

Faces, mediatization and subjectivity

Rostros, mediatización y subjetividad

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INMEDIACIONES

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on the face have a long-standing tradition in the fields of anthropology, philosophy, art, semiotics, and computer science. What kinds of meanings do countenances confer upon bodies? When does the transition between face and visage occur? What are the minimal phenomenological requirements for the perception of a face to emerge? When does a face become “friendly,” “recognizable,” or “identifiable”? These are some of the questions that various disciplines find compelling. The face is a complex object from its very linguistic definition: cara, semblante, rostro are lexemes that designate distinct nuances of a mysterious entity. For some authors, the face can be understood as a bastion of singularity and an opening toward the other (Levinas, 1967); it is a boundary device and a fundamental axis of communication. It can also be considered a privileged semiotic regime for accounting for a set of transformations related to subjectivity (Boero, 2020).

There is a substantive difference between face and visage. While the former is physical or natural, the latter is a human creation. As Finol and Finol (2021) argue, the visage entails an experiential trajectory that takes place thanks to the co-text (the face, the head, the body) and the contexts (choreography, performance, culture, history, etc.). There are faces that, under certain conditions, cease to be a mere cluster of biological cells and become a hive of semiotic cells, in whose configuration and reconfiguration a variety of signs, discourses, and texts incessantly operate (Voto, Finol & Leone, 2021).

In today's era of new technologies and artificial intelligences (AI), in which processes of mediatization have drawn particular attention from researchers around the world, images of faces are shared instantaneously on social media, becoming bodily narratives of life through the meaning-making of devices that biopolitically organize bodies and define inclusions and exclusions, thus producing “acceptable” and “disposable” faces within social discourse (Delupi, 2023). In this way, investigating the production, dissemination, circulation, and reception of faces becomes a fundamental task in light of an uncertain future regarding the boundaries and regulations of Web 3.0, which—as the main leaders of the tech industry propose—includes the metaverse and augmented reality. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that these developments have also produced devices focused on facial recognition, equipped with cameras used to capture faces in real time—whether for health or security purposes—which increasingly expose us to the identification of our countenances, often recorded illegally and without a solid legal basis.

Lastly, it is important to highlight that this issue of *InMediaciones de la Comunicación*, centered on the mediatization of the face on a planetary scale, pays particular attention to its problematization in Latin America. This involves considering the region's history and culture, with their convergences

and divergences: past times and conflicts inscribed in contemporary faces and materialized in flesh, paper, and pixel within decolonial paradigms and critiques of Eurocentric perspectives. Bodies, materialities, and social imaginaries come together in a hybrid and mestizo network, giving rise to chronotopic facespheres that express the complexity of Latin American cultures, since faces are always the result of a situated dimension (Barbotto, Voto & Leone, 2022).

The reader will find here articles that address various topics related to the face and its representation: from portraits on banknotes and the countenances of political figures, to analyses of the mediatization of images of murdered protesters, physiognomies in marginalized neighborhoods, ancient masks, and faces in virtual environments. All the works are part of a global problem, although most share a perspective situated in Latin America, shaped by diverse sociopolitical and cultural realities. Hence the reflection on the face within the context of a peripheral region marked by profound inequalities but also by a strong transformative potential. Likewise, the materials published in the Miscellany section and the interviews accompanying this issue's proposal allow for a deeper reflection and offer insight into the role of images in the post-logocentric society and their impact on contemporary subjectivities.

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