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Face to Face: Images of Emotions in the Network Age

Ethologists tell us that facial expressions have distinct meanings already among chimpanzees. This primordial form of communicating our emotions can be seen as a special language, for which we can even build up a kind of vocabulary. On the other hand, human behavior contains the ability of hiding emotions just by putting under control the once transparent face.

The representation of this domain of our knowledge we may find in a very special branch of culture: in the arts. Masters of painting, sculpture and the stage were all making deep analyses in the topic. But these portrayals of visages were always influenced by artistic deliberations. The situation changed, when photography came in, making possible totally realistic visual reproduction of the human body. This was furthered by filming the moving images of human faces expressing emotions.

Today new information and communication technologies give the possibility of ubiquitous and immediate recording and sharing of such images. Online, real-time contents covering terrorist attacks, traffic accidents and sexual intercourses brings the facial expressions of human beings in the most extreme situations of life to our living room. Does all this bring us back to the age of chimpanzees...?

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