

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Politics of Beauty:

DISCOURSES AND INTERSECTIONS IN THE GLOBAL SPHERE

SUMMER SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
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<http://www.sociology.cam.ac.uk/summerschool>

Extended Deadline for Abstracts: 16th of May 2016

The Politics of Beauty: Discourses and Intersections in the Global Sphere

For millennia, beauty has been a subject of fascination for scholarly research, mainly within the humanities. While literature, film, and art have made constant critical contributions to debates about beauty, the social sciences have been latecomers. Only recently have they established a rich body of critique about the different ways in which discourses of beauty operate in the social world, and how they reveal the workings of dominant ideologies of gender, race, sexuality, and globality. However, the specificity of beauty, particularly in relation to the global sphere and neoliberalism, keeps generating new pressing questions. This summer school aims to offer a space for rigorous interdisciplinary dialogue between the humanities and the social sciences to push debates on beauty further and go beyond the mere pursuing of definitions, towards the exploration of processes and practices, that is, the *doing* of beauty and the politics it entails. Attentive to the ever-evolving meanings and doings of beauty on their journeys through different historic-cultural traditions, conceptual frames, intersections and geographic locales, one overarching goal of this summer school is to theorise beauty as a “travelling concept” (Mieke Bal, 2002). We thus invite scholars to engage with the politics of beauty and their ramifications. How does beauty travel? What kinds of beauty discourses are created and transmitted in such journeys? How are the politics of beauty reconfigured both through its travels and its locatedness? When do they matter and to what effect and extent?

Since the 1970s social movements have been stimulating a wealth of studies on beauty as a racist, classist, ableist, colorist, lookist, sizeist, ageist, and (cis and hetero)sexist regime of representation. Recent research has focused on beauty as a practice or rather as incessant “body work” in neoliberal times – working out, body-building, make-overs, cosmetic surgery, shopping, dieting, etc. –, and its oppressive, discriminatory effects. Despite this invaluable work in describing and analysing such practices, some pertinent questions remain opaque and understudied. How does beauty culture (re)produce and/or stand in tension to discourses of gender, class, race, ethnicity, skin colour, and colonialism? How is beauty productive? What does it produce? What are people’s affective, social, economic, and global investments in beauty? Why does the desire to prescribe beauty standards persist? How to analytically grasp the pleasure of doing body work? Crucially, “how is beauty defined, deployed, defended, subordinated, marked or

manipulated” (Colebrook, 2006: 132). What different media strategies are used to programmatically present, transmit and disperse beauty concepts? What is beauty doing in helping us understand lived experience and temporalities, language and representation, media images, and physicality? In other words, how to grasp the politics of beauty as forming intersectional selves, corporations, nations and global discourses?

This summer school aims to address these questions by opening a space of dialogue between established and emerging scholars and artists working on aesthetic presentation, and to theorise beauty as a form of currency, motor and desire. We invite participants to discuss the politics of beauty around the following themes:

1. Beauty as a currency in economies of visibility and attention.

From the individual to the social, beauty works as a mechanism to filter social exclusion and inclusion and activates strategies of sexism and racism, alongside discourses of femininity, masculinity and appropriate bodies. How does vision, and specifically the gaze, surveil, monitor, scrutinise as well as empower the self and others as “beautiful”? To what extent can we sustain thinking of beauty as a form of social and cultural capital? How are men’s grooming practices and industry joining this conversation? How can we elaborate on notions of ugliness, cuteness, prettiness, averageness, handsomeness as working categories of analysis that address the ways in which we envision, value and experience beauty?

2. Beauty as a psycho-political motor of emotional capitalism.

Feelings keep beauty practices, norms and institutions in circulation. These affective economies have diversified from individualizing feelings of shame, ugliness, insecurity and self-hate to more insidious registers of camaraderie, empathy and apparent awareness of seemingly common experiences of oppression. How could we theorise affects and emotions as a distinctly socio-political category in relation to these emerging beauty registers?

3. Beauty as the desire for conformity in an economy of recognition.

There are valid reasons why research tends to focus on the coercive and harmful ways in which subjects are interpellated by beauty cultures. This notwithstanding, analytical frameworks that focus on techniques of domination, coercion and violence often obscure processes of socialization motivated by desire and pleasure, the necessity for recognition or/and the desire to conform and please. What are the relationships between socialization and the social recognition of one’s looks to dominant ideals? What if we understand beautification as a neoliberal art of governing that rewards self-mobilisation, self-optimisation and self-conformation? If indeed the constant self-optimisation embodies techniques of self-regulation, can we be attuned to the ways in which seemingly empowering technologies of the self are integrated in racialised, classed and gendered structures of power and domination?

4. Beauty as spatially organized economies.

Beauty practices are housed in specific locations, be it beauty parlours, beauty shops, beauty schools or the domestic space of the home. They shape our bodies, mark our skin and influence the way we move. Beauty practices also dominate the pages of women’s magazines and take up valuable airtime, from Coca Cola ads to shows such as America’s Top Model, the Swan or Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. And as the growing beauty

tourism industry underscores, the global commodity of beauty travels specific routes and traverses concrete boundaries. In short: Beauty practices literally take up space. Where are these places most often located and why? How can we empirically investigate the spatial organization of beauty concepts and practices? How do they map onto the hegemonic notion that someone's outer beauty (heteronormative, white beauty standards) is a direct reflection of their inner beauty (moral goodness and purity)? Why are certain places and body parts, sites of beauty discourses while others are not? How do these decisions reflect the spatial economies of beauty?

Confirmed speakers include, in alphabetical order:

Diane Negra, University College Dublin
Dominique Grisard, University of Basel & Swiss Center for Social Research
Francis Ray White, University of Westminster
Jackie Sanchez Taylor, University of Leicester
Joy Gregory, Slade School of Fine Art
Marcia Ochoa, UC Santa Cruz
Margrit Vogt, Europa-University Flensburg
Meeta Rani Jha, University of Winchester
Meredith Jones, Brunel University
Mimi Thi Nguyen, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Mónica Moreno Figueroa, University of Cambridge
Ng'endo Mukii, independent artist, Nairobi
Paula Villa, LMU Munich
Rosalind Gill, City University London
Rosemary Garland-Thomson, Emory College
Sarah Banet-Weiser, USC Annenberg
Shirley Tate, University of Leeds

Summer School Target Audience

To foster an interdisciplinary dialogue, PhD students, postdoctoral researchers and junior scholars from the social sciences, cultural, gender, queer, transgender and postcolonial studies, history, art history, literary, media and visual culture are invited to apply for the summer school. 18 participants will be selected. They will be given the chance to present their research and discuss it with high profile specialists in the field. We are looking for original work that is interested in the themes highlighted above and that pays attention to beauty in relation to (cis and trans)femininities *and* (cis and trans)masculinities, class, race and skin colour, sexuality, dis/ability, age, and body size. The summer school is interested in comparative work. We aim to attract research from a diversity of contexts, and particularly encourage work on and/or based in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and diaspora cultures.

The summer school is followed by an international conference (2-3 September 2016) on the same themes with numerous high profile speakers from a wide range of disciplines and areas of expertise. The conference will be open to the public. We expect summer school participants to attend.

Application Procedure

We kindly ask you to apply with a short **abstract** on your research (300 words) and a one page **CV** to be sent to the following email address, politicsofbeauty2016@gmail.com, no later than 16th of May 2016.

Fees - £150

Inclusive of Summer School and Conference

This also includes accommodation and most meals (all breakfasts and lunch and two dinners).

Concept and Organisation:

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