

THE BARE FACED TRUTH?

TEXT: RICHARD LIONHEART
IMAGES: THE NOSE CLINIC

"The human face as an archetypal phenomenon bears one message: utter vulnerability. Therefore the face will be disguised, covered, decorated, surgically altered – or on the contrary, deprived of all possibilities of hiding...that is why the face is so impossibly difficult to accept: we are staring into vulnerability itself..."

JAMES HILLMAN (JUNGAN PSYCHOLOGIST AND WRITER)

Pieter Swanepoel leans forward and glowers, dismissing the suggestion that a 'nose job' is simply vainglorious self-indulgence. "No, hell, man. We see it again and again. The lives of some of our patients are totally transformed by nose surgery."

As a specialist cosmetic nose surgeon at the Nose Clinic in Pretoria, and perhaps acknowledged as one of the best in his field in the world, Swanepoel has had 30 years to reflect on the mystery and transformative power of cosmetic intervention.

"No, surgery releases this amazing potential that we all have. People want to feel better about themselves. And, it's a fact that you can't radiate positive energy outwards to other people if you don't experience positive energy about yourself."

"That's why, when my patients ask me about cosmetic surgery, especially surgery to enhance the nose, I describe it as 'psycho-surgery,' surgery that addresses the human image on two fronts – the inner 'bad' self image on the one hand, and the outer manifestation, or cause of the inner lack of self worth on the other. It's amazing."



Swanepoel is this paradox, a no-nonsense down-to-earth Afrikaner, a straight-talker, the stereotypical tough nut, yet a passionate surgeon; urbane, charming, a healer in the old sense of the word. So, when he talks about 21st century man's ongoing obsession with image, he tells a tale of extraordinary complexity and fascination: a tale more about power and the capacity for profound, complex change than the superficiality of cosmetic surgery.

In a corporate sense – that world where success and the projection of 'success' rules many ambitions – the obsession with image is both facile and potent; the manifestation of man's primitive need to establish a 'pecking order' over peers. Yet the hero's 'war ribbons,' (the Armani wardrobe and Omega watch) and the 'booty of success' (the Porsche in the underground executive car park) are torpedoed by the very visibility, or image of apparent success. The plumes of the serpent invite hostile and envious scepticism, 'Oh, it's just image. Money isn't everything. Life is more than that.'

Yet what is image? And, why, if image is deliberately or unconsciously cultivated, is it both potent yet



apparently facile.

Probing this façade, Lorraine de Raay, a Johannesburg psychotherapist, explains that, "self-image is an illusion," but simultaneously quotes Ibsen. "A man needs his illusions to keep his life going."

"We know that inadequate people often hide behind carefully cultivated 'success' because they feel inferior. But, if they did not use this survival technique, they would continuously feel vulnerable and exposed," she explains.

"It's part of the myth-making process we adopt to sustain our lives. We cultivate an image that empowers us by projecting carefully controlled messages to the outside world. It's part of a powerful, sub-conscious belief system. Yet, however much we dismiss image as an illusion," she continues, "belief in this illusion sometimes has the potential to transform."

De Raay is intimately familiar with posturing (penetrating the façade) and uses certain 'short therapy' techniques in her practice to achieve 'a transforming experience,' to reinvigorate the soul. "The purpose is to achieve long-lasting transformation in about five to six sessions," she states.

This is the 'virtual evolution' of 'self worth' so often activated and observed by Pieter Swanepoel in his practice. He reflects that, "a minor change to the nose creates a global change to the face."

"How often have I seen this? These women (and a

surprising number of men) come into my rooms. You can see it in their eyes. This unhappiness. 'Doctor,' they tell me, 'this nose of mine, I feel so bad about it. Can you change it?' So then, its surgery and I usually can't wait to take the splint off after the procedure," he explains. "I am as excited as the patient is to see what the new nose looks like, and when it's there, it's there and it has this amazing power to change their lives."

"I've seen it over and over. A few months later, they arrive at my rooms with a boy friend on their arm, and they look so happy. Surgery has transformed their lives. I've been hugged and kissed so many times; I can't tell you how rewarding it is."

Yet is this change – the evolution from depressed person with low self-worth to happy self-accepting person with high self-worth – long lasting? Is it permanent? Can it be permanent?

"Yes," says de Raay, "change and faith in an illusion activates a sub-conscious belief system. It releases a powerful flow of mental energy," she explains. "Removal of this 'thing' (ugly nose) resolves the self-worth problem. We eliminate the cause of their unhappiness (the nose), they buy into it (integrate self-worth) and this belief (in the new nose) activates amazing sub-conscious power. It literally changes the person's behaviour. I see it from the other side. I resolve the inner thing and resolution at this level resolves the messages that people project outwardly to the world."

"There's an evolution," she observes. "People want to clean up their personal acts. They want to feel good about themselves. They understand that image in the old sense is not enough although the steps they take to get there vary. Surgery and psychotherapy can be one aspect of the same journey."

