Portraits in Photography, Film and Drawing: Hail the New Etruscan

> When you're trying to make a portrait of somebody you know well, you have to forget and forget until what you see astonishes you. Indeed, at the heart of any portrait which is alive, there is registered an absolute surprise surrounded by close intimacy. I'll certainly be misunderstood but I'll take a risk and say: to make a portrait is like fucking. (Berger 2013 160)

Such is the collaboration, the delicacy, and the desire to see the essence of, to get to the heart of, the subject in the portrait, in John Berger's delightful articulation of the art of portraiture.

Hail the New Etruscan

In 2018 Oona Grimes spent 8 months on a Bridget Riley Fellowship at the British School of Rome, revisiting the films of the Neorealists, watched as a child and mis-remembered ever since. She made a significant shift in her practice to explore film-making and performance for the first time.

Hail the New Etruscan has been instantiated thrice; The first was a show of drawings with stencilled colour and patchwork on black ground, at Danielle Arnaud. In the gallery notes, Grimes describes these drawings as comprising a storyboard – a film-maker's sketchbook concerning timeline, section breaks, thematic continuities (and discontinuities); and any other ideas that might attend the planning of a complex piece of film or video work that moves through temporal episodes to narrative effect. In her introduction, she writes,

> Daily I would walk to Piazza Rotunda and beyond, just to be in Rome, early before the crowds; to watch the road sweepers and shop keepers setting up, to see the light changing over the city. Gradually those walks, and those [Italian neorealist] films wove themselves into my dreams and my drawings. (Grimes 2019a)

The Piazza Rotunda – as dawn re-ignites the colour of the city, still sleepy for those awakening to work; those snorkling their first ''*spresso*' or kicking off with a '*grappa*;' 'just a thimbleful to cut the phlegm,' as Dashiell Hammett had it; and gasping at his first *mezzo toscano*, already damp and gritty, scratching at the lungs; and for those, also, emerging, made weary by traipsing the city; and whose rounds of the ancient streets have taken them through the night; their pallid faces reflecting the colours of the low-watt, discreet, glimmer of night-signage; now quenching parched throats with sobering bottles of *birra Moretti* – is a hub of Rome, the eternal city.

Oona Grimes, *Anglelo del Fango*, from the *ragazze e ragazzi romani* series 2018

Imagine the early morning cafés in or around the Rotunda – the bright florescent lights and the clatter of crockery on the marble or zinc topped bars – a jangle both repellent and convivial for the early bird and the nighthawk alike.

The *ragazze e ragazzi romani* series brings us back into the night with images of the neon-lit sex clubs (is the Waikiki still operating?); and watering holes of the Roman demimonde. *Angelo del Fango* illuminates a dripping, spent penis adjacent to a young dancing girl who looks heavenward whilst thinking *God-knows-what*; or is it a tartan rag being wrung out – the drip from its tip, merely dirty water; or is the tartan graffiti penis Grimes has stolen from some urchin's scribble on a Roman wall – perhaps an illustration for one of Giuseppe Belli's pungent, *sonetti romaneschi*?

The second instantiation was at Matts Gallery, where several short black and white films were shown in small, i-book format. In these films Grimes works to locate the gestures she has isolated and identified in the work of the Italian Neorealists.

Oona Grimes, *Oscar's Dance*, 2018

What impresses and puzzles is the gesture in the film; and our understanding of the film as a work of art – depending, in no small part, on our understanding of photography. The gesture and the image are linked and our apprehension of the one *in the other*, I shall argue, is vital to our understanding of the nature of portraiture in photography and film. In isolating the gesture, as in *mozzarella in carrozza*, she takes and visually quotes Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*.

Oona Grimes, *mozzarella in carrozza*, 2018

The last of the three instantiations of *Hail the New Etruscan* was at The Bower in London. Here the latest of the films, *the nest is served*, and the earlier, *u. e u.*, contain gestures identified in vignettes from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Uccellacci e Uccellini*, where the Franciscan monk preaches to hawks and sparrows, accompanied by a talking Marxist crow. Extending the gesture from the face to the body shape and to the movement of the hands gets us closer to the kind of meaning that silent films introduced. And so, the question arises: are films and photographs appropriate vehicles for portraiture?

Gesture in film is alluded to by Sartre in his autobiographical work, *Words*,

> I loved the cinema, even for its two-dimensional quality. I made primary colours of its white and black, comprising all the others and revealing themselves only to the initiate; I loved seeing the invisible. Above all, I loved the immutable dumbness of my heroes. But no: they were not mute because they knew how to make themselves understood. We communicated through music; it was the sound of what was going on inside them. (Sartre 2000 78)

Preliminary Notes on Portraiture

The history of portraiture, quite obviously, predates photography. We need to get at the substance of the matter. We need to take a look at a broad, inclusive range of pictures in order to gain access to the *very idea* of portraiture. A picture of a bowl of fruit is not a portrait; although it might make us reflect upon the natural process of life and the stillness, as well as the inevitability, of death. A picture of a head is not necessarily a portrait; although it might make us think about how light reflects off the most looked-at element of a human being. We address ourselves face-to-face. We compete against each other head-to-head. We confide in each other *tête-à-tête.* Even if we were to concede that a portrait must be a picture of, or include, the human head, it is still not *sufficient* to warrant such a picture the status of a portrait. A portrait *needs* more. What more?

It is not enough that a portrait should be recognizable as a particular person. It must, as Berger intones, bring that person to life. We should feel surprise and be disposed to exclaim, 'It's *her*!'

> After my grandmother died in 2005, we held a memorial service in her honour, and for the occasion my mother assembled a collage of photographs. Pointing to one particular image, my mother asked, "Isn't this one just really *her*?' I knew exactly what she meant, and yet it was a puzzle. Why was that one image so revealing and not the rest, which were also indisputably Grandma? In that image, the photographer had caught some essential truth of my grandmother's expression. (Freeland 2010 42)

Freeland captures that which Berger demands – 'absolute surprise' occasioned by 'close intimacy'. The artist and sitter conspire in the making of a portrait.

In the case Freeland offers, we should notice that the portrait is a photograph – one of many, but the only one of which captures 'Grandma'. The others do not; and they are therefore not to be deemed portraits; for they do not capture *her* expression. Hence, a portrait is expressive.

Roland Barthes, the celebrated French essayist, refers to a photograph of his mother as a child. It is taken in a conservatory. Barthes sees in the photograph the *person* of his mother,

> I studied the little girl and at last discovered my mother. The distinctness of her face, the naïve attitude of her hands, the place she had docilely taken without either showing or hiding herself, and finally her expression, which distinguished her, like Good from Evil, from the hysterical little girl, from the simpering doll who plays at being a grownup – all this constituted the figure of a sovereign *innocence* (if you will take this word according to its etymology, which is: 'I do no harm'), all this had transformed the photographic pose into that untenable paradox which she had nonetheless maintained all her life: the assertion of gentleness. In this little girl's image I saw the kindness which had formed her being immediately and forever, without her having inherited it from anyone; how could this kindness have proceeded from the imperfect parents who had loved her so badly – in short: from a family? Her kindness was specifically *out-of-play*, it belonged to no system, or at least it was located at the limits of morality (evangelical, for instance); I could not define it better than this feature (among others): that during the whole of our life together, she never made a single 'observation.' This extreme and particular circumstance , so abstract in relation to an image, was nonetheless present in the face revealed in the photograph I had just discovered. 'Not a just image, just an image,' Godard says. But my grief wanted a just image, an image which would be both justice and accuracy – *justesse*: just an image, but a just image. Such, for me, was the Winter Garden Photograph. (Barthes 2000 69-70)

Both Freeland and Barthes mention the expression of the *person-in-the-picture*, rather than the expression in the picture itself. Both are thinking about photographs as portraits. There seems to be a tension, however, between painting and photography when considering portraiture. (Tracey Emin once remarked of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, that it isn't the depicted person that screams, it's the whole painting.) Paintings can be expressive without depicting expressions. In Abstract Expressionism, for instance, there is no identifiable object, scene or event in the picture. It is the picture itself that is expressive. In painting, we tend to think that the genius of the portraitist is to get the essence of the person into the painting as a whole.

So the question now arises: how can a photograph be expressive? In answering this question, we need to look at depiction in general; and in so doing we shall have occasion to consider the processes of depiction and their contribution to the experiences we seek in looking at them. The claim that portraiture is a form of art stretches its tentacles into the discussion of intention and the retrieval of intention in our appreciation of works of art. In some sense, Barthes immunizes his account from any such scrutiny,

> (I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of a thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'; it

> cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your *stadium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound.) (ibid. 73)

An understanding of portraiture, *as an art*, has to explain what it is about a particular picture that gives us the person. We need to know what it is that the artist recognizes in the conspiracy between her and her subject.

On Pictures in General

The ancients believed in *mimesis* as the basic condition of art. Art, as it were, copies reality. Thus, we find Pliny the Elder recounting the story of a painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius to determine the greater artist. When Zeuxis unveiled his painting of grapes, it is said the birds came down to peck at them, so convincing was the illusion. However, when Parrhasius asked Zeuxis to draw aside the curtain to unveil his rival submission, Zeuxis discovered that the veil itself was Parrhasius' painting; upon which Zeuxis conceded, 'I have deceived the birds, but Parrhasius has deceived Zeuxis.' The clear implication of this account is that the aim of depiction is illusion; such that the spectator of the *ideal* visual representation is to be deceived. She is to mistake the picture for its content.

However, mimesis, as a candidate for the *aesthetic* explanation of depiction is, arguably, misconceived as illusion. For, pictures can assume the appearance of *content* whilst remaining *formally* distinct from it. That is to say: we can see the woman in the picture whilst, simultaneously, seeing the picture surface and recognising the surface as a flat patterned array of monotones or polychromes. We see this surface as the substrate of the depicted content – the depicted content attaches to, or infuses, the flat patterned surface. However, nothing here suggests that the surface should not show up in the aggregated experience.

At the heart of this thought is the view that we do not, when confronted with visual representations, experience them in the same way we would were we confronted by the real thing. The presence of the surface, in the typical experience of looking at pictures, bestows an experiential veil over the content. Through that veil we can safely attend to the shrouded content. The experience of the content, that is, remains dependent upon the perception of the surface. Our cognitive awareness is fixed upon that surface; and the content, to which it provides access, remains beyond the cognitive sphere.

The view is that we perceive the flat surface; and then we use this perception as the basis for entertaining a further *imaginative experience* – one that includes, but goes further than, the bare perceptual experience.

In Tai-Shan Schierenberg's *Landscape*, the scudding storm clouds with sun's evening light illuminating the further reaches of the Suffolk landscape, we see the speed and dexterity with which the artist has manipulated his wet medium in order to secure the emergent image. At least part of our delight, in looking at this painting, is our *seeing* that emergence – grasping that tension between surface and image. Far from undergoing an illusion, we experience the painting as a representation, with all that entails.

Tai-Shan Schierenberg, *Landscape*

To sum up: the first objection to the mimetic account of pictorial representation is that it relies upon the spectator undergoing an illusion. However, arguments are brought forward to show that no such illusion occurs. When we see the content of a picture, in general, we do not undergo an experience which is indiscriminable from the face-to-face seeing of the pictorial content. Indeed, our aesthetic appreciation of pictorial representations depends upon our awareness of the flat surface as a substrate of the experience as of pictorial content.

Ontology and the Hierarchy of Things

A second criticism of mimesis comes in Book X of *The Republic*. Plato has Socrates chastise painters for copying what are already copies of the 'forms'. God creates the form of *the* bed, which is the ideal bed. Indeed, it is the singular, 'idea-in-the-mind-of-god' bed. This ideal *form* is approximated in the world by individual beds, each of which is made by a carpenter. This collection of approximations can, in turn, have their individual appearances copied by a painter; and thus, paintings of beds are twice removed from the ideal bed which exists as a Platonic form. For Plato, *ultimate reality* is made up entirely of forms.

So the argument produces an ontological hierarchy: (1) the individual ideal bed (*real*); (2) the carpenters' copies of the ideal bed (*quasi-real*); and (3) the painters' copies of the carpenters' copies of the ideal bed (*quasi-quasi-real*).

This conception of depiction places an emphasis upon some sort of proximity to the object depicted. Plato's complaint against the painter's art is that the painter's copy is a copy of the carpenter's copy of the *real* bed; hence, twice removed from the ideal bed's ultimate reality. The painter's copy loses contact with reality in its displacement from the original ideal bed. Its attachment is only to the carpenter's copy upon which it depends.

Remembering his new, desirable, high-school art teacher, the essayist David Searcy writes of his first lesson with her. (His previous art teacher had been the elderly Mrs. Gilbert):

> It was the kindness of it I found most troubling. Oh my, this is very good. Yes, this is lovely. Oh but look … (Old Mrs. Gilbert, drawn to error as a vulture to corruption, would have made it easier, hardened my response to mere obedience…) Oh, but see if you look at the grass, it isn't really solid green like that. You know..? See, look. Look at the colors. Look at all the browns and yellows. See if you can draw that, won't you? See if you can try to draw it as it is. (Why should I draw it as it is? We already have it as it is. Why have it twice..?) (Searcy 2016 110)

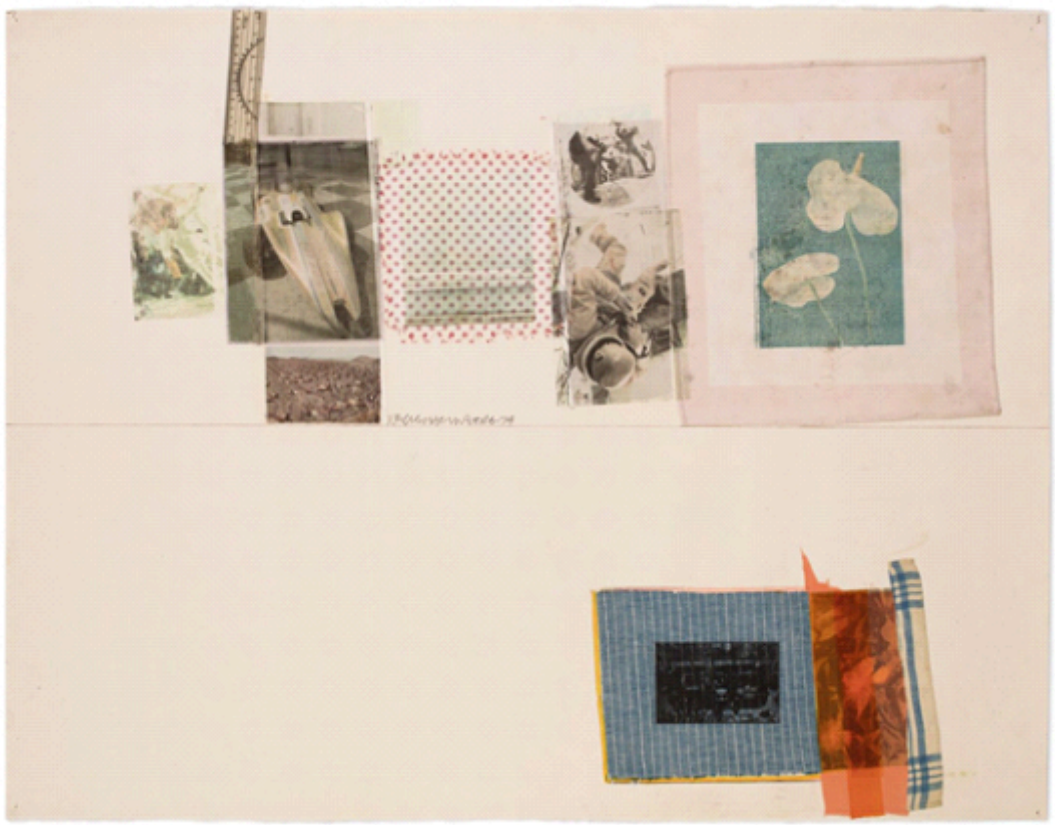
Arthur Danto picks up this thread of argument. Plato's criticism of painting (and hence of all depiction and representation) clearly attaches an inferior ontological status to any art that falls into this category. Danto sees this ontological relegation as the impetus behind the visual arts that rejected representation and sought, instead, to erase the distinction between art and life. Dada, Constructivism, *Arte Povera*, Conceptualism and Post-Conceptualism have all attempted to place emphasis on the object itself, rather than look through or beyond the work to some representational content. In each case the object itself might be the occasion of thought appropriate to the object; but that thought content is not *depicted* content.

Jane Bustin is a contemporary concrete artist, whose work beautifully exemplifies this line of thought. Concrete art rejects both illusionism and representation in its focus on the beauty of the object itself. She uses the delicate properties of the materials she assembles in order to arrest our interest at the surface.

Jane Bustin, *Dubarry*

Even where artists working within these parameters have chosen to use photography, they have 'collaged-in' the photographs – hence making the photograph, whilst being a photograph, a piece of colour or tone within the overall work. On the development of this 'collaging-in', Robert Rauschenberg convincingly works photographic material into the overall work so that it remains image *whilst* it serves to promote attention to the surface. He uses the processed and faded photographs as surface colour and texture in striking a balance between the flat plane and the ephemeral imagery of the depicted world. For Rauschenberg, nevertheless, the emphasis on the pictorial as an everyday phenomenon turns his attention (and our attention) to the art object itself. Indeed, it is Rauschenberg to whom Danto turns in making his case for an art that rejects representation and, in so doing, secures the artwork's superior ontological status. (Danto 1973, Winters 2018)

To sum up: the second (and related) objection to the mimetic account of pictorial representation is that depiction takes us away from the qualities of the art object itself, focusing our interest on its content, at the expense of the actual object, which, we are supposed to believe, is more real than the content to which it provides access.



Robert Rauschenberg, *Spreads*

Immanence, Idolatry and Benign Magic in Art

It is supposed the work of the portrait painter is not merely to provide a likeness or a copy of the subject. It is, arguably, to make a picture that brings that specific sitter to life. It is to bring about an image of the subject in which he or she is immanent.

Immanence is vitally important. For one thing, it has been thought that we can be in contact with the world beyond through the artifice of depiction. Much blood has been shed over depictions thought sacred by some, profane by others. Religious wars have been waged. The bible warns us,

> Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God... (Exodus 20: 4 – 5)

And later,

> Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: and ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. (Deuteronomy, 12: 2 – 3)

Such a view of idolatry presumes an enormous power with which the image is invested; perhaps only a shadow of which survives in the modern portrait. Nevertheless, the portrait, possibly more than any other extant form of depiction, has a pervasive magical air.

Icons in Christianity work by (supposedly) bringing in front of us the depicted saint, religious scene or event. We are not only to think of such portraits, scenes or events as pictures, in our ordinary secular sense, but as the immanence of those saints, scenes or events. We are, in some sense, *in contact* with the saint, the scene or the event. Hence, we find that holy shrines are to be found at places where apparitions of Our Lady are given credit as miracles by the See of Rome. What was experienced in these apparitions was not a representation of the Mother of God, but the Holy Virgin herself. Otherwise there is no miracle at which to wonder; nothing for our holy fathers to interpret for us.

Non-Depictive Contact

In the Spanish civil war, the hand of Saint Teresa of Avila was found in the suitcase of Colonel Villalba, commander of the Republicans after he deserted his post just prior to the fall of Málaga on 8th February 1937. (Koestler 1937) The republicans had looted the relic from the convent in Ronda. It was then transported to Madrid, where General Franco slept with it beside his bed until his death in 1975, whereupon it was returned to the convent in Ronda. (Thomas 2012)

Perhaps it seems odd that the republicans should want it. Odder still, however, that relics have about them such power as to be kept and venerated, first by nuns, and then by a head of state. In Hugh Thomas' *The Spanish Civil War*, he refers to the hand as the '*alleged* hand of St Teresa.' Why should anyone think the hand has power? Here, it is worth noting the difference between a museum and an art gallery; perhaps also, the difference between a museum and a place of worship; and, also, between a place of worship and an art gallery.

(The art gallery houses and exhibits works with the primary purpose of facilitating aesthetic experience – rather in the way that the concert hall is designed to accommodate the recital of music for the aesthetic appreciation of its gathered audience. The museum collects and exhibits items of historical interest that serve to illustrate and convey knowledge of importance to our human understanding of the world about us. Places of worship accommodate congregations of faithful supplicants and sometimes use works of art to illustrate narratives relevant to the religion there accommodated. It is a contestable claim that the *use* of art in such places is not primarily aesthetic; but that, rather, it serves an illustrative purpose.)

We noted above that in cases where the art object is non-representational, it can nevertheless have content in the form of attendant thought. In such cases we use the object to reflect upon some set of ideas, perhaps even to develop ideas surrounding a particular theme. Saint Teresa's hand (always assuming that it is *her* hand) is an example of our having an object upon which the devout can focus whilst contemplating holiness in the manner of St Teresa's life. Rather than being a picture of the deceased saint, it has a connection with her in that it is a part of her remains. Generally speaking, the power of a relic is distilled and attached to the presence of a part of the actual world that figures in the great narrative to which the faithful subscribe.

Art and the Everyday

Both the first and second objections to mimesis show us something about the nature of representation. Each is correct in claiming that the art object, *itself*, should play an important role in our appreciation of the work. However, we have arrived at two important points concerning representation: (i) it is not illusionistic; and (ii) it is not ontologically removed from the privileged existence of the ideal or real. Both objections to mimesis fail because they misrepresent the aims of depiction.

A third criticism of representational art aims at its perceived elitism. Art is both skilful in its manufacture and discriminatory in its appreciation. It belongs to leisure and the classes that can afford its objects and the time to become acculturated to them. To be sure, the criticism is more political than philosophical, but it points to a serious concern that artists and critics have with regard to democracy and beauty.

Surely, as well as being of political import, the idea that beauty could be, or even should be, the province of the wealthy and powerful, is of *aesthetic* concern. After all, beauty can be found anywhere; and everywhere. On this point it is interesting to think of the homes of artists given over to museum status upon their demise. We look around these houses and wonder at the beautiful, usually quite simple things, that artists have collected and that furnish their daily lives. The artist's quest for beauty spills over into her life and the ready-to-hand objects she recruits to its furtherance.

The high culture of Western Europe after the Great War is seen as symptomatic of this perceived elitism and artists in the wake of that war strived to rebell against the cultural norms associated with it. Here is Ezra Pound,

> ***From* Canto XIV**
>
> The slough of unamiable liars,
> bog of stupidities,
> malevolent stupidities, and stupidities,
> the soil living pus, full of vermin,
> dead maggots begetting live maggots,
> slum owners,
> usurers squeezing crab-lice, pandars to authority,
> pets-de-loup, sitting on piles of stone books,
> obscuring the text with philology,
> hiding them under their persons,
> the air without refuge of silence,
> the drift of lice, teething,
> and above it the mouthing of orators,
> the arse-belching of preachers,
> And Invidia,
> the corruption, fœtor, fungus,
> liquid animals, melted ossifications,
> slow rot, fœtid combustion,
> chewed cigar-butts, without dignity, without tragedy,
> …m Episcepus, waving a condom full of black-beetles,
> monopolists, obstructors of knowledge.
> obstructors of distribution. (Pound 1975 131)

Moreover, the rejection of traditional methods of making art, together with the two criticisms of representation, turned attention to everyday beauty. We are surrounded by beauty that belongs neither to art nor to nature. Such instances of beauty can be appreciated independently of traditional artistic norms. However, artists began to illuminate bits of the world by framing it, either literally or simply by mounting it in the spaces of art. And so everyday objects became recruited to the status of art. Art, after the Great War, was suddenly everywhere; and its objects were hard to distinguish from naked reality. This recruitment of the everyday object, or this framing of the everyday has its counterpart in film.

On Photography and Film

The nature of photography, as causally connected with its content, confirms that it is an index of that content. Like a footprint or a raincloud, a sound recording or a DNA sample, the photograph is forensic evidence that something has happened or something will happen. The footprint shows that someone has trodden *here*; the raincloud, that it will rain; the wet grass, that it has rained; a sound recording that someone sang exactly *this*; and the DNA sample that a particular individual was present at *this* scene of crime: *here*.

Indexicals in language are, for example, 'this' 'here,' 'now;' words which act like a pointing finger, marking out in the world where the index fixes us. In the first series of *Strictly Come Dancing* – the American version is *Dancing with the Stars* – minor celebrities with little or no experience of ballroom-dancing are paired with professionals. Part of the show takes in scenes of rehearsals. In the dance studios the professional dancers coach the celebrities and often resort to manipulating the body of the celebrity so that he or she gets to feel, proprioceptively, the way their body should shape itself during a particular routine. This shaping is accompanied by the professional saying something like, 'You should turn like *this* until your right shoulder is directly above your left ankle. *Like this*.' The first 'this' is an accompaniment to an action, the second, marks the point at which we move out of the strictures of language and into the world. '*Like this*!' gestures toward the action, as if leaping from word to world.

In the quotes from both Freeland and Barthes, Grandma and Mother are pointed to in the photographs each has singled out: 'It's *Her*!' This bears the indexicality of the pointing finger; but it selects *that* photograph because here each means something like, 'It's her; *and can only be her*.' The generality of adjectives and adjectival clauses is side-stepped by the immediacy of reference. 'It's her. Because, I see *her* in it.' These two photographs put Freeland and Barthes *in contact* with Grandma and Mother respectively.

The same structure is true of cinema:

> Presence, naturally, is defined in terms of time and space. "To be in the presence of someone" is to recognize him as existing contemporaneously with us and to note that he comes within the actual range of our senses – in the case of cinema of our sight and in radio of our hearing. Before the arrival of photography and later of cinema, the plastic arts (especially portraiture) were the only intermediaries between actual physical presence and absence. Their justification was their resemblance which stirs the imagination and helps the memory. But photography is something else again. In no sense is it the image of an object or person, more correctly it is its tracing. Its automatic genesis distinguishes it radically from the other techniques of reproduction. The photograph proceeds by means of the lens to the taking of a veritable luminous impression in light – to a mold… The cinema does something strangely paradoxical. It makes a molding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object. (Bazin 2005, 96)

We might wonder why Bazin feels the need to choose the photograph's indexicality whilst denying its image status. Surely, the character of the photograph combines both index and image; or else we would be at a loss as to how to explain the congruence of our experience of a photograph, on the one hand, and a photo-realist painting indiscernible from it, on the other. Nevertheless, he gives a powerful argument for the nature of the causal relationship between the means of photography and its 'moulding of the object'. Barthes, in his seminal work on photography, *Camera Lucida,* writes of the photograph,

> '*The photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both: the window and the landscape*.' (Barthes 2000)

In this he aligns himself to the view that the image and the substrate (the depicted object, scene or event, and the flat surface of the photographic paper) cannot be grasped in isolation. Each depends upon the other. The American philosopher, Kendal Walton, in arguing *for* the transparency of photographs, thinks that what we see when looking at a photograph *just is* the object, scene or event therein depicted. However, for Walton, transparency is compatible with our being fully perceptually aware that what we are looking at is a flat piece of patterned monochromatic paper. Moreover, he extends his analysis to cover not only colour photography but colour cinematic projections also. Arguing against the view that apprehending photographic content is somehow to undergo the illusion of being in the presence of the pictorial content he tells us,

> There is no such illusion. Only in the most exotic circumstances would one mistake a photograph for the objects photographed. The flatness of photographs, their frames, the walls on which they are hung are virtually always obvious and unmistakeable. Still photographs of moving objects are motionless. Many photographs are black-and-white. Even photographic motion picture in "living colour" are manifestly mere projections on a flat surface and easily distinguished from "reality." Photographs look like what they are: *photographs*. (Walton 2008)

The photograph combines the two forms of content thus far described. It has indexical connection to the object, scene or event which is its cause; and it presents the object, scene or event in recognizable visual form. It is a representation in that it is transparent and thus, in photography, we literally see that of which the photograph is a photograph. Herein lies its power.

> What is written about a person or an event is frankly an interpretation, as are handmade visual statements, like paintings and drawings. Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire. (Sontag 1979, 4)

In this she seems to acknowledge the argument we rehearsed earlier concerning the impetus to make non-representational art, so that the work of art is identified as a physical object beyond which we should not venture. Later she writes (partly in tension with this, since she concedes that photographs *are* images),

> [A] photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real, it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask. While a painting, even one that meets photographic standards of resemblance, is never more than the stating of an interpretation, a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects) – a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be. Between two fantasy alternatives, that Holbein the Younger had lived long enough to have painted Shakespeare or that a prototype of the camera had been invented early enough to have photographed him, most Bardolators would choose the photograph. This is not just because it would presumably show what Shakespeare really looked like, for even if the hypothetical photograph were faded, barely legible, a brownish shadow, we would probably still prefer it to another glorious Holbein. Having a photograph of Shakespeare would be like having a nail from the True Cross. (Sontag 1979, 154)

Taking our lead from the two objections to mimesis, the ontological pressure of making art *real*, put pressure on film-makers. Either they must recognize the first objection and, therefore, try to make non-representational cinema; or they must try to make their films *realist* in the sense that what they present is only minimally staged or managed.

On the distinction between the high art of theatre versus the less academic art of cinema, the young Sartre, eager to encourage his young charges to seek beauty outwith the academy, spoke to them at the Public Distribution of Awards day at Grande Lycée, Le Havre on 12 July 1931.

> At the movies the forward movement of the action is still inevitable, but it is continuous. There is no stopping point; the picture is all of a piece. Instead of the abstract and interrupted time of tragedy, one would say that here everyday duration, that humdrum of our lives, has suddenly thrown back its veils to stand forth in its inhuman necessity. At the same time, the motion picture is, of all the arts the closest to the real world: real men live in real landscapes. The *Montagne sacrée* is a real mountain, and the sea in *Finis Terrae* is real sea. Everything seems natural except that march toward the end which cannot be stopped. (Sartre 2018 108)

Italian Neorealists use the moving image to achieve gesture. They accommodate Danto's ontological criticism of representation by leaning heavily on both the transparency thesis (as that has latterly been developed by Walton). The Neorealists use *real* content provided by urban settings and the use of non-actors for crowd scenes and even quite major parts within the film. The city you see in *Roma Citta Aperta*, is Rome. The urchins, pimps and whores in Neorealist films are Roman urchins, pimps and whores – not professional actors. Improvisation is encouraged and the overall effect is that of documentary newsreel.

This emphasis on the real, exploiting the indexicality of film, serves to maximise the authenticity of the work; and to reduce the greatest part of acting to spontaneity. The whores, pimps and urchins involved provide authentic gestures in these films. What is shown on screen is, to a large extent, the unfolding of people's lives in the political upheaval of post-war Italy.

In a section of an essay, subtitled, '*The element of cinema is gesture and not image*,' film theorist, Giorgio Agamben, writes,

> Even the *Mona Lisa*, even *Las Meninas* could be seen not as immovable and eternal forms, but as fragments of a gesture or as stills of a lost film wherein only they would regain their true meaning. And that is so because a certain kind of *litigatio*, a paralyzing power whose spell we need to break, is continuously at work in every image; it is as if a silent invocation calling for the liberation of the image into gesture arose from the entire history of art. This is what in ancient Greece was expressed by the legends in which statues break the ties holding them and begin to move…
>
> Cinema leads images back to a homeland of gesture (Agamben 2018)

It is obvious that moving pictures were developed from photography. Less obviously, we have now arrived at the view that photography is to be seen as an abstraction from the moving picture; that 'stills' should be understood in terms of 'movies'. This is the clear Implication of Agamben's argument. It is confirmed by the photographic studies of movement accomplished by Eadweard Muybridge. In those investigations it is clear that the individual photographs are mere abstractions from our perceptual grasp of bodies in motion.

'It's *her*!' we might now conclude, involves seeing a picture surface, seeing further into that picture surface a person we recognize; and in that recognition (yet further) seeing a characteristic gesture; or seeing the face in the picture as having a certain characteristic *disposition*.

Oona Grimes' Drawings

The third instantiation of *Hail the New Etruscan* was at the Bower a new feminist gallery space and publication studio housed in a converted public convenience in Brunswick Park, Peckham.

> In the film, 'The Nest is Served', filmed on site, Grimes has extracted, reinterpreted and performed a vignette from Pasolini's 'Uccellacci e Uccellini' (The Hawks and the Sparrows) 1966. The scene focusses on a poverty stricken family and their ruthless landlord, where the woman attempts to feed her family by cooking a nest…
>
> The exhibition includes coloured pencil drawings & clay heads, representing the marginalised, anonymous - but not forgotten - cast of extras; depicting sad, crying and disheveled, bird-like children. (Grimes 2019b)

Grimes' storyboard drawings are not so much portraits of persons as efforts to isolate and identify gestures by which we might isolate and identify particular persons. The drawings work as if the gesture has been peeled-off to be analysed and recognized for the thing it is in itself. They act as storyboards in that they instruct the sitter and the artist to see this in their collaborative endeavour; and they instruct us how to look and what to look for in the film under view.

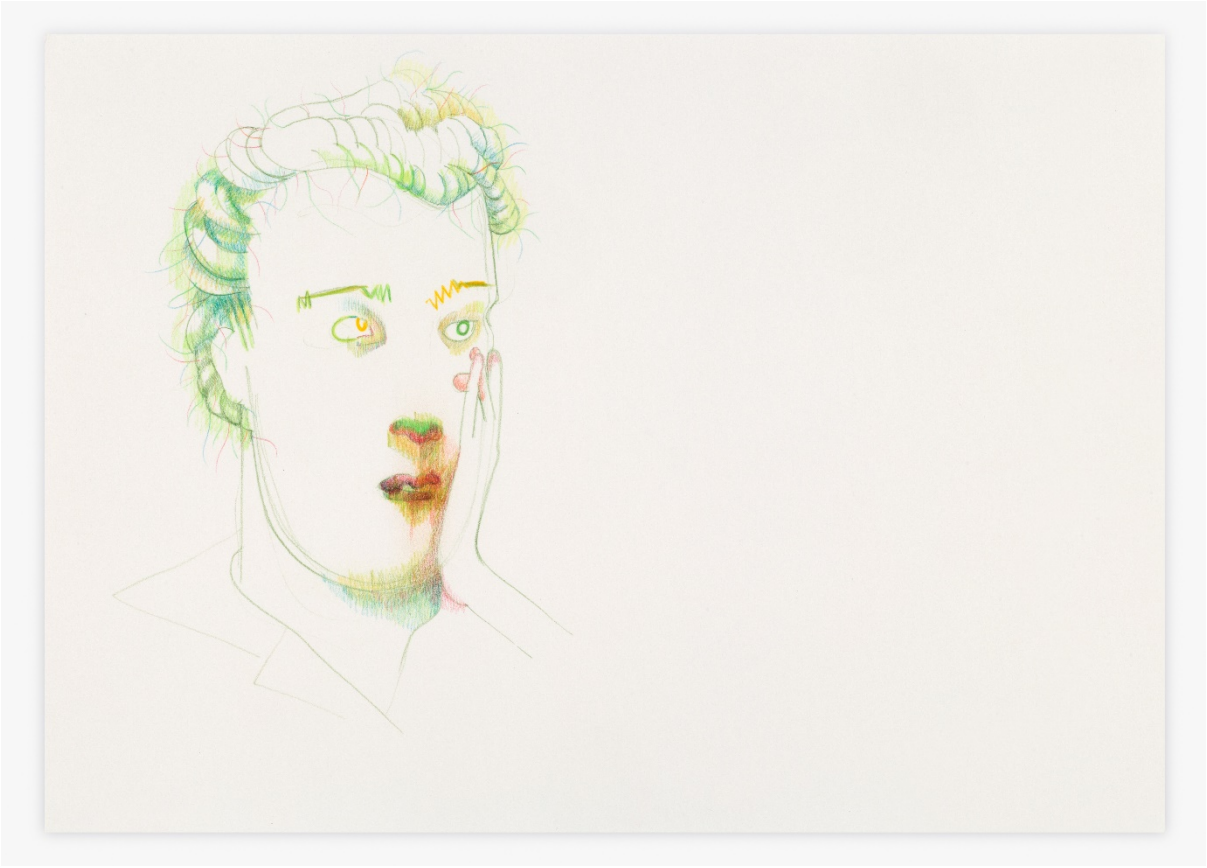
All this is to say that the pictures at the Bower are highly specialized abstractions of gesture that we use to interpret the artistic expression of gesture in the films. If gesture arises from, and in so doing augments, the image, then gesture in film and photography is the site at which portraiture emerges from depiction. It is through gesture that we come to grasp (come into contact with) the person in the picture.

Grimes' drawings at The Bower offer us gestures in abstraction. The snotty-nosed urchins come alive in both the drawings and her film, 'The Nest is Served.' The complex relationship between drawing and film accords authority to the storyboard, so that its individual pictures have the status of works of art. (Storyboards, whilst interesting in themselves, are really only part of the process of conceiving the film and they are thus auxiliary to it.)

In Alex Danchev's worthy biography of Georges Braque, concerning the birth of Cubism, we are told of Louis Vauxcelles recounting the occasion upon which Matisse said to him,

> 'Braque has just sent in a painting made of little cubes'… In order for him to make himself better understood (for I was dumfounded…), [Matisse] took a piece of paper and in three seconds he drew two ascending and converging lines between which the little cubes were set, depicting an Estaque of Georges Braque, who, incidentally, withdrew it from the Grand Palais on the eve of the opening. The painting in question was almost certainly *Houses at L'Estaque* (1908). (Danchev 2012 122)

Whilst it is correct to describe Matisse's three-second drawing as art-historically interesting, it is incorrect to grant it the status of art. It was, in effect, a diagram. Matisse's little drawing stands to Braque's painting as a story board stands to the film developed from it. Curiously, Grimes' drawings *inform* the films she makes; and they are reciprocally informed by those films. *Unlike* the storyboard's standard auxiliary role in the making of a film, Grimes' drawings are incorporated into the whole body of work. Her storyboard drawings, that is, belongs to the work as a whole; and they are, therefore, works of art investigating portraiture. The whole body of work, *Hail the New Etruscan* – comprising drawings, films and clay heads – with its direct relationship to the Italian Neorealist films from which it draws, is itself a complex interdependent set of works that helps us to think about how portraiture can be realized in film and photography; and why some photographs are portraits whilst others are not.



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