Visions of Excess
Selected Writings, 1927–1939

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The Deviations of Nature

Among all things that can be contemplated under the concavity of the heavens, nothing is seen that arouses the human spirit more, that ravishes the sense more, that horrifies more, that provokes more terror or admiration to a greater extent among creatures than the monsters, prodigies, and abominations through which we see the works of nature inverted, mutilated, and truncated.

This remark by Pierre Boaistuau can be found at the beginning of his *Histoires prodigieuses*, a work published in 1561,¹ in other words during a period of public calamities. Prodigies and monsters were regarded in the past as presages and, most often, as such, as birds of ill omen. Boaistuau had the merit of devoting his book to monsters without worrying about augury, and of recognizing to what extent men are eager for stupefaction.

The pleasure of going to see the “‘freaks’” is today seen as a carnival pleasure, and characterizes the one who comes forward as a gawker. In the sixteenth century a kind of religious curiosity, due in part to the habit of living at the mercy of the most terrible scourges, was still mixed with curious silliness. Books devoted to Siamese twins and to two-headed calves were very common, and their authors did not hesitate to affect an elevated tone. In the eighteenth century the interest in monsters could be attributed to an alleged scientific curiosity. The luxurious album of engraved and colored illustrations by Regnault, which was first published in 1775 (and one of whose illustrations is reproduced here),² bears witness to a fairly superficial concern for information. It attests above all
to the fact that, in one way or another, in one period or another, mankind cannot remain indifferent to its monsters.

I will not review here the system of anatomical classification, reprinted in all the dictionaries, from the treatises on teratology by Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire or Guinard. It is of little importance, in fact, that the biologists have ended up classifying monsters in the same way as they do species. They remain, no less positively, anomalies and contradictions.

A "freak" in any given fair provokes a positive impression of aggressive incongruity, a little comic, but much more a source of malaise. This malaise is, in an obscure way, tied to a profound seductiveness. And, if one can speak of a dialectic of forms, it is evident that it is essential to take into account deviations for which nature—even if they are most often determined to be against nature—is incontestably responsible.

On a practical level this impression of incongruity is elementary and constant: it is possible to state that it manifests itself to a certain degree in the presence of any given human individual. But it is barely perceptible. That is why it is preferable to refer to monsters in order to determine it.

However, the common character of personal incongruity and the monster can be expressed with precision. The composite images that Galton achieved through successive exposures of analogous but different faces, on the same piece of photographic film, are well known. From the faces of four hundred male American students, one obtains the typical face of the American student. Georg Treu has defined in Durschnittbild und Schönheit (The Composite Image of Beauty, in Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft, 1914. IX. 3) the relation between the composite image and its components by showing that the first was necessarily more beautiful than an average example of the others; thus twenty mediocre faces constitute a beautiful face, and one obtains without difficulty faces whose proportions are very nearly those of the Hermes of Praxiteles. The composite image would thus give a kind of reality to the necessarily beautiful Platonic idea. At the same time, beauty would be at the mercy of a definition as classical as that of the common measure. But each individual form escapes this common measure and is, to a certain degree, a monster.

It is useful to observe here that the constitution of the perfect type with the aid of composite photography is not very mysterious. In fact, if one photographs a large number of similarly sized but differently shaped pebbles, it is impossible to obtain anything other than a sphere: in other words, a geometric figure. It is enough to note that a common measure necessarily approaches the regularity of geometric figures.

Monsters thus would be the dialectical opposites of geometric regularity, in the same manner as individual forms, but in an irreducible way. Among all
things that can be contemplated under the concavity of the heavens, nothing is
seen that arouses the human spirit more . . . ‘’

The expression of the philosophical dialectic through forms, such as the
maker of the film Battleship Potemkin, S. M. Eisenstein, intends to carry out
in his next film (as he indicated in a lecture given at the Sorbonne on January
17), may take on the value of a revelation, and determine the most elementary,
and thus consequential, human relations. Without broaching here the question
of the metaphysical foundations of any given dialectic, one can affirm that the
determination of a dialectical development of facts as concrete as visible forms
would be literally overwhelming: ‘‘Nothing is seen that arouses the human spirit
more, that ravishes the senses more, that horrifies more, that provokes terror
to a greater extent among creatures . . . ‘’

Notes


2. Les Ecarts de la nature ou Recueil des principales monstruosités que la nature produit dans le monde animal, painted after nature and published by Sr. and De Regnault, Paris, 1775, in-fol., 40 engraved plates.
The Pineal Eye

When my face is flushed with blood, it becomes red and obscene.
It betrays, at the same time, through morbid reflexes, a bloody erection and a demanding thirst for indecency and criminal debauchery.
For that reason I am not afraid to affirm that my face is a scandal and that my passions are only expressed by the Jesuve.

The terrestrial globe is covered with volcanoes, which serve as its anus.
Although this globe eats nothing, it often violently ejects the contents of its entrails.
These contents shoot out with a racket, and fall back, streaming down.

The Solar Anus

I. Scientific Anthropology and Mythical Anthropology
To the extent that a description of human life that goes back to the origins tries to represent what the formless universe has accomplished in producing man rather than something else, how it has been led to this useless production and
by what means it made this creature something different from all the rest—to this extent it is necessary to abandon scientific anthropology, which is reduced to a babbling even more senile than puerile, reduced to giving answers that tend to make the questions put to it seem ludicrous, whereas these answers alone are miserably so when confronted with the inevitable and demanding brutality of an interrogation taking upon itself the very meaning of the life that this anthropology supposedly aims to describe.

But in the first phase, at least, philosophical speculation is rejected with no less impatience than the impotent theories of prehistory when this speculation, obeying the dictates of a guilty conscience, almost always kills itself or timidly prostrates itself before science. For even if this inhuman prostration can still be denounced, even if it is still possible for man to contrast his own cruelty and madness with a necessity that is crushing him, nothing of what is known of the means proper to philosophical investigation can inspire in him any confidence; philosophy has been, up to this point, as much as science, an expression of human subordination, and when man seeks to represent himself, no longer as a moment of a homogeneous process—of a necessary and pitiful process—but as a new laceration within a lacerated nature, it is no longer the leveling phraseology coming to him from the understanding that can help him: he can no longer recognize himself in the degrading chains of logic, but he recognizes himself, instead—not only with rage but in an ecstatic torment—in the virulence of his own phantasms.

Nevertheless, the introduction of a lawless intellectual series into the world of legitimate thought defines itself at the outset as the most arduous and audacious operation. And it is evident that if it were not practiced without equivocation, with a resolution and a rigor rarely attained in other cases, it would be the most vain operation.

Outside of a certain inaccessibility to fear—it is a question here essentially of undergoing, without being overwhelmed, the attraction of the most repulsive objects—two conditions thrust themselves on anyone whose object is to invest understanding with a content that will remain foreign to it, and they do so not only in a clear and distinct way, but as imperative prescriptions.

II. Conditions of Mythological Representation

In the first place, methodical knowledge can only be brushed aside to the extent that it has become an acquired faculty, since, at least in the present circumstances, without close contact with the homogeneous world of practical life, the free play of intelligible images would lose itself and would dissolve fatally in a region where no thought and no word would have the slightest consequence.

It is thus necessary to start by reducing science to a state that must be defined by the term subordination, in such a way that one uses it freely, like a beast of
burden, to accomplish ends which are not its own. Left to itself, free in the poorest sense of the word (where liberty is only impotence), inasmuch as its legacy as the first condition of existence was the task of dissipating and annihilating mythological phantasms, nothing could keep science from blindly emptying the universe of its human content. But it is possible to use it to limit its own movement and to situate beyond its own limits what it will never attain, that before which it becomes an unsuccessful effort and a vague, sterile being. It is true that, posed in this way by science, these elements are still only empty terms and impotent paralogisms. It is only after having passed from these exterior limits of another existence to their mythologically lived content that it becomes possible to treat science with the indifference demanded by its specific nature, but this takes place only on condition that one has first enslaved science through the use of weapons borrowed from it, by making it itself produce the paralogisms that limit it.

The second condition is, first of all, only one of the forms of the first; here too science is utilized for a contrary end. The exclusion of mythology by reason is necessarily a rigorous one, on which there is no going back, and which, when required, must be made still more trenchant. But at the same time, it is necessary to overturn the values created by means of this exclusion; in other words, the fact that reason denies any valid content in a mythological series is the condition of its most significant value. For if the affective violence of human intelligence is projected like a specter across the deserted night of the absolute or of science, it does not follow that this specter has anything in common with the night in which its brilliance becomes glacial. On the contrary, a spectral content only truly exists as such from the moment when the milieu that contains it defines itself through its intolerance toward that which appears in it as a crime. The strongest repulsion by science that can be represented is necessary for the characterization of the excluded part. Such a characterization must be compared to the affective charge of an obscene element whose obscenity derives only from the prohibition leveled against it. So long as the formal exclusion has not taken place, a mythical statement can still be assimilated to a rational statement; the mythical can be described as real and can be methodically explained. But at the same time it loses its spectral characterization, its free falseness. It enters, as in the case of revealed imperative religions, into various mystical groupings that have as a goal the narrow enslavement of impoverished men to an economic necessity: in other words, in the last analysis, to an authority that exploits them.

It is true that such an operation would be inconceivable at the present time, due to the fact that the possibilities have been limited by the very development of science.

Science, proceeding on the basis of a mystical conception of the universe, has separated the constituent elements of the universe into two profoundly distinct classes: it has elaborated, through assimilation, the necessary and practical
parts, transforming a mental activity, which previously was only an instrument of exploitation, into an activity useful for man’s material life. At the same time, it has had to brush aside the delirious parts of the old religious constructions, in order to destroy them. But this act of destruction becomes, at the final point of development, an act of liberation: delirium escapes from necessity, casts off its heavy mantel of mystical servitude, and it is finally only then that, nude and lubricious, it plays with the universe and its laws as if they were toys.

III. The Pineal Eye

Starting from these two principles, and supposing that the first condition, which requires a scientific knowledge of the objects considered, has at least to a large extent been met, nothing stands in the way of a phantomlike and adventurous description of the universe. What remains to be said about the ways in which this description proceeds—and about the relations of the finished description with the object it describes—can only be a reflection on the realized experience.

The eye, at the summit of the skull, opening on the incandescent sun in order to contemplate it in a sinister solitude, is not a product of the understanding, but is instead an immediate existence; it opens and blinds itself like a conflagration, or like a fever that eats the being, or more exactly, the head. And thus it plays the role of a fire in a house; the head, instead of locking up life as money is locked in a safe, spends it without counting, for, at the end of this erotic metamorphosis, the head has received the electric power of points. This great burning head is the image and the disagreeable light of the notion of expenditure, beyond the still empty notion as it is elaborated on the basis of methodical analysis.

From the first, myth is identified not only with life but with the loss of life—with degradation and death. Starting from the being who bore it, it is not at all an external product, but the form that this being takes in his lubricious avatars, in the ecstatic gift he makes of himself as obscene and nude victim—and a victim not before an obscure and immaterial force, but before great howls of prostitutes’ laughter.

Existence no longer resembles a neatly defined itinerary from one practical sign to another, but a sickly incandescence, a durable orgasm.

IV. The Two Axes of Terrestrial Life

No matter how blinding the mythical form, insofar as it is not a simple representation, but the exhausting consumption of being, it is possible, at its first indistinct appearance, to pass from a content to a container, to a circumstantial form
that, although it is probably unacceptable from the point of view of science, does not seem different from the habitual constructs of the intellect.

The distribution of organic existence on the surface of the earth takes place on two axes: the first, vertical, prolongs the radius of the terrestrial sphere; the second, horizontal, is perpendicular to the first. Vegetation develops more or less exclusively on the vertical axis (which is also the axis of the fall of bodies); on the other hand, the development of animal life is situated, or tends to be situated, on the horizontal axis. But although, generally speaking, their movements are only slippages parallel to the lines described by the rotation of the terrestrial globe, animals are never completely foreign to the axis of vegetal life. Thus existence makes them raise themselves above the ground when they come into the world and, in a relatively stable way, when they exit from sleep or love (on the other hand, sleep and death abandon bodies to a force directed from high to low). Their skeleton, even in the most regular cases, is not perfectly adjusted to a horizontal trajectory: the skull and thus the orifice of the eyes are situated above the level of the anal vertebra. However, even if one refers to the position of the male in coitus, and to the structures of some birds, a complete verticality is never attained.

V. The Position of the Human Body and Eyes on the Surface of the Terrestrial Globe

Only human beings, tearing themselves away from peaceful animal horizontality, at the cost of the ignoble and painful efforts that can be seen in the faces of the great apes, have succeeded in appropriating the vegetal erection and in letting themselves be polarized, in a certain sense, by the sky.

It is thus that the Earth—whose immense regions are covered with plants that everywhere flee it in order to offer and destroy themselves endlessly, in order to project themselves into an alternately light and dark celestial void—releases to the disappointing immensity of space the totality of laughing or lacerated men.

But, in this liberation of man, which leads to a suffocating absence of limits on the surface of the globe, human nature is far from surrendering without resistance. For if it is true that his blood, bones, and arms, that the shuddering of his pleasure (or still more the silence of true dread)—if it is true that his senile laughter and his insipid hate are endlessly lost and rise toward a sky as beautiful as death, as pale and implausible as death, his eyes continue to fetter him tightly to vulgar things, in the midst of which necessity has determined his steps.

The horizontal axis of vision, to which the human structure has remained strictly subjected, in the course of man's wrenching rejection of animal nature, is the expression of a misery all the more oppressive in that it is apparently confused with serenity.
VI. The Vertigo-Tree

For the anthropologist who can only observe it, this contradiction of axes of the human structure is devoid of meaning. And if, without even being able to explain itself, anthropology underscored the importance of the axes, it would only betray an unjustifiable tendency toward mysticism. The description of the perpendicular axes only takes on its value once it becomes possible to construct on these axes the puerile play of a mythological existence, answering no longer to observation or deduction but to a free development of the relations between the immediate and varied consciousness of human life and the supposedly unconscious givens that constitute this life.

Thus the pineal eye, detaching itself from the horizontal system of normal ocular vision, appears in a kind of nimbus of tears, like the eye of a tree or, perhaps, like a human tree. At the same time this ocular tree is only a giant (ignoble) pink penis, drunk with the sun and suggesting or soliciting a nauseous malaise, the sickening despair of vertigo. In this transfiguration of nature, during which vision itself, attracted by nausea, is torn out and torn apart by the sunbursts into which it stares, the erection ceases to be a painful upheaval on the surface of the earth and, in a vomiting of flavorless blood, it transforms itself into a vertiginous fall in celestial space, accompanied by a horrible cry.

VII. The Sun

The sun, situated at the bottom of the sky like a cadaver at the bottom of a pit, answers this inhuman cry with the spectral attraction of decomposition. Immense nature breaks its chains and collapses into the limitless void. A severed penis, soft and bloody, is substituted for the habitual order of things. In its folds, where painful jaws still bite, pus, spittle, and larva accumulate, deposited by enormous flies: fecal like the eye painted at the bottom of a vase, this Sun, now borrowing its brilliance from death, has buried existence in the stench of the night.

VIII. The Jesuve

The terrestrial globe has retained its enormity like a bald head, in the middle of which the eye that opens on the void is both volcanic and lacustrine. It extends its disastrous countryside into the deep folds of hairy flesh, and the hairs that form its bush are inundated with tears. But the troubled feelings of a degradation even stranger than death do not have their source in a typical brain: heavy intestines alone press under this nude flesh, as charged with obscenity as a rear end—one that is just as satanic as the equally nude bottom a young sorceress raises to the black sky at the moment her fundament opens, to admit a flaming torch.
The love-cry torn from this comic crater is a feverish sob and a rattling blast of thunder.

The fecal eye of the sun has also torn itself from these volcanic entrails, and the pain of a man who tears out his own eyes with his fingers is no more absurd than this anal maternity of the sun.

IX. The Sacrifice of the Gibbon

The intolerable cry of cocks has a solar significance because of the pride and feeling of triumph of the man perceiving his own dejecta under the open sky. In the same way, during the night, an immense, troubled love, sweet as a young girl’s spasm, abandons and throws itself into a giant universe, with the intimate feeling of having urinated the stars.

In order to renew this tender pact between belly and nature, a rotting forest offers its deceptive latrines, swarming with animals, colored or venomous insects, worms, and little birds. Solar light decomposes in the high branches. An Englishwoman, transfigured by a halo of blond hair, abandons her splendid body to the lubricity and the imagination (driven to the point of ecstasy by the stunning odor of decay) of a number of nude men.

Her humid lips open to kisses like a sweet swamp, like a noiseless flowing river, and her eyes, drowned in pleasure, are as immensely lost as her mouth. Above the entwined human beasts who embrace and handle her, she raises her marvelous head, so heavy with dazzlement, and her eyes open on a scene of madness.

Near a round pit, freshly dug in the midst of exuberant vegetation, a giant female gibbon struggles with three men, who tie her with long cords: her face is even more stupid than it is ignoble, and she lets out unbelievable screams of fear, screams answered by the various cries of small monkeys in the high branches. Once she is trussed up like a chicken—with her legs folded back against her body—the three men tie her upside down to a stake planted in the middle of the pit. Attached in this way, her bestially howling mouth swallows dirt while, on the other end, her huge screaming pink anal protrusion stares at the sky like a flower (the end of the stake runs between her belly and her bound paws): only the part whose obscenity stupefies emerges above the top level of the pit.

Once these preparations are finished, all the men and women present (there are, in fact, several other women, no less taken with debauchery) surround the pit: at this moment they are all equally nude, all equally deranged by the avidity of pleasure (exhausted by voluptuousness), breathless, at wits’ end . . .

They are all armed with shovels, except the Englishwoman: the earth destined to fill the pit is spread evenly around it. The ignoble gibbon, in an ignoble
posture, continues her terrifying howl, but, on a signal from the Englishwoman, everyone busies himself shoveling dirt into the pit, and then quickly stamps it down: thus, in the blink of an eye, the horrible beast is buried alive.

A relative silence settles: all the stupefied glances are fixed on the filthy, beautifully blood-colored solar prominence, sticking out of the earth and ridiculously shuddering with convulsions of agony. Then the Englishwoman with her charming rear end stretches her long nude body on the filled pit: the mucous-flesh of this bald false skull, a little soiled with shit at the radiate flower of its summit, is even more upsetting to see when touched by pretty white fingers. All those around hold back their cries and wipe their sweat; teeth bite lips; a light foam even flows from overly agitated mouths: contracted by strangulation, and even by death, the beautiful boil of red flesh is set ablaze with stinking brown flames.

Like a storm that erupts and, after several minutes of intolerable delay, ravishes in semidarkness an entire countryside with insane cataracts of water and blasts of thunder, in the same disturbed and profoundly overwhelming way (albeit with signs infinitely more difficult to perceive), existence itself shudders and attains a level where there is nothing more than a hallucinatory void, an odor of death that sticks in the throat.

In reality, when this puerile little vomiting took place, it was not on a mere carcass that the mouth of the Englishwoman crushed her most burning, her sweetest kisses, but on the nauseating JESUVE: the bizarre noise of kisses, prolonged on flesh, clattered across the disgusting noise of bowels. But these unheard-of events had set off orgasms, each more suffocating and spasmodic than its predecessor, in the circle of unfortunate observers; all throats were choked by raucous sighs, by impossible cries, and, from all sides, eyes were moist with the brilliant tears of vertigo.

The sun vomited like a sick drunk above the mouths full of comic screams, in the void of an absurd sky . . . And thus an unparalleled heat and stupor formed an alliance—as excessive as torture: like a severed nose, like a torn-out tongue—and celebrated a wedding (celebrated it with the blade of a razor on pretty, insolent rear ends), the little copulation of the stinking hole with the sun . . .

X. The Bronze Eye

The little girls who surround the animal cages in zoos cannot help but be stunned by the ever-so lubricious rear ends of apes. To their puerile understanding, these creatures—who seem to exist only for the purpose of coupling with men—mouth
to mouth, belly to belly—with the most doubtful parts of nature—propose enigmas whose perversity is barely burlesque. Girls cannot avoid thinking of their own little rear ends, of their own dejecta against which crushing interdictions have been leveled: but the image of their personal indecency, conveyed to them by the parti-colored, red, or mauve anal baldness of some apes, reaches, on the other side of the bars of the cage, a comic splendor and a suffocating atrocity. When the mythological deliria dissipate, after having fatigued the spirit through a lack of connections and through a disproportion to the real needs of life, the phantoms banished from all sides, abandoning the sun itself to the vulgarity of a nice day, make room for forms without mystery, through which one can easily make one’s way, with no other goal than defined objects. But all it takes is an idiotic ape in his cage and a little girl (who blushes at seeing him take a crap), to rediscover suddenly the fleeing troop of phantoms, whose obscene sniggers have just charged a rear end as shocking as a sun.

What science cannot do—which is to establish the exceptional signification, the expressive value of an excremental orifice emerging from a hairy body like a live coal, as when, in a lavatory, a human rear end comes out of a pair of pants—the little girl achieves in such a way that there will be nothing left to do but stifle a scream. She drifts away, pressed on by a need; she trots in an alley where her steps make the gravel screech and where she passes her friends without seeing their multicolored balls, which are nevertheless well designed to attract eyes dazzled by any riot of color. Thus she runs to the foul-smelling place and locks herself in with surprise, like a young queen who, out of curiosity, locks herself in the throne room: obscurely, but in ecstasy, she has learned to recognize the face, the comic breath of death; she is unaware only of her own sobs of voluptuousness that will join, much later, this miraculous, sweet discovery . . .

In the course of the progressive erection that goes from the quadruped to Homo erectus, the ignominy of animal appearance grows to the point of attaining horrifying proportions, from the pretty and almost baroque lemur, who still moves on the horizontal plane, up to the gorilla. However, when the line of terminal evolution is directed toward the human being, the series of forms is produced, on the contrary, in the direction of a more and more noble or correct regularity. Thus at the present stage of development the automatic rectitude of a soldier in uniform, maneuvering according to orders, emerges from the immense confusion of the animal world and proposes itself to the universe of astronomy as its highest achievement. If, on the other hand, this mathematical military truth is contrasted with the excremental orifice of the ape, which seems to be its inevitable compensation, the universe that seemed menaced by human splendor in a pitifully imperative form receives no other response than the unintelligible discharge of a burst of laughter . . .
When the arboreal life of apes, moving in jerks from branch to branch, provoked the rupture of the equilibrium that resulted from rectilinear locomotion, everything that obscurely but ceaselessly sought to throw itself outside the animal organism was freely discharged into the region of the inferior orifice. This part, which had never been developed, and was hidden under the tails of other animals, sent out shoots and flowered in the ape; it turned into a bald protuberance and the most beautiful colors of nature made it dazzling. The tail, for a long time incapable of hiding this immense hernia of flesh, disappeared from the most evolved apes, those that carried on the genius of their species, in such a way that the hernia was able to blossom, at the end of the process, with the most hideous obscenity.

Thus the disappearance of the free caudal appendage with which, more than anything else, human pride is commonly associated, in no way signifies a regression of original bestiality, but rather a liberation of lubricious and absolutely disgusting anal forces, of which man is only the contradictory expression.

The earth, shaken to its foundations, answered this doubtful colic of nature—discharged, in the gluey penumbra of forests, through numberless flowers of flesh—with the noisy joy of entrails, with the vomiting of unbelievable volcanoes. In the same way that a burst of laughter provokes others, or a yawn provokes the yawns of a crowd, a burlesque fecal spasm had unleashed, under a black sky ravaged with thunder, a spasm of fire. In this wonderland, a wind, heavy with bloody smoke, broke down from time to time immense glowing trees, while tortuous rivers of red incandescent lava streamed from everywhere, as if from the sky. Victims of an insane terror, the giant apes fled, their flesh broiled, their mouths distorted by puerile screams.

Many of them were felled by fiery tree trunks, which laid them down, screaming, on their stomachs or backs; they soon caught fire and burned like wood. Occasionally, however, a few arrived on a treeless beach, spared by the fire, protected from the smoke by an opposing wind: they were nothing more than breathless lacerations, shapeless silhouettes, half eaten by fire, getting up or moaning on the ground, staggered by intolerable pain. Before a spectacle of red lava—as dazzling as a nightmare—of an apocalyptic lava that seemed to come bloody out of their own anus (just as, originally, their own hairy bodies had thrust out and sadistically exhibited these vile anus—as if all the more to insult and soil that which exists) these unfortunate creatures became like the wombs of women who give birth, something horrible . . .

It is easy, starting with the worm, to consider ironically an animal, a fish, a monkey, a man, as a tube with two orifices, anal and buccal: the nostrils, the eyes, the ears, the brain represent the complications of the buccal orifice; the penis, the testicles, or the female organs that correspond to them, are the compli-
cation of the anal. In these conditions, the violent thrusts that come from the interior of the body can be indifferently rejected to one extremity or the other, and they are discharged, in fact, where they meet the weakest resistance. All the ornaments of the head, of whatever type, mean the generalized privilege of the oral extremity; one can only contrast them with the decorative riches of the excremental extremity of apes.

But when the great anthropoid carcass found itself standing on the ground, no longer swinging from one tree to another, itself now perfectly straight and parallel to a tree, all the impulses that had up to that time found their point of free expulsion in the anal region ran up against a new barrier. Because of the erect posture, the anal region ceased to form a protuberance, and it lost the "privileged power of points": the erection could only be maintained on condition that a barrier of contracted muscles be regularly substituted for this "power of points." Thus the obscure vital thrusts were suddenly thrown back in the direction of the face and the cervical region: they were discharged in the human voice and in more and more fragile intellectual constructions (these new modes of discharge were not only adapted to the principle of the new structure, to the erection, but they even contributed to its rigidity and strength).

Beyond this, in order to consume an excess, the facial extremity assumed a part—relatively weak, but significant—of the excretory functions that up to that time had been routed in the opposite direction: men spit, cough, yawn, belch, blow their noses, sneeze, and cry much more than the other animals, but above all they have acquired the strange faculty of sobbing and bursting into laughter.

Alone, even though it may be substituted at the end of evolution for the mouth as the extreme point of the upper edifice, the pineal gland remains only in a virtual state and can only attain its meaning (without which a man spontaneously enslaves himself and reduces himself to the status of an employee) with the help of mythical confusion, as if better to make human nature a value foreign to its own reality, and thus to tie it to a spectral existence.

It is in relation to this last fact that the metamorphosis of the great ape must be seen as an inversion, having as its object not only the direction of the discharges thrust back through the head—transforming the head into something completely different from a mouth, making it a kind of flower blossoming with the most delirious richness of forms—but also the access of living nature (up to that point tied to the ground) to the unreality of solar space.

It is the inversion of the anal orifice itself, resulting from the shift from a squatting posture to a standing one, that is responsible for the decisive reversal of animal existence.

The bald summit of the anus has become the center, blackened with bushes, of the narrow ravine cleaving the buttocks.

The spectral image of this change of sign is represented by a strange human
nudity—now obscene—that is substituted for the hairy body of animals, and in particular by the pubescent hairs that appear exactly where the ape was glabrous; surrounded by a halo of death, a creature who is too pale and too large stands up, a creature who, under a sick sun, is nothing other than the celestial eye it lacks.
The Big Toe

The big toe is the most human part of the human body, in the sense that no other element of this body is as differentiated from the corresponding element of the anthropoid ape (chimpanzee, gorilla, orangutan, or gibbon). This is due to the fact that the ape is tree dwelling, whereas man moves on the earth without clinging to branches, having himself become a tree, in other words raising himself straight up in the air like a tree, and all the more beautiful for the correctness of his erection. In addition, the function of the human foot consists in giving a firm foundation to the erection of which man is so proud (the big toe, ceasing to grasp branches, is applied to the ground on the same plane as the other toes).

But whatever the role played in the erection by his foot, man, who has a light head, in other words a head raised to the heavens and heavenly things, sees it as spit, on the pretext that he has this foot in the mud.

Although within the body blood flows in equal quantities from high to low and from low to high, there is a bias in favor of that which elevates itself, and human life is erroneously seen as an elevation. The division of the universe into subterranean hell and perfectly pure heaven is an indelible conception, mud and darkness being the principles of evil as light and celestial space are the principles of good: with their feet in mud but their heads more or less in light, men obstinately imagine a tide that will permanently elevate them, never to return, into pure space. Human life entails, in fact, the rage of seeing oneself as a back and forth movement from refuse to the ideal, and from the ideal to refuse—a rage that is easily directed against an organ as base as the foot.

The human foot is commonly subjected to grotesque tortures that deform it and make it rickety. In an imbecile way it is doomed to corns, calluses, and bunions, and if one takes into account turns of phrase that are only now disappearing, to the most nauseating filthiness: the peasant expression "her hands are as dirty as feet," while no longer true of the entire human collectivity, was so in the seventeenth century.

Man's secret horror of his foot is one of the explanations for the tendency to conceal its length and form as much as possible. Heels of greater or lesser height, depending on the sex, distract from the foot’s low and flat character.

Besides, this uneasiness is often confused with a sexual uneasiness; this is especially striking among the Chinese, who, after having atrophied the feet of women, situate them at the most excessive point of deviance. The husband himself must not see the nude feet of his wife, and it is incorrect and immoral in general to look at the feet of women. Catholic confessors, adapting themselves to this aberration, ask their Chinese penitents "if they have not looked at women's feet."

The same aberration is found among the Turks (Volga Turks, Turks of Central Asia), who consider it immoral to show their nude feet and who even go to bed in stockings.

Nothing similar can be cited from classical antiquity (apart from the use of very high soleis in tragedies). The most prudish Roman matrons constantly allowed their nude toes to be seen. On the other hand, modesty concerning the feet developed excessively in the modern era and only started to disappear in the nineteenth century. M. Salomon Reinach has studied this development in detail in the article entitled "Pieds pudiques" ("Modest Feet"), insisting on the role of Spain, where women's feet have been the object of the most dreaded anxiety and thus were the cause of crimes. The simple fact of allowing the shod foot to be seen, jutting out from under a skirt, was regarded as indecent. Under no circumstances was it possible to touch the foot of a woman, this liberty being, with one exception, more grave than any other. Of course, the foot of the queen was the object of the most terrifying prohibition. Thus, according to Mme D'Aulnoy, the Count of Villamediana, in love with Queen Elizabeth, had the idea of starting a fire in order to have the pleasure of carrying her in his arms: "Almost the entire house, worth 100,000 écus, was burned, but he was consoled by the fact that, taking advantage of so favorable an occasion, he took the sovereign in his arms and carried her into a small staircase. He took some liberties there, and, something very much noticed in this country, he even touched her foot. A little page saw it, reported it to the king, and the latter had his revenge by killing the count with a pistol shot."
It is possible to see in these obsessions, as M. Reinach does, a progressive refinement of modesty that little by little has been able to reach the calf, the ankle, and the foot. This explanation, in part well founded, is however not sufficient if one wants to account for the hilarity commonly produced by simply imagining the toes. The play of fantasies and fears, of human necessities and aberrations, is in fact such that fingers have come to signify useful action and firm character, the toes stupor and base idiocy. The vicissitudes of organs, the profusion of stomachs, larynxes, and brains traversing innumerable animal species and individuals, carries the imagination along in an ebb and flow it does not willingly follow, due to a hatred of the still painfully perceptible frenzy of the bloody palpitations of the body. Man willingly imagines himself to be like the god Neptune, stilling his own waves, with majesty; nevertheless, the bellowing waves of the viscera, in more or less incessant inflation and upheaval, brusquely put an end to his dignity. Blind, but tranquil and strangely despising his obscure baseness, a given person, ready to call to mind the grandeur of human history, as when his glance ascends a monument testifying to the grandeur of his nation, is stopped in mid-flight by an atrocious pain in his big toe because, though the most noble of animals, he nevertheless has corns on his feet; in other words, he has feet, and these feet independently lead an ignoble life.

Corns on the feet differ from headaches and toothaches by their baseness, and they are only laughable because of an ignominy explicable by the mud in which feet are found. Since by its physical attitude the human race distances itself as much as it can from terrestrial mud—whereas a spasmodic laugh carries joy to its summit each time its purest flight land man's own arrogance spread-eagle in the mud—one can imagine that a toe, always more or less damaged and humiliating, is psychologically analogous to the brutal fall of a man—in other words, to death. The hideously cadaverous and at the same time loud and proud appearance of the big toe corresponds to this derision and gives a very shrill expression to the disorder of the human body, that prodigy of the violent discord of the organs.

The form of the big toe is not, however, specifically monstrous: in this it is different from other parts of the body, the inside of a gaping mouth, for example. Only secondary (but common) deformations have been able to give its ignominy an exceptionally burlesque value. Now it is easy, most often, to account for burlesque values by means of extreme seductiveness. But we are led here to distinguish categorically two radically opposed kinds of seductiveness (whose habitual confusion entails the most absurd misunderstandings of language).

If a seductive element is to be attributed to the big toe, it is evidently not one to satisfy such exalted aspirations as, for example, the perfectly indelible taste that, in most cases, leads one to prefer elegant and correct forms. On the contrary, if one chooses, for example, the case of the Count of Villamediana, one can affirm that the pleasure he derived from touching the queen’s foot specifically derived from the ugliness and infection represented by the baseness of the foot, in practice by the most deformed feet. Thus, supposing that the queen’s foot was perfectly pretty, it still derived its sacrilegious charm from deformed and muddy feet. Since a queen is a priori a more ideal and ethereal being than any other, it was human to the point of laceration to touch what in fact was not very different from the stinking foot of a thug. Here one submits to a seduction radically opposed to that caused by light and ideal beauty; the two orders of seduction are often confused because a person constantly moves from one to the other, and, given this back and forth movement, whether it finds its end in one direction or the other, seduction is all the more acute when the movement is more brutal.

As for the big toe, classic foot fetishism leading to the licking of toes categorically indicates that it is a phenomenon of base seduction, which accounts for the burlesque value that is always more or less attached to the pleasures condemned by pure and superficial men.

The meaning of this article lies in its insistence on a direct and explicit questioning of seductiveness, without taking into account poetic concoctions that are, ultimately, nothing but a diversion (most human beings are naturally feeble and can only abandon themselves to their instincts when in a poetic haze). A return to reality does not imply any new acceptances, but means that one is seduced in a base manner, without transpositions and to the point of screaming, opening his eyes wide: opening them wide, then, before a big toe.

Note