

SENSES OF HUMOR

colloque
arts et médias



Annual Arts and Medias Symposium of
the University of Montreal
14-16 november 2018

Call for papers

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6th Annual Arts and Medias Symposium of the University of Montreal



In his book *Playing to the Gallery* (2014), Grayson Perry writes that humor does not belong to the world of contemporary art. An artwork may be satirical, subversive, parodic, caricatural, but it may not be funny: it would thus run the risk of not being taken seriously. For Wendy Rick Reaves (2011), humor has taken too big a share in visual culture to be ignored, which is however too complicated for critics to seize its subtleties. Therefore, humor is always situated – it varies upon the places, times and the communities who share it – a fact which did not prevent writers such as Henri Bergson to theorize its universal mechanisms. Does this make humor an appropriate angle through which we may observe and analyze any cultural artefact?

Taking these considerations as starting points, this symposium aims to examine how humor and laughter, taken as theoretical articulators and/or creative inspirations, open possibilities. Is humor's goal necessarily to make its spectators laugh? What does it provoke? In *On Humour* (2002), Simon Critchley posed that humor and laughter can unite people as much as it can establish a distance between them, sometimes concomitantly. Does the study of arts and media practices become a way to (re)create and (re)find a sense of humor at a given time and place? Or does our contemporary eye and humor contribute to give new interpretations to artworks and motifs, such as the infamous "phallus tree" found in the *Roman de la Rose* created by Jeanne de Montbaston (ca. 1350) ?

Through means of elaborations and experimentations of jocular forms or comical styles (irony, parody, absurdism, etc.), the artistic and media practices express different senses of humour which, in return, influence other forms of humour, which they (de/re)construct. From marginal drawings to memes, from cinema to video games, from sculptures to multimedia installations and performances, to which aesthetics does humor correspond? And what roles do the mediums, techniques, modes of diffusion and presentation of a given artwork play in the formation of an artist and her/his public's sense of humor?

In *Images on the Edge* (1992), Michael Camille contended that, if certain artworks may seem to subvert systems of oppression, they only do so on the surface and thereby give an impression of liberty to its public, thus reinforcing the system which artists and their publics sought to weaken. Caricature, for instance, does not always reveal the truth, and it does not always work on behalf of the counter powers: it is easy to demonstrate how James Gillray's work sometimes fall in the racist cliché or the misogynist insult, to name just a few. Thus, between satire and stereotype, laughter and humor become fearful, doubled-edged political weapons. This dimension is another one we wish to explore during this symposium: the political efficacy of humor in artworks and its limits.

Concerning a wave of irony in cinema of the 1990's, Jeffrey Sconce (2002) asserts that this form of humor, tinted by disengagement or even cynicism, may rather reflect the refusal to conform to a certain vision of the world. More recently, the series *Girls* (2012-2017) has been the subject of debate: should we see a critique of narcissism or its affirmation? In other words, does the irony in this series bring a new "gaze", or does it reproduce the "old" through contemporary codes of humor? What are the symptoms of irony's position in nowadays arts and media scenes?

These are all questions that we would like to address (but not limited to) at this multidisciplinary symposium, which will seek to examine links of all kinds between humor, art and laughter.

Considering these avenues for reflection around this year's theme, topic may include, but are not limited to the following axes:

Ethics/Politics : power, hierarchies, morals,
responsibility, subversion, carnivalesque function...

Cultures/Histories : identities, social conventions, sensibilities,
interculturality, historicity, generations, subcultures, Zeitgeist...

Aesthetics/Poetics : genres, forms, styles, practices,
techniques, objects, affects, playfulness...

Graduate students and professors, researchers and museum professionals from all disciplinary backgrounds are invited to submit a paper proposal (approximately 300 words) by Friday,

June 15th 2018.

Research-creation proposals are welcome as well. To submit your proposal, please fill out the form provided and send it back to colloqueharudem@gmail.com. Please note that there is a possibility for papers to be published in the conference proceedings. If you have any questions about the conference, you can write to us at the address above.