

Kulturpreis 2023

Laudatio auf Simone Aughterlony von Ilaria Mancia

Good evening everyone and thank you for this invitation, thank you to the Department of Culture in Kanton Zurich and especially to Simone A. who asked me to be present today for this important occasion of such a prestigious prize.

To begin by thanking Simone A. is for me to express sincere and deep gratitude for what I have been able to discover and experience through them and their work over the years.

As it is said for one of their works, *Biofiction*, ours can be considered "an unusual love story involving many players."

I first encountered Simone's work in New York in 2018, where they were presenting *Everything fits in the room*, co-signed with Jen Rosenblit within the festival *American Realness* and I immediately felt in this encounter "something special," because I saw a rigorous but never rigid research, radical but not declarative, provocative without the search for scandal, dense with meaning but never pretentious.

From that moment on, I thought I wanted to meet and engage with Simone A. again as soon as possible. The opportunity arose in 2021 at the Mattatoio in Rome, a museum institution in the city, where I had been curating education projects, production residencies, exhibitions and performance events for four years, and where Simone A. was involved in public programming and in an interdisciplinary Master's program in Performing Arts in collaboration with the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome.

I thought from the beginning that Simone's involvement, with respect to a place that was trying to change the paradigm of the exhibition space by transforming it into a mobile and creative space, should be implemented in multiple ways. So, in 2021, we presented in an outdoor space of the Mattatoio (former Slaughterhouse), *Biofiction* and the following year, in the summer of 2022, *Everything Fits In The Room*, the "first love" that binds me to them. On this occasion, Simone held a week-long workshop within the Master of Performing Arts program, involving students in their practice and the performance setting and materials. The wall and spatial design of *EFITR* became a place of exchange of practice and special training experience.

At the Mattatoio, Simone's presence brought about a real qualitative leap, a very high moment of integration between performance preparation, relationship and exchange of practices with the Master's students, and audience participation and involvement. *Biofiction* and *EFITR* were, for many people in Rome, insiders and outsiders, encounters of great intensity that still reverberate in the memory of those who went through them as experiences of high cognitive and experiential value.

SA's performative theater is political but not ideological. The Ideological attempt (to convince others that one is right) is replaced by physical effort, by the engagement of bodies. It is the body that tells us something about overcoming binarism, about queerness, and other possible forms of relation. There is no explicit statement on stage, but physical and material evidence. There is a certain irony co-present in that the performers' bodies allow fragilities, imperfections, awkwardness and an unbridled vitality to emerge - the human body becomes "woody" as much as the pieces of wood and "materials" become sensual and sensitive.

It is a radical and provocative work without being scandalous, sexualized but not pornographic, spontaneous but not improvised.

But the theme around which I would like to center this brief talk is primarily *composition*.

S.'s work foregrounds human and nonhuman assemblages and the affective dynamics that, in this new horizontal and hierarchy-free terrain, are created.

A practice that puts the "being with" (*essere-con/cum*) into action and rejects the codified division between nature and culture, male and female, observer and observed, subject and object, generating a queer consciousness and constructing a landscape that is perhaps utopian, but which, in the reality of the stage encounter, is present and powerfully real and relational.

S.A.'s performances involve objects, matter, the non-living (or at least what we are used to considering as such) and, through an eroticization of it, make matter take on an "agency," a function and an action in which the human subject (the performer) penetrates into (but also is penetrated by) a new dimension of relation that attempts to be equal and manifests itself as "vibrant" (osmotic, multidirectional, dynamic). Eros is what produces vibration, a passage of energy in two, indeed in multiple directions.

It is the possibility of making invisible forces visible, what this space - the space of live art, the art of SA - can do.

This reversal of the idea of matter as a passive principle in the face of the human subject possessor of "active" principles opens a real crack in the traditional, patriarchal, modernist, productivist political vision and offers the possibility for a new approach to bodies. A new ecology. An "ecological" work where ecological represents a possible state of the encounter of the changing forces in the field.

In the entire score of Simone's work, *the vibration of eros is a compositional principle*. Boundaries - between human and nonhuman, between animate and inanimate - tend to blur and this makes possible new assemblages, new alliances, new forms of life, new positions that are in relation to each other. *Con-positions*.

We are faced with a non-authoritarian idea of choreography, in which artists from different backgrounds collaborate, a mobile and creative community, which while expressing great physical effort does not claim to control, govern the bodies and their movements, and while wanting to remain open to chance or the unexpected, puts every effort into keeping the exchange of energy between all the elements on stage active at all times: *com-position is a living thing. Either it is lived together, or it is not life*.

For this vital momentum I thank SA and every artist who collaborates and lives with them, wishing us again and again immersions in this necessary, wonderful vitality.