



## THE ADVERTISING IMAGE AS A CONTROL AND POWER TOOL. FROM THE INSISTENCE TO THE EDITION OF OUR OWN BODY.

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*"The society and culture of today print on man's psyche desires, needs and other conditions that force the search of beauty through physical manipulation."<sup>(1)</sup>*

The above quote introduces the issue of power relations -or micro-powers- as Michel Foucault defines them in *The eye of power*<sup>(2)</sup> (forces legitimized by the market interests), a concept that inherently has control over the body. Foucault argues that these power relations affect the body through mechanisms he defines as political technologies of the body, aim of which is to achieve a productive and subjected body able to generate profit.

Let's consider now the body becoming an object to study, functions of which are enhanced in order to achieve a greater productivity and effectiveness. It is a subject with an identity constructed following precise standards, an identity imposed by a set of forces or structures of power, the same that Foucault refers to.

The objectification and commodification of the body when advertising with images – perceived as a weapon of control and power- are able to establish norms and to instil into the viewer concrete desires and standards behaviours according to the market interests. Advertising images –which are generally manipulated by editing software- the alteration of reality goes unnoticed. The full integration of such images in the imaginary of advertising leads to the acceptance and the perception of this altered reality or hyper-reality as something real.

### **THE POST-HUMAN BODY**

The artistic proposals of the trends of Viennese actionism and body art developed over the 60s and 80s focused on the condition of human nature, social issues and to different ways of using the body in their contemporary era. Their practices were focused on the perception of the body as base and substance, and by treating its organic character and accepting its weariness and metamorphosis.

At the same time, in the field of "post humanism", a concept expressed in *A cyborg manifesto* by Donna Haraway (1985) to describe the nature of the human body –man's corporeal and organic mass was being modified. According to Haraway "The post-human refers to the mixture of the organic and the inorganic: the relationship between the body and all kinds of artificial fragments that form a cybernetic organism"<sup>(3)</sup>.

The post-humanist practices are no longer dealing with "reviewing on what lies beneath the skin or tapping into the unconscious, but instead they are wondering about the new experiences that modify and sculpt the body: from cosmetics, light food, aesthetic surgery or sex change and prostheses, to genetic manipulation, cloning and overcoming the body using computers and other practices that imply a contemporary way of inhabiting the world<sup>(4)</sup>." In other words, they insist on the modification of the human body's nature and its appearance.

Additionally, the bodies are "encrypted" -according to Daniela Ceccato- through various operatives<sup>(5)</sup>. "Assisted by fashion (and aesthetic medicine), the contemporary individual turned into an object, does nothing but shape its external appearance, although it differs from what feels inside"<sup>(6)</sup>.

The body obeys to the social pressure of reality's make-believe images, in this case images of the body itself, that work as achievable goals through activities shaping and modifying our body (physical exercise, beauty treatments, etc.).



## FROM THE POST-HUMAN TO THE BODY WORSHIP

Body worship is an aspect of the consumerism ideology that pushes people psychologically -and socially- to spend energy, time and money, in the attempt to achieve the ideal figure: the unreal perfect body.

The human body has gradually become a reality we can control and eventually modify in different aspects. By technological and scientific means (such as genetic engineering, dietetics, plastic surgery, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, physical education and sport), we can transform our body into a "biological simulation"<sup>(7)</sup>, a shifting virtual reality that changes<sup>(8)</sup> according to various criteria for health, beauty, wellness, etc.

In other words, the cultural needs that are eventually imposed by mass media, induce consumers to buy these "body technologies" available on the market in order to get closer to the archetypal image required by current western society and culture.

## THE BODY AS EXTERIOR REALITY AND AESTHETICS

Body worship indicates a persistent enthusiasm for the exterior appearance, health and the perfect function of the body, and the "recognition of the powers of a nurtured body, propitiatory powers of greater personal happiness, greater consideration and social success, of leadership over others, or of comforting sexual-sensual attraction, etc"<sup>(9)</sup>.

But after all, it is an aesthetic unreality, a beautiful and perfect body, an exalted body. A body considered as an aesthetic object.

"The bodies of advertising hide the passage of time and they offer a standard external image: The smooth, neat, hygienic, eternally young skin, a skin that is flat, plastic, homogeneous, standard, and impersonal. The bodies that are healthy, strong, vigorous,(...) ", far away from issues such as fragility, mortal nature or carnality, which are natural features of the body. "The aesthetic of the body is to eliminate all traces of animal nature on the human body, in order to reconstruct the body from new sensory elements, using cosmetics, diet, fitness centres, surgeries, etc., presenting the body according to an aesthetic pattern of the sporty man and the thin woman"<sup>(10)</sup>.

Taking into consideration the aesthetic norms ruling commercial advertising, as a result of the decontextualization of the image that these adverts produce, aspects like artificiality and simulation are revealed.

To address this issue, it is necessary to take in consideration the cultural aspects of simulation, a theme developed by the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard. "Simulation", according to Baudrillard, it is understood as a tool that replaces reality by its representation of it.

In other words, Baudrillard perceives the media culture as a generator of social consciousness that uses -through simulation- the hyper-reality, being more attractive and seductive, because it no longer reflects what is real, but instead it improves it.

## THE AESTHETICIZATION OF BODY WORSHIP

Taking into consideration the new conception on the body in the Internet age a particular imaginary and aesthetic is generated.

If the aesthetic evolution of modernity tended towards the leading edge to the disappearance of the body under various abstractions, the sixties witnessed its most radical recovery and with its entire physical and performing dimension becoming the mechanism to rethink the ways of perception and knowledge<sup>(11)</sup>.

Currently, mass media fill the world with images of seductive and perfect bodies, beauty models based on the idea of what healthy means.

With the emergence of the Internet, and the use of advertising imagery, the body is idealized, and as a reflection of its present is changing its appearance and meaning, turning into a simulation and taking its place, computer generated textures being just an example, providing a more intense pleasure although cold, distant and clean.

"Concepts like "reality", "hyper-reality", "simulation", "true", "false" [...] are increasingly recurrent within mass media shows (as well as the application of statements on the body) in a time when technology and the use of images are linked to commercialism"<sup>(12)</sup>.

Finally, the body, the object of this essay, has changed from wanting to be profitable into the post-human, and through the advertising culture it has become an aesthetic object and has managed to aestheticize the worship of that body.

1 ÚBEDA, Ma. (2006). *La mirada desbordada: El espesor de la experiencia del sujeto estético en el marco de la crisis del régimen escópico*. Tesis. Granada: Editorial de la Universidad de Granada. P. 156.

2 "El ojo del poder. Entrevista con Michel Foucault" en Bentham, J. *El Panóptico*. Barcelona: Ed. La Piqueta, Barcelona, 1980. Traducción de Julia Varela y Fernando Álvarez-Uría.

3 MEJÍA, I. *El cuerpo post-humano: en el arte y la cultura contemporánea*. México. Ed. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005. P. 27.

4 *Ibidem*. P. 40.

5 CECCATO, M. "Cuerpos encriptados: Entre el ser real e irreal" en *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación*. Num. 58, julio 2015.

6 *Ibidem*. P. 188.

7 Rovalletti, M.L. (1998) "La objetivación del cuerpo o el cuerpo como simulacro biológico", en Rovalletti, M.L. *Corporalidad. La problemática del cuerpo en el pensamiento actual*. Buenos Aires: Ed. Lugar. P. 368.

8 Lang, H., (1998) "El cuerpo como instrumento y objeto", en Rovalletti, M.L. *Corporalidad. La problemática del cuerpo en el pensamiento actual*. Buenos Aires: Ed. Lugar. P. 93

9 CALVENTE, M.R. (2010) "El cuerpo humano como objeto estético" en *A parte rei*, Revista de filosofía. Num. 72. Madrid: <<http://serbal.pntic.mec.es/AParteRei/calvente72.pdf>> [Consulta 04/08/2015] P. 2. 10 *Ibidem*. P. 5.

11 FERRARA, D. *El cuerpo humano entre el arte y los medios de masas en el tránsito del siglo XX al XXI*. Tesis. Valencia: Ed. Universidad Politécnica de Valencia. P. 11.

12 *Ibidem*. P. 284.