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**THE HAND IN POETIC AND VISUAL IMAGINARY OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY**

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## Summary

This research starts from the premise that the thematic stability reflected in practice, and in a policy of continuity is capable of contrastingly highlighting the fundamental mutations produced in style or vision. I consider that the fracture, the restructuring, the formal discontinuities produced with radical-instaurative impetus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are dissipated in the horizon of constancy provided by the themes.

In a dichotomic, I „broke” the argument in two distinct, but interrelated sequences. The first part fulfils the role stipulated by the classical notion of concept - namely, to sketch/to summarize briefly the working hypothesis, the limits and especially the openings in the field of research. The second part completes the perspective by adding information on the structure, methods, and the mechanism of the overall vision, as well as details and detailed articulations. The theoretical baggage absolutely necessary to clarify these aspects would be too dense to be presented, so I considered it appropriate to distribute the proportions of our study harmoniously, thus the chapter *The Gesture of Making* has the role of presenting theoretically the perspective of this thesis.

Such a distribution has allowed to assign a fairly large space to examining the proportion of factors regarding the limitation horizon, a percentage which explicitly refers to the title of the research. *The Hand*, the first term of the syntagm, besides the fact that it represents by singularization of the thematic nucleus, which apparently constrains the investigated field, is related to a series of other terms: imaginary /image, poetic, the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By conceptual ambiguity, which is often mentioned by recent research, the terms in question are signs of the open, and, therefore places the research in an indefinite, or more precisely, in a barely sketched prospective territory. Consequently, in the first stage of the study it was necessary to distinguish areas of interest, as well as reliefs capable by their firmness to counterbalance the uncontrolled proliferation within the disciplines on which the theme, through its integrative force, intersects them, thus emphasizing the pluridisciplinary

character of the present research: anthropology, anatomy, philosophy, art history, and aesthetics.

The selection on the thematic level is justified, on one hand, by the fact that hands are, in terms of Arnheim, a powerful compositional centre in the visual organization of the body, and, on the other hand, by the special place they have in the affective horizon.

The pair of hands capable of developing a constellation of specific gestures and behaviours which have been ascribed to them by artists over time in visual arts, is, in this research, correlated to the astonishment of poetry using *poetic* concept in his narrow sense of *lyrical poem*. In other words, this research focuses on 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry by bringing the corpus of texts into the recurring thematic criterion, necessarily mentioning that, due to the limitation, the selection does not pursue the exhaustive recording of the hand representation in the poetic text, but analogous to the selection of the images, significant samples were taken in the declared intention to provide a precedent to which the subsequent developments of the thesis should be related.

There are, at least, three directions in the present study:

The first one follows the texture of the image, the manner of making, methodologically imposing here a diachronic perspective motivated by the theme, able to capture the evolution of representations, styles or techniques in performing the artistic work.

The subsequent direction investigates the behaviour of the hand (expressive, communicative, symbolic) by sketching the whole-part relation, that is the surprise of the hand-to-hand relationship in synchrony and diachronicity, with emphasis on the moments when an epistemic change occurs (Rembrandt, Rodin, and Dali). Whether it has a decisive compositional weight or it is merely a micro-theme, the theme of the hand from the anatomical detail to its expressive capacity is analysed in case studies related both to the interdisciplinary approach and to the successive focus gradually revealing the connotations of the artistic work. Given the complexity of hand gestures, the representative examples that can set up a gesture universe are extracted, choosing alternatively the meaning of gestures and their form, because, as we all know, cultural changes produce obvious changes in gesture coding.

Not unimportant is the relationship between the pivotal element, the hand, and the other objects which configure the visual artistic space. This level refers not only to the inventory of spatial relationships recorded over time in aesthetic studies, although they are fundamental in

terms of visual/visualisation, but also to the metonymic and, therefore restorative, extrapolation of the whole-part (hand-body) proportion to the extent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's episteme in reading the visual representation codes. By focusing our attention on a fragmentary aspect of the human body reflected in art, *a vestige*, in Ranciére's language, we aim to prove that a paradigm can be reconstituted.

The present study is placed in a matrix form capable of reflecting something more than the inner articulations and the mobility analogous to the anatomic segment circumscribed by it, since it was very important for the investigative approach to be able to capture something from the being of *The God of the Five Hypostases*, using an inspired phrase by Focillon recurrently mentioned in this text. So, it is searched for the appropriate model of the free spirit, curiosity, tenderness, grace, and restlessness of hands that write, of the hands that hold the scalpel, mainly of creative hands.

As a result of a careful analysis of the possibilities of systematization, imposed by the vastness of the research field, the model finally reached at is an open one, a "work in progress", allowing these numerous hypostases, multi-layering the perspectives that intersect in order to grasp the hand in their central area, between *theoria* and *praxis*. Thus, the material was distributed in two parts: a preponderantly theoretical part (*The Right Hand*) and a mainly applicative part (*The Left Hand*).

Between the two sections, a clear demarcation line has not been drawn because they have similar objectives, labouring for the configuration of the whole. The *book-hand* isomorphism, the groundwork of this distribution can be taken one step further up to the level of anatomic overlap, obviously in terms of mobility. Thus, the theoretical concretions (chapters I-V - first part) corresponding to the palmar area are naturally extended in case studies (chapters I-V - part two) as metaphorical hermeneutic fingers.

The first chapter, *The Art of Making*, following the line of the mentioned isomorphism, can be associated with the mobility of the thumb, which, due to the opposing character, plays a decisive role in the gesture of prehension. This chapter has a pivotal role in the equation of our research by connecting with the other chapters. Moreover, I described the gesture that animates the whole work in the sense that it focuses here on all the theoretical and interpretative lines of our research. Vilém Flusser, a gesture analyst, believes that one of the signs of humanity resides in the opposing character of the hands and that the hands, in an attempt to become

congruent, meet in an object - that is the *gesture of making*. Through the new form obtained, by aspiring to the whole, by the desideratum of perfection, the hands only confirm overcoming the human condition of *homines fabri*. Here, too, I exposed some theoretical references and clarified emerging concepts of art theory, philosophy and, ultimately, urbanism, which facilitate the understanding of the articulation of the ensemble and the cuts in the corpus of images and texts subject to observation. At the end of this first chapter, a reading suggestion can be allowed which reflects the way in which the work was conceived: an itinerant reading between the theoretical and the applicative pole.

Chapter II, *Image Theories in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, registers the major theories of the image in a tripartite distribution. The first section briefly presents Durand's theory, which, using the symbolic function of the myth, operates with two types of hermeneutical, reductive and instaurative approach, associating the first category names such as Freud, Dumézil, Levi-Strauss and to the other category other strongly resonating names such as: Jung, Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty. In the same section, the contribution of Jean-Jacques Wunenburger through his articulated studies on image and imaginary concepts is mentioned. The researcher, focusing on the causes of their artificial identity from the conceptual point of view, points out the equivocal situations in the significance field of those concepts, which is particularly important because of the effects it generates.

Also in the section above, it is presented a new way of approaching the image in a projective key, more precisely in terms of the *hermeneutics of suspicion*, using the very image – *the loom* - in the process of conceptualization. The reordering and synthetic model belongs to the aesthetician Mircea Muthu, who insists on the procedural character of the image. The middle section of the chapter captures disputes caused by the fragility of domains' boundaries and circumscribes divergent theoretical perspectives in relation to the visual-verbal relationship, which occasionally collide with terms such as: *visual language*, *visual syntax*, *ostensive*, *accept*. This happens because the image, through its capacity for subjugation, through the fascination exercised continuously with the theoreticians, continues to incite to the tension of the limitations of domains in hermeneutics. In this respect, the difference between the linguistic and the visual imaginary is based on arguments that do not have a valorising or hierarchical purpose, but highlight the potentials and shortcomings of the two categories of images, emerging to a *verb-*

*iconic* complementarity, which places the debate on the horizon of recent research into the phenomenon of intermediality.

The last part of the second chapter allows a focus on the subversive, extremely fertile image of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theorized and anchored by Anthony Julius in a network of justifications (separation, canonical, formalistic). Analysing the implications which this type of image have in literature and visual arts, the researcher notes that visual arts are more permissive to transgressive than literature is. Encourage by this remark, or maybe motivated by the desire to make it fragile, I submitted to the triple framework proposed by Anthony Julius, *Glove of Passion* - one of Jean Muno's fantastic stories.

Chapters III, *The Body as the State of Encounter* and IV *The Body in the Art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* are built complementarily. In the first, there are several lines of mental evolution, marking the threshold moments which generated significant body perception shifts (Middle Ages, Renaissance). I noted a significant mental fracture that occurs, at a certain time, between ecclesiastical vision and anatomical body research, leading to a visible process of de-symbolisation largely rooting in the Cartesian radical gesture that separates *res cogitans* from *res extensa*. Another crisis, occurred in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, propels phenomenology on the reform orbit, in Husserlian phenomenology and in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception that place the body in other related concepts. In the respect of the announced complementarity, chapter IV approaches the body from the perspective of art, rebuilding its monadic image, despite the fragmentations and distortions that took over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Remarkable in the horizon of (visual) discursivity foundation remains the salutary contribution of the Rodin-Cézanne pair and their effort directed towards prospecting the shape and modes of vision. The discursive strategies that intersect within this chapter highlight exploratory tensions, advances, syncope, and return to *the broken subject*, effigy of the century.

Chapter V, *Hand and Gestures, Codes and Styles*, ends the volute of the first part by returning to the gesture of doing. The openings produced in the first chapter are here nuanced and completed in the context of anthropological research able to sketch, on the evolutionary scale, the main mechanisms of the sensory equipment. For example, the anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan distinguishes man's main relationships with the environment from which the many branches of the gesture universe derive, within the evolution of gestural codes by relating them to the specificity of an era. The relationship of the hand with the tool is also analysed as

redirection of the action towards the making of tools considered a form of deviation, in the terms of Vilém Flusser, sometimes difficult to manage in the initial gesture of doing. The anthropological and philosophical perspectives required additions in other two directions: anatomical and historical, the gestural codes being thus interdisciplinary, from different levels and having a specialized conceptual tool.

The second part of the paper (*The Left Hand*), which is predominantly practical is relatively autonomous, due to the complexity of the theoretical grid, consistent or frail, depending on the exigencies of the investigated work. It is important to be mentioned that the melange between theory and practice does not occur randomly, but in the spirit of a macrodynamic set up at the level of the ensemble, witnessed by the metaphorical titles of the chapters in this section of the work (*Decompositions, Relief of Forms, Metamorphoses, Volutés of the Figural, Isomorphic Fulgurations*)

The aspiration of compositional equilibrium lies at the basis of the selection of literary texts. If the works of art cover various territories of the universal visual heritage, the artistic work of Rembrandt, Rodin and Dali are largely analysed, and others, such as those of Max Ernst, provide interstices necessary to understand an artistic orientation while from the point of view of literary works the research is related to representative Romanian literary modernism and ne-modernism. As the theme has greatly influenced this section, it is important to be said that the texts have been grouped in relation to the ramifications of the subject researched and not related to the authors. In fact, this was one of the aims of this thesis: to prove that the subject requires another kind of ordering, a soft, permissive one, which frees constraining works and allows them to unfold freely in a horizon of serenity with increased force of seduction.

The first three chapters of the second part (*Decompositions - Rembrandt van Rijn, Relief of Forms - Auguste Rodin, Metamorphosis - Salvador Dali*), expanded arabesques in the realm of the visual work, follow the progressive decomposition/fragmentation of the body image in epistemic fractures. Rembrandt's paintings are, as it can be seen, true anatomy lessons – *The Anatomy Lesson of Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Joan Deyman* (1656) – are, on one hand true veritable statement of the conscious combination between theory and practice and, on the other hand, undeniable evidence of a major break in the body research, dissection.



Auguste Rodin, an overwhelming presence in statuary art due to his ability to summarize, and synthesize traditional values and, at the same time, to exhaust their formal valences, makes the transition between two *aesthetic habitus* transforming into simultaneity what in the history of sculpture usually sits under the sign of succession. He values and fulfils Rembrandt's conquests by showing exhaustive knowledge of the inner tensions of the body to which he confers visual expression using a new significant incision. More precisely, he removes important parts of the statue, head or hands, imposing, in the respect of expressive compensation, the partial figure, the autonomous fragment. It is crucial to be pointed out that in the case of the Rodin's work, the figures included in the corpus of images to be subjected to investigation are found at the intersection of two major criteria:

- a. *part/whole relationship* (whole figure, partial figure)
- b. *the relationship between visual objects* (solitary figure, couple, statuary group)

It is Dali's turn, visually using Freudian theories of the unconscious, to decisively interfere and provoke, based on a new visual syntax, another dislocation of the form that is now subject to the decompositions and successive hybrids involved in the surrealist effort to bring in the same space different perspectives of reality. The partial figure cut by Rodin is alienated from the original meaning and reintegrated into unitary ensembles, fulfilling other meanings.

The chapters *Volutes of the Figural* and *Isomorphic Fulgurations* shape the figurative territory in the counter-development *literary work-visual art work*. When researching recurrences and the theme of hand by cutting gestures or micro-gestures and their significance, present at various authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Rainer Maria Rilke, Wallace Stevens, Paul Valery, Vasile Voiculescu, Tudor Arghezi, Nichita Stănescu Ana Blandiana) it is introduced, in the first part of chapter IV, from a theoretical perspective that belongs to an expert voice in poststructuralist literary studies, Laurent Jenny, and, on the other hand, through clarification of hermeneutic act. A second part captures poetic conceptual circumscription of this section, organized according to a hierarchy that belongs to Martin Buber, proving, due to its clear intertextuality, networks of meaning that transgress the limits of text, the cohesive force of the theme.

The last chapter, as it is natural, attempts to realise an encounter between the two great reliefs that have progressively stretched during the research - the visual work and the literary work - and a third aspect appears which makes junction more mobile, the isomorphism.

Therefore the analysis, animated by the gesture of comprehension and developed in the metaphorical substitution line, generates fully visible new relationships that the theme powerfully raise.

When talking about the contribution that this research brings to this field the answer appears naturally. First, it validates its arguments. Mainly interpretative, the thesis suggests access ways, some disclosures, fragments of volutes on art works questioning and provoking to dialogues. Equally important is the effort to remove the domain limits, an effort necessary because the bibliography reveals two significant aspects: *primo*, the research usually allocates a relatively narrow space to the hand, the information being dispersed in analyses aiming in approaching the body as a whole; *secundo*, studies that would explore the hand from the point of view of the *verb-iconic* conjunction, thus intersecting poetry and visual arts could not be found.

Obviously, not all directions opened during the research could be followed. That is why, initial projects, many of the intuitions that lit up the subject at some point, remained in the seed stage or were overshadowed by the turmoil of others that seemed essential and urgent.

Therefore it is necessary to take into consideration the direction of extending the research. Extremely productive could be the examination of the theme/hand in cinematography, theatre or dance - the domains that have been in the area of this research for a while, but as it was clear that the work cannot exhaustively cover all the ramifications that emerged from the proposed theme they were not abandoned but ... postponed. In other words, there is a quasi-closing of the research, a suspension of it, anticipating new investigative impulses that in accumulative (the snowball technique) or transversal line to include other areas.

In addition to all these, our investigation highlights the way in which, over time, the themes are subject to a long process of resemantisation, especially in the paradigm areas. In this respect, the present research aimed to elicit the rethinking of premises in approaching the thematic. It was aimed to demonstrate that the *theme*, in its instrumental dimension, can serve, in any historical context, as a valid criterion in research, regardless of the research area.