# A TYPOLOGY OF FACES OF THE CITY

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**Abstract**

The urban space is teeming with faces, shaping the city's identity and experience. From the biological faces of its inhabitants to symbolic representations in art, monuments and media, faces play a multifaceted role in urban life. This paper explores the diverse manifestations of faces in urban spaces, examining their cultural, social and political significance, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of the role of faces in shaping urban environments. In doing so, the paper introduces a typology of the facial presence within the urban space, including biological faces, urban inscriptions, practices and digital assemblages. By delineating these categories, the study aims to provide a framework for future research to explore the meanings and interpretations of faces in urban contexts.

**Keywords:** Face, City, Urban Space, Representation, Urban Semiotics.

Faces permeate the urban space, manifesting in various forms – whether as the visages of human and non-human inhabitants or as symbolic representations. Within cities, the biological faces of individuals shape the urban experience, with citizens navigating and utilising spaces in diverse ways influenced by cultural nuances, political perspectives, socio-economic considerations and contingent needs. Moreover, cities serve as a dynamic canvas for the inscription and portrayal of faces through advertising, public statuary, sculptures, monuments, memorials, graffiti, urban art and so on. The advent of digital technology has ushered in new possibilities for capturing, editing and sharing faces in urban spaces through the Internet and social networks.

In the city, ontological faces, face representations and practices coexist with more ethereal ones. These encompass the faces of past inhabitants, residing in the collective memory of present-day urban

communities or materialising through memorial practices and built structures like monuments and memorials, as well as those depicted in literature, cinema, artefacts and photography, which contribute to shape the overall meaning and identity of the city. The concept of the face then extends beyond, finding metaphorical resonance in urban marketing and branding: the phrase «face of the city» (Leone 2024) encapsulates a sanitised, stereotypical urban image, devoid of imperfections, recurrent in tourist materials, postcards, official websites, social media and videos.

This paper introduces a typology of the facial presence within the urban space. Its aim is to identify the objects of research serving as focal points of future studies advancing the understanding of the role of faces and face representations, their meanings and interpretations in urban spaces. Section 1 conducts an examination of the existing literature concerning the city's facial presence, underscoring its limitations and offering suggestions for prospective research. Section 2 and 3 illuminate the primary contributions stemming from the semiotic examination of both the city and the face. Subsequently, section 4 introduces a typology delineating the various facets of facial presence within urban spaces. Each section concentrates on a distinct type, including: 1) biological faces; 2) face inscriptions in urban space; 3) practices involving urban faces; and 4) digital facial assemblages and practices.

## 1. FACE AND THE CITY: A STATE OF THE ART

There is a substantial and continuously expanding body of literature dedicated to the general public that is focusing on the faces of city inhabitants. An example is found in the blog *Humans of New York* and its subsequent book (Stanton 2005), where photographer Brandon Stanton undertook a mission to conduct a photographic census of New Yorkers. This widely followed work hinges on the notion that capturing people's faces serves as narrative testimonials, revealing their gazes, postures, figures, expressions, appearances and personalities. This practice is rooted in portrait painting and photography, having a historical precedent in iconic images such as, to name just a few, the *Afghan girl* by Steve McCurry, *Guerrillero Heroico* by Alberto Korda, *Steve Jobs* by Albert Watson and *Albert Einstein* by Arthur Sasse.

The intertwining of face and the city in the literature is not recent, despite not being developed as it might be anticipated given the significance of these two concepts. In 1972, a book titled *Faces in the City* was published, featuring the verses of James Kavanaugh, a former Catholic priest and advocate on matters related to divorce, birth control and priestly celibacy. The British shipping agent Harold Philip Clunn developed a series titled the *Face of...* series, focusing on the appearance of the built environment of London and Paris specifically, describing how it changed through the 19th century. Through descriptions of urban walks, Clunn enthusiastically depicted the city's growth and the substitution of old buildings with new ones. The photographic book *The face of New York: The city as it was and as it is* (Feininger, Lyman 1954) contains photographs by Andreas Feininger representing the past of the city and the same scenes today; commentaries by Susan E. Lyman from the Museum of the City of New York serves as a history documenting the evolving face of New York.

The concepts of face and city have frequently been employed together in a metaphorical manner. The term *Face of the city* (Leone 2024) encapsulates the notion of a city's imagery, orchestrated from the top and shaped over time by a group of stakeholders tasked with planning and designing the urban space. This imagery serves to create a curated portrayal of the city, offering an outward expression through which the city interfaces with the broader world. This interface, in turn, enables the contemporary exertion of power by influencing and disseminating prevailing ideologies, fortifying political authority, and validating social constructs of inclusion and exclusion. In this respect, in his book *The faces of the contemporary city*, Ponzini (2024) delves into the standardisations observed in major global cities. These cities are progressively exhibiting architectural similarities, a trend partly influenced by a select group of renowned architects. The author specifically examines the contribution of building companies in creating buildings that have achieved iconic status in cities like New York, Paris, London, Berlin, Milan and so on. Haken and Portugali (2003) addressed how the externally portrayed image of the city contributes to its recognizability and imaginability. They explored the legibility and memorability of various urban elements and artefacts, employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis based on Shannon's information theory and qualitative assessment using Haken's concept of semantic information. The authors concluded that

certain elements, including those constituting the city's face, possess both quantitative and qualitative richness, making them more informative, legible and memorable compared to others.

These works have underscored the pivotal role of the face in urban spaces, emphasising its metaphorical significance as a representation of the urban image. Nevertheless, a comprehensive examination of the diverse faces within urban spaces is still lacking, with a few exceptions. Mubi Brighenti (2019) authored a speculative article delving into the intricate relationships between the city and the face. Just as the face disrupts the unity of the head and its associated bodily system, projecting it into an intersubjective social realm of interaction and meaning, similarly the city interrupts the continuity of the land where it is situated, orienting itself towards a higher-level network of interconnected urban centres. Both of these assumptions draw on a theoretical reconstruction of two sections from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980): in *Visagéité* [Faceness] they posit that the head is an integral part of the body, whereas the face represents a deterritorialization of the head; in *Appareil de capture* [Capture Device] the city disrupts the seamless continuity of the land or region where it is situated and direct its focus towards a more extensive network of interconnected urban centres. Hence Mubi Brighenti suggests that:

> The face and the city entertain an elective if not structural affinity: both are parts of two systems simultaneously, both are apt to peculiarly set those systems in motion. The face unsettles the head and the bodily system to which it belongs by projecting it into an intersubjective social system of interaction and signification, no less than the city unsettles the land where it is located by projecting it into long-distance connections with similar entities scattered across the continent, and beyond (Mubi Brighenti 2019, 3).

Leone (2024) proposed a roadmap for examining the influence of digital technology and artificial intelligence on the presence and significance of human faces in cities. He focuses particularly on the cultural, social and economic implications of automatic facial identification and recognition, facial big data and photo-realistic images of human faces produced using generative adversarial networks (GANs) and other artificial intelligence algorithms. This aligns with other steps of the roadmap concerning the interdisciplinary examination of faces and facial representations in urban contexts, comprising four sections: 1) *Faces in the city* addressing the presentation and representation of

faces in urban space; 2) *Faces around the city* investigating digital facial assemblages processed by facial technology; 3) *Faces on the city* referring to traditional and contemporary practices of face inscription on urban surfaces; and, as seen above, 4) *Faces of the city* examining the metaphor of cities as organisms with individual faces.

Beside these exceptions, the relationship between the face and the city, and especially the facial presence and face representations in the urban space is yet to be explored. Semiotics can give valuable contributions in this respect, having largely explored the face and the city, even if separately.

## 2. SEMIOTICS AND THE FACE

The face has a profoundly semiotic nature. The ERC-funded research project FACETS (Face Aesthetics in Contemporary E-Technological Societies), hosted by the University of Turin, Italy, has underlined this complex nature, which comprises a biological dimension (the face), a socio-cultural palimpsest shaping our public interface (the *visus*) and a mediating level for emotions (the *vultus*) (Marino, Leone 2024). The aim of FACETS has been to give a redefinition of the face in semiotic terms, analysing its different contemporary forms with a focus on the impact of emerging digital technologies. The project has explored diverse cultures of the face, emphasising diatopic and culturally-specific variations (e.g. Barbotto *et al.* 2022; Voto *et al.* 2021), thereby establishing the foundation for a cultural semiotics of the visage (Gramigna, Leone 2021; Bellentani 2023d). It has also investigated the exhibition of faces in social networks and emerging visual technologies for facial recognition, detection, representation and manipulation (Leone 2021; 2023) by examining face-related topics, including deep fake technology (Dondero 2023; Leone 2022; Santangelo 2022; Gramigna 2022), digital cosmetics (Leone 2020), selfies (Santangelo 2020; Surace 2020; Leone 2019), emojis and memes (Marino 2022), as well as software for creating digital characters (Giuliana 2022).

While there have been some explorations of the face and the city (Leone 2024; Bellentani 2023c), there is an emerging need to establish a cohesive connection between these two concepts. This paper seeks to take a step in this direction by presenting a typology of the facial presence within the city.

# 3. SEMIOTICS AND THE CITY

Between the 1960s and 1970s, semiotics expanded the boundaries of semiotics beyond its traditional confines, embracing a wider array of cultural artefacts for analysis. This transformation gave rise to specialised branches within semiotics, such as semiotics of space, semiotics of architecture and urban semiotics.

In the late 1960s, the semiotics of architecture introduced a new conceptualization, exploring how architecture conveys meaning. Umberto Eco (1997) proposed viewing architecture as a system of signs composed of spatial signifiers and denotative and connotative signifiers. He argued that architectural objects primarily serve functional purposes but also communicate through their form and function. Alexandros Lagopoulos (2020) revised Eco's semiotic theory of architecture, proposing urban social semiotics to investigate the collective process of city planning, aiming to create a coherent model for the future city. This approach built upon the foundation laid by Gottdiener and Lagopoulos (1986), who initiated the field of urban semiotics, delving into the interpretation and meaning-making of urban spaces by incorporating the historical, architectural, and socio-economic dimensions of the urban space (see also Lagopoulos, Boklund-Lagopoulou 2014). Subsequently, many semiotic analysis emerged, offering diverse perspectives on specific urban areas, such as peripheries and districts (e.g. Cervelli 2005; Montanari 2008), or delving into topics like the post-Socialist or the post-war urban contexts (e.g. Czepczyński 2024; Mazzucchelli 2010).

This research encompasses five primary paradigms (see Bellentani *et al.* 2024). The semiological paradigm views urban spaces and built forms as sign systems. The generative paradigm drawing from Algirdas J. Greimas explores the levels of signification in texts and extends this approach to urban spaces. The Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School offers a more practical understanding of the city mapping interpretive and communicative practices in urban space. The interpretative paradigm building upon Charles S. Peirce delves into the habits of individuals and groups, extending semiotic analysis to physical environments and living systems; IT involves methodologies derived from linguistics, cognitive science and semiotics, all contextualised within the sociocultural fabric of human experience. Finally, the biosemiotic paradigm, a multidisciplinary approach that considers biological and

physical processes as sign systems within urban spaces. These paradigms collectively contribute to the dynamic and evolving field of the semiotics of the city, constantly adapting and expanding its scope. The next section introduces the typology of face presence within urban spaces.

## 4. TYPOLOGY OF THE FACIAL PRESENCE IN THE CITY

Within the urban space, face representations and practices span a diverse array of forms, each offering insights into the intersection of identity, space and culture. Each section concentrates on a distinct type: 1) biological faces; 2) face inscriptions in urban space; 3) practices involving urban faces; and 4) digital facial assemblages.

### 4.1. BIOLOGICAL FACES OF HUMANS AND NON-HUMANS IN THE CITY

The first category encompasses biological faces of the urban space, both human and animal ones. In literature and cinema, cities are frequently depicted as teeming with «a crowd of inexpressive faces-in-transit» (Mubi Brighenti 2019, 13) that populate their streets: cities are so saturated with faces that they can be considered as constituting populations of faces themselves. Within this homogeneous crowd, each face carries its own distinct identity, serving as the primary area of intersubjectivity (Levinas 1961). However, the face is more than just a surface for interpersonal interaction, rather a text manipulated to communicate specific meanings through makeup, attire, hairstyling, tattoos and piercings (Leone 2021). Thus, the face plays an active role in shaping and articulating identity.

> The face that we have, the face that we are, is always a mixture of biology and language, but it is also a mixture of us and the others, of how we intend to present ourselves and how we are actually interpreted. [...] Our face is, indeed, not only a surface, and not only an interface, but also a text. It is a proposition of meaning (Leone 2021, 12).

In addition to human faces, the city also showcases the faces of pets and wildlife. Some animal species have adapted to urban habitats,

becoming integral components of the urban ecosystem. Different urban locales support diverse wildlife populations, with certain species becoming emblematic of specific places: for instance, the squirrels in New York's Central Park, the pigeons in Venice's *Piazza San Marco* and the cockroaches inhabiting less affluent urban suburbs in the United States.

## 4.2. FACE INSCRIPTIONS IN URBAN SPACE

These include advertisement, urban art and face representations in the built environment. As for the first, research underscores the potent impact of facial imagery in marketing and advertising, with studies revealing that ads featuring a person's face attract significantly more attention: notably, 91.7% of ads capture greater viewer engagement compared to non-face advertisements (Guido *et al.* 2019). The neurological wiring predisposes to swiftly process facial stimuli, enabling it to detect faces at least twice as quickly as other types of visual cues. Thus, facial imagery in marketing and advertising has the power to leverage our innate propensity to prioritise and remember faces in our perceptual landscape, particularly in environments characterised by fleeting exposure times, such as the Internet and social media networking services as well as the bustling thoroughfares of the city. This is why billboards and advertising posters prominently feature faces in cities, ranging from the glamorous visages of fashion models to the stern countenances of politicians during election seasons. In 2020, an innovative face wash billboard emerged in the US featuring a woman covering part of her face with the billboard's vinyl, subtly implying the presence of pimples she seeks to conceal. A clinic in Thailand, as part of a campaign by Ogilvy Thailand, has utilised individuals with skin issues as mobile advertisements in return for complementary treatment; around 2,000 individuals dealing with acne and various skin conditions volunteered to act as human billboards.

Beyond commercial endeavours, faces have largely served as potent tools in social advertising campaigns. For instance, the campaign titled *Faces, #PubLooShocker* by the brand Think! (2013, United Kingdom, agency: Leo Burnett) employed facial imagery to raise awareness about drunk driving consequences. Similarly, the *Stand Out* campaign by *Changing Faces* (2008, United Kingdom) challenges so-

cietal perceptions of facial disfigurements. Even in the age of digital billboards and videos, the human face remains a focal point. Women's Aid made waves with a facial recognition billboard, featuring the image of a bruised woman's face alongside the poignant tagline «Look at Me», compelling viewers to confront the reality of domestic abuse and take action: as more people who look the advertisement, the woman's bruises heal and vanish faster, urging society to cease its indifference towards victims.

As for urban art, artists employ faces in various forms of expression, spanning sculptures, graffiti, LED art, mosaic tiling, stencil art, sticker art and wheatpasting. These varied mediums frequently serve as grassroots movements, seeking to assert their social and political significance within public spaces. For instance, Gregos, a French street artist, has left his mark not only on the walls of Paris but also across France and globally, utilising 3D techniques to portray his own face. Another example is the iconic smiley face, introduced by commercial artist Harvey Ball in 1963, that has today transcended its origins to become a symbol of pop art, gracing everything from merchandise to murals and graffiti. The renowned American artist Ron English takes a darker twist on the smiley face, incorporating a grinning skull into his graffiti murals and other works. This serves as a stark reminder of a human construct masking the skeletal reality beneath. Other artists breathe life into existing buildings by adorning them with faces: for instance, Nikita Nomerz paints expressive faces on the weathered facades of abandoned buildings scattered throughout Russian cities.

Some street artists have successfully transitioned from the underground scene to mainstream recognition, blurring the lines between counterculture and corporate branding. Traditional graffiti and street art have even found their place in mainstream advertising campaigns. Institutions often utilise street art to enhance urban landscapes, especially in districts that need revaluation. For example, in 2015, Italian street artist Jorit crafted a depiction of a child's face in Ponticelli, an eastern suburb of Naples, to commemorate the tragic fire that occurred at the Romani camp in the area. Increasingly, urban art is permeating historical city centres. In Naples' central district of Forcella, Jorit again created *San Gennaro Operaio* in 2015, a graffiti portraying the face of the city's patron saint, funded by the Naples Municipality and its partners. Similarly, in 2019, an official mural of Umberto Eco was unveiled on the exterior wall of a neighbourhood house in Bolo-

gna situated near the Department of Communication Sciences, where Eco was one of the founding figures.

In the realm of art performances, the human face has served as a focal point for conveying nuanced social and political messages, as well as functioning as a canvas for negotiating or concealing identity. The Berlin Kidz extends far beyond conventional graffiti writing or installations, encompassing audacious feats such as rappelling, rooftop bike rides on trains, and trespassing. Despite the inherent risks, they have evaded capture during numerous encounters with law enforcement: most of the artists of this collective opt to conceal their face by wearing masks in order to avoid detection by urban cameras or law enforcement.

One of the most ubiquitous representations of faces in the built environment includes statues, monuments, memorials and facial motifs incorporated into various architectural structures. Faces play pivotal roles in public statues, conveying the emotions of depicted figures and forging communicative connections with viewers. Additionally, faces are integral to memorials, serving as poignant reminders of the lives lost. In Western funerary traditions, tombstones frequently incorporate images or busts of the deceased, serving as enduring tributes to their lives. Similarly, in memorial museums, corridors often display portraits of individuals who tragically lost their lives to wars, terrorist attacks, or natural disasters. These portraits not only honour their memory but also serve to preserve their stories for future generations to reflect upon (for further exploration, see Bellentani 2023b). National elites often celebrate their preferred identities through celebratory monuments and monumental architecture, as exemplified by the imposing faces carved into Mount Rushmore. Certain public monuments and sculptures rely solely on the portrayal of the human face as a primary means of conveying meaning. An example of this is the sculpture *Dream* in St. Helens, United Kingdom (Fig. 1). Standing at a towering height of 66 feet (20 meters), this elongated white structure resembles the head and neck of a young woman with closed eyes, evoking a sense of meditation. Commissioned by the St. Helens Council, the sculpture serves as a reflection of the community's aspirations. The same concept can be found in similar sculptures in Toronto, Seattle and Jersey City, New Jersey.

Fɪɢ. 1. The sculpture *Dream* (2009) by Jaume Plensa in Merseyside, funded through The Big Art Project in coordination with the Arts Council England, The Art Fund and Channel 4. Photograph taken by Christian Keenan, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Faces have often adorned the exteriors of buildings, serving as dynamic «discursive spaces» that communicate nuanced meanings through their material presence (Gendelman, Aiello 2011, 256). The presence of faces in the built environments transcends cultures and spans throughout history. Examples abound, ranging from the Great Sphinx of Giza in Egypt to the imagery adorning Gothic cathedrals and landmarks that extend beyond Western traditions, such as the Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia and the Moai statues of Easter Island in Polynesia (for further exploration, see Bellentani 2023a).

One notable example of the use of faces on buildings is the use of apotropaic mascarons, architectural ornaments depicting faces with the purpose of warding off malevolent spirits from homes or cities (when employed on city walls). Mascarons initially served ornamental purposes. In fountains, their mouths directed the flow of water, while in keystones, they provided secure housing for keys. Beyond the Baroque period, Beaux Arts and Art Nouveau have adopted mascarons as purely decorative elements.

Finally, cases of «pareidolia», the inclination of humans to perceive faces in the natural settings (Leone 2021, 17), are common also in the built environment. Frequently, in house façades, windows resemble eyes, doors take on the appearance of mouths and roofs cascade like locks of hair draping down the sides. Some architects intentionally incorporate facial features into their designs: for example, Japanese architect Kazumasa Yamashita exemplifies this approach with the *Face House* in Kyoto with distinct elements resembling eyes, a nose and a mouth. Following his view, this practice served to humanise the house, a simple block of concrete, and leveraging the communicative potency of facial expressions was an effective approach.

## 4.3. PRACTICES OF URBAN FACES

Semiotics has largely investigated the concept of cultural practices (e.g. Fontanille 2010), i.e. generators of meaning through the sequential unfolding of actions, which have the capacity to define the significance of a situation and its subsequent transformation (Basso Fossali in Fontanille 2010). Cultural practices are grounded in the concept of «performativity», an integral aspect of cognitive processes that unfold within a realm of consciousness shaped not solely by individual factors or external influences, but rather by the species-specific ways in which the body acts and interacts with the environment (Pennisi 2019, 9). Therefore, a typology examining the presence of faces within urban spaces should take into account the cultural practices centred around the face that evolve and manifest within the urban space.

A multitude of facial practices can be observed within the cityscape. This section lists the most recognisable ones, distinct from the commonplace «inexpressive faces-in-transit» that populate urban streets (Mubi Brighenti 2019, 13; see § 4.1). These are artistic performances highlighted in 4.2, as well as institutional and vernacular memorials practices, public rituals and ceremonies and resistant practices centred around the face.

Institutional memorial practices encompass a wide array of religious and civic rituals and ceremonies, often centred around the depiction of faces on icons, banners, posters and other mediums. Faces also play a significant role in vernacular memorial practices: for instance, it is common for individuals to bring pictures or drawings of

the victims' faces to sites associated with death and tragedy as a means of commemoration.

Since ancient times, ceremonial face-painting, tattoos, and body decoration have played a significant role in shamanic rituals across various cultures globally. These practices serve as spiritual markers within communities, signifying important rites and occasions such as weddings, childbirth, spiritual ceremonies and transitions. Beyond spiritual contexts, face painting has also served diverse purposes including hunting, artistic expression, entertainment and warfare. Moreover, facial adornment features prominently in state rituals and ceremonies such as parades commemorating important national holidays. Here, the stern visages of military personnel and their commanding officers, uniformed in various attire including distinctive hats denoting different battalions, stand as a source of pride, symbolically embodying the core identity of the state.

However, it is among protesters challenging the state where facial practices have gained significant attention. Various forms of masks, balaclavas, eye masks and bandanas have been widely employed during mass protests, establishing common practices shared among activists worldwide (Delupi 2023). The Guy Fawkes mask, also known as the V for Vendetta or Anonymous mask, is a stylised depiction of Guy Fawkes, the central figure in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, created by illustrator David Lloyd for the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* (1982-1989, Fig. 2). Since its adaptation into a film in 2006, the mask has gained widespread recognition and has become a symbol of protest, particularly associated with the online hacktivist group Anonymous and various anti-establishment movements, including Project Chanology and the Occupy movement. Today, with the advent of facial recognition technology enabling biopolitical control over facial identity, activists are exploring innovative methods to conceal their faces in public spaces, ensuring anonymity amidst heightened surveillance (Thibault, Buruk 2021). Artist Adam Harvey has focused on developing counter-surveillance fashion, including anti-surveillance hijabs, theatrical hairstyles and makeup designed to disrupt facial recognition. Similarly, the company URME Surveillance is dedicated to shielding individuals from facial recognition technology by providing 3D-printed prosthetic faces resembling the company's founder, Leo Savaggio.

Fig. 2. The Anonymous mask. By Pierre-Selim – CC BY-SA 3.0.

## 4.4. DIGITAL FACIAL ASSEMBLAGES AND PRACTICES

The pervasive integration of digital technology into every aspect of life has catalysed significant societal shifts, continually moulding human behaviours and practices. This impact extends even to the realm of facial representations and practices, where digital counterparts are now ubiquitous. As seen in the introduction, Leone (2024) outlines a roadmap to investigate how digital technology and artificial intelligence impact the presence of human faces in urban environments. His focus spans cultural, social and economic dimensions, emphasising areas such as automatic facial recognition, facial big data and the generation of lifelike human faces through algorithms like GANs. Within urban landscapes, diverse forms of digital facial assemblages and practices abound. These include faces projected onto digital signage and advertisements, integrated into digital video mapping displayed on the facades of monumental buildings and woven into immersive experiences found in museums or shopping centres. Digital face portraits are meticulously crafted through artificial intelligence, deep learning algorithms, augmented and virtual reality (AV/VR) devices and digital

filters, devoid of any biological or ontological correlation to the human face (Leone 2021).

Enhancing the commemorative experience, digital memorialization intertwines with urban space, often revolving around the representation of faces and associated rituals (for a semiotic exploration of this topic, refer to Bellentani 2023b). Within this realm, various practices emerge, with portraits adorning electronic memorials serving as interfaces for users to delve into the memories of the departed. Institutions such as museums seamlessly blend physical and digital components to honour and remember. For instance, the 9/11 Museum in New York features a memorial corridor adorned with portraits of the victims, also accessible through interactive displays. Clicking on these portraits unveils personal narratives, thereby using faces as gateways into individual lives. Notably, these representations often showcase the serene expressions of the individuals in their professional uniform (the policemen, the fireworker, the cook, etc.). In these cases, the face is not only an interface, but a text through which personality, identity and character is signified (Leone 2021). In digital memorials and commemorative practices, the text is interactive and arranged by multiple authors since it allows family and friends to share memories, post pictures and connect with each other. Moreover, digital technologies have offered, at both institutional and vernacular levels, innovative avenues to engage with contested physical monuments (Bellentani 2023b).

Moreover, there exists a proliferation of digital practices concerning face (self)representation. Self-portrait photographs or videos, commonly known as selfies, have become ubiquitous urban rituals, frequently shared, liked and commented on social media platforms (Santangelo 2020). Lev Manovich, through the Software Studies Initiative (softwarestudies.com), has employed computational and data visualisation techniques to scrutinise vast collections of Instagram photos. Later, Alise Tifentale and Lev Manovich (2018) initiated the *Selfiecity project* (selfiecity.net) to specifically target the immensely popular selfie genre. It amalgamates insights regarding the demographics of selfie-takers, their poses and expressions. The project offers a plethora of media visualisations, such as image plots that aggregate thousands of photos to unveil intriguing patterns. The sheer prevalence of selfies has birthed the concept of a *selfiecity*, underlining their pervasive influence in contemporary urban culture. Filters, post-production and

face apps give the user the opportunity to continuously negotiate their identity through the redefinition of the image of their faces.

Finally, cities are increasingly blanketed by facial recognition technologies, including security cameras and automated face detection software. Despite resistance witnessed in § 4.3, these devices persistently contribute to the accumulation of digital facial archives, driven by objectives of security and surveillance.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has introduced a typology delving into the facial presence within urban spaces, focusing on 1) biological faces; 2) face inscriptions in urban space; 3) practices involving urban faces; and 4) digital facial assemblages. The urban facial representations and practices outlined here serve as initial analytical categories. Thus far, the intricate interconnections among these categories have not been thoroughly explored. Likewise, urban faces-in-text, i.e. faces of the city as represented in literature, movies, artefacts, photography, etc. and their meanings remains unexplored. These areas remain a subject for future research.

The typology establishes a framework for identifying research subjects that will serve as focal points for future studies, enhancing our comprehension of the significance and interpretation of faces and facial representations within urban environments. Subsequent research should thus adopt an interdisciplinary approach to examine the presence of faces in urban spaces and utilise this framework to analyse specific representations and practices related to urban facial dynamics.

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