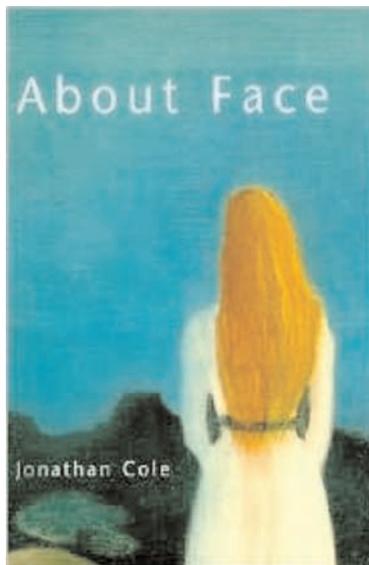


ABOUT FACE

BY JONATHAN COLE

Reviewed by Farwa Ali



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Hardcover: 223 pages

Publisher: MIT PRESS ©1997

Published: 1998-01-01

ISBN: 10 0262032465, 13 9780262032469

"This book represents my journey to try to understand the consequences of various losses of face. Like many journeys the way became clear only when I looked back. Wittgenstein said, 'Don't think, look'. I certainly set out to look and to feel and to understand what it was like to be 'without face'. I began to think and so with this I explore the face by advancing a natural history and theory of face from scientific work and from the narratives of a series of individuals with unusual faces. In so doing is revealed, I hope, something of our nature and how it is defined, in part, by the face."

Evolution of the face as a mirror of the soul, and its function in conveying complicated feelings and emotional states has evolved parallel to the complexity of primates. The human face has come to achieve the position of the harbinger of identity and a display of the inner workings. Neurological disorders altering the ability of the face to emote therefore provide a very interesting insight into the importance of facial expressions in a human's life.

It is this very aspect that Jonathan Cole writes about in his book 'About Face'. Cole first elucidates the natural history and evolution of the face, describing how it has come to cater the representation of emotional complexity. He goes beyond the psychoanalytical Freudian perspective to encompass facial expressions in the interpretation of behavior and cognition. He emphasizes the importance of face hypothesizing that intelligence may have arisen from a need to regulate social groups and interactions by reading thoughts and predicting actions by judging the face. It also has a role in the development of consciousness. People blind since birth that have never had any form of visual stimuli are still aware of the face and its significance. Cole interviews 40 year old Peter who has been blind since birth, but is able to describe a smile and how the face interacts with others. He is a successful television and radio broadcaster. Cole also talks about people who lost sight in adulthood and the frustrating feeling of images and faces slipping away from memory, and the inability to put faces on voices. The loss of image of face accompanied by a loss of image of self was the ultimate fear.

Cole also emphasizes the neurological and psychological aspects of the face and its functioning by elaborating on various neurological disorders like Aspergers syndrome, Mobius syndrome, Parkinson's, Autism, and also blindness and facial disfigurement, all of which to some extent leave a person unable to express himself through facial expressions (e.g Mobius syndrome) or unable to decipher others facial expression (e.g. autism).

The book presents intricately detailed and touching accounts of a series of case studies of patients suffering from these neurological conditions and how the inability to emote via the face left them utterly helpless and cut off, regardless of intact intellect that was present in certain cases. He presents firsthand accounts in the form of extensive interviews, so that the reader may gain a thorough insight into the psyche of the sufferer through his own explanations. This book is an immense learning resource for psychologists and neurologists alike and also for anyone seeking to learn about the mind through the face.