

“Your Body is the Message”

The Corposphere: Body, Absence and Meaning

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Abstract

As part of the theory of Corposphere (Finol, 2015), the following body of work addresses devices that bring into action the dialectic relationships between bodily absence and presence, a phenomenon where what we call the *contemporary exile of the body*, which we find in some artistic manifestations, is expressed. For the analysis we focused on a group of photographs and sculptures, in which the body appears without being explicitly present. A classification of these types of absences is proposed, and an interpretative hypothesis is formulated, according to which, faced with the oversaturation of contemporary representations of the body (advertisements, selfies, etc.), the body is exiled to find a better way to represent it.

Key words: Corposphere; body; absence; exile; phenomenic.

La vacuidad es el origen de todo lo existente
José Unda (2015)

Les vêtements anciens, quand ils subsistent,
conservent une *étrange présence* dans
l'absence même du corps qui les a habités.
Nicole Pellegrin (2005)

Introduction: the exile of the body

One could speak of absences and ellipses of many objects in the natural world. Here we are interested in talking about a particular object: the representation of the body. So, we have

started by asking ourselves what does the absences -total or partial- mean of the body of the semiotic place where it is expected? How do the meanings that use absence function as a device? These questions lead to others: what are the networks of meanings, by presence or absence, where the body is made? For the rigid taxonomy proposed by Greimas and Courtés, "the categorical presence / absence opposition appears as a possibility to distinguish two modes of semiotic existence" (1979, p. 291), from which they classify the first in the syntagmatic order or current and the second in the paradigmatic or virtual order. We hope to demonstrate that the semiotic objects that we are going to analyze transcend these dichotomies, for which it is useful to ask: how to approach phenomenological and absences / presences of the body? We believe that, as Waskul and Vannini point out,

Phenomenological perspectives frame Exceptional way the relationships between body and world in at least two big and in certain way contradictory ways. On the one hand, according to Merleau Ponty, the phenomenological body is marked by somatic presence; whose greater contribution and fundamental assumption is that the *self*, society and the symbolic order are constituted to through the work of the body (Crossley, 1995). By the other side, following Drew Leder (1990, p. 62), the phenomenological body of the modern world is often marked by bodily absence. (2006, p. 9, our underlining)

A fundamental reference in this subject comes to us from Linguistics, which taught us how Absences are also meaning devices. It deals with processes that go from the positive to the negative, from presence to absence. One of those devices is the ellipsis, a "Construction Figure, which consists of omit in the sentence one or more words, necessary for the straight grammatical construction, but not so that it results clear the meaning "(DRAE). The Ecuadorian writer Ruales Hualca asks "How can you write silence without muting the words? How to use language to not-say or to state its absence?"(2015, p. 17)

When talking about ellipsis in plot events, Gómez Tarín points out that in that case its function is "to accelerate the narration to the maximum" (2007, p. 302). Some authors have studied these devices in texts and semiotic contexts and have indicated two fundamental types. Hernando Cuadrado, for example, states that ellipses are "absences of elements of the syntagmatic scheme whose replacement is stated by the context or situation (semantic ellipsis) or required by the rules of Grammar (grammatical or functional ellipses)" (2005, p. 169). We call the context that informs of the meaning of the elided element *co-text* or *syntagmatic context*.

Precisely, Gómez Tarín when referring to the text cinematic defines ellipsis in the following manner: "Ellipsis → Space-time jump, co-text removed from the visualization but possible and re-constructible by the spectator" (1999, p.2). For Acaso, the ellipsis: "consists of the elimination explicit of some element of the visual representation, whose absence transforms the meaning of

the image "(in Crow, 2012). For Pérez Fernández, "at the narrative level, the most commonly used resource, the one that will allow the history, will be the ellipsis" (n/d).

Today, while social networks overflow with representations of the body, with their poses, gestures, clothes and scenarios, a tendency towards its exile seems to find a place in the languages of art, of advertising and in cinema. In order to better situate these processes of corporal exile, we will address in this text, first of all, a classification of what we call body networks, what which will allow us, secondly, to address the anthropo-semiotic relationships of the body and the meanings are created in the transit between their absences and their presences, for which we will draw on a group of photographs that deal with those bodily ellipses, a relatively understudied phenomenon.

1. Presence and absence

If, as Fontanille says, "The presence, a sensitive quality per excellence, is a first semiotic articulation of perception" (1998, p. 38), and, as confirmed by Filinich, "the presence can be conceived as the first mode of existence of meaning" (2008, p. 45), certainly that mode of existence is inseparable from its semiotic correlate, that is, absence. *Presence* and *Absence* are, then, two forms of what we will define as *semiotic place*, that particular space of the Semiosphere where the transit between virtualization → actualization → and realization takes place, just like Greimas and Courtés have defined it (1997). Thus, the *semiotic place* is a space of transits between the possible meanings, the meanings under construction and the senses ultimately made. It is a process, contrary to what could be thought, multi-linear and not uni-linear, whose best representation would be through a fractal.

Filinich adds that "to perceive a presence is, first of all, for one's own body to be affected y by the body of the other"; If this is the case, how does the non-present presence of the other affect us? How are we affected by the absence, the footprint and the shadow of the other? In what ways do the alteration, the disappearance, the invisibility of a body -a body that is not there- generate new meanings beyond its presence? Chandler notes that "analyzing textual absences may help reveal which interests are benefited by its omission". (2014, n/p)

When talking about presences and absences in photography, Joly notes that "in a visual message the perceived elements, detectable by permutation, will find their meaning not only by their presence but also by the absence of certain others that will be associated to them nonetheless" (Joly in Altınbüken, 2009, p. 70). These associative processes are much more intense, and symbolically denser, under the renewal of the meanings they create and the enormous significative capacities of the body; the place from which, as it has been stated before, the world is semiotized.

2. Absence, emptiness and silence

Is it possible to distinguish between absence and emptiness? Although absence is defined in relation to a corresponding and previous presence, the vacuum, on the contrary, refers to an annulment of both. In that sense, the emptiness is a nothingness yet to be fertilized, that has not traversed the frontier of a presence, be it bodily, objectual, gestural, chromatic, etc.; In this way, the vacuum is "anterior", first, to every presence and, second, to all absence, because it supposes the latter. It could also be argued that while presence and absence are organized on an axis of the sensitive, be it visual, tactile, olfactory, auditory or gustatory, the vacuum, on the other hand, is organized on an ontological dimension, on a general property of the possible stocks. However, presence/absence and emptiness are not semiotically innocent, they do not lack meanings; on the contrary, although in Physics the vacuum is defined as lacking matter, in Semiotics that void does not translate into something meaningless: emptiness is endowed with meaning and, according to the contexts where it takes place, it has multiple senses. So, then, a paradox occurs according to which emptiness, lacking in matter, appears semiotically filled.

Now, is it possible to distinguish between absences and silences? Can the absence be a representation of the silence? In principle it could be said that silence is one of the expressive forms of sonority, those instances where it appears negatively marked, while sound would be positively marked. However, the loudness is not limited only to those two expressive possibilities. Marcos Carretero has developed a thesis on silence and visibility and tries to discover how the first is embodied in the second: "Silence is a language, it is an aesthetic category" (2014, p. 128) and, therefore, the visual representation "does not break with communication, but establishes another type of dialogue, parallel to verbalized communication" (2014, p. 136); to which Ponce Maldonado, when talking about "Language of what is silent", adds: "Without the words I do not know how to explain silences (...) It's the words that lead us to them". (2013, p.71)

3. Conditions that favor absences as significative devices

In order for absences to become significative devices in a particular text, the intervention of other semiotics subsystem is necessary to give them meaning; devices such as the co-text and the context. Villegas defines the former thusly:

The combination of redundancy and coherence form a significative group which generates the co-text (semantic context or referential world). It of a rather macrostructural character, as far as it constitutes the frame of reference in which the text acquires its meaning (...) and alludes to the intertextual contexts created by the very text. (Villegas, 1993, p. 40)

The other domain that allows for the construction of meaning comes from multiple significative variables and covers, at least, three different subdomains: a) the communication situation, related to the present conditions -spatial, temporal, environmental, technological-, the processes of enunciation → enounced → reception, which come from the very communicative act itself; b)

the historic, political, cultural, social conditions which in many ways “seep” into the communicative act; c) the experiences of the actors, “seen as a macro semiotics, that is, as an enormous group of significations (that) articulate the idiolect of the actors, a sort of life experience which determines choices, combinations, meanings and senses” (Finol, 2015a, p. 19).

4. The corporal networks

To better locate the *semiotic places* where the absences/bodily presences work and build the notion of *corporeality*, it seems necessary to locate within the Corposphere a network of minimal relationships, the description of which would allow a better understanding of the semiotic processes that work there. The Corposphere, understood as part of the internal borders of Lotman’s semiosphere, covers the extensive set of semiotic fields where the body acts as a sign. The model of networks that we are going to propose includes three types: extero-corporal, inter-corporal and intra-corporal.

4.1. The extero-corporal networks: body →environment

If we view the body as a sign or, better yet, following Merleau-Ponty, as a “set of lived meanings”, we will notice that the anthropological condition, regarding the cultural object, and the semiotic condition, as far as it is an object endowed with meanings, interact and activate in their interrelation with the environment. The body, by its mere presence but also by its absence, semiotizes the world, makes it signify, gives it meaning. In those processes of semiotization the body, by its presence or its absence, establishes dynamic extero-corporal networks, which, for example, allow us to “see” in Figure 1 the presence of two human bodies. In these outer-space networks temporal and spatial structures occupy a privileged place that even when the body is in ellipsis manage to transmit a meaning. Figure 1 shows us two chairs in an environment -sand, sea, sky- that, as a network outside the body, builds its presence from absence, a presence where the same inclination of one of the chairs mimics the inclination -romantic? familiar?- of one body on another. Even if they were interpreted as “two abandoned chairs”, it would be inevitable to think, as one among other alternatives, in two bodies that have just vacated them.



Figure 1 Taken from <http://ow.ly/g3mG3010Yyp>. "Absence is necessary to center our attention on the silence that awaits for us hidden in the background of the image, the absence of sound, the absence of communication, the absence of words". (Marcos Carretero, 2015, p.96)

According to the above, it is in these reciprocal relationships between body and environment where the first semiotizes the second, and where, in turn, the second, in a first stage, becomes a scenario that, then, also semiotizes the first. It is precisely in that environment where, virtually, if you will, the body appears as a phenomenical object, that is to say, an object in itself, but whose vocation is limited to that in itself: it projects itself onto the environment -natural, social, cultural- to semiotize it, to endow it with meaning. It is a relationship where the body is condemned, even despite itself, to be meaningful and to give meaning to the world.

4.2. Inter-corporal networks: body → body; body → non-body

In his 1993 book, *La semiosis social*, Verón spoke of the terms "intercorporal network of complementarity", a concept derived from the works of Bateson, which attributed the multidimensional characteristic: "to the extent in which the sequences of behavior, any fragment of behavior(s) the point of passage of several behavioral chains" (Verón 1993, p. 144), with permanent operations of re-sending derived from contiguity mechanisms. Those inter-body networks, however, are not limited to the co-presence, body ↔ body, in which body syntagmatic relationships are established, but, as we will see, they manifest in body ↔ non-body relationships, that constitute relations which are characteristic of a corporal paradigm. It is in the case of inter-corporal relationships, where the body appears articulated to a non-body, to an absence, where it appears, in a semiotic situation what we will call a-phenomenmic.

4.3. Intra-corporal networks: body internal → external body

We use the term intra-corporal for those networks that are created due to the relationships between the different limits and boundaries of the body itself, including internal and external relationships pertaining to the linkages not only with the organs that make up its innerworkings and the meanings associated to them, but also with their projections: the mirrored image and the shadow. To this type of projections we will refer to as para-phenomenal.

As shown in Figure 2, absence, however, doesn't just affect the body: with its migration the sound of voices, the murmur of footsteps and ambience seem to also disappear. As Marcos Carretero says, "Undoubtedly, absence brings us back to experience of silence" (2014, p. 94). Thus, in Figure 2 the absence of the human body, despite the presence of a religious image and wet spots, provokes, as in a syntagmatic chain, other absences. These are elliptical cotexts that provide the photographic message with an enormous communicative efficiency.



Figure 2 Author: Ivette Minda M. (Coronado & Minda, 2009, p.4).

5. Anthro-po-semiotic categorizations of the body: the phenomenal body

Attached to the mentioned networks, we are going to propose four categorizations of the body, which we have called *phenomenicals*. The first two are refer to the disappearance or vanishing of the body and imaginaries that these strategies generate in the efforts to signify, no longer by presence but also through

absence; the third one refers to dissimulation and fusion with the environment, as expressed in the camouflage; and the Fourth is no longer related to invisibility but, on the contrary, with over-visibility. We use the term phenomenal in its most general sense, that is, as manifestation, as appearance in the world, but also as the opposite, or in other words, as non-manifestation or no-appearance. We will call those four categorizations bodily a-phenomenal, para-phenomenal, pro-phenomenal and ultra-phenomenal.

These categorizations are a consequence of the conception of the body in its double anthropological and semiotics dimensions; dimensions that feed back and forth between each other and allow it to be considered as a sign and also as a fundamental object for the organization of the cultural realm: the body is simultaneously natural and cultural and, in that double condition, fulfils the unity of the world, a unity made possible only when it is placed in its semiotic dimension, because all meanings in the world are born from it and return to it, be it, I repeat, natural or cultural, at the fringes of which the body performs, in a double direction, the possible meanings.



Figure 3 *The Empty Chair*. Author: Edgardo Videla. Taken from <http://ow.ly/vTZQ3010YDj>

5.1. The absent body: a-phenomenal body

In the midst of its apparent simplicity, this photography allows us to deduce some of the main relationships in which the body is situated to signify and also some of the perspectives from which it is possible to study the corporal realizations, whose study would be limited if we did not see it at the same time as an anthropological object and as a semiotic object. In that anthropo-semiotics vision, the body is the cultural complex by nature, it is in and from the body where the semiotization occurs, i.e. "it occurs, it transpires, it happens"; and passes, that is, "tread, walk, run".

If we look closely at Figure 3 we will see that in it appear meanings lacking in signifiers bodily direct, visible, explicit. Indeed, the photography expresses the body without it being present, a contradictory expression with the "optical theorem of existence" proposed by Debray (1992, p.494). While we could speak of a metaphorical "translation", of a footprint, we see that here an explicit nexus is missing, such as it occurs in linguistic metaphors.

The reading of figure 2, as an expression of the human body, relies on the domestic space that it contains, which acts as a co-text. It could be said, using linguistic terminology, that the boots act as an exophoric deixis that operates when the entity referred is outside the text. In this case, the boots do so because they allude to the body human that is not explicitly present.

From the semiotic point of view the interesting in the case of Minda's photography is that the boots activate two mechanisms of meaning: the photographic co-text, that is, the other signs that appear in the same photo (walls, floor, painting of ¿San Martín?) and a triple context historical: social, because it refers to a peasant; space, then it alludes to rurality; economic, because it alludes to poverty. Without Doubt, it is not the same if we look at figures 4 and 5.



Figure 4 and 5: "Model" boots interpreted as "object" or as "merchandise"; lacking of a bodily representation.

We probably would not associate these boots with a human body. At least it would not be our first choice. Maybe in a first instance we would perceive them as "models" or as an exemplary exhibition, perhaps as "products", "merchandise" or "manufacturing", a semantic effect that

derives from its de-contextualization but also from the lack of "wear marks", which turns them into objects paradigmatic and, therefore, a-syntagmatic.

As it was stated before, it is the co-textual operations and contextual ones that determine the emergence of meanings that lack signifiers. What determines that in Figure 2 some empty boots signify the human body? The obvious answer is that boots shown in it have tell-tale signs of being worn, in this case, to protect the feet, which indicates a relationship where a network of meanings intervenes, which implies, for example, risk → protection. It is about a process in which we can find a relationship of the body with the environment, but also with a story, not only personal but also social. That being said, how do you organize that relationship? As we have pointed out elsewhere, the boots establish a border -not a limit- between the body and the environment. These objects would be part of the second frontier of the body: clothing (Finol, 2015b).

In this photograph we can see that semiotic dialectic between absence and presence that, on one side, convey empty boots, lacking some feet that would fill them, an active semiotic mechanism creator of the vacuum, the absence, and yet, despite of everything, we cannot not see the body: we imagine it male, perhaps, a peasant, recently arrived from the farm, the ranch, from the damp earth. But, on the other hand, that of the presence, in Figure 2 we observe the faded image of a saint with a cross; a presence that makes more dramatic the absence of a human body, an absence, temporary or definitive, but which, in any case, leaves us with a testimony of jobs, sweat and hardships, of an associated poverty, confirmed by other semiotic resources such as the emptiness of the home space, the humidity of its walls and their muted colors.

We see here an emptiness generated outside of the body, because it does not fill, it does not occupy what it was meant to fill or occupy; that is, it is not a void in its morphological interior but a vacuity that affects the outside world, an additional test of your ability to build semiosis beyond its own limits and thus develop borders (Finol, 2015b). It is to this non-appearance of the body that we call para-phenomenal: although it is not an explicit and visible body it is itself, with its powerful symbolic density, the organizing object of all the co-and textual isotopies. If the reader had access to the book where this photograph was taken, a second co-textual level which I have called *paragmatic*, they would verify some of the meanings mentioned here. However, even in the absence of this second *co-textual* level it is possible to perceive the isotopies, understood as redundancy of meaning facilitators of a uniform reading (Greimas, 1973). Some of those isotopies would be, among others, {work}, {poverty}, {masculinity}

5.2. The body and its shadows: the para-phenomenal body

...to create a sense of presence
beyond their own bodies.

Dahlan Bin Abdul Ghani (2012).

In this new example (Fig. 6) we see another form of elision of the body whose presence, however, is indicated by the shadow, a type of sign whose particular characteristics have interested semioticians for a long time.



*Figure 6: "I keep the shadow in the photo, but I can erase my body, because I still do not know who I am."
"From the series "I'm not There." Photographs of Pol Hervàs Úbeda.*

From the physical point of view, the shadow is, as it is known, the result of the interrelation between a source of light, an object and a projection space that acts as a screen. The mass of the

object bring the advancement of light to a halt and projects a form without light, relatively similar to the silhouette of that object. The produced shadow thus varies according to the greater or lesser opacity of the object, which is derived from its type of mass. If for the Theory of the Shadow it "is not a simple dark spot on a screen but rather it is governed by the laws of nature "(Prabin, 2010, p. 105), from the symbolic point of view it poses an identity problem, as Úbeda Hervás points out: " My shadow is there but I erase myself because I don't know who I am any longer".

Various photographers have shown interest in the use of bodily shadows as meaningful elements with a high symbolic content. For example, the photograph of Ulises the cat taken by Cartier-Bresson is quite famous (Fig. 7).



Figure 7: Author: Henri Cartier-Bresson. *«Notre chat Ulysse et l'ombre de Martine»*. Paris, 1989. "J'adore les chats! J'en avais un qui s'appelait Ulysse, parce qu'il passait son temps à disparaître" (Cartier-Bresson, 2004).

For Altinbüken, in Figure 7 presences and absences converge and coexist. The first one is represented by the body of the cat and absence is by the human body (2009). More recently Úbeda Urbás has developed a proposal regarding bodily shadows that seem to move away from the body where they originate but, in spite of everything, they remain anchored to the very shoes of an absent body where it should fit: "I follow the shoes to make sure that it is nothing more than a simple shadow "(2013).

The French photographer Richard Vantielcke has also developed a series titled “Les anonymes de l’ombre”, in which bodyless shadows are depicted: “je m’attache à sublimer le quotidien, en lui insufflant une touche de mystère, d’étrangeté, de bizarre parfois...” (Fig. 8).



Figure 8: Author: Richard Vantielcke: "I dedicate myself to sublimate the everyday, infusing it with a touch of mystery, of strangeness, of the bizarre at times ". Taken from <http://ow.ly/d5c7301OYHd>

If shadows are not an absolute absence, per se, they are situated half way between that absolute absence which we have seen in previous examples and the metaphoric substitution by other types of signs. If, as Peirce said, mankind is a sign, so is their shadow, and in that meaning we could say, if the absence of the body in the case of the empty boots is a sign, which we have denominated as a secondary relation or an a-phenomenal body, in the case of the shadow we are talking about a sign of primary relation: There is no shadow without a body, but boot can exist without it. Because of this, we will call the representation formed by the shadow para-phenomenal. It is a similar case of that of the body in front of a mirror: without it there is no sign to be seen nor a shadow of a sign. In that sense, shadows are and indexical sign, but also an iconic one. This is valid for the human body, but also for any other figure, animal or otherwise. So, what is that the body, in contrast with other physical objects, contribute to its meanings? From the point of view of the iconic sing, the body conveys likenesses. But, for us, the shadow is a prefigure. It is the announcement of a figure where it contributes, mainly, symbolic work, that is to say, that which creates new significations beyond the sign and even beyond the sing in a situation.

Now, there is the question of what kind of symbolism? There are many symbolic nuclei associated with the shadow. In some cases, it symbolizes /suspense/, as in horror movies; in others it symbolizes /trace/, as is the case in the picture of Cartier-Bresson; in others it symbolizes /protection/, as in the saying "Whoever leans close to a good tree is blanketed by good shade." But when the shadow is that of a body, other symbolisms such as the veiled presences or the human footprint appear. The shadow of a body is filled with the meanings that it, inevitably, engraves upon it; meanings which exceed those of the mere physical phenomenon.

5.3. The camouflaged body: pro-phenomenal body

Another expression of the processes of invisibilization of the body is that where it melts with the environment, as exemplified by the images of Chinese photographer Liu Bolin (Fig. 9 and 10). This type of representation that we call pro-phenomenical body, privileges a different sense from the previous ones, because it shows an interpretable text in, at least, two directions. On the one hand, this camouflage, in which the body is "absorbed" by the environment, would express how the city, the technological system or the crowd make the human being, the builder, "disappear" precisely into these very environments. In this sense, directionality of the progressive invisibilization goes from the environment to the human body, which, in a certain way, devours and integrates as a "movable" part of said environment. On the other hand, it could also be interpreted in a directionality contrary: it is the body itself, fleeing environments social networks, seeks to "disappear" by merging into urban and technological ecosystem.



Figure 8 and 9: The camouflaged body. Author: Liu Bolin.

In any case, it is a body whose process of disappearance, either in one direction or in another, seeks to reinvent its presence; a body that, in front to the invasion of objects, streets, huge

buildings and supersaturation of vehicles, tries to show, by means of its absence, the progressive deterioration of its corporeality. In his effort to make the body disappear, the author resorts to camouflage, which consists, precisely in giving something the appearance of something else or, as Fabbri points out, "camouflage, above all, breaks the perceptual automatism" (2012, p. 39). It is when it attempts to be "something else" when, finally, the body tries to return to itself, aspires to rescue the sense particular of its own corporeality that it is no longer an essence but a historical product, then, as Marcos Carretero says,

It is necessary to view absence not as pure state in which the absent object has never been, but on the contrary, when the absence of the body is evident it is always, by an inconclusive elimination, because it is the sign of a previous existence that holds within themselves a nostalgia, a remembering, the relationship of the body and its surroundings becomes a historic vision (2015, n/p).

5.4. The unexpected body: the ultra-phenomenal body

But, as we have seen, the body not only acts as a powerful semiotic device thanks to its absence but also thanks to its "excessive presence", to its ability to break arbitrary ideological models, political and cultural. Precisely, Figure 11, used as a poster for the XVI International Photography Festival and Visual Arts Photoespaña 2013, reunites the absence, "the empty chair", and the "excess" of presence, expressed in an unexpected intra-corporal syntagmatic: that of a body where organs traditionally held as exclusive to the female morphology and organs traditionally considered as exclusive of the masculine morphology. This corporal break creates a new semiotic place, understood as a space in the Corposphere where the symbolic paradigms change.



Figure 11: "Beatriz Espejo, Spanish combative and rebellious transsexual, author from the book *Manifiesto Puta* (Edicions Bellaterra, 2009), stars in advertisement for TV and the Internet. A piece that wants to illustrate the theme of the 2013 PhotoEspaña festival through suggestive images and an off with excerpts from an interview with the protagonist, where compare "with a centaur or a siren" (López, 2013, online).

For Beatriz Espejo, a well-known Spanish transsexual leader,

We have imagined things that are not real, have we not? The human being liked to fantasize about gods with superheroes. In the popular imagination there was already that desire, that longing, an ambiguity. More than representing a fantasy for others I wanted to be my own fantasy. When completely naked it is like I am a Centaur, like a Sirena or something strange, right? An apparition (<http://ow.ly/cXsk301OYMP>).

In the traditional and canonic model, the unexpected body is manifests with elements that go beyond the created "expectations"; it is about marginalized bodies, and even worse, stigmatized and condemned due to their presumed "spurious" quality, which is to day "degenerated regarding their nature".

However, it would be wrong to limit the semiotic process to rigid extremes, to insurmountable borders; in this case, the presence, on the one hand, and the absence, on the other, because we would lose the richness of the gray areas, the transits, of the middle ground. Figure 6 illustrates well that transit between the extremes: at the same time as, *stricto sensu*, the body is not present

(absence) it appears semi-enunciated. In other words, the shadow is and is not the body. It is because there would be no shadow without it, and it is not because a shadow is just a light phenomenon, it's a physical representation lacking flesh and bones; for Peirce the shadow is an index sign. Precisely, the pictures show us, even, that the shadow exists, becomes independent, has a life of its own, without the body; it's about a semiotic process to make it invisible, to deprive it of its flesh and of its bones and make it "another" sign, "another" reality. In that sense, the corporal enunciation is reversed: it is not the body who produces, who enunciates the shadow but the other way around.

In view of the previous information, a semiotic sequentiality that exceeds extreme binaries and takes into account the transits, the gray areas, and it would include stages as those presented in Figure 12 could be established.

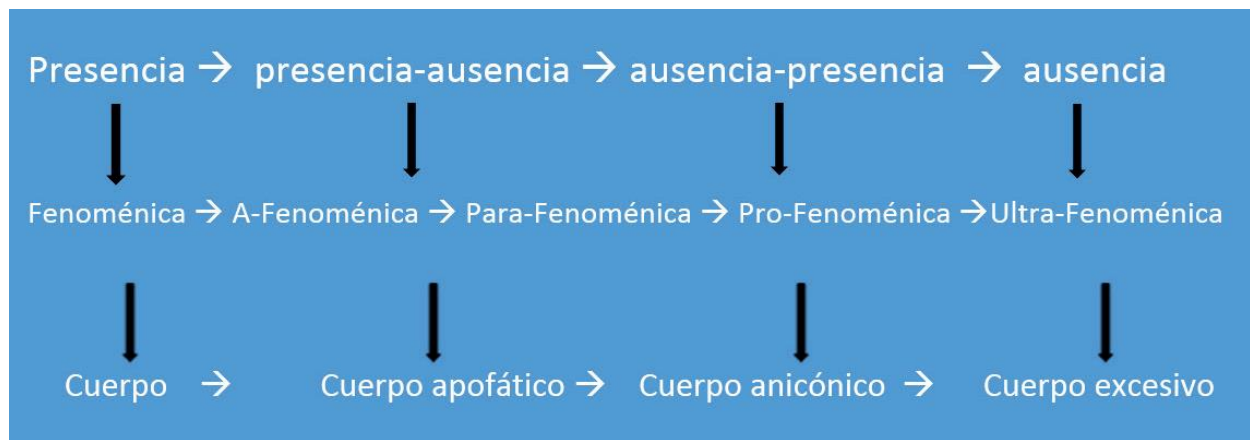


Figure 12: From the author

If we wanted to locate the set of elements modeled in the previous illustration in a network of relationships of greater dimension, we could suggest a new system, in which the limits of the Corposphere overflow onto more complex territories which we merely suggest here as a hypothesis to pursue (Fig. 13):



Figure 13: From the author

In this new model, the body appears as part of a larger and more systematic set, in which, according to our initial hypothesis, floods the other scenarios: it is from the body and towards the body from where the senses of the world flow and come back, senses that are not only activated by their presence but also, as we have seen, by its absence.

We have shown some visual examples of the absolute absences of the body, but these can also be partial. The first example is the mutilated body, where one of its morphological components is not there because the subject was not born with it or because it has been lost. There are famous legends about these absences, perhaps the most known is that of the headless horseman, based on the history of W. Irving The Legend of Sleepy Hollow (1820). A good contemporary example of those bodily representations with absences of organs or portions, are the Catalano sculptures (Fig. 14).



Figure 14: "The travelers", by Bruno Catalano. "A forced trip which is an odyssey, a horizon that embraces and we would like to be infinite, bound by exile and suffering, in search of freedom and guided by survival" (Camacho, 2015).

6. A rebellion against selfie? From the apophatic bodies to the aniconic bodies

In the photographs and sculptures analyzed, which constitute a representation tendency that seems to contradict the media oversaturation of bodily images, two of the iconic-visual mechanisms originated in religious conceptions that denied certain types of visual representations appear to manifest themselves. In effect, if something characterizes contemporary societies, called *the show business societies* by Debord, it is the omnipresence of the image, generators and not only of an overabundance phenomenon of visual representation but, furthermore, that overabundance constitutes a form of social relationship. The best proof - though not the only one - is undoubtedly the selfie (Finol, 2014) which floods social networks and the traditional means of mass media, where the body defines our self-representation: the core of the selfie, with its gestures, looks and poses, is our own body.

However, some artists have begun a countermovement to that oversaturated presence of the body: it tries to disappear, make invisible, eclipse the body, which brings us to aniconism and apophatic strategies. The first term not only speaks of the impossibility of representing those things which are sacred, but also human beings when faced with the “impossibility” of representing a person in front of the task of representing bodily form, as this leads us away from the essentials, that is to say, its corporeity, thus the artist represents it by means of a void, thanks to the hollowness of a pair of boots, or the absence in a chair. It is a semiotic strategy through which the corporeity is better represented as the body is less and less represented. So, it would seem that expressing its full corporeity, they complete body veils it, conceals it, makes it invisible, and thus it is necessary to vanish it from where we would usually find it so that its essence may emerge: its corporeity.

The second semiotic strategy, *the apophatic strategy*, is characterized by denying a predicate about a subject, a phenomenon that can be associated with the use of shadows and the negation of the body that should be there to produce it; or, as Vega states, “the apophatic is what surges and is presented, even if its quality is silenced, darkened or emptied” (2019, p. 11).

In light of this, what particular characteristics do the meanings of the body acquire when it is not present or when, as is the case with shadows, when it is glimpsed it is insinuated, it is substituted? Regarding signs, what does the missing body mean? How is the missing body related, for example, to the glimpsed one? A way -amongst several- to answer these questions is to point out that, in effect, while the presence is displayed in the indicative mode of the semiotic realization, the absence is displayed in the subjunctive mode. Thanks to the former, the bodies are there as part of the world, as concrete and real objects, in the bosom of their circumstances and their situations. Thanks to the latter, bodies, in virtue of their absence, of their shadows and footprints, are a possibility, and insinuation, a hypothesis always on the fringe of realization.

Conclusions: “the secrets of the void” o “the new epiphanies”

It is inevitable to relate the bodily representations that we have seen with artistic movements like abstract expressionism (Pollock, De Kooning), in which body parts are reduced/transformed/fragmented in geometrical forms to, finally, be made invisible and expelled.

The viewed texts seem to go the body itself. Just as Cézanne wanted to paint *appleness* and not the apple itself, (Lawrence, 1993; Caputto Jaffe, 2011), these absences, insinuations or substitutions do not seek to represent the body but rather its corporeity. As we have pointed out, these representations of corporeity are realized through two mechanisms: the aniconist strategy and the apophatic strategy, which bring us closer to a comprehension of Ecuadorian painter José Unda’s proposal, who talks about “the secrets of the void”, a condition expressed in an artwork built “based on that which isn’t there, because it is beyond what we see” (2015, p. 37).

However, it is possible to infer a hypothesis according to which when we peer into these secrets of the void -After all, as Bacon said, “Nothing is more regarded than empty things”- we are contrarily not in front of the disappearance of the body, but rather faced with “new epiphanies” (Vega, 2019, p. 11); as a consequence, when we resist the overabundance of the superficial bodies of the selfie we are developing a new conception of corporeity, where the visibility of its flesh and bones do not limit or hinder its visibility. So, it is about dealing with what Vega, referring to the mystery, calls “the limits of representability” of bodies. Furthermore, it can be concluded that these expressions of bodily absences wander a de-somatization of the body, a de-carnalization that promotes a better visualization of it.

These strategies are inserted in phenomenological visions of the body which we have called *a-phenomenical*, *para-phenomenical*, and *ultra-phenomenical*. As such, when we extend the limits of what is properly phenomenological we can then comprehend, thanks to the creativity of the artists, dimensions that are not always in plain sight; for, in the end, not seeing is also a way to perceive.

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