Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (eds.), *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, Intellect Books, London, 2012; pp. 650; RRP AU $95.00 paperback

Adrian Heathfield and Amelia Jones' *Perform, Repeat, Record* is one of the first scholarly texts to attempt to address how live art, as an ephemeral, often subversive, embodied act, becomes incorporated into history. They assert that live art, by its nature, resists historicisation. Yet, increasingly, we are seeing strategies employed by institutions, scholars, and artists themselves to ensure that works survive over time and through history. The book takes an unconventional approach to addressing these challenges. It attempts to address how the ephemeral moment of live art can be captured and archived. It embraces an interdisciplinary approach, marrying concepts from art history and performance studies with case studies and illustrations from artists, curators, and institutions, and interviews with performers and artists themselves.

Live art, Jones asserts, disrupts and subverts traditional modes of historicisation because it exists at the nexus between ‘temporality, embodiment and experience’ (p. 11). History attempts to stop time by freezing moments within the object/document/archive. Art history and art institutions endeavour to capture time through the presumed permanence of art objects held in collections and referred to in textual historical documents. The embodied performative nature of live art enactments sets them outside this art historical paradigm and, as a result, art ‘histories’ of live art have tended towards retrospective exhibitions of archival and documentary traces of the original performances, and linear historical narratives based on these archives. As a result, temporality and performativity (in the form of their avatars, art history and performance studies) and their points of divergence and intersection form the lynch pins of the volume. Jones, in her introduction, refers to the tension between the framing, containing nature of institutions and histories, and the disruptive, unruly ‘de-containing’ that takes place in live art. It is the diverse range of responses and explorations of this tension that makes this text unique in its reinvention of history-making (p.22).

The book, in keeping with these defining principles, is divided into three overarching themes. The first, entitled ‘Theories and Histories’, takes an academic approach to the subject of how live art can be archived. Many of the contributors to this section are senior art historians and performance scholars who are also actively involved in curatorial practice and include Phillip Auslander, Rebecca Schneider, and Sven Lutticken. Accordingly, many have personal experience of putting into practice the ideas they discuss in these pages with regard to how art galleries,

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1 The best and most persistent examples of this are the many revised and updated editions of Roselee Goldberg’s *Performance: Live art since 1960* and *Performance: Live art from 1909 to the present*. © The Limina Editorial Collective
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performance spaces, and museums are coming to terms with incorporating live art into institutional practice. These insights are reflected in the range and diversity of discursive responses to the notion of a live art ‘archive’. One thing worth noting here is the attempt made by Jones and Heathfield to disrupt the dominance of Euro-American centric discourse by including contributions from scholars from outside that paradigm.

The second part, ‘Documents’, marks a logical progression from the theoretical groundwork that is laid in the first, in that it works to illustrate some of the challenges and provocations presented in attempting to generate histories of live art. The contributions to this part demonstrate the limitations (and possibilities) of ‘capturing’ a live, embodied, ephemeral moment in book form. Heathfield contends that this section is engaged with ‘the mechanisms of historical record’: what those might encompass, what gets omitted or forgotten, how events are remembered or recalled, all of which highlight the failure to grasp a complete record of a live art event (p. 33). Each chapter articulates a documentary trace of a live art work. They take the form of reflexively generated retrospective ‘diaries’ (‘A Text on 20 Years with 66 Footnotes’), poems (‘Faith Wilding, Waiting and Wait-With’), critical deconstructions of re-enactments (‘Reconstruction2’), photographic records, and a variety of other unconventional modes of recording histories.

The final section, ‘Dialogues’, consists of a series of interviews with artists. Heathfield, in his introduction, argues the important role dialogue with an artist/creator plays in creating a fuller historical picture of the works under discussion. He also acknowledges the dangers and pitfalls inherent in reifying the dominant Modernist paradigm of the genius originating artist and their intentions, and makes the claim for a reading of this section that avoids this. He argues for an understanding of the artist interview as a performative enactment in itself. Rather than conceiving of it solely as a platform for the artist to express their intentions and underlying remembrances of the work, he contends that it should be acknowledged as a ‘dialogic exchange’ in which a richer, more complex interchange between artist and interviewer is occurring (p. 34).

Taken as a whole, then, Perform, Repeat, Record embraces the mammoth task of challenging how history making occurs within this field of contemporary art. Embracing a diverse and unconventional range of responses to the provocation ‘How does live art get remembered?’, it has implications for the broader field of historical discourse (p. 15). As the editors acknowledge, the book necessarily falls short of its target, but in doing so it marks itself as an important kicking off point in what is a burgeoning arena of discourse.

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