Silver Age
Nuove culture della vecchiaia

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A cura di
Mauro Portello e Maria Pia Pozzato

SCRITTI DI

ALESSI E LOBACCARO, BELLENTANI E LEONE, BIKTCHOURINA,
BOERO, CARVALHO, CESARI, DE ANGELIS, GALLO,
GALOFARO, GRAMIGNA, LORIA, MAGLI, MONTESANTI,
PONZO, SANFILIPPO, TERRACCIANO, TSALA

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Biography of a wrinkle. Aging, temporality, and transformation of the human face
di Remo Gramigna

> «The human face is so full of time
> that it seems all time must be in that one face.»
> Max Picard

Abstract in English

Faces always tell a story. Medicine men and curanderos of Latin America think that people without wrinkles have no personal history. Their faces are like blank spots. They are, therefore, illegible because they have no meaning. The face of a baby is yet to be written as it is wrinkles-less, whilst the face of an adult is a wrinkled face, which shows signs of time. Whilst traditional medicine has generally assigned a positive value to wrinkles-the value of time, experience, uniqueness-modern conceptions of the face somewhat challenge this view. The history of physiognomy is rich of examples that assign to facial wrinkles a pivotal role in face readings. Girolamo Cardano, for instance, in his *Metoscopia*, sets out an entire system for physiognomic reading based on astrology and divination that was centred around the frontal area of the face, leaving all the rest aside. J. Taxil, C. Spontone, F. Finella and many others argued pretty much the same. George Lichtenberg, who is usually and erroneously thought of as being an anti-physiognomist, thought that the face is like a message board onto which the signs of times are displayed. Lichtenberg not only thought that signs of time are visible and can be read in people's faces, but he asked whether there an influence of external events and circumstances–the environment–on people's faces. He suggested that a wrinkle can become a fixed facial trait by means of repetition, as if the repeated facial expression can with time become a fixed trait, thus positing a link between dynamic and static facial traits. Today the paradigm of physiognomy has lost its grip and new cultural norms have emerged in order to regulate the canons of beauty and social appearance. Whilst wrinkles are the natural history of change displayed on one's faces, wrinkles in other contexts are thought of as traces that should, instead, be removed, masked, altered or hidden away. This has to do with cultural norms of beauty and attractiveness that convey the idea that human faces are better and more attractive when the face is rather plain and young.

Keywords: face wrinkles, physiognomy, aging, old age, human face

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1. Aging as a semiotic process

Undoubtedly, the human face has fascinated humankind for millennia. From ancient physiognomics (Magli 1988; 1995) to the skillful dexterity of artists and painters capturing the mystery of a smile or the depth of a gaze (Britton 2002), to the prevalence of automated face reading systems in today's surveillance and bio-political society (Gates 2011), interest in the human face remains steadfast.
[1] The face is the site of perception, signs, and semiosis. Notably, the biological composition of Homo sapiens uniquely concentrates four out of five senses in the face, with sight, hearing, smell, and taste all localized in this pivotal region playing a key role in the perception of the environment.
Faces act as cognitive templates enabling others to recognize us¾discerning friend from foe and serving as a biological cornerstone. Additionally, faces play a vital role in socio-cultural contexts, providing a sense of identity, individuality, and self-awareness. Juri Lotman, in Culture and Explosion (2009), asserts that:

> Man became man when he realized himself as a man. And this occurred when he noticed that the different members of the human race consisted of different people, different voices and different experiences. The face of the individual, as with individual sexual selection, was probably the first invention of man as a man. (Lotman 2009: 155)

Similarly, Giorgio Agamben eloquently outlines the social and political importance of the face:

> Of course, all living beings show themselves and communicate with each other, but only man makes the face the place of his recognition and his truth, man is the animal that recognizes his own face in the mirror and mirrors and recognizes himself in the face of the other. In this sense, the face is both *similitas*, similitude and *simultas*, the being together of men. A faceless man is necessarily alone. This is why the face is the place of politics (Agamben 2021)[2].

2. Scope and purpose of the research

Face wrinkles, among the signs of old age, are the subject of this study. Old age, as the concluding stage of the life cycle, is distinguished by specific indices and signs, some of which are observable on the human face. Indeed, the aging face, along with facial wrinkles and the subtle transformations it undergoes over time, are considered indicators of the aging process. In what follows, I argue that facial wrinkles offer an opportunity to delve into the challenging yet essential issue of temporality and change in the human face. While the topic of aging encompasses broader anthropological, social, cultural, political, and medical dimensions that cannot be fully addressed here, I have only selected specific portions of the available information on this subject.

> This work is primarily concerned with aging as a semiotic process. In this article, I highlight the significance of face wrinkles among the many facets of the human face. Whilst it is evident that everyone must eventually confront their own ineluctable physical decline, making the discussion may seem trivial, old age can also be viewed as a unique form of semiosis. This involves studying the meaning and com-

munication of old age, including the signs of aging visible on the human face as outlined by Bartlett Stafford in 1977 (Bartlett Stafford 1977: 210).

The essay is divided into four parts: a literature review on aging with a focus on face wrinkles, a discussion of face reading systems, particularly physiognomy, and an exploration of historical methods of reading and interpreting facial wrinkles. Additionally, the distinction between physiognomy and pathognomy is examined. One specific research question addressed is the hypothesis that repeated facial expressions contribute to the formation of face wrinkles. This essay traces the origin of this idea, identifies relevant sources in the literature on physiognomy, face studies, psychology, and otolaryngology, and explains its continued applicability. The implications of this research for face studies and semiotics are also discussed. Additional sources are provided in the bibliography for those seeking more in-depth information on this topic and for those interested in more copious details[3].

3. Interlude. Familiar faces and wrinkles formation

I will begin with a brief personal anecdote. When my uncle passed away, he left us with his autobiography. In a touching chapter of his manuscript, the author portrayed his own father as a hard-working man, whose wrinkles on his cheeks were «as deep as two furrows»[4]. Similarly, I have personally experienced the observation of new wrinkles on familiar faces on several occasions. Having lived abroad for approximately twelve years, I would return to visit my family in southern Italy each year, usually during the summer months. Amidst the excitement and joy of coming back to my homeland after a long, cold, icy, and dark winter, I was always taken aback when I noticed yet another wrinkle etched on my mother's face. Her appearance had changed, and I could not help but notice this subtle yet significant alteration in her physical features (Fig. 1). The most familiar faces are often
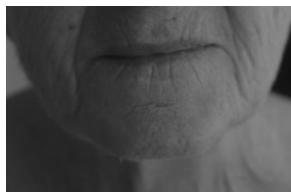
Fig. 1 Family wrinkles. Copyright ® The Author

the ones where the subtle changes of time are most easily discernible, especially when we have not seen that familiar face for an extended period.
Leaving aside my personal history and family genealogy, the purpose of these observations is to emphasize the following point: our faces constantly change and they always tell stories[5]. As I will elaborate on in the following discussion, whilst faces change, there is something that remains the same, however.
Faces are often intertwined with a narrative, reflecting the biography and journey of the individual. Traditional healers and curanderos in Latin America have always placed great importance on facial wrinkles, believing that people without wrinkles lack a personal history. Faces without wrinkles are likened to blank pages, unreadable because they have not yet acquired meaning through life experiences. Likewise, Chinese medicine has paid attention to face wrinkles elaborating a reading system that interprets the meaning of each wrinkle. The infant's face, being wrinkle-free, is

often considered unwritten, while the wrinkles on an adult's face signify the passage of time and life experiences[6]. Therefore, native beliefs about the face view it as accumulating experiences and showing them through wrinkles as one ages.

> It is worth mentioning that Duchenne de Boulogne, in his work *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine* (1862), contrasted the expressionless face of an infant with the emotive face of an older person. He described the infant's face as "neutral", at "zero degrees"—it is a face at rest—while the adult face shows expressions that reflect habitual sentiments and dominant passions: in adults «facial expression is formed in repose in the individual face, which must be the image of our habitual sentiments, the *facies* of our dominant passions» (Duchenne [1990]1862: 31).

I term this approach the "cumulative" approach as it sees the accumulation of life experiences reflected in one's face. On the other hand, Max Picard held a quite contrasting view. According to Picard, the aged person's face is not solely a result of their experiences—it does not follow a cumulative approach as the face is not a "memorial of [their experiences]" (Picard 1930: 201)—but rather, it appears *suddenly* and is "a monument of the unity of the soul". As he pointed out,

> The face is more than a mere memorial tablet of experiences. Experiences are not just written down on the face one after the other in the order of their occurrence, so that they may be read off as from a list,—but what happens is this: the various experiences are united with the soul and merge into a unit, and it is that unit that is stamped upon the face. That is why the face of the aged is not a memorial of his experiences, but it is a monument of the unity of his soul. It is as if the aged had lived so long only that his face be there at the end of life as that monument. So natural is the appearance of this final face that it has the appearance of origin rather than finality, like the beginning of a face and not like the end. (…) The last face is not slowly formed through the passage of years, it appears suddenly. Suddenly, on an appointed day, there it is. Just as a supersaturated solution will suddenly crystallize when the least disturbance strikes it, so does this last face suddenly crystallize out of the former face (Picard 1930: 201–202).

Whilst traditional medicine has generally assigned a positive value to facial wrinkles—symbolizing time, experience, uniqueness, wisdom, and knowledge—modern conceptions of the face somewhat challenge this view. Wrinkles are often seen as something to be hidden or erased in today's society, with many resorting to cosmetic procedures or facial surgery in an attempt to soften what is actually a natural process for all living beings. The trend towards erasing facial wrinkles to adhere to beauty standards of perfection and symmetry has resurfaced today due to the widespread use of facial filters used to digitally alter images on social media platforms like *Snapchat*, *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and others (Poulsen, 2019).

4. Past and future visage: life in retrospect

During an interview at the inaugural Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies in Milan, Italy, in 1974, Roman Jakobson expressed his perpetual interest in the dynamic nature of semiotic systems and how they evolve while maintaining an inherent structure[7]. Transitioning from the macro-level of cultures and semiotic systems to the micro-level of the human body, the human face serves as a prime example of a changing, mutable, and dynamic entity. Al-

though possessing constant features that facilitate identity and recognition, faces undergo changes over time.

This observation may not be immediately apparent, as there has been a prevailing tendency in face studies to emphasize the «static» dimension of the face while neglecting its «dynamic» aspect.[8] I will come back to this point. Internationally renowned scholars such as Charles Darwin (1872) and Paul Ekman (1978) concentrated on mobile facial traits, expressions, and basic emotions, yet their research and experiments predominantly relied on still images and photography, presenting a rather static view of the face. On the contrary, scholars like George Lichtenberg, Rudolf Kassner and Ludwig Klages argued that the essence of the face lies in its dynamism, rhythm, and movement, emphasizing the dynamic element over the static dimension.[9] Therefore, my contention lies with the disproportionate focus on the static aspect of the face at the expense of its dynamic nature.

The inclusion of face images in a series or short visual narratives allows for a deeper understanding of the face as an inherent metamorphosis.[10] While visual and social media platforms often capitalize on this concept indirectly, one effective method to visualize temporal changes is through an arrangement of old photos in chronological order. For instance, Facebook Inc. incorporates a «Facebook memory» feature that showcases users' past photos, posts, and milestones in a chronological timeline, fostering a retrospective view of one's past selves.[11] By comparing images of oneself over time, individuals can observe the passage of time and personal evolution. While the «Facebook memories» feature may not arrange photos in a strict series, it effectively conveys the essence of reminiscence and the transient nature of time: life in retrospect. To illustrate this concept, a series of my own Facebook profile pictures is provided below, arranged in a chronological order (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Life in retrospect.
Facebook Inc. profile pictures. Copyright ®The Author

Faces can be viewed not only in retrospect by tracing one's trajectory through time (past faces), but they can also be envisioned in the future by imagining one's future selves. Mobile phone applications, such as *FaceApp*, serve as apt examples of the manipulative power of media and the element of playfulness associated with manipulating digital facial images (Fig. 3). *FaceApp* allows users to visualize their potential appearance in 30 or 40 years, presenting a visual depiction of the «future self».[12]

Fig. 3 *FaceApp* editor. Photo courtesy: https://www.faceapp.com/

This feature enables users to compare their current and future representations, offering a means to envision and speculate about their potential appearance under various conditions, environmental circumstances, or lifestyle choices (such as smoking, alcohol use, aging, etc.). By predicting one's future visage or constructing an imaginative fictional self in a distant future, this form of future face representation challenges Roland Barthes' well-known assertion that the essence of photography lies in the past, in the *ça-a-été* (Barthes 1980), as these images are projected forward into the future.

5. The rich tapestry of old age: A review of the literature

> Growing old is not merely a biological phenomenon, but also culturally dependent, bearing deep social significance and manifold ramifications. Undoubtedly, in recent times, life expectancy has increased. The extension of the average age within the world population is a trend that has impacted all facets of life. This has implications for the economic, sociological, medical, and demographical aspects[13]. Old age has been studied alongside with the social representations that accompany it. The classical concept of "stigma" coined by Erving Goffman in his seminal work *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), is pertinent at this juncture, as this concept encompasses, among other things, the social status of being old. As Lane pointed out, «the passage of time does bring about physical changes which contribute to the perception of older people as "other". The development of wrinkles and the graying of hair are often considered stigmas of old age» (Lane 1999: 3-4).

Within some cultures, however, the elderly are highly respected and regarded as the bearers of wisdom and knowledge¾as seen, for instance, in the shamanic tradition of native Indians (Mails 2012) ¾while in others, they are relegated to the fringes of the socio-cultural «semiosphere» (Lotman 1989) and stigmatized as sick, dependent, and almost seen as a burden. In contemporary Western societies, the face of the elderly are often neglected and equated with forms of sickness and deviance, as the news frequently report these days. As Le Breton pointed out, «The elderly person sometimes wears his or her body as if it were a stigma, the resonance of which is more or less vivid depending on the social class to which he or she belongs and the quality of the family environment. There is a heightened virtuality of stigma in ageing» (Le Breton 2021: 245)[14]. It is worth recalling that, in contrast to «aging», the term «ageism», coined by Robert Butler in 1979, is a prejudice predicated upon chronological age (Achenbaum 2015). Likewise, Kevi Paterson and Bill Hughes argue that judgements are bases on «aesthetic evidence»:

Such exclusions from responsibility are a stark reminder of the oppressive logic of the carnal hierarchy; they are a palpable denial of 'social competence' based on a knee-jerk aesthetic judgement. This assumption/conclusion about my ('lack of') 'social competence' was reached in an instance as an embodied reaction to my bodiliness. Instantaneous, infantalising judgements are commonplace reactions in my experience and are clearly (unthinking) reactions to my body, its movement and speech. They are based, primarily, on aesthetic 'evidence' as if (somehow) appearance is an omnipotent guide to competence (Paterson and Hughes 2010: 606–607)

Facial wrinkles, in particular, are intertwined with the social construction of beauty and the resulting desire to erase or conceal them through plastic surgery, makeup (Ghigi and Rodler 2010; Muecke 2003; Magli 2013), and, more recently, through the digital manipulation of facial images in mobile apps, or «digital cosmetics» (Leone 2020). Today, the paradigm of physiognomy has diminished, and new cultural norms have emerged to regulate the standards of beauty and social appearance. While wrinkles are a natural part of aging that are displayed on one's face, in other contexts, wrinkles are seen as imperfections that should be removed, masked, altered, or hidden. This relates to cultural standards of beauty and attractiveness that suggest human faces are more appealing when they appear smooth and youthful.

6. Interpreting facial expressions

The face is a springboard of information and a natural signifier. Today's social scientific community has dismissed most of physiognomic claims as pseudo-scientific. However, as Alimahomed noted, «the relationship between inner and outer traits suggests a psychological focus, and just because there is no causal relationship between internal characteristics and facial traits does not mean that humans do not engage in interpretive behaviors when seeing facial qualities on another person» (Alimahomed 2002: 7). As Jürgen Ruesch and Weldon Kees pointed out:

> The total appearance of a person furnishes information for initial and tentative assignment of identities and roles; age, sex, body build, clothing¾even temperament and intelligence¾all furnish helpful cues. (…) Foremost among the body parts that have communicative value is the face. Facial expression is capable of indicating a wide variety of emotional states about which words can only give rough hints (Ruesch and Kees 1961: 57).

> Interpreters in human relations are constantly caught up in guessing and making inferences about others, which are often inaccurate, trying to «read» their minds and predict possible ways of acting and behaving. In a way, we are all natural-born physiognomists as we base our judgments on first impressions, that tiny micro-second that works like a barometer in social interactions. The fact that human beings are wired and evolutionary inclined to reading facial displays and cues in face-to-face interactions is supported by scientific evidence (Liberman 2013).

When people make inferences about others in face-to-face interactions, there is a host of stimuli taking place, so much so that Ekman and Friesen (1975: 10) refer to the face as a «multisignal» and a «multimessage system». We owe to Paul Ekman and Wallas V, Friesen a first typology that laid out different types of face signals. Ekman and Friesen argued that the face signal can be grouped

in three main types: «static», «slow», and «rapid». As they pointed out:

> The face provides three types of signals: static (such as skin color), slow (such as permanent wrinkles), and rapid (such as raising the eyebrows). The *static* signals include many more or less permanent aspects of the face¾skin pigmentation, the shape of the face, bone structure, cartilage, fatty deposits, and the size, shape, and location of the facial features (brows, eyes, nose, mouth). The *slow* signals include changes in the facial appearance which occur gradually in time (Ekman and Friesen 1975: 10).

Static signs have received the most attention since Aristotle. Today there is a great deal of focus on rapid signs since these signs can express emotional states. The most famous study in this field addressed the question of what is the link between facial expression and human emotion. Ekman recognized the universality of seven facial expressions: happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, fear, contempt, and surprise. However, compared with static facial expression, little attention has been paid to slow facial expression.

7. Gombrich's concept of 'physiognomic constancy'

In an essay *entitled The Mask and the Face. The Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and the Art* (1978), Gombrich discusses the concept of «physiognomic constancy» that exists in the face, namely, a constancy that can be traced in the human face regardless of the various changes it undergoes over time.
To explain this concept, Gombrich compares two images of the philosopher Bertrand Russel, one showing him at the age of 4 and the other at the age of 90 (Fig. 4).
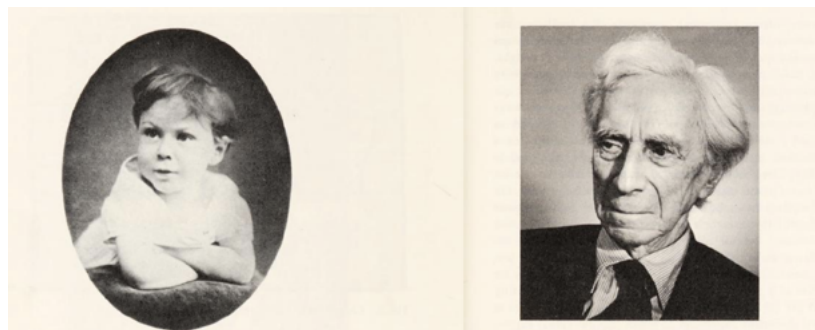
Fig. 4 Physiognomic constancy (Gombrich 1978: 6-7)

> Gombrich shows how the two Russel faces are perfectly recognizable despite the very long time lapse between the taking of each picture, as they exhibit a certain constancy. Although Russel's face has undergone all the transformations that time inevitably imprints, it remains the same face, demonstrating a unity that is recognizable and constant. Gombrich writes, «Yet all growth and decay cannot destroy the unity of the individual's looks¾witness two photographs of Bertrand Russel as a child of four and at the age of ninety. It certainly would not be easy to program a computer to pick out the invariant, and yet it is the same face» (Gombrich 1973: 6).

A great many factors are taken into account in the phenomena of perception, rec-

ognition and identification of a face, some of which are beyond the control of our consciousness. They are often guided in our perceptual judgements by schema, patterns, and templates of recognition that are by no means obvious. Simplifying greatly, we could say that in recognizing a face, we project shapes and templates that make the perception of the face something that is, in a sense, constructed. In this respect, reading a face falls short of a semiotic fallacy (Gurisatti 2006:). In other words, when we see a face we do not just see a face, but we see a face in that we project something onto it. As the 18th-century physicist from Göttingen, George Christoph Lichtenberg, pointed out,

> It is perfectly consistent with the laws of our thought and our sensibility that, as soon as we set our eyes on a man, we are immediately reminded of the absolute likeness of the figure we have already encountered. This figure usually directly determines our judgement. We regularly judge by the face, and we are regularly wrong (Lichtenberg 1991: 127).

This phenomenon is called «associationism of ideas». Lichtenberg's criticisms of physiognomy are numerous and acute and certainly cannot be dismissed in a few words. One of these criticisms concerns the principle of the association of ideas. This principle underlies the mechanism of associating faces with psychological traits on the basis of a set of prior models and assumptions that the individual has. Lichtenberg, in fact, argues that, in recognizing others, people project onto the other person's face certain pre-existing cognitive schemas that play a fundamental role in the perception and recognition of human faces. As Lichtenberg writes, «the superficial physiognomist in every inkblot finds a face and in every face a meaning» (Lichtenberg 1991: 127). The scholar explains how face recognition works in the following terms. Against the principles of traditional physiognomy that has held sway since the time of Aristotle, Lichtenberg argues that the face is essentially unfathomable in its entirety. For this very reason, in order to grasp a face, each of us creates an «extract», a model of a face. This extract is obtained according to the interests, mood, and knowledge of the person looking at the face, assigning a range of different meanings to it (Lichtenberg 1991: 129). According to Lichtenberg, this model is then systematized in such a way that each observer identifies a face consisting of four points, as depicted in the following image (Fig. 5):
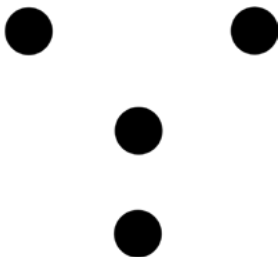

Fig. 5 Face template according to Lichtenberg (1991: 129)

8. Decoding facial wrinkles: Exploring Metoposcopy

As far as I am concerned, there is not an *ex professo* treatment on wrinkles within semiotics, except for the many works on facelift and aesthetic surgery (González-Ulloa 1987) or the many contributions in gerontology. Therefore, to uncover insights into the semiotics of wrinkles, we should delve into the extensive literature on physiognomy.

From Aristotle to Giovan Battista della Porta, from Lavater to Gall and to Lombroso in Italy, the goal of all physiognomists has always been, so to speak, to tame or master an object of study ¾the human face, specifically¾that is intrinsically untamable and immeasurable. Faces have no barometer or system, yet there have been numerous attempts to harness it into well-defined categories. Physiognomy in 14th- and 15th-century European was widely embraced as part of a broad network of pseudo and para-sciences that including magical, esoteric, astrological, alchemical, chiromantic, and divinatory approaches.

The history of physiognomy is rich of examples that assign a pivotal role to facial wrinkles in face readings. One of the most significant contributions to the development of physiognomy is attributed to Girolamo Cardano, who was a physician, astrologer, mathematician philosopher, and interpreter of dreams (Fierz 1983). His studies on physiognomy primarily focused on reading the lines of the forehead, which he called «Metoposcopy». In his work *Metoscopia*, Cardano established an entire system for physiognomic reading based on astrology and divination that was focused around the frontal area of the face, while neglecting the rest. J. Taxil, C. Spontone, F. Finella and many others argued pretty much the same.

According to Cardano, the fundamental principle of metoposcopy can be summed up in the evidence that wrinkles are different in every individual and the theory that the planets act differently depending on individual predispositions indicated in the natal horoscope. He believed in the influence of the planets on the individual, and consequently, on all parts of the body: the forehead is closest to the sky and therefore he thought the greatest influence was concentrated on it. He believed to be able to trace a person's character and destiny by analyzing the appearance and distribution of forehead wrinkles. The forehead is divided into 7 parts, each of which corresponds to the well-defined influence of a planet. Metoposcopy argued that each individual had his destiny written on their forehead and this reading of face line is one of the earliest forms of a semiotics of wrinkles.

9. Exploring the interplay between physiognomy and pathognomy.
Why repeated expressions leave physiognomic imprints

I will now turn to the distinction between *physiognomy* and *pathognomy*. While physiognomy is concerned with the study of fixed or static traits of the human face, pathognomy tackles the study of the dynamic or mobile facial features and their expressions, emotions, and affect. The first recognition of the difference between static and dynamic aspects of the face goes back to the debate between J. K. Lavater and G. Lichtenberg in the 17th century. This is a turning point in face studies.

Firstly, we can trace the physiognomy / pathognomy distinction in J. K. Lavater. In the second fragment of the fourth volume of his *Physiognomic Fragments*, he writes that «physiognomy is the interpretation of forces, the stable character and

its signs, the fixed traits of the face. Pathognomy is the interpretation of passions, the character in motion and its signs, mobile traits and motion» (Lavater 1989: 46). It is important to stress that Lavater considers the two sciences as inseparable and complementary and they should be studied in tandem. The interdependence of these two dimensions is clearly formulated in an important principle that posits the influence of mobile movements on facial static traits as well as wrinkle formation. As he writes:

> Every mimic movement repeated over and over again, every recurring posture, every change of face ends up leaving a stable imprint on the soft parts of the face. The more intense the movement, and the more frequent its repetition, the stronger, deeper and more indelible the imprint it leaves. (...) In all parts of the face, often repeated states of mind ... make permanent imprints[15]. (Lavater 1989: 60).

The momentary rage of the meek alters his features only momentarily, but the constant anger of the irascible is permanently imprinted on his face. In Lavater, however, the emphasis falls more on the static than on the mutability of character and face, while the temporal dynamics will later be investigated by Lichtenberg. Alexander Todorov attributes to James Parsons, who wrote before Lavater, the idea that continual expression of the same emotions could become imprinted on the face. As he put it, «habitual disposition, causing the muscles of the face, that are destined to express it, frequently to act in obedience to that bent of mind, brings on at length a habitual appearance of that passion in the face, and molds it into a constant consent with the mind» (Todorov 2017: 205)[16].

George Lichtenberg, who is usually and erroneously thought of as an anti-physiognomist, believed that the face is like a message board onto which the signs of time are displayed. Lichtenberg not only believed that signs of time are visible and can be read in people's faces, but he also questioned whether external events and circumstances¾such as the environment, the job one does, etc.¾can influence people's faces and facial expressions. He suggested that a wrinkle can become a fixed facial trait by through repetition, indicating that a repeated facial expression can, over time, become a permanent trait, thus establishing a link between dynamic and static facial characteristics.

Lichtenberg placed a strong emphasis on the mobile aspect of the face and its ability to undergo "chameleon-like" transformations (Gurisatti 2006). He advocated for pathognomy as a semiotics of passions, viewing everything as mobile and changing in the human face. Despite their different perspectives, there is a a shared belief between Lavater and Lichtenberg. Lichtenberg, like Lavater, believed that frequent repetition of pathognomic expressions could leave physiognomic imprints. As he elucidated:

> If repeated frequently, pathognomic expressions do not disappear completely each time, but leave physiognomic imprints. (Thus, sometimes the little wrinkle of madness is formed, which appears on the face of the one who is astonished at everything but understands nothing; or the hypocritical little wrinkle of the swindler, the dimple of the cheeks, the little wrinkle of obstinacy, and God knows what other little pits and wrinkles) (Lichtenberg 1991: 124).

Thus, there is a clear hypothesis that "enduring psychological traits are etched into permanent facial wrinkles". (Alimahomed 2002:). In this is not enough to

contend with, the same line of thinking is also found elsewhere. Almost 100 years later, Duchenne de Boulogne in his book *Mecanisme de la Physionomie Humaine* («The mechanism of human facial expression») argued that facial wrinkles are caused by habitual facial expressions.

The hypothesis that facial expression will leave characteristic or trademark permanent wrinkles is also found and backed up by research done in other fields. In the field of otolaryngology (the study of head and neck surgery), two types of wrinkles are identified: 1) fine wrinkles caused primarily by sunlight and smoking and 2) dynamic wrinkling or animation lines caused by expression (Ellis & Ward 1986). Of the two kinds I am more interested in the second type.

The causes of wrinkles are varied and isolating them is a challenging task due to the interaction of different factors such as race, genetic makeup, habitual facial movements, and environmental influences like smoking and sun exposure (Ellis & Ward 1986: 217). Plastic surgeon David Knize (Knize 2001) introduced the term «pseudoexpression» to describe how slow channel wrinkling of the face transforms into facial expressions. Gravity and dynamic wrinkling contribute to these pseudoexpressions. Certain habitual contractions and corrugations may lead to visible wrinkles that resemble facial expressions and can be used to infer personality traits. Knize (2001) explains that individuals who undergo facial surgery often express concerns that they appear angry, tired, or grumpy, even if they are not.

10. Conclusive remarks

In this article, I have only scratched the surface of a subject that deserves much deeper investigation. There are key points that can be extrapolated from this discussion. To begin with, little attention has been given to slow facial signals and dynamic facial traits in face studies, and this gap should be addressed. Secondly, while the main claims of physiognomy have been dismissed as pseudo-science, we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. As I have pointed out, there is an important influence of pathognomy on physiognomy, and this can be summarized with the research question proposed: do pathognomic expressions leave physiognomic imprints? This argument has been traced not only in the history of physiognomy but also in other fields such as otolaryngology and the arts. The implications of studying facial wrinkles are significant. The relevance of pathognomy is both semiotic and characteriological.

Empirical studies should be conducted to assess whether permanent wrinkles impact the likability of an individual. Wrinkles can have positive or negative connotations as they are associated with pro-social or anti-social facial expressions. Recent studies suggest that this may be the case (Alimahomed 2002). Additionally, the cultural significance of wrinkles should not be underestimated. Wrinkles are not solely a biological element but are part of a broader network of semiotic systems, from the beauty industry's efforts to erase wrinkles with Botox and plastic surgery to body image representations on platforms like Instagram and social media.

Note

[1] The literature on face reading systems and physiognomy is legion. For a first survey of this immense discussion, I recommend the volumes of Patrizia Magli and Giovanni Gurisatti.

[2] Agamben, Giorgio 2021. Il volto e la morte. Quodlibet, 24 June, 2022 (https://www.quodlibet.it/una-voce-giorgio-agamben). First published in German as "Wo das Gesicht verschwindet", Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 29 April 2021; now also in Agamben 2021. Original in Italian: "*Certo tutti gli esseri viventi si mostrano e comunicano gli uni agli altri, ma solo l'uomo fa del volto il luogo del suo riconoscimento e della sua verità, l'uomo è l'animale che riconosce il suo volto allo specchio e si specchia e riconosce nel volto dell'altro. Il volto è, in questo senso, tanto la* similitas *, la somiglianza che la* simultas *, l'essere insieme degli uomini. Un uomo senza volto è necessariamente solo. Per questo il volto è il luogo della politica.*" Agamben 2021 was accessed at https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-il-volto-e-la-morte. on 24 June 2022.

[3] For an overview on the subject from the standpoint of cultural analysis, see Andrea von Hülsen-Esch.

[4] Unpublished manuscript.

[5] On the visual narrative aspect of the aged face, see the illustrated book by the artist JR entitled *Wrinkles*.

[6] For a recent account on the representation of the face of infants in cinema, see Surace.

[7] Umberto Eco, "Il mondo dei segni", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6doQdNdGgzI (last accessed 30/09/2023).

[8] The static and dynamic dimensions of the face are a constant in the literature on face studies.

[9] For a satisfactory overview of this trend see Giovanni Gurisatti, *Dizionario Fisiognomico. The face, the forms, the expression*, Quodlibet, 2006.

[10] On the problems related to human face and temporality, see Ahmadi, 203-212.

[11] Facebook Lancia Memories, la nuova sezione dei ricordi: https://tg24.sky.it/tecnologia/2018/06/12/facebook-memories-ricordi (accesso 04/01/2024).

[12] On the notion of "future self", see C. Neil Macrae et al.

[13] It suffices to mention, for instance, that in Italy as well in other European countries, there is a quite unique phenomenon of caregivers (*badanti* or *assistenti familiari*) —usually female coming from abroad— linked with a culture of nursing home for old people, which makes this a very idiosyncratic and significant social phenomenon.

[14] "*La persona anziana porta a volte il proprio corpo quasi fosse una stimmate, la cui risonanza è più o meno viva a seconda della classe sociale alla quale appartiene e della qualità dell'accoglienza dell'ambiente famigliare. Vi è una virtualità accentuata dello stigma nell'invecchiamento*".

[15] "Ogni movimento mimico ripetuto più volte, ogni postura ricorrente, ogni mutamento del volto finisce per lasciare un'*impronta* stabile sulle parti molli del viso. Quanto più intenso è il movimento, e quanto più frequente è la sua ripetizione, tanto più forte, profonda e indelebile è l'impronta che lascia (persino sulle parti ossee, fin dalla gioventù)… In tutte le parti del volto, stati d'animo spesso ripetuti… danno impronte durature".

[16] For support of Parsons's hypothesis, see C. Z. Malatesta, M. J. Fiore, and J. J. Messina (1987). "Affect, personality, and facial expressive characteristics of older people." Psychology and Aging 2, 64–69.

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Biografie delle autrici e degli autori

Flavio Valerio Alessi è dottorando presso l'Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna. Si interessa di semiotica della cultura, in particolare indagando il rapporto tra la gestione e la comunicazione pubblica del sapere scientifico in condizioni di incertezza. In ambito semiotico-cognitivo, i suoi interessi di ricerca riguardano i disturbi dello spettro autistico. Ha preso parte al progetto europeo NeMo. Attualmente insegna semiotica presso la NABA di Roma.

Federico Bellentani è un ricercatore post-doc e project manager all'interno del Progetto ERC-PoC EUFACETS presso l'Università di Torino. Ha conseguito il dottorato di ricerca all'Università di Cardiff (2017) e la laurea magistrale in semiotica (2013) all'Università di Bologna. Nel 2015-2016 è stato ricercatore ospite presso il Dipartimento di Semiotica dell'Università di Tartu, Estonia. Attualmente è vicepresidente dell'Associazione Internazionale di Semiotica dello Spazio e del Tempo e Head of Marketing and Communication presso Injenia, azienda italiana di ICT specializzata in intelligenza artificiale con una solida base in semiotica e storytelling. La sua produzione scientifica include tre libri e oltre 30 articoli in semiotica, cultura digitale, geografia culturale e architettura. Ha presentato la sua ricerca in numerose conferenze internazionali; tra queste, è stato invitato a tenere una conferenza in un programma internazionale che ha riunito studiosi influenti e l'ex Presidente dell'Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid.

Angelina Biktchourina è docente presso l'INALCO di Parigi e membro del CREE (Centre de recherche Europes-Eurasie), insegna grammatica russa e traduzione specializzata. La sua ricerca attuale si concentra sugli appellativi e in particolare è interessata alle norme che regolano l'uso corrente dei pronomi e dei sostantivi di interpellazione nei media russi e in caso di enallage. Dedica inoltre parte della sua ricerca allo studio della rappresentazione della vecchiaia e dell'invecchiamento nel discorso giuridico, sociale e istituzionale russo.

Marianna Boero è professoressa Associata di Filosofia e teoria dei linguaggi nel Dipartimento di Scienze della Comunicazione dell'Università degli Studi di Teramo, dove insegna Semiotica, Semiotica della pubblicità e del consumo e Semiotica dei nuovi media. Precedentemente ha lavorato come assegnista di ricerca presso l'Università di Teramo, come Visiting Research Fellow presso l'Università di Tolosa e come Visiting Professor presso l'Università di Zara, Odessa e Trnava. Ha inoltre insegnato Semiotica per il Design presso l'Università D'Annunzio, Semiotica presso l'Accademia NABA di Roma, Semiotica della moda presso l'Università Sapienza di Roma. Si occupa di semiotica del testo, semiotica della pubblicità e del consumo, semiotica della cultura, socio-semiotica e studi sulla comunicazione, pubblicando diversi articoli e tre monografie su questi temi.

António Carvalho ha conseguito il dottorato di ricerca in Architettura con una tesi sulla progettazione di alloggi per anziani. È professore associato di Architettura e Urbanistica al Politecnico di Milano, dove insegna come progettare spazi a misura di anziano. È ricercatore presso il DASTU - Dipartimento di Architettura e Studi Urbani e i suoi interessi di ricerca sono l'edilizia abitativa age-friendly, gli spazi intergenerazionali, gli ambienti inclusivi, lo spazio urbano condiviso, gli spazi verdi di quartiere e il place-making. Ha tenuto conferenze in diverse università europee e ha pubblicato su questi temi in diverse riviste accademiche. In precedenza ha insegnato in Portogallo ed è stato Visiting Professor in Svizzera, Spagna e Cina.
Antonio Carvalho è un architetto e urbanista pluripremiato che dirige il suo studio di architettura a Lisbona dal 1988, con un raggio di attività che si estende in tutto il Portogallo.

Emma Cesari laureata in Lettere Moderne all'Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, è dottoressa magistrale in Arti Visive del medesimo ateneo. Nella sua tesi magistrale in Semiotica del Visibile, dal titolo *Les Doubles-Jeux nell'arte narrativa di Sophie Calle*, ha studiato il complesso ed affascinante lavoro dell'artista francese, analizzando in particolare il dualismo intrinseco alla sua opera, che si muove tra verità e finzione, autobiografia e rapporto con l'altro, fotografia e testo, installazione di mostre e libri d'artista. È ora specializzanda presso la Scuola di Specializzazione in Beni storico-artistici dell'Università di Bologna.

Mario Da Angelis si è laureato in Arti Visive come allievo del Collegio Superiore dell'Università di Bologna "Alma Mater Studiorum" (dir. Lucia Corrain), è attualmente dottorando in Storia delle Arti presso l'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia. Si interessa di arte, teoria critica e cultura visuale contemporanee, con speciale attenzione alla pittura post-impressionista francese, all'estetica del processo creativo e al cinema sperimentale dal duemila ad oggi. Membro del comitato redazionale della "Rivista di Engramma", ha partecipato a convegni internazionali e scritto saggi e articoli su diverse riviste scientifiche e blog di settore.

Giusy Gallo è professoressa associata di Filosofia e teoria dei linguaggi all'Università della Calabria. È caporedattrice della *Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio*. La sua attività di ricerca si colloca nell'area della Filosofia della comunicazione con interessi relativi alle nuove tecnologie e all'Intelligenza Artificiale. Negli ultimi anni ha pubblicato articoli sulla narrazione nella serialità televisiva, sulla comunicazione politica e su questioni filosofiche sollecitate dalla robotica e dagli algoritmi.

Francesco Galofaro è professore associato all'Università IULM di Milano. Ha ottenuto il dottorato di ricerca in semiotica con Umberto Eco e Maria Pia Pozzato nel 2005. È componente del Centro Universitario Bolognese di Etnosemiotica, diretto da Francesco Marsciani, e ha fatto parte del gruppo di ricerca ERC NeMoSanctI, diretto da Jenny Ponzo presso l'Università di Torino. Con Cinzia Bianchi è coordinatore di redazione della rivista di semiotica online Ocula.

Remo Gramigna è assegnista di ricerca Postdoc FACETS (*Face Aesthetics in Contemporary E-Technological Societies*) presso il Dipartimento di Filosofia e Scienze dell'Educazione dell'Università degli Studi di Torino. Laureato in Scienze della Comunicazione presso l'Università "La Sapienza" Roma e in Semiotica a Tartu, in Estonia. Consegue il titolo di Dottore di Ricerca in *Semiotica e Studi della Cultura* presso l'Università di Tartu con una tesi sul problema filosofico del segno e della menzogna in S. Agostino. È stato *Visiting Scholar* presso l'Università di Siena, *Research Fellow in Culure and Cognition* presso l'Università di Tartu e redattore della rivista internazionale di semiotica *Sign Systems Studies*. Ha pubblicato numerosi saggi su riviste e pubblicazioni nazionali e internazionali e curato numerosi volumi e numeri speciali, soprattutto sulla storia della semiotica. Si è interessato ai problemi di semiotica generale, di semiotica della cultura, di teoria dei linguaggi e dei testi, di semiotica della manipolazione e dell'inganno.

Massimo Leone è professore Ordinario di Filosofia della Comunicazione, Semiotica Culturale e Semiotica Visuale presso il Dipartimento di Filosofia e Scienze dell'Educazione dell'Università di Torino, Italia; Direttore di ISR-FBK, il Centro per le Scienze Religiose della "Fondazione Bruno Kessler" di Trento; professore di Semiotica presso il Dipartimento di Lingua e Letteratura Cinese dell'Università di Shanghai, Cina; membro associato di *Cambridge Digital Humanities*, Università di Cambridge, Regno Unito; e professore aggiunto presso l'Università UCAB di Caracas, Venezuela. È stato visiting professor in diverse università dei cinque continenti. È autore di quindici libri, ha curato più di cinquanta volumi collettivi e ha pubblicato più di seicento articoli in semiotica, studi religiosi e studi visivi. È vincitore di un ERC Consolidator Grant 2018 e di un ERC Proof of Concept Grant 2022. È caporedattore di *Lexia*, la rivista semiotica del Centro di Ricerca Interdisciplinare sulla Comunicazione dell'Università di Torino, della rivista *Semiotica* (De Gruyter) e direttore delle collane "I Saggi di Lexia" (Roma: Aracne), "Semiotics of Religion" (Berlino e Boston: Walter de Gruyter) e "Advances in Face Studies" (Londra e New York: Routledge).

Luigi Lobaccaro è assegnista di ricerca presso il Dipartimento di Filosofia dell'Università di Bologna. I suoi interessi di ricerca sono la semiotica dell'esperienza, la semiotica cognitiva, le scienze cognitive 4E e la psicopatologia. In particolare, la sua ricerca si è concentrata sulla comprensione e l'analisi dei processi di senso legati all'esperienza schizofrenica.

Emiliano Loria già assegnista di ricerca presso il Dipartimento di Medicina Traslazionale dell'Università del Piemonte Orientale, è project manager del progetto Erasmus+ Beyond the Emergency (2021-2024) dedicato alla pedagogia medica e infermieristica per l'assistenza a distanza di pazienti fragili con malattie croniche. Membro del comitato editoriale del Progetto Aging (UPO), si occupa di invecchiamento e trattamenti psichiatrici in pazienti farmaco-resistenti. È capo-redattore della rivista scientifica Mefisto, edita da ETS e focalizzata sulla filosofia e la storia della medicina. Attualmente è docente di filosofia e storia nei licei della provincia di Roma.

Patrizia Magli professore di semiotica, ha insegnato presso il dipartimento di Scienze della comunicazione all'Università di Bologna e poi nel corso di laurea di Arte e Design all'Università di Venezia (IUAV). Nella sua lunga carriera accademica si è occupata di varie forme di testualità e, in particolare, di teatro, design e di arte contemporanea. Tra i suoi libri, *Corpo e linguaggio*, Roma, Ed. Espresso (1980), *Il volto e l'anima*, Milano, Bompiani (1995), *Semiotica. Teoria, metodo, analisi*, Venezia, Marsilio Editori (2004), *Pitturare il volto. Il Trucco, l'Arte, la Moda*, Venezia, Marsilio Editori (2013), *Il volto raccontato. Ritratto e autoritratto in letteratura*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, (2016), *Il senso e la materia. Architettura, design e arte contemporanea*, Venezia, Marsilio Editori (2023).

Fabio Montesanti è Dottorando in StudiUmanistici (DM 352/2022 – Pubblica amministrazione, Ciclo XXXVIII) con sede amministrativa presso l'Università della Calabria (CS), nell'ambito del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR). Recentemente, nell'ambito dello stesso ateneo, gli è stato assegnato lo status di Cultore della Materia (M-FIL/05- FILOSOFIA E TEORIA DEI LINGUAGGI). Ha conseguito la laurea triennale in Comunicazione & Dams, con una tesi intitolata "*Sofistica 2.0: Da Gorgia ai social network*", nella quale ha analizzato il potere persuasivo del linguaggio nel corso della storia; per quanto riguarda la laurea magistrale, con tesi intitolata "*Il fenomeno del code-switching: dall'Italiano standard all'Italiano digitato*", ha analizzato il fenomeno linguistico della commutazione di codice in base alla situazione comunicativa in cui è coinvolto il parlante. Al momento, collabora con la Rete Civica "Iperbole", dedita alla semplificazione dei testi amministrativi, al fine di aumentarne l'accessibilità ai cittadini.

Jenny Ponzo è professoressa Associata all'Università di Torino, dove insegna Semiotica delle Culture Religiose e Semioetica. È attualmente Direttrice del Centro Interdipartimentale di Ricerca sulla Comunicazione. Tra il 2018 e il 2024 è stata la Principal Investigator del progetto NeMoSanctI "New Models of Sanctity in Italy", finanziato dall'ERC (StG. g.a. 757314), in precedenza ha svolto attività di ricerca e insegnamento presso la Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich e l'Università di Losanna.

Maddalena Sanfilippo è dottoressa magistrale in Semiotica presso l'Università degli Studi di Bologna.Attualmente è titolare di una borsa post-lauream in Semiotica presso il dipartimento Culture e Societàdell'Università di Palermo, dove svolge attività di ricerca sulla semiotica del gusto e sulla comunicazione digitale.

Bianca Terracciano è ricercatrice presso il Dipartimento di Comunicazione e Ricerca Sociale della Sapienza Università di Roma, dove insegna "Scienze semiotiche dei testi e dei linguaggi" e "Semiotica di genere". Le sue ricerche vertono sulla semiotica della cultura e della moda, sui social media, sulla propaganda cospirazionista, sull'Hallyu coreano e sulle arti marziali. È autrice di tre libri, coautrice di uno, ha curato cinque volumi e ha scritto più di cento pubblicazioni, come capitoli di libri, articoli in riviste internazionali e riviste culturali.

Didier Tsala Effa è co-direttore del Laboratorio Vie Santé UR 24134 | Vieillissement, Fragilité, Prévention, e-Santé dell'Université di Limoges, dove è responsabile delle scienze umane e sociali. Autore di numerose pubblicazioni, si interessa della fragilità degli anziani e della prevenzione della perdita di autonomia in casa. Gran parte della sua ricerca si concentra sulla semiotica applicata agli oggetti di consumo quotidiano e agli oggetti intelligenti (robotica umanoide, interfacce digitali).