

Humorous Approaches to Art and Activism in Conflict

Exploratory Workshop

Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS)
Meijboomlaan 1, 2242 PR Wassenaar, The Netherlands

18 – 20 September 2013

Convenors: Dr. Sruti Bala (s.bala@uva.nl) and Dr. Veronika Zangl (v.zangl@uva.nl)

Report

The exploratory workshop addressed humorous approaches to intervening in socio-political conflict at the crossroads of art and activism. It discussed ludic aesthetic strategies, ranging from the ironic, the grotesque, the absurd or frivolous, to the carnivalesque in different forms of art and cultural activism. By bringing together scholars from theatre and performance, literary, film and cultural studies, art history, cultural geography and sociology of culture, as well as four artists, who presented and reflected on their own approaches, the workshop served to map out a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, as well as ascertain questions that are worthy of further investigation.

Of special interest was the cross-pollination of memory studies and the study of cultural activism. The workshop departed from the premise that humorous approaches to art and activism in conflict have become relevant in grasping the contemporary 'global' moment, wherein conflicts can no longer be pigeonholed into regional histories and national memories alone and where scholars need to consider the links between art and activist practices.

The workshop consisted of three main strands: (1) the limits and possibilities of humorous approaches in situations of traumatic, violent conflict; (2) how artists and activists approach the 'the opponent' in a conflict setting; (3) the differences and commonalities between art and activism in terms of intervening in social reality.

The exploratory workshop will result in a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal in 2014. A research group at the University of Amsterdam has been created to co-ordinate the follow-up activities.

Co-organisers/Funders



Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS)
Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies (ACGS)
Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (ASCA)
University of Amsterdam

Programme

Wed 18 Sep 2013:

Arrivals in NIAS by 18h

Welcome and Introductions: Dr. Sruti Bala and Dr. Veronika Zangl

19h: Dinner

21-22.30h: Video screenings

Thursday 19 September:

9.30-10: Welcome: Prof. Dr. Aafke Hulk (Rector of NIAS):

Opening statement: Sruti Bala and Veronika Zangl

Strand 1: *Limits and possibilities of humour in conflict*

10-11h *Gil and Moti* (Artist Duo, Rotterdam)

Available for You: Small-Scale Interventions in Art and Life

11-11.30h Coffee/Tea

11.30-13h **Scholar inputs and discussion**

Dr. Ugur Ümit Üngör, (Historian, Utrecht University/Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Amsterdam)

Humor and Mass Violence: Exploring an Awkward Relationship

Dr. Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto-Arponen (Cultural Geographer, Tampere University, Finland)

Materialising the past: Holocaust tattoos and ice hockey masks

Dr. Brigitte Adriaensen (Hispanic Literature and Culture, Radboud University Nijmegen)

Beheadings in the Contemporary Mexican Drugs Novel: Humor and Irony in relation to the Abject

13-14h Lunch

Strand 2: *Laughing at Oneself, Laughing at the Other*

14-15h *Dr. Hilary Ramsden* (Rebel Clown Army, London)

Clowns, buffoons and the killing laugh

15-15.30h Coffee/Tea

15.30-17.30h **Scholar inputs and discussion**

Dr. Ivanka Apostolova (University Euro Balkan, Skopje, Macedonia)

Skopje 2014 as Monumental Theatre Project (anthropological state of ambitions, apathy and mediocre)

Dr. Pia Wiegink (American Studies, Mainz, Germany)

The Politics of Parodic Impersonation

Dr. Eva Fotiadi (Art Historian, University of Amsterdam)

The Anthropophagic power of women's laughter. Feminist migration activism in Austria in the 1990s

Dr. John Sundholm (Film Studies, Karlstad University, Sweden)

A Cinema of Japes: Robert Nelson and the Comic Legacy of Experimental Film

18h Aperitif

19h Dinner

Friday 20 September:

Strand 3: Intervening in the real

9.30-10.30h *Quinsy Gario* (artist-activist, Netherlands)

The "Black Pete is Racism" Campaign: nothing to laugh about?

10.30-11h Coffee/Tea

11-13 h Scholar inputs and discussion

Dr. Frederik Le Roy (Theatre Studies, Antwerp University)

"You must be joking!"

Dr. Begum Özden Firat (Cultural Sociologist, Istanbul)

Gezi insurgency, humor, wit and "unproportional intelligence"

Dr. Ihab Saloul (Cultural Researcher, Amsterdam)

Catastrophe and Humor: Performance *with* Performativity

Dr. Aldo Milohnic (Cultural Researcher, Peace Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia)

Artivistic Interventions as Humorous Re-appropriations

13-14h Lunch

14-16h Roundtable: **Perspectives for Art and Research**

17h Departures