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.

YOULOGY

Self/Portraiture, Ca*nada*, and
Taras Polataiko's *YOU* series

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ABSTRACT

YOULOGY:
Self/Portraiture, Canada, and Taras Polataiko's YOU series

Janelle Mellamphy

What does YOU mean? Who does YOU define? If your initial answer is that YOU defines *the other*, why is it then that every *I* responds to the other's YOU? When you say YOU, I think I. When I say YOU, you think I. Or is it we? YOU is both singular and plural, one and anyone, clear and complex. YOU can be anyone and everyone. But can YOU mean you, if YOU means me and them as well? YOU puts into question the very idea of identity. This equivocality of where one YOU begins and the other ends, the questioning of the subject position and of the object of that subject's gaze, is what is explored in Taras Polataiko's YOU series.

In this thesis, I seek to face the question of identity in terms of self/portraiture. Centring my discussion around YOU, a series of self-portraits by Ukrainian-born Canadian artist Taras Polataiko, I will face the question of identity first with regard to portraiture, by defining the aspects of the self a portrait aims to encapsulate; second as applied in YOU, when the series is read through a Lacanian lens; and third, as taken to its *il*-logical conclusion: the YOULOGY of a notion.

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Prefacing YOU

Portraiture, and its co-relate self-portraiture, are topics written "around." They are used as the basis for discussions of attribution (E.H. Ramsden, "Come Take this Lute"), of patronage (J. Held, Rubens and his Circle), of connoisseurship (Quatremere de Quincy, Essai), or of particular artists (A.M. Hammacher, Van Gogh Self Portraits) -- but few have written on the bottom line: *about* the basis, *about portraiture*. Many texts, ostensibly about portraiture or self-portraiture, do not discuss the *genre* itself: Sean Kelly and Edward Lucie-Smith's The Self-Portrait: A Modern View; Michael Koortbojian's Self-Portraits; Robert Stacey's The Hand Holding the Brush; and articles in the 1975 Art in America "Portrait Issue" -- including Barbara Rose's "Self-Portraiture: Theme with a Thousand Faces," Nancy Princenthal's "The Self in Parts," and Amy Goldin's "The Post-Perceptual Portrait" -- function more as catalogues of works and themes *within* the genres of portraiture and self-portraiture than as discussions *of* the genres. In his 1991 text Portraiture, Richard Brilliant touches on the nature of portraiture and self-portraiture, but ultimately Brilliant adds only an extended discussion of the reaction of the viewer to discussions of those topics other writers have addressed (attribution, patronage, connoisseurship, artists).[1]

This dearth of theoretical writing on portraiture itself is ironic considering the subject

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[1] While Brilliant's text (*Portraiture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) is not ideal, I have relied on it throughout this thesis. Two other texts, Pascal Bonafoux's *Portraits of the Artist: The Self-Portrait in Painting* (New York: Rizzoli; Geneva: Skira, 1985); and Pascale Dubuc's "Problématiques du portrait," *Le Trois* 7/1 (automne 1991-hiver 1992): 3-29, also touch on interesting analyses of the nature of portraiture and self-portraiture, but the discussion is either too brief (in the case of the Bonafoux book) or oversimplified in my opinion (in the case
of the Dubuc article).

of portraiture is the subject him- or herself: the subjects of portraiture are the *self* and the

other; the subject of portraiture is identity. The concept of identity is theoretically addressed

from a number of perspectives: philosophers from René Descartes to Immanuel Kant, from

John Locke to Emmanuel Lévinas explore the notion of identity in search of its definition;[2]

psychoanalysts from Sigmund Freud onwards examine identity in search of its roots;[3] post-

colonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, Trinh Minh-ha, and Homi Bhabha investigate

identity in terms of its marginalization in specific groups.[4] And yet these philosophical,

psychoanalytical, and post-colonial perspectives -- while addressing aspects of the notion

of identity -- also evade the *question* of identity. Post-colonial theories of inclusion speak

of biases and assumptions, of the position of the questioner; they speak of the *questioning*

of identity. Philosophers and psychoanalysts, on the other hand, address questions of

identity in search of their answers.

In this thesis, I seek neither to question the question, nor to posit its answer: I seek

only to *pose* the question, to frame it -- to face it and to give it a face. Centring my

discussion around **YOU**, a series of self-portraits by Ukrainian-born Canadian artist Taras

Polataiko, I will face the question of identity -- that which is unknown -- by discussing the

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[2] See for example Kenneth F. Barber and Jorge J.E. Gracia, eds. *Individuation and Identity in Early Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant* (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1994).

[3] On psychoanalysis and identity, see Jonathan Glover, ed., *The Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1976). With regard to Freud's applications, see especially Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* Trans. Joan Riviere (London, Hogarth Press, 1962).

[4] See for example Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism* (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, UK, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991); Gayatri Spivak, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, eds., New York/London, Routledge, 1996); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London/New York, Routledge, 1994); Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcolonialism and Feminism* (Bloomington/ Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1989).

unknown: portraiture, which is as yet undefined; Emmanuel Lévinas' concept of Illeity, which is uncategorizable; and Jacques Lacan's notion of the Real, the experience which cannot be experienced.

My first chapter, *On the Surface: Who are YOU?*, will introduce the members of the "YOU Project." Focusing on Saskatoon-based artist Taras Polataiko, who immigrated to Canada in 1990, I explore his artistic progression towards the application of YOU to questions of identity in terms of the self/other flux experienced by people "transplanted" from one culture to another.[5]

Before discussing Polataiko's self-portrait series, I will deconstruct the genre of portraiture. In *[De]facing Portraiture* (chapter two) I argue that -- since a portrait aims to depict the identity, the *self* of its subject -- the ideal portrait should include all aspects of that self's identity; the three "I"s: Identification, Identity, and Illeity.[6] This last aspect, a concept borrowed from French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), is posited as the central, vital point; the [*ultra-*] *punctum* of portraiture. Portraiture as a genre is presented as a series of paradoxes. First, portraiture's ultimate goal is to depict Illeity, which is both unknown and unknowable. Second, the more "honest" the portrait (the closer a portrait gets to the Identification and Identity of its subject) the more "dishonest" it is, since identity itself, comprised of the fallacious constructs of Identification and Identity, is proven to be dishonest. Finally, since any portrait is partially *of* and partially *by* both its artist and its

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[5] "Transplanted" is Polataiko's term. See Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre Gallery, YOU [exhibition catalogue] (Winnipeg: Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, 1993): (unpaginated).

[6] *I*dentification and *I*dentity are my own concepts as defined in the second chapter: the terms are used neither in their colloquial nor in their psychoanalytical sense.

subject, and since the sense of self (ipseity) of both artist and subject is always dependant on and constructed by an *other*, there can be no absolute distinction made between portraits and self-portraits.

The paradoxes of portraiture prove ideal for Taras Polataiko's **YOU** series. In *Reflections on the Mirror: Who's YOU?* I argue in this third chapter that **YOU** (1992-1994) can be read as a prolongation of French philosopher Jacques Lacan's notion of the Mirror Stage, and that through image (the Imaginary) and text (the Symbolic), Polataiko approaches both his subject's (his *self's*) Illeity and the Lacanian ideal of the Real.[7] The result is that, juxtaposed with the ever-shifting signifier "you," the paradoxes work to emphasize the unstable identity experienced by the Canadian immigrant and, in the context of this series, by the viewer as well.

Finally, I posit in my fourth chapter, *Effacing Portraiture: YOU-logizing the Canadian Notion*, that Polataiko's exploration of the Canadian immigrant's questioning of identity, as well as the deconstructed model of portraiture, parallels the question of Canadian identity as a whole.

This thesis is as much about language as it is about Taras Polataiko's **YOU** series. Because I examine generally undefined terms used colloquially, yet do not rename these terms, I will point out some instances where this problematization might itself become a problem for my reader:

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[7] Although Polataiko does not list Jacques Lacan among his direct influences (he feels Jean Baudrillard has made more of an impact), it is reasonable to read his **YOU** series through a Lacanian lens, as Lacan's writings heavily impact upon the theories of both Thakkar and Mellamphy -- Polataiko's collaborators and mutual influences in the exploration of YOU as a concept.

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The multiple uses and meanings of the word "you" are, obviously, central to this thesis. For clarity's sake, I try to use the third person singular "one" when speaking about the viewer, but at times I feel I must use the second person singular "you" (as does Polataiko) to make explicit the visual and verbal games the artist plays with/on the viewer. When discussing the word itself, "you" will be lower-case, and in quotation marks. When discussing the *concept* of YOU, as defined by Taras Polataiko, Anand Thakkar, and Dan Mellamphy (and as manipulated by me), I will use all-capital letters. **YOU** in bold text designates Taras Polataiko's series of work entitled **YOU**, the subject of this thesis. Finally, with regard to the concept of YOU, I have opted for the pronoun "an" rather than "a", both for euphonic (YOU-phonic) reasons and because of the homophonic link to the word "anew", which is how I hope the reader will look at notions of identity after exploring the ideas in this thesis.

In discussing the aims of portraiture, I have sub-divided the notion of identity (this term, as colloquially used for the condition of being one's *self*, will always have a lower-case "i"). The sub-categories Identification, Identity, and Illeity (also referred to as I_1, I_2, and I_3) will be distinguished from their more common usage through the capitalization of their first letter "I". The verb "to identify," which can relate both to Identification and Identity, makes clear its reference in context.

I conclude the second chapter by arguing that there is no certain distinction between portraiture and self-portraiture. I do, however, continue to use these terms, basing my selection solely on whether the self/portrait's subject is the artist who created it (in which case, I would call the work a *self-portrait*) or an other (in which case I opt for *portrait*). This

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is for the sake of simplicity, and ought not to detract from the point made at the conclusion of chapter two.

As with I_1, I_2, and I_3 in chapter two, I use capital letters when referring to Lacan's concepts of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic in chapter three, to distinguish these "orders" from the words as they are more commonly used.[8] In order to be consistent, I also capitalize Lacan's notion of the Mirror Stage.

I found in one case that there was no possible manipulation of font or capitalization which would make clear my point: in discussing the shifting nature of "you." Hence, I coined the term *anasententia*, based on the Latin and signifying a "changing/fluctuating in meaning."[9]

Since beginning my work on **YOU** in 1994, Taras Polataiko's series has changed somewhat, some early works having been excluded and new works completed. The first showing of **YOU** paintings took place at the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre in Winnipeg, in November 1993, an appropriate locale for this series which deals with the position of a Ukrainian emigrant/Canadian immigrant. The series at the time comprised seven works. Of these original seven, some have been repainted and replaced; and others have been eliminated from the series as it was shown at the MacKenzie Art Gallery (Regina,

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[8] In *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London/New York: Routledge, 1990), Elizabeth Grosz uses a capital R to distinguish Lacan's Real from the common use of the term, but, like Lacan's other translators and interpreters, leaves the "imaginary" and the "symbolic" in lower case.

[9] After having coined the term anasententia, I was made aware of French philosopher Jacques Derrida's similar notion of *différance*. As this word cannot be adequately translated to English, however, I have chosen to use my own term. On Derrida's *différance*, see Jacques Derrida, *La Voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972); and DavidWood and Robert Bernasconi, eds., Derrida and Différance (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

SK), the Diane Farris Gallery[10] (Vancouver, BC), and the Rosemont Art Gallery (Regina, SK) -- all in 1994 -- and as it stands today according to Polataiko's publicity slide list.

Self-Portrait as Nature Morte (1992) and Departure of the Subject (1992), both exhibited at the Ukrainian Centre, have been excluded from the YOU series proper. Both have a painterly style which is looser than the photo-realist technique Polataiko favoured in YOU, and neither can be aesthetically grouped with the subdued colour scheme and the text/image panels which are characteristic of the YOU series as it now stands.

In 1994, Polataiko repainted YOU and the Artist (1992) enlarging the work from the original 101.5 x 203 cm. to 175 x 350 cm., and enhancing the contrast of light and dark. His 1992 work Don't Believe My Eyes was also enlarged from approximately 101.5 x 203 cm to 165 x 330 cm in 1994, its title changed to Untitled and its text changed from "I *don't*" to "I *can't* believe my eyes."

While many works exhibited at the Ukrainian Centre are dated 1992 in the exhibition catalogue, I would contest this dating with regard to those works incorporating the word "you," as the YOU Project collaboration between Polataiko, Thakkar, and Mellamphy began in September 1993. I would further contest the 1992 dating of YOU as Narcissus as Polataiko did not include this work in the Ukrainian Centre exhibit.

Regardless of the exact dates of the works, the exclusions of and alterations to the works of YOU as originally exhibited have resulted in a more unified series. As there is no catalogue for exhibitions of the YOU series beyond that of the Ukrainian Centre, I will discuss those works Polataiko includes in his slide list, with the addition of Looking at

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[10] Diane Farris became Polataiko's dealer in late 1993.

<u>Medusa</u> which has been selected from the original showing of **YOU**. The dates included are those suggested by Polataiko, my dispute aside.

Finally, I have tried throughout this thesis to use comparative examples drawn from Canadian art and cultural history, both because Polataiko's series explores the experience of an emigrant to *Canada*, and also because I feel the "easier" examples from European and American art are all too frequently used, even in the discussion of specifically Canadian art. That said, I must admit I have chosen the easier route at times in this thesis, finding Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, for instance, to be "obvious" examples for my arguments.
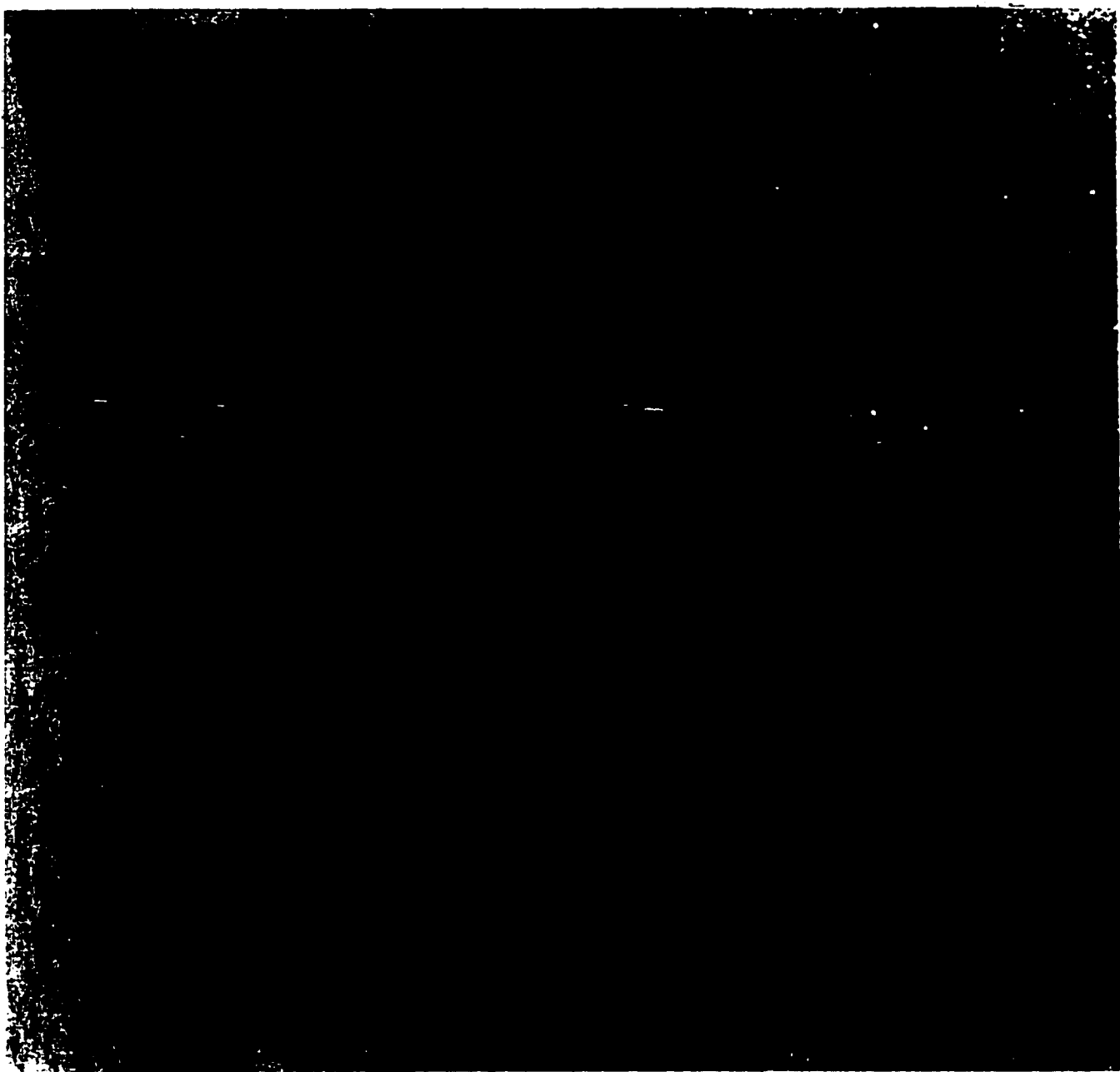
Fig. 1.Taras Polataiko, <u>Looking at YOU</u> (1993); detail

On the Surface: Who are YOU?

The only piece of paper he had was a two-dollar bill; he was about to write his name and number over the Queen's face when, at the last second, he wrote "YOU" instead.

Was the Queen the subject of "YOU"? Had he in this one act obliterated the Queen's identity, denoting her as *other*, changing the referent of her image from the Queen herself to the reader of the note -- to "YOU"? Did the "YOU" indeed refer to the reader or, alternately, did the reader in the act of reading the word become the speaker, and the "YOU" someone other than -- an *other* to -- the reader? This simple act, the writing of three letters on a two-dollar bill, was the beginning of the YOU Project.

Witnessed by Ukrainian-born artist Taras Polataiko (1966-), this act of his friend, Saskatoon writer Anand Thakkar (1961-), was to have significant ramifications for the young artist. In the fall of 1993, Polataiko, Thakkar, and Thakkar's friend from the University of Western Ontario's Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, Dan Mellamphy (1968-) had a series of discussions and debates about the etymological and political ramifications of the seemingly simple pronoun "you." Each took ideas gleaned from collaborative conversations with the others and incorporated them in his own work. The result for Polataiko was the development of his first series, art works entitled YOU.[11]

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[11] Thakkar's application of YOU as a "deconstructive mechanism" and "an-archical articulation" remains unpublished as of yet. Mellamphy's only explicitly YOU-related publication ("YOU-bomb", *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* [June 1996]) was first written in 1993. Mellamphy's "alchemical and apocalyptic elaborations", along with those of Thakkar and Polataiko can be gleaned from Thakkar's essay "Amber and Ash," *Glare* ,(Regina, SK: Rosemont Art Gallery Inc., 1994).

Before his emigration to Canada in 1990,[12] Polataiko had been conscripted by the

Russian Army to paint propagandistic murals and posters for the Soviet Regime. He had

tried to avoid the conscription, dodging the draft three times, but once conscripted, he

managed to "escape the dehumanizing efforts of the Soviet Army" by securing a studio.[13]

> "Visual Agitation" is his translation for the Russian term for the kind of poster and
> mural projects he was assigned while working in the Soviet Army. But as he
> describes it, Polataiko produced images that walked a fine line between social
> realism and subversion, accommodation and satire.[14]

His work for the Soviet Army resulted in an interest in the "dynamics of power and

perception" and questions of "vision and authority." Polataiko demonstrated his keen

understanding of "authorized" propaganda and the viewing subject's reaction to public art

in general as he emerged onto the Canadian art scene in the first blaze of what would become

characteristic media attention: on September 14, 1992, a larger-than-life bronze statue of

then-Governor General Ray Hnatyshyn was unveiled in Saskatoon, as a celebration of 125

years of Confederation and 100 years of Ukrainian settlement. Questioning the propriety of

celebrating one person in a position of power as a representative of all Ukrainian-Canadians

-- including Ukrainian women settlers who endured privation in helping to break the land,

children forbidden to speak their language in Canadian schools, and men who in the 1930s

cut and trimmed trees into railroad ties for 14 cents apiece[15] -- Polataiko painted himself

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[12] Polataiko became a Canadian citizen (while retaining his Ukrainian citizenship as well) in the fall of 1993.

[13] Robin Laurence, "Puzzling Images," *The Weekend Sun* (Saturday June 11 1994): D1.

[14] *Ibid.* With this assertion, Polataiko places himself within Russian cultural history, following the "Agit-Prop" (*agitation-propagande*) tradition of Russian Constructivist artists.

[15] John Lavery, "Taras Polataiko," *Newest Review* (December 1993/January 1994): 10.

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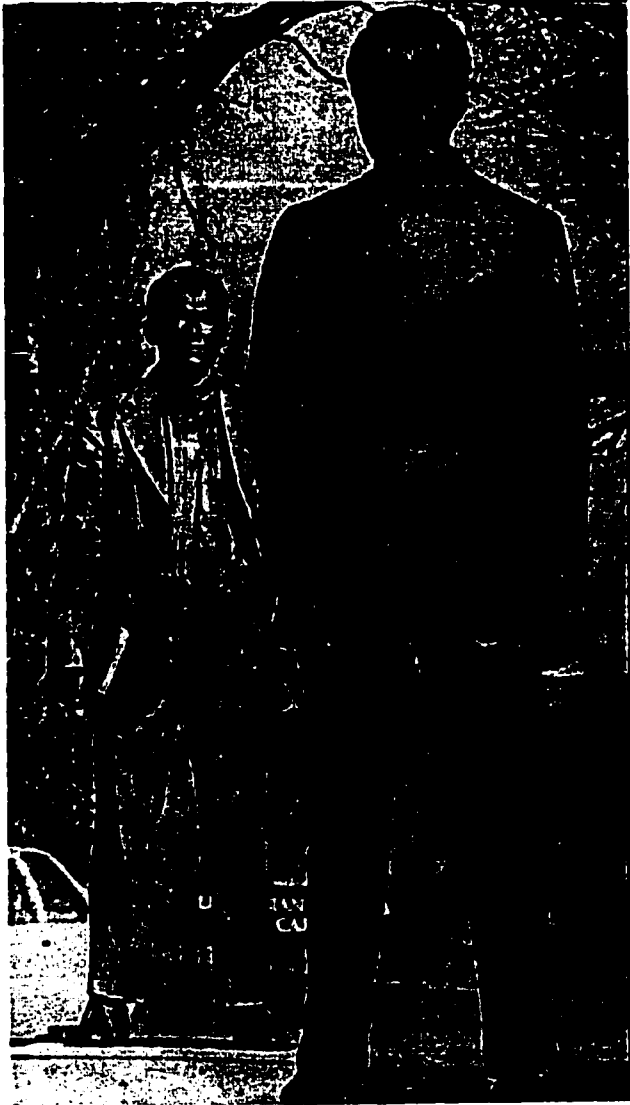
Fig. 2.   Taras Polataiko, Artist as a Politician: In
the Shadow of a Monument (1992), documented in
The StarPhoenix Saskatoon, Sk. (October 10 1992)

bronze and, mounting his own pedestal, confronted Hnatyshyn's image from twenty feet away, standing motionless for one hour at a time on seven occasions, imitating the official monument's pose. Polataiko dedicated his performance, entitled Artist as a Politician: In the Shadow of a Monument, "to the 100th anniversary of Ukrainian settlement, in honour of those Ukrainians who never became Governor General" (1992; fig. 2). While he received some negative press, notably one letter to the editor of the Saskatoon StarPhoenix which strongly suggested Polataiko was not welcome in Canada if he "abused his privileges as a guest in our country," on the whole hisperformance-piece-cum-protest was

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well-received.[16] Many people followed the suggestion printed on Polataiko's pedestal, and attached to it the names of Ukrainian-Canadians they wished to honour, among them "Ukrainian miners killed in the Estevan strike by the RCMP, 1931," "Ukrainian-Canadians who served/died in Spain, 1937-38," and Ukrainian-Canadian women who organized for peace over the past seventy years.[17]

Due principally to the notoriety of Artist as a Politician, Polataiko was commissioned to produce a performance piece for the University of Saskatchewan's faculty Christmas dinner in 1992: the result was Artist as a Meal: Monument à la carte, a work wherein a latex-gloved "waiter" entered the dining hall pushing the "dessert cart" of gold-painted Polataiko, lying nude on a gurney, fruit strategically placed on and around him to produce a modest meal.[18]

These two early performance pieces demonstrate how Polataiko uses his interest in politics, propaganda, and public art works to get the viewer thinking -- as well as to generate some publicity for himself. His first series of work as a professional artist (he completed his MFA at the University of Saskatchewan in 1993) combines these interests with a return to the large-scale painting of his classical training (at the Kosiv College of Art and the Moscow Stroganov Academy of Fine and Industrial Arts) and of his military service, while

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[16] For the original letter of protest, see Morris Cherneskey, "Artist's Protest Inappropriate," in "Readers' Opinions," *The StarPhoenix* (October 22, 1992); for reaction against the letter and in favour of Polataiko, see especially Bob Fink, "Distaste for political idols," in "Readers' Opinions," *The StarPhoenix* (September 30, 1992); and Warren Peterson, "Artist owed a public apology," in "Readers' Opinions," *The StarPhoenix* (October 29, 1992).

[17] For further discussions of this work, see Konstantin Akinsha, "Ten Artists to Watch WOrld-Wide: Taras Polataiko, Canada/Ukraine," *ARTnews* (January 1995): 140-142; John Lavery, "Taras Polataiko"; and Sheila Robertson, "Human Statue," *The StarPhoenix* (October 10 1992): A1, A3.

[18] *Ibid.*

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incorporating ideas generated from his discussions with Thakkar and Mellamphy on the

notion and nature of the multi-subjective, polyvalent word "you."

Fig. 3.   J. Montgomery Flagg,
         Uncle Sam Wants YOU
         (c. 1914); detail

For Polataiko, one of the most poignant ideas to come of these collaborative

discussions was the notion of the iconic twentieth-century image of the all-American

allegorical figure "Uncle Sam," known from public propaganda posters which promoted the

U.S. war effort in 1914.[19] The image shows the stern-faced, white-bearded, red- white- and

blue-wearing Sam pointing out at the reader, above the bold-faced text: "Uncle Sam Wants

YOU" (c. 1914; fig. 3). The message of the popular American poster has never been in

question: Uncle Sam represents the United States of America, and the "YOU" he "wants"

is any and all able-bodied men, wanted to fight on behalf of their homeland. The finger

pointing straight out from the image selects its audience; the premise is that any one in the

U.S. Army's target audience will feel spoken to directly, commandingly, and personally

simply by reading the poster -- in other words, you will know he means you when you read

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[19] Taras Polataiko, interview with the author, October 27 1995.

it.[20] The ambiguity of the word "you," chosen specifically to reach as broad an audience and as wide a response as possible,[21] is called into question only once the contextualizing finger is absent. In the discussions, Polataiko pointed out that if Uncle Sam's finger were severed from the image, the "YOU" in the poster's text would become completely decontextualized, and would show its true, problematic nature: Who is this YOU? Who is Uncle Sam? Is Uncle Sam YOU? Is the reader YOU? Is YOU somewhere between Sam looking out from the poster and the viewer looking into the poster?

At the time of his initial explorations of YOU, Polataiko had been working on a series of self-portraits which explored the experience of immigrants to Canada -- of those "transplanted" from one culture to another: these were the first images of what was to become the **YOU** series (fig. 4). Upon his arrival in Saskatchewan, he himself had pondered the possibilities with regard to his sense of identity: he had the option of assimilating himself into the Canadian community he had chosen as his new home, yet, while doing so, he risked losing his identity as it had grown in his native country. Conversely, he could maintain his Ukrainian identity (as much as identity could be fixed), and be seen as an exotic "other" in his new cultural setting. It was all a matter of perspective: should he be *other* to

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[20] The Uncle Sam propaganda poster was used by the United States Army for recruitment beyond the first World War. It os possible, therefore, that its text may have been altered for different campaigns. See Alan Gowans, *The Unchanging Arts: New Forms for the Traditional Functions of Art in Society* (Philadelphia/New York, J.B. Lippincott, 1971): 34, and Richard Hollis, *Graphic Design: A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994): 253.

[21] While Martha Banta states that the Uncle Sam pose "with finger pointed like a rifle to the heart is a thoroughly male symbol" [*Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1987]: 576) and while late-twentieth century readers may interpret sexual innuendo when Uncle Sam "addresses" a female viewer, the ambiguous breadth of Sam's audience can also be read in terms of the fact that *all* Americans, whether male or female, young or old, were asked to make sacrifices during war time (of food, money, and material possessions as well as potentially of the lives of family, friends and self).

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himself to fit in with others, or should he be the self he was accustomed to, and remain *other* to others?

4. Taras Polataiko, <u>Self-Portrait as Nature Morte</u> (1992); oil on linen, 163 x 110 cm.

The word YOU, which designates everyone in general yet no one in particular, lent itself perfectly to Polataiko's examination of the fluctuating identity of the immigrant. It is appropriate that the seemingly simple images which influenced Polataiko's YOU series (a defaced bill and mishandled poster) both embody the identity flux the artist associates with the experience of the immigrant to Canada.

The printing of YOU over Queen Elizabeth II's image on the Canadian two-dollar bill has implications in Saskatoon that it would have nowhere else: during the second World War, soldiers stationed in Saskatchewan could purchase the services of a prostitute for $2 Canadian. The "euphemism" used at the time for these sex-workers -- a term which only had

currency in Saskatchewan -- was "a two-dollar lady."[22] The YOU over the monarch's face not only put in question her identity (was she YOU? was the reader YOU? did the YOU make of the reader a monarch?) but it also stripped her of her office, making of her but a commoner -- a common two-dollar lady.

Similarly, the very image of Uncle Sam is a question of multiple identities. While the persona is a fictional construct, his image is in fact a self-portrait by American artist J. Montgomery Flagg (1877-1960), inadvertently making Uncle Sam the ideal influence on Polataiko's self-portrait series, YOU.[23] His name, in turn, selected for the initials U.S. [United States] was borrowed from Uncle Sam Wilson, the beef supplier to the U.S. Army during the first World War. The implications of the ominous text "Uncle Sam Wants YOU," unstable firstly through the use of the shifting signifier "you," is all the more perplexing as it opens the possibility that YOU are/is wanted because Uncle Sam has lost his identity -- or else because he wants to replenish his meat supply.

Polataiko found that YOU, with its implicit identity shifts, was the ideal concept to encapsulate the self/other flux of the immigrant in Canada: YOU became the focus of the self-portraits Polataiko had been working on since 1992. These works -- the final 1994 series comprising twelve large-scale paintings, one small-scale painting, and one sculptural piece -- all share the same cropped focus on Polataiko's own face, from forehead to upper lip; all share a monochromatic palette of stony greys, icy blues, black, and white; and all

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[22] Dan Mellamphy, conversation with author, Montréal, Québec, June 3 1996.

[23] The identity of Uncle Sam was related as an anecdote by W.J.T. Mitchell during his presentation of "What do Pictures Want?" (paper presented at *The New Art History*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montréal, Québec, December 3,1995).

share the theme of one's questioning of identity and positioning

Fig. 5.Taras Polataiko, Eyes for YOU (1993); acrylic on linen, 193 x 193 cm.

[De]facing Portraiture

Suspendit picta vultum mentemque labella.
("In painting, he shows both the face and the mind.")

Horace, Epistles II, 1; 1st century B.C.E.

By portrait, I do not mean the outlines and colouring of the human figure, but the inside of the heart and mind of man.

Lord Chesterfield, 1747.

The portrait must be a lyric poem, through which a whole personality, with all its thoughts, feelings and desires, speaks.

Arthur Schopenhauer, 1856.

Like the word "you," "portrait" is a term so colloquially used that one assumes to understand its definition. Words such as "likeness," "representation," or "double," considered synonyms of portrait, also fail to explain precisely what criteria are necessary to capture the subject's identity such that an image be considered a portrait. Originally defined as "a figure drawn, painted, or carved upon a surface to represent some object" -- *trait-pour-trait* -- it is now "almost always" used in reference to "a representation of a person, especially of the face, made from life."[24] Yet this definition would suggest that any visual representation of a person's face, and resemblance (mugshots, passport or identification card photographs, amateur snapshots, etc.) could be defined as a "portrait," which counters the distinctions made by Horace, Chesterfield, and Schopenhauer above. The understanding of

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[24] From the *Oxford English Dictionary* 2nd ed., vol XII (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989): 158-159.

portraiture in terms of an artistic *genre* -- what is necessarily required to consider an image of a person "a portrait" -- is inadequately defined if it is defined at all, and yet has gone unchanged throughout history, as these opening quotes show. More than being pictures of a person, ideal portraits are understood to be representations of a *self*, of an identity. As such, portraits seek to incorporate the same aspects which make up the identity of the subject they depict.

It can be deduced based on those images which are considered to fall into the genre of portraiture, that one criterion of portraits is that their subject be a person. This may seem an absurdly facile distinction, but lack of definition has resulted in the mis-use or extension of the term "portrait." Some artists would consider to be portraits depictions of inanimate objects which held importance to them personally, as is the case with Canadian artist Greg Curnoe (1936-1992) who painted "portraits" of his bicycles (fig. 6). *"Portrait"* has also been used in reference to animals, countries, literature, etc. Yet a portrait proper is an image of a person only, and the use of the term "portrait" to label the representation of an animal or landscape or other object (such as a bicycle in Curnoe's case) is simply a manner of attesting to the importance of that object to the artist. The attribution of this term suggests an anthropomorphism: that the thing represented is as important to and as intimately known by the representor as would be a person, and that an image of it, then, qualifies as a "portrait" *for that person* who identifies with the object as he or she would with a person. By the same token, and more importantly, the (mis)use of this term also suggests that a portrait is something more than a simple representational image.

While a portrait must be an image of a person, not all images of humans are portraits.

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Bertram Brooker's <u>Torso</u> (1937; fig. 7) and Alex Colville's <u>Couple on the Beach</u> (1957; fig.

8) both have the human body as their subject, and yet the representation of the subject in

both cases is too general to consider the works "portraits": the bodies might belong to any

number of people of similar shape, weight, and colouring. A portrait must have a distinctive

subject; an *individual*, a *self* -- it must depict a particular person.[25] The important distinction

to make is between portraying a person's body, and portraying *the person*, his or her identity

(as perceived by the artist or projected by the portrait's subject). In order to attempt the

depiction of one's identity, of course, there must be an identity to depict: that depicted

person must be a real one, who lives or once lived; one who is (or was) a self, who has (or

had) a specific identity. An image of an allegorical figure, such as the figure symbolizing

"Confederation" in Frances Norma Loring's 1917 sculpture <u>Miss Canada</u> (fig. 9), while

identifiable and in human form, is not a "portrait," as she is not and was never an actual

person, but is rather an idea made visible through creative amalgamation of human traits.

Furthermore, a portrait's real, human subject must be recognizable as him- or herself. Unlike

other categoric genres of visual art, the need to identify or name in portraiture is almost

overwhelming: while a still-life can be just a still-life, without the viewing subject needing

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[25] Alfred Stieglitz' photographic portraits of painter Georgia O'Keeffe present an interesting problem with regard to the body/person question: while Stieglitz specifically identifies the images as "portraits," using both that term and O'Keeffe's name, I contend that many of his images would not conform to the definition of portraiture as it will be laid out in this thesis. For examples of Stieglitz' "portraits," see Alexandra Arrowsmith and Thomas West, eds., *Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz: Two Lives -- A Conversation in Paintings and Photographs* (New York, HarperCollins, 1992).

Conversely, although the works discussed in this thesis are figural, it is not necessary that a figure be included to conform to the parameters of portraiture I lay out. For further elaborations, see Carla Gottleib, "Self-Portraiture in Postmodern Art," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 42 (1981): esp. 267-268.
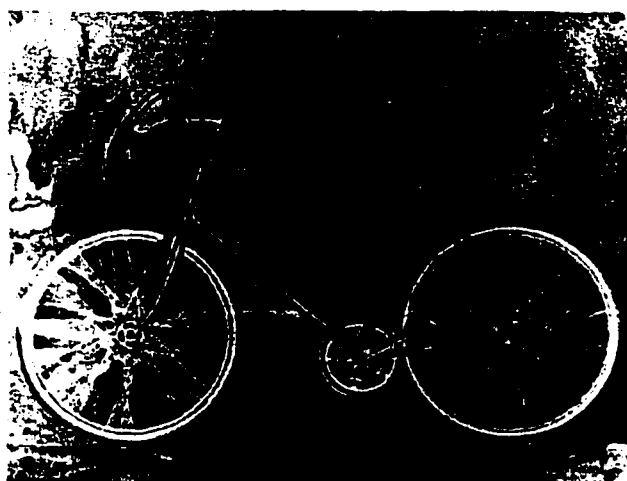
Fig. 6. Greg Curnoe, Mariposa (1978)

Fig. 8. Alex Colville, Couple on the Beach (1957)

Fig. 7. Bertram Brooker, Torso (1937)
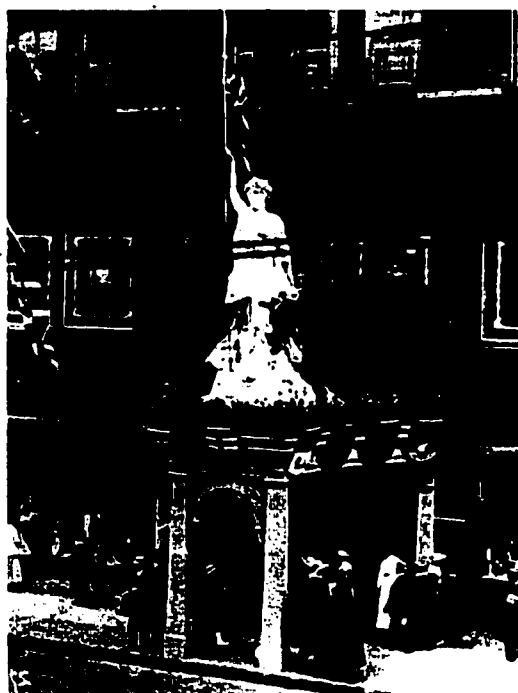
Fig. 9. Frances Norma Loring, Miss Canada (1917)

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to name all the objects depicted, for an image of a person to be a portrait, the subject must be nameable.[26]

Since a name is one aspect of one's identity, "nameability" or *Identification* is necessarily an aspect of portraiture, as a portrait strives to capture the identity of its subject (and hence the Identification that is part of it). The easiest way to make the subject of a portrait nameable is, obviously, to name them in the title of the work: Mon Portrait (Ozias Leduc, 1899); Maurice Gagnon (Paul-Émile Borduas, 1937); Portrait (Mrs Zimmerman) (Prudence Heward, 1943); Nan Fairley (Barker Fairley, 1977); etc.

Explicit naming is not obligatory, however, as issues of Identification can be addressed in some portraits despite a refusal to identify their subjects by name. Marcel Duchamp's Wanted: $2000 Reward (1923; fig. 10) is a case in point. Reminiscent of American "Wanted Posters" -- handbills of criminals' mug-shots, physical descriptions, and aliases, often displayed in post-offices -- Wanted is a double-portrait of Duchamp, with two small photographs showing the artist both full-faced and in profile. At the same time, however, the poster is anonymous, Duchamp's name not being included in the poster's text. Yet because the artist's face and of the name of his female alter-ego, Rrose Sélavy, are both included in the poster and known to those viewers who know or know of Duchamp, the work still serves to identify its unnamed subject.

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[26] This is not to suggest that if the viewer fails to name a subject, this failure strips the image of its standing as a portrait. My point is simply that a portrait be *nameable* -- not necessarily *named*. There are many cases throughout art history of works which were made as portraits but whose subjects' names have been lost. (See Brilliant, *Portraiture*, chapter 1, for a discussion of nameless Ancient Greek portrait busts.) I would argue that these *are* portraits, as that (it is assumed) was the intent at their creation, but that they no longer *function as* portraits, being "illegible" to contemporary viewers, and having become more or less self-referential.

still serves to identify its unnamed subject.

Fig. 10. Marcel Duchamp, Wanted: $2000 Reward (1923)
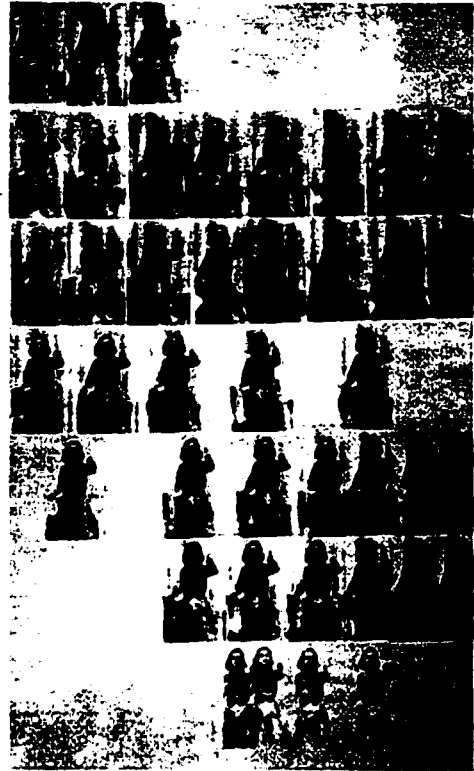
Fig. 11. Andy Warhol, National Velvet (1963)

Another example of a nameless yet identifying portrait is Andy Warhol's National Velvet (1963; fig. 11) whose subject, Elizabeth Taylor, is so associated with the film in which she starred and after which Warhol's work is titled, that to identify her by name, it is unnecessary to name the actress -- and hardly necessary to represent her at all, although the artist repeats her image forty-two times.

In cases such as these, where the image of a portrait's subject has immediate and widespread currency, the exclusion of one's name from a work's title does not prevent one's being named, Identification, as the subject is immediately recognizable.

The depiction of the subject's physical self -- that aspect of identity which is visible --

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is obviously paramount to portraiture. It is the physical self that is identified by name, and so it is the representation of the physical self on which Identification is dependent. To viewers who know or know of a portrait's subject, the image is the overt sign which serves to name them. As regards Identification and naming, it is the face which is the most important part of the physical self; the primary locus where Identification occurs. Cognitive psychologists have proven scientifically that the face is the locus of Identification, as well as the focus of perception: "No other object in the visual world is quite so important as the human face. Not only does it establish a person's identity, but also, through its paramount role in communication, it commands our almost continuous attention."[27]

In portraiture, as in cognitive development, the effect of encountering a known face is its recognition and its naming. But accurate identification of a portrait's subject does not, in and of itself, constitute portraiture. If Identification were the sole aim of portraiture, all visual depictions of actual people, including identification card photographs, photographic snap-shots, etc. could be classified as portraits. As Lord Chesterfield suggested, the "figure," the body, is not the person, the *self* -- and similarly, an accurate or exaggerated depiction is not in and of itself a portrait: to identify a person by name or sight is but the first part of portraiture. Beyond simple Identification, a portrait seeks to point to the inner self of its subject, as Horace, Chesterfield, and Schopenhauer (among others) all suggested. Richard Brilliant agrees, referring to the portrait image as "a general, often generous statement,

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[27] Graham Davies et al., eds., *Perceiving and Rememberiung Faces* (London/New York/Toronto/Sydney/San Fransisco: Academic Press, 1981): 1. See also references to T.R. Alley, V. Bruce, and M.H. Johnson in my bibliography.

summing up 'a life'."[28] To capture what one looks like in such a way as to make the subject

known -- nameable -- to others, and naming is only one aspect of one's identity. Brilliant

defines the "essential constituents of a person's identity" as

> a recognized or recognizable appearance; a given name that refers to no one else; a social, interactive function that can be defined; in context, a pertinent characterization; and a consciousness of the distinction between one's own person and another's, and of the possible relationship between them.[29]

I have argued that physical appearance and name are specific aspects of Identification, and

I will argue in the next chapter that a sense of the distinction between self and other is not

a constituent of identity but is rather a pre-requisite for identity[30]. I do agree with Brilliant's

categories of role in society and characteristics as aspects of identity, and as such as aspects

of portraiture. While aspects of identity which identify and name a person (or portrait

subject) can be related to the identity sub-section *Identification*, societal roles and

characteristic traits fall under the category *Identity*.[31]

The categories which make up Identity point out what, where, when, and how one

does, rather than what one looks like or is named, as with Identification; how one *acts* rather

than how one *appears*. Each of these categories can be understood as a role chosen within

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[28] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 10.

[29] *Ibid.*, 9.

[30] One would not be aware of one's appearance as opposed to the appearance of others -- nor would one respond to one's name -- if not for a sense of "self" and "other".

[31] As I explained in the *Prefacing YOU*, I have used capital letters to distinguish the aspects of portraiture from their more colloquial uses. When one reads "identity" with a lower-case "i", it refers to the colloquial and more global meaning of the word, that which distinguishes one individual from another. Identification and Identity with a capital "I" designate the subsections of *identity*, as titles under which to group the different types of aspects of identity.

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or imposed by society: the characteristic demeanour of a person (i.e.: "personality"); their marital or social status; their professional position, etc. -- while they may be affected by circumstance (social, economic, political, etc.) -- are choices made. As opposed to the visible nature of aspects of Identification, Identity's emotional, social, and professional roles are conceptual. To suggest them in portraiture, they must be expressed symbolically, through expression, pose, attribute, and setting.

The face, that sign of vital importance to the Identification of a subject, is essential to suggesting Identity as well. French theorists, Gilles Dcleuze and Félix Guattari, for instance, argue that the face transcends and transgresses the body, as it has its own surface which is more than just an "exterior envelope" for that which speaks, thinks, and feels.[32] In its expressions which are "legible" to others, the face has its own language: the significant traits of facial language are indexed on specific traits of faces.[33] This language (visagéité or "faciality") is composed of a set of parts (for example, facial features), these encoded into a system. In other words, "faces are not blank composites of salient, distinguishing features, but are active surfaces and shapes which constitute the expression or 'look' of a person."[34] When an image is not considered to be a believable representation of its subject, as in Brilliant's anecdote of a family looking over holiday snapshots and remarking "That's not Aunt Mary!," the problem is not that Aunt Mary's photographed face is not like her physical

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[32] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie: Mille Plateaux*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980): esp. 205-234.

[33] *Ibid.*, 205. It should be noted that the notion of faciality is not restricted to faces per se: Deleuze and Guattari merely use the face as the primary example of an encoded system of "language."

[34] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 110.

one (the locus of her Identification) but more likely that the photograph caught its subject in an uncharacteristic expression and seems unlike his or her Identity. The "look" of a person has to do with that expression which is most commonly associated with him or her. Portraits, however, generally avoid transient emotions, as artists will try to capture the essential stability of the self by combining facial expressions with appropriate poses to suggest a general demeanour which could be considered (by the _viewer_ -- including the portrait's subject _as_ viewer) characteristic of or appropriate to the portrait's subject.[35]

Portraits of politicians are an excellent example of this socially constructed notion of an "appropriate" Identity: what is most striking about the official portraits of Canada's Prime Ministers, on permanent public display at the House of Commons in Ottawa, are the similarities between the portraits. Although the subjects' faces differ, and each frame boasts a small name plate to identify its portrait's subject, these aspects of Identification are virtually the sole distinguishing factors between portraits. Expression, pose, dress, setting, and attribute are essentially identical in each of the thirteen portraits.[36]

Each Prime Minister is statically posed in a shallow space, all on canvasses of roughly identical size, and all but two are painted representing their subject in a three-quarter-length pose. The vast majority of subjects are shown seated, and their hands are poised; either braced on their chair, or unnaturally weightless in one pocket, or, often, depicted holding a pen, official-looking documents, their spectacles or their gloves. Most

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[35] For a discussion of the traditional stability of expressions in portraiture, see Brilliant, _Portraiture_. 112.

[36] For a full description and discussion of these official portraits, as well as a comparison to William Ronald's 1977-1982 portrait series _The Prime Ministers_, see my essay "William Ronald and _The Prime Ministers_: Social Consciousness Through Abstract Expression" (Department of Art History, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec, 1993), esp. 31.

look down at the viewer from within a gilt frame with an expression of control, dignity and understanding; those who do not look away with a determined and scholarly air. Each wears a dark suit, and the rare accent colour, occurring in only three of these sombre, earthy-toned portraits, is always red.

It is impossible to imagine that the identities, the selves of these thirteen Canadians, different people from different backgrounds and different eras, portrayed over a period of one hundred years by eleven different artists, should be so similar that the manner in which their Identities are depicted varies so little. It is significant that the common denominator among these individuals be the office they held for a time. It becomes clear that the Identity depicted through expression, pose and attribute in these portraits is less that of the individual subject than that of the subject's professional role -- that of Prime Minister. These portraits all suggest stable, sombre, serious men, well-educated and fair-minded. In other words, they suggest the dignity, power, and stature expected of a leader of state, regardless of whether these traits are part of the individual subjects' Identity. The professional role, and the constructed Identity which goes with it -- takes precedence over the personal Identity of the individual Canadians who acted the role out.

This is the Identity each prime minister sought to project (they each personally selected their portraitist) and it is also the Identity the viewer expects of one who held this office: as guides relate synopses of each politician's term in office, visitors touring through the halls of the House of Commons in Ottawa, gaze quietly at each portrait, never seeming surprised. One might imagine that the reaction of the crowd would be considerably different

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if Richard Bennett,[37] whose portrait conforms to the above description perfectly (c.1935; fig. 12), had chosen to have himself represented in a work more suggestive of the times through which he "led" his country; perhaps as Charles Comfort's Young Canadian (1932; fig. 13). The latter portrait (of Carl Schaeffer) is more redolent of the Depression era in which it was painted: its subject sits before a barren landscape, looking off with an expression of dejected resignation. His clothes are plain and wrinkle in his slouched pose, and his arms are akimbo,

Fig. 13. Charles Comfort, Young Canadian (1932)

Fig. 12. Kenneth Forbes, Prime Minister Richard Bennett (c. 1935)

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[37] Bennett served as Prime Minister from 1930 to 1935.

balanced on his knees as his sinewy foregrounded worker's hands droop idle. Though this image better represents its era, and is more complete than the Identity suggested in Bennett's portrait, the insight it gives to the Identity of its subject -- his emotional outlook, the economic realities of the majority of his society, his lack of work -- is not what one would consider appropriate to the leader of a country, even one whose tenure ran through some of the worst years of the Great Depression.

The primacy given to the assumption of how a person *ought* to look, over that given to their actual appearance, has resulted in the tendency to "correct" in portraiture, whether through limiting the scope of Identity portrayed (to professional role only, for example) or through outright reconstruction. The pseudo-science of physiognomy, particularly popularized by eighteenth-century Swiss theologian Johann Caspar Lavater, had as its basis the theory that the personality (Identity) of a subject was visible in one's physical characteristics; that there was a direct correspondence between physiognomy and psychology.[38] Many portraits had been influenced by the notions of which came together to constitute the "science" of physiognomics, among them those of Socrates:

> Representations of Socrates provided Lavater with an excellent test case for his theories, because the ancient sources gave the philosopher the countenance of Silenos, with coarse, brutish features, yet artists had to uncover the noble soul within this unrepresentative corporeal envelope. They did so by adjusting his physiognomy, making "ennobling" corrections to his cranium, nose, ears, chin, and beard -- everything -- in an effort to capture the real personality of the man who lives in Plato's dialogues.[39]

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[38] See Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 76ff.

[39] *Ibid.*, 77.

While the false representations of physiognomics have been denounced as a pseudo-science which privileges the white western-European,[40] and representations based upon it are clearly *mis*representations at best, other schema, such as attribute and setting, can be used to categorize aspects of a subject's Identity, as has been discussed with reference to the prime ministers' official portraits. While iconography and setting were used to foreground the profession of Prime Minister rather than the prime ministers themselves, these same tools are used to emphasize emotional and social roles in William Brymner's The Vaughn Sisters (1910; fig. 14). The impression of demure girls of good breeding is gleaned from this image thanks in part to the soft filtered light illuminating the scene from the left[41]. Details of setting and attribute suggest that the subjects are of upper class: the girls' elegant yet understated dresses all but cover the divan on which they sit, allowing only the scrolled woodworking framing the well-stuffed back to show between the sisters. On the floor, an

Fig. 14. William Brymner, The Vaughn Sisters (1910)

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[40] See discussion of Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson's *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley* (c. 1797) in *ibid.*, 35ff; see also P. Meller, "Physiognomical Theory in Renaissance Heroic Portraits," *Acts of the XX International Congress of the History of Art* vol. II (Princeton, NJ: 1963): 53-69.

[41] The warmth of this light is suggestive of morning light which could serve to emphasize the sisters' youth -- that they are in the dawn of their maturity -- as well as their quiet gentility.

open book suggests both class (in that they are educated and can read, are wealthy enough to buy books, and have the leisure time to read them) and, in conjunction with the sitters' expressions, the idea that these subjects are educated and serious. The large vase of flowers in the left foreground -- larger than either of the girls' head and torso -- suggests purity and virginity, and reiterates the notions of youth and class mentioned above.

While the viewer is socially conditioned to "read" expressions and pose (body language),[42] schematized attributes complement and emphasize the Identity traits the body suggests through gesture. Schema are socio-artistic conventions which both the artist and (contemporary) viewer can read, such as flowers symbolizing virginity, books symbolizing learnedness, spectacles suggesting intelligence, flies or other insects connoting illness or death, etc. These attributes, while not *part* of a subject's person, symbolize aspects of his or her Identity: the object symbolizes a trait, and that trait is associated with the portrait's subject by virtue of the juxtaposition of the subject and the trait-suggesting object (attribute) in the portrait.

Identity by association is not exclusive to the use of attributes: the presence of a portrait within a portrait functions in the same way, attributing the characteristics of the one subject onto the other. Classical double herms (two busts fused back-to-back) paired Greeks and Romans of similar intellectual or artistic style, and encouraged the comparison and contrast of the two subjects, as the Identity of each would be enriched (or contaminated) by

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[42] See Alley, *Social and Applied Aspects of Perceiving Faces*; Bruce, *Face Recognition*; Bruce, *Recognizing Faces*; Davies et al., *Perceiving and Remembering Faces*; Johanson and Morton, *Biology and Cognitive Development.*

Fig. 15. Lynn Donoghue, William Kimber
with Mme Moitessier (1980)

Fig. 16. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres
Mme Moitessier (1856) →

that of the other.[43] Lynn Donoghue plays the same sort of associative Identity game in

William Kimber with Mme Moitessier (1980; fig. 15). This portrait places her primary

subject (Kimber) before a copy of French neo-Classicist painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique

Ingres' 1856 portrait of the "fabled beauty" Mme Moitessier (1856; fig. 16). Both

Donoghue's choice of title -- which suggests Moitessier posed with Kimber, rather than his

having posed with her portrait -- and the representation of Kimber in a nearly identical pose

to that of Ingres' subject, emphasize the links between the subjects, and encourage the viewer

to compare and contrast. In this way, what one is like, what one does, etc. can be suggested,

through the identity of the secondary subject, without needing to be symbolized through

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[43] For discussions several works in which this identity transfer occurs, see Brilliant, *Portraiture*, chapter 2, esp. 47ff; 67-68; 120-122.

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iconographical readings.

While Identity suggests what one is like and what one does, and Identification captures what one looks like, it is important to note that Identification (I_1) and Identity (I_2) do not combine to make a person -- a *self*, an identity -- and so the depiction of the combined traits of Identification and Identity does not guarantee a successful (ideal) portrait, wherein the *self* of the subject, <u>who</u> he or she is, is unequivocally portrayed.

Discernable neither visually nor symbolically, there is one aspect of a self which cannot be identified as such. Beyond both Identification and Identity, this third (yet primary) aspect can, I contend, be explained by a third "I": *Illeity.*[44] A concept developed by French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, Illeity is what one experiences at the initial moment of confrontation: it is the knowledge (feeling) that something exists without knowing what it is. One knows, in other words, not *what* there is, but only *that* there is -- that *il y a.*[45] In Camera Lucida, Roland Barthes focuses on an element of photography which he calls the *punctum*. Barthes describes this element as a "prick," a "notion of punctuation," a "detail

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[44] Lévinas first published "Il y a : Existence sans existants" in Deucalion *(Cahiers de Philosophie)* 1 (1946, 141-54) but revisits the concept in many other writings, continuing his exploration of the notion of *Illeity*, the experiencing of the *il y a*.

In introducing this concept of Illeity with regard to portraiture, I use the term "third 'I'" to indicate not only the companion to Identification (or "I_1") and Identity (or "I_2"), as well as to suggest the associations with the "third *eye*" which suggests "seeing" without sight, but also to play on the first person singular "I" in context of the multiple facets which make up this singularity. The complexification of multiple subjectivities and the self/other flux which will be discussed in the next chapter will further add to this idea.

[45] There is great difficulty implicit in any attempt to describe this notion of Illeity, for to "know that there is" is already a step beyond Illeity. The word "Illeity" comes from the Latin *ille*, a third-person singular. As such, Illeity is related to the French *il*, specifically the phrase *il y a*, wherein the "il" is genderless, numberless, yet neither neuter nor nothing. Just as the *il* of the *il y a* cannot be categorized, Illeity happens before categorization, and is uncategorizable. Once categorization occurs -- even to the point of *saying* "there is" -- one has moved beyond Illeity.

which attracts or distresses," which "has provoked a tiny shock":[46] "Le punctum d'une photo,

c'est ce hasard qui, en elle, me point (mais aussi me meurtrit, me poigne)."[47] Like Barthes'

notion of the *punctum*, Illeity is "what pricks you" -- yet as opposed to the *punctum*, a

specific element within the *studium* (the study, the theme) of an image, the Illeity of a

person, portrait subject, situation, can not be pointed out. Significantly, Barthes mentions

two instances where the *punctum* is "unlocatable," "specifically *out-of-play*, [belonging] to

no system" and cannot be specifically defined:[48] first in a photographic portrait of Robert

Wilson, and second in *the* photograph of his mother.[49] This undefined and undefinable

punctum is more an *ultra-punctum*, for despite identifying the *punctum* in numerous

photographs throughout his text, Barthes writes that the *punctum* cannot be coded: "What

I can name cannot really prick me."[50] Like Horace, Chesterfield, and Schopenhauer before

him, Barthes realizes (despite suggesting that any photograph is a portrait by virtue of the

fact its subject existed[51]) that what is sought in a portrait is more than mere likeness:

> Yet as soon as it is a matter of being -- and no longer of a thing -- the Photograph's
> evidence has an entirely different stake. Seeing a bottle, and iris stalk, a chicken, a
> palace photographed involves only reality. But a body, a face, and what is more,

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[46] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday, 1981): 26, 27, 40, 49.

[47] Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris, Éditions de l'Étoile, Gallimard, le Seuil, 1980): 49. I have included this citation in French as its meaning is more layered than is Richard Howard's English translation (*op cit.*, 27): the combination of *point* and *poigne* suggest at once the poignant (*poignant*), a stab (*poignard*), a grip (*poigne*), a bang or thump (*poing*), and a specific spot, a point (as in argument or agreement), punctuation, the notion of pointing, and xa culmination (*point*).

[48] Barthes, Camera Lucida, 57, 69.

[49] *Ibid.*, 57, 67ff.

[50] *Ibid.*, 51.

[51] *Ibid.*, 5-6.

frequently, the body and face of a beloved person? Since photography (this is its *noeme*) *authenticates* the existence of a certain being, I want to discover that being in the photograph completely, *i.e.*, in its essence, "as into itself..." beyond simple resemblance, whether legal or hereditary. Here the Photograph's platitude becomes more painful, for it can correspond to my fond desire only by something inexpressible: evident (this is the law of the Photograph) yet improbable (I cannot prove it). This something is what I call the *air* (the expression, the look).[52]

This inexpressible, unprovable *air*, this *ultra-punctum* of the portrait, is *Illeity*. Unlike Identification and Identity, which are primarily epistemological categories, Illeity is primarily ontological, and is hence epistemologically problematic. It is "knowing" what is not known, such as "otherness" (the other's "self"). It is the encountering of the *un*known face, and of the face of the unknown; it is the first impression, before categorization; that otherness *as* "other."

A portrait, in seeking to represent the subject's self and so also Illeity's sense of *il y a*, can be seen as a portal to Illeity, something wherein one looks for the *il y a*. Illeity is the experience of encountering an other's (unknown) face, the result of and basis for *visagéité*. While Illeity is the perpetual unknown, it is the nature of humanity to know, to learn. This desire to move beyond the unknown (and avoid Illeity) forces a viewer to react to Illeity by attempting to deduce *ce qu'il y a*; "what" is in the "that is." This is attempted through systematic categorization, firstly of what is clearly knowable, and then of what can be deduced. With regard to an other, or a portrait of an other, aspects of Identification (knowable) and Identity (deducible) are used as the categories to attempt to glean the *ce* from the *il*. As in geometric triangulation, these two stable points (I_1 and I_2) are used to attempt

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[52] *Ibid.*, 107.

to define the third, unknown "point," or *ultra-punctum* (I_3; Illeity).

Paradoxically, however, the *ultra-punctum* of Illeity can never be defined. Like a quantum, the aspects of portraiture (I_1, I_2, I_3) are at once indivisible and never whole.[53] In the ideal portrait -- one wherein Illeity exists -- each aspect of the subject's identity is present, and together they present the possibility -- indeed the probability -- of the depiction of a complete self ($I_1 + I_2 + I_3$). Yet by virtue of the fact that Illeity, the unknown unknowable, is part of the equation, the probable sum of the parts -- the identity of a portrait's subject's "self" -- will always be unknown.

The subject's self will never duly be revealed in a portrait, but it is that possibility which sets portraiture apart from other artistic genres: the sensation that a portrait might *be* its subject rather than a mere representation *of* its subject is a result of the artist's intent to portray a "self," rather than a picture of one. In his 1960 work <u>Truth and Method</u>, German theorist Hans-Georg Gadamer called this intended link between a portrait and its human subject "occasionality."[54] In discussing "such things as portraits, poems dedicated to someone, or even contemporary references in comedy," Gadamer writes:

> Occasionality means that their meaning is partly determined by the occasion for which they are intended, so that it contains more than it would without this occasion. Hence, the portrait contains a reference to the man represented, a relation that it does not need to be placed in, but which is expressly intended in the representation itself and is characteristic of it as portrait.[55]

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[53] Although I have "divided" these aspects to discuss them, *in* a portrait, or *in* the person who is the subject of a portrait, they are indivisible, as each is necessary to make up the self the person is and portrait seeks to be. For a more detailed comparison to the quantum, see D. Mellamphy, "YOU, The YOU-bomb."

[54] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975): 127ff.

[55] *Ibid.*, 127.

The closer the depictions of Identification and Identity in a portrait are to that portrait's subject, the stronger the occasionality -- and the closer one feels to unravelling the Illeity of the subject's self. But Gadamer, in describing occasionality, is not discussing the ideal portrait -- the portrait which includes Illeity. In fact, he suggests a danger inherent to the ideal portrait, to capturing the Illeity of its subject:

> In the portrait the individuality of the man portrayed is represented. If, however, a picture shows the model as an individuality, as an interesting type whom the painter has got to sit for him, then this is an objection to the picture; for one then no longer sees in the picture what the painter presents, but something of the untransformed material.[56]

The problem with his argument is belied in his choice of words: Gadamer cautions against the inclusion of "untransformed material" -- the Illeity of a portrait's subject -- in *the picture*, without distinguishing between "picture" and "portrait," as I have done here.[57] Portraits seek to depict more than do "pictures" (of fruit, of objects such as Curnoe's bicycles, etc.) -- portraits seek to depict the inner as well as the outer self; the "mind," the "heart," the "personality" of their subjects, as Horace, Chesterfield, and Schopenhauer (respectively) wrote.

At times, occasionality, that intended link between portrait and person, is ignored or blurred, and portraits are in fact treated as though they were their subjects -- that is to say, the viewer reacts to the portrait as he or she would like to react to the person represented. One example of this type of reaction is the icon, where devout Christians will pray to a once-living saint while kneeling in supplication before its image. Of course, the conflation of

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[56] *Ibid.*, 128.

[57] This distinction is not limited to the paintings, as is clear from the previous discussion about Roland Barthes and the photographic portrait.

Fig. 17. S. Merkusov, <u>Stalin</u> (remnant of a concrete statue in Yerevan - destroyed in 1950)

subject and his or her image does not always result in so reverent a reaction: portrait images of political leaders who have fallen from power, such as Stalin, are often destroyed (fig. 17). "The act of destroying the portrait expresses the anger of the viewer against the person represented and his eagerness to obliterate the one-time leader's existence as a historical being," the person's symbolic power.[58]

In his 1989 text <u>The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response</u>, art historian David Freedberg lends credence to the notion that a portrait might (at least in part) *be* its subject. Trying to redress art history's "still widely current view (whether explicit or implicit) that certain characteristics both of art and of responses to it are

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[58] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 19. It is important to note that, with the exception of believers in Voo-doo and witchcraft, those people who express their anger by acting violently towards an effigy generally <u>are</u> aware that the effigy is representational stand-in for the focus of their discontent; the use of effigies is not necessarily to suggest that physical violence would be done to the *actual* person.

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solely confined to "primitive" or non-Western societies," Freedberg compares Western and

non-Western responses to (photographic) portrait images.[59]

Comparing Western responses to the non-Western belief in "the power that arises

with the portrait that is acknowledged to be both vital representation and vital presence of

the portrayed or of his soul,"[60] Freedberg describes a similar resistance to picture

taking/portrait making in Western societies, this time on "aesthetic grounds" -- "on a feeling

that the picture can never live up to the true quality of the original" or "perhaps more deeply"

on the potential subject's vanity.[61] Freedberg asserts that this Western resistance or fear of

being photographed/portrayed "has cognitive bases at least as much as social ones"[62]:

> [...] how sure can we be of the constancy and strength of our ability to differentiate
> sign from signified? How do we know that when we see an image there is no
> moment of suspension, no moment when striving to reconstitute resembling form as
> resembled reality obliterates all awareness of the signified being as a thing apart, a
> presence elsewhere? Not even the keenest exponents of the view that we have
> become fully acculturated to see object as object, to accept image as representation,
> could claim that. [...] We cannot suppress all vestiges of the tendency to elide
> prototype and image, and to invest the latter with the qualities of the former. In
> doing so, we too may feel the stirring of fear, or sexual arousal, or emotions so strong
> that they threaten to arouse us to visible behaviour; and in the case of portraits of
> ourselves, the beginnings, remote though they may be, of a feeling akin to
> resentment (to assess the emotional disturbance at no more than that) at the

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[59] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1989): this quote xxi; discussion of reactions to portraits 278-282.

While Freedberg's attempts to subvert concepts of "high" versus "low" art are admirable, his constant comparison between more and less privileged societies, and his consistent use of the term "primitive," seems to me to reinforce classist binaries and an "us/them" attitude. His efforts to redress the very binaries he seems to emphasize by replacing them with "universalization" are equally problematic.

[60] *Ibid.*, 281.

[61] *Ibid.*, 280.

[62] *Ibid.*

transference of some part of ourselves to the representation of ourselves.[63]

Freedberg's "reasoning" however, is irrational. The fact that one does *not* know something (that "there is no moment of suspension" etc.) does not mean that that something *is*. My *not* knowing that my reader's name is *not* Knowlton, for example, does not prove that my reader's name *is* Knowlton.

As an alternative to Freedberg's Theory of Response, one might consider semiotic readings of images, particularly as Freedberg himself chose to refer to the portrait and its subject by using the Saussurean semiotic terms of "sign" and "signified."[64] A semiotic reading would permit an image to produce meaning without needing to be "reconstituted" as its referent: Charles Peirce, to name but one semiotic theorist, suggests that signs produce meaning as one of three types: the icon (whereby the sign suggests the signified through its resemblance to it); the symbol (whereby the signified is intuited from its sign, as in the case of schema); and the index (whereby the sign suggests its signified through pointing out the absence of the signified, such as a footprint in sand suggesting the [past] presence of a person).[65] A semiotic reading, in other words, would have allowed for the occasionality of a portrait -- the link between the subject (signified) and his or her image (sign) -- without necessitating Freedberg's assumption that the sign takes from or becomes the signified.

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[63] *Ibid.*, 281.

[64] Saussure, however, would not put these terms in opposition, as signified and signifier are *parts* of the (linguistic) sign. Carol Sanders, *Cours de linguistique générale de Saussure* (Paris: Hachette, 1979): 31, 90ff.

[65] For more extensive elaborations of semiotic readings, see Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 73/1 (March 1991): 174-208. For discussion of Peirces's writings specifically, see Bal and Bryson pp 188-191, and Margaret Iversen, "Sausurre v. Peirce: Models for a Semiotics of Visual Art," in A.L. Rees and Frances Borzello, eds., *The New Art History* (London: Camden Press Ltd., 1986): 85-91.

While portraits have been used as representative replacements for their subjects, and despite Freedberg's assertions, it is important to note that a portrait in fact can *not* be equated with the person portrayed, for the aspects of the "stable" categories of Identification and Identity are, in fact, unstable: names, while they are used to identify an individual, are arbitrary.[66] Attributed at the beginning of some one's life, a name is neither guaranteed to be unique, nor guaranteed to remain unchanged, whether due to marriage, adoption, or immigration, for political reasons or to avoid prejudice, because the bearer of a given name feels it doesn't suit him or her, or, as with many public figures (George Sand, George Elliot, Mark Twain, Martin Sheen, etc.) for professional reasons.[67] For example, Marcel Duchamp, discussed earlier in this chapter, he not only had an alter-ego named Rrose Sélavy, but also signed his 1917 Dada masterwork Fountain with the fictional name R. Mutt.

The depiction of one's physical appearance, even without physiognomic reinterpretation, is also unstable. Though (until recent times) less often as radically altered as names, physical appearance points to another fallacy, for the physical subject in a portrait is never the same as the physical self portrayed. The subject lives in the present, and any image of him or her is necessarily a representation of how they appeared in the past. Though a viewer would say of Greg Curnoe's portrait of his first son, "That is Owen," in fact "that *was* Owen" in 1984 when the portrait was made (fig. 18). The portrait's subject is now

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[66] On the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, see Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Bayot, 1960): 100ff.

[67] One should note that some of these categories, such as "to avoid prejudice" and "for professional reasons" may overlap. For a lengthier discussion of issues of naming, see Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 59ff.

older,[68] and does not look the same as his image in the portrait. This problem of time is

exacerbated the greater the time between the fabrication and the viewing of a portrait, as is

clear portraits of Owen as an infant (1966; fig. 19)

Fig. 18. Greg Curnoe, Owen. Feb 15-June 21
(1984)

Fig. 19. Greg Curnoe, Family Portrait No. 3:
Under the Apple Tree (1966)

Time also negates the "truth" of aspects of Identity, as one's social status, emotional

outlook, and professions are also subject to change, as is clear, for example, from the

discussion of portraits of Stalin. In the case of effigies, the viewer has acknowledged the

discrepancy between the portrait and its subject; between how he or she once was and

currently is seen. Portraits represent the traits considered vital at a given point in the

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[68] Or, more precisely, *was* at the time I was writing those words -- and by the time this text is read, will be
even more so!

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subject's life. The viewer can avoid the time discrepancy/fallacy to a certain extent when a portrait's subject manages to prolong his or her Identification and Identity as they were depicted: one might be able to argue "that is Marilyn Monroe" of Warhol's numerous portraits of her, since this American icon died while the traits her portraits symbolize (her "look," her commodification) still had primacy (1965; fig. 20).[69]

Fig. 20. Andy Warhol, Marilyn (1965)

Of course, the selection of expression, pose, attribute, and setting to suggest Identity in portraiture -- in that each is a socially sanctioned and expected convention used to schematize that which is not visible -- further emphasizes the truth of the portrait as a construction rather than reality. In other words, a portrait which successfully depicts its physical subject, then, is true to his or her traits of Identification, yet also self-reflexively

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[69] Death, paradoxically, is the ultimate argument for the difference between the Identification and Identity of portrait image and the subject represented. The Illeity of the ideal portrait, however, as in the case of the photograph of Barthes' mother (*Camera Lucida*, 67ff) is not affected by changes in Identification or Identity, as it is with-out (and without) those categories.

points out the fallacy of believing in that image, since the subject will never be *that* again (i.e.: the image, like any other image, will always be one of the *past*).

If an honest portrait is ultimately dishonest because the aspects which make up the identity of its subject are fallacious, in that they are socially constructed, then every portrait is at least in part a portrait not of its subject, but of its subject's time. This is the case in as much as the subject, whose identity (as opposed to his self) is socially constructed and fallacious in all aspects, is portrayed less as him- or herself, however this might be defined, than as a representative of the mores, assumptions, and expectations of his or her time.

Interestingly, while being not-quite-subject, the sitter is also partial creator, having selected or at least agreed to a specific pose, manner of dress, and other cues to [fallacious] Identity depicted in the portrait.

While the subject of a portrait can be considered its "in-part-creator," the portrait's assumed creator (the artist) is its "in-part-subject." Oscar Wilde said that "every portrait painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter."[70] While I would argue that Wilde's statement is too definite for the paradoxical nature of portraiture, his suggestion that the artist exists within a portrait of an other is well taken. Barker Fairley worried about being excluded from his portrait of author Robertson Davies (1973; fig. 21), wondering "Can I manage to set down so well-known a countenance and stay true to myself in doing so?"[71] It is through recognizable style and technique that an artist identifies him- or herself in an image. While avowing that the emphasized vertical aspect of Davies' portrait was

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[70] Quoted in Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 82.

[71] Barker Fairley, *Barker Fairley Portraits* (Toronto: Methuen, 1981): 70.

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"unintentional," and that the possible reference to Davies' novel Fifth Business in the choice of background colour "never remotely occurred" to him,[72] as regards commitment to himself (his style), Fairley states: "I certainly made no compromise. My bold treatment of the left eye and brow above it came naturally and easily to me and *served my purpose*."[73]

Both Lynn Donoghue and Greg Curnoe enhanced their own stylistic self-subjectification with references to their stylistic influences. In Homage to Van Dongen (Sheila) No. 1 (1978-79; fig. 22), Curnoe portrayed his wife Sheila in form, himself in a characteristically bold and colourful use of watercolour, and in his stylistic indebtedness to Dutch painter Kees Van Dongen. Similarly, in the aforementioned William Kimber with Mme Moitessier (fig. 16), Donoghue represents Kimber, Moitessier, Ingres, and herself; each artist through her or his portrait, and herself further by suggesting the influence of the French painter on her work.[74]

William Ronald stopped just short of representing himself over and above his subjects in his abstract expressionist portraits of Canada's prime ministers (1977-1982). The large scale, loose style, and thick impasto of John Diefenbaker for example (1978; fig. 23), is more recognisable at first glance as "a William Ronald" than as "the John Diefenbaker." This is, however, definitely a portrait (albeit not a traditional one) of the former Prime Minister: his characteristically puffy eyes are foregrounded; the red arrow symbolizes the

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[72] It was suggested to Fairley after the completion of *Robertson Davies* that "the yellow in the background accorded with the magical element in *Fifth Business*." *Ibid.*, 70.

[73] *Ibid.*, 70; my italics.

[74] One could continue the pattern by saying that in his choice of pose, Ingres was referencing fresco artists of the Herculaneum, who influenced his choice of pose in this portrait.

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Fig. 21 Barker Fairley, Robertson Davies (1973)

Fig. 23. William Ronald, John Diefenbaker
(1978) ➡

Fig. 22. Greg Curnoe, Homage to Van Dongen
(Sheila) No. I (1978-79)

Avro Arrow contract which Diefenbaker cancelled; the murky colours, unsteady lines, and unflattering yet dominant central caricature of Diefenbaker's face represent the Prime Minister's traits of "a fighter who never gave up, an embattled but charismatic leader who looked a little mad and was known to be paranoid."[75] In order to understand these references, however, the viewer must be privy to Ronald's consistent yet individual visual lexicon, which again references the artist.

Although the portrait of an other will not necessarily provide the viewer with a sense of the artist's physical appearance,[76] the artist *is* identified in the work -- "indexically," in Peircean terms -- by signature and/or characteristic style: technique, format, colour choice can function as aspects pointing to the artist's Identity. Whether a portrait's *punctum* (or *ultra-punctum*) is the subject's or the artist's Illeity, or a combination of both, is ultimately unknowable, however, due to the underlying nature of Illeity.

Even when considering the self-portrait, where both artist and subject are the same *self*, the artist can only come to know him- or herself as an other: *ipseity* is the term Emmanuel Lévinas uses to describe the self-reflexive awareness of self.[77] In order to know ipseity, to know oneself as a self, a self must go beyond itself and back again, in order to know the limits, the boundaries of itself:

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[75] William Ronald, *The Prime Ministers* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1983): (unpaginated).

[76] That is, unless the artist includes his or her own image in the portrait of an other, as did Jan van Eyck in *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride* (1434): Van Eyck not only signed "Jan van Eyck was here" [in Latin] on the wall which forms the backdrop to this portrait scene, but he also included a small self-portrait in the reflection of the convex mirror on the back wall.

[77] This notion was first mentioned in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* Trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague/Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979): 86-88, 114-115. (This text was originally published in French in 1969.)

This is an inversion in the process of essence, a withdrawing from the game that being plays in consciousness. It is a withdrawal-in-oneself which is an exile in oneself, without foundation in anything else, a non-condition.[78]

The result is that one is "stripped of self and yet present to self."[79] With regard to the self-portrait, while Identification is overt, in order to glean the Identification and Illeity of the subject -- in this case, the self -- the artist must see him- or herself from without; as an other. The self-portrait is, in essence, a portrait of an other.

Portraiture, then, is paradoxical. Its goal is to depict what is unknown and unknowable (Illeity); it utilizes fallacious traits of Identification and Identity in order to identify the unidentifiable Illeity; and there can be no absolute distinction made between portraits and self-portraits, for in representing the self of one (the subject) by an other (the artist), portraiture makes of the one a creator and of the other, an other self. The only unequivocable statement which can be made about portraiture, as, appropriately, about the Illeity the portrait aims to contain, is that *portraiture is*.

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[78] Emmanuel Lévinas, "Substitution," in Seán Hand, ed., *The Lévinas Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989): 96.

[79] Lévinas, "The servant and her master," in *ibid.*, 156.

Reflections on the Mirror: Who's YOU?

> Ideally, I would love to paint a mirror... a mirror is nothing except the condition of you looking at it now.
>
> Taras Polataiko[80]

An YOU defacing the Queen of the two-dollar bill pointed to how naming -- or, more precisely, the *lack* of naming -- affects the reception of a person or portrait. The un-indexed Uncle Sam seemed to speak to no one, and yet he could at the same time be speaking to every one. Both these ideas speak to the notion that identity is transient, unstable, and this notion was particularly poignant to Taras Polataiko, who was developing a series of self-portrait works about the unstable positioning of the immigrant to Canada, and how the immigrant's sense of self is questioned through being seen by others as *other* -- the experience of Illeity.

It is notable that this series -- this exploration of the self and of other -- was created during Polataiko's first two years as a professional artist in Canada. The timing parallels the chronology of the orders of identification according to French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. That is to say, the Lacanian Mirror Stage, during which one becomes aware of the notions of self and of other, is considered to take place in the first two years of life -- between the ages of six and eighteen months. In his series, Polataiko both prolongs the exploration of identity politics of the Mirror Stage, by melding Lacan's Imaginary and Symbolic orders, and also universalises the exploration of identity, extending the scope of these self-portraits beyond the artist to the viewer.

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[80] Quoted in Laurence, "Puzzling Images," D1.

Lacan posits that there are three orders of identification: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic.[81] A child is born into the order of the Real: during this period, the infant subject has at once the sense of ubiquity, and of the body "in bits-and-pieces": there is no sense of where he or she begins or ends; no sense of self. Because this order precedes a sense of self, "it is capable of representation or conceptualization only through the reconstructive or inferential work of the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. Lacan himself refers to the Real as 'The lack of a lack'."[82] The Real is a continuum, a plenitude without boundaries -- but because it precedes self-awareness, the Real cannot be "experienced" as such. Lacan posits that it is the experiencing of the Real -- the feeling the sense of *lack of lack* -- which one seeks through the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

Following the Real, the Imaginary is the order of identification with images -- that order wherein the self is constituted. Lacan elucidates the Imaginary order through the notion of the Mirror Stage.

The Mirror Stage begins with the perception of the Ideal-I, where the subject sees its reflected image in a mirror as a complete image -- as a gestalt, rather than as a series of body parts. It is a moment of seeing the self -- the I -- without yet having a sense of other or of language. The conception of the Ideal-I is but a fleeting moment, however. The "jubilant"

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[81] These notions were first published in 1948. See Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca, N.Y./London, Cornell University Press, 1985): 74-75 with regard to the dating of Lacan's writing on the Mirror Stage. For an example of the application of the Mirror Phase to the visual arts, see Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989); and also Craig Owens, "The Medusa Effect, or, The Specular Ruse," *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture* B(erkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, University of California Press, 1992): 191-200.

[82] Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 34. While the concept of the "lack" in Lacan is generally related to the phallus (and is hence problematic for many feminist readers) I feel that applying the "lack" to the notion of the Real allows for a less gendered reading: if the Real suggests ubiquity, the post-Real would necessarily constitute *lack* -- of ubiquity and plenitude, rather than necessarily and persistently of the phallus.

reaction to the recognition of self is replaced by a sense of lack, for in moving from the

ubiquitous selflessness of the Real, to the gestalt of the Imaginary, in completing the circuit

to ipseity, the subject realizes not only what he or she *is*, but also what he or she is *not* -- in

other words, in recognizing the self, the subject also conceives of the notion of *other*.

This is the pivotal moment around which the Mirror Stage is centred -- the moment

of what Lacan termed *méconnaissance*. The subject sees the *imago*, the specular image in

the mirror before him or her, and identifies with this image as "self," while at the same time

recognizing that the image is just that -- an image. It is not self, but rather the self as seen

from outside -- as an "other." As Elizabeth Grosz put it: "The subject recognizes itself at

the moment it loses itself in/as the other."[83] In this way, the Mirror Stage demonstrates the

intrinsic link between notions of subject and object: the subject gazing at or into the mirror

conceives of the notion of self, but this recognition comes from seeing itself as a specular

other. The result is that he or she is concomitantly active subject seeing the self in the

mirror's *imago*, and passive object, both of its own gaze, and of the gaze of potential others.

The internal struggle between the notions of self and of other, the instability of concomitant

identification with subject and with object, is a prolonged and continuous one, unlike the

momentary Ideal-I. In the words of Jane Gallop: "The mirror stage is a turning point. After

it, the subject's relation to himself is always mediated through a totalizing image that has

come from outside"[84] -- paralleling Lévinas' ipseity.

Polataiko's Mirror Helmet (1994; fig. 24) is one work from the YOU series which

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[83] *Ibid.*, 41.

[84] Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, 79.

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convincingly encapsulates this continual play between self and other. This sculptural work is a hollow, chrome-plated human head (the artist's) designed to be worn as a head covering. Looking at its mirrored surface, where one expects to see an individual's [individual] face, the viewer finds him- or herself looking at his or her *own* face, reflected by the helmet-mask. To see one's own face on an other's body both literally brings to life the Lacanian concept of seeing both self and other at once through the mirror, and also suggests that one is but a reflection of the other, pointing to the notions of socially constructed identity primarily discussed in the second chapter. Polataiko renders the links between self and other more complex by playing with the viewer's assumptions about the "other": while Polataiko designed Mirror Helmet to reflect (in form) his own facial features, and though he has worn the helmet as a type of understated performance piece at showings of his **YOU** series, Polataiko has also hired others to wear the Mirror Helmet in his place, posing as his self. Viewers would assume they know the identity (i.e.: Identification) of the *other* "wearing"/reflecting their face, without realizing that it was actually another *other* than they had assumed. Through this subtle masquerade -- which was admitted only after the **YOU** exhibitions[85] -- Polataiko points out that the viewer should not be as sure of him- or herself (nor of *his-* or *her*self) as he or she thinks. When the Mirror Helmet is not worn, it is displayed on a 175 x 75 x 65 cm marble pedestal (fig. 25), and included in the list of media used is "one way mirror film." There is no way of knowing if the viewer is being filmed while looking at the Mirror Helmet, and no films have yet been used by Polataiko in other art works, but the mere mention of the possibility puts in question who is the owner (and
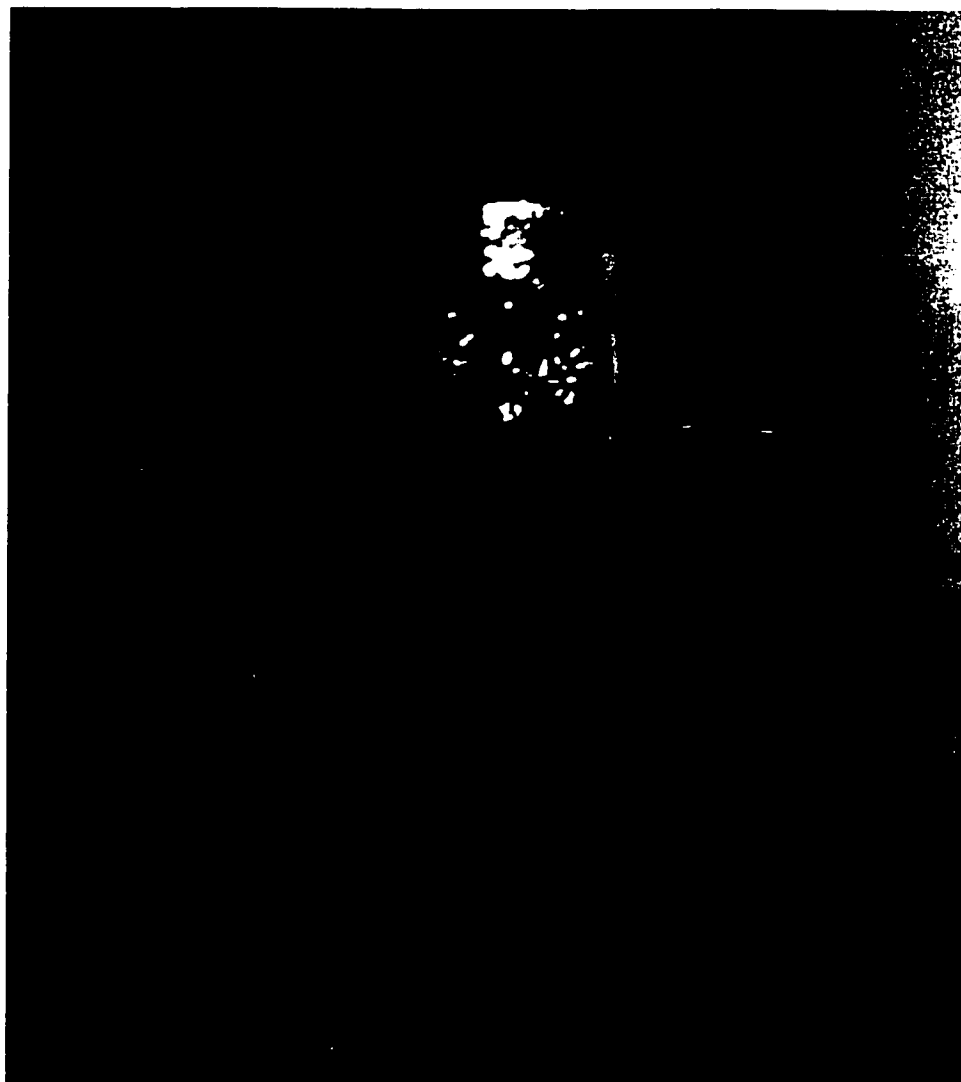
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[85] Taras Polataiko, interview.

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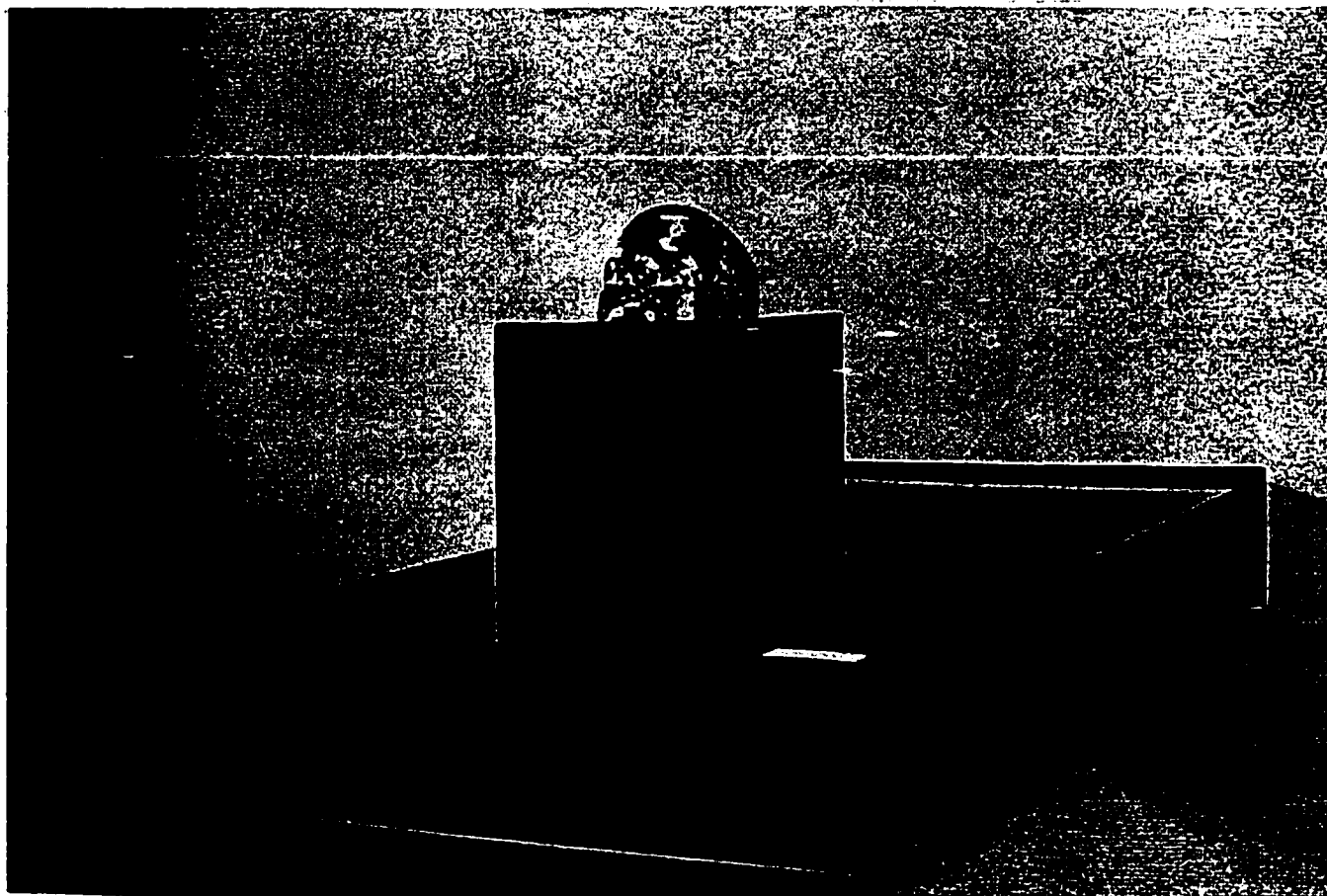Fig. 24. Taras Polataiko, Mirror Helmet (1994) - worn by artist

Fig. 25.Taras Polataiko, Mirror Helmet (1994) - on pedestal, installed at Diane Farris Gallery, Vancouver. Marble, chrome-plated beonze, one-way mirror film, 175 x 75 x 65 cm.

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who the subject) of the gaze -- the viewer or the mask which mirror the viewer's face?

The painted works in the series can also be read as depictions of this Lacanian notion of the Mirror Stage. The faces can be read as specular *imagoes*, creating of the canvas a Lacanian mirror. Two untitled works reflect this idea: one, the smallest piece in the series, is a painting of Polataiko's eyes on a 3.5 x 16.5 cm. piece of particle-board, mounted in an equally-sized recess, such that it be flush with the wall (1994; fig. 26). The viewer gets the impression of being peered at through a high-mounted mail slot. The translucent text super-imposed over the eyes is at first difficult to read, but reveals itself to be the letters **U O Y** -- the mirror reflection of the word *YOU*. The fact that the text is written backwards puts the viewer before this piece in the position of primacy: he or she is the YOU being reflected. By the same token however, the eyes in the work -- which must also be a reflection, as they are intermingled with the reflected text -- are not the viewer's eyes, but Polataiko's. While the viewer is aware that it is he or she before the mirror, one does not expect to have an other's eyes reflected back. Nor would one refer to oneself as "you," as does the work. The result is that, while the work is a mirror reflection and standing before it would necessarily make the viewer the subject of that reflection, the object of the reflection is the image of an *other*; the subject of the silent YOU (OUY). As in the Mirror Stage, where the sense of self is gleaned concomitantly with the sense of other, YOU is (and you are) being reflected through the eyes of an *other*.

The second untitled work, a 165 x 330 cm. painting of Polataiko's face from forehead to upper lip, also has text super-imposed across his eyes, this time in a dark band which
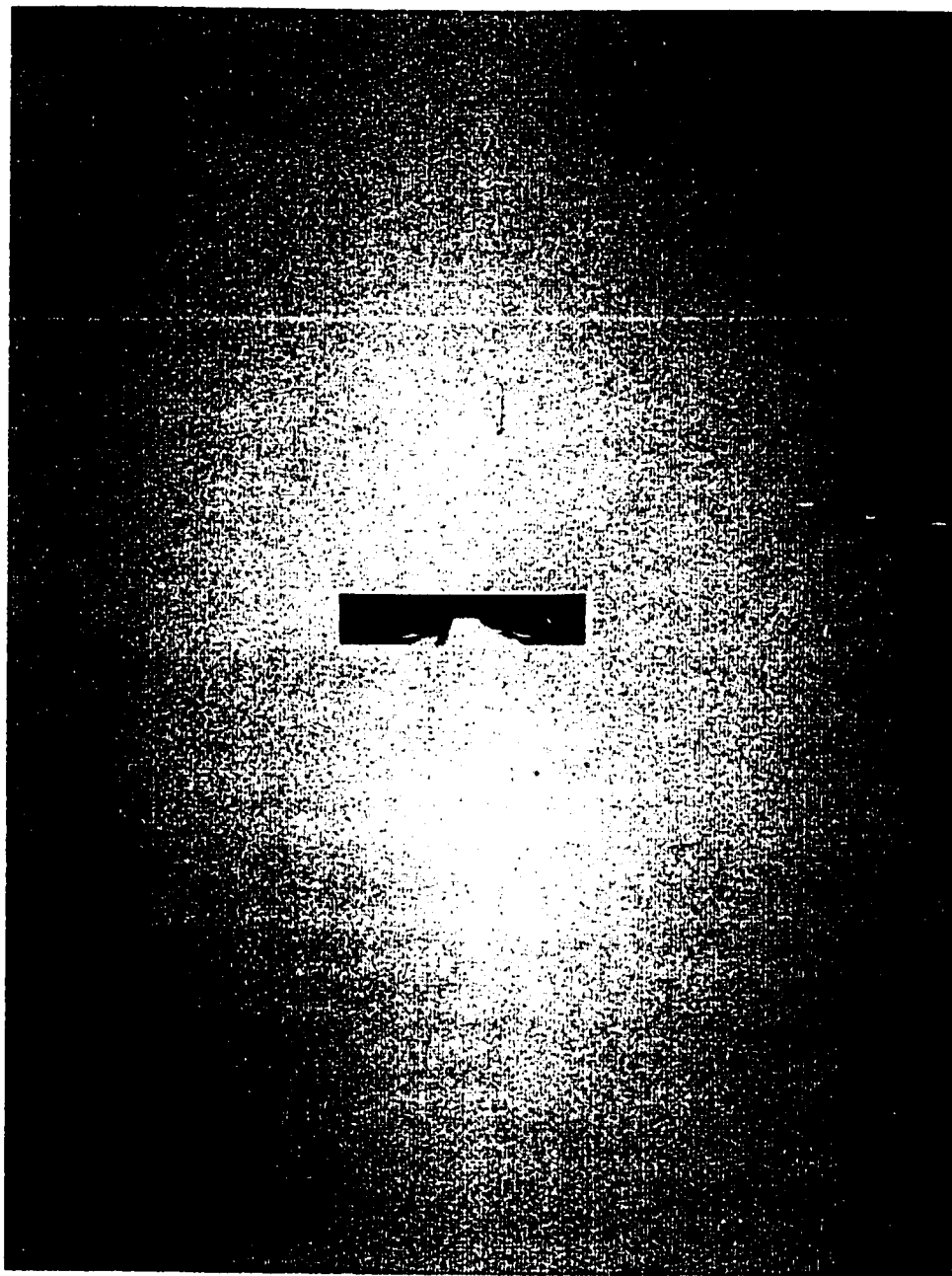
Fig. 26.Taras Polataiko, Untitled (1994)
acrylic on paticle board cut into the wall, 3.5 x 16.5 cm.

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Fig. 27.Taras Polataiko, Untitled (1993)
acrylic on canvas, 120 x 240 cm.

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continues beyond the edges of the canvas (1993; fig. 27). At first glance, the text appears to be in Russian (this observation based on the most easily read letter: a backwards "N" on the far left) and seems a reference to Polataiko's roots in the former U.S.S.R. While many cultures read from right-to-left, or even vertically, it is reasonable in this case to consider this letter "backwards" and to assume to read from left-to-right, as Polataiko's series is based on a *Canadian* experience, and the exhibition cards and artist's statement were written in English. The assumption that this text be Russian, and therefore illegible to many western viewers, links well with the dark band across the portrait's eyes, suggesting notions of self-censorship. However, a closer look reveals that the text reads "INITIATION" and, as in the work just described, is simply painted backwards. Where in the smaller work it is but the eyes of an other which are "reflected" back to the viewer, in this case it is an other's closely-cropped face -- the locus of identity, *visagéité*, and Illeity -- which is reflected. The viewer's self looks into a mirror (since the image is a reflection) and sees an *other* in place of the expected *self*. These two untitled works function as the initiation -- the introduction into knowledge[86] -- of the self/other flux of Polataiko's **YOU** series.

One might argue that the self-portrait images of an *other* (in this case, of Taras Polataiko) can not act as a Lacanian mirror to anyone other than the "self" depicted. However, although the works in the YOU series are self-portraits, they are not overtly identified as such. Not only does Polataiko not reference himself, but he at times effaces himself (aspects of his Identification), using others' names to refer to his own image:

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[86] This is the definition of *initiation* from *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 732.

Looking at Medusa depicts Polataiko as the mortal Gorgon (1993; fig. 28).[87] Two

compelling and related questions to come of this image are Who is the (unstated) "you"

looking at Medusa, and *How* is this looking being accomplished? It is important to note that

the work's title is Looking at Medusa, and not Looking at *a Portrait of* Medusa. The

implication is that the "looking" is active and direct. If the painted image is *Medusa* -- albeit

with Polataiko's face -- then the viewer should turn to stone at a glance, for any one who

directly encounters her face is solidified. That the viewer is not petrified (and, of course,

cannot be petrified) suggests that this work, like those discussed above, is a *reflection* of

Medusa;[88] perhaps the canvas has become a specific mirror -- that of Perseus' shield. But

like the other images in the **YOU** series, Medusa is seen full-faced, and so the "looking" of

the title must be done from directly in front of her. If the image must be a reflection (for the

viewer is not petrified) and must also be seen face-to-face, then the viewer must *be* Medusa,

another *other* at the same time as the first (Polataiko) whose countenance the viewer

continues to reflect. Paradoxically, the reflected image of Medusa is one where Medusa

herself (or himself, as she has Polataiko's countenance) has turned to stone, suggesting that

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[87] Medusa was the only mortal of three Gorgon sisters in Greek mythology. Once a beautiful maiden whose hair was her greatest attribute, Medusa vied in beauty with the goddess Minerva (Athena, in some interpretations), who punished her by depriving Medusa of all her charms, changing her teeth to boars' tusks, giving her the protruding tongue of a serpent, and turning her ringlets to hissing snakes. She was said to be so frightful that a mere glance of her would turn one to stone. Perseus slew her by donning the Helmet of Hades which made its wearer invisible [this gives get another interpretation to Polataiko's *Mirror Helmet!*] and decapitating her in her sleep, avoiding looking at her by letting himself be guided by her refection in Athena's highly polished shield. [From R. Graves, 237; H.A. Guerber, 138-139, 142-144; F. Guirand, 78, 142; and C. Mills Gayley, 208-211.]

[88] While it can be argued that any image of Medusa, any opportunity a viewer has to glimpse her face, "should" turn the viewer to stone, in the case of Polataiko's work, the immediacy of the act of looking implicit in the title, as well as the size of Medusa's face (filling the canvas) and the forced directness of the viewer's "looking" (as the image is full-faced) emphasizes the viewer's potential petrification.

Fig. 28.Taras Polataiko, <u>Looking at Medusa</u> (1993)
acrylic on canvas, c. 88 x 123 cm.

she must have looked at herself. The only possible answer, while illogical since the viewer is not petrified, is that the viewer -- he or she who is directly *Looking at Medusa* -- is Medusa.[89]

Another figure from Greek mythology is referenced in <u>YOU as Narcissus</u> (1992; fig. 29).[90] In this case, Polataiko has effaced not only his name but also his image: this is the only work in the series which does not depict a face at all. Of similar size and painted in the same blue hues as the figural works, <u>YOU as Narcissus</u> appears to depict soft ripples of water; the ebb of a wake. Subtly super-imposed over the ripples, painted in a slightly paler tone, is the ubiquitous word YOU, the tops of its letters wafting with the quiet waves. The viewer has become Narcissus, but rather than falling in love with a self-*image*, this Narcissus is drawn to the word: to YOU -- which, of course, makes of YOU a Narcissus. Appropriately, the myth of Narcissus is as fraught with paradoxes as are portraiture and the decontextualized YOU: rejecting countless others, Narcissus fell in love with an other he could never possess -- his *self* -- and yet this other/self is both his constant possession and one which could be possessed by no other. In the same way that the notion of the fingerless Uncle Sam points to the absolute importance of his digit, <u>YOU as Narcissus</u> emphasizes the importance of the face, as the viewer feels the need to attribute a countenance to the image's

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[89] For more on the interplay between Medusa image and spectator, see Owens, "The Medusa Effect," 191-200.

[90] Narcissus was a beautiful youth, son of the blue nymph Leiriope and the river god Cephisus. Heartlessly rejecting all his suitors, Narcissus was punished by a goddess (various interpretations mention Artemis, Athena, and Aphrodite) and was made to fall in love with his own image, reflected back to him in a still brook. So smitten with this other self, Narcissus spent the rest of his days trying to talk to and embrace that ever-present non-presence. (Variant endings to this myth have Narcissus committing suicide at the realization of his dilemma; falling into the brook and drowning; or dying of languor.) [From Graves, 286; Guerber, 71-72; Guirand, 122; and Mills Gayley, 188-189.]
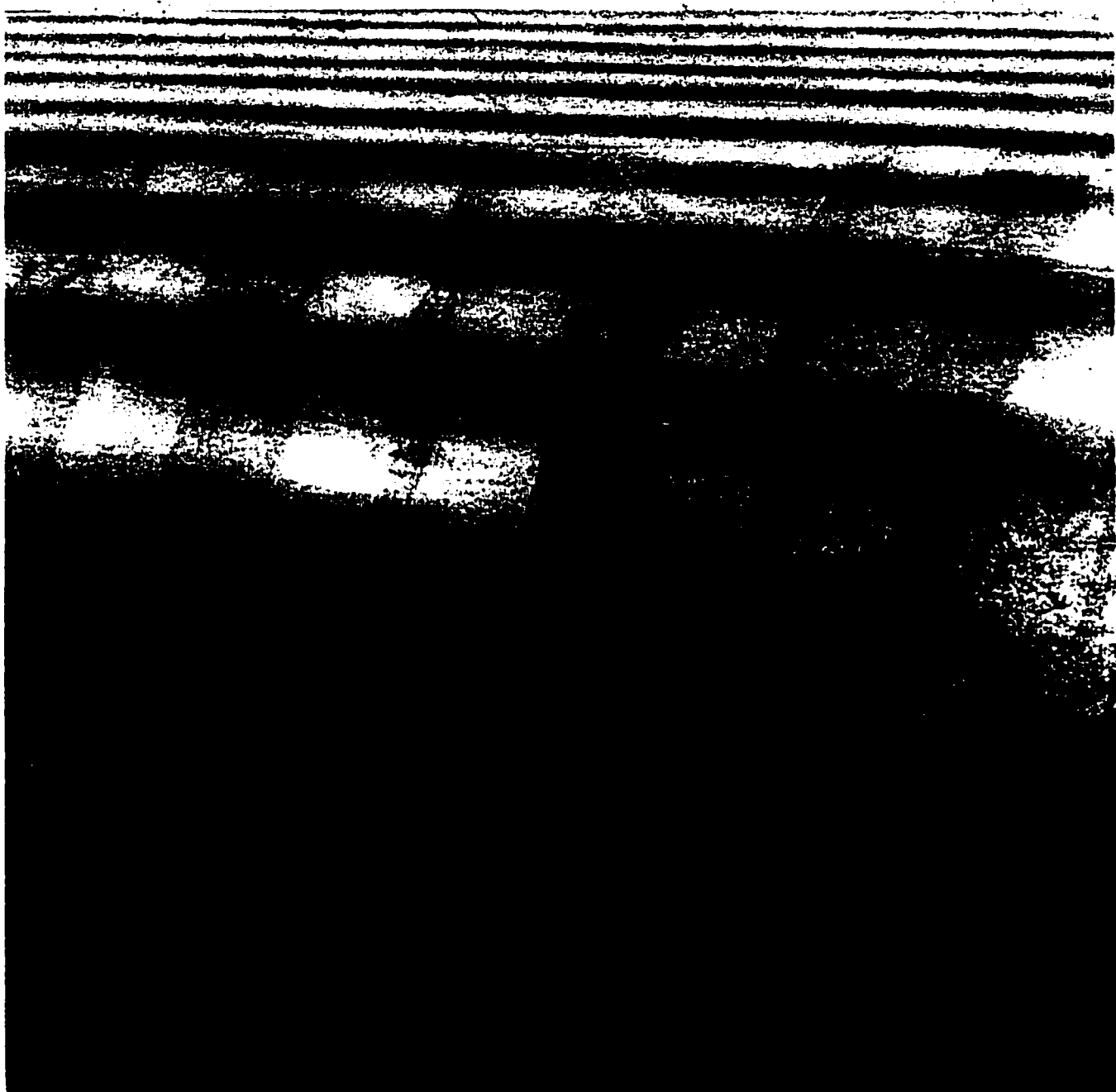
Fig. 29.Taras Polataiko, YOU as Narcissus (1992)
acrylic on linen, 196 x 196 cm.

undefined and undefinable YOU.

Throughout the series, Polataiko effaces his own identity by identifying his image with the names of mythical figures (Medusa, Narcissus) or with the no-name, decontextualized pronoun, YOU. The focus of the series is the initial encounter of an unknown other -- the experience of Illeity. Polataiko does not provide a narrative which would allow the viewer to enter the life of the artist depicted, and hence refuses to allow the viewer to assume privileged access to his identity, even on the level of the assumption discussed with regard to Mirror Helmet. Despite the inclusion of Medusa and Narcissus (suggesting Identification), hair and water (attribute and setting suggesting Identity), the disembodied images of the YOU series provide no clues to the Identification or Identity *of Taras Polataiko*. There is but the interaction of artist and viewer (and the subjective self-other flux caused by this interaction) as is bluntly suggested in the title of another 1994 work, YOU and the Artist (1994; fig. 30). This large-scale diptych, comprised of two 175 cm.^{2} canvasses placed together to form one piece, depicts the artist's face on the left, while the word YOU fills the right-hand side. This work may at first seem to be more literal than many of the others, in that one panel, we deduce, represents "the artist" (or, at least, most of his face) and the other, literally, the "YOU." The artist functions as the subject, and the word "YOU" refers both to the textual panel, and to the viewer(s) of the subject. However, if one reads the title while "reading" the work, one reads "YOU" while looking at the image of the artist, and "and the artist" while looking at an YOU: the order of the title's words is not in

Fig. 30.Taras Polataiko, <u>YOU and the Artist</u> (1994)
acrylic on canvas, 175 x 330 cm.

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the same order as the images which are assumed to correspond to those words.[91] It is the viewer who has become the subject, and the artist has become the object, the other, the "YOU" the viewer refers to.

The instability of the subject/object, I/YOU, self/other ultimately leaves the viewer only with an YOU, the question of *its* identity as looming as the colossal image of the same name: YOU (1994; fig. 31), like the minuscule untitled work first mentioned in this chapter, is an oblong image of Polataiko's eyes superimposed with text -- but the latter work is approximately twenty-seven times the size of the former. Under the imposing gaze of this 92 x 469.5 cm work -- the text in this case clearly written left to right -- the viewer finds him- or herself on the other side of the mirror, and becomes the YOU, the other, of an other's gaze.

It is important to note that the images of the YOU series are not mirror-images of Polataiko. Although many artists have been known to use mirrors as tools in self-depiction,[92] the repeated faces in Polataiko's YOU paintings are amalgams of a series of photographs of the artist which are tacked to a post in his studio. The faces which look out from these Lacanian mirrors are not real -- they are himself thrice removed: photographic images of his self as seen by others, then seen by him, then amalgamated in his memory to create the "other" he represents in his images. In using photographs rather than a mirror to

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[91] Both these readings are done from left-to-right in this series, as was discussed previously with reference to *Untitled* (1993) ["INITIATION"].

[92] On the use of mirrors in self-portraiture, see especially Nathalie Narischkine, *Le Peintre devant son miroir* (Paris: Le Louvre des Antiquaires, 1987); Pascal Bonafoux, *Portraits of the Artist: The Self-Portrait in Painting* (New York: Rizzoli; Geneva: Skira, 1985); and Gottleib, "Self-Portraiture in Post-Modern Art," 277-279.

Fig. 31.Taras Polataiko, <u>YOU</u> (1994)
installation shot at Diane Farris Gallery, Vancouver.
acrylic on linen, 92 x 469.5 cm.

produce the images in the YOU series, Polataiko depicts himself as others see him -- and as "other" to himself. Each work, then, functions as a mirror, not as a mirror-image.

If the YOU series consisted uniquely of images without text, this notion of the Lacanian mirror could only function for Polataiko, despite the fact that, as I have just argued, the *imagoes* are not mirror-images of the artist. Although a viewer other than Polataiko would sense both self and other when confronting the images, there would be no vacillation, no struggle between seeing the *imago*-other *as* self, because it would be unquestionably "other," being based on Polataiko's face. There would be a sense of both self (the viewing subject) and of other (Polataiko, or the images of him) but this sense would be stable: there would be no flux. The image alone could not truly function as a Lacanian mirror, since the identity of the viewer would not be invoked *through* it, *within* it. Through the use of text, however, Polataiko has brought the YOU series beyond the Lacanian order of the Imaginary into the order of the Symbolic, of language. His choice of text allows the works to function as Lacanian mirrors to *any* "other" gazing at the *imago*, regardless of whether the viewer recognizes his or her face in the image.

In theory, the only way to attain the Symbolic order is to disrupt the Imaginary, to interrupt the bipolar self/other duel of the Mirror Stage by breaking the mirror, so to speak, with language. In the case of the YOU series, however, rather than shattering the looking glass, the text reflects the same identity vacillation seen *in* the Mirror Stage. Polataiko centres his use of language primarily around the word YOU -- a linguistic shifter whose meanings are distinguishable only through context. YOU can be singular or plural,

masculine or feminine, one or anyone, subject or object.[93]

Polataiko's use of YOU as a decontextualized unit or in ambiguous text phrases

leaves the pronoun without fixed identity. The result is that YOU can be self or other -- or,

indeed, self *and* other. Lacan wrote that "the function of language is not to inform, but to

invoke."[94] This is precisely the effect of the text in the YOU series. Despite expecting to

be the viewing *subject* looking at the art *object*, the viewer instinctively responds to the YOU

in the paintings as *me* -- where the viewer exists as the "other," the object of the YOU -- just

as the Lacanian subject initially responds to the *imago* as the Ideal-I. The imaginary identity

conflict within the Mirror Stage is reproduced Symbolically here, as the viewer becomes

aware that the YOU might *not* mean "me" but might in fact refer to Polataiko, or to any or

all other viewers -- in which case the viewer exists as the self, the subject of the YOU in the

paintings. It is this anasententia,[95] this constant fluctuating of meaning in the multi-

subjective YOU, which allows the invocation of the Symbolic order to both continue and

underline the identity politics initialized in the Mirror Stage. To relate to YOU by thinking

me, while at the same time rejecting YOU as potentially meaning both *he* (Polataiko) and

they (any and all others confronted by these images), emphasizes the anasententic identity

flux of the YOU series as a whole. As Lacan wrote: "I identify myself in language, but only

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[93] For a complete exploration of the implications of YOU's multi-subjectivity, see D. Mellamphy, "YOU, The YOU-bomb." .

[94] Jacques Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language" (1953) in *Écrits: A Selection* Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York/London: Norton, 1977): 86.

[95] This is a word I coined as I found no other could express the meaning of a constant and continual possibility of twist or shift in meaning. Based on the Latin "ana" meaning differing and "sententia" which is meaning.

by losing myself in it like an object."[96]

As I have argued, the fact that YOU *may* refer to the viewer draws any and all viewers into the self/other binary of the Mirror Stage despite the repetitive visual image of an *other*. The viewer finds him- or herself constantly negotiating the space between self and other -- and does so literally in Looking at YOU (1993; fig. 32). This diptych, like YOU and the Artist, comprises one panel of Polataiko's face and one filled by the word "YOU," but rather than abutting one another, these panels are hung one across from the another. Again, the relationship between the work and its title seems simple at first: the face of the figural panel is "looking" at the "YOU" of the textual panel. However, to look at the panels, the viewer must be placed in the physical and psychological space between them and, so, while looking at the one, must turn his or her back on the other. When looking at the image panel, the questions of who owns the gaze versus who is the referenced "YOU" are reiterated. When looking at the text panel, the question of who is the owner of the voice "saying" YOU is intensified by the knowledge that the other (image) panel continues its gaze, and *is* "Looking at YOU" while you (the viewer) do the same.

The images of the YOU series are, I should reiterate, "other" to all viewers, including Polataiko: although the images are based on Polataiko, they are *imagoes* of a self who does not exist. Jane Gallop writes: "In the Imaginary mode, one's understanding of other people is shaped by one's own *imagoes*. The perceived other is actually, at least in part, a projection."[97] The images of the YOU series are not "perceived others," however: being

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[96] Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language" (1953) in *Écrits*, 86.

[97] Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, 61. My capitalization; my italics.
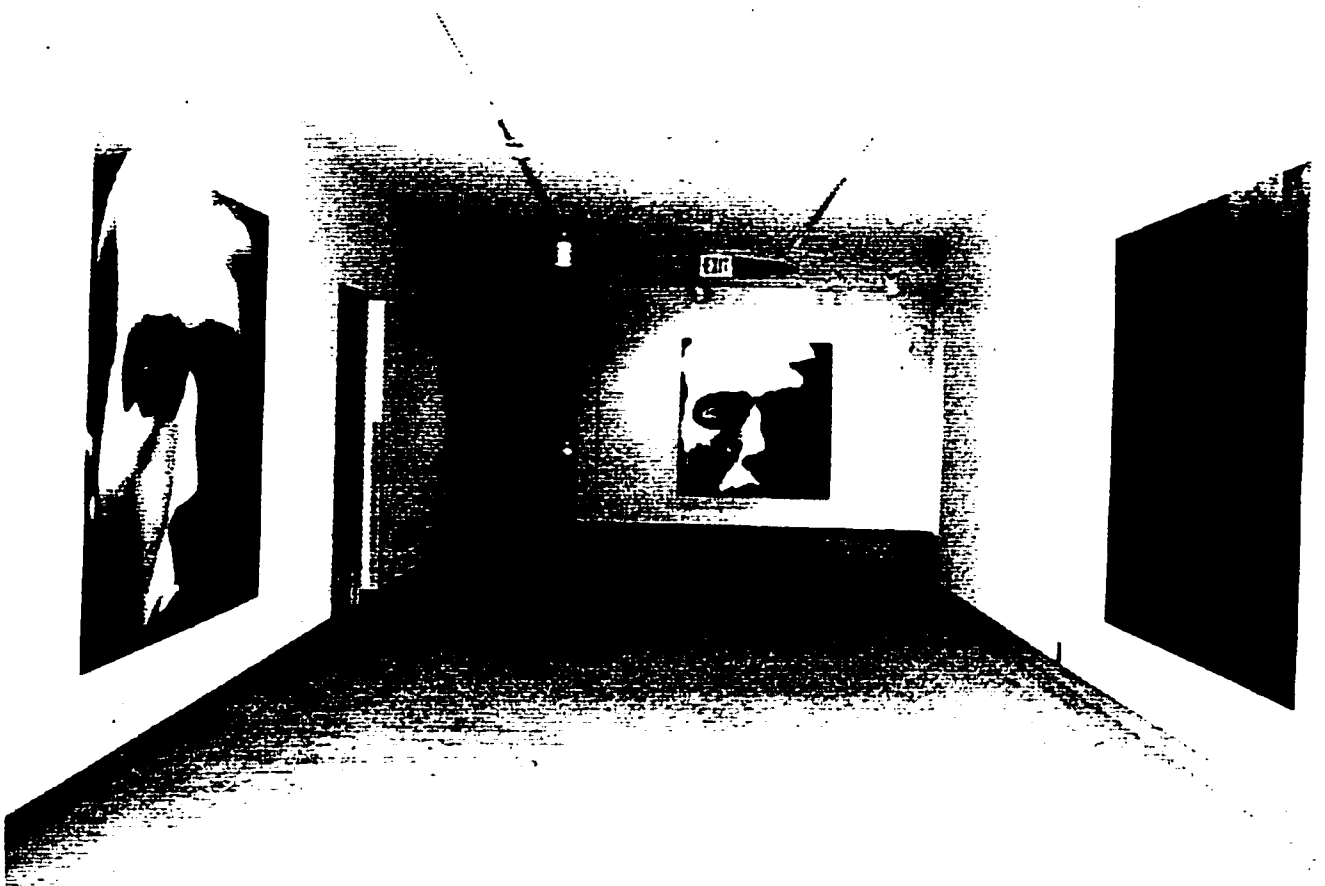
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Fig. 32.Taras Polataiko, Looking at YOU (1993)
acrylic on canvas, each panel 196 x 196 cm.

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created, amalgamated, they are wholly *imagoes*, absolute projections -- they are the *absolute other*. It is through the juxtaposition of this stable and repeated *imago* with the anasententic signifier YOU, that Polataiko causes the viewer to question the preconceptions he or she has about self *and* other -- regardless of whether the viewer resembles the *imago* facially or in sex or race: the face of the *imago* belongs to no one (not even Polataiko) yet through the use of YOU, paradoxically belongs to every one. When confronting the images in the YOU series, the viewer initially believes that he or she is the subject looking at the YOU, the *other*, in the canvas, and that the work is the object. But after a time, the viewer doubts him- or herself, wondering if it is not he or she who is the object, the YOU, and the paintings confronting him or her in fact the subjective owners of the gaze. The viewer is confronted with the question "Who is YOU?" If the YOU represents the artist, the question can be translated as "Who is Taras Polataiko?" If the YOU represents other viewers, the question may be read "Who are they?" Most interestingly, if the YOU *does* represent the viewer, he or she must ask "Who am I?", paralleling the artist's own questioning of identity brought on by his transplantation from the Ukraine to Canada. Ultimately, it becomes clear that the answer to the "Who is YOU?" is always a matter of perspective, depending on who is the privileged subject posing the question.[98] The ability to perceive the self and the other in the Imaginary's Mirror Stage has been intensified by Polataiko through the Symbolic -- the use of language -- as the viewer is confronted with latent preconceptions and biases brought out through the "Who is YOU?" question and its translations.

This reaction is not limited to those works which refer to the viewer. Four works in

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[98] With regard to this questioning, see post-colonial writings including Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other.*

the series privilege the first person singular -- and so suggest the series' repeated face is Polataiko's -- still evoke in the viewer messages about self, other, and prejudicial assumptions.

Self Portrait as a Twin is a diptych which is displayed on panel across from the other, as is Looking at YOU.[99] Rather than having one image panel and one text panel, however, this piece places two identical visages facing one another. While this seems straight-forward enough, like so many of the YOU series pieces, that seeming simplicity is belied in the title: had Polataiko opted for "*Self Portrait as Twins*," this diptych could be read in a direct manner, as the artist imagining an identical-looking sibling/other. By making singular the object of the title, while doubling his image, Polataiko has put the viewer in the position of wondering which panel is the twin?[100] And, were it distinguishable from the other, could it be considered a "self-portrait *as*" rather than a "portrait *of*"? These questions circulate in the viewer's mind as he or she turns bodily from one identical panel to the (its) other. At the same time, having been repeatedly associated with Polataiko's image in the other YOU works, the viewer must also wonder if he or she is the twin -- the other with the self's

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[99] I was unable to obtain an image of this diptych, but due to the consistent similarity in Polataiko's self-representation throughout the series, it is not difficult to imagine this work.

[100] I find it interesting if unexplainable that the image associated with the words "*a twin*" differs from person to person. While I have encountered twins in my past, I have two friends who are fraternal twins (though not of one another). I met both friends as individuals, metting their twins after the fact. I mention this because for me, *a twin* connotes *one* of a pair, and hence my argument about Polataiko's *Self-Portrait as a Twin*. One of my readers for this thesis, however, (whose experience with twins is limited to a pair of identical twins) imagines *two* despite the singularity of a *twin*. With regard to my two, singular *twin* friends, the term *a twin* suggests a pair to one of them, an individual to the other. I note this both out of interest, and in acknowledgement of the possibility that the argument in question may not be found sound by some readers. (These possible readings of *a twin* were brought up in the last days before the printing of this thesis, and I was unable to contact Taras Polataiko to assess his interpretation of the term as a singular.)

(Polataiko's) face, while at the same time being the self (his- or her- own) with the other's (Polataiko's) face.

While Self Portrait as a Twin makes the viewer question which view of the artist to read as the twin and how to read its counterfeit should it be found out, another untitled work of 1994 bluntly expresses the quandary (fig. 33): this work is structured like YOU and the Artist, being a diptych with the left panel depicting Polataiko's face and the right panel abutting it being purely textual. It reads "I CAN'T BELIEVE MY EYES" in the all-caps lettering of the other textual panels. Just as Polataiko's seemingly straight-forward images can be read a multiple of ways, his use of text, while always in capital letters, is also ambiguous, due to the absence of punctuation. Any sense of tone of voice must be gleaned from Polataiko's choice of colour tone: the panels use either light lettering on a dark background (Looking at Medusa; YOU as Narcissus; YOU) or dark lettering on light (YOU and the Artist; Looking at YOU). In the case of this untitled work, Polataiko breaks up his four lines of text by reversing the initial black on blue for the centre two lines. The result is subtly suggestive of the censor band perceived in the second untitled work discussed ["INITIATION"] and changes the tone of the words from an expression of amazement to a statement of fact — one which the viewer, who has gone from subject to object, from self to other to mirror throughout the exhibit, must agree.

Photograph makes manifest this statement (1994; fig. 34). This work is a painted image of a photograph of one of the painted works of the series.[101] This photograph was

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[101] It is probable, based on placement of shadow, that the work photographed is the figural panel of *Looking at YOU*. The great similarity between images in this series, of course, makes it both impossible and unnecessary to definitively identify the source of this model.

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Fig. 33.Taras Polataiko, Untitled (1994)
acrylic on canvas, 165 x 330 cm.

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Fig. 34.Taras Polataiko, <u>Photograph</u> (1994)
acrylic on linen, 198 x 198 cm.

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bent, and a light aimed at it such that the glare on the glossy surface of the photograph emphasize both its two-dimensionality and the warping of this two-dimensional image.[102] Both the photograph and its glare have been rendered in the same photo-realist manner Polataiko has used for all the figural paintings in the series. This work serves both as a reprieve from the constant identity flux instilled by the other works in the series, and also as a moral, bespeaking the fact that the image is not the person -- whether the image be a photograph, a painting or a human body -- and as such ought not to be used to make assumptions or judgements about the unknown other.

It is appropriate, then, that in the single panel My Dream Comes True, Polataiko's face is rendered with the eyes closed (1994; fig. 35). Since notions of self and other are so tied up in the visual, beginning with the Mirror Stage and continuing through the fallacy of the face/body as loci of veritable Identification, the simplest way to begin doing away with the distinction is to close one's eyes. Through this refusal of eye contact with the viewer, the viewer becomes an absolute voyeur: Polataiko is the YOU, the object of the viewing subject's gaze. The closed eyes are also at once a form of censorship (as such connoting the aforementioned Untitled [1993]) and suggestive of interiority, of self-absorption. No longer seeing himself through YOU, Polataiko posits in this work the I. As Roland Barthes wrote: "In order to see [a photograph] well, it is best to look away or close your eyes. [...] Absolute subjectivity is achieved only in a state, an effort, of silence (shutting your eyes to make the

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[102] This is the premise for Polataiko's second series of work, entitled **Glare**. As the two projects overlap chronologically, **YOU** spanning 1992-1994, and **Glare** also being completed in 1994, it is impossible to know whether this work in the **YOU** series was the source of the **Glare** series or influenced by it.

Fig. 35.Taras Polataiko, <u>My Dream Comes True</u> (1994)
acrylic on linen, 196 x 196 cm.

image speak in silence)."[103] Polataiko further avoids the complications implicit in language

(which he has amply shown through his use of the anasententic word YOU) by including no

text in this work. The dangers of this solipsistic dream, however, are pointed out in the

myth which informed Dream's opposite panel, the all-text, no face, YOU as Narcissus.[104]

Lacan's theories moved towards the supremacy of the material signifier over the

signified,[105] and, similarly, it is the text in Polataiko's YOU series which ultimately embodies

the identity politics encapsulated by the image. The title of Eyes for YOU (1993; fig. 5), a

single panel depicting Polataiko's face superimposed by a translucent YOU, illustrates this

point: the sightless *imago* (which cannot be read as self-absorbed due to the juxtaposition

and intermingling of a colossal YOU) may be considered to represent the blind

preconceptions and biases brought to the fore in the forced question of the Who is YOU?

which I have just discussed. The title may be read as offering new or alternate perceptions

by looking through another's eyes. On the other hand, if the *imago* is blind, then so must be

the viewer before the Lacanian mirror of Eyes for YOU; if this is the case, the title cannot

be read, but must rather be interpreted aurally. Reflecting the fact that these are self-portraits

of Polataiko *as seen as an other*, the title may be read "I is for you." Alternately, the first

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[103] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 53, 55.

[104] It is appropriate that Polataiko should have such associations with the myth of Narcissus: The fact that the artist is a gifted self-promoter, and the images of his self as other(s) are obvious parallels. An interesting aside, according to the mythology, Narcissus' mother Leiriope consulted a seer who intoned that her son "will live to a ripe old age, provided that he never knows himself." (Graves, 286.) While Narcissus' self-other dilemma obviously parallels Polataiko's exploration in the YOU series, it is an interesting coincidence that the seer -- *who was blind* -- was named *Teiresias*! [See Graves, 286 and Guirand, 122.] And beside the aside, the Greek word for a face "terrible to look upon" and "marvellous to behold" is *Teras*. (Dan Mellamphy, "Vers le Sublime" [master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1993], 23 fn77.)

[105] Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language" (1953) in *Écrits*, 86. With reagrd to his algorithms, see "The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud" (1957), *ibid.*, 146ff.

word may be understood to be a pluralizing of the first-person-singular pronoun "I". The title, then, would suggest a multiplicity of "I"s, alternate selves, depending on the positioning of the YOU.[106]

Following Lacan's theories one final step, to what he called the "agency of the letter,"[107] we come to the simplest depiction of the anasententic identity politics of the YOU series: in the text panels of both <u>Looking at YOU</u> and of <u>YOU and the Artist</u>, the letter "U" of the word YOU is reversed, so that its positive form appears in the same tone as the negative space of the two preceding letters. The result is that the positive colour in the negative space of the U, becomes the I (fig. 1).

Lacan wrote that "the Other is the locus in which is constituted the I."[108] Looking through a Lacanian lens, I have followed the exploration of identity in Polataiko's works from the series to the image to the text to the word to the letter... It would seem this Lacanian mirror ends by reflecting the bits-and-pieces order of the Real which both has come before the Mirror Stage and is sought through it. But this ending at the beginning is appropriate, for the very fact that the notions of other and self, of YOU and I, are in constant flux and are utterly dependant on perspective, the fact that anasententia occurs in text and word and even in individual letters, suggests that both the ubiquity and the lack of stability implicit in the identity explorations undertaken by Polataiko, mirror the Lacanian pre-self, pre-other, Real subject. The exploration of identity, both in Lacan's work and in Polataiko's

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[106] The notion of multiple "I"s also conveniently refers to the three I's of identity posited in this thesis: Identification, Identity, and Illeity.

[107] Lacan, "The agency of the letter," *ibid.*

[108] Lacan, "The Freudian Thing: The locus of speech" (1955) in *ibid.*, 141.

The exploration of identity, both in Lacan's work and in Polataiko's YOU series, will vacillate from the Real to the Imaginary to the Symbolic and back again, and, as is embodied in the YOU series, U and I, and multiples thereof, will continue to be reflected, and to be reflected upon.

Effacing Portraiture: The Canadian Notion

In his YOU series, Taras Polataiko has made the problems of portraiture work for him. Avoiding the fallacies implicit in Identification and Identity, and focusing on Illeity and ipseity, and the paradoxes of attempting to represent that which is unknown, he has given primacy to the arbitrariness of the distinction between self-portrait and portrait, between self and other, as YOU is everyone yet no one in particular, the particular yet never fixed. In its anasententic instability, the decontextualized YOU resembles Illeity, being in everything, yet uncategorized and uncategorizable. This un-fixed, unstable constant is the vital aspect of portraiture which conventions of Identification and Identity strive to capture.

In trying to visually describe the sensation of being an immigrant to Canada -- unfixed, an other, an *YOU* -- Polataiko has touched on the nature of Canada itself. Since Canada came into existence as a nation by decree of the British North America Act in 1867, the sense of national identity has been in continual question. In his social analysis Canadian Society: A Macro Analysis, sociologist Harry Hiller outlines the necessary characteristics of a society as "locality" or a common environment; "organization" of roles distributed throughout the society; "durability"; and "self-identity." He continues by explaining how each of these factors are lacking in the Canadian pseudo-society: locality is subsumed by a sense of regionalism, for while we share a common territory, it is large, often sparsely settled, and made up of ethnically diverse population blocs. Governmental and social organization are "somewhat superficially constructed," as geography may have encouraged interaction in a north-south direction across the U.S. border rather than in an east-west

direction across Canada."[109]   Immigration, emigration, and (I might add) separatist

movements have thwarted a sense of durability. And finally, Hill argues that "the presence

of two distinct societies within the state" and the persistence of "the so-called hyphenated

Canadian (Italian-Canadian, German-Canadian) terminology" have "reduced the society's

ability to establish a self-identity which all members of the society can recognize and in

which they can participate."[110]

Born of two mothers, Canada's birth was all the more illegitimate as the land was

colonised and native peoples forced into a position of marginalized minorities.[111] It is

Canada's *pluralism* -- of parentage, of peoples, of languages and cultures -- that is both

touted as our primary characteristic worthy of pride,[112] and as the reason for our lack of

unity.[113]

Canada is often described as a multi-cultural "mosaic," a contrasting metaphor to the

cultural "melting pot" attributed to the United States. The suggestion is that multi-

culturalism is embraced in Canada, whereas in the U.S., complete assimilation is expected.

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[109] Harry H. Hill, *Canadian Society: A Macro-Analysis* (Scarborough, On.: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1986): 3-7.

[110] *Ibid.*, 6.

[111] For a discussion of cultural appropriation of Native Canadians from a contemporary perspective, see Marie Ann-Hart Baker, "Gotta Be On Top: Why the Missionary Position Fails to Excite Me," in Jordan Zinovitch, ed., *Semiotext(e): canadas* (New York: Marginal Editions, 1994): 298-302.

[112] For example, an optimistic and positive tone permeates Jean Burnet and Howard Palmer's *"Coming Canadians" -- An Introduction to a History of Canada's Peoples* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989)>

[113] Both Neil Bissoondath (*Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* [Toronto, Penguin, 1994]) and David Lazarus (*A Crack in the Mosaic* [Cornwall On.: Vesta, 1980]) argue that there is an undercurrent of racism which thwarts the actualization of the multi-culturalism Canada is believed to have; Reginald Bibby (*Mosaic Madness: The Poverty and Potential of Life in Canada* [Toronto: Stoddart, 1991]) argues that pluralism can never lead to unity.

The problem with the metaphor of the mosaic is that one gets the impression of a complete image only from a distance; ultimately, the tesserae always remain distinct one from the other. Unity is an illusion of Gestalt seen from without, rather than from within.

Canada is a country of immigrants who, while wearing the diverse traits of foreign ancestors, refuse to see ourselves as "other," reserving that categorization for the native inhabitants of this land. But while not "other," nor do we see ourselves as "selves." We attempt to identify ourselves in terms of "nots": we are *not* American, *not* British, *not* French... We are true reflections of our country, which is also unidentifiable: a country named "village," Canada has no one characteristic geography, no consistent weather, no singular culture, no universal language or traditions. Canada is more a *notion* than a nation, made of not/nought -- unfixed, uncategorized, uncategorizable... Illeity!

The goal of portraiture (and, so, of self-portraiture also) is to attempt to capture the *self* of its subject. The attempt, that is to say, is to depict a self's *identity*: through Identification and Identity, to suggest Illeity, the unknown and unknowable point. While it has been shown that Identification and Identity can never point out the *ultra-punctum* of Illeity (as they, too, are unstable) the final paradox of portraiture is that, should Identification and Identity reach their goal of defining Illeity, they would cease to exist. The closer one gets to the *ideal portrait*, the encapsulation of the experience of Illeity, the further one moves from *portraiture* itself, since Identification and Identity are categorizable, and so, steps away from Illeity. The notion of Canada, having neither Identification nor Identity, is the ideal

portrait: pure Illeity, whose *il* is and must be unknown. This is the logic to paradoxical portraiture and the nature of YOU, where each step seems to negate -- indeed destroy -- the possibility of its precedent. This is the logic of Illeity, of the *il y a*: *il*-logical; YOU-logical; YOU-logistic.

The examination of anasententic identity and the paradoxical nature of portraiture in Taras Polataiko's **YOU** series points to the notion that the ideal portrait is not of a person at all: it is *not* -- and is *nought*. The perfect portrait -- pure Illeity, wherein Identification and Identity are no longer needed -- is the *notion* itself: C*anada*.

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