

The old body as a mistaken image: the moral of smooth skin and media censorship of aging

O corpo velho como uma imagem com falhas: a moral da pele lisa e a censura midiática da velhice

El cuerpo viejo como una imagen con fallas: la moral de la piel lisa y la censura mediática de la vejez

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Abstract *In times of the “cult of the body” and “the society of spectacle”, human bodies are required to become well-defined images, while they are disenchanted from all those symbolic powers that exceed the “good looking” codes. In this context and paradoxically –half a century after the sexual liberation movements and when a recognition of a embodied subjectivity rules, with a continuous increasing “life expectancy”-, emerging taboos and a new sense of decency turn old age into a state of body shame. This essay analyses the strategies of implicit censorship performed by graphic and audiovisual media that avoid showing the images of old bodies by retouching them using refining techniques, implying that showing them would be a new kind of obscenity, and spreading those skills among the public.*

Keywords: *Aging. Contemporary subjectivity. Image. Visibility. Cult of the body.*

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Resumo *Na era do “culto ao corpo” e da espetacularização da sociedade, instados a se converter em imagens com contornos bem definidos, os corpos humanos são desencantados de suas potências simbólicas para além dos códigos da “boa aparência”. Nesse contexto e paradoxalmente – meio século após os movimentos de liberação sexual e em plena reivindicação da subjetividade encarnada, com a “expectativa de vida” aumentando sem cessar –, novos tabus e pudores converteram a velhice num estado corporal vergonhoso. Este artigo focaliza as estratégias de censura implícita dos meios de comunicação gráficos e audiovisuais, que evitam mostrar ou retocam as imagens de corpos idosos com técnicas depuradoras e alisadoras, insinuando que ostentá-las despidoradamente equivaleria a praticar uma nova forma de obscenidade, e disseminando essa pedagogia no próprio público.*

Palavras-chave: *Velhice. Subjetividade contemporânea. Imagem. Visibilidade. Culto ao corpo.*

Resumen *En la era del “culto al cuerpo” y en plena espectacularización de la sociedad, instados a convertirse en imágenes con contornos bien definidos, los cuerpos humanos se ven desencantados de todas sus potencias simbólicas que exceden los códigos de la “buena apariencia”. En ese contexto y paradójicamente — medio siglo después de los movimientos de liberación sexual y cuando rige una reivindicación de la subjetividad encarnada, con la “expectativa de vida” aumentando sin cesar—, nuevos tabúes y pudores convirtieron a la vejez en un estado corporal vergonzoso. Este artículo examina las estrategias de censura implícita en los medios de comunicación gráficos y audiovisuales, que evitan mostrar o retocan las imágenes de cuerpos viejos con técnicas depuradoras y alisadoras, insinuando que ostentarlas impudicamente equivaldría a practicar una nueva forma de obscenidad, y diseminando esa pedagogía en el público.*

Palabras-clave: *Vejez. Subjetividad contemporánea. Imagen. Visibilidad. Culto al cuerpo.*

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*It is a pity that such a radiant creature must grow old —
sighed Wilde.*

*—Really — I agreed — How nice it would be if Dorian
could remain exactly how he is, and if the picture grew old
and got wrinkled in his place! I wish it will be like this!*

Oscar Wilde²

*When I reached 50, it seems as if I became invisible.
Nobody says anything anymore, a compliment, a look,
nothing. It is the thing which most gives me the sensation of
having become and old woman.*

Female teacher, 55 – Coroas [Old Women]³

It is not easy to be an old man in the contemporary world — to be an old woman is even worse! These assertions can sound paradoxical, in a historical moment which, like never before, enabled the quantitative and qualitative expansion of life, particularly as far as women are concerned. Among the many inedited characteristics of this time, we consider the increasing participation of women in all the domains — even in the highest power rungs, with liberties that can be equated with those of men in the diverse planes of existence — as well as the incontestable fact that the world population is ageing. Besides the fact that the fertility rate per inhabitant has been reduced and therefore the relative number of births, the incredible techno scientific advances of the last decades do not stop challenging the limits which traditionally hampered the human bodies, diminishing morbidity as well as mortality. The biological characteristics of each subject and of the species in general reveal to be

² WILDE, Oscar. *O retrato de Dorian Gray*. Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, 2001; p. 15.

³ GOLDENBERG, Mirian. *Coroas: Corpo, envelhecimento, casamento e infidelidade*. [Old Women: Body, ageing, marriage and infidelity] Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Record, 2008. The sentence was taken in one of the interviews given to the Brazilian anthropologist during the research.

less and less intransigent in front of technical intervention, whereas the range of individual and collective experiences expresses a diversity never seen before, able to overstep the horizons of human condition by pushing its confines towards territories that were not thought of.

All these frontiers are being displaced: considered rigid and stable before, determined by unshakable forces such as natural or divine designs, they now experience a dilatation and even a metamorphosis, which broadens their scope beyond that which was considered possible some time ago. In this context, the organic structure which forms the human bodies seems to be in full mutation: its former margins are constantly being redesigned and call into question even the terrible mark of finitude. In the last hundred years, the life expectancy of the world population has doubled. Who was born in Brazil at the beginning of the past century, for example, would expect to live less than thirty-four years; in the 1980s this probability reached a level which can be considered “aged”, when reaching the age of 63.⁴ In the transition to the 21st century, the estimation exceeded the mark of seven decades of life for the Brazilian citizens, according to statistics which already registered a new phenomenon: the ageing of the Brazilian population.⁵ At a planetary level, the demographic profile was also changing: whereas in some countries, life expectancy already exceeds eight decades, it is reckoned that the number of people over sixty will triplicate until 2050, reaching two billions; thus the population of this age group will exceed the quantity of adolescents and children under fourteen.⁶ Thus the elderly people, besides getting older and stronger will soon be the majority — above all the ladies whose vital calendar insists in advantaging that of the gentlemen.

⁴ KALACHE, A; VERAS, Renato; RAMOS, Luiz Roberto. “O envelhecimento da população mundial: Um desafio novo” [“The ageing of world population: A new challenge”]. In: *Rev. Saúde pública*, [Magazine: Public Health] São Paulo, 21:200-10, 1987.

⁵ These data come from the research about “Tendências Demográficas” [Demographic Tendencies], of the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] (IBGE), <http://www.ibge.gov.br>.

⁶ This information comes from the United Nations Organization – (UNO), “Demographic and Social Statistics”, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic>.

In the light of these data, it would be appropriate to ask: what can a body do today? One answer seems obvious: the human bodies can do more and more and, besides this, they can do it for more time. On the other hand, contemporary women and men know that they themselves are the proud artificers of all these conquests, fecundated in the course of the second half of the past century and consolidated in the last decades. It is not only a prolongation of the duration and of the “quantity of life”. This tendency is accompanied by an emphasis on a more complex concept: techno-science and the market provide a useful menu which aims at increasing “life quality” as well, although this other category avoids definitions and is much more complicated when it is being measured. But, in any case, there is no doubt that the historical vectors imprint their influence on the shaping of the bodies and of the subjectivities, and this notion already permeates our era. Socio-cultural, economic and political factors exert a pressure on the subjects of the different times and spaces, stimulating the configuration of certain ways of being and inhibiting other modalities. Thus, within the limits of this flexible and porous basis which is the organism of the *Homo sapiens* species, the historical synergies which are in force in a determined era stimulate certain corporal and subjective developments and, at the same time, they block the appearance of alternative forms.

For all these reasons, if the contours of the human body are redefining themselves in the present time, this exploit is not only due to the marvelous technical solutions which do not stop multiplying, but also to other transformations which affect occidental societies more and more agglutinated and connected through the nets of the global markets. Thus if ageing and death always constituted grave limits to the expansion of human bodies, today these barriers are being dynamited. The new life sciences dream of the possibility to “re-plan” these bodies in order to make them immune to illnesses, avoiding the penuries of old age as well as the fatality of death. It is the ancestral dream of eternal youth, renewed like a great ambition of our time and like a promise which maybe will soon be at the disposal of everybody — or, at least, of all those who can afford to pay for such magnificent recipe.

This last restriction deserves to be underlined, because in case such panacea will really be discovered, there is no doubt that it will not appear in the form of a mystical trip towards some kind of “hereafter”, neither like any other option that involves a flux of supernatural or extraterrestrial energies. If this miracle is concretized among us, it will acquire the prosaic features of merchandise or of a whole line of products and services; and, as such, it will be subject to a price which can be paid in different modalities and with credit facilities. But besides developing in the heart of the market culture in which we live, this so contemporary technical delirium implies a quite complex moral correlate, with contradictory aspects and numerous consequences, the indices of which irradiate in all parts and claim to be investigated. It is worth beginning to potentialize the perplexity: as it was announced at the beginning of this essay, it is not easy to have an old body nowadays, the more paradoxical it may sound in a time which broadened the right to old age in an inedited way and abolished almost all the taboos which restrained the corporal achievements.

The scientific myth and the rejuvenation techniques

The initial perplexity is being reformulated here: why, in spite of all these evident advances and considering the clear advantages which to live in the beginning of the 21st century implies, is it so difficult to be an old man (or an old woman) in the contemporary world? It is appropriate to note that the word sounds offensive, like a kind of insult which should be softened by means of expressions which are more politically correct, such as “third age” or “better age” — the second formula, by the way, the height of euphemisms and of hypocrisy, has unbelievably been popularized in the recent years. All this when, strictly speaking, as we actually know and as Simone de Beauvoir denominated it quite well in her implacable book, neatly entitled *Old Age*, it is the “last age”. Obviously this fatality is not something that one swallows with resig-

nation and ease, above all in such a time, when techno-science seems to have installed itself in the last entrenchment of enchantment and magic. Curiously, in these beginnings of the 21st century, the mythical powers of science and of technique promise to control everything, leaving the decisions relative to his own destiny in the hands of each individual. If this project still has failures and is not achieved completely, the mediatic discourses guarantee that soon these few edges, which still discord, will also be polished and then everything will be technically possible, even the most ambitious dream of all: that of preserving youth and conquering immortality.

Nevertheless, as long as this fabulous aspiration is not achieved, irrigated constantly by the “scientific myth” which bewitches our era, time is passing and our bodies pitifully grow old. Something which results in motivating all kinds of desperations and anxieties, for the mitigation of which we lack antidotes. Therefore, in order to help us to deal with such nonsense, the very techno-science — in its tacit alliance with the mass media and the market — offers a huge catalogue of alternative and always temporary solutions, albeit supposedly efficacious, which aim at avoiding this gap between such sublime ambitions and the still modest objectives which can be achieved by now. In this lot are included the different corporal rejuvenation techniques as well as the drugs to soothe the soul, since techniques never reach the efficacy they promised and therefore the disappointed consumer will need some other kind of consolation. In an essay dedicated to the examination of the “cult of performance” in present society, for example, the French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg quotes an official report of his country which draws attention to the enormous increase of the prescription of psychotropic drugs “as a way of meeting the existential difficulties of the third age”.⁷ Among the twelve most consumed drugs of this kind, from the tranquilizers to the stimulators, four are being used particularly by the older part of the population.

⁷ EHRENBURG, Alain. *O culto da performance: Da aventura empreendedora à depressão nervosa* [*The Cult of Performance: From enterprising adventure to nervous depression*] Aparecida, SP: Ed. Idéias e Letras, 2010; p. 133.

None of this is unexplainable, but this kind of technical support is necessary to bear the weight of old age in a society like ours, which does not dispose of other sorceries to deal with the terrible fact which visibly implies growing old. When instrumental rationality imposes itself as a universal language, able to extend its logic of calculation, of technique and of market to all the domains, without leaving anything out, it is not astonishing that one's own life is also dealt with in these terms. As it occurs with all the other vectors of public and private action, contemporary *bio-policy* was absorbed by the "entrepreneurial spirit" and by the market doctrines which inspire it: a way of functioning which permeates all the institutions and covers all the domains. Hence the life of each individual as well as that of the human species — and that of the whole biosphere inclusive — are thought and dealt with according to those more and more monopolistic rules of the game. It is in this sense that each and any body also defines itself and in an increasing way, as a "capital".

In Brazil, particularly, according to the researches of the anthropologist Miriam Goldenberg, the human body presents itself as "a real physical, symbolic, economic and social capital".⁸ We could explain it like this, for example: the prestige of the models, a profession which "nine out of ten Brazilian girls" long for; actually the main "capital" these stars, who fascinate on the catwalks, dispose of "is the svelte, young and beautiful body".⁹ The value of the financial asset of each one is established according to the different variables, all of them subject to the fluctuant quotations of the market on which the body in question is moving. In spite of the fluctuations and of the insecurity which usually affect this kind of instances such as valuation criteria on which we depend almost exclusively in order to judge what we are, it is well-known that nowadays an old body is worth less than a young one. "Few things become better with time passing", affirmed with impassive coldness an advertisement presented in various Brazilian newspapers and magazines in 2008.

⁸ GOLDENBERG, Miriam. (Org.) *O corpo como capital*. Estudos sobre gênero, sexualidade e moda na cultura brasileira [*The body as capital: Studies on gender, sexuality and fashion*] l. Barueri: Estação das Letras e Cores, 2007; p. 13.

⁹ GOLDENBERG, *op. cit.*; p. 27.

Inclusively or above all, the advertisement suggested that this incapacity to improve with time passing is inherent in human beings; more exactly, by the way, in women. Because, in fact, far from improving with the inexorable passing of the years, the living bodies — particularly women's bodies — usually swell up, become deformed and even crash noisily.

In order to illustrate such certainty, the declaration we mentioned chose to stamp four quite eloquent pictures on the pages of the issues. One next to the other, these photographs showed a female torso without face, almost anonymous: from the middle of the bosom to the part above the knees. The clothes and other details suggested that it belonged to the same person, called Carla, but photographed in different times: her silhouette in four successive periods. In this transition from the first to the last period of time, the girl became less and less young and slender. The intention of the message, uncouth as well as efficacious consisted in emphasizing that there was a decline in the course of that period, within four quick years, Carla's body had deteriorated: from a young attractive woman to a fleshy lady. Under the stigma of this last condition, it is almost insinuated that she stopped being a woman: because of the marks of time, the portrayed figure lost the right to be considered "foxy" for example, something which constitutes "one of the greatest pains of ageing" for Brazilian women because it would imply "to become invisible to men", to be banished from the "seduction market".¹⁰ To skid to this field of invisibility brings about serious implications in the "society of spectacle" in which we live. At the end of this trajectory, which goes from youth to adulthood, the person who is not young anymore would have dilapidated considerable part of her corporal capital and, after having exhausted this capital, she would be on the brink of a virtual inexistence.

What happened to this woman confirms clearly the incontestable declaration expressed in the motto of that advertisement: few things improve with time passing. Almost nothing improves when we grow old, quite on

¹⁰ GOLDENBERG, Mirian. *Coroas: Corpo, envelhecimento, casamento e infidelidade [Old Women: Body, ageing, marriage and infidelity]*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008; p. 95.

the contrary, by the way. An uncommon exception of this magna law of nature would be the case of *Desperate Housewives* and *Grey's Anatomy*, precisely, the products the advertisement was promoting. “Two of the series of the greatest television success” which would actually have an uncommon capacity to challenge the hard fate which affects the Carlas and Marias of flesh and bone. Because, on the contrary to what occurs to the females of the human species, in these television series the restriction is valid, “they get better every year”. In spite of its self-evidence, this affirmation, which presents itself as so obvious in the light of the illustrations, deserves to be analysed. Because this incapacity to improve with time passing, which seems to be intrinsic to almost everything under the auspices of contemporary capitalism — except perhaps, for some wines and television programmes— also contradicts some beliefs which still seem to have some value, referred to the accumulation of experience and the consequent richness in terms of maturing which this process would involve.

Experience, lifting and poverty: a capital market?

In this vertigo of the discarded and of obsolescence, which everything seems to dash to the spasmodic rhythm of the present time, it would be appropriate to investigate what was left of the classical exaltation of experience: that which constituted the basis of wisdom of the aged people in cultures that were more respectful of these values, for example, and which in full modernizing power could lead to “progress” and to improvement as the fruit of learning. According to this kind of reports, the baggage distilled by the sluggish rumination of life experiences — the people as well as the collectives — used to be appreciated as something beneficent, in the pragmatic modern culture and under the productivist logic of capitalism inclusive. All this could be considered a valuable “capital”, which one harvested in the course of one’s life and tried to keep with all the necessary care, or even as a priceless treasure. But now only time seems to be responsible for pouring a portion of undesirable things on our bodies such

as wrinkles, stains, varicose veins, flaccid skin, adiposities, welts and other aberrations. Besides these clearly visible and palpable punishments, ageing also results in the rusting of certain delicate mechanisms, such as the creativity and dynamism proper to the juvenile attitude, thus deteriorating all the elements which fortuitously constitute what we are.

Hence there is no way out: the material we are made of degrades with the advance in age. Therefore, as that advertisement stated, bodies can only become “worse” with time passing. The problem gets worse when we find out that more and more, body – and only body – is *all* we are. As a consequence of this transmutation, it is “not only the flesh” which is being deteriorated, for example, such as other narratives would tell. It is each of us, entirely, that which irremediably “becomes worse” with ageing: all that constitutes us loses its value when we grow old, because in this cruel process occurs a gradual descapitalization of our pubescent virtues. “Increase your youth capital”, exhorts us the typical advertisement of any cosmetic product, stamped on the page of a magazine and illustrated with the radiant face of a young model. The merchandise to be sold is described as “*skin saver chrono*”, a kind of *economizer* or *saviour* of the skin, recurring to a language which takes advantage of the ambiguities between the mercantile lexis and the religious vocabulary. Besides this, it is being associated with the mythical powers of the Greek god of time, Kronos, although it does it under a scientific varnish and in the language that best suits it: English, even in an announcement which emits its rays in a French magazine. All the ingredients of our magic potions are there, thus it is obvious that one has to pay a more or less low price for such a promise of happiness, which will let “your skin 70% younger, 88% smoother and 94% more hydrated”.

Some echoes, which are worthy of attention, gush out of this kind of messages, which mark the pace of this time with their particular combination of puerility and cynicism and which must bring in so many dividends to cosmetic and advertising industries. In 1949 and with her fierce tone, Simone de Beauvoir had denounced the denigrated feminine condition in the pages of her book *The Second Sex*, affirming that “the

woman's body is an object that one can buy: according to her, it represents a capital she is authorized to exploit".¹¹ The most curious of these resonances is that, more than six decades after such statements had been noisily uttered — and in spite of all the advances in the conquests of rights and in the socio-cultural changes which settled in the world since then —, the notion of the human female's young body as a capital which is worth investing with good discernment because it is ineluctably getting wasted, did not lose its validity. This peculiar mythology is not exhausted, but it seems to have increased to the extent that it expanded into other market segments: far from being limited to girls eager to get married, now it reaches old women and males of all ages inclusive.

"Beauty is also a matter of men", teaches an advertisement illustrated with the naked body of a young man in sculpture position who, bashfully hides his face. And it immediately alerts that "beyond cosmetics and gymnastics", that is to say, when these less invasive resources prove to be insufficient, it is worthwhile having recourse to the "aesthetic medicine" and to "plastic surgery", above all if the intention is to solve problems such as "to un-wrinkle or rejuvenate the abdomen", "to improve nose, ears, and chin", "to restore the hair", "to remove body hair", "to whiten the teeth", "to lose weight and eliminate fat". In a cunning tentative to negotiate with the cultural resistances which still perturb the consolidation of this promising market, this Spanish notice defends the "professionalism" of the team that operates in that "medico-aesthetic organization" which is the "most advanced in Europe" and uses "the last technological advances" to satisfy the requirements of its distinguished clientele. The argumentation closes with the following appeals "do not give up improving" and "if you are a man, call us" It may sound convincing or not, but it is far from being the unique strategy put into practice in order to manure this soil which is guessed to be fertile. "The new dimension of man" proclaims the slogan of another "male aesthetic

¹¹ BEAUVOIR, Simone de. *O segundo sexo*, v.2, "A experiência vivida" [*The Second Sex*, vol. 2 "Lived experience"]. São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1967; p. 170.

clinic” which, without venturing to show any photo, soberly enumerates the various services that are offered to infuse this recently inaugurated masculine dimension such as: dermal filler treatment, slimming, hair transplant, facial and corporal aesthetics, depilation and *botox*.

“Actually you deserve to free yourself from the marks of preoccupations”, explains another cosmetic advertisement, very similar to those which traditionally exhort the female public, although it is illustrated with the photography of a handsome male face — but the eyes of which appear framed by fine wrinkles Discreet and didactic, this other Brazilian advertisement addressed to contemporary men also feels obliged to explain the reasons of its proposal, something which does not require any explanation when the target public is composed of women: the advertisement text advises: “nowadays to take care of one’s appearance also means to be informed and up to date”. And immediately afterwards it recommends the consumer to consult the picturesque site *rugasnuncamais.com.br* [*no more wrinkles*] on the internet in case he wishes to get more information “Vanquished by baldness?” asks a Mexican notice, while showing a man with his head inclined in sign of humiliation because of the alluded defeat, the solution of which is also to be sold: “innovative techniques result in an unperceivable transplant” which “minimizes the cicatrization”. In short, this kind of messages, more and more usual, show the voracious universalization of this notion of the body as a capital the value of which would reach its apogee in the adolescence, for women as well as for men. Once this threshold is crossed, it requires much ability to administer the individual investments so that one’s appearance does not reveal the shameful descapitalization brought about by age.

The accursed flesh and the purity of the images

“Old age is the worst of all corruptions”, judges a bronze sentence attributed to Thomas Mann. By the way, as it is well known, the litany, which we deal with here does not only involve the mediatic, techno-scientific

and market discourses, this triple alliance which commands the production of truths nowadays. In fact, art history as well as philosophy and anthropology sulphur sophisms of this kind. And who would be able to refute such clear evidence? The answer is that there is no doubt about this tendency to corporal decrepitude which usually measures the regular cycle of the periods and which culminates in the scandal of death: the worst of all corruptions. But if today the techniques dedicated to avoid this catastrophe proliferate, it is because this evidence is becoming truer, heavier and even absolutely unquestionable. This is partly due to the fact that we do not dispose of sources of enchantment neither for the bodies nor for the world, which are able to counterbalance the monopoly of the scientist myth — or at least to slightly mar the despotic instrumental rationality on which it is based — compensating its weaknesses with other symbolic arrangements and other cosmologic narratives.

In front of this mythical and spiritual indigence which marks contemporary culture it is not amazing that the fiercest moral judgements point out to those who succumb to the effort to adapt themselves to the coordinates of the *good shape*. They are all accused to be negligent in this enterprise, although they have at their disposal the portentous arsenal provided by techno-science, mass media and the market. In spite of the inevitable frustration that such illusionist circle provokes, this very dissatisfaction converts itself into its best fuel because it stimulates the paraphernalia which promises to delay the fatal decline. As a result, a myriad of products and services is announced in a constant festival, with its rhetoric specialized in guaranteeing the most extravagant certainties. We emphasize above all its capacity to help the victims of this imperfect *bio-policy* to dissimulate the inevitable wrecks that this impious beast — old age — still persists in printing on everybody's physical aspect. Thus the force of this thwarted will nourishes the extremely rich purification market, constituted by all kind of antioxidants, moisturizers, draining, liposuctions and stretching with a vocation for rejuvenating the appearances. The objective pursued by these almost alchemical tricks, based upon formulas with a judicious techno-scientific tone — most of them expensive, very expensive — consists in

disguising the damages caused by time on the visible surfaces of the poor living bodies. The less young such organisms become, the more worthy of pity and disdain they will seem, for being incapable to conceal the essence which is so miserably human when they mature and decay.

But why such assiduity in a struggle which, in all lights and in spite of a certain reigning optimism, continues to be doomed to failure? A possible answer would be the following: because in this “society of the spectacle” which persists in obtaining mediatic celebrity in order to be able “to be someone” and which evaluates who is each one by means of what one sees on his corporal surfaces and in his purely visible actuation, old age is a denied right. Or, at least, if ageing is still inevitable for all those who have the chance not to die prematurely, it is forbidden to exhibit the aspect which the progression of old age usually indicates. Thus within this increasing tyranny of young appearances, old age is censured as if it were something obscene and shameful, which should remain hidden, out of the scene, without ambitioning the so valued visibility. A corporal state, which is to be combated, — or at least astutely dissimulated — for being morally suspicious and therefore humiliating. Something indecent which should not be exhibited; at least not without having recourse to convenient filters and to bashful retouching which our era invented for such purpose and which, with increasing insistence, makes them available to everybody and exhorts us to use them.

Thus, in the full force of these values which ratify the crystallization of a new morality, the privileged scenarios of audiovisual mass media avoid showing pictures of old bodies. The magazines with glossy pages only publish this kind of photographs in rare occasions: when it is considered strictly necessary and, even in these cases, they always count on the help of photo editing tools such as the popular *PhotoShop*. But it is not only the case of fixed point photos: in the cinema and on television, the aged bodies are also polished with an arsenal of depuration and smoothing techniques of the moving pictures, such as the software *Baselight*. In Brazil, for example, the powerful Globo Television has been using this

technology since 2006 in order to improve the visual quality of the *tele-novelas* [television series] it produces. A report about a topic published in the same year in a magazine commented the results of the novelty with a certain admiration, affirming that the actresses Regina Duarte and Natália do Vale — at that time 59 and 54 years old, respectively — appeared on the screen “with such a smooth skin that it seemed that they had just been submitted to an aesthetic surgery”. But the representatives of the broadcasting station declared in the same article that it was not a “rejuvenation programme”, but “a method to correct small recording defects to value colours and details or to minimize marks and stains on the skin”.¹² The fact is that the actors’ care as well as the technical intervention in the corporal figures modelled on the screens grew with the increase of the resolution of the picture due to the digital transmission technologies which capture each detail with increasing neatness, revealing any imperfection in the limpidity of the filmed skins.

Hence there are two essential stages of this polishing which censors and rectifies the corporal bulges in the attempt to adequate them to the exigent pattern of the good shape. In the first place, there is an intense process of dissimulation in the very flesh, which every individual must practise as a very important part of the “taking care of oneself” in its contemporary version, having recourse to the various techniques that are available on the market such as the one which daily redesigns a more and more imperfect picture. Then, in the second act of this drama, the very imagetic reproduction of the same bodies is also retouched thanks to the “digital scalpels” which operate on the silhouettes transformed into pixels, in the attempt to give back certain “decency” to these visibly “obscene” lines and volumes. Such a possibility of correcting one’s own corporal defects on the omnipresent digital screens is already available, on the basic menu of the digital cameras of domestic use and on the simplest home-computers inclusive: therefore anybody can apply the skin smoothing mechanisms to his own photographs.

¹² ALVES Jr., Dirceu. “Imagens valorizadas pela tecnologia” [“Images valorised by technology”]. *Isto é Gente*, São Paulo, 07/08/2006.

With respect to mass media, they, on their turn, open their coveted display windows to expose the figures of a few “mature” men and women. Which ones? Those, who, in a certain way, do not look so old. A select group of ladies and gentlemen, who by a miracle or other, succeed in getting out of this ungrateful task of dissimulation more or less slender and therefore they become precious exemplars of this rare species: the *well preserved*. Thus, like living fossils, with their gestures and movements skilfully petrified beneath the flashes, now deserve admiration due to a mixture of genetic luck and arduous work. The public of TV Globo is regularly exposed to the radiations of these carefully chosen and good-looking faces and bodies, the splendour of which results from an exhaustive work in both primordial phases of the purification mentioned above. Many of them had already overcome fifty or sixty years of life on earth, but they still maintain a certain dignity because they know how to exhibit a relatively young appearance. Not at random, the images projected by these celebrities who seem to be preserved in formalin are usually vampirized by the cosmetic industry which capitalizes them in order to sell hopes to all those who, on the contrary, fail tremendously on the difficult market of the anti-ageing wonders. Once again women are especially sensitive to such appeals and, for the same reasons they are usually the most solicited in this interlocution, although the male market is also increasing very rapidly.

“Nourish your skin with youth”, promised an advertisement of a product anchored in the picture of Sharon Stone, for example, when she had a little less than half a century of life. On the photo the actress’ nudity was hardly covered with a light nightgown of black silk — and obviously with a great dose of digital retouching —, whereas she looked in a seducing as well as accusing way at the potential female consumer of her magic merchandise. The select team of these mature and exemplar stars includes other divas who are in more or less advanced phases of their “corporal decadence”, but they still succeed in selling an attractive image with the help of the mediatic, mercantile and techno-scientific machinery, such as the actresses Demi Moore, Juliette Binoche, Julia

Roberts, Jane Fonda and the singer Madonna, for example. By the way, the two latter celebrities were the main responsible for the inauguration of the fashion of physical exercises practised with monastic rigour and daily devotion from the 1980s on and for the subsequent “democratization” of the right to have a *sarado* [beautiful, sensual and well-trained] body — and of the duty, more and more intransigent, to get it at any cost. Now over seventy and fifty, respectively, both continue doing all they can in order to maintain such flags raised with some stateliness and they put their figures at the service of that catechising mission.

The morals of smooth skin: censoring obscene wrinkles

It is obviously a question of image. In the now triumphing empire of audiovisual culture, the catastrophe is stamped on the *visible* features of ageing, which are considered marks of weakness or signs of a defeat and, for this reason, they would be morally reprehensible. In the light of this judgement, to have the courage to exhibit them with such shamelessness is equivalent to practising a new kind of obscenity. But what would exactly be offended with such shamelessness? As it occurs with all the other “imperfections” and “impurities” which time chisels in the human bodies, wrinkles constitute an affront to the tyranny of smooth skin under which we live. Something more scandalous, after all, than any super-exposed, but well turned voluptuousness. Because today we reject “all that in one’s appearance seems to be slovenly, puckered, injured, crumpled, wrinkled, heavy, weakened or distended”, according to what the French anthropologist Jean-Jacques Courtine explains in his analysis about the appearance of a new type of body, in the second half of the 20th century: that of the Californian physical-culturists.¹³ The male ideal germinated in harmony with his female equivalent, symbolized by the doll Barbie,

¹³ COURTINE, Jean-Jacques. “Os Stakhanovistas do Narcisismo : Body-building e puritanismo ostentatório na cultura americana do corpo” [“The Stakhanovists of Narcissism: Body-building and ostensible Puritanism in the American body cult”] In : SANT’ANNA, Denise (Org.). *Políticas do corpo* [Body policies]. São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 1995. p. 86.

the svelte and in blond plastic moulded figure of which continues disseminating its efficacious pedagogy on planetary scale.

Thus in its double gender version, it is a kind of silhouette moulded in the United States of the 1980s, when two parallel and complementary tendencies were flourishing: an “obsession of the corporal involucre” and a “visual culture of the muscle”.¹⁴ After the success irradiated by this new corporal modality at a global level, a new faith was propagated: the faith that no effort should be spared in order to convert one’s own body into an image of a *purity* never seen before, like an “anatomy design”, which reveals a “maximum tension of the skin” and a fat rate “monstrously low”.¹⁵ Thus we witnessed a generalization of a daily struggle against the obstinacy of the flesh, in which the contemporary subjects get embarked with the purpose of reaching an imagetic virtualization fleshless as well as losing flesh. By the way, the morals of the good shape operates this way: submitted to all the pressures of the disenchanting and delightful contemporary world, the individuals are exhorted by the mediatic discourses and by the alluvium of images which teach the features as well as the laws of the “perfect body”; at the same time they are being informed about all the risks which are inherent in the attitudes and in the ways of life that can dangerously remove them from this ideal. It depends on them to become what they are: either transforming their bodies into a display of their virtues and their enviable well-being or the total opposite.

But the mere fact of living – the chance of being a living, organic and material body – is an enormous disadvantage in this mission, because almost everything leads to the fateful physical deterioration. To eat, for example, even if we eat only light and healthy food or merely to be on earth while time passes and is leaving its abominable sequels printed on our flesh. Everything inexorably leads to degeneration. Hence it is appropriate to formulate a new version of the central question: in the full apo-

¹⁴ COURTINE, op. cit.; p. 83 e 86.

¹⁵ COURTINE, op. cit.; p. 86 e 114.

gee of the “cult of the body”, what is exactly that which we venerate so much? In spite of all the advances, of the struggles and of the liberations we could achieve in the 21st century, our bodies are still being accused to be impure and accursed. Obviously in other senses, which are quite different from those who stigmatized the human flesh under medieval Christianity, for example, or even from those who disciplined its movements and desires in the shadow of bourgeois morals. But today the body continuous being suspicious and subject to an intense vigilance, because its physical constitution insists in fatally tending towards temptations and corruptions. But if before the horrors provoked by such condition had the tonality of religious transcendence or of the layman intimism — which could involve earthly sins, interiorized faults and divine expiations —, the new version of these dreads recycles the former penalties in order to reorganize them around an axis which belongs to the order of appearances. Therefore temptations now assume other forms: caloric food, drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, sedentary habits and other customs which are considered unhealthy or sinful. Corruption, on its turn, presents itself under the shadow of ageing and its whole escort of disagreeable collateral effects: fat, flaccidity, wrinkles, loss of pigmentations, baldness, among other signs of perishable organicity and of biological finitude.

There are many repercussions of these displacements in our moral bases, the implications of which resound everywhere. An example would be the aversion provoked by certain pictures which show erotic scenes protagonized by old people, like it is the case of the film *Wolke Neun* [*Cloud 9*], by the German director Andreas Dresen — in Brazil presented under the title *Nunca é tarde demais para amar* [*It is never too late to love*], although a literal translation would be something like *Cloud nine*. This film became the target of polemics and it raised many discussions at its premiere in 2008. For which reason?: to have dared to expose on the cinema screen the naked bodies of a woman and two men, all seventy years old, exercising their carnal passions in a classic *ménage à trois* on the cinema screen, that is to say, the kind of vision which would not have shocked anybody if the characters were interpreted by young and

well-sculpted actors, because it was neither the nudity nor the sexual intensity of the acts which made these pictures perturbing. Doubtlessly the embarrassment had another origin: the film challenged the rigid (although quite hypocritical) morals in force, which imposes the tyrannies of the obligatory young aspect and dooms to invisibility all that dares to deviate from this so obstinate norm

A comparable effect was provoked by the illustration of a report which announced a notice: the first civil marriage celebrated in Argentina by two women, in April 2010. Beyond the controversies emanated from the informative text and from the novelty that was being propagated, the element that most irritated the readership's sensitiveness — to judge from the comments left on the online versions of the newspapers — was the photo: a picture which showed the happy kiss of the newly-married couple, with a bouquet of flowers and the marriage certificate in one of the bride's hand. The reason of the perplexity was the fact that the spouses were 67 and 68 years old respectively and the major moral discomfort came from the two ladies' aspect: a physical appearance that was associated with the typical grandmother's figure, very far from the *well-preserved* divas, the industry of the spectacle accustomed our look to. In the two silhouettes embraced in this passionate hug one could also perceive the inexistence of any visible effort to dissimulate such condition of "*coroas*" [old women], which placed them even at a greater distance from those sensual and glamorous images which our mediatic tradition usually associates with the profiles of lesbian lovers.¹⁶

A kind of bashfulness similar to the one which leads to censor the exhibition of wrinkled skins, especially when they are caught in situations with erotic connotations, is that other one which silences the pictures of fat bodies, above all when they also dare to joyfully assume their weight and their size in public nudity or when they openly practise carnal acts like eating or fornicating. It is another taboo, rarely challenged in the

¹⁶ MARIANETTI, Marina. "Se casó la primera pareja de lesbianas" ["The first lesbian couple got married"]. *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 10/04/2010; and "Una jueza anuló el primer matrimonio entre mujeres celebrado en el país" ["A female judge cancelled the first marriage between women in Argentina"], 16/04/2010.

contemporary audiovisual productions, although this path has already been trodden and threatens to implode soon, due to its appealing potential as a new spectacular niche. For the time being and with great aesthetic as well as political diversity, episodes of this kind fill some nooks and lanes of the internet, genuine den of the “amateur images”, and they appear in some more or less alternative films such as *Battle in Heaven*, by the Mexican Carlos Reygadas (2005), and *Estômago: A gastronomic story* by the Brazilian Marcos Jorge (2007). But in this proposal to put on the screen this “explicit body” which mediatic images try so much to silence, the field of plastic arts took the lead a long time ago: from the infuriated feminists of the 1970s, such as Carolee Schneemann and Judy Chicago, to Lucien Freud’s and Jenny Saville’s more recent paintings, passing by Rebecca Warren’s and Berlinde de Bruyckere’s sculptures, Gilles Barbier’s and Wang Du’s installations, John Coplans’ and Yves Tremorin’s photographs, Aleah Chapin’s and Ignacio Estudillo’s portraits, to mention only some names, almost at random. Because the catalogue is immense and extremely varied; besides this, the tendency seems to be very vigorous and also unrestrained in its will to reveal the cracks in its purifying project as well as in its possible contributions to the trivialization of a spectacularized carnality.

From feminism to ageism?

In spite of these exploitations of the corpulent condition which have been developing in the present time in the domain of visual arts and even if we consider the sinuous flirts of mediatic culture with a certain “dirty realism” which are in vogue today, this kind of so contemporary “censorship” is still proliferating, it is applied with strict severity to almost all the corporal pictures having the right to be exhibited. At the beginning of 2008, an especially emblematic case drew the attention. It was the photography of nobody less than Simone de Beauvoir, published on the cover of the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, in commemoration

of the French philosopher's hundredth birthday. The picture had been taken without her consent in 1952 and the writer appeared naked on it, from behind, getting out of the bathtub, during a visit to her North-American lover Nelson Algren. But the real uproar was not motivated neither by this savage violation of the privacy of this woman who had died more than two decades ago, nor because of her nudity in rotunda exhibition. Instead of this — or better, besides all this —, the focus of the agitation pointed out the technical proceeding to which the picture in question had been submitted: some features of the photographed body had been retouched with digital tools.

In the time in which that furtive click had happened, already six decades ago, the author was 44 years old; hence she was passing through the life stage in which women dangerously embark towards that grey zone which constitutes the gap between youth and old age. In other words, one could say that, at that time, Madame de Beauvoir was becoming a “*coroa*” [an old woman]. This was exactly one of the reasons why the editors of the issue justified the use of *PhotoShop* to retouch her legs and other corporal volumes, alleging that the aesthetic codes of the present time prevent from publishing this kind of photograph on the cover of a magazine without having gone through the scalpel of the digital editing before. Or, as one of the participants of the debate affirmed: “it would have been disrespect not to retouch it”.¹⁷ The argument exactly coincides with one of the premises of the present morals of the good shape, which also nourishes “the myth of *PhotoShop*”, such as Miriam Goldenberg denominates it.

With its rectifying Puritanism, this instrument nowadays so fundamental for the production of corporal pictures “protects women to be really “naked” by eliminating the slightest imperfections of the female body”, the anthropologist explains. “In a certain way *PhotoShop* dresses the woman by removing her wrinkles, welts, cellulites and stains”. In

¹⁷ SIBILIA, Paula. “A bunda de Simone de Beauvoir” [“Simone de Beauvoir’s ass”]. *Trópico*, São Paulo, Fevereiro 2008.

this bashful task, the digital tool “creates a new skin for the female nudity, which seems to be completely smooth and immaculate”.¹⁸ Finally it would be appropriate to add another important explanation here which sustains these practices and creeds and which doubtlessly contributes to reinforce them. As the same author points out, the only body that “even without clothes is decently dressed”, according to the present morality, is the one that is “modelled, taken care of, without undesirable marks (wrinkles, welts, cellulites, stains) and without excesses (fat, flaccidity)”.¹⁹

Considering, as a background, all this reconfiguration of values around the human bodies and their images, it is worth getting back to the episode protagonized by Simone de Beauvoir in 2008, unwillingly as well as posthumously, but which becomes symptomatic for various reasons. Firstly because the owner of this skin, remoulded and smoothed with digital tricks, was one of the main voices of the feminist thought and struggles, which permeated the 20th century. Secondly, because this author’s hands wrote hundreds of lucid pages about the complex meanings of old age in the modern world and about the urgent women’s liberation in a culture which oppressed them, reducing the complexity and the power of their lives to the administration of a minor kind of “corporeal capital”, and, finally, because of the perplexity provoked by the fact that our agile 21st century could not imagine a better way of honouring all this than that of selling, on the very first plane, the picture of an ass, cowardly stolen and conveniently retouched.

It is difficult to admit that such kind of attitudes occur just now when the “second sex” is no more called weak or secondary and when many women advance in the public sphere and dispute the most important posts of the planet. It is appropriate to note that even they, these ladies, who succeed in establishing themselves on the summits of power, do not

¹⁸ GOLDENBERG, Mirian. *Coroas: Corpo, envelhecimento, casamento e infidelidade* [*Old Women: Body, ageing, marriage and infidelity*]. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008; p. 81.

¹⁹ GOLDENBERG, Miriam; RAMOS, Marcelo Silva. “A civilização das formas: o corpo como valor” [“The civilization of forms: the body as value”]. In: GOLDENBERG, M. (Org.) *Nu & Vestido: Dez antropólogos revelam a cultura do corpo carioca*. [*Naked & Dressed: Ten anthropologists reveal the culture of the body of Rio de Janeiro*] Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2002; p. 29.

succeed either in completely avoiding the ambiguous severities of these insidious morals of the good shape. A case which deserves a certain debate was that of the candidate for Brazil's presidency in the elections of 2010, Dilma Rousseff, a lady who was 63 at that time and had an intense political trajectory initiated various decades ago. Until then, apparently, she had never been excessively bothered about cosmetic care. But at the end of 2008, the then minister of the Brazilian government submitted herself to a series of radical aesthetical interventions — including plastic surgeries, diets, contact lenses, hair dying, make up, changes in her way of dressing and hair style— that gave her a rejuvenated appearance. “I am looking more like myself at the age of forty than at the age of sixty”, she confessed in an interview to the magazine *Marie-Claire*, although the photographs of two decades ago show her with an aspect quite different from the one she achieved thanks to the contemporary artifices. And she added, joking: “I have not yet reached thirty, which was my consumption dream”.²⁰

Dilma Rousseff's physical transformations were performed shortly before the official confirmation of her candidature; and all indicates that the reason resides precisely in the implications inherent in such decision. As an aspirant to the national presidency for the first time in her career, the economist would not depend on her own competence or on the negotiations and disputes with her peers, but her judgement would be in the television audience's hands — or more exactly, in the pitiless verdict of their eyes. It was deduced from this fact that a great number of these voters would pay more attention to the texture of the skin, to the haircut and to the clothes of the first woman to dispute such a position in Brazil's history than to her words and ideas, her actions and projects with public resonances. Soon all this would no longer be properly *hers*; it would actually begin to be scripted by the professional team of “image assessors” employed by the political party she had adhered to. In spite of the differ-

²⁰ GULLO, Carla; NEVES, Maria Laura. “A mulher do presidente” [“The president's wife”] *Marie-Claire*, São Paulo, 12/04/2009.

ences in her respective styles and attitudes, similar chains seem to subject the Argentines' present president, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner: already nearing six decades of life, she never let to dedicate a great part of her daily energies to improve her appearance with an intense use of cosmetics and other aesthetical treatments such as *botox* and to carefully choose a sophisticated and never repeated clothing for every occasion, something which does not seem to weigh upon any of her male peers or, at least, not with this magnitude. On the other hand, and on many occasions, it is appropriate to note that all these attributes and customs are also able to arouse more interest than her discourses and actions.

In the light of these few cases rapidly commented on these pages — for considering them symptomatic of certain mutations in our creeds and values relative to the incarnate condition and, particularly, to our relationship with old age, above all for women — it is worth formulating here some final questionings of this essay. What occurred in the last decades so that, in spite of all the victories obtained in the field of corporal struggles, this kind of attitudes and reactions, which denote the uncommon vigour of the new moralisms, are customary today? Would it perhaps be an atavistic permanence of rank machismos which mark our tradition and of certain taboos which still articulate the patriarchal and bourgeois society? Thus would we observe something which — with patience, good luck and new advances — will be overcome soon? Or perhaps, on the contrary, is it an extremely present frame which expresses an unexpected turn with regard to what had occurred in the feminist struggle of the middle of the 20th century and which particularly affects adult women in the beginning of this millennium?

A post-disciplinary, young and spectacular body

If the intention is to point out some answers to these complex questionings, in the first place, it is necessary to emphasize an assessment. It is evident that this so contemporary look, which disdains what it sees

for judging it wrong — or, in other words, wrinkled and fat — and tries to repair or hide it, is not stimulated by the old bourgeois morals which rejected the exhibition of any nudity and blushed at any allusion to sexuality. Very far from this worldview, the severity of this so present look responds to other moral mandates, quite different from those which are more antiquated, although they are not less rigid and implacable. Under this new logic it is neither the vision of the naked body nor the erotic audacity which bothers and provokes such censoring impetus. On the contrary, by the way, all this can be well tolerated or even stimulated and awarded in the contemporary world but there is an important restriction: on the condition that the lines of the silhouettes who protagonize them are perfectly smooth, straight and well defined. This is the glittering morals of the good shape in full action: that which is neither ashamed nor worried about hiding the most evident sensuality but requires that all the bodies which exhibit plane contours and well-mended bulges, like those of the plastic skin of the Barbie doll or the bi-dimensional drawings of the comics

Michel Foucault had already come to this conclusion, as it is reported in an interview he gave almost forty years ago to the magazine *Quel Corps?* [*Which Body?*] shows it. “Be naked....but be thin, handsome, sun-tanned!” this author synthesised in 1975.²¹ Under the emanations of the digital era, a modernized version of this conditioned permissions could add that, besides all this, it is recommended to depurate this nudity which is exposed with the help of *PhotoShop*. “It is possible that women are not ashamed to show their bodies”, explain Alexandre Werneck and Mirian Goldenberg in their analysis about the photographs of the magazine *Playboy* at the beginning of the 21st century, “but not, so they say, without passing before through a session of review by the software, which would delete cellulites, small fatnesses, stains, welts”.²²

²¹ FOUCAULT, Michel. “Poder-Corpo” [Body-Power], In: *Microfísica do poder* [*Microphysics of Power*]. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Graal, 1979; p.147.

²² GOLDENBERG, Mirian. *Corpos: Corpo, envelhecimento, casamento e infidelidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008; p. 80.

Thus the socio-cultural changes, which have altered the panorama until they resulted in these more recent manifestations, began to progress already various decades ago, in the 1970s, precisely when the discipline and the “puritan ethics” were facing a crisis like the great stimulating forces of capitalism. Foucault explains again that “people perceived that this so rigid power was not so indispensable they believed it to be” and “that the industrial societies could content themselves with a much more tenuous power over the body.”²³

As a consequence of this reversal, they deactivated some of the chains which muzzled the modern bones and muscles in order to print on them the rhythms of the factory, of the barracks, of school and of prison. Nevertheless it was not a total liberation. Instead of this, the counteroffensive started “an economic exploitation (and perhaps an ideological one) of erotization, from suntan products to pornographic films”.²⁴ During the last years of the 20th century and the first years of the 21st century, this catalogue which profits from the beautification, pleasure and well-being market exploded, developing new moral rules and new chains in these bodies free from the former disciplinary power. Therefore to the list of qualities imposed on the contemporary corporal figures, rapidly enumerated by Foucault during that interview — thin, handsome, suntanned, — one should also add another very important one: youth, or, at least, young aspect. Because it was exactly in this febrile historical moment, at the end of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s that youth imposed itself with an incontestable and universal value; then the *teen* appearance converted itself into an exclusive synonymous of the *good shape*.

In counterpoint, old age did not only lose its former glories and dignities which exalted values that are clearly anachronistic today such as the experience and wisdom of maturity but it ended up removing almost all its meanings “Who will, at least, attempt to deal with youth invoking its ex-

²³ FOUCAULT, *op. cit.*; p.148.

²⁴ FOUCAULT, *op. cit.*; p.147.

perience?”), Walter Benjamin sagaciously complained in the remote 1930s of the 20th century, dissipating a perspicacious premonitory look.²⁵ Another three or four decades would pass until the famous harangue, which would advise “do not trust anybody over thirty”, will finally triumph. But in 1969 when the tendency was already incontestable, the writer Adolfo Bioy Casares coined a beautiful satire of this tyranny of the inexperienced and exuberant youth that imposed itself everywhere. In his lucid novel *Diary of the War of the Pig*, the Argentine novelist relates the progressive implantation of a programme of extermination of elderly people and, with them, the elimination of all the ugliness and impotence fatally associated with old age. Two years before, in 1967, Guy Debord published his manifest entitled *The Society of the Spectacle*, which also contributes to the understanding of such endings. In this book, as well as in the homonymous film, this author denounces the appearance of a new kind of social organization, articulated according to the appearances. Thus the image of each one became fundamental in order to define who one is and the mediatic codes which regulate these images are far from being “free”.

Whereas they loosened themselves from the inert weight of the old taboos and from other rusty burdens, the bodies, which had impetuously appeared at that time, assumed other commitments and sealed other pacts; above all with the magic of the spectacle and its audiovisual fascinations. “As an answer to the revolt of the body” Foucault still explains, “we find a new investment which does no more have the form of control-repression but of control-stimulation”.²⁶ A few decades after these displacements and their subsequent re-arrangements, we still believe in the myth of the young body as a valuable hyper-stimulated capital which, unfortunately, is being wasted, with time passing, but which one should lose by no means. This creed, which surmises a triumphing concentration of this corporal capital in the capacity to exhibit a young, slender and happy image, is the most vigorous — and

²⁵ BENJAMIN, Walter. “Experiência e pobreza” [“Experience and poverty”]. In: *Obras escolhidas: Magia e técnica, arte e política* (v. 1). São Paulo, Ed. Brasiliense, 1994; p. 117.

²⁶ FOUCAULT, op. cit.; p.147.

tyrannous — of our time. By the way, a huge business was built on these bases: a market which is daily fed by millions of “docile and useful” bodies, male as well as female ones, of all age and ethnic groups, as well as of the most diverse socio-economic strata, scattered all over the intricate global geography. These consuming bodies are desperately eager to buy a determined corporal image, with an enthusiasm worthy of the best causes: that which is considered valid or appropriate. In this itinerary they restlessly struggle in order to preserve that which will vanish anyway: a young, smooth and *good* appearance.

The objective consists in avoiding, desperately and with all the available resources, the fall into the appalling caste of the “third age”. Everything in order not to become a human being of the second-class — or of the third-class or, more precisely and tragically: ---- of the last category. An inferior and even deficient condition in all lights, because it is only defined by the lack of that which was irremediably lost but that others still possess and exhibit proudly. Hence it is in this sense that nobody has the right to grow old now. And more particularly the ladies are the ones who most suffer from the implications of this prohibition. It is not surprising that no woman wants to become a “*coroa* [an old woman]” nowadays, because the dynamic contemporary world does not stop hammering that nobody should allow to be defeated by those obscure forces: those ghosts that, by all means and with such insistence, never desist from their harassment. In this crusade everything or almost everything is valuable. Even something which curiously results in a culture considered hedonistic: the sacrifice of one’s own life, be it in its minuscule versions and daily life or in the most grandiose and lethal of all. The latter is being observed in the deaths caused by complications in plastic surgeries, for example or by the consumption of anabolic steroids, by the excesses in the practice of physical training or in diets and even by the accidents provoked by sun tanning equipments or hair dyes..

A possible explanation for this peculiar phenomenon emanates from the lips of the Hollywood actress Virginia Madsen, who rented her face to protagonize the advertisement of the famous *botox*, a product the virtue

of which would consist in preserving the young aspect of the faces which start wrinkling. Looking firmly at the lens of the camera, this celebrity of that moment affirms that, by regularly injecting this magic substance under her facial skin she is not aiming at “having the aspect of a twenty-five-year-old woman”. Instead of this, the attractive fifty-year-old woman — who nevertheless does not want to become a *coroa* [old woman] by no means — confesses what her intention is: “I do not want to be twenty. I only want to look like myself”. In a similar way an advertisement of a skin cream shows the photo of a smiling model who says “I do not hide my age, I only do not let it appear” As far as this eventual incongruence is concerned, these testimonies make sense in a society like the one that appears at this dawn of the 21st century. By mixing the present exigencies of authenticity and performance, in an apparently contradictory way, — the incisiveness of the verb *ser* [used for a permanent characteristic] with the lightness of the verb *estar* [used for a temporary characteristic] or with the delights of the appearance —, such adverts assume that the right to be someone or “*to be myself*” is a privilege only granted to young people. Or to those who, at least, achieve a certain success in the arduous task to simulate that they continue being it.

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