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OPINION

A nose by any other name

Will 2019 be the year we start to accept the complicated heritage we all wear on our faces?

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SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL
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Can you guess whose noses these are? Read to the end of this article to find out. (Hint: They're all famous Canadians.)

Linda Besner's most recent book is Feel Happier in Nine Seconds.

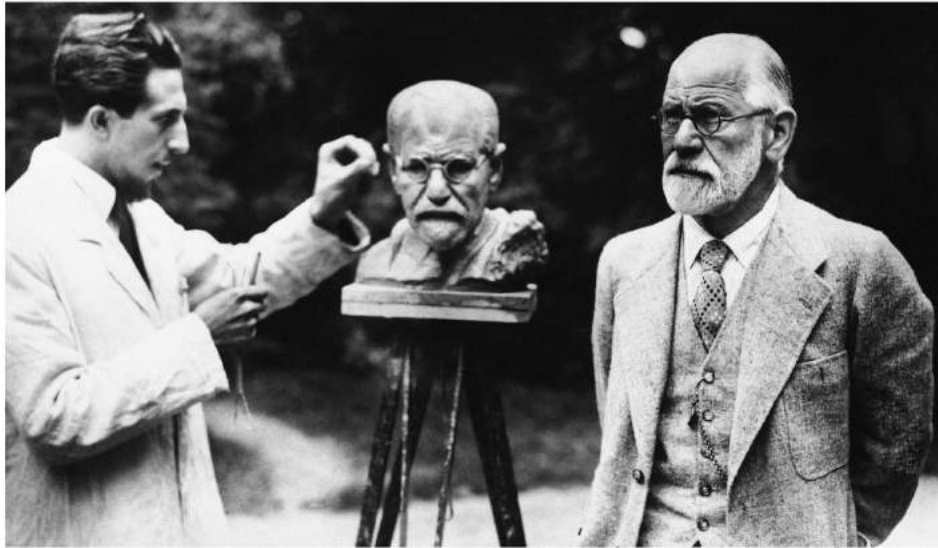
Earlier this year, the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery released a statement. "For better or worse," the news release said, "'selfie-awareness' is more than a fad." In 2013, the AAFPR awarded rhinoplasty the dubious distinction of "social-media champion" — the procedure most requested as a result of social-media influence. A rising trend in "healing diaries" has seen people (usually young women) using YouTube or Instagram to document their nose jobs and recoveries. Patients chronicle their "panda bear" look (black eyes from bruising), compare notes on postanaesthesia dizziness and share photos of themselves with bandaged faces giving the thumbs-up.

In 2019, however, some tastemakers predict that our eyes will learn to delight in the natural nose. Fashion outlets have reported that Lidewij Edelkoort, an influential Dutch trend forecaster (she correctly prophesied the triumphal ascent of pink menswear), on tour to promote her look book for Spring/Summer 2019, told one audience: "This is very important. If you have children, try to not let them change their noses." To another, she said, "If you were considering changing your nose — don't. It's superbeautiful to have a nose. Also to have a nose for business and the arts. If you modify your nose, you might lose that."

Ms. Edelkoort's nose-positive messaging has equivalent movements on social media. Earlier this year, women with larger or curvier noses used the Twitter hashtag #sideprofileselfie to share photos taken from an unforgiving angle. "I've never ever put a photo online of my side profile before because it's made me self-conscious every day for as long as I can remember. But you know what, BIG NOSES ARE OK, although tweeting this is scary," one woman wrote. Although rhinoplasties have taken a nose-dive since the turn of the 21st century (between 2000 and 2017, the number of surgeries plummeted by 44 per cent), they are still the third most popular cosmetic procedure — after breast augmentation and liposuction.

In the final weeks of 2018, I've been lingering on noses in the subway, in auditoriums, and on the street. Everything has been coming up noses, in their infinite variety — noses pointing up, noses pointing down, noses resembling cartoon clouds. Noses gentle as sand dunes, noses curled like sleeping snails. Peaceful noses and noses rocked by inner tension. My own nose like a frog about to leap onto my forehead, its bent legs braced against my cheeks.

The choice to change or retain the nose a person is born with isn't for anyone else to judge. But as Ms. Edelkoort suggests, the nose is not just a nose — it's a nexus of spiritual and psychological meaning, with a history marked by racist standards of beauty and acceptability.



Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, had a strong fixation on his nose, which sculptor Oscar Nemon is shown here trying to recreate in Vienna in 1931.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sigmund Freud was obsessed with his nose. "I suddenly discharged several scabs from the right side," he wrote in 1895 to his friend Wilhelm Fliess, "since then the nose has again been flooded; only today has the purulent secretion become somewhat less dense." Fliess was an otolaryngologist who not only operated on Freud but developed a theory to which Freud was powerfully drawn: of a naso-genital corridor that caused sexual problems to manifest in the nose. Fliess started treating menstrual cramps and "congestion of the sexual apparatus" with nasal surgery (and cocaine, for good measure). Over the course of the naso-genital reflex's glorious 40-year career as an accepted medical fact, doctors told patients their nasal complaints were due to masturbation, and that nosebleeds were a form of "vicarious menstruation."

In his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud wrote that sexual repression caused patients to displace goings-on "below" onto that which is "above" – i.e., dreams of losing a tooth were a symptom of sexual hysteria. Metaphorical language transformed labia into lips and buttocks into cheeks, and the same went for the nose, which, he wrote, "is compared to the penis in numerous allusions, and in each case the presence of hair completes the resemblance." When Fliess nearly killed a patient, Emma Eckstein, who Freud had referred to him (a half-metre of infected gauze had to be extracted from her septic nose), Freud concluded not that Fliess was a quack but that Eckstein's original complaint – nosebleeds – were a physical manifestation of her unconscious desire for Freud's attention.

A different kind of exegete might have taken Eckstein's nosebleeds as a sign of ecstatic religious vision. A fourth-century burn from the bishop Epiphanius tags a Galatian sect as the "Tascodrugites," or "nose-pluggers." Taking their cue from shamanic traditions of the San people of South Africa, later scholars interpreted the sect's nose-blocking behaviour as a strategy for inducing an altered state of consciousness – in historical rock paintings, depictions of shamans can often be identified by the blood flowing from their noses.

In 2002, the theologian JJ. Pilch wrote that in Gospel accounts of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is said to have fallen on his face to pray. In this position, Dr. Pilch writes, "If Jesus were prostrate, laying with the right side of his face on the ground, he would be initiating uninostral breathing in the left nostril." In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus's sweat at this moment is compared to drops of blood falling from the ground, which might be Luke's creative description of a nosebleed.

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In fact, uninostral breathing is a hallmark of yogic meditation (it's how Hilary Clinton coped with her loss in the presidential election). In the same way that our bodies operate on circadian cycles, our noses have their own indwelling timers – we automatically alternate our breathing throughout



the day, breathing predominantly through one nostril or the other. The nasal cycle bears an as-yet poorly understood relationship to brain activity; a 2016 study found that a half-hour of forced alternate-nostril breathing could help subjects remember new motor skills.



A man touches a statue of Jesus at a church in Kolkata, India.

RUPAK DE CHOWDHURI/REUTERS

How and what the nose knows are questions that preoccupy scientists and historians alike. The University of Pennsylvania Smell Identification Test uses scratch-'n'-sniff squares to determine subjects' ability to identify scents – doing poorly on the test may indicate a memory-related disease such as Alzheimer's. At the same time, the experience of smell is difficult to measure or describe. Scent historians pore over old texts for hints of the vanished smellscape of the past and their meaning – the nose's lost epistemology. In some places and times, smelling of cattle meant you were rich. When economic changes affect the smellscape of a town, residents can feel disoriented – no more cookie smell on Rue Viau once the Montreal Oreo factory shut down. Scents are historical facts that resist being archived.

The invisibility of smell and the nose's power to detect the invisible bring us back to The Master of the Nose – as the Zohar calls God. God's nostrils get a lot of play in the Bible – they churn up the waters of the sea, and God complains of the people who eat pig and sit among graves, "Such people are smoke in my nostrils." When God is described as being *erek apayim* or "slow to anger," a literal translation attributes this quality to God's long nostrils. Muslim and Hindu traditions as well as Judeo-Christian ones refer to an odor of sanctity – you can tell a saint by the smell of apples clinging to the dead body – and the use of sweetgrass, cedar, sage and tobacco in Indigenous smudging ceremonies also attests to the importance of the nose's perception. A story about the Chassidic sage Rabbi Mendel of Horodok has him disprove a false rumour of the arrival of the messiah by opening the window to smell the air – "I don't sense this divine truth," he said.



A detail from Michelangelo's paintings at the Sistine Chapel shows God the father, his nostrils flared, as he reaches out toward Adam.

Given the nose's semi-divine status as a conduit to spiritual transcendence, a bellwether of cognitive functioning and a touchstone in the history of psychoanalysis, it's perhaps understandable that we want our noses to be beautiful. But the recent history of rhinoplasty is like the history of beauty itself – rife with power imbalance, moral judgment, sexism and racist ideologies.



In some Indigenous cultures, pressing the nose is a traditional greeting. Inuit call the gesture a kunik, while the Maori equivalent is called a hongi. At left, young Mary Voisey rubs noses with an Inuit woman named Eegie in 1950. At right, Prince Harry receives a hongi from a Maori elder during a welcoming ceremony at Government House in Wellington, the New Zealand capital, in 2018.

RICHARD HARRINGTON/ASSOCIATED PRESS, MARTY MELVILLE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Selfies drive rhinoplasty demand for one very facepalm reason – they make your nose look bigger than it actually is. Cellphone cameras tend to be fitted with wide-screen lenses, and unless you're using a selfie stick, an arm's-length isn't enough distance to restore the real-life proportions of the face: Your nose is too close to the camera.

But why is it so terrible to have a big nose? From the 16th to the 19th century, it was

actually a small nose that Europeans and North Americans found undesirable. Syphilis had ravaged the Continent's nasal cavities – the sexually transmitted disease caused cartilage to collapse, and stunted the noses of babies born to syphilitic parents. A small nose came to be seen as a sign of hereditary licentiousness and moral weakness. In North America, the “pug nose” came to be associated with the Irish, an immigrant underclass, and in the 1880s rhinoplasts helped Irish immigrants achieve bigger, straighter, American noses.

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Rhinoplasty is described in Egyptian texts dating from 3000 BC, and Sushruta, an Ayurvedic doctor working in India in the eighth-century BC, describes using grafts from the forehead to shape new nasal tissue. European rhinoplasties were historically less sophisticated – although some replacements for lost noses were made of skin, others were crafted from copper, ivory, rubber or gold; if painted, they might streak in the rain; if blown too hard, they might fall off. In the ancient world, noselessness was a frequent result of war – enemies might keep your nose as a trophy (this has been true more recently as well – as a legacy of war with Korea, 20,000 enemy organs still reside in the nose tombs of Japan). But aesthetic rhinoplasty – altering a healthy nose to achieve a more pleasing shape – arose in Europe alongside the racial hatreds of the late 19th century.

The Berlin doctor Jacques Joseph – “Nosef” to his friends – is considered the founder of aesthetic rhinoplasty in the West. As Sander L. Gilman notes in *Making the Body Beautiful*, a peculiarity of the nose's history is that rhinoplasts have often been members of marginalized groups themselves – people of mixed heritage, or women, or Jews – people for whom fitting in carried a special import. An 1888 chart headed “How We May Know Him” guided readers on how to identify a Jew, and the stereotype of the monstrous, sharply hooked Jewish nose meant that anyone – Jew or gentile – with this type of nose could be in danger in an antisemitic society. In the early 1900s, Joseph's practice became a hub for Berlin's Jewish community, where Joseph developed new techniques for whittling down their noses to achieve “Gentile contours.”

By the 1960s in North America, more than half of all rhinoplasty patients were Jewish. Celebrities including Barbra Streisand, who chose not to change their noses, seemed poised for disaster. In 1976, a critic wrote of Ms. Streisand's nose: “it zigzags across our horizon like a bolt of fleshy lightning; it towers like a ziggurat made of meat.” But some have attributed the dramatic drop in rhinoplasty procedures since 2000 to a lessening of antisemitic sentiment – as Ashkenazi Jews have come to be largely perceived as white, a big nose carries less stigma.

Others have pointed to a troubling rise in demand for rhinoplasty among Black and Asian patients. “Every black celebrity has had a nose job!” wrote Gabby Bess for *Vice* in 2015, detailing how she wore a clothespin on her nose as a child to try to conjure a narrower tip. A “good nose” – like “good hair” – tends to mean the kind of nose white people are likely to have. In a 2014 article for *The Cut*, Maureen O'Connor wrote of a plastic surgeon's response to her mixed racial heritage, “even the most esteemed surgeons in the field can come across as almost blasphemously politically incorrect in casual conversation.”

“Ethnic rhinoplasty,” as it is sometimes known, has been billed as a corrective for the clichéd 1990s nose job that gave everyone the same Caucasian nose – ironically enough, the “pug nose” that had, a century and a half earlier, been considered too Irish. The idea is to help people achieve the nose they want without enforcing racist aesthetics as the result of a white beauty standard. Part of this notion, paradoxically, is that ethnicity doesn't determine what an individual's best nose looks like – symmetry does.





A model displays a 'Nice Nose' vice, one of the many gimmicks marketed before the development of modern cosmetic surgery. The device was supposed to reshape the patient's nose by turning thumbscrews to put pressure on the skin and tissue.

MOE DOIRON/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Jamil Asaria, the Canadian regional director of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, tells me a rhinoplast is like an architect – an artist who also understands engineering. “If you’re doing a renovation on your house, and you take an archway out to open up the living and dining rooms, you need to put in a support beam,” he says. Nose jobs of the past tended to be reductionist – simply scraping out material to eliminate, say, a dorsal hump. Today’s techniques are reconstructionist, sometimes reinforcing the structure with cartilage from the ribs or behind the ear to create a nose that will age well – the previous generation of altered noses have shown a dismaying tendency to wobble and collapse.

Because of the intensely personal nature of the operation, in initial interviews Dr. Asaria’s patients tell him things they’ve never told anyone – the teasing they’ve endured, how their noses make them feel about themselves. People want their noses to reflect how they see their personalities – men (still a minority, but a growing proportion of rhinoplasty patients) with a shallow bridge and a round tip often want a more angular nose. “If you think of a Wall Street CEO, you think of somebody like Bradley Cooper, whose nose is straight, even a little too big by textbook standards.” Our noses also change as we age – but not, as I thought, because they continue to grow. Instead, Dr. Asaria explained, the skin thins, and the underlying ligaments and cartilage loosen, so the tip may droop as the nose subsides.

Noses have vogues, and the small, pert shape is yesterday’s fad. Dr. Asaria’s female clients have been requesting more “sophisticated” nasal styles – straighter, a touch longer and larger. Patients are also more sophisticated these days – because of the proliferation of cellphone cameras and photo-sharing over social media, they’ve seen more pictures of their own and other people’s faces than any previous generation. Many ask about copying the noses of celebrities (Megan Fox and Ryan Gosling sport popular models), but others, Dr. Asaria said, come in with pictures of strangers they’ve seen on Instagram – just a regular person with an appealing nose. There has also been a revolution in technique: While most rhinoplasties are still done through surgery, it is now possible to alter the shape of the nose through injection. Because the body absorbs an injected filler over time, the altered shape only lasts a year or so. It is now possible to take home a new nose on a trial basis.





Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga's noses nearly touch in a scene from their 2018 film *A Star is Born*. "If you think of a Wall Street CEO, you think of somebody like Bradley Cooper, whose nose is straight, even a little too big by textbook standards," says Dr. Jamil Asaria, Canadian regional director of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

NEAL PRESTON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

As I started taking more notice of the noses around me, I became increasingly aware of how classical standards of beauty ask the nose to efface itself. In an oft-repeated cross-cultural study attempting to find a mathematical answer to what constitutes the beautiful, participants are presented with a series of photos – first of individual faces, then of composite faces produced by averaging the features of two, or four, or eight, or 16 faces. The argument is that humans have an inborn preference for symmetry – as the pictured faces are aggregated, they regularize. Participants generally find the human face more beautiful as it approaches its most abstract form.

Looking at photo sets moving toward the increasingly "beautiful" average face, I watched the nose smooth itself out, retreat from my notice – it seemed to will my attention away from it, so that the eyes and the lips could take centre stage. The good nose, it seemed to whisper, is like a good servant: invisible.

But having once learned to see the nose, I don't want to stop. In Nikolai Gogol's 1836 short story *The Nose*, an army officer wakes up to find his nose gone from its usual perch on his face. He eventually tracks it down: His nose is alighting from a carriage, dressed in a gold-braided uniform and carrying a sword. It seems to be a state councillor of a high position. The officer approaches and explains, with some awkwardness, that the nose is his and ought to return to its ordinary place. "My dear fellow," the nose says, frowning, "you are mistaken. I am a person in my own right."

For me, making the nose beautiful in 2019 means making the nose visible – learning to love the nose as a feature in its own right.



Did you guess all the famous Canadian noses shown at the top of this article? Here are their owners, from left: Actor Ryan Gosling, hockey player P.K. Subban, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, rapper Drake, author Margaret Atwood, Ontario Premier Doug Ford, environmentalist and broadcaster David Suzuki and Alberta Premier Rachel Notley.

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