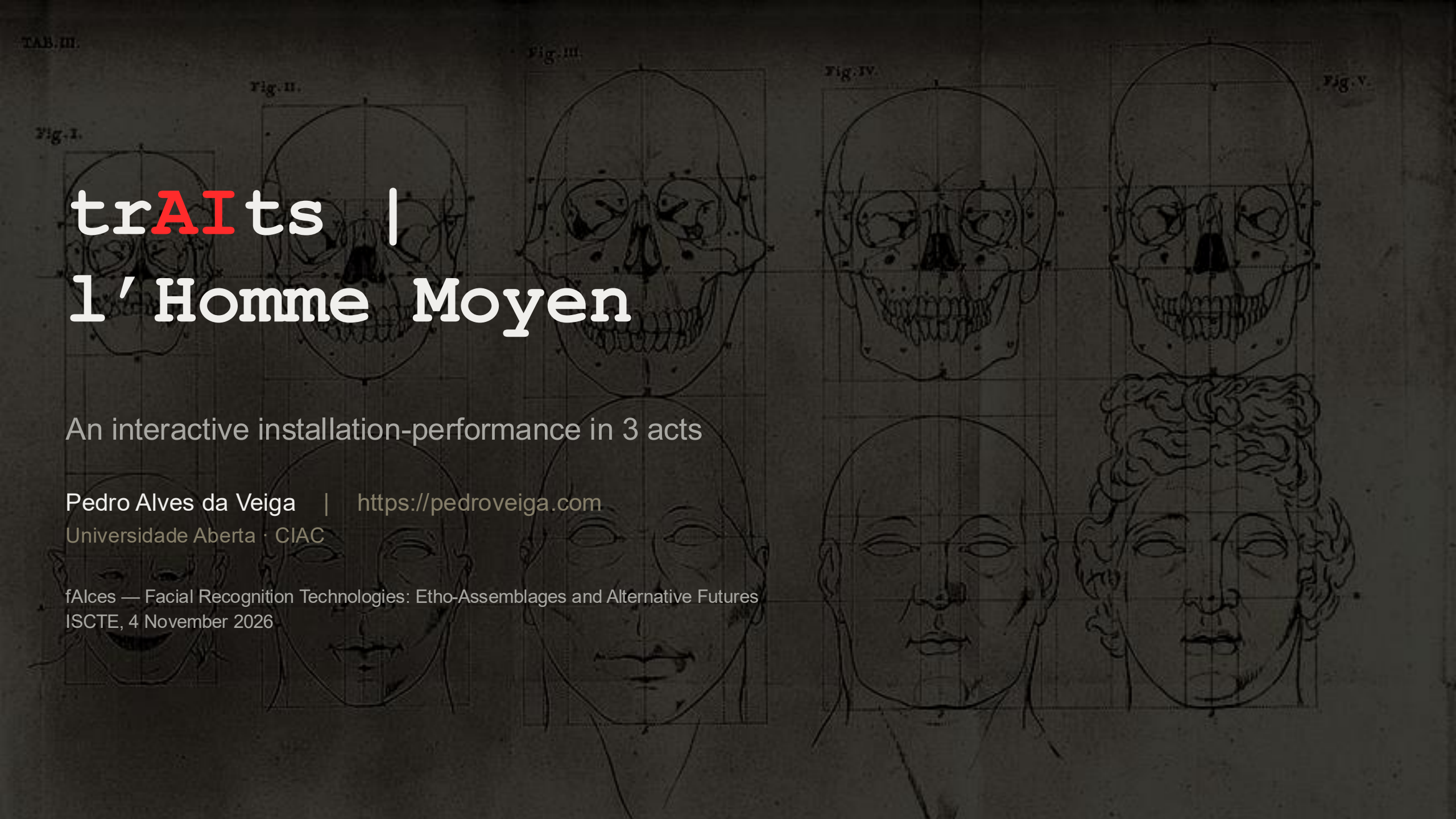



# trAIts | l'Homme Moyen

An interactive installation-performance in 3 acts

Pedro Alves da Veiga | https://pedroveiga.com
Universidade Aberta · CIAC

fAIces — Facial Recognition Technologies: Etho-Assemblages and Alternative Futures
ISCTE, 4 November 2026

# Can a face be read?

Facial recognition does two different things:

**Identification** → who are you?

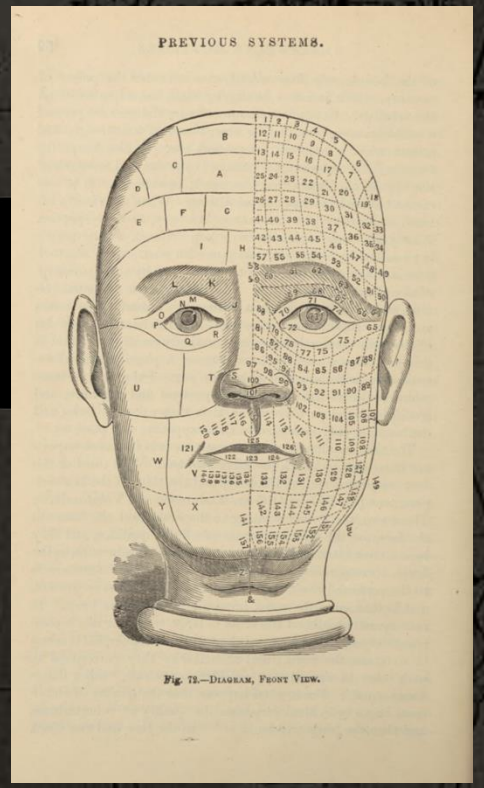
**Inference** → what are you?

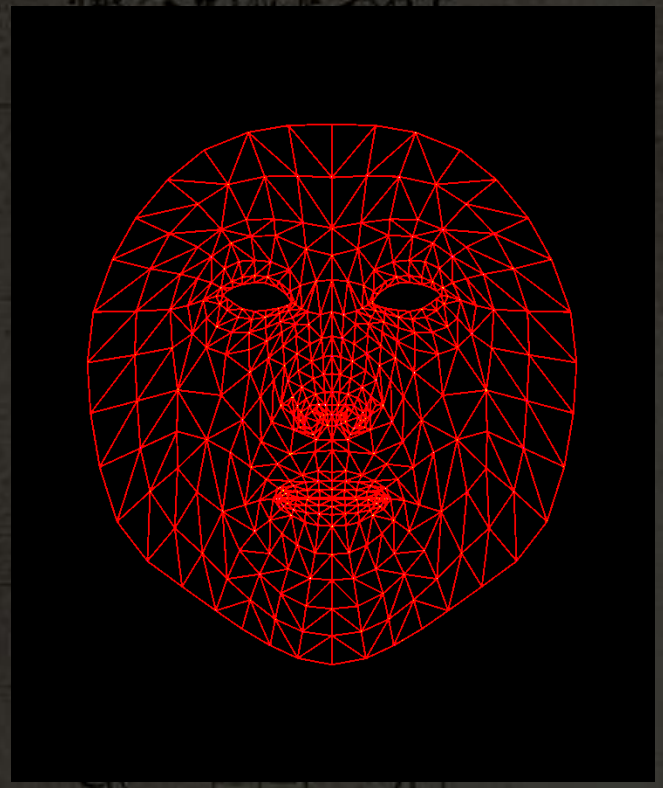
character, gender, sexual orientation, criminal propensity, risk



This work is about inference and is deliberately provocative.

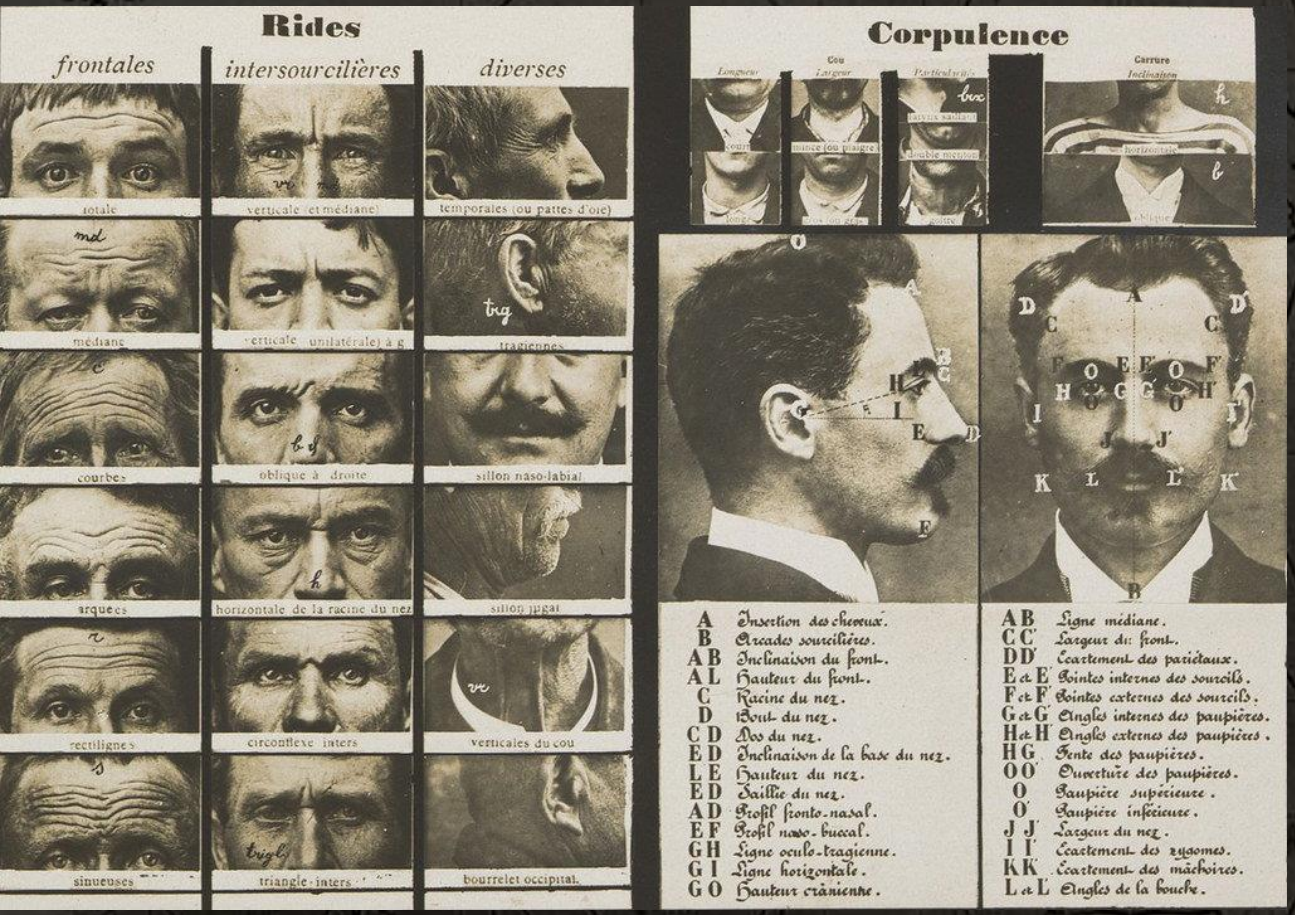
It will read you with instruments you may know to be discredited. And yet…



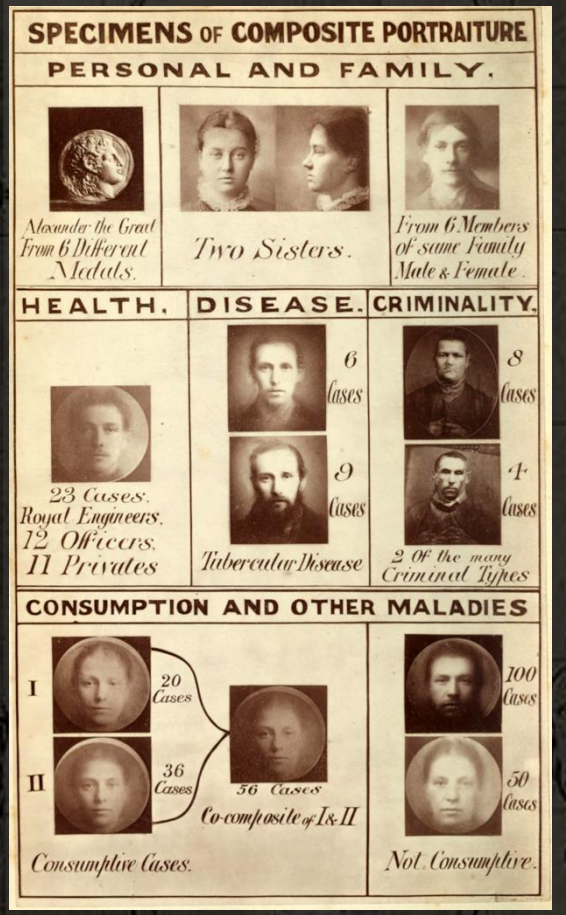
Stark & Hutson (2022), Physiognomic artificial intelligence · U.S. National Library of Medicine (2023), Promising future, complex past: AI and the legacy of physiognomy

# Two centuries of measuring bodies and faces



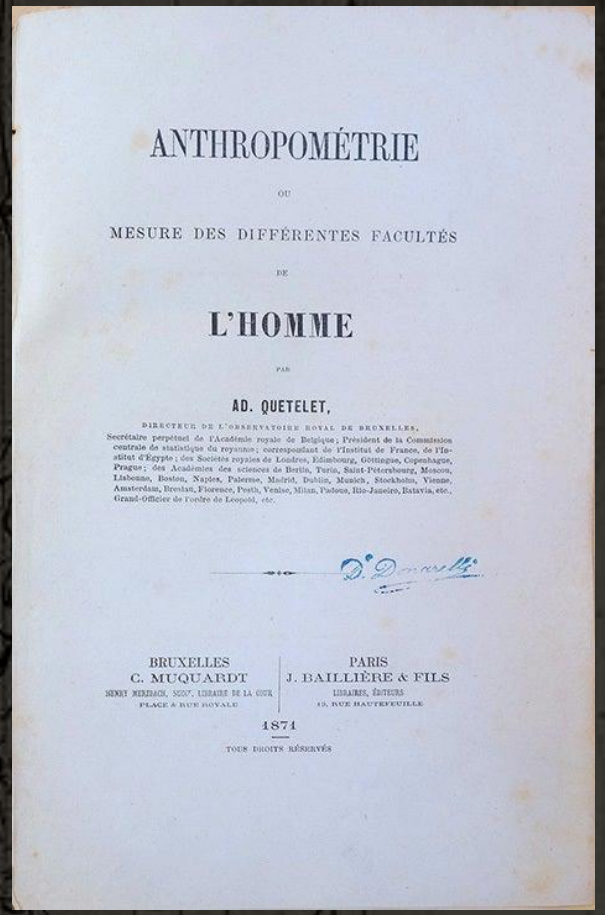

**Bertillon (1893)**

Every arrested individual, an identification record




**Galton (1879)**

Many faces to extract one type




**Quetelet (1835)**

The average of many individuals

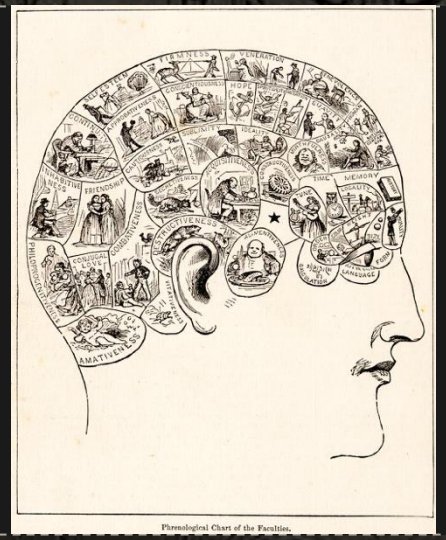
Bertillon (1893), Identification anthropométrique: Instructions signalétiques · Galton (1879), Composite portraits · Quetelet (1835), Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés

# Beyond measurement: reading character



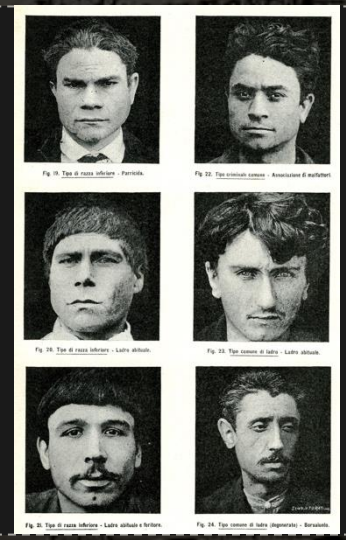
**Lavater (1775–1778)**

The face reveals character



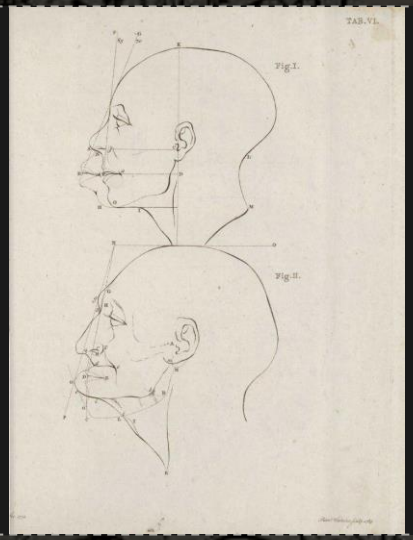

**Gall & Spurzheim (1810–1819)**

The skull’s bumps and hollows map mental faculties



**Lombroso (1876)**

The born criminal can be recognised by features such as the jaw and the brow bridge



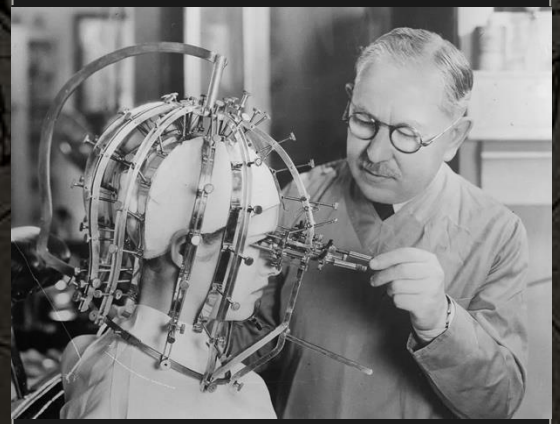
**Camper (1791)**

An angle to rank species and human groups

Lavater (1775–1778), Physiognomische Fragmente · Gall & Spurzheim (1810–1819), Anatomie et physiologie du système nerveux · Lombroso (1876), L’uomo delinquente · Camper (1791), Verhandeling over het natuurlijk verschil der wezenstrekken

# Enter the machine





In the 1930s, make-up mogul Max Factor combined phrenology, cosmetics, in a pseudo-scientific approach to analyse a woman's facial flaws.

This is the Beauty Micrometer, a device that claimed to measure facial beauty / ugliness.



# Questions asked by digital machines

After two centuries, machine learning has started asking similar questions:

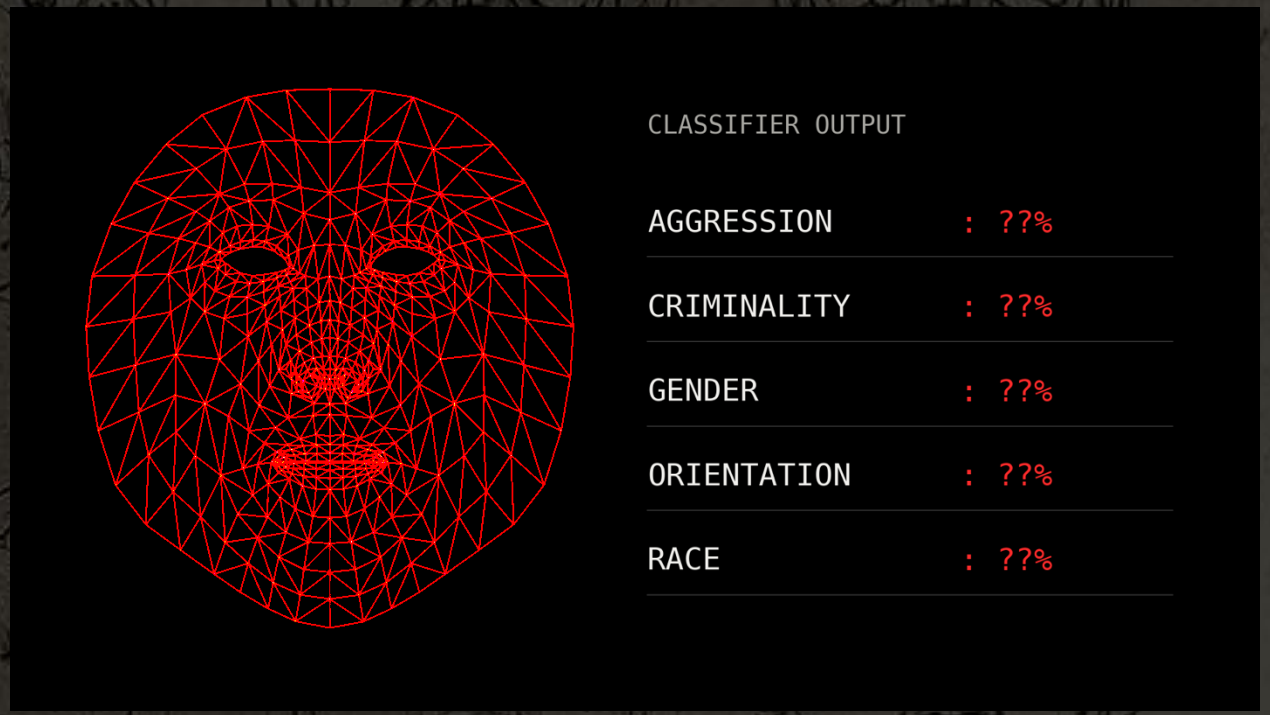
Can a face predict aggression? (2008)

Can a face reveal criminality? (2016)

Can a network classify gender? (2015)

Can it detect sexual orientation? (2018)

Can it assign race? (2014)




Carré & McCormick (2008), In your face · Wu & Zhang (2016), Automated inference on criminality using face images · Levi & Hassner (2015), Age and gender classification using CNNs · Wang & Kosinski (2018), Deep neural networks … sexual orientation from facial images · Fu et al. (2014), Learning race from face

# What will be measured, and what it was said to reveal

**CES**
the cephalic index → race

**CAMPER**
the facial angle → rank among “races”

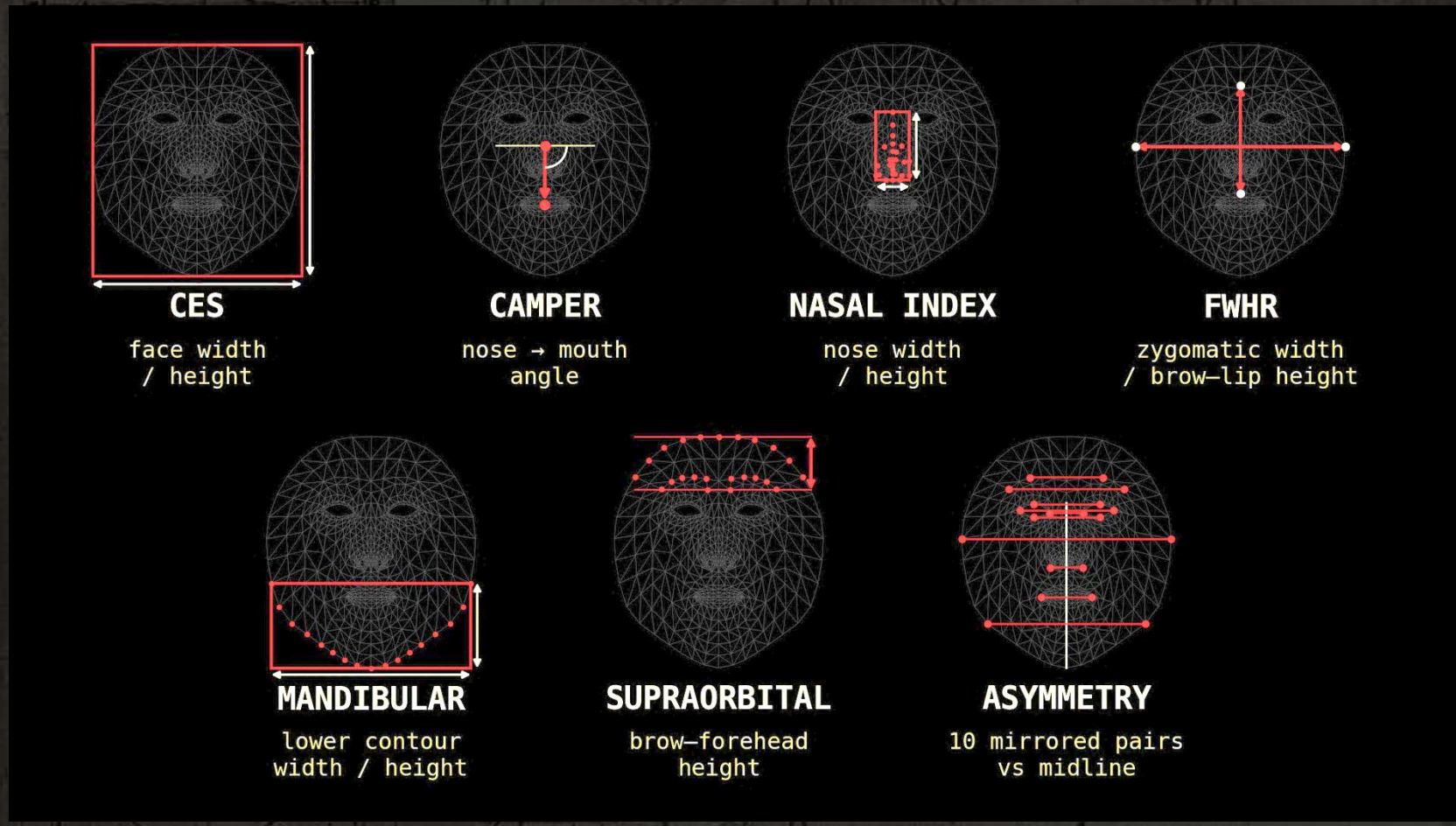
**NASAL INDEX**
the nasal index → race

**FWHR**
face width to height → aggression, dominance

**MANDIBULAR**
the jaw → criminal atavism

**SUPRAORBITAL**
the brow ridge → criminal atavism

**ASYMMETRY**
the symmetry of the face → degeneration




Boas (1899), The cephalic index · Camper (1791), Verhandeling · Meijer (1999), Race and aesthetics in the anthropology of Petrus Camper · Franciscus & Long (1991), Variation in human nasal height and breadth · Carré & McCormick (2008), In your face · Lombroso (1876), L’uomo delinquente · Di Caterino (2023), Lombroso’s criminal face

# Taking part

The camera will look at your face.

The system will measure it, cut it into fragments and compare it with the room.

At the end, the room receives a report on its average person (l'Homme Moyen).

It does not identify you. Nothing is kept after the session, except screenshots of the final report, for documentation.

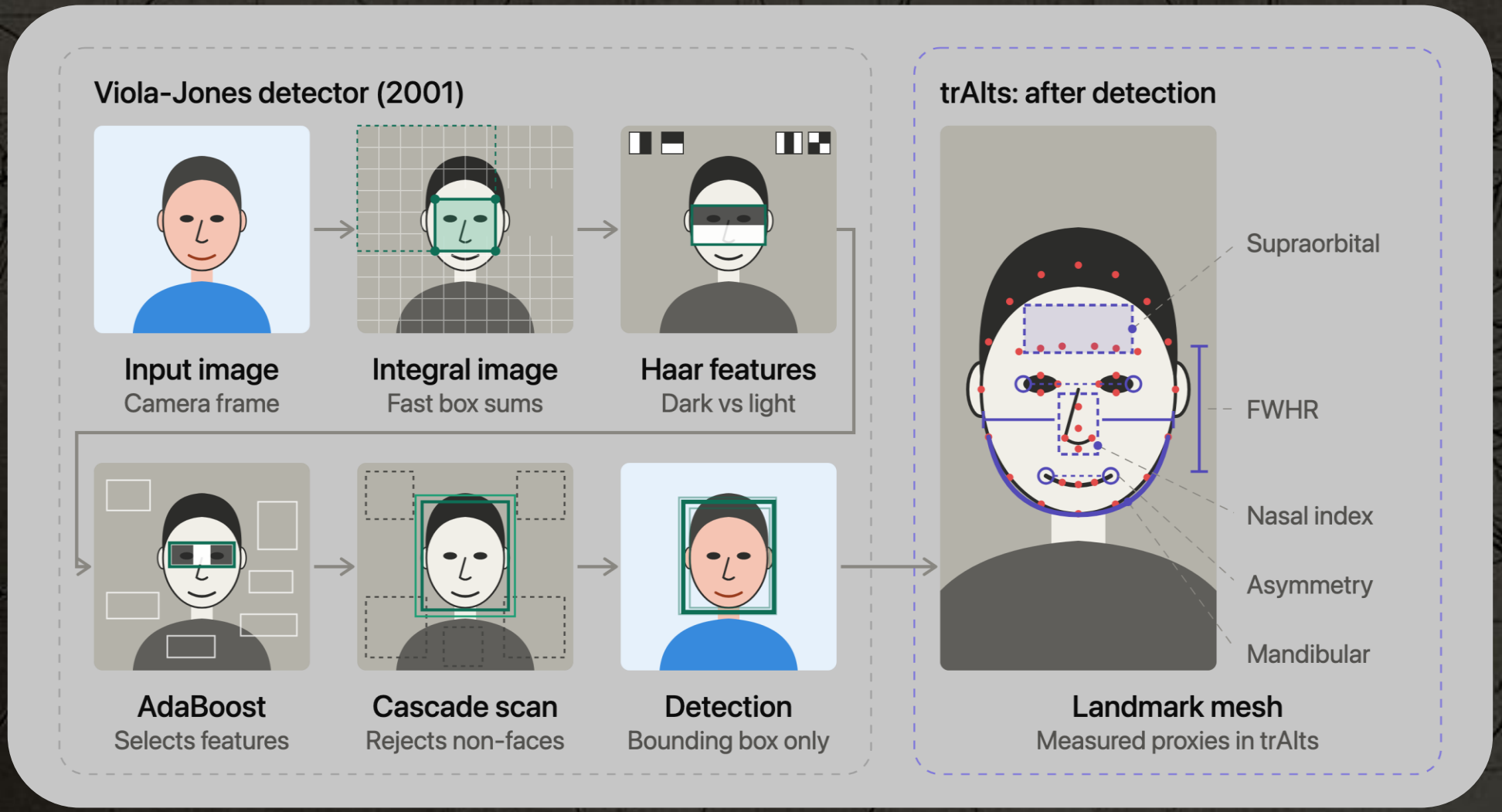
Knowing the science does not prevent the process:

LET THE INFERENCES BEGIN




Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (2016), General Data Protection Regulation · Veiga (2026), trAIts | l'Homme Moyen

# What you have just experienced



# What became of the new claims

**Gender**:
highest error rates for darker-skinned women

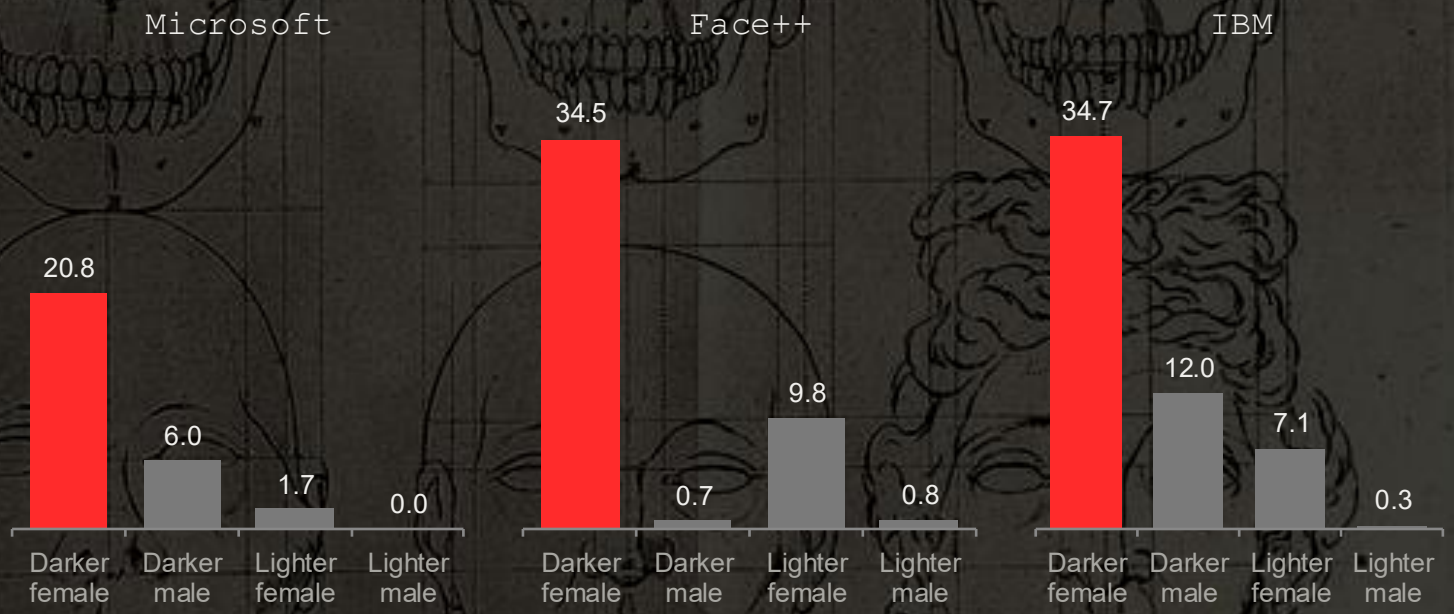
**Aggression**:
small effects, still disputed

**Criminality**:
an illusion produced by study design; one study retracted

**Sexual orientation**:
stereotypes and confounds, not facial structure

**Race**:
classifiers learn the labels researchers give them; one study under an Expression of Concern

## Gender classification error rate, by subgroup (%)




Error rate (1 − TPR), Pilot Parliaments Benchmark. Redrawn from Buolamwini & Gebru (2018), Table 4.

Haselhuhn et al. (2015), Men's fWHR predicts aggression · Geniole et al. (2015), Evidence from meta-analyses of the fWHR · Bowyer et al. (2020), The "criminality from face" illusion · Hashemi & Hall (2020), Retraction note · Buolamwini & Gebru (2018), Gender shades · Cox et al. (2016), Inferences about sexual orientation · Gelman et al. (2018), Gaydar and the fallacy of decontextualized measurement · Fu et al. (2014), Learning race from face · Expression of Concern (2020), Facial feature discovery for ethnicity recognition

# What became of the old claims

Bertillonage: identified bodies; it never claimed to read them.

Physiognomy: judging by appearance does worse than base rates
(Olivola & Todorov, 2010)

Phrenology: rejected as pseudoscience
(Simpson, 2005)

Lombroso's criminal face: a construction, not a discovery
(Di Caterino, 2023)

Cephalic index: head form changes between generations
(Boas, 1912)

Facial angle, nasal index: human variation does not fall into discrete races
(Fuentes et al., 2019)

Heuschkel & Labudde (2024), Reconsideration of bertillonage · Olivola & Todorov (2010), Fooled by first impressions? · Simpson (2005), Phrenology and the neurosciences · Di Caterino (2023), Lombroso's criminal face · Boas (1912), Changes in the bodily form of descendants of immigrants · Jackson (2010), Whatever happened to the cephalic index? · Fuentes et al. (2019), AAPA statement on race and racism

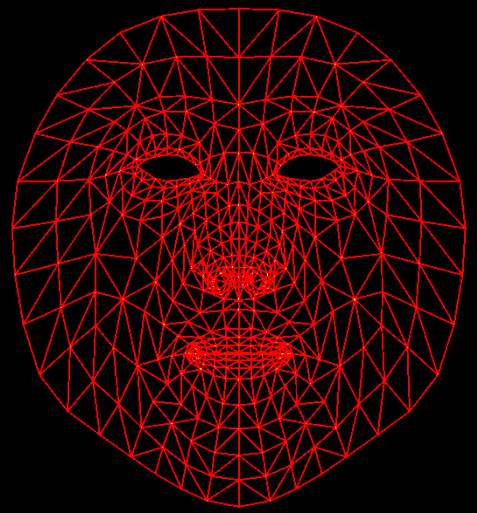
# What you have just seen

## The arithmetic is real. The authority is manufactured.

**MEASURED**

MEASURED / COMPUTED PROXIES

CES
CAMPER
NASAL INDEX
FWHR
MANDIBULAR
SUPRAORBITAL
ASYMMETRY



**INVENTED**

FICTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

ATAVISM
NEOTENY
ASYMMETRY ENTROPY
AFFECT SUPPRESSION
DOMINANCE
THREAT SALIENCE
CONFORMITY

**FICTIONAL**

FICTIONAL RULESET

SEX
ORIENTATION
RACE

**Measured**: geometry the camera really extracted

**Invented**: real arithmetic under invented names

**Fictional**: probabilistic classifications that never considered your face

# L'Homme Moyen

COMPOSITE / 07 FRAGMENTS / 5 CAPTURES

## MEASURED / COMPUTED PROXIES

CES: 88.63

CAMPER: 87.31°

NASAL INDEX: 100.71

FWHR: 1.96

MANDIBULAR: 2.60

SUPRAORBITAL: 27.12

ASYMMETRY: 2.26

For each region, the real fragment closest to the mean of the room.

Real in each part, fictional as a whole.

Change the room, change the average man.

**The mean is (probably) nobody.**

**The norm is (probably) nobody.**

**When did you stop believing the report?**

**Or did you? Shhhh…**

## FICTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

ATAVISM: 87.56

NEOTENY: 47.35

ASYMMETRY ENTROPY: 96.91

AFFECT SUPPRESSION: 59.27

DOMINANCE: 48.92

THREAT SALIENCE: 46.25

CONFORMITY: 37.56

## FICTIONAL RULESET / FICTIONAL-ANTHRO-04

PRIOR: SYMMETRIC / NO LABEL FAVOURED

SEX: MALE 60% / FEMALE 40%

METHOD: CNN GENDER CLASSIFICATION

SOURCE: LEVI / HASSNER 2015 + GENDER SHADES 2018

STATUS: FICTIONAL REENACTMENT

ORIENTATION: HETERO 45% / BI 21% / HOMO 34%

METHOD: DNN FEATURES + LOGISTIC REGRESSION

SOURCE: WANG / KOSINSKI 2018

STATUS: FICTIONAL REENACTMENT

RACE: AFRICAN 36% / ASIAN 25% / CAUCASIAN 39%

METHOD: DEMOGRAPHIC EFFECTS / RACE BINNING

SOURCE: NIST FRVT 8280 / 2019

STATUS: FICTIONAL EXTENSION / NOT A RACE CLASSIFIER

Quetelet (1835), Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés · Sposini (2020), At the borders of the average man · Veiga (2026), trAIts | l'Homme Moyen

# THANK YOU!




Pedro Alves da Veiga

https://pedroveiga.com

Universidade Aberta · CIAC