[…]

Dawn: […] Alright, great, so thank you so much again for carving out the time to be here today. It’s brilliant to have you to give your views. So, before we begin to talk about portrait-sitting accounts, please could you say a little bit about your research background with respect to portraiture and perhaps also with respect to art history, if you don’t mind?

Interviewee: Of course. So I am predominantly, I would say, a philosopher of art. I’ve been trained as a philosopher and I’ve been working in the field of philosophy of art and aesthetics, broadly speaking, for the past twenty years, I think. But I’ve been spending most of my time at the [redacted] in a department of art history and this has had an impact on my practice as a philosopher, I would say, because – because of these practical reasons but also from an intrinsic interest - I’ve always tried to work at the intersection of philosophy of art and history of art. And I’ve tried to ensure that the philosophical articles and books that I write are informed by art history. So, in a way you could say, at least I’ve tried in many of my writings to work at the intersection of history and philosophy of art. And one of the research topics that I’ve been interested in is portraiture. It’s not the only research topic I’ve been working on. So I’ve worked on different themes and topics. But portraiture became a central interest of mine around [redacted] and I’ve been working on it for four to five years, but I’ve gradually moved away from that topic now. So I wouldn’t say that it’s a central topic of research and of interest of mine any longer, even though I keep a genuine interest in the topic, partly because I’m teaching on portraiture, but in terms of research-intensive work that I’ve done, I would say that portraiture has been - more-or-less for five years - a central research interest of mine. I have written a paper on [redacted] portraiture and I set up a [redacted] conference in which I [redacted] of portraiture. And I’ve compiled some of these papers in a book that came out with [redacted]. And in my own contributions to the book I’ve tried to write in such a way that, again, the research is informed by art history, to a certain extent. So I’ve written on portraits of [redacted]. And another essay is on [redacted] portraits and [redacted]. Maybe a final thing to mention is [redacted] that pays attention to diversity in the kind of portraits that are being discussed [redacted]. So that’s another way in which I’ve tried to make a contribution to scholarly activities on portraiture, as one might say. I don’t know whether there’s anything else you’d like me to add to that, or…?

Dawn: That’s brilliant, thanks. That’s completely fine. You’re welcome to add anything, but no, that’s excellent. Thank you so much. So we’ll move on now to a series of questions about portraiture, based on the examples on your sheet. Each question’s made up of two parts. So first I’ll ask you a very general question, and please feel free to answer that question with respect to any periods or portraits that you see fit, and I’ll then follow that up with a question that relates to the specific accounts, which are about British portraits 1900-1960. So the first question in this section is: who participates in portrait sittings, in your view, and what are their various roles?

Interviewee: This is the general question, right, so not in relation to…

Dawn: Yes, this is the general question.

Interviewee: So, who participates in portrait sitting? Generally, I would say, the sitter and the artist. And potentially the patron, if they’re present - the person who commissioned the portrait - might have some role to play as well. Some might argue that the audience plays a role - the audience of the eventual artwork - in that artist and sitter might try to anticipate the role of the audience. But that might be a more indirect role, so to speak. And one can hardly make the case, I think, that the audience actively determines the outcome of the portrait sitting. It’s rather the way that artist and sitter, possibly the person who commissioned the portrait, how they anticipate the audience will respond. So, yeah, in short, I think, artist and portrait sitter. In some occasions, the person who commissions the portrait, the patron. And then there’s an indirect role of the audience. That would be my spontaneous answer to that question.

Dawn: Brilliant, thank you. Sorry, yes, you are slightly on the spot. With that in mind then, could I ask you to look at the account in number one – so that’s the sitting of Winston Churchill to Graham Sutherland – and I wondered, how would you describe the role of the artist here, and how would you describe the role of the sitter? And how does that compare to your expectation?

Interviewee: So, in this particular case, the sitter does play a role. And the role is, as such, acknowledged by the artist. The artist says that the portrait will be at least partly determined by the way that Churchill, in this case, presents himself. And Churchill is made aware of this and, according to Sutherland at least, presented himself in a particular way, as the bulldog. So, it seems to me that, based on this textual account, there’s activity on both sides. Even though - I don’t know whether this is something you want to thematise – but Sutherland seems to suggest that his input is determined by the sitter’s input, so there’s some passivity that he seems to communicate to his sitter, whereas… That’s only going to be to a certain extent, no doubt, because he is actively painting the portrait, depending of course on what he sees. And, knowing Sutherland’s work, he’s not just a passive observer. He does portray his sitters in a very particular, uniquely Sutherland-ish way.

Dawn: Yep. Alright, great. Thank you. So, is that counter to your expectation, that there’d be some kind of passivity in the artist’s role?

[…]

Dawn: Were you surprised by Sutherland’s suggestion that he was somewhat passive?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah, somewhat. It’s a thing that artists say. But knowing Sutherland’s work, and knowing that he’s not at all just a passive observer of whatever or whoever sits in front of him… I’m not going to say it’s disingenuous because I think it’s true that people present themselves differently and that Sutherland will respond to those differences. But he’s not just a passive observer. And I think he would acknowledge that, as such, if put on the spot.

Dawn: Great, alright, thank you. So, carry on thinking about the various roles in portrait production, how would you understand the role of author? Who would be the author of the portrait? If that term is meaningful for you.

Interviewee: It is meaningful. I do a bit of philosophy of film as well and in philosophy of film, that has been a very important discussion, who the author is, since film is, at least according to many people, a collaborative medium. Despite the auteur theory, whereby it was usually the director who was considered the auteur or the author of the film, most people now would acknowledge that there are multiple authors in a film. I think if you transpose that discussion to portraiture, you could end up with a similar conclusion, namely that a portrait will always be, to a certain extent, co-authored. I can’t imagine that the portrait artist is never going to be the author of the portrait, so I think their position as an author, or one of the co-authors, of a portrait is assured. But do we always want to say that the sitter is a co-author, or is it only in particular cases? Because I’m now thinking – this is not painting and maybe it’s not the period that you’re interested in – but I’m thinking of certain photographic portraits of Thomas Ruff, for instance, where he has a very strict format, passport style of photographing people in an expressionless way, almost. So there are clear directions from the artist that they have to look a certain way, and they’re framed in a way that is absolutely determined by them. There’s very limited way for them to pose themselves so they seem to all need to fit a very strict format. And do we want to say, in those cases, that the subjects, the sitters, are co-authors? I’m not entirely sure. I like the… I’m sorry if I’m going on for too long, but I think I would want to say, in principle, that a portrait is going to be co-authored to some extent always by the sitter and the artist and possibly by someone else who might be involved in the process like, as I mentioned earlier, the person commissioning the portrait, perhaps, in some rather exceptional cases. But, having given that as a general principle, perhaps we would want to allow for limited cases where we might not want to say that the sitter is a genuine co-author. And perhaps we can think of similar borderline cases where the role of the artist is very very limited. I can’t think of such a case immediately, but… Sorry, that’s maybe not the clearest answer but that would be my first take at it.

Dawn: No, thank you. That’s brilliant, thank you so much. Yeah, lots of food for thought. I’m going to try not to respond to your answers because this is definitely about getting your view and not mine, but no, that was brilliant, thank you.

[…]

Dawn: […] Great, thank you. So with some of those ideas in mind, looking at the accounts in number two, who would you say is the author here and what makes you reach that decision? Do take your time to read them, obviously.

Interviewee: So we’re now talking about the Singer Sargent portrait of Swettenham? Or both portraits, the Royal Family as well?

Dawn: Both portraits, but if there’s one that interests you more than the other, that’s fine.

Interviewee: I would want to say that, in those two cases, both sitter and artist are co-authors.

Dawn: Great, and what would make you conclude that they are co-authors?

Interviewee: Maybe the clearest case is… Based on the textual evidence here, when I’m looking at the report on the portrait of the Royal Family, it says that they’re ‘closely involved with the portrait’s development’. Now I would need to know more about how they were involved. But if they chose the setting, the pose, what they were wearing, the occasion, possibly, and so on, then it seems that they had a genuine and substantial influence on how the portrait eventually came to look. And that would be reason to assume that, at least to some extent, they should be, or they could be, acknowledged as co-authors. In the case of the Singer Sargent portrait, I know the portrait, not too well, but it’s a very striking portrait, and what is striking about it, [as well is?] the way that the person poses and presents themselves. Now, in knowing this portrait and knowing - based on this textual evidence, which I wasn’t aware of - that artist and sitter had become friends and that he, the sitter, had sat repeatedly for this portrait, specifically for the head and the uniform, does make me want to say that it’s not just John Singer Sargent who should be acknowledged as the author of the portrait but that it was a collaborative effort, to some extent. I want to add two things. When I say collaborative effort, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they should be acknowledged to the same extent as authors and that the same amount of credit should go to the artist and the sitter, but that the sitter has had an impact on the way that the artwork eventually turned out. That seems to me to be beyond question. The other thing I want to add is - this is not really to do with this particular painting but maybe just for your benefit – is that, I say that now quite confidently that I regard the sitter as a co-author of the portrait, but I have to say that this is an insight that has come relatively late for me. So, if you had asked me this question ten years ago, I would have quite confidently said that Singer Sargent is the artist and author and I would be… just less aware of the contribution of the sitter, just as I would be less aware of the contribution of the model in the whole practice. Yeah, I’ll stop there.

Dawn: Okay, thank you. That’s interesting. Maybe I’ll ask you that later, about the maybe shift? in your view. Great, thank you. So, again, we’re thinking about the various people or parties involved in portrait production; who do you think benefits from portrait production?

Interviewee: Starting with the usual suspects, the artist can possibly benefit from the portrait production, so they sell their portraits and they can make a name for themselves. So there are different ways in which they can benefit from portraits being made. Similarly, a sitter can benefit from portrait production. It can help them establish a certain reputation, or it can be a way of glamourising themselves; it can be a way of acquiring a valuable object; it can be a way for them to engage with artists and, in that way, get an inroad into maybe a part of society that they want to be part of but that they’re not necessarily a part of. I’m just thinking out loud here, but there are many different ways in which both sitter and artist can benefit from portraits being produced. Probably it’s not just portraits and sitters that can benefit from a portrait being made. The patron, or the person commissioning the portrait, in all sorts of circumstances, I can imagine, can benefit from this. Benefit… was that the word that you used? Yeah. Again, it depends on how you understand what it means to ‘benefit from’, because if, let’s say, as a father, you commission a painting or a portrait of your children, this can be dear to you, that portrait, but is that a way of benefitting from the portrait? Maybe that would be a bit awkward to call it that. But there are certainly other cases, I think, where a patron can really benefit from commissioning a certain portrait. There must be really good examples, but I can’t immediately think of a good example. But there must be examples.

[…]

Dawn: […] So let’s look at the examples here, and then maybe I’ll ask you if you think ‘benefit’ is the right term or if there’s a more helpful one that you think would suit. So, looking at the examples in number three, my question is, who do you think is benefitting from portrait production in each case, and what would make you say that?

Interviewee: Okay, let me start with the sitting of Marie Tempest to William Nicholson. Right, at least from the textual evidence here, it seems that the artist here has benefitted from this portrait being made. It doesn’t say whether he benefitted greatly financially, but at least in terms of status, he benefitted from the interaction in that she was famous in a way that he was not, and by having her portrait made, she succeeded in elevating his status, to some extent. It’s not to say that Marie Tempest did not in any way benefit from the interaction, but that is less clear from the textual evidence. Moving on to sitting of W. H. Davies to Jacob Epstein… I have no idea who W. H. Davies was - I should know this but I don’t - but yeah, he… [redacted]. Anyway, it seems like he benefitted from the interaction. So the sitter benefitted in that he obtained one of the bronze casts at a strongly reduced price, apparently. So in that way he benefitted, he obtained an artwork, in posing for Epstein, in a way that came at no great cost for him. Similarly, I can imagine that Epstein benefitted because, of course, he had the five other casts that he could then pass on or sell. I imagine this might have been a commission. I don’t know about this particular portrait or this bust, and so I would need to know more about who did what, and who commissioned what, and what happened to the other bronzes, or what was the occasion for the bust, in order to determine really who benefitted from whom. But it seems here that…

Dawn: That’s interesting, from my point of view, to know what you need in the account that isn’t there… is really helpful.

Interviewee: Okay, right, yeah. So here I find that the information is insufficient to give a really clear account of who benefitted from whom. But, based on this one sentence, it seems that Davies benefitted in some way that he himself was pleased with. And moving on to the Michael Balcon excerpt… I need to read it first. Right, it’s interesting - so here we have a clear distinction between artist, sitter and a person who commissioned the portrait, let’s call it the patron. So Hitchcock is the patron and then you have the sitter, Michael Balcon – […] – and then Epstein is the artist. It’s not clear to me who benefitted and if… Well, to a certain extent, it is clear. Jacob Epstein benefitted in the sense that he was paid £250 to make a bust, so in that sense he benefitted, and Michael Balcon benefitted in that his bust was made, but it’s not said in this text, at least, whether he received one of the busts; that’s not made clear. But we can assume that it’s flattering, at least, to have your bust made by an artist like Jacob Epstein. So in that sense he benefitted too. So in this case it seems like two people benefitted from the fact that Hitchcock felt guilty.

Dawn: Great. Alright, thank you. So, moving on, if we keep thinking about these various people or parties involved in portrait production, how helpful do you think is the idea of power or power relationships in describing their interactions?

[…]

Dawn: […] So, if we’re thinking about the people or the parties involved in portrait production, do you think the idea of power and power relationships is a helpful idea in thinking about that interaction?

Interviewee: Yes I do, very much. So that’s the short answer to that question. The longer answer about how exactly power relations feature into this… that’s a different matter, and that in itself would warrant, I think, a PhD. But yes, I think power relations are very important in understanding the interaction between portrait artist, sitter and patron. Not only for this, but one aspect of this is the way that women have been portrayed over the centuries. They were often asked to adopt certain poses or be in certain states of undress for a portrait that clearly reflect the power relations between either the artist and the female sitter, or the patron and the female sitter, and these power relations, I think, for a long period of time, have gone unrecognised, I think, in art history. And luckily, the past, let’s say, half century, people are paying attention to this. But that’s only one instance, I think, of where power relations clearly affect the way that a portrait is made. But there’s so many other ways in which power relations play a role. This can even be the case when we have two men, and powerful men, on both sides, like even if the artist is a powerful – within his artistic medium – and confident man, and the sitter is a confident and powerful man, even then I think the relations of power between them, and the dynamics thereof, are interesting to study and will be illuminating, I think, in trying to figure out how this particular portrait came to be. Actually, since you listed Churchill as one of the first examples, in almost all of the portraits made by Churchill [sic], the power dynamics are important in understanding how the portrait eventually comes out. And it’s not just true of the Sutherland portrait but of so many other portraits. Again, there’s so much more to be said about this. But yeah, I think power relations are very important.

Dawn: Brilliant, thank you. So I’d love to see how those ideas play out in some examples. So we have in number four, I think, yep, three examples. And I’d like to ask, who do you think holds power in each of these interactions, and what makes you say that?

[…]

Interviewee: Okay, this is John Singer Sargent again. Yeah… I’ve now just read the first report about the portrait of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. And even in this short fragment, there’s a lot going on. Since you’ve asked me particularly about power, I think there are power dynamics going on here. The sitter wants to be portrayed in a particular way and the artist wants to portray her in a different way and so there’s a conflict of some sort taking place, which… I’m trying to recall the portrait, I think I’ve seen it. She’s sitting, right? Is she sitting in the portrait?

Dawn: She’s sat, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. I’m trying to recall whether you actually see this in the portrait. I would need to look at the portrait in order to be able to really judge this. But, based on this report, this is not an uncommon conflict when male artists portray female sitters. Again, as I mentioned earlier, no doubt this sort of conflict also happens between two men, like a male artist and a male sitter. But it’s certainly not uncommon when it comes to a male artist portraying female sitters. And what is particularly striking here is the fact that here is someone who was very established and celebrated in her particular profession, so someone who clearly achieved great things in her profession, and she’s being portrayed by the artist almost in a non-professional capacity. So, he doesn’t want to portray her – so it seems, at least, based on this textual fragment – as a representative of her profession, as someone who really achieved something in her profession, but rather wants to portray her as a woman who needs to dress in a particular way. So that power dynamic clearly is present here. I have the feeling – again, I would need to look at the portrait – that there’s more going on here, but that certainly is going on, it seems to me. I would love to spend more time talking and looking at each of these individual examples, but I’ll just move on. Sitting of Gertrude Jekyll to William Nicholson, ‘According to William Nicholson…’… Right, yeah, here there also seems to be some conflict. I would need to know more about Gertrude Jekyll and the reason why William Nicholson wanted to portray her. I don’t know who she was, what her profession was. But here is a conflict, and it seems to me that maybe – I don’t know, based on this text I can’t say – that maybe the conflict has a different origin than the one in the previous fragment. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson wanted to be portrayed in her professional capacity and John Singer Sargent did not wish that to be the case, had something different in mind. Here, it rather seems to be that Gertrude Jekyll thought she was unworthy of portrayal because of her appearance. She didn’t think of herself as being very beautiful, photogenic or appealing, and that seems to be the main source of her resistance. But again, maybe there’s more to it. I would need to know more about her, actually. But there seems to be a conflict here as well between the desire of the artist, who really wants to paint her, and she, the sitter, who doesn’t want to be painted. In the end, she gives in, and the way she describes, at least, the process of sitting, is in a very passive way. So it was like once her resistance had been overcome, she describes it as if she’s almost the passive object of the painter’s interest. So again, power dynamics seem to be relevant but in a different way than in the first fragment. Moving on to sitting of Bernard Law Montgomery to Frank Salisbury… I should preface this by saying that I really wished I had more time and that I had been able to look at these portraits in advance. Yeah, I do want to apologise for that.

Dawn: No, no worries. This is looking at the textual accounts, so if you feel the textual account is impossible to interpret without the portrait then that’s also a helpful view.

Interviewee: Right, I’ll say so now. Again here, I cannot recall the portrait, I don’t know whether I’ve ever seen it. But in terms of power dynamics, this is an interesting contrast with the previous cases because the sitter is clearly a powerful person. It seems to be the commander of the Allied forces in the Second World War. I didn’t know his name was Bernard Law, but there you go. I assume it’s him? Yeah, it’s him. So he’s a very powerful person to begin with. And in the coming-to-be of the portrait, he’s clearly the one taking the initiative, commissioning the portrait and flying the artist over to his headquarters in Berlin. So in terms of power dynamics, an interesting contrast with the previous two cases, in that the sitter is the one taking the initiative, seems to be the one who is in control, and the artist is – based on this textual fragment – seems to be serving the wishes of the sitter more than anything. I’m also struck by the fact that he was enthusiastic as a schoolboy about the fact that he got to fly for the first time, so delighted by the occasion of this portrait being commissioned and everything that comes with it. So, yeah, if anything, here, the dominant - if you want to call it that – the dominant force in this interaction seems to be the sitter, in contrast with the previous two examples.

Dawn: Brilliant, thank you. I know there’s a lot to unpack in these texts and you know that’s why I find them so interesting. But thank you very much. So, a few more questions then in this section. The next one is: is the portrait sitting an ordinary or an extraordinary event?

Interviewee: I think that’s relative. It will be relative to whoever’s sitting for the portrait. For most people, I think it will be a pretty extraordinary event. I want to qualify the first thing I said. It’s not just relative to who is sitting for the portrait but also what kind of portrait is being made, because I was going to say, for most people it will be an extraordinary event – and that is certainly the case when you think about painted portraits. Many people will never have a painted portrait made of them. But then there are, I think, lots of people will have photographic portrait made of them at some point. I have [redacted] children and they have their portrait made each year in class, so for them, if we count that as an instance of portrayal, then for them, certainly after the third or fourth time, it will not be extraordinary, strictly speaking, anymore, if you take into account also the fact that their portraits are made on other occasions, like winnings or big festivities, etcetera. So if we take into account the art form of photography, then sitting for a portrait might not be that extraordinary for many people, whereas for painting it might be extraordinary for most people. But then you have royalty, or people like Montgomery perhaps, field marshals, and people who take up a very prominent place in society, Churchill as well… For them it might not be a very extraordinary event, so, it's not that my answer is all over the place… Really I think the key term here is that it’s going to be relative, relative to who is being portrayed and what kind of portrait that we’re talking about.

Dawn: Great, yes, it’s a very general question so that makes sense. Thank you. So let’s look now at the accounts in five. And you mentioned Montgomery, so this account appears here, I thought we could discuss it here as well. Do you think these sittings are ordinary or extraordinary events in the lives of their participants, and what makes you draw that conclusion?

Interviewee: You used the word ‘participants’, so I gather that you are not just referring to the sitters but also to the artist. So, in this case, it’s clear that it’s an extraordinary event for the artist, even though he’s called a ‘veteran painter of royalty and presidents’, so he’s been around, but he particularly describes the episode in his autobiography, he was enthusiastic in a way that he had rarely been, and particularly delighted with a signed copy of a campaign map. So all of this leads to the conclusion that this particular episode was pretty extraordinary for the artist. Was it extraordinary for the sitter? It’s hard to say based on this textual fragment. I wouldn’t be able to say, so… I imagine that Montgomery’s portrait - well, I know that he’s been painted and photographed many times… How extraordinary he felt this occasion to be, I don’t know.

Dawn: Great, thank you.

[…]

Interviewee: Right. I’m looking at the last fragment now, [it’s a?] short description of how the portrait artist was someone who worked very fast, and so, based on this description, it sounds as if it was not an extraordinary interruption of daily activities, but rather something that was over quite quickly, and so may not have registered as very extraordinary. And now, very quickly looking at the other fragment, this is Rupert Brooke to Clara Ewald, the sitting of Rupert Brooke. If your question is ‘how extraordinary was this sitting to the participants?’, I find it hard to say anything definitive on that based on this fragment alone. It’s an interesting fragment, and he was painted in an effort to cheer him up, so that’s interesting, but it’s hard to say whether this was extraordinary for him.

Dawn: Are you able to identify what you’re looking for in the fragment that isn’t there, or…?

Interviewee: It would help to know what his experience of the sitting was. I’ve only read it quickly, let me read it very… Yeah, we get information about his state of mind beforehand, and at other occasions, and we get a sense of why the portrait was painted, so why the artist made his portrait, but what we don’t get is how exceptional was this, how extraordinary was this for the artist to act in this way, to paint someone just to cheer them up, and we also don’t get a sense of how extraordinary it was for the sitter or what effect the sitting may have had on him. At least, that’s my sense after having read this for the first time.

Dawn: Thank you, no that’s really helpful, thank you. Okay, my next question – and I think you said you’d written [redacted] on this, so this might be… it’s a very broad question, but it’s: how would you define the portrait?

Interviewee: Yes…

Dawn: We can do this in relation to examples if that would be easier.

Interviewee: I think that I would want to stick by the account that I’ve written down, so the easiest thing for me would be to say just see [redacted]. [Redacted] the definition that I end up defending and elaborating is one that focuses on the intention of the portrait maker [redacted]. It’s a complex definition, but what I like about this definition is that it allows for development within the genre, so an abstract portrait can be a portrait even if it doesn’t depict a recognisable individual, as long as the portrait maker wants to do what previous portrait makers have done, namely, Rubens as a painter wanted to convey to an audience what he himself looked like, or the status he accorded himself, for instance. And if a contemporary painter or portrait artist wants to do the same thing, but does this is a new way, with new materials, for instance, not with paint but with some other materials, and the end result is not necessarily one whereby they are physically recognisable, but somehow they convey to an audience the sort of status that they accord themselves - if they succeed in doing that, then that could count as a portrait, even though it’s very different from a portrait in the past. Again, this is a topic where there’s much more to be said. But I think by tying the definition of a portrait to the intention of the portrait maker and previous conceptions of portraiture, you can allow for quite radical development within the genre.

Dawn: Thank you, that’s fascinating. Thank you so much. Of course, yeah, lots more to say. But let’s have a look at some examples. And I’m thinking about just from the text, do you think the work to which the account in number six refers is a portrait. And why or why not? Or do you need more information to say whether or not it is a portrait?

Interviewee: I know Lucian Freud’s work quite well and I would have liked to have looked up this particular painting because, yeah, I can’t bring it to mind, and the reason why I’m hesitant now is that I think some of Lucian Freud’s paintings are portraits and some of them are not. Based on this description - and I should also note that I don’t have the title here, and I think the title could make a huge difference in determining whether it’s a portrait or not - but based on this description, I can’t say whether it’s a portrait. The fact that it’s Lady Caroline Blackwood and not… so I assume, she’s a Lady, right? It’s not just… Yeah. My guess is that it will be a portrait because he will try to capture her as an individual, but I can’t recall… by which I mean his intention will be to try and capture her as an individual, rather than try to paint the flesh of her thighs or whatever… I don’t know how she’s being depicted. So my guess would be that it is a portrait, but I’m unable to determine if I don’t have the title and… It might be the case that the title is not decisive either, and then it would help to know more about how Lucian Freud proceeded with painting that particular portrait, what his aim was and what his intentions were. But, simply based on her account, or this brief excerpt, I’m not able to say whether this is a portrait.

Dawn: Brilliant, thank you, that’s really really interesting. Okay, great. This is the last question of this section where we’re looking at a general question and then an example. So, the question is: how would you define the portrait sitting?

Interviewee: That is a very good question that I haven’t thought about before. I’m going to give you a philosopher’s answer. That is, I think the thing to be defined, so to speak, is the portrait. If you can define that, you can then define portrait sitting as the activity involved in the making of the portrait, which you then need to define what it is. But no, that’s clearly insufficient because there’s so many activities involved in portrait making that do not qualify as sitting. So, maybe… That’s a really good question. So you could say maybe the activity of the subject of the portrait, involved in the making of the portrait. But then not every type of activity would count as the actual sitting, on behalf of the subject. They prepare themselves, that’s activity, but maybe that’s not part of the actual sitting…

Dawn: It’s brilliant to get your thought process on it, thank you.

Interviewee: Or if they just… I don’t know. But, actually, that could be a paper. I don’t think anyone has ever defined portrait sitting. So without wanting to spend too much time on it, I think portrait sitting has the term ‘portrait’, so that is crucial. And I think the main effort should go into defining a portrait, and then you can define sitting in some way in relation to the making of the portrait, which you have defined earlier, then. But that in itself won’t be too easy either, because some of the activities of the subject that is being portrayed will count as relevant, and others not. And so how do you determine which activities are relevant and which not? That will be a challenge. But if you ever come across an account, or if you ever write an account, of portrait sitting, I would definitely be interested.

Dawn: Great, thank you. I hope this research will include giving some statement of what is relevant to portrait sittings and obviously this is a contribution to that, so… yeah, great.

Interviewee: [Redacted] I think here, if you want to distinguish between sitting and modelling, the notion of ‘portrait’ is going to be important, because you model for all sorts of things that are not portraits, so it’s the fact that it’s a portrait that makes one sitting and the other modelling, I guess. And then, the further question, what is the sitting itself, and do we want to include everything the sitter does or only certain features? Even just raising these questions, I think, is really interesting. [Redacted]

Dawn: [Redacted] Alright, brilliant. So, I’m going to persist with this line of enquiry and ask you, are the accounts in number seven… do you think they are accounts of portrait sittings? Do you think these activities are relevant, and why or why not?

[…]

Interviewee: Okay, the first excerpt, I do not want to sound too decisive on this because it’s only one sentence, but it seems to me that this is not an account of sitting. This is rather something that happened after the person sat for the portrait. So once the portrait is finished, I think, the sitting finishes as well. So if afterwards they inscribe a book with the sentence ‘in memory of being sculptured in relief’, so that to me seems to suggest that this is after the fact, after the actual sitting took place and the portrait was finished. And so this is not an account of sitting, it seems to me. The second excerpt… Again, I’m inclined to say that this is not an account of sitting for the portrait. As the sentence itself says, it’s a sequel to the portrait sitting, and then they read a book that was recommended by the artist. However, bearing in mind the way that you introduced your own research interest in this, and the fact that you want to look at sitting, at portraits, as not something that is just separated from ordinary life but is connected in all sorts of ways to ordinary life, it’s one thing to say that something is not part of the sitting and it’s quite another thing to say that sitting is always clearly delineated from other events. So I don’t think the latter is the case. I actually think that sometimes it’s not going to be clear whether something’s actually part of the sitting or not, and sitting is embedded within all sorts of other activities. It’s preceded by certain activities, like preparing, and followed by other activities that follow from it, like the reading of a book. But personally, I would still be inclined to say that certain things are no longer part of the actual sitting. So even though you cannot always draw clear boundaries between the sitting and the non-sitting, I think, doesn’t mean that it cannot be distinguished from other activities that precede it or follow it. And so in this case, again, I’d be inclined to say that this is not part of the sitting but it follows from the sitting. Anyway, sitting of William de Morgan to Evelyn de Morgan. So with relation to this last excerpt, what would be your question?

Dawn: The way I phrased it exactly is ‘Is this account a portrait-sitting account? Why or why not?’, but what I was thinking behind the question is, like we’ve been discussing, the extent of the sitting -when does it start and when does it end, and also what information is relevant to know about it? Those are two slightly different questions, aren’t they, but…

Interviewee: Yeah. You raise really good questions and I think your approach is excellent as well – look at these excerpts and try to determine whether they’re part or not. So I think I want to stick to what I said about the first two examples, that they’re not part of the actual sitting, but they do demonstrate that sitting is embedded within a person’s life and has implications for what comes afterwards and, likewise, that if you want to understand sitting properly, you need to look at things that come beforehand. With the last fragment, I find it more difficult to assess, so this seems to be a letter of the sitter to a publisher about portraits that were made? And I’m inclined to say that what is said here is important to understanding the sitting that took place, but what is said, itself, is not part of the sitting, I would say. So I think that would be an important distinction to make, that something can be of importance to understanding the sitting, but not be part of the sitting itself.

Dawn: Great, thank you so much, that’s brilliant. So that comes to the end of part two, as I called it in the little information sheet. […]

[…]

Dawn: […] Great, thank you. So, in part three, I’ve just got four broader questions about portrait-sitting accounts and your experiences of the material. So my first question is, what would lead you to believe that a portrait-sitting account is credible or not credible? And if you’d like to mention any of the ones we’ve spoken about, that’s fine.

Interviewee: Again, a good question. And hard to give a general answer. It’s much easier to say something about specific examples. But in general…

Dawn: Were there any of these that struck you as, you didn’t quite… I think one of them you said was a bit disingenuous?

Interviewee: I think I mentioned that Sutherland might be slightly disingenuous in saying that it would all depend on how Churchill presents himself. But I don’t think the report itself is disingenuous, or that I don’t think it’s credible. I absolutely believe that Sutherland said this to Churchill, and I also think that, to a certain extent, he expresses something that is true and that he truly believed. And I don’t […] recall any of the fragments to be particularly untrustworthy or not credible. Again, if I had more time to ponder this question, I would come up with a much better and more subtle answer to this, but I think whether a report or not will be credible will depend, among other things, on the general credibility of the speaker or writer, if they are known to confabulate or aggrandise themselves etcetera. If you know this from other contexts, then this should drive you to take whatever they say with a pinch of salt. Maybe not the best example, but Francis Bacon was someone who, in interviews, was not always truthful, would often play around with the interviewer. And so whenever you read something by Francis Bacon, I think you should take it - not with a pinch of salt, it’s always interesting – but don’t always take it at face value. So I think the general credibility of the speaker or writer, whether it’s a sitter or an artist, will play a role. The other thing is that credibility can also be assessed in relation to the actual artwork. So when looking at the portrait, if it turns out to be the case that the report sounds very implausible, then I think that’s another reason to be wary of what is said. Doesn’t necessarily mean that one shouldn’t believe what is said, but at least one can have doubts about the credibility, in light of the actual portrait that is made. So, one, you have the general credibility of the person speaking or writing; two, you have the artwork itself that could give you a clue about whether or not what is said is credible; and then the other thing I can immediately think of is other reports about the same event. That should give you an idea of whether or not the report is credible. It needs to fit with what other people have said. And if it doesn’t fit, it gives you good reason to look with a… [redacted] I was going to say ‘a closer eye’ but that’s not a phrase…

Dawn: With a fine-tooth comb, kind of thing? Is that what you mean?

Interviewee: Yeah, [then?] you need to…

[…]

Dawn: […] You were just saying, if there’s disagreement between accounts, that might indicate a need to look closer.

Interviewee: Yes. Again, I have the feeling that there’s much more to be said but I’ll just leave it there.

Dawn: Brilliant, thank you. My next question is, simply, do you come across accounts of portrait sittings much in your research?

Interviewee: Not much. Occasionally, yes. But since my focus is not on the sitting as such, and since also my research for the past two years has moved on somewhat, I don’t come across accounts of portrait sitting very often. But I do come across accounts of portrait sitting and I do find it relevant in discussing some topics, such as what makes something a portrait, what is the difference between modelling and sitting, which are issues that I’m interested in [redacted]. So the short answer is, I do come across accounts but it’s not like I come across them on a daily or even a weekly or a monthly basis.

Dawn: Sure. Great, thank you, that’s helpful. And are there any accounts that we spoke about today that you found particularly surprising, or stood out to you particularly?

Interviewee: You mean of the textual excerpts that we looked at? So in general I found them all interesting. And it made me realise that I don’t do this enough. I’m not an art historian, I’m a philosopher, and so I don’t always work with this kind of evidence, but it was interesting for me to read these excerpts, and it makes me think now that I should make more use of it, in when I teach portraiture, for instance. And I need to think more about this, certainly in relation to a question like: What is portrait sitting? What makes something part of an episode of portrait sitting, and what not? […]

Interviewee: […] Yeah, the Churchill one I find interesting. That one I’ll definitely remember because [redacted] some of Churchill’s portraits and I was aware of some of the accounts, like the account that Karsh gives […] … the famous photograph of Churchill -

Dawn: The photographer? Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. So that’s a well-known anecdote as well. And, I think, this one I can definitely add to that. And then, besides the general comment that I truly found all of them interesting, let me see whether some… Oh yeah, no the one that stood out and the one that I [redacted] on gender and portraiture is the one… Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and John Singer Sargent. Yeah, it’s…

Dawn: Sure. [Redacted.] Great. Thank you.

Interviewee: Yeah, those are the ones that stand out immediately.

Dawn: Brilliant. And the last question of this part three is, are there any other domain experts you might consult about this material in order to understand it better? So we’ve talked about art history and philosophy but are there any other domains that you think could feed in?

Interviewee: You mean are there any other fields of study?

Dawn: Disciplines, sorry, yeah.

Interviewee: So you don’t mean specific experts that I would want to consult, or..? No.

Dawn: No no, sorry, I mean if I was from a discipline other than art history, I might say ‘Oh I’d like to consult an art historian in order to understand the material’.

Interviewee: Yeah. So in order to understand this material, would I consult other disciplines or other fields of study? It depends on what you consider to be a field of study, but gender studies, if you want to call it that, I think would certainly have something to say about some of these accounts, and I have of course in mind the passage I just referred to. Sociology, for sure, and I think now of - I’m not a sociologist myself so there must be more recent and more productive types of sociology that one could refer to – but I’m thinking of the sorts of analysis that you find in Erving Goffman about the presentation of self in everyday life. If you want to understand sitting for a portrait, which is like a very intensified form of presenting yourself towards another person or in a social context, those kinds of sociological accounts are going to be really useful. If I had a couple of hours to think about this, I probably would come up with other disciplines that could be useful. The one other thing that comes to mind - and this has not been in any way triggered by the excerpts that you’ve shown, but it’s an issue that I think we should all be more aware of - is colonial studies and post-colonial studies, and issues around decolonisation. When you speak of power relations, earlier on - lots of portraits of people from other cultures, people in the colonies etcetera, involve these kinds of [devious?] power relationships, and so if we would want to know more about these, we would definitely have to consult people who actually study this and do research on this, so that would be another discipline, for sure, to involve in the study of portrait sitting, specifically, then, of particular kinds of portraits.

Dawn: Mhmm. Great, yeah absolutely. Okay, brilliant. So I just have two more questions for you today. And this is around just a chance to reflect on the discussion so far and to raise anything that’s been absent from that discussion. So I’d like to ask: Are there any other questions you think I should have asked today? Or is there anything else you’d like to say about the accounts that we’ve talked about, or these topics?

Interviewee: First of all, I want to reiterate something I said at the start. But now, knowing some of the things that you are working on, I can say with more confidence that I think your project is an extremely interesting one, and I [sound disturbance] it’s going to be very conducive to interesting research results, I think, and it’s a project that is certainly worth undertaking and might, I think, make not just a contribution to art history, but - if I’m thinking about accounts of portrait sitting for instance - also the philosophy of art and philosophy of portraiture in particular. So, all credit to you, I think it’s really interesting and exciting. Since I, just by thinking out loud, arrived at issues around colonisation etcetera, given also the period that you’re looking at - I don’t know whether in your research this is the only period you’re going to focus on - but that might be something you need to, or may want to, look into. So if you’re looking at portraits from that period, this was still the British Empire, the two World Wars, so more global perspectives, I think, might… I don’t know. By all means you need to delineate your research, and I’m sure your supervisor will be able to advise you in exactly the right way. But just thinking out loud, if you ask me was there something that maybe I had expected to come in there and wasn’t there… I can’t say I expected issues around colonisations to come in but, having reflected on all the examples that you’ve just given me, maybe that’s something that is not there that is maybe at the background of this particular era, that you might want to thematise in some way. What was the second question that you asked?

Dawn: Is there anything else you’d like to add about the accounts? Or any of the topics we’ve covered? But thank you for your comments on colonisation.

Interviewee: Yeah. It’s not my area of expertise either, but I think it’s interesting and important. No, in itself, not… except I come away from this thinking that this is very fruitful and very promising. [Redacted]

Dawn: Thank you ever so much. [Redacted], thanks for your interest in the research and for such an engaging conversation. It’s been brilliant to hear your thoughts and to get your input into this project, so thank you for making the time. […]

[…]