ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The Role of the Healthy and Atractive Body in the Culture of Individualism. Body Work and the Lifestyle of the 'New Middle Class*

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Since Marcel Mauss' observations on culturally diverse body techniques (Mauss 1973), social scientists studying the body have tended to claim that the body is a product of specific cultural practices (Turner 1995). Hence, any analysis of the significance of the body must be set within the historical and socio-cultural context. According to Bryan S. Turner, the modern shift towards embodiment should be viewed as an outcome of the changes taking place in Western societies: from the breakdown of the land ownership-based feudal system, through the rise of industrial capitalism founded on the control of industrial processes, to the formation of postmodern society, centred around the control of communication and the systems of meaning (Turner 1996: 2-3). In the light of the work of theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Scott Lash, the growing importance of the body could be seen in the context of the transition from first (or simple) modernity to reflexive modernity, understood as a phase in which modernity becomes its own theme – the collective sources of meaning are exhausted and there is an obligation to create meanings by individuals oneselves.

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However, it would be incorrect to claim that before the 20th century the body was completely insignificant. On the contrary – the body attracted much attention from politicians, particularly in the times of economic or military crises (Shilling 2010). Since, as Turner argues, the human body is 'a possibility formed by culture and realized in the course of human interactions' (Turner 1996), the differences between the specific historical periods lie then in the way this possibility is defined and understood. In modernity, it was the body of a worker and a soldier that people strived for (Bauman 1995). In the 19th century, public opinion bemoaned the poor physical condition of the society believing that a healthy, strong and vigorous body could contribute to the development of the nations' economic and military power. Zygmunt Bauman notes that this reasoning stems from the desire to preserve public order and the rule of law. Moreover, in traditional societies there was a strong relation between possession and reproduction. In a way, marriage formed an institutional bond combining the ownership of property and the ownership of the body.

The shift from industrial society to post-industrial society has brought the decline of the traditional relation between ownership, sexuality and the body. The breakdown of this system was fuelled by the introduction of divorce law, widespread use of contraception and social acceptance for changing life partners (Turner 1996). Nowadays, sexual reproduction is deinstitutionalised, it is an outcome of decisions made by independent individuals, while the mechanisms of social life have to a large extent become independent of the politics or public authorities (Bauman 1995).

Thus, the move towards the corporeal should be seen as a result of historical transformations, as well as in the context of the changed principles that integrate the social system and which presently bring individualism to the fore as the basic form of sociality.

According to Małgorzata Jacyno, the breakthrough moment in the history of individualism was the 60s revolution and the rise of the 'new middle class' that made self-improvement every individual's duty and defined the goal towards which everyone should continuously strive for – being creative, beautiful, young and happy. Jacyno states that the sociogenesis of the culture of individualism – understood as a form of sociality characteristic of late modernity – may be seen as rooted in such phenomena as the fall of the puritan ethos, the process of rationalising the world and the shift from the religious order to the medical one (Jacyno 2007: 9-16). The second half of the 20th century saw the growing prominence of cultural determinations – more importance was attached to differences interpreted as the effect of identity-based choices of an individual. As Beck or Giddens undermines, individualisations is the new way of organising the life in the reflexive modernity. Individual is nowadays seen as an active subject, the director of his biography, identity, opinions. Individualisation means 'the desintegration of the certainities of industrial society as well as the compulsion to find and invest new certainities for onself and others without them' (Beck 1994: 19). Therefore, through individualisation, the standard biography becomes – using Giddens' term – 'reflexive biography' (1991). Thus, though in the past the calls for body shaping were supposed to contribute to maintaining the social order, after the change in the organisation of social life and the diminished importance of its collective regulators, the matters of the body have become a private issue. This article is an attempt at reconstructing the dominant vision of the body and its importance in the culture of individualism.

Body and identity

Jean-Claude Kaufmann underlines that the increasingly higher position of the body in the value system is connected with the search for identity (Kaufmann 2004: 148), perceived in the culture of individualism as something malleable, unstable, manifesting itself in everyday choices. The sole link between the body and identity is not novel or characteristic of the culture of individualism. The change in importance placed on the body, and in the strategy of its shaping, results rather from the change in the way we understand identity as well as from the already mentioned rise of an individual as a form of sociality specific to reflexive modernity. 'Identity' in its traditional meaning is about the competences enabling us to function in various systems and to fulfil various social roles. The concept of 'role-identity' introduced by Habermas was a link between the individual and the social level. The specific social roles entailed certain rituals performed on the body. In traditional communities, the majority of rites of passage – that is acts connected with the change of the individual's status – consisted in marking or modifying the body (Gennep 1961, Wieczorkiewicz 2007). These modifications had their precisely defined meaning; the important moments in life (according to the beliefs and traditions of the community), literally, left their mark on one's body. The body was rather a sphere where certain meanings, important from the point of view of the community, were inscribed, and as such it was a symbol of one's affiliation and identification with a group.

Today the unambiguous sense of 'self', close relations with other people and the sense of togetherness are replaced by diversity, fragmentary nature and random relationships (Gergen 2000). The individual's duty is now to independently construct a coherent and authentic 'Self', detached from the social references (Jacyno 2011: 5). The society may only offer various tools to help in one's individual work on 'closing oneself off' (Kaufmann 2004: 242). According to Erik Erikson (who introduced the notion of 'ego identity' to the social sciences), 'identity' is an individual's, not necessarily conscious, theory on his/her self, used by them for their own personal use, a kind of narrative on our internal 'self' (Erikson 1995, Strzyczkowski 2012: 57). The traces of Erikson's theory can be found in the works by such authors as Kenneth Gergen, Ulrich Beck or Anthony Giddens, who all analyse identity mainly from the point of view of the conditions in which it is created. Under this approach the source of individual identity lies not in identification with specific roles, groups and their values, but on the contrary – as Giddens writes – in recognising the

'non-me' sphere (Giddens 1991) and accepting the reality of external world in relation to an individual. In reflexive modernity identity must be forged and maintained by an individual on a routine basis, and in a reflexive manner. According to Giddens, the main measure allowing us to maintain a biographic continuity is the regulated control over our bodies. This control enables an individual to preserve their subjectivity and at the same time to see oneself (or, more precisely, one's embodied 'me') as the object of one's own actions. Thus, the body is not only a channel for conveying feelings and emotions – its appearance and the gestures it makes constitute a reflection of one's identity (Giddens 1991). Kaufmann suggests that identity seeps into specific corporeal and biological features and the face turns into an icon of 'self' (Kaufmann 2004: 248). The body provides us with the tools to hide the abstract nature of pure 'self', because it seems to be concrete and tangible enough to serve as a substitute for identity. However, since our identity is ceaselessly re-created, turning the body into an image of the substantialist identity requires certain effort. The individual has to subject his/her body to discipline, win control over it, make it flexible and receptive. Thus, in late modernity the body acquires the status of a reflexive project, becomes part of our identity or a reflection of the project of 'self', which – according to Chris Shilling – may be seen as one of the features defining postmodernity (Shilling 2003).

Consumption as a tool to shape the 'body project'

The shaping of the body project, being part of the project 'self', is based on continuous references to what popular culture offers. As Kaufmann observed, the view that identity refers to these elements that are special and unique about a person is only an illusion. In fact, identity comprises elements taken from various holistic circles, that is the circles of reference. The circle of an individual serves here rather as an integrating function (Kaufmann 2004: 222). Kaufmann refers to Elias, who noted that the blurring of the borders of one's identity has been inherited from the primitive societies, where identification could cover also animals, plants or stones. Similarly, body work is also often performed through the use of various kinds of devices and services.

In postmodern societies the relation between the body, the identity and the material culture is defined by consumption (Sassatelli 2011) since the culture of consumption is based on the concept of a 'plastic' body. Individuals are encouraged to adopt instrumental strategies in order to prevent their bodies from visual deterioration and disintegration. The images of youth, beauty and accompanying luxury promoted by the media remind individuals that they can improve themselves, and at the same time – their entire life, on every level (Wieczorkiewicz 2007). They impose a certain discipline on individuals by showing them the possibilities of self-improvement (Foucault 1995), preferably with the use of a variety of goods, expert advice and services. The ascetic 'body work' is no longer a path to salvation, and not even a manner to improve health. The prize consists, primarily, in a better appearance and a more marketable 'self' (Featherstone 1982).

The culture of consumption encourages us to shape our *image* in a well-thought-out manner since social acceptance and the individual's status depend on the person's looks. As emphasised by Anthony Synott, in Western societies, already since the times of Aristotle, a beautiful face has been semiotically connected with Love, Kindness, soul and an internal 'self' (Synott 1993). The link between one's personality and appearance has its sources in pseudosciences: physiognomy and phrenology which assumed that it is possible to judge personality traits from one's facial features and skull shape, while a modification of appearance allows to disguise specific inclinations. And even though the beginnings of physiognomy date back to ancient times and phrenology was at its peak in the 19th century, their underlying principle of interpreting the looks in terms of morality is present also in the 21th century (Twine 2002). According to Bernadette Wegenstein and Nora Ruck, a physiognomic perspective is synonymous with the cosmetic gaze, that is a manner of looking at the body through the techniques and strategies of its modification, as well as expecting its future improvement – both these perspectives are rooted in an assumption that internal beauty and external beauty are correlated (Wegenstein, Ruck 2011). The cosmetic gaze is characteristic of today's makeover culture, where bodily transformation is both accepted and desired, not only for the stars and celebrities but for ordinary people as well

(McGee 2005, Featherstone 2010). This culture follows the logic of 'look good – feel good' and sees this principle as an attitude anyone can pursue, although – as noted by Featherstone – the gender-based differences still prevail and women are judged more harshly (Featherstone 2010). The makeover culture is typically best portrayed in the reality shows presenting transformations of selected women by means of plastic surgery or advice offered by stylists, dieticians, etc. (Featherstone 1982, 2010; Wieczorkiewicz 2007; Wegenstein, Ruck 2011). The TV audience in Poland could watch *I Want to Be Beautiful* (Polish title: 'Chcę być piękna') – a reality show made under a Dutch licence, as well as other foreign shows of this kind, such as American *The Swan* (Polish title: 'Łabędziem być'). The description of the *I Want to Be Beautiful* show reads: 'Contestants – women stuck in the mundane daily routine – through a series of various treatments regain their confidence and beauty, by undergoing an amazing physical, mental and emotional transformation'[1]. A similar message accompanies a vast majority of products aimed at improving appearance. The media suggest that good looks and well-being have become a commodity – something that can be achieved once specific goods and services are bought. Better looks lead to better mental well-being, and thus the stagnation experienced prior to the change is seen as a result of unkempt appearance. This stems from the fact that commodification of the body takes place first of all through focusing on the body as the source of identity (Wieczorkiewicz 2007), and secondly – through the belief that we should adopt a critical approach towards our appearance and lifestyle (Featherstone 1982).

However, as demonstrated by Meredith Jones, there is a difference between the historically earlier logic of a 'magical transformation', typical for plastic surgeries and related TV shows, and today's makeover culture, understood by Jones as a continuous manifestation of change and self-improvement (Jones 2008: 12). Today, it is not only about shedding the image that does not meet the common standards. An individual is expected to demonstrate that they have achieved a success (in the form of a perfect body) on their own, through self-control and persistence, which is to attest to their successful internal 'self'. This is precisely the logic behind *The Biggest Loser*, a TV show which for ten years has been unremittingly popular in the United States, with licences sold to nearly thirty other countries, including Poland (the show was broadcast in 2008 on the Telewizja Puls channel under the title: 'Co masz do stracenia?'). Contestants of *The Biggest Loser* are supposed to lose as many kilograms as possible, and the one with the biggest loss of weight wins the programme. They can rely on dieticians and fitness trainers for help but no surgical interventions are allowed. What counts is their own hard work – their fight for a good figure. The very word 'fight' is particularly important here. The media often describe the efforts to stay in shape using the war-like language. The covers of *Shape*, a magazine focused on the issues surrounding appearance and healthy lifestyle, usually contain a headline about the newest celebrity currently 'fighting to regain her figure', e.g.: 'Alżbeta Lenska fighting to regain her pre-baby flat belly' (Shape 11/2011), 'Kazadi & Klich fighting to get their bodies into shape!' (Shape 04/2011). It shows that losing weight is seen as intentional, strategically planned and full of sacrifice process with no place for compromise and failure.

Similar values often constitute the core of the growing number of websites and social network portals[2] which present the 'metamorphoses' – women's new figures (men are definitely in the minority here) achieved through diet and fitness regimes. Such photos attract tens and often even hundreds of comments, mainly containing praises and congratulations to the girls in the photos. The object of admiration in this case is not strictly the attractive appearance – as in the case of presentations of transformed participants in such programmes as *I Want to Be Beautiful* or *The Swan* – since these photos usually do not show the head but only this part of the body which best displays the 'before/after' effect. Those who comment on the photos often ask about the methods used to achieve such a result and the answers given are to them an incentive to start own bodily transfor-

[1] http://www.ipla.tv/Chce-byc-piekna/ (access on: 10.11.2014); translated by the author.

[2] Such as, for instance, the popular blog Bycidealna.pl or the Facebook fan page of Ewa Chodakowska, popular fitness trainer

mation or to stick to the already adopted plan. It seems they admire especially the self-discipline and determination of such 'transformed' persons and they envy them their achievement. Posting a photo of a person who has succeeded in toning their body among the many other similar photos on a social networking site, where instead of the TV audience there is a group of users pursuing the same goal, makes such bodily transformations look more accessible and attainable for whomever is willing to 'take up the challenge'[3].

Therefore, we can see that the practices of bodily transformation are connected with the principles according to which the appearance of the body is interpreted. Together with the development of the fitness culture in the late 60s a toned and chiselled body started to be perceived as a sign of traits highly valued by the society (such as self-discipline, competence, good time management, etc.). In the 70s and 80s the connection between physical exercise and moral superiority even strengthened (McKenzie 2012). In today's culture, obesity and unkempt looks are criticised as they are read as an indication of the lack of self-control.

Body as a means to an end work

In the trailer announcing one of the episodes of *I Want to Be Beautiful*, the motivations of its participants have been described as follows: 'In this episode we will see two ugly ducklings turn into beautiful swans – Wiola Mielnik, former cabaret dancer, who wants to improve her looks to return to performing, and Grażyna Prandota, who would like to look younger in order to find a good job' [4]. Anna Wieczorkiewicz claims that programmes of this kind provide viewers with strategies to interpret their own embodied biographies: they demonstrate that the body may at times determine one's life and that the corporeal element may be used as a material to redesign the story of one's life (Wieczorkiewicz 2007). Thus, body work offers much more than only self-expression – the body is a means to an end and this end is to enjoy life to the full, in its every aspect.

Efforts aimed at improving one's outer appearance are most often associated with the desire to succeed in personal life, since physical appeal is seen as one of the key factors in selecting a life partner. In traditional societies, people mortified the flesh to control their sexual urges but today diets and exercises are supposed to boost sexuality, and attractive looks are to help in having a successful sex life (Featherstone 1982). Bryan Turner notes that the body is of key importance for the new standards of expression and intimacy about which Giddens wrote (Turner 1996). According to Giddens, modern relationships constitute 'pure relationships', maintained only as long as they bring satisfaction to both parties involved (Giddens, 1991, 1993). In late modernity, interpersonal relationships based on trust and intimacy (understood as a readiness to unveil one's problems and needs) serve as a means to fulfilment, better understanding of oneself and self-expression. Instead of a contract there is a constant process of negotiating own satisfaction and the body becomes the channel for this new emotional intensity.

However, as observed by Eva Illouz, an attractive, sexy body raises also hopes for social advance through marriage. Commodification of the human body has made the relation between beauty, eroticism and love more direct. In the 19th century this connection was not that obvious yet – the perception of physical beauty did not cover direct references to sex and sexuality. In the 20th century, a new cult of beauty promoted in women's magazines and in films in an explicit manner coupled make-up and a well-groomed body with sex appeal (Illouz 2012: 43-44). The hope of finding love has thus become the rationale behind taking care of one's looks. The fashion and cosmetic industry and the mass media have shaped the sexuality standards in such a way as to enable as many women as possible to imitate them, and make them seem available for everyone regardless of their social class. As a consequence, beauty and sexuality, which do not have to be dependent on the social class, may potentially disrupt homogamy (Illouz 2012: 48). Hence, body work may indirectly contribute to improvement of one's status and financial condition.

[3] Since January 2014 trainer Ewa Chodakowska has been encouraging everyone on her Facebook profile to 'take up the challenge' and start exercising to get slim before the summer begins.

[4] http://www.ipla.tv/Chce-byc-piekna-odcinek-5/vod-30035 (access on: 10.11.2013)

Social scientists point to the fact that taking care of one's body is connected not only with the hope of improving one's personal life but also takes on a growing importance in professional career. In the context of work, control over body is associated mainly with the concept of scientific management, as developed by Frederick Taylor, according to which the body was subjected to mechanical regulation (Szarecki 2012). Workers had to adjust their bodies to the work regime aimed at maximising efficient production by shortening the time needed to perform specific activities. The system of strict standards did not leave much room for any insufficiency of the organism or fatigue. The culturalistic shift in management prompted rejection of Taylor's rationalistic approach, yet some of its assumptions laid the groundwork for the later theories of human resources management (Banisch 2000). The beginnings of human resources studies consisted in studying the fatigue of workers and the impact of working conditions on work's efficiency. And although the first studies were conducted under the pretext of caring for workers' health, their true reason was to produce expert recommendations on how to control the body and increase its efficiency.

As observed by Mark Banisch, starting with Taylor, management strategies were designed to define managers as thinking beings, responsible for intellectual effort, whereas the embodied dimension of work was to remain the domain of workers who perform physical activities without having any autonomy (Banisch 2000: 65). Subjectivity was reserved for the mental and the disembodied. The growing dematerialisation of work brought about an increased importance of controlling 'the internal life' of individuals. Therefore, it may seem that the corporate culture attaches lesser importance to the human body. However, the marketing perspective, that is a perspective which 'recognises the primacy of form over function' (Szarecki 2012: 103), is connected with a rise in the importance of body shape and fitness. As emphasised by Lash and Urry, modern economy places ever more importance on the aesthetic and emotional components of work, and thus the control of the body-related competence becomes part of the organisational strategy (Lash, Urry 1994, Adkins, Lury 2000, Valentine 2002). Not only the skills of self-presentation are of value but the same is true also for appearance, which becomes the proof of one's competence. Being slim becomes a standard, required from both women and men, and equated with productivity and being success-oriented (Valentine 2002: 11). Shelly McKenzie claims that the expansion of fitness culture in the United States has caused that job seekers are advised to mention their sports hobbies during job interviews, given that jogging and pursuing other sports activities are seen as a sign of self-discipline and determination to succeed (McKenzie 2012: 8). Gill Valentine quotes Gordon Towell, managing director of a media and entertainment holding Granada, who once said in an interview that his company did not hire obese persons because they take more days off, suffer from health issues more often and demonstrate a more slovenly work habits (Valentine 2002: 11). However, research conducted by Valentine shows that in some companies at times 'the entire team is on a diet' and employees admit that their goal is an improved image and not health concerns (Valentine 2002). Lisa Adkins and Celia Lury define the role of the body in the modern corporate culture as the 'flexible body' model, connected with the reflective 'self', that is corporeality which is adaptive, innovative and constantly adjusting to the changing environment of the workplace (Adkins, Lury 2000: 158).

While corporate control of bodily needs is of rather panoptical nature and usually based on clear-cut principles (concerning, for instance, the allowed break for meals or rest, or a ban on sexual contacts between the employees) (Cregan 2012), the standards of self-expression and appearance are most often communicated in a less precise form. A certain suggestion as to what an ideal body should look like are the sports and recreation schemes offered to employees as non-financial benefits (e.g. Multisport, OK System, etc.). They are one of the most common forms of motivating employees. Their popularity allows us to conclude that having a toned, well-groomed and healthy body has become one of the criteria an ideal employee should meet. Employees using such sports schemes offered by their employers join a vast customer base of trainers and dieticians, fitness clubs, swimming pools and dance studios – hence, these schemes (and more precisely the companies that issue them and negotiate their conditions – with both employers and sports facilities) constitute a link between the labour market and the market of goods and services. These schemes offering

sports services function nearly as a 'security dispositif', as defined by Foucault, which – according to Giorgio Agamben – through discourses and practices, knowledge and exercises serves to create obedient but at the same time free bodies (Agamben 2010: 97). The security dispositif regulates the reality quite differently than the disciplinary institutions, focusing not on achieving a predefined order but on accepting the chaos and crises. The dispositif's function is to capture and direct the activities of individuals, based on the assumption that what is needed is not a constant supervision but interventions that should support the desired phenomena and limit those that are undesired (Jacyno 2011: 4).

The sports schemes for employees are part of the developing fitness culture and encourage individuals to take up physical activity; they also contribute to the shaping of a specific type of figure but they do not force it – an employee may decide on their own whether to join the scheme or not. If, however, they decide to take advantage of the offer, they enter a net of connections: the employer, through the company that handles the incentive system, provides a map of places which will help employees work on their embodied 'Self' project.

Body – risk – uncertainty

An instrumental approach towards own body not only facilitates achievement of personal goals but also helps function in the conditions of generalised and overwhelming risk, characteristic for reflexive modernity. Ulrich Beck claims that individuals, regardless of their social background, are faced with an increasing risk of environmental, technological and ecological nature. It has been created by the industrial society, but its institution are not able to deal with it (Beck, Giddens, Lash 1994). Such risk is invisible and intangible but at the same time very common (Beck 1992). Even though it is global in nature, the responsibility for it and the duty to control it lie with individuals, who have to come up with own strategies for coping with and avoiding it. However, as Beck undermines, we have to make choices among a growing number of opportunities, having no hope for any final solution (Beck, Giddens, Lash 1994: 26).

One of the answers for the challenge of dealing with postmodern risks are the attempts to control own body. In the light of unstable points of reference, biology seems to be 'a refuge', something certain, that cannot be questioned– writes Kaufmann (Kaufmann 2004: 249). However, this does not mean that the body avoids the logic of risk. Quite the opposite – according to Bryan Turner we live in a 'somatic society' where current political problems and social concerns are projected on the body (Turner 1996, 2003). In view of the ubiquitous risk, the body seems to be 'the last resort' and refuge since we are able to retain control over it, or at least the culture teaches us so. The privatisation of risk takes place through its medicalisation, that is the individual's focus on the concept of a healthy lifestyle and on adopting various body-centred regimes, such dietary or fitness ones (Jacyno 2007: 91, Turner 1996). In order to minimise the risk, one needs to avoid sedentary lifestyle, empty calories and junk food, kill the germs and detox the body. A healthy, strong and young body is supposed to reduce the risk of diseases of modern civilisation. The process of medicalisation makes certain bodily practices seem rational and useful (Jacyno 2007). Sport, once associated with spontaneity and pleasure, is now treated as a component of a therapy expected to provide numerous benefits (Featherstone 1982).

However, it is evident that the body work strategies involve numerous contradictions. On the one hand, control over body is perceived as a form of handling the post-modern risk, but on the other, the very ways of shaping the body and taking care of it entail also a lingering uncertainty connected with the risk of choosing a wrong strategy. At times, it is difficult to estimate to what extent the treatments applied to our bodies are safe. As Turner notes, the growing number of medical experiments results also in the increase of risk they pose – especially if there are no appropriate regulations on innovations in the field of medicine. As societies become more and more deregulated and market-driven, the scale of risk and threats increases (Turner 2003). One does not have to even go as far as the level of medical treatments. Suffice it to look at the changing trends in slimming diets – there are numerous examples of dietary regimes which for a short period of time are ex-

tremely popular and have many followers, only to be later discredited as dangerous to health.

And this is not the only dimension of uncertainty experienced in connection with the body work practices. Apart from the issue of how safe and effective the applied methods are, what matters is also the social response to the effects of the strategies which are supposed to ensure a specific appearance. While in pre-modern societies the treatments performed on the body had their stable meanings, nowadays these meanings are more ambiguous (Wieczorkiewicz 2007). Today, a very slim figure may be the sign of both poverty and the efforts to meet the beauty standards set by the fashion industry; a tattoo may point to one's criminal past or constitute a mere decoration. Individuals have to continuously decipher the changing codes connected with outer appearance, thus experiencing a persistent feeling of uncertainty and insecurity. Deciphering the codes mistakenly or not being sufficiently familiar with the opportunities of building own identity may provoke a sense of personal inadequacy, which – according to Bauman – is nowadays the most terrifying form of unsuccessful life (Bauman 1995). And such inadequacy does not mean non-compliance with the clear rules. It is rather a feeling of bitterness when we fail to achieve the body shape we have craved for or when it turns out that the goal we have pursued does not correspond to the current most admired and desired form. One may imagine what goes on in the mind of a woman who saves every penny to have a lip-plumping surgery and once she finally manages to pay for such a treatment, it turns out that her new lips are sneered at or at least looked down on. The need to keep up with the ever-changing patterns, and to be flexible enough to adapt to them, is a natural consequence of the privatisation of life strategies, including the ones focusing on the body.

This strain may be relieved by the thriving market of expert advice and assistance offered by specialist institutions. Magazines, websites and TV programmes are brimful of tips on how to have a perfect body and health, and enjoy the 'second youth'. The body-shaping process is assisted by dieticians, personal trainers and psychologists supporting those who want to lose weight. Leaflets and brochures on how to stay in good health and cure various ailments can be found in nearly every chemist's shop. Fitness trainers record videos with training programmes and become idols admired by the masses, as they not only show how to exercise but also motivate their audience and assure them that a better physical condition translates into a better mental state. The immensely popular trainer – Ewa Chodakowska (called 'the trainer of all Poles') maintains that 'physical exercise is the best antidepressant' [5] while 'a good personal trainer is also a good psychologist'[6]. A fit body becomes an extension to a healthy psyche. Hence, expertise in the field of body work replaces not only tradition (see Giddens 1991, Jacyno 2007) but also therapy or religion – it brings relief, offers a chance to clear one's mind and provides guidance on how to achieve balance in life (see Konecki 2012).

Still, the peace of mind and sense of security offered by such expertise are only seeming. Reading advice (in the press or on the Internet) on how to deal with various symptoms, or leaflets advertising dietary supplements supposed to treat various ailments, will only make an individual aware of the disorders they have not heard of before. Foucault claims that the complicatedness of diseases increases together with the social complicatedness, as the social network tightens (Foucault 1994). Hearing a radio advertisement for a product suppressing appetite, and then another one for a product increasing appetite only a few minutes later, one cannot but have the impression that there is no such thing as a single recipe for bodily treatment that would guarantee both well-being and social acceptance. Heeding advice and making rational choices do not really help us escape any real danger but rather give the illusion of control and the sense of subjectivity.

Apart from traditional expert advice, the structuring of bodily practices is increasingly often assisted by new technologies and algorithms. According to Caroline McLoughlin, who analysed the significance of figures and measurements during the New York Marathon, the ubiquitous statistics make pleasure and fun look like work. Moreover, such figures have the individualising power, they are narratives about individual stories form-

[5] website: www.ewachodakowska.pl; access on: 10.11.2013

[6] Introduction to the training programme by Ewa Chodakowska 'Skalpel' (meaning 'scalpel')

ing part of a mass event (McLoughlin 2010). Increasingly popular are the commonly available apps enabling users to, for instance, measure the covered distance and the amount of calories burnt, or to track in detail their jogging route. In this case, the bodily experience is translated by special software into numbers and a schematic image. This type of software is usually linked with the new media, which makes self-expression in the public domain of the Internet even easier – we may share our result with our friends on Facebook, along with the attached jogging route marked on the map. Such results are also amenable to comparison (with the results of others or own results from the past), thus encouraging us to keep self-discipline and make further efforts.

The technological solutions presenting bodily experience through numbers and charts not only serve to express the 'self' but are also aimed at making interventions to prevent diseases (see Hughes, Forth, Alexander 2014), shape the body according to the common standards or generally improve individuals' well-being. The so-called self-trackers, gathered around the website called 'Quantified Self – self knowledge through numbers'[7] record their everyday experiences (considerable part of which, or even the majority, concerns the body: sleep, physical effort or diet) in the digital form and use the results to experiment with their own body in search of optimal solutions. Instead of an expert, the role of an authority is taken over by figures which present the everyday practices in an objective and rational way. Another example of depicting bodily practices in the form of numbers are the new technologies facilitating 'weight management', which obesity specialists pin their hopes on. They stress that such special applications allow individuals to monitor the key indicators on their own (such as physical activity, meals consumed, changes in the body weight) and send them to their doctors without the need to meet them in person (Gilmore, Duhé, Frost, Leanne 2014). Such a solution – based on delegating the task of current supervision of the progress in fighting obesity to the very 'patients' – is seen by obesity specialists as a chance to reduce the percentage of people suffering from this disease.

[7] http://quantifiedself.com/ (access on: 03.03.2014)

All those those methods of processing bodily practices into numbers, diagrams and charts make individuals more "readable" to themselves and capable of managing themselves independently (Jacyno 2007, Halawa 2014). They function as the 'technologies of the self' coined by Foucault as permitting 'individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault 1988: 18). Technologies described above are aimed at achieving state of health, strength and happiness by control of the body. They make this control (which gives the illusion of control over life) even more systematic and rationalised. Own bodily experience becomes the object of analysis, somehow external to the subject, whose experience is being analysed.

Bodily practices – between duty and pleasure

In the era when body shaping becomes a project which requires self-control and determination, body-related treatments take increasingly more time and it is not exactly our 'free time' anymore, since it is spent on activities which resemble rather hard work (Rojek 1985). The ambiguity of the notion of 'free time' may be best observed if we look at the phenomenon of fitness exercises. Although a training session in a gym does take one's mind off of work, it is by no means a time devoid of rules and restrictions. On the contrary, it requires following a specific regime and precisely defined practices. As argued by Roberta Sassatelli, it is a time organised according to the same rules that the ones that apply at work – such as discipline and repetitiveness (Sassatelli 2007: 168-169).

However, this incessant self-control, so highly valued in the culture of the 'new middle class', stands in contradiction to its inherent tendency to seek escape from any restrictions, as well as to the desire to live life to the full. Living life to the full means maximising sensations, experienced mostly through our bodies which thus become a tool, a receiver of such sensations. Keeping the body fit is supposed to prepare it for 'absorption of pleasure' of various kinds (Bauman 1995: 99). Hence, taking care of oneself and own body contributes to the experience of 'living life to the full'.

Yet, an individual has to be able to recognise the fine line between discipline and its excess that, when crossed, may drain all pleasure from life. As Małgorzata Jacyno points out, one has to raise various key qualifications in order not to tumble into 'human misery', but simultaneously is supposed to acquire some knowledge on how to live fully, because any codification and rationalisation of life deprive us from freedom and creativity (Jacyno 2007: 109).

Individuals search then for the 'golden mean' between self-control and pleasure, which is manifested, for instance, in the search for a perfect diet and in seeking advice on how to eat without putting on weight (especially during Christmas). Mike Featherstone underlines that discipline is not an obstacle to hedonism anymore. The trick is to find an appropriate measure, a strategy for combining the regimes with the joy of life, which Featherstone describes as 'calculated hedonism' (Featherstone 1982). Zygmunt Bauman sees yet another challenge with which contemporary individuals are faced – to control one's body in such a manner as to break free from control (Bauman 1995: 102).

The contradictions influencing the behaviours of the 'new middle class' (being the main target group of fitness clubs, trainers, shops with sports clothing, etc.) evoke a fast response from the fitness market. New forms of body work emerge, promoted as both effective and at the same time pleasant and entertaining. One of them is Zumba Fitness – dance fitness classes based on Latin dances (cumbia, salsa, merengue, reggaeton) and aerobic workout, that enjoy immense popularity worldwide, including in Poland. In 2012 Zumba ranked among the top ten fitness trends selected by the American College of Sports Medicine, an institution comprising more than 2 thousand professionals. The creators of Zumba stress that it is much more than just another form of workout for women. At Zumba.com we can read that Zumba is 'a global lifestyle brand that fuses fitness, entertainment and culture'[8]. The list of main advantages of Zumba usually highlights the combination of a highly effective cardio training with fun.

The research on Zumba conducted by me demonstrates that its popularity results precisely from the fact that it allows to pursue the strategy of calculated hedonism. Zumba lovers claim that participation in the classes is to them fun and not hard work on their figure. However, it should be underlined that none of them started attending Zumba classes only for fun – all were motivated by the belief that they should take up some sport and take care of themselves. They admit that thanks to Zumba classes they can lose excess weight but they also add that this is only a 'side effect' as Zumba is to them mainly great entertainment. Most of them chose Zumba to avoid other fitness classes and in their responses they underline what they see as sharp differences between Zumba and other forms of fitness workout. The typical fitness classes are perceived by respondents as boring, restrictive, requiring too much discipline, and defined as 'fascist'. Respondents emphasise that they are aware of the benefits offered by various fitness classes aimed at toning muscles but these are seen as an unpleasant necessity ('I should work on my muscles. But this is torture to me. When I have the TBC[9] classes, all day long I look for an excuse to skip them'[10]), while Zumba classes arouse their enthusiasm. For some most devoted Zumba Fitness fans, the classes become the central point of life around which the entire day and week is organised. The example of Zumba confirms the thesis that in the culture of individualism all forms of constraint and obligation are more easily accepted if individuals feel that they have chosen them on their own (Jacyno 2007: 51).

Although the Zumba technique described above is promoted by its creators and the media as a 'democratic' and egalitarian sport addressed to all, regardless of their age, weight or material status, its 'followers' hail mainly from various fractions of the middle class. Zumba fans, who spend from several to between ten and twenty hours

[8] www.zumba.com (access on: 10.09.2014).

[9] Total Body Conditioning – one of the most popular forms of fitness training

[10] The answer by one of respondents [PARTICIPANT_1] taking part in research project 'Body work – a pleasure or a duty? Analysis of socio-cultural conditions of a commercial success of Zumba', conducted in 2013.

weekly on this activity, often have high cultural capital. They also very actively take part in all Zumba-related events (regular classes, Zumba marathons and parties) and buy products with the Zumba logo (clothing, music). Still, they do not take the 'Zumba addict' role too seriously, and talk about it jokingly. Their involvement in the colourful world of Zumba often stands in contrast to their other interests (including, for example, participation in high or alternative culture) and the prestigious and demanding job they perform. One of the respondents said, motivating her involvement into Zumba activities, said: 'For a few years I've had only reporters around me and I'm fed up with it. I can't function all the time at the level: *let's talk about genocide in Ruanda*. I was so tired of that! Now I can talk about nails for an hour'[11]. Their experience perfectly matches the hybrid lifestyle of the 'new middle class', with its characteristic wide diversity of choices and practices – and the greater the cultural capital of individuals, the greater the diversity of practices (Szlendak 2011, Jacyno 2012).

Summary

The strategies centred on the body, understood as the domain which help to structure everyday experience, are inscribed in the realm of reflexive modernity, in which the meaning of autonomy, decentralisation, flexibility replace dependency and identification with obdurate social structures. The body is perceived as something that can be controlled and shaped in any ways to prove the work on the 'self', but at the same time it is the 'channel' of experiencing the pleasure. Individuals have to deal with this contradiction constantly.

This contradiction is deeply rooted in the values around which the practices of the 'new middle class' are organised – such as individualism, consumerism and instrumentalism (Jacyno 2007: 37). The middle class is the main target social group of the offered dietary, training and pharmaceutical advice. The new fitness workout forms or applications measuring physical effort correspond to the lifestyle matching the habitus of the middle class that values highly self-control and tries to spend their spare time in a valuable manner (see Bourdieu 2010, Gdula, Sadura 2012). Body work is for them an evidence of their self-improvement and that is why everyone should follow the dietary and fitness regimes (Wieczorkiewicz 2007, Adkins 2010).

In the individualised, reflexive culture of 'new middle class' health is treated as a personal achievement and activities aimed at shaping one's body – as a sign of moral superiority (McKenzie 2013). Hence, having a body not matching the body standards is perceived as an evidence of the lack of competence (such as for instance the skill of self-control) and personal failure. However, Schott Lash points out that although in the core of the Giddens' and Beck's reflexive modernity theory there is a statement about releasing subjectivity from the structure, it is not true that the possibilities of such release are equal for everyone (Beck, GIddens, Lash 1994). As Lash point out, there are groups of the 'losers of reflexivity' who have significantly lower possibilities to shape their biographies freely – and it could be said also about bodily practices.

However, despite the fact that the popular body work practices are the manifestation of the values characteristic mainly of the middle class (those who in terms of Lash could be named 'the winners of reflexivity'), the cultural message suggests that the duty to work one's body concerns everyone. Bodily practices of the 'new middle class' gain the status of hegemonic practices, that is practices perceived as something obvious and natural. Lower social classes are thus forced to assume the individualistic ethos as well, expressed for instance in their attitude towards the body.

Since the opportunities to work one's body are defined as equal for everyone, obesity, inappropriate outfits or dishevelled appearance are in popular culture presented as the sins of the working classes (Skeggs 2005, Łaciak 2006, McKenzie 2013). The fact that working class members are presented as falling short of the hegemonic standard of an attractive body, as promoted by the culture of consumption, reinforces the existing inequalities.

As Bev Skeggs put it, nowadays 'class is made through cultural values premised on morality, embodied in personhood and realized (or not) as a property value in symbolic systems of exchange' (Skeggs 2005: 969). Making culture the

[11] [PARTICIPANT_3]; 'Body work – a pleasure or a duty? Analysis of socio-cultural conditions of a commercial success of Zumba'.

main material used in the process of 'self-making' entails disparities in the access various groups have to the forms of subjectivity that are deemed valuable. On the one hand, popular culture shows the possibilities of body work practices which are allegedly available to everyone, on the other hand, however – it replicates the existing inequalities by stigmatising specific groups, as only one model of body shape and body work is valid – the one practiced by the dominating social classes.

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