



LUDWIG-
MAXIMILIANS-
UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

MUNICH DOCTORAL PROGRAM
FOR LITERATURE AND THE ARTS
MIMESIS



Un/masking. On a mimetic form

6th Conference of the IDP Mimesis

4th – 6th July 2019, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte Munich and LMU Munich

Masks are an integral part of human cultural practice. Their innate tension springs from the mimetic faculty to show and conceal, to imitate and create. In this sense, masks display a structural analogy to the workings of mimesis. Not only have masks been a vital part of theatrical practices since antiquity, but they have also always played a crucial role in ritual as well as artistic or literary activities throughout the world. They have the power to create an aesthetic oscillation between truth and illusion that involves a mimetic interplay between identity, difference and appropriation.

In recent years, various artists and performers have been attracted to the object of the mask and the performative potential that the act of masking and unmasking offers. Masks acquire meaning as important symbolic, political, or democratic tools in the work of artists such as Zach Blas, who created physical masks or *Face Cages* (2013–16), using the virtual grids superimposed on faces by facial recognition software. Masks have also become part of a culture of public protest and collective political participation. These instances signal a growing interest in the artistic, metaphorical, and critical value of un/masking in contemporary culture.

In the light of colonial and postcolonial history, any engagement with masks cannot fail to take into account the fact that Western reception of masks and similar artifacts is often problematic, as the example of Primitivism shows. The work of contemporary artists such as Romuald Hazoumé, who creates sculptures resembling traditional African masks through the use of discarded gasoline canisters, confronts the legacy of colonialism.

This conference takes the material object of the mask as well as the act of un/masking as starting points for a theoretical reflection on ambiguity and on mimetic practices. Through an interdisciplinary approach, we intend to connect different disciplines, theories and methods to open new perspectives on the various manifestations of masks. Our interest goes beyond the literal understanding of masks and includes metaphorical usages of the term. In literature, for instance, masks can serve not only as a motif but also as a metaphor for authorship or for narrative forms, as exemplified by the work and life of William Butler Yeats or Luigi Pirandello. In creating an altered persona for the public, Yeats for instance circles around attraction and the supposed authenticity behind the masks, thus mirroring practices already used by Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) or William Shakespeare.

Clothing and other forms of decorating, shaping or covering one's body can also be seen as a form of masking. In all these instances, masks radically alter our sense of the self and touch topics such as originality, authenticity, visibility and concealment.

Thinking about masks in a broader sense allows for the inclusion of non-visual fields, such as music, where the concept of masking has been used to describe the variation of voice (in singing or electronic manipulation) as a form of 'vocal' masking.

In line with Lone Riisgaard and Bjørn Thomassen, this conference draws attention to the mask as a threshold that "brings into contact two distinct realities, subject/object, inside/outside, frame/message" (Riisgaard and Thomassen 2016).

Contributions can be made on – but are not limited to – the following topics

- masks and un/masking in theater, ritual, and religious practice
- masks and un/masking as motif and technique in the visual arts
- masks and un/masking as topoi in literature; with regard to literary persona; and as a principle of narrative form
- masks and performance in the social sphere: practices of clothing and makeup (e.g. cross-dressing, drag)
- masks and political activism (e.g. Anonymous)
- masks and digital technologies: digital masking and appropriation (e.g. facial recognition software, digital editing of the self)
- non-visual domains of the mask: masks and voice, music and ‘sound masking’
- masks and the carnivalesque, grotesque and subversive potential
- masks and (post)colonialism

Application

This international and interdisciplinary conference welcomes contributions from the fields of theater studies, the visual arts, cultural studies, philosophy, literature, art history, or musicology and neighboring disciplines.

Panel sessions will consist of individual talks (20 minutes) and will be followed by a discussion.

Please submit your **abstract** (max. 300 words) along with a **short biography** (max. 150 words) to unmasking@lrz.uni-muenchen.de. The deadline has been extended until the **15th of January 2019**. Contributors will be informed about paper acceptance by early February 2019.

For further information, please visit

<https://www.mimesis-doc.uni-muenchen.de/callforpapers/index.html>

<https://www.zikg.eu/>

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