

THE BEAUTY OF THE BODY AS CULTURAL ENGINEERING

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ABSTRACT. Starting from Aristotle's standpoint about the beauty, the aim of this paper is to join the theory of criteria of the beauty of the human body to the problem of cultural engineering of the beauty of the body. There is an evolution of the definition itself of the beauty of the body: from the naked body to the culturally veiled one. At the same time, the motif of separation between the human being's mind and his/her body is not only general within the entire history but it increased with the development of human intervention over the body.

The chapters of the paper – Beauty – pleasure to see it, The perceptive experience of the beauty of the body, Criteria of the beauty of the body, The cultural engineering, The beauty of the body as relationship between the canon and the organon – are subordinated to the idea of social and historical explanation of the topic.

KEYWORDS: Aristotle, beauty, body, Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, cultural engineering, postmodernity.

Beauty – pleasure to see it

The first aspect we focus on when we discuss about the beauty is that we *see* it and that its appearance gives us a big pleasure. Aristotle has mentioned what a child could express if he is questioned about: “He used to say that beauty is the best of all recommendations, but others say that it was Diogenes who gave this description of it; and that Aristotle called beauty, ‘The gift of a fair appearance’”² and “When he was asked

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² Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, Translated by C.D. Yonge, Life of Aristotle, <http://classicspersuasion.org/pw/diogenes/dlaristotle.htm>; and the author has continued: “that Socrates called it ‘A short-lived tyranny’”;

why people like to spend a great deal of their time with handsome people, ‘That’, said he, ‘is a question fit for a blind man to ask’³.

The fact that we see the beauty and that from this first sensorial contact we begin to understand and relate with the others is inevitable. For this reason, philosophy has had an ambivalent attitude toward the beauty: sometimes it has considered that beauty (of the face and of the body as well) would be only a deceptive appearance – covering the only real essence of man, his soul – and thus it has despised and excluded the beauty from its preoccupations to understand the human being. At other times, for people learn to be human first of all from their reciprocal visual relationship, philosophy has considered the significances constructed by people following their interaction in perception and language as ones of the most important of the human reality. Although not beauty as such would be here essential, the significances result from the fact that man is both body and spirit, and that his perception of the world means that he/she is also perceived, while the entire process of perceiving and being perceived not only comes from and arrives to a complex of soul and body, but the body is the first appearance of the individual in front of the other. Who perceives is the *body-subject*: vision and movement being *bodily powers*, the understanding of man presupposes to consider him as unity of body and mind. The subjectivity as such derives from this. “My body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the “other side” of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself... (it is) a self... that is caught up in things, that has a front and a back, a past and a future”⁴. To perceive the other – as well as to perceive himself – means that the man has bodily, precognitive experiences, more before his doubts concerning the existence of his mind⁵.

Beauty derives from the fact that the mind does not conceive its values, notions, and judgements in a Platonic world of ideas, but in the material world where man’s body is the most important for him.

Plato, ‘The privilege of nature’; Theophrastus, ‘A silent deceit’; Theocritus, ‘An ivory mischief’; Carneades, ‘A sovereignty which stood in need of no guards’.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”, *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, pp. 162–163.

⁵ Here Merleau-Ponty opposes to the tradition Descartes has represented by reducing the explanation of man to his mind.

The body is the material expression of the mind as the work of art is expressed in matter. Consequently, if the human mind can understand the world by virtue of the way the body can act or imagine acting, this understanding itself supposes the state of the body and this state as result of the interacting bodies. From this standpoint, the understanding supposes the *proprioception* of the body, that meaning both his posture⁶ and mechanical movements and his state of healthy look and beauty, or not only his posture and movements but also his state of healthy look and beauty. The concept of proprioception is used here in both its neuroscience meaning as *non-conscious information* (about the body) and the psychological and philosophical meaning as *conscious awareness*. It corresponds to a “pragmatic (action-oriented) pre-reflective awareness” which “is immune to error through misidentification”⁷, showing the importance of the moment of grasping at a glance the bodily state of the other (as well of the own state of the body), or the importance of this grasping as such.

Finally here, although we arrives to express by words many aspects and features of the world (and only by words the indeterminate things become determined), including our complex body-subject, as well as the body-subjects of the others, the perceptual experience is often richer than our reflective ways of describing it: it is certainly so not only because of the under-phenomenological complexity, but also because of the socio-cultural context which forges the perceptive and intellectual tools as well. And if “the completed object is translucent, being shot through from all sides by an infinite number of present scrutinies which intersects in its depth leaving nothing hidden”⁸, the beauty of the body is a special object which swerves from this explanation: first of all, it is a determinate object – the beauty of a certain human body – and as such it cannot, according to Merleau-Ponty,

⁶ Continuing and refining his theory of differentiation and *habitus*, Pierre Bourdieu (*Méditations pascaliennes*, Paris, Seuil, 1997, p. 169–171) has developed the notion of corporeal *hexis*, as posture and manner of a body to move and sit, in order to signal and, at the same time, to assume the social (including sexual and generational) framework within which the subject lies.

⁷ Shaun Gallagher, „Bodily Self-Awareness and Object Perception”, *Theoria et Historia Scientiarum: International Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*, 7 (1), 2003, <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~gallaghr/theoria03.html>

⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Translation C. Smith, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, p. 79.

play a proper normative role (although its different aspects could be experienced normatively); then, even though its different aspects are experienced “as that maximally articulate norm against which every particular presentation is felt to deviate”⁹, the total impression of the beauty of the body remains to always be re-discovered.

The perceptive experience of the beauty of the body

As philosophers showed what the old common sense has experienced, beauty depends upon the subjective feelings of the onlooker. The more so as beauty concerns the entire person: his/her face, mind and behaviour, and body. Thus it is possible that a sparkle of the eyes with the proof of kindness and intelligence of a woman, for example, lead a man to consider she is beautiful. At the common level, sympathy, attraction and love could issue from this subjective perception of the essential unity of a person. Philosophy has conceived this tendency of the human perception as *kalokagathia* – unity of the beautiful and the good –: an abstract concept corresponding to the idea (in Plato, a supreme idea, lain in the world of ideas, this one being the real world; in Aristotle, a result of man’s observation of the empiric world).

But even though people tend to consider the others from the viewpoint of the unity of the beautiful and the good, and thus even ignoring the real physical appearance of a person in favour of his/her spiritual features, nevertheless they can differentiate these aspects. And what is more they could ignore the brighter mind and the most able to sacrifice itself goodness because the beauty in front of them blind them. Not the biological and psychological reasons and mechanisms of this phenomenon are important here, but its phenomenology: the transformation of someone’s perceptive experience of the unity of a person following his/her confrontation with an individual physical appearance. Regarding our theme, the physical appearance of the body might be, rather in our epoch of disclosure of its mystery, lesser penetrating than the face in the appreciation of someone’s beauty, but the importance of the body for the understanding of the human relationships from the point of view of the beauty has to be had in view. If one considers someone else’s face as beautiful, irrespective of

⁹ Sean Dorrance Kelly, „Seeing things in Merleau-Ponty”, *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, edited by Taylor Carman and Mark B.N. Hansen, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 97–98.

his/her body, this is rather the sign of the human ability to discern and separate: moreover, the man could consider a female as beautiful only for her hair, or eyes, or colour are beautiful. If one is impressed by the body (rather than the face), this shows the capacity of man to unite, to look on the whole. And, although the beauty of the face is considered according to the same principle of harmony according to which the body is judged, this principle is more powerful concerning the body than the face: one could consider a face as beautiful even though it contains a too short or too long nose, or not big eyes, but one hardly could be convinced that a female body, for example, would be beautiful having big breasts but a too plump belly and too thin legs.

Thus, the subjective feelings concerning beauty are based on values – general judgements resulted from a long collective experience. Values, becoming criteria, are the elements used by man in his/her own perceptive experience: though he/she is struck by the physical appearance of a person, this first “pure” perception becomes quickly a “civilised” perception (which could also be expressed in words) because of the rapid inclusion in it of the collective level of perceptions and judgements. Certainly, the individual could divert from the values known by him/her: he surpasses some principles of the general perception of the human forms (for him/her, beauty is what he/she see, irrespective of the canons of the forms). At the same time, the individual could transform his first wild perception of the physical appearance of someone, the general criteria of beauty being for him/her so important that he/she arrives at seeing what the principles see and require.

Criteria of the beauty of the body

But what is beauty? Could it be defined, since it has in view the entire appearance of a man/woman – where it could, or it could not be harmony between the face, the eyes, the body, or between the body and the mind¹⁰? And could it be defined, since it is a question of individual

¹⁰ For this reason, proverbs have mentioned: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder; Far from eye, far from heart; The eyes are the window of the soul/heart/mind. But Aristotle has insisted that the harmony between body and soul does not mean equivalence of them: “it is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful”, *Politics*, Book one, V, http://www.constitution.org/ari/polit_01.htm.

tastes¹¹? Would it be the same in every time and space? Certainly not, and we already know well that the representations people have about beauty differ not only according to the epoch and social milieu, but also to the individual as such. Concerning especially this last aspect, the beauty appreciated by the individual depends upon the combined criteria related to the body, face and mind (behaviour, attitude) of a human being. And if we are taking into account the objects of man's appreciation (body, face and mind), we understand that, because the human senses as such (thus the body, face and mind) are created by the historical practice¹², the *criteria of the beauty of the body are also historical*¹³.

They reflect the human needs at a certain time *as these needs are translated through the social hierarchy*. In this respect, one has to note that the criteria of female beauty¹⁴ of the body have followed the social

¹¹ See the old popular wisdom: There's no accounting for tastes. Or, there's no disputing about tastes. But (at a certain moment) the variety of beauty of the human face is richer than the variety of beauty of the human body.

¹² Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Private Property and Communism, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm>: „Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of subjective *human* sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form – in short, *senses* capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, *human* sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of *its* object, by virtue of *humanised* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present.... Just as only music awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has *no* sense for the unmusical ear – is [no] object for it, because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential powers – it can therefore only exist for me insofar as my essential power exists for itself as a subjective capacity; because the meaning of an object for me goes only so far as *my* sense goes (has only a meaning for a sense corresponding to that object) – for this reason the *senses* of the social man *differ* from those of the non-social man... The eye has become a *human* eye, just as its *object* has become a social, *human* object – an object made by man for man. The *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians*. They relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man”.

¹³ This historical character has manifested too in the conceptions about the beauty. For example, the Greek tradition of the pre-eminence of the spirit/intellect has generated the treatment of the Beautiful, the Good and sometimes the Just in a unique whole (see the *kalokagatia*). Aristotle has tried to distinguish the Beautiful from the Good.

¹⁴ Aristotle not even said a word about the beauty of women. He spoke only about the beauty of free men with an independent fortune. In *Politics*, Book One, VII,

subordination of women: what was considered as female beauty has signified the historical conditions within which the need of society to assure the necessary number and quality of progenitors and progeny was expressed. Or, if the model of beauty for the upper strata could divert from this requirement, it was stringent for the lower strata: indeed, their life as such and their progeny have depended on how healthy and husky were their parents and especially their mothers. Or, in this framework the feeble body, even though compensated by a strong mind and heart, has never been considered as beautiful. Or, the representation of the beauty of the body has followed the representation of the social hierarchy: "And doubtless if men differed from one another in the mere forms of their bodies as much as the statues of the Gods do from men, all would acknowledge that the inferior class should be slaves of the superior. And if this is true of the body, how much more just that a similar distinction should exist in the soul? but the beauty of the body is seen, whereas the beauty of the soul is not seen"¹⁵.

Therefore, the criteria of the beauty of the body are not only historical, but also social. These criteria frame a socio-cultural and psychosocial order and, at the same time issue from a specific socio-cultural and psychosocial order that are a historical and social practical understanding and interpretation of the appearance of people as mediation of feelings and judgements (which are social and historical too).

The criteria of the beauty of the body are a perceptual-expressive structuring of being. They reflect the *intention* of the body-subject in precise historical and social contexts and unfold the entire organisation of meanings of these contexts. They are at the same time marks within the ontological construction of the world – within which the human

http://www.constitution.org/ari/polit_01.htm, he has insisted that: "The rule of a household is a monarchy, for every house is under one head: whereas constitutional rule is a government of freemen and equals". In XII, „the husband and father, we saw, rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs, the rule over his children being a royal, over his wife a constitutional rule...when one rules and the other is ruled we endeavor to create a difference of outward forms and names and titles of respect...The relation of the male to the female is of this kind, but there the inequality is permanent".

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, Book One, V, http://www.constitution.org/ari/polit_01.htm. And he continues: "It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right".

body constitutes a specific architectonics – and legitimise the order of the social *ontos* and discourses. At the cultural level, the criteria of the beauty of the body take part of the culturally dominant mode of perception and represent the intersection of different social modes of perception dominated however by the dominant(s) one(s).

The criteria of the beauty of the body are *ideal constructs*¹⁶. They are, first of all, close to the youthful or even childishness' moment of man's life, since in this moment man has not yet grown ugly following his toil and hard life: the girl has not yet passed through giving birth to and bringing up many children, and generally people did not yet eat so many pernicious things which annul their natural immunity and communion with nature. This reason has founded the ideal of human body in the ancient Greece, "the childhood of humankind" (Marx): the bright gods have had beautiful adolescent bodies. Nietzsche pointed out that the Greek civilisation has promoted the unity of the optimistic and logical mind and the body¹⁷ and that just the modern times have brought about a mortification of the body (by continuing the Judeo-Christian tradition¹⁸) and an abasement of the spirit. Thus, if we want

¹⁶ In Plato, Beauty etc. are supreme ideas, while the concrete beauty exists only as participation to this idea.

¹⁷ This unity was transfigured within the beauty of the *naked body*: not for the climate allowed this, nor for society was too primitive. On the contrary: but just the naked body permitted the observance of the effects of the cultivation of the body through gymnastics (*gymnos* – naked) and the effects of combined mental and physical efforts during the Olympiads. But see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy. Out of the Spirit of Music* (1872), http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/nietzsche/tragedy_all.htm, *The Birth of Tragedy. An Attempt at Self-Criticism*, 4: "Their constantly stronger *desire for beauty*, for festivals, entertainments, and new cults really arose out of some lack, out of deprivation, out of melancholy, out of pain (and, before, "the *desire for the ugly*, the good strong willing of the ancient Hellenes for pessimism, for tragic myth, for pictures of everything fearful, evil, enigmatic, destructive, and fateful as the basis of existence"); thus the pre-eminence of the Dionysian spirit of the Greek art, to the Apollonian one, but nevertheless coexistent in a model of sincere society: *The Birth of Tragedy*, 9: "Everything which comes to the surface in the Apollonian part of Greek tragedy, in the dialogue, looks simple, translucent, beautiful. In this sense the dialogue is an image of the Greek man, whose nature reveals itself in dancing, because in dancing the greatest power is only latent, but it betrays its presence in the lithe and rich movement".

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals A Polemical Tract* (1887) <http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/genealogy3.htm>, the entire III, but see 28: the ascetic ideal being "a *will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a revolt against the most fundamental preconditions of life".

to liberate both of them we have to return to the unity of the body and soul, where the first would be even more important, including for it could press to surpass hypocrisy¹⁹. Philosophers – from Socrates²⁰ to the modern scientific spirit – who have aimed at explaining, and not tasting, the human being, would have been those who have generated, among other things, the rupture of the body and the mind and the minimisation of the importance of the former²¹.

However, by mentioning Aristotle's realistic description of the criteria of the beauty of the body, we could but admire the capacity of philosophy to unite the abstract (showed by mathematics – numbers, proportion, and measure) with the concrete.

1) Therefore, "beauty varies with the time of life. In a young man beauty is the possession of a body fit to endure the exertion of running and of contests of strength; which means that he is pleasant to look at; and therefore all-round athletes are the most beautiful, being naturally adapted both for contests of strength and for speed also. For a man in his prime, beauty is fitness for the exertion of warfare, together with a pleasant but at the same time formidable appearance. For an old man, it is to be strong enough for such exertion as is necessary, and to be free from all those deformities of old age which cause pain to others. Strength is the power of moving some one else at will; to do this, you must either pull, push, lift, pin, or grip him; thus you must be strong in all of those ways or at least in some. Excellence in size is to surpass ordinary people in height, thickness, and breadth by just as much as will not make one's movements slower in consequence. Athletic excellence of the body consists in size, strength, and swiftness; swiftness implying strength. He who can fling forward his legs in a certain way, and move them fast and far, is good at running; he who can grip and hold down is

¹⁹ See also David Michael Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being. Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, p. 36.

²⁰ See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (unpublished manuscripts edited posthumously, 1901), http://www.scribd.com/mobile/documents/11604878/download?commit=Download+Now&secret_password=:_428 (March-June 1888) One cannot insist too strongly upon the fact that the great Greek philosophers represent the decadence of every kind of Greek excellence and make it contagious".

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy. Out of the Spirit of Music*, http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/nietzsche/tragedy_all.htm, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 13, 15 (*The birth of The Theoretical Man*), 17, 18.

good at wrestling; he who can drive an adversary from his ground with the right blow is a good boxer: he who can do both the last is a good pancratiast, while he who can do all is an 'all-round' athlete"²².

There are sketched here some criteria of the beauty of the body as they are deduced in a theoretical contemplation²³ of the real world:

- a beautiful body has to be *fit* for resisting and supporting the tasks of the life; (and for these tasks are differentiated according to the social stratification, the beautiful body belongs only to the free and well-off men; slaves only have to be strong enough and proving obedience to the masters);
- by being naturally adapted to the cultivation and the demonstration of its strength, a beautiful body is pleasant to look at; (but this subjective pleasure has, as we saw, an objective basis);
- a beautiful body *shows itself* by proving *excellence* in its movements: (consequently, it is a proof of the excellence of nature).

2) In *Poetics*, Aristotle adds other criteria, by having been started from the analysis of the ideal things as the numbers (in *Metaphysics*): "a beautiful object, whether it be a living organism or any whole composed of parts, must not only have an orderly arrangement of parts, but must also be of a certain magnitude; for beauty depends on magnitude and order. Hence a very small animal organism cannot be beautiful; for the view of it is confused, the object being seen in an almost imperceptible moment of time. Nor, again, can one of vast size be beautiful; for as the eye cannot take it all in at once, the unity and sense of the whole is lost for the spectator; as for instance if there were one a thousand miles long. As, therefore, in the case of animate bodies and organisms a certain magnitude is necessary, and a magnitude which may be easily embraced in one view; so in the plot, a certain length is necessary, and a length which can be easily embraced by the memory"²⁴. Thus:

- a certain magnitude (not too big, not too small), and
- order.

And in *Metaphysics*, by continuing Plato who has spoken about *measure* and *proportion* as elements of beauty and of perfection²⁵, Aristotle has showed that the universal elements of beauty are

²² Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book I, Chapter 5, <http://praxeology.net/rhetoric.htm>

²³ These last words are a tautology, since *thêoria* means just contemplation.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, Section A, Part VII, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.1.1.html>.

²⁵ Plato, *Philebus*, 51.

- order (*taxis*),
- symmetry, and
- definiteness or determinateness (*to orismenon*)²⁶.

Later on, Leonardo considered as the first criteria of beauty, the harmonic relations and proportions between the parts of the human body²⁷. Not inquiring more theories about the criteria of the beauty of the body, we have now to stop on the problem of the means to preserve the beauty of the human body.

The cultural engineering

Letting apart the origin of the concept of engineering²⁸, we provide here a double sense in its utilisation: in a *broad* sense, to engineer is to intervene, with the human intelligence, within the human life; or, to intelligently transform the human environment, as well as the human being itself, in order to realise human ends. To engineer means to have tools: the intervention itself being annihilated without them. From this standpoint, words themselves are tools through which men have forged their intelligence as such and thus their entire life: the criteria, the values, the judgements are means that have constituted and still constitute the ideals – including the ideal of beauty of the body – which move and press the human action and behaviour.

The words and the entire spiritual and material creation of man's life constitute the *culture* within which the man himself, his senses and cultural capacity develop. Culture implies a permanent interaction between man and his milieu, and it is the result of this interaction, as the man himself does. Consequently, the engineering is always cultural, meaning both *direct* and *indirect* actions: when one relates it to

²⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book XII, 10, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/metaphysics/book12.html>.

²⁷ *Treatise on painting* (1651).

²⁸ The Greek *μηχανή* – ingenious invention, from where machine, machine of theatre, from where means, stopgap, slyness, artifice. *Μή* is the root signifying a negation in a hypothetical sense, meaning that the thing one speaks about would be uncertain, presumed, and even inadmissible. From this root, an entire family of words emerged: *μηχανάω* – to imagine, to arrange with art, to combine for a precise purpose, from where to produce, to cause, to occasion (as well as in negative senses: to conspire; *μηχανεύς* – inventor, ingenious; *μηχάνευσις* – apparatus, device; *μηχάνησις* – machine; *μηχάνημα* – ingenious invention, mechanism, machinery; *μηχάνητικός* – able to invent; *μηχανικός* – able to work, constructed by the art of the mechanic (engineer), the art to construct a machine.

technology, one simply underscores the intention to discuss about the technological (direct) interventions of man within his environment, but technology is culture.

Following our problem, the representations of the beauty of the human body are results of the cultural engineering of man: beauty itself is tasted only as result of man's evolution as cultural being. The historical and social character of tastes and appreciations are results of the cultural engineering and reflect it. But the representations of the beauty of the body are indirect cultural interventions.

In a *strict* sense, the cultural engineering means to directly transform the object (and subject) had in view. To represent the beauty of the body as an ideal of symmetry, proportion, arrangement to the human ends had in view at a given time and with regard to certain social categories – is an indirect, broadly speaking, cultural engineering. To action upon the human body through gymnastics and, generally, sport, fashion, hygiene and cosmetics, alimentation, occupation (in jobs and leisure), medicine and pharmacy – is a direct, strict cultural engineering.

The aim of this paper is only to emphasise the interactions between the direct and indirect cultural engineering.

The beauty of the body as relationship between the canon and the *organon*

As it already was shown, the model of the beauty of the body is historical and social. Even Aristotle's canon has referred to the beauty of the young males from the free, rather upper strata of the Greek society. From this viewpoint, rather the natural means, as gymnastics, were used to realise their pattern of the beauty of the body. The result was a harmonious body, without excessive developments of a part or another.

For the girls did not make exercises and after the marriage the tasks to give birth and to take care of the home have inevitably generated a significant difference from the ideal of adolescent body, the harmonious look of the female body was helped by the long dresses and veils which covered it and suggested a more beautiful body than that really existing. I want here to underscore this function of (female) clothing to embellish the appearance of the human body in accordance with the canons of the moment.

The military training of men, as main physical exercises from the Roman Empire on, did not change much of the harmony of the male body. Rather the hard physical labour did this. But as we know, neither fashion nor other means were aimed at compensating the eventual disharmony of the body: the ideal of the male body was just that of strength, showed by the straining of gnarled muscles, and no more that of tenderness of a young body. Besides this aspect, clothes had the function to allow the physical movements of those who gained their existence by the physical activity, while the others were covered by long skirts and vestments, uniforms, mantles and coats: not only the social division of labour, but also the conception of contempt toward the body and shame for one's own body, have generated this situation²⁹. It was amplified by the entire culture of mind-body separation, scorn and non-cultivation of the body: during the European Middle Age, not only the general hygiene, but also that of the upper strata was much lagged-behind the ancient model. Only Renaissance, i.e. the birth of modernity, began to change this neglected and inferior status of the human body.

Later on, before generating a general development of civilisation – including the one of the body care through access to sanity and material means, on the ground of a gradual laicisation and democratisation of the representation of the human body³⁰, *but only in the Western world* – the first Industrial Revolution took place through a high social division of labour and social differentiation. Not only the 19th century London was marked by the smog that made ugly its outlines, splendours and shortcomings, but the hard work of the many did construct a type of man whose body swerved for the worse from the general appearance of men, yet bearing the entire burden of the inertia of old representations about the human body. H.G. Wells' description of Morlocks in *The Time Machine* (1895) – pale, “ape-like figure”, “subterranean”, living “in this artificial Underworld... to the comfort of the daylight race”, working in “underground factories”³¹ seems to be a cruel but true

²⁹ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Centuries, Vol 1: The Structures of Everyday Life*, London, William Collins & Sons, 1981, pp. 312–321.

³⁰ Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (1943), Romanian edition, București, Editura Univers, 1988, pp. 120–160.

³¹ H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, Chapter V, http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Time_Machine/Chapter_V: „Man had not remained one species, but had differentiated into two distinct animals: that my graceful children of the Upper-world were not the

synthesis of the facts. It's no wonder that in the same natural contexts, the members of the Haves lived more and in a healthier status than the members of the Haves-not³².

The technological progress of the 20th century has multiplied the means of the cultural engineering concerning the human body. Nowadays we benefit from a sophisticated body care, exceeding by far the old gymnastics, hygiene and fashion. But the social differentiation marks this process: first of all, the necessary means for the body care in the present understanding are missing to the majority of the population of the world. This is the reason there still are illnesses generated by the lack of sanitation, water, food and healthy food, and the other conditions of civilisation. Many of those hard working have the body generated by the corporeal position during the long hours of labour and made by the routine of their mechanical life.

Then, the social relations generate kinds of human body that any reflection upon this problem would consider as frightful. The principle of harmony of the human body, of the “nothing too much”³³, is infringed by the models of beauty required by the consume society, many times *excessive* (thus infringing the required criteria of proportion and

sole descendants of our generation, but that this bleached, obscene, nocturnal Thing, which had flashed before me, was also heir to all the ages”...” the exclusive tendency of richer people—due, no doubt, to the increasing refinement of their education, and the widening gulf between them and the rude violence of the poor—is already leading to the closing, in their interest, of considerable portions of the surface of the land. About London, for instance, perhaps half the prettier country is shut in against intrusion. And this same widening gulf—which is due to the length and expense of the higher educational process and the increased facilities for and temptations towards refined habits on the part of the rich—will make that exchange between class and class, that promotion by intermarriage which at present retards the splitting of our species along lines of social stratification, less and less frequent. So, in the end, above ground you must have the Haves, pursuing pleasure and comfort and beauty, and below ground the Have-nots, the Workers getting continually adapted to the conditions of their labour. Once they were there, they would no doubt have to pay rent, and not a little of it, for the ventilation of their caverns; and if they refused, they would starve or be suffocated for arrears. Such of them as were so constituted as to be miserable and rebellious would die; and, in the end, the balance being permanent, the survivors would become as well adapted to the conditions of underground life, and as happy in their way, as the Upper-world people were to theirs. As it seemed to me, the refined beauty and the etiolated pallor followed naturally enough”.

³² Charles Gide, *Principes d'économie politique* (1883), Paris, L. Lerose et Forcel, 1884, p. 415.

³³ This is the Delphic precept, that of measure.

moderation): the young starlets who sell any merchandise have the big breasts of suckling women; besides these models, for the majority of women the brassieres worn permanently and from childhood annul the natural resistance of muscles, supplying to the aesthetic surgery the needed buyers; the unhealthy food and living style lead to obesity, but the unfinished cures to growing thin, the numberless medicines and the aesthetic surgery benefit from this; the beauty of the body outrun the importance of the beauty of the mind, erasing the principle of their equality for the human being, for many of the young girls who's life is subordinated to the toil to gain their existence by a boring routine: the miss' competitions and the news about the sexual life of the "VIP"s are for them the token that they would be right.

The body is not only humbled, but also celebrated. However, the hierarchical access to this celebration limits the real development of the beauty of the body for the many.

In this type of society, the technological engineering concerning the human body could even change the principles and ideal of the beauty of the body. This is an open problem, but the ideal and the technological are not only intertwining, but also contradicting each other.

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