



The Builders Association: Performance and Media in Contemporary Theater

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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