire of ideologically differentiating images. If the camera is equated with the gaze within a society, this also suggests that the gaze cannot be reduced to a certain, unchangeable form of authoritative vision. Because the camera is not a timeless and fixed machine but it is also a complex field of relations. As Jonathan Crary remarks, what constitutes the camera is precisely

its multiple diversity, its “mixed” status and an epistemological figure within a discursive order and an object within an arrangement of cultural practices. The camera is...“simultaneously and inseparably a machinic assemblage of enunciation”, an object about which something is said and at the same time an object that is used. It is a site at which a discursive formation intersects with material practices (1990, 30).

In other words, a definition of the camera as a representational network of material practices that are open to change can help us to conceive of the *screen* as a historically

variable apparatus. In this sense Silverman also criticises Lacan, for whom the visual domain would seem to be static and uninfluenced by cultural changes, arguing that the *screen* is subject to change from culture to culture, from time to time, and she prefers to use the term *Cultural Screen* for the *screen*, to emphasise this characteristic.

However, according to Silverman, we should be careful not to confuse the *screen* with the *dominant fiction*. What she calls the *dominant fiction* is what passes for acceptable realities in a given society. It consists of normative representations that still find their roots in the binary opposition of sexual categories and in the historical variation, racial categories and class and other forms of social differences. She adds that the *dominant fiction* can only sustain itself if the larger society affirms it. The *dominant fiction* is thus a system of intelligibility. However, it is not simply the *screen* because the *screen* does not only consist of normative representations but also of all kinds of oppositional and sub-cultural representations.

We can thus have two main positions vis-à-vis the *screen*. We can either take the position from which we apprehend and affirm those elements of the *screen* that are synonymous with the *dominant fiction*. Or we can occupy a different viewing position that Silverman defines as the “productive look”.

In the next chapter I will explain this term. I will also try to argue that the act of posing is one of the moments which can provide us with a “productive look” by continuing my analysis with the last visual corpus of my project. But for now I would like to extend the reasons why in a given society the members tend to affirm the *dominant fiction* and how the *dominant fiction* affects Sander’s photographic project.

#### 4.2.2 Seeing through the screen

Silverman refers to one aspect of Freud's accounts of vision in order to explain better how the human subject tends to affirm the *dominant fiction*. Freud starts examining the process of vision in the *Interpretation of Dreams* and he argues that the visual stimuli enter the psyche by passing through the unconscious and pre-conscious mnemonic reserves. At the level of the preconscious, a process of classification occurs whereby the stimuli are "recognised" through their paradigmatic grouping with other similar stimuli (1955, 533).

To give an example Silverman says that when the subject sees a red chair, it is classified at the level of his/her pre-conscious under the categories of "chair" and "red object" for example, and this permits the subject to apprehend it. She also adds that the pre-conscious also performs some *screening* functions; therefore it may classify the chair in more evaluative ways, so for example, it may reject it as "cheap" or "appropriate for children".

Moreover, she points out that, even before registering that perception, the chair is also placed in communication with unconscious memories in such a way that it may undergo a much more complex semanticization. For example, through its shape or its colour it may become connected with the chair in which the subject's mother used to sit. In other words, the red chair is subject to displacement in a way that can partake of some of the values which emanated outward from those wishes or patterns which persist and insist at the level of the subject's unconscious.

Indeed, Silverman says that "perhaps it [the red chair] will become a prop in the night's re-staging of my unconscious fantasmatic in the reminding of what Freud calls the 'stereotype plate', which underpins my dreams, my fantasies and my object choices" (1996, 180).

In other words, “seeing” is nothing but an affirmation of what has left its traces on our unconscious. The human subject cannot see everything because it can only see literally when the stimulus coincides/matches with the mind’s unconscious inscriptions. And this coincidence is not based only and primarily on conscious belief, but more importantly it involves the activation of certain desires and identifications that are both driven by the desire of the subject to fulfil its lack. What we call the *screen* is thus the set of inscriptions, a matrix that exists in us and that makes possible a certain perception of the world. The *dominant fiction* is that set of inscriptions within a society on which its members agree. It is like the visible part of the iceberg, if we formulate it in a more metaphorical way. It permits us to affirm, agree upon certain values and to reject others. It is all the categorisations that we make within a society in order to evaluate and choose some things over others.

If we look at Sander’s photographs, we can also see that, within the society and the artistic realm in which he lived and worked, (the Weimar period and the movement of “new objectivity”), categorising the individuals, in a hierarchical way, (starting with the farmers as the roots of society and proceeding to the upper class, for example) and/or identifying them according to their jobs, seems to be a significant way of forming, identifying, framing the subject.

Moreover, we can also clearly see in his project an undervaluation of the people who constitute the “marginal” class as he categorises the mentally ill, jobless, or people who are rejected in society under the titles of “servants”, “itinerants” and “the last people” and puts them at the very end of his classification.

This categorisation is an old practice pertaining to the values conferred upon photography at the very beginning of its practise, as I already mentioned in my chapter entitled: “Portraiture and Early Photographic Practice”. Moreover, we also saw in that

chapter that the portrait was above all a public affirmation of significance, and photography extended the availability of the portrait as an object of identity; thus portrait photography became one of the tools at the service of highlighting the *dominant fiction* within a society.

As both Silverman and Barthes argue, and as is also apparent in Sander's project, despite its claimed "objectivity", the camera/gaze has the power to categorise, define, affirm and reject individuals, and this can induce in the poseurs a certain feeling of being "subjectively formed". We saw in the third chapter that as a reaction to that "formation", the poseurs might either pose in a manner that seeks to adapt to and/or confirm this formation. Or they may pose in order to protect themselves from it.

However, as I also started to suggest in this third chapter, my overall aim is to go beyond these two possibilities of "(self-)framing" in order to reveal that the act of posing bears the potential for freedom from any act of (self-)formation, and/or attachment to the self that can manifest itself in the form of (self-)affirmation/recognition and/or (self-)protection. Posing has the potential to question and challenge our position vis-à-vis the *dominant fiction* and the *screen*. I will deal with that possibility in more detail in the next chapter. I want however start to see how this possibility can manifest itself by analysing some visual texts.

So let us start with Sander's photographs in order to discover the traces of such a possibility in the photographs of the poseurs and to let the visual text contribute to our arguments about the act of posing.

### 4.3 Sander's poseurs questioning the *screen*

#### 4.3.1 Exposing the conflicting "self"



Fig.11

Here is a woman (Figure 11), a part-time student as indicated by the title, standing calmly next to a wall that does not give us any clues about the environment in which she is situated. Indeed, in most of Sander's photographs the observer/photographer is generally left alone with the poseur. It seems as if Sander wanted to focus on the portrayed person alone, making the surrounding look as abstract as possible, as neutral as possible, so that the photograph can "objectively" portray the poseur.

The presence of such a wall works in many of his other photographs (such as figures 15, 16, 17) as a background upon which the shadow of the standing person is softly cast. This shadow seems to want to show us something more than the physical traits of the person. Something that is not so easily graspable, something that goes beyond the limited, fixed “figure”, or outline of her body.

At first look, this shadow seems like the “antithesis” of this woman because it is in contrast with her sharply focused and detailed figure. This shadow is also in communication with the darkest shape within the composition, situated at the right of the woman: a bit of a door and its shadow. The woman looks as if she is trapped in between this door and her own shadow, both delimiting in their own way the composition.

However, the fact that both of these areas are not so sharp, and the fact that they form tones and not outlines, reverses this impression and creates a feeling of movement between delimitation and expansion.

All of this makes less determinate the ways in which the woman stands out. If we consider (departing from Sander’s position within the *Neue Sachlichkeit*) that the aim of this photograph was to give fixed, “objective”, information about the identity of the poseur, after observing the details of the composition we may start to doubt whether this photograph really reaches its aim. Indeed, if we analyse the pose of the woman in more detail we can reveal more clues about the ambiguity this photograph creates in us.

If one expects the act of posing to be an act in which the poseur seems to be in tune with his/her pose, this woman seems to break this feeling of security, of self-confidence, of being “one” with herself. Like her shadow that seems to escape from her, her pose seems also to escape from her “intended” self.

First of all we can see the traits of some indecision in her posture and her gaze. Her eyes are looking at the photographer with an air of discomfort. She looks as if she is enduring some forced position, and that she did not choose the way she is standing in this photograph. What increase this effect are the way her hands are positioned and the way she has positioned her legs. Her hands look as if they are in this position because she did not know what else to do with them. She perhaps also looks as if she has put her hands in that position because Sander asked her to do so.

Indeed, her hands do not look very natural, not only because it would be tiring to hold them in that position for a long time but also because they look a bit dirty, like those of a child. That's why they also have an air of clumsiness (ineptness). When it comes to the feet, although we cannot see them, we can guess from the positioning of the legs that they might be positioned in an open way to the sides. This contrasts with the "introverted" hands.

All this makes her look as if she is in conflict with herself. Especially her upper body seems to be trying to fit into a pose, while her legs (which are cropped and left out), her implied feet, her hands and her gaze, seem to escape from this pose, revealing a more unintentional position. Based on this conflict she also looks as if she is trying to hide something about herself.

What we see here is perhaps an exposition of the paradoxes of the poseur, his/her uneasiness in front of the camera where he/she seems to be in-between hiding and exposing him/herself.

Graham Clarke, in a detailed analysis of Sander's photographs in his "Public Faces, Private Lives: August Sander", argues that there is indeed a paradox that underlines Sander's entire project, as there is an ongoing tension (within the photographs) between public and private selves; between a private identity and its

definition and representation in a social context. As we have seen in our example, there seems in fact to be a splitting of the self. On the one hand, we see the traces of a more private, (indecisive, clumsy, cropped out) self and on the other hand, the appearance of another self that is trying to put itself into the social context, trying to be approved, recognised by others.

In Clarke's terms, there is an uneasy relationship between the individual presence and the social "label". Clarke argues that Sander's photographs: "...image individuals amidst a palpable and wonderfully detailed social frame, but they do so as part of a questioning rather than affirming process of definition" (1992, 73). Let's continue then with this argument and see how Sander's poseurs exhibit a questioning/blurring of their supposed identity despite their very effort to affirm it, to be in tune with it.

If we go back to the photograph under discussion, there seems indeed to be a conflict between the "private" and the "public" self in *Part-time Student*, and one of the reasons for that conflict comes from the way the woman's hands are positioned and exposed. Her hands not only easily draw our attention by being positioned in the centre of the composition, but also they look like the only detail of this photograph that breaks the artificiality of her stance because they give the impression that she didn't know what to do with them. Doesn't it frequently happen that when one feels uneasy, bored or unable to control oneself, one does not know what to do with one's hands?

The hands in general can be considered one of the parts of the body (like the face) that cannot be concealed. In this photograph however the hands also create the feeling that they both show (expose) and hide some truth about the "self". What increases this effect is the fact that one of the hands is on the top of the other, as if foregrounding a gesture of hiding.

As also emphasised by Clarke, in some of Sander's portraits (such as figure 12, 13, 14) we repeatedly see a similar positioning of the hands.

For Clarke, the hands, together with the posture and the stance can be considered at first sight as important elements of social meaning. In Sander they become available to us as a signifier of difference and definition: a worker's hands, a bank official's hands, a boxer's hands, etc. And they may have different characteristics, all bearing some traces of the work they are doing.

Clark adds that the hands are part of the public presentation of the body, like the face and in opposition to the physical and sexual parts that are hidden by clothes. They may be more crucial in some instances, such as in the portrait of farmers where they are often textured, with dirt (soil) beneath the fingernails, as they become almost a sacred icon of a life based on nature and land.

However, in this case (Figure 11) they seem to be ambivalent. They might even foreground the fact that the social identity of the poseur (although it may be sustained by visual codes such as clothes, rings and medals), is nevertheless problematic, mainly because the hands of this part-time student look alien, not fitting to the (self-confident, decisive?) image she would like to give herself? We can thus argue that she looks as if she might be someone unrefined trying to look refined. Moreover, physically she looks a bit masculine because of her "butch face" and her hands that look like the hands of a worker (perhaps a farmer).

Clarke argues that Sander's photographic portraits, despite their goal of objective clarity, "contrive to ask both what lies under the surface and, in turn, what 'lies' are imaged on the surface" (1992, 74). He bases his reading on an analysis of

Sander's self-portrait taken in 1937 (Figure 12).<sup>39</sup> He first remarks that, unlike his other portraits such as "the Artist" or the "Writer", this portrait does not give any clue about Sander "the Photographer". There is no declared social function or frame of reference by which the portrayed person is to be defined. He adds that this image is empty of significant detail. Sander's suit, for example, lacks any identifying marks. It only reflects the general social mores and codes of dress.

However, if we continue to look at the photograph, the lack of expression on his face, and the seeming neutrality of the pose, begin to appear faked and forced. For Clarke, Sander has rendered his self in such a way that his history, private life and feelings are hidden from our gaze. Clarke thus argues:

The image declares that "this is me", but it also states that "this is not me". Paradoxically, in having his portrait taken Sander is denying the very act of portrayal. The ostensible assured "surface" of the photographic space gives way not so much to a fully rendered social being as to a "self" caught amidst presence and absence. If the face says, "You will not know who I am", it equally says that "You cannot *see* who I am, nor how I feel". Posing for the camera has become both a diffident and problematic act (1992, 76).

For Clarke Sander's hands suggest both the absence and presence of a hidden truth that is not made public. They point to a place between the hidden and the exposed. They declare the physical presence of a private condition and history. "If the right hand was removed..." says Clarke, "...we might see a scar, a tattoo, a missing finger or (in the context of the period) a number from a concentration camp" (1992, 77).



Fig.12

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<sup>39</sup> I find it useful to refer to the self-portrait of Sander, as I believe that it can be considered as a "signature" of the photographer's entire project.

So, despite the fact that Sander's "citizens" might move through the scale of social significance, with their hands serving as the integers of the self, the evidence for such a claim becomes difficult and diffident in some instances, as is the case with Figures 11 and 12, especially if we analyse their hands with respect to the overall body, pose and expression of the poseur.

Let us continue the same argument with an analysis of two other photographs that seem to be in contrast if we consider their implied social label: The Master Tiler (Figure 13) and The Unemployed Man (Figure 14). As I have already pointed out, hands have a central significance in the case of craftsmen and tradesmen such as potter, cobbler, cook, saddler or tiler. In the Master Tiler too the hands rest but attract our attention.

They express some elegance and are in harmony with the body's calm, self-contained position (unlike in Figure 11). They look as if they are locked and they close the circular shape created by the arms. Compositionally, they also constitute a center of gravity together with the hat. In short they seem to contribute to the unity of the pose of the figure.

Together with the hands, the suit seems also to contribute to the unity of the pose and to clarify the social position of the poseur. As a tiler, his suit reflects how attentive and neat he is (since his coat's buttons shine and give him a much organised nature), and how careful and suited to the job he does. All the details of his dress including the pipe, also stress his well-being, which is emphasised by the stone background that might signify skill, weight and solidity. Clarke adds that this image is a "guild figure" where at first sight the tiler seems to reflect what he is, where there is a seeming unity between his public image and what it portends about a private self.

However, if we continue our analysis we can also remark that despite his seeming self-confidence, dignity, stability, and his air of a man of skill and knowledge, the Master Tiler also seems like a person who has endured his fair share of suffering. His face reflects indeed the face of a man who saw many sufferings, or passed through many difficult life lessons. He also looks a bit discontent. One might ask at this point why he has such a lined face despite his seemingly self-confident appearance. This photograph seems simultaneously to announce a status (the status of being a master tiler) and also to expose the attempt at status in relation to an individual condition that might be something totally different.

Also, the fact that he is standing next to a wall (as if he needs to take support from it), and the fact that he is at the very corner of the wall, (precisely in between two spaces: the sharp and flat surface of the left, and the blurred surface on the right that leads our vision to a blurred openness, probably the window of an old building) gives us a feeling of insecurity and indecisiveness. He looks as if he is at the edge of or in between sharpness and blurriness, in between finitude and infinity. In that sense, he symbolically

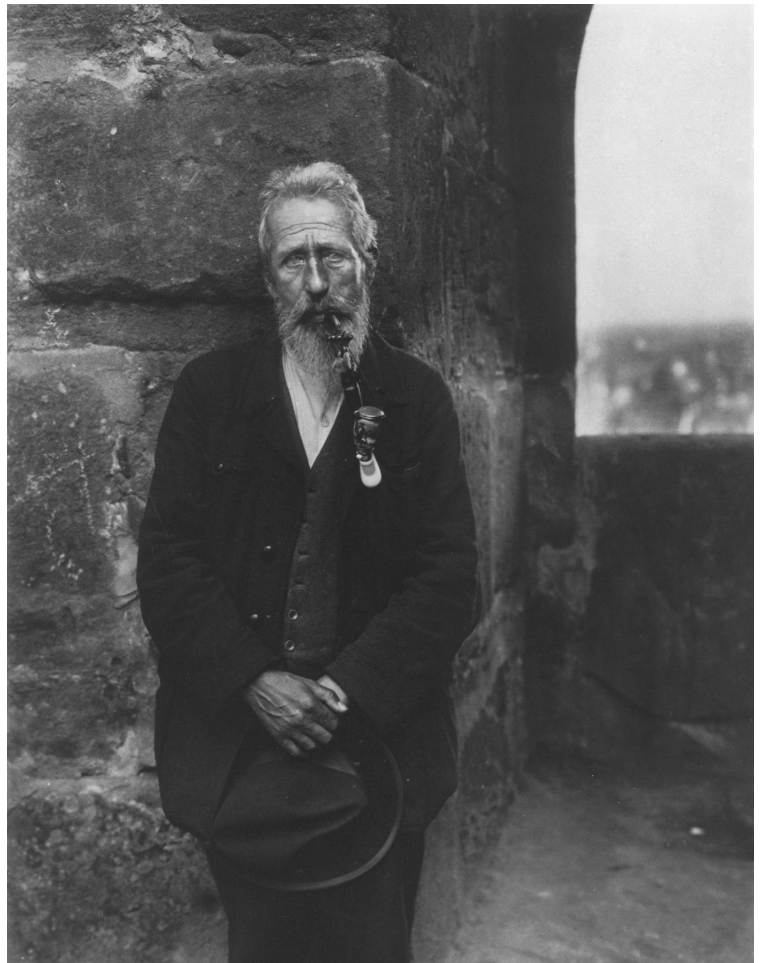


Fig.13

reminds us of the conflicting presence of the self that is in between exposing an affirmative, self-contained image and the knowledge that this image cannot reflect all of who he is (the painful inner conflicts, doubts, and ephemeral manifestation of the “self”). Perhaps the discontent visible on the tiler’s face comes from his acknowledgment that there will always remain an unreachable, uncapturable, unexposable and unknowable self and thus accentuates the plurality of the self.

Now, if consider this image not on its own but in comparison with the next one (Figure 14) we can perhaps see that the overall photographic project of Sander also brings forward differences and pluralities, as Clarke argues:

As we move through the ‘gallery’ of images, social status is assumed through an interplay of codes, each of which has a distinct (if shifting) significance as it validates the self-identity of the subject. And yet there is an implicit critique of the public self suggested precisely through that *difference* (1992, 82).

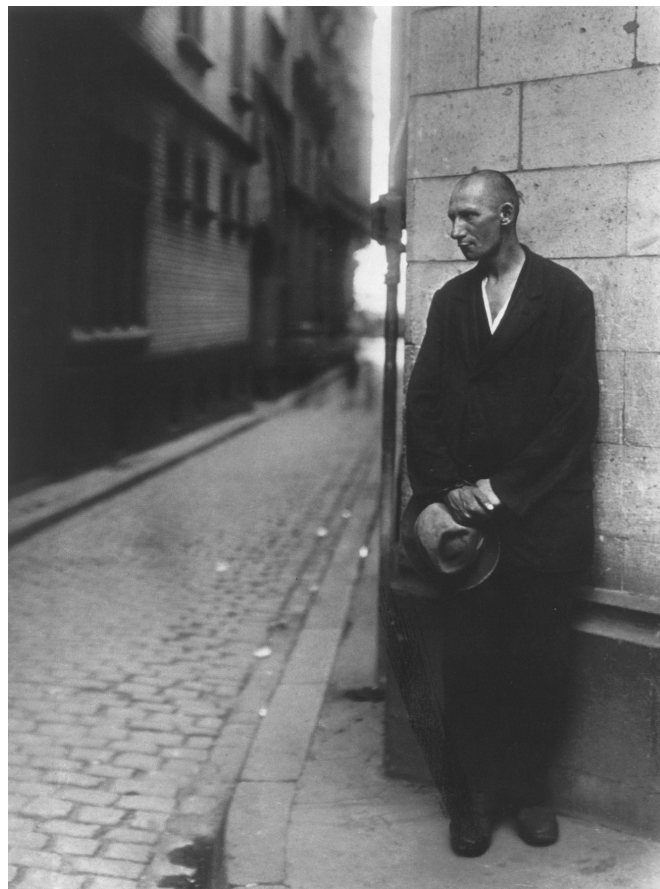


Fig.14

If we look at the photograph entitled *Unemployed Man* (Figure 14), one of the images from the category of *The Last People*, we can see significant similarities to *The Master Tiler*. First of all we can see that both of the figures lean against walls that make a corner between a sharp foreground and blurry background. Both have their hands hold together. Both hold hats. Both wear similar suits, waistcoats and shirts. However, the unemployed man seems to lack some details that the master tiler has. For example, his head is shaved and he does not have any beard or moustache; also, he does not stare at the camera and does not have a pipe.

The master tiler's face reflects more a private history in the sense that he seems to celebrate his individual significance more than the unemployed man. In addition to that, the unemployed man has creases in his jacket, which also lacks buttons and is buttoned clumsily. Also he has an open/absent shirt that both makes him look poor but also creates the impression that he is open without



Fig. 15

anything to hide and lose. His suit seems not to fit him. Clarke argues that in many cases the suit plays an important role in Sander's taxonomy of male presentation and identification. It helps in the fixing of individuals in relation to codes of vertical and hierarchical difference. Among his photographs there are indeed many where the suit brings a power to the body and becomes an extension of the wearer, such as in the *Young National Socialist* (see Figure 15).

Unlike the master tiler and the young National Socialist, the unemployed man's dress with its crumples and its unfitness, points to some ambiguity in his "status", suggesting perhaps, as Clark argues while analysing another photograph that: "this is what I have been doing rather than this is how I want to be seen" (1992, 83).

Indeed, in *Unemployed Man* there is on the one hand the appearance of a self that seems free from an imagined and projected self-image. But on the other hand, there is a negative index of signification, "a code of the unkempt, unclean and the unsuccessful" (1992, 83), in Clarke's terms. I want to argue that, despite this new set of codes emphasised by Sander to perhaps fix and define the individuals at the margins of society, such as also in Figures 18 and 19, the unemployed man looks paradoxically more self-confident, at peace with himself than the master tiler.

First of all, his expression is more serene. The fact that he does not stare at the camera increases this effect. Also the fact that he does not have so many signs (hair, beard, and pipe) of individual history like the master tiler makes him look stripped of any personal detail that would make him attached to himself. He looks as if he has nothing to lose and that might create in him a certain freedom, detachment from fear, or from any concern about how he would be seen in society.

It is precisely because of this that he also looks as if he is both exposing and hiding a certain truth about himself, in the similar but reversed way from the master tiler. This time, he is in conflict because he seems to expose a certain security and inner peace despite his being photographed and labelled as being an unemployed, insecure man. In that sense, it seems that both the *Master Tiler* and *The Unemployed Man* expose a certain paradox between a fixed, projected identity and its shattering.

There are some other examples where the poseurs exhibit a similar paradox in slightly different terms. In Figure 16 for example, we can see a similar composition and behaviour to those of the *Part-Time Student* (Figure 11). The woman is standing against a wall and her shadow appears to be “escaping” from her as it is cast on the wall (see Figure 11). Her stare is stronger and more energetic than the *part-time student’s*, probably because she is looking at the camera in a more self-confident, assertive way. If we read the title of this photograph we can see that she is *The Politician Rosa Wolfstein-Fröhlich*. Since she is a politician, one might thus expect her to be a strong and assertive figure. But, if we analyse her overall pose, there is something striking.

Again the way she exposes (or hides?) her hands, seems ambiguous. Her left hand seems to be timidly holding onto her dress. The fact that it is higher than her right hand gives the impression that she is trying to withdraw it, as we withdraw our hand after touching something we shouldn’t have touched. Also, this hand might be interpreted as a sign of holding onto something from a desire for security. She thus looks as if she is holding on to her dress to protect herself (from the gaze of the camera, from exposing something about herself that she perhaps wants to hide).

Although the right hand looks



Fig.16

more loose and relaxed, both of the hands contrast with her gaze and more confident facial expression. It is as if her face is “extroverted” while her hands are “shy” and “introverted”. In addition to all this, her dress does not seem to reflect the formality that *Part-time student* has because her dress has some wrinkles and traces of its being worn often or for a long time. This gives her a cosy air and it makes her look like being not so formal and of having a stiff stance.

All this creates a blurring of the self through a multiplication of the different manifestations of the self, in the sense that what appears here is the manifestation of a self which is in conflict with herself, between hiding and showing herself, indecisive even to what is happening with(in) herself.

A similar conflict may be seen in other portraits such as Figure 17 and Figure 18. Figure 17 is entitled *The Painter Franz Wilhelm Seivert* and it seems to reflect a very introverted nature. In his pose we can see an attempt at self-protection because his arms are wrapped around his upper body as if to protect the core of his “self”. Also his gaze has an air of drawing back as



Fig.17

if he is trying to consider carefully the moment and/or the photographer. And yet at this very moment of seeming protection, we can also see the appearance of an attitude that is content to “let it go”. If we analyse his facial expression in more detail we can see that his head’s position (slightly moved towards the left) seems less stiff than that of his

body since his body looks more forced, bearing an unwanted position. His head and expression however look more neutral in the sense that his stare appears to say “I don’t care so much about what I am showing to others with this pose”. Also his eyes, although they might seem to have an air of obedience, also secretly escape from any attempt to capture them, because they look a bit dazed. It seems that he is inevitably exposing his feelings about this moment of posing while at the same time trying to hide them. A similar effect exists in another photograph, *The Persecuted Jewess, Mrs. Marcus* (Figure 18).

Here the woman seems at first sight to be in tune with her pose. The way she looks at the camera directly, and the trace of a possible smile especially near the left part of her lips, creates the impression that she is posing willingly. Indeed most of Sander’s poseurs were paid by him.

However, there is also a tension in this photograph because she is trying to close her coat as if she is explicitly hiding something about herself. Perhaps she is simply trying to be appropriate, to seem formal. Moreover, we might also be disturbed when we read the title of this photograph: *Persecuted Jewess, Mrs Marcus*, 1938. We cannot know exactly whether she has been



Fig.18

persecuted when she was posing for this photograph, but in case she has been, her pose seems to be in conflict with the atmosphere of the end of period of the Weimar Republic and the beginning of Nazism, where persecution of Jews was common. Therefore, with her seemingly self-confident and even optimistic posture and her gesture of closing her coat (as if she symbolically tries to hide with this gesture, the atmosphere of this era) she seems to be in the middle of a conflict.

Moreover, because she was probably paid to “give” her pose, she was perhaps trying to act as perfectly as possible to hide any traces of incongruities between her appearance and the uncertainties and difficulties of the social context in which she was living. She was perhaps struggling to maintain a sense of decency.

Indeed, for Leo Rubinfién, there is a theatrical aspect in Sander’s poseurs as well as a paradox, especially if we consider his project from the point of view of its time and socio-political conditions. He argues that “he [Sander] lived amid a disorder, so pronounced that it produced Hitler’s Reich, yet his quiet, seemingly transparent portraits make no obvious reference to the violence that roared outside everybody’s doors” (2004, 99). He adds later on that as soon as we consider the Weimar Republic’s atmosphere while looking at Sander’s portraits, we have to ask whether behind the seemingly calm, universal, elegance of the poseurs there is not an anxiety that the world will not cohere, that he/she might fail to hold his/her place within it.

What we have seen up to now is that it is not only behind their faces that Sander’s poseurs experience a certain anxiety. It is in their pose that we can capture the conflicts they experience by seeing the traces of a conflicted self (conflicted between hiding and showing some truth about the self, between a social sanctioning and a private confusion. Perhaps we can even add to them a new conflict after analysing *The Persecuted*

*Jewess, Mrs. Marcus* and ask ourselves: Is it possible that at the very moment of their pose Sander's poseurs are also faced with the impermanence of their own existence?

Indeed, Rubinfiel states that there is an insecure stateliness in Sander's poseurs, "that strained, dissonant composite of pride and dread that seems so familiar to us, who live far more safely than they did but forever less so than we think" (2004, 104). Considering all of this we can thus argue that Sander's poseurs expose a conflicting, plural, indecisive self, announcing identity only to dislodge its significance. This conflict can be traced back on different levels.

There is a conflict in the personal level between showing and hiding some truth about the self. We saw for example how the part-time student exposes some uneasiness while posing that enabled us to read from her pose the traces of some insecurity and indecisiveness about her "self".

We also saw how a seemingly important member of the society such as the *master tiler*, can display some ambiguities in his pose so that he can expose some incongruities that collapse his expected (self)image of being self confident etc.

We could also read another paradox into the opposite category of people, namely *the unemployed man* who seems not to expose a personal conflict but rather conflict with the intention of the photographer and which creates in the observer a feeling that he is escaping delicately from any attachment to his self.

In all these cases we can see some cracks that seem to puncture the surface of the achieved objectivity and fixity of the social index of Sander's "citizens". We see the appearance of the conflicting self, rather than a self-contained, confident and affirmative one, despite the potential of the pose to provide one with a "defined" sense of the self. Indeed, if we consider that the act of posing can be one of the ways the subject affirms and is affirmed by the *dominant fiction*, the analysis of some of the poses of Sander's

individuals reveals that this is not always the case. The act of posing can put into question and challenge the values by which the culture renders and portrays the individual, because in all the examples we have seen so far, the subject exposes a certain conflict within the self, a certain blurring, plurality and confusion about what we call the self. The next chapter will continue with this argument, this time focusing on a more recent Turkish photographic project that will not only extend our perspective, but will also provide us with different examples of poseurs exhibiting a questioning of their subjectivity.

Freedom is not choosing; that is merely the move that we make when all is already lost. Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves.

**Iris Murdoch**, *A Severed Head*

The whole secret is hidden in the “other”. The “other” means difference. To accept and try to understand this difference is a window opening to self knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

**Ergün Turan, Süreyya Yılmaz Dernek**, *Biz*

From birth to death, and inversely, such is the passage of specular recognition and identification: a tireless alteration of two faces in which as subjects we search for “ours”<sup>41</sup>

**Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe**, *Portrait de l'Artiste en Général*

## 5) “Biz” (US): The pose as a *Productive Look*

In the previous chapter I introduced and analysed how the subject identifies, recognises and sees him/herself and others through the screen. We also started to see how the act of posing may question and challenge this way of looking and relating (to ourselves and to others) through the screen, by departing from an analysis of Sander’s poseurs. I want now to introduce the theorisation of this challenging look, defined by Silverman as the productive look. My main aim in this chapter will thus be to argue that the act of posing can be considered as a moment where the subject may have a productive look

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<sup>40</sup> “Bütün sır ‘Diğeri’inde gizli. Diğeri Farklılık demek, Farklılığı kabul etmek ve anlamaya çalışmak ise kendini bilmeye açılan bir pencere.” from *Biz*, the back cover. My Translation.

<sup>41</sup> Translated by Marianne Hirsh in “Masking the subject: Practicing Theory”. *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis*. Mieke Bal & Inge Boer (eds.), Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, (1994, 111).

towards its “self” and where it can have a critical perspective to the act of (self-) identification and (self-)recognition. I want to show this possibility by mainly analysing the last corpus of my study, a recent Turkish photographic project entitled “Biz”. But before going into such an analysis let’s first try to understand what the Productive look is.

### **5.1 The *Productive Look***

We have already seen in the previous chapter that Silverman focuses on Freud’s challenge to one of the main assumptions pertaining to human vision, the assumption that human vision can objectively see what is outside itself. For Freud there is not only a delay between the introduction of a stimulus into the psyche and its conscious perception, but also, what we call perception is dependent on and made possible by an activation of our old memories and what has left its trace in our unconscious. Thus, when we look at an object we cannot escape attributing to it some psychic value, and most of the time, this attribution may work in ways that consolidate the *dominant fiction*.

One of the reasons for such an affirmative look lies in the fact that the signifying chains that operate in our minds, work to allow the disguised expression of the desire for an object, a person or a scene. In other words, every attempt at naming, affirming, recognising something is driven by an unconscious desire. Silverman argues that any act of recognition is an act of returning to those images that provide the fantasmatic grounding for all of our fantasies and object choices.

To give an example, we can say that when one encounters someone he/she met for the first time, he/she may tend to find in this person’s traits some similarities with someone he/she already knows. This desire to recognise, find in this new person something that is familiar to his/her memories might be a return to an unfulfilled desire

about the person she/he already knows. So everything new or old that one encounters passes through this process and is manipulated and influenced by one's desires and fantasies. Our recognition or rejection of things is driven by such an imperative to return. Silverman asks whether it is possible to get out of this pattern of returning, whether it is possible to relate to the world that surrounds us in a way that is not governed by unfulfilled desires.

She then argues that when we look at an object there is an inevitable displacement that occurs and in general this displacement is not a one-sided displacement. Our glance at a red chair for example, can "induce us to look again at the whole concatenation of red things which we had stored in our memory without deeming them of any consequence and which undergo a transvaluation which will affect the way we look at a traffic light the next time" (1996, 181).

She adds that this displacement can provide us with a potential to look that does not reside in the imperative to return but is motivated by the interlocking imperative to displace. Basing her argument on Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle Silverman adds that since desires and fantasies undergo a repression in the psyche, any object can only be remembered or recognised in the guise of a substitute. She argues: "There can thus be no return or recollection which is not at the same time a displacement, and which, consequently does not introduce alterity" (1996, 181).

What she calls the *productive look* is thus a look that has developed a need for alterity, in such a way that its imperative to displace supersedes the imperative to return. But how is such a look be possible?

For Silverman, Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida may provide an account of this desire for visual alterity when he distinguishes between two looks, the *Studium* and the *Punctum*. The *Studium* is what makes us culturally participate in the figures, gestures,

the settings and the actions when we observe things. For Silverman it is “...what we see when we apprehend the world not only through a particular image repertoire but from the position which is assigned to us in advance- the position indicated by the geometrical point in Lacan’s first diagram” (1996, 182) (See figure 10).

She adds that the *Studium* is thus the result of a “contract” between the creators and the consumers of culture to perpetuate those myths that are synonymous with normative representation.

*Punctum* however is what breaks and punctuates the continuity of any interpretation that is shaped culturally. In a photograph it may be a detail that escapes the frame of symbolic reality. “*Punctum* is that accident which pricks me [but also bruises me, is poignant to me]” (1981, 27) says Barthes. It is a detail that punctuates our reception of any (intended) meaning by creating a space of personal involvement in seeing the image. It creates a duality with the *Studium* that is also described by Barthes as: “the extension of a field which I perceive...as a consequence of my knowledge, my culture” (1981, 25-26). The *Punctum* seems thus to be an interruption that prevents us from recognising and affirming any cultural knowledge.

Moreover, Silverman points out that for Barthes the eye has a transformative potential in the sense that it has an ability to look from a position which is not assigned in advance. The *punctum* can thus be defined for Silverman as “the “prick” one feels when an otherwise insignificant component of the *screen* comes into contact with one’s own mnemonic reserve” (1996, 182).

For Silverman, Barthes provides us with examples of such an intersection in Camera Lucida. For example, while analysing the portrait of an African-American woman he says that her necklace evokes one worn by someone in his own past. For him, to let a detail be embedded in such an associational matrix is to confer a new

significance to it. Therefore, the look Barthes brings to bear on the photographs reproduced in Camera Lucida is a look that is driven by an imperative of displacement. It is thus a look that is resistant to any stabilised visual standardisation.

However, Silverman finds that Barthes' "look" remains nevertheless not truly productive because it deploys memory for the purpose of making a representational element its "own". Indeed, in most of Barthes' readings of photographs, we can see that the displacement tends towards the direction of appropriating the photograph in the sense of connecting it to personal history, such as connecting the necklace to a person from his past. In other words, he is not totally "productive" in his look because he is still driven by his unconscious desire that makes him "read" the photograph from a limited perspective.

Whether one can have a total freedom from the unconscious (memories) while looking at something is questionable. But for Silverman, the *productive look* necessarily requires a constant conscious reworking of the terms under which we unconsciously look at the objects of our visual landscape. She argues indeed that "It [the *productive look*] necessitates the struggle first, to recognise our involuntary acts of incorporation and repudiation, and our implicit affirmation of the dominant elements of the *screen*, and then, to see again, differently" (1996, 184).

Moreover, she adds that it also necessarily entails the opening up of the unconscious to "otherness". But how is all this possible? What does this opening up to "otherness" exactly mean?

For Silverman, the look can develop an inclination for unusual associations, or for diversity (which persists within metaphors), or for heterogeneity "which undoes the compulsive repetition through which every recollection is made to attest to the same

unconscious desire” (1996, 183). In this case it embraces the drift implicit in the imperative of displacement.

However, such a look may also deploy memory primarily for the purpose of making a representational element its “own” (as happens in Barthes’ reading of some photographs in Camera Lucida), or as a validation of the “self”. In this case, although it still works through the imperative of displacement, it nevertheless remains a “remembering look” and not a *productive look*.

Silverman adds that in order for the remembering look to become a *productive look*, it needs to accomplish a final displacement, the displacement of the ego. She argues indeed that: “It [the remembering look] does not fully triumph over the forces that constrain it to see in predetermined ways until its appetite for alterity prevails, not only over sameness, but also over self-sameness” (1996, 183). Here we come back to the problem of (self-) identification that is one of the main problematics of this thesis.

Identification for Silverman is one of the most essential processes of the psyche as it provides the ground for all our relationships to others and to our “self”. The “mirror stage” is one of the examples of (self-) identification that shows how the subject is driven by a desire to identify with his/her image in order to close the gap that will always exist between his/her sensational body and its (ideal) image. And for Lacan this gap is the condition of becoming a “subject” within the symbolic realm.

For Silverman identification with others can have two forms. We can either identify with objects by acknowledging these objects’ separateness from us or we can seek to abolish this distance or separateness. In the latter case, identification results in jubilation, a moment of joy when we can imaginarily coincide with the (ideal) image we worship from afar. That is when we feel ourselves affirmed, accepted, fitting, within

the *dominant fiction*, when we feel illusionarily and momentarily in unity with the world that surrounds us.

Silverman adds, by referring to Lacan's *Seminar VII*, that this desire for unity that motivates the subject's identification with his/her mirror image is also a desire on the part of the subject to avoid the subject's sensation of lack. Silverman argues in fact that the mirror image is also a

Mirage" preventing the subject from apprehending his or her fundamental nothingness or "being-for-death", a lure encouraging him or her to pursue endlessly that imaginary plenitude...However, it is also through this imago that he or she protects him-or herself against knowledge of that lack (1996, 44).

It seems thus that for Silverman, at the basis of our relationship with the world (through identification, recognition/rejection) lies an (un)conscious mechanism that protects us from experiencing, or knowing, the lack that constitutes our nature. One of the ways the subject attempts to avoid confronting his/her lack (or *manque-à-être* in Lacan's terms), is to diminish the distance between the sensational body and ideal images, through (self-) recognition which is always a mis-recognition. For her the *productive look* is a look that always seeks alterity and thus that never permits the illusionary and temporary matching of the subject with its ideal image.

I want to add here that although Silverman's and Lacan's accounts of the possibility of (self-) recognition and (self-) identification are conditioned by the supposed existence of a "lack" within the subject, and a desire to fulfil it, this thesis is approaching the concept of "lack" critically in order to argue that what the subject experiences while (mis-) identifying with others and with its "self", is possible not because of the existence of a "lack" but because of the presence of an emptiness. Although lack and emptiness seem to imply a certain absence, lack is related with an

insufficiency, whereas the emptiness is a rich, “plenitudinous” absence in the sense that unlike lack, it is a condition that is not governed by a desire to be fulfilled.

Therefore, I believe that to consider this emptiness as “lack” (as Lacan and Silverman seem to do) is to transform it into a negative void, the opposite of fullness. In this case one is within the parameters of the Hegelian dialectic. However, this thesis considers this emptiness as the condition of human existence and tries to reveal the ways it can be welcomed and experienced as it is, while arguing that it constitutes the necessary ground, making possible the coming forth of any “presence” and existence.

I believe that the *productive look* can thus be read as a way of looking at the “self” and at “others”, freed from such a dialectical thinking, and it foregrounds the impossibility of (self-) recognition and (self-)identification. It is a look that prevents the mis-recognition of the ideality that one has conferred upon the “self” and/or the “other”.

This impossibility might be manifested and/or experienced in several ways as we have already seen in our analysis of Sander’s photographs in the previous chapter. I want to continue exploring the manifestations of this impossibility by analysing now the moments where the posing subject can experience a “discontinuity” and “otherness”, by referring to a visual analysis of the second corpus of my study: the photographs of Süreyya Yılmaz Dernek and Ergün Turan.

## **5.2 “Biz”**

### **5.2.1 Introduction to the project.**

In 1998 two university students of photography, Süreyya Yılmaz Dernek and Ergün Turan envisaged a project that would be their final project for their degree. They decided to shoot the portraits of the people living in their city (Istanbul). Thus, carrying

with them a black panel that would foreground the details of the poseurs and neutralise the environment, they launched themselves into the streets of Istanbul, travelling from one district to another and asking the passers-by to stop their daily life for a few minutes of posing in front of the dark panel.

This was a very difficult task because hardly anybody wanted to pose for them. Especially women were cautious and very resistant to their demand. For this reason, the two photographers sought the help of a female friend who would come with them and explain to the passers-by that they were university students and they needed to take the portraits in order to pass their class. This explanation, which softened the offensive aspect of taking pictures, helped them a bit, especially in terms of shooting women, but they were only able to take a maximum of six photos a day.<sup>42</sup>

Their project lasted four years, not only because they travelled across the city, from Taksim, Beyoğlu to Kadıköy, from Üsküdar to Ortaköy, from Fatih to Süleymaniye, from Kasımpaşa to Sulukule and Dolapdere, but also because they chose their poseurs with great rigour. They mainly choose people who constitute what Orhan Pamuk calls a “tip”<sup>43</sup>. In four years they took more than four hundred portraits. They selected some of them and published them under a book entitled “Biz”, whose preface was written by Pamuk. At the end of the book we read the following statement about their project:

In the streets of this town where we are living, we come into contact with the eyes of the “others” everyday. The whole town is filled with their voices, their pain and their joys. It breathes with them. At the corner of the town a black panel. Many different people stand in front of it. They look at us with all they have, their story. They are our world. They are “US”.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The reason for this limitation was not indicated in the book “Biz”.

<sup>43</sup> If literally translated it means Type or Typology. However “tip” connotes the opposite meaning of type and is used to describe individuals who are unusual, unique, having a specific characteristic and thus unclassifiable. Quoted from “Biz” p13.

<sup>44</sup> “Yaşadığımız bu kentin sokaklarında her gün sayısız yüzlerle, “Diğer” leriyle göz gözeyiz. Bütün bu kent onların sesleri, onların acı ve sevinçleri ile dolu. Onlarla soluk alıp veriyor. Kentin köşesinde kara

According to Orhan Pamuk, their project, although it departed from the simple idea of shooting portraits, revealed an unexposed side of the citizens of Istanbul. For Pamuk the citizens of Istanbul who cannot totally be free from the closed, introverted, insular Turkish culture and who could thus only be “themselves” in family albums or during snapshots, managed to gaze at Dernek and Turan’s camera with a certain freedom. He adds that while in the portraits “we”<sup>45</sup> give to others we tend to be overcautious about the way we look, we seem to let ourselves be free from such concerns:

In the portraits of us taken by strangers, there is an air of unfamiliarity and fear; we adjust our self, our dress and our gaze. However, in Süreyya Yılmaz Dernek’s and Ergün Turan’s photographs that expose us with all of our characteristics, we both are as we are and we smile free from the panic of being seen by a stranger (2002, 15).<sup>46</sup>

It thus seems that for Pamuk, Dernek and Turan captured something different and unusual, something which seems to be different than the usual attitudes of Turkish people and/or any single individual in front of the camera. In fact, as this chapter will aim to demonstrate, their portraits seem to reveal an unobserved side of the act of posing, that is, its potential to induce in the poseur a freedom from (self-) identification, from trying to “be” someone, revealing the discontinuity and otherness that exists within what we call the “self”. Let’s start then by seeing more in detail the traces of such discontinuity and otherness by focusing on these two major aspects observable in Dernek and Turan’s photographs.

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bir pano. Panonun önünde duran birbirinden farklı insanlar. Kendilerine ait ne varsa, bütün hikayeleri ile bize bakıyorlar. Onlar bizim dünyamız. Onlar, BİZ.” From the back cover of “Biz”. My Translation.

<sup>45</sup> Pamuk uses “we” not only to refer to human beings in general but also to the poseurs of Turan and Dernek.

<sup>46</sup>“Başkalarına çektiğimiz portrelerde bir yabancılik, bir korku havası eser; kendimize, kıyafetimize ve bakışlarımıza bir çeki düzen veriz. Süreyya Yılmaz Dernek ile Ergün Turan’ın bizleri olduğumuz gibi, bütün özelliklerimizle gösteren bu fotoğraflarında ise hem kendimiz gibiyiz, hem de bir yabancıya gözükmek için arınmış gülümsüyoruz.” My translation.

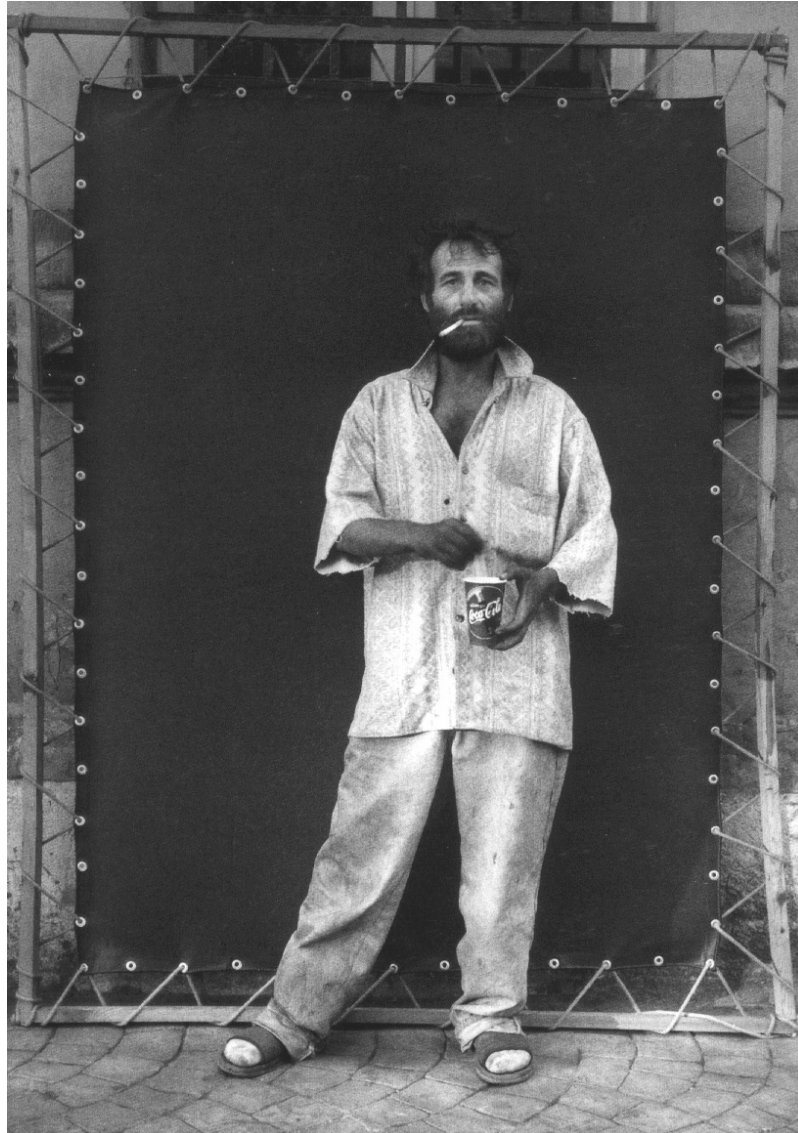


Fig.19

### 5.2.2 Moments of “emptiness” in between the “staged” and the “unstaged”

Above is a man (Figure 19) who gives the impression that he could have been standing not in front of the camera but on the street, gazing at something far away, perhaps the sea. The cigarette that is about to fall from the edge of his lips and the fact that he is mixing the drink he holds in his hands, gives him an air of not caring so much about posing.

Moreover, the fact that he is standing very loosely, his left leg inclined slightly to the side increases this effect. He also seems not to care about his

appearance. His hair is disordered and his shirt collar is opened carelessly. His clothes are dirty and worn. He looks like a construction worker captured during his break. He also seems to have been taken out of his context and put in front of the black panel very suddenly.

If we move closer, we can observe something in his eyes. His eyes appear to be as if they are focused on an invisible point situated behind the photographer's head. He seems like his is frozen for a moment in his thoughts. He is one of those figures in the book that seem a bit out of context, as if only his body was posing while his thoughts are somewhere else. We may also sense that he is dazed.

Unlike some other poseurs who seem to believe in their pose seriously (such as figures 20 and 21), this man seems to be caught in between posing and not posing. Although he agreed to pose for the photographers, he seems not to be maintaining a certain pose. Rather he looks like he is caught at a moment in which he gave up any concerns about the way he would have been seen.

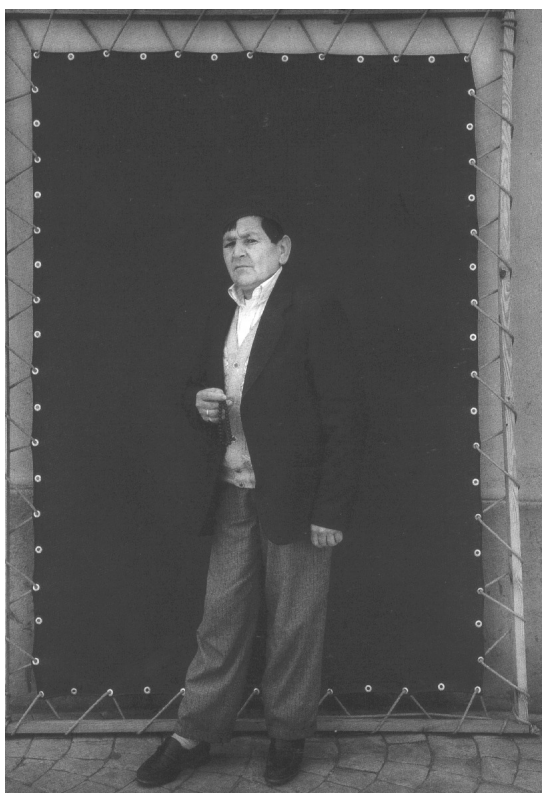


Fig.20

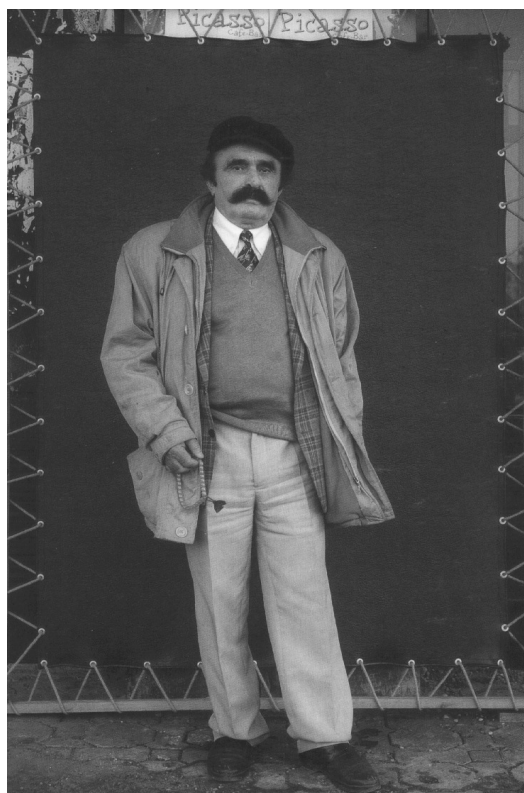
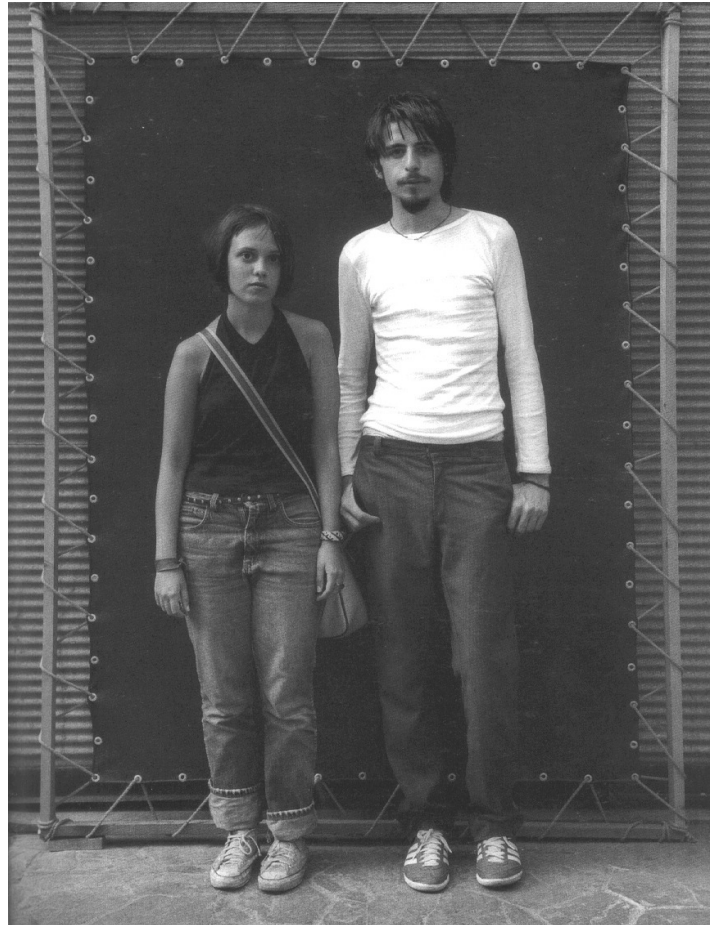


Fig.21

We can observe a similar air of being dazed and free from any concern about posing, in figure 22, and especially in the pose of the girl.

First of all, unlike the boy standing next to her, she is not looking directly at the camera, but at a point that is on the right of the camera lens. Perhaps she is looking at the other photographer who is not shooting at the moment.



Secondly, she reflects in her body an air of giving up, of letting go. Her arms and shoulders seem looser compared to the boy's posture.

The boy, although he seems to want to give a cool and relaxed impression, by looking at the camera directly and even maintaining a positive attitude, is however more tense in his upper body, probably because his hands are stuck into his pockets and he looks in his upper body more stiffed, compared to the girl's indifferent and careless pose.

We might thus say that the girl looks as if she is careless about what is going on (compared to the boy) at this moment. We can also say that she seems perhaps be protecting herself, by deploying an "unpretentious", "uncaring" air as a mask to hide herself. But she seems nevertheless less protective compared to other figures (such

as Figures 27, 28, 29) of the project. I would rather rank her among the people who have a “blank” air like the man of Figure 19.



Fig.23

We can find this air of “blankness” in many other photographs of the book and more frequently in children. In Figure 23 for example, the little girl who sells tissues has an air of blankness in the sense that her eyes seem to be free from any thought or awareness about the moment of the pose. She also seems disturbed, as if she is trying to understand what is going on.

One characteristic of this project is that unlike Sander’s poseurs, none of the people that constitute “Biz” planned to pose in front of the camera beforehand. As a result, the poseurs are perhaps trying to adapt to the unexpected stopping of their

everyday life for a few minutes of posing in front of a stage-like dark background panel, facing a photographer with whom they are not familiar. Thus they seem to have lost their conscious thoughts about this moment of posing.

Imagine that you are walking on the street with your everyday thoughts, plans, and problems. Suddenly someone interrupts this flow and asks you to “stop” for a moment of posing. It is probable that you may feel a little shock and even may experience a “blankness” and “emptiness” in this passage from one state of existence to the other, from being within the flow of thoughts and the world, to a moment of stopping in silence. Like the girl who sells the napkins or the little girl in the next photograph (Figure 24), you may experience a state of emptiness, disconnected from yourself for a while, perhaps questioning and trying to understand what is going on.

In fact, unlike the accordionist girl in Figure 24 who seems to be consciously responding to the camera by showing off her accordion and looking into the camera with an air of knowing what she is doing, the little girl sitting next to her seems to be more caught up in a moment she was not in control of. She seems to



have just sat down or to be about to stand up from the stool she is sitting on. The object she is holding in her left hand is slightly blurred and this shows that she is caught up in a movement. Also, her right foot is curved slightly inwards, which increases the feeling that she is not sitting comfortably and is thus ready to move or change her position. But more than this, in her expression we can see the trace of a shock (the open mouth for example), so that she looks as if at this moment she has lost any control, or conscious thought concerning the moment in which she is posing. She thus looks as if she is in-between posing and not posing.

In all of the figures we have observed so far there is indeed an “in-betweenness” between posing (as the subjects are aware of the camera) and not posing, since some unexpected expression or state of being is also caught, as in a snapshot. It is as if in such moments the poseur inevitably lets escape from his/her pose something that the camera witnesses, something that is beyond his/her control and actual awareness. Maybe the camera catches the letting-go of the “self”.

What is significant in these photographs is that they seem to foreground both the “staged” and the “unstaged” at the same time. On the one hand, there is a conscious staging prepared by the photographers. The black panel they carry with them everywhere is like a mobile theatre background that neutralises all the different districts they travelled to and which helps the passers-by to adapt to the mood of posing.

However, it seems from the photographs we have analysed so far that not all of the passers-by can adapt or can “play” (pose) according to the request of the photographers. Despite their staginess, these photographs reflect some “unstaged”, “un-expected” moments (not explicitly visible as in snapshots in general) but implicitly visible in the gaze and stance of the poseurs.

It is perhaps because Dernek and Turan wanted to capture their “citizens” as unmasked as possible so that they wanted to catch their “empty” moments. The result is that in some of the photographs they shot we can observe the “unstaged”, the unthought, and even the unconscious moments of the poseurs, to the point that they even look a bit puzzled, out of place, disconnected from their “self” and in between posing and not posing.

A similar kind of in-betweenness between the “staged” and the “unstaged” was more visible and inevitable in the early years of photographic practice, because of the limitations of the first photographic cameras. Henry M. Sayre in his article “Rhetoric of the Pose: Photography and the Portrait as Performance” discusses the ways in which early photography may emphasise the conflict between the “staged” and the “unstaged”. For him the particularity of the early photographic image is its ability to function as being a snapshot and a composition at the same time (1986, 49).

Because of the limitations of the photographic apparatus, if any unexpected movement occurs during the shooting, the resulting image is blurred, witnessing in a way the movement within the composition. This blurring shows that despite the effort to control the composition, the camera remains nevertheless an apparatus, which has the potential to catch an “unstaged” moment and thus to disturb the security of any staged composition.

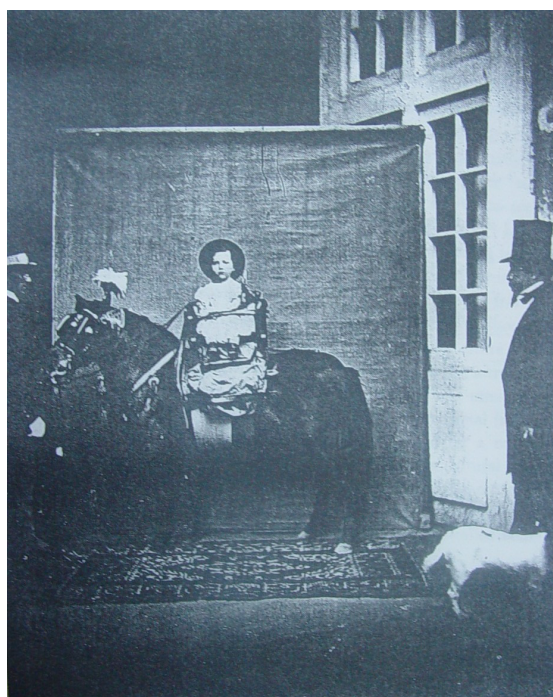


Fig.25

In order to illustrate the tension between the ‘staged’ and the ‘unstaged’ within a photograph, Sayre refers to a photograph executed in 1858 by the Paris studio of *Mayer Frères et Peirson*, and entitled *The Prince Imperial on His Pony* (Fig.25). This photograph which is meant to represent the son of Napoleon III, in an imperial pose on his pony, is similar to Dernek and Turan’s photographs in the sense that it also has a staged background in front of which the little boy and his pony are asked to stand. However, this photograph loses its staginess by capturing as well Napoleon’s dog, that seems to go out of the frame and that is captured in a blurry movement.

According to Sayre, this uncanny existence of an unexpected movement brings a certain ambiguity to the power of the photographic camera by reminding us that, unlike any other form of visual representation, the photographic camera can capture moments or details that can disrupt the stability and security of its intended narrative. Sayre adds that the unexpected movement of the dog that falls out of the frame attracts our attention in a way similar to what Roland Barthes described as the *punctum* (1986, 49).

If we return to the photographs of “Biz” we can also observe the presence of such moments, especially in the facial expression of the poseurs. Although in general some of the figures tend to make an attempt at self-possession or desire to take control of their appearance, in the photographs from “Biz” that we have so far analysed, the poseurs seem not to be driven by such a desire for control. Rather, they stare from an “emptiness”. Their expression seems to indicate an awareness of being exposed to the camera/gaze, but they also seem to “be” at that moment without any calculated stratagem and thus they are not supporting their stare. Moreover, some of them expose some indifference vis-à-vis posing. All this results in the appearance of some unexpected stances and stares.

Moreover, if we focus on the children (figures 23 and 24) we can see that their faces seem to question, to try to understand, to be doubtful in the face of this moment of posing as if saying: “What am I supposed to do?” This moment of doubt is also a moment in which they are unable to lose themselves in a role, to become one with their pose. In this way, they bear the traces of “emptiness”.

Giorgio Agamben in his book Means without Ends argues that human beings do not have any essence, any nature, or any specific destiny. They are empty and insubstantial. This emptiness is so painful that they have an interminable desire to fill it by appropriating their appearance (2000, 93). Perhaps in the case of some of the photographs of Ergün and Turan’s poseurs this emptiness is easily welcomed and not turned into a self-appropriation.

Therefore, perhaps the moment of posing is a moment of absence as well as a presence, because in that moment of emptiness one may feel absent from one’s “self”, from what he/she believes to be his/her identity. Thus the moment of posing may be a moment of the absence of the “self”, even if momentarily, in which the subject may experience the impossibility of self-identity. It is a moment in which time seems to stop flowing and an unexpected “moment” of the subject is revealed.

Moreover, while considering the act of posing in the “posing” section of the third chapter, we saw that the act of posing is also an act in which the poseur “performs” or “enacts” a self-portrait. Therefore we may also consider the pose as a self-portrait. I want thus to return to what Lacoue-Labarthe argues about the self-portrait in order to reveal how his argument can be related to the act of posing.

Lacoue-Labarthe in Le Portrait de L’Artiste en Général, refers to an abolition of time while discussing the self-portrait. As we have already seen in the third chapter, Lacoue-Labarthe bases his main argument on an analysis of Urs Lüthi’s self-portraits.

He argues that the self-portrait in general is an *alloportrait*<sup>47</sup> that is the portrait of the “other”. For him the self-portrait is always the portrait of the “other” because it captures one instance out of the subject’s temporal existence and therefore it represents it as “other” to itself because the subject cannot be reduced to one instance as it is an existence in flow. It is perhaps because of this that we cannot easily recognise our self-portraits.

Therefore, the self-portrait is a representation of the abolition of time because the moment it represents is a moment in which the poseur is taken out of the flow of time and in which the subject cannot resemble its “self”. To be clear let’s refer to Lacoue-Labarthe’s account of the *alloportrait*:

The self-portrait... is in fact an allo-portrait: a portrait of nobody or of what Blanchot calls, in his texts on the image, “Someone without figure”: “that which appears precisely only in the time of the absence of time”, the ceaseless, imminent and always differed coming of death, where “what is present does not present anything, represents itself, belongs right now and always to the return”: in loneliness indeed (1979, 42).<sup>48</sup>

It seems that for Lacoue-Labarthe, the self-portrait is a representation that defers the subject. It is a representation in which the subject cannot “represent” its “self” because the self-sameness never occurs.

In accordance with this argument Lacoue-Labarthe, in an introduction to a photographic book called *Théâtre des Réalités*, argues that although the word “representation” is understood as imitation because of the prefix re- (giving it a value of doubling and seconding) it means to render present. Basing his argument on Diderot’s analysis of the theatrical act, he argues that an actor is not someone who reproduces the

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<sup>47</sup> “Allo-portrait”. Quoted from *Le Portrait de L’Artiste en Général*, p.42 The prefix “allo” comes from the Greek “allos” meaning “other”.

<sup>48</sup> “L’autoportrait...est de fait alloportrait: portrait de personne ou bien de ce que Blanchot appelle, dans ses textes sur l’image, le “Quel qu’un sans figure”: “celui qui n’apparaît précisément que dans le temps de l’absence de temps”, l’incessante, imminente et toujours différé venue de la mort, la ou... ‘ce qui est présent ne présente rien, se représente, appartient d’ores et déjà et de tout temps au retour’: dans la solitude en effet.” My translation.

gestures of another, it is rather someone who presents and makes a character exist, someone who 'builds up' a character. Therefore any act of self-representation might be considered as an act of creation, or production, as we also mentioned in the second chapter while discussing the paradoxes of portraiture. (1996, 115)

Moreover, according to Marianne Hirsh who provides a reading of Lacoue-Labarthe's book in "Masking the subject: practicing theory", the subject of self-portraits exists in time always as "other" in several ways. First of all, he/she is the misapprehended imaginary "other" of the mirror stage (what Lacan calls the "moi"), "the self as externally given and recognised as a projected and absent self/other" (1994, 113). Secondly he/she is a *personne* in the double sense of *person* and *no-one*. Hirsh adds that for Lacoue-Labarthe, by selecting one instant out of the subject's temporal existence, Lüthi's photographs stage the subject's own specular self-encounter with otherness: the subject represented in the photograph is always "other" to the subject looking at his/her own portrait.

Therefore, if we consider the act of posing as a moment of performing a self-portrait (as we saw in the third chapter) we can also argue that the subject posing (performing his/her self-portrait) might expose an "otherness" similar to what is mentioned above.

I want to reveal the existence of such "otherness" by analysing some other photographs from "Biz" where the poseurs seem to protect themselves and are even looking in a hostile way at the camera. Let's now focus on such instances in order to reveal the possibility that in a self-protective way of self-projection lies the possibility of encountering the presence of "otherness".

### 5.2.3 Encountering “otherness”

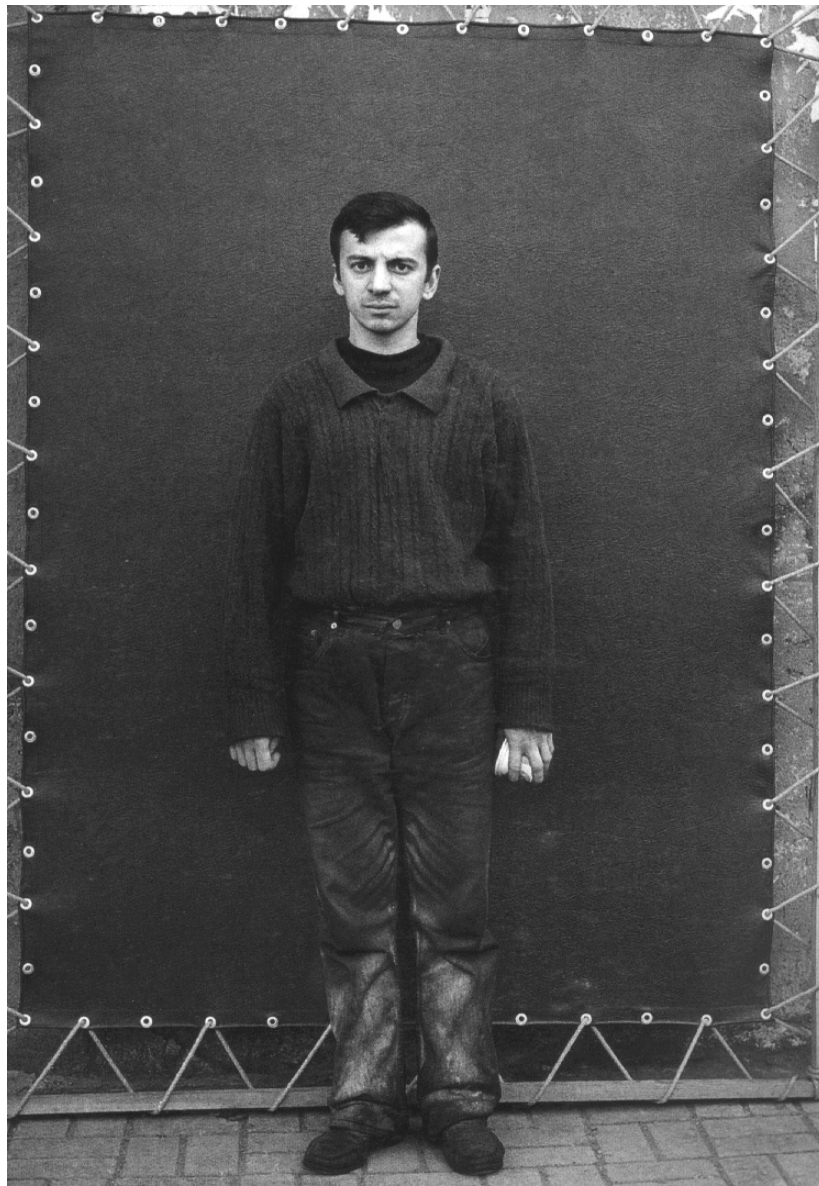


Fig.26

In contrast with the previous photographs analysed in this chapter, we are facing now a man who seems to have a different reaction to the camera/gaze/photographer (Figure 26). First of all, his body's position is very stiff so that it gives the impression that he is tense. What increases this effect is the way he holds the white object in his left hand. He seems to be frightened that the object will fall so he wants to hold it firmly and maybe also to feel himself more secure. This object, which is hard to

identify, (maybe a yogurt container) might symbolically signify something he does not want to give up: it may symbolise the identity he wants to protect.

The way he gazes at the camera is also very self-protective. His facial muscles also seem tense, for example he is frowning. His eyes are staring firmly as well and show traces of an anxiety mixed with anger. He also looks as if he is standing in the position of a guard.

Departing from this analysis we can say that he seems both self-protective and anxious. Moreover, he looks as if he has been placed in front of the camera like a puppet (as he is standing stiffly, symmetrically and in a (self-) controlled way in front of the dark panel, without any room for chance encounters or uncontrolled gestures) but also, this air of self-control increases the effect of being very tense and anxious and creates the impression that he does not want to lose his “self”.

This act of self-protection might point to the presence of the “other”. When one tries to protect oneself, it is by an imperative to frame, to protect oneself from what is “other”, what is different, what is alien and unknown. In this example, the pose seems to be a protective disguise, hiding or controlling the spontaneous expression of the poseur. In this respect we can perhaps argue that while posing, we might not only face the “other” that exists outside us (the photographer, the camera or the potential observer of the photographs) but also we might encounter the “other” within us, because, we might find ourselves in a moment of transforming our “self” into the “other” while protecting our “self”.

In other words, when one assumes a protective pose, one is not only implying the presence of the “other” outside him/herself, but also, he/she is transforming him/her self into an “other”, both to him/herself and to others.

Therefore, this man, through his self-protective pose, implies on the one hand that the presence of the camera/gaze is the presence of the “other”. On the other hand, he makes visible the tension existing within himself by seemingly experiencing himself as “other” to others. In his posture and facial expression he thus creates an atmosphere of tension, repudiating the presence of the camera/gaze instead of welcoming it. A similar welcoming also happens with the girl at the right side of the next figure (Figure 27).



Fig.27

In this photograph (Figure 27) we are indeed facing two opposite reactions vis-à-vis the camera/gaze. The girl on the right seems much more welcoming, amenable, and

easy-going in the moment of the pose than the girl of the left, who is explicitly protecting herself by crossing her arms in front of her.

Moreover, the girl on the left seems very severe, austere, and unkind in her expression. Unlike the man of the previous photograph, she does not seem to be fearful but rather she displays self-trust and she explicitly defies the moment of her photograph being taken.

The other girl next to her seems, however, more loose and open in her posture, her body is more relaxed and her facial expression is less protective. The coexistence of these two opposite reactions increases the effect that when one is self-protective, angry or anxious, one makes visible the line that exists between him/herself and the “other”. It makes visible the separation, the conflict, the differences that separate one’s “self” from others.

With the next photograph (Figure 28) we can continue to consolidate our argument because like the two previous photographs it makes visible the presence of “otherness”. We are facing again an individual who seems both a bit in conflict and also hopeless. We can read on his face the trace of some anger mixed with an air of helplessness. He looks as if he is

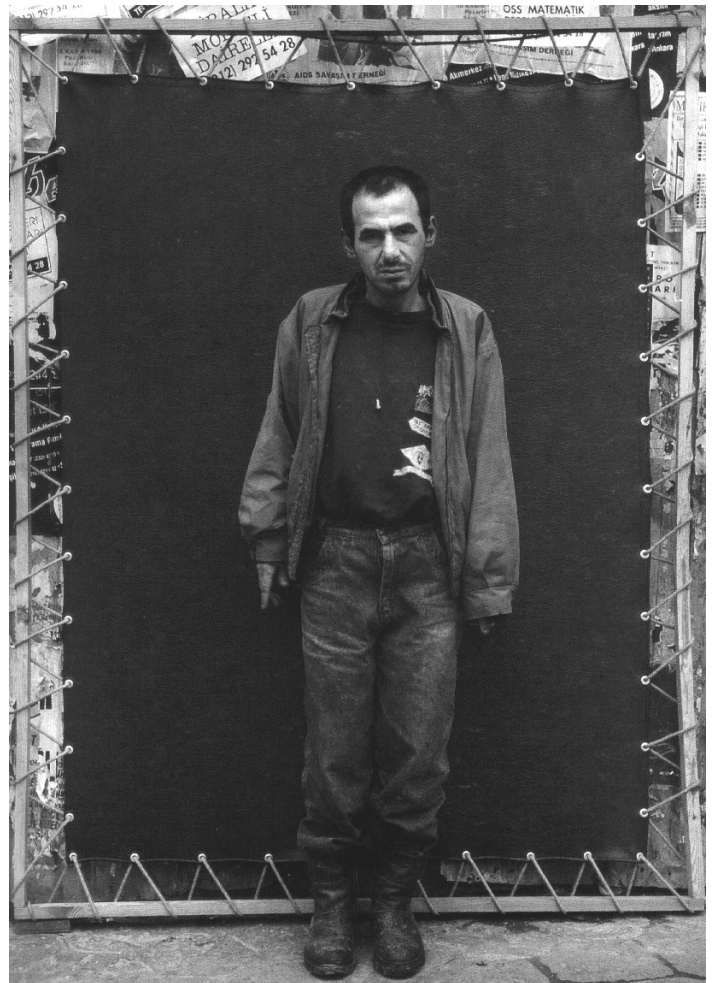


Fig.28

disturbed by the fact that he has to give a pose. Or he appears to be judging and/or criticising the photographer's intention to take his picture. Also the way in which he is withdrawing his left arm into his jacket creates a feeling that he is shy and he might feel tense. Again, he seems not at peace with the moment of the pose but rather, he looks very uneasy with his "self". He seems to be experiencing at this moment an alienation from his "self", a becoming "other" not only to his "self" but to others.

In all the poseurs we have observed in this section there is a manifestation of the presence of "otherness", and they seem to reveal that the posing subject might perform the codes of encounter between the self and the other. In other words, in the photographs we have analysed in this section, the posing subject seems to experience a moment where he/she encounters an enactment of "otherness" while protecting him/herself from the other, the unknown.

In this chapter we thus saw that the poseurs might exhibit some incongruities at the moment of the pose that is manifested in the form of discontinuity, (self-) conflict, in-betweenness and (self-) alienation, all this preventing the subject from relating to its "self" in a continuous and affirmative way.

I believe that those conflicting, alienated, discontinuous states of selfhood not only result in a questioning of the nature of the "self", but also point to the presence of an "emptiness" that characterises the subject. This "emptiness" will be discussed in the concluding chapter. For now, I want to end this chapter by arguing that what we have seen throughout this chapter is that the moment of posing is a moment in which the poseur might expose the impossibility of defining, recognising and/or affirming his/her "self" according to the parameters of self-sameness and thus creating a space for "looking" at his/her "self" in a productive way.

## 6. Conclusion

While shooting a portrait I am not searching for a story. Even if for a small moment, I am searching for the silence existing within the person. I am on my knees in front of him, both of us are silent. Sometimes we blink, but not too much. A total silence. When you meet someone there is always a prejudice in your mind. But erasing this and watching, is always the best.<sup>49</sup>

**Henri Cartier Bresson**

*Henri Cartier Bresson?*

In the epigraph above Henri Cartier Bresson, the famous French photographer of the 1940s seems to draw our attention to a magical space of silence existing between the photographer and his poseur. It seems that for him, the moment of photographing his poseur is a moment of pure silence in which there is the potential to experience something new, freed from prejudices.

Perhaps in this moment of silent interaction between the photographer and the poseur, Bresson finds a space of freedom from the mind and an opening to endless possibilities of encountering and embracing the unexpected, the unknown, something that goes beyond the desire to, “capture” the (hi-)story and the “essence” of the posing individual.

In awe of this mysterious moment of silence that is however not without communication, this project is born out of a desire to analyse the human condition of emptiness that can manifest itself in the necessity and/or the desire to relate to (self-) images.

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<sup>49</sup> This passage is from a film (by Sara Moon) about Henri Cartier Bresson entitled: “Henri Cartier Bresson?”. The Turkish translation of this passage, was published and distributed in an exhibition dedicated to him in the Pera Museum in İstanbul, February 2006. The translation in the epigraph is thus my translation of from this Turkish translation.

In fact, humans, have a significant particularity: they are interested in mirrors, in the image as image. Giorgio Agamben argues that human beings separate images from things and give them a name because they want to recognise themselves. For Agamben to recognize is to take possession of the (self-) appearance that is inevitably exposed, inevitably in the open. All beings are exposed in the sense that they manifest themselves, they have an inevitable appearance. But only the human being feels the urge to “transform the open into a world” (2000, 92). Therefore it takes possession of its own appearance. It turns its own openness into an image it wants to identify with.

This desire for (self-) possession, this urge to be attached to the “self”, comes perhaps from a fear of facing this abyssal emptiness that is an inevitable part of the “self”. It can also be related to a fear of disappearing and of dying. Agamben adds that: “...human beings neither are nor have to be any essence, any nature, or any specific destiny, their condition is the most empty and the most insubstantial of all” (2000, 94).

This thesis aimed thus at “touching” this emptiness by revealing the ways it might be felt, experienced and manifested. But how can one “touch” this inevitable part of the human condition? What can we write about it? And how can we write about it?

I believe that starting from the place that seems to be the most unlikely would be a good idea. Therefore this thesis started searching the manifestations of this emptiness in a moment that seems to be the very opposite of it, a moment where the subject tries consciously to assume, to appropriate, to become attached to an identity: the moment of posing in front of the photographic camera, the moment Bresson refers to as the “pure silence” where the portrayed subject, unlike in snapshots, looks into the camera and exhibits the awareness of being exposed to the camera/gaze.

In that precise moment, Agamben argues, “the insubstantial nature of the human face suddenly comes to light” (2000, 93). Moreover, for him the fact that the poseur looks at the camera means that he/she is conscious that he/she is posing, simulating. Posing is thus a moment where the subject exhibits an enactment of an identity but also becomes aware of the impossibility of this enactment.

Therefore, the very attempt by the subject to pose, to assume an identity, can paradoxically point to the presence of this emptiness that is an inevitable part of his/her “self”. In other words, the fact that the subject consciously poses and makes visible the artificiality of its pose, might point to the presence of the emptiness that characterises him/her. In other words, any attempt to enact identity on the part of the poseur is possible because of the presence of this emptiness, because what we call the “self” is governed by a dynamic existing between presence and absence and/or emptiness. Thus when the subject poses, the very possibility of his/her pose comes from the presence of this emptiness which is an inevitable part of his/her selfhood.

Through a detailed analysis of images of posing subjects, this thesis engaged thus to reveal the human emptiness that can manifest itself in the moment of posing in front of the camera and argued that at that moment the subject might reveal and expose an emptiness. In other words, this thesis argued that it is in the moment of posing that the subject might be faced with the inability of attaching him/herself to any identity. The moment of posing can thus be considered as a moment at which the subject might fail to consolidate or to frame its subjectivity.

The desire to become attached to a self-image, or the desire to recognise our “self” in (self-) images, is visible in any act of (self-) “representation” and especially portraiture. This thesis started thus by providing an account of how and why the relationship between the subject and its image is created, by focusing first on

portraiture and its paradoxes in order to analyse later the particularity of posing for photography as compared to painting.

Following this, it offered a theoretical analysis of the act of posing by giving a psychoanalytical and philosophical account of the relationship between the subject and its image in order to argue that, although posing has been an indispensable part of portraiture, posing for photography has its own characteristics not only because of the presence of the camera (an alien machine) between the photographer and the poseur, but also because of the assumed power of photography to confer and impose an identity on the posing individual.

Indeed, portraits made by painters had been conceived as bearing the traces of the artist's "touch", but photographic portraits had rather been conceived as the imprint of the poseur's appearance. Therefore photographic portraits claimed a power; they impose an identity on the subject at the expense of his/her being.

As Marianne Hirsh also argues in "Masking the Subject: Practicing Theory", when we are photographed in the context of social conventions we wear masks, fabricate ourselves according to certain expectations and are fabricated by them. We are also constructed by our photographic representation by the click of the camera in the sense that, once we are photographed we are reduced to an image over which we have no power over, and knowing this, we tend to construct, create an image of ourselves before the camera imposes its own image on us (1994, 117).

Therefore, posing in front of the camera is a moment where there is manifested a desire or an attempt to become attached to a unique, unshakeable identity. However, despite this attempt, the moment of posing can also reveal the impossibility of (self-) recognition and (self-) identification mainly because at that moment the subject might expose more dramatically the impossibility of coinciding with his/her image.

This impossibility is analysed and supported in this thesis not only through a conversation between theoretical texts but also through a visual analysis of two different photographic projects by August Sander and by Ergün Turand and Süreyya Yılmaz Dernek.

Those projects, although belonging to different periods of time and different cultures, reflect a similar style exposition of individuals (similar choice of compositional framing for example) that seem to put into question (self-) identification in different ways. Departing from this analysis this thesis focused on the possible outcome of this questioning that is its potential to provide the subject with a *productive look* at his/her “self”. Looking productively towards the “self” is a way of perceiving the self that is not driven by a desire to fulfil its lack, but rather to be able to let the “self” face the emptiness that characterizes it being. Therefore the productive look brings a possibility of perceiving the “self” freed from any parameters, desires, or attachments to a specific “image” of the self.

This thesis aimed thus to question (self-) recognition and (self-) attachment, with reference to images of posing people, not only to reveal that posing may be a moment of questioning the assumed power of the photographic camera but also to open up a way of considering it as a moment in which the essential emptiness of the human condition appears.

In other words, this thesis has analysed the relationship between the subject and its image and questioned the process of (self-) recognition and/or (self-) identification by focusing on the act of posing and by providing a productive communication between visual and theoretical texts.

The desire informing this thesis was to explore and expose the human condition of emptiness, and to show the ways it is manifested, in order to remind us

that what we call “subjectivity” cannot be reduced to a singular state of existence. Rather, this thesis pointed to moments where subjects are unable to identify with and/or hold on to their “self”.

In other words, this thesis explored the possibility of conceiving human identity as fluid and fugitive, rather than fixed and stable. It also revealed that this identity can manifest itself in a moment which seemed to be paradoxically the opposite, the moment of posing in front of the camera, the moment in which the subject is tempted to assume, create, hold on to an identity, but is nevertheless reminded of the impossibility of having any stable identity. Indeed, as Michel Pane also argues in a re-reading of Barthes’ Camera Lucida:

What one wants but does not get (cannot get) is a mobile image of one’s profound self, but there is never a coincidence of oneself with the image of oneself. Thus to refer to any human subject as *one*-self is always misleading (1997, 84).

The plurality existing at the heart of subjectivity might lead to an awareness of the impossibility of forming an attachment to any of these “images” and impressions of the self, revealing thus the emptiness existing in the human condition, like the silence existing between words.

What we experience as the “self” might thus be an experience of a fugitive, evasive existence, unable to be inserted into a specific identity. It is like an existence without any land to stay, like that of nomads. It is thus not surprising that August Sander, although driven by a desire to “capture” and categorise the individuals of his society, could not avoid devoting a great deal of importance to individuals who perhaps explicitly belonged to this state of existence. In the section “itinerants” of *Citizens of the 20th Century* we can see photographs of people who lived in that space of in-betweenness, like the Gypsy of Figure 30.

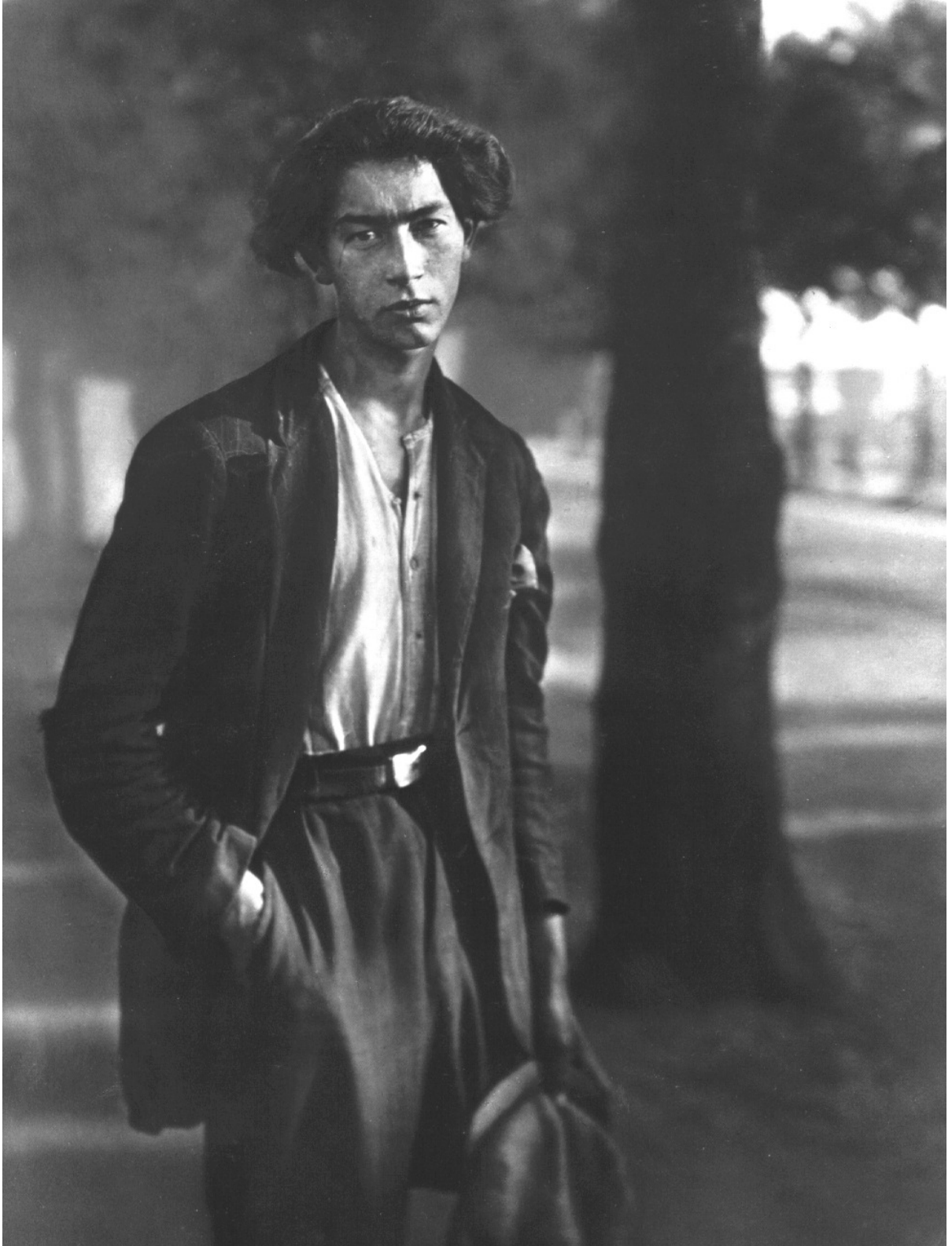
This photograph is one of the more unusual photographs of the book because it has a more artistic touch compared with the other generally “objective- looking” photographs of the entire project. The Gypsy is sharply focused, as if Sander wanted to capture him, to hold him still, while leaving the background softly blurred. His posture is very flexible in the sense that he stands in a welcoming way, slightly forwards, his hand gently placed in his pocket and his look slightly submissive.

The way he stands is thus not a rigid, straight, self-confident and assertive posture. Rather, he seems to be in harmony with the fluid, organic background and he seems neither in conflict with his surroundings nor rejecting the photographer who is taking his picture.

Despite Sander’s efforts to separate and delimit his appearance from the background, he has an air of carelessness, of “letting go” because he has a gentle, flexible stance as if he does not want to be noticed. Also he is one of those rare figures in the book who is not posing rigidly but who rather appears to be caught in movement and just stopped for a moment while he was walking. The way he holds his hat increases this sense of being stopped in the midst of some movement as he is holding it in a careless attitude, not really “holding” it but rather coexisting with it.

Moreover, the fact that his hand and the hat are slightly blurred increases the effect of being in harmony with the background as if he was going to disappear into the background. This seemingly humble man, on whose face we see the reflection of the sun, is perhaps welcoming his emptiness and lack, instead of resisting it, and he is staring at us from a point that also invites us to look back at our “self”. Like other photographs analysed in this thesis, this photograph witnesses and makes the viewer witness the unavoidable condition of all human existence while pushing us to re-

consider our “subjectivity” as well as the act of posing and its problematisation of (self-) recognition and/or (self-) identification.



**Fig. 29** *Gypsy*, 1928

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