

# NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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Roselee Goldberg

## **Performance Now: Live Art for the Twenty-First Century**

London: Thames and Hudson, 2019. 272 p. £32.  
ISBN: 978-0-500-02125-5.

For more than four decades, Roselee Goldberg has been an authoritative voice in accounting for the role of performance and live art as visual practices. Her influence is both art historical (her 1979 *Performance Art: from Futurism to the Present* has been a starting point for students of performance since it appeared) and in shaping contemporary practices (most prominently as the founder of Performa, a biennial of performance in New York City). Goldberg celebrates the possibilities of live performance as an essential cultural mode for artists, institutions, and audiences. Her book takes as its motivation the major shift in the valuation of performance by academics and arts institutions since the turn of the millennium – a shift to which she might be said to have contributed significantly.

*Performance Now* comprises six sections, each introduced with a brief essay and followed by short snapshots of works and projects by contemporary artists. The design and images are lush, befitting a book whose major argument is that performance is primarily a visual medium. The book begins by looking at performance within the established international visual art circuit, with its nodes in cities like New York and London, and art festivals like Documenta in Kassel (Germany), the Venice Biennale, and her own Performa.

Goldberg emphasizes the influence of performance on the changing structure of the contemporary art museum ‘from contemplative edifices of the past to lively cultural hubs’. She also considers how artists working outside these nodes have used performance to access the resourced international circuit, a form of what she calls ‘world citizenship’ (and perhaps more attention could have been devoted to the ways such ‘citizenship’ is fragile).

The final chapters consider three disciplinary intersections – dance, theatre, and architecture – in which Goldberg looks at how the development of visual performance has allowed these disciplines to enter visual art spaces like museums and galleries. Of the three, theatre seems to produce the most anxiety: Goldberg is at pains to distinguish performance art from theatre with the latter

defined as fundamentally orientated towards a text.

Ultimately, *Performance Now* is less a comprehensive survey of global contemporary practices (obviously an impossible task) than an account for a broad readership of how a series of separate but related styles of live performance practice has interacted with the international art world, shorthand for a powerful system of cultural production entangled with other powerful systems.

JOHANNA LINSLEY

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Liz Tomlin

## **Political Dramaturgies and Theatre Spectatorship: Provocations for Change**

London: Methuen, 2019. 205 p. £75.  
ISBN: 978-1-4742-9560-4.

In *Political Dramaturgies and Theatre Spectatorship* Tomlin presents a compelling analysis of contemporary theatre spectatorship together with an analytical model for political theatre. The subtitle *Provocations for Change* is apt as well as timely: as I write this the UK is preparing for a difficult election and many University staff members are striking to protest the ongoing neoliberalization of Higher Education (unfortunately my Institution did not vote to strike). Tomlin’s main provocation is that a rethinking of spectatorship can help us align political theatre practice with the post-Marxist project of radical democracy.

The first part reconceptualizes the spectator of political theatre as a theorized spectator (an essential aesthetic element in any dramaturgical invitation), an autonomous spectator (who requires freedom from ideological steer by the artist), and the precarious or ironic spectator (who is shaped by contemporary neoliberalism). In the second part Tomlin presents a compelling framework of analysis that proposes the field of tension between two political logics of egalitarianism and autonomy as central to contemporary political dramaturgies.

The egalitarian (and therefore ideological) project has been dismissed as too deterministic. However, Tomlin astutely points out that without a collective project for spectators to participate in there is no possibility for the work to meaningfully align itself to the post-Marxist project of radical democracy. This egalitarian

logic cannot dominate the work, as that would remove the possibility for plurality, but it effectively reigns in the autonomous logic that grants spectators the option of individual interpretation and response. The autonomous perspective has been in ascendancy since the poststructuralist moment and Tomlin's argument that it needs to be held in check with an egalitarian perspective to be effective is explored through compelling case studies that combine these two logics in different ways.

Throughout Tomlin considers the perspective of the Other as well as our relationship to them, highlighting that subjectivity is relational and that dialogic empathy or collective responsibility for the other may be exactly what is necessary in this age of precarity. Neoliberalism erodes our ability for dialogic empathy through precarity, but collective agency becomes possible through individual agency, which political theatre can support.

This is an essential book for those making or analyzing political theatre as well as a call to reconceptualize the theoretical base for audience research, to ensure that this does not simply demonstrate the plurality of perspectives advocated by the logic of autonomy, but situates this within an appropriate context.

ASTRID BREEL

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*François Matarasso*

**A Restless Art: How Participation Won and Why it Matters**

Calouste Gulbenkian: Lisbon and London, 2019.

233 p. £10

ISBN: 978-1-903080-20-7.

François Matarasso's book joins a growing collection of work that reflects on the community arts movement of the 1970s and 1980s. With the recent re-emergence of ideas around culture and democracy the work of this period looks fresh and radical once again and questions are being asked about how and why this significant body of work and thinking round art has been neglected and overlooked. Readers will have their own responses to these questions of course but Matarasso is clear about his reactions. Making explicit connections between art and participation 'creates a new unstable form' which unsettles and makes porous the divisions between artist and 'non-artist', between the specialist and the lay person. As such, it is a challenge to traditional ideas about virtuosity, elitism and access.

The book is divided into four main sections: *Participatory Art Now; What is Participatory Art?; Where Does Participatory Art Come From?; and Participatory Art Next*. These are interspersed with

several full-page contemporary case studies based on Matarasso's research and have the advantage of being fully international with examples from Egypt, Colombia, Portugal and many other locations alongside a wealth of British examples. Matarasso's optimism may be seen as slightly surprising given threats to the continuation of so much art work that is carried out on the margins.

In his conceptualization, participation has won, as his subtitle suggests and he cites multiple examples of participatory arts projects that are now the norm, not only in arts and cultural institutions but in health settings, education, criminal justice and many other locations.

But this is not the heart of his argument and he is much more interested in the kind of art projects which place rights at their centre. Echoing the community arts workers of the 1970s (among whom he is numbered), he cites Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that 'everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community'.

This rights-based approach is used to distinguish more radical community arts practices from the broader field of participatory arts. Scholars may be a little frustrated by the occasionally broad-brushstroke approach for which Matarasso makes no apologies, when he explains how important it is for him as a practitioner/scholar to work outside the academy.

He is not writing for an academic audience but for other practitioners with similar beliefs – that 'art is both a valid research method and a form of knowledge'. Nevertheless, this is a welcome addition to a growing field and will be very valuable to those working around questions of participation in theatre in particular, to those with an interest in cultural policy and to anyone teaching and practising around socially engaged or participatory arts more broadly.

ALISON JEFFERS

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*Petra Kupperts, ed.*

**Disability Arts and Culture: Methods and Approaches**

Intellect: Bristol, 2019. 280 p. £75

ISBN: 978-178-938000-2.

This newly released collection of essays, edited by Petra Kupperts, aims to show the different connections between disability and contemporary culture. Methodologies, the cultural forms the research addresses, as well as geographic focus, varies in the texts presented in *Disability Arts and Culture: Methods and Approaches*, although the majority of essays