

Irony: framing (post)modernity

**January
23/24, 2014
4th Graduate Conference in Culture Studies**

Catholic University of Portugal
Faculty of Human Sciences ::: Lisbon

Irony – framing (post)modernity
4th Graduate Conference in Culture Studies

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INTRODUCTION

Irony: framing (post)modernity

Irony, either as a paradigmatic strategy of inquiry and critique or as a trait of character and existential perspective, has deeply informed Western culture and its philosophical and political tradition. The contemporary presence of irony in arts and everyday life – in the use of quotation, appropriation, pastiche, parody, kitsch, etc. – while questioning authenticity and authority, often conceals a lack of commitment that might be seen as a revival of the Jena romantics' epistemological view, in some cases taken to a solipsistic extreme. On one hand, irony as a strategy can be subversive, by deconstructing dogmas and canons, as, for instance, in the challenging of the Kantian notion of beauty by the Duchampian ready-made. On the other hand, it can be conformist when it is expressed as an end in itself, devoid of demystifying quality. Refusing to be dialogical or dialectical, it leaves no room for significant aesthetical experience and/or desirable ethical and political reactions to the established thinking.

Irony's potential today is thus an ambivalent one. If transformative power in politics and aesthetics ultimately lies in undermining norms and claims about truth (Rorty, 1989), postmodern perpetual ironical questioning might lead to the dead-end of nihilism or cynicism (Sloterdijk, 1988 [1983]). What is more, postmodernity might even reveal its very impossibility, since the ironical suspicion about the death of meta-narratives cannot altogether avoid a transcendental point of view (Deleuze, 1990 [1969]). Therefore, in this context, the contemporary problem of irony may perhaps be addressed as the problem of postmodernity itself.

In order to reflect upon the ways irony frames (post)modernity, we must rehearse answers to questions such as: how is irony used as a trope in today's artistic, cultural and political discourses, and practices? How do these rhetorical devices relate to postmodernity as an ironic epoch? How does irony make way for critique? Or, instead, how does irony neutralize the power of criticism by becoming self-referential?

keynote speakers

**ABSTRACTS
& biographies**

ABSTRACT

Philip Auslander

21st Century Girl: Lady Gaga, performance art, and glam

Lady Gaga is one of the most important and visible performers within popular music today to perpetuate the glam legacy not only in music but also in her approach to representing herself in all contexts. Gaga retains and even amplifies many of glam's aesthetic strategies but has reconfigured the glam sensibility for a hypermodern, post-ironic world. Her flirtation with performance art recapitulates the glam ambition to bridge art and popular culture but in the terms of an historical moment at which performance art is becoming the point at which the art world intersects with the culture of celebrity. Her version of gender bending goes glam ambivalence one better by evoking the drag king phenomenon that hit its stride in the 1990s. Gaga borrows the idea of continually changing personae from Bowie and those he influenced (Madonna in particular) but shifts it into hyper-drive by creating a seemingly infinite number of personae simultaneously rather than assuming different identities singly and sequentially. Whereas irony was a central trope of both glam and the postmodernism of which it is a variety, Gaga's self-presentation is simultaneously wholly artificial and wholly sincere. In the absence of the large-scale social and political movements that formed the backdrop of glam as the 1960s became the 1970s, Gaga has created her own movement that celebrates absolute self-definition, always the deepest value of glam.

bio

Philip Auslander received his Ph.D. in Theatre Arts from the Cornell University in 1983 and is full professor of Performance Studies in the School of Literature, Media and Communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He has written on aesthetic and cultural performances as diverse as theatre, performance art, music, stand-up comedy, robotic performance and courtroom procedures. He is the author of five books and editor or co-editor of two collections. His most recently published books are *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (2006) and the second edition of *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (2008). In addition to his work on performance, Auslander contributes art criticism regularly to *ArtForum* and other publications. He has written catalogue essays for museums and galleries in Austria, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He is the editor of *The Art Section: An Online Journal of Art and Cultural Commentary*. His primary research interest is in performance, especially in relation to music, media, and technology.

ABSTRACT

Rui Catalão

The exhaustion of trust

“It is better to suffer wrong than to do it, and happier to be sometimes cheated than not to trust” Dr. Johnson told us long ago. Yet, we seem to consume much of our energy avoiding deception. In his book, *The selfish gene*, Richard Dawkins describes a community of “suckers” and “cheats” (opportunistic liars that take advantage of the generosity of others without ever returning favours). Because suckers are constantly being deceived by cheats a third category emerges: the “grudgers”. The grudgers lose their trust in others and avoid having a supportive and indeterminate behaviour.

Cheats depend upon the existence of suckers but as the number of cheats increases, the number of suckers decreases. With fewer suckers to deceive, the existence of cheats is endangered. By causing the extinction of suckers, cheats are indirectly causing their own end.

In a move of great intellectual perversity, Dawkins proposes the simulation of a population comprised of a majority of suckers and a minority of cheats and grudgers.

The number of cheats grows exponentially until the survival of the population of suckers is at risk. Meanwhile, the small population of grudgers also dangerously decreases. As long as there are suckers to deceive the behaviour of grudgers is in trouble. With the extinction of suckers, the population of grudgers gradually increases. Once the balance is achieved between the grudgers and cheats, the growth of the grudgers accelerates till the near extinction of the cheats.

Still, the cheats can survive for a long period. Since there are fewer of them, they are harder to catch! They become a secret and privileged minority. Parasites of the social contract, they infiltrate themselves into the surveillance systems, controlling the mechanisms built against them. Their decadence has, nevertheless, already started: a long but irreversible agony.

bio

Rui Catalão is a Portuguese performer and writer. Using autobiography, the recent history of his country and an anthropological insight as tools to create fiction, his work deals with memory, chance, fragility, transparency and the way the perception of a given body is affected through storytelling. In the last three years he has presented the solos *Inside words*, *Av. Dos Bons Amigos and Goya's Manifesto*. He has also directed *Untitled*, *Still Life* (with João Galante and Ana Borralho), *Domados, ou não* (with the students from the Balletatro School of Oporto), and *Melodrama for 2 actors & 1 ghost* (with Cláudio da Silva and Sofia Dinger). In Romania, where he lived and worked during 2006-9, he staged the live-movie *Atit de frageda and Follow that summer*, and presented two series of improvised work: *Acum totsi impreuna* and *Rui* (Centrul National al Dansului Bucuresti, 2008-9). He wrote the play *Esther*, adapted from the Old Testament and commissioned by Culturgest PANOS programme for youth theatre companies (2013). He is the editor and co-writer of the book *Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker in Lisbon* (to be published later this year). Screenwriter of the films *To die like a man* (dir. J. P. Rodrigues, 2009) and *The golden helmet* (dir. J. Cramez, 2007), he also made an appearance as an actor in *The face you deserve* (dir. Miguel Gomes, 2004). As a dramaturge (and sometimes performer) he has worked with the choreographers João Fiadeiro, Miguel Pereira, João Galante-Ana Borralho (Portugal); Eduard Gabia, Mihaela Dancs, Manuel Pelmus, Madalina Dan (Romania), and Brynjar Bandlien (Norway). He has also worked as literary critic, writing occasionally for the Portuguese daily *Público* and the monthly magazine *Nau XXI*. His literary criticism and other texts are available on: reinucatalao.blogspot.pt

This amusing simulation of suckers causing the extinction of fools, with the grudgers, in turn, being responsible for the fall of the cheats, was described by Dawkins in 1976, although from an evolutionist perspective. He did not suggest that this phenomenon could occur as a cultural paradigm. Yet, an explosion of instruments of communication took place.

The traffic of information is nowadays widespread and it generates an intense activity of vindication and accusation, perpetrated by the growing number of spiteful people: the grudgers. What we witness, in the means of communication, social networks and ostentatious street demonstrations reproduced at a global scale, is a collective fever of the grudgers chasing cheats.

Shielded by their privileges, by generations and generations that exploited the suckers, cheats take refuge in their last retreats.

Sneaky manipulators, they secretly preserve everything they achieved. If they are spotted, there is nothing left for them to do except disguise themselves not necessarily as suckers (extinct) but beneath the arguments of the wronged grudgers.

According to Dawkins simulation, cheats will disappear more slowly than suckers. The privilege they have accumulated in the meantime will allow them to have a secure retirement. But their golden age has passed. From now on they will witness the slow downfall of their domain and the progressive ruin of a world once full of opportunities. The paradise of cheats was the land of suckers.

And what world will be ours, once the trust is lost?

ABSTRACT

Michele Cometa

Incomprehensibility and Irony. The Romantic roots of a cultural strategy

At the peak of German romantic philosophy and poeology, Friedrich Schlegel, the father of (post)modern Irony, wrote an essay on "Incomprehensibility" (1800) defending the discursive strategy of the *Athenaeum Fragments*. Incomprehensibility and Irony thus became the stigma of (post)modern thought. A re-vision of these categories is now necessary in order to understand the roots but also the future potential of cultural analysis.

bio

Michele Cometa is full professor of Comparative Literature and Visual Culture, coordinator of the doctoral programme in European Cultural Studies and, since 2007, dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Palermo. He is former coordinator of the B.A. in Foreign Languages and Literatures (1998-2001) and former head of the Department of Arts and Communication at the University of Palermo (2005-7). He studied German Literature and Philosophy at the Universities of Palermo and Cologne. He is author of several books on German and European culture, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. His most recently published books are: *L'età di Goethe* (2008 [2006]); with Alain Montandon: *Vedere. Lo sguardo di E. T. A. Hoffmann* (2009); *L'età classico-romantica* (2009); *Studi culturali* (2010); *La scrittura delle immagini* (2012) and *Mistici senza Dio. Teoria letteraria ed esperienza religiosa nel Novecento* (2012). He has edited works by J. J. Winckelmann, F. Schlegel, M. Mendelssohn, G. E. Lessing, J. W. Goethe, K. F. Schinkel, J. I. Hittorff, G. Lukács, O. Weininger, K. Kraus, E. Jünger. He recently co-edited *Die Kunst, das Leben zu "bewirtschaften"*, *Bios zwischen Politik, Ökonomie und Ästhetik* (2013). He translated P. Handke's *Das Spiel vom Fragen*, J. W. Goethe's, *Urfaust*, Z. Koltz's *Yossl Rakover wendet sich an Gott*, P. Turrini's *Josef und Maria*. He is the main editor of the Italian website on Cultural Studies, www.studiculturali.it

ABSTRACT

Jorge Fazenda Lourenço

When the ironic is political*

Is irony a way to cope with the world? As Auden wrote, “Can I learn to suffer / Without saying something ironic or funny / On suffering?” Can the (partial) responses to these questions be found in some of Jorge de Sena’s poems?

* This conference will be held in Portuguese

bio

Jorge Fazenda Lourenço received his Ph.D. in Hispanic Languages and Literatures from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1993 and since then has been associate professor at the Catholic University of Portugal. He is former director of the Research Centre for Communication and Culture (2005-12) and former coordinator of the Master and Doctoral Programmes in Cultural Studies (2005-8) at the Catholic University of Portugal. He has been visiting professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, the Ramon Llull University, Barcelona, and the University of the Andes, Bogotá. He is the general editor of the *Complete Works* by Jorge de Sena (7 volumes since 2010). He is the author of four books of essays on Jorge de Sena (1987, 1998, 2002, 2012), two bibliographies of Sena’s work (1991, 1994), and the editor of five anthologies of his poetry and prose (1989, 1989, 1999, 2002, 2004). He edited an anthology of Fernando Pessoa’s poetry (1985), an anthology of critical writings by Charles Baudelaire (2006) and translated *Le Spleen de Paris* (2007) by the same author. He also translated an anthology of poems by E. E. Cummings (1991) and *Harmonium* by Wallace Stevens (2006). He has published several essays on modern and contemporary Portuguese and Brazilian literatures. His most recent book, *Matéria Cúmplice*, received the 2012 Jorge de Sena Award. His research interests include poetry, the *Bildungsroman* and modernisms.

ABSTRACT

Mario Perniola

Philosophy's smile

Laughter, the comic and irony have been the subject of many studies and research. Very little, however, has been written on the smile from the philosophical point of view. What does a smile mean? And why does a tradition that goes back to the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus associate it with philosophical practice. Even Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes speak occasionally of a *philosophical smile*. In Italy, at the end of the 20th century, the focus was on irony in Gianni Vattimo's philosophy or on the tragic, its opposite, in Luigi Pareyson. My philosophy, instead, could be defined as a philosophy of the smile and of the enigma, whose most important visual manifestations can be found in archaic Greek sculpture and in Baroque painting. My talk makes use of a powerpoint consisting of a few images from these two moments in the history of art. Philosophy's smile originates from experiencing a world in continuous change and constitutes the strongest antidote to fanaticism.

bio

Mario Perniola is full professor of Aesthetics and director of the research centre "Language and Thought" at the University of Rome "Tor Vergata". He is former director of the Department of Philosophy at the same University. He has been visiting professor at many universities and research centres in France, Denmark, Brazil, Japan, Canada, USA and Australia. He is author of several books translated into many languages. His most recently published books are *Mukiteki na mono no sekkusu apiru* (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 2012), *20th Century Aesthetics: Towards A Theory of Feeling* (London: Bloombury, 2013) and *Vom katholischen Fühlen* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2013). The works translated into Portuguese are *Do sentir* (Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 1993); *Enigmas. O momento egípcio na sociedade e na arte* (Lisboa: Bertrand Editora, 1994); *A estética do século XX* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1998); *O sex appeal do inorgânico* (Coimbra: Ariadne Editora, 2003); *Contra a comunicação* (Lisboa: Teorema, 2005) and *A arte e a sua sombra* (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2006). He has directed the journals *Agaragar* (1971-3) *Clinamen* (1988-92) *Estetica News* (1988-95) and, since 2000, *Ágalma. Journal of Cultural Studies and Aesthetics*. Homepage: www.marioperniola.it.

speakers

ABSTRACTS
& biographies

ABSTRACT

Alexandra Balona

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Un coup de Dés. Chance and game as ironic strategy in Francisco Tropa's art work

Francisco Tropa, a Portuguese artist who represented Portugal at the 2011 Venice Art Biennale, develops a complex artistic practice, heterogeneous in its montage of several media, which call upon both the archaic and the modern: sculpture (exploring ancient techniques of casting, the negative and the positive, the original and the copy), installation, photography (mostly its analogic and manual legacy), serigraphy and performances, and also technical drawings and small machinery construction.

With subversive strategies of deployment, chance and ironic play, with a practice anchored in matter and its metamorphosis, the artist inquires on the boundaries of the real and imagination, the visible and the invisible, science and magic, the sacred and the profane, amongst others.

By means of producing "things" with hidden, and often cryptic, meaning that challenge processes of representation and recognition – following Roussel's inventions and Duchamp's linguistic games – the artist defies not only the conventions of thought and perception, but also the dogmatic assumptions of authenticity, autonomy and authority. Placing the artist in an undefined place between the scientist and the shaman, a mediator between the real and the unreal, the known and the unknown, Tropa's art works are mechanisms for which the viewer will have [to find] a possible entry and ignition to set the operation going.

Un coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hazard is the title of the graphic poem by Stéphane Mallarmé, published in 1897, which at first sight is defined by the random placement of words and variations of scale and spacing on the white page of the text. It has been considered as a kind of postmodern and post-structuralist critic of text, language and reading – namely, Barthes unbounded text, Derrida's dissemination of meaning, or Deleuze's rhizomatic entries and exits in representation and interpretation.

Francisco Tropa's art devices, as a *Throw of Dice*, set in motion an inquiring apparatus, at the same time intuitive and erudite, on the established knowledge and stable assumptions and perceptions and, implicitly, on the human condition.

bio

Alexandra Balona is an architect (FAUP, 2001), Master in Contemporary Art (School of Arts, UCP, 2007), and a PhD doctoral student (ABD) in *Media and Communications* at the European Graduate School (2009-), with Samuel Weber as her supervisor. She attended the *Paris Program in Critical Theory*, at the EHESS (Paris, 2010-2011). Her main fields of research are architecture, art, continental philosophy, cultural and performance studies, and contemporary dance. She has participated in *Mais Crítica – Seminar for Performing Arts Critics*, having several texts published online (<http://maiscritica.wordpress.com/>). She has also published, amongst other texts, *What looks like now is long ago. O lugar d'A Sala nas artes de acção no Porto, 1970-2010* in Susana Chioocca (Ed.), *A sala 2006-2011*. Porto, 2012.

ABSTRACT

Manuel G. Boronat

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Drifting deaths and happy endings: paradoxical irony in the films of Aki Kaurismäki

This paper focuses on the radical use of happy endings as critical turning points in the work of the Finnish filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki. Throughout film history, many creators have relied on the ironic power of happy endings as a tool for questioning the rules of traditional narrative and problematizing the ultimate message that popular art conveys to its audience. Kaurismäki stands out as the one contemporary director who has pushed such boundaries further, by using the final sequences of his movies as an experimental zone where irony challenges expected assumptions and pre-established tropes, in a truly paradoxical way: the double happy ending of *Le Havre* as a critique of European society as a whole, the ironical come-backs of dead –and/or dying– characters in *Lights in the Dusk*, *I Hired a Contract Killer* or *The Man Without a Past* as a sort of Sisyphean loop, and the hopeless failures followed by tender hopes at the end of *Shadows in Paradise*, *Ariel* or *Drifting Clouds*, underlying the contradiction by virtue of the absurd.

The proper combination of canonical bibliographic sources (such as the Aristotelian *eiron/alazon* interplay or Kierkegaard's fideism), literary studies (Northrop Frye's view on Hollywood *gimmicks*) and postmodern irony theories (from Agamben to Hutcheon) offers a strong critical background to trace the roots of Kaurismäki's method in previous works and filmmakers. Such roots will be studied by drawing upon three of the main ironic influences in the director's oeuvre: the visual gags of comedy and slapstick (as in the "happy endings" of Keaton or Alexander Mackendrick), the antinomic structures of irony in melodrama (epitomized in Douglas Sirk and re-developed by Fassbinder), and the transcendental role of miracles as controversial happy endings (as in Dreyer's *Ordet* and De Sica's *Miracolo in Milano*). These form a system that intertwines in the mysterious ironies of Aki Kaurismäki.

bio

Manuel Garin Boronat works at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, where he teaches as assistant professor in Film and Media Studies. In 2012, he defended his PhD thesis *The visual gag. From silent film to gameplay*. He is now expanding the comparative media project *Gameplaygag. Between Silent Film and New Media* (gameplaygag.com), having undertaken research stays at the Tokyo University of The Arts and the University of Southern California. His research focuses on audiovisual aesthetics, film soundtrack and serial narratives.

ABSTRACT

Maria Brock

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Sinking Giggling into the Sea – satire & postmodernity in Russia

Though differing in political discourse, culture in both the English-speaking West and Russia currently share a set of ‘conditions of possibility’ for political communication and its subsequent satirical treatment. Since Ancient Greece, satire and mockery of the political elite have in fact had a place in most regimes. They are indicative of a system’s inability to govern its subjects completely, as well as, in some cases, being symptomatic of a regime’s decline. A good example here is that of the ubiquity of the *anekdot* or political joke in the last two decades of the Soviet Union (Yurchak, 1997). However, in the 21st century, ‘cynical distance’ (Žižek, 1989) and ironic posturing have become the prevalent means of relating to politics, so much so that some writers and commentators have called for a dismissal of it in favour of more effective forms of critique (Hitchens, 2009) or a return to ‘New Sincerity’ (e.g. David Foster Wallace). One argument is that satire itself is no longer subversive enough a tool, and that the status quo thus cannot be destabilised by it alone. Another is that in late capitalism – both in Russia and the West, ideology has actually co-opted satire, meaning that citizens can ‘consume’ outrage passively through various satirical media products, and that by displacing this outrage they can thus abstain from more active forms of resistance. Taking as its cue Peter Cook’s quote that he was modelling his club, the Establishment, on ‘those wonderful Berlin cabarets which did so much to stop the rise of Hitler and prevent the outbreak of the Second World War’, the paper will examine the subversive potential of satire in neoliberal times. One attempt to redeem irony in the realm of political satire has been the genre of ‘hyperidentification’ (Boyer and Yurchak, 2010) as exemplified in American TV shows such as *Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*. Returning to present-day Russia, I will reflect on the possibilities of such forms of satire in a society shaped by ‘postmodern irony’ (Pomerantsev, 2011), where everyone claims to be in on the joke, and no major political change seems feasible.

bio

Maria Brock holds an MSc degree in Social & Cultural Psychology from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is currently completing her doctoral thesis in the department of Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London. She teaches both at Birkbeck and the LSE. Her research is located at the interstices of the humanities and social sciences, and evaluates the psychosocial dynamics of transitional and post-transitional societies, focusing on the former Eastern Bloc and Russia in particular. Other interests include memory and ideology. A list of her publications can be found here: <http://birkbeck.academia.edu/MariaBrock>.

ABSTRACT

Pinar Budan

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Resisting in a vicious cycle: the multiple perspectives in the Gezi Park protests

On May 30th 2013, Istanbul and its inhabitants experienced a public uprising against the government which later came to be known as the Gezi Protests. People gathered in Taksim Gezi Park, which is one of the last green areas in Istanbul's densely populated central district named Beyoğlu, in order to prevent the destruction of the park. It was a reaction to protect the park and simultaneously an act of resistance against the government's neoliberal policies. A number of environmentalists confronted the police forces and tried to prevent the cutting down of trees. The protests quickly spread to the whole country and people from all over Turkey held banners saying "Occupy Gezi Park". Ironically, some of these protesters had no idea about Gezi Park, and a small number of people did not even know what the initial event was about. In this respect, what makes the event in Istanbul significant is the fact that the main signifier that triggered the events constitutes a loose ground onto which people could project multiple meanings. In an age where globalization processes are contributing to the disjunction of politics from power, the Gezi Park events constitute chaotic terrain. This uncertainty gives people new hopes and opportunities for political engagement. On the other hand, the ways in which the Gezi Park events were experienced and suppressed creates a situational irony. One of these is the fact that the chemicals that are released from the tear-gas bombs used by police and some of the mediums used by protesters lead to environmental damage. The protests against an environmental disaster cause another environmental disaster. As it might be suggested that the mediums used by the protesters are a reaction to the government's use of brutal force and that violence produces violence, it is significant to demonstrate the irony in some kind of revolutionary movement's way of thinking and the contradiction between the purpose and the medium. In my paper I will demonstrate examples of these situational ironies which unravel the impossibilities of the system, and I intend to discuss the effects and results of these examples at different levels.

bio

Pinar Budan received her BA degree in the department of Western Languages and Literatures from Bogazici University in 2006 with a minor degree in Copywriting. She gained her MA degree in Cultural Studies from Istanbul Bilgi University in 2008. She worked in the private sector as a foreign trade officer between the years of 2008 and 2012. Since 2012, she has been studying at Sabancı University as a Cultural Studies MA student and working as a teaching assistant. She has organized several conferences as part of the Gender and Women Studies Forum at Sabancı University and has recently been granted teaching assistant awards. Her thesis research is on tourism anthropology, practices of remembering and forgetting in a small Aegean village in Izmir. Her areas of interest are anthropology of tourism, space theories, oral history, literature, narrative analysis and politics.

A B S T R A C T

Denis Chistyakov

Moscow State Institute of International Relations
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Irony, absurdity and postmodernism as the pillars of modern Russian politics

As Jean Baudrillard put it, “We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning”.

When researching the postmodern society, one should keep in mind that a postmodern individual is included in entirely different communicational processes to those of a modern person.

A subject today is involved in endless interconnected streams of information. Hence, a subject no longer consumes information in discreet blocks. Rather, we can imagine a subject standing knee-deep in a vast stream, grabbing whatever he or she may find interesting.

Mass-media’s influence on society is thus specific. Messages, images, symbols and signs created by the media not only form our perspective, but also serve as keys to the perception of reality. Under certain conditions, the very reality is being substituted by the virtual reality, creating hyperreality, in the words of Jean Baudrillard.

As the mass-media (including the Internet) is the primary producer and provider of information, then the mass-media is also the primary producer of simulacra.

Keeping that in mind, I would like to inspect how media, sarcasm and irony shape the simulative and absurd reality of modern-day Russian politics, which is more real than the real politics.

The protests of 2011/2012 exposed a corpus of socio-political problems left untouched since 2000, as well as a request for changes in the society stemming from the barely formed middle class. But what is helping to stoke the protests, what is the primary weapon used against the impregnable and blindfolded establishment? It is irony. From the “monstrations” to the Moscow mayor elections, humor binds protesters together into a community that laughs.

In my paper I would like to offer you a short perspective on how Russia’s political activist Alexey Navalny, virtual dissident Lev Sharansky and satirical TV show Reutov TV fight power with humor.

bio

Denis Chistyakov graduated from Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MGIMO), a university specializing in international relations, global issues and the state of the modern world, where he majored in Sociology of Mass Communications. He is currently a doctoral student in Sociology at MGIMO University. His thesis is dedicated to media theory, comparative analysis of modern and postmodern media theories and mass communications in the postmodern reality. His research interests include Philosophy, Post-structuralism, Postmodernism, Popular Culture, Media Studies and Politics.

ABSTRACT

Alexander Casper Cline

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Glass Houses – the gallery and museum as ironic spaces

In the recently translated volume 'Digital Memory and the Archive', media archaeologist Wolfgang Ernst calls for a new, ironic disposition to material culture. Whereas a 19th century antiquarian mode of display might suggest a continuity between recovered artefacts through mythological cultures, or between novel machines according to an imagined historical progress, an 'ironic museum' becomes conscious of the ideologies and discourses it produces. Ernst (2013) calls for a return to studying the technological devices themselves, stripped of their historical baggage: 'media archaeology digs in the museum's ruins.' Running in parallel to this theoretical approach to media is the object-oriented philosophy developed by contemporary thinkers such as Graham Harman, Timothy Morton and Ian Bogost. Drawing upon the work of Quentin Meillassoux, they criticise perspectives that cannot understand the world independent of human perception, while also rejecting a reduction to efficient material causality.

Alongside object-focused thought, we can look at attempts to study the world through the relations between objects. Relations between objects are critical to the process philosophy of A.N. Whitehead, the vitalistic theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and the actor network theory of Bruno Latour. In addition, forms of contemporary art have increasingly become conscious of the affects and behaviours produced by the gallery itself, and turned their attention to producing work and events that highlight such so-called 'post-production'. This tendency is analysed most clearly by the theoretical work of curators such as Claire Bishop and Nicholas Bourriard. We see works that turn gallery spaces inside out, displaying their inner material and institutional workings while obscuring or rendering obsolete the sorts of objects once presented. In a manner it is a logical extrapolation of Marcel Duchamp's already-ironic concept of the Ready-Made to the gallery itself.

Ironic practice within curation therefore has the potential to question how we conceive of the object and of the space in which it is displayed. Traditional notions of spectatorship, perception, materiality and agency become contested territories, while the authority of the curator, artist or archaeologist can be called into question or virtually obliterated. This is to say nothing of the objects themselves, but then an ironic mode of curation allows them to speak for – and against – themselves.

bio

Alexander Casper Cline is a doctoral student at Anglia Ruskin's Cultures of the Digital Economy Institute, working on an archaeology of the Sinclair Spectrum microcomputer. Alex studied philosophy and media at New School and Sussex, and also writes about digital, performance and installation art.

ABSTRACT

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Lost in translation: involuntary humor and visual culture in China

Xiao Dongyue points out in a recent publication (2010) that humor has existed since the creation of poetry and literature, although it has not received a lot of attention due to the fact that it was condemned by Confucian thinkers. The word “humor”, *youmo* in Chinese language, was allegedly translated for the first time by Lin Yutang (1895-1976) during the 1920s. After being condemned again by Mao Zedong during the “Cultural Revolution” (1966-1976), there was a revival of humor as an important element of creativity and the base of social harmony during the 1980s (Xiao 2010). Moreover, in recent years, we have seen the development of humor studies in and on China. In 2011 Jocelyn Valerie Chey and Jessica Milner Davis published two very important books on this topic.

Talking about humor means encompassing various disciplines and requires an interdisciplinary effort on the part of the researcher. The aim of this paper is to study “involuntary humor”, that is to say the kind of humor created without intention, and its representations both in translations and in visual culture in China. The category of “involuntary humor” is not intentional and it is generally created by in-group individuals but considered funny by out-group readers due to a misinterpretation of symbols and signs or simply by literal translations of short texts. After a brief introduction to the history of Chinese humor during (post)modernity, the essay will try to define what “humor” means to Chinese culture. The paper will finally exemplify through different kind of translations of short texts and images (mainly pictures) how things can get lost in – literary and/or visual – translations, provoking humor and laughing not to a targeted audience but to occasional readers or observers with a specific literacy.

bio

Elisabetta Colla holds a PhD in Culture Studies obtained from the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Catholic University of Portugal in Lisbon. She currently teaches Asian Art, Asian Literature and Chinese Ancient History at the Faculty of Arts (Lisbon University) and Chinese Language and Asian Visual Culture at the Faculty of Human Sciences (Catholic University of Portugal – Lisbon). She has also collaborated with museums and institutions to develop a program of special exhibitions and has contributed to some exhibition catalogues on China. She is a member of the Research Centre for Communication and Culture (Catholic University of Portugal – Lisbon) and the Institute of Art History (Lisbon University), and is a researcher at the Macau Scientific and Cultural Centre. She obtained a Master’s degree in Asian Studies from the Faculty of Human Sciences of Oporto, a postgraduate degree in Modern Chinese Studies from the Technical University of Lisbon, a Master’s degree (*Laurea*) in Oriental Languages and Literatures from “Ca’Foscari”, University of Venice, and a diploma in Chinese Language from the former Beijing Languages Institute.

ABSTRACT

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Locus anonymous: geography, anonymity and irony

Among the three of the Aristotelian unities, only “place” can attain a name of its own. Whereas “time” and “action” are helplessly put under periphrastic, parenthetical and so to speak bailed out formulations (*The Ides of March, One Thousand and One Nights, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, Crime and Punishment, Hard Times, Waiting for Godot, Love in the Time of Cholera*), the name of the place is a given in itself. It is simultaneously evocative, emblematic, paradigmatic, charismatic, mythical, bewitching and mesmerizing. In a borrowing from Gertrude Stein’s wording: *Venice is Venice is Venice is Venice*, whether for a merchant or for death. However, the name of the place might sometimes turn into a derogatory commonplace. Into an artistic debacle, thus. Or else, into the expression of a besieging by a harsh ideological motto (*the city of lights, the city that doesn’t sleep, the land of dreams*). Mentally and politically oppressive, then. This paper seeks to question why writers have the need to hide, to deviate and to look away from sites and places, by omitting and changing their names: by avoiding site restriction and name prescription. On the other hand, architects are willing and available – if not eager – to name and christen their work, sometimes in a hard and far-fetched way, in order to bring immediate aesthetical and social recognition to their plannings and buildings. If the former do experience a kind of self-imposed fatherlessness, the latter exert a wilful paternity, in which authority and authorship mingle according to what Michel de Certeau coined as local *superstitions*: superimpositions of names which are overpowering semantic covers that wrap places in a stifling manner (Certeau, 1997: 159). Hasn’t the *Fallingwater* house got its illustrative and tautological name not from the place itself, but out of Lloyd Wright’s criteria? Thus, the project of *anonymity* is also a statement of *autonomy*, and a placement of emancipation. The negative literary strategy of literally refusing and denying the name of the place is in the core of *Utopia* (non-place) as a programme of escaping from the

bio

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dominion of local traditions and site specificity – from the tyranny of *Genius Loci*. This presentation will focus on a case regarding two novels from roughly the same period, but with very different artistic parties and not so close geographic environments, despite all their sociological affinities. How come a realistic novel like *Buddenbrooks* never reveals, in a successful *tour-de-force*, the name of its celebrated location, Thomas Mann's birthplace, the city of Lübeck? Why did Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* transfer the Cornwall of her childhood to a place in Scotland which is bashfully mentioned as being in the Hebrides? Are these examples of artistic resistance or merely ironic and iconoclastic stances out of intellectual detachment?

ABSTRACT

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Distancing reality – irony in Orkeny Istvan's *The Toth Family*

Orkeny Istvan's novel, *The Toth Family*, and later adaptation for theatre with the same title, is one of the finest examples of Hungarian absurd literature, and yet is widely undiscussed by the English-speaking academic community. The play is built around an excellent example of dramatic irony: the Toth family is going out of its way to accommodate every need of a visiting army Major in the hope that it will provide a better life for their son who is fighting on the front in World War II. Completely unaware of their son's death shortly after the arrival of their guest, the family makes a tyrant of the neurotic Major who forbids them to think, sleep or yawn as they please. As the tragicomedy unfolds, the war is stripped of its aspects of terrible suffering through the use of irony, and even the heroic culmination of Toth slaying the tyrant Major, thus freeing his family, seems grotesque and futile. In a world where the cesspool cleaner has a Ph.D. in law and it is normal to forbid the postman to breathe lest it should disturb the Major, the tragedy of World War II is allegorised by the story of this family and irony is used as a tool for distancing the unspeakable horrors of the war.

bio

Reka Dalnoki is a student at the University of Glasgow researching the use of rhetoric and plot devices in constructing meaning in the theatre of the absurd with special interest in the works of Beckett, Ionesco, Stoppard and Orkeny. Her previous research focused on the use of theatrical space in the construction of character and the way literary translations alter our interpretation of absurd drama by the same authors. Her main research interests include existentialism, the absurd, tragicomedy and translation studies.

ABSTRACT

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Irony in *The Simpsons*. Postmodern detachment or satirical militancy?

The Simpsons has been identified as a hallmark of postmodern television and of post-modern irony in particular, understood as the rejection of metanarratives that ground existential meaning in objective truth (Bignell 2008; Barker 2003). *The Simpsons* is exactly said to deny any universal claims to objective truth or existential meaning (Steeves 2005; Ott 2007). The detached postmodern use of irony in *The Simpsons* cancels any possible moral standpoint (Matheson 2001), because it acknowledges the contingency of all viewpoints by consistently undercutting affirmative statements (Beard 2004). The series ironically mocks society, but its ironic mockery is ultimately conservative (Wallace 2001) as it indicates that no ideology can objectively claim to improve the *status quo* (Dettmar 2004). These postmodern ironic readings clash with progressive and satirical interpretations of *The Simpsons* (Turner 2005; Alberti 2004; Marc 1997). Satire namely deploys a militant irony rooted in an absolute moral standard (Frye 1990) aimed at social amelioration (Hutcheon 1985). Jonathan Gray (2005) has argued that *The Simpsons* is indeed satirical and moral, however, without asserting strong moral claims, in order to avoid hypocrisy and patronising. Gray's study interestingly links the ironic criticism of *The Simpsons* to ancient philosophical 'kynicism' (Sloterdijk 1987), but does nonetheless remain firmly rooted in a postmodern framework. By contrast, this paper will re-examine the classical roots of 'kynicism' in Socratic irony, defined by Søren Kierkegaard (1989) as infinite absolute negativity. Although sometimes equalled to postmodern irony (Lippit 2000), I will interpret infinite absolute negativity as an attitude which by contrast holds on to an absolute moral standard that paradoxically remains out of reach. Through a textual analysis, this paper will show that the ironic criticism of *The Simpsons* is satirical exactly because it is rooted in a moral standard, which however unexpressed is presupposed for the series' comedy to function.

bio

Dieter Declercq studied Linguistics and Literature (BA), Philosophy (BA) and Western Literature (MA) at KU Leuven, as well as Film Studies (MA by Research) at De Montfort University, Leicester and Interpreting (MA) at Erasmus University College, Brussels. Since October 2013, he has been developing his PhD research at the Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of Film and the Moving Image, at the University of Kent. He has published on *The Simpsons* as humorous ethical truth-telling in the philosophical journal *Ethical Perspectives* (2013) and on moral approaches to film and television history in the edited collection *Cinema, Television and History: New Approaches* (2014).

ABSTRACT

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***Hamlet* as an object of irony in modernist and postmodern literature**

Shakespeare and his most renowned tragedy *Hamlet* haunt twentieth century English Literature. As James Joyce wittily remarked 'Shakespeare is the happy hunting ground of all minds that have lost their balance'. The aim of the present paper is to study why the iconic figure of Hamlet has become one of the most frequently alluded images in the works of major modernist and postmodern writers and how these allusions function in their works. The analysis is based on two modernist works (*Ulysses* by James Joyce, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* by T.S. Eliot) and two post-modern works (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* by Tom Stoppard, *The Black Prince* by Iris Murdoch).

With the arrival of modernism irony has become both a philosophical conception of existence and an artistic program which sees the world as chaos. Modernists' endeavours to disconnect literature from idealizing and romanticizing tendencies is apparent in both Stephen Dedalus's theory on Shakespeare and Eliot's lyrical hero's perception of Hamlet.

In Postmodern literature, which has become increasingly self-conscious, subversive irony suggests even further complexity. Both Tom Stoppard and Iris Murdoch give a postmodern reading of *Hamlet*, where Shakespeare's text is introduced in ironic quotation marks and irony turns into a tool of the authors' intertextual dealing with other texts. The paper will stress similarities as well as differences between the modern and postmodern treatment of irony. Instead of modernists' quest for meaning in the world of chaos, postmodern writers doubt the possibility and even necessity of such a quest and draw everything into a question, thus using irony to stress fragmentation.

bio

Manana Gelashvili is a Professor of English at Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University. She obtained her PhD for her thesis on *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Romantic Imagination* (1984). Her latest book of *Collected Essays* (1912) contains essays on Woolf, Joyce, Faulkner and Pound. She has made presentations at various international conferences in Oxford, Vienna, Caen, Freiburg and Tbilisi, and has organized four international conferences in Oxford and Tbilisi. She is the author of *The Problem of Time in Modernist Literature* (2005). She has also edited scholarly books, among them on James Joyce, Somerset Maugham, *Collected Essays on English Literature Today* (with David Chandler), and has supervised a number of doctoral dissertations.

ABSTRACT

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***Finnegans Wake* – a modern ironic epic**

In *Anatomy of Criticism* Northrop Frye termed *Finnegans Wake* the “chief ironic epic of our time.” The aim of this paper is not only to show the main elements which make James Joyce’s novel *Finnegans Wake* a modern ironic epic, but also to prove how Joyce, through the use of extensive irony, gives the reader a modern ironic mock epic. Although Joyce himself perceived both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as epics, Joyce’s epic is totally different from the epic Aristotle used to describe in his *Poetics*. Joyce, by using the themes and characteristics of an epic, gives the reader a modern approach to the epic, merely making a mockery out of it. What makes *Ulysses* absolutely different from *Finnegans Wake* is that while in the former Joyce gives a parody of Homer’s *Odyssey*, *Finnegans Wake* takes its origins from a ballad about an alcoholic hod-carrier, Tim Finnegan, that arose in the 1850s. Therefore, irony as a literary device is stronger in *Finnegans Wake*, where the epic hero, who at the same time represents the whole of mankind, has fallen from Odysseus to a simple hod-carrier.

Joyce extensively uses myth as a source constantly parodying either great heroes or events. As Joyce put it “My intention is not only to render the myth sub specie temporis nostri but also to allow each adventure (that is, every hour, every organ, every art being interconnected and interrelated in the somatic scheme of the whole) to condition and even to create its own technique.” Apart from mythical allusions, Joyce widely uses biblical, archetypal and literary allusions to create an ironic hypertext.

bio

Tamar Gelashvili is a doctoral student of English Literature at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. She received her MA at the same university for her thesis on *Minimalism in Beckett’s Late Plays*. She works as a senior specialist of Publishing and Quality Assurance at the Faculty of Humanities and teaches BA students 20th Century English Literature and The English and American Short Story as a guest lecturer.

Tamar has participated in several academic conferences, including international conferences in Vienna and Tbilisi. She has published articles on Joyce, Beckett and Albee, and has translated short stories and plays from English and German.

ABSTRACT

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The deconstruction of Portuguese *imagologia* in Mário de Carvalho's *Fantasia para dois coronéis e uma piscina*

Irony is predominant within the majority of Mário de Carvalho's work, used as a strategy to critique contemporary post-colonial Portugal. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Fantasia para dois coronéis e uma piscina*, in which Carvalho has constructed characters and events in order to address the problems he believes have come to plague the Portuguese psyche within the contemporary period from 1974 onwards. The first of these is the protagonist, Emanuel, whom Carvalho represents as a typical epic hero in the style of *Os Lusíadas*, but then goes on to deconstruct, as Emanuel's adventures in love falter or work against his supposedly heroic qualities. The colonels have features that are reminiscent of the traditional Portuguese construction of *o português velho*, as they seek a return to the bucolic idyll of rural Portugal in order to escape the relentless 'chattering' inherent to modern Portuguese society, but Carvalho juxtaposes these desires with the acquisition of a swimming pool, symbolic of a nouveau-riche Portuguese lifestyle, and an apparent lack of high culture, despite strivings to demonstrate otherwise. Through these characters Carvalho is also commenting on the damage caused to the Portuguese psyche by the colonial wars and subsequent loss of empire, as the colonels are demonstrated as both explicitly and implicitly damaged by their experiences.

This paper will therefore examine how Carvalho uses irony to deconstruct traditional notions of Portuguese identity that have been constructed over centuries within Portuguese *imagologia* of the Portuguese as heroic and noble, qualities inextricably linked to the period of the Discoveries which the Portuguese have always used as the central reference point in the construction of their national identity. The ironic discourse throughout the novel enables a critique of this *imagologia* and therefore questions the nature of Portuguese identity itself.

bio

Anneliese Hatton is currently undertaking an MA by Research in Hispanic Studies at the University of Birmingham in the field of contemporary Portuguese culture and literature, focusing on the work of Mário de Carvalho, and has delivered a paper on *portugalidade* at the University of Glasgow in 2013, with forthcoming papers in Liverpool and Ljubljana. She currently offers courses within the Portuguese department in language, history and culture and literature.

ABSTRACT

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Death in Dortmund

Although the opera *Anna Nicole* tells a tragic and heartbreaking story, it is at the same time laden with irony and sarcasm. *Anna Nicole* (Mark Anthony Turnage/Richard Thomas) was premièred at the Royal Opera House in London in 2011, in a dazzling production by Richard Jones. Two years later *Anna Nicole* had its German première in Dortmund, with a new production by Jens-Daniel Herzog. Later that year, the opera had its American première with the New York City Opera (NYCO).

The score and libretto of *Anna Nicole* provide several rhetorical figures, parodies and puns, with references to both popular and erudite culture, as well as strong religious metaphors. In the ROH performances many spectators reacted by laughing throughout the first act, whereas in Dortmund, at the première, nobody laughed. This is partly due to the more serious and dramatic interpretation of Jens-Daniel Herzog's production, portraying 'Anna Nicole Smith's body as the battle field of neoliberal economics' and moving inexorably towards Anna Nicole's tragic demise. The Dortmund production was enormously successful. However, in New York, Richard Jones's production ended in tears, with *Anna Nicole* dictating the withdrawal of NYCO's main sponsor and the final demise of the mythical company.

Whereas the opera itself addresses questions regarding the mix of tragedy and irony, the events around the two national premières question the reception of irony. For irony to work its subtext has to be understood and reach emotionally equipped receptors, able to deal with irony in a tragic and serious context. What, in this globalised world, can explain the significant differences in the reading and reception of this work, based on a story that made international headlines? And what happens to irony in the face of tragedy?

bio

Vera Herold holds a BA in Music from Conservatório Nacional de Música in Lisbon (1986) and a Post-Graduate qualification in Arts Administration from Instituto Nacional de Administração (1990). She worked at Teatro Nacional de São Carlos, Projet LUMIERE (Association of European Film Archives) and Expo 98. She has also been leader and participant in many cultural projects, for both governmental and private institutions, as owner and manager of a production company and artists' agency, VHProduções. Her fields of interest are opera studies, culture and economy, culture and affects/emotions, literary translation.

ABSTRACT

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Humoreskes. Gravity and importance of humor in Los Torreznos

Locating humorous musical resources in the work of The Torreznos will help us to reflect on ideas about “pathos”(from the Greek πάθος, representing an appeal to the audience’s emotions), repetition and the absurd.

These ideas will be reflected on in detail. On one hand the etymological sense of “absurd” that comes from “-ab” (of) + “surdus” (deaf), literally means “producing a false sound”, referring to something dissonant or divergent (funny, miscellaneous). On the other hand, it may be something that sounds useless, reprehensible or not understood. Furthermore, humor will be thought of as contagious sound, like a noise, as a tool to strike down conventional logic. The humor that arises from repetition uncovers the bark, the thick skin of the words and names. The effect and affection that this sound produces emphasizes the facade of conventional objects, language and ideas associated unconsciously. Through their voices, the performances of The Torreznos lead the hearing towards a litany that resembles the minimalist musical works, allowing variations that highlight the theatricality and intensity. The discourse of the body and live improvisation are factors translated into a clear intention to communicate from minimal resources on the stage, allowing the public and performers to experience a catharsis (from the Greek κάθαρσις =kátharsis, purification through emotions). The emphasis, energy and presence are stressed by constriction, which prevents them from representing or expressing a “natural” form. The seriousness of facing a physical and mental challenge is perceived through distance as a hilarious situation. These emotional and auto-imposed limitations are combined by the artists to achieve synergy among the audience.

We will ask how these artists provide creative, ironic and subversive strategies to transform the listening in the audience and if these exercises are useful for awakening a critical position in the spectators.

bio

Born in Madrid in 1982, Alicia Gueso Hierro is a PhD candidate at the University of Girona, department of History of Art (Contemporary Art and Culture program). She finished her degree in Fine Arts at L' Accademia di Venezia in 2005 and continued her studies in Semiotics of Music Performance in Helsinki (UH). She has participated in workshops and meetings at CA2M, LCE, Goethe Institut, Arteleku and Reina Sofia LIEM-CDMC. She has organized a seminar entitled *The plastic sound: composition strategies* at the University of Alcalá. Currently she is developing her work in the field of Sound Art, her research being focused on Musical Performance and Aurality, and performing in sound-related festivals such as In-Sonora, Noises in the Void and Son at the National Music Auditorium in Madrid. She has participated in the meeting *Performa 11* and is also leading a pedagogic and experimental program of Postdramatic Opera.

ABSTRACT

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The internet is serious business: anonymity, cynicism, and transgression

Despite having conquered a place as a political actor in the global symbolic flows of (mass and social) media, Anonymous has its roots in an obscure hub of a particular internet subculture: 4chan's /b/ (random) subforum. This online space hosts an amusement-driven sociality based on satire, mutual support, information, debate, and moral brinkmanship, rejecting dogmas and generalized notions of appropriateness. Interaction is anonymous, ephemeral, and highly unstructured, relying on digital technology to immediately appropriate all sorts of cultural objects, converting them to digital artifacts which are constantly exchanged and reworked. The result is a critical, semiotically reflexive, global culture processor that operates in real-time, has its own multimedia lexicon and is in a permanent state of transformation. Furthermore, its technical, social, and cultural openness configures its development in close connection with the dynamic configurations of digital mediation in human relations. This communication argues that the seemingly apolitical structure can be conceived as a recuperation of elements from the Cynic philosophy's cosmopolitanism, particularly its strive for autonomy through the rejection of the *polis* and of political readings of man. Anonymous internet sociality grants public expression to both the deviant and the otherwise concealed while simultaneously being motivated by this very possibility, creating a context where the publicly sanctioned is conspicuously validated. Collectively questioning the limits of the *public* and of the *self* here takes the form of transgressive interventions in both spheres, thus constituting a strong political project through a public stance which does not require, and is not subordinated to, a conspicuous self-righteousness.

bio

Pedro Jacobetty is a PhD candidate at the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute of the Open University of Catalonia (IN3-UOC). His thesis work focuses on the intersection between technology, culture, and power dynamics. He holds an MA in Sociology from University Institute of Lisbon, where he also collaborated with the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-IUL). His research interests include technology, culture, politics, and social change.

ABSTRACT

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Theatre of the absurd: when tragic turns into absurd through irony

As Walter Kaufmann argues, after WWII we cannot focus on Oedipus or Hippolytus anymore. Thus, modern dramatists resort to dark humour, to demonstrate the absurdity of the world. Eugène Ionesco describes the new theatre form: it should reach the edge of grotesque, of caricature; it should push everything on the paroxysm, where the source of the tragic lies. These plays have been characterized as “metaphysical farces”. Theatre of the absurd indicates the unhappiness on distance, through irony. Its means are over-imaginative: fantasy, grotesque, clowning, exaggeration, dream, illusion, parable, parody. The tragic world is still presented but with comic covering. Time, people and means change. Ancient tragic poets expressed their beliefs in a “high” way; the absolute misfortune was given in the “highest” way. After the war, the only way to express the impasse in art was irony and exaggeration. Consequently, theatre of the absurd, modern “metamorphosis” of tragedy, as Ion Omesco believes, is the tragicomedy of impasse, of loneliness, of repetition; the only way to “deceive” the absurdity is through humour, irony and sarcasm.

bio

Stella Koulandrou holds a Bachelor's degree in Classics, from the University of Ioannina, a Bachelor's degree in Theatre Studies, from the University of Athens, a MPhil in Theatre Studies: *The Greek theatre from ancient times to nowadays*, from the University of Athens, and a PhD in Theatre Studies: *The reception of Greek tragedy in contemporary French drama*, from the University of Athens. Her research interests focus on Greek tragedy and its reception in contemporary dramaturgy.

A B S T R A C T

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Subverting the stereotypes: identity discourses in Chicana border art

Chicano/a culture is an active participant in contemporary American culture, yet it is best understood in the context of the sociopolitical conditions from which it emerges, that is, the geopolitical border between Mexico and the U.S.A., a place where opposing sensibilities collide and two cultural and political systems coexist.

This proposal tries to demonstrate how Chicana cultural production uses irony to deconstruct dogmas, canons and stereotypes not only by questioning the dichotomies colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed, dominant culture/minority culture and tradition/modernity, but also by criticizing preconceived concepts of culture, race, gender, language and placement that the Anglo-American thought still propagates.

Chicanas, as inhabitants of two distinct cultural sites (and simultaneously living at the margins of both), disrupt received notions of nationalism and cultural identity through art, aiming to articulate the dilemmas forged from the discontinuities and tensions – economic, social, political, and cultural – that run throughout the terrain of Chicano culture. Therefore, devices of paradox, irony and subversion are signs both of the conflictual and contradictory nature of their identity, and of their attempt to struggle and resist restrictive roles imposed by the dominant society and their own community. In a society that is still trying to understand the complexities and universalities of ethnic, racial, cultural and gender intersections between languages, nations and cultures, such cultural practices facilitate our understanding of the contemporary world, where geographic, linguistic and cultural barriers are permanently questioned. Thus this production, developing in the borderlands of our postmodern migratory society, represents a new means of engagement and understanding the reality we live in, one that suggests that it is possible to transform conditions of marginality and exploitation into something powerful and emancipating.

bio

Patrícia Alves de Cavalho Lobo is a PHD candidate at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon. Her doctoral thesis *Chicanas searching for a territory: a legacy of Anzaldúa* focuses on the last three decades of Chicana experience in the borderlands, namely the identity dilemmas caused by internal and external conflicts that emerge from oppression, racism and sexism imposed by the specific context of the geopolitical border between Mexico and the U.S.A. Her Master's Degree dissertation (2007) focuses on Chicana literature. She has a two year specialization in Teaching Foreign Languages, a four year degree in English and German Studies and a BA in Spanish Studies. Her areas of research include Chicano Studies, Border Studies, Gender Studies and Post-colonialism.

ABSTRACT

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Living in cynical times: politics, ideology and speech act theory

As regards the realm of politics, the current, increasingly widespread skepticism of parliamentary-democratic processes on the account of laypeople is mainly due to the widely perceived over-determination of politics (=democracy) by economy (=capitalism). This situation implies that politicians are nowadays being more and more deprived of any decision-making power, their only option being to enforce non-democratic decisions when necessary and democratic decisions only when made possible by (the absence of) economic constraints. More often than not, the whole process results in politicians most of the time adopting a cynical attitude, which Sloterdijk (1983) spotted a long time ago and which Žižek (1989) defined as follows: “the cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask (...) cynical reason is no longer naïve, but is a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it”. This, in turn implies that the traditional critique of ideology as the unmasking of the naked truth is no longer effective. Instead, a logic of re-mark (a repetition of something which we know but, at the same time, refuse to know, thus repressing it) is to be followed. In this essay I hope to instantiate the logic of re-mark via an analysis of various speech acts performed by politicians. I will argue that most of the time these speech acts are unavoidably infelicitous due to the systematic infringement of conditions related to sincerity and intentionality.

bio

Carlos Yebra López (Zaragoza, 1988) is a PhD student in Political Philosophy (BA, University of Zaragoza (Spain), MA, Birkbeck, University of London (UK), PhD at University of Pablo de Olavide (Seville, Spain), whose main interest revolves around the areas of philosophy of language and politics. In recent years his research has been focused on the intersection between political communication and social network analysis. As a result, he has given guest lectures at the PhilLang2013, University of Lodz (Poland, May 2013) and Ruhr Bochum Universität (September 2013) and has published numerous articles on philosophy in national (e.g. *Revista Observaciones Filosóficas*, *Revista Internacional de Pensamiento Político*) and international (e.g. *Philosoverse*, *Psikeba*, *Revista de Estudios Culturales*) peer-reviewed journals.

A B S T R A C T

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Jamesonian irony, retro-avant-garde and the aesthetization of politics

This paper delves deeper into the theoretically perplexing practice of the Slovenian music band Laibach, which draws links to Stalinism, fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism in general. The author presents a different reading to the more established Žižekian resolution of the issue, via his introduction of the notion of 'over-identification', meaning the critique of a regime by taking it more seriously than it takes itself. It is argued in the present paper that Fredric Jameson's concept of modernist Irony as the (un)sublation of two contradictory terms not by solving but by exposing their contradictions and the theoretical frame of political unconscious both help to more aptly explain Laibach's links to socialism, capitalism and their structures of thought. It is further suggested that Jameson's Irony may be characteristic of retro-avant-garde practices in general and help to expose and explain their double meaning strategies and essential failures in creating any clear political agenda. In the end, their Ironic nature situates them within the realm of aesthetics and a historically notorious gesture of the aesthetization of politics.

bio

Aténé Mendelyté is a PhD candidate in film studies at the Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University, Sweden. Prior to that, she studied at the University of Amsterdam and was affiliated to the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Analysis. She is currently working with American avant-garde films in relation to Deleuzian film-philosophy, mental- and neuroaesthetics. Previously, she worked with Samuel Beckett's television plays as well as his theatrical notebooks, concentrating on either film-philosophical or intermedial aspects of his works.

A B S T R A C T

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Curating ironically: can it be done? The case of the permanent exhibition of Israeli art at the Israel Museum

In July 2010, after three years of extensive renovation, the Israel museum reopened, and for the first time in its history, Israel had a permanent exhibition representing Israeli art. The curators, Yigal Zalmona and Amitai Mendelsohn, created an exhibition that does not follow a linear-chronological narrative, but is focused on what they saw as dominant themes in Israeli art. The themes represented are ideological attitudes to the Zionist project, illustrated by the artworks chosen: the Jewish wish to be natives in the land of Israel; the desire for a modernist universal language of art for the nation; Jewish, as opposed to Israeli, identity, reinforced by religious memory. Within the exhibition's thematic framework, the curators contrived a rich network of formalistic or content-related links between the art works. Many of these links are ironic in character, intended to undermine the ideological stances. For example, an ironic artwork can cast an ironic interpretation on the non-ironic pieces surrounding it. Or an ironic meaning can be derived from the encounter between different artworks in the exhibition space. However, irony is a trope that demands special conditions to convey its meaning. Visitors must abandon initial, easier-to-grasp meanings, and fathom – through extremely subtle hints – different, often more painful, understandings of the art before them. Inspired by Carol Duncan and Donald Preziosi, who both suggested routes to ideological readings of exhibitions, and by cultural theorist Mieke Bal, and using tools drawn from the fields of literary and cultural theory, I will examine the conditions of irony in this exhibition, and explore their relationships with other tropes employed by the curators and with the exhibition's formalistic qualities. I suggest that when the conditions do not support irony, other possibilities of reading the exhibition emerge, and irony is transformed into the more accessible, more democratic trope of ambiguity.

bio

Noa Milikowsky-Marienberg earned her BA in the department of Art History at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel. Today she is a graduate student in the program of Cultural Studies at Hebrew University. She recently submitted her MA dissertation, *The Permanent Exhibition of Israeli Art in the Israel Museum: Historiography, Poetics and Interpretation*, written under the supervision of Dr. Dana Arieli-Horowitz and Dr. Nicole Hochner. Noa teaches at the Kerem Institute for Jewish Education in the Humanities under the auspices of David Yellin College; Pardes Art School under the auspices of Washington Hill College; and Hebrew University's Secondary School.

ABSTRACT

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The anti-dramatic irony in film language analysis

If semio-aesthetic incongruity is an essential to succeed in different fields of art, a film would also hardly achieve its goals without irony. Philosophy in the film is not just an expression of a theoretical phenomenon, but a creative process, as Gilles Deleuze recognizes the philosophy as the art of forming, inventing and manufacturing the concepts.

If 'the concept' is regarded as a quest for singularity, we know Bergman as creator of a new artistic language, considering his de-dramatization and deconstruction of the cinematographic image. He produces a contradiction between an action or expression and the context, applying the anti-dramatic ironies in the frame. These ironies construct a distorted narrative which expresses bitingly an absurd atmosphere and leaves the spectator with an unpleasant feeling. What we find through irony is a Sisyphus situation condemned to eternal repetition.

In Bergman's images, we deal with transgressions that appear in the frame, resulting in an illogical world which softens the stiffness of the classic narrative by means of ironies. It is noteworthy to say that the Bergmanian framing challenges the psychology, the philosophy and the ideology of the time. Christian existentialist thinking of the pastor's son is an outlet to find freedom and a wish to change his life.

In this paper, ironic transgressions in Bergman's images are being studied, including the incoherent shots, the effects of time-out, the juxtaposition of fullness and emptiness, the decentralization, the disturbed spaces, the disconnected looks and the sound management.

For Bergman, the cinema is a religious institution where the ideology must be criticized by visual ironies. In *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Persona*, Bergman creates a profitable irritation in which everything that is prescribed and troubling must be destroyed.

bios

Leila Montazeri is a PhD student at University Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3, a screenwriter of Iranian television films and series, and a researcher at Najm Film, the Iranian film society. Her research is on the frame in the cinema of Ingmar Bergman.

Chantal Duchet is Professor (PhD) in Film Studies and Television at University Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3, and a designer of television advertising. Her research focuses on the complex relationships between advertising and film and television as well as semiotic, economic and social aspects. She is the author of several television commercials and numerous papers and CD-ROM on the subject.

ABSTRACT

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Irony as cynicism or dialogue in David Foster Wallace?

In an essay (“E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction”) on American television and literature and the relationship between the two the writer and critic David Foster Wallace assails irony as closely related, or perhaps even more or less identical, to cynicism. Irony tyrannizes us, he claims, because it self-consciously incorporates its own critique, thereby insulating itself against critique. From being a subversive tool of rebellion irony has become a dominant cultural attitude very similar to that which Sloterdijk describes as cynical; as enlightened or self-conscious resignation. “What do you do when postmodern rebellion becomes a pop-cultural institution?” Wallace asks.

I will attempt to answer this question using Wallace’s own literary strategy as an example. And it is my thesis that his literary style conveys a sort of irony which he does not himself detect: a local irony manifested in a concrete communicative situation. Wallace thereby makes use of irony in a form that escapes his own awareness, and in this line I propose a reading of one of his short stories where I read him against himself, so to speak.

On the content-level of the short story “The Depressed Person” from *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* Wallace presents yet another cynical-ironic consciousness: a woman frozen in her own self-analyzing resignation. But instead of letting this cynicism spread to the formal level of narration Wallace offers what becomes an amusing and sympathetic depiction – of an otherwise, well, depressing existence – by use of irony, not as an all-encompassing attitude, but as local *stylistic* manifestations.

Inspired by the thoughts of Mikhail Bakhtin I propose that this strategy may be seen as bordering on a dialogical use of irony which challenges the monological character of irony as all-encompassing ideology. And in doing this, irony may also be bordering on humor.

bio

Solvej Jul Nielsen is Master of Arts in Comparative Literature from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She finished her thesis on irony and its communicative function in a postmodern context in the early spring of 2013. Topics of special interest to her are satire, irony, and humor and their interrelations in a communicative (Mikhail Bakhtin) and philosophical (Søren Kierkegaard) perspective. Furthermore, she has studied intermediality, the interplay of different art forms or media, resulting in an article on intermedial elements in the work of Danish poet Ursula Andkjær Olsen (published online at <http://bachtin.wordpress.com/>).

ABSTRACT

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Cool Fun: the role of irony in the rhetoric of authenticity

Irony has always been a powerful strategy in theatrical practice, as it brings in the broadest of resonances and challenges our perception and awareness. Within post-modern theatre, irony has been employed as a reflexive, meta-theatrical technique to explore new possibilities of thinking and representing the human subject. However, irony can be also used as a potent tool of anti-theatre. This paper will examine the case of the “Cool Fun”, as defined by the German theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann in his influential book, *The Postdramatic Theatre*. Lehmann describes a theatre that mimics and reflects media and their suggestion of immediacy, finding inspiration in television entertainment such as reality shows, splatter films, and pop music. According to Lehmann, it is ironic, distanced and “cool” in tone, in the sense that all emotions can be expressed only in quotation marks, through an “irony filter”. He suggests that, by lowering the standards and being “bad art”, “Cool Fun” communicates anger at social and political conditions, as well as sadness and compassion, and is thus often superior to most routinized productions. He offers the examples of She She Pop, Gob Squad and Beat Le Mot.

Contrary to Lehmann’s claims, this paper will argue that, by replacing theatricality and imagination with the exhibition of the real - mediated – life and exposing the theatrical means and conventions as suspect, “Cool Fun” sets in motion a rhetoric of authenticity, in which the consumers are recognized as producers of meaning. In this framework, irony is used as a tool to negotiate the paradoxes and inconsistencies inherent in the practice of “Cool Fun” and to endow a satisfying feeling of authenticity. Viewed in this way, “Cool Fun” submits to the social and political conditions it supposedly criticizes, becoming part of the postmodern consumer culture.

bio

Niki Orfanou is working on a practice-based PhD via playwriting at the Drama, Theatre and Performance Department in Roehampton University, London, under the supervision of Prof. Joe Kelleher. Her research focuses on the development of a creative analytical methodology to approach new dramatic writing. Her areas of interest include the postdramatic theatre and politics. Her previous studies include an MA in Political Philosophy (University of York, UK) and an MPhil in Playwriting (University of Birmingham, UK). Her latest paper presentations were in *Practice, Process and Paradox: Creativity and the Academy*, Re-Write Conference, Roehampton University (March 2013) and *Aesthetics and Ideology in Literature and Drama* in Avignon University, France (June 2013). Her plays have been staged in the UK and Greece. She has just received a commission/residency with her project SOLSPEIL at the International Performance Festival in the Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff in June 2014.

ABSTRACT

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Irony and the marginal. Camp and trash in pop subcultures

As popular culture touches upon experimental, theatrical practices of dealing with popcultural waste in the 60s, pop culture itself is becoming increasingly more self-reflexive and referential. In this process camp turns into a persistent category in pop culture. Since camp rarely exhibits a relation towards its subjects that can be described as mere quotation or affirmation, but rather utilizes negatively connotated notions like *trash*, *kitsch*, *exaggeration*, or *over-the-top*, it can certainly be viewed as a specific form of irony. However, while postmodern pop irony is primarily analyzed from the point of view of negation and potential deconstruction in academic discourse, terms like *dedication*, *commitment*, and even *passion* are often applied to camp. Camp has been praised for putting emphasis on human labor by showing “the traces of production behind its objects of attention” (A. Ross), for the “love that has gone into certain objects and personal styles” (S. Sontag), for its community building function for marginalised groups, or for rendering visible a social perspective of “spiritual isolation” (P. Core). Its trashy visual aspects have sometimes been described as drawing attention towards the material side of things by highlighting scratches and scrapes of surfaces and emphasizing on representational failures of the ‘ideal’. While many recent theoretical accounts focus on camp and trash aesthetics’ possibility of critically investigating performativity and construction of identity, for subcultural camp-protagonists, saving art’s ‘intensity’ from the reign of ‘good taste’ seems a very ‘authentic’ claim. My paper seeks to investigate camp as a specific aesthetic sub-category of irony and its possible critical potential in contemporary media culture. While it has a tradition of appearing as situated within specific subcultural discourse, can camp retain any potential identification with the marginal in the face of omnipresent pastiche-irony and the normalization of the ‘kooky’, ‘trashy’ and ‘over-the-top’?

bio

Julia Pennauer (1986, Vienna, Austria) is a PhD student in philosophy at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna (Cultural Studies Department). She holds a Masters in Drama, Film and Media studies from the University of Vienna, and works as a curator, theatre director, dramaturge and occasional performer in Austria. Since 2011 she has lectured and engaged in publication projects on camp, trash, retro-aesthetics, pop subcultures and supernatural television. Julia was co-organizer of the international symposium *Camping On The Margins* at Vienna’s Department of Drama, Film and Media Studies (09/2012). She conceived a research project/performance installation dealing with the subject of local appropriations of camp aesthetics at the Imperial Palace Vienna (2012).

A B S T R A C T

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An ironic transition: contemporary history in Romanian New Wave comedies

The Romanian New Wave has been one of the most successful arthouse film movements in the 2000's. Dealing specially with subjects of the transition era – the last years of communism and post-communism in Romania -, its films bring to light how post-modernity has been molded in the country. The genres of the films of this contemporary "Wave" vary: while the most well-known, Cristian Mungiu's Cannes winner "4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days" is a dark drama, we also have very wise comedies. And the most striking feature of these comedies is the use of irony, as a resource to criticize Romania's own contemporary social, economic and political reality. The aim of this paper is to analyze the use of irony in two comedies of the Romanian New Wave: Corneliu Porumboiu's "12:08, East of Bucharest" and Radu Jude's "The Happiest Girl in the World". The first is a contemporary discussion of the events of 1989, while the latter tells about issues of the economic and social scenario in Romania, 2009. The intake of contemporary history by each film will be highlighted, examining whether one can see nostalgia or a full rejection of the communist times. By relating it to the kind of humour used in both films, I hope to build up an image of the country nowadays, in its struggle with a liquid post-modernity (Bauman).

bio

Ana Carolina Bento Ribeiro is a PhD student at the Paris Ouest University where she is working on a thesis about female characters and their relation with History in contemporary Romanian cinema. She is also currently writing film reviews for the East European Film Bulletin and is a literary translator.

ABSTRACT

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Elliott Erwitt and irony as a double *click*

“Click” is an onomatopoeic term indicating the sound an analog camera makes when a photograph is taken, but it is also used in English to mean “to be clear, to fall into place”, as well as expressing the idea of “sympathizing” or “agreeing”. In many of the pictures taken by Elliott Erwitt (born in Paris, 1928) the two meanings coincide, generating the photographer’s *ironic style*. Such an irony is what allows for the superimposition of the first click – capturing the image – with the second click – making the sense of that image empathetically clear in the mind of the observer, and prompting him or her to smile. Most of Erwitt’s photos seem to bring to life the reflections on irony that can be expressed in visual-spatial terms, as for example in the writings of Vladimir Jankélévitch (1964), for whom “irony introduces into our knowledge the relief and distancing of perspective”, or those of Beda Allemann, who believed that irony lives not only on contradiction and antiphrasis but above all on mobility, understood as a shifting of the elements at play, or as a mutation of relationships. In 1971 Allemann wrote: “Next to what stands in the foreground, one must also glimpse something in the background, or better, in different backgrounds; and the play of mobile allusions to irony can only develop between one and another of all these planes”.

This paper thus seeks to study photographs by Elliott Erwitt and capture the contradictions and chance meetings which exist in them, and interpret these elements as points of an *ironic force* which can unite perceptive intuition, materiality of experience and reflective capacities. The irony of Erwitt’s photos will therefore be understood as if it were the *double click* of a computer mouse, executing a function – that is, starting up an image (an icon) and making it “function”.

bio

Alessandro Rossi graduated in History of Art at Pavia University and received his Erasmus Mundus Ph.D. in Cultural Studies in Literary Interzones from Bergamo University and Perpignan University in 2013. He has written essays and articles on Renaissance, Baroque and Contemporary Art, in English, French and Italian. His primary research interest is the relationship between History and Theory of Art. He collaborates with the Center of Visual Studies at Bergamo University. Among his more recent publications are: *The Aristotelic 'phantasmata' & the 'simulacra' theory of Lucretius in a painting attributed to Giorgione, Titian & Sebastiano del Piombo*, in J. Pollock, ed., *Pratique du Hasard. Pour un matérialisme de la rencontre*, PUP, Perpignan 2012, pp. 194-214; *Per il ciclo di Santa Caterina al Collegio dei Nobili di Parma. Documenti e note su Francesco Stringa* (with Isabella Fogliani), *Nuovi Studi*, 17, 2011 (2012), pp. 129-140; *La pittura in cui abitano le ombre. Nota sulla pittura 'figurale' di Gianantonio Gennari, Elephant & Castle*, 6, September 2012, on-line: (http://cav.unibg.it/elephant_castle/web/numeri_monografici/l-ombra/12).

ABSTRACT

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Irony, history and politics in Friedrich Schlegel's philosophy

My study maintains that it is possible to describe Schlegel's irony as a political act. The first part of the paper focuses on history as treated in Kant and in Friedrich Schlegel. They exemplify two different ways in the application of critical thinking to politics. The conviction that rational truth and justice exist makes it possible for Kant to envisage history as a progressive pathway towards a rational organization of Europe. In such a context, history works as a comparison; Kant condemned every subversive act against the existing government. However, in order to judge whether a government is acting to reach this situation of peace or not, we can draw the conclusion that eventually a government acts illegitimately, and that – as Koselleck demonstrates in *Kritik und Krisis* – conversely, we are legitimated to overturn it and establish a rational government. By contrast, in Schlegel's philosophy, irony is the basis for a theory of truth and rationality that completely differs from that of Kant. According to Schlegel, it is not possible to think an objective and universal truth, so it is not possible to think an unchanging and invariable theory of justice, and history is not a way towards it. As a consequence, history cannot be used to legitimate a revolutionary acting.

I will show that this does not entail the absence of a political use of history. In fact, in Schlegel we find a different way to think and to write history: there is not a one and only objective, but a multiplicity of subjective histories, or genealogies. They do not legitimate a revolutionary act of a unitary subject who will continue to act for a universal good. Nevertheless, ironic histories provide us with the possibility to think out of what we usually call justice and to consider other subjects that we are not used to thinking of in a strictly political sense. In short, irony allows for the opening of new political possibilities, with new political subjects and different values; possibilities that will not try to impose on others their own truth, rationality or history, but will fight to be considered in the political arena.

bio

Born in Padua on 27 September 1985, Giulia Valpione studied Philosophy in the Universities of Padua (Università degli Studi) and Munich (Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität). From 2010 she has been a Ph.D. student in Political Philosophy in the Universities of Padua and Jena (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität) with a thesis on Friedrich Schlegel. Her research regards mainly the theoretical and political thinking in classical German Philosophy, the importance of education and the role of educational institutions in the contemporary world, and, more generally, contemporary political thinking. She has published an article on the concept of "transcendental" in S. Maimon and an article on the role of language and *Bildung* in the political philosophy of J. G. Fichte. She also organized a two-year seminar on post-colonial studies at the University of Padua.

ABSTRACT

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The ironist as a fighter: the case of H. Ch. Andersen

The paper will discuss the case of romantic irony in the example of H. Ch. Andersen and his ironic gesture of (1) telling his own life both in fairy tales and in autobiographies and (2) constructing stories of double meaning, stories both for children and for adults, stories representing simultaneously the tragic fate of an over-sensitive, romantic self, and the comic tales of magic. Andersen's strategy of playing with the figure of an author, splitting the self, and of always enclosing both, apparently inconsistent, sides of the narrative – one addressed to children (who play in order to imitate and abolish at the same time the logic of maturity) and one for adults (the tale of pain, exclusion, class difference and ambition) – is to be interpreted as a successful tactic of establishing one's self in ironic diffusion. It does not entail paralysis of over-criticism, nor cynical escapism, nor resentment, nor the condition of the "ironic poet", described by Hegel and Kierkegaard; it is rather a strategy, a part of a fight with the *status quo*. The proposed definition of irony is based on Harold Bloom's concept and on Sloterdijk's idea of cynicism.

Andersen is presented here not as a romantic ironist, but as Don Quichote: a tireless warrior for emancipation. He speaks in a voice of the marginalized: children, the weak, the poor. That constitutes a material of his irony, which becomes a serious play: a way to sublimate one's deficiencies and gain recognition in the eyes of the world.

In sum: looking back at the figure of Andersen and the idea of emancipating, cynical irony might be inspirational today, when we tend to reduce irony to a sophisticated game of self-reference or over-criticism.

bio

Ewa Wojciechowska is a doctoral candidate at Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland. She is writing a dissertation on romantic fantastic from the perspective of the problem of presence. Her research is focused on the intersection between philosophy and literature, especially in the 19th century.

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