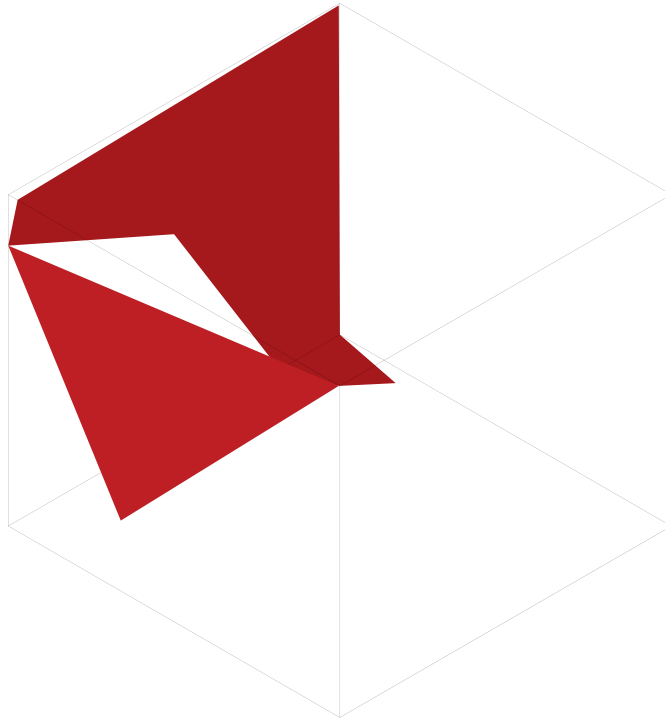


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***Performativity in the Gallery: Staging Interactive Encounters.* Edited by
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Developed from an academic session convened by two of the editors as part of the Museums and Exhibitions Members' Group Committee of the Association of Art Historians (AAH) at the 38th Annual AAH Conference held at Open University, Milton Keynes in 2012, the book brings together a series of texts exploring 'the intricate relationship between live and performing arts, and between art history and museum and gallery spaces.' It includes contributions from curators, art historians, academics and artists to present view on aspects of liveness in the gallery from the various perspectives and observations of those who work with it. Arranged in three parts it roughly divides the material into the challenges by and to performance for collecting and exhibiting from an art historical perspective; audiences and the reception of and participation in live performance; and case studies in curating performance.

The introduction identifies the challenges that performance poses for conventional galleries and art histories, noting that 'Traditional art history has been wary of live art's tendency to encourage increased formal and conceptual risk taking and is cautious about its interdisciplinary nature.' (Remes, et al., p.1) That liveness is also a challenge to visitors' ongoing access to the art, and to documentation. With these problems laid out, the specific essays address them in quite particular ways with variations in tone and voice reflecting the origin of many of the texts as papers delivered by a variety of practitioners in the context of an academic forum.

The editors acknowledge that, in spite of the challenges that liveness poses for museums and galleries, recent years have seen many performance based works in galleries in a reflection of the resurgence of interest in these practices demonstrated both by the art historical review of performance from the 1960s and 70s, and the appearance of performative practices by younger artists becoming recognised for their work. There are many recent examples of new and re-presented performances having prominent exhibitions—Abramovic's cult of personality *The Artist is Present* being the one that springs to mind most readily. Another form is that of the *11 Rooms* and *13 Rooms* curated by Klaus Biesenbach and Hans Ulrich Obrist. There are also many performative practices being supported by smaller organisations. Performance is certainly in good health in the same way in New Zealand at present. In short the genre is active and healthy and it is timely to publish writing reflecting on it.

Part One, 'Art History and its Challenged Position to Performative Encounters', covers the problems of documenting, collecting and exhibiting that performance works present for the gallery and museum. It also includes the more recent challenges that new media also poses for galleries and performance. Documentation is a well discussed topic in relation to performance work and the problems of representation of liveness via images have not yet been satisfactorily resolved and, if the extensive discussion of this area represented in this book is anything to go by, probably never will. Mary Oliver discusses the way documentation and the creation of market value go hand in hand as a way to overcome ephemerality in an attempt to sustain the moment so that it may be proven, commodified and critiqued. Oliver's position is a response to the general tendency of performance historically to be purposefully ephemeral as a way to resist the market and the gallery system, and yet there is such a desire—often on the part of the artists/performers themselves—to document and preserve for the archive, for the future so as to not be forgotten. Most artists do want the record; Tino Sehgal's denial of this is a rare position. There is a desire to confirm the event and, through imaging it, to reshape it for other purposes. Oliver cites the importance RoseLee Goldberg places on the photographer asserting that in the end 'it is the document of the



event that is required above all else' (Remes, et al., p.20), and the similar position of Philip Auslander, as problematic because the emphasis shifts from the artist to the photographer and with it comes problems of authorship. She suggests that the live act becomes secondary to the document, implying that it is a tyrannical relationship because without the document, who can be sure it ever happened. Pip Laurenson and Vivian Van Saaze's following chapter touches on the same issues, but also introduces the re-performance by performers for hire as another market driven and acquisitive mode that has been adopted as a way to address the lack of materiality of performance practices. Maria Chatzichristodoulou's chapter discusses the loss of liveness through documentation and its exhibition, especially with the employment of digital technologies and the effect of mediatisation on liveness. She asserts it as problematic, though, that liveness is firmly associated with the body and the visceral and that mediation of performance by the digital should be considered, urging us to ask whether 'liveness is as open to potentialities of the digital as it is of the visceral?' (Remes, et al., p.57)

Overall, the general tone of Part One implies a kind of crisis is in effect and that liveness is an underdog in a struggle with institutions of culture and the market, and new technologies. There is not really any optimism here, but an urging to consider these issues when thinking about methods and aspects of performance.

Part Two, 'From Curator to Viewer', brings in the participatory into the discussion. Kaja Kaitavouri writes about the ability of performance to disrupt the social dimension of the museum and even cause chaos or harm. She writes that in order to understand the specifics of participatory art and to be able to 'deal with it both in theory and practice' it requires looking for theories from disciplines other than art history—such as sociology where the audience becomes the focus. (Remes, et al., p.116) Kaitavouri's chapter provides some external reference points to a wider social context than that of the gallery or museum by focusing on the disruption of the established behaviours of these spaces.

Lee Campbell's chapter starts off with a discussion of performance as a way to 'open the mechanics of the phenomenological relationships that people have with one another'. (Remes et al., p.137) He names the same issues of representation, reproduction, and their ability to stir things up, citing the well-known commentators before moving on to his own practice with humour. His discussion of the development and presentation of a performative talk using the device of the heckler would benefit from a little more objectivity. The anxiety that he had over the unknown act of his contracted heckler overwhelms any critical distance, especially when he writes that his contracted heckler 'had my future in the palm of her hands...Will I make it out alive?' (Remes et al. p.149) The revelation of his collaborator's chosen act of heckling cannot live up to this melodramatic imagining and, subsequently, when her action is revealed it undermines any power it might have actually had. Even then Campbell could recover by reflecting critically on his dramatization in the text, but he does not.

It was at this point in the book that the lack of connectedness to the world outside of academic theory and gallery practice shifted from something observed in the contents to become something frustrating. Given the strong history of performance art in relation to political activism and protest particularly in relation to issues of social justice, it is surprising that there are not more contributions addressing this area—especially with the focus of the book being on liveness. The power of this liveness to make affective and potent statements about how we live together is not addressed. That the main emphasis of the book is inward looking to the form and reception of liveness in and of itself is no doubt useful discussion, but for this reader it felt that more engagement with issues outside of the ideological space of the gallery and the practices of performance had a place within the scope of the book.

Given the self-referential, formal concerns mostly discussed in the book so far, it was refreshing at the end of Part Two to read Leah Lovett's essay 'Crowd Control: Encountering Art's Audiences', and heartening to see her reference Guillermo Gómez-Peña's observation around the complex and uneasy relationship between live art and institutions, that 'it is only when the art world is in a crisis of ideas that we [performance artists] get asked to participate.' (Gómez-Peña, 2005, in Remes, et al., p.159, note 5) The book's introduction notes the



resurgence of interest in performance in the gallery, and Gómez-Peña's well-known quote makes a pithy statement in this direction. Whether one agrees with Gómez-Peña or not, it is indicative of the problems when art practices become too self-referential it almost desperately ventures outside of itself to draw on the wider world for new material to sustain itself. Gómez-Peña's statement connects with the wider social and political sphere that goes beyond the space and place of the gallery, but that it should not be forgotten the gallery is absolutely a part of and should never be entirely cut off from.

Lovett's essay connects methods of policing used for crowd control with her own performance practice in the gallery. Deploying behavior and costume and quoting directly from Metropolitan Police manuals Lovett's connecting of authoritarian behavior modification, neo-liberal politics and live art performance was the only text that really engaged with the world beyond the art; the context within which all this cultural production takes place. I was relieved to find something that ventured beyond the formal and self-referential concerns of the practice. This is not to entirely undermine the importance of the discussion by practitioners, but as I read through the book my notes were punctuated with comments questioning the wider relevance beyond the privilege of self-discovery (an individualistic and essentially interior activity) of this research. Academic research in an area of cultural production should surely at least give a nod to the wider social and cultural context within which it exists, or do we still believe in art for art's sake?

Part Three, 'Curating Participation in the Gallery: Case Studies', consists of three case studies of projects by curators who have a history of working with participation. It concludes with a text written by Claudia Marion Stemberger and focuses on Gabrielle Goliath's *Stumbling Block*, which also provides the cover image for the book. The work is situated in a South African context and addresses the 'possible alienation' that a local real estate entrepreneur's urban renewal project in a Johannesburg suburb referred to as an urban jungle 'might cause to the neighbourhood's previous residents or the "adventurous" visitors to the area.' (Remes, et al. p. 227) Stemberger footnotes the situation, but does not go into detail about the social situation as the focus is on exploring the term 'residue', which she notes as a specific South African term used around performance work and its representation in the gallery space. There is no further focus on the content of the work or its context beyond that of the display concerns. Again I was left wanting more social context beyond what was covered.

To be fair, the book addressed what it set out to cover: 'participation, liveness, interactivity, process-based performative practices and performance for the camera and online in interdisciplinary practices in a curated gallery space.' These aspects were discussed at length from different perspectives of artists, curators, art historians providing a thorough examination of presenting and preserving liveness and performativity in the gallery and it will provide a helpful resource for others working and or researching this. My response could possibly be more generous, however I still think there is a place for the inclusion of the wider context within which performance is situated as a social practice.



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Charlotte Huddleston is the Director of ST PAUL St Gallery in the School of Art and Design, AUT University. Her current research interests are informed by the educational context and specifically engage with a kaupapa (principle) of ethical approaches to working with culture, agency, collectivity and exchange from within the institution of the university gallery, both on and offsite. Recent projects with this focus include: *Local Time: Horotiu* (2012), *Assembly* co-curated with Melissa Laing and Vera Mey (2012), *FIELDS: an itinerant inquiry across the Kingdom of Cambodia* (2013), and in 2014 she worked with the inaugural ST PAUL St Gallery Research Fellow Sakiko Sugawa. In 2014 she co-convened *The Open Hand: A Call for Civic Debate* alongside the solo exhibition *Leisure Valley* by Gavin Hipkins, and the 2014 ST PAUL St Curatorial Symposium. Huddleston is co-editor of publications from *FIELDS* and Sugawa's Fellowship (forthcoming 2015).

