

## MEDIALITY COUPLES

### Relation Works between image and performance

Institute of Theater Studies, Freie Universität Berlin

19<sup>th</sup> of May 2017

1–6:30 p.m.

The Workshop wants to focus on performance art couples and their specific mediality. The issue up for debate are practices of mediality which (re)present, create, negotiate or even deconstruct couple relationships in performance art. The term “art couple” hereby includes so called “artist couples” which blur the boundary of life and art as well as performative (re)presentations of dual relationships in general. Interpersonal relation is not just a predetermined state of affairs as if given by nature but produced by performative acts and therefore should be thought of as dynamic, heterogeneous and historically situated. Performance art thus appears to be from its very beginning a particularly productive playing field for diverse kinds of *relation work* (as Abramović und Ulay famously titled a series of their projects) experimenting with notions of duality.

The workshop takes as its starting point the observation that a certain aesthetics of the couple is always linked to a specific mediality and that the performative acts producing the couple are inseparably interwoven with media practices and their perception. Following the term’s Latin roots, the *medium* can be thought of as a center, an in-between, a third notion enabling the relation between two (id)entities in the first place. At the same time mediality – following the ancient Greek *metaxy* – always creates relation by creating a distance. Not by chance does this defining vocabulary of identity & alterity, closeness & distance etc. seem equally applicable to the *relation works* of performance couples. In these performances mediality becomes relevant in various, intertwined dimensions, from which the workshop will focus on three especially:

**Mediality of performance:** In a traditional perspective on performance art its specific mediality derives from its liveness, its ephemerality and the bodily co-presence of the performers as well as the spectators. Here the corporeality of the performer couple becomes agent and medium of the relation (e.g. Abramović and Ulay’s series of *Relation Works*, 1976-1979 or VALIE EXPORT and Peter Weibels Aktionen *Aus der Mappeder Hundigkeit* or *TAPP und Tastkino*, both in 1968). The physical body, its bare existence, its movements and gestures in time and space are as crucial for this dimension of mediality as for example the voice, a phenomenon of performativity par excellence in its twin existence of being sensual and meaningful.

**Mediality in performance:** Performance couples often employ intermedial forms of (re)presentation and thus modes of perception to produce a being-in-relation. This media usage ranges from explicitly working with media technologies such as writing, photography, video or digital media technologies (e.g. the GPS-trackings of plan b) but also experimenting with the media potential of materials (e.g. the use of wool and knitting in the work of deufert&plischke). In interplay with other materials and media practices the status of the body itself is put up for debate. Especially relevant is the engagement with diverse aesthetic modes as for instance forms of representation from the visual



arts such as the *tableau vivant* – hence exploring historic role models and their ways to produce “images” of relation.

**Mediality of performance documentation:** Images in the widest sense also play an important part in the documentation of couple performances. Photographs, videos, but also other forms of repetition, quotation or even reenactment make the heterogeneous dimensions of relations perceptible and can therefore be considered as part of the production of the couple (again the self-stagings of Abramović and Ulay are a productive example but one could also consider Janez Janša project *Life II [in progress]*, 2008 – ongoing, which is multiplying and potentially surpassing duality). Thus the particular mediality of performance documentation also reveals the crucial connection between relation and temporality.

The transitory performance on the one hand and the static image on the other hand seem to mark the extreme poles of the mediality of the couple. The materiality of bodies, objects and media and their temporalities become crucial agents for the creation and perception of relation. Thus the term mediality refers to a specific constellation, which is made of the performative as well as of technological apparatuses and the shaping of perception.

As couple performances always challenge notions of subjectivity, gender identity and authorship one might ask how mediality is employed in the formation of a third identity of the couple as well as in creating a relation with the participants / audience. To inquire into the mediality of performance couples means therefore to examine the general perceptibility of relationship, taking into account the materiality as well as the semioticity of its constituting processes. Hence, the workshop seeks to investigate these specific dimensions of mediality: What kind of media practices do performance couples employ? In what ways does mediality create relation? How do media relations shape our thinking of duality?

Speakers:

deufert&plischke (Berlin), Amelia Jones (Los Angeles), Lisa Newman (Ballyvaughan), plan b (Berlin)

The symposium language is English. The Workshop is open to the public.

RSVP: [workshop@kunst-paare.de](mailto:workshop@kunst-paare.de) (Maxi Grotkopp, M.A.)

## Venue

Freie Universität Berlin  
Institute of Theater Studies  
Grunewaldstraße 35  
12165 Berlin-Steglitz  
S+U Rathaus Steglitz, Bus X83 Schmidt-Ott-Str.

Organized by [www.kunst-paare.de](http://www.kunst-paare.de)

# KUNST-PAARE

