

NOTES ON THREE ERECTIONS

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If you're ever in Los Angeles, drive to the end of Wilshire and face the sea. Something stands in your way—something that purports to be a statue of Saint Monica herself. As to who Saint Monica was, the statue gives no clue; bullet-shaped, the stone stands without expression or gesture, giving nothing, asking nothing, and seeming to absorb any light or glance with no return reflection. The piece has an air of wanting to be ignored and it gets its wish. It is as though the sculptor had been frightened by his own idea. Plainly, whether he knew it or not, his idea had been to sculpt the image of a woman onto a phallus.

Walk around the statue. From behind, it is an erection plain and simple and only slightly abstract. From the front, a woman of minimal lines has taken her place within, or on the surface of, the penis. The conception is so phallic that once seen this way it is difficult to see it any other way, if indeed there was any other.

I think of lines from the poet John Yau:

*Memory going one way
the body another. Something wedged in between.*

This minor sculptor was wedged in between, exercising his limited gifts while all but unbeknownst to him his psyche went back, far back, to the Neolithic era and beyond. In that day, it was not unusual to sculpt images of the Great Goddess onto carvings of the erect penis.

There were no gods then. Only goddesses. It would be thousands of years before the race would begin to sculpt male gods. Neolithic humans apparently felt little maleness in divinity. Or put another way: intense spirituality brought forth from them female images. Or another: for a long, long time in the youth of humanity, flashes of the spirit were felt primarily with the feminine aspects of both men and women.

We can only guess at what they meant by carving the Great Goddess onto the cock. Was it the Goddess tattooing her claim onto the very maleness of men? Was it the man finding a passion in sexuality that couldn't be wholly satisfied by the physical, a yearning in him for something of the spirit to mix with his passion? Or was it the meeting not only of the divine and the physical, but of the masculine and the feminine *cohabiting the cock itself*? An idea to reckon with. If the cock is also feminine, then where does "feminism" hide and where does "macho" run?

We have made such easy distinctions in our society, and they suit so conveniently our prejudices of the moment. But simplicities like "feminine or masculine" and "straight or gay" are shallow beside these ancient stones. Robert Bly cites experiments in England that show that if a man suckles an infant regularly, after a few weeks his breasts will start to give milk. That secret was there all the while in those crude stone statues of goddesses on phalluses.

For us these can't be statues of precise meaning and shouldn't be. "Precision" in such things means to focus on one possibility while ignoring the others. Rather these are statues of the cock as a metamorphic possibility—a capacity to leap from meaning to

meaning within the flesh itself. Very different from the singular thrust that “erection” means for us. Think of it rather as raw goddess-stuff and raw god-stuff that, like water from a fountain, hovers in a pillar at the height of its flight, keeping its huge erect form while engaged in continuous transformation.

But these are just words circling the image. Once the image gets into your consciousness it has its own life and doesn’t need explanations so much as it needs to be savored, remembered. What is important in the image of the goddess etched onto the penis is that male and female energy meet in the cock without either one losing essence or form. And the first thing to “do” with such an image is to realize we already embody it, no matter what we’ve forgotten and what we hide from ourselves. The erection, which the feminist and the macho alike have seen as such a one-note, one purpose organ, is less a sword than a wand.

So, an unknowing representative of ancient consciousness, that rather sad statue on Ocean and Wilshire, transcends itself and becomes a piece of psychic archeology. We have many a Neolithic stone in our heads. One of Freud’s first and most important discoveries was that “in the subconscious there is no Time.” Jung extrapolated from individuals to the entire race, using Freud’s insight as a passageway down which he went to find the collective unconscious and his demonstration that ancient archetypes of thought live their own lives through and with us. Not that we are possessed, but that we are connected, and that the rhythms of our wills are often ancient dances.

Take that piece of stone, sandblast out “Santa Monica” and chisel in “Erect Male Member, Featuring Goddess” (marvelous word, *member*, a member of the group that is the person, a member both connected and somehow independent)—*then* people would stop and contemplate that statue. Or laugh at it—which would at least be a beginning, a step away from the monolithic notion of male sexuality in which we’re all, men and women, equally trapped.

Put the Neolithic phallus beside another phallic image, this one some 17,000 years old: a painting in the innermost of the ancient caves at Lascaux, France. Deep in what is considered to be Lascaux’s holiest vault, a wall painting depicts a bison head over a stick figure of a man with a birdlike head and an erection. This is thought (by such as Joseph Campbell and William Irwin Thompson) to be the earliest known depiction of a shaman. The birdlike head is thought to be his mask. His erection is taken as a sign that he is dreaming—for men very often get erections while dreaming. The shaman, who is reclining, is thought to be dreaming of the image of the bison that hovers over him.

Here again is an image to remind us of what the sexual deliberations of the last twenty years, mostly feminist and gay, have largely ignored: that an erect cock has more meanings than sex; that the act of ranging through realms of the psyche, which we call “dreaming,” and which is how the psyches generates its images into composite sequences to give us signs, this act, too causes erections. In fact, given the time we spend sleeping, it may not be too outrageous to say that dreaming causes *most* erections. Which is to say that there is something of the dream in every erection. The dream’s complexity, its lineage, its imagery, and its metamorphic possibilities.

Go further and say: every erection is, in effect, a dream. It rises from a dream, it is sustained by a dream, it seeks to penetrate a dream. Rilke wondered often in his poetry whether lovers ever truly touched. There are the man and the woman and all that each is and all that they want to be and all they pretend to be and all that they think they are and

all that they seek in each other, and all of that is present in *every* coupling, making every coupling a veritable orgy! And the link through which all these aspects pass, the connector, is the erection. Again: the wand.

The shaman sleeping his vision in Lascaux, his vision seeming to hover above the hard-on, sleeps in us as well. We may have forgotten him, we may not like to think about him, but he dreams on, and his cock is also ours. What has happened to us, denying these subtleties of the cock? We've attributed all the mystery to the cunt, that's what. Projected it there, and resented it there, because we had so little of our own, But the cunt has its own great claim on mystery, it doesn't need the inflation we men give it by denying what's inherently within us. It's a sorry way to be men, to live without our own physical mystery.

Who can say how much this denial's hurt us? And who can say how much it's wounded our world? Sexism is the need to suppress the women we secretly fear, and why do we fear them unless it is the suspicion that they contain mysteries, and therefore powers, that we can't equal? And while these mysteries aren't only sexual, the emblems of these mysteries certainly are. I am saying that men would have much less to fear of women if we were open to the equally sexual emblems of our mysterious natures.

In white men, this denial has been a cause of another horror: the racism that has plagued the world in the 500 years that European whites and their American descendents have sought to dominate it. We have looked upon black bodies, especially male black bodies, with utter horror for half a millennium, and why? Christianity has taught us that the body, *per se*, is wrong and that to deny the body is right. Christianity has saturated us with an iconography in which white is good, dark is not. It was a program for hate. When we came upon people who were not only dark but who moved with a suppleness that whites had denied themselves—who were *in* their evil bodies without denial—then everything we'd denied in ourselves came to face us. It was unbearable. For many, it still is. Rather than waken the sleeping shaman within our own cave, we ravaged a world.

We enslaved and hated and killed with the power of our own impacted mysteries. We were mad. A thousand years of denial had made Europeans restless enough to leave their homelands, and ruthless enough to leave their homelands, and ruthless enough to seek mastery of everything. People who hadn't denied as much, who were content with their homeland, and who wanted not mastery but the slow evolution of their traditions—these couldn't stand against the white jihad. We were like a horrible dream of the sleeping shaman within us.

He slept but was not dead. He has been stirring for a while now, half-awake, opening his eyes. In some men he speaks. In some he dances. He has enough mystery of his own, enough power, enough darkness in his light, not to fear or envy anybody else's. The ancients of Lascaux knew that you had to crawl down and down and down through the stone in yourself to find him, and this is something some of us are painfully learning to do. One thing that he will teach us is the ways of the wand.

To find the third erection, drive down the eastern coast of Mexico, where there are few Anglo tourists, and stop in one of the little towns about midway between Brownsville and Tampico. There are no flashy sights to see. These are simply working towns. Walk around in the early evening and go into one of the workingmen's bars (if you're a man—females aren't approved of here). There's usually a pool table, sometimes someone playing music, or a TV or radio. Mostly it's just a bar, no frills, just men drinking beer and talking. But on the walls you will often see two images. One is a crude wall-sized

drawing of a *Playboy*-pinup-like woman (often not a Mexican woman) tied down, bloody with torture, being raped by some huge man, often an Aztec-like Indian. On the other wall, sometimes the opposite wall, there is likely to be a drawing of a flying cock—often a winged and phoenix-like phallus rising out of flames.

Those genial, grizzled, work-tired and sweaty men drinking their *cerveza* are living between those two images. Most of us are. The incongruity between the men and the pictures would be almost comical if we didn't know that those pictures are painted on the inside of their skulls as well. On the one hand you admire how unselfconscious they are about it all—how readily accessible those images are in their lives. Most supposedly sophisticated peoples have to dig a lot harder to unearth the same material. On the other hand, you have to feel for how without consciousness they are—bearing the weight of a culture that is somehow both tumultuous and changeless, exhausted by a struggle for survival that reduces them to a dependence on symbols that make it more difficult for them to survive. They drink their beer every night under the images that could help free them if they weren't too leaden with fatigue—in every sense, on every level—to think beyond what they've been given, to feel beyond what they know.

The winged cock: is it a symbol of disembodied sexuality that will claim no responsibility and that wants no love, hence justifying and making possible the torture on the opposite wall? Or is it an unconscious counterpart to an equally unconscious image of torture, a vivid and poignant image of male sexuality trying to transcend the very walls on which the pictures are painted?

Both, I suspect. Here is the price of the macho code, yes, but that is too easy to say. What creates a macho code? Here is a household matriarchy governed economically by a societal patriarchy that emphasizes being “a strong man” while denying men power over their lives or their work. Which means that there is no place for these men to be men. In work they are mules. And the home is the woman's domain. And so they are powerless except in their bars. And there they have no power but to play games, to talk, to pose, to get drunk, to fantasize. They don't paint pictures of their bosses and politicians being buggered because they would be arrested or shot, and most of them are too savvy to let themselves be so easily murdered. They can only burst their limits in that other place where they feel powerless, their homes. Their families. Their women. Their children. It is a miserable and vicious circle—no different from North America's ghetto bars and redneck bars. It is only that in Mexico it is more stark and less self-conscious, and both those qualities give us these wall paintings.

The rape is a fantasy of power over the women, the home, obviously; yet on another level this is usually Aztec rapist is torturing an almost-white Mexican woman, so this is also a fantasy of the ancient spirit of Mexico making Europe and the United States pay for their sins. It is no wonder that this is the only place where these men can relax; it is the only place where their rage is expressed honestly, however passive that honesty has to be.

And the winged cock flying from the flames—the one that I remember most vividly was so brightly colored, and its lines were so full of energy and movement, that you couldn't mistake its joy. Here was every metaphoric possibility set loose. Here was the rush of wings a man can sometimes feel in his pants. (Not to mention how a woman may want to feel it flying within her.) And here was the flaming psyche it rises from. Here was the wand in its power. And, yes, that power must be grounded to be genuine, to be able to replenish itself. But we separate too easily the idea of being grounded and the

“pure” idea, as the psychologists would call it, the idea of flying free. I think of how these concepts live together in a verse of Robert Bly’s:

*A dream of moles with golden wings
Is not so bad; it is like imagining
Waterfalls of stone deep in mountains.
Or a wing flying alone beneath the earth.*

A flight only occurs, after all, in relation to a ground—and what else is an erection but a rising, a flight, and then a settling down to the ground again? Bly’s “wing flying alone beneath the earth” is such a resonant and satisfying image because within it the contradictions exist without needing to be put to rest by some compromise between them, some resolution. There are nights of lovemaking that are like flying beneath the earth.

The penis, which offers the same passage to piss and jism, to dead waste and creation itself, never resolves its contradictions. That’s apparently not what it’s here for. The wand, far from being the monolith the West has made of it, has many lives that exist at once; its flesh is a medium of paradox, potent by virtue of the possibilities it calls forth.

There has been much talk, in these eighties of ours, about masculinity and about the possibility of a masculine movement through which men would begin describing themselves in a more full, more vital way than they yet have during the reign of Christianity. If this dialogue or movement is going to have some social force, it will have to have at its core a discussion of male sexuality, as feminism had at its core a discussion of female sexuality. I’ve offered these images of erections as a small part of a large beginning.

For certainly the weakest, silliest aspect of feminism—which for the most part has been an overwhelmingly beneficial movement—has been its description of male sexuality. It was a description that assumed a monolithic, monointentioned erection; it was a description that equated the ejaculation of sperm with coming. The three images here—and there obviously could have been many more—should be enough to suggest the many secret passageways within an erection. As far as the question of male “coming”—it is an immense and untried question. Ejaculation is a muscle spasm that many men often feel with virtually no sensation but the twitch of the spasm. To ejaculate is not necessarily to come. Coming involves a constellation of sensations, physical, psychic, emotional, of virtually infinite shadings. Coming may *sometimes* or *often* occur at the moment of ejaculation, when it occurs at all. *But many ejaculations for many men happen without any sensation of coming.*

Until a woman understand this she doesn’t know the first thing about male sexuality.

Nor do many men. There is ample evidence in face after face that, as there are women who have never come, so there are men who have often ejaculated but never come. And they likely don’t know it, as many women never knew it until a few began to be vocal about such things. These men live in a terrifying and baffling sexual numbness in which they try the right moves and say the right things but every climax is, literally, an anticlimax. It is no wonder that in time they have less and less connection with their own bodies, and are increasingly distant from the women they want to love.

Feminism has also gotten a lot of mileage out of the mistaken notion that men can't fake coming the way women can. Men can't fake the ejaculation of sperm, of course, but we can fake the muscle-spasms, hip-jerks, and moans as well as any woman can. During an agonizing period of premature ejaculation, I ejaculated almost instantly upon entering but, remaining hard, I didn't let on but kept right on going through the motions, faking the muscle spasms and moans of orgasm when the woman had (or faked) her own. Several male friends, when questioned, admitted having had similar experiences.

How are men and women to know of these things when they're never spoken of, and when even in literature you can search far and wide for a worthy, complex description of what it may be for a man to come. You don't find it, for instance, in Henry Miller. He describes brilliantly how it feels to be a cock inside a cunt, to truly enter and *be* there; he describes his perceptions of women coming; and he is truly brilliant at writing of the shaman's dream erection—often he seems to write out of the center of those dreams themselves; but he never, in all my reading of him, gets inside his own coming. Nor does D.H. Lawrence, who is so fine at expressing the longing of the phoenix-like winged erection. Their narratives stop before the ejaculation, pass over and continue after it.

Mailer gets close, once, but not in one of his novels—where, considering his aesthetics, his glossing over the issue is unconscionable. But he did it in an essay, a brief passage in his thought-sparking book *The Prisoner of Sex*. After chiding feminist writers (a brave move in 1971) for their “dull assumption that the sexual force of a man was the luck of his birth” he writes of “. . . orgasms stunted as lives, screwed as mean and fierce and squashed and cramped as the lives of men and women whose history was daily torture . . . comes as far away as the aria and the hunt and the devil's ice of a dive, orgasms like the collision of a truck, or coming as soft as snow, arriving with the riches of a king in a costume, or slipping in the sneaky heat of a slide down slippery slopes . . .”

A few sentences onward he gives one of the sentences of his life: at orgasm, he says, “the eye of your life looked back at you then. Who would wish to stare into that eye if it was poorer than one's own?”

Who indeed. We are all paying the price of such moments. We pay for our own and for each other's. Men and women alike. Yet there are times when the eye of your orgasm, the eye staring back at you, matches your own; and times when it is richer than your own, leading you on to what you may yet be.

A single suggestive passage about male orgasm in years of sexually explicit literature is a poor showing. Doubtless there are more floating about, but not many, and they're hardly known and apparently unremembered.

We men, who have never spoken of such things, are squarely to blame for the consequences of our constipated silences. What more than spasms is to be expected of our entire culture of adult men who are frightened to wear colors during business hours? The neatly knotted tie is all that's left of our desert shawl and shaman robe. Most American and European businessmen, aped by businessmen all over the world now, still walk around in the black-and-white and brown-and-white color variations of celibate monks who spent a thousand years frightened of nothing so much as of all the imagery that might rise out of an erection.

One example of a reaction to this color fear are rock stars like Prince who, for all his childish and sexist lyrics, is on the cutting edge of these issues right now because he is bringing colors back to men. Or at any rate, back to boys who will one day be men. The

hot-colored styles Prince inspires reflect the spectrum of the psyche much better than gray flannel.

There are many who would like the needed innovation and advances to occur on a more sophisticated and enlightened level than, say, Prince works on. But that is a luxury we can hardly afford. We are desperate people, and must take our signs as they come, whether from a rock star, or a sullen statue on Ocean and Wilshire, or a painting in a cramped cave, or a mural in a Mexican bar. They are the work of men, and so they are ours.

The body is such an immense place. We take so long to find our ways across it. And each of us has so many bodies. Sometimes they drag behind us, and we feel encumbered and earth-laden. Sometimes they race before us, making huge decisions in our name, while we scramble to catch up—and sometimes we call that “sex.” And we know so little about these things. And one of the only ways we can test the little we know is to speak of it.

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