

From Songs of Limbs and Flesh and Heart Perhaps Too

by Martha Lackritz, '03

for Roland Barthes

"Am I desirable?"

le désir/ desire

Without the consistent reminder that the amorous subject is found sexually appealing, there is an attention to physical detail, a reassessment of worth, and of balance between what is called "inner and outer beauty"

1. In the mirror I am searching for what the other will be drawn to. And not only the other, but anyone: strangers, foes, past lovers. I am scanning legs, hair, and curve of thigh. Is it elbow, or nape of neck? For though in the past I fled from those who took little interest in me "as a person," I now crave this one-track regard just when I at last seem to be appreciated for "who I am." Hence a constant sense of unrest, seeking an other who balances these two desires. (Although I am inclined to believe that the latter must have, to some degree, the same lure to the superficial, only is more capable of hiding it for reasons of character or perhaps sexual feat.)

2. I have bought these new clothes - tighter/shorter/more exposing - for the purpose that the other will take note of the way my body looks in them, for a possible verbal response to a carnal reaction. Here I do not expect much, but wish perhaps the other could muster the words of Federico Garcia Lorca, "To see you naked is to remember the earth." I am thus seeking affirmation, approval. It boils down to ordinary sexual attention. I need to be reminded that the other finds me more than sufficiently, irresistibly at times, alluring.

II.

Looking at Lips

I was once told that the dent between our lips and our noses is the fingerprint of an angel who has erased all knowledge of past lives before we are reborn into new ones. I find that my pinky fits nicely into mine, and wonder if perhaps fuller-lipped people had more memory that needed erasing, more interesting lives to be forgotten. Today my lips feel warm. They are chapping and at last picking up color, which I welcome (sans chapstick) to my otherwise pale features. In elementary school, my teachers seemed thin-lipped. In fashion magazines, gaunt women are featured with round, luscious lips. I can imagine the way their lips bundle up for the lipstick, then relax, allowing the colored stick to pull them side to side. I imagine they don't smack open like the rest of ours. They are slow and sensual, parting seductively into pouting poses, cheeks drawn up high under the eyes. I wish I could remember what poet it was that asked why women's lips part when they apply mascara in front of the mirror. What a marvelous thing to notice. It is as automatic as the closing of eyes when we kiss. Like marionettes, these are unexplainable instincts. Still, I can't help but think lips are underrated. After so much gazing into lovers' eyes, making eyes at someone, giving the evil eye, seeing something eye-to-eye, I am left to brood on the lips. For although the eye is the so-called "window to the soul," we forget that the door must be the mouth, making lips the exitways for words. Somewhere in our brain, there is a lovely uniformed woman instructing our thoughts in the direction of the nearest and safest exit in the case of an emergency, being the moment we want to say something, which, for most of us, is quite often. Perhaps it is better that lips have not yet carried the burden of so many ragged clichés. In some instances, I prefer to leave such seemingly simple features to be admired in their subtlety. Otherwise, all those angels may have to find a new, more inconspicuous place to hide their stamps.

III.

TOES

"Sometimes ... what really turns me on, is when he sucks on my toes." She's standing in the entryway of her room, unleashing sexual secrets through the dark red cage of her lips. She wears deep burgundy nail polish. It is another ivory winter in northern Michigan, and I believe her toes must fit like marbles in the hollow of his mouth.

HIPS

In the clumsy hair-brushing, locker-jamming years of my jr. high, there was nothing I wanted more than a body that curved - that moved on its own. Swayed. Shimmied its way into tight jeans and fitted skirts. A voluptuous coke-bottle man-trap. I studied Jayne Mansfield, Kim Novak; analyzed in bafflement the round bottomed swinging pendulum that kept time on Marilyn Monroe. I wanted to shake loose my knobby knees and gawky stick body. To slink into the hourglass silhouette, the pockets of my pants stretched and sealed. A viola-tapered waist, its glass-shattering screech: the low rumble and quick tempo of congas the only music able to keep up with my swing.

ASS

I'd like to know why so many of us want "a piece of ass," and not the whole thing. I'm craving to discover how to wave my hips when I walk, and how to wear spandex and leggings and biking shorts. I want to know how to move: to learn how to arch my back, to twist and to bend and to writhe with glamour and style. Sandra Cisneros laments, "Because I miss / you I run my hand / along the flat of my thigh / curve of the hip / mango of the ass..." Sweet, savory dawn-colored goddess of fruit - I too would like to believe my ass worthy of such metaphor.

SHOULDERS

This morning my shoulders tell me they need to be seen. I sort through halter tops, tube tops and spaghetti straps before settling on a thin cotton tank top. In the mirror I stare at the line my bone makes from the peak of my shoulders to the hollow in my neck. Tracing with my fingers, I follow the wide V of my clavicles. At night, when I am unable to sleep, I pace with my arms crossed in front of my breast like a mummy. My hands cup each shoulder as though to draw myself into something smaller, arms swallowing my chest, shoulder blades jutting out in folded wings behind me. At the end of the day, I peel off my backpack, hang down my head and roll my shoulders. For I believe that these twin tips, though underrated and unappreciated, are the body's true deities - bearing our loads like camels, carrying themselves like queens. Would that I could turn these words into a hundred golden shrines in praise of their infinite glory.