

APPEL A PROJETS - AMORÇAGE 2021

FICHE BILAN ACTION

ACRONYME : PERFORM

Titre du projet : Performing Water

1 – Bilan des actions réalisées

Description des principales actions (objectifs, acteurs impliqués...). Pour les manifestations scientifiques organisées, préciser le programme, les dates, le(s) lieu(x) et (si possible) le, nombre de participants. (1,5 pages max.)

The funding we requested for 2021 enabled us to consolidate and expand our current network of interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners. The Performing Water project is designed to gather researchers and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines and practices to create an online archive and research platform gathering instances of water's performativity. We were also able to launch a Zoom seminar series featuring conversations between scholars and artists.

Since this project's inception at the unfortunate beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary team members have demonstrated their determination to adapt to rapidly changing research conditions, immediately adjusting the project to a virtual platform that corresponds increasingly well to future modalities of international collaborations. The initial budgetary sum was consecrated to the creation of a multi-functional online research platform, including commissioning a graphic artist to create a visual signature that acknowledges the importance of composition and design in organizing and presenting content for a diverse audience.

The consecutive steps of the project involved the gathering and uploading of multi-media content onto the platform as well as the creation of a member mailing list and the launching of a webinar series. So far, our attempts have been successful beyond our expectations, with over 170 persons signed up to attend our webinars and numerous expressions of interest and suggestions for additions to our archive.

Online research platform

<https://performingwater.org/>

The website features original designs from graphic art company FloCreations and currently hosts our webinar series as well as research content divided into our 3 chosen themes, then sub-divided by artistic medium.

Webinar Series

Our first cycle of webinars was hugely successful, being attended by scholars and practitioners from different countries and disciplines, particularly from Germany and the United States. We have not yet been able to respond to the flood of messages we have received expressing interest and proposing contributions for our platform. *(See program in annex.)*

Conference and Seminar Participations

In addition to these webinars, the primary team members have also had several opportunities throughout the year to present the project within the context of the following events:

Event: OSUN Climate Network Lecture Series

Location: Bard College at Simon's Rock (Massachusetts) & Online

Date: May 4, 2021

Title: "Performing Water and Communicating Climate Change"

Presenters: Ramona Mosse & Anna Street

Event: Contemporary Drama in English (CDE) Critical Theatre Ecologies Conference

Location: University of Augsburg & Online

Date: June 4, 2021

Title: "To Be Like Water – Material Dramaturgies in Unthinkable Environments"

Presenters: Ramona Mosse & Anna Street

Event: Digital Matters: Designing/Performing Agency for the Anthropocene

Location: Humboldt University & Online

Date: September 6, 2021

Title: Water as Medium Panel: "Performing Water in Digital Environments"

Presenters: Kamila Mamadnazarbekova & Anna Street

Event: Séminaire « Créer en des temps incertains »

Location: Université de Rennes 2 & Online

Date: November 18, 2021

Title: Séance N°7 « Histoires d'eau : Approches artistiques et éco-sociales des milieux aquatiques »

Presenters: Anne-Laure Fortin-Tournes

Autres résultats

Publications académiques, volet numérique, actions de formation, médiation grand public, nouveaux partenariats... (0,5 page)

Publications

These activities have led to two publication opportunities, namely:

Article contribution to the *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English* (De Gruyter, indexed in Scopus) entitled “To Be Like Water: Material Dramaturgies in Posthumanist Performance” by Anna Street and Ramona Mosse

Invitation to submit a chapter proposal for the edited collection *Theater and Social Action* as part of the Bloomsbury Methuen Drama Handbooks series entitled “The Politics of Performing Water” by Anna Street

Immersive Exhibition

We are delighted to be partnering with both Le Mans University’s engineering department (ENSIM research lab) and its acoustics institute (LAUM research lab) in the creation and financing of an immersive exhibition around underwater art. The exhibition is currently being built on Le Mans’ campus to provide a multi-sensory engagement with underwater art for students, scholars, and the general public. Life-sized 3D images of Jason deCaires Taylor’s underwater sculptures (<https://www.underwatersculpture.com/>) will be accompanied by sonic and light elements, as well as audio commentaries providing scientific data, legal statutes, and economic factors. Moreover, to further develop the acoustic dimension of the project, our third webinar of the 2021 cycle was devoted to sonic media and bioacoustics with one of the session’s invited artists, Tomoko Sauvage, having completed a residency at Le Mans University’s acoustics institute before launching her international artistic career.

This immersive exhibition will be installed in the on-campus theatre as well as various locations around campus. The university’s *Pôle culture* service (CSTI) is also collaborating with the project via an advertising campaign designed to solicit participation from the general public. This initial experiment is meant as a prototype for further elaborations and traveling installations.

2 – Bilan scientifique

(1,5 pages max.)

By foregrounding the media, history, and materiality of water via multi-disciplinary tools and perspectives, our goal has been to experiment with new forms of discursive

practice and material dramaturgies that engage directly with the mattering of our world. Taking chosen artistic works as a shared point of departure, we aspired to bring together scholars and practitioners from **marine biology, physics, law, economy, geography, anthropology, archeology, history, political science, acoustics and sound design, dance, gender studies, theater and performance studies, literature, new media, and the digital humanities**. For example, the planned immersive exhibition around underwater art intends to include data from the hard sciences as well as contributions from legal studies, anthropology, and literature, all while using cutting-edge technology from the state-of-the-art acoustics lab at Le Mans.

To attempt to do justice to a conceptual revolution that acknowledges matter's dynamism necessarily involves a corresponding radical shift in one's investigative methodology. For if "the universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming" (Barad 2007, 141), then our disciplines depend on each other in their very specificities. If there are no fixed and separate entities, then there is no vantage point or even ontological distance we could adopt from which to engage in analysis. Recognizing the mattering of matter implies privileging the diffractive overlaps of interdisciplinary discoveries and using them to create new discursive practices that are not speculative but directly engage with the materiality of the world. Joanna Zylińska's concept of hydromedia is a case in point here, given that mediality and materiality combine to undercut any distinction between natural and cultural environments: water and computers are not ontologically different, they both participate in a contemporary politics of interconnectedness. Focusing our attention on water's performativity and providing an account of human and non-human histories of water across geographical zones and disciplinary fields thus lends itself to exploring how water's materiality plays an active role in configurations of power and meaning.

As an ultimate interdisciplinary object, the element and medium of water allows us to include perspectives and expertise from as many different disciplines and geographical zones as possible. While this is no simple feat, our strategy of online events and digital platforms which can cross time zones and be adapted to any number of pedagogical contexts is designed to facilitate such collaborations. (Incidentally, our 4-person core member team is composed of 4 different nationalities and native tongues, already attesting to our commitment to transculturality.) Also, to enable a maximum of inclusion, the working language for the project is English. Further evidence of the project's international and interinstitutional crossings can be found in the descriptions of our previous events which have included quite a variety of institutions, geographical zones, and disciplines.

Although performativity is by no means limited to theatrical or artistic practices, just as materiality is by no means limited to the element of water, the choice to concentrate on instances of water's performative capacities within artistic productions has obvious and immediate affinities to the interconnected nature of meaning and matter and thus seems to lend itself particularly well to such explorations. Our focus concentrates on artistic works that engage specifically with water and how water intervenes, interacts, and interrupts configurations of power across the globe. Key terms are material

dramaturgies and diffractive performativity, and a key point of investigation has been the entanglement of the ecological and refugee crises.

3 – Perspectives

Quelles perspectives à l'issue du financement « Amorçage » ?

Nouveaux partenariats envisagés, dépôt de candidature(s) à des appels à projets de plus grande envergure (le cas échéant, indiquer spécifiquement les AAP visés), publications à venir... (0,5 page).

Much more research content for the project than is currently posted has been gathered and is awaiting uploading to the online platform, including the recordings of our past webinars, and we have also begun collecting pedagogical resources that we would like to develop and make available. Lack of time, resources, and technical assistance are our primary obstacles.

Additional funding would allow us to

- expand the team,
- further develop the online platform's technical capabilities,
- upload gathered content to the platform,
- create useful digital tools for both research and pedagogical purposes,
- continue with our webinar series,
- add a research seminar component,
- collaborate with the acoustics lab at Le Mans in creating an immersive exhibition using 3D images of Jason de Caires Taylor's sculptures, to be open to the university community and the general public
- design a digital version of the exhibition for the online platform
- consolidate and expand our international network of partners to include more disciplines and institutions
- continue presenting the project in various conferences and lecture series
- continue publishing our discoveries
- prepare an ANR or ERC grant proposal

ANNEX A PROGRAMME DES WEBINAIRES

Title: *Currents*

Date: September 29, 2021

Invited Guests: Valérie Morisson (Université de Bourgogne Franche Comté), Marianne Keating (artist and researcher)

Description: “Down through the undercurrents of history: John Akomfrah, Ayesha Hameed, Marianne Keating, Ailbhe Ní Bhrian, four artists working ‘in the wake’.”

Multi-screen installations and video montages prove efficient apparatuses to explore the rifts of colonial history and correlate this traumatic legacy to other forms of human and non-human exploitation. The sea, which features in the works of these four contemporary artists, is at once a poetic trope fashioning our perception of the seascape, a natural force possibly submerging man, an aquatic milieu where the fauna thrives despite the threats of the Anthropocene, a route of migration and the repository of many shameful episodes of history. The presentation of works by John Akomfrah, Ayesha Hameed, Marianne Keating and Ailbhe Ní Bhrian by Valérie Morisson (Université de Bourgogne Franche-Comté) will be followed by a round table with the Irish artist.

Title: *Underwater*

Date: October 12, 2021

Invited Guests: Dr. Helen Scales (Marine Biologist), Jason de Caires Taylor (Underwater Sculptor), Al Grumet (Digital Platform Director)

Description: This online seminar, devoted to Underwater imaginaries, explores experiments with submersion, immersion, and how to build connections to the unseen.

Dr. Scales will talk about how her work as a marine biologist and writer aims to show people the hidden living wonders of the ocean, leading her to collaborate with artists and photographers in bringing visual elements to her words and storytelling, including illustrated books for children and adults. She will focus on her collaboration with Jason deCaires Taylor on a photographic book of his underwater sculptures as well as her work with photographers at National Geographic Magazine. **Taylor**’s presentation will feature a timeline of his work in various locations ranging from the Caribbean coral reefs to the temperate waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the tropical climate of the Indian Ocean. The artworks will be a mixture of underwater and tidal installations with the inclusion of some museum exhibitions. Taylor will discuss how his design ideas, techniques and concepts have evolved throughout his career and explain why they change according to the body of water type and project location. The artworks are not only created to become artificial reefs but are also designed to remind us of our connection to the natural world and highlight the threats to our oceans. **Grumet** will give an overview of *Art Works for Change* before presenting their “Footing the Bill” exhibition via a survey of artworks from the exhibition, notably those conveying the connections between water and ecological overshoot. He will then discuss Jason

deCaires Taylor's work and how it connects to the theme of the exhibition before leading us on a review of the interactive gallery featuring Taylor's creations.

Title: *Waves*

Date: December 14, 2021

Invited Guests: Salomé Voegelin (Professor of Sound at the London College of Communication), Tomoko Sauvage (Japanese musician and artist), Robert Stock (Assistant Professor for Cultures of Knowledge at Humboldt University Berlin), Sebastian Schwesinger (Doctoral Researcher and Lecturer in Media and Cultural History at Humboldt University Berlin)

Description: This third webinar in the series will be devoted to sonic explorations of water across a variety of disciplines. From hybrid musical instruments drawing on water to the Anthropocene ocean, the session will explore the histories and aesthetic practices that connect water with sound art, listening, and bioacoustics. Our focus will be on the fundamental relationship between water and sound to discuss how sonic performances of/with water and acoustic ecologies reshape art-making, social relations and redefine what constitutes knowledge. Our guests for this session are the sound artist **Tomoko Sauvage**, who will allow us to listen in to her artistic process of creating sound performances that uniquely combine ceramic water bowls, hydrophone technology, and architecture/environments to explore the sonic materialities of water. The sound philosopher and artist **Salomé Voegelin** will offer a performative reflection on how the various interactions between sound and water provide sites for questioning our established knowledge practices and offer new ways of relating social and natura, while the culture/media historians **Robert Stock** and **Sebastian Schwesinger** will talk about the cultural histories of the Anthropocene Ocean and underwater bioacoustics in order to explore how the natural sciences have repeatedly employed the possibilities of sound studies and sound art to become part of a wider public debate.