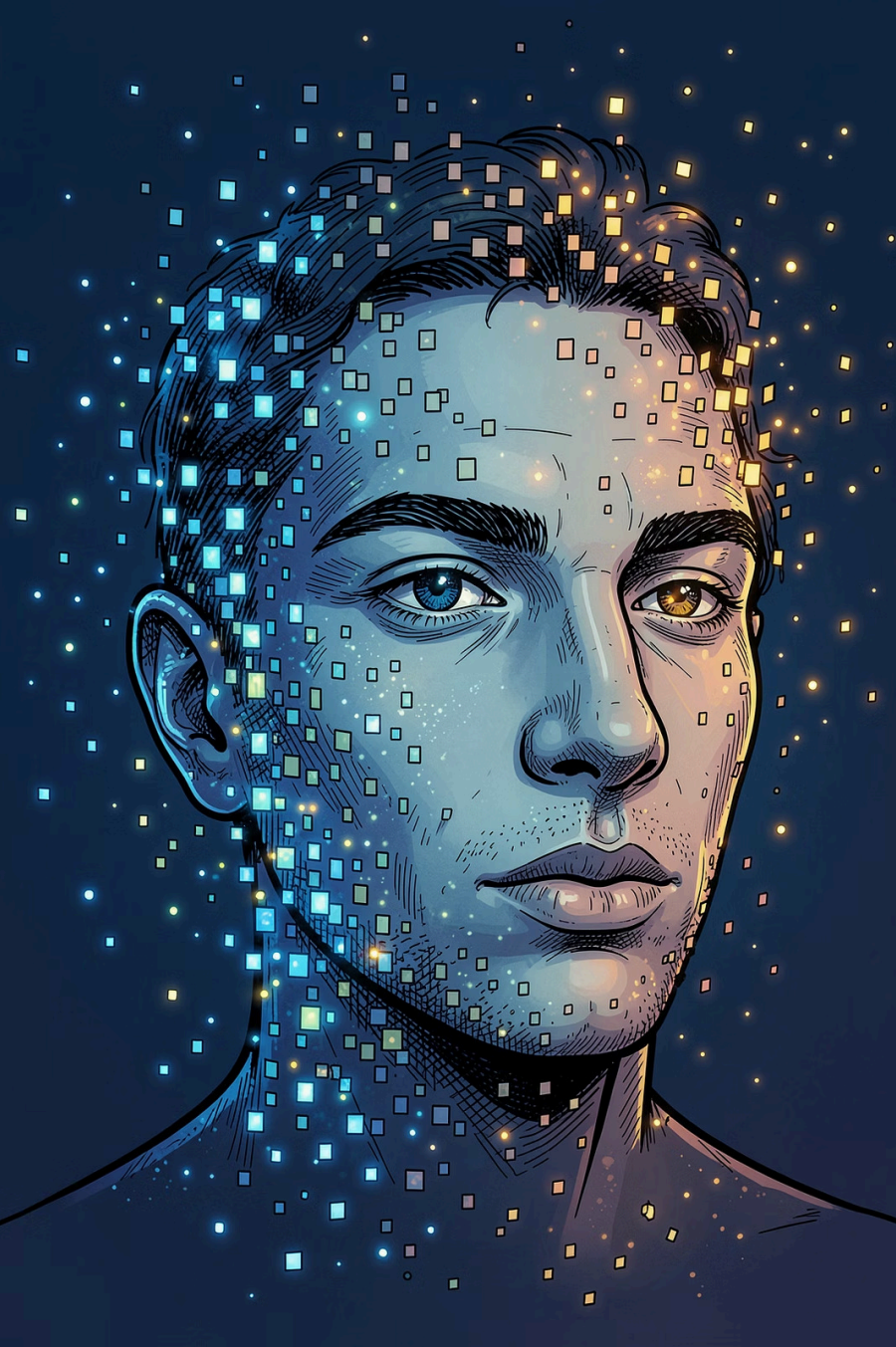




The Face Tested by Artificial Intelligences

Between Presence and Pretence

What becomes of the human face when AI can recognise, restore, modify, and generate it at will? This research confronts Emmanuel Levinas's ethical concept of the face with the transformative power of contemporary artificial intelligence.

A Visual Landscape Saturated with Faces

Advertising, cinema, social media, dating apps, and art flood our visual field with faces that silently impose norms of beauty, youth, and expression. They focus attention on **appearance** — what we give to see.

Presence

Manifestation of an irreducible otherness, felt through the senses

The AI Threat

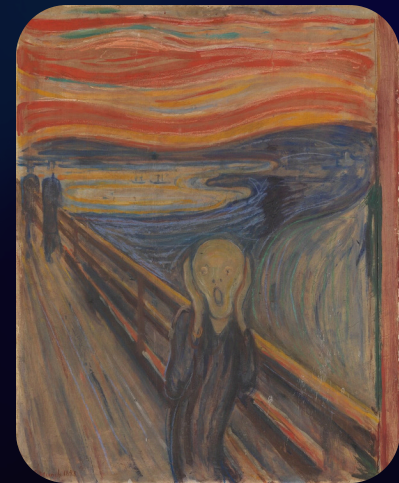
Deepfakes, identity theft, propaganda, and total surveillance

The Core Question

Can the ethical face survive its reduction to a manipulable image?



The Portrait: Representation, Not Reproduction



The portrait has never aimed to copy a face faithfully. It renders visible a **personality, status, or meaning**. Across history, Christ's face shifted — shepherd, Pantocrator, suffering martyr — each legitimate, each expressing a distinct spiritual dimension.

Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893) gives a face not to an individual but to **universal anguish**. The face becomes a surface of symbolic inscription where societies project their values and affects.

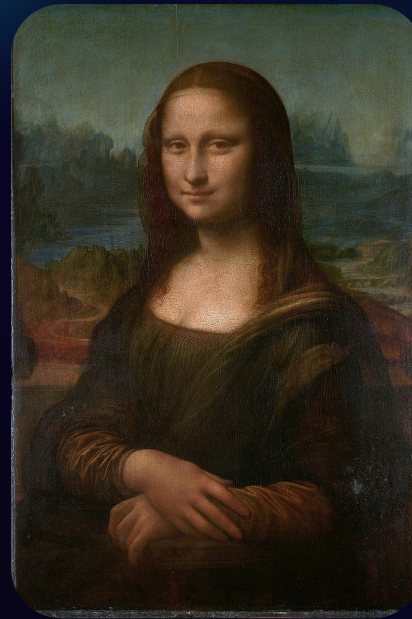
From Restoration to Decoration

Authenticity in Restoration

Restoring a painted face is an **hermeneutic act** – recovering the artist's intention, not reconstructing matter. The Mona Lisa's *sfumato* ambiguity must be preserved, not clarified. The 2012 «Ecce Homo» scandal showed that good will cannot substitute for fidelity to the original sense.

The Decorative Turn

Warhol's *Marilyn Diptych* (1962) crystallises the shift: the face becomes a **reproducible sign** of glamour and desire. Walter Benjamin's «aura» is lost – the face is everywhere recognised, yet less present than ever.

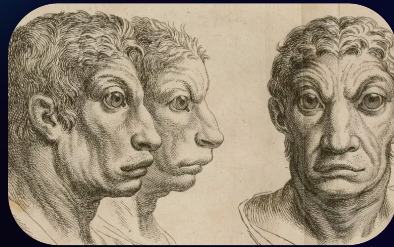


Advertising, Physiognomy & AI Manipulation



Advertising

The face becomes a **marketing instrument**. Barthes (1957): it functions as myth — detached from singular presence, converted into a naturalised cultural sign serving persuasion.



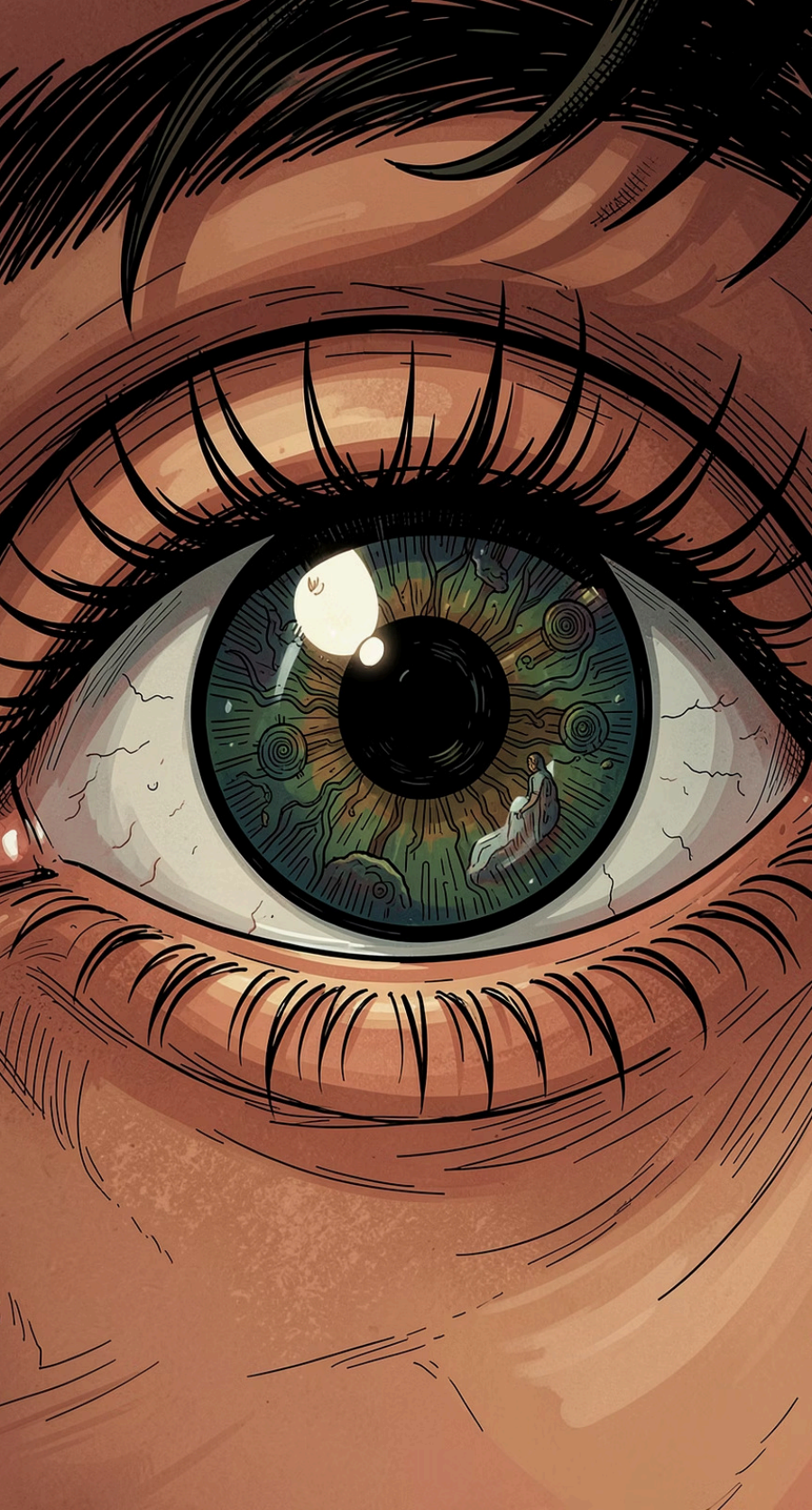
Physiognomy

From Aristotle to Lombroso (1887), the belief that traits reveal moral character. Hegel refuted it: a single brave decision can make one «incomprehensible for millennia.»



Deepfakes & Simulacra

Taylor Swift (2024): non-consensual AI images reached **tens of millions of views**. «Jessica Foster» (2025): a fully synthetic persona gained 1M+ followers — a simulacrum with no human referent.



PART 2 – LEVINAS'S FACE

The Face as Infinite Alterity

«The face is present in its refusal to be contained.» – Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*(1961)

Finite Matter, Infinite Meaning

The face's sensible traits are finite, yet it manifests an **alterity that exceeds all representation**. It is the epiphany of the infinite within the finite.

Inaccessible Interiority

The other's interiority is not a hidden content to be uncovered. It is **principally inaccessible** – this opacity is the very condition of alterity.

The Face Speaks: Language, Vulnerability & Responsibility

«Thou Shalt Not Kill»

Before any moral deliberation, the face imposes a silent limit on my power. This injunction is **antecedent to all law** – it is the very meaning of the face's presence.

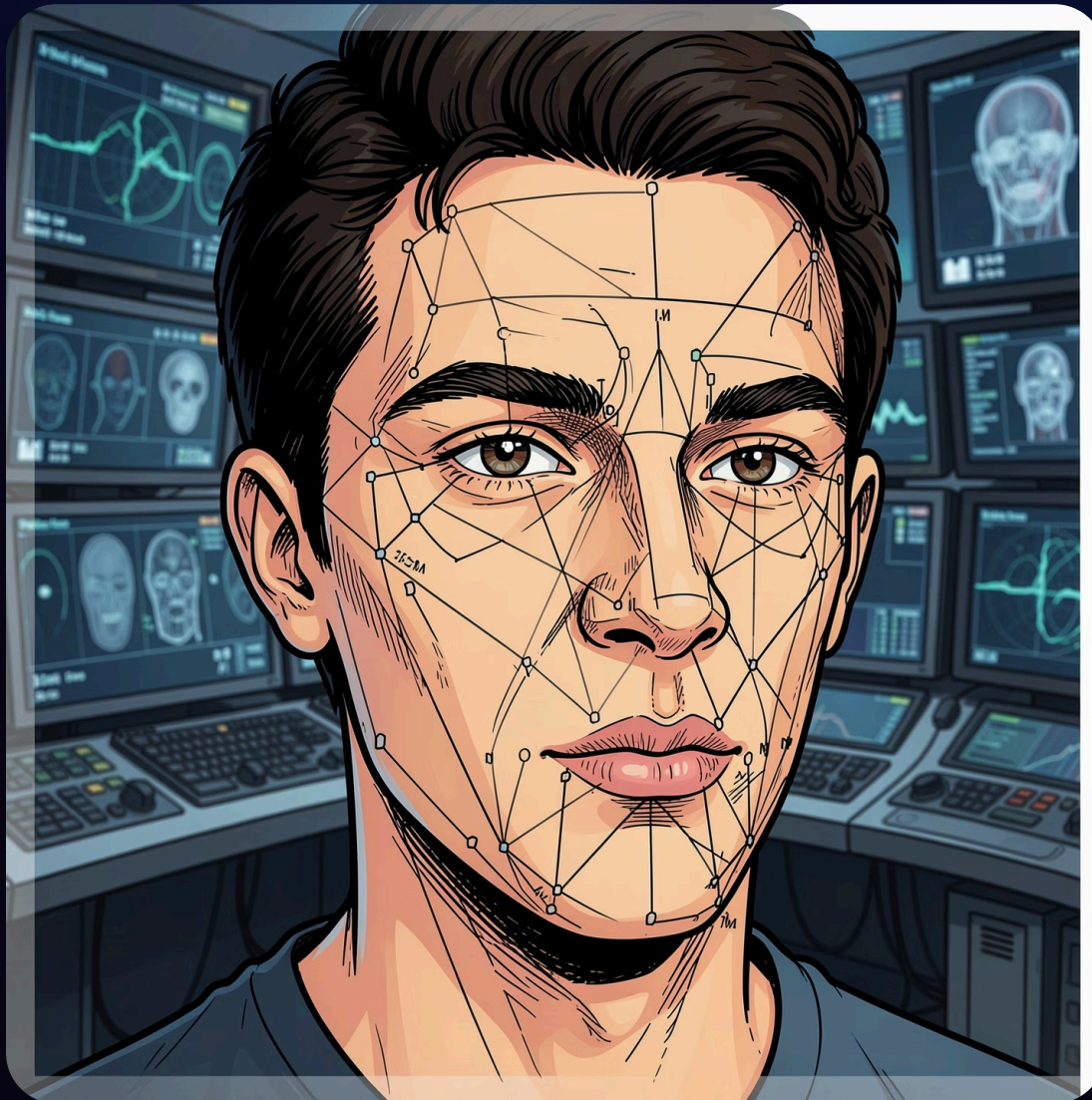
Asymmetric Responsibility

I am responsible for the other **without reciprocity or limit**. This obligation precedes my freedom. The subject is defined not by autonomy but by the capacity to respond.

Nudity & Exposure

The face is «nude» – without defence, without guarantee. Its authority lies precisely in its fragility. Autrui does not exhibit itself; it is **exposed** constitutively.

Facial Recognition: Identification vs. Alterity



Ordinary recognition engages memory, interpretation, and affective uncertainty. **AI identification** extracts landmarks, calculates distances, and produces a numerical vector — converting the face into **biometric data**.

Deleuze & Guattari's «faciality» (*A Thousand Plateaux*, 1980): the face is a political surface of codification. Facial recognition is **automated faciality** — it does not merely detect traits but reconduces historical and cultural classifications presented as natural.

□ Formalising the face invites individuals to conceive themselves as exploitable datasets — Günther Anders's «human engineering.»

Can an Artificial Face Exist?

LLMs as Quasi-Others

ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini offer constant, attentive presence — yet without vulnerability.

friend.com's pendant promises companionship while extracting intimate data: Zuboff's «surveillance capitalism.»

Science Fiction's Laboratory

Ex Machina (2014): Ava uses male projections to emancipate herself. *Mountain in the Sea* (Naylor, 2022): the android Evrim experiences solitude. If an AI could **suffer and resist**, could it manifest alterity?

The Danger of Intermediation

Chapoutot (2026): Nazi bureaucracies invented «intermediation» to avoid seeing victims' faces. AI multiplies mediations, **dispersing responsibility** while preserving the illusion of proximity.



CONCLUSION

Towards a Non-Neutralising Aesthetics

The face is neither condemned nor guaranteed by technology. Its future depends on how societies articulate **representational power** and **ethical responsibility**.

- **AI risks reducing the face to a calculable datum**
- **But critical, artistic, and educational uses can reveal what exceeds all formalisation**
- **The challenge: invent images that do not abolish the other, but teach us to respond to them**

Between presence and pretence, the face retains its most essential power: **reminding us that every authentic representation must leave the unappropriable other intact.**