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## **Modern cosmetology as a source of suffering**

### **Abstract**

Sigmund Freud in his book “The Uneasiness in Culture” published in 1930, introduced a thesis concerning a repressive core of culture. His conception is based on the assumption, that culture disputes with a pursuit of freedom and happiness. It forces people to a number of sacrifices in order to gain a set of alternative means, which could help them to reduce their suffering. Although the theory is over 80 years old, one can undeniably state that it is still just as valid today. Contemporary times, or rather contemporary culture, often determined as a culture of a body, youth or beauty, is filled with aches, tribulations and worries. A pursuit of a “perfect” body became the main demand of the age. The pressure towards one’s body, caused by the society, results not only with a rejection of one’s own look for “how one is supposed to look”, but also with a sense of unease or discomfort. The feeling can be pacified by the development of an aesthetic medicine and cosmetology which specialize in “fixing normality” on a daily basis. This article focuses on the conduct of a modern cosmetology in the case of a progressive commercialization of a human body. The aim of the thesis is an attempt to investigate if the sociological and psychological problems, connected with beauty and attractiveness, are effectively resolved with a new forms of pharmaceuticals, the development of an aesthetic medicine and cosmetology in general, or otherwise - does the accelerating process of the body aestheticization becomes the reason of people’s “suffering”? Has beauty become a product, a sales market for a medical and cosmetic praxis? What dangers are linked with this kind of actions? Is “beauty” a necessary, what is more, a sufficient requirement to achieve happiness? Or finally, is it rather an invented delusion and above all, a source of uncertainty?

**Key words:** Cosmetology, medicalization, aestheticization, project – body, anxiety

## Współczesna kosmetologia jako źródło cierpień

### Streszczenie

W wydanej w 1930 roku książce „Kultura jako źródło cierpień”, Sigmund Freud przedstawił tezę o represyjnej istocie kultury. Freudowska koncepcja bazuje na założeniu, iż kultura polemizuje z dążeniem do wolności i szczęścia. Zmusza ludzi do szeregu wyrzeczeń oferując w zamian zestaw alternatywnych środków redukujących cierpienie. Teza postawiona ponad 80 lat temu nie traci na aktualności. Współczesność – współczesna kultura, określana także mianem kultury ciała młodości, piękna – naszpikowana jest bólami, zgryzotami i troskami. Głównym wymaganiem epoki staje się pogoń za „idealnym” wyglądem. Społeczna presja wywierana na ciało owocuje odrzuceniem własnego wyglądu na rzecz tego jak „powinno się wyglądać”. Powstały w ten sposób dyskomfort może być łagodzony po przez rozwój medycyny estetycznej i kosmetologii, które na co dzień zajmują się „reperowaniem normalności”. Przedmiotem zainteresowania niniejszego artykułu jest działalność współczesnej kosmetologii w odniesieniu do postępującej komercjalizacji ludzkiego ciała. Celem pracy jest próba zbadania, czy rozwój nowych form medykalizacji sprawił, iż problemy społeczne i psychologiczne związane z urodą i atrakcyjnością skutecznie rozwiązywane są przez medycynę i kosmetologię? Czy jest zupełnie inaczej – postępująca estetyzacja ciała staje się przyczyną naszych „cierpień”? Czy uroda na dobre stała się towarem, rynkiem zbytu dla praktyk kosmetycznych i medycznych? Jakie niebezpieczeństwa mogą wiązać się z takimi działaniami? Czy „piękno” jest warunkiem koniecznym i wystarczającym w osiągnięciu szczęścia? Czy raczej wykreowanym złudzeniem i źródłem niepewności?

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kosmetologia, medykalizacja, estetyzacja, projekt ciała, niepokój

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporary culture is often determined as a culture of beauty, youth and attractiveness. However, the omnipresent discourse of corporeality and beauty can be easily defined as a recent revelation of an old issue, mainly because physical appearance occupied an important place even in the ancient times. Not only artists, but also philosophers considered human body as an

object of interest. Symmetric and proportional silhouettes were depicted in sculptures, Hippocrates attempted to create rules which could help people to maintain a healthy and a beautiful body, even ancient gods were depicted as “physically perfect”.

There is no denying, that in the case of the ancient times we can discuss “a culture of a body”, however nowadays the issue evolved into “a cult of a body”. In these days, we face a phenomenon, which penetrates almost every aspect of our modern reality – a body hypertrophy. The pressure on a human corporeality makes the strive for a perfect body a main demand of the era. Beauty culture forces us to work hard over our own bodies, to constantly monitor, control and take care of them. A body becomes an aesthetic project, the preliminaries associated with building-up, what is more, maintaining one’s beauty become almost a lifestyle choice. Our own appearance can serve not only as a source of discomfort, but also as a reason of anxiety. The issue is evaluated as a disease and it requires medical treatment. Does the aesthetic medicine serves as a remedy considering this kind of threat? Furthermore, is it a chance in the race for a better quality of life?

## **BODY AESTHETICIZATION**

Today’s aestheticization processes infiltrate the social reality, life has taken an aesthetic dimension. Surrounding world should be beautiful, sophisticated, sublime, it should become a masterpiece. In this regard, aestheticization is about making life more attractive, treating it as a source of experiences, sensations. Human body was not eluded by the process of reality aestheticization. Presently, corporeality is one of the most crucial areas of influence of the mentioned phenomenon. Assigning aesthetic values to the human body became an important social praxis, it is enough to notice the beautician’s offers or the range of cosmetics available on the market, dynamically changing fashion trends or new techniques of body adornment (tattoos, piercing). Let us not forget about the shape of the body itself (perfectly slim silhouette) and color of a skin (suntan or its lack). Taking care of one’s body in the present-day world is a demand, that needs to be met. Today’s beauty category is an object of lust, to which everyone should pretend. As it comes to functioning in the society, beautiful bodies became a sine qua non condition.

Body aestheticization sends us straight to the category of the body image. Discourse in which the term clarifies itself is often identified with its “surface” aspect, that is the outward appearance. However, as highlighted by many authors, the image of a body is something more, it is an internal depiction of ourselves, manifesting itself in following actions: physical activity, praxis connected with taking care of one’s body or eating habits. Reflection over the issue has a broad sociological and psychological context, which realizes itself in Kevin Thompson’s concept, who claims that body image is “an internalized look on your own appearance, a belief about how it is evaluated by others and feelings connected with it” (Thompson 1999 in: Głębocka 2000; 11).

This internal perspective, together with accompanying emotions, becomes the reason of the estimation of one’s own look. Following Alicja Głębocka “image of a body is often discussed in a context of growing dissatisfaction about one’s appearance, it is observed among representatives of both sex, among eating disorders and constantly raising popularity of aesthetic surgeries” (Głębocka 2000; 9). Lack of satisfaction or discontent can easily lead to anxiety. According to Sarah Gorgan “we live in times when dissatisfaction is a standard” (Gorgan 1999 in: Głębocka 2000; 13-14), the disapproval of one’s body fits into the model perfectly. The given form of our bodies is not good enough, in a modern culture, naturally shaped silhouette does not reach expectations of a present-day society. A problem of dissatisfaction of one’s own beauty is perceived as a divergence between “a perfect” silhouette and one’s own silhouette. The pressure towards “perfect bodies” compatible with culture canon, forces people to undertake variety of actions, which can help to change or improve their bodies. Beauty becomes a subject of continuous fight, an individual project of people, who strive to be able to match not only the aesthetic evaluations directed towards them by the society, but also by themselves.

## **PROJECT - BODY**

Contemporary times creates an image of a man emancipated from traditional structures, free from repressions of archetypal social institutions, consistently fulfilling his personal “project I”. Empowered individual experiences oneself, diligently building the backbone of his own identity, which “is not given but ‘aimed’”, it means that it is created and sustained by a person, who is functioning in a reflective way” (Ocłoń-Kubicka 2009; 48). Therefore, creating your own biography, which has a processual character, may never be accomplished.

“Project I”, in other words, a personal biographical project, when applied to so called “biography incarnation” (Schilling 2007; 19) becomes “a project -body”. In the modern society, body, similarly to identity, is defined as a dynamic entity, with a nature of a construct. Body is a project, which requires work and constant shaping “it entails acceptance of the fact that the appearance, size, shape, even the body insides are potentially open for a reconstruction process, of course amicable with the owner’s premises (ibid.; 19). Modern body is therefore “a plastic composition, which due to vigilance and hard work of its owner, can be carved and shaped” (ibid.; 19).

Following Giddens, modern-day corporeality left for the individuals to control, what is more, deprived of dependable and permanent outlines and references, gained “a virgin land” status, a status of a land that needs to be colonized. Due to a possibility of increased control over one’s own physical appearance, furthermore, to a development of technology and science, including medicine, a human organism began to be perceived as “a subject, which can be modified in a categories such as: genes, blood pressure, cholesterol, size, shape, appearance, breathing capacity, color and many others” (ibid.: 225). A body became a ground, on which one can build “a stable and meaningful sense of oneself in a contemporary world” (ibid.; 225).

Structuring one’s own corporeality manifests itself more progressively in a health discourse. A healthy body becomes a vector, that one should follow by applying a certain “caring regimes” (ibid.; 20), or in other words “body regimes”. According to Giddens, those regimes are learned practices such as variety of diets or working schedules, due to which the body and its needs are under constant control (Giddens 2007; 86-87). A healthy body is a well cared body, that is why caring regimes more often become a beauty care regimes. Following Baudrillard “health is in lesser degree a biological percept linked to the survival necessity, it is more a social percept connected with the social status” (Baudrillard 2006; 186). A healthy body stopped being crucial only to fulfill the biological functions, in modern times its image serves as an emphasis of the social status. In order to sustain the body in the proper health condition it has to be constantly monitored, controlled and nurtured. Nowadays, only under various restrictions and treatments the body can function in a dominant beauty category.

A man stopped being susceptible for nature caprices due to increasing organism control possibilities. He granted himself a right to modify his own

body, which appears to be external towards him, just like a wild nature waiting to be tamed, controlled and adjusted to one's own needs. Consequently implemented regimes are just one of the aspects of this control. The science development, mainly the medical one, mentioned in one of the previous paragraphs, significantly changes forms and possibilities of a body modification. That is why, modern expectations towards appearance are investigated in the medical categories, they become aspects of a medicalization process.

## **BEAUTY MEDICALIZATION**

Following Nowakowski, medicalization is that “something ‘not medically related’ becomes something ‘medical’” (Nowakowski 2012; 23). Medicalization is a process, in which a medical art colonizes new areas of social reality. Non-medical problems begin to take a clinical character, furthermore, they start to be defined as a variety of diseases, disorders and dysfunctions. Presently, it is beauty and generally human body that becomes this kind of new area of social reality. In addition to classic problems defined in a medically proper way, aimed at healing a diseased organism, the issue considering ‘improving’ human body, not infected with an illness is increasingly debated.

An investigator of the phenomenon Antonio Maturo (Maturo 2009; 99), points out three fundamental issues of a modern medicalization process. First of all, currently we are witnessing a ‘multitude of diseases’, a case presented as “a growth of a number of attitudes and behaviors which has been evaluated as a disease and which require medical treatment” (Sokołowska 1980; 183). It is a characteristic development of human conditions and behaviors, usually considered as compatible with norms, into pathologies, that is diseases mostly visible on the psychiatry ground. For mental illnesses or disorders one will consider a naughty children's behavior, overeating, various addictions such as unconscionable use of a computer, hazard or compulsive shopping.

Second of all, we are facing a process of “risk group dilatation”. The phenomenon is about relatively lowering the level of diagnostic criteria, as well as broadening its scale. Diseases are investigated from a standpoint of “risk groups”, that is people exposed to a certain infection. It creates a climate of “pathogenicity”, which can result in blurring the line between a norm and a pathology. Nowakowski similarly highlights the importance of absorption of normal stages of human life, such as family planning (contraception or in vitro), pregnancy and labor, growing old and death, by medical procedures (Nowakowski 2012; 28-29).

As it comes to Maturo, he primarily underlines the third issue, that is modification of the goals of medicine. The traditional ones were focused on treating the patient, however today, a large emphasis is put on the aspect of a life quality. Pharmacological operations are considered a part of such praxis. They are aimed to perfect the cognitive or sexual capabilities or even the appearance itself, for example reduction of aging changes in skin, hair loss as well as surgical interventions such as liposuction or having breast implants. Improving quality of life of relatively healthy people, relates to a “human enhancement” concept, understood as a phenomenon, that “improves” a human being. The process increases the scale of medicalization, enhancing the physical appearance, which in a beauty culture takes a form of “embellishment”. Obesity can serve as a good example of the phenomenon. The culture promoting the ideal of beauty, which takes a skinny silhouette as its determinant, brings us into a position in which “increasing number of individuals is not able to face up the ‘prohibitive’ demands, simultaneously obesity becomes unacceptable, which then influences the intensification of medical research in this area. As a result, obesity begins to be defined in categories of a disease, towards which a certain medical therapies are recommended” (ibid.; 29).

Peter Conrad states, that when the treatments improving our bodies begin to be common, they will lose the term of ‘improvements’, instead they will become a necessity (Conrad 2007; 9). It is hard not to say that the process has already began. The tendency to use medical interventions not to cure, but to improve, even by making patients look better, foreshadows a change of a medicine paradigm classically understood as a medical art. In a modern discourse, beauty lost its natural value, progressively it begins to function as an artificial material formed during medical praxis. There exists many areas such as aesthetic medicine, cosmetology, aesthetic dermatology, aesthetic surgery or aesthetic stomatology. The adjective ‘aesthetic’ needs to be understood in regard to medical, pharmacological and cosmetic activities, which main goal is to improve the physical appearance. Beauty medicalization or rather infiltrating it by the attractiveness discourse is undoubtedly connected with a body aestheticization phenomenon, as well as its cult. According to Schule “in the age of no certainties, attractiveness is the last guaranteed value. Beauty is a main virtue of a culture (...), smooth and pretty appearance is its trademark, it is a chief value of a heartless materialism, which conditions are exquisitely fulfilled by addressing to an average man and both sexes” (Schule 2002; 38-39).

## REALITY COSMETIZATION

Cosmetic body modifications were already known in the ancient times. Many Egyptians took advantage of an aromatic baths, to which they used a clay and ash-based paste with an alleged degreasing properties. In order to take care of one's skin, they used specially made creams from wax, cypress and olive oil. Egyptians, similarly to Greeks, considered fair skin a beauty canon. In those days a suntan was identified with commoners and slaves. To provide the complexion with a proper tone, the bodies were powdered or embrocated with a special lightening creams prepared on the base of bread and milk. The art of make-up was dynamically developing in the countries of Confucian culture. As it comes to the skin care, they used a powder made of a rice flour and a safflower extracts. Ancient Chinese people are also known from the novelties such as first nail polish or the hair coloring procedures.

Body modifications involve surgical interventions, which were also known in the ancient times. One of the examples is the oldest leg prosthesis founded in Egypt - it is almost three thousand years old. Interventions with "a scalpel" usage, which goal was not only to improve the health condition of the patient, but also an aesthetic intentions, are not the present times invention. First ears, nose or lips reconstructions were performed in the sixth century B.C. in the Middle East countries. In the first century B.C., Romans used surgical methods to change their appearance. By relocating skin fragments they removed or masked the heavy scars - a result of a numerous war battles. In the next centuries, operations, as a part of repairing surgery, were progressively replaced by the aesthetic surgery, which in a nineteenth century resulted in a first nose adjustment procedure performed solely from the aesthetic reasons. Twentieth century brought an increasing development of the medicine itself, which of course caused the innovation in the area of aesthetic medicine. Cutting out ribs, in order to gain a thinner waist, putting a sponge implant in a jaw line just to properly shape the face or following later liposuctions and breast enlargements are one of the many procedures included in the aesthetic medicine offer.

However, the present availability of medical resolutions modifying the appearance, caused the change in a body creation paradigm. Modern surgical interventions, a subject to a body culture trends, clarified its separate branch, which can be named a cosmetic surgery. In a present-day society, we deal with an evident popularization of this kind of praxis connected with a cul-



tural pressure of being attractive. It is worth to highlight, that the late modern cosmetics is still based on maintaining an appropriate hygiene level, as well as beauty emphasis, nevertheless, more and more often it is headed in a direction of a proper medicine. Contemporary cosmetics is in fact a cosmetology, comprehensive, interdisciplinary science drawing upon medical, chemical and biological knowledge. Medicalization processes in its principle were to contribute not only to a greater health protection and improvement, but also to a health promotion and preventive actions among the society. A process in a field of medical aestheticization of a reality, is a process of “cosmetization” of a certain social issues. A common denominator of both processes is its main concept, however, there is a divergence in the area of operation, which can be represented in the opposition “internal-external”. Cosmetization affects the external sphere of a human body. Health protection together with health improvement, aim to cure and take care of its outer layer, in other words, its appearance. Aestheticization refers to the issue of beauty or attractiveness. These aspects, these attributes of a physical appearance, caused that presently aestheticization becomes one of the most important elements of a human organism.

Many authors define a present-day aesthetic medicine as “a medicine of desires”. The medicine of desires aims to fulfill a human dreams and aspirations, to meet their expectations and to deal with their complexes. It changes the basic distinction between a need and a desire or a craving. In a classic conceptualization, while discussing patients’ needs, one would determine a relative necessity of repairing the functioning of their organisms. Today, a need is equated with a desire, patient’s desire becomes his need. One can basically define this kind of medicine as a commercialized, a subject to business processes, motivated by nothing else but profits. The status of people together with activities included in certain procedures are also changing. The patient stops being a patient in a traditional meaning of a word, instead, he becomes a client. Furthermore, medical interventions serves as a usual services, while doctors are reduced to a rank of contractors.

Corporeality became not only cultural, but also economical area of influence. Modern body is a privatized body, an article with its consumable value. Mike Featherstone aptly equates human organism with a machine. To remain effective it needs a constant and systematic attention, which prolongs the time

designated to its maintenance. Author says, that “a rational attitude towards subjects is transferred on a human body. A tendency to convert a free time into a time designed for a cosmetic treatments, forces the individual to a greater effort and causes monitoring current body efficiency the most important objective for those, who want to live life to the fullest: crazy life or a life on the edge intensifies the need for a human body to be serviced” (Featherstone 2000; 114). Magdalena Wieczorkowska expresses a parallel opinion. She mentions that giving a body a material value objectifies it, similarly to “establishing a price of a car and its individual parts. Face lifting starts to look like unbending the car body after the accident, stylists and make-up artists’ advices are like a fresh, shiny lacquer layer, whereas stomatologic implants are like a new set of tires. A ‘repaired’ man ‘drives out’ from the beauty salon into the world, in which rules are dictated by a cult of youth and success” (Wieczorkowska 2007; 101).

Body projects discourse contributed to a feeling, that beauty is an issue of a person’s conscientious work. Working over one’s looks involves variety of usually expensive cosmetic treatments. A certain amounts of money enables people to use so called “beauty sanctuaries”. Following Dariusz Czaja, modern body finally got an adequate sanctuary, in a way it has been canonized. Beauty salons, cosmetic surgery offices, all types of biological regeneration offices, solariums or SPAs are those kind of sanctuaries, in which a refined rituals to honor a human body take place (Czaja 1999). Human life largely includes working over one’s own appearance, although fulfilling the obligation implicates the fact, that no matter how many work and financial effort one will use on a certain project, one will never finish it. The situation causes a feeling of discomfort. Beauty as a process must be sustained by a permanent restlessness about one’s own appearance - one can always improve or fix something, it will always remain an unfinished process. New beauty salons’ procedures and products constantly appearing on the market seemingly aim at reducing the discomfort, but in fact, they accelerate the anxiety spiral. There is a necessity of a constant updating of the beauty sanctuaries offers, as well as including them into an every-day regime of taking care of one’s look, under a threat of being socially marginalized.

The thirst for beauty and attractiveness becomes a need, mainly because in modern times it gains an instrumental value. Beauty enables to find a better job or get a promotion, find a partner or fix the existing relations, get rid of the

complexes or load one's self esteem. Attractiveness is associated with many positive traits such as intelligence, physical health or wealth. This kind of associations can be caused by an image of a good-looking face alone. (Etcoff 2000). The procedures aimed at beauty improvement, become a therapeutic treatments, a medicament for a lot of problems of a psycho-social nature. Aesthetic medicine meets the expectations of its clients, more and more aspects of the reality becomes susceptible to this phenomenon. In a modern culture "a body is a passport for everything that is good in our lives, taking care of oneself is based on taking care of one's body" (Featherstone 2000; 115). Youth, vitality, beauty, these are the issues we owe to a proper body care, to a control over our bodies, to implemented programs and finally to cosmetic procedures we use. Currently promoted trend, that attractive appearance equals success, caused a human body to become a significant tool in a road to achieve it.

## SUMMARY

Does the development of a new forms of appearance modifications caused that a lot of problems rooted in a body are effectively reduced by cosmetic procedures? Certainly modern attractiveness discourse makes the strive for a perfect appearance a common requirement. People, who remain passive toward adjusting their appearance to a surrounding reality, are marked by a social stigma, their passiveness is equated with laziness, "the appearance is treated as a reflection of oneself, therefore the punishment for negating it, is lowering the acceptance for a whole person" (Featherstone 2000; 115). In the age of a body cult, leaving a body with no proper cultivation is unacceptable. Beauty sanctuaries serve as a places, through which a characteristic absolution ritual takes place. In this context, a sin is a lack of a proper care for one's own appearance. Contemporary cosmetic art became an answer for a certain social demand, a man is not a prisoner of his own imperfections. In a world of a beauty culture a belief that looks can become a pass to a better world, improve the quality of life or be a reason to achieve happiness, has a significant meaning.

Nevertheless, the pressure towards cosmetic aspect of corporeality led to a change of what was considered as a natural. "Natural beauty" is now only a base, on which one can create a desired beauty pattern. It is only natural trying to level with this pattern, however even the slightest appearance defect,

for example acne, wrinkles, cellulitis or excess of body fat, rise to a rank of a problem and needs to be neutralized. Reality cosmetization, during which a duplication of mechanical patterns takes place, causes the beauty to lose its unique character, it becomes a factory product, an effect gained due to a visit in a beauty salon, a surgical interference, cosmetic products or supplements usage.

The body can be a source of worries, presently ugliness is identified with a disease, that is why the body needs to get a “healthy” look. Nowadays, healthy look equals a cosmetized look. The idea of “health promotion”, which takes a quality of an appearance promotion, is also being cosmetized. Nevertheless, the beauty obtained this way cannot be a stable foundation, on which we can build our lives, mainly because it is voluble, fragile and above all performative. Cosmetic procedures do not cure “the disease”, they do not change the patients’ physiology. A good example are the praxis aiming at preventing the aging processes. Older people do not stop the aging process by using cosmetic procedures, they just reduce or hide the aging symptoms (Gilleard 2005; 119). “Rejuvenating” treatments renew de facto only the outer layer, the outward appearance of a person.

Notwithstanding, beauty becomes a reflection of what we are, through a body image we create our identity, we build our status, we establish the direction of our interactions. Cosmetization causes redefinition of issues built on a base of the appearance such as happiness, success or love. The fact generates a mass of unhappy individuals, who are unable to use those kind of services and in consequence, become marginalized outcasts. Polarization of society on “unattractive” and “attractive” people is de facto a division of people on “poor” and “wealthy”. Poor and unattractive people are so called “people waste” (Bauman 2001), they are sidelined, deprived of the participation in the society on the equal rights.

Present-day forms of body modification creates an image of a beauty available practically for everyone and available ‘right away’. However, one should ask oneself is it perhaps just a posed delusion? Modern cosmetology can serve as a tool, which could help to rebuild peoples’ identities as well as to reduce insecurity towards their bodies. Nevertheless, it is worth to remember, that for many it can account for a main source of anxiety and suffering.

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