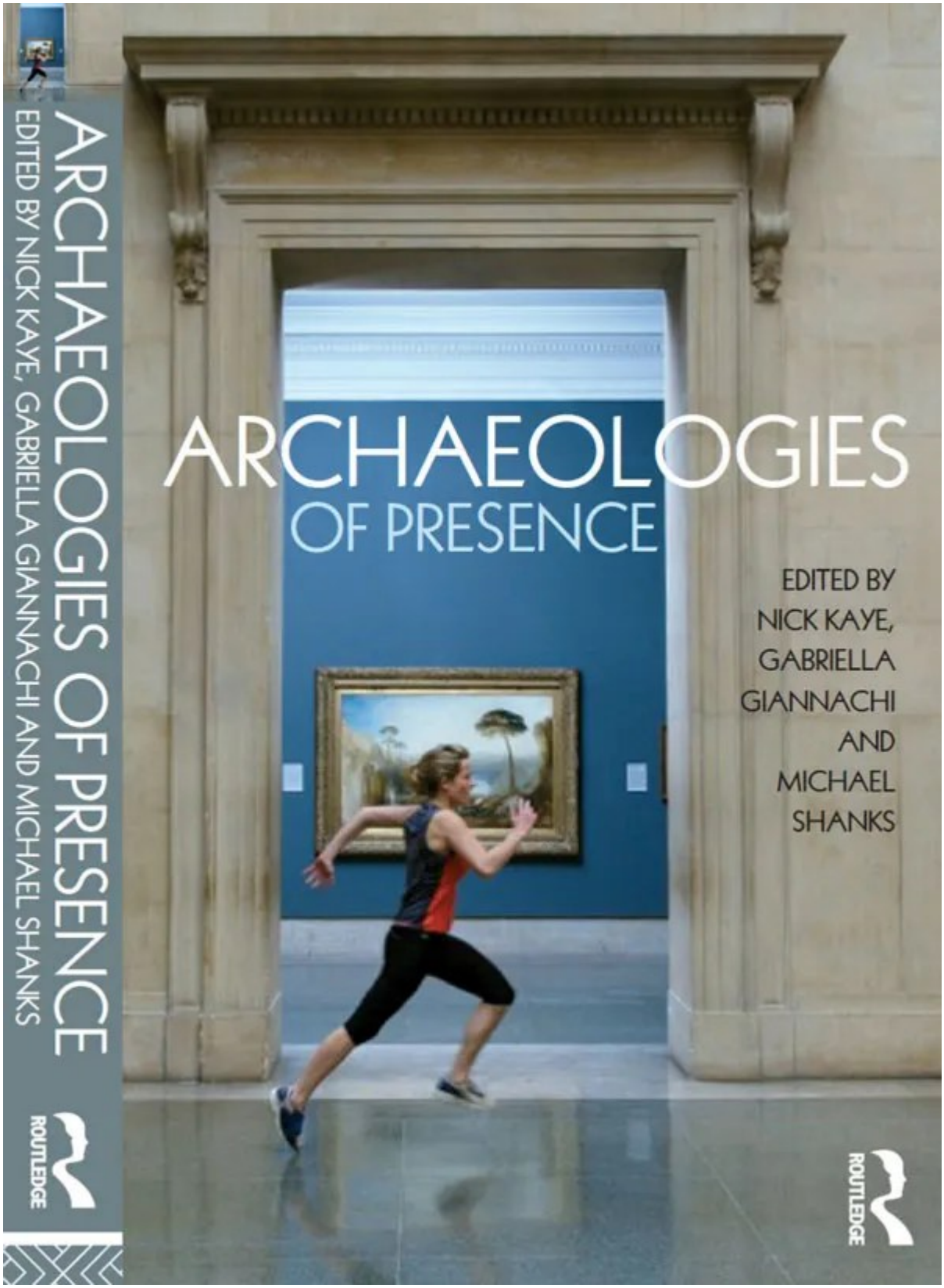
PRESENCE AND AUTHENTICITY – ROUTES TO CIVILITY



A perceptive item in the Guardian yesterday, from Simon Jenkins:

Welcome to the post-digital world, an exhilarating return to civility – via

Facebook and Lady Gaga.

The point – our contemporary world is a mixed reality – witness the growing importance (again) of “live events”, even as we are more connected digitally:

A week in California and a finger in the recessionary wind has shown me where the smart money is moving. It is from online towards “live experience”.

The example of the music business is already well-known. Earnings from recordings have been plummeting for a decade, while from live they are rising ever faster. Warner Brothers release albums free online to publicise forthcoming concerts. In Britain HMV is closing 40 shops while tickets for a Rihanna concert can cost £330, and for Coldplay £180. A seat for Madonna is more expensive than her entire recorded output. A top American performer would reckon to earn between 80% and 90% of revenue from live performance. In the US alone, touring revenue that grossed $1bn in 1995 rose to $4.6bn last year. The big money, goes the catchphrase, “is now at the gate”. Nor is this just a youth phenomenon. On the American music circuit, 96% of singers were reportedly over 40 and almost half were over 60.

The potency of experience extends far beyond the realm of music. The upsurge in live comedy began in the mid-90s with tours by Robert Newman and David Baddiel, but now has Michael McIntyre and others appearing weekly, with back-up teams that would staff a circus. Performers such as Stephen Fry have taken to reading their books in public, Dickens-style, and simulcasting to hundreds of local cinemas. Close to a million people worldwide watch the Met Opera live in cinemas.

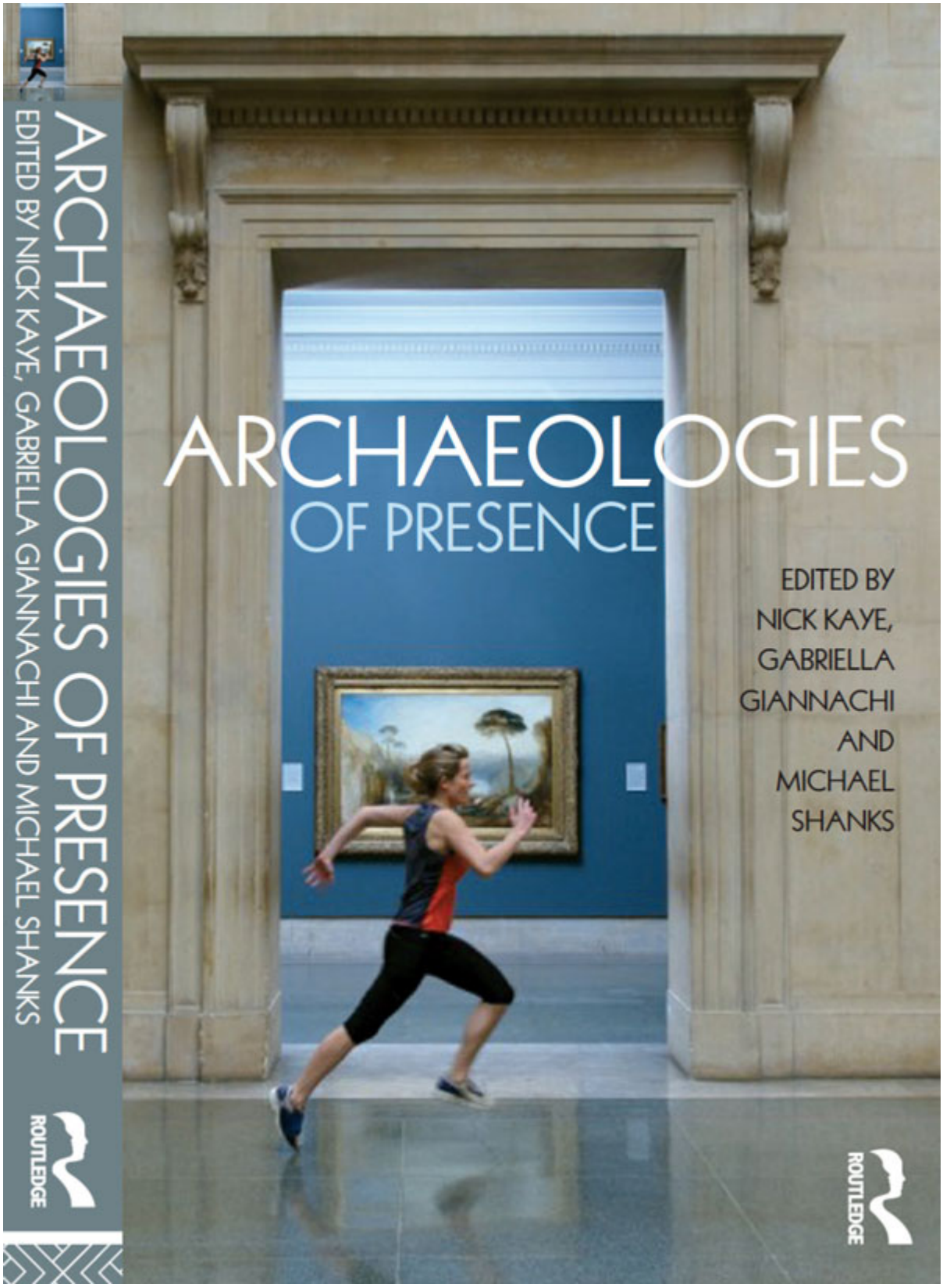
The most carefully researched audience activity, American politics, has swung from advertising and staged events to the archaic political form of active debate. The Republican primary campaign has seen 23 debates, winning unprecedented television audiences of 5-6 million …

The issue is the convergence of authenticity and mediation in what Joe Pine calls the experience economy. People matter in the world of (industrial) design and cultural production in a way that we haven't seen for a long while. As I was recently commenting [link], the values at the heart of this human-centered design ultimately come down to relationships between people, their artifacts, and, crucially, both in the context of what Jenkins calls "civility". (Recall the etymology – this is the world of the *civis*, the citizen – what I am calling *res publica*.)

Jenkins only comments on the significance of authenticity, of presence, of liveness. He doesn't delve into the workings. A forthcoming book edited with

Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye does just this kind of exploration with some performance artists and academics.

Presence, trace, record, media, document, archive … it is one of the culminations of our five year long “presence project”:


ARCHAEOLOGIES OF PRESENCE
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