

Body Languages – Body Signs

The question about consciously and unconsciously readable languages or signs of the gender-oriented, sexually, ethnically, class-specifically etc. constituted body has in its many implications become a central topic of gender research, as well as the question about the body as sign. Bodily produced gestures, miming or attitude are again and again perceived or propagated as a "natural" sign system, but are however laid down and internalized in the context of socio-cultural constellations and traditions like other languages, too. If there is a heritage of ethnology feminist research can relate and has related to, it is the acknowledgement of basic differences in different cultures regarding their dealing with the body that at the same time has contributed to initiate the reflection of the historical differences within the "own" culture. The possibility of conceptualizing changes in relation to the body and not at least of the attributions within gender difference is closely related to it.

The question remains how the conscious and unconscious production of such "languages" is being realized. In what way are body concepts on different levels internalized and embodied for example in processes of identification with specific ideals? And in what way are they again used for the naturalization of power relations? (Phenomena like clothing, fashion, beauty ideals and fetishisms in art and media are substantially involved in the production of historically, politically, culturally and regionally differentiated power effects, too.)

In this chapter the question about those structures and scopes of action that constitute the body's "languages" and "signs" shall be raised as well as the question about the deviations and possibilities of its shifting. Here, attempts of contextualizing and situating the concepts are important – even if the contexts and "locations" of articulation might or should never become completely determinable.

Thus, attention must also not at least be focussed on the overlapping of different discourses relating to the body – such as medical and psychiatric, populationpolicy-related and colonial, technological and as well as artistic or also feminist discourses.

According to our opinion, such research requires international debates within a comparison of cultures that consider the different approaches and sign systems, thus trying to achieve a scope of understanding and evaluation.

In her essay Sigrid Schade summarizes the theoretical and methodical approaches that in the past twenty years have contributed to the central issue of gender research – the conception of the "construction" of body and gender. Psychoanalytical and discourse-historical concepts, in which body (images) could be thought about as "psychical reality" and as sites of individual as well as collective history, as places of disciplinary proceedings and lust represent the starting point for her approach to relate the concept of "representation" within a semiological approach of "body as text", that has been developed above all by the Anglo-American film and media theory and art criticism, to the model of discursive performativity of gender difference, that has been developed by Judith Butler in the 90s.

Sabine Broeck's paper "Will White Feminism Surrender the Default Position? Gender Studies and Whiteness" aims to raise the issue of whiteness in the debate of "what are the politics of gender studies"? One decisive factor to determine our "politics" is the set of ethical assumptions and of the preconceptions, whether consciously articulated or not, of our epistemologies, and/or methodologies. "Our" in this case addresses white colleagues in academia. Sabine Broeck argues that "we" will need paradigmatically different ethics of approaching globalized cultures because the subject position of "our" academia, even within gender studies, inspite of poststructuralist endeavors, has still widely remained the masterful and white default position. Sabine Broeck develops theses for such a new ethics.

"Engendered Bodies: Metaphors in Feminism" by Elena Casado-Aparicio is an attempt to re-think about the feminist subject in post-modern times analyzing figurations as maps which can be inhabited. Anzaldúa's *mestiza*, Braidotti's nomad subjectivity and Haraway's cyborg are presented as examples of the different ways to represent diversity, with accountability and passionate attachment, maintaining the possibility of collective action. The main questions are not whether feminist metaphors correctly represent women or femininity (whatever it is), but what their context of production is, what kind of practices they avail, what kind of discursive space they open, for whom they are available and, mainly, which concept of gender/sexual difference they perform and how they conform our gendered bodies.

In her contribution "The Absent Presence: Reflections on the Discursive Practice of Veiling" Fataneh Farahani analyzes the veil's different functions as a discursive practice in its relation to the construction of female sexuality and patriarchal dominance. Farahani differentiates between the function of segregation that constitutes gender at the very first, the internalization of a protective wall, respectively the function of the veil perceived as protective and finally the pri-

vatization of the female body: its sexuality is either denied or represented as especially dangerous and in this conception of veiling it must be submitted to special regulations and social control.

Why do we say that we live in an age of anxiety? And how is today's anxiety linked to the traumas of current wars? Renata Salecl's paper addresses these questions with the help of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. It shows how contemporary debates about anxiety involve a perception that we might be able to create an anxiety-free society in the future. These tendencies are illustrated with the help of analysis of some trends in today's art, especially the art that deals with the problem of the body.

The essay "Leaving Mother Behind: On the Production and Replacement of the Maternal in Space" by Insa Härtel deals with the symbolization procedures respectively sublimation procedures as being discussed in mainly psychoanalytic models following the example of the practice of *walking*. Here, a central issue is the "origin" of room structures attributed as maternal and their meaning for culturally adequate forms of articulation within the frame of processes of symbolic equation and replacement. How is walking without any questions made possible and in which relation to a sexualization of movement processes can it be seen?

With the public presentation of "human beasts" at the turn of the 19th century two species are at stake: the biological and the medial as Sibylle Benninghoff-Lühl shows in her essay "Living Images of ‚Human Beasts‘: Reflections on the ‚Wild‘ in the Media". The poster, the show and the living image belong to the multitudinous forms, through which the so-called "wild" were held in the balance between beast and man and in which they posed as such. These media did not just parade the "human beasts". They can rather be read as theatricalizations of the image, which visually "froze" the displayed content to popular mythological scenes and at the same time dispersed it in a fascinating manner, possibly due to its abysmal, acoustic and visual quotation.

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