



## Representation of art as an ethical and political act<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** In this article, I discuss the representation of people with disabilities as an ethical and political act, including the intimate demand of face-to-face encountering with another person and a picture in an artwork. The article explores the project, Good afternoon Mr. Holbein, by Pekka Elomaa, through two different image interpretations, which together offer an alternative understanding to the dominant discourse on image analysis. The politics of representation of people with disabilities is troubled together with Levinasian philosophy and disability studies in art education.

**Keywords:** Emmanuel Levinas, disability studies, image interpretation, ethics, vulnerability

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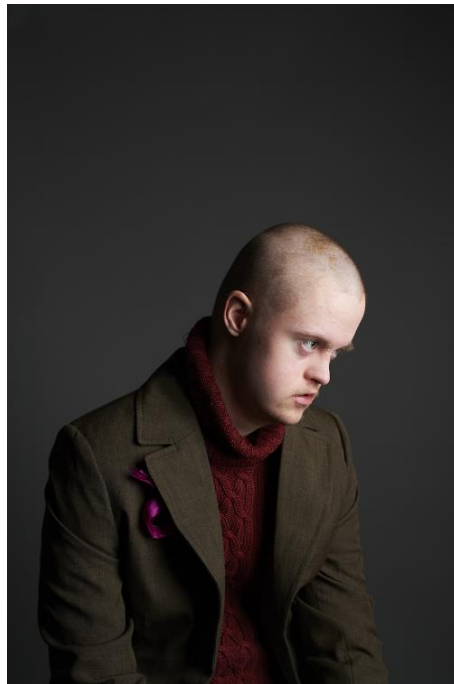
### Art on vulnerability and social just

This article explores one art project through two different and perhaps alternative interpretations. It discusses representation of people with disabilities in artistic collaboration beyond dominant discourse on image analysis. The article tends to take part on art educational conversation on working with people with disabilities and on the issues of representing the people to work with. The two different interpretations on one art project are negotiated through two different theories. The first reading entails encountering an artwork as a vulnerable act, the second reading discusses the art works as political and public art making with people with disabilities. As an example, I present an art project “Good afternoon Mr. Holbein” by Pekka Elomaa. In this project Elomaa has worked for many years in collaboration with people with disabilities. The outcome has been exhibited in a gallery spaces and as a photography book (Elomaa & Jaatinen, 2014).

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Picture 1. Tuomo

As a starting point, there is an assumption that representation of another person would offer an access to her/his world. In this article I discuss the act of looking as an ethical and a violent act. When looking at a representation of people with disabilities in one way or another, viewers always bring along a full range of biases, assumptions, and beliefs. For many these are informed by stereotypical and objectifying representations in sideshows, art history, popular culture, and medical visualizations (Eisenhauer, 2007; 2008). This article asks if Elomaa's and his collaborative group are able to challenge the representation of "othering" and instead bring more ethical and vulnerable level to the interpretation.

Encountering an artwork as a vulnerable act is based on Emmanuel Levinas's thoughts on ethics (Levinas, 2008; 2009). Vulnerability comes from the approach where openness to the "Other's" otherness is on the base of the encountering. This approach tries to avoid a knowing position over the other person. Levinas calls this active position taking as ethical passivity. The other person opens up her/his infinity and the unexpectedness of the alterity. The alterity of the other should not be confused with person's abilities or characteristics, such as disability (Levinas, 1987). When looking at the photographs it is possible to ask ethical questions: How am I looking at the person in the picture and how does the person in the picture look back to me? What kind of hospitality does s/he receive from me?

This article suggests two different, perhaps even conflicting interpretations to Elomaa's collaborative project and photographs. The first interpretation of Elomaa's photographs is ethical and philosophical and is based on the Levinas's face-to-face encountering with the other person. The second reading interprets the artistic collaboration through disability studies and hence has a social justice approach. Elomaa's images are understood in this context as a cultural identity work with people whose voices might often be marginalized. This type of artistic identity work ran by non-disabled artist is not problem-free and it should be analyzed with suspicion just like all representation of marginalized and oppressed people should be.

Jennifer Eisenhower (2007; 2008) is one of the few art educators who have written about art education and visual culture in the context of disability studies (see also Derby, 2011; Wexler, 2005; Blandy, 1991; 1994; Kallio-Tavin, 2013). In disability studies, disability is recognized as a cultural identity comparable with other minority identities. The political argument states that disabled minorities have been oppressed, repressed, isolated, incarcerated, observed, controlled, written about, operated on, instructed, regulated, and institutionalized, and should indeed be theorized and discussed similarly as race, class and gender (Davis, 2006). Disability studies scholars have aimed to challenge the sustained social construction and representation of the body and to analyze disability as a socio-political construction.

As Eisenhower (2007, p.10) reminds, "throughout history, the disabled body has been a site of public spectacle". As part of circus sideshows, representation in art history, in contemporary popular culture, in medical visualizations and in everyday experiences of interaction between disabled and able bodies, "the disabled body has repeatedly been situated within a cultural discourse of *enfreakment*" (Eisenhauer, 2007, p. 11). People with disabilities have been represented as "specimen" to be analyzed and as a "curiosity" to entertain the so-called normal people. Representations have maintained the unquestioned normal/abnormal binaries, an untroubled objectifying gaze and the cultural construction of disabilities as property. There has been a false presumption of looking as a neutral and normative act. Eisenhower calls this objectifying and unethical practice of looking *just looking*. Just looking is a violent and aggressive side of seeing. According to Elkins (1996), this aggressive seeing "distorts what it looks at, and it turns a person into an object in order to let us stare at it without feeling ashamed. ... seeing is also controlling and objectifying and denigrating. In short it is an act of violence and it creates pain." (p. 27)

I am exploring through Levinasian lenses the possibilities of Elomaa's photographs to be interpreted as something else than another representation of people with disabilities by non-disabled artist. I state that the images open up a possibility for a rich and multiple interpretation and therefore they might be able to challenge the spectator to recognize the agency of the represented people. I am asking, if Elomaa's images are able to transform the objectifying and violent stares of viewers into something else? Do the photographs offer an access to the face-to-face encountering without stigmatization? Are these images actually, like Eisenhower (2007) would ask, *staring back*?

Ethical and social justice approaches offer two very different perspectives to discuss Elomaa's project. I believe, as my argument follows, both standpoints are required. While the philosophical arguments and social justice arguments seem to take part of two very different conversations, in order to be both critical and ethical, we need both conversations, but without mixing them. In this article I state that they both – ethical approach as well as the social justice approach are needed for fully understanding of the possibilities of visual art making in collaboration with people with disabilities. Just like Levinas has described, there is a never-ending oscillation between ethics and politics (Simmons, 1999), between philosophy and social justice. I believe this also to be an important pedagogical baseline, to acknowledge the balance between ideal and real world.

## **Good afternoon Mr. Holbein**

Pekka Elomaa was asked 15 years ago to photograph portraits of people with disabilities. Instead of taking these pictures, he chose to teach photography for one year to the people with disabilities in *Lyhty* community, which is a short-term home and workshop for adults with disabilities in Helsinki. Lyhty is famous for cultural activities and experimental and artistic projects, some of them gaining popular publicity, for example their radio broadcasting and the award winning film project, *Kovasikajuttu*.

Elomaa's idea was to teach the participants to document their own life. His idea as a photographer and as an art educator was to guide the participants to structure their own life through photographing. After a while, the group started working, along with documenting, with their own fantasies. The role of performing became more and more important to the participants. The one-year project has turned out to be over fifteen years of collaboration.

Images from the "Good afternoon Mr. Holbein" exhibition and a photography book are from on of the latest workshop project. After playing with masks for ten years the group wanted to perform more candidly and make images without any physical masks. As the work continues, masks are given different meaning and the playful idea with role taking seem to continue as a prominent method for Elomaa and the group. The historical characters are being created without physical masks but through intense sense of drama. The visual example comes from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century renaissance paintings, and especially from Hans Holbein the younger's work. The aim was to capture the concentrated presence of humanity, similarly as it is in the renaissance paintings. Elomaa wants to point out how a human being has not changes in 500 years. He wanted to go back to the early ages of photography, and even further, to the early times of painting, when portraits were more about representations of humanity than about representations of individuals. Elomaa describes their working as a collaboration that is based on many years of friendship and reciprocal confidence. (Elomaa, 2011).

There is something refreshing with Elomaa's approach to the collaborative art making. Many contemporary and participatory art projects claim for democratic working settings between the collaborative artist and the participants. However, it is often clear that collaborative art projects cannot be totally democratic and it is often obvious based on the artistic outcome that the artist has made many of the crucial decisions. Although Elomaa's photographs were designed together with the people whom they represent, he acknowledges his role as an artist who makes the final decisions and takes the responsibility of the project, and hence does not claim the project to be an equal process between the participants and him as an artist.



Picture 2. Juha

## Encountering the other

Levinas states that it is impossible to define a complete and rational reality without first considering the "Other", since the "Other" always brings something unpredictable from his own otherness, from his own radical alterity (Wallenius, 1992; Tuohimaa, 2001). This approach offers an ethical perspective to interpret Elomaa's photographs. According to Levinas, a person first exists in the world as a social being, constituted by a relationship, for whom the not-me—that is, the "Other"—sets the demands; he only exists secondarily as a conceptual and thematic being. This relationship is not the willful act of an ego, nor is it a relationship based on knowledge. It is a relationship of infinite responsibility, or respons(e)ability, for the otherness of the "Other" (Wallenius, 1992; Biesta, 2003). The people represented in the photographs are always the "Others", and should be considered as something "I" do not know and will never get to know. Responding to the "Other's" otherness is an ethical act of respect. The question follows, are there such respect and responsibility built in the photographs?

A responsibility towards the "Other" means being open to the infinity of the "Other". To be able to be fully ethical, one should try to appreciate the person in the image as totally other from self. Hence, the spectator needs to see the person in the image without totalizing him/her into the spectator's own world. This is difficult, because usually the similarities and familiarity are in the center of processes of learning from the "Other". For Levinas, no ethical relation can ever be reciprocal. Seeing the other person in a reciprocal relation as being equal with me would be seeing her/him as the *Same* as me, which, for Levinas, is a form of totalizing thinking. Levinas calls the type of totalizing thinking that limits our conception of other people through our own sameness *totality* or *economy*, which is an opposite of *infinity*.

A totalized world is the conceptual totality mastered by "I", which means that it is mastered in only one way. The "I" that is at the center of mastering a world in which there is a certain sameness of things and events, all of which are in their place conceptually, creates a certain familiarity or domesticity. That prevents "I" from experiencing the infinity of the "Other's" world (Levinas, 1996; Varto, 2005; Joldersma, 2002). In the totalized worldview the person represented in the image is a mirror reflection of self, even when it is a picture of another person. Hence, the person in the images needs to be taken as a mystery that will not be solved. Categorizing based on features and pre-knowledge is against ethical encountering. The face on the image needs to be encountered as new and as something that opens up infinity. Levinas suggest us to resist the familiarity of the "Other" and instead appreciate the "Other's" otherness as something beyond my comprehension.

The ethics and responsibility of Levinas is founded on asymmetry. The intersubjective relationship is always a non-symmetrical relationship, and is therefore founded on inequality (Levinas, 2009). It means that what I can insist on from myself, I cannot insist on from the "Other".<sup>3</sup> The ego cannot demand reciprocity. It also means that even though I cannot demand anything from the "Other", I must be extremely responsible towards the "Other" and always put the "Other" before "I". Even though this ideology seems utopian, it is the nature of the ethical requirement, and it can be implemented momentarily via our actions (Wallenius, 1992). The asymmetrical relationship to the "Other" demands to ask questions: How am I as a spectator responding to the person in Elomaa's picture? According to Levinas, it is always important to try to limit the demands of own ego and give more space to the other, since the other is more important.

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<sup>3</sup> There are two "others" for Levinas: on the one hand, we have the "Other" with a capital "O", *Autrui*, the radical "Other" that calls us into question; in contrast, there is also an "other" with a lower-case "o", *autre*, which is another person.

Levinas's idea of asymmetry differs from the Western ethical endeavor to understand the "Other" as I understand myself. The basis for ethical actions has been an identification with the "Other", relating one's own experiences to the other's experiences and trying to understand the other as I understand myself: to do same things for the other that I would wish be done for me in the same situation (Tuohimaa, 2001). Levinas emphasizes that ethics cannot be related to one's own experiences or based on one's own needs, because the "Other" is always more than my subjectivity can comprehend. I find this to be fundamentally different from the ethics that is usually practiced in everyday life. I also find this to be the major proposition in support of ethics and a responsible pedagogy. This is a key element to the ethical interpretation of Elomaa's artwork as well. Such a proposition demands that we think about the other's needs and wants, what the other is interested in, and not about what I think her/ him to be interested in. The complexity in Elomaa's images is created on one hand through the historical remoteness from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and through the proximity of the represented person. The juxtaposition of clothing and lightning with technology and compositions, together with the intimacy and proximity asks new questions about the other's needs.

Understanding the "Other's" otherness might seem more clear when the other has been diagnosed as different, as disabled. However, this is not the case. The "Other's" otherness is not connected to individual's character, physiognomy or psychology (Levinas, 1987). One has to internalize the fact that the "Other" will remain a stranger, inhabit an alien world of his own, and that the "Other" is not an object that must be interpreted and illuminated via my alien light. S/he shines forth with her/his own light and speaks for her/himself. The inevitable question follows: How can I coexist with her/him and still leave her/his otherness intact? (Wild, 2008). As Levinas points out, we are primarily others to one another and only secondarily different, based on certain characteristics that we may share between each other. The alterity of the encounter is more important and actually the only significant category that we need to consider (Hankamäki, 2004). In this sense, the differences between people, be they based on ethnicity or based on particular abilities, do not affect the alterity of the encounter. They may just make it more visible.

### **Face-to-face with Mr. Holbein**

The face in front of me brings along with it rectitude and an uprightness that exposes me and reminds me of my duty, of my responsibility, to the "Other". The other person's face opens up my own vulnerability and asks what are my responsibilities towards her/him and how do I practice hospitality towards her/him.



Picture 3. Ismo

For Levinas, a face-to-face meeting is the most important type of encounter. An ethical endeavor does not come from a person as such, but from encountering the "Other". When in front of another person, one is open, exposed, receptive and without his or her own aspirations. Another person's face is an entrance to the infinity. A face *means* infinity, whether hostile or friendly. The face of another person can break the thread of making the "Other" out to be the "Same" as us, and expose clearly and momentarily that what is not the "Same" as me, but what is truly "Other" (Levinas, 2008; Varto, 2005; Wallenius, 2005). A face-to-face encounter is the ultimate ethical relationship, since the face is exposed, menaced, which invites us to take part in an act of violence and, at the same time, the face is what forbids us from killing another. Levinas says, "The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, through with a decent nudity" (Levinas, 2009, 86). What does this nudity leave me with? Is this an image on humanity like Elomaa describes, a representation of humanity rather than individuals, including all people and nobody particularly? An image of a people?



Picture 4. Ilmari

A face-to-face encounter is one possibility to confront my own totalized world and try to open it to the infinity of the "Other". Totalizing other people is easy when they are farther away, more distant from "I". Then, defining other people based on their race, ethnicity, gender or disability becomes axiomatic. But when encountering another person's face, I realize that s/he is not just a representative of her/his culture or community, not "for example 'Jewish', because a person is always singular and does not fit under any general concepts" (Wallenius, 2005, 49). When face-to-face with another person, I lose my totalizing definition, since the "Other" is always more than my efforts to define her/him. Looking at the portrait as a representation of a person with disability rather than a representation of humanity is perhaps what Levinas would call natural thinking. It is the initial idea that comes without troubling thinking. The need to define and categorize the "Other" is part of the need to totalize the "Other".





Picture 5. Kari

The approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility; it is more ancient than consciousness and more foundational than the cultural or existential recognition of the "Other" (Levinas & Kearney, 1986; Hankamäki, 2004; Tuohimaa, 2001; Gregoriou, 2008). According to Gregoriou (2008), "The face of the 'Other' (la visage d'Autrui) enacts a structure of responsibility more primary than consciousness, more binding than mutuality, more engaging than agency, more stern than the imperative appeal of juridicality, and more immediate than the vulnerability of bare skin" (p. 213). Seeking the meanings that are revealed by faces is at the core of everything we do in pedagogy. Through faces, we are exposed to the world and to ourselves, and this is the sense of existence, the (only) sense of our being-together.



Picture 6. Anastasia

According to Levinas, the ethical relationship to the “Other” is always more complex than just a relationship of two. The “Third” (*le tiers*) ensures that ethics is always also political. The “Third” moves the ethical reflections further to the horizon, where it is possible to discuss and compare different options and asks for justice (Wallenius, 1992). Levinas defines justice as being in the realm of calculation and knowledge, which pre-supposes politics. Justice is inseparable from the political, but it is different from ethics—which is for him always the primary issue at stake (Simmons, 1999). Levinas enlarges his ethics of two to include the “Third”, since, for him, a face-to-face relationship might also include delusional and selfish limitations: “Third” is necessary for helping us see ethics in a larger context. He moves from discussing the ethical in abstract terms to discussing the political in more concrete terms (Jackson, 2006). Levinas believes that politics must be controlled by ethics, not other way around, because the other “concerns me”.

Eventually, while asking how am I looking at the person in the picture and how does the person in the picture look back to me, I need to follow up with Levinas suggestion and bring the social justice approach into the discussion. Exploring with the two presented theoretical approaches, Emmanuel Levinas’s contribution to the ethics (philosophical) and disability studies and social just in art education movement (political), I pursue to have a deeper access to the interpretation of Elomaa’s images.

## Recognizing the culture of disability

Social disability studies perceive disability as socially constructed phenomena. Differently than in the medical perception of disability, in which disabilities are perceived as being potentially treatable via various treatments and therapies, social disability studies acknowledges all bodies socio-politically constructed and disability as something different than a personal tragedy or impairment. As an area of diverse studies, disability studies processes the complexities of postmodern theories and their assumptions, and thereafter offers a non-therapeutically oriented perspective to the disability discourse. In many ways, the practices of feminist, queer, ethnic, postcolonial, Marxist and postmodern criticism and scholarship have given examples and openings, and their practices have been extended within the field of disability studies (Davis, 2006; Wilson & Lewiecki-Wilson, 2004).

In the field of disability studies in art education, disability is recognized as a cultural identity comparable with other cultural minority identities. However, it is clear that there is not just one culture as a disability culture. Disability culture refers to diverse group of people with diverse physical or mental conditions, who often experience cultural discrimination, stigmatization, segregation and medicalization (Eisenhauer, 2007). These diverse groups and individuals also have different identities and different understandings of their own (dis)abilities. It has often been demonstrated that individuals with disabilities do not want to be treated as "special" (Derby, 2011), live in segregated spaces, receive a segregated education and suffer a loss of rights (Blandy, 1994). Also, people experiencing disabilities often do not want to be perceived as "curious" or as a "genre" categorized by such designations as "outsider art", "mad", or "I'art brut" (Blandy, 1991; Wexler, 2005). While non-disabled people might assume that disabled people lack "normalcy", this is rarely voiced by disabled people themselves, who consider the disability to be a natural part of their identity. The affirmative approach to disability value disabled individuals' own lifestyle as culture and identity (Swain & French, 2000).

"Nothing about us without us" and "art belongs to everybody" are examples of well-known disability rights slogans. Academics and activists have been working for a couple of decades towards fulfillment of these slogans and more equal rights for people with disabilities. Still, people with disabilities as equal representatives in different institutions, art, media, and decision-making bodies are rare. While there might be services available, there are little possibilities to actively produce and implement actions around art and culture, or take part in policy-making decisions in society, or even in one's own life.

Elomaas's images can be seen through promoting diversity and cultural identity in the most positive way. When taking up the social justice approach, rather than philosophical, the idea of affirming group solidarity, developing feelings of acceptance and belonging in the community, comes in an important light. Iris Young (2001) states that denying the differences between people has led to a crucial development in the struggle against exclusion and status differentiation. A typical way of denying differences is to argue for individuality and sameness for everyone rather than affirming group solidarity, which is often the stand of the dominant culture that ignores group specificity. Not recognizing differences also allows privileged groups to ignore their own group specificity and to perpetuate a type of cultural imperialism by creating norms that express this particular point of view. The privileged group then appears neutral and universal, objectifying everything else as "others" (Young, 2001). The approach of denying differences comes very naturally from the dominant and privilege groups. Levinas would call that natural thinking, which does not require critical or ethical thinking.

Elomaa's approach to work with a group of participant is a typical contemporary approach. As art historian Claire Bishop (2012) has stated, that artists' interest on our time are towards participatory art.

According to her, artistic work as collaboration, or socially engaged art, or community-based art or artist as a producer of situations rather than art as individual projects is the contemporary artistic approach. Logically it follows, that people who take part to the art making are seen as co-producers and participants rather than audience or viewers. Over ten years ago, Miwon Kwon (2004) stated that most art projects done with participants focused on marginalized groups and on social issues. This raised the question of characterizing people based on their human diversity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or disability. Naming a group based on their ethnic features or for other reasons was reviewed as suspicion, especially when working with people with disabilities, who might not be able to speak for themselves. While many participatory projects are reviewed through more critical and ethical lenses, there are still artist driven projects that other marginalized groups.

Elomaa has worked with Lyhty association for many years and has a long-term and personal relationship with many people in Lyhty. Elomaa's approach, the way he describes it, does not seem to include an idea of focusing on marginalized people. It is quite clear that the people he works with are in the center of his life, not in the margin. Elomaa's straightforward aim is just to work together with the participants, acknowledging that he as an artist makes most of the decisions. This sounds like a refreshing and fair starting point, which does not include fantasies of working in democracy. This approach does not dilute the sense of mutual appreciation between the artist and the participants. However, when a non-disabled artist is working with a group of people with disability, the question of missing first-hand agency needs to be discussed.

Art and art activism can offer ways in society for those who are not being heard to express their needs and opinions. As Quinn et al. (2012) has stated, a social justice approach to art education can include practicing art as activism, doing art through activism, and/or using artistic and visual methods for activism. An example of art as activism and advocating disability rights as a first-hand perspective is the Finnish punk band *Pertti Kurikan nimipäivät* (Name Day of Pertti Kurikka). Through their music, the band is actively producing and implementing culture activity. They are taking part of the societal production and implementation by expressing their ideas and opinions, and hence using the societal power. This band has also gained wide publicity and popularity. The punk band was chosen to represent Finland in the European song contest, *Eurovision*. The band's voice is hence heard by millions of people. In their lyrics, they make clear statements and take part in conversations in societal questions on human rights, disability rights, such as individual conditions for living, politics of services and decision making on public environments. The songwriter, Kari Aalto has also worked with Pekka Elomaa for many years and he represents Mr. Holbein as Kari (Picture 5).

It is clear, that Kari Aalto's participation in *Pertti Kurikan nimipäivät* band is very different act of agency than participation to the Elomaa's Mr. Holbein series. The critical question needs to be asked when a non-disabled artist runs a project with people with disabilities. The ultimate question for me is, are these pictures able to build a positive representation on the represented individuals and hence promoting for affirmative culture identity of disability? Elomaa's image interpretation for spectators is not problem-free. It is clear for us now that disability is not a major characteristic of the people for the artist or for anybody in the working group. In addition, the ethical encountering with the pictures as a vulnerable act is strong and striking. However, it is impossible to bypass the ethical questions that the pictures together, as a group, create: Why have the particular individuals been chosen to the project? In a way, people in the portraits represent a collective subjectivity of disabled people. Do they, in fact, give their faces to disability? Without knowing the history of the project: a group of people working together and then deciding what to do, instead of artist choosing a group of people for his pre-planned project, the ethical question is obvious. The images do not come with the explanation and without the

explanation the images always leave the door open for criticism. The images need to be responsible for their representation. This criticism should not be seen in a negative light, though. Without the ambiguous nature of the photographs, there would not be room to encounter the "Other" face-to-face, as it is possible now, with the multiple and rich layers of significances.

## Conclusions

Including interpretations, philosophical ethics and social just, into a same analysis is somewhat uneasy but still fruitful attempt to find alternative methods to dominant discourse on image analysis. For Levinas, justice is unethical and violent, and at the same time, necessary for preserving the "Other". There are always conflicts between justice and ethics and unanswered questions. One such question is, does justice limit ethics? The nature of the relationship of the two, ethics and justice, is both one of separation and of oscillation (Simmons, 1999). In this article I have brought together the two different approaches to discuss the challenges of vulnerable encountering the other in representation.

In this article I have asked, do Elomaa's artworks repeat the history of othering people with disabilities? I also asked, if Elomaa's images are able to transform the objectifying and violent stares of viewers into something else? I explored if the photographs are able to offer an access to the face-to-face encountering without stigmatization and if the images would *stare back* to us. Meaning, are they able to challenge the spectator's normative interpretation by offering the images as a site to ask critical questions?

Perhaps the images do not fully resist Levinasian understanding of the "Other's" otherness. It is possible that Elomaa, being the artist in charge of the process has tried to familiarize the participant people to the assumed audience, by fitting them to represent the common Western art historian portraits. Hence, the images are depicting the represented persons respectfully, Levinas might view the effort with suspicion in terms of limiting the other's infinity. Perhaps this choice of representation tends to de-other the people with disabilities by claiming that the people in images who often are marginalized are qualified to be represented in respectful manner. While these complex, critical and ethical questions remain pending, I believe the other perspectives to the interpretation are stronger.

As a conclusion, I have found the photograph's possibilities more striking than their ethical limitations. The collaboration, making together, stands out from the photographs. I hence state that these photographs do not maintain the normal/abnormal binaries, or produce an untroubled objectifying gaze of "curiosity", or treat disability as cultural construction as property? In my understanding the Elomaa's photographs are *staring back*, asking for hospitality and forcing to encounter the "Other". For me, the faces in the images are critically asking, *how* am I looking at the person in the picture? The person in the image also asks, *how* s/he is looking back to me? People in the images have not been objectified for a curious gaze. The gaze looks back to me and asks me questions about the ways in which I am seeing my own curious gaze. The straight, brave and still vulnerable gaze that I receive in the photographs do not apologize but demands reactions. Although this artwork does not offer a first-hand perspective to disability art making, like The Disability Art Movement and affirmative model in disability studies would suggest, these photographs are a brave visual argument for social justice, as much as they are a beautiful and ethical statement.

## Author Presentation

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