

offered to one's gaze a sort of Platonic Idea of the human creature, which explains why her face is almost sexually undefined, without however leaving one in doubt. It is true that this film (in which Queen Christina is by turns a woman and a young cavalier) lends itself to this lack of differentiation; but Garbo does not perform in it any feat of transvestism; she is always herself, and carries without pretence, under her crown or her wide-brimmed hats, the same snowy solitary face. The name given to her, the Divine, probably aimed to convey less a superlative state of beauty than the essence of her corporeal person, descended from a heaven where all things are formed and perfected in the clearest light. She herself knew this: how many actresses have consented to let the crowds see the ominous maturing of their beauty. Not she, however; the essence was not to be degraded, her face was not to have any reality except that of its perfection, which was intellectual more than formal. The Essence became gradually obscured, progressively veiled with dark glasses, broad hats and exiles: but it never deteriorated.

And yet, in this deified face, something sharper than a mask is looming: a kind of voluntary and therefore human relation between the curve of the nostrils and the arch of the eyebrows; a rare, individual function relating two regions of the face. A mask is but a sum of lines; a face, on the contrary, is above all their thematic harmony. Garbo's face represents this fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an existential from an essential beauty, when the archetype leans towards the fascination of mortal faces, when the clarity of the flesh as essence yield its place to a lyricism of Woman.

Viewed as a transition, the face of Garbo reconciles two iconographic ages, it assures the passage from awe to charm. As is well known, we are today at the other pole of this evolution: the face of Audrey Hepburn, for instance, is individualized, not only because of its particular thematic (woman as child, woman as kitten) but also because of her person, of an almost unique specification of the face, which has nothing of the essence left in it, but is constituted by an infinite complexity of morphological functions. As a language, Garbo's singularity was of the order of the concept, that of Audrey Hepburn is of the order of the substance. The face of Garbo is an Idea, that of Hepburn, an Event." {Roland Barthes}

—Susan Lord

Excerpted from "The Face of Garbo," *Mythologies*, 1957. trans. Annette Lavers (London: Granada, 1982), 56–57.

## Genetics

All that is solid melts into numbers.

—Janine Marchessault

## Gluttony

### The Life of an Insatiable Glutton

When I was six, I built me a house out of chocolate sticks. And when I was eight, I ate it.

It felt good to be homeless and headstrong. But when I was ten, I got hungry again, so I ate my dog's howl and my little brother's smile—but that was not enough.

I learned to like the taste of wood and wax and words. I ate the altar, the alphabet and the library. I drank my mother's tears. She cried because she thought she had a termite for a daughter.

When I was eleven, I swallowed stop-signs like lollipops. I licked along the highways but without acquired taste for asphalt, I preferred to suck instead the sky, to gulp the grandiose.

I ate the butcher's scale, the beef, the cooking teaspoons and the measuring cup. When I was twelve, I chewed the classroom clock having stomachached already the rulers, the rule-books, the teacher's desk and the teacher.

Now no one could measure how small I was, or guess I was getting too big. My father shook his head and sighed and said, "The word for this is gluttony and that's a sin." I looked at him and laughed before I ate him.

"I'll ride piggyback to hell on Satan's shoulders! I can drink dreams and I can nibble nightmares! I was a fire-eater when I was five, now don't you think I could eat those damned demons from their horns down to their hooves?"

I nibbled at the leftovers of my neighbors' wasted weekends, and because I never learned to swallow seasons, I nightly slurped on sleep so I could always stay awake. To watch. To wait. At fourteen, bleeding in the nectarine tree, I panged, I shrieked at the frowning moon.

When I was sixteen, I burped. I binged, I purged, I ate again. And when I was gourmet-grown and fallen deep in love with a man who said he loved my lips, I sucked, I sopped so hard, before I knew, the passion plate was clean. Yes, I ate my lover raw.

I found myself alone, rolling on the floor of the pantry with a terrible stomach ache. I chewed my right hand past the nails and knuckles. I wept with thoughts of bittersweet chocolate childhood. No, I could not eat loss. So I gnawed at my wrist and the bone of my arm.

I cringed at the nerve-ends of ligaments. When I got to my elbow, I kept on going, knowing as I did what I did, that when I had consumed me whole, after my ears, my eyes—my mouth would remain, more or less the same; craving continents, gobbling at galaxies, swallowing starshine, blackness and all.

—Emily Raboteau