
Bossing Images: Rather Ridiculous! / Lieber Lachhaft!

curated by Jess Dorrance and Antke Engel

Thursday July 14th, 2016
Agora Rollberg
Am Sudhaus, Berlin-Neukölln

In our current moment of profound inequality and violence, it often feels like there is little to laugh about. Laughter may seem irrelevant, irresponsible, or even impossible. At the same time, many on the left are questioning traditional political and aesthetic strategies of resistance, which have frequently relied on modes of “serious” and “straightforward” realism and recognition.

Bossing Images: Rather Ridiculous! stages an experimental encounter between **artist and writer Ismael Ogando**, **performer Werner Hirsch**, and the audio installation *Speaking Laughter* (2016) by **artist Susan Silton** in order to ask how various kinds of laughter and ridiculousness might serve as bases for different practices and forms of queer, feminist, and anti-racist politics. Can queer laughter operate as a tactic of refusal, recuperation, and repair (saying, “I’d rather be laughable and ridiculous than fit in!”)? What happens to our bodies when we laugh? Can laughter disrupt and deform violent social situations, images, and texts?

Performances and artworks

N.O.Body (2008)

By Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz

Film installation, 16mm/DVD, 15 min, performance by Werner Hirsch

The film reenacts a photograph of the ‘bearded lady’ Annie Jones (1865–1902). Jones toured throughout the USA and all over Europe, first with the Barnum Circus and then later with her own show. Her photograph, which appears in a book by sexual scientist Magnus Hirschfeld, crossed through two different contexts. It travelled from the freak show in the Barnum Circus, where it was used as a business card, to the medical theater, where she was shown in Hirschfeld’s book as a potential ‘patient.’ This transformation from ‘wonder’ to medical objectification indicates the increasing significance of modernity and enlightenment bringing along with it the story of a historical transformation in the representation and evaluation of difference. But what happens in the production of normality and deviance, asks the film *N.O.Body*, if the ‘object of knowledge’ assumes the position of the producer of knowledge, starts laughing and opens up the history of knowledge production once again?

Speaking Laughter (2016)

By Susan Silton

Audio installation, 19:31 min

This audio installation explores vocal tactics like muttering, whistling, gasping, farting, and laughing as strategies of queerfeminist production and reception. “Speaking” a portion of Henri Bergson’s *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900), an essay in which Bergson sought to determine the laws and processes that create the comic, Silton uses her voice to produce wandering, detached, and unknowable speech—raising questions about the conditions of intelligibility, about what counts as ridiculous speech, and about what it means to listen.

nemo canticum (2016)

Performance by Ismael Ogando

What are you laughing at? Go ahead, let it out and laugh until you cry. Show your teeth and shake, I want to know what’s so funny.

Theremin Haha (2007)

Performance by Werner Hirsch

Duet for Theremin and Laughing Voice by William Wheeler, Nicole Dembélé, and Antonia Baehr

The score for this piece is published in: Baehr, Antonia. *RIRE / LAUGH / LACHEN*. Paris: Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers / L’OEil d’Or / make up productions, 2008.

Biographies

Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz have worked together in Berlin since 2007. Their staged film installations often start with a song, a picture, a film, or a script from the past. They produce performances for the camera, staging the actions of individuals and groups living—indeed, thriving—in defiance of normality, law, and economics. Their most recent artists' book, *Aftershow*, was published by Sternberg Press in 2014.

Jess Dorrance is a writer, curator, and PhD student in Performance Studies at UC Berkeley. She writes about the intersections between art, performance, and queer, feminist, and anti-racist politics. She is the co-editor, with Antke Engel, of *Bossing Images: The Power of Images, Queer Art, and Politics* (NGBK, 2012) and is a team member of the Institute for Queer Theory, Berlin.

Antke Engel is director of the Institute for Queer Theory, Berlin (www.queer-institut.de). She holds a PhD in Philosophy and works as an independent scholar in the fields of queer, feminist, and poststructuralist theory, as well as visual cultural studies.

Werner Hirsch is a Berlin-based horse-whisperer, performer, and filmmaker.

Ismael Ogando is an artist who also works in media, journalism, archives, and as a cultural manager. He studied Visual Arts and Social Psychology at Universidad Autonoma de Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic). Currently he is based in Berlin, working as editor-in-chief for GROUND.

Susan Silton resides in Los Angeles. Her project-based work engages multiple aesthetic strategies to mine the complexities of subjectivity and subject positions, often through poetic combinations of humor, discomfort, subterfuge and unabashed beauty. She works across diverse media to realize performance-based, photography, video, installation, participatory-based, text/audio, and print-based projects, and presents in diverse contexts such as public sites, social network platforms, and traditional galleries and institutions.

Zara Zandieh (Zaungast/Special Observer for this event) works as an independent filmmaker and camerawoman in Berlin. She studied cinematography at the film school "filmArche" in Berlin and is currently working on her graduation film. She gives workshops, works as a cinematographer, and makes different film and video formats for various organizations and customers. In her own films and artistic work, she follows a minimalistic and poetic narrative approach and language that invites the audience to take-up unfamiliar perspectives.

Citations for displayed quotes

Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Hamburg: tredition, [1900] 2013.

Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Castro Varela, María do Mar. *Unzeitgemäße Utopien. Migrantinnen zwischen Selbsterfindung und gelehrter Hoffnung*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2007.

Cixous, Hélène. "Castration or Decapitation?" Translated by Annette Kuhn. *Signs* 7(1) (1981): 41-55. (Geschlecht oder Kopf, a. d. Franz. V. Eva Meyer, in dies.: *Die unendliche Zirkulation des Begehrens*, Berlin (Merve) 1977: 15-45.)

Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, by Audre Lorde, 126. Berkeley: Crossing Press, [1984] 2007. (Vom Nutzen unseres Ärgers, a. d. Amerik. v. Renate Stendhal, in: Audre Lorde / Adrienne Rich: *Macht und Sinnlichkeit*, Berlin (Orlanda) 1984/1993.)

Stein, Gertrude. *Three Lives*. New York: Grafton Press, 1909.

An event of the Institute for Queer Theory. Funded by Kulturrat Neukölln

QUEER
INSTITUTE for queer theory

