POSITION PAPER

Human Is Not a Feeling.
Human Is an Action.

On Emotional AI and Le Brun's Manual of Faces

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Everyone knows the feeling: stuck with an AI agent, *typing anything to reach a human.*

I. THE PROBLEM

Agents answer. That is not the same as doing the job.

You have been through it. The agent replies fast, politely, and beside the point. You explain again. It offers the same three links. So you stop explaining and start guessing: *agent*, *human*, *representative*, *complaint* — which word gets you out of here?

Nobody wanted this. The company pays for the agent and gets angrier customers. The customer wanted one thing done. The agent understood every word and missed what was happening.

That gap is the whole problem, and it is not a problem of politeness or tone. The model has every word for people and no working model of what a person *is* — so it has no way to hold on to what this one is doing: complaining, checking, asking for a decision, trying for the third time, deciding whether to stay a customer.

Your agent understands every sentence.
It does not understand the person.

Emotion AI reads faces the way 18th-century acting manuals did: a catalogue of expressions to imitate. Theatre abandoned that method long ago and replaced it with techniques proven on stage every night. Our ontology is built on them.

Human is not a feeling.
Human is an action.

THE MANIFESTO, IN ONE LINE

II. THE ONTOLOGY

An operational system for understanding a human being, used by an LLM.

Operational — it runs. Theory about people is cheap; anyone can write it, and a model can write it by the ream. This is the other kind of thing: a structure that changes what the model does.

Not generatable — a language model cannot produce it from what it was trained on. It did not come out of text. It came out of practice.

For an agent that is the difference between a question and a complaint, between the first attempt and the fourth, between someone who wants information and someone who wants a decision — and so between answering and getting the job done.

III. WHAT PRESENCE MECHANICS IS NOT

Four things people assume we do, and we do not.

NO **We do not recognise emotions from facial expressions.**
No face reading. Nothing in the system looks at a face and decides what the person is feeling.

NO **We do not measure micro-expressions or body language.**
No landmarks, no gesture inventory, no posture score. We make no claim that a twitch means a thought.

NO **We do not match vocal tone or tempo.**
No prosody matching, no mirroring, no warmth dial. An agent that copies your speed has learned nothing about you.

NO **We do not label the conversation with adjectives.**
Not *satisfied*, not *angry*, not *frustrated*. An adjective closes the case — it is the moment a system stops finding out what is going on.

It is also not a dataset, not a prompt pack and not an empathy layer. There is no corpus here, and nothing that tells a model to sound warmer than it is.

Everything on that list measures a surface. We describe what a person is doing. Those are two different things, and the next section is about what happens when they get confused.

IV. THE MANUAL OF FACES

This is the road the industry is taking with AI. The theatre took it first, and it was absurd then too.

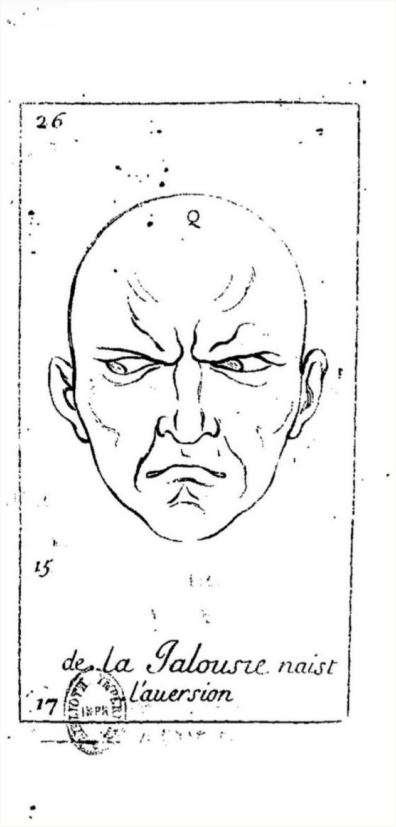
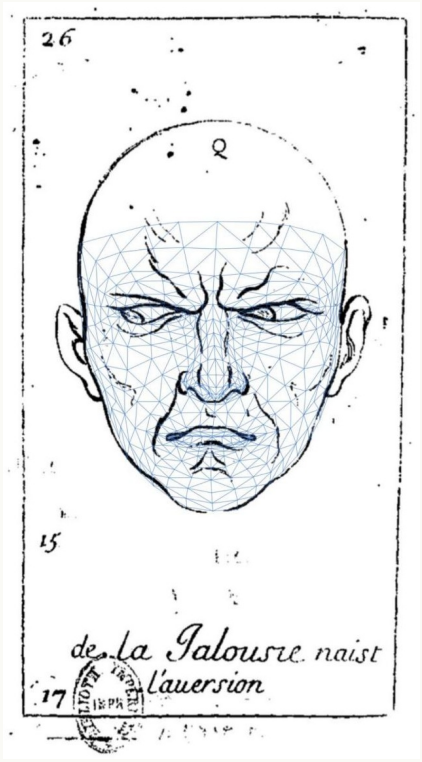


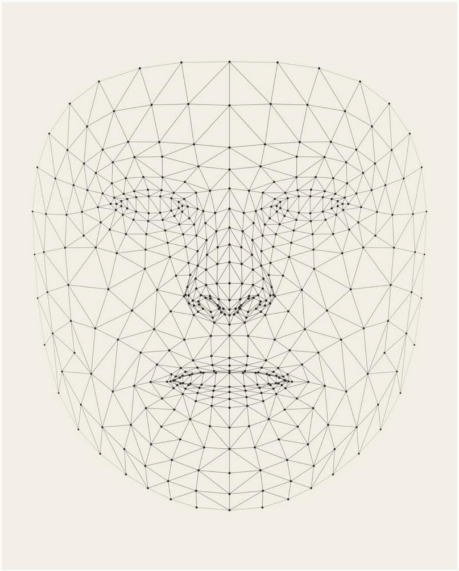
PLATE 26 — JEALOUSY

AFTER CHARLES LE BRUN, *CONFÉRENCE SUR L'EXPRESSION GÉNÉRALE ET PARTICULIÈRE*, DELIVERED 1668, ENGRAVED AND REPRINTED ACROSS EUROPE FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY. CAPTION: *DE LA IALOUSIE NAIST L'AUERSION*.



THE SAME PLATE, 2026

A FACE MESH LAID OVER THE IDENTICAL DRAWING. THE ACCOUNT OF THE PERSON HAS NOT CHANGED AT ALL. ONLY THE INSTRUMENT HAS.



THE MESH ALONE

POINTS AND EDGES, NO PERSON. THIS IS WHAT GETS LABELLED *JEALOUSY 0.87* AND PASSED ON AS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT A HUMAN BEING.

Le Brun gave painters a method: one page per passion, each with its own prescribed brow, eye and mouth. The plates were reprinted for a century and a half, and the method crossed into the theatre. Eighteenth-century acting manuals taught passions the same way: the actor learned the face that jealousy was supposed to have, and put it on when the line came.

The theatre fell for it completely, and paid for it. It worked, in a sense: the audience could name what it was being shown. Nobody believed a person was there. It took the theatre the better part of a century to get out of that habit — you cannot reach a human being by assembling the parts of a face, and in the end everybody in the room could see it.

Put landmarks on a face, score the geometry, output ***ANGER 0.91*** *— and you have rebuilt Le Brun's manual with a tensor instead of an engraving tool. Same inventory of faces. Same premise. Faster. Absurd.*

This is the direction most of the industry is taking. Affect detection, sentiment scores, emotion APIs bolted onto agents — a seventeenth-century idea with better hardware, sold as understanding people. It is the wrong road, and the theatre already walked to the end of it and turned back.

It is also why agents built that way break exactly where it costs money: they can name a face and still have no idea what the person wants, what they have already tried, or what would make them leave.

V. WHAT WE TOOK FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM

Why a theatre practice produced a better structure than an annotation schema did.

Rehearsal has never had access to inner states. A director cannot ask for a feeling and be handed one; an actor who tries to manufacture one produces the Le Brun face. So the craft had to be built on what can actually be given, repeated tomorrow, and understood correctly by a thousand strangers at once: what someone is doing, to whom, under what conditions, against what resistance, with what at stake, and how they change course when it does not work.

That is a structure you can compute with. A feeling-word never was. Practitioners tested it every night against live audiences for centuries — a brutal evaluation loop. We formalised what survived.

VI. A NOTE ON THE AI ACT

Short version.

THE AI ACT

The ontology does not require any analysis of biometric data — no faces, no voices, no bodies. The definition of an emotion recognition system (**Article 3(39)**) and the prohibition in the workplace and in education (**Article 5(1)(f)**) both turn on inferring emotions from biometric data. On its own, the ontology does not conflict with the AI Act.

Compliance, though, is always assessed for a specific system in a specific use. That responsibility sits with the client. Nothing here is legal advice.

VII. WHO IS BEHIND THIS



Bartłomiej Malik — founder of Presence Mechanics. Actor and director by training, which is the point: this structure comes from the room where it was tested, not from a literature review.

TRAINING

Completed acting studies at The Boris Shchukin Theatre Institute, 2020–2025.

SCHOLARSHIP

Holder of the "Młoda Polska" scholarship of the Polish Ministry of Culture, 2021, in the theatre category.

FILM

Appears in Krzysztof Zanussi's *Całopalenie*, premiering in 2026.

AI

Completed the online specialisation "AI Foundations for Business Professionals", Saïd Business School, University of Oxford.

PRACTICE

Delivered 78 digitalisation workshops — cybersecurity and AI — in Silesia in 2026, under Poland's KPO programme.

FOUNDATION

Founder and chairman of the Human Presence Lab Foundation, the research arm behind Presence Mechanics.

FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The ontology described in this paper is available to organisations that want to build it into their own agents and products. For implementation and licensing enquiries:

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