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THE PHYSIOLOGY OF ART

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The Artist Drive in Bodies

An artist compulsion in evolution has produced the brilliant colors and fanciful designs of coral fish and butterflies, the iridescent colors and the fancifully shaped crests and tails of birds. Many mammals have highly decorative elaborations of head and rump—the antlers of elk, the coiled horns of mountain sheep, the manes of zebras and lions, the white tails of deer, the brilliantly colored rumps of baboons. The purely decorative hair of horses' manes grows to a certain length; the decorative hair of our heads, unlike the hair of our armpits and our pubic hair, keeps on growing.

This artist compulsion in nature is also in the individuals themselves, who clean, groom, and preen their plumage and furs. The peacocks who waltz before the hens and the birds of paradise who do gymnastic feats on branches know they are gorgeous.

We humans—along with antelopes, penguins, cranes, butterflies, and octopuses—dance. We—along with birds—sing. Since our closest brothers among the apes do not sing, paleoanthropologists suppose that we must have learned to sing from birds. The supreme form of art, Friedrich Nietzsche said, was that made of the most precious clay and oil—living flesh and blood. It is also the oldest. From earliest times, humans moved in the nonteleological, rhythmic, melodic movements of dance. From earliest times, humans modulated the inner rhythms of their bodies; clay seals depicting yogis were found in Mohenjodaro and Harappa, Pakistan, cities as old as Babylon.

An artist compulsion in evolution accompanies what living things make—the cocoons that caterpillars weave, the geometric patterns of spider webs, the hexagonic cells of honeybees, the intricately woven nests of weavebirds and of hummingbirds, the translucent cups woven of spider webs, the domed pavilions covered with living orchids built by Vogelkof bowerbirds and surrounded by carefully planted and maintained gardens of fine mosses and flowers. From earliest times, the chipped stone tools that humans made achieved perfection of form and refinement of detail. Insects, birds, and humans used the organs and limbs of their bodies to make art.

But are not all the plastic arts somehow derived from the artwork that the artist makes of his own body in song and in dance? Did not song and dance continually motivate humans to adorn themselves with the plumes and furs of other species whose songs and dances they took up? Jewelry, found early in the caves of the most ancient humans, soon added to the adornment of the sashaying and displaying humans. And like the stagemaker bowerbirds, humans began to fashion their habitats, their homes and gardens, as display areas for graceful and dramatic comings and goings. Mosaics, paintings, and sculptures eventually adorn them.

Elaborate and fantastic courtship behaviors have been much documented among jewelfish, whitefish, sticklebacks, cichlids, and guppies; among fruit flies, fireflies, cockroaches, and spiders; among crabs; among mountain sheep, antelopes, elk, lions, and sea lions; and among emperor penguins, ostriches, pheasants, and hummingbirds. Females are drawn to the most imposing and most glamorous males; females select their sexual partners. Through generations of sexual selection on the part of females, birds of paradise and hummingbirds have become ever more varied and ever more gorgeous.

Why does lust demand beauty? Whenever people tell you that they got laid last night, they at once tell you that she was gorgeous or that he was a hunk. Nobody ever tells you: "He or she was nothing to look at, but I just turned off the light and had a great fuck." Lust is accompanied by pleasure (indeed orgasm is, Sigmund Freud said, the supreme pleasure we can know), but evolutionary biologists say that evolution has produced pleasure to get us to go through with sex. For when you think about it, who would bother with copulating—that awkward thrashing about of bodies—if there were no pleasure in it? It is tedious enough

to have to spend twenty minutes a day on the stair machine in the gym. But the pleasure is not enough; lust also demands beauty. "The act of coition and the members employed are so ugly," Leonardo da Vinci opined, "that for the beauty of the faces, the adornments of their partners and the frantic urge, Nature would lose the human race." Sexual selection, by the females, has fixed the shimmering colors of birds and all those crests, wattles, ruffs, collars, tippets, trains, spurs, excrescences on wings and bills, tinted mouths, tails of weird or exquisite form, air bladders, highly colored patches of bare skin, elongated plumes, and brightly hued feet and legs.

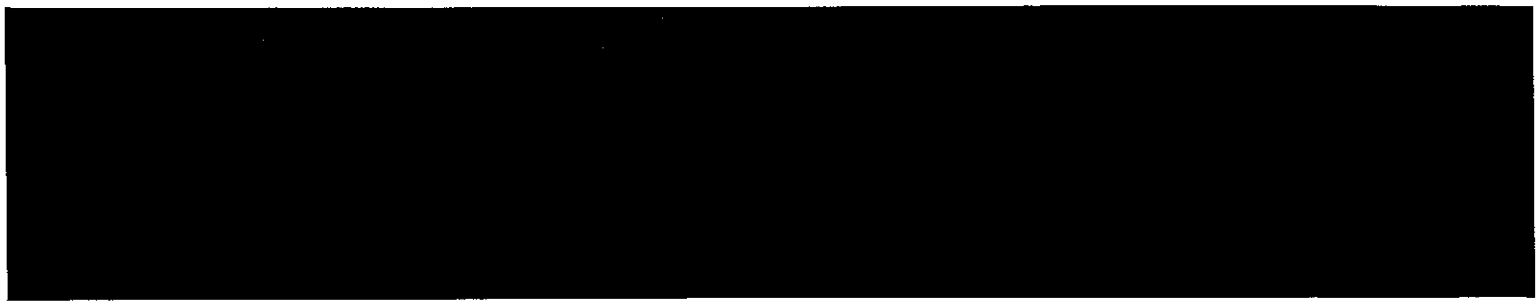
Humans adorn their bodies and construct theaters and gardens in which to display them. But we also work on the very substance of the body. Artistry supplies for body parts cut off; artistry also cuts into and cuts off the substance of the body.

Apotemnein: Greek for "to cut off," "to amputate." Orgasm, according to Freud, is a state of built up tension, which is abruptly released. In the vagina, there are discharges and contractions—segments of tension that tighten, that push across duration, and that abruptly are cut off. The penis gets swollen and hard. Then abruptly it lets go a spurt of jism. The jet is cut off. The penis deflates, shrivels, hangs down.

Painting, composing songs, and writing poems or novels are also orgasmic: there is a flow of excess fluids. And there is cutting off, sectioning, segmenting. The artworks are cut off from the artists; like an ejaculation, or like a child delivered and wandering off on his own, the artists let them go. Paintings come in triptychs. Today artists do not paint masterpieces that stand all by themselves; they paint series and sequences. Galleries and museums put on retrospectives, in which we view an artist's itinerary or research all segmented in canvases that are each framed and cut off from the others. Poems and songs come in stanzas; novels come in chapters. They move along like the segments of a centipede or a segmented worm.

Prosthetic Body Parts and Art

John Wayne Bobbit was not an artist; he was a stud. He was a horny former marine who was married to a Latina woman from Equador. Lorena Bobbit cut off her husband's dick with a carving knife and threw it in the weeds.



They found it, though, and the doctor—an artist—sewed it back on. Skill that man had—artifice, from *ars* and *facere,* "to make art." It worked fine. John Wayne Bobbit now became an artist. He acted in a porn flick—*John Wayne Bobbit Uncut.* He became a star. Polls showed that he had greater name recognition, among Americans, than President Bill Clinton—until Bill Clinton also became a porn star.

Suppose they couldn't find it: the doctor might have cut a dick off a fresh corpse and sewn that onto Bobbit. Sex-change surgeons can build up a penis for a biological female using bits of flesh from here and there on her body and then insert a mechanical device to make it hard and erect.

A guy gets his dick cut off. It happens in war, in automobile accidents, in bedrooms. A guy or a gal gets a foot, a leg, a hand, an arm cut off; a woman gets a breast cut off. An artist cuts off his ear. Mechanical engineers contrive prostheses. They are works of artifice, of art. Every year they get more ingenious and beautiful. These craftsmen are Renaissance men, true descendants of Leonardo da Vinci.

Their art is a classical art, like that of Greek antiquity and the Renaissance. The whole art of prostheses is to restore the harmony and proportion of the natural body and the equilibrium and poise of its movements. Someone had a limb amputated off her or his body, and the body now looks whole. This art quests for perfection, for immortal beauty, for the beauty that looks immortal, without any inner disequilibrium that could bring about collapse.

Nietzsche explained that the whole of Apollonian art is prosthetic. That whole population of anthropomorphized deities in Homer and all the statues and friezes of the age of Pericles functioned to add on to humans' sense of themselves—the sense of their infirmities and debilities—so that they could see themselves as whole.

This drive for symmetry and equilibrium does not simply answer to an ideal of classical culture; it is a biological drive. Most of us never saw that the two sides of our face are not really symmetrical, until a photographer cut a photograph of our face in half, and doubled over each side. But it has been shown recently that across cultures, people find faces that are nearly symmetrical to be more beautiful than asymmetrical faces. In nature, very few species are really randomly mottled; virtually all color patterns and designs on birds, mammals, and fish are the same on both sides. Every zebra is striped differently, but the stripes on one side

are the same as those on the other. Does not the artist's celebration of harmony and proportion have its biological source in the very nature of an organism?

Supernumerary Body Parts

Because nothing demonstrates the demiurgic power of art more than the ingenuity and artifice that go into fabricating prostheses, the temptation inevitably arises to add more prosthetic parts—to add wings like Icarus, to add the powerful rear legs of a goat or a horse like satyrs and centaurs, to add a third arm like Stelarc. However, adding prosthetic body parts in excess of what the normal body has is done only in art and not in real life. And it is not done in classical art but in that somewhat dubious and marginal art of the horror movie.

Bodies with double penises or clitorises, three testicles, or several breasts seem not only ugly but abhorrent at first mention. The body of William Durks (who had two heads imperfectly separated so that he had a double nose, a split lip, and a third eye) and the bodies of persons who were born with incomplete parasitic bodies stuck to their own at first are too horrible for us to be able to gaze at their photographs for more than a moment. We cannot really endure imagining having to live with the body of Frank Letini, with his three legs and two penises; of Betty Lou Williams, with her four legs and three arms; of Myrtle Corbin, with her four legs and two vaginas; of Jean Baptista dos Santos, with his four legs and two functional penises; or of Lazarus Colloredo, with a second head grown out of his chest that had eyes that never opened and a mouth that never closed. Pasqual Pinos was born with an extra head growing out of his forehead; the head could move its eyes and see, and the mouth could open and shut. The excess of body parts initially provokes nothing but repugnance and horror.

But we do not find a child with a missing arm or foot repugnant. We feel instead a surge of tenderness and care. Nobody finds the sight of a three-legged dog running around the neighborhood repugnant.

Cloning brought to the forefront the possibility of producing, with every child born, a clone of that child with a vegetative brain. The clone would be raised to the age of fifteen, then its life terminated, and it would be quick-frozen and kept as a source of organs for any failing liver, kidney, heart, or indeed

amputated or crushed finger, hand, or penis in the child and adult. This procedure would replace the fine art of mechanical prostheses, yet when word of this possibility got out, it provoked alarm in the public and politicians. Animal biologists, however, viewed cloning with equanimity and enthusiasm as the key to producing top-quality flocks of sheep, cattle, and poultry. It was not simply the idea of terminating the life of the clone and then farming his body for organs that people found appalling. That would not be significantly different from using the body parts of stillborn or aborted fetuses. It was not simply a social uneasiness with such a procedure that would be available only to the rich. These issues can be rationalized away. But a nauseous horror subsists over all those extra body parts that would be waiting in the deep freeze—to be connected to our bodies and to begin gesticulating and flailing.

Apotemnophilia

How about cutting off not only the flows of body fluids but also body parts? How is that connected to sex—and to art?

In October 1999, the press carried the following item:

SAN DIEGO, CA—*An unlicensed doctor who amputated a healthy leg to satisfy his elderly patient's rare sexual fetish has been sentenced to 15 years in prison after the botched operation cost the man his life.*

John Ronald Brown, 77, had been a doctor for almost 30 years until his medical license was withdrawn in 1977 for negligence in performing numerous sex-change operations and other procedures.

Living in southern California, Brown continued to operate in secret just across the Mexican border—even after being jailed for three years for working without a license.

Brown received ten thousand dollars to perform the bizarre amputation on Philip Bondy, a 79-year-old New York man, who suffered from apotemnophilia, a fetish shared by only about 200 people around the world in which sexual gratification is derived from the removal of a limb.

Bondy's longtime friend, Gregg Furth, a Jungian psychoanalyst from New York, testified under a grant of immunity during the two-week trial in San Diego that he

and Bondy had contacted Brown as a last resort to fulfill their lifelong desire to amputate their legs.

Mr. Furth himself paid Brown to amputate one of his legs last year but changed his mind when he saw a Mexican doctor who was to assist in the surgery walk into the clinic carrying a butcher's knife.

Bondy, however, was determined to go through with the operation because he felt that his left leg did not belong to his body.

"When you're on the fringe yourself, you have to find someone in the medical profession on the fringe," Mr. Furth explained.

According to the prosecutor, Brown "just chopped off" Bondy's left leg below the knee in a crude operation in Mexico and buried the stump in the desert to hide the evidence. Furth also testified that Bondy was "delighted" the night after his leg had been cut off, although he was upset because he had fallen down several times in the San Diego Holiday Inn hotel room where Brown had taken him after the surgery.

Bondy died two days later of gangrene poisoning.

In a court-ordered report, a probation officer wrote: "In retrospect Mr. Brown stated that he made a poor decision in this instance. He feels that he is too old to be performing surgery in the future."[1]

How we understand Mr. Bondy! Hey, why bring in the shrinks and the cops? His "perversion" is another victimless crime, doing no harm to anybody else. Is there any of us, who at the age of seventy-nine won't think that we can do what we want? Like anyone who goes into any kind of surgery, Bondy knew that there was a risk of death. But he was already seventy-nine, after all. And how fortunate he was to have a counselor in psychotherapist Gregg Furth, who so well understood the problem—and who had the solution.

About the time I came on this news item, I was in a bus in Bangkok, and looking out the window I was drawn to an amputee on crutches. He was standing in front of a department store and looked in no way pathetic. As Buddhists, the Thais practice compassion in their daily lives, and everyone who passed him some money shared a few words with him. I realized that I have often been drawn to amputees in the street. I suppose that I imagined that I was intrigued by seeing how they cope, despite their infirmity. Now I wonder if it was not rather envy of them that drew me to them. If there is not a closeted apotemnophile in me.

So we understand apotemnophilia, although there is evidence that psychiatry does not.

Psychiatry

Since 1882, psychiatry has identified apotemnophilia as a paraphilic fixation of the stigmatic/eligibilic type in which sexuoerotic arousal and facilitation or attainment of orgasm are responsive to and contingent on being oneself an amputee. An apotemnophile becomes fixated on carrying out a self-contrived amputation or on obtaining one in a hospital. His fixation is accompanied by obsessional scheming to get one or more limbs amputated. Apotemnophiles say they are suffering from being "disabled persons trapped in nondisabled bodies."

The reciprocal paraphilic condition in which the partner is an amputee is acrotomophilia or acrotmetophilia (the liking of an amputated extremity). The condition of sexuoerotic arousal is contingent on having an amputee partner, on fantasizing about an amputee, or on fantasizing an nonamputated partner as an amputee to obtain erotic arousal and facilitate or achieve orgasm. An acrotomophile is erotically excited by the stump(s) of the amputee partner. Acrotomophilia is close to amelotasis—the condition of having an erotic inclination toward the stump of an extremity missing either congenitally or as a result of amputation. So around apotemnophiles there is a constellation of acrotomophiles and amelotatists.

Apotemnophilia is related to autoabasiophilia—a paraphilia of the eligibilic/stigmatic type in which sexuoerotic arousal and facilitation or attainment of orgasm are responsive to and contingent on the fantasy of being lame, with a limp, or crippled. The reciprocal paraphilic condition is abasiophilia, in which sexuoerotic arousal and facilitation or attainment of orgasm are responsive to and contingent on the partner being lame, with a limp, or crippled.

These terms were coined by and first used in the writings of sexologist and psychoendocrinologist John Money, professor emeritus in medical pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and in the 1960s head of the Johns Hopkins Psychohormonal Research Unit. In the vernacular, apotemnophiles are called wannabes or pretenders, and acrotomophiles called devotees. Devotees speak of "the interest."

Pretenders want to "feel" disabled. One pretender asks online where he can buy long-leg braces on the black market—so that he can use his newly purchased crutches to crawl the mall. Another says, "My biggest hang-up is wanting to feel paralyzed. I can only experience it by using leg braces or a wheelchair in public." He admits to being frustrated by heavy doors and small bathroom stalls and isn't sure why he voluntarily puts up with the nuisance: "I don't know. I have a genuine visual handicap, and I know what it's like to live with that. You would think my actual disability would make a difference. Somehow it doesn't." Many pretenders have—since childhood—tied up one leg, fashioned crutches, and imitated amputees around the house. Some, however, tape up their ankle to their thigh and roam the streets on a pair of crutches.

Wannabes, in contrast, long for the real thing. Although the newspaper article said Mr. Bondy "suffered" from apotemnophilia, in fact apotemnophiles really suffer from frustration—from having a limb that they don't want and from not finding a surgeon who is willing to cut it off. The medical establishment abides by their slogan: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Medical journals have described people who tried to cut or shoot their legs off. One woman who wanted both legs amputated above the knee used dry ice on her legs to cause gangrene. One person who is famous in apotemnophile circles and who suffered years of inner pain and unfulfilled sexual desire decided to lie down at a railway track and drink himself into unconsciousness. When he awoke, he was an amputee.

Devotees are erotically excited by the stump of an extremity that is missing either congenitally or as a result of amputation. Adolphus Frederick, who ruled Sweden in the eighteenth century, had seven mistresses: two were one-eyed, two were one-legged, and two were one-armed. The last one had no arms at all.[2]

One study found that 71 percent of devotees are also pretenders or wannabes, latent apotemnophiles. How many prosthetists, orthotists, and personal-care assistants are in fact closet apotemnophiles? All those people pushing wheelchairs in Hyde Park in London and the Jardin de Luxembourg in Paris: what percentage are moved by tender concern for someone disabled, and what percentage are wet with the physical closeness to a stump that they want to have?

That devotees are closet apotemnophiles, argues Richard L. Bruno, director of the Post-Polio Institute at the Englewood (New Jersey) Hospital and Medical

Center, is supported by the finding that only 13 percent of acrotomophiles have had a long-term relationship with an amputee. This statistic is reflected in G.C. Riddle's statement, "No amputee is the right amputee," a reference to acrotomophiles' obsessive but typically unsuccessful search for the "amputee of his or her dreams."[3] An actual relationship would cause the disabled individual to become a "real person," making projection of the devotees', pretenders', and wannabes' own needs into him difficult or even impossible.

"While devotees shouldn't be labeled as psychotic, we must ask how a real relationship can flourish with a person fixated on the one aspect of our bodies that may repel others and that we ourselves may like least," asked one amputee. A very tolerant woman amputee remarked, "I don't want to be a sex object or to be with a man obsessed with my breasts or my hair. Could a relationship be possible with a man obsessed with my stump?"[4]

Although the most common Internet bulletin boards, chat rooms, and Web sites are for male devotees of female amputees, others are for male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, plaster cast, crutch, leg, back and neck brace, and even orthodonture devotees, pretenders, and wannabes. An American Online bulletin board posting entitled "Bunion Love" requested "photos, videos, or correspondence dealing with gals [having] deformed/crippled feet, or toe/toes amputated . . . or who have severe bunions on their feet. The more severe, the better."

Attraction to disabled persons has been related—by P. L. Wakefield, A. Frank, and R. W. Meyers in the *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*—to homosexuality, sadism and bondage.[5] An amputee's stump, they suggest, resembles a penis, and provides a less threatening sexual stimulus for male "latent homosexuals." A stump's similarity to a penis has also raised the possibility that a desire for amputation is a "counterphobic" antidote for male acrotomophiles' fear of castration—although these psychiatrists admit that such fears have not been documented. More recent surveys find no increased prevalence of homosexuality, sadism, or interest in bondage among acrotomophiles. And "any similarity between a stump and one's own penis," remarks Richard L. Bruno, "would have little personal meaning for his patient Ms. D., not only because she is a woman but also because she was primarily attracted to men with braces and crutches and was herself interested in pretending to be a wheelchair user. Further, Ms. D. was exclusively heterosexual and had no interest in sadism or bondage."[6]

Bodies in Segments

The urge to create prostheses refers us to the most primal level of the formation of an organism, where we find a drive for bodily integrity, symmetry, equilibrium, and balance. Does not the orgasmic urge to cut off body parts also refer us to the deepest levels of the formation of organisms?

The original form of organism was the segmented worm. The primitive one-celled forms of life first expanded into forms where all functions were present in each segment: any segment that is severed from the organism can move, nourish itself, grow, and reproduce. The organism from which this piece was chopped off wriggles away. The original whole died without leaving a corpse.

Having segmented bodies—having members and joints—leads to dismemberments and disjoinings. Among other species, starfish and octopods readily drop a limb. Brittle starfish do this so readily that it is hard to pick up whole starfish. Some crabs do not wait for a predator otter to attack them but instead grab onto the otter's flesh with their powerful claws, clamp tight, and then disconnect the claws from the body. If a predator takes interest in them, many lizards disconnect and drop their tail. Insects have legs amputated almost routinely.

Anglerfish are deep-ocean fish that are found widely across the Pacific at depths of two and three thousand feet in some sixty species. The newborn male anglerfish has very large tubular eyes and an enlarged olfactory organ. His sexual development advances rapidly. He follows the scent of a female anglerfish avidly. When he has found a female, which can be as much as twenty-five times the size of the male, he uses his specialized small teeth to grip her anywhere on her body. His main task is to avoid being swallowed by her, as she tends to try to do. Once attached, his lips and mouth tissues fuse with the female's tissue, and his alimentary tract degenerates. In time, their bloodstreams intermingle, and he loses his now useless eyesight. Two small openings remain where the mouth used to be, and these allow water to enter for respiration. The male has become a parasite, but he apparently puts no strain on the female. Some have been known to support as many as three males.

Normal, Everyday Apotemnophilia

According to anthropologist Ruth Benedict, in a 1934 essay entitled "Anthropology and the Abnormal," character traits or impulses that are rejected as abnormal

in our psychiatry—such as the propensity to fall into trance, bellicose character, or suspicious character—have been documented to be positively valued in other cultures.[7] But it does seem that no culture has been able to value all of them positively. Apotemnophilia is designated a pathological fetish in our psychiatry. But the Japanese yakuza chop off a finger on initiation into the group. And Papuan women chop off a finger to mark each lover, spouse, or child they have lost. In both cases, the connection with sex is patent. In Italy, castration produced singers who had a vocal range and volume that was impossible for women. It is believed that in the seventeenth century there were four thousand *castrati* in Italy. They sang in the Vatican choirs until 1878. Male circumcision is widespread today in Jewish communities and routine for virtually all boys in the United States, and female circumcision is widespread in Africa.

Among the hip today, the sawing or chopping off of a piece of one's body seems boorish: low-rent. More sophisticated is drilling and boring. Thus cross-sections of tongue, nipple, and cartilage are taken out in body piercing, and cross-sections of bone are taken out of the now hip skull boring.

No doubt those two hundred apotemnophiles that medical science has identified are but the tip of an iceberg.

All this brought back a scene that I observed on Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro a few years ago. A dude with one arm amputated a few inches from the shoulder and the other arm amputated a few inches below the elbow sells knives. He pushes up against tables when tourists are eating. He gets a guffawing pleasure out of grossing them out. At the time, I thought that he had admirably turned his amputations into these powers and pleasures. But did he not first glimpse at the pleasure possibilities of his amputations in the pleasure of the amputations themselves? At the time, I envied his chutzpah. Now I wonder if I was not instead envying his amputations.

Freud laid out the continuity between experiencing orgasm and giving birth. Orgasm for a man or a woman is pleasure—*jouissance* in discharging some body fluids. For the woman, this pleasure leads to the pleasure, *jouissance,* in pushing out and disconnecting an infant and a placenta that have been part of her body. Thus all normal sex can be viewed under the heading of apotemnophilia. The release of endorphins during labor and delivery rejoins the purest apotemnophiliac pleasure.

Bulimia and anorexia are metonyms for apotemnophilia—parts for the whole or whole for the parts, depending on how you view them. Acts that are metaphoric apotemnophilia include the multitude of timid, miniaturized, disguised, symbolic, and hypocritical apotemnophiliac acts—getting a tooth pulled, shaving a face or a skull, plucking eyebrows, chewing on fingernails, picking at scabs, enjoying a bowel movement.

We human apes have lost most of the hair that must once have covered our bodies and protected them from cold and from sunburn. We have had to replace that hair with the hides of other animals or clothes made of plant fibers. When we aim to excite one another sexually, we first take pains to cover our bodies with glamorous garb, jewels, and perfumes. Then the climactic moment of excitement is when we drop our clothes. Georges Bataille saw in the removal of clothing the invitation and temptation to transgression.[8] But is not Bataille's conception of transgression too fundamentally constructed on an opposition between the human and the animal, between the sacred and the profane, and therefore ethnocentrically biased? Is the excitement that is aroused by disrobing an apotemnophiliac not excitement? To see this, let us think of the nudes that are revealed to be or are depicted in art to be integral, wholesome bodies. Then their nudity appears natural; we easily picture them strolling about nude in the Roman baths or reclining at some nineteenth-century open-air picnic. And they are precisely not erotically exciting. The gentlemen at *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) are not even inclined to take off their hats and jackets. The nudity that excites us when someone disrobes is the nudity of a body that needs those clothes to be self-sufficient. Such is the guy whose jeans, leather jacket, and sunglasses make his body that of a biker. Or the dancer who needs this skirt and these high heels to dance flamenco. When these people drop their clothes, they drop whole chunks of their body identity; they looked peeled or flayed. And the excitement it arouses is acrotomophiliac and, arousing a like urge, apotemnophiliac.

Dismemberment proceeds in the sexual act itself. The body collapses on the bed or on the grass, the postural axis that had splayed and sprung the limbs and body parts softens and dissolves. The legs lie on the bed or rock and roll about on their own. The arms expose themselves to manipulation and caresses, the hands lie disconnected from the rest of the body and its will, their positions determined by gravity. The breasts, the belly, the buttocks are animated with movements that

begin and end in them—shivers, shudders, spasms, contractions, giggles. The orgasmic body has lost its integrity; the body parts are disconnected and on their own.

We Artists

We artists.—When we love a woman, we easily conceive a hatred for nature on account of all the repulsive natural functions to which every woman is subject. We prefer not to think of all this; but when our soul touches on these matters for once, it shrugs as it were and looks contemptuously at nature: we feel insulted; nature seems to encroach on our possessions, and with the profanest hands at that. Then we refuse to pay any heed to physiology and decree secretly: "I want to hear nothing about the fact that a human being is something more than soul *and* form*." "The human being under the skin" is for all lovers a horror and unthinkable, a blasphemy against God and love.*[9]

"We artists," Nietzsche says. We leave out the kidneys, the pancreas, the liver—and we become artists. From the beginning, from the earliest rock carvings, we humans have been leaving things out in our pictures of each another. The artists at the Lascaux, Cosquer, and Chauvet caves depicted with the most painstaking anatomical accuracy the limbs and musculature of mastadons, aurochsen, and saber-toothed tigers, but when they depicted humans, they drew stick figures. The charm of a cartoon consists not only in how it whimsically emphasizes some facial feature or gesture but also in how much it leaves out. "Photographically realistic" can be a disdainful expression among artists.

At one time not long ago, those who could afford it, whether matrons of distinguished families or governors of states, had their portraits painted in oils. The painting was hung in the house even when the person was alive. What does the portrait add to the presence of the flesh-and-blood individual? Perhaps it does not add but subtracts. Nietzsche insisted that all plastic, Apollonian art is the construction of illusions. In an illusion, what is there seems complete and self-sufficient, even though much is lacking. In portraits by the old masters, which have the density of carnal reality depicted in perspective, do we admire the illusion of three dimensions on a two-dimensional canvas? Or do we admire the presence of the model, even when much is left out? Only one ear is visible; the portrait

will never turn to show the other ear. Sometimes only one side of the face is there. Often only one arm is in the painting; sometimes the legs and feet, not at all. Could it not be that seeing how much can be eliminated from a body and not be really missed is the secret of the pleasure? It is the excitement of feeling that we can do without the clothes dropped on the bedroom floor, we can do without the jet of jism cut off insouciantly, we can do without that other hand, those legs, that third dimension. Slicing off an ear in the heat of erotic passion is the sort of thing an artist would do to himself. As Nietzsche writes,

For seeing the ultimate beauties of a work, no knowledge or good will is sufficient; this requires the rarest of lucky accidents: The clouds that veil these peaks have to lift for once so that we see them glowing in the sun. Not only do we have to stand in precisely the right spot in order to see this, but the unveiling must have been accomplished by our own soul. . . . The world is overfull of beautiful things but nevertheless poor, very poor when it comes to beautiful moments and unveilings of these things.[10]

How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not? . . . Here we could learn something from physicians, when for example they dilute what is bitter or add wine and sugar to a mixture—but even more from artists who are really continually trying to bring off such inventions and feats. Moving away from things until there is a good deal that one no longer sees and there is much that our eye has to add if we are still to see them at all; or seeing things around a corner and as cut out and framed; or to place them so that they partially conceal each other and grant us only glimpses of architectural perspectives; or looking at them through tinted glass or in the light of the sunset; or giving them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent—all this we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters.[11]

An artist is not a special kind of man, Eric Gill said, every man is a special kind of artist. But intermittently, by segmenting his life, by cutting one segment free from the rest.

Those crowds in the streets—all of us trudging up and down with leaden eyes and dour faces, stopping to greet each another and exchange mindless

banalities—how could we become poets of our lives? By trying to find the relationships between the segments, the meaning of each segment and of the whole? By trying to write some narrative that would try to connect all the segments of our lives together in a beautiful story that would have beginning, middle, and end? At our funerals, our pastors and our friends will sketch out such a story to show that all those segments added up to one of the good, decent, ordinary people or even to a child of God who is now being welcomed into heaven. Those of us in the church listen with leaden eyes and boorish faces, greet one another and exchange mindless banalities when the service is over, and trudge up and down the street to our homes.

But if we were to follow those people with a camera and tape recorder, perhaps we would find that each one, just once in the course of a day, or once every third day, comes out with a few words graceful and lilting as a song. Perhaps just once in the course of a day or once every third day, an intoxicated beam of spring sunlight or the reflected ray off a neon sign, lights up with glory our commonplace faces. To be able to see these small, everyday flash-fires of poetry in our lives, we have to stand precisely in the right spot and at a distance such that there is much that we no longer see. We have to frame those moments, section and segment them. These moments of poetry are disconnected from the prosaic continuity of a life, cut off and cast off: that outburst of laughter that broke from the throat of a stout middle-aged woman in the alley, that faint scent of perfume that lingered on the pillow after the stranger who made love with you for an hour has left, that sudden skid on the polished marble floor that shot the office manager across the room on his ass, that sudden sneeze that scattered into the lecture that the boss was starting to give.

And suppose we were to follow ourselves around all day, with camera and tape recorder, would we—if we found ourselves standing precisely in the right spot—not find moments when a beam breaks out of the turgid clouds of the sky to frame our faces in glory, moments when words comes tumbling out of our mouths like a song? The trick is to catch and disconnect these segments. It is true that it is accomplished by standing on the levels and supporting ourselves on the continuities in our everyday world, by thinking about practical world. But is it not by disconnecting, and letting go of the prosaic continuities, the cloying resentments, the practical worries, that we find segments of poetry in our lives?

Notes

1. *Bankok Post,* September 28, 1999, 3.

2. Daniel P. Mannix, *Freaks: We Who Are Not as Others* (San Francisco: Re/Search, 1976), 112.

3. G.C. Riddle, *Amputees and Devotees: Made for Each Other?* (New York: Irvington, 1988).

4. Ibid.

5. P.L. Wakefield, A. Frank, and R.W. Meyers, "The Hobbyist: A Euphemism for Self-Mutilation and Fetishism," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 41 (1977): 539–552.

6. Richard L. Bruno, "Devotees, Pretenders and Wannabes," *Journal of Sexuality and Disability* 15 (1977): 243–260.

7. Ruth Benedict, "Anthropology and the Abnormal," *Journal of General Psychology* 10 (2) (1934): 59–82.

8. Georges Bataille, *Eroticism,* trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1957).

9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), para. 59.

10. Ibid., para. 339.

11. Ibid., para. 299.