

Chapter 1

Symmetry and *Concinnitas*

self in self steeped and pashed — quite
Disremembering, dísremembering áll now.

G. M. Hopkins

Galen had the disconcerting habit, according to a treatise *On the Medical Names* we only know through its Arabic translation, to reply to questions concerning the name of a sickness by throwing back at random proper names, such as: “The name of this fever is Zenon, or Apollonios,” or any other name that might come to his mind. Galen justifies the strange practice as a mockery of rival physicians, who were far too interested in the name, rather than in the cause or the treatment of an ailment,

as if the method, through which one is freed of the fever, would depend on the knowledge of its name and not on the knowledge of the sickness itself and the determination of the things that are necessary in order to treat it.¹

Even if Galen’s polemic is *prima facie* directed against his contemporaries, his unorthodox method is a parody of the practice of ancient medicine, and a blasphemous parody at that. His calling names mocks the conjuring up by the ancient physician of the divinities that preside over the limbs of the body and are responsible for the sickness affecting the limb they rule. The aching limb is indeed an irated god.² Calling the sickness by name was the first task of the physician, the knowledge of the name regarded as vitally important in gaining control over the aching limb at a time when the belief in the magic of language was still unassailed. We may find such a practice less foreign if we consider that even now, as Virginia Woolf points out, when confronting

the failure of language to express what he perceives as a uniquely individual pain, the sufferer may be

forced to coin words himself, and, taking his pain in one hand, and a lump of pure sound in the other (as perhaps the people of Babel did in the beginning), so to crush them together that a brand new word in the end drops out.³

Pain, Woolf reminds us, is a stimulus to verbalization rather than to inarticulation.⁴ One finds among the preferred techniques of conjuration in ancient Egypt the invocation of each individual part of the body: “there is no part of the body without god,” one charm recites, and then proceeds to name and identify each of them with the divinities presiding over them: “each limb is god.”⁵ But then each disease should be regarded as sacred, the author of the treatise on the sacred disease *par excellence*, epilepsy, does not fail to remark with noticeable sarcasm.⁶ In spite of such enlightened criticisms, the practice continued to thrive in Egyptian medicine well into the Christian era. Origen wrote in the third century that the Egyptians divided the human body into thirty-six parts and that each part was under the care of a god. And “by invoking these,” namely, the corresponding gods, “they heal the sufferings of the various parts (*ta merē*).”⁷

As the number proves, the partition was supported by the parallel belief in the common ancestor of medicine and astrology, iatromathematics, the astrological healing technique. The zodiacal and planetary *melothesia*,⁸ namely, the partition of the human body according to the dominant influences exerted on each individual limb by the zodiacal signs and by the planets, probably evolved as an extension to the human body of the partition of the vault of the sky in Egyptian religion. The sky-goddess Nut naturally encloses the heavenly bodies in her all-encompassing body, whereas the sun-god, when he enters in their dominion on his path, takes on their shape.⁹ The advantage of this healing technique over medicine, from the believer’s point of view, is evident, when we consider that it does not demand the breaking of the long-lasting taboo of the corpse. It dispenses with the need of autopsy by its system of astral correspondences. The fact that “perhaps the most popular anatomical image during the Middle Ages was the ‘zodiac man’”¹⁰ [fig. 2] testifies to the resilience of this magical melothesia well before the beginnings of human anatomy in the Renaissance.

The existence in the West of similar, indigenous beliefs about the body is proven by a famous episode narrated by Livy.¹¹ As the historian is careful to point out, the apologue by which Menenius Agrippa succeeded in persuading the plebeians to renounce their secession and return to Rome was told in “the quaint and uncouth style of that age” (*prisco illo dicendi et horrido*

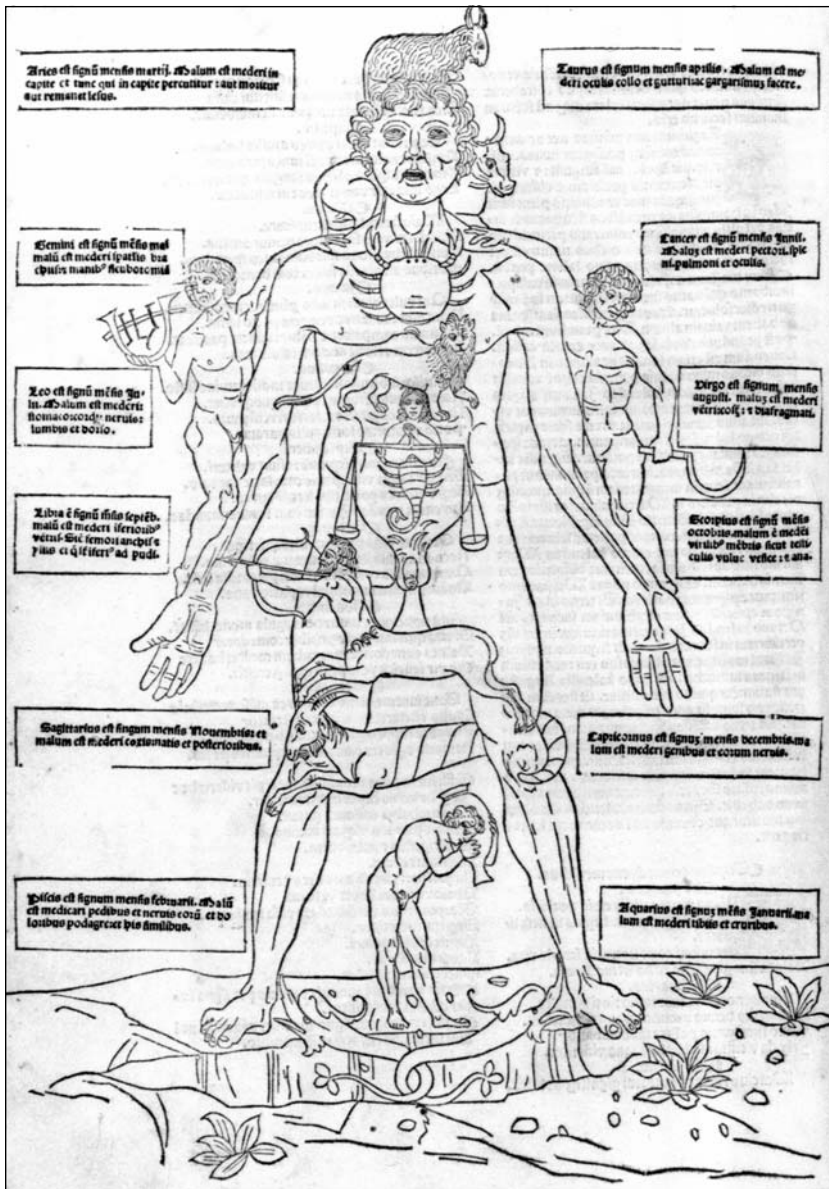


Fig. 2. "Zodiac Man," from Joannes de Ketham, *Fasciculus medicinae*, Venice 1500. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

modo); nonetheless, the Senate ambassador argued eloquently enough the case for the restoration of the social contract. Agrippa manages to restore concord (*concordia*) amongst the citizens by fully resorting to the “fair means or foul” (*per aequa per iniqua*) his mandate entitles him to—he dispatches himself by telling a story:

In the days when man’s members did not all consent amongst themselves, as is now the case, but had each its own opinion and a voice of its own (*tempore quo in homine non, ut nunc, omnia in unum consentiant, sed singulis membris suum cuique consilium suus sermo fuerit*) . . .¹²

Livy can hardly conceal his disbelief at Agrippa’s success with so poor a rhetorical device as a straightforward comparison: “Drawing a parallel from this to show how like was the internal dissension of the bodily members to the anger of the plebs against the Fathers, he prevailed upon the minds of his hearers.” The ancient physician’s mind-set was certainly closer to that of Agrippa’s audience than to Livy’s enlightened historical sensibility. His re-telling of the anecdote further removes the reader from the possibility of remembering the dismembered body Agrippa so successfully evoked for his audience. In order to understand this view we would have to “disremember”¹³ all now, and above all the Pauline rhetoric¹⁴ that no longer allows us to see the body as an unruly collection of parts, each of its own mind, so to speak, rather than a consenting assembly of unanimous members. Pascal codifies with sublime irony the view that still haunts our perception of the body and its component parts, when he writes that “to be a member is to have no life, being, or movement except through the spirit of the body (*être membre est n’avoir de vie, d’être et de mouvement que par l’esprit du corps*).”¹⁵

The change in the Greek view of the body Plato records in the *Charmides* is a case of the new, general “interest in the relation of the whole to its parts,” which “increased especially from the fourth century B.C. onwards” in Greece,¹⁶—an interest the developments in pre-Socratic medicine and natural philosophy decidedly contributed to awaken. In the *Phaedrus* (269C) Socrates attributes the merit of such an advancement, rather than to an exotic figure such as the shaman Zalmoxis, to Hippocrates himself, who argued that it is impossible to understand “the nature of the body” without considering “the nature of the whole.”¹⁷ Hippocrates is here mentioned along with Anaxagoras, the teacher from whom Socrates had expected so much at the time of his youthful infatuation for the “history of nature.”¹⁸ On the other hand, a famous piece of intellectual autobiography in the *Phaedon* (96A–98D) assesses the limits of Anaxagoras’s as well as of the entire Ionian *physiologia* in rather ironical terms. Socrates describes his disappointment at the discovery that Anaxagoras

did not assign any real causes for the ordering of things, but mentioned as causes air and ether and water and many other absurdities. And it seemed to me it was very much as if one should say that Socrates does with intelligence whatever he does, and then, in trying to give the causes of the particular thing I do, should say first that I am now sitting here because my body is composed of bones and sinews, and the bones are hard and have joints which divide them and the sinews can be contracted and relaxed and, with the flesh and the skin which contains them all, are laid about the bones; and so, as the bones are hung loose in their ligaments, the sinews, by relaxing and contracting, make me able to bend my limbs (*ta melē*) now, and that is the cause of my sitting here with my legs bent.¹⁹

Whether or not it fairly reflects Anaxagoras's views, this *reductio ad absurdum* confirms that, in Socrates's eyes, enumeration could no longer lend a proper figure to the human body, and could only amount to a partial account of the nature of a whole. More importantly, maybe, as it could not explain the intelligent behavior of Socrates, an even exhaustive nomenclature of the body parts *a capite ad calcem*, from the head down to the heel,²⁰ could not provide the remedy to the insurgence of a disease, either.²¹

In Egyptian medicine the diagnosis had been hardly more than "a verdict of regional localization of the disease process itself."²² Such a localization, however, entails the ability to name the *loci* of the body. In order to name the disease, it is necessary to identify the part of the body that is hurting. The Hippocratic physicians still named most conditions after the part of the body affected, and many of these names, such as *hepatitis*, *arthritis*, *nephritis*, have survived in current medical terminology.²³ In his study on the genesis of the *Names of the Gods*, Hermann Usener chose the many different expressions of pain that have survived even in the "refined and spiritualized" German language to support his conclusion that a general concept is always a belated creation preceded by innumerable particular denominations, as personal deities (*persönliche Götter*) are preceded by particular gods (*Sondergötter*).²⁴ Following this train of thought, one may conclude that pain always originates as a local pain before leaving place to an overall concept of "pain" or "disease," and that the expression of pain was always an individual expression of pain, an individual answer to the individual pain before becoming a diagnostic tool, a universal plea for compassion, or "the general expression of pain" Reynolds saw on the countenance of Laocoon and his two sons.²⁵

The wonder of Plato's Socrates "at that nail of pain and pleasure which fastens the body to the mind"²⁶ is then an altogether different reflex from the awe a piercing pain might have inspired. Firstly, it implies an equivalence of pain and pleasure that should not be taken for granted; secondly, it assumes a dislocation of pain that abstracts it from the affected limb and dilutes it over

the entire body. Such is the shift advocated by the author of the Hippocratic treatise *De locis in homine*, who starts by evoking the Heraclitean paradox of the circumference, whose origin can no longer be pointed out, once the tracing thereof has been completed: in the same way, in the body “there is no beginning, but everything is both beginning and end.”²⁷ Hence, stretching the analogy a step further, there is also no beginning (*archē*) to a disease, but every part of the body is both its beginning and its end. The search for a specific pathogenic spot is thus no longer the primary task of the healer: since the parts all communicate with each other, the disease is necessarily transmitted to the entire body, it cannot remain isolated or be isolated for curative purposes.²⁸ For this reason the therapy, even in an essay drafting an atlas of the body, so to speak, centers around the temporal notion of *kairos* rather than any spatial category. The spreading of the sickness to the entire body leaves few chances to the physician (*hē de iētrikē oligokairos esti*, XLIV.1): what is vitally important is to seize the right moment (*kairos*) for the administration of the remedies. If the right moment is not seized, then the circle is going to close, and the identification of its origin made an impossible and ultimately idle endeavor.²⁹

Disease thus becomes a separate entity from the aching limb. Diseases were once “thought to be entirely unlike one another, owing to the difference in their seat (*topoi*),” but the better-knowing author of the treatise *On Breaths* can now pun that, while the *topos* changes, the *tropos* (which one might render here as the course) of a disease is always the same.³⁰ As a consequence, the body as a whole must now be acknowledged as the site of pain. The wonder is a reaction to the pain, is an attempt at getting rid of the nail. But the body itself must have seemed the nail when the paronomasia *sōma-sēma* could impose itself, and the analogy of the soul with the corpse, sunken in the body as in a grave, could appear enlightening. Loomings of this view are to be seen already in the linguistic usage of the Homeric poems. It has been repeatedly observed, first by the Alexandrian scholar Aristarch, that Homer consistently used the word we use to interpret with “body,” *sōma*, in reference to a corpse.³¹ The *nomen* of the body is an *omen* of its decline. Plato’s first etymology in the *Cratylus* (400C) clearly reflects this knowledge, although the alternative interpretation, of *sōma/body* as *sēma/sign*, already betrays a new interest in the semiotics of the body *per se*, and not just in view of diagnostic purposes.³² This interest will shortly thereafter result in the development of a physiognomy no longer strictly divinatory, as the one practiced by the Babylonians and probably by them first introduced to the Greeks,³³ nor chiefly prognostical, as we see it applied in the Hippocratic corpus. But to initiate this new practice “a new hierarchy of the passions”³⁴ was needed,—the hierarchy of the passions that emerged in fourth-century Greece and Aristotle codified in a definitive form in his rhetoric and ethics. As a result, the body could now be valued as a signifier of the passions of the soul in

general: “The practice of physiognomy is possible, if one grants that the body and the soul change together, so far as the natural affections go.”³⁵

The onset of grammatical analysis in ancient Greece shows the influence of the model of medicine and the assumption of the human body as the term of comparison by which to name its elements.³⁶ The anatomized³⁷ body provided a most effective model for the analysis of speech into its elements. Grammatical as well as prosodical categories, such as *pous*, *daktylos*, *arthron*, *colon*, *syndesmos*, all derive from the nomenclature of the body parts;³⁸ as, more obviously, the actual unities of measurement.³⁹ The body is taken as the standard by which to measure the universe. Protagoras’s noted sceptical saying: “Man is the measure (*metron*) of all things,”⁴⁰ if taken literally,—and at least in such a way it was interpreted in the Renaissance—does not read as a relativizing device, but rather leads to the establishment of a standard of truth. The body is the most convenient ordering principle. Alberti, for instance, writes that “all things are learned by comparison (*comparationibus haec omnia discuntur*),” and

comparison is made with things most immediately known. As man is the best known of all things to man, perhaps Protagoras, in saying that man is the scale and the measure (*modus et mensura*) of all things, meant that accidents in all things are duly compared to and known by the accidents in man.⁴¹

Since we have standardized unities of measurement, we no longer think of the parts of the body as measurement instruments. “Foot” and “inch” have become for us “dead” metaphors.⁴² We associate to the noun an abstract length and not an actual limb. On the other hand, the ancient body is a dimension. It has a waist and a stature.⁴³ Grammatical categories have fallen prey to a similar forgetfulness. But the very possibility of using the names of body parts in such a special figurative sense ultimately rests on the overall analogy of speech with a living being. The first comparison of the kind occurs in the *Phaidros* (264C), where, in criticizing Lysias’s speech, Socrates offers his own philosophy of composition:

every discourse must be organised (*synestantai*), like a living being, with a body of its own, as it were, so as not to be headless or footless, but to have a middle and members, composed in fitting relation to each other and to the whole (*prepon’tallēlois kai tōi holōi gegrammena*).⁴⁴

The term of comparison is here already the new, well-ordered body; more in general, the analogy rests on a new view of the nature of a compound. A compound cannot be accounted for by a simple enumeration: Hesiod’s

description of a wagon as “a hundred pieces of wood” is not a description definite enough to explain its nature,⁴⁵ nor is the syllabification of a name a sufficient account of its etymology.⁴⁶ The same word, *syllabē*, is equivocally used throughout the *Theaetetus*, to refer both to syllables in our sense and to any sort of combination. Using such an ambiguity as a leverage, Plato may put forward his own theory that the syllable or combination in general (*syllabē*) is, truly, an “idea” arising out of the several “harmonized” elements (*mia idea ex ekastōn tōn synarmottontōn stoicheiōn gignomenē*), and that the same is true of words and of all other things.⁴⁷

Plato straightforwardly dismisses the archaic view of speech in the *Sophist*, where explicit mention is made for the first time of “the art of grammar” (*grammatikē technē*), understood here literally as the art of properly combining letters (*grammata*) together.⁴⁸ He denies the possibility of having a discourse made up of an asyndetic succession of either nouns (*onomata*) alone or verbs (*rēmata*) alone.⁴⁹ Yet Plato’s grammatical analysis does not cross this threshold; although he stresses in the strongest terms that “the complete separation (*to dialyein*) of each thing from all is the utterly final obliteration (*aphanisis*) of all discourse,” and that “our power of discourse (*logos*) is derived from the interweaving (*symplokē*) of the ideas (*tōn ideōn*) with one another,”⁵⁰ he limits himself to conclude that a discourse to be such must not merely name, but combine nouns and verbs as its elements.⁵¹ In the *Sophist* Plato uses the term *desmos* in reference to the vowels, which tie together the letters in a word “as a bond,” by making the consonants resound;⁵² but he does not apply the term to refer to the connecting elements of a sentence. Anticipating the later formal classifications of the parts of speech by the Alexandrian grammarians, Aristotle is the first to have stressed the importance of the connecting elements, which he names generically *syndesmoi*, “ligaments,”⁵³ for the articulation of meaningful discourse.

The passage from a divinatory to a hermeneutical physiognomy parallels the development of early Greek linguistics, from Plato’s onomaturgy in the *Cratylus* to Aristotle’s taxonomy of the parts of diction in the twentieth chapter of the *Poetics*. Undoubtedly, a grammatical pattern continued to be operative throughout antiquity in dictating not only the structure of the epic description of beauty,⁵⁴ but also the ordering of physiognomical treatises. The anonymous author of the most ancient Latin text in the genre, writing in the fourth century of our era, declaredly follows the order of grammar textbooks, starting with the first elements and proceeding then to combine them as a way of constructing the different types of individuals:

Since we have properly exposed and enumerated both the signs of the limbs and the meanings of these signs, like the first elements of the letters, [. . .] let us now conceive and constitute certain types out of several of them, as syllables are made out of letters.

And he goes on to construct the type of “the strong man.”⁵⁵ The composition of a type out of individual features that are previously interpreted in isolation is a standard procedure in most later physiognomical treatises. Such a constructive practice will continue up to the Renaissance and beyond, and produce works such as Giovanni Padovani’s *De Singularum humani corporis partium significationibus*⁵⁶ or Domenico de’ Rubéis’s *Tabulae physiognomicae*,⁵⁷ which reduce the body to a skeleton-like table of contents, first coordinating to each limb its meaning, and then reassembling them to build up the desired type. Yet physiognomy consistently remains inadvertent of the connecting links, which are throughout its history left out of its scope of interpretation. The number of analyzed limbs remains discrete: alike in this to the sixteenth-century French *blasonneur*, who laments that all the limbs of his lady’s body have been already sung, the physiognomist, too, cannot step out of the vicious circle spanned by the same, ever recurring features.⁵⁸ There is no physiognomy of the *traits d’union*. The limbs of the physiognomical body are all, as it were, out of joint.

As it emerges from the Middle Ages, physiognomy encompasses, on the one hand, the doctrine of the right construction of the body, which will be later known, following the revival of Vitruvius, as theory of the proportion, or symmetry, of the human body; on the other, the doctrine of the proper mixing of the humors, which determines our temperaments, or theory of the complexions. It aspires to be both a theory of health and a theory of beauty, as Chrysippus had defined health the right proportion of the elements, and beauty the right proportion of the members of the body.⁵⁹ The human body is, to the physiognomist, both the meter by which God, the *Primus Mensurator*, as Grossateste calls Him,⁶⁰ measures the universe, and the bond (*vinculum*) by which He keeps it together, being “the worthiest of all mixed bodies,” as Peter of Abano exalts it.⁶¹ Later, man as a whole, and not just his body, will be hailed as the “bond or copula of the world” (*nodum et vinculum mundi*),⁶² once the Platonic knowledge will be recovered, that “the greatest of symmetries” is “that which exists between the soul itself and the body itself.”⁶³

Albrecht Dürer’s accomplishments as a theorist of art were very early and widely acknowledged, as the rapidly growing European fortune of his writings witnesses.⁶⁴ Paolo Gallucci concedes, in the dedicatory letter introducing his Italian translation of the *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion*,—to which he supplemented an influential fifth book on the expression of emotions⁶⁵—that

Albrecht Dürer [. . .] by far surpassed all those who came before him (even those who are highly celebrated by histories and verses), and left to posterity in his writings and drawings the idea of the true Painting, and of Sculpture, as one can clearly see from his papers, as well as from this book of the symmetry of the human bodies.⁶⁶

But the European resonance of his works occurred almost in spite of Dürer's adoption of his native German. The choice of a vernacular language did not necessarily entail a gain in audience, nor in perspicuity, at such an early stage in the development of the technical vocabulary of art criticism. Gallucci's acknowledgement is startlingly qualified on the opposite folio by the sonnet dedicated to him by Girolamo Dandolo:

*Di Alberto Duro ha in queste carte vita
Il gran disegno, e del dipinger l'arte,
Mercé di tue virtù, che in ogni parte
Dan spirto à l'opra sua quasi smarrita.*

Albrecht Dürer's grand design, and the art
of painting live in these papers,
thanks to your virtues, which raise
the spirits of his almost forlorn work.⁶⁷

Probably it is not just for metrical reasons that Dandolo prefers the shortened form "Duro" to the transliteration "Durero" adopted by Gallucci.⁶⁸ Dürer's work, the *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion*, first published in German in 1528, would have remained very "hard" (Ital.=*duro*) indeed to its readers, had it not been translated into Latin by his friend, the humanist Joachim Camerarius. Published under the title *De Symmetria partium in rectis formis humanorum corporum*, Camerarius's "splendid translation" was even at the time, as Erwin Panofsky has observed, "indispensable for the understanding of Dürer's archaic German,"⁶⁹ and thereby essentially contributed to the European reception of his work. But the difficulty of Dürer's language is foremost due to his need to invent *ex novo* a terminology for naming the limbs of the body with painstaking precision. Gallucci remarks with admiration in his preface that Dürer

did not leave any small exterior particle of our bodies (for the painter and the sculptor consider nothing else in man than that which is seen) unmeasured and unexplained by his divine mind, with such a subtlety that astonishes all lovers and experts of art.⁷⁰

Camerarius was very much aware of the difficulty of his task in taking on such an ambitious *tour de force*, and discussed it in detail in the introduction to his translation. There he writes:

the author sought out with an almost uncanny diligence names for the parts of the human body wherewith the measurements could be made more precise, and to some of them even imposed new names. I trust that the students of my version will understand this additional

difficulty, not to mention all the other problems I met with, which cannot seem easy to solve, given that there is nothing imitable in this genre from antiquity. However, we divised with no mediocre effort nor little time names wherewith we could render Dürer's own, and we leave up to the readers to decide if they are appropriate.⁷¹

He lets this *caveat* be followed by an overview of his choices, a “tabula rationum,” listing side by side Dürer's German word and his own Latin interpretation, sometimes along with the corresponding Greek term. For instance:

Sinciput graeci vocant βρέγμα. intelligenda est capitis summitas pro qua veteres verticem posuere. Die Scheytel.

The Greeks call the crown of the head βρέγμα.

Whereby they mean the apex of the head, what the ancient called vertex. *Die Scheytel.*

Jugula et juguli. Halsgrüblein. Intelligenda autem est ἡ σφαγή, id est lacuna in mediis jugulis.

The throat. *Halsgrüblein.* It means ἡ σφαγή, namely, the throat-pit,⁷²

and so forth. Camerarius's interest in the topic, which has crystallized itself in his *Commentarii utriusque Linguae*,⁷³ a bilingual dictionary of the body, a signal achievement of humanistic erudition, was most likely stimulated by his work at this translation. But the quest for the proper names of the parts of the human body is a humanistic endeavour *par excellence*.⁷⁴ Nomenclature is “an important matter at the period when the naming of anatomical parts was influenced variously by Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew terms;”⁷⁵ it is also a main concern of early modern physiognomy. During the course of the sixteenth century, physiognomy becomes a more and more philological discipline, to the point that it might be legitimately named an “Anatomia Philologica,” borrowing the title of a 1632 treatise by Gregorius Queccius.⁷⁶ On the one hand, it aims at a restitution of the proper names for the parts of the body in the classical languages, on the other, at their correct translation in the various vernacular idioms.⁷⁷

As a consequence of this process the humanists gathered new evidence of the richness of the Greek language,—Camerarius writes with admiration in his *Commentarii* that the Greeks, “a nation rich of words,” left no part of the body without a name⁷⁸—; but they were also reminded of the comparative poverty of Latin,—the *egestas* Lucretius had first lamented—especially in the borderline domain of ethopoeia, or character description. Willibald Pirckheimer,

the Nürnberg humanist, writes in the dedication of his translation of Theophrastus's *Characters* (1527) to his friend Dürer: "in translating some expressions, I could not even satisfy myself, that which occurred not for a fault of mine, but rather for the poverty of the Latin tongue."⁷⁹

The inadequacy of the Latin language had to be particularly felt in the case of those Greek words the Latins themselves had declared untranslatable and directly transliterated in their own tongue. Such is the case of "symmetria," the term Camerarius chooses to translate Dürer's "Proportion." The word has since been borrowed by most modern European languages, but is now used in a largely different way, to refer almost unambiguously to bilateral symmetry.⁸⁰ Camerarius writes with a polemical overtone in the same introduction I have already cited: "Even if they deny to have a Latin name for it, we will nevertheless translate it as *commensus* or *commensuratio*." (*Latinum nomen etsi habere negant nos tamen interpretemur commensum commensurationemve.*) Naturally Camerarius very well knew—in spite of Pliny's denial: "non habet latinum nomen symmetria" (*Nat. Hist.* 34, 65)—that his calques were no neologisms. Vitruvius himself had used "commensus" for "symmetria" (III.i.2); and "commensuratio" is also attested in post-classical Latin for the same purpose.⁸¹ Yet by using the Graecism *symmetria* instead of transliterating Dürer's *Proportion* backward into Latin, Camerarius was able at once to pay homage both to the Greek tongue and to the authority of Cicero and Vitruvius. Cicero had tentatively proposed the neologism "proportio" in his version of the *Timaeus*; but as a translation of *analogia*, and not of *symmetria*.⁸² And Vitruvius had articulated the relationship between the two terms in the following passage, which opens the third book of his treatise: symmetry

arises from proportion (which in Greek is called ἀναλογία). Proportion consists in taking a fixed module, in each case, both for the parts of a building and for the whole, by which the method of symmetry is put into practice. For without symmetry and proportion no temple can have a regular plan; that is, it must have an exact proportion worked out after the fashion of the members of a finely-shaped human body.⁸³

The passage created many problems to those early translators, who tried to render Vitruvius's technical idiom into their vernaculars. The first Italian translation by Cesare Cesariano certainly does not make it any clearer:

questa [la symmetria] si aparturisse da la proportione: quale graecamente analogia si dice. La Proportione si e de la rata parte de li membri in ogni opera & del tuto la commodulatione. da la quale si effice la ratione de le symmetrie. Imperoche non po alcuna aede senza symmetria & anche proportione habere la ratione de la

compositione: se non como al imagine de uno homo bene figurato de li membri hauera auto exacta la ratione.⁸⁴

It is evident that the translator thought it best to circumvent the difficulties the text presents by simply molding his own language on that of the original, with almost comical results. It has been written apropos of this translation that

Cesariano, even if he wanted to, could not write in vernacular. Sometimes, out of despair, he resorted to Latin, but on the whole his effort as translator and commentator was useless. For the language he pretended to write in could not be that which he spoke, the Lombard dialect; nor a language a layman could oppose, as free and loose from any rule as it still was, to the pressure of a difficult Latin text.

The critic concludes his quite harsh review with the remark that “only today our historical curiosity and philological expertise may patiently unseal the text.”⁸⁵ Thus one fails, however, to take into account the problematic status of Vitruvius’s text itself, whose Latin is not at all better off in dealing with complex Greek concepts. Alberti observes in the opening paragraphs of the sixth book of his *De re aedificatoria*, certainly with a hindsight *pro domo sua*, that Vitruvius

wrote in such a Manner, that to the *Latins* he seemed to write *Greek*, and to the *Greeks*, *Latin*: But indeed it is plain from the Book itself, that he wrote neither *Greek* nor *Latin*, and he might almost as well have never wrote [*sic*] at all, at least with regard to us, since we cannot understand him.⁸⁶

The complaint is echoed by Francesco di Giorgio, who prefaces his incomplete translation of Vitruvius’s treatise by lamenting that “by virtue of Greek and Latin scholarship it has never been possible to master such a task (*per forza di grammatica greca e latina non è stato mai possibile venirne al fine*).”⁸⁷

However, the survival of *symmetria* in transliteration suggests that the difficulty here lies well beyond the shortcomings of the individual translator. No translation has been able to replace the word, which has passed from one language to another, while keeping all its ambiguity in the process. Yet many attempts were made to decode it, especially when the recovery of the forlorn *symmetria prisca*⁸⁸ seemed to lie at hand. In the “Proemio” to his commentary on Dante’s *Comedy*, Cristoforo Landino offers a brief overview of the development of the figurative arts in Florence, which anticipates Vasari’s standard treatment. There he attributes to Cimabue the merit of reviving painting, which had for centuries produced “dead” figures, “unsuited to display any affection of the soul (*punto atteggiate e senza affetto alcuno*

d'animo),” by rediscovering the “true proportion, which the Greeks call symmetry (*vera proportio, la quale e' Greci chiamano simetria*).”⁸⁹ The rediscovery of the “true proportion” of the ancients also entails the recovery of the “true” meaning of the name “symmetry.” But its mere mention could not satisfy all those interpreters who, at a very early stage in the renaissance of Greek studies in the Western world, shared Bruni’s conviction that “there is nothing said in Greek, which cannot be said in Latin (*nihil graece dictum est, quod latine dici non possit*).”⁹⁰ The Pavia humanist Giorgio Valla, one of the most prolific translators of the Renaissance,⁹¹ proposes his own interpretation in the widely read encyclopedia *De expetendis, et fugiendis rebus*: “Symmetria [. . .] latine commensurabilitas dici potest.”⁹² But already Pomponius Gauricus, although he largely relies on Valla’s erudition for the chapters on “symmetria” and “physiognomoniam” in his treatise *De statua*,⁹³ shows his dissatisfaction with this choice by using “commensuratio” or even “mensura” in its stead;⁹⁴ while he picks “commensus” for “analogia” and rebuffs Cicero’s choice of “proportio” for the same term.⁹⁵ Cesariano himself ventures to paraphrase *symmetria* as “numeratione commensurable.”⁹⁶ In a different context, that of Scaligero’s *Poetics*, the choice falls on “convenientia.”⁹⁷ Examples of this sort could be multiplied. A critical assessment of modern Vitruvian versions, to the effect that “each author translates the different passages differently,”⁹⁸ clearly applies to earlier attempts, and to the different words of this elusive text, as well. Yet can we blame the failure of the individual translators, or their disagreement, for what has been the historic outcome of this diatribe, namely, the simple transposition as a loan of this category into all the modern European languages? In other and more general terms: should we consider the loan of a word the acknowledgment of a subjective failure to understand, or the result of an objective untranslatability?

Schuchardt’s paradoxical principle: “jedes Wort ist irgend einmal ein Lehnwort gewesen”⁹⁹ offers maybe a way out of this only apparent alternative. If all words have once been loan-words, all translation has once been transliteration.¹⁰⁰ Συμμετρία had first to become *symmetria* in order to become “symmetry.” In this—all but automatic, yet irreversible—transition, meaning was lost. The word “symmetria” met thus the same destiny most words of our intellectual vocabulary fell prey to: thought abandoned them to speech;¹⁰¹ yet speech kept them alive. Words survive thought as living elegies to what they once signified.¹⁰²

Translation is “the death of understanding”¹⁰³ because it is the death of the letter. Transliteration is its transfiguration. Translation killeth, but transliteration giveth life. Transliteration is the movement that counteracts the obliteration of the letter brought about by translation. Transliteration, and not translation,—not even, as Benjamin would like, the interlinear version of the Scriptures, which to him represents “the prototype or the ideal of all translation” (*das Urbild oder Ideal aller Übersetzung*)¹⁰⁴—harbingers the survival

of the original, its immortality, or just the eventuality of a revival; even if at the price of its immediate understandability. The dismaying outcome of Averroes's search¹⁰⁵ for the meaning of the words "tragedy" and "comedy" remained thus harmless: his misunderstanding did not curtail their survival.

Such a conclusion might sound less paradoxical if we consider that, instead of translating, we are always transliterating; or at least we do so in all Romance languages. The very word Italian and all the other Romance languages use for "translation" literally means "transliteration." The Latin verb *traducere* Aulus Gellius uses to refer to the transport of Greek terms into Latin was taken by the Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni to mean "translation" and as such passed into the Romance *koine*. Gellius writes "vocabulum graecum vetus traductum in linguam romanam." Leonardo Bruni misunderstood the term as meaning "translated," whereas, as the context makes clear, it meant, literally, transliterated.¹⁰⁶

The definition of symmetry in the opening chapter of the third book of the *De architectura* is followed by the Vitruvian theory of the proportions of the "homo bene figuratus." Discussed and illustrated with relentless interest throughout the Renaissance [fig. 3], Vitruvius's canon has been the point of departure of all later attempts to codify anthropometry,¹⁰⁷ as well as of all those aesthetic theories of the Renaissance that interpret beauty as "Vergleichlichkeit." This is Dürer's own term of choice for "symmetry."¹⁰⁸ However, in the Vitruvian lexicon he dedicated to his patron Markus Welser, Bernardino Baldi writes that Germans translate "symmetria" as "rechtmessigung" and "gleichförmung," namely, "rectum seu continuum commensum, et similem deformationem."¹⁰⁹ Baldi also writes that "nos Itali *proportionem et correspondentiam* dicimus."¹¹⁰ As we have seen, the choices available to the Italian interpreter were even more numerous; and since Alberti had rescued the term from Cicero, yet another translation was at hand: *concinnitas*.¹¹¹

In the treatise *On Painting* the word occurs in the Latin text only, without a counterpart in the Italian version. *Concinnitas* is here supposed to result from a fitting composition of surfaces, whereas *symmetria* (which is also missing in the Italian version) is the result of a fitting composition of members.¹¹² In the later *De re aedificatoria* *concinnitas* resurfaces as a central category of Alberti's aesthetics. He uses it to define "pulchritudo":

I shall define beauty to be a Harmony (*concinnitas*) of all the Parts, in whatsoever Subject it appears, fitted together with such Proportion and Connection, that nothing could be added, diminished or altered, but for the Worse.¹¹³

The eighteenth-century translator James Leoni chooses here "harmony"; then in the tenth book, where a different definition is given, which no

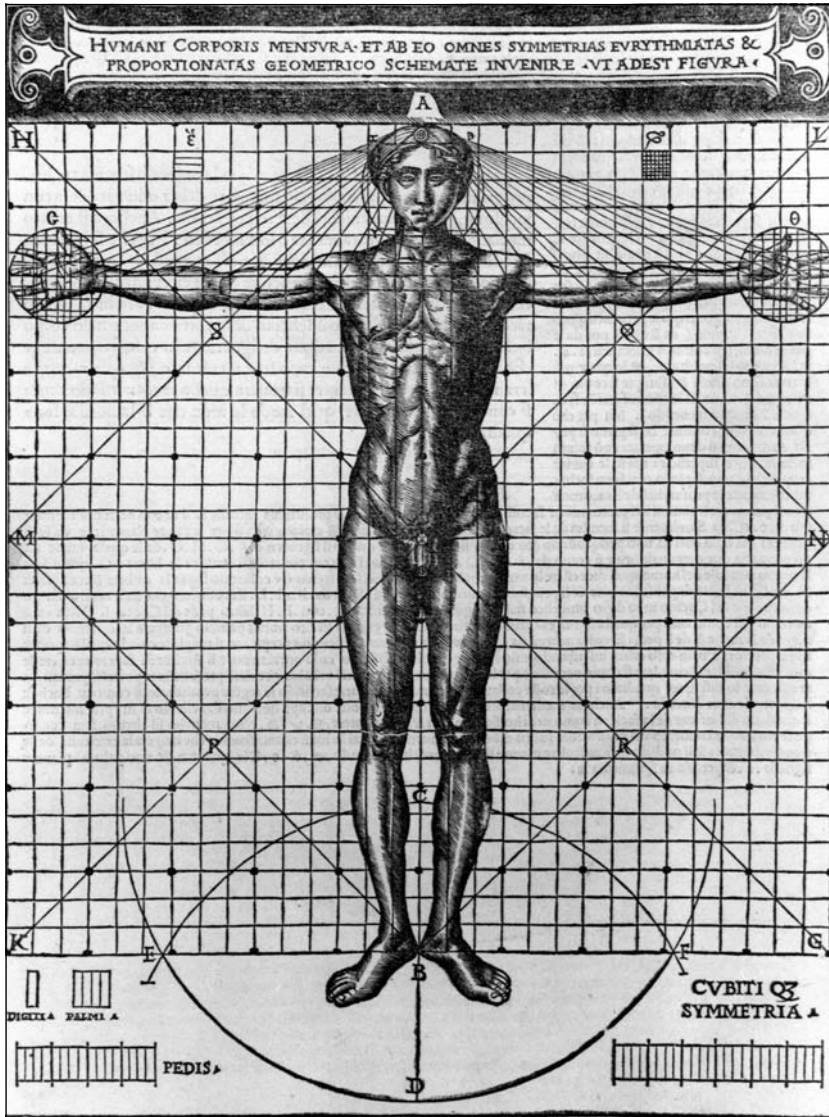


Fig. 3. "Homo bene figuratus," from *Di Lucio Vitruuio Pollione de Architectura Libri Decem traducti de latino in Vulgare*, Como 1521. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

longer straightforwardly identifies beauty with *concinnitas*, Leoni interprets it as “congruity”:

we may conclude Beauty to be such a Consent and Agreement of the Parts (*quendam consensum et conpirationem partium*) of a Whole in which it is found, as to Number, Finishing and Collocation, as Congruity, that is to say, the principal Law of Nature (*concinnitas, hoc est absoluta primariaque ratio naturae*) requires.¹¹⁴

As Leoni’s oscillation betrays, the word has not been assimilated by the English language,¹¹⁵ nor by Italian, even in spite of Alberti’s and Ficino’s patronage. Ficino uses it in his commentary on Plato’s *Symposium*, but only in the Latin version, where, like Alberti, he invokes the category to define beauty:

Beauty is, in fact, a certain charm (*Pulchritudo vero gratia quaedam est*) which is found chiefly and predominantly in the harmony of several elements (*in concinnitate plurium*.) This charm is threefold: there is a certain charm in the soul, in the harmony of several virtues (*ex plurium virtutum concinnitate*); charm is found in material objects, in the harmony of several colors and lines (*ex plurium colorum linearumque concordia*); and likewise charm in sound is the best harmony of several tones (*ex vocium plurium consonantia*).¹¹⁶

In the Italian version of the passage Ficino simply transliterates *concordia* and *consonantia*, while consistently rendering *concinnitas* with “conrispondentia”; whereas for the other occurrences of the word in the treatise he uses throughout “consonantia.”¹¹⁷ In recording Ficino’s definition in his treatise *On the Beauty of Women*, Firenzuola feels the need to explain Ficino’s unfamiliar usage, and does so while transliterating the word into Italian, against the author’s own example:

Ficino, the Platonist, in his work on the *Symposium*, in the second oration, says that beauty is a certain grace that comes from the concise union of several parts; and he uses the term concise because it implies a sweet and charming order, something akin to an elegant collective (*la bellezza è una certa grazia, la quale nasce dalla concinità di più membri: e dice concinità, perciocché quel vocabolo importa un certo ordine, dolce e pieno di garbo, e quasi vuol dire uno attillato aggregamento*).¹¹⁸

The most recent translators of Firenzuola’s text proceed just by way of assonance when they translate *concinnità* as “concision.” As Ficino’s usage shows

quite clearly, for him *concinnitas* was quasi-synonymous with *consonantia*. *Consonantia*, English “consonance,” is directly calqued on Greek *symphonia*, but the adjective *concinnus*, from which *concinnitas*, is also explained as *symphonos* by the ancient glossarists. Priscianus interprets *concinnus* as a compound from the verb *canere*, “to sing.”¹¹⁹ The meaning of the word would hence be closer to *concentus*, from which our word “concert.”¹²⁰ But another, more likely explanation was advanced by Nonius Marcellus, according to which the verb *concinnare* would derive from *cinnus*, the ancient name of a drink made out of various beverages.¹²¹ Such a derivation relates the word *concinnus* to another field of knowledge, the theory of the complexions, in Greek *krasis*, a word that also referred to a mixture of beverages.¹²² *Concinnus* would hence mean “well-mixed,” from which the extension to the field of music in the sense of “well-tempered” would have been quite effortless.¹²³ It is probably to be assumed that this derivation was then forgotten in favor of the more obvious one, assimilating the two verbs *concinnare* and *concinere* in popular etymology.¹²⁴

As in the case of the numerous Latin calques on *symmetria* that were ventured to substitute it, the word *concinnitas*, too, has not been able to supplant its Greek ancestors. In Plato’s *Symposium* the physician Eryximachus, who not by chance is charged of putting forth an interpretation of beauty as harmony, equals *harmonia* and *symphonia*: “harmony is consonance, and consonance is a kind of agreement (*hē gar harmonia symphonia esti, symphonia de homologia tis*).”¹²⁵ As the translation I quote shows, it is preferable and, indeed, necessary to replace the second Greek word with its Latin calque, for the word “symphony” has now taken a much more limited technical meaning, to refer to a specific musical form, and only rarely can be used instead of its Latin alias. The word “harmony,” on the other hand, has kept a wider semantic range, and is not just limited to the musical realm. Few years after Ficino, Pico could write that “the word ‘harmony’ in its general sense can mean the normal state of order in any composite thing,” although “strictly speaking it means only the arranging of several notes which fit together to make a pleasant sound.”¹²⁶ But the semantic range of “harmony” extended well beyond music already in Greek. Before becoming a musical term, the word referred to any kind of fitting together. The words “art,” “rite,” “article,” “articulation,” all derive from the same Indoeuropean root **ar-*, from which “harmony” derives.¹²⁷ The use of “harmony” in reference to an invisible attunement is hence a catachresis, and not vice versa.¹²⁸ Aetius’s authority, according to which Pythagoras, who coined the two terms, used *symmetria* and *harmonia* as synonymous,¹²⁹ comes thus as the belated mythical explanation of a fathommed affinity. Symmetry is the mirror-image of harmony, harmony the echo of symmetry. But how did the word “harmony” outlive the “untuning of the sky,” the obsolescence of both the Classical and Christian theories of world harmony,¹³⁰—as symmetry outlived the decanonization of the human body?

Kant justifies his defense of the philosophical viability of a term such as *idea*, which has, of course, also survived in transliteration in all the modern European languages, by arguing that “to coin new words is to advance a claim to legislation in language that seldom succeeds.”¹³¹ If not the ideal, certainly the most *legitimate* form of translation, one will be entitled to conclude, is transliteration. In one of his posthumously published marginalia, Kant transcribes an etymology current in the eighteenth century, according to which words have a value as money does: “*verba valent sicut numi*,” where the Latin name *numi* is made to derive from the Greek *nomos*, “law.”¹³² *Nomina* are *numi*, names are a currency whose value cannot be altered at will, but is prescribed by law. However, by extension of its proper meaning, the word *nomos* means also “song,” and Aristotle, to whom the former etymology goes back, explained the coincidence as due to the circumstance that the ancients, not having any writing, sang their laws “to avoid forgetting them.”¹³³ Before becoming liable to interpretation, the letter of the law had to be taken to heart.

Along with his rewording of Ficino’s definition, Firenzuola lists those theories of beauty that were battling the ground with the champion of Platonism at this stage of the Italian Renaissance:

In his *Tusculanae*, Cicero says that beauty consists of a suitable arrangement of parts with a certain softness of color (*la bellezza è un’atta figura de’ membri, con certa soavità di colore*). Others, one of whom was Aristotle, said it is a certain appropriate proportion arising from the manner in which differing parts go together one with the other (*una certa proporzione conveniente, che ridonda da uno accozzamento delle membra diverse le une dall’altre*).¹³⁴

Even if Cicero’s definition is more immediately inspired by Chrysippus,¹³⁵ both can be considered versions of what Benedetto Varchi calls Aristotelian, or corporeal beauty,¹³⁶ as the fact that Ficino, when attacking these antagonist views, combines and criticises them jointly, may also confirm: “there are some who think that beauty consists in a disposition of parts, or, to use their own language, size and proportion together with a certain agreeableness of colors.”¹³⁷

Yet Aristotelian beauty, even in its Stoic version, is ultimately rooted in the Pythagorean tradition. Galen’s treatise on the temperaments, which is our main source on the issue, links Chrysippus’s theory of symmetry to its archetype, Polycleitos’s canon. According to Galen, the famed sculptor and disciple of Pythagoras codified corporeal beauty once and for all, in a truly, *per antonomasiam*, canonic way: having taught all the proportions of the body, he thought well to support “his treatise with a work; he made a statue according to the tenets of his treatise, and called the statue, like the work, the

‘Canon,’ which got such a name from having precise commensurability (*symmetria*) of all the parts to one another.”¹³⁸ This statue is obviously the prototype of the Vitruvian “*homo bene figuratus*.”¹³⁹ Ancient artists, according to Pliny, used this statue “to draw their artistic outlines [. . .] as from a sort of law.”¹⁴⁰

In addition to their decisive contribution to the canonization of the body, the Pythagoreans were also credited for upholding the theory of the soul as harmony of the body parts, which Simmias famously defended in the *Phaedon*.¹⁴¹ Cicero writes in the above-mentioned *Tusculan Dialogues* that the Pythagorean Aristoxenus

held the soul to be a special tuning-up of the natural body analogous to that which is called harmony in vocal and instrumental music; answering to the nature and conformation of the whole body, vibrations of different kinds are produced just as sounds are in vocal music.¹⁴²

Later Christian interpreters tried to spiritualize this theory by suggesting that harmony might be the bond uniting a separately existing soul to the body; but this against the evidence provided by all the ancient interpreters.¹⁴³ If the Pythagorean theory is hence ultimately materialistic, one might conclude that the Aristotelian, or, corporeal beauty is nothing else but the harmony of the body the Pythagorean soul no longer is. An aesthetic theory replaces a psychological theory. Beauty replaces the soul as the harmony of the body, and lingers in its stead over the features of the face. Beauty is the (material) soul of a body.

Firenzuola goes on to offer his own compromise solution, which tries to reconcile the theory of beauty as visible symmetry with the theory of beauty as audible harmony. He studiously avoids, thus already confirming its ephemerality, *concinnità* in favor of “harmony,” although, like Pico, he feels the need to justify its employ of the latter term in reference to visible beauty:

beauty is nothing else but ordered concord, akin to a harmony that arises mysteriously from the composition, union, and conjunction of several diverse and different parts (*una ordinata concordia, e quasi un’armonia occultamente risultante dalla composizione, unione, e commissione di più membri diversi*) that are, according to their own needs and qualities, differently well proportioned and in some way beautiful, and which, before they unite themselves into a whole, are different and discordant among themselves. I have said concord and harmony as if by way of a simile [*Dico concordia, e quasi armonia, come per similitudine*], for just as in music the concordance of high, low, and other voices produces the beauty of vocal harmony, so too

a stout limb, a thin one, a light one, a dark one, a straight one, a curved one, a little one, a big one, arranged and joined together by Nature in an inexplicable relationship (*con un incomprensibile proporzione*), create that pleasing unity, that propriety, that moderation we call beauty (*quella grata unione, quel decoro, quella temperanza che noi chiamiamo bellezza*).

He still pays an implicit homage to Alberti's identification of *concinntitas* with a "principal law of nature" when he concludes that beauty "can only come from a mysterious order in Nature (*uno occulto ordine della natura*)," but retorts that "in my opinion, the human intellect cannot fathom" such an order.¹⁴⁴

The members of the body are arranged according to rules of composition that are dictated by nature. Physiognomy, as the most credible of its etymologies suggests (from *physis* and *gnōmē*, "rule of nature"), is meant to spell out the hidden rules of composition of the human body, those rules that determine the make-up of each individual.¹⁴⁵ The Italian word *leggiadria*, if taken in its own etymological import (from *legge*, "law"), provides a possible approximation to the Greek. Firenzuola defines it in his treatise following the definition of beauty I just quoted:

according to some, and to what the word itself says, elegance (*leggiadria*) is nothing more than the observance of an unspoken law, given and promulgated by Nature [. . .] for the movement, bearing, and use both of your entire body and of your specific limbs with grace, modesty, gentility, measure, style, so that no movement, no gesture, be without moderation, without manner, without measure, without intention, but rather, as this unspoken law obliges us, it be trimmed, composed, regulated, graceful. Because this law is not written down anywhere but in a certain natural judgement which of itself neither knows nor can explain the reason, except that Nature wants it like this, I have called it unspoken.¹⁴⁶

The observance of the law of nature, according to Firenzuola, inadvertently graces with beauty, and lawfulness spontaneously turns to *leggiadria*. The law gratuitously bestows, as it were, airs and graces on its subjects. The shift from lawfulness to beauty Firenzuola describes, however, is all but natural. It is rather the recounting of the epochal shift from the pre-historic, unruly body, to the historic, harmonious body. This transformation demanded the allegiance of each individual limb to the covenant bringing them together under a common law. As Livy implies,—and this he suggests to be the ultimate moral of Agrippa's story, when viewed in the larger frame of his history *ab urbe condita*—conviction does not suffice to lay the groundwork of a

commonwealth, since history teaches that “Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words.” Society is at most a sonorous, not a harmonious body. By pacts and covenants, Hobbes writes in the introduction to the *Leviathan*, the most spectacular and extensive application of the analogy between the body natural and the body politic, “the parts of this Body Politique were at first made, set together, and united; hence they resemble that *Fiat*, or the *Let us make man*, pronounced by God in the Creation.”¹⁴⁷ But another divine artificer reminds his audience of vicarious gods, in Plato’s *Timaeus*, that “all that is bound may be dissolved,”¹⁴⁸ were it not for His will that holds the whole together. The archaic body had to be subject to the rule of law in order to develop into a well-tuned body.

Talking about composition, or *synthesis*, which he defines as a *harmonia* of words, the author of the treatise *On the Sublime* compares it to the *system* of the human body: “None of the members has any value by itself apart from the others, yet one with another they all constitute a perfect system (*systema*).”¹⁴⁹ But this standard of comparison was not yet a canon, at least as long as the theoreticians of composition acknowledged the existence of different types of harmonies, each endowed with a different “character” (*charactēr*), “as in personal appearance (*opsis*), so in literary composition.”¹⁵⁰

In 1555 the physician Jean Lyege published in Paris a poem in hexameters in four books under the title *De humani corporis harmonia*. The poem is preceded by a note to the reader, in which the author tries to excuse himself for his “rather hard verses” (*duriusculos versus*),¹⁵¹ by claiming that he had just aimed at rendering faithfully the medical terminology rather than at achieving a harmonious versification. Undoubtedly, the names of the members of the body do not seem to fit the “hard” harmony¹⁵² of the verses of this unlikely Lucretius. The poem opens as follows:

*Corporis humani partes, potioraque membra,
Cumque usu formas horum, numerumque situmque,
Multiplices motus, concinnas denique moles,
Versibus expedio medicae fautoribus artis;*

which, made even more prosaic, sounds:

The parts of the human body, and its major members,
their use and their shapes, their number and site,
their multiple movements, and concinnous masses,
I compose in verses destined to the physicians.¹⁵³

Yet by attempting to fit the human body within the cast of a verse, Lyege was able to indulge both his vocations, as poet and physician. From the

eponym of Western poetry¹⁵⁴ onward, the task of the poet has always been, in a fundamental sense, that of harmonizing the body in pieces, of rebuilding its scattered members in the unity of a verse—and thus of reversing, so to speak, the tendency of the body to loosen itself, to decompose. Poetry recomposes the *disiecti membra poetae*, if only, at first, on an imaginary level and by way of enumeration: in it “a hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head,” already stand “for the whole to be imagined.”¹⁵⁵ The body is remembered out of its dismembered limbs, if only, at first, in a purely metonymical way. In a more literal sense, each line of a poem was once a lineament of the body. The Greek *melos*, from which our melody,¹⁵⁶ is a singularization of the Homeric expression *melea*, used only in the plural to refer to the members of the body.¹⁵⁷ But Parmenides’s *krasis meleōn* is, already no longer in a Homeric sense, both the well-tempered juncture of the bodily members and a certain melodic structure.¹⁵⁸ The epic body differs from its epigone. The master trope of the epic body is the asyndeton,¹⁵⁹ whereas the epigonal body corresponds rather to the scheme of a polysyndeton. In the above-mentioned *Commentarii* Camerarius interprets *sōma* as “membrorum apta compositio et concinnatio,”¹⁶⁰ a description that is certainly anachronistic when applied to the body of the Homeric heroes.

On the other hand, if not beauty, enumeration could certainly bestow sublimity on the archaic body. Longinus praises the asyndeton as an element of the sublime and dismisses the usage of *syndesmoi*, or conjunctions, which frame the expression of emotions in an unnatural slow motion:

if the rush and ruggedness of the emotion (*to pathos*) is levelled and smoothed out by the use of connecting particles, it loses its sting and its fire is quickly put out. For just as you deprive runners of their speed if you bind them up, emotion equally resents being hampered by connecting particles (*syndesmoi*) and other appendages.¹⁶¹

Discourse is a kind of running, according to the etymology of the Latin name (*dis-cursus*).¹⁶² The archaic body is a discursive body, the articulated body that replaces it, at most, a digressive one, a slow pacer. As such, it is better capable of controlling its emotions and of taming them into habits, whereas the austere harmony of the archaic body is better suited to portray *pathos*.¹⁶³

Once again, the transition is best perceived at the decisive caesura of the translation of Greek into Latin. In a letter concerning the proper style for a philosopher Seneca recommends to his pupil Lucilius not to imitate the Greeks, who like to indulge in an unrestrained style, whereas the Romans have become accustomed to the use of signs of interpunction even in writing.¹⁶⁴ But Seneca’s main objection to a discursive practice is moral, and not stylistic, for the price to pay for speed of speech is a loss of shame: “you could only be