

PERFORMANCE CONSERVATION INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

Bern Academy of the Arts

September 30, 2022

1:30pm-7:15pm CEST



Swiss National
Science Foundation



CONTENTS

Colloquium description, p.3

Schedule, p.4

Abstracts / speaker bios in order of appearance, pp. 5-12

Gisela Hochuli, In Strange Hands II, 2002, pp.13-16

PERFORMANCE CONSERVATION INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

What does it mean to conserve performance, to sustain its life into the future? What is performance, if investigated as an event, process, object, documentation, and as an ongoing life, a way of world-making or of producing knowledge? What does performance become, as glimpsed through the lens of distinct disciplinary perspectives?

This online colloquium brings together artists and scholars of performance studies, anthropology, art history, musicology, and conservation to approach the question of the ongoing life and afterlives of performance. In this second annual colloquium organized by the research team *Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge*, we will pursue these questions in a series of lectures by prominent guest speakers, followed by a round table conversation. There will be a chance to engage with the speakers during a Q&A.

This colloquium is part of the ongoing research project *Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge* funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation at Bern Academy of the Arts. The project focuses on the questions of conservation of performance-based works, their temporal specifics, the involvement of the human and non-human body, and the world of their extended trace history, memory, and archive. Explored are notions of care, the ideals of traditional conservation and their relation to tacit or explicit knowledge, skill and technique. Taking as a starting point the necessity for conservators to access and deepen this area of study, and unlike queries that situate these questions within other disciplines, in this project, we approach performance as a necessarily conservable form.

This event is generously supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Institute of Materiality in Art and Culture, Bern Academy of the Arts.

SCHEDULE

All times are in CEST.

- 1:30 — 1:45 pm** **Hanna Hölling, Jules Pelta Feldman, Emilie Magnin:** Welcome and introduction
- 1:45 — 2:30 pm** **Michaela Schäuble:** Critical Acts of Repetition? (Ritual) Performance and Reenactment from an Anthropological Perspective
- 2:30 — 3:15 pm** **Thomas Gartmann:** Can You Conserve Music?
- 3:15 — 3:45 pm** **Gisela Hochuli:** In Strange Hands II, 2022, Live Performance
- 3:45 — 4:00 pm** Break
- 4:00 — 4:45 pm** **Amelia Jones:** Curating Performance as Conservation? Thoughts on Queer Communion: Ron Athey
- 4:45 — 5:30 pm** **Dread Scott:** Socially Engaged Performance and its Aftermath
- 5:30 — 6:15 pm** **Philip Auslander:** In Conversation
- 6:15 — 7:15 pm** Panel discussion with **Philip Auslander, Thomas Gartmann, Dread Scott, and Michaela Schäuble** moderated by **Hanna Hölling, Jules Pelta Feldman, Emilie Magnin, and Aga Wielocha**

ABSTRACTS

SPEAKER BIOS

Michaela Schäuble

Critical Acts of Repetition? (Ritual) Performance and Reenactment from an Anthropological Perspective

In anthropological discourse, “conservation” is usually associated with environmental development programmes, biodiversity, sustainable tourism and/or indigenous economies. The conservation of ritualised performances (i.e. ritual drama, trance, and dance) using audio-visual media is – apart from previous salvage anthropology efforts – less frequently thematised. In recent years, however, religious practices and ritualised performances are increasingly (re)constructed and displayed as cultural heritage in public spheres and for various audiences, including the art world. Such performances, staged presentations and commodified re-appropriations present a conundrum and are highly contested, especially, when reenactments are involved: be it in theatrical and “living history” performances, museum exhibitions and art galleries, and/or on television.

But what happens, if a repetition or a mediated reenactment freezes a (ritual) performance in time? Furthermore, what happens to a ritual if it is “performed” for a theatrical audience? In which contexts is it inadequate or inefficient to distinguish between “authentic” and “staged” ritual performances or heritage? I will discuss these questions with reference to my own research on ritual performances, reenactments and re-medialisation of Apulian tarantism, a spider possession cult that has been endemic to Southern Italy for at least five hundred years.

Michaela Schäuble is Professor for Social Anthropology with a focus on Media Anthropology at the University of Bern (CH). She also trained as a documentary filmmaker and regularly curates film programmes for exhibitions and festivals. From 2013 to 2014 she was lecturer at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology (GCVA) at Manchester University (UK) and from 2008 to 2013 lecturer (wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin) at the Institute for Social Anthropology at the University of Halle-Wittenberg (Germany). In 2009 she completed her PhD with a dissertation on nationalism, gender dynamics and the politics of commemoration in post-war Croatia. Her current research focuses on ecstatic religious cults and saint veneration in the Mediterranean. As head of the SNF Agora project “Tarantism Revisited” she, in collaboration with Anja Dreschke, uses film and photography as a research tool in investigating re-enactment and (religious) performances as sites of revitalising and negotiating tradition, heritage and cultural identity in Southern Italy.

Thomas Gartmann

Can You Conserve Music?

Can music be preserved at all? And what is being preserved in the process? Different types of music, such as classical music, improvisation and conceptual music, are used to explain the various problems. One excursus is devoted to self-playing pianos, a very special way of recording interpretations.

Thomas Gartmann is a musicologist, heads research at the HKB and conducts research on contemporary music, self-playing pianos, interpretation and improvisation, among other topics. On this topic, he has published the essay "Repeatability versus Unrepeatability in Free Improvisation" which occurred in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Improvisation in the Arts*, edited by Alessandro Bertinetto and Marcello Ruta; a volume *Rund um Beethoven. Interpretationsforschung heute*, co edited with Daniel Allenbach and is responsible for the SNF Agora project www.magic-piano.ch.

Gisela Hochuli

In Strange Hands II, 2022, live performance

Artist Gisela Hochuli has developed a Zoom performance, titled *In Strange Hands II*, on the basis of instructions sent by the audience. When signing up, all attendees were asked to contribute a short, written event score or instruction for a performance. For more information and to see the instructions that were submitted, see pages 9-11.

Gisela Hochuli is a performance artist and lives in Switzerland (Bern and Ruppoldsried). She studied economics and sociology at the University of Bern (1989-1996) and fine arts at the Zurich University of the Arts (2001-2005). Since 2002 she has been showing her solo performances in museums, galleries and at national and international performance festivals, in Asia, South and North America, North Africa and Europe. She also works in collaborations with various (inter)national artists. She organizes performance events, teaches performance art and interviews performance artists. In 2014 she won the Swiss Performance Art Award. She is a member of the Performance Art Network CH (PANCH).

For the description of the work's trajectory and performance instructions submitted by the colloquium participants, see pp. 13-16.

Amelia Jones

Curating Performance as Conservation? Thoughts on Queer Communion: Ron Athey

Using the exhibition I curated in 2021, *Queer Communion: Ron Athey*, as an example, this talk explores the question of how (or whether) to curate shows relating to live art practices in the gallery/museum setting. Can one curate performance art without reifying and “ruining” the energies of performance and the live? Is curatorial practice a place to experiment with alternative ways of historicizing live art? I argue, through my exhibition, that it potentially is. Rather than attempting to “conserve” performance by “curating” an artist’s individual performances, I specifically set out to explore how to honor the complexities of a lived career of performance through the formation of queer communities in and around the artist Ron Athey.

Amelia Jones is Robert A. Day Professor at Roski School of Art & Design, USC. Recent publications include the catalogue *Queer Communion: Ron Athey* (2020), co-edited with Andy Campbell (accompanying a retrospective of Athey’s work, which she curated); and *In Between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (2021). Her current work addresses the structural racism of the art world.

Dread Scott

Socially Engaged Performance and its Aftermath

In his talk, Dread Scott will discuss performance and its social and political reverberations in his artistic practice. The talk will consider both the future of Scott's performance works and his own use of past gestures. Among the works to be discussed is *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* (2019), for which Scott led hundreds of participants in restaging the German Coast Uprising of 1811, the largest rebellion of enslaved people in the history of the United States. In carefully reconstructing a historical event – the memory of which was suppressed by anxious slaveowners – while deliberately embracing anachronism and utopian imagination, Scott insists on performance as a technique for actualizing the revolutionary power of past events in the present.

Dread Scott is a multimedia artist based in Brooklyn. His first major work, *What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag* (1988), made while he was a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, became the center of controversy, denounced as a desecration of the American flag by then-President G.H.W. Bush and outlawed by Congress. His work – in installation, photography, screen-printing, video and performance – addresses historical and contemporary injustice and inequality. His art has been exhibited at such institutions as the Whitney Museum of American Art, MoMA PS1, the Contemporary Art Museum Houston and at the Pori Art Museum in Finland. He is a recipient of a Creative Capital grant and Fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts. His work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum and the Akron Art Museum.

Philip Auslander

In Conversation

In conversation with the colloquium organizers, Philip Auslander will elaborate his ideas about performance documentation. What is the relationship of a photograph or video to the performance it purports to document? What is the status of the document in art discourse? How can, or should, we distinguish between documenting, archiving, and conserving? What does it mean to document a performance “retrospectively”? And how have social media and livestreaming shifted what we understand a document – or a performance – to be? The audience is invited to join the conversation and share their thoughts.

Philip Auslander’s primary research interest is in performance, especially in relation to art, music, media, and technology. He has written on aesthetic and cultural performances as diverse as theatre, film acting, performance art, music, stand-up comedy, robotic performance, and courtroom procedures. He is the author of seven books and editor or co-editor of two collections. His most recently published books are *In Concert: Performing Musical Persona* (2021), *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation* (2018), *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (2006) and the second edition of *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (2008). Auslander is the editor of *The Art Section: An Online Journal of Art and Cultural Commentary*. He is also a working screen actor; you can see his credits on the Internet Movie Database.

Gisela Hochuli

In Strange Hands II, 2022

In Strange Hands was performed in 2021 at the first annual colloquium organized by Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge, entitled "Performance: The Ethics and the Politics of Care." Colloquium participants were invited to submit performance instructions, which Hochuli turned into a live performance during the event. *In Strange Hands II* returns to this format, using new instructions collected from this year's attendees. Gisela Hochuli has been working with performance instructions for several years and is interested in questions around their development, reception and interpretation. How can a performance instruction be written in few or many words, how is it understood by the person who hears it, what kind of images does it create in the imagination and how does it manifest itself when it is performed? At her request, artists design a performance instruction, speak it on a smartphone, and send her the audio file. Meanwhile, over 40 performance instructions have been collected since 2019. Three headphones containing these instructions have so far been available to visitors in two exhibitions (akku/ort, Emmenbrücke 2019 and Kunstpavillon Burgbrohl 2021). *In Strange Hands* has also been performed at akku/ort, Emmenbrücke 2019.

In Strange Hands II, 2022

Performance instructions submitted by colloquium participants

To think a thought

I don't have specific preference

Interpret Mieko Shiomi's Fluxus score: Shadow Piece II, 1964

- 1. Project a shadow over the other side of this page**
- 2. Observe the boundary between the shadow and the lighted part**
- 3. Become the boundary line**

Bring Your Own Light.

Bring Your Own Body.

Bring Your Own Animal.

Bring Your Own Liquid.

Bring Your Own Breath.

Bring Your Own CO₂.

Bring Your Own Illusion.

Think of a dream you had when you were a child

den moment atmen

take a moment to care for the body; rest, drink water, breathe

Crack egg

Y

Breath deeply and yawn

I refuse to create situations instead of the artists

find urgency in your relationship with flowers and plants. what does it mean (bodily and imaginatively) to build human-non human companionship around urgency?

0

I move to see, I move to pause

7

kiss your friend's eyes (literally or metaphorically)

Will email later

10

Scratch behind the left ear twice

.

Sorry, I am unable to provide this

Find the elegance in an awkward gesture.

Verstehe nicht, was damit gemeint ist

Meditate

Please perform an action that you could not do in front of a live audience

x

transpose lines of a poem or a sentence into a different (non-verbal) human or non-human language - means for example being expressed through gestures, or body language in general or whining or howling or anything else ...

Mieko Shiomi < portrait piece > 1963

Follow a line

Jump!

unclear to me

Authenticity

Select an object of great personal significance to you. Show the object or a representation of the object to the audience. Describe it visually. Describe how you came to be the guardian of the object that you shepherd through time, and why it is significant to you. Reflect, in words or bodily action, how the object makes you feel. Meditate on its destruction. Reflect, in words or bodily action, how its destruction could make you feel (note: If that becomes too painful, remember that it will not be destroyed today).

Show with your hands how happy you are with the colloquium so far! :)

a unique way of eye blinking

Your thoughts about gesture and silent film?

Allow silence to breathe.

Repeat what you remember doing from the same interval of time in your previous day

Phone a friend

Performance instruction: Find a surface in your close environs. Breath into it. Breath with it

Dream that your dead ancestors walk by your side once again
in the morning there is meaning
Press mute. Then tell a secret
Draw a snowflake and smile
dance
Discriminate to reach equity
washing dishes
Look
use a light source (or absence of a light source) to obscure your image in the zoom window
Count your heartbeats
Breath in deeply, close your eyes, choose a pleasing sound around you
Say: "Tenderness is everything"
Close first the left eye and then the right eye, think for an arbitrarily long moment you are in a forest
and experience all seasons in this moment. Open first the right eye, then the left eye
trage bitte einen gleichbleibenden vokal durch den raum
Count backwards from 51 to 43
Eat a whole lemon
Schneide deine Fussnägel und bilde daraus eine Skulptur
Stand on one foot and speak a sentence about silence
Threshold. Damnation

Thank you for joining us

**www.performanceconservation
materialityknowledge.com**