

Workshop: The Life of Beauty – Experiences, Locations, Methodologies

Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies, University of Zurich, 21.05.2021

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“Beauty is having a moment in the social sciences”, argued sociologist Ashley Mears in 2014, pointing to a surge of interest in research on beauty across disciplines including social and cultural anthropology, sociology, feminist and gender studies as well as critical beauty studies. In a one-day workshop at ISEK, the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies at UZH, we aim to think collectively and creatively about the possibilities of analyzing experiences of bodies and beauty. We welcome contributions in a range of formats – from the traditional paper to concept and fieldnotes – from advanced graduate students and early career scholars interested in thinking together about how beauty is lived and embodied, engaging for example with its moral and affective dimensions, or how it is situated in varied regional political-economic landscapes.

Recent scholarship in the field has brought out how practices around beauty – beauty and body work ranging from cosmetic surgeries to everyday procedures at home and in the salon – are embroiled in structures of inequality and differentiation such as race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability and religion (Craig 2002, Edmonds 2010, Gimlin 2007, Hua 2013, Jarrín 2017, Jha 2016, Liebelt 2016). Studies have made manifest the transnational movement of racialized bodily ideals, as well as local and context-specific schemes of race, and analyzed beauty through the lens of labour and demarcations of space (Gill 2010, Kang 2010, Saraswati 2017, Ossman 2002, Jafar & Casanova 2013). With attention to this literature, we aim to reflect on questions such as:

- How do we move from examining practices of beautification to experiences of beauty? Where else –in what other sites, through what methods– can the latter be assessed?
- What does studying beauty, *specifically*, tell us about the structures of power that it is inextricable from? That is to say, if beauty is tied to systems of race, class, gender, caste, processes of globalization etc.; what particular lens does beauty offer in understanding them? How can a focus on beauty teach us something about them and how they function in the world anew?
- Where is beauty located? How can we trace how beauty figures in people’s lives, and in different sites such as cities, neighborhoods and online spaces? In what relationships does beauty matter, and how is this lived, negotiated and resisted?
- Finally, what are the methodological challenges involved in examining beauty and the body, related both to the on-the-ground questions that arise in studying the topic, as well as to the attitudes towards (and framing of) beauty studies in the academy?

With these questions, we are interested in exploring beauty as method, in reflecting on where and how it becomes important and what it can tell us about how difference is constituted and comes to matter in everyday social life.

We conceive this workshop as a space for collective brainstorming and exchange. Envisioning a format beneficial for participants regardless of the current stage of their projects, we invite and encourage contributions –works in progress, drafts or excerpts of chapters, concept sketches– from PhD and advanced MA students as well as postdoctoral researchers from any discipline.

To participate, please send an abstract of no more than 300 words and a short bio note by **05.04.2021** to katyayani.dalmia@uzh.ch and anne.kukuczka@uzh.ch. In case you have questions, please also get in touch. We will get back to you about the outcome of participation by 14.04.2021. For a lively engagement with each other’s work, we plan to circulate contributions amongst participants by 12.05.2021. If the situation allows, we plan for an in-person workshop. Partial funding is available, please indicate if you would like to be considered.