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Future Face: New Lexicons for Identity

Visual depiction of the body has always been at the heart of medical enquiry and instruction. Indeed, generations of artists, forensic experts and surgeons have probed beneath the surface of the face and mapped its contours, inside and out, on the living and on the dead. The fascination the human face holds for us, its deceptively complex structure and the face as a three-dimensional bar code of identity, are key to both ‘body talk’ and to body ethics.

Centred on the human face, this plenary will explore facial legibility and its transcription in a variety of fields including art and anatomy, anthropology and history, psychology and computer science. Faces are uniquely individual and their diversity, their versatility and their unrivalled ability to communicate are still incompletely understood.

The question of where a face begins and ends is particularly urgent at a time when the ‘virtual’ person prefigures new realms of interaction and experience. As our rapidly developing understanding of life sciences also provokes debate about the parameters of human identity and the material body, the new arts, sciences and technologies require new visual and verbal languages, representations and interpretations.