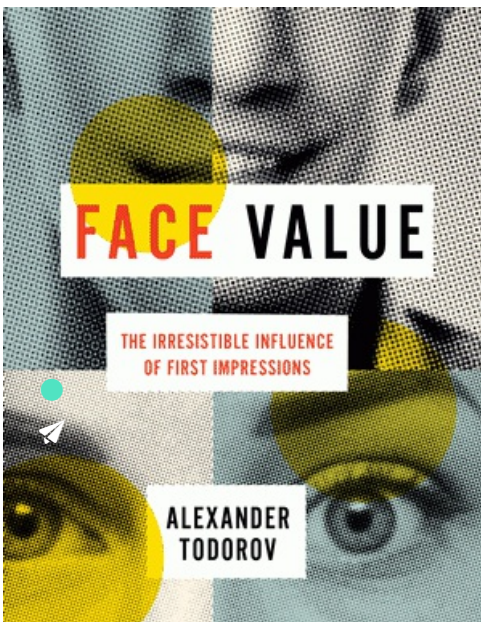


# Book Review: ‘Face Value: The Irresistible Influence of First Impressions’

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## “Face Value”

By Alexander Todorov

Princeton University Press, 326pp | [Buy on Amazon](#)

Alexander Todorov knows that in a fraction of a second of seeing someone’s face, we form an impression. In an incredibly short amount of time — almost intuitively — we form an idea about a person’s character, dominance, kindness, openness, and a myriad of other characteristics. Todorov knows this because he’s studied it for many years. He knows it’s in our very nature to do it — and he also knows it’s probably completely wrong.

Whenever we think about a person, we associate him or her with their face; after all, the eyes are the window to the soul, right? Well, not really. As you’ll find out quite quickly in the book, it’s more the eyebrows that distinguish a face more than the eyes — in other words, you might distinguish a face with its eyes blanked out, but doing the same thing with the eyebrows is much more difficult.

For all the emphasis we place on faces, we’re terrible at judging them. A simple, almost indistinguishable jaw edit can make a politician look more confident or competent. Even something which we don’t consider at all, like face reflectance, can make a face look more submissive or more dominant. It can also make a face seem more trustworthy or more treacherous. Masculinity seems to be innately more dominant, while facial feminine traits seem to be associated with approachability. This added a whole new dimension to the studies. From ancient pseudo-sciences who claimed they could establish who is a criminal through facial analysis

alone, now we know much more — and as it often happens, knowing more means being less arrogant about the conclusions you can draw.

Computer analysis and carefully drawn studies have enabled researchers to understand much more about what makes faces appear in a particular way, and it's often surprisingly little. Researchers create synthetic face models, altering different parameters and seeing how this changes people's perceived image. It's a new field to me, one to which I confess having very little previous interest. But page by page I was drawn in and several times, I just found myself not being able to stop. Todorov is a great scientist, it goes without saying, but he's also a great teacher, and a surprisingly good storyteller. It's not the kind of book you'd expect to want to read more — just as in an adventure novel — but that's exactly what *Face Value* does: it gives you a lot of information in a way that always leaves you wanting for more.

As I'm writing this, all Amazon ratings give *Face Value* the maximum score and I can't imagine it possibly rating lower than this. It's a delightful book filled with intriguing knowledge which I recommend to people of all ages and all backgrounds.

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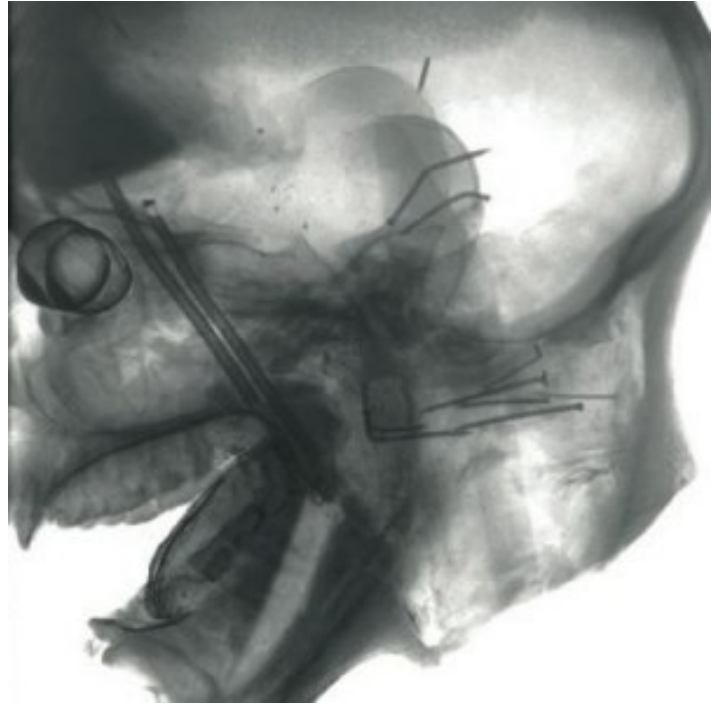


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