CALL FOR PAPERS

NO THING PLAYS ITSELF:

Infrastructures of Support and the Myth of the Solo Act

An interdisciplinary graduate student conference
presented by UCLA's Center for Performance Studies

Conference Date: February 17, 2027
Deadline for Submissions: Friday, November 6, 2026

with keynote speaker, Amelia Jones (USC) *&* an evening conversation with Mindy Seu (UCLA)

Given performance's historic place as a cross-disciplinary, witnessed and often collectively produced art form, it is widely understood as inherently collaborative. Performance, even in the most general sense, depends upon dense infrastructures of support, from material conditions and institutional frameworks to technological systems, historical inheritances, and networks of care and labor that make appearance and shared meaning possible. And yet, these conditions usually recede into the background of experience, especially when they function well. What comes into view when we foreground the conditions that underwrite performance and sustain everyday acts of self-figuration?

As Shannon Jackson reminds us through the work of Vivian Sobchack, "it can be tricky to expose systemic contingency precisely because enabling systems often go unregistered in the moment that we use them" (Jackson 2011, 5). Reflecting on the altered capacities she developed after the amputation of her leg, Sobchack notes how the prostheses and support systems we rely on "are generally the ground of our intentional movement and acts, not the figure," that is "unless there's a function problem or they become of interest 'in themselves'" (Sobchack 2005, 57).

During a moment marked by the erosion and reconfiguration of cultural and academic support systems, amid funding crises, institutional retrenchment, and intensifying political pressures, this conference invites participants to treat the precarity of support as an occasion for critical attention. Can we consider support, not as ground, but as figure itself, or perhaps as a verb that acts to hold ground and figure dialectically? How might performance studies, a field long attuned to collectivity as a medium, help us refine an interdependent language for confronting the increasing instability of enabling systems?

A reference to Thom Andersen's documentary, *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), the title for this conference, "No Thing Plays Itself," signals an interest in Southern California's local histories of support that might serve as useful models for contemporary circumstances that can feel

unprecedented. At the same time, this title extends our inquiry into systemic contingency to include the mediated and mediating role infrastructures occupy. To play oneself is never to originate meaning, but to cite, inhabit and rework languages that precede and exceed the individual. Performance, then, emerges less as an expression of singularity than as an activation of inherited forms: scripts, gestures, aesthetics, technological apparatuses that are collectively accessed.

This one-day graduate conference welcomes submissions from across disciplines that engage questions such as:

- What are strategies for rendering supportive infrastructures sensible "in themselves"?
- How are systems of support localized, distributed or made scalable?
- How is the present supported by the past? How do imagined futures condition the modes of their own production?
- How might intergenerational and interdisciplinary collaboration sustain scholarship and artistic practice during precarious times?
- How do relationships between human and nonhuman actors, technological systems and environments mediate performance?
- How do we contextualize ourselves and our work beyond self-imposed boundaries?
- How might performance function as a mode of political organization, mutual aid, or collective survival?

We look forward to receiving submission proposals on topics such as, but not limited to:

- Histories of infrastructures that support the arts
- Hidden or obscured systems of labor
- Collaboration across artistic, scholarly and activist practices
- Academic work that precipitates across generations
- Complicating notions of automation– digital and corporeal
- Collaborations with non-human actors
- Environmental and ecological support systems, public infrastructures
- Relationships between performance and political organizing/ political organization
- Defenses of solitude and celebrations of loneness

In addition to traditional conference papers, we are accepting proposals for performance lectures, performances, workshops, working groups, and group panels.

SUBMIT ONLINE: https://bit.ly/performucla27
Abstract (200-250 words) and bio (100 words max) by **Friday, November 6, 2026.**
Questions? Contact cps@tft.ucla.edu

Works Cited:
Jackson, Shannon. 2011. *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. Routledge.
Sobchack, Vivian. 2005. "'Choreography for One, Two, and Three Legs' (A Phenomenological Meditation in Movements)." *Topoi*(Dordrecht) 24 (1): 55–66.