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An eye for an eye: ocular motifs and picaresque envisagement in pictures

Summary

Conjectures regarding portraits of the Fool as performative hyper-icons in the picaresque tradition initiate an investigation of canny performances of duplicity in pictures on display. The focus falls on performances of unexpected convolutions acted out by spectators while looking repeatedly at deceptive pictures. The emphasis is on the role of the eye in visual shaping and in iterated performance of rhetorical roles and on recurrent ocular motifs as typiconic features in the picaresque tradition.

'n Oog vir 'n oog: oogmotiewe en pikareske voorstellings in prente

Besinning oor Narreportrette as performatiewe hiperikone in die pikareske tradisie dien as prikkel van hierdie ondersoek na geslepenheid en valsheid in prente. Die fokus val op toeskouers wat opnuut en by herhaling bedrieglike voorstellings aanskou. Klem word gelê op die aandeel van die oog in die visuele vormgewing en herhaalde uitvoering van retoriese rolle en op herhalende oogmotiewe as tipikoniese kenmerke in die pikareske tradisie.

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The previous focus of my inquiries into *imago* rhetoric was the picturing of urban environments in the scenic tradition.[1] At issue were the visual rhetoric of prospector and sightseer roles (the panoptic power of surveillance and aposcopic vision as a means of adapting to it) as well as the scenic tradition's cybernetically based influence on digitalised imaging in popular visual culture and in cyberspace.[2] Stimulated by Suzanne Human's recent doctoral dissertation on "The picaresque tradition: feminism and ideology critique" (1999), my attention has shifted towards another typiconic tradition with a long history of involvement in popular visual culture.

The picaresque tradition is associated with image powers of mockery and ridicule.[3] Typically, this visual rhetoric has the effect of typecasting the artist and spectator positions in certain roles — seemingly inexhaustible variations on the characters of the trickster rogue[4] and his or her accomplice[5] or dupe.[6] Pivotal in the rise of the picaresque tradition, the figure of the Fool is the metaphorical "turning point" of the subversive and transgressive powers of mockery and ridicule. The character of this figure emerges in mixed roles — typically those of the comic jester, the cruel trickster and the monstrous grotesque — displayed for instance in a group of pictures in the early modern genre of so-called Fool's portraits.[7] The likeness of the Fool is sketched with typical rather than individual traits, a common stra-

1 This is an expanded version of a short paper on the envisagement potential of ocular motifs in pictures, presented at the fifteenth annual conference of the South African Association of Art Historians held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, from 24 to 26 September 1999.

2 Van den Berg 1997, 1998 & 1999.

3 See Van den Berg 1996: 18-23 for the general framework and some initial conjectures in this regard.

4 "Trickster" includes the various roles of the rogue, picaro, jester, comedian, conjurer, fortune-teller, clown, humorist, joker, satirist, caricaturist, lampooner, parodist, gamester, conman or dissembler.

5 "Accomplice" includes various roles of collusion which in effect turn bystanders into insiders, and onlookers into connivers.

6 "Dupe" suggests the various roles of the figure of fun, the victim, loser, butt, stooge, sap, sucker or "fall guy".

7 See Vandenbroeck (1987: 45-9) for a more extensive discussion of Fool's portraits.

tegy in early modern portraiture. Far from being simple records of individual facial features, these portraits represent genuine "envisagements" of the character of the Fool. The prosopographic intensity of visual description engages spectators in imaginary role-play with extraordinary *imago* effects. Considered in semiotic terms, these portraits may well exemplify a picaresque "hyper-icon".[8]

The "actantional" temper of this ambivalence in roles is evident in two illustrative examples of Fool's portraits. The first example (Fig 1), a striking sixteenth-century painting, depicts a squint-eyed figure of an insolent Fool baring dirty teeth and gums as he messily eats an egg with his right hand while an animated marotte lewdly

Figure 1: Master of the Angerer Portrait (possibly Marx Reichlich), *Fool* (*c* 1520). Oil on panel, 44.5 by 38.7. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery (Van den Broeck 1987: 48)

8 Human (1999: 18-21) conjectures that the figure of the Fool in these portraits should be read as an instance of Mitchell's (1986: 6) 'hyper-icons' or 'images of imaging'. In this case the portrait image metaphorically images the envisagement of a topsy-turvy world or *verkeerde wereld* as a recurrent *topos* governing the picaresque tradition.

protrudes from his left. Though less overtly apostrophic in its engagement of the spectator than the Fool's roguishly gloating eyes, the puppy on his shoulder, eagerly sniffing for a bite, alludes to the spectator's role as accomplice or dupe. The next example (Fig 2), a seventeenth-century engraving, portrays the costumed Fool as a sly character winking through the fingers of his right hand, which he holds in front of his face, with his spectacles in his left hand serving as an emblem of his sinister point of view. The subscript *Unser seind dreij* ("We being three"), together with the supplementary numerals 1 and 2 on the heads of the Fool and his marotte, spells out the visual point of the portrait. Cast in the role of a third Fool, prospective spectators are thus included in the irreverent threesome of the title. The snared position in which they discover themselves mirrors that of the Fool, imbued with a mixture of collusion, indulgence, amusement, folly, mortification, chagrin, embarrassment and *Schadenfreude*. This has the effect of establishing a complicit but oppositional stance of "us" and "them", an inclusive division of "insiders" and "outsiders" regarding universal folly and precarious wisdom.

Figure 2: Anonymous, *Drei Narren — Unser seind dreij*. Seventeenth-century German copperplate engraving, 29 by 21.2 cm. Münich: Private collection.

Forewarned spectators may well anticipate the rhetorical inversion of the visual role-playing game, and even be ready to counter it. Yet they are not for this reason "foolproof" or safeguarded from the picture's rhetorical effects. Once engaged in the role-play, the spectator has no option but to repeat the collusive performance at each fresh encounter with the image and to keep on risking the duplicitous outcome of the role-play. Neither iteration nor outcome is automatic or involuntary, however, which would result in tedious reduplication. The spectator may decline the subversive gambit outright, at first sight, or in revision. Once the rules of the game are accepted, the appropriate reaction is to respond in kind, by playfully resorting to counter-images or strategies of counter-fabulation. In this respect interaction with picaresque imagery is similar to the telling of jokes or to the exchange of proverbs and admonitions in awkward or deadlocked situations.[9]

The picaresque "hyper-icon" typically insinuates a sly reversibility and iterability of role-play into the phrase "an eye for an eye", which is in itself a doubling of the palindromic symmetry of the word "eye". As a factor of refigurative mimesis, imminent reversal demands alert spectatorship — a wary recognition of precarious inversions and double-dealing envisagements, and a vigilant readiness to deploy counteracting measures. The "actantional" implicature of deceptive figures, like those depicted in Fool's portraits, lures us into situations of playful entrapment by instigating encounters of a typically interactive or performative temper. The wily turning of the tables is in fact carried out by the unsuspecting yet curious beholders themselves, as a direct result of their enactment of spectating roles prefigured in the insidious figure and its display rhetoric.[10] Extrication is achieved through sustained attention and adamant iteration in an astute continuation of the playful battle of wits.

9 Thus Berger (1997: 135-55) seems to suggest that redeeming laughter is only released in a game of intellect when the abusive tenor of ethnic jokes is relativised by the witty citation of countering jokes.

10 Cf Iser 1989: 236-28 on representation as a performative act, and 249-61 on the textual play strategies of contesting *agon*, defamiliarising *alea*, illusory *mimicry* and subversive *ilinx*.

Wolfgang Iser (1989: 257) reminds us that

> All roles [...] are characterized by an intrinsic doubleness: they represent something they aim to project, and yet simultaneously they lack total control over the intended achievement, so that there is always an element in role-playing that eludes the grasp of the player.

In his description of various games, each game pattern adds a characteristic cast to the basic indeterminate ambiguity of role-play. One in particular seems to approximate the typically picaresque gambit:

> *Ilinx* is a play pattern in which the various positions are subverted, undercut, canceled, or even carnivalized as they are played off against one another. It aims at bringing out the rear view of the positions yoked together in the game (Iser 1989: 256).

The play pattern of a game of repeated falling forges an imaginary world permeated entirely by the protean rhythms of geneticist flux — a comically topsy-turvy or fatefully reversible world as the *topos* of the Fool and his roguish entourage.

In Figure 2, the formal design of the Fool's hand-and-eye combination at first sight resembles the scenic shielding and focusing of the sightseer's aposcopic vision.[11] Yet the display rhetoric in which the Fool is framed differs sharply from the typically "orientational" or "adaptational" interface between spectators and scenic pictures. Apart from idiomatic side-play on the verbal meaning of "seeing through the fingers", the partly covered yet brazen-eyed face of the Fool's portrait has a curious double-dealing effect. Its masking as well as its seductive tenor constitute the hyper-iconic core of this image. Canny spectator interaction with the wily *legerdemain* of this cloaked but insolent face enacts a distinctive imaginary cast of envisagement, a prefigurative model repeated countless times as a recurrent feature in the picaresque tradition.

Traces of the picaresque hyper-icon can be read, between the lines as it were, from the individual features of the self-portraits of many picaresque artists, as is particularly evident in the case of Jan Steen. Such traces recur in a recent variation on the genre of the Fool's

11 Cf Van den Berg 1998 & 1999 for discussions of the scenic functions and the typical *pathos* formulae of aposcopic vision.

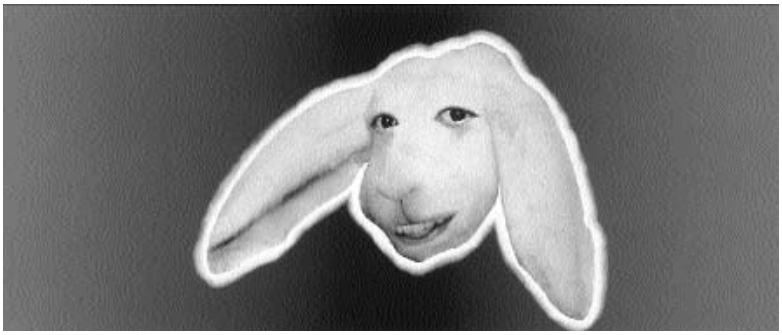

Figure 3: Stephen Murphy, *Self-portrait as a rabbit* (1992). Cibacrome print on board, 40 by 90 cm. London: Saatchi Collection (Kent 1994: 195)

portrait, *Self-portrait as a rabbit* (Fig 3), a manipulated photographic image from 1992 by the British artist Stephen Murphy. Roguish masking is here rendered in a comic version of "morphed" imaging in the manner of a TV screen with a cuddly soft-toy trademark or a patently false, Sesame Street-style, commercial logo. The huge bunny ears play on deceptively innocent references in the recurrent complex of animal allusions relating to the Fool's cap, such as the lecherous rabbit, the dumb donkey, the cunning fox, the wary or cruel wolf. Yet the knowing glance of the Valentino eyes and the teeth-baring conman leer of the artist in the guise of a knavish trickster — a self played and displayed as another — alert streetwise consumers to the implicit presence of less innocent roles in the background.

Gombrich's (1969) admonition regarding "the [functional] priority of context over expression" needs to be reconsidered by rhetorical theory. The notion of rhetorical intentionality is indeed predicated on a functional nexus of "contextual" exigencies and "textual" constraints. Always susceptible to bias and prejudice, however, such demarcations are extremely slippery and are therefore targetted by tricksters and operators. In this regard ideological distortions typically attain visibility by means of the intervention of framing differences between the objectives of a display and the objects on display. The minefield of hidden artifice, deception, craftiness and promotion that separates a display from the displayed is the special

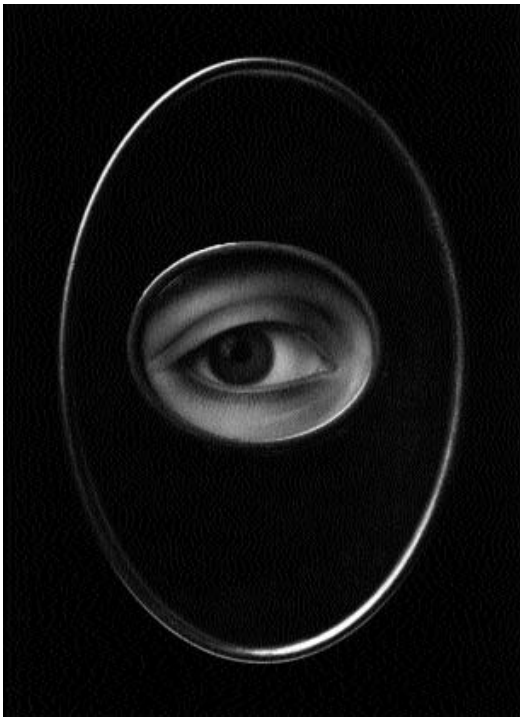

Figure 4: Guiseppe Sacco (dates unknown), *The eye of a young woman* (1844).
Tempera on paperboard, 3.2 by 3.8 cm.
Houston: The Menil Foundation (Hulten 1987: 202)

province of exhibition curators and critics. In constrast, my focus is on the unexpected convolutions acted out by spectators while perusing deceptive images on display. I want to explore two aspects concerning canny performances of pictorial duplicity — the part played by the eye in the visual shaping of rhetorical roles and the notion of recurrent ocular motifs as a typiconic feature in the picaresque tradition.

1. Ocular motifs

I first encountered the remarkable oval image of the eye of a young woman (Fig 4) some ten years ago while investigating the notion of the implied eye in painting (Van den Berg 1990: 8). My current topic is explicit depictions of human eyes and the ideological implications to be drawn from ocular motifs in pictures. Measuring only 3.2 by 3.8 cm, this example of a miniature eye portrait from 1844 is by a little-known artist, Giuseppe Sacco. It was part of a 1987 exhibition in the Venetian Palazzo Grassi, *The Arcimboldo effect*, whose theme was transformations of the face.[12] Apart from the reproduction of the isolated oval image itself, however, the book published by Pontus Hulten concurrently with the exhibition is singularly reticent in offering any further information about the painting.

Of late, Sacco's painting has gained greater prominence, following its reproduction as both the cover illustration and the frontispiece of Richard Leppert's popular textbook of 1996, *Art and the committed eye.* The erotic memento is cited as a striking design feature of a book on "the cultural functions of imagery". A significant difference from the representation in the Pontus Hulten book is the fact that the painting's frame is included in Leppert's reproduction. This apparently constitutes Leppert's concession to the cultural func-

12 The exhibition was organised "in homage to Alfred H Barr, Jr, who fifty years ago introduced Giuseppe Arcimboldo into the history of modern art" (Hulten 1987: colophon page). Sacco's painting had a prominent position, heading the second part of the book published on the occasion of this exhibition (Hulten 1987: 202) — the section devoted to fragmentary, especially facial, *membra disiecta* in modern art, viewed as signs of the abundant *Nachleben* of an Arcimboldian heritage.

tions of imagery — modification of function often being registered in the framing conditions of images (cf Duro 1996). Like the earlier book, however, the Leppert text fails to engage the extinct identity of a picture made to assert the imaginary presence of an absent person in a whimsical and teasing play with flirtatious revealing and concealing. In fact, neither the painting nor the artist is mentioned at all in Leppert's text. The following remarks on the performativity of ocular motifs are thus inserted into the remarkable discursive void that frames this painting.

Instinctive display of ocular decoys is a well-known phenomenon in animal behaviour, for instance as ostensive indices of attraction, ensnarement or defence (cf Huxley 1990). In terms of the human face, the eyes are an integral part of human intercourse — the open and closed face, the changeable yet manifest expressivity of a personal bodily identity[13] as well as the deep ambiguities of human existence in the *chiaroscuro* play of glory and suffering.[14] Represented in the

13 Being a constituent of the human face, the eyes are essential for "human eccentricity", as proposed in Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology: "Body surface and voice, the primal sounding boards of expression, have for the power of 'faculty' of expressivity the character of organs of expression. That is, they appear as means and fields of expression, with and in which it becomes externally perceptible. In this process, that part of the body which is naturally outside the range of self-perception, i.e. the *face*, takes the lead and (with certain limits) becomes its representative. As the posture of the whole body mirrors in itself the mental state, so the face — and, again, in a concentrated way, the look — becomes at once imperceptible and open. He looks out of and sounds forth from it, and by means of it captures the glances of others, the vistas of the world. Concealment and overtness make the face the front, the boundary and mediating surface of one's own against the other, the inner against the outer" (Plessner 1970: 44-5).

14 Following Emmanuel Levinas regarding respect for the "face of the other", Caputo (1987: 272-73) describes the face of suffering as follows: "We catch a glimpse momentarily, *augenblicklich*, in the blink of an eye, of a light in the eye of the other, which leaves us wondering, puzzled, provoked. It is the 'face' as the most conspicuous point of access, the outermost surface of the body, which opens the way to the recess, the 'ground' of the soul, its most hidden chambers [...] The face is a shadowy place, a flickering region where we cannot always trust our eyes [...] there is a lot of what Derrida calls undecidability and dissemination written all over the face, which is a tricky place, full of

images of visual culture, ocular motifs are extremely effective in engaging and activating human powers of "envisagement".[15] Visual artists exploit their *imago* potential in projecting imaginary worlds and fictional characters and in fashioning personal as well as communal identities in the spectators' ideologically entangled imagination. Depicted eyes often become centres of image power, sites of envisagement where ideological powers are contested and where they not only attain, in Kaja Silverman's (1996) memorable phrase, "the threshold of the visible world", but where their ethical consequences unfold and reverberate in the imaginative spaces of human vision.

As metaphors for human vision, for crossing glances and for interlocking acts of viewing and discernment, ocular motifs have the "eye-catching" capacity of extending the contextual reach of images beyond the physical limits of the picture frame (cf Marin 1993). With their visual meaning augmented by a number of facial, gestural or postural *pathos* formulae, as well as by compositional formations and framed settings, ocular motifs play a significant part in eliciting responsive acts of participation by individual beholders, in calling forth diverse role-playing performances and catalysing consequent critical negotiations of character and world identities. In this connection, the phrase "an eye for an eye" succinctly captures the chiasmic entanglement of vision and world in a Merlieu-Pontian sense, in par-

ambiguous signals and conflicting messages. We speak of something being true or false 'on its face' (*super-facium*, sur-face), and that means in an entirely manifest way, with nothing hidden, left behind, concealed. But of course the human face is anything but that. It is, on the contrary, a hall of mirrors, a play of reflections, a place of dissemblance and dissimulation, sometimes a place which we manipulate in order to produce an effect, sometimes a place where the truth gets out of the bag on us against our will. Sometimes our face betrays us, and sometimes we give the lie to others by putting on a convincing face. The human face is anything but simple and unambiguous, anything but just a surface. It is streaked with hidden depths and concealed motives."

15 In extending Plessner's and Caputo's lines of thought into pictorial rhetoric, I am following remarks by Wolterstorff (1980: 122-50) who proposes the term "envisagement" for the action of works of art in projecting imaginary worlds.

ticular the conundrum of ideological motives of envisagement at stake between the picture and the spectator.

2. Single eyes

Let us first consider the case of the eye in isolation — the denuded or excised eye as it were (Fig 5). Pictures in the genre of the miniature eye portrait[16] depict a single, revered eye as a faceless apparition in a hazy aura. This suggests a trace of individuality emerging from misty memory, with the eye's shape and the iris's unique colour pattern resembling the singular indexical whorl of a fingerprint as a unique sign of identity. Fading into the painted surface, the surrounding haze masks the violence of the sharp cut of displacement that removed the eye from somebody's face, in preparation for its dislocation as a transplanted object of display on the body of the carrier. Lacking the bodily expressivity of a face and posture, such single eyes have a strangely impassive appearance — at least to an outsider

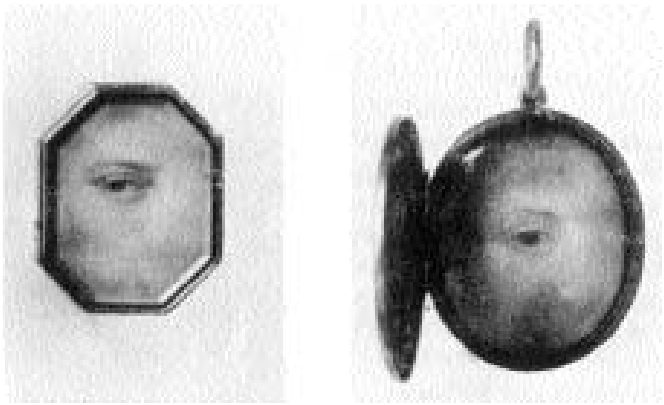

Figure 5: Richard Cosway (1742-1821),
Miniature eye portraits of the Prince of Wales and Maria Anna Fitzherbert (*ca* 1800).
Unknown provenance (Schmidt-Burkhardt 1992: 19)

16 This popular genre of Romantic portraiture, chiefly of British origin, fell into oblivion at the time of the rise of photography, cf the literature cited on the subject of "miniature eye portraits" in Schmidt-Burkhardt 1992: 19-45.

from our century. Evidently, a lover's commitment and ardent fantasy are essential in conferring a face on such haloed and hallowed eyes, and charging them with the momentary erotic presence of an absent sweetheart — like a Proustian memory involuntarily aroused and recollected by a fleeting whiff of fading scent from a treasured lock of hair.

Dating from around 1800, this pair of eyes by the fashionable British miniaturist Richard Cosway is the earliest known instance of miniature eye portraits. Moreover, it is linked to this genre's founding legend in which the painter had only a minor part (cf Williamson 1904). The anecdote concerns Mrs Maria Anna Fitzherbert (the eye on the right), long a favourite of the Prince of Wales, the future king George IV (the eye on the left). They commissioned Cosway to paint portraits of each other's right eye as an exchange of gifts between lovers who had already married in secret in 1785. The legend has it that she surprised the Prince with her gift; his response was to have his right eye portrayed on a ring for her.

The eye portraits evidently served as public substitutes for marriage vows pledged in secret. The exchange of right eyes replaces the ceremonial joining of right hands at a non-morganatic marriage, which was forbidden in their case. Here "an eye for an eye" refers to an exchange of gifts — giving something of oneself as a public sign that one gives oneself to another. It denotes an act of commitment with the power of a vow performed against all odds, repeated in public on every occasion the lovers wore the eye portraits as part of their attire. As an Old Testament expression, on the other hand, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" is also the most celebrated formulation of the archaic *lex talionis*. With the purpose of setting limits to blood feuding, its legalistic formalism imposes an inflexible reciprocity on the taking of eyes, but also on the giving of eyes, as we know from Marcel Mauss's (1969) classical anthropological study on obligatory gift-exchange in archaic societies.[17] Such ritualistic sym-

17 On potlatch gifts, cf Thomas Crow's (1999: 25-50) discussion of Lévi-Strauss's *La voie des masques* (1975) and the masks of the Northwest Coast Kwakiutl.

metries and iterations are only transcended in a complete surrendering of the self.[18]

In J L Austin's (1975) speech act theory, legal and ethical transactions such as these supply many of the examples of so-called "performatives" — acts performed by the illocutionary force of verbal utterances. Mindful of Beneviste's distinction between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enounced, Derrida's (1977) playful critique of Austin launched a rhetorical notion of "performativity".[19] Instead of subjective acts of reproductive repetition as constitutive sources of meaning, Derrida proposes citationality and iterability as crucial to the production of meaning. His deconstruction of the logocentrist privileging of speech and presence above writing and difference also demolished the metaphysical foundations of Western ocularcentrism that conceive the grounding of human knowledge and power in the image of subjective vision.[20] Caputo (1987: 11-95)

18 Van Leeuwen (1995: 316) cites the legal proverb in the first two lines of another Old Testament formulation of the *lex talionis*:

> Whoever shed the blood of man,
> by man shall his blood be shed;
> for in the image of God
> has God made man (Genesis 9: 6),

and comments on the striking chiasmic rhyme of the Hebrew *dam* (blood) and *'adam* (man/humankind): "Here the punishment perfectly fits the crime. The inverted sequence of three words embodies the murderer's own reversal of fortune. What one has done is done to one; the tables are turned." The dense poetic saying is not a timeless proposition sanctioning the death penalty. It demonstrates instead an instance of what Van Leeuwen calls "proverb performance" — the violent loss of life and selfhood as a concrete problem which generates a wise exchange of sayings in deliberating imperfect human judgements of death for murder. Van Leeuwen measures the responsibility for each judgement against O'Donovan's words of wisdom: "Society's justice will never be true justice, but always justice and guilt intertwined in a self-renewing cycle of injury and restitution. Offended society cries out for satisfaction, and is covered with guilt when it takes it."

19 Johnson 1980: 52-66; Caputo 1987: 120-52; Butler 1993: 1-23; Slinn 1999.

20 Cf Rowe (1989: 167) on ocularcentrism and human vision as a root metaphor for Western subjectivism: "The essence of the *subiectum*, its 'subjectivity' consists in its being a 'power of perception', a faculty of sight. Thus the subjectivity of the modern subject is the consciousness that represents and pictures its object."

sees Kierkegaard's struggle with temporal flux and his rejection of the metaphysics of Platonic recollection and Hegelian mediation, reflected in particular in his satirical *Die Wiederholung* (1843), as a key source of Derrida's antimetaphysical position on iterability. Kierkegaard (1955) highlights existential repetition's divergent meanings in the aesthetic, ethical and religious stages or spheres. The aesthete's boredom and the monotony of aesthetic reduplication, ethical constancy in everyday repetitions of the customary, and moral continuity of the repeated free choices by which the resolute self hopes to constitute itself as a responsible self, are destined for a fall in the absurd economy and paradoxes of religion. When the individual faces the abyss, submitting to a law of inwardness and surrendering the self in a relation with God, true repetition represents the radical transition from sin to atonement.

The notion of "display performativity" needs to be considered against this background. It has to incorporate our shared human commitment in material acts of placing-on-view and of viewing-in-place as situated reiterations of sets of constitutive and directive norms that exceed changeable situational exigencies in linking together separate acts. Hence display rhetoric comprises distinct acts of imaginative visualisation performed, in turn, by artists, curators and spectators, each occupying a historically unique position in the "art-world" as a developing institutional framework. Each act in the series reiterates and reinforces canons and conventions whose ideological power is sanctioned by the museum's "civilizing rituals" (cf Duncan 1995). The modern art museum's architectural forms, public spaces, patronage politics, funding stratagems, collecting policies, acquisition tactics, catalogue discourse, exhibition strategies and installation practices all silently serve to bolster curatorial authority (cf Bal 1996). Aside from the ample body of writing devoted to the critique of the system, the discursive void around Sacco's painting is a telltale sign that this elaborate framework has trouble in accommodating the dislocated eye portrait once it has been transplanted into the public sphere of museum collections and art exhibitions. The texts of Hulten and Leppert provide ample evidence that this is a troubled image, even with exchangeable frames, and even in the case of copies or reproductions.

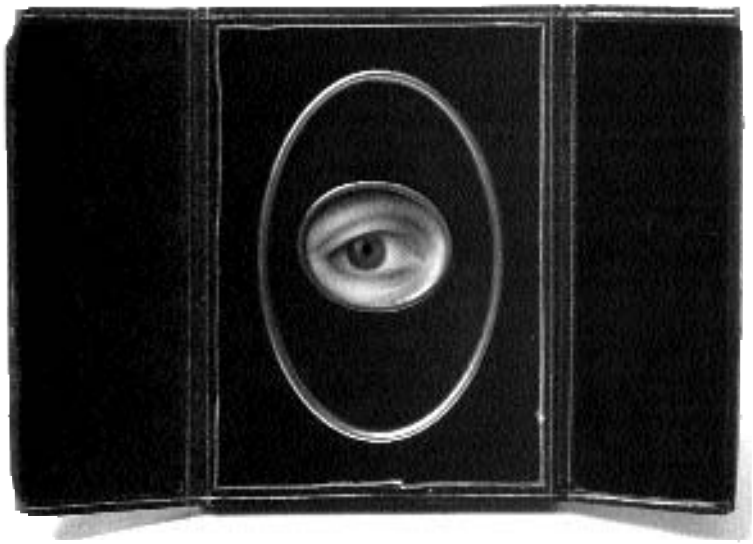

Figure 6: Guiseppe Sacco, *The eye of a young woman* (1844). Tempera on paperboard, 3.2 by 3.8 cm, in original hinged standing case of leather with velvet lining, oval shaped gilt detailing, and brass fillets.
Houston: The Menil Foundation (Leppert 1996: frontispiece)

One may conjecture reasons for these difficulties. They may be due to the sharp excision which removed the disembodied ocular image from an original face (Fig 5), in effect demanding that public museum installations do the impossible and construct substitute framings for the private lover's keepsake and for lovers' bodies. Furthermore, the Sacco eye painting is mounted in a hinged standing case of leather with velvet lining and oval gilt detailing (Fig 6). The keepsake has the appearance of a diminutive triptych or devotional image for private amorous attention, thus engaging a form of cultic significance at odds with the modern museum's secular cult of art (cf Marin 1996). Replacing the hazy ambience that masks the sharp cut of the ocular image in earlier miniature eye portraits, the cropped ocular image in the Sacco painting conveys the impression of a face extending beyond the oval opening, behind the frame. This creates the *voyeur* effect of a hidden *persona* peering through a keyhole-like

opening into a private space in front of the image. Once vibrantly alive with the keepsake's erotic meaning, the afterlife of something irretrievably lost now protrudes into the museum space where the melancholic spectator faces it. This effect even seeps into the discursive space of texts illustrated with its printed reproduction.

The foregoing raises questions concerning spectator identity and display performativity. A keepsake at least requires a "faithful keeper", a "restitutionary custodian" rather than a legal owner; somebody who remembers the person rather than somebody who possesses the object, and who cossets and fondles it rather than putting it on public display. Most likely the lover carried the leather case with the Sacco picture on his person; stood it on his bedside table; undressed and posed in front of it. The dalliance with an absent mistress has to be sustained in close and frequent flirtatious dialogue with the picture's effect of female presence. Alternatively, the keepsake must be hidden when entertaining somebody else (a perverse sense of picaresque humour would probably imagine the case of a perfidious lover). One may even conjecture that the frequency of repeated contact with the keepsake might function as an index of the waning or waxing of his devotion, the proximity or distance, absence or presence of the mistress.

The bodily, if hidden, presence of the object of the lover's desire is effected by the picture's life-size dimensions and the fact that it has the appearance of a *trompe l'oeil* still-life painting of a velvet-lined leather case with gilt trimming, with a real eye.[21] Though small in size indeed, the keepsake evidently exerted enormous iconic power in the intimate world of this couple's erotic bond.

In stark contrast with the diminutive and intimate portrait of a single eye, the gruesome image of a heart with two eyes in *Eye Love Eye* (Fig 7), a huge recent painting by Alain Miller, invades the spaces of public display with disturbing effects. The eyes animate the dead and decaying organ in this grisly and overwhelming instance of violent image cutting and defunct human existence. Due to its upright

21 This reading of the ocular image as a real eye is cued by the triptych framing's resemblance to a medieval reliquary, which suggests the kind of display rhetoric commonly associated with the veneration of holy relics and the remaining body parts of departed saints (cf Bann 1995).

Figure 7: Alain Miller, *Eye Love Eye* (1997). Oil on canvas, 234.9 by 194.9 cm. London: Saatchi colletion (*Art in America* 1998, 86(4): 38)

position on a dark background the dissected heart with the two eyes suggests a monstrous head or a grotesque mask — a stark reminder of the metaphorical nature of the notion of the heart as the seat of love, the source of emotion or the centre of personhood. In the picaresque tradition such radical literalisation of metaphor is a strategy that has been favoured by artists since the time of Brueghel.

The single eye of the Sacco painting, on the other hand, has the representational value of offering a hidden selfhood, a human body and a personal world to which the passionate lover surrenders himself without reserve, completely identifying himself with another. Reiterating constitutive norms of performativity, this dynamic of "being oneself" in "being another" truly informs any committed role-playing act of imaginative envisagement. And far from holding only in the case of lovers, these norms call for care and solicitude as an ethical rule of human intercourse, according to Ricoeur (1992). By interpolating Sacco's painting into Kierkegaard's discourse, three possible ways of responding to the display of the eye portrait may be

read from the dilemma of the lover in the text of *Die Wiederholung* — three eyes whose performativity suggests divergent roles for the modern art historian. The first is the jaded eye of the modern aesthete, bored with the repetitive rituals of the devotional image and the lover's keepsake. The second is the eye of the moralist, for whom repetition means "the steadiness of the unbroken vow, the enduring bond of the lasting marriage, the capacity to find ever new depths in the familiar and selfsame" (Caputo 1987: 30). Is it too farfetched to notice in this description of repetition a nascent paradigm for art historians given to observing the museum's "civilizing rituals", the discipline's hermeneutic canons or professional ethics? Thirdly, there is the uncanny religious eye and the radical questioning of these rituals, the fearful and trembling eye of helpless humility and atonement for human imagination deceived and misdirected by ideology.[22]

Monotony, solicitude and atonement are deeply repressed in, if not entirely absent from the picaresque tradition's topsy-turvy world — a hilarious yet deeply troubled imaginary place, a canny and essentially cruel world. This troubling ambiguity is powerfully demonstrated by the image of a moist and tear-swollen eye in one of Barbara Kruger's photo-montage designs, *Untitled (Remember me)* (Fig 8). Preserving the miniature eye portrait's keepsake format, the more than hundredfold enlargement of the ocular motif to an almost billboard-sized design transports it from the intimate sphere of private devotion into the feverish hustle and bustle of the media-saturated public domain. The tearful eye suggests suffering, abuse and resentment but not humility or atonement. The magnified image of a textured skin surface creates a close-up tactile awareness of the human body. Lacking the hazy aura of early miniature eye portraits

22 In the Kierkegaardian vision of the religious eye, the true model for the picaresque tradition's Fool would be the absurd figure of divine humility, Christ entering Jerusalem as a king on a donkey and exiting the city wearing a crown of thorns and carrying a cross. St Paul explains the meaning of the religious paradox in I Corinthians 1: 27-28: "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God".

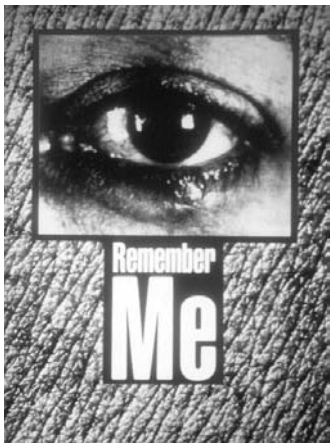

Figure 8: Barbara Kruger (b 1945), *Untitled* (*Remember me*) (1988).
Photographic silkscreen on vinyl, 480 by 268 cm.
New York: Mary Boone Gallery (Linker 1990: 96)

or the Sacco painting's velvet-lined precious jewel setting, the skin here is no mere background. It competes with the eye for the spectator's attention. Hence, in the spectator's responsive performance, vision seems to be invaded by the sense of touch, introducing elements of sensitivity, irritability and resistance which impede the jaded consumer's usual facile and precipitate seeing-and-reading of flashing mass media displays.

Kruger herself calls this rhetorical means of engaging the spectator's attention "hailing". Despite the explicit deictic reference of the subtitle "Remember me", the first-person address of the eye is weak in this design. The moist eye and the skin surface assimilate an implicit and ambiguous "you", a silent and invisible address preceding and following the phrase "Remember me" in the manner of Spanish exclamation marks. Shifting from second- to third-person address, it forcefully interpellates an abject audience identity into subjective spectator responses. Beyond the actual words printed on a red ground as a verbal plea to "Remember me", this form of address

might be described in visual terms as a hailing "mega-optic". Kruger describes it as

> one of the prominent tactics of most public design work, whether it be advertising, corporate signage, or editorial design. In all this work, the economy of the overture is central and involves all manner of shortcuts which wastes not words [*sic*] (Linker 1990: 14).

Confined to this field of manipulated visual citationality, Kruger's "quotational qualities" (Linker 1990: 17) lack the radical scope of Kierkegaardian repetition or Derridean performativity, opting instead for the subversive practice of Althusserian interpellation and Foucaultian politics of micro-power.[23] Hence, according to Kate Linker (1990: 17), Kruger's

> appropriation of devices from the media permitted a counter to its fascinating promises, affording 'a doubled address, a coupling of the ingratiation of wishful thinking with the criticality of knowing better'. Kruger's distinctive strategy is encapsulated: seduce, then intercept.

The sting of Kruger's strategy evidently rehearses the picaresque dynamics of the Fool's portrait hyper-icon. What distinguishes a picaresque position among the currently widespread subversive rhetorics of cultural critique? A visual comparison demonstrating this position in action may answer the question. Imagine Sacco's and Kruger's ocular images collated with the two scenes in a sixteenth-century print by Erhard Schön, *Aus, du alter Tor* (Fig 9) — pairing Sacco's painting with the image of "seductive" vision on the left and Kruger's design with the image of "interceptive" vision on the right.

23 This point is well made by Slinn (1999: 70): "[It] has become common in cultural criticism to pursue a political agenda, usually in terms of what has been defined as a *transformative* critique, which aims not only to question the conditions which sustain existing institutions but to change cultural practice. While, however, performativity rests upon a constitutive theory of discourse, thus allowing for the introduction of new meaning, new metaphors which would shift cultural perception, it does not guarantee or even necessarily offer social change. Critique needs to be distinguished from subversion. What is problematic for transformative aims is their desired link between critique (exposing undesirable assumptions and their means of production) and real social events, since it cannot be assumed that marking cultural norms will necessarily lead to consequential action or transformation."

Figure 9: Erhard Schön (c 1491-1542), *Aus, du alter Tor* (1528). Anamorphic engraving (Baltrusaitis 1969: 19-20)

The megaphon-like shape of anamorphic distortion fanning out on the right-hand side may be read as a figure for the "mega-optic" or interpellative "hailing" effect of Kruger's images. The pointing figure of a Fool unveils the vision, inviting spectators to align their eyes with the arrow on the wall between the two scenes in the Schön print. The "curious perspective" (cf Gilman 1978) involves a hilarious but cruel exposure of human relations. The trio in the left-hand scene — a woman with her attention divided between a younger and an older man, the conventional lover and the cuckold — suddenly appears in the right-hand scene as naked bodies, reduced to basic copulatory actions, stripped of all social pretence and with the customary roles reversed. The young man is the target of the shift from second- to third-person address. In the left-hand scene he faces the arrow from which the anamorphosis should be viewed, set up to represent the spectator. In the right-hand scene, however, he finds himself cast in the role of the "alter Tor" (old simpleton) being shown the door.

On a greatly amplified scale, Barbara Kruger intercepts spectator role-play in cultural perception with similar alienating reversals, with the aim of unsettling gender stereotypes by turning the "insiders" of our culture into interpellated "outsiders". Her interception unmasks the male gaze as a screening device that secures its power at the cost of female humanity. The putative first-person address of self-portraiture also has to contend with the power of this screen, as can be seen next by moving on from the consideration of single and isolated eyes to the full face and character.

3. The self-portraying eye

In the photograph *Self-portrait with Leica,* of 1931 (Fig 10), Ilse Bing explores self-portraiture's intrinsic reflexivity of image citation by posing, in a tight triangular configuration, with her camera and two mirrors. The photograph itself records an image reflected in a mirror of indeterminate size, a reflective surface in proxy for us, the spectators[24] — the artist being the first in a long line of spectators to face

24 Cf Calligan 1998 on the self pictured by means of a mirror that also stands in for the eyes of the spectators.

the performativity of the recorded image during its historical life in visual culture. The small mirror on the left shows the artist's head in profile and with her eye apparently aligned with the camera viewfinder. On the right, partly cut off by the picture frame, is a second and larger view of the photographer — a frontal view of Ilse Bing with a steadying elbow on the table and her face partly obscured by the Leica. The strategy of spectator engagement opted for here differs markedly from the partly covered yet brazen-eyed face of the Fool's portrait (Fig 2). Here the uneven folds and shadows of a backdrop curtain serve as a compositional link between the two views of the photographer's face. Positioned slightly beyond the focal depth, the curtain invokes still-life qualities, being both slightly "behind" and "on" the picture plane, at once "veiling" and "unveiling" this picture's performative transactions with beholders.

Shifting between and combining the profile view and the partly obscured frontal view, the "beholder's share" entails the projection of an imaginary likeness of the artist — the construction of a composite identity for the photographer *cum* instrument *persona*. The conditions for visualising this identity are laid down in part by the artist herself. Seeking to control the picture's spectator engagement and to guide its envisagement potential, she has selected this particular shot with

Figure 10: Ilse Bing (b1899), *Self-portrait with Leica* (Paris, 1931).
Photograph. New York: Edwynn Honk Gallery exhibition 26 March - 9 May 1998
(*Art in America* 1998, 86(4): 16)

its precisely calculated composition, perhaps rejecting several comparable shots in the production process. Nevertheless, the artist *persona* is in part also an imaginative re-creation, an envisagement by others, by spectators positioned in front of the photograph.

In lending their eyes as the responsive mirroring surface at which the camera is aimed, spectators tender themselves for imaginative enactments of the required role-play. They do not look (as we almost invariably do when facing a photographer) into the fixating camera lens, situated in this case on the extreme right edge of the picture. Instead they scan the whole image, continually returning to its focal points (the measuring eyes of Ilse Bing in their double representation, frontal and in profile). In due course the spectator notices a slight disparity between the eye aiming through the camera view finder on the left and, on the right, the eyes peering over the top of the Leica in the frontal view. This difference involves a delicate shift that imparts a sense of temporal adjustment to the envisagement. The photographic *punctum temporis* is thus dilated to incorporate the moments immediately "before" and "after" the shot. Consequently her hidden act of pressing the shutter remote is read as having taken place in an imaginary interval, infused with her likeness and injecting a feminine identity, "voice" or "eye" into the pictorial system. Still, neither her presence nor her actions have created this effect — it is produced by the spectator's iterated performance.

Like the Fools in *Unser seind dreij* (Fig 2) the act of offering "an eye for an eye" here again has the effect of creating a trio. With Bing, however, we do not have imaginative assimilation by role reversal. Instead we have the mirrored registration of difference, read by the mirroring spectators as a difference of imaginary gender identity within themselves — identity constructed as a difference of orientation between us and her *persona*. The "orientational" interface of picture and spectator betrays the presence of a scenic framework. This is confirmed by another Ilse Bing photograph in which mirroring is exploited as a self-portraiture device, *Self-portrait with Metro*, of 1936 (Fig 11). Here the image of the photographer with her camera is reflected in the convex mirror on the right — a micro-scene suspended in the focal point of the bold foreshortening of the scenic perspective. This has the projective function of situating the spectator in

Figure 11: Ilse Bing (b 1899), *Self-portrait with Metro* (1936). Photograph. New York: Houk Friedman (Borzello 1998: 142)

New York, of orientating us as sightseers positioned at an exact spot within this urban environment, in the shoes of the artist as it were. Moreover, we are constructed on an ideological level as her fellow travellers, people who share the same vision of modern urban life.

Beyond the actions of the artist and the spectators the performativity of craft conditions for image production also contribute towards the formation of *personae*. The presence of a mirror in a picture, whether hidden, merely acknowledged or openly flaunted, the mirror has always been one of the self-portraitist's basic *accoutrements*. This can be extended to various mirroring devices, including mechanical processes of image iteration or reproduction. Cutting of the image, citational doubling and transference between images, and the reversal of mirror images are all deeply entrenched in the act of self-

portraiture. An intriguing self-portrait by a little known seventeenth-century Dutch artist, Johannes Gumpp, tersely summarises these issues in a round painting on a square panel (Fig 12).

Using two mirrors like Ilse Bing, Gumpp has arranged an artful setting in which the image of the artist is in fact tripled.[25] Like the Bing photograph (Fig 10), the painting itself presents an image in a mirror which stands in for the viewing spectator. Looming large in

Figure 12: Johannes Gumpp, *Self-portrait* (1646). Oil on canvas, 88.5 by 89 cm. Florence: Uffizi (Asemissen & Schweikhart 1994: xxiii)

25 Cf the discussion of this painting in the context of "the image of the act" in Stoichita (1997: 245-7), a context that includes a number of early modern pictures involving the simultaneous presentation of the painter and his work. Stoichita (1997: 245) describes the *mise en scène* as follows: "we are indeed in the presence of production: we are witnessing the making of a painting. The painter, whom we see from the back, is in the process of painting himself. To his left there is a mirror; to the right a canvas. The mirror shows us his specular

the centre of the picture we thus see the figure of the artist from behind, at work on a self-portrait. On the left a three-quarter view of his face is reflected in a polygonal mirror. Visible on the right is the painter's hand, holding a brush and resting on a maulstick, as he works on the rectangular panel of a self-portrait with a matching three-quarter view of his face. In addition, a *cartellino* with the artist's signature formula (*Johannes Gumpp / im 20. Jare 1646*) is suspended from the top to designate this panel as "the painting".

The specular and the painted images of the artist's face both face in the same direction and are ostensibly similar in appearance. Yet the animosity between a cat and a dog in the lower left- and right-hand corners strikes a note of discord between the two faces with which they are paired, the one putatively a mirror reflection and the other a pictured likeness. As emblems of citational image cutting, the cat and dog inject a picaresque note of rivalry and duplicity into the painting. This note is reinforced by the play with geometrical shapes — the polygonal mirror, the rectangular picture, the round painting on a square panel — apparently comparing the vertiginous effort of self-portraiture with the squaring of a circle.

A noteworthy transference has taken place between the two smaller images within the painting. The scene reflected in the mirror behind the artist's back (in other words, the painting as we see it) would only be visible to the artist in the second, smaller mirror on the left, the mirror with the artist's specular image. Yet it is from the image on the right, the rectangular picture of his face in the painting, that the distinctive gaze of the self-portraitist meets our eyes. Here we see him seeing himself looking, looking at himself as an

> image; the canvas, his painted image. The painter, whose 'real' face remains unseen, is *transposing* his resemblance from the mirror to the canvas. His head is slightly turned toward the left, his brush approaches the canvas. 'Someone' is watching him 'over his shoulder' and catching him in the act of painting. He is painting him while he is painting. This someone is the fictitious author of the whole painting. 'Fictitious', because he is presenting himself as another; 'author', because he has left us a painting (that in the Uffizi), which is none other than Gumpp himself. It is 'Gumpp' who claims to be an 'other': the one who is looking 'over his shoulder', the 'Gumpp' painting the image of himself."

image seen by others, seeing his look as it is reflected in a mirroring surface or in the eyes of the spectator. Due to the image reversal brought about by the mirror, this second, or right-hand image is in fact the mirrored face which Gumpp has cited and turned into a picture by showing his hand and brush at work on it.

The bodily appearance of the artist himself, the dark central figure seen from behind, is and will also remain unknown. In lieu, we have the specular image of his face in a mirror and the painted image of his pictured face to corroborate the resemblance with the self-portraitist's invisible face. By presenting himself as another in an image for others, Gumpp can be said to invoke "an eye for an eye" in a labyrinthine chain of iterations, each representation being reflected in the mirroring eyes of an endless succession of spectators.

4. The deceptive self-portrait

An intriguing work dating from 1669, by Johannes van Wyckersloot, a little-known seventeenth-century artist, serves as my final example of picaresque duplicity (Fig 13). Though the title in the Leipzig catalogue must still be confirmed, I would like to argue that a picaresque unmasking of *fijnschilder* pretensions is at issue in this putative *Portrait of Gerard Terboch*, the painter of Dutch high society. The motif of a single eye again offers a point of entry. It is part of the strange emblematic device, carried in the right hand of the figure of Terborch like a *maschera* at a masque, and consisting of a lighted candle with spectacles affixed to it and a torn scroll of paper spiraling around it. Drawn on the scroll, a frontal view of a single eye can be seen in the area between the candle flame and the spectacles. The scroll is covered in more drawings, a mouth for instance, suggesting a play on vision and taste. The use of an eye as a symbol for the art of painting calls to mind one of the most famous examples of the classical period, Nicholas Poussin's Louvre *Self-portrait* of 1650. Here the eye appears on the diadem adorning the forehead of the female figure of painting (cf Stoichita 1997: 98-101).

The figure of Terborch has the stance of a self-portraitist. The eyes in the three-quarter view of the painter's head direct their self-examining gaze at the spectator. The positioning of the right hand

Figure 13: Johannes van Wyckersloot (1643-1683), *Portrait of Gerard Terborch* [?] (1669). Oil on canvas, 114 by 91 cm.
Leipzig: Museum für Schönen Künste (Hoechtst Almanach)

with the candle and the left hand with a drumstick are significant in view of measures taken by posing self-portraitists in order to hide the artist's hand and to mask the mirror's reversal of left and right. Either hand could have held the brush. Possibly playing on the authority of Poussin's example, Van Wyckersloot portrays Terborch as a *fijnschilder* presenting himself in the role of a professional painter's self-image, posturing with the authority of a Dutch Poussin. The picture is completed by the painter's somber attire and the works of art in the background — part of a huge Italianate painting of idealised nude figures on the left and a classical sculptural model on the right.

Van Wyckersloot's subversive intervention in the iterated rituals of fame is displayed in the foreground, in the strange still-life details

visible in the right-hand corner. Where the vain Terborch would be drumming his own self-importance, the drumskin has been replaced by a tiny circular painting-within-the-painting. It shows a picaresque painter in profile, slyly and obliquely glancing at spectators. Most likely this is a self-portrait of Van Wyckersloot himself. He wears an extravagantly costumed headdress; in his left hand he holds a palette, with his thumb pointing towards Terborch; his right hand is held at his nose in a rude or disparaging gesture. Displayed on an easel is the picture he is working on — a painting of a sheep's head wearing a Fool's cap and holding the second drumstick between his teeth. The posturing *fijnschilder* painting himself and parading his own image is likened to the folly of Van Wyckersloot painting a sheep's portrait. Surreptitiously displaying a portrait of an artist as if it were a self-portrait, the picaresque artist repeats the act of portrayal in a different parodic key. An "eye for an eye" is here quadrupled — the single emblematic eye of the art of painting, the solemn gaze of the posing Terborch, Van Wyckersloot's own sideways glance, and the laughing eyes of the sheep — a sequence of mounting hilarity reaching its climax in the eyes of the spectator.

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