



01 46 69 26 63
University of Paris Nanterre - MSH "Worlds
21 allée de l'Université
92023 Nanterre Cedex

Call for papers

Aesthetic practices

Learning, transmission, sociality

Coordination

Eva Carpigo, anthropologist, associate researcher at the Interdisciplinary Laboratory in Cultural Studies (UMR7069 - LinCS), University of Strasbourg,
Helena Prado, anthropologist, contractual lecturer at the University of Strasbourg, Institute of Ethnology, Interdisciplinary Laboratory in Cultural Studies (UMR7069 - LinCS)

Argument

Present in every known human society since prehistoric times¹ (Taborin, 2004), aesthetic practices have not ceased to attract the interest of the human and social sciences². What do we mean by "aesthetic practices" in this call for papers? All operations on the human body that involve *appearance* and aim to modify it or, on the contrary, to maintain it in its current state: shape, volume, appearance, smell, consistency, texture, roughness, colour. The anthropologist Francesco Remotti, for example, has listed twenty-three categories of interventions on the body that have an impact on bodily appearance and on the presentation of oneself in society, to which we can refer: external objects, grooming, perfume, cosmetics and body paints, modelling of skin appendages (hair, nails, hair), modelling of muscle structure, modelling of bone structure from the outside, modelling of behaviour, modelling of voice, tattoos, scarification, burns and skin marking perforation and insertion of external objects, teeth trimming, amputations, genital surgery, modern cosmetic surgery, feeding and dieting, chemical and hormonal interventions, interventions in view of death, treatment of the corpse, production and treatment of human remains, dissolution (Remotti, 2013: 85). These interventions can be carried out on a daily or ad hoc basis (events) (Gélard, 2008; Faivre 1989).

¹ Archaeologists interpret them as an indication of the development of symbolic thinking for hominids.

² This recent vigour can be observed in Europe, mainly through the university networks "Beauty Demands" (Birmingham, England), "Corps et Beauté" (France), "Politics of beauty" (Cambridge, England), "Beauty and the norm" (Bayreuth, Germany) and "Corps meurtris, beaux et subversifs" (France). Cosmetics companies have acted as patrons, financing initiatives such as the Nivea Observatory and the "Chaire Beauté(s)" (L'Oréal, PSL University).



Contemporary debates on aesthetic practices focus mainly on the political issues surrounding aesthetic norms, and on the social injunctions linked to appearance and beautification³ particularly for women (Bartky, 1982, 1990; Morgan, 1991; Remaury, 2000; Bordo, 2003; Muñiz, 2010, 2011, 2012; Rodriguez-Cabrera et al. 2015; Amadieu, 2016; see also in the mainstream literature: Wolf, 2002; Chollet, 2012). These practices would be a form of alienation to be denounced and fought (Lipovetsky, 1997; Sullivan, 2001; Jeffreys, 2005; Elliott and Lemert, 2006; Lash, 2008; Gotman, 2016). *Beautification* in contemporary urban societies is seen by some authors as a consumption constraint whose satisfaction would be impossible to achieve. Some critical researchers go so far as to denounce the discriminatory (Rhode, 2009), harmful and misogynistic (Pitts-Taylor, 2003, 2007;) or even racist (Muñiz, 2013) character of aesthetic practices - even though they are voluntary. Some of these authors suggest that taking care of one's appearance is pathological, as a sign of exacerbated narcissism or dysmorphophobia.

On the contrary, the anthropological approach makes it possible to consider the investment in bodily appearance as a complex research object, rich in meanings (Blanchard et al., 2008; Boëtsch et al., 2010; Bromberger, 2010; Müller, 2013) and symbolic values (Héritier, 2003; Laurent, 2010; Remotti, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2013, 2018)⁴. The work of appearance, which is part of a staging of *the self in society* (Goffman, 1973), underlines a membership or affiliation to different social groups (De Fontanès and Delaporte, 1981; Boëtsch and Chevé, 2002, Edmonds, 2009, 2010; Taussig, 2012; Holliday and Elfving-Kwan 2012; Holliday et al, 2017; Desjeux, 2018; Desjeux and Xiaomin, 2020; Puig, 2021) or, more broadly, it indicates an adherence of groups to certain shared values (Bartholeyns, 2011; Descola, 2021). We can therefore study these particularisms through the study of the social and cultural inscription of aesthetic practices.

It is a hallmark of anthropology to question the emic meaning of practices. Given the obvious importance that the work of appearance assumes for societies - with a considerable investment of time, money and resources - it is crucial to question the benefits and supposed advantages that these practices confer on individuals and groups. From this perspective, aesthetic practices can reveal the aesthetic experience of actors (Gimlin, 2012), the performative character of these practices (Carpigo, 2018b), the expression of a feminist sisterhood (Martin, 2014), forms of resilience, reinvention, integration, political resistance or negotiation of norms (Parker, 2010), but also possibilities for social mobility, sociability and agentivity (Faivre, 1998; Liotard, 2016; Deshoullière and Dziubinska, 2017; Davis, 1994, 1997, 2007; Silhouette-Dercourt, 2017; Prado, 2018).

³ It seems to us necessary to approach the concept of embellishment with caution, as it is always relative to the representations of the interlocutors. Researchers sometimes analyse it as a 'promise of improvement' or as a search for 'optimisation' of the self (Dalgalarondo and Fournier, 2019).

⁴ In the past, the journal *Ethnologie Française* has devoted two issues to the languages and images of the body, apprehended in a global manner (1976) and to physical appearance as a social reality (1989). More generally, the academic field has seen the emergence of interdisciplinary publications on the modification of appearance for aesthetic purposes (Czechowski and Nahoum-Grappe, 1987; Bartholeyns, 2011; Carpigo, 2018a, 2018b; Jarrin and Pussetti, 2021), which testify to multiple fields and theoretical approaches to the critique of the concepts of appearance, biopolitics, cosmetics, bodily capital, and performance. Drawing on anthropological research, some of them reflect on the aestheticisation of the self and the development of an 'aesthetic sense' as a cultural behaviour common to several animal species and not only to humans (Bartalesi, 2012, 2015, 2017).



The public display of the body is always coupled with exchanges, transmissions and experiments previously carried out in private, with relatives, peers or *beauty operators*⁵. These dimensions of transmission, sharing, invention and aesthetic experimentation are of particular interest to us. Far from being reduced to the experience of physical pain linked to the transformation of the flesh or the application of orthoses, they frequently reveal a certain *pleasure*, or even *amusement*, linked to the creation of new aesthetic interfaces and to the social circulations they allow.

From this perspective, whether they produce conformist or subversive aesthetics, aesthetic choices are always imbued with a matrix of meaning (Le Breton, 1991, 2013; Héritier, 2006; Héritier and Xanthakou, 2004).

Objectives of the issue

Understanding and revealing the meanings invested by people in aesthetic practices are the main objectives of this issue. We are interested in the behind-the-scenes symbolic and social sharing inherent in the aesthetic investment of the body. In doing so, we question the dynamics of strengthening social ties that are played out through participation (learning, transmission, teaching, experimentation, performance, exchange) in the work and games of appearance.

In what contexts are aesthetic practices a resource for individuals, groups and peoples to live *better*? In what circumstances can aesthetic choices help individuals to adapt to social relations and integrate into society? On what occasions does the aestheticisation of the body favour processes of anchoring and negotiating identity?

We favour contributions that bring out the emic meanings around aesthetic body practices, based on direct observation in the field. We invite the authors to pay particular attention to the *privileged relationships and moments of sharing that are established between people* who participate in an aesthetic technique (whether they are beauty operators or recipients) but also to the *socialising or re-socialising effects* (reinsertion, social reintegration, feeling of better being) inherent in these aesthetic processes.

This call is particularly addressed to ethnologists and anthropologists, regardless of the populations and societies studied, but it is also open to all research in social sciences and humanities that is anchored in an in-depth field whose methodology will be effectively explained. In order to facilitate the task of writing for the authors, we propose different thematic entries to orientate more easily the structuring of the issue.

Thematic areas

1. *Transmission of techniques and exchanges around aesthetics.* Like other techniques, aesthetic practices are carried out in chains of operation, in a succession of steps and in sometimes long processes with the aim of obtaining a given result. From the planning of the modification, the search for the right ingredients or materials, to the exchange and trade of the latter between groups, to the execution of appearance modification practices, in what way do

⁵ By "beauty operators" we mean any professional or non-professional recognised, in a given context, as an expert in the work of body appearance and body beauty.



these shared moments and paths constitute the establishment of privileged links between the different actors involved? How are the learning and transmission of appearance techniques configured in the light of different socio-cultural contexts, the diversity of actors (age, gender, origin) and new biographical, historical, social and economic configurations? What social links are created or strengthened through the sharing of aesthetic practices?

2. *Traditions and aesthetic bricolage.* The transmission of these techniques and know-how can be part of a companionship dynamic (Adell, 2020), thus responding to a repetition of certain criteria considered as 'beautiful', as well as the respect of a particular style and know-how inherited from a tradition. At other times, the work on appearance is done in a more creative and sometimes trial-and-error manner. Individuals or groups take the initiative to experiment, to try out different styles and techniques, in short to "tinker". This dynamic process of trial and error reflects the creativity of actors and groups. How can we interrogate the dimension of the inheritance of an aesthetic style or technique, articulating it with the creativity shown by individuals and groups? What analysis can we develop around the evolution, adaptation and mutation of aesthetic criteria and techniques, according to reinterpretations, crossbreeding, hybridisation or creative bricolage?

3. *Contexts and socialities around appearance work.* The sharing of aesthetic techniques enables new socialities and the establishment of links. It takes place in family, professional, friendship, peer or online contexts. We can analyse these multiple contexts by their different meanings. For example, the sharing of a "grandmotherly", "traditional" or "ancestral" cosmetic recipe seems to be charged with symbolism, affect but also with an important cultural dimension. In another, virtual, context, "beauty youtubers" have built up real flourishing businesses and created virtual communities thanks to the sharing of make-up or style tutorials on the internet. The members of these "communities" create and maintain links based on their aesthetic practices; they can exchange and meet online (forums, networks) or in meetings. Can we compare the contexts of aesthetic sharing, grasp their particularities or their similarities? What issues are at stake in the birth of groups and "communities" around the aesthetic work of bodies?

4. *Committed, militant, artistic sharing.* Adherence to or abandonment of an aesthetic practice can be factors that unite individuals (users or beauty operators) in more formal associations or collectives. For example, the association of "failed or successful" cosmetic surgery patients⁶, the nappy (natural happy) movement which advocates the abandonment of straightening for a "return to naturalness" of Afro hair, etc. Sometimes this sharing is motivated by ethical or militant commitments, such as zero waste collectives, slow cosmetics, Do-It-Yourself, organic or vegan cosmetics (not tested on animals and without products of animal origin), made in France or the inclusion of the diversity of the public (different types and colours of skin, hair, etc.) How is a social commitment expressed through everyday aesthetic choices? What values do we transmit when we teach people to take care of their appearance? How can we question these new body militantisms and the social links that result from them?

⁶ The ARCHES (Association des Ratés et réussites de la Chirurgie Esthétique) <http://assoarches.com>



5. *Aesthetic tourism, circulation of goods and people.* The work of appearance implies the exchange of raw materials, accessories or services which are part of a national (interregional) but also global commercial network. Whether it is the trade in cosmetics or clothing and accessories, the fitting of dental veneers, cosmetic surgery or hair implant surgery, this circulation of techniques and cosmetic or fashion products occurs at the same time as a circulation of people in the context of an increasingly important "aesthetic tourism". How can we envisage these new networks of transnational exchanges - of consumption but also of training and learning - around aesthetics? What new socialities and advantages does the globalized consumption of products and services related to appearance confer?

Contributions can be situated at the intersection of the analysis of categories of gender, class, religion, nationality, culture, age, 'race', etc. Finally, we encourage the authors to reflect on the evolutions and adaptations of these "aesthetic socialities" in the light of certain major societal upheavals or forms of social "resistance" (e.g. armed conflicts, migratory contexts, the pandemic of COVID-19, humanitarian crises).

Instructions and timetable

Proposals for contributions (title and abstract of 4,000 to 6,000 characters, including bibliographic references, in French or English) are expected by **25 June 2022**. They should mention the main lines of demonstration as well as the material (surveys and/or archives) mobilised and should be accompanied by a bio-bibliographical note of the author.

They should be sent to the coordinators of the dossier: Eva Carpigo (ecarpigo@gmail.com) and Helena Prado (helenamprado@gmail.com).

The selection of proposals will be sent to the authors at the **beginning of July 2022**. The final texts (35,000 to 70,000 characters max., including spaces and bibliography) must be sent before **31 October 2022**.

The publication of this issue of *French Ethnology* is planned for the autumn of 2023. The formatting of the selected articles will be based on the journal's note to authors:
<http://ethnologie-francaise.fr/proposer-un-varia/>

Bibliographic references

- Adell, Nicolas, 2020. "Gestes techniques et savoir-faire" in *Prototypes. Exhibition catalogue*, Paris, CNAM: 58-60.
- Amadiou Jean-François, 2016, *La société du paraître. Les beaux, les jeunes... et les autres*, Paris, Odile Jacob.
- Bartalesi Lorenzo, 2012, *Estetica evolucionistica. Darwin e l'origine del senso estetico*, Roma, Carocci.
- Bartalesi Lorenzo, 2015. "The anthropological horizon of naturalistic aesthetics," *New Aesthetic Review*, 15: 43-58.

- Bartalesi Lorenzo, 2017. *Antropologia dell'estetico*, Milano, Edizioni Mimesis.
- Bartholeyns Gil, 2011. "The Appearance of Man," *Civilizations*, 59, 2.
- Bartky Sandra Lee, 1982. "Narcissism, Femininity and Alienation Social Theory and Practice", *Florida State University Department of Philosophy*, 8 (2): 127-143.
- Bartky Sandra Lee, 1990. *Feminity and domination: studies in the phenomenology of oppression*, New York, Routledge.
- Blanchard Pascal, Gilles Boëtsch and Dominique Chevé, 2008. *Corps et couleurs*, CNRS Editions.
- Boëtsch Gilles and Dominique Chevé, 2002. *Le corps dans tous ses états. Regards anthropologiques*, Paris, CNRS Editions.
- Boëtsch Gilles, Dominique Chevé and Hélène Claudot-Hawad, 2010. *Décors des corps*, Paris, CNRS Editions.
- Boëtsch Gilles, Bernard Andrieu, David Le Breton, Nadine Pomarède, Georges Vigarello, 2010. *La belle apparence*. Paris, CNRS Editions.
- Bordo Susan, 2003. *Unbearable Weight - Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Bromberger Christian, 2010. *Trichologies. An anthropology of hair*. Paris, Bayard.
- Carpigo Eva, Hélène Gebel, Valentine Gourinat, et al. (eds.) 2018. *Bruised, beautiful and subversive bodies. Transdisciplinary reflections on body modification*. Nancy, Presses Universitaires de Nancy.
- Carpigo Eva, 2018. "Organic Plasticities. An anthropological look around body-environment correspondences," in *Bruised, beautiful and subversive bodies* (edited by E. Carpigo, H. Gebel, V. Gourinat, N. Kefi and S. Ludwig): 121-125.
- Carpigo Eva, 2021. *Les maîtres du paraître. Anthropology of aesthetic surgeons between France and Mexico*, PhD thesis.
- Chollet Mona, 2012, *Beauté fatale. Les nouveaux visages d'une aliénation féminine*. Paris, Editions La Découverte.
- Czechowski Nicole and Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, 1987. *Fatale beauté*, Paris, Autrement.
- Dalgalarrondo Sébastien and Tristan Fournier (eds.), 2019. "The optimization of the self," *French Ethnology*, 49, 4.
- Davis Kathy, 1994. *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery*, New York, Routledge.
- Davis Kathy, 1997. "Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body", *European Journal of Women's Studies Readers series*. SAGE Publications.
- Davis Kathy, 2007, *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels across Borders*, Duke University Press Books.
- De Fontanès Monique and Yves Delaporte, 1981. *Vêtement et sociétés*. Paris, Société des amis du Musée de l'homme.
- Descola, Philippe, 2021. *The forms of the visible. An anthropology of figuration*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil.
- Desjeux Dominique, 2018. "Thirty years of mutation in the staging of the body in China: Body care and make-up as analyzers of social cleavages", in *The Anthropological Imprint of the World: Illustrated Inductive Method*, Bern, Peter Lang: 313-326.
- Desjeux Dominique and Yang Xiaomin, 2020. "An Anthropological Approach to Beauty in China: The Dynamics of Body Beauty in China through the Study of Body Care and Makeup between 1997 and 2014," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 24(1):46-61.



- Deshoullière Grégory and Magda Helena Dziubinska, 2017. Beauty pageants in Latin America, *Journal of the Society of Americanists*, 103-1. ?.
- Edmonds Alexander, 2009. "Learning to love yourself: Esthetic, Health and Therapeutics in Brazilian Plastic Surgery," *Ethnos*, 74, 4: 465-489.
- Edmonds Alexander, 2010. *Pretty Modern: Beauty, Sex and Plastic Surgery in Brazil*. Durham, Duke University Press.
- Elliott Anthony and Charles Lemert, 2006. *The new individualism*, London, Routledge.
- Faivre Isabelle, 1989, "La chirurgie des apparences. Un rite corporel contemporain". *Ethnologie Française*, 19, 2 ["L'apparence"]: 107-110.
- Faivre Isabelle, 1998. *Cosmetic surgery and psychology*. Paris, Editions Maloine.
- Gélar Marie-Luce, 2008. *Les usages du henné. Pratiques, rites et représentations symboliques*, Nancy, Presses universitaires de Nancy, "Epistémologie du corps".
- Gimlin Debra, 2012. *Cosmetic surgery narratives. A cross-cultural analysis of Women's accounts*, Palgrave Macmillian.
- Goffman Erving, 1973. *La mise en scène de la vie quotidienne*, tome 2: Les Relations en public, Paris, Les éditions de minuit.
- Gotman Anne, 2016. *L'identité au scalpel. La chirurgie esthétique et l'individu moderne*, Montreal, Liber.
- Héritier, Françoise, 2003. "A Symbolic Anthropology of the Body", *Journal des africanistes*, 73, 2: 9-26.
- Héritier Françoise, 2006. "Le corps dans le corset du sens", *Champ psychosomatique*, 42, 2: 39-54.
- Héritier Françoise & Margarita Xanthakou (eds.), 2004. *Corps et Affects*, Paris, Odile Jacob.
- Holliday Ruth and Joanna Elfving-Hwang, 2012. "Gender, Globalization and Aesthetic Surgery in South Korea," *Body & Society* 18: 58-81.
- Holliday Ruth, Cheung O, Cho JH, et al , 2017. "Trading faces: The 'Korean Look' and medical nationalism in South Korean cosmetic surgery tourism", *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 58, 2: 190-202.
- Jarrín Alvaro and Chiara Pussetti, 2021. *Remaking the Human: Cosmetic Technologies of Body Repair, Reshaping, and Replacement*, Berghahn Books.
- Jeffreys Sheila, 2005. *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, New York, Routledge.
- Lash Christopher, 2008. *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Declining Expectations*, Paris, Flammarion, "Champs Essais" collection.
- Laurent Pierre-Joseph, 2010. *Beautés imaginaires: Anthropologie du corps et de la parenté*, Brussels, Editions Academia.
- Le Breton David, 1991. *Corps et sociétés. Essai de sociologie et d'anthropologie du corps*. Paris, Meridiens Klincksieck.
- Le Breton David, 2013. *Anthropology of the body and modernity*. Paris, PUF.
- Liotard Philippe, 2016. "The punk body, from transgression to innovation (1976-2016)", *VOLUME!* 13 : 1. p. 123-139
- Lipovetsky Gilles, 1997. *La troisième femme. Permanence et révolution du féminin*, Paris, Gallimard.
- Martin Paula J, 2014. *Suzanne Noël: Cosmetic Surgery, Feminism and Beauty in Early Twentieth-Century France*, New York, Routledge.

- Morgan Kathryn Pauly, 1991. "Women and The Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of The Women's Body, *Hypatia*, 6, 3: 25-53.
- Müller Elise, 2013. *An anthropology of contemporary tattooing. Parcours de porteurs d'encre*. Paris, L'Harmattan.
- Muñoz Elsa, 2010. *Transformaciones corporales: la etnocirugía*, Barcelona, Colección Textos del Cuerpo. Editorial UOC.
- Muñoz Elsa, 2011. *La cirugía cosmética ¿Un desafío a la naturaleza? Belleza y perfección como norma*. México, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Unidad de Azcapotzalco, Division de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades.
- Muñoz Elsa, 2012. "La cirugía cosmética: Productora de mundos posibles. Una mirada a la realidad Mexicana", *Estudios*, 27: 119-132.
- Muñoz Elsa, 2013. "Del mestizaje a la hibridación corporal: La etnocirugía como forma de racismo," *Nómadas*, Universidad Central, Colombia. núm. 38, pp. 81-97.
- Parker Rhian, 2010. *Women, Doctors and Cosmetic Surgery. Negotiating the "Normal" Body*. Edition Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pitts-Taylor Victoria, 2003. *In the Flesh: the Cultural Politics of Body Modification*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pitts-Taylor Victoria, 2007. *Surgery Junkies: Wellness and Pathology in Cosmetic Culture*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press.
- Prado Helena, 2018. "The exoticization of Japanese-Brazilians," *Social Science Review*, 59 pp. 64-75.
- Puig Nicolas, 2021. "The co-production of faces in Lebanon. Une enquête d'anatomie culturelle", *French Ethnology*, 51, 2: 283-298.
- Remaury Bruno, 2000. *Le beau sexe faible. Les images du corps féminin entre cosmétique et santé*, Paris, Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle.
- Remotti Francesco, 2002. *Forme di umanità*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori.
- Remotti Francesco, 2003a. "On incompleteness", in Francis Affergan et al. *Figures of the human. Les représentations de l'anthropologie*. Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS: 19-74.
- Remotti Francesco, 2003b. "Aesthetic interventions on the body", in Francis Affergan et al. *Figures of the human. Les représentations de l'anthropologie*. Editions de l'EHESS: 279- 306.
- Remotti Francesco, [2000] 2006. *Prima lezione di antropologia*, Bari, Edizioni Laterza.
- Remotti Francesco, 2013. *Fare umanità. I drammi dell'antropo-poiesi*, Bari, Editori Laterza.
- Remotti Francesco, 2018. "Intervening on human bodies. Disorientation and the search for beauty," *Revue des Sciences Sociales*, 59, pp. 26-33.
- Rhode Deborah L., 2009. "The injustice of appearance," *Stanford Law Review*. 61:5 : 1033-1101.
- Rodriguez-Cabrera Verónica, Elsa Muñoz and Mauricio List (eds.), 2015, *Prácticas corporales en la búsqueda de la belleza*, Mexico City, La Cifra editorial.
- Silhouette-Dercourt Virginie, 2017. *Ethnic beauty under tension. Between marginalisation, republican injunctions and the inventiveness of everyday life*, Caen, EMS Editions, "Versus".
- Sullivan Deborah, 2001. *Cosmetic Surgery: The Cutting Edge of Commercial Medicine in America*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press.
- Taborin Yvette, 2004. *Langage sans parole: La parure aux temps préhistoriques*, Paris, La maison des roches.
- Taussig Michael, 2012. *The Beauty and The Beast*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.



Wolf Naomi, 2002. *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*, New York, Perennial.

Ethnologie Française: "Langages et images du corps" T. 6, n° 3/4, (1976).

Ethnologie Française : " L'apparence " T.19, n°2 (April-June 1989).

Cahiers de l'Observatoire Nivea (https://data.bnf.fr/15926741/observatoire_nivea/)