

The Skin and the Language of Fertility

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Skin is the outer limit of our bodies. Behind it one finds the singular individual, his physical reality as a living organism and the mind that orders his actions. Skin, therefore, encloses spirit and matter; the skin is the surface wrapping of a more important active complex, but which, on remaining hidden, presents itself to us as enigmatic and in part impenetrable. The other, that stranger who lives beside us, is always behind a skin and, apart from what he does, that surface is all what we see of his real existence. The intelligence that directs him can seem an enigma to us after years of living together, but we always recognize the skin that is shown to us in his name, although it often does so with an appearance that contradicts his acts. This cutaneous membrane hides a latent being, but also above all, protects it. Though as firm and as solid as a wall, skin is an ambiguous frontier in which a sign language is spoken whose comprehensibility and meaning is never received with certainty.

For that reason, to go through the skin of the other and enter his body is a specific act of sexual possession, but also, symbolically and by extension, it is an act of vital dominance. To go through the skin of a living being, opening a breach from which blood escapes, can lead him to lose first his strength then his life. On the other hand, to open the body of the other to put semen in can fertilize and generate life. Blood and semen are liquid products of the body which, depending on how they flow in relation to the skin, can generate life or take it away. Mabi Revuelta's works are very subtly related to the skin. In the first instance, it is obvious that some are made with feathers (ostrich feathers) and wools (mohair) and that in others she draws obstinately long coiled filaments on parchment paper that give the impression of human skin covered partially by down. On a second, a deeper reading, nonetheless.

Revuelta's works show strong ties to the ideas of sacrifice and fertility, which, in turn, are closely linked to the skin's function and uses. In prosperity and fertility rites, the aim is that rain will inseminate the earth, that the masculine sky will contract a mystical marriage with the feminine earth. The call for this union that activates fertility is made with the language of drums, which are stretched skins. Skin is the mediator between the parts, the instrument that speaks the language of both, connecting the earth and the sky. Before the bell, man's communication with supernatural forces was established by means of skins stretched over sacred drums that stunned the air with the rhythms of the tribal language.

Similarly, the call to fertility had to be accompanied by sacrifices, which were usually decapitation, skinning and scalping. In the sacrifice of animals (oxen) the objects were the head and the skin. In the case of men, circumcision had remained as a partial skinning that makes the (infertile) boy into the (fertile) man. The offering of a skin serves to restore health, that is, to flee from death. "To change one's skin" or "to lose a skin", to the sound of ambiguous rhythms, is a sacrificial act for regeneration or the recovery of vital forces. Thanks to the fact that the snake changes its skin each year, we feel certain that this animal is immortal, an impossible goal longed for by man and which he imagines for other living beings.

A large black skin worked over with feathers that expands like a formless liquid along the edges and falls a whirlpool inside of an encrusted hole in a kind of bathtub, the place used to clean the skin of human beings. The mystery of the drain, the density of the stain, the uneven advance of the limits, the metal counterpoint of the fixtures, speak in the dark language of man's hidden juices and plasmas. Our most somber liquids escape through the drains and we try to make our cleaning of this skin the same as a change of skin, which implies an essential change, and thus the ability to be different, to be others. We metamorphose into who we are not, but –dark desire- who we would like to become. Medusa's hair was precisely a bunch of reptiles and a curl, therefore, a snake, the animal that renews his skin. Her petrifying look is the equivalent of the hygienic orifice that traps our gaze and directs it toward the depths.

Milk constitutes an essential nutrient. Semen is the fertilizing milk and the testicles, its reproductive organ, the part of the bull that is amputated for the skin, which becomes a sacrificial offering. Two drops of milk, metaphors for the masculine genital organs that since they are hollow are only skin and consequently, are the equivalent of the drums that speak the language of the sky-earth fertility; they float in the air. Is reproduction possible without fertilization? Before Eve, was Adam a hermaphrodite? Lilith returns. A cloning Frankenstein is eager to get in again. Under what shape is survival possible? Red and black, blood and skin, masculine and feminine, this skin provides prosperity and earthly goods because, as in the rite of circumcision, to take the skin from something or someone is to offer an essential sacrifice.

