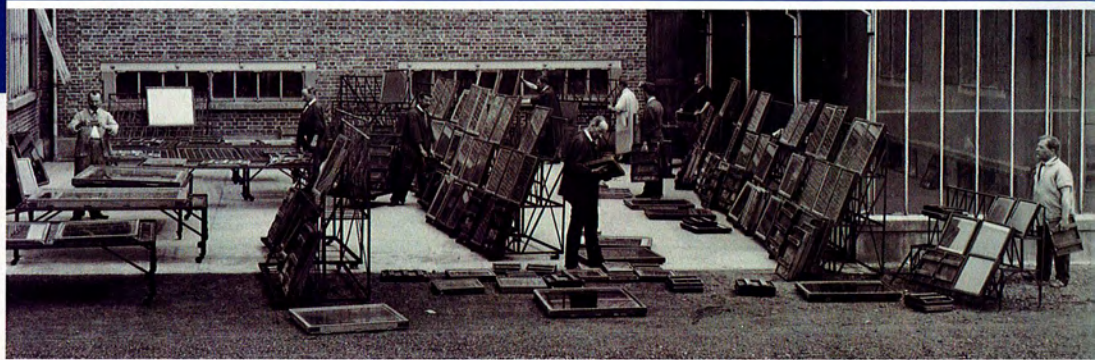




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FAKTIZITÄT UND
GEBRAUCH FRÜHER
FOTOGRAPHIE –
FACTUALITY AND
UTILIZATION OF
EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY



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Duchenne's Frontispiece: Idealised Facticity and the Politics of Photographic Double Portraiture

Wiebke Leister

'Doesn't an image only begin to be interesting – or begin at all – by presenting itself as an image of the other?' (Georges Didi-Huberman: 'Fragments of Humanity', p.277)

Idealised Naturalism

In the early days of photography, electricity, and physiology, the French medical doctor Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne (1806–75) took it upon himself to correct the anatomical inaccuracies of the Laocoon of Rome – one of the most notably admired ancient sculpture groups, housed at the Vatican Museums since it was excavated on the Esquiline Hill in Rome in 1506. It was immediately identified as *the* 'Laocoon' that had been described by Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD) as a masterpiece by sculptors of Rhodes. According to Greek legend, Laocoon was a Trojan priest, who warned against accepting the cunning gift of the wooden horse into the independent city of Troy. The gods on the side of the Greeks therefore sent two giant sea serpents to kill him and his two sons.

The antique statue of *Laocoon and His Sons* (c. 40–30 BC) has become "the prototypical icon of human agony" in Western art¹, while at the same time featuring as the centre piece of a large controversy about the aesthetics of pain. It has been noted for representing its subject in motion (rather than in repose) and for its expressive range across the three figures (rather than one decisive

moment)². But it has also been described as an ideal of art – because the viewer still admires beauty in a scene of pain and death. In terms of spectatorship this is important because the question was: how can terror be represented without causing disgust? How can a horrible subject remain 'aesthetic'?

In the Classical and Renaissance eras, the display of the gaping mouth was certainly seen as an ugly and horrible shape, vulgar and undignified. As Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote in 1766: "The mere wide opening of the mouth [...] is a blot in painting and a fault in sculpture which has the most untoward effect possible. [...] When, therefore, Laocoon sighs, the imagination can hear him shriek; but if he shrieks, then she cannot mount a step higher from this representation, nor, again, descend a step lower without seeing him in a more tolerable and consequently more uninteresting condition. She hears him only groan, or she sees him already dead."³ The creative licence of the artist could and should therefore tone down the expressions of anguish to mere sighing for a more empathic response of the viewer – rather than depicting them in a 'realistic' way. In the late nine-

1 Spivey 2001, 25.

2 Peter Wollen quotes Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's temporal observation that the figures are caught in three dramatic stages of the attack, thus depicting successive degrees of pain: fear (younger son), terror (Laocoon), and compassion (elder son). "Time does not disappear from static forms like painting, photography or

sculpture. It simply appears in a form which precludes a consecutive string of completed events. Instead it favours pivotal moments which carry with them their own temporal presuppositions and implications." (Wollen 2000, 156 f.)

3 Lessing 1967, 14 f.

teenth-century, when Duchenne undertook his facial observations, the 'Classical' was equally seen as an apotheosis of the 'civilised', cultured by definition.

A pioneering physician, Duchenne's work is valued to this day because he undertook the first systematic experiments on facial muscle movement. His 1862 book *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression* used localised medical electrification to reproduce, analyse, and decode the physiology of emotional expressions. By stimulating the movement of individual muscles with low voltage electrodes, he could trigger a wide range of expressions. Allocating each facial muscle to one specific emotion to identify their 'mechanic' roles in expressing specific emotions, he constructed an iconographic scale of emotional expressions, establishing a new terminology. This facial language was in Duchenne's view 'universal and immutable', giving all humans the 'instinctive faculty' to mechanically express sentiments by always contracting the same muscles.

Using the electric conductivity of the human skin and the nerve fibre for his positivist experiments, Duchenne developed the hypothesis that we perceive the meaning of a face as a complete *gestalt*, which transforms itself into a new whole as soon as a small part of it is changed⁴. Because facial anatomy is a fleeting process, his electro-physiological method had two advantages: it *activated* the facial muscles for examination while it also *held* them contracted for photographic documentation – at the time a slow procedure with wet collodion negative plates, long exposure times, impassive poses and albumen prints. This meant that his capturing of physiological activity was actually twofold: it fixed the face twice, first *electrically*, then *photographically*. Hans Belting stresses that it was only made possible through the methodological advances of the mechanical medium of photography that the mechanics of facial expression became depictable⁵. Taken in 1856, Duchenne's early photographs posed a surprising oxymoron: the photographic construction of the otherwise durational process of a specific affect through a single freeze frame at the moment of muscular contraction, supposedly depicting the defining high point of an emotion.

Artists and physiologists had long been part of the same culture, but Duchenne did not only have a scientific outcome in mind when publishing his book *The Mech-*

anism of Human Facial Expression; or, an electro-physiological analysis of the passions applicable to the plastic arts. He also had the aesthetic aim to provide the struggling artist with a handbook of expression templates to successfully depict emotional expressions. Transferring his electro-physiological methodology to the arts, Duchenne took pride in pointing out anatomical 'flaws' in famous paintings and sculptures that in his view could have been avoided if only the artist had studied the expressions accurately, as they occurred in nature⁶. As well as providing advice, he also became active in improving the anatomical inaccuracies in the expressions of classical sculptures on his own plaster copies, as well as demonstrating his findings in photographic tableaux depicting scenes from famous plays.

Pointing out how photography has been used to understand what lies beyond the face, Duchenne's visual atlas is exemplary for the nineteenth-century use and understanding of 'facts' and 'facticity'. Chapter 16 provides "a critical study of several antiquities from the point of view of *m. corrugator supercilii* and *m. frontalis*". Nevertheless, Duchenne anticipated that his correcting of antique sculptures would at first 'offend general opinion' or be seen as 'profane'. Looking, for example, at the head of the Laocoon of Rome, Duchenne explains: "The sculpting of the lateral sections of its forehead is a fantasy of the artist Agasias; it is impossible, because no muscular contraction, isolated or combined, would ever produce it."⁷ The facial furrows and the relief marks of the Trojan priest groaning in agony should, in order to be natural, have rather ended at the height of the eyebrows and not continued on to the temples. Analysing the original facial lines of the Laocoon in his photographic Plate 70 he states: "The medial lines of the forehead are in perfect accord with the oblique and curved movements transmitted to the eyebrow by contraction of *m. corrugator supercilii*, but the sculpting of the lateral portions of the forehead is impossible."⁸ He therefore remodelled these mistakes with his 'profane hand', using the rules established by his electrophysiological experiments, as demonstrated in Plate 71, "on which the lateral forehead is sculpted as it is in nature, and as it should be in Plate 70"⁹. He further reminds us that sculpted beauty was prized in Greek antiquity as the highest artistic ideal and that the face was therefore usu-

4 Influenced by early Scottish anatomist Charles Bell's *Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting* (1806), Duchenne had realised that the look of a face is altered completely by moving one (or a few) muscles, a thesis recently renewed: "With many facial expressions a change in just one area gives the impression that the rest of the facial features have changed as well." (Ekman/Friesen 1975, 39)

5 Belting 2013, 97.

6 "Long and careful observation convinced me that, in all these actions, nature is in perfect accordance with experimentation; yet too often they have been misunderstood in the practice of art." (Duchenne 1990, 124)

7 Duchenne 1990, 95.

8 Duchenne 1990, 93.

9 Duchenne 1990, 93.



1 Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne with Adrien Tournachon: *Icono-photographique, Mécanisme de la Physiologie Humaine*, 'Figure 65', 1854–56, printed 1862, Albumen silver print from glass negative, 12.0 x 9.2 cm: Terror mixed with pain, torture; with voluntary dropping of lower jaw (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

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DUCHENNE (de Boulogne), phot.

2 Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne with Adrien Tournachon, *Figure 71*, 1854–56, printed 1862, Albumen silver print from glass negative, 28.4 × 20.4 cm (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

ally shown in *repose* rather than moved by emotional expressions. He concludes that the physiological advances of his corrections as show in Plate 71 reveal to us "how much more beautiful the expression would have been if Agesandre had sculpted Laocoon's forehead in accordance with the immutable laws of nature"¹⁰.

Charles Darwin agrees with Duchenne's observations in his chapter on 'Low Spirits, Anxiety, Grief, Dejection, Despair' of his 1872 book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*: "The ancient Greek sculptors were familiar with the expression, as shown in the statues of Laocoon and Arretino; but, as Duchenne remarks, they carried the transverse furrows across the whole breadth of the forehead, and thus committed a great anatomical mistake ...". But Darwin comes to a different evaluation with regard to their artistic intentions: "It is, however, more probable that these wonderfully accurate observers intentionally sacrificed truth for the sake of beauty, than that they made a mistake; for rectangular furrows on the forehead would not have had a grand appearance in marble."¹¹ Even though Duchenne would have preferred to see the facial expressions presented more accurately, he agreed that the Laocoon group is one of the most beautiful legacies of antiquity: Laocoon's body and limbs demonstrate the physical pain resulting from the snake's bite, while his face does not show any convulsions of agony, with the folds around nose and lips signifying crying and the half-open mouth and upturned eyes signalling despair¹².

At the same time, Duchenne denied that he was stripping art of its ideal beauty by "reducing it to anatomical realism along the lines of a certain modern school of art."¹³ He insists that the realism of his time would only show imperfections and deformities, while his experimental research allows art to attain the ideal of facial expression, exactly 'like nature herself'. He describes that "contrary to modern realism" the art of antiquity revealed plastic beauty [...] by copying nature exactly [...] in her most beautiful, noble and perfect aspects." This produced, as he puts it, "an idealized naturalism – two words whose combination may shock initially: but which perfectly convey my thought"¹⁴. And it is exactly this formula of 'idealized naturalism' that reveals how he positions himself and his photography as both scientific *and* creative extensions of nature. This

resulted in a rather contradictory admiration for combining ancient idealisation with positivist naturalism, aesthetic beauty with physiological research, which further invigorated the big nineteenth-century debate as to whether photography is able to create artfully imagined rather than just skilfully imitated images. Andrew Cuthbertson therefore argued that by promoting an art of physiological exactness Duchenne "unwittingly lent his weight to the realist movement"¹⁵, while Robert Sobieszek suggested that the very use of the phrase 'idealized naturalism' places Duchenne and his approach in a 'moderate or centrist position' of this debate on photography as either realism or idealism, in an attempt to straddle both¹⁶.

Following his analysis of antique sculptures in the "Scientific section" of his book, Duchenne expands his defence of the relationship of beauty and accuracy in the "Aesthetic section", published later the same year. Following criticisms for using an 'ugly old man' as the main model for his electro-photographic experiments, he asserts that every face can become spiritually beautiful in the process of rendering emotions, while stressing that even the 'ugliest face' was better than any of the still-irritable cadavers he used in earlier studies¹⁷.

A humanist at heart, Duchenne was not interested in revealing inner states or evidencing moral conditions. Basing his research on pathognomic rather than physiognomic traditions, he was concerned with the difficult task of depicting the face in the midst of muscular *movement* rather than in halted stillness. But Duchenne's re-enactments tell us a lot about the blending of studio conventions and scientific documentation in the nineteenth-century, located somewhere between artistic 'illustration' and positivist 'record'. Similarly to Darwin, who included reproductions of Duchenne's electrical illustrations with retouched probes alongside Oscar Rejlander's theatrical portraits of staged emotions as visual evidence in his book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*¹⁸, Duchenne was looking to establish emotions as collective expressions of all humans in order to distinguish humans from other species.

Jonathan Crary reminds us that at the time, medicine and photography were "part of a single interlocking field"¹⁹. Their fantasised alliance as one 'technological' practice was grounded on a similar constructedness of

10 Duchenne 1990, 99.

11 Darwin 1898, 183.

12 He also recalls that "the dreadful death of Laocoon furnished Virgil with one of the most beautiful passages in the Aeneid" (Duchenne 1990, 97 n).

13 Duchenne 1990, 109 n.

14 Duchenne 1990, 110 n.

15 Duchenne 1990, 239 f.

16 Sobieszek 1999, 60.

17 Duchenne writes that the 'old toothless man' was a shoemaker, whom he cured from shoulder pains ('functional muscular spasm'). (Duchenne 1990, 42 f., 101 f.)

18 Darwin's book shows Duchenne's Plate 61 (Terror: electrical contraction with voluntary dropping of the lower jaw) in a version engraved on wood, for which the electrical probes were retouched.

19 Crary 1992, 9.

vision, reality, and the body; they used each other to theatrically demonstrate an argument, creating authoritative illustrations by reinforcing their mutual evidential status. And Duchenne certainly was not alone in his mixing of documentary evidence with stylised performance, which relates, as Elizabeth Edwards points out, “to a growing trend in nineteenth century laboratory practice to replicate the actualities of the physical, empirically experienced world in controlled conditions which allowed for their analysis.”²⁰ This neutralising approach also extended to the portrait studio, which with its plain backdrop

and controlled lighting isolates its sitters and transforms them with a scientific gaze into photographic specimens. At the same time, this institutionalised alliance of supposedly ‘neutral’ photography with ‘normative’ physiognomy was responsible for classifying subjects into objectified bodies. “The lens is like a surgeon’s knife”, Olivier Richon compares: “Reality is tested, touched, manipulated by an apparatus that shapes what it reproduces visually.”²¹ And while the photographic camera scrutinises its subject, the resulting image promises its viewers to see the scene as if they had simply been standing by.

Performing Laughter

Aiming to use photography as a scientific tool, Duchenne considered both his artificial facial contractions and the resulting images as ‘naturalistic’. But having learnt photography in the circle of the famed society photographer Nadar in Paris, Duchenne was certainly also aware that photography was not just a copying device.

Duchenne’s photographs were created with Adrien Tournachon, the younger brother of Gaspard-Félix Tournachon (aka ‘Nadar’)²². In the winter of 1854–55, during the same period when ‘the younger Nadar’ was working with Duchenne, the brothers Nadar collaborated on a series of *têtes d’expression* based on the *commedia dell’arte* character Pierrot, for which they photographed the mime Charles Deburau²³. With long exposure times requiring immobility, Pierrot’s simulated movements are confined to the shallow photographic space, his silently halted performance doubling the process of still photography. It is unclear if the work with Duchenne in some way or other prompted the Pierrot photographs, if the Pierrot-series influenced Duchenne’s experiments, or if both series were just products of the same physiognomic age, but their close relation goes to show that performance was not incidental to Duchenne’s experiments. This means not only that the brothers’ mime project had an important influence on Duchenne’s project, but also, as Gunnar Schmidt notes, that they in turn had access to pioneering facial research²⁴.

Rosalind Krauss describes these Pierrot images as a meeting point of two representational modes: the gestures traced by the performer and the traces recorded by the photographic imprint. Similarly to Belting, she argues that this encounter is only made possible by way of photography: “Now clearly, to render the physiognomic trace by way of the mime is to pass this phenomenon through an aesthetic filter. [...] But the ultimate surface on which the multiple traces are not simply registered, but fixed, is that of the photograph itself.”²⁵

Plates 30–34 of Duchenne’s atlas of emotions relate directly to his research into the physiology of laughter. Looking at these it is important to keep in mind that in the 1850s photographs and the photographic process were not yet widely known and potentially made sitters less self-conscious than those famously described later by Roland Barthes²⁶. It was also not yet a convention to smile on portraits, and accordingly the eccentric photographs of this unconventional man with a range of mechanistic laughs must have been an in many ways astonishing sight for his contemporaries.

While for Plate 30 only one side of the model’s face was triggered into a smile, Plate 31 shows a two-sided expression: “Slightly stronger electrical excitation of both *mm. zygomaticus major*: development of the same fundamental and secondary expressive lines of joy, with mild contraction of some fibres of the muscles called the sphincter of the eyelids: false laughter.”²⁷ Duchenne here

20 Edwards 1997, 58.

21 Richon 2013, 32.

22 Frizot 1998, 260.

23 Jean-Gaspard Baptiste Deburau had modernised the *commedia dell’arte* character through a black skull cap that visually elongated his white face. His son, Charles Deburau, was asked by the brothers Nadar to pose for the series as successful publicity shots

for their struggling studio. Deburau was a friend of Felix’ from his theatre times. Exhibited at the Exposition, Adrien received a gold medal for the Pierrot photographs.

24 Schmidt 2003, 60 f.

25 Krauss 1978, 45.

26 Barthes: ‘He who is Photographed’, 2000, 10 f.

27 Duchenne 1990, 69.



Souvenir des 7 7 1/2 18/8.

*mes amities à M.
Amelin gus.
J. M. D.*

3 Gaspard-Félix & Adrien Tournachon: Jean-Charles Deburau as 'Pierrot Laughing', 1855, Gelatin-coated salted paper print (verniscuir), 27.3 x 19.8 cm (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)



4 (a,b,c): Duchenne: Plate 30, 31, 34. Electrical stimulation of a patient, from the book *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine ou analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions* by Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne published in 1862 (bpc / adoc-photos)

reveals that it is only a small part of the lower eyelid that completes the action of 'the muscle of joy and benevolence' into a joyful expression – a muscle that can only be awoken by a heartfelt emotion, and not by his electro-physiological procedure²⁸. Still, even if true enjoyment is indicated by the involuntary showing of wrinkles under our eyes, it remains open what personality this enjoyment-smile indicates: deceit or delight – some might honestly enjoy malicious pleasure. One problem is this: when we see someone smiling, we usually do not see a muscular contraction but *construct* an interpretation, possibly thinking he or she is 'happy'²⁹. Which is even harder to judge on seeing photographic representations rather than actual expressions.

Duchenne therefore contrasts these electrically induced expressions with a 'voluntary' expression of natural laughter as depicted on Plate 32; a laughter that was not electrically triggered, but equally representative of his 'mechanism' of facial expression. In order to capture this, he would have needed to ask his model to 'keep smiling' and hold the 'momentary' expression, resulting in yet another form of artificial posing while the photograph was taken.

²⁸ Duchenne describes that he was unable to photograph the fleeting 'muscle of kindness' (necessary to complete a joyful expression), because it is "so hard electrically to stimulate in an isolated fashion". But on the left side of the face of Plate 31 he accidentally activated its motor nerve while exciting the main 'muscle of joy', "which gives this side a laugh that is a little less false than the opposite side", or that depicted on the other plates. (Duchenne 1990, 73)

²⁹ Gombrich 1960, 282.

Interestingly, different sets of prints exist from the negatives collaboratively exposed by Duchenne and Adrien Tournachon, which is characteristic for their status between the poles of theatre and laboratory. They differ mainly in how they were cropped: sometimes the whole negative was printed, showing not only the whole figure of the main protagonist, but also the doctor conducting the experiment. Or the image was enlarged to facial ovals, cropping the doctor and his assistant out of the frame to concentrate on the electrified features. This could be read in terms of Tournachon being more interested in documenting the dramatic constellation of figures and their gestures as a whole; similar to the staging of the Pierrot images or other societal portraits taken by studio Nadar. Meanwhile Duchenne's interest was literally more focused on the encounter with the expression, highlighting an iconography of expressive lines that is visually in line with other pathognomic studies.

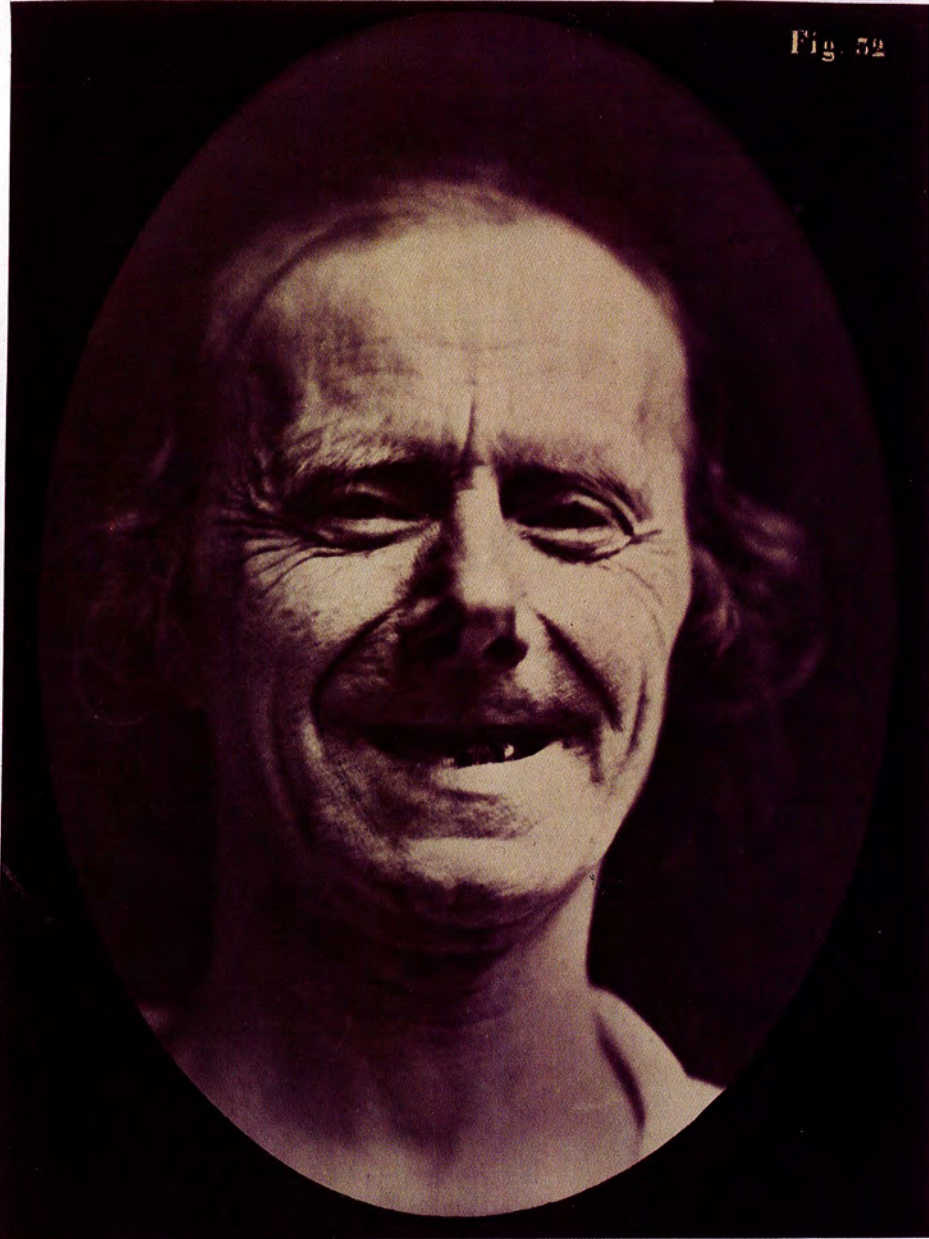
Both kinds of prints exist with and without photographic black oval framing around the motif in different folios or publication contexts, while Duchenne's close ups also exist as life-size oval enlargements, mounted onto stretched canvas in golden frames³⁰. In effect, both the figurative prints and the close ups stress

³⁰ Looking strikingly vivid, the ovals resemble paintings not only because of their defocussed quality, but also because they were coated with a varnish similar to that used for paintings, and this in the 19th century when enlargements of negatives were unusual. Similar to the synoptic plates, some of these ovals have moveable black tear-shaped boards to cover parts of the face because Duchenne had realised that not all parts of the face change, enabling the remaining parts to be read independently.



5 Duchenne: Synoptic Plate 4, *Mécanisme de la Physionomie Humaine*, 1862. 'Simultaneous contrasting' of the expressive lines of the face, i.e. Plate "30 and Plate "'30 (top right) with left and right side of the face masked to highlight different expressions on each side: "the indifference of the eye contrasts strikingly with the widespread joyous expression and gaiety of the inferior part of the face." (Duchenne 1990, 72)

ÉLECTRO-PHYSIOLOGIE PHOTOGRAPHIQUE.



DUCHENNE (de Boulogne), phot.

6 Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne and Adrien Tournachon: 'Figure 52' [sic!; Plate 32], 1854–56, printed 1862, Albumen silver print from glass negative, 28.4 × 20.3 cm: natural laughter; voluntary contraction, Duchenne made him laugh spontaneously (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)



7 Duchenne's enlargement of Plate 32. Oval albumen prints mounted to canvas stretched over a wooden frame, 28 x 20.5 cm, Duchenne Collection, *École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts* (ENSBA), Paris, 29.4 x 21.7 cm; (photo Wiebke Leister)

different *performative* aspects of the facial experiments. The former represents the course of action, the scenario of inflicting an emotional expression – the latter presents a more aestheticized image of associated emotions.

The figurative print of Plate 34 for instance reveals more of the process, showing the doctor, now accompanied by an assistant. Their arms encircling the old man's body in order to research his facial structure, simultaneously activating the 'muscle of joy' and its antagonist the 'muscle of pain', which results in what Duchenne described as an impossible 'grimace'. More *creating* the expression than *evoking* it, the photograph starts to reveal an invasive multiplicity of spectators and bodies³¹.

Shortly before his death in 1875, Duchenne donated his original album of prints together with a set of the near life-size prints in golden frames to the *École nationale*

supérieure des Beaux-Arts for the purpose of teaching art students the correct way of depicting emotions. This stresses his aim to make his research useful to 'the plastic arts', possibly trying to make sure that no other 'incorrect Laocoons' or 'false laughs' would occur – arguing that his artificially demonstrated expressions correspond exactly to natural expressions. But even though the aesthetic conclusions of his work for the making and understanding of art and antiquity remain uncertain, not only his scientific research remains invaluable as a means of identifying the physiological functions of the muscles involved. Blending anatomical knowledge with scientific faradism and photography, his photographs constitute invaluable entry points for thinking about performative aspects of portraiture and the tacit politics inscribed into the image.³²

31 "Unfortunately, the badly photographed head of the experimenter sometimes impairs the scenes that these figures are portraying. A word of explanation on this matter. Sometimes I could

not stand far enough from my subject to avoid being caught in the field of the photographic plate, or so that I could not be focused." (Duchenne 1990, 103)

32 Debord in Cuthbertson 1990, 256.

Simulating Double Portraiture

Printed on the left side of the book's main title page, the frontispiece to Duchenne's book on the mechanics of facial expressions portrays two persons: Duchenne himself and one of his male patients. The image seems well placed to function as a leitmotif in order to raise questions about the complex politics between model and photographer, thus attempting to theorise the curious nature of double portraiture. The image demonstrates the process of electric simulation of the facial musculature, and Duchenne is keen to assure his readers that the model was not in pain because, having been anaesthetised, his face had become desensitised³³.

Still, visually speaking, the physical execution of Duchenne's photographic symptomatology of laughter looks somewhat crude. Knowing that there is actual electricity at play, his procedure to arrive at an image of this smile certainly *appears* rather painful because we cannot help agonising along with his sitter. At the same time this means that the electro-induced expressions are clearly not connected with the model's felt emotions – firstly because he was insensitive to pain and secondly because, even if he had been in pain, he still would have smiled *on cue*.

In this unusual double portrait Duchenne, the experimenter, looks to his left, his eyes gazing somewhere outside the frame slightly above his own eye level. Turning towards his experimentee, he presents himself in a three-quarter profile with a slightly hunched back, while his right hand pokes a pair of electric probes into the model's cheeks, activating the facial muscles next to his dimples to contract into an odd grin. The model's hands come together in his lap, his left hand clutching his right thumb. Facing the camera, he adopts a frontal pose, looking straight out of the photograph – his grimace more a black hole than actually a mouth: looking shy, ashamed, nervous, concerned, or simply forced. Meanwhile, Duchenne's left hand lies on the right shoulder of his subject, as if the patient had to be reassured or held back in place. On the left side, almost an extension of Duchenne's body, we see the volta-faradic apparatus stimulating the facial mask³⁴.

An astonishing balance is kept in the formal black-and-white distribution of the plate: a black, oval shaped

mounting that crops both men at the outer edge of their shoulders; a light backdrop behind their torsos. The patient wears a white shirt, the doctor a black jacket, as a result of which his arm holding up the probes sticks out from the model's torso in a directing, action-implying manner. Duchenne's hand, armed with probes, is slightly below his model's throat, his fingers pointing towards the neck – the shape of the electric probes underlining and exaggerating the model's smile. Duchenne is likewise bald – but bearded and formally dressed with a white bow tie under his dark jacket. In contrast, the old man's shirt is crumpled and unbuttoned, revealing his bare chest in a gaping triangle. Duchenne's head is positioned slightly below that of the old man, possibly wrinkling his brows in a similar manner. Apart from this, Duchenne's face looks quite blank. The model's trousers are dark, outlining another triangular shape of sleeves and hands clutched together. His left arm runs parallel to the oval mount, the stripy pattern of his trousers and the folds of his shirt echoing the swollen veins on the back of his hands with the wires coming from the apparatus running alongside the plunging neckline of his shirt. The apparatus catches a strong reflection of light that repeats the shape of the doctor's right arm above.

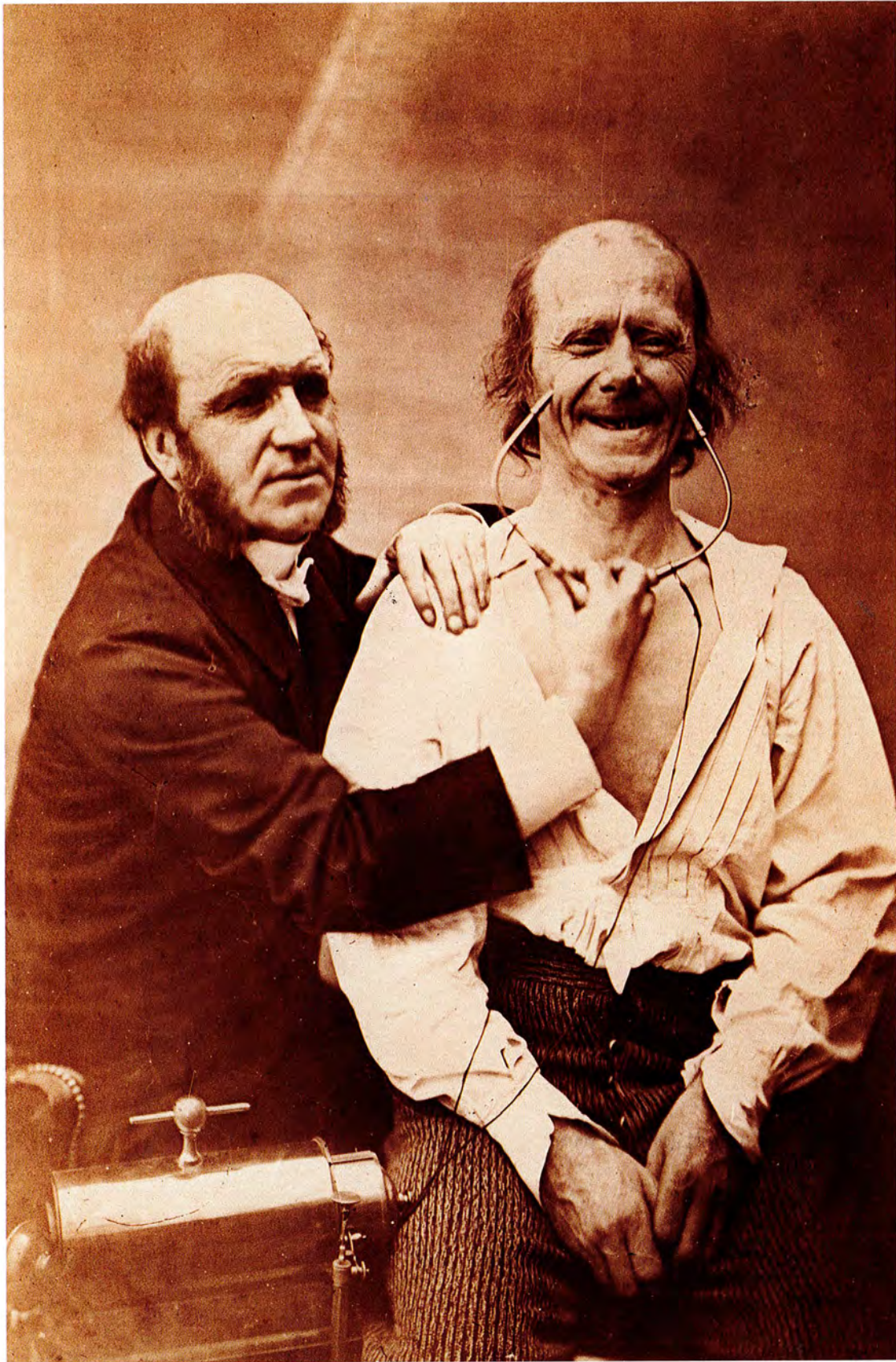
Beyond these formal aspects, my eye is caught by the model's empty smile. I feel 'looked at' by this smile that seems to address me directly³⁵. Emptied of any plausible emotion, it appears like a cut or an open wound, whereas Duchenne himself, the actual originator of the expressive situation, exhibits an ambiguously impassive face, potentially dismissive of the photographic scenario or concentrating on something outside the frame. This contrast of an apparently 'active' smile of the elderly test subject seemingly looking straight into my eyes, and the 'passive' face of the true manufacturer of the artificial expression-performance apparently looking deliberately away from me, reminds me of a ventriloquist's performance – perceiving the puppet speaking as if alive, while the face of its performer stays indifferent, as if simply standing by³⁶. This impression is reinforced by the proximity between Duchenne and his model – certainly intruding into the range of what Edward T. Hall described

33 Duchenne 1990, 20.

34 Duchenne used several of these apparatuses, different in strength and size of the probes for different muscles, now in the Medical Museum in Paris. Catherine Mathon at the archive of École Nationale des Beaux-Arts described that medical students had recently tried out Duchenne's apparatus and did not experience the procedure as painful. (Conversation, Paris, July 2006)

35 A mouth can be an abyss that sometimes exerts an even stronger impact on us than eyes, based on a "split between seeing and looking. [...] we can feel that we are being looked at by something that fails to see us." (Leader 2002, 17)

36 The ventriloquist's dummy became generally used about the same time in the late nineteenth-century.



8 Duchenne: Frontispiece A. Electrical stimulation of a patient, from the book *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine ou analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions* by Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne, published in 1862 (bpc / Cool. B. Garrett / adoc-photos)

as intimate space³⁷, making me increasingly conscious of my own body position. Duchenne's posture looks as if he was reassuring a frightened child, while simultaneously exerting control over its smile. This infantilising impression is strengthened by the higher sitting position of the model³⁸, thus looking to me for a moment as if Duchenne was holding the 'patient' patient on his lap while 'playing' his compliant emotional expressions, which – like words from a motionless mouth – adds a touch of the supernatural to the smiling image, while turning the image more and more into a portrait of my own viewing.

What seems to be a *double portrait*, could therefore rather be classified as a sole portrait of *Doctor Duchenne*: a portrait of the act of his electro-physiological action. In no way does the photograph portray the elderly patient. He, the model, only has *performed* qualities; he does not even perform himself. Similar to someone being treated with laughing gas or getting tickled, he is the 'performed performer', a pictorial object, the object of a pictorial record. Thus – while the model is the activated object – Duchenne becomes the activating subject of the image, and therefore its *true* sitter. The old man is displayed as a remote-controlled emotional accessory that specifies Duchenne's medical interests – a photographic specimen, doubly mortified through being electrically performed *and* photographically recorded.

This swap of active and passive roles, sitter-subject and image-object, is significant for the photograph's unusual status in the context of double portraiture: usually – in order to represent two equal, self-sufficient individuals – both participants either engage with the camera or with each other, presenting them in close association with each other as 'one item' (portraits of friends or couples). But as soon as one person is more prominent, he or she dominates the image while the other becomes his or her emblem, attribute or trophy, as for instance with 'Madonna with child', 'Husband with wife' or 'Doctor with skull' – while 'Skull with doctor' would be an unusual reading of such insignia, like a back-to-front compound noun.

Thinking about the absence of an exchange of gazes within double portraits, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that actual 'multiple portraits' are probably a rare species, because the existence of several people in one image always

produces a 'scenic arrangement' in which people seem to pose as members of a group³⁹. The question 'who controls whom?' is therefore as pertinent in a double portrait as the protagonists' lines of sight and their performative display of gestures, poses and other forms of interaction.

Interestingly, a similar double portrait of the two men exists, probably taken during the same session. In Frontispiece B, Duchenne and the apparatus have moved to the right. The overall impression is much more balanced, Duchenne now standing behind his model, appearing much taller than the old man, his right hand resting on the model's right shoulder. Now both men are looking into the camera, their frontal pose much less awkward, making me wonder why Duchenne might have preferred the one described earlier?⁴⁰

In Frontispiece A, a more ambiguous tension is created: unsure of what is actually being portrayed, it compels me, its viewer, to *fill in* the negative space of the mouth. Not only is the smiling expression not created by the old man himself; it is a two-fold external construction, manifested in the form of an 'object' which can be *passed on* – from Duchenne via the electro-physiological process to the *model* and then to *me*, the external observer. Accordingly, Duchenne's smile operates just like a self-sufficient fragment, a partial object, which no longer stands in for a specific person. Rather, like a shifter in a dialogue, it alternates between 'I' (me) and 'I' (another person), making it available for re-attaching and circulation. Like the Cheshire Cat's smile, that is all what is left from its vanished body⁴¹, the model's smile is a floating signifier seemingly dissected from the model's face. In form of a truly 'doctored' smile, its meaning changes constantly. Imagining the smile being tossed back and forth between the patient and his doctor reflects the dynamics between photographer and model – ultimately responsible for analysing both the *contract* and the *currency* of the image.

Apart from his toothless grin, we will probably not remember much about the old man. Like so many, he is a nameless model: Duchenne's model. He smiles when asked to, his face steered to mechanically obey instructions, to artificially contract on request – the conductor's arms encircling his face in order to seek out its emotional structure. He is *not* in control of the situation, *cannot*

37 Proxemics analyses the human use of space, i.e. the space surrounding a person when interacting with others, as described by Edward T. Hall in his chapter 'Distances in Man', ranging from intimate distance over personal distance to social distance and public distance. (Hall 1990, 113–25)

38 The model was propped up on a stool, while Duchenne was sitting in a lower decorated armchair, leaning forward.

39 Nancy 2007, 14 n3.

40 Frontispiece B was the frontispiece to the octavo edition of Duchenne's *Album de photographies pathologique complémentaire du livre intitulé de l'électrisation localisée*, Octavo ed. Paris: J. B. Baillière et Fils, 1862. Frontispiece B on the cover of Duchenne's *Album de Photographies de Pathologiques* (1862) has the patient hidden under a white triangular shape as a backdrop for the title. (Kaplan 1948, 179)

41 Lewis Carroll: *Alice in Wonderland* (1865)



9 Duchenne: Frontispiece B. Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne (possibly with Adrien Tournachon): 'Faradisation du muscle frontal', 1854–56, printed 1862, albumen silver print from glass negative, 18.6 × 11.7 cm (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

pre-visualize what his image is going to look like, and the photograph is *not* his likeness. He has no presence, and no status. Due to this objectification⁴², he is the *performed*, not the represented, and he has significance only as an attribute in relation to Duchenne – just like the image is signed and titled nothing other than: “*Dr. Duchenne*”⁴³.

Aware that Duchenne’s model is at the same time subject and object of the image, we could therefore ask with Sontag: how can we relate to the pain of others? Or with Barthes: what is the rhetoric of this image? Where Bourdieu could be asking after its social function and Lowry might seek to understand how its space is negotiated, Didi-Huberman might look for the meaning of its visibility as an event of pain – in order to touch more closely on questions of ethics, empathy, and embodiment inherently connected with any coming together of two people in a portrait situation.

And while the model is performed for the camera, photography disappears its sitter in order to turn him into an image. But as the image navigates between these poles, strangely it seems to defy any attempts to look at it objectively, entangling me into its increasingly digressive structure. Turning my body into an extension of its inner workings, my subjectivity becomes occupied by its visuality. This allows for an affective interdependence between image and viewer that potentially opens up an intercorporeal relationship with the work as an interpretative framework that aims to give more importance to the picture’s reality than to reality itself, hence opening

up a psychological space – *in effigy* rather than *in reality*. Possibly revealing it as a contemporary Laocoon, recast as an image of our time.

However, I have to admit that so far I have not yet disclosed one crucial aspect. To quote Duchenne: “Frontispiece A to this text volume illustrates the method of electrization that I have used to obtain an isolated contraction of the facial muscles. The electrodes, held in my right hand, communicate with my induction apparatus via some conducting wires and are positioned to stimulate the muscles of joy. The expressive lines of joy would have appeared on the face if I had sent current through my apparatus. But I must say that in this case the laughter is natural! I merely wanted to show a simulation [French original: *le simulacre*] of my electrophysiological experiments in this figure.”⁴⁴ That is, he simply made the model smile without electrification! Simulating his own laughter experiment, the image also portrays the contradictory methodology of his photo-performative research. So, is Duchenne’s frontispiece therefore showing some kind of ‘true’ laughter, or is he actually faking a true smile by asking the model to smile for the camera? I would argue that Duchenne is in fact welcoming his reader with a photographic simulation of the simulation of a true smile, which simulates his experimental set-up, which simulates facial expressions, simulating emotions – a declination of Jean Baudrillard’s genealogy of the visual⁴⁵. Signalling the process and construction of its performance, it simulates its own simulation of what could have otherwise been seen as a double portrait.

42 It is not only that photography inadvertently objectifies the sitter by turning him into a ‘thing’ to be looked at and thereby disempowering him – here it also refers to the ‘medical’ outset that already constitutes the subject of the experiment as an object to be looked at. This means that Duchenne’s image is doubly ‘objectifying’.

43 Society portraits of Duchenne himself clearly demonstrate not only his camera consciousness but also his awareness what a representational portrait is as a means of portraying status and profession.

44 Duchenne 1990, 44. French original (1862): “Mais je dois dire qu’ici le rire est naturel, et que j’ai seulement voulu montrer, dans son ensemble, le simulacra d’une de mes expériences electro-phys-

iologiques.” This simulation of a smile is similar to the ‘natural’ laughter performed in Plate 32, with the electric probes in the Frontispiece directly suggesting the actual process of an electrical induction.

45 In ancient philosophy ‘simulacrum’ describes a representation that is not necessarily tied to an object in the world: a copy without an original, an image without the qualities of the original. Baudrillard suggests different ‘orders’ of simulation. In postmodernity, the simulacrum is not synonymous with simulation, rather meaning a reproduction characteristic of a specific stage in signification, in which the image is not a reflection of a (hierarchical ordered) reality but a mask perverting (any ‘original’) reality. It signals the absence or disappearance of reality: what remains are copies of representations, simulations of simulations.

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