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## **Self-identification in the context of original concept of feminine type of personality in contemporary photography #widurskiwoman**

**ABSTRACT.** For a long time, recalling the broadest spectrum of art, including literature, painting, sculpture and all works created in the field of artistic creation, there was a connection that defined (in the context of cultural capital) human existence on the social, physical and spiritual level. Nowadays, feminist circles draw attention to the influence and significance of the way of portraying women and men in post-modernity, fighting against stereotypical patterns of gender roles. The concept of #widurskiwoman photography is a representation of women subject to expressive emancipation, aware of their sensuality, illustrating at the same time the perfection of the human body, where the essential features and values presented in them are hidden under the daily ritual of applying the often-undefined mask.

**KEYWORDS:** self-identification, personality, contemporary photography, beauty

### **Introduction**

Man, in nature, as a thinking being, needs to continually improve the knowledge on topics that are close to his interests and the ones that concern him directly or have a significant effect on him. The extensive field, which has not yet been wholly discovered and classified, is still one of the most significant areas of knowledge about the existence of the human species. Just as many have stated that everything about human nature has already been said, still in the history of scientific discoveries and even in our thoughts, some details need to be added, if only to be

confirmed in the reasons given<sup>1</sup>. The nature of today's society leans towards media re-evaluation that affects us strongly enough to permanently influence the process of receiving, experiencing and interpreting our reality. Mass media has become the dominant source of shaping the individual imagination of a broad audience, and this means practically the entire society (Goban, 2005, p. 28). We can confidently say that the message generated by the media is a catalyst for our social mood and individual awareness of ourselves. Contemporary photography ceased to be considered an objective medium. It has become a subjective spectacle of chiaroscuro, with the private agenda of the creators. Not everyone who dared to take on this challenging subject is aware of the consequences that bombard the recipients of their work. Because in art, as in construction industry, materials are by no means neutral, transparent or indifferent elements (Macherey, 2014, p. 54).

### Self-identification

The process of self-identification by each of us is becoming a sanctity. We associate emancipated autonomy with the highest possible virtue. The issue of self-discovery and the development of self-exploration is a topic quite popular over the recent years in the social environment. It is undoubtedly connected to awareness of self-esteem, i.e. with the progress, we make when determining our identity.

Despite the substantive complexity, the subject concerns each of us and undoubtedly every person experiences the phenomenon of self-discovery to a greater or lesser extent. We make such classifications in many areas of our lives, and in the man's image context, woman's image mainly, we can talk about personification. Already at this stage, we feel a certain sense of sublimity, the uniqueness of discussed topic, which we cannot describe in simple words, and we define it with various borrowings, for example from the world of nature.

To understand specific values, we must make a recognition, prepare substantively and cognitively, as in writing a school essay. To thoroughly understand the essence of the thoughts invoked, we should find out

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<sup>1</sup> An example would be the discovery of a new organ in the human body at the beginning of 2018. Interstitium, has been given a name by a team of researchers at the NYU School of Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania and Mount Sinai Beth Israel Medical Centre.

about the prevailing laws around us and adopt the certain social standards that project our way we are looking at the world.

According to Immanuel Kant, this phenomenon means a reality that exists independently of our consciousness. It is a transcendent element that goes beyond the normalised boundaries of our intellect. Aspects such as sense and aesthetics allow us to define our own needs and desires (translated by Chmielowski, 2017). Nowadays, it is difficult to relate and look for relationships between the years in which the spiritual significance was one of the most important aspects of life. Technical progress and the development of media techniques create addictions. The accumulation of information causes their reduction of substantive values, and the image-related absorbency forms us. In building our awareness and position in the group, we often follow the moods and opinions from our interlocutors who have a significant impact on our identification process. Already in the early years of adolescence, we encounter intensified symptoms of incidental views about ourselves, which to a greater or lesser extent create our self-confidence against our peers.

### **Social mirrors theory**

Social mirror theory (SMT) is a how I imagine myself in the way other people think about me. It seems to be the most invasive process of capturing our ideas about ourselves and the environment in which we exist. Man, as an "objectified social entity" (Znaniński, 1991, p. 133), interprets and takes in all behaviours and opinions appearing in interpersonal relations. Schema of this type of attitude can be assessed as highly self-destructive. But only when we experience the consequences of this concept privately, can we induce the drastic nature of today's patterns of arranging moods and attitudes towards portraying the image of women and men in the media.

This influence, combined with a mirror as an item, functioning over the centuries as a celestial object, justifies creating the described image of a woman in the original creation of photography. The mirror as an allegory of cognition is a complementary element in the presented vision.

Mirrors can be intermediaries between us and something supernatural or partners for intimate conversation. The very motive of mirroring reflects the dual form of reality and functions as an invisible boundary between what is real and enigmatic. The recipient who looks at the ex-

hibited photograph often searches for hidden dependencies between the author's intentions and his moods or beliefs.

This process fits perfectly into the ritual of looking in the mirror, conversations with yourself, attempts to interfere with your inner self and the self-identification. The experience gained by one of the authors<sup>2</sup> in the fashion world and the area of consumer goods has created a vision of an everyday act of putting the mask on, which in the routine of life becomes a way of illusory self-acceptance and functioning in various areas of our existence. The conviction that strives to generate extreme emotions and present them in the right concept for a proprietary #widurskiwoman concept becomes a kind of personal philosophy. It speaks of experiencing all emotionality and conscious concentration of tensions to obtain the most vivid reproduction of the presented situations. It is safe to say that this type of cruelty towards the experiences of one's self, brings the author to a better reaching the viewer's consciousness, but not necessarily more correct.

### **An attempt to define “beautiful”**

Referring to issues of corporality, the pursuit of the current canons of beauty and self-acceptance, we ask the recipient the question about the sense of his obsessive search for the perfection. Women's presence for centuries has been and is an inseparable part of such topics as love, lust, sexuality, motherhood. This femininity could also symbolise extreme emotions, rising to the rank of *femme fatale*.

What is beauty, what can be considered beautiful? In the line of reasoning, we can refer to already created laws. We will find something beautiful if it fits perfectly into the framework of conventional beliefs. What fulfils stringent visual or substantive values, affects the behaviour or perception of a human being in a significant way or causes a change in thinking, and even generates behaviour. Something that we consider beautiful can also correspond to the subjective criteria of our taste or lack thereof. But the most accurate definition that significantly influenced the perception of modern aesthetics was created by Immanuel Kant, invoking the concept of *sensus communis*—a particular community of human preferences (Gadamer, 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> Paweł Widurski.

The image of today's expressivist culture, characterised by extraordinary, unreal role models, especially in the fashion world allows the creation of a concept of wearing a mask.

In present-day mass culture offers the man a horizon of possibilities and influences it in a significant way allowing for the definition of his needs along with hidden desires. At the same time, it tightens him in the chaos of his fantasies and willingness, acting destructively on his self-esteem.

The works from the borderline of abstract arts, postmodernism, are the most visible bones of contention in this day's considerations on the identification of beauty. In the sphere of human image creation, the leading topic is the way of presenting the ideal image of a woman.

The personalities who decide what the viewer will watch on television, on the walls of buildings in the form of advertisements and storefronts, are so-called creators. It is with their help that the media "war" is underway. They try to create a divine image of a woman, free from vices, with perfect proportions, a hybrid portrait made by computers. In fact, the unavoidable daily presence of advertisements in our lives already in the seventies became a starting point for many sociologists in Western Europe and the United States to question about the meaning of stereotypical images of women and gender relations disseminated by the media (Bator, 1998, p. 7).

Undoubtedly, this is a deliberate marketing action leading to reaching a much more significant number of consumers, diverse and divided by professed views, reasons, and guided by their definitions of aesthetic values. The process of over-sensitive emancipation of a media woman reflects on the mood of the targeted social groups. The feminist critique of culture led to slow reorientation and fatigue with an image of a woman disfigured by computer software filters. Social media are current carriers of idealised visions of some better living standards, paradoxically, having less and less its real features.

We can see that almost every attempt to create a woman's image is accompanied by "added value" (Elgoza, 1973), which no longer refers only to physical characteristics, but to a certain style of living and reacting to life. It allows the viewer to be convinced of the creation proposed by the author, through whom we become owners of not only the audiovisual value but also a certain way of moving among lifestyle like ours, which is the highest, most desirable form of experiencing. And although the appearance of the product in the described scheme becomes a contentious issue in the categorisation of beauty, the process that has been

developed to achieve the goal of reaching people's consciousness deserves to be called "beautifully" created disinformation. The effect of these activities is the correlation woman—a product.

### **Aggressive fashion**

Fashion world repeatedly uses these tendencies, where clothing becomes a desirable product to the extent that it is given supernatural, transcendent and soothing qualities. Who, if not the model, best advertises the outcome, while being brought down to its level. But also in this area, significant changes took place over the last years, focusing on the way of illustrating the woman and the correctness of her image.

The 1980s abounded in the classic style of portraying, focusing on the idealised elements of a classic, elegant woman. The alternative and the desire to break with the existing canons of beauty were only germinating to prepare recipients for a new era in the next decade (Rouille, 2007, pp. 189–192).

Futuristic tendencies were anticipated, the image was minimised, the models on the catwalks were characterised by straight, profoundly sublime hair. Physical values of the body, hip line, bust and neck area were emphasised, the extremely exposed waist evoked the modernist costumes of the fashion house Thierry Mugler, where the woman gained the status of the muse. It contributed to the stereotypical appearance of a woman who should accept the most desired body dimensions, i.e. "90 by 60 by 90", causing a wave of controversy and extreme opinions.

However, fashion photography has continuously used the physicality of women and accentuated their beauty in the form of glorified products, which they suggested more than they described. The vision of the catwalk for the mentioned women—objects, became the subject of reflection regarding self-identification for the authors.

Inherently, the form of the catwalk is of the assessing nature. It has been adapted to the viewers' best profile to observe. Everything that happens on this long stage has grown to the rank of a conscientiously created show and has the values of an idealised image of reality that is socially recognised as beautiful. The form of the show becomes more and more exalted, engages more attention, human strength and funds, transforming into spectacles, with women as the central element. Thus, a real concept of beauty—a woman, becoming synonymous with the highest aesthetic value—is outlined. Praised by designers, watched by

hundreds of viewers, gathering the glances of millions of men and neighbouring women. This liberated image has created a convention of the essence of beauty in a tangible form that remains in the consciousness of society to this day.

In opposition to the general process of adoration of the described image, anti-aesthetic conventions began to take shape, breaking the standards accepted so far. Clothes, in the context of advertising, have ceased to be the focus of attention. The famous female image began to be pushed by pictures of emaciated bodies, apathy, suffering and traits on the opposite side of the charming definition of beauty. The trash culture starts (Rouille, 2007, pp. 189–192).

Its tendencies are valued by creators seeking their inspiration in contemporary art, but also by clients marked by rock, techno or rap music. In contrast to shipping catalogues, the magazine trends are trying at all costs to arouse desire, recognition, identification with a group or community (Rouille, 2007, p. 191). The ideal cult of luxury, inaccessible to all masses, gives way to more existential values. The most important advantage of an alternative convention is respect for qualities such as experience, focusing on the individual and moving away from rigid forms of image creation.

### Aesthetic thriller

Paweł Widurski, personally experiencing the subject of work in the fashion industry, allowed himself to create a sample of a performative event, which in a significant way referred to the vision of catwalk for models. The event was designed in the form of an aesthetic *thriller*, at the same time breaking with the conventional aesthetics of beauty, bombarding the recipient with profound impressions affecting his perception.

The witness of the event becomes an inseparable part of the exhibition. The author used mirrors and industrial cameras strengthening the impression of observation to make the installation working together with the viewers. Industrial cameras, which are in constant activity, have intensified the act of registering “image here and now”, creating the idea of superior force around observers. People inside two rows of extras become visible objects, being a kind of heroes of the moment.

In this case, we are dealing with a complete reversal of the situation accompanying this type of cultural events. In the planned exhibition, the recipient (viewer) becomes a “rated object”. The action aims to evoke in

the recipients the force used by the real extras, leading to the experience of rawness and psychological stress.

This type of experience on *'living tissue'* allows us to conclude the attitude of man towards today's media culture surrounding us with all possible sides. The moment of looking down to the ground by the characters of the event becomes the effect of the exerted pressure. We can assume that it is an act of surrender, an attempt to get used to a prevailing situation in which we do not necessarily feel good or at ease. It is a natural, human reflex, often uncontrolled, appearing in times of losing one's self-confidence.

The time of passing through a row of staring extras lengthens, and we wonder what thought is currently being formed in the minds of observers about us, we experience the personified process of the previously mentioned *social mirror*.

After the show, we will change places with models for which the catwalk is part of the workplace. Their job makes it impossible to accept the attitude of surrender. Heads are always directed towards a proud march, eyes focused at one point, dazzled by dozens of cameras and recipients' eyes. The pressure is much higher, and any error results in a faux pas.



Foto: Paweł Widurski<sup>3</sup>. *Performative event project*

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### Photographic self-document #widurskiwoman

By delving into the fashion industry, you can quickly see how a contemporary image of a woman affects consumer awareness. The #widurskiwoman concept, its origins, was taken from the background of fashion photography, which in its assumption had a precise and sophisticated way to show the aesthetics of products.

Referring to changes in the expressiveness of reality preservation, with the mentioned *trash* idea, it re-evaluates photographic works. Focusing on the hidden values, experiences and emotions of the photographed objects, we take out everything that in the previous image registration was carefully hidden under the aesthetically created attributes of beauty.

Human experiences, thoughts, reactions, distortions or defects become an integrally visible part of the personality as well as the image of the characters depicted. The simultaneous combination of anti-aesthetic features with subjectively created style, bearing the hallmarks of universally recognised beauty, complements the #widurskiwoman concept. Its product is a photographic self-document in which conversation, experiencing and staging extreme behaviours results in the creation of a story about something specific (a photographic essay), brushing against the truth. Unlike a reporter or documentalist, for whom the presentation of a reality that is best reproduced becomes a criterion of correctness, the



Picture: Pawel Widurski<sup>4</sup>. *Moral possession act*

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created photographs of the author's concept expressively emphasise the hidden features of the individual in a clash with the surrounding reality.

One of the motives was the act of *Moral possession*, eminently depicted by Andrzej Żuławski in the film *Possession* (1981). Photographs were created in the convention of an aesthetic thriller that surprises with its rawness. The leitmotif was internal insanity, and all emotions were topped with extreme exhaustion and apathy.

The evoked vision shows the self-destruction of man and the image of ourselves on the way to own paranoia. Cooperation with the everyday world becomes a study of monotonous vegetation, abounding in the disturbances of necessary life activities.

### The end

#widurskiwoman as a form of a hashtag, it functions as help in re-grouping information and visual materials about women's image analysis. I consider this to be a kind of paradox that a man is not able to continue to get to know himself in depth, spending so much time with himself and others. Time, which should be the most considerable help and guidance in matters of our self-discovery.

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