

*THE HALF-ERROR OF
PHYSIOGNOMY*

by

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY NILS F. SCHOTT

We're getting closer to our goal: (a) first, methodology obliges us to defend and hone a gaze attached to contents. Let's aim to delve into the manifest givens to shed light on them; above all, let's not stray from what we're presented with; let's save the phenomena! (b) then, we ought to learn to read and to see in what we're offered the emergence of signs and clues. And in the corporeal itself, let's discover in particular what's called "the psyche."

From the outset, I challenge several conceptions that block our path:

(a) According to the first, the somatic plays the role of an apparatus [*appareil*] heralding the personality it is said to translate (*soma, sema, semaphore*). Médard Boss already noted, correctly, that the term "expression" conveys what it fights against: the belief in a hidden and hypothetical substance. The psyche would then trickle into the attitudes. But what are we hoping to find behind the mirror or beyond the face [*visage*], this fundamental figure that exposes, and also condenses, the overall image [*l'image d'ensemble*] so well? The ego is only understood through the unfolding of its blurred surface, rarely homogenous and never translucid because inhabited by conflicts, prone to dramas, heavy with sediments and plicatures (multistratified). [The surface], though, is unable to camouflage the secrets, it simultaneously conceals and reveals the hysteric play. As we will see, the repressed rises to the surface where we grasp it, partly, to be sure, with difficulty: we need to lay the foundations of the grammar of this ambiguous text, [which is] no less than fugitive and sometimes even ungraspable.

(b) A more constant, more widely shared heresy concerning our human neomorphology: rather than considering the corporeal to be

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a screen, people go about disarticulating it and defining it in strictly anatomical terms. Isn't it, after all, a simple assemblage of parts and systems [*appareils*]? They rip this bag of flesh open to seize and surprise its functioning. They very quickly associate it with a machine. It is only ever what it is, so, let's describe it, let's autopsy it.

Let's not expect anything from this perspective! It applies within a surgical and therapeutic scheme, but in no way to an anthropology. In the theater, too, *mutatis mutandis*, we must watch and listen to the actors [*acteurs*], not focus on the special effects and stage machinery. Let's beware of the mania of the visceral and of backdrops!

Moreover, people have always seen, in the organism, the reflection of the antecedent, that is to say, dominant cultural and social images. It is impossible to dispel this mist completely! Impossible to avoid this mirage effect by which the ultra-outside projects itself into the very depths and the inside! Physicians often get lost there: they chase phantoms; delirium and the fantastic creep into the hyperrealism of the flesh and the black cavities. Prior to the forceful introduction of machines (levers, relays, reservoirs, fibers), engravings of the somatic inside depict imaginary landscapes, either in the very midst of our entrails (channels, branches and creepers, networks of blood, paths and bifurcations) or, indeed most often, on the horizon of the anatomical depictions (lush trees with subtle foliage, strange but docile animals). Thus, "the anatomical depths aren't medical, they're rustic. They're a living landscape with trees and lakes, a kind of paradise on earth, whose main figures, Adam and Eve, become the anatomical models. In an engraving by Bernhard Siegfried Albinus from 1747, a rhinoceros appears behind a skeleton whose muscles hang from the bones like

finery.”² Leonardo da Vinci, as one of the very first, detaches the body from its religious ties to retain only the architecture of the volumes, of the tubes, as well as the mechanics of potential movements: anatomy, in fact, then seeks to include a kind of virtual movement because the “animated machines” at the time dominate the representation. The representation thus cannot really become autonomous. Only the metaphors change. And isn’t it obvious that still today, cells are conceived of as programmed wholes [*ensembles*]? Biologists get carried away by the idea of merging linguistics and histology, and of nature revealing encoded structures; but we might assert the opposite as well, namely that we can define life only through our most elaborate or most appropriate techniques. The analogy between the fields raises a question of interpretation. Perhaps we will never stop mixing up the real and the social, which could, in these conditions, constitute our transcendental a priori. That is why, when the flayed-alive of yesteryear are, as it were, peeled before our eyes, they strip as if they had to appear before the Last Judgment: they take off the “tissue” (the garb of flesh) that covered them; they hold the liana of their skin as well as the successive muscle envelopes like a shroud.

But does this “body”—at once object and subject—really deserve the name? Nakedness presupposes not so much the presence of the somatic than the beginning of its dismemberment and its elimination; phantasms of death and resurrection inhabit it and lead knowledge of it astray. It’s thus not starting from tearing it apart that we’ll manage to better understand the human itself, to enter into an imperceptible dialectic of its attitudes, its desires, and its neurosis.

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2. Hervé Guibert, *Le rêve de la transparence: 'La découverte du corps humain,' exposition au musée de l'Homme, 1978. Articles intrépides, 1977–1985*, pp. 31–37 (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), here p. 33.

(c) An if not entirely similar, at least very close mistake: that of denominating subjectivism, to which we owe no longer the “body as expression” or the “body as machine” but simply the “body as means,” handled by a wise consciousness pulling the strings.

This hypothesis, as always, amounts to restricting and falsifying the scope of the somatic, transformed, in this case, into a simple agent of execution in service of a sovereign ego said to operate it.

Will we go so far as to consider the subject a mirage? By no means. But, with the human, a previously unknown body emerges because real and violent—and also dangerous—movements are replaced by sketches of possibles. The inhibition of instinctual gestures, the moderation of avid impulsiveness finally opens the way to virtuality, which in turn generates the wave of subjectivity [*l’onde subjectivité*]. Correlatively, primitive needs give way to the more elaborate and partially interiorized plays of desire.

This new conduct, which moves away from primitive conduct, offers matchless advantages; throughout evolution, moreover, the living never stopped working in that direction. Consciousness explodes at the heart of sensoriality when the subject sets about anticipating impressions and thus escapes to the dangerous encirclement by an environment that is as restricted as it is natural. Sensibility becomes keener and, so to speak, puts the stimulus at a distance. This is the time to recall that we’re no longer the slaves of the universe, immersed in it, but that it rises up before us, at a distance. Maurice Pradines perfectly analyzed this formidable mutation, this victory: touch [*tact*] no longer truly signifies contact; it only “captures” very low impressions,

so light and so fast that they can no longer be felt themselves but now count only as announcements, as notices of what would affect us if we moved closer to the stimulus. With this, I'm merely recalling the principle of reversal that confers liberating functions on our sensorial apparatuses: no longer to record what is, the punch of the milieu, but to open us to what awaits us and thus to anticipate it. We escape a world full of dangers; we awaken to a conduct capable of choice. The somatic within remains less concerned: it always remains rather undifferentiated, blind or deaf, but, at the periphery, we can sense minutiae well below the threshold at which reflexes are triggered. The result is that subjectivity flourishes in this conquest that promotes it in a kind of reverse shock. We are awakened to a universe that no longer dictates its law to us. We decide our law. One can no longer avail oneself of the universe to deprecate the organism because, on the contrary, it's the organism that has made the universe possible. Consciousness emerges from its own psychophysiological revolt. The body thus remains, and more so than ever, the center of the psyche, and the psyche is inconceivable outside its anchorage in it. "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego," Freud affirmed.³ It's important that we no longer emphasize nor even preserve the severance conveyed by language that moves the ego too far away from its biological basis.

In reality, this fateful dichotomy internalizes above all social divisions, functions of command opposed to functions of execution. Some are valued all the more because the others are played down. No risk of mixing them up! We'll later have occasion to reflect on this osmosis of the two registers: that of social oppositions and that of psychological

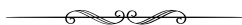
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3. See Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, in: *The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey et al., trans. Joan Riviere, vol. 19, pp. 1–66 (London: Hogarth, 1961), here p. 26.

separations, Plato's famed specular thesis (a play of mirrors) according to which we see the soul in the city and vice versa. But this fetishistic absolutisation of a "willing" abstracted from a "moving" has often been renounced—leaving the various reasons or the motivations of this divorce aside here—by authentic anthropologists who sought to sew back together what one had too brutally tried to tear (Maine de Biran sometimes). Even later, the metaphysicians of incarnation would react against this duality; in parallel, to be sure, they did their utmost to opacify the connections and to obscure the links of an interiority sunk into the dark and thereby hidden from itself. It's astonishing that a philosopher like Gabriel Marcel from the outset sees only two possibilities for the corporeal—either the external spatial he rejects or the visceral, hostile to any possible representation, withdrawn from the light. A clear-cut affirmation: "I am my body. We see immediately that *my* body is *mine* only insofar as it is felt, however confusedly that may be. Supposing it were possible, the radical abolition of coenesthesia would be the destruction of my body insofar as it is mine."⁴ The somatic is highlighted only to humiliate knowledge and to widen, thanks to it, the shadow zone. I'm not going in this passionate direction, even if obviously we must grant that this "internal sense" has delicacy and tone. I'm aiming to accumulate evidence and proof in favor of the opposite movement. I am, consequently, concerned with the deployment of the surface, of our meeting places with the milieu, and with the emergence of the unconscious in the visible itself. Our body is not to be situated and locked up in the depths of the flesh: it will know to show itself on its wall [*paroi*].

I will try to discern there the marks of the individuality of stigmata,

scars, wrinkles, in short, a multitude of signs that, incidentally, are less physical than psychical. The external human, quasi-cutaneous and gestural, presents us with a delicate, changing, and rather proteiform text that, to be sure, is difficult to decipher. That is just what I plan to do: to learn to read it. I thus reject the idea of a subject that is obliged, against its will, to descend into the somatic, one that so to speak exists outside itself before this inevitable fall or this imprisonment. Humans emerge from an old animality they always carry in their flanks but which they vanquished and transformed. In particular—undoubtedly their first claim to fame—they elevated and upended the sensorial at the same time as they took advantage of this new status. This eminent success can be seen already in their posture, their hands, their movements, their walk, their gaze, everywhere we perceive them and where we encounter them directly. And why go look somewhere else for what we're being offered, even if it is often enigmatic? Finally, let's materialize our methods! Let's enter into a resolutely physical anthropology. The problem will be above all to detect the "individual," no longer the human being in general, in this apparently silent whole. But the philosophers I'm satirizing aren't laying down their arms to surprise us with their slogans about freedom and personality—their idealizing malady—they don't admit the error of the *pura mens* and can't be bothered with considering the conditions that have made it effective. The ego lives only in and through its renewed body. So let's not chase after shadows, let's not mistake consequences for principles, but instead scrutinize the configuration, the very temple where the subject inscribes itself and which it fully inhabits, as it has always done.



These general obstacles having been dismissed, it won't be easy to "read the body." We have proof of this in the famous aberration of physiognomy and its various substitutes. I will expose the foundations [of such a reading] as well as its hesitations and shiftiness an all-around thankless task, given how much these anthropologists' texts are also striking in their brooding, their platitudes, their sterility, even. Nonetheless, I propose to take up their promising conception: to access true corporeality, to better conceive of the language of gestures and attitudes. Beforehand, let's consider the first error, that is, naive deciphering, and even settle three prejudicial questions:

(A) Must we take all manifestations into account? Must we not admit [that] in the arcana of mimicry, [there are] redundancies, weeds, and even residuals that hide and spoil the central figure? Darwin states this classic and, in my view, solid conception. The immediate result is that not all that is somatic speaks, that we must heed only what is characteristic.

We're familiar with the evolution theorist's exteriorist method, which clings solely to facial and interfacial situations alone, which he observes mainly in animals, children, the insane, foreigners, the masters of sculpture and painting. Thus, where non-European peoples are concerned, he sends a questionnaire to a large number of correspondents, asking them to respond with direct observations and not with recollections. Thus: "Is astonishment expressed by the eyes and mouth being opened wide, and by the eyebrows being raised?"⁵ Darwin works simply: he harvests the most minute, even insignificant and miniscule manifestations; they can even have been related

or captured by amateurs, the curious—gardeners, veterinarians, breeders, country folk, zookeepers, and so on. Darwin thus sets out to grasp life in its most fundamental plays and mechanisms, but through its phenomenality, in its most notable traits, the jumble of even the smallest folds, juts, curves. Animals—understandably—make the inquiry, that is, the reading, easy because they display their reactions. Humans seem more flexible and above all more misleading.

Let's give an example of this, one that is often proffered but no doubt interpreted badly as well. The Chinese are said to smile when they're enraged. This is immediately cited as proof that any emotion can be translated into any *facies* or *rictus* whatsoever. The conclusion drawn is that signs are arbitrary, that there is no correspondence between interior and exterior, that appearances are equivocal, that meanings are doubtful. In reality, Asians have known the worst miseries, notably that of overcrowding. So, violence mustn't spill over! They've had to tolerate the absence of privacy; hence, an unhappy education in patience and endurance. Smiling a somewhat tense smile derives from an inversion of irascibility. The human body encrusts in itself and as it were naturalizes a painful, necessary, and undoubtedly temporary acceptance. This smile is one of resignation.

In animals, stubborn and difficult to train, reactions, natural discharges, are more easily discerned, and Darwin does not deprive himself of them. In moments of irritation and anger, reptiles and mammals show their teeth, threaten, and, above all, one observes a generalized bristling of their fur, feathers, or appendices. "When a dog approaches a common hen with her chickens, she spreads out her wings, raises her tail, ruffles all her feathers, and looking as ferocious

as possible, dashes at the intruder... Swans, when angered, likewise raise their wings and tail.”⁶ All of them thus tend to increase in size to terrify or at least impress their enemies. And this enlargement, useful for survival, could only be perpetuated. It is interpreted as easily as it is interpreted directly.

Informed by the meticulous study of animal fighting and behavior—the language of violence—Darwin immediately stated three elementary rules of emotional deciphering, applicable to the human itself; let’s present them briefly. (a) The first concerns the non-effacement of formerly useful, partly repressed, yet still perceptible habits. They no longer serve, but they subsist, [and they are] the source of many metaphors or shifts. [Take,] for example, [this] elementary situation: “Another man rubs his eyes when perplexed, or gives a little cough when embarrassed, acting in either case as if he felt a slightly uncomfortable sensation in his eyes or windpipe.”⁷ — (b) The second is called [the rule] of the antithesis: above all, it expands the first and states that, to translate a certain feeling, we often leave it at inverting the primitive, quasi-instinctive movements its opposite would impose. The body, as it were, economizes on its enunciatory possibilities. So, when a cat attacks, its ears fold backward, the back becomes horizontal and flattens, the mouth opens and lets the teeth become visible, and so on, but, when it meets or finds its owner, it manifests its contentment with a violent contrast of its entire body, which it now transforms into pointed ears, a round and raised back, a closed mouth (purring even replaces the growling), in short, the anti-body of anger and the opposite of attack. — (c) Finally, the most important and most

general rule[:] in passion or in its excesses, we cannot avoid muscular overflows, radiations that sends tremors through an entire region [of the body]. One very simple and typical case: “Under a transport of joy or of vivid pleasure, there is a strong tendency to various purposeless movements, and to the utterance of various sounds. We see this in our young children, in their loud laughter, clapping of hands, and jumping for joy; in the bounding and barking of a dog when going out to walk with his master; and in the frisking of a horse when turned out into an open field.”⁸ — (d) We almost have to add a fourth precept, of a no less physical or energetic nature, that relates to another variety of irresistible gestural trickling down tied to an effect of participation–contamination: “Thus persons cutting anything with a pair of scissors may be seen to move their jaws simultaneously with the blades of the scissors. Children learning to write often twist about their tongues as their fingers move, in a ridiculous fashion. ... [A]t leaping matches, as the performer makes his spring, many of the spectators, generally men and boys move their feet.”⁹

These four rules (the formerly useful and above all the role of radiations, of percussions) help us to capture a sensible Corporeal, invaded, non-master of an unavoidable game that impresses itself in or on it, that doesn’t stop marking it (the body as archive and the resonating Body). Darwin, incidentally, has no trouble refuting the idea of a conventional or learned language. We do not control this mimicry but draw on a long past of contractions, of tears, of various movements, with their propensity to expand as well as to reproduce themselves. “An infant may scream either intentionally or instinctively to show

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8. Darwin, *Expression*, p. 57.

9. Darwin, *Expression*, p. 25–26.

that it wants food; but it has no wish or intention to draw its features into the peculiar form which so plainly indicates misery.”¹⁰

What we'll hold on to above all is that while we may claim to give a direct reading, this reading is not, for all that, any less daring when we know nothing about the existence of those movements, movements that provoke one another following mutual implication or that reference aftershocks that come from the depths of time, perceptible above all in the immutability of animals. And while we more or less capture them, we can be wrong about them as well. The body, in fact, has passed through the centuries and has thence become impregnated with strange superimpositions. It is multiple and stratified. In this blend “of the brazen and the hidden,” let's at least know, and know now, how to discern persistent and archaic figures under the evidence of forms. But here, in any case, is the first obstacle to an undisputable deciphering: the somatic implies responses that are both outdated, albeit formerly meaningful, and disproportionate, resulting from an invincible tendency toward generalization. Buytendijk, to be sure, contested this. For him, meaning lives entirely in the appearance [*apparaître*] of motricity. And Darwin is said to have depreciated and overly relativized it: he conceives it only as a function of efficacy or of the (formerly useful) action but never as a function of a pure and possible expression. The body then comes to act in the void of a dead past or in the excesses of overflowing agitations. Can we capture the liturgy of attitudes and movements directly, or ought we to call on an archeologist of the residual somatic as well as on a neurologist of associative radiations or segmentary intercommunications?

Second difficulty: theorists are still divided into two currents. According to the first, it's important to examine our bodies in their totality and via their deployment; for the second, it suffices to observe the body's "summary," since it is concentrated in its summit.

Let me open a long and necessary parenthesis here: how has this projection–reduction formed? Or how does the theory of this minimal isomorphous image work?

First of all—the problem is quite complex—the individual is said to be composed of three segments superimposed on one another, the ventral, the thoracic, the cerebral. Three balls added onto [each other;] the diaphragm seals off the first two while the isthmus of the neck separates the last two. There is no risk of exchange or of mixing[;] we must also distinguish three poles, the abdominal (sexuality and digestion), the respiratory (heart and breath), finally the skull (ideas and will). Plato himself, in the *Republic* as in the *Timaeus*, where he goes into this triplicity, relates it to that of the social classes, which expands and manifests it: the artisans, the warriors, and the legislator-sages. And, for lack of being able to read the soul, he advises considering the body, but above all, we ought to recognize it even in the dominant, axial and enlarged, lines of the city.

Let me note that this number, three, came to dominate and crush the typological morphology, the one that sought to bring the corporeal architecture to light, in which it thought it saw the psychological functions and capacities: hence [Léon] Rostan's (the digestive, the muscular, and the cerebral)¹¹ or [Ernst] Kretschmer's triads (the round pyknic, the athletic, and the asthenic).

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11. Léon Rostan, *Cours élémentaire d'hygiène*, 2nd rev., corr., and augm. ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Bechet, 1828).

Let's dwell for a moment on just this essential, undisputed division that no less enveloped administrative life, the state (Plato), the mythological, traditions as much as [it applied to] representations. Our body does not escape this grid, which cuts it up. This tripartition affects first and foremost society; three orders thus constitute it, which divide up power among them. At the top of the ladder, the superiors, the ones closest to Heaven, the priests, the men of the Law, the keepers of Morality or of law[;] then, in the middle of this secular hierarchy, the soldiers and the heroes; finally, at the bottom, those who ensure the provisioning and the material survival of the whole, not to forget the functions of reproduction that do not, or only to a lesser degree, affect the preceding [groups]. *Oratores, pugnaiores, laboratores* [those who pray, those who fight, those who work]. Religion, army (protecting or conquering), supplies (producing and reproducing combined). I'm repeating the basic teachings of both Georges Dumézil and Georges Duby here: "We only have to leave the Indo-European world," Dumézil writes,

where these formulas are so numerous, to realize that, despite the indeed universal and necessary character of the three needs they refer to, they, for their part, do not have the generality, the spontaneity we might think: no more than the corresponding social division, we do not find them in any Egyptian, Sumerian, Acadian, Phoenician, or Biblical text, nor in the popular literature of the Siberian peoples, nor in the Confucian or Taoist thinkers, who are so inventive and skilled in matters of classification.

And, a few lines later:

Only the Indo-Europeans took this philosophical step ... The step did not have to be taken and retaken independently in each Indo-European province after the dispersion; rather ... it comes before the dispersion ... It is the work of thinkers from whom the Brahmans, the druids, the Roman priestly colleges, in part, inherit.¹²

This triadic vision even penetrated the sensory and colored universe: white signified the pure or the sacred; red stood for the epic, for arms, chivalry, and blood; verdant or dark (black or blue) symbolized the ardor of the living and fertility. Albati, Russati, Virides. Or again Jupiter, Mars, Venus, that is, once more, sovereignty, war, fertility.

A parenthesis within our parenthesis, because we seem to be moving away from the corporeal structures, which, however, we cannot catch sight of outside of this sociopolitical frame—let's not forget that history consists only in trying to rearrange, to weaken, or to restore this tripartition: now the King aims to place himself outside the trifunctional whole he seeks to subject to himself, now he includes himself in it but either as administrator and minister of the sacred (first group, the thaumaturgic kings) or by playing the role simply of commander in chief (second group). Either priest-King or soldier-King or both. He has trouble finding his place; he tends to break, and to his benefit, the venerable ladder. The exemplary triplicity sheds light on the entire Middle Ages, their vicissitudes as well as their general division: the equilibrium[—]between the spiritual (legal, magical, religious) force, tinged by the celestial, and the biological (labor, production and reproduction) [force], via the combative or passional force that, in principle, is devoted to this totality that is to

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12. Georges Dumézil *L'Idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens* (Brussels: Latomus, 1958), p. 23.

be preserved[—]does not always go without saying. Two texts spread it, establish it, one by Gerard [of Florennes], bishop of Cambrai (1024), and one by Adalberon, bishop of Laon, who, indeed writes, “Threefold is the house of God, which is believed to be one. Some pray, others fight, others still work. They are three together and will not suffer being disunited.”¹³ Under these conditions, the King, necessarily crowned by the Bishop, subject to the Divine Law, commands the armed forces, but only ensures that order is maintained. Evil comes, evil can only come from the mixing or the weakening of differences, responsibilities, and ranks: a bishop who leads in battle, for example, or who drives a plough; or a crowned peasant, even a soldier who forces [others] to pray. Of course, the threefold hierarchy will constantly be shaken, be it to humiliate the episcopate, be it to clericalize the nobility, or [be it] even to exalt the serfs. In all these cases, the equilibrium of a society that reflects the Heavenly Jerusalem is profaned; the threefold model that establishes a regular connection between the low and the high is perverted.

Let’s briefly bring up some causes for rupture, two heresies that put the basis of the West, the fundamental trifunctionality, into question: (a) the most decisive, monasticism. Some, in order to better preserve and cement this hierarchical distribution, point to it and finally destabilize it. Monks also escape secular control; they found a universe that is too much apart, that appears to be tiny but is so separate that they also create another polity and weaken that of the social body on the pretext of regenerating it. They blur the lines of divisions and attributions;

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13. Adalberon of Laon, *Carmen ad Rotbertum Francorum Regem*, in *Patrologia Latina* 141, cols. 771–85, here ll. 297–99; qtd. in Georges Duby, *Les Trois ordres ou l’imaginaire du féodalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

they practice a blending of the spiritual and the manual since they pray and work at the same time; they also introduce new distinctions: the pure, then the clergy, finally the laity, all judged according to their distance from the saeculum and its dangers, [thus] taking up Saint Jerome who differentiated between, in descending order, virgins, the continent, and spouses. From these hotspots [*foyers*], fateful spiritual waves spread that drove toward equalizing attitudes, such as forgiving offences and no longer taking revenge, which weakens the warring function, or imposing fasting and prayer, which widens the sphere of the sacred too much, or again granting the most humble a fraternal and eminent place. In short, those who want to consolidate are sure to overburden and above all to crack the sociopolitical edifice, its tiered architecture. They indeed aim to support it but a bit against itself; on the other hand, they place themselves out of the way and outside, and thereby decentralize and diminish it. — (b) The other heresy, in the opposite direction: the too-close alliance [that] *oratores* and *bellatores* [conclude] to establish “God’s peace,” which yields another type of perversion, such as the cleric who wields the sword against the infidels to save the peasantry and, in parallel, ensure his own domination.

But let’s not get further into examining all possible cases, which Plato already described: always the reversal of ranks and insubordination to the divisions. In the present case, roles and groups are being confused; in the earlier case of monachism, another one was being forged that set about reproducing the old ones at the same time as it denied them; in the opposite direction, they are now being fused too much.

We’ll retain at least three conclusions from this wide-ranging evocation, marginal [though it is] to our thesis: (a) first, that the social

plays the role of a transcendental that makes all apprehension possible, our own body included; (b) that it is above all inconceivable to escape the trilogy [and that] the unitary and regenerative monastic way out, the angelism of “setting [oneself] apart” ends up weakening the old divisions; (c) finally, no one doubts that the groups thus constituted never stop competing; they do not reach a harmonious whole. History thus becomes the theater of their mutual interferences.

Let's return to the unavoidable trifunctionality that conditions and constitutes the corporeal morphology. Psychology itself, as a whole, cannot free itself from it. Thus, for a long time, it distinguished between “affectivity, intellectuality, activity” (in the study of impulses and motivations) when it nonetheless tried to draw one from another (for example, knowing could derive from acting). There's no escaping from the trinitarian ideology (Predication, Protection, Production, that is to say, the supernatural, the warrior, the agrarian). It imposes its law on images, on legends, even on beliefs. The Romans embodied it in their successive kings—sacred power with Romulus, legal [power] with Numa [Pompilius], then combative [power] with Tullus Hostilius, and finally prosperity with Ancus Marcius. And, speaking only of the somatic, there's so little movement away from [this ideology] that we never stop, on the contrary, [we're] extending it. In fact, while in a first step the body is reduced to three impenetrable and superimposed spheres, in a second, the third circle (the head), the one located highest, transforms into an anatomical microcosm that reflects and sums up the macrocosm of the whole (the isomorphous projection image). In it, on it, three layers can thus be discerned: (a) the nutritive and sexual region, via the mouth, the lower jaw, the dental digestive [apparatus],

the instinctive-leonine aspects, the prodromes of prognathism; — (b) the gaze, the cheeks align with the respiration, the breath, the emotions. In short, this is the animated and mobile part; — (c) finally, the forehead condenses the theoretical, the contemplative; it is like the temple of the intellect of reflection. Under these conditions, the face [*face*] is inspired by the global somatic and submits to its own divisions. In studying it attentively, we would perceive in it even the conflicts of influence between the various territories. Through this porthole, we see Plato's three social strata, artisans, combatants, thinkers. It miniaturizes the constitutive tripartition and makes it particularly visible. The face [*visage*] translates intensely.

The question is just whether the one stands for the other, whether the body condenses there—[in] a head that symbolizes it—whether a fragment can take the place of the totality. Lavater disputes it, but Gall, the phrenologist, the cranioscopier, feels all the more led to admit it the more he intensifies the tridivision. He finds it and pursues it all the way to the skullcap alone. He doesn't hesitate to cut it up once more: (a) in front, the intellect and its talents, perceptible in the bumps; — (b) in the middle, temporal and parietal, the various passions; — (c) in the lower and the back part at the same time (the cerebellum), the most archaic instincts, notably the sexual [instinct and] its possible perversions. The forehead-prow is said to signify progress, but the paleo-brain is said to serve as hideout for the species, for its violence, for its heavy demands.

Consider the whole or instead keep to the superapical (because exteriorizing and recapitulative) region[—]psychomorphology oscillates between these two extreme attitudes. For the moment, let's

note that in both cases, it's a very good illustration of the fundamental triplicity that weighs down on the West, on all of its "images," on their summaries.

The third of the questions I announced, that is, a rather closely related indecision that relates to the difficulty of the method: are we to rely on the hard or, inversely, on the soft?

Here again, the readers of the face [*visage*] clash: at first, nothing but advantages for the osseous! It is quite fixed and easy to spot. It provides a quasi-invariant, while flesh, drifting and ungraspable, escapes rigorous framing and exact measurements. Gall doesn't hesitate at all: he wants to consult only the architecture of the skeleton and above all the brain pan, the slight bumps, the large protuberances, the deep planes. He's inspired by the following reasoning: the brain has finally conquered its title of nobility, its right to supremacy; we have as definitively moved away from Aristotle's "heart" as we have from blood or from the fluidist thesis (in favor of the solidist one). It is the "cortex" alone that records, elaborates, and finally decides. Personality is enclosed in it. Its development and above all its content escape, but a very undulant osseous envelope molds itself exactly on it. It therefore exteriorizes it because it covers it. So, here again, let's not go looking elsewhere for what we're being offered directly, the very negative, the hollow form of what we hope to capture, that is to say, the cerebral mass in its various territorial potentials. It goes without saying (a) that the localizing conception accompanies the phrenological movement (Broussais, Bouillaud, Broca) like its shadow. The encephalon, in fact, is divided into several, more or less divided regions; each of them then bears corresponding capacities or talents (thus, manual dexterity, the

power to memorize, language diversities [*diversités langagières*] such as writing, reading, speech, even the gift for languages, and so on); (b) that in parallel Gall already applies a histophysiological law that was to have much success, [namely] the osmosis between the membrane and what it protects, between the mantle and the body, two tissues so intertwined, they mutually determine and impress one another; (c) thereby, too, Gall proves to be an experienced clinician, sure of his diagnosis, because the clinical gaze consists in catching clues, silent signs, even stigmata, that is, a “picture” of an emerging pathology (or a psychophysiology) that, though imperceptible, is provided on the surface.

Later, and in his own way, [Alphonse] Bertillon does it again, seizing no longer on the much decried “bone” nor on the bumpy surface of the skull but only on the lengths and dimensions of the body—hence his anthropometry—but these measurements always rest on the skeleton jutting out, which, with its crests, ridges, tuberosities, and numerous apophyses furnishes reference points.¹⁴ It serves as a compass on a soft and often blistered surface.

For others, the human is situated elsewhere, in a, precisely, rather soft model, a kind of individual or tissue physiognomy that cannot exactly be reduced to a few lines or lengths. Above all, let’s not confuse the frame and the picture, the outlines and the content. Lavater, to whom we’ll return, never stops warning against capturing volumes alone, against the importance fixed structures are granted, in short, against “false precision.” This is certainly felt in his method: hazy and imprecise, it goes so far as to include religious and humanitarian hymns where

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14. On Bertillon, see my *Mémoire pour l’avenir* (Paris: Vrin, 1979), pp. 180–182.

it doesn't drone out what is undeniably rubbish. The Zurich pastor often admires [things]; but he also manages to preserve the rights of an attentive gaze, sensitive to details, to the play of mimicry, whereas Gall only evaluates and palpates. Does Gall thus not let go of the prey for the shadow? Is a theory, a science of quality possible?

Still, he agrees that the "expression," the corporeal figure, the eminent image must be captured. How? That's a question I'll address later. Up to this point, I've only brought out the difficulties with his reading (a) of the atavistic and worn-out signs (Darwin); (b) of incomplete or truncated summaries: can the face stand for the whole? (c) of two kinds of lines, the Unchanging (the fixed bones) and the flexible, particularly adjustable and changing lines.



Before we go any further [and] acknowledge the limits, the mediocrity, even, and the extreme naivete of psychomorphology, which believes itself to take hold of the individual soul, without for all that mistaking the few possibilities it contains, let's dwell on Lavater. While he mixes sometimes penetrating analysis with effusion and quasilirium, he also, where he doesn't take up those of his predecessors, clears the path for a few daring innovations. But I won't provide a historical exposition that would separate what is original and what is borrowed in a field, moreover, where the titanic repetition of the same formulas remains the rule. I'll leave aside, for example, [Giambattista della] Porta, [Antoine-Joseph] Pernety, [François] Chaussier, and [Petrus] Camper, and, even more so, on the strictly neuro-organic side,

Charles Bell, [Louis Pierre] Gratiolet, [and Guillaume] Duchenne. Let's dare to extract the best from Lavater! Let's first of all pay tribute to his method or, at least, his point of view. He untiringly reminds us that he sets out to found a "semiotics"¹⁵ and that he simply wants to spell out "the language written by nature itself."¹⁶ Everywhere, always, the "outside" translates, exposes the hidden "inside." This science exclusively of surfaces and their outlines consists thus in the study of the most minute manifestations, in attention to the tiny appearances that shelter the interior which, at the same time, they reveal. This, moreover, general science applies to all situations, to things as to [living] beings; it is at the origin of arts and techniques such as mineralogy, medicine, agronomy, all the sciences of nature as well. "All men (this is indisputable)," Lavater writes,

absolutely all men, estimate all things, whatever, by their physiognomy, their exterior temporary superficialities. By viewing these on every occasion, they draw their conclusions concerning their internal properties.... How does the farmer, walking through his grounds, regulate his future expectations, by the colour, the size, the growth, the exterior, that is to say, by the physiognomy of the bloom, the stalk, or the ear, of his corn; the stem, and

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15. Johann Caspar Lavater, *L'Art de connaître les hommes par la Physionomie*, ed. Jacques-Pierre Maygrier, trans. Antoine-Bernard Caillard, new augm. ed., 9 vols. (Paris: Depélafof, 1820), here vol. 1, 268. [The most comprehensive translation of Lavater, by Thomas Holcroft—*Essays on Physiognomy*, 17th ed. (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1875 [?])—elides this remark (it would have its place on page 37) and several other phrases cited by Dagognet, or translates the German original in such a way that there is no discernible link with French. In what follows, therefore, the first reference is to the 1820 French edition Dagognet uses, the second, where possible, to the English.—Trans.]

16. Lavater, *Physionomie* 2, 48. [This, in fact, is not a quote from Lavater but a description by the French editor in an introductory essay, "Idée générale du système du docteur Gall, et quelques rapprochemens entre ce système et les observations de Lavater," not included in the English edition.—Trans.]

shoots of his vine-tree?—“This ear of corn is blighted—That wood is full of sap; this will grow, that not.”¹⁷

Another undisputable maxim, according to Lavater: there is not a single tree leaf that resembles another (principle of indiscernibles); not a rose that wouldn't differ from the others. The more we go up the “ladder of beings” from the vegetal to the animals, the more the differences break out: “There is no egg perfectly similar to another egg, no eel to an eel, no lion to a lion, no eagle to an eagle, no man to a man.”¹⁸ It becomes possible, as much as [it becomes] necessary, to learn to discern and to gauge the distances, to reach the characteristic material specificity. It is only too clear that “there must be a certain native analogy between the external varieties of the countenance and form, and the internal varieties of the mind.”¹⁹ Pascal already maintained the idea that humans and faces are always dissimilar, even if Lavater inscribes himself in the tradition of a multiform and differentiated naturalism. And undoubtedly what links these theoreticians of the face [*figure*] to each other is what some might call a “poor man's Aristotelianism” because matter here individualizes form; others might call it a principled “anti-Cartesianism” because the philosophy of the cogito, in considering matter to be homogeneous, has too much deprived it of the capacity to encipher or to, by itself, mark [form].

Lavater, whom I'm [only] presenting very schematically, constantly had to fight the objections pelting down on him from all sides. I'll only bring up two by way of illustration.

(a) According to the first [objection, which is] of a zoomorphic nature, organology and the faculty must be disarticulated, because one insect or another has wings but does not fly. Others don't see although they're equipped with sensorial apparatuses (eyes). Is that not proof of a divorce between structures and functions? But Lavater's general physiognomony does not fall into this trap. First of all, it puts a lot of stock with exercise, especially where humans are concerned, who, thanks to their applying themselves, their labor, and their habits, are able to bring out or to demean the "traits" of their own bodies. It's the same for animals: a lack of use leads to a relative effacement. That is why in the "winged ant" that no longer flies, we're witnessing a slow recession of the wings.²⁰ The objection thus rests on a case of mesomorph evolution. To be sure, the non-functioning cannot modify everything, but it re-models; it accentuates, diminishes, or relegates.

Then, reading "natural appearances" demands patience and talent: the answer does not leap out at us. If we evoke only the situation of the elephant, we'll judge it to be heavy, not to say stupid.

But don't stop at the volume, at the first aspect alone anymore! Also learn to recognize the number and the delicacy of the joints [and] thus of the movements. Then behold the masses in movement: you will accord them dexterity, vivid potential, and, above all, in addition to force, suppleness.

(b) Second objection: Is this young science of signs not going to heighten the pernicious furor [that seeks to] spy on, to "stare [*dévisager*]"? On the other hand, does it not deprive humans of their freedom, since

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20. [Lavater, *Physionomie* 1, p. 360; *Essays*, p. 75.]

from the outset, it locks them up within the unmovable limits of the brain pan and the organs?

The Zurich pastor insisted on defending himself against those who attacked him on the moral level. For him, they are mistaken: physiognomy discovers in humans what is best in them and, far from restricting their decisions, favors them. “So be what you are and become what you can [be].”

But the critical questions intensify: “I saw,” Lavater admits, “a criminal condemned to the wheel, who, with Satanic wickedness, had murdered his benefactor, and who yet had the benevolent and open countenance of an angel of Guido. It is not impossible to discover the head of a Regulus among guilty criminals, or of a vestal in the house of correction.”²¹ We can imagine the reply: people born under a lucky star, endowed with talents, may demean themselves. Above all, Lavater does not deny the existence, within a single one, of several “figures” that may fight and succeed each other. He grants “the virtual” a little bit. Humans must, precisely, integrate themselves in themselves: they risk too much in abandoning themselves to one of their inclinations, in not “exteriorizing” the other faces [*faces*] of their plural personality. A verbal response? No. We’ve already admired in Lavater—to not caricature him too much—his art of discerning “images” within a single [image], his capacity for reading not only traits or marks but the agreements or the slight antagonisms between the various segments.

These serious main objections removed, which innovations—borrowed or truly invented, it doesn’t matter here since we’re not

aiming to write the history of the young discipline—must we assign to this audacious somatic psychology? I credit it with three.

My analysis does not consist in supporting the crazy undertaking—reading the soul on the skin and in the bones—but only in presenting it in a somewhat less summary way. In it, we already find some seeds of a physical anthropology to come to which, later, I will commit. It's less important to reject Lavater than it is to extend or go beyond him.

(a) Let's immediately grant Lavater an original will to “flush out” and bring out physical asymmetries that cause imbalances. Lavater heralds and anticipates [Cesare] Lombroso (*Criminal Man*). Physiognomy must no longer be regarded as nor considered to be a homogenous or smooth given, the simple spreading out of a surface: it gives us to see, in it, either very solid convergences (an intense harmony) or imperceptible and subtle disagreements, both in the sensorial (official: nose, mouth, eyes) sites and in the parts referred to as solid (chin, forehead, the skull itself).

To be sure, Lavater enthusiastically and copiously celebrated nature and, beyond it, the Creator: he managed to unite the various organs to such an extent that studying one entails knowledge of the others. The physiognomic scholar is also able to articulate rules of exclusion: “certain noses are never found with certain foreheads; and, on the contrary, other certain foreheads are always accompanied by a certain kind of noses ... Among a hundred circular foreheads, in profile, I have never yet met with one Roman nose.”²² And Lavater sketches, deduces, demonstrates: a geometrical-psychical festival of reliefs, volumes, and lines that call for or eliminate each other. God, for his part, did not

match nor simply glue together—marquetry work, basically—already constituted organs: the body emerges in its entirety from one and the same gesture, of which it is the expression.

Under these conditions, the least dehiscence or the slightest crevice must be troubling: it signifies a possible cracking of the soul, its division. How, then, can it come about? First, it strikes primarily the mobile and flexible regions (rarely the frame) but above all the face, [which,] for Lavater, is a site of tensions; [the face] more or less achieves an equilibrium of forces. That's why it's important to learn to evaluate its integrating power. Lavater, moreover, opposes two kinds of dissonance: (a) the less important one, a sort of non-complementarity between the “solid” and the “soft,” between the invariant and the “muscle” (the flesh, the curves, above all the various movements). To an extent, it's the conflict-contrast between the possible, which the outlines define, and the effectively real, that is to say, the uses; (b) [the] more serious [kind are] discrepancies and asymmetries of the figures' axes; in this regard, top and bottom, profile and front, right and left are carefully compared. [Even] the slightest inequalities will be flushed out and counted. Lavater recommends a few heuristic procedures: (a) practice reproducing the face, simplifying it, but above all translating it: “the best aid of the imagination, the only means of preserving and communicating numberless peculiarities, shades, and expressions, which are not by words, or any other mode, to be described. The physiognomist who cannot draw readily, accurately, and characteristically, will be unable to make, much less to retain, or communicate, innumerable observations.”²³ It is of capital importance to remove all that is useless to lay bare the framework

with the tensions it contains, in both senses of the word, both because it encloses them and because it moderates them. Lavater, in sum, admits two analytic perspectives that intersect even if they are opposed: the conspiring harmony of the parts (the osseous above all) and the apprehension of “transgressions” (his term) and divergences. (b) Another physicopsychical manipulation to discover the play of real assemblages and possible cracks:

Take two, three, or four shades of men, remarkable for understanding, join the features so artificially that no defect shall appear, as far as relates to the act of joining; that is, take the forehead of one, add the nose of a second, the mouth of a third, the chin of a fourth, and the result of this combination of the signs of wisdom shall be folly. Folly is perhaps nothing more than the annexation of some heterogeneous addition.²⁴

The immediate logical consequence is that if a sane individual suddenly falls into dementia, this fall is immediately translated in their traits, which it collapses and upsets. “Right away, this revolution is announced by heterogenous signs. Either the lower part of the countenance extends itself, or the eyes acquire a direction not conformable to the forehead, the mouth cannot remain closed, or the features of the countenance, in some other manner, lose their consistency.”²⁵ Then follows the famous “asylum demeanor” or “asylum face.” Here and there, Lavater brings out other physical notations that indicate a prepathology. It will be difficult for the subject—ill at ease with itself and bearing vague pain—to escape a

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24. Lavater, *Physionomie* 2, 8; *Essays*, 183.

25. Lavater, *Physionomie* 2, pp. 8–9; *Essays*, p. 184 [amended].

corporeal fatality that weighs down on it and compromises its unity and thus its health.

In these sketches, which are as dangerous as they are naive, Lavater doesn't go far enough—that is, [he doesn't] explore the “corporeal image” more deeply—and he too often takes refuge from objections using somewhat artificial means. So, such and such is greedy, impatiently possessive? How can we affirm this? Lavater, in fact, dissuades us from considering someone generous even if they spend [money,] ostentatiously or not. Several times in their lives, the avaricious waste [money] and try to conceal their miserliness from themselves as much as from others. Thanks to this deceptive blend of attitudes and behaviors, therefore, no conclusions can be drawn. And the physiognomist—with a simple question of dosage—can maintain the “for” and the “against” equally. But our discussion here is not really of Lavater and his theory; I'm only aiming to spare him too distorting a reading.

(B) Second, Lavater managed to amplify a method Porta, among others, had taught him—the fantastic recourse to zoomorph[olog]y.

Let me insist on this point. It is arduous to decipher the fleeting and jumbled corporeal text (an air, an attitude, a look). Cureau de la Chambre saw in it the incidence of at least four variables: the figure, its situation, its color, and the animating movement. He set out to break them down. Impassioned people cannot not get somewhat agitated (thus, movement and the color accentuating it) while the virtuous and wise (for them, only figure and situation) are “at rest because reason prevents the movements that would not suit the moderation and the

tranquility it seeks: such is the serious and modest look [*mine*], such the countenance of a man who meditates and who thinks of great things.” The psychosocial intention of Cureau de la Chambre the physician, moreover, is clear: “Should it happen that [a man’s] speech gives the lie to his heart, his face can give the lie to his speech. In fact, however secret the movements of his soul may be, whatever care he takes to hide them, as soon as they are formed, they appear on his face.”²⁶ And the Cartesians, defenders of a certain psychosomatic parallelism, will borrow a lot from him to constitute the indispensable grammar of “natural” or passional language, thus wresting it from the vagueness of the “*je ne sais quoi*”²⁷ and explaining how hatred or love, shame or anger corporeally and unfailingly express themselves. “The soul thus carries its spirits to the outside and spreads them across the exterior parts.”²⁸

Let me note parenthetically that two sciences would emerge from this: (a) the aesthetics of representations, the school of the portrait painters, a neophysics of the image. If we want to give a good rendering of betrayal (Judas) or of devotion, or courage, or even faithfulness, it is in fact important to present a pertinent picture of them and thus to know their “sensible manifestations,” the[ir] “characters” (attitudes, air, etc.). The concern with an exact or, at least, just correspondence animates the philosophers and the artists of the sixteenth century: how do pure feelings inscribe themselves in the space of gestures—a kind of mental geometry or passional topography, as daring, in some respects,

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26. Cureau de la Chambre, *Les caractères des passions*, 1640, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1658–63), vol. 1, 1.

27. “Since this has always been called *the je ne sais quoi*, it seems the intended lesson was that it cannot be said what it is” (de la Chambre, *Caractères* 1, p. 5).

28. De la Chambre, *Caractères* 1, p. 11.

as the analytic geometry to which it is related (the circle and its equation)? Just as a circumference translates the orthogonal projection of a sphere on a plane and one can even be generated from the other (also a problem of perspective), so *mutatis mutandis*, the psyche extends in its own way, symbolizes itself, and gives itself over to the outside. The Descartes of the *Dioptrics*, of the *Regulae*, and of *The Passions of the Soul* tackles this central iconographic question: there, the notion of the figure ensures the transition between soul and body and also, at a higher level, between thinking and the indispensable imagination or between the spiritual and material knowledge. The seventeenth century thus wasn't unaware of the importance and the productivity of the circulation between all the registers (the parallelism), which, precisely, ensure the power of the idea, reflexivity (mirroring), and the play of translations–reflections. Leibniz's genius comes out in this transversal analysis. — (b) An emerging psychophysics expands the question and discovers a fluidic mechanics that runs counter to our emotions: this certainly isn't reflex—[Georges] Canguilhem's demonstration, to my mind, is conclusive²⁹—but a certain automaticity that obliges us, for example, to close our eyes when danger comes too close to us. All of the corporeal links up, [and] it is not so much described as it is deduced: paleness, tremors, tears, sighs, moans. “There is no passion which some particular expression of the eyes does not reveal. For some passions this is quite obvious: even the most stupid servants can tell from their master's eye whether he is angry with them.”³⁰ Not only does Descartes bring order to what had been abandoned to the

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29. [See Canguilhem, *La Formation du concept de reflexe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1955).—Trans.]

30. Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, 323–404 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), §113, 367. The French can be found in volume XI of the standard edition of the *Œuvres* by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (AT), here p. 412.

darkness, to the contingency of the humors, not only does he found a generalized science of movements and their organic repercussions, quite difficult to master or to stop—but, subtly, he manages to insist on the ambiguities and the looseness of this stand-in language, as simply stated section [headings] from *The Passions of the Soul* shows: section 116 is titled “How sadness causes pallor,” section 117 “Why we often blush when we are sad,” or again (in section 113, “The expressions of the eyes and the face”): “some people make almost the same face when they weep as others do when they laugh. Of course, some facial expressions are quite noticeable, such as wrinkles in the forehead in anger and certain movements of the nose and lips in indignation and derision; but these seem not so much natural as voluntary.”³¹ Cureau de la Chambre, preceded in this by the theologian Nicolas Coeffeteau, *Tableau des Passions humaines, de leurs causes et de leurs effets* (1615), had introduced, in the place of voluntarist and moral perspective, the medical [perspective,] that is, the strict study of corresponding signs, of blood movements, and of the other springs that play at the surface.

Let’s close this parenthesis on the Cartesian innovators who establish the foundations of a science of the passional body and its perceptible manifestations [in order to,] so to speak, to see the soul and put the inside outside!

But Lavater goes beyond the seventeenth century and adds a stone to the edifice thanks to a clever stratagem, systematically applied, that we can present in syllogistic form: (a) humans, as we know, discover themselves timidly and sometimes still confusedly, while animals exhibit their forces, their ruses, or their capacities. The social cement

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31. [Descartes, *Passions*, §§113 and 116–17, pp. 368–369 / AT XI:412 and 414.]

has not covered over their powers nor complicated their conduct. Thus the lion is striking by its violence, the snake by its duplicity, the ox by its apathy, the fox by its skittish ruses, and so on. For Lavater, this is indisputable: “It would be more than ridiculous to expect from the lamb, the power of ... the lion. Were the lion and lamb, for the first time, placed before us, had we never known such animals, never heard their names, still we could not resist the impression of the courage and strength of the one, or of the weakness and sufferance of the other.”³² Animal bodies result from this specificity: they thus augment the pulsional. — (b) Under these circumstances, let’s take the following detour: to know the human in its exterior, let’s ask toward what kind of animal it is oriented. Does such and such individual tend toward a bird, a cat, or a horse? Let’s push the lines all the way to their asymptote, beyond even the sphere of caricature, into the phantasms of deformation (downright anamorphosis; see figures 1 and 2, frog-man). — (c) We’ll thus know what psyche inhabits this or that aspect. The relay has allowed for establishing a solid somatopsychical grammar. That is not a play of vague similarities but the means of defining the meaning of corporeal, shrunk or augmented, territories.

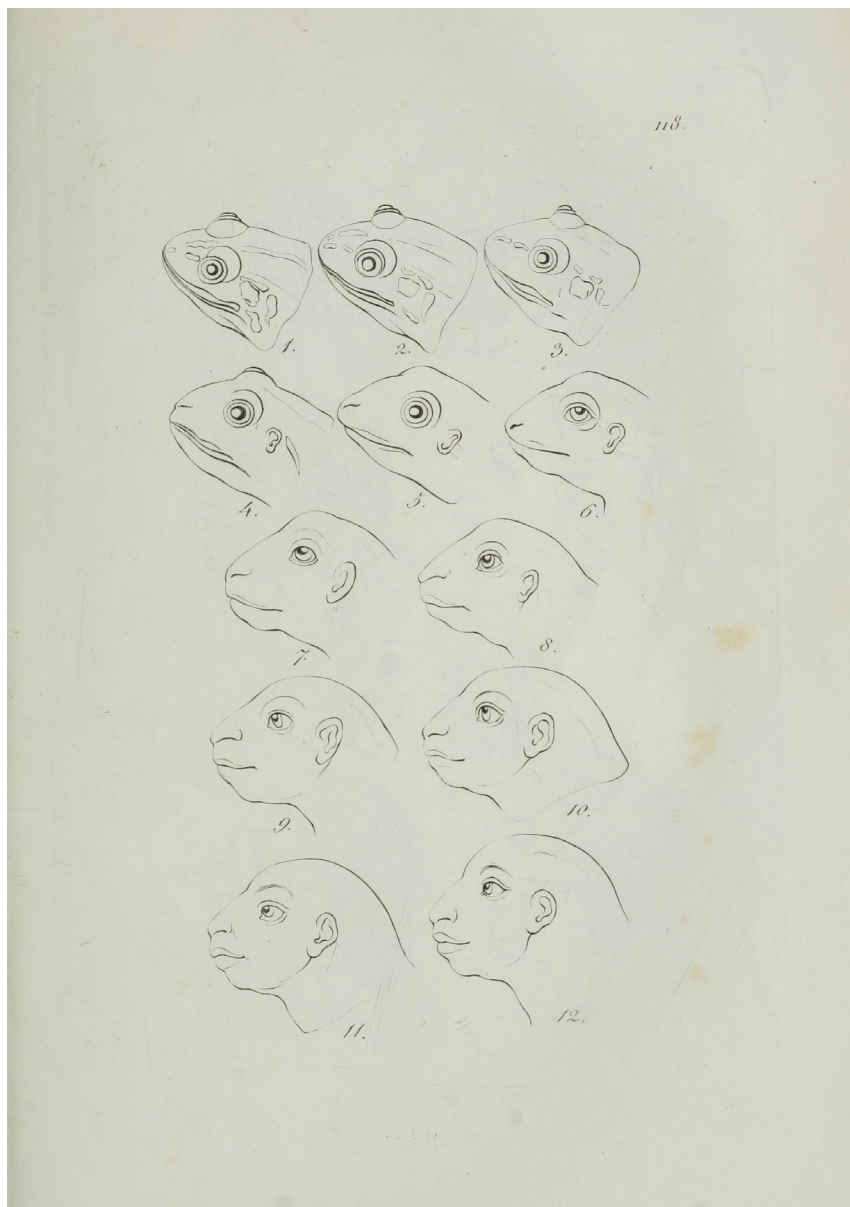


Figure 1. "Frog-man". A creature undergoing physiognomic metamorphosis from a frog into an ideal head of Apollo (stages 1-12). Drawing by J.C. Lavater, 179-. Courtesy of the Wellcome Collection.

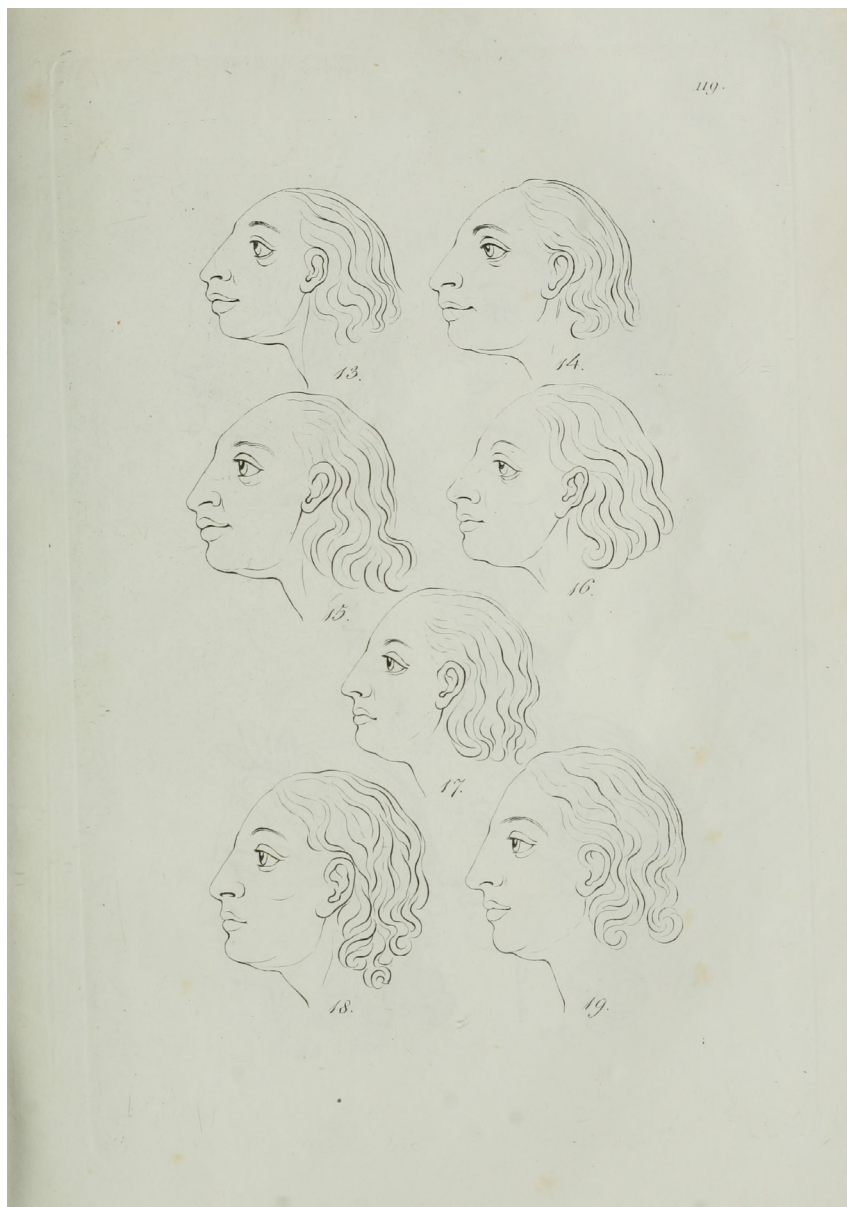


Figure 2. "Frog-man". A creature undergoing physiognomic metamorphosis from a frog into an ideal head of Apollo (stages 13-19). Drawing by J.C. Lavater, 179-. Courtesy of the Wellcome Collection.

A perfunctory example [Lavater] borrows from Porta and taken up by Charles Le Brun concerning the aquiline nose: “It contains within it something royal and majestic, and, just as the eagle is the king of birds, this sign denotes a royal race and an uncommon magnificence. The Persians held this form in high esteem ... According to Plutarch and Xenophon, they observed and still observe [the rule that] no one who does not have an aquiline nose be elevated to royal rank.”³³ Generally, we’ll benefit from advancing less quickly and less rudimentarily: each animal is characterized by its own measurements. Let’s not forget to avail ourselves of them; both the connections and the inductions made on their basis will be better justified.

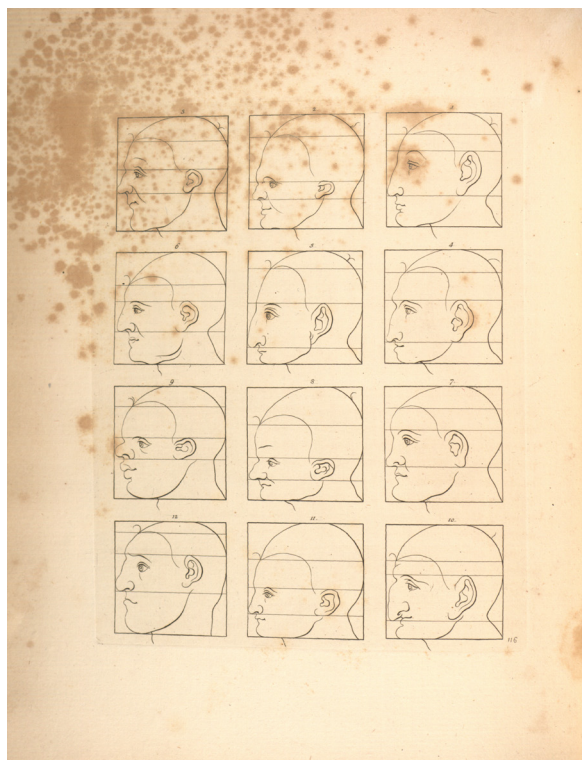


Figure 3. Twelve human profiles in outline, sectioned to show their disproportion. Drawing by J.C. Lavater, 179-, after A. Dürer.

That is why Lavater first undertakes an obligatory and easy pinpointing: dividing the profile into three segments (fig. 3), from the forehead to the eyebrows, from these to the tip of the nose, and finally from there to the tip of the chin. This is easily numbered. Accordingly, that face is said to be stupid whose lower part is divided by the mouth into two strictly equal parts; and that [face] is said to be downright foolish or narrow-minded whose lower region stretches out to the detriment of the two upper ones. Some bird species present us with just this figure of an increasingly flattened head (the bird's head), a rapacious beak, and a correspondingly elongated lower part.

If the soul is the idea of the body, then inversely, the body becomes the manifestation, the revelation of an ego discovering itself. A nose, a forehead, or a mouth cannot split, curve, or expand without *ipso facto* expressing a “ruse” of the personality that is thus seen from its inverse, despite itself, in the space of its thrusts or its desires. And it's not enough to look or to appeal to clairvoyance, to intuition, we must intervene: we destabilize the forms and draw them toward their excesses. A science of the figurative or the somatic timidly emerges. Manipulation here partakes of the imaginary because we precipitate the axes and volumes toward their “vanishing points,” but this amplification allows for frustrating the mechanics of corrections, of harmonies, and of social conventions that sets out to hide from us the contradictions, the violence of the instinctual. Underneath a culture that smooths out and rounds off, we try—thanks to movements and stretches—to seek out the protrusions or the bedrock of the natural.

(C) Lavater's third innovation: he always tried to escape interpretations that were too poor and too restrictive. On the one hand, and I've

mentioned this enough, he often criticized (Gall's) localist study, which keeps to the bumps and depressions of the brain pan and the cerebellum. Lavater, in a way, only appreciates wholes, relations between surfaces, less the dimensions (anthropometry in the strict sense) than their respective importance (indicative of conflict or of harmony). Far from restricting the soul to a bone or a frame, he seeks to capture the tensions and (territorial) dominances, the dynamics of the axes, and the force of correlations.

On the other hand, Lavater didn't hesitate to expand the field of semiological study. We can easily distinguish three concentric circles that exceed the somatic and transport it into the distance [*au loin*]: (a) the first, gesturality, hence Lavater's studies of writing, the parallel study of rhythm, not to forget the attention he pays to the voice and its accents. The blind—and here Lavater claims to be inspired by Diderot—recognize and judge based only on the tone, the timbre of the person speaking: the soul would thus be communicated by breath. Such a study is completely in line with the empiricism of the eighteenth-century philosophers: explore the various sensibilities, the sensorial receptacles, measure the amplitude of their possibilities and potential successors. In a way, personality would come to the fore in such an assessment: is such and such, overall, a visual or an auditory individual or both in a weak way? Up to what point? How far can they reach? Are they more attached to speech, to song, to gestures? In this domain, nothing but differences and inequalities! Lavater thus doesn't get hung up on surfaces alone: he seeks to capture the body in its extensions and its resources. Does this mean he moves away from "structures" in favor of functions? Definitely not! Thus, to return to the zoomorphic theme via this path, "the expression of

these”—the visual—“qualities is found particularly in the distance of the eyes, their oblique position, and, consequently, in the space that separates them.”³⁴ The substrate and its potentialities—this has been my thesis—cannot be disarticulated, but sometimes it seems more efficient to either scrutinize the one or to explore the others. (b) Lavater then considers gait, bearing, attitudes. (c) Finally, even more on the periphery, he’ll go as far as taking clothing into account, the disposition of the places we inhabit, our ways of decorating and furnishing them, in short[:] the psyche, according to Lavater, is captured in its most excentric (if not eccentric) manifestations, that is, in those that are the furthest removed (downright exterior) but meanwhile most revealing. They count as symptoms. In depicting his characters, Balzac would scrupulously respect these recommendations.

I felt obliged to acknowledge three merits of Lavater’s theory (the timid study of discordance, the rather systematic zoomorphic reading, [and] the extension of the corporeal field), but what had to discredit it—besides its often poor and obscure results, besides the vagueness it revels in—is its uncriticized intention to grasp the psyche immediately when [the psyche] constantly disguises itself and escapes. It is not something we can watch. And despite some interesting insights, Lavater fails to recognize all the virtualities that envelop the body itself. It’s not enough to attentively consider the wall or the frame, it’s important, above all, to uncover the furtive and quasi-imperceptible movements that move across them. In any case, the face–mask reveals less than it dissembles. Lavater’s project must be taken up on different foundations and with different tools.



Before we ask painters, ethnologists, and psychiatrists for something with which to approach bodies and plumb their depths, let me present two ways (among others) to bring about a renewal of physical anthropology, which in some respects are a little flat but less dull and less suspect than Lavater's fumes.

In a century when clinical immunology and brain chemistry make giant strides, we don't doubt that science will manage ever better to define the organic specificity of the subject, its marks, its psychophysiological capacities, and, in consequence, its very originality. At the risk of hurting anthropologists, let's recall in passing that the neighboring [discipline of] pharmacology is able to erase moral pain, anxiety, or, in the opposite direction, unfurl an enchanted world before our eyes (the hallucinogens our poets must appeal to, as Théophile Gautier did in the past) and distill beatitude in us. Which psychology wouldn't be brought up short by this wall of an experimental surrealism! What is most interior in us can thus be warped or suppressed by efficacious material substances. Yet this psychopharmacological dynamic obliges us to renounce the separation of soul and body, [and] correlatively, to pose the problem of personality in unitary terms—an astonishingly complex body inseparable from a singular psyche that redoubles it. More than ever, let's fuse together the irreplaceable somatic and the no less particular ego. Let's also study the one through the other.

Without going that far, what are the two achievements from the beginning of the twentieth century?

(A) Pierre Abraham's rigorously photographic technique.

Let's not forget that a subject is partly equivalent to its image. [This

image] may be blamed for all kinds of trouble: its inertia, a poverty so patent it sometimes provokes laughter, the extreme pallor of such a reflection. All the same, this “mechanical portrait” already steals a little of what we are and encloses it. The proof? It allows for identifying a subject that, like it or not, is reduced to a few lines and graphic indications (an outline, a relief, shadows, undulations, wrinkles, etc.). And if this vague image allows for recognition—which precedes knowledge—that is because the psyche is in some way complicit with it. But humans are repelled by this approach: they sacralize their face (narcissism) and laugh at this unfortunate “duplication,” a shadow of their self.

Yet Pierre Abraham not only disregards the prohibitions, he also dares to experiment with this “reflection,” which he manipulates, divides, and puts back together. In a word, he shows, above all, that a face contains several [faces], at least two others that can be extracted: the right side—and this with the help of a mirror that reverses and duplicates it—will yield the “dexter combination,” the left side the “sinister” one. These two new figures reveal expressions that are as distinct from one another as they are [only] very weakly apparent: the natural given drowns out the divergence. Lavater had already noted the existence of this subtle dissymmetry: now it is exploited directly, [and] associated with the psychophysiology of the twofold brain as well. The ambiguity of the human is as it were laid bare or laid flat.

It’s not easy to succeed in this proliferating operation (the three-headed man, the inverse of a beheading). Why? Images were rarely taken frontally. [Abraham] had to resort to mechanic means (make use of Bertillon’s chair, that is, seat the subject and fix the head in

an iron triangle whose axis coincides with that of the optical device). Worse than that, the photographer himself gives in to the attraction of “the social,” or conventional, “half”: he amplifies the distance. The obliqueness of his own gaze thus reinforces that of his model. Without knowing it, he participates in the shot he is entering.

On top of that, the light source is not always the same and, moreover, it [too] is rarely frontal: shadows thus fall on the face and “unequalize” it. Under these conditions, the redoubled right half risks becoming lunary while the left will appear sliced, [thin as a] knife’s blade.

Equally, it is also important to divide well: if the middle line being traced does not cut [the face] into two strictly equal sections (down to a thousandth of a millimeter), we’ll obtain other comparable contrived deformations; the philtrum must be sought out carefully, the dividing line be traced from the tips of the nose and chin: undeniably, every head brackets two halves together; we’re catching the vestigial lines of this coalescence, of this quite perceptible gluing.

Finally, the last handicap, though not the least, is to be found no longer in the setup or the photographer but within the very subject being “reproduced.” “The ones most guilty,” Abraham notes,

are the models. While it takes a certain courage to accept one’s character such as it is, I believe after much experience that it takes heroism to accept one’s face [*figure*]. Most people who come to pose at the photographer’s aren’t, obviously, Spartans, and the photographer’s job isn’t to open a school of Stoicism ... [T]he role

of the lens is not to make an artificial “soul” come out of the face [*visage*] but to render this face as faithfully as possible.³⁵

Let’s note that the elementary trimultiplicity (the right, the left, and the whole) thus calls for precautions such that accidents of the epidermis, the weight of muscles, the heaviness of flesh, even a little of the luster and the direction of the gaze can be maintained. Let’s not restrict “our image” to a kind of diagram: let’s surveil and keep the content. Not only can dissymmetry be observed there, it also seems possible to evaluate it. Other masking maneuvers come to join the earlier ones: only letting the lower part appear, which otherwise is too absorbed in and by the whole—or again fragmenting the figure into quarters (having first considered it laterally, according to the polarity of left and right, then according to bottom and top), going even further in the cutting up (only the nasal septums, the form of the ears, the lines of the mouth, the direction of the eyebrows, etc.). The results are doubtful, but who would contest that pinched and narrow lips, drawn in, signify a filtering, a closing off from external influence? Who would deny that somatic manifestations translate attitudes or desires? Our body is inscription: in some way, it deploys the psychical. Pierre Abraham encourages multiple, stratified studies: “Only two [faces]? What naiveté! We’ve already glimpsed the beginning of new physical fragmentations as of new mental fragmentations. It remains for us to find how we can bring to light, how we can make visible this population of which we have a premonition.”³⁶

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35. Pierre Abraham, *Une figure, deux visages*, in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 22, nos. 246 and 247 (March 1 and April 1, 1934), pp. 409–429 and pp. 585–614, here p. 588.

36. Abraham, *Une figure, deux visages*, p. 614. [Quotation modified to reflect Dagognet’s telling misquotation: Abraham writes *fonctionnement*, “functioning,” not *fractionnement*.—Trans.]

It goes without saying that the photopsychologist illustrated and concretized his laboratory experiments: thus the Baudelairean distance [*écart*] in Baudelaire forces the poet, this enemy of the daguerreotype, to oscillate between authoritarian dreams (Napoleon's effigy submerged underneath his features) and the suffering of man disarmed, if not a martyr, simultaneously henchman and victim. Criminals take the scission to their extreme: underneath sometimes young and affable traits, we discern a background, an impulsive and barbarian backdrop.

Let's note at least two conclusions from this brief reminder: (a) the necessity of montages, of decompositions, and of an instrumentation. We see nothing, or very little, with the naked eye. It's important to work on documents. Let's not hope we could read directly either the complexities of the human body or the enigma of the mask we're wearing. (b) Another theme: anthropologists still do not sufficiently appreciate this "mechanical portrait," considering it a "simulacrum," a mix of mind and matter. In fact, [however,]

the apparatus will give a real more real than the perceived real, more precise (because we can blow it up, enlarge it, filter it). Nothing is missing here, and at the same time, it is a partially interior cut, thanks to the subject retained, the viewing angle, the technique of the shot. This mix, in sum, places the mind in the things retain and, inversely, weights down, materializes our thoughts, which, without it, are quite vague and always fading.³⁷

But it has often been more or less neglected or minimized, no doubt out of fear of seeing "the mental" on the outside and in order to reserve

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37. François Dagognet, Une nouvelle culture, *Sciences et Avenir*, special issue no. 29: L'Avenir des Images (no date [1979/80]), pp. 92–94, here p. 94.

it for the impenetrable inner sanctuary alone. The shadows, our own phantom is kept at a distance. Photography, though flat and poor, thus doesn't play its role enough: it allows for a lot, all the more since the photomechanic techniques are making way for electronic ones, for the infography on the rise (union of design and computer). As the modern machines can read, write, and count, they have learned to draw and display. Any plastic element is susceptible to transcription and treatment; inversely, any program can be transformed into a dynamic image. Moreover, processes are emerging that allow for modifications by reduction and extraction, also for better analyses of a texture, of borders, and of surfaces, for seeing on them the marks and variations the eye did not distinguish (the analysis of forms and the detection of the slightest shades that escape our perception). Psychophotography will not let these possibilities go to waste, which open an unlimited field for anthropometric and, beyond it, anthropotopographic study (iconographic conservation and comparison). Allow me to be provocative: the teaching of psychology becomes a "course of images"! And it's with the help of a blackboard and chalk that we'll be able to discover human beings.

(B) The second branch of this somatopsychic approach: Sheldon's classic, in its time innovative, grid.

To begin with, I'll briefly recall it only to state its merits. It's inspired by biology, more specifically its embryological concepts (germ layers) to define the physical human being: in fact, three tissue-systems, generative components, regulate the fate of our systems and all our organs. Let's above all not dwell on the latter but move on to their constituents—principles: the endoderm, the mesoderm, [and] the

ectoderm. This last one ensures the development of the nerves, the mesoderm that of the muscles and bones, of the framework, the endoderm that of the conjunctive [tissue], the intestinal, the dough, as it were.

Up to this point, we're still stuck in the old ruts of somatotypology, its tridivision (digestive, muscular, cerebral), the same old song, all the more so since Sheldon sometimes abandons his own coordinates for the eternal "abdomen, thorax, head" or, again, round man (the digestive, the visceral), rectangular man (the thoracic, incidentally on the path toward the trapezoidal), and linear man (the long and thin).

Nonetheless, something ingenious and new comes from an assessment of the [relative] importance of each of the three base components and from its being ranked from 1 to 7 (7 for the maximum after a scale for its progression has been fixed). Moreover, Sheldon is convinced that every body blends the three somatic variables in rather original fashion. It follows that it will be expressed with the help of three numbers that will translate the importance and the proportions of the three operators involved. For example, the 711 (one begins with the endoderm, then [comes] the meso- and finally the ecto-; basically going from bottom to top) indicates the extreme uncompensated endomorph: obese, with a preeminent and even intrusive abdomen; in him, everything tends toward spherical plenitude: short neck, head and thorax circular as well. At the opposite end, the 117: narrow and strongly flattened pelvis, a skinny and kyphotic upper body, sloping shoulders, arms thin as reeds, in short, intense fragility, withdrawal, tapering.

Granted this basic tridimensionality, human beings would fall into $7 \times 7 \times 7 = 343$ possible somatotypes (all combinations of the numbers from one to seven grouped into threes). Nonetheless, less rapid studies showed that the variables aren't entirely independent: on the one hand the determination of two of them yields, approximately, the value of the third; on the other, and above all, their sum never exceeds 13-12. That is why one encounters 543s, 542s, but not 555s. A subject does not add up, as in a simple bundle, percentages of endo-, meso, and ecto-: the rate of one governs the others as a result of a minimal solidarity of composition. Such that finally, humanity is said to comprise 76 real somatotypes.

Why do I appreciate this constitutional somatopsychology and revisit its disrepute? Sheldon takes the entire body into account, all its diameters, to determine our positions on the chessboard of possible cases (the 76).

For a long time, people dealt in subtleties and were too fixated on the "face-summary" alone. Sheldon, moreover, is constructing less an anthropometry of dimensions than he is an anthroposcopy of a development located between the telluric (massive, overloaded, bogged-down, satisfied, even jovial corporeality) and the aerial ideal (linearity, thinness, propensity toward exhaustion and introversion). And Sheldon succeeds very well in uniting the quantitative (assessing a thickness, putting a number on a thrust) and the qualitative. Kretschmer had been ahead of him but on a basis both more vague and more narrow.

Even better, Sheldon doesn't conceal the existence of "dysplasias," which he sets out to gauge exactly. Rather rarely does our body present itself as a smooth and homogeneous whole: moreover, it emerges from the confluence of two heredities that never stop fighting over or occupying it. We catch the evidence or the rests of the amalgam. "When, for example, a body is of one somatotype in the region of the head and neck and of another somatotype in the legs and trunk, the individual is spoken of as dysplastic."³⁸ And, to measure the divergence, the corporeal whole is sectioned off into five strips, and on each, the share of the three known components (endo, meso, ecto) is assessed. A fair division: we return once more to the territories or provinces (embryological gradient) that histo-organology had carved out. "The head, face, and neck constitute the first region. The second region is the thoracic trunk. The third region consists of the arms, shoulders, and hands. The fourth region is the abdominal trunk. The fifth region includes the legs and feet."³⁹ When the first is thus spelled 36I, the second 253, the third 45I, and so on, the local disagreements are well-numbered.

Dysplasia breaks out especially among psychopaths—an argument in favor of the constitutionalist theses—as if existential difficulties, mental disintegration, even, ran parallel to the basic corporeal antagonisms, inscribed in the very volumes and topography. It's in the excesses that we learn to recognize it, but it penetrates and runs through pretty much all bodies. Sheldon notes: "It is not uncommon to find female bodies with highly endomorphic legs"—even ham-

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38. William H. Sheldon, *The Varieties of Human Physique* (New York: Harper, 1940), p. 7.

39. Sheldon, *Varieties*, p. 47.

shaped—“and highly ectomorphic”—that is to say, slender and drawn out—“upper segments (arms, upper trunk, head, and neck).”⁴⁰ A violent top–bottom contrast thus dominates (animates or breaks) the configuration of the whole. Sheldon analyzed the most frequent and the most notorious cases of disharmony very closely: a somewhat massive physique that rests on narrow limbs, but the contrary no less, that is, heavy legs (in the form of pillars or posts that come out of a trunk with flimsy scaffolding). Above all, he commented on the possible local conflict between the proximal (that is to say, the forearms and thighs) and the distal parts (legs and arms). Double, in fact, because while their noncorrespondence is striking, we have an easier time getting used to the enlargement of the first followed by the reduction of the second than to the opposite situation, the narrowing of the one, then a rebound of the other (the arm or leg). Hairiness often accentuates the disunion. In any case, a typical situation: a brutal succession, on the lines of the main organs or across the bands (distant vestiges of the metamerization), of the skinny (diminishing size) and the puffy (up to some light bloating). Thus the belly, slim at the top, concave even, suddenly, at the bottom, lets itself go and fattens (convex form): this contrasted form signals acute pain, a collapse. This 236 thoracic dysplastic, moreover, was spontaneously seized on by religious iconography for the Christ-image of agony and the crucifixion: “In an informal study of over one hundred different historical pictures of the Christ, we found that about 30 per cent of the artists have pictured the Christian central figure as approximately a 236, and about 35 per cent of them have made him approximately a 235.”⁴¹ In short, the contradiction between the trunk and the limbs, the noncorrelation

between the lengths and widths, the sudden irregularities between the thicknesses—waves of “belly knots,” as it were—define the main moments in which the fragments stop collaborating and, correlatively, expose a disagreement, a somatopsychic drama. The image of the shattered ego then goes so far as to compromise [the self’s] inhabiting itself, [its] existential stability. That in fact is why it is important to know how to assess and measure, on a positive basis, the local agonies as well as the interzonal antagonisms.

Besides this index *d* (dysplasia), the *g* (or gynandromorphic coefficient) is no less individualizing. Thus, a masculine thorax grafted on a pelvis of the feminine type, a strong intrusion of softness, enlarged hips, arms shorter than the legs, thighs curved all the way to the knees, a body shaped, as a whole, like an 8 or an hourglass (especially in a dorsal view), all these physical signs once more inscribe themselves on a graduated scale and determine, for men, their degree of bisexuality (the share of femininity in them). Often, just measuring the two girdles, the shoulder and the pelvic girdle, suffices to exteriorize it. This androgyny envelops more or less all somatotypes; in that case, they move a little away from their own line and slide toward less commonly associated numbers. Sheldon the tabulator manages to assess the divergences (both for statistical, demographic reasons and on biomorphological grounds).

The importance of this somatic drift is easily guessed: this time, the scission settles at the heart of corporeality, which is struck with a certain objective ambivalence. But in this confused domain of hermaphroditism, we must advance very carefully. In fact, frank virility

or clearcut femininity can couple with a percentage of androgyny that might be judged “excessive” (not on preferential or normative but frequential grounds). Yet for all that, this kind of super-dysplasia will count for nothing: in a word, I’ll even try to explain, following Sheldon, how it can even push toward that which tends to mask or cancel it. The boy (girl-boy, bisexualized) risks getting into an evolution that mobilizes him: on the one hand, because “people as a rule give their emotional allegiance, not to males who are gynandromorphic, but to those who are strong and masculine”;⁴² on the other, he finds himself at a remove too far from athletic feats and other performances that would valorize him. Unless he accepts, as it were, what he is thanks to a generally restricted and tolerant social circle, he aims to overcome his somato-social deficits with spectacular exploits and a certain exhibitionism. He thus morphs into a hyper-faux-manly man: he has entered the complicated labyrinth of “pseudo-trues.”

Here, the anthropometric data lose their habitual accountant’s dryness and translate directly into psychical terms. Here, the so much sought after junction between corporeal forms and attitudes, even mental aptitudes happens by itself. The preponderance of the endomorphic already shed light on rootedness (the telluric), sometimes entombment, extraversion, and contentment, and, in the opposite sense, ectomorphism was not at ease in crowds, in jovial letting-loose, in noise (this cerebral [character] aspires to reflection, to peace and solitude).

Many other problems rise up on Sheldon’s path; I’ll mention only two, without even sketching the answers he’d have to proffer: (a) in

the course of life and due to wanderings, can't an individual, without radically changing its somatotype, at least slide toward the neighbors in the general table that classifies them all? A 7π will certainly not metamorphose into a π7, but couldn't a 525 imperceptibly turn into a 434? Is a certain evolution possible? (b) In the case of an alliance and liaison between individuals, do extremes attract, to neutralize one another, or do their choices follow the lines of force? In short, in the question of couplings and associations, do the numbers add up or are they subtracted?⁴³



Twentieth-century physiognomy surpasses Lavater's and that of his emulators. It overcomes them as much by its results as by its methods (the image laboratories, manipulations, and the rigorous numbering of developments). No matter how severely it is condemned, how much it is mocked in the vein of dynamists like Hegel or Maine de Biran, not only does it subsist, I believe it progresses. Abraham and Sheldon rescued it from its fatal hieraticism. Let's add, too, that the better to take it down, people insist on the most sterile, the most rudimentary strand, Gall's phrenology (cranioscopy, [concerned] only with the bumps and depressions of the brain pan).

The fundamental reproach—of a philosophical order—constantly leveled at it is summarized in the objection: doesn't it smother human freedom? Isn't it absurd, dangerous even, to try and discern the soul on the corporeal walls? Doesn't this turn us into the playthings of a

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43. All these questions, incidentally, have been addressed head-on by the famous psychologist of pulsional photographs, L[éopold] Szondi.

shadow? And then, in the depths of absurdity into which Lombroso doesn't hesitate to descend[:] if by chance we think we find signs of criminality on this surface—plagiocephaly, uneven teeth that recall Hutchinson's teeth,⁴⁴ handle-shaped ears, preeminence of the zygomatic apophyses, onset of synostosis, and other stigmata of so-called degeneracy (with syphilitic degeneracy in the background) all meticulously described—then isn't it advisable, since it's always better to prevent than to heal, to prevent the budding deviant from doing harm and to arrest him before he commits his crime? Let's not go into these incredible extremes that overly distort the very spirit of physical anthropology.

Any philosophy worthy of the name has always exalted the will and its resources: I am not aware of any exception to this rule of apologetics. In starting out, it had to constantly beware of the recurrent perspectives of reduction or of naturalism. How could it dare glorify what would devastate and even debase [it]? Physiognomy, though, physical anthropology and its substitute, medical constitutionalism, seem precisely to go in the opposite direction, that is, to accept a limiting, if not mechanistic, conception of the human they are said to impoverish, and to definitively enclose it, either in its corporeal prison or even in the encephalic sphere that would hold its capacity. The human would then be predetermined and forever be barricaded within itself, without any hope of escaping its fate.

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44. "Hutchinson's teeth," to cite de Graciansky, are a "particular aspect of the two maxillary central incisors." They are "pathognomonic, with oblique axes toward the inside, a narrowing of the biting surface whose width is less than that of the neck, [and] a crescent-shaped notch in the cutting edge of the biting surface." See Pierre de Graciansky, Syphilis, in: *Pathologie Médicale*, ed. Louis Pasteur Vallery-Radot et al., eds., vol. 3, pp. 1283–1363 (Paris: Flammarion, 1951), here p. 1327.

This accusation, however, seems to me to lack any real foundation. In the nineteenth century already, the Zurich pastor, Lavater, protested and responded to his detractors. In reality, traditional philosophy gives in to the demon of angelism, of the “beautiful soul” that is averse to inscribing itself and believes it can flee all determination. It moves us away from a body it maligns and belittles, that it considers a yoke, a humiliation and punishment, at most a convenient and useful apparatus that, if need be, we will learn to improve, enhance, and repair. As a consequence, it becomes blind to the nature and scope of a physiognomy that offends it.

(a) On the one hand, this psychology has always discovered open possibilities in the somatic: less an unchanging osseous frame than a proliferation of clues and perspectives. In parallel, one doesn’t judge a house—the temple—only on the basis of its foundations or its frame.

That, moreover, was the intention of my historical presentation: to prevent the enemies of figuration and of its corollary, caricature, from distorting Lavater’s thought too much! Humans sculpt themselves little by little, they write their fate, but with the ink of their potentialities. Freedom does not consist in deciding according to who knows what preference but in arbitrating within ourselves, in discarding—sometimes temporarily—latencies or forces, in order to choose others [instead]. The body, though, participates in these conflicts, in this subtle and unstable play, hence the multi[ple] faces and numerous marks it bears.

(b) Sheldon himself, indisputably, conceives of the personal liberating act differently than his detractors:

tragedy could be prevented in the lives of young boys if we gave up trying to make athletes of nonathletic somatotypes. One of the most common causes of frustration in the life of the male is this custom of exposing boys promiscuously to the influence of athletic ambition. Possibly not more than five or six boys in a hundred are physically equipped to play a particular athletic game with conspicuous success.⁴⁵

This throws philosophers into a rage; they prefer evoking the case of the orator Demosthenes who, despite a stammer and a difficult childhood, made a name for himself in the art of rhetoric. They also choose to assert an (abstract and absolute) equality between subjects, called on to perform the same feats even as this mendacious program discourages the ones and makes the others feel guilty. These are consoled, to be sure, by the idea, the ideology, rather, that if they had really wanted, they could have. But it is more honest to recognize that an individual, while they can effectively do a lot, cannot do it “all,” that they must actualize certain of their virtualities. And that is the main lesson of classic physiognomy.

I’ll get an earful of the maxims of effort and the proverbs of age-old wisdom—“practice makes perfect.” But Lavater admits that. Unlike Minerva, we’re not born all armed and ready, endowed with this or that talent. We have to exercise and develop it. But to become or to be, learning isn’t enough.

(c) Finally, the zoomorphic play of Lavater’s anthropology has been the subject of much mockery, as have his fantastic theory of signatures or his fabulous analogies, but this, too, misses the point.

The anamorphic conceptions—fish-man, bird-man, or horse-man—promoted a certain psychobiomorphology[, and] everything that brings together the “will” and “representation,” everything that erases this fateful dualism, is salutary and instructive.

In sum, the animal lays out the play of instinct, of unconditional wanting to live. And why are beasts different? Because, to be able to survive, they have set up ruses that do not overlap and that can thread their way through each other with impunity. Plants do the same, to a lesser degree, they, too, are greedy. One takes away the light while the other creeps through the underwood it occupies. They part from one another thanks to their ways of capturing, their ways of life, and their specific violence. Yet this [violence] dictates, and consequently regulates their bearing, their site, their ramifications, or their size. The world of the living thus helps us in linking up the structures and the pulsions they authorize and even make possible. I’m not abandoning my thesis of a morphology or of a surface inseparable from the energies. I’ll even add that this was the point of view of Szondi, the psychophotographer of disturbances and destinies.

Just as an architecture exposes a culture, struggles, a society, and values, so organs lead to functions and the other way around. Exterior and interior interpenetrate. Biology teaches [us] above all to associate the substrata and their various resources. And I think I answered those who insist on the real divergences between them.

Humans neither cut a breach nor constitute an exception. Their human face already marks their presence. By itself. The human head, moreover, never stopped evolving; it reversed course (diminution

and noticeable reduction of the facial skeleton, corresponding retrocession of the maxilla) while the forehead advanced accordingly. In parallel, all the sensorial captors (the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the ears, an instrument panel tuned in to the world) came together, in short, an intense meeting, sensibilization, and also liberation thanks to the possible suppletions among neighboring apparatuses. Thus, as Buytendijk, the analyst of attitudes, rightly notes, the hand soon relieved the mouth of grabbing food, as a consequence of which the teeth reduced in volume and the mandibles shrank. We think we discern bestiality, greedy and grubbing, in snouts, in elongated, protruding muzzles, in burrowing trunks. Now a “face” emerges that already is no longer entirely “a head” before it soon becomes a “mirror-face.”

This is how psychology could extend the lessons of animal biology and general organology: it wouldn't neglect the folds, nor the contractions, nor the rearrangements, nor the outgrowths, but would set out to learn, through them, the dynamic of hyperorganic or, better, to avoid having to use Maine de Biran's term, transorganic wills. And if I haven't been convincing in my defense of a certain kind of Lavaterism, my final analysis will endeavor to save the “body language” of which so far I've only outlined the beginnings, to move closer to the idea of a somatic speech that is as silent as it is eloquent and overabundant.

Note

In the absence of a bibliography, let me signal at least its two extremities:

(a) In the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, the concern is with images, “ideograms,” and allegories. On this subject, Cesare Ripa’s *Iconology or New Explanation of Several Images, Emblems, and Other Hieroglyphic Figures of the Virtues, the Arts, the Sciences, Natural Causes, Different Humors, and Human Passions* (1593), somewhat eclipses all other works.⁴⁶ Medals, engravings, and illustrated almanacs spread; inside the books, vignettes, frontispieces, and tailpieces everywhere! The Abbé de Aubignac founded the Académie des allégoriques.⁴⁷

This flourishing of images, in my view, develops especially after the Council of Trent: the goal, in fact, is to speak in a direct, persuasive language accessible to everyone, including the illiterate. “Father Le Moyne’s *Galerie des Femmes Fortes* [Gallery of Strong Women] goes through six editions ... the *Peintures morales où les passions sont représentées par Tableaux, par Caractères et par questions nouvelles et curieuses* [Moral Pictures Where the Passions Are Represented in New and Curious Paintings, Characters, and Questions] (1660) were reprinted several times.”⁴⁸ But one of the first texts I would recommend was written by Antoine du Verdier, *Prosopographie ou description des personnes insignes, enrichie de plusieurs effigies* [Prosography, or Description of Person-Emblems, Enriched with Several Effigies] (Lyon[: Gryphius], 1573). Du Verdier was later to translate [Vincenzo Cartari’s] *Images of the Gods of the Ancients*.

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46. [Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, or, *Moral Emblems* (London: Motte, 1709).]

47. Georges Couton, Réapprendre à lire: Deux des langages de l’allégorie au XVII^e siècle, *Cahiers de l’Association internationale des études françaises*, no. 28 (May 1976), pp. 81–101, here p. 85.

48. Couton, Réapprendre à lire, p. 93.

(b) At the other extremity—no longer the religion and apostolics of the depictions of virtues and vices, not even the aesthetics of Paintings and the fine arts (Charles Le Brun), but the positivism of physiologists and physicians—let me mention at least Gratiolet's *De la Physionomie et des mouvements d'expression* [*On Physiognomy and the Movements of Expression*] (1865). The author distinguishes between four kinds of movement: the prosbolic, relative to an external goal; the sympathetic, which happens in relation to pleasure and pain; the symbolic, which flows from the imagination; and the metaphorical, which translates psychic states. Let me add a more modern and less restricted work, which I used and cited, Buytendijk, *Attitudes et Mouvements* [*Attitudes and Movements*] (transl. 1957).

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