The pictorial genre of the portrait doubly cherishes the cornerstone of bourgeois western culture. The uniqueness of the individual and his or her accomplishments is central in that culture. And in the portrait, originality comes in twice. The portrait is highly esteemed as a genre because, according to the standard view, in a successful portrait the viewer is not only confronted with the "original", "unique" subjectivity of the portrayer, but also of that of a portrayed. Linda Nochlin has expressed this abundance of originality tersely: in the portrait we watch "the meeting of two subjectivities".

Such a characterisation of the genre immediately foregrounds those aspects of the portrait that heavily depend on specific notions of the human subject and of representation. As for the represented object, this view implies that subjectivity can be equated with notions like the self or individuality. Somebody's subjectivity is defined in its uniqueness rather than in its social connections: it is someone's interior essence rather than a moment of short duration in a differential process. Somebody's continuity or discontinuity with others is denied in order to present the subject as personality. One may ask if this view does justice even to the traditional portrait.

As for the representation itself, the kind of notion we get from this view is equally specific. It implies that the portrait refers to a human being which (was) present outside the portrait. A recent book on portraiture makes this notion of the portrait explicit on its first page:

Fundamental to portraits as a distinct genre in the vast repertoire of artistic representation is the necessity of expressing this intended relationship between the portrait image and the human original.

The artistic portrait differs, however, from the photographic portrait as used in legal and medical institutions, by doing a bit more than just referring to somebody. It is more than documentation. The portrayer proves her/his artistic originality by consolidating the self of the portrayed. Although the portrait refers to an original self already present, this self needs its portrayal in order to secure its own being. The portrayer has enriched the interiority of the portrayed's self by
This description of the portrait as emblem of that concept "becomes the painter's "essence" as a painter does. Camera work is not the traditional portrait's ideal, but its failure, because the essence quality of the sitter can only be caught by the artist, not by the camera.

But in Gadamer's text we don't read about an essential quality which has been captured. The essential quality of the sitter is the increase of being that seems to be produced by the portrayer in the portrait. "What comes into being in it is not already contained in what his acquaintances see in the sitter." The portrayer makes visible the inner essence of the sitter and this visualising act is creative and productive. It's more than a passive rendering of what was presumably already there, although interior and hence invisible. The portrayer gives his subjectivity an outer form so that we viewers can see it. This outer form is then the signifier (expression) of the signified (the sitter's inner essence).

What to do with the surplus of the increase of being? It is clear that Gadamer does not use the term "increase of being" for the portrait's "likeness" with the sitter's material form. He indicates the second referent of the portrait: the sitter's essential quality. Gadamer makes us believe that what comes into being in the portrait is the same as the referent of the painting. He presumes a unity between increase in being and the essential quality of the sitter or, semiotically speaking, between signifier and signified. By presuming unity, he denies that the increase of being is a surplus. By doing that, Gadamer exemplifies the semiotic economy of mimetic representation. This economy involves a straightforward relationship of identity between signifier and signified.

This identity between signer and signified is not inevitable. Andrew Benjamin historicises the kind of semiotic conception which he sees as Gadamer's "distance of being".

5. Brilliant sees the portrait as an emblem of that concept. "Portraits concentrate memory images into a single, transcendent entity; they consider many possible, even legitimate, representations into one, a certain image that captures the consistency of the person, portrayed over time but in one time, the presence and potentially forever" (Brilliant, Portraits, p. 13).


2. Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 43.

The signifier can be viewed as representing the signified. Their unity is then the sign. The possibility of unity is based on the assumed essential homogeneity of the signified. The sign in its unity must represent the singularity of the signified. It is thus that authenticity is interpolated into the relationship between the elements of the sign. Even though the signifier and the signified can never be the same, there is, none the less, a boundary which, transgressed, would render the relationship inauthentic.

Most surprisingly, Benjamin attributes authenticity neither to the signifier nor to the signified, but to the special relationship between the two. In the case of the portrait this semiotic economy implies that the qualifications "authenticity", "uniqueness", or "originality" do not belong to the portrayed subject or to the portrait or painter, but to the mode of representation which makes us believe that signifier and signified form a unity. In connection with the issue of authority, this entails a socially embedded conception: the bourgeois self depends on the portrait has become such a problematic genre, marginal as well as heterogeneous. At the moment that artists stop showing a loss of self instead of its consolidation; shaping the subject as central in a subversive way, because from a semiotic point of view the Picasso made in 1910 of his dealers, Kahnweiler, Vollard and Uhde, as pronouncements of the death of the genre:

These antiportraits fuse the sitter's subjectivity in a continuous network of phenomenological interdependence between pictorial surface and virtual space, between bodily volume and paintery texture, as all physiognomic features merge instantly with their persistent negation in a pictorial erasure of efforts at mimetic resemblance.

In these Cubist paintings Picasso has not only explored a new representational mode, but at the same time articulated a new conception of subjectivity. What kind of subjects emerge from these portraits, and how?

Picasso no longer makes use of a plastic system of signs which refer iconically to figures, fictional or not. His representational mode is no longer mimetic: he uses a small number of forms which signify in relation to each other, differentially. This new mode of representation is based on an economy in which no signifiers forms a fixed unity with signification in detail in his article "Kahnweiler's Lesson". He writes: a "form can sometimes be seen as 'nose' and sometimes as 'mouth', as 'guitar' or as 'tongue'." The signs Picasso uses in these portraits are entirely "virtual", or "nonsubstantial" and can no longer be assumed to relate mimesically to the object of representation; parts of the sitters, faces, are differential processes between the signifiers used.

But does this signifying model based on structural difference also give rise to a new conception of subjectivity? Because of my earlier claim about the intertwinement of these two kinds of concepts, one should expect so. There are remnants of the mimetic model insofar as the portrayed dealers "look" different. They can be distinguished from each other. But as we have seen, a "good" portrait claims more than physical recognisability and it would be ludicrous to claim that Kahnweiler is depicted there in his full presence or essence. Here, the process of constructing the illusion of subjectivity with forms which are arbitrary and exchangeable has become predominant. To differentiate subjects from each other, to depict them as individuals, is not the same as bestowing authenticity on them.

Andy Warhol's portraits have played a major role in posing questions concerning the social and public dimension of subjectivity. In his work, the subject has acquired explicit mythical and incredible proportions. This ironic mythification leads to a disappearance of all subjectivity on both sides of the portrait; that of the painter and the portrayed. Warhol's individuality, his painterly performance is systematically absent. His photographic, mechanically produced portraits leave no room for the illusion of the unique self of the portrayed. The portrayed sitters are also bereft of their interiority. They are exhibited as public substitutes for subjectivity. We viewers see not
a unique self, but a subject in the image of the star, totally moulded on
this public fantasy of "stardom".

The avant-garde opposition to the portrait by Pop artists like
Warhol stems from an uncanny insight into the formative dimension
of the mass-media. In the 1960s, feminism gave a new and more
fundamental dimension to the conviction that identity is not authentic
but socially constructed. It is not the domain of the mass-media which is
foregrounded in its effect of making, or rather emptying out, the subject,
but rather representation in the most general way. The "Untitled Film
Stills" by Cindy Sherman address this issue most disturbingly. These
famous black and white photographs show female characters (always
Sherman herself) in situations which remind us of Hollywood films of
the 1950s. The "Untitled Film Stills" give the illusion that they are based
on shots from existing films and that Sherman has re-enacted the
such an original still. Each effort to point out the original film that the
photographs are based on, however, frustrated. There is no "original"
of a Sherman "Untitled Film Stills". As Krauss writes:

Not in the 'actual film' nor in a publicity shot or 'ad', nor in any
other published picture. The condition of Sherman's work in the
Film Stills - and part of their point, we would say, is the simulacral
nature of what they contain, the condition of being a copy without an
original.11

It is not by accident that Sherman "made her point" within the genre of
the (self-)portrait, because it is exactly the relation between subjectivity
and representation which is scrutinised in her work. The standard
relation between subject and representation is now reversed. We
don't see a transparent representation of a "full" subjectivity, instead we
see a photograph of a subject which is constructed in the image of
the traditional portrait, or rather the standard view of representation.
The traditional portrait, or rather the standard view of
representation, is turned inside out.

In all her "Untitled Film Stills" we are impelled to recognise
a visual style and a type of femininity. The images suggest that there
is a particular kind of femininity in the woman, whereas in fact the
femininity is in the image itself, it is the image.12 This conclusion
could give the impression that there is a little difference between
the impression in Pop-art portraiture and in Sherman's
"Untitled Film Stills". For both oeuvres short-circuit the idea that the
portrait provides a representation of a subject which is authentic and
original.

There is, however, a major difference between the Pop-art portraits
of the 1960s and the feminist photographs of Sherman of the late 1970s.
This difference gives a new edge to the deconstruction of the portrait by
twentieth-century artists. In the words of Rosalind Krauss:

"Indeed, almost two decades of work on the place of woman within
representation has put this shift into effect, so that a whole domain
of discourse no longer conceives of stereotype as a kind of mass-
media mistake, a set of cheap costumes women might put on or
cast aside. Rather stereotype - itself baptised now as "masquerade"
and here understood as a psychoanalytic term - is thought of as the
phenomenon to which all women are submitted both inside and
outside representation, so that as far as femininity goes, there is
nothing but costume".13

This implies that representations in the restricted sense - films,
advertisements, novels, paintings - are part of a far more absolute set of
mechanisms; of representation in the broader sense, called the symbolic
order in Lacanian psychoanalysis.14 Subjectivities are shaped, are
constructed by this symbolic order.

The portrait receives a new significance in the light of this feminist,
psychoanalytically informed conception of subjectivity. In Sherman's
case, the portrait is not used as a critique of the mass-media, but as the
framework which explores and exposes modes of femininity. This had
to be done within the genre of the portrait exactly because, according
to the standard view of the traditional portrait, that was the place were
we could watch femininity as an essential quality, as beauty, that is. If
the portrait has been one of the main frameworks in which the notion
of "real" femininity had been advocated, it is of course the most relevant
space for a deconstruction of that notion.

SUBJECTING POWERS OF REPRESENTATION

Although I have assumed an intertwining in the portrait between
the conception of subjectivity and that of representation, I have so far
focused on twentieth-century portraiture whose main point is to
propose new notions of the subject. Not all twentieth-century artists
who have challenged portraiture began by reflecting on subjectivity.
Some of them gave rise to new conceptions of subjectivity as a result of
their challenging reflections on the effects and powers of representation,
especially of the representation of human subjects. Because of the
intertwining of the two conceptions, the difference is often hard
to discern. Challenging the notion of subjectivity has immediate
consequences for the notion of representation; and the other way round.
But emphasises shift. Therefore, I will now focus on artists who have
changed portraiture by their reflections on representation.

In his Camera Lucida, the French critic and semiotician Roland
Barthes has written about the nature of the relation between portrait
and portrayed. In his view, the image has a strong hold over the subject
through the ability to represent the body of the subject as whole, an
ability that the subject itself lacks. For the subject has only transient
bodily experiences and partial views of its own body. To transform these fragmented experiences and views into a whole, the subject needs an image of itself.

Baudrillard, however, does not see the dependence on the unity-bestowing relation of the image as desirable, but as mortifying. "I die by being photographed by a camera: to be seen as efforts to to be seen in the primal space of the painting, but also as the subject of representational logic also manifests itself in Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne (1967) in the form of another motif recurrent in his oeuvre. The portrait within the portrait is pinned down to the wall by a nail. This nail evokes immediately other Bacon paintings: his Crucifixions in the context of Bacon's allegorical polemic with the western tradition of mimetic representation, the motif of the crucifixion signifies more than just bodily suffering and sacrifice. Within Bacon's consistent reflection on the effects of representation, the crucifixion betokens the inevitable consequence of representation, the tearing apart of the subject, the destructive effect of reproductive mimesis. And this is no less true in those works where the crucifixion is represented by the cross or by slaughter, but subtly and microscopically by nails. The nails signify more than just bodily suffering and sacrifice. Within Bacon's consistent reflection on the effects of representation, the crucifixion betokens the inevitable consequence of representation, the tearing apart of the subject, the destructive effect of reproductive mimesis. And this is not just true in those works where the crucifixion is represented by the cross or by slaughter, but subtly and microscopically by nails. As indexes of the immense suffering and the total mortification to the body, the nails suggest that any attempt to represent mimesically may be regarded literally as an attempt to nail the subject down. Bacon

representation. He folds the subject back onto itself, endorsing the resulting fragmentation as the inevitable consequence of this denial of the unity-bestowing power of representation.

There are many motifs in Bacon's portraits which give rise consistently to this view of the mortifying effects of representation on the portrayed subject. Let me digress for a moment on one motif which strikingly and literally substantiates the power of the portrait to threaten subjectivity. The painting Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne (1967) is not only a portrait, it is also a work about the portrait. Isabel Rawsthorne is portrayed on different ontological levels. We see her in the primal space of the painting, but also as the subject of representation, and the process of representation, her analysis as the distinction between real and representation, here thematised as the distinction between literal, primary space and figural, represented space. We see the female figure not only inside and outside the door, but also as a shadow on the white door and in a painting nailed on the wall (thus represented indexically as well as iconically). This image on the wall encapsulates the tensions produced by the painting that it is part of. As in many Bacon portraits, it is as if the represented figure is coming out of the image; or perhaps it is the other way around, and a figure is being sucked into an image. The figure is both inside and outside the image.

Bacon's representational logic also manifests itself in Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne (1967) in the form of another motif recurrent in his oeuvre. The portrait within the portrait is pinned down to the wall by a nail. This nail evokes immediately other Bacon paintings: his Crucifixions in the context of Bacon's allegorical polemic with the western tradition of mimetic representation, the motif of the crucifixion signifies more than just bodily suffering and sacrifice. Within Bacon's consistent reflection on the effects of representation, the crucifixion betokens the inevitable consequence of representation, the tearing apart of the subject, the destructive effect of reproductive mimesis. And this is not just true in those works where the crucifixion is represented by the cross or by slaughter, but subtly and microscopically by nails. As indexes of the immense suffering and the total mortification to the body, the nails suggest that any attempt to represent mimesically may be regarded literally as an attempt to nail the subject down. Bacon

FB: What I want to do is to distort the thing far beyond the appearance, but in the distortion to bring it back to recording of the appearance.
DS: Are you saying that painting is almost a way of bringing somebody back, that the process of painting is almost like the process of recalling?
FB: I am saying it. And I think that the methods by which this is done are so artificial that the model before you, in my case inhibits the artificiality by which this thing can be brought about6.

Bacon talks about his portraits as conflicts between the artificiality of representation and the resistance of the model to that artificiality. That which Bacon depicts is exactly the fight between subject and representation. He folds the subject back onto itself, endorsing the resulting fragmentation as the inevitable consequence of this denial of the unity-bestowing power of representation.

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outside the image, as well as absence of "presence" in the image. About his "Monuments" (1986), for which he used a photograph of himself and of seventeen classmates, he says the following:

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

The photographs don't help him to bring back the memories of his classmates. He calls his classmates "cadavers", because the portraits of them are dead. The portraits are dead because they don't provide presence or reference. He only remembers what the picture offers in its plain materiality as a signifier: faces.

The dead portraits are in tension with another element of his installations. The installations are always framed as monuments, as memorials or as shrines. The portraits are often lit by naked bulbs as if to represent candles, to emphasise their status as memorial or shrine. These framings make the intention of the installation explicit. These works want to memorialise or to keep in touch with the subjects portrayed. The photographs produce, however, an effect which is in conflict with this intention. They are not able to make the portrayed subject present. They evoke absence. That is why the memorials are not so much memorials of a dead person, but of a dead pictorial genre. The portrait is conscripted in its failure to fulfil its traditional promises.

But Boltanski has made other kinds of work which are closer to fulfilling the standard claims of portraiture. In 1973 and 1974 he made several installations, generically called "Inventories", which consisted of the belongings of an arbitrary person. In his "Inventory of Objects that Belonged to a Woman of New York", he presented the furniture of a woman who had just died. The function of these belongings was to witness the existence of the woman who had passed away. Semiotically speaking, these "Inventories" are fundamentally different from the installations with photographs. While the photographs refer iconically (or rather, fail to do so), the inventories refer indexically. The pieces of furniture represent the woman, not by means of similarity or likeness, but by contiguity. The woman and her belongings have apparently been abandoned.

The point here is the shift from icon to index. The difference between the iconical and the indexical works is a matter of pretension. The photographic portraits claim, by convention, to refer to somebody and to make that person present. They fail, as I have argued, in both
respects. The indexical works don't claim presence: they show somebody's belongings, not the person her/himself. And strangely enough, they are successful as acts of referring to the person to whom the objects belonged. This success is due to the fact that one of the traditional components of the portrait has been exchanged for another semiotic principle. Similarity has gone, contiguity is proposed as the new mode of portraiture. When we stay with the standard definition of the portrait, Boltanski's indexical works fit much better in the genre of the portrait than his photographic portraits.

Although referentiality is more successfully pursued in the indexical installations, the problem of presence in these works is again foregrounded as a failure. In The Clothes of François C., for instance, we see black-and-white, tin-framed photographs of children's clothing. The photographs or these clothes immediately raise the question of the identity and the whereabouts of their owner. This leads again to the "Holocaust-effect". The clothes refer to the storage places in the death and concentration camps where all the belongings of the internees were sorted (thus deprivning them of individual ownership), and stored. After the war, some of these storage places were found, and became symbols, or better indexical traces, of the millions who were put to death in the camps.

Marlene Dumas, a Dutch artist of South African origin, also addresses the problem of reference in her oeuvre, which mainly consists of groups or individual portraits. This artist is even more explicitly concerned with the problem of reference. She has said about her work: "I want to be a referential artist. To refer is only possible to something which has already been named. (But names are not always given by you)". Like artists such as Warhol and Sherman, Dumas is aware of the screen of images and representation, which makes reference impossible, but she does not accept the situation. Instead of foregrounding the screen and the impossibility of plain reference, she fights, while referring, against the conventional "names" which were not given by her. How does she do this?

The portraits and group portraits of 1985-87 show faces that often look like masks. The faces are usually very light. They look like sheets or screens which are emptied out; black pupils, surrounded by white, attract the attention in these bleached faces. The eyes are very ambiguous, in an uncanny way. It is not clear if, in their round darkness, they should be read as remnants of subjectivity - as the eyes peeping through holes in the artificial mask - or whether they are nothing other than stenotypic signs in a mask, indicating eyes. The mask, as well as the caricature, has had an important function in dismantling the traditional portrait in twentieth century art. Buchloh describes this role of the mask and the caricature as follows:

[...] both caricature and mask conceive of a person'sphysiognomy as fixed rather than a fluid field; in singling out particular traits, they reduce the infinity of differential facial expressions to a metonymic set. Thus, the fixedness and malleability of the double allows the projection of the essential characteristics of the differentiated bourgeois subject.

The mask represents essential features of subjectivity as fixed, mechanical or grotesque. Although this is relevant for an understanding of Dumas's work, her mask-like portraits evoke at the same time a very different quality. The faces in her work evoke emptiness and installations, these portraits give rise to a "Holocaust-effect". In her group portraits it seems that the group as such is responsible for this. In The Teacher (1987) she portrays a class of schoolchildren in uniform, uniform is usual in South Africa, but this portrayal emphasizes how apartheid culture fixed identities on the basis of the most superficial exteriority. As a consequence, the children's faces have the same empty uniform expression as their clothes. In The Teacher we see that the uniform expression of the students is that of their teacher. This sameness is presented as death or absence. The question arises, then, whether it is in the situation of the group as such, or the portrayal of a group, which causes this putting to death of subjectivity, this Holocaust-effect? One cannot help remembering there that apartheid was quite literally the representation or "portrayal" of groups. But Dumas's work goes beyond such a political statement alone. She explores the inverse relationship between the political situation of apartheid and the representational consequences of mimetic portrait, looking for essences.

For Dumas' later portraits suggest by their difference that these earlier works are part of an overall project to explore and challenge the conventional characteristics of the traditional portrait as a politically invested genre. In the later works she continues to pursue the genre's conventions, but takes a different approach. She begins to experiment with format. While portraits are usually vertical (reflecting the human subject in its most respected posture, standing), an extreme horizontal format is also introduced. In such images the figures are stretched out in all their horizontal potential. It is as if they are pulled down, made powerless, by the format of the and powerlessness, as opposed to the connection between the vertical format of the portrait and the authority of the portrayed person. This becomes provocatively clear when Dumas paints a male nude in this horizontal position in The Particularity of Nakedness (1987). He considered it a failure, because it had "too many horizontals". A successful painting needs verticals, he seemed to imply, without...
realising that Dumas had purposefully represented masculinity in this painting in such an un-erect way.

Dumas' explorations of the relation between format and authority are shaped by contrasts. While representing masculinity horizontally, she depicts babies vertically in four vertical paintings: *The First People (I-IV)* (1991). When depicted horizontally, we would see babies in these poses in all their vulnerability and powerlessness (see Warhol's *Child*). But, erected, these little creatures suddenly become monsters with grabbing claws. By enlarging this authority-effect of the vertical format, Dumas deconstructs this quality of the traditional portrait. She undoes the increase of being, namely the bestowing of authority on the portrayed, by giving it grotesque proportions and by attributing it to inappropriate exemplars.

In her work *Black Drawings* (1991-2), and the portraits she made for the mental institution Het Hooghuys, in Etten-Leur (1991), Dumas explored portrayal in yet another way. This time she made no individual portrait or group portrait, but a group of portraits. *Black Drawings* consist of 112 portraits of black people; the work made for Het Hooghuys consists of 35 paintings, with one panel containing a poem by the Dutch poet Jan Arends. Most of the paintings are portraits of the people what are living in the mental institution, some are of animals.

These two groups of portraits are radically different from the earlier group portraits. They don't produce a Holocaust-effect. Nor do they work as a collection of original subjectivities. Instead of promoting black subjects or mentally ill subjects to the status of bourgeois subjectivity, she constructs a conception of subjectivity based on variety and diversity, but not on unique individuality. The portrayed models are not bestowed with subjectivity in terms of original presence, but in relation to each other. They are, because they are all different. That is why they all deserve their own panel within their collective portrayal.

The kinds of images I have discussed all suggest that the portrait has not at all become a dead genre in twentieth-century art, as some critics have claimed recently. Conceptions of subjectivity and identity have been challenged and mimetic conceptions of representation have been undermined in all kinds of ways. This has led to the implausibility of the intertwining of bourgeois subjectivity with mimetic representation, but not to the death of the genre as such. Although genres are of course contaminated by their histories, it is not necessary to define a genre by its history. Artists like Warhol, Sherman and Dumas show how a genre can be liberated from its history so that it can become an arena for new significations. The project of "portraying somebody in her/his individual originality or quality or essence" has come to an end. But portraiture as genre has become the form of new conceptions of subjectivity and new notions of representation.