

## The Veils of Masculinity

*Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned away so they would not see their father's nakedness.*

*Genesis 9: 20-23*

I might have been more interested in Global Economics if Mrs. Robinson hadn't been such an obnoxious and off-putting teacher. Our classroom was divided in half, with all the desks facing a central aisle. The highlight of this class arose from sitting across the room from Nick Kirshnakov. Hume-Fogg was an academically selective magnet school, and Nick the one of the closest things we had to a "jock." He was captain of the soccer team and nearly always dressed in umbros, the male equivalent to the miniskirt. Oblivious to my devoted gaze he would sit with his legs slightly spread, rocking his knees with nervous energy, together, apart, together apart... They were like a pair of muscular metronomes, dusted with golden hair, determined to drive my teenage hormones insane. Focused on the merciless gap between his enormous tan thighs, there was always just enough shimmering nylon fabric to prevent me from seeing what I wasn't even sure I was trying to see, but couldn't help looking for.

It was in Mrs. Robinson's class that I read about Berkeley's Naked Guy. As a class requirement we had to subscribe to Newsweek and Time Magazine as a way of keeping up with current political and economic events. So when there was a story about cloning sheep, we would discuss the economic possibilities of genetic research and political ethics of governing scientific progress. 1992 was an election year and most of the magazines through the fall semester were packed with nothing but stories about George Bush, Bill Clinton and Ross Perot. But the November 23, 1992 issue of Newsweek, featured a tiny blurb, a source of levity among more dramatic social stories:

*About "The Naked Guy," otherwise known as Cal-Berkeley sophomore Andrew Martinez. The young man routinely walks through campus and attends classes stark naked, except for a peace sign around his neck, sandals, a backpack-and, on chilly days, a strategically placed bandanna. The Naked Guy-that's what everyone calls him-says he's showing how sexually repressive society is.*

The blurb was accompanied by a little photograph of Martinez walking down the sidewalk wearing nothing but a bandana tied around his waist. I had no idea how to process this audacious defiance of moral decency as well as such disregard for the sanctity of keeping one's private parts private. For the sake of civility the picture showed him concealed by a handkerchief, which was risky enough, but most of the time he doesn't even have that? I fantasized about this for weeks, fascinated by his exposed body and offended by his lack of inhibition. If he had been older it might have been easy to write him off as a dirty old pervert, but Andrew Martinez was nineteen, only two years older than me. If he had been fat and ugly it might have been easy to dismiss him as a freak just looking for attention, but he was extraordinarily handsome and muscular.

We never discussed Martinez in class, probably because he was not considered Global or Economic. He certainly wasn't presented that way, for despite the serious

controversies his story raised in my own moral sphere. The media barely threw him a nod, and when they did it was presented as a sort of joke, some sort of oddity.

Nick's thighs moved back and forth with a rhythm just slightly faster than my pulse. There were parts of the body that simply weren't meant to be seen outside of the holy sanctity of marriage. To acknowledge the area between the lower waist and upper thigh seemed dirty somehow.

In the 1940's William Sheldon started his study in Somatotyping – a “science” that considers measurements of the body to determine physical, emotional and mental aptitudes, as well as behavioral tendencies and longevity. His study was primarily concerned with the male form, and shows strong intentions on determining keys to masculinity. In all of his extensive research, which included measurements and photographs of over 4,000 men, he never documented or measured the penis. His book, “The Atlas of Man” features photographs of the nearly 1400 “specimen,” each figure completely naked except for a veil over the genitals for the sake of decency, and a blindfold for anonymity.

After high school I attended a non-denominational School of Missions in England where I hoped to strengthen my spiritual foundation before entering the faith-testing secular environment of art school. This program was structured to immerse Christians of all ages to the missionary lifestyle in both urban and exotic environments. Fearful that this might be my only experience abroad, I was devoted to capturing every moment for posterity in a journal. I recorded as much as I could with utmost sincerity, completely enchanted by my freedom to express and explore emotions, unfettered in this private and safe place. Without even realizing it, emotional indulgence consumed my journal, focusing on internal thoughts and feelings more than actual experiences and locations.

*While Foucault's disciplinary institutions (school, hospital, prison, factory) are objects of state, municipal or corporate control, the modern home presents itself as a locale for “private” experience: private property, private leisure and private sexual and familial life. This sense of privacy is epitomized by the sealed-off space of the bathroom, lodged at the core of the home: the bathroom door can be locked even against other family members.*

*“Hygiene, Cuisine and the Product World of Early Twentieth Century America,” Incorporations, Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, Crary and Kmintner, NY: zone 6, 1992*

*For there was a tabernacle made; the first... which is called the sanctuary; And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all... Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people.*

*Hebrews 9:1-7*

My journal became my inner sanctuary, my bathroom at the center of the house. It was a private arena, licensed ‘appropriate’ for the purging of thoughts and emotion. Rather than a storage space for documentation, it was a septic tank into which I constantly flushed emotional refuse. I had no other space that allowed me to begin recognizing the possibility that I harbored secret, unthinkable desires, except here: in the secluded pages of a little book that I carried around in a backpack with my Bible,

thousands of miles away from home, across an ocean, in the gloomy English countryside, locked behind the understanding that I was pursuing a greater awareness of faith.

### Missionaries: the Scrubbing Bubbles of the World

Over the course of our fall semester one of our frequent activities was street ministry. The diversity of the streets are still as rich today as when Benjamin first observed the flaneur and flaneuse. Our non-denominational mission was to provide everyone with the common denominator of religious faith, despite their vast social differences. Essentially by sharing the gospel of Christ we were cleaning the streets of moral filth.

In small groups we worked to develop strategies for approaching people on the street and engaging them in conversation. Through this casual interaction we hoped to determine people's spiritual position and share with them the message of salvation through Christ's love. There were several techniques we implemented, such as shoe-shining, caroling, prayer-walks, and drawing a crowd, from which we could single out individual people for one-on-one discussions about God. One of the most popular devices for drawing a crowd was the street skit, which involved a simple version of narrative mime, choreographed to music. Mime can effectively relay concepts without the inhibition of language barriers, and music attracts a crowd as well as heightening a sense of drama. Invariably these skits promoted the Salvation Message, illustrating the way sin separates us from God's love, but through the mercy of sacrifice (Christ's death) we can be reunited with the divine purpose and eternal life. The ToyMaker Sketch and the Painter Sketch were classics, shared among hundreds of missionary bases around the world. Through the repetitive nature of street ministry, skits tend to become a little stale after performing the same routine several times a day, several days a week. So new skits are constantly being created, still conveying the Salvation Message, but incorporating the personal creativities of the individual small groups performing them.

Nic Lark and Eric Thompson each ended up at the School of Missions through events that some might describe as accidental and others might describe as part of God's mysterious but divine plan. While they both exhibited Christian-ish beliefs, it seemed as though neither of them had signed up for the program through his own inspiration or initiative. Eric was a charismatic globe-trotting son of a wealthy Texan doctor. He enrolled in the school as an alternative to returning home from a summer in Nairobi. Nic was a cunning art-school graduate who seemed to be using the program as leverage to get hired by a prestigious but religiously conservative design firm. Together they formed a fast friendship that struck a slight but distinct rebellious stance against the legalistic tendencies of the school's leadership. They adhered to the policies and purposes of the program, without totally committing to its cause. I was completely enamored with Eric and Nic, individually and together. They were a few years older than me, and much more experienced in the ways of the world. Coupled with my unacknowledged sexuality this heightened my infatuation but also created an impossible gap between me and them. Looking back, I am convinced that Nic understood I was gay while everyone else was willing to go along with my denial.

No one in our group but Eric could have conceived the plunger skit, but I credit its irreverent subversiveness to Nic's wit. Eric would pull his shirt up over his head, exposing his muscular Texan torso (this alone was enough to draw a curious crowd),

and suction a plunger to his smooth washboard stomach. With the seasoned showmanship that comes from being the youngest of seven siblings, Eric would strut around in a circle with a perverse smirk, plunging his stomach as if he had discovered a new form of sexual pleasure. After a moment or two of bliss he would realize that the plunger was stuck, and he would recruit Nic's help in trying to remove the offending device. And for several minutes the two would explore many outrageous positions that might provide enough leverage or force to remove the plunger. Through persistence and slapstick, the plunger would not budge. Finally Nic would remember that prayer is the solution for every problem, and would kneel down and invite Eric to pray with him. Eric would finally kneel and pray, and (by flexing his abs a certain way) the plunger immediately released its grip and fell away.

Eric's exposed chest initially created some amount of controversy with the leadership because of the amount of skin he had to show in order for the plunger to stick. But the skit was funny and an effective crowd generator, and most importantly it did contain the Salvation theme, so they let it pass. I have no doubt that seeing one man grabbing and pumping another man's phallus raised some concerns among the leaders, but to make such an observation would have been indecent, even perverse. Since the skit ended with prayer saving the day, it wasn't worthy of censorship or scrutiny. Sometimes a plunger is just a plunger.

*Even the University of California at Berkeley, birthplace of the Free Speech Movement, has its limits. The quiet insistence of Andrew Martinez, a.k.a. the Naked Guy, on attending classes and strolling on campus in the nude finally ran afoul of both Berkeley's rules and politically correct culture.*

*Martinez, 19, began appearing au naturel last September, having led a campus "nude-in" to protest social repression. Campus police arrested him, but the county prosecutor refused to prosecute, concluding that nudity without lewd behavior was not illegal. The university then banned nudity. Martinez persisted, until some female students charged that his behavior constituted sexual harassment. That did it. "Yes, we're a bastion of free expression," a university spokesman explained. "But first and foremost we're a bastion of higher education."*

*Time Magazine, Feb. 8, 1993*

It wasn't simply nudity that created such a scandal for Andrew Martinez. It was the exposure of his penis. Had Martinez been an attractive young female there would have still been scandal, but of a presumably different nature, and it is highly unlikely that the situation would have ended in expulsion.

For my outreach trip in the spring I selected Albania as my mission field. I joined a small team with eight other people to spend ten weeks in this little Eastern European country located directly north of Greece. In 1994, when I was there, the country had only been out from under communist control for four years. Everywhere we went, the landscape was littered with little concrete domes, like grey igloos baking in the heat of the Mediterranean countryside. There was no specific order to these tiny structures – they did not all face a certain way, nor were they strategically aligned for any particular defense. They were not large enough inside to stand up without stooping, nor were they enclosed on all sides, so they could not be renovated into any practical living space. They had once served as a reminder of the threat of imminent invasion when ruling forces convinced the masses that Albania was the height of technological prowess, the

envy of the entire world. In actuality they were cut off from the entire world, not realizing that they were decades behind standards of “progress.” After the fall of Communism, they were humiliated to realize that they had the lowest economy on the European market, and instead of being a global leader, their country was hardly recognized at all. There was no attempt to remove or relocate the little bunkers, and they remained everywhere – monuments to having been veiled from the rest of the world for so many years.

In a December 1992 interview with the Daily Cal, Andrew Martinez said the publicity had caught up with him and he felt increasingly strained by the attention. "I'm stuck with this 'Naked Guy' thing," he said. "It's kind of depressing that that's all I'm known for." During an unpublished interview in 1993, Martinez had this to say about his publicity, "... I get very tired of being the center of attention and it's really wearing me down. Being the center of attention is maybe OK every once in awhile, but it's like headlines all the time: 'Naked Guy goes to go get a drink,' 'Naked Guy walks into a pub.' You know, I just, I think it sucks. I'd rather just live normally and blend in like I did before." His publicity came from his attempts to normalize something that he took for granted and treated as no big deal. His statement-making became a spectacle, isolating him rather than integrating his cause into the mainstream.

*Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.  
And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom;  
and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.  
Matthew 27:50-51*

It seems that resolution cannot happen without sacrifice. To remove a veil requires some sort of compensation. A balance is required for opening the inner-most sanctuary and letting loose the most sacred.

Returning to the United States after my time at the School of Missions I was troubled to look back at my journals and read how much I had recorded about my feelings for Eric and Nic. Page after page of the same emotional dribble – very little about the things I did, and the things I saw, but constant indulgence in how unreciprocated I felt my emotional investments were in these friendships. Seeing it on paper was even more embarrassing, because the particular names ceased to matter, whether it was Eric or Nic, the pattern was impossible to ignore, and dozens of names from high school, junior high, and middle school could have been plugged in just as easily: Jonathan, Josh, Brock, Aaron, Shane, David, Nick, Troy, Chad, Brian... My interest in these males was what I should have been harboring for companionship with the ladies had I been the healthy All-American boy that I liked to think I was. In my journal I wrestled with how my emotional obsession for these male friendships interfered with my faith, but never acknowledged what this obsession actually meant. My insistence in maintaining the self-perception of “normal” blinded me to the sexual obsession that was walking hand-in-hand with my emotions. Understanding on a horrified, subconscious level that my feelings were very sexual, I did my best to exclude myself from what I understood to be “gay.” Heterosexual normative power was undeniable – even without the language to describe it as such, and to admit that I was excluded from that identity was crushing. I was betrayed by my desire, and my desire was an unshakeable part of me.

*“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;”*  
*Hebrews 10:19-21*

*After his days as the Naked Guy, Martinez spent the next decade bouncing among halfway houses, psychiatric institutions, occasional homelessness and jail, but never getting comprehensive treatment, his family said. His life ended in an apparent suicide Thursday morning.*

*Bryan Thomas, “Berkeley Icon Took It All Off For His Cause ‘Naked Guy’ Who Gained National Media Attention In 1990s Dead in Apparent Suicide,” Daily Cal, May 25, 2006*

*On Jan. 10, he {Martinez} was arrested after a fight at a halfway house where he was living and charged with two counts of battery and one count of assault with a deadly weapon. He was in maximum-security custody in Santa Clara County Jail in San Jose.*

*Carolyn Jones, San Jose Chronicle, May 21, 2006*

Mental illness, whether as a result or cause of his over-publicized identity, was not recognized, not treated, and he suffered accordingly. Very little else was brought to public attention about his demise, or his life since getting expelled from Berkeley.