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REFERENCES

RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Now: Live Art for the 21st Century*, Londres : Thames & Hudson, 2018

Catherine Wood, *Performance in Contemporary Art*, Londres : Tate Publishing, 2018

Kaija Kaitavuori, *The Participator in Contemporary Art: Art and Social Relationships*, Londres : I.B. Tauris

Social Design: Participation and Empowerment, Zurich: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich : Lars Müller, 2018. Sous la dir. d'Angeli Sachs

Alex Martinis Roe, *To Become Two: Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice*, Berlin : Archive Books, 2018

Estelle Zhong Mengual, *L'Art en commun : réinventer les formes du collectif en contexte démocratique*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2018, (Œuvres en société)

Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image*, Cambridge : MIT Press, 2019

- 1 Since the early 2000s, the relation between artistic and cultural institutions and the activities associated with performance has been greatly reconfigured. Departments in contemporary art museums, collections, specialized curators, and an ever-growing place in biennials and fairs are all now involved in this practice. Not only has performance as a genre and medium been given unprecedented institutional recognition, but it is also the art world itself that has been placed in “performance mode”, otherwise put, set in motion, and invited to underscore its “performative” dimension. It has had to adapt its frameworks to living forms which are process-based, ephemeral, situated, interactive and participatory, and as such alter the work’s spatial, temporal, physical, social and political coordinates, by giving the public a new role. If these issues stem from the formal breaks made between the 1950s and the 1970s, and if

their history of performance as such represents one of the component parts, since the early years of the 21st century they have arrived at new formulations. Many present-day publications illustrate the extent of their challenges.

- 2 Here, to start with, are two books produced by two epicentres of the contemporary art world, New York and London, where the historical and aesthetic value of performance has been powerfully asserted over the past fifteen years. In New York, this acknowledgement proceeds in an emblematic manner by way of a presentation of Marina Abramović's work at the Guggenheim in 2005, followed by a crowning show at the MoMA in 2010, as well as by the creation of the *Performa* biennial in 2005. Launched by the pioneering RoseLee Goldberg, author, in 1979, of the first history of "performance art"—extended by a second book which appeared in 1998—, this biennial, which will be next held in November 2019, greatly fuels the recent book by the historian and curator: *Performance Now: Live Art for the 21st Century*. In London, the period in question saw live art, supported by the Live Art Development Agency (which this year celebrates its 20th birthday), becoming increasingly visible, thanks in particular to organizations and events devoted to performance at Tate Modern, created in 2000. Here again, it has been a person involved in this recent history, Catherine Wood, Senior Curator in charge of performance at Tate Modern, who has published a book offering a sweeping overview of the genre, titled: *Performance in Contemporary Art*.
- 3 From these two viewpoints, we can see the meaning of performance in art being semantically altered at the center of the artworld. First, performance is associated in the discourse with a certain success. Goldberg's book appears as a celebration of what has become "one of the most highly visible art forms in museums as well as at biennials and art fairs around the globe".¹ This increased visibility appears in the text to go hand-in-glove with an increased "visuality", meaning a claimed membership of the visual arts, subject in the first instance to the aesthetic criteria pertaining to the visual experience. In three specific chapters, the book broaches the field of attraction represented by performance, for dance, theatre and—a new element—architecture (as in the work of Studio Miessen, and Didier Faustino). But everything that lives in live art must, in the end, find a visual form. In the book, the illustrative work makes this end purpose very attractive. The documentary function of the image is downgraded, in Goldberg's book, in favour of a pictorial function: "The photographs in this book are to be read, detail for detail, for colour, composition, rhythm and content, as one would the elements of a painting or sculpture."² It is doubtful that all the artists featuring in the book subscribe to this conception of the performance photograph. But we can understand that, with regard to the visual issue, what is involved for Goldberg is the legitimacy of performance as a medium. This latter is now, supposedly, influencing the other visual arts. So performance has given rise to a "genre of photography unlike any other".³ A new overlapping, chiasma-like effect: the image of the performance has revealed the performance of the image itself. Backing up these observations, the theme of Isobel Harbison's book, *Performing Image*, prompts the formulation of the hypothesis whereby performance represents the paradigm of contemporary visual art, insofar as it works, in depth, on all the arts through the principle of activation which hallmarks it.
- 4 Having acquired artistic, critical and historiographical legitimacy, what remained to be established was institutional and cultural legitimacy. "The argument that performance was difficult to incorporate into contemporary art history or into the collection of a museum because of its ephemeral nature became irrelevant,"⁴ writes Goldberg. The

institutionalization of performance in the 2000s would not, however, hamper the radical nature of certain works. This is what is stated in the chapter “Radical Action: On Performance and Politics”, with references, for example, to the work of Teresa Margolles, Santiago Sierra, Ai Weiwei, Shirin Neshat, and Rabi Mroué, not to mention the Pussy Riot punk group, even though their work is staged quite far away from art venues. The idea of performance as a “global language” emerges in the discourse, appearing like a “passport” permitting African and Asian artists to cross borders.⁵ So, due to the performance effect, the contemporary art museum has become a global platform where hybrid and intercultural practices wield their visual and expressive power, by involving the public’s presence and participation. From now on the experience of visitors consists in sharing “an active engagement with the work and with each other, collectively witnessing an event but participating in it too”.⁶

- 5 When Goldberg refers to Carsten Höller’s installation *Test Site* (2006) at Tate Modern, she describes a place moving from “an institution of quiet contemplation and conservation into a cultural pleasure palace of engagement on a blockbuster scale”.⁷ Does Catherine Wood regard herself as a curator within a “cultural pleasure palace”? Whatever the case, her work at Tate Modern culminates in a book which contrasts in several points with Goldberg’s positions. The core of her idea is less the visual and cultural celebration of contemporary performance as medium than its historical inclusion and theoretical schematization in an expanded frame. While, from the 2000s onward, by way of re-enactment and “re-performance”, performance has become its own historical material, the book questions the development of performance between the 1950s and the 1970s towards post-2000 forms, based on three thematic poles: “I, we, it”, i.e. the artist as subject, the collective formed by the public, and the artwork itself.
- 6 There is no meaningful semantic shift to be found in the idea that performance is “a mode of working that draws attention to, and initiates transgressions of, art’s defining frame”,⁸ although the fact that this transgression is rooted in the heart of the art world makes it paradoxical. On the other hand, more interesting features from the viewpoint of the evolution of the various forms of discourse about performance are worth noting, such as the way performance, as a specific activity and finalized action, has shifted towards the idea of a generalized activation. In fact, while young artists often reject the term ‘performance’ as describing “a specialised area of activity”⁹ associated with focusing on the body, for example, Catherine Wood defines contemporary performance as something that refers to “a space not just for performed action, but a *space of active relations: a space in which things happen*”.¹⁰
- 7 This, essentially, is the idea of a power of activation which the period has remembered with regard to historical performance: “What is especially new and valuable in the work developed during the 1960s and the 1970s, and into the 1980s, is the introduction of a set of templates activating relations between the artist, viewer and artwork”.¹¹ But these “templates”, these models and formats of activation, are no longer aimed at an action involving a strategic transformation of situations. Performance “represents a crucible of aesthetic relations between people and things that persists in a speculative state”.¹² The essential effect of the “liveness” of contemporary performance—according to the author’s analysis of the work of the contemporary Japanese artist Ei Arakawa—is thus to create “a state of *potentiality* embodied in how all the elements of his work might move and change.”¹³ So we can clearly see how the meaning of performance is developing: “from an emphasis on the real-time presence of bodies, performance has

morphed into a metaphorical texture that represents a provisional state of things, suggesting the possibility of change and transformation through iteration.”¹⁴ This textural and metaphorical “provisional” state produced by performance is what Wood calls “the performative”, based on a borrowing from the theory of speech acts developed by John Langshaw Austin, a theory that has hallmarked the discourse about performance in art since 2000,¹⁵ though not without paradoxes and misinterpretations.

- 8 The idea of activation, which seems to us to run through the discourse, involves the revelation of a potential state of things and relations, while remaining within the three-way framework of art: artists, public, work. “They are making, we are watching, this is the work of art”.¹⁶ In this plan of things, performance creates an “expanded zone of contemplation”.¹⁷ Then it is not a matter of getting away from the framework, as claimed by the neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s and 1970s, but of activating the framework to make it function differently. So, “in a twenty-first-century context [...] this kind of work puts an emphasis [...] on the conventional frame of art – the gallery – as not just a viewing space, but a public space in which to gather.”¹⁸ The “expanded” visual experience in the art gallery must thus activate the art framework to permit the production of a form of collective or community. Here, the political issue emerges as “the provisional nature of any “we””.¹⁹ What “agency” or capacity to act, or provisional action, might this experience define in the gallery? Can the institutional framework of art, activated by performance, really lend effectiveness to this potential political arrangement? For a whole swathe of art, this effectiveness can only come about by getting away from institutional frameworks and the three-way scheme that singles out artist, public and work. This applies to what has been called, depending on the various cases and the contexts, participatory art, community-based art, and socially engaged art. Estelle Zhong Mengual prefers to talk about “art in common”, in an ambitious and rich book which tries to renew the analysis of participation in art. For the author, “art in common” is based “on a system of participation which makes it possible to transform the creation of a work—a usually individual practice earmarked for a small number of people—into a collective process.”²⁰ As a key challenge since the early 2000s, participation, here again, has been the subject of virulent discussions, in which Claire Bishop has been one of the protagonists as a result of her criticism of Nicolas Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics, her confrontation with Grant H. Kester, and her reading of Jacques Rancière.²¹ The tension lines which have run through these arguments have to do, in particular, with the stance to be adopted with regard to the liaison between aesthetics and ethics, artistic and social spheres, and inclusive and antagonistic strategies, as well as what is understood by an “active” subject. Moving between these lines to include an original viewpoint, Estelle Zhong Mengual starts out from a precise terrain: British “art in common” from 1997 to 2015—a political and cultural period marked by New Labour and its conception of participatory democracy, where we discover that one of the vehicles of realization stemmed from “social activation”.
- 9 By incorporating in this context Marcus Coates’s and Jeremy Deller’s *Lone Twin* projects, the author shows that these collective practices are at once art (and so not reducible to socio-cultural action) and politics (so not a manipulation of art by the powers-that-be with a view to manufacturing a consensus at the service of the project). We do not have time to comment here on the entire argument developed, which ends with several subtle shifts: the defence of a non-spectacular “doing” or “making”, in contrast with performance in the visual arts; the change in the artist’s competence from a technical

know-how to the capacity to identify the formal potential present in other practices (as in Deller's *Folk Archive*); the aesthetic idea of a useful art but one made "for non-existent ends";²² the identification of a margin of autonomy in the face of the risk of political exploitation, through the agency permitted by the ambiguity of the language game with power; and lastly the creation of a "form of new politicization" based on grouping individual singularities, for the time-span of a collective production, which invents a "non-identitarian community of action as a value and as a political end".²³

- 10 To wind up the analysis of the methods of forming this "community", we shall draw from the sociological tools in Kaija Kaitavuori's book. The Finnish researcher presents participatory art as one of the "most popular genres of contemporary art"²⁴ of these last fifteen years. Her idea, which relies on Georg Simmel, Norbert Elias and Nathalie Heinich, consists in analyzing not art in society, but art as society: "how a society, and what kind of society, is constructed in the artworks, what types of relationships are built or proposed, and how prevailing norms about relationships are challenged".²⁵ Instead of drawing up a typology of participatory art, and without any aesthetic consideration, the sociologist examines roles and methods of participation. To this end, four categories are identified which express the "participator function", based on Michel Foucault's concept of the "author function". These categories depend on the varying degrees of autonomy of the participator as well as his/her level of involvement in the creation of the work. We can make a distinction between the participator as "target", "material", "user" and "co-creator". The book also focuses on the question of authorship and contractuality. So many thematic angles which trace the figure of a *produser* (to use a term adopted by Alex Bruns²⁶), who appears to have relegated the "spectator" or "visitor" as much to the past as to a passiveness which Jacques Rancière deconstructed in *Le Spectateur émancipé*.
- 11 With regard to the fact that analysis of participation in art ushers in a line of thinking about forms of democracy and social organization, which goes beyond the strict artistic framework, it seems important to observe how the participators contribute and what effects their activity has on the work, on themselves, and on those observing or who are a secondary audience. Without which, participation may well remain a "term that sings more than it speaks", to borrow Paul Valéry's thought about freedom, quoted by Zhong Mengual.²⁷ In the field of design and architecture, participation often rings out in a melodious way, but the range and technical aspect of the projects in question limit the real impact on users. Following a line of inspiration ranging from William Morris to Joseph Beuys's "social sculpture", the catalogue edited by Angeli Sachs, *Social design: Participation and Empowerment*, aims, on the contrary, to offer an overview of international projects, often located in disadvantaged areas, which make use of the participation of people concerned, with a view to encouraging "their empowerment in the sense of building their own basic necessities, the transformation of social conditions, and the sustainability of the initiatives".²⁸ Based on a quite different approach, we can find in Alex Martinis Roe's book, *To Become Two: Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice*,²⁹ a method of unusual artistic research aimed at extricating from past--and in this instance feminist--political experiences, methods of organizing and planning the collective, well removed from the snare of words which sing. We might for example ponder upon that principle of a-consensual aesthetics taken from the experience of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective: "For the joy of being together, they didn't have to agree".³⁰

- 12 From one field to the next, from one period to the next, from a point of discourse to those which they are slipping towards, we note the significance of a challenge, that of activation. Should we see therein the sign of a situated aesthetic and political dynamic, which no longer has any need for grand programmatic transcendence to act, or alternatively the symptom of a social and cultural world, of bodies and collectives, lives and thoughts, which perceive the risk of being turned off?

NOTES

1. Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance Now: Live Art for the 21st Century*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2018, p. 7
2. Goldberg, RoseLee. *Op. cit.*, p. 11
3. *Ibid.*, p. 11
4. *Ibid.*, p.17
5. *Ibid.*, p. 9
6. *Ibid.*, p. 15
7. *Ibid.*, p. 16
8. Wood, Catherine. *Performance in Contemporary Art*, London: Tate Publishing, 2018, p. 10
9. *Ibid.*, p. 12
10. *Ibid.*, p. 10
11. *Ibid.*, p. 13
12. *Ibid.*, p.10
13. *Ibid.*, p.10
14. *Ibid.*, p. 227
15. For a presentation of the issue, please refer to: Zerbib, David. "La performance est-elle performative ?", *Artpress* 2, no.18, August-October 2010. On the difference between the performativity of artworks and the "live" performance, see Von Hantelmann, Dorothea. *How to do Things with Art*, Zürich: JRP|Ringier; Les Presses du réel, 2010.
16. Wood, Catherine. *Op. cit.*, p. 23
17. *Ibid.*, p. 23
18. *Ibid.*, p. 23
19. *Ibid.*, p. 229
20. Zhong Mengual, Estelle. *L'Art en commun: réinventer les formes du collectif en contexte démocratique*, Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2018, (Œuvres en société), p. 12
21. Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso, 2012
22. Zhong Mengual, Estelle. *Op. cit.*, p. 112
23. *Ibid.* p. 324
24. Kaitavuori, Kaija. *The Participator in Contemporary Art: Art and Social Relationships*, London: I.B. Tauris, p. 2
25. *Ibid.*, p. 4
26. Bruns, Alex. *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2008
27. Zhong Mengual, Estelle. *Op. cit.*, p. 15

28. *Social Design: Participation and Empowerment*, Zurich: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich: Lars Müller, 2018, p. 28. Edited by Angeli Sachs.

29. Martinis Roe, Alex. *To Become Two: Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice*, Berlin: Archive Books, 2018

30. *Ibid.* p. 75

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