



VOLUME 11 ISSUE 2

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The International Journal of

Critical Cultural Studies

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THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CRITICAL CULTURAL STUDIES
www.thehumanities.com

First published in 2014 in Champaign, Illinois, USA
by Common Ground Publishing LLC
www.commongroundpublishing.com

ISSN: 2327-0055

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Social Languages of the Skin

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Abstract: Visual imagery has merged with philosophical structures to build the scale of a non-written language in which thoughts are metaphorically transferred beyond the brain's barriers in a series of texts that allow the exercise of a daily conversation; these are physical forms that contain vivid visual representations, and the whole is a semantization of the body. The signs of the skin and of the body and their grammatical derivations achieve a loyal semblance of the ideas that they represent; they are therefore considered iconic forms of which metaphoric typology and intrinsic beauty are elements that one must stop and reflect upon, because they are very important accounts of human nature and human socialization through body language. This article is based on the principles of hermeneutics. While theory on the phenomenon of understanding, hermeneutics has integrated a number of models, without systematic implications of the methods of the natural sciences if they are to make valid or appropriate to approach the objects of knowledge rules, however, these actions do not complete the generic theoretical reflection on the act of understanding and interpreting texts, it is not hermeneutic. (Schökel 1994, 16) Hermeneutics express prior conceptualization of mediation of meaning, but the exercise of interpretation is based on the hermeneutical principles. The previous interpretations is precisely the sign of his character to be. As constitutive and certainly decisive element of interpretation, which itself is one with being here, shares his character of being: being – possible, a tangible and concrete being-possible which varies according to the factually according the situation to which is directed the hermeneutic dialogue. (Heidegger 1999, 35) Hermeneutics is the framework from which the possibility of interpreting the visual arts. Interpretation is present, is based on multiple media manifestations of graphic messages on their references and modifications of visibility and behavior; hermeneutics well considered it will be daily and will vary in their procedures under the terms of apprehension of the world, context, characteristics and intentions.

Keywords: Philosophy of the Body, Social Languages, Sign, Skin

Introduction

Visual imagery has merged with the linguistic structure to shape the scale of a non-written language in which thoughts are metaphorically shifted beyond the brain's barriers in a series of texts that allow the exercise of a day to day conversation; these are physical forms that contain vivid visual representations and the whole is a semantization of the body.

The skin coats the surface of the human body shaping and covering with a specific natural appearance the mucous membrane of the intestine, the urethra, the mouth, the nose, the eyes. Its thickness is diverse depending on the specific region; for example, it is a lot denser on the heel of the foot and a lot thinner in the facial area. Its color also varies depending on the specific area, but it especially varies according to the individual's race [...] the skin has several folds [...] depending on the contractions of the muscles that hold it, on the manner in which it is articulated, and on the possibility of wrinkles [...] it has two parts: a deep one called dermis and a second surface called epidermis [...] (Lombardini 1923, 3-5)

Body as a Sign

The signs of the skin and body and their grammatical derivations achieve a true semblance of the ideas that they represent, and are therefore considered, according to Sara Taub (2010, 2/228), iconic forms of which metaphorical typology and intrinsic beauty are elements that one ought to pause and reflect on, these being important accounts of human nature and its socialization through body language.

Didier Anzieu (1995, 25-26) classifies the roles of what he calls the skin-ego:

1. Consistency: for thoughts, density and weight.

2. Contenance: to keep thoughts together.
3. Constancy: to establish a barrier of representations that protects the spirit from overflowing.
4. Significance: to set the ideas through signs that allow differentiating, transcribing and communicating them.
5. Concordance: to establish systems of coherence among the judgments.
6. Individuation: to reflect on the personal arguments that emerge and stick out from a common background.
7. Energization: to release the strength to reason.
8. Sexualization: to conceive and understand erotization.

Each of these roles can be considered a print left by the spirit throughout the prehistory of the human species: the conquest of balancing on two feet; the nudity of skin due to loss of speed; the development of manual comprehension that involves the acquisition of transformation schemes; the invention of communication codes, the consensuality that is given by the clan's union [...] (Anzieu 1995, 29)

The doctrine of sign arbitrariness, attributed to Saussure, has maintained its influence beyond linguistics. The connection between the shape of a word and its meaning has been considered one of the fundamental properties of language. These symbolic shapes, which are no longer restricted to the physical need for referents, are what allows us today to speak from a viewpoint by which iconic shapes are unlimited and their meanings can be manifested in diverse sophisticated or abstract forms that break the barriers of imitation and mimicry among other causes thanks to the process of cultural transference, which some authors refer to as transculturation.

Here, the skin, as a symbolic surface, represents the key piece of the transculturation process, an essential elements of connection, a single relief that constitutes the body and its constellations; that is, an erogenous zone, of physical and ritual contact, where multiple metamorphoses are produced [...] we are aware that entering the depths of the skin means reaching the body, therefore, concepts such as body and skin will often be symbolically bound.

At the same time, this approach proposes the body's representation from a social perspective, the manner in which corporal perception varies among the different spheres of society and how this variation is being reflected in contemporary artistic representations. (Martínez Rossi 2011, 35-36)

Body Language

An important discovery in the recognition and development of body language is the identification of signs that combine metaphor with iconicity. The conceptual metaphor is the constant and consistent application of a basic conceptual area so as to discover another, perhaps less evident one; multiple abstract concepts such as emotions, ideas, personal interactions, etc., are incorporated to the body image in a concrete activity or manifestation. Anger can be manifested as a sensation of fire in the abdomen or as explosions, affection can be shown as closeness of the joints, authority is shown with the weight of a limb, to name a few of Taub's examples (2010, 4).

Iconicity and metaphors integrate a body geography that can be described through mental letters. The cognitive models of language are particularly suitable to describe the networks of the social language of the skin and body, strongly sustained by the universal properties of human knowledge; the ability to establish concepts and to associate them with visual and kinetic images – many of them universal –, occasionally simplifies the determining factors of this social

language and places them in specific body parts and movements so as to codify them. All of this is part of the type of brain, body and experiences that we have in the midst of our human condition.

[...] most humans do not have a full consciousness of their body, except when it is bothering them [...] it is not by chance that they suffer from corporal inexpressiveness [...] that they manifest rigidity as a consequence of the concatenation of fixed habits [...] we do not wish to imply that these individuals are incapable of feeling [...] they are too limited by their attitude to express it corporally [...] (Stoke 1991, 15)

The arguments of linguistics, the resources of conceptual maps, the semantics scene as a prototype theory, and gestural rhetoric, allow representing the types of iconic imagery and analogous ideas that are associated with visual images, both spatially and kinesthetically, in a dynamic that, according to Hyvernaud, at times seems to destroy existence, even if this is not so, because we start all over again.

[...] I recognize the smell of leather and army woolens [...] once again I feel the slimy hand on my flesh. I turn back into that naked man, his clothes at his feet, a man who is cold, ashamed of his bloated belly and scrawny legs [...] toward my skin, toward all those brick-colored, tobacco colored, salad-colored skins, toward all that is inside skins, toward all the blood that flows under skins, toward useless skins, toward skins that have no other use or justification than that of ensuring triumphant permanence in the world [...] (Hyvernaud 2004, 24 / 137)

Iconicity – one of the fundamentals of the social languages of the body and the skin –, is associated with the capacity to associate sensorial and perceptual images with concepts, to simplify them and create analogs using the same resources as other languages, which are likewise constructed based on links between abstract and tangible dominions, to establish their metaphoric and iconic lexicon.

Capturing the passage from one form to another, establishing the moment in which a metamorphosis, a recreation is produced, is obscene. To declare a secret is to destroy it. The result is the emblem, the hierophany that the artist allows us to see at the end of the creative process.

Recreating – creating anew from existing elements – is one of the possibilities of art and it is a process that is linked to hybridization, polymorphism, transmutation and synthesis.

The changing form of hybridism and of polymorphism – a humid quality inherent in the world of marine deities (Frontisi-Ducroux 2006) – allows what is different, disparate, incongruent or apparently incompatible, to combine and to present itself in a credible manner under a new reality.

In hermetic art, the transmutation of base metals into gold was one of the properties of the red philosopher's stone or *lapis sapientiae*, but alchemists were not interested in just any gold, *aurum nostrum non est aurum vulgii*. They were searching for a different treasure; they desired a superior and transcendent gold.

Thirteen is the number of death and birth, of property and inheritance, of society and family, of war and treaties, and in these thirteen epigones, Bernardo turns into a *Magister operis umbrae*. Master builder of shadows. Builder of fragments with fragments, of suggestive anatomies of red vitreous reflections, of human riddles. Glances that listen, and where everything is what is seen and nothing is as it seems.

Alchemist of the male body mends the beautiful pieces that are separate and which were previously dismembered in the bacchanal ecstasy – a ritual of delighted fury, rupture, and physical pain –, that creation demands.

Skin and Society

The skin; that which is on top, that intimate thing that we carry on the outside, which Paul Valery said presents itself to us hinted, metamorphosed. Apollo would reclaim the skin of the satyr Marsias when beating him with ire, and King Astyages in Armenia that of Saint Bartholomew. Both versions, so similar in their baroque representations, refer perhaps to arcane rituals of fertile rebirth, or perhaps, as suggested by Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and the Florentine humanists of the 15th Century, they are symbols of dispossession, purifications obtained through the elimination of the exterior ego conducing to gnostic encounter with perfect love.

Pure or not, the skin is the cover of our whole; it is what protects us, what separates us from others, and at the same time, it is the bearer of our beauty. A beauty that transforms everything, because we do not have the ability to penetrate the inside of the body with our vision, as it was believed that lynxes had.¹

Bernardo Tejada recreates himself in the skin, he manipulates and transforms it, and he shows it to us, but leaves to us the huge imaginative task of pretending what we see, presuming the rest; he gives us no certainty, and following the rules of enigmatography, his works become enigmas. They involve conceptually the same rhetorical characteristics as riddles, *obscuritas* and *ambiguitas*. Darkness to achieve the full vision of the work, and ambiguity in the interpretation by lacking all the visual information, and as in riddles, the enunciation, the external form, encloses the solution.

The light of gold is the light of the grace of the divine. Saints and blessed ones enjoy beautiful golden halos. Gold: *zahab* (bright yellow), which cabbalists place at the fifth Sefirah: Geburah, according to Cabbala. Creation is the greatest mystery that man is called upon to decipher, because although it is true that he himself is an integral part of it, he has the ability to overcome it, since his origins proceed from That which remains behind the veil of existence. (Levy 1945, w/o p.)

Therefore, according to Raquel Hernandez Pumarejo (Hernández 2008), from the canons of Vitruvius to the structures of Le Corbusier and his famous module, the constant has been the understanding of body languages that socially result in a display of everyday metaphors. This corporeal rhetoric is expressed based on morphological changes between childhood, youth and old age.

The body suffers modifications that alter its physiology and appearance from the bottom of the organic whole. This way, each person is described based on his or her anatomical features, on the soma, and one of the singularities that most affect the psyche lie in the ectomorphy and the mesomorphy, that is, in thinness and obesity, the latter, a cause of marginalization of individuals. Jean Baudrillard comments in his text *Fatal Strategies*, that this condition has become a social character as saturated as it is empty, where the big picture of what is social and corporal is lost, integrating elements external to the body as foreign coatings, these are the onion layers of virtuality in the reality of life.

[...] these women, whose torso remains thus reduced to a state of support, are made of a superposition of who knows how many layers of silk or cotton, and were they to be stripped of their garments, the only thing that would remain, as in dolls, would be a ridiculously disproportionate rod [...] (Tanizaki 1994, 68)

In the social languages of corporeity, we find these lean skin or overflowing skin conditions, of which imagery is influenced by semantic fields that transcend the corporeal sphere and which

¹The penetrating vision of the lynx going through any wall, no matter how thick, was proverbial in the Middle Ages.

have created the industry of specialized nutrition along with a phenomenon that food psychologists Herman and Polivy call “cognitive restriction,” referring to the permanent control of food and the persistent observation of wants.

[...] it is an illness of civilization, a new “ascetic ideal,” a magical cult. We no longer eat, we make magic; we no longer see to our appetite, we balance lipids; we no longer cook, we make chemistry, eating has become a type of curse; guilt is permanent [...] (Joignot 2006, w/o p.)

Based on the above, individuals are faced with the phenomena of mirrors and social indexes of appearance that constantly transform looks and body language; sensitivity and the point of view of the senses, the body’s dominion and rhythm are altered in such a way that internal images or mental representations of the self, and visual images, that is, representations registered by vision are dissociated.

I dream of a new flesh. The atoms of this flesh adore each other [...] As it is insensitive to mirrors, no virus throbs in this flesh. It fulfills to perfection synthesis reactions between brain and bones, flesh and skin.

When we recover the skin’s splendor, we celebrate nights and days [...]

This disease is degenerative. It consists of destroying communicative tissue: contracting the skin (sensitivity to touch is lost), reducing visual focus (the space of the book that we read is reduced) [...] (Agur Meabe 2000, 18-51)

Metaphors lead to metamorphosis (Gómez Goyeneche 2006, 2-27).² Both currents develop a series of figures of symbolic identity, like myths, “of stories that are told as if they have taken place,” (Frontisi-Ducroix 2006, 16) which actually hide the physical identity, expressing the vulnerable aspects of sensitivity to everything corporeal and its ongoing struggle with social codes.

To the former soundness of the principle of identity we can now oppose the ductile nature of a new beginning: that of fragility [...] aware of the basic fragility of personal identity, as we are of the weakness that is inherent to collective identities. (Fernández Agis 2005, 250)

Conclusion

These tendencies generate – especially in western societies under the terms of civilization –, a search for new forms of corporal syntax in which the individual is fragmented in a way that cancels the whole, and an approach to his or her own body and to that of others is a type of friction where the skin plays a determining role as an element of information. In this process, outlines are mutilated, artifices are sought for texture and even colors are altered.

The skin variables thus become a sort of external effects that evoke emotional states and create a social response. The fragments achieve a reductionism of the form and resignification of the body, the skin becomes something similar but convincing, breaking the structure to publically exhibit disjointed pieces.

² Cf. “I see metamorphosis as a modification or as a transfiguration of a thing, animal or person into a different one, which establishes a transformation of identification, particularly in characters, as a consequence of the transgression of social norms.”

The Surma³ are the most prodigious decorators of the human body that can be found [...] they also deeply enjoy this slow metamorphosis through which their body becomes a work of art. Painting their skin is their most serious, most transitional and most necessary occupation [...] the strokes of color on skin express the most essential mysteries of evolution: language, the enigma in the relationship between humans [...] answers to a communication system. The Surma remind us of the culture of nature in the sense of mystery and show us how similar we are to other species and, at the same time, so different. [...] (Pacalet 2006, 188-202)

This takes place within the possible reaches of each stratus and achieves complete friction in public figures that are presented in mass media, perfectly retouched with specialized software, losing weight, wrinkles, deformities and acquiring glossiness, youth and public credibility, “we still have a need to be; we can mark our skin, but we do not wish to be marked by it, Nietzsche would tell us, referring specifically to youth.” (Fernández Agis 2005, 263)

³ The Surma, or Suri, are an African tribe estimated to have around 45,000 members. The Suri inhabit mainly the jungles of southwestern Ethiopia and a small enclave of South Sudan.

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The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal.

ISSN 2327-0055

