

# Get touched – bodycare as a design of media for self-perception

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## Mirror, mirror on the wall, why are you just an aesthetic vision at all?

Well, here I am, a modern-day product designer. And besides just me: a part of my work. This is before you in the following, to me somewhat monotonous haptical performance; finished upon this keyboard designed for the purpose of the creation of text. As too often occurs in the creative design of objects, the resulting achievement and the process of creation must be presented in a reproduced form; that is, with text and photographs. Just like a printed rendering, this is a replacement for objects – unprinted, expressionless, a visual manifestation of meaning – printed out, it becomes simply an effigy. It remains problematic that I am unable to convey the subject matter in its comprehensible touchable form, because this is nothing more and nothing less than a pictorial narrative. Thus, I begin in traditional form:

Once upon a time men lived in an era that arose between a digital and a material culture. It was a time of change that occurred after the invention of the steam engine. As always in times of change, men must reorient themselves. Like in earlier centuries, a world of visual and acoustic communication dominates. The difference is that a new standard of interactive presentation has been introduced, and personal contact is being increasingly replaced by digital networking. Yet no platforms for multi-sensory perception and communication exist on this plane. The sensations of touch and smell are excluded. The ‘in between’ of which personal communication are constituted, social and cultural idiosyncrasies, facial expressions and gestures are becoming

increasingly irrelevant. The means of communication remain fixed and firmly set within their setting. Notwithstanding this fact, communication on the digital level can happen in an authentic manner – like how I’m brilliantly smiling at you at this moment – but of course, you thought that already. What is new is firstly, that you can admire my smile through a webcam, and secondly, that the settings in which we spatially and physically find ourselves are becoming ever more distanced from the experiences that we obtain in digital spheres.

The monitor functions as a means of manifesting a superficial, arbitrary surface. It is a communicative projection screen. However, a large part of our modern, assumed reality functions no differently – look around!

For is it not the spitting image in a magazine or when logging into an email account so much as it is the stickers sold in chewing gum vending machines, with the girl in front or her silicon-infused mother next to her, clothed in pink from *Woolworth* or *Prada*, with a *Barbie* or ‘*Petruschka*’ under her arm and Paris Hilton in her eyes. But *Men’s Health* is no problem, dressed in a black sports jacket and *Sony Vaio*, sitting at a poker table with a martini in hand, who isn’t James Bond.

In the age of ‘Copy & Paste’, the imitation of surfaces and superficial approaches in product design have sparked the same debate over authenticity that has occupied photography [1] criticism and the Simulation culture à la *Baudrillard* [2]. How skilful are we with materials, and what effects will be achieved through an accelerated interchangeability of superficial surfaces? Intoxicating illusions and irritant disillusion from most immaterial material and pseu-

do-suitable, formal-material imitation are the borders of plausibility. Their common origin is the medium of the reproduction. The world of superficiality is the home of self-representation, real and digital. Therefore, the following holds true:

*Scene it!* So here I am. I shoot the breeze, ramble on, type emails, play a diverting computer game, work all day long like a good citizen and pine over the subject matter of my lifestyle – because free time is indeed very important for a well-balanced, aware state of being. Unfortunately, free time is far too seldom directed by desire than it is by social constraints and the pressure to perform. In this environment the manifestation of personal identity is indeed a difficult undertaking! My body, my clothing and the objects around me place me in the rank of a social personality. My capabilities, possibilities and their effectiveness create my societal status – which first must be situated [3].

Already through the course of industrialisation, the quality of the objects around us has steadily increased. Now, within the transition to an information culture, the abundance of references is also increasing. Fetishisation and overabundance form the boundaries of subjective materiality [3] – with which we are also digitally flooded – and the almost complete repression of the objective nearness to the sensual subject, in this case you.

For, who are you as 'I'? In your everyday lethargy, in your placating 'point-and-click' monotony, in your phlegmatic consumption you disappear within your artificial role, within which you confine yourself with shame, conventions and imaginations, in order to contrive yourself and live out your passion for social integration, the exchange of knowledge and personal progression.

Yet the interior of this facade, the place of self-perception, exposes and completes your being. Here you can experience desire and aversion and perceive this with all of your senses: your exterior and your interior. This is the individual retreat that should remain private for everyone, as a cocoon for your freedom as a living being.

In itself the vicissitude of the sense of wellbeing is of no continuity; it oscillates much more through a continual play of mental states, among which lust is the most positive form of motivation. However, this can also evaporate from one moment to the next. The manner in which we experience it is depending upon satiety, which in turn produces aversion. For it is the desire for newness and the new that drives us the most. We seek a personal pleasure garden in which we can roam, and there tarry and revel in our emotions. Man wishes to celebrate his zest for life in an unconstrained period within the depths of his mind, in order to again be capable of coming gracefully to terms with the weight of mundane routine.

Let us turn now to a field that offers like almost no other means towards self-adjustment and to self-perception. We deal now with the cosmetic market. More than almost any other branch of commerce, perfect corporeality is superficially staged; charm, communicated through visual perfection. This so-called perfection is created by the concealment and optimisation of the body. The tempting and flawless apparitions in the advertising spaces all around us create ideals, ideals that call forth in us the feeling that our own beauty and our personal desires are incomplete and boring. In the context of optimised archetypes, seemingly scientific findings within advertising texts and the wilfully indolent commercials that propagate the application of hi-tech cosmetics in order to prepare one's appearance for the 'Sex and the City' marathon, we come across as mundane in comparison.

Thus the formation of cosmetics serves as an exemplary subject of my following study. Is it possible to create in the products of self-presentation a metamorphosis, to free them from the purely visual-aesthetic consumption of satisfaction and open them to physical contact and multi-sensual self-experience?

Recreating 'cosmetics' as 'body care' means replacing the self-obsessed make-up mirror with an individual reflection surface. This should be created in an interpersonal, multi-sensual dialogue on pleasurable physical states and feel-