

# Reckoning with the Crisis of Imagination

Nov 6–13, 2017

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Reckoning with the  
Crisis of Imagination

The James Gallery  
The Graduate Center, CUNY  
365 Fifth Avenue at 35th Street

[centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery](http://centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery)

Nov 6-13, 2017

Program Series

*Reckoning with the Crisis of Imagination* is a series of programs that aims to collectively create a space to respond to, interpret and navigate what is at once outrageous, overwhelming, and also mobilizing about our current impasse. A variety of activities in multiple forms and mediums will take place in and around the James Gallery, ranging from workshops, performance art, presentations, stand-up comedy, panel discussions, dance, community organizing strategizing, and more. These activities will utilize the gallery as a public good by bringing together people from a variety of experiences, backgrounds and perspectives to think about how to build a more inclusive “we” and to creatively respond to a time of ongoing crises.

In the face of greatly reduced political horizons, the breakdown of liberal democracy and the rise of racist, autocratic political power, there is a great need and opportunity to examine our individual and collective failures to imagine how bad things can get, did get (ie. Trump winning, Brexit) and are continuing to get, and to imagine what alternative futures are desirable and viable.

In the ongoing present, as it can feel that things are both radically different and exactly the same as they’ve always been, *Reckoning with the Crisis of Imagination* asks:

During a time when there is no clear alternative to the new-old status quo, in what ways can political and cultural strategies of “critique,” “solidarity” and “resistance” be reconceptualized? What does being “shocked” signify? How is it possible, as Masha Gessen urges, “to maintain one’s capacity for shock in the face of the impulse to normalize,” and, at the same time, grapple with the feeling of “profound shock” that the “impossible” could happen (Trump, Brexit), which reflects, as Zadie Smith suggests, “that we must have been living behind a kind of veil, unable to see our own country for what it has become”? How can groups and individuals devise “shocking” strategies and unexpected approaches to disrupt the new-old status quo?

—Katherine Carl and James Sevitt

Mon, Nov 6 and Tue, Nov 7, 2–4:30pm  
Workshop

## Having Difficult Conversations About Divisive Issues

Harriet Protheroe-Davies, organizer,  
Hope Not Hate.

This workshop is for community organizers and anyone interested in further developing their skills in facilitating productive conversations about difficult and divisive issues such as immigration, racism and economic inequality. It will be led by Harriet Protheroe-Davies, a community organizer with HOPE Not Hate (HNH) in Merthyr Tydfil, UK—a post-industrial, former steel town in the heart of the Welsh Valleys that has been heavily targeted by right wing populists since 2015. The workshop techniques are inspired by the work of Los Angeles LGBT, an organization who has mobilized LGBT campaigners to engage voters on their front doorsteps in transformative conversations around transgender rights using a combination of empathetic listening and Socratic questioning techniques, as well as sharing personal experiences.

The goal of the workshop is for participants engaged in similar work in and around NYC to learn about HNH's particular techniques and how they could be applied to their own organizing work. Participants will discuss their own experiences with techniques that have and have not worked and investigate what a 'productive' conversation means and looks like, by rethinking who is an 'ally' and who is the 'opposition' and the role of facts in having productive conversations.

So far in 2017, HNH have trained over 2000 community leaders, faith groups, trade unions, political parties, and grassroots campaign groups in these basic techniques, helping campaigners and community organizers to have productive conversations

about immigration, Brexit and other divisive issues where prejudiced opinions are common. This workshop also has its basis in research: The National Conversation on immigration—the biggest project of its kind—has established focus groups across the UK to find out the opinions of the majority of people on issues of identity, culture, migration and multiculturalism. <http://nationalconversation.uk>

HNH combines cutting-edge research and community organizing in the UK to build resilience against racism and the far-right. Their work focuses on communities targeted by the far-right and right-wing populists through elections so as to bring people together and undercut racist narratives.

HNH's Fear and HOPE research, which has released 4 comparative reports since 2011, provides further context for the key narratives behind anti-immigration and anti-Muslim opinion in the UK. <http://hopenothate.org.uk/fear-hope-2017-overview/>

The same workshop runs on both days. Participants may join for either or both days.

Mon, Nov 6, 5–7pm  
Workshop

## Educator Positionality Mind-Mapping

Sakina Laksimi Morrow, Ph.D. Program  
in Urban Education.

In this workshop we will explore our position- alities as educators by creating visual maps as a way to reflect on our evolving pedagog- ical development. The goal of this mapping activity is to understand and reflect on the ways our previous educational and personal experiences have shaped both the kinds of scholars that we are and the kinds of teach- ing practices we enact in the classroom.

This workshop is the first in a series of three interconnected events on Socially Conscious Pedagogy that explores, imagines, and commits to teaching practices that are self-reflexive, responsive and subversive. Subsequent events will include programming on the intersection of theory and practice, and a roundtable discussion on reimagin- ing disciplinary canons led by doctoral students of color who will speak about their own approaches to text selection in the classroom.

The Developing Socially-Conscious Pedagogy Educator Series was started by a group of GC graduate student educators beginning dialogue about the many social issues we face including but not limited to racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism and other marginalizing forces and interlocking systems of oppression. These marginalizing social forces are produced and reproduced in academia, and manifest in multiple forms across the university. This series seeks to engage-confront-disrupt- resist these systems by inviting educators' participation in the imagination of and commitment to socially-conscious practices.

*Co-sponsored by the Teaching and Learning Center, the Graduate Center, CUNY, and the CUNY Pipeline Initiative.*

Tue, Nov 7, 6:30pm  
Presentation and Conversation

## Merthyr and Masculinities: A personal story of understanding and combating prejudice in post-industrial communities

Harriet Protheroe-Davies, organizer, Hope Not Hate.

In the aftermath of Brexit Harriet Protheroe-Davies returned to Merthyr Tydfil, UK, where she grew up in the South Wales Valleys, to spearhead a new initiative of the anti-fascist charity HOPE Not Hate called 'The Left Behind Communities Project,' which is using specific strategies of 'mobilizing' and 'organizing' to bring people together to undercut racist narratives.

In this talk, Harriet, who is now the South Wales Organizer for HOPE Not Hate, will look at how and why post-industrial areas of South Wales have become a target for far right politics. Through exploring her family's experiences of industrial change, and by sharing her experiences and the ongoing challenges in combating the politics of hate, which will specifically focus on how the alt-right (and, increasingly, UK progressive labour movements) have mobilized a divisive and toxic discourse about gender and "identity politics."

Wed, Nov 8, 2–4:30pm  
Workshop

## This Isn't Funny!: Humor in (Times of) Crisis

Menahem Haike, Guttman College, CUNY.

This workshop will examine and discuss the role of humor in the crisis of imagination, and the delicate relationship between humor and imagination. The current political climate, and the ongoing immense political shifts occurring worldwide, feel at times like the punch line to a joke we all missed (even though we watched it unfolding in front of our eyes). Are we experiencing a crisis of humor that correlates with the crisis of imagination? Is humor a legitimate form of critique? What are our new regulations on what is funny? Are things funny because they are offensive, or are they offensive because they are funny? Through a historical review of our attitudes towards humor, the fleeing of humor to an imaginative (cartoon) world, and a re-examination of offense within the limits of what is "politically correct," the workshop aims to give us a better understanding of this phenomenon, so we may burst out laughing, as an attempt at optimism in the face of despair.

Wed, Nov 8, 7pm  
Performance and Conversation

## This Isn't Funny!: I an, Moron

Jibz Cameron, artist and actor; Morgan Bassichis, artist; Dominique Nisperos, Ph.D. Program in Sociology; Bess Rowen, Ph.D. Program in Performance and Theatre; Keisha Zollar, artist.

Dynasty Handbag presents an excerpt from her "insanely funny" falling-apart stand-up show, I, An Moron, which takes a googley eyed macroscopic look into the climate of contemporary north American white activism and its myriad ways to "resist" while still maintaining bourgeois pour-over prison labor coffee and nut milk. It is also a "queering" of the ever popular one-woman show that often hinges on heterosexual female struggles without necessarily taking into account their evil origins. Show is updated to include horrible current event jokes. Day of show events even!

Following Dynasty's performance she will be joined by performance artists and comedians Morgan Bassichis, Dominique Nisperos, and Keisha Zollar in a panel discussion moderated by Bess Rowen to discuss: What is the role of humor and laughter during these difficult times? How is cleverness being confused with insult, and where is the line between a joke and a threat masquerading as a joke? Which styles and formats are proving productive to "resist" the status quo and which are serving to reinforce it? Is the purpose of a joke to open a new perspective or to bring joy? Is it an art form that gives voice to unconscious drives or opens up a space of social defiance? What assumptions about audience and producers are built into comedy?

*Co-sponsored by the Ph.D. Program in Theatre at the Graduate Center, CUNY.*

Thu, Nov 9  
3–6:30pm: Ongoing open rehearsal  
6:30pm: Conversation

## Performance and Conversation Paramodernities Experiments

Netta Yerushalmy, choreographer; Michael Blake, Emily Rose Canon, Marc Crousillat, Stanley Gambucci, Nicholas Leichter, Hsiao-Jou Tang, and Megan Williams, dancers; Eylul Akinci, Ph.D Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Ana Janevski, Curator of Performance and Media, Museum of Modern Art.

Paramodernities is a meditation on different tracks of modernism within and beyond the purview of dance. It is a series of dance experiments that the artist generates through systematically deconstructing landmark modern dance choreographies. Performed alongside contributions by scholars from different fields in the humanities, who situate these iconic works within the larger project of modernity, Paramodernities explores foundational tenets of modern discourse—such as sovereignty, race, feminism, and nihilism—and includes public discussions as integral parts of each installment. Netta Yerushalmy's project investigates how embodied forms and codified styles of dancing impart deep sensations and ideologies on dancers bodies and audiences bodies, as it also interweaves constructed historical narratives, challenging particularly the normative definitions of modernity. For an installation designed specifically in and for the James Gallery, Yerushalmy will mash-up re-imagined material from works by modernist dance legends Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, Bob Fosse, and Merce Cunningham.

*Co-sponsored by the Ph.D. Program in Theatre, the Graduate Center, CUNY.*

Mon, Nov 13, 6:30pm  
Lecture

## Revolutionary Culture Today

Susan Buck-Morss, Political Science,  
the Graduate Center, CUNY.

On the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Professor Susan Buck-Morss, PhD Program in Political Science at the Graduate Center, will present her thinking on the culture of revolution then and now through words and images.

This series of programs is conceived and organized by Katherine Carl and James Sevitt.

Co-sponsored by the Ph.D. Program in Theatre, Teaching and Learning Center, and The Center for the Humanities.

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The Amie and Tony James Gallery's mission is to bring artists and scholars into dialogue on topics of mutual concern. As a window into the research work of The Graduate Center and a hub of international discussion, the James Gallery is central to the Graduate Center's and the City University of New York's contribution to the cultural life of New York City.

Located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city, the gallery is dedicated to exhibition-making as advanced research embedded in the scholarly work of the Graduate Center across multiple disciplines. The gallery creates and presents artwork in a variety of formats. While some exhibitions remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussions, salons, and screenings have a short duration. The gallery works with scholars, students, artists, and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary boundaries.

# The James Gallery

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