Reduplication and "the Double"

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"We've got to be careful," Hall said. "We've got to watch for duplicates. Apparently it, whatever it is, imitates objects it finds. Like a chameleon. Camouflage."

"Two," Stella Morrison murmured, looking at the two vases of flowers, one at each end of her desk. "It's going to be hard to tell. Two towels, two vases, two chairs. There may be whole rows of things that are all right. All multiples legitimate except one."

"That's the trouble."

—Philip K. Dick, "Colony," 1953

The death knell of painting has been sounding for some time, so long that it is the veritable backbeat of "modern" visuality. Surely no artist working after the invention of photography is unaware of arguments about the obsolescence of painting. Just as surely, painting responds "I'm old, but I'm not dead yet!" As a technology of representation painting can do things that no other media can do; it isn't as tied to the existing world. Its process is one of endless mediation, of an infinite series of consciously performed transformations on the part of the artist. And yet every painter, particularly every figurative painter, grapples with the commanding power of the photograph in giving the world endless images of itself.[1]

In the early 1950s Alex Katz was painting landscapes, still lifes, and modestly sized group portraits he sourced from found photographs. Some of these photograph-based works do not disguise their origins, as indicated in titles such as *Old Photo* (pl. 10) and *Group Portrait 1* (pl. 1). These paintings employ the naive-seeming conventions of amateur snapshots. The arrangement of three figures in *Old Photo* is rigidly centered: a seated man, with arms crossed, is flanked by two standing women, each draping an arm over him. The three individuals' bodies are almost entirely visible from head to toes, lending the painting the sense of artless documentation borrowed from its source in the anonymous photograph. The unsophisticated composition is abetted by the blocky

Detail of *Ada Ada*, 1959 (Pl. 91)

areas of color that form the atmosphere of Katz's work—a peachy-pink foreground, a mustard-yellow stand of trees, and the pale-yellow sky seem like three unmodulated horizontal stripes in which the figures appear to float.

The sense of reduced but continuous areas of color extends to the treatment of the figures; the dress of the figure on the right is a single vertical band of blue with variations that seem to be more about the play of paint on the board that provides the work's support, than the contours of an underlying body. The simplicity of the frontal composition is exaggerated by Katz's schematization of the figures' relationships to their surroundings. In the two women's poses there is an almost bovine solidity in their hooflike legs. Katz has left a penumbra of underlying color around their lower bodies, especially below their waists, refusing to bring the peach color adjacent to their bodies, making them appear as if they are cardboard cutouts before an equally unreal environment of a painted backdrop. Most disconcerting is the eerie flatness of paint with regard to facial features. Each figure, in their no-nonsense frontality, presents the viewer with an empty moon of flesh-colored paint. No eyes, mouths, or noses; just a disk of skin-toned paint topped with a helmet of hair.

The photo-derived works of this period refuse the specificity not only of distinct individual characteristics but also of precise settings. When portrayed in groups, people seem to exist *solely* as members of an overall group composition, like the lanky youngsters of *Four Children* (pl. 8), lined up according to height, or the crew of *Group Portrait 1*, twenty-one people woven together in that way that photographers have of squeezing *everyone* in—a standing back row, an awkwardly crouched middle section, and a slice of the front kneelers. There's even one guy who looks like he's worked his abs for an uncomfortably long time to seem so nonchalantly sprawled across the bottom of this crew. For all the physical proximity of the figures in *Group Portrait 1*, Katz subjects them to a countervailing isolation, hemming them in with the nearly oppressive environment of monochromatic powder-gray floor and walls. It is as though this group, while together, is completely adrift from any context other than the huddle of their bodies, surrounded as they are by the inhospitable atmosphere of murky, dust-colored paint.

In the late 1950s Katz began a different engagement with the photographic. While not directly appropriating the compositions and subjects of existing snapshots, these new works instead reflected on the procedures of duplication that characterize photography. In 1959 he began producing near-life-size "group scenes" that were in fact composed of multiplied images of a single individual. By the early to mid-1960s these portraits sometimes develop into a proliferation of clones—with two, four, or even six repeated figures—all sourced from a single subject. As Katz reflected on his development of the technique, "In the beginning

of the '50s, I did paintings from photographs, I was interested in nostalgia. I was interested in an intimate, lyric feeling. By the end of the decade, it was changing, getting bigger and more artificial. By 1959, I'd done the double portrait, *Ada Ada*, which you couldn't see all at once."[2]

In 1965 Katz's friend, poet and dance critic Edwin Denby, himself the subject of some of these pluralized portrayals (one has four versions of his standing body), coined the phrase "reduplicative portrait" to describe the works.[3] Reduplicative—it's a mouthful. It implies, first of all, that a portrait is already a duplication, so that the procedure of putting multiple portraits side by side reduplicates the already doubled aspect of the portrait. Painted portraits have always participated in a doubling process, providing a subject with a version of him- or herself: some merely satisfactory, others grossly flattering, still others totally ersatz. In the era of mechanical reproduction, the ability to multiply iterations in representation is infinite, becoming a *mise en abyme* of duplicative possibilities: of the contact sheet as filmstrip (which captures nearly indistinguishable sequential moments in a kind of animation à la Eadweard Muybridge); of the possibly infinite copies that can printed of the same image derived from a single negative; of the ability of photographic procedures to superimpose multiple images in one frame through double exposures or through enlarging and printing tricks.

Katz's reduplicative paintings sharpen a series of concerns that were implicit but unresolved in his photo-derived early 1950s works: issues about copies and originals, about reproduction and representation, about emulation and authenticity, about artifice and the materiality of painting. While no longer painting from photographs, and instead engaging directly with what he could see before him, Katz produced images that paradoxically seemed *more* photographic than his earlier works. (As Katz reflected after he began to show these works in the 1950s, "[Willem] De Kooning told me he liked the paintings, and I shouldn't let people knock me out of my position. He said they were like photographs, but they were paintings."[4])

What is at stake in Katz's engagement with the photographic, first as a source to be copied, and secondly as a procedure of doubling? How can studying his reduplicated works elucidate Katz's enigmatic proclamation that he falls on the side of "image-making" more than painting, as he recounts in an anecdote about the famous Leonardo da Vinci cartoon of the Virgin and Child with St. Anne: "My most memorable experience of Leonardo's work was with the big cartoon in the British Museum. The best part of it was later that night, when the thing just flashed in front of my head and seemed completely real. Most of his images are extremely aggressive and powerful. They last. With image-making, the idea is to reassemble details and facts into an image that's plausible. I prefer image-making to painting, when it comes down to it."[5] What is "image-making" for a painter in the era of technological reproduction?[6]

Ada Ada (pl. 90), the first reduplicative painting, is the best place to begin answering that question. It shares with works like *Group Portrait 1* an undifferentiated backdrop that floats the figures untethered; the two Adas are silhouetted with a halo of paint that sets them off from the background, decontextualized from any clear or recognizable sense of place, which contributes to the sense that their shallow depth is paper-doll thin. Unlike the earlier photo-derived paintings, it is a work of near life-size. In the case of *Ada Ada,* the forms—two versions of Katz's wife in a blue housecoat, arms crossed before her—are not connected to one another through physical contact, as in the earlier paintings. Instead, the two Adas stand side by side, as though they are statuettes on display in a shop window.

Katz's repetition of the Adas within a single picture plane becomes a perceptual test of how the time-based procedure of painting stacks up against the mechanical replication of images constructed by the technological apparatus of the camera. For Katz's Adas fail as exact duplicates—the area around the lower legs of the rightmost Ada is a muddy wash of paint that gives her feet the impression of being midshuffle, her nose is somewhat less distinct, her face more oval, and her blue housedress flecked with white paint as though more hastily painted. In viewing the two Adas I cannot help wanting to see one as *first*; perhaps because of the conventions of reading left to right I assign left Ada the status of the original, and right Ada becomes the copy. But it could just as well be that right Ada, with her less finished features, is the initial version, and left Ada is the more polished copy. The play between the figures becomes a kind of standoff in which neither blinks.

As art historian Éric de Chassey has noted about Katz's relationship to technologies of image reproduction, "Our access to the image . . . is now rarely achieved otherwise than through the new non-man-made image, the photographic and the cinematic. . . . Katz seems to have understood early on. . . that mechanical images affect our relationship with reality less by allowing for faithful reproduction than by creating a new degree of reality, one characterized by the image's autonomy, reproducibility, and exponential dissemination."[7] In this "creation of a new degree of reality," Katz has consistently emphasized the estranging qualities of reproduction on the viewing subject. In the early photo-derived works Katz's distortions at the level of individual characteristics led to nearly faceless anonymity. With the reduplicative paintings, composed as they are of doubled or otherwise multiplied portraits, Katz enters a terrain of uncanny representation that reverberates with problems of authenticity and image-making in the postwar period. Presenting viewers with a doubled subject produces anxieties about "genuine" subjectivity and induces a kind of paranoia around the adequacy of representation to capture anything other than the

superficial, surface condition of the body. With Katz's paintings of the late 1950s, the works' "thematics develop a specific cluster of tropes—inversion, reversibility, parallelism, ironic reinscription, false dichotomies, paralogy—all of which are conventionally grouped under the rubric of 'the double.'"[8]

In *Double Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg* (pl. 92) the composition is more complex than *Ada Ada*, with a doubling of not only the human form but also the entire mise-en-scène. Two Rauschenbergs, facing the viewer, sit on simple wooden folding chairs in a loftlike space before large paned windows that bifurcate the space, as though the wall between them is a kind of wonky but invisible mirror. Yet the positions of the two figures are, upon closer inspection, not identical. But remember, neither does a mirror produce a duplicate image. (Imagine raising your right arm in a mirror. You perceive your reflection raising its *left* arm.) The two Rauschenbergs seem to directly mirror one another's positions, while in actuality their bodies form a knot of false parallels. One Rauschenberg is leaning his right arm on the back of the chair, while the other leans his left. The orientation of the legs seems similarly transposed, but in actuality the left leg of *both* figures is extended. This weave of mirrored and non-mirrored orientations undermines the sense of symmetry that seems the point of the painting's doublings. The differences between the two forms extend to their facial features, clothing, and physical deportment: right Rauschenberg has darker eyebrows, his chestnut-colored shirt is buttoned up a bit more, and he slouches in his seat; left Rauschenberg has a slimmer face, wears an apparently darker shirt, and sits up in his chair with better posture. The effect of this doubling is like seeing twins together—while at first glance there is perfect harmony, upon closer inspection slightly perceivable differences can be cataloged, nuances that twins themselves are the first to enumerate in the interest of being seen as distinct individuals, in spite of nearly identical appearance.

After the breakthrough of works like *Ada Ada* and *Double Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg*, Katz began mounting painted forms on wood as three-dimensional objects. At seven-eighths human scale, these cutouts reinforce the paper doll–like aspect of the shallow depth of the reduplicative portraits. In these sculptural works, our inability to see the reduplicative image all at once is itself further complicated by the fact that the boards are painted both front and back. Unlike a traditional painting, however, the cutouts are double-sided painted objects, appearing much more like merchandizing paraphernalia, like a mannequin or a tailor's dummy. As Katz himself mentioned, the small scale of the early 1950s works and their origin as snapshots staged time as a mnemonic experience of emotional longing: "I was interested in nostalgia. . . . I was interested in an intimate, lyric feeling."[9] By the late 1950s, Katz increased the scale of his paintings and presented the viewer with the uncanny experience of seeing multiple versions

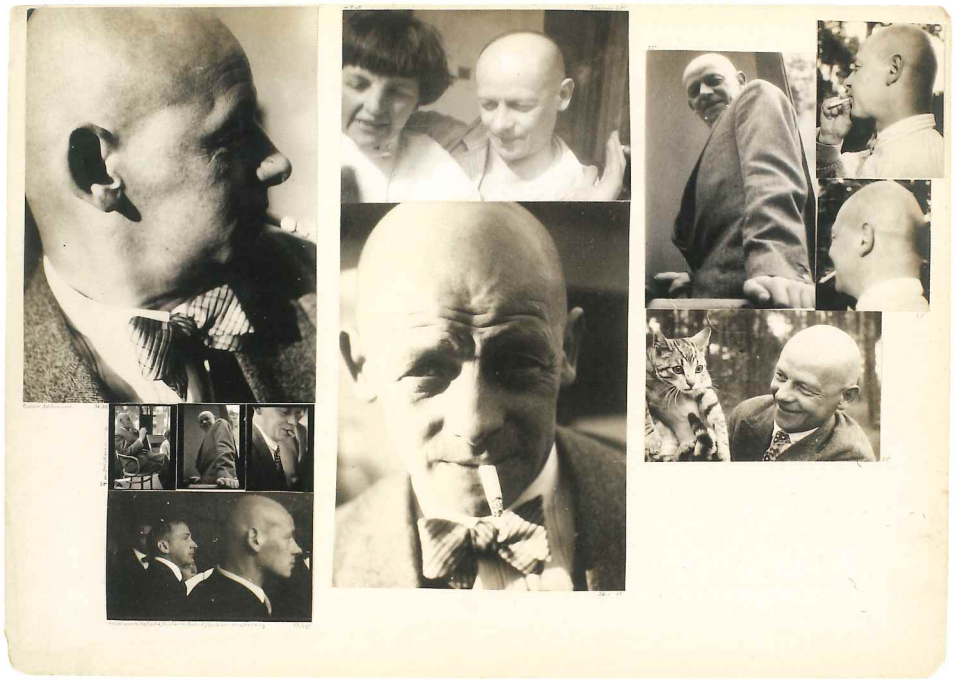

Fig. 26. Josef Albers, American, born Germany, 1888–1976, *Oscar Schlemmer IV, 29; im Meirsterrat '28; [Hans] Wittner, [Ernst] Kallai, Marianne Brandt, Vorkursausstellung '27/'28; Oskar & Tut Sommer 28*, 1927, gelatin silver prints mounted on cardboard, 11½ × 16⅛ in. (29.2 × 41 cm). The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

of the same subject within a single picture plane or as doubled sculptures. These works interfere with gestalt perception and encourage a sort of view that offers an experience of split apperception. Just as one cannot produce a painting "all at once," in contrast to the instantaneity of a photograph, Katz notes that the double portrait is something you "couldn't see all at once."[10]

Painters have long returned to consistent motifs as visual constants they subject to a play of mutation and variation: Claude Monet's haystacks or his Rouen cathedral series, Paul Cézanne's Mont Sainte-Victoire, or Piet Mondrian's piers come to mind. And the number of painters who have used their female partners to produce obsessive numbers of portraits is perhaps a map of modernism's construction of the female form as muse and compulsive fixation. But Katz's reduplicative portraits can be understood as exploration of seriality and an interest in variance *within* a single picture plane that characterizes a specific thread of art not often associated with his work. In this vein, the work of Josef Albers is important to consider, especially the manner in which serial variation is undertaken in the interest of attuning viewers' perceptual apparatus to subtle relationships of similarity and difference within a single painting. Albers's lesser-known photographic portraits are significant in this regard, works in which he presents multiple aspects of the same figure in sequence (fig. 26). Viewers of these works are presented with a subject depicted through fragmentary evidence, calling into

question the ability of any single representation to convey the complex inner life of a sitter, particularly by means of the relentless superficiality of the camera's arresting vision.

In the late 1960s art historian John Berger made a bold claim about the obsolescence of painted portraiture: "It seems to me unlikely that any important portraits will ever be painted again." To him, the singularity of the portrait, its attempt to capture in one image a "likeness" of the complexity of a human, was a kind of falseness. He wrote, "We can no longer accept that the identity of a man can be adequately established by preserving and fixing what he looks like from a single viewpoint in space."[11] The discrepancy between "outermost surface" and "the meaning of individuality" had become acute after the ascendancy of the photographic, an era coincident, Berger notes, with the bourgeois displacement of social status from traditional hierarchies of power. The twinned project, one could say, of bourgeois social-political freedoms for individuals from caste restrictions, and the liberation of subjects and economic markets from feudal institutions, produced what we call "modern" individuality. The crisis these changes produced in representation has to do with the ways manifold characteristics now define a person—the constructed positionalities the subject can occupy beyond those inherited in a relatively fixed social order. Whereas once social status and position not only defined the elite patron-painter relationship, painted portraits also allowed each subject to fulfill their ordained social role.

In the hands of Albers's Black Mountain College students such as Robert Rauschenberg (fig. 27) and Ray Johnson, explorations of seriality introduced the photographic into the realm of the painted portrait, and in so doing called into question the dominant logic of 1950s expressionist painting that emphasized originality and spontaneity. Works like Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II* (figs. 28 and 29), and Johnson's *Moticos* (fig. 30) relied on a complex interplay between repetition of the painted mark and duplications of appropriated photographic imagery. By the early 1960s the ranks of painters exploring this terrain of serial logic with respect to forms of mechanical image reproduction would swell—think of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and James Rosenquist. New kinds of subjects were being produced as much as they were being represented by

Fig. 27. Robert Rauschenberg, American, 1925–2008, *Cy + Roman Steps (I–V)*, 1952, five gelatin silver prints, 14¾ × 14¾ in. (37.5 × 37.5 cm) each. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, purchase through a gift of Phyllis Wattis

Fig. 28. Robert Rauschenberg, American, 1925–2008, *Factum I*, 1957, oil, ink, pencil, crayon, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, and printed paper on canvas, 62½ × 36½ in. (158.8 × 90.2 cm). The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Panza Collection, 86.15

Fig. 29. Robert Rauschenberg, American, 1925–2008, *Factum II*, 1957, oil, ink, pencil, crayon, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, and painted paper on canvas, 61⅜ × 35½ in. (155.9 × 90.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase and an anonymous gift and Louise Reinhardt Smith Bequest (both by exchange), 206.1999

this kind of figuration, ones in which the pose and poise of the subject were being joined in a new kind of iconicity.

In the case of the generation of painters I mentioned, the status of the photographic in portraiture has much to do with the production, circulation, and reception of images in the mass media. Katz's reduplicative portraits also take up photographic *procedures*—presenting multiples side by side as in a contact sheet or in a photomontage—but they were all painted before the subject her- or himself. In this sense Katz returns representation to the older technology that is painting, engaging a temporality that is not mechanical but is a technology nonetheless. In a way we expect mechanical representations to present us with uncanny visions of the human subject, in a sense that is the defining characteristic of the mechanical eye. (Examples of anamorphic imagery in Surrealist painting seem to be the exception, and Katz's paintings are, in a way, a kind of Surrealist trick that reveals our false investment in what can be consciously confirmed by the optics of human vision).

Arguing that Katz's doubling flags the constructed character of the subject is not to dispute that his project of painting multiple versions of the same figure presents us with a kind of amplified visual pleasure, however. As Katz states of himself, "I'm a sucker for beauty."[12] His doubling of form involves, as the art

historian Tom McDonough has argued about Katz, a process of migrating images that call into question the creative process and forms of distribution for photography. What troubles McDonough is the manner in which Ada's beauty or the stylishness of Katz's other subjects may serve to contain the threat of the duplicated subject under capitalism—that is, the manner in which commodification begins to reify subjects and turn them into exchangeable objects. Here is McDonough expressing that worry in his response to a talk by de Chassey:

> One of the things that always has bugged me about Alex Katz is, like, it's "the good taste," it's painting that's in very good taste. . . . If you set Katz next to, say, Warhol, we can see two radically different ways of addressing the issue, and it seems to me there's a *social* impact to, precisely, to precisely the issue of beauty . . . I guess what I'm wondering, is that whether in this work the migration of images is precisely admitted to the realm of painting in order to be domesticated, in order to be pacified, and the *threat* of photography in a sense is done away with, you know in a way that's so different than these rather more recalcitrant works by Warhol, by Lichtenstein, by Rosenquist, to a certain degree.[13]

Fig. 30. Ray Johnson, American, 1927–1995, *James Dean, Lucky Strike*, 1957, collage on cardboard panel, 18 × 15½ in. (45.7 × 39.4 cm). The Ray Johnson Estate, courtesy Richard L. Feigen & Co.

What McDonough calls the "threat" of photography—its serial nature among other things—I want to consider by returning to Katz's conception of his work in the late 1950s as becoming more "artificial" and to probe what that means with respect to the uncanny effect of the doubling of people in the reduplicative paintings. Katz restates his sense of the artificiality of these works in terms of the "psychological":

> I wanted to do a double portrait that was non-psychological. I thought if I painted Ada twice, it would be non-psychological. . . . When I finished, it was a psychological double portrait, but it was a different kind. It had nothing to do with the older kind. . . . Up until that point, my idea was to paint what I see. [*Ada Ada*] was the first time I painted something I couldn't see all at once. It wasn't narrative, but it was artificial, and my painting has been getting more artificial since.[14]