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See yourself as you really are

A mirror which
shows a true image
of yourself is a
revelation, says
Vicky Burnett

We all know that the camera never lies, but what about mirrors? Of course they do. At least, so say John and Catherine Walter, the sibling duo who have created the True Mirror, a looking glass that really lets you see yourself as other people see you.

The Walters insist that conventional mirrors are mendacious devices that should be regarded with much suspicion.

The image in a normal mirror is inverted, hence the fact that writing appears backwards and a watch is impossible to read. So the face we see every day when we brush our teeth or shave or put on our make-up is not the face that other people look at. It is the wrong way round.

"Every day you are confronted with a slightly false version of your own image," says John Walter, 40, who works as a computer consultant. "I don't trust what I see in a regular mirror."

In the True Mirror you appear as if you were standing opposite your double. If you move your right hand, the image in the mirror moves its right hand, diagonally opposite. Confusing, yes. But you are seeing yourself just as you appear to other people.

The truth can be disconcerting. In the window of the Walters' shop in New York's East Village, actress Karin Spielman talks to her image in the mirror.

"I really think I look weird," she gasps, hand over her mouth. "I didn't know my eyes look so big when I talk. I didn't realise they bulged like that."

The True Mirror is, in fact, two high-quality mirrors set at a right angle inside a box-shaped frame. The images caught in each surface are reflected back through the other mirror, thus giving a non-inverted image that is also three-dimensional. Walter is quick to point out that he did not invent the idea, which was first patented in 1887 by John Joseph Hooker, a Catholic priest from Tideswell in Derbyshire.

In his patent, Hooker described his invention as comprising "certain new and useful Mirrors for Obtaining True or Positive reflections". Walter's quest for his true image began when he was only 19 and a self-proclaimed introverted nerd who had few friends and not much success with girls.

One day he looked at some photographs of himself and realised what was wrong: he had squandered his youth on a right-hand parting. It looked all right to him in the mirror, but in the photographs, and to other people, he looked like a

geek. He switched his parting to the left and life took a turn for the better. "I would be assertive," he says, now a cool, confident East Villager with an easy smile. "I would walk into a circle and be liked."

This was the beginning of a 20-year fixation with the way people, especially men, part their hair and the way a mirror can mislead you. As well as leading to the creation of the True Mirror, it led to Catherine, who has a degree in anthropology, to develop "The Hair Part Theory" (hair part being American for a hair parting) which proposes that we subconsciously em-

phasise one side of our personality through our choice of parting.

Clarke Kent parts his hair on the right, whereas Superman flicks it over to the left. Women who part their hair on the left (among them Margaret Thatcher and Hillary Clinton) tend to come across as tough and powerful. When in doubt, part your hair in the middle, says Walter. This conveys a balanced, neutral personality.

The Walters claim that people make positive discoveries using the True Mirror, seeing a charm they do not see in a normal mirror, or discovering that they are more

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attractive than they had thought. The pin-board of comments at the basement shop is filled with exclamations of joy from people who have liked what they found. "Wow! That's what I look like? I look better than I thought."

For some, though, the mirror has

little or no effect. Catherine Walter says about 10 per cent of those who see the mirror see no difference. However, she insists that the True Mirror also lets you look into your own eyes the way you look into other people's: that is, with your left eye looking at their right eye and

vice versa. "When we look at anyone else, anywhere in the world, it is left to right," she says. "By looking into your own eyes, you are able, if you like, to 'read your own soul'."

"We only really have two live external sources of information about who we are — how other people treat us and how we see ourselves in the mirror."

She admits that it may be hard to grasp at first. In the window, however, Spielman seems to be getting on rather well with her "true" image. "I can see real expressions! It looks as if I'm talking to a real

person but I'm actually talking to myself. It's bizarre," she says.

And if people do not want to gaze into the mirror and commune with themselves, that is all right, Walter says. Just correcting the false perception of ourselves that most of us carry around with us all our lives is a big step in the right direction.

"For me, the big thing is that I know what you are looking at," he says. "I know what you are seeing. And that's a big help in life."

The True Mirror Company, 43 East 1st Street, New York, New York 10003, USA (00 1 212 614 6636; e-mail: www.true-mirror.com)



Finally, a mirror that tells it like it is. Siblings John and Catherine Walker have invented the True Mirror, actually two mirrors

set at a right angle, that does not invert the image so you are what you