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Research Report

How German Women View Their Body: The Body Complete and The Body Under Construction

A Study of Images, and Perceptions of The Body in Germany

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Over the last two years Séissmo have repeatedly been asked by clients about the specific way in which Germans perceive the body. It would seem that the body is perceived quite differently in Germany to the way it is seen in the Latin countries of Europe.

When you talk to Germans about their body, the first thing that they tend to mention is their *Selbstbild*, i.e. their mental perception of their own body. This "physical awareness" – *Körperbewußtsein* – is firmly anchored in Germany's cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, Germany is also exposed to numerous other influences:

- Western culture, for example, has played a key role, in particular the influence of America which permits a "remodelling" of the body
- Oriental culture has also been important: Japanese influences, reflected in a striving towards self-recognition and gaining an understanding of one's own body are also of particular significance here.

This report is intended to provide food for thought on the topic of the body through the aid of inter-disciplinary essays and thus provide a better understanding of the "German body".

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Xavier Vigna

**The Body in Germany and France
– Some historical observations –**

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The starting point for my analysis was an observation made by Natacha Dagneaud that there are major differences in perfume sales in Germany and France. To be more precise, the French tend to choose perfume while the Germans go more for Eau de Toilette. This brief essay is intended to provide some answers to the question as to why this is so.

Before we get down to business, however, it is important to sketch in a few details regarding the limitations and presuppositions of this study.

The history of the way in which people perceive their body is closely linked to the way they have developed and planned towns over the centuries: how they have organized sewage disposal, for example, or transformed their places of habitation by adding bathrooms, toilets etc. Such processes also presuppose the availability of time and capital in society. By that I mean having the time to visit a physician, having free time available on a daily basis as well as holidays in which you have time and financial means to buy the relevant goods and underline the importance of social differences. This is also reflected in the way people perceive their body: as a resource, on the one hand, but also as something aesthetic that is worth striving for. Naturally this implies that we really need to take a look at social distinctions here too, but unfortunately that would go beyond the scope of this brief essay due to a lack of time and historical sources.

Our second limitation concerns the geographical scope of the study. Even when just considering the French as a people, it is difficult to see them as a holistic entity due to the large size of the country and the regional differences this automatically brings with it. In the case of Germany things are even more complicated with its mix of Catholicism and Protestantism and a national territory that extends from the Baltic to the Alps. In striving for as much clarity as possible I have elected to work with a rather arbitrary "France" dominated by Mediterranean and Catholic influences and compared it with a Germany that orientates itself towards Nordic and Lutheran values.

Finally, another major problem is the historical sources we have available. On the French side we have a wealth of albeit almost exclusive French historiographic sources to draw on. The remarkable *Histoire des corps* by Alain Corbin and Georges Vigarello¹, for example, only provides one European comparison from the field of sport. In the case of Germany things are once again more problematical because as soon as you look at the theme of the body or physique the spectre of National Socialism is never far away. The Third Reich is presented as the watershed where everything converges and which also serves as the ultimate explanation for everything.

As can readily be seen, we are faced here with an immensely difficult task in that we are trying to provide an interpretation without even having proper comparative data to work with.

After considering all the above limitations once more another matter crosses my mind: before we can properly get to grips with how Germans perceive the body, we really need to view the whole thing in a European context. For this reason I would first like to take a look at how the body is perceived in a more general Western context, then consider some of the differences between Northern and Southern Europe before finally examining specifically German attitudes.

¹ Seuil, 2005, 2 Volumes. The final volume on the 20th Century is due to appear in Autumn 2005

I. GERMANY AND THE WESTERN WORLD

As from the second half of the 18th Century the Western relationship with the body goes through three different transformations. Although Germany does not actually exist as a single entity at this stage, it is still subject to these same changes. In fact, it is very much an integral part of a Western Europe that invents "*body politics*". At this time the western European states introduce what the philosopher Michel Foucault describes as "bio-politics" which are reflected in a multitude of aspects such as regenerating the body, fighting disease and notably preventing epidemics and taking up the fight against deficiency diseases. These policies lead to the introduction of state intervention in the fields of health, sex, birth and the military. Around 1750 clinical medicine comes into being and advances begin to be made in the field of medical training². In 1784 Emperor Joseph II founds the Viennese General Clinic while at the same time medical and surgical training courses are being set up throughout Europe (Germany 1750-1780; Pavie 1770). Germany plays a key role in the developments being made in experimental medicine in Europe at this time through the close links it forges between research and teaching. German efforts culminate in the foundation of excellently equipped institutions such as the one founded in Göttingen in 1823 which incorporates both chemical and veterinary institutes as well as a natural history department and a botanical garden. Germany also starts playing a leading role in the development of physiology at this time with the founding of the journal *Archiv für physiologische Heilkunde* (1842).

As a continuation of these bio-politics the national striving for a healthy population in the second half of the 19th Century results in the introduction of new laws governing pregnancy that are solely committed to ensuring the mother's well-being. In 1869 Prussia is the very first state to pass laws forbidding a mother to work during the final four weeks of pregnancy. Switzerland later introduces a 6-week maternity leave after birth and allows women to miss work for a total of no less than two months at birth. In France, on the other hand, laws guaranteeing a fortnight's post-natal maternity leave are not introduced until as late as June 1913 (the Enguerrand laws).

The growing debate surrounding the body at this time means that the sciences have a greater impact on people's social lives and, in conjunction with the birth of anthropology, this leads to the development of the teachings of hygienics and eugenics. Again, Germany proves no exception to the rule during this phase. With Pasteur there is a shift in the focus of hygienics. Since it is impossible to kill germs (except in the case of rabies and diphtheria) a policy of prevention is adopted which involves the careful identification of living organisms. This in turn results in a desire to identify people who have been infected with germs, whereby health protection (the search for germs) takes on aspects of moral and social control (stigmatisation of those who differ from the norm). Thus in both Germany and France a new form of social hygienics characterized by fears of degeneration and decline begins to prevail. At the same time the discovery of

² The following information is taken from Olivier Faure, "Le regard des médecins", in *Histoire des corps*, Vol. 2, op. cit.

Mendel's Laws (1866) and the obsession with heredity lead, for example, to the theory there is a form of hereditary syphilis that destroys the body and condemns any descendants for the next two, three or even seven generations. However, the symptoms of this disease may first become manifest in old age, meaning that no-one is safe from this disease of vice that is rife on the streets and amongst servants and thus presents a threat to the biological capital of the elite. One of the consequences of all this are the fears surrounding prostitutes who often suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, are dependent on alcohol and threatened by tuberculosis, thus bringing together under one roof all the risks that threaten the body³.

Social hygienics also lead to the birth of naturism which, like all other reactive currents, help contribute to industrial civilisation. These currents are especially prevalent in the Germanic world but without being exclusively German. In the 1890s the *Wandervogel* (lit: Migrating Bird) movement, characterized by a rejection of urban comfort, industrial society and the utilitarianism of the time, is founded in the Berlin suburb of Steglitz. The movement spreads rapidly, having 412 groups by 1903 and no less than 45 000 members by 1914. At the same time the *Wanderverein* is called into being in Hamburg under the leadership of K. Ahlborn which ultimately leads to the foundation of the *Bund Deutscher Wandervereine*. In 1909 Richard Schirmann, a teacher in Altena West Phalia, founds the first youth hostel. In Vienna the social-democratic *Naturfreunde* movement starts, spreading as far as Zurich and Munich before finally crumbling in the years of the Weimar Republic when 200 groups are dissolved under the accusation of being communist activists.⁴

The most interesting phenomenon, however, is the naturist movement⁵ that forms part of the *Lebensreform* (Life reform) organisation which is firmly rooted in the traditions of a vegetarian diet, therapeutic baths, psychotherapy and naturism. This movement cannot just be seen as a reaction against the effects of industrialization and society in general, but also as an organization that wishes to improve and heal society. The ideal pursued is one of *naturgemässe Lebensweise* – a way of life that accords with nature – which is also why they denounce medicine because vaccination has been compulsory in Germany since 1874. The majority of the movement's followers are members of the *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated bourgeoisie) and read the journal *Die Schönheit* (Beauty). Different groups from the lower classes also come together to form organizations, but they tend to be characterized by an anti-intellectualism which finds particular expression in the journal *Kraft und Schönheit* (Strength and Beauty) by Richard Ungewitter.

³ Alain Corbin, *Les filles de nocces. Misère sexuelle et prostitution au 19^e siècle*, Flammarion, 1982. Unfortunately I was unable to find a study about prostitution in Germany in the French National Library.

⁴ André Rauch "La nature revisitée" in Alain Corbin (ed.), *L'avènement des loisirs*, Flammarion, 2001.

⁵ Here I am following Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History 1890-1930*, University of Chicago Press, 2003.



FIGURE 12. Behrend's buttocks. *Kraft und Schönheit* 5 (1905): 173. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

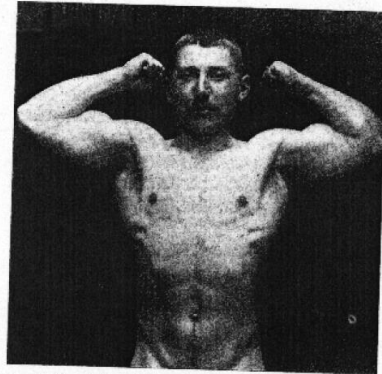


FIGURE 11. Example of good physical development: Curt Behrend. *Kraft und Schönheit* 5 (1905): 172. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

This cult surrounding the human body and its beauty leads to the creation of a nudist cult among the petty bourgeoisie, *Freikörperkultur*. Like its French counterpart, this organisation is eugenic in nature⁶. At this time the movement also begins to take on a political dimension due to the promotion of the concept of a *Volksgemeinschaft* [community of the people], something which transcends all social classes. In the Weimar Republic we find followers of naturism in all classes whereas before 1914 it was solely the reserve of the petite bourgeoisie.

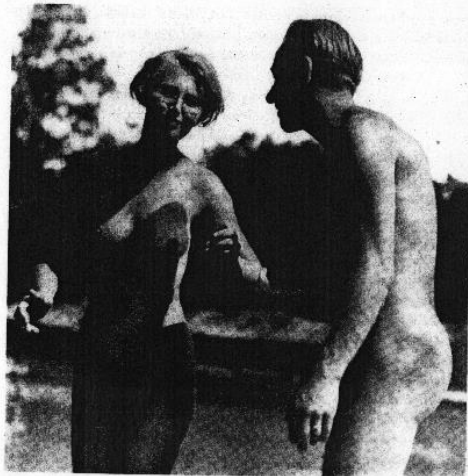


FIGURE 48. Weimarnude culture 4. *Lächendes Leben* 7, no. 7 (1931): 17. Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg.

One of the notable promoters of naturism is Hans Surény, whose book *L'Homme et le soleil* sells over 250 000 copies by 1945. Thus, the naturist movement should certainly be viewed as a Western phenomenon but one which has a different impact on Germany to what it has on France.

The third fundamental development lies in the rediscovery of gymnastics and the invention of sport at the end of the 18th Century. This too is essentially a European phenomenon. The role of gymnastics as a teaching aid was rediscovered

⁶ Arnaud Baubérot, *Histoire du naturisme, le mythe du retour à la nature*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004.

by the Swiss educationalist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (b. Zurich, 1746) who opened schools in Burgdorf in 1800 and later in Yverdon near Bern⁷. In these schools he employs teachers such as Friedrich Fröbel who goes on to found the *Kindergarten*. The first *Kindergarten* opens its doors in the Thuringian spa town of Blankenburg. Pestalozzi finds imitators in Spain, notably Amoros, who opens the first sports school in Paris, and in Fichte in Germany, who hopes his methods will help regenerate the German race. The leading advocate of gymnastics in Germany, however, is Friedrich-Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852) who hit upon the idea of using a programme of physical exercise to restore Germans' confidence after they were defeated at the Battle of Jena. Turnvater Jahn, as he is still known today, opens the first open-air gymnasium at Hasenheide near Berlin in 1810 and publishes *Die deutsche Turnkunst* in 1816. The very nationalist-minded *Turngemeinschaften* (gymnastic associations) are banned between 1820 and 1847 but afterwards win numerous new members⁸. Finally, Per Henrik Ling (1776-1839) starts gymnastics in Sweden, opening his Central Gymnastic Institute in Stockholm in 1813. Ling divides gymnastics up into different categories: educative gymnastics, military gymnastics, medicinal gymnastics, aesthetic gymnastics etc. Thanks to Ling, physical exercise becomes compulsory in Sweden in 1820. After many legal wranglings physical exercise is ultimately introduced as a school subject throughout Europe: In Prussia (compulsory for boys as from 1862, and for girls as from 1875), Italy (1878) and finally France (1880 for boys, 1882 for girls). This chronology reveals just how gymnastics is used to help restore the nation's physique as it were and how deeply it is rooted in a military context. This is especially so in Prussia after the defeat at the hands of the French in Jena in 1806 and is reflected in the resurgence of physical exercise in France in 1880 after the defeat of Sedan 1870, which, according to Angelo Mosso demonstrated the historical triumph of the German leg"⁹.

Sport, on the other hand, is a British invention that proves very popular amongst the middle classes in Victorian England. In France the anglophilia of the elite aids the spread of sport during the eighteen seventies. In Germany, however, English sport is rejected by both the aristocracy, who prefer fencing and riding, and the working class who prefer gymnastics and view football as the game of the bourgeoisie. The German Football Association, which has 83 000 members in 1910¹⁰ is called into being by physicians, tradesmen, journalists etc.

Thus all these political, social and cultural developments allied with a modern form of 'bio-politics' make the case for viewing this as a general Western development. From an anthropological and cultural standpoint, however, we need to examine this general observation more closely.

II. GERMANY IN NORTHERN EUROPE

⁷ Dominique Laty, *Histoire de la gymnastique en Europe*, PUF, 1996, p. 195-290.

⁸ In 1847 there are 300 gymnastic associations with 80 - 90 000 members. By 1864 there are 1934 with a total of 167 000 members. See Svenja Goltermann, *Körper der Nation: Habitusformierung und die Politik des Turnens 1860-1890*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997.

⁹ Anson Rabinbach, *Le moteur humain. L'énergie, la fatigue et les origines de la modernité*, La Fabrique, 2004, p. 366.

¹⁰ Georges Vigarello und Richard Holt: „Le corps travaillé: gymnastes et sportifs au 19^e siècle“, *Histoire des corps*, Band 2, op. cit.

It is important to make certain things clear before embarking on this section of the essay. I have deliberately chosen to compare Germany and France using a North-South divide. To make the division still clearer I have used a survey on Sweden: taking Sweden as it were to be the most northerly point of Germany. Unfortunately the French National Library only has a very limited number of French and English books devoted to Sweden. By virtue of the same reasoning I have also included Italy and Greece in my southern section.

This table is deliberately ideal-typical in nature and in this regard certainly open to question in some areas. However, I still feel that as an overall "system" it does possess a certain coherence and thus a heuristic value.

Some of the comparisons and references and my reasoning behind them are explained in greater detail below.

<i>North</i>		<i>South</i>
Lutherism	1	Catholicism
With Puritanism as border + from a political point of view: prohibitionist movements (alcohol, prostitution)		
The role of the male in worship		A female religion (priests are not really masculine since they have to renounce the flesh entirely) => the males thus escape religious interdictions => eroticism
Inner ethics	2	External morals
Public	3	Private
Community	4	Individual
Transparency	5	Secret
Openness		Closed
Window	6	Shutters
Sex education	7	Taboos
Gender mixing		Separation of the sexes
Strong naturist movement		
Pornography	8	Eroticism
The sea	9	The earth
Sailors		Peasants
Individual, sometimes isolated homes	1 0	(Mediterranean) Village
Nature	1 1	Town and city
Forest	1 2	Plants (agricultural and with pleasant aroma)
Wood	1 3	Stone

Beer (and perhaps water)	1 4	Wine
Fish	1	Vegetables - fruit
Potatoes (from the New World)	5	Maize (from the New World)
Silence	1 6	The spoken word Loquaciousness
Beard	1 7	Clean-shaven
Strength => Early development of gymnastics	1 8	Elegance
Harmony	1 9	Beauty
Reading	2 0	Visual arts (especially sculpture and painting)

1. This comparison has for me an absolute matrix-like structure.

One important aspect we must consider is the concept of Puritanism for which, as far as I know, no real Catholic equivalent exists. Puritanism is both an expression of the limits of Protestantism but also at the very heart of the religion and its political impact. Puritanism is of major significance both in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian worlds where it has resulted in the development of prohibitionist movements and extremely brutal eugenic practices¹¹.

Furthermore, the sexes play totally different roles in each of the religions and are, paradoxically, diametrically opposed. It is the men who read the service and read the bible in Protestantism, irrespective of the "liberal" image the religion enjoys in France. In contrast, Catholicism appears to me to be at heart a feminine religion. By taking a vow of celibacy Catholic priests cast off their male virility and thus cannot really be considered masculine. The cult surrounding the Virgin Mary and the phenomenon of Catholic nuns also serve as illustrations of the feminine dimension that Catholicism has. It is very noticeable in Italian churches that it is the women who assemble before the altar while the men tend to congregate in the background or even remain outside the church. With this withdrawal the men are more or less trying to evade the world of religious interdictions. It is precisely this form of evasion that enables eroticism to flourish in the Mediterranean world (see 8).

2. Is a consequence of 1 but is also due to the role of religious authority: the Protestant vicar is an integral part of the religious community, he is married, has a family etc. just like everyone else. Thus he is one of "us". The Catholic priest, on the other hand, is an outsider who imposes morals upon us.

3 - 6. The strict line drawn between private and public life in Mediterranean countries is not just very manifest it is also plainly insisted upon. In Sweden, on

¹¹ Patrick Sylberman: "Les damnés de la démocratie puritaine: stérilisations en Scandinavie, 1929-19772", *Le Mouvement social* Nr.187.

the other hand, transparency is demanded both socially as well as by the state¹². This contrast reveals the extent of support offered by the community in the North which is illustrated by the patronage that goes on, the role of foundations etc. In the south, on the other hand, life is very much more individualistic and the idea of community is only really expressed within the family.

7 and 8. Sex education has been practised in Scandinavia for a long time, in some places even since the end of the 19th Century. Mixed schools have also existed since this time and gymnastics were also widely introduced for girls¹³. In the Mediterranean countries there are still a lot of single-sex schools, something which was not abandoned in France until the mid-nineteen-sixties.

This contrast also tells us something about how the body is perceived differently in our two cultures. Even going right back to classical Antiquity there has always been a wealth of erotic and permissive literature available in Mediterranean and Arab countries (e.g. Casanova in Italy) and the preference for such literature in France, in particular in the 18th Century, has been sufficiently well publicized. As far as I know, an equivalent current has never really existed in Northern Europe¹⁴. Instead, a climate of openness and transparency has led to the development of pornography, i.e. putting the body on public display.

9 - 12. Since Braudel we have known that the Mediterranean region is earthbound¹⁵, however paradoxical that may seem to be at first sight. The exception that proves the rule here is Venice. The people of the Mediterranean tend to focus on their hinterland that they use for farming or for grazing their sheep and goats. Northern Europe, with its own ocean in the form of the Baltic Sea, is a region populated by sailors and a place where the sea is omnipresent – even as part of the diet (**see 15**). This is also reflected in the Northern European love of water sports.

I get the feeling that this contrast also extends to the way in which nature and the pine forests of Northern Europe have been preserved. In the south larger continuous settlements are preferred and urban settlements have been a typical feature of the Mediterranean ever since antiquity. Perhaps we could also contrast the northern forests with the pleasant smelling domesticated plants that are grown around the Mediterranean. The people of the South are used to the pleasant aromas that belong to their world (fields of lavender, basil and thyme etc.)

13 – 16 Southern European architecture typically uses stone and brickwork. In the North wood is also used as a building material (IKEA!). In the North people drink fermented beer whereas the Mediterranean is dominated by vineyards. This contrast between the maritime north and agricultural south is reflected in the opposites of fish and fruit/vegetables. Interestingly, it is also reflected in the

¹² Kristina Orfali: “Un modèle de la transparence: la société suédoise”, in *Histoire de la vie privée*, edited by Ph. Ariès and G. Duby, Seuil, Vol. 5, 1999.

¹³ Jean Baubérot, “De la femme protestante”, *Histoire des femmes*, edited by G. Duby and M. Perrot, Plon, 1992, Vol. 4.

¹⁴ One only needs to think of the immense scandal caused by D.H. Lawrence’s novel *Lady Chatterly’s Lover* when published in the UK in 1928.

¹⁵ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, Vol. 1: La part du milieu, Livre de Poche, 1990.

products the respective areas have adopted from the New World, potatoes in the North and maize in the South which does not flourish in northern climates due to the harsher climate there.

18 - 20. The aesthetic ideal for the whole of Europe can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the key 18th Century art historian, however, differentiates between the 'high style' and the 'beautiful', i.e. between the strong masculine body and Apollonic beauty¹⁶. This contrast can also be used when comparing the North and South: the striving for strength and the early development of a physical culture in that striving for strength and/or harmony in the North while in the South more importance is attached to elegance and a striving for lines and curves dominates¹⁷. It is at this time that reading becomes important in the North (emerging in parallel to the Protestant custom of reading pious texts). There is also a noticeable lack of great painters between the 17th and 19th centuries (no paintings in Protestant churches) in the North, while the visual arts, called for by the Catholic Counter-Reformation (the pomp of Catholic Mass), establish themselves in the south, especially in the field of painting (also in churches) and (marble) sculpture.

III. SOME NATIONAL PECULIARITIES

Any history of Germany, even social histories, still tends to focus on the *Sonderweg* the nation adopted with the rise of the Third Reich. The topic of National Socialism is so dominant that some historians even tend to view all German characteristics established before National Socialism as being 'proto-Nazi' and that all later behavioural patterns also ultimately have their roots in Nazism¹⁸. I do not intend to ignore this aspect entirely, but I do reject the teleology and determinism implicit in this way of thinking. Instead, my aim is rather to incorporate those specifically German attributes into the European or "Nordic" scheme of things. But before I do this I feel it is important to focus on two aspects of differing importance.

The first matter concerns the importance of militarism in German society, which is due to the dominant role played by Prussia in the creation of the German state. The significance of militarism, which was particularly prevalent after the humbling defeat to the French in Jena in 1806, is, for example, reflected by the importance placed upon physical exercise, but also by the existence of prestigious scholastic institutions which were exclusively military in nature¹⁹. These schools cannot really be compared with French military schools. Militarism is also evident in the vigour of the naturist movement which exalted in the strong, idealistic body beautiful.

¹⁶ Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal. Winckelmann and the origins of Art History*, Yale University Press, 1994.

¹⁷ Curves are an important part of baroque art and thus the Catholic world, even though the baroque hardly plays a role at all in France. See Dominique Fernandez, *La perle et le croissant. L'Europe baroque de Naples à Saint-Petersbourg*, Plon, 1995.

¹⁸ Uli Linke, *German bodies. Race and representation after Hitler*, Routledge, NY – London, 1999.

¹⁹ Ernst von Salomon, *Les cadets*, 10/18, 1986 (Original version *Die Kadetten*, 1933).



FIGURE 45. Weimar nude culture 1. *Licht+Land* 7, no. 13 (1930). Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg.



FIGURE 46. Weimar nude culture 2. *Lebendes Leben* 6, no. 7 (1930): 11. Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg.

The second matter involves a brief detour to the world of anthropology. Although scientists were first able to identify and put a name to pheromones in the nineteen fifties, a link between smell and sexuality can already be found in Greek mythology when Paris discovers the perfumes used by Aphrodite when he visits her in her boudoir. The West put forward the following dichotomy:

Civilisation = white	Savagery = black
Control over odours ²⁰	Strong odours
Absence of body odour	Body odour of the black race ²¹
Repression of sexuality	Lascivious sexuality

Alongside this matrix there is another involving appealing aromas and distasteful odours which can be used to directly label an individual. "From an anthropological standpoint smell is a moral stain"²². Thus the perception of smell represents a form of ethnocentricity as "every smell carries with it certain associations" and "odour is an ethereal and subtle moral indicator". This is why we have the sweet scent of the saint on the one hand and the stench of the outcast on the other:

- Homosexuals with a preference for heavy perfumes,
- Prostitutes, cocottes, the Latin *putida* (she who smells bad),
- Jews
- Redheads, who according to Western mythology smell and are full of sexual energy

²⁰ Norbert Elias, *Le procès de civilisation. Vol.1: La civilisation des mœurs*, Part 2, Presses-Pocket, 1993.

²¹ Jean-Pierre Jardel, "De la couleur et de l'odeur de l'Autre dans la littérature para-anthropologique", in Pascal Lardellier (Dir.): *A fleur de peau. Corps, odeurs et parfums*, Belin, 2003, pp. 183-191.

²² David Le Breton, "Les mises en scène olfactives de l'autre, ou les imaginaires du mépris", in *ibid.*, pp. 115-128. The following text and quotations are taken from this work

These opposites, so typical for the West, are particularly prevalent in Germany which has had only very little experience with southern countries - for geographic reasons and also because, unlike the English and French, the country only had a very brief colonial age (ca. 1880-1914). As "good Europeans" the English were afraid that their presence in India could lead to them becoming degenerated through a diluting of the blood and tissue and resulting anaemia. Faced with rumours of immorality, dissolute sexuality and intense heat, physicians saw sexual abstinence as the only way of preserving oneself from decadence. On the other hand, Elisabeth M. Collingham demonstrated the Indian influence on the bodies of the English stationed in India and mused on the appearance of an Anglo-Indian body which was reflected in the somatic disciplines, personal hygiene and pleasures of the flesh²³.

Likewise in France the whole experience of colonization meant a shift in the country's erotic imagination through stumbling upon other types of female (Odalisques, Moorish, Berber, Wolof, Fulbe, Tutsi, Vietnamese and Tahitian women). These encounters, which led to a fashion for orientalism and resulted in an eroticization of the women concerned, is reflected in the large number of postcard reproductions of the period depicting scenes featuring "false natives"²⁴.

In Germany, however, the lack of a colonial tradition meant that "foreign bodies" played a far less significant role and resulted in white skin being aestheticized far more than elsewhere and also building on Nordic and racist mythologies. This aesthetisation of white skin results in a whole series of equivalences (white = whiteness = naturalness = innocence) and is reflected in the naturist movement²⁵. However, it is essential we do not forget one major aspect here: the naturist movement already starts de-eroticizing the body in the 19th Century and continues to do so during the *revival* it enjoys during the nineteen sixties - a period that stands for sexual liberation and social protest. Thus the liberated body is perhaps paradoxically one that has been de-eroticized.

²³ Elisabeth M. Collingham, *Imperial bodies. The physical experience of the Raj, c. 1800-1947*, Polity, Cambridge, 2001. According to the author, however, sexual contact with the local population was extremely rare

²⁴ Christelle Teraud, *La prostitution coloniale*, Payot, 2003, especially Chapter 9 "La prostituée 'indigène', archétype de la femme fantasmée?"

²⁵ Uli Linke, *German bodies. Race and representation after Hitler*, op. cit. "German representations of national identity are patterned by essentialist tropes, that is, white skin and nakedness, revealing a cultural obsession with a return to the natural and authentic in an apparent search for social anchorage.", p. 24



FIGURE 23. Proportions of a Bavarian woman representing the perfect beauty of the middle-land race according to Stratz. Stratz, *Rassenichönheit*, 380. Landesbibliothek Stuttgart.

This de-eroticized aestheticization of white skin also picks up on some of the themes of the leading physicians and theorists of the *Lebensreform* movement. Carl Heinrich Stratz, gynaecologist and theoretician at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, put forward the theory that real beauty was in fact based on an absence of sexual desire, especially in the case of that beauty encountered amongst Nordic women. In Stratz's view Nordic beauty is neither sensuous nor sexual. Thus he separates beauty and sensuality and in so doing strongly disassociates the immoral French women with their "*poses plastiques*" from the rather less frivolous German female. This is also reflected in the contrast between the Roman women with their "diabolic beauty" with their chaste Nordic colleagues. This truly German beauty is, however, only found in the extremes of society amongst the elite and the peasants, who never mix²⁶.

At the end of this brief discourse we have finally managed to put together our own Germanic scheme that equates whiteness, de-eroticization, a lack of body odour, chastity and naturalness with a spirit of seriousness. If we consider for a moment the following comments made by Georges Vigarello, "Perfume's artificiality stands in total contradiction to the triumphalist mentality of the bourgeoisie. It is volatile and evaporates, making it a symbol of waste and loss. It is not just that its effects are superficial, oh no, it even vanishes into thin air! It is the very antithesis of accumulation and the growth of capital"²⁷. This ideal-typical

²⁶ Michael Hau, *The cult of Health and Beauty in Germany*, op. cit.

Of course Germany does not have a monopoly on such bizarre comparisons. During World War I a certain Dr. Bériller presented a paper to the *Académie de Médecine* on "The fetid bromhidrose of the German race". According to the good doctor, the Germans, in particular the Prussians and Pomeranians, produced an abnormal amount of stools that, in combination with their other body odours, especially that of their sweat, generated a stench comparable with that of a skunk (Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, *14-18, retrouver la guerre*. Gallimard, 2000, pp. 120-124).

²⁷ Georges Vigarello, *Le propre et le sale*, Seuil, 1985, pp. 150-151

scheme for the outgoing 19th Century has of course continued to develop, notably with regard to the aspect of chastity. It is based on a comparison with a perfumed, eroticised, artificial and fanciful south.

The increasing attractiveness of the south in the eyes of contemporary Western society has, of course, necessitated changes in this scheme of things – although it may be more correct to say it has led to more tension rather than real change. The gradual absorption of Southern influences in “Nordic” fantasies certainly affects the question of the acceptability of an eroticization of the body, in particular of the female body.

Xavier Vigna

Dr. Klaus Bernsau

**Back to Business
– Body and Skin in Advertising in 2006**

A semiotic snapshot

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At that moment when you play everything through in your mind, just before you start the actual research everything seems to be pretty clear. You expect to find an overwhelming wealth of imagery depicting the body in advertising from all industries and products. You expect to find the latest “body topics” ranging from beauty in old age, imagery exposing just how the body can be remodelled right through to the morbid and criminal excesses of anorexia, bulimia or doping... But when you actually you get down to the research you are all the more surprised, or even disappointed, to discover the absolute absence of the body in so many different titles, industries or product categories.

Elements that make up the sign of the “human body”

But let’s not get ahead of ourselves, before we begin it is important to define our terminology and sketch in the details of just what we are setting out to do. Naturally it is the human body we wish to focus on, not some heavenly body or some abstract body from the world of physics. And of course all we humans have a body, not even Günter Jauch can get by without a body when he wants to sell us lottery tickets or Pilsner beer.²⁸ But of course that is not what we mean here when we use the term ‘body’ - which is probably pretty clear to everyone reading this. Instead ‘body’ in this context refers to the use of, depiction of, emphasis of the human body in such a way as to portray the human existence in a way that is more or less aesthetic or indeed more or less erotic. But how can we distinguish between this physicality and non-physicality semiotically? Theoretically speaking, we are referring to something for which the German psychologist, linguist and semiotic Karl Bühler has coined the term ‘abstractive relevance’. Now that does not mean to say that all components of a sign, an advertisement or TV spot are meaningful. The viewer knows very well how to select just what information to take on board. This can, of course, lead to some very interesting results and nasty mishaps when the creative people who make the advertising slip up. Now in the case of Günter Jauch, for example, this means that TV-viewers largely block out of their minds that Herr Jauch has a body - also within the terms of this survey – a body that sweats, smells, is alive, demands nourishment, exercise and care and indeed also has sexual needs.



²⁸ Günter Jauch, probably Germany’s most omnipresent media figure – TV game show host, sports commentator - you name it, he does it

Fig. 1-3: Günter Jauch, always perfectly 'bodiless' – whether in the studio, the rain forest or paddling in the ocean

Naturally, as the consummate media-entrepreneur, Herr Jauch also encourages this by making sure that he does not emphasise or unnecessarily draw attention to his body. Firstly – and this is one of the defining features of physicality – every form of nudity is avoided. Herr Jauch's usual form of attire is a suit and tie. Secondly, this choice of clothing helps to eliminate or mask any physical contours such as size, breadth, or muscularity. Thirdly, his preferred choice of colour – or rather non-colour – for his suits, which ranges from a greyish-blue to a greyish-brown completes this picture – or non-picture. The only splash of colour we see is his tie which is used to draw viewers' attention away from the actual man to the tie which serves as a surrogate body. Finally, Herr Jauch is a man and physicality is primarily feminine in nature – not just in the field of advertising.

When saving turns you on, advertising suddenly becomes disembodied

Advertising that uses asexual presenters similar to Günter Jauch makes up a surprisingly large proportion of current advertising, whether we are talking about TV or print advertising. Alongside this we have product- and technology-focussed advertising for cars, computers, mobile phones and consumer electronics and the 'cheap-cheap-saving-is-sexy' advertising. A good epithet for this whole area would be "If you've got it, flaunt it". Without actually being able to put a quantitative figure on this I would say that we have already managed to cover a good 2/3 of the current German advertising in this one paragraph. As I said at the outset, it is surprising just how little physicality we encounter in our reputedly 'over-sexed' and over-styled age.



Figs. 4-6: Current German advertising, surprisingly lacking in physicality

The best example of an absolute lack of physicality in German advertising in 2006 is probably still the 'Geiz ist geil'²⁹ campaign by the consumer electronics company Saturn. An almost virtual female presenter presents us her latest cheap wares.

²⁹ A translator's nightmare: imagine an alliterative slogan such as "thrifty is nifty" but with the connotation "saving turns me on"

She may have a feminine form and her silver jumpsuit may emphasise her figure, but it rapidly becomes clear that it is her products and prices that we should covet - not her other virtues. As with Herr Jauch, it soon becomes apparent that merely having the physical attributes is not enough, rather it is important to use your body actively and consciously. Even if I am physically perfect because I look as though I have been created on a computer, it is still not enough to make me physically attractive. If I want to be sexy I still need to bow to the dictates of styling, even as an artificial figure. By styling, I mean styling my physical attributes in accordance with the current norms and codes of positive physicality, attractiveness and aesthetics.

Since the publication of Erving Goffman's groundbreaking work "Gender and Advertising" we have known that advertising is not up to playing a leading-edge role when it comes to social codes. As such, advertising is not entitled to try and conceptualize or define our understanding of and feelings surrounding the body. In fact, this would totally contradict advertising's original *raison d'être*, which is to reach out to large economically relevant groups of people. This is something it is not possible to achieve with new and unusual codes. Rather advertising is always going to have to use the more mundane modes of communication familiar to the ubiquitous 'silent majority' or its relevant market set. And it would seem that the much vaunted 'silent majority' is unable to find a small car erotic or establish a link between owning a digital camera and their own physical senses. Even in the case of the mobile phone, an article that often really does seem to enjoy a very symbiotic relationship with the young and young-at-heart, advertising is unable to communicate the close physical relationship its users enjoy with the product as this example of the market leader Nokia illustrates. Instead what we often find is the semiotic phenomenon of a substitute body or even a liberation from the body through technical equipment. It's no longer the case that a Porsche functions as a penis extension, instead the SUV serves as a sporty full-body prosthesis!

The WYSIWYG promise – What you see is what you get

Naturally we find plenty of physicality in advertising for products closely associated with the body: body and hair care products, cosmetics, fragrances and, albeit with major limitations, also fashion.



Figs. 7-9: You could hardly make it any clearer. Only in the case of Joop might you set you puzzling over a possible ménage à trois

Perfumes are the products that use the highest physical stakes and as such have practically reserved sexuality and eroticism for themselves. There is not really a lot to be added here from a semiotic point of view. You do not need to be much of an expert to be able to interpret the sight of hands and lips moving across bare skin or signs of display such as raised arms or a plunging neckline. Perhaps it is interesting, however, to look at how homosexuality and trans-sexuality are portrayed here. Due to the way the photograph in figure 9 has been cropped it is not entirely clear whether it is the depicted male model's own hand or that of another man that is stroking his six-pack. But at least there is also a female hand involved in the action. Cutting off the model's head also suggests anonymity in the choice of sexual partner. But that is almost even too much when you consider the demonstrative unambiguousness of the poses otherwise. Interesting in this context is surely the way these advertisements broach the topic of the link between the body, its odours and sexuality. A topic that has only become an issue a long time after the sexual revolution and nudity first raised their heads. Whilst the early naked figures of the seventies were provocative in their nakedness, at the same time they were anti-sceptically clean and completely odour-free.



Figs. 10-11: Squeaky clean and odour-free, the sexual revolution in seventies' advertising

It is not without reason that Patrick Süskind's novella "Perfume" first hit the silver screen in 2006, over twenty years after its initial publication. It was also a major success. But here again we see the defining power of the body in the film world and not in advertising. Advertising merely resorted to a playful conventionalized variant in the form of the Axe TV-spot in which thousands of wild young women try to pounce on a male Axe-user.



Figs. 12-13: Making fragrance visible. In art and advertising (Axe perfume)

"You can get it, if you really want it"

In the field of body care and beautification functionalism and feasibility rule the roost. The body is broken down into its individual components which can all be optimized at will. In line with the concept of feasibility and the related idea of human free will, there is now a broad range of choices available. No longer does a physical image have to adhere to a rigid set of norms. Not of course that that means there is no longer any form of coercion. I can be blonde or brunette, I can be 20 or 50, but whatever happens I must not let myself go. Not since the

cosmetic industry has created so many different tools to help us sculpture our bodies. Most of these implements are also illustrated in the ads.



Figs. 14-16: Anything goes: hair dye (only blonde is not very popular at the moment as an artificial colouring)



Figs. 17-18: The body being put to work to show beauty at all ages

Fantasies of feasibility: the body as a construction site

Particularly when it comes to gauging female beauty and physical awareness, there has been an awful lot of critical and sensitive public discussion that has closely scrutinized and commented on every single change. Who lets herself go and why? What are the limits within which a celebrity's weight is allowed to vary? What forms of styling work and which don't? What hair colour works? Who lives up to the ideals and demands even when he has (apparently) been caught unawares? But this public beauty-MOT does not exonerate any one of us, even if the old chestnut that "it even takes Cindy Crawford 3 hours a morning to look like Cindy Crawford" is still valid. Instead it makes it clear that we are all judged democratically in accordance with the critical rules of the cult of the physique. This also explains the extensive use of celebrities, particularly in advertising that uses the body, as they can be used to regenerate, and thus legitimize, the codes used in advertising through public discussion.



Figs. 19-20: The public beauty discussion: Who is the fairest in the land? And who is letting themselves go?

If you follow the public discussion about the body, health and well-being you notice that cosmetics (in advertising) clearly feel no responsibility whatsoever for promoting a holistic physical awareness. An approach that links a sense of inner well-being with external attractiveness, that links all the organs, both with one another and also the environment, life and diet seems to have been sacrificed on the alter of product differentiation and the competition between the product managers within the concerns. I may have only viewed a totally arbitrary but broad sample but there were virtually no examples of a holistic approach anywhere there. Perhaps this is where we reach the limits of the expertise that we ascribe to cosmetics for dealing with the complex problem of a holistic sense of well-being (in body and mind). Or the brands or users have simply capitulated at the sheer number of implements out there that would have to be used to achieve this. Even those brands that enjoy a holistic positioning such as Nivea or Dove are scuppered here. Likewise the Dove campaign with its appeal for a totally personal sense of beauty and physicality ultimately takes up the position, "You have to work on your body". It is not without reason that in the USA the current Real Beauty campaign was coupled with the 2007 Oscar Prize-Giving

Ceremony, thus linking it with the most public of norms for an attractive appearance.



Fig. 21: Dove or the illusion of liberation from beauty dictates. The main thing is that you use the right form of care

So before we take a look under the semiotic magnifying glass at the way in which the body is portrayed outside the world of body products, we can summarize:

- The real defining power for physical and beauty ideals exists outside the realm of advertising
- The body as a sign has become banal, taboos have largely evaporated – other areas of the media are more progressive in this arena too
- We chiefly see bodies in advertising for products that are closely related to the body
- Bodies are functionalized, anything seems feasible
- The beauty ideal is becoming more multi-faceted
- Beauty is a matter of will-power
- The problem with the idea “Everybody’s beautiful” is that it also incorporates the implicit threat: “You have no excuse for not being so!” Those who fail to do anything about their looks will be ostracized to an even greater degree
- Beauty is once more firmly in the female domain. And once again there is a clear division between masculine and feminine beauty



Figs. 22-27: Implements for nearly all parts of the body: (artificial) hair extensions; more colourful or wrinkle-free lips; filler, but not from the do-it-yourself store; laser cuts in skin are also presented, as are eye corrections

Well what is beautiful then? An iconography of styling

If we accept the previously mentioned Goffman approach that advertising is merely a compounded expression of social circumstances, then beauty is the combination of a more open set of design variables paired with personal free will and technical expertise. Styling is the magic word. Self-confidence is the moderate way of expressing the same thing.



Figs. 28-30: Beauty codes: the face with an amenable expression and open mouth, lots of skin, lots of hair, regular proportions, soft curves and a slim silhouette

That is why advertising largely restricts portrayals of the body to a head or face shot. This includes wide radiant eyes, blue if possible! Wrinkles are no problem just as long as they are combined with an otherwise smooth and rosy skin and, above all, a smile. Hair tends to be long and dark but always has to show signs of having been styled: a clear cut, dye or streaks. Bodies are malleable. Curves and soft shapes dominate, they are often presented in motion, set poses or bent over. Women's bodies are still slim and male bodies are only moderately muscular. These are the same semantic elements that are used when the body is featured in advertising not devoted to the classic body products. Interestingly, there is no complex repertoire for depicting holistic physical well-being or beauty, this area remains practically ignored. Even the idea that skin care or health products can provide the basis for a holistic sense of health and well-being, as indeed the natural and Ph-neutral product lines imply, soon reaches its limits. In this area a quiet smile has established itself as a symbol for common sense so that a health insurance company, the butchers' guild or a spring water can utilize the sign repertoire of an all-round healthy and attractive body.



Figs. 31-33: A holistic physical sense of well-being? Rather something for spring water, diet or a health insurance company

This means that we have the following check-to work with when it comes to classifying and interpreting non-body-product advertising that employs the body:

- An illustration of people yes/no
- Non-body related products yes/no
- Lays emphasis on the body yes/no
- Beauty elements (hair/ eyes/ mouth/ skin/ well-balanced proportions/ curves on women with a slim body, moderate muscles in the case of men) yes/no
- Beauty as an expression of free will yes/no
- A “feasibility product” yes/no

If you find a score of at least 5 yeses then you should look more closely if you are interested in the way the body is used in advertising.

Bordeaux or a wine with body

Why and how do figures 34 and 35 work with physical elements? They do not show the obvious link of challenging attractiveness, intoxication and enjoyment that one may have in mind from other alcoholic drinks. The Freixenet ad is a classic realization that gets very close to the physicality of perfume advertising.

Is the woman in the Bordeaux advertisement positive in a physical sense, i.e. attractive in the way we understand the term? We see her long hair, a lot of exposed skin on her legs and throat. Of course the young woman is slim and has a restrained skin tone. Her hair exhibits colour effects and streaks, the length also suggests it demands quite a bit of intensive care, but otherwise signs of active intervention and styling such as coloration or cut are only minimal. However, she does put her body on show in an active, self-satisfied and self-confident manner, even though she is offering it to her surroundings or male companion rather than the viewer. It is noticeable that the female breast plays a subordinate role – at least in this 2006 ad. Although we have not talked about the female breast yet, it is clearly identifiable as such here but it does not play a significant role in this case. Instead it only really serves to make clear the woman’s gender so that we can safely discount the possibility of her being a very androgynous young male Bordeaux drinker.



Figs. 34-35: Two extremes alcohol advertising using the body: Bordeaux vs. Freixenet

The fact that we see her entire body, particularly in this stretched-out pose, firmly anchored to the ground is something we tend to see when the intention is to imply a holistic link between body, health and naturalness. At the same time, however, this ad does not deny that the body and its appearance can be adapted through external intervention. In fact quite the opposite can be true, see figs. 36 & 37.



Figs. 36-37: Stretched out and firmly anchored to the ground: a healthy physical sense

Now why does the Bordeaux use these physical aesthetics that so clearly copy elements used in cosmetic coding? Firstly, it identifies the man as a connoisseur and aesthete, as he has surrounded himself with the right life accessories. The woman herself is characterized as being strong-willed and successful. Because beauty is no longer a gift of the gods but instead a personal choice. Only the expressive styling possibilities of the typical physical imagery have been deliberately and significantly toned down. Summarizing: you know what you want and also get it, but at the same time you attach importance to a degree of naturalness. Thus Bordeaux and the female body match each other perfectly in this ideal for 2006.

When we look at the way the body is used outside the world of perfume and cosmetics advertising, we can identify three main approaches:

Aestheticization: Here the body functions as an aesthetic or aestheticizing element as part of a composition presenting a product or lifestyle. Here it is used as a logical extension of its role in the field of decorative cosmetics and extended to embrace other product areas.



Figs. 38-40: The aesthetically styled body atmospherically positioned in the right setting (champagne, camera, car)

Harmony: Here the attractive body does not just express agreement between humanity and the environment but also within product groupings. This is the area where non-body products are most common. Because of the cosmetic and fashion industry's very functionalist understanding of the body that we have already mentioned there is no continuum between extensive body care and a holistic feeling of well-being (harmony). Despite this, the way the body is presented using the codes of an attractive body plays a key role in expressing this harmony.



Figs. 41-43: Harmonious beauty advertising cheese, a bank or TV station as a sign for making the right decision

Aggressiveness: This is about expressionism, physicality as a statement. The provocativeness of the nineteen seventies still plays a role here but the emphasis is also on independence and animalistic naturalness. But even so we are still faced with beauty norms here that have been sanctioned by public opinion, a prerequisite for using physicality in advertising.



Abb. 44-46: Aggressive use of the body for unconventional people who know what they want

We can also present our three main threads in the form of a circle to show a continuous transition from aesthetic naturalness to harmony with nature to natural wildness to provocation by a strong physical presence to powerful styling to formal styling to so-called and demonstrated natural beauty before we finish back up with aesthetic naturalness. (Fig. 47)

What all these different manifestations have in common, however, is that they use the idea of the malleable attractive body that stems from the beauty factories of the media and that has been further honed in advertising for cosmetics. Elements that have long since gone beyond the limits of aesthetics (beautiful - ugly) and have already entered the world of ethics (good - bad) or even that of existentialism (true - false). Whereby today the false path is the true path - whether we are talking about hair colour, hair length, skin texture or eye colour.

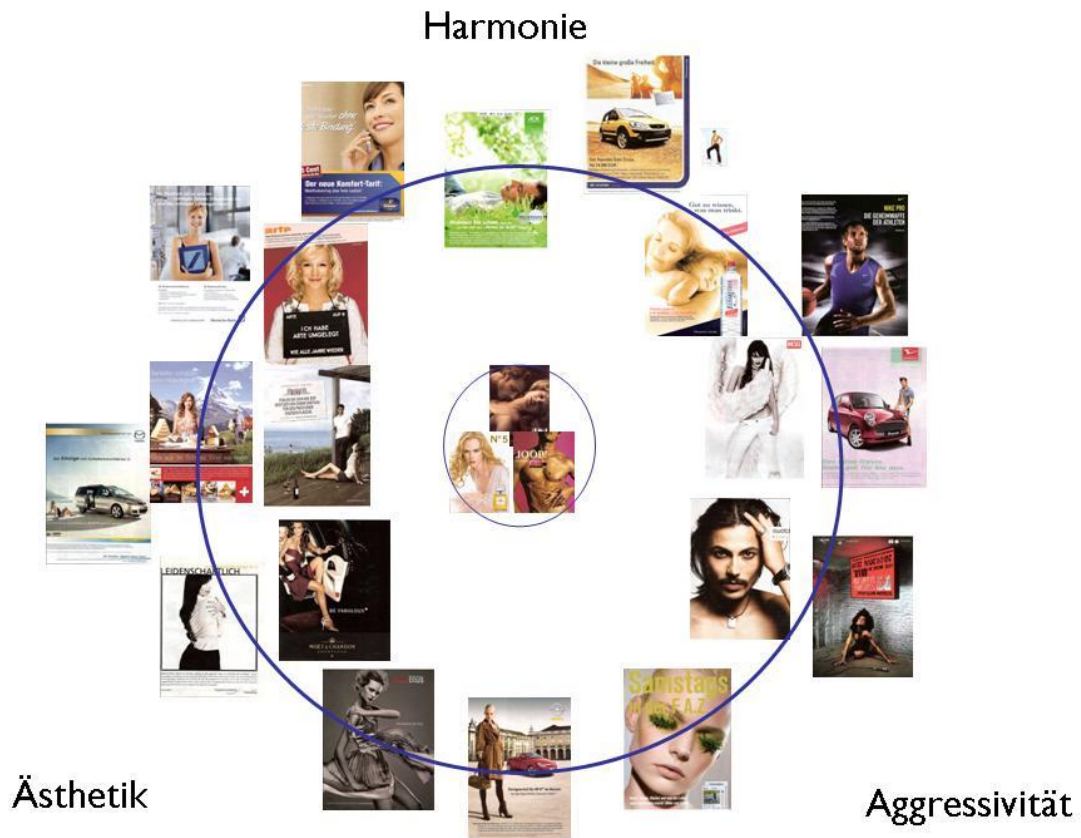


Fig. 47: The physical sign continuum for the non-body-product world

Conclusions or exceptions that prove the rule

The portrayal of the body and skin in all its naturalness – either in its real form or at least implied real form - with all its flaws, spots, flab etc. (fig. 48) is an absolute rarity in the case of women. And even in the rare cases where this is done cues from the standard body code are still employed: the posture (curvaceous and well 'earthed'), a straight nose and full symmetrical mouth.



Fig. 48: The new picture language borrowed from Internet portals such as MySpace brings with it new forms of expression that are closer to real life

It may be a very banal preconception but it is backed up by advertising: men do not have to be attractive – at least not physically. Whereas in the case of women especially those physical characteristics that cannot be altered (at least not without surgical intervention) such as physique, facial proportions or, in particular, the shape of the nose, are subject to stringent norms or are not discussed, men have a far wider range of options available. They are permitted to lead a harmonious existence, even if they are bald, old and overweight. As a man I can also become famous even if I am only short, like Wigald Boning,³⁰ and then extol the virtues of a camera that miraculously only applies the laws governing the right physique to women by transforming an overweight mother in the background into a bathing beauty (Fig. 50). In the same way the womanizer Dieter Bohlen,³¹ all-too familiar from German TV screens, certainly fails to meet the ideal of a young slim smooth-skinned six-pack wearer. Nevertheless, Bohlen does exhibit a remarkable sense of self-irony when he allows himself to be photographed with his mouth taped over, thus reduced in his physicality (Fig. 51). This is a reference that works on many levels, not just referring to his big mouth, familiar from the German edition of Pop Idol, but also from his tabloid role as someone a little too free with his kisses – and ultimately, to the fact that he was recently bound and gagged after being mugged in his own home at the end of 2006.

³⁰ A German comedian

³¹ Juror of the German version of “Pop Idol” and former member of the Euro-pop duo Modern Talking



Fig. 49-51: Men can act a little more freely with their bodies

Summarizing, we can record the fact that the physicality in advertising uses a very reduced set of forms of expression. It suggests the feasibility of the body beautiful. This implies the strict rule that you should actively work on your body and style it in accordance with the norms. Apparent freedoms ultimately only serve to increase the amount of pressure, placed especially on women, to correspond to public norms and ideals.

The codes generated by the press and continually repeated in advertising for body products (fragrances, cosmetics) for the beautiful (female) body are seized upon in all sorts of other industries, not just by those that immediately spring to mind such as the world of fashion and accessories. Instead they are also used to sell cars or financial products that, depending upon their ultimate goal, make use of the same harmony, aesthetics or aggressiveness. Whilst men can also try to live up to their own beauty ideals that correspond to those placed upon their female counterparts they at least have the option of – radically – liberating themselves from these rules governing physicality. However, neither this physicality nor the anti-physicality that exists outside the world of cosmetics and fashion plays a dominant role in advertising. Instead there rules a kind of 'product aesthetics' that promises liberation from the body through consumerism. This is achieved by either clearly focussing on the respective goods or by using quasi disembodied presenters such as the Saturn avatar or celebrities such as Günter Jauch, for example. Consequently, all those who have given up every hope of ever being able to style their body in accordance at least have the comfort of being able to consume outside their body.

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 Neon 10/06: Figs. 42, 44, 46, 48

View 10/06: Figs. 19, 20

Manager Magazin, Bestseller, Harvard Business Manager with no illustrations

TV-spots seen on ZDF, RTL 2, Pro7 from October - December 2006: Figs. 4, 6, 13, 28, 35

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Séissmo – Natacha Dagneaud

The Body: Special Places and Their Secrets

INTRODUCTION

IS THE "GERMAN" BODY REALLY SO DIFFERENT?

Could it not be possible that the reason why Germans' relationship with their "body" still remains a mystery for most southern Europeans is primarily due to linguistic differences? Before we can understand how the body is presented in Germany it is first necessary to look at the semantic meaning of the term "*Körper*" (body).

There are two ways of saying "body" in the Germanic languages. Whereas French and English are able to get by with one word each to cover the body concept adequately, using "*corps*" or "body" respectively, **Germans differentiate between the terms "*Leib*" and "*Körper*".** "*Leib*" stems from the Old High German "*līb*" that was originally used to describe "life" and "person" before it later came to mean "body". Unlike the Latin word "*corpus*" that was Germanicized in the 13th Century to the word "*Körper*", "*Leib*" refers to the subjective and sensual dimension of the body that is perceived by the living person. The term "*Körper*", on the other hand solely refers to the material flesh of the body.

The German body concept thus incorporates both the meaning of "*Leib-Seins*" (of 'being' a body, of living in a body) and "*Körper-Habens*" (having or possessing a body). On the surface this may not appear to be particularly significant, but the "*Leib*" component would seem to explain some German peculiarities:

- The body stands for the living spirit within, it is not just an outer shell but allows us to glimpse the person beneath the surface, i.e. his condition and thoughts
- The body is the mirror of the soul: an appealing soul has a positive effect on the image of the body, it makes it attractive and healthy
- The body is an intermediary or even a vector which enables you to reach out to the soul living inside This means that you cannot work on your body without working on your soul
- Thus the body is a whole, it is indivisible

Parallel to this cultural anchorage, the "*Körper*" is at the same time becoming more and more a disincarnated shell as the inexorable rise of cosmetic surgery demonstrates only too well. This development contributes to an increasingly fragmented perception of the body

This ambivalence currently dominates how the body is viewed in Germany. The question is just how the German female manages to integrate these two ways of perceiving the body. In the following we take stock of all the information we have collected to date during the course of our research. It is the distillation of hundreds of face-to-face interviews and focus groups carried out over the course of a year. It embraces thousands of collated, analysed and evaluated illustrations, information gleaned from reading countless reports, articles and books on the topic and is ultimately intended to reveal just how German women of today perceive certain special parts of their body.



Cover of Stern magazine – March 2006 – Beauty you can buy
– A series on cosmetic surgery

As well as explaining why products and services sometimes sell differently in Germany it is hoped that a better presentation of the “German” body can also provide a new schema for the German female body.

BY WAY OF EXPLANATION

Our starting point:

Basing on our international experience in the field of market research we have brought together statements made by female German consumers about their body and its needs – comments that have regularly amazed us. What stands out first and foremost is the importance of physical hygiene as well as that of body odours and secretions.

The questions we want to look at:

How does the German woman of today see her body? How does she care for it? What are her priorities, what procedures does she employ and what is her motivation?

Aim:

To provide food for thought on the topic of the body and to gain a better understanding of consumers’ motivations and their expectations regarding new product developments.

Procedure:

- Dozens of explorative qualitative interviews carried out in cafés with participants who were not selected for focus groups, sometimes alone, sometimes in pairs
- Countless lateral insights gained during studies and projects carried out through the course of the year
- Several mixed groups on the topic of the toothbrush using projective and rational techniques

The interviews and groups were carried out between January and December 2006.

1. THE BODY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

This is not a chance analogy but reflects the Germans affection for building, construction work, structural work and interior refurbishing. They are proud of having invented the "*Massivbauweise*" (solid construction method). Imagery used to describe the body also often uses metaphors relating to **solid buildings with good foundations**.

At the same time the perception of the body as a construction site also very much corresponds to the German idea of the body as primarily being a **system**. Building regulations have to be adhered to, the environment has to be analysed, and the foundations play a crucial role... And for all this you need the **opinion of an expert**. Here we have the second theoretical aspect: consulting a specialist workman. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that a German university course is highly specialized rather than being of a more general nature like it is in France or the UK. Running a building site successfully means deploying the right experts at just the right time. This also gives us an initial explanation for the ever increasingly fragmented perception of the body in Germany: it has its roots in the **German cult of expertise and specialization**.

Furthermore, this analogy also embraces the concept of constantly working on one's self. How else could the following words of a woman in her early forties be interpreted? *"For me, 'body' means care, keeping fit and a feeling of well-being. Nothing else spontaneously comes to mind."* Is there no room for aesthetics, beauty and eroticism? This woman describes a sexless body that has to be maintained like a machine.

1.1) It's a question of doing things in the right order

We have already discussed the fundamental principal of employing the right workman at the right moment. This implies that there is a right order for doing things in.

If you ask a German woman to think of her body, the first thing that she mentions is a **healthy way of life**, the main constituent parts of which are:

- Diet: a source of vitamins and energy
- Beverages: supply of liquid through drinking a lot of mineral water,
- Sport/exercise: chiefly to activate the metabolism
- Breathing: a lot of importance is attached to being outdoors and in the fresh air

This way of thinking bears similarities with the way a tradesman would first choose the right materials before deciding what tools and construction methods to employ. If the body is a machine that burns fuel, then it is important to make

sure that that fuel can be burned easily and also to ensure that everything runs smoothly, keeping wear and tear to a minimum.

If the conversation turns to body care, it rapidly becomes clear that this chiefly means **washing**. The actual cleansing process of the body is strongly reminiscent of a purification ritual, so great is the female abhorrence of certain phenomena:

- Body odours: sweat, bad breath, wind...
- Other odours that adhere to the body: strong-smelling food that has been eaten with the fingers, the smell of cooked food still hanging in the air ...
- Uncared for parts of the body: calluses, flakes of dead skin, uncut nails and hair ...

"For me, well-groomed means getting washed in the morning, making sure that certain areas of the body are shaved... and that I've got clean hair"

"When you get up in the morning you have bad breath or your armpits smell. Once you've had a wash you're like a new person. You've got rid of the smell for a time and don't need any perfume, you simply feel fresh thanks to the soap and water."

The illustration below was chosen by a woman who was asked to "read through this magazine and tear out an illustration that depicts an *attractive body*."



(from Brigitte magazine – 19/2006)

This picture is revealing in many ways:

- It is black and white and does not try to use colour for aesthetic effect
- It has a portrait format (the woman's posture and the tall trees in the background). Day-to-day hygiene is chiefly practised while standing vertically under the shower where all the impurities can immediately be washed away. This verticality is particularly reassuring in a situation where water is flowing away – it also makes the whole process more efficient. Here is an example that illustrates just how practical verticality is under the shower: *"When I say that I shower morning and evening, what I do is rinse myself from tip to toe, wet my hair and then I get to work, like you said: first I do my face, then my arms, then my chest, then I continue further down, right down until I get to my feet, I lift my feet and give them a good soaping."*
- The woman is wearing white underwear (washable at 90°C) without any seductive connotations: pure, simple, with no trace of eroticism whatsoever
- The woman is standing in direct contact with the natural elements of water, air and earth (her feet are touching the river bed, she is not swimming)
- The woman is alone: she is not looking at her reflection in the water, neither is she catching the eye of the viewer

This is why procedures such as exfoliation are common and also considered to be necessary, just as there is a deeply held belief that cleansing is the key to a healthy skin as it means it is then better able to absorb nutrients.

Perspiration is not solely a problem relating to the armpits, it includes all the body's sweat glands, hence the importance of thorough intimate cleansing and deodorisation. This also explains the increasingly widespread practice of shaving armpits and the bikini zone: body hair is primarily seen as a cause and intensifier of body odour and only on a secondary level is it seen as a physical imperfection. The cult icon Nena shocked the whole of England in the nineteen eighties with her hairy armpits – inconceivable on a German singer of today.

This of course implies that any products you come into contact with should also be relatively odourless so that they do not leave any traces behind (the exception is, of course, perfume which should primarily have a "fresh" aroma). However, more and more strong-smelling foodstuffs such as soft cheeses are now available which shows the ever greater Mediterranean influence that we discussed four years ago is still in evidence. As such the "odour moment" is acceptable, in so far as it does not last too long or extend too far – however, the aroma should also be quick and easy to remove.

1.2) Creating a system that works

The physical representations present us with a **complete picture of the body** in all regards. How often is advertising in which we see bodies without a head or face criticized! As if the body were something indivisible, as if it were amputated without a face, even if we are talking about an advertisement for a cream for the chest or bum.

A cover of the weekly magazine Stern of 11.01.2007 which depicts a male and female body intertwined with one another (without any sexual connotations) suggesting an almost perfect symmetry is very revealing in this context.

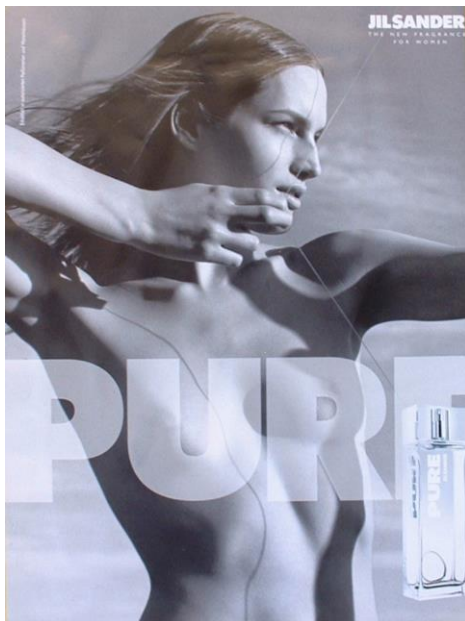


In some interviews we intentionally provoked the women by asking them what part of their body they would be most willing to sacrifice if they were forced to do so. Only very few women were even prepared to answer such a question. The most striking reason giving for refusing to give an answer, however, was the explanation: because **the body would no longer work properly if it had a bit missing** – and it was this that was most upsetting rather than the usefulness of the relevant body part or a sense of aesthetics.

"What can you chop off? You need everything. But if I had to lose something perhaps a hand, but certainly not my feet or legs"

"I'd like to keep my arms, but perhaps I'd be prepared to sacrifice a breast. No! What am I talking about? Certainly not a breast! I wouldn't be prepared to sacrifice anything!"

These two quotations indicate that the **body has to be supported** and stand upright (see 2.1 – the significance of foundations). It is easier to do without a breast than an "active" body part (perhaps the breast could become obsolete in its functional role anyway when you consider the current birth-rate in Germany). The Valkyries concealed their breast with armour, making it invisible/unable to be touched and thus defused its role as a symbol for femininity.



Pure, a perfume by Jil Sander – 2003



Peter Nicolai Arbo (Norwegian painter 1831-1892) – *Valkyries* (Original owned by the Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo)

But here too we see a development in behaviour: the **act of bathing** is elevated to a kind of ritual, a moment of relaxation, especially at the weekend when you spoil yourself with a well-earned break. Some women still find the practice of taking a bath distasteful (*"not everybody likes taking a bath, after all you lie in your own dirt"*). It is important to understand that bathing **primarily serves as a form of relaxation rather than personal cleansing**.

2. THE SPECIAL PARTS AND WHY THEY ARE SO SPECIAL

In this second chapter we want to lift the veil on the **mysteries of the German body**. Our analysis will focus on three key areas:

- **Feet (as organ and body part)**
- **Abdomen (gut)**
- **Teeth (mouth)**

In our view these three areas (especially the feet and abdomen) reveal some ancient fundamental beliefs that deserve closer scrutiny. The way teeth are currently treated seems to indicate a new way of evaluating or at least viewing the body.

Of course other parts of the body are important too. The **“largest organ, the skin”** was vital to all the women interviewed. Our skin reflects our inner (physical and psychological) state and provides a barrier to the outside world that is often under attack. Described in this manner, the skin resembles a membrane. Alongside its function as a general health indicator it has recently also taken on a more “ornamental” function as the current interest in getting a tan testifies. Skin has to look attractive; after all we talk about a “healthy colour”. This certainly seems logical if the skin is considered to be a mirror of the ... self. In the following section we will look at how we are “earthed”.

2.1) The Feet

You cannot have a floor without foundations – the feet are the **mythical part** of the body.

“If your body were a car, then your feet would be the tyres”

“Yes, your feet are the wheels. Nothing works without them. You can’t drive anywhere without wheels and you can’t walk if you haven’t got any feet”

It is important to remember that **German culture attaches a lot of importance to feet:**

- Who was it who **invented the countless foot care products and aids** (Scholl, Gehwol...)? In what other country would you have come across Birkenstock shoes shaped perfectly to suit the form of the foot for optimum comfort? The fact that they are now favoured by British top models only goes to show that it is possible to export the German way of perceiving the body. These “shoes” or, to be more precise, sandals stand for the philosophy behind the foot – it needs to be respected if it is to develop and unfold, it should not be mistreated in any way. The sandal is neither too narrow nor too broad, it has no pretensions, no visual tricks are used to disguise what it really is and neither does it have a heel).



Schwitzende, riechende Füße müssen nicht sein!

GEHWOL pflegendes FUSSDEO erfrischt, desodoriert lang anhaltend und beseitigt Fußgeruch nachhaltig. Das Spray desinfiziert und schützt wirkungsvoll vor Fuß- und Nagelpilz. – Hervorragend für Sportler geeignet!

The Gehwol (= Walk well) (Eduard Gerlach GmbH) website – *Sweaty smelly feet can be avoided! A disinfecting deodorant for the feet*

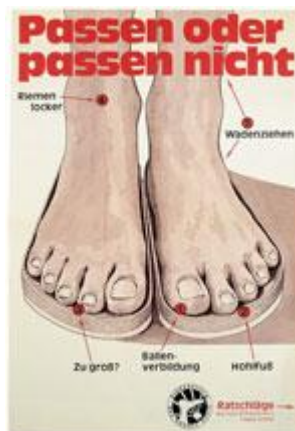
- **Specialist foot products have enjoyed very high sales** for years. The brands that discovered this niche at an early date and were able to build their know-how on solid foundations can be considered very lucky.



The right solution for every foot problem ...
(An excerpt from the Gehwol website)



Podexine by Vichy –
an excellent example of a major foot care
product for the German market



All the skill of the shoemaker ensures a perfect fit that takes into account both the foot and its width: Birkenstock – Made in Germany (since 1774)

- While manicure studios are a relatively new invention in Germany **pedicure studios** have existed there for many years. Making an appointment to see your pedicurist is a perfectly normal thing to do in Germany and is taken for granted as a natural part of body care by both men and women of all ages. The trip to the pedicurist almost has a medical quality about it. For older people it is more or less a practical matter (after all it is difficult to reach your feet when you get old), while foot care for younger Germans has been extended to embrace more and

more fanciful and purely “cosmetic” nail varnish motifs, giving the whole thing a new fashion aspect.



Something typically German: The pedicure studio “Natalie” on the first floor of a shoe shop in Mannheim. The studio is accessed from within the store



The joys of feet – and hands. This shop window in Mannheim focuses on aesthetics and femininity without, however, detracting from the foot’s naturalness, expressed by the flowers and butterflies

The ascent of the foot, from something healthy to a thing of beauty. A new collection of Birkenstock sandals with Swarovski crystals



"Elsa, my colleague, she has her feet done regularly and I must say they look great. She wears flower applications, and not just on one finger nail either. And then in summer she does her toe nails as well – that looks really great. Then she has these Strass crystals on her big-toe nails – what style! You know when you see that that you're dealing with someone who is very well-groomed. You know you could eat off her floors because I bet they're so clean."

There are **many reasons for this foot cult**. In the next section we are going to take a look at the most significant ones. We were able to collect an awful lot of information by using an interviewing technique that involves asking a lot of questions in rapid succession (what are ... the hands, eyes, nose, navel, bottom, feet, nails for...) in order not to give the respondent the opportunity to rationalize.

- The feet **are what connect you to the ground**: Germans attach a lot of importance to **modesty**, a modest person is not "*abgehoben*" (lit. has not lifted off – i.e. hasn't got his head in the clouds). In Germany you should never lose your "*Bodenhaftung*" (lit. adhesion to the ground, i.e. be down-to-earth). The positive adjective "*bodenständig*" (standing/constantly on the ground) is often used to describe a trustworthy, reliable, uncomplicated person who is firmly rooted in his society. Another rich expression is the term "*Fuß fassen*" (lit. to gain a foothold) which has many meanings and is often used to describe or express the desire to settle down somewhere, to orientate oneself and to understand something before acting.
- The feet **support the body like tree trunks supporting a wood**: German culture is very rich in mythology relating to woods (see Xavier Vigna – pp. 12-13), which they venerate and care for. The forest is seen as an ecosystem that has to be in equilibrium and thus reveals the aspirations and problems of a whole society (walks in the woods that resemble a pilgrimage, the different diseases that destroy the woods and associated fears; the home of wild animals; a place where the air is regenerated; the dream of a wild place that regulates itself).

"We have feet to keep our balance" (what a powerful polysemy...)



An illustration selected by a respondent from Brigitte magazine (19/2006) intended to depict physical well-being. Even though her body is stretched out, the woman is leaning up a tree and her feet are touching the ground.

- The feet are **active, they enable you to cover ground**: you can “walk or run” with them, you can even use them to “advance” (socially). And, of course, they also enable you to “stand”, i.e. they give the body its vertical posture, the symbol of civilisation.

“This is what sets us apart from the animals, we can walk” (on two legs and not on all fours)

“Yes, you should also be thankful to your feet. (...) In many cases the feet tend to be disadvantaged. And I then that that’s not right, your feet need proper care too and you really ought to be thankful to them as you walk for miles on them every day. (...) OK, your arms, you need them too for peeling potatoes or applying make-up, but your feet are always on the move. (...) they also deserve care and attention.”

Does this mean that the (German) car of the future would find it easier to get by without a gear lever than pedals? At any rate, when talking to German women it rapidly became very clear just how important contact with the ground is: terms used included chassis, tyres, grip and adhesion in the broadest sense of the word. And if wealth can also be expressed with the aid of the feet (using the idiom “*auf großem Fuß leben*” – lit. to live on a big foot) then we ignore this part of the body at our own peril!

2.2) The intestines

The **abdomen** (or gut) also plays an important role for a German woman. She sees it as a symbol of digestion rather than femininity and motherhood.

A comprehensive study carried out by AC Nielsen in 2006 devoted to purchase behaviour in the food sector reveals that whole grain bread/ black bread and cereals are consumed to a far higher degree in Germany than elsewhere in Europe. While other Europeans are keener on low-cholesterol products or those with vitamin supplements Germans have little faith in such products and prefer to do without rather than paying more for them.

Laxatives (in the form of a medication or a tried-and-tested home remedy) have always played a major role in Germany. Statistics also indicate an increased consumption of whey products that promise a positive effect on the skin and digestive system. Since the German health reform laxatives that demand a doctor's prescription have lost ground, partially in favour of OTC products and privately prescribed laxatives. Countless products intended to ease digestion are available on the market – in TV spots older women (and sometimes also men) explain relatively directly how they dose their laxatives in order to feel better. Websites offering tourist tips for active pensioners often suggest taking a gentle laxative with them on their travels.



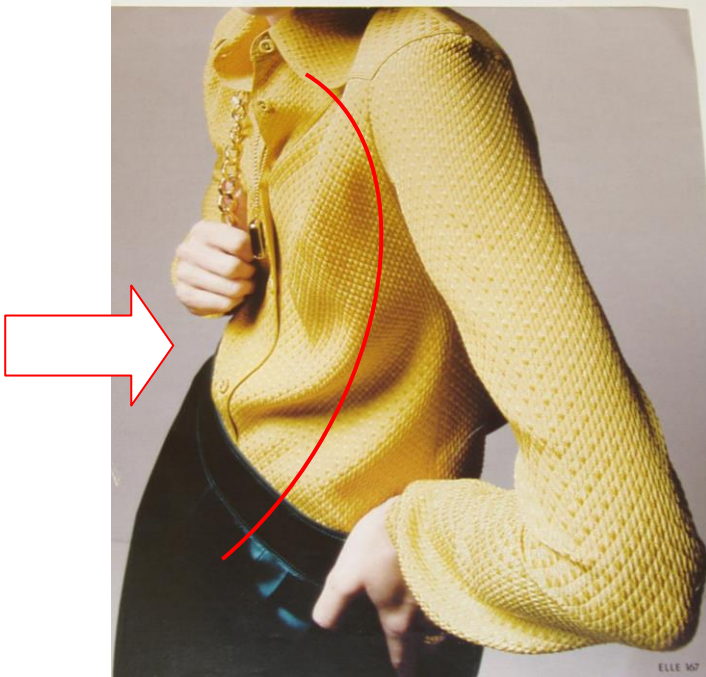
ACTIVIA® yoghurt (Danone) promises to "regulate digestion in a natural fashion."
(www.danone.de)



The topic of bowel movement is neither taboo nor even considered inelegant. Although now threatened by globalization, any visitor to Germany in the past must surely have encountered one of the depicted lavatories where the product of one's labours is presented to its maker in all its glory on a 'porcelain dish' before being swirled away to eternity. A PhD student studying economics at the University of Berlin made the following observation in this context: "No nation in the world spends as much time contemplating its own pooh as do the Germans – that too is a demonstration of our critical abilities." For a long time the lavatory was always incorporated into the bathroom. The sanitation industry is delighted to see, however, that people now tend to have a separate WC (a second WC, a second bathroom without a WC).

Apart from its functional significance, the abdomen stands for the middle of the body, the "*eigene Mitte*", a kind of **centre of gravity**. The psychological dimension is important here as it refers to the need to find your own identity.

The abdominal wall (*Bauchdecke*) also plays an important role being at the centre of deep and healthy **breathing**. Breathing is a central topic for Germans (see above) because they consider air to be a precious commodity.



An illustration from *Elle* magazine chosen by a respondent to show a body that she finds unappealing. "She has no stomach, she's totally skinny." This picture stands for an ossified body that is not breathing.

Finally, the abdomen or gut is also **centre of intuition**: "*Bauchgefühl*" (gut feeling) means listening to that inner voice that helps us in making decisions that often stand in direct opposition to reason or intellect. Unlike in French where you would tend to listen to your heart in matters of conscience, in German, as in English, you listen to your gut.



Psychological test on the website of the woman's magazine *Amica*: "Intuition Check": How reliable is your gut feeling? Countless coaching services believe in encouraging the use of your gut feeling to improve reactions in difficult situations.

Consequently the abdomen is an important **crossroads** and passage. The women interviewed (of all ages, with or without children) regularly said that they see the **pelvis** as an important part of their body. When comparing the body with a car

many of them viewed the pelvis as the steering wheel that gives you control over the vehicle. The typical method adopted in Germany for giving birth (a procedure in which the midwife plays a central role) reveals just how significant an upright posture is in accelerating the birth. Expectant mothers are encouraged to keep walking whilst undergoing labour pains listening to the midwife explaining to them how the baby is making its way down through the pelvis.

2.3) Teeth

Like feet and the gut, **teeth** are also a special part of the body. Our projects this year devoted to the mouth and dental care in conjunction with “the toothbrush” demonstrated to us just how important teeth are when it comes to the way the body is perceived and its social standing, as the following excerpt from a consumer session reveals:

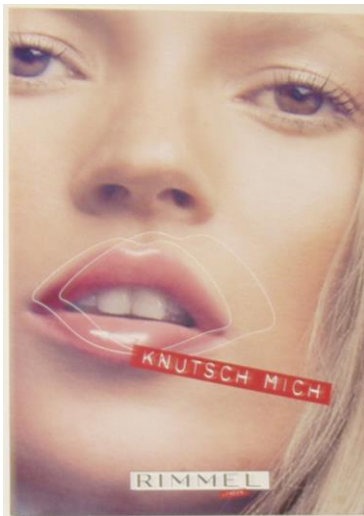
“Moderator: What does a well-groomed exterior mean to you today?

Respondents: Being able to smile.”

Before we look any closer at teeth as a “social tool” it is important to put them in their social perspective.

The mouth symbolizes a door – it is the entrance and exit to the body, a **passage**. It stands for a living, breathing body that has to be provided with energy to keep functioning. The mouth is also the most important place when it comes to expression and communication – all the more because the hands and body play a very subordinate role in German culture when it comes to communicating.

In contrast to the eyes the mouth and lips (the visible lips on a woman) form an **erotic zone** that plays with volume and curves. The eyes are the “windows to the soul” and thus present access to the intellect, what is right and what is pure. “Doe’s eyes” have something tantalizing about them, whereas a carelessly made-up mouth can soon engender shock and be considered offensive or even ridiculous.



A postcard from Rimmel London advertising Jelly Gloss



A photograph of a consumer collage: the symbol of oral satisfaction for the emancipated woman

And what about the teeth? What contribution do they make to the social act? How are they presented, what social backgrounds and significant developments do they stand for?

- "Teeth for eating": teeth primarily serve as tools for chewing. They stand for something animalistic and provide inspiration for the wildest of fantasies as consumer collages on the topic of toothbrushes and associated matters reveal.



Photographs taken from the magazines *ELLE*, February 2006/ *Geo Wissen*, No. 36, 2005 and *Landlust*, January-February 2006.

The illustrations refer to the world of wild animals (lion, crocodile, and fox) and stand for the archetypal predator and the king of the animals. The **canines** become a defensive weapon and can help you climb to a higher rung on the social ladder.

- "Teeth for biting": here the canine seems to stand for the entire dentition that, being **ready to bite**, becomes a **symbol of social status**, or even a **visible sign of wealth**:

"Today teeth are something decorative rather than something organic"

In an age when fashion and cosmetics are no longer enough to set yourself apart from the crowd you **need new finery or armour**. The smile (and thus the teeth) are not just a physical weapon (chewing to survive) nor are they an instrument of seduction (opening the mouth in order to snap it to) instead it has become a weapon in a much broader social context!

A reason for this is that lip make-up has vastly changed over the years. In the past an attractively painted and contoured mouth chiefly served to provide a contrast to the surrounding skin. Today the mouth is stressed for its own sake and also for the sake of the lips (as the incredible success of lip gloss that provides lips with a voluptuous sheen has proven). Lipstick, for a long time seen as the natural enemy of teeth because of the red stains it left behind, could perhaps even mutate to become the **frame that sets off the teeth as the main focus of attention**– in a similar manner to the way eye make-up is intended to draw attention to the eyes...

Consequently, **teeth have taken on an aesthetic significance** in our age. In the fashion world eye-teeth are decorated with crystals, dentists have started advertising their services, in Berlin and other places special marketing channels for oral care are sprouting up all over the place...

"A diamond in the middle because teeth have become a luxury. It also has something to do with perfection. Teeth are an important beauty feature"
"The diamond stands for something precious, it has to shine, be white, pure, precious"

Séissmograph 2006

As this collage shows, having attractive teeth **helps social advancement**:

"Having attractive teeth is like striving for an image, attaining an ideal, it is a goal"

What is even more interesting is that this idea manages to combine **all the symbols of the German beauty ideal** in one image: it is pure, asexual (a picture with a blue surround – a Jil Sander advertisement, an icon with Hanseatic style)...

The danger sign stands for the impossibility of achieving the highest goal, **leaving behind all social limitations**, (this would mean leaving behind the primate state; note the black and white contrast between good and evil in the top section of the collage)



A collage on the weaknesses of the toothbrush. It fails to fulfil its role as a springboard to social success as the vertical format clearly indicates (this was the only collage of those devoted to this topic in portrait format)

A smile means spotlighting **one's own personal value** and exerting influence on others.

"To be totally frank, if I've got two men in front of me to choose from and if they both look equally attractive then I would pay attention to the whiteness of their teeth and I would take the one with the more attractive teeth" (a young single woman)

"If someone has a frayed toothbrush [= a lack of involvement in dental hygiene] I would see him in a worse light rather than a better light"

"Attractive teeth have become a luxury product, like an attractive car"

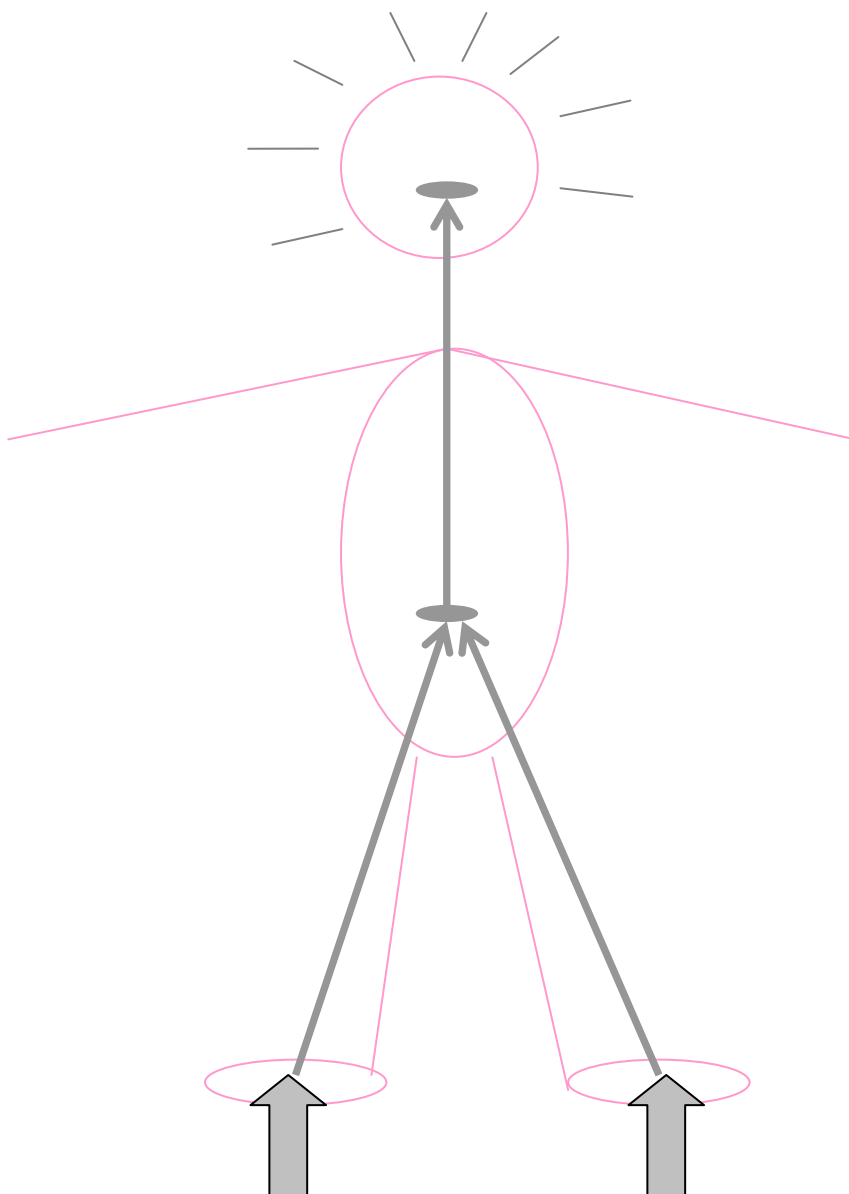
So the **social rules are changing**. Today teeth stand for a certain lifestyle. At the same time this phenomenon also reflects a degree of liberation from mores and codes: always being able to have perfect teeth means you no longer have to care for them so much (a firmly established cleansing ritual in German culture) and also permits a less ascetic lifestyle. Your teeth are no longer your Achilles heel as it were.

However, this development may also reflect the period of **economic insecurity** that Germany has experienced over the past few years that have been characterized by a period of agonizing self-doubt and questioning (less secure jobs, wage restraint, increased flexibility in working hours). A sociological transformation in which the individual has learnt to adopt a more combative

approach in a society that was previously renowned for being more community-minded than individualistic.

CLOSING REMARKS

The body – the path of ascension to the spirit. It has to be earthed in order to ensure a better upward flow of energy. Verticality to ensure a better drainage of unwanted secretions. The over-riding goal: “*Ausstrahlung*”, the German definition of beauty => radiance, charisma, and vibrancy.



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those interview partners who have been prepared to help us, also all those respondents who were prepared to play games and make a brief excursion back to the world of their childhood by crouching down on the floor to make collages, draw pictures, mould plasticene figures, play with dolls made of toothbrushes etc...

We would also like to thank Xavier Vigna and Klaus Bernsau for their valuable contributions. Our warmest thanks also go to Isabelle Bourgeois from the CIRAC Research Centre, Line Kerrad of Stratégir GmbH and Julia Ohde who kept a watchful and critical eye over us.

The Team

As always we have followed an inter-disciplinary approach in order to illuminate our topic from all sorts of different angles and optimize the validity of the results.

- German philology and anthropology: Christine Garnier-Coester
- Psychology: Hilke Westrup
- Politics and sociology: Natacha Dagneaud
- History: Professor Xavier Vigna
- Semiology: Dr. Klaus Bernsau
- Not forgetting Christiane Aubert and Philipp Crocoll with their invaluable support during the desk research phase.

The next Séissmograph will appear at the end of January/ early February 2008 and explore this year's topic in more depth and go into the ageing process in more detail. We are interested in finding out just what demands the **"ageing body"** places on the products and services provided for it.