

BEING AND CONSTRUCTEDNESS:
A PERSONAL JOURNEY IN IDENTITY FORMATION

By

Greg Klassen

B.Sc., University of Guelph, 1984

M.Sc., University of Guelph, 1985

Ph.D., University of Toronto, 1992

Dipl.Adv.Stud.(Visual Arts), New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, 2009

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between surface and depth in photography and their influence on identity formation from the perspective of an Asperger's personality. I saw in my prior work a sense of duality, a conceptual in-between space and the need to construct photographs as a metaphor for my confused sense of self. The present work is an exploration of how my perspective on identity expresses itself in my photographic work, which I have contextualized in relation to the apparent dialectic of internal/individual (being) versus external/social (constructedness). I have further contextualized my work relative to four artists I have identified as representing the use of portrait photography as a means of exploring what lies beneath the surface: Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne's direct, literal approach, Florence Henri's connection between literal and metaphorical, Nancy Burson's consideration of the relationship between "believing" and "seeing", and Elisabeth King's exploration of the relationship between mind and body through "attention's loop". My projects, "emotional me", "mirror/mask", "collaborative self-portrait", and "the emotions project" individually and collectively play on key elements of each of these four approaches to identity. There is a way to balance between internal needs and external pressures when forming a sense of self. For me that balance is found not in words but in a non-linguistic, non-linear form of photographic narrative. I have come to believe that photography – which I see as a medium that both transmits and

reflects, that retains some of the pre-modern assumption of transparency – is the medium that will allow me to explore the incomprehensible.

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1. Introduction

I see myself in a dark room facing a two-way mirror. My camera is set up to shoot whatever I see through the glass. In the room is a single candle providing faint illumination and casting a reflection on the glass. The camera catches simultaneously both the external image and the inner reflection.

I wrote this several years ago as part of the artist statement for my first photographic project titled “In-Between”, a dialogic engagement with my youngest daughter, Morgan. Although I had some intuitive grasp that my work was increasingly circling around identity issues, I was still unaware of the profound implications and inner turmoil inherent in the visual work.

I have trained and worked as a scientist, an evolutionary biologist, all of my adult life. As such I have had the opportunity to study, explore and experiment with many of the key scientific principles we apply to life processes on this planet, including certain aspects of the human condition. But the science I had made my own over the decades could only partially help me address the increasingly pressing questions I was having about the formation of identity, the very personal questions of how I defined myself, to myself and in a larger context. It was my hope that through research with photography, with art making, through dialogue with others: local artists, and works of photographers, philosophers and theorists, I could better imagine and understand the possibilities of identity construction. I felt I was missing something but was unable to intuit what that might be. Unfamiliar and

uncomfortable with an intuitive voicing of these pressing questions I continue to resort to externalizing and objectivizing the very process of exploring the self.

Examples from two recent bodies of work, “In-Between” and “Who?”, hint at an alternate path that a part of me has already stepped onto. This path has circumvented the cognitive, finding a more direct, visual expression in my arts practice in a form of non-linguistic, or pre-linguistic conception.



Figure 1: Greg Klassen, *In-between No. 55*, 2009. Digital print.

The work “In-Between” (Fig. 1) represents my first explicit attempt to make people a core aspect of my photographic work. This series, made in collaboration with my daughter, specifically addressed conversations about our differing

impressions about the spaces we were exploring – shared spaces, differing perceptions. What emerged was the sense of an in-between space, a neutral zone where it was safe to talk, a non-dialectical space that transcends definition. That conception of the in-between space, as both a physical and imagined space, has since become a crucial element in my visual repertoire. The subsequent work “Who?” (Fig. 2) represents an explicit recognition of the crucial



Figure 2: Greg Klassen, *Fred H.*, from series "Who?", 2010, digital print.

role that questions of identity would play in my work. This work not only built on my recognition that exploring the in-between was somehow critically linked to my conception of identity but that the notion of construction – both conceptual and material – would be equally important. For reasons that I could not yet articulate, even to myself, I found in that in-between space a way of visualizing the key elements of a photograph that I could then capture separately with the camera and reconstitute on the computer. Thus a notion of constructedness became another crucial element.

What I did not understand yet, on a conscious level was *why* these elements, the sense of duality, the in-between space, and the notion of constructedness, were so important. An answer would come from a most unexpected quarter: I was recently diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome.

Those of us on the autism spectrum appear to have well understood clinical issues with identity formation. This is a direct consequence of our unique neurological makeup associated in large part with the functioning of what have been termed "mirror neurons" situated in the amygdala region of the brain (Iacobini 1-5). This tends to lead to a sense of identity diffusion where a breakdown in empathic ability makes understanding and interacting with the external, *social* environment exceedingly difficult and confusing (Attwood 11-34). Imagine that you are taking in the external world as a continuous, real-time movie. The images, for the most part, come through crisp and clear but the dialogue, the subtle intonations of speech, the body language, are all acted out in a foreign language and you have neither guide nor dictionary. Postmodernists often talk about – explore, even celebrate - the sense of cultural dislocation experienced by those who have been ripped from their native culture and inserted into new and foreign cultures. Having a neurological makeup like Asperger's Syndrome means that *there is no native culture*, all cultures are foreign, any social condition is, *a priori*, one of dislocation. What the postmodernist fetishizes I must live.

It became quickly apparent when I started delving into the voluminous and diverse literature on "identity" that there is a sharp divide among those who see the formation of identity as primarily a social process, externally driven (Lash and

Friedman 1-30; Haverty Rugg 1-28; Doy 11-34) and those who see an increasing role for internal processes (Keenan xv-xxiii; Damasio 3-30; Ramachandran 3-23; Evans 1-30). Most telling however has been the realization that the notion of disability, of alternate ability, of some form of social dysfunction resides in the in-between space that has opened up as the opposition(s) among these perceptions on identity and its formation polarize (Iacobini 92; Glass 157-162; Attwood 112-127).

As someone whose connection to a socially constructed sense of reality is complex at best I have always found it problematic to rely on external means and measures of identity construction. This has often put me at odds with my societal context – an unresolved dialectic between inner/personal (depth) and outer/social (surface) perceptions of reality. It has also resulted in a well-developed curiosity and skepticism regarding the assumptions applied to external measures of identity while at the same time suffering from the feeling that no other recourse exists.

My recent photographic work has, however, pointed me to the realization that an alternate form of intuition is available, a visual intuition that sidesteps the cognitive linguistics I have come to depend on. Fellow Asperger's personality and author Temple Grandin pointed out just how important this alternate pathway is to those of us not privy to the "normal" intuitive social connections taken for granted by the majority of humanity: "*I think in pictures*. Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written words into full-color movies, complete with sound, which run like a VCR tape in my head. When somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures" (3 emphasis added).

At the beginning of the introduction I referred to seeing myself in a dark room behind a two-way mirror while my camera catches simultaneously both the external image and the inner reflection. This represents a first glimpse of a complex relationship I have developed with the camera. I call myself a photographer but I have come to the realization that the camera – as the photographer’s tool *sine qua non* – is only one component of a complex set of synergistically interacting tools and processes. To me the camera itself – not just the images it makes as an extension of my visualization process – is a form of Duchennian mask, both objectifying and embodying the scientist’s conception of the “observer effect”. At the same time I see the camera as a Henriesque mirror. But, ultimately, the camera is to me one (non-postmodernist) fragment in the construction of the artistic process I have come to refer to as photography. That process involves – in addition to the camera as imaging tool – the computer as a means of (re)constructing images as imagined, and, most importantly the mind as the source of the imagined. Only together as an embodied – but not singular – whole do each of these fragments come together as “photography” in my conception.

The main elements I hope to explore in this thesis concern the relationships between surface and depth – and what they reveal about conceptions of identity, and between fragmentation and construction – and what they reveal about identity formation. To accomplish this I briefly examine four bodies of work roughly matching specific epistemological stages associated with cultural perspectives on identity formation and their expression in photographic practices as outlined by the

sociologist Douglas Kellner (141-177) and photography curator Robert A. Sobieszek (16-37).

2. Structure

I envision an exploration of the self and its relationship to depth and surface in four sections. Although, due to limitations of the medium – the inherent linearity of text-based narrative – I will present these sections in a linear, sequential order, I do not view these sections as a linear sequence of progressive replacement, and neither should the reader. Instead, as discussed by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, I view these stages as temporally and spatially coexisting: “Instead of the analogy of a succession of political regimes or scientific theories, each triumphing on the ruins of its predecessor, imagine new stars winking into existence, not replacing the old ones but changing the geography of the heavens” (18).

I will be exploring four specific aspects of the “self” in two chapters in the explicit context of theory of mind. According to the clinical psychologist Tony Attwood: “The psychological term Theory of Mind (ToM) means the ability to recognize and understand thoughts, beliefs, desires and intentions of other people in order to make sense of their behaviour and predict what they are going to do next” (112). This concept is closely linked with those of “mind reading” (Baron-Cohen 5-9), of empathy and mirror neurons. Thus, a person deficient or lacking in theory of mind – a situation symptomatic of the autism spectrum – is seen as “mind blind” (Baron-Cohen 5-9), lacking in empathy (Attwood 114) or a “broken mirror” (Iacobini 157).

For each aspect I present a personal narrative, a representative photographer and an example of my own photography. At each stage the combination of these elements elucidates one aspect of the self and collectively they build up to a more comprehensive understanding of self-formation from an Asperger's perspective. Photographically, thus, I intend to focus on the self-portrait, specifically – with one exception, see below - a simple head-shot. By focusing on a single face – my face – I hope to reduce the many interpretive complexities associated with the photographic genre of portraiture. This approach is also more open to the exploration of ToM issues in identity formation. In keeping with the divergence of an Asperger's perspective on identity relative to the “norm” composition and lighting of head-shots deliberately do not conform to preconceptions of “professional” portrait photography practice. All portraits were made with a Nikon D7000 with ISO set at as low, and aperture number at as high as lighting allowed. In all cases a 60mm fixed focus lens was used for consistency. All exposures were made on a tripod with a cordless remote control. The one exception to this was “collaborative self portrait” which was completed entirely on the computer.

The first chapter, “being”, addresses some basic questions related to the very existence of identity. I am here engaging the works of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Our existence is framed by space and time, how then can we hope to extract a sense of identity when the very existence of such external realities is put into question? What I am is

different. To a neuroscientist my sense of self is strongly affected by factors outside of the realm of culture, I am a “broken mirror” (Iacobini 157).

In section 1 of chapter one, I explore the very notion of “self” by examining the question of a basic connection between depth – the inner reality of sensation – and surface – the outer reality of projection. ToM is postulated to affect the very ability to recognize faces and their expressions. Why is that important? What is it about my sense of identity formation that is impaired if/when the very connection between the expressed emotion on the surface – of a face – and the felt emotion at depth is in question?

I reference the work of the 19th century physician/photographer Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne, who spent much of his career examining and photographing the physical connection between the actions of facial musculature and the expressions of emotional states in patients at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. I then discuss a series of “self”-portraits based on a subset of emotional expressions recognized today as universal or basic to all humans regardless of culture as suggested by Paul Ekman, Richard Davidson and Wallace V. Friesen (342). These six universal facial expressions of emotion include fear, anger, sadness, surprise, disgust and joy. I present a series of images titled “emotional me”. This consists of six self-portrait-style head-shots exploring facial expressions of the six universal emotion. I chose a neutral white background – representing the *presence* of all colours in the spectrum – to focus attention on the face but also as a reminder that while context can be blocked out, it can never be entirely removed. These images explore the relationship between depth and surface by visually

playing on the relationship between similarity and difference. In each image the pose is as close to identical as possible, the hair is the same, let down in a visual play on the notion of exposing one's self. Similarly I am topless, another allusion to emotional exposure. I retained my wedding ring as a symbol of emotional connection. The one thing that was allowed to change was the facial expression. At first I tried emulating the facial expressions by having Ekman's representative photographs facing me next to the camera, when that didn't work I added a mirror so I could see myself making the expressions. In the end I had to abandon all external references and just make myself feel the emotion. Only then could I make the photographs.

In section 2 of chapter one, I explore the self in the context of reflection and self-reflexivity. ToM is understood to affect self-awareness. What is it about the "broken mirror" that impairs self-awareness? How does the dialectic between the literal and the metaphorical play into this discussion?

I reference the work of the American-born artist/photographer Florence Henri, with particular focus on her use of the mirror as metaphor for self-reflection. I then present a series of self-portraits (re)exploring the connection between depth and surface through a metaphorical play with mirrors, masks and the role of emotion in identity formation. These portraits are a deliberate move away from the tight cropping head-shot while still focusing on the six universal emotions. Unlike the previous series context is the crucial component of these images. How *do* we contextualize emotions?

The series “mirror/mask” explores this question from an internal perspective – probing depth. Each image is made up of several components, fragments of the inner process of contextualizing. These components – shot as separate elements within a tightly controlled “scene” – include the subject (whose face is never seen), the observer (who stands with camera and wearing a blank mask inside a mirror), and various representations of the six universal emotions. The six images in this series play out a putative dialectic between subjective and objective, body and mind, sense and perception – between the phenomenological and the analytical – by placing subject and observer in the same frame. In a visual mimicry of the Asperger’s confusion when faced with the need for empathy – never quite sure of the correct response in social situations - the face of the subject is always hidden, never engaging the audience. Unable to connect internal emotional states with external feedback he is momentarily lost. The figure in the mirror becomes the outward projection – transmission - of the reflexive aspect of the self, and an inward *reflection*, face blank, refusing to provide the sought-for clues.

The second chapter, “constructedness”, relates to the modern assumption that identity can no longer be seen as “given”, that in some ways – to some individuals, in every way – the “self” is fictional and/or constructed as needed through external, social cues (Ward 152-216). The first chapter addressed intuitive aspects of being, a realm foreign to an Asperger’s personality as expressed in the metaphor of the broken mirror. In this chapter I explore ways to repair the broken mirror. I specifically explore implications of the term “construction” as an explicitly conscious process involving the interplay between cognition and embodiment and

the role that might play in (re)connecting between individual and social conceptions of self.

In section 1 of chapter two, I explore the self in the context of the post-modernist conception of the fragments of identity (Ward 155). ToM relates directly to how and why – and to what extent - we can “mind-read” each other. What is involved in reading one another? What can I learn from the way others “read” and how does that involve the process of identity construction?

I reference the work of the American photographer Nancy Burson, who is particularly interested in exploring the relationship between “seeing” and “believing” in order to deconstruct personal, and social preconceptions about identity and its formation in a time when our very societal foundations are in flux. I then present a series of “collaborative” self-portraits that specifically explore the impact of the – external - perspective of others on the projection of individual identity. The dialectic between difference and commonality is examined and used to shed new light on the notion of constructedness. Here I return to the tight cropping of the head-shot but this time in the absence of all emotional expression. Consistent with the first series, “emotional me”, these images lack any visualization of external context. They however, critically examine that visual appearance of “no context” in a self-reflexive manner.

I start by exploring the visualization of the assumption that the “I” is indeed constructed by external agencies, that the perception of others defines identity. To explore this relationship to others’ perception of me, I have made use of the computer program Faces v. 4.0 one of many such programs used by law

enforcement agencies world-wide to reconstruct the likeness of suspected criminals and missing persons. Such programs are based on the principle that every face is made up of a finite combination of facial features – fragments of faces. These fragments – shape of eyes, nose, mouth etc. – each have a number of variants assembled through decades of hands-on experience. Reconstructing a face thus involves identifying the relevant expression for each fragment and reassembling – constructing – the face based on the combination of fragments that best meet the subject’s recollection. Such a program, though it may seem odd, confusing or counterintuitive to others’ perceptions of how they *see* an individual, is a reasonably close approximation of the process I would go through in trying to learn a person’s face. Thus, the process of having others use the program to reconstruct my likeness has proven a useful tool in educating about this aspect of an Asperger’s perspective.

For this project I have asked eighteen individuals to construct my likeness, to the best of their ability, with the aid of the Faces v.4 program. I then presented the results in two ways. I first took the constructions and blended them – averaged all the images – into a single still image much as Francis Galton did so many years ago (Fig. 8). I then took each construction and connected them into a continuous video loop where each construction seamlessly morphs into the next (Fig. 9).

In section 2 of chapter two I explore the self as construction. ToM implicates both the “reader” and the subject of the reading in the process of mind reading. Consequently, identity formation should involve both internal and external processes interactively. I intend to make use of the metaphor of the hermeneutic

spiral (“iterative process” to the scientist) to demonstrate that identity construction need not be seen as a purely external process nor as purely artifact.

I reference the work of the American sculptor and arts teacher Elizabeth King, whose conception of “attention’s loop” (7), of the iterative process of continued self-examination – always from a slightly different angle – results in a new, synthetic perspective on the construction of identity that melds both internal and external. I will then present a series of self-portraits that combine notions of the connection between surface and depth – internal and external - with self-reflexivity, and the recognition that accepting the self to be constituted of “fragments” need not be seen as a – postmodernist - source of identity-dissolution. Quite the contrary, by exploring the synergistic properties of identity fragments from the perspective of someone whose intuitive processes are inherently impaired, to the extent that it embodies the literal of lived autism, I hope to explore a different and more positive perception on identity formation than is possible through the eyes of postmodern ideology as depicted by the likes of Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jean Baudrillard. Here I make use again of tight cropping, the six universal emotions and the *apparent* lack of external context. This time, the ‘masks of emotion’ are presented literally through the interpretations of seven fellow New Brunswick artists (in alphabetical order: Brigitte Clavette, George Fry, Bronwyn Gallagher, Andrew Giffin, Fred Harrison, Suzanne Hill, and Morgan Klassen) and the self-reflexive aspect takes on a new level of complexity by placing the image sequences behind two-way mirrors.

“The emotions project” was designed as a collaborative project that would re-imagine the role of mirror and mask as neither purely opaque nor transparent, the relationship between internal and external “manipulation” of emotional states as the focus of interplay between the pre-modern notion of essentialist “being” and the post-modern notion of relativist “constructedness”; or, on a more personal level, between an Asperger personality’s inner confusion about identity formation as explored in “mirror/mask” and difficulties with external pressures of identity imposition as explored in “collaborative self portrait”.

For this purpose I made a total of 49 “neutral” unadorned masks of my face in a relaxed pose. These masks, although possibly seen as “blank”, are not *tabula rasa*. They carry baggage, a trace of the “I”. Seven masks each were presented to each of the seven fellow artists with the following instructions: Each was to interpret the six basic facial expressions of emotions according to their own whims using standard materials and techniques as used elsewhere in their arts practice – the seventh mask is a tribute to the scientist in me, a neutral expression, the absence of emotion. These masks were then rearranged into seven groups according to each of the emotions. I made a series of self-portraits wearing each mask in turn. Each series of self-portraits – seven versions of anger, of joy, etc. – was then turned into a digital slide show with each slide separated by a blank slide. The slide shows were installed in seven digital photo frames and projected as continuous loops behind two-way mirrors. The audience sees alternately, one interpretation of an emotion and then their own face *reacting*, then another version of the emotion and so on as perception and projection spiral into each other like colliding galaxies. The process – the

looping slideshow behind the two-way mirror interacting with the audience – embodies the expression of an Asperger’s perception of interpersonal interaction – where connection is sought yet never quite attained.

3. Embodiment

3.1. Being

The first chapter, Being, addresses some basic questions related to the very existence of identity. Our existence is framed by space and time, how then can we hope to extract a sense of identity when the very existence of such external realities is put into question by the progressive post-modern abstraction and externalization of identity as exemplified in the thinking of Baudrillard, which I will elaborate on later.

3.1.1. “touch your feelings”

About a decade ago I started seeing a psychologist. Not long into our sessions she told me that it was important for me to “get in touch with my feelings.” I felt this to be a most remarkable statement, rather incongruous on the face of it. Clearly feelings were something intangible, non-material, how could I be expected to touch them? It was not until sometime later that I came to realize the implication of not just her suggestion but my reaction.

3.1.1.1. Duchenne de Boulogne

Pre-modern: where the face (surface) is considered a window on the immutable (depth).



Figure 3: Duchenne de Boulogne, *Terror Mixed With Pain*, 1875? In public domain.

According to Sobieszek the work of Duchenne (Fig. 3) is typical of 19th century – pre-modern – portraiture in that it represents the assumption of the time that the photographic surface can be seen as transparent, a conduit to what lies below (32-79). And what lies below – in relation to portraiture of the time - is typically seen as the core identity of a person. It is typically assumed that this core identity is *unitary*– to Duchenne quite literally God-given. It is also typically assumed that this identity represents an aspect of the person that is ontologically distinct from the body. Call it mind, soul, whatever, there is a clear – Cartesian –

separation of mind and body. Thus, the body – and by extension the body (surface) of a photograph – is considered connected to but distinct from the deeper subject matter.

With the help of the photographer A. Tournachon (also known as Nadar the younger), Duchenne produced a remarkable series of photographs designed to map the relationship between specific facial muscles and underlying emotional states. He accomplished this by enervating facial muscles with electrodes and a home-made volta-faradic apparatus. This body of work contributed to evolutionary biology as attested to by the inclusion of several plates in Charles Darwin's work on the expressions of emotions in man and animal. Through medical teacher and clinician Jean-Martin Charcot, a student of Duchenne's, Duchenne's work directly influenced Sigmund Freud (Sobieszek 44-45) and thus the advancement of psychiatry to this very day (Didi-Huberman 3-12).

What captivated me about this work is two-fold. First I was gripped by the intensity of the basic emotion(s) expressed in the image(s). But I was later taken by what I considered an important paradox. The primary subject of these experiments was apparently unable to express his emotional state due to a facial anesthetic condition. I started to perceive the images in the series as lies at some level. Apparently I was not alone in this response as Andrew Cuthbertson saw a general trend toward a critique of Duchenne's authenticity in subsequent generations (225-231).

Like many of his contemporaries, Duchenne considered the surface he was manipulating – of the subject's face as well as the photographic image – a conduit to

underlying emotional state(s). But since body and mind were considered distinct, manipulating the body was not considered fakery. In Duchenne's mind the face was a tool to be used to express emotions, a flexible complex mask. Manipulating the mask – which both reveals and hides – by external means could be argued to be no more, or less, fakery than manipulating it by internal means. Thus, staging an emotional expression was recognized by Duchenne and many of his contemporaries as manipulation but the manipulation was not viewed as deceit. Quite the contrary, the combination of a belief in a unitary “self” and a sense of separation between that inner “self” and the outer “other” rendered the face – as *interface* – a conduit that could, in principle, be “scientifically” viewed – and manipulated; a view consistent with the contemporaneous “James-Lange” theory of emotions which posited, among other things, that the relationship between mind and body is not just one way (Evans 105). Duchenne's views are also consistent with the pre-objectivist notion that one's work should be “true-to-nature” (Daston and Galison 18) where nature, in this case, refers to underlying emotional states assumed to be shared by all humans, an assumption that Darwin and later Ekman would turn into scientific theory.

This view of the face and its ability to engage in a two-way dialogue between inner and outer realities would however soon come under critical scrutiny, particularly in the humanities and the arts (Sobieszek 32-79). But one important aspect of this work, the fact that these expressions have *to this day* the power to move us and to evoke emotional responses appropriate to the emotion being (re)presented, continues to intrigue. These photographs would not have this power if there was no substance to the claim that surface and depth are somehow

connected. In fact, new evidence from evolutionary studies (Ekman, Davidson and Friesen 342), psychology (ten Brinke, Porter and Baker, in press), and the neurosciences (Damasio 20-28) provides empirical support for the conclusion that surface and depth are connected, albeit in more complex – and mutable – ways than assumed by Duchenne.

3.1.1.2. “emotional me”



Figure 4: Greg Klassen, *Fear, Disgust, Surprise, Sadness, Joy, Anger* from the series “emotional me”, 2011. Digital prints.

The work of Duchenne has raised many criticisms by contemporary critics and artists alike – especially from the perspective of post-modernist discourse (Sobieszek 32-79; Didi-Huberman 29-66). The main thrust of these criticisms relates to two issues of ethics: Is the approach chosen by Duchenne an act of

violence against his subject(s)? Is there a basis for any form of truth claim – can the emotions depicted in his photographs be seen as in any way “real” – if the facial expressions of these emotions are not only not felt by the subject in question but are imposed on the subject by an external agency, namely Duchenne himself, who is thus open to criticisms of personal, aesthetic bias?

“Emotional me” (Fig. 4) is a series of photographs made specifically to forefront these two questions and their relationship to questions of identity formation. I focused the making of these self-portraits on the six “universal emotions” (Ekman and Friesen 34-128) in order to simplify what can be a complex and confounding set of issues: the apparent conflict between universalist and relativist explanations for the origins of emotions and their expressions and their relationship to identity formation (Evans 1-30).

Where Duchenne chose others as his subjects – thus creating a distance between subject and observer – I chose to combine subject and observer in the same person. There can be no question that under these conditions subject and observer have – and understand – the same set of goals. If there is any bias – an inevitability – it is shared and thus diminished from an ethical perspective. There can also be no question of disjunction between emotion felt and emotion expressed. Unlike Duchenne’s subject, mine attests to the ‘reality’ of the images: that is these photographs truthfully depict my emotional state at the time the images were made. Whereas Duchenne felt it sufficient that his photographs appeared “realistic” – that is credible, though consciously manipulated – mine needed to *be* real, the naked truth.

But, although the ethical question of manipulating both subject and image are serious and topical they, in the present context, contribute less to the relevant issues of identity formation than does the question of the source of the emotions being photographed. Here the comparison of my self-portraits with the photographs of Duchenne brings up two critical points: What is the difference, if any, between external and internal ‘manipulation’ of a facial expression? What is the implication of criticizing Duchenne – or anyone for that matter – for external manipulation, for imposing the appearance of an emotion and thus a sense of identity on a subject?

As mentioned above, in Duchenne’s time many believed that the connection between internal and external was a reciprocal one. Thus, according to that philosophy, Duchenne would have been perfectly justified in concluding that an externally “imposed” emotional expression was not only the equivalent of an internally “felt” expression but that by the very act of imposition the subject would feel what the “mask” is projecting. Recent scientific research confirms this reciprocal relationship. Of course if Duchenne had made such an argument – and he did not as far as I can tell – he would open himself to the postmodern ethical criticisms of consciously violating his subject(s). Instead he went to great lengths to show that to the best of his knowledge he was not causing his subjects any pain or discomfort.

My personal experience in making “emotional me” was that I could not hope to make the images look real to others unless I actually felt – truly experienced in a fundamentally phenomenological way – the emotions I was photographing. I attempted – and failed – to photograph myself mimicking these expressions. I found that the act of putting on these ‘masks’ of emotional expressions actually made them

real for me as subject. Thus I see my personal experimentation confirming the reciprocal relationship between feeling and projecting emotions, that feeling can cause one to project but also – and this is crucial – that projecting can equally cause one to feel that emotion, a reciprocity that becomes painfully clear through its dysfunction in an Asperger's personality (Stel, van den Heuvel and Smeets 2151).

So, "emotional me" tells me that this form of manipulation – imposing an emotional expression – can blur the boundaries between the "real" and the "faked". If the relationship between inner feeling (depth) and outer projection (surface) is truly reciprocal – as I am now inclined to believe – then any manipulation, be it from within as in my experiment or from without as in Duchenne's case, will carry with it at least a grain of truth.

In fact, several cognitive scientists and psychologists have found that this connection is deeply ingrained in people regardless of culture and despite the assertion that "most modern adults would explicitly maintain that photographs have no ongoing physical connection to the objects they depict" (Hood, Donnelly et al. 391). These studies demonstrate that even today we have difficulties ripping up photographs of cherished people and things (King, Burton et al. 905) and that "people are less accurate at throwing darts at pictures of the faces of people they like" (Rozin, Millman and Nemeroff 703). These studies refer to this phenomenon as "sympathetic magic", meaning that there is a sense of a profound connection between the photograph and the photographed that goes deeper than the conscious – cultural - notion of signifier and signified, that there is an intuitive connection that may very well be mediated by the function of mirror neurons (Iacobini 30-33).

Duchenne's photographs are seen by some as ethically problematic, as somehow representative of his disconnection with social reality. I can't shake the feeling that these criticisms deflect from the implications that his "manipulations" have had for our understanding of the very real connections between surface and depth – a connection explicitly denied by post-modern theorists – continuing to be (re)discovered by contemporary science. Ekman and his colleagues refer to a genuine smile as the "Duchenne smile" – while a fake one is called the "PanAm smile" (Ekman, et al. 342). This is due to the recognition that only genuine smiles as discovered by Duchenne involve musculature around the eyes as well as the mouth. The involvement of these eye muscles is entirely involuntary and *cannot be faked* (ten Brinke, Porter and Baker, in press).

There is a kind of symmetry that emerges between Duchenne's photographs and mine, a symmetry that reveals an important issue about the connection between internal and external factors in identity formation. If all expressions of emotion were fully under conscious, external control as implied by post-modernist rhetoric then Duchenne's manipulations would indeed be an imposition on his subject, a fakery. But, for key emotions, this has clearly been demonstrated not to be the case: Duchenne manipulated those muscles and combinations of muscles that his subject was intuitively capable of using to express emotions but was consciously not able to access due to his medical condition.

The flipside of this scenario is found in those like myself on the autism spectrum. Unlike Duchenne's subject, I am able to consciously access, and control my facial musculature but I have an impaired intuitive connection between

emotional state and muscular expression. In the words of Stel, van den Heuvel and Smeets I have a “facial feedback impairment” (1250) that is directly attributable to my neurological condition. The fact that I am still capable of manipulating emotional expressions – though apparently only internally not externally –demonstrates two things clearly: First, that “individuals with ASD [autistic spectrum disorder] do not experience feedback from activated facial expressions as controls do” (Stel, van den Heuvel and Smeets 1250). Second, that we are not completely cut off from emotions and their expression. Thus, the series of images in “emotional me” are true representations of my emotional state at each moment photographed. But the truth shown is an internal truth, necessitated by the fact that access to external feedback is denied.

The reason why I reacted so strangely when my psychologist told me I should get in touch with my feelings now seems painfully obvious. I had bought into the ideology that surface and depth, the realities of inner feelings and outer appearances, were distinct, separated from one another by an impenetrable barrier. My sense of personal identity was defined by this illusion. It is a wonderful irony that my photography - the very medium that for many decades has been seen to epitomize this separation – served to break down that illusion.

3.1.2. “two ravens”

About eight years ago I had a vivid dream: I find myself on a grassy field. It is spring. Before me the field rises gently to a small hill. At the crest of the hill stands a mature oak tree. The leaves are just budding. I slowly walk toward the tree. As I walk

my attention is diverted and I find a raven perched on my left shoulder. I continue to approach the oak and the raven on my shoulder gets increasingly agitated. It starts cawing. I look back to the tree and find perched on one of its branches another raven. It too is cawing. As I continue to approach the tree the cawing becomes increasingly raucous until at one point the raven in the tree takes flight and alights on my right shoulder. Still cawing the two ravens turn their heads toward each other, toward me. The moment they face one another all noise ceases... and the dream ends.

3.1.2.1. Florence Henri

Modern: where the surface (face) is all there is.

Sobieszek's distinction between pre-modern and modern – shared with Kellner – is particularly useful for conceptualizing the thread I am exploring in this thesis. Accordingly, a range of modernist photographers continue to accept both the pre-modern assumptions of unity of identity and Cartesian mind/body duality. What changes is the perception of transparency. That is, there appears to be an ontological shift toward viewing both the physical body and the photographic surface as opaque, as an unreliable connector between surface appearance and what lies below. Freudian psychoanalysis has apparently had a huge influence on this perceptual shift (Sobieszek 32-79; Didi-Huberman 37-38).



Figure 5: Florence Henri, *Self Portrait*, 1938. Public domain.

This photograph (Fig. 5), made by Henri in 1938 provides an excellent example of this modernist – staged - approach to the question of identity. Her compositions –especially in her early work - make extensive use of mirrors. This use of the mirror is entirely consistent with modernist, materialist perceptions regarding the “surface”. Thus, according to Diane DuPont of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the mirror becomes an important tool “as pictorial means of creating new sensations of time, space and form”(21). By using mirrors in this manner, Henri was able to reflect and fragment the subject – the relationship between surface and depth - to explore the “reality” of identity through doubling. When her subject – either self or other – was composed in the mirror only, she questioned, visually as well as conceptually, the reality of the subject – which now is the real, the photographed subject or the photographed reflection. Is either?

Additionally, subjects composed before the mirror did not engage the viewer, remaining isolated, inaccessible; thus keeping the question of reality alive. This pictorial ambiguity, according to DuPont, became Henri's metaphor for her modern world.

But Henri was not simply interested in the materiality of her medium. DuPont opined that "if in Henri's hands the mirror was the ideal instrument for manipulating space and form to create pictorial ambiguity, it also provided the perfect tool for the analysis of the self"(35). The mirror, for Henri, became the chief metaphor for self-knowledge, a connection that was to become one of the core themes of feminist approaches to identity, both modern and postmodern (Chadwick 3-35).

Inherent in Henri's approach to photographic composition and the use of mirrors was what might be seen as a fundamentally modernist conundrum: the realization of a potential conflict between the continuing belief in a unitary self, a depth of being, and the modernist acceptance that the surface between inner and outer realities can no longer be seen as transparent. I believe that Henri's very adherence to dualist separation of mind and body permitted her to come to a form – literally – of resolution to this problem by focusing on *form*. Her attempts to access that which lies beneath the surface were no longer literal and direct as in the work of Duchenne. Instead, the mirror became the metaphorical vessel for her explorations. The very assumption of unreality of reflected images in her mirrors allowed her to engage in a new kind of dialogue between internal and external space, between – assumed - illusion and reality. The composition became, not a

literal *search* for a unitary self but a symbolic manipulation of her art to *express* the life of her mind. It is this “skimming” in the in-between space between the historically accepted and the challenges of new “realities” and its expression through her arts practice that excites me about this work. The marked difference between Henri’s use of mirrors for self-reflection and my previously mentioned inability to use mirrors as a tool in that manner has prompted further exploration of the role of the mirror in self-formation.

3.1.2.2. “mirror/mask”

The series “mirror/mask” (Fig. 6) is my attempt to bring together my ideas on the Duchennian mask and the Henriesque mirror in order to play out their relationship from an inner perspective on identity. If the face-as-mask is engaged in a two-way conversation between inner and outer realities, between depth and surface, as Duchenne and many of his contemporaries believed – and as is increasingly confirmed today by the neurosciences and related fields – then the mask-as-face may also serve the same function. The mask maker and former director of the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, George Fry, has a habit of painting the inside of all his masks for that very reason: he sees the message(s) of the mask projecting equally in both directions, wearer and audience are equally implicated (Fry).

Can the same be said for the mirror? Certainly both modernist and post-modernist claims regarding the opacity and fragmentation of the surface would lead

one to the conclusion that no, the mirror-as-surface is a classic example of the surface as reflector not transmitter.

In ‘mirror/mask’ I have personalized – personified – these relationships in order to explore what, if anything, could be learned about how this relationship speaks to the internal processes involved in identity formation. What does the relationship between the mask’s transmissive characteristics and the mirror’s reflective characteristics contribute to an understanding of the internal processes related to the formation of a sense of self, especially from an Asperger’s perspective? The images speak to the resulting turmoil when choice is denied access to intuition – the image in the mirror reflects but does not inform. What might have been seen as a dialectic is interrupted, is reflected back on itself in a tautology of hyper-reflexivity.

The confusion depicted in these images, both inward in self-reflection and outward in both transmission and reception, is consistent with problems of perception of self-formation on the autism spectrum (Atwood 120). The power of the mirror to reflect without insight – that is to reflect back our preconceptions – and thus to mislead, is a well-known trope in literature (e.g., Grimm’s Fairy Tales and the Korean folktale of the ‘Chinese Mirror’). The superficially most obvious means to break out of this “infinite loop” would seem to be to break the mirror. This also has been explored in literature. Indeed the breaking of the mirror – as representative of the opaque surface of modernist thought – is an important theme consistent with the post-modernist proposal of the fragmentation of the surface, of the very impossibility of any coherent sense of self (Ward, 155, summarizes these ideas).

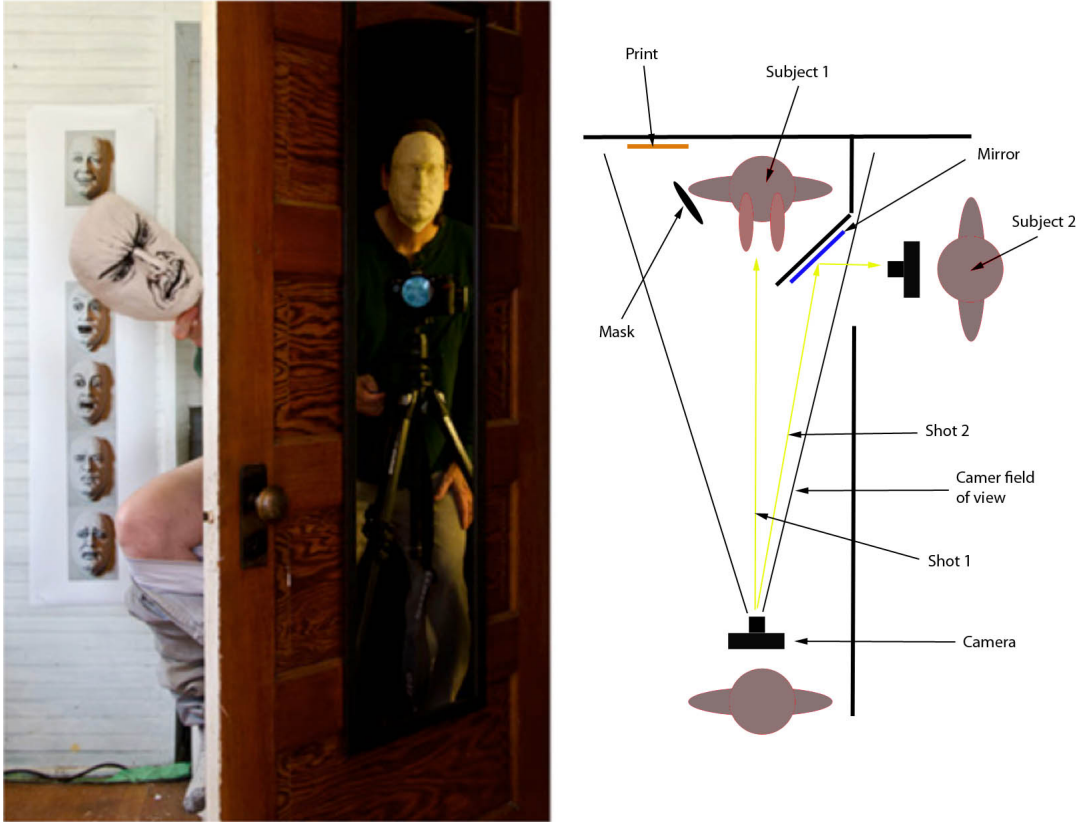


Figure 6: Greg Klassen, *In The Bathroom* (including topological drawing of setup for dual exposure), from the series "mirror/mask", 2011. Digital print.

Conversely, although possibly useful as metaphor for the breaking away of the artist from the historical – ideological – constraints of society, the broken mirror metaphor takes on a very different implication when considering psychological (Glass 157-162), neurological (Iacobini 157-183) and feminist (Chadwick 2-35) interpretations. These interpretations, where the mirror is seen in a more positive, constructive light in identity formation, are consistent with Henri's use of the mirror in self-reflection, are important in understanding the Asperger's perspective in relation to mirrors and thus my use of mirrors in "mirror/mask". There are two things to consider here: Is the mirror truly the opaque reflective surface we make it

out to be? And if not, is there an alternative to breaking the mirror in order to break out of the tautological loop as described above?

As to the first, Henri has already provided a hint. A possible solution to the dilemma may be found in her ability to conceive of the mirror as both literal and metaphorical *simultaneously*. By looking beyond the apparent oppositional binary of literal and metaphorical, I believe Henri to have tapped into a sense where the mirror is more than just reflector, that there is some connection between depth and surface that could also strip the binary of transparent and opaque of its traditional meaning. Marco Iacobini has brought to our attention just what that connection may be in discussing both the neurological metaphor of the “broken mirror” and possible ways of “fixing”, or mediating the condition (172, 177). Recent discoveries in the neurosciences have uncovered what some see as a revolution on the scale of Darwin, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein. A part of the human limbic system contains neuron clusters called “mirror neurons” which many now believe to be nothing less than the evolutionary basis for culture (Ramachandran 132-135). They function as a kind of ‘knee-jerk’ emotional response system. Neuroscientist have shown these neurons to be responsible for why, for instance, we smile when smiled at, why we empathize. They have also demonstrated that it is malfunctioning in these mirror neuron systems that may be at the root of conditions of social dysfunction such as autism.

It seems then that the malfunctioning mirror, the broken mirror, is the problem not the solution. The mirror – the metaphor as seen through the eyes of a neuroscientist – reflects both ways. In the mirror reflectance there is something

introduced or removed, a slight change in perspective. There is a form of leakage that transmits – to the author, to the audience. Perhaps this role as transmitter lies in the ability to interpret how it reflects, or fails to reflect? In my “mirror/mask” studies, not only is the inner self – the subject – troubled by difficulties in understanding, intuitively, his own emotional states – he cannot intuitively *access* emotions, he must make conscious choices - his ability to develop a reciprocal interaction between intuition and cognition is impaired. The observer is always present but provides no input thus, feedback carries no new information, becomes noise. The masked face in the mirror *is* the broken mirror – the absence of intuitive connection. Thus, despite the appearance of cohesion and unlike the mirror as used by Henri, my mirror is shown to enforce a sense of hyper-self-reflexivity, of a cacophonous and destructive feed-back loop that will continuously spiral in upon itself until it implodes. The autistic mind, when bereft of external reinforcement falls in upon itself. But once again, this interpretation is based on the *a priori* assumption that the mirror can only reflect upon itself. These photographs are an indictment of this illusion. The tableau plays out for an audience what would otherwise remain hidden, and only by remaining hidden can its destructive implications be played out. Thus the photograph itself – sometimes referred to as modernism’s mirror (Dupont 14) – breaks the tautology, *becoming* a two-way mirror.

In my dream of the two ravens the noise did not stop until both aspects of my inner self were given equal time, until there was a balance. I see Henri searching for that balance in the way she made use of the material to circumvent the limits of the conception of the binary opposition of reflectance and transmission, the way she

accessed the literal by making it metaphorical. In “mirror/mask” I explored similar issues coming to the conclusion that the mirror, much like the mask, may be seen as more than simply a reflective surface, or at least that reflectance is not simply, and not necessarily a tautological returning upon itself – something is added, or subtracted, in the process.

3.2. Constructedness

The second chapter, “constructedness”, relates to the modern (including postmodern) realization that identity can no longer be seen as “given”, that in some ways – to some individuals, in every way – the “self” is fictional and/or constructed as needed through external, social cues. I specifically explore the implications of two interpretations of the term “construction”. Particular attention is paid to internal and external cues in (re)interpreting construction from an Asperger’s perspective.

3.2.1. “making a fire”

This morning, like most mornings, I built up the fire in our wood stove. There is an art to this, a relationship that requires continuous attention. When starting a new fire the process involves a specific procedure perfected over time. The fire is made - is constructed - and this construction is imposed by my needs which are in turn dependent on the external environment. Thus the fire I produce in my wood stove is my construction, its appearance an effect reflecting my needs. And yet fire, this fire, any fire, has an existence – physical and chemical properties – independent of my control.

In fact my sense of control, the imposition of my will, is a thinly veiled illusion. That which I have “constructed” is never truly my “construct” and I disrespect it at my peril.

3.2.1.1. Nancy Burson

Post-modern: where the face (surface) no longer holds, becomes fractured.

As we transit from modernist to post-modernist views on portraiture, a further ontological shift is apparent. Although even many post-modernists still appear to hold to the notion of Cartesian mind/body duality, there is an increasing trend toward viewing with skepticism, even derision, any notion of unity of mind. As a consequence, postmodernists see not only the – photographic – surface as fractured but, the very notion of any sense of coherent identity as illusion (Ward 155). The vertical fragmentation modernists envisioned between mind and body is extended horizontally to the point that postmodernists view neither mind nor body as coherent entities, separate not only from each other but, from their very selves. The ultimate outcome of such fracturing of identity: schizophrenia (Sobieszek 262-263), even, according to Baudrillard, autism (Horrocks 55).

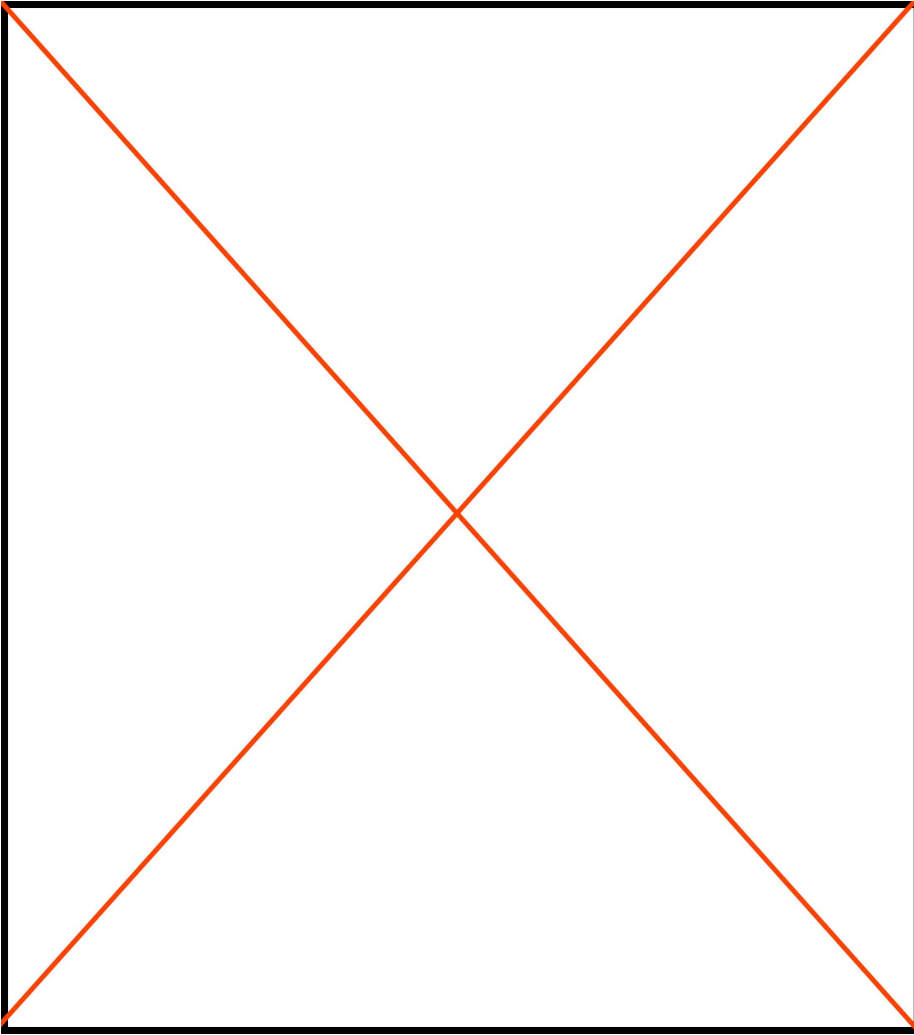


Figure 7: Nancy Burson, *Androgeny (6 men + 6 women)*, 1982. Permission from artist not received.

This image of Burson's (Fig. 7) represents well both her composite image approach and the notion of a constructed image. Much like Duchenne and Henri, Burson is still interested in "an investigation of the baseline humanity behind the mask we present the world," that "through her eyes we question our perception of what it means to be different "(Burson and Sand 7-8). This perceptual shift is achieved by combining multiple photographic portraits into a single composite. One might say that this is little different in intent or technique from efforts made around

the turn of the previous century by the likes of Galton. And there *is* a compelling relation between Burson's work and these predecessors. However, there is also a profound difference – in intent and execution. Whereas Galton and his contemporaries, much like Duchenne, saw a direct connection between the face and what lay beneath, in other words *they believed what they saw* – believed in the authenticity of what the images presented – Burson's approach appears as the diametric opposite: to present to her audience that *what we believe is what we see*. Galton's composites were averaged for each separate exposure such that the final image – a near perfect composite exposure – forefronted those features that all faces held in common. Burson's composites are far more complex conceptually and based on conscious – self-conscious – choices made by the artist about the subjects. In a composite of world leaders she emphasized individual features according to how large a nuclear arsenal they represented. Thus in a very important way Burson presented her composite portraits not as representations of the people being photographed but of the relative power structure they represented. This approach, emphasizing the uneasy relationship between science and art and a decentering of identity is also remarkably consistent with the scientific notion of 'trained judgment' seen by Daston and Galison as the scientific response to issues with objectivist perception. Trained judgment is seen as a step beyond material objectivity, taking account of the role of subjectivity in scientific interpretation (18-19).

Burson and her coauthor Michael Sand stated that, "the public has grudgingly come to accept that digital photography can seamlessly alter the camera's recorded reality and that basic assumptions about photographic 'truth' must be viewed as

problematic” (14). She further concluded about her composites that, “the signs are not the same as what they signify...[that]...reality becomes problematic” (21). And yet the technology that has emerged from her composite works has been – and continues to be – used successfully by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies around the world to find missing children, even decades later. How do we reconcile Burson’s sense that composite images reference nothing “real” with the very real success rate that law enforcement agencies continue to have in finding missing people on the basis of composite images derived from facial features of relatives? Perhaps it is not so much that “reality” becomes problematic but that our assumptions about signs, signifiers and their relationship with reality are being revealed as problematic. This apparent paradox between the “illusion” of a photographic image and the empirical evidence of the very real connections drawn by such images absolutely fascinates me as it ties in very closely with the literal problems of empathy faced by people on the autism spectrum on a daily basis. The in-between space between perception and projection, between seeing and believing is a very real and problematic space for me, not metaphorical or theoretical but a literal – and banally everyday – place of confusion and noise.

3.2.1.2. “collaborative self portrait”

Based on the work of Duchenne I have explored the idea that the mask of identity may be manipulated both from within and without, that the relationship between depth and surface is a two-way process. Similarly, exploring the Henriquesque mirror has revealed that the same may be true for the mirror as surface,

challenging a very basic assumption of the mirror: its reflectance. Burson further challenges us to reexamine the very way we perceive the mirror and the mask: is it a matter of “seeing is believing” *or* “believing is seeing”? Is identity a matter of “being” or of “construction”, or should we question that very dialectic?

In “collaborative self-portrait” (Figs. 8, 9) I examine this relationship by starting with the assumption that the “I” – the individual writing these words – is indeed constructed. This, the self I claim as my own, is somehow the product of others projected onto... ..well, onto me. What would I look like? How do I represent the self through the eyes of others? That is my challenge as artist. That is my challenge as person. It is well understood by experts in the field that autistic selfhood and creativity seem to be most easily shaped and expressed by appropriating others’ identities and voices (Osteen 27). There is a tendency, among those of us on the autism spectrum, to allow others to influence our sense of self, to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by outside influences, partly because empathy-impairment makes it difficult to filter such influences. On the positive side this also means that the Asperger’s personality, diffuse as it is, can be chameleon-like, blending in, to surface appearance anyway, becoming what others expect to see – *to reflect their projections back to them.*

By inviting others to construct my likeness from a pool of preexisting fragments I had hoped to be able to visualize a distinction between identity as “being” – as a given, independent of outside influence – or as “constructed” – as entirely dependent on the vagaries of outside, presumably cultural, interpretation. Thus the role of fragments in identity formation would be discernable as either a

kind of pre-modern jigsaw puzzle where, as Duchenne assumed, the pieces fit together in a pre-defined manner or as a kind of post-modern jumble where the relationship among the pieces is neither predefined, predictable nor necessarily complete.

Both extremes can be seen as containing some grain of “truth”. The blended single image (Fig. 8) bears a remarkable resemblance to a young Greg Klassen. Given that the version of the Faces program used was expressly deficient in “aging” related characteristics the younger appearance of the constructed face should not be too surprising. Never-the-less, this blended construction gives the impression that, collectively, the constructions tended to capture enough of my likeness to be easily recognizable. What is surprising is that the individual constructions (Fig. 9), especially when joined by a morphing process, tended to emphasize difference over similarity, so much so that in certain cases facial features of the person constructing the likeness crept into the construction. It would seem that even my collaborators at times conflated perception with projection. Or perhaps this is an indication that the distinction between the two is not as clear-cut as one might assume?

When I was a graduate student in biology a joke circulated in our cohort. It went like this: Question - what is the difference between a scientist and an artist, answer – a scientist believes what is seen, an artist sees what is believed. We assumed at the time that the joke was on the arts. It wasn’t until many years later that, when I heard the same joke told by an artist friend of mine I realized that she – and her cohort – perceived this as a joke on us.



Figure 8: Greg Klassen, *Blended Me* from the series "collaborative self-portrait", 2011. Digital print.

Nancy Burson clearly sees her blended faces in much the same way: in contrast to the interpretations of Galton and his contemporaries – who seemed to have seen a literal, and causal connection between shared aspects of likeness and behavior where seeing precedes believing – Burson makes us see the blended faces as ‘constructions’ – where believing precedes seeing. She implicates the very process of constructing – as a phenomenon embedded in cultural ideologies – in biasing how and what we see.



Figure 9: Greg Klassen, Sample of four of 18 constructions of my face using Faces v4.0, from the series "collaborative self-portraits", 2011. Digital prints.

But I am no longer convinced that the story is as simple as: “seeing is believing” *versus* “believing is seeing”. I think the joke – if it is a joke – is on both. The fact that I can visualize either, or both of, “difference” and “similarity” through the very same set of images leads me to the conclusion that the very distinction between seeing and believing may be an illusion. If this is right then *both* the notion of “being” and “constructedness” as guidelines for how we perceive the formation of identity are suspect –oversimplifications of more complex processes.

If the fire I spoke of earlier represents the “being” of identity and my building the fire its “construction” then that analogy tells me that being and constructedness are not representative of competing theories of identity formation, they are necessary collaborators in an ongoing process of negotiation. The problematics associated with any breakdown in the negotiation process – as is embodied in persons on the autism spectrum – clearly reveals the process as it should work; or to paraphrase the neuroscientist Vilayanur Ramachandran: what better way to study a system than to examine its broken elements. If I had not questioned my own relationship to perception and projection I may never have seen that the images constructed by my 18 collaborators revealed *both* similarity and difference, *both* being and constructedness as part of ongoing negotiations.

3.2.2 .“colliding galaxies”

I love the night sky – sometimes I feel closer to those distant stars than I do to my immediate surroundings. There is a smudge of light in the constellation Andromeda. This smudge is not a star, it is another galaxy, our sister galaxy. But Andromeda and the Milky Way don’t just exist in space together as if in some static tableau, they are gravitationally bound to each other. One day, in the distant future, they will collide and in a cosmic dance annihilate each other while forming a new, larger and more complex galaxy. Although the original two galaxies will disappear the stars from each will, for the most part, remain intact, carrying with them the traces of their origins. The very process of destruction of the individual galaxies in the formation

of the new will ensure the retention of their memory. There is continuity in fragmentation.

3.2.2.1. Elizabeth King

Embodied: where fragments are reassembled to reveal a real but complex relationship between surface, depth and identity.

It is here that I navigate away from charted waters. What I am suggesting is that a further ontological shift may be occurring – right now. This shift, prompted by the recognition that postmodernists may have had a point in critiquing a simplistic unitary view of identity as attributed to both pre-modern and modern ontologies, also recognizes that the postmodern tendency toward embracing – fetishizing – schizophrenia, and in the case of Baudrillard, autism, as some form of ideal state is untenable (Glass 157-162). The question arises: is it necessary that the ontological shifts we have seen moving from pre- to post-modern views of identity lead inevitably toward a complete fracturing, and thus loss, of any sense of identity? Is there no hope for those of us on the autism spectrum but that our identity is dictated from the outside?

There is an increasing realization that the one assumption shared by all three of the preceding views (pre-modern, modern, post-modern) – that of Cartesian mind/body duality – may have to be reevaluated (Ramachandran 97-132). The result of this reevaluation is the view I have labeled as the “embodied perspective”. It holds that by abandoning the notion of mind/body duality we may see the relationship(s) between mind and body – and by extension, between surface and

depth in a photograph – in an entirely new way, not dialectical but synergistic. The implication for ToM, and therefore for my perception on how my sense of identity is formed and maintained seems to me, at least in part, one of hope – a fundamental part of my sense of identity is embodied in my very being. Identity is not simply subject to the vicissitudes of external forces.

This image (Fig. 10), part of a series made by the sculptor Elizabeth King in collaboration with the photographer Katherine Wetzel reflects the theme explored by King, which is key to understanding why this aspect of embodiment is so important. In King's recent book, "Attention's Loop", she simultaneously *addresses* and *enacts* the complexity of representation and of consciousness itself.

The mannequin – the sculptor's self-portrait – is called "Pupil" with a deliberate eye to the multiple meanings of the word. Similar to Henri's blending of literal and metaphorical mirrors, it is another kind of mirror – simultaneously literal and metaphorical - becoming the physical embodiment of self-examination, an examination that continually returns upon itself without spiraling inward to oblivion. King's notion of the "round trip", the loop, is enacted equally – and collectively - in the making of Pupil, in the posing of Pupil, in the photographing of the poses and in the writing about the process – sensation and perception are in constant flux, constantly referencing – and feeding off - one another.

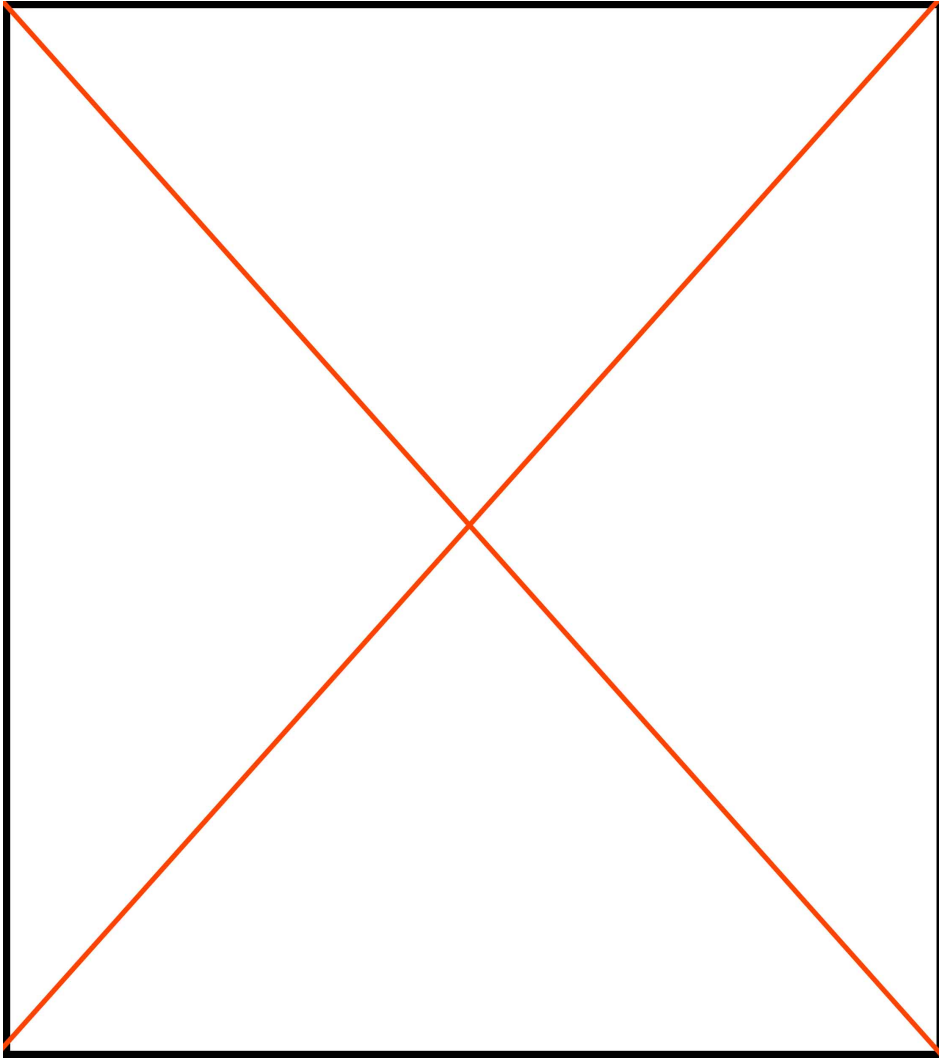


Figure 10: Elizabeth King, *Untitled*, 1999. Permission from artist not received.

She brings the fragments of self-examination together, achieving a synergistic effect, an emergence of a new, inclusive relationship between mind and body: “What if even the most fleeting ruminative fragment of our mental life involves immediate sensation or body motion – or the memory of them? Then these phenomena, especially as they are articulated and broadcast by works of art, must be central to the unfolding of our conscious relations with the world.” (King 16)

According to King, photography, like memory, tends to change the size of things. Forms of representation collide, a tension arises: “at the instant I look I change what I’m trying to see ” (King 44, an artistic rendering of what scientists call the “observer effect”). The boundaries between reality (sensed) and imagined (perceived or remembered) are in flux and “sensation *becomes* perception” (15 emphasis added).

The duality of mind and body becomes entangled as sense and perception – inside/outside, depth/surface - interact in a form of synergistic play. What emerges is a form of self-reflexivity that allows for the coexistence of mind and body and thus, although it may not provide a definitive answer to questions of identity in and of itself, it frees the questioner – unlocks *my* sense of isolation - to explore the various facets of identity without the danger of irreversible fragmentation. Attention’s loop continually brings the question back to its root much as in a hermeneutic spiral, not tautological but iterative, constructive in a sense that blurs the boundary between nature and artifact, *hopeful*.

3.2.2.2. “the emotions project”

The iterative process inherent in King’s notion of “attention’s loop” is at the heart of not only forefronting the problematic in seeing dualistic questions of identity as oppositional binaries in a dialectical stasis – such as scientist vs. artist, depth vs. surface, being vs. constructedness – it demonstrates a process, accessible to scientist and artist alike, by which any problematic may be elucidated and explored, a process that goes beyond simple dialectics, deconstruction or semiotics,

evolving notions of self by repeatedly cycling back and forth between internal and external perceptions, between depth and surface. Perhaps that way something new may be learned about the process of identity formation – that identity *is* formation, a process not a static *thing*.

The first step in producing “the emotions project” (Fig. 11) involved looking inward at emotional states, arguably the most basic aspect of self-recognition and self-reflection. Here I started where I ended with “emotional me”, with the assumption that the ability to feel and express certain emotions is innate. This assumption carries with it more than the notion that these emotional states are hard-wired, static, it references a connection – a silent and invisible link – among all of us, an evolutionary record branded into our very DNA of an ancestral need to connect on the most basic of levels. Here, the inner “manipulation” is expressed as choice. This choice is externalized through the combined processes of “making” – of simultaneously controlling and letting go - of preparing blank masks and inviting others to imprint on those masks.



Figure 11: Greg Klassen. "The emotions project", Sample of six emotions by six collaborators (Morgan Klassen, *Anger*; George Fry, *Disgust*; Andrew Giffin, *Sadness*; Bronwyn Gallagher, *Joy*; Fred Harrison, *Fear*; Suzanne Hill, *Surprise*), 2012. Digital prints.

This opens me up to the external manipulation of others, at the same time as it contextualizes, constrains, those manipulations – I am no longer their blank slate but an equal partner. It is those collaborators who then, in turn, internalize the process, transforming the idea of specific emotions and the connections they make in the sharing. Again externalized, these new – and unique – interpretations are made physical and placed on the subject's face – on my face. Thus, I *become* that interpretation. I reabsorb the emotion – which remains universal even as it acquires specificity. In photographing I project this collusion, a self simultaneously unique and generic, transmitting from a depth and reflecting from the surface. In inviting others – this time as audience – to view, explore and participate in the process this iterative function, this hermeneutic spiral, cycles again – projected emotion to individual reaction and on - all the while spreading out like ripples on a pond.

And, I believe, something happens that deviates from the literal plunging of the depths through the transparent medium of the photograph to a pre-modern essentialist self. Something deviates from the skimming of the opaque surface to explore the metaphorical reflection of a modernist self just out of reach and yet infinitely malleable. Something deviates from a bald, pessimistic post-modernist critique of the very notion of self, assumed to be illusory, a mere construction. What I see as different is a new kind of synthetic process, optimistic and neither purely naturalistic nor artifice – the distinction becoming meaningless.



_DSC3323.jpg



_DSC3327.jpg



_DSC3328.jpg



_DSC3329.jpg



_DSC3330.jpg



_DSC3331.jpg



_DSC3333.jpg



_DSC3334.jpg

Figure 12: Greg Klassen. "The emotions project", Project installation and closeups of each of the seven digital photo frames at random intervals, 2012. Multimedia installation.

I see in this collaboration (Fig. 12) a joining of the universal and the unique, a blending of galaxies such that the result is not a loss of either in order to produce a new and different one, not a dialectical and static 'resolution' but a dynamic and continuous tension. I see a joining that retains the individuality of each and every fragment while, at the same time synergizes them, resulting in an emergence – a new, different and unpredictable yet intimately connected sense of identity. I see the self – the very formation of identity – as a continuous process that is not fractured by time as Roland Barthes (in *Barthes on Barthes*) would have it but nurtured, altered and connected by the very passage of time. Just as the slides behind the two-way mirrors are constantly changing; just as the perception of the relationships between and among the six “emotions” evolves in the mind of author and audience alike, as the effect of each new slide builds on what came before; a sense of identity never stands still, never settles in one static moment or on one static concept, it slips and slides along absorbing and adapting by simultaneously looking inward and outward.

Thus this iterative functioning, this hermeneutics-like spiraling – identity as process – becomes revealed by, and in turn reveals my unique perception as an intuition simultaneously constrained by and unleashed through the uncovering of the relationship between surface and depth from an Asperger's perspective. This is the in-between space I occupy.

3.3. On Reflection

Why do you smile back at me -- automatically -- when I smile at you? Why can

my sadness infect those around me? Contemporary scientists believe that at least six universal facial expressions of emotions exist that are recognized by and affect individuals no matter their cultural background (joy, sadness, anger, disgust, surprise, and fear). They propose a complex relationship between surface (projection) and depth (sensation) that is built into all of us as a necessary aspect of cultural evolution. As a person with Asperger's Syndrome I have become fascinated with this connection between surface and depth, between people, a connection -- intuitive to most -- that is, at least partially hidden from me. With the aid of seven fellow artists I have endeavored to explore this connection – and the disconnect – between people by photographing myself wearing these masks of universal emotions as interpreted through the unique eyes of others and projecting them on to you, my audience.

The above statement accompanied, as an extended text, my exhibition of the final work of this thesis project: “the emotions project”. This research is broadly speaking, about identity; more specifically about identifying specific questions – through my photographic practice - regarding the formulation, expression, projection and experiencing of identity issues from an Asperger's perspective, focusing on the relationship between depth and surface, between connection and disconnect.

Formulating the conceptual framework, that is developing a specific visualization of these questions, has been for me the easy part. I have never had trouble developing and conceptualizing ideas – one of the advantages of Asperger's

is a heightened sense of spatial visualization.

Getting the idea(s) for the project from conception to expression was another thing entirely. As this project relies on the involvement of others, I have found the need to overcome two hurdles: myself, and others. More specifically, I found I needed to overcome my inherent tendencies to avoid working with others. And of course this need has manifested itself on two levels. Getting others involved in the making of the masks and getting involved with others in the production of the final exhibition as group show. It turns out that these are two very different forms of involvement, one of which I find far easier than the other.

Which brings me to the notion of projection: the actual, final realization of the piece in the show. As usual – and definitely not unexpected – the final emanation of this piece is not exactly as originally envisioned. Making changes to a great idea (at least in my head) necessitated by the “ugly” facts of real life has always been a challenge for me. That necessity has expressed itself in two ways. First, I found the need to abandon my conception of monitor arms for my seven photo frames for reasons of space allocation and financial constraint, second, I needed to modify the presentation of one of the emotions (the neutral) due to a mishandling of my mirror order. My solutions – to mount the frames rigidly onto a solid octagon and the need to turn the “neutral” aspect into a static mirror - ended up carrying with them some interesting and unexpected benefits that had me thinking a great deal about rigid thinking – mine – and the potential for flexibility of expression inherent in the work: embracing of unexpected consequences.

The last, and in some ways most revealing aspect of the work came to me as I sat in the gallery and watched people interacting with the piece. And they did interact – I realized that I was not sure up to that point whether that would happen. I did find, much to my relief, that people not only spent time with the work but that many of them came back to it – sometimes repeatedly. More, many laughed at the “joy” piece, frowned at the “disgust” piece and showed confusion at the “neutral” piece – just as I had envisioned. But it was not until the very end of the show that I came to realize the true impact of the work. A couple started asking me pointed and probing questions about the work. The woman ended by telling me that for the first time she truly empathized with “what it must be like for someone like me”. It was in that moment that I had a revelation: the project was a success. But it was also an utter failure, because while I had succeeded in connecting with at least one person in the desired manner, that connection was not reciprocal. I understood her emotional response on an intellectual level; I was never going to *share* in her emotional reaction on an intuitive level. But I also realized that I would never, could never, give up trying.

I am Sisyphus and you are my hill.

4. Conclusion

My projects, “emotional me”, “mirror/mask”, “collaborative self-portrait”, and “the emotions project” individually and collectively play on key elements of each of four approaches to identity. My interpretation of the Duchennian mask reveals something important about the reciprocal relationship between mind and body,

between depth and surface. Exploring the Henriresque mirror helps me realize the danger of assuming this surface to be limited to reflectance. Connecting with Burson's work allows me to see, and explore, the complex relationship between "seeing" and "believing" and the potentially detrimental effect of assuming these two concepts to exist as binary opposites. But most importantly, my interpretation of the work of King has revealed to me an out from the inward spiraling - and associated desperate outward grasping - so typical of identity diffusion in those of us on the autism spectrum. There is a way to balance between internal needs and external pressures when forming a sense of self. For me that balance is found not in words but in photographs, in a non-linguistic, non-linear form of narrative that has found a way to connect me to an intuition I did not know I had, an intuition different from yet complementary to that taken for granted by the majority of humanity. My intuition is one of the visual thinking so symptomatic of many on the autism spectrum. My challenge is to make that intuition understandable to that majority who don't share it. I have come to believe that photography - which I see as a medium that both transmits and reflects, that retains some of the pre-modern assumption of transparency - is the medium that will allow me to meet that challenge.

Although I do not believe that I am currently closer to having any truly concrete answers to the questions I posed in the introduction, I feel that a better understanding of the diverse-yet-connected approaches to identity and its formation and expression as represented by the artists discussed is providing me with a greater understanding of where I stand with my approach to my own arts

practice – and the importance of understanding the relationship between surface and depth in that practice - which borrows at times from each of these artists' conceptions. Nevertheless, connection and separation are not fully resolved, will never be fully resolved. I *am* different, a fragment in a society that while it purports to accept the fragmented still, in its very postmodern reduction of difference to *mere* difference, by in large, fails to comprehend and remains incomprehensible. Jonathan Griffiths further contextualizes the issue with the Asperger's personality firmly in mind. He explains this issue of incomprehension and the importance of the connection between surface and depth as an ontological issue incommensurable with postmodernist thinking "because the post-modern environment described by [Richard] Rorty revolves around a series of social interactions with no reference beyond themselves, and with no overarching logical system. The trouble with that environment is that it's very hostile to [Asperger's personalities] although, at the philosophical level, it doesn't yet know that it is" (98).

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