Face-Work: Making Hair Matter in Sixteenth-Century Central Europe

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ABSTRACT

Bringing gender history, the history of the body and art history into a conversation with material culture studies, this article argues that the sudden fashionability of beards in Renaissance Europe has been intricately linked with a culture of material and visual experimentation. I propose shifting perspectives from a focus on the symbolism of beards towards examining how early modern ways of material engagement with the matter of hair crafted a visual attention to facial hair that made up the sociocultural significance of beards. Focusing on how people made hair matter, I suggest working with the concept of face-work. In particular, this article maps how the Reformation upheavals and the rise of new visual practices dynamised Renaissance protagonists’ creative engagement with facial hair as a means for staging the self.

Crafting the visual attention to renaissance beards

In 1610, the Augsburg art dealer Philipp Hainhofer sent a drawing to Philipp II of Pomerania that portrayed the duke with an elegant beard. A close view reveals that the beard was a literally telling attribute as it was composed by pious wordings that visualised Philipp’s religious sovereignty.1 How was it possible, culturally speaking, that beards functioned as speaking attributes in the material Renaissance? To answer this question, this article brings gender history, the history of the body and art history into a conversation with material culture studies. Focusing on beards in sixteenth-century Central Europe, I reconsider the matter of hair in a society which was ‘intimately involved with how things were made and what they were made from’.2 In the Renaissance, craft expertise and the body were significant means through which to experience subjectivity in relation to material and visual cultures of making.3 This observation invites historians to rethink the significance of hair in regard to the embodied aspects of a material and visual culture that made up the Renaissance symbolic universe. I thus propose a shift of perspective in research on the history of hair. While previous scholarship has focused on the symbolic meanings of hair, I examine how early modern ways of material engagement with the matter of hair crafted a visual attention to facial hair that made up the sociocultural significance of beards.4 Instead of solely focusing on the symbolism of hair in sixteenth-century Central Europe, I focus on how people made hair matter. I argue that the increasing fashionability of beards in the Renaissance has been intricately linked with an age of material and visual experimentation and the
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rise of portraiture in particular. For examining early modern protagonists’ knowledge about how (the matter of) hair mattered for making subjectivity a material reality, I suggest working with the concept of face-work.

Art historians have noticed the conspicuous prominence of beards in portraits of Renaissance men like Bartolomeo Panciatichi, who lived through Europe’s sixteenth-century confessional strife. Born in 1507, Panciatichi grew up as a wealthy Florentine merchant’s son in Lyon. Here, Panciatichi encountered Protestantism before settling in Catholic Florence in 1538/39 where he immediately started a political career in the service of the Medici. Already in 1541, Panciatichi was appointed a member of the local academy and he became the Tuscan consul in France in 1545.5 At the time of his move to Florence and literary ennoblement, Panciatichi commissioned the famous Medici court artist Agnolo Bronzino to paint a portrait of him with a magisterial beard (Figure 1). Douglas Biow has argued that ‘Panciatichi surely aimed to flaunt his distinction through [this] elaborate beard’:

‘So distinct is Panciatichi’s highly textured beard that it stands out in the upper center of the canvas. His beard is also formally echoed in the poised forearms placed as perfectly parallel lines at slightly different levels, the fingers of the right and left hands coupled in balanced pairs, and, perhaps most conspicuously, the sets of elegant, snail-shaped, ornamental window braces receding into the background just to the left of the centrally located beard, each of which represents so many smaller, architectural mirror images of the beard. The inverted twin peaks of the beard, so centrally located in the canvas, thus provide the model for the reiterated visual motifs within the canvas itself.’6

In this portrait, the beard was a central element which deserves further analysis as a visual act that functioned in context of everyday performances.7 Bronzino’s portrait of the sitter’s wife, painted around the same time, mirrors the very same visual elements (Figure 2). Her fingers resemble the gesture of her husband’s hand and the shape of his beard. The portraits present an elaborate visual grammar whose syntax was centred upon Panciatichi’s beard. Soon after their completion, the paintings gained fame among contemporaries like Giorgio Vasari, who praised the artist’s ‘infinite diligence’ in producing such vivid representations of the couple so ‘that they seem truly living.’8 Given that contemporaries knew these paintings and praised their artistic quality and lifelike appeal, it is highly plausible that Panciatichi wanted them to be displayed in his new surroundings when starting his political career as a wealthy humanist-politician in Florence. For this reason, the banker-merchant drew on the established genre of double portraits after his marriage with Lucrezia di Gismondo Pucci in 1534. According to the traditions of this genre, such portraits established a space of interactive and sophisticated visual references. Panciatichi thus most likely also considered the use of the prominent visual analogies centred around his beard.

This is exactly what fellow commissioners of portraits did in sixteenth-century Italy. Condottiere Gian Galeazzo Sanvitale, count of Fontanellato, commissioned Parmigianino to paint him with a flamboyant beard (Figure 3). The artist’s preparatory sketches show that Parmigianino was particularly keen to study the sitter’s beard (Figures 4 and 5). When producing the painting, Parmigianino decided to change some elements that strengthened the visual prominence of the sitter’s elaborated moustache and the many-twisted peaks of the beard. Again, the beard was consciously made a prominent key to the portrait’s visual programme that was reiterated through visual
Figure 1: Agnolo di Cosimo (Bronzino); portrait of Bartolomeo Panciatichi, around 1540, oil on panel, 104 × 85 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. ©Wikimedia commons. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

citations. Such an approach is mirrored in early modern theoretical literature on how artists may capture the sitter’s physical appearance and inner qualities by true-to-life portrayals that present the sitter with a particular sign (segno).

This observation urges us to think about the artist’s role in this game that established the visual referencing of the beard, especially as many further portrait paintings
of Bronzino, Parmigianino and Giovanni Battista Moroni – to name only a few – confirm the prominence of the figure of the bearded man. Panciatichi’s conspicuous beard in Bronzino’s painting reminds of Vasari’s description of how Leonardo da Vinci approached such figures. The artist
Figure 3: Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola (Parmigianino); portrait of Galeazzo Sanvitale, 1524. Oil on canvas, 109 × 81 cm, Museo nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples. ©Wikimedia commons. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
… was always fascinated when he saw a man of striking appearance, with a strange head of hair or beard; and anyone who attracted him he would follow about all day long and end up seeing so clearly in his mind’s eye that when he got home he could draw him as if he were standing there in the flesh.¹²

The figure of the artist, thus, was portrayed as a person with a particular ability to see, to experience and to reproduce the visual attention to hair that this society celebrated for its inherent meanings of experiencing, staging and representing notions of subjectivity and emotions – this observation is valid for both, the artist and the portrayed.

These paintings exemplify the ‘Renaissance of beard value’.¹³ With the reference to this term, historians have debated the return of the fashionability of beards around 1500. Elliot Horowitz understood such a change as a ‘semiotic shift’ in the Renaissance symbolism of beards. In response to the European colonial conquest of the Americas and its largely beardless indigenous cultures, he argued, facial hair became an integral part of ‘European identity’.¹⁴ Such an interpretation, however, falls short to recognise the polysemy of beards. In sixteenth-century Italy, Biow argued, beards rather became fashionable to compensate for contemporary sentiments of endangered masculinities.¹⁵ In the early modern period, as Will Fisher put it, ‘facial hair often conferred masculinity: the beard made the man’.¹⁶ Such interpretations, however, hardly ever expand beyond a discussion of the ‘symbolic power of the beard’ or, as
Mark Johnston phrased it, the ‘semiotic’ functioning of facial hair within ‘systems of symbolic value formation’. Hence, historians have prioritised the study of the symbolism and cultural value of Renaissance beards. This has come at the cost of reducing early modern beards to their representational symbolism, for instance, as a ‘potent symbol of gravity, wisdom, discretion, and virility’ that aims at ‘exposing the beard’s phallic symbolism’.

This article shifts perspectives by anchoring the debate about the Renaissance of the beard within recent historiography on the material Renaissance, thus, this period’s heightened and experimental engagement with the malleability and transformability of a vibrant world of matter. New practices of material and visual engagement, I argue, widened the cultural repertoire of practices that protagonists could rely upon, experiment with and exploit when staging the self. Surprisingly, it has not been discussed that debates about the Renaissance of the beard primarily rely on the analysis of portraits without making them a subject of investigation itself. The Renaissance of the beard coincided with two cultural changes across the continent upon which this article focuses. First, new political settings and the Reformation’s upheavals shook the foundations of religious belief and social life. Second, the sixteenth century was defined by new visual practices which engendered Renaissance protagonists’ creativity when enacting the beard. The rise of portraiture coincided with the spread of illustrated leaflets, new artistic techniques and the sitters’ demands for certain modes of self-fashioning in visual displays. Such changes dynamised the display of a person’s
hair in general, and a man’s beard in particular, that communicated social meanings in what I called a ‘hair-literate society’. In consequence, hair mattered yet its visual attention had to be carefully crafted.

The face-work of bearded protagonists

How can historians study the symbolic and material universe of Renaissance beards? I suggest approaching Renaissance beards as embodied performances, visual acts and social practices that were embedded in a material culture which made hair matter to stage subjectivity. Current examples help outlining this approach. For decades, ‘beard clubs’ have run regular national and international championships. Participants compete with each other to convince the jurors that their beard is the most elaborate, according to certain pre-set classifications of beard types and the tools that are allowed to be used for grooming. In addition, a person’s beard should fit with his entire appearance. Researchers describe such events as a social theatre in which protagonists compete in managing attention and in making the beard a prominent element to produce an image. Such hair-related image making are visual and performative acts that require a certain degree of creativity and imagination as well as visual skills in dealing with the beard. Therefore, the term ‘bearded protagonists’ is applied to those who partake in this conscious game of drafting and staging subjectivity in regard to the beard. ‘Bearding’, in that sense, is a material engagement with one’s hair that results from serious efforts and investments in terms of money, time and social resources for the sake of creating and managing attention. This invites historians to rethink beard grooming as a form of sociability and performative image making that necessitates social, visual and cultural competence over the appearance of the body alongside expertise in creativity and competition.

I conceptualise this observation with Erving Goffman’s notion of face-work, or ‘the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face’, which is ‘the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself’. Face-work relies on the situational usage of one’s ‘repertoire of face-saving practices’. Resulting from a person’s choice between a ‘matrix of possibilities’, face-work is a social skill. This selection necessitates an ‘exercise (in) perceptiveness’ and a skilled evocation and modulation of ‘visual attention’ in order to make face-to-face communication consistent with a person’s image.

It is correct to criticise Goffman’s work for its lack of historicity; yet an understanding of face-work as social practices leads historians to conceptualise beards as performative acts by which people stage emotions, claim social bonds and conceive of subjectivity through body practices in very particular situations, cultural settings and historical contexts. Building on the concept of face-work, I reconsider the actor- and situation-centred nature of forms of material engagement with facial hair in sixteenth-century Central Europe, and how this Renaissance material engagement affected face perception and thereby made hair a carrier of broader symbolic meanings and cultural concepts in acts of ‘face-to-face’ interaction among ‘signifying subjects’. The concept of face-work thus helps historians to examine the ways in which the material and visual engagement with hair in general, and beards in particular, shaped subjects’ forms of seeing, knowing and acting. Critical here are the ways that actual images
could shape face-work in regard to hair or, to say it more succinctly, to what extent a framed face reframed faces. 25

The matter of the body: Face-work in reformation Germany

In sixteenth-century Germany, body practices made hair matter for staging concepts of embodied subjectivity. A telling example for this is the Duke Georg of Saxony, whose masculinity became at stake in early Reformation debates. Having been an initial supporter of Martin Luther, Georg became his opponent soon after the Leipzig debates. He ordered all Lutheran bibles to be confiscated and initiated an alliance against the spread of Protestantism. This prompted Luther to engage in a literary battle over the duke’s honour as a ruler and a man. 26 In his correspondence, the reformer called Georg an unsinnig ruler who was ‘more than frantic’. In a pamphlet, Luther even described Georg as a wanton and keck Meuchler, a ‘proud and crude ass’ whose bodily liquids were hardened (verstockt). 27 This was a harsh accusation as ‘early modern perceptions of the body were marked by this attentiveness to bodily fluids and juices, to their motions, interruptions, consistency and purity in interaction with heat, cold, emotions, nourishment and movement’. In that context, ‘the “flow” itself was not merely a fluid, but the juice of life’. 28 Hardened fluxes, in a consequence, affected a man’s health as much as his social setting and manhood. The duke, whose bodily integrity Luther had accused, himself responded to this defamation in a pamphlet by stating that he would personally send the reformer ‘with a bloody head to the furious devil and his mother, the whore, at the nether hell’. Georg also directly replied to a quote of Luther by calling the monk a kuttenpube, a monkish boy with a cowl, who is himself the world’s ‘biggest and coarsest ass and fool’. 29 In such early Reformation debates, opponents focused on the materiality of men’s bodies in order to challenge their societal standing by talking about hardened fluids and their consequences for manhood. Such body-related representations mattered, as Lyndal Roper emphasised, ‘because the image of the reformer was central to how the Reformation was propagated and how Lutheran identities were created’. 30

In the light of these Reformation debates on masculinity and the body’s physical constitution, Georg’s decision to grow a beard is a telling response. When his wife, Barbara Jagiellon, died in February 1534, Georg decided to avoid shaving in order to show what he called his ‘sorrowful disposition’. 31 The duke not only addressed his beard-related face-work in letters, but Georg also initiated a remarkable visual campaign for propagating his new bearded appearance. While he had earlier rarely been portrayed as a clean-shaven ruler, Georg now commissioned Lucas Cranach to draw an altarpiece portrait for his burial chapel in Meißen. The Cranach portrait was distributed via prints which contemporaries collected and pasted into their own copies of cosmographies. Countless medals likewise displayed the duke’s magisterial beard. That five-year-long visual campaign conferred on him the lasting name ‘George the Bearded’. 32

The sudden growth of facial hair, however, did more than express his grief. It also staged a potent ruler’s physical response to his recently challenged honour as a man in a time, in which religious and dynastical conflicts intermingled. With the outbreak of the Reformation, the divide of the Saxonian house into the two houses of the Albertiner and Ernestiner was mirrored in religious terms. Whilst the latter, above all...
Frederick III, supported Luther, the Albertine Georg was a prominent opponent of the reformer. Luther had just recently attacked Georg’s bodily integrity and masculinity when the duchess died. Their two sons, Johann and Frederick, died shortly afterwards. At that time, the familial strand of the elderly Georg had no male heir. In that context, the display of masculine hair became important to Georg.

When dynastic and religious conflicts intermingled and the ruler’s manliness was at stake, Georg’s decision to grow a beard was a conscious act of face-work to stage male power. Early modern physicians considered beard growth to be the by-product of the concoction of semen through a man’s bodily heat caused by the existence of hot yellow bile. The growth of the beard, intrinsically linked to the quality and quantity of a man’s semen, was itself a symbol of sexual virility. As such, sexual behaviour also had an impact on hair. Paracelsus stated that coitus posed a threat to the balance of bodily temperatures and liquids. This may result in the increased production of salt, he argued, which exits the body via the skin of the head and causes the loss of scalp hair. Such sex-related interpretations of hair loss had a long tradition that was strengthened by Renaissance humanists’ interest in ancient philosophers. Aristotle, the most prominent reference point for sixteenth-century anatomists, stated that men’s ‘eyelashes do not grow, but fall off, when sexual activity begins, and the … greater this activity is’. Aristotle explicitly mentions that the loss of hair only ‘occurs in a man [when] he has entered upon sexual activity’. Similarly, regular yet not excessive sexual activity kept the fluxes in motion. It kept the concoction of semen alive and made the beard grow. Given that Luther had called Georg a wanton man of hardened liquids, the ruler’s new status as a widower, which coincided with sexual abstinence, was another challenge for the balance of his body’s fluxes. The impressive beard demonstrated that Georg’s fluxes were anything but hardened even though he was abstinent. The beard consciously staged the ruler’s sexual potency, stating Georg’s political power in a time of a threatened lineage.

The Saxonian rulers’ substantial collection of razors, shaving brushes and combs bear witness to the fact that people actively cared for hair in early modern Germany. They spent large amounts of money and time on managing self-presentation within their hair-literate communities. Going to the barbershop, the place where razors were used, diseases were cured and rumours were shared, meant managing one’s own physical appearance for staging sociability and subjectivity when going to church services, weddings or marketplaces. Everyday bearding, thus, was embedded in a broader material culture of early modern face-work.

Access to and the usage of such tools granted the beard a physical and visual presence in everyday life that people consciously staged. As the diary of Hieronymus Schlick exemplifies, postponing the shaving of a beard could stage a renewed faith. Educated in orthodox Lutheranism, the Bohemian nobleman travelled Central Europe, converted to Calvinism and was even called to the priesthood of the Reformed German parish in Genève in 1580. Schlick became a close friend of the Reformed theologian Théodore de Bèze who was famous amongst contemporaries for both his religious radicalism and his long beard. Around the very same time, Schlick attended the wedding of the clean-shaven duke of Mansfeld-Artern. Accompanied by his Lutheran relatives, the Calvinist appeared with an unshaven beard that likely provoked indignation. Hans Ulrich Krafft is another example of conscious beard-related face-work. The
A patrician from Ulm had served Ottomans as a slave between 1574 and 1577. When he returned via Wrocław and Opava, he stated, ‘I spread out my beard a bit and took on a sour face’ to avoid being recognised by former acquaintances. Making beards matter for staging subjectivity required expertise in materials. Above all, the domestic world of medicine allowed protagonists to innovatively groom themselves for the day. So-called Probierbüchlein, handwritten and printed collections of recipes, contained countless instructions for perfuming and dyeing hair. In medical manuals, physicians described a variety of products that might promote the growth of hair. Brunschwig started his Excellent and Complete Home Medicine Chest, printed in 1537, with recipes against hair loss and dandruff. Burning pigeon droppings, mixing the ash with water and applying the liquid on the head, he states, effectively stops the loss of hair. Otherwise, either the ash of a burnt frog or a mixture of oak leaves, oak bark and water serves the same purpose. A shampoo containing cottonwood roots or a mixture of vinegar, wheat bran and boiling water made antidandruff agents. In his Book of Remedies, a sixteenth-century German bestseller, a Württemberg court physician presented further recipes for the production of ointments that dyed hair blond and also improved memory. Early modern German craftsmen specialised in the production of combs and merchants established long-distance trade in combs. In late fifteenth-century Naples, for instance, French residents were selling the considerable number of 5,000 combs to a German merchant.

Such instructions and tools aimed at experimental knowledge and domestic use. Indeed, people were eager to collect and try such recipes. Anna of Saxony even asked Danish courtiers to send her recipes for the art (Kunst) ‘that makes hair pretty and proper, also that makes it grow and thicken’. The 19-year-old student Felix Platter, a physician who later declared the connection of facial hair and semen in his medical treatises, used another ointment for managing problems with beard growth and its serious social and gendered implications. Together with another student, he secretly used that ointment at night, unfortunately, to no avail. Even their more frequent shavings did not promote the growth of facial hair. Beardless Platter noted such efforts in his diary because he was afraid that the Basel committee of bearded physicians may reject his request to start a surgery due to his perceived lack of maturity. Also sixteenth-century German costume albums suggest that women used such recipes and dyed their hair, at least partially, blond, red, green or even blue. Women also wove coloured threads into plaits and used artificial hair in various colours. People similarly copied the illustrations and comments in early modern treatises on physiognomy that outlined how the nature and appearance of hair may hint at a person’s character. All these observations show that people valued the components of products and practices of making that enabled them to stage hair in a certain way. The body’s materiality had intrinsic meanings which mattered for the meanings that people attributed to hair. Consequently, expertise in actual face-work related to a person’s hair is well documented. There was thus particular work to do with hair for ‘facing the day’ in the correct manner.

**Imag(in)ing the beard: Face-work in the arts**

Sixteenth-century hair-literate society had a particular interest in the visual representation of beards. Since men’s decisions on hairstyles often served everyday
performances of confessionality and gender, men were particularly eager to have their beards portrayed in a lifelike manner if they commissioned artwork. Matthäus Schwarz, the Catholic head accountant of the Augsburg Fugger family, wore his ‘first beard’ during a sojourn in Lutheran Nuremberg in 1523. The beard staged Schwarz’s transmission from boyhood to manhood to a wider public, a moment which he wished to have captured in a separate image in his costume album. When returning to Augsburg, however, twenty-six-year-old Schwarz shaved again since the inhabitants of that bi-confessional city approached such tiny beards with reservations: it was worn by the young emperor Charles V. Only later, aged 38, would Schwarz start to wear facial hair as a sign of maturity and his desire to marry. In his album, Schwarz pointed out that the artist Narziß Renner had succeeded in representing his face-work in an appropriate manner: ‘the face [also: appearance, angesicht] was well captured’, Schwarz states, and ‘that is when I began to grow a beard’. These comments illustrate how much a lifelike visual representation of the physical appearance of beards was valued. The German phrasing for ‘bearding’ (Bartt ziehen), which Schwarz decided to use for describing the miniature drawing, also implies a processual activity. Obviously, he considered important that this moment of personal decision and of physical transformation be represented in a trustworthy manner. Schwarz wished his face-work to be documented and he also wished to comment on the quality of this documentation in written form. The visual attention to hair, which coincided with a material engagement with the body on the one hand and the rise of portraiture on the other, made him address the act of visual representation that art production offered the portrayed person. At least, he was keen to document his claim for the visual act’s authenticity.  

Schwarz was anything but an exception as many patrons approached artists with ideas in mind of how the beard should be transformed into a visual feature; and these bearded protagonists were likewise eager to comment on the visual act itself in order to document their twofold visual skills in face-work both in reality and in art production. In 1518, the Freiburg law student Bonifacius Amerbach had carefully chosen the wording of an epigram which Hans Holbein had to use for a portrait: the ‘drawn face’, as realistic as it was created by God, was reproduced in an artwork that ‘mirrors with diligence what is my nature’. Some months later, now living in Basel, Amerbach commissioned Holbein to draw another portrait, this time beardless. Again, he consciously crafted the epigram: as once art had imitated the clever nature of the bearded man, the new portrait shows a clean-shaven Amerbach who had read the critique offered by his learned hero Erasmus in the meantime: ‘If a long beard makes the philosopher’, Erasmus stated, ‘why then shouldn’t a bearded billygoat be Plato?’ Amerbach’s face-work and his desire for certain artistic representations created a visual attention to the beard’s presence and absence that staged his erudition. With him, many men imagined the beard’s everyday perception as well as its artistic representation in images. The act of commissioning a portrait, thus, meant to imagine the beard’s perception and was itself an ‘exercise [in] perceptiveness’.  

Face-work in the arts communicated cultural meanings of hair that were related to the portrayed person’s subjectivity. Commissioning a portrait also made the person imagine this visual act as a communicative performance. Visual face-work could also turn beards into chivalric attributes as the Nuremberg field marshal Sebald Schirmer’s portrait, commissioned in 1545, illustrates (Figure 6). When the emperor’s Catholic
troops started to fight the Lutheran Schmalkadic League, Nuremberg’s image as a self-fortified imperial Lutheran city was symbolised by Schirmer’s chivalric acts. Armour and beard staged both chivalry and strength. South German urban and Habsburg court élites therefore cultivated particularly long beards. The imperial military councillor,
Andreas Rauber, cultivated a beard that reached down to the floor, and it was widely known that Rauber could lift an entire anvil with his beard. Such beard styles became so closely associated with chivalry that the emperor himself granted Hans Staininger’s family the hereditary status of nobility because of his almost two-metre-long beard.\textsuperscript{54}

For creating visual attention towards his beard-centred face-work, Schirmer commissioned a well-established artist. Georg Pencz had been trained in the workshop of Dürer, who himself was called \textit{barbatus} for the extensive everyday care of his hair. Pencz’s paintings already adorned the chamber of the Nuremberg city council to whom Schirmer presented his portrait.\textsuperscript{55} Schirmer wished his portrait to fit a visual ensemble of civic, military and political pride. Pencz used all his expertise to establish the visual prominence of Schirmer’s beard. Again, the fingers of the left hand resonate with the sitter’s two-stranded beard whose texture is highlighted by the silver armour that shines through the single strands of his facial hair. By drawing the reflection of the sitter’s face onto his helmet’s shimmering surface, Pencz even duplicates Schirmer’s beard that is now shown in front view and in profile. This allowed Pencz to comment on debates between the arts as sculptors had blamed painters for not being able to show a subject from different views at the same time. This visual stratagem similarly established the sitter’s beard as a focal point in the painting’s visual programme and also staged the heroic marshal as a connoisseur of the arts and humanistic debates.\textsuperscript{56}

Another Nuremberg citizen and \textit{connoisseur des arts} with a prominent bearded appearance was Wenzel Jamnitzer, who commissioned Nicolas Neufchâtel to paint a portrait in the early 1560s (Figure 7). This painting is an astoundingly perceptive statement on the intricacy of artisanship. The many objects refer to the sitter’s many fields of activities. He was a draughtsman, engraver, designer and engineer who was praised for his understanding of perspectives and measurements. The book may be of religious content and refer to his devotional character, however it also hints at his activity as an author of books on visual perspectives and instruments. The volume’s binding appears to be worn out from its repeated opening. Also, the prominent bookmark presents the portrayed as a reader who actively engaged with books for the production of knowledge. For his contemporaries, Jamnitzer mastered making and knowing. He had gained fame for his life-castings of animals and plants that were on display in the most prominent of Central Europe’s princely collections. The portrait’s background shows a gold vessel and silver life-casting of the kind that Jamnitzer produced as table ornaments, household and collection pieces. Contemporaries praised him for his mastery of this craft. Life-castings were the results of complex moulding and casting techniques that required an artist’s skills in observation of the appearance, characteristics, behaviour and transformative character of natural materials as much as it demanded a person’s experienced knowledge of artistic procedures. Jamnitzer was well known for having this artistic refinement and craft expertise to which Neufchâtel refers, by placing one of such highly artistic products in the painting.\textsuperscript{57}

This carefully composed painting turns the sitter’s beard into an astute comment on the intricacy and ingenuity of making. Jamnitzer is shown as a man who cared for his massive beard: he wanted his facial hair to match with his general physical appearance as the colours of his collar’s fur mirror those of his beard. This represents him as a person skilled in face-work and, above all, as a person who wished this face-work to be visually represented. The texture of his exuberant beard is highlighted by
Neufchâtel who decided to contrast the matching colour of the facial and animal hair with the blackness of Jamnitzer’s cloak. As Jamnitzer was a famous expert in the mixture of colour pigments, it is convincing to assume that the colours of Neufchâtel’s painting were consciously chosen. The prevalence of gold and silver tones in the grey and auburn hair of Jamnitzer refers to the expertise of the famous goldsmith and life-caster. Contemporary recipe books of colour pigments create an awareness of how much efforts the artist had put into the representation of facial hair. For producing
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A colour for the depiction of grey hair, a German book declares in 1552, an artist should mix ‘white lead’, ‘ash blue’ and ‘paper black’, which shall then be ‘shaded with thin indigo’. Mixing the pigments for auburn hair demanded similar resources, time, skills and training: ‘purple brown’ shall be mixed with ‘peach-stone black’ and indigo or, otherwise, four drops of writing ink were to be mixed with brazilwood. A third option was to mix two parts of soot with one part of brazilwood and to add a bit of ‘green juice’, a mixture which shall be ‘shadowed with paper black’.

The painter’s face-work makes the painting itself a performative act that not only refers to but also duplicates the portrayed man’s expertise in life-casting. The artist needed to have access to particular materials, and he had to have knowledge about their properties and measurements for mixing them in addition to a long training in combining and segregating materials. Making colours was considered a likewise complex craft knowledge as the one Jamnitzer had to rely on for producing his casts. In addition, the delicate texture of the beard, whose shadows and single hair are drawn in incredible detail in front of the black cloak, recalls the ramifications of life-cast plants. Again, it brings the temporal and artistic efforts to the observer’s mind which the artist had to invest for producing this artwork. Neufchâtel presents a complex system of visual and material references that praise both Jamnitzer’s and his own expertise in cultures of making.

The portrait’s meanings relied on a complex system of visual citations that centred on the beard and that modulated the attention to facial hair in relation to the matter of arts. As so often in Renaissance portraits of bearded men, the gestures are composed by fingers positioned in pairs. This time, however, both hands do not explicitly mirror the style of the beard. They rather implicitly refer to the beard’s gendered significance for addressing the artist’s production in relation to sexuality. Both hands allure to sexualised gestures such as the mano fico, which were often represented in portraits of learned men. On the one hand, the hints to sexual activity are linked with Jamnitzer’s artistic productivity for the divider and yardstick, the working tools of Jamnitzer with which he interacts, imitate vagina and penis. The sculpture in the front likewise plays with metaphors of artistic and sexual creation. Neptune stands on top of a shell that itself conveys erotic connotations in the early modern period, when conca referenced both ‘shell’ and ‘vagina’; Neptune’s trident points towards the drawing addressing again the relationship between production and reproduction. As such, the artistic activity of Jamnitzer’s hands, here depicted as traversing the divider’s spread legs, is characterised as a quasi-sexual act of creation. Authors of Renaissance treatises recommended artists not to have sex in abundance as this would make a man’s hand ‘more shiver and tremble than a leaf in the wind’. Jamnitzer’s conspicuous beard, which was loaded with meanings of manliness and sexuality, mirrored and enabled such visual citations as the colour of the painted hair referred to the artist’s working tools as much as to the products of his artistic activity. Jamnitzer’s beard was an identifying feature. It alluded to his skills in highly refined artistic techniques and his mastery in partaking in a culture of making materials matter for the crafting of things.

The painting’s symbolic universe centred around the beard of the sitter through a complex web of visual citations; actual face-work that referred to the products and
the techniques of producing life-castings and goldsmithery. Neufchâtel’s skilful depiction of Jamnitzer’s beard, thus the act of drawing which eternalised the sitter’s everyday face-work just like he would do when life-casting evanescent plants, is itself addressed as a casting technique which makes the painter a life-caster and the painted beard an actual life-casting. Vasari’s aforementioned comments on Bronzino’s portrait of Panciatichi, as well as the statement of Schwarz that Renner had depicted his own beard in a good manner, underline that the visual representation of beards was particularly appreciated if the artist succeeded in the production of visual effects that communicated lifelikeness. Painters obtained such through patient observation of nature (hair), skilful training in making processes (imitation) and craft knowledge of the materials of which the products (the body and the paintings) were made. In that context, the usage of the brush and its stroke (slag) as contemporary art-theorist Karel van Mander stated, was of particular significance: ‘It is therefore advisable to acquire through practice a natural and competent way of painting foliage, in a good “slag” [the right type of brushstrokes applied in the right rhythm] for herein lies the strength: you must be able to do that’. Van Mander continues by calling in an artist’s constant practice

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\ldots \text{in the hope that with time one achieves one’s goal; yet it turns out not to be an art that can be learned like (training) the muscles of the body; for leaves, hair, skies and draped textiles, all that is a question of spirited handling [of the brush], and [only] the spirit can teach one to produce it.}^65
\]

The visual act of the performance of bodies thus was considered an artist’s embodied and creative knowledge. The imitation and imagination of the matter of hair through material means mattered for staging early modern beards as visual acts. The category of face-work is therefore to be applied to both, a person’s conscious body practices in regard to facial hair and an artist’s pictorial product that shows hair. Hence, artists’ material engagement with hair was crucial for the imagined, hair-related self-fashioning that the sitter and commissioner asked for. Consequently, artists invested great effort in painting hair in ways that cited, represented and animated its cultural meanings for Renaissance observers. As seen above, pigment recipes made artists consciously engage with the matter of hair. The same is true for brushes as artists used actual hair to produce the visual effects that mattered for depicting the matter of hair. Vasari, for instance, praised Raphael for his abilities in using brushwork for creating perceptive effects of lifelike bodies: ‘every stroke of colour made by the brush in the heads, hands, and feet appears to be living flesh rather than mere paint applied by the hand of an artist’. The matter of hair, as crafted in the arts, made such paintings a visual act itself in which the materials of hair – both physical and painted hair – mattered for face-work. Cennino Cennini’s Libro dell’arte states that artists should ‘first learn how to make … brushes’ and the sheer detail of his instructions on how to turn hair into useful tools to depict hair visually illustrate the degree to which artists themselves were trained to know, handle and use the material properties of hair for creating its visual impression. A mid-sixteenth-century German print instructed painters to use the curly and particularly sturdy hair of the tails of Siberian squirrels or stoats for making ‘good brushes’. Otherwise, the hair of the tails of polecats or guinea pigs is recommended. Artists also participated in a vibrant market of trading brushes

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whose hair varied in thickness, origin and characteristics. In his correspondence with
the Duke of Pomerania, the Augsburg arts agent Hainhofer reported to have invested
in diverse types of brushes. Artists, thus, were proficient in analysing the material
properties of hair and working with it; producing and handling the delicacy of thin
and resilient hairbrushes was a material necessity to create visual effects that mirror
the actual matter of hair.

Renaissance artists’ treatises and artistic works thus document their skills in han-
dling hair for painting hair. Such texts and artworks hint at the proficiency that
sixteenth-century artists had evolved for dealing with hair. A comparison between the
sketches and paintings of Holbein the Younger illustrates that the preparatory sketches
particularly focused on the sitter’s hair (Figures 8–13). Holbein was well acquainted
with the beard-focused imaginative repertoire and pictorial wishes of men like Boni-
facius Amerbach, as we have seen above. After his settlement in England, Holbein
studied the sitter’s hair in detail and his sketches aimed at training his hand in produc-
ing a clear visual scheme that he later transferred to the paintings. Such sketches were
first steps of visual face-work that helped the artist to study the bodily face-work of
the sitter and his imagined visual representation. Most interestingly, Holbein’s portrait
of Simon George initially showed a man with a short beard resembling the preparatory
sketch (Figures 8 and 9). X-rays show the artist’s later additions that amended the sit-
ter’s beard which had grown considerably in the meantime. Visual displays, thus, were
subjected to the transformation of the sitter’s body. That George wished to represent
this physical transformation may also have been related to the beard’s sexual meanings
as he used the painting for courting women.

The much-desired lifelike representation of beards was based on techniques, ex-
periences and skills. Producing a life mask, for instance, can only hardly capture fa-
cial and head hair, wherefore Cennini advised the reader to begin by shaving off the
person’s beard and covering the face with a ‘rose-scented, perfumed oil’ by using ‘a
good-sized minever brush’.

Exactly because an artist’s visual face-work was a chal-
lenging task that relied on his experience and expertise as much as it demonstrated
his skills, the production of visual effects that resemble and imitate the matter of hair
was a material challenge and expertise. For making hair matter, the visual act of the
production and representation of the sitter’s well-staged beard itself was an act of face-
work that staged visual and artistic skills. The skilful mastery of this visual game was
an artistic expertise that was worth documenting and commenting on.

The emphasis on face-work as a person’s hair staged in everyday performances, the
imagined perception of a man’s beard, his visual competence in presenting physical
and visual hair, as well as an artist’s uses of materials for crafting a visually illusive
representation of hair all made hair matter for staging subjectivity. In that sense, Re-
naissance portrait paintings were not examples of a ‘distanced bodiliness’ (*distanzierte
Körperlichkeit*). The material representation of the body was rather itself an embodied
experience, which was grounded in complex cultures of making that made the body’s
physical appearance matter for staging cultural concepts. Consequently, the depic-
tion of the beard was not a copying procedure of mere representation, but a visual
and material act of face-work grounded in the cultural appreciation of knowledge of
making.
**Figure 8:** Hans Holbein the Younger; portrait of Simon George, circa 1535, chalks (black and coloured), pen, brush and ink on paper, 28.1 × 19.3 cm, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle. ©Wiki-media commons. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
The material reality of face-work, a man’s engagement with his beard and an artists’ innovative engagement with its depiction, in fact, did more than to create visual attention to beards – it turned beards into literally telling attributes. In 1610, Philipp II, Duke of Pomerania, appointed the Augsburg merchant Hainhofer as agent and art dealer. Hainhofer, whom we already encountered as a person active in buying brushes, decided to express his gratitude for this ducal appointment with a special gift. He dispatched two Schreibmeisterblätter with portrayals of the duke and the duchess that were composed by calligraphy (Figures 14 and 15). This artisanship flourished in the social circles frequented by Hainhofer. His Augsburg business opponent, Sebastian Welser, had bought a Schreibmeister-manual in Antwerp and commented on one page that ‘my writing is even more beautiful than this one’. The author of this book,
Figure 10: Hans Holbein the Younger; portrait of William Reskimer, circa 1532–1534, chalks (black and coloured), pen, ink and metalpoint on paper, 29.0 × 21.0 cm, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle. ©Wikimedia commons. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
Figure 11: Hans Holbein the Younger; portrait of William Reskimer, circa 1532–1534, oil and tempera on oak, 46.4 × 33.7 cm, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle. ©Wikimedia commons. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
Figure 12: Hans Holbein the Younger; portrait of George Brooke, circa 1532–1543, chalks (black and coloured), pen, ink and metalpoint on paper, 28.9 × 20.3 cm, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle. ©Wikimedia commons. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
in fact, was a member of the wealthy Fugger family for whom Hainhofer had already worked. \textsuperscript{75} Through this artistic technique, the duke’s beard, composed of religious phrases, actually tells a story. Philipp murmurs the principles of piety in his beard so that the symbol of ducal power and manliness now illustrates Philipp’s religious sovereignty. Hainhofer’s gift stated the newly appointed agent’s access to resources that were useful for promoting the duke’s face-work in the arts. \textsuperscript{76}

The fact that even modern technology renders the golden letters barely visible is informative (Figure 16). On the one hand, this illustrates the limits of this face-work’s intelligibility. On the other, it highlights the arduous efforts and artisanal skills that artists were willing to apply in generating and managing visual attention to hair in a society whose viewing conventions were trained by miniature art. Visual attention to hair, thus, could mean focusing on a person’s single strands of facial hair and on
their actual components. Hainhofer at least imagined the recipient of these drawings to share these visual conventions of viewing single-stranded hair and to be likewise keen to detect the literal components of each painted hair.
As all these examples show, sixteenth-century Central Europe was heavily engaged in making hair matter through bodily and visual face-work that modulated visual attention to hair, and thereby made hair matter for broader cultural concepts. The way
how artists addressed hair in images created a visual attention to hair that made hair matter to people’s self-images.

**Knowing how to make the beard matter**

In Renaissance Central Europe, men carefully staged beards in body and visual practices such as hairdressing, cosmetics and drawing that relied on a creative usage of a refined material culture. I have argued that innovative engagement with hair in everyday life as well as artists’ skills in visual displays made hair matter for the staging of subjectivity and sociability. Consequently, hair not only symbolised gender, chivalry, erudition, religion or power, but was made to matter through people’s constant material and visual engagement. The usage of the actual matter of the body as well as of the matter that represented the body’s physical appearance made hair a prominent feature of the Renaissance’s symbolic universe. Men’s face-work – the ways they presented and represented beards, crafted and managed the visual attention to hair – made beards symbols for broader cultural concepts.

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Consequently, historians are urged to change their perspective in research on hair in the early modern period. Instead of simply hinting at the symbolic meanings that hair was able to convey in the sixteenth-century Renaissance of the beard, it is important to study how hair was made a meaningful matter through actual practices that generated a visual attention to hair in everyday life. This shift in perspective draws a researcher’s attention to how people established, negotiated or played with symbolic meanings of body and visual practices regarding hair in everyday settings. In this ‘hair-literate society’, both the materiality of the body and of arts mattered for face-work. Bearded protagonists staged subjectivity by making and managing the visual and material reference of hair. Expertise in face-work was thus an embodied knowledge that relied on a complex culture of making the body matter for staging early modern beards as everyday visual acts.

Knowledge on face-work and on how to make a beard matter for the performance of subjectivity was sometimes a challenging task, especially when the meanings of beards changed throughout the lifetime of the portrait. The extent to which the visual and material culture of hair mirrored Reformation debates can shed new light on Panciatichi’s Florentine portraits. Just like Sanvitale and Panciatichi in Italy, inhabitants of Reformation Germany cultivated and shaped a visual awareness of the body through their hair. Beard-related face-work, in that sense, often mirrored potentially transitional moments for a person’s image as it was also the case when Panciatichi moved from Lyon to Florence.

The significance of beard-centred visual displays, finally, leads me back to Bronzino’s portrait of Panciatichi (Figure 1) and the European implications of Reformation beards in portraiture. The prominence of the sitter’s beard, which was highlighted through the artist’s skilful play with visual references, perfectly fits other examples of men’s face-work in sixteenth-century Central Europe. The visual prominence of the beard staged Panciatichi’s image to a new audience: he fashioned himself as a learned married man who had recently become a member of the Florentine academy which was heavily supported by the Medici. Commissioning the Medici court painter staged the humanist-politician’s arrival in Florence and his successful integration into Tuscan court culture.

However, the cultural awareness of beards not only invited protagonists to creatively engage with face-work. Its potential ambiguity also tells a different transalpine story of a Renaissance man’s failure in creative face-work. Panciatichi’s beard might be considered another side of his complex entanglements with Protestant culture north of the Alps: the intellectually vivid sphere of Lyon had brought Panciatichi in contact with high figures of the French court and leading Lutheran humanists, many of them with prominent beards. After his arrival in Florence, he maintained these contacts with Huguenots and Calvinists. The Florentine Inquisition accused Panciatichi of heresy. The beard’s twin peaks could now no longer simply be seen as illustrating Panciatichi’s doubled biographical setting in Lyon and Florence, but might also be seen as demonstrating the challenge of shaping a nuanced balance of the visual attention to the beard over the course of time. His failed face-work could, perhaps, make him a scholar and a potential Protestant heretic alike for hair-literate contemporaries in Tuscany.

In this and many further cases, future research should not only ask about the symbolic meanings of beards but also study how people actually made hair a material
reality through strategies and practices of face-work that crafted and modulated the vis-
ual attention to beards – a challenge for Renaissance protagonists and historians alike.

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69. Ruffach, *Illuminierbuch*, fol. 66v.

70. Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 17.25 Aug 4°, fol. 145v (Philipp Hainhofer to the Duke of Pomerania, 14/24 August 1611): ‘Von aller sort mahlerpensel hab Ich vom Scheckhen, d[er] sie selbs macht, swol auch von den goldt vnd silber müschlin 3 st[uc]kh gekauft’.

71. Erika Michael, *Hans Holbein the Younger: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 670.

72. Cennini, *The Craftsman’s Handbook*, p. 124.

73. Horst Bredekamp, *Der Bildakt: Frankfurter Adorno-Vorlesungen 2007. Neufassung 2015* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2015), pp. 29, 111–16.

74. Landeshausarchiv Schwerin, 11.6-2/2, Nr. 36–7.

75. Wolfgang Fugger, *Ein nutzlich vnd wolgegrundt Formular, Manncherleÿ schoner schriefften (…)* (Nuremberg: Geyßler, 1553), Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Cgm 7072: ‘Meine schrifft ist noch schener als dise hir’.

76. Mundt, *Der Pommersche Kunstschrank*, pp. 53, 395.

77. See the comment of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in Preimesberger, Baader and Suthor, *Porträt*, pp. 464–5.

78. Stefan Hanß, ‘Hair, Emotions and Slavery’, p. 161.

79. In consequence, studying early modern protagonists’ material engagement with hair means to accept that the sensual engagement with the haptic as well as material epistemology of hair differed throughout history. Further research thus has to focus on examining specific early modern ways of how hair mattered for people’s view of the world and of how hair, the senses, visual attention and subjectivity were intermingled. Compare Christian Kassung, Sebastian Schwesinger and Christian Seifert, ‘Mit den Haaren hören: 1832–2014–1897’, in Horst Bredekamp and Wolfgang Schäffner (eds), *Haare hören–Strukturen wissen–Räume agieren: Berichte aus dem Interdisziplinären Labor Bild Wissen Gestaltung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), pp. 171–81; Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

80. On Panciatichi’s ambiguous confessional position, see Caravale, ‘Panciatichi, Bartolomeo’; Salvatore Caponetto, *La riforma protestante nell’Italia del Cinquecento* (Turin: Claudiana, 1992), pp. 354–6; Francesco Piavan, ‘Gli studi padovani di Bartolomeo Panciatichi’, *Quaderni per la storia dell’Università di Padova* 20 (1987), pp. 119–22; Enrico Garavelli, *Lodovico Domenichi e i ‘Nicodemiana’ di Calvino: Storia di un libro perduto e ritrovato* (Rome: Manziana, 2004), pp. 49, 52, 56–7. Compare Vasari’s reference to the *Cristo crocifisso* painting in Vasari, *Opere*, vol. 2, p. 641.

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