

Conference Paper

Semiotics of Hairstyles and Its Communicative Role in Contemporary Everyday Culture

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Abstract

In this article, the hairstyle is viewed as text that contains information on the basic cultural traits, fashion preferences and emotional and psychological states of the people living in a concrete historical period. The article determines that in modern culture semiotics of hairstyle is developed through the communicative process of decoding the relationships between the 'form' and 'content' of the hairstyle, by studying the characteristics of the hairstyle sign system involved in the exchange of information between the communicant and the recipient.

Keywords: semiotics, hairstyle, sign systems, text, code, communication, form, content

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1. Introduction

This article explores the semiotics of hairstyles and its communicative role in modern everyday culture. The author considers hairstyle as a visual sign system that plays a highly important role in personal image. A hairstyle is a 'text' that contains information about individual's age, gender, ethnic identity, social status, profession, country and historical period; his or her emotional and psychological states, fashion preferences and many other factors. Therefore, an entirety of signs present in a hairstyle (color, lines, forms, etc.), together with their contextual relations, serves to transmit a non-obvious and polysemantic social code that carries information both between and within the cultures.

The semiotics of a hairstyle is transmitted through a visual language expressed as a denotative statement, which, through its perception, interpretation and verbalization, is transformed into a connotative statement. Denotation here is represented by form and its aesthetic parameters, while connotation is represented by content and its sociocultural, emotional and psychological prerequisites. Interpretation of the semiotics of hairstyle is based on the interconnections between the 'form' and the 'content'.

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2. Hairstyle as a 'Sign System' of a Cultural Era

Individuals living within a cultural period in which the concrete hairstyle sign system is formed, use codes and expressive tools that are different from codes and tools used by people either in previous cultural periods, or in other cultures. This leads to the need to determine and combine the unified communicative codes used by different cultures engaged in an interpretative process to determine a hairstyle sign system role in nonverbal cultural communication.

A hairstyle is a sign system that changes as a result of cultural changes. Hairstyle code is 'read' through a set of expressive tools that has its own structural logic, aesthetic and emotional interconnection. These tools employed by a hairstyle sign system reflect the 'formal' unity and imagery in the 'content' of a hairstyle. Therefore, the sign system of a hairstyle becomes a tool of indispensable non-verbal communication helping us to understand how individual psychological traits are developed and represented within the society.

To understand the hairstyle text in cultural communication, we need to apply signifying codes used in communication studies. Based on Yuri Lotman's classification, there are three types of such codes: social, textual and interpretative [2, p. 78]. These codes help to interpret the connection between the 'form' and the 'content' of a hairstyle text.

In contemporary culturological research, transformation of the semiotics of hairstyle is explored not only in the context of cultural traditions, social stratum, and gender and age group, but also through the process of changing fashion trends. Hairstyle fashion changes twice a year [3, p. 59] and develops within such typical styles as: classical, romantic, folklore, sports and avant-garde [1, p. 107].

Semiotics of a classical image marks the communicant as a member of business professional class, or someone with power; it signals dominance in any situation. In this case, hairstyle provides an image with a connotation of communicant's emotional strength and strictness. [4, p. 488]. This text is performed through the wide range of social codes. It uses such denotative features as symmetrical geometrical shape and a lack of unnecessary elements.

By choosing this type of hairstyle, the communicant clearly signals this style by a symbolic form recognizable in many cultures. The lack of unnecessary details and monochrome color range mark the communicant's higher role and position. This text is developed through the symbols of angle shapes, dark colors and vertical lines, which many cultures associate with reserve and succinctness.

In the process of everyday representation, a hairstyle usually endures non-planned reorganization (non-active elements of a hairstyle become active). This changes the hairstyle's function. An everyday classical hairstyle becomes an evening hairstyle. This shows that the textual codes are more important than social in the encoding of the text. The rules of communicative game provide spontaneous psychological and emotional solutions in a sociocultural situation.

Semiotics of the romantic hairstyle tells about the sexual attractiveness of its owner. Semiotics of this image is multifaceted; this hairstyle enhances text with the connotation of the communicants' emotional flexibility [4, p. 490]. This text is performed through the wide range of social codes. It uses such denotative features as a dynamic shape and wave-like moving elements.

By choosing this type of hairstyle, the communicant clearly signals this style by a harmony of its aesthetic design. Repeated dynamic details and soft color range express the communicant's sensuality and their interest in a certain type of social game. Such symbolic expressions as an oval shape, light colors and wavy lines create these associations in Slav cultures, including a connotation of natural harmony and lack of affectation.

When this type of haircut changes in an unplanned manner, it develops metrical elements. An everyday romantic hairstyle becomes an evening hairstyle. It creates a text about the communicant's social status. Social and interpretative codes play the most important role in text encoding. The rules of the games are provided by a sociocultural situation, emotional mood and a recipient's disposition.

Semiotics of a sport style image tells about the harmonization and control over the potential of one's body. In this case, the hairstyle supports body image with the connotation of comfort [4, p. 491]. This text is performed through the wide range of interpretative codes. It uses such denotative features as symmetrical organic shape and a lack of unnecessary elements.

By choosing this style of haircut, the communicant chooses the style with universally recognized simplicity in its shapes and symbols, which follows the lines of human body. The lack of decorative details and contrasting colors neutralizes cultural or ethnic markers.

When this type of haircut changes in an unplanned manner, it either changes its texture or reorganizes elements inside the overall shape. Structural and aesthetic organization of this style mixes uniformity and nuances of different elements. A sports haircut becomes an everyday haircut (its elements become more active) or an evening haircut (its elements are enhanced to increase the complexity of the overall form). As

a result, social and textual codes become more important than interpretative codes in this text encoding. The rules of the game are provided by a sociocultural situation.

The semiotics of ethnic style tells about the importance of cultural heritage and a freedom from urbanism. In this case, the hairstyle supports the text about ethnic identity [4, p. 493]. This text is realized through the wide but also limited textual codes. It uses such emotional and aesthetic features as symmetrical organic shapes and textured ethnic elements.

By choosing this type of hairstyle, the communicant clearly signals their identification with a concrete culture. Metric repetition of details and natural color schemes correspond with many cultural stereotypes across cultures; however, organization and decoration are visually different. Therefore, this text would be interpreted differently by different cultures or ethnic groups.

When this type of haircut changes in an unplanned manner, it creates geometric shapes supplemented by mass elements, nuanced balance of the form, enhanced silhouette and smoothed texture. The connotations of this style becomes universal, the interpretation of this text shows the mixture of modern styles used to adapt it to the modern urban environment. Social and interpretative rather than textual codes play the most important role in encoding of this hairstyle text. That is, the rules of the game are provided by the recipients, depending on their level of sophistication.

The semiotics of the avant-garde hairstyle tells about the communicant's originality and uniqueness. This hairstyle supports the communicant's fantasies and develops a text about their inner world through original shapes, elements and colors [4, p. 495]. This text is performed through the limited textual codes. It uses such emotional and aesthetic features as asymmetric dynamic shape and contrasting elements.

By choosing this type of hairstyle, the communicant clearly signals their non-conformity, which is not always intelligible to other cultures. The use of deconstruction, contrast, mixing of elements of different styles, and original color schemes often don't conform with stereotypes existing in different cultures; they create uncertainty. These elements signify the communicant's desire to be free from their culture. Interpretation of this text would be difficult for many cultures or ethnic groups. It creates an unbalanced mixture of symbols.

When this type of haircut changes in a non-planned manner, its non-active elements become active, its shapes change, the contrasting elements become more nuanced, the elements of stylization, combination and deconstruction fuse together. The text that 'creates image through provocation' turns into a text meaning 'fashionable trends in beauty industry'. As a result, the dominant role in the encoding of this text belongs to

the social and interpretative codes rather than the textual codes. The rules of the game are provided by the recipients; the situation depends on their theoretical knowledge of culture and knowledge of fashion.

The fusion of codes in the process of cultural communication makes the system of signs more accessible for a wider range of recipients. This process is based on the replacement of limited codes with the wider ones, on the mixing of different cultural and ethnic styles, and on the enhanced sign system of the hairstyle thanks to its simplified organization. As a result, semiotics of the hairstyle as a communicative factor depends on the characteristic features of different cultures: communicative connotations, prerequisites, interpretations of the hairstyle's sign system, etc.

3. Preliminary Conclusions

Semiotics of the hairstyle in communication helps to prevent communication failure and misunderstandings which are based on the difference in stereotypes existing between cultures. It promotes an intercultural understanding in situations when the knowledge of the communicant's culture is lacking. It also enhances a multicultural approach used to overcome discrimination against certain cultural or ethnic groups.

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