

International Conference: L'action d'art (The Action of Art)

Concept: Paola Yacoub Michel Lasserre

In partnership with l'Académie Libanaise des Beaux-arts – Université de Balamand

Friday 15 and Saturday 16 April, 16:00 to 20:00

Auditorium, Level -2

In English and French

French interventions are indicated in the schedule

Free admission

A century ago, the journal L'action d'art (The Action of Art) was founded by Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, a professor, publisher, curator and anarchist.¹ The L'action d'art formula remains problematic to this day – how to understand action in art.

Action is, by definition, intelligible. What can be said for its place in artistic practices, performance, musical improvisation, documentary processes, and activism? What can works addressing action in artistic practices reveal to us? Currently, the notion of action is approached first and foremost through the recurring debate between intentionalists and their opponents. However, this debate focuses particularly on the norms for interpreting works of art. And yet, L'action d'art cannot subscribe to both camps, to intention and to interpretation. One is therefore led to wonder whether current acts might not contribute to a renewal of L'action d'art, particularly through the re-questioning of conventional genres and formats for activism, actionism, performance, and through interactions with other fields beyond the artistic, such as economy and law.

This symposium intends to take up once more the question of L'action d'art at the crossroads of works that touch on the very structure of action.

¹ The anarchist journal L'action d'art was founded in 1913, 17 issues were published (from 15 February to 15 November).

Collaborators: Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, the painter Atl, Lucien Banville d'Hostel, André Colomer, Paul Dermée, René Dessambre, Manuel Devaldès, Tewfik Fahmy, Paul Maubel.

Symposium Schedule

FRIDAY 15TH APRIL 16.00-20.00

16.00 Welcome and Introduction : **Nora Razian** and **Paola Yacoub**

16.15 **Jean-Michel Roy**
Art and the primacy of action:
From cognitive pragmatism to artistic pragmatism?

The expression of art action is an unfamiliar and intriguing one, and as such a natural invitation to clarify the relations that art might entertain with action. An invitation that this presentation will attempt to answer in two successive steps. The first one will argue that, contrary to what both common sense and a good deal of the tradition of art theory seem to suggest, there are good reasons for hypothesizing that this relation is an essential one. And that the notion of art action should accordingly be understood as putting into light that art is primarily a type of action, next to – and combinable with – other types, from the most mundane (moving the hand...) to the most elevated (changing society...). A hypothesis that it is appropriate to dub artistic pragmatism and that raises a threefold interrogation: How much can it be defended? Under what form exactly? And with what degree of radicality?

The second step will further argue that it is essential to answer these questions at the light of contemporary developments in the understanding of action that belong to the overlapping fields of the philosophy of action and of Cognitive Science. And of various elaborations, in particular, of the idea that action is essential to cognition to be found in the second one, and that can in turn be grouped under the general label of cognitive pragmatism. A research strategy that will be illustrated by focussing on the implications, for the specific phenomenon of the visual perception of art, of the thesis that «perception is action» put forward by one sector of this emerging cognitive pragmatism, known as the enactive approach to visual perception and developed by philosopher Alva Noë and psychologist Kevin O'Regan.

16.50 **Daniel Blanga-Gubbay**
A pillow that has only been slept on by the mayor of Nuremberg
From action to deactivation

Some years ago artist Jason Dodge took the decision to no longer date his works, preventing catalogues and exhibitions to add a date after his new works. In relation to this image, this lecture proposes a reflection on the (false) dichotomy between action and production in artistic creation. If it starts tracing back the idea of action – as might be Gustav Metzger 1977 art strike – as that which

is able to escapes the logics of production by not objectify-able, it sheds a light on the limits of this operative ontology of Western-political philosophy, eventually disclosing a space towards a new use in the concept of *desoeuvrement*: not an action, but a deactivation.

17.30 Discussion and Q&A with **Jean-Michel Roy, Daniel Blanga-Gubbay**, moderated by **Hans Muller**

18.00 **Break**

18.15 **Antoine Moreau**

Moving from the created to the uncreated. A passing to the act; an act of passage.

In French with English translation

If to create is to make a created object, what of the act of shifting the created into the uncreated? Taking as a starting point the concept of *decreation* put forward by Simone Weil, we will examine the effects of this transitive action on contemporary creation, with particular focus given to works produced in relation to the digital, and the Internet.

Keywords: decreation, art, Internet, digital, ethics, copyleft, action.

18.50 **Paola Yacoub Michel Lasserre**

Live

In French with English translation

We shall examine some peculiar actions: the hazardous games invented by ambulance drivers during the civil war. How might we process these actions? What can be done with these narratives? What should our attitude towards them be? These questions can also be looked at in moral and political terms. In addressing them, we will draw upon Georges Politzer's concept of 'drama'.

19.30 Discussion and Q&A **Antoine Moreau, Michel Lasserre and Paola Yacoub**, moderated by **Gregory Buchakjian**

In French with no translation

20.00 **END**

SATURDAY 16TH APRIL 16.00-20.00

16.00 Welcome: **Nora Razian**

16.15 **Maxi Obexer**

Ways to act before - and during the act of writing. A dramatic work

What political and esthetic reflections should be taken before we write the drama.

How can we get in touch with the material, before we *write it down*.

How can we learn from the material itself, before we know by rules how to express it?

How can we bring the form and the material to work together?

16.50 **Christian Kobald**

Document and Mise en Scène

Some thoughts on the »minor«, the informal and the witness, followed by some remarks on why I work with documentary materials in my curatorial practice.

17.30 Discussion and Q&A **Maxi Obexer, Christian Kobald**, moderated by **Angela Harutyunyan**

18.00 **Break**

18.15 **Isabelle de le Court**

Some thoughts on Alfred Gell's Art and Agency

Since its publication in 1998, Alfred Gell's posthumous book *Art and Agency* has been at the same time praised as a new thinking in anthropology of art and criticized for its rejections of semiotics and aesthetics. Gell sought to underline the implications of the difference between Western and non-Western culture and their variety of art acting on the spectator. This paper seeks to examine some of the arguments, such as the art intervention in material technology that Alfred Gell proposed in his undertaking of anthropology of art and how these latter can offer a cross-cultural study of art. We will examine the question of the agency through Gell's terms of the art nexus and the Origination of the Index, and the way the author draws on his *Technology of Enchantment* to argue that agency is achieved through technical ability.

18.50

Sara Ramshaw

The Ethics and Trauma of Action: Art, Improvisation, Justice

Trauma, for Jacques Derrida, emanates from the unprecedented. In its very strangeness and unpredictability, it frightens us, causing trauma and pain. At the same time, though, in the absolutely unique moment of the unprecedented, there is always repetition for it can only be recognised as new in relation to the pre-existent. It is the repeated trauma of the unprecedented, which brings hope and promise to society for it ensures that change is possible and perhaps even inevitable. This promise of social change produces an ethics of hope, that is, openness to the 'other' and to the unknown and unprecedented. This talk will explore the ethics and trauma of action through the art of musical improvisation. Contrary to common sense notions of improvisation, critical improvisational research does not equate improvisation with a reduction in formality, a making it up as one goes along. Instead, it emphasises that formal structures are essential for creativity to occur. So, too, actions are always singular, unprecedented events, but are only recognised as action in relation to a wider social context and structures of meaning. The action of improvisation in musical artistic practices thus reveals much about the society we live in and the possibility for social change and, ultimately, justice.

19.30

Discussion and Q&A with **Isabelle de le Court, Sara Ramshaw**, moderated by **Alia Hamdan**

20.00

END

BIOGRAPHIES

Gregory Buchakjian is a Beirut based art historian and photographer. Faculty at Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA), his research evolves around modern and contemporary Lebanese and Arab art. He is PhD candidate at Université Paris IV Sorbonne for a dissertation entitled: *Abandoned Dwellings in Beirut. Wars and Transformation of the Urban Space. 1860-2015*.

Isabelle de le Court is an art historian and lecturer at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA). She completed her doctorate in History of Art at the University of Leeds on art and conflict in 2012. Her monograph *Post-Traumatic Art in the City: Between War and Cultural Memory in Sarajevo and Beirut* is forthcoming.

Daniel Blanga-Gubbay is Professor at the Académie royale des Beaux Arts in Brussels and a researcher in political philosophy of the arts. He collaborates with the Kunstenfestivaldesarts and is the initiator of Aleppo, a Brussels-based independent research space in art and political theory creating every season a free and temporary *Imaginary Schools* around a specific topic. He graduated in philosophy from the Venice University of Architecture with Giorgio Agamben, and got a European Ph.D, jointly run by the University of Palermo, Valencia and Freie Universität Berlin, working on the political use and evolution of the concept of the *possible*.

Angela Harutyunyan is Associate Professor of Art History and Theory at the American University of Beirut. She is editor of ARTMargins, a journal published by MIT Press. Her book titled *The Political Aesthetics of the Armenian Avantgarde: The journey of the 'painterly real'* is forthcoming with Manchester University Press in 2016.

Alia Hamdan studied contemporary dance, urbanism and philosophy in Paris and Montpellier. From 2005 to 2010, she returns to Beirut and works in the field of urban research, punctually engaging in various performance projects. Since 2012, she pursues a PhD in Esthetics at Paris 8 university and teaches various courses at ALBA university (Beirut). In her artistic practice, Alia explores the encounter of choreography and visual arts. Her performance *Someday* (BIPOD, 2011) designed a film for the stage, a film that connects to performed gestures. In 2015, she participates in *Retrospective* by Xavier Le Roy (BAC, Beirut). Recently, she completed a choreographic movie in the context of the *Art and Archive* residency (Beirut/Cologne).

Christian Kobald is a curator, editor at Spike Art Quarterly, and runs the non-profit exhibition space Yvonne Lambert in Berlin. He studied philosophy at the University of Vienna and the history of art, culture and ideas at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, where he also teaches in the fine arts program.

Antoine Moreau is an artist, initiator of Copyleft Attitude and co-writer of the Free Art License. Lecturer at the University of Franche-Comté, department Multimedia M2I, Laboratory ELLIADD, head of the program *Links between the arts and the digital*.

Hans Muller is chair of the Department of Philosophy at the American University of Beirut since 2013, where he has been teaching philosophy since 2004. He taught at Ithaca College, New York, U.S.A from 2002 to 2004. He received his MA (1996) and his PhD (2003) in philosophy from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and U.S.A. His research is focused on the philosophy of mind with an emphasis on the emotions. He has also published articles on action theory. He teaches courses in those areas as well as in metaphysics, epistemology, logic, philosophy of cognitive science, history of modern philosophy, and applied ethics.

Maxi Obexer is a writer, playwright, founder of the new institut for dramatic writing. Since becoming a fellow of the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin (LCB) at the age of 23, Maxi Obexer has been living in Berlin. In addition to her creative work, she regularly writes reviews and essays for newspapers and anthologies and was responsible for the literature section of the weekly magazine *Freitag* for several years. In 2014, she founded the Neue Institut

für Dramatisches Schreiben. Currently she is a guest professor at Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig. Obexer is known for her political plays, audio plays, and essays. A main focus of her work is the condition of migrants and refugees, e.g. in her play *Geisterschiff* (Ghostship), which deals with a refugee catastrophe in the Mediterranean Sea. In her work *Illegale Helfer* (Illegal Aides) she addresses Europeans who move in the grey zone of legality, supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons without a legal status. Obexer studied comparative literature, philosophy and theater studies in Vienna, Austria, and Berlin. She received numerous fellowships and awards and was previously a Max Kade guest lecturer at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.

<https://german.georgetown.edu/maxiobexer>

www.nids.eu

www.m-obexer.de

Sara Ramshaw is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Exeter, School of Law. After receiving her B.A. (Honours) (With Distinction) from the University of Toronto, Sara obtained both a LLB and a LLM from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. She then clerked at the Ontario Court of Justice (General Division) and was called to the Bar of the Law Society of Upper Canada in 2000. Sara worked as a Research Lawyer at the Superior Court of Justice, Family Court in Toronto, Ontario before commencing postgraduate studies at Birkbeck School of Law in London, England. Sara's doctoral thesis, completed in 2007, examined the legal regulation of jazz musicians in New York City (1940-1967) through the lens of post structural theory informed by feminism, critical race theory and critical improvisation studies. During the 2008-9 academic year, Sara was a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Improvisation, Community and Social Practice (ICASP) project in Montreal, Canada. Her monograph *Justice as Improvisation: The Law of the Extempore* was published by Routledge in 2013. Sara was the principal investigator of a large UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded project, entitled *Into the Key of Law: Transposing Musical Improvisation. The Case of Child Protection in Northern Ireland*.

Jean-Michel Roy joined the Philosophy Department of Lyon ENS in 2000. He previously taught at the University of Bordeaux and the Ulm Ecole Normale Supérieure of Paris, where he also studied. His philosophy PHD was completed at the Paris-I Sorbonne University and he also holds a Master degree in Linguistics from Paris VII University. His early career includes an extended post-doctoral stay in the US with a variety of affiliations with Harvard University, MIT and Wellesley College. His fields of specialization are Twentieth Century philosophy of knowledge and philosophy of Cognitive Science, two areas that he teaches and actively researches at the Lyon ENS. His most recent book was published in September 2010 under the title: *Rhin et Danube: Essais sur le schisme analytico-phénoménologique* (Vrin, Paris). Jean Michel Roy's work also deals with the relation of Cognitive science and philosophy with art theory. His latest publication in this area is: *Triangulating Morris' Intention? Davidson on Morris Quoting Davidson in Investigations : the Expanded Field of Writing in the Works of Robert Morris*, edited by Katia Schneller, Noura Wedell, ENS Éditions, 2015.

Visual artists **Paola Yacoub and Michel Lasserre** have been collaborators since 2000. Their works have been exhibited at Kunst-Werke, Berlin (2000); the Venice (2003), Busan (2004) and Gwangju (2006) biennales; Plateau, Paris (2002); Witte de With, Rotterdam (2003); Xiangning Art Museum, Shenzhen, China (2008). They have given lecture-performances at the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2006); Beirut Art Center (2011); as part of the seminar Something You Should Know, EHESS Paris (2012); Travelling Féministe, Paris (2013). They have been the recipients of several grants, including from DAAD, Berlin, in 2005. Their lectures have been collected in the monograph *Beirut is a Magnificent City: Synoptic Pictures.*, published by the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (2003). Their first joint works focused on a critical interpretation of perceptions of territories in conflict zones. They are currently working on the notion of action, and restoring varied techniques of dramatization to the field of visual arts. Paola Yacoub is director of the Artistic Research Practices program at ALBA, Beirut.