A Journey Inside the Perception of the Self-Image - from the 15th Century Italian Portrait to the Glamorized Image on the Facebook

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Abstract: This article aims to present the philosophical perspective upon the birth of the idea of the individual and the consequences of the discovery of the self-image on the techniques of image reproduction from the Renaissance to the present day. The process of projecting the self-image into the public space acquires a special importance with the elaboration of the portrait technique in the Italian painting of the 15th century. Through Leonardo da Vinci's paintings, this technique of reproducing self-image reaches a certain perfection. Following the evolution of this kind of projections and reproductions of the self-image, it is found that there is an obvious tendency by which the individual tends to free himself from certain patterns, or rather canons, which a certain epoch imposes. This process manifested in the visual arts corresponds to a new philosophical perception of man opened by the works of Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. The assertion of a new type of dignity, correlated with the idea of the microcosm, of the Renaissance man will lead to an affirmation of his own personality and especially to an increase of the will to power reflected more and more in the works of art. With the resurgence of the Italian renaissance, artists and philosophers experienced a decline, but found a favorable space for their development at the court of Elizabeth I, Queen of England. The art of portraiture, but also the philosophy of renaissance survives and is even more flourishing at the court of this queen. But the most important moment of this renaissance is marked by Dutch art after its liberation from Spanish rule. From this moment on, the emancipation of the individual will occur on an unimaginable scale until then. Analysing the Dutch art of portraiture from the seventeenth-century, we identify the fact that painters tried to reproduce images belonging to a wide variety of people, regardless of their social status or wealth, and, as such, the self-images began to be reproduced in a democratic manner. Finally, we will investigate the philosophical aspects that occur with this increasing process of mass reproduction of self-image, especially with the advent of photography and, in particular, digital photography, but also with the possibilities of posting images through contemporary social networks like Facebook, Twitter or TikTok. We conclude that the excesses of such a reproduction of self-image lead to new social behaviors, which were defined by Ioan Petru Culianu as "subjective power", i.e. that form of power experienced directly by a subject.

Keywords: *self-image; 15th century; italian portrait; facebook.*

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1. Introduction

The portrait is a representation of a specific individual, whom the artist has known throughout his life. A portrait not only records someone's features, but it "should say something" about the portrayed person, giving a vivid sense of s/he real presence.

A well-made portrait must highlight both the external image of the sitter, such as clothes, hairstyle, ornaments, objects he holds in his hand, but also the emotions and inner state of the subject at the time of his immortalization, that individual, personal aura. Portraits should express attitudes and emotions of the sitter, not just his physical aspects because only in this way can the identity of individuals be preserved even after their death.

Making a portrait of a person involves a lot of effort on the part of the painter because he must achieve both physical resemblance to the sitter's character -for this purpose being essential to imitate the appearance, color and personal characteristics, which must be studied from different angles in order to harmonize each aspect of body-, but, at the same time, the painter must capture those personal elements that distinguish the sitter and make him unique. The representation must be as favorable as possible for the sitter. Moreover, the portraits of persons of eminence and celebrity should be represented with "the most scrupulous fidelity, because their portrait is rather a public than a private property" (Murray, 1851, p. 3).

This article aims to present the philosophical perspective upon the birth of the idea of the individual and the consequences of the discovery of the self-image on the techniques of image reproduction from the Renaissance to the present day.

2. Construction of the new world of the Renaissance

The Renaissance was defined in the 19th century by Jacob Burckhardt, who, in his work *The Civilization of Italy in Renaissance* (*Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, 1860), published in Basel, considers it an intellectual and political phenomenon that developed in the 14th-16th centuries in Italy. Subsequent debates of scholars concluded that the beginnings of the Renaissance can be identified more precisely and should be correlated with some significant moments in mid-fourteenth-century Italy: "Petrarch's engagement with Roman antiquity in the early 1340s; the Black Death that wiped out a third of the population of Italy (and elsewhere in Europe) beginning in 1348, and Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1349-1352), the

great Italian vernacular prose testament to that pandemic's devastation; and the appearance in Italy in precisely these years of gunpowder weapons that would forever change the future course of armed conflict" (Wyatt, 2014, pp. 3-4).

In our view, the beginning of Renaissance could be placed even earlier, as this new epoch arose due to the events that preceded and followed the crusades, as well as the Homeric wars that led to the emergence of classical Greek civilization in the following centuries. Demographic growth in the West around the year 1000 allowed the Crusades, those bloody wars waged by Christians against Muslims to conquer that sacred place in the East, which they reverently called the "Holy Land".

The Crusades, but especially their consequences, re-signified the history of the West from several points of view. They first led to the emergence of military orders, such as the Knights Templar (1118), which made possible the appearance of the first modern credit cards. Second, due to the development of long-distance trade, a Western maritime empire was established, spreading from Spain to the Far East. At the same time, military campaigns to conquer land and other territories began, bringing together different civilizations that started to make trade and cultural exchanges. Also as a consequence of the crusades and the opening of major trade routes, the foundations of numerous new cities were laid and, as such, the population started to grow, stimulating the development of the economy. Very slowly, over the course of three centuries (11th-13th centuries), a new world emerged, in which increasingly complex social stratifications were formed due to those who have accumulated great fortunes, either due to trade or robberies of all kinds. In this new era also begin to appear the cities.

This world of new cities, which appeared overnight, is also the world in which Dante Alighieri (ca. 1265-1321) lived and created. The Florentine poet was contemporaneous with at least three events that will have the role of influencing his future vision of Hell.

In 1291, with the fall of the fortress of Accra, Christians lost all hope of the possibility of a Christian kingdom in the East. Jerusalem has been abandoned to Islam. Philip IV, King of France, began an increasingly aggressive policy, culminating in the Pope's move to Avignon, in true Babylonian captivity. Much worse, perhaps, is the fact that this king destroyed the Order of the Templars, the most important order of military monks, possibly the true creators of what can be called the chivalric ideal, in the medieval sense of the word.

In 1308, Dante began to write his famous trilogy, intitulată *Divine Comedy*, and completed it in 1320, a year before his death. Its action is placed

on the edge between the 13th and 14th centuries, in the year 1300 respectively, the famous year of the Christic jubilee. The Florentine's magnum opus produced a phenomenon that already announced the modern spirit of the Renaissance - marked by the assertion of individualities.

Beginning with the first part of Dante's narrative poem, *Inferno*, even if its first circles were populated by large groups of sinners, the last ones revealed individuals that gradually moved away from the crowd in order to present to Dante and Vergilius their lives and their sins for which they have been condemned. In a still Gothic, medieval way, a new page in literature is turned, marked by what Giovanni Boccaccio will identify as, in fact, a comedy.

In this Dantean comedy, a desire of assertion is clearly born, even in Hell, of what we call the "self-perception as an individual" of the modern man, who wants to offer a certain image to the public space. For example, Francesca da Rimini, Filippo Argenti or Brunetto Latini are individualized by their own sin. They become emblems of a collective imaginary that identifies certain areas of Hell with their images. The Sin, in the world described by Dante, acquires a representation through a character who has become, perhaps unwittingly, famous.

The circles and bolgias of Hell are structured by Dante in the manner of poetic portraits, using the mnemonic method imposed by the mathematician and philosopher Raimundus Lullus (1232-1315), a method that became "fashionable" at that time, in order to actually fix individual destinies, which, precisely through their individuality, gave value to the genre to which they belong. For example, Francesca da Rimini's poetic description, whose family Dante knew so well, highlights the drama of a sin born of the excesses of sensuality, which continues in its torturous form even in the world of shadows (Alighieri, 1918, pp. 56-58).

Dante's lyrics portray the face and character of Filippo Argenti - a citizen of Florence who joined the Black Guelph political faction, whom the poet placed on the fifth circle among the wrathful people, struggling in the turbulent waters of the Styx with another wrathful (Alighieri, 1918, pp. 85-87) - to raise the lecturer to the understanding of all that the sin of wrath means.

Along with Dante, who recounts his own life and reflects on the consequences of his actions, man actually discovers his own destiny, his own fatality, which he comes to understand only in Hell, as he is now detached from the impulses that once, in the terrestrial world, have imposed some decisions on him. The medievals thought that the Sin could be seen in a

general sense, as an impersonal element, which caught in its genre large groups of people, but in Renaissance, when people began to assume their destiny, their fate, this sin descended from the world of universals directly into the soul of man - seen as an individual, subject to a particular destiny.

Thus, the combination of the idea of sin and that of destiny or fate makes the Dantean construction as one of the first great works of Renaissance literature, which can be seen both as a flowering branch on the robust body of the Middle Ages, by the fact that it is still placed in structures of the medieval mind through the idea of sin, but it is more than that because in this Dantean perspective we begin to find the ancient tragedy with that wonderful and torturous destiny in front of which people were powerless.

It was this heldlessness before the fate, the destiny, that often made these ancient characters so great, as Orestes or Oedipus were. The Dantean characters, in front of their destiny, are similar to those described by Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides, and perhaps even more uplifting - precisely through their consciousness of sin.

This idea, in which the Renaissance re-evaluates, from Christian positions, the ancient thinking about the idea of destiny, is very well captured in Valentine Zaffino's study, entitled *The Renaissance Concept of Fate*: "With the rise of Christian philosophy, divine providence replaced blind fate, and Renaissance thought reinterpreted these concepts in both a mystical and a theological-philosophical sense" (Zaffino, 2019). Therefore, the Renaissance does not mean an dissolution of Christian values, a simple rebirth of Antiquity with its paganism, but, as Zaffino suggests, the Renaissance is a phenomenon characterized primarily by syncretism.

3. The beginning of the Renaissance portraiture

In the Middle Ages, people were thought only through a social category; they did not exist as individuals, but they were peasants or belonged to a guild, for example that of tanners, tailors, blacksmiths, etc.

In the great altar icons or triptychs, only the great donors deserved to be painted as miniature characters at the feet of the saints. However, with the development of cities, the germs of the development of a culture that allowed qualitative differentiations within the painting art appeared.

An important role was played by the *condottieri*, people in arms, who took control of a city. Although politically ephemeral, *condottieri* wanted to compensate for this ephemerality by over-bidding on self-image and thus they appealed to the works of artists, poets, painters and sculptors. There

were also the families of bankers who, when they slipped into politics, also turned to artists to legitimize their power.

Within the cities, developed mainly as commercial centers, especially in Italy, the most important being Florence, a qualitative differentiation between different social categories, but also within the same category began to appear.

Thus, there was no longer a simple group of anonymous, “dead souls”, but began to appear authentic personalities, who differentiated themselves from the group they belonged to, stood out in the group or, even more, rose above all social groups, preparing the idea of *homo universale*, the man who was at the same time an artist, man of arts, banker, mathematician, scientist and so on.

Starting with Trecento, spirits such as Dante and Petrarca marked a new perspective on the individual and especially on the self-consciousness that he acquired and this perspective will be reflected in the art of portraiture.

The traditions of Western portraits date back to antiquity and especially in ancient Greece and Rome, where realistic representations of distinguished men and women appeared in sculpture and on the faces of coins.

After many centuries in which generic representation had been the norm, portraits similar to the one they represent began to reappear in Europe in the 14th century.

This change reflected a further increase in interest in everyday life and individual identity, as well as a rebirth of Greco-Roman customs. The re-birth of the portrait art was thus a significant manifestation of the Renaissance in Europe.

In the history of art, Trecento is synonym with the Proto-Renaissance period of painting, sculpture and architecture. In painting, there were two main streams: that of the conservative Sieneese School of Painting, led by Duccio de Buoninsegna (1255-1318), who continued the old style of Byzantine art, and the second one was the Florentine Proto-Renaissance School led by Giotto (1267-1337). Giotto was the one who came closer to human nature while the canons of painting of that time were oriented towards religious themes. Filippo Villani, in *Vite degli uomini illustri fiorentini*, presents Giotto and his art as one of the pioneers in Italian painting: “... the first was Giovanni named Cimabue, the one who brought back to life the painting of antiquity, especially the almost lost natural representation, which he revoked with art and ingenuity; because Greek and Latin painting had begun this kind of painting for many centuries, as it is demonstrated by

the figures on the walls formerly painted. After him was Giotto, of very illustrious fame, not only equal to the ancient painters, but also a superior talent in art and ingenuity. He restored ancient dignity to painting, and was a very great name, as it appear in many paintings, especially that in the church of San Pietro in Rome, an admirable work of mosaic, and with very great figurative art. He painted himself, ..., with the help of mirrors, and his contemporary poet Dante Alighieri on the walls in the chapel of the Palace of Power. In addition to painting, Giotto was a man of great counsel, and knew the use of many things. He was also a great emulator of poetry, and of fame rather than of earnings. From this praiseworthy man, as a sincere and abundant source knows, very clear streams of painting came out, and this renewed painting endeavored to make nature more precious and pleasant” (Villani, 1950, p. 450). It seems that Giotto was invited to make a portrait of Dante before April 1302 and he indeed made it (Figure 1), including this portrait in a fresco or in a panel in the chapel of the Palazzo del Podestà in Florence.

Figure 1. *Dante Alighieri*
(by Giotto di Bondone, c. 1335)

The portrait made by Giotto preserves the patina of the Early Renaissance, having a sculptural way of realization because the represented character seemed to be a colorful bas-relief, which differed from the background behind it. The portrait with a profile view, an obvious reference to the Caesars of Rome represented on the Roman coins, was a clear sign that in the public space this kind of picture had to symbolize in fact the position and social rank of the character, offering him through this kind of profile, at least at the level of an unconscious collectively, an increase of authority and often compensating by image the real

lack by which the respective character could legitimize his social position that he had often obtained only due to his qualities, fortune and less by his noble blood.

4. Everything has to start somewhere - the Italian portrait in the 15th century

The portraits of the Early Renaissance were not paintings per se, but rather donor inclusions in the paintings with Christian themes they offered to the churches. Donors were frequently depicted in altar paintings or icons they commissioned to beautify various churches.

If the front representation of the portrayed character was largely reserved only for Jesus, the Virgin and the saints, the laity were represented in their portraits only by the profile view. Those paintings most often presented the profiles of rich people - both men and women - in the form of representations that looked more like mortuary effigies, the faces of these people seeming to have something of the hardness and pallor of ancient marble statues. The faces were expressionless, “frozen”, emanating a seraphic calm, which revealed the human only through the eyes of the characters, who reflected a certain tension that seemed to be waiting to be unloaded, the action existing in a kind of philosophical potency and less or almost not in act.

The individual of the Renaissance acquires such a self-awareness that he feels the need to immortalize his image as he wishes. He no longer accepts an image depicted by another, no longer prefers to be represented in an anonymous group of “the damned” or in a possible heavenly assembly, but prefers the status he had here, on Earth.

Portraits that were considered valuable to remain in posterity are beginning to be made. These were kings, aristocrats, people of the Church. Each of these characters are represented together with the symbols that define his rank or passions: coats of arms, signs of power, symbols of music, of science, books, money, pearls, etc. The clothes and ornaments of the sitter were made so as to allow the identification of the sitter.

The first portrait made for lay people and which has survived to this day is *Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement* (Figure 2), made in 1440 by Fra Filippo Lippi. In the picture there are two characters represented in profile view, the favorite view at that time, who look impassively at each other through a window, probably two fiancés or two spouses. The woman is luxuriously dressed, with a coat on the sleeve of which is embroidered the word “*lealta*” (faithful), and the man has his hands on a coat of arms, which refers to the noble family to which he belong.

Figure 2. *Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement*
(by Fra Filippo Lippi, ca. 1440)

Figure 3. *The portrait of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* [by Cristofano dell'Altissimo (15th century)]

Later, Italian painters began to represent donors with distinctive features, much closer to reality, so that the viewer could recognize them. Such an example could be found in the portraits of Tommaso and Maria Portinari, painted by Hans Memling around 1470, probably to celebrate the marriage of the two (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Left: *Tommaso di Folco Portinari*; Right: *Maria Portinari*
(by Hans Memling, ca. 1470)

Although they were meant to flank the image of the Virgin Mary and the Infant in a small triptych, each of them still expresses individual identity as it describes the unique aspect of the person they represented. The artist no longer uses profile views, but the characters are turned into a three-quarter position, which allows for greater involvement between the sitter (model) and the spectator.

The features of the two portraits are somehow idealized, but they are also credible. Although immortalized in a pious posture, some elements, such as the necklace and the elaborate dress of Maria Potinari, define their social status, the husband being a rich banker at that time.

However, the expression of the portrait evolves slowly. Even at the beginning of the 15th century, the Italian masters were unable to capture the emotions on sitter's face.

The first portrait of a philosopher, actually an expressionless profile view, is that of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Figure 3), who wrote the work *De dignitate hominis* (*Oration on the Dignity of Man*, 1486), that *manifesto* of the human dignity seen under the species of the individual who alone assumes the ascent to and descent into his own condition. The Italian

philosopher wrote that after the Supreme Maker conceived man, He placed him at the center of the Universe and spoke to him thus: "We have given you, Adam, no fixed seat or form of your own, no talent peculiar to you alone. This we have done so that whatever seat, whatever form, whatever talent you may judge desirable, these same you may have and possess according to your desire and judgment. ... We have set you at the center of the world so that from there you may more easily gaze upon whatever it contains. We have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that you may, as the free and extraordinary shaper of yourself, fashion yourself in whatever form you prefer. It will be in your power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Alternatively, you shall have the power, in accordance with the judgment of your soul, to be reborn into the higher orders, those that divine" (Pico Della Mirandola, 1999, p. 117). *De dignitate hominis* stated that God created man to appreciate the greatness and beauty of the world and to enjoy it at the same time. Man is not bound to any place, to any particular form, and this is because God has given him a privileged status, i.e. his rising above all creatures. It can be said that Pico della Mirandola was one of the philosophers who shaped the spirit of the Renaissance, which strived to impose a certain type of freedom to the human being.

The echoes of della Mirandola's philosophy are visible in the work of a German painter who visited Italy in the years immediately following the appearance of *De dignitate hominis*. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) is the first artist to make a self-portrait in 1491 (Figure 5), at the age of 20, using his image seen in the convex mirror, which was then available to him. It was a sketch also called "the first modern self-portrait" because it not only presents the physical appearance of the artist, but also "his unique inner self" (Koerner, 1993, p. 37).

Two more famous self-portraits of the artist followed, at a more mature age. Dürer's self-portrait from 1498 (Figure 6) is the first portrait not commissioned by any patron. The artist mentioned in an inscription that the person represented in that painting is himself: "1498, I painted it according to my figure. I was twenty-six years old, Albrecht Dürer", unequivocally attesting that this image is a self-portrait. Through his festive clothes, the self-portrait of 1498 reveals his social status at that time that rivaled that of a member of the high society and Dürer was eager to show himself to the world in this position. It is a clear sign that Dürer had taken from Italy the humanist conception of the artist's sovereignty.

In fact, Dürer's numerous self-portraits evoke his moods at certain moments, the stages in his life, his social position. His self-portraits reveal

the artist's desire to represent himself for posterity, because he has chosen a certain way to be seen by others.

Figure 5. *Self-portrait*
(Albrecht Dürer, 1491)

Figure 6. *Self-portrait*
(Albrecht Dürer, 1498)

Figure 7. *Autoportret*
(Albrecht Dürer, 1500)

The emblematic Dürer's self-portrait is the one from 1500 (Figure 7), through which the artist expressed his power as an artist with dignity. The portrait used a frontal view, and the posture of the sitter is comparative with the representations of Christ, probably in order to emphasize the fact that the art of painting is divine. Presenting himself in the position of Christ-like icons, being dressed in furs like a humanist, the painter become a representative person, as he is no longer a craftsman, but an artist, an intellectual (Koerner, 1993, p. 53). The symbolic elements suggesting that the sitter was indeed Dürer - the painter are his eyes and his creative hand, the true instruments of the artist (Koerner, 1993, p. 6).

But Dürer was only the forerunner of the art of self-portrait. Beginning with the late 15th century, artists began to use different ingenious methods and perspectives to represent themselves. Through self-portraits, artists tried to reveal something much deeper than their own physical appearances, namely their desire to be seen by the world in a certain way.

Towards the end of the 15th century, along with the works of Da Messina and especially those of Leonardo Da Vinci, the Italian portrait began to show its true value. Italian painters maintained and refined three-quarter view of the sitter, but also added elements that would highlight

something from the inner life of the painted character. The painted individual should have something to say, to send a message, sometimes more encrypted, as it is the enigmatic smile in Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Mona Lisa (ca. 1503–1505) (Figure 8). In fact, with Leonardo's paintings it came the time of the great return of man with his face and his whole being to the world around him, which he now dares to look at with his inquisitive eyes.

Artists began to catch the human figure in motion, in action, with a body movement that referred to a certain code recalling to be deciphered, like the painting of *St. John the Baptist* (Figure 9), also made by Leonardo. Moreover, Leonardo's portraits also capture the "movement of the mind", being most of the time with a smile on sitter's face, but some other time with an air of sadness. This path was followed in the next century by Michelangelo Buonarroti when he painted the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican.

Thus, even through the painting of the late 15th and early 16th centuries one can see the spirit of the new world, marked by that magical discovery of the individual who announces the Protestant Reformation in all the magnitude of its manifestation. Man deifies himself, he discovers that mysterious and personal connection with God devoid of any kind of intermediaries, even of the benevolent ones. The portrait is the royal gate to the interiority, to that space of freedom, of autonomous thinking, in which the person, the individual, defines himself in an authentic way, the only place from where the censorship of the idols of the external world can be initiated.

Figure 8. *Portrait of Mona Lisa del Giocondo*
(by Leonardo da Vinci, 1503-1506)

Figure 9. *Saint John the Baptist*
(by Leonardo da Vinci, 1513-1516)

This new spirit imposed by the Italian Renaissance suffered in its homeland, being the victim of religious conflicts that resulted in a fanatical regiment of the souls who could not be left without a shepherd. As a result, the portrait technique would find some freedom of expression in Elizabethan England, defying the crisis in which this kind of art had entered throughout continental Europe.

5. Elizabethan Era - The Golden Age of English Renaissance Portraiture

The 16th century, dominated by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, severely affected the art of portraiture and the spirit of the Italian Renaissance, which considered the individual as an *axis mundi*. The art of portraiture found its own form of manifestation in the English space as an expression of Elizabethan art. The English portrait is the one that seems to accompany the Elizabethan theater in color. The English painters have chosen to portray the great actors of that time, as were Ben Jonson, Kit

Marlowe and the great, immortal, Will (Shakespeare), but also the great political “actors” were the source of inspiration for these artists.

In the 16th century, the idea of a female ruler was captured by queens who wanted power, who wanted to take the destinies of Western Europe into their own hands. The apogee of this power will be embodied by Queen Elizabeth I of England and Ireland (1533-1603).

As monarch, Queen Elizabeth I had a huge impact on the people of culture of her time as she was the one who had to face the Counter-Reformation initiated by the Council of Trent. In the context of a Europe caught in the web of religious conflicts, neutrality was a precious gift, which could not be lost for the sake of a queen. The role that young Elizabeth was to play was that of a woman who was somewhat inaccessible, but protective of the people. Therefore, given the warrior qualities of the queen, but also her difficulty in tying an official marriage, motivated by the fact that the choice of the suitor had political consequences that could be dangerous for the peace of the Kingdom, the queen had to receive a symbol with virgin features. The Flemish painter Quentin Metsys the Younger (1543-1589), an artist at the court of the Tudors in the Elizabethan era, made a symbolic portrait of the queen in 1583, entitled *The Sieve Portrait of Elizabeth I* (Figure 10). The queen holds in her hand a sieve, a symbol of chastity, alluding to Tuccia, a virgin vestal who proved her virginity by carrying water taken from the Tiber with a sieve and which she took to the Temple of the Vestal (Dumitrescu, 2016, pp. 147-148).

With the victory of the British army over the famous and hitherto dreaded Spanish Army, the image of the queen began to change. In the paintings from the end of the 16th century, she appears in a new hypostasis - that of an absolute sovereign. *The Armada Portrait* (1588) (Figure 11), made by an unknown artist, was realized to mark the victory of the British army over the Spanish Armada (presented in the background). Elizabeth's greatness lies not only in the impenetrability of the expression, but also in the richness of the ornaments that enrich her clothing and hairstyle, among which the precious stones and pearls abound. The undisputed power of the sovereign over the whole world is represented by the artist by fixing the queen's hand over the globe.

Figure 10. *The Sieve Portrait of Elizabeth I* (by Quentin Metsys the Younger, 1583)

Figure 11. *The Armada Portrait of Elizabeth I of England* (by an unknown painter, 1588).

Figure 12. *The Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I* [by Isaac Oliver (1556-1617) or Marcus Gheeraerts (1561-1636), ca. 1600-1602].

Towards the end of Elizabeth's life and reign, painters resorted to the allegorical representation of the ever-young Queen, rejuvenating her more and more as the queen became older. *The Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I* (Figure 12), made in 1600, when the queen was already 67 years old, by a young artist [perhaps Isaac Oliver (1556-1617) or perhaps Marcus Gheeraerts (1561-1636)] presents a paradigm shift correlated with the immense power owned by the one who had defeated the powerful Spanish army. Elizabeth I became the Sun, the star that gives light and life to all her subjects. Her cloak shines like gold, but also like the rays of the sun, and has as its print numerous human eyes and ears that refer to the vast network of espionage she led with the help of Walsingham. On the left side of the painting there is the inscription: NON SINE SOLE IRIS ("There is no rainbow without the Sun"), and the queen holds in her hand a rainbow, a symbol of the British spy network, known as the "rainbow scheme" as it has incorporated not only English men, but also foreigners (Dumitrescu, 2016, pp. 148-153).

Following the model of the queen, other high-ranking subjects also asked artists to make their portraits. The portraits of the heads of the secret services are famous: the two Lords Cecil, William and his son Robert, largely responsible for the ambivalence of the 16th century English politics, which

showed a certain ambiguity in the relationship between the philo-catholic aristocracy and the people attracted by the Protestant ideas.

Robert Devereux, the 2nd Earl of Essex and the famous favourite of Elizabeth I, hold a leading place in the panoply of English portraits made up at the end of 16th century. His face is reminiscent of the great victories against the invincible Spanish *Armada*, but also of the military disasters on the Irish front, which led, for political reasons, to his condemnation to death in 1601 (Figure 13).

Figure 13. *Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex* (after Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, early 17th century, based on a work of circa 1596)

The English portraits are like the plays written at that time, reflecting a torturous human turmoil accompanied by great acts of creation as a result of a deep reflexivity on the human condition.

Raoul Sorban, an expert of the era marked by the Council of Trent in 1563, who marked the principles of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, in his *Preface* to the paintings album dedicated to the Dutch painter Frans Hals, recalled precisely this unity of the English art that is reflected in dramaturgy as well as in painting: "Shakespeare, born in the year of Michelangelo's death

(1564) and deceased when Frans Hals was thirty-six years old, could also be considered, we believe, a faithful expression of the new European sentiment, as opposed to the old spirituality; his plays, in which external events have their roots in the deepest and most real conflicts and feelings of the human soul, attest not only to a victorious genre of the age, but - through their free constructions - also to the shadow of purely formal problems. In fact, while Catholicism creates an art of mystical ecstasy, transforming the edifice of the church itself into the theater of great performances, the general ideas of the Reformation are not hostile to the expression, in art, of true and natural feelings” (Șorban, 1978, p. 6).

Even though it had no religious connotations, the English portrait was still aimed primarily at an elite, especially that elite that revolved around Queen Elizabeth I and then around King James I.

6. The Flemish portrait from the 17th century and the first embellishment of the individual in order to obtain a public image

The true glory of the portrait, which descends into the world, capturing all mortals as a whirlwind of destiny, regardless of their age or social status, was marked by the painters from the Netherlands in the 17th century. In this small country created due to the independence from the Spanish Crown, the portrait began to be found in almost all public and private spaces, except for the churches, where the Calvinist religion forbade painting.

The Dutch Republic was that privileged place where sea trade brought goods from everywhere, fully satisfying the curiosity of the eye for the wonders of the material world. It was also the place where art, especially painting, had found an innovative form of expression that created intense emotions for the soul in searching of imaginary spaces.

Moreover, the free territory of the United Provinces of the Netherlands represented at that time the European center not only of the arts and letters, but, first of all, of the sciences. In the Netherlands of the 17th century have been published the most important works of the time in the field of physics, optics, medicine and philosophy. In this academic framework, a special state of intellectual enthusiasm developed, thus accompanying the emotion in front of the joys determined by the wealth of material things, but also in front of the works of the artists that delighted the soul of the free man (Dumitrescu, 2020, p. 201).

By a strange law of compensation, in the absence of painting orders from the clergy, as the protestant churches all had white walls, Dutch artists

will turn to the faces of all kind of people - kings, officials, lawyers, artists, merchants, bankers, the military, but also chambermaids or even beggars, in a true image procession of a century, which will thus become immortal.

The Dutch miracle of the 17th century means, in fact, the full assertion of the individual, both in terms of thinking, as it appears in the philosophy of René Descartes or Spinoza, but also by the aesthetic dimension offered by the great portraitists of the 17th century. However, the portrait arose from the sitter's desire to become known and recognized. Being strongly connected to the social sphere, the portrait had to accurately reproduce the physical appearance of the sitter in order to ensure the portrayed person the quality of a singular individual in relation to others and the ability to be easily recognized. However, in the public space, man has a natural tendency to offer a different self-image than that of his private space.

The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) captured the essence of the Flemish painting, which is to reproduce a human reality that took place on a daily basis, but not as it was presented in its daily banality, but much glamorized, somewhat elevated to the rank of ideal; it was as if banality became overnight, through this type of artistic reproduction, an idea of beauty (Huizinga, 1991, p. 97).

The Golden Age of Flemish painting was represented by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Frans Hals (1582-1666), Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), and Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675).

Frans Hals' revolutionary portraiture is best represented by the painting *Willem van Heythuysen posing with a sword* (Figure 14). It was a portrait made in 1625, at full artistic force of the Dutch painter, when he was 45 years old. In this large painting, the body of the character, a prosperous cloth merchant, is reproduced in its entirety. The painting is clearly intended to impress ostentatiously. The pride and self-satisfaction of this merchant who sees himself like a king is captured. He was, after all, "the king of baize and cloth"! The great garnet curtain, the color of the monarchs, behind him, also proves it. His posture is martial, and the most impressive clothing accessory, in addition to the large white collar at his neck and the gold belt at his waist, is the sword, the handle of which is adorned with precious stones. Clearly, it is not a fighting sword, but an object with a decorative role that suggests the strength, virility and especially the opulence of its owner.

The painting reflects how Willem Heythuysen ordered Hals to be represented. The result was one thought by the painter, somewhere on the verge of the ridicule, perhaps due to the brilliant talent of the Dutch painter, who managed to bring the subject of a painting in that area of maximum ambivalence between opposing states, such as, in this case, the respect that

was demanded by the commissioner of the art work and the ridiculousness of the factual situation of the model. The viewer, bewildered by the grandeur of the image, finds it difficult to decide whether the character in the painting is an authentic nobleman or a cabotine of a false reality, posing ridiculously in his attempt to assume the posture of a prince or king.

The same is true about Frans Hals's later paintings, such as the famous *Portrait of Descartes* (Figure 15), in which the philosopher is captured with that somewhat exaggerated expression in the features, through which meditation comes to light, as a state produced by the metaphysical thinking. Regarding this portrait, the Romanian art critic Raoul Șorban (1978) notes that he expressed a "*thinking ugliness*". However, this combination gave the painting a great aesthetic value, because it amplifies the authentic meaning of the Cartesian philosophy, born out of extreme prudence, fear, but also perseverance on the thorny path of imposing the Truth, in which this philosopher believed with all his conviction.

Three centuries later, Maxime Leroy affirmed that Descartes was "a masked philosopher", who, like the Flemish portraits of the Golden Age, has built a public image in order to deceive, to hide his true identity behind a mask. The modern man, under the sign of Cartesian-type self-reflexivity, builds various masks, public images, which at one point seem to him to be the most convenient for his assertion.

Indeed, living between Catholics and Protestants, libertines and religious fanatics, scientists and pious pastors, therefore in such a motley setting of 17th century Holland, Descartes could only go unnoticed behind a mask, which provided him with that spiritual camouflage without which even his survival, - as a lucid man, a man of common sense and of truth enlightened by his own conscience -, would have been in great danger.

Figure 14. *Willem van Heythuysen posing with a sword*
(by Frans Hals, 1625)

But certainly one of the important paintings for the great mutation that marks the 17th century in Flemish painting is the *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (Figure 16), made in 1665 by Johannes Vermeer. The portrait of the young woman captures precisely this beautified reproduction of the image, but which at the same time conveys a message that refers to the inner subjective dimension of the individual, which Flemish art cultivates. Once captured in the portrait, the girl exceeds the condition of an anonymous existence, she becomes, together with all her enigmatic sensuality that she conveys, a symbol, an idol of the modern world.

Through the Flemish painting of the Golden Age, the individual is prepared to come out of anonymity, to present himself to the world as he wishes, as he sees and feels in his own perception and not in the perception of the institutions that see him only from one perspective. The paintings of that period build the reflective, ambivalent image of a man who wants to show that he is much more than a simple member of an anonymous mass of believers. Even piety becomes a personal matter and much more complicated than it seems at first glance because it involves the ressorts of decision and of inner life.

Figure 15. *Portrait of René Descartes* (by Frans Hals, 1649)

Figure 16. *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (by Johannes Vermeer, ca. 1665)

7. The art of self-portrait in the online environment

At the end of the 19th century, the technique of photography appeared and photographers wanted to realized portraits as close as possible to the portraits painted by the great artists.

Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, artists like Pablo Picasso no longer resorted to artistic means to ensure the physical resemblance of the sitter to the portrait, but they emphasized the interiority they were trying to discover to the sitter.

After a century, with the entry of mankind into the digital computerized era, a new way of life emerges and human being stands under the spectrum of its transformation as “a product of the digital age” (Cucu & Lenta, 2014). The new epoch, also called “the post-modern era”, can be define as “a new state of social evolution characterized by a free individual, liberation of the emotions and expressions from the reason constraints”, but, in the end, this kind of thinking “is not a cultural achievement” (Popoveniuc, 2017).

In the post-modern era, portraits could be found everywhere, not just in museums, galleries or houses, but especially online, in the virtual space of the social networks and anyone could see these images on cell phone or computer.

In the last decades, Europeans have adapted the constant effort involved in working to the body they possess. The body, the only thing that man receives as a primordial datum, acquires a special mission, namely to fulfill civilization here on Earth. Marcel Gauchet stated the following about the man who stepped into modernity: “It is the refusal to suffer one's bequeathed lot, the concern to control its mysteries and functions, and the attempt to maximize its capabilities and resources. To understand, to master, and to increase. Beauty, achievements, or enjoyments are all part of a mobilization to embrace our own flesh which is archetypal given” (Gauchet, 1999, pp. 96-97). This modern paradigm, involving a fusion between freedom and self-perception, reached its peak at the end of the 20th century - when mass reproduction techniques of the image developed and culminated in the early 21st century with what the screens attached to artificial intelligence (AI) could offer. At this moment something new appears. It is a revolution of the image that becomes global as humanity advances in the third millenium, when the Internet and social networks realize the partnership between human desires to promote their self-image and the possibility of their fulfillment through artificial intelligence (AI).

Facebook and all other such applications, such as *Instagram*, *Tik Tok*, *Twitter*, etc., which reproduce images in the online environment, represent the postmodern form of the portrait. Through *Facebook*, people are giving their lives to artificial intelligence, the only one that can store data at such a level that encompasses the entire experience of humanity. People prefer a glamorized image that artificial intelligence will then make it a global one.

Antonio Sandu appreciates that all these products of contemporary communication reflect a much more complex process that creates a new anthropological vision that he describes as follows: “The term *homo sapiens* + (interneticus) is used to draw attention to the fact that the formation structures of our thinking process are no longer entirely adequate for dealing with the new realities of communicational action. The transcendence of the limitations in the spatiality dimension and the human condition dimension of spatialised and localised being generates the premises of a new anthropological condition: transhuman but not yet posthuman” (Sandu, 2015).

The Anthropology of Immortality and the Crisis of Posthuman Conscience, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, *Facebook* is paving the way for the most fanciful scenarios in which self-image and especially people's expectations can be satisfied with the help of artificial intelligence (AI). First of all, high-performance cameras allow *selfies* to be taken, which means a great revolution in the field of self-image because it is no longer made by someone else, but by the very person who demands the image. The *selfie*, as a “*self-portrait photo*”, is a form of almost total assumption of the image of himself by a subject because no one intervenes between the individual and how he chooses his self-perception to be. The author of the photograph often uses, in this case, even the retouching technique to make a self-portrait that reflects the expectations best suited to his desire to step in a certain way into the public space.

In the new context of *Facebook*, a new element appears, namely *the rating* of an image obtained through those “*likes*” (signifying viewers' preferences, many of them anonymous) that a certain picture can obtain at a given time. Being conditioned by its permanent appreciations, the new *self-image* created by social networks becomes an extremely dynamic, fluid one, in a continuous process of a self-reinvention in order to avoid stereotype and boredom.

Another extremely important element is that some *selfie-images* can be associated with advertisements for certain products, becoming a source of income. In this condition, the *self-image* must be in line with the requirements of the sponsors. Thus appears a new type of image, this time intersubjective,

in which the self-image is integrated in a level of expectation that puts a permanent pressure on the one who actually sells his self-image. This process can become obsessive and can induce at some point even anxiety to the one who sells his self-image. Self-image has become a business.

Thus, the event imposed by the image commanders often overlaps with the real desires of the subject, which can lead at one point to exhaustion and neurosis.

This often leads to sometimes exhibitionist and eccentric images, which no longer have any connection with reality but rather with the pretext of the event; many of the *selfie* authors lost their lives for self-portraits that they thought would have a great rating, a great success with the audience. As Günther Anders has already noted, if in the past events reflected people's lives, nowadays people get to live only for certain events, and the self-image has also become, in this new existential context, an event.

The excesses of such a reproduction of self-image lead to new social behaviors, which were defined by Ioan Petru Culianu as "subjective power", which is a form of power experienced directly by a subject.

8. Conclusions

The capture of the portrait from its Renaissance forms to the selfie reveals in fact what philosophy identifies with the concept of "free soul". The free soul actually coincides with the discovery of the individual as the supreme value, being aware of his own dignity and position in the Cosmos. In fact, art does nothing but express through plastic means what philosophers and writers of a certain era theoretically achieved. If the art of Renaissance portraiture cannot be understood without reading Pico della Mirandola's works, the portraits of the Elizabethan era reflect the nuances and valences of the philosophy of the Golden Age of England, in which the philosophy of Francis Bacon, who discovered "new continents of knowledge" and the plays of Kit Marlowe and William Shakespeare, which made full use of the "special effects" offered by the new possibilities of mechanics, shed light on that principle which announced that "knowledge is power". Man became proud of his position as a master of the new world he was discovering through science and technical progress.

This spectacular evolution of the way in which the human soul becomes aware of its freedom and, in conjunction with it, in its self-awareness is reflected, as we have tried to demonstrate, in its perfect form, in the Dutch portrait of the 17th century. Flemish art captures, for the first time, portraits of all social categories, from beggars, orphans, maids,

ordinary or prosperous people dedicated to their work, doctors, lawyers, merchants to princes and kings. This fact demonstrates a maturation of self-awareness that democratizes and, moreover, values its own destiny, regardless of its nature. It is the first time that these characters, regardless of their social condition, primarily matter as people.

This path to the emancipation of the human being has created many expectations, many of which are now fulfilled, such as the condition of women. Towards the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, a new phenomenon was experimented and then implemented in the name of the idea of “free soul”, namely that of the counterculture, in which the self-image catches a dynamic that pushes it into the supersaturation zone, leading eventually to a universe of neurosis and excesses.

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