



# “Body Beauty” in the Group Communication Era- Based on the Perspective of Consumerism

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**Abstract.** The presentation and construction of body image is a unique "spectacle" on social media today. The author analyses it from the perspective of consumerism and concludes that the aesthetic consumption of the body is symbolic, standardized and group-oriented, which can also lead to worries about the aestheticization of everyday life and self-regulation. Therefore, the author believes that a concerted effort is needed, not only to strengthen platform regulation and medical intervention, but also to grasp the subjectivity of body technology in order not to be negatively influenced by consumerism.

**Keywords:** Body aesthetics, group communication, consumerism, subjectivity

## 1 Introduction

With the development of Internet technology, information transmission has become non-linear and decentralized, entering an era of group communication characterized by spontaneity, equality and interactivity. In recent years, the display, promotion and pursuit of “body beauty” have become increasingly popular on online platforms. Internet users voluntarily expose their bodies to the public and enjoy the appreciation coming along with a perfect body that meets aesthetic standards. At the same time, people spend vast amounts of time to ameliorate body shape in order to build a better and healthier body.

Based on this, this article analyses the presentation and construction of body images from the perspective of consumerism, explores the causes and negative effects of the focus on body aesthetics, and suggests a path of action for society and individuals.

## 2 Communication transmutation: from the absence to the return of the body

Compared to content analysis and image representation, the subject of the body is not a popular topic of media research. The primary reason for this is that technological developments have made it possible for subjects to communicate unhindered despite being in a different time and space. The media is an extension of the human being and

physical arrival is no longer a key factor affecting interaction. The 'absence' of the body and the utilization of terminals have become inevitable. "On one side of the screen is the Newtonian physical space, and on the other side is the Cyberspace." [1] In order to reduce the cost of communication and avoid potential risks, people also consciously choose to withhold bodily cues, and discussions of the body in virtual spaces are replaced by more realistic issues such as the anonymity of the subject.

However, as we move into the third era of consumption, where the majority of social citizens, especially those in touch with the media, have become "born consumers". It is no longer important to produce something, but to make them aware of "I need something" and to keep them in a state of insatiable satisfaction. [2] The "rediscovery" of the body also means the rediscovery of business opportunities.

In his book *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Zygmunt Bauman points out that the evolution of human society can be divided into production and consumer societies, and consumption is regarded as waste and personal enjoyment in the former period, where people aim to work to satisfy the necessities of life and the rest of their desires are suppressed. On the contrary, as Baudrillard said, consumption has long been a part of people's daily lives in the consumer society.

But industrialization and overcapacity have broken the harmony between production and consumption, and consumption is no longer simply a matter of satisfying needs. Jean Baudrillard argues that the overcapacity leads to the shift from production-oriented society to consumption-oriented society and has also created greater challenges for producers to seek ways to expand consumption demands considering the precursory effects of the economic crisis.

It coincides with the reinvention of the body nature of the consumer. In production society, where work is seen as a duty and a vocation, the body is a hindrance to efficient output because it can feel hungry and sick, and is also responsible for additional consumption, so the neglect of the body's demand is the social value orientation. The consumer society goes hand in hand with industrial transformation. With high technology playing a more important role in the economic system, unemployment and early retirement bring more free time to the traditional urban working class and some young people's working bodies becoming desire bodies. [3] At the same time, the outbreak of the epidemic and high stress life patterns have led to a growing awareness of the importance of health, and all these concerns have driven the body into the public view in the field of communication.

### **3 Aesthetics of the Body: Aesthetic Practices in the Context of Consumerism**

#### **3.1 Visible Spectacle: The Consumption of the body as a symbol**

In the era of group communication led by digital technology, the trend towards non-linearity and decentralization has empowered everyone to become a carrier of information, and algorithmic mechanisms have been able to perceive and satisfy the needs of groups by meticulously painting their portraits. Overcapacity needs the social

groups to consume their leisure time, which is essentially a pool of consumption to be exploited and a field where information can diffuse and occupy the gaze of the group.

The exposure and display of the body is rapidly taking place in the world of the Internet, where photographs and images of the body are published on various platforms. Either carefully maintained or post-processed, web users apply techniques to transform the body into an "aesthetic body" that can be admired by the audience. In his book *The Society of Spectacle*, Guy Debord introduces the concept of "spectacle"-conscious performance and show, the purpose of which is to focus the audience's gaze and consciousness on the area constructed by the spectacle. The presentation of the body in the media is in fact the shaping of the spectacle, which is not ultimately directed towards the real display of the body, but rather towards increasing its attractiveness in order to meet the expectations of the audience and make them stay and watch. [4]

In the quest for beauty, the body becomes a new kind of consumer product. The body is an object that can be displayed and judged alongside the other goods in the window. As Jean Baudrillard has said, the body is an object of social concern, the most beautiful consumer goods. The body has long since broken away from its original stigmatized meaning, and its natural visibility connects the beholders. The younger, healthier and more beautiful it is, the higher exchange value it has. The body becomes a commodity with commercial value and symbolic meaning. In this way, the practical and functional understanding of the body has gradually been transformed into an aesthetic aesthetic, and the subjectivity and productive nature of the body has been diluted. The body becomes a commodity symbol to be viewed and consumed in the process of being objectified and materialized.

At the same time, the body itself is a kind of capital, and aesthetics in the field of communication is not unpaid labour, nor is body aesthetics limited to the sketching of superficial images. The body becomes the currency of circulation on social platforms in the form of symbols, and the beautiful body images evolve into higher click-through rates and attention. There is no crime in pursuing beauty, but while people seem to be freely appreciating it, they are in fact participating in the complicity of mass communication and consumerism. "The body is re-appropriated not on the basis of the autonomous goals of the subject, but on the basis of an instrumental constraint directly linked to the socially coded rules and standards of production-oriented consumption." [5] Baudrillard reveals this truth that the body is an important and non-negligible part of the field of consumption. Therefore, it is seen, tapped and incorporated into the purpose of consumption.

### **3.2 The Perfect Myth: The standard body and the aestheticization of everyday life**

As mentioned above, the media's almost 'oppressive' approach to inducing people to consume their bodies has cultivated the soil of group communication in the state of overcapacity, including the explosion of media content production, which is no longer about satisfying the basic need for information, but rather about mobilizing the poten-

tial desire to consume and realizing the expansionist nature and value-added demands of the capital. [6]

The media set the stage for consumerism by promoting indicators such as BMI (Body Mass Index), BFP (Body Fat Percentage) and ABSI (A Body Shape Index), setting clear standards for body images, and drawing a sharp line between beautiful and ugly, making weight and fat content above a certain level be a sign of non-conformity. A very small number of bodies are labeled as perfect, ideal, etc., while the rest are naturally full of different flaws that need to be corrected through various attempts and techniques.

The consumer society with overcapacity originally meant that the active position of economic interaction became consumer-oriented and gave the individuals a wider range of free economic discretion. However, the discourse of this body standard has provided a lot of business opportunities for producers. Before the general public has formed an independent aesthetic perception, consumer capital has shaped a figurative body model for them, stimulating people to pay attention to their bodies and to groom them in the form of persuasion and admonition. The media, through the promotion of fitness and bodybuilding, dieting and fat loss, [7] make people in the race to chase the perfect body. Those who are trying to get closer to the standards are often reduced to beauty quest slaves and extreme body anxiety. They no longer question the undifferentiated application of a single standard and the illusory myth of the perfect body, and eventually body aesthetics becomes a means of capitalist control of the mind.

In addition, the aestheticization of everyday life becomes visible in the consumption of the body. The so-called aestheticization of everyday life refers to the fact that along with the increase in productivity levels, material needs are gradually infiltrated into the aesthetic dimension, and more and more elements in real life are seen by us as a construct of aesthetics. Some scholars believe that the aestheticization of everyday life can contribute to the real liberation of aesthetics, and the distance between elite culture and secular art is dissolved. However, this does not mean that ordinary people have the right to speak and interpret "beauty". The media defined and fixed the connotation of beauty in everyday life, [8] resulting in a convergence of aesthetic orientations.

In fact, the aestheticization of everyday life has brought about the generalization and superficialization of beauty with discussions of beauty permeating all aspects of people's daily lives. The most visible sign is the management and maintenance of the body, which has been 'colonized' by visual culture with little internal analysis. [9] The beauty of body is visible and fashionable, and people do not need to have theoretical knowledge. The aesthetic experience can be completed with a mirror or a lens, and the producer only needs to create and present images that are perfect and pleasing to the eye. As Wolfgang Iser put it: "In the surface aestheticization, the most superficial aesthetic values reign: pleasure, entertainment and enjoyment without purpose. "

## 4 Body discipline: individual representations that are gazed at

### 4.1 Body Reputation and Sense of Self-worth

The academic concept of "discipline" was first introduced by Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish* to refer to the means of training and surveillance by which power interferes with the physical body. However, in modern civilized society, the control of the physical body no longer resorts to the exercise of violence, [10] but sees the body as a subordinate position that can be controlled by the mind, relying on the manipulation of the mind to influence the body actions. Positive reinforcement is the most effective one, as Foucault states, "We have discovered a new form of control, not through repression, but through encouragement."

In the age of social media, regulation is mainly manifested in the visual representation of spatial "visibility" and the social competition for fragmented space, [11] Lacan argues that we are beings viewed in the mirror image of the world. The platform effect makes people's bodies constantly under the gaze of social groups, and the external construction of the body becomes people's main concern. A body that meets aesthetic standards naturally receives more praise, which is not only conducive to increased self-confidence and self-identity, but the gaze evolves into an external incentive, and a keen body can quickly detect the direction of change. The fight for body reputation is closely related to personal image enhancement. A good-looking body is often a metaphor for health, self-discipline and other traits, so body owners are also more willing to post their body sculpting and dieting records on social media platforms, and eventually become fitness gurus and self-discipline role models in the group.

### 4.2 "We Want To Be Beautiful": A Shared Space of Consumer Meaning

However, in the process of trying to be beautiful, people have gradually lost the subject status of the body due to the prevalence of gaze, and the body has been objectified as body capital. Self-controlled body training is not only a process of pursuing beauty, but also a subservience under the motive of pleasing others, shaping oneself according to a uniform external standard, and making body beauty a "one size fits all".

Social media has also made "self-regulation" a reality. Foucault's ideal of power control requires a "panoramic prison", a mechanism no longer applicable in today's society, but the new social media platforms have almost perfectly realized the "panoramic". To the present day, the media is not limited to the privileged central surveillance of the surroundings, equality and decentralization allow everyone to access all information within the traffic domain. The presentation of people's bodies is truly "in full view", choosing to show means being ready to be commented, and the negative social commentary is behind the self-punishment.

In addition, media information overload makes harvesting Internet users' preferences a top priority. Big data will push content that is highly catered to the personalized information browsing behavior of Internet users in the past, which also subdivides users into different audience groups. They share interests within the group, [12] and

deepen and solidify such interests by continuously selecting similar information. Thus, the body is no longer a private object of the individual, but a space of meaning in which strangers are linked to each other in social interaction, an individual representation equivalent to speech and behavior, and a code that can identify a group or a person in society at a glance.

As Baudrillard said, "Consumption is a communicative function, a social function directed to the other. In consumption, the subject is either trying to gain some symbolic value, or to enter a certain group, or to reach a certain class, or to express his or her individuality. And this is the truth of consumption." The concern for the body in modern society is not an individual act that means "I want to be beautiful", but is "we want to be beautiful" and "let others see my beauty".

## 5 Conclusions

In short, the standards of the body images set by the mass media and the "hegemony" of consumerism all around have led to the spontaneous use of technology to manage and maintain the body, where technology does not necessarily refer specifically to cosmetic surgery, but is a path based on the desire for beauty. As Foucault defines "Self-technology"-Self-technology means that individuals are able to manipulate their own bodies and souls, thoughts, behaviors, and ways of being through their own power or with the help of others, so as to achieve a transformation of the self and obtain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

However, this "self-technology" deviates from science. First of all, because of the visibility of the body, people's attention to the body is not meaningful health conditions, but only focused on the appearance of the body, [13] and countless people who lack basic medical knowledge join this "image project". They accept the information of science popularization in the media without screening, which leads to fitness injuries and dieting sickness. The body is a complex system, not an object that we can dress up recklessly. When we try to make changes to the body, it is more important to understand it from a formal medical perspective. The mass media should also abandon the propagation of the "body myth" to prevent people from pursuing sensual pleasures and materialistic desires and neglecting the pursuit of spiritual values and moral ethics.

Secondly, the return to the body is to a certain extent conducive to the improvement of physical appearance and quality, [14] and also opens up a section for recreation and leisure after work. However, in the context of consumerism, people's construction of the body is no longer a purely individual enjoyment practice, [15] but a utilitarian production of the body that being gazed at. The body becomes a symbolic commodity recognized by the aesthetic system. People seem to dominate the rights of the body, but in fact they act as intermediaries of social regulation of the body. In the face of the alienated body, it is worthwhile to think deeply about grasping subjectivity and aesthetic freedom.

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