

As in paintings by Tuymans and Dumas, Little's portraits are even without their backstory haunted by death. Something about them is not up to date. They have life but lack detail, are lifelike without being like life. Tunde is reminded that when he sees someone of unremarkable looks in the mainstream media, shown in what is clearly a snapshot or amateur photograph with indifferent lighting and in unbeautified color, an image perhaps cropped from a larger image, when he sees such an image printed in *The New York Times* or shown in a television program he immediately thinks: this person is dead. It is a second-order response to the "why" question. In an era of good cameras and publicity stills, when the culture is awash in professional models, professional photographers, makeup artists, and skilled Photoshop retouchers, if the best photo of someone who needs for whatever reason to be pictured in the newspapers is a bad photo, there's a good chance that it simply wasn't possible to get a better photo of that person. There's a good chance the person is dead and the reason they are being pictured at all is because they are dead.

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EVERY IMAGE OF A human being proposes a question to the viewer: why am I being shown this? Sometimes, perhaps often, the answer arrives so swiftly that the question is not even noticed: this is a family album, this is a selfie taken on vacation, this is a stock photo for an advertising campaign. But sometimes the question is proposed and the answer is slow in arriving and into this delayed arrival enter unsettling feelings not dissimilar to those one experiences when the camera lingers a little too long on a character's face in a film. The observer thinks and is meant to think: why?

Looking at the drawings Tunde thinks not only of the unanswerable "why" of Little's brutality but also of the elusive "why" of the effect the portraits have on a viewer.

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THE UNCANNY-VALLEY JANE AND John Does lead him to a more recent set of images. In the sibling chat last year Taiwo had sent him and Kehinde a photograph of someone neither of them recognized, a fair-haired white man. This was a game he and the twins sometimes played: challenging one another to figure out what was unusual about a given image. Tunde's guess in this case was that perhaps the "white" man wasn't actually white at all, that he was just a very fair-skinned black person. Kehinde's guess was that the man had not been assigned male at birth. Taiwo wrote back to say that both of those might indeed be the case, there was no way of telling one way or the other. But she had sent this particular photograph because it was of someone who had never existed. The image was entirely computer-generated, she said. She sent them a link to the website. Tunde had glanced at it at the time.

He now returns to the website and spends half an hour on it. "This person does not exist," the URL announces. Each time he refreshes the page a new face appears. A

young woman with olive skin and dark brown hair, a middle-aged man with white skin and stubble, a gender-ambiguous person with white skin and gray eyes, a white woman of about fifty with arched eyebrows, an East Asian boy of about ten, an Indonesian-looking girl of about thirteen, a red-haired woman with red lipstick. Ordinary people, some beautiful, some less so, an entire population. The site is run on something called a generative adversarial network. A computer program is given access to a vast archive of human faces, engages in deep learning, and begins to pick up the patterns and varieties of the photographed human face. From what it knows about faces the program is then able to generate new faces ad infinitum.

The program appears to have mastered light and shadow, skin color, hair texture, expression, attitude. The results are impressive and discomfiting. Most of the images do not fall into the uncanny valley as happened with the unidentified murder victims. These people who do not exist in fact look real. Occasionally there are glitches in the rendering and someone's ears are weird or someone has glasses growing out of their temples or the background pattern is incoherent. But generally the photographs are convincing, showing people in a variety of light conditions with a believable range of facial expressions. Some of the pictures are normal and perfectly banal in a way that might in a different context make him think the person was dead. But these ones are not dead, they have simply never lived, they simply never will have been. They are pure algorithmic phantoms, pure phantasms, a third vertex to the two created by Little's

sketches of the remembered dead and the police images of the unidentified Jane and John Does: the remembered dead, the remembered undead, the imaginary never-lives.

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MOST OF THE HUMAN BEINGS who have lived and died have left behind them no trace of how they looked, what their voices sounded like, how they moved, what they preferred. It is a vast oblivion but also a relief that we are not inundated with the faces and presences of the innumerable dead. We can move on with our twenty-first-century lives without having to watch videos of every eleventh-century inhabitant of Normandy or Java or Songhay. It was not until the invention and dissemination of photography that it became common for large numbers of people to have their likenesses recorded for posterity, a possibility that had previously been available only to the wealthy and powerful; and it was also only in that era as well with the invention of the gramophone that it became possible for anyone's voice at all, no matter how eminent, to be recorded and heard after their death. The earlier privilege of remaining uncaptured, of dying with one's death, was lost. Should the dead move around us like those who haven't died? Should their presence be more material than those one sees in dreams?

He recalls the advisory note often present in Australian-produced films, addressed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, that the film they are about to watch contains the images, voices, and names of deceased

persons. This gesture of respect or caution has behind it a cultural practice with which he is not familiar, a taboo against naming the dead. In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures the recently dead are referred to only with circumlocutions. When the technology of photography and film became commonplace in those communities it led to a further discomfort with viewing images of the dead or with hearing their voices. For many Westerners no existential or moral distinction is made between watching a film made ten years ago and one made seventy years ago, even though it is likely that most people in the latter would already be dead. (More than once Sadako has turned to him while they are watching an old film and whispered: all these people are dead.) Looking up the protocols around the Australian advisory notes, Tunde finds a different concept, also used by some Aboriginal people. Because it can be hard to tell if white people are happy or sad, if they are jealous or angry or moody, because the notion of a stiff upper lip is believed to make these public displays of emotion unwelcome for them, some Aboriginal people say "white people have no face." A startling phrase and he can't help but like it. White people have no face. An unwritten poem.

And it is this droll moment that makes him realize what else it is about the computer-generated faces that is bothering him: those faces are almost all white. A very few of them could be read as Asian or Latinx but in thirty minutes of clicking he has landed on not a single black face. White people have no face and that face is everywhere. It is probably a simple instance of algorithmic bias in this case. But he knows these things are never simple.

In one sense the people in the photographs can be said to have no race at all, as they are fictional creations, not real people. But that is a language game since these are intended to be taken as people or as photographs of people. The project is implicitly a representation of the world. Why then does this imagined world, a world made by certain technologically minded Americans, have very few black people in it? He is not one to insist on black representation in every context. He is not aware of himself trying to keep score and he finds it fatiguing to even have to notice such things. But that is not entirely true. He does notice, in fact he notices automatically and he finds the absences egregious. It would be more exhausting to shut his eyes to such erasures. He expects that the designers will have excuses about data sets and the availability of material on which to train the generative adversarial network. But there are always excuses and they are often plausible. That granted, what he knows is that white people are comfortable in all-white environments. They don't notice black absence in their museums and schools, in their restaurants, in the movies they watch, the books they read, the scholars they cite. Even in a purely fictional world, even in a futuristic world, their default is monochrome. It is as though to put black people into fiction or to imagine them in the future would be to participate in an unseemly exercise in political balance, as though black presence could only and ever be there to represent "blackness." He can hear himself arguing now and he dislikes the sound of it.

