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Beauty and the Flesh
The Biggest Loser, to be Beautiful is to Exclude the Flesh[1]

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Abstract
To define beauty, as a quality of a body is difficult, depending moreover on subjective evaluations that change according to different social formations. Considering however, a possible reading of the individual as structured through soul, body and flesh, the statement that beauty depends on the exclusion of flesh can be put forth. It is in this light that the reality show *The Biggest Loser* shall be analysed and the contemporary definition of beauty discussed.
Keywords: soul, body, flesh, beauty.

1. Introduction

Beauty is and always has been important. Defining beauty and its parameters, though, is difficult. In referring to the beauty of a body, harmony and proportion are taken into account, but these are fleeting criteria, changing according to different social formations.

Beauty has often been associated with the Good. In operational terms, this means that beauty lies in the adequacy of an individual to the moral, social and political standards of a given community.

It will be argued, as a broader criterion, that *beauty implies the exclusion of flesh*. In this sense, three separate moments will be analysed:

1. Catholic premises linking flesh to sin and evil to ugliness.
2. Modernist emphasis on status and health.
3. Present obsession with youth, health and elegance.

This paper intends to examine the reality show *The Biggest Loser* establishing a connection between beauty and the notion of the exclusion of flesh. For reasons of economy, the text will focus most deeply on the Catholic distinctions between soul, body and flesh and on the analysis of *The Biggest Loser*.

2. Preliminary Point

Briefly, in relation to the modern context, it is important to refer its intimate association with the French Revolution and the Enlightenment as well as the Industrial Revolution and subsequent establishment of global mass markets.

The modern period is characterized by a gradual transition of power, from the Divine – Church and King – where it concentrated up until then, to the Institutional – State, Church and Family. This new social organization, mostly grounded on a newfound confidence in the power of reason and the belief in a world rationally organized, fosters the conviction that science and technology can generate perfect societies, originating the utopian idea of recreating the celestial paradise on earth. For such, it becomes necessary that both individuals and societies be tamed.

It is in this context that Michel Foucault (1990) analyses the transition of punitive power: from one that is carried out on the body (through the control of life and death, through torture and public executions) to one carried out through the body by means of certain disciplinary fields. These are, essentially, of two kinds – legal and medical; law punishes moral crimes or behavioural disorders, while mental disease is treated through clinical disciplines such as psychiatry, which regulate bodily desires. The pair Clinic-Law intends to produce individuals that are physically and morally healthy, fitting into a society that averts degeneration (a term much linked with Nazism). Prevention and social hygiene are enforced through treatment or rejection of abnormality, madness and disease.

Modernity generates a model individual – the productive and socially adjusted European male. This model is rooted in a series of exclusions: to be adjusted means not to be a woman, an African or a Jew, or mad, destitute, sexually deviant or poor. Regarding beauty: status and health are considered beautiful (meaning one possesses social and genetic capital) while ugliness is associated with being a degenerate. Disease and death – things of the flesh – are subtracted from the territory of the healthy; disease is confined into hospitals, sanatoriums, clinics, asylums and madhouses; it is around this period that cemeteries are distanced from the

[1] This text results from the doctoral thesis presented to the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon, entitled *O Corpo como Imagem e as Imagens do Corpo na Contemporaneidade* (2013).

villages, placed in neighbouring terrains.

3. The Body and the Soul

Grounded in Socratic-Platonic thought, Western tradition has long-lived with the duality between matter and idea, between body and soul. The nature of these two realities is distinct: on the one hand that which has always existed without having been born, that which is immutable and everlasting and, on the other, that which is born and dies without ever really existing, without ceasing to become (Timaeus and Critias 28b-28c).

Nonetheless, for Plato, although body and soul are distinct, they are linked to one another, the soul being composed of three parts that, lodged in different bodily cavities, are responsible for different faculties. The discord between desires, such as being thirsty and not wanting to drink - according to Socrates' example (The Republic 439 b-c) is the argument that justifies the existence of the three souls: it is possible for one to want to drink and at the same time refrain from drinking. There is a rational soul that dominates impulses, being responsible for knowledge; a high-spirited soul that aids the rational soul, fighting courageously for what it considers to be just, and, lastly, an irrational and appetitive soul, responsible for hunger, thirst and other bodily desires and pleasures.

As Plato says (Timaeus and Critias 77a-c), the human body, shaped on the soul, is composed in accordance to the parts of the soul it accommodates. Rationality is thus found in the head, whose spherical form mimics that of the Universe and whose slight contact with the flesh indicates sensibility and intelligence. The division between the rational soul and the mortal soul is guaranteed through the neck. The mortal soul is further divided between the spirited soul, located in the chest and the appetitive soul, located in the belly; this last one being far enough from the head that the "savage animal" might not upset the part of the soul that cogitates. The liver, positioned in the region of appetites, is likened to a mirror, able to receive and reflect the images of rational thought, providing the means for taming those urges specific to "the bitterness that is its counterpart".

The dichotomy between real and ideal entails, from the outset, the assessment of a real that cannot be self-sufficient: it is through the concepts of eternity – Good, Beauty, Truth, Justice – that reality gains meaning. One's salvation lays in one's capacity to cast-off the body and approximate the soul to what it most resembles: the immortal. Platonic transcendence implies that the real always falls short, permanently surpassed by a plane of non-real, inherently turning the body into a thing that ought be disavowed. The head – similar to the spherical form of the Universe – and the eye – analogous to the soul – are the body parts that are valued.

Nonetheless, centuries later Saint Augustine (Confessions Book III, Chapter VI) warns of the dangers of sight, distinguishing "the eyes of the flesh" – that entrap the soul through the beauty of forms, colours and shimmers – from "the invisible eyes" that seek divine Beauty and do not let themselves be deceived. Here, the divergence between Beauty as a value close to Truth and divinity and beauty as a quality of appearance, which can be deceiving, is already drawn.

The platonic model informs Christianity, in which the Body of Christ is the central figure. It coincides with the body of Christians while combining earthly, mortal nature and spirituality (because it is, at once, in between the two and a part of both).

Again, condemnation falls on the material and on Man. Born a sinner; he can only seek out redemption by living according to the laws of God, aspiring to join Him. Tainted by original sin, Man must suffer through the earthly agonies that derive from the conflicts and torments of carnal bonds; these do not stem from his primitive nature, but are a sign of his condemnation. Eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge has sentenced all men to live in pain, making them earn their food and suffer bodily torments. To tempt Eve into eating the Forbidden fruit, the serpent says that whoever eats it will have "his eyes opened", becoming wise and knowing Good and Evil. So originally, sin is of an intellectual nature, signifying that Man will be capable of knowing as much as God. But in exchange, God gives Man physical pain – to Eve He gives suffering in the bearing and delivering of children, to Adam He gives painful labour in the earning of life, to both He gives death. Because they ate the apple, Adam and Eve lost the "garment of grace" (Agamben 2010, p.55-91) that covered their flesh.

Immediately upon eating the forbidden fruit, they realise they are naked, feeling ashamed of their exposed bodies and particularly of their genitals which they cover with fig leaves. The body had always existed, had always been in plain sight, but in Paradise it was protected and covered by a veil of divine grace or glory that prevented all evil associated with the flesh: disease, death and above all, libido. Nudity, according to Giorgio Agamben, is a negativity resulting from being conscious of the naked body; it happens when the garments of grace are removed, leaving the body exposed to libido which is defined as a revolt of flesh against the spirit. From this moment on, since birth Man carries the sin of the flesh; one that torments the soul, bringing to light a structural lack that can only be resolved in another life: only after going through the necessary abstinences can one achieve reform.

4. The Soul, The Body and The Flesh

Leprosy, also known as "Lazarus' illness", is caused by the *Mycobacterium Leprae,* a bacterium that affects the

peripheral nervous system, causing skin lesions and leading, in more serious cases, to deformities of the body, especially of extremities (face and nose, feet and hands). These deformities, characterised by the appearance of protuberances in the body, affect areas such as ears, nose and elbows, making physical differences between infected and healthy persons highly visible. The visibility of symptoms led to the exclusion of diseased persons, who were placed in leprosarium – large territories at the gates of the city – and, in many cases, forced to use a bell around their necks to warn others as they approached. Leprosy, in being associated with sexual sin, was seen as a disease of the flesh, caused by its appetites; a visible sign of the rebellion of flesh against the formal integrity of the body, revealing failure of the body to control its flesh.

Platonic dualism is based on distinction between that which is eternal and immutable and that which becomes, leading to repudiation of that which is contingent. In the case of humans, this attribute is of the flesh, which becomes degraded and dies, revealing a frailty that must be hidden. The task of the body is to cover and protect the flesh, preventing it from showing its weakness ["Watch and pray so that you will not fall intotemptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."(The Holy Bible Matthew 26:41)]. In Catholic tradition the body assumes an intermediate position between flesh and soul: it partakes of the materiality of flesh but exists in the image of God, sheltering the Holy Spirit; in the Body of Christ is united the Catholic family. By communicating His Spirit to all men, Christ made them His kindred and a part of His Body: a Body that emerges through the communion of Spirit at Baptism, which resurrects after death to be united with God, that is shared through the bread and wine of Eucharist. The head is that of Christ Himself – "image of the invisible God" (Concílio Econumenico 1987, p.63) – which is to this common Body what the soul is to the body of each individual.

The significance of the distinction between body and flesh becomes evident when the Bible speaks of the resurrection of the body, stating that the immortal spirit will return or incarnate into the body[1]; the flesh is both a source of sin and a possibility for redemption, for it is by admonishing flesh that salvation can be achieved. Having faith and relinquishing flesh are conditions for salvation and reunification with Christ. The demand to renounce temptation – which is essentially condensed in the will of the libido – gives the Church control over its faithful; confession is the privileged device, forcing believers into self-examination and assumption of guilt, while giving confessors the power to judge and punish[2].

In the economy of salvation the body occupies that sensitive intermediate position between flesh and soul, just as Christ rules over all, celestial and terrestrial. Giorgio Agamben (2010, p.91-104), in his text on the "Glorious Body", synthesizes theological discussions on the subject: firstly – he considers – the soul recovers that same body it was housed in while alive, though a perfected version, no longer subject to passions, submitted only to the will of the rational soul. Although celestial, this body exists and is palpable. This physicality was asserted by the Council of Trent through the dogma of Transubstantiation[3], which emphasized the connection between the flesh and blood of Eucharist and the sufferings of Christ on the cross. The control strategy of the Church was based on continuous attention to sin and to the visibility of flesh, so much so that Christ on the cross is the image of the flesh of Christ on the cross; as is demonstrated by a particularly violent description in which the lifeless body of Jesus is speared, blood and water gushing out[4].

The glorious body is not, as Agamben argues, the transposition of one terrestrial reality into another, nobler and superior. Rather, it marks the reintegration of the body with itself. A body no longer subject to becoming, or in other words, free from the pressure of libido, nutrition, defecation, growth and aging, all functions determined by the flesh. Here, it is worth mentioning the attention given to the age at which Jesus dies; the resurrected body assumes that ideal age at which one has stopped growing but is yet exempt from the decadence and aging of flesh, which exposes the frailty of the body.

The newly recovered body is stable, as far as age, quantity and proportion are concerned; free from the terrestrial functions of protecting, covering and disciplining the flesh; its sole task is to provide the spirit with a material form. From this point of view, body is form itself: giving visible shape to formless flesh, it renders perceptible the virtues of the soul. It is the plane of intersection between soul and flesh. Nonetheless, its earthly manifestation is of precarious nature and this is clearly shown when, as in the case of Leprosy, flesh overturns the body.

After losing the garments of grace, the body becomes malleable, being in turn an image of soul and virtue, or one of flesh and sin. This plasticity turns the body into a surface onto which something is projected and

[1]"It is by being returned to the body that the spirit obtains immortality; the resurrection of the bodies is the condition for the survival of the spirit (…)" (Deleuze, 1996, p.30).
Author´s translation.
[2]Michel Foucault describes how confession works.
FOUCAULT, M. (1999). *Abnormal. Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*. p.172-194.
[3]Dogma proclaimed at the IV Council of the Lateran, in 1215.
[4]"When they came to Jesus, they saw that He was already dead, so they did not break His legs but one of the soldiers plunged his spear into Jesus' side and at once blood and water poured out."(The Holy Bible. John, 19: 33-35.).

made visible, onto which are inscribed the power tactics of a certain social formation.

5. Soul, Body and Flesh Today

In the book *Space, Time and Perversion*, Elizabeth Grosz (1995, p.33-35) identifies two viewpoints for analysing the body: that which she calls "inscription" – which she associates to a public and social body that functions as a surface for inscribing social morality and law – and the perspective of the "lived body" which, associated to phenomenology and psychoanalysis, relates to the layout of an imaginary anatomy. In the Western world the body is established through a distinction between interior and exterior, the latter being a surface that expresses interiority or subjectivity. As such, in can be read and deciphered like a text – to the extent that social law is embodied, the body becomes textualized and those movements that are generated by the exterior/interior relation are classified as behaviour. Taken as surfaces, "bodies speak without necessarily talking, because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intextuated, narrativized; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms, and ideals become incarnated" (Groz 1995, p.35).

The division referred to by Grosz differentiates the body as a public surface – which, in the West, mirrors that which results from the clash between social constraints and subjectivity – from the interior – a concept that embraces terms such as soul, "I" or conscience. Mike Featherstone (1991, p.171) marks a similar distinction by speaking of an "inner body" *versus* an "outer body". But while the latter is comparable to Grosz's "exterior", here defined through appearance and the way a body moves and controls itself in the social arena, the "inner body" is associated with the functioning of organs and with health. Three entities emerge: the public body, where social and private motivations are made perceptible, the subjective interior and the biological organism. In spite of all theological debates involving this matter, a similar dissociation was already to be found in the Catholic concepts of soul, body and flesh, a separation where the body is isolated and simultaneously in contact with the soul and the flesh.

José Gil (1997) analyses the body's form of existence, defining it in terms of a surface that accommodates a depth, an exterior that points to an interior: the interior is schematized by the exterior. Gil considers that individuals act out the existence of these two regions on a daily basis. This becomes evident when, for example, one attempts to communicate with another: one directs one´s voice to the ears of the interlocutor or searches for his eyes; in moments of intimacy, one might embrace the other and touch the other's skin; in sexual relations affective intimacy involves opening and sharing interior spaces. Relationships between individuals suggest that both parties aspire to join their interiors and it is by way of the bodily orifices – ears, mouth, skin, etc. – that such is made possible. These occupy a region between the exterior and interior, between surface and depth: "it is not *on the surface* of the body itself but *in its depth*, beyond the orifices, that the soul eventually resides" (Gil 1997, p.153)[1]. Whether one accepts this division, or not, it is commonly acknowledged in relationships amongst individuals. In this same essay, Gil identifies what he designates as the depth of another interior, that of the organs. He clearly states that the interior space should not be confused with the organs, associating awareness of flesh to malaise; when one senses the presence of organs and this happens when feeling pain or discomfort, the feeling of malaise makes one perceive flesh as something uncalled-for, a stranger to the subject.

These considerations reassert the distinction between three elements: an exterior, an interior and organs, entities that can be correlated to the boby, soul and flesh, as long as we assume that the body is connected to the soul and flesh (Gil refers the discomfort caused by being conscious of the organs "living off the body"). However, by defining the flesh as something unfamiliar or alien, Gil assigns a key role to the soul and the body in defining an individual, a point of view that reinforces traditional western classifications.

6. The Biggest Loser

The Biggest Loser is a reality show which began in 2004 in the U.S., produced by NBC. Contestants are housed in a resort, having no contact with the exterior and being supervised by a medical team and two personal trainers: Jillian Michaels and Bob Harper. The criteria for selection is the contestant's weight (and associated indexes: body mass index, diseases such as diabetes, sleep apnoea, cholesterol, etc.), which vary between 100Kg and 300Kg. Week after week, the candidates follow a strict diet and exercise regularly, facing "challenges" in which their physical limits are put to the test, as well as their courage, team spirit and intellectual and emotional resistance. At the end of each week they are weighed. The two candidates with the least percentage of weight loss face elimination, being one of them voted off by his co-contestants and dismissed from the resort. All participants will meet again at the "grand finale" where they compete for a monetary prize.

Besides intense physical training, Bob and Jillian focus on psychological rehabilitation, endeavouring to understand the causes that led to the weight gain, stressing the need to cure the "interior" in order to improve the "exterior" and to work hard so that the newly cured "interior" reflects in exterior appearance. *The Biggest Loser*

[1] Author´s translation.

claims to represent a break with old habits, to bring about a profound change in lifestyle, empowering contestants and helping them to regain confidence and self-esteem; that which Danny – winner of the eighth season – refers to as "it" during the grand finale: "I always knew I've had it inside of me"[1]. The goal is to increase positive feelings capable of inducing and sustaining changes in the body, the result of which is significant improvement in quality of life, not only because one becomes healthier but also because one looks better. At the start of the show, many contestants testify to their withdrawal from social and/or sentimental life, ashamed as they are of showing themselves in public. Afterwards they announce that they feel happier; that they can more adequately fulfil their social roles (at work, as parents or spouses) and furthermore, that they have begun living again. It is this specific achievement that Jillian lays emphasis on in one casting ad for a new season: "Are you ready for your own success story?" Like "Uncle Sam", she points her finger at all who wish to have a "successful body", much like the one she herself exhibits, toned and elegant. Jillian's provocation is aimed both at possible candidates and at the Biggest Loser "family" or "movement". The reality show has created a virtual community: it offers diet and exercise programs intended to aid Americans who wish to lose weight at home; encourages participation in the pound-for-pound challenge, in which weight loss is converted into food donations to *Feeding America*, a national network of food banks; merchandising is sold (such as calorie trackers, t-shirts, workout DVDs, etc.) while each episode serves to advertise food products, gym accessories and other goods of sponsoring brands. There is also an ecological element, expressed through the *FilterForGood* program, aiming to replace bottled water with *Brita* bottles (and associated purifying system). The "American family" thus constitutes itself through an intricate network of actions, weight loss being associated to humanitarian and ecological causes, personal success harmonizing with social activism whereas each individual becomes part of a television public and group of consumers targeted through market strategies. Here, it is possible to witness the association to a Good that becomes specific, being determined by what "is good" for individuals and their communities.

At the beginning of each season candidates exhibit their excessive weight, appearing minimally dressed (shorts for men, shorts and a top for women) at each successive weigh-in. Their former shame of appearing in public gives way to a willingness to reveal their bodies, not that such a revelation is done confidently; on the contrary, it is painful and tearful. This attitude is like an assumption of guilt before the community; the same shame and guilt, which historically walk hand in hand, settling in a body where flesh becomes visible.

The spectator – voyeuristic motives aside – is confronted with bodies that are ordinarily hidden by clothes, confronted with body as form, its plasticity and limits: the excessive flesh deforms the immortalized shape of the canonical image of the *Vitruvian Man*, delineated by the underlying bone structure. Such emergence of flesh deteriorates the protective function of the body, associated as much with the edification of a Man free of sin as with that of the Modern Man – in which status and health coincide – and distorts the body's double meaning as object of consumption: that of a symbol and labour value.

Seeing the body as an outline, boundary or frame, that threatens to collapse makes the interior seem larger than the exterior, a situation described by Mark Cousins (2009, p.146) as "repellent" because it contradicts the isomorphous relationship between the representation of an object and the space it occupies, in this particular case, between the exterior and the interior of a human body.

It is the collapse between these two spaces – interior and exterior – that Laura Mulvey identifies in Cindy Sherman's *Disgust Pictures* (1987-1991) when she describes them as "sexual detritus, decaying food, vomit, slime, menstrual blood, hair" (Mulvey 1991, p.144), substances that suggest anorexia and bulimia[2]. According to the author, the body disappears, denoting the exhaustion of interior and exterior as categories, thus dissolving the idea, wrought by patriarchal society, of the body as facade or cosmetic masque. In line with feminist critique, Mulvey specifically considers the feminine body as constructed through masculine fetish but, in assuming the possibility that this fetishized body can fade and transform into a body without meaning, she paves the way to dissolving the idea of the body as a construction, regardless of gender. Consistent with this point of view, the integrity of the body as image or appearance – a veil that covers the flesh – is threatened, coinciding moreover with an attack on all constructions of the Human, namely modern concepts which call for an individual in control of destiny, life and death. Flesh becoming over-visible entails a double destruction: that of the symbolic body (the representation) and that of the body that contains the flesh (the formal limit), the latter causing the destruction of the first.

In *The Biggest Loser*, the competitors' degree of obesity points to a failure of control: the emergence of flesh generates individuals that are ill, foretelling death [«Et la carne, la chair, n´est-ce pas ce qui désigne en tout cas le sanglant absolu, l´informe, l´intérieur du corps, par opposition à la blanche surface?» (Didi-Huberman 1985, p.22)]; this proves that, although one might dominate one's body, one does have full control over flesh and ["When flesh re-emerges in its absolute presence, through disease, for example, the body suddenly disappears."

[1]Available at http://www.nbc.com/the-biggest-loser/video/categories/season-8-finale/1186424/. (2011.11.12).
[2]See KRAUSS, Rosalind (1999). The Destiny of the *Informe*. p.238, 240.

(Miranda 2008, p.102)[1]]. The body becomes "viscous", assuming a transient state between liquid and solid or, as Didi-Huberman (2008, p.155) states it, between form and informe. Rejecting this breakdown of form, brought about by an excess of flesh, is symptomatic of a bulimic society that shuns the marks of its own surplus, produced by a consumer society, which is also one of waste. Social bulimia becomes, at the individual level, paradigmatic of the anorectic body, in which a pathological self-control is exerted in monitoring ingested quantities - this is the model proposed by Jillian and Bob on *The Biggest Loser* as to prevent the degradation of the body. While Modernity's impetus for control was intended as a defence to society as a whole, today, as the challenges of the era reveal themselves to be pandemics and global ecological disasters far beyond the control of nations, there is an increased awareness of personal risk - defence becomes private, manifest in body and health care[2]. In an attempt to transfer the soul's immortality to the body, value is put on a healthy, athletic and strong body, capable of answering for itself and acting upon the world.

The Biggest Loser's strategy takes effect and contestants do indeed lose weight. In parallel, they eliminate or improve pathological conditions associated with obesity; from a medical standpoint, an age reversal takes place (e.g., cholesterol levels return to those considered normal for the age of the competitor), made visible through a muscular and vigorous appearance. Using health as an argument (that which is good and makes one feel good), elegance and youth are achieved; as in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this is a strategy of personal accountability, which furthermore aids the victory over flesh. Each season, physical improvement is accompanied by a visual makeover, managed by representatives of the fashion industry such as Tyra Banks (sixth season) or image consultant Tim Gunn (recurrently); hair, makeup and clothing are changed, "style" is updated and rejuvenated. Subsequently, contestants parade on the catwalk, being applauded by their families and even making public appearances on the *Tyra Banks Show*. From shame in showing themselves, they pass into a state, which though short-lived, is close to that of celebrities. This is encouraged and cultivated by the very contestants that assume themselves as role models and "inspiration" for all Americans wishing to lose weight. The passage from shame to role model follows the way in which the body is exhibited during the competition: at the outset, at weigh-ins the body is almost entirely exposed, as the show progresses and weight is lost, the contestants begin to wear t-shirts. Beyond possible speculations about the need to hide the marks of such a rapid weight loss, one can consider this epic of liberation from flesh as enabling individuals to abandon a public exhibition where they are presented as oddities (evoking freak-shows) and conquer their dignity. The body is clothed and prepared for exhibition, symbolically reversing the image of nudity as loss (of the "garments of grace"), taking up the crusade of a bodily construction that aspires to be "naked". There is a shift here, from Agamben's "nude" to Kenneth Clark's (1990) "naked": *nude* being a Greek invention and relating to a real that is constantly improved into an ideal perfection (an achievement and a rectification), operating the passage from matter to form.

As a value to exhibit, the naked is an achievement and also a rectification, a situation that is emphasized in another contest, *How to Look Good Naked*, produced by the British Channel 4 since 2006 and presented by fashion consultant Gok Wan. The particularity of this competition is that, presumably, it invests in making competitors – men and women with excess weight – feel good about their bodies. At the beginning of the program, participants compare their bodies with those of figurants and although they initially consider themselves to be heavier, they are led to recognise that this is not true. This is followed by a visual makeover: hair, dress and makeup are renewed and the final test is being photographed naked, having the image displayed in public places and hearing the (usually positive) comments of viewers. In addition to care (makeup and hair) for the shooting session, the body is staged in order to look better. The body is not simply stripped; it is arranged to appear as an improved version of itself. Thus, the chosen setup favours the model and typically the body is partially covered, be it with water in a swimming pool, a scarf or the play of light and shadow; what is photogenic is emphasized, the rest being hidden by shadows. Reconciliation with the body is thus based on a fiction of that body.

7. Conclusion

At present, it is recurrent to note an increased concern with appearance; various pathologies, that lead to discomfort with one´s body, are associated to the mediatisation of beautiful bodies; it follows, that contemporaneity is said to establish the cult of the body. However, the body has been an object of cult and attention throughout the times, as it is through the body that agreement or disagreement with proposed models has always been expressed. It was through the body that the good soul was made perceptible, then the good character of modernity and now, the good personality. What has changed is the degree of accountability placed on individuals, as, in addition to complying with proposed designs, each is now expected to establish a personal project and goals. Paradise or modern categories no longer stand as predetermined models. Furthermore, bodies

[1]Author´s translation.
[2]See KROKER, A. ; KROKER, M. (1987). Panic Sex in America. *In Body Invadors. Panic Sex in America*.

currently displayed are enhanced, by way of digital imaging or actual physical alterations brought about by available products and technologies. Because of this, each individual, while constantly comparing him or herself to these enhanced versions, struggles to adapt his or her body to these standards. The catholic body belongs to Christ; the modern body belongs to each but is overseen by institutions, the contemporary body, although individual presupposes a project, a greater aspiration and not a fact or a stable and secure condition.
Given the products available, there seems to be no justification or excuse for not being beautiful – not being beautiful equals failure. The criteria of youth, health and elegance persist, upholding modern aspirations in the present moment.

Considering that degradation and death are characteristics of the flesh, it can be assumed that beauty has always depended on its exclusion: Catholicism's strategy is through control of the flesh and insistence on virtue, the resuscitated body of Christ being the repository of youth and good proportion; Modernity attempts to avert degeneration and disease waging on health and status; presently, all marks of aging and breakdown are fought off, obesity being the greater concern, to the extent that it signals an excess of flesh. Taming the flesh implies upholding moral as well as formal principles, considering that exposing flesh undermines the formal integrity of the body; leprosy attests to a beaten body; disease and degradation serve as evidence to the decomposition of the body; and the excess of flesh obscures the canonical form of the human body. Control over flesh equals the success of social and individual mechanisms while the emergence of flesh indicates a failure in power structures: the victory of sin, the victory of Nature over science, technology and culture; and, at the individual level, the defeat of self-control.

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