

The Mediated Body

Cosmetic Surgery in Television Drama, Reality Television and Fashion Photography

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Abstract

Taking Vivian Sobchack's idea of the digital morph as not only a digital practice but also a metaphor for a culture obsessed with the idea of bodily changes, of reversibility and metamorphoses, the article takes a closer look at the visual construction of the body as a site of transformation, modification, and improvement in both television, film and fashion photography. The article focuses on the two reality programmes */Extreme Makeover/* (ABC) and */The Swan/* (FOX), the American drama-series */Nip/Tuck/* and an extended series of fashion photographs from */Italian Vogue/* July 2005 by American photographer Steven Meisel titled */Makeover Madness/*. The article argues that this modifiable body is today's */natural body /* and it concludes that even though the modified body, digital or not, is noticeable everywhere in contemporary visual culture it may, primarily, point out what our culture wants to deny.

Key Words: the body, makeover television, fashion photography, beauty, the female body, cosmetic surgery

Introduction

Digital techniques have rendered the body modifiable to hitherto unseen extents. This is noticeable everywhere in contemporary visual culture, in films and on TV, in fashion photography, advertising and video art. Digital techniques *morph* the body from one shape into another in front of our very eyes or suspend its natural boundaries in movements that defy gravity, as is evident in *The Matrix* films (1999, 2003, 2003), Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) or Zhang Yimou's *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). The *digital morph*, however, is only one way of sculpturing the body and providing it with extreme capacities in contemporary media culture. The posthuman cyborg in performance art and films is another (cf., Wamberg 2002, Beebe, 2000), and a third way is the invitation backstage to witness the working of the "cosmetic morph", transformations of the "real" body via plastic surgery both in a fiction drama series like *Nip/Tuck* (FX) and reality series like *Extreme Makeover* (ABC) and *The Swan* (Fox). Finally, the body is modified and manipulated digitally in fashion photography and advertisements. Every imaginable bodily transformation seems to be possible in "the Culture of Quick-Change", to paraphrase film researcher Vivian Sobchack in her book

Meta-Morphing from 2000. The mediated body seems to have no limits, and there are also no limits to the graphical details of the surgeons' gory work on bodily surfaces.

The challenges to the body and its boundaries from the avant-garde of the past four decades¹ seem to have been displaced in different ways to popular culture in the new millennium. Australian avant-garde artist Stelarc's 1990s cyborg performances² have their popular cultural counterpart in Dr. Octopus in *Spiderman 2*, even though, in the latter, the mechanical extensions of the body are unintentional and a curse that transforms the scientist into a monster, whereas Stelarc was interested in situating and discussing the body in a field between nature and technology, between exerting control and being controlled by technology (cf., Høholt 2000). The close-ups of mouths forced wide open by the dentist's tools in *Extreme Makeover* are reminiscent of frames from Bruce Naumann's short experimental film *Pulling Mouth* from 1969. And representations of French performance artist Orlan's mediated "carnal art" performances in the 1990s³ bear similarities to both the staging of cosmetic makeovers in popular culture's reality shows and a drama series like *Nip/Tuck*, whose main protagonists are male plastic surgeons.⁴ But whereas the staging of bodily transformations in Orlan's performance art is part of a feminist, critical project, *Nip/Tuck* is inscribed in a popular cultural field where sex scenes and scenes from the operation room are constructed in identical aesthetic ways and have arousal and the production of affect as their primary end.⁵ And yet, the events are constructed as *performances* in both cases; both in Orlan's artistic surgery – with her own flesh as material, to paraphrase Danish art historian Anders Troelsen (2002) – and in the aesthetic surgery in *Extreme Makeover*, *The Swan* and *Nip/Tuck*, the body is modified unhesitatingly and as naturally as if it were a living sculpture.

Reality TV programmes, in particular, play a part in a discourse of normalizing or naturalizing plastic surgery and other operations on the "natural" body. These TV programmes partake as much as the scientific and philosophical debate in today's challenging of the idea of the body as an essential given; they contribute to as well as mirror the rising interest in cosmetic surgery.⁶ This article is about mainstream – as opposed to avant-garde – works in which the material body and cosmetic surgery procedures are at the visual centre. My study takes a closer look at the visual construction of the body as a site of transformation, modification and improvement in both television, film and fashion photography. I want to discuss the mediated idea of the body as a form seemingly endlessly capable of transcending its own boundaries in the two reality programmes *Extreme Makeover* (ABC) and *The Swan* (FOX), the American drama series *Nip/Tuck* and an extended series of fashion photographs from *Italian Vogue* July 2005 taken by American photographer Steven Meisel. In all these works, aesthetic surgery or what Anne Balsamo (1996) names "fashion surgery" takes centre stage almost literally.⁷ Thus, I shall focus on the mediated performance of the body as a site of transformation, modification and re-sculpturing. Related, but no less interesting and relevant questions about gender and the construction of the gendered body, and the relationship between body, identity and age will be left aside in this article.⁸

The Morph as Digital Technique and Metaphor

Following Sobchack (2000a), I have found it fruitful and inspiring to work with the concepts of *morphing* and *the morph* as both technical terms and metaphors in my discussion of the different visual constructions of the modifiable body. Inspired by Victoria Duckett's article in *Meta-Morphing* (Duckett 2000), I use the notion of the

cosmetic morph both as a way of understanding the temporal and narrative structure of the works and their implied idea of the body's capacity for what Vivian Sobchack calls "marvellous transformation" (Sobchack 2000a: xv). Accordingly, the cosmetic morph is my term for the *mediated body* constructed by the works. As for the television programmes, we may talk about body narratives of marvellous (and sometimes not so marvellous) transformation from a miserable and ugly 'before' to a wonderful and beautiful 'now'.⁹ Although they do so in different ways, both *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* regard cosmetic surgery as a supermarket in which it is possible to choose anything and to easily and quickly have those bodily modifications¹⁰ performed that secure a better future; very significantly, in one episode of *Extreme Makeover*, one of the surgeons put the following question to 32-year-old Kim just before she was going to have her first operation: "Anything else last minute?"¹¹ At the same time, the reality shows and *Nip/Tuck* use *the digital morph* as a visual aid for the surgeons to inform their patients about the changes that will occur from 'before' to 'after'. Finally, but not least, the digital morph, especially in *Nip/Tuck*, contributes to the construction of the impression that the visualized and surgically performed 'after' is always at the same time a new 'before', paving the way for a new 'after' – promising and compulsory at the same time. Thus, the use of digital morphing as a means to visualize the transformed body contributes to the overall sense of the body's capacity for quick changes.

However, I use the morph in a wider sense, too. My point is that the cosmetic morph as a specific mediated construction of the body has the digital morph as its underlying media logic and cultural logic. The makeover programmes mimic the logic of the digital morph and thus the programmes' mediated transformations of the material body in a sense presuppose digitalization as a development of media technology, but more importantly as a sort of "cultural imagery", a pervasive cultural understanding that, as Vivian Sobchack puts it, "links a present digital practice to a much broader history and tropology of metamorphosis and its meanings" (Sobchack 2000a: xiv). Correspondingly, American multimedia producer and anthropologist Louise Krasniewicz regards the morph both as a digitally produced trope and as a metaphor, "a marker of our time, a time in which morphlike activities and events are overwhelming our sense of boundaries, space, direction, identity, and time" (Krasniewicz 2000: 54). No matter whether the surgeons in the programmes actually use digital morphing in order to visualize the proposed alterations to the patients (the surgeons do on some crucial occasions in *Nip/Tuck*¹²), I use the morph and morphing as metaphors for a historically specific understanding of the body. In the programmes and photographs I am going to discuss in the following, this understanding is mediated in the form of the *cosmetic morph*.

Technically speaking, morphing is the transformation of one visual object into another by means of computer technology. Morphing is a visual process that is performed without the usual cinematographic techniques such as editing or other processes that mark the shift from one image to the next. Computer graphics make these transformations seamless, fluid and quick – like the fluid metal T-1000's famous quick-changes in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* from 1991 or the faces in the equally famous video to Michael Jackson's *Black or White*, also from 1991. According to Krasniewicz, there is a difference between morphing and warping. In computer graphics, warping is the process whereby object 'a' is transformed into object 'b' (like in the before and after pictures in *Extreme Makeover*). Morphed images, on the other hand, multiply differences instead of eliminating them, says Krasniewicz (2000: 50); the morph fuses

image 'a' and image 'b' into a new image that is a combination of the two. Thus, morphing "provide(s) a more chilling sense of boundary manipulation" (ibid.); the warped images end with a new and different object, the morphed do not in the same definite manner.

It is true of computer generated figurations that there is always the possibility that one form can morph or warp into yet another form – or back into a former. The process is reversible and metamorphoses can continue ad infinitum. Paradoxically (or the uncanny paradox, one might say¹³), the logic precondition for talking about transformation is an idea of a whole, whereas, conversely, the possibility of transformation hinges on an object's lack of boundaries and coherence (Sobchack 2000b: 136-37).

Thus, the morph is a figure of transformation defined by its physical and temporal impossibility. The morph questions established categories and is able to create new and otherwise unthinkable connections (Krasniewicz 200: 52). Morphing is endlessly reversible. It points to the non-hierarchical (Sobchack 2000a: xix) and questions "notions of coherence and self-identity in space and time" (Sobchack 2000a: xiv). The morph represents, says Sobchack (2000b: 151), "human transformation, metamorphoses, mutability outside of human time, labor, struggle, and power, seemingly transcending structures of hierarchy and succession".

Both *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* seem to be founded on these general ideas, which they at once follow and contest. Even though the programmes repeatedly inform us that an extended amount of time passes from the first surgery to the revelation of the 'brand new' person, they nevertheless adhere to a notion of time and an aesthetics that emphasizes reversibility, metamorphosis and quick-change. Thus, a recurrent means of filming operations is in fast-motion, as if we were dealing with magic hocus-pocus,¹⁴ and after the ritualized post-surgery images of the more or less suffering, more or less bandaged participants wrapped up in their bathrobes, there are no further signs of the surgical interventions on the body. Scars seem to be non-existent in this universe of cosmetic body modifications – what counts is the present and the future. Thus the series contributes to the *naturalizing* of the body as a sculpture that can continuously be re-modelled, and it challenges the biological, ageing body as an essential given. But the makeover shows are also inscribed in the paradox that characterizes today's notion of the body and that the rise in cosmetic surgery has elucidated as a continuous ambivalence in modernity: On the one hand, there is a persistent faith in the body as an essence in Western culture, the ultimate ontological refuge that reacts in accordance with untouchable and preconceived biological and temporal rules. Therefore, it is still a widespread practice that having undergone cosmetic surgery is kept a secret – this goes for stars and celebrities as well.¹⁵ At the same time, it becomes more and more archaic to insist that cosmetic surgery is unnatural per se and, consequently, that it would be possible to precisely define what constitutes a 'natural' unity of body and soul – and what does not.

Contrary to *Nip/Tuck*, both *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* establish a sense of *closure*, partly due to the series' structure, in which each new episode has new participants and each episode ends by celebrating the fact that bodily flaws and dysfunctionalities have been made to disappear – like for example ugly teeth being pulled out and replaced by the implantation of a row of new and completely regular pearly whites. Each episode starts in a situation of need and incompleteness and ends in a situation of fulfilment constructed as a *performative climax*. In *Extreme Makeover*,

the finished 'work' is revealed to the invited group of friends and family who seem to be waiting in total excitement for the moment of disclosure, whereas, in *The Swan*, this thrilling moment of revelation is primarily addressed to the participant herself, who during the three months of makeover has had no access to mirrors and has only been allowed to be in touch with relatives and friends for a very short while – ten minutes over the telephone per week – this is why the middle part of each episode of *The Swan* focuses, more than *Extreme Makeover* does, on the fight against post-operational depressions and weight problems. Secondly, the revelation is addressed to the makeover team and the host, who are also present in the luxuriously decorated room of revelation.

It seems that there is only improvement to look forward to from now on. This is the happy closure to each episode. *Extreme Makeover* constructs optimistically a kind of psychological irreversibility at the same time as it promises social irreversibility. The makeover team has functioned as a channel into the art of *correction of deviance*, as formulated by one of the surgeons who worked on Kim in *Extreme Makeover*. Just like physical scars on the body are non-existent, the 'after' situation, paradoxically, seems to come into existence without a 'before'. The new person appears as a tabula rasa, without traces of the operation, without the heavy burden of the past and without traces of the passing of time imprinted on the body. The body is *the body without traces* in these makeover programmes. It is finished, forever situated in the here and now. The ageing body has been eliminated from the programmes, and, as a result, they construct closure in a much more effective way.

And yet, the completely made over body is also, in another sense, a fragile and paradoxical body. No matter how many quick-fixes, no matter how much the episodes are directed towards the closure's unveiling of a finished body, the programmes are framed within – or they must suppress, as a kind of absent presence – another (nightmarish) narrative about bodily mortality and another sense of irreversibility: not concerning the ageing of the biological body, but the collapse of the modified body. Despite the optimistic closure, it seems that the programmes cannot evade the sceptical thought that, even though biology may no longer be the problem, we must address the collapse of the modified body. What about the development of new (non-)surgical techniques and materials to repair the made-over body? Closure may never provide complete and satisfactory fulfilment in these makeover programmes; a 'bodily fix', a surgical procedure is always inscribed in the logic of the morph. Thus, it is no wonder that ABC write on their website that the next season will provide the viewers with a more effective closure. Surgeons will now develop on the consequences of the makeover for the participant and there will be "more updates on some of last season's most popular makeover participants".¹⁶

On the one hand, it seems that the warp would be a more adequate metaphor for the makeover programmes construction of bodily transformations; one bodily shape is transformed into a different other. Furthermore, the final 'before'-'after' pictures of participants are digitally warped and not morphed. That is true enough. But on the other hand, there is also a strong adherence to the morph's notion of hybridity and reversibility in the programmes' construction of the smoothly modifiable body. Hybridity, for example, guides the surgeons' image of the transformed body: The surgeon who is going to perform the different procedures on 55-year-old Art in *Extreme Makeover* (second season's episode 13) compares him to Russell Crowe and says that "that'll be my target"; when he performs his surgical procedures on Art, he will use the

appearance of the Australian actor as his visual template. So Art will wake up from anaesthesia as a hybrid between his former outer 'I' and Russell Crowe, thus, in a sense, echoing Orlan whose operated appearance was to be a composite of female faces from art history's famous painting and sculptures, the brow from da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, the cheek from Botticelli's *Venus*, the eyes from Gerome's *Psyche*, for example.

In her book *The Symptom of Beauty* (1994), art historian Francette Pacteau maintains that "[b]ehind the woman there is, always, the image to which the question of her beauty must be referred" (Pacteau 2000: 31). This applies to *Extreme Makeover*'s male participant, Art, too. His new appearance is a hybrid of how he looked like before and another image used by the surgeons to form his new look.¹⁷ Or, like the dentist states when he explains how he is going to improve on a set of extremely irregular and maltreated teeth – a quote that is repeated on other occasions in the series – "it's like an artist looking at a canvas". He is the artist and he has the gift to form the actual given bodily parts into a more attractive image; in this sense, he propagates an image of himself as an artist, which is also expressed by many of the famous cosmetic surgeons who are interviewed in Angela Taschen's *Aesthetic Surgery* (2005).

But I think that the morph is the precise term in another way, too. Both reality programmes construct the body as a utopian figure, which can be re-sculptured according to any wish and fantasy and according to the skills of the surgical experts. And each new performance is always improving on the former morph. Consequently, the cosmetic morph is not monstrous. The performative numbers from the operation theatre may be so, but the modified body is never monstrous and cosmetic surgery has removed whatever monstrosity might have characterized the 'before' body. The mediated made-over body is the very proof that its owner has won a prize in the lottery (being chosen to participate in the programme and receiving the makeover for free). Not least, the body's metamorphoses are made independently of biology. The irreversibility of time, and hence, of time's imprint on the body, is countered by a fantasy of infinite reversibility.¹⁸ "Anything else?"

It is striking in both *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* (where one of each episode's two contestants is chosen to participate in a beauty pageant and compete for the title as "The Swan") that all participants end up resembling each other. This is probably somewhat unintentionally revealed as 32-year-old Kim in *Extreme Makeover* opens her mouth to admire her new teeth and kindly and politely tells the dentist that "they look like your teeth now". She is absolutely right. The middle aged white male doctor and the younger, black woman end up having the same white regular teeth. This multiplication of sameness is especially striking in *The Swan*, and it inevitably brings to mind clones and artificial beings. But this fantasy of monstrosity is countered by having each participant tell his or her individual story about the reasons why they wanted a makeover. In this way, we are given different traumatic stories of how participants have experienced a lifetime of feelings of being ugly or otherwise bodily handicapped, of not being able to function socially, of being humiliated at school and in the community. The participants themselves tell these stories as well as their friends and family whom we meet in their private surroundings, and often private snapshots and images of participants posing in melancholic solitude or in private everyday situations illustrate their words.

The shows provide us with a story about the body and simultaneously with a psychological story. The latter frames the story of the body; fundamentally, the participants applied to be on the show out of necessity. Furthermore, the psychological

story frames the story of the makeover as a *unique* story that in a *unique* way unites a 'before' with an 'after' in a body with an untouched soul. However, this is a delicate argument that is not easily maintained. When one of the surgeons in *The Swan* (first season's first episode)¹⁹ states that "We're gonna maximize Rachel's femininity" or explains that they will "open up her eyes and really let her prettiness come out", this is countered by another remark by another doctor in the same episode who, when asked by the host what they are going to do, replies like an artist that they will "create beauty". This last comment seems more like a slip of the tongue, though, considering the show's thorough argument about the makeover's ability to pave the way for personal development. As if Danish author Peter Seeberg anticipated one of the philosophical discussions intensified by the growth of plastic surgery procedures, he lets his protagonist, who has had most of his body replaced by new parts, ask the following question in his famous short story *The Patient* from 1962: "How far is it possible to reduce a human being without making it into something completely different?" Certainly, Seeberg chooses to say *reduce* instead of *modify* – but the point is that the two reality shows refrain from asking these kinds of questions or initiating these kinds of discussions at all. Instead they focus on positive stories about unhappy people whom Fox and ABC gives the gift of a bodily makeover and offers the promise of a new beginning in life.²⁰

The performance of the makeover is the point of no return in the two shows' recurrent narratives, which both maintain that in order to develop a true harmonious identity, outer appearance and inner core must correspond. The outside must reflect the inside, but outer appearance and inner core may also have a stimulating effect on each other. The aim of the surgical procedures, training and so on is simply to harmonize the inner and outer self. On the one hand, the shows argue that there is an inner spirit and beauty in a person that remains untouched no matter how many operations are conducted on the flesh. On the other hand, it is not always possible for this inner core to make itself heard. Transformations of the outer appearance will help and thus pave the way for the necessary psychological and social changes (for the better, of course). "I lost my soul", recounts one of the participants in *The Swan* in tears (first season's first episode) at the same time as she confesses that she has always hated to show her body in public. The argument is that the lost soul can be found by means of a transformed body.

These two slightly different narratives are distributed onto each of the two participants in the episode of *Extreme Makeover* that I use as my example: dark-skinned Kim and Art who is a white male.²¹ As told by the Danish voice-over in the beginning of the episode, the story about Kim concerns "a girl whose appearance becomes a burden"; she never smiles because her teeth look so horrible. Kim has a cosmetic correction carried out on her teeth – but now that she's at it, she decides to have her breasts 'done', she has a nose correction (rhinoplasty), and so on.²² In the end she says "I see a new person but I still see Kim. I know I'm not gonna change but on the outside it looks a lot better"; her outer appearance is made to correspond with her inner 'I' and she is ready to unfold her potentials. The story about Art concerns a widower whose wife died some years ago and now he is ready to have a social life again.²³ One of his problems is, he says, that he has a young mind in an old man's unattractive body, and the doctors can, as one of them said, do something "to prevent the sad appearance". After the surgical procedures, a personal trainer helps him build up his self-confidence – "They've done so much on your outside that now we're gonna work

on your inside” – and finally Art points out that “I am a different person now”. In his case, too, the outer and inner self are now in keeping with each other, and he concludes that it is up to him “what I make of these gifts”.

Extreme Makeover inserts participants into a classical notion of identity whereby appearances are deceitful and even the ugliest person may have a beautiful and unique soul. But the programme also inconsistently states that outer appearance and inner core always correspond and that an unattractive outside may create a damaging lack of self-confidence. The cosmetic morph connects the two figures, and the makeover unites the social, the psychological and the aesthetic. You are as you appear, but nature does not necessarily provide you with the look that corresponds to the way you are. A beautiful facade may facilitate both self-confidence and the ability to function successfully, which are buried in even the most insecure person. In this way, both *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* are very optimistic shows in which each episode ends by placing the participants right at the gate to the land of golden opportunities. Furthermore, in *The Swan* participants are given the opportunity to enter a beauty pageant and end up as a beauty queen, “The Swan”.

The Swan and the Beautiful

Whereas *Extreme Makeover* is about the possibility of a better life, the goal for each participant in *The Swan* is also to be the one chosen to enter the beauty pageant, which ends the season.²⁴ When the women are assigned a personal fitness trainer who will aid them in rapid weight loss during the three months, they not only practice enhancing their personal well-being and retrieving inner self-confidence, but also living up to Western ideals of female beauty as much as possible. The makeover team, like in *Extreme Makeover*, consists of plastic surgeons, (cosmetic) dentists, eye surgeons, dermatologists, fitness trainers, dieticians specialized in rapid weight loss, a therapist, and a Life Coach whose job it is to keep up the participant’s spirit and energy. In the opening part of each episode, the host and the makeover team watch a video together in which the new participant tells her story. After having observed the woman on the short video, the host turns to the – obviously very emotionally affected – team members and asks how they are going to start on the woman, for example, “Where do you begin with Kelly?” (first season’s first episode), or “What are you gonna do with that nose Randall?” (first season’s eighth episode). At this point, Dr. Randall, the plastic surgeon, quickly lists the number of procedures it will take to transform the participant into a beauty. His answer to the question about Kelly is that “we do breast augmentation, we do liposuction, and with a lot of training, she’s a winner. We can really transform her.” (first season’s first episode).

The episodes’ climactic moments, which appear just before the final choice of the participant who will continue to the beauty pageant, are the ceremonial unveilings of the new appearance. The ceremony starts with the host reminding the viewers that the two participants have not had access to mirrors for three months, and then she turns to the team that “worked on them” and asks what they have done. In the programme about Rachel (first season’s first episode), the host reminds us that Rachel used to have a weight problem and asks how they handled that: “Dr Haworth, you worked your magic on her. What can we expect to see? What change can we expect to see when she comes out here?” And the plastic surgeon, Dr. Haworth, replies, “Well I did perform a whole host of strategic plastic surgical procedures upon Rachel and I think this is one great

example of how her spectacular end result is greater than the sum of her individual parts". Again, they watch the videotape in which fragments of 'before' scenes are repeated, for example of a tear-stained Rachel who sobbingly confesses that she always felt "average". Then the host summarizes by saying that Rachel has had a hard time and announces that we are now going to see how this "self-confessed average girl has blossomed into a bombshell". The folding doors in the background of the long shot open as if a curtain rose and there stands "the brave new" Rachel, glamorously lit. She moves towards the foreground of the image and turns and twists for the benefit of both the viewers and the makeover team, who applaud her appearance and her effort.

The emotional climax occurs when the participant is asked to confront herself in a mirror. The host announces that there is a mirror behind a voluptuously draped velvet curtain, and that it will be drawn when she is ready. After a series of dramatic tracking shots accompanied by dramatic music, the camera stops behind the mirror so that viewers can get a privileged look at the participant's immediate emotional reaction when she confronts her new self for the first time; the makeover team is seen gazing fascinated at her reaction in the background of the image. We have different shots of the deeply moved participant, who in all episodes characterizes her mirror image as beautiful and expresses her deep astonishment that the person she is looking at in the mirror is actually her. Finally, the host walks over to her, embraces her and tells her how happy she is for her. Thus, the sense of disturbed identity and embarrassment, even shock that might be part of the participant's highly emotional reaction to the revelation of her new appearance is elegantly eliminated by the host's interference and the show's construction of closure.

The ritualistic revelation scenes end with a couple of statements from the makeover team, for example from Rachel's trainer, who claims that "Rachel's transformation is the epitome of a person who has just gone from being average to being a fully confident beautiful woman". The surgeon claims in a similar manner that he "was frankly shocked and proud and emotional over seeing her and I could not have done this without the whole Swan-team". These statements typify the show's understanding of the relationship between body, self and cosmetic surgery. Firstly, the makeover transforms average women who are not fond of their looks into beautiful and self-confident women. Secondly, this transformation is not least the result of an expert team's work on participants' material bodies.

The women are given the same appearance, more or less, but this – in a sense monstrous – serialized performance of a generalized idea of beauty is countered by 1) letting all the participants tell their individual, painful stories about self-loathing and how their lack of self-esteem has cast shadows on their family life and 2) setting a beauty pageant as the goal for the whole transformation. Accordingly, the programme subscribes to a mainstream beauty ideal that favours harmony, balance and symmetry²⁵ and that forms the women according to a Western – American – female ideal, in which long hair, slenderness and a certain accentuation of hips and breasts top the list. Beauty is a commodity in these shows. Plastic surgery and training programmes combined with psychological coaching can transform any woman from ugly duckling into swan. As a consequence, the show's overall argument is, perhaps not surprisingly, that surgically produced beauty is the means to a better life. But the show's fabrication of one beauty after the other runs in a way counter to its own argumentation. German writer Barbara Sichtermann reminds us in her clever article "Beauty, democracy and death" that "beauty is as rare as a black swan" (Sichtermann 1984: 59). Regarded from this point of

view and also bearing in mind the ritualized stagings of the climactic revelations, the women are involuntarily made to look like beauty clones, mass-produced embodiments of an idea of female beauty.

According to Sichtermann, beauty is *the exceptional*. Beauty is a *unique* imprint of a historically given ideal of beauty. However, it seems as though the makeover team actually describe their work on the women as the opposite: Their aim is to sculpture the women so close to the *average* version of the ideal as possible. The show mirrors Sichtermann's presumption that we all desire beauty, but, paradoxically enough, it also seems to demonstrate that the essence of beauty is precisely that it is not an obtainable acquisition for everyone. The women in the show are sculptured in the image of each other, and as such, their made-over bodies, which the show insistently calls "beautiful", have more in common with the obscene in Baudrillard's sense of the word: sameness, indifference.

Barbara Sichtermann asserts that beauty is characterized by being a rare occurrence. Beauty resists democratization, she says, and this is the way it should be. If beauty were accessible for everyone, no one would notice the truly beautiful anymore. Thus, she states that the desire for beauty and the sadness over never having possessed it, not having been able to keep it or regretting having been denied it belong together. She underlines, in an interesting and original critique of beauty ads, that "the promise of beauty to any women becomes a rude lie only if you remember that beauty as well as the power that it confers upon the one who owns it can only be given a general form at the cost of its very substance" (ibid.). *The Swan* abandons the women in a state of powerlessness in front of the mirror, where they must confront themselves for the first time in three months and thereafter be measured, the host says, according to "beauty, poise, and overall transformation". The show does not allow them the joy of performing the power of beauty in their everyday life situations; there is no 'at home later' sequence in the show. The impossible paradox in *The Swan* is the idea that the average woman can be transformed into a 'beauty'. It ends by unintentionally revealing that it is impossible to produce beauty in accordance with the general ideas of beauty, because beauty has nothing to do with the general.

The female body is constructed as a sculpture in the closing ceremony. We are invited to take a look at it from all angles as the participants turn around for the makeover team and the viewers and as the camera turns gazingly, as if embodied, around the women. The woman's body is constructed as an almost classical work of art, a neo-classical marble figure: round, well-balanced, smooth, impenetrable – immortal – without cracks or scars, "completely free of the mortal body's openings, wounds, broken veins" (Gade & Jespersen 2000: 12), "a blinding sight of perfection", to quote the way Danish art historian Anders Troelsen denotes the marble sculpture's sublime "shining and impenetrable surface" (Troelsen 2002: 11). The show points out that there is a life outside the ceremonial studio setting and the recovery facilities, though: The host asks each participant what they think of their husband's reaction to their new selves, and the family is invited to greet the participant who will not enter the beauty pageant. But the women are first and foremost constructed by the show as timeless and elegant creatures – or works – the finished result of the team's work on their bodies with markers, scalpels, implants and training machines.

In the introductory passage to Troelsen's article about approaches to sculpture, where he touches upon Orlan's carnal art, he argues that the French artist performs the opposite task to what is usually undertaken by an artist. She imitates art with her operations on her

real body, whereas art usually imitates reality. To a certain extent, what goes on in *The Swan* is similar to what takes place in Orlan's operation room. In both cases, the female body is constructed as a "walking sculpture" (ibid.). Also in both cases, the body is regarded as raw material that can be modelled and remodelled infinitely. The difference is that *The Swan*'s team performs their makeovers according to measurements of mainstream beauty, and neither femininity nor beauty is at any point a debatable issue in the show. In contrast, it is the very idea of Orlan's performances to question the relationship between femininity and beauty and she underlines that she is not against plastic surgery. Furthermore, Orlan is at once the artist and the work of art in her operation theatre, whereas the women in both *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* are inserted in a kind of double Pygmalion narrative; they are being designed by the surgeon who, like the artist, blows life into his material, but they are also inscribed in a kind of reverse movement whereby the female body is stiffened into the marble's dead form.

The Cosmetic Morph in Fashion Photography

As my second example of the pervasive construction of the body as infinitely transformable, I will look at the body as placed somewhere in-between Orlan and *The Swan*'s cosmetic morphs in contemporary fashion photography. Fashion photography harbours the ideal plastic body – the body as an easily shaped material in the hands and in front of the lens of the fashion photographer (cf., Jerslev 1998). The fashionable body is an obedient body that may be chiselled or bent into any shape, beautiful or not, meaningful or without any meaning at all, as long as the clothes and the overall aesthetic design make sense. The body in contemporary fashion photography is often neither well-proportioned nor trained; owing to digital image manipulation, it looks like a 'genetically modified' body with, for example, extremely long legs or an extremely slender waist. Fashion photographers working for advanced magazines like *Nylon*, *Arena*, *Dazed & Confused*, *The Face*, *i-D Magazine* (and sometimes (especially Italian) *Vogue*) are not primarily interested in the beautiful body; their aim is to create conspicuous image narratives,²⁶ and the digital morph provides the model's body with proportions and capacities that fulfil the photographer's vision.

Digital image manipulation makes the creation of artificial bodies possible; however, these modified and aestheticized photographic bodies do not deny the existence of a unique and 'natural' beautiful model behind the frozen pose or photographically sculptured and manipulated 'marble' body. They only deny an immediate relationship between photography and reality. The digital morph makes the body's "marvellous transformation" possible in fashion photography, whereas the cosmetic morph and the body as a material morph are absent, to a certain extent, in the world of fashion.

In a paradoxical move, Italian *Vogue* inscribed cosmetic surgery into fashion in a 70-page fashion spread titled "Makeover Madness" in July 2005. American photographer Steven Meisel directed the series, which opened with the statement: "There is much too little discussion – for or against cosmetic surgery: aesthetics, 'obsession' or a tendency between art, realism, and irony?"²⁷ In the fashion spread which thematizes "morphlike activities", the fashionable body and the cosmetic morph unite in a paradoxical performance in an extended and almost surreal series of highly stylized backstage tableaux from operating rooms and luxurious hotel suites in which the postoperative healing and caring take place. The series includes typical 'before' and 'after' mug-shot-like images, scenarios from operating rooms, in which the model poses in expensive designer clothes

on the operating table surrounded by surgeons and nurses, operating tools, syringes and bloodstained cloths and with markings for surgery or bloody stitches on their bodies. Furthermore, there are photographs taken in corridors and suites in an extremely luxurious hotel, where the models pose either on their way to surgery or after the operations. In the tableaux from the suites, the models are again surrounded by doctors, nurses and piles of medical supplies; they are heavily bandaged (as if after face lifts or other facial corrections), suffering and wrapped up in blankets and thick hotel dressing gowns, lazily loafing in their beds watching television or eating breakfast from a shiny silver tray, talking or, more likely, negotiating over their cell phones, discussing with other similarly bandaged women what personal shoppers have brought them or giving business instructions to fashionably dressed, male employees.

Meisel's fashion spreads from the new millennium have typically been narrative and filmic, borrowing their aesthetics from many different film genres. In the "Makeover Madness" narrative, plastic surgery is performed as the quick pastime of busy and rich female business executives. Quick changes with as little loss of valuable work-time as possible, with a cell phone in one hand – in the operating room as well – and a bunch of employees around. Thus "Makeover Madness" may be regarded as an ironic commentary on female executives' busy life in the fast lane of big business, where plastic surgery is a common part of their self-centred way of life, not an exception to it. No matter how ironic and surreal the photographs may be, the series' extended staging of cosmetic surgery as an everyday upper class luxury reflects the spreading of plastic surgery to wider parts of the population during the past decade – both as an actual practice and cultural knowledge. The photographs comment self-consciously on the discussion about plastic surgery as an intervention into an otherwise 'natural' body: we see on one of the photographs an open magazine with pictures of Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes under the headline "Are They Faking It?" But, basically, they do not question the 'natural' uniqueness of the body of the models whose names are included in the credit information. The printed information on the before-after photographs, where the models' seemingly ordinary black-and-white 'before' face is placed side by side with a glamorous colour 'after' photograph, refers not only to the barely visible clothes but also to make-up brands; thus the brief commodity information anchors, not least, fashion photography as a field of (digital) image manipulation. In "Makeover Madness", the cosmetic morph is therefore constructed solely as a *mediated* idea of the body. Despite the traces of blood after lip enhancements or bloody stitches after eyelid corrections, the photographs leave no traces of cosmetic surgery on the real model body. The models in fashion and, by extension, fashion per se remain untouched by the world of cosmetic surgery that inhabits Steven Meisel's fashion photographs. Meisel's photographs of cosmetic surgery confirm rather than deny that the model remains exceptional and that the fashion world is still filled with exceptionally beautiful women. Thus, the fashion world itself remains exclusively fashionable, filled with the rare basis for 'real' beauty.²⁸

***Nip/Tuck* and the Operation Room as Attraction**

"Tell me what you don't like about yourself" is a recurrent question in the bleak and dark-humoured (melo)drama series *Nip/Tuck*. The question is asked to each new patient by one of the two male plastic surgeons, Sean and Christian, and like in the reality shows, the doctors believe that performing cosmetic surgery and improving on

patients' looks may provide them with an opportunity for a better life. However, the series anchors the surgeon's professional beliefs in a wider field of tension, as patients in several cases do not get a better life. Likewise, money is very often a decisive issue for the two men. The genre – a bleak version of the soap-inspired drama serial – and the morph as a metaphor mirror each other; there is no closure, a fact that is already pointed out in the title sequence. Here we see close-ups of naked chalk-white mannequins' bodies and a similarly chalk-coloured (gloved) hand drawing red lines on the mannequins with a marker. Sometimes a mannequin moves a tiny bit (a finger twitches almost invisibly, an eye moves a millimetre), as if it were situated in some impossible place between human flesh and inorganic material; in the last shot, the lower part of a female mannequin's face morphs smoothly into a human face.²⁹

Sean and Christian are friends and have, over some years, developed a profitable business as well as a reputation for being the best (and most handsome) plastic surgeons in the Miami area. Sean is married and tries to administer a complicated family life; he is the more conscientious one, who keeps arguing that they should do more reconstructive pro bono work. Christian is single; he is less occupied with the moral aspects of their work and more interested in sex, beautiful women and fast cars – even though he is also a good person at heart and longs for a family like his partner's. *Nip/Tuck* is about the clinic and the patients, their desire for aesthetic and – sometimes – reconstructive – surgery, the reasons why they consult the two surgeons, Sean's and Christian's discussions about the reasonableness of their patient's requests, the surgery and the more or less successful aftermath of the successfully performed operations. Partly, it is about Sean's and Christian's private life – which is often indistinguishable from their relations to their patients – Sean's ups and downs in his relationship with his wife who, in the fourth episode, goes back to medical school and his loving but no less problematic relationship to his troubled and sensitive teenage son, whose biological father, we learn in the second season, is not Sean but Christian.³⁰ Finally, “performative numbers”, sex scenes and operation scenes, which are constructed more or less alike, punctuate the episodes.

There is an abundance of discussions about cosmetic surgery in the show – a necessary reconstructive procedure (a child with large burns on his body (pilot episode), a model who has had her face cut up by a serial rapist (episode 20) or a black woman who was circumcised as a child and wants a new clitoris (episode 16)), a purely aesthetic procedure (an older and very rich woman who wants to have “her eyes refreshed” before her daughter's wedding (the pilot) and ends up having a “plastic surgery addiction problem” (as one of the surgeons put it in episode 17) or Sean's mother-in-law, a psychologist, who wants a facelift because she is going to have her picture taken for her new book (episode 14)) – or something in between – a cancer patient who had a breast removed and wants a new breast because she has fallen in love (episode 6) or a blind woman who wants to have her eyes look like she is not blind (episode 24). The two friends are constantly forced to face moral issues and this often gets them into trouble, partly because they are not able to see through their patients' more or less problematic or sinister motives for wanting surgery, partly because they in some cases end up going after the money. “We're in the vanity business”, Christian remarks at one point, but the show also places them in a business (too) close to mentally disturbed persons, to criminals, to the porno industry and to prostitution, to situations in which cosmetic surgery could, for example, remove significant birth marks

that might reveal a paedophile priest (episode 8) or alter a face in order to help a criminal to hide himself (pilot episode and episode 13).³¹

Especially Christian, who is obsessed with perfection, thinks that they really improve their patients' lives, whereas Sean pessimistically objects that they more rightly "externalize the hate they feel towards themselves". Despite Christian's aspirations to create beauty and perfection, the show connects cosmetic surgery and deviations over and over again. And, at the same time, it seems to take great pains to place Sean's wife Julia outside this rather suspect world as if she were the innocent virgin in contrast to the more or less prostituted world of cosmetic surgery – the real woman as opposed to the many gender-bendings that populate the show. As if there were one world of truth and a different and shady world of complicated ambiguities in *Nip/Tuck*.³² *Nip/Tuck* takes a much more ambiguous stance towards cosmetic surgery than do the two reality shows. The drama series is much more provocative and interested in discussing cultural issues and is the only work, among those I have discussed in this article, that points out that the growing business of cosmetic surgery is about hiding the body's inevitable ageing – even though *Nip/Tuck* can only embody this discussion in pathetic female characters: One of the recurrent characters in the first two seasons is Mrs. Grubman, a rich widow, who wants a younger body, and who is represented as a pathetic "scalpel slave" to borrow one of Anne Balsamo's phrases (Balsamo 1997: 70), a lonely and miserable woman who ends up in a wheel chair (episode 17) because she did not inform the surgeons, prior to an operation, that she took antidepressants in fear that they would deny her the operation.

On the one hand, the series shows that fantasies about *quick fixes* flourish, no matter how young, how thin or how pretty the patient is. On the other hand, it also wishes to maintain through the main characters, the two "flesh sculptors" (episode 23) with their piercing gaze for bodily flaws and their preference for symmetry, a trained body and firm breasts, that there is a realm of 'natural' bodily beauty in which quick changes are not necessary. For both men, Sean's wife belongs to this world. "I don't want my family infected by what we do here", Sean states in the pilot – which is of course an impossible task. Conversely, Christian points without hesitation to the slight irregularities in his sexy model-girlfriend's appearance, and he marks with her lipstick the areas on her curvaceous body he thinks she has to have done in order to achieve what he regards as physical perfection. When she looks at herself in the mirror and sees the red lines which designate "your problem areas" as Christian puts it, she desperately asks him if she is that ugly, hereby not referring to the scarily outlined body she is looking at, but to the imperfect body his gaze has pointed out to her.

Victoria Duckett suggests, in her article about Orlan, that what makes it such a disturbing experience to watch the performance artist's operations on her body is the difficulty "in watching the construction of the product rather than its fetishistic display" (Duckett 2000: 211). The same could actually be said of *Nip/Tuck*, *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*. The body burdened with the stigmata of the surgeons' marker brutally announces the verdict of bodily incompleteness. It points out that the body does not belong to the one that inhabits it but to another person's objectifying gaze, and it says that the material body is never a finished, singular entity, but a modifiable mass of organic matter. But, contrary to Orlan's operating theatre, the surgery scenes in *Nip/Tuck* are constructed as entertaining acts meant to provide the audience with an arousal similar to the show's explicit sex scenes. They appear as spectacular attractions, filled with flesh and blood and often a grim humour which adds a comic twist to the

scenes, excessive “performative numbers” as Marsha Kinder characterizes violent sequences in action films, filled with “visceral pleasures” (Kinder 2001: 70) – and the show seems self-conscious in showing its awareness of this construction by letting Sean and Christian perform their operations to the accompaniment of music coming from the CD player that is turned on at the beginning of each operation.

To take a typical example, in the second surgery ‘number’ in the pilot episode, we see that Sean signals ‘go’ by saying “let’s do it” and then there is a close-up of the CD player hanging on the wall. It starts spinning and Rolling Stones’ *Paint it Black* fills the operating room and simultaneously blocks out all natural sound. A slow-motion shot of a scalpel being handed to Sean sets off the operation, which stages the surgical procedures by means of different image speeds, camera angles and camera focus and different editing strategies. As the song is coming to an end, there are close-ups of bloody surgery tools and gloves landing in metal bowls and glasses and then there is a cut to a close-up of a post-surgery image of the patient. The first sex scene between Christian and his model girlfriend Kimber is constructed and inserted in the narrative in a similar manner. So the operating scenes are not meant to point to the two surgeons’ undoubted skills. Rather, they stage the cosmetic morph as a visual attraction, in which flesh and blood are sexualized, just like when the perfect bodies rub against each other in the sex scenes. Both the operating room and the anaesthetized bodies, the nipping and tucking, the lifting and sucking appear as aesthetic fragments. As such, the scenes emphasize the narrative construction of the universe of plastic surgery as a twilight zone and they underline the two surgeons’ idea of the body – a fragmentary unit with separate parts, each modifiable independent of the other. Finally, these scenes bring into focus the fact that the televisual operating theatre, here as well as in the reality shows, offers unique and uncannily fascinating visual pleasure.

Concluding Remarks

The recurrent line in *Nip/Tuck*, “Tell me what you don’t like about yourself”, indicates the exact focus of the television shows that I have discussed in this article. The need and the wish for a beautiful body. The line also highlights what the shows are *not* about: death, bodily decay – plastic surgical interventions in order to escape the final closure. *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* argue that the average person will definitely live a better life after a makeover, not least because the transformation will liberate the nobility of the soul. The body is infinitely modifiable – a material morph that can be sculptured and re-sculptured. As so vividly shown in the fashion photographs as well, this modifiable body is today’s *natural body*. A form that we do not have to inhabit if we want to look different, a body that digital image manipulation can alter in fashion photography, a mediated body that, in the form of the cosmetic morph, can change quickly and marvellously in television shows, a body whose transformations – as shown in the reality programmes – will in no time make a negative self-image disappear. It may be said of all the works discussed above that they, in a more or less ambiguous way, touch upon the field of artificiality and the body – most ambiguously in *Nip/Tuck*, which is also the most daring in its willingness to address the many moral and psychological issues surrounding cosmetic surgery. *Nip/Tuck* discusses ethical questions on several occasions and at the same time stops at nothing to stage its operating scenes as marketable attractions.

The cosmetic morph is just like the digital, “a marker of our time”, to quote Louise Krasniewics once more. It is, not least, a marker of the things our present culture wishes to deny.

Notes

1. From the 1960's and 1970's body art and performance art, including such names as Bruce Nauman, Hermann Nitch, Chris Burden and Vico Acconci.
2. For example Stelarc's *Third Hand Performances 1992-1993* (cf., Wamberg 2002).
3. Orlan names her performances *Carnal Art* on her web site www.orlan.net. By *Carnal Art* she understands “an inscription on the flesh, as our age now makes possible”, a time when “the body has become an 'modified ready-made'”. Orlan's carnal art is not founded on the notion of an essential body, on the contrary. Her message is much more sophisticated; thus she underlines that “*Carnal Art* is not against cosmetic surgery but, rather against the conventions carried by it and their subsequent inscription”. For an introduction to Orlan's body art, see Rose (1993), and for an excellent discussion of the morph in relation to Orlan, see Duckett 2000.
4. The series premiered July 2003 on the cable channel FX; the third season started September 2005. *Nip/Tuck* has been the most successful show on cable television ever and has had especially high ratings in the 18 to 49 group. In the following I refer to the first two seasons released on DVD.
5. “This show is about skin on every level”, says series creator Ryan Murphy in the *New York Times*, August 2, 2003 (Udovitch 2003).
6. This goes for Denmark, too, according to the relative success of the magazine *Plastique*. According to Bock (2005), the first issue sold 15,000 out of 20,000 copies. The magazine has 500 subscribers (summer 2005), of which half are men. It is estimated that 10,000 plastic surgeries are performed in Denmark annually (according to Bock 2005). In the US, the number of cosmetic plastic treatments has risen by 24 per cent during the past four years (cf., La Ferla & Singer 2005), in England the same percentage is as high as 83, according to Moore (2005).
7. Anne Balsamo (1996) among others distinguishes between reconstructive surgery and cosmetic or aesthetic surgery. Even though she underlines that there is no unambiguous distinction between the two terms, in the sense that all plastic surgery involves aesthetic considerations, she underlines that reconstructive surgery heals “catastrophic, congenital, or cancer-damage deformities” whereas aesthetic surgery is elective to a much larger extent (Balsamo 1996: 58).
8. The present article is written within a wider research context, a project about “Morphing and Extreme Makeovers – Visuality and the Body in the Culture of Quick-Change”, which I am conducting as part of the larger research project *High-tension Aesthetics. Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Media* financed by the Danish Research Council on a three-year grant. For further information about the project, see www.high-tension-aesthetics.com.
9. On *Extreme Makeover's* homepage www.abc.go.com/primetime/extrememakeover, ABC writes that in the programme, “fairly tales fantasies come true”. The site contains summaries of all episodes from the three seasons.
10. Here, as elsewhere, I use Mike Featherstone's term for a range of different practices that include “piercing, tattooing, branding, cutting, binding and inserting implants to alter the appearance and form of the body” (Featherstone 2000: 1) – contrary to slower practices like gymnastics and working out, which do not use instruments to cut or pierce for example. I think this definition will have to be reconsidered before long due to the development of surgical techniques. Many plastic surgeons have stated that future plastic surgery will use the scalpel to a much lesser extent.
11. Second season's episode 13. I use examples from this episode, too, when I go into more detail discussing *Extreme Makeover* below.
In an article in the English magazine *Red* (Moore 2005), plastic surgeons criticize *Extreme Makeover's* quick changes and its requirement that participants undergo maximum change. They argue that far too many procedures are performed at the same time and also that the participants are not given enough time to decide whether they want to undergo more changes. Finally, due to the multiple operative procedures in the course of one operation, the British specialists criticize the programme for keeping patients under anaesthetics too long. That multiple procedures take place at the same time in the mentioned episode of *Extreme Make-*

- over is shown strikingly in close-ups of what seem like the surgeons notes. Each line on the list is marked after each new modification as if the note were some kind of shopping list.
12. For example, in the second season's finale where Joan Rivers playing Joan Rivers comes to the two surgeons in order to have a makeover that will give her back her 'natural' look. When the surgeons morph an image of her present outer into an image of what she would look like had her face not been modified in any way, she is horrified.
 13. No wonder that the morph as a figure of transformation belongs to the horror film genre. Noel Carroll (1990) specifically argues that the uncanny is connected to categorical incompleteness and the blurring of boundaries.
 14. Even though fast-motion is also used in *The Swan* in order to diminish the graphic revelation of blood and the bodily inner – contrary to *Extreme Makeover* and, not least, *Nip/Tuck*. *The Swan* also uses blurring of parts of the image during surgery sequences.
 15. Sharon Stone, for example, filed suit against a plastic surgeon for having disclosed that he had performed a face-lift on the actress. According to Dargis (2005), the legal proceedings emphasized the actress' *natural* beauty. A gossip website like www.awfulplasticsurgery.com seemingly reveals celebrities plastic surgery by opposing before and after pictures.
 16. According to the show's website, a fourth season has not yet been scheduled.
 17. Surgeons in the programmes often refer to actors and actresses when they try to explain the result of the makeover to the participants – we never see them use digital morphing as information channels. The MTV show *I Want a Famous Face* (www.mtv.com/onair/dyn/i_want_a_famous_face_2/series.jhtml) takes this comparison between star and the average person a step further. Here we follow young people who go through a makeover with the specific goal of coming to resemble their idol – Brad Pitt for example. MTV underlines on the website that the channel is not paying for the hopeful wannabes' surgical performances: "The subjects of this documentary series decided on their own to get plastic surgery. MTV then asked to document their journey".
 18. See Sweetman (2000) for a discussion on the meaning of *permanence* in relation to piercing and tattooing.
 19. My examples are taken from the first season's episode one and eight (broadcast in US in the spring of 2004). Until now *The Swan* has lasted for two seasons; the second season without very much attendance in the US.
 20. Thus *Extreme Makeover* may partake of ABC's positive self-branding. This becomes even more obvious in *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*, in which the family who has been given a complete home makeover praise the network with the words "thank you ABC, thank you ABC" in the final images.
 21. In each *Extreme Makeover* episode, two participants get a makeover, and the programme crosscuts between them. A third participant gets a "Mini-Extreme Makeover": New hairstyle, new make-up and new clothes. The person's new appearance is always revealed to friends and family in the end of the first half of the episode.
 22. On the *Extreme Makeover* web site, under Patient Bios, one can read that "Kim received a nose job, lower eyelid lift, upper lip reduction, breast augmentation, removal of a third nipple, liposuction of abdomen and inner thighs, PRK eye surgery, laser hair removal, extraction of 6 front teeth and 4 lower teeth, lip and gum repositioning, crown lengthening, 2 crowns, upper and lower bridges, partial dentures and 5 da Vinci porcelain veneers". Art "received a brow lift, face lift, a neck lift with contouring of the jaw line & chin, a nose job, upper and lower eyelid lift, a cheek lift, liposuction of chest and flanks, a tummy tuck, a Foto facial, removal of moles on face, Botox for crows' feet, Zoom whitening, 8 upper da Vinci porcelain veneers, a night guard, cataract surgery, a hair transplant and hair restoration". Most 'patient bios' list a similar or even greater number of body modifications performed by "the Extreme Team".
 23. *Extreme Makeover* selects many men for a makeover. This may not mirror the actual share of men in the audience, but it does seem to mirror the fact that more and more men have plastic surgery. According to Angelika Taschen (2005), 15 per cent of all patients were male in 2002, and this percentage is growing. A Danish report about private plastic surgery clinics published by the National Board of Health in Denmark shows the same tendency (cf., Bock (2005)). Angelika Taschen shows, by the way, that not until the end of the Nineteenth century did the number of women having plastic surgery surpass the number of men.
 24. See Mikos (2004) for an extended description of the show.
 25. These ideals are also emphasized by the group of plastic surgeons who are interviewed in *Aesthetic Surgery* (Taschen 2005) when asked the question "What is your concept of beauty?"

26. In the 1990s, a leading and much-discussed trend in advanced fashion photography was realism (cf., for example Arnold (2001)). Realism seems today to have been replaced by a more narrative and filmic tendency, illustrated for example in Steven Meisel's often multi-paged spreads for Italian *Vogue*. Meisel has for example been inspired by film noir, science fiction or paparazzi aesthetics or he has just made photo series that connote filmicity in general. Steven Meisel and Italian *Vogue* have on several occasions collaborated with the American digital design firm EyeballNYC. For an excellent study of the history of fashion photography in Danish, see Andersen (2006).
27. The original text is:
 se ne parla
 troppo-poco-pro-contra
 chirurgia
 estetica
 ossessione o
 tendenza?
 tra arte, realismo
 e ironia
28. For an extended discussion of Steven Meisel's fashion photography see Jerslev 2006.
29. The music score is Engine Room's "A perfect lie" and the lyrics are: "make me – beautiful/ make me/ a perfect soul/ a perfect mind/ a perfect face/ a perfect lie.
30. The show has quite rightly been called a "surreal soap opera" (Aurthur 2005).
31. The show's bleak humour is shown in episode 13, when Sean goes to kill a villain who has threatened the two men to do surgery on prostitutes on several occasions. Escobar offers Sean a deal; if he gets a new face, he will stop pursuing them. The doctors accept, but it turns out that they give Escobar the face of a most wanted criminal named Ortiz. The episode ends with Ortiz/Escobar being arrested in the airport.
32. This insistent placing of Julia outside the world of cosmetic surgery was radically altered in season two, when she first got a 'boob job' and then had the implants removed again at the same time as she had reconstructive surgery on her face after an accident.

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