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Face/On: Face Transplants And The Ethics Of The Other



Synopsis

Are our identities attached to our faces? If so, what happens when the face connected to the self is gone forever—or replaced? In *Face/On*, Sharrona Pearl investigates the stakes for changing the face and the changing stakes for the face in both contemporary society and the sciences. The first comprehensive cultural study of face transplant surgery, *Face/On* reveals our true relationships to faces and facelessness, explains the significance we place on facial manipulation, and decodes how we understand loss, reconstruction, and transplantation of the face. To achieve this, Pearl draws on a vast array of sources: bioethical and medical reports, newspaper and television coverage, performances by pop culture icons, hospital records, personal interviews, films, and military files. She argues that we are on the cusp of a new ethics, in an opportune moment for reframing essentialist ideas about appearance in favor of a more expansive form of interpersonal interaction. Accessibly written and respectfully illustrated, *Face/On* offers a new perspective on face transplant surgery as a way to consider the self and its representation as constantly present and evolving. Highly interdisciplinary, this study will appeal to anyone wishing to know more about critical interventions into recent medicine, makeover culture, and the beauty industry.

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press (April 12, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022646136X

ISBN-13: 978-0226461366

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #1,544,802 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #40 in Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Surgery > Transplants #48 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Diseases & Physical Ailments > Organ Transplants #2258 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Philosophy > Ethics

Customer Reviews

"Although only about 30 face transplants have been performed, Sharrona Pearl believes that the procedure and the ways it has been represented in films and television

touches on crucial questions of the self, the relationship between mind and body [and] cultural negotiations of self-presentation and manipulation. It may also lead us to think again about the design of digital avatars and how faces in advertising and other media [are manipulated] to elicit behaviour from viewers. This book charts the strange territory that has been opened up by the advent of face transplants and claims it may be time to come up with a new ethics of the face." (Times Higher Education) "Sharrona Pearl's new book is an absolute pleasure to read. *Face/On* looks closely at facial allotransplantations (FAT), commonly known as face transplants, in order to offer a careful and fascinating study of the stakes for changing the face, and the changing stakes for the face.... [S]parklingly written and well worth a read!" (Carla Nappi New Books Network) "Written in a voice that is punchy, personal, ruminative, probing, and always crystal clear, *Face/On* shows how face transplants raise some of the oldest mysteries of identity and embodiment. Not only an inquiry into medical and media ethics, it is also a philosophical consideration of identity, a cultural study of popular discourse, an exploration of intractable questions about health and beauty, and a consideration of what it means to be an enfleshed being. Always poignant and funny, *Face/On* is illuminating." (John Durham Peters, Yale University) "In this thoughtful and engaging exploration of medical, cinematic, popular, and literary representations of the face transplant, Pearl deftly shows what is at stake when faces are surgically changed as well as how these stakes have changed over the past century. *Face/On* powerfully confronts the societal abnegation of the faceless, the disfigured, and the visually different, compelling us all to rethink how we imagine humanity." (Kathy Davis, author of *Reshaping the Female Body*) "Pearl has provided us with a new chapter in the history of modern identity. Beautifully written, *Face/On* offers both a history of medical transplants and an account of philosophical and theoretical investigations of the relations between face and self." (Jack Halberstam, author of *The Queer Art of Failure*)

Sharrona Pearl is assistant professor of communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* and editor of *Images, Ethics, Technology*.

A very interesting and far ranging discussion of identity and the role of the face in thinking about culture and media, medical and personal ethics. I didn't know anything about the science-fiction turned reality/medical miracle that is the face transplant before reading this book, but it proves to be a fertile tool through which to analyze a ton of intriguing questions, from how we judge one another

to what constitutes cosmetic vs. medically necessary intervention. A joy to read, and I can't stop thinking about the implications it raises about modern culture and the way we interact with, and think about, others!

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