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Lynda Edridge

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ECCE HOMO

> *"The painter is standing a little back from his canvas. He is glancing at his model; perhaps he is considering whether to add some finishing touch, though it is also possible that the first stroke has not yet been made. The arm holding the brush is bent to the left, towards the palette; it is motionless, for an instant, between canvas and paints. The skilled hand is suspended in mid-air, arrested in rapt attention on the painter's gaze; and the gaze, in return, waits upon the arrested gesture. Between the fine point of the brush and the steely gaze, the scene is about to yield up its volume."*
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> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

Background and Influences

I began the *Ecce Homo* project with some very broad questions about the genetic code and the effect of this new and complex lexicon on the perception of the human body, particularly within the discipline of the visual arts. How could and would the code be interpreted and included in the visual imagery of the human body within the culture of my society? How would I personally be able to interpret the human body via the code within the context of making art works?

In pursuit of a solution to these questions and in the process of undertaking research for the sub-thesis component of this project, I began reading Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, *Discipline and Punishment*, *The Order of Things*, etc., in a somewhat labyrinthine search for answers. These philosophical historical dissertations created more problems and led to more questions than I could possibly elucidate in this report. However, I began to understand that all human life is encoded. It is supported by complex structures of thought that are coded against basic beliefs or principles, widely supported and accepted. Generally, we unquestioningly understand our world mediated through these principles.

As I was researching honorific portraiture and medical illustration of the nineteenth century for the sub-thesis, I began to think about the face as a possible zone upon which all sorts of basic principles and ideas might be encoded. Perhaps faces operate in society as signs and codes everywhere. This train of thought led me to take a short detour through the complexity of the semiotics of signs, signifiers and symbols, etc., that proved somewhat incidental to the purposes of making my pictures.

Of far more interest and relevance to my work was the imagery produced by numerous, little known artists for the alienists, psychiatrists, physicians and scientists of the late eighteenth and whole of the nineteenth centuries. In this genre it could clearly be seen that faces operated as codes or visual markers, part of the complexity of diagnosing human infirmity.

I began to look at faces that appear in popular culture because they seemed to contain some form of inherent cultural coding. Human models, such as those that appear in the fashion and pornographic rags were an initial source of inspiration, as there appeared to be connections between fashion and sex, and more tenuously, genetics. Faces can now be manipulated and altered by plastic surgery. Developed initially by committed surgeons and physicians to provide vitally needed reconstructive surgery to the wounded soldiers and civilians of World War I, plastic surgery now plays an important part in sustaining the perfectly fetishised human body for the fashion and sex industries. Like plastic surgery, genetics contains the very real possibility for human transformation and the acquisition of 'fetish traits'.

Following this interest in the human face as a form of cultural coding, I spent a considerable amount of time making images of faces. Drawing is the most direct method I know to

explore a subject. It is open to sudden stops and shifts, and the meanderings of thought that take place when one is given three years to contemplate and research a subject. During this period of my work, I completed many drawings of faces I found interesting, as well as a series of ink and wash images of fashion and pornographic models, and some small portrait paintings. My reading had stimulated my artistic interest in the cultural construct of madness, so I also drew the faces of the old and demented in the high-level dementia facility, where I work as an assistant in nursing (AIN), attending to the bodily and emotional needs of aged and unreasoned people.

I deliberately took this job as a way of investigating the subject of insanity for the sub-thesis component of the MPhil. I had decided that the most informed analysis I could make on the subject of unreason would be mediated by the most direct experience of diagnosed insanity that I could achieve. Consequently, I made a deliberate choice to work amongst people who did have this diagnosis. The availability of this work also coincided with a desperate need for funds to support myself for the duration of the MPhil.

Whilst giving me some insight into the various mental maladies that fall into the category of 'dementia', I have also come to understand that the lives of these people are subject to the highest level of categorization. This is sustained by a system of surveillance, reportage, locks, fences and tracking devices. The bureaucratic structures that support this entire area of health care are all pervasive. They are complex and convoluted structures that manufacture an endless amount of writing in the form of systems of codes and categories. I believe individual human concerns are lost in the words and codes that describe them.

I found myself in a strange sort of nexus. One of being emotionally involved with the elderly people I was caring for and yet complicit in a system that, I believe, has clear faults. This position, of having a foot in both camps, so to speak, helped me gain some objectivity when it came to thinking about these people and their minds and lives.

In my life as a painter I find that everything that occurs in those other parts of life, unrelated to painting and picture making, still have their parts to play in my work. And so I looked for ways and means of incorporating some of the ideas that circulated in my mind as I worked at the nursing home.

I have drawn the faces of the people I work with incessantly, and I have become fascinated with expression as it appears on the features of the face. Facial expression is fleeting, that is, unless it is fixed by some technology: the hand of an artist, the finger on the shutter release of a camera, or some other recording device. I am interested in the dichotomy between the fleeting nature of expression and the fixed recording and translation of a particular facial expression, not only in the genre of portraiture, but throughout visual culture more generally. At the same time, I also drew and painted the images of friends, family and strangers as captured through the lens of my camera. All this work contributed to the development of my understanding of portraiture and the notion of faciality.

In part, this experimental work was required to try and work out my own relationship to the face as a painter. I had little experience in portrait painting and needed to become familiar with portraying the components that construct the face, i.e., mouth, nose, eyes, ears, etc., and experimenting with how these elements could be manipulated in order to convey a particular emotion or state of being.

Particular books and their writers as well as artists and their creations have accompanied me for the past eighteen months of my exploration of the face, identity and genetics. The way these writers write is visual and metaphoric, often using visual images as vehicles for translating their ideas, particularly in the case of Antonin Artaud who was a prolific creator of

faces as well as being a compulsive writer of words. In all these books and writers, I found the ideas confronting, relevant and timely. Antonin Artaud, Michel Foucault, Michel Houellebecq, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have had a significant influence on the creation of the *Ecce Homo* project.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

Michel Foucault's work has had a significant influence across a range of disciplines. In a sense he laid out the post-modernist groundwork for the late twentieth century; he set the precedent for recontextualising just about everything in western history and culture. He questions the fundamental conventions, laws and codes of Western civilization. He had no patience with idealism. Such statements as, "One makes war to win, not because it's just"; and "When the proletariat takes power, it may be quite possible that the proletariat will exert toward the classes over which it has triumphed, a violent, dictatorial, and even bloody power. I can't see what objection one could make to this,"[1] have raised the ire of humanist thinkers the world over. With statements like these, he completely empties the subject (here, war) of all moral order, allowing a completely objective analysis to take place.

With almost every line he wrote, Foucault questioned the structures of thought, ideas and power that construct Western society, emptying them of their moral content – an order superimposed on them by the purveyors of classificatory systems.

We have invaded Afghanistan, and we prepare to engage with Iraq, in the name of 'peace and democracy'.   It seems to me that in his work, Michel Foucault addresses the present as well as elucidating an extraordinary history of Western knowledge:

> The fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical order with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.[2]

In analyzing Velazquez's painting, *Las Meninas*, Foucault proposes that we forget about the 'names' of the characters that appear in this painting, suggesting that without the 'names', the painting returns to an order that is outside of the imposed order of the 'name'.

> These proper names [identifying the characters of the painting] would form useful landmarks and avoid ambiguous designations; they would tell us in any case what the painter is looking at, and the majority of the characters in the picture along with him. But the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by visible, they prove insuperbly inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similies, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. And the proper name, in this particular context, is merely an artifice: it gives us a finger to point with, in other words, to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as though they were equivalents. But if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided, so as to stay as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task. It is perhaps through the medium of this grey, anonymous language, always over-meticulous and repetitive because too broad, that the painting may, little by little, release its illuminations.[3]

I believe that Foucault suggests that the names of the characters in this painting delineate the superficial meaning of the painting, but that the wider implications of the painting, outside of the meanings of the names, can be extrapolated by using instead a generalized, "grey, anonymous language".

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I make faces without names attached to them. They are simply faces. Varying and different in their aspect, they are individual, but they are nameless. By doing this I hope to focus the viewer's attention on the fact of the face itself, as a structure, a construct, a subject whose interpretation is more open, for the fact of losing its individual name and attains instead the generic term of 'face'. The 'name' suggests an order, an imperative, other than that of the 'face', which stands in stark simplicity for itself.

Michel Houllebecq, *Atomised*

This novel is a gruesome critique of contemporary Western culture. For me, it seemed to exude the profundity of George Orwell's *1984*. Houllebecq makes use of the rigorous science of twenty first century genetics and with an extraordinary poetic and bleak imagination has created a novel that is causing outrage and eloquent praise the world over.

Michel Houellebecq's narrative concerns two half-brothers, Bruno and Michel, born into the liberation of a post-sixties, Americanised world. Bruno seeks fulfillment in the only way that society offers him: through sex. Michel, however, is a successful scientist. Unlike Bruno he has withdrawn from the freedom of the times, yet he is still incapable of emotional attachment.

The overriding theme of this book is the idea that 'metaphysical mutations' regularly convulse and reconfigure human existence. The 'sexual revolution' and the license this has produced in the last decades of the twentieth century appears as such a mutation: the separation of sex and reproduction leads Houellebecq's characters into a liberation which they are unable to deal with. As they enter middle age and their bodies begin to fail, they are bombarded and immersed in the frantic displacements of fantasy, pornography, plastic surgery, therapy and the pervasive parody of traditional religion that is contemporary 'spirituality'.

However, all of this turns out to be a rehearsal for the true metaphysical mutation. The grand transformation for which Michel's research has been preparing is nothing less than humanity's final, definitive and suicidal act: having killed off God in the scientific revolution and having done away with society in the sexual revolution, man now cedes his domination of the world to his replacement, a new and infinitely happier species.

The ultimate 'metaphysical mutation' closes this book – that of genetic engineering. With the help of Michel's theories it is proven that:

> Any genetic code, however complex, could be noted in a standard, structurally stable form, isolated from any mutations. This meant that every cell contained within it the possibility of being perfectly copied. Every animal species, however highly evolved, could be transformed into a similar species, reproduced by cloning and therefore immortal.[4]

Michel mysteriously vanishes from the world in 2009. His scientific disciples extrapolate Michel's theories in his absence, perhaps in ways that he could not have foreseen. Experiments are conducted with identical twins that show that two individuals, identical in every biological way, may develop into entirely different individuals. However, they will always retain a sense of fraternity, despite personality and intellectual differences.

By 2029 sex has become irrelevant for reproduction. It becomes solely a means of achieving pleasure and fulfillment. By genetically increasing the corpuscles that stimulate pleasure in a human being, situating them across the entire body, rather than just around the glans penis and clitoris, the sexual pleasure of the new human species is vastly increased.

The book ends in a utopian world of fraternity:

Having broken the filial chain that linked us to humanity, we live on. Men consider us to be happy; it is certainly true that we have succeeded in overcoming the monstrous egotism, cruelty and anger which they could not; we live very different lives. Science and art are still a part of our society, but without the stimulus of personal vanity, the pursuit of Truth and Beauty has taken on a less urgent aspect. To humans of the old species, our world seems a paradise. It has even been known for us to refer to ourselves – with a certain humour – by the name which they dreamed of, 'gods'.[5]

<center>*****</center>

I construct the faces out of one genetic code, using that portion of the code that pertains to masculinity. I use the code for masculinity because it remains the dominant paradigm at the beginning of the twenty first century. The male of the human species still largely controls the wealth and power of the world; and men dominate science. Therefore if there is to be one code for all – then let it contain the male traits that ensure the male of the species is so successful. I also use the binary code, 0101010101, because it is the code that drives the computers that enable life in its smallest components, the genetic code, to be visualised. But for this code, we would not have been able to read our human genome.

Antonin Artaud, *The Human Face*

All of the multi-faceted work of Antonin Artaud fascinates me. However, for the purposes of this project, a long poem he created to accompany an exhibition of his drawings of faces was particularly inspiring and I have included an abridged version:

The human face
is an empty power, a
field of death.
The old revolutionary
claim to a form
that's never corres-
ponded with its body, goes off
to be something other
than the body.
So it's absurd
to reproach a painter
for academically
insisting in his time upon
still reproducing
the features of the human face
such as they are; for such
as they are, they haven't
yet found the form they
point to and specify
to make more than a sketch

Which means
that the human face
hasn't yet found *the* face
and that it's up to the painter
to give it it.
but that means
the human face,
such as it is, is still in quest of it-
self with two eyes
a nose a mouth
and the auricular
cavities
which correspond to the holes
of the sockets like

the four openings
to the sepulchre of
approaching death

In the portraits
I have drawn
I have above all avoided
forgetting the nose the mouth
the eyes the ears or
the hair, but I've sought
to force the face that was
talking to me to reveal
the secret
of an old human story

I haven't sought
to take great pains with my lines
or their effects
but rather to inventory the
kinds of patent
linear truths which
are as valid
through words,
through written phrases,
as through the graphism
and perspective of lines…[6]

Antonin Artaud delineates here, the multiple potentialities of the face for expression and meaning. He includes all the essential characteristics of an individual face but he does not adhere to the strict likeness of the subject, he allows his mark the individuality of a word, not restraining it by copying the contour before him, but allowing the mark its own expressive nature.

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I would allow the 'mark its own expressive nature' with the faces I have created. Whilst incorporating all of the features of the individual face, I would, within the limits of the stamp, force expression and personality by stamping alternately, aggressive and haphazard then slow and considered. This would counterpoint the strict boundaries of grid and code.

Gilles Deleuze/Felix Guatari *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism & Schizophrenia*

I took a short, though momentous, detour across the 'Plateaus' of Deleuze and Guatarri's convoluted analysis of the structures of capitalism. I found this book deeply confusing but the chapter entitled, *Year Zero: Faciality*, though complex, provided some insight into another understanding: that of the face as a form of abstraction of the body. Faciality is not concerned with resemblance but with an order of reasons. It is a mechanic process that draws the entire body across the surface of the face. The face is not a model or an image but a code by which we understand the 'other' person. The state of the body is coded by the elements of the face.   Deleuze and Guatarri write about the face in terms of a white wall with black holes. The black holes are subjective and the white wall is reflective

To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari

> You can only dismantle the face by going through the face, in the sense of both using the face, and going too close to the face, to the point at which the faciality traits break down and molecular universes are called into being ... Make fun of and with the surfaces, multiply them, break them into their component parts; the pixels of a television screen, the crackly resolution of low-grade video, the low hum of white noise in your wires ... only on your face, and at the bottom of your

black hole and upon your white wall, will you be able to set faciality traits free, not in order to return to a primitive head but to invent a combination by which those traits connect with traits of picturality that have also been freed from their respective codes.[7]

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I was inspired by the contradictions and metaphors implicit in this chapter: the white wall/black hole system. I would use boards, flatly aligned to the wall, so as to create a surface that is a face. I would use the black stamp of the binary code to fill in the 'black holes of subjectivity'; this is where my expression, my mark, though limited, would be located. I did not want to create portraits as such, but rather faces that alluded to the traditions of portraiture. In essence, I wanted to my work with faces to have the physical and material presence, inherent to portrait painting, but I did not want that presence to be necessarily coded to a definitive identity. I wanted to construct images that hovered somewhere in the borderlands between presence and absence, between the named and the unnamed human being, in that place where identity dissolves.

Scientific Journals

Many of these journals have gained popular currency. They can be purchased from such mundane locations as supermarkets and newsagents and can be found alongside the Woman's Weekly and Gardening Australia. I believe that with the advent of the decoding of the Human Genome and all that that implies, the general public has become intensely aware and concerned with what the scientists are up to. I think that the ordinary citizen, at least in the West, is increasingly aware of the impact that science has, even at the street/supermarket level and this has meant that the scientists feel it necessary to communicate their research to the widest possible audience, rather than the select few who are involved in their field.

Throughout the *Ecce Homo* project I have constantly plumbed the visual imagery created for scientists in scientific journals. These images, usually generated by designers and their computers, are often intensely beautiful, even when describing some dreadful disease, virus, or the scary world of genetic engineering.

I looked at artists that explored identity, particularly those that used the portrait or face: Mike Parr and Marlene Dumas are two artists who have used the face in order to communicate ideas beyond the features of the face itself – notions of power, authority, individuality and identity. I have looked at and studied the work of these two artists, and they appear to be working with some of the ideas that I am interested in concerning the face.

Marlene Dumas

Much of Marlene Dumas' work reflects the binary nature of western culture: black/white, masculine/feminine, the intellectual/the sensual, the rational/the sublime, etc.[8] Dumas has constructed large grids of multiple faces of black people, Christ, blondes, models and those she calls rejects. All of these faces are made primarily of ink wash on paper and the paper is pinned to the wall. She reinterprets the nude, looking not to the typical artist's model for inspiration but rather drawing all that she needs from the imagery of pornographic magazines. She paints babies, not as cute and cuddly things, but instead stretched out on large vertical canvases, if not as corpses, then certainly as specimens, bearing some resemblance to frogs prepared for dissection. She paints brides in gowns delightful, but the expressions in the faces of the brides are strangely blank, bland and anonymous, giving an overall sinister and threatening aspect to the image, which is in direct contrast to the bridal dresses and the connotations of such a symbolic item of clothing. Mike Parr achieves a similar affect with his *Self Portrait as a Bride* series.

Marlene Dumas parodies the culture around her, often subverting the gentlest and cloy of subjects into something minacious. She plays with the symbolic nature of the subjects that she paints, whether they are objects, people or faces. I found this approach particularly interesting because her discourse with complex and quite profound subjects is interpreted in a manner that is painterly and visual and located within the historical boundaries of traditional methods of picture making – painting and drawing.

Marlene Dumas makes use of accepted motifs, like the nude, the portrait, the child and the bride, but then she inverts/subverts the motif that gives the series or individual image a meaning outside of its generally accepted cultural construct.

Mike Parr

Mike Parr is an extraordinary Australian artist. My first experience with Parr's art was inside the labyrinth (*Fathers III [Subject, Verb,* Object) he installed for the *Guinness Contemporary Art Project*, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1996, This was a powerful and visceral experience in which the viewer in a sense became the performer. The experience was terribly confronting as the maze was pitch black and the passageways that led around the maze were narrow and one was forced to encounter the bodies of 'others' - unknown, unseen, unfamiliar. Some people were unable to enter the maze at all, finding it too confronting, others entered and found themselves hopelessly lost and had to be led out by the guard posted outside. Still others seemed to experience some kind of hysteria and also had to be 'rescued' by the guard.

He has described the whole of his body of work: installation, photographs, prints, performance, film and writing, as a continuous 'self-portrait'. Like Antonin Artaud, Parr's work is intensely psychological. He pushes his work to the very margins of madness or possibly hysteria and is unafraid of plumbing the depths of his own psyche in a deliberate confrontation with the public world.

Of particular interest to me are his drawn and printed self-portraits. I think in creating the images of himself that he does, he is attempting to break open portraiture's traditionally accepted representational codes. He does not adhere to his likeness, although he uses gridded-up photographs or the mirror as his source material. He appears to attack his image with his hand and whatever tool he happens to be using in order to make the image, say an etching implement. Perhaps the act of making the drawing or print is a performance, and something of this is evident in the final result. Often these images are laid over a grid, or the grid laid over the image. Mike Parr's self-portraits are always installed or cut in a grid format, that I believe is representative of the structure and inalienable precepts that govern our society, but I also believe the grid is representative of the structure and principles that govern our society and by which moral judgments are passed.

And it is the grid which became very important to me. I had been making portraits and faces on single sheets of paper or canvas board with the stamp. What I was finding was that the face became irrelevant and the number (the stamp) seemed to be dominating the image. I was looking for a fine balance between the priority of the face and the priority of the number. However, when I applied a grid over or under the face of the subject, this seemed to pull the face back from the oblivion into which it had fallen into without the grid. From the beginning of the process of constructing these images (from the initial photocopied source material), to the final presentation, these faces are constantly in a grid format.

Many other artists have had an impact on my work; however, it is these two that I constantly return to for inspiration. Other artists of importance to me are Joseph Beuys, Chuck Close, Christian Boltanski, Luc Tuymans, John Beard, Cindy Jackson, Jake and Dinos Chapman,

Stelarc, Orlan, Joel-Peter Witkin, Andres Serrano, Mona Hatoum, Gilbert and George, Kiki Smith and Jenny Saville. What is coherent in my interest in all of these artists is their preoccupation with the human body, notions of identity and a challenging approach to accepted modes of representation.

The Face

Our fascination for the human visage is intense, archaic, and possibly pre-historic. It is present in the imagery of thousands of years of human existence: it is the face of absolute authority that appears on the earliest metal coinage as it still appears on much of our own coinage - the Queen of England, after all, still personifies the ultimate authority of our political life; it is the face of 'Our Lord' – one face for all; it is the face of terror - masked, dark and bearded; it is the face of beauty - airbrushed and surgically altered to meet prevailing standards of desirability; it is the 'Face of our Nation', as revealed in the flashing lights and reflective mirrors of the National Museum of Australia's Eternity Gallery. Australia Post and SBS also represent the 'faces of Australia' on our letters as postage stamps[*] and television screens[+].

Our most contemporary technology is devoted to allowing us access to our own and others' images. Camcorders, digital cameras download in double quick time. Spidery satellites beamed the image of the 'happy face' to be seen on the surface of the planet Mars – really? Yes, to a global audience of rapt faces.

Portraits occupy much of our attention. How many of us have spent hours pawing dusty time-speckled images of distant, and not so distant, ancestors? How we search for similarities between them and ourselves in the curve of cheek, the hook of nose or a look in the eyes! Portraiture can represent a genetic trace that is more physical than the endless strings of letters that comprise our biological genetic code. Endless snaps are taken as mementos of people who inhabit our lives. It would not be unrealistic to suppose that each and every person who reads this text has at least one portrait of some description in her living space.

What are we, as consumers of the face, to interpret from the myriad of faces that are presented to us? How are our own subjective judgments and opinions influenced? This is the 'machine' of 'faciality' that co-opts and assimilates bodies into binary categories of powerful/powerless, beautiful/ugly, good guy/bad guy, citizen/alien, etc.

In discovering that the face is a coded subject it seemed that I had found a vehicle that could carry an alpha/numeric lexicon. Genetics and binary are languages that operate specifically as code. They are codes that describe invisible structures that support complex systems. On the other hand, human heads have a visceral and physical anatomical structure that is solid and immediately apparent to the human eye. The anatomy of the face is a structure of tissue, cartilage and bone. It is the visual manifestation of the orifices and structures needed by the human being to eat, breath, see and smell. However, the shape of the face, the size of the nose, the position and shape of the eyes, the height and width of the forehead, the size of the mouth and jaw, the position of the brow, are all structures that can be subject to a grid of categorization. The arrangement of these various anatomical structures and their relationship to each other are categories that, up until fairly recent times, people would pass judgment on others as to the social and biological status of a vast spectrum of humanity.

The face, when it is isolated from the mass of the anatomical head, can become a screen across which expression passes. These expressions are fleeting and changeable. Lines and indentations appear and disappear with each changing expression. Portraits freeze these tics of transient expression into images of provisional identity. These are the faces that we are

often presented with as consumers and citizens. We create meaning from these faces because we know what certain facial expressions indicate, and this is what we are generally intended to do when media presents us with images of faces. This is especially true of faces that are presented to us without their bodies, i.e., the close-up of a face in a moment of film or a photograph; the moon face, pale and luminous appearing from the darkness that could represent landscape, body or nothingness.

I began the *Ecce Homo* project using faces of people who had been of some interest for me in the process of this research - fairly well recognized faces such as Foucault, Artaud, Baudrillard, Mumia Abu Jamal, among others.

I also used the faces of those that were anonymous, who had little or no public identity. This was, in a sense, to apply a kind of test to the idea of Foucault's when he discusses the painting *Las Meninas* by Velasquez.

When the final series was complete, I could clearly see that those faces without names, at least to me, have a more abject quality – there is a strong sense of anonymity. The faces with names are weighted with the history of the known identity of the individual depicted. These are specific individuals – they are portraits, in spite of the restraint of the mark. With the unnamed others, the quality of anonymity increased the abject nature of the overall image, it complimented the nonentity of the marks that comprise the structure of the face.

The other point that is critical in choosing a face to copy is that the expression must be ambiguous. I look for a kind of non-expression. The face must be frontal, exposed and screen-like, the eyes should be open and the mouth closed. The age and sex of the subject does not matter and in the end can become ambiguous. This is because of reproductive processes involved in constructing the faces; means that many of the details, lines and wrinkles by which we would normally evaluate such things are lost.

The Genetic Code

What initially sparked my interest in the Human Genome Project and the genetic code were the metaphors that were being used in the public domain to describe it and its consequences. 'The Book of Life', 'the Manual of Man', 'the Code of Codes' and 'Promethean Science', are phrases often used to describe the science of genetics. There seemed to be almost a religious aspect to the language used in connection with the genetic code that either excited or terrified people.

> Because genetics is so often asked to test beliefs about what it means to be human, it is a science closer to moral and religious doctrine than any other. The Bible, the Torah and the Koran all explore the rules by which existence is governed: creation, inheritance, man's place in nature, good, evil, fate and salvation. The Old Testament was the first genetic text of all. It is largely a record of separation: of who is among the chosen. The idea of universal relatedness, a common humanity, is restricted to the New [Testament]. Like most religious writings, both are codes for regulating society. … In biblical times, as now, human qualities were seen as innate and beyond control; the future, for good or ill, was set at birth. Kinship ruled those ancient lands and, in spite of the supposed tolerance of the times in which we live, it retains its power today.[9]

The science of the human genome is extremely complicated and difficult for the lay reader to understand. I will attempt to briefly explain the basic principles involved: The entire human genome is visualized as more than three billion of the same four alphabetical letters – G A C T arranged in differing sequences. These letters abbreviate simple chemicals or bases called guanine, adenine, cytosine and thymine. The bases arrange themselves in complementary pairs to form the rungs connecting the two strands of the famous double helix. C always pairs with G, and A with T. Every human cell contains twenty-two pairs of chromosomes, one set passed down from each parent. Twenty-two pairs are known as the autosomes, the

twenty-third pair are the sex chromosomes: females have two X chromosomes, and males have an X and a Y chromosome. Each chromosome is a bundle of DNA and protein. The particular arrangement of the bases on the double helix code are a set of instructions, telling each cell what to do, when and where. Every single millimeter of the human body, inside and out is comprised of cells, constantly dividing and issuing chemical instructions to grow and maintain the human body.

Before cells divide (a constantly occurring process in the human body) its genetic instructions must be copied so that a complete instruction manual can pass into each daughter cell. As the double helix unzips, each daughter strand serves as a template to generate a new strand, identical to the original. However, mistakes do occur and this is where our illnesses and bodily defects begin.

One may describe the genome as a giant encyclopedia of twenty-four volumes (22 chromosomes, plus the X and Y chromosomes). Each volume contains, on average, several thousand terms (genes).

Explaining the whole of the genetic code, its functions and processes would take a considerable tome, so I have tried to briefly outline its most basic function - that of producing the 'building blocks' that construct the human body.

I am interested in the constant replications of the genetic code - the copying - the defects arising from this process of production and reproduction, the defects that occur as the bases mismatch and rearrange themselves. I imagine the human gene sequence as a drawing tool, sketching out the intricate workings of the human body, mistakes occur in the copying process, corrections are made and sometimes the errors cause profound difficulties, indeed the destruction of the body itself. One can only begin to imagine what will happen when human beings develop the technology and the mindset to enable us to become the hand that guides the crayon of genetics.

My work is grounded in a reproductive process. My source material is from reproductions of faces that are in the world. They are never drawn from 'life'. In my work I use the genetic code as a mark with which I dissolve the features of the face. This mark is a silk-screen mark in pale paint, usually white or 'hospital green'. The silk-screening technique itself contains the possibilities of reproduction, creating multiples, and replicating the image until it finally breaks down and dissolves. With this mark I am able to dissolve the black stamp of binary code that describes the features, contours and expression of the face. I use a small section of the gene that codes for masculinity. The reason for this is primarily because I wanted to use an actual piece of genetic code and also because I perceive the masculine/feminine binary as largely weighted towards the masculine in terms of wealth, power and influence in the world.

The Binary Code

Every computer in the world communicates information to itself, other computers and hardware, and to their users in binary code. This code is made of zeros and ones. Every group of seven to 16 characters corresponds to one letter, numeral, or symbol in a human language. Computers register information as the absence or presence of an electrical charge – on and off. Each zero or one in the binary code is called *bit*.

Genetic technologies could not have developed without the use of computers and the resultant development of highly digitized technologies. In this way I came to consider the binary code as a yet another code integral to the life of the human being in the modern world. I was amazed that something as complex as the myriad of human languages could be simply reduced to two numerals. It seemed such a vast reduction.

It is the notion of the binary that I am interested in. The binary is two: it is 0 and it is 1; it is the two things that are the opposite of each other; it is black/white, male/female, presence/absence, etc… I therefore have a stamp of binary code 1101100 that in decimal numbers translates to108. There is no reason or purpose to this particular decimal number. It is meaningless. It is the configuration of the ones and zeros that I am more interested in. With this stamp I delineate the features of the face. I use this stamp alternately fast and hard, then slow and methodical. I use the stamp in an expressionistic and physical way. I cannot make two marks with the stamp that are identical to each other. I allow my mark making to err in reproducing the face that I am copying. By the contours, outlines and gestures of this black mark the personal and very individual touch of the maker is apparent and this contributes physical and visceral presence of the faces, despite the fact that they are disembodied and constructed from code. The action of using stamp forces me into a more subjective relationship with the source material – the copy of the face from which I am copying in order to create another face.

The Stamps and Silkscreens

Both the silk screens and the stamps, to a greater or lesser extent, are clunky and rather clumsy drawing or painting implements. They do not have the dexterity of a brush or a pencil. I am limited by the text and the objectness of the two tools that I use to apply the mark to the canvas boards. The stamp is a large, heavy, old-fashioned office stamp with large numerals in raised rubber. I use this stamp as a drawing implement, but its heftiness and the straight line of numerals that it delivers limits the kind of marks that I am able to make with it.

There is a great deal of resistance between the canvas-board structure onto which I stamp the face and the stamp pad ink I use with the stamp. In order to get the stamp-pad ink to adhere to the canvas-board, a fair amount of force must be applied when wielding the stamp. It is difficult, nearly impossible to attain a true black no matter how much force is applied however; layers of stamped ink will eventually become a deep grey/black.

The Process of Making *Ecce Homo*

I begin the process of making these images by taking photographs of faces that engage me, printing faces that appear from time to time on my computer screen or from print media such as magazines and newspapers. The identity of the face is irrelevant to me and I tend to use faces that have a very low public profile or who are totally anonymous. I then isolate the face from the body using the photocopier (another reproductive tool) and enlarge it to approximately A1 in size. To achieve this size, using an ordinary photocopier, it is necessary to divide the face into four parts in order to make four A3 copies that make the A1 size. This process can be quite haphazard and some detail is often lost in the trimming of the paper.

The resultant approximate A1 image is a far cry from the original, say, 1cm-5cm one that I began with. Large amounts of facial detail are lost in the enlargement process and in the trimming of each copy. This results in large white spaces interspersed with dark black lines. Every tiny pixel becomes the mark of a thick child's crayon.

I then separate the four A3 copies and divide them again each into four. In this way I am left with 16 small scraps of paper (roughly A5) in size. Each one comprises one tiny segment of the original face. I assign each scrap of photocopy to one of 16 canvas boards (each 40.5cm x 51cm) that will eventually comprise the entire face (162cm x 204cm).   I use canvas boards because they are mere millimeters thick and so do not stand out from the walls to which they

will eventually be pinned. I want the faces to appear not as objects but as much a part of the wall itself as possible.

The 16 boards require some preparation before I begin to stamp the features of the face onto them. I do one of two things: Either I screen print tiny genetic codes vertically and horizontally across the boards in hospital green or white acrylic paint, or I prime the canvas boards with chromatic grey acrylic paint. I add some genetic text in contrasting acrylic. In the end the contrasting text will be all but subsumed beneath the weight of the face. It will only appear as flecks, short lines and small shapes, sometimes alluding to the structure of the double helix of DNA strands.

All of this priming has a fairly minimal effect on the boards at this stage, but the purpose for doing it all - for putting it down before I stamp, rather than after - is that the stamp pad ink that I use with the stamp seems to react with the chemicals in the paint. It seems as if the molecules in the ink, when pressed against the acrylic paint, fragment to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the amount of paint and the type of paint used in the priming process. This also alters the depth of the blacks, greys and whites that almost totally comprise the final image.

I stamp the face onto the grid of 16 boards, board by board, following fairly closely but not too rigorously the features delineated on each of the 16 fragments of photocopied face. I work the stamp-pad ink into the canvas, varying the speed and precision of my mark making. At this point, I am attempting to balance a degree of copying with a degree of haphazard and random mark making. There is some resistance that occurs between the primed canvas boards and the ink of the stamp. The ink will not immediately stick to the boards and so it is necessary to build up layers of stamping or to apply considerable weight when wielding the stamp. Either way creates a different mark.

After the ink of the stamping has dried somewhat, I then apply the genetic code with the silk screen. I have made three screens: one screen carries the genetic code in 12pt in the 'ariel narrow' font, in the shape of a blocked-in double helix. The other two screens carry the same sequence of code in 24pt in the 'Times New Roman' font. One of these screens is an A4 sized page of genetic text, the other is much smaller and enables me to be more precise in its application. The reason for the different fonts and their sizes is to allow some variation in the mark that I apply. The font of the stamp is different again, although it approximates the size of the 24pt 'Times New Roman' font used on the screens.

I apply the stamp and the silk screen alternately to the boards, building up layers of genetic text and binary code. This process is fragmentary in that it is virtually impossible for me to work the entire image at once. Given the confines of the space in which I work, I am only able to work, at most, four boards at once. I do not mind this as I think it ensures that the grid created by the boards is apparent when the face is complete, since, in places, the meeting of the grid lines is somewhat disordered. It is intended to add to the rather dyslexic nature of the completed face.

I cease this process of layering genetic and binary code when I am satisfied that the overall face has achieved a fine balance. By this I mean that the whites, greys and blacks are equal in tonal value to each other. In this way the face remains as a surface, something like to a screen. Some depth is created but it is slight. This is because there is very little true black, neither is there a true white and the small flickers of contrasting colour are the merest details of the whole.

At this point the face is complete and ready to be hung. I consider the hanging of the work important. A pin in the center of the top and bottom edge holds each board to wall. The

edges of each board should meet as closely as possible as in this way each board supports the other with the most minimal amount of pinning. Pinning the boards in this precise way causes the vertical edges of some of the boards to lift slightly away from each other. The separation is minimal, but I believe necessary, because it counterpoints the rigorousness of the grid. It ensures that this structure appears fragile and liable to fragmentation and disintegration.

Whilst the process of constructing these faces is mechanical and quite ordered, I did not want the process to completely undermine the fact that the face is 'human', I did not want to create 'clones' or faces that were the same. Rather, I wanted these faces to have a physical presence and individuality, in spite of their similar and coded constructions. It seemed necessary that these images subtly reference traditional notions of painting. I achieve this by using the stamp as a brush or a pencil. Thus, creating a phenomenological mark that has physical presence because it was made by hand. You know that when you look at a painting or a drawing that you are looking at something that was made – yesterday or five hundred years ago – by a human man or woman. That the touch that applied the marks that construct the image was direct, virtually unmediated by technology. I want the faces that I construct to hover between the printed, reproduced, and mechanical inherent to printing, and the expressionistic, physical and individuality of painting and drawing.

The faces appear to oscillate between being known and unknown: the faces I depict are obviously individual yet they are not named. They allude to an absence and a presence: an absence of the body attached to the face, yet an inferred presence of the body through the very physicality and expression of the face.

I have made faces that threaten to dissolve but, as yet, have not. The flurry of text marks blurs boundaries and lines obfuscating the image of the face, like the white noise of televisions and digital screens and the silent cacophony of the information highway.

Conclusion

This then is Ecce Homo - a series of paintings made with unpainterly implements, referencing portraiture yet they are the antithesis of that genre for these faces are anonymous. They portray no one individual, but by virtue of the marks that construct the faces they are intended to represent every one of us.

I decided to call this project *Ecce Homo*. Ecce Homo is Latin for 'behold the man' or simply 'behold man'. I have used these words to imply a generalized conception of 'man' meaning humanity. I also link the biblical connotation of Pontius Pilate presenting Christ to the people as, not the son of God, but simply as a man. *Ecce Homo* is also the title of Nietszche's memoir, which I read close to the end of this project. To me it seems that Nietszche speaks more to our own times than his own. The questions posed by theology and genetics are similar. Both offer complex explanations as to the means and reasons for human existence. As we pursue the secrets of our genetic code, there is a sense that we are becoming gods in our own right, or that our attachment to a metaphysical notion of 'God' is becoming obsolete. The science of our genes points the way to our ultimate control over our own biological destinies. The need for metaphysical answers to the puzzling questions of human life are being eroded as science explores the 'building blocks of life' that are our genes.

The questions that are posed and gradually being answered by the science of genetics speak very much about identity and identification. As we discover more about our genetic material it is becoming obvious that, whilst our commonalities are vast, the differences between individuals are slight, but encoded and thus decodable. Religious, cultural, social and political structures and codification systems ensure that these differences remain in place,

separating different groups from each other, reinforcing the binary nature of the social life of human beings.

These images are about the instability of identity and the instability of the structures that construct identity. They suggest that identity and identification is not immutable but a system that contains the possibility of being fallible and/or erroneous.

I cannot answer specifically the question that initially began this project: How would the lexicon of the genetic code affect popular perception of the human body? This code has unbelievable creative potential and curative possibilities. However it also has its dark side; it is a lexicon that is susceptible to manipulation in the hands of those who would wish to exploit its classificatory nature.

During the process of this investigation of the human genetic code and its consequences for the human body, I have read widely and this reading has greatly inspired and informed the production of the faces of *Ecce Homo*. I have learnt that it is possible to have a discourse, in visual imagery, with the profound ideas expressed in literature and philosophy. I now understand that these ideas can form a strong backbone around which I am able to explore my own concerns, and perhaps discourse with some of the great and the terrible texts of humankind.

NOTES

[1] From a debate with Noam Chomsky, Amsterdam, November 1971

[2] Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things*, Routledge Classics, 2000, pp.xxii

[3] Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things*, Routledge Classics, 2000, pp.10

[4] Houellebecq, Michel, *Atomised*, Vintage Books, London, 2001, pp.370

[5] *Ibid*, pp.378-379

[6] Hirschman, Jack (Ed), *Antonin Artaud. Anthology*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1965, pp 229-234

[7] Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp.189

[8] Casadio, Josephine Mariuccia, *Focus*, Marlene Dumas, Phaidon, London, 1999

[*] At the end of 1998 a call was made for ordinary Australians to photograph other ordinary Australians for a commemorative stamp series, *The Face of Australia*. Nineteen of the twenty-seven faces chosen were white Australian, three Asian, three European (one from an unspecified EU country, the other two Lebanese and Turkish respectively) and two Aboriginal.

[+] SBS is currently running a self-promotional advertisement featuring a face of an individual 'Australian' whose face is being filmed as he/she is watching SBS program. SBS explained that they had vans parked around Australian towns and cities to which they invited volunteers from the Australian public that they might participate in the making of these series of vignettes.

[9] Jones, Steve, *In The Blood. God, Genes and Destiny*, Harper Collins *Publishers*, London, 1996

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