

The Builders Association: Performance and Media in Contemporary Theater (MIT Press)

By Shannon Jackson, Marianne Weems

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This book begins with the building of a house, and the building of a company while building the house. It expands to look at the ideas found in various rooms, some of which expanded into virtual space while they still were grounded in the lives of the artists in the house. -- from the preface by Marianne Weems

The Builders Association, an award-winning intermedia performance company founded in 1994, develops its work in extended collaborations with artists and designers, working through performance, video, architecture, sound, and text to integrate live performance with other media. Its work is not only cross-media but cross-genre -- fiction and nonfiction, unorthodox retellings of classic tales and multimedia stagings of contemporary events. This book offers a generously illustrated history and critical appraisal of The Builders Association, written by Shannon Jackson, a leading theater scholar, and Marianne Weems, the founder and artistic director of the company. It also includes critical meditations from such artists and scholars as Elizabeth Diller, Pico Iyer, Saskia Sassen, Kate Valk, and many others.

Technological wizardry in the theater has a long history, going back to the deus ex machina of ancient Greek drama. The Builders Association makes its technological dependence visible, putting backstage technologies center stage and presenting architectural assemblies of screens and bodies. Jackson and Weems explore a series of major productions -- from MASTER BUILDER (Ibsen by way of Gordon Matta-Clark) to SUPERVISION (an exploration of dataveillance) to HOUSE/DIVIDED (the foreclosure crisis juxtaposed with the Joads of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*). Each work is described through a series of steps, including "R&D," "Operating Systems," "Storyboard," and "Rehearsal/Assembly."

The Builders Association not only traces the evolution of an intermedial aesthetic practice but also tells a story about how a group makes the risky decision to make art in the first place.

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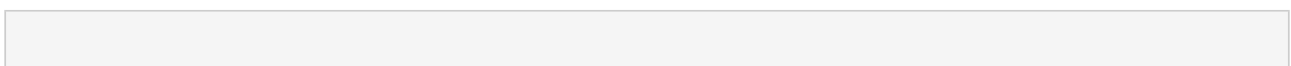
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Editorial Review

Review

A perfect pair; Marianne Weems, founder, director, and visionary of The Builders Association and Shannon Jackson, critic, historian, and educator extraordinaire, have created a book about the way that The Builders Association have built their remarkable repertoire over the past several decades. It is a how-to manual, an historic document, and a guide through important theater, art, and new media conversations. A pleasure to read. It makes one want to see each of the productions presented here in such many-sided and wondrous detail, all over again.

(RoseLee Goldberg, art historian, critic, and curator, and founding director of Performa)

Marianne Weems and The Builders Association have spent two decades refusing to divide expressive forms into 'Old vs. New,' as they invent their astonishing hybrids of live performance and digital media. Jackson and Weems's book is a record and synthesis of their remarkable work.

(Clay Shirky, author of *Cognitive Surplus* and *Here Comes Everybody*)

Asserting 'we had almost no interest in theatre,' The Builders Association creates the most marvelous... theatre. A performance universe of collage and coherence, a visual-literary media feast served with pinpoint precision. Drawing from deep wells of digital design, architecture, film, dramaturgy, and acting, The Builders make actual and virtual realities of social and political significance. Hugely entertaining, too. A theatre for the twenty-first century, like no other. This elegant, lively, and comprehensive book by Jackson and Weems brings it all home.

(Richard Schechner, Performance Studies, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University; Editor, *TDR: The Drama Review*)

In *The Builders Association*, scholar Shannon Jackson and founder/director Marianne Weems expertly careen through twenty extraordinary years of this new media theater company's pioneering work and in the process, demonstrate how one of the oldest forms of art can amplify and make sensible our historic and future moment of globalized, mediatized life.

(Chris Salter, artist, University Research Chair in New Media, Technology, and the Senses, Concordia University, Montreal; author of *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance* and *Alien Agency: Experimental Encounters with Art in the Making*)

About the Author

Shannon Jackson is Director of the Arts Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is Richard and Rhoda Goldman Professor of Rhetoric and of Theater and Performance Studies; previous books include *Professing Performance and Social Works*. Marianne Weems is Artistic Director of The Builders Association, a faculty member of Carnegie Mellon University's Integrative Media Program, and

coauthor of *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*.

Users Review

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