

INTRODUCTION: CORPO, LITERATURA, ARTES E MÍDIA/ BODY, LITERATURE, ARTS AND MEDIA

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From the most remote times and for a long time, the human body and mind were considered two distinct organs that had different and independent functions. In other words, the human being was seen from a dualist perspective: physical and mental, body and mind, material and substance. Corporeality was taken as a mere support of the reasoning capacity and it had a precultural status. This view was common in multiple areas of knowledge such as the medical, psychological, anthropological, philosophical, and many others. As a result of the overgrading of reason, the role of emotions was disdained for centuries. Only in the last two centuries the body has been regarded as a semantic field, a space and a topos for the elaboration of new theoretical perspectives, particularly concerning the relation between corporeality and the psychic reality of the emotions, traditionally relegated to secondary relevance in relation to human beings' rational capacities. Foucault's work¹ stands out in this respect as far as he contends that the body is a discursive construction and, as such, it presents particular modes of inscriptions that

command different kinds of behavior and practices. Under the conditions of disciplinary normalization of the body at work in the Western world, power produces the subject's desire and pleasure, and that is why the body becomes a privileged target of the interrelations between knowledge and power.

Produced through and in history, the body situates oneself in the world. We are not a *ratio* inserted in a body: we are our own body. It is from and through the body and its intruding affective force on our desires and emotions that we can make some sense of the reality around us. As a platform for the human experience, the subject has thus been refigured as a corporeal being, and the body, no longer an inert entity or a danger to the operation of reason, has been considered as the center of perspective, insight and agency. The so-called "natural body" has been dismantled, and Judith Butler has joined in Foucault's claim that there is no "natural body" that pre-exists its cultural inscription.² The saying "Just because we don't have the technology to visualize the mind-body connection doesn't mean it's not real"

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(Mercola) seems to summarize postmodern thinking on the body as a signifying medium or, as Elizabeth Grosz defines it, “a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private (ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, affects)” (9).

According to Daniel Lieberman, “[w]e live in paradoxical times for our bodies” (ix). In our days it is already acknowledged that we frequently experience emotions directly in our body, which means a necessary relevance must be applied to the study of contemporary thought and of its artistic representation and mediatic expression. Furthermore, some relevant reasoning on the body and its relationship with art and the media taken from the official site of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA, in New York City)³ lead our thoughts towards the notion that the human body is central to how we understand the constitution of social and cultural identities along gender, sexuality, ethnicity and racial lines. Also, alterations in the body may point at alignments with or insurrection against social conventions. The 1960s and 1970s were a time of social upheavals in the United States and Europe. The most significant, moving ideas at the time were (and still are) the fight for equality for women beginning with a new consciousness of their own bodies in terms of sexuality, maternity, reproductive rights. From then up to nowadays, artists, art historians, feminists and literary critics, among others, have investigated how images in Western art and the media perpetuated idealizations or debasements, especially, of the female form. The body is today depicted through a great variety of lenses in multi/inter/disciplinary fields.

The range of articles presented in this volume—*Corpo, Literatura, Artes e Mídia/Body, Literature, Arts and Media*—attests to the vigor of interdisciplinary work in the exploration, from a variety of theoretical perspectives and interpretative insights, of the body as a sign, a function of discourse and an aesthetic image, a presence that permeates the fields of literature, of art and of the media, all cultural mediated forms subject to description and interpretation. The rich interplay among the texts makes up a mosaic of analogies, dialogues, confluences and differences that highlight the centrality of the body as a purveyor of social, cultural

and political meanings in different geographical and historical contexts.

It is important to point out that there is no radical difference between the visual and the textual as much as they constitute aesthetic modes of production that define fields of imaginary representations that, in principle, do not bear on reference outside itself but nevertheless resonate with meanings which can be identified on cultural, social and political grounds. Erwin Panofsky was a pioneer in establishing the analogy between literary and painterly meanings in his classical work *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, published in 1927, in which he argued that image is textuality and vice versa. In fact, in Greek language and culture, the word *graphein* means to write and to paint. In the Western tradition there is a long history of art and literature conceived under the dominant concept of mimesis, a concept that has often been misinterpreted as imitation, in the sense of the representation of a reality as a given. Mimesis is rather a matter of an illusion of the real as it depends on rules, conventions and rhetorical codifications. The concept of representation that gained momentum in its association with nineteenth century realism was predicated on the assumption of linguistic realism that conceived language as a medium that reflects something prior to its emergence and thus provides access to the experience of the real.

Today, in the context of the linguistic turn of post-structuralism theoretical perspectives, the concept of representation has lost its long-standing prestige. However, it survives in studies of literature and art as a means to grapple with the intertwining of image, textuality and meaning. Stripped of its foundational essentialism, representation becomes a conduit of signs that inscribes language at the confluence of material processes, history, ideology and subjectivity. As Jean-Luc Nancy states in his *Corpus* (2000) there is no more ontology as such: ontology unveils itself as writing, and writing does not mean to show or prove a signification but signals a gesture to touch on meaning (18). Obviously the case of visual art is not reducible to the terms of writing, yet the fact that an image is readable in the sense of a meaning-making narrative, proves that it is a medium that allows cutting across the binary opposition between the verbal

and the visual. Such is the thesis advanced by Mieke Ball in her classical work *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word/Image Opposition* (1991) where she starts from the traditional critique of Rembrandt's aggressive/excessive realism, particularly in relation to his female nudes, to a thorough scrutiny of the images based on a difference between the voyeuristic gaze that constructs the female object based on the linguistic model of sender-oriented communication—to convey female beauty—and the glance-appealing work that inscribes the visual model of subjection. According to Bal, the paintings' narrative draw the female viewer to read the gaze and process its content by relating it to the verbal pre-text. But as one thinks one is reading, the visuality of the image imposes itself forcefully. Thus, verbal and visual forms of aesthetic production can neither be distinguished nor hierarchized. The body of evidence present in the articles that follow provide critical mappings of the ways the body is imagined, represented and reflected upon in visual and textual modes.

In "Corpo, linguagem e real: o sopro de *Exu Bará* e seu lugar na comunicação" [Body, language and the real: the breath of the *Exu Bará* and its place in communication], Florence Marie Dravet proposes a poetical methodology based on the body-thinking figure associated with the notion of *Exu Bará* to Afro-Brazilians and Africans *nagô* nation to advance an analysis of myths and language, forms of expression fueled by the breath that gives life to speech and gesture, in order to apprehend the semantic and sensorial meaning of the body and its role in communication. The analysis that seeks to convey a possible ontology converges pointedly to the interpretation of the geometrical representation of the body, couched on what the author qualifies as a philosophical-artistic conception that views the body as a distinguishing living presence in the interaction with its surroundings.

Enéias Farias Tavares, in "O corpo feminino e seus enigmas: a esfinge na pintura de Franz Stuck" [The female body and its enigmas: the Sphinx in Franz Stuck's painting], probes into the cultural imaginary of the female body by examining the association of the monstrous materiality of the female body with the demonization of woman, and discusses the assumption

that such representations have been central in Western culture, from the ancient Greek to Jewish-Christian traditions. From his reading of Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity* (1986), among others, Tavares builds up his argument on the relation of Oedipus and the Sphinx and offers a detailed and consistent analysis of the Sphinx theme present in three paintings by the German artist Franz Von Stuck, providing evidence of a subtle yet important change in the perception of the female body by the end of the nineteenth century.

José Carlos Felix and Juliana Cristina Salvadori in "A mortificação do corpo em *É isto um homem?* de Primo Levi" [The mortification of the body in *Is this a man?* by Primo Levi] present a poignant analysis of one of the most prominent narrative/testimony of the *Shoah*. Addressing the theme of the violated body in a narrative haunted by a traumatic real that exceeds representation and drawing from Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* and Giorgio Agamben's notion of "raw life", the authors focus on the body/writing by discussing the relation between violence, rationalization and the production of the inferior body through the logic of work by which the human becomes inhuman and the experience of horror is displayed in full scale.

In "Private affairs, public office: reading the body of Virgília in *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*", Kenneth David Jackson and Apsara Iyer draw on critical works by Amy Kaminsky (1993) and Karen Sanchez-Eppler (1993) as regards the constitution of the public space and the female body to offer an insightful and strong reading of female characterization in Machado de Assis' canonical novel. The question of public space versus private space and the relation between private intimacies and public office are points of departure to examine in depth the "significance of Virgília's body, as a suggestive tableau for a larger entity—the body politic" in the context of the dominant class structure where political maneuvers and success in ascending to public office often intersect with the roles and reputation of women, be the idealized wife or the mistress.

"A autorrepressão do desejo em *Marta*, de Medeiros e Albuquerque: uma análise deuleziana-guattariana do incesto" [The self-repression of desire

in *Marta*, by Medeiros e Albuquerque: a deleuzian-guattarian analysis of incest], by Franco Baptista Sandanello (Unesp/UFSCar) and Vanessa de Oliveira Temporal (UFSCar), develops a highly relevant subject as they rescue a Brazilian novel that was first edited in 1920. It deals with a theme that even today in the twenty-first century still is taboo, not only in literature but also in life: incest. The bold investigation of such a theme presents a rich theoretical support, for besides the *Anti-Oedipus*, by Deleuze and Guattari, the authors make use of notions by Marcuse, Foucault, Nietzsche, and Antonio Candido, among others.

In “O discurso político e o corpo na televisão: debate/combate” [Political discourse and the body on television: debate/fighting], Luciana Carmona Garcia Manzano (UNIFRAN) “seeks to analyze the electoral political discourse from senses inscribed on the body of the presidential candidates in the 2014 campaign during the television broadcast of the last debate aired by Globo TV, on 24 October”. The theoretical support associates principles from Discourse Analysis, based on Michel Pêcheux, with anthropological studies of imagery production, according to Hans Belting’s assumptions, and Michel Foucault’s notions concerning the social practices that point at meanings inscribed on the bodies. Her main goal is to think over how the political discourse inscribed in the body position of the candidates in television functions.

The obsession with the decomposition of the human corpse in the low Middle Age and its transposition into an aesthetic object in romantic gothic fictions is examined by Juliana Schmitt in her “O imaginário do cadáver em decomposição: das danças macabras ao roman-charogne” [The imaginary of the decaying corpse: from the dance of death to the *roman-charogne*]. Evoking pioneer scholars on the subject such as Johan Huizinga, Philippe Ariès, Michel Vovelle, the author traces the origins of macabre art by referring to manuscripts, paintings and samples of tombs’ sculptures and death chambers, makes observations about the emergence of the gothic genre and then probes into three narratives of the nineteenth century.

In “The pile of bodies in graphic narratives: variations on an image”, by André Cabral de Almeida

Cardoso (UFF), the theme is “a recurring image in graphic novels published from the 1980s to the present day: that of a pile of bodies”. The main text under analysis is “*Maus*, Art Spiegelman’s classic graphic novel on the Holocaust”. The bibliography that gives support to this study is up-to-date, a fact that enriches the investigation due to the increasing interest in graphic novels in Brazilian universities.

“Quando a carne se faz verbo: a emergência de significados pelo (e no) corpo” [When flesh turns into words: the emergence of meaning through (and in) the body], by Aline Aver Vanin (UFCSPA), recovers philosophical positions on the body-mind dichotomy. One of the most meaningful aspects of the article lies in the fact that the writer advocates “that it is through the body that most of the concepts emerge, especially those related to emotions”. The subject is developed within the field of Cognitive Linguistics.

“Biopolítica, biopoder e cuidado de si na campanha antitabagista das embalagens de cigarro” [Biopolitics, biopower and selfcare in anti-smoking campaign on cigarette packs], by Claudemir Sousa and Regina Baracuh, both from the Universidade Federal da Paraíba, “discusses the constitution of the smoker subject in anti-smoking campaigns present in the statements molded over the syncretic materiality of cigarette packs”. The methodology results from the combination of the theoretical support given by Discourse Analysis with Foucaultian’s concepts-notions of subject, governability, biopower, biopolitics and selfcare as analytical categories. Besides, the article includes Historical Semiology, by Jean-Jacques Courtine, in order to analyze the syncretic materiality of enunciation that dialogues with theoreticians such as Stuart Hall, who follows the paths of Cultural Studies, and is concerned with the discursive construction of identities. The authors are able to conclude that anti-smoking campaigns intersect medical, legal and aesthetic discourses.

“Beaten, broken and burnt—violence against the bodies of the female protagonists in three 21st century bestsellers written by women”, by Renata Kabke Pinheiro (UFPEL), focuses on the analysis of *Twilight* (2005), *The Hunger Games* (2008) and *Fifty Shades*

of Grey (2011), under the theoretical light of Critical Discourse Analysis. Her aim is to verify whether or not the discourses embedded in such kinds of violence perpetuate gender stereotypes, especially in literature.

“The performative force of bodies: affective realism in contemporary Brazilian Cinema”, by Alessandra Brandão and Ramayana Lira de Sousa, both professors at Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina, “traces the emergence of a younger generation of Brazilian filmmakers whose works bypass traditional themes in Brazilian cinema such as urban violence and historical revisionism to engage in post-identity politics avoiding narratives of nation, class and gender”. These films question the status of the image, and produce a productive and politically meaningful space between fiction and documentary. They aim at discussing the “Novíssimo cinema brasileiro” (the “Brand New” Brazilian Cinema), as well as the performative force of bodies in its affective realism. In Brazil, since the mid 1960s, this Brand New Cinema invests in authorial works, often organized around a group of friends or collectives, and gives special attention to small events, daily life and delicate bonds. They are modestly budgeted films that enjoy a limited commercial circulation, as for instance *O céu sobre os ombros*, directed by Sérgio Borges, and *Avenida Brasília Formosa*, directed by Gabriel Mascaro, among many others.

The articles presented in this issue of *Ilha do Desterro* foreground the important role of the body as a locus of intellectual insight into the workings of culture and of the articulation of critical subjectivities. In spite of conceptual boundaries between literature, visual art, media and advertisement, the ensemble of articles stage a narrative with clusters of meaning around a wide spectrum – the healthy, political, repressed, sick, monstrous, suffering, beaten, tortured, addicted, dead body – that inscribes the incommensurable figuration of a collective body, that of humanity itself.

Notes

1. See for this purpose *Microfísica do Poder* (1982) and *História da Sexualidade* (1988).
2. See for this purpose *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993).
3. See the site http://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/investigating-identity/the-body-in-art, consulted in 16 sept. 2015.

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