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Makeup: Why Do We Put It On?

God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another.
—William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

As the onerous job of introducing the more technical matters of semiotics is behind us, it is time to get back to other interesting parts of Martha's recording. Incidentally, the smoking ritual, which was the focus of the first chapter, is just one of many examples of coded behaviors, known as *nonverbal*. Anthropological and psychological research has established that we transmit most of our messages, not through words, but through the body. We have the capacity to produce up to seven hundred thousand distinct physical (nonverbal) signs, of which one thousand are different bodily postures, five thousand are hand gestures, and two hundred and fifty thousand are facial expressions.[1] Psychologist Paul Ekman has even linked particular emotions to specific facial signals and expressions—eyebrow position, eye shape, mouth shape, nostril size, and so on.[2] When someone is telling a lie, for instance, the pupils tend to contract, one eyebrow may lift, and the corner of the mouth may twitch. To cover up the lie, the person might use strategies such as smiling, nodding, and winking, which seem to be incongruent with the other facial patterns.[3] Given such instinctive signaling, Ekman has claimed that it is possible to write a "grammar of the face" that shows less cross-cultural variation than do the grammars of verbal languages.

Ekman has classified basic facial expressions into thousands of microexpressions in what he calls the Facial Action Coding System (FACS). He claims that FACS can help people detect deception with up to 76 percent accuracy. FACS has been adopted as a screening tool in various airports and as a

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detection device in some police interrogations. However, the use of FACS raises ethical problems. Lie detection is not a precise science, for the simple reason that people can fool the lie detection technology with good old human cleverness. As Ken Adler has shown in his fascinating book, *The Lie Detectors*, throughout history people have employed all kinds of strategies to help them detect liars, from the ancient Chinese practice of making a suspect chew rice (a dry mouth supposedly exposing a liar) to the belief in India that lying makes the toes curl up.[4] In effect, Adler argues, knowledge of detecting lying scientifically remains elusive.

Conveying emotional states through ear, mouth, lip and other bodily movements is a trait that cuts across species. Dogs prick up their ears during an alert mode; lynxes twitch them in conflicted or agitated states; cats flatten them when they are in a protective mode. Many animals constrict their mouths and bare their teeth to convey hostility. Following intense sexual sniffing, various primates expose their upper teeth, making themselves appear to be overwhelmed by their sexual urges. Many of our own emotional states are conveyed in similar ways: when we bare our teeth, for instance, we invariably signal aggressiveness and hostility.

However, in the human species, the face is not only a source for the display of emotions, but also a source for defining and presenting the self in social situations. Making up the face with cosmetics, removing (or growing) facial hair, and wearing decorative trinkets such as earrings and nose rings is, in fact, designed to do something that is entirely alien to other species—to communicate who we are to others or what we want them to think we are. Facial decoration and specific kinds of clothing can announce social class or status, as is the case in India where a caste mark on a person's face lets others know their place in society; it can mark the coming-of-age; it can function to enhance attractiveness in courtship; and the list could go on and on. Makeup is clear evidence that we have cut the link to our purely instinctive past, and transformed the face into something more than a carrier and conveyor of spontaneous emotional states.

Does Martha's video reveal anything pertinent to the theme of makeup? It shows that Ted, our male protagonist, has shaved himself and has slicked down his hair with lotion for the occasion. It also shows that Cheryl, our female protagonist, has put on red lipstick, mascara, facial powder, and long pendant earrings. Martha has also made some interesting notes for us, which are relevant to the matter at hand. Her notes inform us that Ted had doused himself with musk cologne and Cheryl had done the same with sweet lavender perfume. Given our previous analysis of the restaurant scene as a courtship display, it should come as no surprise that the semiotician would see

cosmetics, lotions, and perfumes as elements of a grooming code, which, like the smoking code, is gender-specific and, thus, designed to enhance the sexual attractiveness of the actors in the performance. To the semiotician, the signs that comprise the grooming code provide further insights into human courtship, and more generally, into human meaning-making.

Making Up the Face

Psychologists have found that, at puberty, an individual will respond sexually or amorously only to particular kinds of faces. The source of this response is hardly biologically programmed, but appears to be based on the kinds of experiences the individual had during childhood. At puberty, these generate an unconscious image of what the ideal love-mate's appearance should be like, becoming quite specific as to details of physiognomy, facial shape, eye structure, and so on. This finding (if really true) only confirms what people have known intuitively since time immemorial. This is why tribal cultures have always marked the coming-of-age with elaborate rites involving cosmetic decorations designed to highlight the face as the primary focus of romantic attention. For instance, the pubescent males of the Secoya people who live along the Río Santa Naría in Peru insert a sprig of grass through their nasal septum for the traditional coming-of-age rite. This allows them to keep their faces "poised" to exude confidence and masculinity. This "sexualizing" of the face has parallels in all cultures. Even in contemporary urban cultures, where formal society-wide puberty rites are lacking, adolescent females, for example, sexualize their look, typically, by putting on lipstick, mascara, and earrings. Males sexualize it in analogous ways, by growing a mustache or beard, letting their hair grow long, and sometimes putting on earrings.

As the archaeological record confirms, cosmetics have a long and unbroken connection with maturation and courtship customs that goes back considerably in time. As anthropologist Helen Fisher has shown, even in the prehistoric Cro-Magnon era, during the last glacial age, humans spent hours decorating themselves, plaiting their hair, donning garlands of flowers, wearing bracelets and pendants, and decorating their tunics and leggings with multi-colored fur, feathers, and beads.[5] Our contemporary cosmetic and fashion accouterments are really no more than modern versions of such ancient forms of bodily decorations intended for romance. The colors used in lipsticks and eye decorations, as well as the rings people put on their ears, nose, lips, eyebrows, and even tongue are signifiers in a *grooming code* that has ancient origins.

Unguent jars, some of which were scented, have been found in Egyptian tombs of the First Dynasty (c. 3100–2907 BCE). These were probably used by both men and women to keep their skin supple and unwrinkled in the dry heat of Egypt. The women also developed the art of eye beautification by applying dark-green color to the under lid and by blackening the lashes and the upper lid with *kohl*, a preparation made from antimony and soot. In the first century CE, kohl came to be widely used by the Romans for darkening eyelashes and eyelids. They also employed rouge, depilatories, chalk for whitening the complexion, and pumice for cleaning the teeth. Similar practices are found across the world and across time. In effect, there has never been a culture without cosmetics used in rituals of courtship and maturation.

The reason why Cheryl wore red lipstick can now be connected to some of the connotations of this color sign (previous chapter). Red has a long and fascinating cross-cultural history of symbolic meanings—for example, to the Pawnees of North America, painting one's body red is the symbolic embodiment of life associated with the color of blood; in languages of the Slavic family red signifies "living, beautiful"; and so on.[6] Red is also highly suggestive of female fertility across many cultures. This is the reason why in advertising (and in erotic pictures and movies) close-ups of female lips, painted red, slightly parted, have a powerful erotic effect on viewers.

Hairstyle

Now, let's consider another aspect of appearance caught on Martha's video—Cheryl's long hair, which contrasts with Ted's short-cut style. Hairstyle has always had social significance. Since prehistoric times, people have cut, braided, and dyed their hair and changed it in various ways as part of grooming and fashion.[7] Members of the Mesopotamian and Persian nobility, for instance, curled, dyed, and plaited their long hair and beards, sometimes adding gold dust or gold and silver ornaments for embellishment. Egyptian men and women shaved their heads to combat the Egyptian heat. Therefore, baldness became a fashion style in its own right. Hebrew men were prohibited by biblical law from cutting their hair or beard, but orthodox women, upon marriage, were expected to crop their hair and wear a wig.

The way people have worn their hair has, in a phrase, always been a sign of beauty, personality, membership in a certain social class, and even physical power. The biblical story of Samson who lost his superhuman strength after having his hair cut by Delilah is repeated in other ancient stories, in which strong heroic men wore long hair, while slaves were forced to shave their heads

to indicate submission and humiliation. A shaved head can also indicate sacrifice and submission of a spiritual nature—Buddhist monks shave their heads for this very reason. In addition, it can convey group allegiance, as exemplified by the shaved heads of punks and other subcultures today. In the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, the Christian Church dictated that married women had to cover their heads in public for modesty. Only husbands were allowed to see their wives' hair. Women who had natural red hair tried to color it because they would otherwise be seen as witches. Curling the hair was reserved for the aristocracy. Most noblemen had long, flowing curls. Such hairstyles became despised among the bourgeoisie and the lower classes and groups. The chief opponents of King Charles I during the civil war in England (1642–49) were the Puritans, who were called Roundheads because they cut their hair short, frowning upon the long hairstyles and cosmetic fashions of the aristocracy, which they saw as elements in a degenerate lifestyle.

In the 1920s hairstyle became a form of rebellion against staid puritanical lifestyles and a declaration of sexual independence. Young women wore short hair as part of the so-called Flapper look; young men slicked down their hair with oil in the manner of the movie star Rudolph Valentino. During the 1950s, some teenagers wore a crew cut, a very short hairstyle combed upward to resemble a brush. Others wore their hair long on the sides, and swept back, so that it looked somewhat like a duck's tail. During the 1960s young males copied the haircuts of the Beatles, a British rock music group, who wore long hair that covered the forehead. Long hair was also the style of adolescent females in that era. A number of unisex styles, which were fashionable for both sexes, appeared during the 1960s. The subsequent decades saw hairstyles vary according to emerging forms of fashion and lifestyle, ranging from the bizarre Mohawk hairstyles of punks to the cropped hairstyles of movie stars.

All this comes as no surprise to the semiotician, since hairstyles and cosmetics are sign systems or codes and, thus, interpretable in specific ways according to culture and era. They are part of the material means through which the body is transformed into a language. This is why some people today adopt bizarre nonconformist grooming styles. Aware of their subversive value, they adopt them to make ideological statements, shock others, look tough, or mock the styles of others. Similar to the Puritans, some today condemn the use of cosmetics and the wearing of extravagant hairstyles as symptoms of a narcissistic disease spread by the beauty industry, pop culture, celebrities, and the media working in tandem. Others instead praise them. Kathy Peiss, for instance, has argued that cosmetics have actually been instrumental in liberating women to express themselves sexually on their own terms.[8] The founders of modern-day cosmetic trends were simple women—Elizabeth Arden

(1884–1966), a Canadian, was the daughter of poor tenant farmers; Helena Rubinstein (1870–1965) was born of poor Jewish parents in Poland; and Madam C. J. Walker (1867–1919) was born to former slaves in Louisiana. Although it is true that our media culture often preys on social fears associated with "bad complexions," "aging," and the like, it has at the same time allowed us to assert our right to be openly attractive, not conceal it.

Given the long history of cosmetic makeup and hairstyles, it is now a straightforward matter to understand in semiotic terms why Cheryl wore her hair long (which was the "in" style for women at the time of Martha's recording), put on red lipstick, mascara, and facial powder, while Ted wore short hair (the "in" style for men), shaved himself cleanly, and put on styling lotion to keep his hair in place. Makeup and hairstyling allow prospective romantic partners to highlight their attractiveness through the deployment of the appropriate grooming signifiers. Perfume is part of the grooming code too. This is why Cheryl sprayed on a sweet lavender perfume and Ted a musk cologne. Although the sense of sight has largely replaced the sense of smell for sexual arousal—modern humans are more inclined to respond to erotic images than to bodily scents—the need for olfactory-based fantasizing has not disappeared completely from our evolution. Similar to other animals, humans continue to respond sexually to odors and scents that are emitted by prospective mates. Artificial scents have always been used as effective surrogates for biological scents.

Portraiture

The perception of the face as a signifier of selfhood is borne out by the art of portraiture. Portraits are probes of character and personality. The first ones date from Egypt around 3100 BCE. They were mainly funereal masks, etchings, or sculptures of pharaohs and nobles. The subjects are portrayed in rigid, staring poses, communicating everlasting authority. The ancient Romans also made death masks of ancestors (worn by survivors in funeral processions) that were remarkable in how they captured the uniqueness of their subjects. Early Christian portrait artists had three subjects—Jesus, the Madonna, and the saints. Medieval gospel books included portraits of the gospel authors, shown writing at their desks. During the same era, the portraits of donors became a means of verifying patronage, power, and virtue. The Renaissance marked a turning point in the history of portraiture. In that era artists started to become fascinated by the face of the common person as a sign of human character in all its variable manifestations. Among the portraitists of that period were some

of the greatest visual artists of all time—Sandro Botticelli, Leonardo Da Vinci, Raphael, and Titian. Their portraits explored the "poetry" of the face, seeking to extract the meaning of individual human life from its expressions of sadness, humor, joy, and tragedy.

The focus on individuality that the Renaissance spawned was not a unique historical development of Western culture. In China, murals depicting portraits of common people go back to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). They convey the subject's character not only through facial features, but also through clothing, pose, and gesture. The stone heads made by the Maya peoples, the "laughing clay sculptures" of the Veracruz region in Mexico, the effigy vessels and funerary vases of the Mohican culture, and many other examples of Native American portraiture also display powerful images of individuality.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries photography entered the domain of portraiture. Among the first photographic portraitists, the names of Oscar Gustave Rejlander (1813–75), Henry Peach Robinson (1834–1901), Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) and Diane Arbus (1923–71) are often mentioned. Like canvas portraitists, these early photo artists used the camera to capture the poignancy of the faces of common people. Photography is one of the primary ways in which we now create memories. The photographs that adorn our tables, walls, and our mobile phones are, in effect, visual mementos and testimonials of who we are. Photographs capture a fleeting and irretrievable moment in time, extracting it from the flux of change that characterizes human life. Such captured moments have strong appeal because they provide eyewitness evidence, so to speak, that we do indeed exist in some enduring form, at least in the photographic space.

The Selfie and the Simulacrum

The next section of Martha's video reveals something that has become emblematic of the contemporary world in which we all live. In it, we see Cheryl and Ted take a Selfie of themselves and then post it on their Instagram sites. They are engaging in a new self-styled form of portraiture made possible by new technologies—a form that also reveals how perceptions of selfhood, persona, representation, and other semiotic modalities are morphing in the age of the Internet.

Instagram is an online mobile photo- and video-sharing social network founded in 2010, which allows anyone to take pictures and videos and share them on other social media sites and platforms, ever since it was acquired by

Facebook in 2012. The popularity of Instagram is a symptom of living in the world of the "matrix," where the constant barrage of images has taken precedence over reflective words. French scholar Jean Baudrillard put forth the idea of the *simulacrum* in 1983 to describe the effects of modern media on the mind, whereby what is on the other side of a screen (TV or computer) seems more real than real to those who have become accustomed to viewing screens for information and delectation.[9] The 1999 movie, *The Matrix*, treated this theme in an insightful way, before the advent of Web 2.0 technologies. The main protagonist of that movie, Neo, lives "on" and "through" the computer screen. The technical name of the screen is the *matrix*, describing the network of circuits on it. But the same word also meant "womb" in Latin. The movie's transparent subtext is that, with the advent of the digital universe, new generations are now being born through two kinds of wombs—the biological and the technological. The difference between the two has become indistinguishable—it has become a simulacrum.

The Selfie is, in effect, a modern-day form of self-portraiture. Its impact on society has been acknowledged by various sources, including the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, which produced a film series titled *Thinkfluencer* in 2013 that explored the implications of Selfie culture. There was even a short-lived sitcom in 2014 on ABC, titled *Selfie*, which revolved around a woman who was obsessed with gaining fame through the Selfies she posted on Instagram. She ends up discovering, in true cautionary tale tradition, that this whole new trend is meaningless and alienating.

The self-construction of selfhood extends to all new media. Online sites such as Facebook and Twitter, among many others, are virtual locales where users share common interests and interact in a regular way. Entry to a site generally involves constructing a "public profile" of oneself (a summary of one's autobiography and interests) and interacting with individuals, called "Friends," using the online site. Ning has even launched a new kind of hosting service that encourages users to create their own networking sites. The socio-philosophical implications of social networking have been studied from many angles, since they are immense. Some of these will be discussed subsequently. Suffice it to say here that Web 2.0 technologies may have even rewired the brain. Living in a social media universe, we may indeed feel that it is the only option available to us for interacting with others. The triumph of social media lies in the promise to allow human needs to be expressed individualistically, yet connect them communally—hence the paradox. As social media communities become part of larger pathways of a global connected intelligence, a new form of consciousness has emerged, called by Peter Russell a "global brain" already in 1983 and thus long before the advent of social media.[10]

The Internet does indeed seem to function as if it were a nervous system connecting the entire planet. Intelligence in this system is collective, not centralized in any particular person or institution. This means that no one individual can control it; the system organizes itself from the networks and processes of interaction among the components. In other words, we have created the Internet to mirror our brain structure. The hyperlinks among webpages resemble synaptic connections, forming a huge associative network along which information is distributed. The Internet is one huge mirror metaphor, so to speak, connecting domains of all kinds, including social ones allowing for interpersonal information distribution much like the neural networks in the brain, which distribute information in a parallel fashion, along different pathways. There is a danger here, as will be discussed in more detail later on. We might become controlled by the whole system of bots, autonomous programs on a network that can interact with computer systems or users, which may dupe us, like Baudrillard feared, to believe that intelligence and consciousness are independent of the body. This is a warning sign or symptom, which we ignore at our own risk.

Kissing

Another section of Martha's video reveals something rather bizarre, at least as seen from the view of other cultures and children of any culture. In it we see Cheryl and Ted making oscular contact—a form of nonverbal communication we commonly call "kissing." Kissing is one of those things that a semiotician would find highly interesting and relevant to understanding human nature.[11] The particular type of kissing that occurred on the video is called "French kissing"—an erotic form of osculation reserved for intimate amorous relationships. Osculation is not limited to courtship situations. It has other functions and meanings that are found throughout the world, being more important in some cultures and less so in others. The German language has words for thirty kinds of kissing actions, including *nachküssen*, which means "making up for kisses that have not been given." Some languages, on the other hand, have no words whatsoever for such actions.

According to some culture theorists, the erotic kiss may have crystallized in India in 1500 BCE, which is the period when Vedic writings start mentioning people "sniffing" with their mouths and lovers "setting mouth to mouth." In early Christian times the lip kiss was regarded as something spiritual, rather than sexual, representing the exchange of breath between two people, which was thought to contain the soul of a person. This idea was extended to marriage

ceremonies, with the nuptial kiss symbolizing the spiritual union of the bride and groom. In Celtic legend too, the kiss is seen as an exchange of the breath of life.

Archaeological findings suggest that erotic kissing is ancient and widespread. Representations of kissing have been found, for instance, on two thousand-year-old Peruvian pots and vases. Some psychologists argue that the origin of such kissing lies in the need to transfer *sebum*, the substance that lubricates our skin and hair, so that mating partners can achieve a form of chemical bonding. Others believe that we kiss because the lips, tongue, and interior of the mouth are highly sensitive erogenous zones connected to the limbic system, the oldest part of the brain and the source of sexual pleasure. Whatever the case, it is clear that kissing, similar to smoking and grooming, is now part of a code that allows the partners in courtship performances to communicate romantic feelings. Romantic kissing is widespread, but it is not universal. It is not common in many parts of Asia, and is completely unknown in some African societies. In Inuit and Laplander cultures romantic partners are more inclined to rub noses than to kiss (probably to smell each other's skin). Obviously, what is normal osculation behavior in one system of everyday life is seen as bizarre in another.[12]

Humans kiss not just for romance, as mentioned. They do so for a variety of reasons: to greet each other, to show love and affection, and so on. Hand kissing, especially the man kissing the hand of a woman, was once thought to be chivalrous and important in greeting a woman. Athletes kiss trophies, pious people kiss religious books, artifacts and statues, a gambler kisses the dice for luck, and wanderers kiss the soil upon reaching safe ground. The point is that kissing is an important semiotic activity that invariably elicits reactions and interpretations of various kinds. Some kisses have become famous, ranging from Judas' kiss of betrayal to Madonna's provocative kiss of Britney Spears on television. The fabled kisses of star-crossed lovers are part of cultural lore—Sleeping Beauty and the Prince, Snow White, Paolo and Francesca, Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, and so on. Many movies are memorable because of a particular kiss exchanged between two lovers—for example, *Gone with the Wind* (Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh), *From Here to Eternity* (Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr), *Rear Window* (James Stewart and Grace Kelly), *An Officer and a Gentleman* (Richard Gere and Debra Winger), and *Titanic* (Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet), to mention a few. Kissing is also a basic theme in pop love songs—for example, *Kiss Me Big* (Tennessee Ernie Ford), *Kisses Sweeter than Wine* (Jimmie Rodgers), *It's in His Kiss* (Betty Everett). *Kisses of Fire* (ABBA), *Suck My Kiss* (The Red Hot Chili Peppers), and *Kiss from a Rose* (Seal), again among many others.

In art, perhaps no other portrait of a kiss is as famous as the one painted by the Austrian nouveau style artist Gustav Klimt (1862–1918) in 1908 that seems to bring out the delicate romantic and passionate qualities of the kiss at once. As seen through the eyes of a great artist, the kiss becomes a symbol of humanity in all its idiosyncrasies. The kissers blend into each other, becoming a singular body. Kissing is more than sex; it is an expression of intimacy and a sign of how the body and the emotions form an unbroken harmony. Other famous paintings of the kiss are found among the works of Titian, Rubens, Canova, Munch, Schiele, Chagall, Matisse, Toulouse-Lautrec, Rodin, and Hayez. The kiss has become part and parcel of the language of love because it has behind it such a long history of meanings—a history in which it speaks volumes for itself as a sign—perhaps *the* sign—of romantic love.

Eye Contact

In the next segment of her video, Martha has taken a close-up of the faces of our two protagonists, showing them gazing intently and steadily at each other, as if they were in a state of wonder or expectancy. Making eye contact is part of a vast repertoire of facial signals and signs that humans deploy to send out various messages: for example, staring suggests challenge, making eyes flirtation, eyebrow constriction thoughtfulness, and eyebrow elevation surprise. The presence of numerous words to describe the ways we look at each other—*glower*, *gawk*, *glance*, *watch*, *gaze*, *scan*, *peep*, *wink*, *observe*, *peek*, *peer*, *inspect*, *scrutinize*, *ogle*, *gape*, *sneer*, *grimace*, *scowl*, and so on—bears testimony to the fact that we perceive eye contact as extremely meaningful. Looking and being looked at are courtship strategies that depend not only on the directness of the eyeline, but also upon head tilting and facial expression, on the orientation of the body, and on the sex of the gazer.[13] Traditionally, in many cultures it has been the expectation that men are the lookers and women the "looked at." Changes in gender roles since the late 1960s have altered this pattern. Today, the lookers are equally males and females.

Across cultures the length of time involved in making eye contact along with the pattern of contact (looking into the eyes, looking down or up, and so on) convey what kinds of social relationship people have to each other, among other things. Some patterns appear to cut across cultures: for example, staring is typically interpreted as a challenge throughout the world; "making eyes" at someone is normally interpreted as flirtation; narrow eyelids communicate pensiveness, and making the eyebrows come nearer together communicates thoughtfulness; raising the eyebrows conveys surprise. However, even in these

there is culture-specific variation. Southern Europeans will tend to look more into each other's eyes during conversation than will North Americans; in some cultures, males do not look into female eyes unless they are married or are members of the same family. In all cultures, eyes themselves are part of the symbolic order. In some traditions, including the Hindu and Taoist ones, the eyes are identified with the sun (the right eye) and the moon (the left eye). In ancient Greece the eye was perceived to be a symbol with magical powers. This is why the Greeks painted it on the prows of their warships, believing that it had the power to guide them to victory. In ancient Egypt the Eye of Horus was thought to have healing and protective powers. In many cultures there exists the concept of an "evil eye," which is perceived to be a certain kind of stare that is purported to have the power to harm or bewitch someone. The list of symbolic connotations associated with the eye is an infinite one.

In the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* (directed by Stanley Kubrick) the computer named Hal scrutinizes the environment around itself through a menacing "eye lens"; and in *Blade Runner* (directed by Ridley Scott), the eye is presented as the symbol of humanity. The replicants (robots) in the movie are icons of the human form. However, there is one feature that differentiates human anatomy from artificially made anatomies—the eye. Replicants use their mechanical eyes exclusively to see; humans use them as well to show feeling and to understand the world. Aware of the mysterious power of the human eye, the replicants kill their maker by poking out his eyes.

Body Language

The details of skeletal structure distinguishing *Homo sapiens* from its nearest primate relatives—the gorilla, chimpanzee, and orangutan—stem largely from a very early adaptation to a completely erect posture and bipedal (two-legged) striding walk. The uniquely S-shaped spinal column places the center of gravity of the human body directly over the area of support provided by the feet, thus giving stability and balance in the upright position. This biological development is the physical source of signifying postures and poses, and of other bodily schemas of which human beings are capable, all of which come under the rubric of "body language."

In human affairs, the body has always been an issue of high moral, social, and aesthetic significance. In ancient Greece it was glorified as a source of pleasure, while in Rome as the root of moral corruption. Since ancient times, philosophers have debated the nature of the relation of the body to the soul and the mind. The French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes

(1596–1650) even went so far as to suggest that God had created two classes of substance that make up the whole of reality: one was thinking substances, or *minds*, and the other was extended substances, or *bodies*.

Martha's video is replete with instances and displays based on a strategic deployment of body language. Because these are coded culturally, they may appear comical to outsiders. To those who know the code, on the other hand, body language is sensed as crucial in courtship and romance. The study of body language is known technically as *kinesics*, the term used by American researcher Ray L. Birdwhistell (1918–94), who became interested in analyzing the way people interacted by watching films (just like we have been doing in an imaginary way in this book). He noticed that people seemed to transmit information unconsciously through their eye movements, facial expressions, and postures. For this reason, he came to view body language as a critical component of human interaction. His first book on the topic, *Introduction to Kinesics*, was published in 1952.[14] In it, he discussed the role of body schemas and gesture in human communication, claiming that it is possible to write a "kinesic grammar" in the same way that linguists write a verbal grammar. As he put it: "The first premise in developing a notational system for body language is to assume that all movements of the body have meaning. None are accidental."[15] Messages made with body language can give a look and feel to a conversation remembered long after spoken words fade away.

A kinesic analysis of Martha's video shows that the postures and poses that Ted and Cheryl assumed as they were smoking away and looking into each other's eyes are clearly reminiscent of those used by performers and actors. Their body language was part of a courtship display. So, too, are the decorations that are put on the body to enhance interest in it. Not surprisingly, we see a rose tattoo on Cheryl's right shoulder.

Tattooing is one of the most ancient forms of creative body decoration. Cave paintings date it to at least approximately 8000 BCE, but it may go back even farther in time to the Upper Paleolithic era (38,000–10,000 BCE).[16] Almost every culture has practiced tattooing. As early as 2000 BCE, the Egyptians used it to indicate social rank, affiliation, or allegiance. The ancient Greeks and Romans, on the other hand, used tattoos to brand slaves and criminals. Tattoos are a sign of honor in the Marquesas Islands, a group of islands in the South Pacific Ocean; the young women of eastern New Guinea (like Cheryl) see tattoos as signs of beauty; and the list could go on and on. Sailors introduced into Europe the practice of tattooing during the Age of Exploration; it remained a rarely used body art until the middle part of the twentieth century when it gained popularity among disparate groups, including fashion models, youth gangs, and prison inmates. It was propelled into mainstream American culture

in 1981 by the album *Tattoo You* by the Rolling Stones. In contemporary urban culture, tattooing has become mainly fashion statement, used by media icons and common folk alike, with no distinction as to age, gender, or social class. In reaction to its spread, some subcultures, such as goths and punks, have resorted to tattooing in a more extreme and, thus, exclusive form. Goth tattoos extol the occult and the macabre; those of the punks, the bizarre and the weird. They are the equivalents of the body decorations worn by the mockers in ancient carnivals—decorations designed to shock moralistic society.

Objects

Decorating the body to present an appropriate persona involves putting on trinkets and jewelry. Rings, for instance, convey specific types of messages that can be interpreted only in cultural contexts. In some cultures, they are worn to convey things such as educational status (graduation ring), institutional affiliation, marital status, athletic prowess, social status (diamond rings), group affiliation, personal interests, and so on. Some ornaments, such as cross chains, beads, and amulets are worn to convey meanings of a superstitious or occult nature. However, more often than not, the wearing of jewelry has a courtship objective. Traditionally, when a Zulu woman falls in love, she is expected to make a beaded necklace resembling a close-fitting collar with a flat panel attached, which she then gives to her suitor. Depending on the combination of colors and bead pattern, the necklace will convey a specific type of romantic message: a combination of pink and white beads in a certain pattern would convey the message "You are poor, but I love you just the same."[17]

All cultures share the belief that certain objects possess mysterious powers. This belief is the basis of the ancient craft of alchemy, defined as the art of transmuting materials that lasted well into the medieval ages and continues to have some adherents to this day. The principal activity of the alchemists was the search for the "philosopher's stone"—brought back into popularity by the Harry Potter movies of the 2000s—and the production of gold by artificial means. Gold meant (and continues to mean) power, deification, and immortality. The belief in the mystique or "hidden life" of objects has not disappeared from the modern world. In the 1970s, for example, the pet rock craze beset American society. Many considered the fad a ploy foisted upon a gullible public spoiled by consumerism by a clever manufacturer, and thus simply a quick way to make money. However, that craze could not have been perpetrated in the first place, unless some latent (or unconscious) semiotic force was at work—and that force was *animism* or the intuitive belief that objects are imbued with spiritual energy. The same animistic tendencies can be seen in

the common view held by people that some objects are unexplainably magical. This is why, if some objects are lost, then impending danger is feared. If, however, they are found serendipitously—as for instance when one finds a "lucky penny"—then it is believed that the gods or Fortune will look auspiciously upon the finder.

Objects are clearly signs. This is why many are preserved and kept in museums. Similar to works of art, they are felt to be reflections of human attempts to shape the world on their own terms and to, literally, "make" it conform to human expectations. As McLuhan (Chap. 1) suggested, objects extend human bodily structure. The automobile, for instance, is experienced by many of us as an extension of our bodily armor. In the public world of traffic, it creates a space around the physical body that is as inviolable as the body itself. Interestingly, but not unexpectedly, this perception is not confined to modern urban cultures. The anthropologist Basso found that the Western Apache of east-central Arizona also perceive the car as a body, even going so far as to use the names of body parts to refer to analogous automobile parts: for example, the hood is called a "nose," the headlights "eyes," the windshield "forehead," the area from the top of the windshield to the front bumper a "face," the front wheels "hands and arms," the rear wheels "feet," the items under the hood "innards," the battery a "liver," the electrical wiring "veins," the gas tank a "stomach," the distributor a "heart," the radiator a "lung," and the radiator hoses "intestines."[18]

Animism is certainly obvious as a latent form of semiosis in childhood. Children have always played with objects as signs standing for suggestive referents—broom handles can be imagined to be enemies to be vanquished, rocks can be imagined to be animate things, and so on. However, a toy is different, semiotically speaking. It is an adult-made object given to children according to social traditions. Dolls are particularly interesting in this regard because they are icons of the human figure and associated with female childhood. As early as 600 BCE dolls were made with movable limbs and removable garments, to reinforce their resemblance to human anatomy. Dolls have been found in the tombs of ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman children. Evidently, the objective was to provide the children with a lifelike human form, so that they could play with someone in the afterlife. Analogous sacred meanings are found throughout the world. In the aboriginal Hopi culture of the United States, kachina dolls are given to female children as part of fertility rites. In many Christian traditions, dolls have been used since the Middle Ages to represent the Holy Family in the Nativity scene, as part of Christmas observations. In Mexico, dolls representing Our Lady of Guadeloupe are ceremonially paraded every year. In some cultures of the Caribbean, it is believed that one can cause physical or psychological damage to another person by doing something injurious to a doll constructed in effigy to resemble that person.

The modern-day perception of dolls as toys for female children can be traced to Germany in the early fifteenth century, when doll figures were made on purpose to show new clothing styles to German women. Shortly thereafter, manufacturers in England, France, Holland, and Italy began to manufacture dolls dressed in fashions typical of their respective locales. The more ornate ones were often used by rulers and courtiers as gifts. By the seventeenth century, however, simpler dolls, made of cloth or leather, were manufactured mainly as toys for female children.

Twentieth century technology made it possible to make dolls look so lifelike that they were often used to illustrate clothing style trends and were sent from one country to another to display the latest fashions in miniature form. Noteworthy design innovations in dolls manufactured between 1925 and World War II included sleeping eyes with lashes, dimples, open mouths with tiny teeth, fingers with nails, and latex-rubber dolls that could drink water and wet themselves. Since the 1950s, the association of lifelike dolls with female childhood has been entrenched further by both the quantity of doll types produced and their promotion in the marketplace. Of particular semiotic interest in this regard is the Barbie doll, launched in 1959 and which evolved into an icon of female childhood for many years, adapting its identity to changing social views of femininity. Barbie has been portrayed as an astronaut, an athlete, a ballerina, a businesswoman, a dancer, a dentist, a doctor, a fire-fighter, a paleontologist, a police officer, a rock star, and so on. She has also been involved in a romantic relationship with the Ken doll, which appeared in 1961. The two dolls split up in 2006, a period when break-ups among celebrities were common. Barbie has also been friends with minority dolls, including African American and Hispanic dolls. Books, apparel, cosmetics, and video games are now branded Barbie goods, and she has appeared in films such as *Toy Story 2* and *3*. Barbie has also been parodied on *Saturday Night Live*. Acknowledging her pop culture status, Andy Warhol made a painting of the doll in 1985. In a phrase, Barbie is an emblematic sign of American culture. Its spread to other countries is thus limited, because it is culturally meaningless. Some countries have even banned sales of the doll, claiming that it does not conform to the ideals and values of their societies.

Dancing

There is another segment on Martha's video that requires some semiotic commentary in this chapter; namely, the segment in which Cheryl and Ted can be seen engaged in a bodily embrace called a *dance*, moving in rhythmic unity to

the musical beats made by the jazz band in the restaurant. Why do humans dance? Bodily locomotion has a biological source. This is probably why it is virtually impossible to remain motionless for any protracted period of time. Indeed, when we are forced to do so, our body reacts against it. During the performance of a lengthy, slow movement of a classical symphony, it is almost impossible to keep perfectly still or not to cough, even though one might be enraptured by the music. The need for almost constant movement during our waking hours is probably a remnant of an ancient survival mechanism designed to keep us moving, so as not to be easy prey for enemies. At some point in human history, however, our instinctual survival movements gave way to something vastly different—the dance, a set of organized rhythmic bodily movements that are designed to evoke some meaning or communicate some message.

Dancing involves spatial gesture (the shapes made by the moving body and the designs in space made by the limbs), tempo (patterned rhythm), and bodily schemas (heavy limp, tense, restrained, or bound movements). These may allow dancers to express emotions, moods, ideas, tell a story, or simply experience movement that is pleasurable or exciting in itself. In some situations, dancing may lead to trance or some other altered state of awareness. The latter is sometimes interpreted as possession by spirits. In tribal societies, for instance, shamans dance in trance in order to heal others physically or emotionally.

It is not known when people began to dance. Prehistoric cave paintings from more than twenty thousand years ago depict figures in animal costumes who seem to be dancing, possibly in hunting or fertility rituals, or perhaps merely for entertainment. Written as well as visual evidence of dance has survived from the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. Egyptian tombs depict people who seem to be dancing, often in acrobatic positions. These figures probably represented professional slave entertainers. Dancing was an integral component of agricultural and religious festivals in Egypt, such as the one enacting the cyclic death and rebirth of the god Osiris (symbolizing the seasonal cycle of the Nile). Ritual dances, especially those honoring Dionysus, the god of wine, are believed to be the motivation for including dancing in Greek drama, accompanying the spoken or sung verse. In ancient Rome, professional dancers, pantomimists, jugglers, and acrobats worked as traveling "sexual entertainers," so to speak, similar to the erotic dancers of today. This is perhaps why the Christian Church, which at first allowed dancing as a part of worship and religious celebrations, denounced dancing as immoral during the Middle Ages. Dancing continued among the peasants, however, both in communal festivals and as a form of entertainment. Variations of medieval peasant dances continue today as folk

dances. Some peasant dances, taken over and adapted by the aristocracy, became courtly dances that, in turn, evolved into the classical ballet. The latter originated in the courts of Italy and France during the Renaissance, becoming a professional art form by the late seventeenth century. Since that time, ballet has remained a major category of the performing arts. Its style and subject matter continue to evolve as modern-day dance artists experiment with new ways of expression through dance. Some forms of dance have developed around work activities, as in the Japanese rice-planting dances or in the Swedish weaving dances, which make working more pleasant.

Throughout the world, the significant stages of an individual's life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death, are marked and celebrated by rituals that often involve dancing. Weddings, for instance, provide one of the most common occasions for dancing. The bride and the groom may dance together to show bonding, or else they may perform separate dances—the bride's reel of northern England, for example, is danced by the bride and her attendants. Dance is also perceived by many societies as part of their rites of passage. In some societies even today organized dances may be the only events at which young people of different sexes can meet and socialize without sanction or reprobation.

What Does It All Mean?

The semiotic study of nonverbal behavior is a study of how people experience and define themselves through their bodies and their objects. In most cultures, self-image is expressed and conveyed primarily as body image. In many contemporary societies the slim and lean look is a strategic sign of attractiveness for both males and females. The margin of deviation from any idealized thinness model is larger for males than it is for females; but males must frequently strive to develop a muscular look. This oversensitivity to idealized body prototypes is the reason why we tend to become discontented with our bodies.[19] From this discontent, a whole subculture based on physical exercises has become part of everyday life in many modern societies.

What the topics discussed in this chapter ultimately bring out is the importance of form in human life. A form is a "sign-in-the-making," so to speak, something that suggests something else, even though we cannot quite grasp what that something else is. The feminine form (as represented in paintings and other media) is a case-in-point of the inbuilt power of suggestion of forms. Whereas the masculine form has been represented throughout history (in sculpture and painting) to emphasize virility, the feminine form has been represented with a high degree of ambiguity to represent both motherhood

and sexuality in tandem.[20] Pop culture has projected the feminine form out in the open like never before. The Charleston, a dance craze that was introduced in 1923 by the Broadway musical *Runnin' Wild*, became one of the first vehicles for emphasizing the feminine form, becoming instantly emblematic of society's shift to a sexier, more carefree mood. Condemned by society's moral elders, it clearly signaled the advent and installation of a popular culture implanted in a sexual defiance of adult mores.

The representation of the body has always informed any meaningful reading of pop culture. The open sexuality of many modern performances has always challenged moralistic views of the body. Above all else, they bring questions of sex, sexuality, and gender to the forefront. Today, representations of the body and sexual persona are being altered by new technologies, as we have argued briefly here. From the Selfie to social media networks we are now living in a simulacrum that makes it difficult to distinguish between virtual bodies (bodies represented on screens) and real bodies. This has concrete implications for the semiotic study of the body, as we have seen. But perhaps the most salient one is that the three-part interaction between the senses, the world, and the mind, which is the source of semiosis, is becoming more and more an interaction that includes a fourth part—the virtual world. The implications of this development in human evolution will be broached in a later chapter.

Notes

1. Desmond Morris, Peter Collett, Peter Marsh, and Marie O'Shaugness, *Gestures: Their origins and distributions* (London: Cape, 1979).
2. The findings of Ekman and his research colleagues can be found in: Paul Ekman and Walter Friesen, *Unmasking the face* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975); Paul Ekman, *Telling lies* (New York: Norton, 1985); and Paul Ekman, *Emotions Revealed* (New York: Holt, 2003).
3. Paul Ekman, *Telling lies* (New York: Norton, 1985). An interesting cultural history of the smile is the one by Angus Trimble, *A brief history of the smile* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).
4. Ken Adler, *The lie detectors* (New York: The Free Press, 2006).
5. Helen E. Fisher, *Anatomy of love* (New York: Norton, 1992), 272–3.
6. Roger Wescott, *Sound and sense* (Lake Bluff, Ill.: Jupiter Press, 1980).
7. See the interesting study of hairstyles by Grant McCracken, *Big hair: A journey into the transformation of self* (Toronto: Penguin, 1995).
8. Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a jar: The making of America's beauty culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998). In *Inventing Beauty* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), Teresa Riordan argues that when it comes to beauty it seems that

human ingenuity has been at its most productive, especially in the modern era, with all kinds of inventions, from lipstick dispensers to corsets and Wonderbras.

9. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotexte, 1983).
10. Peter Russell, *The global brain* (New York: Tarcher, 1983).
11. See, for example, Marcel Danesi, *The history of the kiss: The origins of pop culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).
12. Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality,* vol. 1 (London: Allen Lane. 1976).
13. Andrew Synnott, *The body social: Symbolism, self and society* (London: Routledge, 1993), 22.
14. Ray, L. Birdwhistell, *Introduction to kinesics* (Ann Arbor: University of Ann Arbor, 1952).
15. Ibid., p. 70.
16. Teresa Green, *The tattoo encyclopedia* (New York: Fireside, 2003), x–xi. In *Spiritual tattoo: A cultural history of tattooing, piercing, scarification, branding, and implants* (Berkeley: Frog, 2005), John A. Rush suggests that tattooing may go even further back in time to 200,000 BCE.
17. L. S. Dubin, *The history of beads* (New York: Abrams, 1987), 134.
18. Keith H. Basso, *Western Apache language and culture: Essays in linguistic anthropology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 15–24.
19. Marcel Danesi, *My son is an alien: A cultural portrait of today's youth* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 56–57.
20. In *Striptease: The untold story of the girlie show* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Rachel Shteir shows convincingly how the feminine form has always made performances such as stripteases central elements in pop culture's history.

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