

SPEAKING LIKENESS

Kathryn Smith

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In memoriam and gratitude to

Betty Pat. Gatliff (1930 - 2020)

Mehmet Yaşar İşcan (1943 - 2019)

John Clement (1948 - 2018)

leaders in the field who passed during the period of this research

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Re-Staging Faciality in Forensic Art

Kathryn Smith

What processes are involved in determining someone's name who dies without proof of identity, or goes missing and their current whereabouts are unknown, or is wanted in connection with a crime? Who produces the faces of the unknown and the vanished that stare out from public appeal posters, occasional news articles, and now countless online web-sleuthing communities? Where can one train as a forensic imaging specialist and is it a viable career? Is there a difference between Forensic Art and Facial Identification? How do lived experiences of the profession relate to how this work is externally perceived? And what emotional labour is involved in such work? What is its hidden curriculum? And how is the field evolving in relation to new technologies and media platforms?

Speaking Likeness is the first anthology of cross-cultural perspectives on the poorly understood but necessary work of forensic facial imaging, staged as a work of online forensic theatre with an accompanying e-book. It takes the form of eighteen durational, narrated portraits of forensic imaging specialists from around the world, which present a polyvocal set of answers to the above questions. Based in an understanding of the human face as a primary site of relatability onto which we project our ideas about dignity and difference, *Speaking Likeness* is intended to encourage slow looking in order to focus our attention on the gaze and the ethics of reciprocity. Engaging another person face-to-face, Emmanuel Levinas would have said, fosters a mutual sense of personhood; this is the source of his humanist

ethics (Levinas 1979; Levinas and Nemo 1985; Butler 2016). This kind of looking enables a facial image (or even a human fragment) to be recognised as a 'subject,' whereas another kind of looking – scientific observation for example – might seek to professionally objectify such an image or fragment through a trained gaze that abstracts, discriminates and categorizes.

The eighteen practitioners featured here represent diverse backgrounds and training experiences and work variously within law enforcement, government institutions, academia or as independent practitioners in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Korea and South Africa. Some identify primarily as forensic artists; others use forensic art techniques as part of a broader suite of forensic identification practices. All are committed to developing and deploying visual images in the service of human identification, and most remain 'hidden figures', eschewing publicity despite the intense public interest in this work. By flipping the gaze onto the faces of forensic artists (rather than their work products) *Speaking Likeness* works with the dynamics of returning a mediated gaze through the interface of a screen.

Forensic Art and Facial Identification are discrete yet complementary fields with shared histories. After years of existing as conjoined practices (Wilkinson and Rynn 2012), a process of disambiguation is currently underway. The practice of Forensic Art (Taylor 2000) has traditionally distinguished between practices aimed at assisting in the apprehension of criminal suspects, and those working to identify the unidentified dead, with the

location of the disappeared or missing falling somewhere in between the two in respect of both motivation and methodology. In Forensic Art, suitably trained practitioners depict unknown suspects or decedents, working either from eye-witness accounts to produce facial composites for suspect identification, or from post-mortem photographs or skulls to produce post-mortem depictions or reconstructions of unidentified decedents. These types of images are produced in a variety of media, techniques and stylistic modes with no reference to the actual target face. Age progressions might be produced from existing images of those who have gone missing, or who wish to evade authorities. To untrained eyes, forensic facial images tread the thin, twinned lines of (in)credulity and (il)legibility. Even if they don't resemble photographs, they must still appeal to realism's truths and construction's ambiguities simultaneously: they must be specific enough to prompt recognition of a particular person, but not so specific as to exclude a candidate due to lack of accord in certain features.

By contrast, Facial Identification (Valentine and Davis 2015) involves comparative methods, analysing facial images either one-to-one (facial analysis), or one-to-many (facial recognition), and has become increasingly automated or computer-assisted. Facial Identification has also become more strictly defined through new disciplinary standards¹, leaving Forensic Art without internationally agreed standards of practice² or formal representation on scientific development and oversight committees, with techniques such as software-based composites and skull-to-face comparisons existing in a liminal state between these two worlds.

However they are defined, forensic

facial depictions have serious and high stakes work to do. It is a general truth that a crime cannot be investigated unless the identity of a victim is known, and forensic facial images can be important intelligence-generating tools if produced and circulated appropriately, providing renewed impetus to an investigation that has stalled if primary methods of identification (fingerprints, dental, DNA) have failed to produce a comparative match. Post-mortem methods in particular tend to come into play relatively late in the life of an initial investigation, and sometimes not at all. My broader research indicates that as a general rule, post-mortem methods are significantly under-exploited due to lack of resources, adequate understanding of their multiple use-values, and the ability of the relevant authorities to communicate effectively with stakeholder groups. This neglect is highlighted by new methods of DNA phenotyping, forensic genealogy and crowd-sourced investigations via social media platforms (a form of citizen-led forensics) which are ushering in a new future for the field of post-mortem identification that law enforcement is struggling to fully embrace, whilst also foregrounding essential questions concerning data privacy, ethics and 'authorized' expertise.

Seeking to embody and reflect values *inter alia* the sitedness of encounter, information exchange within and between academic and practitioner contexts, and the intimacy of one-to-one conversation, *Speaking Likeness* makes a contribution to practice-led artistic research as an object that speaks to the limits of writing research, in which conversation as a tool of data collection demanded recognition as a medium and a material in itself. As a

¹ See the NIST Organisation of Scientific Area Committees <https://www.nist.gov/topics/organization-scientific-area-committees-forensic-science/facial-identification-subcommittee> and Facial Identification Scientific Working Group <https://fiswg.org/index.htm>

² With the exception of those advanced by the Forensic Art disciplinary subcommittee of the International Association for Identification: https://www.theiai.org/forensic_art.php. The International Association of/for Craniofacial Identification remains the only network of sustained focus for interdisciplinary academic commitment to research informing practice in this subject area <http://www.craniofacial-id.org/>

particular kind of online environment, it engages a number of ideas invested in how meaning is produced within the 'forensic' as an epistemological framework. The material-semiotic and telematic are both integral aspects of the work's process and presentation, giving expressive form to the relationship between index and interface (Paulsen 2013). This speaks directly to the internet as a global public forum, and a significant site of counter-forensic action. The forum is the physical and conceptual space from which the modern concept of 'forensics' originates (Weizman 2014), and counter-forensics refers to the mobilization of investigative skills in the interests of human rights (Sekula 1993/2014; Keenan, 2014).

Formally and conceptually, it embraces a range of ideas related to experimental archivalism (Jones 2016); the book as corpus or body of knowledge (Barthes 1993); the verbatim play (Slovo and Lee 2011); forensic theatre (Frieze 2019) and concepts of faciality (Levinas *op.cit.*; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Edkins 2015; Butler *op.cit.*; M'Charek and Schramm 2020). Within the work itself, parallels between the performative figure of the expert-witness-as-interlocutor and the practitioner-observer-in-the-field are played out through the relationship between face and voice as complex media and vehicles of cognitive authority. In this way, it engages directly with the concept of *prosopopeia* (literally meaning 'to give face'), a rhetorical device within classical Greek theatre where actors give speaking power to inanimate objects, and which Thomas Keenan (2014) has identified as characteristic of the expert witness. In their role as authorised interlocutors, expert witnesses confer 'speaking power' to objects and things in

the public theatre of the court room, thus performing the work of forensic speech, which is "traditionally undertaken as a relation between three elements: an object or building 'made to speak,' an expert who functions as the translator from the 'language of objects' to that of people, and the forum or assembly in which such claims can be made" (Weizman 2018, pp. 67). The potential of such speech is evident in forensic anthropologist Clyde Snow's maxim that 'the bones don't lie' and it is echoed in Tony Walter's concept of 'mediator deathwork' (Walter 2005) and the concept of performative speech more broadly, referring to a speech act that literally makes something happen, such as a judge pronouncing a sentence.

Over the period of a year, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seventy forensic art/imaging and post-mortem identification practitioners as well as allied workers across the globe, as part of a doctoral research project exploring the role of visual images in post-mortem human identification, motivated on the one hand by a growing (but largely invisible) global crisis in irregular (and frequently fatal) migration journeys and the challenges this presents for forensic deathwork and humanitarianism (Walter 2005; Moon 2020) and on the other, by a general lack of engagement with forensic images in art theory or visual studies, despite a popular fascination with the field (Smith 2018). These interviews became the basis for the scripted narratives which testify to personal and professional trajectories, disciplinary frustrations, instructive cases, emotional burdens and the future of the field.

By definition, forensic cultures (Burney and Hamlin 2019; Burney, Kirby, and

Pemberton 2013) are closed spaces which deal with very sensitive information, their pop-culture interpretations bearing little resemblance to actual experience. The role of art within these cultures is epistemologically insecure yet undeniable, representing the opposite of 'objective' and 'evidential' but also often the last chance of identifying someone who bears no scientific trace. My own formal training in Forensic Art granted privileged access to this otherwise closed world, and enabled the extension of a participant-observer methodology from a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) into an embodied one (Michel 2018), fostering numerous 'face-to-face' encounters across a number of real-world and virtual locations in which the concept of sitedness – location, context, direct interaction – was a critical condition in shaping the research and its findings. Emic and etic knowledge enfolded here, the view from within and without occurring simultaneously. Validated methods and accepted practices in forensic facial imaging were recorded alongside more maverick ones, and the need for greater 'pracademic' flow (Posner 2009; Caldwell and Dorling 1995) was revealed, as well as aspects of the field's significant hidden curriculum (Portelli 1993). Including myself in the *Speaking Likeness* cohort (as P00) was a device aimed at drawing explicit attention to the inevitably subjective lens a researcher will bring to empirical work, as it is through their lens that we become aware not only of concerns translated into problems to be addressed, but also what else might be absent/absented from an enquiry (Rappert 2015).

There is a truism in face science that you can only represent what you have already seen. This idea is at the root of the cognitive and perceptual biases produced, in part, by a limited 'facial diet' (Todorov 2017). *Speaking Likeness* trades on the primacy of the facial image in constructing an identity *for* someone (a process which in itself involves no small element of cognitive bias) and then how we present and perform our selves. Voice and accent contribute to this bias. I was interested in provoking these processes by partly suspending them, in order to attend to the intimacy of looking, particularly at the face, and having our gaze returned in a manner that is gently confrontational. I was also interested in tracing the reflexive aspect of a gaze turning inward over time.

As an extension of a semi-structured interview, certain participants agreed to sit for a durational portrait captured via digital video, sitting alone in a room and focusing their gaze on a camera as a proxy for an interlocutor/viewer, for a minimum of five minutes. In doing so, they agreed to become a version of the kind of image that they may produce or encounter in their day-to-day professional lives. And like the subjects whose faces they construct, they are unnamed, but their operational context and location is recorded.

Each portrait was then paired with its relevant narrative, the non-linear flow of the original conversation edited and re-organised for a listening (and reading) audience according to a series of tropes – *It all started with...*; *The names we give*; *Subject or object*; *Working cases*; *Accurate or recognisable*; *There was this case...*; *Interdisciplinary interactions*; *Evidence or intelligence*; *Emotional labour*; *Matters of Care*, *matters of concern*; *Being seen*; and *Forensic futures* – which developed out of a comparative analysis

of these interviews as an archive of primary research data. These tropes came to represent key interests that are broadly consistent across the field, cutting across cultures and contexts, enabling the elucidation of shared interests within this heterogeneous community and suggesting possible interventions towards addressing these issues in an internationally relevant way (or at least where attention should be focused to ensure the future relevance of the field). Thus, *Speaking Likeness* enacts Valentin Groebner's observation (2007; p.10) that the best approach to a history of identification, a topic deeply entangled with the structures of statehood, citizenship, legal recognition and individual subjectivity, is to try and 'capture it in a net of narratives.' Scripts were collaboratively agreed to ensure participants were satisfied with their (re)mediated narrative representations, a move which further highlights the impossibility of a neutral, discrete researcher identity. Even in the context of formal, ethically approved research with its protocols and methods, we – researcher and participant – are still performing for each other, and ourselves.

The verbatim research transcripts recorded moments of non- or extra-verbal communication (laughter, sighing) as well as conversational tone as faithfully as possible (with sensitivity to professional and ethical limits), enabling a rich reinstatement of the context and spirit of each encounter. Removing the distractions and non-sequiturs of spoken conversation while retaining expressive idiosyncrasies that characterise individual speech and language patterns highlights the specifics of each voice, both in terms of conversational content but also as

a material which can be sculpturally shaped. As such, any extra-verbal conversational traces were shown [in square brackets] where appropriate. Moments where participants would address me directly, or refer to a visual example that is unavailable to the listener/reader were also retained which, together with the use of the second-person 'you' is encountered throughout, invoked in a specific personal sense as well as a plural, collective sense, which further amplifies the shift from a dyadic encounter to a triadic one in which the researcher/interlocutor role is implicitly replaced by the viewer/reader as the person being addressed. Yet a trace of my presence as the only consistent interlocutor persists in the voice you hear.

Replacing the various nuances of accent, age and perceived gender represented in this group with a single, disembodied (female) voice may be considered an audacious move, but it was a simple solution to a number of practical challenges in the interviewing process (a lack of shared language, physical location and audio recording conditions) which also produced some unexpected conceptual affordances. It anonymises the speakers with the effect of being simultaneously unifying and flattening whilst also suggesting an internal monologue that involves some suspension of disbelief: we must believe that these words belong to these faces, even if the voice does not appear to 'fit'. Depending on which face is selected first, this effect may be more or less jarring. One consistent voice accompanying such a diverse collection of faces, speaking in the 'wrong' accent and/or presumed gender, is intended to draw obvious and absurd attention to the cognitive bias embodied by voice, where accent and articulation are vectors of assumption about gender and nationality/

origins in relation to physical appearance. Yet retaining the idiosyncratic traces of individual speech in the written scripts acknowledges the power of performative language, and the close and complex relationship between voice and face as material-semiotic carriers of identity and authority that also happen to possess forensic power.

Revealing the face but disguising the voice works against the conventions of identity protection employed in most reportage, yet this solution was acceptable even to practitioners who requested having their names withheld as a condition of their participation. Relative anonymity is also a desirable condition for many practitioners in the field. Unlike other forms of art, the personality and ‘signature’ of the forensic artist should be sublimated in service to the victim (eyewitness or unidentified decedent) and the signifying status of the image as a form of visual testimony. But this professional invisibility is double-edged, contributing to lack of access to, and misperceptions about, the field.

As P01 reminds us, forensic facial images are complex media, so it is also interesting to consider the ways in which artists self-describe as being a sort of medium themselves, not quite in the spiritualist sense (although this is not completely absent from the field’s lore where intuition is a recognised asset, if not exactly formally acknowledged as a skill). Rather, forensic artists understand their role as a ‘conduit person’ or ‘middleman’ (P19), or being used ‘as a vessel’ (P03), which align with Walter’s criteria for “mediator deathwork” (Walter, *op.cit.*). And then there is my own mediator role, designing and shaping the conditions for these encounters which in turn impacted my research process, confirming and challenging my hypotheses and assumptions,

and refining my analytical lenses. Mine is literally and figuratively the voice through which these stories are told, assuming a certain authority in the process but also recognising my accountability and responsibility for their veracity, and the integrity of their translation.

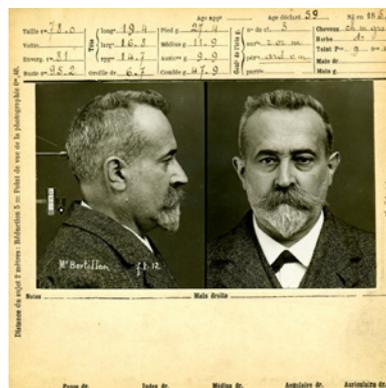
Speaking Likeness safeguards anonymity whilst also putting it at risk, foregrounding the contingencies and ethics of establishing trust and engaging questions of individual agency and collaboration which were actively negotiated throughout the process. Withholding names and actual speaking voices, but revealing faces, ideas and operational contexts could be seen as pushing against the conventions of anonymity in research where protecting individual privacy might have the undesirable effect of further effacing those who are actively seeking platforms to be heard. Yet anonymity is also a form of agency, enabling free(r) speech where conditions might otherwise prohibit it. Thinking through anonymity in this way thus offers another way to approach the notion of ‘radical effacement’ (Butler *op.cit.*) of some bodies perpetuated by particular structural (political, social, cultural) conditions, and possible ways to resist this, which perhaps begins with the willingness to simply turn towards and open up to one another.

Speaking Likeness also sought to derive new poetical potential from the conventions of the institutionalised portrait – what we might recognise as the clinical or ethnographic image, the criminal mug shot or the passport photograph (Albers 2010; Edwards 1990; Sekula 1986). The face gallery/grid that introduces the site’s landing page and main navigational interface (and which reappears

as end pages in the book iteration) obeys the visual cues of the passport/mugshot photograph, tracing an arc through Allan Sekula's *The Body and the Archive* (1986), to his *Photography and the Limits of National Identity* (Sekula 2014)³ – where the term ‘counter-forensic’ first appeared – variously referencing the material-semiotic flows that operate between the biometric interests of our contemporary forensic age and the evolution of facial compositing and recognition software; the anthropological taxonomies of ethnographic photography; the use of facial arrays in psychology experiments as well as criminal identification; and the lightbox and contact sheet as artefacts of the analogue photo studio in digital translation.

The phrase ‘speaking likeness’ is a direct English translation of the French phrase *portrait parlé*, coined by Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914) for his ‘signaletic’ system of human (criminal) identification (Siegel 2011; Sekula 1986), a strictly denotative process aimed at an ‘unambiguous’ translation of physical appearance into language, which is the origins and legacy of modern biometric and forensic human identification methods. The phrase was conceivably adapted by photographer Arne Svenson for his project *Unspeaking Likeness* (although not directly referenced in it) in which he photographed forensic sculptures of unidentified decedents as living people sitting for portraits.⁴

Speaking Likeness was conceived as a visual reply to Svenson’s project, informed by my own experiences of working critically and operationally with/in forensic cultures, and closing a self-reflexive loop opened by Bertillon himself when he made himself a subject of his own Bertillonage system.



Alphonse Bertillon's own Bertillonage card (recto), 1893. Wikimedia Commons

The idea of a ‘speaking portrait’ holding a wealth of hidden information that can be unlocked, as long as it is correctly recorded, analysed and interpreted/performed by an appropriate expert, is a foundational concept in how visual evidence is constructed within forensic cultures, based in part in photography’s presumed indexicality (Dufour 2015; Sekula 1986; Siegel 2011). In semiotic terms, an index is a direct trace of an object – a footprint can be matched with a specific foot and so on. In (analogue) photography, the mechanical documentation of a subject present before the camera is held to produce photography’s privileged relationship to reality and thus its capacity to record evidence. As many of these accounts show, language is at best limited and at worst, a source of prejudice, violence and oppression. But bodies are in actuality rather unruly, and ultimately resist such institutional taming, and so Bertillon’s ambitions of unambiguous translation from data-image to body have not been fully realised.

An alternative theory of the photograph is of the ‘depictive trace’ (Pettersson 2011), which suggests that photographs are not merely (or only) accurate representations,

³ Originally published 1993, republished 2006 and 2008.

⁴ Svenson’s project was first published as an exhibition, *Unspeaking Likeness: Portraits* (Western Project, Los Angeles 2005) (Svenson n.d., online) and more recently as an eponymous large-format book (2016, Twin Palms), with an introduction by Svenson and an essay by William T. Vollmann.

but provide ‘epistemic access’ to what they depict via their peculiar sense of transparency (Harries et al, 2018). Direct observation of an object assumes spatial proximity between observer and observed. By contrast, the capacity photographs have of producing “quasi-illusionistic experiences of objects” that allow us to see things “in their surfaces,” (Pettersson, *op.cit.* p.193) has the effect of collapsing perceptual and spatial registers, producing an experience of intimacy with what is represented in, and beyond, the image. This notion of the depictive trace opens up more generously to abstract, digital and other post-photographic practices (Fontcuberta 2014; Morris 2014) than the indexical does, and appears to offer a more plausible account of photography’s potency as an evidential tool that in fact *exceeds* the indexical trace, particularly with reference to humanitarian forensic investigations. This, I suggest, accounts for the extra-evidentiary power of the images of Mengele’s skull superimposed with versions of his younger and older selves which served as the impetus for Keenan and Weizman’s theory of forensic aesthetics (Keenan and Weizman 2012).

As such, this interpretation of the ‘speaking likeness’ replaces the empirical (and political) fantasy of quantitatively managing resistant and unlawful bodies with a more poetic interpersonal exchange. The work is partly an act of retrieval, presenting a whole-face experience, dynamic and changing over time, and produced through an embodied (real-life or virtual) encounter between peers who recount disciplinary lore to reflect on the law. It also describes how I believe forensic facial depictions operate, which is as objects ‘on the edge’ of portraiture. Even as they rely on similar artistic or illustrative skills

and may resemble conventional portraiture, something about these depictions innately points to a function that relies on, but is in excess of, their form. To fulfil their objectives to present a plausible likeness that also recognises its own limits, forensic depictions must appeal to realism whilst acknowledging their own construction. As a form of witness testimony, they operate alongside other forms of substantiation and validation. As investigative tools, they aim to open lines of communication between an unidentified decedent or unknown suspect, and those who might recognise them. As P08 suggests, this may enable unidentified decedents to ‘complete their life stories.’

Forensic facial depictions don’t appear to have any aesthetic ambitions; their language is mostly plain, straightforward, functional, which some find frustrating, humorous, or simply not worth paying attention to as cultural objects. This is wrong. Such images are fully aware of their own limits in their stylistic and interpretive restrictions, reflected through visual techniques (blurring, shading) that signify ambiguity. The extent to which these are present or absent in turn reflects the varying skills and sensitivities of the artist. In whatever way such images might be seen as artistically wanting, their singular potency resides in the demands they make of us to act in the interests of the people they ostensibly represent.

The final work comprises 222 videos with a total viewing time of approximately six hours. Such a work is unlikely to be experienced in its totality by a single viewer, and if a viewer is so committed, it is extremely unlikely that this will occur in single sitting. The value of an accompanying manuscript featuring video-

stills of the portraits and related scripts – the object you are currently looking at – was realised as an alternative way of experiencing the work, either separately from the online piece or in tandem, enabling follow-along reading and cross-referencing between narrative pathways. Within the two modes of delivery – online and book – the primary navigational device is flipped. In the online version, the thirteen thematic tropes direct the experience, providing a polyvocal perspective on each trope composed from story fragments. Being able to track multiple perspectives on a single pathway was a critical strategy to destabilise the hegemony of a single voice or story. In the book version, individual stories are foregrounded, flowing through each interview encounter sequentially and through each trope uninterrupted, your place in the narrative indicated by a scarlet highlight within the margin menu. However, it is still possible to replicate a polyvocal experience by using the pathway index at the back of the book (p.393). Not every participant has an entry for every single pathway. In this case, nothing is highlighted in the margin list and the relevant portrait remains dim on the online interface.

The durational nature of the portraits is referenced in the book using stills from different temporal moments of the five-minute long portrait sittings at the beginning and end of each chapter and of the book itself, captured at 30 seconds and at 4 minutes 30 seconds respectively. Examining these comparatively reveals the passing of time through subtle changes to facial expression and head pose.

The content of *Speaking Likeness* reveals the nuances of forensic facial imaging as something of a frontier territory populated by

colourful characters who embody the often-competing interests of art, science and forensic investigation. In terms of social capital, these roles traditionally sit in some tension – if not in direct opposition – to one another. Being trusted and trustworthy is a significant asset in this world. The professional terrain is characterised by a singular concentration of interdisciplinary expertise produced mostly through master-apprentice training models. There is no one way into this work, and once in, practitioners are faced with little oversight, other than peer-based regulation, in which personal affiliations and agendas may carry more weight than professional interest in the advancement of the field as a whole. Real barriers to professional participation exist, not least through the lack of reliable and accessible information. Popular interest exceeds professional opportunities in the field, and as such, forensic facial imaging remains niche, poorly understood, under-funded and under-utilised.

Law enforcement is historically the origin and natural context for this work and those working within these agencies (or with historical ties to them) are at a distinct advantage in accessing casework. There are no internationally agreed professional standards for this work and limited professional recognition. Outside of law enforcement (but with connections that bridge the gap), trainers and mentors represent more effective gatekeepers and arbiters of quality control than the professional associations that represent the interests of the field. A vast and complex hidden curriculum is at work in this world, which can offer powerful insights into heuristic knowledge if it can be made visible, and which challenges commonly-held ideas about ‘expertise.’

Finally, claims to the accuracy of Forensic Art continue to be contested, a debate which is often confused with the ‘success’ of these images but which is a deeply contingent process, and less likely an effect of their ‘likeness’ with the target than of their effective circulation and exposure. This impacts directly on the ambivalent and uneven investment in forensic imaging methods as a routine investigative tool in post-mortem identification globally.

Katharina Schramm (2020; p.1-2) observes that “facialization marks the border between inclusion and exclusion, objectification and subjectivity, [producing] a profound tension where the face oscillates between its association with a person’s individual humanity and the classificatory processes that sort her out as a human type.”

Visually, *Speaking Likeness* exploits the bland, anti-aesthetic of the passport photograph, but in its durational and narrated form fosters a particular form of engaged attention. These eighteen blinking, breathing and slighting shifting faces represent a new form of remediated portraiture, acting as test sites around and onto which complex ethics and biases between subject and object may be performed and projected. It is hoped that in holding their gaze, a sense of the embodied tensions between the Levinasian ‘face of the Other’ to which we must ‘turn towards,’ as well as Deleuze and Guattari’s dehumanizing and classificatory system of their ‘abstract machine of faciality’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; MacCormack 2000; M’charek 2020), which precludes empathic vision, is both communicated and felt.

Reclaiming a Levinasian ethics of the face demands recognition that the ‘radical effacement’ of certain peoplehoods exists. It also means recognizing that the ‘faciality machine’ is our dominant social mode, a classificatory politics which produces ideas about whole bodies through facial fragments and accoutrements, which is particularly amplified within forensic identification. I suggest that both co-exist within forensic facial imaging work, characterizing its different expressions and perhaps even informing core motivational values within the field. Victim-related work is distinctly more Levinasian than criminal identification work (facial compositing and recognition systems being the material embodiments of the ‘abstract machine of faciality’) yet both positions coexist and overlap within the field.

Advocating for a ‘(re)turn towards the face of another’ in a way that actively promotes recognition of mutual personhood, is to reintroduce an ethics to the politics that have come to dictate forensic identification policies and values, and resist systems in which some bodies are made to matter more than others. Recognising how the denial of certain bodies and peoplehoods are produced via the operations of the ‘abstract machine of faciality’ in forensic identification, and to push back against such operations using the tools of the field as the method to achieve this, is a critical and counter-forensic act. Viewed through the lens of humanitarian commitment, I suggest that post-mortem Forensic Art, as a tool of forensic deathwork, may be seen as a form of critical social praxis (critical citizenship). As such, *Speaking Likeness* has come to embody my central thesis of the value in restaging Forensic Art as a counter-forensic device.

Through storytelling, a form which sits counter to objective abstraction, *Speaking Likeness* provides a space in which practitioners may reclaim individual agency outside of their operational contexts; a reckoning between law and lore. It is a kind of disciplinary tribunal or debriefing in a mode designed to engage and even entertain, whilst also educating the field about itself: practitioners are often invisible even to each other. It is a redoubled performance, a re-enactment of research and practice in which the tacit and the invisible features of forensic facial imaging as a culture and a practice (its hidden labours and curriculum), are drawn out by attending to the traces of the personal and emotional within professional practice. As such, it offers an alternative perspective on, or way into, the central questions animating this study: *What is at stake in producing, working with and circulating images of post-mortem faces?* and *If we think of Forensic Art as art at all, what kind of art is it?*

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I extend my deepest gratitude to all the practitioners who collaborated with me on this peculiar experiment. Let's continue to pull back the veil on this complex and fragmented field, assert the power of the visual, and reconnect the living with their dead.

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Kathryn Smith, 2020

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To access the artwork, visit www.speakinglikeness.online

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