

# Beauty as Art: Somaesthetic Consumption as Alternative to Docility

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## ABSTRACT

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) has enabled researchers to consider complex consumer experiences that are embedded within cultural norms (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, Firat & Venkatesh, 1995, Thompson & Troester, 2002). Such an approach allows for a poststructuralist epistemology where one can negotiate how consumer identities are formed in relation to certain kinds of knowledges (social sciences, biological sciences) and well as certain forms of power (corporate, government, NGO, charities, and educational institutions). However, often the concept coming from such research is that one has produced “docile” bodies—that is individuals who do not perceive themselves to be managed by such institutions and sciences (Foucault, 1995, 1990, Rose, 2009, Lemke, 2011).

For example, one can look at the manner in which women in particular shaped their lives around creating themselves as beautiful object without being coerced to do so. However, very often these beauty rituals and consumptive and productive activities further interests that are possibly opposed to the betterment of women. Feminists have drawn attention to this conundrum (Barkty, 1990, Bordo, 1995, Beauvoir, 1989, Heyes 2007) where women are willingly submitting to ever more exacting rituals of beauty to the detriment of their senses of self and their possibilities in political, cultural, and social spaces.

An alternative narrative exists where feminist suggest that such time spent caring for one self in beauty rituals may indeed be a form of individual play, feminist resistance to directing oneself outward, or even the kind of “care of the self” that Foucault calls for in his last writings (Scott, 1994, 2000, Groeneveld 2009) In such a manner, the consumption of beauty products and the participation in beauty rituals and programs is not necessarily detrimental to women.

This paper considers the role of consumption in these beauty rituals and suggests that work in somaesthetics (Shusterman, 1999, 2008) provides a helpful way to not assume all such rituals are objectifying and creating submissive bodies, but at the same time to acknowledge their dangers for a flourishing feminist life. Somaesthetics argues that what one should attend to (perhaps in addition, perhaps exclusively) is the widening of one’s capabilities for aesthetic pleasure instead of if one conforms to some other, likely predetermined and exclusive, model of beauty. It is thus inherently experiential rather than about a model of achievement. Yet, such a practice preserves the art inherent in beauty creation. Heyes (2007), Shusterman (2003), and Jolles (2012) already

suggested in feminist philosophical research the potential of somaesthetics to widen individual experience. In this paper, I wish to look at ways to see consumption of beauty products and practices in a somaesthetic light to complement existing work in consumer research, rituals, and feminism (Richins, 1991, Gulas & McKeage, 2000, Bristor & Fisher, 1993, Rook, 1985, Samper, Yang, & Daniels, 2018).

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ID#: 1332