Anthology: On the Politics of Ugliness

Deadline: Jan 15, 2015

Ela Przybylo

Ugliness is a pejorative marker for bodies, things, and feelings that fall beyond or outside the limits of acceptability. Ugliness has long been indirectly deployed in order to mark, collect, and exclude that which is determined to be aesthetically intolerable (Garland-Thomson; Grealy; Schweik), disgusting (Meagher), dirty (Douglas), abject (Kristeva), monstrous (Braidotti; Haraway; Rai & Puar; Schildrick; Sharpe), revolting (Lebesco), grotesque (Russo), or even simply plain and unaltered (Bartky; Bordo; Morgan; Wolf). While aesthetically ugliness has been positioned both against beauty and as a distinct category for art and art-making (Adorno; Ranciere), there has been little sustained engagement with the ways that ugliness operates alongside identities, bodies, intimacies, practices, and spaces (exceptions include Danticat; Kincaid; Athanassoglou-Kallmyer). Part of the reason for this absence might be that ugliness is at once too broad and too diffuse, serving, as art historian Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer has pointed out, as "an all-purpose repository for everything that [does] not quite fit," a marker of "mundane reality, the irrational, evil, disorder, dissonance, irregularity, excess, deformity, the marginal" (281).

A repository for many socio-cultural feelings and attitudes, ugliness operates in ways that have dangerous and deadly consequences for bodies and those who inhabit them. When a body is labeled or understood as "ugly," it is subsequently positioned as up for expunging, destruction, and affectively motivated terror (Fanon). For example, the "ugly laws" of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America demonstrate the visceral discomfort that "ugly" bodies evoke, justifying their exclusion from public spaces on account of their "polluting" effects (Schweik). This demarcation of ugliness is inextricably bound with taken-for-granted ethical, epistemological, and ontological assumptions about the value of bodies. Further, ugliness is infused with dominant discourses of ability, race, heterosexuality, gender, body size, health, and age. At the level of ideas, relations and institutions, deployments of ugliness can have lethal effects on a body's horizons and the possibilities for visibility, intimacy, and thick life.

On the Politics of Uglinessseeks to provide the first anthology that centralizes ugliness as a political category. It explores the various ways in which ugliness is deployed against those whose bodies, habits, gestures, feelings, expressions, or ways of being deviate from social norms. It argues that ugliness is politicalin at least two ways: (1) it denotes inequalities and hierarchies, often serving as a repository for all that is "other;" and (2) it is contingent and relational, taking shape through the comparison and evaluation of bodies. This collection asserts that it is only in facing ugliness as a political category that we can agitate routinely harmful ways of seeing, understanding and relating.

We are seeking an array of contributions that will center the politics of ugliness as it relates to bodies, feelings, gestures, habits, things, spaces, sounds, intimacies and their operations alongside ability, race, gender, class, sexuality, body size, age, health, or animality. Specifically, we invite submissions of academic papers; however, we will also consider art-based work, memoirs, cultural scholars, writers, and artists. We welcome approaches informed by (but not limited to) critical disability studies, critical race and postcolonial studies, feminist theory, literary theory, art history, cultural studies, queer and sexuality studies, science and technology studies, critical psychology, environmental studies, musicology, and performance studies.

Submissions should engage with the politics of ugliness. Topics of inquiry may include:

- interrogations of ugliness as violence against bodies
- the ethics of engaging with ugliness
- feminist explorations of ugliness, "ugly" engagements with feminism
- ugly methodologies, reading practices, and modes of inquiry
- representations of ugliness, "ugly" bodies, body parts, and "ugly" behaviors
- phenomenological encounters with ugliness: feeling ugly, being "ugly," embodying ugliness
- ugly intimacies, feelings, and dispositions (e.g., Ngai; Sharpe)
- genealogies, archives, temporalities, and histories of ugliness
- the fashionizing of ugliness, ugly fashion
- ugly development practices, environmental ugliness
- visual, sensorial, and tactile pollution in relation to spaces and geographies
- theoretical considerations of ugliness as a political category
- reclamations and tactical repositionings of ugliness (e.g., Eileraas)

The deadline for chapter proposals (maximum of 500 words) is 15 January 2015. Please forward proposals or questions to Ela Przybylo

(przybylo@yorku.ca) and Sara Rodrigues (sararod@yorku.ca) with the subject heading "On the Politics of Ugliness."

Reference:

CFP: Anthology: On the Politics of Ugliness. In: ArtHist.net, Oct 11, 2014 (accessed Nov 8, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/8631>.