

## **VIOLENCE IN ART: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH A SEMINAR ON ANTHROPOLOGY OF ART AND VIOLENCE**

DEPARTMENT OF ETHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

Ljubljana 19 May 2017



**VIOLENCE IN ART: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH.  
A SEMINAR ON ANTHROPOLOGY OF ART AND VIOLENCE**

Convened by **Jaka Repič** and **Ulrike Davis-Sulikowski**

The seminar aims to approach artists and their works of art – pictures, paintings, sculptures, art exhibitions, films, music, monuments, novels, poems – about violent episodes as a source for ethnography and a means to expose some of the inner workings of violence. The ethnography of violence is a tricky, often difficult and sometimes outright dangerous job. Besides, most of violent acts happen at times and in places where there are no ethnographers present, so descriptions of actual violent events and experiences of violence are often done afterwards. Such descriptions, narratives, images and other means of representations can serve as important historical and ethnographic sources that allows for a deeper understanding of violence.

Violence is historically situated practice that also appears in cultural representations, social memories and imaginaries. It is not merely a violent act or event, but is also imagined by different actors before and after it is carried out. Riches (1986) writes that the fundamental ‘triangle of violence’ includes perpetrators, victims, and observers, all of whom are caught up in their own interpretive frameworks and agendas. Violence, he stresses, should be explored as performing power and legitimacy as well as asserting illegitimacy and resistance. It is perpetrated, experienced, inscribed in landscape, narrated and memorialised as well as capitalised for future violence or resistance.

There are many relevant representations of violence that show its experiential level. In this seminar we focus on works of art and discuss how they can be a source for ethnography. Art is relevant because it is relational and dependent on complex historical and socio-political processes. Art as a means of social communication and a powerful tool of socially engaged practices of interpretation and resistance reveals important aspect of human experience of violence. Hence, we approach diverse works of art – in the ample sense of the word – that depict, describe, or narrate violent events. Pictures, paintings, films, monuments, novels, poems, music etc. offer keen views and detailed dissections of violent acts and processes, insights into individual and social experiences of violence as well as broader social, political and historical contexts in which violence occurs.

## PROGRAMME:

- 9:00 Welcome address
- 9:10 **Yasushi Uchiyama**, University of Tsukuba: *Mind and Artworks: Gell's Anthropological Theory of Art in Two Parts*
- 9:40 **Ulrike Davis-Sulikowski**, University of Vienna: *Violent Landscapes: On Body, Space and Time*
- 10:10 **Bojan Baskar**, University of Ljubljana: *Njegoš's Mountain Wreath: From the National Poem to the 'Blueprint for Ethnic Cleansing' and Back*
- 10:40 Coffee break
- 11:00 **Stefan Khittel**, University of Vienna: *Chasing the Shadows of Madness: Representations of Violence in Francis Ford Coppola's 'Apocalypse Now' and Jessica Hagedorn's 'Dream Jungle'*
- 11:30 **Juan Carlos Radovich**, University of Buenos Aires: *"Puel Kona" ("Warriors from the East") A Mapuche Band against Violence and Discrimination in Southern Argentina*
- 12:30 **Jaka Repič**, University of Ljubljana: *Artworks of Violence: Memories and Visual Art among Slovenians in Argentina*
- 13:00 Lunch break
- 14:30 **Nadia Molek de Jager**, University of Buenos Aires: *Representations of Memories through Art: The Artistic Work of Zdravko Dučmelić in Argentina*



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- 15:00 **Rajko Muršič**, University of Ljubljana: *»Who Sings Means No Harm«: Popular Music, Violence and Politics*
- 15:30 **Tomaž Krpič**: *Performative Violence and the Spectator's Cognitive Auto-poetic Feedback Loop*
- 16:00 Closing discussion

## **BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**

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Ljubljana, 19 May 2017

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The seminar aims to approach artists and their works of art – pictures, paintings, sculptures, art exhibitions, films, music, monuments, novels, poems – about violent episodes as a source for ethnography and a means to expose some of the inner workings of violence. The ethnography of violence is a tricky, often difficult and sometimes outright dangerous job. Besides, most of violent acts happen at times and in places where there are no ethnographers present, so descriptions of actual violent events and experiences of violence are often done afterwards. Such descriptions, narratives, images and other means of representations can serve as important historical and ethnographic sources that allows for a deeper understanding of violence.

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**Yasushi Uchiyamada**, University of Tsukuba

*Mind and Artworks: Gell's Anthropological Theory of Art in Two Parts*

Gell published the “manifesto” of the anthropology of art in the form of “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology” in a collected volume *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics* (Coote and Shelton 1992), wherein he discussed art not in terms of aesthetics but as a technical system, and hence, he did not look for a non-Western “aesthetics” as others did. Yet the two editors (mis)represent Gell’s anti-aesthetic approach as one of their kind and note: “There is no contradiction here, just a difference in terminology” (1992: 9) and go on to claim (with reference to Coote’s chapter): “it is a basic task of the anthropology of aesthetics to investigate how people from different cultures ‘see’ the world” (ibid.: 9). What’s wrong with this familiar enquiry into other aesthetics? A few years later, Gell in his “On Coote’s ‘Marvels of Everyday Vision’” (1995) candidly criticized the aesthetic theorization of artworks and concluded: “Coote’s search for a quintessential ‘cultural’ aesthetic seems to me to lead towards a dead end, just as the aesthetician’s search for universal definitions of ‘beauty’ led to a philosophical dead end” (Gell [1995]1999: 231).

In this paper, I do not have an intention to trace a path leading to what Gell calls a dead end. But let me quote a passage from Arthur Danto who was Gell’s arch-antagonist in “Vogel’s net: traps as artworks and artworks as traps” (Gell 1996). Following Kant, Danto asserts that natural beauty and artistic beauty are identical: “This principle of beauty ... cuts across not only cultural lines but lines of species.” “The female scorpion fly shows invariant preference for males with symmetrical wings.” Moreover, it cuts across living things and non-living things: “The principles of good design are the same as the outward emblems of health and fertility.” Danto then leaves the universal Kantian beauty for the privileged Hegelian spirit: “We leave, in Hegel’s terms, the sphere of natural beauty for the beauty of art and of what he termed spirit” (Danto 1997: 97). Such a quest for the beauty of art as the Hegelian spirit leads to a dead end. In this paper, I take up Gell’s problematic of relationships between extended mind (not spirit) and artworks in two parts, partly because his *Art and Agency* (1998) consists of not well connected two parts, and partly because his posthumously published paper (Gell 2015) provides a passage to link the two. First, I revisit (the volt sorcery and) *Slashed Rokeby Venus* (original by Velasquez c. 1647-1651) “produced” by Mary Richardson in 1914. Second, I discuss the theoretical (and perhaps political) implications of seeing *Slashed Rokeby Venus* as Gell might have done with his embryonic anthropology of forth dimension.

**Ulrike Davis-Sulikowski**, University of Vienna  
*Violent Landscapes: On Body, Space and Time*

The landscapes of Hieronymus Bosch and his famous Triptychon and Paul Gilroy's trope of the ship constitute key points of departure for discussing some notions and connotations of violence and 'landscape' as metaphor for states of body and mind. 'Heaven', 'hell' and 'bodies' in-between and the chronotopos of the Middle Passage are connected and related, anchored and interwoven by violence, "sheer violence" (Hall) and thus locate the human body in space, time and socio-cultural experience – "We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe" (Fanon). Applying and employing anthropological tools like cross-cultural comparison, field research and selected anthropological concepts this talk will try to add some aspect to the discourse of ethnography and art on the issue of violence; and will explain what the Atlantic of the past and the Mediterranean of the present have in common – "Violence is man re-creating himself" (Fanon).

**Bojan Baskar**, University of Ljubljana

*Njegoš's Mountain Wreath: From the National Poem to the 'Blueprint for Ethnic Cleansing' and Back*

Njegoš (full name Petar II Petrović Njegoš, 1813-1851), the Montenegrin Prince-Bishop, is better known as the Romantic Poet who wrote the poem *The Mountain Wreath*. The poem is written in dramatic form and its story is taking place around Christmas, at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Old Montenegro, largely on the slopes of the Mount Lovćen and the plateau of Cetinje, its capital. Throughout the poem, the Montenegrin tribals and their ruler, *vladika* Danilo, deliberate about undertaking the massacre of their co-tribal converts to Islam. The massacre, bringing terrifying casualties to both sides, begins towards the end of the poem.

Published in 1847, the poem had first acquired the canonicity of the national poem around the WWI (as a Serb national poem); eventually, after the WW II, as the Yugoslav, and finally, after the Montenegrin independence, as the Montenegrin national poem. The poem was twice instrumentalized by the Serb nationalist militias, known as chetniks, for instigating and legitimizing the massacres of Muslims; first during the WW II and then during the violent demise of Yugoslavia after 1991. Largely perceived by Western audiences as a blueprint for ethnic cleansing, the poem has been more than once referred to in the proceedings of the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague whose judges seem to have also uncritically adopted this view of the poem. The purpose of this paper is to look at how Njegoš, in this poem, dealt with the nightmarish issue of intraethnic violence.



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**Stefan Khittel**, University of Vienna

*Chasing the Shadows of Madness: Representations of Violence in Francis Ford Coppola's 'Apocalypse Now' and Jessica Hagedorn's 'Dream Jungle'*

Francis F. Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* is today regarded as a classic, as the epitome of the insanity of war. Filipino-American author Jessica Hagedorn places the circumstances of the shooting of 'Apocalypse Now' in the Philippines at the centre of her novel *Dream Jungle*. She depicts the madness of shooting such a film within a post-colonial setting surrounded by actual war. I compare the cinematic and literary representations of war violence by comparing them with testimonies of people participating in the local war in the Philippines as perpetrators, victims or witnesses. The interplay of facts and fiction seems to add an additional angle for the analysis of violence in war and a distinct understanding of psychological mechanisms.

**Juan Carlos Radovich**, University of Buenos Aires

*“Puel Kona” (“Warriors from the East”) A Mapuche Band against Violence and Discrimination in Southern Argentina*

This paper deals with data gathered by Social Anthropological techniques of research, obtained among Mapuche aboriginal people from Northern Patagonian province of Neuquen, in Southern Argentina. *“Puel Kona”* (“Warriors from the East”) is a music band of cultural resistance, against different ways of violence suffered by Mapuche people. Young men and women are members of this band, playing various musical styles (such as rock, cumbia, hip hop and ska, combining with traditional Mapuche music). These young members of the band, belongs to Mapuche families established in urban areas as a consequence of a migratory process. These third generation of migrants grew up in households in which their parents began an ethno-political movement linked to Mapuche ethnic revival after the end of the last military dictatorship which ruled the country by authoritarian methods from 1976 to 1983. They obtained experience by participating in many strategies from the globalized world. In this paper we’ll analyze some of the contents of musical production of *“Puel Kona”* band in the context of discrimination, racism, confrontation against the state, and the struggle of Mapuche people to be themselves.

**Jaka Repič**, University of Ljubljana

*Artworks of Violence: Memories and Visual Art among Slovenians in Argentina*

Artworks of the Slovenian artists in Argentina reveal a marked ambivalence of artists' inclusion into two social spaces, which influence genres, styles and themes of their creativity – one of Argentinean contemporary art and one pertaining to Slovenian diaspora. I will present artists, who have produced artworks related to individual and collective memories of violence of the Second World War, exile after the war and life in diaspora. Violence, war, exile and homeland are often at the core of their artistic imagination and production. In Slovenian diaspora in Argentina, visual art is often ascribed with great affective power of representing individual and collective experiences of violence, loss, hopes and faith. Hence, artworks are also subjected to ambiguous interpretations and use.

I want to follow two lines of enquiry. Firstly, if we juxtapose art production and artists' life histories with broader socio-historical contexts, can we address these artworks ethnographically? Secondly, I am interested in how specific sociality influences artists as well as how their artworks also create sociality.

**Nadia Molek de Jager, Juan Carlos Radovich, Juan Esteban de Jager,  
Amalia Molek**, University of Buenos Aires

*Representations of Memories through Art: The Artistic Work of Zdravko Dučmelić in Argentina*

We attempt to present the artistic world of the Croatian painter Zdravko Dučmelić in Argentina, from an interdisciplinary approach that connects contributions from the fields of anthropology and art history to the research problems art and creative processes as a source to elaborate violent episodes. We will present the configuration of Dučmelić's artistic and aesthetic habitus, his insertion in the Argentinian sociocultural and artistic context to review Dučmelić's creative process, paying special attention to the way that personal experiences, emotional stimuli and memories about the World War II were resignified into artistic symbolic and oneiric images.

**Rajko Muršič**, University of Ljubljana

*»Who Sings Means No Harm«: Popular Music, Violence and Politics*

There is a wide spread misconception that arts, and music in particular, are either harmless activities or even important »cultural« tools in promotion of civility. This is perhaps the reason why the awareness of violent use of music is quite recent, especially in popular music studies. But since metal was used as a tool of torture in interrogation of Muslim captives, nobody could have pretended that music's innocent. On the contrary, music has always been used in the military, in brutal rites of passage, as an effective agent of mobilisation, and a stimulator of affects and passions; and, since Jump Jim Crow, popular music has never been the exception to the rule.

The author will present some examples of violent use of music and present quandaries about the Croatian rock singer Thompson, since the announcement of his performance in Slovenia, and discuss the limits of art and politics in relation to the present-day European Fascist art.

## **Tomaž Krpič**

### *Performative Violence and the Spectator's Cognitive Auto-poetic Feedback Loop*

This paper addresses the nature of violence in art performance in relation to the spectators. In the 1970s, so called the golden era of (body) art performance, we were witnesses of many (body) art events, where artist's body was the subject of sometimes extremely violent agency. Art performances, like for instance Burden's *Shoot* (1971), Gina Pane's *Escalade non-anaesthésiée* (1971), Valie Export's *Eros/ion* (1971), Marina Abramović's *The Lips of Thomas* (1975), and Vito Acconci's *Trademarks* (1970), just to name a few, imprinted the psychic suffering of individual and communities on to the social screen. Unpleasant, repulsive and painful marginal self-reflexive bodily techniques used in the (body) art performances – from biting, cutting, stabbing, burning to nailing and many more – contested many self-evident social, political and cultural conventions of that time. The performers' violent treatment of their own carnal bodies causes empathic feelings in the mind of the spectators. Their reactions, multiple in forms of behaviour, are analytically described as auto-poetic feedback loop by Erika Fischer-Lichte. The spectators usually reacted to the performers' violation of own bodies' integrity by establishing cognitive and emotional, and sometimes even physical relationship, with the performer on the stage.