

SKELETON, SEMANTICS OF REPRESENTATIONS

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Abstract

The world of today instinctively uses a series of symbols and representations whose source and initial connotation are lost. The skulls and skeletons flashed on the pink T-shirts of the teen girls, phone case covers, baby onesies and cartoons are just a mere fraction of the contemporary interpretations. The tattoos, dramatic representations, horror movies where skeletons come to life, though dreadful, are not malignant or tougher than certain historical depictions – engravings, paintings, sculptures or architectural or decorative sets. All these forms and images need to be semantically decrypted in the temporal and cultural context of association. The image, a communication code, is also an instrument of manipulation. The man will initiate a certain relation with life via religion or its denial thereof. The pure representation of the skeleton or of the skull triggers a great emotional load, refers to life and its ending.

Keywords: *skeleton, skull, death representations, symbology of representations, fear, memento mori, macabre dances*

INTRODUCTION

The skeleton and the skull in particular is part of the cultural data, filled with symbolical senses, which also belong to the universal non-verbal language.

The representations of the skeletons and skulls are nuanced, enriched by a diverse semantics, depending on the message to be conveyed, the cultural context and, clearly, on the historic time of reference.

These images, non-natural yet always traceable human representations come from the desire of shocking, of drawing attention or of outlining a certain type of space or event.

A bizarre but also frequent thing is the representation of the skeletons in spontaneous attitudes, of the living, and not of the decomposed bodies. The dissociation of the living and dead worlds is specific for only certain cultures, while others are seeing to melt away this frontier, to *lead* the living world by a constant reference to the *after-world*.

It is sure that all the semantic decryptions concerning the skull and skeleton have a connection with death, even when dreaming about life, in an antithesis.

The emergence of such type of representation is lost in time and the lack of data and images are limiting my observations to the stage of suppositions. The few examples herein are trying to lay out some aspects, connotations and mentality changes in the public conscience.

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THE FIRST REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SKELETONS – *assumptions*

While the most theories connect the emergence of the representations of skeletons and skulls to the ‚Black Plague’¹, when death was turned into a personal form and present everywhere, that was surely not the first contact of the people with the dead bodies and their bones.

The beginnings of the medical science are quite distant but this study will consider relevant the surgical interventions conducted in the prehistorical times – trephine and amputation. The Egyptian surgeons were opening the abscesses and doing the circumcisions, while the embalment techniques proved a superior knowledge of the human body. In ancient Rome, surgical instruments were invented, such as forceps, scalpel, speculum and the surgical needle. The Latin space preserved representations of skeletons prior to Vesuvius² eruption in Pompeii. The first mosaic shows a skeleton holding two wine amphorae, a sign for going to a party³, while the other one displays a less decomposed body, in a more pleasurable attitude.



Image 1. Roman mosaics found in Pompeii vila

Despite of the above, it seems that the oldest representation of a skeleton is a mosaic from the 3rd century AD, called the ‚**Reckless Skeleton**’ and discovered in Hatay Province at the Turkish-Syrian frontier, in the ancient Greek-Roman city of Antiocheia. According to the archaeologists in the Museum of Archaeology in Hatay, there were also two other scenes in mosaics that were adorning the dining room of a house belonging to a high-class family.



Image 2. Reckless Skeleton, mosaic, 3rd century AD, Hatay Province, Antiocheia

The unusual representation blows life into earthy remains when placing them into attitudes vivants (the lying position was the banquet stance for the Romans) close to the riches, wine chalices and amphorae and also a loaf of bread. The position of the skeleton makes reference to the worldly merriment – „Be happy and live your life”⁴. The translation of the Greek term *euphrosynos* refers to the party-goer, the *one of good cheer*. Whoever spent all his life having fun, eating and drinking, never thought of death, even it would also touch the ones living wordlessly. The image can be thus construed as a very early *Memento mori*.

THE FUNERARY SYMBOL

Even though the first representations are true discourses for supporting life and feasting, the most popular symbols are funerary, the ones exploiting the idea of turning the living body into a skull or skeleton. Nowadays, the funerary space still clusters such images on slabs, crosses, funerary stelae or complex sculptural ensembles but they date from the early Christianity. The tomb stones were assigned this symbolical language before being given inscriptions with the names of the deceased.

The skull and bones – is to be found on the monuments of the most Christian rites and it is always schematized, carved in bass-relief or even engraved. It can turn into a decorative motive when receiving volutes or vegetal elements but it is easily recognizable. The mandible is missing but the two bones (femora) are present most of the time. They are very often placed under the skull, not behind or in front of it.

The skulls can be included in real monumental compositions, statuary or architectural, thus forming sophisticated parables, accessible to only those knowledgeable of deciphering symbolics.

A relevant example is the funerary monument of Grigorie Dimitrie IV Ghika⁵ (b. 1765 – d. 16.10.1834) in the small cemetery around the Chapel of Ghica Palace⁶, mentioned above in the paragraph about Eshaton.



Image 3,4. Funerary stelae in the Cimitirul din Deal – Cemetery of the Evangelical Rectory in the Medieval Fortress of Sighisoara



Image 5. Elena Fliti's Slab (1823 – 1878), Bellu Cemetery



Image 6. C. Cantacuzino's Slab, Bellu Cemetery

FUNERARY PARABLES – the skeletons

The western countries have collected the most parables in the funerary space, monumental developments of large dimensions, meant to shock the onlookers, to convey strong feelings about departing this world.



Image 7. Image of the goddess of death, Hel, unfinished project



Image 8. Death sitting on a rock crushing a boat, arch. J. Alaux, Tomb of Captain Catherineau, Bordeaux, Chartreuse Cemetery



Image 9. Grim Reaper in Melaten Cemetery, Köln, author - Marco Verch Sursa foto?

The first chosen image is an allegoric representation coming from the Norwegian mythology – Hel, the daughter of Loki and Angrboða. When Odin⁷, the supreme god, gave away gifts to his children, he handed her power over nine worlds. She became the mistress of the ones dying of old age or sickness, namely non-heroic deaths that were not worth of a place in Valhalla. This goddess of death was living in Niflheim, a world of coldness and ice, of nine frozen rivers that stand for the nine realms of her kingdom. The deity takes the shape of a young female character, winged angel and draped on her right side, while the left side, the same decomposed presence limits to the skeleton covered by rotten drapes.

The second funerary sculpture shows the *Death sitting on a rock crushing a boat*, architect J. Alaux, a spectacular allegory in the manner in which the struggle of the death time at sea is counterbalanced by the pyramidal composition, stable and even static to which the death personification brings its contribution. The draped skeleton, the scythe in her hand, is expressionless but embodies an impacable presence, disconnected from time and events.

A third example is Grim Reaper in the shape of a draped skeleton. The volume, carved in stone, develops on the vertical direction into a slightly pyramidal composition, framed by the stones in the inferior side and by the clepsydra on which the character is leaning his right hand. This element that symbolizes the passing of time left until meeting with Death is outweighed by another one, a scythe held in the left hand.

Besides the funerary monuments giving a real shape of the idea of death, another important funerary topic is where the deceased is represented on the bier, dead or in the form of a gisant⁸. These monumental shapes of marking the funerary space are favored by the aristocracy and the crowned heads. It is also them who would prefer the sculptural developments where the deceased – sometimes both spouses – are shown on their knees in prayer. An example is the Orans of Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI (the monument commission was made by Louis XVIII in 1816 by Edme Gaulle and Pierre

Petitot, completed in 1830). Another representation of death is where the deceased lying on the bier is on the onset of decomposition – this is called *gisant-transi*. The oldest example preserved in France is found in the Museum of Laon as the monumnet of Guillaume de Harcigny, 1394. He is the famous doctor who provided medical care to King Charles VI.

The image of death among the four horsemen of Apocalypse

In the context of the largely diverse representations of Death, I will remind of a particular case, where Death is human and alive. It is the last of the four horsemen of Apocalypse⁹, along with Pestilence, War and Famine.

Even since the Middle Ages, the representation of these horsemen has been given a symbolical code helped by the colors of horses, clothing and the accessories worn by these four, as well as by the dynamics of the characters or the dominant chromatics of the entire portrayal.

Death is neither the being riding the black horse (Famine), the red horse (War) nor the one on the white horse (Pestilence). All these horsemen were bringing all the wraths as the world knew them at that time, which were culminating with Death, the rider on a yellow-green, cadaverous color. This last horseman is not described as carrying a weapon or another object, but he is followed by Hades (the place or the state of the bygone spirits). He is often represented with a sword or a scythe.



Image 10. Lorvão Beatus, Lisbon, ANTT, Ordem de Cister, Mosteiro de Santa Maria de Lorvão, Liv. 44, fol. 108v.



Image 11. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Turin Beatus Codex, Beatus of Liébana, Spain



Image 12. Albrecht Dürer, 1498, The Four Horsemen, from The Apocalypse

The skull and bones at the Knights Templar and the secret societies (freemasonry and *Skull and bones 322/“ Bilderberg Group”*)

According to certain sources, the skull and crossbones, displayed on some Templar flags, was the symbol of Christ crucifixion and rebirth. One hypothesis favors the idea of this flag as a loan by the pirates who were flying it to show support for the Templars' activities.

Another hypothesis is the one in which the dissolution of the Templar Order has triggered the borrowing of the already existent pirate flag by the exiled knights.



Image 13.



Image 14.



Image 15.

The emergence of freemasonry¹⁰ is difficult to date, since there are deep roots in history, among the priests of the ancient Egypt, Pythagoreans and Templar Knights¹¹. The skull with bones is a freemasonry symbols, both for the third degree masons and also for secret societies derived from them - *Skull and bones 322* și "Bilderberg Group").

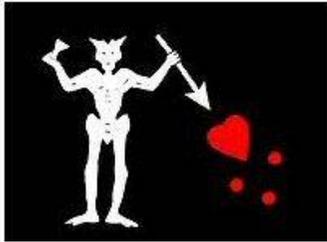
In freemasonry, the skull stands for the physical death, a requirement for the rebirth of the New Man. Death is a prologue of rebirth and evolution towards another level of life, a convention of the ruling in the spirit. The skull makes reference to this initiatory cycle. The secret societies often use symbols such as *Plumbline/Level* to provide Death with the role of a great leveler.

Pirate flags

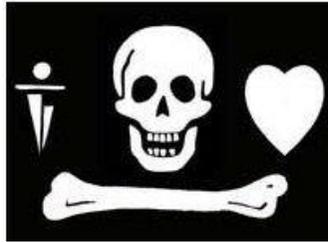
Piracy has been a profession as old as sailing. Among the sea robbers, a rather large number of them were serving under governments and they were called corsairs. In dependence on the geographical area of operation, the pirates has different names: *buccaneers* in the West Indies; *kaper* or *vrijbuiter* (plumbers) in the Netherlands; *lanun*, in Indonesia or Malaysia and *picaron* were the Spanish outlaws.

The skull-with-bones flag, unanimously recognized as the pirates', was meant to frighten the sailing boats, it was a signal of the imminent attack. In English, it is called *Jolly Roger* (the Happy

Roger). One of the likely sources can be the French *jolie rouge*, where the red flag was used by the Solomon's Temple knights. Here comes from the possible translation towards Jolly Roger (where *roger* meant vagrant).



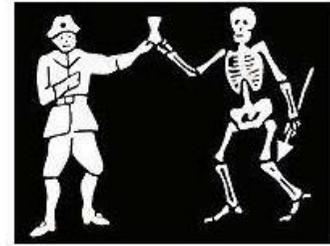
Edward Teach (Blackbeard)



Stede Bonnet



John Racham (Calico Jack)



Bartholomew Roberts (Black Bart)



Image 16.

The first mention of the *Jolly Roger* flag was made in the 1742 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary*. Another etymologic source reminds of the same French origin by the history of the buccaneers; they had the habit to tie clothes soaked in animal blood to the mast so that they will frighten their future victims and persuade them to cave in without fighting; these ad-hoc standards were called *'joli rogue'*, later borrowed by English.

In the meantime, the pirate black flags have received symbolical elements to customize them. Jack Rackham – also known as Calico Jack¹² – had two cutlasses crossed under the skull on his flag, while 'Black Beard's' (Thomas Thew) had an arm clenched on a cutlass. Flags from the golden age of piracy could be representations of entire skeletons; a known example is Bartholomew Roberts¹³ that includes, besides a skeleton (death), a clepsydra as a symbol of the time flying by for the people who happened to see that flag close up.

The first description of the black flag was made by the captain of the English ship *Poole* in 1700, as a result of the attack conducted by French pirate Emmanuel Wynne, in the vicinity of St. Jago Island.

It is the first depiction of a pavilion being *'black, with a skull and two bones crossed underneath, with a clepsydra next to them.'*

The skull with the bones crossed underneath was the international symbol for **poison**, irrespective of all the other interpretations and contexts.

The skull - Memento mori

The Latin expression has not only received forms and explanations in the plastic arts but also in poetry, photography art (mainly in the Victorian times), tattoos or cinema. The term shows for the first time on the emblem of the German order of *Death's Head* (Württemberg-Ölssischer Ritterorden vom Totenopf), established by Duke Sylvius Nemrod (1652).

The most popular form of memento mori consists in the representation of the *skull* along with other symbolical elements, such as the *Hourglass*- The "passage of time or that time has run out for the individual buried at the location. Its use associated with personified figures of Death and Father Time comes out of a long tradition of mortuary symbolism. Rarely used alone, it usually appeared along with hearts, stars, leaves and sacred flowering vines. It was also the frequent companion of winged death's-heads and bones." *Hourglass with Wings* - Time Flying; Short Life. There are also *sundials* or *clocks* referring to the Transience of life. *Candles blowing themselves out*, the inverted or extinguished - death. *Smoke* - Brevity of life. *Poppies* - Peace, rest, sleep, eternal sleep, consolation. *Rotten Fruit* - The "brevity and the ephemeral nature of life". *Wings, Winged skull* - "Flight of the soul from mortal man." *Wheel* - Wheel of fortune. There are also symbols like *Arrow/Dart* and *Gravedigger Tools* that indicates mortality; *Coffin* - Death; the end of life; *Cornucopia* - A fruitful life and the *Urn*, a popular symbol of mourning.

In a close connection with these topics there are the *vanitas-like still life*. They further bring a series of objects as well as *musical instruments* and *butterflies* epitomizing the "brevity and the ephemeral nature of life", plus other objects suggesting *wealth*, such as *wallets, crowns, fine clothing*, etc. They are a strong indication of the irrelevance of material goods after death. The *wine*, the *books* and the *bubbles* imply the transience of life with a direct reference to vanity (as in futility, worldly pleasures). *Serpents, Worms* - Temporariness of the body, uselessness of vanity.

The term originally comes from the opening lines of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible: 'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'

This type of representations became more and more popular during the 17th century, a religious time when people thought that terrestrial life is a preparation for the hereafter, the beyond life. In spite of that, modern artists will turn to the same topic, eg. Pablo Picasso and his *Goat's Skull, Bottle and Candle*, 1952.

A genuine memento mori created between 30 BC and 14 A.D. was preserved in the same Pompeii. It is a magnificent mosaic that exhibits symbols with a later recognition. The skull seems to be inspired from the monkey anatomy, it has ears and a wide and strange proportion. There is a scales above it, letting hang a leaded-end thread. The skull lies in balance on a wheel of fortune. At the ends of the scales, the symbols of power are well balanced (the sceptre and the royal purple, on the left and

the ,sack and the stick, symbols of poverty', on the right). A butterfly, symbol of the transient life, is between the skull and the wheel of fortune.

The second image is Jacob de Gheyn's *Vanitas Still Life*, done in 1603. Starting with the 16th century, the vanity topic flourishes in Flanders and the Netherlands. While the macabre art was becoming more violent in its more explicit imagery of death, this topic was pleading for morality via subtle images of still life and objects filled with connotations.

A third image shows funerary headstones of the 17th-18th centuries in Maxton Cemetery, Scotland. The variety of the expressions of this widespread topic should be appreciated.



*Image 17. Memento mori Pompeii
between 30 B.C. and 14 A.D*



*Image 18. Jacob de Gheyn Vanitas
(1603)*



*Image 19. Headstones in Maxton
Churchyard, Scotland (17th/18th c.)
Photo: Walter Baxter*

Heraldry – the use of skulls and skeletons with an identity connotation

Heraldry is an identity manifesto, relevant for both the labeling of the affiliation to the caste, of the possessions, the influence area and also for the identity designation for the deceased people.

The funerary spaces are richly illustrated with effigies, emblems, coats of arms. There are 56 monuments in Bellu Cemetery ¹⁴ only bearing family pennons. The interior of the funerary space does not, however, display those crests receiving identity symbols based on skull or skeleton. The images below are peculiar by the choices made but they convey a series of stories that had already occurred in the family history, while trying to erase certain erroneous interpretations hereof.



Image 20.



Image 21. Walter de Burgo,
Northern Ireland



Image 22. Coats of arms
for Hamond-Graeme
family



Image 23. Typographic vignettes,
19th century

The Ossuary in Sedlec is an artistic, architectural monument, a history trustee that will use the human remains in an impressive manner yet hard to decipher by the viewing public. Even the well placed crest will have a difficult time to display the reunited symbolical elements.

*To the grave – a rather bored skeleton of Walter de Burgo in the arms of the city of Londonderry, Northern Ireland.*¹⁵

*A rather gruesome crest of the Hamond-Graeme family, in which a skull is lifted from a spike in remembrance of an ancestor's 17th-century exploit.*¹⁶

The effigy is completed on top by a ribbon featuring the inscription *sepulto viresco* (coming back from my own tomb).

The fourth image, an engraving, uses symbols related to memento mori - the skull (supplemented with a facial grimace), the clypeus above the skull and the snakes flanking this outlandish crest. A monogram can be seen in its lowermost center.



Image 24. Duke of Rothes procession – heraldic funeral that took place on 23 August 1681, one month after he died

The heraldic insignias are to be found on the mourning flags, carried by high dignitaries when the deceased comes from an established family. The size of the funerary convoy, the quietness in clothing and the masting of the ceremony paraphernalia are ritualistic elements, mainly when the coffin needs protection and it is carried under a ridged funeral armour.

This small section of the funeral procesion of the Duke of Rothes includes his "cavalier" or champion and various types of mourning flags befitting a duke's degree.

The heraldic funeral par excellence: the coffin of the Duke of Rothers is covered with his arms and teardrops. Note this coronet on the coffin.¹⁷

Artistic compositions – personifications and death parables

There is no life without death. Death escorts us and sometimes it takes a detour, mindedly or not. Death is not all ears to us, does not fulfill our wish list...

A striking composition is the one with Adam and Eve in Eden's Garden, where they let themselves tempted with tasting from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* from the *Tree of Life*. The outcome was that they were banished from Heaven and became mortals. The *Tree of Life* is drawn as a skeleton as it mediates the touch of mortality.



Image 25. Albrecht Dürer. *The Blacksmith Fool*, in Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools*, Basel, 1494



Image 26. *The Tree of Life and Death* Typographic vignettes, 19th century

Another memorable composition that juxtaposes the living and the dead worlds is done in a 3D format around the *astronomical clock*¹⁸ (or the Prague orloj) located in the tower of the Old Town Square – Male Namesti in downtown Prague. Along the skeleton, the clock also features the allegoric figures of Lust, Greed and Vanity. The clock was made in 1410, as a joint project of Mikulas from Kadan and Professor Jan Sindel, astronomer of the Charles University in Prague.¹⁹ The presence of the skeleton holding a clepsydra stands for the *Fugit irreparabile tempus* sintagm (irretrievable time flies). The clock mechanisms activate the clepsydra that flips every hour, which gives the impression to the living that time is not on their side.



Image 27. *Denumire?*

The macabre dances

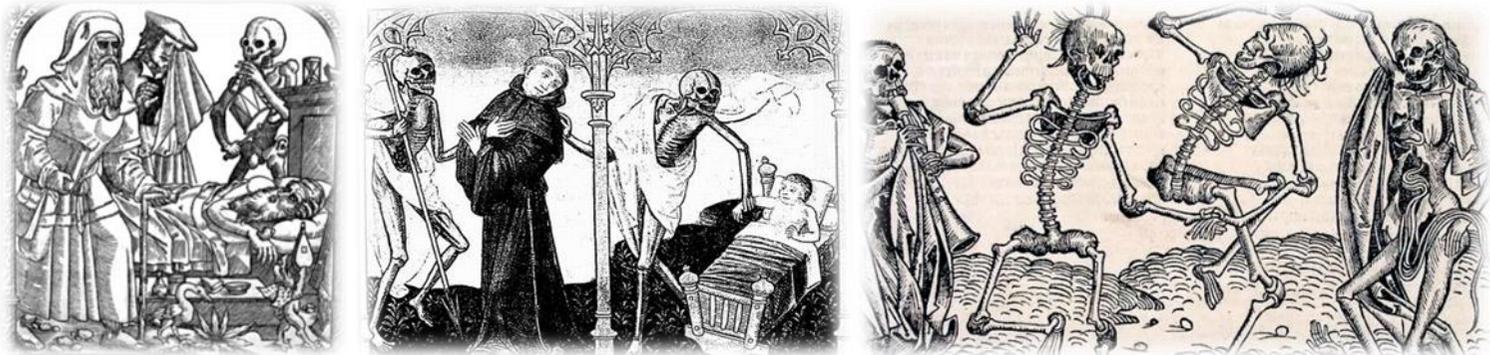


Image 28-33 Typographic vignettes



Danse macabre, Guyot Marchant, 1491



Lübeck, Dance of Death

Dancing with Death – the acknowledgment of death and unknown – the macabre dances are a constant concern in a Europe troubled by war, pestilence, the Little Ice Age and a dramatic food shortage. The presence of Death could not be missed, it had to be given the nod, taken in arms and subdued. The religious discourse has always placed a pressure of an eschatological connotation. The sermons of the monks were revolving around the end of the world and the Judgment Day. Both the macabre dances and memento mori represent plastic statements of an educational policy. The message to be conveyed would often turn into a play to be interpreted within the cemetery space. The dance with Death is a stage of spirit readiness and the disparate images are not searching the temperance discourse in memento mori but rather the one of awareness.

The dance with Death will be signed up by poor people and crowned heads, farmers, fighters or priests, old and young alike. The extremes will open and end this dance. The representation of the skeletons proves a poor knowledge of anatomy, as most of them have a still fleshy body, draped in rags.

The Day of the Dead in Mexico

*Dia de los Muertos*²⁰ or the Day of the Dead is both a Christianized holiday and a great festival...on a gruesome topic. Every October 31, the country fills with color, shows and parades, decorations, interpretations of skeletons and skulls. Cemeteries are not forgotten, the graves are gifted with ornaments, flowers, puppets and many candles. The churches will follow in this colorful and cheerful display, where each altar will be covered in a wide selection of representative objects. This is the day when families come together and pray for the relief of the souls of the people left on their spiritual journey. During this holiday, the skeletons are modeled and baked, being enjoyed as sweet treats. The solemn events featured in the costumed parades will become amusement for everyone.



Image 34. *Dia de los Muertos*

The ossuary and its artistic valences

The Sedlec Ossuary, mentioned in regards to coats of arms, gathers and uses the human remains of a large number of Capuchin monks (40,000 – 70,000). The discourse of the contemporary world is underlain on making an impression of the onlooker to the limit, but the message of this architectural and artistic conglomerate is 'We used to be what you are now and you will be what we are now.'



Image 35. *The Sedlec Ossuary*

The Ossuary, a small Christian chapel, is located beneath the Church of All Saints in Sedlec, a suburb of Kutna Hora city in the Czech Republic. This is the reason why to be also called the 'Church of Bones'.

The eschaton, the promise of resurrection

Eschatology, female noun, is the sum of the religious beliefs concerned with the final events of humanity.



Image 36.



Image 37. *Grigorie Dimitrie IV Ghika's funeral Monument from Teiul*

The eschaton can be deciphered in associating images of a rich symbolistics. The funerary space puts together and contextualizes a sequence of symbols that make direct reference to death and also to the promise for resurrection.

The funerary monument right above belongs to Grigorie Dimitrie IV Ghika, located in the former family chapel within Ghica Palace (in the courtyard of Teiul Doamnei Ghica Church). It is a funerary and identity monument, with a carefully chosen symbolism. The funerary monuments of the development were not available to the vulgus, in terms of semantic decryption. As a composition, the center of gravity is the bass-relief in the medalion, the butterfly lifting up in the air and leaving its cocoon (the tomb). The entablement corners show skulls lying on crossbones. This death symbol is toned down by the central medalion with the promise for eternal life, the Eschaton. The western-like style of this monument is visible in the combination of the *ronde-bosse* sculptures, 'weepers' and skulls, with symbolical bass-reliefs of a butterfly leaving the cocoon and the worm, which is death. The delicate symbolism is given by the classical or neo-gothic architectonic elements.

The monument has been joined by a contemporary tattoo, similar in symbolistics, which should be 'translated' in the same manner. The butterfly seems to leave the forehead bone and represents the same resurrection of the dead at the end of the days.

The art of tattoo has branched out in time, going from shapes of a refined symbolistics or to a pure decorativism, emptied of connotations. The tattoos have more and more varied rationale, from superstitions or the equivalent of amulets to shapes triggering fear or hierarchies. The skulls will be used as a shield from death and they also carry a component of defiance or confrontation with it, assertion of life or of the hedonistic living ('Carpe Diem').

The death skull tattoo (and the crossbones underneath) is frequently seen among army people. Some motorcycle riders will get this tattoo counting on its charm value, a safeguard against death. It is often associated with the SS German/Nazi symbol, but its roots date back in time. The *Totenkopfring* ('dead head ring'), the honor rings, as well as the SS Nazi troupes insignia *Totenkopf*, ('dead head') – have acquired a certain value. They would be the overcome of fear and death by absolute loyalty. Rumor said that such a tattoo on your forearm would help you cheat death.

The crystal skulls, a present concern beyond disputes and authenticity



Image 38. The crystal skulls

The emergence of those 13 crystal skulls debuted in 1924 with the discovery made by Anna Mitchell Hedgez²¹.

In 1970, the skull was examined in a Californian lab and the conclusion amazed everyone. It was a fascinating, perfect artwork, proved to be a Maya artifact. No traces would be found to point towards a manual work. The skull had been made with primitive tools, yet the precision and finishings were simply astounding. Many people wondered whether that skull had been sculpted by alien civilizations.

A number of 13 similar skulls were unearthed in various parts of the world. In 1990, a crystal skull had been placed by an anonymous person in front of the Smithsonian Institute.

The skull was enormous in size. The specialists tried to estimate its age but to no avail. Some experts were skeptical about these discoveries, stating that the Mayans did not have the necessary technology for this work. The Mayan legends say that these skulls had been made by Itzas for Atlantis' humans. The skull represent 12 worlds, including ours, where the life on Terra is the youngest. These skulls were brought to the Earth to have four civilizations created, namely Atlantis, Lemuria, Mu and Mieyhun. Those 13 skulls were held in a pyramid by the Olmecs, Mayans and then by the Aztecs. It is the last ones to be responsible for spreading them throughout the world.

THE SKULLS TODAY

There are few representations of the contemporary world to preserve the sobriety and expression required by the topic under study. The skulls and skeletons, mere graphic illustrations that inspire the clothing, convey only one message, *I am cool!* The matching jewelery, bandanas or

balaclavas, play the role of a mask, change the perception over an individual, without bringing a real and deep reversal.

Printed T-shirts – the nice skull and the ugly skull



Image 39. T-shirt stand from a rock concert



Image 40.



Image 41.



Image 42.



Image 43. T-shirt stand from a rock concert



Image 44.

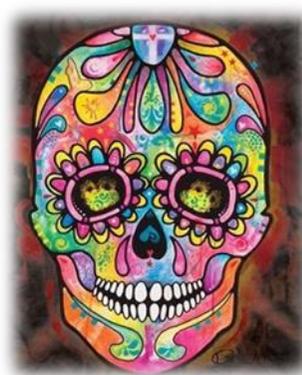


Image 45.



Image 46.

The fashion trend of the *ugly* T-shirts, with skulls and aggressive symbols, is not at all new, as it is associated with rock music, style and attitude. The bikers are also building for themselves a *wild* image, starting from the T-shirts prints and accessories or even the ones from motorcycles. The symbols chosen for these prints are interpretations of consecrated topics to which forms and expressions are added, related to flying, freedom or being fearless. The texts often assist with conveying a message. Besides all these, the last years have brought a type of laicization, of removing the connotations of a

representation and of an outlining of a sweet, brightly colored or even frisky image. These prints are used many times by teen girls who are thus designing their maturing process.

Skulls and skeletons for everyday objects



Image 47.



Image 48. Halloween manicures



Image 49.



Image 50.

The loss of a connotation in a representation occurs when the market, the space have become replete with that exact image. The skull, more facile now, decorates the phone case covers with sparkling sequins, nails, jewels, gloves, mugs and desk gadgets, bikes and everything in between. The children clothes, Halloween costumes, the masks or kitchen aprons are everyday objects that display this urbanity veil. The rural space, more inflexible, does not give a green light to such hierarchies and insignias. Over there, the skeleton has been assigned one place only....in the funerary space.

The funny skeleton – from cartoons to emojis and animation



Image 51.



Image 52.



Image 53. Emoticon



Image 54.



Image 55. Tim Burton's Corpse Bride (2005)

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bef

riend with *Death*, it still remains a deeply distressing experience even if lived by someone else. As for children, *Death* should be told about and understood so that they could deal with it better than we did...

How can you explain something you cannot completely apprehend? You narrate and keep drawing, explain situations, make suppositions and enjoy the way the *unknown* turns into *possible*.

How can you avoid nightmares? You *soften* them and stick a human face on them.

The cartoons, diagrams and caricatures make people laugh. Animation will carry us to the dreamland, either as children or grown-ups.

But what are these emojis with skulls and skeletons. Are they the new *macabre dances*?

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Endnotes

¹ The Black Death, the great pandemics that came to Europe from Central Asia around 1347 and lasted until 1351, during which a third of the world population perished. (according to medieval historian Froissart). This disease had a regular occurrence between 1361 and the end of the 15th century. The last epidemic happened in England, 1665.

² The great eruption of Vesuvius mountain in 79

³ According to archeologist Demet Kara on <http://www.descopera.ro/istorie/15274701-un-mozaic-antic-cu-un-schelet-nesabit-ii-uimeste-pe-arheologi-mesajul-pe-care-il-transmite-este-si-mai-surprinzator-foto>

⁴ idem

⁵ 1793 – High Master of the Horses 1796 – High Supplying Officer 1799 – 1800 High Stewart 1808 – High Weaponry Officer 1813 – High Registrar 1817 – High Governor, Prince of Muntenia 12.07.1822 – 11.05.1828

⁶ Today, Tei Church was built in an Italian neoclassical style in 1833 by Master Weltz.

⁷ Odin, the supreme god of the northern mythology, also the god of death and war. He is associated with Zeus and also known as Rognir, Sann, Omi, Ohinn, Oer, Sidhott, Thund, Haptagod, Sidskegg, Sigtyr, Unn, Herran, Herteit, Hropt, Herian, Ialg, Iolf, Ialk, Iolnir, Sigfahir, Skilfing, Svipal, Blindi, Nikar, Nikuz, Lusifer, Oski, Svidur, Lucifer, Svidrir, Thunn, Vokr, Fiolsvinn, Hergaut, Grim, Yggr, Grimnir, Valfahir, Haer, Alfader, Haerbardhr, Ganglari, Hroptr, Fiolnir, Gaut.

⁸ The representation of the deceased in a dignified posture, of the man standing with the folds compliant with gravity and thus falling towards the feet, but in an inverted and horizontal position, confirmed by the presence of a symbolical animal or a pet under the feet.

⁹ The four horsemen of Apocalypse are described in the last book of the New Testament, Jesus' Revelation according to John of Patmos, chapter 6, verses 1-8. The Christian apocalyptic interpretation is that the four horsemen bring the Apocalypse over the world prior to the Judgment Day.

¹⁰ The official version is that the first people who developed degrees of secrecy within the Fraternity were the Scots. This is where the famous Mason Word has been celebrated since 1638, even though, according to David Stevenson (*The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710*, Cambridge University Press, 1988), the annual testing required by the Schaw Statutes drafted on December 28, 1599 might point to the existence of an esoteric instruction at the end of the 16th century

¹¹ The connection between the crusaders and freemasonry was made official in 1737, in the famous speech delivered in Paris by Scottish knight De Ramsay. The crusaders are hence proclaimed as real parents of Freemasonry, which leads to the settlement of the *Templar* trend in Germany and most part of Europe.

¹² John "Jack" Rackham (26 December 1682 – 18 November 1720[1]), commonly known as Calico Jack, was an English pirate captain operating in the Bahamas and in Cuba during the early 18th century.

¹³ Bartholomew Roberts, (17 May 1682 – 10 February 1722) born John Roberts, was a Welsh pirate who raided ships off the Americas and West Africa between 1719 and 1722

¹⁴ *Bellu Orthodox, Military, Catholic and Greek-Catholic*

¹⁵ *The Story and Language of Heraldry*, S. Slater, Southwater, 2012, p.90

¹⁶ *The Story and Language of Heraldry*, S. Slater, Southwater, 2012, p. the crest 57

¹⁷ *The Story and Language of Heraldry*, S. Slater, Southwater, 2012, p.43

¹⁸ The astronomic clock in Prague or Prague orloj ([Czech: Pražský orloj](#) [[prafski: orloj](#)]), was mounted in 1410 as the third oldest and the only one still operating.

¹⁹ Posted in Watch personalities

²⁰ <https://blog.icomexico.com/tag/diadelosmuertos/> - Instituto Cultural Oaxaca

²¹ Until her death in 2007, Anne Mitchell Hedgez strongly claimed that she had discovered the skull in a mortuary room in a pyramid located in the Amazon Jungle.