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Article:

Selfiehood: Singularity, Celebrity and the Enlightenment[1]

SHEARER WEST

I am a member of the international Re-Enlightenment network: a collection of eighteenth-century scholars from a variety of disciplines who have been meeting for intellectual exchange for a number of years.[2] We debate vociferously about the ways in which the Enlightenment can help us understand our contemporary knowledge economy and digitally connected world, and conversely, how our present day global challenges can deepen our understanding of the history and culture of the Enlightenment. I would précis our mission as follows: to ask present-centered questions of the past without doing violence to our historical sources. To consider current global challenges through an Enlightenment lens is never less than illuminating, and this method evokes Jo Roach's view of the "deep eighteenth century" (as opposed to the "long" or "wide" eighteenth century)—a century, as he puts it, "that isn't over yet".[3] Here I am treading on territory that has a powerful legacy in the manner in which Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in 1947 interpreted the authoritarianism and hyper-empiricism of the Nazi regime as the culmination of the Enlightenment project.[4] While their uncompromising view of the Enlightenment has been rightly deconstructed, it opened up a new way of thinking about the workings of mass culture and totalitarianism in the 20th century. The subject of this essay is quite different from theirs, though it draws on a comparable consideration of Enlightenment legacy.

I will probe a 21ˢᵗ- century narcissistic obsession with the self and images of the self by looking back to a defining period in late eighteenth-century England when "selfhood" became examined, popularized and visually presented in new ways.

The narcissistic phenomenon that triggered my historical investigation was identified by Christopher Lasch in the 1970s as characterized by: "the fascination with fame and celebrity, the fear of competition, the inability to suspend disbelief, the shallowness and transitory quality of personal relations".[5] While these factors retain their resonance, more recent concerns about freedom of speech, safe spaces and micro aggressions are uncomfortably aligned to self-obsession, narcissism, solipsism and body dysmorphism.[6] As a portraiture specialist, I am particularly interested in the ways in which self-obsession finds its way into images, especially the mass media attention given to people taking photographs of themselves.[7] Not only are global media and social media inundated with these images, but quite often we are looking at photographs of people taking selfies, rather than the selfies themselves.[8] However, while anyone and everyone today can make an image of themselves, the purveyors of "selfies" before the 21ˢᵗ century were primarily artists, a subject that I reflect on below. Travelling from our present-day "selfiehood" to the past, many scholars have demonstrated how the Enlightenment represented a period in which there was a new attention to individual and personal identity. New technologies and spaces of dissemination and socialization opened up a growing concern with the self, individuality, singularity and the social performance of what we would now call personality within a nascent celebrity culture. I am going to explore the way in which this cultural shift can be understood in its own terms, the growing fascination with singularity and eccentricity at the end of the eighteenth century, the contribution of portraiture to changes in social attitudes to the self, and the relationship of these changes to a deep-rooted English political commitment to liberty.

The last decades of the eighteenth century experienced a constellation of new developments in social life, philosophy and visual culture that together foregrounded more frequently the singular traits of individuals.[9] These new tendencies were opposed to earlier generic categorizations that searched for broad classifications of social types, modelled loosely on Theophrastus.[10] The changes that took place in conceptions of identity and self have been characterized by a number of scholars in slightly different ways; however most agree that perceived stability of character was accompanied by an emphasis on interiority and the distinctiveness of individual "personalities".[11] This was of course a phenomenon that predated the eighteenth century. Charles Taylor, in his magisterial work of moral philosophy, *Sources of the*

Self, traced this history back to the Middle Ages, even though he recognized that the eighteenth century, with what he referred to as: "the valuation of commerce…the rise of the novel…the changing understanding of marriage and the family, and…the new importance of sentiment" represented an acceleration of this tendency.[12] Frederick Rider, in his study of Montaigne, claimed that the conception of individuals as divided into subject and object, and the self-consciousness that accompanied this, developed in the Renaissance and was augmented by self-objectification, or as he put it: "the distance between an individual and an image of himself that he externalizes through the medium of written words or paint."[13] While the birth of selfhood can be discovered in whatever period of history we like, there is little doubt that the latter decades of the eighteenth century saw some significant developments in the way in which people thought about individuals and the self. Among these developments was the popularity of Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*; a rage from the late 1780s for eccentric magazines and other biographical and visual collections of strange, outré or extraordinary individuals; the growth of a celebrity culture that fueled a prurient attention to the details of the private character of public figures, and the Royal Academy exhibitions and the proliferation of print shops in London. In each of these instances, a fascination with variety of human character went hand-in-hand with portraiture as a means of expressing that variety.

Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* first appeared in German in 1775–8 and in 1792 was translated by Henry Hunter into English and dedicated to Lavater's friend and fellow Swiss, the artist, Henri Fuseli. Lavater saw physiognomy as "the talent of discovering the interior of Man by his exterior", and his three-volume work was predicated on an argument that there was an infinite variety of human character.[14] He was heavily reliant on portraiture as a tool by which to test his pseudo-scientific theory. The English edition of Lavater therefore had over 800 engravings, many of them portraits, a number of which were supplied by Fuseli. Lavater tackled the concept of portraiture directly: "What is the art of *Portrait painting*? It is the representation of a real individual, or part of his body only; it is the reproduction of an image; it is the art of presenting, on the first glance of an eye, the form of a man by traits, which it would be impossible to convey by words."[15] Coming as he did from a strong Zwinglian perspective, Lavater's essays were necessarily colored by a fascination with the soul and the ways in which the workings of the soul showed itself in the human countenance. His admirers and critics recognized this moral dimension to his work. Gottfried Lessing called his project "moral semiotics", while *The World* in 1790 referred to him (inaccurately) as a "German Divine" and compared his theology to Methodism.[16]

Though largely predicated on the idea of infinite variety in human nature, Lavater's theory of physiognomy projected an aura of objectivity—of examining the faces of others in order to spy on their soul. However, he also published other writings, which suggested that self-examination was as prominent as this voyeuristic aspect of his philosophy. His *Aphorisms* and most notably, his *Secret Journal of a Self-Observer*—both of which were translated into English in the 1790s—in some ways echo the more secular perspective of Rousseau, who wrote in his *Confessions*: "I know my heart, and have studied mankind: I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence."[17] Lavater's *Secret Journal* is a study of his emotional responses to minor circumstances in his life that is occasionally almost embarrassing to read, and was subject to some criticism at the time. He claimed, "One ought to observe one's self with the utmost care…and, in order to recollect afterwards, to one's own benefit, the most secret emotions of the mind, one ought to commit them faithfully to writing in the first tranquil moment."[18] And he goes on to justify the publication of personal revelations:

> Wherefore is the most special private history of an individual to be intruded upon half the world? How important must Lavater appear to himself if he presumes to tell half the world at what hour he rises, goes to bed, &c, &c, &c…?... I should think myself very much obliged to every person who would communicate to me such a <u>Genuine</u> history of his life, and his heart, interspersed with so many trifling incidents, and enriched with such an accurate account of bad, good, and indifferent actions and sentiments. I should prefer the reading of such a book to any one else, the Bible excepted.—Do not all philosophical historians complain that, as yet, the history of man has afforded so little moral advantage, because one knows so very little of their private history, and the details of their life?[19]

The kind of self-exploration that Rousseau and Lavater promoted was an individualism that Taylor, in *Sources of the Self*, expressed as "inwardness, subjectivism, reflexivity".[20] Lavater was also concerned with the external manifestations of that interiority as it appeared in both physical appearance and the proxy of portraits. However, while any literate person could write a journal, it was only artists who were capable of producing self-portraits of any depth and penetration. With the possible exception of silhouettes, which were a popular amateur mode of self-representation, the ability to portray yourself was technically out of reach of untrained individuals before the advent of photography in the nineteenth century. This is what Derrida

in *Memoirs of the Blind* refers to as "the superb irony of the portraitist as a model".[21] In an age in which there was growing attention to self-revelation and performative self-reflection, the tools available to most individuals for portraying themselves were primarily words, rather than images. What can we understand from those self-portraits that were produced during the years in which both Lavater and Rousseau exposed different ways of considering the individuality of the self?

The first thing to note here is that while the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts was packed with portraits, self-portraits were rarely on display. Despite this fact, Royal Academicians were producing self-portraits with great regularity, and it is worth considering what role these self-portraits played in their lives and careers.[22] Joshua Reynolds, for example, painted nearly 30 self-portraits over his lifetime which epitomize his skill, variety and innovation, and reveal him flirting with the kind of self-reflection that was promoted by Lavater.[23] The earliest of these self-portraits of 1747—8 (fig. 1) shows him with palette, brushes and mahlstick, shading his eyes in the process of painting.[24] With the unusual gesture and dark composition, it pays an obvious homage to Rembrandt, who recurs as a source in a number of self-portraits, including those Reynolds painted immediately after his Grand Tour. For instance, Reynolds refers to Rembrandt in his self-portrait wearing the robes of his honorary Doctorate of Civil Law from Oxford University (1775, Florence, Uffizi)—a portrait that was presented, by invitation, to the Florentine Gallery self-portrait collection when Reynolds became an honorary member of the Florentine Academy. This collection had been started by Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici in 1617 and was carried on by his nephews throughout the seventeenth century, so Reynolds was adding his self-portrait to a distinguished pantheon of works collected over a 150 year period. Reynolds's gift to the collection was described by Giuseppe Pelli, Director of the Gallery, as "all the beauties of Rembrandt's manner carried to perfection."[25] Reynolds signaled his status as an honorary doctor in several other portraits, including one which he presented to the Royal Academy (fig. 2), inaugurating a tradition of Royal Academicians gifting "diploma works", often self-portraits, to commemorate their elevation to the status of RA. This portrait of 1780 shows Reynolds posing in his Oxford doctoral gown, standing before a bust by Daniele da Volterra of his hero, Michelangelo. Although it has been disputed, this portrait may be an echo of Rembrandt's *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* (1653, New York, Metropolitan Museum), which eventually entered the collection of Reynolds's friend, Sir Abraham Hume. Whatever the actual source, Reynolds's self-portraits echo Rembrandt's tendency to role play (fig. 3), to show off his status when he was at the height of his success, and to mark the signs of his decline as he aged.

Figure 1. Joshua Reynolds, *Self-portrait shading his eyes*, 1748–9, National Portrait Gallery, London, De Agostini Picture Library, Bridgeman Images

Figure 2. Joshua Reynolds, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1779–80, oil on panel, Royal Academy of Arts, London, Bridgeman Images

Figure 3. Rembrandt, *Self-Portrait in Oriental Costume*, 1631, Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée du Petit-Palais, Paris, Bridgeman Images

On the latter note, his self- portrait for Hester Thrale's Streatham Library playfully alludes to his growing deafness, while he makes little attempt to disguise his myopia in other portraits where he represents himself wearing his silver spectacles (fig. 4).

Interestingly, Reynolds mentions Rembrandt only sporadically in his Discourses, and then largely critically and almost solely in terms of his painting technique. In his sixth Discourse, for example, Reynolds suggests that the coltish enthusiasm of young students led them to imitate mannerisms, either the "dry and hard" style of Poussin or the "tak[ing] individual nature just as he finds it" of Rembrandt.[26] Poussin and Rembrandt, according to the eighth Discourse, "ran into contrary extremes, and it is difficult to determine which is the most reprehensible, both being equally distant from the demands of nature, and the purposes of art."[27]

Reynolds's wholehearted embrace of Rembrandt's mode of painting in his self-portraits thus becomes something of a puzzle, though there are clues elsewhere in his writing that this homage could be explained by his idea that there was a distinction between the most appropriate visual modes for private exploration and for publicly exhibited portraiture. As Richard Wendorf has observed, Reynolds's unpublished character sketches of his friends Garrick and Goldsmith point to a theory of character that he presented only obliquely in his public pronouncements on art.[28] In his letter to *The Idler* in 1759, Reynolds was quite circumspect about the propriety of any sort of self-exploration: "whoever is delighted with his own picture must derive his pleasure from the pleasure of another. Every man is always present to himself, and has, therefore, little need of his own resemblance, nor can desire it but for the sake of those whom he loves, and by whom he hopes to be remembered."[29] However, by the time he gave his seventh discourse, he could proclaim that: "Every man whose business is description ought to be acquainted with that part of philosophy which gives an insight into human nature, and relates to the manners, characters, passions and affections", and pronounced in a Lavater mode, "he who does not know himself does not know others."[30]

Reynolds's self-portraits, like those of many of his fellow Royal Academicians, were produced for reasons other than public exhibition. They were meant as gifts to friends, as evidence of virtuosity to be displayed in studios that were visited by potential patrons, and as ceremonial objects presented to official organizations like the Royal Academy. Thomas Lawrence's rare forays into self-portraiture exemplify these functions: his early drawing of himself as a child prodigy was reportedly produced to be evidence of his artistic talent, and his last self-portrait, painted in 1825, was a grudging concession to a request to leave an image of himself as legacy
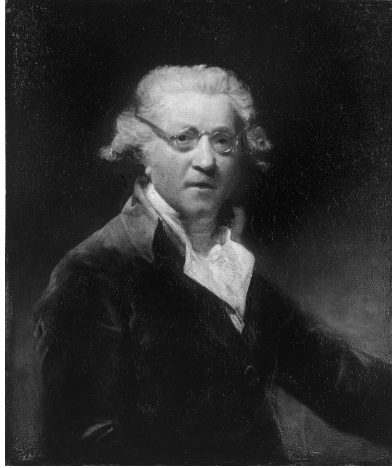
Figure 4. Joshua Reynolds, *Self-portrait*, 1788, oil on panel, Royal Collection Trust ©Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, 2016, Bridgeman Images

of his Presidency of the Royal Academy. So self-portraits were only public declarations of character in the most general possible sense. Having said that, we can see evidence of artists beginning to veer into the territory of self-exploration, coinciding with the period in which Rousseau's *Confessions* and Lavater's *Physiognomy* were beginning to take some hold on the public imagination. Angelica Kauffman, for example, used self-portraiture for autobiographical effect in a depiction of herself making a Judgement of Hercules style choice between music and painting (fig. 5), providing a manifesto statement of the difficulties she experienced in choosing between her competing talents.[31] As with Reynolds's self-portraits in doctoral robes, Kauffman produced several replicas of this work, the size of which (2 meters wide) reinforced its significance as a statement of her abilities and life choices. Johan Zoffany's *Self-Portrait with an Hourglass* of 1778 (Florence, Uffizi) is, on the one hand, an overdetermined *memento mori* allegory, packed with death symbolism, including the hourglass itself and the inscription "Ars Longa, Vita Brevis" on his book. On the other hand, it is an ironic self-reference to his well-known propensity for womanizing.[32] James Barry used a similar sort of historicizing format to Kauffman in some of his self-portraits, including his self-portrait as Timanthes seated next to a statue of Hercules trampling down Envy (c. 1780-1803, National Gallery of

Figure 5. Angelica Kauffman, Self-Portrait between Music and painting, 1794, Nostell Priory, Yorkshire, National Trust Photographic Library, John Hammond, Bridgeman Images

Ireland), which he worked on for over 20 years. Another self-portrait study was the basis for Barry placing himself in the procession of the *Crowning of the Victors at Olympia*, the mural he painted for the Society of Artists between 1777 and 1784. Most extraordinary, though, in Barry's repertoire, is an earlier self-portrait with fellow artists with whom he studied in Rome, Thomas Paine and Dominique Lefevre (1767, London, National Portrait Gallery). Here, Barry portrays himself as a dashing young man, staring arrogantly at the viewer, while Paine behind him holds pallet and brushes and Lefevre in the rear admires the Belvedere Torso. This self-portrait was in the sale of Barry's effects when he died, so it was clearly a personal statement for him, but one that leaves us with the impression of an artist who was both self-conscious and self-exploratory.[33]

Most of these self-portraits were carefully contrived to make an impression, though decorum tended to be preserved, even in the more experimental self-portraits of Reynolds and Barry. Lavater and Reynolds, while recognizing the variety of individual character and the need to "know thyself", were both skeptical of extremes of character. Lavater, although referred to by detractors and admirers alike as "eccentric", stated in his *Aphorisms*: "Who affects useless singularities has surely a little mind."[34] Despite Lavater's cautions, the focus on individuality that emerged in the latter decades of the eighteenth century catalyzed a fascination with the more outré qualities of individual character. What was throughout the century referred to as

"singularity" became in the 1790s associated with the term "eccentricity". The sociologists, David Weeks and Kate Ward, have plotted the history of eccentricity on a graph, which indicates a massive spike of eccentrics in the latter part of the eighteenth century.[35] In fact, their graph does not demonstrate that there were more eccentric people in the eighteenth century, but that there were more people writing about them. Unlike physiognomy, which explored both character and the body, the interest in eccentricity was almost exclusively concentrated on the external manifestations of individuals: aspects of their physical appearance or behavior that singled them out as different from everyone else. Here, Lavater's "infinite variety" was converted into "infinite oddity". *The Spectator*'s Roger de Coverley represented the originating example of this sort of eccentricity: "He is a Gentleman that is very singular in his Behaviour, but his Singularities proceed from his good Sense."[36] Glimmers of it appear again mid-century in Corbyn Morris' *Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour, Raillery* of 1744 where he states:

> Humour is any whimsical Oddity or Foible, appearing in the Temper, or Conduct of a Person in real Life… ….HUMOUR extensively and fully understood, is any remarkable Oddity or Foible belonging to a Person in real Life; whether his Foible be constitutional, habitual, or only affected; whether partial in one or two Circumstances; or tinging the whole Temper and Conduct of the Person.[37]

Morris' view of humor, which others referred to as "singularity", became synthesized into a pseudo-social category by James Granger's *Biographical History of England*, which appeared the same year that Lavater's *Physiognomy* was published in German.[38] Granger stratified society into 12 classes, the first of which was royalty, and the last "Persons of both Sexes, chiefly of the lowest Order of the People, remarkable for only one Circumstance in their Lives; namely such as lived to a great Age, deformed Persons, Convicts &c." These categories were adapted into a portrait context by Henry Bromley, whose *Catalogue of Engraved British Portraits* of 1793 used the same subdivisions.[39] Bromley identified dozens of portraits, mostly prints of low quality, representing (in his parlance) robbers, beggars, dwarves, giants, blind men and women, incendiaries, murderers, men without arms, lunatics, fire eaters and female soldiers. Eccentric compendia, which were popular for the next 20 years or so, told stories of such remarkable characters, emphasizing their outré physical qualities and behavioral oddities. The title of G.H. Wilson's *Eccentric Mirror* of 1813 gives a comprehensive overview of what by then was an accepted definition of eccentricity:

> …male and female characters, ancient and modern, who have
> been particularly distinguished by extraordinary qualifications,
> talents, and propensities, natural or acquired, comprehending
> singular instances of longevity, conformation, birth stature,
> powers of mind and of body, wonderful exploits, adventures,
> habits, propensities, enterprising pursuits &c &c.[40]

Examples of the types of characters explored in these compendia include
"Sir" Jeffrey Dunstan, the so-called "Mayor of Garratt" (fig. 6)—a foundling
and secondhand wig seller who made his own coat of arms: "Sir Jeffrey was
remarkably dirty in person and always appeared with his shirt thrown open…
He had a most filthy and disgraceful habit, when he saw a number of girls
around him, of spitting in their faces."[41] Another of hundreds of examples
was James Caulfield's story of the man who ate stones:

> His manner is to put three or four stones into a spoon, and so
> putting them into his mouth together, swallows them all down
> one after another; then (first spitting) he drinks a glass of beer
> after them. He devours about half a peck of these stones every
> day; and when he chinks upon his stomach, or shakes his body,
> you may hear the stones rattle as if they were in a sack.[42]

Such descriptions were often, though not always, accompanied by prints or
frontispieces, which were designed to pick out these eccentricities as they
were manifested in the face, body or dress.

While many of these eccentric individuals were a social underclass,
and the prints which represented them of a fairly basic aesthetic quality,
"eccentric" as a term was also associated with a range of celebrities such
as Samuel Johnson, Henry Fuseli, Laurence Sterne, Samuel Foote the actor
and indeed Lavater himself, and it found its aesthetic home in more elite
forms of visual representation such as macaroni prints and caricatures. The
rage for macaroni prints and macaroni magazines in the 1770s was in part an
attack on effeminacy and foreign fashion, but equally represented the early
stages of this fascination with the extrinsic qualities of singular individuals.[43]
The Macaroni Scavoir Vivre and Theatrical Magazine of 1774 began its
assessment of singular behavior with the example of Diogenes in his tub, and
then suggested that the legacy of antiquity lingered on in modern England:

> This affectation of singularity prevails no less in our own
> age. People of this stamp indeed, though not *all* pretend to be
> philosophers, yet they think they have as good a right to their
> peculiarities…

Figure 6. Jeffrey Dunstan, *Mayor of Garratt* engraving, 19th century, Private Collection ©Look and Learn, Valerie Jackson Harris Collection, Bridgeman Images

> Some of these gentry are men of a portion of real learning, others are only such as are ambitious of being termed *odd fellow, queer subjects* and the like, by the members of the clubs they frequent, at coffee houses or alehouses.[44]

Francis Grose's *Rules for Drawing Caricature* of 1788 demonstrates the ways in which a caricaturist should look to distort features for effect, and he recognized the sorts of physical qualities, often disabilities, that could be easily exploited in the caricaturist's arsenal.[45] It is possible to identify a family resemblance between some of the schematic portraits of real life eccentrics and the caricatures of James Gillray, who equally targeted outré qualities in his often brilliant attacks on public figures.

This focus on singularity, as manifested in behavioral oddity and/or physical difference often had a synecdochic function—encapsulating the whole of individual character into a single legible feature that could be easily represented in art.[46] This was a step further than Lavater's idea that the soul could be read in the face, and indeed there was significant skepticism about

the potential for art to do more than delineate superficial surface features. Reynolds recognized the limitations of art in probing the character of individuals: "The habits of my profession," he wrote, "unluckily extend to the consideration of so much only of character as lies on the surface, as is expressed in the lineaments of the countenance."[47] His attempts to break out of the constraints he recognized in his art can be seen in his representations of individuals who were badged at the time as eccentrics. For example, Laurence Sterne, identified with his eccentric creation, Tristram Shandy, is represented in Reynolds's famous portrait (fig. 7) in a confident posture of contemplation, wearing his curate's gown, with his rather prominent nose, his eyes sharp and penetrating, and his elbow resting on a creative clutter of paperwork on the table beside him. Reynolds painted this portrait as a speculation rather than for a commission, to advertise his skill as an artist and to capitalize on the wild success of *Tristram Shandy* the year before. While Reynolds gained attention primarily through subsequent engravings, it is notable that early in his career, he was already interested in character as a subject for his portraiture. Reynolds's later portraits for Streatham Library provide us with an eccentric pantheon: Samuel Johnson, with his characteristic nervous tics and large stature; the Italian satirist, Giuseppe Baretti, with the myopia that led to him accidentally to stab a prostitute's pimp in the Haymarket; and the musicologist Charles Burney, with his half smile, overdressed for a private portrait in his doctoral gown.[48] In each of these cases, Reynolds highlighted some singular qualities of his friends, without descending into the distorting mode of caricature.

Each of the individuals depicted by Reynolds in the Streatham Library portraits made their appearance in the various eccentric compendia. They were seen to be singular characters, whose behavior and physical qualities set them apart from the rest of society. They were also very much symptomatic of celebrity culture: another sensation that needs to be considered as part of late eighteenth-century "selfiehood". The emergence of the singular and reflective self in fact occurred in front of a vast public audience: the people who read the ever proliferating newspapers and gossip sheets and looked at the caricatures that increasingly appeared in the print shop windows. This meant that the intimate self was to an extent played out in public, as eccentricity became a type of consumer product. Just as eccentricity took on a different semantic significance in the last decade or so of the eighteenth century, "celebrity" as a noun--signifying a person who is famous due to something other than birth—came into widespread use in the English language in the same period. A plethora of recent scholarship posits that the birth of celebrity can be attributed to the decline of royal power, a burgeoning consumer culture, and the displacement of social and cultural desires and
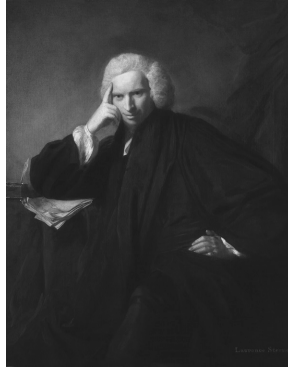
Figure 7. Joshua Reynolds, *Laurence Sterne*, oil on canvas, 1760, London, National Portrait Gallery

anxieties onto high profile public figures.[49] All of these authors explicitly relate the growth of celebrity culture to the transfer of admiration from figures of political or royal authority to those who come to public attention for other reasons—whether from talent or notorious behavior. Many of them also engage with the historical relationship between a changing approach to fame, and a growing bourgeois consumerism. Robert van Krieken refers to the "surplus value" of celebrity, and suggests that qualities such as esteem, status, wealth and influence become forms of "capital" that are increasingly ascribed to celebrity figures from the eighteenth century.[50] Fred Inglis explicitly links celebrity to consumerism: "Fame became a commodity, to be invested like capital in a life's work…Celebrity, its consort, stood to fame as marketing to production"; and as Stella Tillyard succinctly put it: "Celebrity was born at the moment when private life became a tradeable public commodity."[51]

Art historians have recognized that portraiture, which dominated both public exhibitions and print shops, was one of the most important components of the media proliferation that fueled the growth of celebrity culture. So how did the highly visible, public phenomenon of celebrity relate to the often private explorations of the self I have addressed so far? Here I want to return to Adorno and Horkheimer, whose essay on "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" formed a view about the role that individualism played in the commodified and post-Enlightenment world of celebrity culture. In their analysis of the Enlightenment legacy, they saw a tension between individuality and standardization. They wrote:

> Individuals are tolerated only as far as their wholehearted identity
> with the universal is beyond question. From the standardized
> improvisation in jazz to the original film personality who must
> have a lock of hair straying over her eyes…pseudo individuality
> reigns…The peculiarity of the self is a socially conditioned
> monopoly commodity misrepresented as natural. It is reduced
> to the moustache, the French accent, the deep voice of the
> prostitute…[52]

Although they did not express it in this way, Adorno and Horkheimer, in
their critique of the Enlightenment, were recognizing the kind of reification
of individual feature that came with the phenomenon of eccentricity. Their
understanding of this within mass culture and, by implication, celebrity
culture, provides us with an interesting retrospective way to conceptualize
the relationship between celebrity and the self in the late eighteenth century.
Recent scholars of celebrity see celebrity as "the commodification of fame"
and the exposure of private life to public scrutiny. Contemporaries in the
eighteenth century commented on a growing prurient attention to the details
of private life that was beginning to become commonplace in newspapers,
pamphlets and caricatures. Elizabeth Chudleigh, the Duchess of Kingston,
represents one of many examples. She was married in secret and reportedly
in the dead of night to Augustus Hervey who was later the 3rd Earl of Bristol,
and they kept their marriage secret so Chudleigh could retain her post as
Maid of Honor to the Princess of Wales and the livelihood that went along
with it. While living apart from her husband, she had at least one affair,
but when Hervey became Earl of Bristol, she forged a parish register to
prove their union, though she later took out a lawsuit against him to stop
him from claiming the marriage in order to impose a divorce. Declared a
spinster by the court eventually, she married the Duke of Kingston. When
Kingston died, his nephew brought a bigamy charge against her, and she was
found guilty. If this complex scandal were not enough to keep the papers
busy, she also had a very public spat with the playwright and actor Samuel
Foote, who mimicked the Duchess in the poisonous character of Lady Kitty
Crocodile in his *Trip to Calais* (1776). He attempted to blackmail her, and
she was later implicated as fueling the scandal around Foote's subsequent
accusation of sodomy and 1776 trial.[53] All of this was played out in public
print, where Chudleigh was maligned not exclusively on the basis of her
actions but on what were perceived to be deficiencies in her character. As
one detractor put it:

> She had an ambition to be thought ingenious, she would endeavor to pass off purchased paintings, and purchased tapestry, as works of her own hand….she rendered herself odious, from overbearing pride, and ridiculous and contemptible, from vulgar vanity.[54]

The Duchess of Kingston herself lamented the new attention to private lives that appeared in public journals and public prints. She wrote: "This is an age when the prying eye of curiosity penetrates the privacy of every distinguished person…The most trivial pursuits of the one [living] and the former table-talk of the other [the dead] are exposed and narrated…by some officious hand."[55]

The way in which the singularities or eccentricities of individual celebrities were placed under a microscope, judged and often maligned by the public press gives us a glimmer of what we see today in our tabloid and paparazzi culture. However, the focus on individual difference, character and self arguably has a deeper political origin that may have been lost in the century and a half between Joshua Reynolds and Adorno and Horkheimer. The sort of singularity that was celebrated or reviled by Lavater, through portraiture and within Enlightenment celebrity culture, had a legacy in the eighteenth-century Whig tendency to relate variety of character and individuality to both humor (in all senses of the word) and the liberty enabled by the British constitution. This coupling can be traced to the writings of William Temple and William Congreve of the 1690s.[56] The argument was carried through from the Earl of Shaftesbury's "Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour" (1709) to Reynolds's friend and portrait subject, James Beattie, who repeated the link between the British constitution and variety of character in "On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition" (1776).[57] One thread that runs through this discourse is the idea that singularity is desirable, as long as no one is harmed by it. *The Spectator* claimed: "SINGULARITY…. is only vicious when it makes Men act contrary to Reason, or when it puts them upon distinguishing themselves by Trifles."[58] This notion was so deeply embedded in English discourse that it became a justification for the creation of the eccentric compendia. *Kirby's Wonderful and Eccentric Museum* of 1820 synthesized this argument: "it has been justly asserted concerning the English nation, that no other country contains so many humourists or eccentric characters; and this declaration is an indirect eulogium on the political constitution and the laws under which we have the happiness of living, by which each individual is left at liberty to follow every humour, whim and fancy, provided it be not prejudicial to his fellow creatures."[59]

The coupling of singularity with English liberty lingered well into the nineteenth century and appeared also in eccentric compendia. Admired by

de Tocqueville when he visited England in the 1830s and identified the "spirit of individuality" as the basis of English character, eccentricity was also at the heart of J.S. Mill's essay "On Liberty" of 1859, where he echoed *The Spectator* in celebrating eccentricity as long as it does not damage others. To Mill, one of the big problems of his age was that conformity had stifled eccentricity, but the latter was a counter to "tyranny of opinion" and "despotism of custom": "the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius mental vigour and moral courage which it contained."[60]

It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the earliest eccentrics (and one whose presence was constantly reprised in the eccentric compendia), was John Wilkes, vilified for his ugly visage by Hogarth but celebrated as a popular hero by the defenders of liberty. In the proliferation of portrait prints that followed Hogarth's work, Wilkes' distinctive visage became associated with the human rights that he supported.

I think we are in a different kind of place today when we observe the steady array of selfies taken by politicians of themselves and their friends, watched by fans, detractors and paparazzi with their own smartphones and cameras. Where is the eccentricity, the oddity, the celebration of difference? Are we in fact seeing here the conformism that John Stuart Mill worried was the tyranny of opinion, antithetical to free expression, or the "pseudo individuality" reviled by Adorno and Horkheimer? In the eighteenth century the tools of self-portraiture were almost solely in the hands of artists, whereas the advent of the smartphone in the 21st century has allowed for an instant deictic declaration of self that has more to do with time and place than with character or personality. In asking the present-centered question about our narcissistic, self-obsessed age, I must reinforce Mill's concerns, but I come to a different kind of conclusion than Adorno and Horkheimer in seeing more of a rupture than a historical continuity between the Enlightenment and today. Self-portraiture as it was deployed by artists operated mostly in private; singularity or eccentricity, as it came to reify individual difference was also a public political celebration of the liberty represented by the British constitution. And thinking about Wilkes (whatever his failings as a human being) as a political role model for individuality, celebrity and eccentricity, more work needs to be done to understand why in the intervening centuries there has been such a rupture in the relationship between politics, liberty, human rights and self-representation.

NOTES

1. This essay is based on a special plenary address to the 2016 conference of the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies in Pittsburgh. Special thanks go to Heather McPherson, and to the panelists who responded to my paper so constructively and imaginatively: Michael Yonan, Douglas Fordham, Melissa Hyde, Kate Jensen and Mary Sheriff. I am also grateful to the outstanding insights of the audience in the general discussion afterwards which have informed this essay. I owe more than I can express to the many scholars whose work I cite in these notes.

2. http://www.reenlightenment.org/

3. Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2007), 12.

4. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford Univ, Press, 2002).

5. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 176.

6. There are numerous studies of narcissism and narcissistic personalities, written by historians, practising psychiatrists and medics. Consideration of narcissistic personalities began with Sigmund Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914) (Worcestershire: Read Books Ltd, 2013). For a sample of studies that followed on from Lasch's revitalization of the discussion, see Alexander Lowen, *Narcisissm: Denial of the True Self* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1983); and Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

7. See James Hall, *The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014), 7: "Self-portraiture has become the defining genre of our confessional age…a symptom of what has been dubbed 'the culture of narcissism'".

8. See the excellent blogs by Hannah Williams, who considers just how recent the phenomenon of the "selfie" is, with its entry in the OED appearing only in 2013: Hannah Williams, "Portraits are High Art, so why not the Selfie?" Washington Post, 4 July 2014, and "Portraits are a Fine Art, so let's Embrace the Selfie", *The Conversation*, 26 June 2014.

9. See my previous discussion of these changes in Shearer West, "Eccentricity and the Self: Caricature, Physiognomy and Celebrity in Eighteenth-Century English Portraiture", in Andrew Kahn, ed., *Representing Private Lives of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010), 219–50.

10. See J.W. Smeed, *The Theophrastan "Character": The History of a Literary Genre* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); and Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1997).

11. See Lisa Freeman, *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2004); Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-*

Century England (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989); and Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003). The *OED* reveals that the term "personality", referring to "the possessor of individual characteristics or qualities" was used as early as 1678, but it did not gain common currency in relation to individual psychological difference until the nineteenth century.

12. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 285.

13. Frederick Rider, *The Dialectic of Selfhood in Montaigne* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1973), 6.

14. Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, H. Hunter etc., 1789-98), 1:20.

15. Lavater, *Physiognomy*, 2:240.

16. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, letter to Friedrich Nicolai, 9 July 1776, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 10 vols. (Leipzig: G.J. Göschen'sche Verlagshandlung, 1853–7), 9: 680. See also Richard Gray, *German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 2004), 11; and Ellis Shookman, ed., *The Faces of Physiognomy: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Johann Caspar Lavater* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), 6; and "Remarks upon Mr. Lavater's Late Publication", *The World* (28 August 1790), 6.

17. J.J. Rousseau, *The Confessions of J.J. Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva*, 2 vols. (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796), 1:1. Johann Caspar Lavater, *Aphorisms on Man*, 2nd edn. (London: T. Bensley, 1789); and [Johann Caspar Lavater], *Secret Journal of a Self-Observer; or, Confessions and Familiar Letters of the Rev. J.C. Lavater*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell, 1795).

18. Lavater, *Secret Journal*, 1: 60–61.

19. Lavater, *Secret Journal*, 2: xvi, xx–xxi.

20. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, ix, 3.

21. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 65.

22. See Laura Cumming, *A Face to the World: Self-Portraits* (London: HarperPress, 2009), 7, who rightly asks: "And why do artists choose to show themselves in the first place, exposing themselves and their art to the accusations of narcissism so often raised by critics who seem to confuse self-representation with self-regard?"

23. For the most comprehensive detail about Reynolds's self-portraits, see David Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000); and for a recent interpretation of these works, see Mark Hallett, *Reynolds: Portraiture in Action* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2014).

24. See Lucy Davis and Mark Hallett, eds., *Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* (London: Paul Holberton, 2015).

25. Frederick Whiley Hilles, *Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1929), 242-3. See also John Ingamells and John Edgcumbe, eds., *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 59–63.

26. Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert Wark (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1975), 103.

27. Reynolds, *Discourses*, 147–8.

28. Richard Wendorf, *The Elements of Life: Biography and Portrait-Painting in Stuart and Georgian England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 147.

29. *The Idler* (24 February 1759), 126.

30. Reynolds, *Discourses*, 117–18, 132.

31. See Angela Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2006), 223–83; and Wendy Wassyng Roworth, *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London: Reaktion, 1992).

32. See Martin Postle, ed., *Johan Zoffany, RA: Society Observed*, exhibition catalogue (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2011); and William Pressly, "Genius Unveiled: The Self-Portraits of Johan Zoffany", *Art Bulletin* 69:1 (March 1987): 88–101.

33. See William Pressly, *James Barry: The Artist as Hero*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1983), 66–71.

34. Lavater, *Aphorisms*, 22.

35. David Joseph Weeks and Kate Ward, *Eccentrics: The Scientific Investigation* (Stirling: Stirling Univ. Press, 1988).

36. *The Spectator*, 6th edn (London: J. Tonson, 1723), no. 2, 1:5.

37. Corbyn Morris, *An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour, Raillery, Satire and Ridicule* (London: J. Roberts, 1744), 12, 23.

38. James Granger, *A Biographical History of England*, 4 vols. (London: T. Davies, 1775).

39. Henry Bromley, *A Catalogue of Engraved British Portraits: from Egbert the Great to the Present Time* (London: T. Payne, 1793).

40. G.H. Wilson, *The Eccentric Mirror*, 4 vols. (London: J & J Cundee, 1813). Other examples include: *Kirby's Wonderful and Eccentric Museum* (London: R.S. Kirby, 1820); *Portraits and Lives of Remarkable and Eccentric Characters*, 2 vols. (London: J. Arnett, 1819). For later explorations of this phenomenon, see John Timbs, *English Eccentrics and Eccentricities*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1866); Edith Sitwell, *The English Eccentrics* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933); Michèle Plaisant, ed., *L'Excentricité en Grande-Bretagne au 18esiècle* (Lille: Les Presses de l'Université de Lille III, 1976); and Shearer West, "Eccentricity and the Self".

41. *Portraits and Lives of Eccentric Characters*, 51–2.

42. James Caulfield, *Portraits, Memoirs and Characters of Remarkable Persons from the Reign of Edward the Third to the Revolution*, 2 vols. (London: J. Caulfield, 1794), 2:122.

43. See Shearer West, "The Darly Macaroni Prints and the Politics of 'Private Man'", *Eighteenth Century Life* 25 (Spring 2001): 170–82; and Amelia Rauser,

"Hair, Authenticity and the Self-Made Macaroni", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38:1 (2004): 101–17.

44. *The Macaroni Scavoir Vivre and Theatrical Magazine* (June 1774), 378.

45. Francis Grose, *Rules for Drawing Caricatures, with an Essay on Comic Painting* (London: A. Grant, 1788).

46. Shearer West, "Wilkes's Squint: Synecdochic Physiognomy and Political Identity in Eighteenth-Century Print Culture", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33.1 (1999): 65–84.

47. Frederick W. Hilles, ed., *Portraits: Character Sketches of Oliver Goldsmith, Samuel Johnson, and David Garrick* (London: Heinemann, 1952), 94.

48. The Streatham portraits have been discussed most recently and perceptively by Mark Hallett in *Reynolds*, 287–309. For a discussion of Baretti and the prostitute story, see Shearer West, "Xenophobia and Xenomania: Italians and the English Royal Academy", in Shearer West, ed., *Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 116–39.

49. Leo Braudy *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Fred Inglis, *A Short History of Celebrity* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010); Robert van Krieken, *Celebrity Society* (London: Routledge, 2012); Joseph Roach, *It*; Brian Moeran, "Celebrities and the Name Economy", *Research in Economic Anthropology* 22 (2003): 299–321; Cheryl Wanko, *Roles of Authority: Thespian Biography and Celebrity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Univ. Press, 2003); and Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2001).

50. van Krieken, *Celebrity Society*, 10.

51. Inglis, *Short History of Celebrity*, 40; Stella Tillyard, "'Paths of Glory': Fame and the Public in Eighteenth-Century London"**,** in Martin Postle, ed., *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 2005), 64.

52. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 124–5.

53. See Matthew Kinservik, *Sex, Scandal and Celebrity in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

54. Manuscript volume of "Portraits" of Mary, Lady Hervey, Henrietta Lane Speed, Countess de Viry, the Marchioness of Cercello and Elizabeth Chudleigh, 1801, Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington, Connecticut.

55. *An Authentic Detail of Particulars Relative to the Late Duchess of Kingston*, new edn. (London: G. Kearsley, 1788), 1.

56. "Liberty begats Stomach or Heart, and Stomach will not be Constrained. Thus we have come to have more Originals, and more that appear what they are; we have more Humour because every Man follows his own." William Temple, "Of Poetry" in J.E. Spingarn ed., *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, vol. 3: 1685–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 104.

57. Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Early of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks on Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols. (1714) (reprint Farnborough: Greggs International Publishers Ltd, 2nd edition, 1968); and James Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music, as they Affect the Mind, On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition, On the Utility of Classical Learning* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1776).

58. *The Spectator*, no. 576, 8: 87.

59. *Kirby's Wonderful and Eccentric Museum,* 113–14.

60. John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty" (1859) in J.M. Robson, ed., *Essays on Politics and Society* (Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), 268–9.

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