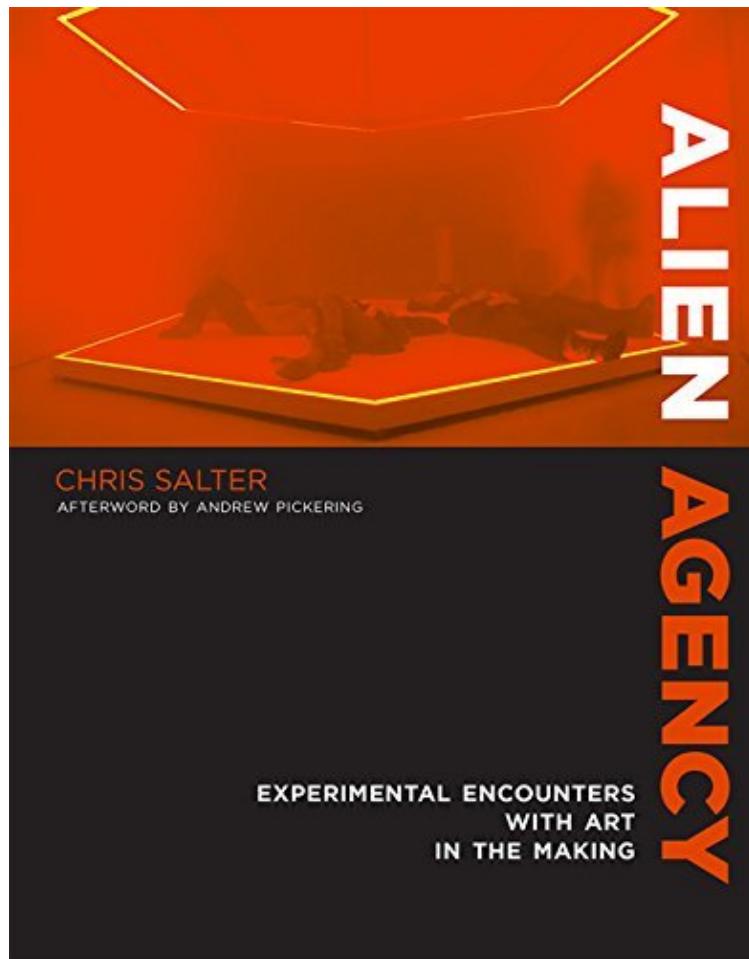


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## **Alien Agency: Experimental Encounters with Art in the Making (MIT Press)**

*Chris Salter, Andrew Pickering*  
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**Chris Salter, Andrew Pickering : Alien Agency: Experimental Encounters with Art in the Making (MIT Press)**  
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Alien Agency: Experimental Encounters with Art in the Making (MIT Press):

In Alien Agency, Chris Salter tells three stories of art in the making. Salter examines three works in which the materials of art -- the "stuff of the world" -- behave and perform in ways beyond the creator's intent, becoming unknown, surprising, alien. Studying these works -- all three deeply embroiled in and enabled by science and technology -- allows him to focus on practice through the experiential and affective elements of creation. Drawing on extensive ethnographic observation and on his own experience as an artist, Salter investigates how researcher-creators organize the conditions for these experimental, performative assemblages -- assemblages that sidestep dichotomies

between subjects and objects, human and nonhuman, mind and body, knowing and experiencing. Salter reports on the sound artists Bruce Odland and Sam Auinger (O+A) and their efforts to capture and then project unnoticed urban sounds; tracks the multi-year project TEMA (Tissue Engineered Muscle Actuators) at the art research lab Symbiotica and its construction of a hybrid "semi-living" machine from specially grown mouse muscle cells; and describes a research-creation project (which he himself initiated) that uses light, vibration, sound, smell, and other sensory stimuli to enable audiences to experience other cultures' "ways of sensing." Combining theory, diary, history, and ethnography, Salter also explores a broader question: How do new things emerge into the world and what do they do?

Alien Agency takes the reader on an excursion to the edge of experimental art, as it approaches the threshold of new materialities heralding emergent sensoria, alive with the buzz and bustle of nonhuman agencies. Through in-depth accounts of the methods, means, and conceptual underpinnings of three collaborative projects in urban perception, bioart, and sensory interaction, Chris Salter paints a vivid portrait of art in the making that will be of major interest to artists and theorists alike. (Brian Massumi, University of Montreal, author of *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*) If you've ever wondered how contemporary artists make things with technology and science, this book will delight and inspire you. It is a close ethnographic encounter with the sheer amount of inventive work, failed experiments, multiple collaborations, philosophical inquiry, and try, try, try again, required to put together art projects. And you learn, as Chris Salter does, how totally strange sound, sensation, and muscle are. (Joseph Dumit, Science Technology Studies, University of California, Davis) In his new book, *Alien Agency*, Chris Salter takes the reader on a journey that oscillates between ethnography and biography, between aesthetic critique and philosophical elaboration, between consideration of matters of science and elaborations of the sense-making agency of art. He stakes his claim from the onset: to illuminate how art destabilizes both the phenomenon and our perception of it. What we learn by following Salter's journey is how to tune our senses to the emergence of culture that unfolds in and through the practice of art-as-making. This unfolding engages the mutable becoming of human being. *Alien Agency* is a brilliant, beautifully written account of an intellectual's journey that seeks to illuminate the entanglements between human and nonhuman that form the fields of possibility for critical shifts in perspectives about the nature of agency in a posthuman landscape. (Anne Balsamo, Dean of the School of Media Studies, The New School; author of *Designing Culture: The Technological Imagination at Work*) Chris Salter ... is a one-of-a-kind researcher and artist. His artistic work focuses and challenges human perception in different critical ways, while in his theoretical research he uses his own sensitivity to investigate the work of others. This book is the remarkable result of both combined, with a shared aim: understanding the artistic process "while it's happening". (Neural) About the Author Chris Salter is an artist, Codirector of the Hexagram network and Associate Professor of Design+Computation Arts at Concordia University, Montreal. He is the author of *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance* (MIT Press).