

Laughing at Power, Fascism, and Authoritarianism:  
Satire, Humor, Irony, and Interrogating Their Political Efficacy

April 8-10, 2018  
Center for Jewish History  
New York City

Abstract deadline: September 1, 2017  
Response by: October 1, 2017  
Projects to be workshopped deadline: March 1, 2018

Satire, humor, and irony have served as powerful weapons against totalitarianism and other forms of authoritarianism and authoritarian leaders. Before Hitler was scary, he was considered a joke, someone to be laughed at. During World War II, journalists, artists, writers and film-makers around the globe, used their golden pens, cameras, and paintbrushes to create powerful weapons against fascism. Some of them lived in the relative safety of United States or China, others were in the midst of it all, in Polish ghettos, occupied parts of the Soviet Union, or hiding in French villages. Today we understand these works both as effective forms of resistance and powerful means of making sense of the incomprehensible historical events. Studying satirical films, cabarets, comedy routines, music, cartoons, caricatures, and jokes as historical sources reveals details of the zeitgeist of the time, simply unavailable from other sources.

At the same time, humor is limited in its ability to effect politics. While someone could laugh at Hitler, Hitler could not be stopped only through laughter. The workshop, jointly hosted by the journal *East European Jewish Affairs* and the Center for Jewish History and sponsored by the University of Colorado's Singer Fund for Jewish Studies, proposes a new way of thinking about humor and resistance by bringing together scholars, artists, musicians, and comedians, and use both scholarly methods of textual analysis and artistic imagination to work on uncovering how fascism was fought not with the sword, but with laughter, satire, and irony and a healthy dose of political organizing.

The workshop will include a keynote address by cartoonist Eli Valley followed by a conversation with YIVO Scholar Eddy Portnoy, on Sunday evening, April 8 and back-to-back performances by scholar-musician collaborations of Anna Shternshis and Psoy Korolenko along with David Shneer and Jewlia Eisenberg related to the theme on Monday, April 9.

Please send all proposals to [eeja@colorado.edu](mailto:eeja@colorado.edu) no later than September 1, 2017. We hope to have responses to the proposals ready by October 1. Since this is a workshop, we expect participants to prepare something in advance for circulation, whether it be a short 10-15 page paper, a clip of a performance, cartoon, a comedy routine.

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