

remarkably resilient” (265) in that theatre remains an elitist entertainment relative to most film and television. He supports his argument in part by pointing out that the effect of the established order remains evident in response to the work of playwrights such as Tracy Letts, whose play *August: Osage County* was understood by critics to have sprung from the O’Neillian tradition.

In *Highbrow/Lowdown*, David Savran has produced an intriguing piece of scholarship that stretches beyond theatre to examine broader American culture. The influence of jazz on theatre artists of the 1920s has been noted by previous scholars, among them Jonathan Chambers in his examination of John Howard Lawson in *Messiah of the New Technique* (2006). Jazz, however, was only one facet of Chambers’s analysis of the whole of Lawson’s career. Savran’s innovative approach brings jazz to the forefront of the wider American theatre experience. *Highbrow/Lowdown* represents significant original research addressing the matter of how and why Eugene O’Neill became the foremost American playwright of the twentieth century. It is an important study for scholars interested in the development of twentieth-century American theatre as well as those interested in the influence of jazz and class relations upon American popular culture.



***(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance.*** By Josephine Machon. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; pp. 221. \$90 cloth, \$29 paper. doi:10.1017/S0040557411000597

Reviewed by Lourdes Arciniega, University of Calgary

Quantifying visceral performance in theoretical terms can be a daunting task, but Josephine Machon tackles the challenge successfully in *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*, providing both theatre practitioners and academics with a thought-provoking analysis that lays the groundwork for future research in this emerging field of theatre studies. Machon defines visceral theatre performances as those that highlight a dialogic connection among the performing body, the playtext, and an audience whose response to the action is often unsettling and unexpected. In her quest to find a theoretical discourse to analyze visceral performance, Machon appropriates the term “(syn)aesthetics” from the Greek, meaning the merging of sensations and perceptions, to formulate an “interpretative device which describes *simultaneously* a performance style—its impulse, and processes of production—and the appreciation strategy necessary to articulate a response to such work” (4). She adds the parentheses to the word to distinguish her theatre-based theory from the neurological term it echoes.

Machon begins by defining terms and boundaries, and outlining theories that provide the foundation for the practical analysis to come, repeatedly stressing the interdisciplinary, intertextual, and even intersensual nature of visceral performance. This fused sensory experience merges the semantic with the

sensual, establishing a “double-edged rendering of making-sense/*sense* making” (14). A (syn)aesthetic performance, according to Machon, is aware of the sensual disturbance it creates in an audience whose responses to the bodies and actions onstage vary according to individual experience. To study the audience’s reactions, Machon refers to some of the aesthetic ideas put forth by Immanuel Kant, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Elaine Scarry, who argue that the actor’s body inhabits a transgressive space, inside and outside linguistic systems. Machon argues that women’s creative work, in particular, leads to a revisioning of a woman’s body onstage as “not only a stimulus, subject, site and sight for sex-gendered scrutiny and identification but also for the exploration of a complex blend of highly charged mappings—individual, emotional, psychological, sexual, historical, cultural, political” (27–8). Machon provides examples from texts by Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane that strive to break traditional theatre barriers, looking for a more instinctive gut reaction from the audience to the female presence onstage.

In Chapter 2, Machon frames (syn)aesthetics within the work of contemporary theorists who engage, support, and speak to her revision of visceral performance. She stresses the importance of Friedrich Nietzsche’s Dionysian artistic impulse, and its production of an “intoxicated reality” (35) in an individual, which forces him or her to rely on instinctive reactions. Machon takes into account the Russian formalists’ study of the various manifestations of verbal language, and Roland Barthes’s work on *jouissance* and the fusing of physiological and psychological experiences in texts to create an event “simultaneously pleasurable and disturbing, that accentuates the human experience of the live(d)” (39). Machon also engages with the work of feminist theorists, such as Julia Kristeva’s on transgressive communication, and Hélène Cixous’s and Luce Irigaray’s on *écriture féminine* in its constantly morphing possibilities both in practical performance and as a tool for analysis. Finally, Machon also brings into play the body-centered work of performance theorists such as Antonin Artaud, Howard Barker, Susan Broadhurst, and Valère Novarina to comment on the collapse of cultural and theatrical boundaries.

Chapter 3 links the above-named theories with examples of (syn)aesthetics in practice. Machon focuses on (syn)aesthetic hybrids, performances where site, set design, visceral language, and modern technology combine to create a sensate experience for the audience. (Syn)aesthetic practitioners manipulate verbal text by merging it with music, dance, and movement, thus allowing audiences to perceive language aurally, physically, and intellectually, “stimulating, through word-play, sensations that are read through the body” (79). The audience, in turn, is acutely self-aware of its journey through various layers of meaning creating a corporeal memory of the experience. Machon’s analytical strategies include the study of the retroactive quality of the body in performance, where practitioners perceive reactions from the bodies of the audience members and incorporate them into changes in future performances.

The first three chapters, comprising Part I of the text, encompass the theoretical framework of Machon’s theory. Part II leads the reader from the theoretical to the practical, featuring a (syn)aesthetic exchange with ten excerpts

from interviews with leading performance practitioners such as Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle of Punchdrunk, Lizzie Clachan and David Rosenberg of Shunt Theatre Collective, Akram Kham, Marisa Carnesky, Naomi Wallace, Kwame Kwei-Armah, Linda Bassett, Jo McInnes, Jenny Sealey, Glyn Cannon, together with Sara Giddens and Simon Jones of Bodies in Flight, and Leslie Hill and Helen Paris of Curious. The interviews shed light on the experiences of these various playwrights, artists, designers, dancers, and actors, with Machon inserting questions to prompt relevant commentary. The direct and sometimes jarring structure of the interviews, though, seems at odds with the academic discourse that precedes it; some careful editing of this section would have contributed to a more fluid narrative. Yet, Machon's intent may have been to give the reader the opportunity to hear other voices, and to experience, if only vicariously, the sense of creation, participation, and sensual engagement stressed by these interdisciplinary artists. Following each interview, the author also provides links to video versions of each group's performances, reinforcing her stand on the need for a joint theoretical and practical analysis of performance. After including the reader in these multidisciplinary conversations, Machon ends her work abruptly with the last interview. Although detailed notes and an extensive bibliography follow the conversations, supporting the book's academic bent, a brief concluding chapter, commenting perhaps on the future of (syn)aesthetics, is missing. Machon's voice at the end of the book would have provided a more satisfactory conclusion to the dialogue. Nevertheless, this text as a whole provides some intriguing and groundbreaking theoretical frameworks for reading performance, encouraging the reader and/or spectator to understand his or her engagement with the increasingly popular field of visceral performance.



***The Body and the Arts.*** Edited by Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude, and Jane Macnaughton. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; pp. 312. \$95.00 cloth.

***Theatre in Health and Care.*** By Emma Brodzinski. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; pp. 200. \$80.00 cloth.

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Reviewed by Boone J. Hopkins, University of Kansas

The perpetual feedback loop between the body and the arts is a vital space of inquiry that connects many diverse fields. How does a body become a site of artistic production? How does embodied practice illuminate the complexities of perception and self-awareness? How does a body heal itself through knowing itself? These questions surrounding artistic practice, as it lives through and on the body, are the focus of two recent publications that offer up bodies for further dissection and consideration.

*The Body and the Arts*, coedited by Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude, and Jane Macnaughton, maps the dynamic relationship between the body and the arts,