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Citation: Dunne-Howrie, J. (2020). Documenting Performance: The Contexts & Processes of Digital Curation and Archiving. *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 16(2), pp. 217-218. doi: 10.1080/14794713.2020.1778840

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Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14794713.2020.1778840>

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Documenting Performance: The Contexts & Processes of Digital Curation and Archiving

edited by Toni Sant, London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 392 pp., £18.99 (paperback). ISBN-13: 978-1472588173

This edited volume of essays offers a timely challenge to the performing arts bias for post-structuralist critiques of the archive as a centre of logocentric authority. The editor Toni Sant makes an important contribution to this field by addressing the pragmatic requirements of systematically documenting performance processes from a library and information science (LIS) perspective. This interdisciplinary approach leads Sant to make the key insight that a performing arts *collection* can only be described as performance *documentation* once appropriate metadata has been created to enable public access. More broadly, the digital is framed in *Documenting Performance* as a paradigm for how live performance connects with new audiences across time through its documentation.

Chapters are divided into four sections: Contexts for Documenting Performance, Ways of Documenting Performance, From Documents to Documenting, and Documenting Bodies in Motion. The early chapters give the reader a sense of the complex technical issues raised by performance documentation from the perspectives of curators and archivists. Later chapters look at how live performance has been documented historically in archival and performative formats, the creative potentials of documenting live art works, and the affordances of digital technologies in creating interactive document formats that communicate the discursive experience of performance processes.

Daniela Salazar Dekker considers how museums can enable visitors to play a more active role in constructing the cultural memory of live performance using the case study of the Cartão de Memória (Memory Card) exhibition at Lisbon's Museum of Music. Visitors were invited to share a 'musical memory' (25) through oral and written testimonies that were gifted either in person or remotely through the museum's website and Facebook page. These memories were displayed and made available to download on a specially created memory card. Each memory acted as a generative document for more memories, thereby turning the exhibition into a cultural memory machine. This participatory approach to visitor interpretation turns the audience's memories into textual documents that evoke the presence of their past experiences of live performance.

Alberto Pendón Martínez and Gema Bueno de la Fuente argue that domain ontologies like FRBROO (Functional Requirements Bibliographic Record Object) and semantic web technologies in general can allow theatre and performance to enter the globalised cultural heritage network in a way that communicates the experience of liveness. The authors advocate FRBROO because it places the live event as the primary entity which connects objects, times and people recorded in documents and can be adapted to the needs of specific performing arts collections using standardized description vocabularies. This is a vital requirement for collections to be interoperable on an international level.

Annet Dekker, Gabriella Giannachi and Vivian van Saaze analyse how documents become new artworks using *Roberta Breitmore* (1972-8) by performance artist Lynn Herschman Leeson as a case study. The authors challenge document theorist's Suzanne Briet's three-tiered hierarchy of documents (primary, secondary and auxiliary) by advocating the term 'inter-documents' (63) to describe those material remains of live performance that

encapsulate all three hierarchical levels by becoming part of a performance's environment. *Roberta Breitmore* is a constructed identity that began as records of fictional events in Roberta's life that were performed by Leeson. The piece has evolved into a plethora of documents and live events over the preceding decades and now exists as a complex aesthetic network of inter-documents generated by Leeson, curators, technologists and other performance artists. *Roberta Breitmore* demonstrates how the 'document is implicated in its past, present and potential future performance' (66).

Kirsty Sedgman and Joanna Bucknall address this issue of stretching a live performance outside the event sphere through documents from the perspective of audience reception. They argue that social media can 'operate as relational discursive fields' (113) for spectators who wish to share divergent experiences of theatre in contrast to the limited and hierarchical forms of critical reception from experts in the theatre industry. Whilst I found the example of Forced Entertainment's use of Twitter during their production of *Complete Works* (2015) as a case study in giving space for divergent audience voices unconvincing, the authors identify exciting potentials in using social media to engender critical modes of audience participation from inside the event. The behavioural algorithms of social media inevitably determine what kinds of relationships between 'reflective audiences' (127) are possible, so perhaps the most valuable role for performing arts practitioners is to collaborate with LIS professionals to develop web platforms specifically designed for divergent critical modes of audience participation that cannot be experienced on popular social media.

The necessity of creating new publication formats for disseminating somatic knowledge is another important theme in the book. Ben Spatz contends that for video to have the same 'epistemic density' (249) as an academic article then it must have a palimpsestic visual quality that compels the viewer to watch it multiple times in order to engage fully with the information instantiated within it. Alissa Clarke draws on her experience as a workshop participant with Odin Teatret and Sandra Reeve to argue that performative writing can communicate the heightened experience of psychophysical embodiment. Clarke evocatively describes her documents as 'textual lava' (264) and aligns her argument with Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine* to articulate an urgent need to express the boundless sensorial pleasure of psychophysicality. Clarke situates this performative writing in opposition to phallogocentric modes of documenting somatic knowledge by contending that the meaning of a text can become indexically confined by theory and contextualisation.

Documenting Performance shows that interdisciplinary collaboration between performance practitioners and LIS professionals is vital to ensure the sustainability of theatre and performance collections by making documentation an integral part of contemporary practice. Looking ahead, this will require creating the role of a documentalist tasked with documenting the knowledge generated by live performance during its processual stages that shape new forms of (performative and critical) discourse through its documentation.

Dr Joseph Dunne-Howrie
City, University of London

joseph.dunne-howrie@city.ac.uk
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9831-4195>