

Congress

Body Modifications: BMS
A new cultural phenomenon
&
Visual Semiotics tool-analysis

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Theoretical premises [Theory of verbal signs](#)

Basic concept

VERBAL SIGN

Linguistic
definition:
Ferdinand de
Saussure

signifier

signified

referent

Sign and referent

Object [O]

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies



Body modification (or body alteration) is the deliberate altering of the human body for aesthetic or non-medical purpose, such as sexual enhancement, a rite of passage, denoting affiliation, trust and loyalty, religious reasons, shock value, and self-expression. It can range from the socially acceptable decoration (e.g., pierced ears in many societies) to the religiously mandated (e.g., circumcision in a number of cultures), and everywhere in between. Body art is the modification of any part of the human body for spiritual, religious, artistic or aesthetic reasons. <http://en.wikipedia.org>

Body modifications: BMS

"Body modification (or body alteration) is the deliberate altering of the human body for aesthetic or non-medical purpose, such as sexual enhancement, a rite of passage, denoting affiliation, trust and loyalty, religious reasons, shock value, and self-expression. *It can range from the socially acceptable decoration (e.g., pierced ears in many societies) to the religiously mandated (e.g., circumcision in a number of cultures), and everywhere in between.* Body art is the modification of any part of the human body for spiritual, religious, artistic or aesthetic reasons."

<http://en.wikipedia>

Body is not anatomy

Body is a cultural sign and a cultural object

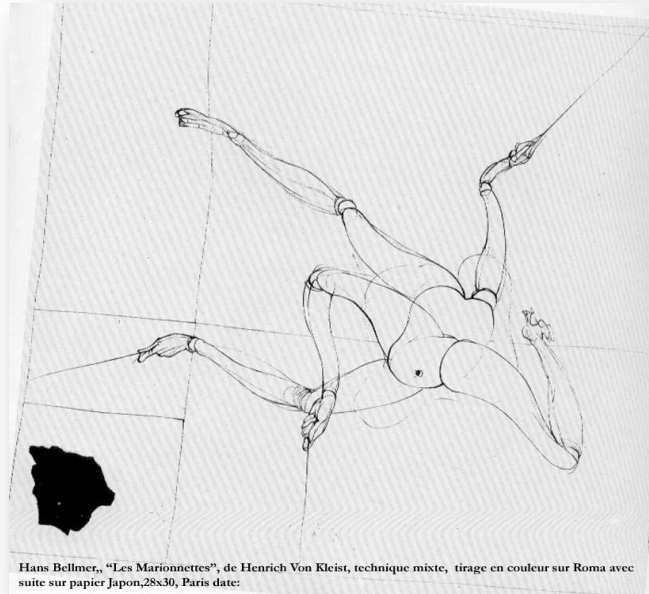
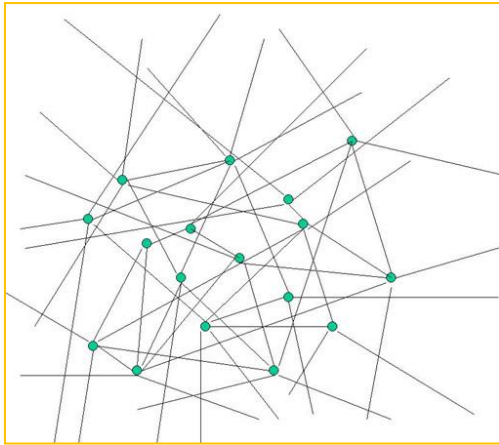
Body relates to the concept of corporeality in culture

The understanding of what 'body' is, relies on the understanding of its interpretation within the frame of

Culture

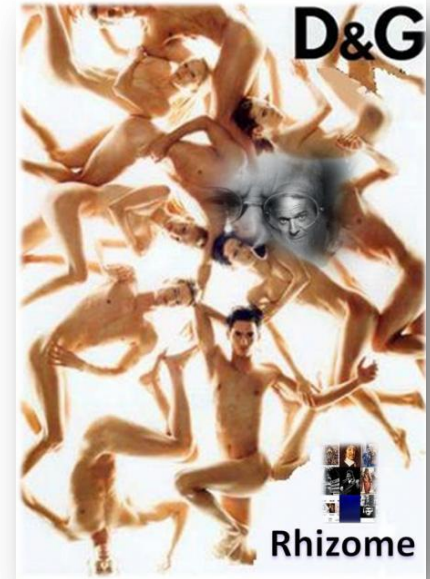
visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies

a rhizomic expansion based on related individual units



Hans Bellmer, "Les Marionnettes", de Henrich Von Kleist, technique mixte, tirage en couleur sur Roma avec suite sur papier Japon, 28x30, Paris date:

Hans Bellmer, Les Marionnettes



**Hans Bellmer,
Le Centre de la
Poupée, 1935-
1936**



Hans Bellmer, Le Centre de la Poupée, Abstraction
www.artsandculture.gov

BMS Status in present-day western culture

BMS 1

The first types of BMS correspond to well-known well-identified well-defined and 'well'-named BMS. 'Face-lifting', 'tattoo', 'piercing', and 'scarification' are some of these.

Mild BMS—pictures

The birth of a new referent :

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies



Man-male body builder



Woman-female body builder

a rhizomic expansion based on related
individual units



**Multiplicity of
bodies : various
bodies**

The birth of a new referent :



cosmetic surgery
plastic surgery



Paris Hilton

I am a single aspiring actress. I have recently come across the opportunity to **"improve" my appearance** through plastic surgery. (anyone intending on doing this, should visit Lebanon, it is CHEAP)

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies

Botox Armpit Treatments



The birth of a new referent :

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies

Pubic Hair Transplants



Calf Implants



Harder BMS—pictures

The birth to a new referent :

Plastic cosmetic surgery- women

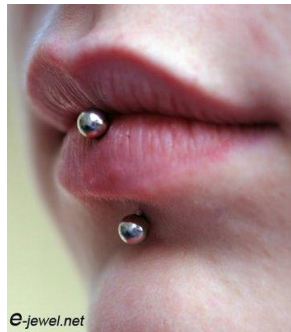
visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies



The birth of a new referent :

visual translation of bodies: Building, creating or constructing the body

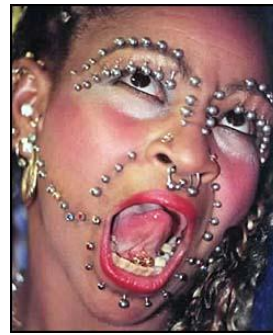
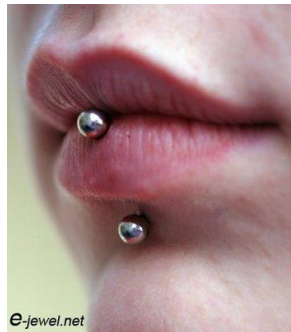
Currently, tattoos and certain piercings are seen as utterly **socially acceptable**, and no-one blinks twice if your barista has 8 earrings and full sleeve tattoos



The birth of a new referent :

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies

Currently, certain piercings are seen as utterly **socially acceptable**, and no-one blinks twice if your barista has 8 earrings



The birth of a new referent :

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies

Tattoos too are seen as utterly **socially acceptable**, and no-one blinks twice if your barista has a full sleeve tattoos.



The birth of a new referent :

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies

**“Utterly socially acceptable”..? –Yes
But how do we call “that”?**



The birth of a new referent :

Plastic cosmetic surgery- men

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies



[Dumb and Dumber: The Weirdest Cosmetic Surgery Procedures-Mar122009-](#)
Published by [Jennifer](#) at
5:23 pm
under [Uncategorized-](#)
<http://forladiesbyladies.com>

Ah, the American Dream.

The birth of a new referent :



Jocelyn Wildenstein-[Cat Woman](#)



visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies

BMS Status in present-day western culture

BMS 2

When the **identities** produced by BMS are so new and novel that the image of the modified body remains unidentified and non-recognizable then, verbal signs or syntagms which could have helped define and name the identity of the corporeal modified person, remain 'unavailable'.

The birth of a new referent : **Identity and naming**

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies



Lady Gaga & French artist Orlan

<http://www.orlan.com>

Subdermal Implants



Transplants, human hybridization and gender

Hard BMS—pictures

Transplants, human hybridization and gender

Some of these new identities borrow their physical features from the world of animals, mostly reptiles and insects but also cats as in the case of 'the cat man' or pigs [?] as in the case of Matthew Barney's Cremaster.

The birth of a new referent : **Identity and naming**
visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies



<http://www.tribal-tattoo-art.info>

Subdermal Implants



body modification (tattoo, piercing,
implant)

Date 22 May 2006

Source Own work

Author [User:Nicor](#)

Permission

([Reusing this file](#)) See below.

**visual translation of modified, re-built,
created or constructed bodies**

The birth of a new referent : **Identity and naming**



The **CREMASTER** Cycle by Matthew Barney

The Series Project: The Cremaster Cycle

Film essay by: Witney Seibold-<http://witneyman.wordpress.com>:

"The five levels of the Cycle range from 1, fully feminine, to 5, fully masculine. 3, the final part, is the state in the middle, when all is potential."

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies

The birth of a new referent : **Identity and naming**

The **Cat Man**

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies

The birth of a new referent : **Identity and naming**



[Dennis Avner](#) from Tonopah, Nevada, likes to go by his Indian name 'Stalking Cat'.

Here is a man – a human- who has tattooed his face, colored his teeth with green strips, sawed them, pierced his cheeks, and enlarged the contour of his eyes.

He is now what he is, the question being: what? How shall we **call** what we see and what he is at present? How shall we relate to this new identity?

visual translation of modified, re-built, created or constructed bodies



The birth of a new referent : **Identity and naming**

Dennis Avner -**Cat Man**
:" the human 'tiger' who enjoys climbing trees and eats raw meat every day"



The birth of a new referent : **Identity and naming**

Becoming a cat: The 'cat-ity' of the cat and the cat-man



Feline For Life. "While this guy violates all laws of nature, he follows almost all of the body alteration procedures on the list. With the addition of full facial tattoos to stripe his skin like some kind of a tiger, piercings that are used for attaching whiskers, and teeth filing so he can more easily eat a diet of raw meat (yeah, that's right), Dennis Avner is about as **close to being Catman as you can get**. True story... he actually holds down an office job. Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1052934/Cat-Man--human-tiger-enjoys-climbing-trees-eats-raw-meat-day.html#ixzz1OmdYSy2G>

Becoming a cat: The 'cat-ity' of the cat and the cat-man

Dennis Avner from Tonopah, Nevada, likes to go by his Indian name 'Stalking Cat'.

'I am Huron and following a very old tradition **have transformed myself** into a tiger,' he says on his website stalkingcat.com. The tiger aficionado – naturally – enjoys climbing trees and must eat meat 'every day, just as a tiger would.'



This should be 'as close to raw as possible, or at the temperature that an animal would be if it had just been killed,' he told The Sun. But Cat can't live the tiger's life 24 hours a day – he has human needs too. These he meets by working in an office – 'the only difference is **I look like a cat**' – or by making personal TV appearances, which have included Larry King Live, VH1's 'Totally Obsessed' and Kerrang! His latest public appearance was at the new Ripley's Believe It Or Not! museum, which opened this week in London's Piccadilly Circus. The museum features oddities from across the world – including a sixteenth-century iron maiden torture device and three antique shrunken heads made by the Jivaro Indians of Ecuador. Eye of the Tiger: Dennis wear green contacts with split irises to complete his look–

But what of Stalking Cat's personal life? How do real-life Cat Men find Cat Women? It's difficult – but not impossible. 'I'm seeing a couple of women at the moment,' says Cat. 'They understand that being a tiger is more important to me than humanity, which is difficult for many women to cope with.'

Reactions to the cat-man

Alright, I know that this is late but I wish to spread my own words on this topic. See, here is the thing. I don't have body modifications due to living under a roof with my parentals. It happens. Yet, all the piercings that I do have are for a reason. They are gauged for a reason. When I get tattoo's and hell, I might think of something else nifty that will coaside with my life, it will be a part of me, **expressing my personal being onto my body.** Treat your body like a temple. **Well, I do. I also like to redecorate. Also, my body is not whom I am personally – plain. Yet, if I want it to be more of myself than, WAH-LAH! It will now be how I see myself and it will be how I wish others to see what I am capable of. The Tiger man...he went through so much for his own life and all the pain...all the dedication, all the time and money. He is showing everyone in this world his power animal, his strength, dedication, outrageousness, and so on, just by what he has done with his body. Let it go. The glasses, I find that rather great. I would do that if I had the strength for it too. But, do not judge, simply learn and observe!**

Comment by Erika — May 14, 2010 @ [6:08 pm](#)

The birth of a new referent : **Identity and naming**

*Some BMS rely on the meeting between
signifiers.*

This meeting between 2 signifiers lead to a new
verbal signifier
For example:

*'snake' and 'man' = 'snakeman',
'pig's ears' and 'man' = 'pig's ears man'
'Two forefront balls' and 'woman' = ' a two
forefront balls woman'*

The birth of a new referent : **Identity and naming**
BMS and the question of Identity

What is at stake is the identity produced by the various surgical modifications.

- 1.the physical identity which relies on and is the product of the surgical operations which reveals, unveils, and discloses
- 2.the new still unknown ontological identity of the [human] living creature.

BMS and The status of the o/Other-BMS and Incorporation of the o/Other-BMS- The body as container

Other, the Other and incorporation of the other/Other

Being 'other':

the modified body shows how the subject of the modified body becomes 'another' i.e. an 'other' person.

In fact a modified body person is a person who modifies one's body by incorporating an 'other' into one's body.

It is a person who incorporates the 'other' in one's body.

It shows how, by modifying one's body, the subject of the body modification not only modifies one's body in terms of cosmetics and surgery, but also modifies one's body according to one's relation to the 'other'.

Hyperindividualism and the incorporation of the Other/other

According to Gilles Lipovetsky, *hyperindividualism* in developed western societies has become so dominant a phenomenon that it has created a situation of rupture between persons or individuals.

Then, between individuals stands a gap – a void -. It is within this void that the other, becoming a central cultural-social question- has been converted into a demand for proximity.

by individuals now 'subjects of demand and desire'- a demand for relations or a demand for links, a demand

The reduction of the distance goes through BMS.

It is through and by incorporation that body- modified- subjects reduce the distance between themselves and others.

In that case, it is important to understand that BMS means the incorporation of the other i.e. that the other as incorporated or as being incorporated or as has-been incorporated by the subject of the demand.

It is also important to understand that BMS means the integration of the other in subject's body: the other is integrated, or is being integrated or has been integrated by the subject through and by its incorporation.

What we are witnessing here is the result of what has been done: a redesigning of an initial body by and through the incorporation of the other.

What we see here is the other **IN** the modified body of the subject.

But what we see here is also the design of the incorporation i.e. the way the subject has chosen to incorporate-integrate the other in order to transform one's own body and create a new derived body.

BMS post corporeality

What stands at the core of BMS is the desire of the subject

Given to modifications on the basis of its parts or components, this body has become a receptacle of desire.

Desire being linked to a signifier it is this signifier which arouses the desire of the subject. For example here 'cat', 'snake' or 'pig' .

It is also the values of the respective 'animalities' or 'animalnesses'.

Based on subject's identification either with an animal and its animalness or animality or with an object loaded with signification and meaning i.e. with values, desire transforms cats, snakes and pigs and their respective animalness or animality into objects of desire.

'Human being' is a cultural category. It is a category immersed in culture. It therefore functions as a signifier which signified [content and signification] depends on the cultural space or the cultural frame in which it is activated.

What is interesting in BMS is the fact that the desire to perform a BMS being based on such signifiers as 'cats', 'snakes' or 'pigs' or other animals, it shows that the desire of the subject is a desire to possess, incorporate, integrate what comes from 'nature', what belongs to nature, what reminds and recalls nature.

'Nature' is a sign which referent is nowadays out of the realm of human. In other words, 'nature' is an 'order' to which human have become strangers. It is an 'order' to which the specie named 'human being' does no longer belong. These come in the form of graft (small shoot or scion) or (organ) transplant. New categories of **verbal signs** appear here which reflect new categories of human beings, new identities, new cultural identities and new cultural categories of human beings.

These new verbal signs have an impact: they modify our understanding of the verbal-cultural sign 'human being'. 'Human being' can no longer be related to as a 'natural' category, as a stable sign' as a homogeneous sign. Modified bodies of human beings show that our perception of the 'natural' as far as human beings are concerned, is no longer relevant.

BMS as a cultural trauma: towards a disruptive reality

Reality, traumatic events, trauma and the Real

These identities are real. They are based on a new referent.

However

They show a **disruptive reality**

They are traumatic events

They are the real of the reality

They are what cannot be said – yet (Lacan)

Some relate to the results of BMS as a negation of the body i.e. as a non-body.

Lacan has shown that the difference between reality and the real relies on the violent irruption of an act or an event in the reality. Violence being linked to the act of the event, its impact on our psyche is so strong that it creates a rupture i.e. a trauma.

A trauma is defined as

It discloses a rupture, a linguistic rupture, a rupture of the language and in the language.

A trauma cannot be related by the use of verbal signs.

A trauma cannot be related to by the use of verbal signs.

What we are confronted her with is the symbolic cultural and linguistic status of BMS identities.

BM can no longer be defined as a 'human body'.

The modified body is seen as 'something else'.

It is seen as a derived body, a derivation.

In this context, when modified bodies become a derivation, it is the language
which is implied.

For, when bodies derive so does the language.

In that far,

since none of the present-day signs of the present-day language can refer to
'it', new verbal signs are required.

What can we do in front of this linguistic need?

Do we have to invent new verbal signs and if so, on what basis?

The modification of the bodies is like the modification of the language.

They both undergo a fundamental change.

But more: the possibility for many to modify their body according to their desire, will lead to a new reality: that of the multiplication of BModified – of Modified body, which will imply the multiplication of new verbal signs. Inflation of verbal signs? Or : liquification of the language or the linguistic reality?

The value of the language = the value of the body

The more modifications the human body will undergo, the more unstable the language will become.

Changing one's corporeality will necessitate a new understanding of language.

Defined by de Saussure as a system of signs, language will become a...