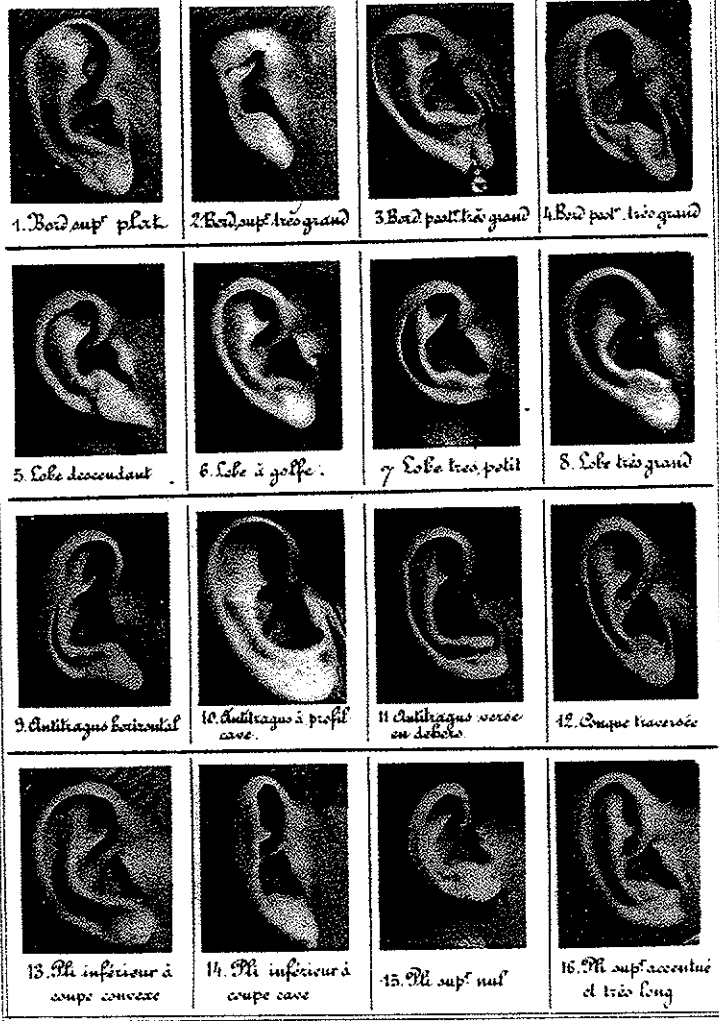


Planche 56

Tableau récapitulatif des formes sériees les plus caractéristiques à signaler sur la fiche en tout état de cause



Cléber Dugast et Félix Geoffroy

# TYPECASTING

On the Arts & Sciences  
of Human Inequality

A History of Dominant Ideas

Elizabeth Stuart  
EWEN & EWEN

SEVEN STORIES PRESS  
NEW YORK

## DIDOT'S INVENTION

Stereotypes make sense of the big, complex, often transient world that confronts us. In the process they transform it. While the current meaning of stereotyping usually refers to the unthinking tendency to reduce individuals and cultures to one-dimensional, often slanderous, visual clichés, this practice has deep historical roots and is linked to the rise of the modern world.

Defining people according to simplistic categories, of course, dates back to antiquity. In myth, ritual, and drama, and in the ways that history was recounted, characters often appeared as easily identifiable types, embodiments of good and evil, virtue and trickery, innocence and cunning. In the contemporary world, however, where cultural meanings transcend customary borders, and where the standardization of images and information is commonplace, the problem of stereotyping has become particularly acute.

Within recent history, the media's capacity to spawn mass impressions instantaneously, has been a pivotal factor in the dissemination of stereotypes. In fact, the link between media and stereotype is found in the origin of the word itself. Coined in 1794 by the French printer Fermin Didot, "stereotype" was the name he gave to a novel printing process by which papier mâché molds were made from full pages of handset type. Like cookie cutters, these molds were then used to produce duplicate plates, cast in metal, permitting newspapers and books to be printed on several presses at the same time without the need to set individual pieces of type into forms for each printing press.<sup>1</sup>

Yet even among printers the contemporary implications of stereotyping were furtively in attendance. As far back as Gutenberg's development of movable-type printing, in the mid fifteenth century, the hard metal hand-cut die, or "punch," from which multiple pieces of type could be cloned, was referred to as the *patrix*, derived from the Latin for father, *pater*. The progenitor of type, then, was assigned a masculine role by a printing profession that was exclusively male. Stamped by the *patrix*, the molds that were used to mass-produce the pieces of type that bore their "father's" image, was called the *matrix*, from *mater* or mother. With Didot's innovation, handset type became the *patrix*, the molds they shaped became the *matrix*. Here, in the early jargon of printers, gender was used to communicate a hierarchy of importance in the evolution from original to copy.

52 Issues of power, and assumptions of social inequality, then, were joined to the term stereotype from its inception.<sup>2</sup> The invention of stereotype technology multiplied the variety of printed materials that could be produced, hastened the mass production of print and the growth of a mass readership. More than ever before, unprecedented numbers of people could now consume the same ideas and information simultaneously. Borrowing its prefix from the Greek *stereos*—meaning solid, hard, or fixed—the term stereotype, by the 1820s, was beginning to evolve into a metaphor, a common shorthand for “the idea of unchangeability, of monotonous regularity and formalisation.”<sup>3</sup>

It was, however, the renowned American journalist Walter Lippmann who introduced the term stereotype into the social, cultural, and psychological vocabulary of contemporary life. The term had been used before, but never in quite the same way.

In *Public Opinion*, his classic 1922 study of “public mind” and the forces that shape popular consciousness, Lippmann presented “stereotypes” as axiomatic elements of human perception. In the modern world, he argued, their utility was essential. The complexity of modern existence, and the global reach of contemporary society, made it impossible for people to make sense of the world on the basis of firsthand knowledge.

[T]he real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it. To traverse the world men must have maps of the world.

Stereotypes, he contended, were those maps. Together they formed a “repertory of fixed impressions” that “we carry about in our heads,” rigid mental templates that frame individual experience in an increasingly anonymous world.

For Lippmann, the stereotypes did not emanate from the individual. Instead, they were an inexorable by-product of the surrounding culture, a perceptual reflex that imposed itself between people’s eyes and the world they believed they were seeing.

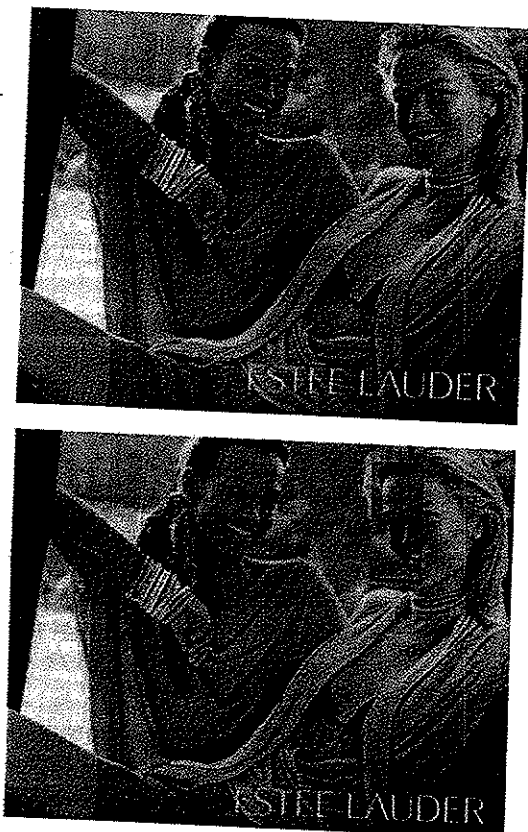
For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we

tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.

FIRST WE DEFINE AND THEN WE SEE

What makes you different is what makes you beautiful. New, Individualist Natural Finish Makeup

Now there's a makeup that matches what that skin tone has for the most natural, flawless look. It's makeup as individual as you are.



What makes you different is what makes you beautiful. New, Individualist Natural Finish Makeup

Now there's a makeup that matches what that skin tone has for the most natural, flawless look. It's makeup as individual as you are.

Common cultural assumptions encourage the viewer of this advertisement (top) to see these two women as essentially different. When the face of the black model is flipped horizontally and superimposed over the face of the white model (bottom), however, it becomes evident that socially inscribed racial distinctions defy common sense. Aside from variations in the hue of the skin, these two models could be identical twins, both conforming to a Nordic standard of beauty. Ideas of difference and inequality are simultaneously transmitted by the way the models are posed. While the white model confidently looks out to the desiring eyes of a prospective consumer, the black model's subordinate position is telegraphed by the palpable admiration she shows for her white counterpart, as seen in the original ad above.

ARCHIE BISHOP

Through this fateful “mechanism,” he maintained, “heroes are incarnated, devils are made.”

Lippmann’s discovery was, without question, a reflection of its time. Prior to the modern era, most people had acquired their assumptions about the world from intimate surroundings, from a familiar and provincial sphere of experience. By the mid nineteenth century, however, the disorienting impersonality of urban industrial life was emerging as a widespread lament. Within the cacophony of this brave new world, the “screech, blare and color” of the modern media left a conspicuous imprint on the popular imagination. Mass circulation newspapers and magazines, photography, and vivid advertising billboards were ubiquitous, battling for public attention. An increasingly voyeuristic, physically disconnected dialog between people and the world at large was becoming the norm. The Age of Spectatorship was arriving.

By the turn of the twentieth century, movies were emerging as the quintessential modern medium. With flickering light, they were revealing an unprecedented capacity to speak, in silence, to the human psyche. The moving picture, wrote Harvard psychologist Hugo Münsterberg in 1916, “has furnished art with a means which far transcends the power of any theater stage.” Movies, he observed, “can act as our imagination acts. . . . The photoplay obeys the laws of the mind rather than those of the outer world.”<sup>4</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, a prime mover of Hollywood filmmaking, concurred when he spoke of “the motion picture’s ability to photograph thought.”<sup>5</sup> Mirroring the unconscious workings of mental life, the eloquence of film was capable of evoking a deep emotional response while bypassing the filter of critical reason.

This idea was not lost on Walter Lippmann. Underlying his reveries on stereotype was a profound appreciation for the power of Hollywood film.

In the whole experience of the race there has been no aid to visualization comparable to the cinema. . . . [Movies] seem utterly real. They come, we imagine, directly to us without human meddling, and they are the most effortless food for the mind conceivable. Any description in words, or even any inert picture, requires an effort of memory before a picture exists in the mind. But on the screen the whole process of observing, describing, reporting, and then imagining, has been accomplished for you. Without more trouble than is needed to stay awake the result which your imagination is always aiming at is reeled off on the screen.<sup>6</sup>

Within this medium, the stereotyping process and the elaboration of formulas for making audiences identify with certain characters, and project their deep- 55

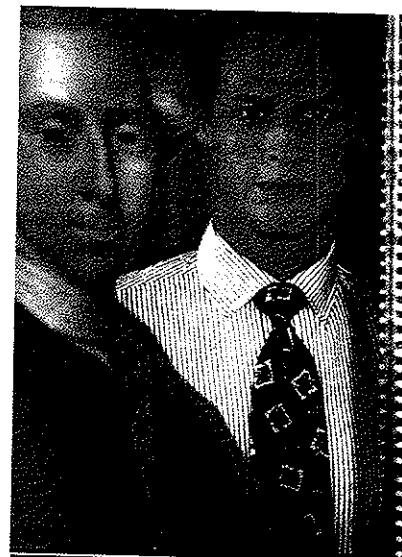
“We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And these preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception. They mark out certain objects as familiar or strange, emphasizing the difference, so that the slightly familiar is seen as very familiar and the somewhat strange is sharply alien.”

—Walter Lippmann on the power of stereotypes

Even in silence, images can communicate a universe of meaning. In these two, taken from American magazine advertisements, the outlook of Western Civilization is laid bare, coldly stated in an eloquent if enigmatic instant.

The man in the looking glass (above) represents the decorum of the fine gentleman with whom he shares a frame. Positing a visual association between a man in a tie and one in an oil painting, these are the icons of reason, where culture and refinement reside.

The woman (below) represents the double bogey of animalistic inclinations. As a woman and as a dark-skinned person she is depicted as the wild repository of primitivism, assuming the blame for hypersexual danger while the men at right are potential victims of her primitive allure. Like the dusky world that lurks beyond the boundaries of civilization, she must be tamed, lest her crafty passions destroy us.



est anxieties onto others, was being refined and standardized as never before. Unlike theatrical directors, who relied on the talents of trained actors, early moviemakers often selected "character actors" on the basis of pure physical appearance, scouring the streets for easily identifiable social types. Münsterberg was among the first to describe the process.

If the photoplay needs a brutal boxer in a mining camp, the producer will not . . . try to transform a clean, neat, professional actor into a vulgar brute, but he will sift the Bowery until he has found some creature who looks as if he came from that mining camp and who has at least the prize fighter's cauliflower ear. . . . If he needs the fat bartender with his smug smile, or the humble Jewish peddler, or the Italian organ grinder, he does not rely on wigs and paint; he finds them all ready-made on the East Side.<sup>7</sup>

By 1922, Hollywood typecasting had become a well-honed practice in American popular culture, and for Lippmann, Hollywood was a living laboratory, a paradigm within which the influence of simple images on public opinion could be analyzed and understood. "In popular representations," he explained, "the handles for identification are almost always marked. You know who the hero is at once. No work promises to be easily popular where the marking is not definite and the choice clear."<sup>8</sup>

For Lippmann, the example being set by the film industry offered a window into the more generalized processes of perception. In "The Great Society," as he labeled his contemporary world, stereotypes were the prevailing tools by which a media-driven culture explained, and made digestible, complicated and confusing social realities. Amid the chaos of the modern, nuance was an unaffordable luxury.

Educated by the teachings of psychoanalysis, Lippmann understood stereotype as something that resided, primarily, in the unconscious mind, apart from rational thought. This, he disclosed, was the secret of its power.

Its hallmark is that it precedes the use of reason; is a form of perception, imposes a certain character on the data of our senses, before the data reach the intelligence. . . . There is nothing so obdurate to education or criticism as the stereotype. It stamps itself upon evidence in the very act of securing the evidence.<sup>9</sup>

These stereotypes provided people with narratives, stories that encouraged them, without reflection, to see certain things, certain people, in predetermined ways, regardless of countervailing evidence.

We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And these preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception. They mark out certain objects as familiar or strange, emphasizing the difference, so that the slightly familiar is seen as very familiar, and the somewhat strange is sharply alien.<sup>10</sup>

To Lippmann, the "pictures in our heads," indelibly inscribed, were an intractable part of a person's identity, they embodied "the core of our personal tradition." Stereotypes offered a habitual picture of reality, a line of defense against actual or perceived threats, protecting "our position in society."

They are an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world. . . . They may not be a complete picture . . . but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted. In that world people and things have their well-known places, and do certain expected things. We feel at home there. We fit in. We are members. We know the way around. There we find the charm of the familiar, the normal, the dependable; its grooves and shapes are where we are accustomed to find them. . . . It fits as snugly as an old shoe.

When the "charm of the familiar" is imperiled, Lippmann noted, people will go to extremes to preserve and defend their version of things as they are. "No wonder," he wrote, "that any disturbance of the stereotypes seems like an attack on the foundations of the universe. It is an attack upon the foundations of our universe, and, where big things are at stake, we do not readily admit that there is any difference between our universe and the universe."<sup>11</sup>

With both hindsight and prescience, Lippmann had identified and named one of the most potent features of modernity. To be sure, the impulse to distinguish between the familiar and the alien is an ancient human trait. Modernity, however, had pumped up the volume. In a rapidly changing world, where firsthand experience was losing ground as a source of useful information, the media system was replacing customary networks, and rendering stereotypes into easily consumable, industrially generated substitutes for intimate knowledge. More and

more, heroes would be celebrated, beauty would be venerated, enemies would be hunted down, wars would be fought all on the basis of such fragile, if marketable, preconceptions.

Writing in the aftermath of the First World War, Lippmann situated the rise of stereotyping within "The Great Society," a world where global connections had become increasingly visible and localism seemed a remnant of an outmoded past. Yet stereotypes, as Lippmann defined them, were part and parcel of changes that had been altering the rhythms of existence, in many parts of the world, for centuries. "The Great Society" did not spring up overnight. It was the offspring of developments that had begun to take place, initially in Europe and then throughout the world, with the rise of merchant capitalism in the latter years of the Middle Ages.

## CREATED EQUAL

Throughout most of recorded history, lives have been lived within contexts shaped by entrenched social inequality. Divisions between rulers and the ruled, between haves and have-nots, between those who claim privilege as a God-given right and those for whom suffering is their inescapable lot permeate the archives of human events.

In Europe, during the period that witnessed the growth of towns and cities and the flowering of mercantile trade, the strict aristocratic and ecclesiastical hierarchy that had dominated feudalism for centuries continued to demarcate the boundaries of social and political power. Rights were still divine and exercised exclusively by a landowning nobility and by princes of the Roman Catholic Church. Common folk were expected to accept, without question, their inferior rank in a Great Chain of Being.

The Bible was the Word of God, the universal law, but its interpretation was kept in the hands of those privileged few who were sanctioned to read it. Biblical interpretation tended to uphold the immense social and political landholding power of the nobility and the Church. There was a vast chasm between the material abundance of the Church and aristocracy and the scarcity experienced by the peasantry, and this system was represented as the immutable order of things. According to the prevailing clerical reading of the Bible, social inequality was the way of God. Although feudal power was often held and defended by the sword, it was justified by the Word. The monopoly over the Word, over literacy, and over the ability to interpret what was read, was a fundamental aspect of rule.

In the feudal order, the ruling elite preached social order as the will of God. In deference and submission, they taught, lay salvation. Insubordination and sin paved the way to hell. This doctrine was upheld by a strict rule that forbade the translation of the Latin Bible into any language spoken and understood by ordinary people. This ban on "vernacular" literature was supported by severe sanctions. Those heretics who attempted to make the Word of God accessible to common people often suffered the punishment of death.

Town life, however, was not fully conducive to such restrictions. The growth of trade was invigorating sectors of society that, under the old order, had had little voice. An up-and-coming merchant class, gaining in wealth and economic influence, was stifled by the fossilized faiths of the feudal system. At the same time, the rural dispossessed became

## PHYSIOGNOMY: THE SCIENCE OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Though often prejudicial, one of the enduring habits of street life is the quick once-over, a reflexive penchant for sizing up and drawing conclusions about unknown individuals who cross our path. The social make-up of the metropolis, its size and variety, almost requires us to make such unthinking mental judgements. So automatic are these instant evaluations of human appearances that it is hard to imagine that they might have provided the foundation for a systematic field of knowledge.

Yet, in 1775, a Protestant minister from Zürich, Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801), proclaimed the birth of a new method, amalgamating religion, science, and aesthetics, for evaluating human character on the basis of a detailed study of facial features. He called it physiognomy, borrowing the term from earlier explorations of human faces and their meanings.

Aristotle had written on the subject in *History of Animals and a Treatise on Physiognomy*.<sup>1</sup> Here, he drew correlations between the demeanors of people and animals, arguing that individuals who resemble a particular animal species tend to have a comparable disposition. Giambattista della Porta, whose work with the camera obscura made him acutely sensitive to facial and bodily detail, also wrote on human physiognomy in *De humana physiognomonica* (1586). Like Aristotle, della Porta grounded his analytical method on comparisons between men and "the lower animals."<sup>2</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, democratic notions were circulating throughout Europe and America. Responding to this threat, Lavater concocted an analytical system that reasserted human inequality as a God-given truth. This idea, reformulated in modern terms, was presented in a heavily illustrated multivolume tome called *Essays on Physiognomy*.<sup>3</sup> Following its initial publication, the work went through many editions and translations and established Lavater as one of the most celebrated



JOHANN CASPAR LAVATER.

Lavater. REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPAR LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME I, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

antidemocratic thinkers of his day. Among his admirers were the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a close friend, and oddly, given his democratic leanings, William Blake, who provided illustrations for a subsequent edition in translation.

Zürich, Lavater's home, was a small city of 17,000 people, though it would soon become a major international financial center. Despite its size, Zürich

was already a significant locus of learning and commerce, a cosmopolitan crossroads where people and ideas were in motion. As in other cities, encounters with strangers were an increasingly common aspect of life, and Lavater's physiognomic techniques offered a pragmatic approach for negotiating urban existence, for judging others at face value. His new science, such as it was, built on what he understood to be people's natural inclination to evaluate others on the basis of first impressions. "All men, in their intercourse with each other, form physiognomical decisions. . . . [M]ost men, in proportion as they have mingled with the world, derive some profit from their knowledge of mankind, even at first glance."<sup>4</sup>

Lavater's purpose was to refine this predilection, to improve the diagnostic power of such observations, to provide interpretive tools that would permit a trained physiognomist to evaluate "the correspondence between the external

and internal man, the visible superficies and the invisible contents."<sup>5</sup>

As a minister in the first Swiss city to embrace the Protestant Reformation, Lavater revealed, through his work, the historical footprints of theological upheavals going back more than two hundred years. In the 1520s, under the spiritual leadership of Ulrich Zwingli, Zürich had become a staunch center of Reformation thought and action, outlawing the practice of the Catholic Mass in 1525, abolishing pilgrimages and processions, advocating marriage for clergymen, and closing monasteries.

By 1549, Zürich came under the influence of another Swiss theologian, John Calvin. Like Zwingli, Calvin abhorred the luxury and ostentation of Catholic ritual and posed, instead, a concept of religious devotion that was

## DE HVM. PHYSIOGNOMONIA



VICI Honoris, admodum Iosephum Castellani M. D. LXXXVI.

Portrait of Della Porta on the cover of *De humana physiognomonia*, 1586.

COURTESY OF MARTYAN LAN

built on the principle of pure, unadorned faith. Calvinism was founded on the doctrine of predestination, the conviction that—in the beginning of time—God decided who among humanity were "the elect," those chosen for salvation, and those who were not. There was no way that people could know, absolutely, if they were saved, and a life of faith was an anxious process of self-examination, a search for signs of favor in the eyes of God.

Yet, alongside faith, there was also a belief in the redemptive value of work and industry. Reflecting the social attitudes of its commercially engaged adherents, Calvinism began to construct an elaborate constellation of secular rules and regulations, behavioral prescriptions for moral discipline. While conduct, comportment, or physical appearance were not instruments by which salvation could be attained, Calvinists were expected to carry themselves in a way that suggested godliness. As Zürich flourished as a commercial center, these behavioral prescriptions became increasingly paramount. By the late eighteenth century, among many Calvinists, upright behavior in business and civic affairs, accentuated by a corresponding physical demeanor, had replaced apprehensive self-examination as the yardstick of piety.

Lavater's new physiognomic science was predicated on this evolution, on the growing prominence of worldly appearances as tangible indices of virtue. He justified this link with the story of Genesis, in which God created man in His own image. Yet, with the Fall from Grace and the expulsion from Eden, Lavater contended, only those who maintained a faith in God continued to exhibit the visual perfection of his likeness. Others, mired in sin and deceit, exhibited the signs of their degeneracy.



Pervert: "An image of the most brutal sensuality." REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPER LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME 1, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY



Miser: "The most sordid avarice." REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPER LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME 1, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

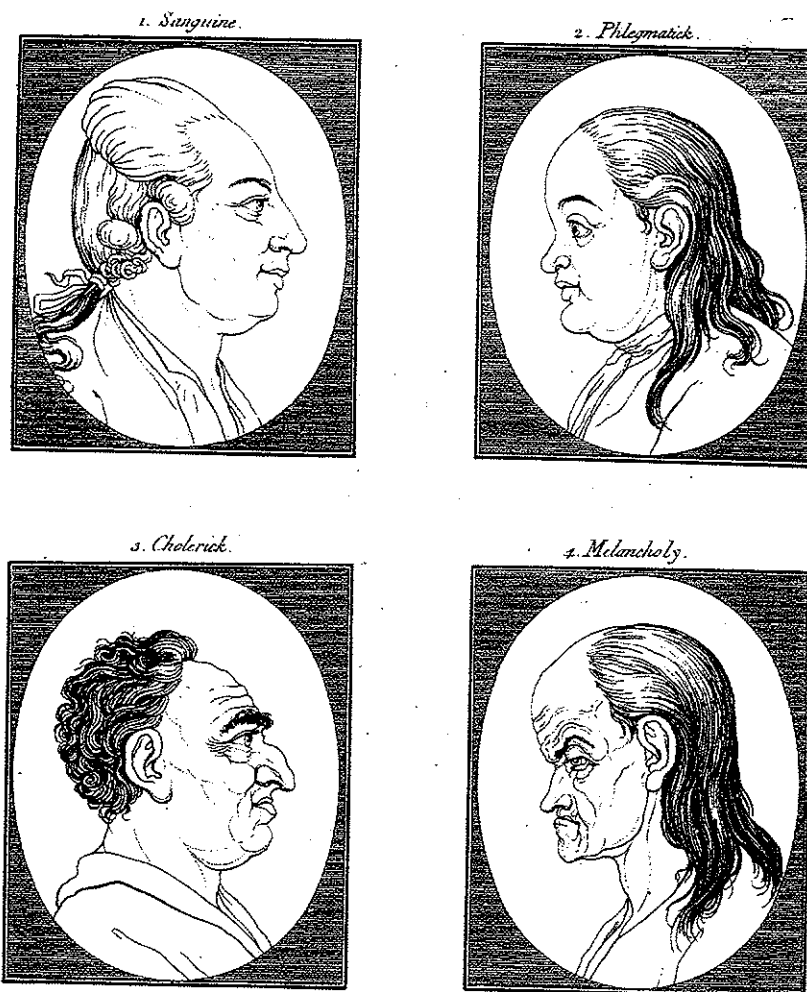
Following the doctrine of predestination, which saw humankind divided, irrevocably, into sinners and saved, Lavater argued that a person's piety could be deciphered from the features of his or her face. Believing in an intimate connection between "corporeal and moral beauty," as well as between "corporeal and moral deformity," Lavater maintained that "The countenance is the



Jesus Christ. REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPER LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME I, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

theatre on which the soul exhibits itself."<sup>6</sup> Beauty was the sign of a pious soul, ugliness the burden of the wicked.

Lavater was keenly aware that people were capable of dissembling, erecting appearances intended to create a mirage of moral integrity. In an urban environment, where deceptions were prevalent, Lavater warned that "first glance" verdicts could not be trusted for an accurate read of character.



The Four Temperaments. REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPER LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME I, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

Men . . . make all possible efforts to appear wiser, better, and honester than, in reality, they are. They affect the behavior, the voice, the appearance of the most rigorous virtue. This is part of their art; they study to deceive, til they are able to remove every doubt, destroy every suspicion that is entertained of their worth.<sup>7</sup>

A trained physiognomist, however, would not be deceived by such artifice. A scientific understanding of elemental facial structures, Lavater maintained, would permit the educated eye to move in on certain unalterable features in order to locate absolute proof of a person's ethical merit or turpitude. Unaware of advancements in makeup and cosmetic surgery that would flourish in the twentieth century, Lavater enumerated those aspects of the human countenance that offered infallible evidence for physiognomic investigation.

What man, for example, . . . would be able to alter the confirmation of his bones, according to his pleasure? Can any man give himself instead of a flat, a bold and arched forehead; or a sharp indented forehead, when nature has given him one arched and round?

Who can change the colour and position of his eyebrows? Can any man bestow on himself thick, bushy eye-brows, when they are either thin or wholly deficient of hair?

Can any fashion the flat and short, into the well-proportioned and beautiful nose?

Who can make his thick lips thin, or his thin lips thick?

Who can change a round into a pointed, or a pointed into a round chin?

Who can alter the colour of his eyes, or give them, at his pleasure, more or less lustre?

Where is the art, where the dissimulation, that can make the blue eye brown, the gray one black?<sup>8</sup>

Assuming the permanent nature of certain key physical traits, Lavater presented the rules of a new science by which the right individual could become a physiognomist, who analyzed the content of character through a detailed examination of specific facial features. "[N]eglect no part of the countenance," he instructed, for "[e]ach trait contains the whole character of man as, in the smallest of the works of God, the character of Deity is contained. . . . Every minute part has the nature and character of the whole. Each speaks truth, the truth of the whole."



No. 1. With a face like this, no one will ever achieve a bold and hazardous enterprize: he will have domestic virtues, he will faithfully discharge the duties of his station; but he is incapable of attaining any portion of the Warrior's valour, or the Poet's genius.

2. His forehead inclines too much backward, to admit of his having a sufficient degree of firmness and constancy. In other respects, to consider the whole together, the form of his face is not ordinary. He is less capable of observing for himself, than of judging with discernment concerning observations already made.

3. Has much more capacity and prudence than all the others, and 4. hath the least of these qualities. With difficulty will this last rise above objects present and sensual.

If I were obliged to characterize them by a single word, I would say of 1. He is timid; of 2. He has taste; of 3. He is a prudent observer; of 4. He is sensual.

1. Can never attain the taste which characterizes 2. nor he the prudence of 3. 4. Is equally incapable of acquiring the one or the other of these qualities.

REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPER LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME II, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

Beyond the eyes, he contended, certain facial elements stood out as ineluctable windows to the soul. The nose, a persistent fixation in the history of stereotyping, was Lavater's Rosetta Stone.

I hold the nose to be the foundation, or abutment, of the brain. Whoever is acquainted with the Gothic arch will perfectly understand what I mean by the abutment; for upon this the whole power of the arch of the forehead rests, and without it the mouth and cheeks would be oppressed by miserable ruins.

A beautiful nose will never be found accompanying an ugly countenance. . . . The following is requisite to the perfectly beautiful nose.

a. Its length should be equal the length of the forehead. b. At the top should be a gentle indenting. c. Viewed in front, the back, dorsum, spina nasi, should be broad. And nearly parallel, yet above the centra something broader. d. The button or end of the nose, orbiculus, must be neither hard nor fleshy; and its under outline must be remarkably definite, well delineated, neither pointed nor very broad. e. The sides . . . seen in front, must be well defined, and the descending nostrils gently shortened. . . . Such a nose is of more worth than a kingdom.

Teeth were also eloquent facial indicators. "Long teeth are certain signs of weakness and pusillanimity. White, clean, well-arranged teeth, visible as soon as the mouth opens, but not projecting, nor always entirely seen, I have never met with in adults except in good, acute, honest, candid, faithful men." Chins, too, were important indicators of character. "I am, from numerous experiments, convinced that the projecting chin ever denotes something positive; and the retreating something negative. The presence, or absence, of strength in man, is often signified by the chin.<sup>9</sup>

Inheriting a tradition of visual truth that assumed that well-executed works of art were accurate portrayals of their subject matter, Lavater, throughout his book, illustrated his points on moral elevation or degeneracy by using engravings based on sculpture and paintings gleaned from the ages.

Referring to a portrait of Shakespeare, he wrote, "Who does not read the clear, the capacious, the rapid mind; all conceiving, all embracing, that, with equal swiftness and facility, imagines, creates, produces?"<sup>10</sup>

In his commentary on a drawing of an unidentified man, he injected, "Who does not here read reason debased; stupidity almost sunken to brutality? This eye, these wrinkles, of a lowering forehead, this projecting mouth, the whole position of the head, do they not all denote manifest dullness and debility?"<sup>11</sup>

Reflecting on the face of Judas Iscariot as rendered by the German painter Hans Holbein,



The face of indolence. REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPER LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME 1, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

Lavater inquired with incredulity, "Who can persuade himself that an apostle of Jesus Christ ever had an aspect like this, or that the Saviour could have called such a countenance to the apostleship? . . . Who could place confidence in such a man?"<sup>12</sup>

Lavater continued his analysis of the face of Judas.

Had we never been told that this is the portrait of Judas Iscariot after Holbein, had we never seen a face that wore the least resemblance to it, a primitive feeling would warn us at once to expect from it neither generosity, nor tenderness, nor elevation of mind. The sordid Jew would excite our aversion, though we were able neither to compare him with any other nor to give him a name.<sup>13</sup>

Such historical exercises, which appear throughout *Essays in Physiognomy*, served as object lessons for contemporary readers and would-be practitioners. Inasmuch as physiognomic inquiries were time consuming and could not be completed on the spot, it was essential for specialists to learn how to fix their impressions in memory, and translate these into usable notes and then into mathematically precise drawings for later deliberation.

First . . . describe the whole form and each particular feature in words, as if to a painter, who was to draw a picture of the person. . . . After this description, let this person sit, if it be practical. . . . Begin with his stature. Then give the proportions; first the apparent, as measured according to perpendicular and horizontal lines; proceed afterward to the forehead, nose, mouth, chin, and especially to the figure, colour, position, size, and depth of his eyes. . . . Draw the figure of the person, when he is absent, according to this description. . . . That this kind of exercise may become more perfect, a habit must be acquired of studying any countenance, so as to seize and deeply impress its most prominent features on the memory, in a few moments.

To insure mathematical accuracy, specific geometric drills were recommended in the delineation of such portraits.

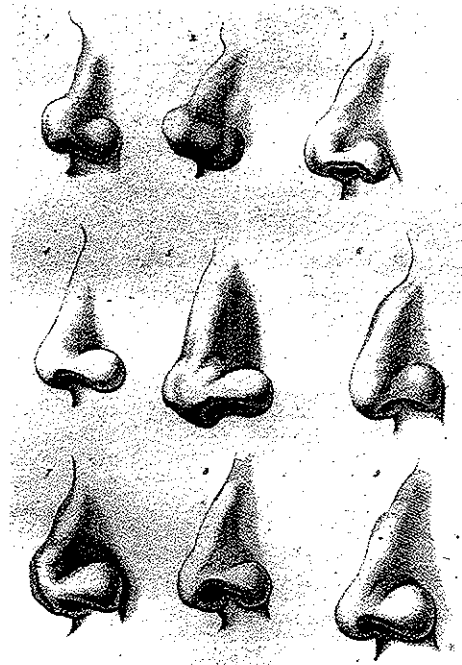
Having observed the full face, I next examine the profile, perhaps by dividing it into two parts. I then define its perpendicular length, according to the three customary divisions and remark its perpendicular vari-

ations: then the relative positions of these three parts, the forehead, the nose, the chin. This I can the easier do, if I imagine a right line passing from the extreme point of the upper lip, immediately under the nose, to the point of the deepest part of the cavity under the forehead, by which this relative position, in all countenances, naturally divides itself into three principle sections; the perpendicular, the line projecting at the lower point, or the line projecting at the upper point. Without having such simple and determinate rules, it will never be possible for the imagination to retain the true form of the head, physiognomically accurate.<sup>14</sup>

For rendering serviceable portraits, Lavater advocated specific tools and lighting conditions. "Oil paintings, when perfect, are the most useful to the physiognomist," he noted, but were too "expensive" a medium for ordinary use. Though inexpensive to create, drawings in black chalk were "useless," generating images so vague in detail that they were intrinsically "untrue and

unnatural." Having investigated a wide variety of media, Lavater declared that "I have hitherto found nothing equal to the English black lead pencil, retouched by Indian ink, to express the physiognomical character of the countenance, round, picturesque, powerful, and precise." In order to review the accuracy of a portrait once it had been drawn, Lavater recommended using "a camera obscura to compare the drawing to the true figure on the instrument."<sup>15</sup>

Given the underlying philosophy of Lavater's strange science, however, technique alone could not create a true physiognomist. According to a world view that equated specific standards of beauty with virtue, only the beautiful were in a position to identify the good. Only good-looking people were qualified to become physiognomists.

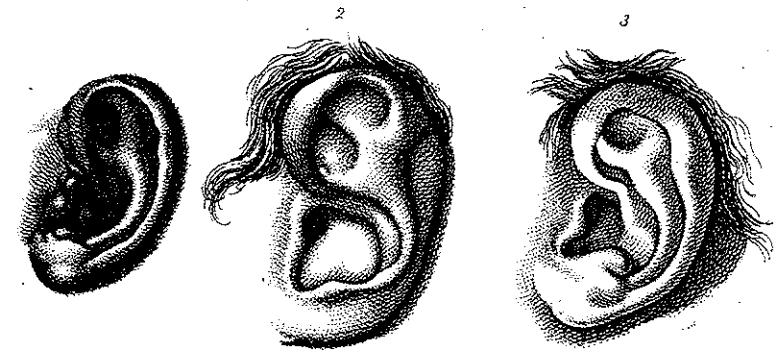


REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPER LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME III, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

No one, therefore, ought to enter the sanctuary of physiognomy who has a debased mind, an ill-formed forehead, a blinking eye, or a distorted mouth.

No one whose person is not well formed can become a good physiognomist. The handsomest painters were the greatest painters. . . . The physiognomists of greatest symmetry are the best: as the most virtuous best can determine on virtue, and the just on justice, so can the most handsome countenances on the goodness, beauty, and noble traits of the

### FRAGMENT FIFTH. ADDITION C.



1. Seems made for a man capable of acquiring and transmitting knowledge; for a pedagogue, who mechanically collects a great number of scientific articles.

2. Cannot be referred to any but a head excessively weak. This form broad and smooth; this want of rounding in the contours, may in truth subsist with superior faculties, and particularly be frequently found in musical ears; but when the whole is so flat, so coarse, so tense, it certainly excludes genius.

3. Has too much precision to ascribe it to a blockhead, but, on the other hand, it is too round, and too maffy, to furnish the indication of an extraordinary man.

REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPER LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME III, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

human countenance; and, consequently, on its defects and ignoble properties. The scarcity of human beauty is a certain reason why physiognomy is so much decried and finds so many opponents.

Beyond physical beauty, the qualifications for a good physiognomist included keen powers of observation, an anal compulsion for detail, and a willingness to draw instantaneous, often invidious, conclusions about other people, without hesitation.

Whoever does not, at the first aspect of any man, feel a certain emotion of affection or dislike, attraction or repulsion, never can become a physiognomist.

His first requisites, as has, in part, already been remarked, should be a body well proportioned and finely organized: accuracy of sensation, capable of receiving the most minute outward impressions, and easily transmitting them faithfully to memory; or, as I ought rather to say, impressing them upon the imagination, and the fibres of the brain. His eye, in particular, must be excellent, clear, acute, rapid, and firm.

Precision in observation is the very soul of physiognomy. The physiognomist must possess a most delicate, swift, certain, most extensive spirit of observation.<sup>16</sup>

Ostensibly a science that would enable a trained practitioner to evaluate the moral worth of people encountered in everyday life, Lavater's cosmology also contained within it the imprint of European empire, expressing the outlook of a man whose universe had been shaped by the biases of colonialism. While much of his book focused on individual traits and their interpretation, towards the end of his treatise he opened up the subject of "National Physiognomy," a specific arena of his discipline that examined questions of racial character.

That there is national physiognomy, as well as national character, is undeniable. . . . Compare a Negro and an Englishman, a native of Lapland and an Italian, a Frenchman and an inhabitant of Terra del Fuego. Examine their forms, countenances, characters and minds. Their differences will be easily seen.<sup>17</sup>

While hard to fathom today, such biases were not antithetical to contemporary democratic thinking. Thomas Jefferson, whose Declaration of

Independence was published but one year after *Essays in Physiognomy*, was himself a devotee of such physiognomic generalizations as explanations of racial difference. Comparing whites and blacks, Jefferson wrote:

[T]he difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of color in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which covers the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgement in favor of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oran-utan for the black women over those of his own species. The circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worthy [of] attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man?<sup>18</sup>

In the faces of individuals, Lavater argued, one uncovered more than their personal traits. The trained eye, he contended, could look beyond the individual and discern the general characteristics of the racial stock from which the individual came. Within particular features of an individual the traits of the group were simultaneously manifest. In the nineteenth century, methods for uncovering group identities within individuals became more and more elaborate—benefiting from instrumental uses of photography by criminologists, anthropologists and advocates of eugenics—but Lavater was among the first to propose the existence of such scientific linkages.

Describing a man in a turban, Lavater leveled his vitriol upon a people, judging them, from a single portrait, unqualified for learning, loving, or appreciating the benefits of civilization.

The conformation of the head, the overhanging of the forehead alone, decidedly speak stupidity, incapable of instruction; and not less so the position of the nose to the mouth, perfectly brutal, without affection or mental enjoyment: the eyes, chin, and beard, all correspond.<sup>19</sup>

While he was less disparaging of his European brethren, they, too, were classifiable according to physiognomic categories.

The French I am least able to characterize.—They have no traits so bold as the English, nor so minute as the Germans. I know them chiefly by their teeth and their laugh. The Italians I discover by the nose, small eyes, and projecting chin. The English by their foreheads and eyebrows. The Dutch by the rotundity of the head, and the weakness of the hair. The Germans, by the angles and wrinkles round the eyes, and in the cheeks. The Russians, by the snub nose, and their light-coloured, or black hair.<sup>20</sup>

For Lavater, the question of “national physiognomy” was pivotal. In an expanding world, where interactions between European and non-European societies were intensifying, the ability to draw a global map of physiognomic distinctions, a new hierarchy of inequality, had become an essential priority. Philosophers, businessmen, and men of contemplation alike must be educated in “the natural history of national physiognomy,” he implored. It contained “profound, indestructible, and eternal” truths. To deny it, would be “equal to denying the light of the sun at noon day.”

Read today, Lavater’s work seems wildly opinionated. Though he claimed to be articulating a body of laws and principles, his subjective ramblings lack the aura of systematic thinking that one tends to associate with Enlightenment science. Nonetheless, Lavater’s contribution helped to legitimize discriminatory evaluations of other people as an essential element in the emerging field of natural history and science. While many of those who inherited the physiognomic enterprise would criticize the imprecision of his work, Lavater’s fixation on the conclusive moral significance of facial features—noses, brows, chins, eyes, ears, teeth, and the like—would mark popular and scientific understandings of human difference for centuries to follow. So, too, would his visual strategy of persuasion, which juxtaposed divergent portraits of humanity in order to communicate ideals of good and evil, intelligence and feeble-mindedness, civilization and savagery, beauty and ugliness.

## HIERARCHIES OF HUMANITY

On July 11, 2002, the journal *Nature* published a report on the recent discovery of an early human male fossil, a partial skull unearthed by French paleontologists in Chad, in Central Africa. The story, heralding this event as “one of the most important fossil finds in the last 100 years,” appeared on front pages around the world.<sup>1</sup>

Using the standard binomial naming procedure invented by a Swedish botanist named Carl von Linné (more generally known as Carolus Linnaeus, 1707–1778), the scientists labeled their specimen *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* but generally refer to him as Toumai, meaning “hope of life” in the Goran language. Declaring their find “the oldest and most primitive known member” of the human family, the French team predicted that the fossil would “illuminate the earliest chapter in human evolutionary history.”<sup>2</sup> With a face and teeth that appear distinctly human and a small brain case like that of a chimpanzee, this nearly seven-million-year-old ancestor shattered basic assumptions about the lineage and development of the human species, previously estimated to be no more than four million years old. In an editorial appearing in the *New York Times* on July 12, the writer announced that, beyond his age, Toumai’s appearance had thrown into question the widely held scientific belief that people had evolved, as a single species, along a neat “highway leading from the past to the present.” Perhaps, the editorial suggested, present-day hominids are not the inheritors of a common line, but rather a diversified group, assembled out of several “closely related species.”<sup>3</sup>

Man or ape? One species or many? Questions such as these, regarding the origins and diversity of humankind, were obsessive preoccupations of eighteenth-century European science. Encountering or, more often, relying on travelers’ accounts of people with varying skin tones, hair textures, facial structures, and body types, Enlightenment scientists, philosophers, and dilettantes strained to construct intricate, well-ordered systems of classification in order to situate each particular variant within its “proper place” in the natural order of things. Within such systems, or taxonomies, organisms were assigned specific places, each in relation to all others, providing an ostensibly objective scientific map, a modern reconfiguration of the Great Chain of Being. This impulse animates the great contradiction within Enlightenment thinking. While radical democrats claimed nature and its laws as the bedrock upon which notions of human equality and “The Rights of Man” rested, others looked toward systematic scientific

schemas as a new refuge for upholding principles of hierarchy, as a rationale justifying the control of lesser beings by their superiors.

One common feature of eighteenth-century taxonomy was its dogmatic commitment to the idea that each life form occupied a distinctive place within an overall system, that each species embodied a specific ideal type and could be distinguished by a unique set of identifiable characteristics. There was little room for ambiguity. Each living thing conformed to a picture in the taxonomist's head, each had a singular and defining essence. Things that veered from these visible truths were viewed as aberrations, anomalies, nature's mistakes.

This conceit is at odds with much recent thinking about how to comprehend the nature of living things. Stephen Jay Gould, perhaps the most influential taxonomist of the twentieth century, argued that ideal-type organisms do not actually exist in nature. The borders separating one type from another, he maintained again and again, are, at best, blurry. "Nature," he wrote, "comes to us as continua, not as discrete objects with clear boundaries." Even within species, "variation is primary; essences are illusory."<sup>4</sup>

Gould's rejection of the eighteenth-century paradigm is not a minor quibble over the details of scientific classification. It is about the social values that shape the exercise of classification itself, speaking to questions of tolerance and justice, of who and what will be accepted within the bounds of normalcy. The debate, as he defined it, came down to essentialism, which he argued:

establishes criteria for judgment and worth: individual objects that lie close to their essence are good; those that depart are bad, if not unreal. . . . Antiessentialist thinking forces us to view the world differently. We must accept shadings and continua as fundamental. . . .

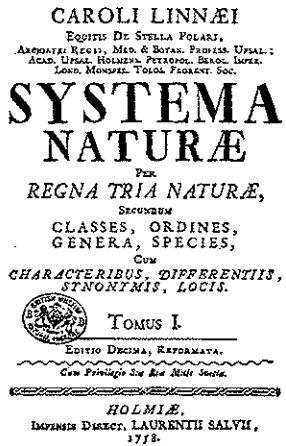
The taxonomic essentialist scoops up a handful of fossil snails in a single species, tries to abstract an essence, and rates his snails by their match to this average. The antiessentialist sees something entirely different in his hand—a range of irreducible variation defining the species, some variants more frequent than others, but all perfectly good snails.<sup>5</sup>

Gould's democratic approach, however, would have appalled Linnaeus, whose *Systema naturae* (System of Nature) still provides the foundation for modern biological nomenclature. In the first nine editions of the tome, beginning in 1735, Linnaeus cataloged and named 7,700 species of plant life. In the tenth edition of 1758, described by Gould as "the founding document of animal taxonomy," he applied his binomial system to more than 4,400 zoological varieties. Whether plant or animal, each species was defined by unambiguous and observable physical characteristics.

Despite its aura of certitude, classification is never a neutral act. Naming is a way of exercising power, and often reflects the outlook of the namer. Linnaeus's binomial system belied his claims of scientific neutrality. In eighteenth-century Europe, though commerce and natural science had emerged as powerful arenas of authority and democratic reveries were becoming infectious, much of what went on in society still operated under the aegis and imprimatur of the crown. If Linnaeus's method created a tool for modern science, it still used the metaphor of monarchy as a way of framing the order of things. Plants and animals constituted two natural kingdoms (*regna naturae*). Within these kingdoms, a hierarchy of classes, orders, genera, and species provided categories by which all life forms, plant and animal, were classified. In a world where many still saw hierarchy and inequality as natural, taxonomy provided a tangible ratification of this belief. Within the animal kingdom, for example, mammalia (mammals) occupied the highest level, followed by birds, amphibia, fish, insects, and vermin. Within the class of mammals, the genus primates held the highest ground, and among primates, it was *Homo sapiens* (humans) who stood dominant over *Simia* (apes and monkeys), followed by *Lemur* (lemurs) and then *Vespertilio* (bats), the last of these no longer considered primates. Every other class of animals was similarly divided into a hierarchical organization.<sup>6</sup>

Not only did monarchy supply a defining imagery for understanding nature, but the Linnaean system also validated prevailing inequalities of gender. Linnaeus's description of plants, discussed at length by the historian Londa Schiebinger, offers an instructive example. Plants, from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance, were mainly categorized in terms of their various medicinal applications. Herbalism, as a compendium of knowledge, emphasized these practical uses. By the eighteenth century, under the sway of Linnaeus and others, the "focus shifted from the medicinal virtues of plants to finding abstract methods of classification."<sup>7</sup>

In detailing the structural makeup of botanical specimens, gender and sexuality triumphed as the dominant allegory of plant life. Even though many plants are hermaphroditic and do not conform to customary definitions of gender, Lin-



COURTESY OF LEE HERMAN

naeus emphatically described plants in terms of their male and female parts, with so-called dominant parts designated male, submissive parts female. So taken was he with patriarchal conventions of marriage, that he often described botanical features using the Greek terminology for husband and wife. Schiebinger adds that a scientific belief that plants, and animals as well, "reproduce within marital relations persisted into the nineteenth century."<sup>8</sup>

In Linnaeus's approach to the animal world, Schiebinger continues, dominant assumptions about human gender were also brought to bear. Most classes of vertebrates, for example, are named using descriptions applicable to all members of the group, regardless of sex. The class aves (or birds) was named for the power of flight, not limited to either sex. The class pisces (or fish) was also sexually indeterminate. In originating the term mammalia to describe the class to which humans belonged, however, Linnaeus selected the lactating breasts (mammary glands) of the female to serve as the diagnostic category of classification.

Given other patterns of vertebrate nomenclature, this choice may seem curious. But by creating the term mammalia, based on the female breast, Linnaeus defined the direct human connection to the animal world exclusively in terms of women. In a society that celebrated men as reasonable beings, apart from and above the bestiary, and viewed women as unreasonable and driven by instinct, perhaps it is not so strange that the burden of animality should have been so unequivocally linked with femaleness. Conversely, in naming the human species *Homo sapiens*, meaning "man of wisdom," Linnaeus opted to focus on that characteristic that purportedly separated men from the animal world.

While Linnaeus saw differences among the varieties of *Homo sapiens*, these differences were, for the most part, defined by culture and location. In the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae*, he named four principal varieties of *Homo sapiens*. These included *Americanus*, indigenous people of the Americas; *Europæus*, Europeans; *Asiaticus*, Asians; and *Afer*, people of Africa. Linnaeus specified distinctions separating these four groups in terms of color, temperament, and behavior, clearly holding a bias in favor of Europeans. If Europeans were "white, sanguine, [and] muscular," Asians were "pale-yellow, melancholy, [and] stiff." Africans were "black, phlegmatic, [and] relaxed."<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, geographic origin was the determining factor in defining these primary groups of *Homo sapiens*.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of subhuman species did work its way into Linnaeus's system with his inclusion of two fanciful creatures in his discussion of the genus *Homo*: an apelike missing link, named *Homo troglodytes* (Troglodytes), a figment that endured in popular culture for some time, and *Homo caudatus*, an imaginary

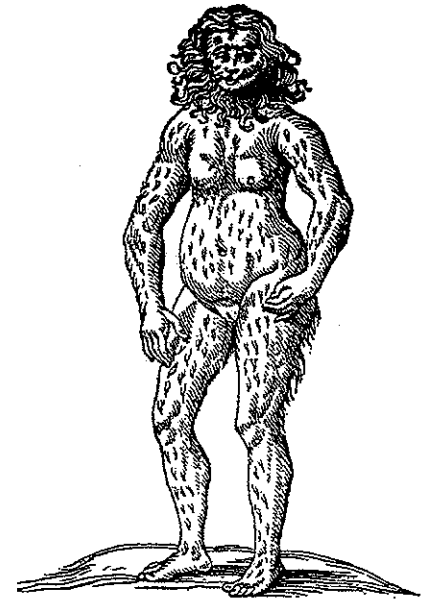
manlike creature with a tail. Both of these fabrications, it is thought, were based on the unreliable reports of travelers. Aside from these chimerical excursions, however, the invidious ranking of human types into a coherent system of greater and lessers had not yet been fleshed out as a fixture of taxonomic thinking.

In describing the place of *Homo sapiens* within his overall system, Linnaeus avoided biblical convention and did not trouble himself with recounting a story of creation. His goal was classification, and for the most part, geography offered a neat methodology for enumerating his four principal varieties of human beings. Yet, as Linnaeus worked, his *systema naturae* was being tinkered with.

Fourteen years after Linnaeus began his study, Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, keeper of the Royal Garden (Jardin du Roi) in Paris, began publishing a massive illustrated history of nature, in which he altered the religious story of Creation, offering a more complex and secular naturalist interpretation of the earth and its history. Within his monumental *Histoire naturelle*, which eventually reached forty-four volumes, the history of the world moved from seven days to seven epochs, each lasting thousands of years.

Anticipating present-day descriptions of the earth and its development, Buffon's epochs were defined by the progressive cooling of the earth's surface. It was in the sixth epoch (mirroring the sixth day) that humans first appeared. According to his tale, climactic conditions in the area that now encompassed Catholic Europe, and particularly those regions known as Circassia and Georgia, in the foothills of the Caucasus, were ideal for the creation of the first, most perfect, humans.

The most temperate climate lies between the 40th and 50th degree of latitude, and it produces the most handsome and beautiful men. It is from this climate that the ideas of the genuine color of mankind, and of the various degrees of beauty ought to be derived.<sup>11</sup>



Troglodyte. LINNAEUS' DESCRIPTION BASED ON THIS ILLUSTRATION FROM JACOB BONDT IN HIS *HISTORIA NATURALIS ORIENTALIS*, 1658. COURTESY OF LEE HERMAN

If the climate of these regions was conducive to the development of the first and most beautiful of peoples, other climates, according to Buffon, contributed to a process of deterioration from the pristine original. Buffon's term for this was degeneration. The anthropologist and historian Miriam Claude Meijer explains that this term signified a regression from the pure and original state of the species.

The term degeneration came from the Latin roots 'de' and 'genus', meaning 'from' and 'original stock' respectively. De-generation meant departure from the original form at creation, deviation from the pristine organic form through exposure to climactic extremes. The choice of words reflected the Christian tradition of an original perfection of nature which had been marred by human imperfection, i.e. the fall of man.<sup>12</sup>

Like much of Buffon's secularism, his story of degeneration mirrored biblical assumptions.

Buffon's idea of degeneration was climactically driven. As people ventured from the European cradle of creation, migrating to tropical and arctic climes, he argued, perfection gave way to decay. Africans and far-northern tribes, such as those from Lapland, as well as Asians and those who settled in the Americas were all counted among the degenerate.

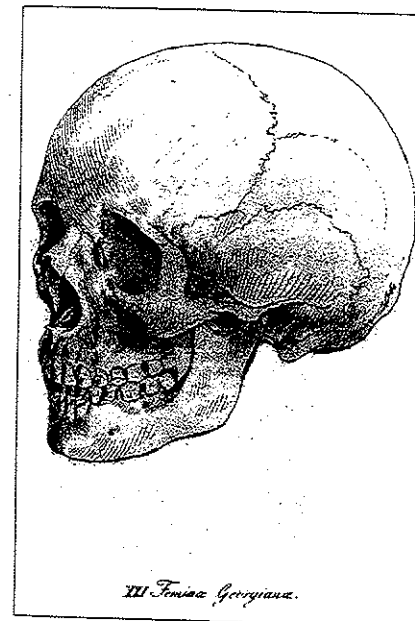
But it was Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), a devoted student of Linnaeus, whose work would provide the most durable foundation for the fields of physical anthropology and natural history as they related to the classification of human types. A professor of medicine at the University of Göttingen and court physician to King George III of Great Britain, Blumenbach focused solely on the subject of human difference. First published in 1775, and revised in 1795, Blumenbach's masterwork, *Treatise on the Natural Variety of Mankind*, provided a scientific keystone for modern theories of racial inequality.

Building on Buffon's interpretation, Blumenbach added specificity and a now familiar lexicon to the narrative of origin and decline. Blumenbach was a bone collector, part of the growing brotherhood of bone collectors who, as Europeans, traversed the world, accumulated human crania, among other things, as evidence of their worldly sophistication. Blumenbach's collection of skulls was celebrated as one of the finest in the world, and people regularly sent him human trophies to add to his cabinets. In all, he amassed 245 skulls from around the globe. Amid these, one stood out. To Blumenbach she embod-

ied the pinnacle of human perfection, possessing a symmetry and beauty that was simply and viscerally captivating.

The skull in question was that of a woman from the region of Georgia, in the Caucasus, whom he named *Feminae Georgianae*.<sup>13</sup> From this single specimen, Blumenbach wove a tale about the origins of humanity, its noble roots and its subsequent decline. Echoing Buffon, he maintained that the Georgian woman came from that place that was the starting point of humanity, the location where the species *Homo sapiens* first appeared in its most pristine and perfect form. He named this original bloodline the Caucasian variety, a term that continues to be used, usually without question. He explained:

I have taken the name of this variety from Mount Caucasus, both because its neighborhood, and especially its southern slope, produces the most beautiful race of men, I mean the Georgian; and because all physiological reasons converge to this, that in that region, if anywhere, it seems we ought with the greatest probability to place the autochthones [origins] of mankind.<sup>14</sup>



*Feminae Georgianae*, Blumenbach's muse for the Caucasian type. REPRINTED FROM J. F. BLUMENBACH'S *ON THE NATURAL VARIETIES OF MANKIND*, PLATE 4

To Blumenbach, the Caucasians possessed "the most beautiful form of skull," a mark of their elevated status among the peoples of the world. (It is ironic that in Russia, such an outlook is at odds with commonly held biases regarding residents of the Caucasus. According to a prominent Russian sociologist, Professor Vladimir Ilyan, whom we interviewed in St. Petersburg, Russians have long viewed Caucasians as "gangsters and thieves, similar to the way that Italians are routinely characterized in the United States." Ilyan, himself a native of Northern Caucasus, is well aware of this prejudice from experience.) Presumably unaware of this invidious perspective, Blumenbach described his version of the Caucasian in flattering detail.

Colour white, cheeks rosy; hair brown or chestnut-coloured . . . face oval, straight, its parts moderately defined, forehead smooth, nose narrow, lightly hooked, mouth small. The primary teeth placed perpendicularly in each jaw; the lips . . . moderately open, the chin full and rounded. In general, that kind of appearance which, according to our opinion of symmetry, we consider most handsome and becoming.

Among the Caucasians, Blumenbach included the people of Europe (except for Europe's Jews, who were designated Oriental) along with people from the Middle East and North Africa. This inclusion of dark-skinned peoples within



Blumenbach's racial science would endure, and its continuation was abetted by the showmanship of P. T. Barnum, who launched "Circassian Beauties" as a standard attraction in museums and midways of the nineteenth century. The "Star of the East," Zulumma Agra (left), Barnum's first example of the type, was supposedly rescued from a slave market in Constantinople. According to Barnum's puffery, she had been abducted from that region, which had produced the Caucasian race, and she was presented as the epitome of human beauty. Turkish sultans, according to myth, were behind the "white slave trade" that carried these unwilling but eminently desirable captives into their harems. To the right is another example displayed at Barnum's American Museum. PHOTOGRAPH OF ZALUMMA AGRA BY MATHEW BRADY FROM THE COLLECTION OF PICTUREHISTORY.COM

the Caucasian variety may seem curious, coming from a scientist who placed such a premium on whiteness. Perhaps the most compelling explanation for this inclusion is that for Europeans, the regions where these people lived encompassed areas widely understood to have been the cradle of civilization: places such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Holy Land. By locating inhabitants of these regions neatly within the Caucasian variety, Blumenbach—and many subsequent racial scientists—were able to circumvent the possibility that any people, other than the type originating in Europe, could have been responsible for achieving significant social and cultural accomplishments.

This need to situate the founders of civilization within the Caucasian variety speaks to an essentialist mindset that insists on fitting people, and other life forms, into clear-cut and rigidly enforced categories. Had Blumenbach been able to anticipate Gould's notion that life exists on a continuum, that ideal types are abstractions that do not exist in nature, he would not have needed to place ancient civilization within the Caucasian camp. Without having done so, however, the very idea of rigidly divided racial categories would have made no sense, and the "truth" of racial categorization, and Europe's superiority, was a deeply embedded faith for men like Blumenbach.

Descending from the Caucasian ideal were four other racial groups, each seen as a degeneration from that ideal.

All mankind . . . seems to me as it may be best . . . be divided into the five following varieties; which may be designated and distinguished from each other by the names Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. I have allotted the first place to the Caucasian . . . which make me esteem it the primeval one. This diverges in both directions into two, most remote and very different from each other; on the one side, namely, into the Ethiopian, and on the other into the Mongolian. The remaining two occupy the intermediate position between that primeval one and these two extreme varieties; that is, the American between the Caucasian and Mongolian; the Malay between the same Caucasian and Ethiopian.<sup>15</sup>

Together, Blumenbach's taxonomy of the five human varieties could be visualized as a pyramid. At the top, characterized by their whiteness, stood the Caucasians, a vision of humanity as it was meant to be. At the base of the pyramid, each to one side, lay "two ultimate extremes" of degeneration, Mongolians (from Eastern Asia) and Ethiopians (dark-skinned Africans). The Malay (Polynesians and Melanesians of the Pacific; Australian aborigines) and Americans (Indians of the

New World) stood as intermediaries between the Caucasian ideal and its two utmost retrogressions. Throughout Blumenbach's work, color remained the most palpable index of decay, though facial structure was also discussed. According to Blumenbach's rendition of the Fall, all of these inferior varieties were created by a build-up of carbon in the skin, producing an "unnatural and diseased colour," the deleterious result of overexposure to the elements.<sup>16</sup> His unfounded assumption that white was the "primitive color of mankind" was based on the axiomatic belief that while it is "very easy for [white] . . . to degenerate into brown . . . [it is] very much more difficult for dark to become white, when the secretion and precipitation of this carbonaceous pigment has once deeply struck root."<sup>17</sup> Despite the fact that Blumenbach saw each of his five varieties as belonging to a common species, he had, at the same time, constructed a human hierarchy that elevated Caucasians to the highest level of creation, ranking all other types in terms of their innate pathology. This perspective would inform the trajectory and vocabulary of natural history and racial science into the late twentieth century.

Blumenbach, it must be added, was part of a scientific tradition still rooted in the synergy of art and science. His system of ranking was based, exclusively, on judgments about the relative beauty of the different types he surveyed. His criteria were essentially aesthetic. Issues of intellectual development or innate intelligence were not his primary concern, though they would certainly become central issues as the trail that he blazed became, in the nineteenth century and onward, a well-traveled highway.

## CAMPER'S ANGLE

Blumenbach's aesthetic science was, to a large extent, the outcome of an idea that had been steeping in Europe since the time of Roger Bacon: the belief that material evidence, observed and interpreted by the eye's mind, provided an empirical footing for scientific knowledge and natural law. The notion that beauty is truth, and truth beauty, was unquestionably related to a marriage between artistic creativity and optical technology that originated in the late Middle Ages and took flight during the Renaissance. The belief that art encapsulated eternal truths, however, was not simply a product of this fusion of art and science. It was also related to a revitalized interest in the arts of antiquity and in the ideals of "classicism" initiated, in large part, by the papal court during the brief high Renaissance period of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

In 1377, when the papacy returned to Rome after nearly seventy years in exile in Avignon, it reentered a city that had been destroyed by barbarian invasions and battles among local aristocrats. A search for ideals upon which a revived Roman Catholic Church could be built led a succession of popes toward the old Roman Empire, and the ancient civilization of Greece that had influenced it significantly, as archetypes to work from. The papacy saw Greek civilization, particularly in its works of art, as a beacon that could help to establish a new sense of order and grandeur. Many centuries earlier, the Roman Empire had gathered a trove of artworks from around the world and had also generated its own monumental statuary and architecture inspired by Greek culture. Beginning with Pope Alexander VI, elected in 1492, excavations were undertaken to bring these ancient treasures to light, to be placed in the Court of the Vatican. Among these rediscoveries was a statue that became known as the Apollo of the Belvedere—named for the Belvedere Courtyard in the Vatican where it stood—a marble Roman copy of a Greek bronze.<sup>1</sup>

In classical art, particularly in its rendition of the human form, the high Renaissance venerated a concept of beauty that was seen as timeless, an expression of "lasting, unchanging, incorruptible" truths that were, professedly, "eternally human." The art historian Arnold Hauser has convincingly argued that this notion of eternal beauty, rooted in the Aristotelian concept of *kalokathia* (nobility), was a fiction forwarded by ecclesiastical and secular elites in an attempt to elevate their own power into beauty and present their "influence and position as timeless, imperishable, and immutable." Within this

purview, says Hauser, “physical beauty and power become the valid expression of intellectual beauty and significance.”<sup>2</sup>

Though the high Renaissance endured for only twenty years, the conceit that classical ideals of beauty embodied transcendent, universally applicable human values—though it fell out of favor for an extended period—proved to be remarkably durable. Nearly three hundred years after the unearthing of the Apollo, the cant of classicism reemerged as the bedrock upon which the new scholarly endeavors of art history and archaeology would be built. Not surprisingly, the founder of these nascent fields was a librarian who worked in the Vatican, cataloguing its large collection of Greek sculpture, the principal site of existing Greek and Roman statuary.<sup>3</sup>

His name was Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768). Hailing from Dresden, the capital of Saxony, Winckelmann converted to Catholicism in 1754 and moved to Rome the following year, where he would eventually be in the employ of the Vatican. There he began writing the first major works of art history, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1755) and *The History of Ancient Art* (1764). By the time of his scandalous death at the age of fifty—

murdered in Trieste, while returning to Rome after being honored by the Habsburg court—Winckelmann was Europe's preeminent expert on ancient art. Translated from the original German into French and Italian by 1766, his *History of Ancient Art* was widely read and helped to promote and popularize the classical vision of beauty as the aesthetic paragon. In his wake, educated Europeans flocked to Italy to experience the artifacts of classical culture firsthand. People of wealth started building collections of Greek and Roman antiques, and adventurous art lovers participated in new excavations of ancient sites.<sup>4</sup> Among an enlightened middle class, even those unable to collect or excavate were instructed in the classical ideal through widely disseminated engravings and accounts.<sup>5</sup>

To Winckelmann, sculpture, far more than painting, served as the artistic standard of truth. Flat paintings, which offered only an illusion of depth, were, to his mind, but visual magic tricks. What is more, the sensual hedonism that he discerned in many eighteenth-century paintings he viewed as a debauched and debased perversion of beauty.<sup>6</sup>

Classical sculpture, on the other hand, offered an authentic rendition of



Winckelmann. REPRINTED FROM JOHANN CASPER LAVATER'S *ESSAYS IN PHYSIOGNOMY*, VOLUME II, LONDON, 1810; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

three-dimensionality, a physically scrupulous presentation of austere and simple aesthetic principles.<sup>7</sup> In their sculpture, Winckelmann argued, the Greeks had articulated a strong and symmetrical vision of human beauty that exceeded the beauty one might encounter in everyday life, presenting, instead, a touchstone of aesthetic perfection and divinity.

Like Lavater, he believed that God represented “the highest beauty . . . and our idea of human beauty advances towards perfection in as it can be imagined in conformity of proportion, as it can be imagined in conformity and harmony with that highest existence.” He continued: “This idea of beauty is like an essence extracted from matter by fire; it seeks to beget onto itself a creature formed after the likeness of the first rational being designed in the mind of the divinity.”<sup>8</sup>

In order to depict this essence, he maintained, Greek statues were not patterned after single individuals but, rather, were careful and consummate constructions of ideal parts, each bodily detail modeled from a different person.

This selection of the most beautiful parts and their harmonious union in one figure produced ideal beauty,—which is therefore no metaphysical abstraction; so that the ideal is not found in every part of the human figure taken separately, but can be ascribed to it only as a whole; for beauties as great as any of those which art has ever produced can be found singly in nature, but, in the entire figure, nature must yield the palm to art.<sup>9</sup>

To Winckelmann, it was the Apollo of the Belvedere that stood for the quintessence of the Greek ideal, the apotheosis of masculine magnificence. “The highest conception of ideal male beauty is especially expressed in the Apollo, in whom the strength of adult years is found united with the soft forms of the most beautiful spring-time of youth.”<sup>10</sup>

Unlike our own society's ideal of highly articulated or “ripped” musculature, the Greek ideal was supple and smooth, honoring the body type of a leisured elite rather than that of a bulked-up laborer, as represented in the Apollo. “In the Apollo, an image of the most beautiful of the Gods, these muscles are smooth and, like molten glass blown into scarce visible waves, are more obvious to touch than to sight.”<sup>11</sup>

This invitation to touch the Apollo, the better to fully appreciate his beauty, was but one expression of Winckelmann's distinctly homoerotic sensibility. Elsewhere, his Apollonian ideal was marked by a profound sexual ambiguity, a reverential admiration for the indeterminate boundaries of gender.

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The attention which the Greek artists paid to the selection of the most beautiful parts from numberless beautiful persons did not remain limited to male and female youth alone, but their observation was directed also to the conformation of eunuchs, from whom boys of handsome shape were chosen. Those equivocal beauties, effected by the removal of the seminal vessels—in which the masculine characteristics approximated, in the superior delicacy of the limbs and in greater plumpness and roundness generally, to the softness of the female sex.<sup>12</sup>



Nineteenth-century souvenir photo of the Apollo of Belvedere. FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

If Winckelmann's coronation of the classical ideal asserted that it embodied a transcendent and ethereal definition of beauty, the aesthetic guidelines he employed cannot be separated from the geopolitical position of Europe in the late eighteenth century, particularly in relation to its expanding colonial empires. Throughout his work, for example, there is a fixation on the inherent virtue of whiteness. "As white is the color which reflects the greatest number of rays of light, and consequently is the most easily perceived, a beautiful body will, accordingly be the more beautiful the whiter it is." While the Greeks, he offered, viewed "a brown complexion in beautiful boy" as a sign of courage, "those of fair complexion were called children of the Gods."

In Winckelmann, the divine harmony of the Greek ideal was posed vigorously against countenances found among those "nations which . . . have lost half of their likeness to the creator." Conspicuous among these fallen nations were Africans, Laplanders, and Asians.

The projecting, swollen mouth which the negro has, in common with the monkey of his land, is a superfluous growth, caused by the heat of the climate, just as among us the lips swell up from heat or a humid and harsh salt air, and in some men, indeed from violent anger. The small eyes of extreme northern and eastern nations make a part of the incompleteness of their growth, which is short and small.<sup>13</sup>

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Winckelmann's rendition of beauty—white and male—dismissed the majority of humanity from its purview. It presented beauty as an exclusive property of Europeans and, in so doing, shored up the colonialists' world view. Yet another part of its appeal to the European middle classes was its apparent affirmation of their antiaristocratic moral outlook. For a bourgeoisie that was becoming increasingly hostile to the excesses of monarchy and to the lavish aesthetic that surrounded aristocratic life, the stark clarity of the Greek ideal spoke for the values of a new democratic public. Though its aesthetic principles were biased and exclusionary, its influence on the neoclassical art that emerged amid the French Revolution, and on future revolutionary art forms, was unmistakable. It spoke to the disciplined ethic of a middle class that was coming into its own.

Winckelmann's impact on the emergence of art history and archaeology, as public fascinations and academic disciplines, was enormous. For many, his arguments about harmony and order continue to endure as aesthetic standards. In the Greek ideal that he celebrated, one might even see an early articulation of modernism, with its rejection of ornamentation and its focus on elementary forms and the balanced unity of the whole. Yet his ideas, and his worship of the Apollo of the Belvedere in particular, also worked their way into the history and development of racial science.

In this regard, one of the most influential disciples of Winckelmann was Petrus Camper (1722–1789), a Dutch surgeon, anatomist, and painter whose most significant undertaking was the development of detailed geometric rules for the visual portrayal of the different races of humanity. Camper, in many ways, was the embodiment of the nexus of art and science, prescribing links between "the science of anatomy" and "the arts of drawing" that assumed an identity of the two. "That an intimate connexion subsists between the different branches of the Arts and Sciences, by virtue of which the one elucidates or reflects a lustre upon the other, is a truth that has never been litigated."<sup>14</sup>

Camper was a man of many interests. Over his lifetime, he studied architecture, perspective, engraving, carpentry, welding, dyke maintenance, jurisprudence, and horticulture, among other things, but his primary contributions were in the fields of surgery, anatomy, and scientific illustration. Heavily influenced by Sir Isaac Newton's convic-



Petrus Camper. REPRINTED FROM *THE WORKS OF THE LATE PROFESSOR CAMPER ON THE CONNEXION BETWEEN THE SCIENCE OF ANATOMY AND THE ARTS OF DRAWING, PAINTING, STATUARY, ETC. ETC.*, LONDON, 1794; FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EWEN LIBRARY

tion that “sensory experience was the only source of knowledge,” he also looked to visual art as an indispensable tool for documenting observable truths.<sup>15</sup>

Graduating from the University of Leyden in 1746, Camper completed his Ph.D. and M.D. degrees, writing two theses, one on the anatomy of the eye, the other on the phenomenon of visual perception, approaching “the eye as an optical instrument, as a means of acquiring ideas through vision, and as a carrier of fallacies.”<sup>16</sup> This fixation on optics placed him within a long lineage and, for Camper, moved him toward the visual analysis of measurable differences separating the races, particularly as they applied to facial structure.

Camper’s systematic interest in human countenances commenced after he studied midwifery, when he began collecting fetuses of both black and white still-born children for “his personal museum,” noting that racial differences were already discernible in utero.<sup>17</sup> This area of inquiry may have been influenced by one of his teachers in midwifery, the Englishman William Smellie, who preached that “Nature herself has formed the human species into castes and ranks.”

Later, while a professor of philosophy, anatomy and surgery at the University of Amsterdam, Camper encountered a variety of “foreign races,” some on slave ships, in this hub of global commerce. There, he observed and drew a sampling of these dark strangers, some from life, others from the morgue, where he “performed judicial autopsies.”<sup>18</sup>

Today the dissection of cadavers is seen as a customary aspect of medical training, and autopsies are routinely performed under a number of specified circumstances. In Camper’s time, however, this was not the case. The dissection of the dead was generally seen as a profane act, a desecration of beings formed in the likeness of God. Insofar as human dissections were tolerated, only the bodies of the most reviled could be legally cut up.

In Great Britain, where Camper studied midwifery, the hanged remains of murderers had been the “sole legal source for corpses for dissection” since the reign of Henry VIII.<sup>19</sup> Due to this legal restriction, and the limited number of available corpses, anatomists and their students—increasingly hungry for knowledge of the human body—began to rely on “a black market in corpses” supplied by grave robbers, body snatchers, and other members of what was generally known as “the resurrection trade.” Graveyards were routinely sacked and the general public viewed resurrectionists, and the anatomists whom they served, with a visceral hatred.

Ultimately, in the years 1827–1828, a case came to light that raised public revulsion to a fever pitch. Two men, William Burke and William Hare, decided that grave robbing required too much effort and began strangling poor people,

including a number of prostitutes, after getting them drunk. Once dead, their bodies, sixteen in all, came under the scalpel of Dr. Robert Knox, an eminent anatomist at the Edinburgh College of Surgeons. In the wake of a trial, in which he was convicted on the basis of evidence from his compatriot Hare and from Dr. Knox, Burke was hanged and then, as part of his punishment, dissected in front of a limited number of “ticket holders.” After the main event, two thousand medical students were permitted to see the open cadaver and then, the next day, “between thirty and forty thousand members of the general public” were allowed to view the body.<sup>20</sup>

In 1831, in the wake of a second case of “Burking,” the Anatomy Act was passed, providing a new legal source of bodies for dissection. Now, instead of murderers, those too poor to pay for their own funerals ended up on the slab. Ruth Richardson, who has written the definitive book on the relationship between dissection and the destitute, summarizes the Act with chilling clarity: “What had for generations been a feared and hated punishment for murder became one for poverty.”<sup>21</sup> In France, as well, corpses were routinely harvested from among the poorest sectors of society.

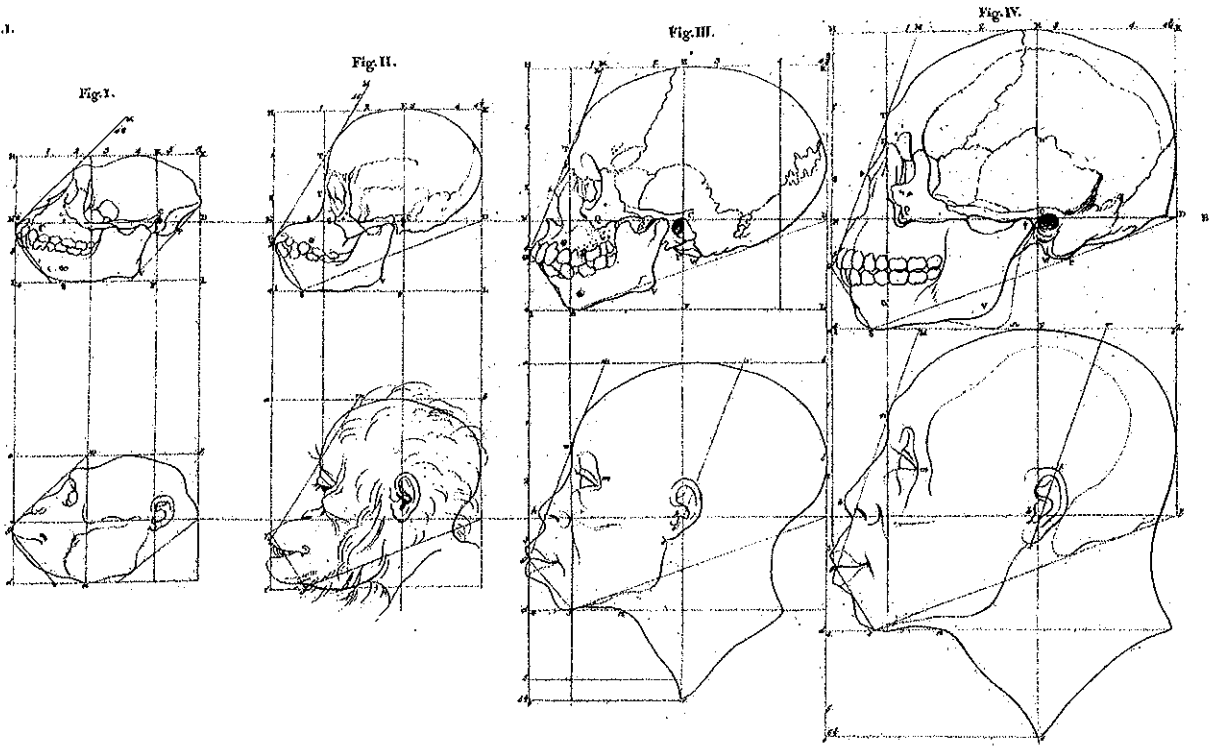
In light of this situation, Camper’s dissections, along with dissections by others who sought to codify the anatomy of human difference, must be seen as part of a practice that was reserved for the most despised and often powerless elements of society. Proper Europeans would not be subjected to such an indignity.

During Camper’s years as a professor at the Academy in Groningen (1763–1773), his observations congealed into a grand, all-inclusive theory, energetically packaged for public consumption. Continuing to build what was becoming a considerable private museum of human and animal skulls, Camper began to “dissect blacks and orang-utans in public demonstrations” and then, in 1770, began publicizing the “facial line” (*linea facialis*) or “facial angle” formula that would make him famous.<sup>22</sup>

Traveling throughout Europe, Camper delivered lectures on the facial angle in major capitals, including an address in 1777 to the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris. He also met with leading men of letters and was entertained by monarchs, including George III in England, Louis XVI in France, and Frederick the Great in Prussia.

The facial angle, the cause for his celebrity, was an ostensibly exact method for classifying different racial groups, founded on what he claimed to be unassailable empirical evidence. According to Camper, who invented special instruments to perform this procedure, an extended line connecting, in profile, the base of the brow with the upper lip, then juxtaposed with horizontal lines, produced a mea-

TAB. I.

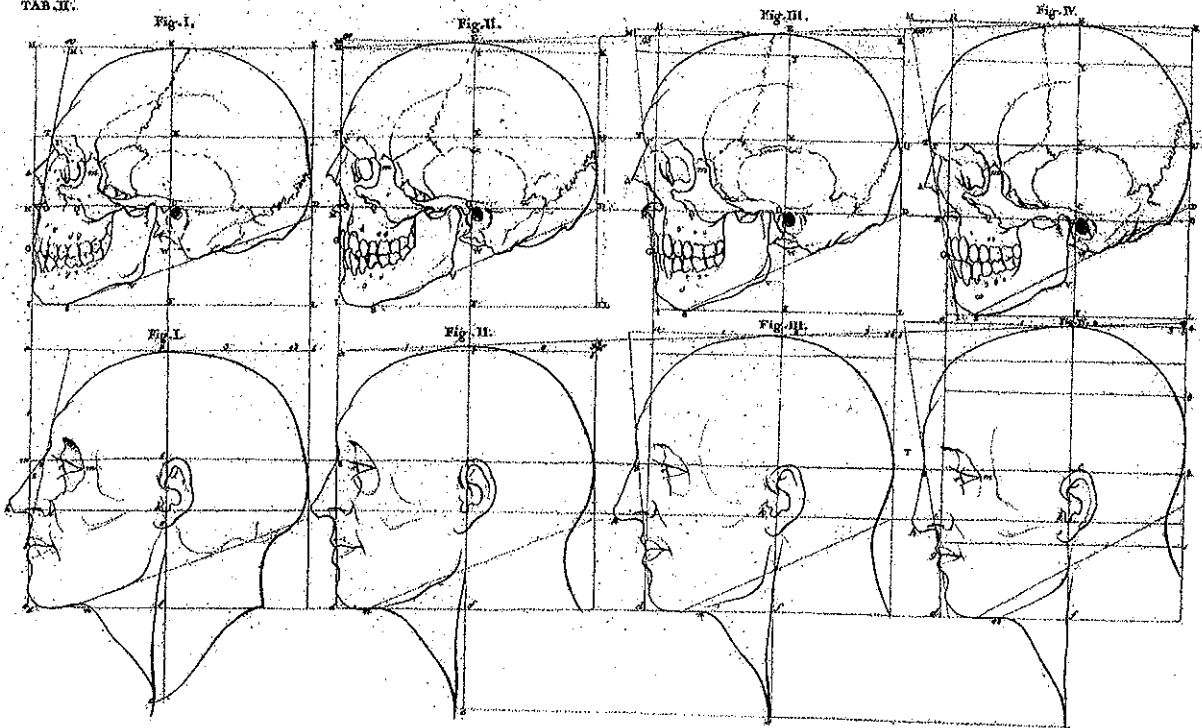


*Enlithet. Sc. 1. 1794. by K. B. G. G. G. G.*

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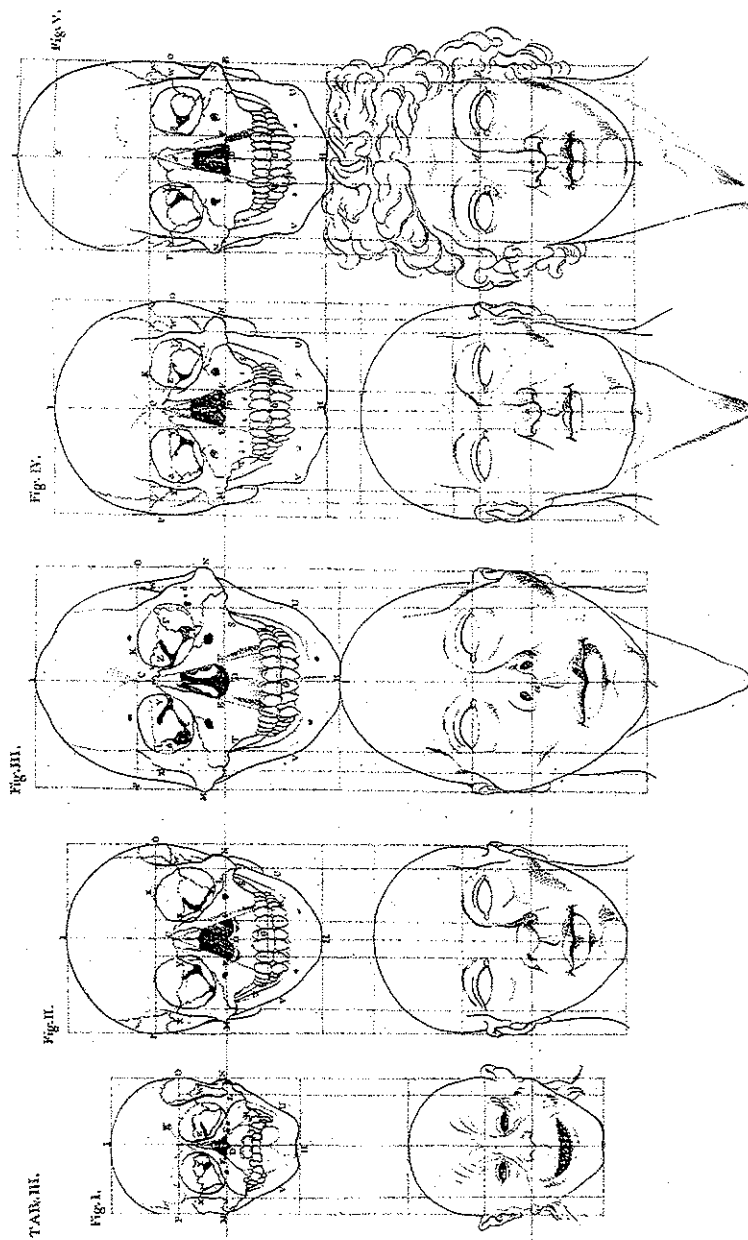
TAB. II.



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asurable angle on the basis of which different kinds of people, as well as animals, could be predictably categorized. True to the spirit of his times, Camper began his investigation with those considered among the lowest ranks of humanity. His first human measurements used the skull of "a negroe" and one of a Calmuck, from an Asian Tartar people whom Camper deemed "the ugliest of all the inhabitants of the earth."<sup>23</sup> Alongside these two, Camper placed the skull of an ape.

I observed that a line, drawn along the forehead and the upper lip, indicated this difference in national physiognomy; and also pointed out the degree of familiarity between a negroe and the ape. . . . This discovery formed the basis of my edifice.<sup>24</sup>

Having established what he saw as the lower end of the spectrum, Camper proceeded to examine European skulls and then applied his formula to Winckelmann's paradigm of splendor, the Apollo of the Belvedere. Scanning the spectrum of human diversity, he concluded that "the two extremities of the facial line are from 70 to 100 degrees, from the negroe to the Grecian antique."<sup>25</sup> The line attributed to "the negroe," the "Calmack," and the "Caffre," he reported, revealed a projecting lower jaw and a forehead that receded from above the nose, while the angle found on the Apollo revealed a forehead that projected forward, 10 degrees beyond the perpendicular. This was the range within which humanity fell, placing it in proximity to beasts at one end and to gods at the other. Europeans, whose "maximum and minimum of comeliness" fell between 100 and 80 degrees, came closest to the benchmark of the gods, though Camper admitted that it would be rare or impossible to find a living individual with the perfection of the Apollo.

Though his measurements of Africans were admittedly based on only a few skulls, he concluded that the average "negroe" had a facial angle in the neighborhood of 70 degrees. "However, the facial line must not sink much lower than five degrees; that is, to 65; as the countenance would too closely resemble that of an ape. Lower than seventy gives the features of an ape; still lower the resemblance of a dog."<sup>26</sup>

Like Blumenbach and other secular creationists, Camper assembled his skulls into a linear narrative, offering a visualization of the ostensible trajectory from lower life forms to the highest. In a cabinet in his museum, he created a parade of developmental evolution, allowing one skull in each category to stand for all.

It is amusing to contemplate an arrangement of these, placed in a regular succession: apes, oranges, negroes, the skull of a Hottentot, Madagas-

car, Celebese, Chinese, Moguller, Calmuck, and divers Europeans. It was in this manner that I arranged them upon a shelf in my cabinet, in order that these differences might become the more obvious.<sup>27</sup>

In order to carry this narrative to a greater public, Camper reported, he routinely illustrated his lectures with drawings comparing the “facial line of a European, of a Negro, of an ape, and of an ancient statue to the greatest pleasure and surprise of everyone. . . . All in all, the assembly was very satisfied with my lecture and amazed by my discovery.”<sup>28</sup> His posthumously published *Treatise on the Natural Difference of Features in Persons of Different Countries and Periods of Life* also included detailed engravings of animal and human skulls and heads, shown in profile and in sequence, each with a matrix of appropriate lines to validate the geometry of difference.

Like Blumenbach and Lavater, Camper proposed a vision of human hierarchy that used Eurocentric aesthetic judgments as if they were empirical evidence. Such was the science of the time. What Camper contributed, however, was an apparatus of measurement, which replaced literary exposition with quantification. Now difference could be abstracted and simplified to a system of mathematically derived numbers, creating a phantom objectivity—in a world fascinated by the idea of mathematical precision—that conveyed its ideas through a generally accepted rhetoric of truth.

Along the way, Camper disposed of the imprecise issue of skin color as a pivotal element of diagnosis. Though color had figured significantly for Blumenbach and Winckelmann, Camper believed that it was an element not easily calculated, one that offered little information about the contours of grace. In sticking to the principle of measurement, Camper upheld the idea that human distinctions could be accurately gauged and numerically validated. Though some argued with the specifics of Camper’s system, his introduction of measurement provided a methodological staple for future students of differentiation, providing a descriptive language that could easily assume a semblance of scientific objectivity.

Despite its apparent numerical exactitude, Camper’s facial line drew criticisms from his physiognomic compatriots. Lavater, while he did not dispute the utility of Camper’s angle, argued that physiognomic science could not be reduced to a single measurement and remained convinced that facial analysis required a more thorough gathering of physical data.<sup>29</sup>

Blumenbach was far less generous, accusing Camper of sloppy science and manipulation of evidence to serve his thesis. Within each of the different races,

he maintained, the facial line revealed a broad spectrum of difference. Using his own bone collection as evidence, he proclaimed that the angle that Camper attributed to Africans could be readily found among Europeans and, conversely, the supposedly European facial line could be found among Africans. The range of angles, he argued, ran the gamut of humanity and could not be divided along racial lines. At the end of the day, Blumenbach concluded, Camper’s method was “arbitrary and uncertain,” and even his placement of lines varied from specimen to specimen in order to produce a desired measurement.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, despite these objections, the apparent facticity that Camper’s system generated was remarkably appealing to those intent on demonstrating human inequality. In France, the highly influential anatomist Georges Cuvier employed Camper’s angle as a diagnostic tool for measuring relative intelligence among the races. Similarly, in the United States, Samuel George Morton used Camper’s tools to document the innate inferiority and barbarism of the Indians of the Americas at a time when the extermination of these peoples was official government policy.

Moving from the specific to the general, the historian Londa Schiebinger has argued that Camper’s angle and his application of measurement and measuring instruments to human heads, became “the central visual icon of all subsequent racism: a hierarchy of skulls passing progressively from lowliest ape and negro to loftiest Greek. As a primary instrument of racism in the nineteenth century, the facial line became the most frequent means of explaining the gradation of species.”<sup>31</sup> Camper’s angle, in the hands of scientists and casting directors, persisted, wittingly and not, well into the twentieth century.