Physiognomy, Phrenology and the Temporality of the Body

RICHARD TWINE

> How to explain the . . . ineffability of an emotion or of a nuance in an expression that, at the very moment of its surfacing and almost becoming perceptible to the eye, is already gone, either too late or too soon, something fleeting and, at the same time, already vanished? (Magli, 1989: 88)

The historical analysis of physiognomy and phrenology is an exceptional project. These are terms that now have next to no meaning for the majority of people. This amnesia is worthy of note in itself. Physiognomy of course has a much longer history than phrenology. The former can be traced back to antiquity while the latter was a pseudo-science which spanned the 19th century in Western Europe and North America. That these terms have very little contemporary currency may be down to their being part of scientific knowledge and so excluded from popular discourses. However, this argument does not stand closer inspection. These knowledges did not ultimately succeed in attaining lasting scientific status but, during their short and intertwined moments of prestige, they achieved a significant level of mass popularization. While these actual terms may no longer attain their former resonance, their underlying ethos that posits a moral interpretation of physical appearances does most certainly remain relevant at the outset of the 21st century. Their degree of mass popularization, particularly in the 19th century makes our contemporary amnesia all the more difficult to fathom.

This memory lapse is repeated in contemporary scholarly research where very little importance is given to the histories of physiognomy and phrenology. Commonly a humorous reference is made to these pseudo-sciences to illustrate how silly we *were* then and how far psychologically we have *progressed* since. In retrospect, the notion that we attributed a certain morality to a person from their

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appearance seems preposterous. However, there is a darker side to this contemporary self-aggrandizing humour when it is brought to attention just how salient these knowledges remain, if not explicitly named as such. Alternatively, sociology may essentialize the importance of appearance to social relations, as in Goffman's (albeit important) work on 'impression management' (1959). At the start of the 21st century, the dominant popular scopic remains essentially physiognomic. Physiognomy still underlies many everyday assumptions about class, gender and 'race', and now gets technologized as it provides the underlying ethos for practices such as cosmetic surgery.

It is worth saying a little here of how I aim to treat the historicization of physiognomy and phrenology, and indeed why I am juxtaposing them. Initially, I intended to concentrate on the resurgence of physiognomy during the latter part of the 18th century, that swept throughout Western Europe largely due to the writings of Johann Caspar Lavater. However, I discovered that important tenets of physiognomic discourse continued under the guise of phrenology well into the 19th century. While many writers have recognized the obvious connections between physiognomy and phrenology they have failed to outline just how important physiognomy was to 19th-century phrenology (e.g. Cooter, 1984; Davies, 1955; de Giustino, 1975). As I shall illustrate, both the scientific and popular expressions of 19th-century phrenology were conduits for the perpetuation of physiognomy. Phrenology played a crucial role in the popularization of those physiognomic aesthetics that are of particular interest to this article. While I seek not to reduce phrenology to physiognomy I do aim to emphasize this neglected aspect of 19th-century phrenology.

One reason for the denial of the physiognomy in phrenology could be their respective sensory associations. Phrenology in particular has become retrospectively stereotyped vaguely as 'that 19th-century pseudo-science concerned with the bumps on people's heads'. This has constructed phrenology as comprising a tactile epistemology. In contrast physiognomy is recounted (if at all) as those attempts to exteriorize another's interior psychological realm through the construction of myriad meanings in relation to physical features and appearances. Consequently, physiognomy is epistemologically visual. Indeed, an important element of those attempts towards the end of the 18th century to establish physiognomy as a formal science, revolved around stressing the centrality of observation to its very practice. However, this distinction at the level of epistemology is false and is informed by a misconception of phrenology that denies its physiognomic content. Through reference to 19th-century phrenological works, I will emphasize this content and so a particular *visual* aspect of phrenology. I find the fact that neither physiognomy nor phrenology achieved the status of a

formal science less relevant than the impressive mass popularization they attained. My intention is to emphasize the normalization of certain important tenets of these knowledges, and how these ideas have far outlived the actual terms *physiognomy* and *phrenology*, and remain central today for our embodied social practices and relations.

I want to begin chronologically with a discussion of the resurgence of physiognomy in the latter half of the 18th century and then link this into the emergence of phrenology right at the outset of the 19th century. I will briefly emphasize the impact of physiognomy and phrenology upon art and literature in the 19th century. I shall outline the discursive lineage between physiognomy and phrenology. Finally, I shall offer a theoretical overview that will concentrate upon the implications of physiognomic discourse in terms of relations between self and other. I will critique physiognomy mainly for its complicity with representationalism and thus be interested in adding a sense of temporality to our perception of embodiment. This can in turn be utilized to undermine several contemporary practices, notably cosmetic surgery.

The belief that you can read the character of another from their appearance is an historically pervasive phenomenon. Actual written treatises on physiognomy date back to at least Aristotle[1] (384–322 BC) and his teacher Plato's (427–348 BC) theory linking physical beauty with moral goodness. Moreover, the example of Chinese physiognomy shows us that this practice has not been confined to Europe. Such historical and cultural spread of course does not imply that we simply find refuge in some naturalized view of physiognomy. Perception is by no means solely a biological act. Historically, there have been periods where physiognomy has been more explicitly popular and this may relate to certain factors present at that particular socio-historical context. The resurgence I will focus upon began in the latter half of the 18th century and is inevitably tied to the name of the Swiss Pastor, Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801). Both Aristotle and Plato, and also the Italian Della Porta (1536–1615) influenced Lavater's physiognomic work. Porta, who in 1586 wrote *De Humana Physiognomia*, carried on the Greek tradition of using animal physiognomies as explanations for human character types, which is then repeated in Lavater. Magli refers to these as 'Zoological Physiognomics' (1989: 97–8). This element of physiognomy relied on a prior anthropomorphic physiognomy of a certain animal then being applied to humans as in representing someone as lion-like, and so courageous. This stands as an example of a constructed discourse of 'nature' then being used to give order and explanation to human social relations. Since many animals have been given masculinized or feminized meanings this type of physiognomy could be used to reinforce prevailing gender stereotypes. This serves as an initial example of the

contemporary perpetuation of physiognomy when we talk of certain people resembling particular animals. We may speak of someone as rat-like or owl-like. It is open as to whether this process of animalization speaks of a supposed visual resemblance or is also intended to invoke the anthropomorphic character association of a particular animal. The considerable ambiguity with which the West has constructed animality entails a similarly uncertain intent, however; the animalization of, for example, women is a very pervasive process of devaluation (see Adams, 1991).

Lavaterian Physiognomy

While Lavater's ideas were not original they were unique in their breadth of influence and popularity. His main work on physiognomy was entitled *Essays on Physiognomy* (1775–8), comprising four volumes. This work should also be set in the context of the significant development in aesthetic theory particularly in the latter half of the 18th century (Tytler, 1982: 48). Especially pertinent to Lavater were the new theories of beauty, for example those of Hogarth and Shaftesbury, that attempted to apply geometric analysis to the understanding of aesthetics and often reproduced the Platonic dictum that physical beauty signified moral goodness.

The popularity of this work can be measured by the many different editions and translations that it underwent. As Graham reports, by 1810 there had been a total of 55 editions, variously priced to suit all pockets (1961: 562). While Lavater's resuscitation of physiognomic discourse certainly had its objectors, he was visited and admired by major figures of the European aristocracy, such as the Grand Duke of Russia and Prince Edward of England. Graham cites a mid-19th-century edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1853–60) to further underline the impact of Lavater's work:

> Its publication created everywhere a profound sensation. Admiration, contempt, resentment, and fear were cherished towards the author. The discoverer of the new science was everywhere flattered or pilloried; and in many places, where the study of human character from the face became an epidemic, the people went masked through the streets. (1961: 561–2)

While one would think this was something of an exaggeration it does suggest that the legitimation of physiognomic discourse led to a significant degree of apprehension since character was suddenly reasserted as a visible concept.

We can also gauge the influential scope of physiognomy by briefly analysing the fields of art and literature at this time and the changes they underwent. To begin with there was a very close relation between art and physiognomy in the 18th and 19th centuries. Lavater's *Essays*, in particular, were embellished with

countless plates of the human face. Indeed, this was thought to have contributed partially to its popularity, since that quality and scope of portraiture was difficult to obtain at such a low cost during this period. Moreover, through his network Lavater was able to enlist the contributions of the artist Fuseli and the poet William Blake to provide these portraits. Lavater's and subsequent uses of art by works of physiognomy provide an initial point of critique. As you will note from Figure 1, the portraits used by Lavater verged on caricature, a variety of portrait that is already thoroughly physiognomic and so rather conveniently reinforcing to the reader the assertion of a 'self-evident' link between face and character.

The difficulty for Lavater revolved around the distinction made at the time between physiognomy and *pathognomy*. Pathognomy was the term given to those changeable, gestural features of the face thought to signify the passions, whereas physiognomy was the study of those supposedly static features of the face which were related to underlying character and not emotion. Lavater explicitly defined his physiognomy in contrast to pathognomy. In setting up physiognomy as the static side of the distinction, agency is extracted from the body and given to the physiognomist who can then skilfully uncover the secrets of the face (nature). The distinction between physiognomy and pathognomy is debatable and I will have more to say on this issue of temporality later.

Figure 1 Physiognomic plates from Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* (1840: 94), with permission of the John Rylands Library, Manchester.

The relationship between physiognomy and art was not confined to the former's strategic use of the latter. As Mary Cowling argues, physiognomy was to have an important influence upon 19th-century Victorian art itself (1989). The infusion of Lavaterian physiognomic discourse into the mainstream of mid-19th-century society, assisted as we shall see by phrenology, created a common visual language between artist and audience. Cowling suggests that, because we now view the human face in far less reverential terms, it is difficult to understand this physiognomic language present in Victorian art (1989: 7). However, I think she downplays the extent to which physiognomic visual discourses remain pertinent today. While it is certainly probable that they have changed (one is less likely to see physiognomic racist representations for example), I will argue that they remain central to our perceptions of otherness. One of the most straightforward platforms for contemporary physiognomy is animation. In the popular cartoon *The Simpsons* the 'stupid' characters tend to be drawn with their teeth permanently exposed. Another example is the uglification of the 'bad' characters in the James Bond genre (Synnott, 1990). Arguably, though, the seminal moment of physiognomy in the popular culture of the 20th century was in the 1930s film *The Wizard of Oz*: when Dorothy asks the good 'white' witch why she is so beautiful, the witch replies 'Why, only bad witches are ugly.' All these examples retain the belief in a static correspondence between external image and morality or character.

The impact of physiognomy during the 19th century can also be gauged by its entry into literature, especially from the way it re-opened and considerably expanded the whole arena of characterization for the novelist. For Shortland, it is in the 19th century that the body becomes clearly legible and that this legibility, fuelled by physiognomy and then phrenology, re-orientates the dominant understandings of character in art, literature and science, crudely, from one based on action to one based more upon physical appearance (1985: 283–4). Physiognomy and then phrenology appear in the work of many of the major 19th-century novelists, including Dickens, Balzac, Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen, George Eliot and Oscar Wilde. Given that these pseudo-sciences always had a somewhat ambivalent reception, their representation within the 19th-century novel was not always as something the author either patronized or admired. Indeed, for Dickens and Austen the novel provided an opportunity to air their scepticism towards physiognomy (see Tytler, 1982: 247). However, in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*, completed in 1846,[2] there are no less than 30 separate references to physiognomy or phrenology. Brontë here is obsessed with the physical features of her characters and is keen to illustrate to the reader what their appearance says about their morality or character. She makes explicit reference to physiognomy

and also employs the 'faculty' language of phrenology. This example illustrates, then, how both physiognomy and phrenology were intertwined as interpretive frameworks for deciphering physicality in the mid-19th century. Similarly, the French novelist Balzac wholeheartedly embraced both physiognomy and phrenology. Balzac's novels contain a great number of detailed physical descriptions. Physiognomy and phrenology appealed to his belief that the physical world, in this instance the body, only had significance insofar as it was a symbolic representation of something more important (see Graham, 1979: 118). This echoes both Christian and scientific views that generally denigrate the body as subservient to a soul or mind.

Indeed Balzac's particular attraction to physiognomy provides another clue as to its initial popularity. Physiognomy was able to appeal to both religious and scientific viewpoints. What was formerly a suspect and questionable body of knowledge became for a short while, with the aid of Lavater's veneer of scientific discourse, a respected scholarly endeavour. Far from constructing religion as subservient to science Lavater attempted to use science to improve the morality of people, to systematize and operationalize the notion that appearance reflected one's morality. Lavater's physiognomy could appeal to people without compromising their Christianity *or* the increasing scientism of that period.

Lavater's ultimate failure to create a *science* of physiognomy had the result that its public popularity and influence endured for longer than its scientific status. As I will show, this public popularity was re-ignited after Lavater's death under the guise of phrenology in the 19th century. It is far from simple to account for the popularity of physiognomic discourse in the 19th century although, apart from its initial scientific appeal, we can put forward a number of hypotheses. At a time of increased urbanization and geographical mobility there was increased likelihood for one to be confronted with (physical) difference and an overall greater contact with strangers. In this way physiognomic discourse could be said to have provided a reassuring interpretive framework for one to categorize people and retain, to an extent, some control over a changing social environment. It is perhaps not always sufficiently emphasized just how radical a change urbanization was for many people. A relatively sudden increase in the frequency of contact with strangers entailed a vacuum of communication between self and other. Put in the terms of Giddens (1991), it can be said that these changes increased general levels of 'ontological insecurity' and that physiognomy was able to assuage the uncomfortable emotional experience of rapid socio-cultural change. Such an explanation, based upon changing social and spatial arrangements, might also be appropriate in accounting for both physiognomy's long history and its continued contemporary importance. Thus, physiognomy's resurgence and cultural spread

during the 18th and 19th centuries in Western Europe and the United States can, it may be argued, be partially attributed to this changing social milieu.

Moreover, physiognomic discourse should also be situated within the considerable ideology of the nation-state that arose particularly during the 19th century. This refers to a 'series of ideological practices that sought to represent the nation as a social, spatial and historical fact that is real, continuous and meaningful' (Waters, 1995: 134–5) that have only just begun to be seriously challenged by the various changes brought on by globalization. To Waters' list we should add that nationhood was represented as a *biological* fact in certain important ways. Physiognomy promoted the idea of a generalized national physiognomy and character type. Lavater wrote:

> That there is a national physiognomy, as well as national character, is undeniable. Whoever doubts of this can never have observed men of different nations, nor have compared the inhabitants of the extreme confines of any two. (1840: 339)

According to Hall, it is just such assertions about a 'national character' that were an important practice within the ideology of nationhood (1992: 293). Although these stereotypes may have partially lost their physiognomic component, examples such as 'British fair play' (and indeed the 'stiff upper lip') or 'the fiery Mediterranean temperament' retain a contemporary use. The 19th-century ideology of nationhood drew upon the physiognomic coding of the body as an unproblematic site of truth to produce many such narratives that were important to nationalism and the legitimation of both Eurocentrism and colonialism. Throughout the 19th century physiognomy was a classic capillary discourse, percolating into a whole constellation of knowledges, notably phrenology, anthropometry, anthropology, criminology and eugenics. I will now turn to a discussion of the most important of these in terms of 19th-century popularity and dissemination, phrenology.

Phrenology

Like the resurgence of physiognomy 25 years earlier, phrenology began on the continent and gradually spread to the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. While he did not coin the term, phrenology's main tenets were put forward by Franz-Josef Gall (1758–1828) at the end of the 18th century. Although there are important differences between Lavaterian physiognomy and Gall's phrenology, the latter's thinking was clearly influenced by the former. Gall's later work was spurred on by thoughts he had during his student days in the 1770s and 1780s. During this time he observed that his fellow students who had good memories all had prominent eyes, and so he assumed that the part of the brain

Figure 2 A typical phrenological typography illustrating 37 faculties (Davies, 1971: 6), with permission of the John Rylands Library, Manchester.

concerned with memory was located behind the eyes (Davies, 1955: 6–7). That his first thoughts on the mind were physiognomic was undoubtedly strongly related to the popularity of (Lavaterian) physiognomy at this time. What began as an interest in physiognomy developed into what was, at the time, the most significant theory of mind yet. Gall was perhaps the first figure to formalize the view that the mind and the brain were one and the same thing. At the time this materialism was a religiously controversial view and ultimately led to Gall's expulsion from Austria in 1802. His ideas radically developed the notion of cerebral localization; the view that various parts of the brain have relatively distinct functions. Gall remains an important historical figure in physiological psychology not for his phrenology per se, but for his theories of mind that were inherent to it and which stand as a precursor to later functionalist psychological theories. Specifically, he was influential in attaching the concept of mind to the actual material location of the brain, and in doing so, further entrenched mind/body dualism as he deprived other parts of the body the opportunity to be thought of as 'mind' or mind-like.[3]

What was problematic for Gall's phrenology was that his theory of cerebral localization retained an important tenet of physiognomic discourse. He retained what we might term a visual representationalism in that he thought that the degree to which an individual had developed a particular brain function could be externally verified from the surface of their head. This decisively entailed that

phrenology would continue physiognomy's fascination with outward physical appearance. Thus if we refer to Figure 2, which shows a typical phrenological chart outlining 37 brain faculties, it was proposed that the degree of development of each faculty had a corresponding bearing upon the shape of one's head. Not only did this open the door to character analysis and give rise to the subsequent derogatory term of 'bumpology'; it revealed another facet of Gall's thinking.

On the one hand Gall allowed continuity with prior physiognomic discourse (even though he saw his own writing as substantially more scientific than Lavater's), on the other he was also putting forward a theory that ran counter to Lockean constructivism. As Young points out, Gall's theory 'postulated a set of innate, inherited instincts transmitted in the form of cerebral organs, whose activity varied with the size of the respective organs' (1970: 15). It would be difficult to imagine how Gall could sustain his prior attachment to physiognomic discourse without it also being allied with a view of qualitatively innate faculties unless he was also going to postulate that one's head shape would change as one developed certain faculties. However, during the 19th century this issue of essentialism and constructivism would shadow phrenology. Some adherents clearly also held a constructivist view as they wished to harness the science to social reform movements. Indeed, somewhat ambiguously, phrenology would never have achieved its degree of popularity if it had not eventually espoused an optimistic view of the variability of moral character that then enabled such ideas as self-help and self-improvement to become such a part of its appeal. That 'improvements' were not accompanied by a changed head shape or physiognomy was seemingly glossed over.

As important as Gall to early phrenology was his research assistant Johann Caspar Spurzheim (1776–1832). It was Spurzheim who coined the phrase 'phrenology' and did more than any other individual to popularize the growing movement in the first third of the 19th century. Spurzheim espoused a less deterministic phrenology and believed that it was a new important tool in the moral improvement of the human race. This issue was instrumental in Spurzheim's split from Gall, who retained the belief that one could not radically improve one's faculties by means of moral education. In time Spurzheim was to claim there were more phrenological faculties than Gall had suggested. His retreat from anatomical experimentation and openness to speculation offended Gall. In 1814 this ideological and methodological separation was rendered geographical when Spurzheim embarked upon a considerable lecture tour of the United Kingdom. Significantly, while Gall had grown critical of Lavaterian physiognomy, Spurzheim's interest remained. He agreed with Lavater that physiognomy was indeed a science and noted Lavater's writing on the head,

arguing that it simply required further theorization (1826: 8). Indeed physiognomy remained a worthy topic of discussion in both his publications and his lecture tours. During the 19th century, phrenology became less about anatomical dissections and theories of cerebral localization, and more akin to a pseudo-physiognomic character theory and, equally important, a social reform movement. More accurately, an important reformist strand of phrenology involved itself with many 19th-century reform movements. For example, phrenologists took a notable interest in education, penology, psychiatry and criminology. These applications often encouraged an optimistic humanitarian approach to the individual and, for example, a secularized understanding of insanity. However, in its more deterministic moments (towards the end of the 19th century as we shall see), phrenology and physiognomy were re-invoked to buttress scientific racism and the misogynistic focus on prostitution (see Gilman, 1989).

By the 1820s every major British city had its own phrenological society, often being associated with the Literary and Philosophical Societies, as well as the Mechanics Institutes. Until the 1820s memberships comprised, for the most part, 'men of science' and philosophy. Hereafter, the societies were less gender biased and attracted a substantial number of the reformist middle classes (Cooter, 1989: viii). Davies reported that memberships were rather unstable and had largely waned by the 1850s (1955: 79), indicative of a mid-century dip in interest in phrenology. Members had the opportunity to discuss and distribute phrenological writings, and to hear lecturers who typically employed the increasingly popular 'phrenological bust' as heuristic device. Cooter cites one visitor to London in the mid-1830s who found it difficult to walk the streets without encountering 'situations in which phrenological busts and casts are exposed for sale' (1984: 136). It was also commonplace to find phrenological charts outlining the different faculties in the nation's chemists. Under the influence of Spurzheim, many upwardly mobile men were attracted to phrenology and began to lecture on the subject themselves. The most notable of these was George Combe (1788–1858). His *The Constitution of Man*, published in 1828, was essentially his own formulation of phrenology and its practical uses. This book sold particularly well. In 1835, an affordable people's edition was published that sold 17,000 copies in just over a year (de Giustino, 1975: 60). Although phrenology had always been treated with scepticism, and even derision, by the British scientific establishment, it had certainly become an important 'popular science' that took on the appearance of a science with its accompanying journals and publications.

Both Spurzheim and Combe embarked on successful tours of the United States to popularize phrenology further. The social reforming aspect of

phrenology began to take off and significant applications were seen in education, penology, criminology and the treatment of the insane. In many cases, this involved a move towards liberalization, with an increasing stress on rehabilitation. Unlike physiognomy, phrenology had now become more of a social movement, despite retaining aspects of physiognomic discourse. In mid-19th century Britain there was a lull in interest in phrenology, but this was rekindled in the 1860s. Interestingly, a group of Americans, the brothers Orson and Lorenzo Fowler and their brother-in-law Samuel Wells, played an important role in this revival in phrenology. The Fowler and Wells publication house produced a whole new range of phrenological pamphlets, books and journals for consumption on both sides of the Atlantic. Within these publications, phrenologists were able to advertise their 'expertise' at giving readings. It was not unusual for such people to be self-appointed experts, spontaneously conjuring up a professorship for themselves. To give an indication of their cultural spread, one phrenologist in the United States, named Nelson Sizer (a friend of Fowler and Wells) made over 200,000 phrenological examinations (Davies, 1955: 38). In the United States phrenology had undergone something of a transformation. Under the entrepreneurship of Fowler and Wells, phrenology had been rendered more practical, less theoretical, more simplified and so more consumable. It was this variety of phrenology that was then exported back to Britain. The pseudo-science had now lost all chance of being granted the status of a professionally recognized science. However, this was less relevant to an appreciation of how this knowledge had seeped into the public consciousness and given legitimation to how one could visually and morally judge the body of another. The social construction of, and re-emphasis on, a moralized body proved an effective way of strengthening social hierarchy and moral boundaries, especially, as I now argue, in the latter half of the 19th century.

Second-Wave Phrenology

Although it is my contention that the phrenology of Gall and then Spurzheim was, in important ways, also faithful to physiognomy, the phrenology of the latter half of the 19th century was significantly more so. In the pages of the British *Phrenological Magazine – A Journal of Education and Mental Science* (1881), edited by Alfred Story, there are numerous articles of a clearly physiognomic nature such as a chapter on the physiognomy of the nose as well as one entitled 'The Face as Indicative of Character'. An even more clear indication of the closeness of 'second-wave phrenology' to physiognomy was the publication in 1866 of Samuel Wells's *New Physiognomy*. As Wells writes:

Figure 3 The cover of Samuel Wells's 1868 *Illustrated Annual of Phrenology and Physiognomy*, with permission of the John Rylands Library, Manchester.

> The subject (of physiognomy) is now attracting more attention than at any previous time since the death of Lavater, and we hope to see this interest go on increasing till physiognomy shall form a part of the education of every individual. (1866: xvii)

Second-wave phrenology had two further significant differences to that of Gall and Spurzheim. First, it was now characterized by a self-defensive anti-intellectualism that was no doubt strongly related to years of abuse from the majority of the scientific aristocracy. Second, as Cooter concurs, phrenological works in the latter half of the 19th century were more interested in the question of racial difference and degeneration (1984: 262). This suggests that the period was one in which those ideologies of nationhood discussed earlier were renewed and consolidated. Frequent pictorial representations of the racialized (notably black Africans and Australian aborigines) are found within the phrenological journals at this time. For their effectiveness they depended upon the view of the external body as a site of truth that was employed to divide assumed racial

superiority from inferiority. Phrenology was then part of the climate of that time which used science and pseudo-science to naturalize racism, Eurocentrism, class inequality, patriarchy and species-ism. To this use of phrenology we should add craniology, anthropometry, criminology and anthropology (see Gould, 1981).

For example in Figure 3, within the centre display, the white male is placed above that of the other 'races'. Gender here is at least as relevant since the uses which phrenology and physiognomy were put to at this time included the examination of female prostitutes and deliberations on the Hottentot. These speak of an intersecting of gender, sexuality and 'race', which, as Gilman argues, was a projection to deflect attention away from masculine insecurity over the control of the white male body (1989: 302). Within the above annual the reader finds several features on the issue of race, including one on the Australian aboriginal, entitled 'The Cannibal of Central Australia' (1868: 47). An early example of this shift within phrenology was Orson Fowler's *Hereditary Descent: Its Laws and Facts Applied to Human Improvement* (1848). Thirty-five years prior to the first major work on eugenics Fowler is concerned with the use of breeding to improve the human stock.[4] In one sense, phrenology in the latter half of the 19th century became caught up in the scientific and popular interest in heredity at that time. This more physiognomic phrenology was also heavily used in books and manuals aimed at self-improvement that was not so subtly linked to the wider improvement of the race or nation. One example in the area of self-improvement involved the application of phrenological knowledge to choice of partner. Lorenzo Fowler's *Marriage, its History and Ceremonies, with a Phrenological and Physiological Exposition of the Functions and Qualifications for Happy Marriages* (1860) contained a wealth of advice in relation to which physical types were suitable to marry each other. Again, the boundary between phrenology and physiognomy is blurred, with many images used to point out particular physiognomies to be avoided.

However, it is inaccurate to portray phrenology as a knowledge that solely ended up as part of that group of pseudo-sciences employed to naturalize racism, Eurocentrism, class inequality, patriarchy and species-ism. Like eugenics in the early 20th century, phrenology was similarly claimed by socialists and feminists as a justice-enhancing body of knowledge. Simplified, this apparent contradiction in the case of phrenology hinged significantly over the difference between taking a constructivist or an essentialist view of the phrenological faculties. Nevertheless, the role of a physiognomic phrenology in the pseudo-scientific justification of social hierarchy cannot be denied. Indeed, it may be argued that phrenology was a neglected theoretical parent of 20th-century eugenics. The founder of

eugenics, Francis Galton (1822–1911), lived through and was raised in the same culture in which phrenology and physiognomy had flourished. Like the culture he grew up in, Galton became very interested in human physicality, appearance and classification. He was convinced that he came from superior genetic stock (his cousin was Charles Darwin) and in 1869 published his *Hereditary Genius.* He argued that a society must provide more favourable conditions so that the hereditary transmission of 'superior' talent could be passed on. His most important work on eugenics, entitled *Inquiries into Human Faculty* (1883), appears to give a linguistic nod to phrenology. Galton also had a strong interest in phrenology during the mid-19th century. As Kerles reports, Galton was fascinated by phrenological measurements and, around 1849, he actually consulted the London Phrenological Institution for a phrenological reading where he was told that his 'skull measured twenty-two inches around, that he possessed a sanguine temperament with considerable self-will, self-regard, and no small share of obstinacy' (1985: 6–7). Yet more convincing evidence that Galton's eugenics were significantly influenced by a physiognomic phrenology is found in some of his work and methodology. In his *Memories of My Life* (1909), Galton recalls his creation of a 'Beauty Map' of the British Isles, in which he ranked women from different cities in terms of their assumed aesthetic qualities. Moreover, in *Inquiries into Human Faculty* (1883), Galton employed the method of 'composite portraiture', a series of similar photos of the same subject compiled together that were supposed to be more representative. These were used to physiognomically represent those of 'inferior' stock such as 'criminal types'. As Galton wrote 'The effect of composite portraiture is to *bring into evidence all the traits* in which there is agreement, and to leave but a ghost of a trace of individual peculiarities' (1883: 10, my emphasis). This was very similar to the slightly later work of the well-known Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso that re-emphasized criminality as physiognomically written on the body, for example, the view of female criminals as having thicker than average jaws (Lombroso and Ferrero, 1895: 18). These examples of eugenics and criminal anthropology are significant. The former emphasizes a neglected route of phrenological discourse, and both suggest that physiognomic discourse was able to ride the wave of phrenology and give impetus to new assertions of truth up until at least the start of the 20th century. However, as I wish to point out, the effect of these discourses was hardly vacuumed away as the 20th century[5] progressed, and important tenets of physiognomic discourse remain entrenched today. With this in mind I want to conclude with some thoughts on the problem physiognomy has with the temporality of the body as well as the consequences it has for relations between self and other.

The Problems of Physiognomic Discourse

I should attempt to specify what features of physiognomic discourse remain today. The 20th century has seen further developments which enhance the belief that the body is readable and in some sense indicative of character. Of obvious importance here is the advent of capitalist consumerism that has generalized tenets of physiognomy to intensify the importance of clothing but also other material possessions, as indicative of character. While assessments of character based on appearance may be simply unreliable, it is when such perceptions become related to attributing moral value that they become more pernicious. Of interest to me here is the representationalism of physiognomy. Although the critique of representationalism within language is well established, if not wholly adopted, representationalism within our *visual* discourses is barely touched upon. Indeed, physiognomy profited during the Enlightenment from its crowning of the visual as the king of the sensory hierarchy. Contained herein have been the associations of seeing with believing, and of vision with truth, that 18th- and 19th-century physiognomy embodied. However, there is no static configuration of the senses for human ontology, but historical variation.

Moreover, the correlating of identity with appearance is not timeless or absolute. The naturalized idea that we inevitably judge by appearance is challenged by this historicization of physiognomic perception. Contemporary assertions of truth still rely upon this physiognomic logic that allows us all too easily to mark out others and carelessly categorize them. Inferiorizations of others along lines of age, gender, class, 'race' and species are complex and different but there is a commonality in that they all draw upon a physiognomic marking of a body that makes unsubstantiated and generalized claims upon the subjectivity of the (human) being in question. Aged skin and senility, black skin and criminality, such stereotypes still inform the social scene. We continue to give life to specific physiognomic and phrenological language when we speak of people as 'high or lowbrow', 'thick-headed' or 'thick-necked'. Moreover, links between appearance and identity are often the subtext to many contemporary issues related to self. For example, it is difficult to account for cosmetic surgery without those involved holding a commitment to a belief in physiognomy. However, I do not wish to reproduce a denigration of the visual for it is surely plural, as when it provides a conduit for intersubjectivity and empathy. A further disclaimer is that critiques of physiognomic discourse not fall into the trap of dualistically prioritizing mind over body as constitutive of identity, as in 'it's what's on the inside that counts'. This retains the inside/outside aspect of the dualism and somewhat misses the point. That is to say, my particular critique of physiognomy is not about

excluding the body from our self-constitution, but about resisting the body's entrapment within physiognomic discourse that tends to define our bodies *for us*. So what is at issue here is the way in which physiognomic discourse promotes for the self an objectifying visuality that closes off the encounter with the subjectivity of another *and* encourages self-constitutive practices that largely equate *appearance* with identity. The role of physiognomic representationalism in this visuality is most clearly challenged by introducing a sense of temporality into our conception of embodiment. This move also undermines contemporary practices such as cosmetic surgery.

I want to argue that the failure to take account of the temporality of the body reflects the failure to see the body as simultaneously part of both nature and culture. In order to begin this it is useful to return to the methodology of Lavaterian physiognomy. To recall, physiognomy at this time was involved in making a distinction between itself and pathognomy, which was the study of those changeable, gestural features of the face, thought to signify the passions. Thus, Lavater thought that physiognomy would reveal those underlying and unchanging features of the face apart from one's pathognomy.[6] For Lavater, the question of how to represent a person's physiognomy 'scientifically' was resolved partly by using plates such as in Figure 1 above, but especially by use of the silhouette. On the use of the silhouette, for which he designed his own machine (an adapted chair), Lavater writes:

> Silhouettes alone have extended my physiognomic knowledge, more than any kind of portrait. . . . We see in it neither motion, nor light, nor colour, nor rising, nor cavity. . . . The silhouette arrests the attention: by fixing it on the exterior contours alone, it simplifies the observation, which becomes by that more easy and accurate. . . . The silhouette is a positive and incontestable proof of the reality of the Science of Physiognomics. (1789: 176–8)

Thus for Lavater the silhouette took motion out of the face and represented the 'true' physiognomy on which 'scientific' character judgements could be made. To take this a step further, as Stafford points out, Lavater also viewed the dead body as an appropriately stilled subject for physiognomic analysis (1991: 100). Indeed, this led to the practice of obtaining death masks of the deceased that were used in both physiognomic and phrenological studies.

This example of using casts of the dead perhaps gives us a clue as to one of the underlying anxieties of physiognomic logic. In the long-standing drama of the culture/nature dualism, it has typically been culture that has been associated with temporality and agency, features that have been selectively denied to both nature and embodiment. Indeed, one discourse of nature draws upon this assumed atemporality when certain behaviours are labelled 'unnatural' in a normative sense (homosexuality most obviously). The attempt to abstract a static physiognomy

from pathognomy was erroneous since the body, and the face specifically, are continually in flux. This motion can be thought of in both the short and long term: the former being the subtle and infinite changes in a face informed by motion and light, and the latter the changes to the body over the life course. The use of death masks as physiognomic tools provides the clue. May it be that the denial of temporality to the body is unconsciously a denial of physical change and ultimately one's own demise? In the contemporary social scene, cosmetic surgery then can be thought of as the fulfilment of this view of the body, as it attempts to reverse or suspend the body's temporality and mortal fate.

Physiognomy's atemporal view of the body is informed by its assumption that the body *is* nature and so *outside* culture. However, recognizing that the human body is simultaneously both natural and cultural reinforces a sense of the body's multi-temporality. Lavater's belief that one could assess the morality of a person from their appearance discounted the fact that appearance and the body are socially constructed. A person may come to be understood as 'looking intelligent' or 'looking good'[7] but this is merely down to the socially constructed associating of one signifier with one signified. Sociologically, physiognomic knowledge is problematic because appearance is *unpredictably* located within a vast array of changeable meanings *and* also what we understand as a 'good' or 'bad character' varies across time and space. Moreover, a person's character is often difficult to pinpoint morally, with both moral ambiguity and hypocrisy often relevant. How would such characters then appear to us? Similarly, one's sense of self changes over the life course. A person may *become* what a particular culture defines as more or less moral. Does their face then exhibit a corresponding change? Similar objections to physiognomy were raised during Lavater's time and underline some of its problems.

We can further specify the complicity of physiognomic discourse with representationalism. Just as the representational theory of language attempts to arrest the instability of meaning, physiognomic discourse disciplines and freezes the inherent flux involved in the emotionality and materiality of the body. On physiognomy Magli writes:

> Such a symbolising process introduces us into a new time: no longer is it the non-time of an actual face, lost in the interrupted fluctuation of lights and shadows. Rather, it is the time of a 'measure' that stills things, develops a formal image and locks it into an absolute fixidity, wherein it then interprets proportions, defines outlines, and attempts to establish essential traits. (1989: 90)

In its desire to be recognized by the scientific mainstream, physiognomy employed methods that resembled the wider scientific orientation toward the body and nature. The body became abstracted from time and context, and became

in extreme a rather mathematized representation. These abstraction and classificatory processes directed at the body at least gave it a partial resemblance to Western science's dualistic hierarchy of reason over embodiment, the emotions and nature.

Physiognomic discourse is not difficult to critique; shaking off its perceptual agenda is more problematic. Its reappearance in some New Age settings (Synnott, 1993: 81) also illustrates how the discourse is subject to periodic revival. It is hoped that this critique of physiognomy can form a small part of a turn toward alternative social relations and assist in the exposé of the cosmetic surgery industry. More theoretically, the representationalism of physiognomy encourages us to think that, because two qualities may appear in tandem there is then a self-evident correlation between them. The continued faith in the belief of a static correspondence between appearance and essence engenders false confidence in our judgement of, and relation to, others. In turn, this encourages a further leap of faith when we falsely attribute motive to others based upon visual cues. In her important *The Fashioned Self* Joanne Finkelstein correctly identifies this tendency to collapse signifier and signified, writing 'intellectuality is not a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles' (1991: 174). That we do confuse the two has an enormous, yet largely unresolved, consequence for our social relations with others. If the rendering static of physiognomic categories serves a purpose for our ontological security then I would suggest that an alternative, less oppressive, strategy would be beneficial.

If in our everyday social practices we remain complicit with this physiognomically inspired representationalism, we forego meaningful interaction with others. There arises a communicational abyss wherein the other is not allowed to speak for themselves, the 'social' remains largely unestablished and the self unchallenged. The discourses of physiognomy play an important role in the filling of this abyss. They run counter to a truly social and relational self that should, in Maclaren's words, offer 'no final word of who I am, nor of who you are' (1998: 8). While physiognomy can be said to provide for social relations, these are of poor quality. More seriously, they encourage a perceptual filter that objectifies the other. As Plumwood has written 'The self that complements the instrumental treatment of the other is one . . . that is defined against others, and lacks essential connection to them' (1996: 170). As physiognomy inserts its own meanings into interaction, it works against intersubjective social connection and often confines interaction to a preliminary *visual* as opposed to a verbal and/or listening experience.

Perhaps the first stage to less prejudicial social relations is to recognize the determining power of physiognomic discourse. It is not too difficult to realize

reflexively when one is 'judging by appearance'. The next step would be to promote a more patient relation to otherness that does not make a rush to judgement. This social self would be living more temporally in several ways. First, this self would be aware that appearance is transient from day to day. Second, this self would allow others to change both in terms of appearance and identity. Finally, this self would be equipped with the knowledge that aesthetic categories such as 'beauty' are historically and socially constructed and contested. This temporal wisdom would erode the power of representational physiognomic discourse and perhaps facilitate more social self–other relations, not so based upon denying the other a voice, and denying the self a connection.

Notes

1. There is some debate over whether Aristotle was the actual author of *Physiognomics* or whether it was written by one of his students.
2. It was not published until 1857.
3. Admittedly, the physiognomy in phrenology linking appearance with character could also be read as a weak counter-dualistic move. I argue that physiognomy, in the specific way that it connects mind and body, is an example of a non-emancipatory counter-dualistic move.
4. The works of the Fowlers first became available in Britain during the early 1850s, although not *widely* available until the 1860s (Cooter, 1984: 262).
5. It is possible to trace a lineage between phrenological discourse and the Nazi Holocaust. During the Second World War, the SS formed a department called the '*Ahnenerbe*' that dealt with issues of cultural heritage. In 1942 this recruited a Dr August Hirt (1898–?), a German anatomist. At his request 86 men and women (largely Jewish) were killed at Auschwitz and their bodies were taken to his hospital in Strassburg, France. By conducting pseudo-anthropological examinations of the skulls of these bodies, Hirt and the *Ahnenerbe* aimed to resurrect the late 19th-century practice of using phrenology to naturalize national and/or racial hierarchy. After the war it is thought that Hirt escaped (see Lachman, 1977).
6. This issue of temporality also separates 19th-century physiognomy from contemporary academic studies of the face and non-verbal communication (see, for example, Zebrowitz, 1997).
7. The phrase 'looking good' is perhaps the most popular physiognomic phrase in contemporary Western culture, especially at the outset of the 21st century. This echoes the belief of Platonic and Lavaterian physiognomy that there is a harmony between moral and corporeal beauty. The view that the beautiful are good and the ugly are bad remains culturally entrenched. This is, of course, partly perpetuated by an initial axiomatic faith in such aesthetic categories.

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Richard Twine recently completed his PhD thesis, 'Ecofeminism and the "New" Sociologies: A Collaboration against Dualism', at the Department of Sociology at Manchester Metropolitan University. His interests include the sociology of the body, environmental sociology and eco/feminist theory. He has published in the journal *Ethics and the Environment*, and has run the ecofeminism website www.ecofem.org since 1996.