

Institute of Contemporary Arts

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Saturday
29 February
2020

Thinking Art

A one-day
international
conference

Organized by the Centre for Research
in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP)
Kingston University in collaboration
with the ICA

In 1990, the ICA established a Philosophical Forum to host a series of lectures on theoretical work that engaged contemporary art beyond the intellectual horizon of the aesthetic tradition (subsequently published as *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, ICA, 1991).

Thirty years later, we return to the same broad theme of 'thinking art' – at once philosophical and transdisciplinary – under very different political and theoretical conditions. Many of the terms and theoretical definitions debated in 1990 have now changed, and the technologies, institutions, markets, forms of labour and social spaces discussed have since become radically destabilised.

This conference provides a forum for critical discussion of some of the theoretical discourses that currently preoccupy the anglophone art world: vital and poetic materialisms; art and labour; instabilities of forms; social ecologies and intimations of catastrophe.

10am: Arrival

10:30–11:45am: Materialisms, Digital and Poetic *Six-Handed, Machine Assisted, Furious*

Caroline Bassett (Digital Humanities, University of Cambridge)
The Consolation of Materialism

Keston Sutherland (Poetics, University of Sussex)

12–1:15pm: Art and Labour

On the Logic – not Iconography – of the Diagram: From Picabia to Rotella, 1915–1962

Jaleh Mansoor (Art History, University of British Columbia)
*Neither Capitalist Nor Worker: On the Historical Roots of
the Artist as an Anti-Capitalist*

Dave Beech (Fine Art, Chelsea, University of the Arts London
& Valad Academy, Gothenburg)

1:15–2:30pm: Lunch

2:30–3:45pm: Instabilities of Forms

Arting Philosophy

Ludger Schwarte (Philosophy, Dusseldorf Art Academy)
*The Making of a Feminist Subject: Carla Lonzi's Refusal of Art
as a Transformative Practice*

Giovanna Zapperi (Art History, University of Tours)

4:00–5:15pm: Social Ecologies, Intimations of Catastrophe

Black Atlantis: The Plantationocene

Ayesha Hameed (Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths)
People Who Think Together Dance Together #8 (A Report)
Christian Nyampeta (artist, London)

5:30–7pm: Reception in the ICA Sake Bar

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Abstracts & Speakers

Caroline Bassett: *Six-Handed, Machine Assisted, Furious*

What is the kernel of the computational object? Where is the agency in an AI? The material turn in digital medium theory produces an insistence on finding the essence of the thing. The rest is thought inessential, an outer skin, to be sloughed off, a rind we could do without. This is technological fetishism; an absence that covers a lack. In the attempt to distil the thing itself, the thing itself is radically diminished, and its relation to the world, the vibrancy of its material appeal, is etiolated. In response this paper draws on *Furious*, a six-handed, machine-assisted, techno-feminist production arguing for other ways to think about digital materialism. *Furious* insists on the porous, the hybrid, and explores the traffic between the peculiar agency of algorithms and the informing force of the symbolic. It deploys writing as a political technology, one that can attack reductive accounts of 'the human' necessarily emerging from stripped-down versions of 'the machine' and that can re-find material complexity in technical assemblages and the environments they organise.

Caroline Bassett is Professor of Digital Humanities at Cambridge. Her research explores media technology, critical theory, feminism, and cultural change. Recent publications include work on AI and behaviourism, and on gender and digital media history. Her latest book is *Furious: Technological Feminism and Digital Futures* (Pluto, 2020), co-authored with Sarah Kember and Kate O'Riordan.

Dave Beech: *Neither Capitalist Nor Worker: On the Historical Roots of the Artist as an Anti-Capitalist*

This paper will outline the historical conditions for the emergence of the artist as a distinctive economic and social producer. By examining the politics of art through the lens of the politics of labour it will shed new light on the relationship between art and capitalism. It will trace how the new institutions of the Fine Arts in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe redefined the artist in direct opposition to both commerce and the mechanical arts within an aristocratic hierarchy of labour. The legacy of the elevation of the Fine Arts above business and the workshop contains the germ of the modern anti-capitalist conviction common within the artworld.

Dave Beech is Reader in Art and Marxism at the University of the Arts, London. He is the author of *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Brill, 2015), which was shortlisted for the Deutscher Memorial Prize. His most recent book is *Art and Postcapitalism: Aesthetic Labour, Automation and Value Production* (Pluto, 2019). *Art and Labour: On the Hostility to Handicraft, Aesthetic Labour and the Politics of Work in Art* (Brill, 2020) is forthcoming. Beech is an artist who worked in the collective Freee (with Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan) between 2004 and 2018. His current art practice translates the tradition of critical documentary film into sequences of prints that combine photomontage and text art.

Ayesha Hameed: *Black Atlantis: The Plantationocene*

This lecture performance asks: what is the relationship between climate change and plantation economies, and how might we begin to think of a watery plantationocene? It revolves around two islands: a former plantation in St George's Parish in Barbados, and the port city of Port of Spain in Trinidad: visiting the heartland of one of the three stops of the triangular trade, and taking seriously Donna Haraway's and Anna Tsing's use of the term 'plantationocene' which connects the development of a plantation form of production to the beginning of the current geological era that we are in.

Ayesha Hameed lives in London. Since 2014 Hameed's multi-chapter project 'Black Atlantis' has looked at the Black Atlantic and its afterlives in contemporary illegalised migration at sea, in oceanic environments, through Afrofuturistic dancefloors and soundsystems and in outer space. Through videos, audio essays and performance lectures, she examines how to think through sound, image, water, violence and history as elements of an active archive; and time travel as an historical method. Recent exhibitions include Liverpool Biennale (2020),

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Gothenburg Biennale (2019), Lubumbashi Biennale (2019) and Dakar Biennale (2018). She is co-editor of *Futures and Fictions* (Repeater, 2017) and co-author of the forthcoming *Visual Cultures as ... Time Travel* (Sternberg, 2020). She is currently Co-Programme Leader of the PhD in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Christian Nyampeta: *People Who Think Together Dance Together #8 (A Report)*

This audio-visual presentation commences with a set of unadorned questions: How come my name is Christian? How to build a memory of present-day limits of living? How to layer the memories that are sometimes contradictory, even though they are all true? How to reconcile the singular national and official memory with the multiple individual, collective memories, and perhaps even the geographical, geological and ecological ones?

The presentation addresses these questions through sonic and visual fragments from Nyampeta's collaborative and open-ended film, *People Who Think Together Dance Together*. The film constructs social ecologies through setting up audiosocial structures and inventorying visual cultures across artistic assemblies, philosophical conferences, social gatherings, pedagogical convenings and spiritual conversations, within and beyond spaces and knowledges that come out of historical ruptures, discontinuities, disjointed continuities and modes of thinking that do not follow the post/ante doctrine.

People Who Think Together Dance Together is also the name of collective parties and sonic gatherings initiated by Rangoato Hlasane as an integral component of the symposiums of Another Roadmap for Arts Education Africa Cluster, a research on the history of arts education undertaken within a network of educators, artists and researchers working in four continents around the world, initiated at the Institute for Art Education at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

Artist Christian Nyampeta convenes the Nyanza Working Group of Another Roadmap School. His recent solo exhibitions include *École du soir* at SculptureCenter in New York; *A Flower Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow* at the Museum of Contemporary Art GfZK in Leipzig, co-commissioned with Contour Biennale 9 in Mechelen, and co-produced with Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels, Perdu Amsterdam, and Wilfried Lentz Gallery in Rotterdam; and *Words after the World* at Camden Arts Centre in London. He contributed to the 5th Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art; the Dakar Biennale 2018; and the 11th Gwangju Biennial in 2016. Nyampeta runs Radius, an online and occasionally inhabitable radio station, and he submitted a PhD thesis in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London, under the supervision of Kodwo Eshun. He was awarded The Art Prize Future of Europe 2019 and the European Union Prize at the 12th Bamako Encounters – African Biennial of Photography.

Jaleh Mansoor: *On the Logic – not Iconography – of the Diagram: From Picabia to Rotella, 1915–1962*

What does 'context' mean for Art History, a discipline founded in the nationalisms of the 19th century, wherein place, time, and style triangulated to form a coherent heuristic frame – after 1945, and after 1973, and again now? And how do we find words to describe prevailing tendencies in contemporary art among the numerous, scattered and apparently unrelated tendencies encountered at art fairs and biennials, and in established museums and institutions of the bourgeois public sphere? These two questions appear unrelated until a pattern begins to emerge suggesting the dependence of one question on the other. The diagram is one (aesthetic) operation within which the questions converge or are shown to be already entwined. Already operative in the historical avant-gardes of the interwar period (Brancusi, Duchamp, Picabia), this modality of graphic practice has risen to dominance over the last 50 years: Manzoni (*Linea*, 1961), Barry Flanagan (*Diary of a Conversation*, *George Melly*, 1972), Dorothea Rockburne, Richard Hamilton, Agnes Denes, Nancy Holt, Lee Lozano, Anna Maria Maiolino, Richard Tuttle, Mark Lombardi, Gabriel Orozco, Ellen Gallagher, William

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Kentridge, Kara Walker, Cristóbal Lehyt, Julie Mehretu, Daniel Zeller and Nobuya Hoki.

Jaleh Mansoor is an Associate Professor in the faculty of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. She has written monographic studies on the work of Piero Manzoni, Ed Ruscha, Agnes Martin, Blinky Palermo, Gerhard Richter and Mona Hatoum. She co-edited *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Duke, 2010) and is the author of *Marshall Plan Modernism: Italian Postwar Abstraction and the Beginnings of Autonomia* (Duke, 2016). Her current project is tentatively entitled *Stealing Back Time from Universal Prostitution: The Biopolitics of Abstraction Crossing Modernism, 1888–2008*. It traces the historical and structural entwinement of aesthetic and real (or concrete) abstraction – defined as the extraction of labour power valorised by transactional exchange on the market – to offer a comprehensive account of the political economic forces forming the structural conditions of and motivation for 20th-century aesthetic abstraction, the turn to Social Practice art and the advent of post-humanism. She is the recipient of a three-year SSHRC Insight Grant with her collaborator, Lakota Sioux artist Dana Claxton.

Ludger Schwarte: *Arting Philosophy*

Artworks are often described as formal constellations, which one reads or experiences aesthetically. Yet neither an analysis of aesthetic experience nor of formal features of art works will tell us how (new) art works come about. So, considering the becoming of aesthetic forms as one of the central features of art works, what it is, precisely, that artistic practice consists of, in its difference from aesthetic and design practices? Do artists 'make' art, 'produce an artwork' or 'work as precarious performers in the art world'? Is artistic practice a labour, a production or a performance?

Ludger Schwarte is Professor of Philosophy at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. His research covers the areas of aesthetics, political philosophy, philosophy of culture, ontology, and history of science. His most recent books are *Notate für eine künftige Kunst/Notes pour un art future* (Merve, 2016/les presses du reel, 2019) and *Piktrale Evidenz* (W Fink, 2015).

Keston Sutherland: *The Consolation of Materialism*

Keston Sutherland is a poet and Professor of Poetics at the University of Sussex. He has held visiting Fellowships at Harvard University and the University of California, Berkeley, and in 2016 was the Bain-Swigggett Professor of Poetry at Princeton University. Collections of his poetry and translations include *Whither Russia* (Baroque, 2017), *Poetical Works 1999–2015* (Enitharmon Press, 2015) and *The Odes to TL61P* (Enitharmon Press, 2013).

Giovanna Zapperi: *The Making of a Feminist Subject: Carla Lonzi's Refusal of Art as a Transformative Practice*

In 1970, Carla Lonzi (1931–82), a prominent art critic in 1960s Italy, withdrew from the art world in order to engage in feminism. However, her withdrawal did not mean that she ceased to reflect on art and its patriarchal structures: on the contrary, her critique of art plays a crucial role in the process of imagining a new feminist subjectivity. Her ideas about the artist's autonomy and authenticity, her notion of culture as a repressive force, the emphasis on relations and the critique of authority within the art field are all crucial to her feminism.

Giovanna Zapperi is a Paris-based art historian and a Professor of Contemporary Art History at University of Tours. Her latest book, *Carla Lonzi. Un'arte della vita* ('Carla Lonzi: An Art of Life'; Rome, 2017; French translation: Dijon, 2018), examines the writings of Carla Lonzi. With Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, she has curated the exhibition *Defiant Muses: Delphine Seyrig and Feminist Video Collectives in France, 1970s–1980s* (Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2019–2020).



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