



How Do the Rich Smile? A Study in Visual Sociology

György LENGYEL

Institute of Sociology and Social Policy
Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary
gyorgy.lengyel@uni-corvinus.hu

Abstract. The paper is based on a classroom research. It investigates how students recognize social status by visual information alone, and how their opinions change when visual and verbal information are combined. First, photos of three multi-billionaires were projected without additional information and we asked short characterizations including social status. The majority mentioned upper or upper-middle class as regards social status. For occupation, the respondents wrote businessman, manager, intellectual and clerk most frequently. The positive features outnumbered the negative ones. However, smiles did not only divide the spectators but also elicited more negative than positive associations. The most frequent positive characteristics mentioned were self-assurance, elegance, diligence, authority, openness and good humour. The most frequent negative features for all three persons were conceited, complacent. Spectators often allude to invisible features such as career and family. When verbal information was added to the photos, it considerably boosted the number of positive attributes and decreased the negative ones. The most important common characteristic – self-assurance – remained and even increased after reading the text. By contrast, mentions of conceitedness decreased as did inferences from primary visual information while references to subjective well-being: success and family increased.

Keywords: visual and textual information, high social status, pseudo-spontaneous message, photography, business elite

Introduction

This paper sums up the results of a classroom research in which we investigated how students would recognize social status by visual information alone, what guided their eyes, what characteristics they accentuated, what attributes they used and how their opinions changed when supplementary verbal information was also given.

The investigation took place within a seminar at the Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary, in 2006. At the end of a reliability test, we projected three portraits on the wall without giving any information and asked the students to write a few words about the social status and other characteristics of each figure separately, and what common or dissimilar traits they recognized in them. The three persons – three men – were all among the 100 richest Hungarians but they were not so well-known as to be recognizable even for specialists. The names and faces are not published here, for apart from several positive features the students often wrote unflattering things and it would not be fair to offend the models. The reader has to envision three little known Hungarian multi-billionaires, or leaf through the annually published booklets of the *100 richest Hungarians*.

When a month later the inquiry was repeated, we attached a brief objective verbal description of their social status, which altered the opinions. How come? How do people form an opinion on the basis of visual perception, and what features of the sight capture the attention of several people? Why and how are visual and verbal kinds of information connected, how do they reinforce or weaken, or complement each other? I wish to find answers to these questions in the below study.

On the first occasion of the investigation, twenty-six BA students provided usable answers, on the second occasion twenty-three. For comparability's sake we only elaborated – with the SPSS program – the answers of the participants in both sessions. As required by the encoding instruction, the texts were recorded by two encoders independently of each other in such a way that the doubtful interpretational variants were compared and made unanimous¹.

How do the rich smile? Justification for the title is the smile on two of the three faces, as is common in photos, and the mention of the smile by the students both in positive and negative terms. Before embarking on my topic in the strict sense, I briefly revise the professional impulses I have received from visual sociology and the related disciplines. Then I present the guesses concerning social status and the characteristics stressed by the students in individual portraits or as

¹ Data encoding was done by Erika Bartók and Anna Tóth. The author would like to thank the comments of Tibor Kuczi on a previous version of this paper. Codebook and data are available by request at the author.

common traits shared by the three sitters. Finally, I describe the ways how visual and verbal information is linked up, and summarize the findings.

Some relevant statements in the academic literature

Visual studies have rich research literature, though it is far from the survey-based puzzle-solving paradigm (Bourdieu, Boltanski, Castel and Chamboredon, [1965] 1998; Prosser, 1998; Pink, 2001; Emmison and Smith, 2002; Sztompka 2009). It follows from the nature of the specialty that it is primarily related to descriptive-explorative methods and rarely allows for the testing of hypotheses. Alluding to the literature, Howard S. Becker (1998) points out that the main use of visual sociology might be in the systematic presentation of emotions, interactions and material culture. Speaking of photo interviews, Collier notes that although photos of the familiar circumstances taken during fieldwork elicit far fewer abstract associations than the tests of experimental psychology, the discussion over the photos is often emotionally surcharged and may help explore the hidden contents of value systems (Collier, 1985).

Goffman's photo-related analyses have contributed several useful observations and concepts to the academic discourse (Goffman, 1981). These include his views on the contents of stealthy shots, the interrelation between portraits and models, as well as the distinction between private and public photos, and the handling of verbal information as the interpretative frame of the picture. This is close to the second phase of our research in which the interplay between visual and verbal information is analyzed. In our case it was evident that the photos analyzed were portraits meant for the public, hence the deliberate coincidence of theme and model and the appearance of certain objects and gestures served self-representation.

Among sociological investigations, a similar attempt to ours was Teckenberg's who showed nine photos of situations partly well known from magazines to thirty-nine people, asking them to interpret the sight (Teckenberg, 1982). The respondents sometimes made up stories about a photo that had nothing to do with the visual information.

Barthes' distinction between *studium* and *punctum* – whether the picture provokes thoughts or elicits emotional reactions – might also be of use here (Barthes, 1985). Since during this investigation all respondents saw the same photos yet some reacted more or less objectively, others emotionally, the argumentation must be reversed: *studium* and *punctum* are inherent attributes of the interpreters rather than that of the pictures.

A frequent research field in communication theory, behavioural science and psychology is the interrelation between emotions and facial expression (Buda, 1986). Illustrating experiments with pictures has been a time-tested method in

natural science, education and the dissemination of knowledge for a long time. Duchenne, then Darwin tried to describe the interplay between emotions and facial expression (Darwin [1892] 1963; Ekman, 1973). A part of psychological examinations deliberately uses pictures, not only for illustration. In this regard, the use of the slide-viewing paradigm is perhaps closest to our research.

The slide-viewing paradigm was applied by Ross Buck and his colleagues in several experiments (Buck, 1979). The point is that non-verbal communication, more exactly facial expressions, are studied from the angle of the sender and that of the receiver of the message. While the senders are viewing pictures eliciting various emotions and explain these experiences verbally, the receivers watch this on muted television, and try to recognize the emotions elicited by the pictures on the basis of facial expressions. Experiences have shown that women sent accurate signals in a significantly greater rate, while men proved to be internalizers to a greater degree. Externalizers displayed greater self-confidence and often worded their emotional reactions in personal terms.

Receptivity to non-verbal information has not shown such systematic peculiarities. In experiments designed to measure the ability to decode emotions, students of arts and business proved better than natural science students. In one experiment female students were just slightly better at reception than males, in another experiment there was no significant difference by gender (Buck, Miller and Caul, 1974; Buck, 1979).

As for experiments with small children, it was found that at three years of age, children decoded from facial expression the emotions of their own gender far better. With growing age, this difference remained the same among boys but was reversed among girls, who later recognized the emotions of boys to a greater degree. This phenomenon must be connected to the social learning process of gender roles (Buck, 1979).

Less systematic but interesting results were arrived at by Barthes in a short essay in which he analyzed election photos of politicians. The point to such posters is to eliminate verbal information and condense the social characteristics and message of the politician in an image. What they reveal is the candidate's "social position", the spectacular comfort of familiar, legal and religious "norms" (Barthes, 1983: 134) and what the candidate stylizes him/herself into. Its types are "one who suggests social rank", "the intellectual" ("penetrating glance", transfigured melancholy) and the women's idol, a "men's man". Of course, a lot is known about election pictures: their aims, context, intentions of the senders of the pictures and the typical responses of the recipients. It is also known that they are framed by important textual information: names, political affiliations and sometimes promises and ideological catchwords. There is thus text, though not speech, that helps with interpretation.

There remains the question of how social status can be identified in a photo when there is no framing text. This has encouraged us to check whether there are typical categories and significant deviations in the responses of the participants in our experiment, and to see whether the typical reactions display correlations with other variables and attitudes measured during the experiment.

Another intriguing question to be answered is what correlation there is between verbal and non-verbal communication. In an experiment, photos of facial expressions of basic emotions – happiness, anger, surprise, sadness – were shown to secondary school pupils with sentences attached in such a way that sometimes they perfectly corresponded to the emotions and sometimes they did not match at all (Friedman, 1979). (Fear and disgust – also listed by specialists among the basic emotion types – were omitted for methodological reasons.) One of the questions was how sincere the participants thought the combination of visual and verbal information was. It was found that positive verbal contents paired with positive visual experience was deemed most sincere. Anger and sadness paired with sentences of negative contents was also judged sincere. They judged asynchronous messages less sincere, taking them for irony or sarcasm in the best case. Girls proved more accurate in decoding the sincerity of the messages in this experiment, too.

Another study with relevance to the present research has put the results of several investigations to meta-analysis, trying to answer the question what correlation there is between verbal skills and the symbolic and spontaneous forms of non-verbal communication (Buck and Vanlear, 2002). It was found that there is systematic and significant correlation between verbal and mimic skills. In the authors' view, the reason was that both forms belonged to symbolic communication which was connected to the left hemisphere of the brain. As against that, the decoding of the spontaneous and pseudo-spontaneous emotions belongs to the right hemisphere. Several elements of symbolic communication, such as speech and mime, depend on socially learnt skills and are intentional activities. Spontaneous communication, by contrast, meant the unwitting expression of emotions. The specificity of pseudo-spontaneous communication is being intentional: its aim is to present seemingly spontaneous traits that may generate required emotional responses in the recipient of the message. In fact, pseudo-spontaneous communication is deceit. Sometimes it is pious fraud – like the effort of the parent to conceal his/her headache or the actor's intention to make the audience weep – but it is also a favourite instrument of swindlers.

As regards smile, it has many epithets: the most famous smile is enigmatic, but there are wise, childish, kindly, innocent, serene smiles. In Darwin's view smiling and laughing have a common root, while others question it. Laughter can be diabolic, a smile cannot. At most, a smile is cynical or sarcastic, or, to refer to a different sentiment, resigned. A distorted smile is a grin. A smile convinces the environment that its sender has positive (or, at least not extremely negative)

sentiments toward others. Moreover, a smiling person gives the impression that he/she is on good terms with him/herself, he/she is settled, happy, satisfied with the situation or at least has put up with things as they are.

A longitudinal survey has found that the intensity of the smile on the high-school graduation photo correlates with later success and happiness in love relationship (Coniff, 2007).

The study of facial expressions and their visual illustration goes back to Guillaume Duchenne who lent his name to the ‘genuine’ or Duchenne-smile. Of course, Duchenne also exemplified unnatural smiles: he stimulated the experimental person’s cheekbones with electricity which drew the corners of the mouth spasmodically aside. Darwin showed Duchenne’s photo of this experiment to twenty-four people, twenty-one of whom recognized some sort of smile but most interpreted it as a grin or a bad joke (Darwin [1892] 1963: 159). In a “natural smile”, the muscles both around the mouth and the eyes emanate positive emotions, and that differentiates it from professional or polite smiles in which only the face muscle is stretched for a smile but the eyes do not join in (Kraut and Johnston, 1979; Kraut, 1982; Coniff 2007). Some people condemn the latter type of smile so widespread in commerce, services and we must add, in politics, because of its insincere nature and those who use it impose it upon themselves to extort something out of us (Koetzle, 2003; Coniff, 2007). There might be some truth in this criticism, but this very frequent smile type appears in the postured snapshots which are meant to radiate careless, stylized joy, sincerity, openness.

Results

Perceiving social status

Some four-fifths of the students in our experiment touched on social status and occupation. The decisive majority of allusions to social status referred to the upper or upper-middle class. Though entrepreneur or banker was not uttered, speaking of two photos, synonyms were mentioned: manager and businessman.

Table 1. Guess of social status, occupation based on photos (frequencies)

	A	B	C
Businessman	2	3	4
Manager	1	6	6
Politician	-	2	2
Intellectual, professor	13	1	1
Clerk, lower or middle-range position	2	1	5
Media person	-	5	-
Other	-	5	1
No answer/Don’t know	5	5	4

As for the first photo: the majority thought the model was an intellectual, often professor. The photo showed a grey-haired, bespectacled man with a moustache in a light suit and tie, sitting relaxed in an elegant, comfortable armchair, with a bookcase full of heavy encyclopaedias and gilded tomes in the background. Probably the latter explain the associations with an intellectual.

In the second photo, all parameters of the clothing and posture were similar but the moustache and glasses were missing, the grey hair was thinning and on the modern coloured wall in the background there was a map. The latter probably suggested a media role to the respondents, one student guessing he was a meteorologist.

The third picture showed an elegantly dressed youngish man in a dark suit and tie, sitting in a slightly rigid pose behind a desk, his hand and glasses resting on a large hard-cover notebook open in front of him. In the foreground on the desk there was a translucent table ornament, perhaps some prize, and in the background there was a green plant in a white pot on a shelf. Most respondents said it showed a businessmen or manager, while secondary mentions included first of all a clerk, a medium-ranking official or even a junior clerk.

The first set of responses revealed that the majority assessed the social status, and most of them guessed the manager-businessman status right in two cases. Regarding occupation, the most frequent mentions were leader, businessman, intellectual and official. In addition to the personality, face and figure, probably mimic, posture, clothing and material environment also contribute to the overall impression. The 'telltale' signs in the latter misled a few respondents in all three cases.

The question was whether these marks misled the same persons, or, to put it differently, whether there were a few students who were less sensitive to visual input, had less social experience and had difficulties in decoding status differences, or the different background signs disorientated students differently. This could be tested easily with cross tabulation and it was found that despite strong correlation between the variables – also justified by the small N – there was not considerable overlapping in these cells: the majority of those whose guess was a media person in the second photo guessed a manager in the third, and conversely, those who thought the third person was an official thought the second was a businessman or leader. There was massive overlapping among those who did not mention social-occupational categories in any of the cases: four out of five were the same students.

Attributed positive and negative character trait

Typical features associated with the economic elite: possession of wealth, income, money, power, influence and renown were mentioned so often by the students that everybody could have mentioned them about all three photos. However, the frequency of such mentions was unevenly distributed concerning both the sitters and the respondents. Such properties were over represented in mentions about the sitter of picture B and under represented for picture C.

Table 2. Some characteristics (frequencies)

	A	B	C
Wealth	4	8	2
Income	6	4	4
Power	5	6	3
Money	2	2	0
Influence	2	4	2
Reputation	0	6	0
Together	19	30	11

The latter needs special attention because it was the person who was most often thought to be a businessman or manager. Interestingly, the status of manager or businessman is not necessarily associated with money, power or influence. It was rare that the students mentioned none of the above features, while the brief descriptions by some of them touched on very many social aspects.

The most important positive traits that the characterizations frequently mentioned for all three models was self-assurance, resolve, diligence, authority, openness, elegance and good humour. Among the rest of the frequent positive features, satisfied, happy, sincere, honest were applied to the first two smiling grey-haired gentlemen. Success was mainly associated with them. The second, more widely smiling person and the third man sitting by the desk were thought to be natural, simple, conscientious, reliable and prestigious as shared features. The common traits of the first – “intellectual” – and third persons were authority and honesty. The first elegant gentleman with the moustache was believed to be cultured, experienced, well-balanced, energetic, talented, polite, proud, a family-man, one who cares for his reputation and there is something to him that inspires sympathy. He received the highest number of positive adjectives taking into account all mentions and not only the first three coded ones. The second man received relatively few independent epithets: he feels safe, merry and modern. The latter was probably elicited by the environment, the former two adjectives were probably associated with the wide smile. The third person received again quite a lot

of independent attributes: hard-working, serious, calm, a good strategist, a good coordinator, handles situations well – these were mostly connected to management and work and were possibly elicited jointly by the visual elements of the office environment and the formal posture.

The negative adjectives amounted to about two-thirds of the positive ones, on occasions referring to the excessiveness of some positive trait: too serious, too conservative. Self-confidence, resolve, informality seen as positive traits by some are judged by those with a more critical stance as complacency, self-importance. This is the only negative trait included among the first three mentions for all three persons. The negative adjectives that the first two grey-haired gentlemen of distinguished appearance share are particularly biting: self-conceit, dishonesty, infamy. Nor are the negative attributes mentioned jointly for the second and third persons less trenchant: slyness, foxiness, coldness, aloofness, lack of credibility. Somebody thought that both the first and third persons were upset, anxious. The majority felt they were not at all at a first glance.

Looking at a picture, and particularly when we try to verbalize our impressions, we mobilize a variety of implicit knowledge consciously or unconsciously (Gombrich, 1972; Goffman, 1981). Lots of things can be seen into the picture: learnt routines or life experience, momentary mood, and our own problems. In the first case, we draw on more or less adequate conceptual schemes: here, what we have learnt of self-control, the nature of tensions underlying seeming calm. If we have such internalized routines, we tend to see the world accordingly.

In the second case, we base our judgment on similarity with some person or situation: if it happened sometime in the past, it may also happen now. If a well-known person looked like this little before declaring war or being arrested, it is hard to get rid of the analogies and not to anticipate *mutatis mutandis* similar events. On the other side, the projection of one's own problems has been well known for a long time: apart from its therapeutic utility, it is also a sort of recycled experience – the utilization of some internal, and not external, experience this time (Cronin 1998). This may underlie a student's response who thinks the person of his/her father's age is not fond of his family, works too much to the detriment of his family.

We may also have limited linguistic codes and cannot translate our impressions accurately. When in such a case someone – for example, a student at the end of a seminar assignment – feels he has to reply, there probably emerges discrepancy between his sense of reality and his representation of reality. He does not write what he feels but he writes something that he thinks is expected, and sooner or later he will feel what he writes, or get frustrated.

The first person marked A received few negative epithets which he also shared with others. The second person (B), however, was deemed wicked, a Mafioso, careerist, as well as demure and devoid of authority. The third person,

who appeared serious in positive terms, was now sullen, too morose, reserved, while some also found him enervated, bored, lacking imagination, as well as uncertain, unhappy and not fond of his family.

It is to be stressed again that students associated all these characteristics from the sheer sight. There are undoubtedly some features that may be inferred from the sight with more or less probability: such are self-assuredness, simplicity, naturalness, good humour, elegance, prestige, authority, and other – actually surprisingly many – traits. We sometimes say that someone has a sincere, straight glance. There are other characteristics that are hard to associate with the sight at first glance; such include, for example, satisfaction, happiness, honesty, talent, experience. It must be concluded in this chapter that an impression caused by the sight also contains invisible traits assigned to the observed person.

Positive references, and even the neutral ones, exceeded by far the amount of negative judgments. Contradictory descriptions containing both positive and negative allusions were only found with two students. Such interpretations would not have been unrealistic, because a person may elicit ambivalent feelings, but most students appeared to prefer the unambiguous, mostly positive or neutral interpretation of an aspect.

Perception of the smile

The overwhelming majority of remarks concerned the external appearance and clothing, predominantly in a positive or neutral context. The same applies to carriage. As regards the material surroundings, neutral mentions were predominant, followed by more positive than negative remarks.

When we concentrated on the smile, the situation changed. It is also an external feature, an accentuated feature in a portrait and it is also very personal. More negative than positive responses were elicited by the smiles.

How do the rich smile? Badly – repulsively for the majority. What may underlie that? Something is wrong with the smile of the rich on several counts. One – but less weighty – problem is if they don't smile. The third person (C) who sits by the desk without a smile received negative or ambivalent and neutral remarks. The greater problem with a smile was encountered by the students in the case of B. He was sitting in a light suit in a comfortable leather armchair with a broad smile baring his upper teeth, looking into the camera. This caused a division among the observers. Five found him nice, seven repugnant, and the smile must have been the only external visible trait that generated this judgment, for the rest of the external factors received positive, rather than neutral epithets.

Comparing him with the first person, hardly any differences can be found. Both show their upper teeth in a smile, but the smile is slightly more closed in the first case and also shaded by a moustache. There appears some dental unevenness

in A, but this is not judged negatively (two positive, one neutral and one negative remarks arrived about his smile). His clothing is similar, the only difference being a pair of glasses and his grey hair is not thinning, unlike the second person's.

The first answer to the titular question may be that the rich smile with self-assurance, and it depends on the outlook, frame of mind, socialization or mood of the observer to see it as conceitedness. This statement could only be checked if we had control groups from other strata of society, and also, if it were possible to decompose evaluations into their constituents to define which derives from the smile and which from the rest of the external features. We have no such comparative data, but some sociographic photos can be adduced for illustration. In August Sander's photos, people of the upper classes do not often smile (Sander, 2002). Pondering about these shots, Barthes does not only remark that after the Nazi coup these figures were condemned because they did not fit the archetypes of racial theory, but he also noted that the figures of the *Notary* and the *Executor* were characterized by severity, self-importance, resolve and relentlessness, but "a notary and an executioner would never have inferred these connotations from these photos" (Barthes, 1985: 44). Among hundreds of Sander's photos of peasants and workers one can hardly find a smiling face. The German sitters of the photos taken in the first half of the 20th century probably all felt that they had to represent their occupation or life situation with due dignity. Among Kata Kálmán's old peasants too, few models felt like smiling (Kálmán, 1937). Dorothea Lange's sociophotos later entitled *Homeless Madonna* also taken in the 1930s show a mother of seven children stuck in a tent of pea pickers in California. The mother's eyes are clear and expressive in all five photos, but radiate anxiety and bitterness, just as the children's gestures, clothing and the surrounding milieu do (Koetzle, 2003, vol.2: 28-37). There is a single shot in which the mother's features are in repose and emanate a certain reserved serenity: when she nurses her youngest child.

The poor rarely smile in photos, and if they do, they do so with reservation, often covering their mouth with a hand. Sometimes only their eyes smile, as the unshaven men of the run-down mining region in America (Light and Light, 2006) in whose lives merry events also happen, but not too frequently. In Brassai's scenes of nightlife in Paris we often see cocksure roughs, rowdy sailors and prostitutes, but their confidence always alludes to some tension-laden situation, their laughter and gestures are too wild (Brassai, 1980). Cartier-Bresson's humanist scenes often make the spectator smile, yet those whom he photographed rarely smile (Cartier-Bresson, 1999).

First of all, a rich person smiles as if he was in possession of all his thirty-two teeth, or at least he wishes to make that impression. The rich have no teeth missing, and today an ostensible gold replacement is rare. Also rare is a gap between their teeth (but in A there is). There are cultures in which a set of healthy teeth is an attribute not only of the rich – "the consolidated middle class" – but also of the

majority of society. They spend their childhood at the orthodontist's and are inculcated with the official smile – an indispensable property of positive self-representation – produced by the controlled play of facial muscles. It can often be mobilized by a photo or video camera reflex-like. It is not the case with the rich: they are really self-assured, good humoured, making the impression that there is no problem they cannot solve.

Why are then most descriptions of these smiles in the negative? What first occurs to me is that self-confidence and a carefree demeanour, which might be important positive signals in business life, might exert a contrary effect in a broader circle – at least among the students who are against the collar-and-tie, leather-armchair, self-confident milieu in this age bracket.

A thought should be given to a special interpretation in research: notably, that men's faces express emotions, especially positive emotions, less accurately than women's (Tucker and Riggio, 1988). All three photos show men – the overwhelming majority of the 100 richest Hungarians are men. Here, however, it must be borne in mind that all three men were highly educated and had serious managerial experience, hence it can be presumed that they were in possession of the skills of self-control and sensitivity, and were clearly aware of the communicative situation.

A shade more subtle interpretation of the phenomenon proposes that the ambivalence of the portraits derives from the stylization or miming of sincerity, joy, carelessness and openness instead of their real presence. Indeed, the smile of the second person which elicited the most criticism is rather official than genuine. He was therefore not in possession of the adequate visual codes, and though comprehending the communicative situation, he did not emit the right signals. It was no help to him to know that a portrait for the public was being taken and not his spontaneous reaction was photographed. His smile is not only official but a little laboured as well.

There is yet another aspect to be considered. The gutter press and commercial televisions provide examples galore that self-assurance is not only a characteristic of the upper circles but also of the demimonde. The stock of gestures and self-representation of money-grubbers, tricksters, white-collar criminals do not diverge from those of the elite very much as they want to be alike, representing a more strident variety of the elite. Value systems and selective mechanisms have not crystallized and stabilized yet for the newly recruited elite to keep distance. It was not long ago that they acquired their first billions and the mass media keep inquiring into their origin. In the press the entrepreneur is sometimes the synonym of the criminal, hence a self-assured smile might be self-supportive and self-justifying. The opinions that guess conceitedness beneath such smiles may also reflect the negative stereotypes about the elite.

Table 3. Common and dissimilar characteristics (frequencies)

Common: high social status	11
Common: businessman	4
Common: wealth	6
Common: success	5
Common: self-assurance	3
Common: any positive behavioural characteristics	9
Common: any negative behavioural characteristics	0
Common: any external characteristics (age, clothes, environment)	7
Dissimilar: social status	3
Dissimilar: behaviour, trait	5

At the end of the test we asked the students to sum up the common and dissimilar features of the three persons. If we were to draw a 'phantom' image on their basis, we would get the representative of the 'anonymous billionaire'. The majority of mentions contained epithets for all three persons, none referring to negative behavioural traits. Divergent characteristics were mentioned by few respondents, and even among these different social statuses were under-represented. In the detailed assessment of the three persons the students mentioned far more similar and dissimilar traits than in the summary. When they had to give an overall description of the three persons, they almost exclusively stressed high social status, wealth and positive features.

Invisible features

Returning to the typical traits, two groups of factors were separately examined that are not directly visible but recur in the mentions frequently. One is the question of career, the other is the attitude to the family. For A, career was mentioned in a positive, for B in a negative context, while for C positive and negative overtones were equally present. Why is that possible? Why does our eye guide us to passing positive or negative judgments about an invisible aspect? The only possible answer is that some students inferred conclusions from the overall impression to the presumed forms of the manner of living. They coloured and rounded out reality. As the assignment was to describe the person in the photo and they were given few clues, they constructed a fictitious figure bestowed with features they had very vague ideas of.

The other invisible aspect was the attitude to the family. For A positive, for C negative contexts were guessed. A was sitting in a comfortable armchair smiling, surrounded by lots of books. C does not smile, he is sitting by a desk in an office. These pictures perhaps provide more clues to a lively imagination: a benevolent father is listening to his adolescent's problems the way A is looking at the

photographer, while C gives the impression of a busy and severe boss. Busy and severe bosses have little time for their families, some students might have thought or just sensed when they constructed their stories of family and career. As for C, four mentioned the motif of career positively and four negatively. Checking this question by cross tabulation, we find that most mentions on the career came from other students than mentions on the family. It is not the case that a small segment (some one-fifth) of the students took into account these aspects in all three cases, while the rest did not. We found that some considered this aspect with a positive content in the first case and mostly others with a negative content in the other case. There was only a noteworthy correlation in the evaluation of A's and B's attitudes to career: half of those who mentioned career positively for A applied negative adjectives to B's career. Why they saw B as a pusher, a bully, even a Mafioso is hard to understand. It even occurred to me that B might have appeared in the media with some negative rumours but after checking it we found there was no such appearance. The students' judgment was formulated under the impression given by the sight and the compulsion to perform the requested task. The students were first-year students who had no systematic professional knowledge as yet. Some might have interpreted the task like an essay-writing assignment in secondary school: 'write a description of an imaginary hero' and they gave vent to their imagination. At any rate, this section revealed that we often draw conclusions about the invisible elements from the sight.

We have tested the correlations with several background variables including divergence by gender, but most provided no explanation. The lack of smile was mentioned – somewhat surprisingly – by boys to a greater degree. For invisible characteristics – career and family – not even that much prop could be obtained. By age, the group was homogeneous; as for the rest of the variables, neither gender, nor place of birth or the father's occupation provided any clues as to their inferences to family and career from the visual information. As regards cultural resources – at least the incorporated cultural capital we had the possibility to measure – the group was homogeneous. No explanatory power was found in the differences in social resources, friendships and confidence. Faint correlations were shown by the subjective evaluation of the way of living and the variables measuring deviance, fears and uncertainty, but this correlation was also contradictory. Positive mentions of the family were over-represented among those who felt uncertain to an above-average degree and thought that nowadays they were not in control of their own destinies. Proportionately more of those who were just partly satisfied with their lives and were often afraid tended to make negative remarks about the family. Of course, it must not be forgotten that we operated with a small N, so however compound categories we may work with the correlations might be accidental and only indicative of presumptions. As regards career, very

weak correlations were found; those who are at a loss in their life situations tended to make negative mentions of career.

Correlation between visual and verbal information

As mentioned above, after a month from the original experiment the three portraits were projected again at the end of a class, with brief biographical commentaries. The commentary included the name, occupation and qualifications, and the position taken in the list of the 100 richest Hungarians, the size of fortune and a few other important data. The text was a real frame to the visual information. The first and most conspicuous change was the drop in the number of associations with richness, income, money, power, renown, influence. The main reason was that the text made all this obvious. In the case of B who was earlier believed to be a media figure by many, such mentions – first of all references to power, income and fame – dropped to a third of the former rate. As for the other two persons, the aggregate of mentioned qualities did not change in essentials, but became more concentrated: mentions of wealth and money increased and those of income and power decreased.

All things considered, the rate of positive adjectives largely increased – especially for the first two persons – which means that textual information massively contributed to the positive overall impression. A particularly great rise was registered in the rate of those who now saw the three rich men as family-loving successful and self-confident figures. There was also a rise in the number of those who thought these people were hard-working, well-balanced, satisfied, happy and joyful. More felt sympathy for them, more thought they were cultured, talented, honest and generous. The registration of impressions by perception only decreased or disappeared (such as bossy, elegant, open, energetic, etc.)

The set of negative adjectives shrank, because the read text changed the evaluation of B considerably for the better. A, who earlier received a negligible number of negative mentions, earned now twice as many, and even so he received the fewest critical remarks and the most positive epithets. Such qualifications as conceited, bumptious, wicked, Mafioso, untruthful, unhappy or lacks imagination ceased, and references to hard work to the detriment of family life increased. Textual information considerably boosted mentions – both positive and negative – of the family. This was caused by the information that B and C were married and had so many children.

Who felt compelled to give a positive, ‘family-loving’ description? The social background variables did not provide any useful clue again. The tendency was that negative remarks about the attitude of the model to his family were written by those who were more self-assured than the average and felt their own families had a high place in the social hierarchy.

Concluding remarks

In sum, it can be concluded that the assessment of social status on the basis of visual information was successful. The majority answered the question and guessed right. The overwhelming majority of remarks referred to upper or upper-middle class as regards social status. For occupation, the respondents wrote businessman, manager, intellectual and official most frequently. The frequency of the mentions of fortune, income, money, power, influence and fame was distributed unevenly among the persons in the photos.

The positive features mentioned in the descriptions outnumbered the negative ones. The most frequent positive characteristics mentioned were self-assurance, elegance, diligence, authority, openness and good humour. The most frequent negative features for all three persons were conceited, complacent. Especially the third person who did not smile in the photo was tagged morose, grim, cold, and aloof. The epithets dishonest, sly, foxy were also used. These negative qualities were associated with the smile, as they were mainly bestowed upon the person whose smile divided the spectators. While positive features outnumbered negative ones in general, smiles did not only divide the spectators but also elicited more negative than positive associations. The rich intentionally smile with self-confidence and carelessness, but most viewers regarded their smile as a sign of complacency. In a portrait meant for publicity the presentation of happiness is a pseudo-spontaneous message and someone who does not succeed in pretending this emotion well will be punished by the recipients of the message for the lack of sincerity.

Another interesting finding of the experiment is that spectators often allude to invisible features in addition to the perceptible traits. Several remarks were made at career and family, some in a positive and some in a negative context. The spectators probably make inferences as to the invisible properties on the basis of the overall impression, and the impressions are made sharper by the compulsion to verbalize them in the experimental situation and in this process they mobilize several elements of implicit knowledge. Negative attitude to the family inferred from the visual information was mainly emphasized by those who were dissatisfied with their own lives and struggled with fears. When the photos were supplemented with text, the correlation was reversed: negative remarks were over-represented among self-confident respondents with a high social background.

The students in the experiment mentioned more common than dissimilar characteristics. The most frequent common traits included high social status, some positive behavioural trait, wealth and success.

When verbal information was added to the photos, the attributes related to fortune, renown and power decreased in number and became more concentrated. Associations with income, reputation and power decreased and those with fortune

increased. There was more to this change than the intention to avoid repeating the verbal information. Textual information considerably boosted the number of positive attributes and decreased the negative ones. Obviously, the students' judgment was not guided by the stereotypic images of the rich. The most important common characteristic – self-assurance – remained and even increased after reading the text. By contrast, mentions of conceitedness decreased as did inferences from primary visual information while references to subjective well-being, i.e. success and family increased.

References

- Barthes, Roland (1983). *Mitológiák (Mythologies)*. Budapest: Európa.
- Barthes, Roland (1985). *Világoskamra. Jegyzetek a fotográfiáról (Camera Lucida. Notes on Photography)*. Budapest: Európa.
- Becker, Howard S (1998). Visual sociology, documentary photography and photojournalism: It's almost a matter of context. In J. Prosser (ed.), *Image-based Research. A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*. London: Routledge Falmer, pp. 84-96.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, Boltanski, Luc, Castel, Robert and Chamboredon, Jean-Claude ([1965] 1998). *Photography. A Middle-brow Art*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Brassai (1980). *Előhívás. Levelek. 1920-1940. (Developing. Letters. 1921-1940)* Bukarest: Kriterion.
- Buck, Ross (1979). Measuring individual differences in the nonverbal communication of affect: the slide-viewing paradigm. *Human Communication Research*, 6: 47-57.
- Buck, Ross and VanLear, C. Arthur (2002). Verbal and nonverbal communication: Distinguishing symbolic, spontaneous, and pseudo-spontaneous nonverbal behavior. *Journal of Communication*, 52: 522-541.
- Buck, Ross, Miller, Robert, E. and Caul, William, F. (1974). Sex, personality, and physiological variables in the communication of affect via facial expression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 30: 587-596.
- Buda, Béla (1986). *A közvetlen emberi kommunikáció szabályszerűségei (Regularities of Direct Human Communication)*. Budapest: Animula.
- Cartier-Bresson, Henri (1999). *Europeans*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Collier, John, Jr. and Collier, Malcolm (1986). *Visual Anthropology. Photography as a Research Method*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Coniff, Richard (2007). What's behind a smile? *Smithonian*, 35: 46-53.
- Cronin, Órla (1998). Psychology and photographic theory. In J. Prosser (ed.), *Image-based Research. A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*. London: Routledge Falmer, London, pp. 69-83.
- Darwin, Charles ([1892, 2nd ed.], 1963). *Az ember és az állat érzelmeinek kifejezése*. Budapest: Gondolat.
- Ekman, Paul (1973). Cross-cultural studies of facial expression. In P. Ekman (ed.), *Darwin and Facial Expression. A Century of Research in Review*. New York: Academic Press, pp. 169-222.

- Emmison, Michael and Smith, Philip (2002). *Researching the Visual. Images, Objects, Contexts and Interactions in Social and Cultural Inquiry*. London: Sage.
- Friedman, Howard S. (1979). The interactive effects of facial expressions of emotion and verbal messages on perceptions of affective meaning. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 15: 453-469.
- Goffman, Erving (1981). *A hétköznapi élet szociálpszichológiája*. Budapest: Gondolat.
- Gombrich, Ernst H. (1972). Illúzió és művészet (Illusion and Art). In R. L. Gregory and E. H. Gombrich (eds.), *Illúzió a természetben és a művészetben (Illusion in Nature and Art)*. Budapest: Gondolat, pp. 199-246.
- Kálmán, Kata (1937). *Tiborc*. Budapest: Cserépfalvi.
- Koetzle, Hans-Michael (2003). *Fotóikonok. Képek és történetük (Photo Icons. Photos and Their History)*. Vol. 1-2. Budapest: Vincze.
- Kraut, Robert E. (1983). Social presence, facial feedback, and emotion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 42: 853-863.
- Kraut, Robert E. and Johnston, Robert E. (1979). Social and emotional messages of smiling: An ethological approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37: 1539-1553.
- Light, Ken and Light, Melanie (2006). *Coal Hollow. Photographs and Oral Histories*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Patrick, Christopher J. and Lavoro, Stacey A. (1997). Ratings of emotional response to pictorial stimuli. Positive and negative affect dimensions. *Motivation and Emotion*, 21: 297-321.
- Pink, Sarah (2001). *Visual Ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Prosser, Jan ed., (1998) *Image-based Research. A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Sander, August (2002). *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Bds. I-VII. Köln: Scirmer-Mosel.
- Sztompka, Piotr (2009). *Vizuális szociológia. A fényképezés mint kutatási módszer (Visual Sociology. Photography as Research Method)*. Budapest: Gondolat.
- Teckenberg, Wolfgang (1982). Bildwirklichkeit und soziale Wirklichkeit. Der Einsatz von Fotos in der Soziologie. *Soziale Welt*, 333: 169-207.
- Tucker, Joan S. and Riggio, Ronald E. (1988). The role of social skills in encoding posed and spontaneous facial expressions. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 12: 87-97.