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## The Other I

### Photographic Portrait: Reality and Authenticity

### Photographic Portrait: Disappropriation of Identity/Affirmation of the Other

Last century's positivist, bourgeois beliefs and Roland Barthes's radical reflections subtly intermingle in "The Identity at Play" whose central theme is photographic portraits as images of consumption. Accepted social codes are dismantled, exposing the fiction of the being who poses in front of the apparatus and transforms himself into an image. This image appears as a tenuous, dense surface on which the subject's abdication to his uniqueness is inscribed. He thereby converts himself into an object, spatially and territorially submitting himself to the reproductive/repetitive cycle. Nothing demonstrates this productive logic -- in which identity quantitatively atomizes itself and obeys the tacit assumptions involved in repeating the ritual in front of the apparatus -- better than the material chosen by Rosangela Renno. Although the I.D. photo is a compulsory product, here vast segments of society satisfy their desire to leave objective proof of their existence. This photo unveils the mechanism intrinsic to the technical image, its double loyalty to the spheres of truth and fiction, giving birth to a rehearsed verisimilitude, to the paradox of a depersonalized Narcissus.

Rosangela Renno reinforces this alienation effect by manipulating her archive of images of consumption in different ways, ultimately

strengthening perceptions of the ways in which her icons are generated and circulate. It is significant that in some groupings, photography directly exploits the negative, the other side of the image that society is allowed to see, sometimes obliterating its visibility, sometimes making it even more evident. In this way, a game of erasure is established in which identification and unidentification eternally chase each other, transforming themselves into the site where body and ghost meet, midway between the established and the latent real.

In another collection of work, Rosangela inverts this organizing logic in order to concentrate on deconstructing mystical identity, and in doing so, reveal the social processes it governs. It is no accident that the form she has chosen is a jigsaw puzzle: the image is constructed bit by bit, using fragments to attain not the unpredictable, but a predetermined configuration where the game unveils a structure of the controlled unexpected.

By exploring photography's social dimension, its circulation and function inside the market of signs, the *objet trouvé* of "The Identity at Play" clarifies the image's precarious reality, its exchange value, its obviousness in a visually polluted society. However, it does not stop at this first discovery, but establishes a dialectical game between appropriation as a means of maintaining a distance from the art system, and as instantaneous participation in this same system. Although the *objet trouvé*, the I.D. photo, gains new semantic strength through juxtaposition and condensation, its dense, visual impact compels it to move from the insignificant to the significant.

At first, one might think that the dimension of quotation reveals the true nature of appropriation as a process which puts notions of authorship at risk, installing a mechanism which distances both the subject and the traditional subjectivity attributed to art. Viewed through this prism, the cycle of repetition and reproduction which rules the laws of the image of consumption gains a new meaning if we apply one of John Berger's theories which appears to respond to Rosangela Renno's proposal.

If, as Berger suggests, reproducing an image sets movements in motion, one which returns to the original and another which establishes a new reference point for other images, this is the fundamental action of "The Identity at Play", especially if we keep in mind Rosangela Renno's extraordinary installation structure. In the space she has created, which is, of course, different from the conventional circuit of the image of consumption, Rosangela Renno declares her fascination for the IMAGE, far from all cultural references, far from all qualitative or hierarchical distinctions. Her icons acquire a transformative power, for the photographs no longer greet us as sources of identity/identification, but as participants in a fictionalizing and distancing process that is simultaneously critical and participatory.

Annateresa Fabris, 1991