

**Aesthetics and Cosmetics: Uses and Abuses**

The widespread use among dentists of the words "aesthetics" and "cosmetics," either in the limited sphere of small groups or during national and international meetings, imposes a reflection on their meaning and correct use. Let us examine the different meanings of the two terms through the centuries, concentrating our attention on the word "aesthetics," which has been the object of philosophical research since the 18th century.

"Aesthetics" comes from the Greek word *αἰσθητική*, which is the feminine of the adjective *αἰσθητικός*, deriving in turn from *αἴσθησις*. As a concrete noun *αἴσθησις* means an organ of sense (sight, hearing, smell, touch, or taste), and as an abstract noun it means perception. The verb *αἰσθάνομαι* derives from *αἴσθησις* and means "to perceive through our senses." From the verb *αἰσθάνομαι*, the adjective *αἰσθητός-ή-όν* (masculine, feminine, neuter) is derived, indicating the object perceived by the organs of sense, which can be harmonic or discordant, symmetric or asymmetric, melodic or cacophonous, sweet- or bad-smelling, sweet or sour, smooth or rough, sharp, bitter, etc. The term we are interested in and which is the object of this brief study is a noun substantive as well as an adjective: *αἰσθητική*, feminine of *αἰσθητικός*.

This noun aroused the interest of philosophical science and research, which included it in scientific terminology around two and a half centuries ago. The word first appeared in literature in 1750 as "Aesthetica" and was used by the German philosopher, Baumgarten (1714-1765), who had already used it in his juvenile work "Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus" (1735). From this point, the noun "aesthetics" has been used as "the science and research of artistic beauty." Baumgarten believed that sensitive representations are the objects of art, while clear representations—more precisely, concepts—are the objects of rational knowledge.

However, definitions of art and beauty have varied largely with the passing of the centuries. In ancient philosophy, art and beauty were considered to be completely different and independent. For Plato, beauty was the evident manifestation of ideas, *πασῶν τῶν ἐνθουσιάζσεων ἀρίστη τε ἐξ ἀρίστων*, while art was the imitation of sensitive things or of the events that develop in the sensitive world, *φαντάσματος ἢ ἀληθείας οὐσα μίμησις; φαντάσματος, ἔφη*. For Aristotle, beauty consisted in order and symmetry and in a greatness which could be easily embraced in its entirety (Poet. 7, Metaf. XIII).

In the 18th century, art and beauty began to be considered and studied as a single concept; they were linked by the concept of taste, which was intended as the faculty of identifying beauty both within and beyond art (Hume and Burke). Kant established the identity between the concepts of art and beauty. He believed that nature is beautiful when it has the appearance of art and that art can only be beautiful when we (who are aware of the fact that it is art) consider it as nature (Critique of Judgement, 45). For Schelling it is art that regulates nature, and not nature that regulates art.

The relationship between art and nature has been distinguished in three concepts: (1) art as imitation, attributed to the ancient philosophers (Plato and Aristotle); (2) art as creation, referring to the Romantic Age (Schelling, Fichte, Hegel); and (3) art as construction, when aesthetics is considered as the meeting point between nature and man (Kant).

Three concepts distinguish Man's relation to art: (1) art as knowledge (Aristotle, Schelling, Hegel, Croce, Gentile); (2) art as practical activity (Aristotle, Spencer, Groos, Nietzsche); and (3) art as sensitivity (Plato, Baumgarten, Vico),

Philosophers have assigned two principal tasks to art: (1) art as education (Aristotle, Hegel, Croce); and (2) art as expression (Dewey: art as experience). It should be added that expression is in itself communication and that the possibilities of communication of a successful work of art are unlimited and relatively independent of the prevailing public taste.

Some believe the origin of the word "cosmetics" dates back to *Cosmos*, the Roman manufacturer of perfumes. However, the most widely accepted opinion is that it derives from the Greek verb *χοσμέω-ω*, which means "to adorn" or to embellish. In its modern meaning, cosmetics is the art of adorning and embellishing the body; it refers to those treatments and preparations designed to improve or rejuvenate the entire body, in particular the face and those parts such as hands, arms, feet, legs, mouth, neck, and hair which are not covered by clothes. Cosmetics is therefore art and not science or research.

If aesthetics is the study and scientific research of artistic beauty, in dentistry this research must be directed toward a "practical creative construction" able to blend harmony, beauty, and functionality. This will be achieved only if we have first obtained the best possible result from the functional, volumetric, chromatic, and symmetric points of view between the product of our stomatologic intervention and the remaining orofacial, dentofacial, and craniofacial components.

In other words, we should try to harmonize as much as possible (balancing often opposing components), the crown or the bridge with the nearby antagonist and contralateral teeth in form, volume, height, width, chromatic and symmetric tonalities, for example, in the analogy of those of the contralateral semi-arch. These same components should also be taken into account for the gingiva and for the nearby papillae.

Patients should have the smile they like according to their taste and culture; they should have good phonetics and feel there is a good relation between teeth, gingiva, cheeks, lips, and tongue. Age, height, profession, socio-cultural conditions, intelligence, and personality should also be considered. Each of these elements must create a functional and eurythmic whole. Charles L. Pincus, a forerunner of aesthetics in dental surgery, says that in the reconstruction of the "personality of the mouth," different factors, not only functional, biological, and aesthetic, but also psychological, are to be taken into account, and that these vary from one individual to another.

Cosmetic intervention should be reserved to those few patients for whom we wish to obtain a further improvement that, while not necessary, will emphasize the charm or the physical appearance of the harmonic and functional result already obtained by our previous interventions. It is hoped that it will soon be possible to speak a common language, that we may talk about aesthetics in prosthesis, in restorative dentistry, in periodontology, etc, and not about crowns, fillings, or aesthetic flaps, since the patient and the dental operator often have opposite ideas about what is to be considered aesthetic.

The meaning of the term "aesthetics" is not universal, since it is the research and study of artistic beauty, and for this reason it cannot have an absolute sense even less than it is possible for its evolutionary cycle to be considered as concluded. Cosmetics is only physical, exterior, superficial embellishment, which has nothing to do with the scientific research of artistic beauty.

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