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Reading the Face: Lavater in the Twenty-first Century

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6. Reading the Face: Lavater in the Twenty-first Century

In 1982, Graeme Tytler wrote the following in his preface to *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes*: 'Physiognomy is a word seldom used nowadays in ordinary discourse; indeed, such is its rarity that even academics, on hearing it mentioned, tend to be unsure of its meaning.' (Tytler xiii) He goes on to bemoan the lack of gifted physiognomists:

> unlike our nineteenth-century forebears, who took this science seriously enough to keep physiognomic books in their libraries, we are hardly more proficient at telling character or predicting behavior from a consideration of the outward man than we are at forecasting the weather from a glance at cloud formations. (Tytler xiii)

Tytler cursorily dismisses what he refers to as the 'homely instructions on the art of reading the face' that have been fostered by the popular press as part of the 'same mediocrity as the cult of astrology.' (Tytler xiii) Yet it is odd that Tytler has so little tolerance for the contemporary popular practice of 'face-reading,' when the premise of his book has everything to do with the popular cult of physiognomy from the time of the 1775-1778 publication of the Zurich pastor Johann Caspar Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beforderung der Menschenkentniss und Menschenliebe* or *Essays on Physiognomy* to the later decades of the nineteenth century as suggested by the subtitle of his book, *Faces and Fortunes*.[1] Tytler's disdain for the entertainment provided by self-trained physiognomists in the nineteen-eighties is discredited by his enthusiastic acknowledgment of 'an extraordinary physiognomic cult' in the seventeen-eighties as Lavater's contemporaries Fülleborn and Wezel[2] both confirmed in their work. To quote Fülleborn, 'How quickly Lavaterian ideas and language influenced literature as well as everyday life can be easily imagined.' Wezel's 1785 testimony is no less convincing: 'Almost everybody has his own physiognomic alphabet, according to which he deciphers the nature and activities of his fellow men.' (Tytler 78) Publishing on Lavater at the turn of the last century, scholar Heinrich Maier added even more wood to the fire: 'Physiognomy became very

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popular in German and mostly so in aristocratic circles. Whether at court, or in the boudoirs of the most elegant society ladies, Lavater was a favorite topic of conversation, and it was considered the done thing to make physiognomic readings of one another.' (Tytler 79) Tytler closes this part of his argument by showing how difficult it was at the time to predict whether physiognomy would become an exact science or not. For Lavater had captured both the popular and the scientific imagination of his time in the same way that the emerging science of anthropology had, and there was no reason to doubt that it, too, would evolve into a bonafide area of continuing scholarly inquiry. Instead, as we know, physiognomy did not share the bright future enjoyed by the science of man in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nor, however, did the 'pseudo-science' ever disappear. It appears in fact that physiognomy and anthropology may be experiencing reciprocal reversals of fortune in recent years.

No Auguste Comte, Franz Boas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Bronislaw Malinowski or Margaret Mead had come along to launch and codify physiognomy as a science or social science with a shared set of methods in the way that such a group of scholars had ushered in anthropology with successive generations maintaining the discipline's viability during the nineteenth century and for most of the twentieth. Indeed, anthropology's goal of describing and classifying cultures was very appealing to both colonial and post-colonial mindsets, albeit for totally different and opposing reasons, which have ironically perpetuated the status of anthropology as a discipline. For nineteenth-century positivists, cultural anthropology offered unerring evidence that progress was indeed culturally based and that the West had an obligation and a right to civilize. Anthropology appealed to and even promoted all national European economies, identities, and ideologies, while physiognomy, which targeted the individual and served no national agenda, certainly had no political advocates. Suffice it to say that the writing of ethnographies and the practice of cultural anthropology have suffered criticism that targets the 'scientific' claims of these activities today, debasing them in the worst case scenario to subjective stories with little or no intrinsic merit and little relevance in the eyes of interdisciplinary scholars such as Clifford Geertz and James Clifford. These contemporary scholars began questioning the very premises upon which nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century notions of culture were predicated through the writing of critical ethnographies of the West which employ the theoretical tools of semiotics and deconstruction to shed light on our fascination with cultural anthropology.[3] Today the field of anthropology is fraught with critiques within its own ranks concerning the need or lack thereof of scientific viability. In his book on the Mead-Freeman controversy that pit culture against

biology, anthropologist Martin Orans attacks the way cultural anthropology has been practiced: 'From the outset, most cultural anthropologists have practiced the discipline as though unaware of the requirement of verifiability...The requirement of verifiability is considered by these anthropologists to be a manifestation of "positivism," which they regard as outmoded.' (Orans 10-11) The hold of science and its definition are clearly in flux, and it is precisely this kind of questioning that resides at the heart of our culture's consideration of alternative methods and the blurring of the lines between science and pseudo-science.

Keeping this in mind, let us briefly examine the 'scientific' trajectory of Lavater's ideas and their convoluted history. Lavater's predecessors and most especially those who came after him constituted a fractious group. Of primary concern are those in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century who, though disputing and debunking Lavater's claims, sought at the same time to erect their own edifice on the ruins of physiognomy by establishing a reputable branch that would garner them fame and glory. Lavater himself stated in the first volume of his *Physiognomische Fragmente* that physiognomy was about to become 'the science of sciences,' and the initial reaction to the publication of the *Fragmente* was extremely positive.[4] However, sharp criticism from Georg Christoph Lichtenberg attacked the scientific designs of physiognomy by calling for a study of human character that would take into account a person's deeds rather than his features. Though successful at dampening the 'scientific' euphoria that Lavater's text had inspired in men of letters and science from Bonnet to Haller in Switzerland, to Goethe and Herder in Germany, physiognomy merely moved underground, demoted to the rank of pseudo-science, which, it should be noted, seems to have done nothing to diminish its practice and, on the contrary, appears to have caused the numbers of its followers to burgeon.[5]

At the cusp of the twenty-first century, physiognomy once again occupies a curiously hybrid position, receiving consistent, albeit cautious, attention from the scholarly community in branches of psychology known as 'personology' and social psychology, and an enthusiastic, quasi cult-like acceptance from a wildly popular branch of increasingly applied popular psychology which also goes by the name of 'personology.' The theories of Leopold Szondi also appear to be directly related to Lavaterian physiognomy. A Hungarian-born psychiatrist who became a permanent resident of Zurich at the end of World War II, Szondi developed the Szondi Test beginning in 1930 to obtain better results from psychiatric interviews.

The Szondi Test consists of 48 photographs of pure psychopathic types of patients. There are eight groups of six patients with photographs of each. Test

subjects are instructed to choose the faces of the patients they like or dislike. The kinds and numbers of selections or absences are analyzed and interpreted. (Hughes 1)

Although similar to the Rorschach Test as a projective tool, the Szondi Test and Szondi's theories, which fall predominantly in the areas of family studies and psychiatric genetics, have received little attention in the United States in comparison with the reading of inkblots.[6] While far more research needs to be conducted to establish the correspondences between Lavater and Szondi, it is obvious that reading inkblots has more scientific cachet in the United States than the reading of the face. While the reasons for such diagnostic preferences are not clear, it is likely that the pseudo-science stigma associated with reading the face has a great deal to do with this preference. However, Szondi's time may not be far off, as non-traditional, 'holistic' diagnostic methods continue to make dramatic inroads in the medical field today, especially in California's New Age marketplace. The majority of these techniques rely upon the 'reading' of parts of the body, such as the iris, feet, skin, hair, or alignment of the spine for their diagnosis, with new hybrid sciences and treatments such as 'psychic chiropractics' cropping up on a daily basis and receiving serious consideration from the press.[7] The growing symbiosis of scientific and pseudo-scientific methods in our time parallels a similar set of circumstances at the end of the eighteenth century in which the likes of Cagliostro and Mesmer existed alongside Galvani and Volta.

This article explores both the current scholarly and popular manifestations of trends juxtaposing science and pseudo-science and their relationship to Lavater's *Essays*; it also points out the fine, and at times imperceptible line separating the two. Indeed, it is the conflation of science and pseudo-science, and by the same token, high and popular culture that embodies the culture of the late twentieth century as well as that of the late eighteenth century, when cultural products increasingly became an intermingling of both.[8] The ideas of C. W. E. Bigsby are particularly relevant in this context. Bigsby attributes the fuzziness of the boundaries between high and popular culture to the act of appropriation by which popular and high culture borrow from each other reciprocally over time to the point where one is indistinguishable from the other. (Kammen 6) In the case of Lavaterian physiognomy, we shall see that the appropriation of Lavater's ideas by the masses provoked the outcry of his strongest critic, Lichtenberg.

A number of scientific studies have appeared in very recent years in the field of social psychology that reappropriate physiognomy for scientific study; two that are worth mentioning and their authors' credentials worth citing will be used to assess the place of physiognomy as a

scientific pursuit. The first is *Reading Faces: Window to the Soul?* (1997) by Leslie A. Zebrowitz who is Manuel Yellen Professor of Social Relations and professor of psychology at Brandeis University, and the second, *In the Eye of the Beholder: The Science of Face Perception* (1998), written by Vicki Bruce, University of Stirling, and Andy Young, University of York, to accompany an exhibition on 'The Science of the Face,' held at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Spring 1998. These studies and their antecedents in the 1970's and 1980's that are discussed at the end of this article attest to a growing body of evidence that pseudo-science or science, physiognomy again enjoys a role as interpretive tool that not only cannot be ignored, but must be explored in order to tap its full potential under a variety of different names and disciplines.

It should also be noted that the parallels drawn in this article have been made between the science of 'reading the face' that existed at the end of the eighteenth century (physiognomy) and personology, which is the term used at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first both by psychologists who study the relationship between physical characteristics and the development of personality, and by 'personologists' who read features as a means of predicting one's fate. Although this article does not delve far into the science of pathogomy, i.e., the reading of facial expression, physiognomy and pathogomy developed side by side and were alternately invoked as complementary and disparate sciences. For example, Lavater's sharpest contemporary detractor, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, employed pathogomy as the primary weapon in his arsenal when he criticized the premises upon which Lavater's study of the static features of the face had been built, preferring a 'semiotics of affects.' Not a few have speculated that Lichtenberg's attack on Lavater's views stemmed from the debunker's own unattractive appearance; Lichtenberg's emphasis on expression shifted the center of the discourse away from the lockstep correspondences that had been drawn between facial features and moral traits toward the role of social circumstances as determining agents in human behavior. In his preference for pathognomy over physiognomy, Lichtenberg had wisely tapped into a line of research related to problems of representation that had dominated French thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Pathognomy had therefore acquired a certain amount of credence in learned circles, starting with the reading of expression espoused by the seventeenth-century artist, Charles Le Brun, author of *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (1688). Le Brun's work ushered in the centuries-long French preoccupation with the æsthetic of facial expression in the visual and performing arts which has been traced in French artistic practice in the work of Maurice Quentin de La Tour and Jean-Baptiste Greuze, among others.[9] However, Lichtenberg's decision to

formally critique Lavaterian principles was primarily a reaction to the cult-like frenzy that Lavater's *Fragmente* had provoked, with the sudden rise of a spate of self-appointed physiognomists whose analyses had moved beyond the realm of passing fad and drawing room activity to accepted tool in criminal proceedings. Lichtenberg's critique specifically aims at sabotaging these practitioners of physiognomy as its title, *Über die Physiognomik; wider die Physiognomen*, (*On Physiognomy; Against Physiognomists*) would indicate.[10]

At first glance, it would seem that the scholarly community might want to dismiss the cult-like aura that the practice of 'personology' readings wears in the 'New-Age' era at the end of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that 'personology' in its popular form is associated not only with astrologers but also psychics, it is impossible to dismiss the practice out of hand because like graphology, its application is far-reaching, affecting the very hiring practices of corporate America and the careers of tens of thousands of its employees, a practice akin to the use of physiognomy in court cases that Lichtenberg had objected to. It is sobering to realize that a growing number of employers is just as inclined to have the picture you've sent in with your application for a position analyzed for physiognomic suitability as they are to submit your handwriting to the graphologist's scrutiny or the remains of your morning tea to the laboratory to determine which drugs you may have consumed six months earlier. Through the diffusion mechanisms of mass culture, the popular culture practice of reading the face has been institutionalized as an everyday assessment tool that is available to Human Resources departments in corporations nationwide.

Not that the scenario was much different in the day-to-day application of Lavaterian principles at the beginning of the nineteenth century. To quote *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1801:

> In Switzerland, in Germany, in France, even in Britain, all the world became passionate admirers of the Physiognomic Science of Lavater. His books published in the German language were multiplied by many editions. In the enthusiasm with which they were studied and admired, they were bought as necessary reading in every family as even the Bible itself. A servant would, at one time, scarcely be hired till the descriptions and engravings of Lavater had been consulted in careful comparison with the lines and features of the young man's or woman's countenance.

Since ours is an eighteenth-century audience, it is likely that physiognomy and Lavater are far better known to the reader than are personology and George Roman, the 'nationally known personologist' as he is billed in the October 1999 issue of *Movieline* magazine, where he was

hired by the editors to determine which popular singers might have the greatest chance of 'crossing over' to screen acting.[11] Charles Oakley, author of the article 'Singers On-Screen,' informs his readers about the nature of the evidence they are about to be offered regarding the likelihood that their favorite singers will achieve comparable or greater fame in film:

> With a bumper crop of late '90's recording artists storming movie studio gates, it's time to take a look at the goods these contenders have to offer. Deciding to leave aside such subjective matters as whether or not they can act, we took a scientific approach and enlisted nationally known 'personologist' George Roman to apply his expertise to the question of who among these warblers has what it takes to be a screen star. (*Movieline* 54)

Having conjured up the specter of science, the author decides he had better define his terms, just in case the material is beyond the grasp of his readership: 'Personology, which is basically a disciplined form of "face reading" correlates physical genetic facial features, such as the set of the eyes, the shape of the nose or the height of the forehead, to specific personality traits.' (*Movieline*, 54) Sound familiar? Let us recall Lavater's definition of physiognomy:

> When I speak of Physiognomy considered as a Science, I comprehend under the term Physiognomy, all the external signs which, in Man, directly force themselves on the observer, — every feature, every outline, every modification, active or passive, every attitude and position of the human body, in a word, everything that contributes immediately to the knowledge of Man, whether active or passive — everything that shows him as he really is (Lavater, 1789, Vol. I, p. 20);

and about science he said, 'whenever truth of knowledge is explained by fixed principle it becomes scientific.' We are struck by the similarity in these two definitions. Through empirical observation and application of systematic practice, one arrives at an understanding of the person, or the personality. Indeed, the scientific nature of the study is based precisely on the observation of material man, or in the case of Lavater, living men and women, as well as death masks, skulls, paintings, engravings, silhouettes and busts of historical figures. Concerned, however, with the need to control the observational environment, Lavater owned and used the silhouette machine, an apparatus that could make silhouettes of any one person.[12] Thanks to this simple and easily applied technology, it was possible to create multiple copies of one's profile for more widespread consumption.

By the end of the eighteenth century, aristocrats were exchanging silhouettes, and no doubt analyzing them, as well as sending them to Lavater for interpretation. By the same token, the twenty-first century personologist also requires a controlled observational environment. George Roman's website informs the candidate who desires a consultation that 'Personology is a very visual science and needs to see you in person, in lieu of which, you may use photos shot from different angles to get the three-dimensional effect for the analysis.' If you opt for the virtual reading, which will arrive through e-mail, you must send $65 and photos for the analysis that include:

1. Clear headshot, full front face with forehead exposed.
2. Clear full left side profile headshot with full ear exposed.
3. Clear full right side profile headshot with full ear exposed.
4. Clear full body shot, from head to toe.
5. Clear shot of both hands; fingers extended with palms facing forward.

Please make sure there are no blurred or cut off pictures. Make sure everything is clear, close up and complete. If you have had any plastic surgery or reconstructive surgery, please let me know. Also, photos before the surgery will be required for an accurate profile. (Roman)

Both Lavater and the twenty-first century personologist agree on the inability to change who one is through manipulation of the outer structure, based, in both cases, on the notion that man's outward appearance, whether taken as a whole or in parts, is a manifestation of his inner self. (Tytler 68) Lavater warns the amateur physiognomist of the deception of some appearances, but claims that with experience, the expert physiognomist can read the true physiognomy and character of the subject. Although George Roman claims in his website that misreading is impossible even when the facial structure has been altered, the photo instructions that request pre-plastic or reconstructive surgery photos probably attest to the fact that most surgery is so good these days that not even the experts can tell. Modern surgical techniques aside, however, both the eighteenth-century physiognomist and the twenty-first century personologist share a similar philosophy about their mission and its purpose. To quote G.P. Brooks and R.W. John's article 'Contributions to the History of Psychology: Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*,' Lavater deserves recognition because he argued for psychology as a legitimate field of human science, held the general goal of developing a psychology of personality, and argued for the understanding of individual differences and the application of the system to the understanding and controlling of every-day events. (Brooks and John 10-11)

Despite the banal, hollywoodian aura of its contemporary metamorphosis, personologist George Roman's purpose in analyzing the singers

who are the subject of the *Movieline* magazine article is not too different. Indeed, Roman's procedure shares striking similarities with that of the physiognomist Lavater. Once they have defined physiognomy/personology for their reader, both authors provide a series of visual and textual 'fragments' that they have analyzed. Fully aware of the value of name recognition, both offer the public a series of well-known countenances with the accompanying analyses underneath. Whether these figures be representative of the *République des lettres* of the eighteenth century, or the *République des étoiles* of Hollywood, there is an uncanny similarity in procedure, resulting in something akin to today's 'celebrity endorsement' of a product, method, or procedure, which lends instantaneous credence and authority to both the results and the practitioners. Coupled with the cult of celebrity and working in tandem with it, the visual nature of Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*, replete with engravings of prominent men, fanned the flames of popular consumption of Lavater's work, theories, and his own persona. Here, too, Lavater's selection of the engraver of European reputation, childhood friend Johann Heinrich Füssli, was not idle.[13] A Zurich native, Füssli had made a name for himself throughout Europe, and particularly in England, where he settled and from where he collaborated with Lavater and Henry Hunter on the English translation of the *Essays*. In marketing terms, the Füssli-Lavater coupling was the surest way to enhance and expand the reputation and following of both in the 1780's, when the original German and the French translation of the *Essays* had already been in circulation for ten years.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe's relationship and dealings with Lavater in the early years of their careers demonstrate the mutual benefit derived by both from the eighteenth-century form of celebrity endorsement. His abiding interest in Lavater and physiognomy and his use of physiognomic principles in his own work are well documented.[14] He visited Lavater, traveled with him, and publicly acknowledged the importance of Lavaterian ideals. Not surprisingly, Goethe was one of Lavater's favorite subjects of analysis, a perfect specimen whose inner genius and innate style and natural grace were reflected in his face. Lavater was fulsome in his praise of Goethe's profile: 'How gentle, how utterly without awkwardness, constraint, tension, or flabbiness! How effortlessly and harmoniously the contour of the profile curves from the top of the forehead down to the collar.' (Tytler 62)

Goethe himself had become something of a cult figure subsequent to the publication of *Werther*. He had shared his developing manuscript of the novella with Lavater, clearly seeing in the physiognomist and his ideas a vision that was consonant with the emerging esthetic and discourse of the *Sturm und Drang* and pre-romanticism. Goethe and Lavater

saw in each other the representation of a distinct cultural moment, one that became immediately identifiable with their personae.[15] Lavater's claims about the essential characteristics necessary for the expert physiognomist further substantiate this point. Lavater described in detail the attributes of the physiognomist, who should possess a fine physique and all of the moral and intellectual qualities that automatically correspond to physical beauty:

> No one whose person is not well formed, can become a good physiognomist...As the most virtuous can best determine on virtue, and the just on justice: so can the most handsome countenances on the goodness, beauty, and noble traits of the human countenance, and consequently on its defects and ignoble properties. The scarcity of human beauty is the reason why physiognomy is so much decried, and finds so many opponents. (Lavater, from the 1793 Robinson translation, 85, cited in Bruce and Young 142)

His description even included life style advice. The successful physiognomist should surround himself as much as possible with people who have 'good faces,' people who are, by virtue of their physical beauty, the best that society has to offer. (Tytler 65-66)

Goethe and Lavater's friendship mutually fulfilled this requirement. Both had become cultural icons and both were regularly 'seen' in the company of the cultural icons of the moment. As we have already stated, Goethe's rise to the pinnacle of European cultural adulation is well documented and regularly cited as one of the first examples of mass hero worship and emulation, one in which the writer and his hero, Werther, became a single figure in the public imagination. Less well known to the non-specialist is Lavater's public persona and following. Tytler recounts Bernese mystic Julie Bondeli's comment about wanting to keep Lavater's visit to her a secret so as to avoid a mob of people seeking him out for physiognomical readings. (60)

George Roman's analyses reveal a similar awareness of the relationship between personology as an indicator of taste and culture. Particularly pertinent in his gallery is the smiling picture of Cuban-American singer Gloria Estefan, accompanied by the following personology profile: 'She's got the charismatic, persuasive sparkle that our entire culture responds to. The set of her mouth and "the oral expression lines" around it suggest she's good with words. Her wide face means she's confident and inspires confidence.' (*Movieline* 56) Roman, whose website locates him in Beverly Hills, bills himself as the personologist to the stars — and the stars, as we know, are the beautiful people. In the millennial permutation of the Lavaterian world, physiognomy is pursued as a tool for power and success rather than as a window to the soul, but the kind of

discourse and the way in which it represents a particular cultural ideal is identical to the one that prevailed at the end of the long eighteenth century. The right face and body translate into success in Hollywood — from the best roles and the best clothes to the best parties and the best (read most attractive) spouses. The Lavaterian notion that outward appearance represents the inner and the corollary that 'beauty and ugliness are expressions of virtue and vice respectively' (Tytler 68) find their twenty-first century correspondences in the beauty equals success, ugliness equals failure paradigm. Whereas Lavater's analyses of portraits, silhouettes, engravings, and drawings indicate the propensities for virtue or vice in their subjects, George Roman's personology profiles articulate their conclusions through the discourse of hollywoodian success or failure. Whitney Houston's profile contains all of the elements of what it takes to be a success in Hollywood: 'No wonder she's a star. The charisma of those eyes pulls people right in. The visible eyelids say, "Don't bore me with details." She's not an analyzer, but an action-oriented person, and the mouth says she's generous and impetuous. She'd be a star at whatever she tried.' (*Movieline* 59) The profile of ex-spice girl Geri Halliwell is also reported as a success. Her facial structure expresses the strength required by the job and the single-minded endurance it takes to succeed. 'Look at that jaw — it's the jaw of a commander! Think of George Patton or Winston Churchill. If this girl had to crush you, she would do it, to win at any game. She's a standout in any situation, definitely not a team player.' (*Movieline* 58) Rap singer LL Cool J's picture elicits a combination of what Roman found in the faces of Whitney Houston and Geri Halliwell: 'This is a forceful, powerful, confident person — the wide face indicates that. He shows charisma in his eyes that draws people in. You'd want to believe this guy, no matter what he said because of the strong lower face. I'd see this person toughing it out to the bitter end. He's a survivor all the way.' (*Movieline* 59) A common feature of the analyses of faces of success is the descriptors used. Gloria Estefan, Whitney Houston, and LL Cool J are all described as having charisma or as being charismatic, Geri Halliwell and LL Cool J as being powerful and confident, and all of them as possessing a potential to rivet the onlooker, which is what Hollywood is all about, rather than the listener, which is what the successful singer is required to do, but not the successful actor or actress.

George Roman's analysis of faces of failure, however, is far more introspective and moralizing, suggesting that unattractive features and looks provoke feelings of mistrust, and therefore failure. The language used to describe these more sinister-looking individuals largely mirrors Lavater's. When Lavater wanted to make a particularly emphatic point about a certain universal type, he used the technique of the multiple

fragment, that is, a cluster of smaller drawings of heads analyzed as a group. One of these groups depicts four heads, three of which have their eyes cast downward, long noses and melancholy expressions. Of them, Lavater says, 'No man will expect cheerfulness, tranquillity, content, strength of mind, and magnanimity of numbers 9-12.' George Roman has scarcely better to say about a ghoulish photograph of Marilyn Manson. Manson's personology profile reads:

> His long, thin face means he lacks inherent confidence, but gains it through knowledge. The close-set eyes mean low tolerance, a judgmental nature and a tendency to be quick to react. The nose tells you he knows the monetary value of things. The full lower lip means he's both verbal and impetuous. His slanted-back forehead means he's decisive, but he's not built to be in charge.

Alanis Morissette, another long, thin-faced singer, also receives less than a lukewarm reading:

> She's the thin, tall ectomorphic body type personified — very affected by mood, very much a loner. Her wide irises and high forehead also say she's fussy and a thinker. That long face says she lacks confidence and her jawline indicates she's not a take-charge type. The downturn in the outer corners of her mouth indicates pessimism... (*Movieline* 56)

The profiles of other less than beautiful people provide a study of opposites to the successful types. Charisma and strength are replaced by moodiness and lack of confidence or inability to take charge. Another negative trait that appeared in several gloomy profiles cited argumentativeness, attributable to an angular chin (singers Jewel, Mariah Carey, Marc Anthony, and Sheryl Crow). (*Movieline* 56-57)

A word is in order here about the looks of the physiognomist George Roman. As you first click on his website, you find him seated before you, casually, albeit carefully dressed in a red sweater and dark-colored slacks. His face displays all of the most positive characteristics that he has described in those singers he deems singled out for success. Having read several of these profiles good and bad, the profile he might write for himself automatically pens itself in the website browser's mind: 'Roman's relaxed pose suggests a people-oriented person who is ready to embrace the world. His broad face and charismatic smile exude confidence and charm, while his strong jaw reflects a decisive, take charge quality. A winner in any situation.'

George Roman, personologist, like Lavater before him is a paragon of what he preaches. He looks like the Hollywood stars he caters to and probably has a bit of a cult following of his own. But what does it mean

to look like these people? The reader who tries to classify the people described by their profiles would be hard pressed to imagine specifically what they look like. Roman's language of success or failure actually does very little to establish the kinds of differentiation that Lavater, the scientist, was ultimately interested in.

This area of difference has to do with the national and racial types found in Lavater. Lavater was highly interested in differences of sex, age, race, and even class, the later of which has barely received scholarly attention but is an important area of classification, especially if we think about his drawings of Zurich farmers and tradespeople. Since he was interested in heredity as well as moral characteristics, and inheritance's logical corollary of family and national physiognomies, Lavater's work appeared to intersect on several points with anthropology, and there is no doubt that the two emerging disciplines influenced each other. As Tytler has pointed out, Lavater considered national physiognomies 'one of the profoundest, most unshakeable, most essential foundations of physiognomy.' (70) Conversely, no racial, sexual, class, or age-related stereotypes are invoked in George Roman's personology profiles, even though ten of the singers are African-American, one is Cuban-American, and at least two are racially mixed. Roman steers clear of commentary on features that might lead him too far afield of the politically correct line he has decided to toe. This utter and complete reversal in the tendency to create individual profiles within racial, gender, class, or age typologies at the end of the twentieth century proves that much about our collective impressions of who we are as individuals and as a society can still be learned from meta-readings of the cultish, pseudo-scientific practice of reading the face. Though a more thorough analysis of this socio-cultural phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that in the United States at least, political correctness is shaping our perceptions. It is also true that genetic engineering and altering could lead to the creation of faces whose hereditary, racial, gender, and aging characteristics could be attenuated or changed in accordance with rigidly controlled, scientific standards. Indeed, much of the research being done in the field of psychology today on reading the face may, in fact, ultimately lead to that. It is in any case a tribute to Lavater and a confirmation of the mass appeal of the work of personoligist George Roman to read the following in J. Liggett's 1974 monograph, *The Human Face*: 'Beauty must be pursued at whatever price, because it confers on its possessor profound social influence, power and respect.' (46) The anthropological underpinnings of his argument, which conclude a discussion of the ubiquitous pursuit of beauty in every society, whether it be primitive or sophisticated, use the precepts of physiognomy to make their point.

The researcher who seeks to trace the permutations of Lavaterian ideals in the last half of the twentieth century is struck by the variety of disciplinary literature in which one finds an exciting collection of scientific experimentation and hypotheses that suggest that physiognomy may well be on the verge of a renaissance. Thomas Alley's preface to *Social and Applied Aspects of Perceiving Faces* says it best:

> An important motive for producing this volume is the unfortunate independence with which research and theory on face perception have been pursued across the disciplines of psychology, sociology, dental sciences, and plastic and reconstructive surgery. In contrast to much of the primary literature on face perception, this book is truly interdisciplinary. The contributors to this volume represent a variety of backgrounds, ranging from perceptual psychology to orthodontics...[they] all share...an appreciation for the tremendous importance of face perception on determining how people, each with their own unique facial appearance and varying degrees of similarity to others, influence and are influenced by the world around them. (Alley xiii)

The author of the foreword to the volume, Thomas Cash, offers statistical data on what he considers a burgeoning new field. He states that he witnessed the research literature grow from 100 studies at the beginning of the 1970's to over 1,000 by 1988, when Alley's collection of essays was published. (xv) However, a simple statement by Alley sums up the interest in understanding how one might be perceived by others whether the reading came from Lavater in the eighteenth century, Roman and his personology website or a social psychologist/personologist of today: 'facial appearance is one of the chief factors influencing human social interactions.' (xiii) This single truth is the premise for the entire collection of articles in Alley's monograph, and, one might argue, for Lavater's *Essays* as well. 'Physiognomical theories were profoundly shaped by prevailing philosophical trends and scientific methods: drawing on empiricism, physiognomy evolved a whole new way of looking at the world, seeing nature in terms of infinite variety and each human face as a unique and separate entity.' (Alley 5) As our post-modern sensibility now allows us to continually redefine and expand boundaries and limits in the arts and literature, it would appear that science and scientific inquiry are undergoing similar reassessments. In such a context, Lavater's ideas begin to make more sense as science. In the twenty-first century, reading the face may finally become the science Lavater had set his sights on at the end of the eighteenth.

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Notes

1 A search on website Amazon.com for books containing the keyword 'personology' brings up thirteen different books, four of which are out of print. While the majority of the titles do tend to conflate astrology and personology at first blush, i.e. titles such as *The Secret Language of Birthdays: Personology Profiles for Each Day of the Year*, or *The Power of Birthdays, Stars & Numbers: The Complete Personology Reference Guide*, both of which appear among the three most popular, and garnering five stars on what Amazon calls the 'Average Customer Review,' Tytler may have overlooked the parallel renewal of interest in personology by psychologists. Indeed, the third of the top three books has a more academic title, i.e., *Personology: Method and Content in Personality Assessment and Psychobiography*, and offers the buyer no scanned picture of a new age cover to entice, since the cover is most certainly something drab and clinical. Moreover, three of the four out-of-print titles also appear to be academic. They are: *Endeavors in Psychology: Selections from the Personology of Henry A. Murry*; *Humanism in personology: Allport, Maslow, and Murry*; and *Thus Speaks the Body; Attempts toward a Personology from the Point of View of Respiration and Postures.* The fourth out-of-print title, *Personology and the Dynamics of Success*, is the most closely related to the present-day manifestation of personology I am most interested in and, which I argue in this article, matches most closely the social outcome of physiognomy and the inevitable 'success,' albeit moral, in Lavater's interpretation, of the flawless physiognomy.

2 Georg Gustav Fülleborn, *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, 4 vols. Züllichau und Freystadt, 1796; and J. C. Wetzel, *Versuch über die Kentniss des Menschen*, 1784-85. The year following his history of philosophy, Fülleborn published his *Abriss einer Geschichte und Literatur der Physiognomik*, 1797, considered the most exhaustive account of the history of physiognomy, with an extensive bibliography.

3 For the best summary of this position see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988. Clifford's delineation of the origins and evolution of ethnology, ethnography, and ethnographical research methods is shot through with clever criticism that does a good job of preparing the reader for the 'defamiliarization of ethnographic authority' which he espouses and which constitutes the primary 'predicament of culture' that is the object of his study.

4 Sigfried Frey, 'Lichtenberg, and the Suggestive Power of the Face,' *The Faces of Physiognomy: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Johan Caspar Lavater*, ed. Elllis Shookman, Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993, 65-103.

5 For an in depth discussion of the Lavater and Lichtenberg camps, see Carsten Zelle, 'Soul Semiology: On Lavater's Physiognomic Principles,' in Shookman, 41-59.

6 Information on Szondi in English is very hard to find, as Richard A. Hughes has remarked in the only English-language text I could find about Szondi and his system. Hughes attributes the brief presence of the Szondi Test in America to a lack of access to the primary literature: 'The Szondi Test has been widely used, along with other projective tools such as the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Test. However, a problem arose in that the extensive companion literature of the Szondi Test has remained largely untranslated and, therefore, essentially unknown in the United States. Only two English-language books appeared to help clinicians interpret the test (Deri 1949; Szondi, Moser, and Webb 1959), but these dealt with technical diagnostic issues and did not present the broad systematic quality of Szondi's knowledge and experience.' (Hughes 1) Today, Szondi's ideas live on at the Szondi Institute, founded in Zurich in 1969, and the journal *Szondiana*, published by the staff.

7 The 'Southern California Living' section of the October 9, 2000 edition of *The Los Angeles Times* carries the story of the miraculous recoveries wrought by Dr. Ed Wagner, whom the paper defines as 'Malibu's psychic chiropractor,' who 'digs into patients' histories to make present-day adjustments.' Merrill Markoe's article, 'Bad Golf Swing? You May Need a Past-Life Checkup' under the rubric 'L.A. at Large' consists of a series of testimonials from credible sources including noted celebrities and their spouses, all that is needed these days to move from pseudo to scientific on the California scene. While the practice still has not found resonance with the editors of the 'Health' section of the paper, which appears as a special insert every Monday, a quick perusal of its contents tells me it won't be long.

8 See Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change in the 20th Century*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999 for a discussion of the conflation of high and low culture in the United States over the last century and the evolution of the discourse on taste and culture in twentieth-century America that continues in America today. Particularly useful as a theoretical framework is the discussion of the interplay between mass and popular culture found in Chapter 1, 'Coming to Terms with Defining Terms,' 3-26.

9 For a thorough discussion of the French contribution to and position on physiognomy and pathogomy in the eighteenth century, see Melissa Percival, *The Appearance of Character: Physiognomy and Facial Expression in Eighteenth-Century France*, Modern Humanities Research Association, Volume 47, W.S. Maney & Son Ltd., 1999.

10 *Über die Physiognomik; wider die Physiognomen*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1778), 87f. Note that this title was given to the second edition of the treatise. The original title, *Ueber Physiognomik, und am Ende etwas zur Erklarung der Kupferstiche des Almanachs*, appeared as a short treatise in his almanach, the *Göttinger Taschen Calender vom Jahr 1778*, ed. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg. For a more detailed examination of the Lavater-Lichtenberg controversy, see Siegfried Frey, 'Lavater, Lichtenberg, and the Suggestive Power of the Human Face' (Shookman 64-103).

11 Judging from another publication that provides Hollywood gossip to the masses, *Us* has a standing personology insert on its astrology page entitled 'Control your Destiny.' This page, which is the last of the magazine, provides horoscopes and the picture of a star whose birthday falls during the week that the magazine is

published. The August 28, 2000 issue features actor Regis Philbin for astrology and Mena Suvari, known for her role as the teen temptress in *American Beauty*, for the personology profile. The word personology is not used, but the insert carries the caption 'About Face.' The reading is very similar to those produced by George Roman. The author of the column, Cheryl Lee Terry, bills herself as an astrologer, further evidence of the link between face reading and astrology in popular culture.

12 The silhouette machine used by Lavater was invented by Étienne de Silhouette (1709-69). Tytler reports that it was widely used among aristocrats in the 1760's, but became even more popular after the publication of Lavater's *Essays*. (Tytler 57) This low-cost form of portraiture made multiple copies of one's physiognomy readily available.

13 'Füssli's leading role in the diffusion of Lavater's physiognomical theories was certainly one of the most seminal aspects of Lavater's English reception.' (Allentuck 91)

14 Every study of Lavater that we consulted included copious references to Goethe's passion for physiognomy and his friendship with Lavater. (Bruce and Young 141; numerous references in Tytler)

15 One could easily add Füssli's name as well. As Marcia Allentuck has shown, Füssli and Lavater's shared past in Zurich, in particular their joint authorship of the incendiary pamphlet, *Der Ungerechte Landvogt, oder die Klagen eines Patrioten*, had already established their reputation as innovators, which had attracted Goethe to them both.