

The vaginas that appeared on my face

Marcelo Garbine

This business of always thinking too much, being lost in my own world of thought, it costs me way too much. There is only a little time left over for me to take care of the basic tasks of everyday life, like keeping my house clean, having a beer, saying hi to my neighbors, and taking a shower.

I was getting changed to go give a talk somewhere one day when I noticed that there was not a single damn pair of clean underwear in the drawer. My house is dark, because the burned-out lamps don't get replaced. Often I find myself sitting on the toilet, swearing when I am surprised to find that the stock of toilet paper has run out. A single devouring thought takes over my entire being: if God took such great care to design such a perfect human body, why the hell didn't he just go a tiny bit farther and give us intestines that could make feces with a better consistency, rubbery, maybe, that would not make a mess?

And what can I possibly say about such a complicated task as shaving? What? Not complicated, you say? It can be annoying, but tasks that are easy for everyone else are incredibly complicated for me.

My beard is really thick and grows too fast, which is why I've gotten into the habit of contracting this job out to third parties. I have completely lost my ability to maneuver a Gillette.

They say nothing is healthy in excess. In my experience, this applies to dedication to the "big things" like reflection, composition, and creation. And maybe it also applies to more modest efforts, like shaving.

A barber is a very useful specialist. Thanks to this person, I avoid the disgrace of having to display a collection of razor slits resembling vaginas all over my face every time I try to exercise a skill I haven't quite mastered yet: expertly maneuvering a razor blade. But I just need the barber to be a barber: no going overboard and being a barbarian, or worse, a butcher.

Fifteen or twenty dollars is nothing. I'd pay fifty for a shave. If this kind of professional existed, I would even pay for somebody to brush my teeth.

When I was in school for economics, I learned that difference between the fifty bucks I would willingly pay for someone to mow my face and the fifteen or twenty they actually charge me is called the consumer surplus.

Since I always look on the bright side, when I pay my barber, I don't feel like I'm spending twenty dollars. I remember the consumer surplus, and the way I see it, I am gaining eighty (I hope my barber isn't reading this). So, I am killing two politically-correct euphemisms with a single barb: my baby face is saved from an invasion of vulvas created by my own inept hands, while at the same time I am making eighty bucks. Woohoo! It may be a silly thing to be happy about, but at least I admit it.

The problem is not paying for this service, no matter how much it costs. The question is, what do I get in return for my hard-earned money? And the reality is sad: no matter how much we pay, it is very hard to find a skilled technician, in any area, who leaves us feeling that we've spent our money well.

Employees in those hotels we always stay at, and think we are going to get a little respect, not just because we are paying, but because we go there all the time, those employees are rude.

It doesn't matter that I have stayed there at least ninety times over the last three years. The maid will knock on the door exactly at noon to ask me if I'm going to get a move on or if I am going to pay for the night. And there's no point in arguing. It makes it worse. Pointless stress, no sir.

One time the woman working the desk at a hotel where I used to stay regularly wagged her finger at me and scolded me for coming in with dirty shoes.

"I wasn't paying attention to my dirty shoes, sorry if I made work for you. Please, forgive me. But with all respect, you don't need to yell at me! After all, it's not like I'm staying here for free, I'm a paying guest, and this room is expensive!"

She looked at me sarcastically and said,

"Ha, ha, ha. You have no idea what expensive means, dahling." I don't know if she was trying to sound like a Boston Brahmin or Joan Rivers, but she was trying to out-snob me.

This lack of return on money we spend, dreaming of getting good service, seems to be a widespread misfortune.

Like when you are at some rest stop on the highway and want to have a miserable burger and a warm coke (no ice! machine out of order!) but the wretch behind the counter won't let you pay with your debit or credit card, claiming that you have to spend at least twenty dollars, you swear you will never step foot in that lowlife craphole again. But over time, I've noticed that I've made

this promise about dozens of places where I have been chased out, at no extra charge.

So there we have it, the unhappy dilemma: do I starve, or do I break my promise to myself and go crawling back to that same craphole, tail between my legs, and put up with the smirking clerk with his crossed arms, looking down at me like he's glad to see me back here, begging him to sell me a hamburger and paying in cash.

Keeping this in mind, it is clear that a barber's services would be no exception. Harold was the barber closest to my house. He was an old man, almost 80, who was just starting to show the effects of Parkinson's disease. It's not that I was crazy, going to a place like this... but if I didn't have the time to even go to the supermarket and regularly spent an arm and a leg doing my shopping at the little bakery around the corner from my house, do you think there is any chance I would look around for a better barber? This is what I've got, and I'm sticking to it.

So I wanted to get rid of the stuffed animal that had sprouted all over my cheeks and the surrounding area.

"Harold, can I get a shave?"

"What can I do for you, sonny?"

"HAROLD, CAN I GET A SHAVE?"

"Aaaaah... I hear you."

Harold rolled up his sleeves, did his best to straighten up his stooped back, and raised his terrifying straight razor up high. And this is the part when I started to hear the Alfred Hitchcock music playing in the background. Was this old fart going to stick the damn thing in my eye? And then Harold brought down the axe, uh, I mean, the razor.

He crooked his neck back and stuck out his tongue, raised the razor above his head and brought his hand down with a whoosh and then, yikes.

He could have taken a wad of fluff off my face, but what did he do? He took it off with the skin too. My terrified eyes desperately did not want to see that scene, but Harold had no pity, he granted no mercy, and down came the blade again, whoosh, and yikes!

The sound of the blade moving downward sounded like something out of Loony Tunes, when the coyote goes over the cliff. And with it came one more slice on my face.

Harold might be old, senile, crippled, and half dead, but he was not a bad guy. Seeing the fear on my face, he used all his senile psychology, overcame his catatonic state, and tried to distract me by asking what I thought about the election (this was 2000, and George Bush had just won the presidency, at least according to some).

Considering that Harold was just slightly older than God, and feared that God just as much as he hated pinko commie hippies, I would be crazy to comment that I was not exactly thrilled with Bush's election and Al Gore's loss.

After all, Gore had a lot going for him, in my eyes; he had the youth, he was an environmentalist, hell, the man invented the internet.

In my defense, I had no idea that for years to come we would say the name "Al Gore" when we wanted to refer to someone who doesn't know how to have fun or has no sense of humor. Or that he didn't invent the internet. I wanted to say that the election had been stolen from a really forward-looking thinker, who went to Princeton with Tommy Lee Jones. But I was not that crazy.

And if Harold was already slicing me without provocation, imagine what he would do if I told him that even Robert de Niro had wanted Al Gore to win.

"Harold, I think it is great that Bush was elected, but I'm a little more concerned with the scars that you're leaving on my face."

"You're bleeding like a pig, but that's normal. The scars will go away, sonny. I got hit by a car and I got this scar here, but it's almost gone now."

"How long ago was that, Harold?"

"Almost thirty years ago, sonny."

"Harold, here is a hundred bucks, let me up, for the love of God!"

And so it was thanks to Harold that I found myself getting excited in front of the mirror, like a narcissist, looking at all these protruding vaginas that were sprouting up on my face.

What I had tried to prevent, by not dealing with my own beard and hiring an expert, happened anyway.

I decided to relax and go with it, since I was basically screwed.

And really, truly, I tell you this was good for something: soon after this traumatic episode, I had to travel to participate in a course. Since I was in a serious relationship at the time, and I'm an extremely loyal guy, that trip was a long eight-day dry spell. But even so, every time I went to the bathroom, I could look in the mirror and take pleasure in the seven vaginas Harold had left on my face.

And that occasion, I even wrote a little rhyme to amuse myself.

I don't remember it now, but it definitely involved slits and tits. It was just me, doing my own face in the mirror, in that sleazy hotel bathroom. But it was great.

“No, don't stop! Don't stop! Aaah!!”

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